COMP90055 Computing Project Report

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Name of Degree Enrolled in: Master of Information Technology — Computing

Subject Code: COMP90055 Computing Project

Total credit points for entire project: 25

Type of Project: Research project

Semester in which project commenced: Semester 1, 2015

Semester in which project is expected to complete: Semester1, 2015

Project Title: Information Extraction of biomedical relationships in published colon cancer literature

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Information Extraction of biomedical relationships in published colon cancer literature

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of

Master of Information Technology

June 2015

To my loving parents . . .

Declaration

I certify that

- this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person where due reference is not made in the text.

- the thesis is approximately 6000 words in length (excluding text in images, table, bibliographies and appendices).

Ruichen Teng
June 2015

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor Prof. Karin Verspoor for the extremely helpful guidance and constant encouragement throughout the duration of this project. Her timely responses have really made this project work. In addition, my gratitude goes to Dr. Haibin Liu and Dr. Andrew MacKinlay for sharing valuable insights into the software system. I would also like to thank Dr. Jeremy Nicholson for chatting with me about NLP research. Finally I would like to thank my friends and family for carrying me through this extremely tough semester.

Abstract

Automatic information extraction from text has a variety of applications and Particiularly, relation extraction from biomedical literature discovers structured has inspired a significant interest in research. Relation extraction, in particular, A variety of techniques, including pattern-based methods, co-occurrence based methods, feature-based methods, semi-supervised methods and kernel methods have been proposed and evaluated on different kinds of corpus. In this project, we adapted an existing event-extraction system to a new corpus on relation extraction tasks.

Table of contents

List of figures **xiii**

List of tables **xv**

1 Introduction **1**

1.1 Motivation 1

1.2 Definitions and Assumptions 2

1.3 Research Question 3

1.4 Thesis Structure 3

2 Related Work **5**

2.1 Named Entity Recognition 5

2.2 Relation Extraction 5

2.2.1 Pattern Based Methods 6

2.2.2 Co-occurrence based methods 6

2.2.3 Feature Based Methods 7

2.2.4 Semi-Supervised Methods 7

2.2.5 Kernel Methods 8

3 Project Work **9**

3.1 Data Collection 9

3.2 Dependency Graph and Shortest Path 10

3.3 Approximate Subgraph Matching Algorithm 11

3.3.1 Prepossessing 12

3.3.2 Rule Learning 12

3.3.3 Sentence Matching 13

3.3.4 Rule Optimization 14

3.4 System Adaptation 14

3.5 Results 16

4 Conclusion 17

4.1 Conclusion 17

4.2 Contributions 17

4.3 Future Work 17

4.3.1 Full System Adaptation 17

4.3.2 Relation Type Fine-Tuning 18

4.3.3 The Parser Effect 19

4.3.4 Parameter Tuning 19

4.3.5 Combination of Kernels 19

4.3.6 The Abstract Effect 19

References 21

List of figures

1.1 An Example of Relations Captured in a Sentence 2
1.2 An Example of Events Captured in a Sentence 2

2.1 Word Patterns for Protein-Protein Interaction from Ono et al. [29] 6
2.2 Example of a Shallow Parse Tree [43] 8

3.1 Dependency Graph of " The p.Lys618Ala variant was co-existent with pathogenic mutations in two unrelated LS families." 11
3.2 Rules learned for " The p.Lys618Ala variant was co-existent with pathogenic mutations in two unrelated LS families." 12
3.3 Exact Subgraph Matching 13
3.4 Approximate Subgraph Matching 14
3.5 Changing Annotation Format 15

List of tables

3.1 Variome Relation Types 10
3.2 Overall Result 16

Introduction

1.1 Motivation

Text mining is the process of searching for patterns in natural language text using methods in computer science, linguistics, and statistics. Despite being unstructured and only human-understandable, text is still our primary media for exchange of information[41]. The prevalence of textual data presents a big challenge to computer-driven natural language understanding. *Information extraction*, in particular, refers to the task of acquiring organized, structured and queryable format of data from the unstructured corpus.

While text mining is widely used in areas like marketing and document verifying, it has received increased attention for its application to biomedical literatures[2, 19, 20]. This trend stems from the direct need of biomedical workers and researchers to cope with information explosion in their field. For instance, MEDLINE(Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online), the online database of United States National Library of Medicine, has accumulated nearly 0.8 million citations and 2.7 billion searches in 2014 alone[25], with total citations reaching 25 million. Within these publications there are valuable research results that should add to human knowledge. In the meantime, our primary knowledge base in life science - the biomedical databases, are still mostly being populated manually by *biocurators* - the “museum catalogers of the Internet age”[39]. They are professional scientists who read biomedical articles, record relevant data and organize them according to the biomedical database schema. The sheer volume of publications has made this process increasingly unrealistic[10].

Not only does data overload make knowledge discovery demanding, it also leads to a decline in literature quality. Nowadays biomedical workers and researchers are more prone to drawing wrong conclusions because they simply can not read all the relevant publications, among which oftentimes contradicting results are reported. Needless to say, we are in desperate need of automatic tools for systematically analyzing documents and extracting information. In fact, it has been argued that text mining is required to improve the coverage of databases[3].

