

A comparison of Double-DOP and DOP*

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Abstract

This paper investigates two existing estimators in the Data Oriented Parsing approach to natural language syntax: Double-DOP and DOP*. We assess the theoretical and practical differences between these estimators by comparing the grammars they derive and their performance on part of the WSJ treebank. Performing estimation with a split corpus decreased the weight of large fragments, and the consistent estimator did not perform better than the non-consistent estimators. We elucidate the correspondence between the grammar distributions and their theoretical properties.

1 Introduction

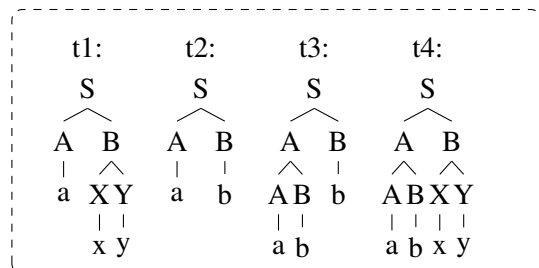


Figure 1: A toy treebank

A common approach to natural language syntax, is to view the structure of sentences as constituent trees. An artificial example of a treebank is given in figure 1. Constituent trees can be described by a *Context Free Grammars* (CFG), such that all trees are built up from rules that each describe the production (children nodes) of a single node (parent) in the tree. When building an empirical model of observed parse trees, these rules are extended with probabilities to form a *probabilistic CFG* (PCFG). This gives the trees that are ‘generated’ by these rules their own probability,

which makes it a statistical model of a distribution over natural language syntax.

A CFG models each production as an independent event, but natural language probably has more complex interdependencies. To this end, grammars can be enriched (e.g. by Markovisation, that include information about grandparent or sibling nodes).

1.1 DOP

Data-Oriented Parsing (DOP), as first introduced in (Scha, 1990), takes a different approach. It models the language with a *Probabilistic Tree Substitution Grammar* (PTSG). The trees in the treebank are taken apart, which results in *fragments* of arbitrary depth¹. A fragment is a connected subgraph of a tree such that it corresponds to context-free productions in that tree, i.e. each node must have either have children with the same labels as in the original tree, or no children at all. This is illustrated in figure 2. Note that not all fragments from the treebank in figure 1 are displayed. We see that each level-one fragment corresponds to a CFG rule. The *symbolic grammar* refers to the set of fragments (that receive a non-zero weight) in a grammar.

Fragments can be combined in a *derivation* to build syntactic structures. A step in a derivation is a composition, denoted by the symbol \circ . For instance, tree t_1 can be derived as $t_1 = f_2 \circ f_{10}$. We follow the convention to only allow left-most derivations. This means that the left-most non-terminal node in a fragment f_1 must correspond to the root node of f_2 in order to derive $f_3 = f_1 \circ f_2$.

A weight must be assigned to each fragment. This can be done by counting how often it occurs in the treebank compared to others with the same root, yielding the *relative frequency estimate*. The probability of a derivation is the product of the

¹Fragments are sometimes referred to as ‘subtrees’ in literature



Figure 2: Extracted fragments

probability of the fragments it uses. Note that a single tree can be the result of different derivations. Therefore probability of a tree is the sum of the probabilities of all its derivations.

Theoretical issues It has been shown that DOP (in its original formulation) is biased and inconsistent (Johnson, 2002), which are both assumed to be bad properties of an estimator in general. As we will see, bias is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, Zollman proves in (Zollmann and Sima'an, 2005) that any non-overfitting estimator is biased. Furthermore, he shows that it is possible to define a DOP-estimator that is provably consistent.

Practical issues In its original formulation, DOP takes the trees apart in all possible ways. The number of fragments is exponential in the length of the sentences, thus the size of the symbolic grammar would be far too huge to be computationally feasible. Different approaches have been taken to reduce the symbolic grammar, e.g. by sampling or by applying a smart algorithm.

1.2 Our contribution

The main question of this work concerns the correspondence between theoretical properties and practical performance. Is it possible to gain theoretically attractive properties without performance losses? Can we reduce overfitting in an already well-performing approach by introducing the right bias? How do consistent grammars and well-performing grammars differ in their fragment weight distribution?

We compare two approaches that aim to solve the issues we pointed out: Double-DOP (Sangati and Zuidema, 2011) and DOP*(?). We trained three grammars related to these approaches on part of the WSJ treebank. We hope the comparison of grammars leads to profound insight into the internal distribution of the model, in order to elucidate the correspondence between the fragment weights and theoretical properties.

