

The ABC of Computational Text Analysis

#6 Learning Regular Expressions

01 April 2021

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Lucerne

Recap last Lecture

- well solved assignment 🎉
example solution
- counting words 📊
particular or all words
- preprocessing and cleaning 🧼

Outline

- introduction regular expression ✨
- practicing RegEx 🏎️

Text as Pattern

Formal Search Patterns





How to extract **any** email address in a text collection?

```
Please contact us via info@organization.org.  
---  
For specific questions ask Mrs. Green (a.green@mail.com).  
---  
Reach out to support@me.ch
```

Solution: Write a single pattern to match any valid email all

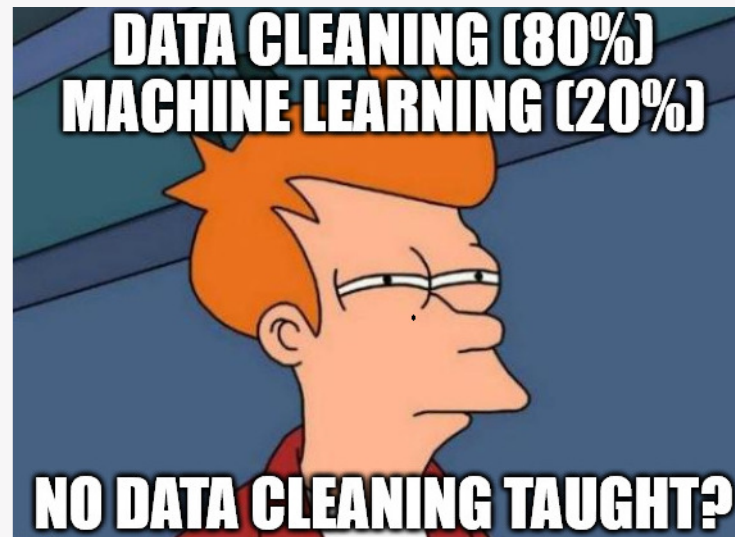
```
[\\w._-]+@[\\w._-]+      # matches any valid email address
```

What are patterns for?

- finding 
- extracting 
- removing/cleaning 
- replacing 

... any parts in texts

Data Cleaning is paramount!



What is RegEx?

RegEx = Regular Expressions = Patterns

- **literal** string of characters
word, phrases, dates etc.
- highly flexible **meta** expressions
e.g., `\w` represents alphanumeric characters
- `[Cc]o+1` → Col, col, Cool, coool ...
- akin to regular languages

Finding + Extracting

globally search for regular expression and print (grep)

- tool to filter/keep certain lines only
- allow extended regex patterns

use `egrep` instead of `grep`

```
egrep 'yes' file.txt          # search in a specific file
egrep -r 'yes' folder         # search recursively within folder

egrep 'yes' *.txt             # keep lines containing pattern (yes)
egrep -i 'yes' *.txt          # dito, ignore casing (Yes, yes, YES ...)
egrep -v 'noisy' *.txt        # do NOT keep lines containing noisy

# extract raw match only to allow for subsequent counting
egrep -o 'only' *.txt         # print match only, not entire line
egrep -h 'only' *.txt         # suppress file name
```

Quantifiers

repeat preceding character x times

- $?$ zero or one
- $+$ one or more
- $*$ zero or any number
- $\{n\}$, $\{m, n\}$ a specified number of times

```
egrep -r "Bundesrath?es"      # match old and new spelling of
egrep -r "aa+"                # match two or more "a"
egrep -r "e{2}"               # match sequence of two "e"
```

 Do not confuse regex with Bash wildcards!

