OTTER EXPERIMENTS IN A SYSTEM
OF COMBINATORY LOGIC*

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ABSTRACT. This paper describes some experiments involving the automated theorem-proving program OTTER in the system TRC of illative combinatory logic. We show how OTTER can be steered to find a contradiction in an inconsistent variant of TRC, and present some experimentally discovered identities in TRC.

1. Introduction.

OTTER [5] is a resolution/paramodulation theorem-proving program for first-order logic with equality. It has been used successfully in several areas of logic and algebra [8], [9], [6], [7], [4].

In this paper we describe our experiments with OTTER in the system TRC of illative combinatory logic [3]. The system TRC has been formulated by M. R. Holmes who proved that it is equiconsistent with Quine’s New Foundations.

New Foundations (NF) was introduced by Quine and extensively studied by Rosser, Jensen and others. NF is an attempt to axiomatize mathematics in a way different from the traditional Zermelo-Fraenkel axioms. Specker showed that NF refutes the Axiom of Choice, but the consistency of NF is an open question.

Combinatory logic axiomatizes the intuition that everything is a function (combinator). The basic symbol in the language is a binary function $a$ and $a(x, y)$ (usually abbreviated to $x(y)$ or just $xy$) denotes the result of applying $x$ to $y$.

Holmes gave a translation of NF into a combinatory logic system called TRC. OTTER is particularly well suited for experimentation in TRC; TRC has a small number of axioms, most of them equations, and apart from its equiconsistency with NF, not much is known about the theory (we wish to point out that no model of TRC is known). This work (as well as the ongoing experimentation by my student W. Wood) is a modest beginning in a systematic investigation of TRC using automated reasoning techniques.

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The theory TRC is closely related to combinatory logic [2], [1]. When TRC is slightly modified one obtains an inconsistent theory. This is easily proved by elementary methods of lambda calculus (and well known to the author of TRC). Here we describe how a contradiction in the inconsistent theory can be found directly, using OTTER.

While experimenting with OTTER, we have come across a number of interesting consequences of the axioms of TRC, and we present here a few, with proofs provided by OTTER.

The work on this paper was done while the author visited Argonne National Laboratory in May 1994, under the Faculty Research Participation Program. I am greatly indebted to William McCune and Larry Wos for their patient explanations of the workings of OTTER, and for many valuable discussions we had on automated reasoning techniques.

The Theory TRC

M. R. Holmes introduced in [3] the system TRC (for ‘type-respecting combinators) and proved that TRC is equiconsistent with Quine’s New Foundations. The theory TRC is a system of combinatory logic: the objects of TRC are combinators. For two combinators \( x \) and \( y \) we use concatenation to denote application

\[ xy = x(y) \]

and use the convention that the operation \( xy \) associates left:

\[ xyz = (xy)z . \]

The theory TRC has four constant combinators \( \text{Abst} \), \( \text{Eq} \), \( p_1 \) and \( p_2 \), the operation (function) of application, a two-place function pair\((x, y)\) (written as \( \langle x, y \rangle \)), and a one-place function \( K \). The axioms of TRC are as follows:

I. \( K(x)y = x \) (constant functions)
II. \( p_i(x_1, x_2) = x_i \) for \( i = 1, 2 \) (projections)
III. \( \langle p_1x, p_2x \rangle = x \) (pairing)
IV. \( \langle f, g \rangle x = \langle fx, gx \rangle \) (pairwise application)
V. \( \text{Abst} (x, y, z) = x K(z)(y, z) \) (abstraction)
VI. \( \text{Eq} \langle x, y \rangle = p_1 \) if \( x = y \); \( \text{Eq} \langle x, y \rangle = p_2 \) if \( x \neq y \) (equality)
VII. If for all \( x, f x = gx \), then \( f = g \) (extensionality)
VIII. \( p_1 \neq p_2 \)

In [3] Holmes proves that NF can be interpreted in TRC, and conversely, TRC can be interpreted in NF. As NF is as yet not known to be either consistent or inconsistent, the same applies to TRC.

