

Fast, Scalable Phrase-Based SMT Decoding

Anonymous ACL submission

Abstract

The utilization of statistical machine translation (SMT) has grown enormously over the last decade, many using open-source software developed by the NLP community. As commercial utilization has increased, there has been a pressing need that is optimized for their requirements. Specifically, faster phrase-based decoding, and more efficient utilization of modern multicore servers.

We present in this paper a re-assessment of the major components of phrase-based decoding and decoder implementation with particular emphasis on speed and scalability to multicore machines. The result is a drop-in replacement for the Moses decoder which is up to fifteen times faster and scales almost linearly with the number of cores. Furthermore, the decoder makes less search errors than the current Moses decoder.

1 Introduction

SMT has been one of the outstanding success story from the NLP community in the last decade, progressing from a mostly research discipline to public useability via services such as Google Translate, Microsoft Translator Hub, as well as services and products built around offline products such as Language Weaver and the open-source Moses toolkit. The latter has spawned a cottage industry encompassing a range of organizations and services from small language service providers seeking to reduce translation cost, to large inter-governmental organizations such as the EU and the UN that require high volume, high quality translation.

For high volume users, decoding is a largest and most critical part of the translation process which needs to be fast and efficient. However, it has been noticed that the Moses decoder, amongst others, is unable to efficiently use multiple CPU cores that are now common on modern servers (reviewed paper, github discussion). That is, the time taken to decode a test set does not substantial decrease when more cores are used, in fact, decoding time may increase when more cores are added. The problem will continue to grow as the commercial use of SMT increases and the number of CPU cores increases.

There have been speculation on the causes of the inefficiency as well as potential remedies. This paper is the first we know of that seeks to tackle this problem head on. We present an phrase-based decoder that is not only significantly faster than the Moses baseline for single-threaded operation, but is able to scale run multiple threads on multicore machines with only a slightly loss in linear speed. Model scores and functionality are compatible with Moses to aid comparison and ease of transition for users. All source code will be made available under an open-source license.

1.1 Prior Work

There are a number of open-source SMT projects, most includes a decoder. The most well known is Moses, which supports phrase-based models, hierarchical phrase-based as well as various syntax-based models. Joshua also supports hierarchical and syntax models and has recently supported phrase-based models. Phrasal supports a number of variants of the phrase-based model. CDEC supports hierarchical and syntactic models.

A number of the decoders support multithreading whilst others use alternative methods such as Hadoop or external scripts to parallelize decoding. We shall investigate the efficiency of using

parallelizing decoding using the multi-processor approach. None of the decoder focus on multi-threads decoding.

(Recently reviewed) describes running multiple processes of the Moses decoder for increased speed.

Other prior work look to optimizing specific components of decoding. (Liang and Chiang) describes the cube-pruning and cube-growing algorithm for decoding which allows the tradeoff between speed and translation quality to the adjusted with a single parameter. (KenLM) and (DALM) describes fast, efficient datastructures for language models. (Zen) describes an implementation of a phrase-table for an SMT decoder that is loaded on demand, reducing the initial loading time and memory requirements. (CompactPT) extends this by compressing the on-disk phrase table and lexicalized re-ordering model resulting in impressive speed gains over previous work.

(mtplz) is perhaps closest in intent to this work. This takes a wholistic approach to decoding, describing a novel decoding algorithm which is focused on better decoding speed. It also describes a number of implementation details for faster decoding. However, the decoding algorithm is only able to incorporate one stateful feature function which precludes some of the useful decoding configurations which contains multiple stateful feature functions. It does not include a load-on-demand phrase table, therefore, cannot be used in a commercial environment where phrase-table has not be filtered with a know test set for any realistic size phrase-table. Neither did this paper analyze the scalability of their work to multicore servers.

The rest of the paper will be broken up into the following sections. Next, we will describe the phrase-based model and the major implementation components, with particular emphasis on decoding time shortcomings. We will then describe modifications to improve decoding speed and present results. We conclude in the last section discuss suggested improvements and future work.

2 Phrase-Based Model

The objective of decoding is to find the target translation with the maximum probability, given a source sentence. That is, for a source sentence s , the objective is to find a target translation \hat{t} which has the highest conditional probability

$p(t|s)$. Mathematically, this is written as:

$$\hat{t} = \arg \max_t p(t|s) \quad (1)$$

where the *arg max* function is the search. The log-linear model generalizes Equation 1 to include more component models and weighting each model according to the contribution of each model to the total probability.

$$p(t|s) = \frac{1}{Z} \exp\left(\sum_m \lambda_m h_m(t, s)\right) \quad (2)$$

where λ_m is the weight, and h_m is the feature function, or ‘score’, for model m . Z is the partition function which can be ignored for optimization.

