



Natural Language and Dialog

Artificial Intelligence for
Interactive Media and Games

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1

Outline

- Computational theory of human language and dialog
 - background
 - terminology
- Language and dialog in games
 - current common industry practice
 - emerging trends
- Speech



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2

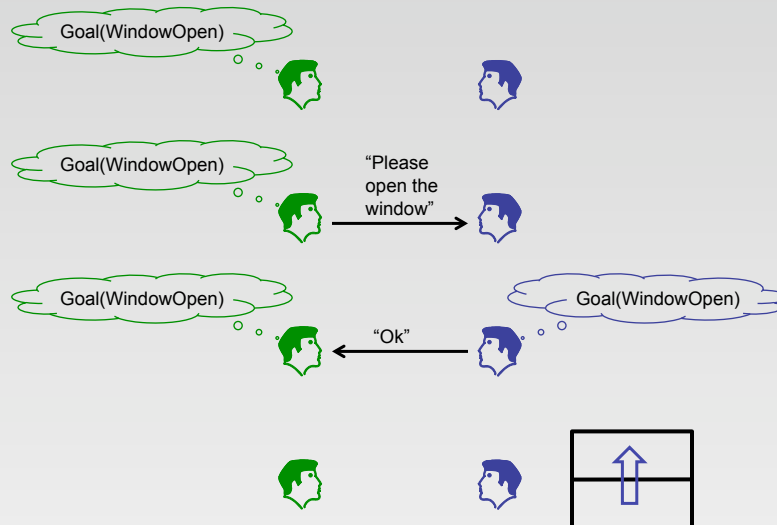
What is Dialog?

- a **conversation** between **two** participants
 - **verbal** communication
 - spoken or written
 - what about non-verbal components?
 - at least two **turns**
 - each turn consists of one or more **utterances**
 - not necessarily complete sentences
 - backchannels (uh-huh), overlapping, interruptions
 - what about more than two participants?
 - more complex turn-taking rules
 - dialog is a two-person **discourse**
- in a shared **context**
 - not just any random utterances
 - e.g., a story or collaboration

What is the Purpose of Dialog?

- **contributes** to participants' **goals** in the context
 - *example*
 - my goal (desired world state) is for the window to be open
 - I say "Please open the window" to person standing next to the window
 - if person is cooperative, she says "Ok"
 - she opens the window
 - is it still a dialog if she skips saying "Ok"?
 - yes, but a bit degenerate
 - notice interleaving/coordination of communication (utterances) and action (world state changes)

Cognitive Modeling of Dialog



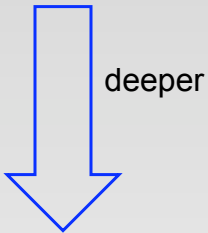
What is the *Immediate Purpose* of Dialog?

- the speaker is trying to achieve a change in the mental state of the hearer
 - emotional state
 - “your mother wears army boots”
 - “I love you”
 - beliefs
 - “roses are red”
 - “I’m scared”
 - goals (intentions)
 - “please open the window”
 - “don’t look in there”

What about Questions?

- “What time is it?”
 - speaker’s goal is to change his own mental state
 - to one in which he knows the time
 - speaker *could* achieve goal by looking at clock
 - but if no clock, can achieve goal indirectly
 - by changing mental state of hearer (with wrist watch)
 - to include goal of telling speaker the time
 - e.g., “Please tell me the time.”

Levels of Language Representation

1. Surface form (realization)
 2. Syntax
 3. Semantics
 4. Pragmatics
- 

many-to-one mappings from each level to next

- *multiple surface forms with same syntax*
- *multiple syntactic forms with same semantics*
- *etc.*

1. Surface Form (Realization)

- The sequence of words that are actually written, read, spoken or heard
- Two utterances, e.g., in two different languages, may differ only in their surface forms
 - *English*: “the roses are red”
 - *French*: “les roses sont rouges”

2. Syntax

- *Parsing (diagramming)* a sentence
 - *part of speech tags*: adjective, preposition, noun, etc.
 - *syntactic roles*: subject, verb, (direct/indirect) object, etc.