1.3 Outlook

Section 2 elaborates the notions of consistency and bias and their relation to overfitting. In section 3, we give a detailed description of the estimators Double-DOP and DOP*. Section 4 offers a detailed comparison of the two as well as a description of the experiments we conduct. We investigate the differences between the grammars produced by Double-DOP and DOP*. The algorithms can be decomposed into two parts. We also analyze the impact of the partial choices by mutually using these parts.

In section 5, we present our findings and provide an analysis.

2 Statistics: Consistency and Bias

Linguistic studies of syntax mostly concern *competence* models, which describe the structures that appear in a language. In contrast, a *performance* model of language is an estimate of the probability of observing a parse tree in language use. It treats language as a statistical distribution over syntactic structures.

Let Ω be the set of all possible parse trees. The distribution $P_\Omega : \Omega \rightarrow [0, 1]$ then describes a language, where $P_\Omega(t)$ is the probability of observing a tree $t \in \Omega$. Using a sample of parse trees from the language, an *estimator* EST builds a statistical model. A parser then uses that statistical model to predict the correct parse tree of sentences. A sample $X \in \Omega^n$ from the language is called a *corpus* or *treebank* of size n , which makes $\text{EST}(X)$ an estimator trained on a sample. If \mathcal{M} is the set of probability distributions over Ω , then $P_\Omega \in \mathcal{M}$ and $\text{EST}(X) \in \mathcal{M}$.

In theory, an estimator should make exactly the right estimations of probabilities if it's given an infinite amount of data. That is to say, it should *converge* to the true distribution. If an estimator converges in the limit, that estimator is *consistent*. However, given a finite amount of data, the esti-

mator will probably not generate the correct distribution. The distance between the true distribution P^* and an estimate P is called the *loss* of that estimate. The loss can be defined in different ways, but the most popular is the *mean squared difference*:

$$\mathcal{L}(P, P^*) = \sum_{t \in \Omega} P^*(t)(P^*(t) - P(t))^2$$

From a true distribution, it's possible to calculate the expected loss of an estimator trained on a treebank of a certain size. This is the *risk* or *error* of that estimator given a sample size and a distribution. When the sample size approaches the limit, the error of an estimator should diminish. With these definitions, it is possible to define estimator consistency when sampling $X \in \Omega^n$ from P_Ω :

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \mathbf{E}[\mathcal{L}(\text{EST}(X), P_\Omega)] = 0$$

In its original formulation, DOP was defined using a *relative frequency estimate*, by counting how often it occurs in the treebank compared to others with the same root. However, it has been shown (Johnson, 2002) that in this case, the RF estimator is inconsistent.

Another property of an estimator is its *bias*, which is defined as the difference between the true probability distribution and the expected estimate for a language. If such a language exists, the estimator is biased in general. It has been proven that any unbiased DOP estimator will overfit a treebank by assigning zero-probabilities to trees outside the corpus. To prevent overfitting, it is therefore necessary to introduce a bias that assigns a non-zero probability to unseen trees. By maximizing the probability of a corpus different from the one from which the fragments are extracted, we will see that it is possible to minimize overfitting.

3 Existing Models: Double-DOP and DOP*

In this section, we outline two approaches to constrain the extraction of fragments: Double-DOP and DOP*.

3.1 Double-DOP

In the following, we discuss Double-DOP as it was presented in by Sangati and Zuidema in (2011).

In this model, no unique fragments are extracted from the dataset: if a construction occurs in one tree only, it is probably not representative for the language. This is carried out by a dynamic programming algorithm using tree-kernels. It iterates over pairs of trees in the treebank, looking for fragments they have in common. Only the maximal overlapping fragments are stored, not all its sub-fragments.

The symbolic grammar that is the output of this algorithm is not guaranteed to derive each tree in the training corpus. Therefore all fragments of depth one, constituting the set of PCFG-productions, are also added.

The emphasis of Double-DOP is on the extraction method for determining the symbolic grammar. However, it was also implemented with different estimators. The estimation is done in a second pass over the treebank, gathering frequency counts for the fragments in the symbolic grammar. We will use the relative frequency estimate, which was empirically found to perform best (Sangati and Zuidema, 2011).