1.2 Definitions and Assumptions

Below are a list of terms which I will use throughout this thesis, more detailed examples will be given in the relevant sections, but a general definition is first given here to avoid any confusions that might arise.

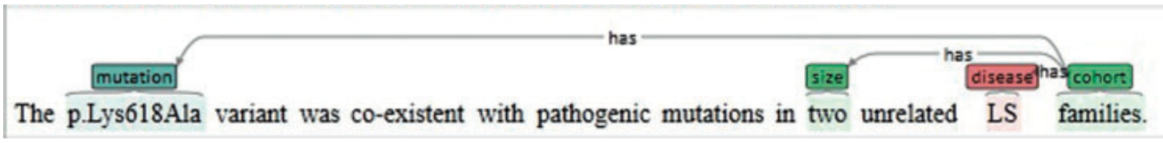


Fig. 1.1 An Example of Relations Captured in a Sentence

- *Relation Extraction:* In general, relation extraction refers to the process of discovering a relationship between entities in text. Relations can be unary (one-to-itself), binary (one-to-one) and more complex[24]. In this project we are mainly concerned with binary relations between two entities. As illustrated in Figure 1.1, the sentence contains relations like *families have p.Lys618A1a*, *families have two(members)*, *families have the LS(disease)*, etc. In the domain of natural language processing, the relation can be semantic or syntactic, with semantic relations being the most important for knowledge discovery. Specifically, semantic relations between biomedical entities such as protein-protein interactions and gene expressions cover a wide range of knowledge in this field and have driven numerous research work.

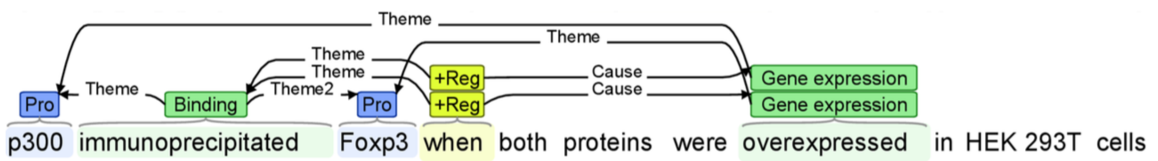


Fig. 1.2 An Example of Events Captured in a Sentence

- *Event Extraction:* A biomedical event usually refers to a statement of molecular interaction in text [5]. Figure 1.2 shows a sentence that contains two protein catabolism events (pro), one binding event, two positive regulation events, and two gene expression events between respective entities.

Both relation extraction and event extraction belongs to the broader concept of information extraction.

1.3 Research Question

This project looks to investigate the adaptation of event extraction system Approximate Subgraph Matching (ASM)[22], on relation extraction tasks, specifically regarding the relations in the Variome Corpus annotated with the Variome Annotation Schema[38]. The effectiveness of the system in extracting relations between entities (disease, ethnicity, gender, gene, mutation, patient, etc.) will be evaluated. Since ASM is a supervised, rule-based data mining system developed solely for event extraction, it needs to be re-trained and carefully adapted to the new corpus. We believe such a relation extraction tool has very promising applications for biomedical researchers, doctors, pharmaceutical companies, and the general public. The extracted relations can be helpful in information search, knowledge discovery and hypothesis generation.

1.4 Thesis Structure

The remainder of the thesis is organized in the following manner. In Chapter 2, we discuss different algorithms used for relation extraction tasks including pattern-based methods, co-occurrence based methods, feature-based methods, semi-supervised methods and kernel based methods. In Chapter 3, we provide a detailed description of the Approximate Subgraph Matching system and explain how this event extraction system was adapted for relation extraction task in Variome Corpus. We then present the relation extraction results and our analysis. In Chapter 4, we conclude our work and present future directions.

Related Work

This chapter will explore the research related to this thesis. First we introduce briefly named entity recognition, an important step before relation extraction. Next different relation extraction algorithms are presented.

2.1 Named Entity Recognition

Named Entity Recognition, or NER, is the task of identifying elements in text that belong to pre-defined categories. Specifically, NER in biomedical text mining aims at identifying entities such as proteins, diseases, genes, etc. There is extra difficulty for NER in the biomedical domain mainly for the following reasons. First, there is no canonical dictionary for biomedical entities[10]. The entity names are created on the fly and the number of names is in the millions. Second, the names are not defined unambiguously[40]. The same name may refer to different entities depending on context, in the meantime an entity might have several names. Finally, even human interpretations differ with named entities in the biomedical text. For example in our corpus for this project there were about 10% disagreement on named entities between two human annotators[38].

2.2 Relation Extraction

While it is often the case that the accuracy of named entity recognition would have a significant impact on the performance of relation extraction, the two problems are usually treated separately. This allows the relevant tools for each problem to be evaluated independently. Therefore, in the following sections, the relation extraction methods usually have the named entity annotations given in their test data, so that the algorithm only needs to focus on extracting relations between known entities.

