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# ARULESPY: EXPLORING ASSOCIATION RULES AND FREQUENT ITEMSETS IN PYTHON

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## Abstract

The R package `arules` implements a comprehensive infrastructure for representing, manipulating and analyzing transaction data and frequent pattern mining. It has been developed and maintained for the last 18 years and provides the most complete set of over 50 interest measures. It contains optimized C/C++ code for mining and manipulating association rules using sparse matrix representation. This document describes the new Python package `arulespy`, which makes this infrastructure finally available for Python users following Pythonic program writing style including slicing and list comprehension.

**Keywords** association rule mining

## 1 Introduction

Association rule mining plays a vital role in discovering hidden patterns and relationships within large transactional datasets. Applications range from exploratory data analysis in marketing to building rule-based classifiers. R (R Development Core Team 2005) users have had access to the family of `arules` infrastructure packages for association rule mining (Hahsler et al. 2011) for a long time. The core packages are `arules` (Hahsler, Grün, and Hornik 2005) which provides the infrastructure for representing, manipulating and analyzing transaction data and frequent patterns (itemsets and association rules), and `arulesViz` (Hahsler 2017), providing various visualization techniques for association rules and itemsets. The packages are built on contributed C code, like the implementation of the APRIORI algorithm and the ECLAT algorithm provided by Christian Borgelt (Borgelt 2003), C++ sparse matrix code provided by the R `Matrix` package (Bates, Maechler, and Jagan 2022), and custom C/C++ code implemented by the `arules` team, and R interface code. For portability, all C and C++ code has been updated to the latest standard (C++20 and C17). The Python interface is based on `rpy2` (Gautier 2022). Much care has been taken to translate R's functional interface into a Pythonic package providing Python programmers with expected behavior.

With many data scientists needing to work with R, R markdown, but also with Python and Jupyter notebooks, `arulespy` provides a native and easy to install Python interface to the wide range of functionalities provided by the R packages `arules` and `arulesViz`.

Several popular Python packages provide frequent pattern mining in Python including in the popular `mlxtend` package (Raschka 2018), but `arules` still provides a higher level of functionality in terms of visualization options, and available infrastructure.

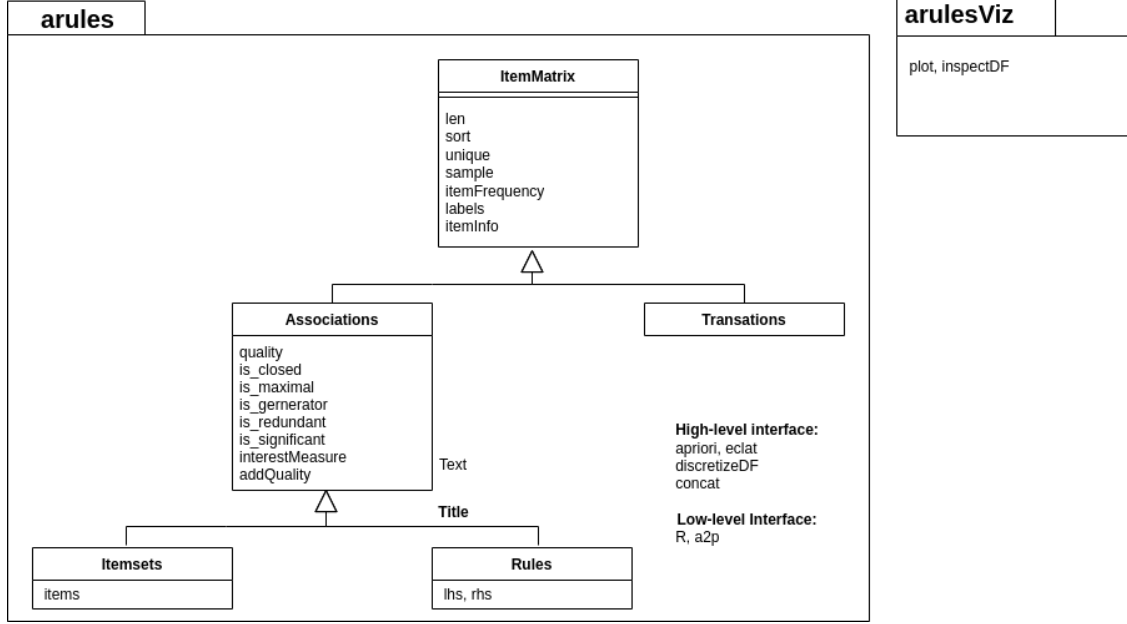


Figure 1: arulespy modules with Python classes.

