Head Automata and Bilingual Tiling: Translation with Minimal Representations

Hiyan Alshawi   Adam L. Buchsbaum

AT&T Labs—Research
600 Mountain Ave.
Murray Hill NJ, 07974
{hiyan,alb}@research.att.com

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Abstract

We present a language model consisting of a collection of costed bidirectional finite state automata associated with the head words of phrases. The model is suitable for incremental application of lexical associations in a dynamic programming search for optimal dependency tree derivations. We also present a model and algorithm for machine translation involving optimal "tiling" of a dependency tree with entries of a costed bilingual lexicon. Experimental results are reported comparing methods for assigning cost functions to these models. We conclude with a discussion of the adequacy of annotated linguistic strings as representations for machine translation. (This material was presented by H. Alshawi in an invited lecture at the 34th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics, Santa Cruz, California, 1996.)

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1 Introduction

Until the advent of statistical methods in the mainstream of natural language processing, syntactic and semantic representations were becoming progressively more complex. This trend is now reversing itself, in part because statistical methods reduce the burden of detailed modeling required by constraint-based grammars, and in part because statistical models for converting natural language into complex syntactic or semantic representations is not well understood at present. At the same time, lexically centered views of language have continued to increase in popularity. We can see this in lexicalized grammatical theories, head-driven parsing and generation, and statistical disambiguation based on lexical associations.

These themes — simple representations, statistical modeling, and lexicalism — form the basis for the models and algorithms described in the bulk of this paper. The primary purpose is to build effective mechanisms for machine translation, the oldest and still the most commonplace application of non-superficial natural language processing. A secondary motivation is to test the extent to which a non-trivial language processing task can be carried out without complex semantic representations.

In Section 2 we present reversible mono-lingual models consisting of collections of simple automata associated with the heads of phrases. These *head automata* are applied by an algorithm with admissible incremental pruning based on semantic association costs, providing a practical solution to the problem of combinatoric disambiguation (Church and Patil 1982). The model is intended to combine the lexical sensitivity of N-gram models (Jelinek et al. 1992) and the structural properties of statistical context free grammars (Booth 1969) without the computational overhead of statistical lexicalized tree-adjoining grammars (Schabes 1992, Resnik 1992). The quantitative dependency model described here grew out of the model presented in Alshawi 1996a. An alternative model based on transducer versions of the automata is described in Alshawi 1996b.

For translation, we use a model for mapping dependency graphs written by the source language head automata. This model is coded entirely as a bilingual lexicon, with associated cost parameters. The transfer algorithm described in Section 4 searches for the lowest cost 'tiling' of the target dependency graph with entries from the bilingual lexicon. Dynamic programming is again used to make exhaustive search tractable, avoiding the combinatoric explosion of shake-and-bake translation (Whitelock 1992, Brew 1992).

In Section 5 we present a general framework for associating costs with the solutions of search processes, pointing out some benefits of cost functions other than log likelihood, including an error-minimization cost function for unsupervised training of the parameters in our translation application. Section 6 briefly describes an English-Chinese translator employing the models and algorithms. We also present experimental results comparing the performance of different cost assignment methods.

Finally, we return to the more general discussion of representations for machine translation and other natural language processing tasks, arguing the case for simple representations close to natural language itself.

2 Head Automata Language Models

2.1 Lexical and Dependency Parameters

Head automata mono-lingual language models consist of a *lexicon*, in which each entry is a pair $\langle w, m \rangle$ of a word w from a vocabulary V and a head automaton m (defined below), and a *parameter* *table* giving an assignment of costs to events in a generative process involving the automata.

We first describe the model in terms of the familiar paradigm of a generative statistical model, presenting the parameters as conditional probabilities. This gives us a stochastic version of dependency grammar (Hudson 1984).

Each derivation in the generative statistical model produces an *ordered dependency tree*, that is, a tree in which nodes dominate ordered sequences of left and right subtrees and in which the nodes have labels taken from the vocabulary V and the arcs have labels taken from a set R of relation symbols. When a node with label w immediately dominates a node with label w' via an arc with label r, we say that w' is an *r-dependent* of the *head* w. The interpretation of this directed arc is that relation r holds between particular instances of w and w'. (A word may have several or no r-dependents for a particular relation r.) A recursive left-parent-right traversal of the nodes of an ordered dependency tree for a derivation yields the word string for the derivation.

A head automaton m of a lexical entry $\langle w, m\rangle$ defines possible ordered local trees immediately dominated by w in derivations. Model parameters for head automata, together with dependency parameters and lexical parameters, give a probability distribution for derivations.

A *dependency parameter*

$$P(\downarrow, w'|w, r')$$

is the probability, given a head w with a dependent arc with label r', that w' is the r'-dependent for this arc.

A *lexical parameter*

$$P(m, q|r, \downarrow, w)$$

is the probability that a local tree immediately dominated by an r-dependent w is derived by starting in state q of some automaton m in a lexical entry $\langle w, m\rangle$. The model also includes lexical parameters

$$P(w, m, q| \triangleright)$$

for the probability that w is the head word for an entire derivation initiated from state q of automaton m.

