Context-Based Approach for Pivot Translation Services

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Abstract

Machine translation services available on the Web are becoming increasingly popular. However, a pivot translation service is required to realize translations between non-English languages by cascading different translation services via English. As a result, the meaning of words often drifts due to the inconsistency, asymmetry and intransitivity of word selections among translation services. In this paper, we propose context-based coordination to maintain the consistency of word meanings during pivot translation services. First, we propose a method to automatically generate multilingual equivalent terms based on bilingual dictionaries and use generated terms to propagate context among combined translation services. Second, we show a multiagent architecture as one way of implementation, wherein a coordinator agent gathers and propagates context from/to a translation agent. We generated trilingual equivalent noun terms and implemented a Japanese-to-German-and-back translation, cascading into four translation services. The evaluation results showed that the generated terms can cover over 58% of all nouns. The translation quality was improved by 40% for all sentences, and the quality rating for all sentences increased by an average of 0.47 points on a five-point scale. These results indicate that we can realize consistent pivot translation services through context-based coordination based on existing services.

1 Introduction

Recently, the number of languages used in Web pages has increased rapidly. People using English on the Internet now comprise 30% of all Internet users; users of Asian languages comprise 26%; users of European languages excluding English comprise 25%; and users of all other languages comprise 20%. This trend introduces the requirement for translations between non-English languages in addition to between English and non-English languages. Although the increase in the number of online translation services enables people to access machine translations easily, it is practically impossible to cover all combinations of n languages as the development of \((n^{2}-n)\) direct translation services would be extremely costly. The pivot translation service generated by combining multiple translation services via a pivot language is a practical solution for such situation.

However, pivot translation often yields drifting for the meanings of words because of inconsistent word selection, making it difficult for users to continue communication. Establishing common ground among users in machine-translation-mediated communication is known to be difficult [Yamashita et al., 2009]; one of the causes of difficulty is inconsistent word selection [Yamashita and Ishida, 2006].

In phrase-based statistical machine translation (SMT), methods for pivot translation with no direct corpora between the source and target languages have been proposed [Utityama and Isahara, 2007; Wu and Wang, 2007]. In their approach, the phrase-table required for SMT between the source and target languages is generated by combining phrase-tables between the source and pivot languages and the pivot and target languages. The phrase and lexical translation probabilities in the new table are estimated from original corpora, enabling more accurate selection of translated phrases. In the other approach for word selection problems, Kanayama and Watanabe [2003] proposed the linguistic annotation method. They embedded lexical and syntactical information for a source sentence into the intermediated sentence to assure the correctness of the pivot translation. However, the above approaches are not available immediately in practice because it is not easy to prepare the enormous and reliable corpora required to merge phrase tables or to apply the linguistic approach to all translation services. In contrast, we propose a method to realize consistent translation with available dictionaries and translation services.

To coordinate existing translation services, this study used the framework of service computing. In Web service composition, the WS-Coordination (Web Services Coordination)
specification enables the propagation of the service ID or port number as “CoordinationContext” to solve the semantic problems of service composition; it is also used to match input and output data types automatically [Hassine et al., 2006]. Moreover, the method of meta-level control for composite Web services in an open environment, known as “Service Supervision,” has been proposed for designers who are not authorized to modify each component Web service [Tanaka et al., 2009]. In terms of improving the performance of composite Web services, a context-aware approach called situated Web service (SiWS) has been proposed to improve the performance of Web services with diverse interfaces and various clients [Matsumura et al., 2006]. We took this type of approach to coordinate word selection of whole component services with context from outside the Web services. In the development of machine translations or language resources, Bramantoro et al. [2008] proposed a method to combine language resources and middleware architecture to integrate deep and shallow natural language processing components. This approach uses both language resources and language processing component as Web services: our context-based coordination approach can contribute towards the improvement of combined services in such areas.

