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J. Morris Chang
Iowa State University, morris@iastate.edu

Chi-Chen Fang
Iowa State University

Kuan-Hsing Ho
Iowa State University

Norene Kelly
Iowa State University

Pei-Yuan Wu
Princeton University

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Capturing Cognitive Fingerprints from Keystroke Dynamics for Active Authentication

J. Morris Chang, Chi-Chen Fang, Kuan-Hsing Ho, Norene Kelly, Pei-Yuan Wu, Yixiao Ding, Chris Chu, Stephen Gilbert, Amed E. Kamal, Sun-Yuan Kung

Abstract – Conventional authentication systems identify a user only at entry point. Keystroke dynamics can continuously authenticate users by the typing rhythm without extra devices. This paper presents a new feature called Cognitive Typing Rhythm to continuously verify the identities of computer users. Two machine techniques, SVM and KRR, have been developed in our system. The experiments were conducted by 1,977 users, and the best result obtained a false rejection rate of 0.7% and a false acceptance rate of 5.5%. This paper introduces using cognitive fingerprints for continuous authentication, and the feature is effective and has been verified through a large-scale dataset.

Keywords – security, continuous authentication, keystroke dynamics

Introduction

Conventional authentication systems verify a user only during initial login. Active authentication performs verification continuously as long as the session remains active. This work focuses on using behavioral biometrics, extracted from keystroke dynamics, as “something a user is” for active authentication. This scheme performs continual verification in the background, requires no additional hardware devices and is invisible to users.

Keystroke dynamics, the detailed timing information of keystrokes when using a keyboard, has been studied for the past three decades. The typical keystroke interval time is expressed as the time between typing two characters, and this feature is called the digraphs. The keystroke rhythms of a user are distinct enough from person to person such that they can be used as biometrics to identify people. However, it has been generally considered much less reliable than physical biometrics such as fingerprints. The main challenge is the presence of within-user variability.

Due to within-user variability of interval times among identical keystrokes, most past efforts have focused on verification techniques that can manage such variability. For example, a method called Degree of Disorder (DoD) [1, 2] was proposed to cope with the time variation issues. It argued that while the keystroke typing durations usually vary between each sample, the order of the timing tends to be consistent. It suggested that the distance of the order between two keystroke patterns can be used to measure the similarity.

A recent paper [3] provided a comprehensive survey on biometric authentication using keystroke dynamics. This survey paper classified research papers based on their features extraction methods, feature subset selection methods and classification methods. Most of the systems described in this survey were based on typing rhythm of short sample texts, which is dominated by the physical characteristics of users and too brief to capture a “cognitive fingerprint.” In the current keystroke authentication commercial market, some products combine the timing information of the password with password-based access control to generate the hardened password [4, 5, 6].
In this paper, we present a biometric-based active authentication system. This system continuously monitors and analyzes various keyboard behavior performed by the user. We extract the features from keystroke dynamics that contain cognitive factors, resulting in cognitive fingerprints. Each feature is a sequence of digraphs from a specific word. This method is driven by our hypothesis that a cognitive factor can affect the typing rhythm of a specific word. Cognitive factors have been largely ignored in the keystroke dynamics studies of the past three decades. The rest of this paper will detail our project’s: (1) search for cognitive fingerprints; (2) building of an authentication system with machine learning techniques; and (3) results from a large scale experiment at Iowa State University.

Searching for cognitive fingerprints

Physical biometrics rely on physical characteristics such as fingerprints or retinal patterns. The behavioral biometric of keystroke dynamics must incorporate cognitive fingerprints to advance the field, but the cognitive fingerprint does not have a specific definition. We hypothesize that natural pauses (delays between typing characters in words) are caused by cognitive factors (e.g., spelling an unfamiliar word or after certain syllables) [7, 8, 9, 10, 11], which are unique among individuals. Thus, a cognitive factor can affect the typing rhythm of a specific word. In this research, each feature is represented by a unique cognitive typing rhythm (CTR) which contains the sequence of digraphs from a specific word. Such features include natural pauses among its timing information (e.g., digraphs) and could be used as a cognitive fingerprint. Conventional keystroke dynamics does not distinguish timing information between different words and only considers a collection of digraphs (e.g., tri-graphs or N-graphs). Cognitive factors, thus, have been ignored.

