

Why the Time Is Ripe for Discourse in Machine Translation

Rico Sennrich

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Machine Translation will not Work [Kay, 1986]

But, **we still have little idea how to translate** into a closely related language like French or German, English **sentences containing such words as "he", "she", "it", "not", "and", and "of"**. Furthermore, such work as has been done on these problems has been studiously ignored by all those currently involved in developing systems.

A History of Discourse in MT (Abridged)

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Anaphora in Rule-based MT

The 1990s have seen an intensification of research efforts in anaphora resolution for MT. This can be seen in the growing number of related projects which have reported promising results (e.g., Wada 1990; Leass & Schwall 1991; Nakaiwa & Ikehara 1992, 1995; Chen 1992; Saggion & Carvalho 1994; Preuss et al. 1994; Nakaiwa et al. 1994, 1995; Mitkov et al. 1995, 1997; Geldbach 1997).

[Mitkov, 1999]

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Discourse in SMT

- **anaphora resolution** [Le Nagard and Koehn, 2010, Hardmeier and Federico, 2010, Hardmeier et al., 2015]
- **lexical consistency** [Carpuat, 2009, Tiedemann, 2010, Gong et al., 2011]
- **discourse connectives** [Meyer et al., 2012]
- **topic adaptation** [Su et al., 2012, Hasler et al., 2014]

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Where Are We Now?

Where Is Machine Translation Now?

Google's Neural Machine Translation System: Bridging the Gap between Human and Machine Translation

Microsoft reaches a historic milestone, using AI to match human performance in translating news from Chinese to English

March 14, 2018 | [Allison Linn](#)

SDL Cracks Russian to English Neural Machine Translation

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...extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence

coreference

In fairness, Miller did not attack the statue itself.

[...]

But he did attack its meaning [...]

HUMAN	MT
Um fair zu bleiben, Miller griff nicht die Statue selbst an. [...] Aber er griff deren Bedeutung an [...]	Fairerweise hat Miller die Statue nicht selbst angegriffen. [...] Aber er griff seine Bedeutung an [...]

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lexical coherence

Weidezaunprojekt ist elementar

Das Fischerbacher Weidezaun-Projekt ist ein Erfolgsprojekt und wird im kommenden Jahr fortgesetzt.

HUMAN	MT
Pasture fence project is fundamental	Electric fence project is basic
The Fischerbach pasture fence project is a successful project and will be continued next year.	The Fischerbacher Weidezaun-Projekt is a success and will be continued in the coming year.

lexical coherence

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HUMAN

Pasture fence project is fundamental

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MT

Electric fence project is basic

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Examples from Top WMT18 Systems

pro-drop

该款机器人使用语音合成、 [...]

曾获得国际消费电子产品展（CES） [...]

HUMAN

This robot uses speech synthesis, [...] with conversational [...] features.

It has won two major CES awards [...]

MT

Using speech synthesis [...] the robot has the functions of chatting conversation [...]

Has won two awards at the International Consumer Electronics Exhibition (CES) [...]

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laudable...

- follows best practices with WMT-style evaluation
- data released for scientific scrutiny (outputs, references, rankings)

Achieving Human Parity

Microsoft reaches a historic milestone, using AI to match human performance in translating news from Chinese to English

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...but warrants further scrutiny

- failure to reject null hypothesis is not evidence of parity

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are we 95% sure that there is a quality difference?

...hm...no.

~~hey everyone, they're the same! I'm 95% sure!~~

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- failure to reject null hypothesis is not evidence of parity
are we 95% sure that there is a quality difference?
...hm...no.
~~hey everyone, they're the same! I'm 95% sure!~~
- alternative hypothesis:
human raters prefer human translations on a **document-level**
- rationale:
 - context helps raters understand text and spot semantic errors
 - discourse errors are invisible in sentence-level evaluation



can we reproduce Microsoft's finding with different evaluation protocol?

	original evaluation	our evaluation
test set	WMT17	WMT17 (native Chinese part)
system	Microsoft COMBO-6	Microsoft COMBO-6
raters	crowd-workers	professional translators
experimental unit	sentence	sentence / document
measurement	direct assessment	pairwise ranking
raters see reference	no	no
raters see source	yes	yes / no
ratings	$\geq 2,520$ per system	≈ 200 per setting

Which Text is Better?

Members of the public who find their cars obstructed by unfamiliar vehicles during their daily journeys can use the "Twitter Move Car" feature to address this distress when the driver of the unfamiliar vehicle cannot be reached.

A citizen whose car is obstructed by vehicle and is unable to contact the owner of the obstructing vehicle can use the "WeChat Move the Car" function to address the issue.

Which Text is Better?

