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## TEXT SIMPLIFICATION: IMPROVING INFORMATION ACCESSIBILITY

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### Admin

- Ethics discussion on Wednesday: read papers beforehand
- Project status update due Wednesday
- Next Monday, Quiz #4 (comprehensive)
- Next Wednesday, presentations

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### Text simplification

Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction.

- E. F. Schumacher

**Goal:**

Reduce the reading complexity of a sentence by incorporating more accessible vocabulary and sentence structure while maintaining the content.

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## Simplify

Alfonso Perez Munoz, usually referred to as Alfonso, is a former Spanish footballer, in the striker position.

The reverse process, producing electrical energy from mechanical energy, is accomplished by a generator or dynamo.

7

## Text simplification: real examples

Alfonso Perez Munoz, usually referred to as Alfonso, is a former Spanish footballer, in the striker position.



Alfonso Perez is a former Spanish football player.

8

## Text simplification: real examples

Alfonso Perez *Munoz, usually referred to as Alfonso*, is a former Spanish footballer, *in the striker position*.



Alfonso Perez is a former Spanish football player.

Deletion

9

## Text simplification: real examples

Alfonso Perez Munoz, usually referred to as Alfonso, is a former Spanish *footballer*, in the striker position.



Alfonso Perez is a former Spanish *football player*.

Rewording

10

### Text simplification: real examples

Endemic types or species are especially likely to develop on islands because of their geographical isolation.



Endemic types are most likely to develop on islands because they are isolated.

11

### Text simplification: real examples

Endemic types *or species* are especially likely to develop on islands because of their geographical isolation.



Endemic types are most likely to develop on islands because they are isolated.

**Deletion**

12

### Text simplification: real examples

Endemic types or species are *especially* likely to develop on islands because *of their geographical isolation*.



Endemic types are *most* likely to develop on islands because *they are isolated*.

**Rewording**

13

### Text simplification: real examples

The reverse process, producing electrical energy from mechanical energy, is accomplished by a generator or dynamo.



A dynamo or an electric generator does the reverse: it changes mechanical movement into electric energy.

14

## Text simplification: real examples

The reverse process, producing *electrical energy* from *mechanical energy*, is accomplished by a *generator or dynamo*.



A *dynamo or an electric generator* does the reverse: it changes *mechanical movement* into *electric energy*.

15

## Text simplification: real examples

The reverse process, producing *electrical energy* from *mechanical energy*, is accomplished by a *generator or dynamo*.



A *dynamo or an electric generator* does the reverse: it changes *mechanical movement* into *electric energy*.

- Deletion and rewording
- Insertion and reordering

16

## Goals today

Introduce the text simplification problem ✓

Highlight why text simplification is important

Show some examples of text simplification approaches

Give one perspective on CS research

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## Why text simplification?

A lot of text data is available



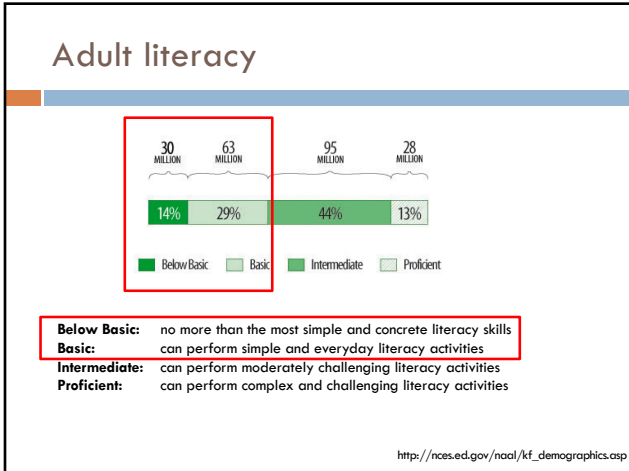
Google™



WebMD

**Problem:** much of this content is written above the reading level of many people

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### Why text simplification?

