

# 03\_categorical\_pipeline

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## 1 Encoding of categorical variables

In this notebook, we will present typical ways of dealing with **categorical variables** by encoding them, namely **ordinal encoding** and **one-hot encoding**.

Let's first load the entire adult dataset containing both numerical and categorical data.

```
[1]: import pandas as pd

adult_census = pd.read_csv("../datasets/adult-census.csv")
# drop the duplicated column `education-num` as stated in the first notebook
adult_census = adult_census.drop(columns="education-num")

target_name = "class"
target = adult_census[target_name]

data = adult_census.drop(columns=[target_name])
```

### 1.1 Identify categorical variables

As we saw in the previous section, a numerical variable is a quantity represented by a real or integer number. These variables can be naturally handled by machine learning algorithms that are typically composed of a sequence of arithmetic instructions such as additions and multiplications.

In contrast, categorical variables have discrete values, typically represented by string labels (but not only) taken from a finite list of possible choices. For instance, the variable **native-country** in our dataset is a categorical variable because it encodes the data using a finite list of possible countries (along with the ? symbol when this information is missing):

```
[2]: data["native-country"].value_counts().sort_index()
```

```
[2]: ?                857
     Cambodia          28
     Canada           182
     China            122
     Columbia          85
     Cuba             138
     Dominican-Republic 103
     Ecuador           45
```

El-Salvador	155
England	127
France	38
Germany	206
Greece	49
Guatemala	88
Haiti	75
Holand-Netherlands	1
Honduras	20
Hong	30
Hungary	19
India	151
Iran	59
Ireland	37
Italy	105
Jamaica	106
Japan	92
Laos	23
Mexico	951
Nicaragua	49
Outlying-US(Guam-USVI-etc)	23
Peru	46
Philippines	295
Poland	87
Portugal	67
Puerto-Rico	184
Scotland	21
South	115
Taiwan	65
Thailand	30
Trinidad&Tobago	27
United-States	43832
Vietnam	86
Yugoslavia	23

Name: native-country, dtype: int64

How can we easily recognize categorical columns among the dataset? Part of the answer lies in the columns' data type:

```
[3]: data.dtypes
```

```
[3]: age          int64
     workclass    object
     education    object
     marital-status object
     occupation   object
     relationship object
```

```

race           object
sex            object
capital-gain   int64
capital-loss   int64
hours-per-week int64
native-country object
dtype: object

```

If we look at the "native-country" column, we observe its data type is `object`, meaning it contains string values.

## 1.2 Select features based on their data type

In the previous notebook, we manually defined the numerical columns. We could do a similar approach. Instead, we will use the scikit-learn helper function `make_column_selector`, which allows us to select columns based on their data type. We will illustrate how to use this helper.

```

[4]: from sklearn.compose import make_column_selector as selector

categorical_columns_selector = selector(dtype_include=object)
categorical_columns = categorical_columns_selector(data)
categorical_columns

```

```

[4]: ['workclass',
      'education',
      'marital-status',
      'occupation',
      'relationship',
      'race',
      'sex',
      'native-country']

```

Here, we created the selector by passing the data type to include; we then passed the input dataset to the selector object, which returned a list of column names that have the requested data type. We can now filter out the unwanted columns:

```

[5]: data_categorical = data[categorical_columns]
data_categorical.head()

```

```

[5]:
   workclass  education  marital-status  occupation \
0   Private    11th      Never-married  Machine-op-inspct
1   Private    HS-grad   Married-civ-spouse  Farming-fishing
2  Local-gov  Assoc-acdm  Married-civ-spouse  Protective-serv
3   Private  Some-college  Married-civ-spouse  Machine-op-inspct
4         ?   Some-college  Never-married         ?

   relationship  race  sex  native-country
0   Own-child  Black  Male  United-States

```

1	Husband	White	Male	United-States
2	Husband	White	Male	United-States
3	Husband	Black	Male	United-States
4	Own-child	White	Female	United-States

```
[6]: print(f"The dataset is composed of {data_categorical.shape[1]} features")
```

The dataset is composed of 8 features

In the remainder of this section, we will present different strategies to encode categorical data into numerical data which can be used by a machine-learning algorithm.

