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AN APPROACH TO THE SEGMENTATION PROBLEM IN SPEECH ANALYSIS AND LANGUAGE TRANSLATION

by

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INTRODUCTION

THE generation of proper word boundaries is an important part of several problems in information processing. Specifically, the speech recognition problem is often described as the production of a phonemic transcript, followed by the assembly of phonemes into complete words.^{1,2,3,4} The automatic translation of certain natural or artificial languages, such as, for example, Chinese and Japanese to English,^{5,6,7} or English to Braille⁸ also requires the generation of words in the output language which may correspond either to several items of input, or to only part of an input item.

The segmentation problem is often complicated by the fact that each item of input may be associated with several possible output correspondents, only one of which is acceptable in any given context. Frequently, the reduction of each set of multiple correspondents is at least partly dependent upon the proper recognition of word boundaries. The English phoneme sequence/aban/ might, for example, correspond to the indefinite article "a" followed by the noun "ban", or it might form a verb or noun prefix as in "abandon", or "abandonment". Similarly, the Chinese character \square (dzi), which may be translated as "self" when standing alone, may in combination with other characters be translated variously as "freedom", "self-defence", "ego", "originality", "naturally", "freely", "liberalism", and so on.

The generation of syntactically well-formed sentences in the output language is a common requirement for the set of problems under consideration. Since the material being processed does not, however, consist of complete syntactic units, it is first necessary to generate the appropriate structural information before any method based on syntax can be used.

Two principal techniques are therefore proposed for the recognition of

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word boundaries and the elimination of multiple correspondents. The first consists of a *particle analysis* designed to attach to each output correspondent, whether consisting of a complete word or not, a set of grammatical indicators giving information about the possible role of the given correspondent in a sentence. The second is a type of syntactic *analysis* which compares certain predicted structural features in each sentence with the syntactic Information actually attached to each output correspondent. The acceptable correspondents are those for which the grammatical indicators match the predictions. Methods are given to select a single acceptable correspondent from each set of multiple correspondents and to assemble particles which do not constitute complete words into complete output items.

THE PHONEMIC ENGLISH INPUT

To demonstrate the techniques involved, machine shorthand as produced by a stenotype device is used as input. Since the vowel letters and many consonant letters are written according to sound rather than according to the normal English spelling, the machine shorthand units, or *strokes*, represent linguistic units of the spoken language. Each stroke may correspond in written English to one syllable, one complete word, or one phrase consisting of several words. Moreover, because of the limited number of keys available on the stenotype machine, a special transcription system is used which substitutes a set of letters available on the keyboard for each English phoneme to be represented. A number of special shorthand abbreviations, similar to the contractions used in Braille, are also provided to represent certain high frequency words, affixes or phrases.⁹

In order to decode the abbreviations and phrases, a small dictionary is used, including approximately one thousand high frequency shorthand strokes. Each stroke is listed together with a set of English correspondents. Each correspondent in the dictionary is furnished with a set of grammatical indicators. As an example, the shorthand stroke A has correspondents "a" and "an". The grammatical indicators for "a" show that, in English, this correspondent can be an article, a verb prefix, an adjective prefix, a noun prefix, or an adverb prefix. An excerpt from the dictionary of abbreviations and phrases used in the computer experiments is shown in figure 1.*

To keep the dictionary down to reasonable size, only a relatively small proportion of the many thousands of possible English words and syllables are included in the dictionary. Many output correspondents will therefore not be found in the dictionary during the look-up operation and no grammatical information is available for these correspondents

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^{*} A Univac I computer was used to perform the experimental work.

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Dictionary of Abbreviations and Phrases Including Grammatical Indicators Fig. 1

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An output sample showing the transliterated text after substitution of English letter clusters for the corresponding shorthand clusters, and after the dictionary look-up operation is shown in *figure 2*. It will be noted that the English output includes incorrect word forms and multiple correspondents. In some cases both correct and incorrect word forms are generated. In other cases, several morphologically correct forms are produced, and it is necessary to use criteria extracted from the context to choose the appropriate correspondent. A representative sample of the types of multiple correspondents which may arise is shown in *Table 1*.