As we can see from Figure 1(a), there is a collection of digraphs (“re”) observed from the same user. One might think the collection of digraphs represent part of a keystroke rhythm. However, as we more closely examine each collection of digraphs, these digraphs are clustered around different words that contain the digraphs. For example, for the collection of digraphs “re”, we can separate these digraphs according to four different words (i.e., really, were, parents, and store). This shows that examining digraphs in isolation might result in missing some important information related to specific words. This observation confirms our hypothesis: a cognitive
factor can affect the typing rhythm of a specific word. Thus, we extract CTR from keystroke
dynamics and use them as features (cognitive fingerprints) for active authentication. Each feature
is a sequence of digraphs of a specific word (instead of a collection of digraphs). For each
legitimate user, we collect samples of each feature and, then, build a classifier for that feature
during the training phase of machine learning.

**Building authentication system with machine learning techniques**

We have developed two authentication systems based on two different machine learning
techniques. The first one uses off-the-shelf SVM (support vector machine) library [12] while the
second one employs an in-house developed library based on KRR (Kernel Ridge Regression)
[13]. These libraries are used to build each classifier during the training phase. While it is not
possible to know the patterns of all imposters, we use patterns from the legitimate user and some
known imposters to build each classifier and expect that it can detect any potential imposter
within a reasonable probability. This is a two-class (legitimate user vs. imposters) classification
approach in machine learning. We build a trained profile with multiple classifiers for each
legitimate user. During the testing phase (i.e., authentication), a set of testing data is given to the
trained profile for verification. Each classifier under testing yields a matching score between the
testing dataset and trained file. The final decision (accept or reject) is based on a sum of scores
fusion method.

Other than differing basic machine learning libraries, the two systems share the same feature
selection and fusion method. In the fusion method, we evaluate each classifier to determine the
confidence level of its decision. Such evaluation is conducted during the training phase with
datasets from each legitimate user and imposters. The basic idea is illustrated in Figure 2. The
dataset has been separated into k equal size subsets. Each time, k-1 subsets are used as training
data and the remaining subset is for testing. Such testing will be repeated k times until every
subset has been used for testing the model. This technique is called k-fold cross-validation (a.k.a.
rotation estimation).

From results of these tests, we can estimate the probabilities of true acceptance ($P_{ta}$) and false
acceptance ($P_{fa}$) of the classifier. For example, after the testing with dataset from legitimate user,
there are N acceptances out of M samples, $P_{ta}$ is N/M. The confidence of decision ($W_a$) on
acceptance is expressed as the ratio of $P_{ta}$ to $P_{fa}$. The confidence of decision on rejection ($W_r$) is
expressed as the ratio of the probability of true rejection (1-$P_{fa}$) to the probability of false
rejection (1-$P_{ta}$).
After the training, in the trained profile, there are $W_a$ and $W_r$ for each classifier. During the testing phase, each classifier generates a decision (acceptance or rejection). Either $W_a$ or $W_r$ will be applied to this decision. The final decision is based on the sum of scores of all involved classifiers.

**A large scale experiment at Iowa State University**

For this project, we developed a web-based software system to collect the keystroke dynamics of individuals in large scale testing at Iowa State University. This web-based system provided three simulated user environments: typing short sentences, writing short essays, and browsing web pages. The users’ cognitive fingerprints were stored in a database for further analyses. Machine learning techniques were used to perform pattern recognition to authenticate users.

During November and December of 2012, email invitations were sent to 36,000 members of the ISU community. There were 1,977 participants completed two segments that each lasted about 30-minutes, and resulted in about 900 words for each participant for each segment. In addition, 983 participants (out of the 1,977) completed another segment of approximately 30-minutes in length, in which about 1,200 words were collected for each participant. We then developed 983 individual profiles (trained files). Each profile was trained under two-class classification in which one legitimate user had 2,100 collected words and the imposter training set was based on collected words from other 982 known participants. Each profile was tested with the data of the 1,977 participants (testing dataset of 900 words per participant).
The experiment results are presented in Figure 3, where the performance comparison of two verification systems is summarized in 3 (a), and the DET (Detection Error Tradeoff) chart from KRR-based system is given in 3 (b). In this experiment, 983 legitimate profiles had been tested by themselves. 7 (out of 983) users had been recognized as imposter for SVM, and 17 (out of 983) users for KRR. Also, each profile had been tested with other 1976 participants and the FAR was 0.055% for both SVM and KRR. In summary, the proposed scheme is effective for authentication and has been verified through a large-scale dataset.

