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EIC+, an algorithm for automatic and unsupervised extraction of ion chromatograms in high resolution mass spectrometry

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Abstract

Within the feature extraction process in high-resolution mass spectrometry (HRMS), we focused on the identification of EICs-Extracted Ion Chromatograms. A proposed algorithm tuned with its default parameters yielded EIC matrices which recovered most of the 836 reference features identified within a set of public and fully described Orbitrap data, already benchmarked with XCMS, MZmine2, MS-Dial and Compound Discoverer. A good accuracy on the calculation of the m/z values was also observed. Tools are available on the Galaxy Test Toolshed.

Keywords: extracted ion chromatograms; features; m/z values; high resolution mass spectrometry; EIC+ algorithm

1 1. Introduction

A mass spectrum is a beam of abundances of ions represented by their m/z2 values [3]. Within each mass spectrum, the regions of m/z values with high 3 abundances, or signals, form mass peaks, or peaks. HRMS-high resolution mass spectrometry consists in liquid chromatography coupled to mass spectrometry. The analysis of a sample in HRMS yields a MS data, which is a series of mass spectra, each acquired at a different retention time (RT). A collection of several 7 MS data will form a MS dataset. Within each MS data, a feature is defined when a same peak is identified in several mass spectra which are consecutive ۵ by their RTs. A feature is a triplet containing a m/z value, a retention time 10 and a signal intensity. Extraction of features, performed by proprietary or free 11 softwares, is the beginning of HRMS preprocessings. It can be summarized as 12 follow for a MS1 acquisition (full scan). Let ms_i be the mass spectrum corre-13 sponding to the i^{th} retention time. Each ms_i is a matrix of two columns, m/z

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values and signal intensities, which form peaks with the profile option of the 15 mass spectrometer, or which have been converted to centroids with the centroid 16 option. Successive m_{s_i} , e.g. m_{s_i} , $m_{s_{i+1}}$ and $m_{s_{i+2}}$, may contain the same 17 m/z value. From a MS1 data and a given m/z value, an Extracted Ion Chro-18 matogram or EIC is obtained by collecting the signals associated to a given m/z19 value (with a tolerance) along all the RTs. The next process is the identification 20 of features or chromatographic peaks, sometimes refered to as peak picking. But 21 the calculation is tricky, and several softwares, or even the same software with 22 different parameters, do not yield the same solution. Benchmarks give clues on 23 their respective performances, according to different figures of merit. A first ap-24 proach was to compare the features obtained by different softwares, using their 25 distances calculated with their m/z and RT values. The figure of merit was the 26 number of features identified by several softwares, considered to be true posi-27 tives. Venn diagrams were used by Tautenhahn et al [8] to compare Centwave, 28 MZMine and Matchfilter algorithms, and by Myers et al [4] to compare XCMS 29 [7] and MZmine2 [6]. But an outlier on Venn diagrams is simply an algorithm 30 which performs differently; its performances can be worse, or better. Then, an-31 other and more reliable approach was based on a ground truth, reference values 32 to which experimental results could be compared. Li et al [2] compared sev-33 eral softwares on samples for which hundreds of compounds had been manually 34 quantified. The figure of merit was the recovery rate of features, based on the 35 proximity between reference and experimental values for three variables: RTs, 36 m/z and signal intensities. Such approach targets final users, because it gives 37 them clues to choose a processing application. But it does not explain why an 38 application performed better than another. In other words, we have seen that 39 features extraction is a two-steps process: EIC extraction from raw MS data 40 then features identification from EICs. The recovery rate was not 100% for any 41 software: where was information lost? At the EIC step? At the features step? 42 Both? Moreover, the accuracy of m/z prediction was not discussed, while it 43 should be a mandatory figure of merit when the goal of the processing is to 44 propose CHONS chemical formula. 45

Taking those remarks in consideration, the design of the following algorithm was focused on the EIC extraction and the accuracy of the prediction of the m/z values, with a parsimonious number of tuning parameters. The aim of this article was to show that almost all information from the dataset published by Li et al could be recovered by the EICs, and beyond, that it remains possible to improve the features extraction process.

