# Introduction to Unification Theory Applications

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### **Outline**

**Theorem Proving** 

**Programming** 

**Program Transformation** 

Computational Linguistics





### **Outline**

**Theorem Proving** 

Programming

**Program Transformation** 

**Computational Linguistics** 





### Theorem Proving

- Robinson's unification algorithm was introduced in the context of theorem proving.
- Unification: Computational mechanism behind the resolution inference rule.





- Resolution is a rule of logical inference that allows one from "A or B" and "not-A or C" to conclude that "B or C".
- Logically

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- ► For instance, from the two sentences
  - it rains or it is sunny,
  - it does not rain or trees are wet (this is the same as if it rains then trees are wet)

#### one concludes that

- it is sunny or trees are wet.
- ▶ Just take *A* for *it rains*, *B* for *it is sunny*, and *C* for *trees are* wet.





Resolution for first-order clauses:

$$\frac{A_1 \vee B \qquad \neg A_2 \vee C}{B\sigma \vee C\sigma},$$

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  - Every number is less than its successor.
  - ▶ If *y* is less than *x* then *y* is less than the successor of *x*.

#### one concludes that

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- ► How?





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- Let's write the sentences as logical formulae.
- ► Every number is less than its successor:  $\forall x \ number(x) \Rightarrow less \ than(x, s(x))$
- ▶ If *y* is less than *x* then *y* is less than the successor of *x*:  $\forall y \forall x \ less\_than(y, x) \Rightarrow less\_than(y, s(x))$
- Write these formulae in disjunctive form and strip off the quantifiers:

```
\neg number(x) \lor less\_than(x, s(x))
\neg less\_than(y, x) \lor less\_than(y, s(x))
```



Prepare for the resolution step. Make the clauses variable disjoint:

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- ▶ Perform the resolution step and obtain the resolvent:  $\neg number(y) \lor less\ than(y, s(s(y))).$



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- ▶ Perform the resolution step and obtain the resolvent:  $\neg number(y) \lor less\ than(y, s(s(y))).$
- What would go wrong if we did not make the clauses variable disjoint?





# **Factoring**

- ► Another rule in resolution calculus that requires unification.
- Factoring

$$\frac{A_1 \vee A_2 \vee C}{A_1 \sigma \vee C \sigma}$$

where  $\sigma = mgu(A_1, A_2)$ .

#### Given:

- If y is less than x then y is less than the successor of x.
- If x is not less than a successor of some y, than 0 is less than x.

#### Prove:

0 is less than its successor.





Translating into formulae.

#### Given:

- ▶  $\neg less\_than(y, x) \lor less\_than(y, s(x))$ .
- $less\_than(x, s(y)) \lor less\_than(0, x)$ .

#### Prove:

•  $less\_than(0, s(0))$ 





- 1.  $\neg less\_than(y, x) \lor less\_than(y, s(x))$ .
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- 3.  $\neg less\_than(0, s(0))$ .

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- 4.  $less\_than(0, s(x)) \lor less\_than(x, s(y))$ , (Resolvent of the renamed copy of 1  $\neg less\_than(y', x') \lor less\_than(y', s(x'))$  and 2, obtained by unifying  $less\_than(y', x')$  and  $less\_than(0, x)$  with  $\{y' \mapsto 0, x' \mapsto x\}$ .



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- 5.  $less\_than(0, s(0))$ (Factor of 4 with  $\{x \mapsto 0, y \mapsto 0\}$
- □ (Contradiction, resolvent of 3 and 5).





### **Outline**

Theorem Proving

**Programming** 

**Program Transformation** 

**Computational Linguistics** 





- Unification plays a crucial role in logic programming.
- Used to perform execution steps.





▶ Logic programs consist of (nonnegative) clauses, written:

$$A \leftarrow B_1, \ldots, B_n,$$

where  $n \geq 0$  and  $A, B_i$  are atoms.

- Example:
  - ▶ likes(john, X) ← likes(X, wine).
    John likes everybody who likes wine.
  - likes(john, wine). John likes wine.
  - likes(mary, wine). Marry likes wine.





Goals are negative clauses, written

$$\leftarrow D_1,\ldots,D_m$$

where m > 0.

- Example:
  - ► ← likes(john, X).
    Who (or what) does John like?
  - ► ← likes(X, marry), likes(X, wine).
    Who likes both marry and wine?
  - ►  $\leftarrow likes(john, X), likes(Y, X).$ Find such X and Y that both John and Y like X.





Inference step:

$$\frac{\leftarrow D_1, \dots, D_m}{\leftarrow D_1 \sigma, \dots, D_{i-1} \sigma, B_1 \sigma, \dots, B_n \sigma, D_{i+1} \sigma, \dots, D_m \sigma}$$

where  $\sigma = mgu(D_i, A)$  for (a renamed copy of) some program clause  $A \leftarrow B_1, \dots, B_n$ .