2.2 Head Automata

A head automaton is a weighted finite state machine that writes (or accepts) a pair of sequences of relation symbols from R:

$$(\langle r_1 \cdots r_k\rangle, \langle r_{k+1} \cdots r_n\rangle).$$

These correspond to the relations between a head word and the sequences of dependent phrases to its left and right (see Figure 1). The machine consists of a finite set $q_0, \cdots, q_s$ of states and an *action table* specifying the finite cost (non-zero probability) actions the automaton can undergo.

There are three types of action for an automaton m: left transitions, right transitions, and stop actions. These actions, together with associated probabilistic model parameters, are as follows.

- Left transition: if in state q_{i-1}, m can write a symbol r onto the right end of the current left sequence and enter state q_i with probability $P(\leftarrow, q_i, r|q_{i-1}, m)$.

- Right transition: if in state q_{i-1}, m can write a symbol r onto the left end of the current right sequence and enter state q_i with probability $P(\rightarrow, q_i, r|q_{i-1}, m)$.

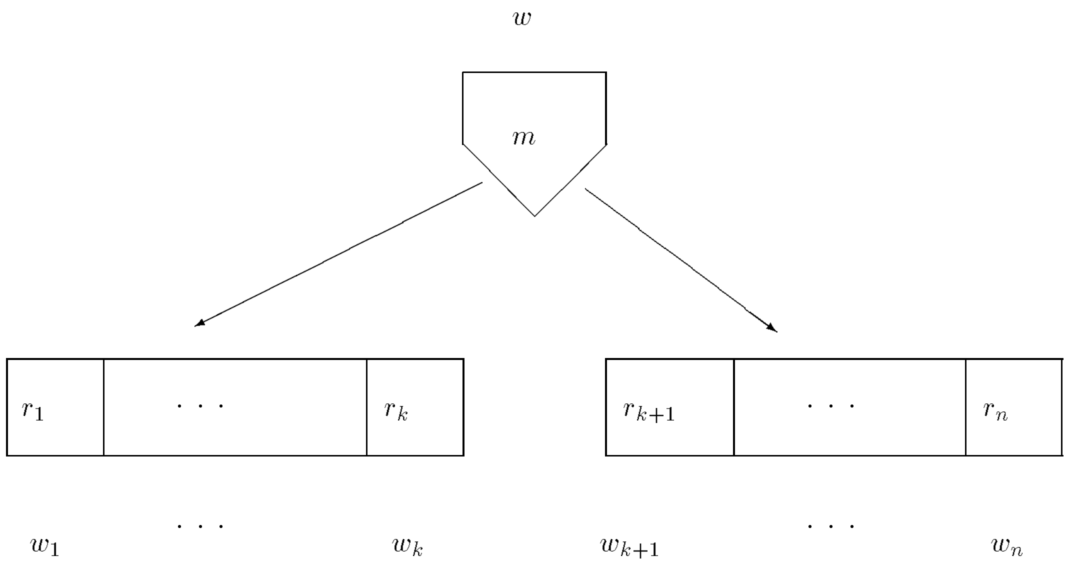

Figure 1: Head automaton m scans left and right sequences of relations r_i for dependents w_i of w.

- Stop: if in state q, m can stop with probability $P(\square|q, m)$, at which point the sequences are considered complete.

For a consistent probabilistic model, the probabilities of all transitions and stop actions from a state q must sum to unity. Any state of a head automaton can be an initial state, the probability of a particular initial state in a derivation being specified by lexical parameters. A derivation of a pair of symbol sequence thus corresponds to the selection of an initial state, a sequence of zero or more transitions (writing the symbols) and a stop action. The probability, given an initial state q, that automaton m will a generate a pair of sequences, i.e.

$$P(\langle r_1 \cdots r_k \rangle, \langle r_{k+1} \cdots r_n \rangle | m, q)$$

is the product of the probabilities of the actions taken to generate the sequences. The case of zero transitions will yield empty sequences, corresponding to a leaf node of the dependency tree.

From a linguistic perspective, head automata allow for a compact, graded, notion of lexical subcategorization (Gazdar et al. 1985) and the linear order of a head and its dependent phrases. Lexical parameters can control the saturation of a lexical item (for example a verb that is both transitive and intransitive) by starting the same automaton in different states. Head automata can also be used to code a grammar in which states of an automaton for word w corresponds to X-bar levels (Jackendoff 1977) for phrases headed by w.

Head automata are formally more powerful than finite state automata that accept regular languages in the following sense. Each head automaton defines a formal language with alphabet R whose strings are the concatenation of the left and right sequence pairs written by the automaton. The class of languages defined in this way clearly includes all regular languages, since strings of a regular language can be generated, for example, by a head automaton that only writes a left sequence. Head automata can also accept some non-regular languages requiring coordination of the left and right sequences, for example the language $a^n b^n$ (requiring two states), and the language of palindromes over a finite alphabet.

2.3 Derivation Probability

Let the probability of generating an ordered dependency subtree D headed by an r-dependent word w be $P(D|w,r)$. The recursive process of generating this subtree proceeds as follows:

1. Select an initial state q of an automaton m for w with lexical probability $P(m,q|r,\downarrow,w)$.
2. Run the automaton m_0 with initial state q to generate a pair of relation sequences with probability $P(\langle r_1 \cdots r_k\rangle, \langle r_{k+1} \cdots r_n\rangle | m, q)$.
3. For each relation r_i in these sequences, select a dependent word w_i with dependency probability $P(\downarrow, w_i|w, r_i)$.
4. For each dependent w_i, recursively generate a subtree with probability $P(D_i|w_i, r_i)$.

