

Lipidome visualisation, comparison, and analysis in a vector space

Short title: Lipidome Analysis

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For submission to PLoS Computational Biology

20 **Abstract**

21 A shallow neural network was used to embed lipid structures in a 2- or 3-dimensional
 22 space with the goal that structurally similar species have similar vectors. Tests on
 23 complete lipid databanks show that the method automatically produces distributions
 24 which follow conventional lipid classifications. The embedding is accompanied by the
 25 web-based software, Lipidome Projector. This displays user lipidomes as 2D or 3D
 26 scatterplots for quick exploratory analysis, quantitative comparison and interpretation
 27 at a structural level.

28 **Author summary**

29 Lipids are not just the basis of membranes. They carry signals and metabolic energy.
 30 This means that the presence, absence, and quantity of lipids reflects a cell's
 31 biochemical state - starving, nourished, sick or healthy. Lipidomics (measuring all
 32 lipids in a biological specimen) provides lists of the chemical species and their
 33 quantities.

34 We have used a shallow neural network from natural language modelling to embed
 35 lipids in a continuous vector space. Firstly, this means that similar molecules have
 36 similar positions in this space. Conventional lipid categories cluster automatically.
 37 Secondly, the accompanying web-based software, Lipidome Projector imports a
 38 lipidome and displays it as a set of points. Reading several lipidomes at once allows
 39 quantitative and structural comparisons. Combined with the ability to show structure
 40 and abundance diagrams, the software allows exploratory analysis and interpretation
 41 of lipidomics datasets.

Introduction

Lipids remind one of membranes or fats, but they also carry energy and signals, so one may assume that the set of lipids in a sample reflects the health and metabolic state of a tissue or organism. Mass spectrometry provides lipidome information, but a list of 10^2 - 10^4 lipids and quantities is not easily interpretable. For exploratory analysis, one would like a method that highlights chemical trends and shows how samples differ with respect to lipid structures and quantities. Given a set of mass spectrometry peaks that have been assigned to lipids, the idea is to display lipidomes as scatterplots in a 2- or 3-dimensional space. This requires two steps. First, there must be a continuous vector space such that each lipid gets distinct coordinates. Second, one needs software to display and compare plots interactively. The software should make it easy to relate points back to their names and chemical structures.

The aims here are different to those of other lipidomics software packages. If one wants to treat a lipidome similarly to gene expression data, one can look for changed levels of lipids or focus on molecules whose abundances are correlated [1–3]. If one wants to see a lipidome in terms of networks, there is network construction and display software [4]. Our focus is different. Lipidome Projector lets one quickly highlight and interactively explore differences between groups of samples, with the simultaneous display of abundances and structures.

The first challenge is finding vectors for molecules for the two- and three-dimensional plots. Previous attempts applied ideas from string comparisons [5], but this was not without problems. Whatever notation one uses, a small change to a molecule can lead to a large change in a string representation such as SMILES [6], so the similarity metrics are fundamentally unstable. Kopczynski et al approached the problem with

66 elegant distance metrics, but this required some preconceptions about lipid structures
67 and used expensive graph similarity methods [7].

68 We come to the problem with slightly different ideas and some specific goals. The
69 method should be objective, unsupervised and require minimal chemical
70 preconceptions. Coordinates should be quite different for unrelated molecules, but
71 systematic changes such as extending the length of an aliphatic chain should give a
72 series of points near each other. Adding a phosphate or alcohol group to two different
73 molecules should change both coordinates in a similar manner. Our method for lipids
74 is a modified version of Mol2Vec [8], a technique from the small-molecule literature
75 which is, in turn, based on Word2Vec [9] a word embedding method from natural
76 language processing. To embed words, one first defines a vocabulary and gives
77 each word a unique token. In a text corpus, similar tokens appear in similar contexts
78 with reasonable probability, such that a token / context prediction task can be used to
79 train semantic vector representations. To apply the idea in chemistry, one constructs
80 a vocabulary of chemical fragments and trains a shallow network on a large set of
81 molecules to recognise surrounding contexts. Input fragments are represented by
82 integer identifiers derived from computed sparse connectivity fingerprints [10].
83 Fragment vectors come from hidden layer weights of the trained network and are
84 summed to produce vector representations of entire molecules.

85 Calculating the vector space model is performed once on a large set of lipid
86 structures and takes several hours. User lipidome data is simply matched to
87 precomputed vectors. Lipidome Projector, the browser-based application for
88 visualization and analysis, allows one to interactively explore lipidomes in the vector
89 space and additionally displays lipid abundance charts and molecular structures.

To judge our methods, we consider the distributions of lipids in the computed vector space and apply Lipidome Projector visualizations on three published lipidome datasets.

Materials and Methods

Lipid Vector Space

For training, the Lipid Maps Structure Database (LMSD) [11] and SwissLipids [12] (both accessed Jan 2023) were combined. SwissLipids entries were filtered to obtain lipids with valid SMILES at isomeric subspecies level. The combination of databases resulted in over 620 000 unique structures. RDKit [13] was used to convert all database entries to a consistent charge state and RDKit's implementation of extended connectivity fingerprints [10] was used to assign a unique identifier to each substructure of a specified radius around each atom. Substructure identifiers were ordered according to the position of the substructure's central atom within the molecule's canonical SMILES string.

A few small modifications to Mol2Vec were necessary. First, chirality was explicitly considered. Secondly, a parameter had to be adapted to capture differences in long alkyl chains. Mol2Vec descriptors for small molecules are usually built from fragments using atoms (radius 0) and their immediate neighbours (radius 1). For the much larger lipid structures, radii of size 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45 and 50 were used, resulting in just under three million unique fragments for the combination of databases. For each lipid, the set of fragments for each radius was used as a separate training sentence.

