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Journal of Information Science 2002; 28; 375

DOI: 10.1177/016555150202800503

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Ontology research and development. Part 2 – a review of ontology mapping and evolving

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Received 29 November 2001
Revised 2 April 2002

Abstract.

This is the second of a two-part paper to review ontology research and development, in particular, ontology mapping and evolving. Ontology is defined as a formal explicit specification of a shared conceptualization. Ontology itself is not a static model so that it must have the potential to capture changes of meanings and relations. As such, mapping and evolving ontologies is part of an essential task of ontology learning and development. Ontology mapping is concerned with reusing existing ontologies, expanding and combining them by some means and enabling a larger pool of information and knowledge in different domains to be integrated to support new communication and use. Ontology evolving, likewise, is concerned with maintaining existing ontologies and extending them as appropriate when new information or knowledge is acquired. It is apparent from the reviews that current research into semi-automatic or automatic ontology research in all the three aspects of generation, mapping and evolving have so far achieved limited success. Expert human input is essential in almost all cases. Achievements have been made largely in the form of tools and aids to assist the human expert. Many research challenges remain in this field and many of such challenges need to be overcome if the next generation of the Semantic Web is to be realized.

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1. Introduction

Ontology is defined as a formal explicit specification of a shared conceptualization [1]. It provides a shared and common understanding of a domain that can be communicated across people and application systems. Ontology itself is not a static model. It must have the potential to capture the changes of meaning [2].

Ontologies are developed to provide the common semantics for agent communication. When two agents need to communicate or exchange information, the prerequisite is that a common consensus has to form between them. This leads to the need to map two ontologies. For example, in business to business (B2B) e-commerce applications, the mapping among different classification standards (such as UNSPSC (http://eccma.org/unspsc/) and ecl@ss (www.eclass.de/)) turns out to be not trivial.

This paper reports the second part of the survey on ontology research and development. The first part introduced the subject of ontology and focused on the state-of-the-art techniques and work done on semi-automatic and automatic ontology generation, as well as the problems facing this research [3]. This second part focuses on the current status of research into ontology mapping and ontology evolving.

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An introduction to ontology mapping is first presented, followed by a review of a number of different ontology mapping projects to illustrate the approaches, techniques, resulting mapping and problems associated with the ontologies produced. This is followed by a review of related work on ontologies evolving using a similar framework of presentation.

2. Ontology mapping

Effective use or reuse of knowledge is essential. This is especially so now because of the overwhelming amount of information that is being continually generated, which in turn has forced organizations, businesses and people to manage their knowledge more effectively and efficiently. Simply combining knowledge from distinct domains creates several problems, for instance different knowledge representation formats, semantic inconsistencies, and so on. The same applies to the area of ontology engineering.

With ontologies generation, ontology engineers subsequently face the problem of how to reuse these existing ontologies, and how to map various different ontologies in order to enable a common interface and understanding to emerge for the support of communication between existing and new domains. As such, ontology mapping has turned out to be another important research area for ontology learning.

Sofia Pinto *et al*. [4] provided a framework and clarified the meaning of the term 'ontology integration' to include that of ontology reuse, ontology merging and ontology alignment along with tools, methodologies and applications, as shown in Table 1.

Noy and Musen [5] clarified the difference between ontology alignment and ontology merging and noted that 'in ontology merging, a single ontology is created which is a merged version of the original ontologies, while in ontology alignment, the two original ontologies exist, with links established between them'. There are several ways to carry out ontology mapping, as can be seen in the ways in which the resulting mapping are represented. Mappings can be represented as conditional rules [6], functions [7], logic [8], or a set of tables and procedures [9].

Ontology mapping has been addressed by researchers using different approaches:

- One-to-one approach, where for each ontology a set of translating functions is provided to allow communication with the other ontologies without an intermediate ontology. The problem with this approach is one of computing complexity (e.g. OBSERVER [10]).
- Single-shared ontology. The drawbacks of dealing with a single shared ontology are similar to those of any standards [11].
- Ontology clustering, where resources are clustered together on the basis of similarities. Additionally, ontology clusters can be organized in a hierarchical fashion [12].

Figure 1 shows a very simple example of ontology mapping in which the process of mapping an Employee ontology and a Personnel ontology from different departments of the same company is illustrated. A different UnitOfMeasure exists in these two ontologies so that the mapping rule of UnitConversion is needed to secure the right mapping.

