Abstract

We present the Weltmodell, a commonsense knowledge base that was automatically generated from aggregated dependency parse fragments gathered from over 3.5 million English language books. We leverage the magnitude and diversity of this dataset to arrive at close to ten million distinct N-ary commonsense facts using techniques from open-domain Information Extraction (IE). Furthermore, we compute a range of measures of association and distributional similarity on this data. We present the results of our efforts using a browsable web demonstrator and publicly release all generated data for use and discussion by the research community. In this paper, we give an overview of our knowledge acquisition method and representation model, and present our web demonstrator.

Keywords: Knowledge Acquisition, Open Information Extraction, Commonsense Reasoning

1. Introduction

Acquiring and representing structured, machine-readable general world knowledge has been a longstanding challenge in AI and NLP. Early approaches for the creation of commonsense knowledge were based on hand-coded knowledge by groups of expert logicians (Lenat, 1995). To overcome the inherent complexities in scaling up hand-built rule-systems, more recent approaches have investigated the use of crowd-sourcing (Singh et al., 2002) and the integration of numerous hand-built structured data sources (Speer and Havasi, 2012). A prominent example of this line of work is ConceptNet (Liu and Singh, 2004), a graph-based knowledge representation project in which nodes are concepts and edges relations that hold between these concepts.

We follow a different recent line of work which investigates the use of automated, data-driven methods to create commonsense knowledge bases (Schubert, 2002; Gordon et al., 2010; Gordon, 2010). We are motivated by ever-growing amounts of readily available natural language text (Halevy et al., 2009), an increasing maturity of Information Extraction (IE) technologies and the availability of scalable computing architectures (Dean and Ghemawat, 2008).

In particular, we are motivated by the availability of a dataset of aggregated dependency parse fragments gathered from over 3.5 million English language books (Goldberg and Orwant, 2013). By applying techniques from open-domain IE (Akbik and Löser, 2012) and distributional semantics (Akbik et al., 2012) to this large and diverse dataset, we investigate the potential of large scale data-driven approaches for automatically acquiring commonsense knowledge. We distinguish our work from related efforts (Speer and Havasi, 2012; Schubert, 2002) in that we model relations that hold between an arbitrary number of concepts (e.g. N-ary relations) and determine several notions of similarity and association which we include in our model. We make the results of our efforts publicly available for use and discussion by the research community.

We present the Weltmodell, the commonsense knowledge base created with our data-driven approach, using a browsable web interface. Typical commonsense information that users may query in the Weltmodell includes:

- Facts that pertain to a given concept, along with co-occurrence counts and mutual information values. For instance, a user might query for the concept “coffee” (see Table 1). Example facts include unary facts (“coffee may smell good”), binary facts (“someone may drink coffee”) and ternary facts (“someone may have coffee for breakfast”).

- Concepts that may fill a slot in a given statement. For example, given the facts found for “coffee” in Table 1, users may ask: “What are other things that someone may have for breakfast?”, “What other things may smell good?”, or “What things may a waiter bring?”? See Table 2 for example results for such queries.

- Statements with high applicative similarity for a given statement. For instance, a user might ask “What statements hold for things that a waiter may bring?” (they may be put or placed on a table). We discuss such notions of similarity in section 2.4.

In the following, we give an overview of our knowledge acquisition methodology and knowledge representation model. We also give a brief overview of our web UI.

| FACT | NPMI | COUNT |
|------|------|-------|
| [someone] may sip [coffee] | 0.65 | 6946 |
| [someone] may drink [coffee] | 0.56 | 11206 |
| [someone] may pour [coffee] | 0.52 | 2658 |
| [coffee] may smell good | 0.49 | 219 |
| [someone] may have [coffee] for [breakfast] | 0.44 | 102 |
| [waiter] may bring [coffee] | 0.41 | 140 |

Table 1: Facts that pertain to the concept “coffee”, ordered by normalized pointwise mutual information (NPMI). Facts have different numbers of slots for concepts which are indicated by brackets. Thus, “[someone] may have [coffee] for [breakfast]”, for example, is a ternary statement.
Table 2: Typical concepts that are observed for four example statements of different arity. Each statement has exactly one free slot, indicated as “[..]”. In example b), a ternary statement, the concepts observed that may fill the free slot are different items of food that one may have for breakfast. Example d) is a unary statement that is observed for concepts that may smell good.

