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# **Abstract**

Due to advancements in DNA sequencing technologies the amount of genetic data has exploded over the last decade. Traditional models for representing said data can not account for the observed variation and more advanced representations are necessary to accurately depict the true nature of genetical information. However, more complex models calls for more complex techniques for interacting with the data. In this thesis we present an efficient, non-heuristical approach for finding optimal alignments of genetic sequences against graph-based reference genomes.



# **Acknowledgements**



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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

This thesis is the final result of a master project in Informatics: Programming and networks. The project has been supervised by the Biomedical Informatics research group at the Department of Informatics, University of Oslo and was a part of the start phase of a larger project regarding graph-based reference genomes.

### **1.1 Motivation**

The project started out as an exploration of using graph representations for reference genomes. Throughout the early phases the need for a formalization of the alignment process presented itself often. Even something as basic as deciding what the graphs would look like could be solved through defining this process, by implicitly deciding how the input data should be compared and combined. The existing straight-forward approach was not satisfying, and alignment stood out as the most pressing problem to solve to get the ball rolling.

### **1.2 Aims of the thesis**

The project in itself had a clear goal: Develop an algorithm for aligning against graph-based reference genomes. This thesis will not be concerned with the chronological events of the development process. Instead the thesis will be concerned with presenting the result of the project: The algorithm “Fuzzy context-based search”. Interesting design choices taken throughout the process will be presented through the algorithm itself, the reasoning behind these choices given as formal arguments underway. Additionally, the thesis has two smaller goals:

- Validate the correctness of the approach
- Perform performance testing and comparisons to other tools on larger datasets

In order to succeed with the two smaller goals, a tool was created which implements the algorithm. This tool is available online, instructions on re-

trieving and using the tool can be found in section C of the appendix.

Throughout the development process we were faced with several decisions in which we chose to bound the problem, to end up with a simple, formally strict proof-of-concept, which should work as a base for later expansions into more specific tools. These might seem as “shortcuts” to the reader: We assure this is not the case. When ever one of these design choices arise we defend them, and in the later parts of the thesis we reintroduce them again when considering the feasibility of the approach.

During the master project the article “Canonical, Stable, General Mapping using Context Schemes” was published, discussing an approach to alignment which is similar to the one presented in this thesis. The similarities and differences between the two is granted a large part of the discussion section of the thesis.

### **1.3 Contents**

The first chapter will present the theoretical background for the thesis: What kind of data are we dealing with, why is there a problem which needs to be solved and what is done in the field previously. The third and fourth chapters are concerned with presenting the algorithm, first as a conceptual overview and then in more technical detail through explaining the implementation found in the tool. The next chapter addresses the validation of the algorithm. This is done through a series of examples run in the tool and can thus also be used as an introductory manual. Chapter 6 tests the performance of the tool by running a large number of tests on large, real-life datasets. The results from both these chapters are discussed in Chapter 7, along with the previously mentioned comparison of two approaches to the problem. In the eight chapter a conclusion is drawn regarding the value of the approach before finally possible future improvements is discussed in Chapter 9.

# **Chapter 2**

## **Background**

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first is concerned with the biological entities involved throughout the thesis. Because genetics is a huge discipline the chapter will only briefly describe the most critical areas important for this thesis, readers interested in a more thorough introduction are referred to the book “Introduction to genomics”[16]. The second section is directly aimed at the progress in the field of graph-based genomes through discussing relevant articles. Lastly some more general topics of computer science and bioinformatics which play a vital role in the proposed algorithm is presented.

### **2.1 Genetics**

*Deoxyribonucleic acid* (DNA) is a molecular structure in which living organisms store genetic information. The information is encoded by *nucleotides* bound together by a sugar-phosphate backbone into strands. The nucleotides are smaller molecules which vary based on the nitrogenous base they contain: *Adenine* (A), *Cytosine* (C), *Guanine* (G) or *Thymine* (T). Each of the nucleotides has a *complementary base*, A has T and C has G, which it can bind to to form a *base pair*. Due to the chemical structure of the nucleotides, a DNA strand can be said to have a direction: Upstream towards the 5' end or downstream towards the 3' end. The DNA molecule is composed of two reverse complementary which strands are connected in a *double helix* structure. The two strands will have opposing directions, and every base in one of the strands will be connected to its complement. Because either of the strands are easily deduced from the other, DNA is usually represented by only one of them. DNA can thus be seen as a linear sequence of discrete units and can be represented by text strings, containing the four leading letters representing nucleotides. The text strings representations often also contain the letter N, referencing *aNy base*. The genetic sequence of an individual is called the *genotype*. Observable traits of the individual is called the *phenotype*.

### **2.1.1 The central dogma**

The process of transforming the genetic information into large functional biomolecules is called *the central dogma* of molecular biology. The central dogma states that DNA is transcribed into *messenger RNA* (mRNA) which in turn is translated into proteins. mRNA is, like DNA, a sequence of nucleotides consisting of the three bases A, C and G and *Uracil* (U) instead of T. The mRNA can be divided into triplets of nucleotides called *codons*. The cell decodes the mRNA codons and create strings of amino acids which are transformed into functional proteins. The relationship between codons and amino acids can be looked up in a table called *The standard genetic code*[16, Chapter 1, p. 6]. Only a portion of the nucleotides in DNA act as *coding regions* which make it through the transcription process and code for actual protein sequences. These are also called *exons*. The remaining *non-coding regions* of the genetic sequence are known as *introns*. In humans about 1.3% of the genome is coding regions[16, Chapter 4], the rest used to be referred to as *junk DNA*. We now know that the non-coding regions also holds important information.

### **2.1.2 Variation**

Genetic information is prone to mutations, either as a result of environmental influence or as a consequence of imperfections during DNA transcription. The simplest mutations are *point mutations* which affect a single nucleotide base. Point mutations can either be *Single-nucleotide polymorphisms* (SNPs) where a single base is substituted for another, or *insertions* or *deletions* (indels) where a single nucleotide is removed or inserted into the genetic sequence. Mutations can also occur over larger areas of the genome, where longer subsequences can be deleted, inserted, moved or reversed. A final type of mutations is *Copy number variations*, or *repeats*, where a longer sequence of DNA, typically at least 1 kb [7], is repeated a variable number of times.

As mutations happen randomly to individuals in a population, a diversity of genotypes emerges and creates variability within a *gene pool*. These different genotypes give rise to a variety of phenotypes. A subset of these phenotypes can ensure that an individual is better suited for survival and reproduction than others. Given enough time and scarcity in resources the best suited individuals will survive and pass on their genes to the next generation. This is the process of *natural selection* which is the main driving force behind evolution. Another mechanism in play is *genetic drift* which affects gene frequencies in a gene pool through non-selective, random processes.[referanser](#)

Because there are more possible combinations of nucleotide triplets than there are amino acids there exists some overlap between the codons and the resulting amino acid. For instance the DNA triplets “CGA”, “CGC”, “CGG”, “CGT”, “AGA” and “AGG” all encode for the amino acid Arginine. In

in these cases point mutations can occur without affecting the resulting protein. These mutations are called *synonymous*, the opposing case which alters the amino acid sequence are called *non-synonymous*.

### 2.1.3 Reference genomes

A *reference genome* is a data structure which contains genetic information for a population, typically for a given species. The reference genome has a set of continuous nucleotide sequences, called *contigs*, combined into larger *scaffolds* which again are combined to form the *genome* for a species. The first reference genomes collapsed samples from several individuals into a linear *consensus sequence* which was representable for the species as a whole. Later reference genomes have been built more flexibly to allow positions on the genome, called *loci*, to have several variants, termed *alternate loci*. A specific variant of a gene is called an *allele*. A *haplotype* is a set of alleles which tend to be inherited together. Reference genomes form what can be seen as an index for the genome of a species and can be used in sequencing (Section 2.2.1). The structure of a reference genome can increase computational tractability by reducing the double-storage of equal regions which would happen through storing individual sequences. The reference also provides a mosaic representing genetic variation, which can be useful when doing genetic analysis.

### 2.1.4 The human genome

The human genome consists of roughly 3 billion base pairs (bp). These base pairs are spread over 46 chromosomes and are assumed to contain about 23 000 genes [16]. The current human reference genome is GRCh38[10], developed and maintained by the *Genome Reference Consortium* [9]. GRCh38 contains 261 alternate loci, spread over 178 out of a total of 238 regions. An average human is estimated to deviate from the reference genome in 10.000-11.000 synonymous sites and 10.000-12.000 non-synonymous sites [5].

## Major Histocompatibility Complex

The *Major Histocompatibility Complex* (MHC) is a genetic region spanning approximately 4.5-5 million base pairs (mb)[6][25]. In humans it is located on chromosome 6 and contains about 200 genes. MHC is a region known to contain genes which affect the functionality of the immune system [33]. Even more so MHC is known to be a highly variable region, containing variants that are directly associated with disease [11]. The high variability creates difficulties when comparing DNA sequences to determine genetic causes for the observed disorders.

## 2.2 Bioinformatics

### 2.2.1 Sequencing

During *sequencing* a *sequencing machine* is used on a physical DNA fragment to find the underlying nucleotide sequence. The machines produce short *reads*, typically in the order of a hundred bp[29], which are combined into longer sequences through a process called *assembly*. When the sequenced individual belongs to a specie with a reference genome, reads are typically mapped to positions in the reference to determine their underlying order in what is called *mapping assembly*. In the opposing case overlap techniques[28] or de Bruijn graphs (Section 2.3.1) are often used in what is known as *de novo assembly*[16, Chapter 1, p. 19].

The different sequencing technologies have varying degrees of errors introduced in their reads, often closely related to the sequencing cost[29]. The errors can take the form of both point mutations and larger structural variations. Reads produced by sequencing machines are typically prone to contain more errors in their peripherals. There exists efficient strategies for both estimating error rates [39] and correcting the reads[20] Can probably provide more citations.

### 2.2.2 Alignment

*Sequence alignment* is the process of determining correspondence between text strings, in this case representing DNA, by mapping the elements from one to the elements of the other according to a *substitution matrix* (Fig. ??) providing a *mapping score*.

#### Definition 1 (Mapping score)

A score retrieved by mapping to characters  $c_1, c_2$  against a substitution matrix. Referenced by  $\text{mappingScore}(c_1, c_2)$

The alignment procedure is never allowed to change the order of the elements in the two strings, but can introduce *gaps*. A gap occurs when one element in one string does not have a counterpart in the opposing string (Fig. 2.1). When a gap occurs the resulting is penalized according to the length of the gap, by a *gap penalty*.

#### Definition 2 (Gap penalty)

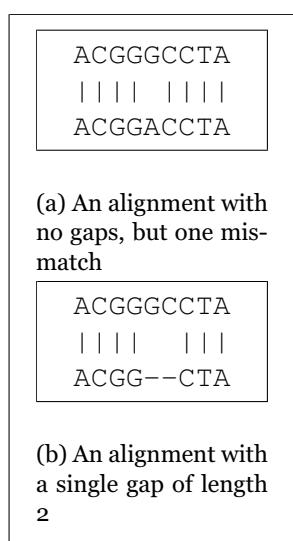
The penalty received for a gap of a given length  $l$ . Referenced by  $\text{gapPenalty}(l)$ .

Gap penalties come in different shapes, often according to the origin of the data involved. A *linear gap penalty* gives linear penalties related to the gap length. An *affine gap penalty* distinguishes between opening and continuing a gap. A *logarithmic gap penalty* lets the increase in penalty fade as the gap expands. A schema which provides functionality for mapping bases and penalizing gaps is called a *scoring schema*.

### Definition 3 (Scoring schema)

A structure which provides a  $\text{mappingScore}(c_1, c_2)$ -function and a  $\text{gapPenalty}(\text{distance})$ -function. The alphabet  $\Sigma$  of a scoring schema is defined by the characters present in the scoring schema.

A gap refers to an element in one of the strings which has no counterpart in the other string when aligned (Fig. 2.1). The scoring schemas can be based around simple match/mismatch scores, which corresponds to the mathematical *Edit distance problem*, or more complex scores (Fig. 2.1). These complex models typically try to model the probabilities behind the physical processes responsible for change. The computational sequence alignment problem consists of finding the highest scoring alignment for any two strings. There exists two main variants of the problem: Finding *global alignments*, where two entire strings are aligned against each other, and finding *local alignments*, where a string is aligned against a substring of the other. The two are traditionally solved respectively by the Needleman-Wunsch and Smith-Waterman algorithms which both are based on *dynamic programming* (Section 2.2.3).



If more than two sequences are aligned the result is a *Multiple sequence alignment* (MSA). This is typically done on sequences which are expected to share a common ancestor to determine which traits in the individuals arised from the same origins and how the involved species have diverged genetically over time. A final variant of the alignment problem is one involving large databases of sequences, where the algorithms does not only need to find the best alignment between two sequences, but also determine which sequence should be chosen in order to maximize the result. Both of the preceding techniques typically utilize heuristical methods in order to decrease the computational complexity.

Figure 2.1: Examples of aligned text strings

	A	C	G	T
A	91	-114	-31	-123
C	-114	100	-125	-31
G	-31	-125	100	-114
T	-123	-31	-114	91

Table 2.1: The HOXD70 substitution matrix

### 2.2.3 Dynamic programming

*Dynamic programming* (DP) is a problem-solving technique where a problem instance is solved by combining the results of smaller subproblems. DP is similar to recursion in that every instance is solved by a *recurrence relation* (Equation 2.1) which recurses on smaller and smaller problems until a *base case* is found. A base case represent the bottom of the recursion and is a value which can easily be computed without further lookups. The main difference between recursion and DP is that the latter usually stores its intermediate results to allow for fast lookups for reoccurring instances. DP is often used as an approach for optimization problems in order to minimize computational complexity while giving a guarantee for optimal results [1, Chapter 9].

A problem which is typically solved by dynamic programming is the previously mentioned edit distance problem which utilizes a 2-dimensional array to store the computed values (Fig. 2.2). For two strings  $S$  and  $P$ , every index  $[i, j]$  in the edit distance table represents the problem instance of the strings  $S[0 : i], P[0 : j]$ . The base cases can be seen in the first row and column. There are often dropped from the table itself due to the simple nature of their computations. The remainder of the table is filled out with the following recurrence relation:

	a	l	g	o	r	i	t	h	m
o	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
l	1	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g	2	2	2	2	2	3	4	5	6
a	3	3	3	2	3	4	5	6	7
r	4	3	4	3	3	4	5	6	7
i	5	4	4	4	4	3	4	5	6
t	6	5	5	5	5	4	3	4	5
h	7	6	6	6	5	4	3	4	5
m	8	7	7	7	7	6	5	4	3
	9	8	8	8	8	7	6	5	4

Table 2.2: The 2-dimensional array used for solving the edit distance problem for the strings S=“algorithm” and P=“logarithm” (Note: This follows regular ED scoring where every operation is penalized +1)

$$D[i, j] = \min \begin{cases} D[i - 1, j] + 1 \\ D[i, j - 1] + 1 \\ D[i - 1, j - 1] + score(S[i], P[j]) \end{cases} \quad (2.1)$$

where  $score(x, y)$  is an inverse equality function. The score for the entire problem instance can be found in the cell with the highest indexes in the

bottom right corner.

There are two separate ways of using Dynamic Programming. A *bottom-up* approach starts at the smallest cases and computes everything until it reaches the actual given problem instances. This corresponds to starting in the top left corner of the edit distance array and computing the cells iteratively moving downwards to the right. A *top-down* procedure starts at the given problem instance and recursively computes every subproblem that is needed. This means starting in the bottom right corner of the 2-dimensional array and recursing upwards to the right. For the edit distance problem the choice of approach bears no big significance as every cell has to be computed either way, but there are problems where using top-down can avoid some computations which are irrelevant to the final result. The latter can also be efficient for heuristical methods where an area of the search space can be overlooked.

#### 2.2.4 Suffix trees

A *suffix trie* is a special tree constructed specifically for strings of text, containing vertices representing characters (Fig. 2.2a). Every suffix of a string has a corresponding leaf vertex, where the vertices along path from the root to the vertex contains the characters in the suffix. From this it follows that every substring has a matching path starting in the root node. A *suffix tree*, or *compressed suffix trie*, is a suffix trie in which every linear path is compressed into a single vertex (Fig. 2.2b). Suffix trees can easily be extended to hold collections of strings[1, Chapter 20]. An elementary solution has a space complexity of  $O(s)$ , where  $s$  is the length of the string (or the total length of all strings if the tree is built from a collection), and a string of length  $m$  can be looked up in  $O(km)$  time for an alphabet of size  $k$ [1, Section 20.6.1]

A Block-sorting Lossless Data Compression Algorithm

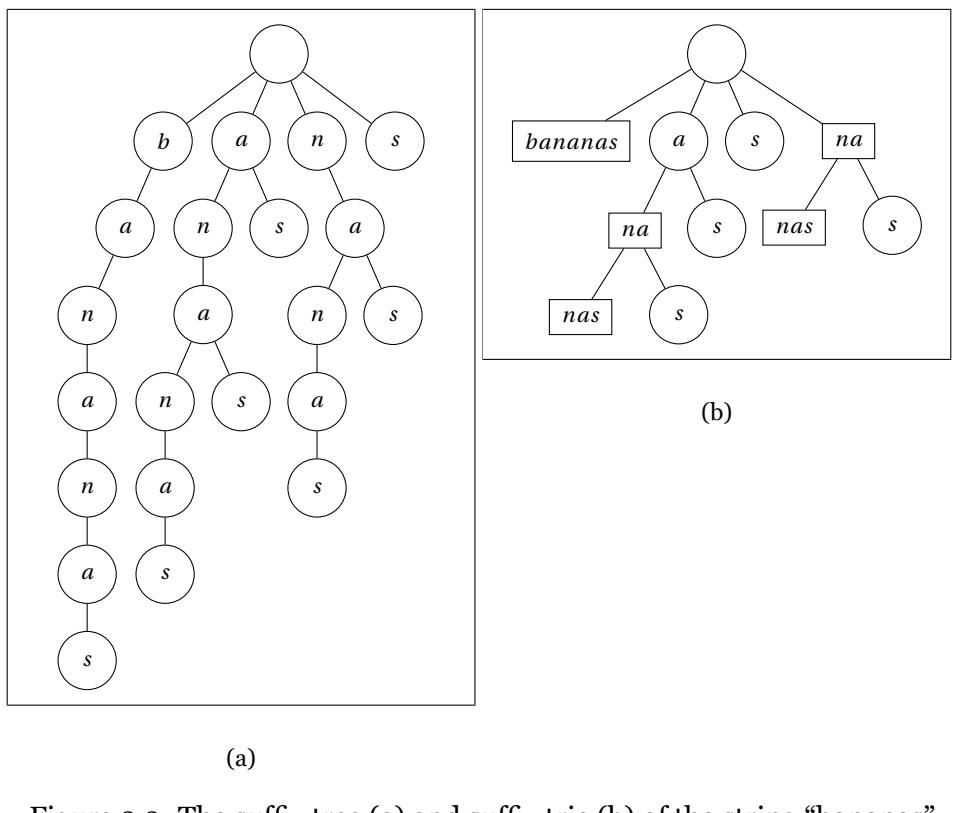


Figure 2.2: The suffix tree (a) and suffix trie (b) of the string “bananas”

## 2.3 Graph-based genome representations

Representing genetic information as graphs instead of the traditional linear representations have some major advantages. Graphs are far more expressive structures compared to text strings, able to represent more complex relationships between the elements involved. Secondly, if biological questions can be rephrased to graph theoretical settings, the extensive mathematical field of graph theory can present more feasible approaches to previously hard problems. There is however a major problem: A more complex structure calls for more sophisticated variants of existing methods. Graph-based approaches have been used for some time in the assembly process, and more recently in relation to reference genomes. This section will present both of these approaches alongside some of the remaining unsolved problems. The section is presented in a way which should not require any previous knowledge of graph theory except for elementary terms, but readers interested in a more complete introduction is referred to the bibliography [32, Chapter 0] [40, Chapter 9] [1, Chapter 11]. Complexity in regards to the graphs and their operations is discussed using *big-O* notation [40, Chapter 2][1, Section 3.1]

### 2.3.1 Representation

Deciding upon the representation of the graph consists of defining the structure of the elements involved, namely the vertices and edges. As the graphs are built from genetic information the basic building blocks, the nucleotides, should obviously be represented. If the input data are more complex than single nucleotides, we must represent the relationships. Because the input data has variation, the structure needs to tolerate flexibility. There is however a risk of making the structures so flexible they present no consistency, and a flexibility/rigidness-tradeoff becomes apparent (Fig. 2.3). How the struc-

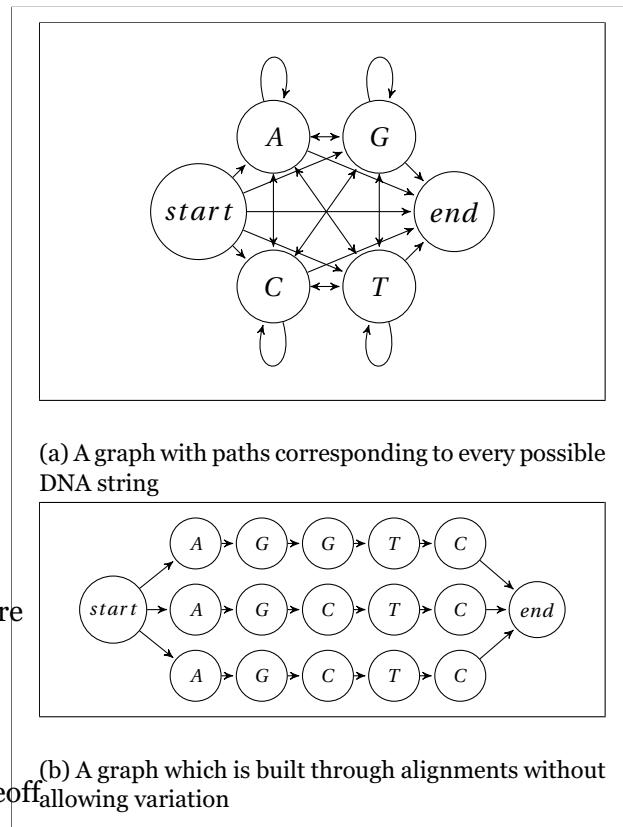


Figure 2.3: Two sequence graphs displaying too much flexibility (a) and (arguably) too much rigidity (b)

tures are defined in detailed should be determined through the operations which are desirable to perform on them.