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市民在日常出行中,发现爱车被陌生车辆阻碍了,在联系不上陌生车辆司机的情况下,可以使用“**微信挪车**”功能解决这一困扰。

8月11日起,西安交警微信服务号“西安交警”推出“**微信挪车**”服务。

这项服务推出后,日常生活中,市民如遇陌生车辆在驾驶人不在现场的情况下阻碍自己车辆行驶时,就可通过使用“**微信挪车**”功能解决此类问题。 [...]

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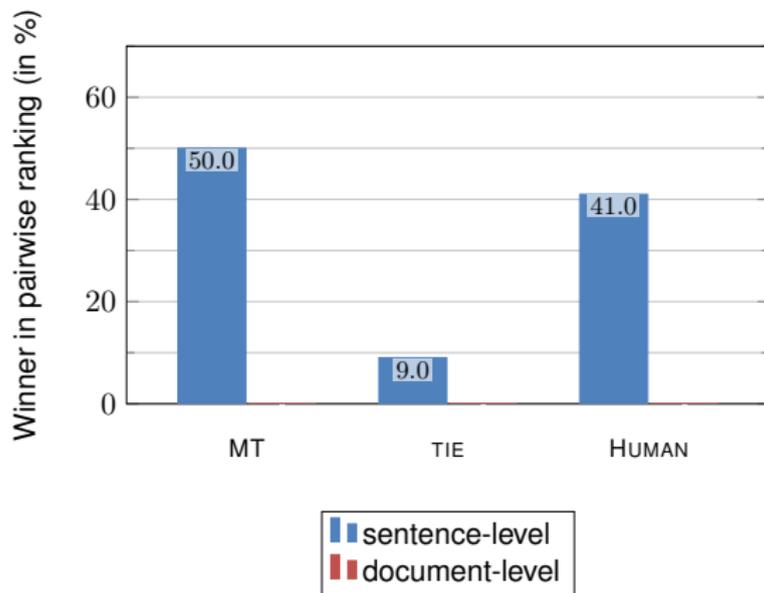
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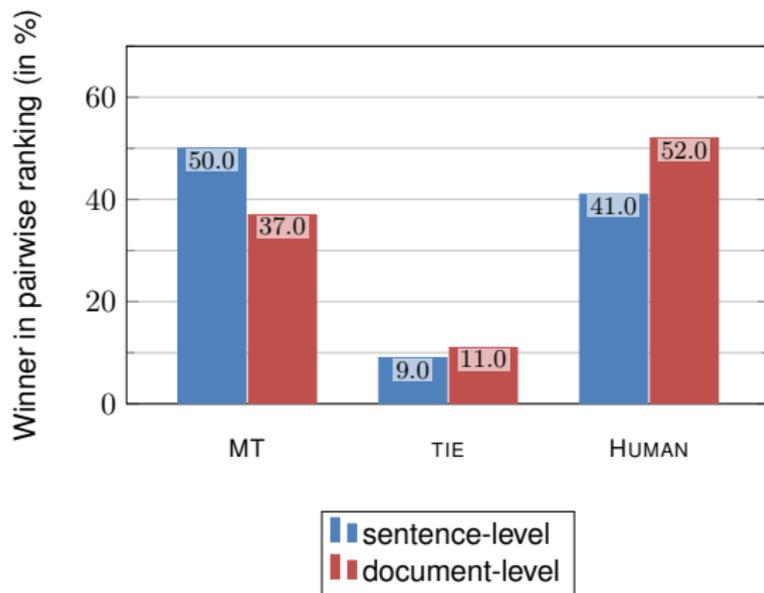
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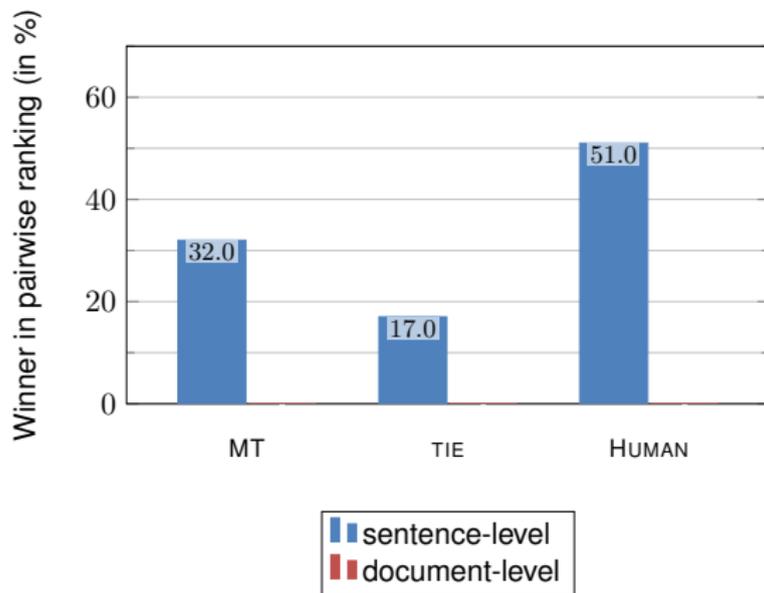
Evaluation Results: Bilingual Assessment