2.2.1 Pattern Based Methods

Pattern based relation extraction methods first saw its application in extracting protein-protein interactions[15]. Initially, a set of part-of-speech rules are applied to split the syntactically complex sentence into simple sentences. For example, a sentence with part-of-speech tag sequence $\{P1, VB1, P2, VB2, CC, P3\}$ can be splitted to $\{P1, VB1, P2\}$ and $\{P1, VB2, P3\}$. Then, a set of word patterns can be applied to extract relations from these simple sentences[29]. An example of that is shown in Figure 2.1. In addition, Hao et al. [15]

Keyword	Pattern	Example of sentence
Interact	*A* interact with *B*	*Spc97p interacts with spc98* and *Tub4* in the two-hybrid system.
	interaction of *A* (with|and) *B*	The *interaction of Cet1 with Ceg1* elicits...
	interaction (between|among) *A* and *B*	Functional and physical *interaction* between *Rad24* and *Rfc5*...
	A–*B* interaction	These data suggest that the *Cert1-Ceg1 interaction* is...
	A and *B* interact	*Stn1 and Cdc13* proteins displayed a physical *interaction* by...
Associate	*A* associate with *B*	*Atx1* also *associated* directly *with* the cytosolic domains of *Ccc2*.
	association between *A* and *B*	Physical *association between GCN5 and ADA2*.
	association of *A* (with|and) *B*	*Association of Vma12p* with *Vph1p*.
	A and *B* association with each other	The *SET4 and STE18* gene products *associated with each other*.
Bind	*A* bind to *B*	*GCN binds to ADA2*...
	bind of *A* to *B*	The *binding of Met28* to *DNA*.
	A and *B* bind	*Cdc24p and Bem1p bind* to each other
	bind between *A* and *B*	*Binding between TIF34* and *TIF35* in_vitro.
	A bind *B*	the N-terminal of *SIN1* is suffisient to *bind SAP1*.
Complex	*A*(-|/)*B* complex	*Pc11, 2-Pho85* kinase *complexes* become essential...
	A and *B* complex	*Cdc46p* and *Cdc47p* ... *complex* with each other.
	complex *A* and *B*	*Poll* and *Pob3* may form a *complex*...
	A complex with *B*	*GCG20* was... *complex* formation *with GCN1*.
	A complex...contain *B*	*Boilp* is part of a larger *complex* that *contains Cdc42p*.
	A complex *B*	*Ste11 complexed* to *Ste7*...

Fig. 2.1 Word Patterns for Protein-Protein Interaction from Ono et al. [29]

proposed an idea of minimal description length, as in finding the optimal pattern set that has the most balance among high precision, short rule length and low rule complexity by dynamic programming. Pattern based methods has achieved quite respectable performances for extracting protein-protein interactions[15]. However, it does not incorporate the richness of expressions, such as the anaphora terms like pronouns. Consequently, it does not generalize well and usually needs huge amount of training data.

2.2.2 Co-occurrence based methods

Finding co-occurring terms within a sentence or abstract has been the foundation of many relation extraction algorithms[4, 8, 16, 33, 34, 42]. Simple co-occurrence measures include probabilistic indicators such as point-wise mutual information, chi-square and log-likelihood ratio. More advanced measures include Concept Space, where thesaurus are mapped to a multi-dimensional Euclidean space[21, 36]. The main advantage of co-occurrence based methods is their simple implementation and low computational complexity. However, simplistic word counting often fails to grasp the essence of relations. Thus co-occurrence based methods are more suitable for detecting simple relations like gene-gene relations, but not in the general case of more complex biological relations.

2.2.3 Feature Based Methods

Feature based relation extraction often takes a statistical machine learning approach. The relation extraction task is regarded as a classification problem where each sentence with entities of interest is classified to a relation type. As a result, it is necessary to engineer a set of features for the learning algorithm. Kambhatla [18] from the IBM Watson lab proposed an approach that selects a feature stream between every pair of entity mentions. The feature stream include in-between word sequence, entity type, overlap with other mentions, syntactically dependent words of the mentions and parse-tree paths connecting two mentions. This feature stream is then used to build a maximum entropy model to classify relations for the Automatic Content Extraction(ACE) task. GuoDong et al. [14], Jiang and Zhai [17] later extended this work experimenting with more features. While their work showed very good results, they also rely heavily on high-quality feature engineering. Inclusion of undesirable features would significantly hurt system performance. This burden of feature engineering makes feature based methods less desirable[22].

2.2.4 Semi-Supervised Methods

Semi-supervised methods address the scarcity of training data. Training data for relation extraction is extremely expensive because substantial human labor is required to read the documents and label each training instance. Craven et al. [12] first experimented distant supervision by automatically extracting relations from databases records, "weakly" labeling the training data with these relations, extracting patterns from the training data, and filtering out inconfident patterns. Similar approaches have been explored since [6, 26, 27]. Recently Ravikumar et al. [30] used protein structure records in the Protein Data Bank for automatic creation of training data in protein-residue relation extraction. The problem with semi-supervised methods is that they could generate noisy patterns[28].