### De Bruijn graphs

In the article “An Eulerian path approach to DNA fragment assembly”[28], Pevzner, Tang and Waterman proposes *de Bruijn* graphs as a solution to find the correct assembly of repeats during fragment assembly. A de Bruijn graph is a structure where vertices represent *k-mers* from an alphabet and edges represent relationships between the k-mers of two vertices (Fig. 2.4). Pevzner et al. lets the vertices contain strings of length  $l - 1$  and connects vertices with an edge wherever there exists a read of length  $l$  containing the two substrings. Formulating the problem in this fashion lets the problem be formulated as a *Eulerian path* problem, solvable in polynomial time, rather than the traditional “overlap-layout-consensus” method which is equivalent to the NP-complete problem of finding a *Hamiltonian path*[1, Section 11.1]. A great benefit with de Bruijn graphs is that there is no ambiguity: Any legal k-mer has at no point more than one vertex representing it.

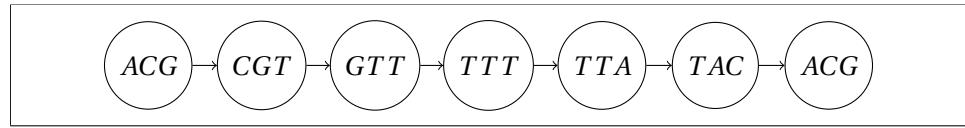


Figure 2.4: A de Bruijn graph with  $k = 3$  corresponding to the sequence ACCTTACG

A more detailed type of de Bruijn graphs is the colored variant where the origins of edges and vertices are stored as colors. The entire sequence originating from a single individual sample can be seen by following a path with a given color. Similarities between samples can be seen as multicolored stretches, variation take the form of bubbles. Colored de Bruijn graphs can be used for *de novo* assembly as a more powerful method for detecting variation, compared to traditional assembly techniques[12].

### Sequence graphs

The relationship between a de Bruijn graph and the sequences it represents is not immediately apparent. A more intuitively pleasing representation is a graph where every vertex contains exactly one nucleotide (Figure [figure](#)), a concept called *partially ordered graphs* by Lee et al.[6] and *sequence graphs* by Paten et al.[26]. In this representation the underlying connection between the characters of a text string and the vertices of the graph is more obvious. The representation does however have a major

drawback compared to de Bruijn graphs: The concept of uniqueness. A vertice can no longer be identified solely by the data it contains. To solve this problem the vertices can be given ids, for instance UUIDs[26], for uniqueness. Even though these ids can be used to identify a vertice they contain no information regarding the data which is stored in the graph. The difficulties presented by this problem will be the basis for the subsequent section on mapping.

### Cactus graphs

The article “Cactus Graphs for Genome Comparisons” introduces cactus graphs as a model for alignment of multiple genomes. A cactus graph has vertices representing sets of homologous DNA sequences and edges representing adjacencies between the strings in any of the genomes used as input (Fig. [figure](#)). In cases where there exists several adjacencies between two vertices these are combined into a single edge with several labels. The result is a graph where every *simple cycle*, cycles where no vertice is repeated, has at most one vertex in common. A similarity between this representation and de Bruijn graphs is that the vertices contain subsequences of the original input sequences. Additionally this representations allows some flexibility, controllable through the definition of homology. If the strictest possible restriction is set, a restriction which requires equal strings, the vertices would contain an exact k-mer from an input sequence just like the de Bruijn vertices.

#### 2.3.2 Mapping

Although the two terms are often used isomorphically we will in this thesis define mapping and alignment as two separate concepts. Mapping is the process of finding relationships between single characters of a string and single elements of a reference genome. Alignment is concerned with finding relationships between consecutive elements of an input string and substructures in the reference genome. For linear strings mapping is easy. Every string has the same underlying coordinate system, represented by the positions of the characters, and two elements from two separate sequences are either in the same position or they are not. If they are not the difference in position can be derived from the difference between the indexes. Because the indexes of a graph has only one property, uniqueness, they do not hold the intrinsic value of describing relationships between vertices. Any mapping system which uses fixed coordinates would face problems when dealing with a fluent graph able to merge in new information, as the internal relations are bound to change. In de Bruijn graphs the problem is solved by moving the mappable quality away from positions and into the data: For any possible k-mer there either is a corresponding vertice or there is not. In sequence graphs, where nucleotides are the most basic information, there exists an equal number of identically scoring positions for every base as there are vertices containing that vertice in the graph.

Paten et al.[26] introduce the concept of *context-based mapping* as a solution to the mapping problem when the reference is modeled as a graph. Context-based mapping is an approach where a vertice is identified by the surrounding environment in the graph. More technically a vertice has a set of *contexts* which are tuples ( $L, B, R$ ). The  $L$  references the left side, a path going in to the vertice,  $B$  is the base contained in the vertice and  $R$  is an outgoing path from the vertice (Fig. [figure](#)). More conceptually, contexts can be seen as paths which pass through a given vertice. Because these paths are linear and passes through vertices containing characters, the contexts can be treated as text strings. There are two concrete examples of approaches presented in the article: The *general left-right exact match mapping scheme* and the *central exact match mapping scheme*. The key words left-right and central refer to how a vertice defines its contexts based on the surroundings. The former defines separate contexts for incoming and outgoing paths whereas the latter defines the vertice as a center of a path where the differences of the lengths of the two contexts are minimized. A *balanced central exact match mapping scheme* is a special case of the latter where both contexts are the same length, and the vertice thus is the center of a k-mer. This is a concept closely related to de Bruijn graphs.

Both of the examples use the word *exact* in their definitions. The term refers to the fact that every context is *unique* to a single vertice which means every possible context either maps unambiguously to a single vertice or does not map at all. Because the graphs have the possibility of branching a vertice can have several contexts contained in *context sets*. Because every context is unique a collection of such will also be unique, which means context-based mapping leads to a unique two-way mapping schema. This is an even stronger notion of mappability than positions in strings, as a character of a string does not necessarily map uniquely back to its position. Being this precise in the definition has a drawback: If a vertice does not have a unique context it is no longer mappable.

### 2.3.3 Alignment

As previously discussed, alignment of text strings has for some time been considered a solved problem. We let the two strings represent each their dimension in a two-dimensional space and search for a path through the space which yields an optimal score. When one of the strings is replaced with a graph a simple one-dimensional representation is no longer sufficient. There does not exist a simple “3 steps before” or “11 steps after” relationship between the elements involved. A solution to this problem can be to imagine alignments against graphs like alignments against sequences in a database: There exists several possible sequences which can be aligned two-dimensionally, find the one yielding the highest score. But, unlike individual sequences in a database, the paths through a graph can have overlapping regions. Creating all possible paths results in an exponential number of possibilities which does not necessarily portray a fair picture of the underlying structure.

## Dynamic programming on graphs

The article “Multiple sequence alignment using partial order graphs” proposes a direct adaptation of the regular two-dimensional dynamic programming solution for graphs. Every vertex contains a one-dimensional array representing the string which is aligned. Just like an array-index in the edit distance problems, the vertex looks at smaller subproblems to decide what the values of the array should be. However, because this is a graph and not a string, we have no preceding indexes to look up. The vertex has to look at every preceding vertex as a single instance of the two-dimensional problem, to determine which of the incoming vertices represents the linear path which presents the highest score. After filling out every index  $i$  of the array in the vertex  $v$  in this fashion, the array represents the highest score possible for the substring up to index  $s$  for all paths up to vertex  $v$ .

Using an approach which is this closely related to the known approaches for regular string alignment has its advantages. Alignments and scores are verifiable through existing tools and the principle of optimality is contained through the dynamic programming. Techniques for handling the different types of alignments, for instance local or global, can be inherited from the domain of strings. The algorithm is however susceptible to the inherent complexity of graphs.

## Context-based alignment

In the article “Canonical, Stable, General Mapping using Context Schemes”[25] the concept of context-based mapping is used for aligning strings. The algorithm works by identifying substrings of the input string which maps uniquely to a context in the reference. Overlapping contexts are combined into longer *Maximal Unique Substrings* (MUMs) which uniquely align to a region of the reference. Finally the aligned substrings are combined in chains into  $\beta$ -synteny blocks, paths along the graph where exactly  $\beta$  mismatches are allowed between the uniquely mapped elements. Any remaining bases are mapped *on credit*, for instance as a graph search through the region represented by the gap between the end and start of consecutive uniquely mapped sequences. The conceptual idea is that any string mapping to a region of the graph should share a number of unique paths, which can be combined into a larger result. The authors name their heuristical approach the  $\alpha - \beta$ -Natural Context-Driven Mapping Scheme where the  $\alpha$  refers to the level of uniqueness required in a context to be considered unique and the  $\beta$  refers to the degree of similarity between a substring and a context in order to classify the two as equal.

## 2.4 Tools and frameworks

This section will very briefly present some of the technical concepts and tools mentioned throughout the thesis. The thesis requires no understanding of these elements: They are only mentioned to provide

a backbone for non-technical readers interested in the implementation section and exploring the developed tool.

#### **2.4.1 Generics in java**

#### **2.4.2 Serialization**

Serialization is the process of writing data structures and objects stored in memory while executing a program to a file. The state of the program is saved through writing the values of the variables involved. The execution can later be resumed in any given state by reading and recreating the serialized objects. Java provides their own off-the-shelf serialization through the `Serializable` interface which contains functionality for reading and writing objects to file through filestreams. The serialized objects are transformed to sequences of bytes containing both information regarding the semantics of the type of the object and values stored in variables. More specifics regarding the serialization process can be read in the Java API documentation [35].

#### **2.4.3 The JUnit library**

JUnit[34] is a Java library which provides utilities for testing components. The testing is done through asserting a set of first order logical statements, intuitively written in Java syntax, and the checking whether these assertions are correct. Examples of statements can be:

- `assertEquals(x, y)`
- `assertTrue(x > y)`
- `assertNotNull(object)`

The library presents an opportunity to test the *correctness* of a system through checking it's state. The library is however not concerned with whether this correctness is a valid measurement of the expected behaviour of the system.

#### **2.4.4 Visualizing graphs: The dot-format**

This thesis is concerned with building graphs and searching through them. Often we want to display the graphs and the results from searches to have a reference when discussing their properties. This in itself is not an easy task: Visualization of complex graphs quickly turn into an combinatorical problem of where the elements should be placed. Graphviz[8] is a set of tools created for solving this problem, including a stand-alone tool for Linux platforms. `.dot` is one of the

# Chapter 3

## The algorithm “Fuzzy context-based search”

In this chapter we introduce the algorithm “Fuzzy context-based search” as a solution to the problem of aligning text strings against graph-based reference genomes. In order to do this we will first present formal definitions of the elements and structures involved as well as the problem itself. The following description of the algorithm will be a conceptual overview where the motivation behind the steps taken are also described. A more detailed introduction to an implementation of the algorithm will follow in the succeeding chapter, in which space and time complexity will also be discussed. Due to the abstract nature of this chapter the reader is advised to use the coming chapter as a reference whenever needed. The two have corresponding sections, and the latter contain exact details and concrete examples.

In order to avoid ambiguity when dealing with already existing concepts, the terms which are defined are given problem-specific names. For several of the terms there also follows a shorthand notation behind the original name in the definition title. Whenever these shorthand names are used in the subsequent explanatory sections we refer exclusively to the definitions done in this thesis.

### 3.1 The graphs

The graphs used as reference genome graphs will be built iteratively by starting out with an empty graph and sequentially merging in input sequences aligned against the existing structure. How the sequences are merged, and thus what the graphs look like, are decided entirely through the alignment procedure, which in part relies on the scoring schema. This first section is dedicated to precisely defining the involved graphs.

**Definition 4** (Graph-based reference genome (Graph))

*A pair  $G = \{V, E\}$  where  $V$  is a set of vertices and  $E$  is a set of edges.  $|G|$  denotes the number of vertices in  $G$ .*

The involved graphs will be sequence graphs (Section ??) where every vertex correspond to a single nucleotide from a one or more input sequences used in building the graph. Whether the vertex originates from a single or several sequences is based on whether any new bases has been mapped, and consecutively merged into the vertex. In addition to the nucleobase the vertices will contain an index which is unique to the graph. Every graph  $G$  will have two special vertices  $s_G = \{s, 0\}$  and  $t_G = \{e, -1\}$  which represents unique start and end vertices.

**Definition 5** (Graph genome vertex (Vertice))

*A pair  $v = \{b, i\}$  where  $b \in \{A, C, T, G\}$  and  $i$  is a unique index. The vertice at index  $i$  is denoted  $v_i$ . The notation  $b(v_i)$  references the first element in the pair (the nucleotide).*

The edges model the relationships between the vertices and thus the relationships between the elements of the input sequences. Every edge has its origin from a consecutive pair of nucleotides in one or more input sequences.

**Definition 6** (Graph genome edge (Edge))

*An ordered pair  $e = \{i_s, i_e\}$  where both elements are indexes for vertices.*

There exists no information storing the origin of an edge, or whether an edge originates from one or more input sequences, and all edges are thus seen as equally probable when aligning a sequence. A sequence of vertices where there exists an edge for every pair of consecutive vertices is called a *path*. The introduction of paths is a way of capturing the combination of several individual characters into text strings in the domain of our graphs.

**Definition 7** (Graph genome path (Path))

*A list  $P$  of indexes such that for all consecutive pairs  $p_x, p_{x+1} \in P$ , where  $p_n$  denotes the  $n$ -th element of the list, there exists an edge  $e = \{p_x, p_{x+1}\}$ . The notation  $p_{-1}$  denotes the last element in the list. The length of  $P$ ,  $l(P)$ , is equal to the number of indexes in the list. The distance  $d(P)$  between  $p_0$  and  $p_{-1}$  is  $l(P) - 2$ .*

**Corollary 1**

*Every edge  $e$  is also a path  $P$  with  $l(P) = 2$  and  $d(P) = 0$ .*

Paths spanning the entire length of a graph  $G$ , from  $s_G$  to  $t_G$  are named full paths. Every input sequence used to build the graph has a corresponding full path.

**Definition 8** (Full path)

*A path  $P$  through a graph  $G$  where  $p_0 = 0$  and  $p_{-1} = -1$*

There is no correspondence the other way, meaning there can exist full paths which does not originate from a single input sequence (Fig. 3.1). When aligning regular text strings against eachother the introduction of gaps is a key element. The concept of strings with gaps are translated to graphs through *incomplete paths*.

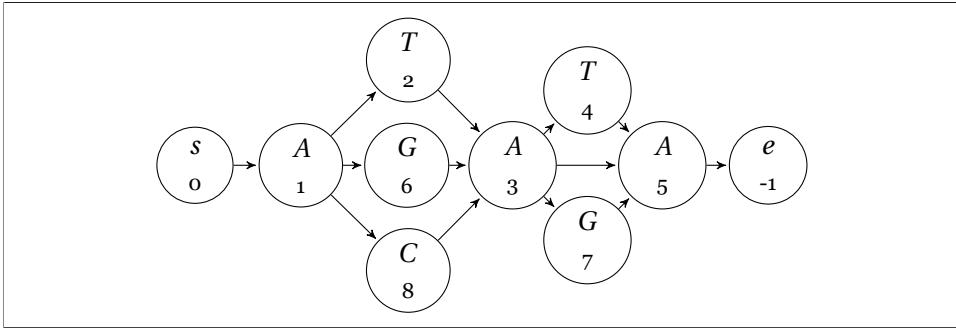


Figure 3.1: An example reference graph  $G$  made from the three sequences “ATATA”, “AGAGA” and “ACAA”. Although the graph is made from 3 sequences, 9 full paths can be found

**Definition 9** (Incomplete path)

A list  $P^*$  of indexes such that for all consecutive pairs  $\{p^*_x, p^*_{x+1}\} \in P^*$  there exists a path  $P$  such that  $p_0 = p^*_x$  and  $p_{-1} = p^*_{x+1}$ .

Conceptually incomplete paths can be seen as regular paths where some of the vertices are removed to reflect gaps. We can score an incomplete path by looking solely at the gaps present and avoiding the nucleobases contained in the vertices to produce a *path score*.

**Definition 10** (Path score)

The total score of all gaps present in an incomplete path  $P^*$  according to a scoring schema

In an incomplete path there exists two possible relationships between consecutive elements: Either they are neighbours and there exists an edge between them, or they are not neighbours and are at the beginning and end of a path. Because the edges have distance 0 and are thus not penalized, the path score of an incomplete path can be found by summarizing gap penalties for gaps between every pair of consecutive vertices.

**Corollary 2**

$\text{pathScore}(P^*) = \sum_{i=0}^{|P^*|-2} \text{gapPenalty}(\text{distance}(p^*_i, p^*_{i+1}))$  where  $\text{distance}(x, y)$  denotes the distance of the shortest path  $P$  where  $P_0 = x$  and  $P_{-1} = y$ .

## 3.2 The alignment problem

Because the alignment problem is concerned with aligning text strings against graphs we need to define a second component alongside the graphs: The input sequences.

### Definition 11 (Input sequence)

A string  $s$  over the alphabet  $\{A, C, T, G\}$ . The length of the string is given by  $|s|$ . The individual character on position  $0 \leq x < |s|$  is referenced by  $s_x$ .

Once we have a clear definition of a graph  $G$  and an input sequence  $s$  we can try to find an *alignment* between the two, which model the relationship between them. In order to do this, the alignments should provide relations between the smallest constituents of the two input structures, the vertices of the graph and the characters of the string, in a way such that the internal structures of the two are reflected against each other. We can model an alignment as a special variant of an incomplete path, which allows for *unmapped elements*. These elements are recognized as elements of  $|s|$  which is mapped to 0, the index of the start-vertex and thus always an invalid mapping. The remaining elements of  $s$  is mapped to indexes of valid vertices of  $G$  which form an incomplete path  $P^*$ . Moving forward through the individual positions  $s_x$  which are mapped corresponds to traversing  $P^*$ .