2. Knowledge Acquisition

2.1. Data set

We base our knowledge acquisition effort on the Syntactic N-Grams dataset (Goldberg and Orwant, 2013). It was extracted from corpus of 3.5 million digitized English Google Books (Michel et al., 2011) and includes ca. 10 billion distinct items. The dataset contains syntactic n-grams, rooted dependency tree fragments from parsed English text. N-grams may consist of up to 5 arcs in a dependency tree between content-words (word types judged to be semantically important such as nouns and verbs), plus any number of arcs to functional-markers, word types such as determiners and auxiliary verbs. At time of writing, it is the largest openly available corpus of its kind. An example of a syntactic n-gram that was seen 16 times is given in Figure 1a).

![Diagram](attachment:image.png)

Figure 1: Extraction process for an example n-gram. The n-gram is displayed in a). The extraction method identifies the head verb (highlighted bold) and dismisses all nodes that are not of interest (highlighted in italics). The extracted fact with its components (frame, verb, concepts and count) is listed in b). The collapsed statement-concept representation for this fact is given in c).

2.2. Fact Extraction

Our method expects as input a dependency tree fragment that contains a verb and all of its arguments. We apply an open-domain Information Extraction method modeled on the KRAKEN system described in (Akbik and Löser, 2012): Using a simple rule-set over typed dependencies, we collect subjects, particles, negations, passive subjects, direct and prepositional objects of the verb, and determine whether the dependency tree fragment contains a passive construction, and whether it is negated. Personal pronouns and certain nouns (such as “anybody” and “everyone”) are replaced with the placeholder “someone”. Some vague words such as “that” and “everything” are generalized to “something”. Verbs are lemmatized in active, but not in passive, constructions.

We then place the collected arguments in the following order: Subject, negation, main verb, particles, direct objects and prepositional objects. All other links, such as auxiliary verbs and complements are disregarded. So, the input fragment “when the waiter had brought coffee” yields the fact “[waiter] may bring [coffee].” Refer to Figure 1 a) and b) for an illustration of this step.

**Representation.** This yields a large resource of N-ary facts. Facts consist of a frame with slots for each noun concept. So, in the fact “[waiter] may bring [coffee]”, the frame is “[..] may bring [..]” and the concepts are “waiter” and “coffee”. Frames are always based on a verb, so that for each verb a number of frames with different numbers of slots and prepositions exist. The verb “bring”, for instance, has frames such as “[..] may bring [..] before [..]” and “[..] may bring down [..]”. Aggregated frequency counts from the Syntactic N-Grams dataset are also stored for each fact. An illustration of a fact and its components is given in Figure 1 b).

Finally, a statement is a fact in which exactly one slot is empty, such as “[waiter] may bring [..]”. Statements pertain to concepts that may fill the empty slot. This concept-statement pair representation is important to our knowledge base, because it allows us to define filters and calculate several measures of similarity and association.

2.3. Pointwise Mutual Information.

Many frequently observed statements are very general and are seen with very large numbers of concepts. An example
is “[someone] may see [.]” which is observed for nearly any noun. In order to measure the strength of the association between a statement and a concept that may fill the statement’s free slot, we compute the mutual information of each concept-statement pair. We use the pointwise mutual information (PMI) - as well as its normalized variant (NPMI) - and calculate the discrepancy between the probability of a concept-statement coincidence given their joint distribution and their individual distributions, assuming independence. Equation 1 shows the formula for the NPMI, where \( p(s) \) is the probability of a statement and \( p(c) \) the probability of a concept.

\[
\text{npmi}(s, c) = \log \frac{p(s, c)}{p(s)p(c)}
\]

We also compute the so-called Lexicographer’s Mutual Information (LMI) by multiplying the NPMI with the concept-statement co-occurrence counts. This offsets the tendency of the PMI to rate rare events to highly. We make all three statistics available, as we feel that each may be used to find significant, or typical, statements for a given concept and vice versa.

### 2.4. Functional and Applicative Similarity

We compute measures of similarity for all pairs of concepts and all pairs of statements.

