HEURISTIC ANALYSIS

For an Adversarial Game Playing Agent for Isolation

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SYNOPSIS

The project aims at developing an adversarial search agent to play the game "Isolation". This project report focusses on the heuristics to be used in A* Search for minimax and alphabeta pruning.

Isolation is a deterministic, two-player game of perfect information in which the players alternate turns moving a single piece from one cell to another on a board. Whenever either player occupies a cell, that cell becomes blocked for the remainder of the game. The first player with no remaining legal moves loses, and the opponent is declared the winner.

This project uses a version of Isolation where each agent is restricted to L-shaped movements (like a knight in chess) on a rectangular grid (like a chess or checkerboard). The agents can move to any open cell on the board that is 2-rows and 1-column or 2-columns and 1-row away from their current position on the board. Movements are blocked at the edges of the board (the board does not wrap around), however, the player can "jump" blocked or occupied spaces (just like a knight in chess).

Additionally, agents will have a fixed time limit each turn to search for the best move and respond. If the time limit expires during a player's turn, that player forfeits the match, and the opponent wins. These rules are implemented in the isolation.Board class provided in the repository.

CUSTOM HEURISTICS

1. HEURISTIC 1: MINIMIZING OPPONENT'S MOVES (SEE CODE)

The heuristic is based on the logic that opponent's moves should be minimized. It can be mathematically expressed as:

$$\text{l}en(my\ available\ moves) - \alpha\ len(available\ opponent\ moves), \qquad where\ \alpha \in (1, \infty)$$

The value of α was empirically chosen as 1.5.

2. HEURISTIC 2: MAXIMIZING PLAYER'S MOVES (SEE CODE)

The heuristic is based on the logic that player's moves should be maximized. It can be mathematically expressed as:

$$\alpha\ len(my\ available\ moves) - len(available\ opponent\ moves), \qquad where\ \alpha \in (1, \infty)$$

The value of α was empirically chosen as 1.5.

3. HEURISTIC 3: MAXIMIZING RATIO OF PLAYER TO OPPONENT MOVE (SEE CODE)

The heuristic is based on the logic that player should have more moves in comparison to opponent. It can be mathematically expressed as:

$$\frac{len(my\ available\ moves)}{len(available\ opponent\ moves)}$$

4. HEURISTIC 4: MINIMIZING RATIO OF OPPONENT TO PLAYER MOVE (SEE CODE)

The heuristic is based on the logic that opponent should have less moves in comparison to player. It can be mathematically expressed as:

$$-\frac{len(available\ opponent\ moves)}{len(my\ available\ moves)}$$

5. HEURISTIC 5: COMBINING HEURISTIC 3 AND 4 (SEE CODE)

Can be mathematically expressed as:

$$\frac{len(my\ available\ moves)}{len(available\ opponent\ moves)} - \frac{len(available\ opponent\ moves)}{len(my\ available\ moves)}$$

Maximizing above equation is equivalent to maximizing:

$$[len(my\ available\ moves)]^2 - [len(available\ opponent\ moves)]^2$$

The latter form has been implemented in the code.

6. HEURISTIC 6: WEIGHTED COMBINATION OF HEURISTIC 3 AND 4 (SEE CODE)

Can be mathematically expressed as:

$$\frac{len(my\ available\ moves)}{len(available\ opponent\ moves)} - \alpha \frac{len(available\ opponent\ moves)}{len(my\ available\ moves)}, \qquad where\ \alpha \in (1, \infty)$$

Maximizing above equation is equivalent to maximizing:

$$[len(my\ available\ moves)]^2 - \beta\ [len(available\ opponent\ moves)]^2, \qquad where\ \beta \in (1, \infty)$$

The latter form has been implemented in the code with β chosen as 1.5 empirically.

7. HEURISTIC 7: WEIGHTED COMBINATION OF HEURISTIC 3 AND 4 (SEE CODE)

Can be mathematically expressed as:

$$\alpha \frac{len(my\ available\ moves)}{len(available\ opponent\ moves)} - \frac{len(available\ opponent\ moves)}{len(my\ available\ moves)}, \qquad where\ \alpha \in (1, \infty)$$

Maximizing above equation is equivalent to maximizing:

$$\beta[len(my\ available\ moves)]^2 - [len(available\ opponent\ moves)]^2, \qquad where\ \beta \in (1, \infty)$$

The latter form has been implemented in the code with β chosen as 1.5 empirically.