### Definition 12 (Alignment)

Given a graph  $G$  and a string  $s$ , an alignment  $A$  is an ordered list of length  $|s|$  such that every element  $a_x \in A$  is either 0 or the index for a valid vertex of  $G$  such that for every consecutive pair of valid indexes  $a_n, a_m$  there exists a path  $P$  where  $p_0 = a_n$  and  $p_{-1} = a_m$ . A 0 represents an unmapped character in  $s$ .

When we have defined the alignments we can start scoring them. The scoring happens according to a scoring schema and should be the sum of three different scores:

1. The mapping scores of the mapped elements
2. The gap penalties for gaps in the graph, represented by the distance of the shortest path between consecutive pairs of mapped elements
3. The gap penalties for gaps in the string, represented by unmapped positions

We already know how to find the first two. The last can be found by summing up the gap penalties for all the gaps in the input sequence. A gap in the input sequence can be identified by a continuous subsequence  $A^*_{x:y} \in A$  spanning the indexes  $x$  to  $y-1$  where every element is unmapped. An important aspect here is that every unmapped element should only be considered part of exactly one gap. We cover this aspect by only considering *maximal unmapped subsequences*

### Definition 13

A subsequence  $A^*_{x:y} \in A$ , such that every  $a^* = 0$  for every  $a^* \in A^*$  and  $x$  is either 0 or  $a_{x-1} \neq 0$  and  $y$  is either  $|s|-1$  or  $a_{y+1} \neq 0$ .

The gap penalties for gaps in the string is then defined as  $\sum_{A^* \in A} gapPenalty(|A^*|)$  where  $A^*$  is the maximal unmapped subsequences of  $A$ .

**Definition 14** (Alignment score)

*Given a sequence  $s$ , a graph  $G$  and an alignment  $A$ , the score produced by combining mapping scores for the pairs  $\{b(v_{a_x}), s_x\}$  for  $0 \leq x < |s|$  with the path score for the incomplete path provided by consecutive mapped indexes of  $A$  and the gap penalties for the string gaps in  $A$ . We reference this score by  $alignmentScore(A)$ .*

We can then easily define the alignment problem itself:

**Definition 15** (The optimal alignment score problem)

*For any pair  $\{G, s\}$ , where  $G$  is a graph and  $s$  is an input sequence, find one of the alignments  $A$  which produces the highest possible alignment score.*

Notice that the definition only calls for finding one of the alignments which produce a highest possible score. This is done in order to simplify the abstract explanations of the algorithm. Implementation-wise this can trivially be changed to find all optimal alignments. The necessary adjustments is discussed as a part of the succeeding chapter in section 4.1.3. Additionally we have defined a bounded version of the problem, called *The bounded optimal alignment score problem*. This second version also considers a score threshold value  $T$  and deems a string  $s$  *unalignable* if the optimal alignment produces a score lower than  $T$ .

**Definition 16** (The bounded optimal alignment score problem)

*Given a triplet  $\{G, s, T\}$  where  $G$  and  $s$  are as before and  $T$  is a numeric value, find the alignment  $A$  which produces the highest alignment score, if and only if the alignment score for  $A$  is higher than  $T$ . If no such alignment exists,  $s$  should be classified as unalignable.*

Defining a bounded adaptation of the problem is obviously done in order to reduce the computational complexity, but it also present a powerful notion of control to the model: We can choose the degree of similarity required for elements to be considered equal. This simplifies the concept of equality into a classification problem where the border between the two classes can be easily manipulated through the threshold variable.

### 3.3 “Fuzzy context-based search”

We now present the algorithm we propose as a solution to the bounded optimal alignment score problem. The algorithm consists of two distinct subproblems which are solved in consecutive steps:

1. Create a new graph  $G'$  for an input triplet  $\{G, s, T\}$
2. Search  $G'$  for an optimal alignment

Both the motivation behind each step and the conceptual approach for solving the subproblem will be explained in its corresponding subsection. In addition to the three involved components set as input parameters, the algorithm has a preset scoring schema.

In presenting the algorithm we introduce a new variable  $\lambda$ .  $\lambda$  represents the *error margin* allowed in an alignment and is computed by taking the difference between the highest possible alignment score for  $s$  and the scoring threshold  $T$ . The highest possible score for any string can be found by aligning the string against itself with regular string alignment operations, using the already defined scoring schema. Introducing  $\lambda$  gives us the opportunity to do strict pruning throughout the entire alignment process: Any alignment which contains a single element, be it a gap or a sequence of mappings, which is penalized more than  $\lambda$  compared to the corresponding element in an optimal alignment can never have a total alignment score higher than  $T$  (This should hopefully become apparent throughout this chapter, but a more compact proof can be found in Appendix A).

#### 3.3.1 Creating a new graph

The motivation behind building an entirely new graph is the realization that whenever reads are mapped against a reference genome the read is typically vastly shorter than the reference. We can therefore do a *horizontal pruning* where we determine which sections along the horizontal axis of the graphs are interesting for the alignment. The same argument can be made for extremely complex graphs, where only a small number of the branches are relevant, in an operation we have called a *vertical pruning*. The result should be a new graph  $G'$  with a vertex set  $V'$  and an edge set  $E'$ .

We first let  $V'$  be a subset of the original vertex set  $V$ . In order to guarantee optimality we put a restriction on  $V'$ :

1. Every  $v_x \in V$  should be in  $V'$  if there exists an optimal alignment  $A$  with a higher score than  $T$  which contains the index  $x$

Through the definition of the alignments we know they are ordered and that the indexed elements refer to the vertices which map to a specific position in the string. We can use this knowledge to more specifically define  $V'$  as an ordered set of sets  $V'_x$  where every indexed set is related to the corresponding position in the alignment:

1. Every  $v_x \in V$  should be in  $V'_y$  if there exists an optimal alignment  $A$  with a higher score than  $T$  where  $a_y = x$

This is a restriction which is strictly enforced throughout the algorithm, to continue ensuring the optimal solution is still a possibility. We formulate a second restriction, to reduce the number of vertices which are not interesting for final alignments:

2. Every vertex  $v_x \in V$  which is not referenced by  $a_i$  in any optimal alignment should not be in  $V'_i$

If we manage to create  $V'$  from these two restrictions we can guarantee a vertex set where every element of every optimal alignment is still present and all excesses vertices has been dropped. However, finding these vertices requires knowledge of every alignment  $A$  of every string  $s$  for every threshold  $T$ , a number of possibilities which quickly become infeasible. In order to make the operation more tractable we identify the second restriction as only being related to the computational complexity, which means it does not have to be strictly enforced. We can thus relax it:

2. Every vertex  $v_x \in V$  should be in  $V'_i$  for every  $0 \leq i < |s|$ .

This is a complete relaxation and puts every vertex  $v \in V$  in every subset of  $V'$ . The resulting parenting candidate vertex set  $V'$  is a set far greater than  $V$  which is obviously suboptimal for the following search. These two cases represent the two extremes on the scale of how strictly we enforce the second restriction and they both represent problems: Either the search is too hard to the results are not good enough. We can let the second restriction be an informal description of a search for an optimal middle ground between the two:

2. Every subset  $V'_x$  should be *as small as possible, without being the search growing too complex*

We let a vertex  $v$  be a *candidate vertex* for index  $i$  if it is a part of the *candidate set*  $V'_i$ . In order to find candidate vertices we apply *fuzziness* to the context-based mapping schema proposed by Paten et al.[26]. We say a vertex is a candidate vertex for an index if it has a context which is similar enough to the context of the corresponding position in  $s$ . The vagueness of “similar enough” is controlled through the fuzziness, which again is controlled through the error margin parameter  $\lambda$ . The contexts of the vertex represents the paths passing through it, and because we know that if a context is penalized more than  $\lambda$  compared to the maximal possible score we know that the context can never be a part of a longer incomplete path with a total score higher than  $T$ . Thus, more formally, for every index  $0 \leq i < |s|$  we put  $v_x$  in  $V'_i$  if and only if the context set  $c(v_x)$  of  $v_x$  contains a context which can be aligned against  $c(s_i)$  with a score higher than  $T_c$ .  $T_c$  is a *context threshold score* and is computed by taking the max possible score for a context in  $s$  and subtract  $\lambda$ .

After deciding which vertices make up  $G'$  we need to decide how we combine them, through the edge set  $E'$ . Because the subsets of candidate vertices follow a natural ordering there is already defined a direction in the graph. Every vertex of every candidate set  $V'_i$  should have an incoming edge from every vertex in the preceding candidate set  $V'_{i-1}$  to account for this direction. Because we allow gaps in our alignments we have to extend the number of steps a vertex looks back for possible paths: Every vertex in every candidate set  $V'_i$  should have an incoming edge from *every* preceding candidate set  $V'_j$ , where  $0 \leq j < i$ . These edges represent the relationships between the elements of the string. We do also want to represent the relationships between the vertices in the graph they originate from. This is done through introducing *weighted edges*:

**Definition 17** (Graph genome weighted edge (Weighted edge))

A triplet  $e' = \{i_s, i_e, w\}$  where the two first elements are indexes for vertices in  $V'$  and the latter is an integer value

We let the weight  $w$  denote the distance  $d(P)$  of the shortest path  $P$  where  $P_0 = i_s$  and  $P_{-1} = i_e$ . These weights can be found through a regular graph search in  $G$ , if no distance is found we let it be inf. At this point we have a complete graph  $G'$ .

### Corollary 3

For every edge  $e = \{i_s, i_e\} \in E$  where  $v_{i_s} \in V'_x, v_{i_e} \in V'_y$  and  $x > y$  there exists a weighted edge  $e' = \{i_s, i_e, 0\} \in E'$

The resulting graph is still very complex . Every vertex is connected to every preceding vertex, and in order to find the weights of these edges we need to do graph searches for every possible pair of vertices. However, we still know we are not interested in incomplete paths which have a lower score than  $T$  and we thus can limit the edges to only the ones that are passable without being penalized more than  $\lambda$ . This sets a bound both on how far back in the candidate sets a vertex looks for neighbours and, more importantly, puts a strict upper bound on the complexity of the individual graph searches done in  $G$ .

#### 3.3.2 Searching the newly formed graph

We have built  $G'$  in a specific way to guarantee the optimal alignments still exist, which means the next step is finding them. Searching for an alignment means combining vertices, representing bases, into a path representing a string. This linear sequence can be aligned against the input sequence with regular string alignment tools and the scores are therefore easily verifiable.

In order to continue securing optimal results the algorithm does the search using dynamic programming. The search algorithm is conceptually very similar to PO-MSA[14], except the roles are switched around: Instead of

searching through the reference graph with an input string we are searching through the indices of the string with the candidate nodes from the reference graph as our input. When we dynamically compute scores we are still doing the same thing as a regular PO-MSA, letting a candidate vertex  $v_x$  in a candidate set  $V'_i$  be an intersection at position  $x, i$  in a two-dimensional space where the dimensions represent the string and the path. We set the scores to the highest possible score for aligning the substring  $s'_i$  of  $s$  ending in  $i$  against a path ending in  $v_x$ . In this way we can find the highest possible score for the entire alignment in the highest scoring node in the last candidate set.

The base case of the dynamic programming are the candidate vertices in the first candidate set,  $v_x \in V'_0$ . We initialize these scores to  $\text{mappingScore}(b(v_x), s_0)$ , which is equivalent to aligning them against the substring containing exactly the first character of the string. During the following bottom-up procedure we will be faced with another set of base cases: Vertices which have no incoming edges. If the vertices are reachable by gapping over the preceding indexes of the string without the gap penalty exceeding  $\lambda$  we initialize them to their mapping score combined with the gap penalty. In all other cases we set the score to  $-2 * \lambda$ , which yields any path starting with the vertex score lower than  $T$  and thus not be considered candidates for the optimal alignment.

The recurrence relation of the dynamic programming algorithm is concerned with setting the score for any vertex/index pair which is not a base case. The score for these candidate vertices  $v_x \in V'_i$  are set by looking at all incoming edges, find the one yielding the highest score and add  $\text{mappingScore}(b(v_x), s_y)$ . The score for an edge is found by taking the score in the vertex  $v_y \in V'_j$ , represented by the start-index  $i_s$  in the edge, and adding the gap penalties corresponding to traversing the edge. There are two gap penalties related to the edge: one penalty for the distance represented by the weight  $w$  and one penalty for jumping from index  $i$  to index  $j$ . However, all edges traversed in the final alignment will only be penalized for one of them.

When the scores have been computed for every candidate vertex we can start looking for the highest score, which represents the alignment score for one of the optimal alignments. We will find this score in as a score for one of the vertices in the candidate set corresponding to the last index of the string. At this point we just have to backtrack the procedure which lead to the score to find the actual alignment, which is guaranteed to be one of the optimal alignments. If we find no score which is higher than the threshold  $T$  in this column we can deem the string as unalignable.

### 3.4 Heuristical applications

This chapter presents a non-heuristical algorithm which is never incorrect,

a concept which provides steady ground when discussing the tractability of a conceptual solution to a problem. The rest of the thesis will be concerned with the algorithm explained here, in all its formally provable glory. However we at this point want to take a brief detour to discuss heuristical applications, and more specifically the heuristical possibilities provided by the presented approach. Whenever we do not find any possible paths we can align against to achieve a score higher than  $T$  we do a hard cut-off and deem  $s$  unalignable, to achieve the previously mentioned formally steady ground. This might seem a bit rash: We have already done searches to determine which parts of  $G$  are similar to parts of  $s$ . The results from these searches could be utilized to for instance “lock in” some areas of  $s$ . Then the remainder of the alignment could be pieced together by filling in the gaps. Doing this would result in something similar to the approach presented in section 2.3.3. Thus, the comparison between the two found in section ?? will also cover many of the implications of a strict non-heuristical approach vs. an heuristic.

# Chapter 4

## Implementation

In this section we will present the implementation of the algorithm “Fuzzy context-based search” which is found in the *GraphGenome* tool (Appendix C). The algorithm will be coupled by a concrete example which is found in figures 4.1-4.3 and table 4.1. Throughout this chapter, and in the example, the scoring schema is assumed to be the *negated edit distance* schema.

**Definition 18** (Negated edit distance scoring schema)

*A scoring schema where the substitution matrix is a variant of an identity matrix scoring equal characters 0 and mismatches -1. Both the gap opening and gap extension penalty is -1*

The reason for the negation compared to regular edit distance is that the tool is implemented for generalized scoring schemas which attempt to maximize alignment scores. Otherwise, the scoring schema is chosen due to its intuitive nature: A final score of  $-x$  means there are exactly  $x$  differences. The scoring schema is also practical for doing complexity analysis, a gap which is penalized by  $y$  means traversing exactly  $y$  vertices or indexes.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first explains the implementation of the algorithm corresponding to the previous chapter. The second is a brief overview of how the tool merges sequences into the graph after they have been aligned. This section is included to better provide an intuition as to how the graphs are built and what readers can expect when seeing the results and using the tool themselves.

### 4.1 Aligning sequences

The alignment process consists of the two steps described in the previous chapter, which each has their corresponding subsection. In addition to these the tool needs to do a precomputation of the graph in order to build a searchable index. This is not counted as a step in the alignment process as the precomputation is dependant only on the graph and the index is thus reusable for several alignments.

### 4.1.1 Building the index

There are two data structures needed for aligning a string against the graph: a suffix trie for left contexts and a suffix trie for right contexts. Before either of the two are built the algorithm needs to decide a length for the contexts. Currently in the tool there are two ways of setting the context length: A user given parameter or an approximation based on the probability of sharing contexts (Appendix D). The length of the contexts does not impact the quality of the alignments found by the algorithm (Appendix A) but will have an impact on the runtime (Appendix B).

When a context length  $|c|$  is set, the algorithm can start building the index itself. Two sets of strings, a left context set and a right context set, is generated for every vertex in the graph  $G$ . Because the algorithms for the two are equal, aside from the starting point and the direction of the traversal, the following explanation only describes one of them.

The generation of the left contexts start out by adding an empty context to the context set  $c(v_i)$  for every vertex  $v_i$  which is a neighbour to  $s_G$  and inserting these vertices in a FIFO-queue. The contexts are stored in an individual array of sets of strings where the indexes correspond to the indexes of the vertices. The algorithm marks  $s_G$  as finished in a boolean table and starts iterating over the elements of the queue.

When a vertex  $v_x$  is popped from the top of the queue the first operation consists of checking whether the context set of the vertex is done. A context set is complete if every vertex in the incoming neighbour set  $n_i(v_x)$  of the vertex is marked as finished [Improve im implementation](#). If the context set is not complete the vertex reinserts itself at the end of the queue. In the opposite case, when a vertex is deemed as ready, it starts generating contexts for its outgoing neighbours  $n_o(v_x)$ . The vertex takes every context  $c$  belonging to its own context set  $c(v_x)$  and creates a new context  $c'$  by prepending the base  $b(v_x)$  to the string. If necessary, when the length of a new context exceeds  $|c|$ , the trailing character of the string is also removed. Each of these newly created contexts are added to the context sets of every outgoing neighbour  $v_y \in n_o(v_x)$  and  $v_y$  is added to the queue. Every vertex should be enqueued at most once to avoid an exponential growth in queue size. This is enforced through efficient lookup of currently enqueued vertices in a hash set. The final step for the vertex is marking itself as finished.

In order to avoid making the end vertex  $t_G$  mappable the algorithm directly puts it back at the end of the queue whenever it is seen. When the queue contains a single element, and this element is  $t_G$ , the algorithm halts. At this point every vertex along every path leading up to  $t_G$  has generated its context, and as we know every vertex stems from an input sequence and every input sequence ends in  $t_G$  we know every vertex has been visited.  $s_G$  and  $t_G$  swaps places as start and end-vertices, the definitions of what is an

```

while queue does not consist of  $t_G$  do
    current = queue.pop
    if all incoming neighbours are not done then
        enqueue current;
        continue;
    end
    for every context  $c$  do
        for all outgoing neighbours do
            suffixes[outgoing.index].put( $b(current) + c$ );
            if outgoing not in queue then
                enqueue outgoing;
            end
        end
    end
    finished[current.index] = True;
end

```

**Algorithm 1:** The loop which generates left contexts for a graph

incoming and an outgoing neighbour is switched and the algorithm starts again to generate right contexts.

As sets per definition does not allow duplicates the impact of a branching occurring in the graph will fade away after exactly  $|c|$  steps as the difference is trimmed away (Fig. 4.1), and thus avoid explosive exponentiality in the context set sizes. Unlike the method of Paten et al. [26] there are no requirements for contexts to be uniquely mappable to exactly one vertex. Because the last step of the algorithm does a search for an incomplete path through all the candidate vertices this presents no difficulties when finding the alignment. Furthermore, dropping this precondition assures every node has two valid contexts and are thus present in both suffix trees.