3. Ontology mapping projects

Many existing ontology mapping projects have been carried out and reported in the literature. The following

Table 1
Examples of ontology integration techniques and applications

Tools	Ontologies built/applications	Methodology
1. Integration of ontologies by building a new ontology and reusing other available ontologies (ontology reuse)		
Ontolingua server	PhySys, Mereology ontology, KACTUS, Standard-Units ontology, etc.	Integration of the building blocks and foundational theories
2. Integration of ontologies by merging different ontologies into a single one that 'unifies' all of them (includes Ontology Merging and Ontology Alignment)		
ONIONS	SENSUS, Agreed-Upon-Ontology	Manually, brainstorming, ONIONS
3. Integration of ontologies into applications		
KACTUS	CYC, GUM, PIF, UMLS, EngMath, PhySys, Enterprise Ontology, Reference ontology	Manual method, brainstorming, ONIONS

Note: the various tools, ontologies and methodologies presented in the table will be discussed in subsequent sections.

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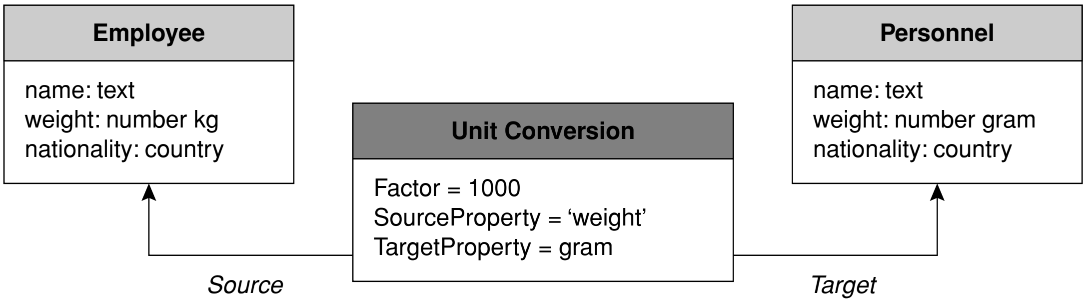

Fig. 1. Simple example of ontology mapping.

sections provide an update of the state of development of ontology mapping in these projects. Information about each project along with the important features associated with it are provided and highlighted.

3.1. InfoSleuth's reference ontology

InfoSleuth [13] can support construction of complex ontologies from smaller component ontologies so that tools tailored for one component ontology can be used in many application domains. Examples of reused ontologies include units of measure, chemistry knowledge, geographic metadata, etc. Mapping is explicitly specified among these ontologies as relationships between terms in one ontology and related terms in other ontologies.

All mappings between ontologies are made by a special class of agents known as 'resource agents'. A resource agent encapsulates a set of information about the ontology mapping rules, and presents that information to the agent-based system in terms of one or more ontologies (called reference ontologies). All mapping is encapsulated within the resource agent. All ontologies are represented in OKBC (Open Knowledge Base Connectivity) and stored in an OKBC server by a special class of agents called ontology agents, which can provide ontology specifications to users (for request formulation) and to resource agents (for mapping).

3.2. Stanford's ontology algebra

In this application, the mapping between ontologies has been executed by ontology algebra [14], consisting of three operations, namely, intersection, union and difference. The objective of ontology algebra is to provide the capability for interrogating many largely semantically disjoint knowledge resources. Here, articulations (the rules that provide links across domains) can be established to enable the knowledge interoperability. Contexts, the abstract mathematical entities with some properties, were defined to be the unit of encapsulation for well-structured ontologies [15], which could provide guarantees about the knowledge they export, and contain feasible inferences about them. The ontology resulting from the mappings between two source ontologies is assumed to be consistent only within its own context, known as an articulation context [16]. Similar work can be found in McCarthy's research and the CYC (Cycorp's Cyc knowledge base; www.cyc.com/) project. For instance, McCarthy [15] defined context as simple mathematical entities used for the situations in which particular assertions are valid. He proposed using the lifting axioms to state that a proposition or assertion in the context of one knowledge base is valid in another. The CYC [8] use of microtheories bears some resemblance to this definition of context. Every microtheory within CYC is a context that makes some simplifying assumptions about the world. Microtheories in CYC are organized in an inheritance hierarchy whereby everything asserted in the super-microtheory is also true in the lower level microtheory.

Mitra *et al.* [17] used ontology algebra to enable interoperation between ontologies via articulation ontology. The input to the algebra is provided by ontology graphs. The operators in the algebra include unitary operators like filter and extract, and binary operators that include union, intersection and difference (as in normal set operators):

- The union operator generates a unified ontology graph comprising two original ontology graphs connected by the articulation. The union presents a coherent, connected and semantically sound unified ontology.
- The intersection operator produces the articulation ontology graph, which consists of the nodes and the edges added to the articulation generator using the

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articulation rules between two ontologies. The intersection determines the portions of knowledge bases that deal with similar concepts.

- The difference operator, distinguishing between two ontologies (O1–O2) is defined as the terms and relationships of the first ontology that have not been determined to exist in the second. This operation allows a local ontology maintainer to determine the extent of one ontology that remains independent of the articulation with other domain ontologies, so that it can be independently manipulated without having to update any articulation.

