

Refining Retinal Layer Segmentation in OCT Imaging with Advanced Techniques and Clinical Applications

Ranjitha Rajan^{1,3,*} S.N. Kumar²

Abstract

Segmenting retinal layers from Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) pictures entails locating and separating different retinal layers to offer comprehensive anatomical and pathological information. Age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma are among the retinal illnesses for which this procedure is crucial for diagnosis and follow-up. By utilizing preprocessing techniques to improve image quality and applying advanced algorithms—such as intensity-based, gradient-based, and texture-based methods—alongside deep learning approaches, clinicians can accurately measure the thickness and volume of retinal layers. This segmentation enables precise assessment of retinal health, supports surgical planning, and facilitates the evaluation of treatment effectiveness, ultimately enhancing patient outcomes through early and accurate diagnosis. The proposed method begins with preprocessing steps in MATLAB to enhance image quality. These include edge detection, histogram equalization for contrast enhancement, and median filtering for noise reduction. The segmented layers are then post-processed to refine the boundaries and eliminate any artifacts. This approach possibly improves patient outcomes and streamlines clinical workflows by increasing diagnostic accuracy and assisting in the early detection and management of retinal disorders. The use of MATLAB codes for this aprovideon provides a flexible and accessible platform for further research and development in retinal image analysis.

Keywords: Segmentation, OCT, retinal layers, deep learning, early diagnosis

INTRODUCTION

In the field of ophthalmology, the segmentation of retinal layers from Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) images is an important task for the identification and subsequent treatment of various retinal diseases, such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and macular degeneration. OCT and OCT angiography are examples of non-invasive imaging techniques (OCTA). They take cross-sectional images of your retina using light waves. Your ophthalmologist can see every unique layer of the retina with OCT [13]. As a result, your ophthalmologist can map and measure their thickness. These metrics support diagnosis Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) is a sophisticated imaging modality that generates high-resolution, three-dimensional, non-invasive pictures of biological tissues' structural makeup. OCT is especially useful in ophthalmology because it can take fine-grained volumetric images of the retina, which help in retinal disease diagnosis and research. The shape, distribution, and optical characteristics

*Author for Correspondence

Ranjitha Rajan
E-mail: rrajan@lincoln.edu.my

¹Research Scholar, Department of Electronics Communication Engineering, Amal Jyothi of College of Engineering, Assistant Professor, Lincoln University College, Kota Bharu, Koovappally, Kerala, Malaysia, India

²Associate Professor, Department of Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Amal Jyothi College of Engineering, Koovappally, Kerala, India

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of structural features like drusen, cysts, macular holes, and blood vessels, as well as the thickness of retinal layers, may all be precisely visualized and measured with OCT. When it comes to clinical research on retinal disorders and the diagnosis of retinal problems, these characteristics are crucial markers.

The borders of the different retinal layers, such as the retinal pigment epithelium (RPE), ganglion cell layer (GCL), photoreceptor layer (PR), and retinal nerve fiber layer (RNFL), are defined during this phase (Figure 1).

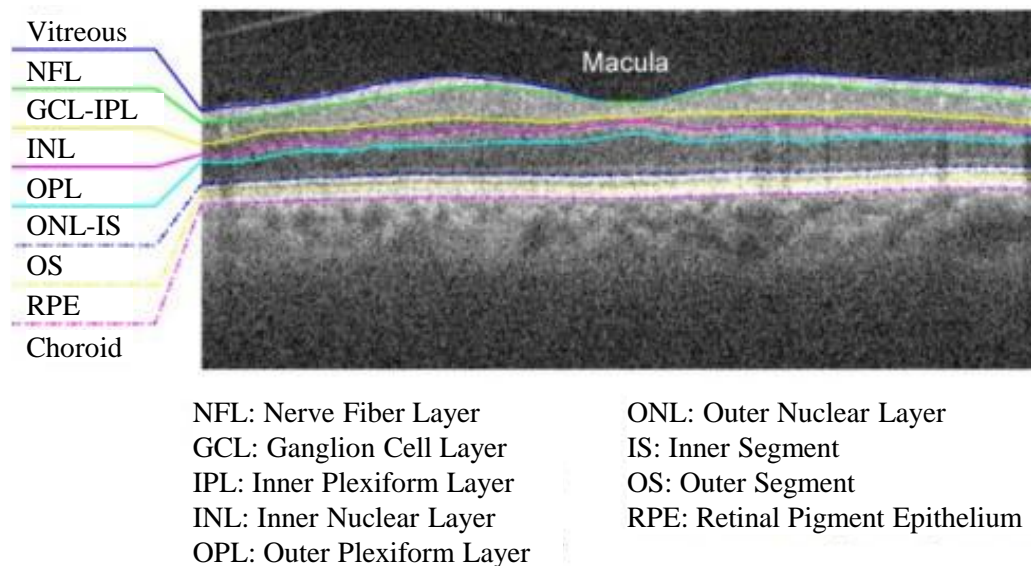


Figure 1. Retinal layers in OCT scan.

