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Innovation in phraseomatics: DiCoP project and DiCoP-Text corpus for the enrichment of Language Models and Automatic Translation

Lian Chen, Wenjun Sun, Flora Badin

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Lian Chen, Wenjun Sun, Flora Badin. Innovation in phraseomatics: DiCoP project and DiCoP-Text corpus for the enrichment of Language Models and Automatic Translation. EURALEX 2024 - 21st EURALEX International Congress Lexicography and Semantics, Kristina Štrkalj Despot; Ana Ostroški Anić; Ivana Brač, Oct 2024, Cavtat, Croatia. pp.227-234. hal-04664240

HAL Id: hal-04664240

<https://hal.science/hal-04664240v1>

Submitted on 8 Oct 2024

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Kristina Š. Despot
Ana Ostroški Anić
Ivana Brač (Eds.)

Lexicography and Semantics



Proceedings of the
XXI EURALEX International Congress

8–12 October 2024
Cavtat, Croatia



Nakladnik: Institut za hrvatski jezik
Za nakladnika: Željko Jozić

Knjiga: Lexicography and Semantics,
Proceedings of the
XXI EURALEX International Congress

Urednice: Kristina Štrkalj Despot
Ana Ostroški Anić
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Tehničko uređenje i računalni slog: Elena Vrbanić
Oblikovanje naslovnice: Elena Vrbanić
Tisak:



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ISBN 978-953-7967-77-2

Kristina Š. Despot, Ana Ostroški Anić, Ivana Brač (Eds.)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	11
-----------------------	----

PART I: CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

Acknowledgements	15
Main Sponsors.....	15
Sponsors.....	16
Programme Committee.....	17
Local Organising Committee.....	17
Scientific Committee.....	17
Overview of Keynotes and Workshops.....	19
Keynotes.....	19
Keynotes of the Workshop Figurative Language and Large Language Models.....	19
Workshops.....	19

PART II: PROCEEDINGS

Chapter I. Lexicography and Semantics	21
--	----

Tony Veale

You Talk Funny! Someday Me Talk Funny Too! – On Learning to See the Humorous Side of Familiar Words.....	22
---	----

Valeria Caruso, Lucia di Pace

Words for Choosing Food in <i>ALMA – Multimedia Atlas of Bio/Cultural Food</i>	35
--	----

Janet DeCesaris, Mercè Lorente Casafort

Old Words, New Terms – Semantic Broadening and Narrowing in the Vocabulary of the Circular Economy.....	49
--	----

Maucha Gamonal, Adriana Pagano, Tiago Torrent, Ely Matos, Arthur Lorenzi

Automated Semantic Frame Annotation – An Exploratory Study in the Health Domain.....	61
---	----

Ellert Thor Johannsson, Thordis Ulfarsdottir

The Role of Semantic Fields in Contemporary Icelandic Dictionaries.....	75
---	----

Robert Krovetz

Morpho-Semantics and Dictionary Entries.....	86
--	----

Haniva Yunita Leo

Do Indonesian Speakers Feel ‘pain’? NSM and Corpus-Based Approach to the Cross-Linguistic Concept of ‘pain’ in Bahasa Indonesia.....	101
---	-----

Michael Nguyen, Peter Juel Henriksen

The Locum Hyphen – A Formal Approach to the Lexicalization of Multiword Expressions With Rich Internal Semantics.....	113
--	-----

