Using inference to improve search on SAT problems

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Introduction

- SAT: propositional satisfiability problem
- Archetypal NP-complete problem (Cook, 1971)
- Numerous practical applications, including planning, quasigroup completion, and model checking
- My research: evaluating techniques for using inference to improve search

Satisfiable SAT instance

$$\begin{array}{ccc} a & \vee & \neg b \\ b & \vee & c \\ \neg c & \vee & d \end{array}$$

Alternative form:

$$\Sigma = (a \vee \neg b) \wedge (b \vee c) \wedge (\neg c \vee d)$$

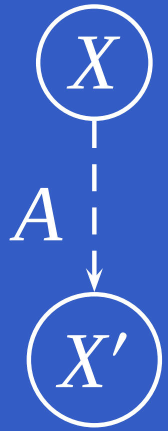
Satisfying assignment:

$$A = \{a \mapsto T,\;\; b \mapsto T,\;\; c \mapsto F\}$$

Solving SAT problems

- The Davis-Putnam method
  - Uses resolution to eliminate variables
- Resolution is intractable and impractical for many problems
  - E.g. *best* case exponential space complexity on pigeon-hole problems
- DLL (Davis-Logemann-Loveland)
  - Replaces resolution with branching
  - Complete backtracking search
  - Basis of the fastest available solvers

Assignment during search



- $X = (a \vee \neg b \vee \neg c)$
- $A = \{a \mapsto F,\ \ b \mapsto T\}$
- $X' = (\neg c)$

Example of unit propagation

Given:

- $X = (a \vee \neg b \vee \neg c)$
- $A = \{a \mapsto F,\ \ b \mapsto T\}$

We know that:

- $X' = (\neg c)$

It is obvious that we must assign c false:

- $A' = A \cup \{c \mapsto F\} = \{a \mapsto F,\ \ b \mapsto T,\ \ c \mapsto F\}$
- $X'' \mapsto T$

Evaluating unit propagation

- Unit propagation is an extremely worthwhile inference technique to add to a search procedure
    - Substantial pruning
    - Simple reasoning
- Implementation details have a massive impact on performance, even for a simple and effective technique such as unit propagation

Evaluating inference techniques

- When examining the potential worth of an inference technique, we need to compare:
  - How much of the search space will be pruned (the benefit)
  - How much time and space executing the technique will require (the cost)
- Some of this comparison can be done theoretically
- Implementation details cannot be avoided

Example of resolution

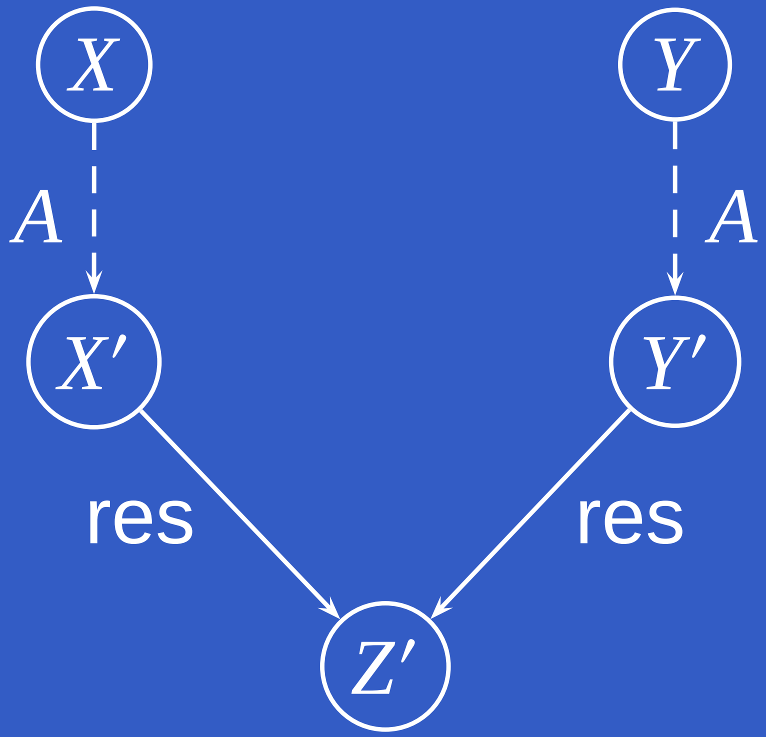
$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} & & a & \vee & c & \vee & \boxed{d} \\ & & \neg b & \vee & c & \vee & \boxed{\neg d} \\ \hline a & \vee & \neg b & \vee & c & & \end{array}$$

Example of neighbour resolution

- $X = (\neg a \vee \neg b \vee \neg c)$
- $Y = (a \vee \neg b \vee \neg c)$

$$\begin{array}{ccccc} \boxed{\neg a} & \vee & \neg b & \vee & \neg c \\ \boxed{a} & \vee & \neg b & \vee & \neg c \\ \hline & & \neg b & \vee & \neg c \end{array}$$

