Disassemble Byte Sequence Using Graph Attention Network

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Abstract: Disassembly is the basis of static analysis of binary code and is used in malicious code detection, vulnerability mining, software optimization, etc. Disassembly of arbitrary suspicious code blocks (e.g., for suspicious traffic packets intercepted by the network) is a difficult task. Traditional disassembly methods require manual specification of the starting address and cannot automate the disassembly of arbitrary code blocks. In this paper, we propose a disassembly method based on code extension selection network by combining traditional linear sweep and recursive traversal methods. First, each byte of a code block is used as the disassembly start address, and all disassembly results (control flow graphs) are combined into a single flow graph. Then a graph attention network is trained to pick the correct subgraph (control flow graph) as the final result. In the experiment, the compiler-generated executable file, as well as the executable file generated by hand-written assembly code, the data file and the byte sequence intercepted by the code segment were tested, and the disassembly accuracy was 93%, which can effectively distinguish the code from the data.

Keywords: Graph neural network, disassembly, function identification, reverse engineering, binary code analysis

Categories: I.2.1, D.2.7, L.4.0

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1 Introduction

In software research and analysis, the source code of most software is not available or accessible, and the software can only be analyzed effectively through binary code analysis (BCA) [Liu et al., 2013]. In this case, BCA is an important tool for software analysis, such as malicious code analysis, malware detection, vulnerability mining and analysis, etc [Song et al., 2008]. For many software, vulnerabilities are hidden and not easily detected, and BCA can be used to better discover vulnerabilities and fix them [Djoudi and Bardin, 2015]. In the process of computer use, malware is hidden in the normal application software to cause damage to the computer. Malware is often not open source. Through BCA, hidden malware can be detected [Ma et al., 2020]. For malicious code
hidden in normal programs, such as advertising pop-ups, malicious access to software usage, downloading irrelevant applications and other malicious code can greatly damage user privacy [Cui et al., 2018]. By BCA, they can be detected. In short, for the analysis of malicious code, BCA is a key technical tool [Cui et al., 2019].

For BCA, the usual method is to disassemble the binary code, then divide the functions and construct a control flow graph (CFG) for each function, so as to analyze the function and infer the role of the whole software accordingly [Anand et al., 2013, Besson et al., 2001]. In the IA32 architecture executable binary code, there is a mixture of code and data [Wartell et al., 2011]. Static analysis cannot distinguish between code and data [Kruegel et al., 2004]. Direct disassembly of binary code containing data will disassemble the data into assembly code, making it impossible to analyze the functionality of the binary code. Therefore, distinguishing between code and data without any debugging information is a challenging problem.

Existing BCA approaches can usually only be performed on a complete program [Rosenblum et al., 2008]. In network transmissions, the intercepted traffic packets may only be part of a program [Zhang et al., 2007]. For a sequence of bytes, the disassembly results starting from different locations are completely different. For example, “8BFF558BEC”, the disassembly result from 8B is “mov edi,edi/ push ebp/ mov ebp,esp”, the disassembly result from “FF” is “call dword ptr [ebp - 0x75]/ in al, dx”, and the disassembly result from “55” is “push ebp/ mov ebp, esp”. For a sequence of bytes, the first few bytes may be part of the previous instruction or the sequence may start with partial data. Thus, it is not possible to determine the starting byte position of the binary sequence. Usually, it can only be determined manually after disassembling from different bytes, which is very inefficient and inaccurate.

To address these problems, this paper proposes an encoding extended selection network, which tries to disassemble from each byte position for an arbitrary code sequence, and transforms the obtained disassembly results into a CFG linked to become an extended control flow graph (ECFG). Then the correct nodes in the ECFG are distinguished by a graph attention network [Velickovic et al., 2018] to obtain the CFG for each function.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the related work. Section 3 provides the details of the code expansion selection network. Section 4 shows the evaluation and discussion. Finally, Section 5 summarizes our work and discusses the future work.

