Evo-Scope: Fully automated assessment of correlated evolution on

phylogenetic trees

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Abstract

1. Correlated evolution describes how multiple biological traits evolve together. Recently

developed methods provide increasingly detailed results of correlated evolution, sometimes

at elevated computational costs.

2. Here, we present *evo-scope*, a fast and fully-automated pipeline with minimal input

requirements to compute correlation between discrete traits evolving on a phylogenetic tree.

Notably, we improve two of our previously developed tools that efficiently compute statistics

of correlated evolution to characterize the nature, such as synergy or antagonism, and the

strength of the interdependence between the traits.

3. Furthermore, we improved the running time and implemented several additional features,

such as genetic mapping, Bayesian Markov Chain Monte Carlo estimation, consideration of

missing data and phylogenetic uncertainty.

4. As an application, we scan a published penicillin resistance data set of *Streptococcus*

pneumoniae and characterize genetic mutations that correlate with antibiotic resistance. The

pipeline is accessible both as a self-contained github repository

(https://github.com/Maxime5G/EvoScope) and through a graphical galaxy interface

(https://galaxy.pasteur.fr/u/maximeg/w/evoscope).

Keywords: phylogenetics, correlated evolution, workflow

Introduction

The study of correlated evolution between biological traits illustrates the tight

interdependence between processes in evolutionary biology. The constant development of

new tools (listed in Table S1) to understand these dependencies now allow one to predict

residues in contact in 3D structures of proteins (Morcos et al., 2011) or to identify protein-

protein interactions (Barker & Pagel, 2005). Nevertheless, the measuring of these correlations

is complicated by the phylogenetic relations (i.e., phylogenetic inertia) between living

entities, typically represented by a phylogenetic tree. As such, species belonging to the same

taxon may share several residues or biological traits by vertical descent, a process which one

usually wants to disentangle from converge due to other processes, such as natural selection

(Achaz & Dutheil, 2021). Therefore, the measurement of correlation between traits must

either correct, or explicitly account for phylogenetic structure.

A typical application of the study of correlated evolution is the measure of the correlation

between genetic factors and a given phenotype, i.e., genetic mapping, generally performed

through genome-wide association studies (GWAS). Multiple tools have been devoted to

measure such correlation, and these use different methods to account for phylogenetic

relationships (see Table S1). While most methods add a correction term for this, few rely

explicitly on the topology of the phylogenetic tree (e.g., treeWAS (Collins & Didelot, 2018)).

Particularly in bacteria, tree-aware GWAS has been critical to detect genetic variants involved

in the evolution of antibiotic resistance (Farhat et al., 2019), virulence (Galardini et al., 2020)

or niche adaptation (Gori et al., 2020).

We have previously developed two methods to measure correlated evolution on

phylogenetic trees. First, *epics* calculates all possible orderings of mutational events affecting

two traits occurring on a phylogenetic tree, and computes efficiently the exact probability to

observe a number of co-counts equal or larger than the observed repartition (Behdenna et

al., 2016). The second tool, *epocs*, computes the influence of the mutation of a first trait on

the mutation rate of a second one by maximum likelihood (Behdenna et al., 2021). Notably,

epocs assesses different possible interactions between the traits, such as induction or

inhibition.

Here we describe a novel software, *evo-scope* (EVOlutionary Study of Correlations of

Occurrences on a Phylogeny), combining *epics* and *epocs*, to ease the detection of correlated

evolution on phylogenetic trees for discrete traits. We further detail new features that we

have added in the *evo-scope* implementation. Notable improvements include accelerated

run-times (e.g., using sparse matrices in *epics*), consideration of missing data in species traits,

analysis of a single trait (i.e., GWAS), the analysis of forests of trees and a Bayesian Markov

Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) estimation.

Presentation of *evo-scope*

The details of the *epics* and *epocs* models are described in Behdenna (2016, 2021). *Evo-*

scope provides new versions of these tools with additional features.

