Department of Informatics, Systems and Communication

An HMM-based approach for misspelling correction

Probabilistic Modeles for Decision

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In recent decades, technology has had a strong impact on everyone's life. It plays an important role in the communication process, simplifying different activities for both individuals and businesses.

Nowadays we have advanced communication technology tools available, such as smartphones, tablets and computers that have simplified the way humans communicate.
Companies can write an e-mail and deliver it to all their consumers in a few minutes. People can message their friends at every moment and share an interest with new friends from different countries.

This advancement in communication technology has made it necessary to equip our technological tools with a series of programs and software that control and correct automatically the misspelt words typed.

In this project, we propose and evaluate an automatic spelling correction algorithm, modelling the typing process as an *Hidden Markov Model* (HMM).

FIXME: keyboard?

Chapter 2

Problem Formulation

FIXME: Given an observation sequence, typically a phrase, and the model parameters, we are interested in detect and correct errors estimating the optimal state sequence.

In our HMM, the hidden states represent the intended words and the observations are the typed words.

The initial state probabilities π are given by the word frequencies and the state transitions A_{ij}, that is the probability of one word given its predecessor obtained from ??**FIXME**

The emission probabilities, B_{ij}, represent the probability of a typed word given the intended one, and depend on the confusion probabilities.

FIXME: We also detect the non-word error?

2.1 Purpose

2.2 Design Choices

We have chosen the English language for different reasons. First of all, the great majority of material in literature deals with the problem in question in the English languag. Moreover it is a simple language, both from a grammatical and a lexical point of view: it lacks in certain symbols, like accents and apostrophes, and genres. Furthermore all punctuation and special character symbols were not considered, but only letters and sometimes numbers.

We considered that a typed word only depends on the previous one, being in the framework of Markov chains. If we know the probability of a word given its predecessor, the frequency of each word, and the probability to type word x when word y is intended, we have all the necessary ingredients to use Hidden Markov Models.

2.3 Software

FIXME We have developed the project in **Python**.
The interface is a native macOS application written in **Swift**.

Chapter 3

Dataset

3.1 Dataset Acquisition

3.1.1 Transition Model

We performed our experiments on two different transition models.
The first one is a concatenation of public domain book excerpts from Project Gutenberg, containing about a million word.

The second one has been extracted from the json file LordOfTheRingsBook.json containing the collections of the "Lord of the rings" book.

To each corpora we applied some preprocessing procedures, in particular we divided them in lower-case sentences, and cleaned from special characters and punctuation, obtaining the datasets `big_clean.csv` and `lotr_clean.csv` (**FIXME** something about apostrophes)

FIXMEHow we use these?

3.1.2 Error Model

The basic error model dataset was collected from the following resources [1] [2] [3] [4]:

- BIRKBECK: contains 36 133 misspellings of 6136 words, taken from the native-speaker section (British and American) of the Birkbeck spelling error corpus.

- HOLBROOK: contains 1791 misspellings of 1200 words, taken from the book "English for the Rejected" by David Holbrook (Cambridge University Press - 1964).

[1] `https://www.dcs.bbk.ac.uk/~ROGER/corpora.html`
[2] `https://www.kaggle.com/rtatman/spelling-variation-on-urban-dictionary`
[3] `https://www.kaggle.com/bittlingmayer/spelling`
[4] `http://luululu.com/tweet`

- ASPELL: contains 531 misspellings of 450 words, taken from one assembled by Atkinson for testing the GNU Aspell spellchecker.
- WIKIPEDIA: contains 2455 misspellings of 1922 words, taken from the misspellings made by Wikipedia editors.
- URBAN-DICTIONARY-VARIANTS: contains 716 variant spellings, taken from the text scraped from Urban Dictionary (in UK English).
- SPELL-SET: contains 670 typos.
- TWEET-TYPO: contains 39 172 typos, taken from Twitter.

All the datasets are joined and cleaned. After that, it contains 79 677 row, in each of which there is the typo and the correct word. The dataset obtained is divided into two corpora: 80% is used as a train set (63 679 rows) and 20% is used as a test set (15 998 rows).

