Decoding with Phrase-Based Models

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(slides by Philipp Koehn)

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School of informatics

Decoding

- We have a mathematical model for translation

$$p(\mathbf{e}|\mathbf{f})$$

- Task of decoding: find the translation $\mathbf{e}_{\text{best}}$ with highest probability

$$\mathbf{e}_{\text{best}} = \text{argmax}_{\mathbf{e}}\, p(\mathbf{e}|\mathbf{f})$$

- Two types of error
  - the most probable translation is bad $\rightarrow$ fix the model
  - search does not find the most probably translation $\rightarrow$ fix the search

- Translation is NP complete - need heuristics to efficiently explore the space space

Translation Process

- Task: translate this sentence from German into English

er geht ja nicht nach hause

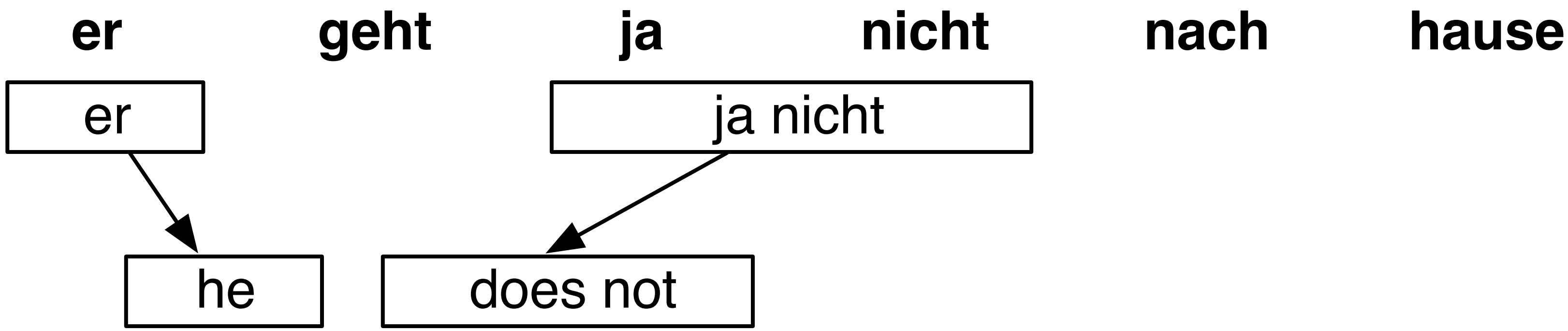
Translation Process

- Task: translate this sentence from German into English

- Pick phrase in input, translate

Translation Process

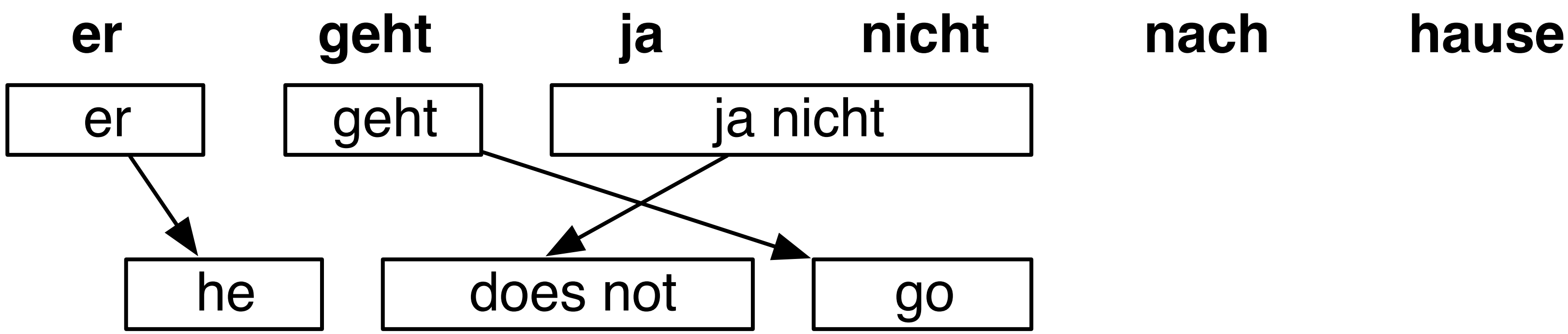
- Task: translate this sentence from German into English



- Pick phrase in input, translate
  - it is allowed to pick words out of sequence reordering
  - phrases may have multiple words: many-to-many translation

Translation Process

- Task: translate this sentence from German into English



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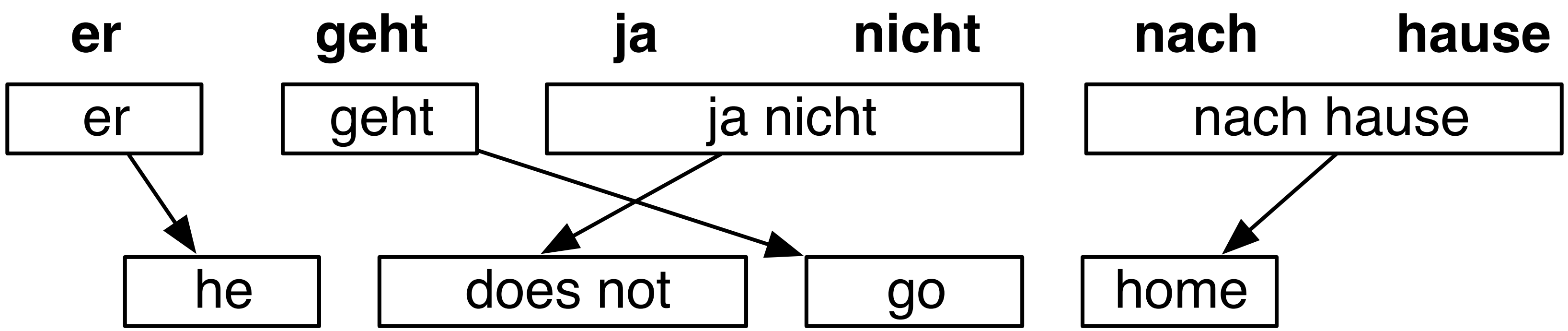
Translation Process

