

Towards Modeling Natural Language Inferences with Part-Whole Relations using Formal Ontology and Lexical Semantics

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Abstract

In this paper, we present a framework of natural language semantics combined with formal ontology to deal with lexical and world knowledge. We build on a framework of Dependent Type Semantics (DTS), a framework of natural language semantics based on dependent type theory. We show how to handle natural language inferences with part-whole relations, in particular, bridging inferences and inferences with the so-called total and partial predicates, in this framework.

Introduction

Entailment relations are of central importance in the study of formal semantics for natural languages. Generally speaking, the task of determining whether one sentence intuitively entails another sentence requires vast amounts of lexical and world knowledge. Over the past several decades, however, formal semanticists have concentrated on a relatively small set of entailment relations that arise from the compositional structure of a sentence, and in doing so, have abstracted away from how logical inferences interact with a rich body of lexical and world knowledge.

Meanwhile, since the emergence of statistical parsers based on sophisticated syntactic theories (Clark and Curran 2007), there has been developed a wide-coverage semantic parser that translates sentences into logical formulas and recognizes entailments using theorem proving (Bos 2008). Then it has been of increasing importance to combine well-developed methods of formal semantics with a rich body of lexical and world knowledge for natural language inferences. For that purpose, large lexical resources such as WordNet (Fellbaum 1998) have been widely used, and there have been attempts to improve the quality of such resources using the concepts of formal ontology (Gangemi et al. 2003). At present, however, there are few attempts to combine such an ontology with the state-of-the-art formal semantics; moreover, there is little discussion on what kind of knowledge is needed to represent a variety of inferences in natural languages from a linguistic point of view.

In this paper, we propose a framework of natural language semantics combined with formal ontology to deal with lexical and world knowledge. We build on a framework of De-

pendent Type Semantics (DTS), a framework of natural language semantics based on dependent type theory (Martin-Löf 1984). A special attention will be paid to the inferences that are sensitive to the part-whole relations among structured entities, in particular, bridging inferences and inferences with total and partial predicates.

Formal semantics has been developed as sentence semantics and then further extended to discourse semantics in 1980's. However, the attempt to combine formal semantics with lexical semantics is still underdeveloped. The present paper also aims to contribute to filling this gap, by means of enriching type-theoretical semantics of DTS with a mechanism to handle inferences based on lexical knowledge.

Textual entailment and formal ontology

To recognize an entailment relation between sentences requires one to grasp a piece of world knowledge that is not explicitly delivered in given premises. To formally capture the relevant knowledge, we focus on two types of semantic links between concepts: *is-a* links and *part-of* links.

The so-called monotonicity inference (Icard and Moss 2014) is a typical instance of inferences that require knowledge expressed by *is-a* links. For example, to derive an inference *A Eurostar runs* \Rightarrow *A train runs*, we need to rely on the knowledge that a Eurostar is a train.

Part-of links are used to describe parthood relations between concepts. An important class of inferences that depend on *part-of* links is *bridging inference* (Clark 1975):

- (1) John got on a Eurostar and wanted to eat dinner. But the buffet car was not open.

To establish an anaphoric relation between the underlined noun phrases, one needs to use the knowledge that a buffet car is *part of* a Eurostar. What plays a crucial role in deriving such a bridging inference is *role concept* (Mizoguchi 2004). In contrast to basic concepts such as *train* and *human*, concepts like *buffet car*, *brake* and *passenger* represent a role in the context determined by the concept *train*. In general, a bridging inference is triggered by the expression denoting a role concept in a semantic representation; then the antecedent of the anaphora is identified with the concept that provides a context for the role concept. We will provide a formal representation of bridging inferences below.

To derive entailment relations and resolve anaphoric dependencies, one needs to give a formal description of world knowledge and then combine it with semantic representations (SRs) for the premises and conclusion. In this paper, we use a framework of DTS for building semantic representations. The entire system of building semantic representations and deriving entailment relations is pictured in Fig. 1.

