ABSTRACT

This project proposes an algorithm to combine datasets using inexact character variables, and implements this algorithm using SAS® software. When this algorithm is used together with PROC SQL it allows combining the datasets based on several inexact variables, hence producing better matches. This procedure offers realistic solutions for accurate and more complete matching of inexact data fields. Apart from being simple and easy to understand, the strength of this procedure is to condense information from several inexact character variables into one numerical measure. Thus, many valid matches can be captured that previously could only be made with an individual’s exhausting visual inspection. The procedure will save time and effort for anyone trying to combine datasets with inexact character variables.

1. INTRODUCTION

This project develops an algorithm to combine datasets using inexact character variables. Such a requirement will arise when names from different database records that do not agree precisely by a computer, and thus considered no match; but a “human eye” reviewing could tell that the names were really of the same person. For example, the two datasets can have different variations of name for the same company like “Ladenburg Thalmann Financial Services Inc” and “Fin Svcs, Ladenburg Thalmann Inc.” These common data fields are usually imprecise due to errors or variations in reporting that make typical linking by exact agreement insufficient, but the algorithm developed in this project will accommodate such matches.
The need to combine datasets using inexact text variable arises when a researcher is trying to use two different data sources that don’t share unique identifier. This situation is typical for the researchers trying to combine data from different sources; for example, SDC Plantium and WRDS, or Placement Tracker and WRDS. Such a list could be endless because there is no way to resolve name variations when data is combined from different sources. The typical computer linking procedures requiring exactness have been previously shown to miss a substantial fraction of valid matches.

The attractive feature of the proposed algorithm is that it provides numerical measure for the match. In particular, it calculates the number of letters that match in the two character string from “right to left” and “left to right,” the sum of these divided by the total number of letters in the two strings provide the “proportion of common letters” in the strings. Performance test reveal that when the proportion of common letters is more than 0.80 the two names, almost certainly, belong to the same company. A successful and reliable linkage procedure, such as this, offers great opportunities for researchers.

2. ALGORITHM DESCRIPTION

To obtain proportion of common letters in the two text strings (call them string1, and string2) search for the shorter length string in the longer string from left-to-right and record the maximum number of letters that match, call it “match_left2right”. Then do the same right-to-left and record it as “match_right2left.” Then calculate proportion of common letters as

\[
PCL = \frac{\text{sum(match_left2right,match_right2left)}}{\text{sum(length(string1),length(string2))}}
\]

2.1. SAS CODE

The above algorithm is coded as a user defined function in SAS software (SAS Institute Inc) using “PROC FCMP;” SAS.9.2 is required to use this function in DATA step or “PROC SQL.” Below is the complete code with description:
Invoke PROC FCMP, and name the function “PCL”, short for proportion of common letters, which will take input of two string variables:

```
proc fcmp outlib=sasuser.funcs.trial;
function pcl(string1 $, string2 $);
```

Create a few “dummy” variables and initialize them to zero:

```
match_left2right=0;  
match_left2right1=0;  
match_right2left=0;  
match_right2left1=0;
```

Check if string1 has greater length then string2, and if so, obtain the maximum number of character in string2 that are also in the same order in string1 from left-to-right and record them in variable “match_left2right.”

```
if length(string1) >= length(string2) then do;
   do i=1 to min(length(string1),length(string2)) by 1;
      do j=min(length(string1),length(string2))+1-i to 1 by -1;
         if index(string1,substr(string2,i,j)) >0 then
            match_left2right1=j;
         if match_left2right1 > match_left2right then
            match_left2right=match_left2right1;
      end;
   end;
end;
```

Also, obtain the maximum number of character in string2 that are also in the same order in string1 from right-to-left and record them in variable “match_right2left.”

```
   do i=1 to min(length(string1),length(string2)) by 1;
      do j=i to 1 by -1;
         if index(string1,substr(string2,i-j+1,j)) > 0 then
            match_right2left1=j;
      if match_right2left1 > match_right2left then
            match_right2left=match_right2left1;
   end;
end;
```

However, if string2 has greater length then string1, obtain the maximum number of character in string1 that are also in the same order in string2 from left-to-right and record them in variable “match_left2right.”
if length(string2) >= length(string1) then do;
    do i=1 to min(length(string2),length(string1)) by 1;
        do j=min(length(string2),length(string1))+1-i to 1 by -1;
            if index(string2,substr(string1,i,j)) >0 then
                match_left2right1=j;
                if match_left2right1 > match_left2right then
                    match_left2right=match_left2right1;
                end;
        end;
end;

Also, obtain the maximum number of character in string1 that are also in the same order in string2 from right-to-left and record them in variable “match_right2left.”

    do i=1 to min(length(string2),length(string1)) by 1;
        do j=i to 1 by -1;
            if index(string2,substr(string1,i-j+1,j)) > 0 then
                match_right2left1=j;
                if match_right2left1 > match_right2left then
                    match_right2left=match_right2left1;
                end;
        end;
end;