- Task: translate this sentence from German into English



- Pick phrase in input, translate

Computing Translation Probability

- Probabilistic model for phrase-based translation:

$$\mathbf{e}_{\text{best}} = \text{argmax}_{\mathbf{e}} \prod_{i=1}^{I} \phi(\bar{f}_i|\bar{e}_i)\ d(start_i - end_{i-1} - 1)\ p_{\text{LM}}(\mathbf{e})$$

- Score is computed incrementally for each partial hypothesis

Computing Translation Probability

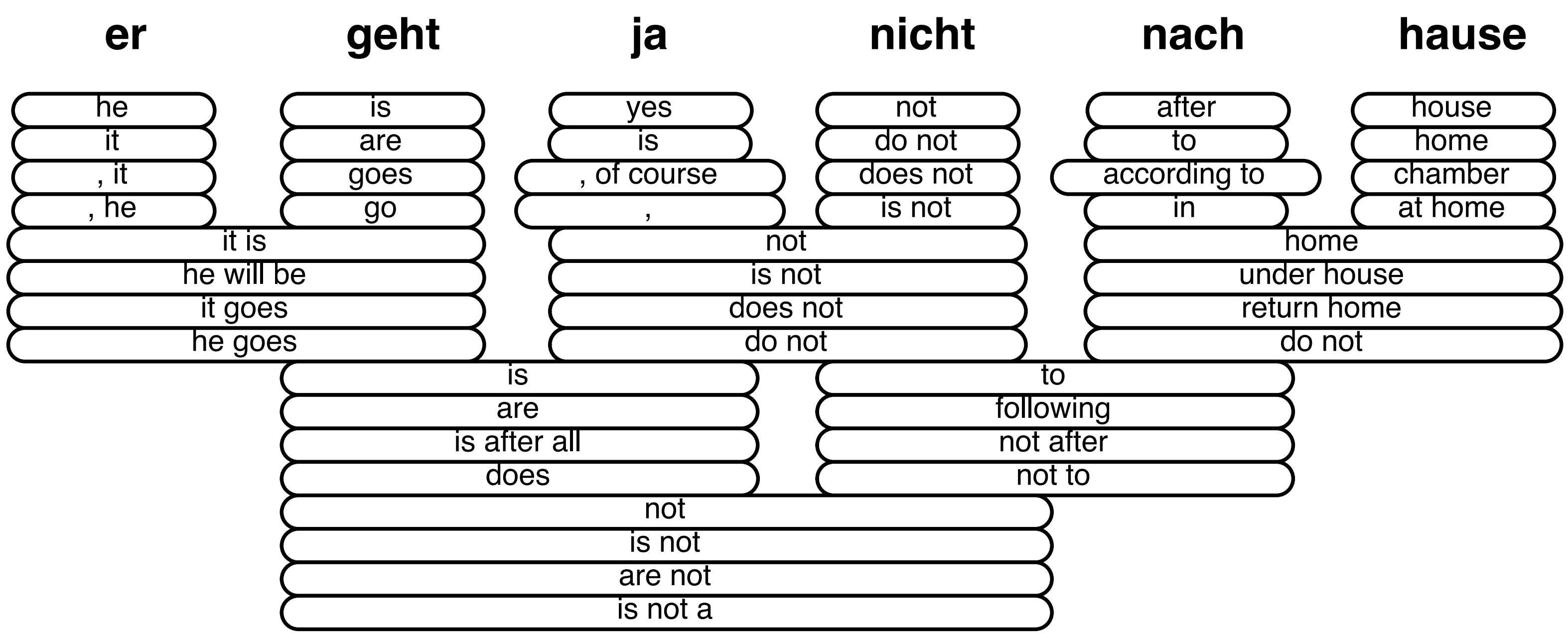
Components of the probabilistic model:

- **Phrase translation** Picking phrase $\bar{f}_i$ to be translated as a phrase $\bar{e}_i$
  $\rightarrow$ look up score $\phi(\bar{f}_i|\bar{e}_i)$ from phrase translation table

- **Reordering** Previous phrase ended in end_{i-1}, current phrase starts at $start_i$
  $\rightarrow$ compute $d(start_i - end_{i-1} - 1)$

