# Blocking: An R Package for Blocking of Records for Record Linkage and Deduplication

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Abstract An abstract of less than 250 words.

## 1 Introduction

Interactive data graphics provides plots that allow users to interact them. One of the most basic types of interaction is through tooltips, where users are provided additional information about elements in the plot by moving the cursor over the plot.

This paper will first review some R packages on interactive graphics and their tooltip implementations. A new package ToOoOlTiPs that provides customized tooltips for plot, is introduced. Some example plots will then be given to showcase how these tooltips help users to better read the graphics.

# 2 Background

Some packages on interactive graphics include **plotly** (Sievert, 2020) that interfaces with Javascript for web-based interactive graphics, **crosstalk** (Cheng and Sievert, 2021) that specializes cross-linking elements across individual graphics. The recent R Journal paper **tsibbletalk** (Wang and Cook, 2021) provides a good example of including interactive graphics into an article for the journal. It has both a set of linked plots, and also an animated gif example, illustrating linking between time series plots and feature summaries.

- 3 Blocking of records using blocking function
- 4 Integration with existing packages
- 5 Case study

# 5.1 Record linkage example

Let us first load the required packages.

library(blocking)
library(data.table)

We demonstrate the use of blocking function for record linkage on the foreigners dataset included in the package. This fictional representation of the foreign population in Poland was generated based on publicly available information, preserving the distributions from administrative registers. It contains 110,000 rows with 100,000 entities. Each row represents one record, with the following columns:

- fname first name,
- sname second name,
- surname surname.
- date date of birth,
- region region (county),

- country country,
- true\_id person ID.

data(foreigners)
head(foreigners)

```
#>
       fname sname
                       surname
                                      date region country true_id
      <char> <char>
                        <char>
                                    <char> <char> <char>
                        imanov 1998/02/05
#> 1:
        emin
                                                      031
#> 2: nurlan
                    suleymanli 2000/08/01
                                                       031
                                                                 1
#> 3:
                    maharrsmov 1939/03/08
                                                      031
                                                                 2
        amio
#> 4:
        amik
                    maharramof 1939/03/08
                                                      031
                                                                 2
                    maharramov 1993/03/08
#> 5:
        amil
                                                      031
                                                                 2
#> 6: gadir
                    jahangirov 1991/08/29
                                                      031
                                                                 3
```

We split the dataset into two separate files: one containing the first appearance of each entity in the foreigners dataset, and the other containing its subsequent appearances.

```
foreigners_1 <- foreigners[!duplicated(foreigners$true_id), ]
foreigners_2 <- foreigners[duplicated(foreigners$true_id), ]</pre>
```

Now in both datasets we remove slashes from the date column and create a new string column that concatenates the information from all columns (excluding true\_id) in each row.

```
foreigners_1[, date := gsub("/", "", date)]
foreigners_1[, txt := paste0(fname, sname, surname, date, region, country)]
foreigners_2[, date := gsub("/", "", date)]
foreigners_2[, txt := paste0(fname, sname, surname, date, region, country)]
head(foreigners_1)
#>
       fname sname
                       surname
                                   date region country true_id
#>
      <char> <char>
                        <char>
                                 <char> <char> <char>
                                                          <num>
#> 1:
        emin
                        imanov 19980205
                                                    031
#> 2: nurlan
                    suleymanli 20000801
                                                    031
                                                              1
                                                              2
#> 3: amio
                    maharrsmov 19390308
                                                    031
#> 4: gadir
                    jahangirov 19910829
                                                    031
                                                              3
                     bayramova 19961006 01261
                                                              4
#> 5:
       zaur
                                                    031
#> 6:
        asif
                      mammadov 19970726
                                                    031
                                                              5
#>
                                 txt
#>
#> 1:
              eminimanov19980205031
       nurlansuleymanli20000801031
#> 2:
#> 3:
         amiomaharrsmov19390308031
         gadirjahangirov19910829031
#> 5: zaurbayramova1996100601261031
#> 6:
            asifmammadov19970726031
```

#### General use

We use the newly created columns in the blocking function, which relies on the default **rnndescent** (Nearest Neighbor Descent) algorithm based on cosine distance. Additionally, we set verbose = 1 to monitor progress. Note that a default parameter of the blocking function is seed = 2023, which sets the random seed.

```
\#> ===== creating tokens ===== 
\#> ===== starting search (nnd, x, y: 100000, 10000, t: 1232) ===== 
\#> ===== creating graph =====
```

Now we examine the results of record linkage.