2.1 Beam Search

A translation of a source sentence is created by applying a series of translation rules which together translate each source word once, and only once. Each partial translation is called a *hypothesis*, which is created by applying a rule to an existing hypothesis. This process is called *hypothesis expansion* and starts with a hypothesis that has translated no source word and ends with a completed hypothesis that has translated all source words. The highest-scoring completed hypothesis, according to the model score, is returned as most probable translation, \hat{t} . Incomplete hypotheses are referred to as partial hypotheses.

Each rule translates a contiguous sequence of source words but successive translation options do not have to be adjacent on the source side, depending on the distortion limit. However, the target output is constructed strictly left-to-right from the target string of successive translation options. Therefore, successive translation options which are not adjacent and monotonic in the source causes translation reordering.

A beam search algorithm is used to create the completed hypothesis set efficiently. Partial hypotheses are organized into stacks where each stack holds a number of comparable hypotheses. Hypotheses in the same stack have the same coverage cardinality $|C|$, where C is the coverage set, $C \subseteq \{1, 2, \dots |s|\}$ of the number of source words translated. Therefore, $|s| + 1$ number of stacks are created for the decoding of a sentence s .

There are three main optimization to the search that we shall investigate. Firstly, the search creates and destroy a large number of hypothesis objects in memory which puts a heavy burden on the

operating system. We shall optimize the search algorithm to use memory pools and object pools, replacing the operating system’s general purpose memory management with our own application-aware management.

The speed of memory access is dependent on whether the data is in the CPU cache which is a constrained resource compared to memory size, typically 20MB in the latest processors. We shall seek to re-use recently accessed information to increase likelihood of the data being in the CPU cache.

In multiprocessor servers, the CPU cache is attached to each processor and each core. If a sentence is being decoded on one CPU is switched to another, the CPU cache on the new CPU must be repopulated, slowing down decoding. We will therefore investigate binding threads to specific cores.

Lastly, we shall investigate different stack configurations other than coverage cardinality to see whether they can improve speed and translation quality.

2.2 Feature Functions

Features functions are the h_m in Equation 2, calculating a score for each hypothesis.

The standard feature functions in the phrase-based model include:

1. log transforms translation model probabilities, $p_{TM}(t|s)$ and $p_{TM}(s|t)$, and word-based translation probabilities $p_w(t|s)$ and $p_w(s|t)$,
2. log transforms of the lexicalized re-ordering probabilities,
3. log transforms of the target language model probability $p(t)$,
4. a distortion penalty
5. a phrase-penalty,
6. a word penalty,
7. an unknown word penalty.

The first three feature functions frequently trained on data and require the feature to read the model from files. The other feature functions do not require model files. We shall investigate the first two feature functions for optimization.

2.3 Translation Model

Load-on-demand ‘binary’ phrase-tables are often used for MT deployment due to their fast loading and querying speed, and because they can be used with large phrase-tables. We therefore focus on optimizing decoding speed with these phrase-tables, specifically the Probing PT.

We shall look at the caching strategies to reduce the number of phrase-table lookups. We shall also investigate the datastructures used by the phrase-table and their impact on decoding speed.

2.4 Lexicalized Reordering Model

The lexicalized reordering model is trained on parallel data, usually requiring random lookups of the model file during decoding. However, the key to the lookup are the source and target phrase of each translation rule. We shall investigate the advantages of storing the mode data within the translation rule.

3 Experimental Setup

We trained two phrase-based systems using the Moses toolkit, with standard settings. The first system was trained on most of the publicly available Arabic-English data from Opus (Jrg Tiedemann, 2012,) consisting of over 69 million parallel sentences, and tuned on a held out set. The second system was trained on the French-English Europarl corpus. The phrase-tables were then pruned, keeping only the top 100 entries per source phrase, according to $p(t|s)$. All models files were then binarized; the language models were binaized using KenLM (???), the phrase table using Probing PT (???), lexicalized reordering model using the compact datastructure described in ???. These binary formats were chosen for their best-of-class multithreaded performance. Table 1 gives details of the resultant sizes of the model files.

	ar-en	fr-en
Phrase table	17	5.8
Language model	3.1	1.8
Lex-re model	2.3	637MB

Table 1: Model sizes in GB

For testing decoding speed, we used a subset of the training data, Table 2. The two test set have differing characteristics that we are interested in ana-

lyzing, ar-en have short sentences while fr-en have overly long sentences.

	ar-en	fr-en
# sentences	800k	200k
# words	5.8m	5.9m
Avg words/sent	7.3	29.7

Table 2: Test sets

Where we need to compare the model score of the algorithms, we used a held out set; ??? for ar-en and ??? for fr-en.

