

CDCAT: a Multi-Language Cross-Document Entity and Event Coreference Annotation Tool

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Abstract: A tool for the manual annotation of cross-document entity and event coreferences that helps annotators to label mention coreference relations in text is essential for the annotation of coreference corpora. To the best of our knowledge, CROss-document Main Events and entities Recognition (CROMER) is the only open-source manual annotation tool available for cross-document entity and event coreferences. However, CROMER lacks multi-language support and extensibility. Moreover, to label cross-document mention coreference relations, CROMER requires the support of another intra-document coreference annotation tool known as Content Annotation Tool, which is now unavailable. To address these problems, we introduce cross-document coreference annotation tool (CDCAT), a new multi-language open-source manual annotation tool for cross-document entity and event coreference, which can handle different input/output formats, preprocessing functions, languages, and annotation systems. Using this new tool, annotators can label a reference relation with only two mouse clicks. Best practice analyses reveal that annotators can reach an annotation speed of 0.025 coreference relations per second on a corpus with a coreference density of 0.076 coreference relations per word. As the first multi-language open-source cross-document entity and event coreference annotation tool, CDCAT can theoretically achieve higher annotation efficiency than CROMER.

Key words: event coreference; entity coreference; manual annotation tool; natural language processing

1 Introduction

Coreference resolution refers to the clustering of expressions that refer to the same entity or event in a text, whether within a single document or across a document collection [1]. Coreference resolution, as a means for extracting the deep semantics of natural language, is an essential natural language processing (NLP) task and one of the most downstream NLP tasks. Coreference resolution is widely used in question answering system [2], natural language generation [3], and measure of academic articles similarity [4].

When identifying the coreference relations between mentions in texts, researchers mainly focus on two kinds of mentions: entities and events. An entity (or named entity) can be the name of a person, place, or institution, or a proper noun, to name a few [5]. An event is a specific occurrence involving participants

[6]. Although different definitions of entity and event have been established by a range of open tasks, organizations, and conferences, such as the ACE [6] [7], TAC [8], and TimeML [9], there is no generally accepted definition for the term entity or event.

A mention usually refers to an object in the real world. In this paper, we refer to this object as an “*instance*,” following the denotation used in Event Coreference Bank (ECB)+ corpus [10]. If two mentions refer to the same instance, they are co-referenced. Tasks related to coreference relations in texts have attracted widespread attention since the Sixth Message Understanding Conference in 1995, and many coreference corpora have since become available.

However, in most of those corpora which are usually in English, the labeled relations are either entity or event coreferenced, and are merely intra-documents. Due to the high cost of manual annotation, only a few of these

corpora are cross-documents that have both entity and event coreference relations labeled.

The most widely used cross-document entity and event coreference corpus is the ECB series (i.e., ECB [11], EECB [12], and ECB+ [10]), in which the texts are all in English, and only events of interest are labeled. The lack of corpora in other languages limits related research in this field, resulting in the need for a manual annotation tool for creating corpora in different languages or a particular domain.

To the best of our knowledge, the CROSS-document Main Events and entities Recognition tool (CROMER) * is the only open-source manual annotation tool for cross-document entity and event coreference [13]. However, CROMER supports only English and Italian corpora, and requires another intra-document coreference annotation tool known as content annotation tool (CAT)† to label cross-document mention coreferences, which is currently unavailable [14]. Furthermore, the annotation procedure requires that annotators read the corpus twice, which reduces efficiency.

To address the above challenges and problems, we present a new cross-document entity and event coreference manual annotation tool, CDCAT (cross-document coreference annotation tool). CDCAT is open-source and can handle different input/output formats, preprocessing functions, languages, and annotation systems. It is also efficient-annotators can label a reference relation with just two clicks and best practice tests have revealed that annotators can reach an annotation speed of 0.025 coreference relations per second on a corpus with a coreference density of 0.076 coreference relations per word. As the first multi-language open-source cross-document entity and event coreference annotation tool, CDCAT also achieves higher efficiency than CROMER.