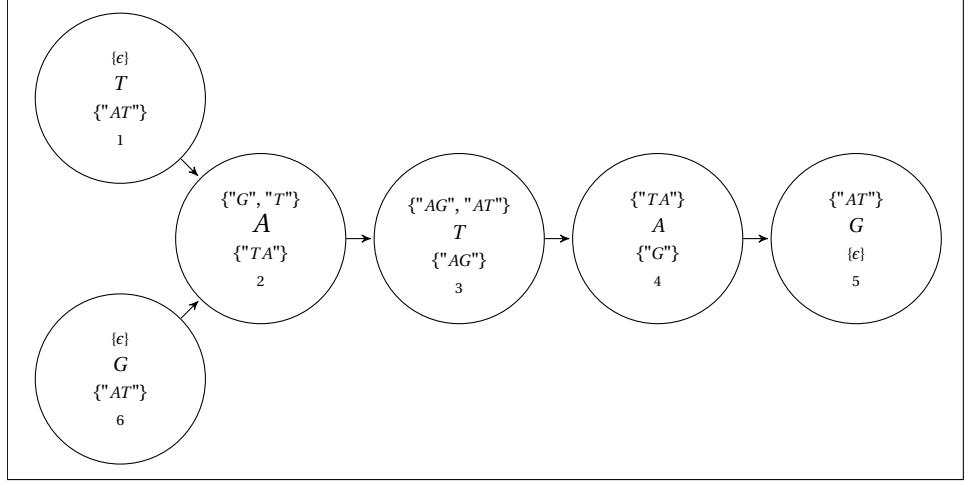


Figure 4.1: A small reference graph with left contexts (top) and right contexts (bottom) of length 2 shown

After generating the two context sets for every node, the elements of each one is inserted into their corresponding suffix tree. Every suffix is stored as a key with the index of it's originating node as a value (fig. 4.2). In theory every node can have  $4^{|c|}$  contexts in each set, in practice a more fair approximation is  $b^{|c|}$  where  $b$  is the observed branching factor for the graph. **Should contain something about probable values of B. Find an article on it.** The current implementation uses a naive suffix tree implementation where insertion is  $O(|c|)$ , giving a total time complexity of  $O(b^{|c|}|c|)$  per node per context set and  $O(2|G|b^{|c|}|c|)$  for the entire graph. The generation process visits  $|G|$  vertices once in each direction, looking up approximately  $b$  neighbours. Building the entire index can thus be done in  $O(2|G|b + 2|G|b^{|c|}|c|)$ . **compress more?**

#### 4.1.2 Generating the modified graph

Unlike the index built in the previous step, the produced graph  $G'$  is a function of both the original graph  $G$ , the input sequence  $s$  and the threshold  $T$ . For every character  $s_x \in s$  a left-context string and a right-context string is generated by looking at the  $|c|$  surrounding characters. The two context strings are used as a basis for a fuzzy search in it's corresponding suffix trie, where search is a recursive function based on PO-MSA. The root node is supplied with a one-dimensional scoring array corresponding to the context string  $c$ , which is initialized with all zeroes. Then, for every child, a new scoring array is computed by regular edit distance rules: For each index  $i$  take the maximal score for either a gap in the graph, a gap in the string or matching the character  $c_i$  with the character

$b$  contained in the child node:

$$scores_b[i] = \max \begin{cases} scores_b[i-1] + gapPenalty(1) & \# \text{ String gap} \\ scores[i] + gapPenalty(1) & \# \text{ Graph gap} \\ scores[i-1] + mappingScore(c_i, b) & \# \text{ Mapping} \end{cases} \quad (4.1)$$

(Reference actual code in supplementary?), (more explanation needed?).

An important aspect is that this procedure uses the same scoring schema as the one defined for the entire alignment. This newly created array is then supplemented to the same recursive function in the child. When a leaf node is reached the last index of the supplied scoring array corresponds to mapping the entire string  $c$  against the entire context achieved by concatenating the characters contained in the path through the tree traversed by the recursion. If the score is higher than the context threshold  $T_c$  for the given context string, every index contained in the node is stored as a pair on the form  $\{index, score\}$ . The candidate sets are implemented as maps with the index as a key, which allows us to store the index of every candidate exactly once by only saving the pair which produces the highest value.

In order to also be able to look up contexts which are shorter than the contexts stored in the tree, the suffix tree search implementation has built in a concept which we called **something smart**. This concepts allows all suffix trie vertices at a depth greater than the length of the string which is looked up to inherit a maximum score from their parenting node. Doing this we can avoid deterioration of the scores as the searched contexts no longer needs to introduce gaps to align against the longer, stored contexts.

Additionally the suffix search does one more optimization. Whenever

the context is short, defined in the tool as *shorter than*  $|c|$ , there will be alot of matches. The tool has to iterate over every single one to subtract its indexes. In these cases the tool simply returns an empty set which is treated as a set containing every single index with a maximal score. But even this seemingly simple operation has pitfalls to avoid. Whenever the provided string has a length  $|l| < 2 * c + 1$  the middle elements will have contexts on either side which is not searched due to their length, which provides two empty sets. To avoid this the suffix tree search has built in a *force* option, which assures atleast one set of candidate vertices is always found.

In theory every leaf node has to be visited in order to check the score for every represented context in the tree. In practice the tree can be pruned by

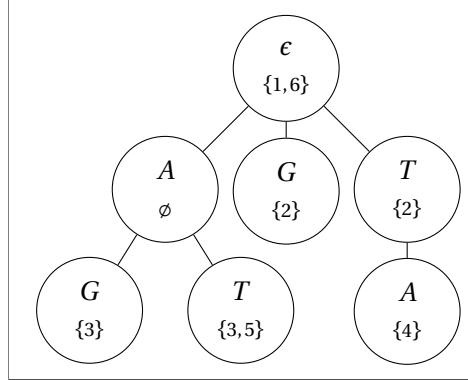
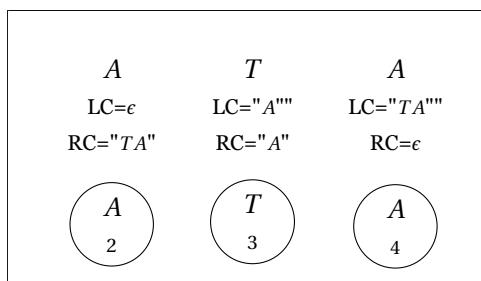
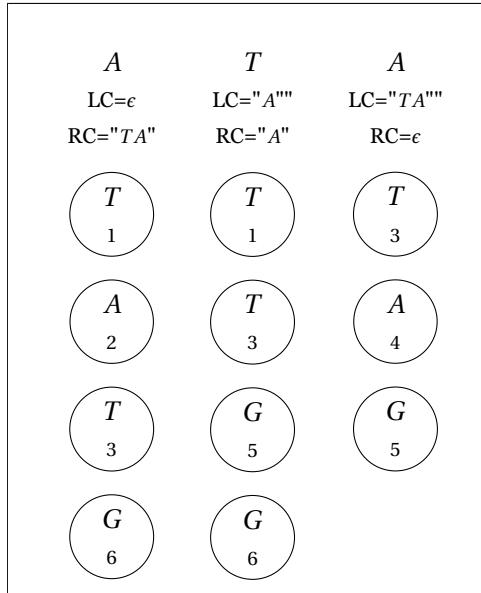


Figure 4.2: The left suffix tree corresponding to the graph in 4.1

cutting off the search whenever the *maximal potential score* falls below the threshold  $T_c$  for the provided context. The maximal potential score for a node is found by adding together the currently highest score in the scoring array with the maximal matching score for the remainder of the string. This reduces the number of nodes to be searched from  $O(4^c)$  to (something alot smaller. Needs calculations).



(a)  $T = 0$



(b)  $T = 1$

Figure 4.3: The resulting candidate sets for mapping the string "ATA" against the reference genome from fig. 4.1 with varying  $T$  values

contained in the indexation of the candidate sets. The second relationship is found through graph searches in  $G$ . Finding the weights of these edges are however not necessary before the involved vertices are scored in the next step, and the searches can therefore be delayed until that point. This is done in order to avoid having to use space storing data which is only necessary at a single point during the computation.

After the fuzzy search is concluded there are two maps of candidates for every index, one containing the vertices matching the left context and an equivalent for vertices matching the right context. The keysets of these maps are intersected to produce a final candidate set for the index  $i$ , where the score is created by adding together the scores from the two original sets. During the intersection process the final set can again be pruned by removing all vertices which has a combined score that is lower than the combined threshold  $T_c$  for both contexts. If one of the sets are empty, due to pruning in the suffix tree search, we simply emulate the intersection by keeping the non-empty set. Formally we can define the new vertice set  $V'$  as an ordered list of sets  $V'_i$  for  $0 \leq i < |s|$  where

$$V'_i = \{v_x \mid v_x \in G \wedge \exists [c \in c(v_x)] (\text{alignmentScore}(c, c(s_i)) >= \dots) \quad (4.2)$$

Intuitively this should be the place where the edges are created in order to finish up  $G'$ . As mentioned there are two relationships between the vertices which should be represented: The distance between the elements in  $s$  and the distance between the vertices in  $G$ . The first relationship is inherently contained in the indexation of the candidate sets. The second relationship is found through graph searches in  $G$ . Finding the weights of these edges are however not necessary before the involved vertices are scored in the next step, and the searches can therefore be delayed until that point. This is done in order to avoid having to use space storing data which is only necessary at a single point during the computation.

#### 4.1.3 Searching $G'$ with a modified PO-MSA search

The first thing done in the search is to move the indexes of the vertices in the candidate sets over to a two-dimensional array *indexes* where we let one dimension represent the indexes of the string and the second the individual vertices in the candidate set. This is done in order to have the vertices in a structure where we can reference them solely by an index. In addition to the *indexes* array we create a floating point array *scores* with exactly the same dimensions, to contain the scores for the individual vertices. Additionally, in order to backtrack and find the optimal alignment, we create an equally sized *backpointer* array. Conceptually this should store pairs of integers referencing the other indexes in the array, in the tool this is implemented by Strings.

A	T	A	A	T	A	(a) Indexes	(b) Scores
1	1	3	-1	-2	-2		
2	3	4	0	0	0		
3	5	5	-1	-3	-2		
6	6		-1	-3			

A	T	A	(c) Backpointers
-1:-1	0:0	1:1	
-1:-1	0:1	1:1	
-1:-1	0:2	1:1	
-1:-1	0:3		

Table 4.1: The 4 arrays used by the searching algorithm when using the candidate sets from Fig 4.3 and  $T = -1$

rays reference the same index.

After setting the values in the easily discoverable base cases we start computing scores for the paths in our graph. The nodes  $v_x \in V'_i$  for the remaining candidate sets at the indexes  $1 \leq i < |s|$  are looped over with  $j$  as a counter, and  $\text{indexes}[i][j]$  is set to  $x$ . For every such entry a list of pairs is made with other indexes  $(i', j')$  such that  $i'$  is a preceding index  $i' < i$  and  $j'$  is another counter variable looping over  $\text{indexes}[i']$ . For every entry-pair  $((i, j), (i', j'))$  we produce a score by the scoring function  $\theta((i, j), (i', j'))$ . The scoring function works by combining the score contained in the preceding entry,  $\text{scores}[i'][j']$ , the gap penalties, and a mapping score for the current index  $\text{mappingScore}(v_{\text{indexes}[i][j]}, s_i)$ . The gap penalty is found by combining a gap penalty for a gap of length  $i - i'$  and for a gap of length

The search is initialized by looping over every node  $v_x \in V'_0$  with a counter  $j$ , setting

```

indexes[0][j] = x
scores[0][j] = mappingScore(b(vx), s0)
backPointers[0][j] = -1 : -1

```

The iteration over the elements of the set with the counter  $j$  will not be according to any ordering as the elements of the set are inherently not ordered. This is not important to us as the elements of a single candidate set have no relation which we want to contain. However, from this point onward, we have given the elements an order. Although this internal ordering does not hold any value this is important as we now know the same index in the three separate ar-

$distance(v_{indexes[i'][j']}, v_{indexes[i][j]})$ . The computation of the last gap penalty corresponds to finding the edges, which up to this point have been without interest to the algorithm. We search for these distances by a breadth-first regular graph search which starts in the vertice  $(n_{indexes[i'][j']})$  and is concluded when we find  $n_{indexes[i][j]}$ . Whenever we search for more than  $\lambda$  steps without finding the target vertice, we can return the current distance multiplied by 2. When a gap penalty is computed for a gap this length the score will always be  $2 * \lambda$  which means the edge can never be part of any final alignments and is thus not interesting.

The final score stored in  $scores[i][j]$  is the maximal achievable score produced by the function  $\theta$  for one of the vertice pairs ending in the vertice with index  $indexes[i][j]$ .  $backPointers[i][j]$  is set to the to the index-pair  $(i', j')$  responsible for producing this score. The recurrence formulas for the three arrays are thus:

$$\begin{aligned} indexes[i][j] &= x & n_x \in V'_i \\ scores[i][j] &= \underset{i', j'}{\max} \theta((i, j), (i', j')) & 0 \leq i' < i, 0 \leq j' < |scores[i']| \\ backPointers[i][j] &= \underset{i', j'}{\arg\max} \theta((i, j), (i', j')) & 0 \leq i' < i, 0 \leq j' < |scores[i']| \end{aligned} \quad (4.3)$$

where  $\theta$  is a scoring function defined as:

$$\begin{aligned} \theta((x_1, y_1), (x_2, y_2)) &= scores[x_2][y_2] \\ &+ gapPenalty(x_1 - x_2) \\ &+ gapPenalty(distance(n_{indexes[x_2][y_2]}, n_{indexes[x_1][y_1]})) \\ &+ mappingScore(b(n_{indexes[x_1][y_1]}), s_{x_1}) \end{aligned} \quad (4.4)$$

When the iteration ends we will have a score for every candidate vertice in every candidate set. We can iterate over the scores corresponding to the last candidate set,  $scores[|s| - 1]$  to find the highest alignment score. The optimal alignment ends in the vertice with the index in the corresponding cell in the  $indexes$  array. We can then backtrack backwards through the  $backPointers$  array, storing the corresponding indexes of the vertices from the  $indexes$  array along the way to produce the actual alignment. The entire operation can be done in  $O(\frac{\lambda^2 |s|(|c|^\lambda |G|)^2}{4^{|c|^2}})$  (Appendix B). The exponential factor  $|G|^2$  is to a large degree cancelled out by  $|c|$ , which defaults to be algorithmically set by a function dependant on  $|G|$ . This leaves an operation which is heavily dependant on only on the error margin  $\lambda$ .

## Finding all optimal alignments

There is only a small adjustment necessary to produce all optimal alignments instead of a single one, but it makes the explanation of and reasoning around the procedure considerably more complex. Briefly, the first step needed is storing a list of backpointers for every index to every preceding index which produces the same highest score. Then, when backtracking, the algorithm needs to find every maximal score for the last candidate

set. For each one of these the algorithm must start a computational branch which corresponds to each final alignment. These branches are further split up whenever faced with a backpointer consisting of more than one index. Every resulting branch corresponds to a single, equally scoring, optimal alignment.

There exists a third variant of the problem where only uniquely aligned reads are classified as alignable. Any read which has more than one possible optimal alignment can be classified as ambiguous and dropped. Again, there is only a small modification needed to accomplish this within the implementation. Once again we allow for branches while backtracking, by storing lists of optimal backpointers. However, this time around we cut the search whenever we discover a branching in the backtracking process. A branch represents several solutions with the same score, and the read is thus classified as unalignable.

#### 4.1.4 Handling invalid threshold values

Whenever the algorithm is not able to find any alignments with a score higher than  $T$  it classifies the input string  $|s|$  as unalignable. There are two scenarios where this would happen: Either the path yielding the highest score consists of a series of steps in which each individual step is considered legal (Is not penalized more than  $\lambda$ ), but the combination is not good enough, or the path goes through a step in which there are no legal possibilities for traversal. The last would happen when a every path goes through an edge which was not found due to pruning and has been given the distance of  $2 * \lambda$ . Both the cases are identified through not finding any paths scoring high enough and both result in an *empty alignment*, an alignment where every element of  $s$  is unmappable.

Yielding an empty alignment for the first case might seem strange as the algorithm does a full computation and finds a legal path. There is however one important consideration: Vertices which are parts of an optimal path might have been dropped during the pruning of the candidate sets. There is one very interesting case where this occurs, namely when the difference between the threshold  $T$  and the highest scoring alignment is exactly 1 (or the minimal penalty possible for generalized context shemes). In this case we know there are no paths which yield a score of  $T$ , because we would have found them, and there are no unfound alignments scoring higher than the one we found because there exists no such possible scores. In order to stay in line with the strict problem definition these cases are also classified unmappable.

The second case is often less interesting as it usually leads to vastly less coherent alignments and as a result typically lower scores. Even so, there are interesting concepts touched upon also here: Because of the distinct penalty given to invalid edges we have no real way of knowing how the proposed alignment is really scored. Thus it can, much like the case

discussed above, contain interesting sections which are aligned well within the threshold.

## 4.2 Merging aligned sequences

Whenever a graph is made from a set of genetic sequences there is an expectation of what the graph should look like, where there should be branches, common sequences and so on. This is decided by how the input sequences are merged together to produce graphs. Although the merge can be seen as the key element in this process, these are decisions which are made purely by the alignment process, which in turn relies on the scoring schema and scoring threshold. Varying these two components can create a variety of graphs (Fig. ??). To avoid confusion we have split the two completely apart, letting the alignment algorithm do all the heavy lifting to keep the merge as as much of a straight forward procedure as possible.

Whenever an input string  $s$  is aligned against a graph  $G$  we can do a merge, a procedure which should result in the internal structure of  $s$  being present in the merged graph  $G^*$ . To make reasoning around the procedure we visualize  $s$  as a special sequence graph  $G_s$  where every individual character is represented by a single vertex and every consecutive pair of characters is connected with an edge. This is a convenient representations for several reasons: For one the graph has a strict internal direction which we can use to number the vertices according to their position in the string. We let  $s_x$  denote the vertex in  $G_s$  with position  $x$ . An important note is that this is a simplified type of the previously defined graphs which does not require start and end-vertices, which means the indexation begins at 0. The reason for this simplification is that we can use the alignment  $A$  to create an equality operator:

$$eq(s_x, v_y) = \begin{cases} True & If a_x = v_y \\ False & Else \end{cases} \quad (4.5)$$

When we have this way of checking equality between the two graphs we

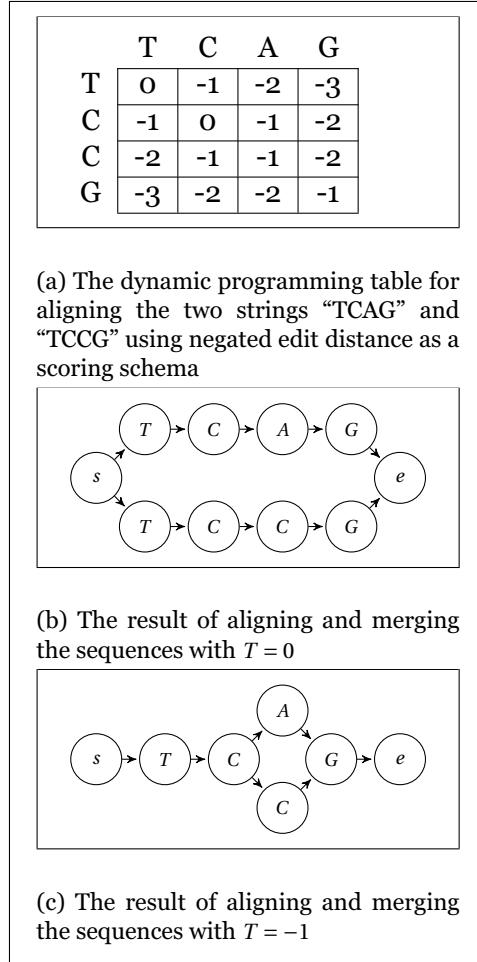


Figure 4.4: Different scoring thresholds  $T$  yields different reference graphs

can simply let the vertex set  $V_*$  of the merged graph be the union of the original vertex set  $V$  and the vertex set of  $G_s$ , where every “new” vertex is given a new index when merged in. For the edges there are three cases to consider: An edge between two existing vertices, an edge from a new vertex to an existing edge (and its opposite) and an edge between two new vertices. To simplify the procedure the three latter cases can all generalized as cases where the edge does not already exist, and needs to be created.

The implementation of this procedure is done even more smoothly. Because the string and alignment both have a direction we can move along this direction and merge or create new vertices iteratively. We let a pointer  $prev$  denote the index of the previous element in the graph. Because every input sequence which is represented in the graph should have a full path we initialize this to  $s_G$ . We then iterate over the elements of the alignment. For every index  $i$  we start by creating a new vertex  $curr$  if  $a_i = 0$  and thus unmapped. We also create a new vertex if index is mapped, but the characters  $s_i$  and  $b(v_{a_i})$  is not equal. This vertex contains the character  $s_i$  and is given a unique index  $x$  by the graph. If the index  $i$  is mapped and the characters are equal we let  $curr$  be the vertex  $v_{a_i}$ . At this point we have a pair of vertices,  $prev$  and  $curr$ , which represents consecutive characters in  $s$  and should thus have an edge between them. We create this edge by inserting  $curr$  in the neighbour set of  $prev$ , and set  $prev = curr$  to move the backpointer. When the iteration finishes we have the last vertex in the alignment contained in the backpointer and create and edge from  $prev$  to  $t_G$  to finish off the full path.