Retinal Nerve Fiber Layer (RNFL): Consisting of the axons of retinal ganglion cells, the retinal nerve fiber layer (RNFL) is crucial for transmitting visual information from the retina to the brain.

Since diseases like glaucoma can cause this layer to thin, accurate segmentation of the RNFL is essential for diagnosis.

Ganglion Cell Layer (GCL): The ganglion cells' cell bodies are found in this layer, and they oversee processing visual data. Diseases affecting the number and function of ganglion cells can be evaluated with the aid of the GCL segmentation.

Photoreceptor Layer (PR): This layer contains the light-sensitive rods and cones that oversee gathering visual data. When diagnosing disorders like age-related macular degeneration and retinal dystrophies, accurate segmentation of the photoreceptor layer is essential.

Retinal Pigment Epithelium (RPE): The retinal pigment epithelium (RPE) maintains the health of the retina by supporting the photoreceptors. Diseases like macular degeneration that impact this supporting layer must be identified and tracked, which makes segmenting the RPE crucial.

Automated segmentation methods have gained significant attention due to their efficiency and reproducibility compared to manual segmentation. These methods typically involve preprocessing steps to enhance image quality, followed by the application of segmentation algorithms such as edge detection, region growing, graph-based approaches, and deep learning-based techniques. Convolutional neural networks (CNNs) are deep learning-based methods that have demonstrated impressive performance in retinal layer segmentation tasks. CNNs can learn hierarchical features directly from OCT images and effectively capture complex patterns in the data.

Furthermore, techniques such as transfer learning and data augmentation can help improve segmentation accuracy, especially when dealing with limited data. Evaluation of segmentation algorithms is essential to assess their performance. Additionally, clinical validation studies can demonstrate the reliability and applicability of automated segmentation methods in real-world scenarios. In general, automated retinal layer segmentation from OCT images has a lot of possibilities to improve ophthalmology clinical diagnosis, patient care, and treatment monitoring. Sustained investigation in this domain is crucial for the development of precise and therapeutically applicable segmentation methodologies [1].

This work presents a novel model for the segmentation of retinal layers from pictures obtained with Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT). To assess this suggested model's performance, we compare it with current segmentation techniques. According to the results, our model performs more accurately and consistently than current techniques. It is a significant development in OCT image analysis since it exhibits increased agreement with manual annotations and shows enhanced precision in defining retinal layers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines the evolution of segmentation techniques in retinal OCT imaging, focusing on traditional methods, advancements in machine learning, and the impact of deep learning. The paper "Structured layer surface segmentation for retina OCT using fully convolutional regression networks" by Li et.al investigates the use of fully convolutional regression networks for segmenting structured layer surfaces in retinal OCT images [2].

Qiaoliang, et al. introduced Deep Retina, a deep learning approach for retinal layer segmentation in OCT images, utilizing an enhanced Xception65 model to analyze retinal layers [3].

Jefferson et.al proposed a method using U-Net and DexiNed to segment layers in OCT images of both healthy individuals and those with Intermediate Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)[4].

Ignacio A. et al. explored the use of Mask R-CNN for segmenting retinal OCT images, emphasizing hyperparameter selection and comparing its performance to traditional techniques [5].

Bashir I. Dodo, et al. introduced an automated retinal layer segmentation method combining fuzzy histogram hyperbolization and graph cut techniques to segment eight boundaries and seven layers in 150 OCT B-scans from various regions [6].

Mohammad Rahil, et al. presented a deep ensemble architecture for segmenting retinal cysts in OCT images, evaluated using the RETOUCH challenge dataset, and demonstrated a 1.8% improvement over state-of-the-art methods [7].