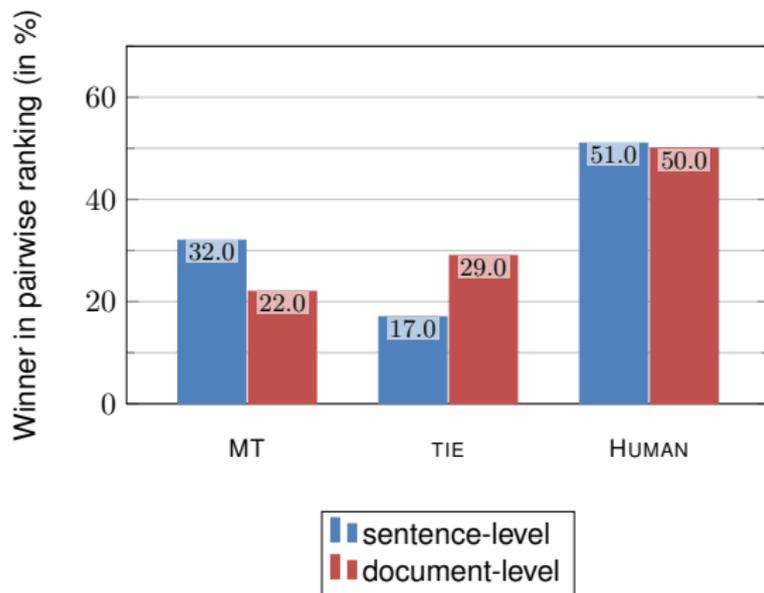
Evaluation Results: Bilingual Assessment



Evaluation Results: Monolingual Assessment



Evaluation Results: Monolingual Assessment



A Case for Document-level Evaluation

- document-level ratings show significant preference for HUMAN
- preference for HUMAN is even stronger in monolingual evaluation

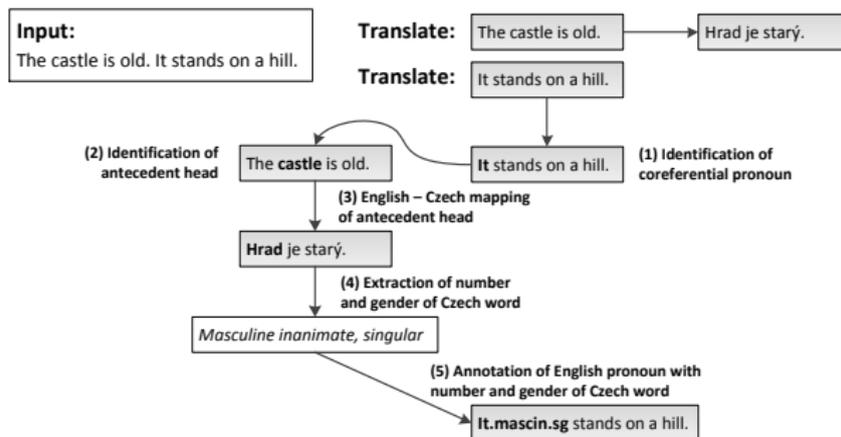
Conclusions

- discourse-level cohesion and coherence is important, but invisible in sentence-level evaluation
- distinguishing MT from human translations becomes harder with increasing quality
→ is it time to move to document-level evaluation in shared tasks?

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New Chances: Context-Aware NMT

SMT era:

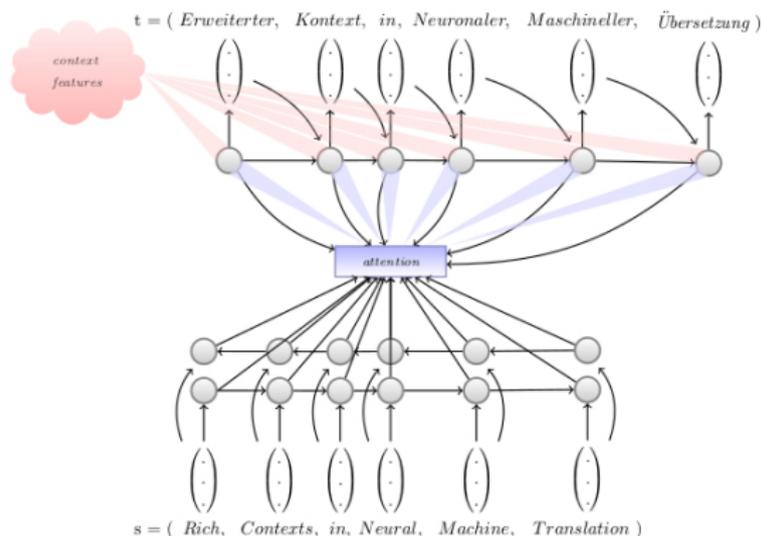


specialized features

[Hardmeier, 2012, Guillou, 2012, Meyer et al., 2012]

