Classifying Search Engine Queries Using the Web as Background Knowledge

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2. RELATED WORK
Capturing the intended meaning of a search query with the help of word sense disambiguation has been heavily investigated. Early studies (see [12] for a complete overview) have found no or only little improvement in precision. Word sense disambiguation is often resolved implicitly when queries are sufficiently long; in these rare cases, the additional words provide sufficient context to resolve the intended meaning. Web search queries most often contain only two or three words and the work of Schütze and Pederson [13], Gonzalez et al. [9] and Stokoe et al. [14] demonstrates that word sense disambiguation can improve information retrieval.

A different line of research focuses on interactive query expansion or query reformulation. Bruza and Dennis [4; 6] develop a hyper-index to provide the user with query reformulation recommendations. Anick and Tipirneni [3] develop an interactive query refinement system that is based on the analysis of semantically related lexical compounds. Allan and Raghavan [2] refine query semantics with the use of part-of-speech patterns and formulate clarification questions for the user. Glance [8] studies a collaborative recommendation system that records the queries of all users and supports new searches by recommending related query strings of other users.

Clustering the set of search results is another way to deal with query ambiguity: ideally, ambiguous queries result in multiple clusters that reflect the possible interpretations of the query. After a topic insensitive web search the results are clustered based on content [5; 16; 11] and link structure [15].

Our solution is based on a taxonomic mapping between a web directory and the subject taxonomy. Integrating objects from one taxonomy into another has been studied by different authors. Agrawal and Srikannt [1] develop an enhanced naive Bayes algorithm that is based on the intuition that if two documents share their category in one taxonomy, they are likely also share their category in another taxonomy. Zhang and Lee [17] use a similar approach in combination with Support Vector Machines; in addition, they develop a co-bootstrapping method. Instead of exchanging objects between taxonomies Doan et al. [7] learn a direct mapping between taxonomy nodes using the joint distribution of concepts. All those approaches require a substantial number of training examples in the
source as well as in the target taxonomy. In our case, the web directory provides an abundance of filed web pages whereas there are only 111 example queries and no example documents for the subject taxonomy.

3. PROBLEM SETTING
The problem that we address is driven by the intuition that a significant aspect of the semantics behind a search query can be captured by identifying likely nodes in a subject taxonomy. An instance of the query categorization problem is described by an arbitrary but fixed subject taxonomy. The nodes are named (e.g., living, entertainment, sports for first level, living/pets and animals, sports/olympic games for second level nodes and so on), and their semantics are primarily characterized by these names. In addition, example queries that are labeled with nodes may be available that exemplify search queries for documents within these categories.

For the KDD Cup 2005, a two-level taxonomy of 67 nodes is provided together with a total of 111 example queries; each of these 111 queries is manually tagged with up to five nodes in the taxonomy. An example excerpt of these data is displayed in Table 1. The example queries are not guaranteed to be drawn from the same distribution that governs the evaluation data. From this input, a classifier has to be obtained that automatically labels new queries with one or several nodes of the taxonomy. The subject taxonomy can be assumed to be fixed (over a reasonable period of time) for any given problem instance. Therefore, it is reasonable to allow for some manual involvement over the process of generating a classifier. The classifier, on the other hand, has to work automatically and be efficient in order to process a large volume of queries posted to a search engine. For the KDD Cup, a set of 800,000 hold-out queries are available. For a subset of these queries (it has been unknown which subset), manually annotated labels are available. A natural performance criterion to be maximized is the F-measure, the harmonic mean of classification precision and recall. In addition, a second sub-task of the Cup is to maximize precision, subject to the constraint that the F-measure be within the ten highest values for F-measure obtained by all submissions. This criterion is difficult to maximize because it requires a conjecture about the submissions of competitors.

4. CLASSIFICATION ARCHITECTURE
The classification system that we devise consists of a component that searches a given query in a web directory; we use the Google directory search interface that searches the open web directory Dmoz.org. This component generates an ordered list of categories of the web directory. In general, the categories of the web directory will be distinct from the subject taxonomy that defines the query categorization problem instance at hand. Therefore, a second component of the architecture maps directory categories to nodes of the subject taxonomy. Web directories tend to be large and manually mapping each of their nodes to a node of the given subject taxonomy is impractical; we therefore construct a tool that supports a semi-automatic mapping.