Figure 1. Schematic representation of the *evo-scope* pipeline (see Methods). The user

supplies a rooted phylogenetic tree with the values of *n* discrete traits at the tips. Pastml

reconstructs the evolution of each trait along the tree and an R script formats the

reconstruction to display the mutations on the branches. *Epics* is run as a pre-filter to identify

significantly associated pairs of evolutionary processes (*m*) among the initial *n*. Next, *epocs*

maximizes the likelihoods of four evolutionary models, one of independence and three of

dependence, on the selected pairs. Finally, an R script summarizes the results and outputs

the best model explaining the repartition of events on the tree. Additionally, a figure can be

generated for any pair considered to describe the gains of likelihood between nested

models.

Description of the pipeline

The *evo-scope* pipeline consists of five steps: ancestral character reconstruction, parsing and

formatting, running *epics*, running *epocs* and summarizing the results (Fig 1).

1. Ancestral Character Reconstruction (ACR)

As initial input, a user provides a rooted phylogenetic tree and a file with the values of discrete

traits at the tips. Pastml reconstructs the trait states on the internal branches of the tree using

the JOINT model (Ishikawa et al., 2019; Pupko et al., 2000). Any other ACR tool or algorithm

(e.g., Maximum A Posteriori in *pastml*) can be used as long as one single state (defined or

undefined) is provided on each branch.

2. ACR parsing and tree reformatting

Evo-scope reconstructs all mutational events on the branches based on the ancestral

reconstruction. A mutational event is defined as any change of a trait value between two

consecutive nodes of the tree. At most one mutation per branch per trait is allowed: either a

change occurred between the parent and daughter node or none.

3. *Epics* as a pre-filter

Evo-scope then runs *epics* to discover by default pairs of traits that co-occur frequently on

the branches of the trees (Behdenna et al., 2016). Other scenarios for the pairs of traits

placement are available, such as genealogically ordered pairs. At this step, *epics* is used as a

pre-filter as it runs very fast and it only detects statistical association between the mutational

events on the tree. Importantly, *epics* does not allow to predict an evolutionary scenario. As

such, additional in-depth analysis is required to better describe the interactions between the

mutational events. However, for very large data sets, *epics* might be the only option available

as running time increase substantially for the maximum likelihood-based tool *epocs*. The

output of this step is the list of all pair of events that are significantly associated on the tree

for a given p-value.

4.   *Epocs* for the model discovery

For all significantly associated traits, *epocs* maximizes the likelihood of multiple scenarios of

induction to determine which of the trait influenced the occurrence of the other one. The

multiple scenarios can contain from two to eight parameters and describe the

interrelationship between the occurrence of two events on the tree. The parameters are

divided into natural occurrence rates ($\mu_{\{i,j\}}$, $\upsilon_{\{i,j\}}$) and excited occurrence rates ($\mu^*_{\{i,j\}}$, $\upsilon^*_{\{i,j\}}$)

for each of the trait (Fig 3A). The ratio between the excited occurrence rates and the natural

occurrence rates defines the induction.

In the current version, the model exploration is restricted to three models of correlation

compared to a model of independence. The three models of correlation describe either an

induction of the first trait on the second one, vice-versa or a co-induction of both events.

5.   Summarizing the results

Finally, *evo-scope* extracts the likelihoods and parameter values inferred for each of the

models. To select the best model for each pair, the program performs likelihood ratio tests

(LRT) between nested models (Behdenna et al., 2021). Next, it compares the calculated LRT

value to a χ^2 distribution whose degrees of freedom is the difference in the number of

parameters between models. Finally, based on significant LRTs, *evo-scope* selects the "best"

model by a trade-off measure which maximizes the LRT value and minimizes the number of

model parameters. *Evo-scope* then allows the user to select a pair and plot the likelihood

gains between nested models.