⁵² 2. Material and methods

53 2.1. The EIC+ algorithm

⁵⁴ Contrary to ADAP [5] or Centwave [8] which process each data once, our ⁵⁵ algorithm perfoms several processings of the original centroid data. The goal ⁵⁶ was to determine more accurately the experimental m/z values leading to the ⁵⁷ future EICs. At each loop, m/z values were recalculated, converging towards stable values. The algorithm called EIC+ is schematized in figure 1. The three tuning parameters were: *mztol*, *eicsig* and *dw*, i.e. a tolerance around a given m/z value, a minimum of signal and a Durbin-Watson threshold. The starting point was a centroid high resolution MS data.

• Identification of a first m/z list

All the signals of the MS data were gathered into the same matrix of two 63 columns: m/z values and signal intensities. The m/z values were sorted 64 in ascending order, identical m/z values were merged, signal intensities 65 added. The maximum of signal was associated to a m/z value called 66 mz_{max} which was stored in a list of m/z. The m/z between the bound-67 aries $[mz_{max}-mztol, mz_{max}+mztol]$ were dropped. Then, the algorithm 68 checked for the next mz_{max} and the previous calculations were repeated 69 until the maximum of the remaining signals reached *eicsig*. 70

• Filling a first EIC matrix

The first EIC matrix was initiated as a matrix of zeros; the rows were the retention times, and the columns the list of mz_{max} previously identified. The MS data was scanned again, each m/z value was compared to the m/z of the EIC matrix. If an absolute difference was lower than mztol, the signal was added into the EIC matrix at the corresponding retention time and m/z; otherwise it was discarded. Some statistics were also collected.

• Converging towards a last EIC matrix

The statistics allowed a new barycentric calculation of each m/z value of 79 the previous EIC matrix. Two EICs which became closer than *mztol* were 80 merged into a new and temporary EIC whose m/z value was recalculated 81 by weighting the m/z with the signals used to fill the matrix. After ex-82 ploring all of the possibilities of merging EICs, a new EIC matrix was 83 initiated to zeros and filled as previously described. Several loops were 84 processed until a stop, no more than 5 m/z values merged in 3 successive 85 loops. The last EIC matrix was obtained. 86

• Cleaning up the last EIC matrix

The cleaning was achieved using a slightly modified version of the Durbin-88 Watson (DW) test. For each EIC forming a vector of length N_{RT} (the 89 number of retention times), a vector of length $N_{RT} - 1$ containing the 90 differences between two successive elements was calculated. The DW value 91 was the ratio between the norm of the difference vector and the norm 92 of the EIC vector. It ranged from 0 for continuous signals to 2 for very 93 discontinuous signals. EICs with DW values higher than dw were supposed 94 to be noise, so they were dropped. 95

96 2.2. Feature extraction from the EICs

Regular outputs from e.g. XCMS or MZMine2 are features, while regular outputs for EIC+ are matrices of EICs, the step before. Our goal was to show



Figure 1: Flow diagram of MZmine2-ADAP (a) and of EIC+ (b). The ADAP flow diagram was reproduced from figure 1 of Myers et al, Anal.Chem., 2017. The box "Filling an EIC matrix" in (b) performs almost the loop of the ADAP algorithm in (a), with the difference that, in case of "no", ADAP makes a new EIC with the data point whereas EIC+ drops it.

that a large part of the information concerning the reference features had been 99 captured within the EIC matrix. For comparison with the results obtained by 100 Li et al [2], features extraction from our EIC matrices was mandatory. It was 101 performed with a home-made tool, designed to be plugged into the workflow, 102 not described because we do not claim any novelty with it. The results were 103 good enough to use it, even if other algorithms may have performed better. To 104 save calculation time, a selection of the EICs corresponding to the reference 105 m/z values was performed on the EIC matrix before features extraction. 106