Pär Nilsson Figurative, Transferred or Extended use? The Use of Semantic Labels in the First Edition and the Revised Version of the Swedish Academy Dictionary.....	122
Sanni Nimb, Ida Flörke, Sussi Olsen, Bolette S. Pedersen, Nathalie C. H. Sørensen COR.SEM, a New Formal Semantic Lexicon for Danish.....	131
Andrej Perdih, Kozma Ahačič, Nataša Jakop, Nina Ledinek, Špela Petric Žižić Semantic Information on the Franček Educational Language Portal for Slovenian.....	144
Emma Sköldberg, Shafqat Mumtaz Virk, Pauline Sander, Simon Hengchen and Dominik Schlechtweg Revealing Semantic Variation in Swedish Using Computational Models of Semantic Proximity – Results From Lexicographical Experiments.....	158
Petra Storjohann Synonyms in Contrast – A Dynamic and Descriptive Resource for New Semantic Equivalents.....	172
Lars Trap-Jensen, Henrik Lorentzen Back to Basics – Meaning Description for Human Users and for Computers.....	179
Ene Vainik, Geda Paulsen, Heete Sahkai, Jelena Kallas, Arvi Tavast, Arvi Tavast, Kristina Koppel From a Dictionary to a Constructicon – Putting the Basics on the Map.....	196
Chapter II. Lexicography and Language Technologies.....	204
Igor Boguslavsky Lexical Resources for a Semantic Parser of Russian – Argument Structure of Ordinal Adjectives.....	205
Nataliia Cheilytko, Ruprecht von Waldenfels Word Embeddings for Detecting Lexical Semantic Change in Ukrainian.....	216
Lian Chen, Wenjun Sun, Flora Badin Innovation in Phraseomatics – DiCoP Project and DiCoP-Text Corpus for the Enrichment of Language Models and Automatic Translation.....	227
Enikő Héja, Kata Gábor, László Simon, Veronika Lipp Graph-based Detection of Hungarian Adjectival Meaning Structures via Monolingual Static Embeddings.....	235
Geraint Paul Rees, Isabel Gibert A Textbook or ChatGPT – Which Helps Novice Programmers Most with Unknown Terms?.....	248
Bálint Sass The “Dependency Tree Fragments” Model for Querying a Constructicon.....	257

Dragana Špica, Benedikt Perak Enhancing Japanese Lexical Networks Using Large Language Models – Extracting Synonyms and Antonyms with GPT-4o.....	265
Chapter III. Dictionary Writing Systems and Lexicographic Tools.....	285
Michaela Denisová, Gilles-Maurice de Schryver, Pavel Rychlý The Automatic Determination of Translation Equivalents in Lexicography: What Works and What Doesn't?.....	286
Stephanie Evert, Christine Ganslmayer, Christian Rink Multi-Level Analysis as a Systematic Approach to Evaluating the Quality of AI-Generated Dictionary Entries.....	298
Carolina Flinz, Daniel Henkel, Valeria Zotti, Sabrina Ballestracci A Multilingual Parallel Corpus for the Lexical Information System LBC – Recent Progress and Future Perspectives.....	316
Peter Juel Henriksen Make Each Morph Count – A New Approach to Computational Lexicography for Text Processing.....	329
František Kovařík, Vojtěch Kovář, Marek Blahuš On Rapid Annotation of Czech Headwords – Analysing the First Tasks of Czech Dictionary Express.....	336
Irene Renau, Rogelio Nazar, Daniel Mora Melanchthon Towards the Automatic Generation of a Pattern-Based Dictionary of Spanish Verbs.....	345
Chapter IV. Reports on Lexicographical and Lexicological Projects.....	361
Juris Baldunčiks, Silga Sviķe Pages of Latvian Historical Slang Dictionary: <i>dzeršana</i> ('drinking').....	362
María Auxiliadora Barrios Rodríguez Diretes, a Spanish Monolingual Dictionary Based on Lexical-Semantic Relations.....	369
Luke Omoyemi Akinremi, María José Domínguez Vázquez The Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters in Lexicography – EMJM-EMLex – New Developments and Goals.....	383
Dwayne Ellul Maltese Lexicography – A Historical Context and the Current State.....	389
Ivana Filipović Petrović, Kristina Kocijan Creating the Dataset of Croatian Verbal Idioms – Automatic Identification in a Corpus and Lexicographic Implementation.....	405

