

# *specL* - Prepare Peptide Spectrum Matches for Use in Targeted Proteomics

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**October 26, 2021**

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# 1 Introduction

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Targeted proteomics is a fast evolving field in proteomics science and was even elected as method of the year in 2012 <sup>1</sup>. Especially targeted methods like SWATH [1] open promising perspectives for the identification and quantification of peptides and proteins. All targeted methods have in common the need of precise MS coordinates composed of precursor mass, fragment masses, and retention time. The combination of this information is kept in so called assays or spectra libraries. Here we present an R package able to produce such libraries out of peptide identification results (Mascot (dat), TPP (pep.xml and mzXMLs), ProteinPilot (group), Omssa (omx)). *specL* (see also [2]) is an easy to use, versatile and flexible function, which can be integrated into already existing commercial or non commercial analysis pipelines for targeted proteomics data analysis. Some examples of today's pipelines are ProteinPilot combined with Peakview (AB Sciex), Spectronaut (Biognosys) or OpenSwath [3].

<sup>1</sup><http://www.nature.com/nmeth/journal/v10/n1/pdf/nmeth.2329.pdf>, 2014-09-22

In the following vignette it is described how the *specL* package can be used for the included data sets `peptideStd` and `peptideStd.redundant`.

## 2 Workflow

---

### 2.1 Prologue - How to get the input for the *specL* package?

Since peptide identification (using, e.g., Mascot, Sequest, xTandem!, Omssa, ProteinPilot) usually creates result files which are heavily redundant and therefore unsuited for spectral library building, the search results must first be filtered. To create non-redundant input files, we use the BiblioSpec [4] algorithm implemented in Skyline [5]. A given search result (e.g. Mascot result file) is loaded into the software Skyline and is redundancy filtered. The 'Skyline workflow step' provides two sqlite readable files<sup>2</sup> as output named `'*.blib'` and `'*.redundant.blib'`. These files are used as ideal input for this packages. Note here, that Skyline is very flexible when it comes to peptide identification results. It means with Skyline you can build the spectrum library files for almost all search engines (even from other spectrum library files such as spectraST [6]).

<sup>2</sup>sqlite uses standard SQL as query language.

The first step which has to be performed on the R shell is loading *specL* library.

```
R> library(specL)
R> packageVersion('specL')
[1] '1.28.0'
```

### 2.2 Read from redundant plus non-redundant blib files

for demonstration `specL` contains the two data sets namely `peptideStd` and `peptideStd.redundant`. This is a data set which comes from two standard run experiments which are routinely used to check if the liquid chromatographic system is still working appropriate. The sample consists of a digest of the Fetuin protein (Bos taurus, uniprot id: P12763). 40 femtomole are loaded on column. Mascot was used to search and identify the respective peptides.

```
R> summary(peptideStd)

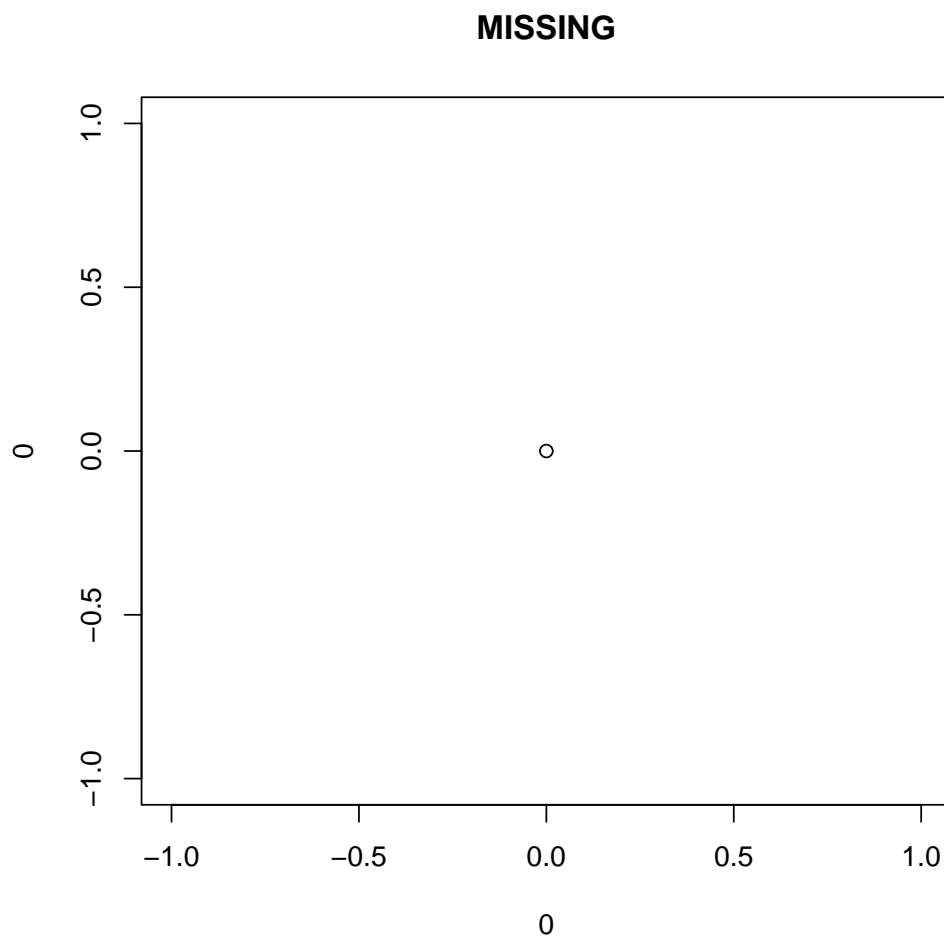
Summary of a "psmSet" object.
Number of precursor:
      137
Number of precursors in Filename(s)
      0140910_01_fetuin_400amol_1.raw      21
      0140910_07_fetuin_400amol_2.raw     116
Number of annotated precursor:
      0
```

