

INTRODUCTION

Segmentation is an important branch in medical image processing and the basis for further detailed investigations on computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), X-ray, ultrasound (US) or nuclear images. Through segmentation, an image is divided into various connected areas that correspond to certain tissue types. A common aim is to delineate healthy and pathologic tissues. A frequent example in medicine is the identification of a tumor or pathological lesion and its volume to evaluate treatment planning and outcome. In the clinical routine, segmentation is necessary for the planning of specific treatment tasks, that are for example used in the radiation therapy or for the creation of three-dimensional (3D) visualizations and models to simulate a surgical procedure. Segmentation can be classified into several families of techniques, such as thresholding, region growing, watershed, edge-based approaches, active contours and model-based algorithms. Recently, deep learning using neural networks is becoming important for automatic segmentation applications.

Neural networks are constructed of neurons that are organized into input layers, output layers, and hidden layers, which are located between the input and output layers. Neural networks with a large number of layers are known as deep networks. The neurons are connected via weights, which can be trained with a training dataset to solve specific problems. For efficient training, neural networks require large amounts of training data.

To train deep learning networks for lower jawbone (mandible) segmentation, we used anonymized CT datasets from ten patients of the complete head and neck region. All CT data acquisitions have been performed in the clinical routine for diagnostic reasons at a maxillofacial surgery department at our disposal. Each mandible of these CT images was segmented by two specialized doctors manually (slice-by-slice in axial direction) to generate the ground truth contours for the segmentation task.

METHODS

All implementations of this work were accomplished with the MeVisLab platform. MeVisLab is a medical image processing software with a graphical user interface. Besides, it provides built-in modules for basic image processing operations, such as low-pass filtering. These modules can be connected to form image processing networks.

We developed a MeVisLab module network that converts segmentation contours into ground truth images and a depiction of the patients' CT images. In addition, a MeVisLab macro module was created, which saves image data as separate and, optionally, modified slices.

In addition, we developed a SaveAsSingleSlices macro-module, which allows storing all slices of one image data stack as separate TIFF or PNG files automatically. In addition, our macro-module is able to export selected slices and to augment the dataset with geometric transformations and noise. Geometric transformations may use any combination of rotation, scaling and mirroring, while noise can be of the uniform, Gaussian or salt-and-pepper variety. All parameters can be interactive specified in a custom user interface panel.