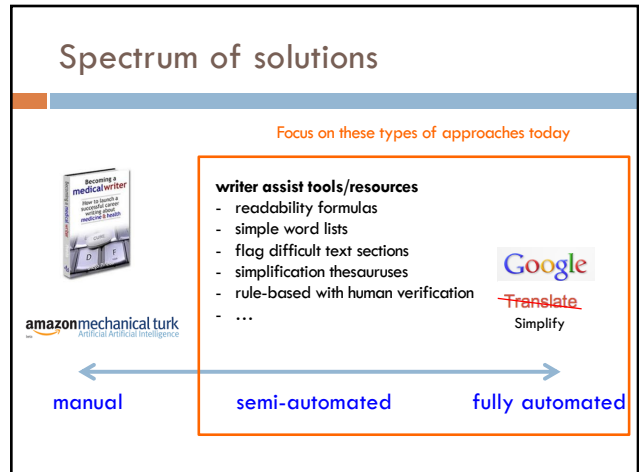
- Broader availability of standard text resources
  - language learners
  - people with aphasia or other cognitive disabilities
  - children
- Broader availability of domain-specific text resources
  - health and medical documents
    - 90M Americans (over a quarter!) do not have sufficient health literacy to understand currently provided materials
    - Cost of low health literacy is estimated to be hundreds of billions
  - academic papers
  - legal documents

20

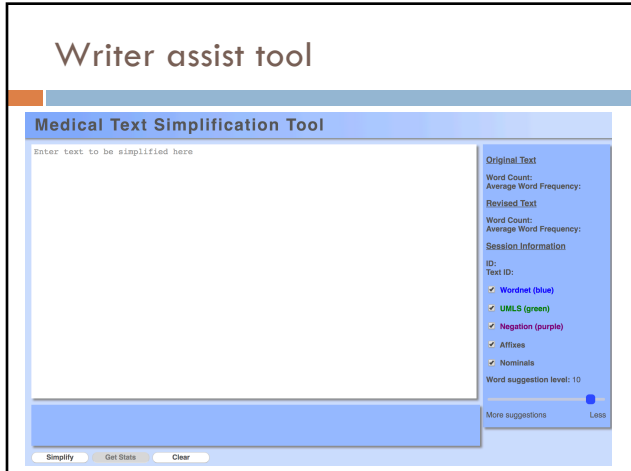
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21



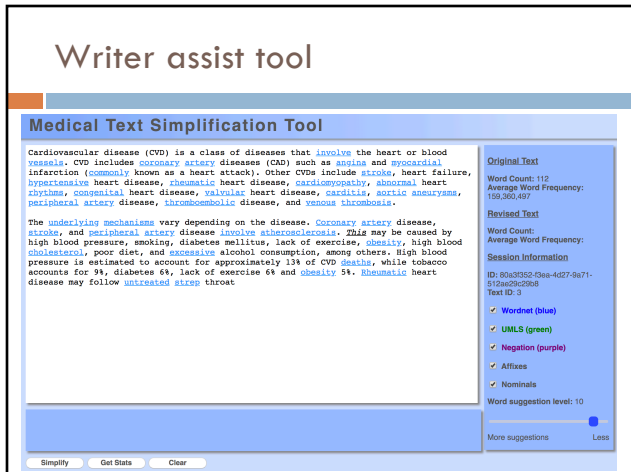
22



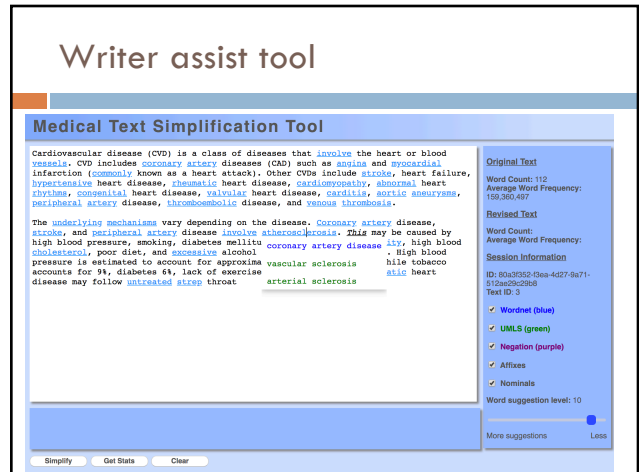
23



24



25



26

## Writer assist tool

### Medical Text Simplification Tool

Asthma is a common long-term **inflammatory** disease of the **airways** of the **lungs**. It is characterized by **variable and recurring symptoms**, **reversible airflow obstruction**, and **easily triggered bronchospasms**. Symptoms include **episodes of wheezing, coughing, chest tightness**, and **shortness of breath**. **These** symptoms may occur a few times a day or a few times per week. Depending on the person, **asthma** symptoms may become worse at night or with exercise.