2 Related Work

Many manual annotation tools [14, 15] have been developed for use in intra-document coreference annotation. However, to the best of our knowledge, CROMER is the only open-source manual annotation tool for cross-document entity and event coreference [13].

CROMER is an excellent software program that

*<https://github.com/hltfbk/CROMER/>

†<http://dh.fbk.eu/resources/>

cat-content-annotation-tool

supports multi-user operation and links between mentions and external knowledge graphs. The well-known corpus, ECB+, is annotated by CROMER. However, there are also a few drawbacks associated with CROMER:

- CROMER is designed only for English and Italian and has no specific interface to support other natural languages. Moreover, uploading corpora in other natural languages sometimes introduces errors.
- As a document-level annotation tool, CROMER links a set of documents to instances that are mentioned at least once in each of those documents. The only way for CROMER to annotate mention-level coreferences is by the use of CAT, i.e., a free-for-research user-friendly intra-document mention coreference annotation tool. Annotators must label the intra-document mention coreferences using CAT and then feed the CAT output into CROMER. However, CAT has recently become unavailable, which means no open-source cross-document mention coreference annotation tool is currently available.
- The use of two different software tools (CROMER and CAT) rather than one integrated tool leads to some problems. In the top-down annotation strategy, annotators create all instances of interest, which results in the loss of other information. In the down-top annotation strategy, annotators must read the corpora twice: a preliminary reading to create all the instances and label the intra-document mention coreferences, and a careful rereading for labeling cross-document coreference relations. This process limits the level of annotation efficiency.

The above drawbacks motivated our development of a new and more effective multi-language cross-document coreference annotation tool .

3 CDCAT

As shown in Fig. 1, CDCAT consists of a platform and four kinds of plugins: input plugins, preprocessing plugins, a CDCAT graphical user interface (GUI), and output plugins, with the platform managing all the labeled data, and the plugins not saving any labeled data. This platformCplugin structure makes it easy

to use third-party software. As such, CDCAT can support different types of input, preprocess, and output. After the installation and configuration of CDCAT, the general workflow consists of four steps: a) input, b) preprocessing, c) manual annotation, and d) output.

3.1 Platform

The primary function of the platform is to manage labeled corpus data. As shown in Fig. 2, the platform has three parts: text, nodes, and instances.

- The text is the plain text of the corpora.
- A node, which consists of a parent node and a number of child nodes, represents a range of characters. There is a default root node, and each character in the text corresponds to a node. More nodes can be added to construct a more complex corpus tree. A node also has configurable labels and two fixed labels: the label “*path*,” which is the path from the root node to the node itself, and the label “*coref.instance*”, which links the node to an instance. A configurable label is a label that annotators can choose to add or not. The label “*mention.type*” is a typical configurable label for nodes. Typically, researchers make a distinction between entity and event mentions. However, it can be difficult to determine whether some mentions refer to an entity or an event. For the sake of flexibility and scalability, CDCAT has no hard rules for distinguishing between entities and events. Accordingly, annotators can assign different values to the label “*mention.type*” of entities or events.
- A mention usually refers to an instance in the real world. An instance has some configurable labels and three fixed labels: the label “*id*,” the label “*desc*” (readable description of the instance), and the label “*mentionList*” (a list of nodes that refer to this instance).

There is a two-way reference link between a node and an instance. A node has the label “*coref.instance*” to represent a link from the node to the corresponding instance. Correspondingly, there must be a link to this node in the label “*mentionList*” of the instance. Two nodes are considered to co-refer if they refer to the same instance.

Most annotation systems are supported by the ability to edit configurable labels. Annotators can add a new

label to nodes or instances and configure the optional values of the label. The example in Fig. 2 illustrates the basic idea of the nodeCinstance system. Annotators must design a specific annotation system prior to making annotations, i.e., they must decide the kind of mentions that should be labeled and the corresponding labels of nodes or instances required. The config file of CDCAT must then be edited to determine what kind of labels to give the nodes and instances.

