On Generating Combilex Pronunciations via Morphological Analysis

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Abstract

Combilex is a high quality lexicon that has been developed specifically for speech technology purposes and recently released by CSTR. Combilex benefits from many advanced features. This paper explores one of these: the ability to generate fully-specified transcriptions for morphologically derived words automatically. This functionality was originally implemented to encode the pronunciations of derived words in terms of their constituent morphemes, thus accelerating lexicon development and ensuring a high level of consistency. In this paper, we propose this method of modelling pronunciations can be exploited further by combining it with a morphological parser, thus yielding a method to generate full transcriptions for unknown derived words. Not only could this accelerate adding new derived words to Combilex, but it could also serve as an alternative to conventional letter-to-sound rules. This paper presents preliminary work indicating this is a promising direction.

Index Terms: combilex lexicon, letter-to-sound rules, grapheme-to-phone conversion, morphological decomposition

1. Introduction

Speech technology very much relies on the availability of a mapping from words to pronunciations. As the final stage of front-end linguistic processing in text-to-speech synthesis (TTS), a specification for the pronunciation of the words in the sentence must be found. In automatic speech recognition (ASR), this mapping is typically relied upon to form the hypothesised word sequences in terms of phone-based statistical acoustic models. Two simple ways to realise this mapping are commonplace: a lexicon simply listing words and their pronunciation; and letter-to-sound (LTS) rules, either hand-written or learned automatically from data, to predict a pronunciation from a word’s orthographic form. For many languages, either one of these, or a combination of the two, gives acceptable results. For some languages, however, they are insufficient and word morphology must be taken into account. For example, agglutinating languages such as Finnish have a massive number of potential words that can be formed using a large set of affixes. It would simply not be practical to list all these in a lexicon for ASR [1]. Meanwhile for German, TTS systems benefit from morphological analysis to deal with the productive process of word-compounding [2].

In the case of English, morphological analysis has not traditionally played a significant role in TTS or ASR. English has a rich and fairly complex system of derivational morphology, but only a tiny number of inflections1. Consequently, for ASR it is regarded as feasible just to have a large list of words as “atomic” entities, without considering their underlying mor-

1We shall hereafter not distinguish between derivational and inflectional morphology, simply referring to both as derivational.
as having the word in the lexicon. This is especially useful consider-
ing TTS methods such as unit selection and HMM-based syn-
theses typically use extensive context features as part of their
approach to waveform generation.

As far as we are aware, no work has previously been pre-
tected on this topic, at least for English. The purpose of this
paper is therefore primarily to introduce and discuss this idea,
as well as preliminary work to indicate the extent to which this
might be a useful approach. At this preliminary stage, there
are two obvious questions. The first concerns whether we can
estimate how useful this approach might be in terms of how
many words currently outside our lexicon are likely to be de-
\( \text{word} \) derived words. The second concerns the extent to which we might
expect this approach will work for that set of words.

For the remainder of this paper, Section 2 begins by giving
a brief introduction to Combilex, describing its morphologi-
cal derivations component in particular. In Section 3, we look
closer at the proposed idea of generating Combilex pronunci-
ations for unseen words via morphological analysis. Instrumental
to this, we briefly discuss the tool we have used for mor-
phological analysis, and present some of our preliminary findings,
before finally presenting our conclusions in Section 4.

2. Main features of Combilex

Combilex is a relatively large pronunciation lexicon that has
been developed specifically for use in speech technology ap-
lications. It has been created entirely from scratch at CSTR,
and has recently been released under wide-ranging licensing op-
tions. Combilex has many advanced features compared to oth-
er available lexicons. A fuller discussion of some of these,
and the underlying design decisions, may be found in [5, 4].
More information about obtaining and using Combilex may
also be obtained from the project web page [6].

Combilex is an accent-independent lexicon. This means
we can use it to automatically generate surface lexicons specifi-
cally tailored to any accent group, or indeed to the accent of any
individual speaker. Unlike other lexicons, which may have been
created from multiple sources or authors, the pronunciations
contained in Combilex have been supervised by a single lexi-
cographer. In addition, Combilex has been created as an SQL
data base, and a system of phonotactic constraints and automatic
consistency-checking rules are applied before any pronuncia-
tion is added to Combilex. This all helps guard against the
introduction of mistakes and inconsistency due to human error.
Furthermore, as mentioned in Section 1, Combilex has been
implemented so that morphologically-interdependent words are
explicitly linked. Specifically, only the minimum possible core
set of basic words and other morphemes have pronunciations
which have been entered. All other words and terms which are
predictable are then generated automatically. Not only has this
facilitated rapid development, but it also helps to ensure that
the pronunciations of morphemes in related words remain con-
sistent, which is a powerful aid in the task of maintaining the
lexicon in the long term. In short, the method of Combilex's
construction implies a high level of consistency and accuracy in
the pronunciation strings it contains.

