

# Rebanking CCGbank for improved NP interpretation

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## Abstract

Once released, treebanks tend to remain unchanged despite any shortcomings in their depth of linguistic analysis or coverage of specific phenomena. Instead, separate resources are created to address such problems. In this paper we show how to improve the quality of a treebank, by integrating resources and implementing improved analyses for specific constructions.

We demonstrate this *rebanking* process by creating an updated version of CCGbank that includes the predicate-argument structure of both verbs and nouns, base-NP brackets, verb-particle constructions, and restrictive and non-restrictive nominal modifiers; and evaluate the impact of these changes on a statistical parser.

## 1 Introduction

Progress in natural language processing relies on direct comparison on shared data, discouraging improvements to the evaluation data. This means that we often spend years competing to reproduce partially incorrect annotations. It also encourages us to approach related problems as discrete tasks, when a new data set that adds deeper information establishes a new incompatible evaluation.

Direct comparison has been central to progress in statistical parsing, but it has also caused problems. Treebanking is a difficult engineering task: coverage, cost, consistency and granularity are all competing concerns that must be balanced against each other when the annotation scheme is developed. The difficulty of the task means that we ought to view treebanking as an ongoing process akin to grammar development, such as the many years of work on the ERG (Flickinger, 2000).

This paper demonstrates how a treebank can be *rebanked* to incorporate novel analyses and infor-

mation from existing resources. We chose to work on CCGbank (Hockenmaier and Steedman, 2007), a Combinatory Categorical Grammar (Steedman, 2000) treebank acquired from the Penn Treebank (Marcus et al., 1993). This work is equally applicable to the corpora described by Miyao et al. (2004), Shen et al. (2008) or Cahill et al. (2008).

Our first changes integrate four previously suggested improvements to CCGbank. We then describe a novel CCG analysis of NP predicate-argument structure, which we implement using NomBank (Meyers et al., 2004). Our analysis allows the distinction between core and peripheral arguments to be represented for predicate nouns.

With this distinction, an entailment recognition system could recognise that *Google's acquisition of YouTube* entailed *Google acquired YouTube*, because equivalent predicate-argument structures are built for both. Our analysis also recovers non-local dependencies mediated by nominal predicates; for instance, *Google* is the agent of *acquire* in *Google's decision to acquire YouTube*.

The rebanked corpus extends CCGbank with:

1. NP brackets from Vadas and Curran (2008);
2. Restored and normalised punctuation;
3. Propbank-derived verb subcategorisation;
4. Verb particle structure drawn from Propbank;
5. Restrictive and non-restrictive adnominals;
6. Reanalyses to promote better head-finding;
7. Nombank-derived noun subcategorisation.

Together, these changes modify 30% of the labelled dependencies in CCGbank, demonstrating how multiple resources can be brought together in a single, richly annotated corpus. We then train and evaluate a parser for these changes, to investigate their impact on the accuracy of a state-of-the-art statistical CCG parser.

## 2 Background and motivation

Formalisms like HPSG (Pollard and Sag, 1994), LFG (Kaplan and Bresnan, 1982), and CCG (Steedman, 2000) are *linguistically motivated* in the sense that they attempt to explain and predict the limited variation found in the grammars of natural languages. They also attempt to specify how grammars construct semantic representations from surface strings, which is why they are sometimes referred to as *deep* grammars. Analyses produced by these formalisms can be more detailed than those produced by skeletal phrase-structure parsers, because they produce fully specified predicate-argument structures.

Unfortunately, statistical parsers do not take advantage of this potential detail. Statistical parsers induce their grammars from corpora, and the corpora for linguistically motivated formalisms currently do not contain high quality predicate-argument annotation, because they were derived from the Penn Treebank (PTB Marcus et al., 1993). Manually written grammars for these formalisms, such as the ERG HPSG grammar (Flickinger, 2000) and the XLE LFG grammar (Butt et al., 2006) produce far more detailed and linguistically correct analyses than any English statistical parser, due to the comparatively coarse-grained annotation schemes of the corpora statistical parsers are trained on. While rule-based parsers use grammars that are carefully engineered (e.g. Oepen et al., 2004), and can be updated to reflect the best linguistic analyses, statistical parsers have so far had to take what they are given.