2 Related work

The main process of disassembly is to map binary code to assembly instructions according to a certain strategy, and the common methods are mainly divided into static disassembly and dynamic disassembly [Harris and Miller, 2005]. Static disassembly can work directly on binary code. Dynamic disassembly, on the other hand, must be performed at program runtime and has a lower code coverage. The traditional static disassembly work is divided into linear sweep and recursive traversal. Linear sweep, i.e., disassembling code one instruction after another from the start byte, cannot distinguish between mixed code and data. The wrong disassembly of data into code will affect the subsequent disassembly results. Recursive traversal is control-flow oriented and continues disassembling along the control flow, but the code coverage is lower.

Andriess et al. tested binary files generated by disassembly tools compiled in the real world [Andriess et al., 2016]. They used 981 x86 and x64 binaries from C/C++ projects. These projects were compiled using different compilers and compilation options. They
found that some high-level language constructs, such as function boundaries, were more
difficult to recover than in the literature and gave a discussion and analysis of where the
disassembler capabilities did not match the literature. Li et al. used a different approach
to evaluate against some traditional disassembly tools [Li et al., 2020]. They used 879
binaries from unused projects that used multiple compilers and optimization settings.

Bauman et al. have implemented a new binary rewriting tool that can rewrite stripped
binaries [Bauman et al., 2018]. They used two basic techniques, a superset disassembler
and an instruction rewriter, to first construct a superset containing all the legal instructions
of the binary code and redirect it to a new address using the instruction reassembly
technique in the dynamic binary instrument via indirect control flow. Miller et al. used
some heuristic rules based on the construction of the superset disassembler to calculate
each assembly instruction’s probability to confirm whether the instruction is a true
assembly instruction [Miller et al., 2019].

A data log-based disassembly technique was proposed by Flores-Montoya et al
[Flores-Montoya and Schulte, 2020]. For a stripped binary file with binary rewriting,
they found that the data log inference process is particularly suitable for disassembly
and corresponding analysis, and generates disassembly code with accurate symbolic
information based on the data log. Ammar Ben Khadra et al. proposed a tool for rule-based
disassembly methods Spedi [Ben Khadra et al., 2016]. First, all possible basic blocks
are speculated and then conflicting basic blocks are refined by analysis to complete
disassembly. Most of the call and jump table targets can be recovered at the same time
and can be adapted to obfuscation without any symbolic information.

Pei et al. used transfer learning for the disassembly task [Pei et al., 2021]. The model
is first preprocessed and trained, and then fine-tuned to perform the disassembly task,
i.e., recovering function bounds and assembly instructions. It was evaluated on a set of
x86/x64 binaries, and the experimental results showed that the method works well.

The input of the above approaches are executable files. They are not designed to
disassemble an arbitrary byte sequence. In this paper, code extension selection network
is firstly proposed to do the work. It can be used to replace or assist manual analysis for
byte sequences. It is useful in binary analysis tasks.

3 Our work

An extended control flow graph (ECFG) $G$ is a two-tuple $G = (V, E)$, where $V$ is a set
of instructions, and $E \subseteq V \times V$ is the set of possible control flow transfers between
the instructions in $V$. Code extension selection network (CESN) is a graph neural network
(GNN) [Velickovic et al., 2018] that is used to identify the correct instruction and control
flow in an ECFG.

3.1 Disassembly

The first step in CESN is disassembling a byte sequence starting at each byte. Linear
sweep is used to obtain all possible disassembly code. The disassembly result starting
from the same position is unique. For a byte sequence $\{b_1, \cdots, b_n\}$, let $\text{DisasmFrom}(i)$
be the disassembly result starting from byte $i$. Assuming that byte $b_1 b_2 b_3$ can form an
assembly instruction, then the byte sequence $\{b_1, \cdots, b_n\}$ and $\{b_1, \cdots, b_n\}$ have the
same assembly result after byte $b_4$. Thus, $\text{DisasmFrom}(b_1) \subset \text{DisasmFrom}(b_1)$. The
whole algorithm is shown in Algorithm 1.
Algorithm 1: Disassemble a byte sequence