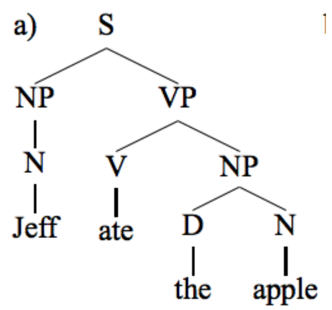


Fig. 2.2 Example of a Shallow Parse Tree [43]

2.2.5 Kernel Methods

Kernels provide a similarity measure between two objects in some complex feature space. In contrast to feature based methods, kernel-based methods allow the original representation of the object to be retained, and the kernel function will work out the similarity measure. For instance, the sentence *"Jeff ate the apple."* can represented as a shallow parse tree[43]. The feature based methods would want to select features such as number of nodes, number of edges and directions of edges, whereas kernel based methods allows feeding the entire tree object into a tree kernel function K[11], and output the similarity measure between two trees t_1 and t_2 as $K(t_1, t_2)$. Among various methods discussed above, we feel that **kernel based methods** can preserve the linguistically rich representations of sentences and has more flexibility as there are no manually encoded rules. The next chapter will discuss a graph kernel we chose for the relation extraction task in this project.

Project Work

3.1 Data Collection

Our dataset is the Variome Corpus[38], which is openly accessible. [1] Verspoor et al. [38] gave a detailed illustration of the document selection and annotation process. I will summarize the main points here.

A major part of the current biomedical research lies in understanding the relations between human genetic variation and disease phenotypes. The *Human Variome Project*, or *HVP*, is a global initiative to collect all genetic variation information affecting human health[31]. In particular, it acts as a liaison between individuals and organizations to integrate the genetic variants into databases that are open to the general public[38]. The *International Society for Gastrointestinal Hereditary Tumours (InSiGHT)*, is an international organization which aims to benefit patients with hereditary gastrointestinal(GI) tumours by research, education and personal assistance. In 2008, InSiGHT and HVP began a collaboration which propels InSiGHT to refine its process in the integration and interpretation of genetic variants. Consequently, a substantial effort was made to understand the mutation of mismatch repair(MMR) genes, the cause of Lynch Syndrome - one of the main syndromes of GI cancer[32]. A total of 10 full-text articles were selected from PubMed Central®by searching the common Lynch syndrome genes. These documents cover inherited colon cancer as well as certain other cancers. The annotation schema, also known as the Variome Annotation Schema[38], include 11 entity types and 13 relation types, as can be seen in the table 3.1.

In short, the annotation and selection of corpus is inspired by the needs of inSIGHT database, but intended for broader applications. In particular, the annotations are done by two human annotators. As suggested in [38], occasional annotation disagreement has been

[1] http://www.opennicta.com.au/home/health/variome

Table 3.1 Variome Relation Types

Relation Type	Entity1	Entity2
relatedTo	mutation	disease
relatedTo	disease	gene
relatedTo	disease	body-part
has	gene	mutation
has	mutation	size
has	disease	characteristic
has	cohort-patient	age
has	cohort-patient	characteristic
has	cohort-patient	disease
has	cohort-patient	ethnicity
has	cohort-patient	gender
has	cohort-patient	mutation
has	cohort-patient	size

resolved and the result is merged into a single corpus. Thus in this relation extraction task here, we refer to the manual annotations as the gold standard.

3.2 Dependency Graph and Shortest Path

The dependency graph of a sentence is a directed graph, where nodes represent sentence tokens, and edges indicate their semantic relations. Figure 3.1 shows the dependency graph of the sentence *" The p.Lys618Ala variant was co-existent with pathogenic mutations in two unrelated LS families."* generated by the Stanford Parser. Such a graph preserves the rich semantic structure of a sentence, and has been widely regarded as an informative way of presenting a sentence. A detailed explanation of the relative constituents in the graph can be found in [13]. However, the point is to transfer only human-readable sentences to a computer-understandable data structure. The general idea would be to feed this graph into a learning algorithm and classify relations based on similarity to the sentence graph in the training set. Different approaches exist for this process. Turku Event Extraction System (TEES)[2], for instance, engineers a feature vector which consists of token features(part-of-speech tags and character constituents for each word), sentence features(bag-of-words counts), and graph-based features(dependency path represented as N-grams) and builds a multi-class SVM model with the feature vector[5]. In this project, we decide to use the *Shortest Path Hypothesis*[7], namely the heuristic that the relation between two entities in

