

COMENIUS UNIVERSITY, BRATISLAVA
FACULTY OF MATHEMATICS, PHYSICS AND INFORMATICS

COMPUTATIONAL DESIGN OF PROBES
FOR THE HYB-SEQ PROTOCOL
BACHELOR THESIS

2017
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COMENIUS UNIVERSITY, BRATISLAVA
FACULTY OF MATHEMATICS, PHYSICS AND INFORMATICS

COMPUTATIONAL DESIGN OF PROBES
FOR THE HYB-SEQ PROTOCOL
BACHELOR THESIS

Study programme: Bioinformatics
Study field: 2508 and 1536 Computer science and biology
Department: Department of Computer Science
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Bratislava, 2017
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Field of Study: Computer Science, Informatics
Biology
Type of Thesis: Bachelor's thesis
Language of Thesis: English
Secondary language: Slovak

Title: Computational Design of Probes for the Hyb-Seq Protocol

Aim: The goal of the thesis is to design probes for the Hyb-Seq protocol for Alyssum genus based on raw sequencing data. The starting point is an existing software pipeline called Sondovač (<https://github.com/V-Z/sondovac>). The goal is to explore and describe methods used in this tool, propose and test appropriate parameter settings and potentially propose improvements of the pipeline.

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Študijné odbory: informatika
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Typ záverečnej práce: bakalárska
Jazyk záverečnej práce: anglický
Sekundárny jazyk: slovenský

Názov: Computational Design of Probes for the Hyb-Seq Protocol
Automatizovaný dizajn prôb pre Hyb-Seq protokol

Cieľ: Cieľom práce je vytvoriť próby pre Hyb-Seq protokol pre rod *Alyssum* zo surových sekvenačných dát. Východiskom práce je existujúci nástroj Sondovač (<https://github.com/V-Z/sondovac>), pričom cieľom je naštudovať a popísať metódy použité v tomto nástroji, navrhnúť a otestovať vhodné nastavenia parametrov, prípadne navrhnúť vylepšenia nástroja.

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Pod'akovanie: Thanks Obama.

Abstrakt

Slovenský abstrakt v rozsahu 100-500 slov, jeden odstavec. Abstrakt stručne sumarizuje výsledky práce. Mal by byť pochopiteľný pre bežného informatika. Nemal by teda využívať skratky, termíny alebo označenie zavedené v práci, okrem tých, ktoré sú všeobecne známe.

Kľúčové slová: jedno, druhé, tretie (prípadne štvrté, piate)

Abstract

Abstract in the English language (translation of the abstract in the Slovak language).

Keywords:

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Introduction

Computational biology is currently a blooming discipline, its methods and tools having wide use among scientists, especially in the subject of genetics. One such use lies in taxonomy: a determination of phylogenetic relationships and evolutionary history among various species or families [7].

Research in the fields of phylogenesis and taxonomy allows us better understanding of biodiversity, evolution or ecology and aids in identification and classification of living organisms, effectively showing their differences and similarities. The analysis of evolutionary history is called phylogeny and is represented by a tree diagram called a phylogenetic tree [8]. We will provide a more detailed description of phylogenetic trees in chapter 1.

Creation of phylogenetic trees and comparing organisms in general requires a large amount of data, usually in the form of DNA or RNA sequences. In the last few years, the price of sequencing has gone down rapidly. However, phylogenetic trees require data from several organisms, and can prove to be time and money consuming. Moreover, we are sequencing plants, which tend to have much bigger and more complex genomes, along with additional genetic information from chloroplasts and mitochondria [10].

A modern approach to sequencing - the next generation sequencing offers reduced time and is affordable even with more data. The next generation sequencing, or NGS for short is a name for several methods that are more effective than the previously used Sanger sequencing. Specifically, Hyb-Seq protocol [13] is a method that utilizes target enrichment and genome skimming to forego sequencing all of the genome. Hyb-Seq uses specifically designed probes to find conserved places within the genome, and thus enabling comparison among the species.

These probes are usually determined from orthologous low-copy nuclear loci combined with other types of information, for example mitochondrial and plastid genomes. However, finding these loci for non-model organisms is a difficult task. Loci can be selected from transcriptomes (set of all messenger RNA molecules), genomes, gene expression studies, or the literature. There is a lack of automated bioinformatic pipelines for selection of low-copy nuclear loci.