3.2 Input

The input of the CDCAT is a corpus, which can either be labeled or not. As CDCAT supports many input plugins, the corpus can have different formats. The corresponding input plugin transforms the input corpus into a corpus tree and passes it to the platform. Table 1 lists all the supported input formats and the corresponding annotation formats.

Table 1 Supported input formats and the formats to be supported.

Input Format	Supported or Not
string/text (plain text)	Supported
string/text (NLTK tree string)	Supported
string/text (CoNLL)	To be Supported
string/text (Stanford)	To be Supported
file (pickle)	Supported
file (plain text)	Supported
folder	To be Supported

3.3 Preprocessing

CDCAT is designed for manual annotation. However, some optional auto annotation models are provided as preprocessing plugins to generate potential nodes and reduce the labor required by annotators. Using these plugins, annotators can simply select the generated nodes and label them in the manual annotation step; otherwise, annotators must first create a node for each target mention.

It is highly recommended that tokenization and syntactic analysis be performed by calling the corresponding plugins which can create a node for every token and syntactic constituent.

However, it is impossible to support every possible kind of processing plugin because corpora in different natural languages require different processing plugins. For example, the English and Chinese tokenization

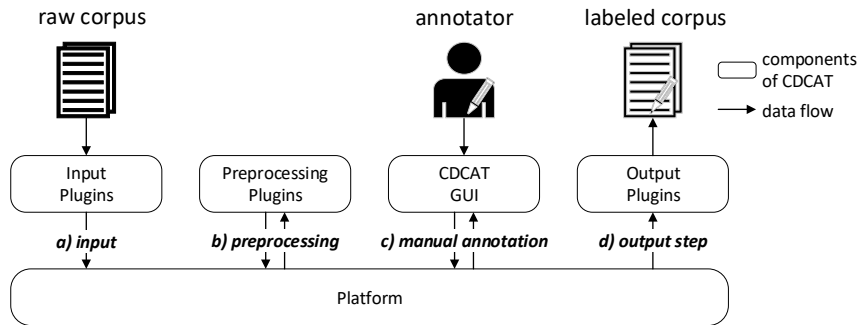


Fig. 1 Components and work flow of CDCAT.

