

Migrating the FMA from Protégé to OWL

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Abstract. This paper focuses on the migration of the Foundational Model of Anatomy from its frame-based representation in Protégé to its logical representation in OWL. First, it considers specificities of the FMA in Protégé that were taken into account for the migration, and presents some conversion rules defined for migrating FMA from Protégé 2.1 to OWL DL. Then, the incremental approach currently adopted is outlined. Preliminary results are reported, exhibiting the benefits of this work both for the FMA and for description logic systems.

1. Introduction

The long term goal of this project is to provide a service assisting the conversion of frame-based ontologies to OWL, in order to take advantage of the higher expressiveness and powerful reasoning services of its underlying description logic (DL). Converting frame-based ontologies to OWL becomes an important issue corresponding to general needs for interoperability and resources sharing on the Semantic Web. This trend is already observed in medicine, where biomedical thesauri are currently being migrated to OWL (e.g. Gene Ontology, MeSH, NCI Thesaurus).

The frame-based ontology under study is the Foundational Model of Anatomy (FMA, version 1.1), which was converted from Protégé 2.1 to OWL DL. The FMA was selected mainly because anatomy plays a central role in medicine. The FMA claims to be [2] “a reference ontology in biomedical informatics for correlating different views of anatomy, aligning existing and emerging ontologies in bioinformatics ...”. Next, from a representational viewpoint, it is pertinent to evaluate the relevance of OWL DL and benefits of DL reasoning services such as consistency checking, automatic classification and instance recognition, for a large biomedical ontology such as the FMA. Finally, its complexity and size make converting the FMA into OWL a challenge for editing environments (e.g., Protégé OWL) and reasoners (e.g., Racer). In fact, the sheer size of FMA brought to light major computational difficulties and revealed some problems with the systems used. For this reason, we adopted an incremental approach to converting the FMA in order to reduce the performance issue and investigate the other issues step by step. While [6] suggests a solution based on OWL Full, our paper presents preliminary results obtained from a conversion of a large subset of the FMA into OWL DL, and its benefits.

2. Methods

At a first glance, it might be thought that migrating a Protégé ontology to OWL could be achieved by a simple export function mapping Protégé primitives to OWL constructs. In fact, DLs have a higher expressiveness and migrating a frame-based ontology to OWL requires not only a syntactic “translation”, but also a semantic “enrichment”. Indeed, property restrictions such as *allValuesFrom* and *someValuesFrom* cannot be directly derived from the original ontology, where they were not specified. Additionally, satisfiability and classification strongly rely on the classes *logical* definitions. A reasoner (e.g., Racer) can only automatically classify the “defined” classes¹ - i.e. classes with at least one necessary and sufficient condition. In frame representations, all slots p_i with range B_i defined at a class A are considered as a set of necessary conditions. Identifying *necessary and sufficient* conditions is a major “enrichment” of the ontology. Finally, the FMA makes extensive use of meta-classes in Protégé, which are not allowed in OWL DL. In Protégé, each concept of the Anatomy Taxonomy is modeled both as a meta-class and as a class, instance of a meta-class. This was the “technical solution for enabling the selective inheritance of attributes” [2]. For example, *Heart* is defined (1) as a meta-class, subclass of *Organ+with+cavitated+organ+parts*, itself subclass of *Organ*, and (2) as its instance. At the meta level (1), *Heart* inherits all the slots, facets, characteristics of its superclasses. For instance, it inherits from *Organ* the slot *bounded+by* with multiple values allowed in the class *Surface+of+organ*, the slot *arterial+supply* etc. At the instance level (2) the class slots of *Heart* are assigned particular values. For example, *bounded+by* is filled with *Surface+of+heart*, *arterial+supply* is filled with *Right+coronary+artery* and *Left+coronary+artery* etc. Simply ignoring meta-classes in the migration would not be satisfactory, because all the knowledge specified at

¹ except if a property has a domain (or range) that is a primitive class, which can coerce classes to be reclassified under the primitive class that is the domain or range of the property (§0).

the meta level would be lost. The adopted solution is, for each concept, to merge the two levels of representation in Protégé onto a single OWL class.

2.1 Migration rules for FMA

The migration was achieved from the text files FMA.pont and FMA.pins. Two types of migration rules have been designed: “translation” and “enrichment” rules. Translation simply draws on the structural correspondence between Protégé and OWL constructs, e.g. inverse, symmetry. By contrast, enrichment rules interpret the underlying principles of FMA, so as to introduce logical features such as `allValuesFrom` and `someValuesFrom` property restrictions. Here are some of the migration rules we created (see [5] for details).