	TABLE	1		
MULTIPLE	CORRESPONDEN	ICES	GENERATED	BY
	DICTIONARY	LOOK	-UP	

Type of Ambiguity	Shorthand	Possible Translations
Morphological	TPHAGS OFRGS PWHREF EUPB TKUS TREUL	<pre>naings, nation offertion, offerings blef in dus (industrial) tril</pre>
Syntactic	OPGS TKEUG WE URBGT	openings, option dig, dying when, we you shall go it, your account
Semantic	SHRED SPORT TKEUG	shred, sled sport, support, export dying, dyeing

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Assembled Shorthand Output Including Grammatical Indicators Fig. 2

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THE PARTICLE ANALYSIS

The particle analysis is designed to assign syntactic indicators to correspondents not already furnished with grammatical information, and to reduce the ambiguity in the grammatical indicators found during dictionary look-up. This is done by considering in turn every grammatical indicator of each English correspondent attached to a given shorthand stroke. A list of the principal grammatical indicators is given in *Table 2*. The first character of the indicator is used to represent the word type, and the second character distinguishes various cases within each word type. As an example, AS is the indicator used for adjective suffixes, and NP represents noun prefixes.

Shorthand strokes are first partitioned to determine whether one of a set of recognizable suffixes is present. If so, the grammatical indicators derived from the suffix, as shown in *Table 3*, are tested for compatibility with the indicators attached to the stems; correspondents with incompatible stem and suffix indicators are eliminated. Correspondents consisting of several English words are similarly tested, and incompatible phrases such as articles not followed by either adjectives, adverbs, or nouns are eliminated.

The particle analysis then concentrates on those correspondents not provided with grammatical indicators, or provided with particle indications. In particular, correspondents without grammatical indication or with a prefix indication are given a special identification whenever one of the correspondents of the succeeding item is provided with in infix or suffix indicator. Such a prefix can later be attached to the corresponding suffix supplied by the next shorthand item. Similarly, correspondents without grammatical indication, or with an infix or suffix indicator, are modified if the preceding item includes a correspondent with a prefix indication.

A simplified flowchart for the particle analysis is shown in *figure 3*, The sample analysis of *figure 4* exhibits the grammatical indicators before and after particle analysis (columns 3 and 4). The correspondent of stroke 5, for example, which could not be found in the dictionary is given a special infix marker (L2) because it is followed by an adverb suffix (HS indication), and preceded by a correspondent with prefix indicators (VP,AP). Similarly the correspondent of word 16 is recognized as an adjective prefix, and word 24 as a participle infix, even though no grammatical information was originally available for these two correspondents. In each case the grammatical indicator used as a criterion in the modification process is circled in column 3 of *figure 4* and grammatical indicators of adjacent shorthand items are suitably modified as shown in column 4 of *figure 4*. The L2 marker is used for all infix or suffix particles, and the corresponding shorthand strokes are treated as parts of a single item during syntactic analysis.

It is seen that, as a result of the particle analysis, all but three

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TABLE 2 GRAMMATICAL INDICATORS

Grammatical	Indicators	
Character	Position	Definition
1	2	
A		Adjectives
В		Participles
С		Conjunctions and Style Indicators
L		Particle Indicators
N		Nouns
P		Pronouns
R		Prepositions
Т		Articles
V		Verbs
	1	Indicators marking distinctions
	2	within each group, such as N1
	3	for singular nouns, N2 for plural
	4	nouns, and N3 for possessive nouns.
	P	Prefix Indicators
	М	Infix indicators
	S	Suffix Indicators
	0	Complete Word Indicators