## 1.3 Strategies to encode categories

### 1.3.1 Encoding ordinal categories

The most intuitive strategy is to encode each category with a different number. The `OrdinalEncoder` will transform the data in such manner. We will start by encoding a single column to understand how the encoding works.

```
[7]: from sklearn.preprocessing import OrdinalEncoder

education_column = data_categorical[["education"]]

encoder = OrdinalEncoder()
education_encoded = encoder.fit_transform(education_column)
education_encoded
```

```
[7]: array([[ 1.],
           [11.],
           [ 7.],
           ...,
           [11.],
           [11.],
           [11.]])
```

We see that each category in "education" has been replaced by a numeric value. We could check the mapping between the categories and the numerical values by checking the fitted attribute `categories_`.

```
[8]: encoder.categories_
```

```
[8]: [array([' 10th', ' 11th', ' 12th', ' 1st-4th', ' 5th-6th', ' 7th-8th',
           ' 9th', ' Assoc-acdm', ' Assoc-voc', ' Bachelors', ' Doctorate',
           ' HS-grad', ' Masters', ' Preschool', ' Prof-school',
           ' Some-college'], dtype=object)]
```

Now, we can check the encoding applied on all categorical features.

```
[9]: data_encoded = encoder.fit_transform(data_categorical)
data_encoded[:5]
```

```
[9]: array([[ 4.,  1.,  4.,  7.,  3.,  2.,  1., 39.],
          [ 4., 11.,  2.,  5.,  0.,  4.,  1., 39.],
          [ 2.,  7.,  2., 11.,  0.,  4.,  1., 39.],
          [ 4., 15.,  2.,  7.,  0.,  2.,  1., 39.],
          [ 0., 15.,  4.,  0.,  3.,  4.,  0., 39.]])
```

```
[10]: encoder.categories_
```

```
[10]: [array(['?', 'Federal-gov', 'Local-gov', 'Never-worked', 'Private',
          'Self-emp-inc', 'Self-emp-not-inc', 'State-gov', 'Without-pay'],
          dtype=object),
       array(['10th', '11th', '12th', '1st-4th', '5th-6th', '7th-8th',
          '9th', 'Assoc-acdm', 'Assoc-voc', 'Bachelors', 'Doctorate',
          'HS-grad', 'Masters', 'Preschool', 'Prof-school',
          'Some-college'], dtype=object),
       array(['Divorced', 'Married-AF-spouse', 'Married-civ-spouse',
          'Married-spouse-absent', 'Never-married', 'Separated',
          'Widowed'], dtype=object),
       array(['?', 'Adm-clerical', 'Armed-Forces', 'Craft-repair',
          'Exec-managerial', 'Farming-fishing', 'Handlers-cleaners',
          'Machine-op-inspct', 'Other-service', 'Priv-house-serv',
          'Prof-specialty', 'Protective-serv', 'Sales', 'Tech-support',
          'Transport-moving'], dtype=object),
       array(['Husband', 'Not-in-family', 'Other-relative', 'Own-child',
          'Unmarried', 'Wife'], dtype=object),
       array(['Amer-Indian-Eskimo', 'Asian-Pac-Islander', 'Black', 'Other',
          'White'], dtype=object),
       array(['Female', 'Male'], dtype=object),
       array(['?', 'Cambodia', 'Canada', 'China', 'Columbia', 'Cuba',
          'Dominican-Republic', 'Ecuador', 'El-Salvador', 'England',
          'France', 'Germany', 'Greece', 'Guatemala', 'Haiti',
          'Holand-Netherlands', 'Honduras', 'Hong', 'Hungary', 'India',
          'Iran', 'Ireland', 'Italy', 'Jamaica', 'Japan', 'Laos',
          'Mexico', 'Nicaragua', 'Outlying-US(Guam-USVI-etc)', 'Peru',
          'Philippines', 'Poland', 'Portugal', 'Puerto-Rico',
          'Scotland', 'South', 'Taiwan', 'Thailand', 'Trinidad&Tobago',
          'United-States', 'Vietnam', 'Yugoslavia'], dtype=object)]
```

```
[11]: print(
        f"The dataset encoded contains {data_encoded.shape[1]} features")
```

The dataset encoded contains 8 features

We see that the categories have been encoded for each feature (column) independently. We also note that the number of features before and after the encoding is the same.

