

An Introduction to Information Retrieval, Part II

STA 325

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READING: *Principles of Data Mining*, sections 14.1–14.4 (skipping 14.3.3 for now) and 3.7.

Let’s recap where we left similarity searching for documents. We represent each document as a **bag of words**, i.e., a vector giving the number of times each word occurred in the document. This abstracts away all the grammatical structure, context, etc., leaving us with a matrix whose rows are feature vectors, a data frame. To find documents which are similar to a given document Q , we calculate the distance between Q and all the other documents, i.e., the distance between their feature vectors.

1 Queries

If we have a document in hand which we like, and we want to find the k documents closest to it, we can do this once we know the distances between that document and all the others. But how can we get away from finding that one good document to begin with?

The trick is that a query, whether an actual sentence (“What are the common problems of the 2001 model year Saturn?”) or just a list of key words (“problems 2001 model Saturn”) *is* a small document. If we represent user queries as bags of words, we can use our similarity searching procedure on them. This is really all it takes.

2 Inverse Document Frequency

Someone asked in class last time about selectively paying less attention to certain words, especially common words, and more to the rest. This is an excellent notion. Not all features are going to be equally useful, and some words are so common that they give us almost no ability at all to discriminate between relevant and irrelevant documents. In (most) collections of English documents, looking at “the”, “of”, “a”, etc., is a waste of time. We could handle this by a fixed list of **stop words**, which we just don’t count, but this at once too crude (all or nothing) and too much work (we need to think up the list).

Normalization	Equal weight	IDF weight
None	38	52
Word count	39	37
Euclidean length	44	19

Table 1: Number of mis-classifications in a collection of 102 stories from the *Times* about music (45 stories) and the other arts (57 stories) when using the nearest neighbor method, with different choices of normalization and with or without IDF weighting. (Cf. Fig. 1.) Note that an idiot who always guessed “art” would only make 45 mistakes.

Inverse document frequency (IDF) is a more adaptive approach. The **document frequency** of a w is the number of documents it appears in, n_w . The IDF weight of w is

$$IDF(w) \equiv \log \frac{N}{n_w}$$

where N is the total size of our collection. Now when we make our bag-of-words vector for the document Q , the number of times w appears in Q , Q_w , is multiplied by $IDF(w)$. Notice that if w appears in every document, $n_w = N$ and it gets an IDF weight of zero; we won’t use it to calculate distances. This takes care of most of the things we’d use a list of stop-words for, but it also takes into account, implicitly, the kind of documents we’re using. (In a data base of papers on genetics, “gene” and “DNA” are going to have IDF weights of near zero too.) On the other hand, if w appears in only a few documents, it will get a weight of about $\log N$, and all documents containing w will tend to be close to each other.

Table 1 shows how including IDF weighting, along with Euclidean length normalization, dramatically improves our ability to classify posts as either about music or about the other arts.

You could tell a similar story about any increasing function, not just log, but log happens to work very well in practice, in part because it’s not very sensitive to the exact number of documents. So this is not the same log we will see in information theory, or the log in psychophysics. Notice also that this is *not* guaranteed to work. Even if w appears in every document, so $IDF(w) = 0$, it might be common in some of them and rare in others, so we’ll ignore what might have been useful information. (Maybe genetics papers about laboratory procedures use “DNA” more often, and papers about hereditary diseases use “gene” more often.)

— This is our first look at the problem of **feature selection**: how do we pick out good, useful features from the very large, perhaps infinite, collection of possible features? We will come back to this in various ways throughout the course. Right now, concentrate on the fact that in search, and other classification problems, we are looking for features that let us **discriminate** between the classes.

3 More Wrinkles to Similarity Search

3.1 Stemming

It is a lot easier to decide what counts as “a word” in English than in some other languages.¹ Even so, we need to decide whether “car” and “cars” are the same word, for our purposes, or not. **Stemming** takes derived forms of words (like “cars”, “flying”) and reduces them to their stem (“car”, “fly”). Doing this well requires linguistic knowledge (so the system doesn’t think the stem of “potatoes” is “potatoe”, or that “gravity” is the same as “grave”), and it can even be harmful (if the document has “Saturns”, plural, it’s most likely about the cars).

3.2 Feedback

People are much better at telling whether you’ve found what they’re looking for than they are at *explaining* what it is that they’re looking for. (They know it when they see it.) Queries are users trying to explain what they’re looking for (to a computer, no less), so they’re often pretty bad. An important idea in data mining is that people should do things at which they are better than computers and vice versa: here they should be deciders, not explainers. **Rocchio’s algorithm** takes feedback from the user, about which documents were relevant, and then refines the search, giving more weight to what they like, and less to what they don’t like.

The user gives the system some query, whose bag-of-words vector is Q_t . The system responses with various documents, some of which the user marks as relevant (R) and others as not-relevant (NR). (See Fig. ?? again.) The system then modifies the query vector:

$$Q_{t+1} = \alpha Q_t + \frac{\beta}{|R|} \sum_{\text{doc} \in R} \text{doc} - \frac{\gamma}{|NR|} \sum_{\text{doc} \in NR} \text{doc}$$

where $|R|$ and $|NR|$ are the number of relevant and non-relevant documents, and α , β and γ are positive constants. α says how much continuity there is between the old search and the new one; β and γ gauge our preference for recall (we find more relevant items) versus precision (more of what we find is relevant). The system then runs another search with Q_{t+1} , and cycle starts over. As this repeats, Q_t gets closer to the bag-of-words vector which best represents what

¹For example, Turkish is what is known as an “agglutinative” language, in which grammatical units are “glued together” to form compound words whose meaning would be a whole phrase or sentence in English, e.g., *gelemiyebilirim*, “I may be unable to come”, *yapabilecekdiyseniz*, “if you were going to be able to do”, or *calistirilmamaliymis*, “supposedly he ought not to be made to work”. (German does this too, but not so much.) This causes problems with Turkish-language applications, because many sequences-of-letters-separated-by-punctuation are effectively unique. See, for example, L. Özgür, T. Güngör and F. Gürgeç, “Adaptive anti-spam filtering for agglutinative languages: a special case for Turkish”, *Pattern Recognition Letters* **25** (2004): 1819–1831, available from <http://www.cmpe.boun.edu.tr/~gungort/>.

the user has in mind, assuming they have something definite and consistent in mind.

