Lifted Unit Propagation for Effective Grounding

Pashootan Vaezipoor¹, David Mitchell¹, and Maarten Mariën²

¹ Department of Computing Science, Simon Fraser University, Canada {pva6,mitchell}@cs.sfu.ca
² Department of Computer Science, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium maartenm@cs.kuleuven.be

Abstract. A grounding of a formula $\phi$ over a given finite domain is a ground formula which is equivalent to $\phi$ on that domain. Very effective propositional solvers have made grounding-based methods for problem solving increasingly important, however for realistic problem domains and instances, the size of groundings is often problematic. A key technique in ground (e.g., SAT) solvers is unit propagation, which often significantly reduces ground formula size even before search begins. We define a “lifted” version of unit propagation which may be carried out prior to grounding, and describe integration of the resulting technique into grounding algorithms. We describe an implementation of the method in a bottom-up grounder, and an experimental study of its performance.

1 Introduction

Grounding is central in many systems for solving combinatorial problems based on declarative specifications. In grounding-based systems, a “ grounder” combines a problem specification with a problem instance to produce a ground formula which represents the solutions for the instance. A solution (if there is one) is obtained by sending this formula to a “ground solver”, such as a SAT solver or propositional answer set programming (ASP) solver. Many systems have specifications given in extensions or restrictions of classical first order logic (FO), including: IDP [WMD08c], MXG [Moh04], Enfragmo [ATÜ+10,AWTM11], ASPPS [LT06], and Kodkod [TJ07]. Specifications for ASP systems, such as DLV [LPF+06] and clingo [GKK+08], are (extended) normal logic programs under stable model semantics.

Here our focus is grounding specifications in the form of FO formulas. In this setting, formula $\phi$ constitutes a specification of a problem (e.g., graph 3-colouring), and a problem instance is a finite structure $A$ (e.g., a graph). The grounder, roughly, must produce a ground formula $\psi$ which is logically equivalent to $\phi$ over the domain of $A$. Then $\psi$ can be transformed into a propositional CNF formula, and given as input to a SAT solver. If a satisfying assignment is found, a solution to $A$ can be constructed from it. ASP systems use an analogous process.

A “naive” grounding of $\phi$ over a finite domain $A$ can be obtained by replacing each sub-formula of the form $\exists x \psi(x)$ with $\bigvee_{a \in A} \psi(\tilde{a})$, where $\tilde{a}$ is a constant symbol which denotes domain element $a$, and similarly replacing each subformula $\forall x \psi(x)$ with a conjunction. For a fixed FO formula $\phi$, this can be done in time polynomial in $|A|$. Most grounders use refinements of this method, implemented top-down or bottom-up, and perform well on simple benchmark problems and small instances. However, as we tackle more realistic problems with complex specifications and instances having large domains, the groundings produced can become prohibitively large. This can be the case even when the formulas are “not too hard”. That is, the system performance is poor because of time spent generating and manipulating this large ground formula, yet an essentially equivalent but smaller formul can be solved in reasonable time. This work represents one direction in our group’s efforts to develop techniques which scale effectively to complex specifications and large instances.

Most SAT solvers begin by executing unit propagation (UP) on the input formula (perhaps with other “pre-processing”). This initial application of UP often eliminates a large number of variables and clauses, and is done very fast. However, it may be too late: the system has already spent a good deal of time generating large but rather uninteresting (parts of) ground formulas, transforming them to CNF, moving them from the grounder to the SAT solver, building the SAT solver’s data structures, etc. This suggests trying to execute a process similar to UP before or during grounding.

One version of this idea was introduced in [WMD08b,WMD10]. The method presented there involves computing a symbolic and incomplete representation of the information that UP could derive, obtained

* This author’s contributions to this paper were made while he was a post-doctoral fellow at SFU.
from $\phi$ alone without reference to a particular instance structure. For brevity, we refer to that method as GWB, for “Grounding with Bounds”. In [WMD08b,WMD10], the top-down grounder GtDL [WMD08a] is modified to use this information, and experiments indicate it significantly reduces the size of groundings without taking unreasonable time.

An alternate approach is to construct a concrete and complete representation of the information that UP can derive about a grounding of $\phi$ over $\mathcal{A}$, and use this information during grounding to reduce grounding size. This paper presents such a method, which we call lifted unit propagation (LUP). (The authors of the GWB papers considered this approach also [DW08], but to our knowledge did not implement it or report on it. The relationship between GWB and LUP is discussed further in Section 7.) The LUP method is roughly as follows.

1. Modify instance structure $\mathcal{A}$ to produce a new (partial) structure which contains information equivalent to that derived by executing UP on the CNF formula obtained from a grounding of $\phi$ over $\mathcal{A}$. We call this new partial structure the LUP structure for $\phi$ and $\mathcal{A}$, denoted $\mathcal{LUP}(\phi,\mathcal{A})$.

2. Run a modified (top-down or bottom-up) grounding algorithm which takes as input, $\phi$ and $\mathcal{LUP}(\phi,\mathcal{A})$, and produces a grounding of $\phi$ over $\mathcal{A}$.

The modification in step 2 relies on the idea that a tuple in $\mathcal{LUP}(\phi,\mathcal{A})$ indicates that a particular sub-formula has the same (known) truth value in every model. Thus, that subformula may be replaced with its truth value. The CNF formula obtained by grounding over $\mathcal{LUP}(\phi,\mathcal{A})$ is at most as large as the formula that results from producing the naive grounding and then executing UP on it. Sometimes it is much smaller than this, because the grounding method naturally eliminates some autark sub-formulas which UP does not eliminate, as explained in Sections 3 and 6.

We compute the LUP structure by constructing, from $\phi$, an inductive definition of the relations of the LUP structure for $\phi$ and $\mathcal{A}$ (see Section 4). We implemented a semi-naive method for evaluating this inductive definition, based on relational algebra, within our grounder Enfragmo. (We also computed these definitions using the ASP grounders gringo and DLV, but these were not faster.)

For top-down grounding (see Section 3), we modify the naive recursive algorithm to check the derived information in $\mathcal{LUP}(\phi,\mathcal{A})$ at the time of instantiating each sub-formula of $\phi$. This algorithm is presented primarily for expository purposes, and is similar to the modified top-down algorithm used for GWB in GtDL.

