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Automated Recognition and Post-coordination of Complex Clinical Terms

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Abstract. One of the key tasks in integrating guideline-based decision support systems with the electronic patient record is the mapping of clinical terms contained in both guidelines and patient notes to a common, controlled terminology. However, a vocabulary of pre-coordinated terms cannot cover every possible variation - clinical terms are often highly compositional and complex. We present a rule-based approach for automated recognition and post-coordination of clinical terms using minimal, morpheme-based thesauri, neoclassical combining forms and part-of-speech analysis. The process integrates MetaMap with the open-source GATE framework.

Keywords. natural language processing, interoperability, clinical decision support

Introduction

Application of natural language processing (NLP) techniques for recognition of biomedical and clinical terms has recently been driven by increased demand for information retrieval and extraction tools for standardising and exchanging data between electronic medical record (EMR) systems[1].

While there are a number of approaches to this task, including rule, dictionary, and statistical based approaches[2], there are essentially three steps involved:

1. *recognize* the text string as a possible term (*candidate term* identification)
2. *classify* the candidate term (e.g. chemical compound, part of body, disease)
3. *map* the term to a single concept (*pre-coordination*) or to qualified, multiple concepts (*post-coordination*) within a standardised vocabulary or ontology.

The last step is essential for semantic interoperability of data between EMR systems. For guideline-based clinical decision support (CDS) to provide point of care recommendations within an EMR, patient data must be mapped to the terminology and data model (a *virtual medical record*) employed by the guideline knowledge base[3].

The UMLS Metathesaurus from the National Library of Medicine (NLM)[4] is a large, multi-lingual vocabulary of biomedical concepts classified according to one or more types from a semantic network. The Metathesaurus comprises over 100 reference terminologies, such as HL7 v3, SNOMED CT and LOINC, which have been adopted as international standards for patient data encoding, and form the basis of the information model adopted by at least one formalised guideline model[3].

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MetaMap is a tool for discovering UMLS Metathesaurus concepts in free text[5], and is considered to be the 'gold standard' for this task[6]. It allows complex clinical terms to be mapped to individual concepts within UMLS source vocabularies.

Composition of Clinical Terms

The naming of chemical and biological terms frequently involves the use of Latin and Greek *morphemes*. Such terms are known as *neoclassical compounds*. Computational analysis of neoclassical compounds can help identify unknown terms and provide classification for human review[7].

In this paper, we present a purely rule-based application utilising neoclassical combining forms (NCF), part-of-speech (POS) analysis and lexical rules for recognition of complex clinical terms. A post-coordination module annotates the clinical terms with metadata from MetaMap and provides output in HL7 v3 CDA XML.

1. Method

We constructed an NLP pipeline within the GATE framework[8]. The pipeline consists of generic modules for tokenization, POS tagging and noun-phrase identification. Modules were also developed for identification of neoclassical compounds; anatomical terms; chemical nomenclature; proteins, drugs and enzymes; temporal expressions and quantities; and clinical term post-coordination. A MetaMap plugin for GATE was developed in Java using the MetaMap Java API[9]. The transducer modules were written in the GATE JAPE grammar.

1.1. Identification of Potential Clinical Terms

Following approaches suggested by [7],[10], we created lists of neoclassical morphemes and classified them as prefixes, roots and suffixes relating to bodily concepts (e.g. *gastr-*, *haem-*, *derm-*), clinical signs (*cirrh-*, *glauc-*, *-itis*, *-asis*, *-lytic*) and descriptive and positional terms (*ankyl-*, *pachy-*, *inter-*, *intra-*). Suffixes considered to be strongly indicative of a clinical term without an accompanying neoclassical prefix or root were grouped separately (e.g. *-itis*, *-ostomy*).

Regular expressions were written to combine the morphemes into patterns that represent a complete neoclassical compound.

1.2. Recognition of Anatomical Terms

Anatomical terms tend to be highly compositional. We created gazetteers from which to construct regular expressions for identification of complete anatomical structures, using functional prefixes (*adductor*, *extensor*), positional prefixes (*anterior*, *posterior*, *distal*, *dorsal*); anatomical parts and surfaces (*bursa*, *cortex*, *fossa*, *fascia*), organs and organ parts. Complete anatomical terms can then be recognised, for example:

Endothoracic$_{\text{neoclassical}}$ **fascia**$_{\text{part}}$ **of anterior**$_{\text{position}}$ **thoracic**$_{\text{neoclassical}}$ **wall**$_{\text{part}}$

Right$_{\text{position}}$ **posterior**$_{\text{position}}$ **cusp**$_{\text{part}}$ **of aortic**$_{\text{neoclassical}}$ **valve**$_{\text{part}}$