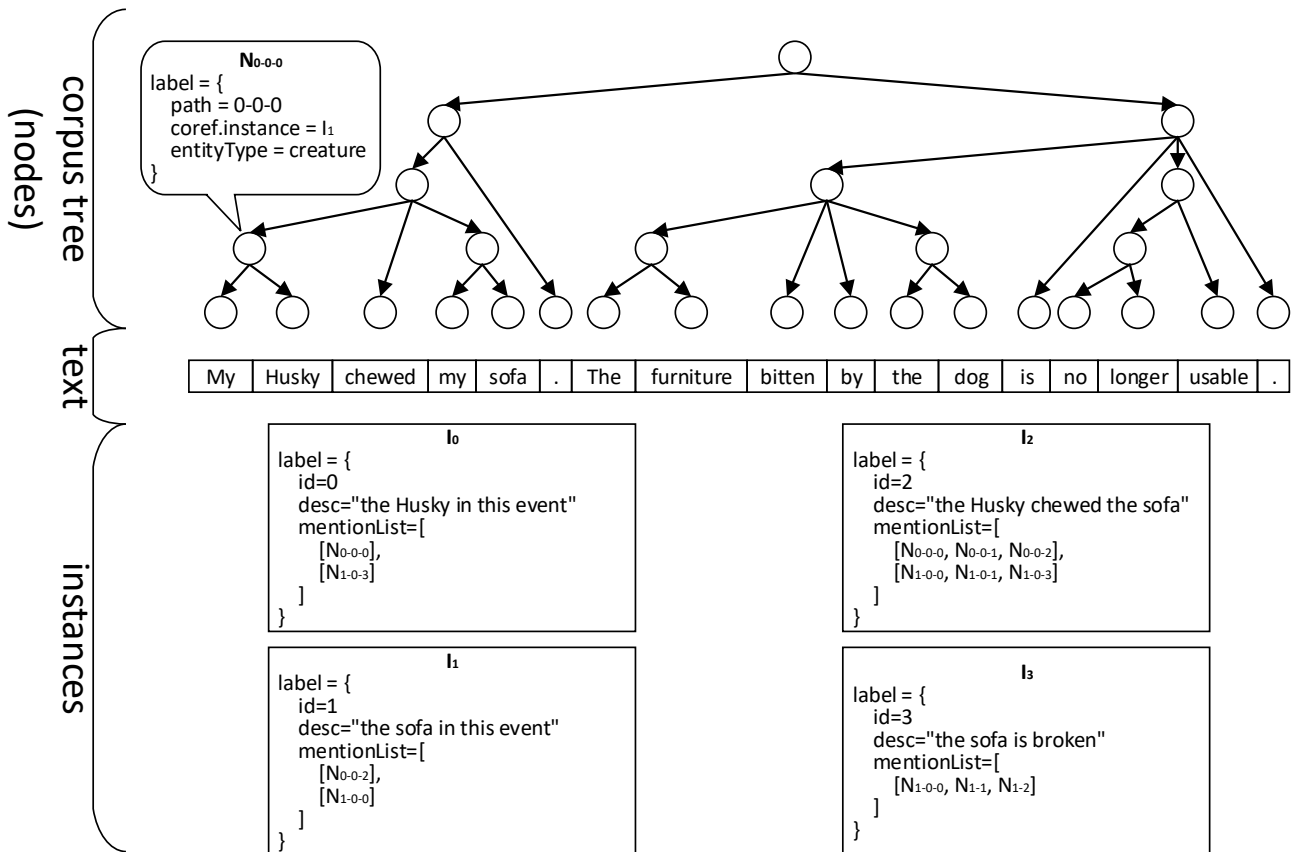


Fig. 2 Structure of annotation data.

strategies are different. As such, developers must select a third-party auto annotation model for particular annotation tasks in the target language and convert it into a preprocessing plugin. The conversion process is discussed in section 4.2.

3.4 Manual annotation

To perform manual annotation, the annotator first calls the GUI function and inputs the corpus tree as a parameter, after which then CDCAT GUI will appear.

There are five windows in the CDCAT GUI, as shown in Fig. 3:

- (1) Content Window: displays the content.
- (2) Center Window: shows the text of the current article.
- (3) Node Information Window: describes the node information of the current mention.
- (4) Instance Window: lists all the instances in order



Fig. 3 Five windows in the CDCAT GUI for selecting a mention and creating a node.

of use history, i.e., an instance is moved to the top of the Instance Window after being clicked. This window is not editable. Annotators cannot group instances or change their order. The instance order is dynamically updated after clicks.

(5) Instance Information Window: provides information for the current instance.

Loading the whole corpus at once consumes much memory and time. Therefore, a corpus is labeled based on the article unit. Any node with a label “*article: True*” is recognized as an article. All the parent nodes of every article node form a subtree, and this subtree comprises the content of the corpus, as shown in the Content Window.

To present the text of an article, the annotator clicks on the article in the Center Window. Then, the annotators can begin the annotation process, which typically has four steps:

(1) Select a mention: Select a range of characters in the Center Window. The selected characters turn red, as shown in Fig. 3[‡], which indicates that these characters are considered as “current mention.”

(2) Create and edit the node: If there is already a node for the current mention, the node information

[‡]The Sample text in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 is from http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2019-03/12/c_1210079099.htm.

appears immediately in the Node Information Window. Otherwise, the annotators must click the “add an annotation node for this mention” button in the Node Information Window to create a node for the current mention. The node information will then be listed in the Node Information Window. Annotators can view and edit annotation information in the Node Information Window, as shown in Fig. 4. The special node label “*coref.instance*” links to an instance. Two mentions that link to the same instance are considered to be co-referred. If there is no corresponding instance, annotators must create a new instance.