**Input:** $L$: a byte sequence  
**Output:** $R$: disassembly result

1. $V \leftarrow \emptyset$, $R \leftarrow \emptyset$;
2. foreach $i \in L$ do
3.     if $\text{ADDRESS}(i) \notin V$ then
4.         $D \leftarrow \text{DisasmFrom}(i)$;
5.         $R \leftarrow R \cup D$;
6.         foreach $j \in D$ do
7.             $V \leftarrow V \cup \{\text{ADDRESS}(j)\}$
8.     return $R$

3.2 ECFG construction

The extended control flow graph (ECFG) construction algorithm is shown in Algorithm 2. The overall process is similar to the construction of the CFG. If an instruction is a jump instruction and the jump target exists, an edge from the instruction to the jump target is added. If it is a conditional jump, or if it is a non-jump, an edge from the instruction to the next instruction is added [Federico and Agosta, 2016]. Figure 1 gives an example of ECFG construction.

Algorithm 2: Build an ECFG

**Input:** $R$: disassembly result  
**Output:** $G$: ECFG

1. $G \leftarrow \emptyset$;
2. foreach $r \in R$ do
3.     foreach $i \in r$ do
4.         if $i$ is a jump then
5.             if $\text{TARGET}(i) \in R$ then
6.                 $G \leftarrow G \cup \{i \rightarrow \text{TARGET}(i)\}$;
7.             if $i$ is a conditional jump then
8.                 $G \leftarrow G \cup \{i \rightarrow \text{NEXT}(i)\}$
9.         else
10.            $G \leftarrow G \cup \{i \rightarrow \text{NEXT}(i)\}$
11.     return $G$
3.3 ECFG pruning

In an ECFG, there are some illegal instructions. These instructions and all their preceding instructions should be deleted. Illegal instructions are defined as follows.

1. For a conditional jump instruction, if the jump address is the instruction next to itself, it is illegal.
2. If the target of a conditional branch instruction is illegal, the instruction is illegal.
3. If no ancestor node of a conditional branch instruction modifies the corresponding register or flag bit, the branch instruction is illegal.
4. High-privilege instructions (such as I/O instructions) in normal user programs are illegal.

**Figure 1: Example of building an ECFG**

(a) Code disassembly

(b) ECFG
Removing illegal instructions in an ECFG greatly improves the running speed and reduce memory usage when analyzing large binary files.

### 3.4 Connected subgraph search

For a pruned ECFG, there may be multiple disconnected subgraphs. Each concatenated subgraph corresponds to one possible CFG of a function. Functions are usually terminated with a return/jump instruction. If a subgraph of an ECFG does not end with a return/jump instruction, the subgraph is considered illegal and can be deleted. The search process of the connected subgraphs is shown in Algorithm 3.

#### Algorithm 3: ECFG Subgraph Search

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Input:</th>
<th>$G$: an ECFG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Output:</td>
<td>$GS$: connected subgraphs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

```plaintext
GS ← ∅, workList ← ∅, visited ← ∅;
/* Search connected subgraphs */
for $v \in G$ do
  if $v \notin \text{visited}$ then
    workList.push($v$);
    $G' ← ∅$;
    while workList ≠ ∅ do
      $v' ← \text{workList.pop()}$;
      visited ← visited ∪ {$v'$};
      foreach $p \in v'$predecessor do
        $G' ← G' \cup \{p → v'\}$;
        workList.push($p$);
      foreach $p \in v'$successor do
        $G' ← G' \cup \{v' → p\}$;
        workList.push($p$);
    $GS ← GS ∪ G'$;
  /* Remove illegal subgraph */
  $GS.removeIf(\text{g→!g.exists}(v → v \text{ is leaf node and } v \text{ is RET or JMP}))$;
return $GS$
```

### 3.5 CFG prediction

For a pruned ECFG, some of the nodes are true instructions, while others may be data or the result of disassembly from other addresses. The disassembly problem translates into finding the true disassembly nodes in an ECFG. Graph neural network (GNN) [Scarselli et al., 2009, Guo and Wang, 2021] is a deep learning method for feature extraction of graph data structures. After training the graph attention neural network, the logical
relationship between instructions enables the model to find all correctly disassembled nodes in an ECFG.