Now we can calculate the proportion of common letters, return its value and end the function:

    pcl = sum(match_left2right,match_right2left)/sum(length(string1),length(string2));
    if string1='' or string2='' then pcl=.;
    return(pcl);
endsub;

Table 1 shows an example of calculation undertaken by the code using DATA step.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>String1</th>
<th>String2</th>
<th>Match_left2right</th>
<th>Match_right2left</th>
<th>PCL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERNEURON PHARMACEUTICALS INC</td>
<td>INTERNEURON PHARMACEUTICALS INC</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONWEALTH BIOTECHNOLOGIES INC</td>
<td>COMMONWEALTH BIOTECHNOLOGIES IN</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCESS ANYTIME BANCORP INC</td>
<td>ACCESS ANYTIME BANCORP</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NETWORK CONNECTION INC (THE)</td>
<td>NETWORK CONNECTION INC</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENEREX BIOTECHNOLOGY CORPORATION</td>
<td>GENEREX BIOTECHNOLOGY CORP DEL</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALLOU HEALTH &amp; BEAUTY INC</td>
<td>ALLOU HEALTH &amp; BEAUTY CARE INC</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTH TEXAS DRILLING &amp; EXPLORATION INC</td>
<td>SOUTH TEXAS DRILLING &amp; EXPL INC</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMERICAN ORIENTAL BIOENGINEERING INC</td>
<td>AMERICAN ORIENTAL BIOENGINEERING INC</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CREATIVE COMPUTER APPLICATIONS INC</td>
<td>CREATIVE COMPUTER APPLICATIONS INC</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NETWORK EVENT THEATRE INC</td>
<td>NETWORK EVENT THEATER INC</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TORTOISE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE CORPORATION</td>
<td>TORTOISE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE CORPORATION</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANTA CRUZ OPERATION (THE) INC</td>
<td>SANTA CRUZ OPERATION INC THE</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENERAL DATACOMM INDUSTRIES INC</td>
<td>GENERAL DATACOMM INDUSTRIES INC</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENERAL DATACOMM INDUSTRIES INC</td>
<td>GENERAL DATACOMM INDUSTRIES INC</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUROTECH LIMITED</td>
<td>EUROTECH LTD</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONSTELLATION ENERGY PARTNERS LLC</td>
<td>CONSTELLATION ENERGY PARTNERS LLC</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLEXIBLE SOLUTIONS INTERNATIONAL INC</td>
<td>FLEXIBLE SOLUTIONS INTERNATIONAL INC</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI DIAMOND TECHNOLOGY INC</td>
<td>SI DIAMOND TECHNOLOGY INC</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEOPLES BANCRUST COMPANY INC (THE)</td>
<td>PEOPLES BANCRUST COMPANY INC (THE)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERMA-FIX ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES INC</td>
<td>PERMA-FIX ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES INC</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fin Sves, Ladenburg Thalmann Inc</td>
<td>Ladenburg Thalmann Financial Services Inc</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MED-DESIGN CORPORATION (THE)</td>
<td>MED-DESIGN CORPORATION (THE)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Calculation Undertaken by the Code Using DATA Step

2.2. MERGING TWO DATASETS USING SQL AND PCL FUNCTION

Using the above function we can calculation the proportion of common letters IF the two text strings are provided in the same row. However, we usually need to combine two datasets using...
inexact strings, which can be accomplished by combining the above PCL function with PROC SQL. This can be best illustrated by an example; let’s say “master” dataset has 2 observations for which we need to find the match from the “base” dataset that has 21 observations. In this example it is known at the outset that common name variations and inaccuracies may be present. Each file has a unique ID number for each observation. This ID number is quite useful in the process of combining datasets, initially important variables unnecessary to the matching process do not need to be carried along, but only a smaller file of each origin containing only the variables that are useful in matching can be retained for the task, and later the ID variables can be used to capture the remaining information.

In viewing this data to attempt to match-merge the records, examples are of common inexact fields such as name, which do not agree precisely, and are not usually matched by the computer, but that the names are really of the same company. The proposed method can accommodate such match-merges and is illustrated in the tables below. Table 2 contains the names that are to be matched to the names in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masterid</th>
<th>String1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>ACCESS ANYTIME BANCORP INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>NETWORK CONNECTION INC (THE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Fin Svs, Ladenburg Thalmann Inc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Master Dataset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baseid</th>
<th>String2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>INTERNEURON PHARMACEUTICALS INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>COMMONWEALTH BIOTECHNOLOGIES INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ACCESS ANYTIME BANCORP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>NETWORK CONNECTION INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>GENEREX BIOTECHNOLOGY CORP DEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>AMERICAN ORIENTAL BIOENGINEERING INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ALLOU HEALTH &amp; BEAUTY CARE INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Company Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>NETWORK EVENT THEATER INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>CREATIVE COMPUTER APPLICS INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>SOUTH TEXAS DRILLING &amp; EXPL INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>TORTOISE ENERGY INFRASTRUCT COR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>PERMA FIX ENVIRONMENTAL SVCS IN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>GENERAL DATACOMM INDS INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SANTA CRUZ OPERATION INC THE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>GENERAL DATACOMM INDS INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>CONSTELLATION ENERGY PTNRS L L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>FLEXIBLE SOLUTIONS INTL INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>PEOPLES BANCTRUST CO INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>EUROTECH LTD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>MED DESIGN CORP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>SI DIAMOND TECH INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Ladenburg Thalmann Financial Services Inc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Base Dataset**