Louise Holmer, Ann Lillieström, Emma Sköldberg, Jonatan Uppström Time to Say Goodbye Revisited – On the Exclusion of Headwords from the Swedish Academy Glossary (SAOL).....	419
Kathryn Hudson The Benefits of Bio(lexicography) – A Topical Approach to Lexicographic Practice.....	429
Boris Kern Considering Word Formation in Compiling Dictionaries.....	438
Anas Fahad Khan, Ana Salgado, Isuri Anuradha, Rute Costa, Chamila Liyanage, John P. McCrae, Atul K. Ojha, Priya Rani and Francesca Frontini Cultural Heritage and Multilingual Understanding through lexical Archives (CHAMUÇA) – Portuguese Borrowings in Contemporary Asian Languages.....	449
Veronika Kolářová, Jiří Mirovský Looking for Sense in Nonsense – Valency of Negative Forms of Nouns and Adjectives in the NomVallex Lexicon.....	459
Kusujiro Miyoshi John Pickering’s Reference Materials for His <i>Vocabulary</i> (1816) – Transcending the Bounds of Dictionaries.....	471
Pär Nilsson Report on the Revision of the Swedish Academy Dictionary – and the Search for “Old Neologisms”.....	481
Sanni Nimb, Nathalie C. H. Sørensen, Jonas Jensen Making Danish Thesaurus Data Available to Researchers – The WebDDB project.....	497
Christian-Emil Smith Ore, Oddrun Grønvik The Spoken Word as Represented in Norsk Ordbok.....	504
Petya Osenova, Kiril Simov All About Words! An Integrated Dictionaries Portal for Bulgarian.....	520
Vanja Štefanec, Krešimir Šojat, Matea Filko CroDeriv – Search and Visualization Interface.....	529
Chapter V. Bi- and Multilingual Lexicography.....	535
Vladimír Benko, Zuzana Kříhová, Boris Lehečka, Darina Vystrčilová Persian to Czech Dictionary – A Traditional Dictionary in the Era of AI?.....	536
Cormac Breathnach, Pádraig Ó Mianáin Making a Molehill out of a Mountain: Technical and Editorial Considerations in Producing the Concise English-Irish Dictionary (2020).....	551
Elina Chadjipapa, Zoe Gavriilidou Helix – A Bilingual Illustrated Dictionary for Greek Heritage Learners.....	566

Rajna Dragičević, Yury Makarov, Daria Ryzhova, Yulia Shapich, Ekaterina Yakushkina A New Serbian-Russian Dictionary.....	576
Mariusz Piotr Kamiński The Contribution of Bilingualized Entries and Vocabulary Knowledge to the Learner's Success in Sentence Completion – The Case of <i>jump</i> Verbs.....	584
Evelina Kirsakmene False Friends in General Bilingual Dictionaries (English and French into Latvian.....)	591
Daria Lazić Lexicographic Treatment of Vocabulary Related to Age – The Example of Croatian and Danish.....	600
Irina Lobzhanidze, Rusudan Gersamia, Nino Tsulaia Compiling a Bilingual Megrelian-English Online Dictionary – Preserving Endangered Kartvelian Languages.....	614
Chenlu Yu A German-Chinese e-Dictionary of Manufacturing Technology in Automotive Industry – Entry Design.....	627
Chapter VI. Specialized Lexicography, Terminology, and Terminography.....	635
Andrea Abel, Natascia Ralli Gender in Electronic Dictionaries and Terminology Databases – State of the Art and Future Directions.....	636
Ieda Maria Alves, Beatriz Curti-Contessoto, Ana Maria Ribeiro de Jesus Challenges of Creating a Medical Dictionary for a Low Literacy Audience in Brazil – Focusing on Politically Marked Terms Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic.....	653
Lynne Bowker Eponyms, EDI and Terminology Planning in the Biological Sciences.....	662
Theresa Kruse, Ulrich Heid, Barbara Schmidt-Thieme Mathematics Students as Lexicographers – Learning Domain Concepts and Their Relations by Designing Dictionary Articles and Concept Maps.....	673
David Lindemann Teaching Terminology through Wikibase and Wikidata.....	680
Bruno Nahod Can We Substitute Field Experts with Customized Large Language Model in Processing Specialized Languages? – A Case Study.....	686