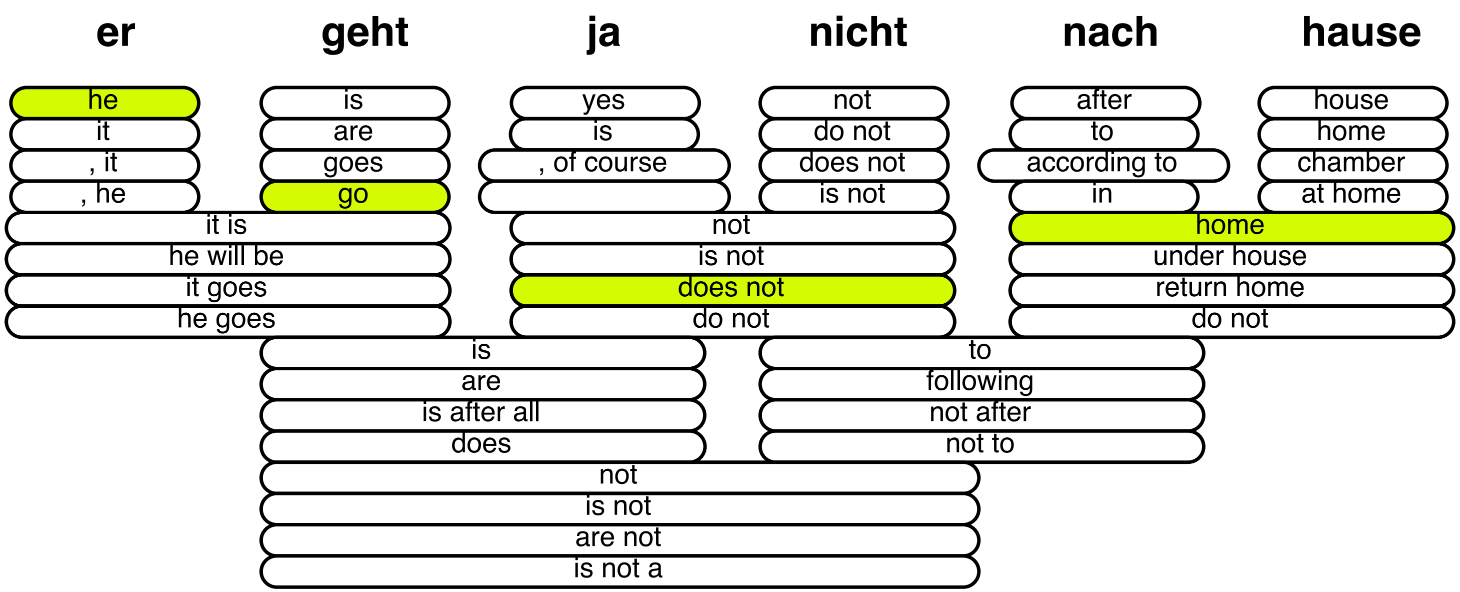
- **Language model** For n-gram model, need to keep track of last $n-1$ words
  $\rightarrow$ compute score $p_{\text{LM}}(w_i|w_{i-(n-1)}, ..., w_{i-1})$ for added words w_i

Translation Options



- Many translation options to choose from
  - in Europarl phrase table: 2727 matching phrase pairs for this sentence
  - by pruning to the top 20 per phrase, 202 translation options remain

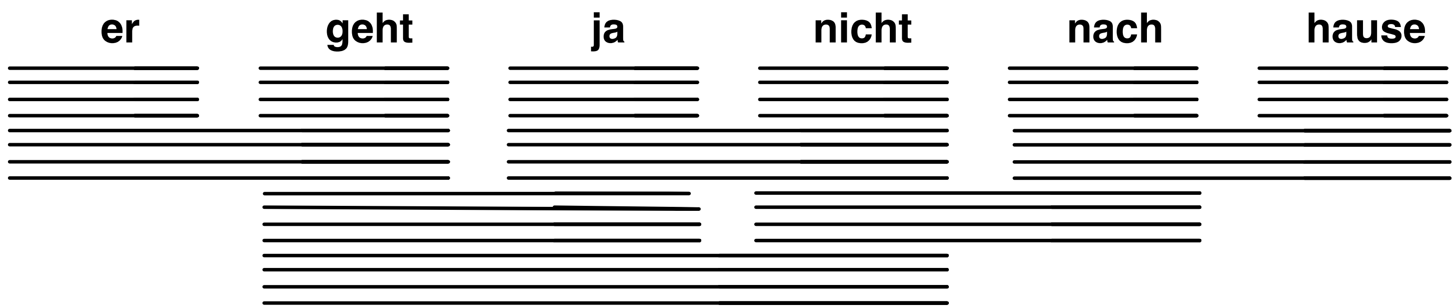
Translation Options



- The machine translation decoder does not know the right answer
  - picking the right translation options
  - arranging them in the right order

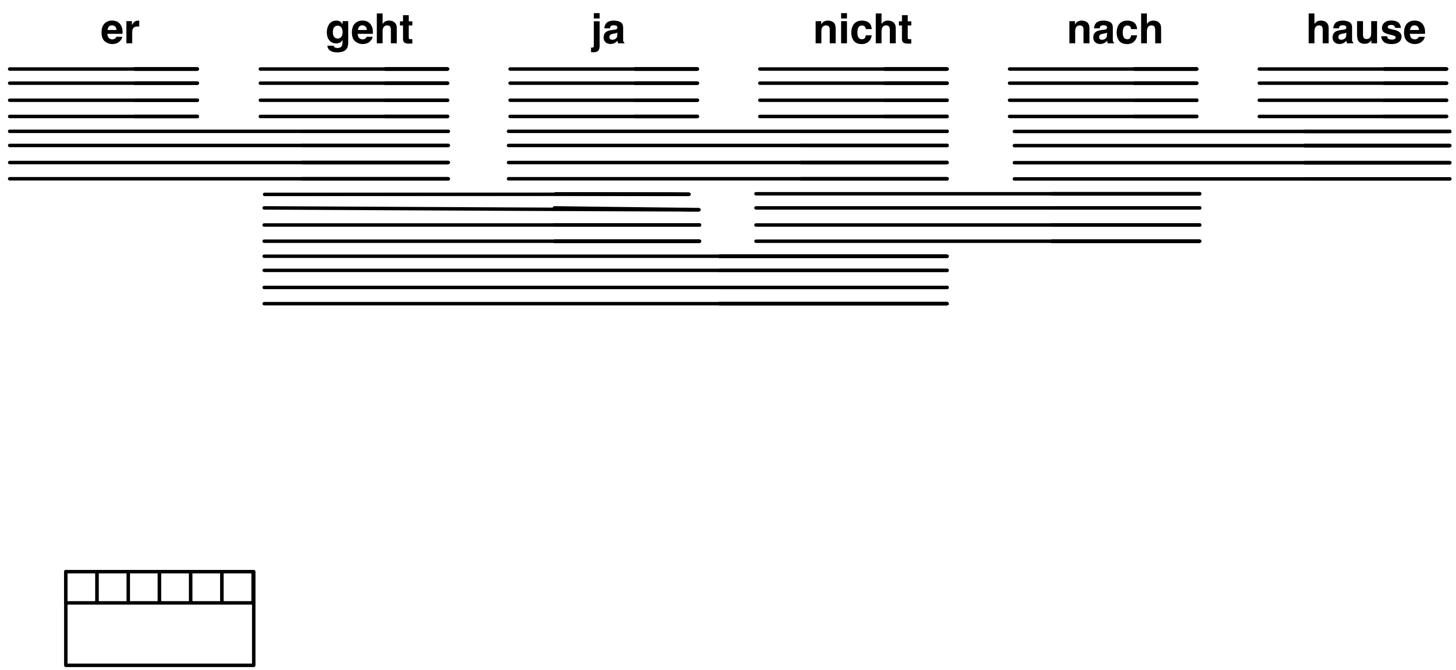
→ Search problem solved by heuristic beam search