Combilex offers rich information in addition to the
phones contained in a word. This includes POS tags, lex-
cal stress, syllabification, morpheme boundaries, free variant
and headword ordering, source domain and gender tags for
names, source language tags for loanwords, and an explicit
alignment of the phones contained in a word to their corre-
ponding graphemes. This last feature is useful for at least three
reasons. First, it can be used when generating a lexicon for a
non-native accent, for which pronunciation may often be influ-
enced by the written form of a word. Second, it can be used to
build LTS rules [4]. Almost all data-driven methods for building
LTS rules (e.g. decision trees [7] or Pronunciation by Analogy
[8, 9]) require a training set consisting of words whose letters
are aligned with the corresponding phones in their pronuncia-
tion. Finally, as we shall see in Section 2.2, this alignment is
indispensable when processing pronunciation strings to effect
many of the morphological derivations in English.

2.1. Combilex transcriptions

Combilex transcriptions are written using a set of "meta-
phones", which are a superset of the phones found in the differ-
ent accents of English. This symbol set is based on the SAMP
set, but has been necessarily modified and extended. These trans-
criptions are termed "base-form" pronunciations, and can be
thought of as a generalisation of how a word is pronounced in
all accents of English. Base-form transcriptions may then be
processed automatically to yield numerous lexicons of accent-
specific "surface-form" transcriptions (termed a "surface-form
lexicon"), such as generic RP or GAM, or even transcriptions
tailored to a specific speaker.

The best way to introduce the main features of Combilex
transcriptions is with an example. Fig. 1 gives the base-form
transcription for the word "deacidify". The braces \( \{ \ldots \} \) indi-
cate free root morpheme boundaries, while \( "<" \) and \(">" \) indi-
cate prefix and suffix morpheme boundaries respectively. Thus,
this word is encoded as a derivation of the free root morpheme
"acid", using suffix "-ify>" and prefix "<de-". The symbols
"'w" and "s" denote primary and secondary stress respectively,
while "." marks a syllable boundary.

Every Combilex base-form transcription contains an in-
dication of the alignment of the constituent metaphones to their
corresponding graphemes. This is denoted as pairs of
metaphones and graphemes tied together with an underscore
"_". Metaphones appear to the left of the underscore, with
graphemes to the right. For example, the symbol \( "@_a" \) rep-
resents a schwa vowel (IPA symbol \( \text{a} \) ) that is tied to the
grapheme "a". As a notational economy, the grapheme (and
underscore) is omitted wherever it is identical to the metaphe-
phone string. For example in Fig. 1 the symbol "f" represents a voice-
less labiodental fricative which is aligned to the grapheme "f".
Though not shown in this example, where more than one meta-
phone symbol is associated with a given grapheme, they are con-
catenated with a "," symbol. Furthermore, a "0" is used to rep-
resent a null metaphone, i.e. one that has no acoustic realisa-
tion, while "+" indicates a grapheme (e.g. "e") which, although
not pronounced itself, does have an effect on the phonemic re-
alisation of surrounding graphemes. Finally, it is important to
note that this alignment is retained through the conversion from
base-form to surface-form transcriptions. Consequently, we can
easily obtain phone-grapheme alignments for all surface-form
lexicons generated from Combilex.

2.2. Morphological derivations

Combilex currently is capable of processing base-form tran-
scriptions with more than 90 suffixes and 30 prefixes. Ex-
ample suffixes include 
-\( \text{ed} \), -\( \text{ic} \), -\( \text{ify} \) and -\( \text{ness} \), while example prefixes include
\( \text{de-}, \), \( \text{semi-} \), \( \text{re-}, \), 
\( \text{cover-}\) and so on. Affixes were added to Combilex in or-
der of their productivity. Very productive inflectional suffixes,
words via morphological analysis. The answer lies partly in how many OOV words are derivations, and partly in how accurately we could generate morphological parses for such words.