Additional novel features to *epics* and *epocs*

1. Analysis on multiple independent trees

The user can provide a list of independent trees (non-overlapping taxa), to either *epics* or

epocs, with the same type of events. This feature is particularly useful whenever the same

character can be analyzed across unrelated clades. In particular, *epics* and *epocs* will collect

the information of all the trees and generate a global result by integrating the information

across all trees. To do so, *epics* computes an aggregated p-value convoluted across all trees,

while *epocs* transmits the likelihood calculation across all trees.

2. Forest of trees

To account for phylogenetic uncertainty, the user can provide a forest of trees, such as

generated by BEAST or MrBayes (Ronquist et al., 2012; Suchard et al., 2018), to either *epics*

or *epocs*, and the results are ranked to extract the mode and 95% credibility intervals. In

epics, the p-values are ranked by the tree likelihoods, while in *epocs* the results are ranked

by the product of the *epocs* likelihood and the tree likelihood.

3. MCMC exploration of likelihood surface

In the standard *epocs*, the likelihood is maximized considering all possible arrangements,

with some restrictions on the number of co-occurrences due to computational complexity. In

the MCMC case, the program is allowed to explore freely any possible arrangement of the

co-occurrences. This feature is implemented in a third executable *epocs_mcmc*. In this

module, the user supplies a tree with events to analyze and a standard Metropolis-Hastings

algorithm will explore the parameter distribution across the number of replicates selected by

the user (Hastings, 1970). Notable behaviors of the MCMC chain determine the relevancy of

each parameter in the model. For example, a flat uniform distribution of the posterior is likely

to reflect that this parameter is not pertinent in the model. In addition, the algorithm explores

the order in the co-occurrences of the traits. *Epocs_mcmc* outputs a tab-delimited file

compatible with Tracer (Rambaut et al., 2018).

4. Missing data

The presence of uncharacterized traits at the tips can be taken into account in each of the

tools above. For *epics*, the branches where traits are unknown are masked, whereas for *epocs*

and *epocs_mcmc*, branches containing an unknown trait value and those below are excluded

in the likelihood calculation.

5. GWAS-like procedure

Epics and *epocs* have now the possibility of selecting either one character or two to test in

the procedures. Whenever the user selects only one character, the analysis is similar to a

GWAS, where any other character is tested against the one selected.

Analysis of an antibiotic resistance dataset

As test data, we retrieved 603 genomes of *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (Chewapreecha et al.,

2014; Croucher et al., 2013, 2015; Lees et al., 2018). In this data set, the resistance to

penicillin is known and encoded as a binary variable (R for resistant strains, S for susceptible

strains). Also, 198,248 single-nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) have been called in the

genomes. For the post-hoc MCMC analysis, we retrieved a significant association from *evo-*

scope and ran *epocs_mcmc* with a chain length of 10^7 steps and sampling every 50 steps

on this pair.

Availability

The source code of *evo-scope*, *epics* and *epocs* are available on github under the GNU

General Public License v3: https://github.com/Maxime5G/EvoScope, and pastml is available

either on bioconda (Grüning et al., 2018)   or   on   github:

https://github.com/evolbioinfo/pastml. We also provide a galaxy access to all tools and a

"push-button"   workflow   at   the   Pasteur   institute   server:

https://galaxy.pasteur.fr/u/maximeg/w/evoscope.

Results

To illustrate the applicability of the present pipeline, we evaluated *evo-scope* by performing

a GWAS-like analysis to a data set of 603 genomes of *S. pneumoniae* (Chewapreecha et al.,

2014; Croucher et al., 2013, 2015; Lees et al., 2018). As a positive control, *evo-scope*

detected genetic variants correlated to penicillin resistance (following (Chewapreecha et al.,