### Example

### Program:

```
likes(john, X) \leftarrow likes(X, wine).
likes(john, wine).
likes(mary, wine).
```

#### Goal:

$$\leftarrow$$
 likes(X, marry), likes(X, wine).

#### Inference:

- ▶ Unifying likes(X, marry) with likes(john, X') gives  $\{X \mapsto john, X' \mapsto marry\}$
- ▶ New goal:  $\leftarrow$  *likes*(*marry*, *wine*), *likes*(*john*, *marry*).





# **Prolog**

- Prolog: Most popular logic programming language.
- Unification in Prolog is nonstandard: Omits occur-check.
- ▶ Result: Prolog unifies terms x and f(x), using the substitution  $\{x \mapsto f(f(f(\ldots)))\}$ .
- Because of that, sometimes Prolog might draw conclusions the user does not expect:

$$less(X, s(X)).$$

$$foo: -less(s(Y), Y).$$
? - foo.
yes.

Infinite terms in a theoretical model for real Prolog implementations.





### Example

```
A \lambda-Prolog program:
```

```
(age bob 24).
(age sue 23).
(age ned 23).
(mappred P nil nil).
(mappred P (X::L) (Y::K)):- (P X Y), (mappred P L K).
```

mappred maps the predicate P on the lists (X::L) and (Y::K).





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mappred maps the predicate P on the lists (X::L) and (Y::K).

The goal (mappred x y (age x y) L (23::24::nil)) returns two answers:

```
L = (sue::bob::nil)
L = (ned::bob::nil)
```





### Example (Cont.)

 On the previous slide, the goal was unified with the head of the (copy of) second mappred clause by the substitution

$$\{P \mapsto x \setminus y \setminus (age \ x \ y), L \mapsto (X :: L'), Y \mapsto 23, K \mapsto (24 :: nil)\}$$

 $x \ y \ (age \ x \ y)$  is the  $\lambda$ -Prolog notation for  $\lambda x. \lambda y. \ (age \ x \ y)$ .

▶ It made the new goal

(age X 23), (mappred 
$$x y (age x y) L' (24::nil))$$
.

etc.





- ▶ The fragment of higher-order unification used in  $\lambda$ -prolog is unification for higher-order patterns.
- ▶ Higher-order pattern is a  $\lambda$ -term where arguments of free variables are distinct bound variables.
- Higher-order pattern unification is unitary.





### Programming in Mathematica

- Mathematica is a symbolic computation system, a product of Wolfram Research, Inc.
- It comes with a rule based programming language.
- An example of Mathematica code to compute factorial:

$$f[0] := 1$$
  
 $f[n_{-}] := n * f[n - 1]/; n > 0$ 

- ➤ To compute f [5], it first tries to match 0 with 5, which fails.
- Next, n matches 5 with the substitution n → 5, the condition 5 > 0 is satisfied and the next goal becomes 5 \* f [4].
- ▶ n\_ indicates that n is a variable that can match an expression.
- ► Matching is a special case of unification:  $s \doteq^? t$  is a matching problem if t is ground.





# Programming in Mathematica

- Mathematica has a special kind of variable, called sequence variable.
- Sequence variables can be instantiated by finite sequences.
- Convenient to write short, elegant programs.
- Unification with sequence variables is decidable and infinitary, matching is finitary.





# Programming in Mathematica

An example of Mathematica code for bubble sort:

```
\begin{split} & \text{sort}[\{x\_\_\_, u\_\_, v\_\_\_, v\_\_z\_\_\}] := \text{sort}[\{x, v, y, u, z\}]/; u > v \\ & \text{sort}[\{x\_\_\_\}] := \{x\} \end{split}
```

- x\_\_\_\_ indicates that x is a sequence variable.
- ▶ sort[{x\_\_\_,u\_,y\_\_\_,v\_,z\_\_\_}] matches sort[{1,2,3,4,1}] in various ways.
- ► The one that satisfies the condition u > v is

$$\{x \mapsto 1, u \mapsto 2, y \mapsto (3, 4), v \mapsto 1, z \mapsto ()\}$$

▶ The next goal becomes  $sort[{1,1,3,4,2}]$ , and so on.





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### **Program Transformation**

- Program transformation is the act of changing one program into another.
- Some techniques describe transformation as rewriting systems for program schemas, together with constraints on the instances of the schemas that must be met in order for the transformation to be valid.
- When a rewriting rule is applied to a particular program, the schema in the left hand side of the rule should match the program.
- Usually schemas are expressed in a higher-order language.
- Leads to higher-order matching.