For bottom-up grounding (see Section 5), we revise the bottom-up grounding method based on extended relational algebra described in [MTHM06,PLTG07], which is the basis of grounders our group has been developing. The change required to ground using $\mathcal{LUP}(\phi,\mathcal{A})$ is a simple revision to the base case.

In Section 6 we present an experimental evaluation of the performance of our grounder Enfragmo with LUP. This evaluation is limited by the fact that our LUP implementation does not support specifications with arithmetic or aggregates, and a shortage of interesting benchmarks which have natural specifications without these features. Within the limited domains we have tested to date, we found:

1. CNF formulas produced by Enfragmo with LUP are always smaller than the result of running UP on the CNF formula produced by Enfragmo without LUP, and in some cases much smaller.
2. CNF formulas produced by Enfragmo with LUP are always smaller than the ground formulas produced by GtDL, with or without GWB turned on.
3. Grounding over $\mathcal{LUP}(\phi,\mathcal{A})$ is always slower than grounding without, but CNF transformation with LUP is almost always faster than without.
4. Total solving time for Enfragmo with LUP is sometimes significantly less than that of Enfragmo without LUP, but in other cases is somewhat greater.
5. Enfragmo with LUP and the SAT solver MiniSat always runs faster than the IDP system (GtDL with ground solver MINISAT(ID)), with or without the GWB method turned on in GtDL.

Determining the extent to which these observations generalize is future work.

2 FO Model Expansion and Grounding

A natural formalization of combinatorial search problems and their specifications is as the logical task of model expansion (MX) [MT11]. Here, we define MX for the special case of FO. Recall that a structure $\mathcal{B}$
for vocabulary $\sigma \cup \varepsilon$ is an expansion of $\sigma$-structure $\mathcal{A}$ iff $\mathcal{A}$ and $\mathcal{B}$ have the same domain ($A = B$), and interpret their common vocabulary identically, i.e., for each symbol $R$ of $\sigma$, $R^B = R^A$. Also, if $\mathcal{B}$ is an expansion of $\sigma$-structure $\mathcal{A}$, then $\mathcal{A}$ is the reduct of $\mathcal{B}$ defined by $\sigma$.

**Definition 1 (Model Expansion for FO).**

*Given: A FO formula $\phi$ on vocabulary $\sigma \cup \varepsilon$ and a $\sigma$-structure $\mathcal{A}$.  
*Find: an expansion $\mathcal{B}$ of $\mathcal{A}$ that satisfies $\phi$.*

In the present context, the formula $\phi$ constitutes a problem specification, the structure $\mathcal{A}$ a problem instance, and expansions of $\mathcal{A}$ which satisfy $\phi$ are solutions for $\mathcal{A}$. Thus, we call the vocabulary of $\mathcal{A}$, the *instance* vocabulary, denoted by $\sigma$, and $\varepsilon$ the *expansion* vocabulary. We sometimes say $\phi$ is $\mathcal{A}$-satisfiable if there exists an expansion $\mathcal{B}$ of $\mathcal{A}$ that satisfies $\phi$.

**Example 1.** Consider the following formula $\phi$:

\[
\forall x[(R(x) \lor B(x) \lor G(x)) \land \neg(R(x) \land B(x)) \land \neg(R(x) \land G(x)) \land \neg(B(x) \land G(x))]
\land \forall x \forall y[E(x, y) \lor (\neg(R(x) \land R(y)) \land \neg(B(x) \land B(y)) \land \neg(G(x) \land G(y)))]
\]

A finite structure $\mathcal{A}$ over vocabulary $\sigma = \{ E \}$, where $E$ is a binary relation symbol, is a graph. Given graph $A = \mathcal{G} = (V; E)$, there is an expansion $\mathcal{B}$ of $\mathcal{A}$ that satisfies $\phi$, iff $\mathcal{G}$ is 3-colourable. So $\phi$ constitutes a specification of the problem of graph 3-colouring. To illustrate:

\[
\mathcal{A} = (V; E^A, R^B, B^B, G^B) \models \phi
\]

An interpretation for the expansion vocabulary $\varepsilon := \{ R, B, G \}$ given by structure $\mathcal{B}$ is a colouring of $\mathcal{G}$, and the proper 3-colourings of $\mathcal{G}$ are the interpretations of $\varepsilon$ in structures $\mathcal{B}$ that satisfy $\phi$.

### 2.1 Grounding for Model Expansion

Given $\phi$ and $\mathcal{A}$, we want to produce a CNF formula (for input to a SAT solver), which represents the solutions to $\mathcal{A}$. We do this in two steps: grounding, followed by transformation to CNF. The grounding step produces a ground formula $\psi$ which is equivalent to $\phi$ over expansions of $\mathcal{A}$. To produce $\psi$, we bring domain elements into the syntax by expanding the vocabulary with a new constant symbol for each domain element. For $\mathcal{A}$, the domain of $\mathcal{A}$, we denote this set of constants by $\tilde{A}$. For each $a \in A$, we write $\tilde{a}$ for the corresponding symbol in $\tilde{A}$. We also write $\bar{a}$, where $\bar{a}$ is a tuple.

**Definition 2 (Grounding of $\phi$ over $\mathcal{A}$).** Let $\phi$ be a formula of vocabulary $\sigma \cup \varepsilon$, $\mathcal{A}$ be a finite $\sigma$-structure, and $\psi$ be a ground formula of vocabulary $\mu$, where $\mu \supseteq \sigma \cup \varepsilon \cup \tilde{A}$. Then $\psi$ is a grounding of $\phi$ over $\mathcal{A}$ if and only if:

1. if $\phi$ is $\mathcal{A}$-satisfiable then $\psi$ is $\mathcal{A}$-satisfiable;
2. if $\mathcal{B}$ is a $\mu$-structure which is an expansion of $\mathcal{A}$ and gives $\tilde{A}$ the intended interpretation, and $\mathcal{B} \models \psi$, then $\mathcal{B} \models \phi$.

We call $\psi$ a reduced grounding if it contains no symbols of the instance vocabulary $\sigma$.

