

# INFORMATION EXTRACTION FROM BIOMEDICAL TEXT: THE BIOTEXT PROJECT

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## Abstract

We study information extraction for identifying protein-protein interactions stated in biomedical text. In this paper, we present an architecture for an information extraction system and discuss our improvements and results pertaining to several components of the system, including information retrieval, named entity recognition, syntactic analysis, and domain analysis. The individual results are discussed in the context of the whole system, and domain adaptations and differences from classical approaches are considered. We combine structural natural language processing with machine learning methods to address the general and domain-specific challenges of information extraction targeting protein-protein interactions.

**Keywords:** biomedical literature mining, information retrieval, named entity recognition, word sense disambiguation, parsing, parse ranking

## 1. Introduction

The amount of published knowledge in the biomedical domain is overwhelming and grows at an unprecedented rate. Although many databases collecting biomedical knowledge exist, their coverage is limited and manual identification of e.g. protein-protein interactions requires significant human effort. Freeform text remains a main source of information and thus Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Information Extraction (IE) methods are required to facilitate automated processing and structured access to the knowledge. The BioText project aims at developing NLP methods and resources for biomedical text mining as well as adapting existing methods to take into account the specific properties of the biomedical text domain. This paper gives an overview of our approach, the developed methods and the key results of the project.

Our overall goal is the development of a modular system that processes biomedical text, such as abstracts contained in the PubMed literature database, and extracts the protein-protein interactions stated therein. The system consists of the following major subsystems: Information Retrieval (IR), Named Entity (NE) recognition, syntactic analysis, and pattern-based domain analysis. We apply machine learning approaches such as Bayesian classification, Support Vector Machines (SVM) (see e.g. Vapnik 1998) and Regularized Least-Squares (RLS) (see e.g. Poggio and Smale 2003) as well as



## 4. Named entity recognition and disambiguation

NE recognition can be divided into two subtasks: determining the boundaries of the NEs and classifying the entities into classes such as genes and proteins. Both problems can be addressed using Word Sense Disambiguation (WSD) methods. Much of the ambiguity in biomedical text is caused by inconsistent or non-existent naming conventions. Further, capitalization and other surface clues are not reliable indicators of entities in the domain. For example, there exist *Drosophila* gene names such as *white* and *cycle* which can be confused with the ordinary meanings of these words. We use machine learning methods with particular focus on kernel-based learning algorithms (see e.g. Schölkopf and Smola 2002) to address the problem of WSD.

In Ginter et al. (2004a), we introduced a statistical classification method and a weighted bag-of-words representation, where the context words are weighted so that the words located closer to the ambiguous word receive higher weights. The new method was shown to improve the classification performance in gene/protein name disambiguation from 79% to 82% accuracy.

We have adapted the weighted bag-of-words approach for SVM classifiers and applied them to the problem of gene/protein name disambiguation, improving the performance, measured as the area under the ROC curve (AUC), from 80% to 85% (?). We have also introduced a position-sensitive kernel function which generalizes over the ordinary bag-of-words, position-sensitive bag-of-words and weighted bag-of-words approaches (Pahikkala et al. 2005b). Considering context-sensitive spelling error correction as a WSD problem, it was demonstrated that the position-sensitive kernel improves the performance of the SVM classifier from 94% to 98% (AUC). The results reflect the difficulty of the biomedical disambiguation tasks as well as demonstrate the applicability of the method to other domains.

In Pahikkala et al. (2005a), we further analyze this kernel function and construct smoothed word position-sensitive as well as smoothed word position- and distance-sensitive representations of our training data using kernel density estimation techniques (see e.g. Silverman 1986). For the Naïve Bayes classifier, these representations were used to obtain class-conditional probabilities of word-position features. We demonstrate with the Senseval-3 data that the kernel improves the classification performance of SVMs compared to the ordinary Bag-of-Words kernel and furthermore improves the classification performance of the Bayes classifier given the kernel-smoothed data representation.

## 5. Syntactic analysis

In this section, we present our choice of parser and the architecture of the syntactic analysis component. We also illustrate our use of machine-learning methods to improve the performance of a parser based on a hand-written grammar.