The researchers also built up a system known as ONION (Ontology compositION), which is an architecture based on a sound formalism to support a scalable framework for ontology integration. The special feature of this system is that it separates the logical inference engine from the representation model of the ontologies as much as possible. This allows the accommodation of different inference engines. This system contains the following components:

- data layer which manages the ontology representations, the articulations and the rule sets involved and the rules required for query processing;
- viewer (which is basically a graphical user interface);
- query system;
- articulation agent that is responsible for creating the articulation ontology and the semantic bridges between it and the source ontologies. (The generation of the articulation in this system is semi-automatic.)

The ontology in ONION is represented by the conceptual graph, and the ontology mapping is based on the graph mapping. At the same time, domain experts can define a variety of fuzzy matching. The main innovation of ONION is that it uses articulations of ontologies to interoperate among ontologies and it also represents ontologies graphically which could help in separating the data layer from the inference engine.

Mitra *et al.* [18] generated SKAT (Semantic Knowledge Articulation Tool) to extract information from a website by supplying a template graph. It can also extract structural information from an ontology that could be used to create a new ontology. Noy and Musen [5] developed SMART which is an algorithm that provides a semi-automatic approach to ontology merging and alignment. SMART assists the ontology engineer by prompting to-do lists as well as performing consistency checking.

3.3. AIFB's formal concept analysis

The ontology learning group in AIFB (Institute of Applied Informatics and Formal Description Methods, University of Karlsruhe, Germany) through Stumme *et al.* [19] discussed preliminary steps towards an order-theoretic foundation for maintaining and merging ontologies and articulated some questions about how a structural approach might improve the merging process, for instance:

- Which consistency conditions should ontologies verify in order to be merged?
- Can the merging of ontologies be described as a parameterized operation on the set of ontologies?
- How can other relations beside the *is-a* relation be integrated?
- How can an interactive knowledge acquisition process support the construction of the aligning function?
- How can meta-knowledge about concepts and relations provided by axioms be exploited for the aligning process, and so on.

They proposed the Formal Concept Analysis [20] for the merging and maintaining of ontologies that offers a comprehensive formalization of concepts by mathematizing them as a unit of thought constituted of two parts: its extension and its intension. Formal Concept Analysis starts with a formal context defined as a triplet K:=(G, M, I), where G is a set of objects, M is a set of attributes, and I is a binary relation between G and M. The interested reader can refer to Ganter and Wille [20] for a more detailed account of this technique.

3.4. ECAI 2000's method

A number of automatic ontology mapping research projects were reported in the Ontology Learning Workshop of ECAI 2000 (European Conference on Artificial Intelligence). It is a well-known fact that discovering related concepts in a multi-agent system with diverse ontologies is difficult using existing knowledge representation languages and approaches, and a number of speakers reported a program in this area.

Williams and Tsatsoulis [21] proposed an instance-based approach for identifying candidate relations between diverse ontologies using concept cluster integration. They discussed how their agents represent, learn, share and interpret concepts using ontologies constructed from web page bookmark hierarchies. The concept vector represents a specific web page and the actual semantic concept is represented by a group of concept vectors judged to be similar by the user

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(according to the meaning of the bookmark). The agents use supervised inductive learning to learn their individual ontologies. The output of this ontology learning are semantic concept descriptions (SCD) represented as interpretation rules. They built up one system to fulfill this purpose called DOGGIE, which could apply the concept cluster algorithm (CCI) to look for candidate relations between ontologies. The experimental results have demonstrated the feasibility of the instance-based approach for discovering candidate relations between ontologies using concept cluster integration. However, here they assume all the relations are only general *is-a* relations. This method could be very useful for ontology merging.

Tamma and Bench-Capon [22] presented a semi-automatic framework to deal with inheritance conflicts and inconsistencies while integrating ontologies. This framework represents ontologies by a frame-based language where the classical set of slot facets is extended to encompass other information in order to associate with each attribute a degree of strength, thus permitting one to deal with default conflicts and inconsistencies. The framework includes several steps:

- Check the class and slot name's synonyms.
- If a name mismatch is detected, the system proceeds both bottom-up and top-down trying to relate classes.
- If an inconsistency is detected then the priority functions for the inheritance rules are computed on the grounds of both the rankings of probabilities and the degree of strength.
- Subsequently, the system provides domain experts with a list of suggestions that are evaluated according to a priority function. The final choice is always left to the domain experts, but the system provides them with a set of possible choices including information concerning how and when the attribute changes.

Uschold [23] pointed out that the global reference ontology would be the perfect candidate for ontology mapping of local ontologies. Different user communities could view the global reference ontology from their own preferred perspectives through mapping and projecting. The basic idea is to define a set of mapping rules to form a perspective for viewing and interacting with the ontology. Different sets of mapping rules enable the ontology, or a portion of it, to be viewed from three different perspectives: viewing the global ontology using own local terminologies; viewing a selected portion of the ontology; and viewing at a higher level of abstraction.