107 2.3. The MS datasets

Two MS datasets were considered. MS dataset 1 consisted in a single 108 Orbitrap MS data, named VI2016 AC 4A.raw acquired at the University 109 of Barcelona in 2016. The sample was a red wine spiked with acetaldehyde 110 prior to its analysis. Polyphenols had been targeted, 117 compounds had 111 been previously manually identified in this wine sample, following a previous 112 work on model solutions [9]. Nevertheless, as several chemical compounds 113 had exactly the same raw formulae, the number of different m/z values was 114 109. MS dataset 2 consisted in ten Orbitrap MS datasets described by Li et 115 al [2], and available with their metadata thanks to the Metabolights project 116 at: https://www.ebi.ac.uk/metabolights/MTBLS733. The spectra were named 117 SA1.raw to SA5.raw and SB1.raw to SB5.raw. The metadata consisted in a 118 list of 836 chemical compounds manually identified by Li et al into the 10 spec-119 tra, with their RTs, m/z values and signal intensities. Only MS1 spectra were 120 considered. Before processing, two successive conversions were performed: from 121 .raw to .md5 by MSConvert, then from .md5 to .h5 by HDFView. 122

123 2.4. The processings

All tools were coded in Scilab 6.0.2 (*https://www.scilab.org*) with the Fact toolbox, then wrapped into Galaxy tools. The centroid calculation was performed according to a previous work [1].

127 2.5. Tuning the EIC+ with dataset 1

The workflow concerning dataset 1 involved EIC extraction only, features 128 were not considered yet. The development and the very first application of 129 EIC+ was based on dataset 1 and the figures of merit described hereafter. 130 Preliminary experiments had concluded that the minimum of signal *eicsig* and 131 the Durbin-Watson threshold dw could be fairly set to 30000 and 1 respectively. 132 Variations around these values did not strongly modify the results (not shown). 133 Our attention was focused on *mztol*. Values were chosen from 0.0012 to 0.0060134 by steps of 0.0012. The algorithm was run with each of these values, yielding for 135 each mztol a list of experimental m/z values. Then, each reference m/z value 136 was seeked within these lists with m/z tolerances set to 0.0005, 0.0100, 0.0030, 137 0.0050 and 0.0100. 138

139 2.6. The benchmark, with dataset 2

The processing consisted in two successive steps: 1) extracting the EICs with EIC+; 2) extracting the features from the previously determined EICs.

142 2.6.1. Step 1: extracting the EICs with EIC+

The workflow concerning MS dataset 2 is described in figure 2. Compression was a means to save computational resources and time. It consisted in merging 5 successive RTs. When EICs had been extracted from each of the 5 datasets, they were averaged, yielding a single EIC file from SA and a single EIC file from SB. Then, features could be extracted.

148 2.6.2. Step 2: extracting the features

The features were extracted with a home-made tool using 4 parameters: i) the minimum and maximum sizes of the RT window, 0.3mn and 0.05mn respectively; ii) thresholds for the maximum of signal in each selected feature/peak and for the Durbin-Watson value, 100000 and 1 respectively.



Figure 2: Workflow applied to SA1-SA5. SB1-SB5 were processed similarily.

153 2.7. The figures of merit

Five figures of merit were calculated. The EICs m/z recovery and the EICs m/z unicity ratio were applied to dataset 1 for tuning the parameters, and to dataset2 for assessing the quality of EICs extraction. The true features, the accurately quantified true features and the RMSEP-root mean square error of prediction of the true features m/z values were applied to dataset 2 after features extraction.

• The EICs m/z recovery

The EIC recovery is N_R the number of chemical compounds identified by the processing. It should be compared to the total number of reference m/z values. • The EICs m/z unicity ratio

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The $i^{th} m/z$ value from the m/z reference list of chemical compounds can be associated to $N_u^i m/z$ values of the EIC matrix, under a certain tolerance. The not-null N_u^i values were added and divided by N_R , yielding the unicity ratio:

unicity ratio =
$$\frac{\sum N_u^i}{N_R}$$

A ratio close to 1 suggests that there is non ambiguity of identification between the m/z values from the reference list and the m/z values from the EIC matrix.

