

CSE 598 Project Proposal: Imitation Learning with Baxter Robot using Hi-Fives

Michael Drolet, Frankie Liu, Evan Lam

Abstract—The goal of this project is to successfully learn hi-fives for human-robot interaction. We used an Imitation Learning approach by incorporating Bayesian Interaction Primitives [1]. Through expert-guided demonstrations, we train the robot to learn relationships between human and robot trajectories. We demonstrate that the robot is able to complete the interaction with a human and successfully issue a hi-five. We implemented the Bayesian Interaction Primitives to teach a Baxter Robot how to hi-five through imitation learning. Additionally, we compared the trajectories with human bio-mechanics data.

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching robots how to interact with humans is an interesting challenge in the field of Human Robot Interaction. The athletic and social components which make humans successful in daily interactions are often difficult to capture for robots. Nonetheless there are a variety of methods to teach robots to learn new tasks for human interaction. Imitation learning uses a human expert to guide the robot's interaction. Reinforcement Learning is another popular option for learning tasks that humans are experienced at. Bayesian Interaction approach is a probabilistic approach for teaching a robot.

Our goal is to have a simple interaction that is able to be generalized across different robots using limited samples. The Bayesian Interaction approach enables a simple interaction which can be generalized using limited samples. On the other hand, using a Reinforcement Learning approach would require a significant number of demonstrations in order for the robot to learn the hi-five interaction.

For our project, we train a Baxter robot which is traditionally an industrial robot built by Rethink Robotics. This Baxter robot is refitted in a friendly bear costume. We hope that by developing interactions for this Baxter robot, we can create an emotional support robot which can provide people comfort in times of emotional distress.



Fig. 1. Example of human hi-fiving Baxter

II. RELATED WORK

A. Bayesian Interaction Primitives

The Bayesian Interaction Primitive (BIP) framework is a novel and powerful approach that is being used by the Interactive Robotics Lab at Arizona State University. This SLAM inspired algorithm is useful for encoding spatiotemporal information about the interaction into a state space. BIP approximates each dimension using a weighted linear combination of time-dependent basis functions. In this case, we are using Gaussian basis functions. Included in a state vector are the weights for every basis function, the phase, and phase velocity. As a result, BIP allows us to infer the current state, given previous states (demonstrations) and current observations. Formatting this probabilistically allows the inference to be done using Bayes Filters (in particular, a Kalman Filter) during testing to guide the robot. Since the robot's degrees of freedom are no longer being observed during testing, the BIP framework is based on obtaining a partial observation of the current state to generate the positions/variables of the whole state space. This approach is effective for learning on different types of robots, as there is no domain specific knowledge encoded into the algorithm.

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The goal of this project is for the Baxter robot to successfully issue hi-fives. Our design consideration consists of a quick hi-five with a high success rate. We did most of our training and demonstrations on the Baxter robot, we also integrate our work with the VREP simulation tool.

A. Teaching Baxter

TODO: Michael explains the machine learning and the math behind the training

We plan to use the Extended Kalman Filter (EKF) to perform the filtering in the experiment, as this filter is suitable for smaller sample sizes (compared to the Extended Kalman Filter) and offers good performance in practice.

B. Data Generation

We collected subject data by using the Optitrack motion capture system, where 3D poses were collected at 120 Hz. Subjects wore a headband and two gloves that are equipped with motion capture markers. By using only three degrees of freedom, we avoid performing inference in a space that is too high-dimensional. After all, hands and head position are likely the only relevant information needed to perform a successful hi-five. We used ROS as our communication protocol and to handle messages.

