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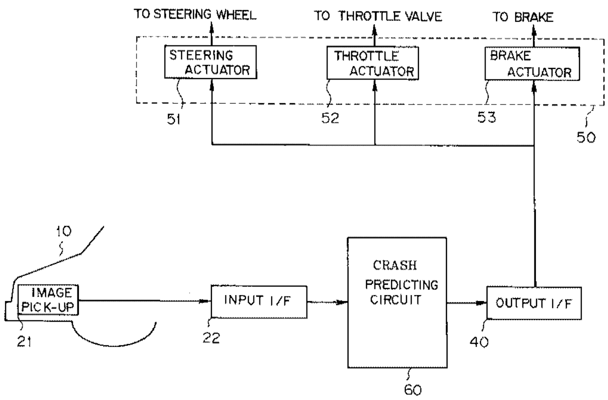
(54) **Vehicle crash predictive and evasive operation system by neural networks.**

(57) A system for predicting and evading crash of a vehicle (10) comprising image pick-up means (21) mounted on the vehicle for picking up images of actual ever-changing views when the vehicle is on running to produce actual image data, crash predicting means (60) associated with said image pick-up means (21), said crash predicting means (60) being successively supplied with the actual image data for predicting occurrence of crash between the vehicle and potentially dangerous objects on the roadway to produce an operational signal when there is possibility of crash and safety drive ensuring means (50) connected to said crash predicting means for actuating, in response to the operational signal, occupant protecting mechanism (51,52,53) which is operatively connected thereto and equipped in the vehicle, wherein said crash predicting means (60) comprises a neural network which is previously trained with training data to predict the possibility of crash, the training data representing ever-changing views previously picked-up said image picking-up means (21) during driving of the vehicle and just after actual crash.



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Background of the Invention

This invention generally relates to a system for predicting and evading crash of a vehicle, which otherwise will certainly be happened.

A driver has an unconscious and immediate sense of various conditions through the objects in view and, as a case may be, he must take an action to evade any possible crash or collision. However, drivers will often be panicked at the emergency of above their sense. Such a panicked driver may sometimes be the last one who can cope with the emergency to ensure the active safety of the vehicle. Besides, the response delay to stimuli in varying degrees is inherent to human beings, so that it is impossible in some cases to evade crash or danger by physical considerations. With this respect, various techniques have been developed to evade collision by means of mounting on a vehicle a system for determining the possibility of crash in a mechanical or electrical manner before it happens. Accidents could be reduced if drivers had an automatic system or the like warning of potential collision situations.

An automobile collision avoidance radar is typically used as this automatic system. Such an automobile collision avoidance radar is disclosed in, for example, M. Kiyoto and A. Tachibana, Nissan Technical Review: Automobile Collision-Avoidance Radar, Vol. 18, Dec. 1982 that is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety. The radar disclosed comprises a small radar radiation element and antennas installed at the front end of a vehicle. A transmitter transmits microwaves through the radiation element towards the headway. The microwave backscatter from a leading vehicle or any other objects as echo returns. The echo returns are received by a receiver through the antennas and supplied to a signal processor. The signal processor carries out signal processing operation to calculate a relative velocity and a relative distance between the object and the vehicle. The relative velocity and the relative distance are compared with predetermined values, respectively, to determine if the vehicle is going to collide with the object. The high possibility of collision results in activation of a proper safety system or systems.

However, the above mentioned radar system has a disadvantage of faulty operation or malfunctions, especially when the vehicle implementing this system passes by a sharp curve in a road. The radar essentially detects objects in front of the vehicle on which it is mounted. The system thus tends to incorrectly identify objects alongside the road such as a roadside, guard rails or even an automobile correctly running on the adjacent lane.

An intelligent vehicle has also been proposed that comprises an image processing system for cruise and traction controls. Ever-changing views spreading ahead the vehicle are successively picked up as image patterns. These image patterns are subjected to pattern matching with predetermined reference patterns. The reference patterns are classified into some categories associated with possible driving conditions. For example, three categories are defined for straight running, right turn and left turn. When a matching result indicates the presence of potentially dangerous objects in the picked up image, a steering wheel and a brake system are automatically operated through a particular mechanism to avoid or evade crash to that object.