3.2 DOP*

In DOP* (Zollmann and Sima'an, 2005), a rather different approach is taken called held-out estimation. The treebank is split in two parts, the *extraction corpus* (EC) and a *held-out corpus* (HC). An initial set of fragments is extracted from the EC , containing all the fragments from its trees. The weights are then determined so as to maximize the likelihood of HC , under the assumption that this is equivalent to maximizing the joint probability of the *shortest derivations* of the trees in HC .

The weight of a fragment is its relative frequency of occurring in a shortest derivation, and all fragments that do not occur in such a derivation are removed from the symbolic grammar. Of course, a tree could have several equally short derivations. The probability mass is divided over the fragments taking parts in the different shortest derivations in that case. Furthermore, some trees in HC may not be derivable at all, which indicates that the grammar does not have complete coverage: a sentence in the test set might also be undervivable.

To maximize coverage of the grammar, DOP* comes with a smoothing method. The relative frequency of undervivable trees in HC is denoted by p_{unkn} . This value is uniformly discounted from

the weight of all the fragments in the grammar. Then p_{unkn} is distributed over a PCFG grammar, thus containing all the depth one fragments in the entire treebank ($HC \cup EC$). The resulting two grammars are merged, the weight of fragments that occur in both are added together.

Consistency and bias DOP* was introduced as the first consistent (non-trivial) DOP-estimator. Zollmann and Sima'an provide a consistency proof in (2005). On the other hand, DOP* is biased, but Zollmann shows how bias actually arises from generalization: no non-overfitting DOP estimator could be unbiased. Bias is therefore not problematic but a desirable property of an estimator.

The consistency of DOP* is fundamentally tied to the extraction of fragments in the shortest derivations. As the treebank size increases, the expected loss of the estimate will diminish, as described above. One of the goals of this project is to describe what influence this has on the distribution of weight over the fragments in the grammar.

4 Comparison

DOP* and Double-DOP differ both in the set of fragments they extract and their estimation of the weights. To investigate the exact differences, we will view both steps separately.

Extraction Double-DOP uses a tree kernel approach to find the maximal overlapping fragments of pairs of trees, which are added to the symbolic grammar. We will call this the *maximal-overlap* method. DOP* iteratively finds the shortest derivation of one tree given all the fragments of a set of trees, hereafter the *shortest-derivation* method.

It is easy to see that the *shortest-derivation* extraction in itself does not depend on the corpus split: we can also find the shortest possible derivation using fragments from all the other trees. Likewise Double-DOP could be implemented using a split, comparing all trees in the *HC* to all trees in the *EC*. We will refer to these methods as *full* and *split* estimation.

Estimation Both approaches use the relative frequencies of the fragments for the weights:

$$p(f) = \frac{\text{count}(f)}{\sum_{f' \in F_{\text{root}}(f)} \text{count}(f')} \quad (1)$$

Where $F_{\text{root}}(f)$ denotes the fragments in the grammar that have the same root as f . However,

in the Double-DOP case these values refer to exact counts of the fragments in the treebank, whereas in DOP* they refer to occurrence of fragments in shortest derivations.

Double-DOP determines the weights of the fragments in the symbolic grammar in a separate run over the treebank, to obtain exact counts. We use the relative frequency estimate to assign weights to the fragments. DOP* on the other hand counts the occurrence in shortest derivations of the fragments, and normalizes relative to counts of fragments with the same root.

Smoothing To maximize coverage of the grammar, both Double-DOP and DOP* add PCFG rules to the grammar. In Double-DOP this is done before the estimation, such that the CFG rules are treated as if they were extracted as maximal overlapping fragments. DOP* is smoothed by calculating the weight of the unparsed sentences: p_{unkn} , and distributes this probability mass over the PCFG grammar.

Example This example clarifies how the grammars that result from Double-DOP and DOP* can actually differ. Recall our toy treebank from figure 1 and the fragments in figure 2. Applying the maximal overlap extraction and shortest derivation extraction with full estimation to this treebank, yields the weights in table 1.

Note the remarkable differences in the weight distributions. For example, f_1 gets a weight of $p_k \times 0.5$ in the maximal overlap approach, and zero in the shortest derivation case. Of course, the sparsity of the data contributes much to these extreme variations. However, the observed differences encourage us to investigate these two approaches into more depth.