Given a query, the third component processes the sorted list of categories returned by the web directory search component, consults the mapping component to translate these into nodes of the subject taxonomy, and combines all information into probability scores for the nodes of the subject taxonomy. This component conjectures the final result of up to five nodes in the subject taxonomy that maximize either the F-measure, or the precision at a desired minimum F-measure level.

4.1 Web Directory Search
This component of our classification architecture searches a web directory—we use the Domz.org web directory—for the query. The component preprocesses the query by first removing search options (e.g., "filetype:" from the query string, and then posts the query to the Google directory search which scans the Dmoz directory for occurrences of the query within the Dmoz categories. The web directory searching component processes the first 100 search results and transforms them into an ordered list of those directory categories that the 100 retrieved documents are classified into. Note, however, that the Dmoz taxonomy (or any other web directory) is generally distinct from the given subject taxonomy; in our case the KDD Cup taxonomy.

The web directory searching component exploits two additional features of the Google directory search service. Google suggests alternative queries that in many cases correct spelling errors in the posted queries ("did you mean: ... "). The web directory searching component always accepts these suggestions which in many cases improves the results on misspelled search queries. Google directory search also provides a list of "related categories" along with the search results. These related categories are stored and influence the final weighting process.

4.2 Semi-Automatic Category Mapping
The taxonomy of the web directory generally differs from the subject taxonomy that defines the instance of the query classification problem. The category mapping component of our classification architecture therefore translates the directory taxonomy into the subject taxonomy.

The subject taxonomy is characterized by the descriptive names of its nodes and very few example queries—for many nodes, only a single exemplifying query is available in the KDD Cup data. The web directory taxonomy, on the other hand, is defined by the collection of web pages filed under each node in addition to the descriptive name of each node. Given the salient role played by the descriptive names in the subject taxonomy and given the substantial size of the Dmoz web directory that contains thousands of nodes, a semi-automatic mechanism is advised. Fully automatic learning of a taxonomy mapping is an elegant alternative path that can be taken when sufficiently many example queries for both taxonomies are available—in our case, a total of 111 training examples renders this approach little promising.

We manually assign directory categories to categories of the subject taxonomy by inspecting the web directory up to the second level, in some branches to the third or forth level where a finer granularity is needed. Bounding the depth for the manual inspection is necessary to keep the task manageable. Each directory node is assigned up to three categories of the subject taxonomy, resulting in an \( n : m \) mapping between the taxonomies. Some examples of the resulting mapping table are shown in Table 2.

The web directory organizes country specific pages in the
same structure as the main taxonomy. They can be reached from the main taxonomy under the regional branch. Because the regional information is not relevant for the categorization the path nodes that correspond to regional information get removed, so that the regional directory nodes are projected onto the non-regional parts of the main taxonomy. For example, the category regional/Europe/Germany/health is treated like health.

When a node of the web taxonomy is mapped to a node of the subject taxonomy then, by default, its entire subtree is mapped to the same node. This default behavior is overruled when nodes within that subtree are explicitly mapped to a distinct node of the subject taxonomy.

The manual mapping of the first two (partially up to four) levels of the taxonomies imposes the risk of missing relevant nodes hidden deeper in the hierarchy. On the other hand, constructing a mapping for thousands of nodes is cumbersome. We develop an automatic recommendation system that provides suggestions for correspondences of deeper categories. We define a characteristic query for each category of the subject taxonomy; e.g., information/law & politics is assigned the query “legal OR politics”. The mapping recommendation system posts these queries to the web directory search engine; the categories of retrieved web pages are added to a candidate list of recommended mappings.

After manually inspecting these recommendations for the KDD Cup task and accepting some 200 of them, we obtain a mapping that entails 763 rules following the schema visualized in Table 2.