3.5. ISI's OntoMorph

The OntoMorph system of the Information Sciences Institute of the University of Southern California (ISI) aims to facilitate ontology merging and the rapid generation of knowledge base translators [24]. It combines two powerful mechanisms to describe KB transformations. The first of these mechanisms is syntactic rewriting via pattern-directed rewrite rules that allow the concise specification of sentence-level transformations based on pattern matching, and the second mechanism involves semantic rewriting which modulates syntactic rewriting via semantic models and logical inference. The integration of ontologies can be based on any mixture of syntactic and semantic criteria.

In the syntactic rewriting process, input expressions are first tokenized into lexemes and then represented as syntax trees, which are represented internally as flat sequences of tokens and their structure only exists logically. OntoMorph's pattern language and execution model is strongly influenced by Plisp [25]. The pattern language can match and de-structure arbitrarily nested syntax trees in a direct and concise fashion. Rewrite rules are applied to the execution model.

For the semantic rewriting process, OntoMorph is built on top of the PowerLoom knowledge representation system, which is a successor to the Loom system. Using semantic import rules, the precise image of the source KB semantics can be established within PowerLoom (limited only by the expressiveness of first-order logic).

3.6. KRAFT's ontology clustering

Visser *et al.* [26] proposed a set of techniques to map one-to-one ontologies in the KRAFT project (standing for Knowledge Reuse and Fusion/Transformation):

- class mapping – maps a source ontology class name to a target ontology class name;
- attribute mapping – maps the set of values of a source ontology attribute to a set of values of a target ontology attribute, or maps a source ontology attribute name to a target ontology attribute name;
- relation mapping – maps a source ontology relation name to a target ontology relation name; and
- compound mapping – maps compound source ontology expressions to compound target ontology expressions.

Following this, Visser and Tamma [12] suggested the concept of 'ontology clustering' to integrate heterogeneous resources. Ontology clustering is based on the similarities between the concepts known to different

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agents. The ontology clustering was represented in a hierarchical fashion. The ontology on top of the hierarchy is known as the application ontology that is used to describe the specific domain so that it is not reusable. The application ontology contains a relevant subset of WordNet concepts with senses selected from WordNet. A new ontology cluster is a child ontology that defines certain new concepts using the concepts already contained in its parent ontology. Concepts are described in terms of attributes and inheritance relations, and are hierarchically organized. This approach has been applied to the international domain of coffee.

3.7. Heterogeneous database integration

In the ontology community, the concept of ontology has been extended to encompass a very broad scope. Many classification systems, catalogues and indexes have also referred to ontology (or more specifically in this context, lightweight ontology). A database scheme is another such lightweight ontology. In the database community, the problems concerning the integration of heterogeneous databases were raised long ago. Initial research in heterogeneous databases was largely directed towards the issues of resolving schema and data heterogeneity conflicts across multiple autonomous databases [27], and of developing a global schema to provide integration [28–30]. Some of these researches are worthy of mention since they offer results that could indicate potential solutions for ontology mapping and merging.

Batini *et al.* [31] provided a comprehensive survey of different schema integration techniques. They define schema integration as the activity of integrating schemata of existing or proposed databases into a global, unified schema. The five steps to schema integration described include pre-integration, comparison, conformation, merging and restructuring.

While structural integration has been well defined in Sheth and Larson [32] and Batini *et al*. [31], the treatment from a semantic perspective is not that easy. In an attempt to reconcile the semantic and schematic perspectives, Sheth and Kashyap [33] presented a semantic taxonomy to demonstrate semantic similarities between two objects and related this to a structural taxonomy. Various types of semantic relationships have been discussed in the literature. Many terms such as semantic equivalence, semantic relevance, semantic resemblance, semantic compatibility, semantic discrepancy, semantic reconciliation and semantic relativism have been defined. There is no general agreement on these terms. There are a number of projects addressing the semantic issues of database integration, for example, FEMUS (Swiss Institute of Technology), ETHZ (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich) and COIN (Context technology Interchange Network, MIT).

Intelligent integration has been applied to heterogeneous database integration, and two major ideas are proposed in the literature: the first is via *agents* [34]. Typical systems are RETSINA (www-2.cs.cmu.edu/~softagents/retsina.html; an open multi-agent system (MAS)) and InfoSleuth. The second is based on the concept of *mediators* [35] that provide intermediary services by linking data resources and application programs. Examples include the TSMISS at Stanford University. Both information agents and mediators require domain knowledge that is modelled in some kind of common vocabulary (ontology).