## 2 Package Installation

**arulespy** is based on the Python package **rpy2**, which requires an R installation. **arulespy** is easily installed from the Python Package Index using pip:

```
pip install arulespy
```

This installation will take care of installing the needed R packages. Note that the R packages are installed during the first time **arulespy** is imported. This installation may require some time. Detailed installation instructions can be found on the package’s PyPI page (Hahsler 2023).

## 3 Overview of features

### 3.1 Pythonic high-level interface

**arulespy** provides the computational infrastructure to represent all data structures necessary to mine association rules. Agrawal, Imielinski, and Swami (1993) introduced the problem of mining association rules from transaction data as follows (the definition is taken from Hahsler, Grün, and Hornik (2005)):

Let  $I = \{i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n\}$  be a set of  $n$  binary attributes called items. Let  $D = \{t_1, t_2, \dots, t_m\}$  be a set of transactions called the database. Each transaction in  $D$  has a unique transaction ID and contains a subset of the items in  $I$ . A rule is defined as an implication of the form  $X \Rightarrow Y$  where  $X, Y \subseteq I$  and  $X \cup Y = \emptyset$  are called itemsets. On itemsets and rules several quality measures can be defined. The most important measures are support and confidence. The support  $supp(X)$  of an itemset  $X$  is defined as the proportion of transactions in the data set which contain the itemset. Itemsets with a support which surpasses a user-defined threshold  $\sigma$  are called frequent itemsets. The confidence of a rule is defined as  $conf(X \Rightarrow Y) = supp(X \cup Y) / supp(X)$ . Association rules are rules with  $supp(X \cup Y) \geq \sigma$  and  $conf(X \Rightarrow Y) \geq \delta$  where  $\sigma$  and  $\delta$  are user-defined thresholds. More measures to judge the quality or interestingness of rules and itemsets have been described in the literature (see Tan, Kumar, and Srivastava (2004), Geng and Hamilton (2006), Lenca et al. (2007)). A complete list of available interest measures in **arulespy** can be found in Hahsler (2005).

**arulespy** provides a high-level interface to transactions, itemsets, and rules based on sparse matrices representing sets of itemsets as with the class `itemMatrix`. Figure 1 shows the implemented classes divided by module.

All classes provide Pythonic slicing using `[]`, `ranges`, `len()`, methods for `sort()`, `unique()`, `sample()`, and methods to convert the data into different Python data structures are provided. These include: `as_df()` (a pandas dataframe), `as_matrix()` (a numpy matrix), `as_dict()` (a Python dictionary), and `as_list()`. Associations in addition provide methods to extract `quality()` information, `items()` (`lhs()` and `rhs()` for rules), and to determine if the association `is_closed()`, `is_maximal()`, `is_generator()`, `is_redundant()`, or `is_significant()`.

Combining objects is modeled after `pandas.concat()` taking a list of objects to combine.

For visualization, module `arulesviz` contains a `plot()` function to produce visualizations via `ggplot` and interactive HTML widgets to inspect rules (`inspectDF()`).

The package uses docstrings and Python help can be obtained using `help()`.