To solve the word selection problem in pivot translation services, we propose the context-based coordination method for translation services. We regard the internal translation processes of services as black boxes and realize the coordination outside the services instead of proposing a new machine translation technology. This study addresses the following issues.

**2. Context-Based Coordination with Propagated Context**

To ensure consistency in word selection, we propose the propagation of context across cascaded translation services by regarding the context as a set of multilingual equivalent terms. In the research area of bilingual dictionaries, methods to match the meanings of the words of different languages by combining multiple dictionaries are proposed. We refer to those methods and propose a method to generate the multilingual equivalent terms automatically based on commercially available bilingual dictionaries.

**Multiagent Architecture for Coordination**

This paper proposes a multiagent architecture as one way to implement context-based coordination, wherein the coordinator agent gathers and propagates the context from/to translation agents.

We implemented a coordinated Japanese-to-German-and-back translation service by cascading four translation services and obtained results indicating that the translation quality improved substantially. The advantage of this approach is that high-quality translations can be extracted from existing translation services with existing bilingual dictionaries without modifying their internal coding systems.

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**Figure 1. Issues in composite translation services**

(a) Inconsistency in word selection

- Japanese user (Japanese): *kinou watashi tachi ha pa-thi wo sita.*
  
  (We had a party yesterday.)

- Translation (English): There was a party yesterday.

(b) Asymmetry in word selection

- Japanese user (Japanese): *kanojo no ketten mondai da.*
  
  (Her fault is a big problem.)

- Translation (English): Her fault is a big problem.

(c) Intransitivity in word selection

- Translation (German): *Ihre Schuld ist ein großes Problem.*
  
  (Her responsibility is a big problem.)

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**2. Overview of Context-Based Approach**

**2.1 Issues in Composite Translation Services**

We conducted several experiments using the Language Grid [Ishida, 2006] and classified word selection errors into three categories: inconsistency, asymmetry, and intransitivity. **Inconsistency** is when translations of the same source word vary in different sentences. **Asymmetry** is when the back-translated word is different from the source word. The impact of these errors on communication has already been analyzed [Yamashita and Ishida, 2006]. Quantitative results with interview data show that lexical entrainment [Brennan and Clark, 1996] is disrupted by asymmetries in machine translations since they interfere with echoing. **Intransitivity** is when the word sense drifts across the cascaded machine translators.

Figure 1 presents examples of common problems encountered by cascaded translation services. All original Japanese and German sentences in this paper are italicized and their English translations are provided in parentheses. (a) is an example of inconsistency, wherein the English word “paper” is translated to the Japanese word *ronbun* (thesis) in Case 1, while the same word is translated into *kami* (paper) in Case 2. Asymmetry is presented in (b). In the first step of the machine translation-mediated communication, the Japanese word *pa-thi* (party), which means a social gathering, is
translated into English correctly. However, when an English user echoes the word “party,” it is translated into the Japanese word *tou* (political party). Intransitivity is presented in (c). The Japanese word *ketten* (fault), which means a weakness of character, is translated into English correctly, but mistranslated to the German word *Schuld* (responsibility). This is because the intermediate English word “fault” has several meanings, and the English-German translator does not have any knowledge of the context for the preceding Japanese-English translation.

2.2 Context-Based Pivot Translation Service with Multiagent Architecture

We propose a multiagent architecture for context-based pivot translation service, as shown in figure 2. The coordinator agent, which plays the role of controlling the whole translation, gathers and propagates context from/to the translation agents in addition to requesting them to translate the sentence. It possesses all possible contexts internally, selects all contexts that suit the context reported by the translation agent, and transfers them to the next translation agent. Translation agents possess the in-built functionality for the original translation service; they perform translations by taking into account the context provided by the coordinator agent, update the context, and transfer the result to the coordinator agent. They have knowledge of the languages and make language-specific processes or decisions. By using the agent framework, more advanced improvements are possible: for instance, adding the ability to interact with users in order to identify the context of the sentence.