An ECFG may contain one or more functions. The graph attention network assigns different weights to different neighboring nodes [Wang et al., 2019a]. Then, it obtains the output of each node by weighting and summing the features of the neighboring nodes with the attention mechanism [Wang et al., 2019b]. Finally, it aggregates the features of the neighboring nodes to the central node through node-by-node computation. Each operation is done by cyclically traversing all nodes on the graph [Rong et al., 2020]. The GNN is demonstrated in Fig. 2. Each central node containing the features of the neighboring nodes is classified using a fully connected network to determine whether the node is a disassembly instruction [Goodfellow et al., 2015].

The input of the graph attention layer is a node feature vector set $h = \{h_1, h_2, \ldots, h_n\}$, $h_i \in \mathbb{R}^F$, where $n$ is the number of nodes, $F$ is the number of node features, and $R$ represents the features of a certain node. The output of each layer is $h' = h'_1, h'_2, \ldots, h'_n$, $h' \in \mathbb{R}^{F'}$. A weight matrix is trained for all nodes, $W \in \mathbb{R}^{F' \times F}$, and it is the relationship between the input $F$ features and the output $F'$ features. The attention coefficients are $e_{ij} = a(W h_i, W h_j)$, where $a$ indicates a function that calculates the degree of correlation between two nodes.

The vector $h$ is the feature vector of the nodes. The subscripts $i, j$ denote the $i$th node and the $j$th node. To make the attention coefficients easier to compute and compare, softmax is introduced to regularize the $j$th and $i$th node where the former is the neighboring node of the latter. $\alpha$ is the attention coefficient, $\alpha_{ij}$ is the attention coefficient of
Combining the first two formulas, the complete regularization formula can be obtained as follows. The LeakyReLU is an activation function used to introduce non-linearity.

$$\alpha_{ij} = \frac{\exp(e_{ij})}{\sum_{k \in N_i} \exp(e_{ik})}$$

(1)

The attention coefficients between different nodes after regularization are obtained through the above operations. It can be used to predict the output characteristics of each node.

$$h'_i = \sigma(\sum_{j \in N_i} \alpha_{ij} W h_j)$$

(3)

$W$ is the weight matrix multiplied by the feature. $\alpha$ is the attention cross-correlation coefficient calculated previously. $\sigma$ is the non-linear activation function. The $j$th node ($j \in N_i$) represents all nodes adjacent to the $i$th node.

In order to stabilize the learning process of the self-attention mechanism, the capabilities of the model is enhanced by using $k$ independent attention mechanisms to execute the formula to obtain the final one:

$$h'_i = \sigma\left(\frac{1}{K} \sum_{k=1}^{K} \sum_{j \in N_i} \alpha_{ij}^{k} W^k h_j\right)$$

(4)

A total of $K$ attention mechanisms need to be considered. $k$ represents the $k$th in $K$, and the $k$th attention mechanism is $a^k$. The linear transformation weight matrix of the input feature under the $k$th attention mechanism is expressed as $W^k$.

Using an ECFG as input, the overall task is transformed into a node classification problem by learning all the nodes in the ECFG through graph attention networks. All nodes in the graph are classified into correct, and invalid instructions (including disassembly results from other bytes as well as data). Through training, the correct nodes in the graph can be identified. An example of classification is given in Fig. 3. After node classification, the correct disassembly result in the ECFG can be obtained. The correct nodes builds the correct CFG. The first byte of the first instruction of the CFG is the starting byte, and bytes that are not in the CFG are judged as data.

4 Experiment

4.1 Setup

4.1.1 Data set

The data set comes from three sources.