Gensim [14] was used to train the Word2Vec model with training parameters listed in Table S1. The network generated 100-dimensional substructure vectors, which were summed for each molecule. For visualization, the Barnes-Hut [15] version of t-

distributed stochastic neighbour embedding [16] as implemented in OpenTSNE [17] was used to reduce the 100-dimensional vector space to generate 2- and 3-dimensional vector sets (parameters listed in Table S2). The embedding process is summarised in Fig 1 A.

Fig 1. Vector Space Generation and Matching. (A) A lipid structure is decomposed into its substructures of different sizes represented by Morgan sparse fingerprint integers, which constitute the training data for Word2Vec. A molecule's vector is the sum of its substructure vectors and is projected to 2D or 3D with stochastic neighbour embedding. (B) The user provides a list of lipid species names and component constraints. Lipid names are parsed and matched to appropriate isomer names from the pre-parsed database. The component constraints are applied to filter the matches. Vectors of the remaining isomers are averaged for each lipid. Not illustrated is an additional step, in which database matching is attempted on the original names of unparsed lipid species.

Lipidome Processing

As part of building the system, entries from the lipid databases are stored along with their corresponding vectors and higher-level abbreviations for each isomer following previously defined levels [18]. When a user lipidome is imported, entries are matched against pre-calculated vectors (Fig 1 B). Goslin [19] is used to parse both databases and user data. It accepts common nomenclature, but should it fail, the process will look for a match based on user-provided names. This means that Lipidome Projector covers at least all entries from the union of SwissLipids and the LMSD that were successfully parsed by Goslin (S1 Dataset gives a list of translated class names).

Mass spectrometry often does not identify a lipid at the complete structure level [18] so additional steps are necessary to deal with this ambiguity. The software finds the

set of isomers that match the higher-level abbreviation, but not all members of this set will be plausible for the organism under consideration. To filter the list of possible lipids, Lipidome Projector expects a constraints list with allowed fatty acyls and long-chain bases. The remaining isomer vectors are averaged to produce a single representative vector.

Visualization and Analysis Software

Plots are generated using Plotly.py [20]. Marker sizes are derived from respective lipid abundances, to which either linear or min-max scaling is applied. Dash [20] is used to build the web-application front end. The rest of the application was built in Python [21] with pandas [22] used for data-table storage and manipulation. Parsing and matching are performed server-side. The original lipidome dataset together with the newly derived lipid names and computed vectors is stored inside the user's browser session and sent to the server for temporary processing operations such as averaging of samples or plot updates. Lipidome datasets and constraints are read in a simple table format.

Datasets

Publicly available lipidome datasets from drosophila [23], yeast [24] and mouse [25] were used for development and analysed as user cases. Python scripts for the extraction of the original data and formatting into formats appropriate for Lipidome Projector, as well as manually constructed respective FA and LCB constraint files are given in S2 dataset.

Results

Lipid Vector Space

We first consider the projection of lipids into a vector space by looking at the distributions of points for entries from the combined databases with a valid structure

and class. Are the vectors consistent with chemical intuition and database classification? Fig 2 A shows the entire lipid set in two dimensions (see S2 Fig for 3D version). With some exceptions, lipids within a category are grouped together in the vector space despite the underlying structural diversity. For the largest categories, glycerolipids (GL), glycerophospholipids (GP) and sphingolipids (SP) a clear separation can be observed with some overlap and outliers at some borders. To look in more detail, one can focus on the class level with the example of selected glycerophospholipid classes. Fig 2 B marks three clusters, which largely correspond to diacyl, mono-alkyl and plasmalogen glycerophospholipids respectively. This suggests that the embedding has mostly captured the chemical connectivity at the glycerol. Within each large cluster, phosphatidylinositols (PI) and phosphatidylcholines (PC) form their own subgroups with some local exceptions. For the other classes there are numerous smaller, intertwined clusters spread across the vector space. Also marked are a few unusual molecules with uncommon fatty acyl double bond structures such as (5E, 9E) or chains which are heavily methylated or even contain ladderane, a structural moiety seen in bacteria. These are positioned outside the main group as one might expect since the database is dominated by the biochemistry of mammals. The remaining plots in Fig 2 show how the lipid vectors capture chemical functional groups and their structural context. In Fig 2 C there is a general trend of more double bonds from left to right. Focusing on a local region shows that clustering is determined by lipid class (Fig 2 D) and fatty acyl double bond location and number (Fig 2 E). Additionally, one can see a systematic change in mass as one moves along clusters (Fig 2 F). These patterns suggest that the embedding captures gradual structural changes. This was further assessed using a contrived example borrowed from the literature [5]. Three sets of manually generated structures were added to the training data. The first two consist of series of

phosphatidylinositols with a successively longer fatty acyl chain. The sets are the same, except for the presence / absence of a double bond in the lengthening chain. Fig 3 B shows that growing an aliphatic chain gives progressively changing vector positions, while the presence of the double bond leads to a large, but consistent displacement. The third set consists of a series of ceramides, each of which is hydroxylated at a different position within its fatty acyl chain (Fig 3 A). The steps of the hydroxylated position translate into an almost linear series of vectors with the exception of an outlier near the acyl bond.