### 3.2 Creating transaction data

To prepare transaction data, `arulespy` provides `discretizeDF()` to prepare a pandas dataframe with numeric attributes by discretization and `Transactions.from_df()` to convert pandas dataframes into sparse transaction representation.

```
from arulespy.arules import Transactions, apriori, parameters
```

The data need to be prepared as a pandas dataframe. Here we import the Zoo dataset (Asuncion and Newman 2007) which contains the features of 101 animales as binary attributes, a numeric attribute for the number of legs and nominal animal type. We show some of the attributes for the first three animals.

```
import pandas as pd
```

```
df = pd.read_csv('https://mhahsler.github.io/arulespy/examples/Zoo.csv')
df[0:3]
```

	hair	feathers	eggs	...	legs	tail	domestic	catsize	type
0	True	False	False	...	4	False	False	True	mammal
1	True	False	False	...	4	True	False	True	mammal
2	False	False	True	...	0	True	False	False	fish

Next, we convert the animals to transactions. In this process, binary attributes are converted into items, numeric attributes are discretized into range items and nominal attributes are automatically one-hot-encoded.

```
trans = Transactions.from_df()
print(trans)

## transactions in sparse format with
## 101 transactions (rows) and
## 25 items (columns)

trans.as_df()
```

	items	transactionID
1	{hair,milk,predator,toothed,...,legs=[4,8],catsize,type=mammal}	0
2	{hair,milk,toothed,...,legs=[4,8],tail,catsize,type=mammal}	1
3	{eggs,aquatic,predator,...,fins,legs=[0,2],tail,type=fish}	2
...	...	...

For space reasons, we only show the first three transactions and omit some of the items. Transactions are stored as a sparse matrix. The item definitions show that the number of legs was discretized into 3 ranges and the animal type was converted into 7 binary items.

```
trans.itemInfo()
```

	labels	variables	levels
1	hair	hair	TRUE
2	feathers	feathers	TRUE
3	eggs	eggs	TRUE
4	milk	milk	TRUE
5	airborne	airborne	TRUE
6	aquatic	aquatic	TRUE
7	predator	predator	TRUE
8	toothed	toothed	TRUE
9	backbone	backbone	TRUE
10	breathes	breathes	TRUE
11	venomous	venomous	TRUE
12	fins	fins	TRUE
13	legs=[0,2)	legs	[0,2)
14	legs=[2,4)	legs	[2,4)
15	legs=[4,8]	legs	[4,8]
16	tail	tail	TRUE
17	domestic	domestic	TRUE
18	catsize	catsize	TRUE
19	type=amphibian	type	amphibian
20	type=bird	type	bird
21	type=fish	type	fish
22	type=insect	type	insect
23	type=mammal	type	mammal
24	type=mollusc.et.al	type	mollusc.et.al
25	type=reptile	type	reptile

We can easily slice transactions, sample from transactions, combine them and find unique transactions using methods for the Python Transactions class.

### 3.3 Mining Association Rules

The mining functions `apriori()` and `ec1at()` are part of the high-level interface. `apriori()` calls the APRIORI algorithm implemented in the R package `arules` and performs all necessary conversions. Parameters for the algorithm are specified as a Python `dict` inside the `parameter()` function.

```
rules = apriori(trans,
                 parameter = parameters({"supp": 0.01, "conf": 0.7}),
                 control = parameters({"verbose": False}))

print(rules)

## set of 30438 rules
```

We can inspect the top three confidence rules.

```
rules.sort(by = 'confidence')[0:3].as_df()
```

	LHS	RHS	support	confidence	coverage	lift	count
4	{type=amphibian}	{aquatic}	0.04	1	0.04	2.81	4
5	{type=amphibian}	{legs=[4,8]}	0.04	1	0.04	1.98	4
6	{type=amphibian}	{eggs}	0.04	1	0.04	1.71	4

The set of rules is rather large with a length of

```
len(rules)

## 30438
```

Rules can be tested for many properties. For example, a rule is improvement-based redundant if a more general rule with the same or a higher confidence exists in the set (Bayardo, Agrawal, and Gunopulos 2000). The following code filters all redundant rules using Python list comprehension reducing the set to about a third.

```
non_redundant_rules = rules[[not x for x in rules.is_redundant()]]
non_redundant_rules.as_df()
```

	LHS	RHS	support	confidence	coverage	lift	count
1	{}	{tail}	0.74	0.74	1	1	75
2	{}	{breathes}	0.79	0.79	1	1	80
3	{}	{backbone}	0.82	0.82	1	1	
...	...	...	...	...	...		
11676	{predator,toothed, breathes,tail}	{catsize}	0.15	0.71	0.21	1.64	15
11691	{eggs,toothed, breathes,tail}	{predator}	0.04	1	0.04	1.8	4