Chapter VII. Dictionary (in) Use	699
Margit Langemets, Lydia Risberg, Kristel Algreve To Dream or Not to Dream About ‘Correct’ Meanings? – Insights into the User Experience Survey.....	700
Tinatín Margalitadze, Katalin P. Márkus Cross-Border Collaboration in Teaching Dictionary Skills.....	720
Barbora Štěpánková, Lucie Poláková, Jana Šindlerová, Michal Novák What Can Dictionaries Tell Us About Pragmatic Markers – Building the Lexicon of Epistemic and Evidential Markers in Czech.....	728
Chapter VIII. Historical and Dialect Lexicography	742
David Lindemann, Mikel Alonso Linking Historical Corpus Data and Annotations Using Wikibase.....	743
Ivana Lovrić Jović, Martina Kramarić The Dubrovnik Idiom Through Time – Crafting a Diachronic Dictionary.....	749
Magdalena Majdak Defining Meanings in Historical Dictionaries – The Case of the Electronic Dictionary of the 17th- and 18th-Century Polish.....	763
Martina Waclawičová Dialect Dictionary and Lexicalization of Dialect Phenomena.....	776
Leonardo Zilio, Besim Kabashi Using Neural Machine Translation for Normalising Historical Documents.....	783



PART I: CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to all those who generously supported the XXI EURALEX International Congress financially. Your contributions have been invaluable, and we sincerely appreciate your commitment to making this event a success.

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We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who dedicated their time and expertise to reviewing the submissions and papers. Your invaluable contributions have greatly enriched the quality of our conference, and we are truly appreciative of your efforts.

We wish to express our deepest gratitude to the members of the Local Organizing Committee for their remarkable dedication and hard work in making this event a reality. We truly appreciate all the time and energy you've invested in creating a memorable and smooth experience for everyone.

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INNOVATION IN PHRASEOMATICS

DiCoP Project and DiCoP-Text Corpus for the Enrichment of Language Models and Automatic Translation

Abstract This article examines advances in phraseomatics (Chen, 2023) and digital phraseography through the DiCoP project and its DiCoP-Text corpus, aimed at enriching linguistic models and machine translation. The project evaluates the frequency of use of phraseological units (PUs) and improves their translation in different contexts, drawing on recent research in phraseotranslation (Sułkowska, 2022) and natural language processing (NLP). It emphasizes French-Chinese and Chinese-French language pairs. We integrated 549 PUs from the novel *The Three-Body Problem* by Liu Cixin for our tests. Various processes, such as tokenization, identification, alignment, and annotation, were used to improve the translation of PUs. DiCoP-Text, a comprehensive database including newspaper articles, literary works, and textbooks, aims to enhance the performance of language models (LMs).

Keywords DiCoP; DiCoP-Text; phraseomatics; phraseotranslation; digital phraseography; NLP; language models

1. Introduction: Digital (Meta)Phraseography and Phraseomatics

In the contemporary digital age, the field of computerized phraseography faces challenges, which highlights the emergence of a particular discipline: phraseomatics or computational phraseology (Chen, 2023). This article explores the intricacies between computer science and the analysis of phraseological units or PUs (Gonzalez-Rey, 2002; Bolly, 2011, p. 28) to understand the subtleties of semantics and the structure of expressions in a digital context. This emerging discipline highlights the challenges and opportunities inherent in the evolution of (meta)phraseography (Chen, 2022; 2023).

In this sense, we present the Dictionary and Corpus of Phraseology (DiCoP)¹ project we are currently developing. The main objective is to create an electronic dictionary of multilingual phraseology (currently French-Chinese and Chinese-French) concerning PUs. Thus, this article is concerned with Chinese into French and, more specifically, among the innovative aspects of this project, the DiCoP-Text, which will serve as a corpus for phraseotranslation.

