Robot Compliant Behavior through Reinforcement Learning

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In tasks which involve contact or require a specific response to physical perturbations, position control alone is insufficient to achieve the goals of the task. In these cases, the robot should have the ability to adapt the impedance for different task requirements in order to achieve better versatility and robustness. Impedance control is one of the most adopted methods controlling the interaction between a manipulator and the environment. For redundant manipulators, different impedance behaviors can be realized for the end-effector and the null-space of the main task [1].

In this work, we proposed a method to learn variable stiffness gains by experience. We build a reinforcement learning system to learn the new trajectory and corresponding null-space stiffness in robot body based on some tasks. In contrast to [3], we use the PoWER algorithm [2] in this system. Furthermore we use this system to learn the variable stiffness in null-space impedance control so that the Cartesian space execution will not be affected.

Null-space impedance control

For redundant manipulators it is possible to have some joint-space impedance and task-space impedance simultaneously by projecting the joint space stiffness in the null-space of the Jacobian of the main task.

\[ \ddot{q}_i = J^T(\ddot{x}_c - J\dot{q}) + N(\ddot{q}_d + M^{\ddagger}d(B\ddot{q}_d - q) + K_{s}(q_d - q)\cdot \tau_{\text{ext}}) \]  

(1)

where $J^T$ is the pseudo inverse of the Jacobian, $\ddot{x}_c$ is the task-space commanded acceleration, $N$ is a $(n \times n)$ matrix which projects joint velocity into the null-space of Jacobian, $\dddot{q}$ are the joint variables, $M_d$, $B_d$ and $K_s$ are the desired inertia, damping and stiffness matrices respectively.

Maintaining the Integrity of the Specifications

To learn the null-space stiffness, we built a reinforcement learning system. The system is shown in Figure 1. The initial trajectory is obtained by training Dynamic Movement Primitive (DMP). Initial stiffness is set constant. Then we use PoWER algorithm to optimize the planed trajectory and stiffness according to the reward function. The modified trajectory will be updated through

\[ \tau\ddot{y} = \alpha_s(b_s^T(<\theta + E> - z) + b_{in}^T(\theta + E) \]  

(2)

where $y$ is the modified trajectory on robot body, $g$ is a known goal state, $\alpha_s$ and $b_s$ are constants, $\tau$ is a temporal scaling factor. $\theta$ is the policy parameter, which is updated by PoWER and $E$ is the exploration noise. $b_{in}$ is nonlinear function composed of Gaussian basis functions of the trajectory. The stiffness update rule is

\[ \dot{K}_s = \alpha_s(b_s^T(<\theta + E> - K_s) \]  

(3)

where $K_s$ is the leaned stiffness, $\theta$ and $E$ share the same definition with (2). $\alpha_s$ is a constant. $b_s$ is the vector of basis functions of stiffness.

We performed an experiment on a KUKA LWR4+. A spherical obstacle is located in the environment. We set the reward function so that it leads to good tracking far from the obstacle and to avoid obstacle and to decrease stiffness near the obstacle. Figure 2 shows the task-space error with constant stiffness and learned variable stiffness. One can see that with the learned impedance the robot achieved better task-space execution.

![Figure 3](image)

References