## **Program Transformation**

### Example (Schema Matching)

Schema:

$$F(x) \Leftarrow \text{ if } A(x) \text{ then } B(x) \text{ else } H(D(x), F(E(x))).$$

Instance program:

$$fact(x) \Leftarrow if x = 0 then 1 else x * fact(x - 1)$$

▶ The schema matches the instance with the substitution:

$$\begin{aligned} & \{ F \mapsto \lambda x. \mathsf{fact}(x), A \mapsto \lambda x. x = 0, B \mapsto \lambda x. 1, \\ & H \mapsto \lambda x. \lambda y. x * y, D \mapsto \lambda x. x, E \mapsto \lambda x. x - 1 \} \end{aligned}$$





### **Program Transformation**

### Example (Schema Matching)

The same schema, different instance.

Schema:

$$F(x) \Leftarrow \text{ if } A(x) \text{ then } B(x) \text{ else } H(D(x), F(E(x)))$$

Instance:

$$\mathsf{rev}(x) \Leftarrow \mathsf{if}\,\mathsf{Null}(x)\,\mathsf{then}\,x\,\mathsf{else}\,\mathsf{app}(\mathsf{rev}(\mathsf{Cdr}(x)),\mathsf{Cons}(\mathsf{Car}(x),\mathsf{nil}))$$

Matching substitution:

$$\begin{split} \{F \mapsto \lambda x. \mathsf{rev}(x), A \mapsto \lambda x. \mathsf{Null}(x), B \mapsto \lambda x. x, \\ H \mapsto \lambda x. \lambda y. \mathsf{app}(y, x), D \mapsto \lambda x. \mathsf{Cons}(\mathsf{Car}(x), \mathsf{nil}), \\ E \mapsto \lambda x. \mathsf{Cdr}(x) \} \end{split}$$





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- ► An elliptical construction involves two phrases (clauses) that are parallel in structure in some sense.
- The source clause is complete.
- The target clause is missing material found in the source.
- ► Goal: To recover the property of the parallel element in the target the missing material stands for.





### Example

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- ► To interpret "George does too", we require the property *P* such that, when applied to the interpretation of the subject of "Dan likes golf", i.e. *dan*, gives the interpretation of "Dan likes golf".





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- ► Find *P* such that  $P(dan) \stackrel{!}{=}$ ?  $like(\underline{dan}, golf)$ .





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- ▶ Interpretation:  $like(dan, golf) \land P(george)\sigma_2$  that gives  $like(dan, golf) \land like(george, golf)$ .





- Higher-order unification generates multiple solutions.
- Leads to multiple readings.
- Constraints help to filter out some.
- Still, several may remain.
- Strict and sloppy reading.





### Example

▶ Dan likes his wife, and George does too.

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- ▶ Constraint: Solution should not contain the primary occurrence. Hence,  $\sigma_1$  and  $\sigma_2$  are discarded.
- ▶ Strict reading:  $P(george)\sigma_3 = like(george, wife-of(dan))$ .





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- ► Constraint: Solution should not contain the primary occurrence. Hence,  $\sigma_1$  and  $\sigma_2$  are discarded.
- ▶ Strict reading:  $P(george)\sigma_3 = like(george, wife-of(dan))$ .
- ▶ Sloppy reading:  $P(george)\sigma_4 = like(george, wife-of(george))$ .





► First-order syntactic unification

First-order equational unification

Higher-order unification

Applications related to logic, language, and information





- First-order syntactic unification
  - Most general unifier.
  - Unification algorithm.
  - Improvements of the algorithm.
- First-order equational unification

Higher-order unification

Applications related to logic, language, and information





- ► First-order syntactic unification
  - Most general unifier.
  - Unification algorithm.
  - Improvements of the algorithm.
- First-order equational unification
  - Minimal complete set of unifiers.
  - Decidability/Undecadibility, Unification type.
  - Results for particular theories.
  - Universal E-unification procedure.
  - Narrowing.
- Higher-order unification

Applications related to logic, language, and information





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  - Results for particular theories.
  - Universal E-unification procedure.
  - Narrowing.
- Higher-order unification
  - Undecidability.
  - Unification type (zero).
  - Preunification procedure.
- Applications related to logic, language, and information





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- Applications related to logic, language, and information
  - Theorem proving.
  - Programming, program transformation.
  - ► Ellipsis resolution.





### **Open Problems**

#### Some open problems in unification theory:

- Is unification of patterns decidable for equational theories whose axioms have the same set of variables on left and right hand side? (Jouannaud, 1994).
- Are context unification and linear second order unification decidable? (Comon, 1991, Schmidt-Schauß, 1994, Levy, 1996).
- What is the exact complexity of word unification? (Schulz, 1998).

The RTA list of open problems:

http://rtaloop.pps.jussieu.fr/