EVALUATING HEURISTICS

The tournament.py script is used to evaluate the effectiveness of heuristic. The script measures relative performance of player in a round-robin tournament against several other pre-defined agents.

The performance of time-limited iterative deepening search is hardware dependent (faster hardware is expected to search deeper than slower hardware in the same amount of time). The script controls for these effects by also measuring the baseline performance of an agent called "ID_Improved" that uses Iterative Deepening and the improved_score heuristic from sample_players.py.

The tournament opponents are listed below:

- Random: An agent that randomly chooses a move each turn.
- MM_Null: CustomPlayer agent using fixed-depth minimax search and the null_score heuristic
- MM_Open: CustomPlayer agent using fixed-depth minimax search and the open_move_score heuristic
- MM_Improved: CustomPlayer agent using fixed-depth minimax search and the improved_score heuristic
- AB_Null: CustomPlayer agent using fixed-depth alpha-beta search and the null_score heuristic
- AB_Open: CustomPlayer agent using fixed-depth alpha-beta search and the open_move_score heuristic
- AB_Improved: CustomPlayer agent using fixed-depth alpha-beta search and the improved_score heuristic
- ID_Improved: CustomPlayer agent using iterative alpha-beta search and the improved_score heuristic
- Student1: CustomPlayer agent using iterative alpha-beta search and the heuristic 1
- Student2: CustomPlayer agent using iterative alpha-beta search and the heuristic 2
- Student3: CustomPlayer agent using iterative alpha-beta search and the heuristic 3
- Student4: CustomPlayer agent using iterative alpha-beta search and the heuristic 4
- Student5: CustomPlayer agent using iterative alpha-beta search and the heuristic 5
- Student6: CustomPlayer agent using iterative alpha-beta search and the heuristic 6
- Student7: CustomPlayer agent using iterative alpha-beta search and the heuristic 7

Since, running only a few matches gave different results, the number of matches were increased from 20 to 500 to get more sample points.

RESULTS

The performance of various agents is as follow:

Agent	Performance	Rank
ID_Improved	61.94%	8
Student1	65.89%	2
Student2	65.41%	4
Student3	64.21%	6
Student4	63.51%	7
Student5	64.48%	5
Student6	66.46%	1
Student7	65.45%	3

All the custom heuristics perform better than ID_Improved by a reasonable margin with **Student6** *(CustomPlayer agent using iterative alpha-beta search and the heuristic 6)* performing the best.

The raw evaluation result can be found in A. Appendix: Evaluation Result.

