Multi-Model System for Effective Subtitling Compression

Carol-Luca Gasan and Vasile Păis

Research Institute for Artificial Intelligence "Mihai Drăgănescu", Romanian Academy Bucharest, Romania

Abstract

This paper presents RACAI's system used for the shared task of "Subtitling track: Subtitle Compression" (the English to Spanish language direction), organized as part of "the 21st edition of The International Conference on Spoken Language Translation (IWSLT 2024)". The proposed system consists of multiple models whose outputs are then ensembled using an algorithm, which has the purpose of maximizing the similarity of the initial and resulting text. We present the introduced datasets and the models' training strategy, along with the reported results on the proposed test set.

1 Introduction

Subtitles play a vital role in ensuring accessibility and comprehension of audiovisual (AV) content for viewers with diverse needs, including those with hearing impairments or language barriers. However, traditional subtitling methods often generate text exceeding recommended reading speed constraints, hindering comprehension and viewer engagement. This problem becomes particularly pronounced for audiences with slower reading speeds or limited language proficiency.

In the context of the 21st edition of The International Conference on Spoken Language Translation (IWSLT 2024), the Subtitle Compression task, part of the Subtitling track, required participants to propose systems that rephrase subtitles that are non-compliant with the reading speed constraint without limitations on the training data conditions. This paper describes the possibility of using large language models (LLMs) to achieve this while trying to benefit from the initial content in the source language. Sometimes, sentences have formats that make them hard to compress, especially when a translation step has been made. The most fundamental example of such inconvenience is regarding idioms. They might not have perfect equivalents in

the target language, and thus, their compression becomes even more challenging to process. Problems of this kind can be partially solved by initially compressing the sentence in the source language and then translating it. Our contribution is twofold: a) we introduce a new method that is able to combine the predictions of multiple models; b) we explore different parameters for the proposed algorithm and present the results on the shared task dataset.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section [2](#page-0-0) presents related work, Section [3](#page-2-0) describes the method proposed, including dataset description (in Section [3.3\)](#page-2-1), model training (in Section [3.4\)](#page-3-0) and ensemble process (in Section [3.5\)](#page-4-0); results are given in Section [4](#page-4-1) and we conclude in Section [5.](#page-6-0)

2 Related work

In this section, we explore the various methodologies and research efforts that have contributed to the development of compression tasks. Although the compression task is inherently monolingual, we consider not only the works focused on text summarization but also those addressing automatic subtitling, machine translation (MT), and automatic speech recognition (ASR). This is because these domains often employ similar techniques and face comparable challenges in reducing and transforming textual data while maintaining its essential information and coherence.

2.1 Automatic subtitling

Recent advancements in speech translation (ST) have focused on developing systems that can translate spoken language directly into another language, bypassing the need for separate automatic speech recognition and machine translation (MT) steps. This approach, known as end-to-end ST, has shown promising results. [Papi et al.](#page-6-1) [\(2023a\)](#page-6-1) build on this progress by exploring the use of direct architectures for both simultaneous translation (SimulST) and

automatic subtitling tasks. Their work contributes to the growing body of research on efficient and effective methods for real-time speech translation applications. [Bahar et al.](#page-6-2) [\(2023\)](#page-6-2) tackle the same task, by proposing En-Ru and En-Pt production models, which support formality control via prefix tokens.

2.2 Text summarization models

Sentence compression has been extensively explored using various transformer-based architectures. The T5 model [\(Raffel et al.,](#page-7-0) [2023\)](#page-7-0) employs a text-to-text transformer architecture, leveraging its encoder-decoder structure to identify and eliminate redundant information through a process of denoising and reconstruction. Specifically, T5 uses a unified framework that converts all NLP tasks into a text-to-text format, allowing it to adapt to sentence compression tasks through task-specific prompting and fine-tuning.

BART [\(Lewis et al.,](#page-6-3) [2020\)](#page-6-3) utilizes a novel denoising autoencoder approach, where the input sentence is corrupted through token masking and deletion, and the model is trained to reconstruct the original sentence. During pre-training, BART learns to predict the original tokens from their corrupted versions, developing a robust understanding of sentence structure and semantics. This pre-training objective enables the model to develop a strong ability to recognize and remove redundant information.