### 3.4 Visualization

The set of rules is still relatively large, but visualization can help analyzing the rules. The `arulespy` module `arulesViz` can produce a wide range of visualizations for association rules (Hofmann and Wilhelm 2001). It exports a plot function which produces `ggplot2` plots (Wickham 2016).

```
from arulespy.arulesViz import plot, inspectDF
from rpy2.ipython.ggplot import image_png
```

The standard plot is a scatter plot of rules using support and consequence on the axes and lift for color shading. `ggplot` objects can be rendered directly in a Jupyter notebook code cell using `image_png()`.

```
gg = arulesViz.plot(rules, method="scatter")
image_png(gg)
```

In Figure 2, we see that high lift rules have typically relative low support and the process of association rule generation from frequent itemsets results in characteristic streaks of rules in the support/confidence space with similar items in the LHS and RHS.

Plots can also be saved as an image using `ggsave()` (from the R package `ggplot2`).

```
ggsave = packages.importr('ggplot2').ggsave
ggsave(gg, file = "scatterplot.png")
```

Another visualization that is appropriate for large rule sets is a matrix visualization grouped by LHS itemsets introduced by Hahsler and Karpienko (2016). Figure 3 shows a that the highest-lift rule groups in the top-lift relate eggs and a different number of legs with the animal types amphibian and reptile. Lift quickly decreases as we move down, while support generally increases.

```
gg = plot(rules, method="grouped")
image_png(gg)
```

Another popular visualization of a set of rules is as a graph. This visualization method is only useful for relatively small rules sets. We therefore filter the rules first to keep only rules with an animal-type item in the RHS. This can be again done by list comprehension and slicing.

```
type_rules = rules[['type' in x for x in rules.rhs().labels()]]
```

