Multiple hypothesis tracking based extraction of airway trees from CT data
Raghavendra, Selvan; Petersen, Jens; de Bruijne, Marleen

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MUltiple Hypothesis Tracking Based Extraction of Airway Trees from CT Data

Using statistical ranking of template-matched hypotheses

Selvan R., Petersen J., de Bruijne M.

Image Group, Department of Computer Science

Abstract

Segmentation of airway tree from CT scans of lungs has important clinical applications, in relation to the diagnosis of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Here we present a method based on multiple hypothesis tracking (MHT) and template matching, originally devised for vessel segmentation, to extract airway trees. Idealized tubular templates are constructed and ranked using scores assigned based on the image data. Several such regularly spaced hypotheses are used in constructing a hypothesis tree, which is then traversed to obtain improved segmentation results.

Introduction

COPD is a leading cause of mortality worldwide, characterised by:
- Distortion of the lung tissues (emphysema)
- Morphological changes to the airways

Existing methods:
- Airway tree segmentation is a challenging problem
- Most methods try to strike a balance between specificity and sensitivity.
- Room for improvement on both fronts
- Single hypothesis / greedy algorithms
  - Inconsistent decisions
  - Only the best hypothesis is propagated
  - Sensitive to noise
  - High local solutions

MHT-based methods

Idea: Deferr decision at current step to a future step. Meanwhile, maintain all hypotheses.

Multiple hypothesis tracking (MHT)

Philosophy: Delay decisions. Use more data. Benefit from hindsight.
- Widely used in multi-target tracking [5]
- Deferred decision based on more data
- Several hypotheses are maintained
- Search depth controls the size of tree
- Trade-off between optimality, tractability

A tracking perspective to segmentation
- Prediction by regularly spaced guesses
- Image data is used to update the guesses

Figure 1: Coronal, sagittal and axial views from a CT, along with a reference segmentation.

Figure 2: Coronal view of the probability image after classification. Darker regions correspond to high probability, and hence likely airway regions.

Figure 3: Overview of tracking between two steps.

Figure 4: MHT tree, of search depth 2. The decision at T1 is made based on all the data up to T2, tracing back the best global hypothesis depicted in blue.

Figure 5: 3D tubular template of radius r, with center c at x, along the direction 6. Intensity profile (p) at a crosssection is shown on right.

Figure 6: Generation of local hypotheses. 1. Each hypothesis inherits parameters from previous step, uses a predetermined increment in direction and position to progress to the next step.

Figure 7: Illustration of scores and thresholds in org and ranking based MHT methods.

Figure 8: Each step, all hypotheses are considered for clustering. As an example here, two clusters are formed and the best hypothesis within each is propagated as a new branch.

Handling branching
- Spectral clustering is performed
- If two clear clusters are observed, best hypothesis in each is tracked as new branch

Results

Data & Experiments
- Single seed point automatically placed at the origin of trachea; thus fully automatic
- Set of 32 images split into training, test sets
- Danish Lung Cancer Screening Trial data used [2]
- Probability images from KNN classifier
- Centrelines of segmentation results are compared with reference segmentations, to quantify estimation error:

\[
\text{Error distance: } d = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \min(d_i(\hat{c}_i^{op}, \hat{c}_i^{ref}))
\]

\[
E(c_j) = \sum_{i=1}^{n} E(c_j, c_i^{op}) = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \left(\sqrt{d_i^2(c_j, c_i^{op})} + \eta \right)
\]

where \(\eta\) is Euclidean distance

Figure 9: Centrelines of test set results overlaid with reference.

Discussion
- Ranking based MHT method shows an improvement in performance.
- Fully automatic tree extraction method
- It does not outperform region-growing on probability images

Conclusions
- MHT allows for improved tracking decisions, as tracking solutions are not local.
- Method in [1] has been modified to extract airway trees.
- Ranking based scheme is more suitable for extracting airways, where structures of varying dimensions are observed.

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References