(3) Create and edit an instance: Click the “+” button in the Instance Window to create an instance. A new empty button to represent the new instance is then added to the Instance Window, and its information will be listed in the Instance Information Window, as shown in Fig. 4. Annotators can view and edit the annotation information of the current instance in the Instance Information Window.

(4) Coreference annotation: To enter edit mode, double click the button after the label “*coref.Instance*” in the Node Information Window. Search for the corresponding instance in the Instance Window; click on the instance to link the current node to this instance, and then exit the edit mode. There can be more than one mention

linked to the same instance, and these mentions are co-referred.

In the above steps, five clicks (double click is counted as one) are needed to label a coreference relation. These include a click for the selection of a mention, a click for the creation of a node, a click for the creation of an instance, a double click to enter edit mode of the coreference label, and a click to select the corresponding instance. However, many strategies can be implemented to speed up the annotation process. One strategy is the use of preprocessing plugins to automatically create nodes. Another strategy is to use shortcuts, whereby after step 1, annotators can click the “→” button in the Instance Window. This operation creates a new node and instance based on a current mention, and links this node to this instance. When using this strategy, only two clicks are required.

3.5 Output

The labeled corpus is saved on the platform and supports output formats like pickle files.

4 Results and Analysis

CDCAT, which is implemented in Python 3.6, is an open-source software available from GitHub[§]. The CDCAT GUI is Python web software based on the Flask framework, the details of which are provided on GitHub.

4.1 Annotation Effectiveness

In CROMER, as noted above, annotators who follow the downCtop strategy must skim the corpus and create instances, and then reread the corpus carefully to link the nodes to the corresponding instances, which limits annotation efficiency.

In CDCAT, annotators must read corpora just once, during which they can create a node and an instance based on a mention, and link the node to the instance with just two clicks. This annotation strategy is more efficient than that of CROMER. Table 2 shows some common operations and the ideal average annotation speed.

We note that some factors may interrupt skilled annotators during actual tasks and cause the annotation speed to be much slower than ideal. To evaluate the actual annotation speed, as a test corpus, we used a Chinese coreference corpus containing news from

Table 2 Common operations, the number of mouse clicks required, and the ideal average annotation speed.

Operation	Click Count/ Average Time
Create a node based on a mention	Two click/ 3.60s (depend on the length of the target mention)
Create an empty instance	One click/ 1.36s
Create a node and instance based on mention, and label the reference relation	Two clicks/ 3.55s
Link a node to an instance	Two clicks/ 2.56s (ignore the time of searching the target instance in Instance Window)
Label a coreference relation from scratch	Six clicks/ 9.02s (ignore the time of searching the target instance in Instance Window)

xinhuanet.com regarding Boeing 737 MAX 8 planes crashes. In the annotation of the test corpus, a number of factors slowed the annotation speed, which are listed in Table 3. Corresponding optimizations led to the development of a new version of CDCAT (denoted as CDCAT1 and CDCAT2, respectively).

As shown in Table 3, the editable Instance Window is the main difference between CDCAT1 and CDCAT2. Annotators who spend time organizing instances in the Instance Window can save time when searching for instances. Conversely, less time spent organizing instances may result in long instance search times. Annotators must balance these two factors to determine how they will organize instances and how long this will take.

The annotation speeds of three experiments are compared. In Experiment 1, the annotator using CDCAT1 spent no time organizing instances. In Experiment 2, the annotator using CDCAT2 organized instances mainly by events. In Experiment 3, the annotator, who also used CDCAT2, organized instances mainly by mention types. Examples of instance organization in the three experiments are shown in Figs. 6, 7, and 8, respectively.

