A New Model of Speech Motor Control based on Task Dynamics and State Feedback

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Abstract

We present a new model of speech motor control (TD-SFC) based on articulatory goals that explicitly incorporates acoustico-kinesthetic sensory feedback using a framework for state-based control. We do this by combining two existing, complementary models of speech motor control – the Task Dynamics model [1] and the State Feedback Control model of speech [2]. We demonstrate the effectiveness of the combined model by simulating a simple formant perturbation study, and show that the model qualitatively reproduces the behavior of online compensation for unexpected perturbations reported in human subjects.

Index Terms: speech motor control, auditory feedback, state feedback control, feedback perturbation, speech production

1. Introduction

One of the outstanding issues in speech research is how the central nervous system controls the rapid, complex articulatory movements produced while speaking. A number of models have been proposed to account for this extraordinarily facile motor behavior, including (among others) the DIVA model [3], Task Dynamics [1], and State Feedback Control [2].

DIVA combines articulatory and acoustic speech synthesis with a neurologically-specified production model. DIVA, however, is only a trajectory-based kinematic model that does not account for dynamics of the articulatory process. In contrast, TADA is a dynamic model of the vocal articulatory process. However, TADA does not include a model of how auditory feedback is used in speech. State Feedback control (SFC) is an observer-based model that postulates that sensory feedback is used to update estimates of the current states of the vocal tract during a state correction process. However, SFC model does not clearly specify the dynamic process underlying vocal articulation.

We propose a novel speech production model, the Task Dynamics-State Feedback Control (TD-SFC) model, combining a neuro-biologically inspired short-latency feedback control scheme (derived from State Feedback Control) coupled with a well-developed method for deriving utterance specific control laws and generating the resulting articulatory and acoustic outcomes (derived from Task Dynamics). We first describe the model, then show its utility in qualitatively modeling human behavior in response to unexpected acoustic perturbations.

2. Modeling Background

Both Task Dynamics and State Feedback control are elaborations of a basic type of control system widely used in modeling a variety of motor control domains: feedback control. In an ideal feedback control system (Figure 1), a controller that generates a motor command \( u_t \) based on a control law \( U(\cdot) \) and the current state of the system \( x_t \). This motor command is passed to the physical plant (for speech, the vocal tract), which generates a change in the state of the system based on the motor command, the current state of the system, and the internal dynamics of the plant itself. This new state \( x_{t+1} \) is used by the controller to generate the next motor command \( u_{t+1} \).

Such an ideal feedback controller has two principal problems. First, the human central nervous system (CNS) cannot know the current state of the production system—the only information available to the CNS is sensory information. Sensory information is problematic as it 1) reflects the consequences (auditory, somatosensory, etc) of the state of the production system rather than the state of the system itself 2) is corrupted by varying amounts of neural noise and 3) is delayed in time relative...
to the true state. SFC was developed to address these issues by modeling a way the CNS could optimally estimate the state of the production system from noisy, delayed sensory signals [2].

The second problem with the ideal feedback control system described above is that the control law governing how the system changes is unknown. At least for speech, any such controller must be quite complex. Task Dynamics, and particularly the Task Dynamics Application (TaDA), provides a model of this control law, and is able to generate state-dependent motor commands that drive changes in the speech articulators [1, 4].

While both SFC and Task Dynamics have evolved out of a general feedback controller, they have focused on refining entirely different parts of the model. Task Dynamics has developed the controller, while assuming that the instantaneous state of the speech production system can be known without error. SFC has modeled how the CNS can estimate the state of the system, but put off understanding how that state could be used by the controller to generate motor commands.

2.1. Task Dynamics Application (TaDA)

The Task Dynamics Application (or TaDA) software [5, 6, 4] implements the Task Dynamic model of inter-articulator speech coordination with the framework of Articulatory Phonology [7]. Based on any arbitrary orthographic (ARPABET) input, TaDA uses a feedback control schema to control a configurable articulatory SPEECH synthesizer [8, 9], generating both articulatory and acoustic output.

In TaDA, articulatory control and functional coordination of the speech articulators is accomplished with reference to speech ‘tasks’ which are coordinated together in time. Speech tasks, or ‘gestures’, are taken to be constriction actions of the vocal tract (e.g., close the lips), with specific spatial targets and temporal extents. Each gesture controls multiple speech articulators that are used coordinately to achieve that particular task (e.g., the upper lip, low lip, and jaw move together to close the lips) [7].

