Conversational Task Agent

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Abstract. The present document is the final report for the Web Search and Data Mining course project. This document combines all the work, explanation about the chosen algorithms and implementation of the first, second and third phases, as well as an adequate result analysis. The execution and implementation of the unique part of the project will also be described and discussed.

1 Introduction

Conversational Task Agent have influenced the way many people engage with everyday activities and it is expected that in upcoming years, the use of the conversational paradigm will substitute the traditional search-and-browse paradigm[8].

In this report it will be discussed the implementation of a conversational assistant that helps the user to execute a task and provide the user with proper guidance throughout the task.

On the **first phase**, the main focus was on creating a searchable index of a recipe knowledge base that allowed the system to be able to solve a Question-Answer retrieval task.

On the **second phase**, the objectives were to illustrate all the steps of all recipes with images already provided using CLIP, understand the the self-attention mechanism for vision-language web related tasks and demonstrate the use of the Transformer architecture in different tasks.

In this **third phase**, our goal was to accurately develop a Dialog Manager, that makes use of the Multimodal Tasks Knowledge-base and the provided Intent Detector, combining the approach, knowledge obtained and results from the previous phase of this project, to finally achieve an adequate Conversational Task Agent that can guide the user throughout the process of cooking a desired recipe. Furthermore, as a unique part of our project, our Task Agent was developed to support a game that the user can play to try to guess the title of a random recipe, given images, ingredients or the description of each recipe's step.

2 Algorithms and Implementation

As explained in the introduction, the goal of the first phase of this project was to create a searchable index of recipe knowledge base implementing a Question-Answer search framework to answer Natural Questions. For that purpose we used the **OpenSearch framework**. Opensearch is a distributed search and analytics engine base on Apache Lucene, which organizes data into indices. Searches on the added data can be made using several types of queries with different features to be able to retrieve the desired data[2].

2.1 Mappings

To index documents using the OpenSearch framework specific settings and mappings have to be defined. In this project the documents provided are JSON files containing information about recipes. On our implementation we used 4 different types of data properties:

- to map the **recipe_id** and the **ingredients** we used the **keyword type**, since these index mappings are a string sequence of structured characters;
- to map the **title** and **description** of each recipe the **text type** was the property chosen, considering that they are string sequences of characters that represent full-text values
- to map the **title_embedding** and the **description_embedding** we used the **knn_vector type**;
- and finally, to map the **number of servings** that each recipe suggests we use the **Integer data property**.

To improve the index mappings on the properties of the text type we included two other parameters: **analyzer** and **similarity**.

The analyzer refers to the text processing method that we desire to use when running queries on that property. OpenSearch provides several built-in analyzers with each one of these using different character filters, tokenizers and token filters, and in our implementation, we decided to use the **standard analyzer**. The similarity, the second parameter, refers to the similarity module to be used. Similarity is the process of computing how similar two words, phrases or sentences are, which can be very helpful to tasks like question answering[**?**]. The **default similarity** module is the **BM25**. This module is an improvement over the TF_IDF algorithm, a widely used algorithm in natural language processing, because BM25 takes into account the field length and applies term frequency saturation functions, making the result more relevant to the user's query. Because of these reasons, we decided to go with this module.

2.2 K-Nearest Neighbor Vector mapping

As described above the embeddings of the title and the description use the type knn_vector so we are able to perform Approximate k-nn searches. Knn means **K-nearest neighbor and Approximate means** that for a given search, the neighbors returned are an estimate of the true k-nearest neighbors [4].

To index mappings of knn_vector type we need to detail other required properties, such as the **dimension** and the **method**. The dimension property indicates the dimensionality of the indexed vectors and the method property needs to be filled with other specific properties to the indexing method. In our case, the indexing method chosen was the **Hierarichical Navigable Small World**, or **hnsw**. This method is an Hierarchical proximity graph approach that does not require training to approximate k-NN searches. The properties specific to the indexing method are:

- **name**: name is hnsw as described above.
- **space_type**: indicates the similarity function containing the vector space used to calculate the distance between vectors, and we opt with the inner-product one.
- **engine**: the engine property indicates the approximate k-NN library to use for indexing and search and we chose the engine faiss.
- Finally the parameter **property**, is divided in two other:
  - **ef_construction**: the size of the dynamic list used during k-NN graph creation and the greater the value we choose here, the more accurate the graph and slower the indexing speed;
  - **'m'**:indicates the number of bidirectional links created for each new element, and the increasing of this value can have a large impact on memory[3].