An Inconsistent Variant of TRC

It is important that \( K \) is a function symbol, not a combinator, even though its definition is formally the same as that of the combinator \( K \) in combinatory logic:

I*. \( K x y = x \).
If we replace the function symbol $K$ by a combinator $K$ and replace Axiom I by $I^*$ and Axiom V by $V^*$.

Abst $xyz = x(Kz)(yz)$,

then the resulting system TRC* is inconsistent. This can be proved by employing the simple but powerful feature of combinatory logic, the abstraction property, along with a version of Russell's paradox.

The actual explicit contradictory term might be quite complicated, and a natural question arises whether an automated theorem prover can find a contradiction, without being prompted by a human.

We have conducted a large number of experiments with OTTER and eventually succeeded to have OTTER find a contradiction, but not without a few hints.

The Strategy

First we restate the axioms of TRC* into clauses. Even though OTTER does accept first order formulas as input, it translates them into clauses anyway. Besides, an inspection of the clauses that form the input should help decide which options to select.

```
set(knuth_bendix).
set(ur_res).
set(unit_deletion).
set(bird_print).
assign(max_mem,64000).
assign(max_weight,40).
assign(pick_given_ratio,6).
list(sos).

x = x.
a(a(k,x),y) = x.
a(p1,pair(x,y)) = x.
a(p2,pair(x,y)) = y.
pair(a(p1,x),a(p2,x)) = x.
a(pair(x,y),z) = pair(a(x,z),a(y,z)).
a(a(abst,x),y,z) = a(a(x,a(k,z)),a(y,z)).
a(eq,pair(x,x)) = p1.
x = y | a(eq,pair(x,y)) = p2.
x = y | a(x,n(x,y)) != a(y,n(x,y)).
p1 != p2.
end_of_list.
```

Note that to state the axiom of extensionality one has to introduce a Skolem function $n(x,y) (n(x,y) = \text{some } z \text{ such that } xz \neq yz$. Also, we write $a(x,y)$ for $xy$ (but the bird-print option makes it possible to output $a$ as concatenation).

Next, we decide which clauses to put in the set of support. As we are looking for a contradiction and do not intend to concentrate on any particular clause, we put all clauses into sos.

Most clauses in the axiom set are units, and in fact equations. For that reason we select the Knuth-Bendix completion procedure [5]. This procedure transforms a set of equalities into a set of rewrite rules. For a suitable inference rule to accompany knuth_bendix, we follow McCune's advice to use the unit-resulting resolution
(UR-resolution), along with unit deletion. As our SPARC station has sufficient memory, we set the maximum to 64MB. As we expect the contradiction to be quite complicated, we set the maximum weight = 40.

Search for a Contradiction

With the input file and options set as described above, OTTER exceeded the allocated memory without finding a proof. It generated well over 100,000 clauses, mostly equations, but did not discover a contradiction.

Our first attempt to enhance its power was to expand the input by adding “interesting” clauses proved by OTTER, and introduce names for “important” terms. Without a clear direction, this approach failed. With the language being enlarged, the number of “useless” tautologies grew rapidly and OTTER reached the memory limit more easily. After many unsuccessful runs we decided to abandon this strategy. (This strategy however turned out to be a good exploratory tool: OTTER generated a number of clauses that we later verified to be theorems of TRC).

As it became clear that this “formalist” approach would not work we had to decide how to steer OTTER in the right direction. As a first gentle push, we directed OTTER to search for a “diagonal” combinator. A contradiction would no doubt involve some form of diagonalization, so we asked OTTER to find a combinator $F$ with the property $F x = x x$.