- We have created 6,469 blocks.
- The blocking process utilized 1,232 columns (2 character shingles).
- We have 3,916 blocks of 2 elements, 1,604 blocks of 3 elements,..., 2 blocks of 7 elements.

#### result\_reclin

Structure of the object is as follows:

- result a data. table with identifiers and block IDs,
- method name of the ANN algorithm used,
- deduplication whether deduplication was applied,
- representation whether shingles or vectors were used,
- metrics metrics for quality assessment (here NULL),
- confusion confusion matrix (here NULL),
- colnames column names used for the comparison,
- graph an igraph object, mainly for visualization (here NULL).

```
str(result_reclin, 1)
```

```
#> List of 8
#> $ result
              :Classes 'data.table' and 'data.frame': 10000 obs. of 4 variables:
  ..- attr(*, ".internal.selfref")=<externalptr>
#> $ method
                 : chr "nnd"
#> $ deduplication : logi FALSE
#> $ representation: chr "shingles"
#> $ metrics
                 : NULL
#> $ confusion
                  : NULL
                  : chr [1:1232] "0a" "0b" "0c" "0m" ...
#> $ colnames
#> $ graph
                   : NULL
#> - attr(*, "class")= chr "blocking"
```

The resulting data. table has four columns:

- x reference dataset (i.e. foreigners\_1) this may not contain all units of foreigners\_1,
- y query (each row of foreigners\_2) this may not contain all units of foreigners\_2,
- block block ID,
- dist distance between objects.

head(result\_reclin\$result)

```
#>
            y block
                      dist
       Χ
    <int> <int> <num>
#>
                      <num>
      3 1 1 0.2216882
#> 1:
      3
#> 2:
           2
                1 0.2122737
#> 3:
      21
           3
                2 0.1172652
          4
               3 0.1863238
      57
#> 4:
      57 5 3 0.1379310
#> 5:
#> 6:
       61 6
                 4 0.2307692
```

Let's examine the first pair. Obviously, there are typos in the fname and surname. Nevertheless, the pair is a match.

```
cbind(t(foreigners_1[3, 1:6]), t(foreigners_2[1, 1:6]))
```

```
#> [,1] [,2]
#> fname "amio" "amik"
#> sname "" ""
#> surname "maharrsmov" "maharramof"
#> date "19390308" "19390308"
#> region "" ""
#> country "031" "031"
```

Now we use the true\_id values to evaluate our approach.

```
matches <- merge(x = foreigners_1[, .(x = 1:.N, true_id)],
               y = foreigners_2[, .(y = 1:.N, true_id)],
               by = "true_id")
matches[, block := rleid(x)]
head(matches)
#> Key: <true_id>
#>
    true_id x y block
       <num> <int> <int> <int>
#>
#> 1:
         2 3
                   1
#> 2:
         2
               3
#> 3:
        20
               21
         56
               57
                     4
                           3
#> 4:
#> 5:
          56
               57
                      5
                           3
#> 6:
         60
                      6
                           4
               61
```

We have 10,000 matched pairs. We use the true\_blocks parameter in the blocking function to specify the true block assignments. We obtain the quality metrics for the assessment of record linkage.

```
#> Blocking based on the nnd method.
#> Number of blocks: 6469.
#> Number of columns used for blocking: 1232.
#> Reduction ratio: 0.9999.
#> Distribution of the size of the blocks:
          4
               5
    2 3
                   6
#> 3916 1604 926
               19
#> Evaluation metrics (standard):
#>
      recall precision
                            fpr
                                   fnr accuracy specificity
#>
     96.7782
             78.7000
                         0.0038
                                   3.2218
                                           99.9957
                                                      99.9962
#>
    f1 score
#>
     86.8079
```

