Fuzzy SQL

# Utility of Cohorts in Synthetic Data

SQL select queries have two aspects that can be of a great value for exploring the utility of synthetic data. First, a select query may incorporate a *filtering* clause (e.g. using WHERE) that reflects a specific inclusion-exclusion criterion for a cohort study. Secondly, a select query may aggregate variables in two or more distinct categories e.g. exposed and unexposed subjects. Further, the aggregation function (e.g. SUM, AVG…etc.) may serve as a workload to evaluate the synthetic data. For instance, aggregate queries are used as workloads by (Fan et al. 2020). The generated query is run on both real and synthetic datasets. The query results from both datasets are compared and the relative error is calculated to serve as a utility measure. However, the current studies assume a pre-determined query formulation such as that proposed by (Li et al. 2019) where specific categorical variables are chosen for aggregation. This deterministic approach may lead to biased conclusions. For instance, a generative model may learn the underlying distribution of some variables better than the others. These variables may happen to be the ones used in the pre-defined aggregation functions and result in unrepresentative scores. In addition, this approach requires that the query to be customized to each specific dataset. A priori knowledge of how the synthetic data will be used is also necessary. Typically, a proper solution shall be independent from the dataset selection or usage. To tackle this problem, we are inspired by the randomness introduced by SQL Fuzzing techniques also known as Fuzzers.

SQL Fuzzers are mainly used to test database management systems (DBMSs) for any bugs or vulnerabilities (Jibson 2019). Before executing an SQL query, a DBMS performs two levels of checks. First the SQL statement is checked for any syntactic error such as grammatical errors. Secondly, the query is checked semantically e.g. a call is made to a non-existent table. Once the DBMS performs the necessary checks, the SQL statement is executed according to the best execution plan (Zhong et al. 2020). Fuzzers usually generate large amount of queries that do not pass the aforementioned checks. For instance, American Fuzzy Lop (AFL) (Zalewski n.d.), a widely used fuzzer, has only 30% out of its generated queries passing the syntax check while only 4% can pass the semantic check (Zhong et al. 2020). Some research attempts are made to focus on finding DBMS logic errors rather than semantic and syntactic errors. However, such techniques generate both the queries and the test datasets (Ghit et al. 2020). Other researchers (Rigger and Su 2020) propose an approach to generate queries that ensure fetching a randomly selected row and hence avoid syntactic and semantic error injection. Clearly, this technique assumes priori knowledge of the dataset.

To ensure unbiased representation of synthetic data utility, we propose a Fuzzy SQL technique that has the following features:

Datasets may include categorical, continuous and date variables.

*Filtered* *aggregate* queries shall be randomly generated, i.e. grouping may be executed using any combination of the available categorical variables.

Aggregation may take place across any of the available continuous variables.

A random condition may be imposed on the aggregate queries. In such case, the values used in the WHERE clause shall be randomly sampled from the real data and equally executed on both the real and synthetic data.

A proper metric shall be established to compare the results from the real and synthetic data.

## Utility Evaluation

Once a cohort is defined using a random SQL query, it needs to be evaluated. In one approach, (Fan et al. 2020) proposes to arrange the data with one of the categorical variables as a dependent variable. Then two classifiers are trained using training examples from the real and synthetic data respectively. Finally the testing examples from the real data are used to test both models using traditional metric such as F1. The F1 scores for both models are compared. Clearly, this approach will highly depend on the selection of the dependent variable especially if the dataset mostly incudes categorical variables. In our case, since the randomly generated filtered queries can be aggregated, we use the Hellinger distance to evaluate the utility of cohorts. Whenever a continuous variable is used with an aggregation function, we measure the normalized Euclidean distances between resulting aggregate components in both the real and synthetic data. Details of our proposal and the metric calculations are given in the attached appendix.

# Appendix

Fuzzy SQL is developed to enable the comparison between real and synthetic datasets that are generated by any ML technique. Fuzzy SQL will generate semantically and syntactically correct SELECT random queries that are simultaneously applied to both inputs of real and synthetic datasets. The tool returns all query results along with the corresponding query parameters such as the SQL statement. The query results may be further analyzed to measure distances between real and synthetic responses to each query.

The input datasets may be either tabular of longitudinal.

We define two basic types of random SELECT queries, namely, *'filter'* and *'aggregate'* queries. We further combine these into a third type and we call it *'filter-aggregate'* query. Metrics, such as the Hellinger distance, can be applied to the results of any aggregate query in the same manner they are applied to the original datasets.

If the input data includes continuous variables, various 'aggregate functions' may be randomly applied in addition to counting the resulting number of records. These functions are limited to AVG, SUM, MIN and MAX. If the input does not include any continuous variable, only the COUNT aggregate function is applied. The types of each variable are typically defined by the user and inputted along with the real and synthetic datasets.