- “The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.”

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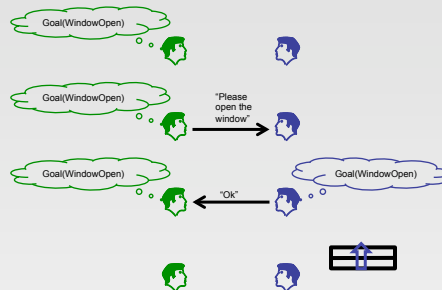
[S
  [NP The quick brown fox]
  [VP jumped
    [PP over
      [NP the lazy dog]]]]
  
```

3. Semantics

- The *meaning* of a sentence *in isolation*
- Much less standardized than syntax
 - frame-based semantics
 - logical (axiomatic) semantics
 - probabilistic semantics
 - etc., etc.
- Two sentences with different surface form and syntax may have same semantics
 - “John kissed Mary.”
[S [NP John] [VP kissed [NP Mary]]]
 - “Mary was kissed by John.”
[S [NP Mary] [VP was kissed [PP by [NP John]]]]
 - frame semantics:
{action: kiss, agent: John, theme: Mary, time: past }

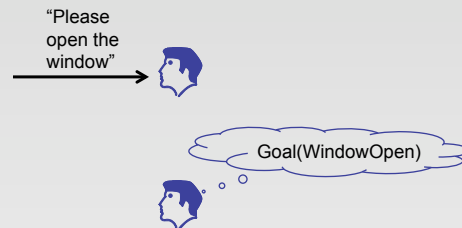
4. Pragmatics

- *Everything else* about how the utterance functions in its *context*
- Even less standardized than semantics
 - E.g., goal/belief modification semantics



Language Understanding

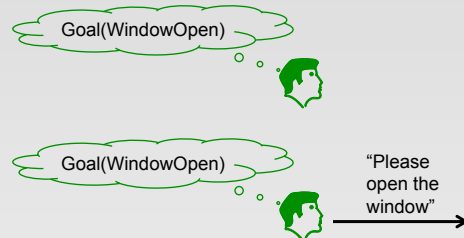
- Start with surface form
- Compute pragmatic function



- Perhaps mapping through syntactic and semantic forms along the way...

Language Generation

- Start with pragmatic (deep) representation
- Output surface form



- Perhaps mapping through semantic and syntactic form along the way...

Language Generation Challenges

▪ Expressiveness

- how to say the same thing with different styles, emotional content, etc.
- e.g., “Hello” vs. “Yo, dude”
- need computational theory which separates *style* and *content*

▪ Coherence

- generation needs to have wider window than single utterance
- planning a sequence of utterances (anaphora, etc.)

Dialog in Games

▪ In what genres is dialog most important?

- role playing games (RPG)
- text adventure (interactive fiction - IF)
- first person shooters (FPS)
- real-time strategy (RTS)
- sports? casual? serious? ...

Dialog between Whom?

- **player ↔ NPC**
 - main challenge and focus
 - “dialog trees” commonly used
- **NPC ↔ NPC**
 - player is bystander
- **player ↔ player**
 - e.g., in MMO’s
 - no problem for humans on both ends
 - system/NPC as bystander?

Player-NPC Dialog

- Two computational problems to solve
 - generating NPC utterances
 - understanding player utterances
- Dialog trees
 - common solution to *both at the same time*
 - all possible player and NPC utterances authored in advance
 - decision tree based on user choices

Dialog Trees

```

Speak("Welcome stranger. What brings thee among us gentle folk?")

reply = player.SpeakOption(
    1, "Yo dude, wazzup?",
    2, "I want your money, your woman and that chicken")

if reply == 1 then

    Speak("Wazzuuuuup!")

else if reply == 2 then

    Speak("Well, well. A fight ye wants, is it? Ye can't just go around
    these parts demandin' chickens from folk. Yer likely to get
    that ugly face smashed in. Be off with thee!")