New Chances: Context-Aware NMT

NMT era:



contextual sentences as additional input

[Jean et al., 2017, Wang et al., 2017, Tiedemann and Scherrer, 2017, Bawden et al., 2018, Voita et al., 2018, Maruf and Haffari, 2018]

Some Research Questions

- How do we measure progress?
- Which context matters?
- What neural architectures work well?

Evaluating Discourse Phenomena

[Bawden et al., NAACL 2018]



- How do we measure progress?
 - hand-crafted test set of 200 context-dependent translations
- Which context matters?
 - (focus on translations that depend on previous target sentence)
- What neural architectures work well?
 - exploration of multi-encoder and concatenating architectures

setup: train on subset of OpenSubtitles2016 English-French

A Contrastive Test Set: Coreference

Source:

context: Oh, I hate **flies**. Look, there's another one!

sentence: Don't worry, I'll kill **it** for you.

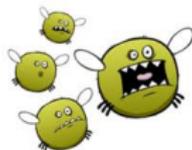
Target:

context: Ô je déteste les mouches.

Regarde, il y en a une autre !

correct: T'inquiète, je **la** tuerai pour toi.

incorrect: T'inquiète, je **le** tuerai pour toi.



A Contrastive Test Set: Coreference

Can the model rank the **correct** sentence above the **incorrect** one?

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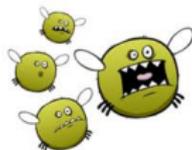
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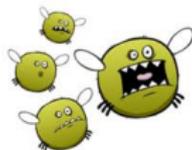
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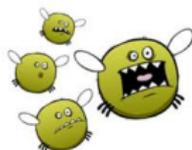
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Balanced examples:
Non-contextual baseline scores
50%

A Contrastive Test Set: Coherence and Cohesion

Source:

context: So what do you say to £50?

current sent.: It's a little **steeper** than I was expecting.

Target:

context: Qu'est-ce que vous en pensez de 50£ ?

correct: C'est un peu plus **cher** que ce que je pensais.

incorrect: C'est un peu plus **raide** que ce que je pensais.

Source:

context: How are your feet holding up?

current sent.: It's a little **steeper** than I was expecting.

Target:

context: Comment vont tes pieds ?

correct: C'est un peu plus **raide** que ce que je pensais.

incorrect: C'est un peu plus **cher** que ce que je pensais.

A Contrastive Test Set: Coherence and Cohesion

Source:

context: What's **crazy** about me?

current sent.: Is this **crazy**?

Target:

context: Qu'est-ce qu'il y a de **dingue** chez moi ?

correct: Est-ce que ça c'est **dingue** ?

incorrect: Est-ce que ça c'est fou ?

Source:

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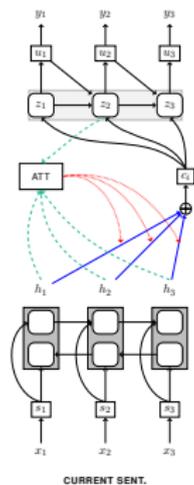
Target:

context: Qu'est-ce qu'il y a de **fou** chez moi ?

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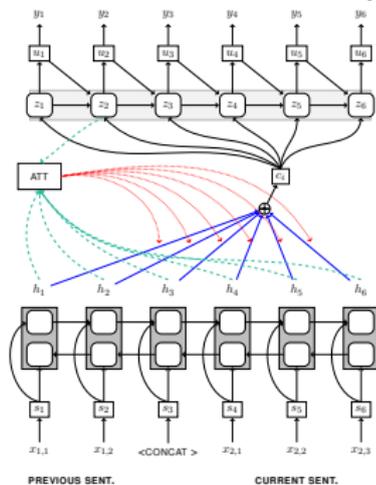
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Baseline



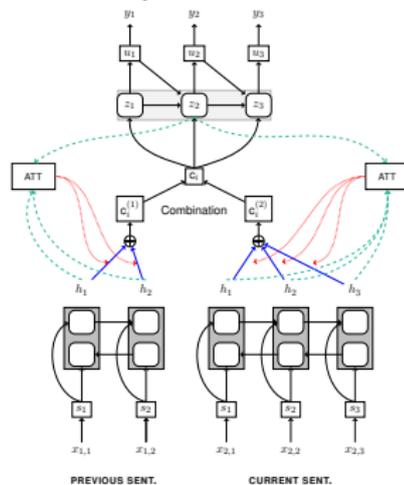
[Bahdanau et al., 2015]