For example, our approach results in a 3.22% false negative rate (FNR). To improve this, we can increase the epsilon parameter of the NND method from 0.1 to 0.5. To do so, we configure the control\_ann parameter in the blocking function using the controls\_ann and control\_nnd functions.

```
result_3_reclin <- blocking(x = foreigners_1$txt,</pre>
                     y = foreigners_2$txt,
                      verbose = 1,
                      true_blocks = matches[, .(x, y, block)],
              control_ann = controls_ann(nnd = control_nnd(epsilon = 0.5)))
#> ===== creating tokens =====
#> ===== starting search (nnd, x, y: 100000, 10000, t: 1232) =====
#> ===== creating graph =====
result_3_reclin
#> Blocking based on the nnd method.
#> Number of blocks: 6392.
#> Number of columns used for blocking: 1232.
#> Reduction ratio: 0.9999.
#> Distribution of the size of the blocks:
#>
    2
        3 4 5
                  7
#> 3798 1613 956 21
#> Evaluation metrics (standard):
                       fpr fnr
0.0036 3.1318
                                  fnr
#>
      recall precision
                                         accuracy specificity
#>
     96.8682
              80.1100
                                          99.9960
                                                    99.9964
#>
    f1_score
     87.6957
```

That decreases the FNR to 3.13%.

## Integration with the reclin2 package

Let us load the reclin2 package.

library(reclin2)

Now we present record linkage using the pair\_ann function. It is based on the pair\_minism function and reuses some of its source code. The on parameter specifies the column names for the approximate nearest neighbours (ANN) search. Setting deduplication = FALSE enables record linkage. The function works as follows.

```
result_pair_ann <- pair_ann(x = foreigners_1,</pre>
                             y = foreigners_2,
                   on = c("fname", "sname", "surname", "date", "region", "country"),
                             deduplication = FALSE)
head(result_pair_ann)
#>
     First data set: 100 000 records
     Second data set: 10 000 records
#>
#>
     Total number of pairs: 6 pairs
#>
    Blocking on: 'fname', 'sname', 'surname', 'date', 'region', 'country'
#>
#>
               .y block
         . X
      <int> <int> <num>
#>
#> 1:
          3
               1
          3
#> 2:
#> 3:
         21
               3
                      2
#> 4:
         57
                4
                      3
#> 5:
         57
                5
                      3
#> 6:
         61
```

The pair\_ann function returns the total number of pairs. This output can be integrated into the pipeline of the reclin2 package. We compare pairs across all selected variables using the Jaro-Winkler distance. The similarity scores are summed across the variables and we set threshold = 4.5 to accept a pair.

```
result_pair_ann |>
 compare_pairs(on = c("fname", "sname", "surname", "date", "region", "country"),
               comparators = list(cmp_jarowinkler())) |>
  score_simple("score",
           on = c("fname", "sname", "surname", "date", "region", "country")) |>
  select_threshold("threshold", score = "score", threshold = 4.5) |>
  link(selection = "threshold") |>
  head()
#>
    Total number of pairs: 6 pairs
#>
#> Key: <.y>
#>
                  fname.x sname.x surname.x
                                                date.x region.x country.x
        . y
              . X
#>
     <int> <int>
                   <char> <char> <char>
                                                <char>
                                                         <char>
                                                                   <char>
#> 1:
        1
              3
                      amio
                                  maharrsmov 19390308
                                                                      031
         2
                                  maharrsmov 19390308
#> 2:
               3
                      amio
                                                                      031
                                                          01465
#> 3:
              21
                      amil
                                    khalilov 19990901
                                                                      031
         4
              57 javansjir
                                    m kayilov 19691011
#> 4:
                                                                      031
#> 5:
         5
              57 javansjir
                                    m kayilov 19691011
                                                                      031
         6
                    rashad
                                     mehtiyev 19980320
#> 6:
              61
                                                                      031
     true_id.x
#>
                                       txt.x fname.y sname.y surname.y
#>
         <num>
                                      <char>
                                                <char> <char>
                                                                   <char>
#> 1:
                   amiomaharrsmov19390308031
                                                  amik
                                                              maharramof
             2
                   amiomaharrsmov19390308031
                                                              maharramov
#> 2:
                                                  amil
            20 amilkhalilov1999090101465031
#> 3:
                                                  amul
                                                               khalilpv
#> 4:
            56 javansjirm kayilov19691011031 javanshir
                                                               mikayilov
```