### 4.3 Generating a Final Conjecture

The web directory searching component returns for each query \( q \) an ordered list of up to 100 web directory categories \( C'(q) \), we denote the elements of \( C'(q) \) as \( c'_j \). The mapping component maps a web directory category \( c'_j \) to a list of subject taxonomy categories \( M(c'_j) \) whose elements we write as \( c_j \). Conversely, let \( M^{-1}(q,c_j) \) be the ordered subset of \( C'(q) \) whose elements \( c'_j \) have \( c_j \) in their assigned subject taxonomy nodes; i.e., \( M^{-1}(q,c_j) \subseteq C'(q) \) with \( c'_j \in M^{-1}(q,c_j) \) if and only if \( c_j \in M(c'_j) \). The ordering of the elements of \( M^{-1}(q,c_j) \) is equal to their ordering in \( C'(q) \).

Equation 1 defines the weight that associates the query \( q \) to subject taxonomy category \( c \).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{w}(q,c_j) = f_1(c_j)f_2(q) \sum_{c'_k \in M^{-1}(q,c_j)} f_3(q,c'_k) \alpha_k^{d_1(c'_k)} \alpha_k^{d_2(c'_k)-d_1(c'_k)}
\end{align*}
\]

The terms of the weighting function are defined as follows. Many technical decisions were made according to preliminary experimental studies. The weighting parameters \( \alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_s \) are determined through an iterative procedure.

Starting with intuitive values, we repeatedly pick one of those parameters and manually adjust it to achieve optimal accuracy on the training set while holding the others fixed.

- Regularization term \( f_2(c_j) = \alpha_1 \) if \( c_j \) is an “other” category (e.g., sports/other), and 1 otherwise. This factor compensates for the disproportionally large number of

### Table 1: Examples of the training queries with first two categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Query</th>
<th>Subject taxonomy node 1</th>
<th>Subject taxonomy node 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bank loans</td>
<td>living/finance &amp; investment</td>
<td>information/companies &amp; industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bar exam result</td>
<td>information/law &amp; politics</td>
<td>living/career &amp; jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bassett hound dogs</td>
<td>living/pets &amp; animals</td>
<td>information/science &amp; technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beginner guitar</td>
<td>entertainment/music</td>
<td>information/education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behr paint color samples</td>
<td>living/furnishing &amp; houseware</td>
<td>shopping/buying guides &amp; researching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing 2008</td>
<td>sports/Olympic Games</td>
<td>information/local &amp; regional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bench grinders</td>
<td>living/tools &amp; hardware</td>
<td>living/landscaping &amp; gardening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bowling clip art pictures</td>
<td>entertainment/pictures &amp; photos</td>
<td>sports/other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Examples of the taxonomy mapping after applying the semi-automatic assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Web directory taxonomy node</th>
<th>Subject taxonomy node 1</th>
<th>Subject taxonomy node 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>health</td>
<td>living/health &amp; fitness</td>
<td>living/health &amp; fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health/animal</td>
<td>living/pets &amp; animals</td>
<td>living/pets &amp; animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health/beauty</td>
<td>living/fashion &amp; apparel</td>
<td>living/health &amp; fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health/medicine</td>
<td>living/health &amp; fitness</td>
<td>information/science &amp; technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health/medicine/employment</td>
<td>living/career &amp; jobs</td>
<td>information/education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health/mental health/humor</td>
<td>entertainment/humor &amp; fun</td>
<td>information/education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health/nursing/education</td>
<td>living/health &amp; fitness</td>
<td>information/education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health/search engines</td>
<td>information/references &amp; libraries</td>
<td>living/health &amp; fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health/weight loss/low fat cooking</td>
<td>living/food &amp; cooking</td>
<td>living/food &amp; cooking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
these categories in the manual mapping. In our setting, $\alpha_1$ is empirically adjusted to 0.5.

- Prior adjustment term $f_2(i) = \alpha_2 \log \#\text{Results}(q)$, where $\#\text{Results}(q)$ is the total number of results returned by the web directory search engine for query $q$. A higher total number of results implies better quality of the top 10 result and so our intuition is that the category associations of queries with more search results should influence the result stronger; $\alpha_2$ is set to 1.05.

