Data Engineering for AI

Enhance data persistence strategies for optimal AI and analytical workload performance

Sundeep Goud Katta Lav Kumar



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Dedicated to

My parents, wife and son - Sundeep Goud Katta

My parents, wife and son - Lav Kumar

About the Authors

- Sundeep Goud Katta is a seasoned technology leader based in California, with over 13 years of experience in AI-driven solutions, cloud-based architectures, and scalable CRM platforms. As a lead, he has spearheaded enterprise-grade initiatives that streamline deployment pipelines, enhance system resilience, and drive intelligent automation through GPT-powered models and predictive analytics. Sundeep's technical expertise spans across CRM experience platforms, Azure cloud ecosystems, and modern web technologies, including Three.js, Revit, and WPF. He has played a pivotal role in large-scale platform migrations, performance tuning, and the creation of robust validation and monitoring frameworks that power secure, high-performing, and user-centric systems. An active contributor to the tech community, Sundeep has served as a reviewer for IEEE COMPASS, judged prestigious industry awards such as Globee and Brandon Hall, and reviewed technical publications for leading publishers including O'Reilly and Manning. His passion for innovation, technical excellence, and knowledge-sharing positions him as a leading voice in the evolving landscape of scalable data engineering.
- Lav Kumar is a seasoned full-stack developer with over 12 years of experience architecting and delivering scalable, enterprise-grade software solutions. Based in Fremont, California, Lav currently serves as a lead member of technical staff at a leading CRM company in San Francisco, where he plays a pivotal role in advancing AI-powered search capabilities. His work focuses on enhancing user experience through personalized search results and the optimization of intelligent search algorithms. Lav's professional journey includes impactful tenures at Nokia and Samsung, where he contributed to the development of core features and applications that helped shape the commercial success of flagship products. His technical expertise spans Java/J2EE, modern UI development, microservices architecture, and the integration of AI/ML technologies into production systems. A passionate advocate for data science and big data, Lav is dedicated to building innovative, data-driven solutions that scale. His contributions have earned him multiple awards for excellence and innovation across his career. As a Salesforce Trailhead Ranger and an Accelerate Program Graduate, Lav demonstrates an ongoing commitment to professional growth and technical mastery.

About the Reviewers

Anusha Reddy Narapuredddy is a senior software engineer at Apple, where she leads the development of Apple's largest observability platform. With deep expertise in building large-scale distributed systems, AI/ML applications, and observability platforms and infrastructure that power critical AI/ML services used by billions of users worldwide, Anusha has played a pivotal role in the development and deployment of several industry-leading technologies. Her work ensures the reliability of Apple's flagship services like Siri, Search, and iOS.

As CNCF OpenTelemetry contributing member, Anusha is recognized for her contributions to the field of computer science, particularly in advancing observability platforms. She holds patents and has published scholarly articles in the field of distributed systems and AI-enhanced observability.

- Gaurav Khare is a seasoned senior data engineer with 16 years of experience in the finance domain. He is an expert in Python, Hadoop, Spark, NLP and big data technologies, specializing in data analysis, data science. Throughout his career, he has built scalable data infrastructure and implemented advanced analytics solutions to improve banking operations and decision-making. An avid reader and technical reviewer, he stays at the forefront of emerging technologies. He actively contributes to technical communities, sharing insights and mentoring peers, earning a strong reputation as a skilled professional and thoughtful leader.
- Vipin Kataria is a seasoned data and machine learning engineer with over 20 years of experience in designing and implementing customer and data-centric products. As an enterprise architect, he currently focuses on building cloud data platforms that help businesses develop applications providing timely, trusted, and actionable data. He is also dedicated to building Gen AI platforms leveraging large language models to transform business operations and enhance customer experiences.

His technical expertise spans building scalable real-time streaming platforms using Apache Kafka, Spark Streaming, and event-driven architectures that process terabytes of IoT data. His expertise extends to designing comprehensive ML platforms that provide end-to-end capabilities from data preparation to model deployment, featuring automated pipelines for continuous training, A/B testing, and model monitoring using MLflow and Kubeflow.

