

PRACTICAL ARTIFICIAL COMMONSENSE

Practical Artificial Commonsense

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Abstract

While robots and software agents have been applied with spectacular success to challenging problems in our world, these same successes often translate into spectacular failures when these systems encounter situations that their engineers never conceived. These failures stand in stark contrast to the average person who, while lacking the speed and accuracy of such machines, can draw on commonsense intuitions to effortlessly improvise novel solutions to unexpected problems. The objective of artificial commonsense is to bring some measure of this powerful mental agility and understanding to robots and software systems.

In this dissertation, I offer a practical perspective on the problem of constructing systems with commonsense. Starting with philosophical underpinnings and working through formal models, object-oriented design and implementation, I revisit prevailing assumptions with a pragmatic focus on the goals of constructing effective, efficient, affordable and real commonsense reasoning systems.

I begin with a formal analysis—the *first* formal analysis—of the Symbol Grounding Problem, in which I develop an ontology of representational classes. This analysis serves as motivation for the development of a hybrid reasoning system that combines iconic and symbolic representations.

I then proceed to the primary contribution of this dissertation: the development of a framework for constructing commonsense reasoning systems within constrained time and resources, from present-day technology. This hybrid reasoning framework, named *Comirit*, integrates simulation, logical deduction and machine learning techniques into a coherent whole. It is, furthermore, an open-ended framework that allows the integration of any number of additional mechanisms.

An evaluation of Comirit demonstrates the value of the framework and highlights the advantages of having developed with a practical perspective. Not only is Comirit an efficient and affordable working system (rather than pure theory) but also it is found to be more complete, elaboration tolerant and capable of autonomous independent learning when applied to standard benchmark problems of commonsense reasoning.

Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where referenced or acknowledged, this dissertation and the research described within are entirely my own work.

No part of this dissertation has been previously submitted towards the award of a degree at any institution.

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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Research Context	13
3.	Intelligent Systems and Symbol Grounding	57
4.	Inside Comirit.....	77
5.	Representations	89
6.	Control.....	125
7.	Learning and Control	163
8.	Evaluation	183
9.	Conclusion and Future Work.....	225
	Bibliography.....	237
A.	Summary of the Z Notation	251

Extended Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	1
1.1.	Contributions	2
1.2.	Significance	5
1.3.	Thesis and Method	8
	1.3.1. <i>Theory of Analysis for Symbol Grounding</i>	9
	1.3.2. <i>Theory of Design and Action for Commonsense Reasoning</i>	9
1.4.	Scope Limitations	9
1.5.	A Note on Notation	10
1.6.	Dissertation Outline.....	11
2.	Research Context	13
2.1.	Defining Commonsense.....	14
	2.1.1. <i>Origins</i>	15
	2.1.2. <i>Modern Definitions</i>	16
	2.1.3. <i>Defining Commonsense as a Dimension of Intelligence</i>	18
	2.1.4. <i>Practical Approaches towards Defining Commonsense</i>	19
2.2.	Evaluating Commonsense Systems	20
2.3.	The Rule-based Legacy	24
2.4.	Early History and Context.....	28
2.5.	Analyzing Current Systems.....	30
2.6.	Analysis of Current Approaches.....	32
	2.6.1. <i>Universal Theories: AI_ξ, AI_ξ^{nl} and Gödel Machines</i>	33

2.6.2.	<i>Logical Learners: Advice Taker</i>	34
2.6.3.	<i>Logical Formalisms: Situation Calculus and Action Logics</i>	35
2.6.4.	<i>Semi-Formal Methods: Cyc, Project Halo and Semantic Web</i>	37
2.6.5.	<i>Cognitive Architectures: ACT-R and Soar</i>	38
2.6.6.	<i>Fuzzy Reasoning: NARS, Probabilistic and Bayesian Logics</i>	40
2.6.7.	<i>Human-Inspired Mechanisms: Qualitative Reasoning, Analogical Reasoning, Scripts and Case Based Reasoning</i>	41
2.6.8.	<i>Evolutionary Learning: Novamente and Discovery Systems</i>	42
2.6.9.	<i>Corpus-Based Methods: OMCS and MindPixel</i>	44
2.6.10.	<i>Connectionist Methods: Creativity Engine and China-Brain</i>	45
2.6.11.	<i>Biological Simulation: Blue Brain</i>	46
2.6.12.	<i>Faking it: Eliza and Chatterbots</i>	48
2.6.13.	<i>Rejecting it: Reactive Systems</i>	49
2.7.	Research Gap	51
2.8.	Integration Architectures	52
2.9.	Conclusion	54