Fig 2. Vector Space (2D). (A) Entire vector space. Marker colour represents lipid category: Fatty acids (FA), glycerolipids (GL), glycerophospholipids (GP), sphingolipids (SP), sterol lipids (ST), prenol lipids (PR), saccharolipids (SL) and polyketides (PK). (B) Region of the vector space focused on selected glycerophospholipids: Glycerophosphates (PA), glycerophosphocholines (PC), glycerophosphoethanolamines (PE), glycerophosphoglycerols (PG), glycerophosphoinositols (PI) and glycerophosphoserines (PS). Marker colour: Lipid class. (C) Same region as in B, marker colour represents the number of fatty acyl double bonds. (D) Zoomed-in region of selected glycerophospholipids, marker colour represents lipid class. (E) Same region as in D, marker colour represents the double bond profile of the 2-sn fatty acyl. (F) Same region as in D, marker colour represents molecule mass.

Fig 3. Impact of Stepwise Structural Changes. (A) Local vector space region of manually added ceramide structures. Marker annotations denote the fatty acyl hydroxylation position. (B) Local vector space region of manually added phosphatidylinositol structures. Marker annotations denote the length of the 2-sn fatty acyl.

Another aspect of the quality of the vector space is its coverage of lipid classes, fatty acyls, and long-chain bases, which in our case, is completely dependent on the underlying databases and the parser. When lipidomes are imported, entries are discarded if they cannot be matched or if they are rejected by the constraint-based filtering. For the three example literature datasets used here, we implemented plausible FA / LCB constraints and performed the matching to the database. Reasonable manual preprocessing steps, such as re-formatting the data, removing duplicate entries, and adjusting unusual nomenclature were performed beforehand, and are available as Python scripts in S2 dataset. The processing statistics are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Matching statistics for development datasets.

Dataset	Num. lipids	Successfully matched	Parsed - not matched	Not parsed - not matched	Filtered
<i>Drosophila</i>	359	324 (90.3%)	9 (2.5%)	4 (1.1%)	22 (6.1%)
Yeast	249	235 (94.4%)	14 (5.6%)	0	0
LAMP3	209	199 (95.2%)	3 (1.4%)	0	7 (3.3%)

Visualization

One has to look at complete databases to judge the vector space and embedding of lipids. A user, however, would be interested in what one sees in their lipidome. We take three examples from the literature and look at the scatterplots in the light of the biochemistry noted by the original authors.

The first dataset consists of lipidomes of different *Drosophila melanogaster* larval tissue types (brain, fat body, gut, lipoprotein, salivary gland, wing disc) fed with different diets (plant food or yeast food) [23]. For our quick analysis, we averaged the

lipidome samples by tissue type. Carvalho et al noted that hexosyl ceramides (HexCer) and ether glycerophospholipids (O-) were only detected in gut and brain tissues respectively. Fig 4 A shows how this kind of feature can be easily observed and highlighted. Fig 4 B displays a comparison of fat body and lipoprotein tissue types focused on a glycerolipid region and highlights the expected large amounts of triacylglycerol (TG) species in the fat body and conversely an overabundance of diacylglycerols (DG) in the lipoprotein tissue, both noted in the original publication.

Fig 4. Lipidome Dataset Projections. (A) *Drosophila* dataset averaged over tissue type. HexCer and ether-linked GPs are only present in gut and brain tissues respectively. Min-max scaling of abundances was used to calculate marker area. (B) *Drosophila* dataset zoomed in to a glycerolipid region of the vector space showing selected tissue samples (same marker scaling as in A). (C) Yeast lipidomes – comparison between the means of the wildtype and the Elo2 and Elo3 strains with min-max marker scaling. (D) Yeast dataset zoomed in on a region of partially annotated sphingolipids (same marker scaling as in C). Elo2 and Elo3 strains contain species with shorter fatty acyls. (E) Mouse lung lipidome dataset lipids coloured by the log₂ abundance fold change between the wildtype and LAMP3-KO asthma conditions. Certain lipids with relatively high change values are annotated. (F) PG region comparison between wildtype and LAMP3-KO asthma conditions. Linear scaling applied to marker sizes.

The second example is focussed on a yeast study comparing the wildtype strain (BY4741) and mutants that were defective in fatty acyl elongation (Elo1, Elo2, Elo3) [24]. Two different growth temperatures (24°C and 37°C) were considered. The study showed that the Elo2 and Elo3 strains produce sphingolipids with shorter fatty acyl chains. We averaged the samples by strain, filtered Elo1, and projected the full

results onto our vector space (Fig 4 C). Fig 4 D displays sphingolipid abundances from the wildtype strain compared to average abundances from the Elo2 and Elo3 group, clearly showing that species with shorter fatty acyls occurring in the Elo strains with a higher prevalence.

The third dataset is taken from a study of LAMP3-deficient mice, evaluating the role of this protein in the lung [25]. The two different conditions genotype (wildtype / LAMP3-KO) and challenge (none / allergen induced asthma) resulted in four groups of mice. Fig 4 E and F show that if we average the samples by genotype and challenge and compare the wildtype to the LAMP3-KO genotypes in the asthma group, there is a large reduction in phosphatidylglycerols in the LAMP3-KO group, as noted by the authors. Fig 4 E also shows the increased abundance of diacylglycerols and decreased amounts of certain sphingolipids and phosphatidylinositols in the wildtype group.

Discussion

There are two aspects to this work. Firstly, there is the fundamental embedding of molecules in a low-dimensional space. Secondly, there are practical issues and the software implementation.

From the point of view of the vector space, there are some surprising observations. The lipid coordinates agree with chemical intuition, although the training was completely unsupervised. The lipids compositions from myriads of substructure vectors on their own produce a systematically organized vector space, which is improved by substructure vector training. Not only were classic lipid categories separated, but unusual structures are given coordinates on the edges of the common lipid classes (Fig 2 B). The local and global structure of the embedding is interesting.

