Integrating Spatial and Conceptual Knowledge in Virtual Assembly

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The CODY\textsuperscript{1} Virtual Constructor is a knowledge based system for the interactive assembly of complex aggregates on a virtual assembly bench[1]. In our testbed scenario, the user can assemble a toy airplane and similar constructs from parts of a construction kit, such as bolts, blocks, and bars (see figure 1). The user can inspect the graphics scene from different perspectives and change the blocks' configuration by way of verbal instructions, e.g., "Attach the long bolt to the top of the undercarriage."\textsuperscript{2} When processing user instructions, the Virtual Constructor accesses the geometric scene descriptions to evaluate spatial expressions ("the top of"), as well as additional conceptual representations containing knowledge about the currently assembled aggregates ("undercarriage"). The spatial information contained in the visualized scene is not only exploited for instruction processing though: the airplane's subassemblies usually require their parts to be arranged in a specific way, for example, the airplane wings must be attached crosswise to the fuselage; or, the wheels of the undercarriage must be in parallel planes. On the one hand, spatial information is necessary to adequately describe the airplane's assembly groups. On the other hand, this information can be inferred from the scene descriptions. Thus, the spatial knowledge of the geometric scene descriptions needs to be integrated with the conceptual knowledge representations.

The background knowledge of the Virtual Constructor is defined in four knowledge bases. The first one contains the building blocks' generic geometry models. They define the building blocks' wire frame models, center of gravity, and prototypical orientation. They also define the relative positions and orientations of the objects' connection ports. A second knowledge base defines several qualitative spatial relations over the geometry models, such as parallel, orthogonal, and touches. A third knowledge base defines conceptual knowledge about the building blocks and their connection ports. Finally, a fourth knowledge base defines the airplane's structured assembly groups as well as the specific roles the building blocks can assume in assembly groups. For example, a BOLT assumes the role of an AXLE when it is part of a HALFAXLESYSTEM.

The concept definition formalism builds on the semantic network language ERNEST [3], and the terminological language for part-of hierarchies introduced

\textsuperscript{1} CODY is a project in the collaborative research center "Situated Artificial Communicators" (SFB 360) at the University of Bielefeld and is in part supported by the German National Science Foundation (DFG).

\textsuperscript{2} Translation of original German input.
Concept: UNDERCARRIAGE

is-a: ASSEMBLYGROUP
part "has-left-halfaxlesystem" : HALFAXLESYSTEM
part "has-right-halfaxlesystem" : HALFAXLESYSTEM
part "has-block" : UNDERCARRIAGEBLOCK
pp-constraint connection "has-block" "has-left-halfaxlesystem"
pp-constraint connection "has-block" "has-right-halfaxlesystem"
pp-constraint parallel \( \perp \) "has-left-halfaxlesystem" "has-right-halfaxlesystem"

Dynamic conceptual descriptions are kept in working memory and linked to their corresponding geometry models. Whenever objects are composed on the virtual assembly bench, new connection relations are inferred from the geometry models and propagated along the part-of structure in the database. First, unstructured aggregate representations are created and matched against the model knowledge base. Then, new representations for recognized assembly groups are created and new roles are assigned to their parts accordingly. Figure 1 exemplifies the effectiveness of the geometric constraint parallel \( \perp \) in the above concept definition. In the middle, an undercarriage was recognized. On the right, a complex aggregate which is not an undercarriage is depicted that consists of the same parts, but with the geometric constraint parallel \( \perp \) violated.

Fig. 1. a) Assembled toy airplane b) undercarriage c) no undercarriage

References