However, be careful when applying this encoding strategy: using this integer representation leads downstream predictive models to assume that the values are ordered ( $0 < 1 < 2 < 3 \dots$  for instance).

By default, `OrdinalEncoder` uses a lexicographical strategy to map string category labels to integers. This strategy is arbitrary and often meaningless. For instance, suppose the dataset has a categorical variable named "size" with categories such as "S", "M", "L", "XL". We would like the integer representation to respect the meaning of the sizes by mapping them to increasing integers such as 0, 1, 2, 3. However, the lexicographical strategy used by default would map the labels "S", "M", "L", "XL" to 2, 1, 0, 3, by following the alphabetical order.

The `OrdinalEncoder` class accepts a `categories` constructor argument to pass categories in the expected ordering explicitly. You can find more information in the [scikit-learn documentation](#) if needed.

If a categorical variable does not carry any meaningful order information then this encoding might be misleading to downstream statistical models and you might consider using one-hot encoding instead (see below).

### 1.3.2 Encoding nominal categories (without assuming any order)

`OneHotEncoder` is an alternative encoder that prevents the downstream models to make a false assumption about the ordering of categories. For a given feature, it will create as many new columns as there are possible categories. For a given sample, the value of the column corresponding to the category will be set to 1 while all the columns of the other categories will be set to 0.

We will start by encoding a single feature (e.g. "education") to illustrate how the encoding works.

```
[12]: from sklearn.preprocessing import OneHotEncoder

encoder = OneHotEncoder(sparse=False)
education_encoded = encoder.fit_transform(education_column)
education_encoded
```

```
[12]: array([[0., 1., 0., ..., 0., 0., 0.],
             [0., 0., 0., ..., 0., 0., 0.],
             [0., 0., 0., ..., 0., 0., 0.],
             ...,
             [0., 0., 0., ..., 0., 0., 0.],
             [0., 0., 0., ..., 0., 0., 0.],
             [0., 0., 0., ..., 0., 0., 0.]])
```

Note

`sparse=False` is used in the `OneHotEncoder` for didactic purposes, namely easier visualization of the data.

Sparse matrices are efficient data structures when most of your matrix elements are zero. They won't be covered in details in this course. If you want more details about them, you can look at [this](#).

We see that encoding a single feature will give a NumPy array full of zeros and ones. We can get a better understanding using the associated feature names resulting from the transformation.

```
[13]: feature_names = encoder.get_feature_names(input_features=["education"])
education_encoded = pd.DataFrame(education_encoded, columns=feature_names)
education_encoded
```

```
[13]:
```

	education_ 10th	education_ 11th	education_ 12th	education_ 1st-4th \
0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0
1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
...	...	...	...	...
48837	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
48838	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
48839	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
48840	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
48841	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

	education_ 5th-6th	education_ 7th-8th	education_ 9th \
0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1	0.0	0.0	0.0
2	0.0	0.0	0.0
3	0.0	0.0	0.0
4	0.0	0.0	0.0
...	...	...	...
48837	0.0	0.0	0.0
48838	0.0	0.0	0.0
48839	0.0	0.0	0.0
48840	0.0	0.0	0.0
48841	0.0	0.0	0.0

	education_ Assoc-acdm	education_ Assoc-voc	education_ Bachelors \
0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1	0.0	0.0	0.0
2	1.0	0.0	0.0
3	0.0	0.0	0.0
4	0.0	0.0	0.0
...	...	...	...
48837	1.0	0.0	0.0
48838	0.0	0.0	0.0
48839	0.0	0.0	0.0
48840	0.0	0.0	0.0
48841	0.0	0.0	0.0

	education_ Doctorate	education_ HS-grad	education_ Masters \
0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1	0.0	1.0	0.0
2	0.0	0.0	0.0

3	0.0	0.0	0.0
4	0.0	0.0	0.0
...	...	...	...
48837	0.0	0.0	0.0
48838	0.0	1.0	0.0
48839	0.0	1.0	0.0
48840	0.0	1.0	0.0
48841	0.0	1.0	0.0

  

	education_ Preschool	education_ Prof-school	education_ Some-college
0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1	0.0	0.0	0.0
2	0.0	0.0	0.0
3	0.0	0.0	1.0
4	0.0	0.0	1.0
...	...	...	...
48837	0.0	0.0	0.0
48838	0.0	0.0	0.0
48839	0.0	0.0	0.0
48840	0.0	0.0	0.0
48841	0.0	0.0	0.0

[48842 rows x 16 columns]

As we can see, each category (unique value) became a column; the encoding returned, for each sample, a 1 to specify which category it belongs to.

