
Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing

Lecture 13

Semantics and discourse

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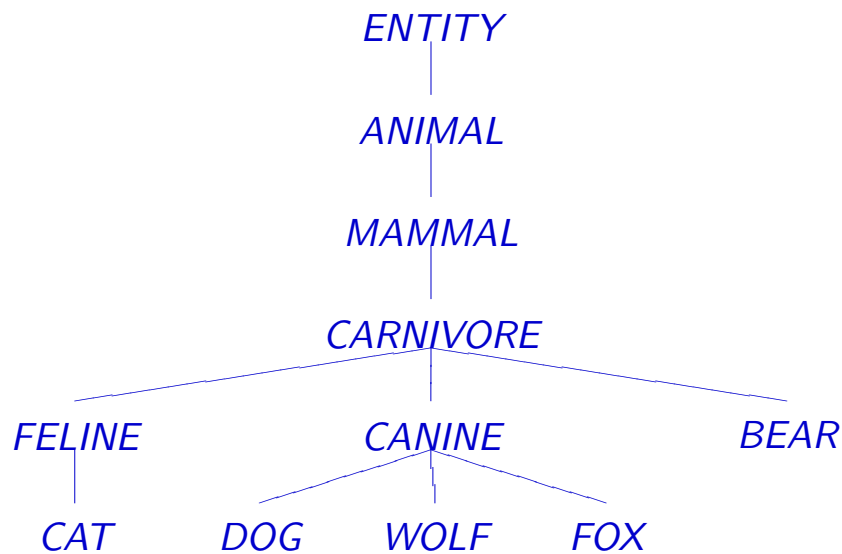
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Semantics

- What is **meaning**?
- What is the meaning of the word *cat*?
 - not a specific cat
 - not all cats
 - abstract notion of any cat
- Atomic semantic units: **concepts**
 - example: *cat* → *CAT*

WordNet: an ontology of concepts



Semantic relationships

- **Hypernym / hyponym**
 - *CAT is-a FELINE*
 - basis of hierarchical relationships in WordNet
- **Part / whole**
 - *CAT has-part PAW*
 - *PAW is-part-of CAT*
- **Membership**
 - *FACULTY has-member PROFESSOR*
 - *PROFESSOR is-member-of FACULTY*
- **Antonym / opposite**
 - *LEADER is-opposite-of FOLLOWER*

Thematic roles

- Words play **semantic roles** in a sentence

I see *the woman* *with the telescope* .
AGENT THEME INSTRUMENT

- Specific verbs typically require **arguments** with specific thematic roles and allow **adjuncts** with specific thematic roles.

Semantic frames

- Complex concepts can be defined by **semantic frames**, whose **slots** are filled by concrete information
- **SOCCKER-GAME**
 - *HOME-TEAM: Heart of Midlothian*
 - *AWAY-TEAM: FC Motherwell*
 - *SCORE: 3-0*
 - *TIME-STARTED: 2006-02-18 16:00 GMT*
 - *LOCATION: Tynecastle Stadium, Edinburgh*
- **Information extraction**: can we fill semantic frames from text?

Source of semantic knowledge

- Semantic knowledge is not directly observable
- Building semantic knowledge bases
 - for instance WordNet, an ontology
 - labor intensive
 - may not contain all information we want, e.g.
 - * *pigeon* is a **typical** *bird*
 - * *penguin* is not a typical *bird*
- Can we automatically learn semantics?

Learning semantics

The meaning of a word is its use.
Ludwig Wittgenstein, Aphorism 43

- Represent context of a word in a vector
 - Similar words have similar **context vectors**
- Example: **Google sets** <http://labs.google.com/sets>
 - one meaning of *cat*
 - enter: *cat, dog*
 - return: *cat, dog, horse, fish, bird, rabbit, cattle, ...*
 - another meaning of *cat*
 - enter: *cat, more*
 - return: *more, cat, ls, rm, mv, cd, cp, ...*

Learning prejudices

- Detecting national stereotypes with Google
- Enter: *Scots are known to be **
⇒ *frugal, friendly, generous, thrifty, ...*
- Enter: *Englishmen are known to be **
⇒ *prudish, great sports-lovers, people with manners, courteous, cold, ...*
- Enter: *Germans are known to be **
⇒ *pathetic, hard-nosed, arrogant, very punctual, fanatical, hard-working, ...*

Discourse

- Beyond the sentence level, we are interested in how texts are structured
 - central message of text
 - supporting arguments
 - introduction, conclusion
- **Elementary discourse units (EDU)** (~ clauses) are related to each other
- Texts shift in focus → **text segmentation**