#>	5:	56	javansji	irm kayilov	1969101103	1 javsnshir	m kayilov
#>	6:	60	rash	nadmehtiyev	1998032003	1 rasgad	meht9yev
#>		date.y	region.y	country.y	true_id.y		txt.y
#>		<char></char>	<char></char>	<char></char>	<num></num>		<char></char>
#>	1:	19390308		031	2	amikmahar	ramof19390308031
#>	2:	19930308		031	2	amilmahar	ramov19930308031
#>	3:	19990901	01465	031	20	amulkhalilpv	1999090101465031
#>	4:	19961011		031	56	javanshirmika	yilov19961011031
#>	5:	19691011		031	56	javsnshirm ka	yilov19691011031
#>	6:	19890320		031	60	rasgadmeh	t9yev19890320031

We observe that the example pairs are matches.

## 5.2 Deduplication example

We demonstrate deduplication using the blocking function on the RLdata500 dataset from the RecordLinkage package. Note that the dataset is included in the blocking package. It contains artificial personal data. Fifty records have been duplicated with randomly generated errors. Each row represents one record, with the following columns:

- fname\_c1 first name, first component,
- fname\_c2 first name, second component,
- lname\_c1 last name, first component,
- lname\_c2 last name, second component,
- by year of birth,
- bm month of birth,
- bd day of birth,
- rec\_id record id,
- ent\_id entity id.

data(RLdata500) head(RLdata500)

#>	fname_c1	fname_c2	lname_c1	lname_c2	by	bm	bd	rec_id	ent_id
#>	<char></char>	<char></char>	<char></char>	<char></char>	<int></int>	<int></int>	<int></int>	<int></int>	<int></int>
<b>#&gt;</b> 1:	CARSTEN		MEIER		1949	7	22	1	34
<b>#&gt;</b> 2:	GERD		BAUER		1968	7	27	2	51
<b>#&gt; 3:</b>	ROBERT		HARTMANN		1930	4	30	3	115
<b>#&gt; 4:</b>	STEFAN		WOLFF		1957	9	2	4	189
#> 5:	RALF		KRUEGER		1966	1	13	5	72
<b>#&gt;</b> 6:	JUERGEN		FRANKE		1929	7	4	6	142

We create a new column (id\_count) that indicates how many times a given unit occurs and then add leading zeros to the bm and bd columns. Finally, we create a new string column that concatenates the information from all columns (excluding rec\_id, ent\_id and id\_count) in each row.

```
RLdata500[, id_count :=.N, ent_id]
RLdata500[, bm:=sprintf("%02d", bm)]
RLdata500[, bd:=sprintf("%02d", bd)]
RLdata500[, txt:=tolower(paste0(fname_c1,fname_c2,lname_c1,lname_c2,by,bm,bd))]
head(RLdata500)
     fname_c1 fname_c2 lname_c1 lname_c2 by
#>
                                               bm
                                                      bd rec_id ent_id
       <char> <char> <char> <char> <int> <char> <char> <int> <int>
#>
                        MEIER 1949 07 22
```