1. Win10 Professional 32-bit (version number 1507) 306 executable files under \Windows \System32. The mixing of code and data in the .text section of these files is more obvious.
2. MASM32 examples hand-written assembly code programs. There is less data in the .text section of these files.

3. 128 pictures were randomly selected from the internet for training and testing, including GIF, JFIF, JPG, PNG, WEBP picture files. They are used to test the performance of the model on data and code.

For executable files, the ground truth of disassembly code is obtained by the program database files (PDB, which contains debugging information of the executable file). For the disassembly result starting from a byte (single instruction), there are two cases: 1) the disassembly result at that byte position is correct (TrueDisasm); 2) the disassembly result at that byte position is incorrect (FalseDisasm).

The details of the data set are shown in Table 1. For compiler-generated, hand-written, and data files, these files are extracted as byte sequences and their ECFGs are constructed. In an ECFG, a node is a TrueDisasm, which is a true instruction corresponding to the source code; or a FalseDisasm, which is a false instruction disassembled from data or an incorrect address of code.

The code in a file has a high probability of having the same code style. So the training set and test set are divided in files to avoid similar style of code in them. The training set and test set files are divided by 5:1 to verify the robustness and effectiveness of a model.

4.1.2 Model settings

The disassembly engine used in this experiment is Capstone, and the deep learning framework is tf_geometric, a graph neural network library based on TensorFlow. Four layers of graph attention network are used to learn the parameters, with 8 attention heads of each layer and the activation function LeakyRelu. The final classification is performed using full connectivity with the activation function sigmoid. L2 regularization is performed with a learning rate of 5e-3 and iterations of 10000.

Figure 3: Example of node classification by graph attention network
4.2 Result

4.2.1 Training result

The compiler-generated executables, the hand-written assembly-generated executables, and the data files are put together for training, and the results are shown in Fig. 4.

![Accuracy of CESN on different data sets. TestCompiler represents the test set of high language programs. TestASM is test set of hand-crafted programs.](image-url)

Fig. 4 shows that putting all training sets together for training can classify more accurately the disassembly results of data files, compiler-generated executables, and hand-written assembly-generated executables. The precision, recall, F1 score, and PTrueDisasm (the proportion of TrueDisasm predicted after classification among all generated nodes) are introduced to have a more accurate evaluation of the model. The models trained with
all training sets, hand-crafted files, compiler-generated files are called CESN, MCG, and CGG, respectively.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Precision} &= \frac{TP}{TP + FP} \\
\text{Recall} &= \frac{TP}{TP + FN} \\
F_1\text{-score} &= 2 \times \frac{\text{Precision} \times \text{Recall}}{\text{Precision} + \text{Recall}} \\
\text{PTrueDisasm} &= \frac{\text{TrueDisasm}}{\text{TrueDisasm} + \text{FalseDisasm}}
\end{align*}
\]

Where TP refers to the predicted and actual results are TrueDisasm, TN refers to the predicted and actual results are FalseDisasm, FP refers to the predicted result is TrueDisasm while actual result is FalseDisasm, FN refers to the predicted result is FalseDisasm while actual result is TrueDisasm.

Table 2 indicates the detailed evaluation metrics for the compiler-generated and hand-written code segments of the test set, as well as the detailed evaluation metrics for the data file.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data set</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Precision</th>
<th>Recall</th>
<th>F1 Score</th>
<th>PTrueDisasm</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compiler-generated</td>
<td>CGG</td>
<td>0.82990</td>
<td>0.83512</td>
<td>0.83250</td>
<td>0.36875</td>
<td>0.87686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MCG</td>
<td>0.70093</td>
<td>0.61430</td>
<td>0.65476</td>
<td>0.32116</td>
<td>0.76262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CESN</td>
<td>0.82990</td>
<td>0.83512</td>
<td>0.83250</td>
<td>0.36875</td>
<td>0.87686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand-written</td>
<td>CGG</td>
<td>0.80084</td>
<td>0.72387</td>
<td>0.76041</td>
<td>0.24628</td>
<td>0.87571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MCG</td>
<td>0.83014</td>
<td>0.90497</td>
<td>0.86594</td>
<td>0.29703</td>
<td>0.92365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CESN</td>
<td>0.77208</td>
<td>0.71925</td>
<td>0.74473</td>
<td>0.25383</td>
<td>0.86565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>CGG</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.27070</td>
<td>0.72930</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MCG</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.17606</td>
<td>0.82394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CESN</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.05337</td>
<td>0.94663</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Result of test set