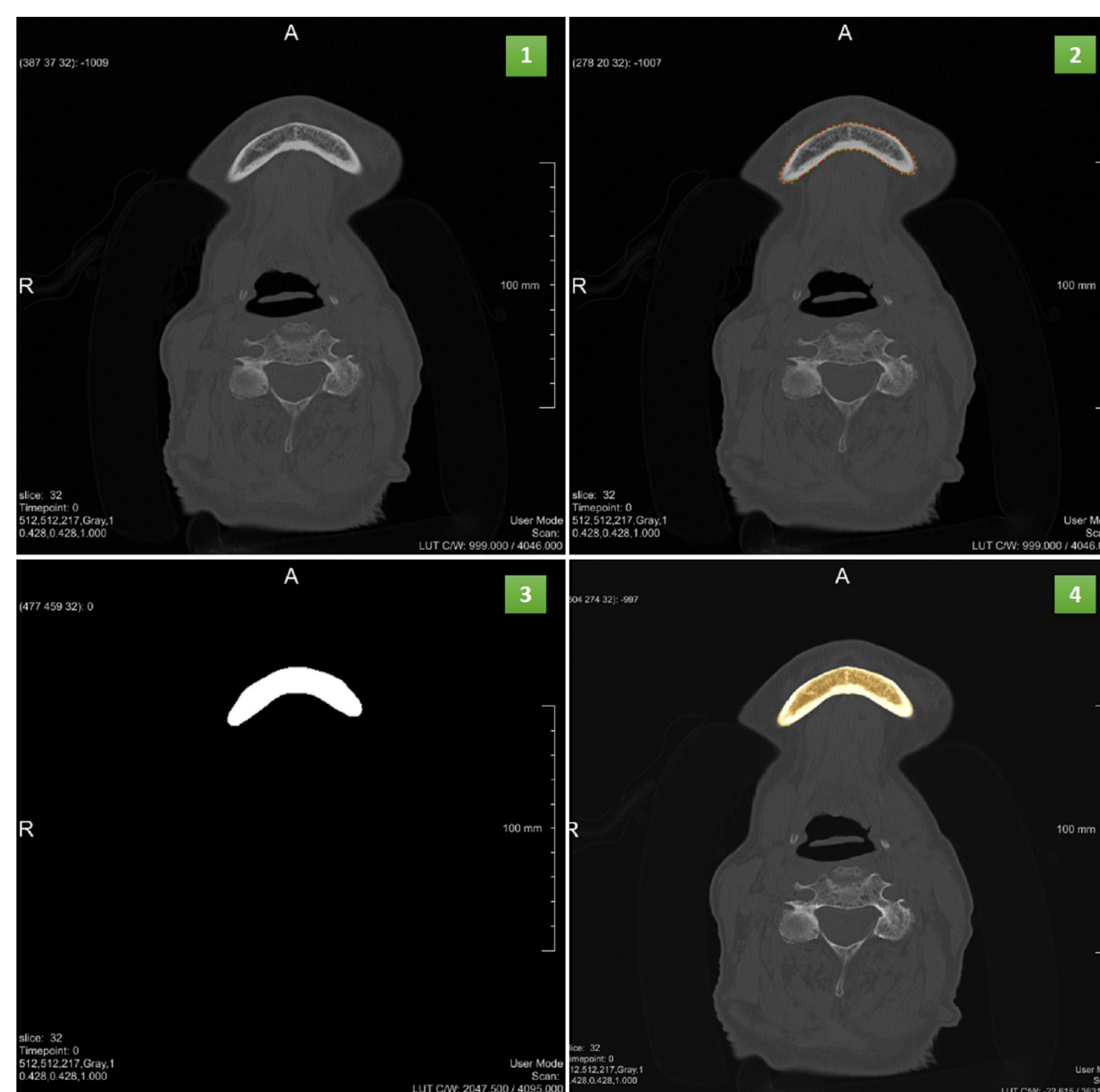


Fig. 2 Various representations created with a View2D modules. No. 1 shows the original CT, No. 2 the CT with an overlaid contour, No. 3 the binary mask and No. 4 the CT with the overlaid binary mask.

RESULTS

The number of exportable images relies on the definition of the storage parameters by the user. If the default values for transformation and adding noise are applied on a single slice, it is possible to export eleven slices (the original slice and ten artificially generated slices). We chose rotation angles of $\pm 8^\circ$, and a scale of 1 ± 0.04 in x- and y-direction. The amplitude of uniform noise has a value of 800 gray values, the Gaussian noise has a mean value of zero and a standard deviation of 300 gray values. The salt-and-pepper amplitudes are set to ± 2000 gray values, and the density is set to a value of 0.05.

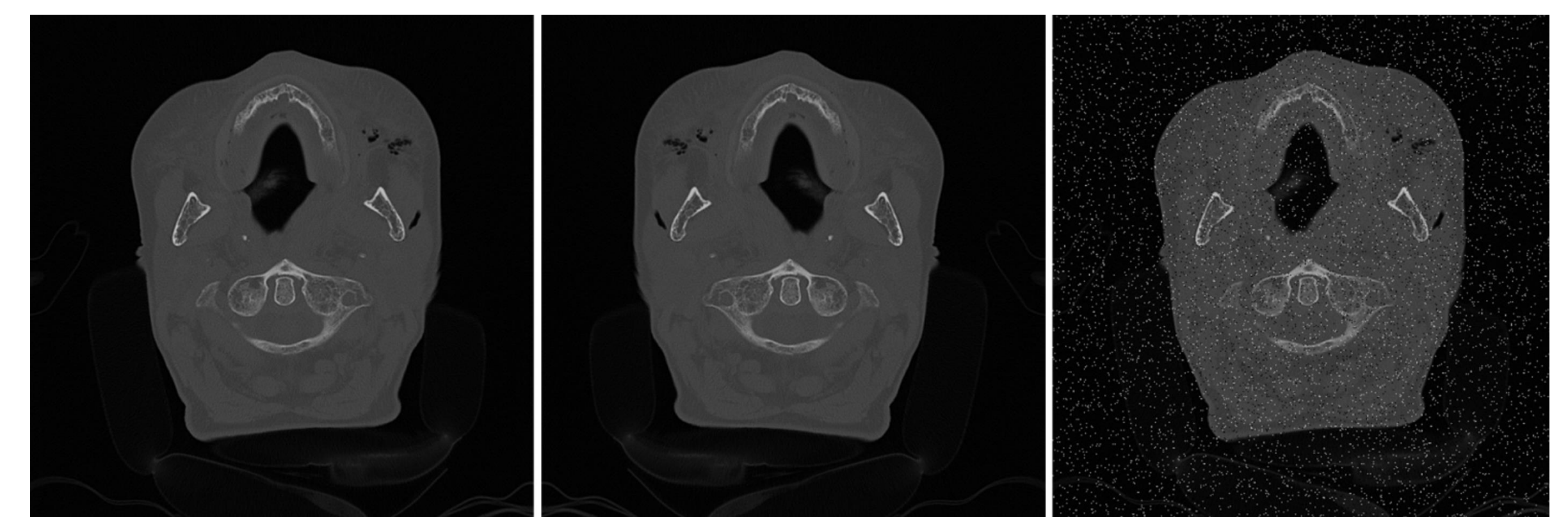


Fig. 3 Examples of exported CT slices in the lower jawbone area. The left image shows the original acquired CT slice of a patient. In the middle, is a flipped version of the left image visible. The right CT slice displays an image with added salt-and-pepper noise (amplitude ± 2000 and density 0.05).

CONCLUSIONS

In this work, a MeVisLab network and a macro-module have been developed to provide a convenient way to handle data preparation and augmentation for the segmentation of the lower jawbones with deep learning networks. The macro-module provides a convenient interface for tuning the training data set by selecting slices and applying freely configurable data augmentation. This approach makes it easy to systematically vary the data set before training.

REFERENCES

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