Sondovac is a script that offers relatively easy and automated creation of orthologous low-copy nuclear probes from transcriptome and genome skim data for target

enrichment [11]. Purpose of this thesis is to understand this tool, describe methods used in it and to create probes for plants from genus *Alyssum* using raw sequencing data. The resulting data are intended to be further used by the Hyb-Seq protocol.

In the first chapter, we will take a look at the biological motivation behind probe design and we will explain the most common terms used through the thesis and provide some information on phylogenetic trees. Chapter ?? offers insight into the biological data we are using and what we are trying to achieve with it. Chapter ?? will explain the Hyb-Seq protocol in more detail. Next, chapter ?? will take us through a detailed description of Sondovac and its methods. Chapter ?? will entail the results we got from creating probes for *Alyssum*. In conclusion, chapter ?? will go through possible improvements of the pipeline that is Sondovac, and their implementation.

Chapter 1

Biological motivation and background

In this chapter we will introduce the terms and concepts of biology, genetics and computational biology that are commonly used through this thesis. We will explain phylogenetic trees, their significance in evolutionary biology, their construction and their connection to the Hyb-Seq protocol and probes. In addition, we will specify the data we are using, provide a biological background for them and describe the way in which they are processed.

1.1 Terminology overview, basic terms and concepts

1.1.1 Nucleic acids

Nucleic acids carry the genetic information of all known living things. Two nucleic acids are called RNA (ribonucleic acid) and DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid). They both consist of sequence of nucleotides - monomers that are made of a pentose - a sugar with 5 carbons (ribose in RNA, deoxyribose in DNA), a phosphate group, and a nitrogenous-base. The five most common bases are cytosine (C), guanine (G), adenine (A), thymine (T) and uracil (U). RNA contains C, G, A, U and DNA contains C, G, A, T. These bases create hydrogen bonds between each other as follows: C-G, A-T in DNA, and C-G, A-U in RNA. RNA is usually single stranded and the bases pair with each other within the same strand, creating 3D-structures. Most DNAs is a double helix - it has two complementary strands that pair with each other.

1.1.2 Genes

A gene is a basic unit of heredity, a region in DNA that encodes some function, usually a protein. Several genes can encode a single trait or one gene can encode multiple traits. A position, or a place of a gene in DNA is called locus (plur. loci). Homologous genes are genes that share a common ancestor. More specifically, homologous sequences are

called orthologs, if two copies of the same gene are in two different species and they are called paralogs, if the gene was duplicated within the same genome. During evolution, orthologs retain the same function while paralogs (or one of them) can gain new functions. Sequences of DNA that are converted into mature mRNA are called exons. The sequences that are between exons are called introns. Introns do not code proteins and their sequences can change frequently over time. Exons, on the other hand, are much more conserved.

1.1.3 Transcription, translation

When making proteins, regions of DNA are transcribed into a shorter RNA that is complementary to the original DNA sequence. This RNA is called messenger RNA or mRNA. mRNA is then translated into proteins. The complete set of all mRNAs from a cell or a population of cells is called transcriptome. The transcriptome represents all genes that are being actively expressed.

1.2 Construction of phylogenetic trees

Here we will describe why is a construction of a phylogenetic tree important for the study of evolution. We will also look into how the tree can be made from the data we have.

1.3 Data and objectives

In this chapter we will take a closer look at the data we are using. We will cover the biological aspect of the data and compare the data we have to other kinds of data. We will also look at how such data are obtained and how they are further processed. We will define the problem we are facing from the biological point of view and why do we want to solve it.

1.3.1 The actual biological problem

In this section we will consider the actual biological process and lab work behind the creation of probes and, by extension, the phylogenetic tree. We will answer why and how does the biological process work.

1.3.2 What kind of data we are using

This is just a citation so I know what I need to address later: Script `sondovac_part_a.sh` requires as input files: 1) Transcriptome input file in FASTA format. Note: For techni-

cal reasons, the labels of FASTA sequences must be unique numbers (no other characters). Sondovač will check the labels, and if they are not in an appropriate form, a copy of this input file with correct labels will be created. 2) Plastome reference sequence input file in FASTA format. 3) Paired-end genome skim input file in FASTQ format (two files - forward and reverse reads). 4) OPTIONAL: Mitochondriome reference sequence input file in FASTA format. This file is not required. [11]

1.3.3 Where the data comes from

Chapter 2

Hyb-Seq Protocol

In this chapter we will describe in detail the Hyb-Seq Protocol and next generation sequencing. We will address their position in the process of creating a phylogenetic tree and their connection to the Sondovac.