For both `peptideStd`, `peptideStd.redundant` data sets the Skyline software was used to generate the bibliospec files which contain the peptide sequences with the respective peptide spectrum match (PSM). The `specL::read.bibliospec` function was used to read the blib files into R.

The from `read.bibliospec` generated object has its own plot functions. The LC-MS map graphs peptide mass versus retention time.

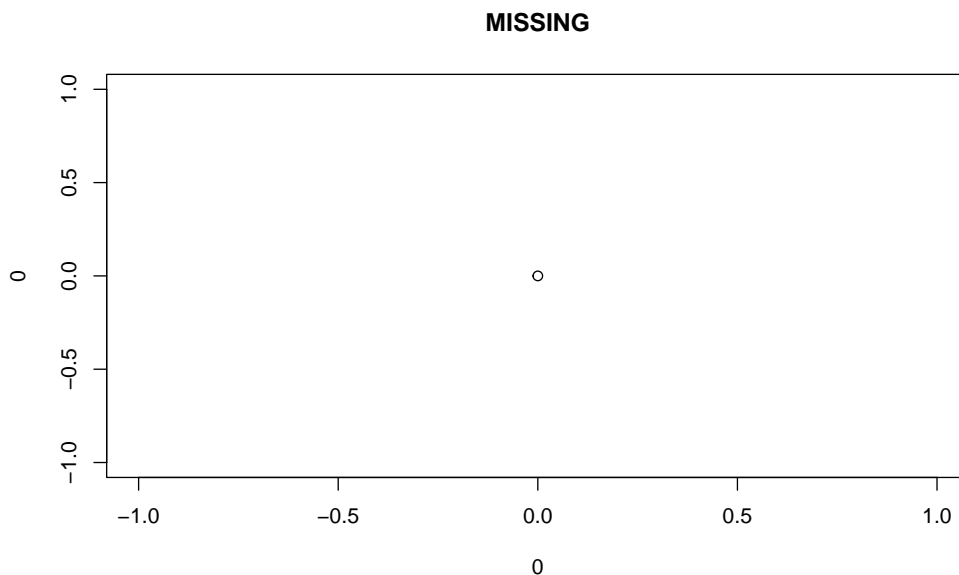
```
R> # plot(peptideStd)
R> plot(0,0, main='MISSING')
```

## specL - Prepare Peptide Spectrum Matches for Use in Targeted Proteomics



The individual peptide spectrum match (psm) is displayed by using the [protViz](#) [peakplot](#) function.

```
R> demoIdx <- 40  
R> # str(peptideStd[[demoIdx]])  
R> #res <- plot(peptideStd[[demoIdx]], ion.axes=TRUE)  
R> plot(0,0, main='MISSING')
```



### 2.3 Read from Mascot result files

Alternatively Mascot search result files (dat) can be used by applying *protViz* perl script `protViz_mascotDat2RData.pl`.