Let's apply this encoding on the full dataset.

```
[14]: print(
        f"The dataset is composed of {data_categorical.shape[1]} features")
data_categorical.head()
```

The dataset is composed of 8 features

```
[14]: workclass      education      marital-status      occupation \
0      Private      11th      Never-married      Machine-op-inspct
1      Private      HS-grad      Married-civ-spouse      Farming-fishing
2      Local-gov      Assoc-acdm      Married-civ-spouse      Protective-serv
3      Private      Some-college      Married-civ-spouse      Machine-op-inspct
4      ?      Some-college      Never-married      ?

relationship      race      sex      native-country
0      Own-child      Black      Male      United-States
1      Husband      White      Male      United-States
2      Husband      White      Male      United-States
3      Husband      Black      Male      United-States
4      Own-child      White      Female      United-States
```



```
[15]: data_encoded = encoder.fit_transform(data_categorical)
data_encoded[:5]
```

```
[15]: array([[0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0.],
[0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0.],
[0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 1.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0.],
[0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0.],
[1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0.,
1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 1., 1., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0., 0.,
0., 0., 0., 1., 0., 0.]])
```

```
[16]: print(
      f"The encoded dataset contains {data_encoded.shape[1]} features")
```

The encoded dataset contains 102 features

Let's wrap this NumPy array in a dataframe with informative column names as provided by the encoder object:

```
[17]: columns_encoded = encoder.get_feature_names(data_categorical.columns)
pd.DataFrame(data_encoded, columns=columns_encoded).head()
```

```
[17]: workclass_ ? workclass_ Federal-gov workclass_ Local-gov \
0          0.0          0.0          0.0
1          0.0          0.0          0.0
2          0.0          0.0          1.0
3          0.0          0.0          0.0
4          1.0          0.0          0.0

workclass_ Never-worked workclass_ Private workclass_ Self-emp-inc \
0          0.0          1.0          0.0
1          0.0          1.0          0.0
2          0.0          0.0          0.0
3          0.0          1.0          0.0
4          0.0          0.0          0.0

workclass_ Self-emp-not-inc workclass_ State-gov workclass_ Without-pay \
0          0.0          0.0          0.0
1          0.0          0.0          0.0
2          0.0          0.0          0.0
3          0.0          0.0          0.0
4          0.0          0.0          0.0

education_ 10th ... native-country_ Portugal \
0          0.0 ...          0.0
1          0.0 ...          0.0
2          0.0 ...          0.0
3          0.0 ...          0.0
4          0.0 ...          0.0

native-country_ Puerto-Rico native-country_ Scotland \
0          0.0          0.0
1          0.0          0.0
2          0.0          0.0
3          0.0          0.0
4          0.0          0.0

native-country_ South native-country_ Taiwan native-country_ Thailand \
0          0.0          0.0          0.0
1          0.0          0.0          0.0
2          0.0          0.0          0.0
3          0.0          0.0          0.0
4          0.0          0.0          0.0

native-country_ Trinidad&Tobago native-country_ United-States \
0          0.0          1.0
```

1	0.0	1.0
2	0.0	1.0
3	0.0	1.0
4	0.0	1.0

	native-country_ Vietnam	native-country_ Yugoslavia
0	0.0	0.0
1	0.0	0.0
2	0.0	0.0
3	0.0	0.0
4	0.0	0.0

[5 rows x 102 columns]

Look at how the "workclass" variable of the 3 first records has been encoded and compare this to the original string representation.

The number of features after the encoding is more than 10 times larger than in the original data because some variables such as `occupation` and `native-country` have many possible categories.

### 1.3.3 Choosing an encoding strategy

Choosing an encoding strategy will depend on the underlying models and the type of categories (i.e. ordinal vs. nominal).

Indeed, using an `OrdinalEncoder` will output ordinal categories. It means that there is an order in the resulting categories (e.g.  $0 > 1 > 2$ ). The impact of violating this ordering assumption is really dependent on the downstream models. Linear models will be impacted by misordered categories while tree-based models will not be.