The instances in the figures are in Chinese because the test corpus is in Chinese, but they have been partially translated to enable comprehension by English readers. To measure the annotation speed, we used the average number of coreference relations that one annotator can label in one second. Figure 9 shows the average annotation speed for the n-th article. Figure

[§]<https://github.com/Zhuo-Ren/cdcat>



Fig. 4 Editing current mention or current instance.

10 shows the average annotation speed of the first n articles, in which it is obvious that for the first few articles, the annotation speed of Experiment 1 is higher because the annotator did not spend time organizing instances and could readily find target instances among the small number of instances. However, as the number of words increases, the number of instances correspondingly increases, and the annotator must spend more time searching. In addition, the annotator in Experiment 2 did not achieve a higher speed than that in Experiment 1 because organizing instances by event takes more time than can be saved when searching for instances. The best practice strategy allows for more flexible organization of instances. The annotator who followed this strategy in Experiment 3 organized instances by location, time, institution, and any other type they observed, and thereby attained the highest annotation speed with an increased number of instances.

In conclusion, using CDCAT2 and the best practice strategy (Experiment 3), annotators reached an annotation speed of 0.025 coreference relations per second on a corpus with a coreference density of 0.076 coreference relations per word. An average speed when using CDCAT2 is 0.023 coreference relations per second.

4.2 Function Extension

The data structure of nodes is implemented based on the `nltk.tree.ParentedTree`, a class implemented in the Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) package. As such,

theoretically, the nodes should work well with NLTK functions.

Developers can extend the functionality of CDCAT by developing new preprocessing plugins based on related third-party models. In a preprocessing plugin, the corpus tree in the platform is converted into the input format of the third-party model, and the output of the third-party model is converted into a corpus tree. Developers need not know the internals of CDCAT. They can simply use the interfaces of node and instance to implement the format conversion. Explanations and examples about the interfaces are given by provided in a docstring.

4.3 Language Extension

A corpus in any natural language can be supported by CDCAT as long as the corpus is Universal Character Set/Unicode Transformation Format 8 (UTF-8) encoded. However, different natural languages require different preprocessing plugins. For example, Chinese and English corpora have different tokenization strategies. Developers must convert a corresponding third-party model into a new plugin on the platform prior to starting the annotation process.

The default CDCAT user interface is in English. All the button text is configured based on a configuration file. To translate the user interface into another natural language, the button text listed in the configuration file must simply be translated.

Table 3 Major factors that influence the annotation speed and corresponding solutions.

factors that related to the annotation speed	corresponding solutions
<p>The layout of the GUI. A larger scale of the Center Window is not good for the improvement of annotation effectiveness. On the contrary, the larger the scale, the longer it takes to move your mouse from mention to buttons.</p> <p>In annotation step 4, annotators should search for the target instance in the Instance Window. This is the most time-consuming operation when there are more and more instances.</p> <p>Rename an instance with a more explicit description to make it easier for searching.</p>	<p>The new version, CDCAT2, is designed with a narrow Center Window and an editable Instance Window. Annotators can group instances and change the order of them as they wish to make it easier for annotators to find the target instance in annotation step 4.</p>
<p>Annotators can not decide whether a mention should be labeled. It would be a waste of time if annotators label the mention and no more co-referred mention appears in the following text; if annotators ignore the mention and a co-referred mention appears in the following text, annotators have to go back and label the first mention.</p> <p>Misoperation and the corresponding rollback operation.</p>	<p>There is no optimization because those factors are about annotators, not the annotation tool. Accordingly, we try to equate those factors when comparing the annotation speed of two different annotation tools. Annotators are told which mention is co-referred with another and asked to annotate twice to get familiar with the tools.</p>
<p>The coreference density of the test corpus. A highly skilled annotator with a perfect annotation tool can not get a high annotation speed if there is only a few coreference relations in the test corpus.</p>	<p>There is no optimization because those factors are about the corpus, not the annotation tool. Accordingly, the coreference density of the test corpus is analyzed, as shown in Fig. 5.</p>