The Llama2 model [\(Touvron et al.,](#page-7-1) [2023\)](#page-7-1) relies on a combination of masked language modelling and denoising objectives to learn a robust representation of language. Specifically, it uses a multi-task learning framework that jointly optimizes masked language modelling, sentiment analysis, and nextsentence prediction tasks. This multi-task learning approach enables Llama2 to develop a comprehensive understanding of language syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

2.3 Automatic speech recognition

Automatic speech recognition (ASR) has witnessed significant advancements with the emergence of transformer-based architectures. The Whisper model [\(Radford et al.,](#page-7-2) [2023\)](#page-7-2) employs a conditional waveform-to-text model that leverages a combination of self-supervised learning and supervised finetuning to achieve state-of-the-art performance on various ASR benchmarks. It uses a multi-task learning framework that jointly optimizes masked acoustic modelling, phoneme recognition, and sentence transcription tasks, enabling it to learn robust representations of spoken language that can generalize across different accents, languages, and recording conditions.

2.4 Translation models

Machine translation has seen significant advancements with the development of large-scale transformer-based models. NLLB (No Language Left Behind) [\(Team et al.,](#page-7-3) [2022\)](#page-7-3) is a family of translation models that aim to bridge the gap between high-resource and low-resource languages. NLLB uses a multilingual masked language modelling objective to pre-train a single model on a massive dataset of 50 languages, enabling it to learn shared representations across languages and achieve state-of-the-art performance on various translation benchmarks. NLLB employs a novel "language-agnostic" approach that treats all languages equally, without relying on languagespecific adapters or fine-tuning, making it particularly effective for low-resource languages.

2.5 Summarization Datasets

The development of effective text summarization models relies heavily on the availability of highquality, linguistically diverse datasets. In this regard, the Google Sentence Compression [\(Filippova](#page-6-4) [and Altun,](#page-6-4) [2013\)](#page-6-4) dataset is a prominent resource, comprising approximately 200,000 sentence pairs extracted from news articles. Each pair consists of an original sentence and its corresponding compressed version, with an average compression ratio of 35%. Notably, this dataset is primarily composed of English sentences, with a focus on formal, written language.

TaPaCo [\(Scherrer,](#page-7-4) [2020\)](#page-7-4) is a freely available paraphrase corpus that offers a unique resource for natural language processing (NLP) research. Extracted from the Tatoeba database, a crowdsourced platform primarily designed for language learners, TaPaCo provides a vast collection of paraphrases in 73 languages.

The PAWS-X (PAWS eXtended) [\(Yang et al.,](#page-7-5) [2019\)](#page-7-5) dataset takes a multilingual approach to text summarization, featuring a diverse range of texts from the web in four languages: English, French, German, and Spanish. With over 1 million pairs of original texts and their corresponding summaries, PAWS-X provides a comprehensive benchmark for evaluating cross-lingual summarization performance. The dataset's structure is noteworthy, with each instance comprising a source text, a target summary, and corresponding metadata such as language labels and genre information.

3 Method

3.1 Overview

Our proposed method analyzes both the original text in English and the translated text in Spanish in order to have an alternative approach in case the latter is not being compressed within the established limits. Therefore, we had to obtain the initial subtitles in the language of the video through an automatic speech recognition model. With that in mind, we can compress and translate the English text in this exact order such that we obtain a new set of Spanish sentences to be fitted within the time intervals presented in the given SRT file. We define a sentence based on the presence of strong punctuation; a sentence may span over multiple time intervals in the SRT file. Having a series of alternatives for each sentence that has to be processed, we run an algorithm to determine the assignment of the compressed sentences that maximizes the similarity between the reference and the prediction texts. A general representation of the method is presented in Figure [1.](#page-3-1)

3.2 Performance identifiers and metrics

We focused on multiple metrics to define the performance of our models and to determine a relation of order between sentences with the same meaning.