References


Bio

J. Morris Chang is an associate professor of electrical and computer engineering at Iowa State University. His technical interests include cyber security, wireless networks, and embedded computer systems. Chang has a PhD in computer engineering from North Carolina State University. Contact him at morris@iastate.edu.

Chi-Chen Fang got his B.S. in electrical engineering from Tatung University. He is a Ph.D student in Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Iowa State University. His research interests are computer security and embedded computer systems.

Kuan-Hsing Ho is currently a master student at Electrical and Computer Engineering in Iowa State University. His research interests include machine learning, information extraction and integration and learning from large datasets.

Norene Kelly is a doctoral student in the Human Computer Interaction program at Iowa State University. Her Master thesis pertained to affective computing and haptics, and she is the instructor of a models and theories course in HCI. She has a professional membership in ACM/SIGCHI (Association for Computing Machinery/human-technology & human-computer interaction division).

Peiyuan Wu received his B.S. in electrical engineering from National Taiwan University, Taiwan in 2009. He is currently a Ph.D student at Department of Electrical Engineering in Princeton University. His research interest lies in the robustness and efficiency issues in kernel based machine learning. His email is peiwu@princeton.edu.
Yixiao Ding is currently a Ph.D student at Electrical and Computer Engineering in Iowa State University. His interest lies in CAD of VLSI physical design, and design and analysis of algorithms.

Chris Chu received the B.S. degree in computer science from the University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, in 1993. He received the M.S. degree and the Ph.D. degree in computer science from the University of Texas at Austin in 1994 and 1999, respectively. Dr. Chu is a Professor in the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department at Iowa State University. His area of expertises include CAD of VLSI physical design, and design and analysis of algorithms.

Stephen Gilbert, Ph.D., is Associate Director of the Virtual Reality Applications Center (VRAC) at Iowa State University and assistant professor of industrial and manufacturing systems engineering in the human factors division. His research focuses on intelligent tutoring systems, human-computer interaction, and emerging technologies for training. Gilbert has a Ph.D. in brain and cognitive sciences from MIT and B.S.E. in civil engineering and operations research from Princeton.

Ahmed E. Kamal is a professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Iowa State University. His research interests are in the areas of Cognitive Radio Networks, Optical Networks and Performance Evaluation. He is a Fellow of the IEEE. He received his Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Toronto in Canada.

S.Y. Kung is a Professor at Department of Electrical Engineering in Princeton University. His research areas include VLSI array processors, system modeling and identification, machine learning, wireless communication, sensor array processing, multimedia signal processing, and genomic signal processing and data mining.

Contact information
J. Morris Chang
391A Durham, Ames, IA 50011-2252
515-294-7618
morris@iastate.edu

Chi-Chen Fang
2215 Coover Hall, Ames, IA 50011
515-294-2664
cfang@iastate.edu

Kuan-Hsing Ho
2215 Coover Hall, Ames, IA 50011
515-294-2664
pm426015@iastate.edu

Norene Kelly
8904 Highland Oaks Dr., Johnston, IA 50131
515-334-5489
Peiyuan Wu
Atrium 3, Engineering Quadrangle, Department of Electrical Engineering
Princeton University, Princeton NJ 08544
peiwu@princeton.edu

Yixiao Ding
2215 Coover Hall, Ames, IA 50011
515-294-2664
vyding@iastate.edu

Chris Chu
2215 Coover Hall, Ames, IA 50011
cnchu@iastate.edu

Stephen Gilbert
1620 Howe Hall, Ames, IA 50011
515-294-6782
gilbert@iastate.edu

Ahmed E. Kamal
319 Durham, Ames, IA 50011-2252
515-294-3580
kamal@iastate.edu

S.Y. Kung
Room B230, Engineering Quadrangle, Department of Electrical Engineering
Princeton University, Princeton NJ 08544
kung@princeton.edu