Context can be represented in several ways, such as a set of characteristic words in a document, surrounding text, or talk of an expression. Since context in one language can be translated to other languages with multilingual equivalent terms, we represent context by sets of equivalent terms, not sets of terms in one language. In our architecture, we consider a set of terms in the source sentence as context in the source language and use equivalent terms as propagated context.

3 Generating Multilingual Equivalent Terms

The set of equivalent terms can be generated by analyzing generic bilingual dictionaries. However, since it is costly and difficult to manually develop multilingual dictionaries that include all words in all languages, we require an automated method to develop such a dictionary. In previous work on this subject, the concepts for different languages were matched using bilingual dictionaries [Tokunaga and Tanaka, 1990]. We extended this idea to generate a set of trilingual equivalent terms (referred to hereafter as a triple). We represent mappings of words belonging to different languages in the form of a graph; a word is represented as a vertex, and a mapping in bilingual dictionaries is represented as a directed edge. If the graph contains a triangle, the three words are considered equivalent terms. Figure 3 shows the two types of triangles: loop and transition. The loop triangle starts from a source language, looks up dictionaries three times, and returning to the source language. The transition triangle starts from a source language and looks up dictionaries to locate transitive and direct routes between the source and target languages. It is easy to generate a triple from such triangles. We call such triples generated from loop triangles loop-type triples hereafter.

Example 1 (A loop triangle representing “sky”)

Figure 4 shows an example of a loop triangle, starting with the Japanese word *sora* (sky/heaven/midair). Words such as “sky” are extracted by looking up a Japanese-English dictionary. The German word *Himmel* (sky/heaven) is obtained by looking up the word “sky” in an English-German dictionary. Since the source Japanese word is extracted from a German-Japanese dictionary, *Himmel* (sky/heaven) is considered as a triple. Continuing this process further yields other triples.

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3 Multilingual equivalent terms can also be developed manually, as in the case of EuroWordNet [Vossen, 1998].
Algorithm 1: COORDINATOR-AGENT CA
1: $s_i$/* Source sentence*/
2: $t_i$/* A word in sentence $s_i$*/
3: $MTA_1$/* An ordered list of translation agents
   ($MTA = \{MTA_1, MTA_2, \ldots, MTA_n\}$)*/
4: $MTA_i$ = \{(s_i, t_i)\}/* A translation agent; a set of pairs of
   sentence $s_i$ and $t_i$*/
5: $T_i$/* A set of $n$-tuples ($w_1$, $w_2$, ..., $w_n$), where $w_i$ is included in $t_i$
   (k: $i$); All $n$-tuples are $n$-lingual equivalent terms*/
6: $Q_i$/* A set of pairs ($o_i$, $m_{i+1}$), where $o_i \in s_i$, and $m_{i+1}$ is the
   modified translated word for $o_i$*/
7: when received (ask, $s_i$) from user do
8:    $T_i$ ← \{$(w_1, w_2, ..., w_n)$ | $w_i \in s_i$};
9:    for each $MTA_i$ in $MTA$ do
10:       send (request, ($s_i$, $T_i$)) to $MTA_i$;
11:    when received (response, ($s_i$, $Q_i$)) do;
12:       $T_i$ ← SELECT-POSSIBLE-N-TUPLES ($T_i$, $Q_i$);
13:     end do;
14:     end loop;
15:    send (reply, $s_i+1$) to user;
16: end do;

Algorithm 2: SELECT-POSSIBLE-N-TUPLES ($T_i$, $Q_i$) return $T_{i+1}$
1: $T_{i+1}$ ← \{};
2: for each pair ($o_i$, $m_{i+1}$) in $Q_i$ do
3:    $T_{i+1}$ ← $T_{i+1}$ ∪ \{($w_1$, $w_2$, ..., $w_n$) | $w_i = o_i$ and $w_{i+1} = m_{i+1}$\};
4: end loop;
5: return $T_{i+1}$;