What we suggest in this paper is that a treebank’s grammar need not last its lifetime. For a start, there have been many annotations of the PTB that add much of the extra information needed to produce very high quality analyses for a linguistically motivated grammar. There are also other transformations which can be made with no additional information. That is, sometimes the existing trees allow transformation rules to be written that improve the quality of the grammar.

Linguistic theories are constantly changing, which means that there is a substantial lag between what we (think we) understand of grammar and the annotations in our corpora. The grammar engineering process we describe, which we dub *re-banking*, is intended to reduce this gap, tightening the feedback loop between formal and computational linguistics.

### 2.1 Combinatory Categorical Grammar

Combinatory Categorical Grammar (CCG; Steedman, 2000) is a lexicalised grammar, which means that all grammatical dependencies are specified in the lexical entries and that the production of derivations is governed by a small set of rules.

Lexical categories are either atomic ( $S$ ,  $NP$ ,  $PP$ ,  $N$ ), or a functor consisting of a result, directional slash, and argument. For instance, *in* might head a  $PP$ -typed constituent with one  $NP$ -typed argument, written as  $PP/NP$ .

A category can have a functor as its result, so that a word can have a complex valency structure. For instance, a verb phrase is represented by the category  $S\backslash NP$ : it is a function from a leftward  $NP$  (a subject) to a sentence. A transitive verb requires an object to become a verb phrase, producing the category  $(S\backslash NP)/NP$ .

A CCG grammar consists of a small number of schematic rules, called combinators. CCG extends the basic application rules of pure categorial grammar with (generalised) composition rules and type raising. The most common rules are:

$$\begin{array}{llll} X/Y & Y & \Rightarrow & X & (>) \\ & Y & X\backslash Y & \Rightarrow & X & (<) \\ X/Y & Y/Z & \Rightarrow & X/Z & (>\mathbf{B}) \\ Y\backslash Z & X\backslash Y & \Rightarrow & X\backslash Z & (<\mathbf{B}) \\ Y/Z & X\backslash Y & \Rightarrow & X/Z & (<\mathbf{B}_\times) \end{array}$$

CCGbank (Hockenmaier and Steedman, 2007) extends this compact set of combinatory rules with a set of type-changing rules, designed to strike a better balance between sparsity in the category set and ambiguity in the grammar. We mark type-changing rules **TC** in our derivations.

In wide-coverage descriptions, categories are generally modelled as typed-feature structures (Shieber, 1986), rather than atomic symbols. This allows the grammar to include a notion of headedness, and to unify under-specified features.

We occasionally must refer to these additional details, for which we employ the following notation. Features are annotated in square-brackets, e.g.  $S[dcl]$ . Head-finding indices are annotated on categories in subscripts, e.g.  $(NP_y\backslash NP_y)/NP_z$ . The index of the word the category is assigned to is left implicit. We will sometimes also annotate derivations with the heads of categories as they are being built, to help the reader keep track of what lexemes have been bound to which categories.

### 3 Combining CCGbank corrections

There have been a few papers describing corrections to CCGbank. We bring these corrections together for the first time, before building on them with our further changes.

#### 3.1 Compound noun brackets

Compound noun phrases can nest inside each other, creating bracketing ambiguities:

- (1) (crude oil) prices
- (2) crude (oil prices)

The structure of such compound noun phrases is left underspecified in the Penn Treebank (PTB), because the annotation procedure involved stitching together partial parses produced by the Fidditch parser (Hindle, 1983), which produced flat brackets for these constructions. The bracketing decision was also a source of annotator disagreement (Bies et al., 1995).