2014)). In addition, *evo-scope* inferred the induction values for the significant associations to

determine the strength and the direction of the correlation between the occurrence of

antibiotic resistance and the SNPs. Of the 82,829 SNPs present in at least eight genomes, we

report a total of 1,629 SNPs (1.97%) associated with the resistance by *epics* (Fig. 2A) – of

which 543 (33.3% of the significant SNPs) were further inferred to be correlated with the

resistance by *epocs*, with a P-value < 10^{-4} (Fig. 2B,C). In the end, *evo-scope* found that nearly

half of the correlated SNPs (n=255, 47%) are located in only three genes, *penA*, *pbpX* and

pbp1A, in accordance with previous results, as mutations in these three genes are the major

drivers of penicillin resistance in *S. pneumoniae* (Chewapreecha et al., 2014) (Fig. 2B,C). In

addition, we detected 45 significant SNPs in *mraY*, a gene involved in cell wall biogenesis

(Chewapreecha et al., 2014), and 44 SNPs in *clpL*, reported to be related to penicillin

susceptibility and compensation of the antibiotic resistance fitness cost (Hakenbeck et al.,

2012; Tran et al., 2011). In our study, most of the inferred inductions revealed that the

resistance phenotype occurred first in the tree, with the genetic mutations occurring very

quickly afterwards (i.e., induction values > 100 – Fig 2C).

A.

B.

C.

Figure 2. **Application of *evo-scope* to a dataset of *S. pneumoniae*.** (A) Manhattan plot of the P-values inferred by *epics*. In color are shown genes of interest with multiple SNPs of low p-values. Notably, the three highest peaks correspond to *pbpX*, *pbp1A* and *penA*. (B) Barplot showing the p-value inferred by *epocs*, grouped by gene IDs. (C) Barplots showing the inductions inferred by *epocs* (*i.e.*, the lambda in (Behdenna et al., 2021)). Top row represents the inductions Resistance -> Mutation, bottom row represents the other way round. For each statistical association between the resistance and one of the 543 significant SNP, we retrieved the best model using LRT. Most notably, the three genes of interest *pbpX*, *penA* and *pbp1A* display low P-values and strong inductions.

Additionally, we include a post-hoc MCMC analysis with *epocs_mcmc* to demonstrate the usefulness of this addition in the *evo-scope* toolbox. For this purpose, we tested it on a significant association from *evo-scope*, which indicated an induction resistance -> mutation. (Table 1 and Fig. 3B).

235   Table 1. Parameter estimates of the MCMC run for the selected pair.

Parameter	ML estimates	Mean of the bayesian estimates	Mode of the posterior distribution	95% Credible interval
$\mu1$	46.263	41.03	38.81	[25.39 – 57.51]
$\mu1*$	292.22	543.25	503.8	[214.42 – 934.32]
$\mu2$	6.8197	14.66	12.79	[4.41 – 25.73]
$\mu2*$	377.08	338.24	317.8	[148.78 – 543.70]
$v1$	41.474	46.23	41.76	[20.36 – 73.91]
$v1*$	?	475.22	68.12	[0.33 – 37.86]
$v2$	0	4.67	0.5724	[1.4E-5 – 13.94]
$v2*$	0	294.33	41.59	[3.6E-5 – 41.23]

Parameter naming follows the convention from (Behdenna et al., 2021). Non-starred rates

represent natural occurrence rates, whereas starred rates represent excited occurrence rates

(see also Fig 3A for a summary graph). ML estimates are the values of each parameter

selected with the free-for-all model in *epocs* (model "8"). Mean of the Bayesian estimates

and mode of the posterior distribution are, respectively, the mean and mode values

calculated the MCMC chain. The last column shows the 95% credible intervals of the posterior

distribution.

Figure 3. Likelihood ratios and output from an *epocs_mcmc* run on one significant association

between the resistance phenotype and a SNP in *pbpX*. (A) Summary graph of parameter

models and transitions upon evolutionary events on a mock tree, adapted from (Behdenna

et al., 2021). Non-starred rates are natural rates of occurrence, starred rates are excited rates

of occurrence. An occurrence of the first event in the pair activates the excited rates of the

second event in the pair. Once the second event occurs, the excitation is consumed. (B)

Likelihood ratios between the four models tested by *evo-scope*, following the convention

from (Behdenna et al., 2021) . Lines connect nested models. The comparison providing the

best likelihood gain while minimizing the number of parameters is the comparison between

the model of independence and the model of induction E1->E2 (i.e., Resistance -> Mutation).