Thus, in general `OneHotEncoder` is the encoding strategy used when the downstream models are **linear models** while `OrdinalEncoder` is used with **tree-based models**.

You still can use an `OrdinalEncoder` with linear models but you need to be sure that: - the original categories (before encoding) have an ordering; - the encoded categories follow the same ordering than the original categories. The next exercise highlight the issue of misusing `OrdinalEncoder` with a linear model.

Also, there is no need to use an `OneHotEncoder` even if the original categories do not have an given order with tree-based model. It will be the purpose of the final exercise of this sequence.

## 1.4 Evaluate our predictive pipeline

We can now integrate this encoder inside a machine learning pipeline like we did with numerical data: let's train a linear classifier on the encoded data and check the statistical performance of this machine learning pipeline using cross-validation.

Before we create the pipeline, we have to linger on the `native-country`. Let's recall some statistics regarding this column.

```
[18]: data["native-country"].value_counts()
```

```

[18]: United-States      43832
      Mexico            951
      ?                 857
      Philippines       295
      Germany           206
      Puerto-Rico       184
      Canada            182
      El-Salvador       155
      India             151
      Cuba              138
      England           127
      China             122
      South             115
      Jamaica           106
      Italy             105
      Dominican-Republic 103
      Japan             92
      Guatemala         88
      Poland            87
      Vietnam           86
      Columbia          85
      Haiti             75
      Portugal          67
      Taiwan            65
      Iran              59
      Nicaragua         49
      Greece            49
      Peru              46
      Ecuador           45
      France            38
      Ireland           37
      Thailand          30
      Hong              30
      Cambodia          28
      Trinidad&Tobago   27
      Outlying-US(Guam-USVI-etc) 23
      Laos              23
      Yugoslavia        23
      Scotland          21
      Honduras          20
      Hungary           19
      Holand-Netherlands 1
Name: native-country, dtype: int64

```

We see that the **Holand-Netherlands** category is occurring rarely. This will be a problem during cross-validation: if the sample ends up in the test set during splitting then the classifier would not have seen the category during training and will not be able to encode it.

In scikit-learn, there are two solutions to bypass this issue:

- list all the possible categories and provide it to the encoder via the keyword argument `categories`;
- use the parameter `handle_unknown`.

Here, we will use the latter solution for simplicity.

Tip

Be aware the `OrdinalEncoder` exposes as well a parameter `handle_unknown`. It can be set to `use_encoded_value` and by setting `unknown_value` to handle rare categories. You are going to use these parameters in the next exercise.

We can now create our machine learning pipeline.

```
[19]: from sklearn.pipeline import make_pipeline
      from sklearn.linear_model import LogisticRegression

      model = make_pipeline(
          OneHotEncoder(handle_unknown="ignore"), LogisticRegression(max_iter=500)
      )
```

Note

Here, we need to increase the maximum number of iterations to obtain a fully converged `LogisticRegression` and silence a `ConvergenceWarning`. Contrary to the numerical features, the one-hot encoded categorical features are all on the same scale (values are 0 or 1), so they would not benefit from scaling. In this case, increasing `max_iter` is the right thing to do.

Finally, we can check the model's statistical performance only using the categorical columns.

```
[20]: from sklearn.model_selection import cross_validate
      cv_results = cross_validate(model, data_categorical, target)
      cv_results
```

```
[20]: {'fit_time': array([0.85367131, 0.86852932, 0.80280256, 0.86758685,
0.84853792]),
      'score_time': array([0.02705097, 0.02723289, 0.02719402, 0.02859902,
0.02724504]),
      'test_score': array([0.83222438, 0.83560242, 0.82872645, 0.83312858,
0.83466421])}
```

```
[21]: scores = cv_results["test_score"]
      print(f"The accuracy is: {scores.mean():.3f} +/- {scores.std():.3f}")
```

The accuracy is: 0.833 +/- 0.002

As you can see, this representation of the categorical variables is slightly more predictive of the revenue than the numerical variables that we used previously.

In this notebook we have: \* seen two common strategies for encoding categorical features: **ordinal encoding** and **one-hot encoding**; \* used a **pipeline** to use a **one-hot encoder** before fitting a

logistic regression.