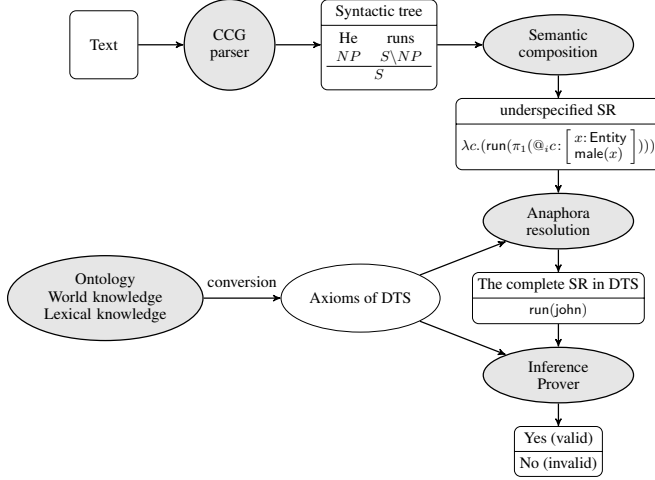


Figure 1: The entire inference system based on DTS

We use Combinatory Categorial Grammar (CCG) as a syntactic framework (Steedman 2000; Bekki 2010). Sentences that serve as inputs to the system are mapped to semantic representations in DTS via syntactic processing and semantic composition in CCG. A relevant piece of world knowledge and lexical knowledge is converted into axioms of DTS, and together with the outputs of semantic composition, they are used to derive the inferences in question. We will briefly introduce the framework of CCG and DTS.

Combinatory Categorial Grammar (CCG)

CCG is based on the idea of *surface compositionality*, i.e., the idea of providing a compositional derivation of semantic representations based on surface structures of sentences.

There are two kind of syntactic categories, *basic categories* like S , N and NP and *complex categories* of the forms X/Y and $X\backslash Y$. Complex categories of the form X/Y expect their argument Y to their right, while those of the form $X\backslash Y$ expect Y to their left. Categories are combined by an application of combinatory rules. Each rule serves as a meaning composition rule, specifying how to combine the meanings (semantic representations) of expressions into a larger unit. In Fig. 2, the combinatory rule ($>$) on the left means that an expression having a category X/Y and a meaning f , combined with an expression having a category Y and a meaning a , yields an expression having a category X and a meaning fa . Each meaning is represented as a λ -term. By virtue of this clear connection between syntax and semantics, CCG is particularly suitable for implementing compositional semantics.

$$\frac{X/Y : f \quad Y : a}{X : fa} > \quad \frac{Y : a \quad X\backslash Y : f}{X : fa} <$$

Figure 2: Combinatory rules in CCG. Forward ($>$) and backward ($<$) function application rules.

Dependent Type Semantics (DTS)

DTS (Bekki 2014) is a computational framework of natural language semantics based on dependent type theory. DTS gives a semantic representation for natural language sentences using Π -types and Σ -types in dependent type theory. Π -types correspond to universal quantifiers, while Σ -types correspond to existential quantifiers. An object of type $(\Pi x : A) B(x)$ is a function f such that for any object a of type A , fa has type $B(a)$. Implication $A \rightarrow B$ is a degenerate form of Π -type: when x does not occur free in B , $(\Pi x : A) B(x)$ is written as $A \rightarrow B$.

An object of type $(\Sigma x : A) B(x)$ is a pair (a, b) of an object a of type A and an object b of type $B(a)$. Conjunction $A \wedge B$ is a degenerate form of Σ -type: when x does not occur free in B , $(\Sigma x : A) B(x)$ is written as $A \wedge B$. Projection function π_1 and π_2 are defined for objects of Σ -types, with the computation rules: $\pi_1(a, b) = a$ and $\pi_2(a, b) = b$. See, e.g., Martin-Löf (1984) and Ranta (1994) for more details on Π -types and Σ -types.

In DTS, Π -types and Σ -types are written as follows:

	Π -type	Σ -type
Standard notation	$(\Pi x : A) B(x)$	$(\Sigma x : A) B(x)$
DTS notation	$(x : A) \rightarrow B(x)$	$\left[\begin{array}{c} x:A \\ B(x) \end{array} \right]$
if $x \notin fv(B)$	$A \rightarrow B$	$\left[\begin{array}{c} A \\ B \end{array} \right]$

Here $fv(B)$ means the set of free variables occurring in B . DTS uses the following abbreviation for Σ -types.

$$\left[\begin{array}{c} x : A \\ B \\ C \end{array} \right] \equiv_{\text{def}} \left[\begin{array}{c} x:A \\ \left[\begin{array}{c} B \\ C \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

Fig.3 shows introduction and elimination rules for Π -types and Σ -types.

Dependent type theory has been used as an alternative to dynamic semantics (Ranta 1994). To handle anaphoric relations in a proper way, we need a system that can formally represent a dynamic binding relation as exemplified in (2a). It is known that the standard first-order logic (FOL) is not suitable for this purpose (Groenendijk and Stokhof 1991). That is, if we analyze a pronoun as a variable and conjoin the two sentences by means of conjunction, then the second variable x remains unbound as indicated in (2b).