The perl script can be found in the `exec` directory of the *protViz* package. The mascot `mod_file` can be found in the configurations of the mascot server. An example on our Linux shell looks as follow:

```
$ /usr/local/lib/R/site-library/protViz/exec/protViz_mascotDat2RData.pl \  
-d=/usr/local/mascot/data/20130116/F178287.dat \  
-m=mod_file
```

`mascotDat2RData.pl` requires the Mascot server `mod_file` keeping all the configured modification.

Once the perl script is finished, the resulting RData file can be read into the R session using `load`.

Next, the variable modifications, and the S3 `psmSet` object has to be generated. This can be done by using `specL:::.mascot2psmSet`

```
R> specL:::.mascot2psmSet  
  
function (dat, mod, mascotScoreCutOff = 40)  
{  
  res <- lapply(dat, function(x) {  
    x$MonoisotopicAAMass <- protViz::aa2mass(x$peptideSequence)[[1]]
```

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```
modString <- as.numeric(strsplit(x$modification, "")[[1]])
modIdx <- which(modString > 0) - 1
modString.length <- length(modString)
x$varModification <- mod[modString[c(-1, -modString.length)] +
  1]
if (length(modIdx) > 0) {
  warning("modified varModification caused.")
  x$varModification[modIdx] <- x$varModification[modIdx] -
    x$MonoisotopicAAmass[modIdx]
}
rt <- x$rtinseconds
x <- c(x, rt = rt, fileName = "mascot")
class(x) <- "psm"
return(x)
})
res <- res[which(unlist(lapply(dat, function(x) {
  x$mascotScore > mascotScoreCutOff && length(x$mZ) > 10
}))))]
class(res) <- "psmSet"
return(res)
}
<bytecode: 0x55d38c94ed98>
<environment: namespace:specL>
```

If you are processing Mascot result files you can continue reading in section [2.5](#).

However, please note, due to the potential high redundancy of peptide spectrum matches in a database search approach, it might not result in useful ion library for targeted data extraction, unless redundancy filtering is handled. However in a future release a redundancy filter algorithm might be proposed to resolve this problem.

## 2.4 Annotate protein ids using FASTA

The information to which protein a peptide-spectrum-match belongs (PSM) is not stored by BiblioSpec. Therefore *specL* provides the `annotate.protein_id` function which uses R's internal `grep` to 'reassigning' the protein information. Therefore a `fasta` object has to be loaded into the R system using `read.fasta` of the *seqinr* package. For this, not necessarily, the same `fasta` file needs to be provided as in the original database search.

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The following lines demonstrate a simple sanity check with a single FASTA style formatted protein entry. Also it demonstrates the use case how to identify entries in the R-object which are from one or a few proteins of interest.

```
R> irtFASTAseq <- paste(">zz|ZZ_FGCZCont0260|",
+ "iRT_Protein_with_AAAAK_spacers concatenated Biognosys\n",
+ "LGGNEQVTRAAAAKGAGSSEPVTGLDAKAAAAKVEATFGVDESNKAAAAKYILAGVENS",
+ "KAAAAKTPVISGGPYEYRAAAKTPVITGAPYEYRAAAKDGLDAASYAPVRAAAKAD",
+ "VTPADFSEWSKAAAAKGTFIIDPGGVIRAAAAKGTFIIDPAAVIRAAAAKLFLQFGAQGS",
+ "PFLK\n")
R> Tfile <- file(); cat(irtFASTAseq, file = Tfile);
R> fasta.irtFASTAseq <- read.fasta(Tfile, as.string=TRUE, seqtype="AA")
R> close(Tfile)
```

As expected the `peptideStd` data, e.g., our demo Object, does not contain any protein information yet.

```
R> peptideStd[[demoIdx]]$proteinInformation
[1] ""
```

The protein information can be added as follow:

```
R> peptideStd <- annotate.protein_id(peptideStd,
+   fasta=fasta.irtFASTAseq)
```

The following lines show now the object indices of those entries which do have a protein information now.

```
R> (idx<-which(unlist(lapply(peptideStd,
+   function(x){nchar(x$proteinInformation)>0}))))
[1] 1 2 3 4 5 6
```

As expected, there are now a number of peptide sequences annotated with the protein ID.