When Hockenmaier and Steedman (2002) went to acquire a CCG treebank from the PTB, this posed a problem. There is no equivalent way to leave these structures under-specified in CCG, because derivations must be binary branching. They therefore employed a simple heuristic: assume all such structures branch to the right. Under this analysis, *crude oil* is not a constituent, producing an incorrect analysis as in (1).

Vadas and Curran (2007) addressed this by manually annotating all of the ambiguous noun phrases in the PTB, and went on to use this information to correct 20,409 dependencies (1.95%) in CCGbank (Vadas and Curran, 2008). Our changes build on this corrected corpus.

#### 3.2 Punctuation corrections

The syntactic analysis of punctuation is notoriously difficult, and punctuation is not always treated consistently in the Penn Treebank (Bies et al., 1995). Hockenmaier (2003) determined that quotation marks were particularly problematic, and therefore removed them from CCGbank altogether. We use the process described by Tse and Curran (2008) to restore the quotation marks and shift commas so that they always attach to the constituent to their left. This allows a grammar rule to be removed, preventing a great deal of spurious ambiguity and improving the speed of the C&C parser (Clark and Curran, 2007) by 37%.

### 3.3 Verb predicate-argument corrections

Semantic role descriptions generally recognise a distinction between core arguments, whose role comes from a set specific to the predicate, and peripheral arguments, who have a role drawn from a small, generic set. This distinction is represented in the surface syntax in CCG, because the category of a verb must specify its argument structure. In (3) *as a director* is annotated as a complement; in (4) it is an adjunct:

- (3) *He joined as a director*  
 $NP (S \setminus NP) / PP \quad PP$
- (4) *He joined as a director*  
 $NP \quad S \setminus NP \quad (S \setminus NP) \setminus (S \setminus NP)$

CCGbank contains noisy complement and adjunct distinctions, because they were drawn from PTB function labels which imperfectly represent the distinction. In our previous work we used Propbank (Palmer et al., 2005) to convert 1,543 complements to adjuncts and 13,256 adjuncts to complements (Honnibal and Curran, 2007). If a constituent such as *as a director* received an adjunct category, but was labelled as a core argument in Propbank, we changed it to a complement, using its head's part-of-speech tag to infer its constituent type. We performed the equivalent transformation to ensure all peripheral arguments of verbs were analysed as adjuncts.

#### 3.4 Verb-particle constructions

Propbank also offers reliable annotation of verb-particle constructions. This was not available in the PTB, so Hockenmaier and Steedman (2007) annotated all intransitive prepositions as adjuncts:

- (5) *He woke up*  
 $NP \quad S \setminus NP \quad (S \setminus NP) \setminus (S \setminus NP)$

We follow Constable and Curran (2009) in exploiting the Propbank annotations to add verb-particle distinctions to CCGbank, by introducing a new atomic category *PT* for particles, and changing their status from adjuncts to complements:

- (6) *He woke up*  
 $NP (S \setminus NP) / PT \quad PT$

This analysis could be improved by adding extra head-finding logic to the verbal category, to recognise the multi-word expression as the head.







Corpus	L. DEPS	U. DEPS	CATS
+NP brackets	97.2	97.7	98.5
+Quotes	97.2	97.7	98.5
+Propbank	93.0	94.9	96.7
+Particles	92.5	94.8	96.2
+Restrictivity	79.5	94.4	90.6
+Part. Gen.	76.1	90.1	90.4
+NP Pred-Arg	70.6	83.3	84.8

Table 1: Effect of the changes on CCGbank, by percentage of dependencies and categories left unchanged in Section 00.

