

A Fuzzy Ontology-based Semantic Data Integration System

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Abstract

Data integration becomes even more necessary given the increasing availability of data from distributed and heterogeneous sources. To address such heterogeneity, crisp ontologies have been employed in order to represent the semantics of integrated data. However, it is interesting to use fuzzy logic concepts in these ontologies, for a more expressive representation of vague information relevant to some domains. In this context, this paper presents DISFOQuE system for data integration based on fuzzy ontology, which provides a homogeneous view of data sources and also performs query expansions in order to retrieve more comprehensive answers to the user. We have executed a real experiment in the domain of watershed analysis, which provided a homogeneous view of the watershed data sources and more effective answers to researchers.

Keywords: Data Integration, Fuzzy Ontology, Query Expansion, Semantic Information Processing

1. Introduction

The goal of data integration systems (DIS) is to provide a unique, transparent and homogenous view of a set of heterogeneous data sources [1] [2]. Data integration is becoming even more necessary given the increasing availability of data from distributed and heterogeneous sources, as experienced in the development of the Internet. Such characteristics make it difficult to search for desired information since queries might be inappropriately answered or may have incomplete results if each data source is analyzed in isolation.

Among the approaches to the development of DIS, there are some researchers that use ontologies to represent a homogeneous view of data sources [1] [2]. Ontologies, as considered by the Computer Science community, comprise elements such as classes, individuals, properties and relationships [3], which can be used to model the semantics of the domain related to integrated data sources.

These ontologies are considered *crisp* since they are based on classical logics, which only represent exact information (“false” or “true” statements). However, there are domains that require some imprecise or vague information to describe them. For this purpose, representing fuzzy sets concepts [4] in ontologies is a feasible approach to express imprecise concepts and relationships, e.g. the similarity degree between two parameters of water quality in a watershed analysis domain. By analyzing such fuzzy ontology constructs, it is possible to expand user queries in DIS and then retrieve approximate results [5].

Facing this context, this paper presents DISFOQuE system, a data integration system based on fuzzy ontology, developed to provide a homogeneous view of distributed and heterogeneous data sources. DISFOQuE system analyzes the fuzzy ontology in order to perform semantic query expansions, aiming to retrieve similar results that are relevant to user requirements. To present more details of the developed system, the remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes existing data integration systems and discusses how fuzzy ontology can be applied to handle some of their limitations. Section 3 presents the DISFOQuE system, explaining its architecture and operation. A case study is detailed in Section 4. Finally, section 5 describes our conclusions along with future works.

2. Using Fuzzy Ontology for Data Integration

Data integration systems (DIS) deal with two main problems: combining data located in different sources and providing the user with a unified view of gathered results [1] [2]. By providing a unique, transparent and homogeneous view of heterogeneous data sources, it is possible to retrieve richer information, since different sources can have complementary data. In order to build an integrated view of data sources, some conflicts must be addressed, such as syntactic (schematic and structural) [6] and semantic ones [7].

To handle some of these conflicts, several DIS-related researches are based on ontologies [8] [9], including

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