Table 2 shows that the proposed method can disassemble the complete code segment for identification and also analyze the data file. The lower accuracy is caused by the fact that the code and data are more similar, while the PTrueDisasm of the data segment is often lower than that of the code segment.

For the identification of binary sequences, 256-bytes sequences were intercepted from the compiler-generated test set and the hand-written data set to test the accuracy of the proposed method for byte sequence identification. For the compiler-generated executable files, the intercepted byte sequences were 0x500-0x600, 0x1000-0x1100, 0x1500-0x1600, and 0x2000-0x2100. Due to the small size of the manually written assembly files, only 0x100-0x200, 0x500-0x600 were intercepted. The detailed results are shown in Table 3.

Furthermore, 1,280-bytes sequences were intercepted from the compiler-generated test set and the hand-written data set to test the accuracy of the method for byte sequence identification. For the compiler-generated executable file the intercepted byte sequences were 0x500-0xa00, 0x1000-0x1500, 0x1500-0x1a00, and due to the hand-written assembly file is small, only 0x100-0x600, 0x500-0xa00 are intercepted, as shown in Table 4.
Table 3: Result of 256-bytes sequences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data set</th>
<th>Address Model</th>
<th>Precision</th>
<th>Recall</th>
<th>F1 Score</th>
<th>PTrueDisasm</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compiler-generated 500-600</td>
<td>CGG</td>
<td>0.41107</td>
<td>0.89474</td>
<td>0.56333</td>
<td>0.15777</td>
<td>0.89946</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MCG</td>
<td>0.44973</td>
<td>0.59649</td>
<td>0.51282</td>
<td>0.09613</td>
<td>0.91785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CESN</td>
<td><strong>0.45289</strong></td>
<td>0.81330</td>
<td><strong>0.58180</strong></td>
<td>0.12267</td>
<td>0.92013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capstone</td>
<td>0.19455</td>
<td><strong>0.97569</strong></td>
<td>0.32442</td>
<td>0.22656</td>
<td>0.72570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000-1100</td>
<td>CGG</td>
<td>0.66262</td>
<td>0.93705</td>
<td><strong>0.77630</strong></td>
<td>0.17389</td>
<td><strong>0.93359</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MCG</td>
<td>0.55895</td>
<td>0.57654</td>
<td>0.56761</td>
<td>0.12684</td>
<td>0.89199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CESN</td>
<td><strong>0.67910</strong></td>
<td>0.85980</td>
<td>0.75884</td>
<td>0.15569</td>
<td>0.93280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capstone</td>
<td>0.3309</td>
<td><strong>0.98440</strong></td>
<td>0.49776</td>
<td>0.40234</td>
<td>0.76214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500-1600</td>
<td>CGG</td>
<td>0.37692</td>
<td><strong>0.88920</strong></td>
<td>0.69981</td>
<td>0.20598</td>
<td><strong>0.89805</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MCG</td>
<td>0.49645</td>
<td>0.59139</td>
<td>0.53978</td>
<td>0.15920</td>
<td>0.86522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CESN</td>
<td><strong>0.60662</strong></td>
<td>0.78899</td>
<td>0.68589</td>
<td>0.17382</td>
<td><strong>0.90342</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capstone</td>
<td>0.32509</td>
<td>0.87273</td>
<td>0.47371</td>
<td>0.46094</td>
<td>0.74809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2100</td>
<td>CGG</td>
<td>0.53668</td>
<td>0.93168</td>
<td>0.72524</td>
<td>0.23583</td>
<td>0.89391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MCG</td>
<td>0.58567</td>
<td>0.62961</td>
<td>0.60684</td>
<td>0.16155</td>
<td>0.87740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CESN</td>
<td><strong>0.61961</strong></td>
<td>0.84662</td>
<td>0.71554</td>
<td>0.20534</td>
<td><strong>0.90884</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hand-written 100-200</td>
<td>CGG</td>
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<td>0.66724</td>
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<td>0.86683</td>
<td>0.75388</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Capstone</td>
<td>0.35306</td>
<td><strong>0.98702</strong></td>
<td>0.52008</td>
<td>0.44609</td>
<td>0.78074</td>
</tr>
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<td>CGG</td>
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Table 4: Result of 1,280-bytes sequences