```
R> peptideStd[[demoIdx]]$proteinInformation
[1] "zz|ZZ_FGCZCont0260|"
```

Please note, that the default digest pattern is defined as

```
R> digestPattern = "([RK])|(^)|(^M)"
```



## specL - Prepare Peptide Spectrum Matches for Use in Targeted Proteomics

for tryptic peptides. For other enzymes, the pattern has to be adapted. For example, for semi-tryptic identifications use `digestPattern = ""`.

### 2.5 Generate the spectral library (assay)

`genSwathIonLib` is the main contribution of the `specL` package. It generates the spectral library used in a targeted data extraction workflow from a mass spectrometric measurement. Generating the ion library using iRT peptides is highly recommended as described. However if you have no iRT peptide continue reading in section 2.7.

Generation of the spec Library with default (see Table 1) settings.

```
R> res.genSwathIonLib <- genSwathIonLib(data = peptideStd,  
+   data.fit = peptideStd.redundant)
```

parameter	description	value
max.mZ.Da.error	max ms2 tolerance	0.1
topN	the n most intense fragment ion	10
fragmentIonMzRange	mZ range filter of fragment ion	c(300, 1800)
fragmentIonRange	min/max number of fragment ions	c(5, 100)
fragmentIonFUN	desired fragment ion types	b1+, y1+, b2+, y2+, b3+, y3+

**Table 1:** `genSwathIonLib` default settings

```
R> summary(res.genSwathIonLib)
```

Summary of a "specLSet" object.

Parameter:

Number of precursor (q1 and peptideModSeq) = 137

Number of unique precursor

(q1.in-silico and peptideModSeq) = 126

Number of iRT peptide(s) = 8

Which std peptides (iRTs) where found in which raw files:

```
0140910_01_fetuin_400amol_1.raw GAGSSEPVTGLDAK  
0140910_01_fetuin_400amol_1.raw TPVITGAPYEYR  
0140910_01_fetuin_400amol_1.raw VEATFGVDESNAK  
0140910_07_fetuin_400amol_2.raw ADVTPADFSEWSK  
0140910_07_fetuin_400amol_2.raw DGLDAASYAPVR  
0140910_07_fetuin_400amol_2.raw GTFIIDPGGVIR  
0140910_07_fetuin_400amol_2.raw LFLQFGAQGSPFLK  
0140910_07_fetuin_400amol_2.raw TPVISGGPYEYR
```

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Number of transitions frequency:

4	1
5	5
6	10
7	7
8	18
9	32
10	64

Number of annotated precursor = 6

Number of file(s)

2

Number of precursors in Filename(s)

0140910_01_fetuin_400amol_1.raw	21
0140910_07_fetuin_400amol_2.raw	116

Misc:

Memory usage = 676976 bytes

The determined mass spec coordinates of the selected tandem mass spectrum `demoIdx` look like this:

```
R> res.genSwathIonLib@ionlibrary[[demoIdx]]
```

An "specL" object.

content:

group\_id = GAGSSEPVTGLDAK.2

peptide\_sequence = GAGSSEPVTGLDAK

proteinInformation = zz|ZZ\_FGCZCont0260|

q1 = 644.8219

q1.in\_silico = 1288.638

q3 = 800.4497 604.3285 1016.522 503.2805 929.4925 400.7282

333.176 1160.581 703.3948 343.1235

q3.in\_silico = 800.4512 604.3301 1016.526 503.2824 929.4938

400.7295 333.1769 1160.579 703.3985 343.1615

prec\_z = 2

frg\_type = y y y y y y y y y b

frg\_nr = 8 6 10 5 9 8 3 12 7 8

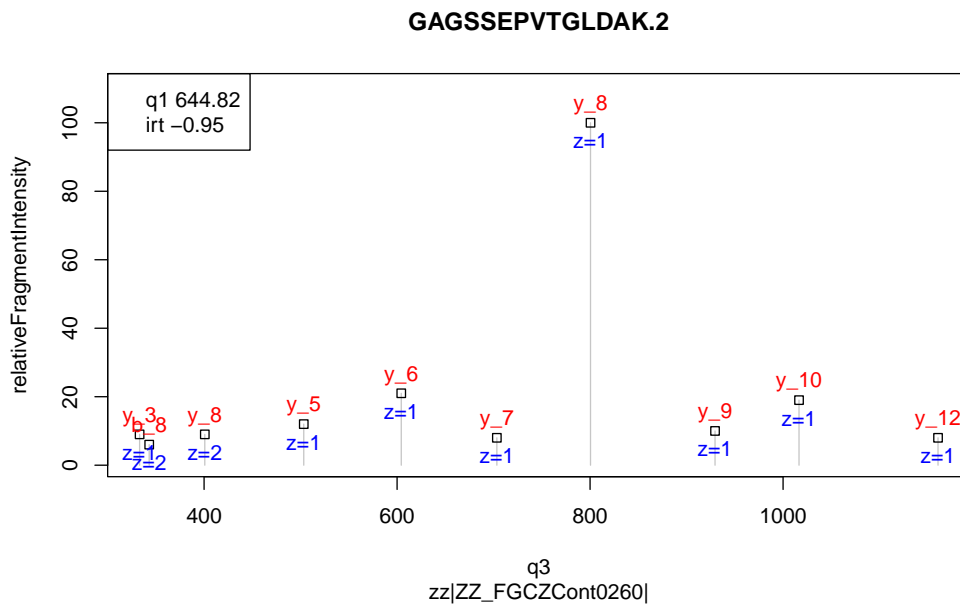
## specL - Prepare Peptide Spectrum Matches for Use in Targeted Proteomics