  For a balanced result between accuracy and speed we decided to go with the value of 256 on ef_construction property and the value of 48 on the 'm' property.

The majority of the choices we made for the values of the properties described above were based on the examples and documentation provided by the tutor on the workshops.

To add the recipes on the index that we created, we iterated the json document and for each recipe we extracted the **title**, **description**, **ingredients** and **servings**. To be able to create an embedding for the title and description, we used the encode function using a Transformer encoder trained with the **MS-MARCO dataset**. After using the encode function on the title and description to create the embbedings, we added them on the index as well.

2.3 Queries description

To search and test our index we implemented multiple based searches: a **Text-based Search**, a **Boolean Text-based Search**, a **Boolean Search using a filter** and an **Embedding-based Search**. We created a new Python document to create all the search based functions. For the Text-based Search we search a result providing a query and the fields we want in the response. We then created two boolean search, one where we search with a query and given ingredients where the result must have the ingredients provided and should have the query. The other boolean we get a result using a filter for the ingridients and as before, we also should have the given query in the response. Finally we implemented a search using the embedding that we add to the index earlier. We can search using the title embedding or the description embedding.

2.4 CLIP

For the second phase of this project, the first objective that was done was the illustration of all the steps with images as mentioned in the introduction, using **Contrastive Language-Image Pre-training (CLIP)** that allowed us to compute the similarity between a given step and all provided images. CLIP is a neural network trained on a variety of pairs of type (image, text). It can be instructed in natural language to predict the best and most relevant image, given a text, or the other way around, without directly optimizing the task[9].

In order for us to implement and use CLIP functionalities to find the image that best describes each step, first we had to get all the images from recipes and steps that the provided json document had. In order to encode the images and save them, we used the method load of clip from **ViT-B/32** that returned the **model** and the **TorchVision** transform needed by the model to transform the images[9]. With the images opened, we applied the method tensor from the **torch library** that is a multi-dimensional matrix which contains elements of a single data type[10]. The values of that matrix, in our specific case, are the features of the images. The features were encoded using the model loaded previously, and normalized in order to be used in future procedures to calculate the similarity with the text features.

To choose the best image given a step information, we loaded a new model, a processor and a tokenizer from the pretrained model of CLIP and we defined two functions:

- **similarity** - calculates the similarity value between the text features and the image features;
- **bestImage** - that receives a text, encodes it into a numpy array, calculates the similarity using the function previously described and returns the index of the best image.

For visualization purposes, we also defined two other functions: **showStepsUrl** and **showStepsImage**. These functions have a similar functionality. Both receive an id of a recipe as parameter, and check if each of the recipe's instruction have an image, and if it does not, then the **bestImage** is used to calculate the image that better describes its description in order to help the user to cook the recipe step by step. The first function only shows the URL for the image, and the second one shows the actual image as output. We opt for using these two similar functions so we can choose the most suitable one for our final product, the Dialog Manager, on the third phase of this project.

Failure Analysis and Future Solution Our approach to address the problem of illustrating all the steps of all recipes with images may present some lack of accuracy on choosing the best image possible for each step of the recipe. However, a perfect match between every step and every image, would be almost impossible, since there is a high discrepancy between the number of instructions and the number of images on the dataset. In fact, there are 5425 instructions and there are only 1801 images from the instructions and the recipes. In order to improve the accuracy of our solution, it would be necessary to have more available images on the dataset.

In addition, on our implementation, every time an instruction does not have an image associated, we calculate the best image for that step, and if there is the need to retrieve the same step again, there would also be the need to calculate the best image again. Over time, this is not the most efficient approach. To improve the efficiency of our solution, we could save the image url on the appropriated attribute of the json file when the best image is calculated for a specific step. This way, we would only have to calculate the best image once for each step.

2.5 Questions phase 2: Contextual embeddings and self-attention

Contextual Embeddings Word embeddings are applied in a free environment, this is it does not have a sense of context in the sentence. In order to mitigate this problem it is used contextual embeddings. BERT calculates the embeddings of the words in a bidirectional way using both previous and next context around the word. This is particularly important for homonyms (words with different meanings but same spelling) because in word embeddings like word2vec with no context awareness this words would have the same values, BERT using 3 layers (positional, sentence and token) is capable of generating different embeddings for each meaning.