Jiaqi Yang et al. introduced the Anomaly-Guided Mechanism (AGM) for multi-class segmentation in single Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) images, combining anomaly detection with self-attention techniques. To enhance the model's ability to focus on potential lesions and reduce the influence of less relevant regions, we have integrated an iterative refinement stage. We evaluated the performance of our model using two public datasets and one challenging private dataset [8].

Songfeng T., et al. proposed a neural network approach using the CSWin Transformer (CTS-Net) for retinal layer segmentation with smooth boundaries, introducing the BADice Loss function to enhance boundary segmentation accuracy [9]

Franziska, et al. developed an AI image segmentation algorithm to accurately delineate the outer nuclear layer (ONL) in OCT scans of patients with inherited retinal diseases, achieving a dice score of 98.7%. Thickness maps for retinal and ONL layers were also generated [10].

Hui, et al. presented a novel approach combining U-Net with a constrained differentiable dynamic programming module for end-to-end retina OCT surface segmentation, enforcing surface smoothness and improving global structure preservation through effective feature learning [11].

To evaluate EdgeSelect's performance with a manual segmentation method, Yijun Huang et al. created EdgeSelect, a semi-automatic method for segmenting retinal layers in spectral domain Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) pictures. The EdgeSelect technique showed promise for OCT image analysis in clinical trials, as it demonstrated enhanced reproducibility and excellent agreement with manual segmentation in both normal and retinal disease-affected eyes [12].

Sahar Hojati et al. present a user-friendly program in this study that is intended to remove artificial shadows from blood vessels and to extract quantitative information from OCT-A (Optical Coherence Tomography) images. The analysis and diagnosis of blood diseases should be greatly aided by these qualities. Using a 4.5×4.5 mm rectangle scan focused on the optic disk, our method analyzes deep optic nerve data using blood flow information displayed as a vessel density (VD) map (%).[14]

In this work, Nithya R. et al. use spectral domain Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) pictures and color fundus images from the same participants to investigate different segmentation methods for glaucoma identification. According to the experimental findings, OCT image analysis produces performance errors that are less than those of fundus image analysis [15].

METHODOLOGY

The MATLAB code provided is designed for the segmentation and identification of various layers in a medical image, such as those from optical coherence tomography (OCT). Initially, the code applies median filtering to the image to reduce noise while preserving important edges. It then uses Otsu's method to determine an optimal threshold for binarizing the image, creating a binary image that separates the foreground (layer of interest) from the background. Morphological procedures like opening and closing are used to smooth the binary picture and get rid of little artifacts.

The code then identifies edges within the binary image using the Canny edge detection method, which helps in accurately outlining the boundaries of the layers. For each detected edge, the code fits a polynomial curve to model the contour of the layer. These fitted curves are interpolated and plotted to visualize the segmented layers. This process is repeated for different regions of the image, each representing specific anatomical layers, ensuring precise segmentation and clear differentiation of the layers [13].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The provided MATLAB code meticulously processes a medical image, such as an optical coherence tomography (OCT) scan, to segment and identify different retinal layers. Each section of the code targets a specific retinal layer. For the Vitreous Layer (V), the code performs median filtering to reduce noise, applies thresholding to binarize the image, and detects edges to outline the layer boundary, followed by polynomial fitting to smooth the boundary. The NFL (N) section follows similar steps but includes additional filtering and boundary adjustments to improve accuracy. For the GCL (G), the code involves similar preprocessing, but with checks for specific conditions to refine boundary detection.

The INL (IN) section continues with standard preprocessing and additional filtering for boundary adjustments. The OPL (OP)section uses more intensive preprocessing, including morphological operations like dilation and opening, edge detection, and polynomial fitting to accurately capture the layer's contour. The ONL (ON)section involves complex preprocessing, including multiple morphological operations and edge detection to precisely identify the layer boundary. For the OS (OS), the code uses preprocessing followed by morphological operations and edge detection to delineate the boundary. Finally, the RPE (R) section employs similar preprocessing steps as other layers, with additional steps for refining boundary detection and polynomial fitting to ensure a smooth and accurate

representation of the layer's contour. Each section tailors the preprocessing and boundary detection steps to the specific characteristics of the respective retinal layer, ensuring precise segmentation and clear differentiation of the layers. Figure 2 shows the segmentation of retinal layers in OCT image.

