



Natural Language and Dialog

Artificial Intelligence for
Interactive Media and Games

Professor Charles Rich
Computer Science Department
rich@wpi.edu

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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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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

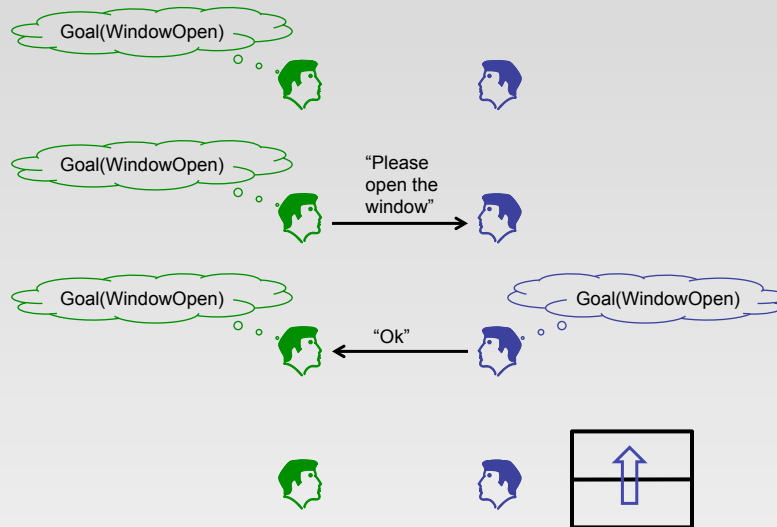


What is the Purpose of Dialog?

- **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, if she opens the window (nonverbal response)
 - 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, including:
 - 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”

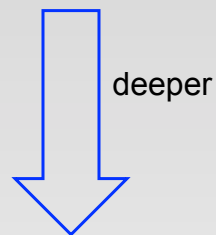
What about Questions?

- “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
 - in other words: “Please tell me the time.”

Levels of Language Representation

[0. Sound Waves (Speech)]

1. Surface Form (Words)
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

- The sequence of words that are actually written, read, spoken or heard
- Two utterances, e.g., in two different languages, may differ in their surface forms, but have the same meaning:
 - *English*: “the roses are red”
 - *French*: “les roses sont rouges”
- Or even in the same language:
 - *Active*: “John kissed Mary”
 - *Passive*: “Mary was kissed by John”

2. Syntax

- sequence of words → tree
- *Parsing* (“*diagramming*”) a sentence in terms of:
 - *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.”

```

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

3. Semantics

- The *meaning* of an utterance *in isolation*
- Much less standardized than syntax
 - frame-based semantics
 - logical (axiomatic) semantics
 - probabilistic semantics
 - etc., etc.
- Two sentences with different surface form and different 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 }

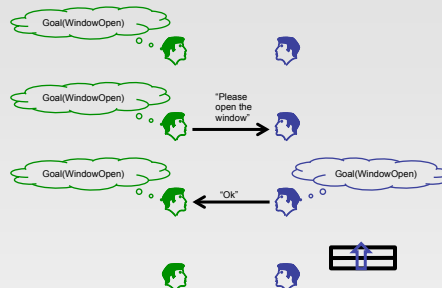


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4. Pragmatics

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

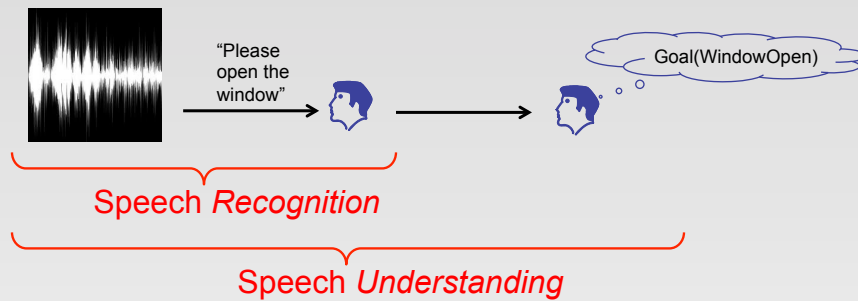


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(Spoken) Language Understanding

- Start with (sound wave or) words
- Compute pragmatic function



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

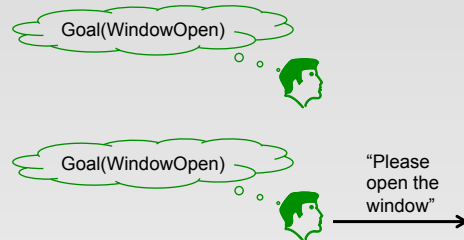


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Language Generation

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



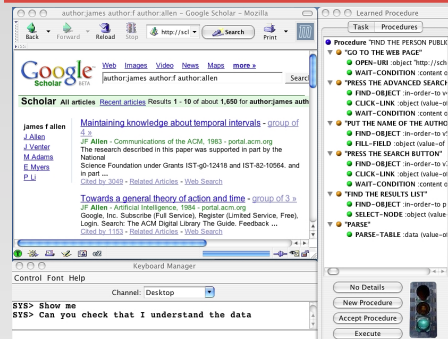
- (Perhaps) mapping through semantic and syntactic form along the way...



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State of the Art in Academic Research



<http://www.cs.rochester.edu/research/cisd/projects/plow/>

- unrestricted language (speech) understanding input
- constrained domain
- full syntactic parsing, semantic interpretation
- pragmatics
- general-purpose language generation

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State of the Art in Academic Research



http://ict.usc.edu/projects/responsive_virtual_human_museum_guides/C40

- unrestricted (spoken) language understanding input
- constrained domain
- statistical approach
- canned language generation (voice acting)

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Language Understanding Challenges

▪ Coverage

- you can make almost anything work if you restrict the domain enough
 - know all the words that will be used
 - know all the purposes (pragmatics)
- e.g., airline reservation system
- but not the Turing Test

▪ Semantics

- lack of agreement inhibits generalization and sharing of results

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 research 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 Tree implemented as script