In the notebook provided as a solution for the phase 2, it is generated 12 plots to visualize the contextual word embeddings of all 12 layers and it can be observed that for each layer words with similar meanings are in each layer quite close to each other. For example, the word "cancer" is used in the both words with the same meaning and they have almost the same embeddings, also the words "throat" and "lung", both connected by the context "cancer" in the sentence, have similar embeddings and because of that are always close on each layer's plot.

Positional Embeddings The position and order of words are very important since they are the ones that define the grammar and thus the actual semantics of a sentence[11]. Positional Embeddings are introduced in order to recover the information about position, since information about "order" for example is not shown in the embeddings. This is because the "order" is not automatically considered by the model, and in Transformer, this information is not present[12].

In order to test and study positional embeddings, we used a simple BERT encoder. We provided a sequence with the word dog repeated 20 times, and then we encoded it.

Looking at the plots that were generated on the notebook that we provided for positional embeddings, we can observe that on every plot, the words dog are always grouped or very close to each other. This means that, although there can be some very small discrepancy in the visualization, the words are very similar and that makes sense since the words are all the same.

Sentence Embeddings The representation of the meaning of a sentence is important for many tasks. It allows us to understand the intention of the sentence without calculating individually the embeddings of the words.

To demonstrate our work on sentence embeddings, we utilized **Sentence-Transformers**, a python framework used for sentence, text and image embeddings. The model we chose is the **msmarco-distilbert-base-v2** which maps sentences and paragraphs to a 768 dimensional dense vector space [13]. The tokenizer is also from the **msmarco-distilbert-base-v2** transformer. We based our implementation on the examples and documentation provided by the tutor.

In order to compute the sentence embedding, firstly the sentence has to be tokenized and after that the token embeddings of the sentence have to be calculate. Then, a mean pooling function on the token embeddings calculates the average of all the tokens and finally the pooled embeddigs are normalized.

To visualize the similarities between two sentences, we defined a function that, given two sentence embeddings, calculates the cosine similarity between both. This gives a similarity score between them, and this way we are able to observe how similar two sentences are.

Self-Attention Self-attention is an attention mechanism relating different positions of a single sequence in order to compute a representation of the sequence [14]. In simpler words, self-attention allows each word in the sentence to look at other words to better know which word contribute for the current word.

In order to compute the self attention, it is firstly necessary to do the encoding of the desired words of one or more sentences. To do that, we used the AutoTokenizer and the AutoModel from **bert-base-uncased** model. Then, with the encode tokens, we are able to access their output that contains the **attentions** for all tokens. This return the attention weights after the attention softmax, used to compute the weighted average in the self-attention heads.

To visualize our results, we decided to present a Multi-head Self-attention heatmap matrix of the layer one of the attentions, where we are able to verify the different results for the attention calculation on the different heads of the Multi-head Attention. On the first visualization, we used the BERT Cross-Encoder to compute the two different sentences simultaneously, and while using the BERT as a Dual-Encoder with the two desired sentences encoded separately. While using the cross encoder, we can verify that there is an higher correlation between the words that can have a similar context.

2.6 Dialog Manager

For the third phase of this project we used the Multimodal Tasks Knowledgebase and the provided intent detector in order to properly develop a Dialog Manager, that can produce an adequate guidance according to the user's needs.

Dialog Intent Detector To implement the Dialog intent detector, we decided to use the provided intent detector model, *Twiz - Task Wizard*. This model is able to identify several different intents according to the sentence handed by the user. In order to compute the actual intent of each sentence and then identify its intent, it is necessary to use the *Roberta-base* tokenizer to encode the sentence.

From all the intents available using the supplied intent detector, we choose to focus our interest in the ones that are most relevant to our Conversational Task agent, in particular the following intents: Search Recipe, Out of Scope, Yes, No, Stop, Start recipe, Next step, Previous step and Help.

2.7 Task Bot Implementation

As mentioned previously, the development of the Taskbot or Dialog manager was the main goal of the final phase of this project. To be able to do this, we had to combine the results and knowledge acquired from the two first phases.

From the first phase we had to utilize the Multimodel Task Knowledge-base, using the index with the specified settings and mappings with embeddings as explained in the first two sections of the Implementation part of this document. It is important to briefly remind, that to be able to create an embedding we used the encode function that operates with the **MSMARCO dataset**. We also had to re utilize the Search queries implemented on the first phase, however it was only necessary to use the Embedding-based Search on the title of the recipe, since this was the most suitable having into account the type of message returned by the Task bot when asked for a recipe and consequently our desired implementation for the entire task bot.