There is one important aspect to be considered when using the merge procedure: Every sequence which is merged in is considered a stand-alone sequence which starts at the beginning of the graph and ends at the end. This is important because it shows that even though the tool is designed for aligning short reads against a large graph it is not design to iteratively merge these in. The result would be a long full path representing a chromosome, genome or something similar and several short full paths representing the individual reads. The imagined usage of is as a part of a larger process:

1. Create a graph by merging several known genetic sequences
2. Align individual reads against the graph
3. Create a sequence either from sequences of reads or by altering a sequence in the graph
4. Merge in the new sequence

The third step is not contained within the tool as it goes beyond the domain of the thesis. Even though the results from the alignments are sequences of indexes for vertices, the process of combining them should be isomorphical to a simple version of regular assembly and can thus be solved by for instance de Bruijn graphs.

### **4.3 Parallelization**

Of the two steps, one stand out as a text book case for possible parallelization. Searching for the candidate vertices for an index is done completely separate from the other indexes. An extremely trivial parallelization of this step is implemented through splitting up the indexes into separate threads. Further parallelization is possible as the recursive searches through the trees are only dependant on the results from the vertices higher up in the trees, there is no exchange of data between the vertices of a layer. This is not implemented in the tool to keep the “proof of concept” presentation of the approach as conceptually simple as possible.



# **Chapter 5**

## **Validation of the approach**

In the previous two chapters we have described the approach we developed and how we chose to implement it. This chapter is concerned with showing the behaviour of the approach. When a set of sequences are combined into a graph there should be an expectation as to what the result should look like. This expectation is grounded in the underlying formalism of the approach: The definitions of the involved elements, the scoring schema used and even smaller details like the order of some operations. We now increase the level of abstraction from the realm of formal details into "What results can we expect from using this approach".

Throughout the chapter we will be doing example runs of the tool on some input data coupled with the graphical output. Additionally we will present some statements regarding the state of the data structures to represent the formalization of the expectation of the results. Importantly, this is not an attempt to show whether the tool acts correctly or not, that part is covered by the next chapter. This is a chapter determined to show the reader what it is we actually deem as correct behaviour, and how this behaviour is manifested through the input/output pairs. Throughout the development and implementation process these expectations and many more have been used as a requirement specification, realized through a test set which can be found in the github repo (Appendix ??).

The scoring schema used throughout the chapter is the negated edit distance scoring schema. This is used because of the flat structure of both the scores and the penalties, which gives intuitive results for alignments.

### **5.1 Test data**

As mentioned, the behaviour of the approach is determined by a relatively small set of formal instructions as to how it should behave in different circumstances. However, these instructions can be nested. This is a step which is crucial in order to graphs complex enough to represent genetic variation. As the nesting goes on and the structures involved grow more and more complex, finding the underlying formal rules becomes non-trivial. In

order to avoid any ambiguity the test data in this chapter consists of small, hand-crafted sequences. The tests are divided into sections, the sequences in each section are designed to represent exactly one trait of genetic data which the algorithm should handle in a specific way.

Although negated edit distance provide a good basis for intuitive results, the glat structure also presents a possible weakness: The scoring schema yields results which are susceptible to order of operations characteristics of the implementation. The test sequences provided are constructed to avoid any ambiguity concerning the order of the instructions given.

## 5.2 Tests

We start out with the most basic operation: Turning a sequence into a reference graph. We first show the command, or commands, which is run:

```
./build_index.sh --input-sequences=ACGTATTAC
--png=build
```

The input sequence is given through the `--input-sequences` argument. We then show the graphical result which is stored in a `png`-file with the name given as a `--png` argument:

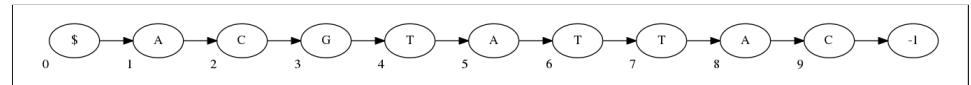


Figure 5.1: The reference graph made from the sequence "ACGTATTAC"

At last we provide a set of statements regarding the result:

- A reference graph made from a string  $s$  should have exactly  $|s| + 2$  vertices

These statements are not exhaustive with regards to the output, as such a list would be very long and not particularly interesting. The statements provided will be what we classify as important details which follow from the inner workings of the algorithm, which in part means we omit statements which are exceedingly trivial.

The graph built in this example will provide a basis for all of the following examples. In order to provide a working setup to readers who use this chapter as an introduction to the tool the different tests are separated by their index-file, determined by the `--index` parameter.

## Equal sequences

We move on to the most trivial alignment operation, aligning a sequence against itself:

```
./build_index.sh --input-sequences=ACGTATTAC
--index=equal.index
./align_sequence.sh --index=equal.index
--align-sequence=ACGTATTAC --png=equal-align
./align_sequence.sh --index=equal.index
--align-sequence=ACGTATTAC --merge=true --png=equal-merge
```

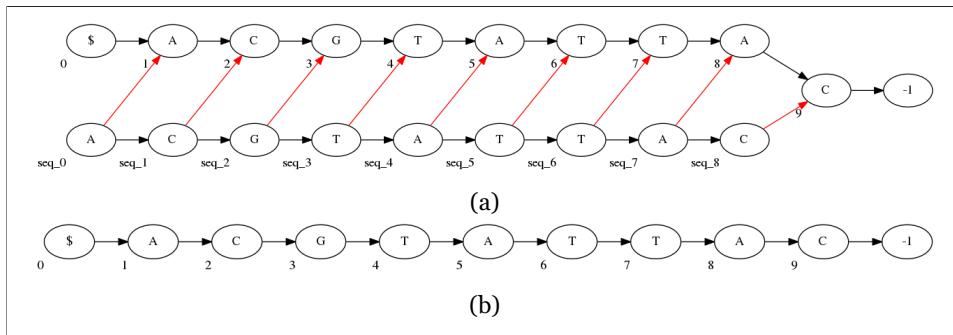


Figure 5.2: The result of aligning (a) and merging (b) the sequence "ACGTATTAC" against the reference seen in figure 5.1

- Aligning a sequence against itself should provide an alignment with the indexes of continuous vertices
- Merging a sequence with itself should result in a graph with the same number of vertices as before the merge

## SNPs

We let SNPs be the first point mutation. At first we align and merge without setting the error margin  $\lambda$ :

```
./build_index.sh --input-sequences=ACGTATTAC
--index=snp-no-errors.index
./align_sequence.sh --index=snp-no-errors.index
--align-sequence=ACGGATTAC --png=snp-no-errors-align
./align_sequence.sh --index=snp-no-errors.index
--align-sequence=ACGGATTAC --merge=true --png=snp-no-errors-merge
```

- Aligning a sequence with an error compared to the reference and no error margin should result in an empty alignment
- Merging an empty alignment should result in a new full path

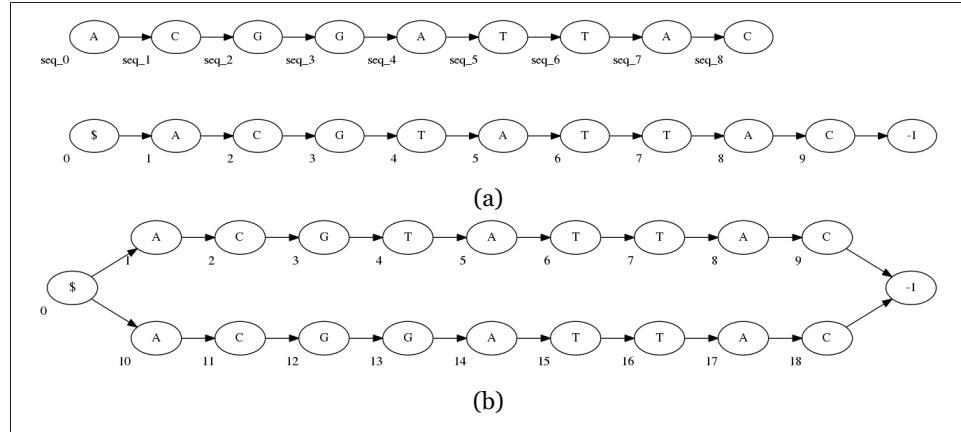


Figure 5.3: The result of aligning (a) and merging (b) the sequence "ACGTATTAC" against the reference seen in figure 5.1

We then align the same sequence while allowing an error margin through the `--error-margin` parameter:

```
./build_index.sh --input-sequences=ACGTATTAC
--index=single-snp.index
./align_sequence.sh --index=single-snp.index
--align-sequence=ACGGATTAC --error-margin=1 --png=single-snp-align
./align_sequence.sh --index=single-snp.index
--align-sequence=ACGGATTAC --error-margin=1 --merge=true
--png=single-snp-merge
```

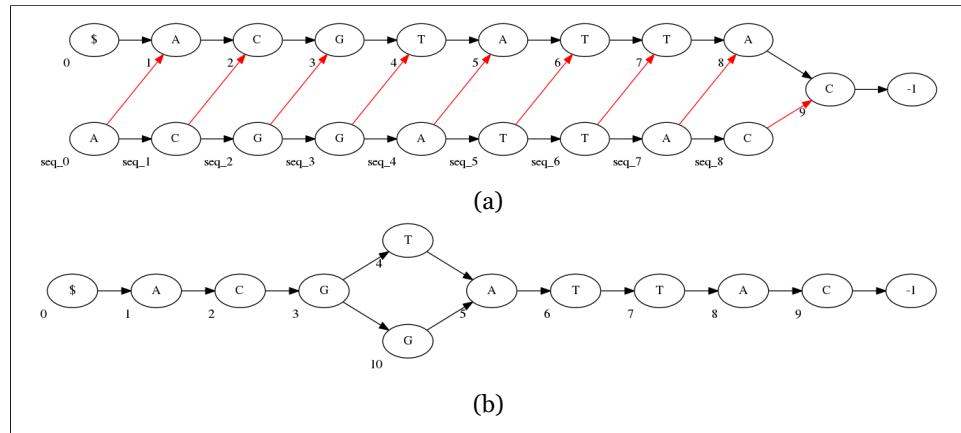


Figure 5.4: The result of aligning (a) and merging (b) the sequence "ACGGATTAC" against the reference seen in figure 5.1

- Aligning a sequence with a SNP compared to the reference should provide an alignment with the indexes of continuous vertices

- Merging a sequence with exactly one SNP should yield a graph with exactly one vertex more than the old graph, where exactly one vertex has one more outgoing edge and exactly one vertex has one more incoming edge.

## Indels

First we test a deletion by removing the fifth character in the alignment sequence:

```
./build_index.sh --input-sequences=ACGTATTAC
--index=deletion.index
./align_sequence.sh --index=deletion.index
--align-sequence=ACGTTTAC --error-margin=1 --png=deletion-align
./align_sequence.sh --index=deletion.index
--align-sequence=ACGTTTAC --error-margin=1 --merge=true
--png=deletion-merge
```

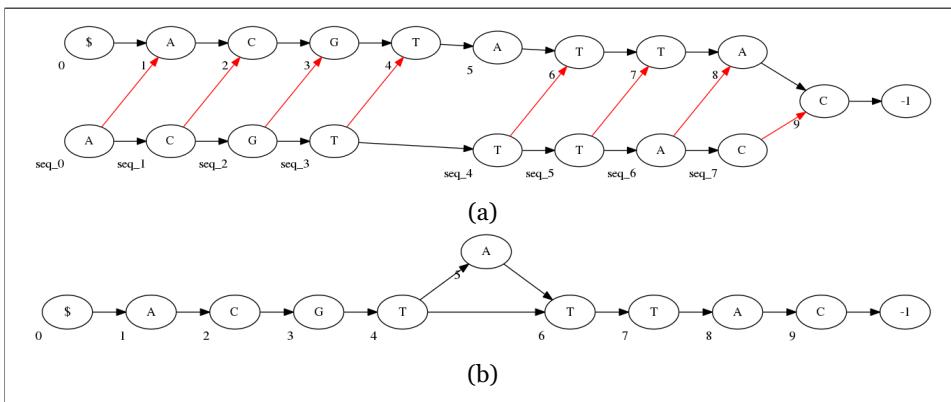


Figure 5.5: The result of aligning (a) and merging (b) the sequence "ACGTTTAC" against the reference seen in figure 5.1

- Aligning a sequence with a deletion compared to the reference should provide an alignment where exactly one pair of consecutive indexes does not represent neighbouring vertices
- Merging a sequence with a deletion should result in a graph with the same number of vertices as the old graph, but one additional edge

Secondly we test an insertion by inserting an extra 'A' after the fifth character:

```
./build_index.sh --input-sequences=ACGTATTAC
--index=insertion.index
./align_sequence.sh --index=insertion.index
--align-sequence=ACGTAATTAC --error-margin=1 --png=insertion-align
```

```

./align_sequence.sh --index=insertion.index
--align-sequence=ACGTAAATTAC --error-margin=1 --merge=true
--png=insertion-merge

```

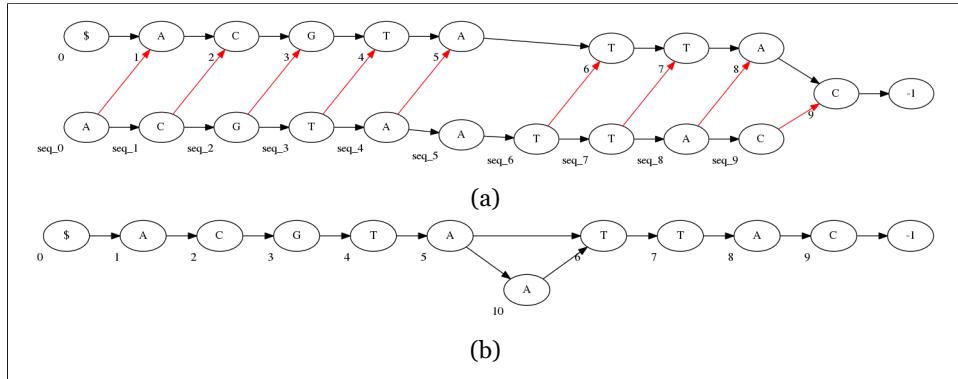


Figure 5.6: The result of aligning (a) and merging (b) the sequence "ACGTAAATTAC" against the reference seen in figure 5.1

- Aligning a sequence with an insertion compared to the reference should provide an alignment of indexes of consecutive vertices split apart by exactly one unmapped index
- Merging a sequence with an insertion should result in a graph with exactly one more vertex and two more edges

## Structural variation

In section 2.1.2 of the background chapter we present structural variation as mutations which occur over "larger areas of the genome". This kind of variation include larger subsequences which have been removed, inserted, moved or reversed. In the case of removals we will see reads which span the sequence that is removed, represented by a large gap in corresponding path in the graph. This is a notion which does not go well with the strict mathematical notion of similarity, and is not handled well by the tool. However the approach does create data which could be useful in identifying such gaps. These are discussed in section ???. In the case of a large insertion we will see reads which does obviously not have a counterpart in the graph. This will either result in unaligned reads or spurious matches with the most similar structure in the graph. Finding the true origin of these reads will have to be done by a larger assembly process which is discussed in section ???. Large subsequences which are moved will be similar to insertions, however here we will actually align the reads to their origin instead of having spurious results. Piecing them together correctly is a job for the assembly process. The latter case of reversion is simply not implemented in the tool. This is not a result of laziness: It is done strictly in order to minimize the amount of ambiguity when showing the results achieved by the approach. Neither

of the cases mentioned are covered by the small cases in this chapter, and is thus not shown.

We will now treat structural variation as any variation which is not covered by the point mutations shown in the previous section. Conveniently, if we drop the actual large structural changes, these mutations cover all the possible base cases of variation, and we can always define more complex cases as a combination of these. Because the number of possibilities grow exponentially we will only show a subset of cases to display the flexibility in the approach.

We start out by combining an insertion with an SNP:

```
./build_index.sh --input-sequences=ACGTATTAC
--index=structural1.index
./align_sequence.sh --index=structural1.index
--align-sequence=ACGTGGTTAC --error-margin=2 --merge=true
--png=structural1-merge
```

We then try a number of consecutive SNPs:

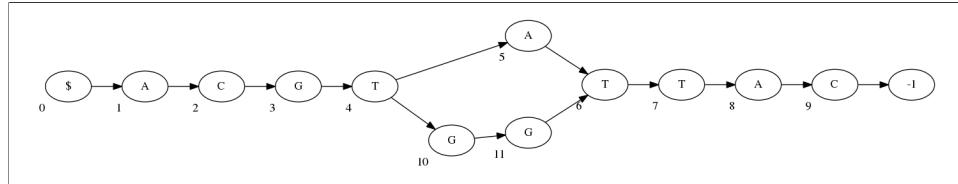


Figure 5.7: The result of merging the sequence “ACGTGGTTAC” with the reference seen in figure 5.1

```
./build_index.sh --input-sequences=ACGTATTAC
--index=structural2.index
./align_sequence.sh --index=structural2.index
--align-sequence=ACGTACCTT --error-margin=4 --merge=true
--png=structural2-merge
```

At this point we get a result which might not be expected. Instead of four

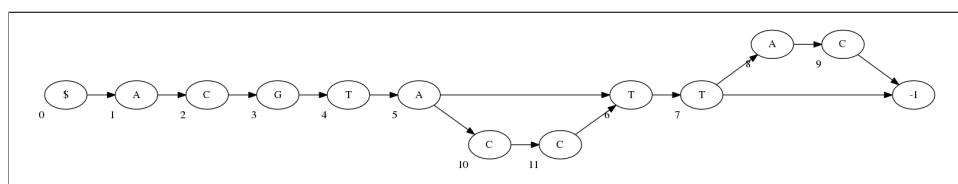


Figure 5.8: The result of merging the sequence “ACGTACCTT” with the reference seen in figure 5.1

SNPs the alignment contains two deletions and two insertions. This is the

previously mentioned effect of the order of operations kicking in. Importantly the somewhat surprising alignment has the exactly same alignment score as the expected one. This is also an example

## Complex graphs

The last snippet of examples will be concerned with building more complex graphs. Although the previous examples are great displays of the functionality of the algorithm they don't exhibit the expressive power of the approach to any degree. This section will demonstrate this flexibility through a series of consecutive alignments and merges against the same graph.