We decided to created another dataset of typos starting from the `lotr_clean.csv`. Extracting a list of all the words contained in this corpus, for each of these we have generated a sequence of five typos according to the algorithm that will be defined in the chapter 3.1.4. The final dataset contains 62 759 row, with the same structure as the one described above. Also in this case the two datasets train and test were created, respectively containing 50 058 and 12 701% rows.

3.1.3 Language Model

We used two different language model datasets.
The first one is a lists of most frequent words from Wiktionary and the British National Corpus. We use `frequency-alpha-gcide.txt`, a smaller version derived from the original dataset Google's ngram corpora, that includes wordlists, cleaned up and limited to only the top 65 538 words.

With this dataset we found some problems, for example the lack of proper names, city names, countries, brands etc. Moreover, most of the typical words of the language used in the sentence dataset were missing. For this reason, we decided to create a new language model `lotr_language_model.txt`, based on the frequency of the word in the dataset `lotr_clean.csv`.

Each of these datasets contains, for each row of the corpus, the ranking of the word, the word itself, the count of the occurrences of the word, a percentage of how often each word was being used and a cumulative percentage.

3.1.4 Perturbated Dataset

In order to evaluate our algorithm on whole sentences, we create new perturbed datasets starting from the datasets `big_clean` and `lotr_clean` described in the section 3.1.1.

FIXME:Estimates for the frequency of spelling errors in human-typed text vary from 1-2% for carefully retyping already printed text to 10-15% for web queries. The disturbance introduced presents an error dependent on the error model previously presented, with the difference that it is created starting from the typos belonging to the test datasets.

Three different texts for each dataset, of approximately 50 000 sentences each, have been generated, each of which has a percentage of errors in the text of **FIXME** 10-15-20% respectively.

We implemented a perturbation algorithm, which for each line of our input file generates a new perturbed string.
The input text is perturbed accordingly the following steps:

1. The probability that a word has an edit is computed by multiplying the value of p, coming from the error model, by the percentage of errors desired (10-15-20%).

2. For each word of length n, the number of edits to be introduced x is calculated according to the relation $x \sim \text{Bin}(n, p)$ **FIXME**: why? Assumptions?

3. The characters to be changed within each word are chosen randomly.

4. **FIXME**: The type of edit to be introduced within each word is chosen according to the probability of each type of error. The disturbance goes to alter the letters designated not in a random manner. In fact, we use four different probabilities to define whether a letter will be deleted from the index in question, if a new letter will be inserted after the actual character, or if the current character will be replaced with one of the possible letters according to the error model probability, or if the current character will be swapped with the next or the previous one.

Swap errors are only introduced if there are no further changes in the word. Cases of elimination of a whole word are excluded, as these would heavily influence the evaluation metrics as they are inconsistent with our model.

Chapter 4

Models

We will consider two optimality criteria. The first one chooses the states that are individually most likely and maximizes the expected number of correct individual states. The second criterion estimates the most likely state sequence, or *trellis path*. The algorithm used to implement these criteria is the **Viterbi** algorithm.

4.1 Hidden Markov Model

FIXME: Hmm approach **FIXME**: description of hmm

FIXME: our application ...

A **Hidden Markov Model** (HMM) allows us to talk about both observed events, like misspelled words that we see in the input, and hidden events, like the intended words, that we think of as causal factors in our probabilistic model.

Our HMM is specified by the following components:

- $Q = q_1 q_2 \ldots q_N$: a set of N **states**
- $A = a_{11} \ldots a_{ij} \ldots a_{NN}$: a **transition probability matrix** A.
  Each a_{ij} representing the probability of moving from state i to state j, such that $\sum_{j=1}^{N} a_{ij} = 1 \quad \forall i$
- $O = o_1 o_2 \ldots o_T$: a sequence of T **observations**, each one drawn from a vocabulary $V = v_1, v_2, \ldots, v_V$
- $B = b_i(o_t)$: a sequence of **observation likelihoods**, also called **emission probabilities**, each expressing the probability of an observation ot being generated from a state i
- $\pi = \pi_1, \pi_2, \ldots, \pi_N$: an **initial probability distribution** over states. π_i is the probability that the Markov chain will start in state i.

