ISMLA Project: Malayalam Glosser

Thora Daneyko

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Abstract

Miau

1 Introduction

Bla bla bla test മലയാളി bla bla.

2 Malayalam Language Processing

2.1 About Malayalam

Malayalam is a Dravidian language spoken by over 30 million people in the southern Indian state Kerala. Like most Dravidian languages, Malayalam has a very free SOV word order and a rich agglutinative exclusively suffixing morphology. The verbal morphology is especially complex, as verbs can be marked for various tenses, aspects and moods and may be chained together into long compounds to express subtle differences in meaning (Asher and Kumari 1997).

2.2 NLP challenges

2.2.1 Parsing the Malayalam script

Malayalam is written in Malayalam script, an abugida descended from the Brahmi script. The basic characters represent a syllable composed of a consonant and the inherent vowel /a/. The inherent vowel can be changed by attaching a vowel diacritic to the base character. Hence, the symbol & represents the syllable /ka/, but with the diacritic for /i/ or /ē/ it becomes &l /ki/ or & /kē/. Similarly, the inherent vowel may be deleted using the diacritic that is known as candrakkala 'half moon' in Malayalam and virama or halant in many other Indic languages to represent a consonant without vowel, as in & /k/, or to type consonant clusters, as in & /ka/ (usually displayed as the ligature & lightharpoonup languages). In Malayalam, however, the candrakkala has a phonetic value of its own at the end of a word, often transcribed as a short close or mid unrounded vowel ([i] or [o]), as in & sos kāṭŭ 'forest' being pronounced [ka:di], not [ka:t],

with intervocalic voicing applying just as between any other two vowels. The candrakkala therefore serves two quite different purposes. The only consonants that can appear at the end of a word without being followed by the candrakkala vowel are /m/, /n/, /n/, /n/, /n/, /n/, and /n/. For this reason, Malayalam has its own characters for these sounds without the inherent vowel (except /m/, which is represented by the $anusv\bar{a}ram$ diacritic $\circ \circ$), called cillu: $\circ \circ$, $\circ \circ \circ$, $\circ \circ \circ$, $\circ \circ \circ$, $\circ \circ$, $\circ \circ \circ$, $\circ \circ$

Conversion from Malayalam script into some other format therefore holds a few difficulties that one must be aware of. However, converting Malayalam script into some alphabetic representation is an important preprocessing step for morpheme splitting, since Malayalam morphemes are not necessarily syllabic and can therefore only hardly be represented and analyzed in the Malayalam script.

2.2.2 Tokenization

The Malayalam script generally separates words by whitespaces, just like the Latin script. However, there is a strong tendency to merge adjacent words in writing. Thus, the two-word sentence slapd ആണ് ticcar āṇǔ 'is a teacher' may also be written as a single word: slaposm' ticcarāṇǔ. This may include any number of words from any part of speech and does not only occur in literature, as in (1), but also in everyday speech and writing, as in (2). Bindu and Idicula (2011) estimate that "80-85% of words in Malayalam text documents are compound words", though it is not entirely clear whether they only refer to the merging of independent words or also to suffixing.

(1) മേഘം പോലെ കറുപ്പുനിറഞ്ഞോടുകൂടിയവർ ആണ്.

 $M\bar{e}gham\ p\bar{o}le\ karuppunira\~n\~n\=otuk\bar{u}tiyavar\ \bar{a}n\~u.$

മേഘം പോലെ കറുപ്പ് നിറഞ്ഞോട് കൂടി അവർ ആണ് $m\bar{e}ghani$ $p\bar{o}le$ $karupp ar{u}$ $nira ar{n} - ar{o}t ar{u}$ $kar{u}ti$ avar $ar{a}n ar{u}$ cloud like black be-full-PST.PART-SOC with they COP

'They are black like clouds.' (Vēṇugōpālan 2009, p. 179)

(2) അതിന് നിനക്കെന്താ? Atinŭ ninakkentā?