Decoding: Precompute Translation Options



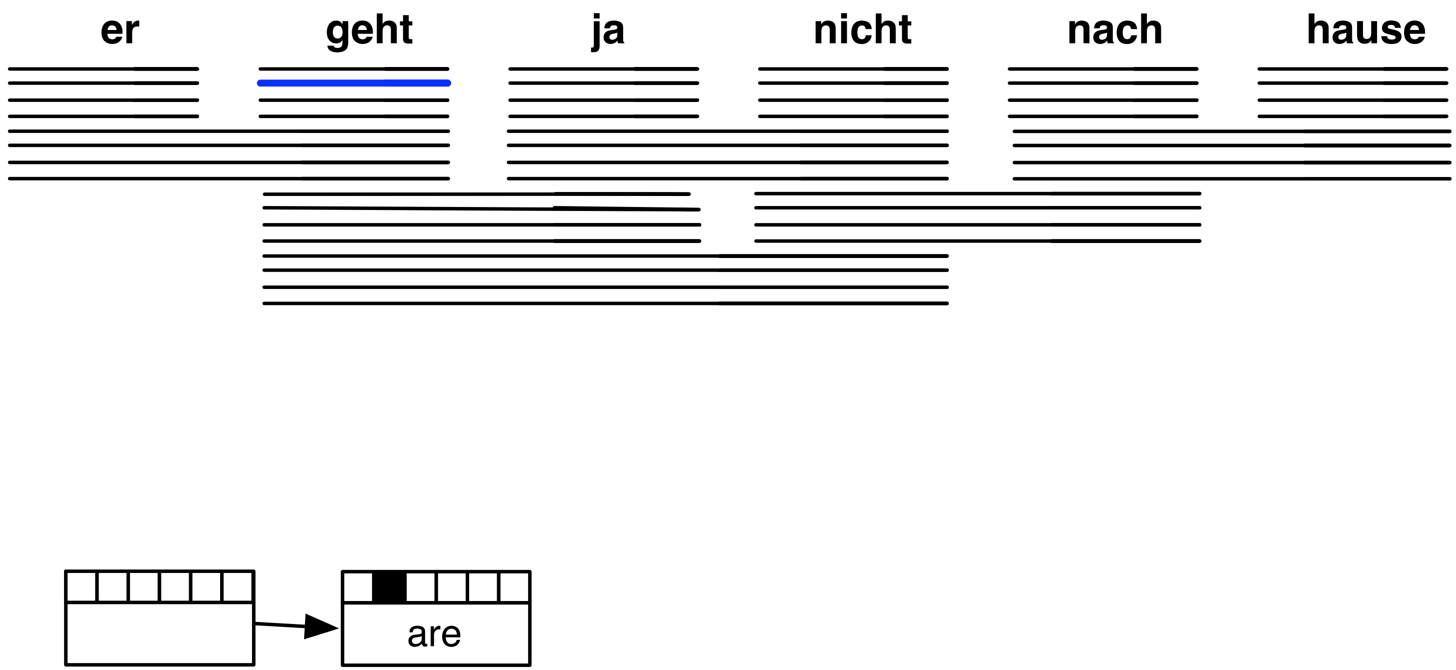
consult phrase translation table for all input phrases

Decoding: Start with Initial Hypothesis



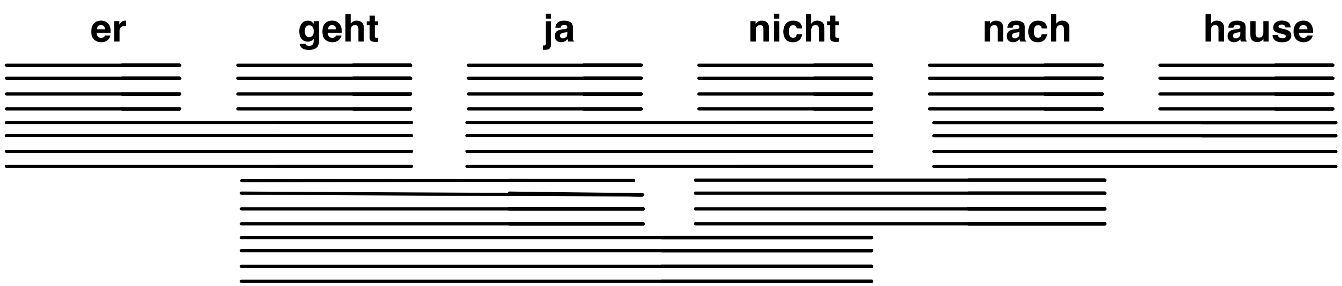
initial hypothesis: no input words covered, no output produced

