

Introduction to Unification Theory

Narrowing

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Overview

Introduction

Basic Narrowing

Outline

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Introduction

- ▶ The most important special case of the E -unification problem, when the equational theory can be represented by a ground convergent set of rewrite rules.
- ▶ Narrowing: The process that is used to solve such E -unification problems.



Introduction

- ▶ Let E be a set of identities, and R a convergent term rewriting equivalent to E .
- ▶ σ is an E -unifier of s and t , then $s\sigma$ and $t\sigma$ have the same R -normal forms.
- ▶ Idea: Construct the unifier and the corresponding reduction chains simultaneously.



Example

- ▶ $E = \{0 + x = x\}$, $R = \{0 + x \longrightarrow x\}$.
- ▶ Solve E -unification problem $\{y + z \stackrel{?}{\doteq}_E 0\}$.
- ▶ Proceed as follows:

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 1. Look for an instance of $y + z$ to which the rewrite rule applies. Such instance is computed by syntactically unifying $y + z$ and $0 + x$, yielding the mgu $\varphi = \{y \mapsto 0, z \mapsto x\}$.



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 2. $(y + z)\varphi = 0 + x$, rewriting it with $0 + x \longrightarrow x$ gives x and we obtain a new problem $\{x \stackrel{?}{\dot{=} }_E 0\}$.



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 3. $\{x \stackrel{?}{\dot{=} }_E 0\}$ has the syntactic mgu $\vartheta = \{x \mapsto 0\}$.



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 2. $(y + z)\varphi = 0 + x$, rewriting it with $0 + x \longrightarrow x$ gives x and we obtain a new problem $\{x \stackrel{?}{\dot{=} }_E 0\}$.
 3. $\{x \stackrel{?}{\dot{=} }_E 0\}$ has the syntactic mgu $\vartheta = \{x \mapsto 0\}$.
 4. By this process we have simultaneously constructed the E -unifier $\sigma = \varphi\vartheta = \{y \mapsto 0, z \mapsto 0, x \mapsto 0\}$ and the rewrite chain $(y + z)\sigma = 0 + 0 \longrightarrow 0 = 0\sigma$.



Preliminaries

- ▶ A **rewrite rule**: a directed equation $l \longrightarrow r$, where $\text{vars}(r) \subseteq \text{vars}(l)$.
- ▶ A **term rewriting system** (TRS): a set of rewrite rules.
- ▶ $s[t]_p$: A term obtained from s by replacing its subterm at position p with the term t .
- ▶ The **rewrite relation** R associated with a TRS R : $s \longrightarrow_R t$ if there exists a variant $l \longrightarrow r$ of a rewrite rule in R , a position p in s , and a substitution σ such that $s|_p = l\sigma$ and $t = s[r\sigma]_p$.
- ▶ $s|_p$ is called a **redex**.



Preliminaries

- ▶ \rightarrow_R : The transitive-reflexive closure of \longrightarrow_R .
- ▶ s **reduces** to t in R : $s \rightarrow_R t$.
- ▶ If E is the set of equations corresponding to R , i.e., $E = \{l \doteq r \mid l \longrightarrow r \in R\}$, then \doteq_E coincides with the reflexive-symmetric-transitive closure of R .
- ▶ Two terms t_1, t_2 are **joinable** (wrt R), denoted by $t_1 \downarrow_R t_2$, if there exists a term s such that $t_1 \rightarrow_R s$ and $t_2 \rightarrow_R s$.
- ▶ A term s is a **normal form** (wrt R) if there is no term t with $s \longrightarrow_R t$.



Preliminaries

- ▶ R is **terminating** if there are no infinite reduction sequences $t_1 \longrightarrow_R t_2 \longrightarrow_R t_3 \longrightarrow_R \dots$.
- ▶ R is **confluent** if for all terms s, t_1, t_2 with $s \longrightarrow_R t_1$ and $s \longrightarrow_R t_2$ we have $t_1 \downarrow_R t_2$.
- ▶ R is **convergent** if it is confluent and terminating.



