Comparing Least Squares Calculations

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Abstract

Many statistics methods require one or more least squares problems to be solved. There are several ways to perform this calculation, using objects from the base R system and using objects in the classes defined in the `Matrix` package.

We compare the speed of some of these methods on a very small example and on a example for which the model matrix is large and sparse.

1 Linear least squares calculations

Many statistical techniques require least squares solutions

$$\widehat{\boldsymbol{\beta}} = \arg\min_{\boldsymbol{\beta}} \|\boldsymbol{y} - \boldsymbol{X}\boldsymbol{\beta}\|^2 \tag{1}$$

where $\boldsymbol{X}$ is an $n \times p$ model matrix ($p \leq n$), $\boldsymbol{y}$ is n-dimensional and $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ is p dimensional. Most statistics texts state that the solution to (1) is

$$\widehat{\boldsymbol{\beta}} = \left(\boldsymbol{X}^{\mathsf{T}}\boldsymbol{X}\right)^{-1}\boldsymbol{X}^{\mathsf{T}}\boldsymbol{y} \tag{2}$$

when $\boldsymbol{X}$ has full column rank (i.e. the columns of $\boldsymbol{X}$ are linearly independent) and all too frequently it is calculated in exactly this way.

1.1 A small example

As an example, let's create a model matrix, `mm`, and corresponding response vector, `y`, for a simple linear regression model using the `Formaldehyde` data.

```
> data(Formaldehyde)
> str(Formaldehyde)
```

```
`data.frame':	6 obs. of  2 variables:
 $ carb  : num  0.1 0.3 0.5 0.6 0.7 0.9
 $ optden: num  0.086 0.269 0.446 0.538 0.626 0.782
```

```
> print(mm <- cbind(1, Formaldehyde$carb))

     [,1] [,2]
[1,]    1  0.1
[2,]    1  0.3
[3,]    1  0.5
[4,]    1  0.6
[5,]    1  0.7
[6,]    1  0.9

> print(y <- Formaldehyde$optden)

[1] 0.086 0.269 0.446 0.538 0.626 0.782
```

Using `t` to evaluate the transpose, `solve` to take an inverse, and the `%*%` operator for matrix multiplication, we can translate 2 into the S language as

```
> solve(t(mm) %*% mm) %*% t(mm) %*% y

            [,1]
[1,] 0.005085714
[2,] 0.876285714
```

On modern computers this calculation is performed so quickly that it cannot be timed accurately in R

```
> sysgc.time(solve(t(mm) %*% mm) %*% t(mm) %*% y)

[1] 0 0 0 0 0
```

and it provides essentially the same results as the standard `lm.fit` function that is called by `lm`.

```
> dput(c(solve(t(mm) %*% mm) %*% t(mm) %*% y))

c(0.00508571428571444, 0.876285714285715)

> dput(lm.fit(mm, y)$coefficients)

c(0.00508571428571435, 0.876285714285714)
```

1.2 A large example

For a large, ill-conditioned least squares problem, such as that described in Koenker and Ng (2003), the literal translation of (2) does not perform well.

```
> library(Matrix)
> data(mm, package = "Matrix")
> data(y, package = "Matrix")
> mm = as(mm, "matrix")
> dim(mm)
```

```
[1] 1850  712
```

```
> sysgc.time(naive.sol <- solve(t(mm) %*% mm) %*% t(mm) %*%
+     y)
```

```
[1] 3.55 0.15 3.70 0.00 0.00
```

Because the calculation of a “cross-product” matrix, such as $\boldsymbol{X}^{\mathsf{T}}\boldsymbol{X}$ or $\boldsymbol{X}^{\mathsf{T}}\boldsymbol{y}$, is a common operation in statistics, the `crossprod` function has been provided to do this efficiently. In the single argument form `crossprod(mm)` calculates $\boldsymbol{X}^{\mathsf{T}}\boldsymbol{X}$, taking advantage of the symmetry of the product. That is, instead of calculating the $712^2 = 506944$ elements of $\boldsymbol{X}^{\mathsf{T}}\boldsymbol{X}$ separately, it only calculates the $(712 \cdot 713)/2 = 253828$ elements in the upper triangle and replicates them in the lower triangle. Furthermore, there is no need to calculate the inverse of a matrix explicitly when solving a linear system of equations. When the two argument form of the `solve` function is used the linear system

$$\left(\boldsymbol{X}^{\mathsf{T}}\boldsymbol{X}\right)\widehat{\boldsymbol{\beta}} = \boldsymbol{X}^{\mathsf{T}}\boldsymbol{y} \tag{3}$$

is solved directly.

