



Introduction of Automation for the Production of Bilingual, Parallel-aligned Text

**by Will Tanenbaum, Steve LaRocca, John Morgan,
and Ghulam Hazrat Jahed**

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14. ABSTRACT As the study and application of statistical machine translation (SMT) grows, progress is often circumscribed by a lack of data. The statistical models that govern SMT engines rely on many large bilingual text corpora, each comprised of vast numbers of bilingual text segments. For certain languages, corpora already exist and help to power translation engines. Regrettably, this is not the case for every language the Army is interested in, making the creation or acquisition of such data a priority. To this end, a language expert in Dari and Pashto was hired, who collected, prepared, and ensured the quality of bilingual text. To explore ways to aid the expert, a variety of the steps performed by the expert and necessary to the process were automated. The hypothesis was that automation of selected processes would improve efficiency, measured in terms of both speed of production, and quantity of data produced, even when time to correct automation-caused errors was accounted for. As predicted, the net result of introducing automation was an increase in both the rate of producing correct bilingual segments and the number produced. The implications of these results for improving larger bilingual data creation and acquisition efforts are discussed.					
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Acknowledgments

The Pipeline project was conceived and directed by Dr. Stephen A. LaRocca of the Multilingual Computing Branch (MLCB). The Pipeline, itself, was originally developed by Dr. Mark Arehart of the MITRE Corporation for the U.S. Army Research Laboratory (ARL), with support from Dr. Sherri Condon of MITRE. Subsequent additions to the Pipeline were made by John J. Morgan and the author. The author would like to thank Dr. LaRocca and Mr. Morgan for their direction and encouragement, as well as Dr. Melissa Holland and Dr. Michelle Vanni for editing this publication. Thanks also to Ghulam Hazrat Jahed for serving as both language expert and translator. My sincere thanks to all others in MLCB, without whom this experiment could not have been conducted.

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1. Introduction and Background

Computational linguistics, as a discipline, centers on enhancing the capability of computers in translating one natural language into another, which is called machine translation (MT). Originally, it was assumed that MT would be as simple as compiling a multilingual lexicon; however, such methods met with only limited success. Today, MT relies on the ever-increasing capacity of computers to ingest and learn from large amounts of bilingual data from human translators, or ground truth data. This method, statistical machine translation (SMT), models patterns of translation by assigning weighted probabilities to bilingual correspondences derived from ground truth data.

1.1 The Need for Bilingual Data

To build an SMT engine, huge amounts of bilingual data are required, both to serve as ground truth and to properly calibrate the governing heuristics; more data generally serves to make an SMT engine more accurate. For some languages, bilingual data that pairs English with another language are numerous and easy to come by. These languages include French, German, and Spanish, all of which are Indo-European. Some non-Indo-European languages, like Japanese and Mandarin Chinese, show increasing amounts of bilingual data with English. However, there is little available, bilingual data between English and languages of remote, less developed regions of the world—Afghanistan (Dari and Pashto), for instance. Yet it is regions like this where the Army goes and, hence, where it needs MT. To compensate for the lack of data for building SMT, the Army has invested resources in the production of bilingual text-data for Dari-English and Pashto-English.

1.2 The Production of Bilingual Data for SMT

The production of high-quality, bilingual text that is usable for building SMT is long and involved. The primary processes are shown in figure 1.

Finding Parallel Text It begins with locating a source of text-data written with fairly equivalent versions in both English and the target language, (as opposed to, say, a Dari text and an English précis); this is called parallel text.

Correction and Normalization After location, the data must be copied into a word-processor so that a language expert may correct any errors. The expert must employ a standard so as to ensure uniform stylistic and character formats.

Segmentation Then, the expert must divide the text into segments small enough to be useful to an SMT engine. Again, a general standard must be adopted and applied to every sentence. This can present a particular challenge in the alignment phase if the sentences of the source language and target language texts do not enjoy a one-to-one correspondence.

Alignment Formatting After that, the segments of one language must be aligned with those of the other. The aligned text is must then be converted into Translation Memory eXchange (TMX) format to be compiled into a cohesive corpus. TMX data constitutes a pair of aligned segments and a probability.

This entire procedure is painstakingly carried out by a single language expert. Understandably, this method is not conducive to maximum output from the expert. To optimize the use of the Army's time and resources, it was decided that automation should be introduced to aid the expert whenever appropriate.

2. Pipelines and Experiments

We refer to the series of automated processes, designed to increase the amount of bilingual parallel *.tmx text produced and authenticated by the language expert, as the *Pipeline*. Originally, the Pipeline featured a mix of open-source programs, as well as program code written by Mark Arehart (MITRE), and it was tailored to extract data only from a single source—the online newspaper, *Sada-e Azadi*. An enhanced version of the Pipeline incorporated additional open-source content, in addition to program code written by John Morgan and Will Tanenbaum.

2.1 The Original Pipeline

The web site, Sada-e Azadi, displays the online version of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) publication. Its features include topics like current events, politics, economy, media, entertainment, and health. It also offers a question-and-answer column, called “Baba Jan.” Each article is offered in three languages: Dari, English, and Pashto.

2.1.1 Initial Harvest

To acquire this data, we used the open-source program, *Wget* (1), which downloads html-annotated text from web sites.

2.1.2 Working Storage

The Pipeline then accessed a routine to write the html-annotated text of each Sada-e Azadi article accessed to one of three directories, based on the natural language of the article.

2.1.3 Extraction: Tag Stripping

From there, the Pipeline passed control to the open-source parser, *Beautiful Soup* (2), which filtered out the html annotation, as well as any non-text data, such as pictures, sound files, videos, and links.