Asthma is thought to be caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Environmental factors include exposure to air **pollution** and **allergens**. Other potential **triggers** include **medications** such as **aspirin** and **beta blockers**. Diagnosis is usually based on the pattern of symptoms, response to therapy over time, and **spirometry** lung function testing. **Asthma** is classified according to the frequency of symptoms, forced **expiratory volume in one second (FEV1)**, and **peak expiratory flow rate**. It may also be classified **as acute or chronic**, where **acute** refers to a **readmission** toward developing a type 1 **hypersensitivity** reaction.

There is no **cure** for **asthma**. Symptoms can be **prevented** by **avoiding triggers**, such as **allergens and irritants**, and by the use of **inhaled corticosteroids**. Long-acting beta **agonists (LABA)** or **antileukotriene** agents may be used in addition to **inhaled corticosteroids** if **asthma symptoms remain uncontrolled**. Treatment of **rapidly worsening symptoms** is usually with an **inhaled short-acting beta-2 agonist** such as **salmeterol** and **corticosteroids** taken by mouth. In **very severe cases**, **intravenous corticosteroids**, **magnesium sulfate**, and **hospitalization** may be required.

Replace the adverb and the adjective with an adjective For example:  
The resident studied at one of California's **most elite** medical schools.  
The resident studied at one of California's **top** medical schools.

Word Count: 156  
Average Word Frequency: 373.575,774

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Word suggestion level: 10

More suggestions

27

## How do we identify difficult words?

### Medical Text Simplification Tool

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More suggestions

28

## Quantifying word difficulty

Hypothesis:

The more often a person sees a word, the more familiar they are with that word, and therefore the simpler it is

Proxy for "how often you see a word":

Frequency on the web!

Google™ bing™ Y!

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## Validating the frequency hypothesis

Google: ~1.3M unique "words"

sort based on frequency

randomly pick 25 words from each bin

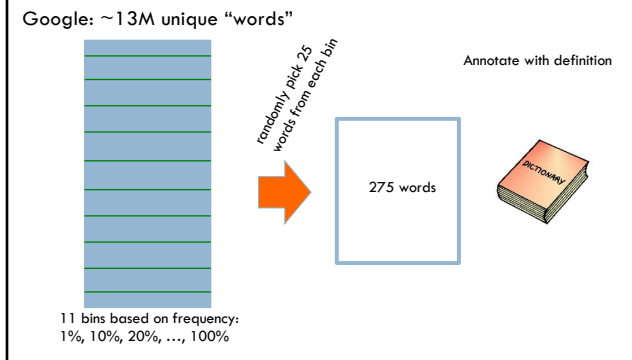
275 words

11 bins based on frequency: 1%, 10%, 20%, ..., 100%

Does the frequency of these words relate to people's **knowledge/familiarity** with these words?

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## Validating the frequency hypothesis



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## Validating the frequency hypothesis

marmorean:

- a) crimson-and-grey songbird that inhabits town walls and mountain cliffs of southern Eurasia and northern Africa
- b) of or relating to or characteristic of marble
- c) the most common protein in muscle
- d) a color or shade

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## Validating the frequency hypothesis

marmorean:

- a) crimson-and-grey songbird that inhabits town walls and mountain cliffs of southern Eurasia and northern Africa
  - b) of or relating to or characteristic of marble
  - c) the most common protein in muscle
  - d) a color or shade
- random definitions from other words in data set

33

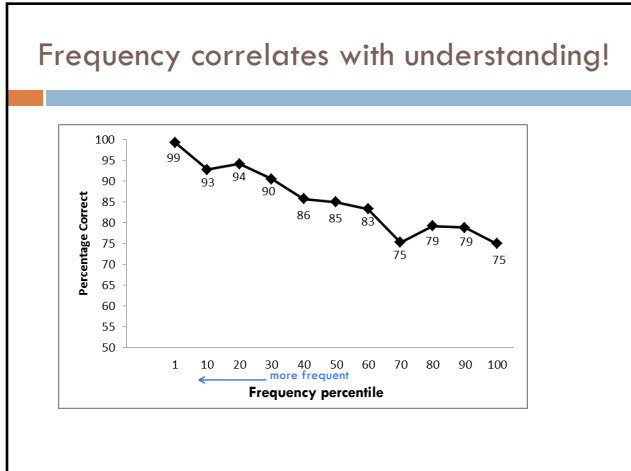
## Study participants

amazon mechanical turk™  
Artificial Artificial Intelligence

50 participants per word \* 275 words =  
13,750 total annotations!