Beyond technical architecture, he is passionate about mentoring teams and building data-driven cultures, fostering innovation and excellence in every organization he serves. He is also an active independent researcher in machine learning and a technical reviewer for various books and journals.

Raghavendra Patlolla is a full-stack engineer with over 10 years of experience in web and API development. He specializes in database management, using DynamoDB and PostgreSQL to design scalable and efficient solutions for complex applications. He also has extensive expertise in deploying applications on AWS and Azure, leveraging tools like AWS Cognito, API Gateway, and Lambda functions to create secure, serverless architectures. His back-end development skills include building robust APIs with Node.js, Express.js, and GraphQL, ensuring seamless data interactions. Additionally, he is skilled in front-end development, creating intuitive user interfaces with frameworks such as ReactJS, Vue.js, Angular, and Svelte. Known for optimizing workflows and reducing costs, he brings a blend of technical expertise and practical problem-solving to every project.

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Preface

We live in an age awash with data. Every app click, sensor reading, and customer interaction generates a new stream of information. For a modern professional, the ability to collect, organize, and transform this flood of raw data into meaningful insights is not just a niche skill, it is a career-defining advantage. In a world where data drives decisions, those who can harness that data to build intelligent solutions are leading the charge.

The book was written with working professionals in mind. Whether you are a seasoned data engineer, a solutions architect, or an AI enthusiast, this book speaks to your goals of leveling up and staying ahead in a rapidly evolving field. It is for anyone who wants to go beyond the buzzwords and understand what really makes scalable, AI-ready data systems tick. As you turn these pages, you will find a relatable, no-nonsense exploration of the technologies, principles, and patterns that empower high-performance data infrastructure in real-world scenarios.

Consider this book your hands-on roadmap for building robust data platforms. No matter your current focus, designing batch or real-time data pipelines, wrangling streaming data in motion, or preparing features for the next machine learning model, you will find guidance tailored to your needs. The chapters ahead break down complex topics into approachable lessons so you can apply them directly in your daily work and if you are eyeing a transition into an AI-focused role, the practical knowledge here will demystify the backbone of AI projects and give you the confidence to contribute from day one.

You will learn how to design and optimize data pipelines that can efficiently manage large-scale workloads. The course will guide you in streamlining real-time data flows, ensuring your analytics and AI models consistently receive fresh and reliable inputs. You will also explore techniques for engineering high-quality data features that strengthen the effectiveness and robustness of your machine learning models. Additionally, you will gain the skills to secure and govern data throughout its entire lifecycle, from ingestion to storage and beyond, enabling you to trust and confidently share your data.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Data Engineering in AI- This chapter traces the evolution of data engineering alongside AI, covering the shift from early infrastructure to big data and distributed systems. It explains key concepts like data types, pipelines, and tools, while emphasizing data engineering's role in scalable AI systems and its growing importance in modern organizations. It also introduces the intersection of business intelligence and AI, highlighting how well-orchestrated data enables smarter decision-making. Whether you

are new to the field or experienced, the chapter provides a solid foundation and context for what follows. It concludes with a forward-looking perspective on data engineering's expanding influence across industries.

Chapter 2: Managing Data Collection- Data collection is the critical first step in any AI pipeline, and this chapter discusses the scalable methods for acquiring data from APIs, databases, sensors, and user-generated content. It covers the architectural differences between real-time and batch data collection, and how tools like Kafka and Flume support large-scale ingestion. You will explore best practices for ensuring reliability, high throughput, and fault tolerance. The chapter also emphasizes early data validation to minimize downstream issues and outlines strategies for optimizing latency and cost, particularly in cloud-native setups. Key topics like data formats, logging, and security are discussed, establishing a foundation for efficient, high-quality data collection.