2.1.4 Return to Storage

The Pipeline then saved the text from each article, in block paragraph form, as a text data file in the appropriate language directory.

2.1.5 Text Clean-up

Prior to segmentation, the Pipeline accesses a routine for adjusting selected properties, especially punctuation, of the resulting text. This routine standardizes certain language-specific characters, such as the Arabic period and colon, and replaces stylized smart-quotation marks with the generic version.

2.1.6 Segmentation and Alignment

Finally, the Pipeline accessed a sentence-level segmenter, which output the text in a format acceptable as input to SMT engines. When applied to both sides of the parallel corpus data, the segmentation step contributed to the alignment process, which matched segments by order of occurrence, before the paired segments were presented to the language expert for data quality control processes.

2.2 The Enhanced Pipeline

The original Pipeline featured a fairly simple segmenting algorithm based on end-of-sentence punctuation. Essentially, the segmenter would create a segment break at periods or similar end-of-sentence symbols, such as question marks. Despite efficient handling of notable exceptions to this rule, particularly title abbreviations (Dr., Mr., Ms., etc.), this was still a fairly inelegant solution to the problem. Sentences neither always contained the exact same information from language to language, nor were they of consistent length.

2.2.1 Punkt Pickle Segmentation

To better segment the text, the *Natural Language ToolKit (3)* (NLTK), particularly the *Punkt* tool, was used. When calibrated using a critical mass of data in a given language, Punkt generates a language-specific segmenter called a *Pickle*. The designers of Punkt included 12 Pickles with the NLTK, including one for English. A Dari Pickle was generated using a corpus to which the Army already had access. Thus far, a Pashto Pickle has yet to be created due to an insufficient volume of ground-truth data. The segments created by the Pickles tended to be far more sensible and coherent than those created by the original segmenter.

2.2.2 Bilingual Sentence Aligner Alignment

An open-source Perl script called the *Bilingual Sentence Aligner (4)* (BSA) was employed to align the data in parallel segments. The BSA's accuracy improves with ever greater volumes of data. Thus, given the large number of bilingual data segments produced from the first six steps in the Pipeline, we expected improved alignment accuracy and a speeding up of the language expert's data quality control process.

2.3 The Experimental Procedure

Admittedly, the changes in processes constituting both the Original Pipeline (OP) and the Enhanced Pipeline (EP) introduce new opportunities for error. Nonetheless, for the first experiment, it was hypothesized that the time saved with automated Harvesting, alone, would more than compensate for any additional errors. Moreover, to confirm that decreases in time and increases in efficiency were caused by automation in Traditional (T) versus OP data preparation, and by Segmentation and Alignment improvements in OP versus EP data preparation, an experimental framework was designed to observe the time and efficiency of work performed under the three conditions—T, OP, and EP—and a second experiment (OP versus EP) was also conducted.

To compare efficiencies of work performance under the three conditions, 10 articles were selected from the Sada-e Azadi web site. The articles were of similar length, about 25 lines, plus or minus one line. Four articles were about politics, four involved health, and two discussed media and entertainment. Five articles were randomly chosen for each version of the Pipeline: two from politics, two from health, and one about media and entertainment. Both versions of the Pipeline featured the same Harvest and Extraction processes; they first diverged at the Segmentation stage. As noted in previous sections, the OP used a basic segmenter and aligned each language's segments solely according to the order in which they appeared. The EP used Punkt and the BSA for Segmentation and Alignment. To determine which Pipeline's use effected greater efficiencies, the language expert was timed from start to finish in the performance of his data quality control work of aligning and correcting any mistakes in the bilingual parallel versions of the 10 articles, five of which were processed by OP and five by EP. The versions were alternated to mitigate possible learning effects based on order of presentation.

3. Results and Discussion

The value of automation was confirmed by the results of both experiments. As suspected, without any automation, the expert harvested and aligned only a tiny proportion of what he aligned in the same amount of time with automated assistance. The difference in volume of data aligned was immense, such that it invalidated any need for statistical comparison. In comparing the two versions of the Pipeline, the differences were also quite pronounced. We calculated the mean time required by the language expert to correct the paragraphs processed by the OP and the EP. The times, in minutes, were 24.036 and 1.978, respectively. A t-test found a statistically significant difference between groups, $t = 7.257$ with 4 degrees of freedom ($P = .002$).

While not constituting empirical evidence, the subjective opinion of the expert about the two versions of the Pipeline was, nevertheless, solicited and validated our experimental results. He found a marked increase in difficulty when attempting to reconcile the lines produced with the

OP, when compared with that found using the EP, due to spurious Segmentation and Alignment. It was also his opinion that the OP performed drastically worse on articles with a relatively greater number of sentences.

4. Summary and Conclusions

The results of the experiments indicate an undeniable advantage using automation for harvesting and processing bilingual parallel text data. Whereas full automation is not yet feasible, the addition of automated tools has proven an invaluable aid for language experts. A marked increase in efficiency, similar to that gained through use of the OP and the EP, can lead to a comparable growth in SMT capability.

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List of Symbols, Abbreviations, and Acronyms

ARL	U.S. Army Research Laboratory
BSA	Bilingual Sentence Aligner
EP	Enhanced Pipeline
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MLCB	Multilingual Computing Branch
MT	machine translation
NLTK	Natural Language ToolKit
OP	Original Pipeline
SMT	statistical machine translation
T	Traditional
TMX	Translation Memory eXchange

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