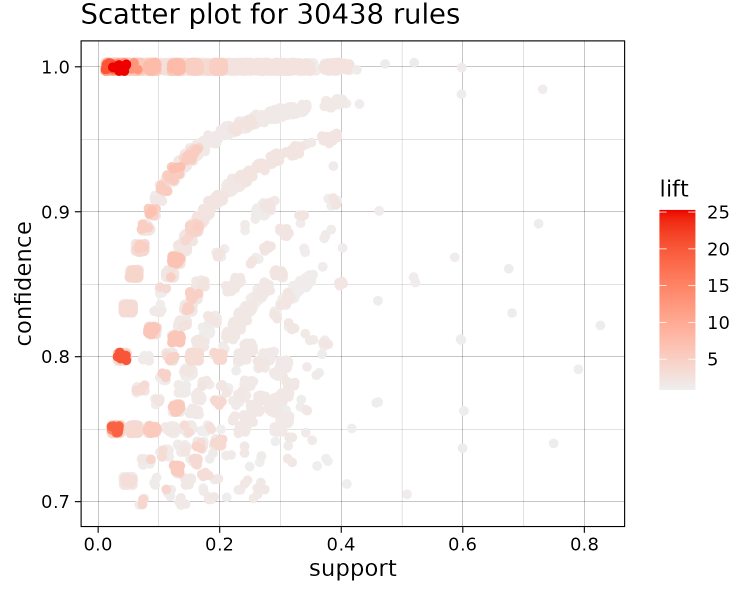


Figure 2: Scatter plot of the rules

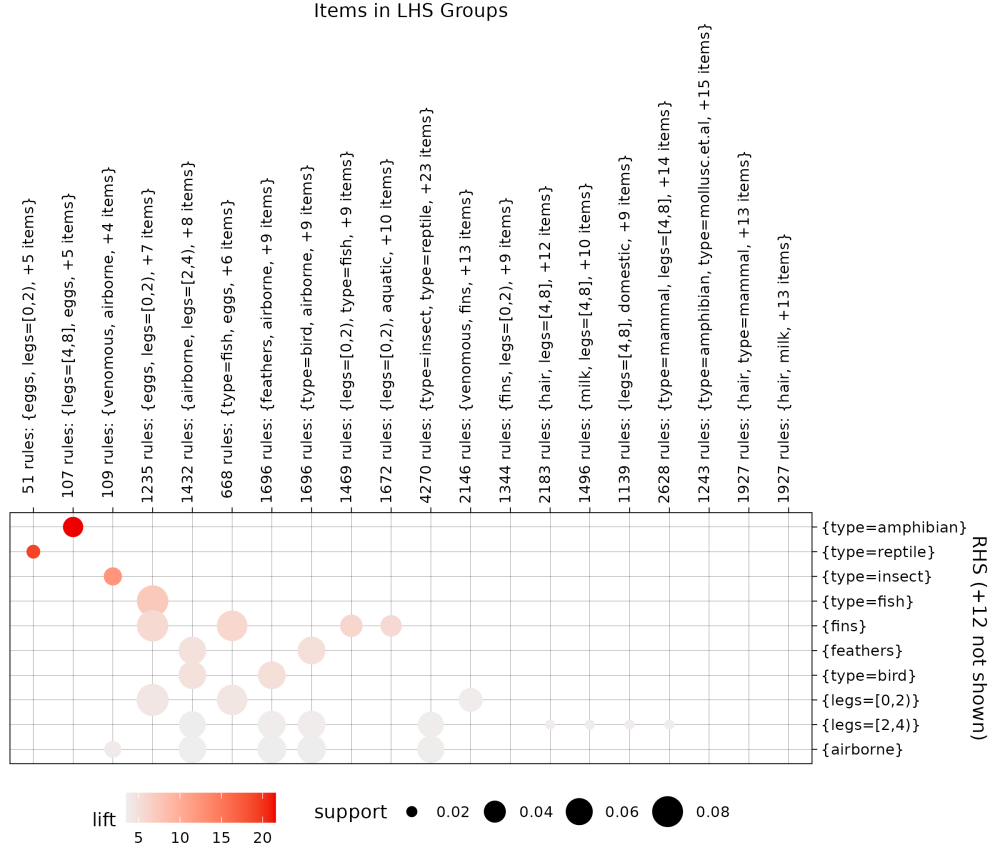


Figure 3: Grouped matrix visualization

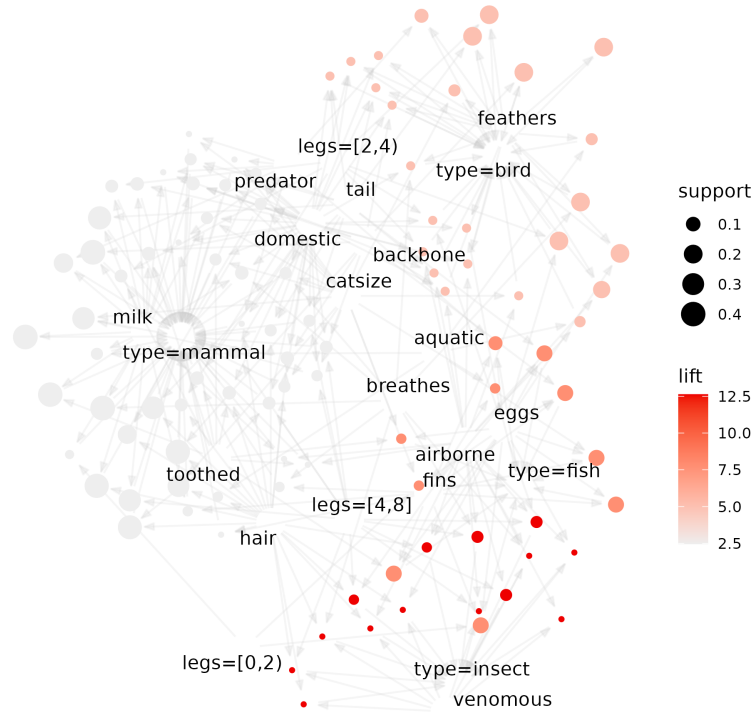


Figure 4: Plot rules as a graph

We plot now the top 100 rules by confidence as a graph. Rules are represented as bubbles with the size proportional to rule support and the color proportional to lift. In Figure 4, we can identify four groups of rules with the items for the types bird, mammal, fish and insect in the RHS. While mammal rules are generally high-support and low-lift, insects rules have very high lift.

```
rules_top_100 = arules.sort(type_rules, by = 'confidence')[0:100]
gg = arulesViz.plot(rules_top_100, method="graph")
```

