Synchronous Vector TAG for Syntax and Semantics: Control Verbs, Relative Clauses, and Inverse Linking

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Abstract

Recent work has used the synchronous tree-adjoining grammar (STAG) formalism to demonstrate that many of the cases in which syntactic and semantic derivations appeared to be divergent could be handled elegantly through synchronization. This research has provided syntax and semantics for diverse and complex linguistic phenomena. However, certain hard cases push the STAG formalism to its limits, requiring awkward analyses or leaving no clear solution at all. In this paper a new variant of STAG, synchronous vector TAG (SV-TAG), and demonstrate that it has the potential to handle hard cases such as control verbs, relative clauses, and inverse linking, while maintaining the simplicity of previous STAG syntax-semantics analyses.

1 Introduction

As first described by Shieber and Schabes (1990), synchronous tree-adjoining grammar (STAG) can be used to provide a semantics for a TAG syntactic analysis by taking the tree pairs to represent a syntactic analysis synchronized with a semantic analysis. Recent work has used the STAG formalism to demonstrate that many of the cases in which syntactic and semantic derivations appeared to be divergent could be handled elegantly through synchronization. This research has provided syntax and semantics for such diverse and complex linguistic phenomena as relative clauses\(^1\) (Han, 2006; Nesson and Shieber, 2006), nested quantifiers (Nesson and Shieber, 2006; Nesson and Shieber, 2007), wh-questions (Nesson and Shieber, 2006; Nesson and Shieber, 2007), in-situ wh-questions (Nesson and Shieber, 2007), it-clefts (Han and Hedberg, 2006), and topicalization (Nesson and Shieber, 2007). In these analyses the constraints of the tree-local or set-local MCTAG formalisms have played a critical role in permitting the available semantic readings while ruling out the unavailable ones. This research has demonstrated the value of synchronous grammars for characterizing the syntactic-semantic interface by showing how much more could be done using this simple mechanism than previously thought.

The analysis of nested quantifiers presented by Nesson and Shieber (2006) exemplifies this. Consider the sentence:

(1) Two politicians courted every person at some fundraiser.

We use the synchronous set-local MCTAG grammar in Figure 1 to analyze sentence (1).\(^2\) We depart from traditional TAG notation by labeling adjunction sites explicitly with boxed numbers. The node labels we use in the semantics indicate the semantic types of the phrases they dominate.

Although a nested quantifier may take scope over the quantifier within which it is nested (so-called “inverse linking”) not all permutations of scope orderings of the quantifiers are available (Joshi et al., 2003). In particular, the \textit{every} > \textit{two} > \textit{some} reading is ill-formed (Hobbs and
Figure 1: Grammar and derivation for sentence (1): “Two politicians courted every person at some fundraiser.” Note that we make use of a higher-order conjunction operation here (and elsewhere), which conjoins properties “pointwise” in the obvious way.

Figure 2: Synchronous TL-MCTAG grammar and derivation for sentence (2): “Every boy always wants to eat some food.”

Shieber, 1987), and the some > two > every reading, while formally expressible has been claimed to be not semantically available (Fodor, 1982; Horn, 1974). In our analysis, because the nested quantifier is introduced through the prepositional phrase, which in turn modifies the noun phrase containing the nesting quantifier, the two quantifiers already form a set that operates as a unit with respect to the rest of the derivation. Without any further stipulation, all and only the attested four readings are generated.

However, the simplicity and constrained nature of the STAG approach brings with it serious challenges of expressivity. Certain cases seem to require more flexibility than the previous analysis, couched in tree- and set-local MCTAG, provides. For instance, as mentioned above, some accounts (VanLehn, 1978; Hobbs and Shieber, 1987) indicate that a fifth scope reading is possible in sentences like sentence (1). We illustrate the limitations of STAG with two further examples involving the semantics of control verbs and relative clauses.

2 Difficult Cases for STAG Syntax and Semantics

The elegance of the STAG analysis is encouraging. However, certain cases seem to require more flexibility than the previous analysis, couched in tree- and set-local MCTAG, provides. For instance, as mentioned above, some accounts (VanLehn, 1978; Hobbs and Shieber, 1987) indicate that a fifth scope reading is possible in sentences like sentence (1). We illustrate the limitations of STAG with two further examples involving the semantics of control verbs and relative clauses.

2.1 Control Verbs

Consider the sentence:

(2) Every boy always wants to eat some food.
With appropriate context, sentence (2) can produce the scope ordering always > some > every > wants. However, a straightforward STAG analysis of the sentence produces a derivation that is incompatible with this reading. Both the derivation of the sentence and the elementary trees for wants and always are given in Figure 2. If always adjoins at link [1] and every adjoins at link [3] they become indivisibly attached to each other and some cannot intervene between them. If always adjoins at link [3] instead, the scope reading every > some > always > wants will be produced. But there is no way to generate the reading always > some > every > wants. In order to produce this reading the scope of every and the scope of always must be prevented from becoming attached to each other before they multiply adjoin with some at the root of eat.

2.2 Relative Clauses

Consider the sentence:

(3) John saw a soccer player whose picture every boy bought.