- (2) a. Someone entered. He smiled.
- b. $(\exists x \text{ Entered}(x)) \wedge \text{Smiled}(x)$
- c. $(\Sigma u : (\Sigma x : \text{Entity}) \text{Entered}(x)) \text{Smiled}(\pi_1 u)$

By contrast, using Σ -types we can provide a semantic representation as shown in (2c). Here, the first sentence corresponds to the expression $(\Sigma x : \text{Entity}) \text{Entered}(x)$; by

$$\begin{array}{c}
\overline{x : A} \\
\vdots \\
(x : A) \rightarrow B : \text{type} \quad M : B \\
\hline
\lambda x.M : (x : A) \rightarrow B \quad (\text{III})
\end{array}
\quad
\begin{array}{c}
M : (x : A) \rightarrow B \quad N : A \\
\hline
MN : B[N/x] \quad (\text{II}E)
\end{array}
\quad
\begin{array}{c}
M : \left[\begin{array}{c} x : A \\ B \end{array} \right] \\
\hline
\pi_1(M) : A \quad (\Sigma E)
\end{array}
\quad
\begin{array}{c}
M : \left[\begin{array}{c} x : A \\ B \end{array} \right] \\
\hline
\pi_2(M) : B[\pi_1(M)/x] \quad (\Sigma E)
\end{array}$$

Figure 3: Introduction (*I*) and Elimination (*E*) rule of Π -type and Σ -type in DTS

picking up a proof term of this type (= proposition) in terms of $\pi_1 u$ we can properly capture the anaphoric relation between the antecedent quantifier and the pronoun. We can also capture the accessibility constraints on anaphora (Karttunen 1969) in terms of inference rules for Σ -types and Π -types without any further stipulation. For details, see Bekki (2014).

A characteristic of DTS is that it is enriched with *underspecified terms* to give a fully compositional analysis of inferences involving anaphora. In the next section, we will apply this framework to the analysis of bridging inferences.

Converting world knowledge into DTS formula

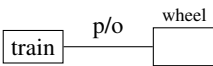
We will explain by examples how to convert world knowledge into DTS formulas. Concepts such as *train* and *wheel* in ontology correspond to 1-place predicates. The part-whole relation, “*x* is part of *y*”, corresponds to the 2-place predicate $x \preceq y$, where \preceq is a partial order. *Is-a* links and *part-of* links are converted into DTS axioms in the following way. Here Entity represents the type of entities, and \rightarrow is right-associative. We use the graphical notations for the semantic links (Mizoguchi and Kozaki 2009).

1. is-a link

A Eurostar is a train. 

DTS axiom $(x : \text{Entity}) \rightarrow \text{Eurostar}(x) \rightarrow \text{Train}(x)$

2. part-of link

A wheel is part of a train. 

DTS axiom $(x : \text{Entity}) \rightarrow \text{Train}(x) \rightarrow \left[\begin{array}{c} y : \text{Entity} \\ \text{Wheel}(y) \\ y \preceq x \end{array} \right]$

A *part-of* link has an axiom that derives the existence of the parts from the whole. It is known that FOL can be embedded into dependent type theory (Martin-Löf 1984), hence an entire family of description logic axioms (Baader 2003) that can be translated into FOL can also be converted to axioms in dependent type theory.

Bridging inferences

Bridging inferences are special in that the antecedent is *inferred* given the information explicitly provided in a previous discourse and some relevant world knowledge (Krahmer and Piwek 1999). Due to this inferential character, it is not straightforward to handle bridging inferences in standard dynamic theories of anaphora such as Discourse Representation Theory (van der Sandt 1992; Kamp and Reyle 1993; Geurts 1999).

In DTS, the process of searching the antecedent of an anaphoric pronoun, including the case of bridging inferences, is formulated as a process of proof search, so that it can treat anaphora resolution and inferences with world knowledge in a unified way. DTS is augmented with an operator $@$ to represent anaphoric elements.

As an illustration, consider the discourse in (1) simplified as follows:

- (3) a. John got on a Eurostar.
- b. But the buffet car was not open.

(3a) and (3b) are translated as shown in Fig. 4. Lexical entries and CCG-derivations for these sentences are provided in Appendix. In Fig. 4, the two semantic representations (SRs) are conjoined using dynamic conjunction $M ; N$, which is defined as follows:

$$M ; N \equiv_{\text{def}} \lambda c. \left[\begin{array}{c} u : Mc \\ N(c, u) \end{array} \right]$$