(C-F) Histograms of parameter values taken from the MCMC chain. Scales are parameter-

based in order to best display the shape of the parameter distribution.

After running *epocs_mcmc*, we see that $\mu1$ is clearly defined, with a narrow distribution (Fig

3C). Interestingly, even though the preferred model by ML is the induction Resistance ->

Mutation, $\mu1^*$ (demonstrating an induction Mutation -> Resistance) is still somewhat relevant

to the model, but the confidence interval is quite wide (Fig 3E). Importantly, $\mu2$ is close to

zero and $\mu2^*$ is clearly defined with a narrow distribution (Fig 3D,F). We conclude from these

observations that the selected mutation in *pbpX* mostly occurs after the resistance, therefore

indicating an induction Resistance -> Mutation. In addition, the order of the co-occurrences

are inferred in the same direction as ML and further, the υ parameter posterior distributions

are centered around the parameter values inferred by ML (Fig S1).

Discussion

Inferring correlations between evolutionary events has multiple useful applications. However, fast and easily interpretable tools are still lacking. Here, we provide a self-contained and fully automated pipeline to detect correlated evolution, with minimal input required from the user. *Evo-scope* takes as input any number of discrete traits and a rooted phylogenetic tree and outputs a model of correlated evolution best explaining the repartition of the events on the tree. The flexibility of *evo-scope* allows to perform different types of analyses, such as GWAS as exemplified in this paper. Here, we applied *evo-scope* on a well-described dataset of antibiotic resistance and SNPs in *S. pneumoniae* to 1) test the accuracy of the pipeline and 2) to add on the literature possible inductions either from the mutations to the resistance or in the other way round. We showed that *evo-scope* is able to retrieve consistent results with the literature in a timely manner.

The Induction values inferred on the significantly associated pairs revealed that most of the mutations associated with the resistance occurred after the resistance phenotype. Two effects may contribute to explain this result. Methodologically, the ACR step might introduce biases regarding the real occurrence timing of both mutations and resistance as the algorithm tries to minimize the number of steps to reconstruct a trait, while antibiotic resistance and resistance-conferring mutations are known to be subject to homoplasies (see for example (Coolen et al., 2021)).

In bacteria, genomic changes that are necessary to evolve antibiotic resistance are often a burden for the bacteria, imposing a fitness cost (Andersson & Hughes, 2010). However,

mechanisms exist that compensate the cost of such antibiotic resistance, such as the evolution

of a secondary mutation in the genome. For *S. pneumoniae*, bacteria exhibiting multiple

mutations in the penicillin binding proteins exhibit a phenotype of resistance and

compensation (Orio et al., 2011). Using *evo-scope*, we showed that many significantly

associated pairs of mutations concur with these observations. Furthermore, the patterns of

mutation acquisitions and inductions could shed light on evolutionary trajectories of the

acquisition of antibiotic resistance in *S. pneumoniae*.

In conclusion, we developed a fully-automated pipeline, with minimal input required from the

user. Our approach, by considering explicitly the phylogenetic component, allows to detect

correlated evolution between discrete traits of any species by explicitly taking into account

the underlying structure. We show that our pipeline can also be applied to tree-aware GWAS

analyses in bacteria, expanding previous results in the field linking genetic variants to

penicillin resistance in *S. pneumoniae*.

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Author contribution

GA, MG, AL, ER, PG, CC conceived the ideas and designed methodology; MG collected the

data; GA, MG analyzed the data; MG led the writing of the manuscript. GA, AL, PG, ER

obtained the funding for this project. All authors contributed critically to the drafts and gave

final approval for publication.

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