In this sentence every can outscope the implicit quantifier in whose, giving the reading where each boy bought a different picture of the soccer player. However, as shown in Figure 3, because every adjoins to bought and bought substitutes into whose below the scope of whose, there is no way for the scope of every to attach above whose. As with the earlier problems, what is required is the ability to delay the attachment scope of every to allow it to attach higher in the derived tree.

These examples demonstrate that STAG requires further development to be able to express the full range of readings that quantificational phenomena generate.

3 Synchronous Vector-TAG

A simple solution to this problem would merely relax the set-locality of the semantic MCTAG in the presented grammar. However, this introduces at least two problems. First, the complexity of non-local MCTAG is prohibitive. Second, by eliminating set-locality, the readings generated become extremely hard to control. To remedy these problems, we propose the use of vector TAG (Rambow, 1994), a computationally more tractable and expressively more controllable multicomponent TAG formalism as the base formalism to synchronize.

A Vector-TAG (V-TAG) is a 5-tuple \((N, T, S, V)\) where \(N\) and \(T\) are disjoint sets of nonterminal and terminal symbols, respectively; \(S \in N\) is the start symbol; and \(V\) is a set of sets of trees, called vectors. In Rambow’s original definition the sets in \(V\) were partitioned into two sets, \(V_I\) and \(V_A\), where the sets in \(V_I\) were constrained to include at most one initial tree, and the sets in
possess dominance links. For a vector \( \tau \in V \) the dominance links form a binary relation \( \text{dom} \) over the set of nodes in the trees of \( \tau \) such that if \( \text{dom}(\eta_1, \eta_2) \), then \( \eta_1 \) is the foot node of an auxiliary tree in \( \tau \), and \( \eta_2 \) is any node in any tree of \( \tau \). A strict V-TAG is one in which all trees in a vector are connected to each other via dominance links. We use an even stronger constraint in the analyses presented here in which the dominance links in a vector must form a total order over the trees. We call the unique tree in the vector that does not dominate any other tree the foundation tree. We distinguish individual trees in a vector with subscripts numbered from 0 starting with the foundation tree.

A derivation in a V-TAG is defined as in TAG. There is no locality requirement or other restriction on adjunction except that if one tree from a vector is used in a derivation, all trees from that vector must be used in the derivation.\(^7\) In addition, all adjunctions must respect the dominance relations in that a node \( \eta_1 \) that dominates a node \( \eta_2 \) must appear on the path from \( \eta_2 \) to the root of the derived tree. If a tree with foot \( \eta_1 \) multiply adjoins at the same location as a tree containing a node \( \eta_2 \) that is dominated by \( \eta_1 \), the tree containing with \( \eta_1 \) must appear higher in the derived tree. Rambow (1994) defines integrity constraints for V-TAG that limit the locations where trees in a vector may adjoin. An integrity constraint placed on a node in an elementary tree dictates that the node may not be on the path between two nodes connected by a dominance link.

The derivation tree for a V-TAG may be constructed just as for an MCTAG or STAG where the nodes of the tree are the tree sets and the branches of the tree are labeled with the links at which the synchronized operations take place or the address of the adjunction in the case of a non-foundation tree. The base derivation tree can also be elaborated to give a clearer picture of the relationships between individual trees. In an elaborated derivation tree each tree in a vector is represented explicitly and subscripted to indicate its place in the total order of its vector.

In an elaborated derivation tree the non-foundation trees of a vector do not have to be children of the same tree as the foundation tree of their vector. However, the dominance constraints of the vectors must be respected. Well-formedness can be checked on an elaborated derivation tree by finding the nearest common ancestor of any two trees connected by a dominance link and checking that the address on the branch leading to the dominating tree dominates the address leading to the dominated tree and that each tree along the path from the dominating tree to the common ancestor adjoins along the spine. Figure 4 gives a schematic example of a well-formed elaborated derivation tree.

We define a synchronous V-TAG (SV-TAG) as a set of triples, \( \langle v_L, v_R, \sim \rangle \) where \( v_L \) and \( v_R \) are V-TAG vectors and \( \sim \) is a linking relation between nodes in \( v_L \) and \( v_R \). A pair (or pair of sets) of trees within each vector are distinguished as the foundation trees. A foundation adjunction occurs when the foundation trees drawn from the left and right vectors of \( \langle v_L, v_R, \sim \rangle \) adjoin at linked locations in some other vector \( \langle v'_L, v'_R, \sim' \rangle \). In contrast to tree-local or set-local MCTAG in which every adjunction site must be marked with a link in order for a tree set to adjoin, in SV-TAG only the adjunction sites where the foundation trees adjoin are marked explicitly with links. The remainder of the trees in \( v_L \) and \( v_R \) are free to adjoin anywhere in the left and right derived trees, respectively, so long as they obey the constraints of their dominance links. Practically, this definition constrains synchronized

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\( V_A \) contained only auxiliary trees. We relax the requirements of and distinction between these two sets of trees to allow sets of any combination of initial and auxiliary trees including sets with more than one initial tree.

