BiSyn-GAT+: Bi-Syntax Aware Graph Attention Network for Aspect-based Sentiment Analysis

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Abstract

Aspect-based sentiment analysis (ABSA) is a fine-grained sentiment analysis task that aims to align aspects and corresponding sentiments for aspect-specific sentiment polarity inference. It is challenging because a sentence may contain multiple aspects or complicated (e.g., conditional, coordinating, or adversative) relations. Recently, exploiting dependency syntax information with graph neural networks has been the most popular trend. Despite its success, methods that heavily rely on the dependency tree pose challenges in accurately modeling the alignment of the aspects and their words indicative of sentiment, since the dependency tree may provide noisy signals of unrelated associations (e.g., the “conj” relation between “great” and “dreadful” in Figure 2).

In this paper, to alleviate this problem, we propose a Bi-Syntax aware Graph Attention Network (BiSyn-GAT+). Specifically, BiSyn-GAT+ fully exploits the syntax information (e.g., phrase segmentation and hierarchical structure) of the constituent tree of a sentence to model the sentiment-aware context of every single aspect (called intra-context) and the sentiment relations across aspects (called inter-context) for learning. Experiments on four benchmark datasets demonstrate that BiSyn-GAT+ outperforms the state-of-the-art methods consistently.

1 Introduction

Aspect-based sentiment analysis (ABSA) aims to identify the sentiment polarity towards a given aspect in the sentence. Many previous works (Yang et al., 2018; Li et al., 2019) mainly focus on extracting sequence features via Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) or Convolution Neural Networks (CNNs) with attention mechanisms, which often assume that words closer to the target aspect are more likely to be related to its sentiment. However, the assumption might not be valid as exemplified in Figure 1 (a), “service” is obviously closer to “great” rather than “dreadful”, and these methods may assign the irrelevant opinion word “great” to “service” mistakenly.

To mitigate this problem, there already exists several efforts (Wang et al., 2020a; Chen et al., 2020) dedicated to research on how to effectively leverage non-sequential information (e.g., syntactic information like dependency tree) via Graph Neural Networks (GNNs). Generally, a dependency tree (i.e., Dep.Tree), linking the aspect terms to the syntactically related words, stays valid in the long-distance dependency problem. However, the inherent nature of Dep.Tree structure may introduce noise like the unrelated relations across clauses, such as “conj” relation between “great” and “dreadful” in Figure 2, which discourages capturing the sentiment-aware context of each aspect, i.e., intra-context. More-

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The food is great but the service and environment are dreadful.

Hence, in this paper, we consider fully exploiting the syntax information of the constituent tree to tackle the problem. Typically, a constituent tree (i.e., Con.Tree) often contains precise and discriminative phrase segmentation and hierarchical composition structure, which are helpful for correctly aligning the aspects and their corresponding words indicative of sentiment. The former can naturally divide a complicated sentence into multiple clauses, and the latter can discriminate different relations among aspects to infer the sentiment relations of different aspects. We illustrate this with an example in Figure 3: (1) Clause “The food is great” and the clause “the service and environment are dreadful” are segmented by the phrase segmentation term “but”; (2) In Layer-1, the term “and” indicates the coordinating relation of “service” and “environment”, while the term “but” in Layer-3 reflects the adversative relation towards “food” and “service” (or “environment”).

Thus, to better align aspect terms and corresponding sentiments, we propose a new framework, Bi-Syntax aware Graph Attention Network (BiSyn-GAT+), to effectively leverage the syntax information of constituent tree by modeling intra-context and inter-context information. In particular, BiSyn-GAT+ employs: 1) a syntax graph embedding to encode the intra-context of each aspect based on the fusion syntax information within the same clause in a bottom-up way, which combines the phrase-level syntax information of its constituent tree and the clause-level syntax information of its dependency tree. 2) an aspect-context graph consisting of phrase segmentation terms and all aspects to model the inter-context of each aspect. Specifically, it aggregates the sentiment information of other aspects according to the influence between the current aspect and its neighbor aspects, which is calculated based on aspect representations learned from bi-directional relations over the aspect context graph, respectively.