Figure 5. Algorithms of the coordinator agent $CA$

This method can easily be extended to four or more languages by combining triples generated in each of the three languages similar to the extension proposed by Wu et al. [Wu et al., 2008]. For example, for Japanese, English, German, and French words, Japanese-English-German-French triples are obtained first followed by English-German-French triples. The quadruple is generated by combining two triples with identical English and German words. It is noteworthy that a triangle does not always imply equivalent terms. In the case where word A has word sense $C_1$ and $C_2$, word B has $C_2$ and $C_3$, and word C has $C_3$ and $C_1$, no shared sense exists between the three words. Assume that each word in a triple has $n$ senses with uniform distribution, the probability of sharing the same sense is $0.83$ for $n = 2$ and $0.91$ for $n = 3$; this probability approaches $1$ as $n$ increases. In practice, the term frequencies of $n$ words are unequal, and the actual probability is higher than the calculated one. Thus we can obtain reliable equivalent terms by combining triples if the number of languages increases.

In related research on dictionary formulation, a method to construct a bilingual dictionary using a third language as an intermediate is proposed [Tanaka and Umemura, 1994]. This study takes the example of generating a Japanese-French dictionary by connecting Japanese-English and English-French dictionaries. It addresses the problem that a French word with a meaning different from that of the original Japanese word is obtained due to ambiguity in the intermediate English word; this problem is solved through inverse consultation with French-English and English-Japanese dictionaries. We focus on obtaining more reliable equivalent terms when dictionaries exist between each pair of languages and differ from the above research in terms of our assumptions and objectives. In order to realize coordination even when sufficient dictionaries are not available, methods such as inverse consultation are required to obtain equivalent terms.

4 Context-based Coordination Algorithms

Algorithms of the multiagent architecture for the context-based coordination are shown in figure 5 and 6. These algorithms are simple implementations of our multiagent model. Let machine translator $MT_i$ input source sentence $s_i$ and output translated sentence $t_i$. Let the translation agent $MTA_i$ receive source sentence $s_i$, generate and modify $t_i$, and output $s_{i+1}$, which is a source sentence of $MTA_{i+1}$. Let the coordinator agent $CA$ repeat the coordination process from $MTA_i$ to $MTA_{i+1}$ and receive $s_{i+1}$ as the final result in the target language. Multilingual equivalent terms in $n$ languages are grouped into $n$-tuples. The context $T_i$ is a set of $n$-tuples and the $i$-th word in each $n$-tuple in $T_i$ is included in $s_i$. In a $n$-tuple ($w_1$, $w_2$, ..., $w_n$), the words $w_2$, ..., $w_n$ have the same meaning as $w_1$ i.e. the same meaning as original sentence $s_i$, and their use assures the correct translation.

First, $CA$ prepares the initial context $T_i$ from $s_i$, received from the user and starts translation. After $MTA_i$ returns the translated sentence $s_{i+1}$ and $Q_i$—representing word pairs of the source word in $s_i$ and translated word in $s_{i+1}$—$CA$
generates a new context $T_{i+1}$ for the $i+1$-th translation by narrowing down $T_i$ such that the $i+1$-th word in each n-tuple appears in $s_{i+1}$ by the SELECT-POSSIBLE-N-TUPLES procedure. $T_{i+1}$ may contain ambiguity in word selection for the $i+1$-th word, as more than two n-tuples containing the same $j$-th word (1 $\leq j \leq i+1$) can exist with different $i+1$-th words. If there are several candidates for the $i+1$-th word, the $i+1$-th translation agent $MTA_{i+1}$ determines the most appropriate one. The choice is noted to $CA$ by $Q_{i+1}$, and $CA$ reflects it to the next translation.