Standard Moses phrase-based configurations are used, except that we use the cube-pruning algorithm (???) with a pop-limit of 400, rather than the basic phrase-based algorithm. The cube-pruning algorithm is often employed by users who require fast decoding as it gives them the ability to trade speed with translation quality with a simple pop-limit parameter.

As a baseline, we use the latest version of the Moses decoder taken from the github repository.

For all experiments, we used a Dell PowerEdge R620 server with 16 cores, 32 hyper-threads, split over 2 physical processors (Intel Xeon E5-2650 @ 2.00GHz). The server has 380GB RAM. The operating system was Ubuntu 14.04, the code was compiled with gcc 4.8.4 and Boost library 1.59.

4 Results

4.1 Optimizing Memory

We create a dynamic memory pool which can grow as more memory is requested. The memory is not released, instead the pool can be reset in order for the memory to be re-used. We instantiate two pools for each thread, one which is never reset and another which is reset after the decoding each sentence. Objects are created in either pool according to their life cycle.

For critical objects with high churn such as the hypotheses, thread-specific LIFO queues are used to recycle objects which are no longer used. This not only reduces memory wastage but re-uses recent objects which are likely to be in the CPU cache.

Over 30% of the Moses decoder running time is spent on memory management and this increases when more threads are used, Table 3. By contrast, our decoder spends ???% on memory management.

	1 thread	32 threads
Moses	???%	???%
Our work	???%	???%

Table 3: %age decoding time managing memory

A potential disadvantage of using memory pool is that the decoder will use more memory, however, Table 4 shows that peak memory consumption are comparable.

	1 thread	32 threads
Moses	???	???
Our work	???	???

Table 4: Peak Memory Usage in GB

4.2 Stack Configuration

The most popular stack configuration for phrase-based model, as implemented in Pharaoh, Moses and Joshua, has been by coverage cardinality, ie. hypotheses that have translated the same number of source words are stored in the same stack. There have been research into other stack layouts such as (Ortiz-Martínez et al., 2006), and it has been noted that the decoder in (Brown et al., 1993) uses coverage stacks, as opposed to coverage cardinality.

We also note that distortion limit which constrains hypothesis extension is dependent on the hypothesis' coverage vector, C and the end position of most recent source word that has been translated, e . The distortion limit must be checked for every instance of a hypothesis and translation rule, Figure 1. However, by separating hypotheses

```

for all  $hypo$  in  $stack_{|C|}$  do
  for all translation rules do
    if can-expand( $C(hypo)$ ,  $e(hypo)$ , translation rule range) then
      expand  $hypo$  with translation rule  $\rightarrow$  new  $hypo$ 
      add new  $hypo$  into next stack
    end if
  end for
end for

```

Figure 1: Hypothesis Expansion with Unsorted Stack

into 'ministack' according to coverage and end position, the distortion limit only needs to be checked

```

for each ministack, Figure 2. We therefore looked
  for all ministackC,e in stack|C| do
    for all translation rules do
      if can-expand(C, e, translation rule range)
      then
        for all hypo in ministackC,e do
          expand hypo with translation rule →
          new hypo
          add new hypo into next stack
        end for
      end if
    end for
  end for

```

Figure 2: Hypothesis Expansion with Sorted Stack

at the effects of three stack configurations.

1. coverage cardinality,
2. coverage,
3. coverage and end position of most recent translated source word.

5 BLAH BLAH

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Submitted and camera-ready formatting is similar, however, the submitted paper should have:

1. Author-identifying information removed
2. A ‘ruler’ on the left and right margins
3. Page numbers
4. A confidentiality header.

In contrast, the camera-ready **should not have** a ruler, page numbers, nor a confidentiality header. By uncommenting `\aclfinalcopy` at the top of this document, it will compile to produce an example of the camera-ready formatting; by leaving it

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Manuscripts must be in two-column format. Exceptions to the two-column format include the title, as well as the authors’ names and complete addresses (only in the final version, not in the version submitted for review), which must be centered at the top of the first page (see the guidelines in Subsection 6.4), and any full-width figures or tables. Type single-spaced. Do not number the pages in the camera-ready version. Start all pages directly under the top margin. See the guidelines later regarding formatting the first page.

The maximum length of a manuscript is eight (8) pages for the main conference, printed single-sided, plus two (2) pages for references (see Section 7 for additional information on the maximum number of pages).

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ACL provides this description in L^AT_EX2e (`acl2016.tex`) and PDF format (`acl2016.pdf`), along with the L^AT_EX2e style file used to format it (`acl2016.sty`) and an ACL bibliography style (`acl2016.bst`) and example bibliography (`acl2016.bib`). These files are all available at acl2016.org/index.php?article_id=9. We strongly recommend the use of these style files, which have been appropriately tailored for the ACL 2016 proceedings.