## Data type of variables

To ensure the validity of the SQL select statement as interpreted by the database engine, Fuzzy SQL makes a distinction among three basic data types, namely: Categorical, Continuous and Date. Accordingly, if a dataset includes a variable with a different data type, it will be mapped to the proper type as per the table below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Input Data Type | Output Data Type |
| 'qualitative', 'categorical', 'nominal', 'discrete', 'ordinal', 'dichotomous', 'TEXT', ‘INTEGER’ | ‘categorical’[[1]](#footnote-1) |
| 'quantitative', 'continuous', 'interval', 'ratio', 'REAL' | 'continuous' |
| 'date', 'time', 'datetime' | 'date' |

The distinction arises from their intrinsic properties as summarized in the following table:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Property | ‘categorical’ | 'continuous' | 'date' |
| Can be used to aggregate data across it | Yes | No | No |
| Can be used with the aggregate functions: SUM, AVG, MIN and MAX | No | Yes | No |
| Can be used with the ‘IN’ operation | Yes | No | Yes |
| Can be used with the ‘BETWEEN’ operation | No | Yes | Yes |

The three basic data types can be equally used for the rest of operations.

## Tabular Data Templates

Without loss of generality, and to simplify the mathematical constructs, we herein ignore the logical operation 'NOT' and the value comparison operations BETWEEN, LIKE and IN. We further consider that the same set of value comparison operations is applicable to all types of variables. In practice, a distinction in their applicability is made and all the aforementioned operations are considered. Further, please note that, for our purpose, the terms *categorical* and *nominal* are used interchangeably. Define:

* : Database table for real data.
* : Database table for synthetic data
* : The number of records in .
* is the set of *nominal* variables in both and where indicates the number of these variables.
* is the set of *continuous* variables in both and .
* is the set of *date* variables in both and .
* For any member in the above sets, it may assume a *value* given in the real dataset such that is the the set of all values that may take. The length of is .

We further define various operations:

* is the set of logical operations.
* is the set of value comparison operations.
* is the set of aggregate functions.

Random samples are drawn from the above sets to construct the three major queries defined below. The basic sampling functions can be defined as:

where is a sampling function that maps any set into a single element set . For instance, the set may be mapped by into

where is a sampling function that maps any set into a multiple element set . For instance, the set may be mapped by into

### Aggregate Queries

If , an aggregate query takes the form:

SELECT

FROM

GROUP BY

However, if , an aggregate query takes the form:

SELECT

FROM

GROUP BY

Similar queries are constructed for .

### Filter Queries

If , a filter query takes the form:

SELECT

FROM

WHERE

]

The WHERE clause comprises basic expressions denoted by . Say if the sampled number of variables equals to 1 (i.e. =1), then the above expression will reduce to:

SELECT

FROM

WHERE

If , a filter query takes the form:

SELECT

FROM

WHERE

]

Similar queries are constructed for .

### Filter-Aggregate Queries

Filter-Aggregate queries are the most important for comparing real and synthetic datasets. The query is constructed by combining the above two forms. Hence, if , a filter-aggregate query takes the form:

SELECT

FROM

WHERE

]

GROUP BY

and if , a filter-aggregate query takes the form:

SELECT

FROM

WHERE

]

GROUP BY

Similar queries are constructed for .

## Longitudinal Data Templates

Fuzzy SQL supports the generation of valid random queries for joint tables in parent-child relationship. One-to-many relationship for single or multiple-child is supported. In continuation to the definitions given in Tabular Data Templates, and for simplicity, we will drop the distinction between the real and synthetic tables since the generated random queries are always identical. Define:

* : Any randomly selected parent table.
* is the set of nominal variables in where indicates the number of these variables. Similarly, we define the continuous and date variables pertaining to the parent table using the superscripts ’c’ and ’d’ instead on ’n’.
* where is the number of child tables related to .
* is the set of nominal variables in where indicates the number of these variables. Similarly, we define the continuous and date variables pertaining to the child table using the superscripts ’c’ and ’d’.
* : is the parent’s joining key between and whereas .
* : is the child’s joining key between and whereas .

To avoid repetition, we only show the template for random filter-aggregate queries, which essentially comprises both filter and aggregate queries.

### FILTER-AGGREGATE QUERIES

If , and let the random sampling of the related tables be , then a filter-aggregate query takes the form:

SELECT

FROM

JOIN ON

JOIN ON

…

WHERE

GROUP BY

If , the SELECT term in the above expression is replaced by:

SELECT

In practice, the pre-aggregation filter condition is applied either using WHERE or using AND after the JOIN clause. Our implementation makes a random pick.