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<tr>
<th>DataSet</th>
<th>Address Model</th>
<th>Precision</th>
<th>Recall</th>
<th>F1 Score</th>
<th>PTrueDisasm</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Compiler-generated 500-0a00</td>
<td>CGG</td>
<td><strong>0.59291</strong></td>
<td>0.90079</td>
<td>0.71512</td>
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<td><strong>0.93066</strong></td>
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<td>0.55409</td>
<td>0.60943</td>
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<td>0.63157</td>
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<td><strong>0.91284</strong></td>
<td>0.45973</td>
<td>0.04531</td>
<td>0.79614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000-1500</td>
<td>CGG</td>
<td><strong>0.63912</strong></td>
<td>0.93114</td>
<td><strong>0.75798</strong></td>
<td>0.17813</td>
<td><strong>0.92730</strong></td>
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<td>0.55887</td>
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<td>CESN</td>
<td>0.66697</td>
<td>0.86683</td>
<td>0.75388</td>
<td>0.15891</td>
<td>0.93080</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Capstone</td>
<td>0.35306</td>
<td><strong>0.98702</strong></td>
<td>0.52008</td>
<td>0.44609</td>
<td>0.78074</td>
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<tr>
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<td>CGG</td>
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<td><strong>0.76455</strong></td>
<td>0.18246</td>
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<td>0.68196</td>
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<td>0.43773</td>
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<td>0.58906</td>
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</table>
For the identification and analysis of binary byte sequences, it is clear from the experiments that the method of this paper is better than the direct disassembly of binary byte sequences using Capstone in general. Due to the mixture of code and data, the direct disassembly work leads to low accuracy, and a large amount of data is disassembled into assembly code incorrectly. The proposed method can effectively distinguish between code and data. It has a better accuracy in general.

Table 5 lists PTrueDisasm of CESN on test set. In real-world situations, since it is not known whether the input byte sequences belong to compiler-generated, hand-written-generated or data, CESN is used for testing and analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All bytes 256-bytes</th>
<th>1,280-bytes</th>
<th>0.14738</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Compiler-generated</td>
<td>0.36875</td>
<td>0.16438</td>
<td>0.17592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand-written</td>
<td>0.25383</td>
<td>0.20933</td>
<td>0.05337</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>0.05337</td>
<td>0.05337</td>
<td>0.05337</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: PTrueDisasm of CESN on test set

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 Disassembly

Table 2 and Table 3 shows that the accuracy is about 87% and the F1 score is 79% in the identification of the instructions of the complete code segment; the accuracy is about 91% and the F1 score is 71% in the identification of the disassembly instructions of the code segment. The accuracy calculates the number of correctly identified nodes among all nodes. In the real scenario, the recognition as FalseDisasm does not have analytical significance, so in the F1 score calculation, only the result of TrueDisasm is calculated.

CESN is not ideal for the recognition of disassembly instructions for complete code segments and code fragments, which is caused by the more similar code and data. File where.exe was randomly selected for detailed analysis. The results were divided into the following two cases.