We can now express the probability $P(D_0)$ for an entire ordered dependency tree derivation D_0 headed by a word w_0 as

$$
\begin{aligned}
&P(D_0) = \\
&\qquad P(w_0, m_0, q_0 | \rhd) \\
&\qquad P(\langle r_1 \cdots r_k\rangle, \langle r_{k+1} \cdots r_n\rangle | m_0, q_0) \\
&\qquad \textstyle\prod_{1 \le i \le n} P(\downarrow, w_i | w_0, r_i) P(D_i | w_i, r_i).
\end{aligned}
$$

In the translation application we search for the highest probability derivation (or more generally, the N-highest probability derivations). For other purposes, the probability of strings may be of more interest. The probability of a string according to the model is the sum of the probabilities of derivations of ordered dependency trees yielding the string.

In practice, the number of parameters in a head automaton language model is dominated by the dependency parameters, that is, $O(|V|^2|R|)$ parameters. This puts the size of the model somewhere in between 2-gram and 3-gram model. The similarly motivated link grammar model (Lafferty, Sleator and Temperley 1992) has $O(|V|^3)$ parameters. Unlike simple N-gram models, head automata models yield an interesting distribution of sentence lengths. For example, the average sentence length for Monte-Carlo generation with our probabilistic head automata model for ATIS was 10.6 words (the average was 9.7 words for the corpus it was trained on).

3 Analysis and Generation

3.1 Analysis

Head automaton models admit efficient lexically driven analysis (parsing) algorithms in which partial analyses are costed incrementally as they are constructed. Put in terms of the traditional parsing issues in natural language understanding, "semantic" associations coded as dependency parameters are applied at each parsing step allowing semantically suboptimal analyses to be eliminated, so the analysis with the best semantic score can be identified without scoring an exponential number of syntactic parses. Since the model is lexical, linguistic constructions headed by lexical items not present in the input are not involved in the search the way they are with typical top-down or predictive parsing strategies.

We will sketch an algorithm for finding the lowest cost ordered dependency tree derivation for an input string in polynomial time in the length of the string. In our experimental system we use a more general version of the algorithm to allow input in the form of word lattices.

The algorithm is a bottom-up tabular parser (Younger 1967, Early 1970) in which constituents are constructed "head-outwards" (Kay 1989, Sata and Stock 1989). Since we are analyzing bottom-up with generative model automata, the algorithm 'runs' the automata backwards. Edges in the parsing lattice (or "chart") are tuples representing partial or complete phrases headed by a word w from position i to position j in the string:

$$\langle w, t, i, j, m, q, c \rangle.$$

Here m is the head automaton for w in this derivation; the automaton is in state q; t is the dependency tree constructed so far, and c is the cost of the partial derivation. We will use the notation $C(x|y)$ for the cost of a model event with probability $P(x|y)$; the assignment of costs to events is discussed in Section 5.

Initialization: For each word w in the input between positions i and j, the lattice is initialized with phrases

$$\langle w, \{\}, i, j, m, q_f, c_f \rangle$$

for any lexical entry $\langle w, m \rangle$ and any final state q_f of the automaton m in the entry. A final state is one for which the stop action cost $c_f = C(\Box | q_f, m)$ is finite.

Transitions: Phrases are combined bottom-up to form progressively larger phrases. There are two types of combination corresponding to left and right transitions of the automaton for the word acting as the head in the combination. We will specify left combination; right combination is the mirror image of left combination. If the lattice contains two phrases abutting at position k in the string:

$$\langle w_1, t_1, i, k, m_1, q_1, c_1 \rangle$$
$$\langle w_2, t_2, k, j, m_2, q_2, c_2 \rangle,$$

and the parameter table contains the following finite costs parameters (a left r-transition of m_2, a lexical parameter for w_1, and an r-dependency parameter):

$$c_3 = C(\leftarrow, q_2, r | q_2', m_2)$$
$$c_4 = C(m_1, q_1 | r, \downarrow, w_1)$$
$$c_5 = C(\downarrow, w_1 | w_2, r),$$

then build a new phrase headed by w_2 with a tree t_2' formed by adding t_1 to t_2 as an r-dependent of w_2:

$$\langle w_2, t_2', i, j, m_2, q_2', c_1 + c_2 + c_3 + c_4 + c_5 \rangle.$$

When no more combinations are possible, for each phrase spanning the entire input we add the appropriate start of derivation cost to these phrases and select the one with the lowest total cost.

Pruning: The dynamic programming condition for pruning suboptimal partial analyses is as follows. Whenever there are two phrases

$$p = \langle w, t, i, j, m, q, c \rangle$$
$$p' = \langle w, t', i, j, m, q, c' \rangle,$$

and c' is greater than c, then we can remove p' because for any derivation involving p' that spans the entire string, there will be a lower cost derivation involving p. This pruning condition is effective at curbing a combinatorial explosion arising from, for example, prepositional phrase attachment ambiguities (coded in the alternative trees t and t').