3.1. How many OOV words are derivations?

Unfortunately, this is by nature a difficult question. It could be suggested a large number of the words not included in Combilex are names, for which an approach based on morphological analysis would be no use at all. However, it is true to say that names too undergo morphological transformation. For example, derived from the one name “Adam” we of course find “Adams”, but other less obvious derivations such as “Adamesque”, and even “Adamness” and “Adamify”, may be easily found with a web search, and with apparent meanings as one would expect!

To estimate an upper bound on the total possible productivity of morphological derivation, we could try an empirical approach of taking a representative set of roots and generating all derivations by applying all possible combinations of affixes. Unfortunately, this is impractical, not least because it is unclear what stopping criterion to use (neoantidisestablishmentarianism? postneoantidisestablishmentarianism?...). Moreover, blindly and exhaustively generating derived words would not reflect human judgement about what constitutes an acceptable, meaningful derivation.

It seems clear intuitively that however many non-derived words there are, there are likely to be many multiples of that number which are derivations of them. The statistics from Combilex support this: approx. 22k headwords are “core”, non-derived words; 12k words are names; and 100k words have been entered as derivations. Thus, it seems at least likely that the proposed approach will be applicable to a large proportion of OOV words.

3.2. Morphological analysis experiment

We have used the well-known PC-KIMMO morphological analysis tool (version 2.1.13), which is based on Kimmo Koskenniemi’s finite-state two-level model of morphology, in an experiment to investigate what proportion of derived words we might expect to have pronunciation strings predicted correctly via the proposed approach. We have furthermore used Englex (version 2.0.6b), which provides a two-level description of English morphology for PC-KIMMO consisting of a set of orthographic rules and a lexicon containing approx. 20k roots and affixes. As a straightforward way to evaluate the proposed method, we took the complete set of derived headwords in Combilex and analysed them using PC-KIMMO. One of three outcomes was possible for each word: a) the morphological parse would match that specified in Combilex; b) the parse would not match; or c) no parse would be found. The results obtained are shown in Table 1 (labelled “run 1”).

Analysis of the list of words which failed to parse revealed the overwhelming majority contained a root which was either not present in PC-KIMMO’s lexicon, or did not include all possible POS types. We chose to add 10,143 new words
to PC-KIMMO’s lexicon including: 5,171 proper nouns, 4,353
nouns, 870 verbs and 486 adjectives (some with multiple types). We have not so far addressed the issue of missing POS tags for
existing words, which would further reduce parse failures.
Meanwhile, analysis of those words for which the parse
found did not constitute a single, exact match revealed a number of reasons, which we broadly classify into three groups:

1) Incompatible format In some cases Englex and
Combilex use a different approach to representing
affix morphemes, which requires harmonisation. For
example, Englex has two suffixes “-ise>” and
“-ize>”, whereas Combilex has only “-ise>” and
treats “-ize>” as a variant spelling.

2) Differing choices for morphological structure For example,
PC-KIMMO has a lexical entry for the word “abol-
ition” and does not parse this word into submorphemes (although does indicate its root is “abolish”), whereas
Combilex represents this word with the morphological structure “abolish>ion>”. This means all parses for
derived words based on “abolition” do not match, though they may otherwise be the same.

3) PC-KIMMO returns multiple parses for many words. For example, “codirector” is parsed as
“<co<di{rector}” (as in Combilex) and
“<co<di{rector}”. Multiple parses sometimes make sense (e.g. for homographs), but often some parses either do not seem likely or are certainly not correct.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>run</th>
<th># match</th>
<th># non-match</th>
<th># no parse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>54,615</td>
<td>23,497 (23.8%)</td>
<td>20,627 (20.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>74,474</td>
<td>18,024 (18.3%)</td>
<td>6,241 (6.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Morphological analysis of Combilex derived words.

In future work, we shall work on increasing the propor-
tion of words which produce a parse that is compatible with
Combilex. Nevertheless, it is unlikely we could achieve 100% correct parses, and we will inevitably need to address this issue, which we have not done at all at this stage. Complete failure to find a parse is arguably not a serious problem; for TTS, it would be simple to fall back to using LTS rules for example. However, the issue of incorrect parses will require more atten-
tion. Finally, once we have addressed these two issues and in-
tegrated morphological analysis more closely with the morpho-
logical derivation component of Combilex, it will be interesting
to conduct a fair comparison against the performance of a
state-of-the-art LTS system.

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