Our main contributions are as follows:

1. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first work to exploit syntax information of constituent tree (e.g., phrase segmentation and hierarchical structure) with GNNs for ABSA. Moreover, it shows superiority in the alignments between aspects and corresponding words indicative of sentiment.

2. We propose a framework, Bi-Syntax aware Graph Attention Network (BiSyn-GAT+), to fully leverage syntax information of constituent tree (or, and dependency tree) by modeling the sentiment-aware context of each single aspect and the sentiment relations across aspects.

3. Extensive experiments on four datasets show that our proposed model achieves state-of-the-art performances.

2 Related Work

Sentiment analysis is an important task in the field of natural language processing (Zhang et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2020) and can be applied in downstream tasks, like emotional chatbot (Wei et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020a; Lan et al., 2020; Wei et al., 2021), recommendation system (Zhao et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2020b), QA system (Wei et al., 2011; Qiu et al., 2021). Here we focus on a fine-grained sentiment analysis task — ABSA. Recently, deep learning methods have been widely adopted for ABSA task. These works can be divided into two main categories: methods without syntax information (i.e., Syntax-free methods) and methods with syntax information (i.e., Syntax-based methods).

Syntax-free methods: Neural networks with attention mechanisms (Wang et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2017; Song et al., 2019) have been widely used. Chen et al. (2017) adopts a multiple-attention mechanism to capture sentiment features. Song et al. (2019) uses an attentional encoder network (AEN) to excavate rich semantic information from word embeddings.

Syntax-based methods: Recently, utilizing dependency information with GNNs has become an effective way for ABSA. Zhang et al. (2019) uses graph convolutional networks (GCN) to learn
node representations from Dep.Tree. Tang et al. (2020) proposes a dependency graph enhanced dual-transformer network (DGEDT) by jointly considering representations from Transformers and corresponding dependency graph. Wang et al. (2020a) constructs aspect-oriented dependency trees and proposes R-GAT, extending the graph attention network to encode graphs with labeled edges. Li et al. (2021) proposes a dual graph convolutional networks (DualGCN) model, simultaneously considering syntax structures and semantic correlations. All above works use syntax information of Dep.Tree, which may introduce noise, as we said before. Thus, we exploit syntax information of Con.Tree with GNNs. Precisely, we follow the Con.Tree to aggregate information from words within the same phrases in a bottom-up way and capture intra-context information.

Moreover, some works resort to modeling aspect-"aspect relations. Some (Hazarika et al., 2018; Majumder et al., 2018) adopt aspect representations to model relations by RNNs or memory networks, without utilizing context information. And some (Fan et al., 2018; Hu et al., 2019) propose alignment loss or orthogonal attention regulation to constrain aspect-level interactions, which fail when aspects have no explicit opinion expressions or multiple aspects share same opinion words. Recently, there are some works utilizing GNNs to model aspect relations. Liang et al. (2020) constructs an inter-aspect graph based on relative dependencies between aspects. Zhao et al. (2020) constructs a sentiment graph based on relative dependencies between aspects. Liang et al. (2020) constructs an inter-aspect graph consisting of all aspects and phrase segmentation information, such as conjunction words. Thus, we propose an aspect-context graph to aggregate information from words within the same phrases in a bottom-up way and capture intra-context information.

**GNNs with constituent tree:** To our knowledge, we are the first work to utilize the constituent tree for ABSA task. But in aspect-category sentiment analysis task, which predicts sentiment polarity towards a given predefined category in the text, Li et al. (2020b) proposes a Sentence Constituent-Aware Network (SCAN) that generates representations of the nodes in Con.Tree. Unlike SCAN, we view parsed phrases as different spans of the input text instead of individual nodes. So we don’t introduce any inner nodes of Con.Tree (e.g., “NP”、“VP” of Figure 3) into the representation space, decreasing the computational overhead.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Overview

**Problem Statement.** Let $s = \{w_i\}_n$ and $A = \{a_j\}_m$ be a sentence and a predefined aspect set, where $n$ and $m$ are the number of words in $s$ and the number of aspects in $A$, respectively. For each $s$, $A_s = \{a_i|a_i \in A, a_i \in s\}$ denotes the aspects contained in $s$. We treat each multiple-word aspect as a single word for simplicity, so $a_i$ also means the $i$-th word of $s$. The goal of ABSA is to predict the sentiment polarity $y_i \in \{\text{positive}, \text{negative}, \text{neural}\}$ for each aspect $a_i \in A_s$.