The image processing system of the type described is useful in normal driving conditions where the pattern matching can be effectively made between the image patterns successively picked up and the reference patterns for safety driving control. However, image patterns representing various conditions on the roadway should be stored previously in the intelligent vehicle as the reference patterns. Vehicle orientation at initiation of crash varies greatly, so that huge numbers of reference patterns are required for the positive operation. This means that only a time-consuming calculation will result in a correct matching of the patterns, which is not suitable for evading an unexpected crash.

It is, of course, possible to increase operational speed of the pattern matching by using a large dedicated image processor. However, such a dedicated processor is generally complex in structure and relatively expensive, so that it is difficult to apply the same as the on-vehicle equipment. In addition, on-vehicle image processors, if achieved, will perform its function sufficiently only in the limited applications such as a supplemental navigation system during the normal cruising.

Summary of the Invention

An object of the present invention is to provide a system for predicting and evading crash of a vehicle using neural networks.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a system capable of training neural networks by means of collecting image data representing ever-changing vistas along the travel direction of a vehicle until the vehicle collides with something.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide a system for predicting crash though matching operation between data obtained on driving a vehicle and data learned by neural networks.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide a system for evading crash of a vehicle using neural networks to actuate a vehicle safety system for protecting an occupant.

In order to achieve the above mentioned objects, the present invention is provided with a system for predicting and evading crash of a vehicle comprising: an image pick-up device mounted on the vehicle for picking up images of ever-changing views when the vehicle is on running to produce image data; a crash predicting circuit associated with the image pick-up device, the crash predicting circuit being successively supplied with the image data for predicting occurrence of crash between the vehicle and potentially dangerous objects on the roadway to produce an operational signal when there is possibility of crash; and a safety driving ensuring device connected to the crash predicting circuit for actuating, in response to the operational signal, occupant protecting mechanism which is operatively connected thereto and equipped in the vehicle; wherein the crash predicting circuit comprises a neural network which is previously trained with training data to predict the possibility of crash, the training data representing ever-changing views previously picked-up the image picking-up device during driving of the vehicle and just after actual crash.

The neural network comprises at least an input layer and an output layer, and the training data are supplied to the input layer while the output layer is supplied with, as teacher data, flags representing expected and unexpected crash, respectively, of the vehicle. In addition, the neural network may comprise a two-dimensional self-organizing competitive learning layer as an intermediate layer.

Other advantages and features of the present invention will be described in detain in the following preferred embodiments thereof.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a conventional system for predicting and evading crash of a vehicle;

Fig. 2 is a schematic view showing a processing element in a typical neural network;

Fig. 3 is a graphical representation of a sigmoid function used as a transfer function for training neural networks;

Fig. 4 is a block diagram of a system for predicting and evading crash of a vehicle using neural networks according to the first embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 5(a) is a schematic structural diagram of a crash predicting circuit in Fig. 4 realized by a neural network of three layers;

Fig. 5(b) shows an example of an input layer consisting of a two-dimensional array of processing elements of the neural network shown in Fig. 5(a);

Figs. 6(a) and 6(b) are exemplified views picked up, as the training image data supplied to the neural network, at different time instances during driving an experimental vehicle;

Fig. 7 is a view showing an example of an image data obtained during driving a utility vehicle;

Fig. 8 is a view showing another example of an image data obtained during driving a utility vehicle; and

Fig. 9 is a block diagram of a system for predicting and evading crash using neural networks according to the second embodiment of the present invention.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

A conventional system for predicting and evading crash of a vehicle is described first to facilitate an understanding of the present invention. Throughout the following detailed description, similar reference numerals refer to similar elements in all figures of the drawing.

In the following description, the term "crash" is used in a wider sense that relates to all unexpected traffic accidents. Accidents other than crash include a turnover or fall of a vehicle, with which the phenomenon of "crash" is associated in some degrees therefore the use of term crash as a cause of traffic accidents.