### 3.5 Interactive Visualizations

`arulesViz` supports interactive visualizations (Hahsler 2017) using interactive HTML widgets (Vaidyanathan et al. 2023), which are self-contained HTML pages that can be shared as HTML or embedded directly into Jupyter notebooks using an `IFrame`.

A very powerful tool to analyze sets of rules is just a sortable table. `inspectDT()` produces a widget where rules can be interactively filtered and sorted. Most static plots available in module `arulesViz` can also be created as interactive widgets using packages like `plotly` (Sievert 2020) and `visNetwork` (Almende B.V. and Contributors and Thieurmél 2022). The interactive widget created by the following code is available at <https://mhahsler.github.io/arulespy/examples/rules.html>.

```
from IPython.display import IFrame
import rpy2.robj.packages as packages
saveWidget = packages.importr('htmlwidgets').saveWidget

m = inspectDT(rules)
```

```
saveWidget(m, "datatable.html", selfcontained = True)
IFrame("datatable.html", "100%", 800)
```

## 4 Low-level Interface

The `arules` module of `arulepy` exports the `rpy2` interface to the `arules` library using the symbol `R`. This provides a complete low-level interface to all `arules` functions (see `arules` reference manual at <https://mhahsler.r-universe.dev/arules#reference>). Note that the low-level interface expects all parameters to be `R/rpy2` data type and also returns them. Automatic conversion is not provided, but the helper function `a2py()` can be used as a convenient way to convert `R` data types into Python data types.

In the following, we create a set of 1000 random transactions and convert the `R/rpy2` transactions object to a Python object.

```
from arulespy.arules import R, r2py

trans = a2py(R.random_transactions(10, 1000))
print(trans)
```

```
## transactions in sparse format with
## 1000 transactions (rows) and
## 10 items (columns)
```

The low-level interface also lets the user directly access the sparse representation. It is automatically transformed into a `scipy` sparse array.

```
from scipy.sparse import csc_array

trans.items().as_csc_array()

## <10x1000 sparse array of type '<class 'numpy.int64''>'
##      with 2959 stored elements in Compressed Sparse Column format>
```

Finally, the low-level interface also lets the user manually define the contents of objects in `arules`. For example, we create a set of three rules. This is a low-level operation, since it translates item labels in Python lists into the sparse representation used internally.

```
lhs = [
    ['hair', 'milk', 'predator'],
    ['hair', 'tail', 'predator'],
    ['fins']
]

rhs = [
    ['type=mammal'],
    ['type=mammal'],
    ['type=fish']
]

r = Rules.new(ItemMatrix.from_list(lhs, itemLabels = trans),
              ItemMatrix.from_list(rhs, itemLabels = trans))

r.addQuality(r.interestMeasure(['support', 'confidence', 'lift'], trans))

r.as_df()
```

	LHS	RHS	support	confidence	lift
1	{hair,milk,predator}	{type=mammal}	0.2	1	2.46



	LHS	RHS	support	confidence	lift
2	{hair,predator,tail}	{type=mammal}	0.16	1	2.46
3	{fins}	{type=fish}	0.13	0.76	5.94

Most functions in `arules` are accessible using the Python classes and their methods. Using the low-level interface will only be needed occasionally or when the user wants to implement new functionality that performs computation on the underlying data.

## 5 Conclusion

This report introduces the usage of `arulespy`, a new package that makes the functionality of the R infrastructure to mine and visualize association rules available to the Python community. After R is installed, no further R knowledge is necessary to work with the package and most functions work as expected by Python programmers and integrate easily with popular Python tools like Jupyter notebooks.

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