**Architecture.** As shown in Figure 4, our proposed architecture takes the sentence and all aspects that appear in the text as the input, and outputs the sentiment predictions of the aspects. It contains three components: 1) the intra-context module encodes the input $\{w_i\}$ to obtain aspect-specific representations of the target aspects, which contains two encoders: a context encoder that outputs contextual word representations and a syntax encoder that utilizes syntax information of the parsed constituent tree (or, and dependency tree). 2) the inter-context module includes a relation encoder applied to the constructed aspect-context graph to output relation-enhanced representations. The aspect-context graph composes all aspects of the given sentence and phrase segmentation terms obtained from a designed rule-based map function applied to the constituent tree. 3) the sentiment classifier takes output representations of the above two modules to make predictions.

#### 3.2 Intra-Context Module

In this part, we utilize a context encoder and a syntax encoder to model the sentiment-aware context of every single aspect and generate aspect-specific representation for each aspect. Note that for multi-aspect sentences, we use this module multiple times, as each time deals with one aspect.

#### 3.2.1 Context Encoder

We use BERT (Devlin et al., 2019) to generate contextual word representations. Given target aspect $a_t$, we follow BERT-SPC (Song et al., 2019) to construct a BERT-based sequence:

$$BERT_{seqt} = [CLS] + \{w_i\} + [SEP] + a_t + [SEP],$$

(1)
The food is great the service and the environment are dreadful.

Figure 4: Overall architecture. It takes the sentence and all aspects as input and outputs sentiment predictions for all aspects. It has three components: 1) the intra-context module contains two encoders: a context encoder that outputs contextual word representations and a syntax encoder that utilizes syntax information of the parsed constituent tree (or, and dependency tree). Output representations from two encoders are fused to generate aspect-specific representations; 2) the inter-context module includes a relation encoder applied to the constructed aspect-context graph to obtain relation-enhanced representations. The aspect-context graph includes all aspects and phrase segmentation terms obtained from a designed rule-based map function applied to the constituent tree. 3) the sentiment classifier takes the outputs from two modules to make predictions.

Then, the output representation is obtained by,

$$ h^t = \left\{ h^t_0, h^t_1, \ldots, h^t_{n'}, \ldots, h^t_{n'+2+m'} \right\} $$

where $n'$ and $m'$ are lengths of input text and target aspect $a_t$ after BERT tokenizer separately, $h^t_0$ is “BERT pooling” vector representing the BERT sequence, $h^t_i$ is the contextual representation of each token. Note that $w_i$ may be split into multiple sub-words by BERT tokenizer. So we calculate the contextual representation of $w_i$ as follows,

$$ h^t_i = \frac{1}{|BertT(w_i)|} \sum_{k \in BertT(w_i)} h^t_k, $$

where $BertT(w_i)$ returns an index set of $w_i$’s sub-words in BERT sequence, and $||$ returns its length.

### 3.2.2 Syntax Encoder

The above representations only consider semantic information, so we propose a syntax encoder to utilize rich syntax information. Our syntax encoder is stacked by several designed Hierarchical Graph ATtention (HGAT) blocks, and each block consists of multiple graph attention (i.e., GAT) layers that encode syntax information hierarchically under the guidance of the constituent tree (or, and the dependency tree). The key point is the construction of corresponding graphs.

**Graph construction.** As Figure 4 shows, we follow the syntax structure of Con.Tree in a bottom-up way. Each layer $l$ of Con.Tree consists of several phrases $\{ph^l_u\}$ that compose the input text, and each phrase represents an individual semantic unit. *e.g.,* $\{ph^3_u\}$ in Figure 3 is {The food is great, but, the service and the environment are dreadful}. We construct corresponding graphs based on those phrases. *i.e.,* For layer $l$ that consists of phrases $\{ph^l_u\}$, we construct the adjacent matrix $CA$ that shows word connections:

$$ CA^l_{i,j} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } w_i, w_j \text{ in same phrase of } \{ph^l_u\}, \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} $$

which is exemplified as $Con.Graphs$ in Figure 5.