Indeed, in French and Chinese, PUs are ubiquitous in daily use (Bolly, 2011), so their recognition poses a major challenge in natural language processing (NLP). The DiCoP project addresses this problem by creating a bilingual electronic dictionary

¹ To learn more about the architecture of the macrostructure and microstructure of this innovative DiCoP digital dictionary, we invite you to consult our work presented at the Asialex conference (Chen, 2023).

(with multilingual expansion envisaged) and developing a corpus of common PUs (e.g., collocations, idiomatic expressions, and proverbs). However, identifying PUs in a monolingual source text and translating them correctly for a parallel (bilingual) corpus constitutes a real challenge for automatic phraseotranslation (Sułkowska, 2022; Chen, 2022), especially since these expressions are numerous and possess metaphorical and opaque semantics (Gross, 1996).

2. Corpus of Phraseotraductology: DiCoP-Text

It is possible to determine corpus types depending on the characteristics of a corpus and the origin of its data. Bowker and Pearson (2002) distinguished the following corpus types: general/specialized, synchronic/diachronic, written/oral, and monolingual/bilingual. Monolingual corpora are comprised of data from just one language, while multilingual corpora are comprised of data from several languages and are either parallel or comparable.

DiCoP-Text refers to a collection of texts used to study PUs. This corpus contains a comparative component, in each language separately, sourced from various media (e.g., literary works, poetry, magazines, and newspapers) to analyze the usage and check the vitality (e.g., type and frequency) of PUs in a specific language. It also includes a parallel component (i.e., bilingual, primarily sourced from literary works, as other media lack existing translations) to enhance bilingual translations.

The collection and digital processing of texts are currently undergoing expansion. To illustrate the application of NLP in the DiCoP-Text project and analyze PUs, more precisely, *chéngyǔ*² corresponding to French idiomatic expressions, we selected a parallel corpus: the novel *The Three-Body Problem* (三体 *Sāntǐ*) by Liu Cixin, with its French translation. The novel comprises 186,079 words in the original Chinese version and 141,279 in the French version.³

3. DiCoP-Text and NLP: Analysis of Parallel Corpus Results

To develop the corpus and NLP, we started by processing various electronic or digitized file formats, converting them to conventional formats such as .txt. The corpus is designed to ensure its quality and relevance. We then analyzed the data to extract morphosyntactic and syntactic information, and automatically selected PUs from the corpora. We will now present our method and the steps of processing the corpus in a systematic and rigorous manner.

² “*Chéngyǔ* are polylexical sequences, fixed phrases, or short sentences that function as monolexical units within a sentence. Semantically, they are endowed with a specific, non-compositional meaning that cannot be directly deduced from the individual characters. Syntactically, their basic form, which most often follows a fixed quaternary (quadrisyllabic) rhythm and is divided phonetically and/or syntactically into two hemistichs, is conventional and unchanged for generations; hence the name *chéngyǔ*, meaning “ready-made expressions.” Culturally, they convey the idiosyncrasies of a culture. Most often derived from classical literary language, they reflect an elegant and concise style and frequently contain strong allusive content” (Chen, 2021, p. 129). For example: 佛口蛇心 *fókǒu-shéxīn* (Buddha’s mouth, serpent’s heart): “the mouth of a Buddha, the heart of a snake” (Prov.).

³ For example, in French, “avoir la tête dans les nuages” (have your head in the clouds).