2.1 Next generation sequencing

Next generation sequencing refers to faster and cheaper approaches to sequencing and acquiring phylogenetic information. The effectiveness of NGS is due to using better technology - sequencing platforms such as Illumina, Roche 454 sequencer and others, which can sequence many shorter sequences at the same time. The process where the sequences from different individuals are sequenced subsequently is known as pooling. [?]nand2016next When sequencing a whole genome, it's divided into small fragments which are then sequenced subsequently. Several copies of genome are used and thus each base is sequenced multiple times; often in a different fragment. The resulting data is then put together using bioinformatics analyses. [?]ehjati2013next

2.2 Hyb-Seq Protocol

Hyb-seq protocol is the combination of target enrichment and genome skimming. It enables data collection for low-copy nuclear genes and high-copy genomic targets for evolution studies and plant systematics. In hyb-seq, suitable probes are first created to serve in target enrichment. The principle of target enrichment is selectively finding regions of interest in a genome before sequencing and only processing those, thus making the following sequencing process more effective. [?]eitemier2014hyb From the sequenced data, a phylogenetic tree can be built. The script Sondovac, we are using in this thesis, is a tool that selects orthologous low-copy nuclear genes from provided data. The goal is to find effective markers to use in target enrichment.

2.3 Orthologous genes

Orthologous genes are fundamental for phylogeny, since they can be used as markers. Selecting orthologous genes that are effective as markers is difficult as gene duplication and deletion is making it hard to tell orthologs from paralogs. Single-copy paralogs that has undergone lineage-specific changes can be mistaken for orthologs. [?][ang2014identification](#) Distinguishing orthologs from paralogs is especially difficult in angiosperms, where polyploidization is a common occurrence. [?][hang2012highly](#)

2.4 Low-copy nuclear genes

Low-copy nuclear genes are genes from nucleus that can be found in the genome in few or single copies. Highly conserved orthologous low-copy nuclear genes have found their use as a source of phylogenetic information. They proved to be effective markers to track organismal evolution. [?][hang2012highly](#) Most of the protein-coding cell genes can be found in nucleus. Compared to genes from other organelles, nuclear genes from eukaryotic organisms consist from several chromosomes. Because of this, genes of eukaryotic organisms are evolutionary unlinked; either on different chromosomes or sufficiently far apart. [?][ang2014identification](#)

Finding low-copy nuclear genes has been constrained by technical limitations. High sequencing throughput of current platforms, such as Illumina, combined with target enrichment enables us to sequence large amounts of low-copy nuclear loci effectively. [?][ang2002utility](#)

Chapter 3

Existing work - Sondovac

In this chapter, we will take a closer look at the pipeline and the workflow of Sondovac. We will also specify the input and output data format and consider them from the informatic and more formal point of view. Finally, detailed description of the tools and software that are used by Sondovac will be listed.

3.1 Sondovac origins

Sondovac is a Czech neologism standing for "Probe-maker". It was created by Roswitha Smickl. Sondovac is an interactive and automated script to create orthologous low-copy nuclear probes for further use by the Hyb-Seq protocol. It uses transcriptome and genome skim data. Sondovac does not require strong bioinformatic skills nor high-performance computer. It is intended for either Linux or Mac OS X.

3.2 The pipeline

Sondovac is written in BASH, an Unix shell and a command language [6]. It has three parts: `sondovac_part_a.sh`, the geneious [1] intermediate part and `sondovac_part_b.sh`. Between the parts a and b of Sondovac it is necessary to manually input the output from the part a into another software - Geneious, for data processing and then run the part b on the output from the software.