**HGAT block.** A HGAT block aims to encode syntax information into word representations hierarchically. As Figure 5 shows, a HGAT block is stacked by several GAT layers that utilize a masked self-attention mechanism to aggregate information from neighbors and a fully connected feed forward network to map representations to the same semantic space. Attention mechanism can handle the diversity of neighbors with higher weights assigned to more related words. It can be formulated as follows,
We also explore dependency information. As input and outputs relation-enhanced representations of all aspects from intra-context module, we construct an aspect-context graph to model the relations of aspects. Thus, in Figure 3.

\[
DA_{i,j} = \begin{cases} 
1 & \text{if } w_i, w_j \text{ link directly in Dep.Tree} \\
0 & \text{otherwise}
\end{cases}
\]  

We consider three operations: **position-wise dot**, **position-wise add**, and **conditional position-wise add**. Each corresponding adjacent matrix FA is shown as follows,

A. **position-wise dot**. For each layer of Con.Tree, this operation only considers neighbors of the Dep.Tree that are also in the same phrase.

\[
FA = CA \cdot DA
\]

B. **position-wise add**. For each layer of Con.Tree, this operation considers words in the same phrases and neighbors of the Dep.Tree. Some edges of Dep.Tree can shorten paths between aspect words and relevant opinion words, e.g., “good” and “great” in Figure 3.

\[
FA = CA + DA
\]

C. **conditional position-wise add**. This operation considers phrase-level syntax information of Con.Tree and clause-level syntax information of Dep.Tree. Specifically, it first deletes all dependency edges that are across clauses (e.g., the edge between “great” and “dreadful” in Figure 2) and then conducts **position-wise add** operation with the remaining dependency edges.

\[
FA = CA \oplus DA
\]

Thus, the output of the **intra-context module** contains both contextual information and syntax information, which is formulated as follows,

\[
v_t^{as} = \left[ \hat{h}_t + \hat{g}_t, h_0^t \right]
\]

3.3 **Inter-Context Module**

The **intra-context module** ignores the mutual influence of aspects. Thus, in **inter-context module**, we construct an aspect-context graph to model the relations across aspects. This module only works for multi-aspect sentences, with aspect-specific representations of all aspects from **intra-context module** as input and outputs relation-enhanced representation of each aspect.

**Phrase segmentation.** Aspect relations can be revealed by some phrase segmentation terms, like
conjunction words. Thus, we design a rule-based map function $PS$ that returns phrase segmentation terms of two aspects: Given two aspects, it first finds their lowest common ancestor (LCA) in the Con.Tree, which contains information of two aspects and has the least irrelevant context. We call branches from LCA that between sub-trees which two aspects are separately in as “inner branches”. $PS$ returns all text words in the inner branches if they exist; else, it returns words between two aspects of the input text. It is formulated as follows,

$$PS(a_i, a_j) = \begin{cases} \{w_k\}, & \text{if } |Br(a_i, a_j)| = 0 \\ Br(a_i, a_j), & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

where $i < k < j$ and $Br(a_i, a_j)$ returns text words in the inner branches of $a_i$ and $a_j$, e.g., in Figure 3, given aspects food and service, the LCA node is $S$ of Layer-4 that has three branches, with food in the first and service in the third. So “but” in the second branch (inner branch) is the phrase segmentation term that reflects sentiment relation of two aspects.

**Aspect-context graph construction.** We notice that the influence range of one aspect should be continuous, and the mutual influence of aspects attenuates with distance. Considering all aspect pairs introduces noise caused by long distance and increases computational overhead. So we only model relations across neighbor aspects. After extracting phrase segmentation terms of neighbor aspects by $PS$ function, we construct an aspect-context graph by linking aspects with corresponding phrase segmentation terms to help infer relations. To distinguish the bi-directional relations over the aspect-context graph, we build two corresponding adjacent matrices. The first handles influence from aspects in odd-index among all aspects of the sentence, to neighbor even-index aspects, the second handles the opposite. An example is shown in Figure 6. Then, taking $\{v^{ts}_t, t \in A_a\}$ and corresponding phrase segmentation terms representations encoded by BERT as the input, the above HGAT blocks are applied as the relation encoder to obtain relation-enhanced representation $v^{ta}_t$ for each aspect $a_t$.