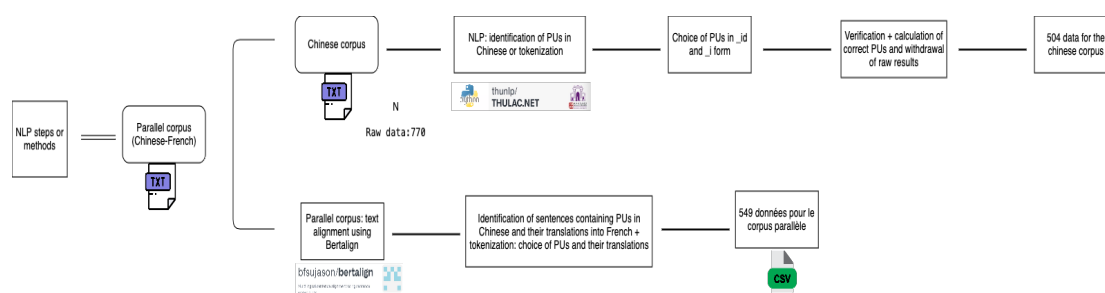


Fig. 1: NLP process followed for the parallel corpus

3.1 Performance and Evaluation of PU Identification in the Chinese Version with Thulac

For the Chinese analysis, we used the Thulac⁴ tool with Python to identify *chéngyǔ*, which we marked as `_i` or `_id` to indicate they were idioms. Our results are described below.

Table 1: Chinese monolingual corpus performance and evaluation results

	Chinese PUs identified by Thulac			
Total	771			
Success rates	65.43% (504/771)			
Error rate	34.57% (267/771)			
	Form <code>_id</code> (567 PUs)	Form <code>_i</code> (204 PUs)		
	Correct	Error	Correct	Error
Number of IEs	321	246	183	21
Percentage	56.61 %	43.39%	89.71%	10.29%

We identified 771 instances marked as `_id` or `_i`. Of these, 504 were confirmed correct, with 267 errors not constituting PUs. Even with a success rate of approximately 65.43%, this tool greatly facilitated identification and tokenization at this stage. We also checked 66 idiomatic expressions (IEs) that the Thulac tool did not identify as PUs.

Furthermore, we observed repetitions in the IEs listed in this table. For example, the expression 一动不动 *yīdòngbùdòng* appeared seven times but was translated differently depending on the case, such as “ne bougeait plus” (no longer moved), “être immobiles” (to be still), and “resta immobile” (remained still), or it could be omitted in the translation depending on the specific context.

3.2 Data Alignment in Chinese and French

Data alignment in Chinese and French was conducted using the Bertalign⁵ tool, which is known for its effectiveness in multilingual alignment. Bertalign

⁴ <http://thulac.thunlp.org/>

⁵ <https://github.com/bfsujason/bertalign>

achieves more accurate results than the traditional length-, dictionary-, or MT-based alignment methods (Thompson & Koehn, 2019). Bertalign identifies correspondences between words in both languages and facilitates the subsequent extraction of Chinese PUs and their French translations. Hence, the tool helps avoid literal translations of compositional expressions, which is a key challenge in machine translation.