```
frg_z = 1 1 1 1 1 2 1 1 1 2
relativeFragmentIntensity = 100 21 19 12 10 9 9 8 8 6
irt = -0.95
peptideModSeq = GAGSSEPVTGLDAK
mZ.error = 0.001514 0.00156 0.003685 0.001914 0.001318
0.001313 0.000856 0.001846 0.003686 0.0380015
uclei_diff_extraction_methods\20140910_01_fetuin_400amol_1.raw
score = 41.54902
```

```
size:
Memory usage: 4776 bytes
```

It can be displayed using the `specL::plot` function.

```
R> plot(res.genSwathIonLib@ionlibrary[[demoIdx]])
```

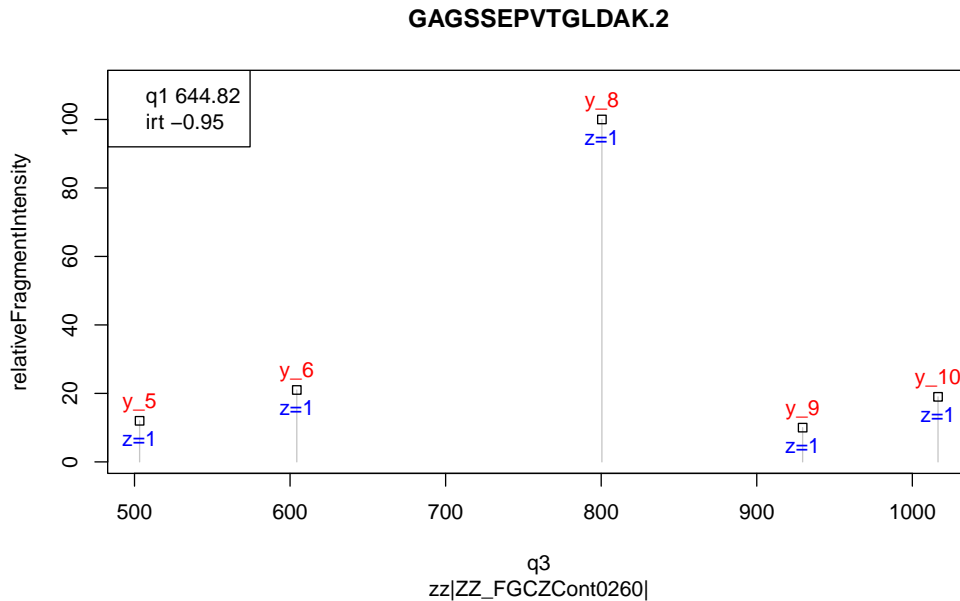


The following code considers only the top five y ions.

```
R> # define customized fragment ions
R> # for demonstration lets consider only the top five singly charged y ions.
R>
R> r.genSwathIonLib.top5 <- genSwathIonLib(peptideStd,
+     peptideStd.redundant, topN=5,
+     fragmentIonFUN=function (b, y) {
+         return( cbind(y1=y) )
```

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```
+      }  
+     )  
R> plot(r.genSwathIonLib.top5@ionlibrary[[demoIdx]])  
R>
```



## 2.6 Normalizing the retention time using iRT peptides

Retention time is a very important parameter in targeted data extraction. However retention times are not easy to transfer between different reverse phase columns or HPLC systems. To make transfer applicable and account for inter run shift in retention time Biognosys [7] invented the iRT normalization based on iRT / HRM peptides. For this, a set of well behaving peptides (good flying properties, good fragmentation characteristics, completely artificial) which cover the whole rt-gradient are spiked into each sample. For this set of peptide an independent retention time (dimension less) is suggested by Biognosys. With this at hand, the set of peptides can later be used to apply a linear regression model to adapt all measured retention times into an independent retention time scale.