The worst case asymptotic time complexity of the analysis algorithm is $O(\min(n^2, |V|^2)n^3)$, where n is the length of an input string and $|V|$ is the size of the vocabulary. This limit can be derived in a similar way to cubic time tabular recognition algorithms for context free grammars (Younger 1967) with the grammar related term being replaced by the term $\min(n^2, |V|^2)$ since the words of the input sentence also act as categories in the head automata model. In this context "recognition" refers to checking that the input string can be generated from the grammar. Note that our algorithm is for analysis (in the sense of finding the best derivation) which, in general, is a higher time complexity problem than recognition.

3.2 Generation

By generation here we mean determining the lowest cost linear surface ordering for the dependents of each word in an *unordered* dependency structure resulting from the transfer mapping described in Section 4. In general, the output of transfer is a dependency graph and the task of the generator involves a search for a backbone dependency tree for the graph, if necessary by adding dependency edges to join up unconnected components of the graph. For each graph component, the main steps of the search process, described non-deterministically, are

1. Select a node with word label w having a finite start of derivation cost $C(w, m, q|\triangleright)$.

2. Execute a path through the head automaton m starting at state q and ending at state q' with a finite stop action cost $C(\square|q', m)$. When making a transition with relation r_i in the path, select a graph edge with label r_i from w to some previously unvisited node w_i with finite dependency cost $C(\downarrow, w_i|w, r_i)$. Include the cost of the transition (e.g. $C(\rightarrow, q_i, r_i|q_{i-1}, m)$) in the running total for this derivation.

3. For each dependent node w_i, select a lexical entry with cost $C(m_i, q_i|r_i, \downarrow, w_i)$, and recursively apply the machine m_i from state q_i as in step 2.

4. Perform a left-parent-right traversal of the nodes of the resulting dependency tree, yielding a target string.

The target string resulting from the lowest cost tree that includes all nodes in the graph is selected as the translation target string. The independence assumptions implicit in head automata models mean that we can select lowest cost orderings of local dependency trees, below a given relation r, independently in the search for the lowest cost derivation.

When the generator is used as part of the translation system, the dependency parameter costs are not, in fact, applied by the generator. Instead, because these parameters are independent of surface order, they are applied earlier by the transfer component, influencing the choice of structure passed to the generator.

4 Transfer Maps

4.1 Transfer Model Bilingual Lexicon

The transfer model defines possible mappings, with associated costs, of dependency trees with source-language word node labels into ones with target-language word labels. Unlike the head automata monolingual models, the transfer model operates with unordered dependency trees, that is, it treats the dependents of a word as an unordered bag. The model is general enough to cover the common translation problems discussed in the literature (e.g. Lindop and Tsujii 1991 and Dorr 1994) including many-to-many word mapping, argument switching, and head switching.

A transfer model consists of a bilingual lexicon and a transfer parameter table. The model uses *dependency tree fragments*, which are the same as unordered dependency trees except that some nodes may not have word labels. In the *bilingual lexicon*, an entry for a source word w_i (see top portion of Figure 2) has the form

$$\langle w_i, H_i, n_i, G_i, f_i \rangle$$

where H_i is a source language tree fragment, n_i (the *primary node*) is a distinguished node of H_i with label w_i, G_i is a target tree fragment, and f_i is a *mapping function*, i.e. a (possibly partial) function from the nodes of H_i to the nodes of G_i.

The *transfer parameter table* specifies costs for the application of transfer entries. In a context-independent model, each entry has a single cost parameter. In context-dependent transfer models, the cost function takes into account the identities of the labels of the arcs and nodes dominating w_i in the source graph. (Context dependence is discussed further in Section 5.) The set of transfer parameters may also include costs for the *null transfer entries* for w_i, for use in derivations in which w_i is translated by the entry for another word v. For example, the entry for v might be for translating an idiom involving w_i as a modifier.

Each entry in the bilingual lexicon specifies a way of mapping part of a dependency tree, specifically that part "matching" (as explained below) the source fragment of the entry, into part of a target graph, as indicated by the target fragment. Entry mapping functions specify how the set of target fragments for deriving a translation are to be combined: whenever an entry is applied, a global node-mapping function is extended to include the entry mapping function.

4.2 Matching, Tiling, and Derivation

Transfer mapping takes a source dependency tree S from analysis and produces a minimum cost derivation of a target graph T and a (possibly partial) function f from source nodes to target nodes. In fact, the transfer model is applicable to certain types of source dependency graphs that are more general than trees, although the version of the head automata model described here only produces trees.

We will say that a tree fragment H *matches* an unordered dependency tree S if there is a function g (a *matching function*) from the nodes of H to the nodes of S such that

- g is a total one-one function;
- if a node n of H has a label, and that label is word w, then the word label for $g(n)$ is also w;
- for every arc in H with label r from node n_1 to node n_2, there is an arc with label r from $g(n_1)$ to $g(n_2)$.

Unlike first order unification, this definition of matching is not commutative and is not deterministic in that there may be multiple matching functions for applying a bilingual entry to an input source tree. A particular match of an entry against a dependency tree can be represented by the matching function g, a set of arcs A in S, and the (possibly context dependent) cost c of applying the entry.