When this attempt was unsuccessful, we tried several variants, eventually finding a combinator $F = \text{Abst Abst } K$ such that

$$ F x y = x x. $$

Below is a run of OTTER that found this $F$. Since looking for a term satisfying a single equation should not require substitutions into or from nonatomic clauses, we set the flags \texttt{para\_from\_units\_only} and \texttt{para\_into\_units\_only}. This focused the search sufficiently and OTTER found an answer in 378 sec. (after 22461 clauses).

```prolog
set(knuth_bendix).
set(ur_res).
set(unit_deletion).
set(para_from_units_only).
set(para_into_units_only).
set(bird_print).
assign(max_mem, 64000).
assign(max_weight, 40).
assign(pick_given_ratio, 6).
list(usable).
0 [] x=x.
end_of_list.
list(sos).
0 [] k x y=x.
0 [] p1 pair(x,y)=x.
0 [] p2 pair(x,y)=y.
0 [] pair(p1 x, p2 x)=x.
0 [] pair(x,y) = pair(x z, y z).
0 [] abst x y z=x (k z) (y z).
```
An inspection of the proof shows that only Axioms I* and V* are used. When we deleted the irrelevant information and let OTTER concentrate on $\alpha$, $Abst$ and $K$ only, it found the answer in less than a second. This illustrates how essential it is to choose the input to contain only as many assumptions as necessary for the proof.

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END OF PROOF

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Encouraged by this partial success we added the following axiom to the input file.

\[ F x y = x x \]
and started the search for a contradiction anew. While OTTER now generated a number of properties of the combinator \( F \) that to a trained eye looked suspicious, it still did not find a contradiction. We therefore decided for a different tack. A contradiction should have the form of Russell’s paradox and should involve a contradictory use of the equality combinator. So we asked OTTER to find a combinator \( s \) with the property \( s = Eq(s, p_2) \). It is clear that such a self-referential combinator yields a contradiction: \( s = p_1 \) if and only if \( s = p_2 \).

Again, OTTER failed to find an answer, and again, we tried various modifications, finally succeeding to elicit an answer when asked to find an \( s \) such that

\[ s = Eq(K s, K p_2) \]

OTTER found such an \( s \) in 29 sec (again, with options \texttt{para_from_units_only} and \texttt{para_into_units_only}):
When inspecting the proof we find that some of the axioms are not used. After deleting the unnecessary axioms we obtained the following proof:

```
set (knuth_bendix).
set (ur_res).
set (unit_deletion).
set (para_from_units_only).
set (para_into_units_only).
set (bird_print).
assign (max_mem, 64000).
assign (max_weight, 20).
assign (pick_given_ratio, 6).
list (usable).
0 [] x=x.
end_of_list.
list (sos).
0 [] k x y=x.
0 [] p1 pair(x,y)=y.
```

When inspecting the proof we find that some of the axioms are not used. After deleting the unnecessary axioms we obtained the following proof:
This time, it took OTTER a little more time, but the resulting combinator looks less complicated:

\[ s = \text{Abst}(K \text{Eq})⟨F, K(K p_2)⟩(\text{Abst}(K \text{Eq})⟨F, K(K p_2)⟩). \]

Upon closer inspection, the difference from the first proof is that \(\text{Abst}(K \text{Eq})\) replaces \(\text{Abst}(\text{Abst}(K \text{Eq}))\). This of course begs the question whether these two terms might be equal. Indeed, the answer is yes, and in fact it is an instance of a general identity. (The general identity \(\text{Abst}(\text{Abst}(\text{Abst} x)) = \text{Abst} x\) is true in TRC and is verified in the following section.)

Another observation is that \( s = W W \) where \( W \) is the combinator \(\text{Abst}(K \text{Eq})⟨F, K(K p_2)⟩\). Thus the contradictory combinator \( W \) has the property

\[ W W = \text{Eq}⟨K(W W), K p_2⟩, \]

(which I believe should look familiar to experts in lambda calculus).
As a final experiment, we ask OTTER to verify that the combinator $s$ is contradictory. So we add the axiom