## 6.1 Implementation and Statistics

We detect this construction by identifying NPs post-modified by an *of* PP. The NP’s head must either have the POS tag CD, or be one of the following words, determined through manual inspection of Sections 02-21:

*all, another, average, both, each, another, any, anything, both, certain, each, either, enough, few, little, most, much, neither, nothing, other, part, plenty, several, some, something, that, those.*

Having identified the construction, we simply relabel the *NP* to *NP/PP*, and the *NP\NP* adnominal to *PP*. We identified and reanalysed 3,010 partitive genitives in CCGbank.

## 7 Similarity to CCGbank

Table 1 shows the percentage of labelled dependencies (L. Deps), unlabelled dependencies (U. Deps) and lexical categories (Cats) that remained the same after each set of changes.

A labelled dependency is a 4-tuple consisting of the head, the argument, the lexical category of the head, and the argument slot that the dependency fills. For instance, the subject fills slot 1 and the object fills slot 2 on the transitive verb category  $(S\backslash NP)/NP$ . There are more changes to labelled dependencies than lexical categories because one lexical category change alters all of the dependencies headed by a predicate, as they all depend on its lexical category. Unlabelled dependencies consist of only the head and argument.

The biggest changes were those described in Sections 4 and 5. After the addition of nominal predicate-argument structure, over 50% of the labelled dependencies were changed. Many of these changes involved changing an adjunct to a complement, which affects the unlabelled dependencies because the head and argument are inverted.

## 8 Lexicon statistics

Our changes make the grammar sensitive to new distinctions, which increases the number of lexical categories required. Table 2 shows the number

Corpus	CATS	Cats $\geq 10$	CATS/WORD
CCGbank	1286	425	8.6
+NP brackets	1298	429	8.9
+Quotes	1300	431	8.8
+Propbank	1342	433	8.9
+Particles	1405	458	9.1
+Restrictivity	1447	471	9.3
+Part. Gen.	1455	474	9.5
+NP Pred-Arg	1574	511	10.1

Table 2: Effect of the changes on the size of the lexicon.

of lexical categories (Cats), the number of lexical categories that occur at least 10 times in Sections 02-21 (Cats  $\geq 10$ ), and the average number of categories available for assignment to each token in Section 00 (Cats/Word). We followed Clark and Curran’s (2007) process to determine the set of categories a word could receive, which includes a part-of-speech back-off for infrequent words.

The lexicon steadily grew with each set of changes, because each added information to the corpus. The addition of quotes only added two categories (*LQU* and *RQU*), and the addition of the quote tokens slightly decreased the average categories per word. The Propbank and verb-particle changes both introduced rare categories for complicated, infrequent argument structures.

The *NP* predicate-argument structure modifications added the most information. Head nouns were previously guaranteed the category *N* in CCGbank; possessive clitics always received the category  $(NP/N)\backslash NP$ ; and possessive personal pronouns were always *NP/N*. Our changes introduce new categories for these frequent tokens, which meant a substantial increase in the number of possible categories per word.

## 9 Parsing Evaluation

Some of the changes we have made correct problems that have caused the performance of a statistical CCG parser to be over-estimated. Other changes introduce new distinctions, which a parser may or may not find difficult to reproduce. To investigate these issues, we trained and evaluated the C&C CCG parser on our rebanked corpora.

The experiments were set up as follows. We used the highest scoring configuration described by Clark and Curran (2007), the hybrid dependency model, using gold-standard POS tags. We followed Clark and Curran in excluding sentences that could not be parsed from the evaluation. All models obtained similar coverage, between 99.0 and 99.3%. The parser was evaluated using depen-

Corpus	WSJ 00			WSJ 23		
	LF	UF	CAT	LF	UF	CAT
CCGbank	87.2	92.9	94.1	87.7	93.0	94.4
+NP brackets	86.9	92.8	93.8	87.3	92.8	93.9
+Quotes	86.8	92.7	93.9	87.1	92.6	94.0
+Propbank	86.7	92.6	94.0	87.0	92.6	94.0
+Particles	86.4	92.5	93.8	86.8	92.6	93.8
All Rebanking	84.2	91.2	91.9	84.7	91.3	92.2

Table 3: Parser evaluation on the rebanked corpora.

