**CHAPTER 4**

**ANSWER-SET PROGRAMMING**

4.1 Overview

The system that has been designed uses an ASP-based approach to represent knowledge from natural language text. So, a basic understanding of answer-set programming is required to understand the remainder of the thesis. This chapter introduces the answer-set programming paradigm and further elaborates on some of the important definitions, concepts and patterns used in answer-set programming. At the end of this chapter, we will go over some of the systems that are developed to run ASP programs.

4.1 What is Answer-Set Programming (ASP)

Answer-Set Programming is a declarative problem-solving paradigm that uses both non-monotonic reasoning and logic programming. It is widely used in automatically solving problems relating to representation and reasoning tasks such as modeling reasoning agents, non-monotonic inferences, common sense reasoning, modeling preferences and priorities and many more. An answer set program is a collection of statements that describe the objects of a domain and model relations between them. The semantics of an ASP Program defines a set of possible beliefs that an agent has associated with the program. This set of beliefs is called as an answer-set. The basic constituents of an ASP program are the rules, facts and constraints that describe the problem. Such a program is then passed onto an answer-set solver, which generates answer-sets to the program, that are used to obtain solutions to the problem.

4.2 Syntax

In this subsection, we introduce the syntax of an ASP program.

4.2.1 Atom

The most basic constituent of the ASP program is an atom. An atomic statement or an atom, is an expression of the form p(t1,…,tn) where p is a predicate symbol of arity n and t1…tn are n terms belonging to the predicate p. Here n >= 0 and the terms ti can be integers or strings of letters, numbers, or underscore that either begin with an underscore or a lower-case letter. If in an atomic statement n = 0, then the brackets are omitted. As an example, ‘parent(mary, alice)’ and ‘alice’ are both atoms, whereas ‘parent(mary, girl(alice))’ is not an atom.

4.2.2 Literal

A literal is an atom of the form p(t1,…,tn) or its negation -p(t1,…,tn). Here, -p(t1,…,tn) is referred to as a negative literal. It means that p(t1,…,tn) is false. An atom is called as a ground literal if every term ti in the atom is ground. For example ‘parent(X, Y)’ is a literal where as ‘parent(mary, alice)’ is called as a ground literal.

4.2.3 Rule or Clause

An ASP Program consists of a collection of rules of the form

1. l0
2. li <- li+1, …,lm,not lm+1,…,not ln

Here, the symbol ‘not’ is a logical connective and is called as a default negation or negation as failure. Its semantic is discussed later in the chapter. An ASP rule is divided into two parts viz. head and a body. A head is a literal on the left side of the rule and a body is a set of literals on the right side of the rule. The head or the body in a rule can be empty. A rule with an empty head is called as a constraint whereas a rule with an empty body is called as a fact.

4.3 Semantics

Using the earlier mentioned syntax, we create an ASP program as a collection of rules, facts, and constraints. In this section, we shall discuss about the meaning of these rules and how they are interpreted while reasoning using these rules. The following are a few semantic patterns commonly used in answer-set programs.

4.3.1 Modelling Implication

As we saw earlier, every rule (excluding facts) in ASP has two parts separated by the consequence operator “:-“. In such a rule the head of the rule is said to succeed only if every literal in the body of the rule succeeds. As an example, consider the rule

p :- q, r.

we can read this kind of rule as “if q and r succeed then p succeeds”. Such kind of a pattern is commonly used in ASP programs to show implications.

4.3.2 Classical Negation

Classical Negation is a pattern in which we use negative literals, to show the fact that the literal under consideration has been proved to be false. As an example, consider the following rule.

-p(a) :- q(a)

The above rule states that if q(a) is shown to succeed then p(a) is false or -p(a) is true. Classical negation is one of the ways to represent negations in ASP programs.

4.3.3 Epistemic Disjunction

We model epistemic disjunctions in ASP when we need to model the semantics for the statement, “Either p(a) succeeds or q(a) succeeds”. Epistemic disjunction is different from exclusive or, where both p(a) and q(a) might succeed at the same time. Thus, to model epistemic disjunction we can make use of even loops in the following manner.

p(a) :- not q(a).

q(a) :- not p(a).

If we solve the above ASP program using an answer-set solver we will get two answer sets {p(a)} and {q(a)}, i.e. either p(a) succeeds or q(a) succeeds.

4.3.4 Constraints

Constraints are applied in places where we know for a fact that certain rules are always false and should not be part of the answer-set. As an example, if we know that it is impossible for p(a) to succeed then we can model this constraint as follows

:- p(a).

The above rule states that p(a) is always false. Here we see that a constraint limits the sets of beliefs that an agent has but does not help to derive new information.

4.3.5 Default Negation or Negation As Failure (NAF)

Default Negation, also called as Negation As Failure is used to make conclusions based on the absence of information. This type of negation is used to conclude about default rules and assume defaults to be true in case of absence of enough information. As an example, consider the following example where we state that if we are not able to prove that q(a) succeeds then p(a) succeeds.

p(a) :- not q(a).

So in the above rule we assumed that p(a) has succeeded based on the absence of information about q(a). NAF is an important tool to model defaults in ASP programs. Negation as Failure assumes closed-world assumption (CWA), in which we assume, what is not currently know to be true, as false.

4.4 Default Reasoning

Default Reasoning or Representing Defaults is one of the advantages of using ASP. The concept of closed-world assumption discussed earlier is an example of default reasoning where we default the value of the literal to fail in the absence of the literal in the answer set. Default reasoning is very useful in modelling human reasoning as we can draw conclusions even in the absence of information by defaulting to the default rule. Default reasoning thus plays an important role in common sense reasoning and understanding. In case of ASP, a default d stated as “Normally elements of class C have property P” is represented as the following rule

p(X) :- c(X),

not ab(d(X)),

not -p(X).

Here, ab(d(X)) can be read as “X is abnormal with respect to the default assumption d” and not -p(X) can be read as “We can’t successfully prove that p(X) is false” or “p(X) may be true”.

Default reasoning uses two kinds of exceptions viz Strong exceptions and weak exceptions. Weak exception makes the default inapplicable and stop the agent from making a default conclusion. For example, in the above-mentioned default rule we can apply a weak exception e(X) by adding the following rule to the program

ab(d(X)) :- not -e(X).

The exception states that X may not be applicable to d if e(X) may be true. Similarly, Strong Exceptions refute the defaults conclusion by allowing the agent to derive the opposite to be true. This can be demonstrated by adding the following rule to the program

-p(X) :- e(X).

The above rule states that p(X) is false if e(X) succeeds, which allows us to defeat d’s conclusion that normally class C elements have the property P.

4.5 Present systems SASP, CLASP