Preliminaries

- ▶ A constraint system: either \perp (representing failure) or a triple $P; C; S$.
- ▶ P : A multiset of equations, representing the schema of the problem.
- ▶ C : A set of equations, representing constraints on variables in P .
- ▶ S : A set of equations, representing bindings in the solution.
- ▶ C plays the role similar to P earlier, the rules from \mathcal{U} will be applied to $C; S$ as before.
- ▶ ϑ is said to be a solution (or E -unifier) of a system $P; C; S$ if it E -unifies each equation in P , and unifies each of the equations in C and S ; the system \perp has no E -unifiers.



Assumptions

- ▶ The rewrite system R is ground convergent with respect to a reduction ordering \succ .
- ▶ R is represented as a numbered sequence of rules

$$\{l_1 \longrightarrow r_1, \dots, l_n \longrightarrow r_n\}.$$

- ▶ The index of a rule is be its number in this sequence.



Preliminaries

Restricted form of substitution:

Definition

Given a rewrite system R , a substitution ϑ is **R -reduced** (or just **reduced** if R is unimportant) if for every $x \in \text{dom}(\vartheta)$, x is in R -normal form.

Example

$$R = \{f(f(x, y), z) \rightarrow f(x, f(y, z)), f(x, x) \rightarrow x\}.$$

$$\vartheta_1 = \{x \mapsto f(f(u, v), w), y \mapsto f(a, f(a, a))\} : \text{not } R\text{-reduced.}$$

$$\vartheta_2 = \{x \mapsto f(u, f(v, w)), y \mapsto a\} : R\text{-reduced.}$$

For any ϑ and terminating set of rules R one can find an R -equivalent reduced substitution ϑ' .



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The Calculus \mathcal{B} for Basic Narrowing

The rule set S :

Trivial: $P; \{s \doteq^? s\} \cup C'; S \Longrightarrow P; C'; S.$

Decomposition: $P; \{f(s_1, \dots, s_n) \doteq^? f(t_1, \dots, t_n)\} \cup C'; S \Longrightarrow$
 $P; \{s_1 \doteq^? t_1, \dots, s_n \doteq^? t_n\} \cup C'; S,$
where $n \geq 0.$

Orient: $P; \{t \doteq^? x\} \cup C'; S \Longrightarrow P; \{x \doteq^? t\} \cup C'; S$
if t is not a variable.

Basic Variable $P; \{x \doteq^? t\} \cup C'; S \Longrightarrow$

Elimination: $P; C' \{x \mapsto t\}; S \{x \mapsto t\} \cup \{x \approx t\},$
if $x \notin \text{vars}(t).$



Soundness of the Calculus \mathcal{B}

Theorem

Let R be a ground convergent set of rewrite rules. If $P; \emptyset; \emptyset \Longrightarrow_{\mathcal{B}}^ \emptyset; \emptyset; S$, then σ_S is an R -unifier of P .*

Proof.

Exercise. □



Completeness of the Calculus \mathcal{B}

Theorem

Let R be a ground convergent set of rewrite rules. If ϑ is an R -reduced solution of $P; \emptyset; \emptyset$, then there exists a sequence $P; \emptyset; \emptyset \Longrightarrow_{\mathcal{B}}^* \emptyset; \emptyset; S$ such that $\sigma_S \leq_R^{vars(P)} \vartheta$.

Proof.

- ▶ We may assume that $P\vartheta$ is ground and that ϑ is R -reduced, since the relation \succ does not distinguish between R -equivalent substitutions.
- ▶ Thus, we will prove a stronger result, that when ϑ is R -reduced, then $\sigma_S \leq^{vars(P)} \vartheta$.



Completeness of the Calculus \mathcal{B}

Theorem

Let R be a ground convergent set of rewrite rules. If ϑ is an R -reduced solution of $P; \emptyset; \emptyset$, then there exists a sequence $P; \emptyset; \emptyset \Longrightarrow_{\mathcal{B}}^* \emptyset; \emptyset; S$ such that $\sigma_S \leq_R^{vars(P)} \vartheta$.

Proof.

The complexity $\langle m, n_1, n_2, n_3 \rangle$ for $P; C; S$ and its solution ϑ :

M = The multiset of all terms occurring in $P\vartheta$;

n_1 = The number of distinct variables in C ;

n_2 = The number of symbols in C ;

n_3 = The number of equations $t \stackrel{?}{\doteq}_E x \in C$ where t is not a variable.