Text segmentation

- Some text types have very pronounced **topic shifts**
 - news broadcasts cover different stories
- Also other long texts may cover multiple topics
 - lectures
 - speeches
 - essays
- Task text segmentation
 - *given*: text
 - *wanted*: segmentation into smaller units with different topics

Segmentation by vocabulary change

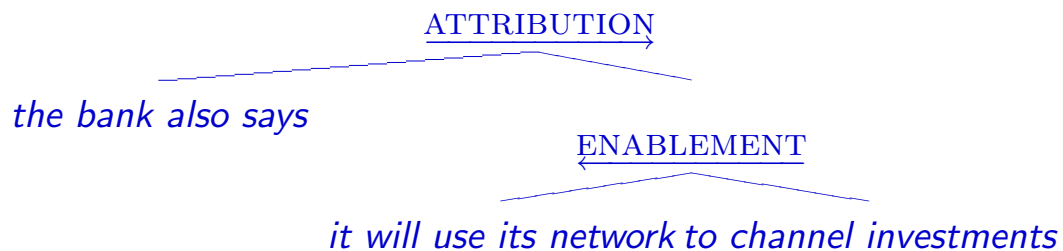
- At a **topic boundary**, use of vocabulary changes
- By comparing vocabulary of neighboring text parts, boundaries can be detected
- Example: *Stargazers text* from Hearst [1994]
 - intro: the search for life in space
 - the moons chemical composition
 - how early proximity of the moon shaped it
 - how the moon helped life evolve on earth
 - improbability of the earth-moon system

next slide from MIT class [6.864: Natural Language Processing](#)

Sentence:	05	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95			
14 form	1	111	1	1						1 1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1				
8 scientist				11			1	1			1		1	1	1							
5 space	11	1	1												1							
25 star	1			1								11	22	111112	1	1	1	11	1111	1		
5 binary												11	1		1					1		
4 trinary												1	1		1					1		
8 astronomer	1			1								1	1		1	1	1	1				
7 orbit	1				1								12	1	1							
6 pull						2	1	1							1	1						
16 planet	1	1		11			1		1				21	11111					1	1		
7 galaxy	1											1				1	11	1		1		
4 lunar			1	1	1		1															
19 life	1	1	1					1	11	1	11	1	1				1	1	1	111	1	1
27 moon		13	1111	1	1	22	21	21	21			11	1									
3 move									1	1	1											
7 continent								2	1	1	2	1										
3 shoreline												12										
6 time				1				1	1	1	1	1									1	
3 water							11				1											
6 say							1	1		1		11			1							
3 species								1	1	1												

Rhetorical relations

- **Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST)**: relations between spans of EDUs
- Example:



Types of rhetorical relations

- **Mono-nuclear:** **Nucleus** is more salient than **satellite**, which contains supporting information
- **Multi-nuclear:** joining spans have equal importance
- 78 types of relations in 16 classes
attribution, background, cause, comparison, condition, contrast, elaboration, enablement, evaluation, explanation, joint, manner-means, topic-comment, summary, temporal, topic-change
- More detail, see: *Building a discourse-tagged corpus in the framework of rhetorical structure theory* by Lynn Carlson, Daniel Marcu, and Mary Ellen Okurowski [SIGDIAL 2001]

Discourse parsing

- **Human annotator agreement** on rhetorical relations is not very high
 - 77.0% if 18 relation types are used
 - 71.9% if 110 relation types are used
- *Probabilistic parsing model* [Soricut and Marcu, NAACL 2003]
 - probabilistic chart parser
 - achieves similar performance
- Experiments done on the sentence level.
- Discourse parsing should be useful for, e.g., **summarization**

Anaphora

Violent protests broke out again in Happyland. According to the country's department of peace, flowers will be handed out tomorrow. A spokesman of the department announced that they will be blue and green. This will demonstrate the country's commitment to alleviate the situation.

- A text contains often multiple **references** to the same objects:
 - *flowers* — *they*
 - *Happyland* — *the country*
 - *department of peace* — *the department*
 - *violent protests* — *the situation*
 - *handing out flowers* — *this*
- **Anaphora resolution** (matching the references) is a hard problem

Sentiment detection

- What is the overall **sentiment** of a text
- Example: *movie review*
 - is it a recommendation or a negative review?
 - can be framed as a text classification problem
 - see *Seeing stars: exploiting class relationships for sentiment categorization with respect to rating scales* by Bo Pang and Lillian Lee [ACL 2005]
- Similar questions
 - is a text critical of a person?
 - does the text have a bias (political, etc.)?