3. Intelligent Systems and Symbol Grounding 57

3.1.	Symbol Systems and Symbol Grounding	59
3.2.	Notational Preliminaries.....	61
3.3.	Semantic Interpretability.....	63
3.4.	Representational System Classes	65
3.4.1.	<i>Context-Free Semantically Interpretable Representation</i>	66
3.4.2.	<i>Semantically Interpretable Representation</i>	67
3.4.3.	<i>Iconic and Symbolic Representation</i>	67
3.4.4.	<i>Distributed Representation</i>	68
3.4.5.	<i>Unconstrained Representation</i>	69
3.4.6.	<i>Non-Formal</i>	70
3.5.	Discussion	71
3.6.	Implementing Frameworks	72
3.7.	Conclusion	74

4. Inside Comirit 77

4.1.	What is Comirit?	78
4.1.1.	<i>What is the Comirit Design?</i>	79

4.1.2.	<i>What is the Comirit Framework?</i>	79
4.1.3.	<i>What is a Comirit System?</i>	79
4.1.4.	<i>What is a Comirit Embedding?</i>	80
4.2.	Design of the Comirit Framework	81
4.3.	Representations	82
4.4.	Control.....	84
4.5.	Control and Learning.....	86
4.6.	Conclusion	88
5.	Representations	89
<hr/>		
5.1.	Why Simulation?.....	90
5.1.1.	<i>Advantages and Compromises</i>	93
5.2.	Connections to the Literature	94
5.2.1.	<i>Early Applications of Simulation</i>	95
5.2.2.	<i>Analogies between Simulation and Established Practice</i>	97
5.2.3.	<i>Qualitative Simulation</i>	97
5.2.4.	<i>Other Applications of Simulation</i>	98
5.2.5.	<i>On the Limited Application to Commonsense</i>	98
5.2.6.	<i>Recent Developments</i>	99
5.2.7.	<i>A Note of Caution Regarding Mental Imagery</i>	100
5.3.	Concept.....	100
5.3.1.	<i>Parts of a Simulation</i>	101
5.3.2.	<i>System Clock</i>	101
5.3.3.	<i>Graph Representation</i>	102
5.3.4.	<i>Annotations</i>	105
5.3.5.	<i>Constraints</i>	106
5.4.	Example	111
5.4.1.	<i>Modeling Principle</i>	111
5.4.2.	<i>Graph Representation and Annotations</i>	112
5.4.3.	<i>Constraints</i>	112
5.4.4.	<i>Discussion</i>	116
5.5.	Implementation	117
5.5.1.	<i>Object Oriented Implementation</i>	117
5.5.2.	<i>Optimization</i>	118
5.6.	General Applicability	120
5.7.	Limitations and Challenges.....	121

5.7.1.	<i>Deductive Inflexibility</i>	121
5.7.2.	<i>Control Languages</i>	122
5.7.3.	<i>Tool Support</i>	123
5.8.	Conclusion	124

6. Control 125

6.1.	Connections to the Literature	126
6.1.1.	<i>Integration Techniques</i>	127
6.1.2.	<i>Logical Attachments</i>	128
6.1.3.	<i>Tableau Systems</i>	129
6.2.	Concept.....	134
6.2.1.	<i>Formal Definition</i>	134
6.2.2.	<i>Illustrative Example</i>	138
6.3.	Implementation.....	140
6.3.1.	<i>Object Oriented Design Principles</i>	142
6.3.2.	<i>Object Oriented Design</i>	143
6.3.3.	<i>Implementing Simple Rules</i>	150
6.3.4.	<i>Meta-Rules and Cost-based Heuristics</i>	152
6.4.	Discussion	155
6.4.1.	<i>Design Objectives</i>	155
6.4.2.	<i>Bridging the Iconic/Symbolic Divide</i>	157
6.4.3.	<i>Tableau-based Queries</i>	159
6.5.	Conclusion	160

7. Learning and Control 163

7.1.	Inspiration.....	164
7.2.	Models of Machine Learning.....	166
7.3.	Concept.....	166
7.4.	Example	169
7.5.	Implementation.....	172
7.5.1.	<i>Framework Implementation</i>	172
7.5.2.	<i>Implementing Learners</i>	173
7.6.	Discussion and Future Work.....	177
7.6.1.	<i>Cuts</i>	177
7.6.2.	<i>Factoring</i>	178

