Distance between Categorical Attributes, Ordinal Attributes, and Mixed Types

Proximity Measure for Categorical Attributes

- Categorical data, also called nominal attributes
  - Example: Color (red, yellow, blue, green), profession, etc.
- Method 1: Simple matching
  - *m*: # of matches, *p*: total # of variables

$$d(i, j) = \frac{p - m}{p}$$

- Method 2: Use a large number of binary attributes
  - Creating a new binary attribute for each of the *M* nominal states

Ordinal Variables

- An ordinal variable can be discrete or continuous
- Order is important, e.g., rank (e.g., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior)
- Can be treated like interval-scaled
  - Replace *an ordinal variable value* by its rank: $r_{if} \in \{1, ..., M_f\}$
  - Map the range of each variable onto [0, 1] by replacing *i*-th object in the *f*-th variable by

$$z_{if} = \frac{r_{if} - 1}{M_f - 1}$$

    - Example: freshman: 0; sophomore: 1/3; junior: 2/3; senior 1
      - Then distance: d(freshman, senior) = 1, d(junior, senior) = 1/3
  - Compute the dissimilarity using methods for interval-scaled variables

Attributes of Mixed Type

- A dataset may contain all attribute types
  - Nominal, symmetric binary, asymmetric binary, numeric, and ordinal
- One may use a weighted formula to combine their effects:

$$d(i,j) = \frac{\sum_{f=1}^{p} w_{ij}^{(f)} d_{ij}^{(f)}}{\sum_{f=1}^{p} w_{ij}^{(f)}}$$

  - If f is numeric: Use the normalized distance
  - If f is binary or nominal: $d_{ij}^{(f)} = 0$ if $x_{if} = x_{jf}$; or $d_{ij}^{(f)} = 1$ otherwise
  - If f is ordinal
    - Compute ranks z_{if} (where $z_{if} = \frac{r_{if} - 1}{M_f - 1}$)
    - Treat z_{if} as interval-scaled