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അതിന് നിനക്ക് എന്ത് ആണ് at	ext{-}inreve{u} nin	ext{-}akkreve{u} entreve{u} ar{a}nreve{u} that-DAT you-DAT what COP
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'Why do you care?' (Moag 1994, p. 165)

The above examples already indicate that even on the phonetic level this process is not always as simple as in signorm tāccarāṇŭ, where the two words are just merged together. The changes that the affected words undergo when written as one are referred to as external sandhi (Devadath et al. 2014). Its counterpart, internal sandhi, describes the changes that occur when bound morphemes, such as case endings, are added to a stem. However, these rules are often specific to the suffix in question. The most common external sandhi rules that regularly apply when merging arbitrary words in a sentence are the following:

- Insertion of a glide between two vowels (/y/ or /v/ depending on the roundedness of the first vowel), as in (1) കൂടിയവർ kūṭiyavar (കൂടി kūṭi + അവർ avar).
- Dropping of the candrakkala vowel when merging with a word starting with a vowel, as in (2) നിനക്കെന്താ(ണ്) ninakkentā(nŭ) (നിനക്ക് ninakkŭ + എന്ത് entŭ + ആണ് ānŭ).
- The candrakkala vowel becoming /u/ when merging with a word starting with a consonant, as in (1) കുപ്പുനിറഞ്ഞോടുകടി karuppuniraññōṭukūṭi (കുപ്പ് karuppŭ + നിറഞ്ഞോട് niraññōṭŭ + കൂടി kūṭi).
- Doubling of an initial consonant (especially plosives) when preceded by a vowel or *cillu* consonant. This is very frequent in compounds, such as അരിപ്പെട്ടി arippeṭṭi 'rice box' (അരി ari + പെട്ടി peṭṭi) or പാൽക്കുപ്പി pālk-kuppi 'milk bottle' (പാൽ pāl + കപ്പി kuppi) (Asher and Kumari 1997, p. 397). It also occurs in chains of verbs, e.g. when merging the verb കൊടുക്കുക koṭukkuka 'to give' with the past tense form of the verb പെടുക peṭuka 'to fall into' to create the passive expression കൊടുക്കപ്പെട്ട koṭuk-kappeṭṭu 'was given' (കൊടുക്ക koṭukka + പെട്ടു peṭṭu) (Asher and Kumari 1997, p. 269).
- (Orthographic change only:) The *cillus* and the *anusvāram* becoming their full counterparts before a vowel, as in พุฒอวธสาว? sukhamāṇō? 'how are you/are you well?' (พูฒอ sukham + ആสาว āṇō) (Moag 1994, p. 30).
- Dropping of the anusvāram before a consonant, as in പുസ്തകപ്രേമം pustakaprēmam 'love of books' (പുസ്തകം pustakam + പ്രേമം prēmam) (Asher and Kumari 1997, p. 398).

For a Malayalam tokenizer, it is therefore not sufficient to extract tokens separated by whitespaces and punctuation, it must also be able to identify and split merged words and reverse the *sandhi* that has altered the participating tokens.

2.2.3 Morphological analysis

Malayalam is a highly agglutinative language and even individual tokens can get quite long under the load of multiple inflectional endings. Luckily, Malayalam is exclusively suffixing, so once the individual words of a sentence have been identified, each of them will always begin with the root or stem and optionally end in a sequence of suffixes. Also, apart from the *internal sandhi* operating at morpheme boundaries, Malayalam grammar is very regular.

Malayalam's core vocabulary mainly consists of nouns and verbs. It only has a handful of non-derived adjectives, while all other adjective-like words have been derived from verb phrases. Also, adjectives do not have any inflections of their own; instead, they are usually nominalized (Asher and Kumari 1997, p. 349ff). Nouns are only marked for number and case, of which Malayalam has seven.

Verbs, on the other hand, display a rather rich and complex morphology. They can have up to three causatives, passive voice and various aspects, moods and tenses. (3) is an example of a heavily inflected Malayalam verb.

(3) പാഠങ്ങൾ പഠിപ്പിക്കപ്പെട്ടുകൊണ്ടിരുന്നിട്ടുണ്ടാകണം.

pāṭhannal paṭhippikkappeṭṭukoṇṭirunniṭṭuṇṭākaṇam.