Chapter 3: Data Ingestion in Action- Once data is collected, it must be ingested efficiently into processing systems. This chapter breaks down the ingestion process across modern data stacks. You will explore pipeline designs for structured, semi-structured, and unstructured data. Tools like AWS Kinesis, Apache NiFi, and Kafka Connect are introduced with context. The chapter discusses architectural choices for ingestion: stream vs. microbatch vs. batch. You will learn how to optimize ingestion for parallelism, buffering, and error recovery. It highlights strategies to ensure schema enforcement, deduplication, and real-time transformation. Best practices for ingesting data into data lakes and warehouses are also shared. Whether it is IoT or logs, ingestion is where speed meets structure, and this chapter shows you how.

Chapter 4: Data Storage in Real-time- Modern analytics and AI require real-time access to clean, consistent data. This chapter walks through architectures like Lambda, Kappa, and Lakehouse models. You will discover how to architect for low-latency queries and scalable data growth. Topics like time-based partitioning, data versioning, and compaction are covered. It also introduces file formats like Parquet, Avro, and ORC in a real-time context. The chapter helps you choose between hot and cold storage and manage costs effectively. You will learn how to ensure ACID compliance or eventual consistency depending on your use case. Streaming storage systems like Apache Hudi and Delta Lake are explored. The goal is to help you build real-time data lakes that serve both operational and analytical needs.

Chapter 5: Data Processing Techniques and Best Practices- Data must be processed before it becomes useful for AI or business intelligence. This chapter starts with a comparison of ETL and ELT workflows and where each fits best. You will learn how to scale processing using tools like Apache Spark, Flink, and Beam. The chapter discusses the trade-offs

of SQL-based vs. NoSQL-based processing engines. It discusses stream processing, windowing functions, and join strategies at scale. Special focus is given to managing cost and reducing redundancy in multi-stage pipelines. It explores how to ensure data quality, auditability, and lineage during transformations. You will also see how to design pipelines for retraining machine learning models. Whether you are processing terabytes or petabytes, this chapter gives you a playbook to do it right.

Chapter 6: Data Integration and Interoperability- AI pipelines often rely on data coming from different systems; this is where integration matters. This chapter explains how to connect disparate data sources using APIs, ETL tools, and message queues. Technologies like Apache NiFi, Talend, and MuleSoft are introduced with architectural examples. You will understand how to deal with schema evolution, latency mismatches, and data duplication. The chapter covers integration across on-prem, cloud, and hybrid environments. It also explores the role of metadata, data contracts, and standard formats like JSON, XML, and Avro. Interoperability in an enterprise setting means building trust across systems, and that is emphasized here. Whether integrating legacy systems or modern SaaS platforms, this chapter provides actionable insights. Real-world data mapping and synchronization strategies round out the discussion.

Chapter 7: Ensuring Data Quality- Even the most scalable pipeline fails if the data is unreliable. This chapter dives into ensuring data quality at every step of the pipeline. It introduces key quality metrics like accuracy, completeness, consistency, and timeliness. Tools like Great Expectations, Deequ, and Apache Griffin are examined with practical examples. You will learn how to automate validation rules and handle edge cases in real-time. The chapter outlines strategies for managing schema drift and alerting on anomalies. There is a strong focus on integrating data quality checks into CI/CD pipelines. Use cases from finance, healthcare, and retail demonstrate what can go wrong and how to prevent it. By the end, you will see data quality not as an afterthought, but as a built-in feature of modern engineering.

Chapter 8: Understanding Data Analytics- With clean data in place, the next step is turning it into insights. This chapter explores data analytics frameworks and how they support AI models and dashboards. It starts with a taxonomy of analytics: descriptive, diagnostic, predictive, and prescriptive. You will learn how scalable analytics platforms handle real-time and batch data. Concepts like OLAP cubes, query optimization, and caching strategies are demystified. Performance tuning, cost optimization, and governance are all addressed. You will see how analytics pipelines power business KPIs and machine learning features. The chapter also covers metadata management and data lineage tracking. It is a bridge between raw data and the decisions that drive the enterprise forward.