Palopoli *et al.* [30] present two techniques to integrate and abstract database schemes. Scheme integration is intended to produce a global conceptual scheme from a set of heterogeneous input schemes. Scheme abstraction groups objects of a scheme into homogeneous clusters. Both assume the existence of a collection of inter-schema properties describing semantic relationships holding among input database scheme objects. The first technique uses inter-schema properties to produce and integrate schema. The second one takes an integrated scheme as the input and yields an output in the form of an abstracted scheme. The difficulties encountered in achieving schema integration have highlighted the importance of capturing the semantics embedded in the underlying schemata. There is a general agreement that integration can be achieved only with a good understanding of the embedded semantics of the component databases. Srinivasan *et al.* [36] introduced a conceptual integration approach that exploits the similarity in meta-level information on database objects to discover a set of concepts that serve as a domain abstraction and provide a conceptual layer above existing legacy systems

3.8. Other ontology mappings

Hovy [37] described several heuristic rules to support the merging of ontologies. For instance, the NAME heuristic compares the names of two concepts, the DEFINITION heuristic uses linguistic techniques for comparing the natural language definitions of two concepts, and the TAXONOMY heuristic checks the closeness of two concepts to each other.

The Chimaera system [38] can provide support for merging ontological terms from different knowledge sources, for checking the coverage and correctness of

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ontologies and for maintaining ontologies. It contains a broad collection of commands and functions to support the merging of ontologies by coalescing two semantically identical terms from different ontologies and by identifying terms that should be related by subsumption or disjointness relationships.

PROMPT [39] is an algorithm for ontology merging and alignment that is able to handle ontologies specified in OKBC-compatible format. It starts with the identification of matching class names. Based on this initial step an iterative approach is carried out for performing automatic updates, finding resulting conflicts, and making suggestions to remove these conflicts. PROMPT is implemented as an extension to the Protégé 2000 knowledge acquisition tool and offers a collection of operations for merging two classes and related slots.

Li [40] identifies similarities between attributes from two schemas using neural networks. Campbell and Shapiro [41] described an agent that mediates between agents that subscribe to different ontologies. Bright *et al.* [28] use a thesaurus and a measure of 'semantic-distance' based on path distance to merge ontologies. Kashyap and Sheth [42] define the 'semantic proximity' of two concepts as a tuple encompassing contexts, value domains and mappings, and database states. The resulting analysis yields a hierarchy of types of semantic proximity, including equivalence, relationship, relevance, resemblance and incompatibility.

Lehmann and Cohn [43] require that concept definitions of the ontologies should include more specialized definitions for typical instances, and assume that the set relation between any two definitions can be identified as equivalence, containment, overlap or disjointness. OBSERVER [10] combines intensional and extensional analysis to calculate lower and upper bounds for the precision and recall of queries that are translated across ontologies on the basis of manually identified subsumption relations.

Weinstein and Birmingham [44] compared concepts in differentiated ontologies, which inherit definitional structure from concepts in shared ontologies. Shared, inherited structure provides a common ground that supports measures of 'description compatibility'. They use description compatibility to compare ontology structures represented as graphs and identify similarities for mapping between elements of the graphs. The relations they find between concepts are based on the assumption that local concepts inherit from concepts that are shared. Their system was evaluated by generating description logic ontologies in artificial words.

Borst and Akkermans [45] used the term 'ontology mapping' to describe the process where an entity of a primary ontology is furthered differentiated through the application of a secondary ontology. The mapping exists between the secondary and the primary ontology and constraints on a secondary ontology restrict the application of its elements. The result of ontological mappings is a set of ontological commitments which could be considered as a new ontology.

3.9. Ontology mapping: summary of observations

The summary of the aforementioned research of ontology mapping along the dimensions of mapping rules, resulting ontology, application areas, assisting tools and systems are summarized in Table 2.

From these reviews, it became evident that most of these mappings depend very much on the inputs of human experts. Although some tools are available to facilitate the mapping, the limited functions they could provide are class or relation name checking, consistency checking, to-do list recommendations, etc. Ontology mapping is not a simple one-to-one mapping (link the class name, relation name, attribute name from one ontology to another), but demands substantial deeper checking and verification for inheritance, consistency of the inference, etc. Furthermore, ontology mapping could be complicated by many-to-one, one-to-many or many-to-many relations either within one domain or one that transcends different domains (ontology clustering).

Ontology mapping could also be viewed as the projection of the general ontologies from different points of view, either according to the different application domains or various tasks or applications [23]. Much remains to be done in the area of semi-automatic or automatic ontology mapping. However, when the problems facing automatic ontology generation are tackled and overcome, there will be a move towards providing a solution for ontology mapping at the same time.

4. Ontology evolving (maintenance)

The second half of this paper examines ontology evolving (the preferred term used in ontology literature over ontology maintenance). Ontology evolving requires the clarity of structure of ontologies so as to guarantee an accurate gauge of the maintenance effort. Some of the research on semi-automatic or automatic ontology evolving has been carried out recently, but almost all are at early stages and requires manual intervention.