2TO2 - concatenated input



[Tiedemann and Scherrer, 2017]

Multiple encoders

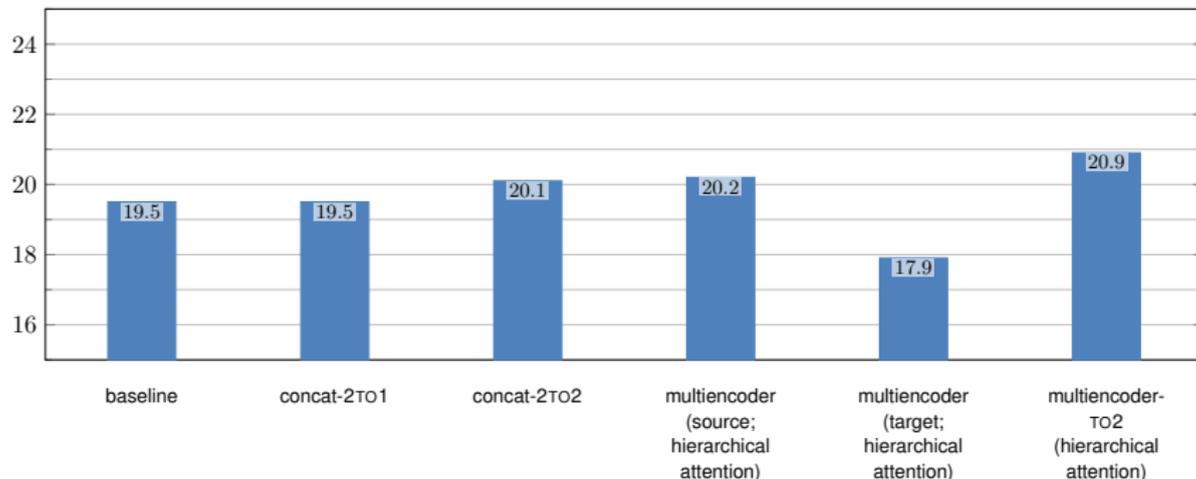


[Wang et al., 2017]

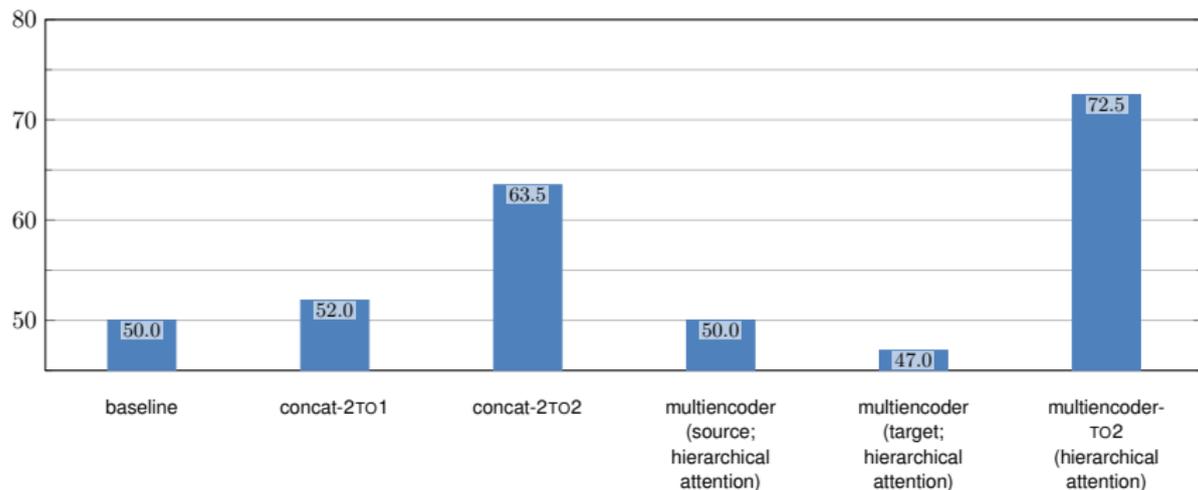
architecture exploration:

- condition on previous source, target, or both?
- use multiple encoders or just concatenate sentences?
- how to combine multiple context vectors in multi-encoder setups?
 - concatenate
 - gating mechanism
 - hierarchical attention