4.1 Experiments

We compare the original formulation of Double-DOP and DOP*, i.e. maximal overlap with full estimation and shortest derivation with split estimation. Furthermore, we add a new estimator that is a hybrid of the two: maximal overlap with split estimation. We have not been able to provide an efficient implementation of shortest derivation extraction with full estimation.

Estimation and parsing were done with the *disco-dop* framework².

²<http://staff.science.uva.nl/~acranenb/discodop/>

	Maximal overlap*	weight	Shortest deriv.**	weight***
f1	(t1,t3), (t2,t4)	4/12	-	$p_u \times 1/1$
f2	(t1,t2)	2/12	1b, 2a	$p_k \times 2/8$
f3	(t2,t3)	2/12	2b, 3b	$p_k \times 2/8$
f4	(t3,t4)	2/12	3a, 4b	$p_k \times 2/8$
f5	(t1,t4)	2/12	1a, 4a	$p_k \times 2/8$
f6	(t1,t3), (t1,t4), (t2,t3), (t2,t4)	4/6	1a, 2b	$p_k \times 2/4 + p_u \times 1/2$
f7	-	0	3b, 4a	$p_k \times 2/4$
f8	CFG rule	2/6	-	$p_u \times 1/2$
f9	(t2,t3), (t2,t4), (t3,t4)	4/6	2a, 3a	$p_k \times 2/4 + p_u \times 1/2$
f10	-	0	1b, 4b	$p_k \times 2/4$
f11	CFG rule	2/6	-	$p_u \times 1/2$
f12	CFG rule	2/2	-	$p_u \times 1/1$
f13	CFG rule	2/2	-	$p_u \times 1/1$

Table 1: The weights assignment according to both extraction methods in a full estimation manner.

* The fragment occurs in the maximal overlap of these pairs of trees

** For this dataset, two shortest derivations exist for each tree: $t_1 = f_5 \circ f_6$ (1a) or $t_1 = f_2 \circ f_{10}$ (1b), $t_2 = f_2 \circ f_8$ (2a) or $t_2 = f_3 \circ f_6$ (2b), $t_3 = f_4 \circ f_8$ (3a) or $t_3 = f_3 \circ f_7$ (3b), $t_4 = f_5 \circ f_7$ (4a) or $t_4 = f_4 \circ f_9$ (4b)

*** Smoothing: p_u is short for p_{unkn} , $p_k = 1 - p_{unkn}$

Data We use the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) section of the Penn Treebank for our experiments. DOP* has only been applied to the Dutch OVIS corpus in (Zollmann and Sima'an, 2005), which contains relatively small and (therefore) easy sentences. Therefore we are curious about its performance on the WSJ.

The corpus was preprocessed in *disco-dop* by removing functions and binarizing the trees by Markovization ($h=1$, $v=1$).

Algorithm First, we find the maximally overlapping fragments of all trees in the corpus, which corresponds to Double-DOP, and we call the *Full Maximum Overlap* approach. Then, we randomly split the corpus ten times in two equally-sized parts, called *EC* and *HC*. For each split, build a DOP-reduction grammar from *EC* and use it to find the shortest derivations (*Split Shortest Derivations*) of the trees in *HC*, which corresponds to DOP*. Additionally, we find the maximally overlapping fragments and estimate their weights from the *EC*. We'll call this *Split Maximum Overlap*.

The results for the different splits were interpolated and the resulting grammars were smoothed as described above. For finding p_{unkn} , the weight of unparseable sentences in the DOP* estimation, we needed to find the trees that had not been derived in any split. This was done by comparing each set of underived trees with the *HC* sets of every split.

Parsing The input for the parser consisted of sentences with a POS-tag attached to each word. The parser matches fragments to the whole pair (word and POS-tag) when the word is known, but only uses the POS tag in case the word is unknown.

5 Results and analysis

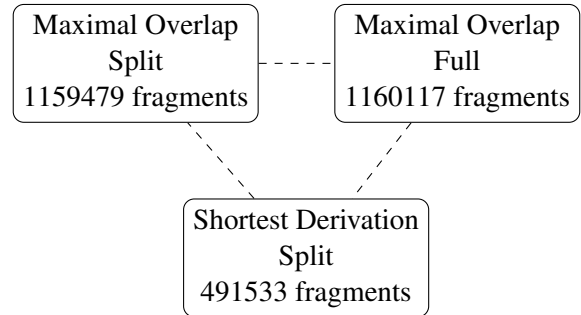


Figure 3: The grammars and their size

Figure 3 summarizes the three grammars we investigate.