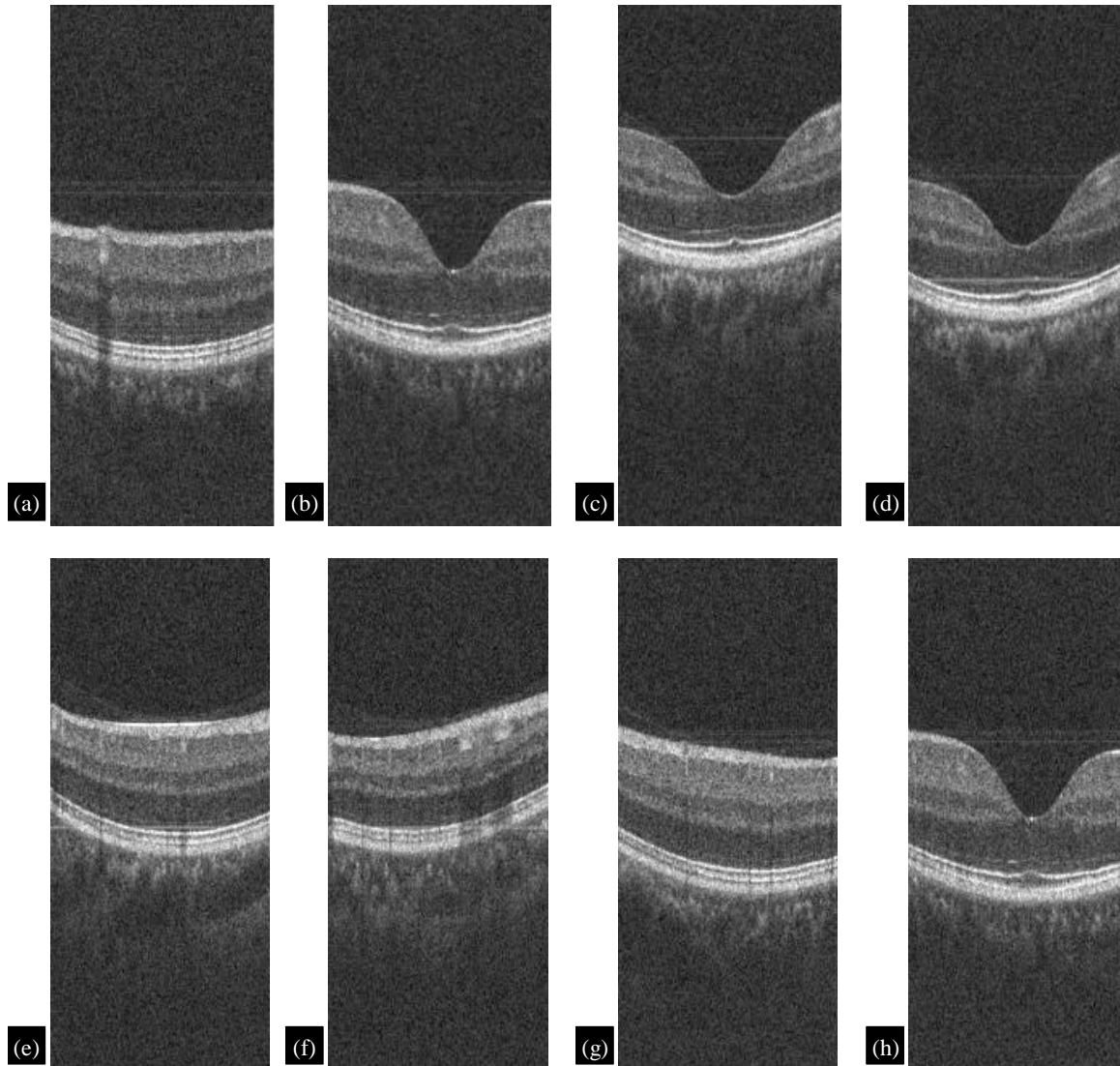


Figure 2. Different segmented retinal images from OCT scan.

CONCLUSION

Segmentation of retinal layers from Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) images represents a major technological advancement in medical imaging, offering high precision in mapping the complex structures of the retina. Sensible segmentation techniques, particularly those based on deep learning, have significantly increased the precision and stability of retinal layer detection and measurement. This degree of accuracy allows medical professionals to recognise minute changes and take prompt action, which is important for the early detection, tracking, and treatment of retinal disorders. While there are still issues with uneven image quality and the need for large datasets, ongoing research and development are improving these techniques and showing promise for better patient care outcomes and diagnostic capabilities.

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