- The $f_3(q, c_j)$ term is defined as $f_3(q, c_j) = \alpha_3 r(q, c_j)$ if $r(q, c_j) < 10$, and $\alpha_3^{10-\max(r(q, c_j), 10)}$ otherwise, where $r(q, c_j)$ is the position of $c_j$ within the result list of the web directory search engine. This term reflects the relevance of the results for the query, as the search engine sees it. The relevance of a result degrades exponentially with its rank within all results, for the first 10 results with decay factor $\alpha_3$ (we choose $\alpha_3 = 0.9$), and for subsequent results with decay factor $\alpha_4 > \alpha_3$ ($\alpha_4 = 0.97$). In addition, $f_3(q, c_j)$ allows to integrate the “related categories” because Google directory search retrieves in addition to the ranked list of matching pages. Web directory categories that have been obtained in such a way are weighted with a factor of $f_3(q, c_j) = \alpha_5 = 1.1$.

- The factor $\alpha_6$ accounts for the redundancy in multiple web directory taxonomy categories that are mapped to the same subject taxonomy category. Any result for $c_j$ beyond the first provides less new information than the preceding ones, so the exponential decay factor of $\alpha_6$ is applied, which we set to 0.9.

- Two depth parameters account for the depth $d_1(c_j)$ of the left hand side of the mapping rule that maps $c_k$ to its counterparts in the subject taxonomy, and the depth $d_2(c_j)$ of $c_j$ itself in the web taxonomy. The term $\alpha_7 d_1(c_j)$ reflects the higher confidence in mapping rules for more specialized branches of the hierarchy. For instance, the application of the rule with left-hand side arts/performing arts/acting/actors and actresses yields a higher confidence in the resulting taxonomic category than the application of the rule with left-hand side arts. Experiments with the training set indicate $\alpha_7 = 1.3$ as a good value.

The difference $d_2(c_j) - d_1(c_j)$ measures the number of taxonomic levels that separate a web taxonomy node from its matching rule. For instance, if the category health/nursing/employment gets matched with the rule health → living/health & fitness, two excess levels are ignored which reduces the quality of the resulting category set. The decay factor is set to $\alpha_8 = 0.8$.

The final classification conjecture for a query $q$ is based on three factors: firstly, the weights $w(q, c_j)$ for each category $c_j$. Secondly, the rank $r_w(q, c_j)$ of category $c_j$ is the position at which $c_j$ occurs when all categories are ordered according to $w(q, c_j)$. Thirdly, an additional margin criterion that measures the distance between the weights of $c_j$ and the next likely category; $\delta(q, c_j) = w(q, c_j) - \max_{c: w(q, c) < w(q, c_j)} \{w(q, c)\}$.

We determine the category weights $w(q, c_j)$ for all training queries $q$ and fit a logarithmic curve to the data to model the probability $P(c|w(q, c_j))$. Figure 1 shows the empirical data and the fitted curve; queries are grouped into equally sized batches. We estimate the discrete distribution $P(c_j|r_w(q, c_j))$ from the training data, Figure 2 shows the result.

![Figure 1: Relation between category weight $w(q, c_j)$ of a query-category pair and its probability of correctness $P(c_j|w(q, c_j))$ on the training data.](image1)

![Figure 2: Relation between category rank $r_w(c_j)$ and its probability of correctness $P(c_j|r_w(c_j))$ on the training data.](image2)
because $\nabla F(\theta) = \frac{\delta F}{\delta TP}(\theta)\frac{\delta TP(X = 1)}{\delta FP(\theta)} + \frac{\delta F}{\delta FP}(\theta)\frac{\delta TP(X = 0)}{\delta FP(\theta)}$ and for $X = 0$ only the one with respect to FP is relevant. TP and FP are the number of true positives and false positives respectively. We get Equation 5 by substituting $P(X = 1) = \theta + \epsilon$ and $P(X = 0) = 1 - (\theta + \epsilon)$.