Estimating all grammars took 45 hours on 16 CPU cores.

p_{unkn} was found to be 1.41×10^{-3} for our dataset.

5.1 Parsing performance

Table 2 shows the parsing performance for the three grammars we constructed. Note that the

	Maximal Overlap Full	Maximal Overlap Split	Shortest Derivation Split
labeled recall	86.17	85.11	79.20
labeled precision	86.05	85.50	79.32
labeled f-measure	86.11	85.31	79.26
exact match	28.32	25.87	16.52

Table 2: Results for 1229 sentences of length ≤ 40

POS-tags were passed to the parser in all cases, so tagging accuracy was 100% and is omitted from this table. Note that we did only one run on a pre-defined train/ test split.

Both Maximal Overlap grammars perform much better than the Shortest Derivation one, in spite of the latter being consistent. This might well be related to the size of the grammars: the Shortest Derivation grammar has less than half the number of fragments the other two grammars have.

A second explanation might be the smoothing we conducted. Recall that the coverage of the Maximal Overlap approach is catered in a rather natural way, by extending the symbolic grammar with all PCFG rules from the treebank and treating them like the other fragments in the estimation. In the case of Shortest Derivation however, the coverage was a bit more artificial. p_{unkn} was computed over all folds and used to redistribute weights over a classical PCFG constructed from the entire treebank.

Furthermore, we observe that the performance of Maximal Overlap with Full estimation performs slightly better than the Split estimation. The latter was expected to prevent overfitting, but apparently was not helpful in this case. As the weights of these two grammars do not diverge much, it would be recommended to do several runs (with different splits for train and test set). This was however not feasible for us, given the limited amount of time for this project.

5.2 Pairwise comparison of the grammars

In each plot, two grammars are compared to each other. The fragments are presented in a scatter plot, with the weights assigned by the two grammars along the axes. The weights are best visualized on a logarithmic scale. However, it is also informative to see those fragments with value zero. Therefore, the first interval ($[0, 10^{-6}]$) is linear, while the rest of the plot is logarithmic. The difference between grammars is represented by the

distance of the points to the *identity line* $x = y$. The color corresponds to some feature, e.g. the depth of the fragment. The color mapping is also logarithmic.

Depth of the fragments In figure 4, the color of the points in the scatter plot refer to the depth of the fragments. Depth is a common measure of fragment size. Johnson shows in (2002) that the original DOP1 had a bias towards larger fragments.

Plot 4c illustrates the effect of the split estimation as compared to full estimation. We see a remarkable, almost linear separation of fragments with larger depth (lighter color) below the identity line, and fragments with smaller depth above it. This indicates that the split estimation tends to reduce the bias towards larger fragments.

In plots 4a and 4b, the shortest derivation extraction is compared to both maximal overlap grammars. Although the correlation between weight assignment and depth is less evident, the area above the identity line gets fragments with a lighter color. This reveals that shortest derivation extraction gives a higher weight to large fragments than maximal overlap.

Width of the fragments The width of the fragments is another measure of their size. It is defined as the number of substitution sites plus the number of terminals. As an example, in figure 5a both extraction methods are compared with split estimation. The dark peak on the right corresponds to the smoothing: PCFG fragments have width one or two. We see that the Maximal Overlap approach has stronger smoothing, i.e. it assigns larger weights to PCFG fragments. In figure 5b only fragments of depth 2 and deeper are shown, and the dark peak is gone.

The way the fragments with certain width are distributed does not differ much from the depth, of course width and depth are strongly correlated themselves. We have also looked at the number of

