



WordNet

A lexical database for English

What is WordNet?

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WordNet® is a large lexical database of English. Nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are grouped into sets of cognitive synonyms (synsets), each expressing a distinct concept. Synsets are interlinked by means of conceptual-semantic and lexical relations. The resulting network of meaningfully related words and concepts can be navigated with the [browser](#). WordNet is also freely and publicly available for [download](#). WordNet's structure makes it a useful tool for computational linguistics and natural language processing.

Please note that any changes made to the database are not reflected until a new version of WordNet is publicly released. Due to limited staffing, there are currently no plans for future WordNet releases.

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WordNet superficially resembles a thesaurus, in that it groups words together based on their meanings. However, there are some important distinctions. First, WordNet interlinks not just word forms—strings of letters—but specific senses of words. As a result, words that are found in close proximity to one another in the network are semantically disambiguated. Second, WordNet labels the semantic relations among words, whereas the groupings of words in a thesaurus does not follow any explicit pattern other than meaning similarity.

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Structure

The main relation among words in WordNet is synonymy, as between the words shut and close or car and automobile. Synonyms--words that denote the same concept and are interchangeable in many contexts--are grouped into unordered sets (synsets). Each of WordNet's 117 000 synsets is linked to other synsets by means of a small number of "conceptual relations." Additionally, a synset contains a brief definition ("gloss") and, in most cases, one or more short sentences illustrating the use of the synset members. Word forms with several distinct meanings are represented in as many distinct synsets. Thus, each form-meaning pair in WordNet is unique.

Relations

The most frequently encoded relation among synsets is the super-subordinate relation (also called hyperonymy, hyponymy or ISA relation). It links more general synsets like {furniture, piece_of_furniture} to increasingly specific ones like {bed} and {bunkbed}. Thus, WordNet states that the category furniture includes bed, which in turn includes bunkbed; conversely, concepts like bed and bunkbed make up the category furniture. All noun hierarchies ultimately go up the root node {entity}. Hyponymy relation is transitive: if an armchair is a kind of chair, and if a chair is a kind of furniture, then an armchair is a kind of furniture. WordNet distinguishes among Types (common nouns) and Instances (specific persons, countries and geographic entities). Thus, armchair is a type of chair, Barack Obama is an instance of a president. Instances are always leaf (terminal) nodes in their hierarchies.

Meronymy, the part-whole relation holds between synsets like {chair} and {back, backrest}, {seat} and {leg}. Parts are inherited from their superordinates: if a chair has legs, then an armchair has legs as well. Parts are not inherited "upward" as they may be characteristic only of specific kinds of things rather than the class as a whole: chairs and kinds of chairs have legs, but not all kinds of furniture have legs.

Verb synsets are arranged into hierarchies as well; verbs towards the bottom of the trees (troponyms) express increasingly specific manners characterizing an event, as in {communicate}-{talk}-{whisper}. The specific manner expressed depends on the semantic field; volume (as in the example above) is just one dimension along which verbs can be elaborated. Others are speed (move-jog-run) or intensity of emotion (like-love-idolize). Verbs describing events that necessarily and unidirectionally entail one another are linked: {buy}-{pay}, {succeed}-{try}, {show}-{see}, etc.

Adjectives are organized in terms of antonymy. Pairs of "direct" antonyms like wet-dry and young-old reflect the strong semantic contract of their members. Each of these polar adjectives in turn is

linked to a number of “semantically similar” ones: dry is linked to parched, arid, dessicated and bone-dry and wet to soggy, waterlogged, etc. Semantically similar adjectives are “indirect antonyms” of the contral member of the opposite pole. Relational adjectives (“pertainyms”) point to the nouns they are derived from (criminal-crime).

There are only few adverbs in WordNet (hardly, mostly, really, etc.) as the majority of English adverbs are straightforwardly derived from adjectives via morphological affixation (surprisingly, strangely, etc.)

Cross-POS relations

The majority of the WordNet’s relations connect words from the same part of speech (POS). Thus, WordNet really consists of four sub-nets, one each for nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, with few cross-POS pointers. Cross-POS relations include the “morphosemantic” links that hold among semantically similar words sharing a stem with the same meaning: observe (verb), observant (adjective) observation, observatory (nouns). In many of the noun-verb pairs the semantic role of the noun with respect to the verb has been specified: {sleeper, sleeping_car} is the LOCATION for {sleep} and {painter} is the AGENT of {paint}, while {painting, picture} is its RESULT.

More Information

Fellbaum, Christiane (2005). WordNet and wordnets. In: Brown, Keith et al. (eds.), Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics, Second Edition, Oxford: Elsevier, 665-670

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