Fowler *et al.* [13] mentioned the need to maintain different versions of the same ontology in InfoSleuth agent

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Table 2
Summary for ontology mapping

Project	InfoSleuth	Stanford	AIFB	ECAI 2000	ISI	KRAFT	Others
Mapping rules	Reference ontology Agent mapping (reference agent, ontology agent)	Ontology algebra Articulation Context (articulation context) Lifting algorithm Microtheory Graph mapping Fuzzy mapping	Order-theoretic foundation Formal concept analysis Theoretical discussion (no specific methods)	Concept cluster integration Supervised inductive learning Default conflicts and inconsistency checking based on the features provided by frame-based language Ontology projection	Syntactic rewriting Semantic rewriting (based on semantic models or logical inference)	One-to-one ontology mapping Ontology clustering	Heuristic rules Logical subsumption or disjointness PROMPT Neural networks for identifying similarity between attributes Path distance (semantic distance) Semantic proximity Description compatibility
Results for final ontology	Represented in OKBC Stored in OKBC server	The final ontology is assumed to be consistent only within its own context Represented in conceptual graph	None	Semantic concept descriptions Represented in frame-based language	PowerLoom (first-order logic)	Hierarchy fashion	OKBC Conceptual graph Description logic A set of ontological commitment
Semi-automatic/ automatic?	Manually (or semi-automatically)	Manually (or semi-automatically)	None	Manually (or semi-automatically)	Manually (or semi-automatically)	Manually (or semi-automatically)	Manually (or semi-automatically)
Application area	Multi-agent system	None	None	Multi-agent system	None	International coffee preparation	Database
Assisting tool (system)	None SKAT	ONION SMART (consistency checking and to-do list)	None	DOGGIE	OntoMorph	None	Chimaera OBSERVER
Others				Assume all relations are general is-a relations		WordNet	

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architecture as it is being scaled up. Both TOVE [46] and METHODOLOGY [47] focus on ontology maintenance, but manually. The main difference is that METHODOLOGY focuses on comprehensively addressing the maintenance stage of the life cycle of ontology, whereas TOVE utilizes more formal techniques to address a more limited number of maintenance issues. Uschold [23] also pointed out the importance of ontology maintenance between local and global ontologies, especially the importance of standardizing concepts and relations using unique identifier codes and names.

4.1. Stanford's algebraic methodology

Jannink and Wiederhold [55] maintained the ontology using the same methodology as that employed to generate their ontologies – ontology algebra. When the knowledge base changes, they use the S operator, which provides a simple method for assessing the contents of a context to reveal terms with missing end tags in the data. For instance, $S_{len(hw)div20}$(dictionary) returns the entries of the dictionary, grouped by length of the head words. Once the errors were identified, the rules to convert terms with missing end tags were added. By maintaining statistics with the S operator on the process of extracting the relevant parts of the dictionary, rules can be updated straightforwardly. The congruity measure within the algebraic framework significantly simplified the process of identifying and handling the changes among the ontologies. Wiederhold [35] implored that 'it is important that new systems for our networks are designed with maintenance in mind'. Keeping ontologies small enables semantic agreement among the people using them with little lag time.

4.2. AIFB's method

Stumme *et al.* [19] also used the same method in their ontology mapping for ontology maintenance. They pointed out that current maintenance of ontologies is tedious and time-consuming. Domain experts can easily lose orientation in large ontologies. Tool support is needed to make reasonable suggestions to the expert or to automate certain tasks based on some pre-defined principles. They considered that future research in this direction should include the integration of approaches for generating ontologies from text with linguistic methods, and for evaluating them with data mining techniques. They proposed the Formal Concept Analysis for ontology maintenance. Formal Concept Analysis [20] offers formalization by mathematizing the concept as a unit of thought constituted of two parts: its extension and its intension.

4.3. ECAI 2000

Faatz *et al.* [48] presented an algorithm to determine similarities between text documents and used the strict supervised learning algorithm to improve the already-existing ontology based on the similarities or clusters of the relevant knowledge. First, they chose plain-text documents from online newswire or other web documents, then indexed them according to the controlled vocabularies and the already-built-up ontology (manually). They used the vector space model to normalize each document adding some background knowledge from the manually built-up ontology to enrich the whole document. After that, they used multi-linear regression to cluster or match the similarity among the documents and let the domain experts or the ontology engineers decide whether knowledge learned from the similarity matching or clustering could be used to maintain the current ontology. They concluded the paper with several areas for future research: (1) confirmation of the proposed idea by experimenting with a certain amount of new vocabulary; (2) improving the results by introducing an additional qualitative tagging of keywords in the vector representation; and (3) attempting to find new ways to automatically detect ontological relations.