4.4 Annotation System Extension

There are a number of default labels for nodes and instances, but other types of labels can be added to nodes and instances. By editing a config file, annotators can choose the labels that are shown in the CDCAT

user interface and the optional values that these labels will have. For example, in ECB+, mentions are divided into event and entity categories, which can be divided further into 31 small classes. If an annotator labels a corpus following the annotation system of ECB+, the label “*mention.type*” must be added to the nodes and all 31 small classes set as the optional values of this label in the config file.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

This paper introduced CDCAT, the first multi-language open-source cross-document entity and event coreference annotation tool. CDCAT can handle a range of IO formats, preprocessing functions, languages, and annotation systems. As no similar tool is available, our comparison with previous results was restricted to the workflow level. Annotators using CDCAT achieved higher efficiency than those using CROMER at the workflow level, and CDCAT was used in an annotation task on a test corpus. During the annotation of this corpus, a number of factors were identified as limiting the efficiency of CDCAT. We then developed a corresponding optimized version, CDCAT2. Using CDCAT2 and the best practice strategy, annotators reached an annotation speed of 0.025 coreference relations per second on a corpus with a coreference density of 0.076 coreference relations per word.

Possible improvements involving the use of hotkeys will be studied in future work. In addition, the labeling of instance relations will be supported by the next version of CDCAT.

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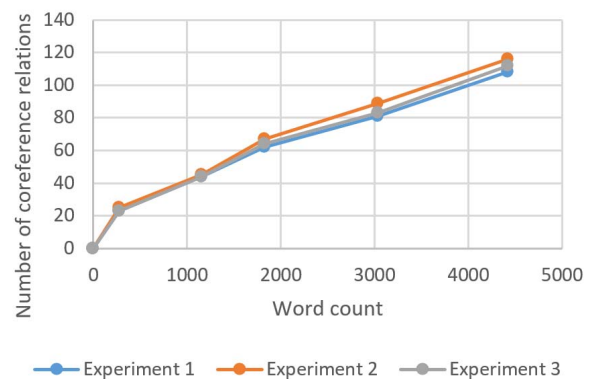


Fig. 5 Each word in the test corpus includes an average of 0.076 coreference relations.

2005	NYT	Ethiopian: airplane	Ethiopian: lead to		
Ethiopian	Ethiopian Air	Boeing	Ethiopian: crash	ban	
Lion: airplane	Lion: crash				
u.s. National Transportation Safety Board					
Lion: the whole event	Ethiopian: 157 people				
Ethiopian: dead	14 th	Apr	2017	2018	29th Mar
11 Mar 2019	10 Mar 2019	Indonesia			
trouble light of MCAS	WSJ	Ethiopian: take off			
Lion: take off	Lion: dead	US	Lion Air		
Ethiopian: the whole event	埃航不久	发出求救信号			
亚的斯亚贝巴市外50公里处					
印度尼西亚国家安全运输委员会					
失事客机黑匣子	去年				
去年10月	737MAX8	737MAX两次事故	法新社		
联邦航空管理局	机动特性增强系统	可选配置			
一套额外安全功能包	迎角	迎角传感器	仰俯		
西南航空	哥伦比亚广播公司	国会	参议院		
, 国会参议院商务委员会					
"商业内幕"网站					
丹尼斯·米伦伯格	复飞	美国航空公司	115趟航班		
取消	8日10日	道格·帕克	10章	美联社	10年

Fig. 6 Organization of instances in Experiment 1.