Combining these optimizations we obtain

```
> sysgc.time(cpod.sol <- solve(crossprod(mm), crossprod(mm,
+     y)))
```

```
[1] 0.70 0.02 0.72 0.00 0.00
```

```
> all.equal(naive.sol, cpod.sol)
```

```
[1] TRUE
```

On this computer (2.0 GHz Pentium-4, 1 GB Memory, Goto’s BLAS) the crossprod form of the calculation is about four times as fast as the naive calculation. In fact, the entire crossprod solution is faster than simply calculating $\boldsymbol{X}^{\mathsf{T}}\boldsymbol{X}$ the naive way.

```
> sysgc.time(t(mm) %*% mm)
```

```
[1] 0.83 0.02 0.85 0.00 0.00
```

1.3 Least squares calculations with Matrix classes

The `crossprod` function applied to a single matrix takes advantage of symmetry when calculating the product but does not retain the information that the product is symmetric (and positive semidefinite). As a result the solution of (3) is performed using general linear system solver based on an LU decomposition when it would be faster, and more stable numerically, to use a Cholesky decomposition. The Cholesky decomposition could be used but it is rather awkward

```
> sysgc.time(ch <- chol(crossprod(mm)))
```

```
[1] 0.52 0.01 0.53 0.00 0.00
```

```
> sysgc.time(chol.sol <- backsolve(ch, forwardsolve(ch, crossprod(mm,
+     y), upper = TRUE, trans = TRUE)))
```

```
[1] 0.07 0.09 0.16 0.00 0.00
```

```
> all.equal(chol.sol, naive.sol)
```

```
[1] TRUE
```

The `Matrix` package uses the S4 class system (Chambers, 1998) to retain information on the structure of matrices from the intermediate calculations. A general matrix in dense storage, created by the `Matrix` function, has class `"geMatrix"` but its cross-product has class `"poMatrix"`. The `solve` methods for the `"poMatrix"` class use the Cholesky decomposition.

```
> data(mm, package = "Matrix")
> mm = as(mm, "geMatrix")
> class(crossprod(mm))
```

```
[1] "poMatrix"
attr(,"package")
[1] "Matrix"
```

```
> sysgc.time(Mat.sol <- solve(crossprod(mm), crossprod(mm,
+     y)))
```

```
[1] 0.52 0.00 0.52 0.00 0.00
```

```
> all.equal(naive.sol, as(Mat.sol, "matrix"))
```

```
[1] TRUE
```

Furthermore, any method that calculates a decomposition or factorization stores the resulting factorization with the original object so that it can be reused without recalculation.

```
> xpx = crossprod(mm)
> xpy = crossprod(mm, y)
> sysgc.time(solve(xpx, xpy))
```

```
[1] 0.07 0.01 0.08 0.00 0.00
```

```
> sysgc.time(solve(xpx, xpy))
```

```
[1] 0.01 0.00 0.01 0.00 0.00
```

The model matrix `mm` is sparse; that is, most of the elements of `mm` are zero. The `Matrix` package incorporates special methods for sparse matrices, which produce the fastest results of all.

```
> data(mm, package = "Matrix")
> class(mm)

[1] "cscMatrix"
attr(,"package")
[1] "Matrix"

> sysgc.time(sparse.sol <- solve(crossprod(mm), crossprod(mm,
+     y)))

[1] 0.03 0.00 0.04 0.00 0.00

> all.equal(naive.sol, as(sparse.sol, "matrix"))

[1] TRUE
```

As with other classes in the `Matrix` package, the `sscMatrix` retains any factorization that has been calculated although, in this case, the decomposition is so fast that it is difficult to determine the difference in the solution times.

```
> xpx = crossprod(mm)
> xpy = crossprod(mm, y)
> sysgc.time(solve(xpx, xpy))

[1] 0.01 0.00 0.01 0.00 0.00

> sysgc.time(solve(xpx, xpy))

[1] 0 0 0 0 0
```

References

John M. Chambers. *Programming with Data*. Springer, New York, 1998. ISBN 0-387-98503-4. 4

Roger Koenker and Pin Ng. SparseM: A sparse matrix package for R. *J. of Statistical Software*, 8(6), 2003. 2