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p\bar{a}than -nal pathi -ppi -kka -ppet -tu -kont -irunn -itt -unt\bar{a}k lesson -PL learn -CAU -CAU -PASS -PST -PROG -PST -PERF -be -anam -DES.PRS
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'Lessons must have been being taught.' (Asher and Kumari 1997, p. 304)

Even though most verbs that actually occur in texts come with a much smaller number of suffixes, every verb will be inflected somehow, and the possibilities are vast. As Asher and Kumari (1997) note, it seems that "all morphological combinations are possible that are semantically interpretable and compatible" (p. 304). Also, Malayalam has a tendency to chain verbs to express even more subtle semantic differences, so a typical Malayalam sentences will often contain multiple verbs. As mentioned above, almost all adjectives are actually adjectivized verbs, which may be inflected as well.

When processing Malayalam morphology, one can take advantage of the fact that Malayalam exclusively uses suffixes which are also rather regular. However, one must also beachten the *internal sandhi* between suffixes which is sometimes peculiar for a certain suffix. For verbs, the amount of possible combinations of suffixes is huge, which is a besondere hindrance for paradigm generation.

3 Previous work

In their 2011 paper on automatic machine translation between Malayalam and Tamil, Jayan, Rajeev, and Rajendran draw a pessimistic conclusion regarding

Malayalam morphological analysis: "A sandhi splitter demands a morphological analyzer and a morphological analyzer demands a sandhi splitter. There is a dead lock between the two." While it is true that there is a certain dependency between resolving sandhi-merged words into individual tokens and analyzing the morphology of these tokens, many researchers following Jayan, Rajeev, and Rajendran (2011) have now overcome the "dead lock" and found successful ways to perform sandhi splitting and morphological analysis separately.

3.1 Sandhi splitting

The importance of sandhi splitting for the processing of Dravidian languages and especially Malayalam has recently been recognized and addressed by several researchers. Devadath et al. (2014) note that "[s]andhi acts as a bottle-neck for all term distribution based approaches for any NLP and IR task". The developed applications serve as preprocessors for POS Taggers (Manju, Soumya, and Idicula 2009; Bindu and Idicula 2011), Parsers (Devadath 2016) and Morphological Analyzers (Sebastian and Kumar 2018). Further Anwendungsgebiete for sandhi splitters are "document indexing and topic modeling" (Nisha and Raj 2016) and machine translation (Jayan, Rajeev, and Rajendran 2011).

Manju, Soumya, and Idicula (2009) and Bindu and Idicula (2011) use a dictionary lookup approach for sandhi splitting. They maintain a lexicon of Malayalam words and recursively search for the longest known substring in an input string. For each possible substring, they also reverse any sandhi rule that might have applied and thus generate a number of forms to look up. Since their sandhi splitters are only a preprocessing step for their POS Taggers, they do not report any performance measures.

Statistical methods for sandhi splitting are much more popular that rule based methods. Devadath et al. (2014) explore a hybrid approach where they first determine the split points statistically relying on n-gram frequencies and then modify the identified tokens using predefined sandhi rules. Their system reaches an accuracy of 91.1 % (meaning words that were split exactly as in the gold standard).

Kuncham et al. (2015) develop a purely statistical language independent sandhi splitter which they evaluate on Telugu and Malayalam. The train a Conditional Random Fields model to identify split points and applicable sandhi rules based on the characters of the word and surrounding segments to resolve ambiguous splits and sandhi processes. They reach an accuracy of 89.07~% for Telugu and 90.50~% for Malayalam.

Nisha and Raj (2016) employ Memory Based Language Processing to create a sandhi splitter and morphological analyzer for Malayalam. Their system divides words in the training corpus into a root and suffix part and matches unseen data against the already encountered suffixes, finding the closest match using a distance measure. They report an accuracy of 90 %.