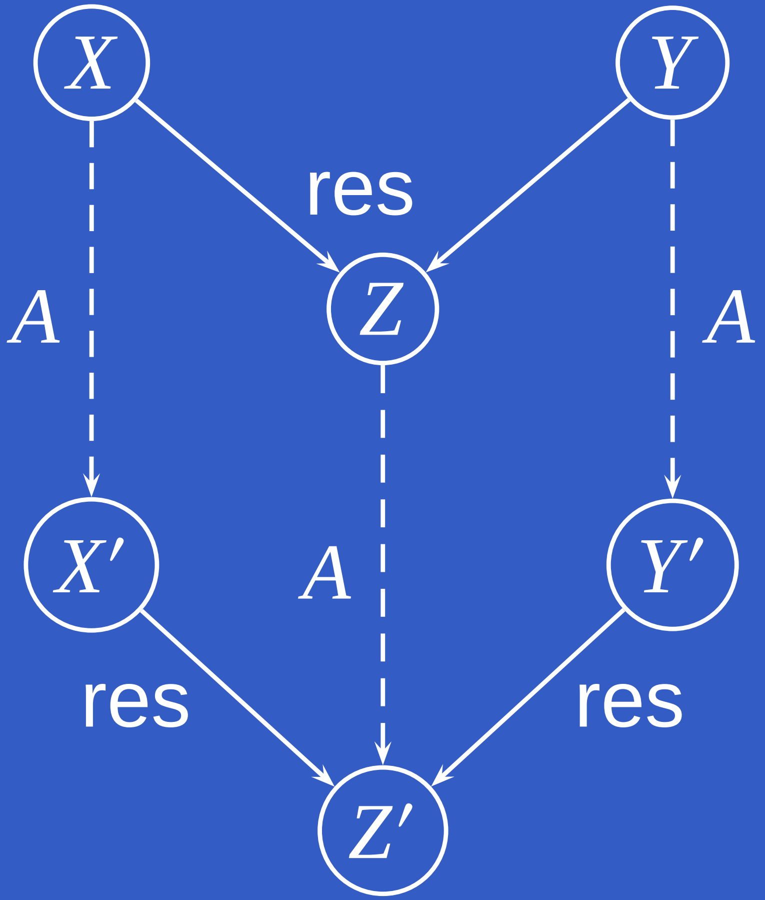
Neighbour resolution



Evaluating neighbour resolution

- Neighbour resolution during search significantly prunes the search space on many problems
- Identifying neighbouring clauses during search takes a great deal of time
- The time cost outweighs the benefit, meaning that this implementation of neighbour resolution during search is not practically beneficial

Preprocessing neighbour resolution



Evaluating preprocessing NR

- Not a completely correct simulation
- Works fairly well for some problem classes, but needs more work

Future work

- More theoretical evaluation
  - How much pruning?
  - How much work compared to unit prop?
  - Which instances respond to a technique?
  - Is it possible to identify an equivalent preprocessing technique?
- Efficiently combining nogood recording with other inference techniques
- Hyper binary resolution
  - Relationship between CSP encodings

Conclusions

- SAT is both theoretically interesting and practically important
- Inference can successfully augment search on SAT problems
- The challenge is to find inference techniques that are cost-effective

Related work

Combining resolution and search:

- Rish and Dechter. Resolution versus search: two strategies for SAT. In SAT2000, IOS Press, 2000.
- van Gelder. Satisfiability testing with more reasoning and less guessing. In Second DIMACS implementation challenge, 1995.
- Cha and Iwama. Adding new clauses for faster local search. In Proc AAAI-96, 1996.

Other worthwhile inference techniques

- Nogood recording
- Conflict-directed backjumping
- Equivalency reasoning
- Restrictions of resolution
- Hyper-resolution
- Variable probing

Future work: improved simulation

In our current implementation of simulated neighbour resolution:

- Subsumption during search is ignored
  - We can mark resolvent clauses and cheaply apply subsumption to just those clauses during search
- Extra resolvents (not corresponding to actual neighbour resolvents) are added
  - We can use knowledge of the branching heuristic to determine which resolvents correspond to actual neighbour resolvents

Future work: improved implementatio

- Neighbour resolution during search is slow because identifying neighbouring clauses is expensive
  - We have an improved algorithm for neighbour identification which we plan to implement
- It is not worth applying resolution to some problem classes (e.g. the JNH SATLIB instances)
  - We are developing syntactic methods for identifying some such problem classes

Future work: investigation

- If implied clauses are visible to the branching heuristic, the search tree may actually be grow instead of being pruned
  - We plan to investigate the effect of including the implied clauses, but making the branching heuristic ignore them

My other work

Investigating preprocessing techniques:

- Systematic comparison of existing techniques
- Selecting and evaluating novel techniques
    - E.g. taking first-order techniques and applying them to SAT problems