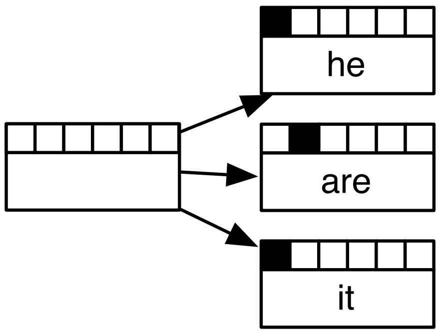
Decoding: Hypothesis Expansion



pick any translation option, create new hypothesis

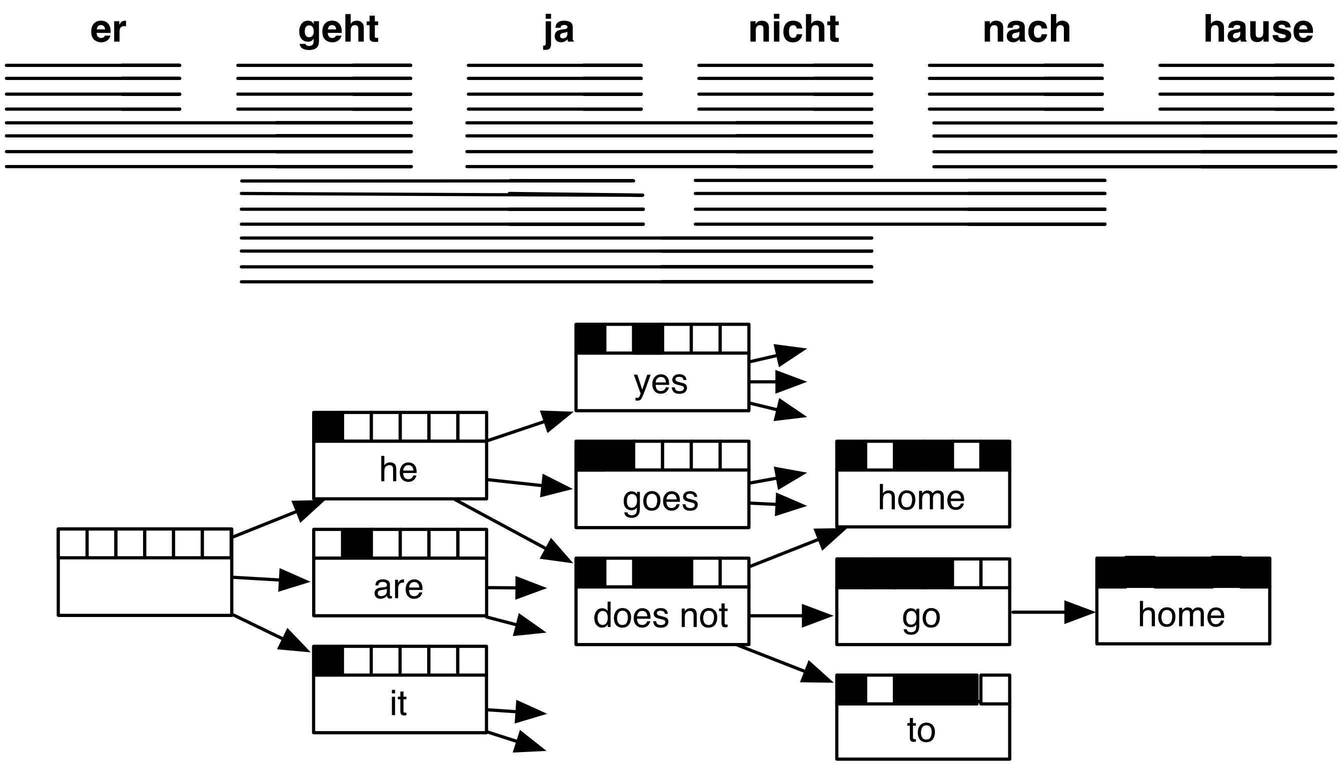
Decoding: Hypothesis Expansion





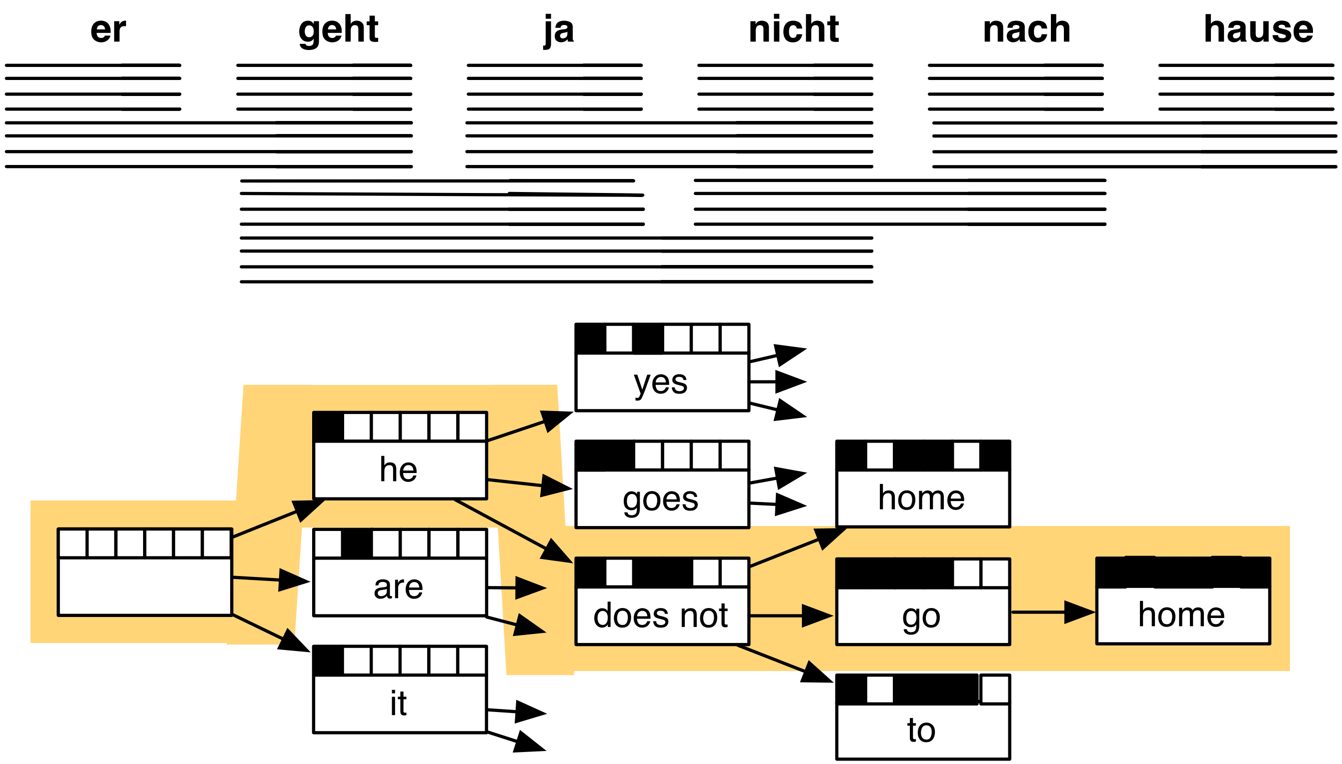
create hypotheses for all other translation options