[2]https://github.com/jbjorne/TEES

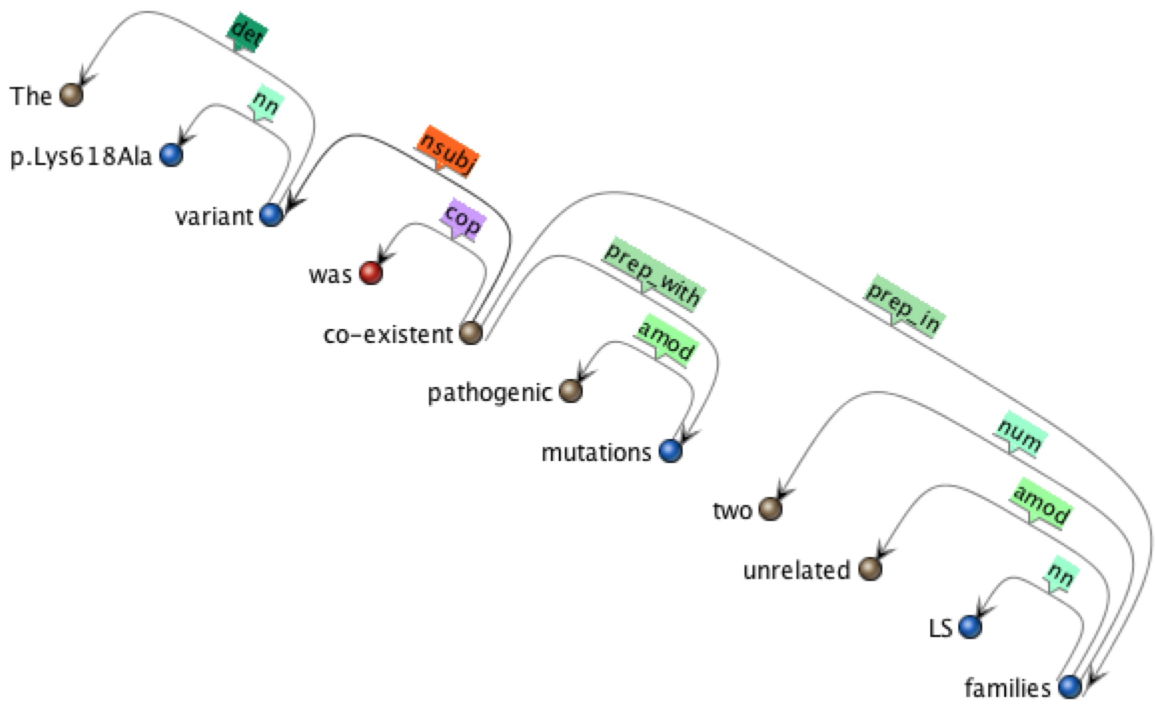


Fig. 3.1 Dependency Graph of “ The p.Lys618Ala variant was co-existent with pathogenic mutations in two unrelated LS families.”

a sentence can be distilled from the shortest path between these entities in the undirected version of the sentence dependency graph. This effectively reduces the burden of feature engineering[22], but it also calls for high-quality training data. We believe that with effective parameter tuning and clever graph matching techniques, the shortest path can be a single standalone feature for a relation between two entities.

3.3 Approximate Subgraph Matching Algorithm

Disclaimer: As the Approximate Subgraph Matching system was originally developed for event extraction, it is more convenient to refer to the system as being learning “events”. By nature events are nothing more than complex relations between entities, which is exactly the rationale behind adapting such an event extraction system for relations extraction tasks. What was later done in the adaptation process was treating relation as a type of “event”. In this section, “relations” and “events” are used (somewhat) interchangeably.

The Approximate Subgraph Matching framework, proposed by Liu et al. [22] has the following work flow:

3.3.1 Prepossessing

As mentioned in section 2.1, in order to separate Named Entity Recognition from the Relation Extraction task, the named entity annotations are provided in training, development and test sets. The sentences are identified by the JULIE Sentence Boundary Detector[35], and parsed with the *clearnlp* parser [3][9]. The model for dependency parsing and part-of-speech tagging is trained on the CRAFT corpus [37].

3.3.2 Rule Learning

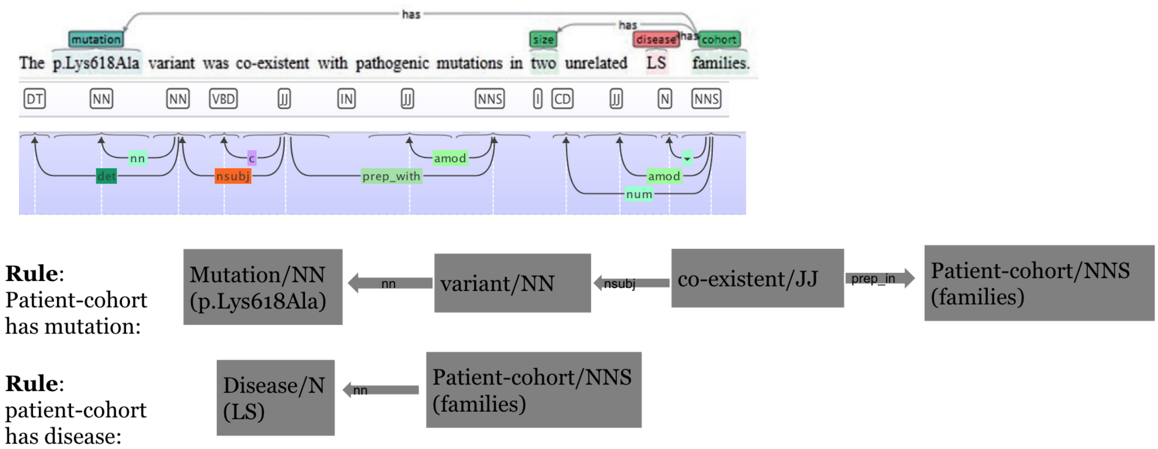


Fig. 3.2 Rules learned for " The p.Lys618Ala variant was co-existent with pathogenic mutations in two unrelated LS families."