$MTA_i$ generates a translated sentence $t_i$ using $MT_i$ to create $P_i$—a set of word pairs of source word $o_i$ and translated word $c_{i+1}$—using the GET-WORD-PAIRS-USED-BY-MT procedure. One way to implement this function is to divide $s_i$ and $t_i$ into morphemes and map between them using bilingual dictionaries. Then, $MTA_i$ modifies words in $P_i$ based on the context $T_i$, using the procedure CREATE-WORD-PAIRS-TO-BE-USED and $Q_i$. Since $T_i$ preserves the words used in the preceding $i$ translations, the translated words excluded from $T_i$ may have different meanings. Such words are replaced by words included in $T_{i+1}$ selected from among a few candidates if $T_i$ contains ambiguity. Finally, $t_i$ is modified by the procedure MODIFY-TRANSLATED-SENTENCE, wherein the words are replaced using $P_i$ and $Q_i$. The word selection process can be improved through several methods: for instance, by referring to term frequency or priority of words, in case the translation agent possesses this information. If the entire document or conversation logs are available, this information can be utilized by $CA$ to create an initial context $T_i$.

**Example 2 (Context-based translation)**

We show the translation process for the sentence shown in figure 1(c). In this example, the replacement of target words is limited to nouns. Figure 7 shows the process of the English-German translation agent $MTA_1$ after the Japanese-English translation agent $MTA_2$ completes its translation process. In the first step, the coordinator agent $CA$ receives the Japanese source sentence $s_1 = \text{“kanojo no ketten ha ookina mondai da”} \text{ (Her fault is a big problem)},” sets all possible n-tuples including the words in $s_1$ and transfers $s_1$ and $T_1$ to $MTA_1$. $MTA_1$ then translates $s_1$ into the English sentence $t_1 = \text{“Her fault is a big problem”}$ using the Japanese-English translation service $MT_1$. $MTA_1$ obtains pairs $P_1$ of words in $s_1$ and $t_1$: $P_1 = \{\langle\text{ketten (fault)}, \text{fault}\rangle, \langle\text{mondai (fault)}, \text{problem}\rangle\}$. $MTA_1$ then examines the translated words. For example, if $T_1$ contains triples including both $\text{ketten (fault)}$ and “fault,” $MTA_1$ realizes that they share the same meaning. If that is not the case, the triples may remain incomplete, and $MTA_1$ has to abandon efforts to maintain context. If the triples are complete, then triples including both $\text{ketten (fault)}$ and “fault” as well as those including both $\text{mondai (problem)}$ and “problem” should be included in $T_1$. Therefore, translated words are not modified: $Q_1 = P_1$ and $s_2 = t_1$. $MTA_1$ then sends $s_2$ and $Q_1$ to $CA$ and $CA$ generates the new context $T_2$. For example, both triples of $T_1$ including both $\text{ketten (fault)}$ and “fault” are to be included in $T_2$, as shown in figure 7.

In the second step, $s_2$ and $T_2$ are sent to the second English-German translation agent $MTA_2$. $MTA_2$ translates $s_2$ to the German sentence $t_2 = \text{“Ihre Schuld ist ein großes Problem”} \text{ (Her responsibility is a big problem)}.” Pairs $P_2$ are then obtained: $P_2 = \{\langle\text{fault, Schuld (responsibility)}\rangle, \langle\text{problem, Problem (problem)}\rangle\}$. It appears that the word $\text{Schuld (responsibility)}$ has semantically drifted, as there is no triple in $T_2$ that includes both “fault” and $\text{Schuld (responsibility)}$. Thus it is replaced by a word that is included in a triple in $T_2$, which also includes “fault.” If the first triple in figure 7 is selected, $Q_2$ would be $\{\langle\text{fault, Fehler (fault)}\rangle, \langle\text{problem, Problem (problem)}\rangle\}$. $MTA_2$ modifies $t_2$ to $s_3 = \text{“Ihre Fehler ist ein großes Problem”} \text{ (Her fault is a big problem)}.” $s_3$ is finally returned to the user.