APPENDICES

A. APPENDIX: EVALUATION RESULT

```
This script evaluates the performance of the custom heuristic function by
comparing the strength of an agent using iterative deepening (ID) search with
alpha-beta pruning against the strength rating of agents using other
heuristic
functions.  The `ID_Improved` agent provides a baseline by measuring the
performance of a basic agent using Iterative Deepening and the "improved"
heuristic (from lecture) on your hardware.  The `Student` agent then measures
the performance of Iterative Deepening and the custom heuristic against the
same opponents.


*************************
 Evaluating: ID_Improved
*************************

Playing Matches:
----------
  Match 1: ID_Improved vs   Random    Result: 1724 to 276
  Match 2: ID_Improved vs   MM_Null   Result: 1395 to 605
  Match 3: ID_Improved vs   MM_Open   Result: 1012 to 988
  Match 4: ID_Improved vs MM_Improved Result: 952 to 1048
  Match 5: ID_Improved vs   AB_Null   Result: 1297 to 703
  Match 6: ID_Improved vs   AB_Open   Result: 1150 to 850
  Match 7: ID_Improved vs AB_Improved Result: 1142 to 858


Results:
----------
ID_Improved         61.94%

*************************
  Evaluating: Student1
*************************

Playing Matches:
----------
  Match 1:  Student1   vs   Random    Result: 1736 to 264
  Match 2:  Student1   vs   MM_Null   Result: 1458 to 542
  Match 3:  Student1   vs   MM_Open   Result: 1136 to 864
  Match 4:  Student1   vs MM_Improved Result: 1036 to 964
  Match 5:  Student1   vs   AB_Null   Result: 1411 to 589
  Match 6:  Student1   vs   AB_Open   Result: 1230 to 770
  Match 7:  Student1   vs AB_Improved Result: 1218 to 782


Results:
----------
Student1            65.89%

*************************
```

```
  Evaluating: Student2
*************************

Playing Matches:
----------
  Match 1:  Student2   vs   Random    Result: 1745 to 255
  Match 2:  Student2   vs   MM_Null   Result: 1433 to 567
  Match 3:  Student2   vs   MM_Open   Result: 1106 to 894
  Match 4:  Student2   vs MM_Improved Result: 1041 to 959
  Match 5:  Student2   vs   AB_Null   Result: 1388 to 612
  Match 6:  Student2   vs   AB_Open   Result: 1235 to 765
  Match 7:  Student2   vs AB_Improved Result: 1209 to 791


Results:
----------
Student2            65.41%

*************************
  Evaluating: Student3
*************************

Playing Matches:
----------
  Match 1:  Student3   vs   Random    Result: 1724 to 276
  Match 2:  Student3   vs   MM_Null   Result: 1412 to 588
  Match 3:  Student3   vs   MM_Open   Result: 1092 to 908
  Match 4:  Student3   vs MM_Improved Result: 1018 to 982
  Match 5:  Student3   vs   AB_Null   Result: 1336 to 664
  Match 6:  Student3   vs   AB_Open   Result: 1210 to 790
  Match 7:  Student3   vs AB_Improved Result: 1197 to 803


Results:
----------
Student3            64.21%

*************************
  Evaluating: Student4
*************************

Playing Matches:
----------
  Match 1:  Student4   vs   Random    Result: 1726 to 274
  Match 2:  Student4   vs   MM_Null   Result: 1392 to 608
  Match 3:  Student4   vs   MM_Open   Result: 1098 to 902
  Match 4:  Student4   vs MM_Improved Result: 986 to 1014
  Match 5:  Student4   vs   AB_Null   Result: 1317 to 683
  Match 6:  Student4   vs   AB_Open   Result: 1178 to 822
  Match 7:  Student4   vs AB_Improved Result: 1195 to 805


Results:
----------
Student4            63.51%

*************************
  Evaluating: Student5
```

```
************************

Playing Matches:
----------
  Match 1:  Student5   vs   Random    Result: 1719 to 281
  Match 2:  Student5   vs   MM_Null   Result: 1439 to 561
  Match 3:  Student5   vs   MM_Open   Result: 1088 to 912
  Match 4:  Student5   vs MM_Improved Result: 998 to 1002
  Match 5:  Student5   vs   AB_Null   Result: 1354 to 646
  Match 6:  Student5   vs   AB_Open   Result: 1222 to 778
  Match 7:  Student5   vs AB_Improved Result: 1207 to 793


Results:
----------
Student5            64.48%

************************
  Evaluating: Student6
************************

Playing Matches:
----------
  Match 1:  Student6   vs   Random    Result: 1741 to 259
  Match 2:  Student6   vs   MM_Null   Result: 1520 to 480
  Match 3:  Student6   vs   MM_Open   Result: 1112 to 888
  Match 4:  Student6   vs MM_Improved Result: 1059 to 941
  Match 5:  Student6   vs   AB_Null   Result: 1418 to 582
  Match 6:  Student6   vs   AB_Open   Result: 1245 to 755
  Match 7:  Student6   vs AB_Improved Result: 1209 to 791


Results:
----------
Student6            66.46%

************************
  Evaluating: Student7
************************

Playing Matches:
----------
  Match 1:  Student7   vs   Random    Result: 1714 to 286
  Match 2:  Student7   vs   MM_Null   Result: 1435 to 565
  Match 3:  Student7   vs   MM_Open   Result: 1138 to 862
  Match 4:  Student7   vs MM_Improved Result: 1084 to 916
  Match 5:  Student7   vs   AB_Null   Result: 1369 to 631
  Match 6:  Student7   vs   AB_Open   Result: 1199 to 801
  Match 7:  Student7   vs AB_Improved Result: 1224 to 776


Results:
----------
Student7            65.45%
```