#> 1: CARSTEN

34

1

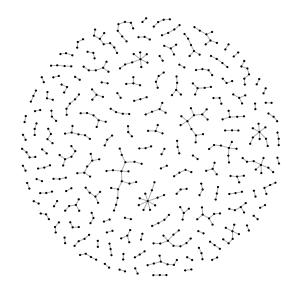
```
#> 2:
                                                        07
                                                               27
                                                                        2
          GERD
                             BAUER
                                              1968
                                                                              51
#> 3:
        ROBERT
                         HARTMANN
                                              1930
                                                        04
                                                               30
                                                                        3
                                                                             115
                                                        09
                                                               02
                                                                        4
                                                                             189
#> 4:
        STEFAN
                            WOLFF
                                              1957
                                                                        5
                                                                              72
#> 5:
          RALF
                          KRUEGER
                                              1966
                                                        01
                                                               13
                                                                        6
                                                                             142
#> 6:
       JUERGEN
                           FRANKE
                                              1929
                                                        07
                                                               04
      id_count
#>
                                    txt
#>
         <int>
                                 <char>
#> 1:
            1
                  carstenmeier19490722
#> 2:
             2
                     gerdbauer19680727
#> 3:
             1 roberthartmann19300430
#> 4:
             1
                   stefanwolff19570902
#> 5:
             1
                   ralfkrueger19660113
#> 6:
             1 juergenfranke19290704
```

As in the previous example, we use the txt column in the blocking function. This time, we set ann = hnsw to use the Hierarchical Navigable Small World (HNSW) algorithm from the RcppHNSW package and graph = TRUE to obtain an igraph object for visualization.

```
result_dedup_hnsw <- blocking(x = RLdata500$txt,</pre>
                          ann = "hnsw",
                          graph = TRUE,
                          verbose = 1)
#> ===== creating tokens =====
#> ===== starting search (hnsw, x, y: 500, 500, t: 429) =====
#> ===== creating graph =====
  The results are as follows.
result_dedup_hnsw
#> Blocking based on the hnsw method.
#> Number of blocks: 133.
#> Number of columns used for blocking: 429.
#> Reduction ratio: 0.9916.
#> Distribution of the size of the blocks:
#> 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 17
#> 46 35 23 8 6 6 2 3 1 1 1 1
head(result_dedup_hnsw$result)
             y block
#>
                          dist
        Χ
#>
     <int> <int> <num>
                         <num>
                  35 0.47379863
#> 1:
        1
             64
#> 2:
        2
            43
                  1 0.08074522
            486
#> 3:
        2
                  1 0.41023219
#> 4:
        3
            450
                  88 0.43263358
#> 5:
        4
            50
                  13 0.52565831
#> 6:
        5
            128
                  2 0.51333570
```

Now we visualize connections using the obtained graph.

```
plot(result_dedup_hnsw$graph, vertex.size = 1, vertex.label = NA)
```



We create a long data.table with information on blocks and units from the original dataset.

df\_block\_melted <- melt(result\_dedup\_hnsw\$result, id.vars = c("block", "dist"))
df\_block\_melted\_rec\_block <- unique(df\_block\_melted[, .(rec\_id=value, block)])
head(df\_block\_melted\_rec\_block)</pre>

```
#>
      rec_id block
#>
       <int> <num>
#> 1:
#> 2:
            2
                  1
#> 3:
                 88
                 13
#> 4:
#> 5:
                  2
            6
                 35
#> 6:
```

We add the block information to the final dataset.

RLdata500[df\_block\_melted\_rec\_block, on = "rec\_id", block\_id := i.block]
head(RLdata500)