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### How do we identify difficult words?

#### Medical Text Simplification Tool

**Original Text**  
 Word Count: 156  
 Average Word Frequency: 373.575,774

**Revised Text**  
 Word Count:  
 Average Word Frequency:

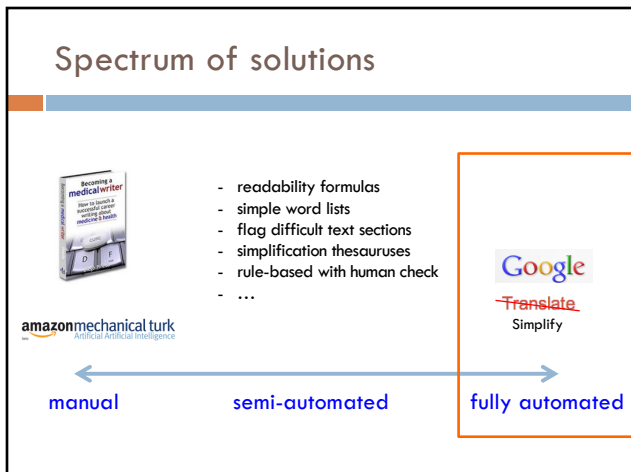
**Session Information**  
 ID: 90a3702-01a-427-9a71-210a2c206a  
 Text ID: 4

- Wordnet (blue)
- UMLS (green)
- Negation (purple)
- Affixes
- Nonsense

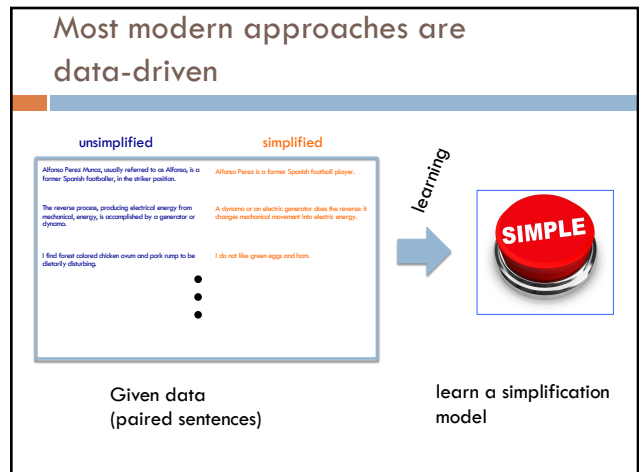
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Replace the adverb and the adjective with an adjective. For example:  
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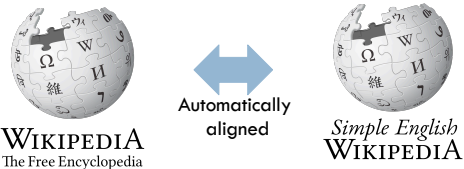
## Simple English Wikipedia



Simple English  
WIKIPEDIA

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## Example data source: Wikipedia



Automatically aligned

60K articles pairs

~200K aligned sentence pairs

40

## From aligned documents to aligned sentences

**E minor** (Em, Mim) is a *minor scale* based on the note E. The E natural minor scale (↑ 2̣ 3̣ 4̣ 5̣ 6̣ 7̣) consists of the pitches E, F#, G, A, B, C, and D. The E harmonic minor scale (↑ 2̣ 3̣ 4̣ 5̣ 6̣ 7̣) contains the natural 7, D#, rather than the flattened 7, D – to align with the major dominant chord, B7 (B D# F# A).

Its *key signature* has one sharp, F (see below: Scales and keys).

Its relative major is G major, and its parallel major is E major.