Machine learning is by far the preferred method for building a sandhi splitter and the systems reach a high accuracy. However, while token merging and sandhi processes are frequent in Malayalam, the involved sandhi rules are rather few and usually very simple. Collecting large training sets and building complex statistical models seems exaggerated for this task. Since Malayalam (external) sandhi is either simple insertion or only affects the final characters of the preceding word and leaves the following word untouched, a recursive lookup strategy from right to left, as employed by Manju, Soumya, and Idicula (2009) and Bindu and Idicula (2011), seems to be fitting the task quite nicely. Of course, this requires a large dictionary that either contains all possible inflected forms or comes with a morphological analyzer, and will also fail on unknown words or forms. The big advantage of the statistical models here is that they easily generalize to unseen data.

3.2 Morphological analysis

Bla bla

Rajeev, Rajendran, and Sherly (2007) and Jayan, Rajeev, and Rajendran (2011) make use of Malayalam's suffixing nature and employ a suffix stripping method: On a tokenized sentence, they recursively remove recognized suffixes from the word, paying attention to sandhi processes, until the remaining stem can be found in a dictionary. For Malayalam, this method is very effective, but requires a predefined set of suffixes and a large dictionary of stems. Also, it is not generalizable to languages with prefixes or a non-agglutinative morphology.

Manju, Soumya, and Idicula (2009) take a less specialized direction by parsing and analyzing Malayalam words using a Finite State Transducer (FST). FSTs have long proven to be very suitable for morphological analysis, especially of agglutinative languages (Beesley and Karttunen 2003). They are also very fast, producing an analysis in the time that is needed to read the input string once. However, FSTs can quickly get very complex and they require hand-crafted rules for recognizing the individual morphemes, just as the suffix stripping method.

In contrast to these manual methods, Sebastian and Kumar (2018) employ a machine learning approach to their Malayalam morphological analyzer. They train a Naive Bayes classifier on a split point and sandhi rule annotated data set. The overall performance of their system is not entirely clear, as they only provide accuracy measures for words ending in -yalla (negation), -yute (genitive case), -yāṇŭ and -yāyi (two forms of ākuka 'to be', actually cases of external sandhi), only covering one rather predictable type of sandhi (glide insertion). For these four examples, their analyzer recognizes and applies 92.06 % of the desired splits.

4 The Malayalam Glosser

Bla bla

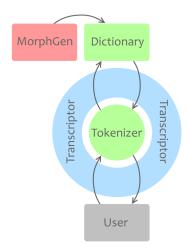


Figure 1: The architecture of the Malayalam Glosser.

4.1 Transliteration

Due to its syllabic nature, morpheme splitting is a tedious task in the Malayalam script and is best carried out in an alphabetic transcription. Also, while the Malayalam script has been included in Unicode for quite some time and Malayalam keyboard layouts are preinstalled on most modern machines, even native speakers of Malayalam frequently type Malayalam in a Latin romanization. Language learners, the primary target audience of the Malayalam Glosser, often do not know how to use the Malayalam script on a computer, especially when they are beginners. It is therefore necessary to convert Malayalam text between the script and various romanizations to be able to support the most popular input formats and display the finished glosses in a readable way.

4.1.1 Supported Scripts

Apart from the Malayalam script, the Malayalam Glosser currently supports two additional romanization schemes, Mozhi and ISO-15919. The Mozhi romanization is very popular especially among Malayalis to write Malayalam on the web. It consists only of ASCII characters and utilizes capitalization to enlarge the set of available characters (Cibu 2008). The ISO-15919 or National Library at Kolkata romanization is the default romanization scheme in scientific texts for all Indic languages (it is also the one used in this paper). It makes heavy use of diacritics and is thus not easily typable on the average English keyboard. Because of this, there also is an ASCII version of ISO-15919 which replaces the diacritics by punctuation characters (ISO 2001). Both variants of ISO-15919, Unicode and ASCII based, are supported by the Malayalam Glosser.

A full table with all Malayalam characters in the different scripts (Malayalam script, ISO-15919 Unicode, ISO-15919 ASCII and Mozhi) can be found in the appendix. (4) is an example of how the sentence 'xxx' is spelled in the four supported scripts.

(4) Malayalam: ISO-15919 Unicode: ISO-15919 ASCII: Mozhi:

The ISO-15919 ASCII romanization is also the underlying representation of all dictionary entries, since the Malayalam rules of the MorphGen are written in this format.