5 Evaluation

We constructed Japanese-English-German triples limiting their parts-of-speech to nouns. Table 1 lists the dictionaries used and the number of triples obtained from them. Transition-type triples start with Japanese words. A total number of 21,914 triples were obtained. We first analyzed the effectiveness of the 21,914 triples in covering arbitrary Japanese documents. We used the term frequency of nouns in a Web corpus storing 470 million sentences containing 5000 million Japanese words [Kawahara and Kurohashi, 2006]. The triples
Table 1: Dictionary and generated triples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dictionary</th>
<th>Number of headwords</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genius Japanese-English dictionary</td>
<td>31,944 (noun)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concise Japanese-German dictionary</td>
<td>38,487 (all words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford English-German dictionary</td>
<td>31,180 (noun)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crown German-Japanese dictionary</td>
<td>34,255 (noun)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) Number of triples of each type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number of triples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loop</td>
<td>15,627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition (starting from Japanese)</td>
<td>13,757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (no overlaps)</td>
<td>21,914</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source sentence (Japanese; A):

```
torakku ga michi wo huaide ita.
```

(A truck was blocking the road.)

B: `torakku ha houhou wo samatageta.

(A truck was blocking the method.)

C: `torakku ha michi wo samatageta.

(A truck was blocking the road.)

Figure 8. Example of an improvement from 4 (Most) to 5 (All)

appeared to cover 58% of all nouns in the corpus and 40% of all parts-of-speech words. If the triples are used in descending order of term frequency, 6,000 triples can cover 50% of nouns and 38% of all parts-of-speech words. This implies that a relatively small number of triples can cover the majority of frequently used nouns.

We then conducted a preliminary evaluation of the quality of Japanese-German back translation using the cascade of Japanese-English, English-German, German-English, and English-Japanese translations. We compared the source Japanese sentence (A), back-translated Japanese sentence generated without context (B), and that generated based on context (C). For purposes of accuracy, we took the subjective evaluation by three Japanese subjects who were native speakers of Japanese. The subjects were asked to evaluate the translation quality on a five-point scale, how much of the original meaning of sentence A was conveyed through sentences B and C (5-All, 4-Most, 3-Much, 2-Little, 1-None).

Source sentences were selected from the Machine Translation Test Set provided by the NTT Natural Language Research Group. We randomly selected 100 samples in which B and C were different. The results of Welch’s test show that a relatively small number of triples can cover 50% of words and 40% of all parts-of-speech appearing in arbitrary sentences.

**Context-based Coordination with Propagated Context**

We took an approach to propagate context across combined translation services. Treating context as a set of multilingual equivalent terms used in translation, we propose to obtain all possible terms based on triangle forms formed by the relationships between words and translated words extracted from bilingual dictionaries. Our triangle method can be easily extended to four or more languages, and it is efficient in obtaining a sufficient amount of terms; the evaluation results show that the generated equivalent noun terms cover 58% of nouns and 40% of all parts-of-speech appearing in arbitrary sentences.

**Multiagent Architecture for Coordination**

We proposed a multiagent architecture as one way to implement coordination with propagated context, wherein the coordinator agent gathers and propagates context from/to translation agents. Evaluation results of the translation quality of the indicated improvements in 41% of the total 100 sentences used and that the quality rating increased by an average of 0.47 points on a five-point scale. This architecture offers the flexibility of extension and the possibility of constructing a more complex composition of translation services and other types of language resources.

By considering the translation services as black boxes, a substantial improvement in translation quality was realized. The advantage of our approach is that we can improve the translation quality without any corpora, training of translation services with training sentences, or changing the inner components of systems; we only use available language resources and add some components outside existing translation services. This improvement is not trivial in the intercultural collaboration domain [Ishida et al., 2007]. Context-based coordination approach will play an important role in the quality improvement of the component service itself making up the composite service, which is frequently considered an issue of the component technologies.

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