Definition 2 is a slight generalization of that used in [MTHM06,PLTG07], in that it allows $\psi$ to have vocabulary symbols not in $\sigma \cup \varepsilon \cup \tilde{A}$. This generalization allows us to apply a Tseitin-style CNF transformation in such a way that the resulting CNF formula is still a grounding of $\phi$ over $\mathcal{A}$. If $\mathcal{B}$ is an expansion of $\mathcal{A}$ satisfying $\psi$, then the reduct of $\mathcal{B}$ defined by $\sigma \cup \varepsilon$ is an expansion of $\mathcal{A}$ that satisfies $\phi$. For the remainder of the paper, we assume that $\phi$ is in negation normal form (NNF), i.e., negations are applied only to atoms. Any formula may be transformed in linear time to an equivalent formula in CNF.
Definition 4 (UP propagation to $\phi$). Let $\gamma$ be a ground FO formula in CNF. Define $\text{UP}(\gamma)$, the result of applying unit propagation to $\gamma$, to be the fixed point of the following operation:

If $\gamma$ contains a unit clause ($l$), delete from each clause of $\gamma$ every occurrence of $\neg l$, and delete from $\gamma$ every clause containing $l$.

Now, $\text{CNF}(\text{NaiveGnd}_A(\phi))$ is the result of producing the naive grounding of $\phi$ over $A$, and transforming it to CNF in the standard way, and $\text{UP}(\text{CNF}(\text{NaiveGnd}_A(\phi)))$ is the formula obtained after simplifying it by executing unit propagation. These two formulas provide reference points for measuring the reduction in ground formula size obtained by LUP.
3 Bound Structures and Top-down Grounding

We present grounding algorithms, in this section and in Section 4, which produce groundings of $\phi$ over a class of partial structures, which we call bound structures, related to $\mathcal{A}$. The structure $\mathcal{U}(\phi, \mathcal{A})$ is a particular bound structure. In this section, we define partial structures and bound structures, and then present a top-down grounding algorithm. The formalization of bound structures here, and of $\mathcal{U}(\phi, \mathcal{A})$ in Section 4 are ours, although a similar formalization was implicit in [DW08].

3.1 Partial Structures and Bound Structures

A relational $\tau$-structure $\mathcal{A}$ consists of a domain $A$ together with a relation $R^A \subseteq A^k$ for each $k$-ary relation symbol of $\tau$. To talk about partial structures, in which the interpretation of a relation symbol may be only partially defined, it is convenient to view a structure in terms of the characteristic functions of the relations.

Partial $\tau$-structure $\mathcal{A}$ consists of a domain $A$ together with a $k$-ary function $\chi_R^A : A^k \rightarrow \{\top, \bot, \infty\}$, for each $k$-ary relation symbol $R$ of $\tau$. Here, as elsewhere, $\top$ denotes true, $\bot$ denotes false, and $\infty$ denotes undefined. If each of these characteristic functions is total, then $\mathcal{A}$ is total. We may sometimes abuse terminology and call a relation partial, meaning the characteristic function interpreting the relation symbol undefined. Similarly, for any partial $\tau$-structure, $\mathcal{A}$ is total, it is convenient to view a structure in terms of the characteristic functions of the relations.

3.2 Bound Structures and Tseitin Structures

Assume the natural partial adaptation of standard FO semantics the to the case of partial relations, e.g. with Kleene’s 3-valued semantics [Kle52]. For any (total) $\tau$-structure $B$, each $\tau$-sentence $\phi$ is either true or false in $B (B \models \phi$ or $B \not\models \phi$), and each $\tau$-formula $\phi(x)$ with free variables $x$, defines a relation

$$\phi^B = \{ \bar{a} \in A^{|x|} : B \models \phi(x) | x/\bar{a} \}.$$  \hfill (1)

Similarly, for any partial $\tau$-structure, $\mathcal{A}$, each $\tau$-sentence is either true, false or undetermined in $B$, and each $\tau$-formula $\phi(x)$ with free variables $x$ defines a partial function

$$\chi_\phi^A : A^k \rightarrow \{\top, \bot, \infty\}.$$  \hfill (2)

In the case $\chi_\phi^A$ is total, it is the characteristic function of the relation $\{1\}$.

There is a natural partial order on partial structures for any vocabulary $\tau$, which we may denote by $\leq$, where $\mathcal{A} \leq \mathcal{B}$ if $\mathcal{A}$ and $\mathcal{B}$ agree at all points where they are both defined, and $\mathcal{B}$ is defined at every point $\mathcal{A}$ is. If $\mathcal{A} \leq \mathcal{B}$, we may say that $\mathcal{B}$ is a strengthening of $\mathcal{A}$. When convenient, if the vocabulary of $\mathcal{A}$ is a proper subset of that of $\mathcal{B}$, we may still call $\mathcal{B}$ a strengthening of $\mathcal{A}$, taking $\mathcal{A}$ to leave all symbols not in its vocabulary, completely undefined. We will call $\mathcal{B}$ a conservative strengthening of $\mathcal{A}$ with respect to formula $\phi$ if $\mathcal{B}$ is a strengthening of $\mathcal{A}$ and in addition every total structure which is a strengthening of $\mathcal{A}$ and a model of $\phi$ is also a strengthening of $\mathcal{B}$. (Intuitively, we could ground $\phi$ over $\mathcal{B}$ instead of $\mathcal{A}$, and not lose any intended models.)

The specific structures of interest are over a vocabulary expanding the vocabulary of $\phi$ in a certain way. We will call a vocabulary $\tau$ a Tseitin vocabulary for $\phi$ if it contains, in addition to the symbols of $\phi$, the set $\omega$ of Tseitin symbols for $\phi$. We call a $\tau$-structure a “Tseitin structure for $\phi$” if the interpretations of the Tseitin symbols respect the special role of those symbols in the Tseitin transformation. For example, if $\alpha = \alpha_1 \land \alpha_2$, then $\hat{\alpha}^\mathcal{A}$ must be true iff $\hat{\alpha}_1^\mathcal{A} = \hat{\alpha}_2^\mathcal{A} = true$. The vocabulary of the formula $\text{CNF}(\text{NaiveGnd}_{\mathcal{A}}(\phi))$ is a Tseitin vocabulary for $\phi$, and every model of that formula is a Tseitin structure for $\phi$.