Associate to it the well-founded ordering in the usual way.



Completeness of the Calculus \mathcal{B}

Theorem

Let R be a ground convergent set of rewrite rules. If ϑ is an R -reduced solution of $P; \emptyset; \emptyset$, then there exists a sequence $P; \emptyset; \emptyset \Longrightarrow_{\mathcal{B}}^* \emptyset; \emptyset; S$ such that $\sigma_S \leq_R^{vars(P)} \vartheta$.

Proof.

Show by induction on this measure that if ϑ is a solution of $P; C; S'$ with S' in a solved form, then there exists a sequence

$$P; C; S' \Longrightarrow^* \emptyset; \emptyset; S$$

such that $\sigma_S \leq^{\mathcal{X}} \vartheta$, where $\mathcal{X} = vars(P, C, S')$.

The base case $\emptyset; \emptyset; S$ is trivial. □



Completeness of the Calculus \mathcal{B}

Theorem

Let R be a ground convergent set of rewrite rules. If ϑ is an R -reduced solution of $P; \emptyset; \emptyset$, then there exists a sequence $P; \emptyset; \emptyset \Longrightarrow_{\mathcal{B}}^* \emptyset; \emptyset; S$ such that $\sigma_S \leq_R^{vars(P)} \vartheta$.

Proof.

For the induction step there are several overlapping cases:

1. If $C = \{s \doteq^? t\} \cup C'$, then $s\vartheta = t\vartheta$ and we use S to generate a transformation step to a smaller system containing the same set of variables, and with the same solution. By the induction hypothesis, we have

$$P; C; S' \Longrightarrow_S P; C''; S'' \Longrightarrow^* \emptyset; \emptyset; S$$

such that $\sigma_S \leq^{\mathcal{X}} \vartheta$ for $\mathcal{X} = vars(P, C, S')$.



Completeness of the Calculus \mathcal{B}

Theorem

Let R be a ground convergent set of rewrite rules. If ϑ is an R -reduced solution of $P; \emptyset; \emptyset$, then there exists a sequence $P; \emptyset; \emptyset \Longrightarrow_{\mathcal{B}}^* \emptyset; \emptyset; S$ such that $\sigma_S \leq_R^{vars(P)} \vartheta$.

Proof.

2. If $P = \{s \doteq^? t\} \cup P'$ and $s\vartheta = t\vartheta$, then we may apply **Constrain** to obtain a smaller system (reducing the component M) with the same solution and the same set of variables, and we conclude as in the previous case.



Completeness of the Calculus \mathcal{B}

Theorem

Let R be a ground convergent set of rewrite rules. If ϑ is an R -reduced solution of $P; \emptyset; \emptyset$, then there exists a sequence $P; \emptyset; \emptyset \Longrightarrow_{\mathcal{B}}^* \emptyset; \emptyset; S$ such that $\sigma_S \leq_R^{vars(P)} \vartheta$.

Proof.

- ▶ Assume $P = \{s \doteq^? t\} \cup P'$ and there is an innermost redex in, say $s\vartheta$.
 - ▶ If more than one instance of a rule from R reduces this redex, we choose the rule with the smallest index in the set R .
 - ▶ Since ϑ is R -reduced, the redex must occur inside the non-variable positions of s .

□



Completeness of the Calculus \mathcal{B}

Theorem

Let R be a ground convergent set of rewrite rules. If ϑ is an R -reduced solution of $P; \emptyset; \emptyset$, then there exists a sequence $P; \emptyset; \emptyset \Longrightarrow_{\mathcal{B}}^* \emptyset; \emptyset; S$ such that $\sigma_S \leq_R^{vars(P)} \vartheta$.

Proof.

3. \blacktriangleright Hence, we have the transformation:

$$\begin{aligned} \{s[s'] \doteq^? t\} \cup P'; C; S' &\Longrightarrow_{LP} \\ \{s[r] \doteq^? t\} \cup P'; \{l\sigma'_S \doteq^? s'\sigma'_S\} \cup C; S' \end{aligned}$$

- \blacktriangleright The new system smaller with respect to its new solution $\vartheta' = \vartheta\rho$. ϑ' is still R -reduced.
- \blacktriangleright By the induction hypothesis, $\{s[r] \doteq^? t\} \cup P'; \{l\sigma_{S'} \doteq^? s'\sigma_{S'}\} \cup C; S' \Longrightarrow^* \emptyset; \emptyset; S$ such that $\sigma_S \leq^{\mathcal{X}} \vartheta'$ with $\mathcal{X} = vars(l, r, P, C, S')$, and since $x\vartheta = x\vartheta'$ for every $x \in vars(P, C, S')$, the induction is complete.



