Generating Syntactically Diverse Translations with Syntactic Codes

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1 Introduction

When using machine translation products, users may desire to see candidate translations other than the best one. In this scenario, users usually expect the machine translation system to provide more candidates with drastically different syntactic structures. However, it is undesirable that the candidate translations contain less appropriate words which alter the meaning or nuance of the source sentence.

To obtain diverse sentences, conventional NMT models allow one to sample translations using the beam search algorithm, but the sampled translation results usually share similar syntactic structures. Recently, various methods [7, 12] are proposed to generate sentences with high diversity. These methods encourage the model to use creative vocabulary during the generation process. Most of them evaluate the generated results with corpus-level metrics such as the discrepancy of word distributions. Although producing creative words benefits tasks such as conversation generation, however in machine translation, it can damage the translation quality by changing the original meaning.

Here, we are interested in generating multiple translations with only syntactic diversity. Once the syntactic structure is determined, we want the model to still select the best words for each candidate translation. To minimize the cost of modification to the neural machine translation (NMT) models, we prefix the target sentences with syntactic tags that indicate their structures. As the tokens are generated in left-to-right order during decoding, the NMT model is forced to plan the syntactic structure before generating words. This approach can be easily integrated to existing NMT products as no modification to the NMT model architecture is required.

In this work, we choose the syntactic tags to represent the global syntactic structure of a sentence. Information about local structures such as the number of words in a noun phrase is not desired and has to be omitted in the tags. As consequence, we choose to simplify the part-of-speech (POS) tags and use it as a global structural representation.

To eliminate the negative impact on decoding speed, we use a sequence auto-encoder with a discretization bottleneck to compress the sequences into few codes. This approach is similar to the discrete auto-encoder approach [6], where they capture utterance-level information. We show that the syntactic tag sequences can be compressed into one or two codes but still maintain their effectiveness.

Fig. 1 shows our proposed approach for training the NMT model. In the first phase, we parse target sentences to obtain its syntactic codes. Then, based on the tags and source sentence, the coding model produces multiple discrete codes. Finally, an NMT model is trained based on the original source sentence and the target sentence prefixed by the codes.
2 Learning Syntactic Codes

This section discusses the motivation and methodology for learning discrete syntactic codes. First, we describe an easy method to extract the global sentence structure from part-of-speech (POS) tags. Then, we describe a coding model that learns discrete syntactic codes to speed up the decoding.

2.1 Extracting Global Syntactic Structures

To construct the syntactic prior of translations, we need a representation of syntactic structures. However, it is extremely difficult for a neural network to automatically realize and extract the syntactic structure from the utterances. Therefore, we consider to derive the representation of global sentence structures from part-of-speech tags, which are available for most languages.

Normally, part-of-speech tags contain detailed information about local structures. For example, the words “destroy” and “break down” have different POS tags, but the difference between them are local. In this work, we want to use the syntactic tags only for planning the global sentence structure, other details such as words and local structures are left for the NMT model to fulfill.

Here, we reduce the POS tags to form a global structural representation with a simple heuristics:

1. Remove all tags other than “N”, “V”, “PRP”, “,” and “.”. Note that all tags begin with “N” (e.g., NNS) are mapped to “N”, and tags begin with “V” (e.g., VBD) are mapped to “V”.

2. Remove duplicated consecutive tags.

The following list gives an example of the process:

Input: He found a fox behind the wall.
POS Tags: PRP VBD DT NN IN DT NN .
Step 1: PRP V N N .
Step 2: PRP V N N .

It should be noted that other syntactic parse results can also be potentially useful to represent the global structure; this is left for future works to explore. In our experiments, we found simplified POS tags to be effective and convenient for implementation.

2.2 Code Learning

Prefixing the target sentences with the simplified tags will significantly increase the sequence length, thus worsen the latency of translating a sentence. To mitigate the impact, we propose to compress the syntactic tags into few discrete codes with a code learning model.