N.B.: A word can't appear in a document a negative number of times, so ordinarily bag-of-words vectors have non-negative components. Q_t , however, can easily come to have negative components, indicating the words whose *presence* is evidence that the document isn't relevant. Recalling the example of problems with used 2001 Saturns, we probably don't want anything which contains "Titan" or "Rhea", since it's either about mythology or astronomy, and giving our query negative components for those words suppresses those documents.

Rocchio's algorithm works with any kind of similarity-based search, not just text. It's related to many machine-learning procedures which incrementally adjust in the direction of what has worked and away from what has not — the **stochastic approximation** algorithm for estimating functions and curves, **reinforcement learning** for making decisions, **Bayesian learning** for updating conditional probabilities, and **multiplicative weight training** for combining predictors. This is no accident; they are all special cases of adaptive evolution by means of natural selection.

4 Visualization: Multidimensional Scaling

The bag-of-words vectors representing our documents generally live in spaces with lots of dimensions, certainly more than three, which are hard for ordinary humans to visualize. However, we can compute the distance between any two vectors, so we know how far apart they are. **Multidimensional scaling** (MDS) is the general name for a family of algorithms which take high-dimensional vectors and map them down to two- or three-dimensional vectors, trying to preserve all the relevant distances.

Abstractly, the idea is that we start with vectors v_1, v_2, \dots, v_n in a p -dimensional space, where p is large, and we want to find new vectors x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n in \mathbb{R}^2 or \mathbb{R}^3 such that

$$\sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j \neq i} (\delta(v_1, v_2) - d(x_1, x_2))^2$$

is as small as possible, where δ is distance in the original space and d is Euclidean distance in the new space. Note that the new or **image** points x_i are *representations* of the v_i , i.e., representations of representations.

There is some trickiness to properly minimizing this **objective function** — for instance, if we rotate all the x_i through a common angle, their distances are unchanged, but it's not really a new solution — and it's not usually possible to make it exactly zero (See Sec. 3.7 in the textbook for details.) We will see a lot of multidimensional scaling plots, because they are nice visualization tools, but we will also see a lot of other **data reduction** or **dimensionality reduction** methods, because sometimes it's more important to preserve *other* properties than distances.

Notice that while the bag of words representation gives each of our original coordinates/features some meaning — it says something very definite about the document being represented — that’s not the case with the coordinates we get after doing the MDS. If nothing else, the fact that we could rotate all of the image points arbitrarily makes it very hard to assign any interpretation to where the images fall on the axes. This is true of many other dimensionality-reduction methods as well.

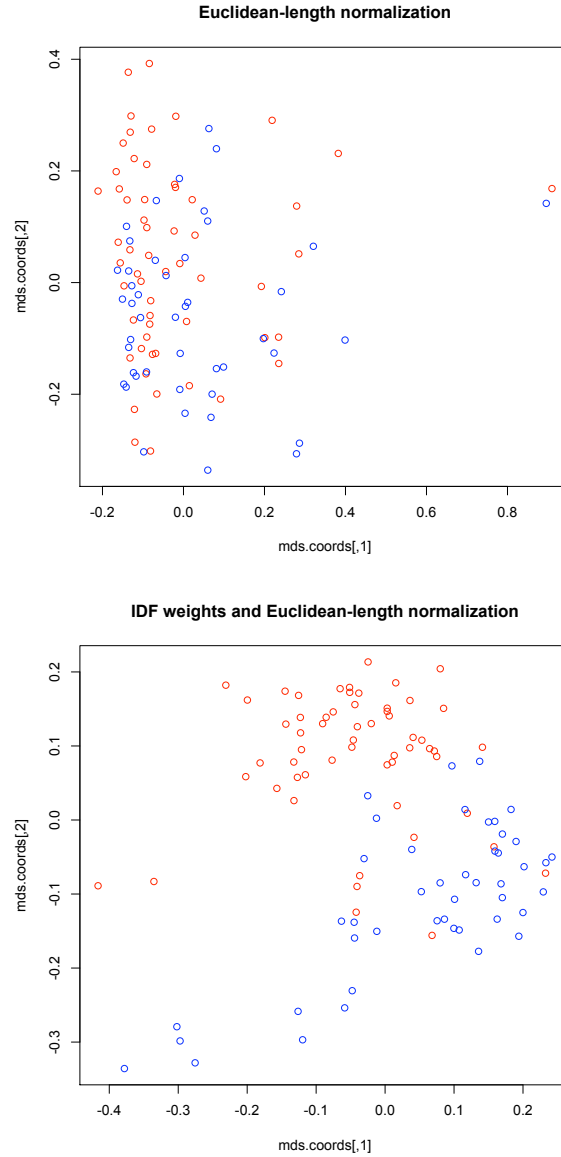


Figure 1: Illustrations of multidimensional scaling for the 102 art/music stories (art=red, music=blue), with and without IDF weights. This was produced using the R command `cmdscale` (plus a little extra code to plot it nicely). Notice that with IDF weights, the two classes are far more distinct visually, which comes through in the classification results in Table 1.