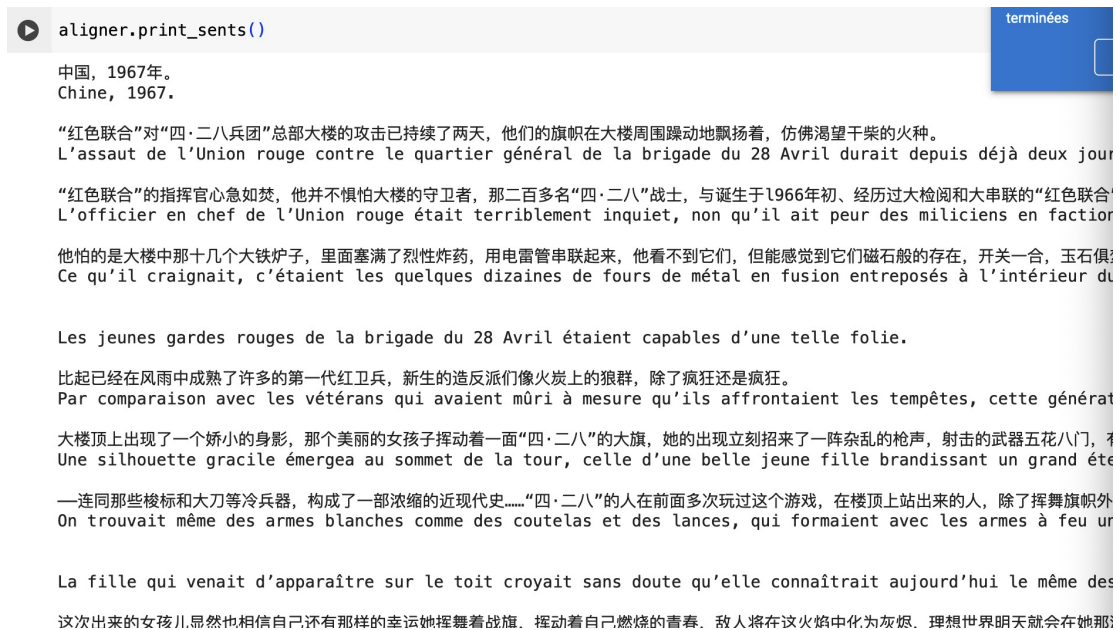


Fig. 2: Each sentence in Chinese and its French translation after alignment

After alignment, the results were evaluated for accuracy by analyzing selected sentences to guarantee the quality and reliability of the aligned data. Sentences containing these idioms and their translations were compiled in a CSV file for detailed analysis. By focusing on sentences containing PUs, we provided essential enriched context to enhance the efficiency of automatic translation. This targeted approach, recommended by Artetxe et al. (2018), eliminated the need for large parallel corpora. The PUs identified were associated with equivalents in the target languages and were classified by a confidence value.

These data were then passed on to our engineers for technical integration and optimization, ensuring efficient linguistic data management in a multilingual context.

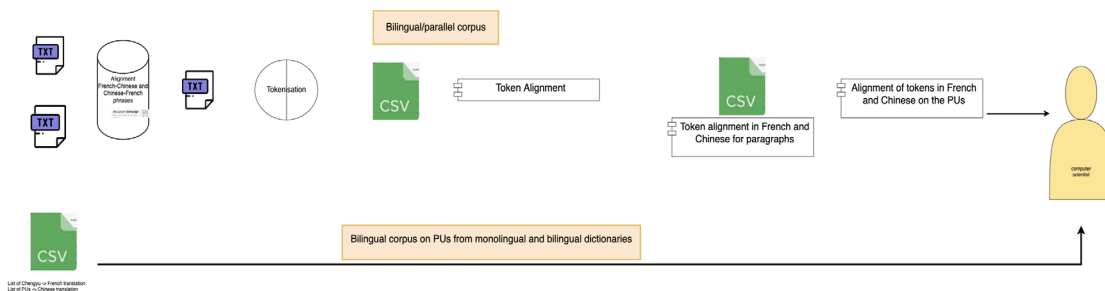


Fig. 3: Processes from NLP to IT

4. DiCoP-Text for the Enrichment of Language Models and Automatic Translation: Phraséo – Tractologie et Informatique

Today, neural network technology is widely used in machine translation task, especially pre-trained models methods. Pre-trained models are trained with large-scale datasets and then fine-tuned for specific subtasks to achieve better performance. However, because of the dependency on pre-trained models for data and the lack of specific PU training data, the current pre-trained translation models faced challenges when the sentences contained PUs.

Thus, we proposed an approach to improve the translation of machine translation models' PUs.⁶ First, we updated the vocabulary of the tokenizer of the pre-trained model based on PUs and then renewed the model's embedding layer so that the model could recognize PUs from the input context and produce the new token embedding. Then, we fine-tuned the model with individual PU data to improve its ability to embed the PUs into a semantic vector.

We proceeded to sentence-level training after the model could distinguish and embed individual PUs. We split the sentence data into training, validation, and test sets. With this idea, we tested if fine-tuning with the PU corpus could improve the machine translation model's ability to recognize and translate PUs at the sentence level.