\( ^7 \)The definition of V-TAG is very similar to that of non-local MCTAG as defined by Weir (1988) except that in non-local MCTAG all trees from a tree set are required to adjoin simultaneously.
Figure 5: An grammar and derivation trees for sentence (4): “Allegedly John always wins.” In the elaborated derivation trees the non-foundation trees are connected with a dashed line. The circled link is simply a shorthand for an address in the tree, not true links in the grammar.

V-TAG vectors to have one synchronized operation with the remainder of the trees adjoining with the usual unconstrained non-locality of V-TAG.

An SV-TAG can be characterized as simple, tree-local, set-local or non-local depending on the number and orientation of the link locations in the grammar. If each link has only one location in the left and right grammars then the SV-TAG is called simple because the foundation adjunctions on each side of the grammar follow the constraints of a TAG. If links have multiple locations that occur all within one tree on each side of the grammar then the SV-TAG may be termed tree-local. When links occur in multiple trees within a vector the SV-TAG is called set-local and if link locations of a single link occur in multiple vectors then the SV-TAG is called non-local. Although the base derivation tree still serves as the connection between the syntactic and semantic derivations and the interface through which they constrain each other, an elaborated derivation tree can help clarify the available readings on each side of the grammar. An example of a grammar, derivation, and elaborated derivation for the following sentence is given in Figure 5.

(4) Allegedly John always wins.

Sentence (4) permits only one reading in which allegedly outscopes always. This constraint is de-
4 Applying SV-TAG to the Hard Cases

The additional flexibility provided by SV-TAG permits analysis of the difficult control verb and relative clause examples presented above while still providing a satisfactory analysis of the inverse linking example.

4.1 Inverse Linking

Figure 6 gives a SV-TAG grammar and elaborated semantic derivation tree for sentence (1). The elementary tree sets are similar to the ones presented above except that we have removed the $S$ and $t$ trees from the elementary tree set for the prepositions $at$ and removed all of the non-foundational link locations. The syntactic derivation is straightforward and is presented implicitly in the elaborated derivation tree. The semantic derivation merits closer examination. The tree containing the bound variable of some in the semantics foundationally adjoins into $at$ at link $[4]$. The scope tree of some is free to adjoin anywhere along the path to the root of the derived tree. It has no site at which to adjoin into the $at$ tree, so it must adjoin higher in the derivation tree. The scope tree of some may adjoin into either of the two $t$ nodes on the path to the root of the every tree while still respecting its dominance link. Adjoining at these two positions will indivisibly connect the scopes of every and some in both orders as in the STAG analysis of this sentence presented earlier. However, the scope part of some does not have to adjoin at these nodes. When every foundationally adjoins into court, the scope part of some will become free to adjoin anywhere between the root of the scope part of every and the root of the derivation. Since the only location available for the scope parts of every, two, and some can adjoin are at the root of court, this will produce the fifth scope reading in which two intervenes between some and every. The sixth scope reading is prevented by the dominance link requiring the foot of the scope tree of some to dominate the bound variable of some.

It is interesting to note that the disputed fifth reading requires the scope part of some to travel several steps up the derivation tree. Whether there is any relationship between the relative obscurity of this scope reading and the necessity of passing the scope of some two levels up the tree may be explored in future work.

4.2 Control Verbs

Figure 7 presents an SV-TAG grammar and the elaborated semantic derivation tree for sentence (2). As with the previous example, the syn-
tactic derivation is straightforward. In the semantics, SV-TAG allows us to produce all six orderings between the quantifiers as well as the de dicto and de re readings of want. Both always and every foundationally adjoin into wants. The readings in which always and every are indivisibly attached to each other as well as the reading in which some intervenes between every and always can be produced by adjoining the dominating trees of always and every into t nodes of the wants tree. The reading in which some intervenes between always and every is produced by the scope parts of always and some multiply adjoining at the root of eat.

Because the scope part of always is not part of its foundation it can attach above other scopetakers that attach along the VP spine. However, constraints such as the one suggested for sentence (4) may be used to disallow this.

4.3 Relative Clauses

The SV-TAG grammar and derivation tree in Figure 8 achieve the reading that could not be achieved in STAG. Note that the grammar differs only in that the links have been reduced to foundation links. The scope part of every is able to pass up through bought and is available to adjoin at either of the t nodes in the implicit quantifier in the se tree.

Without any constraint the scope part of every may continue higher in the derivation to multiply adjoin with the scope of a at the root of saw. This violates the linguistic generalization that quantifiers may not take scope above a relative clause that contains them. An integrity constraint placed at the root of the se semantic tree blocks the scope part of every from escaping the relative clause.

5 Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that certain hard cases for synchronous TAG syntax and semantics, such as control verbs, can be successfully analyzed using SV-TAG, a synchronous variant of V-TAG defined herein. SV-TAG maintains the simplicity inherent in the synchronous grammar approach to modeling the syntax-semantics interface, provides the derivation tree as an underspecified representation of the semantics, and is likely to be efficient to process.

References


Figure 8: SV-TAG grammar and derivation tree for sentence (3): “John saw a soccer player whose picture every boy bought.” Tree sets for nouns and quantifiers are as in earlier figures.