4.3.1.1 FalseDisasm is predicted as TrueDisasm

In Fig. 5, code between 0x4015AC and 0x4015B9 is the true disassembly. CESN determines that the corresponding instructions at all addresses in the figure are correct. However, there is a misjudgment at 0x4015B0 and 0x4015B4. The byte 80 33 C0 at 0x4015B0 is identified as instruction “xor byte ptr [ebx], 0xc0”, and the byte 89 04 7B at 0x4015B4 is identified as instruction “mov dword ptr [ebx + edi*2], eax”. This is probably due to the fact that the instruction at 0x4015B0 is similar to the instruction at 0x4015B1, and the instruction at 0x4015B4 is similar to the instruction at 0x4015B3. This can be corrected according to the control flow.

In Fig. 6, the true disassembly is between 0x4015E0 to 0x4015EA and it is judged as TrueDisasm. This may be due to the existence of similar instructions in the training set that are all TrueDisasm, leading to a similar situation in the test set where FalseDisasm is judged as TrueDisasm. Since the instruction pop ebp does not have a parent in the
Figure 5: FalseDisasm is predicted as TrueDisasm in where.exe

(a) Real Disassembly

(b) ECFG

control flow, and the target of loopne (0x40162d) is FalseDisasm at both the real case and the predicted result, some heuristic rules could be applied to remove the false instruction at 0x4015E3 and 0x4015E4.

4.3.1.2 TrueDisasm is predicted as FalseDisasm

In Fig. 7, the true disassembly is between 0x401905 and 0x40191B. However, in the prediction result of CESN, the instruction at 0x401913 is discriminated as FalseDisasm. This may be due to the fact that there are fewer consecutive mov instructions in the training set and the model is not sensitive to the address articulation.
In Fig. 8, the real disassembly is between 0x401B10 and 0x401B33. However, the model judges the instructions at 0x401B26, 0x401B2B, and 0x401B2E as data. It is probably due to the fact that the bytes corresponding to these instructions in the model training set are data. In a real scenario, it is not possible to have a broken control flow.

4.3.2 Compiler-generated and hand-written data set

Executables, which are built with different compilers, optimization options, and architectures, contain the features belonging to the compilers. Common approaches are currently based on these features for disassembly, function identification or similarity matching. However, these features may not work well for assembly programs which may not have standard features. The proposed method is not based on the head and tail features of functions, and can effectively disassemble the hand-written executables. As shown in Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4, the accuracy of CESN in hand-written reaches 87% and the F1 score is 74%. The accuracy in the code fragment reaches 88% and the F1 score is 71%.

4.3.3 Code and data distinction

CESN can disassemble any byte sequence and identify code and data in it. For an ECFG, the instructions in the graph contain true and false instructions. Among them, in the
Table 5 shows that CESN can distinguish more obviously whether a byte sequence belongs to code or data. In the real scenario, for a byte sequence, if there are more than 10% TrueDisasm, it can be considered that the byte sequence contains code.

5 Conclusions and future work

In this paper, a new disassembly method is proposed. First, by disassembling each byte of the byte sequence as the first address in turn, an ECFG is constructed for the disassembly results, and the graph nodes are classified using a graph attention network to obtain the correct CFG. The experimental results show that the proposed approach can effectively disassemble binary code sequences and provide a new way of thinking to distinguish

Figure 8: TrueDisasm is predicted as FalseDisasm in where.exe

complete code segment, about 30% instructions are true. In the code segment, about 20% instructions are true. In the data, there is no disassembly code, i.e., the number of instructions should be 0.
code and data, which possesses good applicability even in the face of complex data sets with complex data and different code writing styles.

However, there are three shortcomings. First, the proposed method cannot identify indirect jumps. It can be considered to introduce dynamic analysis or use link prediction in graph neural network to find the addresses of indirect jumps. Second, disassembly rules could be used to optimize the graph neural network after it classifies nodes. The rules include data segments must be preceded by jump instructions, functions end with jump, return, call instructions, etc. These rules filter out the misclassified nodes. Finally, the bytes is used as node features, ignoring the relationship between bytes. In future, embedding could be used to obtain a larger feature space.

**Acknowledgment**

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**References**