For each annotated sentence in the training set, a dependency graph is generated and the nodes representing entities are marked. The entity tokens are then replaced with their entity types, such that the rules learned are about an the generic entity types (e.g. gene mutation) instead of specific entities (e.g. p.Lys618Ala), so that our model has a better ability to generalize as we might not see the specific entities again in the test set. Next, the graph is transformed to its undirected version and the shortest path between entities are found with Dijkstra algorithm. This path is leaned as a rule associated with the event type in the annotation as a rule corresponding to that event type. Figure 3.2 gives an example of

[3] https://code.google.com/p/clearnlp/

the learned rules for sentence *“ The p.Lys618Ala variant was co-existent with pathogenic mutations in two unrelated LS families.”* This kind of instance-based learning can be effective provided there is enough training data[1]. A set of rules would then be learned for each event type, representing the graph patterns that indicating a specific type of event.

3.3.3 Sentence Matching

The rules generated from the previous step could, in theory, be used to match sentences. For each sentence in the test set, a dependency graph can be generated together with the entity annotations(these are provided, as discussed). The graph can be searched exhaustively looking at the path(s) between each entity tokens, for an exact match with one or more rules within the rule set. This step is know as searching for exact subgraph isomorphism. Figure 3.3 gives an example of Exact Subgraph Matching(ESM).

However, the above-mentioned matching approach would invariably lead to low recall,

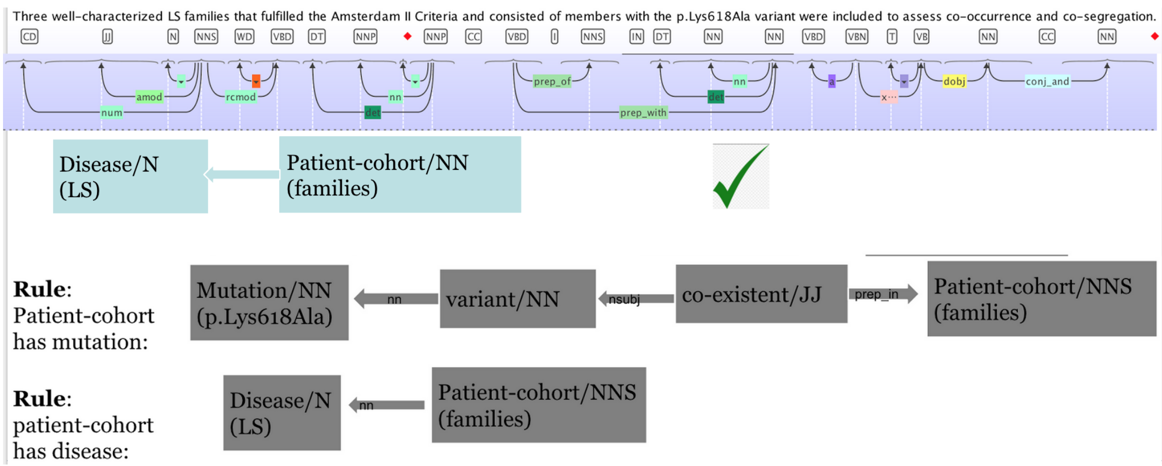


Fig. 3.3 Exact Subgraph Matching

as the richness of language can almost always produce slightly different dependency graph structure representing exactly the same events between the same entities. For instance, Figure 3.4 shows a scenario where *patient-cohort has mutation* should be extracted as an event of interest, but there is a slight mismatch in the subgraph patterns. This leads to the rationale behind approximate subgraph matching, which relaxes the matching process and allows for a penalty-based matching. The formula for calculating subgraph distance is:

$$
\begin{aligned}
GraphDist(SentenceGraph, RuleGraph) = \\
w1 \times structDist(SentenceGraph, RuleGraph) + \\
w2 \times labelDist(SentenceGraph, RuleGraph) + \\
w3 \times directionalityDist(SentenceGraph, RuleGraph)
\end{aligned} \tag{3.1}
$$

structDist is the structural difference between two subgraphs denoted by the distance between each pair of matched nodes. *labelDist* and *directionalityDist* are the difference in edge labels and edge directions respectively[22].