From a particular utterance, the relevant tasks are selected by first converting the orthographic input to the model to a phonetic string using a version of the Carnegie Mellon pronouncing dictionary that also provides syllabification. The syllabified string is then parsed into articulatory gestures and a segmental dictionary that also provides syllabification. The segmented string is then parsed into articulatory gestures and a pronunciation dictionary that also provides syllabification. The segmented string is then parsed into articulatory gestures and a pronunciation dictionary that also provides syllabification. The segmented string is then parsed into articulatory gestures and a pronunciation dictionary that also provides syllabification. The segmented string is then parsed into articulatory gestures and a pronunciation dictionary that also provides syllabification. The segmented string is then parsed into articulatory gestures and a pronunciation dictionary that also provides syllabification.

The gestural score represents the Task Dynamic control law that governs the behavior of the model. Each gesture is modeled as a point attractor with second-order mass-spring dynamics, which when active forms part of the multi-dimensional model. This model contains 1) a controller, 2) a model vocal tract or plant that receives a motor command from the controller and produces changes in both articulatory and acoustic states, and 3) a model to generate acoustic output from time-varying articulatory trajectories.

The speech production SFC model is a neurally plausible formalization of this concept, which includes an observer that ideally estimates the state of the vocal tract. Based on a copy of the motor command, the observer estimates the future state of the vocal tract, generates the predicted sensory consequences of that predicted state, compares the predicted sensory expectations with actual sensory feedback to generate a sensory error, and corrects the state prediction if any error is found.

2.2. The State Feedback Model of Motor Control

State feedback control (SFC) is the combination of a control law acting on a state estimate provided by an observer [2]. It is so named because if the state \( x_t \) of the vocal tract was available to the CNS via immediate feedback, then the CNS could control \( x_t \) directly via feedback control. In other words, a fundamental principle of SFC is that control must be based on an internal estimate of the state \( x_t \) because \( x_t \) is not directly observable from any type of sensory feedback, and furthermore, the sensory feedback that comes to the higher CNS is both noisy and delayed [10].

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3. Proposed Model: TD-SFC

In order to address the shortcomings of the current implementations of both Task Dynamics and State Feedback Control, we have developed a hybrid model that combines the insights from each model into a larger feedback control framework. A schematic of the current model, TD-SFC (Task Dynamics-State Feedback Control), is shown in Figure 3.

The dashed blue box replicates the current Task Dynamics model. This model contains 1) a controller, 2) a model vocal tract or plant that receives a motor command from the controller and produces changes in both articulatory and acoustic state, and 3) a model to generate acoustic output from time-varying articulatory trajectories. Note that the gestural score, part of the controller, essentially defines an utterance-specific, time-varying control law that determines how the state of the system will change in a state-dependent manner. Here we rep-
The proposed hybrid TD-SFC model. This model, based on the shared feedback control architecture of Task Dynamics and SFC, includes the controller and vocal tract model from TaDA (in blue) and an implementation of SFC-style state estimation (in red). The observer includes predictive components (green arrows) and mechanisms to correct predictions based on sensory feedback (red arrows).

Note that the current version of TaDA assumes perfect observability and feedback of the current vocal tract state at every iteration of the model (represented by the dotted blue arrow in Figure 3), which is unrealistic for the human CNS given the variety of reasons discussed above. Incorporating state feedback as prescribed by the SFC model (red box in Figure 3) allows us to overcome this limitation.

The basic concept of SFC is that a copy of the motor command ("efference copy") is passed to an internal model of the vocal tract. Based on this efference copy, the internal model generates 1) an estimate of the next state of the vocal tract and 2) an estimate of the sensory consequences of the estimated state. In our model, the output of the forward dynamics model (\( \hat{x}_t \), which is equivalent to the motor command) is passed to the internal model. The observer then estimates how this motor command would effect the speech articulators by replicating the inverse kinematic model (generating \( \hat{\dot{x}}_t \)) and the Euler integration model (generating \( \hat{x}_t, \hat{\dot{x}}_t \)). The expected acoustic state (\( \hat{y}_t \)) is then derived based on the predicted articulatory state.

Crucially, the SFC model also evaluates the acoustic sensory error \( \Delta \hat{y}_t \) between the estimated model acoustics \( \hat{y}_t \) and the actual acoustics \( y_t \), and passes this value to a state estimator that computes a state error correction estimate \( e_t = \Delta \hat{x}_t \). In our current implementation of the model, we use an Extended Kalman Filter (EKF) [11] to perform the state estimation. The updated state estimate \( \hat{x}_{t+1} \) in this case is given by:

\[
\hat{x}_{t+1} = \hat{x}_{t+1|t} + K_t \Delta \hat{y}_t
\]

where \( \Delta \hat{y}_t \) is the innovation or measurement residual and \( K_t \) is the Kalman Gain, which is computed in the following manner:

\[
K_t = P_{t|t-1} J_t^T (J_t P_{t|t-1} J_t^T + R_t)^{-1}
\]

\[
P_{t|t-1} = J_t P_{t|t-1|t} J_t^T + Q_t
\]

where \( J_t \) represents the Jacobian of the process model \( F \) at time \( t \), \( J_{t|t-1} \) is the Jacobian of the observation model \( H \) at time \( t \), and \( P_{t|t-1} \) refers to the predicted covariance estimate. \( Q_t \) and \( R_t \) indicate process and observation noise, respectively.