Class information. Classes and properties – stored at (meta)class level in Protégé – are converted to OWL classes and properties with specified domain (`rdfs:domain`) and range (`rdfs:range`). The following property characteristics are translated into OWL: inverse (`owl:inverseOf`), logical characteristics, i.e. transitive, symmetric (`owl:TransitiveProperty`, `owl:SymmetricProperty`), and also property cardinality and restrictions (`owl:FunctionalProperty`, `owl:hasValue`). In practice, the main rules are the following.

- **Top level slots**, specified in Protégé to save top-level slot information, are converted into `DatatypeProperty` or `ObjectProperty` with the relevant range and restrictions, according to their definition. For example, a top-level slot with type SYMBOL is converted (1) into a `DatatypeProperty` with range `#Boolean` (e.g., `has_boundary`) when its allowed values are TRUE FALSE, (2) into an `ObjectProperty` with an enumerated class (`oneOf{allowed-values}`) as range when its allowed values are different from TRUE FALSE and (3) into an `ObjectProperty` with the union of the allowed (meta)classes as range when it has allowed classes (or allowed-parents).

Single-slots with cardinality 0 1 are converted to `FunctionalProperty`.

Inverse-slots. If top level slot have “inverse-slot”, it is converted to `SymmetricProperty` or `inverseOf`. If the inverse value is itself, it is `SymmetricProperty` with range assigned to its domain, else it is `inverseOf`. Thus, for example, the top level slot `has+boundary` is converted to a `DatatypeProperty` with range `#boolean`, with a `FunctionalProperty` restriction, the multislot `bounded+by` is converted to an `ObjectProperty` with range `#Physical_anatomical_entity`, and `inverse` `#bounds`.

- **Slots at class** enable to define the domain of an OWL property and to refine its value constraints: if p is slot of class A_1 , then A_1 becomes the domain of p e.g. `#Physical_anatomical_entity` becomes the domain of `has_boundary`; if the same slot p occurs in class A_2 , then the domain of p is the union of A_1 and A_2 . Optimization of domain $c_1 \cup c_2 \dots \cup c_n$ has been done: if c_i is descendant of another class according to two levels of is-a, then c_i is removed from the domain (reducing the domain of “arterial supply” from 4007 classes to 4).

Allowed-parents, allowed-classes, value define the allowed values of properties at class. They are converted into necessary conditions expressing value constraint on the property for this class: if p is slot of class A specified with allowed-parents or allowed-classes (resp. with value), then p is converted by a necessary condition at class A expressing `owl:allValuesFrom` (resp. `owl:hasValue`) restrictions to the union class of all its allowed-parents or allowed-classes.

Is-a is converted into subsumption axioms (`subClassOf`): A is-a B (if B is not USER nor :STANDARD-CLASS or :STANDARD-SLOT or RELATION) is converted to A `subClassOf` B (resp. is-a $B_1 B_2$ is converted to `subClassOf` $B_1 \cap \text{subClassOf } B_2$), e.g. is-a `Anatomical+structure`.

Instance information. Values of properties – specified at instance level in Protégé – are converted by OWL annotation or property existential restrictions for the class. In practice, the rules are the following:

- **Non structural slots.** In Protégé slots such as preferred name, synonyms, UWD AID, definition, author etc., are defined at metaclasses [3]) for preventing their values to be propagated to their instances or subclasses. We used annotations on classes instead, which are allowed in OWL-DL. For example, UWD AID is an annotation (`<owl:AnnotationProperty rdf:ID="UWD AID">`) whose value for Heart is 7088.
- **Structural slots.** Another main use of metaclass is for “structural” slots, such as `part+of`, `custom+partonomy`, `bounded+by`, etc. It enables to specify each class for “canonical” anatomy thanks to the particular values assigned to its metaclass own slots, which are thus not propagated. For example, a “canonical” Heart is specified as having as custom partonomy exactly a `Right+atrium`, a `Left+atrium`, a `Right+ventricle`, a `Left+ventricle`, as being `bounded+by` exactly a `Surface+of+heart`. Structural own slots are converted by a necessary (or necessary and sufficient) condition at class A expressing, `owl:someValuesFrom` restrictions for p values to the union class of all the classes assigned to p. For example (`bounded+by` `Surface+of+heart`) is converted to a `someValuesFrom` restriction on property `#bounded_by`, which means that any instance of heart is necessarily bounded at least by one `#Surface_of_heart`. This preliminary representation of structural own slots is not complete and shall be improved soon (§4).
- **Instantiation** is converted by subsumption axioms: [A] of C (if C is not A itself nor is-a B) is converted into A `subClassOf` C (e.g., Heart is `subClassOf` of `Organ_with_cavitated_organ_parts`)