FIXMEAggiungere immagine

We consider a *first-order* Hidden Markov Model, that instantiates two simplifying assumptions. First, as with a first-order Markov chain, the probability of a particular state depends only on the previous state. Second, the probability of an output observation o_i depends only on the state that produced the observation q_i and not on any other states or any other observations.

4.2 Noisy Channel Model

Non-word errors are detected by looking for any word not found in a dictionary. To correct them we first generate **candidates**, according to a distance given as a parameter to the model (`edit_distance`), that are real words with a similar letter sequence to the error.

The intuition of the noisy channel model is to treat the misspelled word as if a correctly spelled word had been "distorted" by being passed through a noisy communication channel. This channel introduces "noise" in the form of substitutions or other changes to the letters, making it hard to recognise the "true" word.

We see an observation x (a misspelled word) and we want to find the word w that generated this misspelled word (the intended word). Out of all possible words in the vocabulary V we want to find the word $\hat{w}$ such that $P(\hat{w}|x)$ is highest among all the candidates w

$$\hat{w} = \arg\max_{w \in V} P(w|x). \tag{4.1}$$

This noisy channel model is, therefore, a kind of Bayesian inference, in which it is possible to transform the equation 4.1 into a set of other probabilities

$$\hat{w} = \arg\max_{w \in V} \frac{P(x|w)P(w)}{P(x)}. \tag{4.2}$$

Since $P(x)$ doesn't change for each word because we are always asking about the most likely word for the same observed error x, we can conveniently simplify the equation 4.2 by dropping the denominator

$$\hat{w} = \arg\max_{w \in V} P(x|w)P(w). \tag{4.3}$$

FIXME: We apply the noisy channel approach to correcting non-word spelling errors by taking any word not in our spell dictionary, for example *adventhre*, generating a list of candidate words like *adventure*, *adventurer*, *adventured*, ranking them according to 4.3, and picking the highest-ranked one, *adventure*. **FIXME**: We choose the most likely candidate, the one with the highest probability.

The two components of the equation are, respectively, $P(x|w)$ the **channel model** and $P(w)$ the prior probability of a hidden word (a candidate). The prior probability of each correction is the language model probability of the word w in context, which is computed using a **FIXME** *unigram* language model. The likelihood is estimated just using the number of times that the a letter i was substituted for the letter j in the large corpus of errors **FIXME** QUALE=? To compute the probability for each edit we used a confusion matrix that contains counts of errors. **FIXME** How?

Each candidate is scored by $P(\text{candidate})P(\text{typo}|\text{candidate})$ and then normalised by the sum of the scores for all proposed candidates.

FIXME: (How is estimated the prior? How are computed the conditional probabilities?)

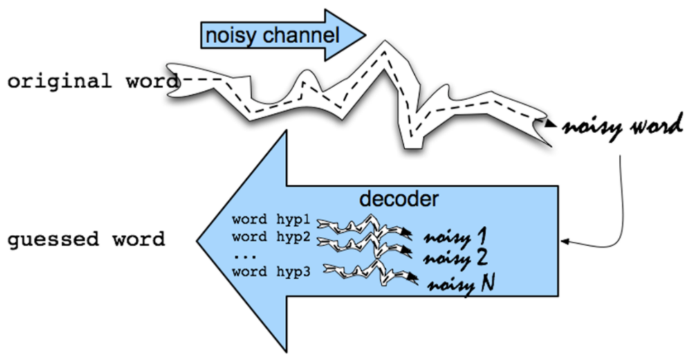

Figure 4.1: Noisy channel

FIXME: When for a input typo we do not have any candidate ??

FIXME: Real word spelling error detection is a much more difficult task, since any word in the input text could be an error. So we don't...