Decoding: Hypothesis Expansion



also create hypotheses from created partial hypothesis

Decoding: Find Best Path



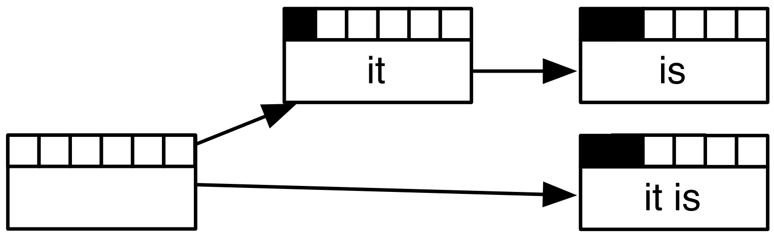
backtrack from highest scoring complete hypothesis

Computational Complexity

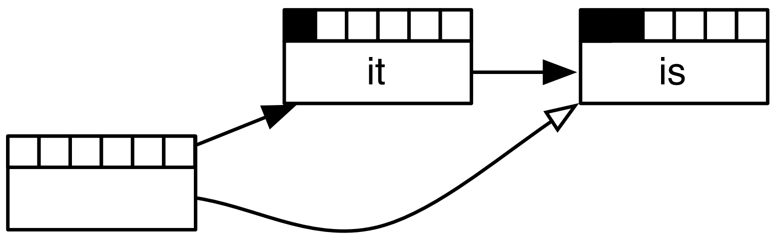
- The suggested process creates exponential number of hypothesis
- Machine translation decoding is NP-complete
- Reduction of search space:
  - recombination (risk-free)
  - pruning (risky)

Recombination

- Two hypothesis paths lead to two matching hypotheses
  - same number of foreign words translated
  - same English words in the output
  - different scores

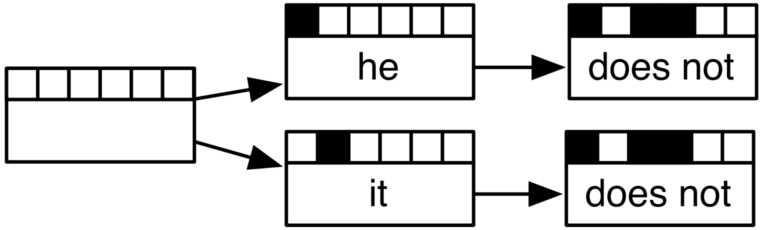


- Worse hypothesis is dropped



Recombination

- Two hypothesis paths lead to hypotheses indistinguishable in subsequent search
  - same number of foreign words translated
  - same last two English words in output (assuming trigram LM)
  - same last foreign word translated
  - different scores



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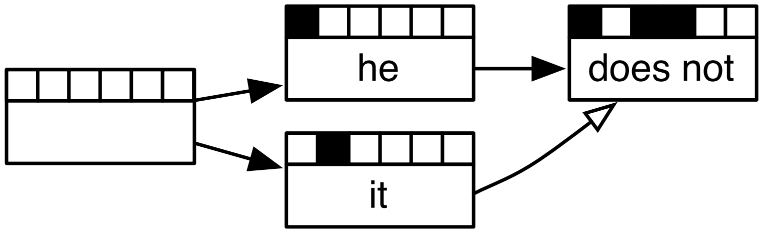


Restrictions on Recombination

- **Translation model:** Phrase translation independent from each other

  $\rightarrow$ no restriction to hypothesis recombination

- **Language model:** Last $n-1$ words used as history in n-gram language model

  $\rightarrow$ recombined hypotheses must match in their last $n-1$ words

- **Reordering model:** Distance-based reordering model based on distance to end position of previous input phrase

  $\rightarrow$ recombined hypotheses must have that same end position

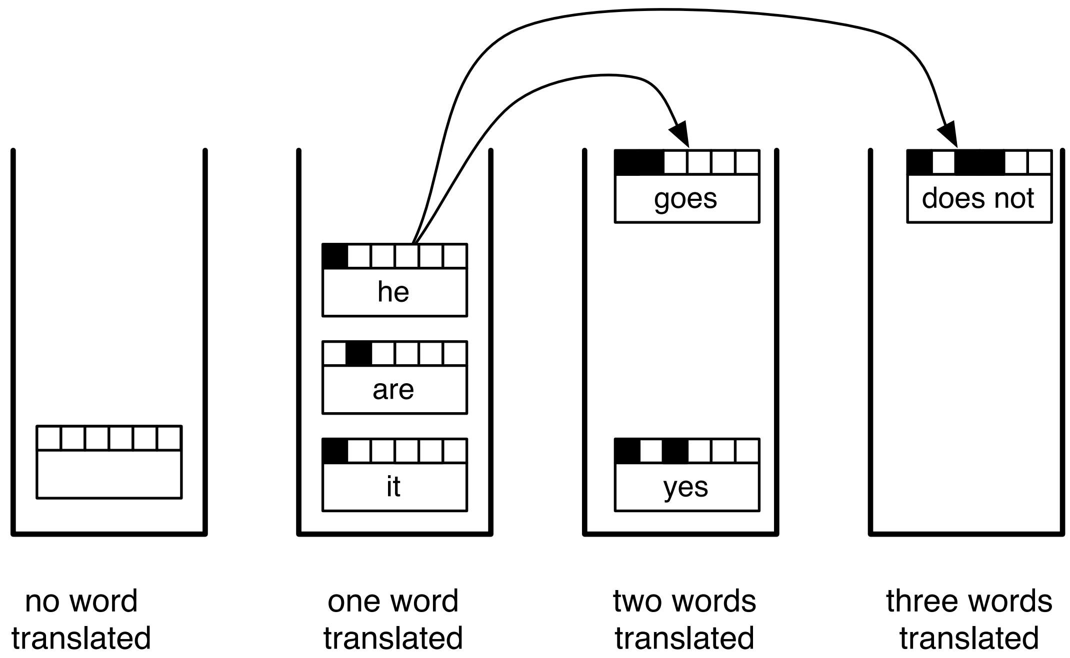
- Other feature function may introduce additional restrictions

