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1 Equational Unification

In the following let E be a set of identities of the form $\{e_1 \approx f_1, \dots, e_n \approx f_n\}$. Furthermore let $\text{Sig}(E)$ denote the set of all function symbols occurring in E . Let Σ be a finite set of function symbols and a superset of $\text{Sig}(E)$.

Definition 1.1. An E -unification Problem over Σ is a finite set S of the form $S = \left\{ s_1 \stackrel{?}{\approx}_E t_1, \dots, s_n \stackrel{?}{\approx}_E t_n \right\}$ with $s_1, \dots, s_n, t_1, \dots, t_n \in T(\Sigma, V)$, V being a countable set of Variables.

A substitution σ is an E -unifier of S iff $\sigma(s_i) \approx_E \sigma(t_i)$ for all $1 \leq i \leq n$. The set of all E -unifiers of S is denoted by $\mathcal{U}_E(S)$. S is E -unifiable iff $\mathcal{U}_E(S) \neq \emptyset$.

Definition 1.2. Let S be an E -unification problem over Σ .

- S is an **elementary** E -unification problem iff $\text{Sig}(E) = \Sigma$.
- S is an E -unification problem **with constants** iff $\Sigma - \text{Sig}(E) \subseteq \Sigma^{(0)}$ and $\text{Sig}(E) \subset \Sigma$
- S is an **general** E -unification problem iff $\Sigma - \text{Sig}(E)$ contains an at least unary function symbol.

One *most general unifier* does not always suffice to represent $\mathcal{U}_E(S)$. In this case we need a *minimal complete set of unifiers* but to define this set we first need an order on substitutions.

Definition 1.3. Let X be a set of variables. A substitution σ is **more general** modulo \approx_E than a substitution σ' on X iff there is a substitution δ such that $\delta(\sigma(x)) \approx_E \sigma'(x)$ for all $x \in X$. We denote this by $\sigma \lesssim_E^X \sigma'$.

\lesssim_E^X is a quasi order since it obviously is reflexive and transitive. But why do we only demand equality modulo \approx_E on X and not on all Variables like we did in syntactic unification? Note that by the restriction to Variables in X more substitutions are comparable with respect to \lesssim_E^X since we do not demand equality modulo \approx_E on all Variables. Lets denote the Variables occurring in an E -unification problem S by $\text{Var}(S)$. It is easy to see that if $X = \text{Var}(S)$, σ' is an E -unifier of S and $\sigma \lesssim_E^X \sigma'$ then σ is also an E -unifier of S . This only shows that restriction to X does not do any damage but the reason it is useful is that there are E -unification problems S for which any *minimal complete set of E-unifiers* has to contain Variables not occurring in S . Lets consider a small example, let $\sigma := \{x \mapsto f(y)\}$ be in \mathcal{M} a *minimal complete set of E-unifiers* of S with $\text{Var}(S) = \{x\}$ and $\{a \approx x\} \notin E$. Clearly $\sigma' := \{x \mapsto f(a)\}$ is also an E -unifier of S but σ and σ' are incomparable w.r.t. $\lesssim_E^{\{x,y\}}$. The substitution $\delta := \{y \mapsto a\}$ does not work here since $\delta(\sigma(y)) = a \not\approx_E y = \sigma'(y)$ which means there has to be another unifier σ'' in \mathcal{M} with $\sigma'' \lesssim_E^{\{x,y\}} \sigma$. But if we restrict X to $\{x\}$ we only need that $\delta(\sigma(x)) = f(a) \approx_E f(a) = \sigma'(x)$ so $\sigma \lesssim_E^{\{x\}} \sigma'$ holds. We see that *minimal complete sets of E-unifiers* can become unnecessary large if we consider all Variables. Since we have talked about these sets a lot lets define them formally.

Definition 1.4. Let S be an E -unification problem over Σ and let $X := \text{Var}(S)$. A **complete set of E -unifiers** of S is a set of substitutions \mathcal{C} that satisfies the following properties.

- each $\sigma \in \mathcal{C}$ is an E -unifier of S
- for all $\theta \in \mathcal{U}_E(S)$ there exists a $\sigma \in \mathcal{C}$ such that $\sigma \lesssim_E^X \theta$

A **minimal complete set of E -unifiers** is a complete set of E -unifiers \mathcal{M} that satisfies the additional property

- for all $\sigma, \sigma' \in \mathcal{M}$, $\sigma \lesssim_E^X \sigma'$ implies $\sigma = \sigma'$.

The substitution σ is a **most general E -unifier** (mgu) of S iff $\{\sigma\}$ is a minimal complete set of E -unifiers of S .

Now let us consider an example in which a minimal complete set of E -unifiers contains infinitely many elements. Let $A := \{x + (y + z) \approx (x + y) + z\}$ be a set of identities and $S := \left\{x + a \stackrel{?}{\approx}_A a + x\right\}$ an A -unification problem over $\Sigma := \{+, a\}$. For $n > 0$, we define substitutions σ_n inductively as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}\sigma_1 &:= \{x \mapsto a\} \\ \sigma_{n+1} &:= \{x \mapsto a + \sigma_n(x)\}\end{aligned}$$

Since A axiomatizes associativity we can omit the brackets and give an explicit definition of σ_n .

$$\sigma_n := \{ \underbrace{a + \dots + a}_{n \times a} \}$$

Now it is easy to see that all σ_n are A -unifiers of S . Lets consider an arbitrary A -unifier θ of S . $\theta(x)$ has the form $\theta(x) := x_1 + \dots + x_n$ where the x_i are a or a variable. Since θ is an A -unifier of S we have that:

$$\begin{aligned}\theta(x) + a &\approx_A a + \theta(x) \\ x_1 + \dots + x_n + a &\approx_A a + x_1 + \dots + x_n \\ \implies x_1 = a, x_n = a &\quad a + x_2 + \dots + x_{n-1} + a + a \approx_A a + a + x_2 + \dots + x_{n-1} + a \\ \implies x_2 = a, x_{n-1} = a &\quad a + a + \dots + a + a + a \approx_A a + a + a + \dots + a + a \\ \vdots &\quad \vdots \\ \implies &\quad \underbrace{a + \dots + a}_{n+1 \times a} \approx_A \underbrace{a + \dots + a}_{n+1 \times a}\end{aligned}$$

So $\theta(x) = \sigma_n(x)$ which implies $\sigma \lesssim_A^{\{x\}} \theta$. Since we picked θ arbitrarily this yields completeness of the set $\mathcal{M} := \bigcup_{n>0} \{\sigma_n\}$. All σ_n are distinct and map x to ground terms. Hence they are pairwise incomparable with respect to $\lesssim_A^{\{x\}}$. This shows minimality of \mathcal{M} . We see that minimal complete sets of E -unifiers do not need to have finite cardinality.