Code Encoder Given the sentence pair \((X, Y)\), let the structural tags of the target sentence be \(S_1, ..., S_T\), the encoder computes the logits of \(N\) softmax vectors:

\[
\tilde{h}_t = \text{LSTM}(E(S_t), \tilde{h}_{t+1}; \phi_e), \quad (1)
\]

\[
[\tilde{C}_1, ..., \tilde{C}_N] = \text{softmax}(f(h_t; \phi_h)), \quad (2)
\]

where the tag sequence \(S_1, ..., S_T\) is firstly encoded using a backward LSTM. \(E(\cdot)\) denotes an embedding function, and \(f(\cdot)\) denotes a linear transformation. Then, we compute a set of continuous vectors \(\tilde{C}_1, ..., \tilde{C}_N\), which are latterly discretized into approximated one-hot vectors \(C_1, ..., C_N\) using Gumbel-Sofmax reparameterization trick [5, 8] as:

\[
C_i = g(S_i; \epsilon; \phi),
\]

\[
= \text{softmax}_c(\log \tilde{C}_i + \text{gumbel}(\epsilon)).
\]

Here, \(\tau\) is the temperature of the softmax. The computation of Gumbel-softmax relies on the Gumbel noise, which is defined as \(\text{gumbel}(\epsilon) = -\log(-\log(\epsilon))\). As both \(\tilde{C}_i\) and \(\epsilon\) are vectors in Eq. 4, the \(\log(\cdot)\) here is an element-wise operation. The random variable \(\epsilon\) is sampled from a uniform distribution \(U(0, 1)\). In Eq. 3, \(g(S_i; \epsilon; \phi)\) represents the encoder function, which is used to produce the codes once its parameter \(\phi\) is trained.

Decoder In the decoder, we combine the information from \(X\) and \(C\) to initialize a decoder LSTM that sequentially predicts the structural tags \(S_1, ..., S_T\):

\[
s_t = \text{LSTM}(E(X_t), s_{t+1}; \theta_x),
\]

\[
h_0 = f([C_1, ..., C_N]; \theta_h) + s_1,
\]

\[
h_t = \text{LSTM}(E(S_{t-1}), h_{t-1}; \theta_d),
\]

where \([C_1, ..., C_N]\) is a concatenation of \(N\) Gumbel-softmax code vectors. Note that only \(h_t\) is computed with a forward LSTM. Finally, we predict the probability of emitting each tag \(S_t\) with

\[
P(S_t|S_{<t}, X, C) = \text{softmax}(f_{out}(h_t; \theta_{out})).
\]

2.3 NMT with Structural Planning

Once the coding model is trained, the Gumbel-softmax code vectors \(C_1, ..., C_N\) should be very close to one-hot vectors. We can extract \(N\) discrete codes...
by applying argmax on the softmax vectors, and pre-
fix the target sentences in the training data with the
codes, resulting in \((X, C; Y)\) training pairs. We connect
the codes and target sentences with a \(\langle\text{eoc}\rangle\) token.

To evaluate the performance of structural planning
with discrete codes, we train a regular NMT model
with the modified dataset. The codes are removed
from the translation results after decoding. Similarly,
we can evaluate the tag planning model using
\((X, S; Y)\) pairs.

3 Related Work

As generating diverse text has its application in
tasks such as conversation generation, several exist-
ing works are presented to improve the diversity
of language generation. Similar to [3], [2] gener-
ates diverse image captions with a conditional GAN,
whereas [4] generates diverse questions with a VAE.

Some creative approaches are also proposed on this
topic. [7] improves the diversity of generation by
modifying the scoring function in beam search. A hy-
perparameter that controls the diversity is optimized
by reinforcement learning. [12] learns \(K\) shared de-
coders, each is conditioned on a trainable pattern
embedding. In each iteration, only the decoder with
lowest cross-entropy receives training signal.

Existing works on language generation care about
using creative vocabulary. Both [7] and [12] mea-
sure the diversity with corpus-level metrics. The for-
mer work evaluates the number of unique \(n\)-grams in
the generated text, whereas the latter one measures
the divergence of word distributions produced by dif-
ferent style-specific decoders. Our approach differs
from these works by putting the focus on improving
the syntactic diversity instead of choice of words.

4 Experiments

We evaluate our models on two machine translation
datasets: IWSLT14 German-to-English dataset [1]
and ASPEC Japanese-to-English dataset [9]. These
datasets contain 178K and 3M bilingual pairs, re-
spectively. For the IWSLT14 De-En dataset, we ap-
ply the Moses toolkit to tokenize both sides of the
corpus. For the ASPEC Ja-En dataset, we use the
Moses toolkit to tokenize the English side and Kytea
tokenize the Japanese side.