Example

- ▶ $R = \{0 + x \longrightarrow x, s(x) + y \longrightarrow s(x + y)\}$
- ▶ Goal: $\{z + z \doteq^? s(s(0))\}$
- ▶ Successful derivation:

$$\begin{aligned} & \{z + z \doteq^? s(s(0))\}; \emptyset; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{LP}} \\ & \{s(x + y) \doteq^? s(s(0))\}; \{z + z \doteq^? s(x) + y\}; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{D}} \\ & \{s(x + y) \doteq^? s(s(0))\}; \{z \doteq^? s(x), z \doteq^? y\}; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{BVE}} \\ & \{s(x + y) \doteq^? s(s(0))\}; \{s(x) \doteq^? y\}; \{z \approx s(x)\} \longrightarrow_{\text{O}} \\ & \{s(x + y) \doteq^? s(s(0))\}; \{y \doteq^? s(x)\}; \{z \approx s(x)\} \longrightarrow_{\text{BVE}} \\ & \{s(x + y) \doteq^? s(s(0))\}; \emptyset; \{z \approx s(x), y \approx s(x)\} \longrightarrow_{\text{LP}} \\ & \{s(x') \doteq^? s(s(0))\}; \{x + s(x) \doteq^? 0 + x'\}; \\ & \{z \approx s(x), y \approx s(x)\} \longrightarrow_{\text{D}} \end{aligned}$$



Example

- ▶ $R = \{0 + x \longrightarrow x, s(x) + y \longrightarrow s(x + y)\}$
- ▶ Goal: $\{z + z \doteq^? s(s(0))\}$
- ▶ Successful derivation (cont.):

$$\{s(x') \doteq^? s(s(0))\}; \{x \doteq^? 0, s(x) \doteq^? x'\}; \{z \approx s(x), y \approx s(x)\} \longrightarrow_{\text{BVE}}$$

$$\{s(x') \doteq^? s(s(0))\}; \{s(0) \doteq^? x'\}; \{z \approx s(0), y \approx s(0), x \approx 0\} \longrightarrow_{\text{O}}$$

$$\{s(x') \doteq^? s(s(0))\}; \{x' \doteq^? s(0)\}; \{z \approx s(0), y \approx s(0), x \approx 0\} \longrightarrow_{\text{BVE}}$$

$$\{s(x') \doteq^? s(s(0))\}; \emptyset; \{z \approx s(0), y \approx s(0), x \approx 0, x' \approx s(0)\} \longrightarrow_{\text{C}}$$

$$\emptyset; \{s(s(0)) \doteq^? s(s(0))\}; \{z \approx s(0), y \approx s(0), x \approx 0, x' \approx s(0)\} \longrightarrow_{\text{T}}$$

$$\emptyset; \emptyset; \{z \approx s(0), y \approx s(0), x \approx 0, x' \approx s(0)\}.$$



Counterexample for Nonterminating R

If R is not terminating, \mathcal{B} may not find solutions.

Counterexample by A. Middeldorp and E. Hamoen, 1994:

- ▶ $R = \{f(x) \longrightarrow g(x, x), a \longrightarrow b, g(a, b) \longrightarrow c, g(b, b) \longrightarrow f(a)\}$
- ▶ Goal: $\{f(a) \doteq^? c\}$
- ▶ The goal is unifiable ($f(a) \doteq_R c$), but \mathcal{B} can not verify it:

$$\begin{aligned} & \{f(a) \doteq^? c\}; \emptyset; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{LP}} \\ & \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \{f(x) \doteq^? f(a)\}; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{D}} \\ & \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \{x \doteq^? a\}; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{BVE}} \\ & \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \emptyset; \{x \approx a\} \longrightarrow_{\text{C}} \\ & \emptyset; \{g(a, a) \doteq^? c\}; \{x \approx a\} \longrightarrow_{\perp} \end{aligned}$$