Note that one of the challenges in implementing such an EKF is that both the process model \( F \) (that provides a functional mapping from \( \Delta \hat{x}_{t-1} \) to \( \Delta \hat{x}_t \)) as well as the observation model \( H \) (that maps from \( \Delta \hat{x}_t \) to \( \Delta \hat{y}_t \)) are unknown. In order to solve this problem, we learn the process model and observation model functional mappings required for Extended Kalman Filtering using a computationally efficient machine learning technique [12]. While we do not here explicitly relate this machine learning...
process to human learning, such maps could theoretically be learned during early speech acquisition, such as babbling [3].

We used the current version of TaDA (without SFC-style state estimation) to generate 972 vowel-consonant-vowel (or CV) sequences corresponding to all combinations of 9 English monophthongs and 12 consonants (including stops, fricatives, nasals and approximants). We then extracted 10-dimensional constriction task variable trajectories and 4-dimensional acoustic variable trajectories (corresponding to the first four formants, F1 - F4) from this dataset, and used this to train the mappings for the process and observation model using LWPR.

Once the process and observation models are trained, the Extended Kalman Filter produces estimates of the state error $e_t = \Delta x_t$, which is subtracted from the current state estimate $x_t$ to produce a corrected vocal tract state estimate $\hat{x}_t$, which is in turn fed back to the controller. All motor commands in this system are generated based on this estimated state, rather than the actual state of the system.

4. Simulation Experiments

4.1. Response of model to altered feedback

One of the strongest pieces of evidence that the speech-production system uses acoustic feedback to control ongoing speech comes from studies which perturb the spectral components of speech in real time [13, 14, 15]. In these studies, subjects repeatedly produce either a single word with an extended vowel or a sustained vowel while listening to feedback of their own voice played back in real time via headphones. On a random subset of trials, their speech formants are perturbed (either F1 alone or F1 and F2). Subjects compensate somewhat, though not completely, for this unexpected perturbation by shifting their own formants in the opposite direction (e.g., a positive shift in F1 played back to the subject induces a negative F1 shift in the subject’s production). These compensations generally begin roughly 200 ms after the onset of the perturbation or, for experiments with continuous perturbation throughout the production of a word, the vowel onset.

These results are generally taken as evidence that vowels have an explicit acoustic target [16]. We hypothesized that this compensatory behavior could, alternatively, be produced by a system with articulatory, rather than explicitly acoustic, goals. Although the targets in such a system might be in articulatory space, the actual articulatory state of the system cannot be directly known; rather, the current state must be estimated from 1) the expected outcome of produced motor command and 2) sensory feedback. In such a system, a given motor command issued to achieve a particular articulatory task would generate a sensory feedback expectation, which could then be compared with incoming sensory feedback. Any discrepancy between the expected and actual sensory feedback would generate a sensory error, which could be used to update the estimate of the current articulator state. Thus, introducing an error in auditory space could cause the speaker to (incorrectly) estimate the state of their articulatory system, leading to corrective movements.

4.2. Simulation and results

In order to study the behavior of the TD-SFC model, we simulated a simple altered auditory feedback experiment. We perturbed F1 of the vocal tract acoustic output $y_t$ by 100Hz. Since the model acoustic output $\hat{y}_t$ is unperturbed, this should result in a large feedback error. We would then expect the model to compensate for this large feedback error by lowering F1.

Figure 4 shows the results of one example simulation run of the TD-SFC model for this experiment. We observe that after perturbing the plant F1 (in blue) by 100Hz at $t = 50$ms, the model F1 (red) trajectory displays compensatory behavior by lowering F1 below the baseline of 500Hz, which is in line with previous studies on altered auditory feedback perturbations. Figure 5, which visualizes the entries in the observation Jacobian matrix $J_{oo}$, that affect F1 in particular, allows us to observe that the main constriction task variables which affect F1 include the tongue tip constriction location and degree.

5. Summary

We have proposed a new speech production model, TD-SFC, based on the shared feedback control architecture of prior versions of Task Dynamics and State Feedback Control models. We have shown that this model, though still under development, is capable of correcting for sensory perturbations, producing corrective responses that qualitatively match human behavior, despite having no explicit acoustic or auditory target.

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7. References