Globally, the space reflects broad classes, but locally, it is remarkable that moving a hydroxylation along a chain gives a set of points near each other and almost lying on a smooth curve. There is reason to say this is unexpected. Consider the space as first calculated in 100 dimensions. Maybe there are directions corresponding to phosphorylation, chain extension, moving bonds and other chemical properties. When we project the space to two or three dimensions, one will inevitably lose information. The local structure is a tribute to stochastic nearest neighbour-embedding rather than any invention on our part.

There are also differences compared to other vector spaces for lipids. Marella et al calculated the differences between molecules using the differences between string representations of the molecules [5]. This suffers from the instability of string representations. Kopczynski et al avoided this problem by using graph-based similarity [7]. There is a less obvious difference in the methods. Kopczynski et al calculated distances between lipids and used principal coordinate analysis to get low dimensional coordinates from the distance matrix. This is deterministic, but discarding everything after the few most important eigenvectors is a brutal truncation. Our method also requires dimensional reduction, but our experiments with principal component analysis suggested that too much local structure was lost. We would concede that stochastic neighbour embedding is not deterministic, the cost function details are ad hoc and it does not have the geometric rigour of principal component analysis. It does, however, seem to preserve relationships between neighbouring molecules.

Kopczynski et al's approach does admit one feature that we lack. We construct a space based on all known lipids and then show all lipidomes in this context. In contrast, Kopczynski et al build a new space for each set of lipidomes. This allows

them to construct a very natural measure for the similarity of lipidomes and lends itself to clustering of datasets.

Continuing in this self-critical vein, the non-determinism of our approach might be considered a disadvantage. Repeating the training and dimensional reduction always gives slightly different results. With more training time or different parameters, one might get even better results. Having experimented in this direction, we suspect that this is not a useful pursuit. It would be more profitable to consider completely different strategies. Graph convolutional networks would be a natural fit to molecular structures [26] and one could experiment with novel dimensionality reduction methods such as UMAP [27].

Besides the embedding, other issues should be addressed. We are not the first group to lament the inherent inconsistency of lipid nomenclature [18]. Synonyms such as SM(d18:1/14:0) and SM 18:1;2/14:0 are tedious but can be handled mechanically by packages such as Goslin. A more fundamental problem are lipid notation ambiguities which cannot be solved by any parser.

In this study we encountered ambiguities in the position, number and precise location of double bonds and hydroxylations of sphingolipids. Some line notations would allow one to denote some ambiguities [28], but lipidome data is typically not stored in such formats. Another problem is that a user lipidome may contain species that are not in the training set (SwissLipids + LMSD). This problem will be alleviated when we implement an on-the-fly method to generate structures and respective vectors from nomenclature only.

The second half of this work is the software. With the vector space precomputed, it is not too demanding to run on an ordinary laptop. The web application stores lipidome

data on the client side and sends it to the server for processing operations. This does require a fair amount of client-server communication, but we are currently moving more processing tasks to the client's browser. Software is also a matter of taste. The current release displays properties such as relative abundances using very compact methods, but these might at first seem foreign to a user.

There are clear directions for the future. There will be improvements to the underlying vector space as we experiment with the embedding model and as the databases are updated. The software will change as a result of user experience, and it will automatically benefit from the evolution of the parsing package [19]. Finally, we plan proper integration with biochemical pathway software. As it stands, the vector space is conceptually useful, and the software fills a practical niche.

Acknowledgments

We are indebted to Dr Nils Hoffmann for advice and consolation beyond the call of reasonable duty. Dr Dominik Kopczynski provided invaluable insights on many technical issues.

Availability

Lipidome Projector is available for download (https://www.github.com/olzhabaev/lipidome_projector) and released under the MIT license. It is a web-application that can be run locally or deployed to a server. The repository has pre-computed vectors for and pre-parsed versions of the Lipid Maps and SwissLipids databases. The software distribution also includes modules for the pre-processing of the databases and a complete recalculation of the vector space. An instance of Lipidome Projector is available at: <https://lipidomeprojector.zbh.uni-hamburg.de/>

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Supporting information

Figures

S1 Fig. Lipidome Projector Interface, *Drosophila* dataset. Top left: Lipidome

dataset scatter plot; Top right: Settings, data operations and abundance charts.

Bottom: Abundance and feature tables.

S2 Fig. Vector Space (3D). (A) Projection of the entire vector space. Marker colour

represents lipid category: Fatty acids (FA), glycerolipids (GL), glycerophospholipids

(GP), sphingolipids (SP), sterol lipids (ST), prenol lipids (PR), saccharolipids (SL) and

polyketides (PK). (B) Region of the vector space focused on a set of selected

glycerophospholipids: Glycerophosphates (PA), glycerophosphocholines (PC),

glycerophosphoethanolamines (PE), glycerophosphoglycerols (PG),

glycerophosphoinositols (PI) and glycerophosphoserines (PS). Marker colour: Lipid

class. (C) Same region as in B. Marker colour: Number of fatty acyl double bonds.

(D) Zoomed in region of selected glycerophospholipids. Marker colour: Lipid class.

(E) Same region as in D. Marker colour: Double bond profile of the 2-sn fatty acyl. (F)

Same region as in D. Marker colour: Molecule mass.

Tables

S1 Table. Word2Vec Embedding Parameters.

S2 Table. Stochastic Neighbour Embedding Parameters.

Data

S1 Dataset. List of classes present in LMSD and SwissLipids recognised by the Goslin parser in translated representation.

S2 Dataset. Python scripts with instructions for the extraction and transformation of original datasets; Transformed datasets; Dataset FA / LCB constraints.

S3 Dataset. Partially interactive HTMLs of vector space and dataset projection scatter plots.