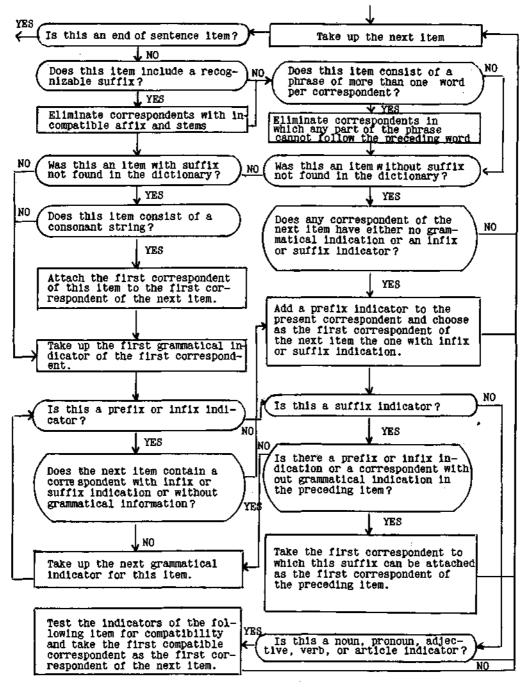
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of the correspondents shown in *figure 4* are furnished with grammatical indicators. Moreover, since particle indicators have been eliminated, the average number of indicators attached to a given correspondent is now much smaller. The probability of ambiguity arising in the predictive analysis is therefore considerably reduced.

Shorthand Suffix	English Correspondents	Derived Grammatical indicator
PLTS	ments mities mates	N2 N2 N2, V2
PLT	ment mity mate	N1, V1 N1 V1, N1, A0
BGS	ction ctious	N1 A0
GS	tion ings tious tial	N1, V1 N2, V2 A0 A0, N1
TS	ities ates	N2 N2, V2
D (alone)	ed	B0, V1
G	ing	N1, A0, B0, V1
S (alone)	s	N2, V2
Т	ity ate	N1 V1, N1, A0

TABLE 3 GRAMMATICAL INDICATORS DERIVED FROM SUFFIXES

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SIMPLIFIED FLOWCHART FOR PARTICLE ANALYSIS Fig. 3

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1	Short-	Selected	Grammatic	al Indicator:	3	Function
	hand	English	After	After	After	Selected by
	Original	Correspon-	Dictionary	Particle	Predictive	Predictive
		dents	Look-up	Analysis	Analysis	Analysis
1	TPH	in	RO	RO	RO	Infinity
2	1938	1938	-	-	N1	Prep. Comp.
3	A	a	TO	_T0	T 0	Subject
4	EPB	en)	VP, AP, BS, <u>V8</u>	_f→®)"	HO	Adverb Es.
б	TEUR	tir }		L2	HO	Adverb Es.
6	HREU	ly J	(H), AS, NP, AP	L IS	HO	Adverb Es.
7	TPHU	new	AP, HO	AO, HO	AO	Adj. Master
6	APB	and	CO, C1	CO, C1	CO	Infinity
9	TKEUF	different	AO	AO 🛛	A0	Subject
10	TEUP	tip	-	-	N1.	Adj. Master
11	F	of	RO	RO	RO	Prep. Es.
12	HREUT	11t	(AP, NP, VP, HP	- AOZ	A0	Prep. Comp.
13	SORS	sors	- N2, V2	N2, V2	N2	Adj. Master
14	RBGS	,	CO	CO	CO	Infinity
15	Т	the	TO	TO	TO	Prep. Comp.
16	TPHRU	flu }		T AQZ	AO:	ADJ. Master
17	RES	res }	NP, AP, VP, AM	12	AO	Adj. Master
18	EPBT	ent)	(AS), NS		AQ	Adj. Master
19	HRAPL	lam)		i -	N1	Adj. Master
20	P	p }		{ L2	N1	Adj. Master
21	RBGS	•	CO	. CO	C0	Infinity
22	WAS	Was	V4	<u>V</u> 4	V4	Pred. Head
23	EUPB	in)	RO, HO	<u>(</u> 80)2	BÔ	Verb Comp.
24	TRO	tro	<u> </u>	ī2	BO	Verb Comp.
25	TKUS	duce }	/VS, NM	{ L2	BÓ	Verb Comp.
28	р	∫ had	V4	ZZZ		
~0	U) a /	(BS), NS, VS, AS	1 12	BO	Verb. Comp.
27	TOT	to the	RO-TO	RO-TO	RO-TO	Prep. Comp.
		(a)	TO	ZZZ		
28	A	₹				
		La	VP, AP, NP, HP	€ A OZ	AO	Adj. Master
29	PHER	mer }		12	A0	Adj. Master
30	KAFB	Сал	NP, AP, VP, AS,NS	L L&	A 0	Adj. Master
31	PUB	public J	AO, N1	AN, N1	AO	Adj. Master
32	FPLT		PÓ	PO	PO	End Sent.
i						