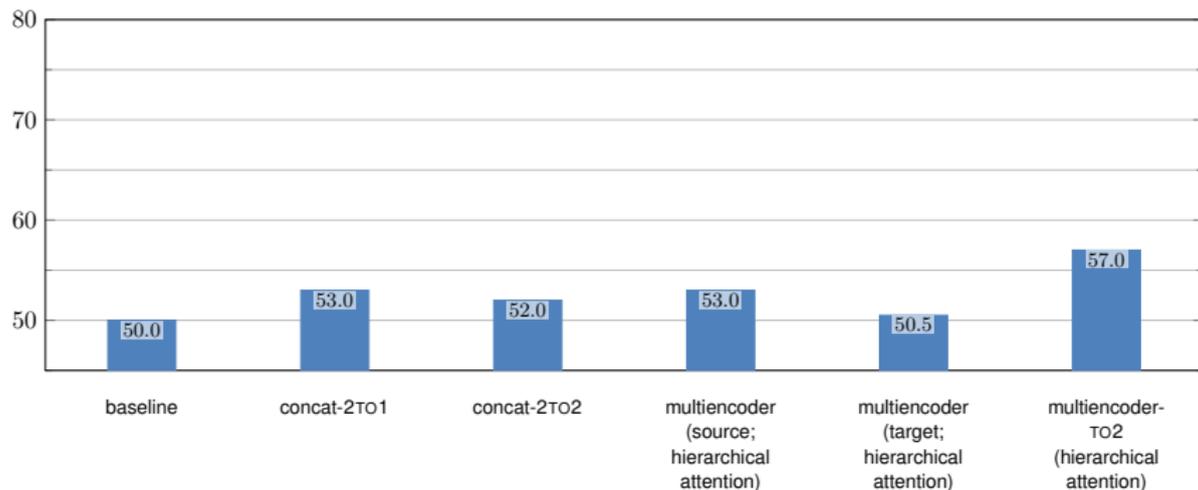
Results: BLEU



Results: Contrastive Test Set: Coreference



Results: Contrastive Test Set: Coherence/Cohesion



- simple context-aware NMT systems learn discourse phenomena
- architectures matter
- learning coreference easier than lexical coherence and word sense disambiguation (?)
(for hand-crafted, difficult cases)

- future work: more comprehensive test set of discourse phenomena



set-up

- simple architecture: concatenation of previous sentence
- analysis of attention patterns
- recurrent connections make analysis difficult

Analyzing Use of Context: RNN

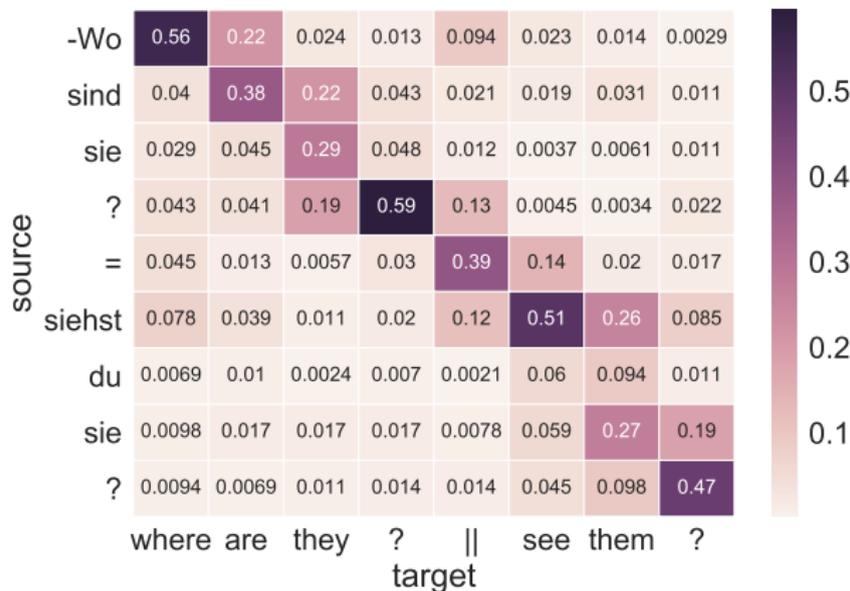
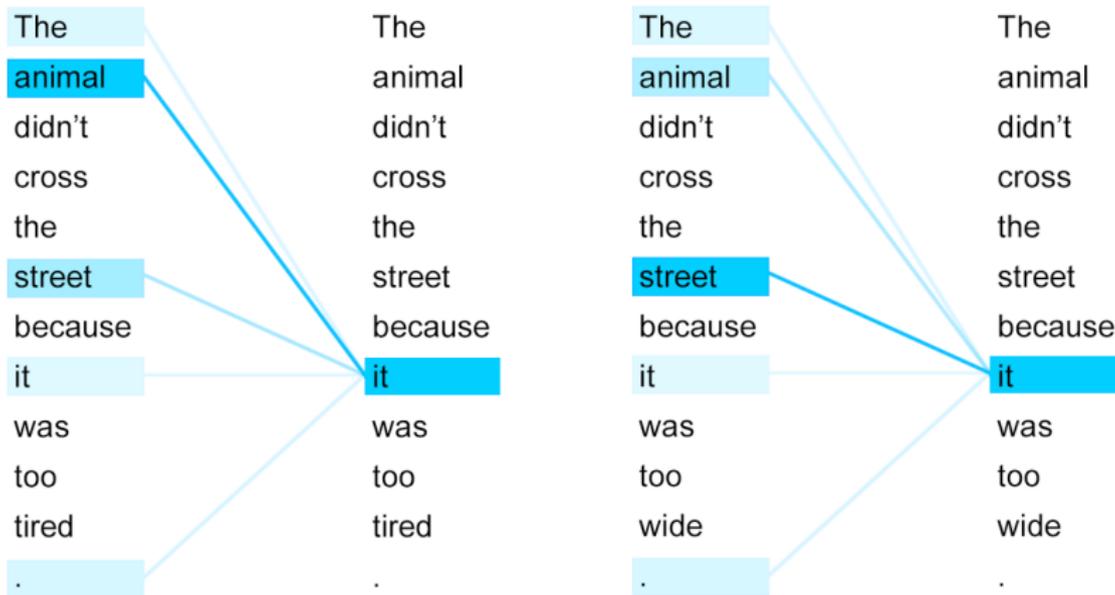