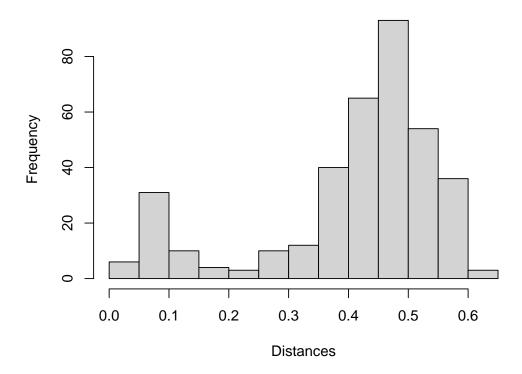
#>		fname_c1	fname_c2	lname_c1	<pre>lname_c2</pre>	by	bm	bd	rec_id	ent_id
#>		<char></char>	<char></char>	<char></char>	<char></char>	<int></int>	<char></char>	<char></char>	<int></int>	<int></int>
#>	1:	CARSTEN		MEIER		1949	07	22	1	34
#>	2:	GERD		BAUER		1968	07	27	2	51
#>	3:	ROBERT	HARTMANN			1930	04	30	3	115
#>	4:	STEFAN		WOLFF		1957	09	02	4	189
#>	5:	RALF		KRUEGER		1966	01	13	5	72
#>	6:	JUERGEN		FRANKE		1929	07	04	6	142
#>		id_count			txt bloc	ck_id				

#>	<int></int>	<char></char>	<num></num>
<b>#&gt;</b> 1:	1	carstenmeier19490722	35
<b>#&gt;</b> 2:	2	gerdbauer19680727	1
<b>#&gt;</b> 3:	1	roberthartmann19300430	88
<b>#&gt; 4:</b>	1	stefanwolff19570902	13
<b>#&gt;</b> 5:	1	ralfkrueger19660113	2
<b>#&gt;</b> 6:	1	juergenfranke19290704	35

We can check in how many blocks the same entities (ent\_id) are observed. In our example, all the same entities are in the same blocks.

Now we can visualize the distances between the units stored in the result\_dedup\_hnsw\$result dataset. Clearly we have a mixture of two groups: matches (close to 0) and non-matches (close to 1).

# Distances calculated between units

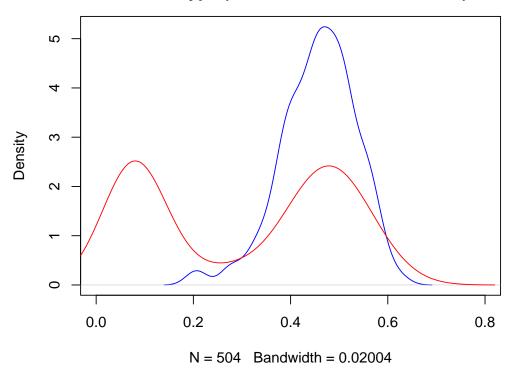


Finally, we visualize the result based on the information whether a block contains matches or not.

```
df_for_density <- copy(df_block_melted[block %in% RLdata500$block_id])
df_for_density[, match:= block %in% RLdata500[id_count == 2]$block_id]</pre>
```

plot(density(df\_for\_density[match==FALSE]\$dist), col = "blue", xlim = c(0, 0.8),
 main = "Distribution of distances between\nclusters type (match=red, non-match=blue)")
lines(density(df\_for\_density[match==TRUE]\$dist), col = "red", xlim = c(0, 0.8))

# Distribution of distances between clusters type (match=red, non-match=blue)



Now we compare the evaluation metrics across all ANN algorithms supported by the blocking function, i.e. NND, HNSW, Approximate Nearest Neighbors Oh Yeah (Annoy, from the RcppAnnoy package), Locality-sensitive hashing (LSH, from the mlpack package), and k-Nearest Neighbors (kNN – denoted as "kd", from the mlpack package). We use the rec\_id and ent\_id columns from the RLdata500 dataset to specify the true blocks and then calculate evaluation metrics for all algorithms. Additionally, we assess blocking using the klsh function from the klsh package, configured to create 10 blocks and 100 blocks, respectively. In both settings, we use 20 random projections and 2-character shingles. The results are as follows (klsh\_10 and klsh\_100 refer to the klsh algorithm with 10 blocks and 100 blocks, respectively).

male

99.03929 6.661503

Adelie

#> klsh\_100

Torgersen

species	island	bill_length_mm	bill_depth_mm	flipper_length_mm	body_mass_g	sex	year
Adelie	Torgersen	39.1	18.7	181	3750	male	2007
Adelie	Torgersen	39.5	17.4	186	3800	female	2007
Adelie	Torgersen	40.3	18.0	195	3250	female	2007
Adelie	Torgersen	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	2007
Adelie	Torgersen	36.7	19.3	193	3450	female	2007