The following SQL statements will provide us with the best match for the string variable in master dataset:

```sql
proc sql;
  create table matched_output as
  select *, pcl(masterdataset.string1, basebasedataset.string2) as pcl,
  from masterdataset, basebasedataset
  group by masterdataset.masterid
  having max(pcl)=pcl;
quit;
```
The output produced by the above sql statement is summarized in table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masterid</th>
<th>String1</th>
<th>String2</th>
<th>Baseid</th>
<th>Pcl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>ACCESS ANYTIME BANCORP INC</td>
<td>ACCESS ANYTIME BANCORP</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>NETWORK CONNECTION INC (THE)</td>
<td>NETWORK CONNECTION INC</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Fin Svcs, Ladenburg Thalmann Inc</td>
<td>Ladenburg Thalmann Financial Services Inc</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Results

2.3. Making Use of Several Inexact Character Variables to Combine Datasets

In several instances there is more than one inexact character variables available in the two datasets. This additional information can easily be incorporated in a single measure to combine the two datasets. Let’s assume we have three inexact character variables (NAME, TICKER, and CUSIP\(^1\)). The following SQL statement can incorporate all the information from the three strings into PCL_ALL:

```
proc sql;  
create table matched_output as  
    select *, mean(pcl(master_name, base_name), pcl(master_ticker, base_ticker), pcl(master_CUSIP, base_CUSIP)) as PCL_ALL  
    from master,base  
group by masterid  
having max(pcl)=pcl;  
quit;
```

\(^1\) Usually CUSIP is an exact identifier, however, several time it is not, for example, different digits for CUSIP in the two datasets.
3. PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS WITH LARGE SAMPLE

Performance analysis of the above procedure is conducted on the data obtained from Placement Tracker with 12000 observations and WRDS with 50000 observations. Former data is treated as “master” dataset, while the latter is the “base” dataset. These two datasets had three inexact common variables, namely, Firm Name, Ticker, and Cusip\(^2\). Before, implementing the above procedure, firm names (in both datasets) were made uppercase and few symbols were removed using the following data step:

```sas
data dataset;set dataset;
    name=upcase(name);
    name=compress(name,'.');
    name=compress(name,'@');
    name=compress(name,':');
    name=compress(name,'/');
    name=compress(name,'&');
    name=compress(name,'*');
    name=compress(name,',');
    name=compress(name,'-');
    name=compress(name);  
run;
```

Due to the large amount of data being processed PROC SQL could not conduct the calculations in one full sweep. Therefore, “master” data was divided in ten observations at a time and then matched with the “base” data; these matched observations were then combined into one file. The following macro implements this process.

```sas
Data master1;set master;
    serialNumber=_n_;  
run;
%let j = 0;
%MACRO DivideAndConquer;
  %DO i = 10 %TO 12000 %by 10;
  data master2;set master1;
  ```

\(^2\) CUSIP in the master dataset is missing or altered while downloading using excel.
if serialNumber s1 > &j and s1 <=&i;
run;
%let j=&i;

proc sql;
create table matched_output10 as
   select *, mean(pcl(master_name, base_name), pcl(master_ticker, base_ticker),
   pcl(master_CUSIP , base_CUSIP)) as PCL_ALL
   from master2,base
group by masterid
having max(pcl)=pcl;
quit;

PROC APPEND   BASE= matched_output DATA= matched_output10;run;
DM   'clear log';
%END;
%MEND DivideAndConquer;

The matches produced by the above were manually checked to make sure the variation of the names refer to the same company. Figure 1 exhibits the “Retention Rate,” which is defined as the number of correct matches divided by the total matches in a given range of PCL. These results illustrate that the retention rate is very high for PCL above 0.85, but starts to fall sharply below PCL of 0.65 and reaches zero for PCL below 0.45.
Figure 1: Retention Rate based on Three Inexact Character variables

4. CONCLUSION

Often errors or variations in reported names can occur because two datasets have different sources of data collection which could result in different levels in precision and accuracy. The process described here can replicate the ‘human eye’ to successfully create such matches that are inexact, and keep necessary manual inspections to a minimum. This technique will save a lot of time and effort for the researches. The strength of the procedure lies in providing a numerical measure for the match between the two strings – proportion of common letters. The procedure goes a step further and able to include the information regarding a match from several inexact character variables. The ideas in this paper provide a concrete and workable solution that will considerably lessen the individual’s visual workload.
CONTACT INFORMATION

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City, State ZIP: Charlottesville, Virginia, 22903 
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