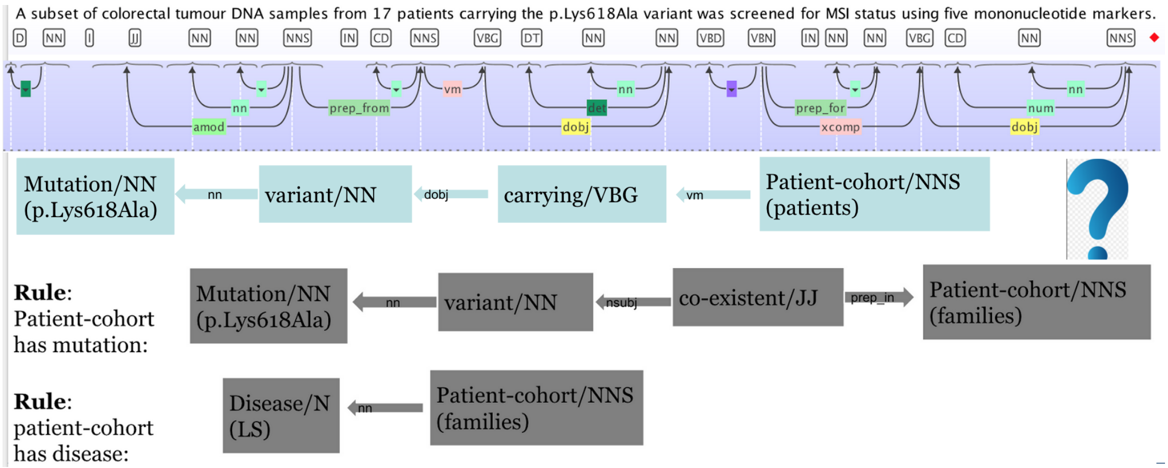


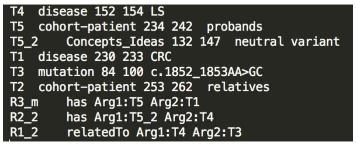
Fig. 3.4 Approximate Subgraph Matching

3.3.4 Rule Optimization

To avoid learning the idiosyncrasies in the training data, an iterative rule set optimization process is executed. After the initial learning phase, each rule in the rule set is tested first on the training data to see if it get produce accurate enough predictions (above 0.25). The low performing rules are discarded as a consequence.

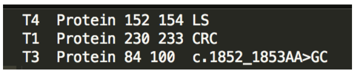
3.4 System Adaptation

As mentioned in 1.3, the project aims at adapting an existing event extraction system on relation extraction tasks. The existing ASM system was developed for the BioNLP Shared Task 2011 and 2013.



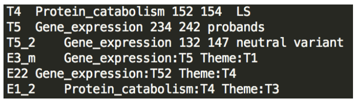
```
T4  disease 152 154 LS
T5  cohort-patient 234 242  probands
T5_2    Concepts_Ideas 132 147  neutral variant
T1  disease 230 233 CRC
T3  mutation 84 100 c.1852_1853AA>GC
T2  cohort-patient 253 262  relatives
R3_m    has Arg1:T5 Arg2:T1
R2_2    has Arg1:T5_2 Arg2:T4
R1_2    relatedTo Arg1:T4 Arg2:T3
```

(a) before : ann



```
T4  Protein 152 154 LS
T1  Protein 230 233 CRC
T3  Protein 84 100  c.1852_1853AA>GC
```

(b) after: a1



```
T4  Protein_catabolism 152 154  LS
T5  Gene_expression 234 242 probands
T5_2    Gene_expression 132 147 neutral variant
E3_m    Gene_expression:T5 Theme:T1
E22 Gene_expression:T52 Theme:T4
E1_2    Protein_catabolism:T4 Theme:T3
```

(c) after: a2

Fig. 3.5 Changing Annotation Format

BioNLP shared Task series is a community-wide text mining challenge specifically for biomedical literatures. The GE task in shared task 2013 aims at retrieving events of the following format: The *.a1* files list all the entities as in Figure 3.5b, the *.a2* files list all the event triggers, followed by events as in Figure 3.5c. An entity is annotated with its ID, entity type, text offsets, and the textual token. The same goes for triggers. Events are annotated as a relation between the event trigger and one or more entities.

Figure 3.5a shows the *Variome Annotation Format*. Different from the shared task, all the annotations would be in one *.ann* file, with entities annotated the same way as in the shared task, and relations similar to events. However, relations do not have triggers at all. This distinction became a major challenge for this project. During the duration of this project, most of my attempts to fully adapt the system to relation extraction tasks have failed. In essence, the differentiation in the retrieval process lies in the event retrieval relies on the detection and prediction of a trigger word, where as the relation extraction does not.

My only attempts that worked was transforming the annotation format of the Variome Corpus to that of the BioNLP Shared Task 2013, such that the original system would not break. The transformation is illustrated in this tables. The "has" relationship is transformed to "gene regulation" event, and "relatedTo" relationship is transformed to "Phosphyrilation" event, with the entity annotation slightly too. The entities would be of type "Protein" instead of the original entity types in the Variome Corpus. **The major bottleneck for this adaptation work is that the original system includes a hard-coded trigger detection and prediction process.** As for events detecting trigger words such as "activates" for gene expression is an important step for prediction. However, this process is not included at all in the event prediction process and to cope with the original system I had to add "fake triggers" for these events. As a result, the first entity of each event/relation annotation is added as the trigger for the notation.

As shown in Figure 3.5, the original Variome Annotation file (.ann) is splitted into two files(.a1 and .a2), The code checks if the entity exist in any event annotations. If not, the annotation will be ignored such as $T2$. Next the code checks if the annotation is a first argument or second argument. If the annotation is the first argument, it is treated as an event trigger, such as $T4, T5, T5\_2$. The trigger annotations are above the event annotations in the .a2 file where as the other entity annotations are in the .a2 file. After this first attempt I had a few better ideas to add fake triggers, the best one being adding the entity types (patient-cohort), with parenthesis directly after the entity tokens and do a binding event. Due to the time constraints and these ideas being essentially fool's gold, I did not implement these ideas.