Roux *et al.* [49] present a method to insert new concepts in an existing information extraction system based on conceptual graph architecture. In this system, an ontology is a two-fold set that contains passive information, the lattice, combined with active information, the graph patterns. This system has adopted a two-level architecture:

- A linguistic analysis component that is mainly based on the Finite State Transducer technology. It consists of a Part-of-Speech tagger and a Robust Parser. Text is processed in several steps – tokenization, morphological analysis, disambiguation using a Hidden Markov Model technique, error corrections, and finally a contextual lookup to identify names. Syntactic dependencies are then extracted from that output.
- A knowledge-based processing component based on conceptual graphs. The syntactic dependencies extracted at the linguistic level are used to build the semantic representation.

When a new word appears, pattern matching and syntactic dependencies were used to detect this new

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word from the Web document and insert it in the lattice. As the lattice comprises concepts that are connected to each other along semantic paths, this poses the requirement to categorize this new concept in order to find its correct slot in the lattice. This is based on the projection of customized conceptual sub-graphs with typed concepts on specific nodes to detect certain configuration of verbs that will assign their position in the lattice. However, this algorithm is currently under development and future tests are needed to validate its usefulness and applicability.

Todirascu *et al.* [50] proposed a system to acquire new concepts and to place them into the existing domain hierarchies (domain ontology). When a new document is added to the index base, it is processed by the Part-of-Speech technique. From here, the most frequent content words (noun, adjective, etc.) and their contexts are extracted. For each context, a concept description is built and classified in the existing hierarchy. Sense tagging assigns words and syntagms with their Description Logic description. Partial semantic descriptions are combined by heuristic rules to encode syntactic knowledge. In order to limit the size of the domain ontology, they encountered some major problems in that the selection of high-frequency words always ends as very general concepts and inconsistent conceptual descriptions of concepts are very common.

Agirre *et al.* [51] used topic signatures and hierarchical clusters to tag a given occurrence of a word with the intention of enriching very large ontologies from the Web. In this work, the main obstacle to getting clean signatures comes from the method to link concepts and relevant documents from the Web. Some filtering techniques have to be applied in order to get documents with less bias and more content. Cleaner topic signatures open the avenue for interesting ontology enhancement, as they provide concepts with rich topical information. For instance, similarity between topic signatures could be used to find out topically related concepts, so that the clustering strategy could be extended to all other concepts.

4.4. Ontology server

The core architecture of OntoSeek is an ontology server [52]. The server provides an interface for applications willing to access or manipulate an ontology data model (a generic graph data structure), and facilities maintaining a persistent LCG (Lexical Conceptual Graph) database. End users and resource encoders can access the server to update the LCG database encoded in markup language, such as HTML or XML.

Uschold and Gruninger [53] extensively discussed the ontology server provided by the Knowledge Systems Laboratory at Stanford University. To some degree, they already found the importance of the ontology server for ontology maintenance research in the foreseeable future. The main function of the ontology server is to create, edit, evaluate, publish, maintain and reuse ontologies. The particular significance is the ability to support the collaborative works through the Web. Duineveld *et al.* [54] also conducted a complicated comparison of the current available ontology editing tools from different points of views among which are the client/server support of tools to facilitate the collaborative ontology generation and the ontology maintenance issue. Uschold and Gruninger [53] list the improvement of the ontology server in contrast to the original Ontolingua system as follows:

- it is a remote computer server available on the Web;
- it provides an extensible library of shareable and reusable ontologies with suitable protections for proprietary, group and private work;
- there is an extensive browsing capability, which allows convenient viewing of ontologies;
- it has extended the original representation language to support decomposition of ontologies into modules and assembling new ontologies from existing modules from the library;
- it provides explicit support for collaborative work, which includes the concept of session to which multiple parties can be attached; parties are automatically informed of each other's activities;
- it has an application programmer's interface (API) which allows remote applications to query and modify ontologies stored on the server overt the Internet;
- as well as translating into multiple output language, it also allows multiple input languages.

4.5. Ontology evolving: summary of observations

A summary of the aforementioned research in the area of ontology evolving along the dimensions of evolving or maintenance rules and future research requirements is shown in Table 3.

5. Discussion: ontology and its role in bringing the Semantic Web to its full potential

The World Wide Web, with its continuous explosive growth of information, has caused a severe information

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Table 3
Summary of ontology evolving or maintenance

Project	Stanford	AIFB	ECAI 2000	Ontology server	Others
Evolving or maintenance rules	Ontology algebra Congruity measure Keeping ontologies small Bear the maintenance in mind when designing or generating the ontology	Order – theoretical foundation Formal concept analysis Theoretical discussion (no specific methods)	Similarity measures based on the strict supervised learning Concept clustering Lattice and semantic path identification Partial semantic description (description logic) Topic signature and hierarchical cluster	Facilitate browse and editing Client/server accessing Online collaboration	TOVE (formal techniques) METHODOLOGY (maintenance stage of the life cycle of ontology) Standardizing concepts and relations (unique identifier codes and names)
Semi-automatic/ automatic?	Manually (semi-automatic)	–	Manually (semi-automatic)	Manually (semi-automatic)	Manually
Future research	–	Generate ontology automatically from the text based on linguistic methods Evaluate it with data mining techniques	Try additional qualitative tagging in the vector representation Automatic detection of ontological relations	–	–
Assisting tool (system)	–	–	–	OntoSeek	–

overload problem. It is increasingly difficult to find, access, present and maintain the information required by a wide variety of users. This is because the information content is presented primarily in natural language. A wide gap has emerged between the information available and the tools that are in place to support information seeking and use.