Here c is a proof term that encodes the information provided by the previous discourse; then, the pair (c, u) , where u is the proof term for the SR of the first sentence, is passed to the SR of the second sentence. This context-passing mechanism allows us to handle dynamic binding. The bridging inference is triggered by the expression standing for the role concept *buffet car*, which is represented in terms of an $@$ -operator. In the conjoined SR in Fig. 4, we have the following formula:

$$(4) \quad \neg \text{Open}(\pi_1(@_1(c, v) : \left[\begin{array}{c} y : \text{Entity} \\ \text{BuffetCar}(y) \\ y \preceq @_2(c, v) : \text{Entity} \end{array} \right]))$$

A term of the form $@_i c : \Lambda$ is called *type annotation*, where Λ specifies the type of the term $@_i c$. The underspecified term $@_i$ is a function that takes a local context c as argument. In the case of (4), the term $@_2(c, v)$ is annotated with the type Entity and the term $@_1(c, v)$ with the type corresponding to the proposition “there is a buffet car which is part of $@_2(c, v)$ ” represented as a Σ -type.

To begin with, we resolve the embedded $@$ -term, that is, $@_2$. The underspecified term $@_2$ takes a local context (c, v) as argument and returns an entity. The type of the $@$ -operator can be specified in terms of type inferences; for instance, the type of $@_2$ can be specified in the following way:

$$(5) \quad @_2 : \left[\begin{array}{c} \gamma \\ \left[\begin{array}{c} u : \left[\begin{array}{c} x : \text{Entity} \\ \text{Eurostar}(x) \end{array} \right] \\ \text{GetOn}(j, \pi_1 u) \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right] \rightarrow \text{Entity}$$

Here γ is the type of the previous context c . The process of resolving anaphora is a process to construct a proof term

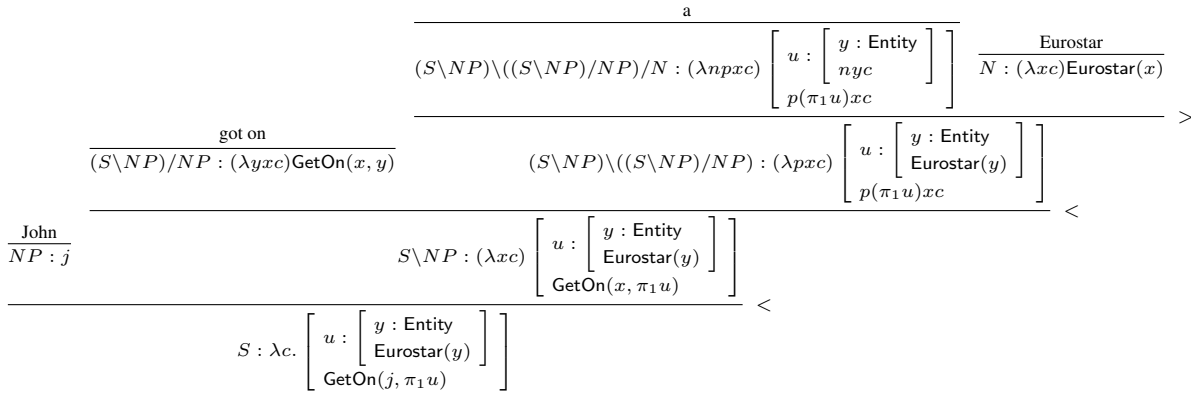


Figure 8: A compositional derivation of the SR of (3a)

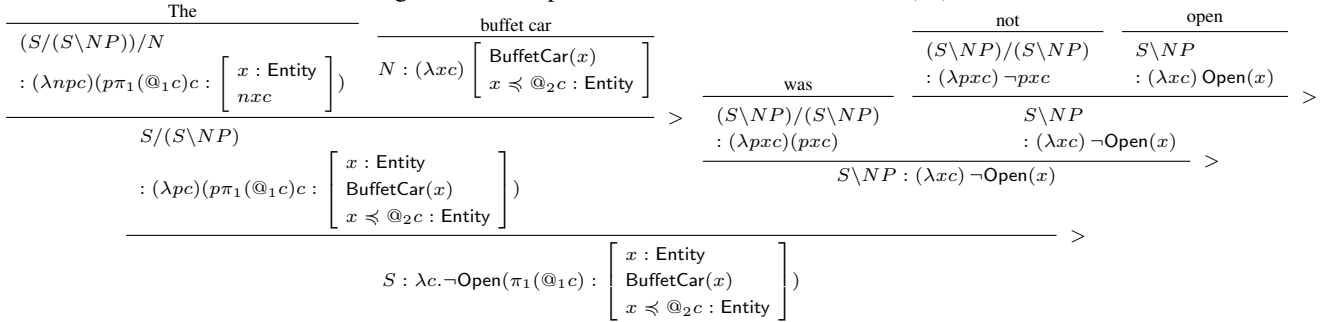


Figure 9: A compositional derivation of the SR of (3b)

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