

CLAM: Computational Linguistics Application Mediator

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Induction of Linguistic Knowledge.



Introduction

Observation

There are a lot of specialised command-line NLP tools available.

Problems

- 1 Tools often available only locally, installation and configuration can be tough
- 2 Not very user-friendly for the untrained general public or technically-challenged researchers (aka Linguists)
- 3 How to connect one tool to another?

Solution

Making NLP tools available as a full-fledged webservice.

Advantages

- 1 Services available over the web.
- 2 User-friendly interface built-in in the webservice
- 3 Great for demo purposes
- 4 Multiple webservices can be chained in a workflow

Our Focus

- ① A *universal* approach: *wrapping*
 - Turn almost *any* NLP tool into a webservice with *minimal effort*
 - NLP tool = Given input files and a custom set of parameters, produce output files
 - No need to alter the tool itself
- ② Machine-parsable interface & Human-friendly interface

Wrapping Approach

- 1 NLP application: blackbox
- 2 Wrapper script
- 3 CLAM Webservice

Technical Details

RESTful Webservice

RESTful Webservice (as opposed to SOAP, XML-RPC)

- 1 Resource-oriented: "Representations" of "resources" (projects)
- 2 Using HTTP verbs
- 3 Lightweight
- 4 Returns human-readable, machine-parseable XML adhering to a CLAM XML Scheme Definition
- 5 User authentication in the form of HTTP Digest Authentication

Python

Written entirely in Python 2.5

- 1 NLP tools, wrapper scripts, and clients may be in any language
- 2 But: Readily available API when writing wrapper scripts and clients in Python.
- 3 Built on web.py, runs standalone and out-of-the box with built-in CherryPy webserver

Built-in User Interface

User interface automatically generated from XML using XSLT (in browser)

- 1 Webservice *directly* accessible from webserver
- 2 Web 2.0 interface: xHTML Strict, jquery (javascript), AJAX, CSS

Setup

CLAM Setup

Projects are the main resources, users start a new project for each experiment/batch.

Three states:

- **Status 0)** Parameter selection and file upload
- **Status 1)** System in progress
 - Actual NLP tool runs at this stage only
 - Users may safely close browser, shut down computer, and come back later in this stage
- **Status 2)** System done, view/download output files

Providing a Service

In order to make a webservice:

- ❶ Write a service configuration file (in Python, but no Python experience required).
 - General meta information about your system (name, description, etc..)
 - Definition of parameters accepted by your system/wrapper script
 - Definition of input formats and output formats
 - Definition of users and authentication method
- ❷ Write a wrapper script for your system
 - Wrapper script is invoked by CLAM, and should in turn invoke the actual system
 - Acts as glue between CLAM and your NLP Application.
 - Can be written in any language (python users may benefit from the CLAM API)
 - Not always necessary, NLP applications can be invoked directly by CLAM as well.



Writing a Client

- ❶ Communicate with service over HTTP, using HTTP verbs on projects and files to effectuate state transfers
 - GET / - List all projects
 - GET /project/ - Get a project's state
 - PUT /project/ - Create a project
 - POST /project/ - Start a project with POSTed data as parameters
 - DELETE /project/ - Delete or abort a project
 - POST /project/upload/ - Upload a file
 - GET /project/output/ - Download all output files as archive
 - GET /project/output/file - Download output file
- ❷ Parse XML responses
- ❸ **Python users benefit from CLAM Client API, taking care of all above communication and response parsing!**

Architecture