We start by building a graph from all the sequences from the first set of tests:

```
./build_index.sh --input-sequences=ACGTATTAC,ACGGATTAC,
ACGTTTAC,ACGTAATTAC --index=complex.index --error-margin=1
--png=complex1
```

We then merge in the sequences from the previous section:

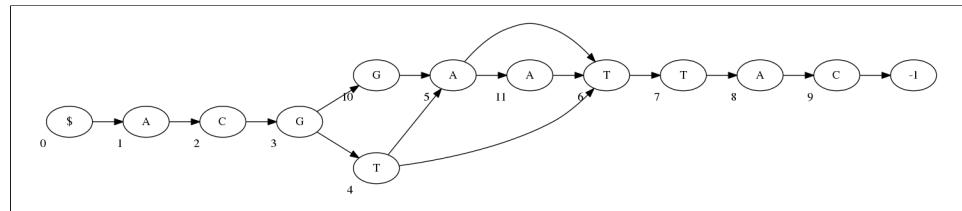


Figure 5.9: The reference graph made from the sequences "ACGTATTAC", "ACGGATTAC", "ACGTTTAC", "ACGTAATTAC"

```
./align_sequence.sh --index=complex.index
--align-sequence=ACGTGGTTAC --error-margin=2 --merge=true
./align_sequence.sh --index=complex.index
--align-sequence=ACGTACCTT --error-margin=4 --merge=true
--png=complex-merge
```

At this point it gets hard to reason about the graphs. The overview of the graph does not intuitively give us a trace back to its origins as quickly as earlier. We are still able to provide statements regarding this state by looking at the definitions used in building the algorithm. One of these statements could for instance be that every originating sequence should have a full path in the graph. We can confirm this by aligning one of the original sequences against the reference:

```
./align_sequence --index=complex.index
--align-sequence=ACGTGGTTAC --error-margin=0
```

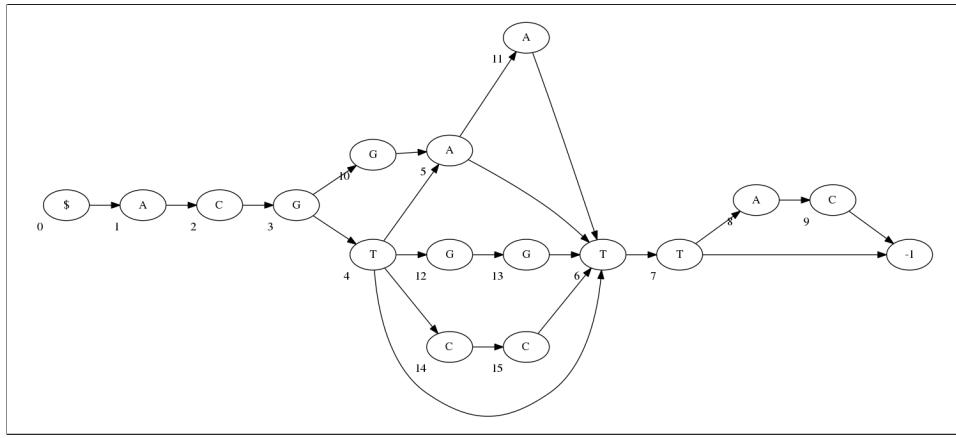


Figure 5.10: The two sequences “ACGTGGTTAC” and “ACGTACCTT” merged into the graph reference from figure 5.9

--png=complex-align

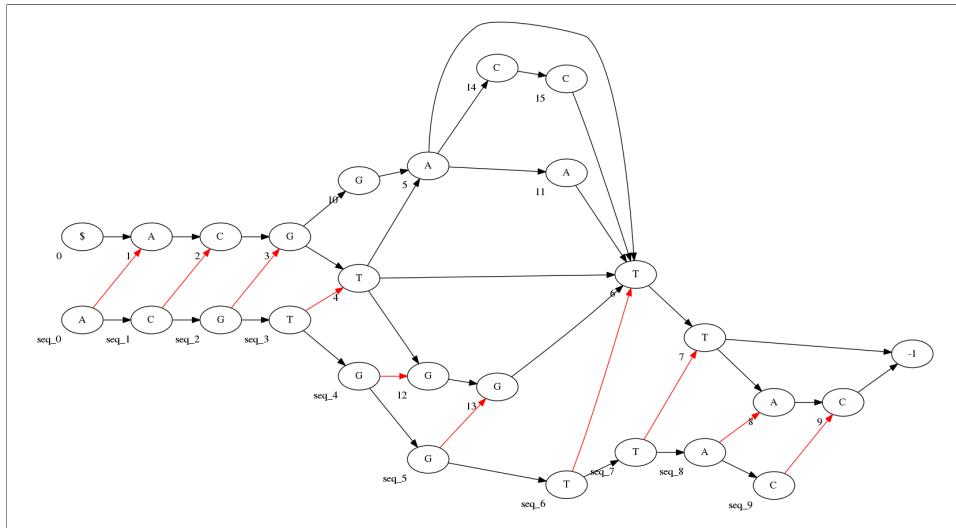


Figure 5.11: Aligning the sequence “ACGTGGTTAC” against the reference graph seen in figure 5.10



# Chapter 6

## Performance testing

This chapter is concerned with testing the efficiency of the approach by running tests on the implemented tool. There are two metrics which will be presented: The running time of the algorithm and the correctness of the achieved result. How correctness is determined is covered in section 6.2. Most of the results are compared against running the same alignment with an own PO-MSA implementation. PO-MSA is chosen because of its intuitive nature, the easily deducible relationship between graph complexity and running time and, most importantly, because it is a non-heuristical approach which means it guarantees a correct result every time.

### 6.1 Test data

These tests are meant to reflect usage in what would be an every day situation, and does therefore use real genetic data. All of the sequences are FASTA-files from the MHC region, most fetched from the vg github repo[38], some from the test-set provided by the sequence graphs tool[24]. The exact test sets are chosen to provide a variety of sequence lengths. In order to cover lengths where we found no sequences there are created artificial sequences by cutting out suitable regions from longer sequences. All the sequences which are used can be found in the test-folder of the github repo of the tool (Appendix C).

Specifically, there are 8 main data-sets involved in the testing process:

- **mhc1.fa** A 700 bp long sequence from the MHC region (not specified more precisely where). Fetched from the docker repo of the sg project
- **primary.fasta** A 3345 bp long sequence from the HLA-A gene in the MHC region from the primary assembly of GRCh38. Originates from the vg github.
- **20k.fasta, 35k.fasta, 100k.fasta, 150k.fasta, 500k.fasta** Five subsequences of an alternate assembly of the MHC region of respectively 21.070bp, 35.770bp, 101.570bp, 144.480bp and 448.490bp. The

alternate assembly originates from the NCBI database[22] with id NT\_167244.1.

- **mhc\_full.fa** The previously mentioned full mhc assembly of 4.622.290bp.

Additionally, some of the tests use more specific data. This data will be presented when necessary. All the test data found can be found in the git-hub repo??, in the data-folder

In order to do alignments we needed reads aswell as the reference data itself. These reads are generated by the read-generator seen in the appendix. A read  $r$  from a graph  $G$  is generated by the following procedure:

1. Choose a random vertice  $v \in G$   
 $\{s_G, t_G\}$  such that the smallest distance from  $v$  to  $t_g$  is larger than the chosen read size  $|r|$
2. For  $r$  steps:
  - (a) Append  $b(v_x)$  to the read  $r$
  - (b) Choose a random neighbouring vertice  $v_y \in \text{neighbours}(v_x)$  as the new  $v_x$
3. When a read  $r$  has been generated, for  $r_i \in r$ 
  - (a) Choose a random floating point value  $0 <= v <= 1$ 
    - If  $v < (p/3)$  delete  $r_i$
    - Else if  $v < (2p/3)$  insert a random base  $b \in \{A, C, G, T\}$  before  $r_i$
    - Else if  $v < p$  substitue  $r_i$  with a random base  $b \in \{A, C, G, T\}$   $\{r_i\}$
4. Output  $r$

In order to provide reproducability the randomness in the reads are generated from a seed.

Because this thesis is concerned with the mathematical properties of the model the noise in the reads does not necessarily depict the true nature of either genetic variation (Section 2.1.2) or read errors (Section 2.2.1). This is acceptable because any specification of how alignments should be scored will be a specification of the general problem, and is thus left for others.

## 6.2 Validation

When an alignment is produced for a read we classify it as either as correct or not correct. Intuitively one could imagine this can be figured out by determining whether the generated read aligns back to the path it was

generated from. However, when noise is introduced an interesting phenomenon can occur: The modified read can be more similar to another path in the graph than its origin. This can also occur whenever there exists actual equal paths in the graph, typically in the case of repeats. In order to stick with mathematical properties, our definition of optimality holds no relation to the origin of a read but is purely defined as the path which produces the highest possible alignment score. As PO-MSA is an exhaustive search we define optimally aligned as alignments which produce the same alignment score as the highest score found by PO-MSA. Consequently, as only the scores are compared, even when the approach produces a different alignments than PO-MSA this can be classified as optimal.

## 6.3 Time capturing mechanisms

For both the "Fuzzy context-based search" and the PO-MSA algorithm the time capturing mechanisms are built into the tool, using the Java System object. This allowed us to wrap the time capturing of each individual constituent as close to the functional parts as possible in order to avoid unnecessary overhead. When comparing tools the time was taken from the tool was started until the tool ended. Doing it this way has several disadvantages, which are discussed in Section 6.6.

## 6.4 Building the index

The building of the index is the first step of the process realized through the build\_index.sh script. To summarize this step consists of reading the input files, building the graph and generating the suffix trees. The build process was run 50 times on 6 different data sets, the averaged results can be seen in table ???. All of these are linear operations which can be seen in ???.

When splitting up the runtime into the individual constituents an interesting pattern emerges (Fig. 6.2): The main load of the indexation lies in writing to file. The data structure used is a large tree of nested complex structures such as hashmaps, which the standard Java serialization does not handle well **PROB SHUD REFERENCE SOMETHING. API MAYBE.** Putting effort into reducing the size of the index will thus have a dramatic effect on the time complexity.

Data set:	G	Time (ns)
mhc1.fa	700	597127494
primary.fasta	3345	2050636347
20k.fasta	21070	13858701254
30k.fasta	35770	25401423058
100k.fasta	101570	77928851412
150k.fa	144480	122654330941

Table 6.1: Runtimes of build\_index.sh

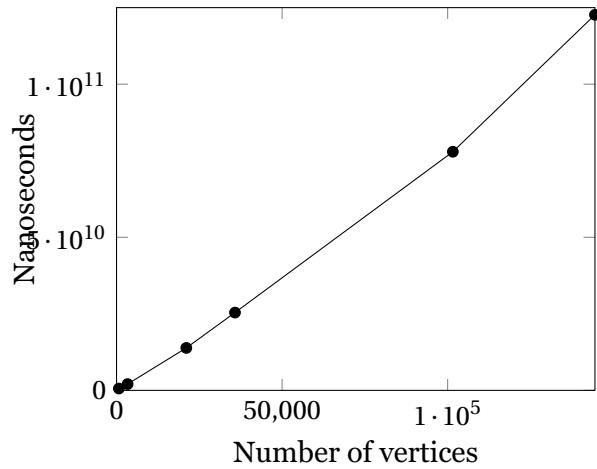


Figure 6.1: Runtime for the build index procedure

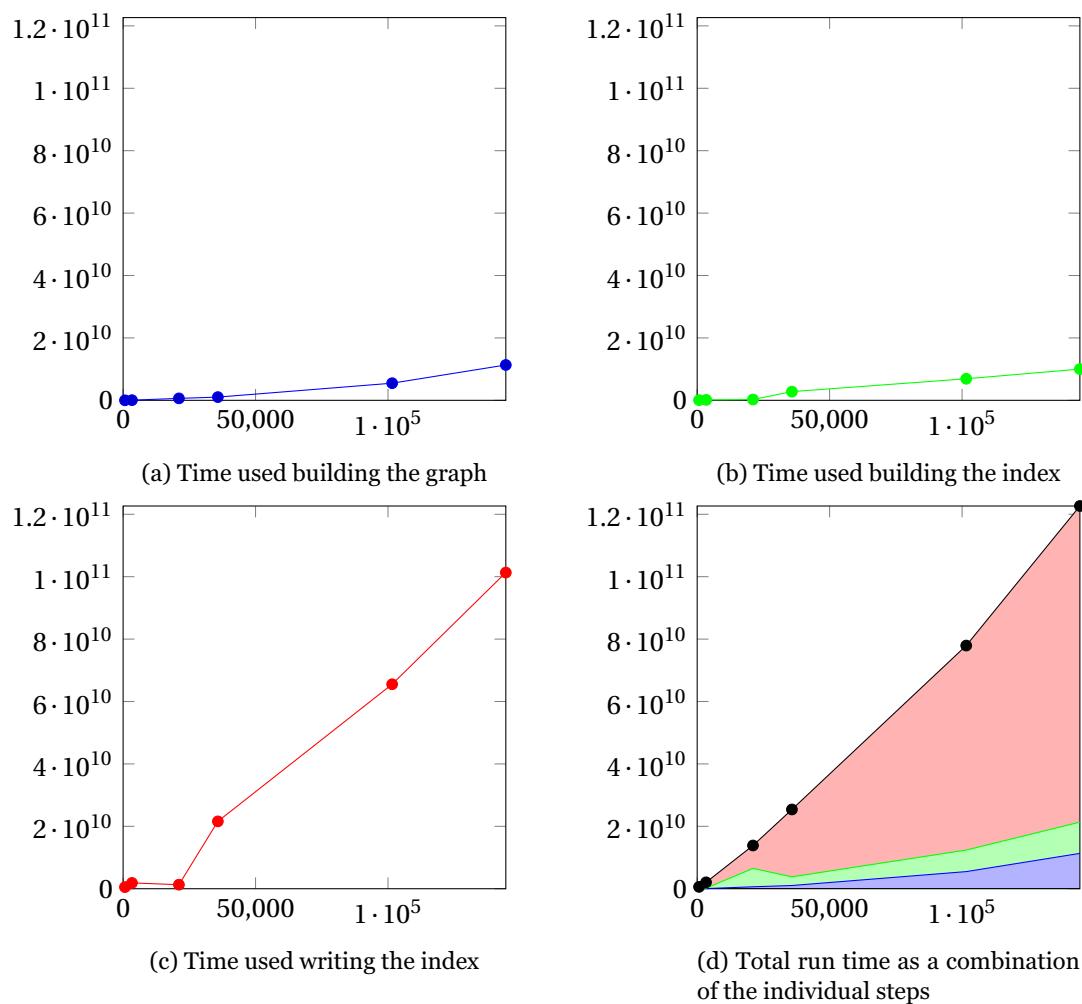


Figure 6.2: Time (ns) used by the indexation process as a function of the number of vertices

## 6.5 Alignment

The alignment tests are run by the align\_sequence.sh script, both with `--type=fuzzy` and `--type=po_msa` parameters. The section is divided into segments, based on what variable is tuned. As a remainder to the reader, these are the variables which are in play:

- $|G|$  is the size of the graph
- $\lambda$  is the allowed error margin
- $|s|$  is the length of the input sequence
- $b$  is the branching factor of the graph

Additionally we include one more variable:

- $p$  is the amount of noise added to the reads

As each of the subsequent sections are concerned with the impact of exactly one of these variables, the “non-important” variables are locked to a standard value:

- $|G| = 35.000$  Representing the mid-range of our test-sets.
- $\lambda = 0, p = 0.0$  We let alignment back to the origin represent the base case in the study.
- $|s| = 100$  Common read length for the Illumina HiSeq2000 technology.
- $b = 1$  Calculations can be found in section 6.5.

In every section a set of 50 alignments has been run with each setting that is tested. The alignments are produced through the previously mentioned read generation process and the results are averaged over all the runs.

### Runtime as a function of graph size

We first start by varying the size of the graph by using different fasta files as input. The results can be seen in table 6.2. PO-MSA does as expected show a clear linear trend in figure 6.3. The fuzzy search only depends on graph size to decide context lengths, and this extremely logarithmical relationship seems almost constant in comparison.

<b>Dataset:</b>	<b>Size:</b>	<b>PO-MSA runtime (ns)</b>	<b>Fuzzy runtime</b>	<b>Correct</b>
mhc1.fa	700	85097029	24601275	100%
primary.fasta	3345	89367932	28554977	100%
20k.fasta	21070	297994542	31282803	100%
35k.fasta	35770	454186275	30924263	100%
100k.fasta	101570	1193934335	32429709	100%
hline 150k.fasta	144480	1817456548	33846424	100%

Table 6.2: Results from aligning sequences against graphs with different sizes

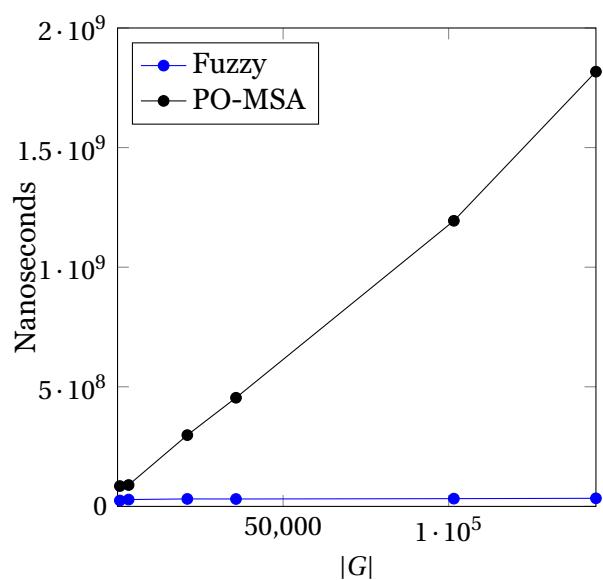


Figure 6.3: Runtime of the alignment process as a function of  $|G|$

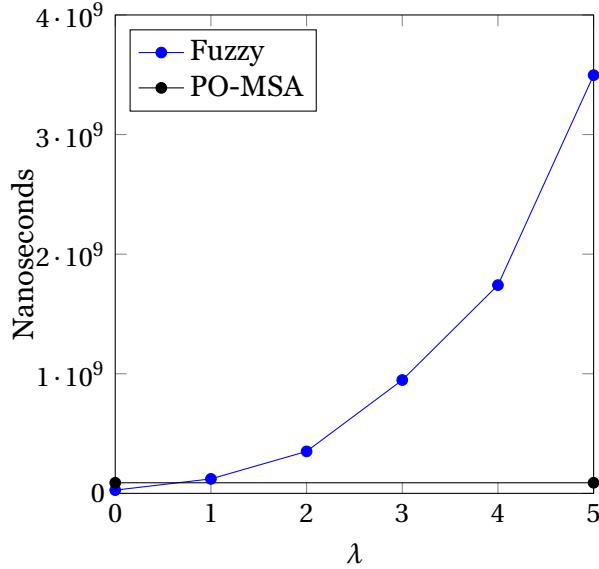


Figure 6.4: Runtime of the alignment process as a function of  $\lambda$

### Runtime as a function of error margin

**GRAPH HAS VALUES FROM 3345 SIZE** These tests are separated by varying the `--error-margin` parameter. The results can be seen in figure 6.4. The approach explodes in complexity as the number of allowed contexts increase exponentially. Already at `--error-margin=1` the approach is slower than a regular PO-MSA search. It is important to state that this growth is not directly correspondant to the actual number given as an error margin. It is rather correlated to the number of possibilities within the given scoring schema given the error margin. For negated edit distance, the two coincide. Interestingly, we can recognize that the starting point for the exponential function is dependant on the graph sizes. When increasing the number of vertices to 150.000 the approach is suddenly more efficient than PO-MSA up to  $\lambda = 2$  (Figure 6.5). Additionally, if we utilize the parallelization through the `--parallelization=true` we manage to put a linear bound on the exponential growth.

### Runtime as a function of sequence length

Regulating sequence length is done by varying the `--len` parameter sent to the read generator. The values used are approximations towards values found by actual sequencing technologies[17], the results can be found in table 6.3. As expected both algorithms are very linear with respect to read length, the fuzzy search growing seemingly slower than PO-MSA.