$$X. \quad s = Eq(K s, K p_2)$$

and add a name for the term $K p_2$. We also disable the `para_from_units_only` and `para_into_units_only` flags, as the more general paramodulation is needed to produce a contradiction.

```plaintext
set(knuth_bendix).
set(ur_res).
set(unit_deletion).
set(bird_print).
assign(max_mem, 64000).
assign(max_weight, 40).
assign(pick_given_ratio, 6).
list(usable).
0 [] x=x.
end_of_list.
list(sos).
0 [ ] k x y=x.
0 [ ] p1 pair(x,y)=x.
0 [ ] p2 pair(x,y)=y.
0 [ ] pair(p1 x, p2 x)=x.
0 [ ] pair(x, y) = pair(x z, y z).
0 [ ] abst x y z=x (k z) (y z).
0 [ ] eq pair(x, x)=p1.
0 [ ] x=x|eq pair(x, y) =p2.
0 [ ] x=x|n(x, y) != n(x, y).
0 [ ] p1!=p2.
0 [ ] k p1=cp1.
0 [ ] k p2=cp2.
0 [ ] s=eq pair(k s, k p2).
end_of_list.

----> UNIT CONFLICT at 0.31 sec ----> 84 [binary, 82.1, 17.1] $F$.

------------------------- PROOF -------------------------
2 [ ] k x y=x.
14, 13 [ ] eq pair(x, x)=p1.
15 [ ] x=x|eq pair(x, y) =p2.
17 [ ] p2!=p1.
21, 20 [ ] k p2=cp2.
22 [demod, 21] eq pair(k s, cp2)=s.
30, 29 [para_from, 20.1.1, 2.1.1.1] cp2 x=p2.
36 [para_into, 15.2.1, 22.1.1] k s=cp2|s=p2.
74, 73 [para_from, 35.1.1, 2.1.1.1, demod, 30] s=p2.
82 [back_demod, 22, demod, 74, 21, 14, 74] p2!=p1.
84 [binary, 82.1, 17.1] $F$.
------------------------- end of proof -------------------------

Some Theorems of TRC

While running the experiments, we have observed a number of interesting clauses generated by OTTER. In addition to producing equations true in TRC, some of the output led us to formulate, and then verify (or disprove) various conjectures in TRC. Below we give a sample of some theorems of TRC that we found interesting (it
remains to be seen how important these facts are). We view this as a modest prelude to a systematic study of TRC, using automated reasoning techniques. (We have obtained a large number of interesting theorems of TRC that we intend to present in a future paper.) We hope that the information so obtained might contribute to the eventual proof of inconsistency of NF (or to the construction of a model).

In Proposition 1 below, \( \text{Id} \) stands for the identity combinator, \( \text{Id} \ x = x \). Note that \( \text{Id} = (p_1, p_2) \). Clearly, 1a is a consequence of 1b. (The referee pointed out that the proof of 1b yields the stronger statement 1c.) The proofs of Proposition 1b and 2 are OTTER’s and are reprinted below with her permission.

**Proposition 1.**

(a) \( \text{Abst Abst Abst Abst Abst} = \text{Id} \),
(b) \( \text{Abst Abst Abst Abst} = K(K(\text{Id})) \),
(c) \( \text{Abst Abst Abst Abst} x \ y = \text{Id} \).

**Proposition 2.** For all \( x \),

(a) \( \text{Abst}(\text{Abst}(\text{Abst} \ x)) = \text{Abst} \ x \),
(b) \( \text{Abst}(\text{Abst} K(\ x)) = K(\ x) \),
(c) \( \text{Abst} K(K(\ x)) = K(K(\ x)) \).

[Warren Wood pointed out that 2c is also true in classical combinatory logic (replacing \( \text{Abst} \) with \( S \) and \( K(\ x) \) with \( K \)].]

**Proofs of 1 (b), 2 (a), (b), (c).**

```
set(knuth_bendix).
set(ur_res).
set(unit_deletion).
set(para_from_units_only).
set(bird_print).
assign(max_mem,16000).
assign(max_weight,40).
assign(pick_given_ratio,6).
list(usable).
0 [] x=x.
end_of_list.
list(sos).
0 [] k(x) y=x.
0 [] abst x y z=x k(z) (y z).
0 [] x|y n(x,y) !y n(x,y).
0 [] id x=x.
0 [] abst abst abst abst !=k(k(id)).
end_of_list.