Much of the *classical guitar* repertoire is in E minor, as this is a very natural key for the instrument. In standard tuning (E A D G B E), four of the instrument's six 'open' (unfretted) strings are part of the tonic chord. The key of E minor is also extremely popular in *heavy metal music*, as its tonic is the lowest note on a standard-tuned guitar.

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E minor was one of the most-often used keys by Felix Mendelssohn.

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## From aligned documents to aligned sentences

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E minor was one of the most-often used keys by Felix Mendelssohn.

How could you do this?

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## Simplification approaches

Many different data-driven approaches

- ▣ Lexical (change a word at a time)
- ▣ Phrasal (change phrases)
- ▣ Syntactic (use grammatical structure)
- ▣ Neural networks

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## Lexical simplification

The ACL was **established** in 1962.



The ACL was **started** in 1962.

Simplification is accomplished by changing one word (or phrase) at a time.

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## Lexical simplification

The ACL was **established** in 1962.



The ACL was **started** in 1962.

How can we learn to do this from our data?

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## Preprocessing

The first school was established in 1857

The first school was started in 1857

The district was established in 1993 by merging ...

The district was made in 1993 by joining ...

Automatically word-align sentences

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## Extract candidate simplifications

The first school was *established* in 1857

The first school was *started* in 1857

The district was *established* in 1993 by *merging* ...

The district was *made* in 1993 by *joining* ...

extract aligned candidate word pairs:

- different words
- same part of speech
- not in a list of common words (stoplist)

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## Simplification rules learned

word	candidate simplifications
abolish	remove, replace, stop
established	began, made, settled, started
merging	becoming, joining

...

Learned simplification rules for **14,478** words

On average **2.25** candidate simplifications

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## Not all rules apply in all contexts

The ACL was *established* in 1962.



The ACL was *began* in 1962. ❌

The ACL was *made* in 1962. ?

The ACL was *settled* in 1962. ❌

The ACL was *started* in 1962. ✓

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## Data for learning context

Enter a *simpler* word that could be substituted for the red, bold word in the sentence. A *simpler* word is one that would be understood by more people or people with a lower reading level (e.g. children).

Food is **procured** with its suckers and then crushed using its tough "beak" of chitin.

amazon mechanicalturk™  
Artificial Artificial Intelligence

51

## Data for learning context

Enter a *simpler* word that could be substituted for the red, bold word in the sentence. A *simpler* word is one that would be understood by more people or people with a lower reading level (e.g. children).

Food is **procured** with its suckers and then crushed using its tough "beak" of chitin.

?

amazon mechanicalturk™  
Artificial Artificial Intelligence

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## Collected data for 500 words

	simplification	# of people that suggested simplification (out of 50)
procured →	obtained	17
	gathered	9
	gotten	8
	grabbed	4
	acquired	2
	made	2
	...	

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## Learning to apply rules

### 500 examples

Food is **procured** with its suckers and then crushed using its tough "beak" of chitin.

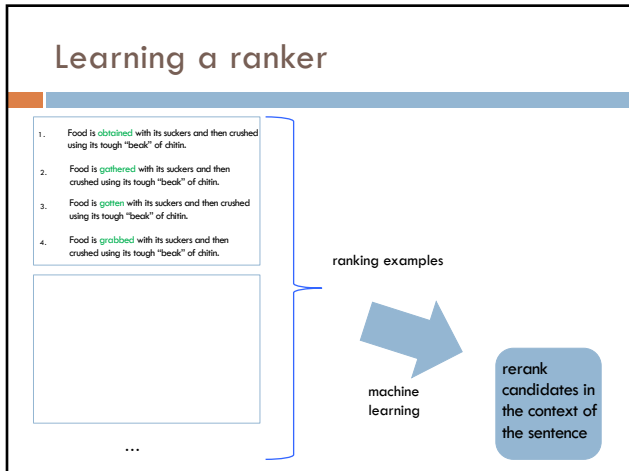


1. Food is **obtained** with its suckers and then crushed using its tough "beak" of chitin.
2. Food is **gathered** with its suckers and then crushed using its tough "beak" of chitin.
3. Food is **gotten** with its suckers and then crushed using its tough "beak" of chitin.
4. Food is **grabbed** with its suckers and then crushed using its tough "beak" of chitin.