If the identification results contain iRT peptides the package supports the conversion to the iRT scale. For this (if the identification result are based on multiple input files) the redundant BiblioSpec file is required where all iRT peptides from all measurements are stored. For the most representative spectrum in the non-redundant R-object the original filename is identified and the respective

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linear model for this one particular MS experiment is applied to normalize the retention time to the iRT scale. The iRT peptides as well as their independent retention times are stored in the `iRTpeptides` object.

`specL` uses by default the iRT peptide table to normalize into the independent retention time but could also be extended or changed to custom iRT peptides if available.

```
R> iRTpeptides
```

The method `genSwathIonLib` uses:

```
R> fit <- lm(formula = rt ~ aggregateInputRT * fileName,  
+ data=m)
```

to build the linear models for each MS measurement individually. For defining `m` both data sets were aggregated over the attributes `peptide` and `fileName` using the `mean` operator.

```
R> data <- aggregate(df$rt, by = list(df$peptide, df$fileName),  
+ FUN = mean)  
R> data.fit <- aggregate(df.fit$rt,  
+ by = list(df.fit$peptide, df.fit$fileName),  
+ FUN = mean)
```

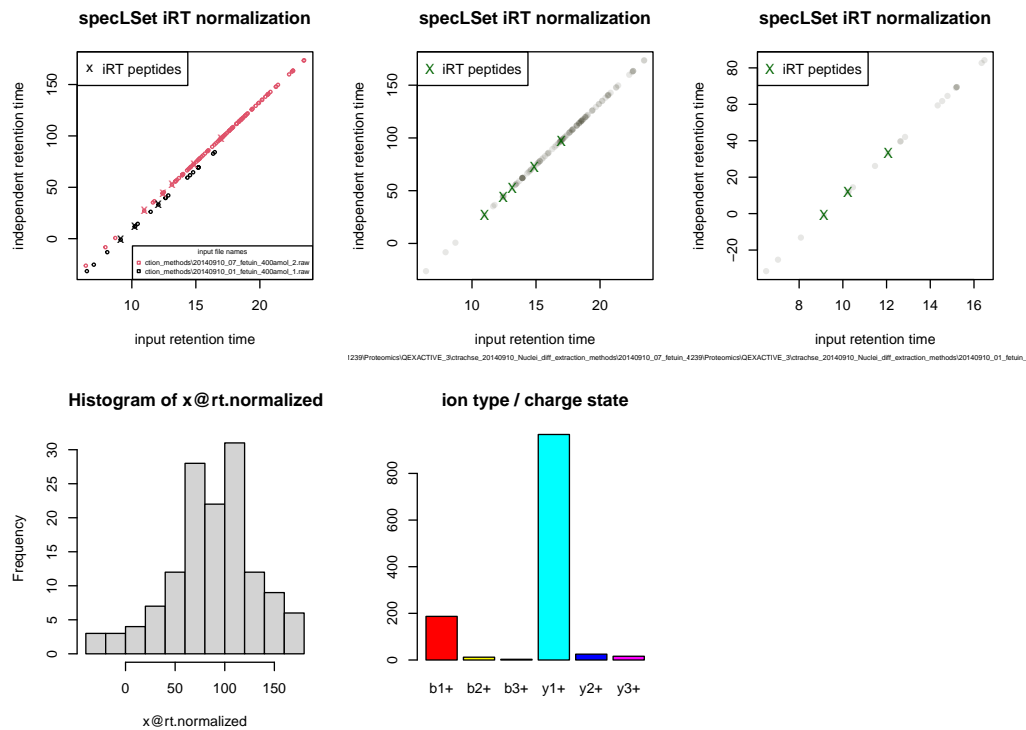
Afterwards the following join operator was applied.

```
R> m <- merge(iRT, data.fit, by.x='peptide', by.y='peptide')
```

The following graph displays the normalized retention time versus the measured retention time after applying the calculated model to the two data sets.

```
R> # calls the plot method for a specLSet object  
R> op <- par(mfrow=c(2,3))  
R> plot(res.genSwathIonLib)  
[1] 16.83185 13.13262 18.54058 18.36923 15.30478 15.30478  
[1] 7.032372 6.490769 14.787681 14.544429 15.207398  
[6] 15.207398  
R> par(op)
```

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Shown are original retention time (in minutes) and iRT (dimensionless) for two standard run experiments (color black and red). Indicated with black **X** are the iRT peptides which are the base for the regression.