--- UNIT CONFLICT at 6.27 sec --- 430 [binary,428.1,44.1] $F$.
--------------- PROOF ----------------
1 [] x=x.
3,2 [] k(x) y=x.
4 [] abst x y z=x k(z) (y z).
5 [] x|y n(x,y) !y n(x,y).
6 [] id x=x.
8 [] k(k(id)) != abst abst abst abst.
9 [] x k(y) (z y)= abst x z y.
10 [ur,5,8,moder,3] abst abst abst abst n(k(k(id)), abst abst abst abst) != k(id).
11 [para_into,5.2.1,6.1.1] id|x n(id,x) != n(id,x).
```
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12 [para_into,5.2.1,2.1.1] k(x)≡y|y n(k(x),y) !≡x.
17 [para_from,4.1.1,11.2.1] abst x y≡id|x k(n(id,abst x y) (y n(id,abst x y)) !≡n(id,abst x y).
21 [para_into,9.1.1,6.1.1,demod,3] abst id x y≡y.
38,39 [para_from,9.1.1,4.1.1,demod,3] abst abst x y z≡y (x y z).
39 [back_demod,10,demod,38] abst (abst abst n(k(k(id)),abst abst abst abst))!≡k(id).
40 [ur,21,11] abst id x≡id.
43,42 [ur,40,12] k(id)≡abst id.
44 [back_demod,39,demod,43,43] abst (abst abst n(k(abst id),abst abst abst abst))!≡abst id.
51 [para_from,40.1.1,5.2.1] abst id≡x|x n(abst id,x) !≡id.
407 [para_from,37.1.1,17.2.1,demod,3,unit_delete,1] abst (abst abst x) y≡id.
428 [ur,407,51] abst (abst abst x)≡abst id.
430 [binary,428.1,44.1] $F$.

-------------- end of proof --------------

set(knuth_bendix).
set(ur_res).
set(unit_deletion).
set(para_from_units_only).
set(bird_print).
assign(max_mem,64000).
assign(max_weight,60).
assign(pick_given_ratio,6).
list(usable).
0 [] x≡x.
end_of_list.
list(sos).
0 [] k(x) y≡x.
0 [] abst x y z≡x k(z) (y z).
0 [] x≡y|x n(x,y) !≡y n(x,y).
0 [] abst (abst (abst b))!≡abst b.
end_of_list.

--------- UNIT CONFLICT at 4.66 sec ---------> 638 [binary,636.1,8.1] $F$.

-------------- end of proof --------------

3,2 [] k(x) y≡x.
4 [] abst x y z≡x k(z) (y z).
5 [] x≡y|x n(x,y) !≡y n(x,y).
6 [] abst (abst (abst b))!≡abst b.
7 [] x k(y) (z y)≡abst x z y.
8 [ur,5,6] abst (abst (abst b)) n(abst (abst (abst b)),abst b)
!≡abst b n(abst (abst (abst b)),abst b).
20 [para_into,7.1.1,2.1.1] x k(y) z≡abst x k(z) y.
21 [para_into,7.1.1,4.1.1,demod,2] x k(y z) z≡abst (abst x) y z.
48 [para_into,20.1.1,7.1.1] abst x k(y z) z≡abst x y z.
457 [para_into,48.1.1,21.1.1] abst (abst (abst x)) y z≡abst x y z.
636 [ur,457,5] abst (abst (abst x)) y≡abst x y.
638 [binary,636.1,8.1] $F$.

-------------- end of proof --------------

set(knuth_bendix).
set(ur_res).
set(unit_deletion).
set(para_from_units_only).
set(bird_print).
assign(max_mem,16000).
assign(max_weight,40).
assign(pick_given_ratio,6).
list(usable).
0 [] x=x.
end_of_list.
list(sos).
0 [] k(x) y=x.
0 [] abst x y z=x k(z) (y z).
0 [] x=y | x n(x,y) != y n(x,y).
0 [] id x=x.
0 [] k(b))!=abst (abst k(b)).
end_of_list.

---UNIT CONFLICT at 1.11 sec --- 104 [binary,102.1,10.1] $F$.

--------- PROOF ---------

3,2 [] k(x) y=x.
5 [] x=y | x n(x,y) ! = y n(x,y).
8 [] abst (abst k(b)) != k(b).
9 [] x k(y) (z y) != abst x z y.

---UNIT CONFLICT at 0.53 sec --- 55 [binary,54.1,1.1] $F$.

--------- PROOF ---------
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