4.1.2 Transliterators

The main class handling all transliterations between the different scripts in the MalayalamTranscriptor. However, it mostly serves as an interface to the transliterator system designed for the NorthEuraLex database by the EVOLAEMP project (Jäger and Dellert 2017). To display phonetic transcriptions for the lexical entries in their database, they developed automatic rule-based transliterators that are able to convert from orthography to IPA based on language-specific rule sets (Daneyko 2016). Since phonetic transcription is just another type of transliteration, the same infrastructure can also be used to convert between different romanization schemes. The EVOLAEMP transliterators also have an efficient FST based implementation, the Java version of which is quite platform-dependent, so the basic Java implementation (called 'simple transliterators' in Daneyko (2016)) was used in a slightly altered form.

Transliterator rules from Malayalam script to ISO-15919 Unicode and from ISO-15919 Unicode to IPA were already written for the NorthEuraLex database. Hence, ISO-15919 Unicode was selected as the intermediate representation for the transliterators and additional rules were written for ISO-15919 Unicode to Malayalam script, ISO-15919 Unicode from and to ISO-15919 ASCII, and ISO-15919 Unicode from and to Mozhi.

4.2 Morphology Generation

MorphGen

4.3 Dictionary lookup

MalayalamDictionary

4.3.1 Efficiency considerations

Considering that the dictionary may be very large and that the main function of the Glosser is to look words up in this dictionary, being able to load and query it very quickly is essential for the performance of the Glosser. Hence, I experimented with a few alternatives for storing the dictionary data and investigated their efficiency. The tests elaborated below are not very exact or well-designed and were only meant to quickly assess the usefulness of the considered methods.

HashMap vs. ReverseTrie

The straightforward way to represent a dictionary as a Java object is a HashMap. Apart from being readily available and easy to use, querying a HashMap is fast. However, this also means that all entries are stored as their complete String representation, which may consume quite a lot of space. Considering that the inflected forms of the words share most of their characters, a trie representation seemed quite suitable and might be able to save space compared to a simple HashMap. Since Malayalam is exclusively suffixing, I programmed a ReverseTrie which reads and retrieves the strings from last to first character, in order to save as much space as possible. A useful side effect of this is that the tokenizer does not need to look up all suffixes of a compound word in the dictionary, but can simply do a suffix search of the ReverseTrie to get the longest contained suffix.

In order to compare the performance of a HashMap and ReverseTrie based dictionary, I measured the memory used by the program before loading the dictionary data and after creating the HashMap and Trie (calculated as Runtime.totalMemory() - Runtime.freeMemory() after a System.gc() call). Then I let the dictionary find the longest known suffix of the test String aviteyullatariññu (avițe ullată ariññu "knew (he) was there") 1,000,000 times and measured the time needed by a MashMap and ReverseTrie based dictionary (calculated using System.currentmillis()). Finally, I rewrote the tokenizer to also work with a ReverseTrie and tested how long tokenization of the short conversation from lesson 11 of Moag (1994, p.164f) took it with the two dictionary types.

Despite the many shared suffixes, the HashMap was smaller than the ReverseTrie, taking up 8,318,164.8 bytes on average during five test runs, while the Trie required 12,590,051.2 bytes. However, the memory used by the HashMap varied greatly, ranging from only 5,160,456 to 9,801,392 bytes, while the Trie always consumed almost exactly the same amount of memory. This indicates that the measurements might have been distorted by background processes such as the garbage collection. However, the HashMap still seems to be considerably smaller.

As expected, the ReverseTrie outperformed the HashMap on the looped suffix search of <code>aviṭeyuḷḷatariññu</code>. The Map took an average of 999 milliseconds during five test runs, while the Trie only needed 312.4 ms. However, the performance of the Trie was very unstable, ranging from 140 to 518 ms between runs, while the HashMap always needed between 908 and 1049 ms, which is still much slower than the slowest suffix search of the Trie.