Pruning

- Recombination reduces search space, but not enough
  (we still have a NP complete problem on our hands)

- Pruning: remove bad hypotheses early
  - put comparable hypothesis into stacks
    (hypotheses that have translated same number of input words)
  - limit number of hypotheses in each stack

Stacks



- Hypothesis expansion in a stack decoder
  - translation option is applied to hypothesis
  - new hypothesis is dropped into a stack further down

```
place empty hypothesis into stack 0
for all stacks 0...n-1 do
    for all hypotheses in stack do
        for all translation options do
            if applicable then
                create new hypothesis
                place in stack
                recombine with existing hypothesis if possible
                prune stack if too big
            end if
        end for
    end for
end for
```

Stack Decoding Algorithm

Pruning

- Pruning strategies
  - histogram pruning: keep at most k hypotheses in each stack
  - threshold pruning: keep hyp. with score $\alpha \times$ best score ($\alpha < 1$)

- Computational time complexity of decoding with histogram pruning

$$O(\text{max stack size} \times \text{translation options} \times \text{sentence length})$$

- Number of translation options is linear with sentence length, hence:

$$O(\text{max stack size} \times \text{sentence length}^2)$$

- Quadratic complexity

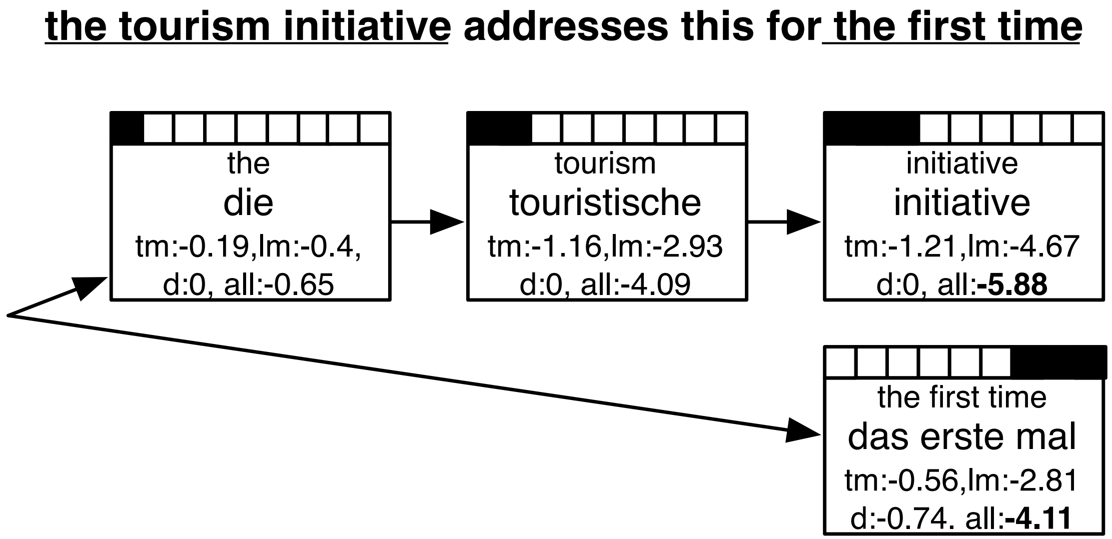
Reordering Limits

- Limiting reordering to maximum reordering distance
- Typical reordering distance 5–8 words
  - depending on language pair
  - larger reordering limit hurts translation quality
- Reduces complexity to linear

$$O(\text{max stack size} \times \text{sentence length})$$

- Speed / quality trade-off by setting maximum stack size

Translating the Easy Part First?