The Recognition of Word Boundaries Sample Analysis Fig. 4

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THE PREDICTIVE SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS

The method of predictive syntactic analysis originating at the National Bureau of Standards,¹⁰ and modified at Harvard University,^{11,12} is based on the notion that, in terms of the human communications system, sentence analysis cannot be a complicated multi-layered combinatorial problem in which the function of a given word is made to depend upon the characteristics of all other words in the sentence. Rather, it is noted that speech emission and reception appear to be quasilinear, one-dimensional processes when viewed as a function of time, and that as a result it must be possible to analyze a sentence in a reasonably linear fashion.

This premise is supported by certain statistical studies which indicate a large degree of regularity in sentence formation,¹³ by psychological experiments undertaken to test the memory span of human beings,¹⁴ and by research toward a new model for language structure and sentence production¹⁵.

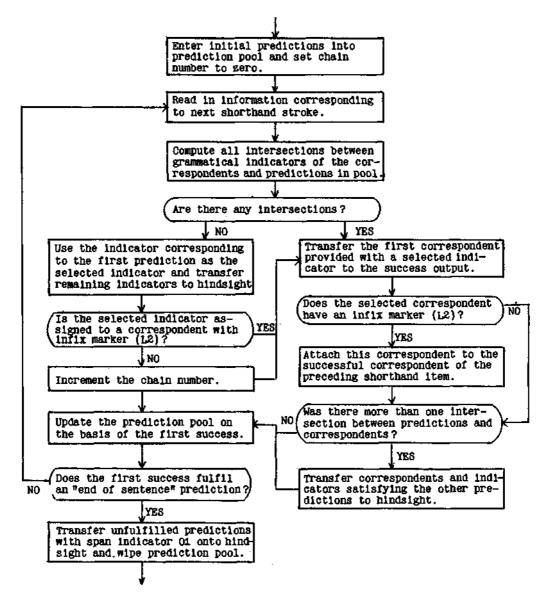
The method of predictive analysis consists in scanning through a sentence from left to right, one word at a time, while making *predictions* at every point about syntactic structures to be found further to the right. Each word in the sentence is tested to find what previously made prediction it fulfills; this information is used, in turn, to set up further predictions for later structures in the same sentence.

The programme actually used attempts to match the syntactic indicators of each correspondent with the predictions stored in a *prediction pool*. At the start of the sentence, a set of initial predictions including "subject", "predicate", and "end of sentence" is entered into the prediction pool. The first match between one of the indicators and a prediction, in the pool is called a *success*. The corresponding word and its indicator, known as the selected correspondent and selected indicator, respectively, are transferred onto a *success output tape* and the prediction pool is updated by eliminating the selected indicator and adding further predictions. Other correspondents which also match one of the predictions are removed to a storage pool known as *hindsight*.