As in the second phase, to be able to illustrate the best image possible for all steps, even the ones that do not have any image, we used CLIP. CLIP allowed us to compute the similarity between a given step description and all the images available for this project. To implement the CLIP functionalities, we executed the exact same process as the one used on the previous stage, described on the Section 2.4 *CLIP* of the present document. Having said that, we also used the model, processor and tokenizer from the pretrained model of CLIP as well as the the functions **similarity** and **bestImage**.

When the Task bot first starts, it displays a greeting message to the user informing the functionalities and capabilities supported. In this initial state, the actions available for the task bot according to the result intent of the user's sentence are to search for a desired recipe, to print a help menu or to play a game with the user (described on the next section). Obviously, there is also an adaptive behaviour for when none of the intents result on one of this actions and the action that task bot is performing can be stopped at any time whenever the user decides to.

If the user enters a recipe title or description, then the task bot will search and find the most similar recipes (using the Embedding-based search mentioned) according to the text inserted by the user. The title and image of the most similar recipe will be displayed and the user will be asked if he wants it. In the case the user responds that he do not want that recipe, the second most similar recipe will be displayed, and if he still decides not to accept this recipe, then will be prompted to be more specific on the desired recipe.

When the user decides the recipe that he wants, he will be asked if we would like to check a list of all its ingredients before actually starting the recipe process. Then, the guidance to perform the recipe is displayed to the user, by presenting each description of each step sequentially, combined with the best image available to visually demonstrate the step's description. The user can navigate, forward or backward, between the steps of the recipe if he desires to.

When the last step of the recipe is achieved, the task bot indicates to the user that he successfully finished the recipe. The task bot returns to the initial state (after the greeting message), where the actions of searching for a recipe, help menu, or change to the guessing game are available again.

2.8 Game: Guess the recipe title

In our independent part of the project we decided to do a game inside the Taskbot, where the user could challenge the Taskbot to a guessing a recipe game.

To do that, we used the similarity functions that we implemented during the second phase from the sentence embeddings, in order to be able to determine if the answer of the user was close or not to the recipe title (the correct answer). We also created a function that removed stop words from the recipe title, using the spacy library and the vocabulary of stop words already present in it. This way, guessing the recipe title is more interesting since stop words are not used in the calculation of the similarity between the user guess and the correct answer.

In the game functionality, as mentioned above, you can start it on the beggining by saying something similar to "play game". Inside it, the Taskbot ask firstly if the user really wants to start the game. By being affirmative, Taskbot starts by mentioning the rules and presents the image of the recipe that the user needs to guess. The rules are that the first time the user guesses, if it fails, it is presented the list of ingredients, and if he fails after that the steps are shown one by one until no more steps are available. The user loses the game if in the last step shown, is answer is still not correct. The user wins if he gets a correct answer.

We determined that a correct answer would be one that scored equal or higher to 0.70 of similarity value. This way, we allow very close answers to be correct, and this shows to be better since some recipes have very specific names difficult to guess.

3 Evaluation

3.1 Dataset Description

Open Search is an engine for analysis and search of data. The data is stored in indices that are collections of JSON documents. In order to initialize it, the indices contains *settings* and *mappings*. The settings give information about the index name, creation date, number of shards and replicas and the mappings describe the collections of fields for the JSON documents that will be indexed [2].

Our index settings has four shards, zero replicas of each shard and a refresh interval of minus one (meaning that the refresh is disabled).

Our choice for the set of index mappings to index the recipes' data are:

- recipe_id *keyword*
- title *text*
- title_embedding *knn_vector*
- description *text*
- description_embedding *knn_vector*
- ingredients *keyword*
- servings *integer*

Recipe_id and ingredients are of type keyword because they are structured sequences of characters, the first is an unique id for each document indexed and the other is a list with all of the ingredients for that receipt. The title and description are both of type text because they represent full-text values that describe in the most generic and simple way the content of the receipt For this type text we used the standard analyzer and the similarity module BM25 that their goal are explained in section 2. The servings is of type integer because it is a 32-bit number that describes the number of people who can enjoy that receipt. The last two, description_embedding and title_embedding, are of type knn_vector (a custom type of data to allow knn-search on OpenSearch, better explained in section 2) and they represent the embeddings of both title and description calculated with Dual-Encoders.

This mappings' choice is directly connected to the natural questions that are going to be asked to OpenSearch. This is, we chose the mappings fields accordingly to the most important information that will most probably be asked in the questions. For example, in the query "How to cook chicken" is of our main interest to search on the title, descriptions and ingredients of the receipt and all of this attributes are indexed on the mappings of the documents. Servings and ingredients are a good addition to use in boolean queries to the data where it can be specified an ingredient or the amount of servings that are needed.On the other side the steps is not a information we need to keep indexed on Open Search because there is no interest in search on that data.