On a real Malayalam text, where only few words are long compounds such as $aviteyullatari\~n\~nu$, both methods were equally fast. During 10 glossings of the Moag conversation, the Map based tokenization took 156.3 ms on average and the Trie based tokenization 161.7 ms. Both ran very stable.

All in all, the HashMap seems to be the better choice, since it is smaller than the Trie and equally fast on normal Malayalam texts. The Trie is faster when tokenizing long compound words, which however are not frequent enough to justify preferring it over the HashMap.

File storage vs. Serialization

Loading the dictionary data into the underlying HashMap (or ReverseTrie) takes a considerable amount of time at launch. Hence, I considered serializing the Map or Trie object to be able to load it quicker. Since the Java serialization is known to rather slow, I used the FST Fast Serialization library for my tests. I first read the dictionary data from the text file and created the HashMap and ReverseTrie from it, measuring the time needed. Then I serialized the two objects and took the time required to describe them.

During five test runs, parsing the text file into an object took 278.2 ms on average for the HashMap and 310.6 ms for the Trie. Deserializing the same objects required 563.4 ms on average for the HashMap and 339.8 ms for the Trie. Loading the data from a text file is thus faster than deserializing a previously created object.

The file storing the serialized ReverseTrie was twice as large as the file with the HashMap. This confirms my assertions from the previous section that the Trie takes more space than the HashMap.

4.4 Tokenization

MalayalamGlosser

4.5 UI Design

5 Conclusion

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A Abbreviations used in glosses

CAU	Causative	PL	Plural number
COP	The copula $\bar{a}n\ddot{u}$	PROG	Progressive aspect
DAT	Dative case	PRS	Present tense
DES	Desiderative mood	PST	Past tense
PASS	Passive voice	PART	Participle
PERF	Perfect aspect	SOC	Sociative case

B Transcription schemes

Script	ISO (Uni)	ISO (ASCII)	Mozhi
അ	a	a	a
ആ	$\bar{\mathrm{a}}$	aa	aa
ഇ	i	i	i
ഈ	$\overline{1}$	ii	ii
<u>ഉ</u>	u	u	u
ഊ	$ar{ ext{u}}$	uu	uu
8	r	,r	R
എ	e	e	e
ഏ	ē	ee	\mathbf{E}
ഐ	ai	ai	ai
8	O	O	O
ഓ	ō	00	O
ഔ	au	au	au
അം	$a\dot{m}$	a;m	am
അഃ	ah	a.h	ah
ക	ka	ka	ka
ഖ	kha	kha	kha
S	ga	ga	ga
ഘ	gha	gha	gha
ങ	'nа	;na	nga
ച	ca	ca	cha
<u> 2</u> 0	cha	cha	chha
ജ	ja	ja	$_{ m ja}$
ത്ധ	jha	$_{ m jha}$	$_{ m jha}$
ഞ	ña	~na	$_{ m nja}$
S	ţа	.ta	Ta
0	ṭha	.tha	Tha
w	фа	.da	Da
œ	фhа	.dha	Dha
ണ	ņa	.na	Na
ത	ta	ta	tha
\mathbf{r}	tha	tha	thha
З	da	da	da

ω	dha	dha	dha
m	na	na	na
പ	pa	pa	pa
ഫ	pha	pha	pha
ബ	ba	ba	ba
ß	bha	bha	bha
2	ma	ma	$_{\mathrm{ma}}$
ω	ya	ya	ya
0	ra	ra	ra
ല	la	la	la
വ	va	va	va
ശ	śa	;sa	Sa
ഷ	șа	.sa	sha
m	sa	sa	sa
ഹ	ha	ha	ha
<u> </u>	ļa	.la	La
φ	<u>l</u> a	_la	zha
0	$\underline{\mathbf{r}}\mathbf{a}$	_ra	rra
8	$\underline{\mathrm{tta}}/\underline{\mathrm{rra}}$	_t_ta/_r_ra	ta
റ ൻ ൻ	$n\underline{t}a/n\underline{r}a$	n_ta/n_ra	nta
ൻ	n	n	n
ൺ	ņ	.n	N
ð	r	r	r
ൽ	1	1	l
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