• True features and accurately quantified true features

Our experimental features were compared to the reference features pro-168 vided by Li et al on the basis of their m/z values, their retention times 169 and their signal intensities. According to the same authors, true features 170 verified simultaneously shifts in m/z values and RTs lower than thresholds 171 set to 10 ppm and 0.3 minutes respectively. One of our first motivations 172 was to determine chemical compositions from the molecular weights of the 173 ions, so we compared the m/z values on the basis of a mass unit, rather 174 than of a percent which depends on the m/z values. For a comparison as 175 fair as possible with the previous benchmark of Li et al, the median of the 176 836 reference m/z values was calculated, the value of 386 obtained. There-177 fore, the threshold was set to 10 ppm of 386, that is 0.00386 mass units. 178 For the retention times, no threshold was used. Our algorithm provided 179 the start and stop RTs, the test was passed when the reference RTs fell 180 within this range. Then, accurately quantified true features corresponded 181 to true features for which the experimental SB/SA signal ratio did not 182 differ from more than 20% from the reference ratio determined manually 183 by Li et al and refered to as fold changes in their data. 184

• The RMSEP of the true features m/z values

Let \mathbf{m}_{ref} and \mathbf{m}_{exp} be vectors containing the N reference m/z values and the N experimental m/z values associated to the N true features defined above. The RMSEP-root mean square error of prediction was calculated for SA then for SB according to Equation 1, with $\mathbf{d} = \mathbf{m}_{ref} - \mathbf{m}_{exp}$.

$$RMSEP = \sqrt{\frac{\mathbf{d}^T \mathbf{d}}{N}} \tag{1}$$

¹⁹⁰ 3. Results and discussion

Results concerning the tuning of the parameters for dataset 1 were gathered into table 1. The best solution should present the highest recovery percent and the lowest unicity ratio, while *mztol* being as low as possible: mztol = 0.0024was chosen. Then a processing of dataset 2 was performed with the parameters defined above, i.e. mztol = 0.0024, eicsig = 30000 and dw = 1, which are also

EICs m/z recovery						EICs m/z unicity ratio						
mztol	m/z tolerance, $\times 10^{E4}$					mztol	m/z tolerance, $\times 10^{E4}$					
	with reference values						with reference values					
	5	10	30	50	100			5	10	30	50	100
0.0012	23	50	93	94	95]	0.0012	1	1	1.06	1.18	1.23
0.0018	24	55	94	98	99		0.0018	1	1	1.03	1.12	1.17
0.0024	26	55	100	103	103		0.0024	1	1	1.01	1.07	1.16
0.0030	26	59	98	102	103		0.0030	1	1	1	1.05	1.13
0.0036	27	63	101	105	106		0.0036	1	1	1	1.05	1.10
0.0048	31	66	101	105	106		0.0048	1	1	1	1.01	1.08
0.0060	33	62	103	106	108		0.0060	1	1	1	1.00	1.05

Table 1: Two figures of merit calculated for dataset 1. The number of different m/z values from the reference list is 109.

the default parameters. This choice was supported by similar results previously obtained on two other datasets, not reported here. Using the EIC+ algorithm, two EIC matrices $\mathbf{X_{sa}}$ and $\mathbf{X_{sb}}$ of dimensions (2484 × 19958) and (2475 × 18773) were obtained from the five SA and the five SB MS data of Li et al, respectively. The first value was the number of retention times, the second the number of EICs. $\mathbf{X_{sa}}$ presented 800 EICs, and $\mathbf{X_{sb}}$ 799, whose m/z values corresponded to reference features, see table 2.

Dataset	$\mathbf{X}_{\mathbf{sa}}$	$\rm X_{sb}$
Total number of EICs	19958	18773
Number of selected EICs	800	799
Unicity ratio	1.015	1.011
RMSEP of m/z values	0.00044	0.00044
DW value	0.27	0.27

Table 2: EICs extraction from SA and SB. The threshold on the m/z values between selected EICs and reference features was 0.0030.