3.2 Baselines

All the work done in the project in all three phases was to build a foundation to construct the final product : a conversational task agent capable of searching the desired recipes that the user wants while showing the best images. The biggest difficulties that were meant to surpass are natural language processing, that can be a huge battle to virtual systems because language rules are complex (for example equal words can have totally different meanings), connection of images to text and vice versa, this adds a level of difficulty because there is also the need to process visual objects that can be even more challenging and recognition of dialog intents, this is when having a conversation the BOT needs more than understanding nouns, verbs and adjectives to know what is the intent of the whole sentence (if the user wants to stop or continue for example).

Natural Language Processing The first tool that we had a first contact to try and understand NLP was *spacy.* Spacy is a API to process natural language very simple to use and understand with support for more than 66 languages. The setup goes by loading the chosen model that the user desires to use, next the phrase we want to process is loaded and divided into token/entities. After this we can evaluate all the words in the sentence for different characteristics like: stop words or if it a verb or a noun. This makes possible to understand and extract just the information the developer needs. A similar API that could also be used is *NLTK*.

OpenSearch was another software that was a must to implement in the project. OpenSearch is an distributed system to store data and offer some features to seach and anlyse that same data. The setup is more complex than the one before described but easy to understand. The data is organized into a index (this needs to be created and specified all the fields and models for them) and to it we added our documents after parsing the JSON document offered (like explained above). One of the main advantages offered is that one of the field type in the indexes are knn_vectors making possible to use embedding (a faster processing way to words or images). The OpenSeach client has a search method that makes possible to query data present on the index and all the documents.

Connection of images to Text The tool offered to make the connection between images and text is *CLIP*. *CLIP* is "a neural network which efficiently learns visual concepts from natural language supervision" [17]. It offers a ton of features but the one necessary for use to use was having a specific text find the best photo that relates to it because we needed to illustrate each step with a photo. This is possible by enconding all photos and keeping it stored and whenever a text is required, calculate a cosine similarity with the embedding of all the photos.

Dialog intents In order to develop the Dialog Manager it was also indispensable to use an appropriate Intent Detector. For that reason, we used the provided intent detector model, *Twiz* (Task Wizard) in combination with the the tokenizer form *Roberta-base* model. *Twiz* is a multimodal conversational assistant to guide users solving step-by-step tasks. The *Roberta-base* model is a transformers model pretrained on a large amount of English data with raw texts only, with an automatic process to generate inputs and labels for those texts.[18]

One of the main conclusions that can be done in the beginning, and supported with our experience after some time using all this tools is that data search, natural language are areas of expertise in constant development and with the exponential growth of Artificial Intelligence they tend to become more and more complex and with thousands of varied features.

4 Results analysis and Critical Discussion

By completing this project, we believe that we have accomplished the goals for this project, achieving all the purposed functionalities and utilities of the final product. However, it is also important to discuss and reflect on what failed or could be done better, in terms of performance or overall utility. Having said that, there are some important features that could have been improved or implemented in a more ideal way.

To start with, it is important to explain that some of the initial purposed and developed search queries (namely the Text-based Search and the Boolean Search using a filter), were only used for testing purposes and analysis of the index, and were left out of the final product, the task bot. Because of this, we are not able to implement the support for the task bot to use different types of search queries, according to the type of sentence provided by the user when searching for a specific recipe. This way, it is not possible to perform a recipe search using the number of servings or a search by a specific ingredient that may or may not be on the list of ingredients of each recipe, for example.

For our implementation, we decided to not use persistent storage techniques, for tasks that take a long time to process, such as computing the embeddings or open all the images of the dataset and calculate their features, but we acknowledge that this approach would be more efficient in those cases.

As already mentioned on the Failure Analysis section, our approach to illustrate all the instructions of each recipe with images may present some lack of accuracy, but having into account the discrepancy between the number of steps and the images available on the dataset, we believe that this could not be improved. What could actually be done in a more efficient way, would be to save the url of the best image on the designated attribute of the JSON file, in order to not be necessary to calculate the best image possible for the same step more than once.

We would also like to refer, that the visual display of the Task bot system and interactions with it could be more appealing if designed more carefully and meticulously, but we aimed to make this system simple (as purposed) and intuitive to use for any kind of user.

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