7.6.3.	<i>Complex Learning Signals and Control Theory</i>	179
7.7.	Conclusion	180
8.	Evaluation	183
<hr/>		
8.1.	Capabilities.....	184
	8.1.1. <i>Principled Design</i>	185
	8.1.2. <i>Benchmark Evaluation: Representations</i>	186
	8.1.3. <i>Benchmark Evaluation: Control</i>	197
	8.1.4. <i>Benchmark Evaluation: Learning and Control</i>	202
	8.1.5. <i>Correspondences</i>	212
8.2.	Cost-Effectiveness.....	217
	8.2.1. <i>Extrapolation from Prototypes</i>	217
	8.2.2. <i>Costs of Similar Efforts</i>	219
8.3.	Non-speculative Technologies	221
	8.3.1. <i>Technologies in the Design</i>	221
	8.3.2. <i>Prototypes</i>	222
8.4.	Conclusion	222
9.	Conclusion and Future Work	225
<hr/>		
9.1.	Dissertation Objectives	226
	9.1.1. <i>Primary Contribution</i>	226
	9.1.2. <i>Secondary Contributions</i>	228
	9.1.3. <i>Research Gap</i>	229
9.2.	Future Work	231
	9.2.1. <i>Formal Foundations</i>	231
	9.2.2. <i>Framework Formalization</i>	232
	9.2.3. <i>Framework Design</i>	233
	9.2.4. <i>Framework Implementation</i>	234
	9.2.5. <i>Applications</i>	234
9.3.	Final Thoughts.....	235

A.	Summary of the Z Notation	251
A.1.	A 60-second Summary.....	252
A.2.	Mathematical Toolkit.....	252
	<i>A.2.1. Logical Relations</i>	253
	<i>A.2.2. Quantifiers</i>	253
	<i>A.2.3. Set and Tuple Constructors</i>	254
	<i>A.2.4. Function and Sequence Constructors</i>	254
	<i>A.2.5. Set Operators and Relations</i>	255
	<i>A.2.6. Function and Tuple Operators</i>	256
	<i>A.2.7. Numbers</i>	256
A.3.	Type and Schema Declarations	257

List of Figures

2.1.	Systematic trade-off.....	51
4.1.	Virtual meal.....	83
4.2.	Virtual meal with spillage.....	83
4.3.	Tableau reasoning (bus versus tax).....	85
4.4.	Tableau-based learning (hard versus soft).....	87
5.1.	Game screen-shots	91
5.2.	Facsimile of Gardin and Meltzer.....	95
5.3.	Facsimile of Gardin and Meltzer.....	96
5.4.	Example multi-graph	103
5.5.	Example business multi-graph	104
5.6.	Example annotations	107
5.7.	Parts of a simulation	113
5.8.	Simulated spill.....	116
5.9.	Simulation class diagram	118
6.1.	Disjunction versus conjunction rule.....	130
6.2.	Worked tableau example	132
6.3.	Worked tableau example	133
6.4.	Set-based disjunctive normal form	138

6.5.	Hybrid reasoning with a mug of coffee	141
6.6.	Class diagram for the Comirit Framework.....	144
7.1.	Worked example of tableau learning	171
7.2.	Class diagram for learning.....	172
8.1.	Egg Cracking Problem: initial conditions	187
8.2.	Egg Cracking Problem: simulations	189
8.3.	Egg Cracking Problem: elaborations	189
8.4.	Simulation of liquid flow	195
8.5.	Eating on an Airplane Problem: initial conditions	200
8.6.	Eating on an Airplane Problem: tableau analysis	201
8.7.	Toys in the virtual toy box	205
8.8.	Evaluation procedure for virtual toy box.....	207
8.9.	Single-instance learning rate	208
8.10.	Self-organizing map learning rate	210
8.11.	Gärdenfors' cognitive framework.....	214

List of Tables

1.1.	Applications of commonsense reasoning	6
2.1.	Measures for evaluation	23
5.1.	Annotations on a mass-spring simulation	113
6.1.	Key-matching.....	147
8.1.	Comparison with Morgenstern	194
8.2.	Knowledge about the Egg Cracking Problem found in ConceptNet	196
8.3.	The labor involved in developing prototypes of Comirit	218