## 2.7 Generate the spectral library having no iRTs

If no iRT peptides are contained in the data not iRT normalization is applied. The scatter plot below shows on the y axis that there were not iRT transformation.

```
R> idx.iRT <- which(unlist(lapply(peptideStd,  
+   function(x){  
+     if(x$peptideSequence %in% iRTpeptides$peptide){0}  
+     else{1}  
+   }))) == 0)  
R> # remove all iRTs and compute ion library  
R> res.genSwathIonLib.no_iRT <- genSwathIonLib(peptideStd[-idx.iRT])  
R> summary(res.genSwathIonLib.no_iRT)
```

Summary of a "specLSet" object.

Parameter:

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```
Number of precursor (q1 and peptideModSeq) = 129
Number of unique precursor
(q1.in-silico and peptideModSeq) = 118
Number of iRT peptide(s) = 0
Number of transitions frequency:
    4      1
    5      5
    6     10
    7      7
    8     17
    9     31
   10     58

Number of annotated precursor = 0
Number of file(s)
    2

Number of precursors in Filename(s)
    0140910_01_fetuin_400amol_1.raw      18
    0140910_07_fetuin_400amol_2.raw     111

Misc:

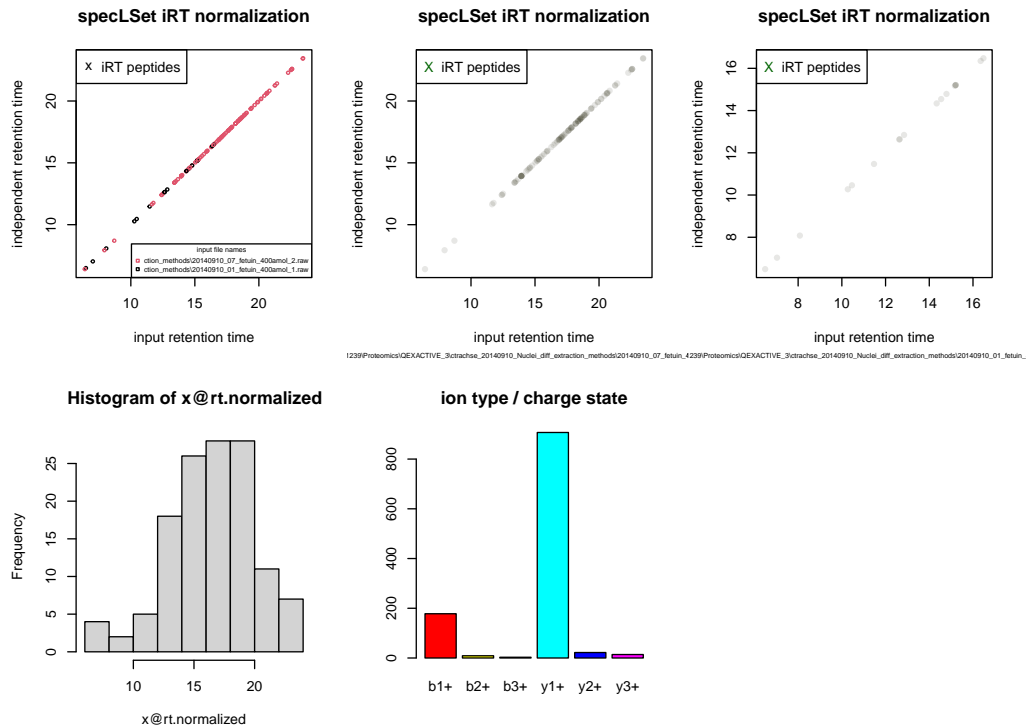
Memory usage      =      630368 bytes

R> op <- par(mfrow = c(2, 3))
R> plot(res.genSwathIonLib.no_iRT)

[1] 16.83185 18.54058 18.36923 15.30478 15.30478 19.36682
[1]  7.032372  6.490769 14.787681 14.544429 15.207398
[6] 15.207398

R> par(op)
```

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## 2.8 Write output to file

The output can be written as an ASCII text file.