ROUGE (Recall-Oriented Understudy for Gisting Evaluation) [\(Lin,](#page-6-5) [2004\)](#page-6-5) is a set of metrics used to evaluate the quality of summarization models. It measures the overlap between the generated summary and the reference summary, focusing on recall (i.e., how much of the reference summary is covered by the generated summary). There are several variants of ROUGE, including:

a) ROUGE-1: measures the overlap of unigrams (single words) between the generated and reference summaries;

b) ROUGE-2: measures the overlap of bigrams (pairs of adjacent words) between the generated and reference summaries;

c) ROUGE-L: measures the longest common subsequence between the generated and reference summaries.

ROUGE scores range from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating better summarization quality.

BLEU (Bilingual Evaluation Understudy) [\(Pap](#page-6-6)[ineni et al.,](#page-6-6) [2002\)](#page-6-6) is a metric used to evaluate the quality of machine translation models, but it can also be applied to summarization tasks. It measures the similarity between the generated summary and the reference summary based on n-gram overlap. BLEU calculates the precision of n-grams (sequences of n items) in the generated summary compared to the reference summary. BLEU scores range from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating better summarization quality.

MPNet [\(Quyen and Kim,](#page-7-6) [2023\)](#page-7-6) is a type of neural network architecture that uses word embeddings to represent words as vectors in a high-dimensional space. In this context, MPNet is used to calculate the distance between words or phrases in the generated summary and the reference summary. The distance calculation can be done using various metrics, such as cosine similarity (in this case), Euclidean distance, or Manhattan distance. The resulting distance score can be used to evaluate the semantic similarity between the generated and reference summaries.

BLEURT (BERT-based Learned Utility for Ranking Translation Outputs) [\(Sellam et al.,](#page-7-7) [2020\)](#page-7-7) is a metric that evaluates the quality of summarization models using a BERT-based approach. It learns to predict a utility score for each generated summary based on its similarity to the reference summary. BLEURT analyzes different factors, including:

a) Fluency: measures the grammatical correctness and coherence of the generated summary;

b) Relevance: measures the degree to which the generated summary covers the main points and ideas of the original text;

c) Informativeness: measures the amount of new information presented in the generated summary;

d) Coherence: measures the degree to which the generated summary is well-organized and easy to follow.

The BLEURT score is a weighted sum of these individual metrics, providing a comprehensive evaluation of the generated summary's quality.

3.3 Dataset Choice and Creation

As part of the gathered Spanish corpora, PAWS-X and TaPaCo were used as they are, while Google's Sentence Compression dataset was filtered to eliminate pairs of sentences with very low compression rate. In addition to these resources, we created a new one (Sent-Comp-ES) by translating Google's

Figure 1: Scheme of the overall transformation.

Dataset	Language	Dimension
Sent. Comp.	English	200k
Sent-Comp-Es	Spanish	53k
TaPaCo	Spanish	85k
PAWS-X (filtered)	Spanish	9k

Table 1: Datasets used for extractive summarization.

Sentence Compression dataset (referred as Sent. Comp. later in the paper) for extractive summarization (i.e., the task of selecting a subset of words from a sentence to form a summary). In the transformation process, multiple rules have been established such that the quality of the data is preserved, with the downside of obtaining less data than the initial resource. The conducted steps are in exact order:

a) Eliminate the English pairs with an associated compression rate smaller than 10% for sentences with at least 10 characters:

b) Eliminate the English pairs with an associated ROUGE score smaller than 0.8;

c) Translate the remaining sentences to Spanish using Facebook's NLLB model;

d) Eliminate the Spanish pairs not respecting the extractive summarization pattern (i.e., eliminate those pairs for which the compressed sentence is not a subsequence of words from the initial sentence);

e) Check again for the associated compression

rate and ROUGE score while keeping the same constraints as aforementioned;

In the end, from 200k pairs of English sentences, we formed 53k pairs of Spanish sentences that can be used for extractive summarization training. Furthermore, all processed data can be as well used for abstractive summarization.