...

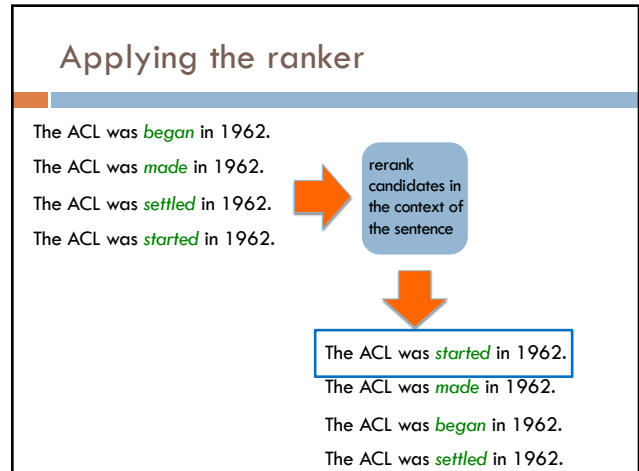
54

## Learning a ranker



55

## Applying the ranker



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## Results

### Previous approach:

- ▣ Coverage: 85% (of the words that could be changed)
- ▣ Accuracy: 54% (of the suggestions are correct)

### Our approach:

- ▣ Coverage: 86%
- ▣ Accuracy: **76%**

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## Simplification approaches

### Many different data-driven approaches

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## Phrase-based sentence simplification

I disdain green ham with green eggs

59

## Phrase-based sentence simplification

I disdain green ham with green eggs

Unsimplified sentence is probabilistically broken into phrases

- "phrase" is a sequence of words

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## Phrase-based sentence simplification

I disdain green ham with green eggs

I do not like ham and green eggs

Each phrase is probabilistically simplified

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## Phrase-based sentence simplification

I disdain green ham with green eggs

I do not like green eggs and ham

Phrases are probabilistically reordered

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### Learned phrase examples

original	simple	probability
ham	ham	0.7
ham	pork	0.2
ham	meat	0.1
...		
like to eat a variety	like to eat a variety	0.5
like to eat a variety	like to eat lots	0.3
like to eat a variety	like to eat many	0.2

Learn these aligned phrases and probabilities from the aligned sentences

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### Phrase-based sentence simplification

I disdain green ham with green eggs



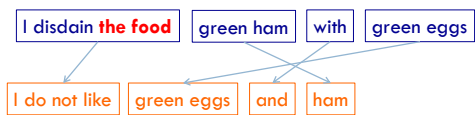
- I do not like green eggs and ham
- I do not like ham and green eggs
- I do not like green eggs and green ham
- I do not like green eggs with ham
- I do not like eggs with ham
- ...

Model is probabilistic and considers many, many variations!

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### Phrase-based sentence simplification

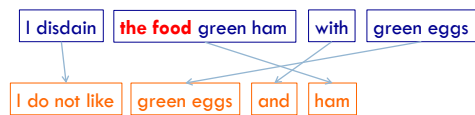
**Problem:** does not account for phrasal deletion



65

### Phrase-based sentence simplification

**Problem:** does not account for phrasal deletion

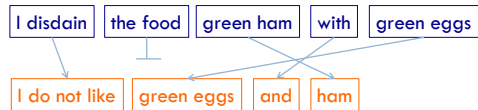


66



## Phrase-based sentence simplification

We add phrasal deletion



Each phrase is probabilistically simplified  
*Phrases can also be probabilistically deleted*

## Deleted phrases

0.5% of learned phrases are deletions

Phrase-table entry	probability of deletion
,	0.057
the	0.033
of the	0.0015
or	0.0014
however ,	0.00095
the city of	0.00034
generally	0.00033
approximately	0.00025
, however ,	0.00022
, etc	0.00013

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## Qualitatively: Phrase-based

*Critical reception* for The Wild has been negative.



Reviews for The Wild has been negative.

rewording

## Qualitatively: Phrase-based

Bauska is a town in Bauska county, in the *Zemgale region* of *southern Latvia*.



Bauska is a town in Bauska county, in the region of *Zemgale*.

rewording/reordering, deletion

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### Qualitatively: Phrase-based

Nicolas Anelka is a French footballer who currently plays as a striker for Chelsea in the English premier league.