Many new research initiatives and commercial enterprises have been set up to enrich available information with machine-processable semantics. Such support is essential for 'bringing the web to its full potential'. Tim Berners-Lee, Director of the World Wide Web Consortium, referred to the future of the current WWW as the '*Semantic Web*' – an extended web of machine-readable information and automated services that extend far beyond current capabilities. The explicit representation of the semantics underlying data, programs, pages and other web resources will enable a knowledge-based web that provides a qualitatively new level of service.

A key enabler for the Semantic Web is online ontological support for data, information and knowledge exchange. Given the exponential growth of the information available online, automatic processing is vital to the task of managing and maintaining access to that information. Used to describe the structure and semantics of information exchange, *ontologies* are seen to play a key role in areas such as knowledge management, B2B e-commerce and other such burgeoning electronic initiatives.

Currently the Semantic Web has attracted much interest from various communities. Much interesting and important research related to the Semantic Web has been addressed through ontology development and

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research and a number of promising advances have been made:

- Ontology language – W3C (www.w3c.org) and EU IST projects (OntoKnowledge (www.ontoknowledge.org), OntoWeb (www.ontoweb.org) and Wonderweb (wonderweb.semanticweb.org)) are working together with the objective of deriving efficient ontology languages. Current candidate lanuages include those of RDF (www.w3.org/RDF), DAML+OIL (www.w3c.org/2001/sw), Topic Maps (www.topicmaps.org). More information on these languages can be found in the Semantic Web portal at www.semanticweb.org.
- Ontology tools – many tools, both research-based or commercial entities, are avaialbe to support ontology editing, ontology library management, ontology mapping and aligning, and ontology inferening. More information and a list of such tools can be found in www.ontoweb.org/sig.htm.
- Digital libraries – XML or its variants are already widely adopted to tag the metadata of e-journals or museum collections in many digital library projects. Documents or information are represented as much as possible in the machine-understandable format. The EU IST project – HeritageMap (http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/HeritageMap/HeritageMapB.html) is a good example of such a development.
- Pioneering business applications – although the Semantic Web from the business-application point of view is far from being a reality, ontologies have been deployed for many applications such as corporate intranets and knowledge management (for example: www.ontoknowlege.org), e-commerce (for example: mkbeem.elibel.tm.fr/home.html), web portals and communities (for example: cweb.inria.fr). A limited number of successful scenarios for ontology-based applications can be found in www.ontoweb.org/download/deliverables/D21_Final-final.pdf
- Web services is a development that deals with the limitation of the current web by aiming to transform the web from a collection of information into a distributed device of computation. In order to do so, appropriate means for description of web services need to be developed. These are based on semi-formal natural language descriptions so that there is a need for human programmers to provide the links between services. A related development is the development of the Semantic Web-enabled Web Services (www.cs.vu.nl/~dieter/wsmf) that is aimed at providing mechanization in service identification, configuration, comparison and combination. Ontologies are key enablers that provide the terminology used by such services.

Although such developments are promising, fundamental challenges remain at the root of ontology research and development.

6. Conclusion

Ontology research and development has gained substantial interest recently as researchers grapple with the information overload problem and the need to better organize and use information in order to support information retrieval and extraction to deliver the right information, in the right amount and at the right time. Researchers are diverse and come from the fields of library and information science, computer science, artificial intelligence, e-commerce and knowledge management. Ontologies have a higher level of applicability over the traditional computing and information science techniques in their ability to define relationships, deeper semantics and enhanced expressiveness, all of which collectively serve as the enabler for the next generation of the Semantic Web to become a reality.

The need for manual intervention in all the three aspects of ontology generation, mapping and evolving attests to the complex nature of ontology research and its associated unresolved problems. Many useful tools and techniques have surfaced and these serve as useful aids to human experts to create, use and maintain existing ontologies. Nonetheless, many remaining research challenges need to be resolved in order for ontologies to be applied on the scale envisaged in the future. A focus on tackling ontology generation is the first necessary step to be taken since this has direct implications and applications in the area of ontology mapping and evolving. So far, no significant breakthrough in semi-automatic and automatic ontology generation has been reported but the interest shown, and work done, by many well-known research institutions and agencies augurs well for this area of research in the future.

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