Experiment, Results, and Analysis

We first extracted Chinese PUs from all datasets and compared each PU with the tokenizer of the language model. We added it if there was no corresponding item in the tokenizer's vocabulary while expanding the language model's embedding layer to initialize the weights of the added Chinese PUs. In the training phase, the model learned the embeddings of all Chinese PUs and the training sentence set. Then the model was tested on the test sentence set.

We selected these language models:⁷ Mbart (Tang et al., 2020), M2m100 (Fan et al., 2021), Nllb (Costa-jussà et al., 2022), and Mrebel (Cabot et al., 2023). For metrics, we chose SacreBLEU (Post, 2018). The experiment corpus had 549 data items. We divided the corpus into training, validation, and test sets at a ratio of 6:2:2. Subsequently, 409 new tokens were added for each of the four language models to the tokenizer. In the training phase, we set learning to $4e-5$ and the batch size to 8. For the translation task, we selected Chinese to French.

The results are shown in Table 2. The "Original model" and the "Fine-tuned model" designate the performance of the original and fine-tuned language models, respectively.

⁶ The relevant code is available at the anonymous code repository: <https://anonymous.4open.science/r/DiCo-C7BA>

⁷ The weights files of all the language models can be downloaded at this address separately: <https://huggingface.co/Babelscape/mrebel-large>, <https://huggingface.co/facebook/mbart-large-50-many-to-many-mmt>, <https://huggingface.co/facebook/nllb-200-distilled-600M>, and https://huggingface.co/facebook/m2m100_418M.

Table 2: The experimental results.

Model	Original model	Fine-tuned model	Improved value
Mbart	2,0686	16,7191	14,6505
M2m100	4,9078	16,2120	11,3042
Nllb	4,6345	17,1385	12,5040
Mrebel	0,0131	7,1798	7,1667

Based on the experimental results, we noted that after fine-tuning, all language improved in translation performance, indicating that the introduction of PUs can help translation models better understand PUs. Although each fine-tuned model outperformed its original model, they all scored low. This phenomenon was related to the volume of the training data, as the pre-trained models needed a large corpus to enable them to learn as much as possible about the semantics of individual tokens under different contents. However, the dataset used in this experiment had only 549 items, which was insufficient. Therefore, the fine-tuning performance of the model will be further improved after the PUs corpus is expanded. Nonetheless, fine-tuning could not completely make up for the shortcomings of the original model. In addition to expanding the PU corpus, using the Chinese-French translation corpus of ordinary texts to improve the Chinese-French translation ability of the model can also improve the performance. We will use methods such as prompt engineering to explore the effects of corpus improvement in future work.

4. Conclusion

The first evaluation of the NLP tools in the DiCoP-Text project provided a detailed overview of the effectiveness of the DiCoP-Text corpus and the improved LMs. Our proposal aimed to improve LMs by integrating more fixed expressions and refining linguistic models for more accurate identification and translation of PUs. However, room for improvement exists:

- 1) In the future, we envision broader applicability of our DiCoP project. Indeed, expansion to other languages would strengthen its relevance and applicability across the IT language community. We also aim to provide more information, including details concerning user interfaces, accessibility, and integrating user feedback into ongoing development.
- 2) We studied the effect of fine-tuning the translation model using a PU corpus. This approach involved updating the tokenizer, training the model to integrate these PUs, refining the model from sentences containing them, and testing based on sentence-level data. The results indicated that fine-tuning the model with PUs could improve its translation capacity. However, given the limitations of the model and the corpus volume, additional efforts are necessary to refine its translation capacity. Thus, our future research will focus on expanding the corpus and improving the model's Chinese-French translation capability.

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Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere thanks to Mrs. Anne-Lyse Minard, a specialist in Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Associate Professor at the Laboratoire Ligérien de Linguistique (LLL) at the University of Orléans, for her invaluable assistance in guiding us through computing techniques.

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