A *tiling* of a source graph with respect to a transfer model is a set of entry matches

$$\{\langle E_1, g_1, A_1, c_1 \rangle, \cdots, \langle E_k, g_k, A_k, c_k \rangle\}$$

which is such that

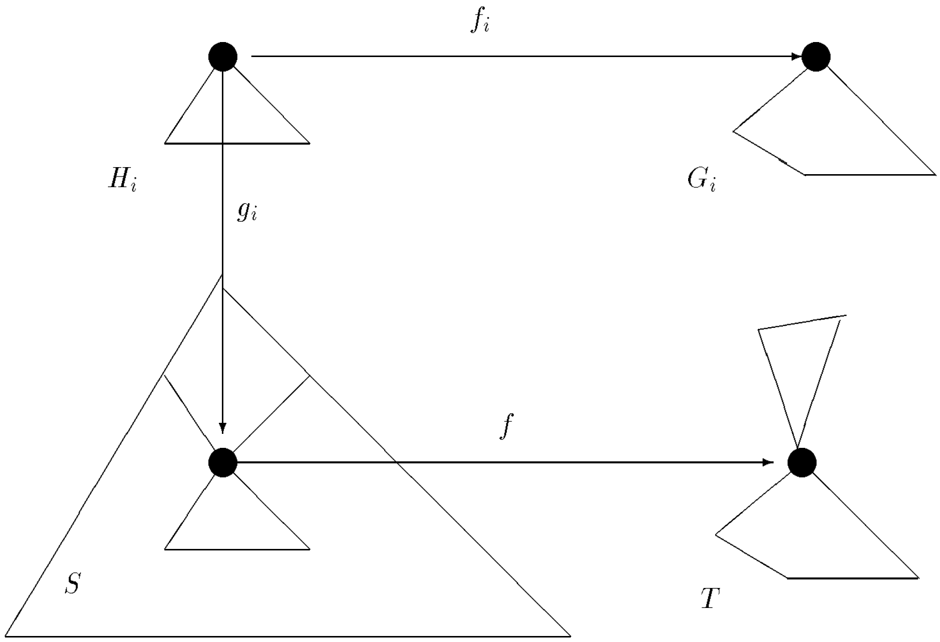

Figure 2: Transfer matching and mapping functions

- k is the number of nodes in the source tree S.
- Each E_i, $1 \le i \le k$, is a bilingual entry $\langle w_i, H_i, n_i, G_i, f_i \rangle$ matching S with function g_i (see Figure 2) and arcs A_i.
- For primary nodes n_i and n_j of two distinct entries E_i and E_j, $g_i(n_i)$ and $g_j(n_j)$ are distinct.
- The sets of edges A_i form a partition of the edges of S.
- The images $g_i(L_i)$ form a partition of the nodes of S, where L_i is the set of *labeled* source nodes in the source fragment H_i of E_i.
- c_i is the cost of the match specified by the parameter table.

A tiling of S yields a costed derivation of a target dependency graph T as follows:

- The cost of the derivation is the sum of the costs c_i for each match in the tiling.
- The nodes and arcs of T are composed of the nodes and arcs of the target fragments G_i for the entries E_i.
- Let f_i and f_j be the mapping functions for entries E_i and E_j. For any node n of S for which target nodes $f_i(g_i^{-1}(n))$ and $f_j(g_i^{-1}(n))$ are defined, these two nodes are identified as a single node $f(n)$ in T.

The merging of target fragment nodes in the last condition has the effect of joining the target fragments in a consistent fashion. The node mapping function f for the entire tree thus has a different role from the alignment function in the IBM statistical translation model (Brown et al. 1990, 1993); the role of the latter includes the linear ordering of words in the target string. In our approach, target word order is handled exclusively by the target monolingual model.

4.3 Transfer Algorithm

The main transfer search is preceded by a bilingual lexicon matching phase. This leads to greater efficiency as it avoids repeating matching operations during the search phase, and it allows a static analysis of the matching entries and source tree to identify subtrees for which the search phase can safely prune out suboptimal partial translations.

Transfer Configurations In order to apply target language model relation costs incrementally, we need to distinguish between complete and incomplete arcs: an arc is complete if both its nodes have labels, otherwise it is incomplete. The output of the lexicon matching phrase, and the partial derivations manipulated by the search phase are both in the form of *transfer configurations*

$$\langle S, R, T, P, f, c, I \rangle$$

where S is the set of source nodes and arcs consumed so far in the derivation, R the remaining source nodes and arcs, f the mapping function built so far, T the set of nodes and complete arcs of the target graph, P the set of incomplete target arcs, c the partial derivation cost, and I a set of source nodes for which entries have yet to be applied.

Lexical matching phase The algorithm for lexical matching has a similar control structure to standard unification algorithms, except that it can result in multiple matches. We omit the details. The lexicon matching phase returns, for each source node i, a set of *runtime entries*. There is one runtime entry for each successful match and possibly a null entry for the node if the word label for i is included in successful matches for other entries. Runtime entries are transfer configurations of the form

$$\langle H_i, \phi, G_i, P_i, f_i, c_i, \{i\} \rangle$$

in which H_i is the source fragment for the entry with each node replaced by its image under the applicable matching function; G_i the target fragment for the entry, except for the incomplete arcs P_i of this fragment; f_i the composition of mapping function for the entry with the inverse of the matching function; c_i the cost of applying the entry in the context of its match with the source graph plus the cost in the target model of the arcs in G_i.