If no match occurs for a given set of correspondents between grammatical indicators and predictions, a success is forced by accepting the indicator corresponding to the first prediction and the first correspondent as the selected items. When a success if forced, an error index known as the *chain number* is incremented to provide at least a partial indication of the accuracy of the analysis. Different types of predictions are identified by a *prediction span indicator* which is used in part to control the updating of the prediction pool.

A simplified flowchart for the predictive analysis is shown in *fig.5*. In actual practice, the indicators of each correspondent of a given shorthand stroke are tested separately against each of the predictions

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Simplified Flowchart for Predictive Analysis

Fig. 5

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in the pool. If no match occurs, a success is forced; the chain number is then increased if the selected word is not provided with an infix marker. Words which were previously recognized as particles can thus accept any indicator without penalty.

When the last word in a sentence has been treated, the prediction pool is wiped and essential predictions, identified by an 01 span indicator, are written on the hindsight tape. If no essential predictions are left in the pool at the end of a sentence, and if the chain number is small, indicating that the predictions were generally fulfilled, the analysis is assumed correct. Otherwise, it is possible to refine the analysis by reprocessing a sentence several times, using information originally stored in the hindsight. Span indicators and chain numbers are thus useful not only for error detection but also for error correction in some cases.

The various types of prediction span indicators are listed in *Table 4*. The principal grammatical functions performed by the words in a sentence are shown in *Table 5* together with the grammatical indicators which can *fulfil* each particular function. The functions *predicted* by the grammatical indicators are similarly shown in *Table 6*. For example, a correspondent provided with a noun (N) indicator is acceptable as a noun-adjective complement (*Table 5*) and will in turn predict the occurrence of another nounadjective complement or of a preposition function (*Table 6*).

TABLE	4.	

PREDICTION	SPAN	INDICATORS

Prediction Span Indicator	Code	Special Action during Analysis
Prediction must be fulfilled by next word or not at all	00	Erase prediction after one word
Prediction must be fulfilled	01	Put prediction in hindsight if not fulfilled
Prediction may be fulfilled several times	02	Do not erase: prediction if fulfilled
Prediction should be ful- filled some time before the end of sentence	03	Erase only when fulfilled or during end wipe

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		TABLE 5		
SYNTACTIC	FUNCTIONS	FULFILLEDBY	GRAMMATICAL	INDICATORS

Grammatical Functions	Function Codes	Fulfilling Indicators
Subject of Vert	SUBJCT	A0, T0, N1, N2, P1, P2, R1, B0
Master	ADJ MAS	N1, N2, N3, A0, B0
Object of Verb	OBJT V	A0, T0, N1, N2, N3, P2, P3, B0
Predicate Head	PRED H	V1, V2, V3, V4
Noun-Adjective Complement	NADJ CM	N1, N2, N3, B0, A0, R1
Verb Complement	VERB CM	R1, B0, V1, V4
Adverb Master	ADV MAS	A0, B0, V1, V2, V3, V4, H0
Preposition Complement	PREP C	A0, T0, N1, N2, N3, P2, P3, B0
Adverb Function	ADV E	H0
Preposition Function	PREP E	R0
Subclause Subject	SCL SB	T0, A0, N1, N2, P1, P3, B0
Infinity	INFINT	R0, H0, C0, C1
Infinitive Base	INF BS	V1, V4
End of Sentence	END SEN	P0

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Grammatical Indicators	Grammatical Functions Predicted
A (adjectives)	Master Noun Adjective Complement Adverb Function Preposition Function
B (participles)	Noun Adjective Complement Verb Complement Adverb Function Preposition Function Subclause Subject
C (conjunctions)	Subject of Verb Predicate Head Subclause Subject Infinity
H (adverbs)	Adverb Master
N (nouns)	Noun Adjective Complement Preposition Function
P (pronouns)	Noun Adjective Complement Preposition Function Subclause Subject
R (prepositions)	Preposition Complement Adverb Function Infinitive Base
T (articles)	Master
V (verbs)	Object of Verb Verb Complement Adverb Function