Chapter 9: Data Visualization and Reporting- Insights are only useful when they are understood. This chapter explores how to visualize data so stakeholders can act on it. It explains chart types, design principles, and storytelling techniques for effective dashboards. Tools like Tableau, Power BI, Looker, and D3.js are compared. Real-world scenarios demonstrate how visualizations influence business outcomes. The chapter dives into common pitfalls like misleading axes and cognitive overload. Accessibility, interactivity, and personalization are emphasized. AI's role in auto-generating visual insights and anomalies is also explored. Whether you are presenting to executives or monitoring ML models, clear visuals matter and this chapter shows how to deliver them.

Chapter 10: Operational Data Security-Security is not just an IT function, it is foundational to trustworthy data platforms. This chapter provides a comprehensive view of securing data in motion and at rest. It covers encryption standards, key management systems, and RBAC implementations. The shared responsibility model in cloud platforms is explained in detail. You will explore security architectures using VPNs, firewalls, and private endpoints. The chapter also outlines how to build threat models for data pipelines. Real-time alerting, access audits, and compliance automation are emphasized. Case studies from regulated industries demonstrate what is at stake. Secure data pipelines are critical to safe, ethical AI, and this chapter makes sure you know how to build them.

Chapter 11: Protecting Data Privacy- As data volumes grow, so do privacy concerns. This chapter covers how to design pipelines that respect user privacy and comply with regulations. You will explore principles from GDPR, CCPA, and HIPAA in a practical context. Anonymization, pseudonymization, and data masking techniques are explained clearly. The chapter outlines how to manage user consent, access controls, and audit trails. It highlights privacy-preserving machine learning techniques like federated learning and differential privacy. Real-world examples show the impact of privacy lapses and how to prevent them. You will also learn how to integrate privacy policies into agile data teams. Privacy is not just legal, it is ethical, and this chapter shows you how to embed it from day one.

Chapter 12: Data Engineering Case Studies- To tie it all together, this chapter presents real-world case studies from leading industries. You will walk through how an e-commerce giant scaled its feature store using Spark and Redshift. A financial services company's fraud detection pipeline using Kafka and Flink is detailed. Healthcare use cases showcase privacy-respecting integration with EHR systems. Each case study includes architecture diagrams, tool choices, and key lessons learned. The chapter reflects on how trade-offs were managed under pressure. Whether scaling for billions of events or optimizing for real-time AI, these stories bring theory to life. You will know about patterns, anti-patterns, and inspiration for your systems.

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CHAPTER 1 Introduction to Data Engineering in AI

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of data engineering from its early days to the modernday stack, emphasizing the role of data in **artificial intelligence** (**AI**) and **machine learning** (**ML**). It covers key concepts, tools, and the evolution of data management and processing frameworks. You will explore the historical shift from traditional data management to the big data revolution, uncovering how technological advancements have reshaped the way organizations handle vast and complex datasets. We will delve into the essential role of data engineering in modern businesses, highlighting its impact on operational efficiency, strategic insights, and competitive advantage. The chapter also bridges the connection between data engineering and AI, illustrating how well-engineered data pipelines empower machine learning models to deliver accurate and actionable results.

By the end of this chapter, you will have a comprehensive overview of the data engineering's past, present and future, enabling you with the knowledge to navigate its core principles and its synergy with AI. This chapter will set the stage for deeper exploration in the chapters to come.