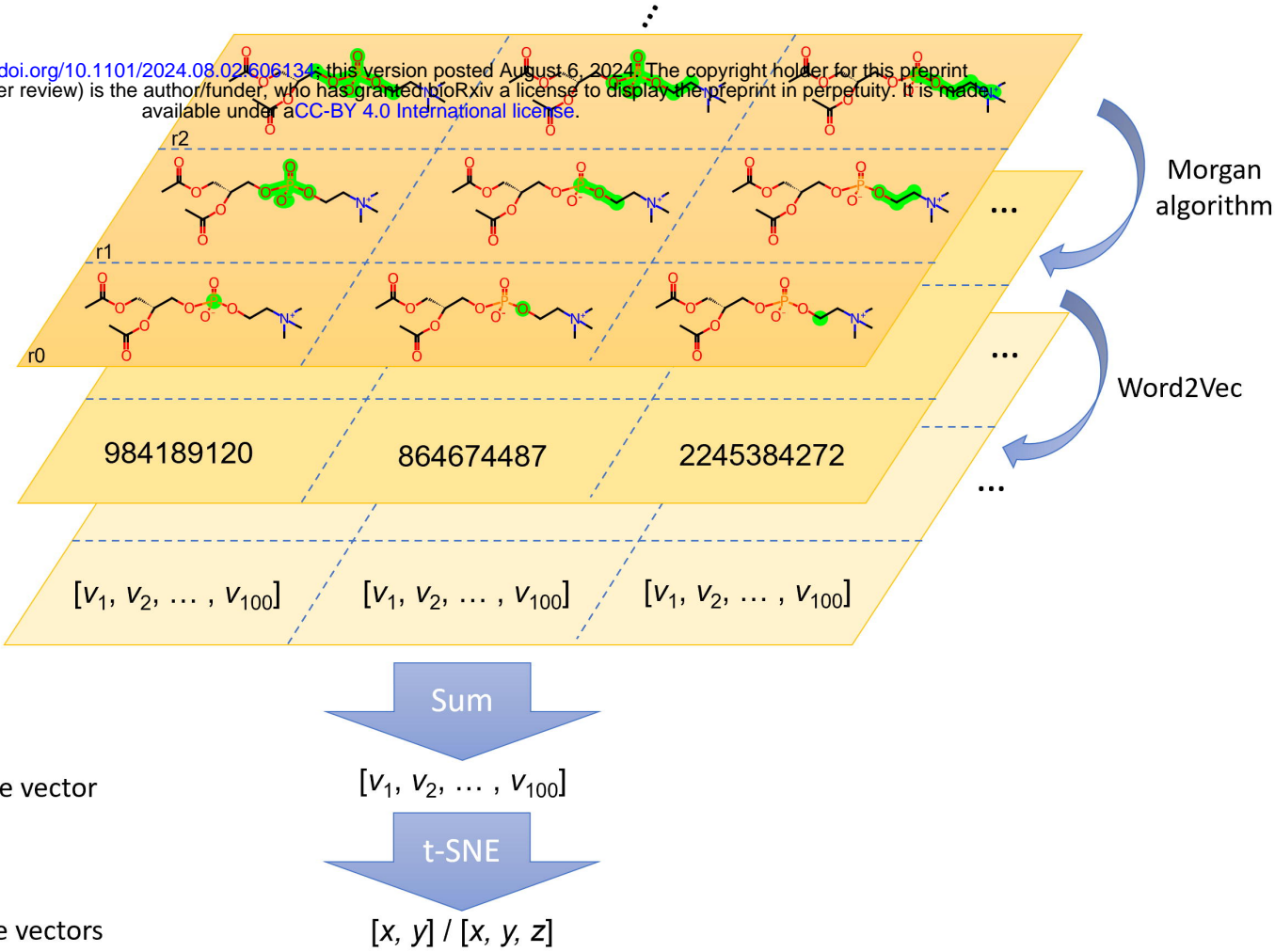
A

bioRxiv preprint doi: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2024.08.02.606134>; this version posted August 6, 2024. The copyright holder for this preprint (which was not certified by peer review) is the author/funder, who has granted bioRxiv a license to display the preprint in perpetuity. It is made available under aCC-BY 4.0 International license.