3.2.1 Sondovac part a

The part a of the script covers 6 steps:

1. Removing the transcripts that share $\geq 90\%$ sequence similarity
2. Removing the reads of plastid origin

3. Removing the reads of mitochondrial origin
4. Combining the paired-end reads
5. Matching the the unique transcripts and the filtered, combined genome skim reads sharing $\geq 85\%$ sequence similarity
6. Filtering the BLAT output
 - (a) Choosing the transcript or genome skim sequences for further processing
 - (b) Removing the transcripts with more than 1000 BLAT hits
 - (c) Removing the transcript or genome skim BLAT hits containing masked nucleotides

3.2.2 Geneious

3.2.3 Sondovac part b

Sondovac part b covers 4 steps:

1. Retention of those contigs that comprise exons greater or equal than bait length and have a certain total locus length
2. Removal of probe sequences sharing greater or equal than 90% sequence similarity
3. Retention of those contigs that comprise exons greater or equal than bait length and have a certain total locus length
4. Removal of probe sequences sharing greater or equal than 90% sequence similarity with the plastome reference

3.3 Input and output data

3.3.1 Input data for part a

Input data for part a of Sondovac consist of 5 file, 1 of them being optional.

1. Transcriptome input file in FASTA format The file consists of several blocks with same format: On the first line of a block there is a '>' character followed with a unique description of the sequence, in this case a number. On the next few lines, there is the actual sequence composed of 'A', 'C', 'G' or 'T' characters.

2. Plastome reference sequence input file in FASTA format This file is used in both parts. It consists of a single long sequence and the starting line with '>' and the sequence's unique description.
3. Mitochondriome reference sequence input file in FASTA format (Optional) The file contains a single sequence along with the first line describing it. It is optional, because the size of a plant mitochondrial genome can vary greatly and have high rearrangement rates.
4. Paired-end genome skim input file in FASTQ format (first file)
5. Paired-end genome skim input file in FASTQ format (second file)

3.3.2 Output data

3.3.3 Input data for part b

1. Input file in TSV format (output of Geneious assembly)
2. Input file in FASTA format (output of Geneious assembly)
3. Plastome reference sequence input file in FASTA format This file is used in both parts. It consists of a single long sequence and the starting line with '>' and the sequence's unique description.

3.3.4 Output data

3.4 Use of Sondovac

Here we will write about how to use Sondovac, what modes does it run and what flags or settings can be used.

3.5 Used software and tools

Sondovac uses a broad variety of tools and scientific software packages, both freeware and payware. It is mainly coded in BASH, but it also uses smaller python scripts. We will take a closer look at what each of the tools is and what does it do in the Sondovac script.

3.5.1 Programming languages

1. BASH

2. Python

3.5.2 Tools and software

This is just structure, there will be more about each of these tools.

1. Bam2fastq
2. BLAT
3. Bowtie2 Bowtie2 is a tool used for aligning sequencing reads to longer reference sequences. [2]
4. CD-HIT
5. FASTX toolkit
6. FLASH
7. Geneious
8. Htsjdk
9. Libgtextutils
10. Picard
11. SAMtools

Chapter 4

Practical work and results

In this chapter, we will describe the practical work and process of creating suitable probes. We will take a look at parameters and specifications. Lastly, we will summarize the results of the thesis and describe the final data.

4.1 Input data

We worked with two different sets of input data. These data shared most of the files, differing only in genome.

The first set used the following data:

1. Transcriptome: *Alyssum alyssoides*
2. Genome: *Odontarrhena tortuosa*
3. Mitochondrion: *Arabidopsis thaliana*
4. Chloroplast: *Arabidopsis thaliana*

The second set used the following data:

1. Transcriptome: *Alyssum alyssoides*
2. Genome: *Alyssum gmelinii*
3. Mitochondrion: *Arabidopsis thaliana*
4. Chloroplast: *Arabidopsis thaliana*

4.1.1 Nickel and metallic genes

We were especially interested in nickel and metallic genes that might be present in these genomes. Therefore, we matched the possible probes against nickel and metallic genes and primarily picked those with the greatest similarity.

4.2 Autometed selection of probes

When making probes, we usually want to get exact number of bases, because the created probes are later passed to another company, such as MYcroarray (USA) [3] that will create the actual physical probes from them. These companies usually charge for processing of a precise number of bases. To save money, it is best to fill this number to the brim. Therefore, when we have several sequences available, we want to select such sequences, that the sum of thei lenghts makes the highest number possible, but does not exceed the given limit, let us say 1,000,000 of base pairs.