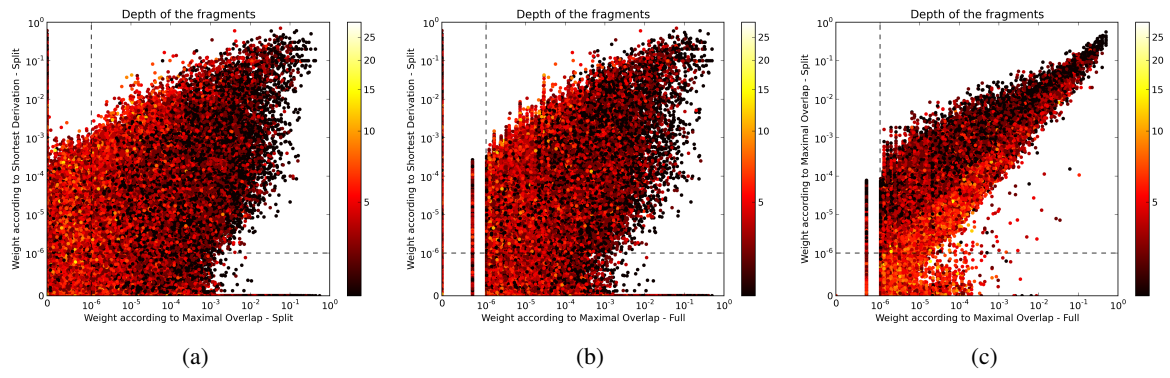


Figure 4: Comparing three grammars by depth of the fragments

substitution sites and the number of terminals of isolation, but this did not reveal much more than the total width.

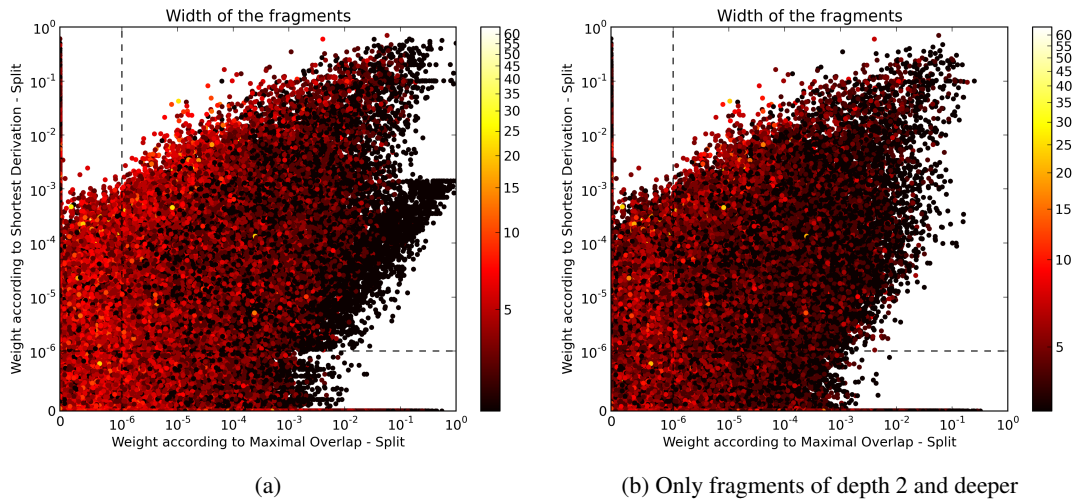


Figure 5: Comparing shortest derivation to maximal overlap extraction by width of the fragments

6 Conclusion

We have investigated two existing estimators in the Data Oriented Parsing approach to natural language syntax: Double-DOP and DOP*. Our main question concerned the correspondence between theoretical properties and practical performance.

We compared the theoretically attractive shortest-derivation fragment extraction from DOP* with the practical Double-DOP approach. We observed that the latter performed substantially better. Because the consistent grammar performed poorer, it seems that consistency might be a less interesting property in practice.

We introduced the corpus splitting from DOP* into the Double-DOP approach. We have showed that the held-out estimation makes the grammar less biased towards large fragments. However, interpolating the results of random splits did not give us the expected overfitting avoidance.

Concerns While all grammars were trained on the same data set, the grammar from the shortest derivation with split was significantly smaller than the others. This could in itself explain the lower performance of this grammar, instead of the estimation method, because larger tree substitution grammars simply describe more data. It is therefore impossible to be completely certain in blaming the lower performance on the shortest-derivation approach. Other factors that might play a role are the usage of relative frequency (other estimates could be applied) and the smoothing method: the PCFG rules got higher weight assignment in the Double-DOP approach.

Future work Our analysis concerned only two existing DOP estimators: Double-DOP and DOP*. Others have been proposed with one or more of the same desirable properties or comparable performance, of which the comparative analysis is future work.

Additionally, the fragment weight comparison in this paper is exploratory and rough. It would be very interesting to perform clustering on features such as depth, number of substitution sites and terminals to build a model of the difference in weight distribution.

Finally, it is an important question whether estimator consistency for DOP is a valuable property at all. Behaviour of an estimator in the limit, on finite languages and on artificial constructions is not guaranteed to lead to improved performance on real treebanks.

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