```

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]

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



XML Dialog Tree

```

<say id="Shelter" actor="sidekick" text="Not so fast. I can't walk much further today, and the weather's getting worse">
<say actor="player" text="Okay. What should we do, then?">
<say actor="sidekick" text="We need to build a shelter for the night">
<say id="Floor" actor="player" text="Let's use pieces of that wreck to build a hut">
<say actor="sidekick" text="Okay, the floor is flat already, so what should we build first?">
<do task="BuildWalls">
<say actor="sidekick" text="Do we want pillars at the front?"
  applicable="!world.get('shack').hasPillar('right')>
<say actor="player" text="Sure, let's go for it">
<do id="Roof" task="BuildPillars">
<say actor="sidekick" text="Now all that's left is the roof!">
<do task="BuildRoof"/>
</say>
</do>
</say>
<say actor="player" text="No, let's not have pillars">
<say actor="sidekick" ref="Roof"/>
</say>
</say>
<do task="_Roof_tree"
  applicable="world.get('shack').hasPillar('right')>
<say actor="sidekick" text="Glad that's over!">
</do>
</do>
<do task="BuildPillars">
<say actor="sidekick" text="They look cool, but we definitely need walls">
<do task="BuildWalls">
<say actor="sidekick" ref="Roof"/>
...

```


[Disco for Games (D4g)]



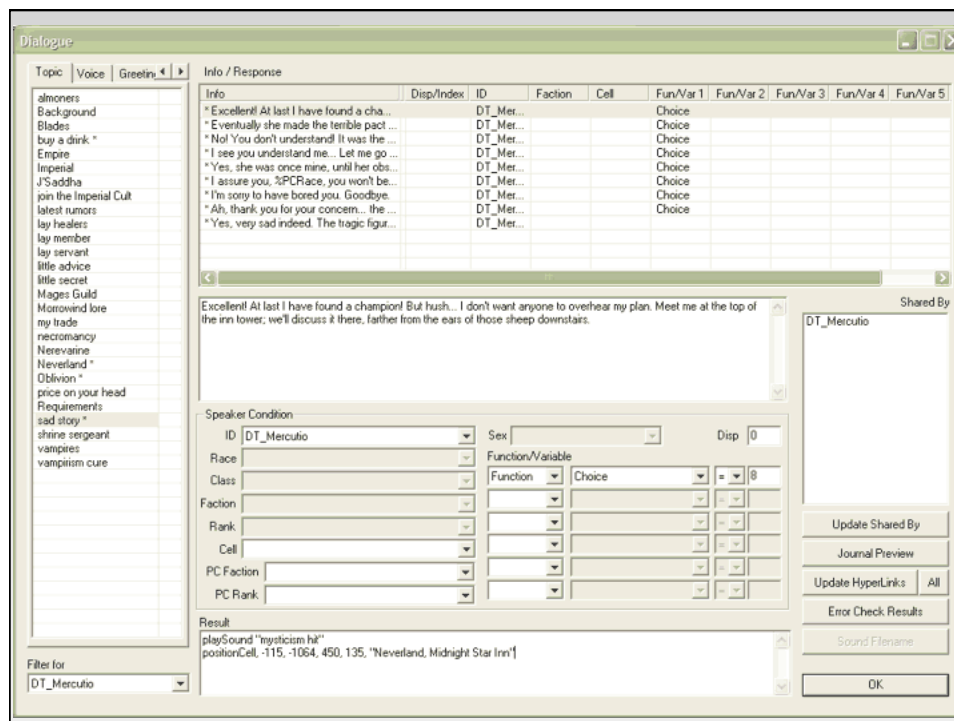
Morrowind (The Elder Scrolls) Dialog Editor

- 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>

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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
- annual Interactive Fiction Competition
- 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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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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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)

- “Classic” (but still state of the art) game experiment in text natural language understanding
 - 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

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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)



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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

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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.”



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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

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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 PCs and smartphones
- **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** (keyword spotting)

Speech Generation

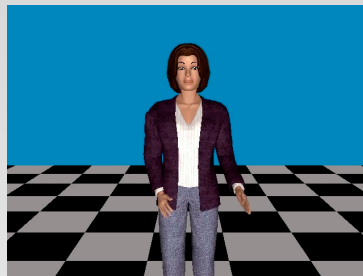
- text to speech
- widely available commercial systems
 - many different “voices”
 - never sounds as good as recorded voices
 - built into PCs and smartphones
- two approaches
 - concatenative
 - chops up and stitches back together recorded voices
 - usually sounds pretty good
 - a lot of labor to produce 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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Emotional Speech Generation



- research of Catherine Pelachaud
- same words but different sounds (and gestures) for different emotional states

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Clancy's EndWar



- Ubisoft 2009
- Andi-Land style menu, but using voice

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Mass Effect 3



- Ubisoft 2011
- Kinect voice recognition
- Voice selection from regular dialog menus

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Alelo Tactical Language



- spinoff of USC research
- very successful serious game

<http://tacticallanguage.com>

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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