2.2 Incremental approach

About 40,000 FMA concepts and their slot values were extracted for conversion, i.e. 57% of the original 70,000 FMA concepts. Applied to this subset, the migration process resulted in 117,000 frames, including 40,000 classes and 77,000 conditions (necessary, and necessary and sufficient) on these classes. There are 155 properties and 85 individuals. It took about 15 minutes to load the FMA.owl file in Protégé OWL. Launched from Protégé-OWL, Racer classification failed. Running Racer directly from Rice resulted in stack overflow errors. Since Racer could not handle the whole FMA.owl file (although restricted to 2/3 of the whole FMA), as suggested by the Racer authors, we decided to test smaller versions to minimize the performance issue and investigate eventual errors, adding more features incrementally. First a FMA OWL version without any properties was checked to test if the taxonomy could pass Racer. Then, we added equivalent class definition using only one property at the time to test if defined classes could pass Racer. Necessary conditions for defined classes, annotation properties, datatype properties and attributed slots were introduced progressively.

3. Preliminary results

The first test was successfully passed. To test classification with “defined” classes, the property selected was “constitutional part”, resulting in 570 “defined” classes. This choice was partly motivated by a size issue: constitutional part is well populated in FMA, compared for instance to “custom paratomy” or “regional part”, thus is computationally more significant. Obviously, such a definition is not “semantically” satisfactory since anatomical structures cannot be defined solely in terms of their constitutional parts (the same parts may belong to different structures), but it may be next refined. The classification of this FMA.owl file took about 25 minutes. About 300 classes were moved within the inferred hierarchy. Based on this definition, some classes were identified to be equivalent, e.g., `Wall_of_biatrial_part_of_heart` and `Wall_of_biventricular_part_of_heart`, since composed of the same constitutional parts. No inconsistencies were found. However, when datatype properties have been added, several inconsistencies were identified by Racer:

Inconsistencies of classes from boolean datatype properties. A class that inherits from its superclasses both *true* and *false* values for the same property is unsatisfiable. For example, “Zone of cell” is unsatisfiable because it is specified as having no mass, and on the other hand, is subsumed by “Material physical anatomical entity” from which it inherits mass. 116 classes were identified as unsatisfiable by Racer because of such inconsistencies.

Inconsistencies of classes from domain and range. `rdfs:range` (resp. `domain`) restrictions are global. Thus if *p* has class *A*’ as domain and *B*’ as range, and *A* has a property *p* with range *B*, then *B* must be a subclass of *B*’ and *A* must be a subclass of *A*’. Conflicting definitions of global and local ranges or domains lead to inconsistencies. For example, “Surface of wrist” is unsatisfiable because the range of “2D part” is “Non-material physical anatomical entity”, which is disjoint from its “2D part” `owl:someValuesFrom` restriction to class “Anatomic snuff box” which is a subclass of “Material physical anatomical entity”.

Inconsistencies between metaclass and class definitions. For example, “Compartment subdivision” is defined as a subclass of “Anatomical cluster”, which is a subclass of “Material physical anatomical entity”. On the other hand, “Compartment subdivision” is an instance of `Anatomical_space`, which is a subclass of “Non-material physical anatomical”. The two definitions are inconsistent because these two classes are disjoint.

4. Discussion and perspectives

Converting a large part of FMA from Protégé into OWL DL was possible. This process revealed inconsistencies in the original FMA, which might have been missed otherwise. Some classes were also reclassified. These benefits prefigure the potential improvements that might result from “OWLlizing” the FMA. This work brought to light current technical limitations of the software. The main problem was a computational issue. But we also met other difficulties that were resolved quickly with help from the Racer team. As far as we know, the NCI Thesaurus is one of the largest file in Protégé OWL so far. It contains “only” 53,000 frames, including 34,000 classes and 9,000 conditions. But it is much smaller and less complex than the FMA OWL. Moreover, there are no defined class, `hasValue` or `allValuesFrom` restrictions, nor class union, specified, whereas all these features occur in the FMA OWL file. Thus the FMA in OWL offers a real challenge for description logics reasoners.

At this step, the objective was to stick as much as possible to the original representation of FMA in Protégé in order to evaluate the original properties of the FMA. The migration presented here is not complete yet and still has some limitations. The main issue concerns choices for “enrichment”.