**Definition 5 (Bound Structures).** Let $\phi$ be a formula, and $\mathcal{A}$ be a structure for a sub-set of the vocabulary of $\phi$. A bound structure for $\phi$ and $\mathcal{A}$ is a partial Tseitin structure for $\phi$ that is a conservative strengthening of $\mathcal{A}$ with respect to $\phi$.

Intuitively, a bound structure provides a way to represent the information from the instance together with additional information, including information about the Tseitin symbols in a grounding of $\phi$, that we may derive (by any means), provided that information does not eliminate any intended models.

Let $\tau$ be the minimum vocabulary for bound structures for $\phi$ and $\mathcal{A}$. The bound structures for $\phi$ and $\mathcal{A}$ with vocabulary $\tau$ form a lattice under the partial order $\leq$, with $\mathcal{A}$ the minimum element. The maximum element is defined exactly for the atoms of $\text{CNF}(\text{NaiveGnd}_{\mathcal{A}}(\phi))$ which have the same truth value in every Tseitin $\tau$-structure that satisfies $\phi$. This is the structure produced by “Most Optimum Propagator” in [WMD10].
Definition 6 (Grounding over a bound structure). Let \( \hat{A} \) be a bound structure for \( \phi \) and \( A \). A formula \( \psi \), over a Tseitin vocabulary for \( \phi \) which includes \( \hat{A} \), is a grounding of \( \phi \) over \( \hat{A} \) iff

1. if there is a total strengthening of \( \hat{A} \) that satisfies \( \phi \), then there is a one that satisfies \( \psi \);
2. if \( B \) is a total Tseitin structure for \( \phi \) which strengthens \( \hat{A} \), gives \( \hat{A} \) the intended interpretation and satisfies \( \psi \), then it satisfies \( \phi \).

A grounding \( \psi \) of \( \phi \) over \( \hat{A} \) need not be a grounding of \( \phi \) over \( A \). If we conjoin with \( \psi \) ground atoms representing the information contained in \( \hat{A} \), then we do obtain a grounding of \( \phi \) over \( A \). In practice, we send just CNF(\( \psi \)) to the SAT solver, and if a satisfying assignment is found, add the missing information back in at the time we construct a model for \( \phi \).

3.2 Top-down Grounding over a Bound Structure

Algorithm 2 produces a grounding of \( \phi \) over a bound structure \( \hat{A} \) for \( A \). Gnd and Simpl are defined by mutual recursion. Gnd performs expansions and substitutions, while Simpl performs lookups in \( \hat{A} \) to see if the grounding of a sub-formula may be left out. Eval provides the base cases, evaluating ground atoms over \( \sigma \cup \varepsilon \cup A \cup \omega \) in \( \hat{A} \).

Algorithm 2 Top-Down Grounding over Bound Structure \( \hat{A} \) for \( \phi \) and \( A \)

\[
\text{Gnd}_{\hat{A}}(\phi, \theta) = \begin{cases} 
\text{Eval}_{\hat{A}}(P, \theta) & \phi \text{ is an atom } P(\bar{x}) \\
\neg\text{Eval}_{\hat{A}}(P, \theta) & \phi \text{ is a negated atom } \neg P(\bar{x}) \\
\bigwedge_{i} \text{Simpl}_{\hat{A}}(\psi_{i}, \theta) & \phi = \bigwedge_{i} \psi_{i} \\
\bigvee_{i} \text{Simpl}_{\hat{A}}(\psi_{i}, \theta) & \phi = \bigvee_{i} \psi_{i} \\
\bigwedge_{a \in A} \text{Simpl}_{\hat{A}}(\psi, \theta \cup (x/a)) & \phi = \forall x \psi \\
\bigvee_{a \in A} \text{Simpl}_{\hat{A}}(\psi, \theta \cup (x/a)) & \phi = \exists x \psi 
\end{cases}
\]

\[
\text{Eval}_{\hat{A}}(P, \theta) = \begin{cases} 
\top & \hat{A} \models P[\theta] \\
\bot & \hat{A} \models \neg P[\theta] \\
\hat{A} \models P(\bar{x})[\theta] & \text{o.w}
\end{cases}
\]

\[
\text{Simpl}_{\hat{A}}(\psi, \theta) = \begin{cases} 
\top & \hat{A} \models [\psi][\theta] \\
\bot & \hat{A} \models \neg [\psi][\theta] \\
\text{Gnd}_{\hat{A}}(\psi, \theta) & \text{o.w}
\end{cases}
\]

The stronger \( \hat{A} \) is, the smaller the ground formula produced by Algorithm 2. If we set \( \hat{A} \) to be undefined everywhere (i.e., to just give the domain), then Algorithm 2 produces NaiveGnd\(_{\hat{A}}\)(\( \phi \), \( \theta \)). If \( \hat{A} \) is set to \( A \), we get the reduced grounding obtained by evaluating instance symbols out of NaiveGnd\(_{\hat{A}}\)(\( \phi \)).

Proposition 1. Algorithm 2 produces a grounding of \( \phi \) over \( \hat{A} \).

3.3 Autarkies and Autark Subformulas

In the literature, an autarky [MSS85] is informally a “self-sufficient” model for some clauses which does not affect the remaining clauses of the formula. An autark subformula is a subformula which is satisfied by an autarky. To see how an autark subformula may be produced during grounding, let \( \lambda = \gamma_{1} \lor \gamma_{2} \) and imagine that the value of subformula \( \gamma_{1} \) is true according to our bound structure. Then \( \lambda \) will be true, regardless of the value of \( \gamma_{2} \), and the grounder will replace its subformula with its truth value, whereas in the case of naive grounding, the grounder does not have that information during the grounding. So it generates the set of clauses for this subformula as: \( \{ \neg \lambda \lor \gamma_{1} \lor \gamma_{2}, \neg \gamma_{1} \lor \lambda, \neg \gamma_{2} \lor \lambda \} \). Now the propagation of the truth value of \( \lambda_{1} \) and subsequently \( \lambda \), results in elimination of all the three clauses, but the set of clauses
generated for $\gamma_2$ will remain in the CNF formula. We call $\gamma_2$ and the clauses made from that subformula autarkies.