**Table 1:** A basic table

```
k = 2
klsh_10_metrics <- klsh::confusion.from.blocking(blocking = blocks_klsh_10,
                                              true_ids = RLdata500$ent_id)[-1]
klsh_10_metrics$f1_score <- 2 * klsh_10_metrics$precision * klsh_10_metrics$recall /
  (klsh_10_metrics$precision + klsh_10_metrics$recall)
eval_metrics$klsh_10 <- unlist(klsh_10_metrics)</pre>
blocks_klsh_100 <- klsh::klsh(r.set = RLdata500[, c("fname_c1", "fname_c2", "lname_c1",
                                                "lname_c2", "by", "bm", "bd")],
                              p = 20,
                              num.blocks = 100,
                              k = 2
klsh_100_metrics <- klsh::confusion.from.blocking(blocking = blocks_klsh_100,
                                              true_ids = RLdata500$ent_id)[-1]
klsh_100_metrics$f1_score <- 2 * klsh_100_metrics$precision * klsh_100_metrics$recall /
  (klsh_100_metrics$precision + klsh_100_metrics$recall)
eval_metrics$klsh_100 <- unlist(klsh_100_metrics)</pre>
do.call(rbind, eval_metrics) * 100
            recall precision
#>
                                   fpr fnr accuracy specificity f1_score
#> nnd
              100 5.0607287 0.7522053 0 99.24810
                                                       99.24779 9.633911
#> hnsw
               100 4.7573739 0.8027265
                                        0 99.19760
                                                       99.19727 9.082652
              100 4.8030740 0.7947073 0 99.20561
                                                       99.20529 9.165903
#> annoy
#> 1sh
               98 1.1207685 3.4667201
                                       2 96.53387
                                                       96.53328 2.216192
#> kd
              100 4.3066322 0.8909383
                                        0 99.10942
                                                       99.10906 8.257638
#> klsh_10
               82 0.3290794 9.9582999 18 90.03848
                                                       90.04170 0.655528
```

# 6 Customizing tooltip design with ToOoOlTiPs

**ToOoOlTiPs** is a packages for customizing tooltips in interactive graphics, it features these possibilities.

86 3.4649476 0.9607057 14 99.03407

## 7 A gallery of tooltips examples

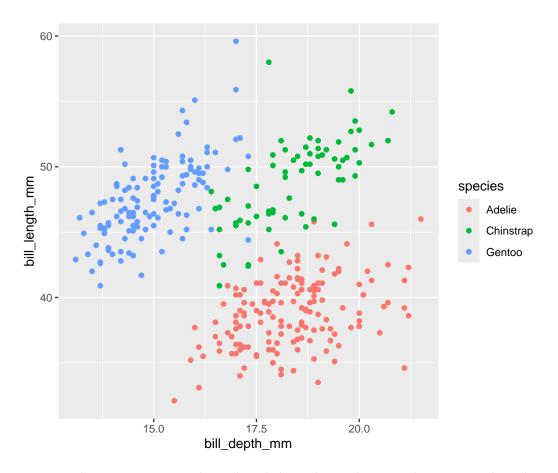
The palmerpenguins data (Horst et al., 2020) features three penguin species which has a lovely illustration by Alison Horst in Figure 1.

Table 1 prints at the first few rows of the penguins data:

Figure 2 shows an plot of the penguins data, made using the ggplot2 package.



Figure 1: Artwork by allison\_horst



**Figure 2:** A basic non-interactive plot made with the ggplot2 package on palmer penguin data. Three species of penguins are plotted with bill depth on the x-axis and bill length on the y-axis. Visit the online article to access the interactive version made with the plotly package.

# 8 Summary

We have displayed various tooltips that are available in the package ToOoOlTiPs.

# 9 Acknowledgements

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