end

```

[From Buckland, Chapter 6]



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21

Dialog Trees

- Advantages
 - *fast & flexible* – code can do anything
 - *reliable* – no misunderstandings
 - *expressive* – author has complete control to create desired style, character, atmosphere, etc.
- Disadvantages
 - restricts player
 - very labor intensive
 - doesn't scale well to complex interactions
 - must keep variability down to keep labor down
 - leads to lack of replayability
 - can help somewhat by designing special editors and engines for executing dialog trees



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22

Morrowind (TES) Dialog Editor

- database of utterances
 - organized around extensible set of “topics”
 - each utterance has conditions and results
 - including menu choices
 - simple templating via variables (name, etc.)
 - sort of like programming a rule-based system

<http://tommyshideout.net/files/srikandi/DialogueTut>



23

The screenshot shows the 'Dialogue' editor interface. On the left is a 'Topic' list with items like 'almoners', 'Background', 'Blades', etc. The main area is a table with columns: Info, Disp/Index, ID, Faction, Cell, Fun/Var 1, Fun/Var 2, Fun/Var 3, Fun/Var 4, Fun/Var 5. Below the table is a 'Speaker Condition' panel with dropdowns for ID, Race, Class, Faction, Rank, Cell, PC Faction, and PC Rank. A 'Result' field contains the text: 'playSound "mysticism h1" position:Cell, -115, -1064, 450, 135, "Neverland, Midnight Star Inn"'. On the right, there are buttons for 'Update Shared By', 'Journal Preview', 'Update HyperLinks', 'Error Check Results', 'Sound Filename', and 'OK'.

Text Adventure Games

- also called “interactive fiction” (IF)
 - confusing with “interactive drama” and “interactive storytelling”
- started with *Adventure* in 1975
 - Infocom’s *Zork* series in 70’s and 80’s
- Interactive Fiction Competition (2008)
- restricted syntax and semantics
 - few hundred standard verbs
 - open-ended nouns
 - simple (learned) command syntax
 - highly evolved set of ad hoc techniques



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25

Text Adventure Games

>WAIT

Time passes...

The scooter glides into the station's docking port. The retro-thrusters bring the scooter to a halt. As the docking port fills with air the scooter's hatch opens.

>LOOK

Scooter, in the pilot's couch

You are in the cramped one-man space scooter. Through the viewport, you see the docking port of Space Station BG-12. The scooter's hatch is open. You can see a toolbox here.

>OPEN THE TOOLBOX

You can't reach it from the pilot's couch.



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26

Text Adventures Games

>STAND UP

You are standing again.

>OPEN THE TOOLBOX

It's locked.

>LEAVE THE SCOOTER

Docking Port

This is the huge docking port of the space station. Only one ship is here at the moment, a one-man scooter, so the docking port seems unusually empty. A tube leads down toward the heart of the station,

>DOWN

Main Hallway, Sector M

This is the station's main corridor, which continues to port and starboard. A tube leads up toward the docking port.

Emerging Trends in Game Dialog

- Natural language understanding
 - replacing fixed menu choices
 - give player more flexibility to express herself
- Natural language generation
 - generating NPC utterances procedurally
 - reduces authoring labor
- Speech

Façade



<http://www.interactivestory.net>

(2005)

- State of the art in experimental game NLU
 - unrestricted text input
 - micro-domain (very constrained)
 - go directly from surface form to pragmatic effect
 - broad, shallow, author-intensive techniques
 - cheating strategies when doesn't understand

Façade – Surface Text Rules