Figure 6: Attention patterns with referential pronouns in extended context.

Analyzing Use of Context: Transformer



[Uszkoreit, 2017]

Analyzing Use of Context

[Voita, Serdyukov, Sennrich, Titov, ACL 2018]



set-up

- Transformer architecture with clear interface to context
- analysis of attention patterns

Context-Aware Transformer

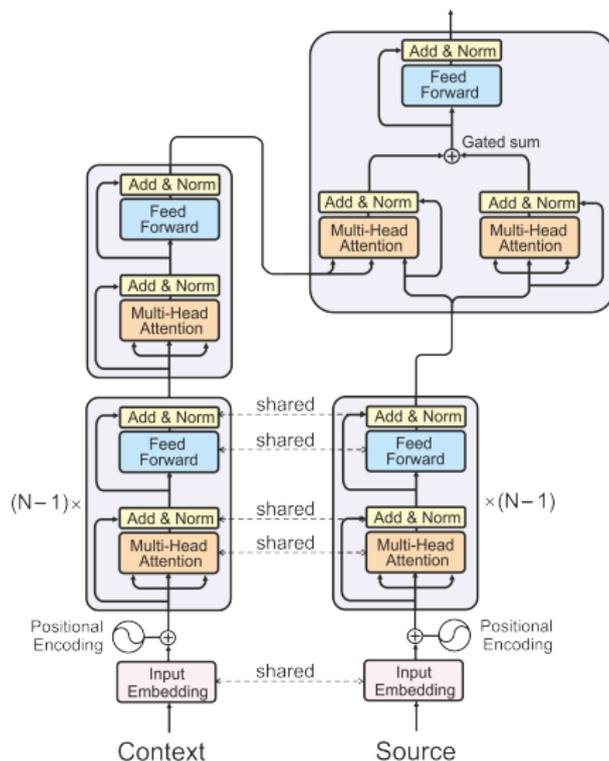
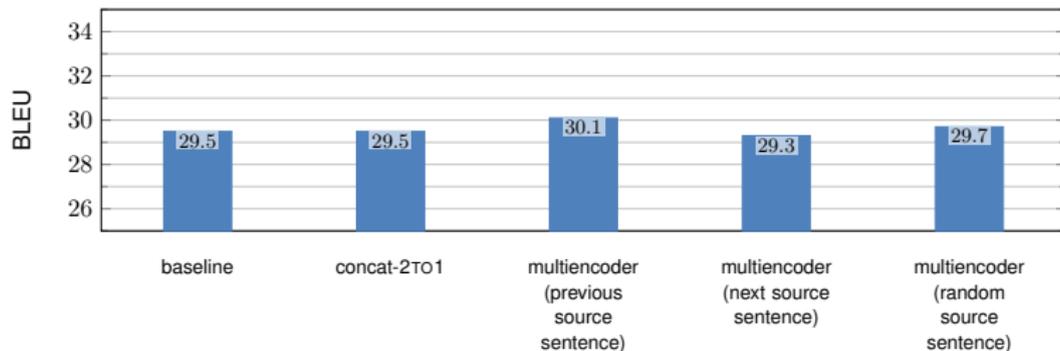