2005	2013	2017	2018	Oct. 2018	29th Oct. 2018	2019		
this summer	Mar. 2019	10th	11th	12th	13th	29th Apr.		
last week	14th	Apr.	end of April	May.	15th	21th	23th	Jun.
beginning of June	5th Aug.	19th Aug.						
GName ++								
AFP	AP	Xinhua News Agency	WSJ					
Columbia Broadcasting System	CNN	Business Insider						
《消费者报导》	《纽约时报》	比尔·麦吉						
两次事故 埃航事故 狮航事故								
Ethiopia	Ethiopian Airlines	Tewolde GebreMariam						
Indonesia	Lion Airlines	National Transportation Safety Committee						
US	Federal Aviation Administration	迈克尔·韦尔塔	埃尔韦尔					
Department of Transportation	Ray LaHood	obama	Trump					
得克萨斯州	沃思堡	华盛顿	南卡罗来纳	西南航空	美国航空公司			
道格·帕克	国会	senate	国会参议院商务委员会					
House of Representatives	美国国家运输安全委员会	詹姆斯·霍尔						
美国众议院运输和基础设施委员会	彼得·德法齐奥							
Boeing	Dennis A. Muilenburg	波音南卡罗来纳工厂						
737Max8 two airplane track same take off 不寻常的爬升和俯冲 客机机会掉头向下 飞行模拟机软件 失事客机黑匣子 失速 机动特性增强系统 "机动特性增强系统"(MCAS)故障显示灯 失误启动 可选配置 迎角传感器 迎角 额外安全功能包 机头俯仰数据								

Fig. 8 Organization of instances in Experiment 3.

Ethiopian Crash ++			
Ethiopian Crash	737M8	Ethiopian Air	
Us Federal Aviation Administration	evaluation of MCAS	outsource	
Boeing			
2019.3.10	airplane	6 minutes after taking off	crash crash site
2019.3.10	157 people	dead	
2019.3.10	u.s. National Transportation Safety Board	announce	dispatch 4 staff people
2019.3.11	Indonesia's national transport safety committee	announce	support help
2019.3.11	Boeing	improve	737M8 control software
2019.3.11	埃航客机黑匣子	未	找到
2019.3.11	11日宣停飞的运营商	停飞	737M8
2019.3.11	Boeing	股票	下跌
2019.3.12	Boeing	充满信心	
2019.3.12	迈克尔·韦尔塔	两架失事客机	相似 彼得·德法齐奥 运动轨迹 不寻常的爬升和俯冲 737MAX两次事故
2019.3.12	美国	拒绝	停飞
2019.3.13	Boeing	支持	停飞
2019.3.13	Us Federal Aviation Administration	要求	737M8 停飞

Fig. 7 Organization of instances in Experiment 2.

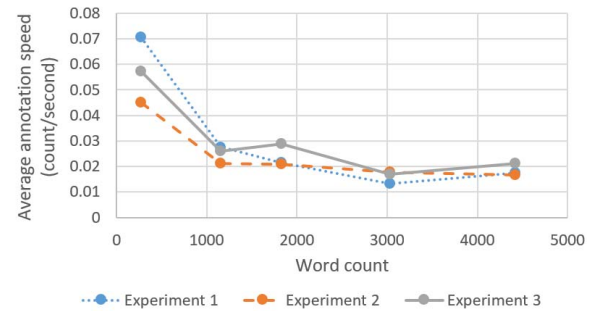


Fig. 9 Average annotation speeds for the n-th article.

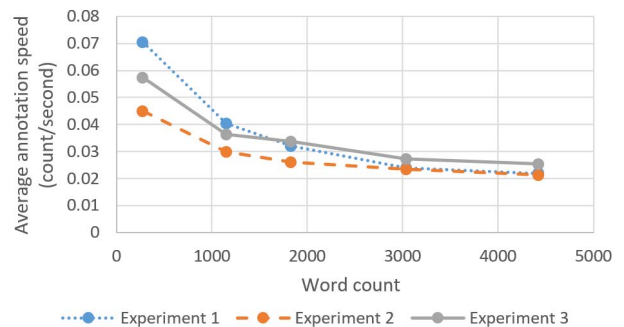


Fig. 10 Average annotation speeds for the first n articles.