After tokenization, we apply byte-pair encoding
[10] to segment the texts into subwords, forcing the
vocabulary size of each language to be 20K and 40K
for the IWSLT dataset and ASPEC dataset.

4.1 Evaluation of NMT Models

Model Architecture: To create a strong NMT
baselines, we test two types of NMT models in our

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Architecture</th>
<th>BLEU</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep LSTM baseline</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ tag planning</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ discrete plan ((N=1, K=4))</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ discrete plan ((N=2, K=4))</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep LSTM baseline</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ tag planning</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ discrete plan ((N=1, K=4))</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ discrete plan ((N=2, K=4))</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformer baseline</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ tag planning</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ discrete plan ((N=1, K=4))</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ discrete plan ((N=2, K=4))</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Performance evaluation for NMT models
trained with different approaches. The BLEU(\%) scores are reported using beam size of 5.

experiments: deep LSTM model and transformer
model [11]. Both models are broadly used in industry
recently.

For the deep LSTM model, we use two layers
of bidirectional LSTM encoders with two layers of
LSTM decoders in the NMT model. The hidden
layers have 256 units for the IWSLT De-En task and
1000 units for the ASPEC Ja-En task. For the
transformer model, we follow the settings of the base
transformer. The hidden size is 512, both the en-
coder and the decoder have 6 layers.

Evaluation Results: Table 1 shows the resul-
tant BLEU scores of different models, which indi-
cates that our proposed planning approach does not
degrade the translation quality in both translation
tasks. When we use the part-of-speech tags as a prior
to directly control the sentence structure, a drop in
BLEU scores is observed for LSTM-based models.

We can observe an improvement on translation
performance especially for the transformer models.
The improvement may be the consequence of being
able to simultaneously explore drastically different
candidates. A recent study [7] also showed that beam
search performance can be improved by increasing
the diversity of the candidate space.

4.2 Evaluation of Syntactic Diversity

In our approach, a single code is not guaranteed to be
aligned to a specific structure. Therefore, we can not
evaluate the diversity with the divergence between
word distributions as [12] does. In order to quanti-
tatively evaluate the diversity of generated transla-
tions, we propose to use a simple BLEU discrepancy
metric. Suppose \(Y\) is a list of candidate translations,
we compute the discrepancy with
\[
\text{DP}(Y) = \frac{1}{|Y|(|Y|-1)} \sum_{y \in Y} \sum_{y' \in Y, y' \neq y} 1 - \Delta(y, y'),
\]
where \(\Delta(y, y')\) computes the BLEU score of two candidates. This equation computes the mean value of \(1\) - BLEU between candidate pairs. The score is higher when the candidates have less similarity.

In order to evaluate the syntactic diversity, we further propose a POS-DP metric, in which \(\Delta(y, y')\) computes the BLEU scores using the POS tags of two candidates. Therefore, lexical diversity is completely omitted in the scores.

We report the averaged discrepancy scores in Table 2. We first apply beam search on the baseline model with a beam size of 4 to obtain four candidates for measuring the baseline syntactic diversity. Then we sample translations from a NMT with discrete code prior \((N = 1, K = 4)\). As there are only four possible codes, we sample four translations and measure the discrepancy scores of them.

We can see that the proposed method achieves higher discrepancy scores, which means that the candidate translations are less similar to each other. A larger gap in diversity is observed when evaluating with the POS-DP metric. It indicates that the proposed method creates more diversity in terms of syntactic structure. In Table 3, we give a comparison of the candidate translations sampled by the beam search and the proposed approach.

Table 2: Evaluation of discrepancy scores (DP) for the baseline model and the discrete planning approach. We also report the discrepancy scores of the part-of-speech tags of candidates (POS-DP).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dataset</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>DP</th>
<th>POS-DP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De-En</td>
<td>baseline NMT</td>
<td>35.99</td>
<td>27.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discrete plan</td>
<td><strong>39.79</strong></td>
<td><strong>36.51</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ja-En</td>
<td>baseline NMT</td>
<td>25.89</td>
<td>20.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discrete plan</td>
<td><strong>52.10</strong></td>
<td><strong>45.42</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: A comparison of translation candidates produced by beam search (BS) and the proposed planning approach (PL) for the given Japanese sentence.

BS
- process of the AP is described.
- a process of AP is described.
- reaction of AP is described.

PL
- the process of AP is described.
- this paper describes the process of AP.

References