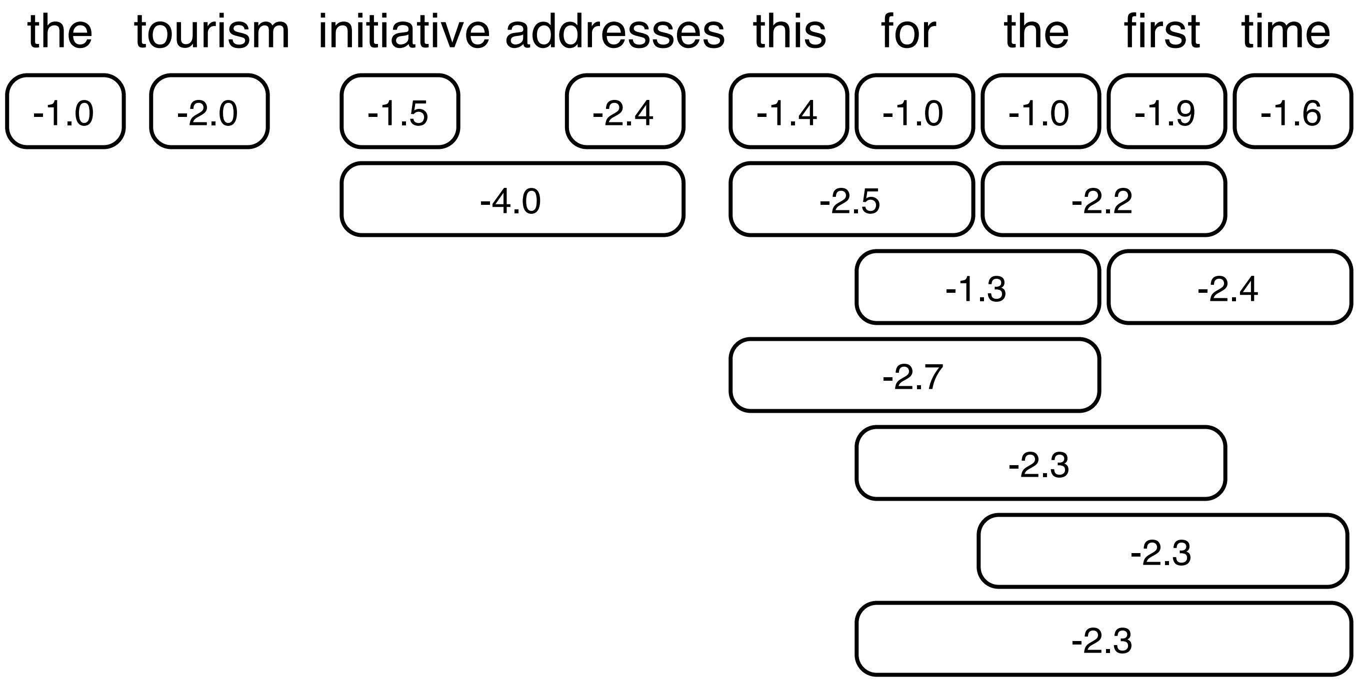


both hypotheses translate 3 words
worse hypothesis has better score

Estimating Future Cost

- Future cost estimate: how expensive is translation of rest of sentence?
- Optimistic: choose cheapest translation options
- Cost for each translation option
  - **translation model**: cost known
  - **language model:** output words known, but not context
    $\rightarrow$ estimate without context
  - **reordering model:** unknown, ignored for future cost estimation

Cost Estimates from Translation Options



cost of cheapest translation options for each input span (log-probabilities)

Cost Estimates for all Spans

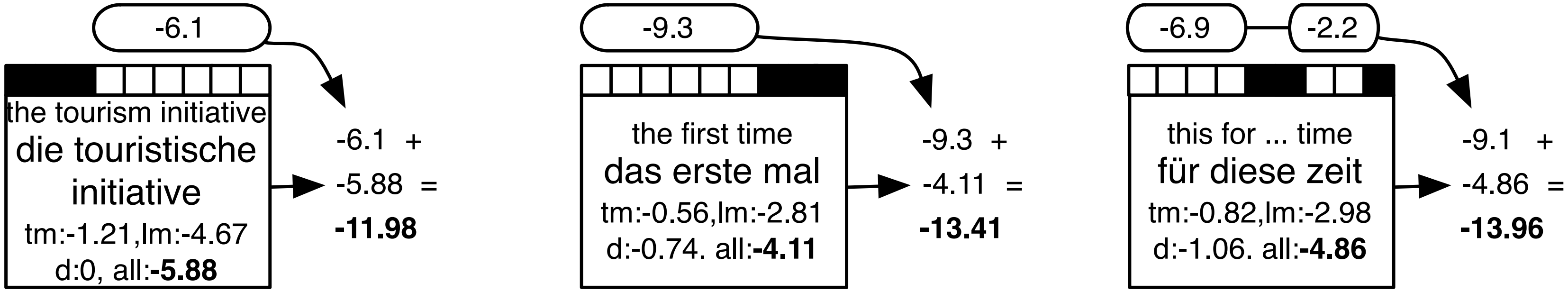
- Compute cost estimate for all contiguous spans by combining cheapest options

first word	future cost estimate for n words (from first)								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
the	-1.0	-3.0	-4.5	-6.9	-8.3	-9.3	-9.6	-10.6	-10.6
tourism	-2.0	-3.5	-5.9	-7.3	-8.3	-8.6	-9.6	-9.6	
initiative	-1.5	-3.9	-5.3	-6.3	-6.6	-7.6	-7.6		
addresses	-2.4	-3.8	-4.8	-5.1	-6.1	-6.1			
this	-1.4	-2.4	-2.7	-3.7	-3.7				
for	-1.0	-1.3	-2.3	-2.3					
the	-1.0	-2.2	-2.3						
first	-1.9	-2.4							
time	-1.6								

Cost Estimates for all Spans

- Function words cheaper (the: -1.0) than content words (tourism -2.0)
- Common phrases cheaper (for the first time: -2.3)
  than unusual ones (tourism initiative addresses: -5.9)

Combining Score and Future Cost



- Hypothesis score and future cost estimate are combined for pruning
  - left hypothesis starts with hard part: the tourism initiative
    score: -5.88, future cost: -6.1 → total cost -11.98
  - middle hypothesis starts with easiest part: the first time
    score: -4.11, future cost: -9.3 → total cost -13.41
  - right hypothesis picks easy parts: this for ... time
    score: -4.86, future cost: -9.1 → total cost -13.96

Other Decoding Algorithms

- A* search
  - Usually cuts down on search space, but not guaranteed to finish in polynomial time
  - Admissible heuristic: Future cost must never underestimate cost

- Greedy hill-climbing
  - Rough initial translation, iteratively improve - global propertise
  - Small search space and local optima

- Using finite state transducers (standard toolkits)

Summary

- Translation process: produce output left to right
- Translation options
- Decoding by hypothesis expansion
- Reducing search space
  - recombination
  - pruning (requires future cost estimate)
- Other decoding algorithms