Transfer Search Before the transfer search proper, the resulting runtime entries together with the source graph are analyzed to determine *decomposition nodes*. A decomposition node n is a source tree node for which it is safe to prune suboptimal translations of the subtree dominated by n. Specifically, it is checked that n is the root node of all source fragments H_n of runtime entries in which both n *and* its node label are included, and that $f_n(n)$ is not dominated by (i.e. not reachable via directed arcs from) another node in the target graph G_n of such entries.

Transfer search maintains a set M of active runtime entries. Initially, this is the set of runtime entries resulting from the lexicon matching phase. Overall search control is as follows:

1. Determine the set of decomposition nodes.
2. Sort the decomposition nodes into a list D such that if n_1 dominates n_2 in S then n_2 precedes n_1 in D.
3. If D is empty, apply the subtree transfer search (given below) to S, return the lowest cost solution, and stop.

4. Remove the first decomposition node n from D and apply the subtree transfer search to the subtree S' dominated by n, to yield solutions $\langle S', \phi, T', \phi, f', c', \phi \rangle$.

5. Partition these solutions into subsets with the same word label for the node $f'(n)$, and select the solution with lowest cost c' from each subset.

6. Remove from M the set of runtime entries for nodes in S'.

7. For each selected subtree solution, add to M a new runtime entry $\langle S', \phi, T', f', c', \{n\} \rangle$.

8. Repeat from step 3.

The subtree transfer search maintains a queue Q of configurations corresponding to partial derivations for translating the subtree. Control follows a standard non-deterministic search paradigm:

1. Initialize Q to contain a single configuration $\langle \phi, R_0, \phi, \phi, \phi, 0, I_0 \rangle$ with the input subtree R_0 and the set of nodes I_0 in R_0.

2. If Q is empty, return the lowest cost solution found and stop.

3. Remove a configuration $\langle S, R, T, P, f, c, I \rangle$ from the queue.

4. If R is empty, add the configuration to the set of subtree solutions.

5. Select a node i from I.

6. For each runtime entry $\langle H_i, \phi, G_i, P_i, f_i, c_i, \{i\} \rangle$ for i, if H_i is a subgraph of R, add to Q a configuration $\langle S \cup H_i, R - H_i, T \cup G_i \cup G', P \cup P_i - G', f \cup f_i, c + c_i + c_{G'}, I - \{i\} \rangle$, where G' is the set of newly completed arcs (those in $P \cup P_i$ with both node labels in $T \cup G_i \cup P \cup P_i$) and $c_{G'}$ is the cost of the arcs G' in the target language model.

7. For any source node n for which $f(n)$ and $f_i(n)$ are both defined, merge these two target nodes.

8. Repeat from step 2.

Keeping the arcs P separate in the configuration allows efficient incremental application of target dependency costs $c_{G'}$ during the search, so these costs are taken into account in the pruning step of the overall search control. This way we can keep the benefits of monolingual/bilingual modularity (Isabelle and Macklovitch 1986) without the computational overhead of transfer-and-filter (Alshawi et al. 1992).

It is possible to apply the subtree search directly to the whole graph starting with the initial runtime entries from lexical matching. However, this would result in an exponential search, specifically a search tree with a branching factor of the order of the number of matching entries per input word. Fortunately, long sentences typically have several decomposition nodes, such as the heads of noun phrases, so the search as described is factored into manageable components.

5 Cost Functions

5.1 Costed Search Processes

The head automata model and transfer model were originally conceived as probabilistic models. In order to take advantage of more of the information available in our training data, we experimented with cost functions that make use of incorrect translations as negative examples and also to treat the correctness of a translation hypothesis as a matter of degree.

To experiment with different models, we implemented a general mechanism for associating costs to solutions of a search process. Here, a search process is conceptualized as a non-deterministic computation that takes a single input string, undergoes a sequence of state transitions in a non-deterministic fashion, then outputs a solution string. Process states are distinct from, but may include, head automaton states.

A cost function for a search process is a real valued function defined on a pair of equivalence classes of process states. The first element of the pair, a *context* c, is an equivalence class of states before transitions. The second element, an *event* e, is an equivalence class of states after transitions. (The equivalence relations for contexts and events may be different.) We refer to an event-context pair as a *choice*, for which we use the notation

$$(e|c)$$

borrowed from the special case of conditional probabilities. The cost of a derivation of a solution by the process is taken to be the sum of costs of choices involved in the derivation.

We represent events and contexts by finite sequences of symbols (typically words or relation symbols in the translation application). We write

$$C(a_1 \cdots a_n | b_1 \cdots b_k)$$

for the cost of the event represented by $\langle a_1 \cdots a_n \rangle$ in the context represented by $\langle b_1 \cdots b_k \rangle$.