- word spotting and pattern matching rules
 - *dialog acts* (pragmatic)
 - ("hello" | "hi") ["there"] → Hello
 - "grace" → Character(Grace)
 - Hello && Character(?char) → Greet(?char)
- example dialog acts:
 - Agree(?char), Disagree(?char)
 - Express(?char, ?emotion)
 - ReferTo(?char, ?object)

ANDI-Land



<http://www.andi-land.com>

“Logical Agents for Language and Action”,
M. Magnusson & P. Doherty,
Linköping U., Sweden, AIIDE’08

- restricted natural language text input
 - using context-free grammar
 - shows user possible syntactic completions as player types
 - underlying logical theorem-prover
 - all output generated procedurally

ANDI-Land

Magni: “Who owns the axe?”

↓ *parsing*

[S Who [VP owns [NP the axe]]]

↓ *semantic interpretation*

informRef(magni, value(12:15, owner(axe)))

↓ *theorem proving*

inform(magni, ld(value(12:15, owner(axe)), smith))

↓ *reversible grammar*

Smith: “I own the axe.”

ANDI-Land

Magni: "Sell the axe to me."

↓ *parsing*

[S [VP sell [NP the axe] [PP to me]]]

↓ *semantic interpretation*

$\exists t_1 t_2$ [Occurs(smith, (t₁,t₂), sell(axe, magni))]

↓ *theorem proving*

Committed(smith, t1, Occurs...) \wedge

Executable(smith, (t₁,t₂), sell(axe,magni)) \wedge

Believes(smith, t1, ActionId(sell(axe, magni), sell(axe, magni))) \Rightarrow

Occurs(smith, (t₁,t₂), sell(axe, magni))

Natural Language Generation



<http://www-scm.tees.ac.uk/f.charles>

- Generating NPC to NPC dialog for Interactive Storytelling
 - no pre-authored dialog
 - situations generated by autonomous planning agents
 - using logic and templates to generate surface forms

Speech

- Speech recognition
- Speech generation
- Speech in games
 - experiments with player speech input
 - NPC speech output almost always recorded

Speech Recognition

- widely available commercial systems
 - all based on HMM (Hidden Markov Models) trained on large corpora
 - built into Mac Leopard and Windows Vista [\[demo\]](#)
- easier vs. harder versions
 - isolated word vs. continuous
 - speaker trained vs. speaker independent
 - small vs. large vocabulary
 - grammar-based vs. dictation
 - push-to-talk vs. open-microphone

Speech Generation

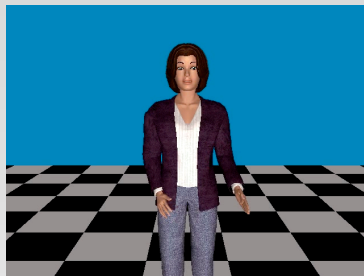
- text to speech
- widely available commercial systems
 - many different “voices”
 - never sounds as good as recorded voices, especially if mixed
 - built into Mac Leopard and Windows Vista [demo]
- two approaches
 - concatenative
 - chops up and stitches back together recorded voices
 - usually sounds pretty good
 - a lot of labor to produce each voice
 - model-based
 - uses mathematical model of vocal tract
 - easy to adjust parameters to get different voices
 - less natural sounding



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37

Emotional Speech Generation



- research of Catherine Pelachaud
- same words but different affect and gestures for different emotional states



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38

Lifeline



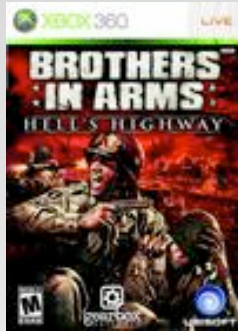
- Sony 2003
- single word commands
- not too successful
- speech on Wii recently announced
 - waiting for first games

Star Trek Bridge Commander



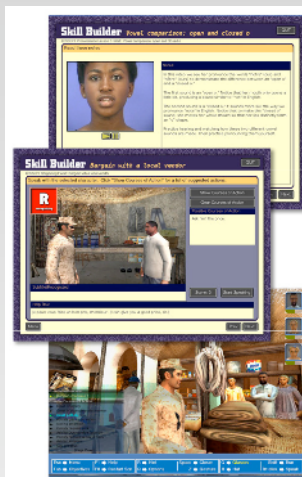
- Totally Games 2002
- more natural use of voice commands
- “shields up!”

Brothers in Arms – Hell's Highway



- Gearbox 2008
- more natural use of voice commands
- “follow me!”

Tactical Language



- 2008 spinoff of USC research
- very successful serious game

<http://tacticallanguage.com>

Summary

- Natural language and dialog in games
 - academic research techniques mature
 - a lot of interest at points of overlap between academia and industry (e.g., AIIDE)
 - initial experimentation in games mixed
 - potential for breakthrough application in games in next few years