3.4 Model Choice and Training

Since this paper focuses on an ensemble selection system, we had to define the models we want to use and train. Regarding the Spanish text models, we finetuned the base checkpoints of T5 and Bart, while for Llama2, we chose the 13B parameters checkpoint. Through the previous models, we propose to tackle both extractive and abstractive summarization. On the other hand, for the audio processing, since it can be assumed that for generating the given Spanish text, a variant of the original English text is already composed, we decided to go with a pre-trained large checkpoint of the Whisper v2 model. Wee feed the model pre-segmented audio by taking timestamps of the original Spanish SRT, without activating the internal VAD. For the English text summarization, a pre-trained large checkpoint of T5 was used.

T5 and Bart were trained on a joint dataset containing TaPaCo, PAWS-X and Sent-Comp-ES, totaling at 147k pairs of sentences, with a simple prompt, namely *"comprimir: "* (en: *"compress: "*).

Model	Learning Rate	Epoch	Avg. Compression	ROUGE	BLEU	MPNET
T ₅ -base	1e-4	4	48%	0.60	0.23	0.81
T ₅ -base	$2e-5$	4	47%	0.61	0.20	0.74
T ₅ -base	$1e-4$	15	46%	0.61	0.24	0.81
Bart-base	$2e-5$	4	46%	0.60	0.24	0.82
Bart-base	$2e-5$	15	47%	0.62	0.25	0.84
Llama2-13B	1e-4		18%	0.57	0.23	0.80
$Llama2-13B$	$1e-4$	4	33%	0.60	0.24	0.85

Table 2: Metrics obtained on the gathered corpora while training for Spanish sentence compression.

We also finetuned Llama2 on all the data available (200k pairs) using QLoRA [\(Dettmers et al.,](#page-6-7) [2023\)](#page-6-7), with a more complex prompt trying to settle the context and the general task:

TAREA: Parafrasee la frase de entrada para hacerla lo más corta posible en términos de número de caracteres, conservando el significado inicial y teniendo una gramática y puntuación correctas. Si no es posible o no está seguro, mantenga la frase sin cambios. ### SENTENCIA SIN COMPRIMIR: <UNCOMP> ### SENTENCIA COMPRIMIDA: <COMP>

(Note: the <UNCOMP> and <COMP> tokens are replacing the uncompressed and compressed sentences respectively.)

Table [2](#page-4-2) contains the results acquired during training. According to the reported performance and considering Llama2's inference time, we decided to exclude it from the prediction system. Another important reason is that Llama2 was trained for abstractive summarization, which makes the reconstruction of the SRT file from sentences really difficult.

3.5 Algorithm Development

In order to present the proposed algorithm, let us standardize the problem to be solved. We have N sentences distributed among M time intervals, where a sentence might be covering multiple intervals. Each sentence can be written as a set of word sequences, representing its splits among the time intervals it overlaps. Using the summarization models, we obtain for each given sentence a set of at most K other sentences split in the same manner (possible because the extractive summarization preserves the order of the words), along with some metrics defining the resemblance to the uncompressed text. Considering known the time

intervals' lengths, we can determine if a split is compliant by taking into account the dimension of the newly formed word sequence. We define the following notion as well: the score of an assignment is the weighted sum of similarity scores where the weights are length-based. The score is between 0 and 1, a score of one being obtained for the initial sentences. The length of a sentence is defined as the number of characters.

A baseline approach is to go through all the possible combinations of assigned sentences and choose the one with a maximal score that is also compliant. The complexity of this algorithm is in terms of $O((M + N) * K^N)$. Our proposed algorithm achieves a complexity of $O((M+N) * K * \alpha)$, where α is the maximum length of a split. The main idea of the algorithm is to denote critical points as the time intervals that contain words from more than one sentence. Then, we just have to analyze the best obtainable score until a certain checkpoint, while consuming a certain number of characters from the maximum allowed within that time interval. This is achievable using dynamic programming and it reduces the complexity to the one previously mentioned. The pseudo code for obtaining the maximum score can be seen in Figure [2.](#page-5-0) The optimal solution can be easily reconstructed by maintaining a backward array during the update of the *dp* array, which allows backtracking from the final state to the initial state to retrieve the sequence of selected sentences.