1.3. Recognition of Chemical Compounds

Using lists of chemical element names, ions and alkane prefixes we created combinatorial rules that implement the IUPAC nomenclature[11, 12] for organic and inorganic compounds. Systematic combination of chemical morphemes allows a variety of compounds to be identified, for example:

di$_{\text{multiplier}}$**sodium**$_{\text{element}}$**hypo**$_{\text{oxidation_prefix}}$**chlor**$_{\text{ion_root}}$**ite**$_{\text{oxidation_suffix}}$

tri$_{\text{multiplier}}$**chlor**$_{\text{ion_root}}$**ometh**$_{\text{alkane_root}}$**ane**$_{\text{alkane_suffix}}$

2,3-di$_{\text{multiplier}}$**eth**$_{\text{alkane_root}}$**yl**$_{\text{alkane_suffix}}$**pent**$_{\text{alkane_root}}$**ane**$_{\text{alkane_suffix}}$

Additional production rules were created by combining chemical morphemes with neoclassical terminals such as *-ase* (enzymes: e.g. acetylcholinesterase), *-ein*, *-in*, *-ine*, *-an* (biological molecules: e.g. ferritin).

1.4. Candidate Term Post-coordination

Prepositional terms comprise two or more noun phrases joined by the prepositions ‘or’ or ‘to’[13], e.g. ‘carcinoma of the lung’.

Such compound phrases require an initial normalisation process so that they can be properly post-coordinated with qualifier concepts from the Metathesaurus.

After experimenting with different noun-phrase combinations to see which combinations gave the best results in MetaMap, we devised the following heuristic:

1. Remove non-negating determiners (*a*, *the*, *this*) from each noun phrase
2. Store the first noun phrase
3. Reverse the order of the remaining noun phrases
4. Add the last token of the first noun phrase to the end
5. Add the remaining tokens of the first noun phrase to the beginning

Example: ‘an ipsilateral fracture of the left femoral neck’

Step 1: {ipsilateral fracture}{left femoral neck}
Step 2: ~~{ipsilateral fracture}~~{left femoral neck}
Step 3: {left femoral neck}
Step 4: {left femoral neck}{fracture}
Step 5: {ipsilateral}{left femoral neck}{fracture}

Although this form is not exactly equivalent semantically to simply reversing the order of the noun phrases[13], this method produces the desired qualified concepts from MetaMap:

```
Meta Mapping (875):
  637 Ipsilateral {SNOMEDCT} [Spatial Concept]
  637 Left {SNOMEDCT} [Spatial Concept]
  884 Femoral Neck Fracture (Femoral neck fracture {SNOMEDCT}) [Injury or
Poisoning]
```

From this HL7v3 CDA XML can be generated by mapping UMLS semantic types to their corresponding qualifiers in SNOMED.

2. Results

The NCF transducer was evaluated against a corpus of 500 MedLine abstracts that had previously been annotated solely with MetaMap (Table 1).

Table 1. Recall and precision of neoclassical combining forms(B) vs MetaMap(A): whole abstract

Annotation	Match	Only A	Only B	Overlap	Recall	Precision	F1.0lenient
Medical_Term	7682	14953	1358	4466	0.45	0.90	0.60

Candidate terms identified by the neoclassical rules were submitted to MetaMap for concept mapping; comparing only the candidate terms against those validated by MetaMap yielded the results shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Recall and precision of neoclassical combining forms(B) vs MetaMap(A): candidate terms only

Annotation	Match	Only A	Only B	Overlap	Recall	Precision	F1.0lenient
Medical_Term	9597	861	1358	2551	0.93	0.90	0.92

The performance of the entire pipeline has not yet been formally evaluated: we are currently refining the rules against an NLP research data set from i2b2[14].

3. Discussion

The high precision but moderate recall of the NCF rules shows that they are useful but insufficient for identifying clinical terms in unstructured text. Additional rules are required for matching anatomical terms, biochemical compounds and complex phrases.

3.1. Related Work

[15] presented a module for recognising medical terms using neoclassical forms, although they validated candidate terms against a general lexicon (EuroWordNet), rather than a specialist biomedical thesaurus. [10] suggested a methodology for medical term recognition using NCFs, but an implementation was not described.

[13] proposed a similar approach to normalising prepositional terms, although they used simple noun-phrase order inversion. However, our approach seemed to produce more useful results from MetaMap, although this requires more formal evaluation.

[16] developed the open-source Health Information Text Extraction (HITEx) tool using GATE. As with our approach, this combined standard GATE modules for POS tagging and noun-phrase chunking, and a regular expression based term identifier. They used the UMLS Metathesaurus directly, although their tool provided similar concept mapping functionality to MetaMap. Additionally, they used a machine-learning component, currently missing from our approach. It is not clear whether they used neoclassical combining forms to assist in term identification. Also, their rules are written in a compact, undocumented syntax, whereas our rules are written in JAPE, which is well documented, easy to modify and extend.

4. Conclusion

We have developed a rules-based approach for clinical term identification, concept mapping and post-coordination within the GATE framework that integrates with MetaMap. Our approach provides high precision with moderate recall when evaluated against general biomedical texts. However, with rule refinement for specific domains (such as clinical notes and clinical guidelines), recall should improve.

We aim to release the code as an open-source project so that the rules can be shared and enhanced by other researchers working in the field.

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