To find this list of candidates we uses a minimum edit distance algorithm in the extended version with transposition called **Damerau-Levenshtein** edit distance **??**.

The following type of errors were considered in our model:

- DIGITS DELETIONS
- DIGITS INSERTIONS
- SUBSTITUTIONS OF DIGITS: this is the probability to type a character i when the character j was intended ($P(i|j)$). This probability was determined experimentally. **FIXME**: how? from where?

- TRANSPOSITIONS OF ADJACENT DIGITS: two letters are swapped.

4.3 Most Likely State Sequence

The Viterbi algorithm calculates the most probable sequence of hidden states, the words intended. The Viterbi algorithm is a probabilistic extension of minimum edit distance. Instead of computing the "minimum edit distance" between two strings, Viterbi computes the "maximum probability alignment" of one string with another.

The initial probability of being in a state i, π_i, in our case the probability of intend a word i, and the transition probabilities A_{ij}, or the transition from the word i to the next word j, are given. Since we have observed the output $y_1, y_2, \dots, y_t$, that is the sentence written with typos, it is possible to computed the most likely state sequence $x_1, x_2, \dots, x_t$, the sentence intended, starting from the following expression:

$$\begin{aligned} V_{1,t+1} &= P(x_1, \dots, x_t, x_{t+1}, y_1, \dots, y_t, y_{t+1}) = \\ &= \arg\max_{x_{1:t}} p(x_1, \dots, x_t | y_1, \dots, y_t) = \\ &= \alpha \cdot p(y_{t+1}|x_{t+1}) \cdot \max_{x_t} \Big(p(x_{t+1}|x_t) \max p(x_1, \dots, x_t | y_1, \dots, y_t) \Big) \end{aligned} \tag{4.4}$$

The initial state probabilities π are actually the word frequencies (? We don't estimate it in a proper way), the state transition probabilities are given by the probability of a word given its predecessor, **FIXME**: come vengono prese and the emission probabilities are the probabilities to type word i when word j was intended.

In our implementation, we construct the *trellis* choosing the **FIXME**: locally/-globally best state. As we can see in the picture below, we display an example of the trellis drawing only the best predecessor of each state.

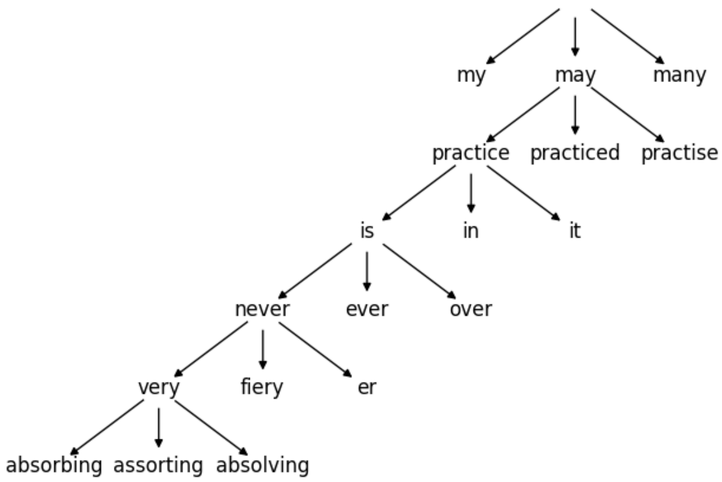

Figure 4.2: Trellis example

In this example, we observed the sentence *my practice iu never iery absorcing* and our algorithm return the most likely state sequence *may practice is never very absorbing*. In this case, the algorithm partially fails, because the intended sentence was *my practice is never very absorbing*.
FIXME: (pi la probabilità iniziale del prima stato non lo abbiamo, non lo facciamo perchè dal nostro dataset non abbiamo sempre la prima parola...)

We decide to implement the **Viterbi** based algorithm instead the Forward-Backward algorithm relying on the experiments carried out in the literature. The HMM-Based Error Correction Mechanism for Five-Key Chording Keyboards article [1] explains that the Forward-Backward algorithm estimates the most likely state for each observation, but the resulting state sequence may not be a valid succession of words in natural language (or a very unlikely word sequence) and produce inferior results.