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- ▶ Goal: $\{f(a) \doteq^? c\}$
- ▶ Second unsuccessful derivation:

$$\begin{aligned} & \{f(a) \doteq^? c\}; \emptyset; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{LP}} \\ & \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \{f(x) \doteq^? f(a)\}; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{D}} \\ & \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \{x \doteq^? a\}; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{BVE}} \\ & \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \emptyset; \{x \approx a\} \longrightarrow_{\text{LP}} \\ & \{c \doteq^? c\}; \{g(a, a) \doteq^? g(a, b)\}; \{x \approx a\} \longrightarrow_{\text{D}} \\ & \{c \doteq^? c\}; \{a \doteq^? b, a \doteq^? a\}; \{x \approx a\} \longrightarrow \perp \end{aligned}$$



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- ▶ Goal: $\{f(a) \doteq^? c\}$
- ▶ Third unsuccessful derivation:

$$\begin{aligned} & \{f(a) \doteq^? c\}; \emptyset; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{LP}} \\ & \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \{f(x) \doteq^? f(a)\}; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{D}} \\ & \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \{x \doteq^? a\}; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{BVE}} \\ & \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \emptyset; \{x \approx a\} \longrightarrow_{\text{LP}} \\ & \{f(a) \doteq^? c\}; \{g(a, a) \doteq^? g(b, b)\}; \{x \approx a\} \longrightarrow_{\text{D}} \\ & \{f(a) \doteq^? c\}; \{a \doteq^? b\}; \{x \approx a\} \longrightarrow \perp \end{aligned}$$



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- ▶ Goal: $\{f(a) \doteq^? c\}$
- ▶ Fourth unsuccessful derivation:

$$\begin{aligned} & \{f(a) \doteq^? c\}; \emptyset; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{LP}} \\ \{f(b) \doteq^? c\}; \{a \doteq^? a\}; \emptyset & \longrightarrow_{\text{T}} \{f(b) \doteq^? c\}; \emptyset; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{LP}} \\ \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \{f(x) \doteq^? f(b)\}; \emptyset & \longrightarrow_{\text{D}} \\ \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \{x \doteq^? b\}; \emptyset & \longrightarrow_{\text{BVE}} \\ \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \emptyset; \{x \approx b\} & \longrightarrow_{\text{C}} \\ \emptyset; \{g(b, b) \doteq^? c\}; \{x \approx b\} & \longrightarrow \end{aligned}$$



Counterexample for Nonterminating R

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- ▶ $R = \{f(x) \longrightarrow g(x, x), a \longrightarrow b, g(a, b) \longrightarrow c, g(b, b) \longrightarrow f(a)\}$
- ▶ Goal: $\{f(a) \doteq^? c\}$
- ▶ An infinite derivation:

$$\begin{aligned} & \{f(a) \doteq^? c\}; \emptyset; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{LP}} \\ \{f(b) \doteq^? c\}; \{a \doteq^? a\}; \emptyset & \longrightarrow_{\text{T}} \{f(b) \doteq^? c\}; \emptyset; \emptyset \longrightarrow_{\text{LP}} \\ \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \{f(x) \doteq^? f(b)\}; \emptyset & \longrightarrow_{\text{D}} \\ \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \{x \doteq^? b\}; \emptyset & \longrightarrow_{\text{BVE}} \\ \{g(x, x) \doteq^? c\}; \emptyset; \{x \approx b\} & \longrightarrow_{\text{LP}} \\ \{f(a) \doteq^? c\}; \{g(b, b) \doteq^? g(b, b)\}; \{x \approx b\} & \longrightarrow_{\text{T}} \\ \{f(a) \doteq^? c\}; \emptyset; \{x \approx b\} & \longrightarrow \dots \end{aligned}$$



Strategies and refinements

- ▶ Variety of strategies and refinements can be developed for the basic narrowing calculus without destroying completeness.
- ▶ For instance, composite rules, simplification, redex orderings and variable abstraction.
- ▶ For more details, see, e.g.,



F. Baader and W. Snyder.

Unification theory.

In A. Robinson and A. Voronkov, editors, *Handbook of Automated Reasoning*, volume I, chapter 8, pages 445–532. Elsevier Science, 2001.