### Runtime as a function of graph complexity

The graph complexity is decided by the number of variants featured in the graph. We have let the branching factor  $b$  be our benchmark with

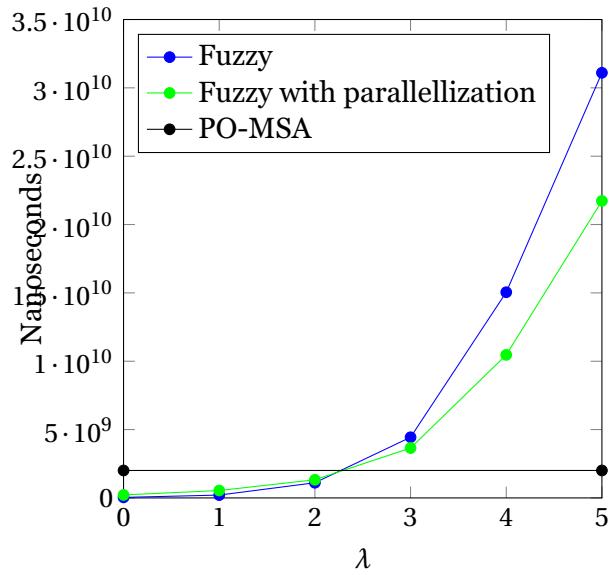


Figure 6.5: Runtime of the alignment process as a function of  $\lambda$  with  $|G| = 150.000$  and --parallelization=true

Technology	Read length	PO-MSA time	Fuzzy time
HiSeq2000 (min)	50	171961927	19347780
HiSeq2000	90	264031377	30038511
SOLiDv4	100	294027088	36927650
Ion PGM	200	676355995	59767319
Sanger 3730xl (min)	400	1117436847	98570092
454 GS FLX	700	1600069004	167703497
Sanger 3730xl (max)	900	2121961653	194846761

Table 6.3: Running times for different read lengths for the PO-MSA and fuzzy algorithms

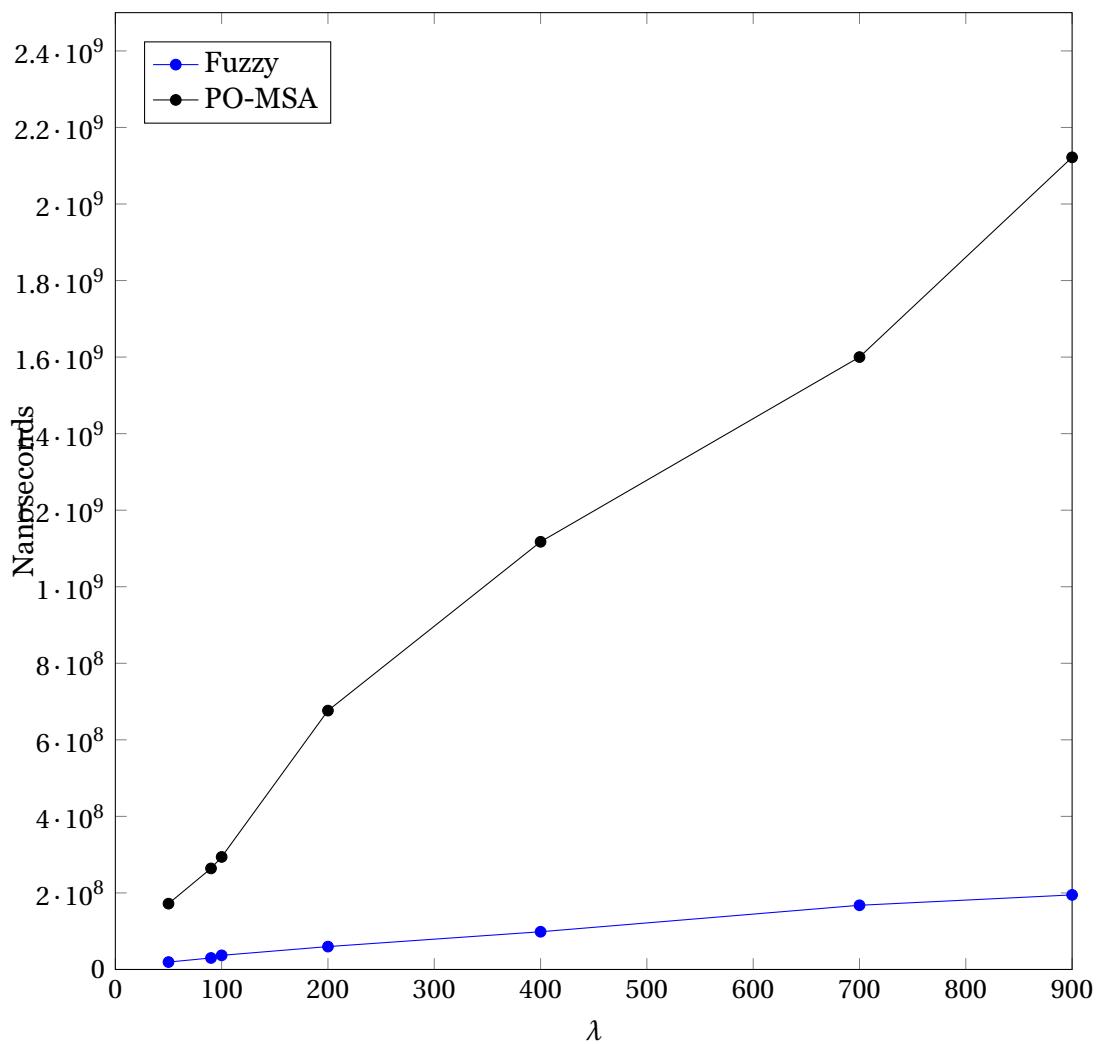


Figure 6.6: Runtime of the alignment process as a function of  $|s|$

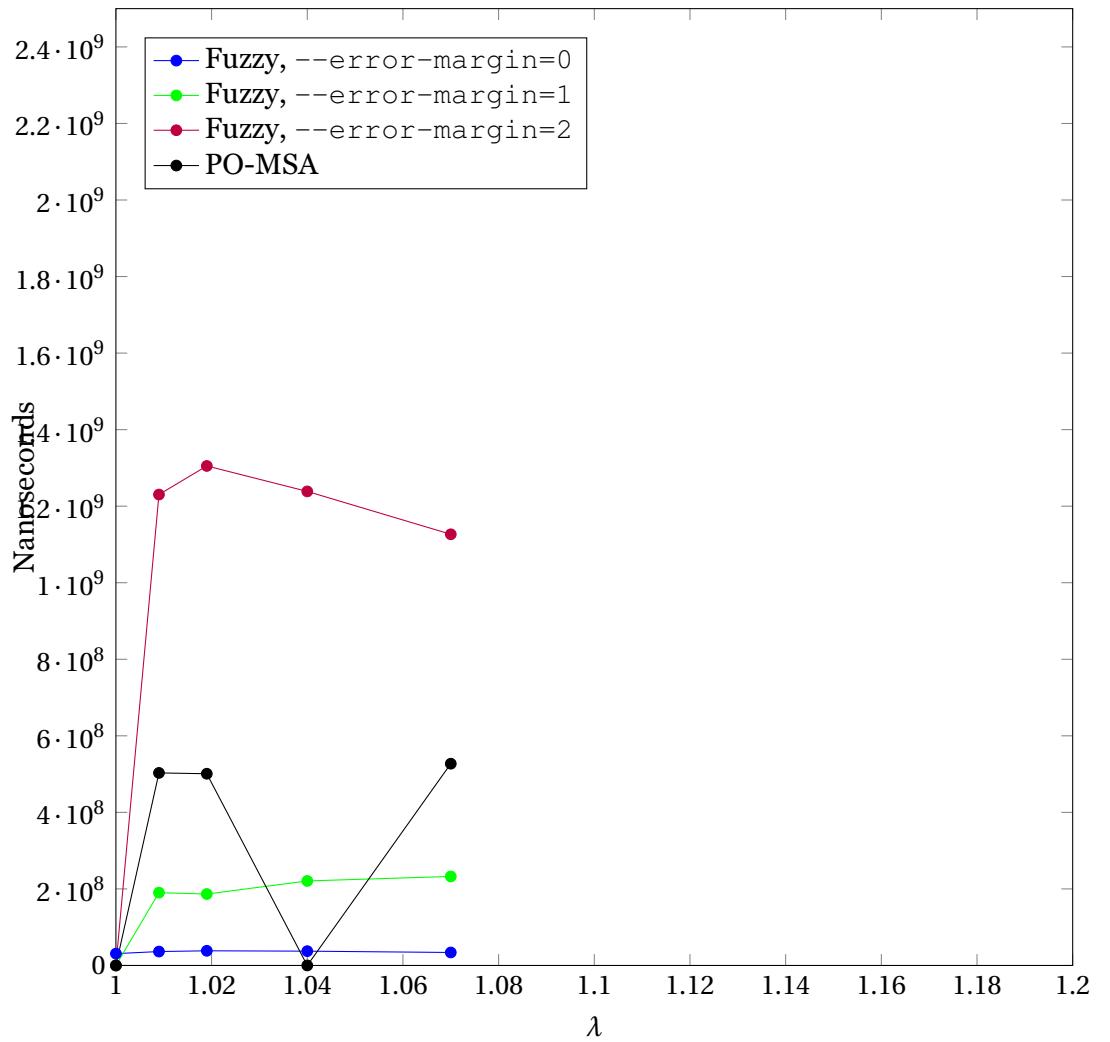


Figure 6.7: Runtime of the alignment process as a function of  $b$

regards to the complexity. This section will feature testing on two distinct datasets. A set of real alleles for different genes in the MHC region and a set of generated variation for the 35k.fasta sequence. Both datasets contain what could be considered rather moderate values of  $b$ , the real life data in particular. This is a reflection of genetic variation. Using the numbers from section 2.1.4, assuming every variant creates a new branch and that every human has a unique set of variants, a reference graph of the entire human genome would have a branching factor of approximately  $1 + |p| * 0.000007$  where  $|p|$  is the population size [footnote with values](#). This is the reason we often use the approximate value  $b = 1$ . It is important to remember that this number is concerned with branching on a vertex level, the actual number of variants grow exponentially with regards to the graph size.

## Correctness as a function of noise

There are two reasons for running these tests: Finding bugs in the tool and learning about statistical distributions. The approach is shown to be correct whenever  $\lambda$  is greater than the edit distance to the most similar path in the graph, and wrong when it is not. These results are thus an projection of the probability of generating a read  $r$  such that  $\lambda \geq \text{maxscore}(r)$  given an error probability  $p$ . We do however include these results as they reflect usage in an everyday, non-controlled environment. For the first set of tests we set  $\lambda = 2$ , as this is the cutoff-point where a fuzzy search is still more efficient than PO-MSA. The results can be seen in table 6.4

A more interesting experiment is looking at the correctness while both varying  $p$  and  $\lambda$ . In table 6.8 we can see the results from such an experiment. Every cell represents the number of correct runs out of 100 tests, which conveniently is equivalent to the error percentage. Every row represents one table corresponding to table 6.4. More interestingly, every column corresponds to a single mutation-probability which would typically be correlated with an entire data-set. Although the sample is small there seems to be a trend where the number of correctly mapped reads logarithmically increases as the error-margin is increased.

$p$	Correctness
0.00	100%
0.01	90%
0.02	60%
0.04	60%
0.06	40%
0.08	20%
0.1	10%

Table 6.4: Percentage of correctly aligned reads as  $p$  varies and  $\lambda$  is fixed

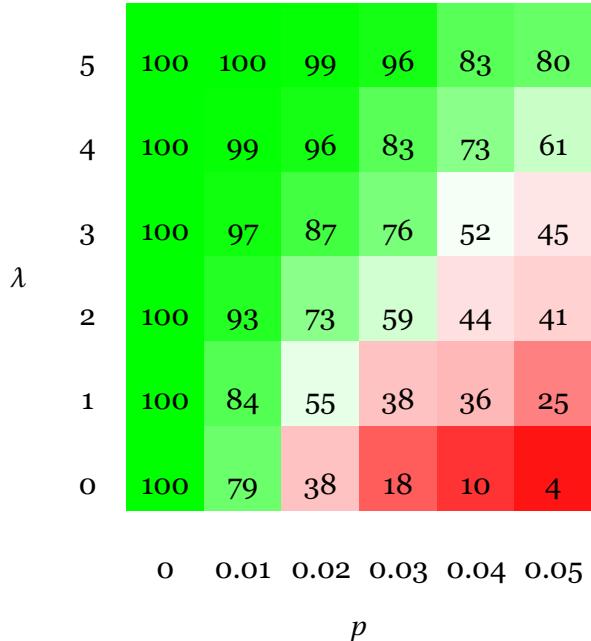


Figure 6.8: Percentage of correctly aligned reads as a function of both  $p$  and  $\lambda$  varies

## 6.6 Comparison with other tools

In this section we have compared the GraphGenome tool with the sequence graphs tool maintained by Adam Novak. We have timed the process strictly by running a clock on the execution time of each of the tools. For our own tool we have included the clock which is run on the algorithm itself. When running a clock on the entire execution we are extremely prone to overhead, specially in the case where there is I/O with large files involved. This makes doing analysis on the results a futile effort where there is hard to draw conclusions. We did the tests with the intention of discovering underlying growth factors in each of the algorithms which would hopefully still shine through.

Unfortunately, the sequence graphs tool did not handle the larger datasets used previously in testing. In order to get a more detailed picture of the space in which both tools produce results we ran tests of several of the smaller sequences found in the data-folder of the docker project. The results from building the index can be seen in table ?? and figure 6.9. The results from alignment can be found in table ?? and figure 6.10. All results are taken as an average over 50 runs.

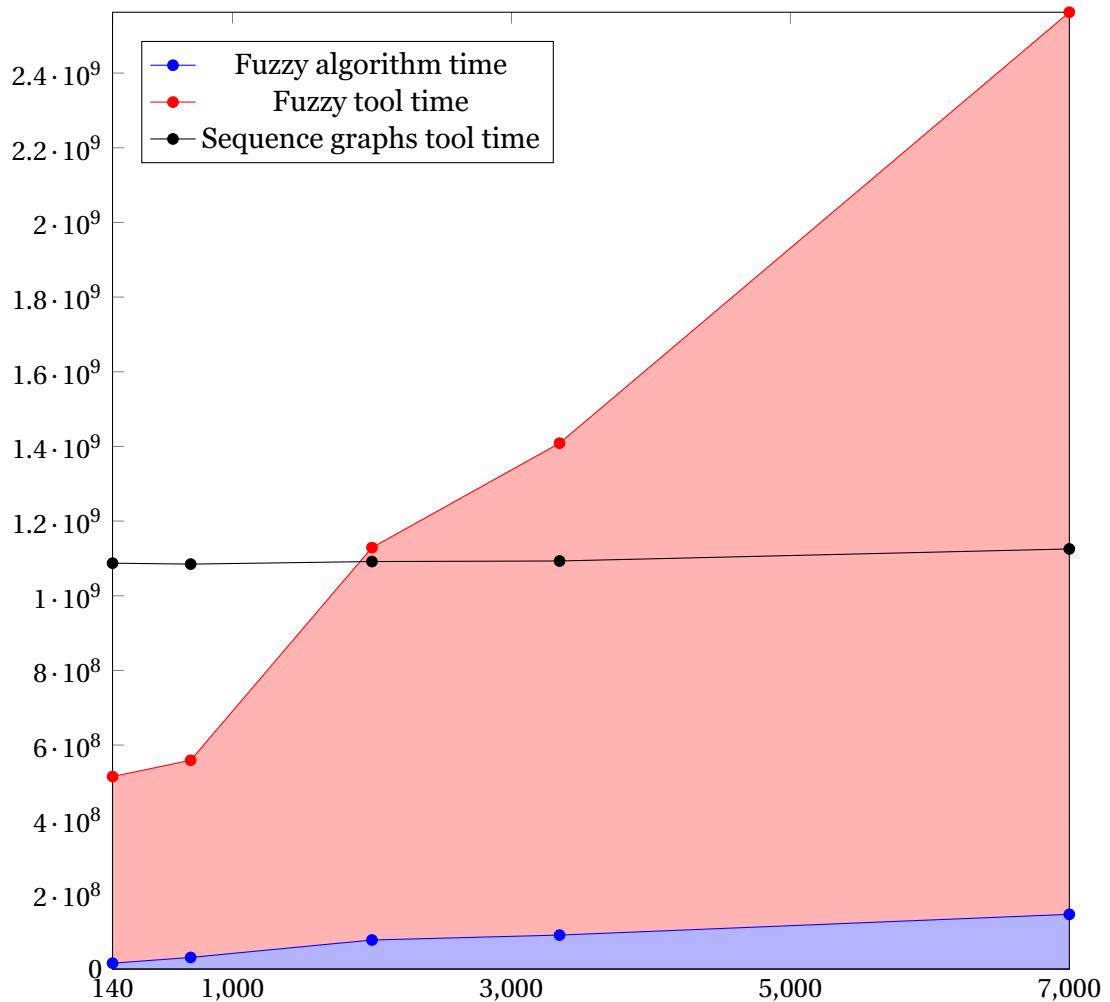


Figure 6.9: Time spent building the index by the different tools

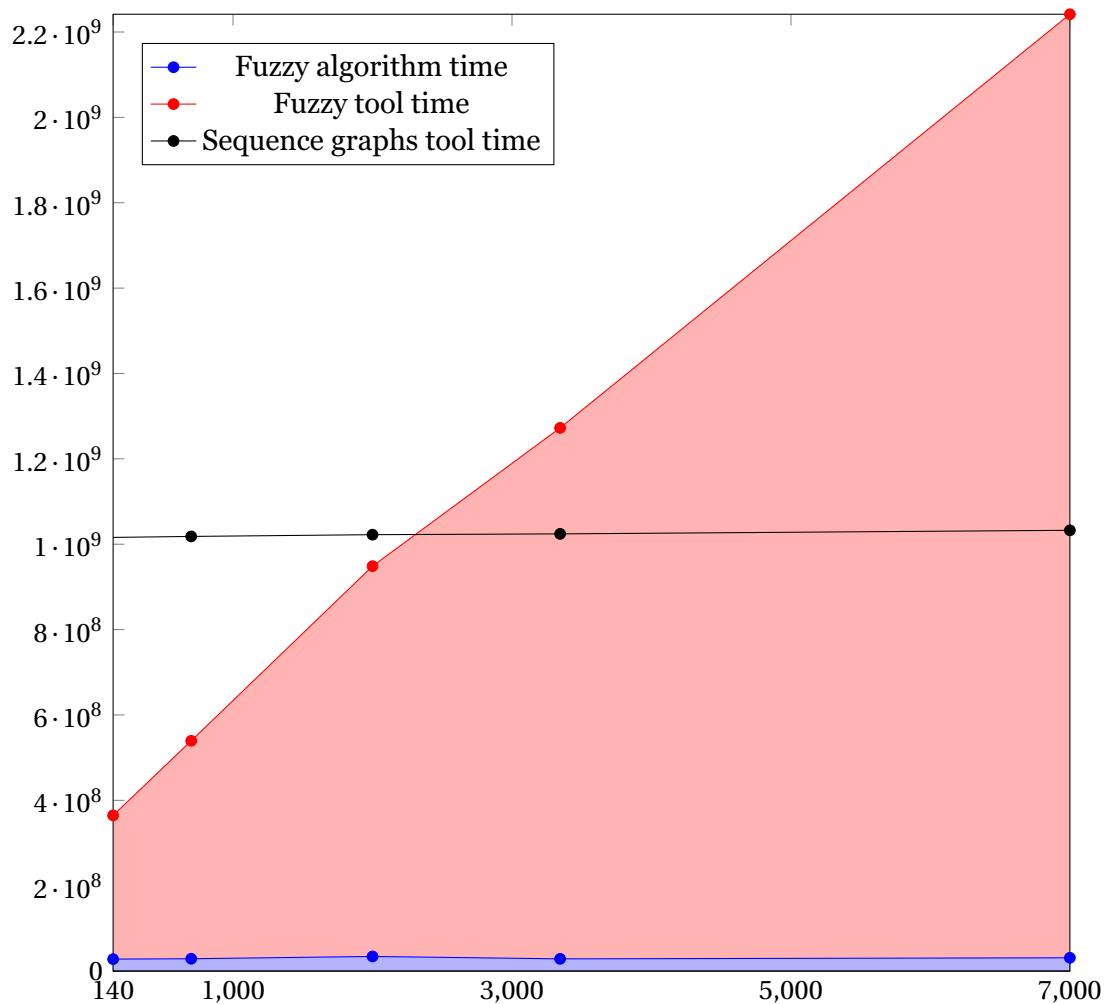


Figure 6.10: Time spent building aligning by the different tools

# Chapter 7

## Discussion

### 7.1 Is the approach correct?

We will start by discussing the results from Chapter 5. Every test from the chapter comes with a set of formal statements regarding the provided visualization, which represents the underlying result. We are not interested in arguing whether these statements are true or not: We want to explore if the statements provide a valid basis for confirming the correctness of the approach. In the introduction of the chapter we state that non-trivial statements are dropped, to avoid long lists of general very general assumptions. Doing this cut off also has a secondary, interesting property: It demonstrates which properties we find non-trivial, and thus interesting to examine. In order to use the approach for actual biological problems one would assume the need for more of these non-trivial statements. They could originate from a problem specification in a precise biological domain: “*All alignments should contain vertices from an separable subset of the population*”, or for instance from a statistical analysis point of view: “*The fraction of input sequences traversing a path should impact all scores retrieved through aligning against it*”. We argue these are strictly examples of extensions to the statements we present, and therefore also represent extensions to the requirement specification used as a basis for the approach. We see these as necessary extensions, and they will be discussed further in chapter ???. But we also claim the work done in this project has an innate value, as a search for a solution to a more general problem. All knowledge gained in reference to this general problem is easily transferable to more specific use cases.