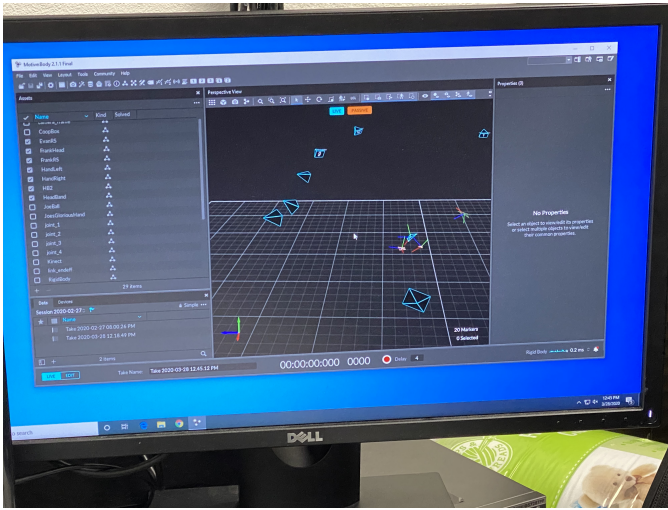


Fig. 2. Optitrack application running

C. Implementation

A huge advantage of using the in-person Baxter robot is that we are able to find joint angle key frames for the training pose easily. For example, we put the robot into puppet mode and then recorded its key positions for a hi-five. Then, all that is required is to interpolate between these points to obtain a motion sequence. This method allowed us to quickly create different hi-five poses and allows us to come up with new poses if we decide to improve our hi-five motion. Lastly, the biggest benefit of using the Baxter in-person is that we have access to a controlled environment- with an Optitrack system, high speed network, and device drivers all configured- so that development and deployment is seamless.

In order to train the Baxter robot, our group conducted approximately 75 in-person demonstrations (hi-fives) on the Baxter robot. Most of these test hi-fives were done using Frankie as the HRI partner, however we did not want our model to overfit the trajectories by using only one person. Therefore, we decided to also use Evan as a HRI partner during training. The hi-five was generated using key frames. We trained the Baxter robot on two different hi-five interaction types. Our first hi-five was very segmented and tried to mimic a robot movement. Our second hi-five was more fluid and smooth like a natural hi-five between two people.

D. Interaction Analysis and Bio-mechanic Analysis

E. Simulation Integration

The simulation tool we are using is VREP. This is a nice tool since its interface is user-friendly and there are useful resources to begin developing with it. We were considering using Gazebo due to its ability to integrate tightly with ROS. However, Gazebo appeared to be heavy compared to other simulators. We ultimately decided on VREP.

One of the challenges we faced while using VREP was that its interface is different than the way we currently interact with the Baxter robot. The simulator has commands to set joint angles, joint velocities, and other options by

using the built-in commands. However, we are using ROS topics within the IntPrim framework to control the Baxter robot. Consequently, switching from simulation to real-life would require a large number of code changes and a need to maintain two different types of controllers.

A work-around lead us to looking into using ROS topics for the VREP simulator, and using PyRep to handle the callbacks from receiving a message. PyRep can call internal LuaScript functions in the simulator, and has greater speed than the Blue Origin (simx). This means that the high frequency topics would be handled better using this PyRep/ROS integration, compared to vanilla VREP, and also gives us the ability to only maintain one ROS controller for both the simulation and real Baxter robot. The next challenge is to figure out which components should be done in-person (which is difficult due to the virus), and see which components can be done by using the simulator.

IV. CURRENT LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Some of the parameters that need to be tuned are the number of basis functions per degree of freedom and the scaling factor for each. This is done through a grid-search that tests various combinations during testing and reports the configuration that results in the lowest Mean Absolute Error (MAE) from the ideal trajectory.

V. CONCLUSION

In the future, we plan to finish writing the ROS subscribers and PyRep interfaces in VREP. This will allow us to do offline experiments (simulations, per say) and when/if things subside with the virus, we can test the results in person. Additionally, we plan to meet and use the Optitrack system for the biomechanical analysis, as this will provide us with the most accurate results.

REFERENCES

- [1] J. Campbell, A. Hitzmann, S. Stepputtis, S. Ikemoto, K. Hosoda, and H. Ben Amor. Learning Interactive Behaviors for Musculoskeletal Robots Using Bayesian Interaction Primitives. IEEE/RSJ International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems (IROS), Macau, China, November 2019.