As shown in Fig. 1, an image pick-up device 21 is mounted at a front portion of an automobile 10 to pick up ever-changing images as analog image data. This image pick-up device 21 is any one of suitable devices such as a charge-coupled-device (CCD) camera. The image data are subject to sampling for a sampling range $_\Delta$Tduring a predetermined sampling period $_\Delta$t. The image data are collected up to crash. In this event, the image pick-up range of the image pick-up device 21 corresponds to a field of view observed through naked eyes. The image pick-up device 21 is connected to an input interface 22. The analog image data obtained by the image pick-up device 21 are supplied to the input interface 22. The input interface 22 serves as an analog-to-digital converter for converting the analog image data into digital image data. More particularly, the picked up images are digitized by means of dividing the same into tiny pixels (data elements) isolated by grids. It is preferable to eliminate noises and distortions at this stage. The input interface 22 is also connected to a speed sensor 23, a steering gear ratio sensor 24 and a signal processor 30. The speed sensor 23 supplies velocity data to the signal processor 30 through the input interface 22. The velocity data represents an actual velocity of the automobile 10 at the time instant when the image pick-up device

21 picks up an image of a view. Likewise, the steering gear ratio sensor 24 supplies steering gear ratio data to the signal processor 30 through the input interface 22. The steering gear ratio data represents an actual steering gear ratio of the automobile 10.

The signal processor 30 comprises a central processing unit (CPU) 31, a read-only memory (ROM) 32 and a random-access memory (RAM) 33. CPU 31, ROM 32 and RAM 33 are operatively connected to each other through a data bus 34. To evade potentially dangerous objects, CPU 31 carries out calculation operation in response to the image, velocity and steering gear ratio data given through the input interface 22. CPU 31 performs proper functions according to programs stored in ROM 32 and RAM 33. The outputs of the signal processor 30 is transmitted through an output interface 40. ROM 32 stores a table relating to numerical values required for the calculation. It also stores a table representing operational amount for a safety drive ensuring arrangement 50. On the other hand, RAM 33 stores programs for use in calculating an optimum operational amount for the safety drive ensuring arrangement 50. A program for this purpose is disclosed in, for example, Teruo Yatabe, Automation Technique: Intelligent Vehicle, pages 22-28.

The signal processor 30 first determines, according to the picked up image data, whether there is a space available on the roadway to pass through. When there is enough space to pass through and a potentially dangerous object is present on the roadway, the signal processor 30 calculates optimum operational amount for the safety drive ensuring arrangement 50 to operate the same. In Fig. 1, the safety drive ensuring arrangement 50 consists of a steering actuator 51, a throttle actuator 52 and a brake actuator 53. If the signal processor 30 determines that it is necessary to operate these actuators, it produces steering gear ratio command, set velocity command, and brake operation command. The steering actuator 51, the throttle actuator 52 and the brake actuator 53 are operated depending on the condition in response to the steering gear ratio command, the set velocity command and the brake operation command, respectively.

The actuators are for use in actuating occupant protecting mechanism such as a brake device. Operation of these actuators is described now.

The steering actuator 51 is a hydraulic actuator for use in rotating steering wheel (not shown) in an emergency. In this event, the steering wheel is automatically rotated according to the steering gear ratio and rotational direction indicated by the steering gear ratio command. The operational amount of the steering or hydraulic actuator can be controlled in a well-known manner through a servo valve and a hydraulic pump, both of which are not shown in the figure.

The throttle actuator 52 acts to adjust opening amount of a throttle valve (not shown) to decrease speed while evading objects or so on.

The brake actuator 53 performs a function to gradually decrease speed of a vehicle in response to the brake operational command. The brake actuator 53 is also capable of achieving sudden brake operation, if necessary.

As mentioned above, CPU 31 carries out its operation with the tables and programs stored in ROM 32 and RAM 33, respectively, for every one picked up image data. The conventional system is thus disadvantageous in that the calculation operation requires relatively long time interval as mentioned in the preamble of the instant specification.

On the contrary, a system according to the present invention uses image data representing ever-changing views picked up from a vehicle until it suffers from an accident. These image data are used for training a neural network implemented in the present system. After completion of the training, the neural network is implemented in a utility vehicle and serves as a decision making circuit for starting safety driving arrangements to evade crash, which otherwise will certainly be happened. The neural network predicts crash and evades the same by means of properly starting an automatic steering system or a brake system.

A well-known neural network is described first to facilitate an understanding of the present invention and, following which preferred embodiments of the present invention will be described with reference to the drawing.

A neural network is the technological discipline concerned with information processing system, which has been developed and still in their development stage. Such artificial neural network structure is based on our present understanding of biological nervous systems. The artificial neural network is a parallel, distributed information processing structure consisting of processing elements interconnected unidirectional signal channels called connections. Each processing element has a single output connection that branches into as many collateral connections as desired.