![Figure 6: Example of an aspect-context graph and corresponding two adjacent matrices for distinguishing the bi-directional relations.](image)

| Dataset       | Sentence-Level | Aspect-Level |
|---------------|----------------|--------------|
|               | Multi-Asp.     | Single-Asp.  | All          | Pos. | Neg. | Neu. |
| Restaurant    | Train          | 971          | 1009         | 1980 | 2164 | 807  | 637  |
|               | Test           | 315          | 284          | 599  | 727  | 196  | 196  |
| Laptop        | Train          | 538          | 916          | 1454 | 937  | 851  | 455  |
|               | Test           | 150          | 259          | 409  | 337  | 128  | 637  |
| MAMS          | Train          | 4297         | 0            | 4297 | 1380 | 2764 | 5042 |
|               | Test           | 500          | 0            | 500  | 403  | 325  | 604  |
| Twitter       | Train          | 0            | 6051         | 6051 | 1507 | 1328 | 3016 |
|               | Test           | 0            | 677          | 677  | 172  | 169  | 336  |

Table 1: Statistics of datasets. Multi-Asp., Single-Asp. indicate the number of sentences with multiple or single aspect; Pos., Neg., and Neu. show the number of aspects towards positive, negative and neutral label.

3.4 Training

The outputs of the *intra-context module* and *inter-context module* are combined to form the final representations, which are later fed to a fully connected layer (i.e., sentiment classifier) with a softmax activation function, generating the probabilities over the three sentiment polarities:

$$o_t = v^{ts}_t + v^{ta}_t,$$

$$p(t) = \text{softmax}(W_\theta o_t + b_p),$$

where $W_\theta$, $b_p$ are parameters of the classifier.$^1$

The loss is defined as the cross-entropy loss between golden polarity labels and predicted polarity distributions of all (sentence, aspect) pairs:

$$L(\theta)^{\text{Sentiment}} = - \sum_s \sum_{a_t \in A_s} \text{loss}(p(t), y(t)),$$

where $a_t$ is the aspect and also the $t$-th word in $s$, $\text{loss}$ is the standard cross-entropy loss, $\theta$ represents model parameters.

4 Experiment

4.1 Datasets and Setup

We evaluate our models on four English dataset: Laptop, Restaurant datasets from SemEval2014 (Task 4) (Pontiki et al., 2014), MAMS (Jiang et al., 2019), and Twitter (Dong et al., 2014). Laptop and Restaurant contain both multi-aspect and single-aspect sentences. Each sentence in MAMS contains at least two aspects with different sentiments.

$^1$In Eq14, $v^{ta}_t$ is set to zero in single-aspect sentence.
4.2 Baselines

We compare our model with the following models:

1) Syntax-free baselines: BERT-SPC (Song et al., 2019), AEN-BERT (Song et al., 2019);

2) Syntax-based baselines: R-GAT (Wang et al., 2020a), RGAT+ (Bai et al., 2020), DGEDT (Tang et al., 2020), DualGCN (Li et al., 2021);

3) Baselines that model aspect-aspect relations: SDGCN-BERT (Zhao et al., 2020), InterGCN (Liang et al., 2020);

We adopt SuPar\(^2\) as parser. Specifically, we use CRF constituency parser (Zhang et al., 2020) to get the constituent tree; and following previous works (Wang et al., 2020a; Bai et al., 2020), we use deep Biaffine Parser (Dozat and Manning, 2017) to get the dependency tree. Our context encoder is BERT-base-uncased\(^3\) model. Adam optimizer is adopted with a learning rate $2 \times 10^{-5}$ and a $L_2$ regularization $10^{-5}$ for model training. Number of GAT layers of one HGAT block is 3, and number of HGAT blocks is in range [1,3] on different datasets. “Accuracy” and “Macro-Averaged F1” are evaluation metrics. More details are in Appendix A.