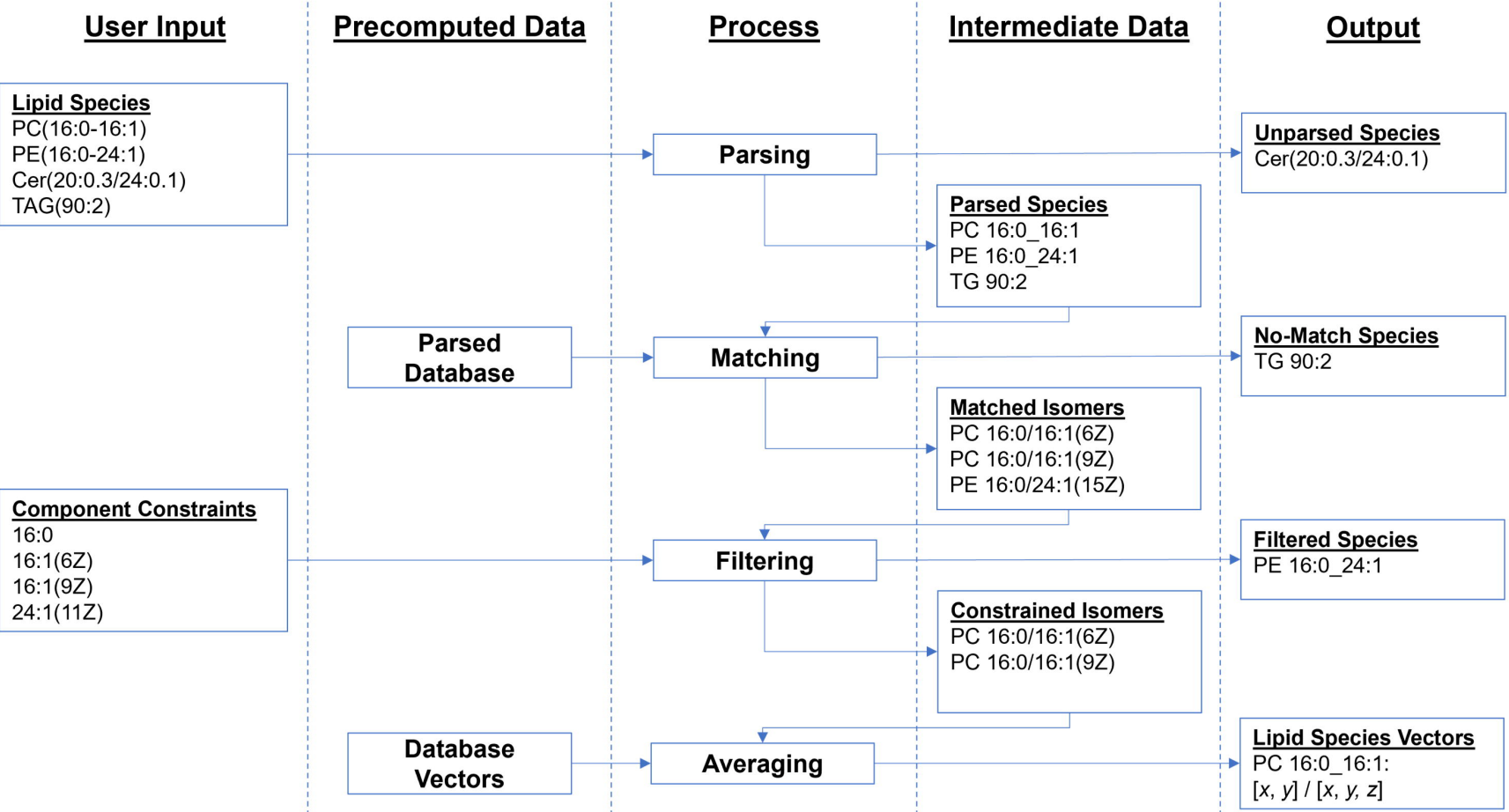
Substructures

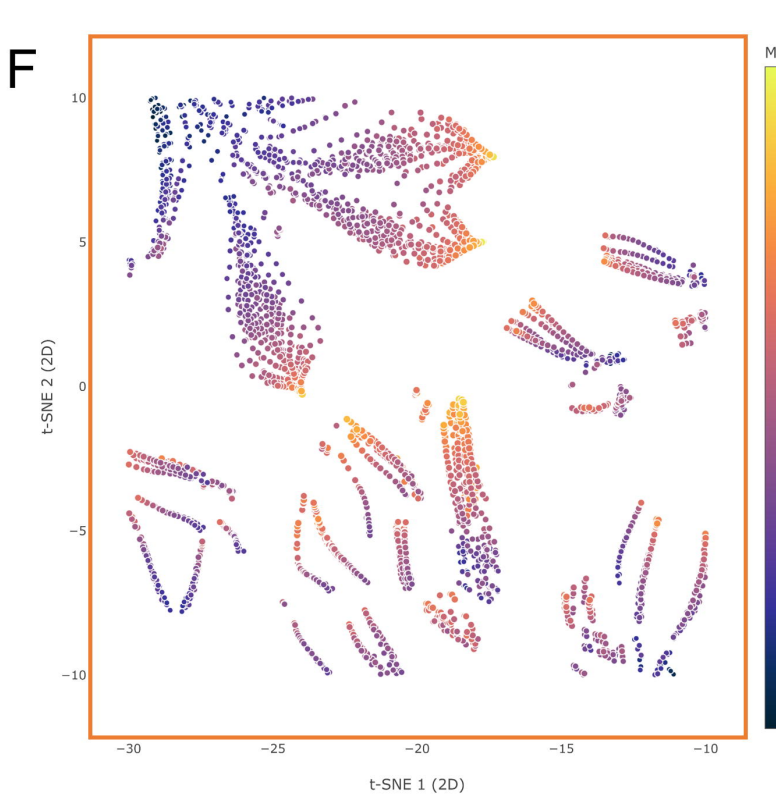
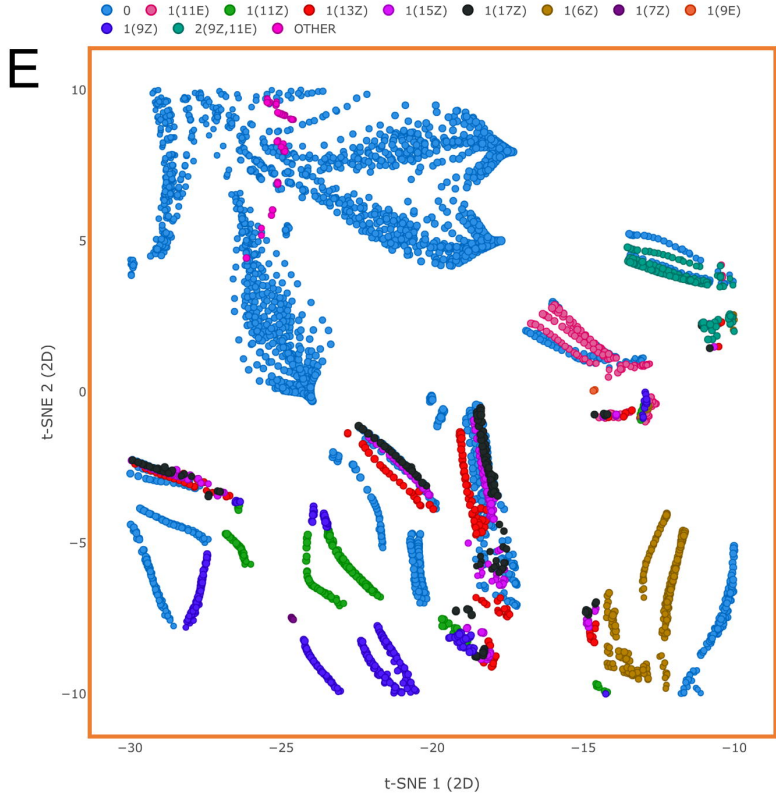
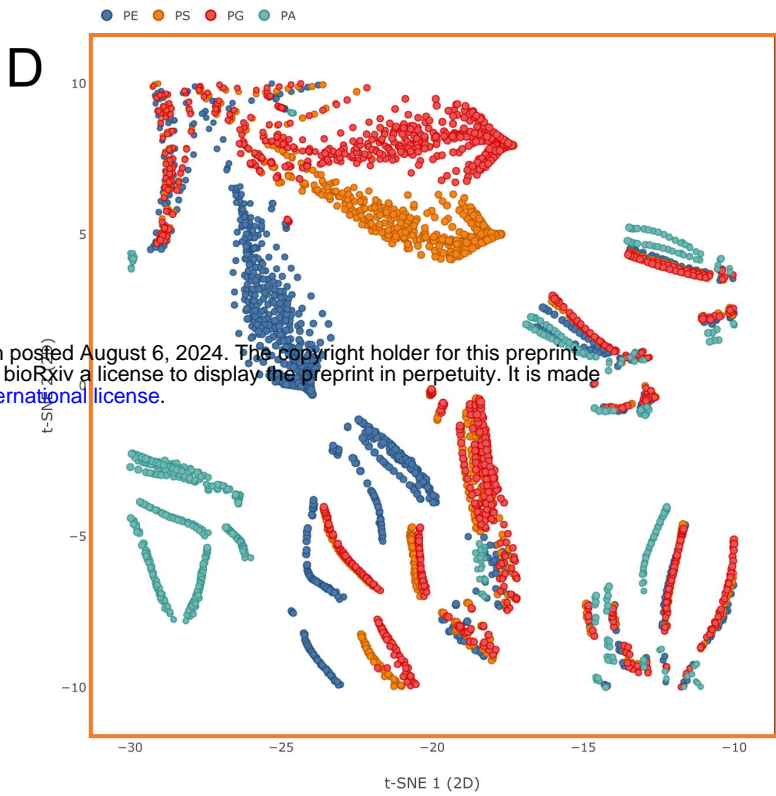
