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Can we parse without tagging?

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Abstract

Syntactic parsing is a major area of NLP which has been widely studied with the help of many approaches. Usually, parsers take in input tagged texts, that is to say texts whose lexical units have been annotated with informations such as lemma, grammatical code, gender and number. In this paper, we present a parsing method that can work on untagged texts as well as on tagged ones. We then compare results obtained on specialized texts in their raw and tagged version in order to determine if tagging is absolutely necessary.

Introduction

Syntactic parsing is a major problem in Natural Language Processing and has been widely studied with the help of different methods, such as statistical parsing (Charniak, 1997; Collins, 1996; Magerman, 1995) and linguistic-based methods (Roche, 1993; Abney, 1996; Koskenniemi et al., 1992; Ait-Mokhtar & Chanod, 1997). Traditionally, at least for Romance languages, parsers take in input tagged texts in which each lexical unit is given to grammatical and/or inflectional information, such as lemma, grammatical category, gender and number. There are many taggers that use a mix of probabilistic and linguistic information: (Church, 1988), TreeTagger (Schmidt, 1994), Brill's Tagger (Brill, 1994), (Cutting et al., 1992), Xerox part-of-speech tagger, GREYC parser (Giguet & Vergne, 1997), etc. Most of these tag about 95% of all lexical units correctly. This means that there is always a certain percentage of erroneously tagged units which will disrupt the behavior of parsers.

In this paper we will discuss the possibility of parsing texts without prior tagging. Therefore we will apply the same parsing method to two versions of the same text: one which was first disambiguated by automatic tagging and one which was not (in the latter case, a dictionary provides morphological information, but without disambiguation). Results will be compared in order to measure the impact of disambiguation. The method used is a common approach based on precise linguistic descriptions: electronic dictionaries (Silberztein, 1993) and lexicon-grammar tables (Gross, 1975).

The framework

The question of whether or not tagging is needed for parsing arose within the framework of an applied research project which aims at developing a linguistic index engine¹. In this particular context, indexation is viewed as the ultimate step towards an information extraction process. Parsing is therefore understood in a restrictive way: it is used on texts that resort to a technical sublanguage (as opposed to general language) and is used to analyse sentences that contain predefined verbs² in

order to extract their various complements. We built extraction graphs which enable us to correctly extract the syntactic structures described in the linguistic databases of the lexicon-grammar. The following question then arose: should these extraction graphs be applied to a disambiguated text (where each word of the text is associated with one - and only one - POS tag) or could the system rely on a "simple" dictionary lookup procedure that would provide all the possible analyses for any given word but which would offer no disambiguation.

Before discussing these two possibilities, we will first describe the parsing method and the linguistic resources format.

The parsing method

Contrary to many other parsers, our method is based on an exact linguistic description and does not use statistics of any kind. The main part of this description consists of tables that, for each verb, describe the elementary structures in which it can appear. We can automatically generate grammars from such tables, and subsequently, apply them to texts via the advanced pattern matching function offered by the Unitex³ software. This approach has already been illustrated by several works (Roche, 1993; Senellart, 1999; Paumier, 2003).

Lexicon-grammar tables

Lexicon-grammar tables were introduced by Maurice Gross who analysed complete verbs in French (Gross 1975). These tables have since then been extended to the rest of French simple verbs (Boons et al., 1976; Guillet & Leclère, 1992) as well as to other kind of predicates (nouns, adjectives) and various languages.

The tables consist of a formal description of verbs represented as a matrix, as shown in Figure 1. Each line corresponds to a verb, and each row represents a formal syntactic property⁴. A '+' sign in a cell,

paper, we will not give more details.

³ Unitex is an LGPL-licensed software, available at: <http://igm.univ-mlv.fr/~unitex/>

⁴ Usually, a lexicon-grammar table contains verbs that have the same main structure (for instance, *N0 V N1*). For convenience sake, we proceeded differently in our experiments. This is why there are properties referring to *N4* or *N5*, which is not standard in the lexicon-grammar frame. However, this detail has no

- ¹ This research was partly financed by Bureau Van Dijk. We wish to thank them for their collaboration.
- ² The full process involves also the analysis of nominal forms. As we do not elaborate on this part in this

Figure 4: ambiguous text after dictionary lookup

Is this comparison relevant ?

One can object that the comparison is irrelevant because decisions of the statistical guesser are not based on the same dictionary as the one used for the “no-tagger” approach.

This is not really a limitation since the words that are found in the TreeTagger's lexical resources are also present in the DELAF dictionary which covers a very large part of the lexicon. However there are some differences between the outputs of the TreeTagger and that of the dictionary lookup program:

- some words could be absent from our dictionary (neologisms, proper names, misspelt words) but the TreeTagger will always provide a tag for these. This point will be discussed below in the “results” section ;
- the dictionary contains a large number of compound lexical forms (over 100.000 compound words); however the tagger cannot analyse compounds. This has no influence on the results since the noun phrase grammar we have developed contains patterns which match the internal structure of compound words (*N de N, N à N, AN, NA, etc.*).

Naturally, this argumentation is valid for any tagger with a comparable level of accuracy.

Results

Precision

Tagged text: 92.28% (598/648)
Untagged text: 88.67% (493/556)

The small difference in precision scores (3.61%) may indicate that tagging is not absolutely necessary. Precision errors are due to the matching algorithm that gives priority to longest matches. For instance, the French word *est* can be an adjective (*east*) or a verb (a form of *to be*). Consequently, if the matching program considers it as an adjective, it will provide the following erroneous analysis:

```
<N0>L'air</N0> alimentant <N1>la  
combustion est injecté par des buses à  
la base de la chambre</N1>
```

In the example above, *est* is a verb, and the correct N1 complement is only *la combustion*. Such errors occur when the text is not disambiguated or when a word has been erroneously disambiguated.

Recall

Tagged text: 47.84 % (598/1250)
Untagged text: 39.44 % (493/1250)

The analysis of these results has highlighted two main reasons of this difference (8.4 %):

- Incompleteness of electronic dictionaries: even if they have a very large coverage, these resources cannot be exhaustive. In a domain such as energy, there are many neologisms and technical terms that are not in dictionaries. Therefore an unknown word is a fatal error with a dictionary-based approach, whereas a tagger always gives it a tag. When this tag is correct, the tagger approach is more efficient than the dictionary one.
- Numbers: in its current state, our prototype contains no graph able to handle numbers. This fact blocks the analysis in the same way as unknown words do. On the other hand, the tagger gives tags to numbers so that the grammar can deal with them if they are tagged as determiners.

These poor recall scores are mainly due to complex structures that occur in texts and that are not taken into account in our grammars. For example, verb coordination, anaphora and relatives have not been described (or very briefly). The reason for this is that, within the framework of indexation, we gave priority to precision in order to extract relevant complements. We did not try to make a complete parsing of our corpus, but only to parse sentences that contain enough information to be useful for indexation.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented a parsing method which is based on a precise linguistic description and which can be applied to tagged texts as well as untagged texts. The analysis of the results obtained with and without disambiguation shows that precision is not significantly greater if we use a tagger. On the contrary, we have observed that recall is better with a tagger, because our method is currently blocked by unknown units such as neologisms and numbers.

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