The example suggests that this is a common phenomena and that the number of autarkies might be quite large in many groundings, as will be seen in Section 6.

4 Lifted Unit Propagation Structures

In this section we define $LUP(\phi, A)$, and a method for constructing it.

Definition 7 ($LUP(\phi, A)$). Let $\text{Units}$ denote the set of unit clauses that appears during the execution of $\text{UP}$ on $\text{CNF}$(NaiveGnd$_A(\phi)$). The $\text{LUP}$ structure for $\phi$ and $A$ is the unique bound structure for $\phi$ and $A$ for which:

$$
\chi^A_{[\psi]}(\bar{a}) = \begin{cases} 
\top & [\psi](\bar{a}) \in \text{Units} \\
\bot & \neg[\psi](\bar{a}) \in \text{Units} \\
\infty & \text{w.r.t.} 
\end{cases}
$$

(3)

Since Algorithm produces a grounding, according to Definition 6, for any bound structure, it produces a grounding for $\phi$ over $LUP(\phi, A)$.

To construct $LUP(\phi, A)$, we use an inductive definition obtained from $\phi$. In this inductive definition, we use distinct vocabulary symbols for the sets of tuples which $A$ sets to true and false. The algorithm works based on the notion of True (False) bounds:

Definition 8 (Formula-Bound). A True (resp. False) bound for a subformula $\psi(\bar{x})$ according to bound structure $A$ is the relation denoted by $T_\psi$ (resp. $F_\psi$) such that:

1. $\bar{a} \in T_\psi \iff [\psi]^A(\bar{a}) = \top$
2. $\bar{a} \in F_\psi \iff [\psi]^A(\bar{a}) = \bot$

Naturally, when $[\psi]^A(\bar{a}) = \infty$, $\bar{a}$ is not contained in either $T_\psi$ or $F_\psi$.

The rules of the inductive definition are given in Table 1. These rules may be read as rules of FO(ID), the extension of classical logic with inductive definitions under the well-founded semantics [VGRS91;DT08], with free variables implicitly universally quantified. The $type$ column indicates the type of the subformula, and the $rules$ columns identify the rule for this subformula. Given a $\sigma$-structure $A$, we may evaluate the definitions on $A$, thus obtaining a set of concrete bounds for the subformulas of $\phi$. The rules reflect the reasoning that $\text{UP}$ can do. For example consider rule $(\bigvee_i \psi_i)$ of $\downarrow$ for $\gamma(\bar{x}) = \psi_1(\bar{x}_1) \vee \cdots \vee \psi_N(\bar{x}_N)$, and for some $i \in \{1, \ldots, N\}$:

$$
T_{\psi_i}(\bar{x}_i) \leftarrow T_{\gamma}(\bar{x}) \land \bigwedge_{j \neq i} F_{\psi_j}(\bar{x}_j).
$$

This states that when a tuple $\bar{a}$ satisfies $\gamma$ but falsifies all disjuncts, $\psi_j$, of $\gamma$ except for one, namely $\psi_i$, then it must satisfy $\psi_i$. As a starting point, we know the value of the instance predicates, and we also assume that $\phi$ is $A$-satisfiable.

Example 2. Let $\phi = \forall x \neg I_1(x) \lor E_1(x)$, $\sigma = \{I_1, I_2\}$, and $A = \{(1, 2, 3, 4); I_1^A = \{1\}\}$. The relevant rules from Table 1 are:

$$
\begin{align*}
T_{\neg I_1(x) \lor E_1(x)}(x) & \leftarrow T_{\phi} \\
T_{I_1(x)}(x) & \leftarrow I_1(x) \\
F_{\neg I_1(x)}(x) & \leftarrow T_{I_1(x)} \\
T_{E_1(x)}(x) & \leftarrow T_{\neg I_1(x) \lor E_1(x)}(x) \land F_{\neg I_1(x)}(x) \\
T_{E_1(x)}(x) & \leftarrow T_{E_1(x)}(x)
\end{align*}
$$

We find that $T_{E_1} = \{1\}$; in other words: $E_1(1)$ is true in each model of $\phi$ expanding $A$.

Note that this inductive definition is monotone, because $\phi$ is in Negation Normal Form (NNF).
the execution of the
for the atomic formulas. So, we delete these true bounds based on the initial unjustified assumption, and

\[ R(x) \leftarrow F(x) \]

The two sets of rules, the \[ \downarrow f \] rules do not contribute any information to the set of bounds. To see this, observe that every \[ \downarrow f \] rule has an atom of the form \( F_\gamma(x) \) in its body. Intuitively, for one of these rules to contribute a defined bound, certain information must have previously been obtained regarding bounds for its parent. It can be shown, by induction, that, in every case, the information about a bound inferred by an application of a \( \downarrow f \) rule must have previously been inferred by a \( \uparrow f \) rule. In line 2 of the algorithm we compute bounds using only the two sets of rules, \( \downarrow t \) and \( \uparrow f \). This is justified by the fact that applying \( \{ \uparrow t, \downarrow t, \uparrow f \} \) to a fixpoint has the same effect as applying \( \{ \downarrow t, \uparrow f \} \) to a fixpoint and then applying the \( \uparrow t \) rules afterwards. So we postpone the execution of the \( \uparrow t \) rules to line 7.

Line 3 checks for the case that the definition has no model, which is to say that the rules allow us to derive that some atom is both in the true bound and the false bound for some subformula. This happens exactly when \( \text{UP} \) applied to the naive grounding would detect inconsistency.