Corpus	Rebanked		CCGbank	
	LF	UF	LF	UF
+NP brackets	86.45	92.36	86.52	92.35
+Quotes	86.57	92.40	86.52	92.35
+Propbank	87.76	92.96	87.74	92.99
+Particles	87.50	92.77	87.67	92.93
All Rebanking	87.23	92.71	88.02	93.51

Table 4: Comparison of parsers trained on CCGbank and the rebanked corpora, using dependencies that occur in both.

dependencies generated from the gold-standard derivations (Boxwell, p.c., 2010).

Table 3 shows the accuracy of the parser on Sections 00 and 23. The parser scored slightly lower as the NP brackets, Quotes, Propbank and Particles corrections were added. This apparent decline in performance is at least partially an artefact of the evaluation. CCGbank contains some dependencies that are trivial to recover, because Hockenmaier and Steedman (2007) was forced to adopt a strictly right-branching analysis for NP brackets.

There was a larger drop in accuracy on the fully rebanked corpus, which included our analyses of restrictivity, partitive constructions and noun predicate-argument structure. This might also be explained by the evaluation, as the rebanked corpus includes much more fine-grained distinctions. The labelled dependencies evaluation is particularly sensitive to this, as a single category change affects multiple dependencies. This can be seen in the smaller gap in category accuracy.

We investigated whether the differences in performance were due to the different evaluation data by comparing the parsers’ performance against the original parser on the dependencies they agreed upon, to allow direct comparison. To do this, we extracted the CCGbank intersection of each corpus’s Section 00 dependencies.

Table 4 compares the labelled and unlabelled recall of the rebanked parsers we trained against the CCGbank parser on these intersections. Note that each row refers to a different intersection, so results are not comparable between rows. This comparison shows that the declines in accuracy seen in Table 3 were largely confined to the corrected de-

pendencies. The parser’s performance remained fairly stable on the dependencies left unchanged.

The rebanked parser performed 0.8% worse than the CCGbank parser on the intersection dependencies, suggesting that the fine-grained distinctions we introduced did cause some sparse data problems. However, we did not change any of the parser’s maximum entropy features or hyperparameters, which are tuned for CCGbank.

## 10 Conclusion

Research in natural language understanding is driven by the datasets that we have available. The most cited computational linguistics work to date is the Penn Treebank (Marcus et al., 1993)<sup>1</sup>. Propbank (Palmer et al., 2005) has also been very influential since its release, and NomBank has been used for semantic dependency parsing in the CoNLL 2008 and 2009 shared tasks.

This paper has described how these resources can be jointly exploited using a linguistically motivated theory of syntax and semantics. The semantic annotations provided by Propbank and NomBank allowed us to build a corpus that takes much greater advantage of the semantic transparency of a deep grammar, using careful analyses and phenomenon-specific conversion rules.

The major areas of CCGbank’s grammar left to be improved are the analysis of comparatives, and the analysis of named entities. English comparatives are diverse and difficult to analyse. Even the XTAG grammar (Doran et al., 1994), which deals with the major constructions of English in enviable detail, does not offer a full analysis of these phenomena. Named entities are also difficult to analyse, as many entity types obey their own specific grammars. This is another example of a phenomenon that could be analysed much better in CCGbank using an existing resource, the BBN named entity corpus.

Our rebanking has substantially improved CCGbank, by increasing the granularity and linguistic fidelity of its analyses. We achieved this by exploiting existing resources and crafting novel analyses. The process we have demonstrated can be used to train a parser that returns dependencies that abstract away as much surface syntactic variation as possible — including, now, even whether the predicate and arguments are expressed in a noun phrase or a full clause.

<sup>1</sup><http://clair.si.umich.edu/clair/anthology/rankings.cgi>



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