```
R> write.spectronaut(res.genSwathIonLib,  
+ file="specL-Spectronaut.txt")
```

## 2.9 Epilogue - What can I do with that library now?

The specL output text file can directly be used as input (assay) for the Spectronaut software from Biognosys or with minimal reshaping for Peakview. Alternatively it can be used as a basis for script based construction of SRM/MRM assays.



### 2.10 Benchmark

The benchmarks were processed on a 12 core XEON Server (X5650 @ 2.67GHz) running Linux Debian wheezy having R version 3.1.1 (2014-07-10), specL 1.1.2, and BiocParallel 1.0.0 installed. The default setting of BiocParallel has used eight cores. As FASTA we used a TAIR10 retrieved from <http://www.arabidopsis.org/> and Human Swissprot.

fasta=TAIR10	#proteins	#tryptic peptides	file size	blib [unpublished]	#specs	file size	runtime	annotate	generate
	71032	3423196	39M	39648/118268	51M	79min	19sec		
	71032	3423196	39M	65018/136963	120M	130min	30sec		
fasta=HUMAN	88969	3997085	43M	blib [8, Rosenberger]	256908/3060421	4.4G	≈7h	≈5min	

The following parameter settings were given to the `genSwathIonLib` function:

```
R> res <- genSwathIonLib(data, data.fit,  
+   topN=10,  
+   fragmentIonMzRange=c(200,2000),  
+   fragmentIonRange=c(2,100))
```

## 3 Acknowledgement

The authors thank all colleagues of the Functional Genomics Center Zuerich (FGCZ), and especial thank goes to our test users Sira Echevarría Zomeño (ETHZ), Tobias Kockmann (ETHZ), Lukas von Ziegler (Brain Research Institute, UZH|ETH Zurich), and Stephan Michalik (Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität Greifswald, Germany).

## 4 TODO for next releases

- importer for peakview csv format; enable `compare.specLSet(object0, object1)`
- new option for `specL::genSwathIonLib`; Exclude fragment ions from precursor `window = TRUE, FALSE`
- new option for `specL::genSwathIonLib`; Predict transitions for heavy labeled peptides using information from light peptides `predictHeavy = TRUE,FALSE, LabelFile = "fileWithHeavyAA"`
- new export function into TraML format for compatibility with OpenSWATH [3]

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- replace `seqinr read.fasta` by using `Biostrings readAAStringSet` to handle fasta files
- add `varMods` to `specL` class
- replace Mascot score by a generic score
- in-silico rt ion map plot (`plot.specLSet`) split window into SWATH windows (one plot per, e.g., 25Da window)
- assay refinement - replace contaminated fragment ion in library

## 5 Session information

---

An overview of the package versions used to produce this document are shown below.

- R version 4.1.1 (2021-08-10), x86\_64-pc-linux-gnu
- Locale: LC\_CTYPE=en\_US.UTF-8, LC\_NUMERIC=C, LC\_TIME=en\_GB, LC\_COLLATE=C, LC\_MONETARY=en\_US.UTF-8, LC\_MESSAGES=en\_US.UTF-8, LC\_PAPER=en\_US.UTF-8, LC\_NAME=C, LC\_ADDRESS=C, LC\_TELEPHONE=C, LC\_MEASUREMENT=en\_US.UTF-8, LC\_IDENTIFICATION=C
- Running under: Ubuntu 20.04.3 LTS
- Matrix products: default
- BLAS: /home/biocbuild/bbs-3.14-bioc/R/lib/libRblas.so
- LAPACK: /home/biocbuild/bbs-3.14-bioc/R/lib/libRlapack.so
- Base packages: base, datasets, grDevices, graphics, methods, stats, utils
- Other packages: BiocStyle 2.22.0, DBI 1.1.1, RSQLite 2.2.8, knitr 1.36, protViz 0.7.0, seqinr 4.2-8, specL 1.28.0
- Loaded via a namespace (and not attached): BiocManager 1.30.16, MASS 7.3-54, R6 2.5.1, Rcpp 1.0.7, ade4 1.7-18, bit 4.0.4, bit64 4.0.5, blob 1.2.2, bookdown 0.24, bslib 0.3.1, cachem 1.0.6, codetools 0.2-18, compiler 4.1.1, digest 0.6.28, evaluate 0.14, fastmap 1.1.0, highr 0.9, htmltools 0.5.2, jquerylib 0.1.4, jsonlite 1.7.2, magick 2.7.3, magrittr 2.0.1, memoise 2.0.0, parallel 4.1.1, rlang 0.4.12, rmarkdown 2.11, sass 0.4.0, stringi 1.7.5, stringr 1.4.0, tools 4.1.1, vctrs 0.3.8, xfun 0.27, yaml 2.2.1

## References

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