"Backed off" costs can be computed by averaging over larger equivalence classes (represented by shorter sequences in which positions are eliminated systematically). A similar smoothing technique has been applied to the specific case of prepositional phrase attachment by Collins and Brooks (1995). We have used backed off costs in the translation application for the various cost functions described below. Although this resulted in some improvement in testing, so far the improvement has not been statistically significant.

5.2 Model Cost Functions

Taken together, the events, contexts, and cost function constitute a *process cost model*, or simply a *model*. The cost function specifies the *model parameters*; the other components are the *model structure*.

We have experimented with a number of model types, including the following.

Probabilistic model: In this model we assume a probability distribution on the possible events for a context, that is,

$$\sum_e P(e|c) = 1.$$

The cost parameters of the model are defined as:

$$C(e|c) = -\ln(P(e|c)).$$

Given a set of solutions from executions of a process, let $n^+(e|c)$ be the number of times choice $(e|c)$ was taken leading to acceptable solutions (e.g. correct translations) and $n^+(c)$ be the number of times context c was encountered for these solutions. We can then estimate the probabilistic model costs with

$$C(e|c) \approx \ln(n^+(c)) - \ln(n^+(e|c)).$$

Discriminative model: The costs in this model are likelihood ratios comparing positive and negative solutions, for example correct and incorrect translations. (See Dunning 1993 on the application of likelihood ratios in computational linguistics.) Let $n^-(e|c)$ be the count for choice $(e|c)$ leading to negative solutions. The cost function for the discriminative model is estimated as

$$C(e|c) \approx \ln(n^-(e|c)) - \ln(n^+(e|c)).$$

Mean distance model: In the mean distance model, we make use of some measure of goodness of a solution t_s for some input s by comparing it against an ideal solution $\hat{t}_s$ for s with a distance metric h:

$$h(t_s, \hat{t}_s) \mapsto d$$

in which d is a non-negative real number. A parameter for choice $(e|c)$ in the distance model

$$C(e|c) = E_h(e|c)$$

is the mean value of $h(t_s, \hat{t}_s)$ for solutions t_s produced by derivations including the choice $(e|c)$.
Normalized distance model: The mean distance model does not use the constraint that a particular choice faced by a process is always a choice between events with the same context. It is also somewhat sensitive to peculiarities of the distance function h. With the same assumptions we made for the mean distance model, let

$$E_h(c)$$

be the average of $h(t_s, \hat{t}_s)$ for solutions derived from sequences of choices including the context c. The cost parameter for $(e|c)$ in the normalized distance model is

$$C(e|c) = \frac{E_h(e|c)}{E_h(c)},$$

that is, the ratio of the expected distance for derivations involving the choice and the expected distance for all derivations involving the context for that choice.

Reflexive Training If we have a manually translated corpus, we can apply the mean and normalized distance models to translation by taking the ideal solution $\hat{t}_s$ for translating a source string s to be the manual translation for s. In the absence of good metrics for comparing translations, we employ a heuristic string distance metric to compare word selection and word order in t_s and $\hat{t}_s$.

In order to train the model parameters without a manually translated corpus, we use a "reflexive" training method (similar in spirit to the "wake-sleep" algorithm, Hinton et al. 1995). In this method, our search process translates a source sentence s to t_s in the target language and then translates t_s back to a source language sentence s'. The original sentence s can then act as the ideal solution of the overall process. For this training method to be effective, we need a reasonably good initial model, i.e. one for which the distance $h(s, s')$ is inversely correlated with the probability that t_s is a good translation of s.

6 Experimental System

We have built an experimental translation system using the monolingual and translation models described in this paper. The system translates sentences in the ATIS domain (Hirschman et al. 1993) between English and Mandarin Chinese. The translator is in fact a subsystem of a speech translation prototype, though the experiments we describe here are for transcribed spoken utterances. (We informally refer to the transcribed utterances as sentences.) The average time taken for translation of sentences (of unrestricted length) from the ATIS corpus was around 1.7 seconds with approximately 0.4 seconds being taken by the analysis algorithm and 0.7 seconds by the transfer algorithm.

English and Chinese lexicons of around 1200 and 1000 words respectively were constructed. Altogether, the entries in these lexicons made reference to around 200 structurally distinct head automata. The transfer lexicon contained around 3500 paired graph fragments, most of which were used in both transfer directions. With this model structure, we tried a number of methods for assigning cost functions. The nature of the training methods and their corresponding cost functions meant that different amounts of training data could be used, as discussed further below.

The methods make use of a supervised training set and an unsupervised training set, both sets being chosen at random from the 20,000 or so ATIS sentences available to us. The supervised training set comprised around 1950 sentences. A subcollection of 1150 of these sentences were translated by the system, and the resulting translations manually classified as 'good' (800 translations) or 'bad' (350 translations). The remaining 800 supervised training set sentences were hand-tagged for prepositional attachment points. (Prepositional phrase attachment is a major cause of ambiguity in the ATIS corpus, and moreover can affect English-Chinese translation, see Chen and Chen 1992.) The attachment information was used to generate additional negative and positive counts for dependency choices. The unsupervised training set consisted of approximately 13,000 sentences; it was used for automatic training (as described under 'Reflexive Training' above) by translating the sentences into Chinese and back to English.

A. *Qualitative Baseline:* In this model, all choices were assigned the same cost except for irregular events (such as unknown words or partial analyses) which were all assigned a high penalty cost. This model gives an indication of performance based solely on model structure.