$$\nabla F(\theta) = \lim_{\epsilon \to 0} E[F(\theta + \epsilon) - F(\theta)]$$

$$= \lim_{\epsilon \to 0} \left[ P(X = 1) \frac{\delta F}{\delta TP}(\theta) + P(X = 0) \frac{\delta F}{\delta FP}(\theta) \right]$$

$$= \lim_{\epsilon \to 0} \left( \theta + \epsilon \right) \frac{\delta F}{\delta TP}(\theta) + \left( 1 - \left( \theta + \epsilon \right) \right) \frac{\delta F}{\delta FP}(\theta)$$

$$= \theta \frac{\delta F}{\delta TP}(\theta) + \left( 1 - \theta \right) \frac{\delta F}{\delta FP}(\theta)$$

With Equation 6 we determine the direction of search from each new threshold value $\theta$ and conduct a binary search. In each search step the search space is halved and the direction of search is determined through the F-gradient.

For the precision task we need to specify a minimum F-measure that we want to achieve. For finding the best precision we start with a threshold $\theta = 1$ and step down in sufficiently small steps until the minimum F-measure is reached.

5. EVALUATION

The trade-off between F-measure and precision, dependent on the probability threshold $\theta$, is visualized in Figure 3. The hill climbing procedure described in Section 4.3 successfully finds the maximum F-measure at 0.51. Table 3 gives an overview of the different solutions of our team and the winning team. We can see that the F-measure performance of our submission on the held out data set that is used for the competition result is lower (0.41) than the estimation on the training data. In this case measuring the performance on the 111 training examples can only be used as a rough estimate of the actual performance. The winning solution for the F-measure task of the winning team reaches 0.44; our submission of 0.41 is rated second best and receives the Runner-Up Award.

For the precision task we have to make a guess at the F-measures of the competing teams as the goal is to achieve the maximum precision while remaining within the top ten F-measure submissions. We prepare two guesses, one with an F-measure of 0.29 and the other with an F-measure of 0.51 (same as the submission for the F-measure task) on the training data (see Table 3). Assuming that most competing teams would risk a high precision at a relatively low recall level, we decided to submit the first solution that achieves 75% precision on the hold-out data. Refuting our assumption, the ten teams whose solutions achieve the highest F-measure decide for more balanced solutions that outperform our F-measure without getting close to our precision. Our second guess of an F-measure of 0.41 and a precision of 45% would even have beaten the winning team’s submission of an F-measure of 0.43 and 42% precision. So the winning team not only had an excellent solution to the query categorization problem, but also solved the “poker playing” problem of predicting their competitors’ hands well.

Table 3: Performance measures of our and winning solutions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Evaluation data</th>
<th>F-measure</th>
<th>Precision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F-measure</td>
<td>our submission</td>
<td>training</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-measure</td>
<td>our submission</td>
<td>hold-out</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-measure</td>
<td>winner</td>
<td>hold-out</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>our guess 1 (submission)</td>
<td>training</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>our guess 1 (submission)</td>
<td>hold-out</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>our guess 2</td>
<td>hold-out</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>winner</td>
<td>hold-out</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Relation between F-measure/precision and the probability threshold $\theta$ estimated on the training data.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Extracting semantic information from search queries is important for a search engine to understand a user’s information need. Mapping a search query to a set of nodes of a subject taxonomy captures an aspect of that query’s semantics.

We devised an architecture that allows to map queries to an arbitrary subject taxonomy; the instantiation of the architecture to a given taxonomy requires manual effort that is supported by a tool that suggests translation rules from the web directory to the taxonomy. The architecture comprises of a web directory search component that determines a ranked list of categories of directory categories that are relevant to the query. A taxonomy mapping component translates these categories into (possibly multiple) nodes of the target taxonomy, and a conjecturing component combines this information into the final taxonomy categories. A logistic regression model trained with the MLtch software package combines the association weights between query and
taxonomy nodes, the ranking of the nodes, and a margin term into a probability used to determine the most likely nodes. The KDD Cup 2005 provides a benchmarking framework for the query categorization task. Our system achieved the second-highest F-measure among all participants; this argues that our system and architecture provide a good and appropriate solution to this problem.

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
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8. REFERENCES


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