6.3 Format of Electronic Manuscript

For the production of the electronic manuscript, you must use Adobe’s Portable Document Format (PDF). This format can be generated from postscript files: on Unix systems, you can use `ps2pdf` for this purpose; under Microsoft Windows, you can use Adobe’s Distiller, or if you have `cygwin` installed, you can use `dvipdf` or `ps2pdf`. Note that some word processing programs generate PDF that may not include all the necessary fonts (esp. tree diagrams, symbols). When you print or create the PDF file, there is usually an option in your printer setup to include none, all, or just non-standard fonts. Please make sure that you select the option of including ALL the fonts. *Before sending it, test your PDF by printing it from a computer different from the one where it was created.* Moreover, some word processors may generate very large postscript/PDF files, where each page is rendered as an image. Such images may reproduce poorly. In this case, try alternative ways to obtain the postscript and/or PDF. One way on some systems is to install a driver for a postscript printer, send your document to the printer specifying “Output to a file”, then convert the file to PDF. For reasons of uniformity, Adobe’s **Times Roman** font should be used. In L^AT_EX2e this is accomplished by putting

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Table 5: Example commands for accented characters, to be used in, e.g., BIB_TE_X names.

```
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```

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Center the title, author name(s) and affiliation(s) across both columns (or, in the case of initial submission, space for the names). Do not use footnotes for affiliations. Use the two-column format only when you begin the abstract.

Title: Place the title centered at the top of the first page, in a 15 point bold font. (For a complete guide to font sizes and styles, see Table 6.) Long titles should be typed on two lines without a blank line intervening. Approximately, put the title at 1in from the top of the page, followed by a blank line, then the author name(s), and the affiliation(s) on the following line. Do not use only initials for given names (middle initials are allowed). Do not format surnames in all capitals (e.g., “Mitchell,” not “MITCHELL”). The affiliation should contain the author’s complete address, and if possible, an electronic mail address. Leave about 0.75in between the affiliation and the body of the first page.

Abstract: Type the abstract at the beginning of the first column. The width of the abstract text should be smaller than the width of the columns for the text in the body of the paper by about 0.25in on each side. Center the word **Abstract** in a 12 point bold font above the body of the abstract. The abstract should be a concise summary of the general thesis and conclusions of the paper. It should be no longer than 200 words. The abstract text should be in 10 point font.

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Indent when starting a new paragraph. For reasons of uniformity, use Adobe’s **Times Roman** fonts, with 11 points for text and subsection headings, 12 points for section headings and 15 points for the title. If Times Roman is unavailable, use **Computer Modern Roman** (L^AT_EX2e’s default; see section 6.3 above). Note that the latter is about 10% less dense than Adobe’s Times Roman font.

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Headings: Type and label section and subsection headings in the style shown on the present document. Use numbered sections (Arabic numerals) in order to facilitate cross references. Number subsections with the section number and the subsection number separated by a dot, in Arabic numerals.

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paper title	15 pt	bold
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Table 6: Font guide.

sociation, 1983). Authors’ full names rather than initials are preferred. You may use **standard** abbreviations for conferences¹ and journals².

Appendices: Appendices, if any, directly follow the text and the references (but see above). Letter them in sequence and provide an informative title: **Appendix A. Title of Appendix**.

Acknowledgment sections should go as a last (unnumbered) section immediately before the references.

6.6 Footnotes

Footnotes: Put footnotes at the bottom of the page. They may be numbered or referred to by asterisks or other symbols.³ Footnotes should be separated from the text by a line.⁴ Footnotes should be in 9 point font.

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Illustrations: Place figures, tables, and photographs in the paper near where they are first discussed, rather than at the end, if possible. Wide illustrations may run across both columns and should be placed at the top of a page. Color illustrations are discouraged, unless you have verified that they will be understandable when printed in black ink.

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¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_computer_science_conference_acronyms

²<http://www.abbreviations.com/jas.php>

³This is how a footnote should appear.

⁴Note the line separating the footnotes from the text.

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As the reviewing will be blind, the paper must not include the authors' names and affiliations. Furthermore, self-references that reveal the author's identity, e.g., "We previously showed (Smith, 1991) ..." must be avoided. Instead, use citations such as "Smith previously showed (Smith, 1991) ..." Papers that do not conform to these requirements will be rejected without review. In addition, please do not post your submissions on the web until after the review process is complete (in special cases this is permitted: see the multiple submission policy below).

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Acknowledgments

Do not number the acknowledgment section. This section should not be presented for the submission version.

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