B. *Probabilistic:* Counts for choices leading to good translations for sentences of the supervised training corpus, together with counts from the manually assigned attachment points, were used to compute negated log probability costs.

C. *Discriminative:* The positive counts as in the probabilistic method, together with corresponding negative counts from bad translations or incorrect attachment choices, were used to compute log likelihood ratio costs.

D. *Normalized Distance:* In this fully automatic method, normalized distance costs were computed from reflexive translation of the sentences in the unsupervised training corpus. The translation runs were carried out with parameters from method A.

E. *Bootstrapped Normalized Distance:* The same as method D except that the system used to carry out the reflexive translation was running with parameters from method C.

Table 1 shows the results of evaluating the performance of these models for translating 200 unrestricted length ATIS sentences into Chinese. This was a previously unseen test set not included in any of the training sets. Two measures of translation acceptability are shown, as judged by a Chinese speaker. (In separate experiments, we verified that the judgments of this speaker were near the average of five Chinese speakers). The first measure, "meaning and grammar", gives the percentage of sentence translations judged to preserve meaning without the introduction of

Table 1: Translation performance of different cost assignment methods

Method	Meaning and Grammar (%)	Meaning Preservation (%)
A	29	71
D	37	71
B	46	82
C	52	83
E	54	83

grammatical errors. For the second measure, "meaning preservation", grammatical errors were allowed if they did not interfere with meaning (in the sense of misleading the hearer). In the table, we have grouped together methods A and D for which the parameters were derived without human supervision effort, and methods B, C, and E which depended on the same amount of human supervision effort. This means that side by side comparison of these methods has practical relevance, even though the methods exploited different amounts of data. In the case of E, the supervision effort was used only as an oracle during training, not directly in the cost computations.

We can see from Table 1 that the choice of method affected translation quality (meaning and grammar) more than it affected preservation of meaning. A possible explanation is that the model structure was adequate for most lexical choice decisions because of the relatively low degree of polysemy in the ATIS corpus. For the stricter measure, the differences were statistically significant, according to the sign test at the 5% significance level, for the following comparisons: C and E each outperformed B and D, and B and D each outperformed A.

7 Language Processing and Semantic Representations

The translation system we have described employs only simple representations of sentences and phrases. Apart from the words themselves, the only symbols used are the dependency relations R. In our experimental system, these relation symbols are themselves natural language words, although this is not a necessary property of our models. Information coded explicitly in sentence representations by word senses and feature constraints in our previous work (Alshawi 1992) is implicit in the models used to derive the dependency trees and translations. In particular, dependency parameters and context-dependent transfer parameters give rise to an implicit, graded notion of word sense.

For language-centered applications like translation or summarization, for which we have a large body of examples of the desired behavior, we can think of the task in terms of the formal problem of modeling a relation between strings based on examples of that relation. By taking this viewpoint, we seem to be ignoring the intuition that most interesting natural language processing tasks (translation, summarization, interfaces) are semantic in nature. It is therefore tempting to conclude that an adequate treatment of these tasks requires the manipulation of artificial semantic representation languages with well-understood formal denotations. While the intuition seems reasonable, the conclusion might be too strong in that it rules out the possibility that natural language itself is adequate for manipulating semantic denotations. After all, this is the primary function of natural language.

The main justification for artificial semantic representation languages is that they are unambiguous by design. This may not be as critical, or useful, as it might first appear. While it is true that natural language is ambiguous and under-specified out of context, this uncertainty is greatly reduced by context to the point where further resolution (e.g. full scoping) is irrelevant to the task, or even the intended meaning. The fact that translation is insensitive to many ambiguities motivated the use of unresolved quasi-logical form for transfer (Alshawi et al. 1992).

To the extent that contextual resolution is necessary, context may be provided by the state of the language processor rather than complex semantic representations. Local context may include the state of local processing components (such as our head automata) for capturing grammatical constraints, or the identity of other words in a phrase for capturing sense distinctions. For larger scale context, we have argued elsewhere (Alshawi 1987) that memory activation patterns resulting from the process of carrying out an understanding task can act as global context without explicit representations of discourse. Under this view, the challenge is how to exploit context in performing a task rather than how to map natural language phrases to expressions of a formalism for coding meaning independently of context or intended use.

There is now greater understanding of the formal semantics of under-specified and ambiguous representations. In Alshawi 1995, we provide a denotational semantics for a simple under-specified language and argue for extending this treatment to a formal semantics of natural language strings as expressions of an under-specified representation. In this paradigm, ordered dependency trees can be viewed as natural language strings annotated so that some of the implicit relations are more explicit. A milder form of this kind of annotation is a bracketed natural language string. We are not advocating an approach in which linguistic structure is ignored (as it is in the IBM translator described by Brown et al. 1990), but rather one in which the syntactic and semantic structure of a string is implicit in the way it is processed by an interpreter.

One important advantage of using representations that are close to natural language itself is that it reduces the degrees of freedom in specifying language and task models, making these models easier to acquire automatically. With these considerations in mind, we have started to experiment with a version of the translator described here with even simpler representations and for which the model structure, not just the parameters, can be acquired automatically.

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