### 4.3 Main Results

Table 2 shows results of the baselines and our models. For fairness of comparison, we present the reported results of those baselines. Observations are:

1) Our proposed models outperform most baselines, and our full model BiSyn-GAT+ achieves state-

2) We adopt SuPar\(^2\) as parser. Specifically, we use CRF constituency parser (Zhang et al., 2020) to get the constituent tree; and following previous works (Wang et al., 2020a; Bai et al., 2020), we use deep Biaffine Parser (Dozat and Manning, 2017) to get the dependency tree. Our context encoder is BERT-base-uncased\(^3\) model. Adam optimizer is adopted with a learning rate $2 \times 10^{-5}$ and a $L_2$ regularization $10^{-5}$ for model training. Number of GAT layers of one HGAT block is 3, and number of HGAT blocks is in range [1,3] on different datasets. “Accuracy” and “Macro-Averaged F1” are evaluation metrics. More details are in Appendix A.

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### 4.3 Main Results

Table 2 shows results of the baselines and our models. For fairness of comparison, we present the reported results of those baselines. Observations are:

1) Our proposed models outperform most baselines, and our full model BiSyn-GAT+ achieves state-
of-the-art performances in all datasets, especially 1.27 and 1.75 F1 improvements on Restaurant and MAMS. 2) Models with syntax information outperform those without, which means syntax structure is helpful. 3) Our models show superiority to those that only use dependency information, which implies that constituent tree can provide profitable information. 4) BiSyn-GAT+ shows consistent improvement compared to BiSyn-GAT, which means modeling aspect-aspect relations can improve performance, especially when more multi-aspect sentences are available, e.g., 0.8 and 1.06 F1 improvements on Restaurant and MAMS.

### 4.5 Effects of Aspect-context graph

We also investigate the effects of our bi-relational modeling of the proposed aspect-context graph. Firstly, we use BiSyn-GAT as base model to see whether the approach modeling aspects relations improves the performance; Secondly, based on our proposed aspect-context graph, we consider two variants: (a) w/ Bi-relation, a directed one that distinguishes the influence one aspect imposes on other aspects and is received from other aspects, i.e., our full model BiSyn-GAT+; (b) w/o Bi-relation, an undirected one that ignores the direction of the influence; Thirdly, inspired by Zhao et al. (2020), we define the aspect graph as the graph with all aspects as its nodes, i.e., our aspect-context graph without any segmentation terms. Based on the aspect graph, we propose three variants: (c) adjacent aspect graph, an undirected one where neighbor aspects are connected; (d) bi-adjacent aspect graph, a directed one where neighbor aspects are connected; (e) global aspect graph, an undirected one where all aspects are connected; The above five variants are illustrated in Figure 7. Experimental

| Model          | Parser       | Restaurant | MAMS |
|----------------|--------------|------------|------|
|                |              | Acc. (%)   | F1. (%) | Acc. (%) | F1. (%) |
| Base           |              | 84.99      | 78.51  | 82.71    | 82.22   |
| w/o dep.       | Stanford Parser | 86.51      | 81.34  | 84.51    | 84.06   |
|                | SuPar         | 86.60      | 81.51  | 84.58    | 84.09   |
| BiSyn-GAT      | Stanford Parser | 86.66      | 81.56  | 84.88    | 84.31   |
|                | SuPar         | 87.49      | 81.63  | 84.90    | 84.43   |
| BiSyn-GAT+     | Stanford Parser | 87.84      | 82.39  | 85.78    | 85.40   |
|                | SuPar         | 87.94      | 82.43  | 85.85    | 85.49   |

Table 5: Experiments results with different parsers.

w/o dep. is one variant of BiSyn-GAT, only using constituent information.

4.4 Ablation Study

We also conduct an ablation study to verify the effectiveness of our proposed method. The results are shown in Table 3. We set the context encoder of our model as the base model, i.e., BERT+. The observations are that: 1) BERT+ achieves the lowest performance, which shows syntax information is helpful in ABSA task. 2) In category w/o AA, w/o con. is inferior to w/o dep., which means syntax information of Con.Tree is useful. Moreover, the comparison between w/o con. and con.×dep. verifies that some dependency edges that cross the phrases indeed bring noise, as the former considers all dependency edges and the latter ignores those across phrases obtained from Con.Tree for each layer. 3) Fusing two syntax information in the proper ways can boost performance. In category w/o AA, con.+dep. and con.⊕dep. both outperform w/o dep. and w/o con. in all datasets. However, con.×dep. is inferior to w/o dep.. One possible reason is that the position-wise dot operation ignores most connections within phrases, causing the graphs to be more sparse. It also verifies that words within the same phrases of Con.Tree are essential for aligning aspects and corresponding opinions. 4) Modeling aspect-aspect relations is beneficial from the comparison between w/AA and w/o AA, especially in Restaurant and MAMS that contain more multi-aspect sentences.