### 7.2 The performance

We will move on to discuss the results found in Chapter 6. Specifically there are three characteristics with these results we find interesting: The efficiency of the approach under optimal conditions, the complexity in relation to introducing fuzziness and the indexation. The three subsequent chapters will summarize these characteristics, discuss the nature of the results and the effects this has on the viability of the approach.

## Optimal conditions

We define the base case in the experiments done as the problem of aligning an unaltered read back to its origin. We test this by putting constraints on the parameters concerned with fuzziness and vary the remaining, typically related to the complexity of the input data. The results can be seen in figure ??, ?? and ?. In all of these situations the approach display good behaviour when compared to PO-MSA, especially when the runtime is seen as a function of graph size. This in itself is not an extremely impressive result: It can be achieved through simpler solutions, for instance by using hashed k-mers from the graph as an index. What is interesting is that this is not the characteristic which was identified as the goal of the approach and then sought out in a vacuum. It emerges from a solution to a more general problem. This creates a good foundation by showing that the approach is very tractable for the simplest use cases.

## The exponential growth in relation to fuzzyness

We increase the complexity of the test cases by introducing fuzziness through the error margin parameter  $\lambda$ . The results can be seen in figure 6.4, where the large exponential growth of the approach can be seen. This is in a way expected: Fuzzyness has the innate property of exponentially increasing the number of interesting probabilities. When we combine this with a dense search space of similar sequences the growth explodes. At some point it is better to exhaustively let PO-MSA test the possibilities we actually have instead of letting the fuzzy search generate and search for variants. The border between the two is represented where the two functions cross in the figure.

The extreme growth and the early cross over point between the two algorithms in the figure seem to make the feasibility of the approach plummet. In the figure 6.5 there are results which can refute this statement to some degree. We can see that a simple parallelization seem to flatten the growth. There still exists room for extreme optimizations through parallelizing the suffix tree search; we included a simple version to display the powerful effect. These possibilities are discussed further in chapter ?. The most important point is the one which was made while presenting the results: Although the growth is bad, the starting point is decided by the “base case”, which we know will improve as the complexity of the input data increases. The fact that these two factors does not interact with each other results in an increase in tractability as the data sets grow: A very desirable trait when dealing with real genetic data. Another important argument can be made as the graph size increases in comparison to the read length. There will exists a large number of pure combinations of paths of length  $|r|$  in the graph, which decreases the probability of not finding anything relevant when doing alignments and similarly decreases the necessity for a high error margin. These two pieces of information leave us arguing that the approach is still an interesting step along the way towards solving the

problem.

Lastly we want to discuss the nature of the error margin. When working on “real” data with an unknown number of errors, the fraction of correctly aligned reads increases as the error margin-parameter is increased (Figure ??). The errors in this figure is sequences where the algorithm returns an empty alignment, stating that there exists no way of possibly aligning the sequence within the given error margin. If we chose to view the alignment as a continuous set of discrete contexts, this could happen even when the algorithm has been able to produce a “good enough” alignment for every distinct context and combined them in the best possible way. In this process the algorithm could dismiss a lot of actually optimal alignments. This is the process which we allow through the `-heuristic=true` option which is discussed earlier. Utilizing this decreases the necessary error margin from *number of total errors*  $e_t$  to  $e_t * (|c|/|s|)$ . This is a clear optimization towards making the approach more feasible, but as it moves into the realm of the heuristic it has been avoided throughout this thesis.

## Indexation

The possibly most visually outstanding result presented in the previous chapter is the pure amount of time used by the indexation process, as seen in figures 6.2d and 6.10. Most of this time is used by slow interactions with the file system, by reading and writing a large index. This thesis has not at all been concerned with the tractability of this process. Although the results seem severe there exists solutions both for better compression[\[ref\]](#), better serialization[\[ref\]](#) and smarter interactions with slower hardware[\[ref\]](#). Ultimately one could argue that in a real life scenario the index should be kept in memory on a supercomputer[\[ref\]](#)[\[ref\]](#). Importantly, we are not concluding that it is fair to completely remove the indexation factor when examining the results. We are rather stating this is a key component of the developed approach, but the work is left for others (see Chapter ??).

### 7.3 A comparison between the sequence graphs tool and the "fuzzy context-based alignment" tool

### 7.4 Usefulness of the approach

The discussion around the results from Chapter 6 show some blatant weaknesses with the approach. However, it also shows that in some cases the approach works great. We will reserve this section to discuss directly what the usefulness of the approached we presented in this thesis. The possibly more interesting discussion regarding how we can utilize what we have learned to improve the algorithm have been reserved for Chapter ??, which also in-

cludes a discussion around heuristical applications.

The results show a clearly separable set of use cases where the approach works great: Aligning small, similar sequences against a large graph. However, the notion of similarity can be hard to decide in advance. For this reason we present a specific realm of usage for the approach: Validation of heuristical methods. If one aligns a sequence against a graph with a heuristical approach one would find an alignment, and a correspondant alignment score. Using this alignment score one could easily calculate an error margin. Running our approach with this error margin would result in one of three cases:

- An alignment with the same score, meaning one of these exist
- No alignment, meaning the score is faulty and the alignment is wrong
- An alignment with a lower score, meaning the heuristical search was incorrect

The first case provides an obvious value if it is combined with a procedure for checking whether a given alignment has a given score. The second case will discover a bug in the heuristical procedure, which is definitively valuable but not on a conceptual level. The third case is extremely interesting as it does not necessarily point out a fault in the heuristical implementation, but moreso a conceptual error in the heuristic used.

# **Chapter 8**

## **Conclusion**



# Chapter 9

## Future work

### 9.1 Improvements of the algorithm

We have chosen to divide the needed work on the tool into three levels, depending on the level of abstraction of the involved elements. The first level could be called something like “*Changes needed to make the tool usable for solving a biological problem*” and includes things such as implementing support for looking up reverse-complementary strings. However, this level also includes things which are extremely problem-specific regarding which direction the developer want to take: Maybe you want to store the origins of vertices or edges. Due to the subjectivity this level is not discussed in great detail.

The second level concerns “*Stuff which is so badly implemented it needs fixing to make usage of the tool feasible*”. The stand-out element on this level is the indexation process. This requires some more work. The index has to be flexible enough to handle fuzzy searches on dense, often extremely similar data-sets. Inspiration could be taken from the work on suffix structures for regular strings[\[ref\]](#) or possibly from the broader realm of Information Retrieval[\[ref\]](#). Another element on this level is the parallelization. Including a smart parallelization procedure into the actual suffix tree search could have a dramatic impact on runtimes. These two elements should be combined by having parallelization in the back of the mind while redesigning the index structure. It could also be possible to implement parallelization on the second step of the algorithm using some sort of Future-objects, although this seems a taller mountain to climb for a smaller reward.

The third and final level contains “*Elements which can possibly be improved to drastically reduce runtimes*”. At this level we examine the conceptual algorithm and try to identify possibly unnecessary double-work being done. The first thing which stand out as such is the usage of paths as contexts to determine which vertices should be used, then taking a step back down to the vertex-level to find recombinations of paths used for the alignment. This is completely necessary in the approach presented here to ensure flexibility as far as possible, but feels like an excessive step back

and forth. Finding a better solution for this could improve the complexity of both steps of algorithms by reducing the number of individual vertices searched for in the suffix tree search which also reduces the complexity of the generated graph for the dynamic programming search.

Secondarily, this approach feeds all candidate vertices found by pruning into a single graph. This seems unnecessary as the candidate vertices could stem from regions of the graph which are both interesting, but they are so far apart there can exist no combination of them which is interesting. If these cases could be determined efficiently the vertices could be split up into two candidate graphs which for instance can be searched in parallel. The main problem would be determining when this is the case without too much overhead.

## 9.2 Further testing

The second part of interesting further work would be to go further to determine whether the approach is feasible in actual biological settings. Preferably this should be done after the work discussed in the previous section, but early testing could provide valuable insights on whether the approach is even tractable as a solution to the problems presented in this thesis. This testing should be done on actual computers doing these kinds of operations using real-life, large data-sets. In this situation we also imagine an improvement to the visualization of the graphs could prove useful.

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# **Appendices**



## Appendix A

# Proving optimality

Because the description of the approach is rather comprehensive, we chose to include a more brief proof that the approach is correct. Because the second step of the algorithm is exhaustive we only need to prove the first step: Every vertex part of an optimal alignment is passed on from the suffix tree search.

We have a graph  $G$  and a string  $s$  such that there exists an optimal alignment  $A$  with a score  $\$_A$ . We have an error-margin  $\lambda$  such that the maximal achievable alignment score  $\max(s)$  is smaller than  $\$_A + \lambda$ . Because we are using consistent scoring schemas we know  $\max(s) = \text{align}(s, s)$ . We also know  $\max(s + c) = \max(s) + \text{mappingScore}(c, c)$  for any  $c \in \Sigma$ . Thus we can view  $\max(s)$  as a discrete function of the length of  $s$ , where the increase between any two indices are maximal for  $s$ .

We now assume the opposite case of what we are trying to prove:

### Assumption 1

*There exists a vertex  $v$  which is part of an optimal alignment with a score  $\varphi_A > \max(s) - \lambda$  which is pruned away from the search.*

Because  $v$  is pruned away it is not a part of any contexts which has a context score higher than  $T_c = \max(s') - \lambda$  for any substring  $s' \in s$ . If we pick out the highest scoring context  $c$  this has a context score  $T_c < \max(s') - \lambda$ . There are two cases to cover: Either  $s' = s$  or  $|s'| < |s|$ . In the first case we can let the context score  $T_c$  also denote the alignment score  $\varphi_A$ . We insert  $s' = s$  into the calculation and find  $\varphi_A < \max(s) - \lambda$  which contradicts the assumption. In the second case of  $|s'| < |s|$  there exists a part of the string  $s$  which is not covered by the substring  $s'$  aligned against the context. We call this part  $\bar{s}$ . We let  $x$  denote the value which is lost when aligning  $c$  against  $s'$  such that  $T_c = \max(s') - \lambda - x, x > 0$ . In order for the alignment of the full string  $s' + \bar{s}$  to achieve a score  $\varphi_A > \max(s) - \lambda$ ,  $\bar{s}$  has to be aligned against contexts such that the sum of their scores  $T_c = \max(\bar{s}) + x, x > 0$ . From the previous definition of  $\max$  we know that no alignment of any of the substrings  $\bar{s} \in s$  can achieve a score higher than  $\max(\bar{s})$ , which means this is impossible. Thus the max score for any alignment containing this

context is  $\varphi_A = \max(s) - \lambda - x, x > 0$  which also contradicts the assumption. Because both the exhaustive cases lead to contradictions, the assumption is invalid.

## Appendix B

# Average case complexity analysis

We let  $G$  be a reference graph and  $s$  and input sequence.  $\lambda$  denotes the allowed error margin under the negated edit distance scoring schema.

For every candidate vertex  $v_x$  in every candidate set  $V'_i$ ,  $0 <= i < |s|$ , we need to find the distance to every preceding vertex in every preceding candidate set  $V'_{i-j}$  for  $1 <= j <= \lambda + 1$ . We let this number be denoted by  $dist(G, s)$

$$dist(G, s) = \sum_{i=0}^{|s|-1} |V'_i| \sum_{j=1}^{\lambda+1} |V'_{i-j}| \quad (\text{B.1})$$

If we assume the contexts in  $G$  and the substrings in  $s$  are both normally distributed over the space of all possible contexts, the size of any two candidate sets are interchangeable. This is not an entirely true assumption in the cases of shorter contexts at the beginning and end of  $s$ , but the impact of these fades as  $|s|$  grows compared to  $|c|$ . We let  $avg(V'_x)$  denote the average size of the candidate sets. We can use this approximation to contract the previous equation

$$\begin{aligned} dist(G, s) &= \sum_{i=0}^{|s|-1} |V'_i| \sum_{j=1}^{\lambda+1} |V'_{i-j}| \\ &= (|s| - 1) avg(V'_x) (\lambda + 1) avg(V'_x) \\ &= (|s| - 1)(\lambda + 1) avg(V'_x)^2 \end{aligned} \quad (\text{B.2})$$

The sizes of these sets are given by the number of valid contexts,  $num(c, \lambda)$ , multiplied by the probability that a context exists,  $prob(c)$ . If we set  $\lambda = 0$  we allow no fuzzyness and are thus looking for a single context

$$num(c, 0) = 1 \quad (\text{B.3})$$

When increasing  $\lambda$  by one we are allowing the search to branch out exactly once from the existing branches. There are 3 possibilities for branching out in the suffix tree at each of the  $|c|$  levels, one possibility for each other character. Each of the branches adds another legal context to the search

$$num(c, \lambda) = 1 + 3|c| * num(c, \lambda - 1) \quad (\text{B.4})$$

If we overestimate the number of possible branches by letting the search include every branch which has already been searched this number can be simplified

$$num(c, \lambda) = 1 + 3|c|^\lambda \quad (\text{B.5})$$

The probability of a context existing in the suffix tree is given by the number of actual contexts divided by the number of possible contexts. We approximate the number of actual contexts by the branching factor of the graph  $b$  raised to  $|c|$  for every vertice. If we assume the branching factor is close to 1 this can be contracted to  $|G|$

$$prob(c) = \frac{|G|}{4^{|c|}} \quad (\text{B.6})$$

which means

$$avg(V'_x) = (1 + 3|c|^\lambda) * \frac{|G|}{4^{|c|}} \quad (\text{B.7})$$

and

$$dist(G, s) = (|s| - 1)(\lambda + 1)((1 + 3|c|^\lambda) * \frac{|G|}{4^{|c|}})^2 \quad (\text{B.8})$$

The distance search itself consists of doing a simple comparison in every vertice which is reachable by the searching algorithm. If we again assume  $b \approx 1$  and we let  $\lambda$  put an upper bound on the length of the paths which are searched the searching algorithm visits exactly  $\lambda$  vertices. The final complexity for the entire operation is found by multiplying the complexity of the distance search with the times it is executed

$$O(search(G', s, \lambda)) = \lambda((|s| - 1)(\lambda + 1)((1 + 3|c|^\lambda) * \frac{|G|}{4^{|c|}})^2) \quad (\text{B.9})$$

which can be shortened to

$$O(search(G', s, \lambda)) = \frac{\lambda^2 |s| (|c|^\lambda |G|)^2}{4^{|c|^2}} \quad (\text{B.10})$$

## **Appendix C**

# **The GraphGenome tool**



## Appendix D

# The "birthday problem" and context lengths

The "birthday problem" is the problem of deciding the probability  $B(n)$  that two people in a group of  $n$  share a birthday. We can let  $B'(n)$  represent the opposing probability, that there is noone amongst the  $n$  which share birthdays. As the two are both exhaustive and exclusive we know that  $B(n) + B'(n) = 1$  and thus that  $B(n) = 1 - B'(n)$ .

Deciding the probability that noone is sharing a birthday can be broken down to the individual people making up the selection. When we add a person to the selection we multiply the probability for the previous selection with the probability that the given person does not share a birthday, which is given by the probability of selecting an available day from the total number of days, 365. As we already know we are not interested in selections where two people share birthdays, the available days are equal to 365 minus the number of people in the selection,  $n - 1$ . The total result for a group of  $n$  people is thus given by the formula:

$$B'(n) = \frac{365 - 0}{365} * \frac{365 - 1}{365} * \frac{365 - 2}{365} * \dots * \frac{365 - (n - 2)}{365} * \frac{365 - (n - 1)}{365} \quad (\text{D.1})$$

which can be approximated using taylor series [37]:

$$B'(n) = e^{-(n^2/(2*365))} \quad (\text{D.2})$$

which gives:

$$B(n) = 1 - e^{-(n^2/(2*365))} \quad (\text{D.3})$$

Conveniently, we can apply the approximations used in the birthday problem to determine the probability of contexts being shared by two or more vertices. We let the number of actual contexts  $x$  replace the number of people, and the number of possible contexts  $y$  replace the days of the year.  $y$  is easily calculated by  $4^{|c|}$ , which is the number of all possible strings over the alphabet  $\{A, C, G, T\}$ .

$$y = 4^{|c|} \quad (\text{D.4})$$

Computing  $x$  requires more work, so we chose to do another approximation to avoid complex calculations. We let  $b$  be the branching factor, such

that every vertex has approximately  $b$  neighbours. Every one of these neighbours has approximately  $b$  neighbours again, and so on for every one of the  $|c|$  vertices which make up a context. This leads  $b^{|c|}$  contexts for each vertex and  $|G|b^{|c|}$  total contexts. If we assume our graphs are mostly linear we can set  $b = 1$  to end up with a total of  $|G|$  contexts.

$$x = |G| \quad (\text{D.5})$$

Plugging these values into the previous formula we search for the smallest context length  $|c|$  which gives us less than 1% probability of shared contexts

$$|c| = \min_c (1 - e^{-|G|^2/2*4^c}) < 0.01 \quad (\text{D.6})$$

These approximations might seem crude, but as previously stated the length of the contexts does not affect the correctness of the final result and thus we are only trimming efficiency. The functions made by varying  $|c|$  in the approximation seem to do a jump from values exponentially decreasing from 1 to values logarithmically approaching 0 (See fig. D.1). The values close to 1 represent contexts with a low probability of overlap, which gives deep suffix trees. Values close to 0 represent contexts with a lot of overlap, which gives high complexity in the search part done by the algorithm. A clear goal is to be a part of the “jumping section” as laying too close to either of the boundaries run a danger of overcompensating for the opposite effect. The somewhat arbitrarily chosen value 1% was decided as a means to avoid bloated indexes at the cost of a small runtime increase.

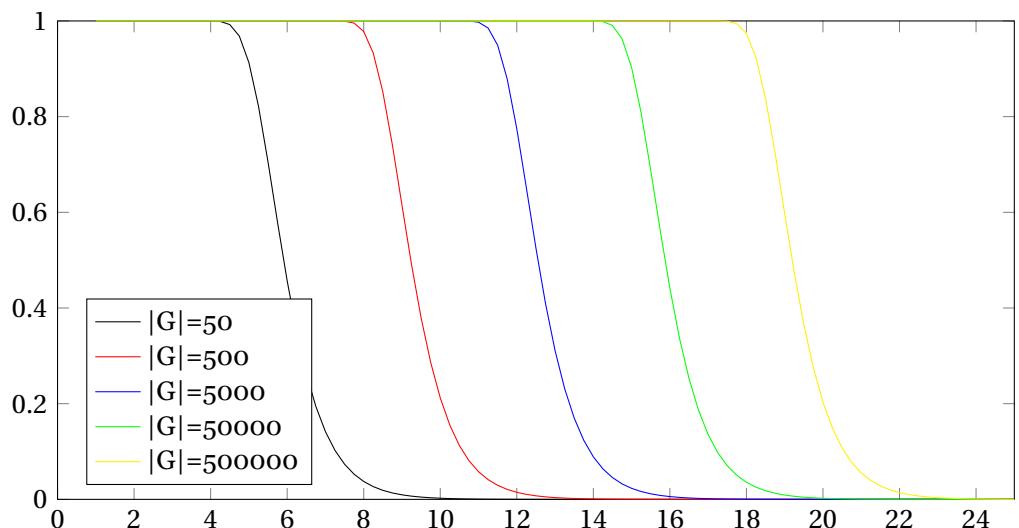


Figure D.1: The functions  $y = B(|G|)$  provided by varying  $x = |c|$  for different graph sizes