Chapter 5

Experimental Results

FIXME comparison **FIXME** performance

We performed three different types of experiments.

The first one using as a transition model the dataset `big_clean`, the associate perturbed dataset and test error models, and the language model `frequency-alpha-gcide`.

A second one using the same datasets but introducing a lemmatisation consisting in a simple dictionary lookup.

The last one using as transition model the dataset `lotr_clean`, the associate perturbed dataset and test error models, and the language model `lotr_language_model`.

In all the experiments to come, reference will be made to the following variables:

- p: the probability that a word has an edit
- ins: the probability that a word has a letter insertion
- del: the probability that a word has a letter deletion
- sub: the probability that a word has a letter substitution
- swap: the probability that a word has a swap between two letters

5.0.1 Experiment 1

FIXME Edit distance, perturbation dataset used

p	ins	del	sub	swap
0.5	0.70	0.70	0.70	0.70

Table 5.1: Error Model

	Time (sec)	Accuracy Top1	Accuracy Top3	Accuracy Top5
Train		%	%	%
Test	1220	40.96%	56.34 %	60.03 %

Table 5.2: Typos performance evaluation

#sentence	Time (sec)	Accuracy	Initial Error	Precision	Recall	Specificity
5000	3549	44.40%	14.77%	89.43%	45.42%	14.81%

Table 5.3: Sentences performance evaluation

5.0.2 Experiment 2

p	ins	del	sub	swap
0.5	0.70	0.70	0.70	0.70

Table 5.4: Error Model

We detected some problems with our dataset, in particular it lacks of plural forms and other things

In order to avoid this problem, we decided to try a new approach that use lemmaisation (stemmisationj ......

	Time (sec)	Accuracy Top1	Accuracy Top3	Accuracy Top5
Train	20 986	41.38%	57.28 %	61.60 %
Test	5270	41.54%	57.18 %	61.15 %

Table 5.5: Typos performance evaluation

#sentence	Time (sec)	Accuracy	Initial Error	Precision	Recall	Specificity
1000	2705	53.46%	15.01%	90.96%	54.50%	10.52%

Table 5.6: Sentences performance evaluation

5.0.3 Experiment 3

Edit distance, perturbation dataset used

p	ins	del	sub	swap
0.5	0.70	0.70	0.70	0.70

Table 5.7: Error Model

Analysis of spelling error data has shown that the majority of spelling errors consist of a single-letter change and so we often make the simplifying assumption that these candidates have an edit distance of 1 from the error word.

FIXME

	Time (sec)	Accuracy Top1	Accuracy Top3	Accuracy Top5
Train	20 986	41.38%	57.28 %	61.60 %
Test	5270	56.78%	74.75 %	80.59 %

Table 5.8: Typos performance evaluation

#sentence	Time (sec)	Accuracy	Initial Error	Precision	Recall	Specificity
1620	2705	58.21%	17.39%	90.30%	58.62%	8.43%

Table 5.9: Sentences performance evaluation

Chapter 6

Conclusions

it is important to use larger language models than unigrams

For this reason modern systems often use much larger dictionaries automatically derived from very large lists of unigrams like the Google N-gram corpus

6.1 Future Works

- update the various dataset: in particular we can use a new frequency dataset consistent with the language model one.
- Compute the initial probabilities π from the language model
- Consider additional type of error in the model
- improving the noisy channel error model to consider neighbouring characters - Use other algorithms, such as the forward-backward (smooothing) instead Viterbi
- Optimise the code, in particular the lemmatisation/stemming
- Use recurrent neural network instead the hidden markov models.
- We can also improve the performance of the noisy channel model by changing how the prior and the likelihood are combined. In the standard model they are just multiplied together.

The fact that words are generally more frequent than their misspellings can be used in candidate suggestion, by building a set of words and spelling variations that have similar contexts, sorting by frequency, treating the most frequent variant as the source, and learning an error model from the difference

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