Finally, in lines 6 and 7 we throw away the true bounds for all non-atomic subformulas, and then compute new bounds by evaluating the \( \uparrow t \) rules, taking already computed bounds (with true bounds for non-atoms set to empty) as the initial bounds in the computation. To see why, observe that the true bounds computed in line 2 are based on the assumption that \( \phi \) is \( A \)-satisfiable. So \( [\bar{\phi}] \) is set to true which stops the top-down bounded grounding algorithm of Section 2.2 from producing a grounding for \( \phi \). That is because the \( \text{Simpl} \) function, considering the true bound for the \( \phi \), simply returns \( \top \) instead of calling \( \text{Gnd}_A(\ldots) \) on subformulas of the \( \phi \). This also holds for all the formulas with true-bounds, calculated this way, except for the atomic formulas. So, we delete these true bounds based on the initial unjustified assumption, and

4.1 LUP Structure Computation

Our method for constructing \( \mathcal{LP} \) is given in Algorithm 3. Several lines in the algorithm require explanation. In line 1, the \( \downarrow f \) rules are omitted from the set of constructed rules. Because \( \phi \) is in NNF, the \( \downarrow f \) rules do not contribute any information to the set of bounds. To see this, observe that every \( \downarrow f \) rule has an atom of the form \( F_\gamma(x) \) in its body. Intuitively, for one of these rules to contribute a defined bound, certain information must have previously been obtained regarding bounds for its parent. It can be shown, by induction, that, in every case, the information about a bound inferred by an application of a \( \downarrow f \) rule must have previously been inferred by a \( \uparrow f \) rule. In line 2 of the algorithm we compute bounds using only the two sets of rules, \( \downarrow t \) and \( \uparrow f \). This is justified by the fact that applying \( \{ \uparrow t, \downarrow t, \uparrow f \} \) to a fixpoint has the same effect as applying \( \{ \downarrow t, \uparrow f \} \) to a fixpoint and then applying the \( \uparrow t \) rules afterwards. So we postpone the execution of the \( \uparrow t \) rules to line 7.

Line 3 checks for the case that the definition has no model, which is to say that the rules allow us to derive that some atom is both in the true bound and the false bound for some subformula. This happens exactly when \( \text{UP} \) applied to the naive grounding would detect inconsistency.

Finally, in lines 6 and 7 we throw away the true bounds for all non-atomic subformulas, and then compute new bounds by evaluating the \( \uparrow t \) rules, taking already computed bounds (with true bounds for non-atoms set to empty) as the initial bounds in the computation. To see why, observe that the true bounds computed in line 2 are based on the assumption that \( \phi \) is \( A \)-satisfiable. So \( [\bar{\phi}] \) is set to true which stops the top-down bounded grounding algorithm of Section 2.2 from producing a grounding for \( \phi \). That is because the \( \text{Simpl} \) function, considering the true bound for the \( \phi \), simply returns \( \top \) instead of calling \( \text{Gnd}_A(\ldots) \) on subformulas of the \( \phi \). This also holds for all the formulas with true-bounds, calculated this way, except for the atomic formulas. So, we delete these true bounds based on the initial unjustified assumption, and

### Algorithm 3: Computation of \( \mathcal{LP}(\phi, A) \)

1: Construct the rules \( \{ \uparrow t, \downarrow t, \uparrow f \} \)
2: Compute bounds by evaluating the inductive definition \( \{ \downarrow t, \uparrow f \} \)
3: if Bounds are inconsistent then
4: \hspace{1em} return "\( A \) has no solution"
5: end if
6: Throw away \( T_\psi(x) \) for all non-atomic subformulas \( \psi(x) \)
7: Compute new bounds by evaluating the inductive definition \( \{ \uparrow t \} \)
8: return LUP structure constructed from the computed bounds, according to Definition 3.
then construct the correct true bounds by application of the ↑t rules, in line 7. This is the main reason for postponing the execution of ↑t rules.

5 Bottom-up Grounding over Bound Structures

The grounding algorithm we use in Enfragmo constructs a grounding by a bottom-up process that parallels database query evaluation, based on an extension of the relational algebra. We give a rough sketch of the method here: further details can be found in, e.g., [Moh04,PTG07]. Given a structure (database) \( \mathcal{A} \), a boolean query is a formula \( \phi \) over the vocabulary of \( \mathcal{A} \), and query answering is evaluating whether \( \phi \) is true, i.e., \( \mathcal{A} \models \phi \). In the context of grounding, \( \phi \) has some additional vocabulary beyond that of \( \mathcal{A} \), and producing a reduced grounding involves evaluating out the instance vocabulary, and producing a ground formula representing the expansions of \( \mathcal{A} \) for which \( \phi \) is true.

For each sub-formula \( \alpha(\bar{x}) \) with free variables \( \bar{x} \), we call the set of reduced groundings for \( \alpha \) under all possible ground instantiations of \( \bar{x} \) an answer to \( \alpha(\bar{x}) \). We represent answers with tables on which the extended algebra operates. An X-relation, in databases, is a k-ary relation associated with a \( k \)-tuple of variables \( X \), representing a set of instantiations of the variables of \( X \). Our grounding method uses extended X-relations, in which each tuple \( \bar{a} \) is associated with a formula. In particular, if \( R \) is the answer to \( \alpha(\bar{x}) \), then \( R \) consists of the pairs \((\bar{a}, \alpha(\bar{a}))\). Since a sentence has no free variables, the answer to a sentence \( \phi \) is a zero-ary extended X-relation, containing a single pair \((\bar{a}, \psi)\), associating the empty tuple with formula \( \psi \), which is a reduced grounding of \( \phi \).

The relational algebra has operations corresponding to each connective and quantifier in FO: complement (negation); join (conjunction); union (disjunction); projection (existential quantification); division or quotient (universal quantification). Each generalizes to extended X-relations. If \( R \) over domain \( \mathcal{A} \), denoted \( R \bowtie S \), is the extended \( X \cup Y \)-relation \( \{ (\bar{a}, \psi) \mid \bar{a} : X \cup Y \rightarrow \mathcal{A} \} \), then \( R \bowtie \mathcal{A} \) is an answer to \( \alpha_2(\bar{y}) \) (both wrt \( \mathcal{A} \)), then \( R \bowtie S \) is an answer to \( \alpha_1(\bar{x}) \bowtie \alpha_2(\bar{y}) \). The analogous property holds for the other operators.

To ground with this algebra, we define the answer to atomic formula \( P(\bar{x}) \) as follows. If \( P \) is an instance predicate, the answer is the set of tuples \((\bar{a}, \top)\), for \( \bar{a} \in P^A \). If \( P \) is an expansion predicate, the answer is the set of all tuples \((\bar{a}, P(\bar{a}))\), for \( \bar{a} \) a tuple of elements from the domain of \( \mathcal{A} \). Then we apply the algebra inductively, bottom-up, on the structure of the formula. At the top, we obtain the answer to \( \phi \), which is a relation containing only the pair \((\bar{a}, \psi)\), where \( \psi \) is a reduced grounding of \( \phi \) wrt \( \mathcal{A} \).