Figure 7: Illustrations of variants when investigating the effects of aspect-context graph.
results are shown in Table 4 and we can observe that: 1) w/ Bi-relation (i.e., BiSyn-GAT+) outperforms w/o Bi-relation consistently, which indicates distinguishing the bi-relational influences is beneficial; 2) Overall, aspect-context graph shows superiority compared with aspect graph, which means the phrase segmentation terms can help model aspect relations; 3) Unlike in aspect-context graph, bi-adjacent aspect graph does not guarantee performance improvement compared with adjacent aspect graph, which reflects the importance of phrase segmentation terms when modeling aspect-aspect relations; 4) Overall, global aspect graph performs better than adjacent aspect graph, which is correlated with the results in Zhao et al. (2020); 5) In Restaurant dataset, adjacent aspect graph and global aspect graph show comparable performance. One possible reason is that the number of samples that contain at least three aspects is very limited, as shown in Table 8 of Appendix. And adjacent aspect graph equals global aspect graph when faced with two aspects.

### 4.6 Effects of Parsing

We conduct experiments to study the influence of parsing accuracy on model performance. Two parsers are selected: (a) Stanford Parser (Manning et al., 2014), a well-known toolkit; it has transition-based dependency parser (Chen and Manning, 2014) and shift-reduce constituency parser (Zhu et al., 2013); (b) SuPar, which RGAT+ ( Bai et al., 2020) and our proposed models adopt; it has deep biaffine dependency parser (Dozat and Manning, 2017) and neural CRF constituency parser (Zhang et al., 2020). Generally, SuPar has better parsing performances than Stanford Parser. We use BERT+ as the base model and compare the performance of model w/o dep, Bisyn-GAT, BiSyn-GAT+ when using different parsers. The results are shown in Table 5. Observations are that: 1) With Stanford Parser, our models can also achieve good performance. 2) Models with SuPar perform better than models with Stanford Parser, which is correlated with the parsing accuracy of two parsers.

### 4.7 Case Study

As shown in Figure 6, we present four examples to help better understand our proposed model, especially inter-context module when faced with complex sentences. The first is a comparative sentence especially inter-context module when faced with complex sentences. The first is a comparative sentence with two clauses connected by the conjunction “but”. Both models make correct predictions for atmosphere. However, BiSyn-GAT predicts wrong over outside while BiSyn-GAT+ still makes a correct prediction, which show the inter-context module correctly captures the reversed sentiment relation between outside and atmosphere by phrase segmentation terms “”, but”. The rest examples all show that inter-context module can use relations across aspects to help correct the predictions.

### 5 Conclusion

In this paper, we propose the BiSyn-GAT+ framework to model the sentiment-aware context of each aspect and sentiment relations across aspects for learning by fully exploiting the syntax information of the constituent tree. It includes two well-designed modules: 1) intra-context module that fuses related semantic and syntax information hierarchically; 2) inter-context module that models relations across aspects with the constructed aspect-context graph. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first work to exploit the constituent tree with GNNs for the ABSA task. Moreover, our proposed model achieves state-of-the-art performances on four benchmark datasets.
Acknowledgements

This work was supported in part by the National Natural Science Foundation of China under Grant No.61602197, Grant No.L1924068, Grant No.61772076, in part by CCF-AFSG Research Fund under Grant No.RF20210005, and in part by the fund of Joint Laboratory of HUST and Pingan Property & Casualty Research (HPL). The authors would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments on improving the quality of this paper.

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A.1 Statistics of constituent tree depth

Table 7 shows more detailed statistics about four benchmark datasets at the aspect level. We define the “constituent tree depth” as the number of nodes in the path from the aspect term node to the root node in the Con.Tree. It means we treat the layer that the aspect term is in as the bottom layer for constituent graph construction and drop layers below it. The aspect term has no other neighbors in those layers and thus fails to update its representation through the graph encoder. According to the constituent tree depth statistics, we set the number of GAT layers of one HGAT block in the syntax encoder to 3, the most common depth.