**Functional similarity.** Following (Turney, 2012), we define the functional similarity of two concepts to be the degree to which two concepts are observed with the same statements. The concepts “coffee” and “tea” for example are functionally similar, because they share a large set of nouns such as “medicine”, “dose” and “draught”. We apply our algorithm to the dataset and find 852,387,621 facts, of which 9,544,862 are distinct. The knowledge base spans 933,997 distinct frames, 2,993,678 distinct concepts and 6,155,115 distinct statements.

**Applicative similarity.** We define two statements to have a high applicative similarity if they are observed with similar nouns. For example, the statements “[.] may cure [disease]” and “[someone] may be administered [.]” have a certain applicative similarity because they are observed with nouns such as “medicine”, “dose” and “draught”. A verbalization of this example would be “things that cure diseases may often be administered to someone”. See Table 3 for examples.

We measure the similarity of two concepts or statements using the cosine distance (Bullinaria and Levy, 2007) over shared attributes in a vector space presentation. The closer the cosine distance is to 0, the more similar two concepts or statements are. We describe the process of calculating the cosine distance in greater detail in (Akbik et al., 2012).

### 2.5. Results

We apply our algorithm to the dataset and find 852,387,621 facts, of which 9,544,862 are distinct. The knowledge base spans 933,997 distinct frames, 2,993,678 distinct concepts and 6,155,115 distinct statements.

### 3. Demonstration

For demonstration and discussion purposes, we make available a browsable web interface to the WELTMODELL at http://www.textmining.tu-berlin.de/weltmodell, where users can freely browse concepts, statements, frames and verbs. The two most important views are the concept and the statement views:

**Concept view** The concept view shows associated statements and functionally similar concepts for a given concept. Users may filter statements according to their rarity. See Figure 2 for an example. A click on the arrow next to a statement leads to the statement view.

**Statement view** The statement view shows associated concepts and applicatively similar concepts for a given statement. Here, users can execute a single-link hierarchical agglomerative clustering (HAC) by clicking the “group” button. Associated concepts are then grouped according to their functional similarity. We show an example of this view and the visualized clustering in Figure 3.

Users can compare the different mutual information metrics and inspect for each fact a sample of syntactic n-grams in which it was found.

### 4. Outlook

Present work focuses on expanding the range of our knowledge acquisition efforts to non-verb constructions such as noun phrases, and finding causal relationships between verbs (Rink et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2011). We intend to increase the data quality by continuously refining our extractors and integrating external repositories such as WORDNET (Miller, 1995) and OPEN MIND COMMON SENSE (Singh et al., 2002). We also plan to add more visualization options as we add new types of commonsense understanding.
information. We will also investigate in how far we can encourage and automatically integrate user feedback into our knowledge base.

**Disambiguation.** One principal problem that we are addressing is the widespread ambiguity of concepts (as well as statements to a lesser extend). Examples for ambiguous concepts are “plane” (airplane vs. field) and “change” (coin vs. modification). Our hope is to separate the meanings either using unsupervised methods, for example through clustering the statements for each concept, or by disambiguating concepts to WordNet. Initial investigations of both supervised and unsupervised approaches point to potential, however no results of sufficient quality for inclusion into the publicly browsable dataset have yet been produced.

**Incompleteness.** Another challenge that we are investigating concerns incompleteness; even with the very large dataset used in our experiments, not all possible facts are observed. An example of this is the statement “[_] may have [wing]”, which is observed for many different birds, but not the concept “owl”. However, the WELTMODELL contains enough information to infer such statements, e.g. we know that an owl is a bird and that it can fly. We also observe that birds that can fly often have wings. Currently we are investigating matrix completion methods as a general means to infer new information (Riedel et al., 2013).

**Common sense reasoning.** In order to gather further requirements for data-driven commonsense knowledge acquisition, we intend to address commonsense reasoning tasks such as the Choice of Plausible Alternatives (COPA) task described in (Roemmele et al., 2011). Our goal is to create methods that not only heuristically solve such tasks but also “explain” their choice as a series of human-readable commonsense reasoning steps.
5. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our colleague Larysa Visengeriyeva for her help and ideas in working with the syntactic n-grams. Alan Akbik and Thilo Michael received funding from the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement no ICT-2009-4-1 270137 ‘Scalable Preservation Environments’ (SCAPE).

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