Structure

The chapter discusses the following topics:

• Early days of big data revolution

- Role of data engineering in modern business
- Intersection with AI and ML
- Understanding data types, structures, and sources
- Navigating the data landscape
- Databases, data warehousing, and data lakes
- ETL processes
- Importance of data quality and integrity

Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will have an idea of how data engineering has evolved from the early days of big data to how it plays the most important role in today's business landscape. We will look at how data engineering intersects with AI and ML, showing how these fields work together to make smarter decisions. In this module, you will be learning different types of data, their structure, and sources in a way that will provide a very strong foundation for any person entering the world of data. Core concepts such as databases, data warehousing, and data lakes would be explained in an understandable way with respect to how they support and help in storing large bulks of information. We will also cover ETL processes, showing the difference between traditional ways and how things have changed with time. Finally, the importance of data quality and integrity will be underlined to make sure that the insights one draws from data are reliable and actionable.

Early days of big data revolution

During the early days of big data, massive data generation overlapped with emerging technologies for storage, processing, and distributed computing. This inflection points not only changed how organizations utilize and make sense of big data but also provided many fundamental principles that still spur innovation in data science, ML, and AI today.

Historical background

In the early days, most organizations used to rely on bulky mainframes occupying entire rooms to store and process the data. Early systems lacked capacity and functionality compared to what was needed, mainly targeting large organizations like governments and research institutions. Entry of data was a labor-intensive task, and storage was costly making businesses selective about the data they maintained. Businesses used to have to decide what data was worth storing due to storage and maintenance costs. The era of mainframes also made sure that the data was stolen or locked up, therefore making it hard for any organization to share or integrate information with other departments.

As technology improved, these issues were solved by relational databases. Relational databases introduced a structured form of data storage in tabular forms with relationships

between those tables. This introduced more usability and flexibility to the data. Initial innovators like *IBM DB2* and *Oracle* started shaping data management in such a way that allowed organizations to store larger amounts of information more proficiently. Relational databases introduced sophisticated querying capabilities, therefore allowing users to identify specific datasets and conduct analytics atop them. Thus, the era of the digital revolution in data engineering began through the movement from manual to more automated data management systems.

Transition to digital

The digital revolution marked the beginning of a great transformation in data storage and processing. Relational databases became the order of the day and with this mainstream adoption came organizations that had begun to realize the power of structured data. This transition offered businesses a chance to enhance efficiency in their operations through access to data that earlier was not easy to deal with. SQL was developed as the standardized means of interacting with these databases, allowing for more intuitive, useful querying, and data manipulation.

It was during this era that demands for data access in real-time increased. Data retrieval speed was also further improved by the evolution in storage technology, for example, from the tape-based system to the use of disk drives. More organizations started adopting digital processes and data was no longer confined to printed forms or physical records. A sudden influx in the volume of data rose after digitalization. It was the time when enterprises needed more complex systems capable not only of storing massive data but also of retrieving and analyzing it with efficiency. The relational database model proved to be trustworthy yet showed its inability under the influx that rose due to several new sources.

Big data revolution

As the digital internet evolved, the influx of data increased and so did the concept of big data. The traditional relational databases that had served companies well for years began to struggle with the increasing volume, velocity, and variety of data. The rise of social media, e-commerce, and digital services meant that organizations were generating more data than before and much of it was unstructured. Storing them in relational databases did not serve the purpose. It was becoming heavily complex to keep adding data neatly into relational tables; it came in the form of videos, images, sensor readings, and complex transactional records.

The big data revolution was driven by the need for more robust tools capable of handling massive datasets across distributed systems. Enter *Hadoop*, a distributed computing framework that enables businesses to process vast amounts of data across clusters of commodity hardware. Hadoop revolutionized the way large datasets were managed by breaking them down into smaller chunks and distributing them across multiple servers.

This distributed approach allowed companies to take advantage of cheaper hardware rather than relying on expensive, high-end systems. Hadoop's power stemmed from its ability to process data in parallel which speeds up tasks that would have taken days, if not weeks, on traditional systems. Built on the principle of scale-out architecture, Hadoop could effortlessly handle everything from simple logs to complex datasets. This newfound capacity for processing data opened a world of possibilities for businesses, allowing them to tap into new insights and build data-driven strategies. Hadoop combined with its **Hadoop Distributed File System (HDFS)** ensured that data remained redundant and available, even if some of the hardware failed. In short, Hadoop became a key player in the big data revolution, empowering organizations to handle and analyze massive data at an unprecedented scale.