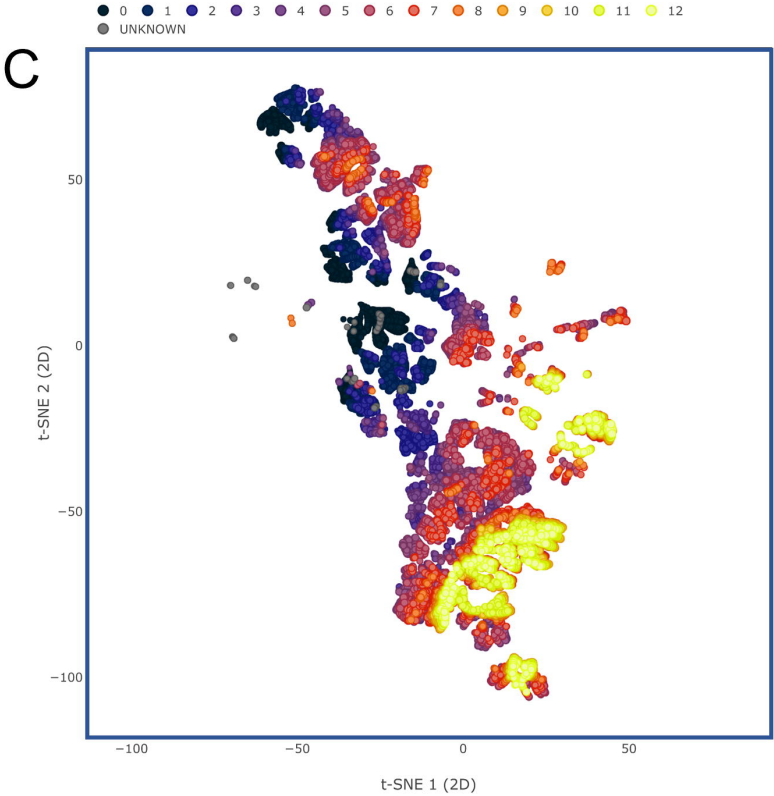
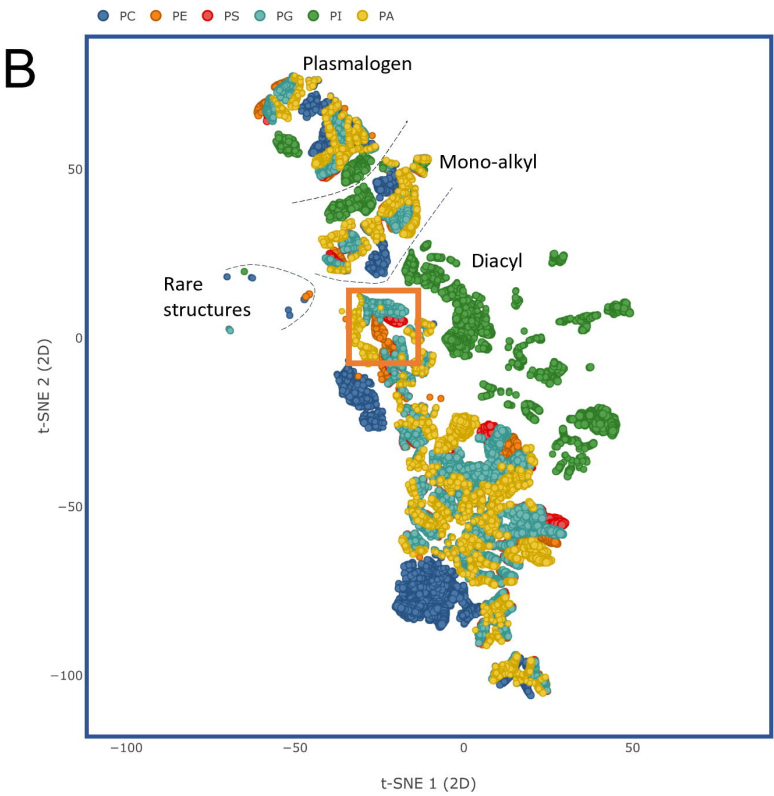
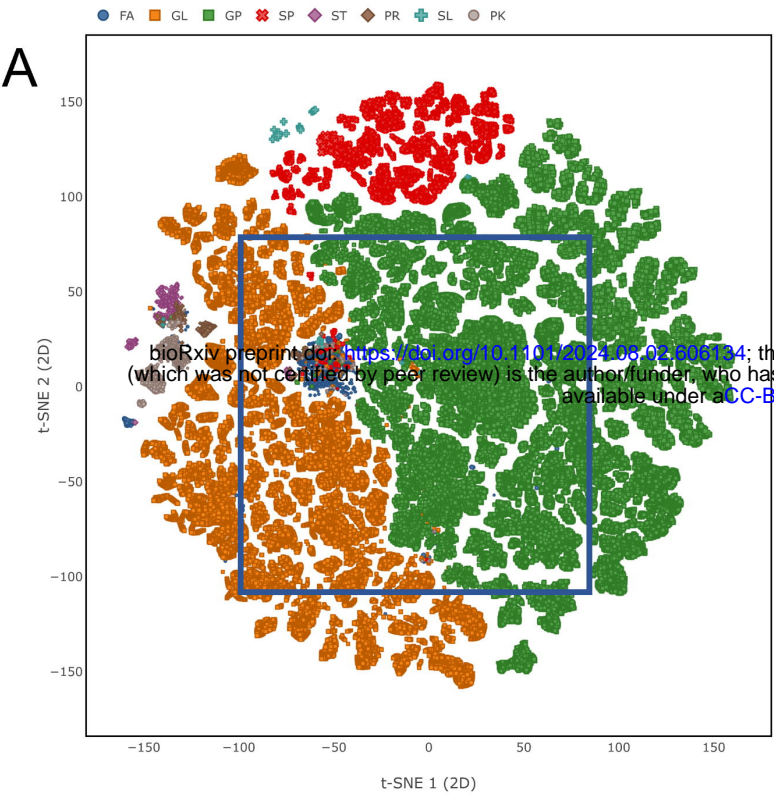
Substructure identifiers