Note that the EICs extraction did not provide information on the reference 203 features that could be identified, 0, 1, 2 or more by EIC. To allow a comparison 204 with the results of Li et al, features were extracted from the selected EICs of 205 X_{sa} and X_{sb} , yielding 3757 and 3531 peaks/features respectively, an average of 206 4-5 by EIC. Some integration problems were due to the different EIC shapes, as 207 observed in Figure 3. Automatic integration was easy with well-defined peaks, 208 as in Figure 4(a) and (b). On the other hand, as in Figure 4(d), automatic 209 integration failed because of the complexity of the signal -here a long RT-. Thus, 210 the visualization of an EIC can be helpful to assess the quality of integration of 211 its features. Manual integration would have recovered as accurately quantified 212 11 features which failed the automatic integration. However this result was not 213 considered any more, Li et al based their benchmark on automatic integration 214



Figure 3: Dataset 2, the diversity of EICs illustrated with four examples from SA



Figure 4: Dataset 2, diversity of features shapes for SA and SB in blue and red, respectively. Features (a), (b) and (c) were correctly integrated , but not for feature (d) whose RTs did not match between SA and SB.

and so did we. All the results concerning the features were made available as a 215 spreadsheet file in the supplementary material. A summary is presented in table 216 3. The numbers of true features and accurately quantified true features were 217 820 and 787 respectively. These scores (820 - 787) were good compared to the 218 results obtained by Li et al: 748 - 482 for Compound Discoverer, 799 - 654 for 219 MS-Dial, 820-731 for XCMS and 769-761 for MZMine2. Then it is important 220 to point out that Li et al tuned their algorithms with the same datasets analyzed 221 in their paper, while we used another dataset. Their approach led to the best 222 performance of each software, relevant for their benchmark but not in most non-223 targeted analysis, the reference compounds being unknown. Its simplicity of use 224 constitutes a real added-value for the EIC+ algorithm, even if the calculation 225 takes time. 226

number of reference features	836
	000
number of true features	820
number of accurately quantified true features	787
RMSEP of m/z values from SA ($N = 820$)	0.00042 u
RMSEP of m/z values from SB ($N = 820$)	$0.00045 \ u$
shift in RT	$0.3\pm0.1~\mathrm{mn}$

Table 3: Summary of the features extraction issued from datasets 2. Inspired from Li et al [2], the true features verify: $\Delta m/z < 0.00386$ and the reference RT fall within the experimental RT range, for both SA and SB. True features become accurately quantified when their experimental SB/SA signal ratio does not vary from more than 20 p.cent from the reference ratio. RMSEP is the root mean square error of prediction.

Some attention was also paid to the errors of prediction for the RTs and for 227 the m/z values. RTs showed a shift of 0.30 minutes between our estimations 228 and the reference RTs, see Figure 5(a), certainly due to a different calculation; 229 our estimations were based on the median RTs. The RMSEP on m/z values 230 were 0.00056 and 0.00052 for SA and SB respectively, but errors of prediction 231 were lower for a majority of samples. From figure 5(b) corresponding to SA, 232 more than 650 m/z values present differences under or equal to 0.0002. With 233 such accuracy, the determination of raw formulae from experimental m/z values 234 becomes possible. 235

236 4. Conclusion

Our *EIC*+ algorithm presented a good recovery of true features and a good 237 accuracy of the calculated m/z values, standing the comparison with XCMS, 238 MZMine2 or Xcalibur. But its most interesting characteristic relies on a few 239 (3) and self-explanatory tuning parameters, a threshold on the m/z values, a 240 threshold on the signal intensities and a threshold on the noise estimated by 241 the Durbin-Watson value. Less parameters means easier and more reproducible 242 tunings. To give access to Galaxy users, the algorithm was deposited in the 243 Galaxy Test Toolshed (https://testtoolshed.g2.bx.psu.edu/) where it forms a 244

suite of 9 tools. The Galaxy Test Toolshed eases the installation in a Galaxy
web application. The code of the 9 tools can also be downloaded via a link to
a Mercurial git managed by Galaxy.



Figure 5: Number of observations in groups defined by the differences between experimental and reference values for retention times (a) and for m/z values (b)

248 5. Acknowledgement

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254 6.

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