Min-Max Tours for Task Allocation to Heterogeneous Agents

Aditya Mishra; Vishal Bharti & Nayana Barai
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Introduction

The paper tackles task allocation in heterogeneous multi-agent systems, aiming to minimize the maximum tour cost for any agent returning to the depot. Framed as the NP-hard Heterogeneous Task Allocation Problem (HTAP), the authors propose a three-phase approximation algorithm that delivers a constant-factor solution.

Problem Statement

HTAP involves assigning tasks to a set of agents that belong to different types, where each type has a specific capability to execute certain tasks. The objective is to partition the tasks among the agents while ensuring:

- Type-specific tasks are performed by compatible agents.
- Generic tasks can be performed by any agent.
- The maximum tour cost (i.e., the longest route among all agents) is minimized.

The problem is modeled using a complete graph where nodes represent tasks and the depot, and edges represent travel costs that satisfy the triangle inequality.

Proposed Solution

The authors introduce a three-phase algorithm to approximate the optimal task allocation:

1. CycleSplit Algorithm: A heuristic-based allocation that first partitions tasks into tours using a Christofides' algorithm-based approach and then splits them among agents.
2. HeteroMinMaxSplit Algorithm: An improved algorithm that considers the workload imbalance among agents, aiming for a more balanced task allocation while minimizing the worst-case tour cost.
3. Rebalancing Phase: A final adjustment step to ensure better load balancing among agents of the same type.

The proposed algorithms provide a 5-factor approximation guarantee, which is reduced to 4 in special cases where each agent is unique in its type.

Implementation Details

To implement the methods described in the paper, our approach will include the following steps:

1. Graph Representation: We will represent the task environment as a weighted graph where nodes correspond to tasks and edges represent the travel cost between tasks, ensuring that the weights satisfy the triangle inequality.
2. Christofides' Algorithm Implementation: Since the proposed algorithms use Christofides' heuristic for tour construction, we will implement this algorithm to generate initial tours efficiently.
3. CycleSplit Algorithm Development: We will develop the CycleSplit algorithm by partitioning task tours and assigning them to agents while maintaining a balanced workload distribution.
4. HeteroMinMaxSplit Algorithm Development: To improve upon the CycleSplit method, we will implement HeteroMinMaxSplit, incorporating a load-balancing mechanism to optimize task assignment.
5. Optimization and Fine-tuning: We will experiment with different heuristics for task splitting and rebalancing to achieve better performance.
6. Testing and Validation: We will create synthetic datasets and real-world scenarios to evaluate the performance of our implementation, comparing results with the theoretical guarantees provided in the paper.
7. Scalability Analysis: We will assess how the implemented algorithms perform with increasing numbers of agents and tasks to ensure practical applicability.

Conclusion

The Min-Max Tours for Task Allocation to Heterogeneous Agents problem presents a significant challenge in optimizing task distribution among multi-agent systems. The proposed CycleSplit and HeteroMinMaxSplit algorithms offer efficient approximations with bounded performance guarantees. Our implementation will use *Python* and *NetworkX* to develop and evaluate these algorithms, ensuring practical applicability and scalability in real-world task allocation scenarios.