Nicolas Anelka is a French football player. He plays for Chelsea.

rewording, deletion,  
sentence splitting

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### Qualitatively: Phrase-based

Each edge of a tesseract is of the same length.



Same edge of the same length.

72

### Qualitatively: *Previous approach*

He often recuperated at Menton, near Nice, France, where he eventually died on 1892 January 31.



He died.

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### Quantitatively

Compared to **three** previous systems:

#### Pros:

- phrase-based approach tends to be more similar to human simplifications than other approaches
- deletion improves the quality
- model is fairly easy to understand

#### Cons:

- tends to only make minor changes to the sentences
- some disfluencies due to long distance dependencies

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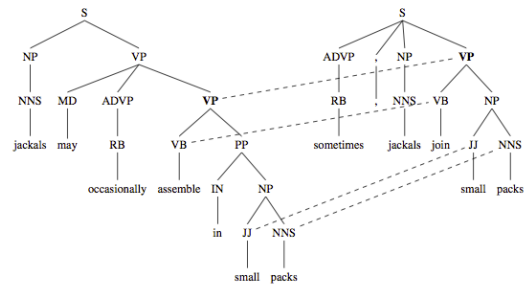
## Simplification approaches

Many different data-driven approaches

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75

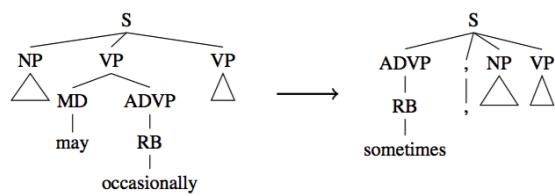
## Syntax-based approach



Rather than operating on phrases, operate on grammar trees

76

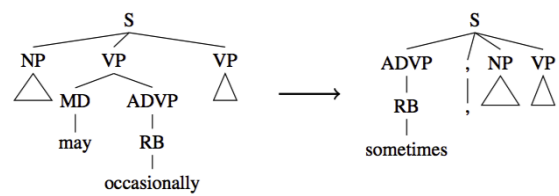
## Learn probabilistic, syntax-based rules



They may occasionally eat → sometimes, they eat

77

## Learn probabilistic, syntax-based rules



The scary cats from the park may occasionally walk around on two legs → sometimes, the scary cats from the park walk around on two legs

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## An aside



sometimes, the scary cats from the park  
walk around on two legs

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## A syntax-based approach

Our life is frittered away by detail.  
Simplify, simplify.  
- H.D. Thoreau



Our life is frittered away.  
- Lab Machine 227-31

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## Qualitatively: syntax-based

Overall Bamberga is the tenth brightest main belt asteroid **after, in order, Vesta, Pallas, Ceres, Iris, Hebe, Juno, Melpomene, Eunomia and Flora.**



Syntax:

Overall Bamberga is the tenth brightest main belt asteroid.

Phrase-based: (same as input)

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## Quantitatively

Compared to **phrase-based**:

**Pros:**

- Much more significant simplifications
- More grammatical
- Simpler

**Cons:**

- Was sometimes aggressive about removing content

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## Goals today

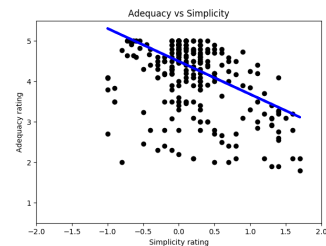
- Introduce the text simplification problem ✓
- Highlight why text simplification is important ✓
- Show some examples of text simplification approaches ✓
- Give one perspective on CS research ✓

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## Future thoughts/challenges

### What is simple?

- ▣ different domains may have different notion
- ▣ how do we measure/evaluate simplicity



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## Collaborators!

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## Course recap

Corpus analysis

Regex

Language modeling (smoothing!)

Linguistics basics

Learning grammars PCFGs

Parsing

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## Course recap

- Text similarity
- Word similarity
- Machine translation
- Word alignment
- Machine learning (Naive Bayes, SVMs)
- Neural nets (basics, Word2Vec, large language models)

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## Course recap

- HashMaps/dictionaries
- Java
- How to count words! 😊

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## Course recap

- How many lines of code?
- How many slides?

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