**Example 3.** Let \( \sigma = \{ P \} \) and \( \varepsilon = \{ E \} \), and let \( \mathcal{A} \) be a \( \sigma \)-structure with \( P^A = \{(1, 2, 3), (3, 4, 5)\} \). The following extended relation \( R \) is an answer to \( \phi_1 \equiv P(x, y, z) \land E(x, y) \land E(y, z) \):

| x | y | z | ψ |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | E(1, 2) ∧ E(2, 3) |
| 3 | 4 | 5 | E(3, 4) ∧ E(4, 5) |

Observe that \( \delta_R(1, 2, 3) = E(1, 2) \land E(2, 3) \) is a reduced grounding of \( \phi_1[[1, 2, 3]] = P(1, 2, 3) \land E(1, 2) \land E(2, 3) \), and \( \delta_R(1, 1, 1) = \bot \) is a reduced grounding of \( \phi_1[[1, 1, 1]] \).

The following extended relation is an answer to \( \phi_2 \equiv \exists z \phi_1 \):

| x | y | ψ |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | E(1, 2) ∧ E(2, 3) |
| 3 | 4 | E(3, 4) ∧ E(4, 5) |

Here, \( E(1, 2) \land E(2, 3) \) is a reduced grounding of \( \phi_2[[1, 2]] \). Finally, the following represents an answer to \( \phi_3 \equiv \exists x \exists y \phi_2 \), where the single formula is a reduced grounding of \( \phi_3 \):

| x | y | ψ |
|---|---|---|
| (E(1, 2) ∧ E(2, 3)) | (E(3, 4) ∧ E(4, 5)) |
To modify the algorithm to ground using $\mathcal{LUP}(\phi, A)$ we need only change the base case for expansion predicates. To be precise, if $P$ is an expansion predicate we set the answer to $P(\bar{x})$ to the set of pairs $(\bar{a}, \psi)$ such that:

$$
\psi = \begin{cases} 
  P(\bar{a}) & \text{if } P^{\mathcal{LUP}(\phi, A)}(\bar{a}) = \infty \\
  \top & \text{if } P^{\mathcal{LUP}(\phi, A)}(\bar{a}) = \top \\
  \bot & \text{if } P^{\mathcal{LUP}(\phi, A)}(\bar{a}) = \bot 
\end{cases}
$$

Observe that bottom-up grounding mimics the second phase of Algorithm 3 i.e., a bottom-up truth propagation, except that it also propagates the falses. So, for bottom up grounding, we can omit line 7 from Algorithm 3.

Proposition 2. Let $(\langle \rangle, \psi)$ be the answer to sentence $\phi$ wrt $A$ after LUP initialization, then:

$$
Gnd_{\mathcal{LUP}(\phi, A)}(\phi, \emptyset) \equiv \psi
$$

where $Gnd_{\mathcal{LUP}(\phi, A)}(\phi, \emptyset)$ is the result of top-down grounding Algorithm 2 of $\phi$ over LUP structure $\mathcal{LUP}(\phi, A)$.

This bottom-up method uses only the reduct of $\mathcal{LUP}(\phi, A)$ defined by $\sigma \cup \varepsilon \cup \tilde{A}$, not the entire LUP structure.

6 Experimental Evaluation of LUP

In this section we present an empirical study of the effect of LUP on grounding size and on grounding and solving times. We also compare LUP with GWB in terms of these same measures. The implementation of LUP is within our bottom-up grounder Enfragmo, as described in this paper, and the implementation of GWB is in the top-down grounder GI\textsc{dl}, which is described in [WMD08b, WMD10]. GI\textsc{dl} has several parameters to control the precision of the bounds computation. In our experiments we use the default settings. We used MINISAT as the ground solver for Enfragmo. GI\textsc{dl} produces an output specifically for the ground solver MINISAT(ID), and together they form the IDP system [WMD08d].

We report data for instances of three problems: Latin Square Completion, Bounded Spanning Tree and Sudoku. The instances are latin\textunderscore square.17068* instances of Normal Latin Square Completion, the 104\_rand\_45.250* and 104\_rand\_35.250* instances of BST, and the ASP contest 2009 instances of Sudoku from the Asparagus repository\[^3\]. All experiments were run on a Dell Precision T3400 computer with a quad-core 2.66GHz Intel Core 2 processor having 4MB cache and 8GB of RAM, running CentOS 5.5 with Linux kernel 2.6.18.

In Tables 2 and 4, columns headed “Literals” or “Clauses” give the number of literals or clauses in the CNF formula produced by Enfragmo without LUP (our baseline), or these values for other grounding methods expressed as a percentage of the baseline value. In Tables 3 and 5, all values are times seconds. All values give are means for the entire collection of instances. Variances are not given, because they are very small. We split the instances of BST, into two sets, based on the number of nodes (35 or 45), because these two groups exhibit somewhat different behaviour, but within the groups variances are also small. In all tables, the minimum (best) values for each row are in bold face type, to highlight the conditions which gave best performance.

Table 2 compares the sizes of CNF formulas produced by Enfragmo without LUP (the base line) with the formulas obtained by running UP on the baseline formulas and by running Enfragmo with LUP. Clearly LUP reduces the size at least as much as UP, and usually reduces the size much more, due to the removal of autarkies.

Table 2 compares the sizes of CNF formulas produced by Enfragmo without LUP (the base line) with the formulas obtained by running UP on the baseline formulas and by running Enfragmo with LUP. Clearly LUP reduces the size at least as much as UP, and usually reduces the size much more, due to the removal of autarkies.