Substructure vectors

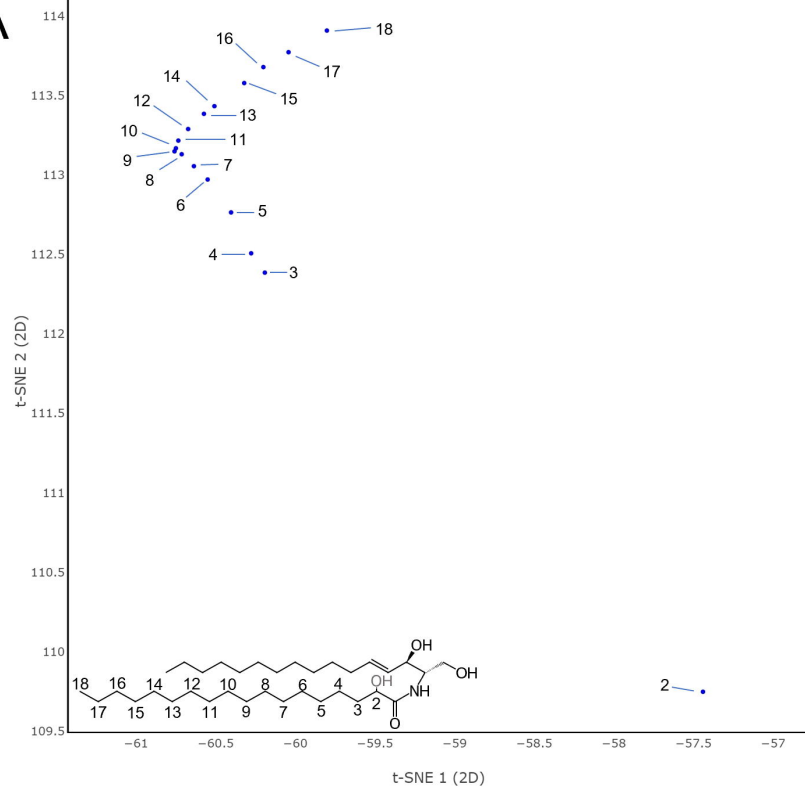


B





A



B