## Metrics

### Hellinger Distance for Datasets

The Hellinger distance may be used to measure the quality of synthetic data. First we consider the calculation of the Hellinger distance between the real and the synthetic tabular datasets and respectively. Define:

* is the set of *nominal* variables in both and where indicates the number of these variables.
* is the number of occurrences (i.e. counts) of the class for the nominal variable in .

The discrete probability of the class can be calculated as:

For instance, consider the *nominal* variable with two classes '<=50k' and '>50k'. Then the first class may have occurrences and the second may have occurrences with discrete probabilities of and respectively.

Similarly, for the synthetic data we can calculate the discrete probabilities

The Hellinger distance for the nominal variable is calculated as:

The Hellinger distance between and can be calculated by taking the mean across all *nominal* variables:

### Hellinger Distance for Queries

In *aggregate* queries, grouping is done by randomly selected *nominal* variables. In this sense, measuring the Hellinger distance for the datasets as explained above is just a special case where grouping is done by a single nominal variable at a time. So, for number of *nominal* variables in the original datasets, we may execute number of queries with each query grouped by a single variable. Then by averaging the Hellinger distances of these queries, we reach the same results in 0

If grouping is done by more than a single variable, it is as we are defining a new nominal variable where may be any combination of two or more dataset variables  as defined in 0. The query will result in specific number of classes for . Using the superscript to indicate the class of , we calculate the Hellinger distance for the query by:

Both discrete probabilities and were defined earlier in 0. For instance, consider an aggregate query grouped by the two nominal variables and with each having two distinct classes. The query will result in the variable having four distinct classes with a discrete probability for each resulting class .

### Euclidean Distance for Queries

Once the *aggregate* query is executed, the variable , as defined in 0, will result in the classes: . If the data includes a continuous variable , an aggregate function, say AGG, may be applied to that variable. For each class , an aggregation value of the continuous variable can be calculated. For instance, let be a combination of two nominal variables and . Let be a continuous variable, then for each of the four distinct classes, we can calculate the . Define:

* is the aggregate value (e.g. ) corresponding to the class of an arbitrary continuos variable in .
* is the aggregate value corresponding to the class of the same continuos variable in

From the above components, we can find the difference components:

We further find the mean and standard deviation across all the classes:

and we compute the standardized aggregate values:

Finally, we compute the norm and normalize it to reflect the normalized Euclidean distance between the real and synthetic queries:

Normalizing the distance by the number of resulting classes for the random query enables us to average the Euclidean distance across multiple queries since each of them may result in different number of classes.

### Example for calculating distances

As a simple example, consider a real  dataset with the variables  and . A random aggregate query is executed and resulted in the following:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| work\_class | education | AVG(hours\_per\_week) | COUNTS |
| Private | Divorced | 39.0 | 219 |
| Self-emp | Married | 33.3 | 9 |
| Private | Married | 41.0 | 29 |
| Local-gov | Never-married | 36.0 | 20 |
| Private | Never-married | Nan | Nan |
| Aggregate random query applied to | | | |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| work\_class | education | AVG(hours\_per\_week) | COUNTS |
| Private | Divorced | 35.0 | 121 |
| Self-emp | Married | 40.0 | 30 |
| Private | Married | 38.5 | 21 |
| Local-gov | Never-married | Nan | Nan |
| Private | Never-married | 39.0 | 3 |
| Aggregate random query applied to | | | |

The query results in a new variable  which is the combination of  and . The resulting variable assumes new classes which are basically the combination of the classes of the original variables. Further, the executed random query does not necessarily result in the same *number* and *type* of records (i.e. classes) for both real and synthetic data. This explains the presence of Nan where it indicates a non-matching record. This can go both sides, i.e. synthetic data may miss a class combination that is present in the real data or it may result in a class combination which is never present in the real data.

In the tables above, the real data query resulted in 277 occurrence of the first four classes (i.e. (Private, Divorced) with a probability 219/277=0.791 , (Self-emp, Married) with a probability of 9/277=0.0325 and so forth. The synthetic data query resulted in a total of 175 occurrences and its class probabilities can be calculated in the same manner.

Replacing Nan by a probability of zero, the Hellinger distance between the two queries is calculated as



For the Euclidean distance, we first find the difference components of the resulting averages of the continuous variable hours\_per\_week as (4,-0.67,2.5). Note that the non-matching classes are ignored. The component vector can be standardized into ( 0.702,-1.145,0.443) and finally the norm is calculated and divided by the number of components resulting in normalized Euclidean distance of 0.471.

# References

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1. The term ‘nominal’ may be interchangeably used throughout this document. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)