

MrBayes 3.2.2 with compound Dirichlet priors

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Introduction

MrBayes version 3.2.2 implements the compound Dirichlet priors for branch lengths described by Rannala et al. (2012) and Zhang et al. (2012). Compared with the exponential and uniform priors for branch lengths in previous versions of MrBayes, the Dirichlet priors appear more reasonable and may avoid the problem of extremely long trees, as discussed by Brown et al. (2010) and Marshall (2010). This version also implements the two-exponential prior on internal and external branch lengths described by Yang & Rannala (2005) and Yang (2007).

I suggest that before analyzing your own data, you run the program without data (mcmc data=no) to confirm that the posterior estimates are consistent with the priors. Also if you analyze the lizards data set (Sceloporus.nex) of Leaché and Mulcahy (2007), you should be able to duplicate the results of table 3 in Zhang et al. (2012). Under GTR+ Γ_4 , the posterior mean and 95% CI of the tree length is 1.824 (1.689, 1.958) for `gammadir(1,1,1,1)`, and is 1.821 (1.688, 1.954) for `invgamdir(3,2,1,1)`.

Commands for compound Dirichlet priors

Gamma prior on the tree length

```
prset brlenspr=unconstrained:gammadir( $\alpha_T, \beta_T, \alpha, c$ );
```

α_T and β_T are the shape and rate parameters of the gamma distribution on the tree length.

We use $\alpha_T=1$ by default, while the prior mean of the tree length is α_T / β_T . α and c are the parameters of the Dirichlet prior on the proportional branch lengths. α is inversely related to the variance of the branch lengths, while c is the ratio of the prior means for the internal and external branch lengths. $\alpha = c = 1$ specifies the uniform Dirichlet distribution.

Inverse gamma prior on the tree length

```
prset brlenspr=unconstrained:invgamdir( $\alpha_T, \beta_T, \alpha, c$ );
```

This prior is heavier-tailed than gamma. We use $\alpha_T = 3$ by default, while the prior mean of the tree length is $\beta_T / (\alpha_T - 1)$.

Commands for two-exponential prior

```
prset brlenspr=unconstrained:twoexp( $r_I, r_E$ );
```

r_I and r_E are parameters for internal branches and external branches respectively. We use $r_I = 100$, $r_E = 10$ by default, while $r_I = r_E = 10$ is equivalent to the default prior `exponential(10)`.

The three commands above are newly introduced in version 3.2.2. They all can be used

together with other commands in `prset`. For example,
`prset statefreqpr=fixed(equal) brlenspr=uncon:gamma(1,.5,.8,1);`

References

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- Rannala, B., T. Zhu, and Z. Yang. 2012. Tail paradox, partial identifiability and influential priors in Bayesian branch length inference. *Mol. Biol. Evol.* 29:325-335.
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- Zhang, C., B. Rannala, and Z. Yang. 2012. Robustness of compound Dirichlet priors for Bayesian inference of branch lengths. *Syst. Biol.* 61:779-784.