– **Property existential restrictions and closure restrictions.** We defined existential restrictions (`owl:someValueFrom`) instead of metaclass structural own slots values. The two reasons behind this choice are: On the one hand (1) the assumption (from [2] and [3]) that in Protégé FMA, if a class *A* has a slot *p* filled with values $V_1, V_2 \dots V_i \dots V_n$ (e.g., constitutional part), it means that for every individual of *A*, *p* has exactly one value of each class V_i . On the other hand, the expressiveness limitation of OWL DL, which does not support qualified cardinality restrictions; and existential restrictions do not offer equivalent flexibility. For example “has part `someValuesFrom` V_1 , has part `someValueFrom` V_2 , etc” is not equivalent to “has part exactly one V_1 and exactly one V_2 , etc.”. First, “`someValuesFrom`” does not prevent to have another part V_3 , which is not V_1 or V_2 , nor to have several parts of the same V_i . A classical solution to the first point, also called “closure axioms” [4], is to

is to introduce universal property restrictions by suited `owl:allValuesFrom` axioms. But this is not satisfactory either for two reasons: i) Computing the closure is not obvious. If the property is transitive, e.g. part of, it is necessary to recursively compute its transitive closure and also the union of all the parts of all the subclasses, and to add a value restriction on the property stating that the only possible values must belong to their union. ii) Closure axioms do not prevent from having several individuals of the same class V_1 (e.g. two parts right frontal lobe for a right hemisphere!). Although adding closure axioms might be a temporary partial solution, an OWL extension with qualified cardinality restrictions would be more desirable.

– **Disjointness axioms.** At that time, the inconsistencies reported (§3) are mainly based on opposite values of a given boolean datatype property or on the disjointness of classes due to it. But the same holds for disjoint classes in general. Ideally, a classification satisfies the so-called “jointly exhaustive and pairwise disjoint” rule. If the FMA complies with this rule, however it is not explicit in the FMA Protégé. Explicit disjointness axioms should be asserted between relevant siblings (for primitive classes). Introducing such disjointness axioms will most probably lead to identifying more inconsistencies. For example, OWL domains and ranges are global axioms used in reasoning. If a property p has domain A and p is used for B , it will be inferred that class B must be a subclass of A . This can force classes A and B to be reclassified, and if A and B are disjoint, the reasoner will identify an inconsistency (the same reasoning holds for range combined with disjointness). Situations similar to §3 can result in reclassification or in the identification of inconsistencies from domain and range object properties or from metaclass and class definition, when A and B are disjoint.

– **Equivalent class definition.** Four options can be considered for specifying the “defined” classes. 1) Each concept has a single class definition, expressing the intersection of all the property restrictions asserted in Protégé for that concept by its own slots and attributed relations values. 2) Each “defined” concept has a set of several equivalent class definitions (necessary & sufficient conditions). “Defined” concepts would then be specified by several *class equivalence* axioms of the form $CN \equiv Expression_1 \equiv \dots \equiv Expression_n$, where CN is the concept name and $Expression_i$ are complex expressions (OWL class description), interpreted as a necessary and sufficient conditions for an individual to be an instance of the class CN . 3) Each concept has one preferred definition, the other conditions being simply necessary. 4) No “defined” classes are a priori selected: since the FMA is a “shared reference ontology”, only primitive classes are provided (i.e. all conditions are necessary), and the most usual class definitions are proposed as optional. The responsibility of selecting a predefined expression (as necessary & sufficient conditions) is left to the users as required by their applications.

In the future, we suggest introducing disjointness axioms between primitive classes (siblings) and enriching the FMA representation with “semantically” correct class definition(s) (equivalent class expression combining several properties e.g. parts and boundaries properties). Another suggestion is to introduce some changes in the FMA OWL representation in agreement with the FMA authors, without giving up the FMA underlying ontological and modeling principles. Several questions are still open. The main point is to create definition(s) that would allow identifying uniquely an anatomical entity so as to specify semantically correct expressions for defined classes. A main strength of our approach is its flexibility: different conversion rules can be selected and different equivalent class definitions created, depending on the application.

In conclusion, although not fully completed yet, converting the whole FMA into OWL DL proved possible. Most features of the original FMA were preserved. Despite size issues, Racer could be used with some restrictions. The present migration demonstrates some benefits already obtained, both for the FMA and for description logic systems, and prefigures additional improvements for FMA. We suggested several options for providing the FMA with equivalent class definitions. Enriching the FMA representation with “semantically” correct class definition(s) is a promising perspective.

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6. References

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