Note: Hadoop was not the first big data technology but it played a significant role in popularizing the concept of big data due to its ability to handle massive datasets in a distributed and scalable way. Before Hadoop, companies were using other distributed computing technologies like Google's MapReduce and Bigtable which inspired Hadoop's creation.

Hadoop's ability to store unstructured data in its HDFS and its processing power through *MapReduce* marked a turning point in data engineering. Companies like *Facebook* and *Google* led the way in harnessing the power of big data technologies, enabling them to build personalized services and optimize their operations through data-driven insights. This revolution unlocked new possibilities but it also introduced new complexities in terms of managing, securing, and analyzing such large volumes of information.

Data explosion

The growth of the Internet along with the rapid increase in mobile devices and the rise of the **Internet of Things (IoT)** further accelerated the explosion of data. By the mid-2000s, companies were collecting terabytes, if not petabytes, of data daily. Every click, swipe, and purchase generated data that could be captured and analyzed, opening new opportunities for businesses to understand their customers in real-time. However, this data explosion also presented tougher times for data engineers and data scientists to make effective use of.

Note: A data engineer focuses on building and maintaining the infrastructure and pipelines that handle large datasets, ensuring data is clean, reliable, and accessible. In contrast, a data scientist analyzes this data to extract insights, develop predictive models, and inform decision-making. While data engineers prioritize architecture and data flow, data scientists concentrate on statistics, machine learning, and deriving value from the data. Both roles are essential in the data-driven ecosystem, complementing each other to unlock data's full potential.

This era of data explosion set the stage for the next phase of innovation in data engineering where the focus shifted from merely storing and processing data to leveraging it for advanced analytics and AI. The convergence of big data technologies with AI created a fertile ground for ML and predictive modeling, unlocking new opportunities across industries.

Role of data engineering in modern business

Data engineering plays a crucial role in modern business by ensuring that vast amounts of data are efficiently collected, processed, and made accessible for analysis. This discipline enables organizations to transform raw data into valuable insights, driving informed decision-making and innovation across all sectors.

Data-driven enterprise

The current business world uses more and more data to drive strategy and decisionmaking across organizations. It is not an innocent byproduct of operations but has transformed into an asset at the very core of businesses and organizations. Businesses that make priorities related to data as a core resource are being referred to as data-driven enterprises nowadays. These organizations believe that the information they will gather from customer interactions, operations, or external sources will offer them insights to inform future growth and improvement in day-to-day operations. The key to tapping into the power of data will be through effective usage of the data pipelines that enable businesses to collect, process, and analyze data in a structured and meaningful way.

Data-driven enterprises have advantages over traditional businesses in many different aspects, they are better positioned in the knowledge of market trends, identification of customer preferences, and timely response to changes in their environment. This is possible because a data-driven enterprise enables one to make decisions based on up-to-date information rather than intuition or reports compiled some time ago. A retail company can therefore continually readjust its inventory levels in accordance with monitored customer purchasing trends to avoid stockouts, increasing customer satisfaction. Conversely, financial service firms may leverage big data to detect the potential risks of their portfolio and change their strategy before that to avoid an issue.

Being one of the top facilitators in data engineering, its role is to ensure that data from different sources moves seamlessly into a position where it can be analyzed. This involves the creation of pipelines that bring data in from sources such as transaction systems, sensors, and social media, treating it like some sort of raw material that needs transformation into an easily analyzable format. The aim is to harness the power of continuous flows for real-time analysis and decision-making. This enables businesses to be agile, adapting to new information and trends as they arise rather than waiting for quarterly reports or annual reviews.

Additionally, data-driven companies can make sure that innovation in culture is assured through the usage of data to test new ideas and measure their impact. Instead of intuition,