Total time for solving a problem instance is composed of grounding time and SAT solving time. Table 3 compares the grounding and SAT solving time with and without LUP bounds. It is evident that the SAT solving time is always reduced with LUP. This reduction is due to the elimination of the unit clauses and autark subformulas from the grounding. Autark subformula elimination also affects the time required to convert the ground formula to CNF which reduces the grounding time, but in some cases the overhead

\[^3\] http://asparagus.cs.uni-potsdam.de
Table 2: Impact of LUP on the size of the grounding. The first two columns give the numbers of literals and clauses in groundings produced by Enfragmo without LUP (the baseline). The other columns give these measures for formulas produced by executing UP on the baseline groundings (Enfragmo+UP), and for groundings produced by Enfragmo with LUP (Enfragmo+LUP), expressed as a fraction baseline values.

| Problem     | Enfragmo | Enfragmo+UP (%) | Enfragmo+LUP (%) |
|-------------|----------|-----------------|------------------|
|             | Literals | Clauses         | Literals | Clauses | Literals | Clauses |
| Latin Square| 7452400  | 2314100         | 0.07     | 0.07    | 0.07     | 0.07    |
| BST 45      | 22924989 | 9061818         | 0.96     | 0.96    | 0.24     | 0.24    |
| BST 35      | 8662215  | 3415697         | 0.95     | 0.96    | 0.37     | 0.37    |
| Sudoku      | 2875122  | 981668          | 0.17     | 0.18    | 0.07     | 0.08    |

Table 3: Impact of LUP on reduction in both grounding and (SAT) solving time. Grounding time here includes LUP computations and CNF generation.

| Problem     | Enfragmo | Enfragmo with LUP | Speed Up Factor |
|-------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|
|             | Gnd      | Solving           | Total          |
|             | Gnd      | Solving           | Total          |
|             | Gnd      | Solving           | Total          |
| Latin Square| 0.89     | 1.39              | 2.28           | 0.34 | 3.61 | -2.38 | 1.05 | -1.33 |
| BST 45      | 6.08     | 7.56              | 13.64          | 2    | 1.74 | 3.74  | 4.07 | 5.82 | 9.9   |
| BST 35      | 2.13     | 2.14              | 4.27           | 1.07 | 0.46 | 1.53  | 1.06 | 1.68 | 2.74  |
| Sudoku      | 0.46     | 1.12              | 1.59           | 2.08 | 0.26 | 2.34  | -1.62 | 0.86 | -0.76 |

imposed by LUP computation may not be made up for by this reduction. As the table shows, when LUP outperforms the normal grounding we get factor of 3 speed-ups, whereas when it loses to normal grounding the slowdown is by a factor of 1.5.

Table 4 compares the size reductions obtained by LUP and by GWB in GiDL. The output of GiDL contains clauses and rules. The rules are transformed to clauses in (MiniSat(ID)). The measures reported here are after that transformation. LUP reduces the size much more than GWB, in most of the cases. This stems from the fact that GiDL’s bound computation does not aim for completeness wrt unit propagation. This also affects the solving time because the CNF formulas are much smaller with LUP as shown in Table 5. Table 5 shows that Enfragmo with LUP and MiniSat is always faster than GiDL with MiniSat(ID) with or without bounds, and it is in some cases faster than Enfragmo without LUP.

7 Discussion

In the context of grounding-based problem solving, we have described a method we call lifted unit propagation (LUP) for carrying out a process essentially equivalent to unit propagation before and during grounding. Our experiments indicate that the method can substantially reduce grounding size – even more than unit propagation itself, and sometimes reduce total solving time as well.

| Problem     | Enfragmo (no LUP) | Gidl (no bounds) | Enfragmo with LUP | Gidl with bounds |
|-------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Latin Square| 7452400           | 2514100          | 0.74              | 0.07            |
| BST 45      | 22924989          | 9061818          | 0.99              | 0.24            |
| BST 35      | 8662215           | 3415697          | 1.04              | 0.37            |
| Sudoku      | 2875122           | 981668           | 0.56              | 0.07            |

Table 4: Comparison between the effectiveness of LUP and GiDL. Bounds on reduction in grounding size. The columns under Enfragmo show the actual grounding size whereas the other columns show the ratio of the grounding size relative to that of Enfragmo (without LUP).
Table 5: Comparison of solving time for Enfragmo and IDP, with and without LUP/bounds.

| Problem    | Enfragmo | IDP | Enfragmo+LUP | IDP (Bounds) |
|------------|----------|-----|--------------|--------------|
| Latin Square | 0.89    | 1.29 | 2.28        | 3            |
| BST 45     | 6.08    | 7.56 | 13.64       | 20.84        |
| BST 35     | 2.13    | 2.14 | 4.27        | 6.31         |
| Sudoku     | 0.46    | 1.12 | 1.59        | 1.81         |

Our work was motivated by the results of [WMD08b, WMD10], which presented the method we have referred to as GWB. In GWB, bounds on sub-formulas of the specification formula are computed without reference to an instance structure, and represented with FO formulas. The grounding algorithm evaluates instantiations of these bound formulas on the instance structure to determine that certain parts of the naive grounding may be left out. If the bound formulas exactly represent the information unit propagation can derive, then LUP and GWB are equivalent (though implemented differently). However, generally the GWB bounds are weaker than the LUP bounds, for two reasons. First, they must be weaker, because no FO formula can define the bounds obtainable with respect to an arbitrary instance structure. Second, to make the implementation in GiDIL efficient, the computation of the bounds is heuristically truncated. This led us to ask how much additional reduction in formula size might be obtained by the complete LUP method, and whether the LUP computation could be done fast enough for this extra reduction to be useful in practice.

Our experiments with the Enfragmo and GiDIL grounders show that, at least for some kinds of problems and instances, using LUP can produce much smaller groundings than the GWB implementation in GiDIL. In our experiments, the total solving times for Enfragmo with ground solver MINISAT were always less than those of GiDIL with ground solver MINISAT(ID). However, LUP reduced total solving time of Enfragmo with MINISAT significantly in some cases, and increased it — albeit less significantly — in others. Since there are many possible improvements of the LUP implementation, the question of whether LUP can be implemented efficiently enough to be used all the time remains unanswered.

Investigating more efficient ways to do LUP, such as by using better data structures, is a subject for future work, as is consideration of other approximate methods such, as placing a heuristic time-out on the LUP structure computation, or dovetailing of the LUP computation with grounding. We also observed that the much of the reduction in grounding size obtained by LUP is due to identification of autark sub-formulas. These cannot be eliminated from the naive grounding by unit propagation. Further investigation of the importance of these in practice is another direction we are pursuing. One more direction we are pursuing is the study of methods for deriving even stronger information that represented by the LUP structure, to further reduce ground formula size, and possibly grounding time as well.

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