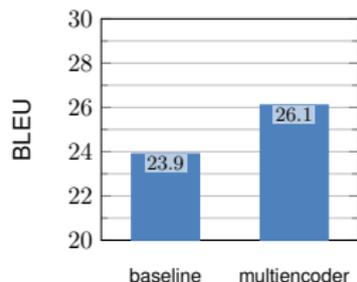
Figure 1: Encoder of the discourse-aware model

Context-Aware Transformer: Evaluation

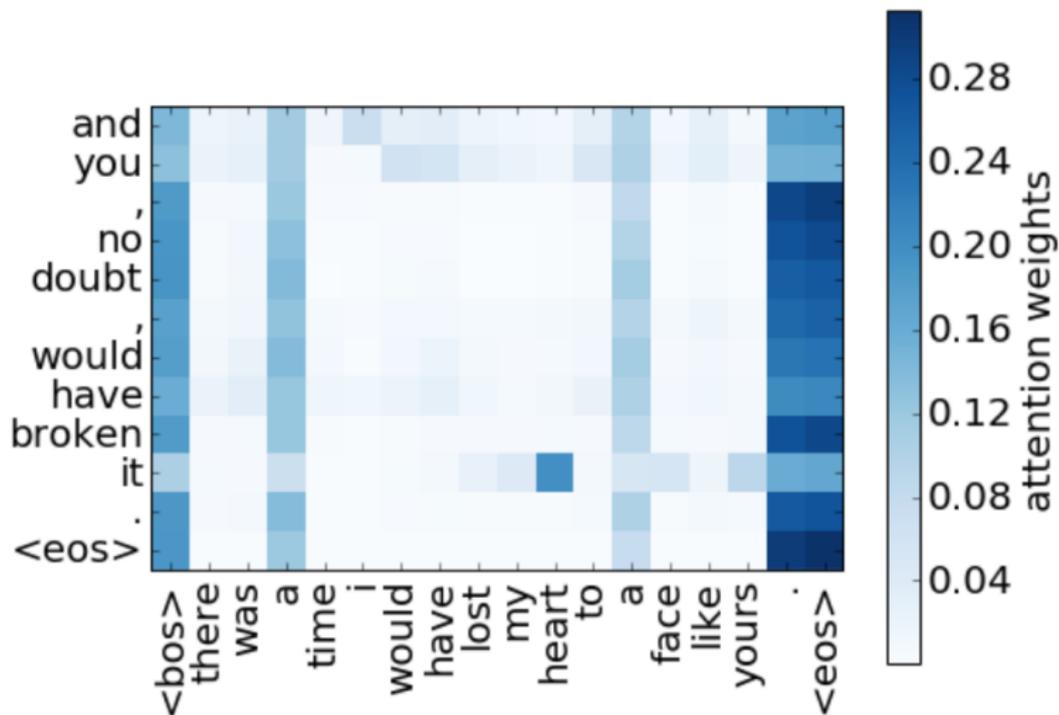
- OpenSubtitles2018 English→Russian
- scores on random test set:



larger improvements on focused test set ('it' with nominal antecedent):



Context-Aware Transformer Learns Anaphora Resolution



Context-Aware Transformer Learns Anaphora Resolution

	agreement (in %)
coreNLP	77
attention	72
last noun	54

Agreement with human assessment for coreference resolution of anaphoric *it*.
Examples with ≥ 1 noun in context sentence.

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How Do We Measure Progress?

- BLEU still works (somewhat)
- targeted evaluation:
 - contrastive pairs
 - pronoun translation task
- document-level human evaluation

potential for new discourse-level measures

Which Context Matters?

most work so far focuses on previous sentence, but:

- relevant information can be further in past
- relevant information can be in future context

source	I went there with my friend . She was amazed to see that it had multiple floors.
reference	Sono andato la' con la mia amica . E' rimasta meraviglia nel vedere che aveva piu' piani
baseline	Arrivai li con il mio amico . Rimaneva meravigliato di vedere che aveva una cosa piu incredibile.
contextual (prev+next)	Sono andato con la mia amica . Fu sorpresa nel vedere che aveva piu piani.

[Agrawal et al., 2018]

What Neural Architectures Work Well?

- baseline architectures ok(-ish) with concatenated context
- simple multi-encoder architectures effective

big challenge: efficiently/effectively scaling up to large contexts

Conclusions

- we cannot "solve" machine translation on sentence-level
- let's put effort into:
 - document-level training data
 - document-level evaluation
- simple context-aware architectures learn discourse phenomena...
...but still work to be done on better architectures for large contexts

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Thank you for your attention

Resources

- contrastive test sets for discourse in MT evaluation:
<https://github.com/rbawden/discourse-mt-test-sets>

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