Character Sets

- [...] any of these character
 - any vowel:* [aueoi]
 - any digit:* [0-9]
 - any letter:* [A-Za-z]
- [^...] any character but none of these
 - anything but the vowels:* [^aueoi]

```
# match the capitalized and non-capitalized form  
egrep -r '[Gg]rüne'
```

```
# match sequences of 3 vowels  
egrep -r [aeiou]{3}
```

```
# extract all bigrams (sequence of two words)  
egrep -roshi '[a-z]+ [a-z]+'
```

Special Symbols

- `.` any character (excl. newline)
- `\` escaping to match literal
 - `\.` means the literal `.` instead of “any symbol”*
- `\w` any alpha-numeric character
 - same as `[A-Za-z0-9_]`*
- `\s` any whitespace (space, newline, tab)
 - same as `[\t\n]`*

```
# match anything between brackets
egrep -r '\(.*\).'
```

The power of . * ...

matches *any character any times*

More complex Examples

```
# extract websites
egrep -ro "www\.\w+\.\w+"

# extract emails
egrep -ro "[\w._-]+@[\w._-]+" */*.txt
```

Combining RegEx with Frequency Analysis

something actually useful

```
# count political areas by looking up words ending with "politik"  
egrep -rioh '\w*politik' */*.txt | sort | uniq -c | sort -h  
  
# count ideologies/concepts by looking up words ending with "ismus"  
egrep -rioh '\w*ismus' */*.txt | sort | uniq -c | sort -h
```




Start simple,
add complexity subsequently.

Replacing + Removing

stream editor (sed)

- advanced find + replace using regex

```
sed "s/WHAT/WITH/g" file.txt
```

- `sed` replaces any sequence, `tr` only single symbols

```
echo "hello" | sed "s/llo/y/g"      # replace "llo" with a "y"  
  
# by setting the g flag in "s/llo/y/g",  
# sed replaces all occurrences, not only the first one
```

Contextual Replacing

reuse match with grouping

- define a group with parentheses (group_pattern)
- \1 equals the expression inside first pair of parentheses
- \2 expression of second pair
- ...

```
# swap order of name (last first -> first last)
echo "Lastname Firstname" | sed -E "s/(.*) (.*)/\2 \1/"

# matching also supports grouping
# match any pair of digits (two identical digits)
egrep -r "([0-9])\1([0-9])\2"
```

More Meta-Symbols

- `\b` word boundary

`word\b` does not match `words`

- `^` begin of line and `$` end of line

`^A` matches only `A` at line start

- `|` disjunction (OR)

`(Mr|Mrs|Mr\.|Mrs\.)` `Green` matches alternatives

Greediness Trap

- greedy ~ match the longest string possible
- quantifiers *** or *+* are greedy
- non-greedy by excluding some symbols

*[^EXCLUDE_SYMBOLS] instead of .**

```
# greedy: an apple, other apple
echo 'an apple, other apple' | egrep 'a.*apple'

# non-greedy: an apple
echo 'an apple, other apple' | egrep 'a[^,]*apple'
```

Assignment #2

- get/submit via OLAT
starting tomorrow
deadline 9 April 2021, 23:59
- use forum on [OLAT](#)
subscribe to get notifications
- ask friends for support, not solutions

In-class: Exercises I

1. Update your local copy of the GitHub repository KED2021 with `git pull`. Go to the party programmes in `KED2021/materials/data/swiss_party_programmes/txt`.
2. Use `egrep` to extract all uppercased words that are abbreviations in most cases (e.g., UNO, SVP, SP).
3. Use `egrep` to extract words following any of these strings: `der die das`.
4. Do the self-check on the next slide.
5. Use `sed -E` to remove the table of content, the footer and the page number in the programme of the Green Party. Check the corresponding PDF to get a visual impression and test your regular expression with `egrep` first to see if you match the correct parts in the document.

In-class: Self-Check

equivalent patterns

```
a+ == aa*           # "a" once or more than once
a? == (a|_)         # "a" once or nothing
a{3} == aaa         # three "a"
a{2,3} == (aa|aaa)  # two or three "a"
[ab] == (a|b)       # "a" or "b"
[0-9] == (0|1|2|3|4|5|6|7|8|9) #any digit
```

In-class: Exercise II

1. Since you know about RegEx, we can use a more sophisticated tokenizer to split a text into words. What is the difference between the old and new approach? Test it and check the helper page with [man](#).

```
# new, improved approach
cat text.txt | tr -sc "[a-zäöüA-ZÄÖÜ0-9-]" "\n"

# old approach
cat text.txt | tr ' ' '\n'
```


More Resources

required

- Ben Schmidt. 2019. Regular Expressions. [online](#)

highly recommended

- Nikolaj Lindberg. egrep for Linguists. [online](#)