4 Results

The dev set proposed within the shared task consists of 7 SRT files, part of the EuroParl Interviews (EPI) en-es test set, whereas the test set concerns AV docs from the ITV entertainment series, all generated by the non-participating [\(Papi et al.,](#page-6-8) [2023b\)](#page-6-8). The reported results of our submission can be seen in Table [3,](#page-5-1) where ChrF is a metric introduced by

	1: Input:				
	2: capacity - array of size $M+1$ (stores time interval capacities)				
	3: interval - array of pairs (stores start and end times for each sentence)				
	4: quality - matrix of size $(N + 1) \times (K + 1)$ (stores similarity scores)				
	5: quantity - 3D matrix of size $(N + 1) \times (K + 1) \times ($ interval[i].right – interval[i].left) (stores word				
	sequence lengths)				
	6: dp - matrix of size $(N + 1) \times$ (maximum capacity across intervals) (stores maximum score achievable)				
	7: Initialize dp				
	8: $dp[0][0] = 0$ \triangleright base case, no sentences processed				
	9: for $i = 1$ to N do				
10:	$dp[i] \leftarrow array$ filled with $-\infty$ \triangleright initialize scores for current sentence				
	$11:$ end for				
	12: Loop through sentences				
	13: for $i=1$ to N do				
14:	if interval ^[i] . left \neq interval ^[i] - 1]. right then				
15:	Get maximum score from previous sentence \triangleright no addition possible				
16:	for $j = 1$ to K do \triangleright loop through candidate sentences for current				
17:	Update dp with score from previous $+$ current sentence similarity				
18:	end for				
19:	else if interval ^[i] . left \langle interval ^[i] . right then				
20:	for $j = 1$ to K do \triangleright loop through candidate sentences for current				
21:	for last = 0 to capacity[i.left] - quantity[i][j][0] do \triangleright check if candidate fits				
22:	Update dp with score from previous $+$ current sentence similarity				
23:	end for				
24:	end for				
25:	else				
26:	for curr = capacity[i.left] down to 0 do \triangleright loop through capacities				
27:	for $j = 1$ to K do \triangleright loop through candidate sentences for current				
28:	if candidate fits current capacity then				
29:	Update dp with score from previous $+$ current sentence similarity				
30:	end if				
31:	end for				
32:	end for				
33:	end if				
	34: end for				
	35: Find maximum score across all capacities for the last sentence				
	36: max_score $\leftarrow -\infty$				
	37: for $i = 0$ to capacity $[M]$ do				
38:	$\max_{score} \leftarrow \max(\max_{score}, \text{dp}[N][i])$				
	39: end for				
	40: Output: max_score				

Figure 2: Pseudo code for obtaining the maximum score.

Table 3: Reported results on the proposed test set.

[\(Popovic´,](#page-6-9) [2015\)](#page-6-9) , and TER (Translation Edit Rate) represents the minimum number of edits needed to change a hypothesis so that it exactly matches one of the references, normalized by the average length of the references. In addition, the methods' acronyms in Table [3](#page-5-1) respect the following notations:

a) ref: reference subtitles used to compute BLEU/ChrF/TER/BLEURT scores;

b) ori test-set: original subtitles to be compressed;

c) ori test-set-1line: original subtitles where those segmented in more lines are unsegmented in 1-line;

d) baseline: hard cut at max number of charsq compatible with subtitle duration;

e) RACAI: subtitles generated with the system described in this paper.

5 Conclusion

This paper presents RACAI's system for the "Subtitling track: Subtitle Compression" shared task, focusing on compressing subtitles from English to Spanish while maintaining readability within reading speed constraints. Our system leverages multiple large language models (LLMs) to generate alternative compressed sentences for the original text. An ensemble selection algorithm then chooses the most suitable compressed options based on similarity metrics. This approach allows us to benefit from the strengths of various models and address potential shortcomings of individual models.

Future work could explore the incorporation of additional metrics or quality estimation techniques within the ensemble selection algorithm. Additionally, investigating the effectiveness of the system on different language pairs or domains could be valuable, such as including the Romanian language. We previously had an interest for processing Romanian language speech using Whisper [\(Gasan and](#page-6-10) Păiș, [2023\)](#page-6-10). Overall, this work contributes to the development of automatic subtitling systems that ensure accessibility and comprehension for diverse audiences.

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