TABLE 6 SYNTACTIC FUNCTIONS PREDICTED BY GRAMMATICAL INDICATORS

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A sample sentence is analyzed in *fig.* 4. Selected indicators and selected grammatical functions are shown in columns 5 and 6, respectively, of *fig.* 4. It will be noted that a single correspondent is chosen for each shorthand stroke; each correspondent is assigned a unique grammatical function, and word parts which must be assembled into complete words are assigned the same grammatical indicator. The correspondent "a", for example is properly recognized as an article, subject of the sentence, in stroke 5, whereas in stroke 28 it is recognized as an adjective which forms a part of the word "a-mer-can".

The success and hindsight outputs actually produced on the Univac computer for the sentence previously considered in *fig.4* are shown in *figs. 6* and 7 respectively. Word boundary indications are included in column 3 of *fig. 6*, showing for example that en-tir-ly, flu-res-ent, lam-p, in-tro-duce-d, etc., are to be attached to form complete words. The final chain number of 03 shows that a success was forced three times. The correct correspondent was chosen in each case, all word boundaries were properly recognized and, except for some minor imperfections in the assignment of grammatical functions, the sample sentence was analyzed correctly.

The updating of the prediction pool is illustrated in *fig. 8*. The pool is operated as a push-down store in such a way that the last prediction entered into the pool is the first one tested for fulfillment. This procedure simplifies the computer programme, economizes storage space, and follows the intuitive notion that the predictions made by the last word analyzed are the ones most likely to be fulfilled by the word which follows. At each step, the selected prediction and all predictions with a 00 span indicator are erased, and new predictions are added to the top of the pool.

A sentence similar to the one analyzed in *figs. 4, 6 and 7* is shown in *fig. 9* before syntactic analysis, including all the multiple correspondents, and excluding any information about the word boundaries. One correspondent must be chosen from each set of multiple correspondents shown in the figure. A comparison of *figs. 6 and 9* shows the improvement obtained.

CONCLUSION

The contextual and syntactic analyses described were used successfully on several samples of shorthand text. Word boundaries were properly recognized and correspondents correctly assigned for over ninety percent of the shorthand strokes. Almost identical programmes would seem to promise equal success with a variety of input languages. A dictionary of certain phoneme clusters including both acoustic and linguistic features must be used for speech input, and a dictionary of the principal contractions for Braille. In each case the recognition of the many input clusters which are not included in the dictionary is left to a particle analysis, and the formation of complete well-formed output sentences is handled by a syntactic process similar to the predictive analysis.

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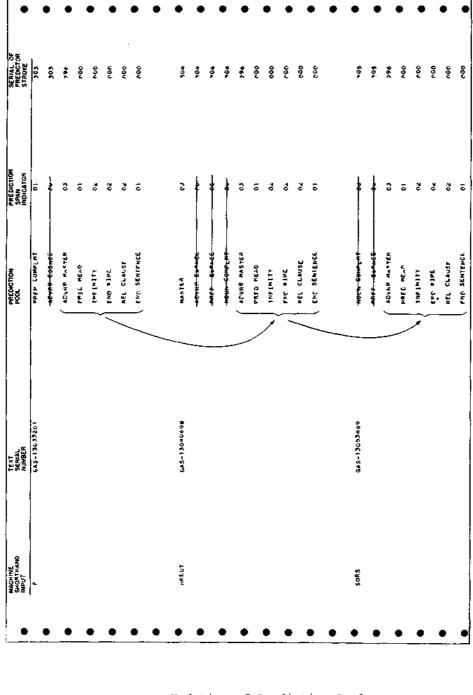
Success Output Fig. 6 720

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Hindsight Output Fig. 7 721

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Updating of Prediction Pool Fig. 8

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Edited Interlinear Translation Before Syntactic Analysis

Fig. 9

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