A.2 Multi-aspect Distribution of datasets

Table 8 shows the multi-aspect distribution of the Restaurant, Laptop, and MAMS datasets. This can explain the improvement of BiSyn-GAT+ compared to BiSyn-GAT on different datasets: MAMS > Restaurant > Laptop. MAMS contains the most multi-aspect sentences that our proposed Inter-context module can fully utilize.

Table 7: Depth distribution of parsed constituent trees on four datasets. The maximums are in bold. The last row lists the max tree depth of each dataset.

| Multi. Distribution | Restaurant | Laptop | MAMS | Twitter |
|---------------------|------------|--------|------|---------|
|                     | Train Test | Train Test | Train Valid Test | Train Test |
| 2                   | 555        | 192     | 343   | 101     |
| 3                   | 826        | 76      | 137   | 33      |
| 4                   | 1103       | 812     | 127   | 33      |
| 5                   | 1620       | 1029    | 1161  | 106     |
| 6                   | 2054       | 1692    | 1180  | 109     |
| 7                   | 2669       | 2054    | 1341  | 119     |
| 8                   | 3134       | 2669    | 1620  | 125     |
| ≥ 10                | 3134       | 2669    | 1620  | 125     |
| MAX.                | 18          | 13      | 13    | 15      |

Table 8: Multi.aspect distribution of three datasets.

A.3 Training Detail

The numbers of parameters of BiSyn-GAT and BiSyn-GAT+ are 112M and 233M. Each epoch takes about 60s or 70s in RTX 2080 Ti. We test the model that performs best on validation data, and for datasets without official validation data, we follow the dataset settings of previous work (Bai et al., 2020). We use the grid search to find the best parameters for our model and report the maximum results. The number of HGAT blocks within our relation encoder is in range [1, 3] on different datasets and the number of its inner GAT layers is set to 2; the dropout rate is 0.1 for the input and output and is in the range [0.2, 0.7] between layers; In each HGAT block of our syntax encoder, for samples with fewer constituent tree layers, we only adopt the same number of GAT layers to encode; for samples with more constituent tree layers, we prune them to three layers.

B Discussion about phrase segmentation term

We firstly provide more cases about the phrase segmentation terms in this section. For each case, the aspects are displayed in bold and phrase segmentation words are underlined between the corresponding two aspects:

1) However, we went for lunch and were the only ones eating there and yet the service seemed eager for use to be done and to get out.
2) We were so excited since I was reading a great review of this place, however we were disappointed with the taste of the food.
3) Then the manager gave us lemon juice instead of ceasar dressing for a ceasar salad which ruined the salad.
4) The only drawback was slow service, but the food and ambiance are so nice that your wait is a pleasant and b) worth it.
5) Compared to the soup of average taste, the rice is better in this restaurant.

The top 4 cases show that our approach can capture words, such as “and”, “but”, “yet”, “however”, “instead of” to help infer aspects relations.

However, we also notice there is a limitation of our method: it can only find the phrase segmentation terms within the two aspects, failing to capture some important words indicative of relations that appear in other locations. e.g., in case 5), our approach capture “,” instead of “compared to”, while only the latter can show the reversed sentiment of
two aspects. We leave this problem as the future work, considering that our current approach is simple and can also achieve good performance.

C Limitations and future work

This section discusses some improvements that can be made in future work. 1) Our full model adopts two BERT encoders, one in *Intra*-context module for encoding input text and aspects and one in *Inter*-context module for encoding the phrase segmentation terms. The pros are that our *Inter*-context can easily generalize to other ABSA models, taking their output aspect representations and generating the relation enhanced representations. However, this causes the parameters of BiSyn-GAT+ up to 233M. We will consider other encoding strategies instead of simply using another BERT; 2) We notice that the label information from Con.Tree can also provide valuable information, e.g., NP node and VP node, which together form the S node, may contain the aspect term and corresponding opinion words separately, as shown in Figure 3. It is worth trying to utilize more information from Con.Tree, and we will continue to explore it in future work.