3.5 Results

Table 3.2 Overall Result

Relation Type	Gold	Answer	Match	Precision	Recall	F1-score
has	1711	1310	402	0.3069	0.2350	0.2661
relatedTo	157	1498	36	0.0240	0.2293	0.0435
TOTAL	1868	2808	438	0.1560	0.2345	0.1874

The overall result of the system is shown in table 3.2, the main reason the system is not performing well is that it is not predicting the triggers words correctly, because I have chosen to treat entity annotations as triggers. Trigger prediction is usually treated as a classification problem where for every token in the test sentence, a score is assigned for labeling it as trigger for each event type.

Another important reason is the entity type is quite different from the proteins as proclaimed.

Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion

We have explored the possibility of adapting an event-extraction system in relation extraction tasks for the Variome Corpus.

4.2 Contributions

The contributions of the research in this thesis are as follows:

- *The first attempt to use the system outside original system developers.* While this may seem like an easy task, a lot of the time for this project has been devoted to resolving dependencies, and debugging scripts to first have an end-to-end system, even for the original shared task data set.
- *The first attempt for literature mining of the Variome Corpus.* To our knowledge, this is the first text mining attempt to the Variome Corpus.

4.3 Future Work

4.3.1 Full System Adaptation

Given the nature of the existing software system, in effect I wrote an adapter for the Variome Corpus, transforming the Variome Corpus Annotations to a format that the ASM system can work with. This is, of course, far from the best solution. However, the ASM system was originally developed solely for an event extraction shared task under time constraints, without much expectation that the system might be adapted on day. As a result, the system annotation format hard-coded in strings and a lot of implicit programming logic such as the involvement of trigger spread out across many different methods, to the extent that all of my efforts to change the code have failed. The main reason for the failure is my inability to detect all the methods and classes where changes should be made, resulting in unexpected system behavior. While is natural and understandable for academic software like this to be one-and-done after use in the shared task, I think it is in the interest of future system users and developers to have a well-documented, adequately extensible system in place, with room for tweaking algorithms and file formats with parameters. Ideally, the shortest path kernel will expose interfaces to users, allowing them to adjust what is happening under the hood with a few parameters. For instance, the existence of trigger should be optional and can be set with a parameter applied to the both the rule learning process and event extraction process. In fact, even in the shared task 2013, the existence of trigger for events like relations or coherence is optional. Next, annotation format should be parametrized, and the system should establish a relationship between user-defined entity and relation types its the entity and relation class. Moreover, the named entity recognition could be a dispatchable unit of the system too, with options to use user-given entities or the output of a named-entity recognizer. A perfect scenario would be one in which the user can input a configuration schema indicating annotation formats, entity types, entity output(whether from the annotation file or from a named entity recognizer), event/relations types and the location of textual data. That way the system can be used for different kinds of tasks, possibly even beyond the domain of biomedical text mining and provide valuable feedback for the plausibility of the approximate subgraph matching paradigm.

4.3.2 Relation Type Fine-Tuning

Currently, the system only has two relations types, a “has” relation and a “relatedTo” relation. However, a patient-has-disease relation is semantically quite different from a gene-has-mutation relation, despite both of them being chunked to a single relation type called “has”. One might be tempted to have fine-grained relation types and incorporate the entity types into the relation, such as a separate “patient-cohort-has-disease” and a separate “gene-has-mutation” instead of a “has” relation for both. Nevertheless, this would cause the training set to become extremely sparse and the system learning behavior could change drastically. The correlation between granularity of event types and system performance has yet to be explored.

4.3.3 The Parser Effect

This project uses the exact same preprocessing pipeline as [23]. However, MacKinlay et al. [23] concluded that changing the parser from the one originally used in [22] has limited recall to an effect that can not be offset by increasing the amount of training data. It was suggested that the longer dependency graph produced by the *clearnlp* parser is harder to generalize. The effect of parser on relation extraction task for the Variome Corpus is yet to be investigated. Again, the parser should be a loosely coupled component of the system too, such that the effect of different dependency parsers can be explored more easily.

4.3.4 Parameter Tuning

Once with an end-to-end system running on the Variome Corpus, the parameters such as subgraph weights, thresholds, rule set optimization aggressiveness need to be tuned for the training set and test parameter tuning on the test set.

4.3.5 Combination of Kernels

A significant limitation of the ASM based approach is the lower recall compared with other systems. Successful general literature mining at the semantic level might require a combination of many approaches. The shortest path kernel should be a loosely coupled component of the system and replaceable or by other kernels or a combination of kernels.

4.3.6 The Abstract Effect

Many earlier biomedical text mining approaches only process abstracts of articles. The rationale is that abstract would contain a summary of the whole article and the important relations that it contains. In the Variome Corpus the full-text articles are splitted into sections such as abstract, introduction, conclusion, etc. With this in mind, one might be careful in how to distribute data for training, development and testing to avoid over-fitting in the future.

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