Aside from this, we often have other requirements on the selected sequences, usually based on biological evidence. There might be sequences we do not want in our selection, or even sequences we might want to add.

This selection is usually done by hand or a series of programmes. It would be beneficial, if this part too, was automated.

We want to create a script, that would work with the second part of sondovac and would be able to select the best possible sequences to fill up the limit. This script would take into account any sequences we want to keep, or those we do not want in the result.

We need specific genes - responsible for nickel and metal binding. If these genes are present among our sequences, they have to be in the result. We will take the largest possible output file from sondovac_part_b: the one with the lowest minimum total locus length. From this file, we will select the required genes. Any additional probes will be chosen by a combination of greedy algorithm and a knapsack.

4.3 Process overview

After several tries, it was estabilished that we will make probes from two sets of data to cover broader spectrum of plants they can be used for. We ran the Sondovac script for each set and got two resulting sets of possible probes. From these possible probes, we proceeded to pick those that fit the criteria the best. Consecutively, the probes have to make up to 1,000,000 base pairs, due to restrictions of the probe-making company. To pick suitable probes, we matched each data set to nickel and metal genes and chose those that aligned with them. We matched the data sets against each other and picked probes by similarity. We chose only one of the probes that matched. The other one wasn't included in the final probes to avoid duplicates. Finally, the rest was picked so they would make up the 1,000,000 bases to make the most of the space.

4.4 Using the pipeline

The possible probes were produced by running the script *Sondovac* on two different data sets. We then picked suitable probes from the resulting probes.

We set the minimal total locus length on 360 for both datasets - the least possible minimal total locus length - so we could get the largest amount of possible probes to pick from.

4.5 Probe picker

Probe picker is a script that we coded to help with picking the final probes. It is coded in python. The probe picker requires a list of all possible probes to pick from as an input. It can be also given a list of probes we definitely want in the result - such as the ones that aligned with the nickel or metallic genes or intersection of the two genomes - and a list of probes we do not want in the result - such as duplicates or sequences that are too similar to each other, for example the second of the pair of aligned genes from the two genomes we had.

Aside from lists of probes, the Probe Picker requires a target number of bases to be set and a threshold after which the program should change approaches. After reaching this threshold, the program will start picking the probes so they make up to the 1,000,000 bases instead of taking probes in order.

After the input files are obtained, the Probe Picker will match a sequence's name to sequence using dictionary data type and the sequence's length to its name using an array.

Then, the script puts sequences to keep and sequences to remove into a dictionary, creating a set for each data. Finally, the actual selection ensues. First, the probe is picked if it isn't in the sequences to remove. If it's also in the sequences to keep, it is automatically put into the output. If the sequence isn't amongst the sequences to remove and it isn't amongst the sequences to keep either, it's saved for later processing; for when we are picking sequences in order or picking them so they make up to the target number of bases.

After picking the sequences that are present in the list of sequences to keep, we start filling the rest of the space by the remaining sequences. We sort the sequences in descending order and pick the largest ones until we hit the threshold. The larger the sequence, the higher the possibility that it's relevant when it matches with something.

After reaching the threshold, we switch to using dynamic programming to make up to the target number of bases with best possible accuracy while not exceeding this number.

4.5.1 Knapsack problem and dynamic programming

A knapsack problem is a well known problem in combinatorial optimisation. The problem goes as follows: If we are given a knapsack with a weight limit and a set of items where each has a value and weight, what is the biggest possible value we can pack into the knapsack while the total weight of items is less or equal to the knapsack's limit. The Probe Picker presents us with a problem, where we have n numbers to choose from and a limit l that we mustn't overstep. This is a variation of the knapsack problem, where the value of each item is equal to its length, or rather, the number of bases it consists of. As a result, we want a list of bases that make the most of the possible space; we want to fill the "knapsack" as precisely as possible without overstepping the limit.

4.5.2 Picker for genes to keep and remove

We coded additional script that creates the list of probes we want to have in the result and those we want to remove.

4.6 Resulting data

Chapter 5

Possible Improvements

In this chapter we will suggest possible improvements to the pipeline and go through the various approaches to the problem. We will also describe main parts of the actual code and algorithms used.

5.0.1 Full automatization

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