A basic function of the processing elements is described below.

As shown in Fig. 2, each processing element can receive any number of incoming functions while it has a single output connection that can be fan out into copies to form multiple output connections. Thus the artificial neural network is by far more simple than the networks in a human brain. Each of the input data x1, x2, ..., xi is multiplied by its corresponding weight coefficient w1, w2,..., wi, respectively, and the processing element sums the weighted inputs and passes the result through a nonlinearity. Each processing element is characterized by an internal threshold or offset and by the type of nonlinearity and processes a predetermined transfer function to produce an output f(X) corresponding to the sum (X = $_{\Sigma}$xi • wi). In Fig. 2, xi represents an output of an i-th processing element in an (s-1)-th layer and wi represents a connection strength or the weight from the (s-1)-th layer to the s-th layer. The output f(X) represents energy condition of each processing element. Though the neural networks come in a variety of forms, they can be generally classified into feedforward and recurrent classes. In the latter, the output of each processing element is fed back to other processing elements via weights. As described above, the network has an energy or an energy function associated with it that will be minimum finally. In other words, the network is considered to have converged and stabilized when outputs no longer change on successive iteration. Means to stabilize the network depends on the algorithm used.

The back propagation neural network is one of the most important and common neural network architecture, which is applied to the present invention. In this embodiment, the neural network is used to determine if there is a possibility of crash. When the neural network detects the possibility of crash, it supplies an operational command to a safety ensuring unit in a manner described below. As well known in the art, the back propagation neural network is a hierarchical design consisting of fully interconnected layers of processing elements. More particularly, the network architecture comprises at least an input layer and an output layer. The network architecture may further comprise additional layer or N hidden layers between the input layer and the output layer where N represents an integer that is equal to or larger than zero. Each layer consists of one or more processing elements that are connected by links with variable weights. The net is trained by initially selecting small random weights and internal thresholds and then presenting all training data repeatedly. Weights are adjusted after every trial using information specifying the correct result until weights converge to an acceptable value. The neural network is thus trained to automatically generate and produce a desired output for an unknown input.

Basic learning operation of the back propagation neural network is as follows. First, input values are supplied to the neural network as the training data to produce output values, each of which is compared with a correct or desired output value (teacher data) to obtain information indicating a difference between the actual and desired outputs. The neural network adjusts the weights to reduce the difference between them. More particularly, the difference can be represented by a well-known mean square error. During training operation, the network adjusts all weights to minimize a cost function equal to the mean square error. Adjustment of the weights is achieved by means of back propagating the error from the output layer to the input layer. This process is continued until the network reaches a satisfactory level of performance. The neural network trained in the above mentioned manner can produce output data based on the input data even for an unknown input pattern.

The generalized delta rule derived with the steepest descent may be used to optimize the learning procedure that involves the presentation of a set of pairs of input and output patterns. The system first uses the input data to produce its own output data and then compares this with the desired output. If there is no difference, no learning takes place and otherwise the weights are changed to reduce the difference. As a result of this it becomes possible to converge the network after a relatively short cycle of training.

To train the net weights on connections are first initialised randomly and input data (training data) are successively supplied to the processing elements in the input layer. Each processing element is fully connected to other processing elements in the next layer where a predetermined calculation operation is carried out. In other words, the training input is fed through to the output. At the output layer the error is found using, for example, a sigmoid function and is propagated back to modify the weight on a connection. The goal is to minimize the error so that the weights are repeatedly adjusted and updated until the network reaches a satisfactory level of performance. A graphical representation of sigmoid functions is shown in Fig. 3.

In this embodiment a sigmoid function as shown in Fig. 3 is applied as the transfer function for the network. The sigmoid function is a bounded differentiable real function that is defined for all real input values and that has a positive derivative everywhere. The central portion of the sigmoid (whether it is near 0 or displaced) is assumed to be roughly linear. With the sigmoid function it becomes possible to establish effective neural network models.

As a sigmoid function parameter in each layer, a y-directional scale and a y-coordinate offset are defined. The y-directional scale is defined for each layer to exhibit exponential variation. This results in improved convergence efficiency of the network.

It is readily understood that other functions may be used as the transfer function. For example, in a sinusoidal function a differential coefficient for

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