### 5.1. Parser

Our analyses suggest that general English parsers may not be well applicable to biomedical English, and that adaption to the domain is required (Pyysalo et al. 2004: 2005). Moreover, a statistical inference of the domain grammar is infeasible as the amount of treebank data in the domain is very limited—the largest domain treebank is the GENIA

treebank<sup>1</sup> with 1700 sentences. This motivates the choice of a parser based on a hand-written grammar that can be manually adapted to the domain; in the BioText project, we have decided to use the Link Grammar (LG) parser of Sleator and Temperley (1991). The LG parser is a full dependency parser with broad coverage of newswire English. LG has recently received significant attention in the Bio-NLP domain, see for example Alphonse et al. (2004).

The architecture of our syntactic analysis component built around LG is as follows. First, the input sentences are tokenized in a separate tokenization step: The tokenization model originally used by LG was found unsuitable for many common features of biomedical text and replaced with an external tokenization system. After tokenization, we have chosen to augment the parsing system with separate preprocessing and postprocessing stages. In preprocessing, input sentences are simplified by replacing detected NEs with single tokens recognized by the parser, as well as by removing citations and other features for which the parser has no support and which can be naturally captured using regular expressions. Postprocessing is applied after parsing to restore the original sentence text. To improve the applicability of LG to the biomedical domain, we have implemented a number of the modifications proposed in Pyysalo et al. (2004). While the work on parser adaptation is still undergoing, preliminary evaluation suggests that the implemented modifications increase the fraction of recovered correct dependencies from 73% to 78% in the parse ranked first by the built-in heuristics of the LG parser. The parser generates all the alternative parses allowed by the grammar; the respective improvement for the best generated parse is from 82% to 89%.

The domain analysis is performed on the first parse returned by the syntactic analysis component. We have found that the heuristic parse ranking of LG often performs poorly, failing to rank the best parses first. To address this issue, we are developing a machine-learning approach for parse ranking that is applied after post-processing.

## 5.2. Parse ranking

The task of recognizing the best parses among a set of alternative parses for a single sentence can be cast as a ranking problem. We are currently developing a ranking machine based on the RLS algorithm. Our methodology couples RLS, different ranking performance measures and grammatically motivated features. To convey the most important information about parse structure to the ranking machine, we apply features such as grammatical bigrams, link types (the grammatical roles assigned to the links), a combination of link length and link type, part-of-speech information, and several additional attributes. Each parse is assigned a penalty based on the number of incorrect links. We are also studying a scoring approach where additional information about link types is used in penalization.

The developed method, Regularized Least-Squares Ranking (RLSRa), is a special case of ordinal regression where performance evaluation is based on the rank correlation measure of Kendall (1970), scaled between zero and one. Preliminary evaluation of RLSRa against LG parser built-in heuristics indicates a performance improvement from 55% to 70% using our method. Furthermore, RLSRa provides a reliable ranking solution in application to sparse biomedical datasets.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www-tsujii.is.s.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~genia/topics/Corpus/GTB.html>

## 6. Domain analysis

To extract factual knowledge from the parsed sentences, we are developing a set of hand-written patterns. Each pattern specifies a substructure of the linkage (the graph that represents an LG dependency parse) that is likely to state a protein-protein interaction. A successful match of a pattern in a linkage corresponds to an identified interaction. We chose to create high-precision patterns to minimize the number of false positive matches. High precision typically implies low recall; however, due to the large amount of published literature, the system can be given more than one opportunity to extract most of the interactions as they are likely to be stated in several publications. Processing more data can thus diminish the low recall problem to some extent.

The choice of parser has an obvious influence on the nature of the patterns and the formalism in which the patterns are expressed. Since we chose a full dependency parser, it is natural to represent both the linkage and the patterns in terms of relations on the set of words and link types. This representation is naturally and straightforwardly expressed in a declarative language such as Prolog. Each linkage and each pattern are thus described as a set of predicates, and the unification mechanism of Prolog provides the pattern matching mechanism.

## 7. Conclusions and future work

We have described our work in biomedical IE, presented the architecture of an IE system targeting protein-protein interactions, and discussed each of its components. For each part of the system, we have presented our approach, summarizing improvements and key results. Currently, we are focusing on finishing the domain adaptation of the syntactic analysis component and the development of IE patterns. The implementation of an integrated system that combines the discussed components remains future work.

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