

# Ontology and Framework for Semantic Labelling of Document Data and Software Methods

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**Abstract**— We present a metadata labelling framework for datasets, software tools, and workflows. An ontology for document image analysis was developed with deep support for historical data. An accompanying open source software framework was implemented to enable ontology editing, data and method annotation, workflow composition, and semantic search. A wide range of examples is used to illustrate real-world application.

**Keywords**- *Semantics; ontology; historical documents; document retrieval; scientific workflows; metadata*

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the rapidly expanding volume of data and increasing complexity of software it becomes increasingly important to establish sophisticated annotation and retrieval systems. Several metadata formats (e.g. METS [1] and Dublin Core [2]) with varying amount of detail are used to add information about authorship, publication date, technical characteristics etc. to data items such as documents and the corresponding document images.

We present a complementary framework to annotate data, but also software methods targeting specific data, using semantic labels describing the nature of the items in detail. This is part of an ongoing research project investigating scientific workflows including workflow composition systems and repositories.

Scientific workflows are used to automate software processes. To that effect, workflow systems typically offer the following features: visualisation, fault tolerance, distribution, data provenance, and repeatability. Workflows are defined by their activities (actors) and the way they are connected (data flow). Activities therein have data input and output ports.

To allow for more automation and assistive features in workflow composition and retrieval, a semantic labelling approach was developed, including a complete framework for: ontology creation and editing, workflow composition and labelling, semantic matching algorithms, and data and workflow repositories.

To the authors' knowledge, the proposed framework is the first implementation of a flexible and yet powerful semantic labelling approach (not only for documents). Other workflow systems with semantic features ([14][20]) use very strict semantic models (a workflow has to be modelled as a whole using semantic "language") and default reasoners currently limited to basic queries.

Workflow data items and online datasets have in common that a detailed semantic description helps with search and retrieval. We therefore propose that the

developed ontology and labelling approach can be used to extend the existing metadata of document image datasets. The ontology includes a wide variety of concepts, complementing existing schemes which usually represent an archiving / library point of view or a very technical point of view (e.g. image attributes).

The proposed ontology and its creation are described in the next section, followed by a description of the software framework in Section III. After a discussion in Section IV the paper concludes with Section V.

## II. ONTOLOGY

The ontology was developed for document image analysis and recognition, but with extensibility to other domains in mind. METHONTOLOGY [3] was used as design strategy. As the initial conceptualisation, domain-related terms were collected from various sources (text books, IJDAR papers, ACM classification scheme, project reports etc.) and put into a "term cloud". The mostly randomly arranged terms were then moved and grouped iteratively until high- and low-level concepts emerged.

To include concepts for historical material, a collection of keywords for tagging of document images was incorporated as well. They originate from the IMPACT project [4] and were refined during the Europeana Newspapers project [5]. An early description can be found in a keynote by Antonacopoulos [6]. The keywords were used to tag existing datasets [7][8] and range from document characteristics to flaws/conditions introduced through ageing, wear, or during digitisation. The original categorisation was refined to fit in with other concepts in the ontology.

The keywords are in line with related work for defects in printed documents [9][10] and photographs [11]. It is worth noting that certain aspects are modelled in more domain-specific detail in those works (e.g. grouping into physical, chemical, and biological cause of degradation or conditions specific to developed photographs), which can be used as basis for future extensions of the proposed ontology, where required.

The ontology consists of *label type* hierarchies, each targeting one aspect of a data item or an activity. A label type is thereby a concept within a class hierarchy. Labels are an instance of a label type, when attached to a data item (as metadata). In other words, the ontology is a collection of taxonomies (or partonomies), with several (more general) root label types and attached trees of label types which represent more specialised terms.

Both *activities* and *data objects* can be labelled. Here, an activity is any kind of process that transforms or

generates data. A data object can be the input for or output from an activity, but also a standalone item (such as a document image) or a collection (such as a document image dataset). Partial labelling (i.e. for sub-elements of a data object) can be realised as well, but is not currently part of the implementation.

The top-level label types for activities are: domain, processing level, automation, data creation, adaptability, platform, and licence. Activities are also characterised by their input and output data, which can be labelled as well. When searching for an activity (e.g. a software tool), it can be taken into account whether it processes images of a certain kind, whether it is fully automated, whether it runs on a given operating system, and whether it produces a desired output (for instance).

The top-level types for data objects are: source, age, physical production method, acquisition method / replication steps, precision, content type, content encoding, source / target content, data granularity, data condition, data attributes, and topic. TABLE I. shows an abbreviated list of data-related label types.

The complete ontology also contains definitions and examples for terms. Currently it consists of about 350 label types. An ontology version and the option of migration rules allows for future extensions without breaking backwards compatibility. The ontology can be serialised using the OWL (Web Ontology Language) standard [12] or a simplified XML format.

The next section describes how labels are used to search for objects or aid the creation of workflows.

### III. FRAMEWORK

A range of algorithms and supporting software tools (Java-based) was developed to test and demonstrate the proposed labelling approach. In this section, the different components of that framework are described.

The *Ontology Editor* is used to view and edit the label types using a tree-based interface. In addition to types, label slots are used to define how many labels of one category can be assigned to a data object or activity (see Figure 1. ). Export to OWL format allows the ontology to be viewed (and edited) also in other general-purpose tools such as Protégé [13] (although editing is simpler in the dedicated tool). It should be noted that the editor can be used to extend the ontology proposed in Section II or to create an entirely new one. Versioning is supported via a single integer number.

The *Workflow Editor* allows the composition of scientific workflows. The approach is loosely based on the ASKALON workflow system [14]. Different types of activities are combined to create control flow. Data flow is achieved through connecting data input and output ports of activities. The ports and also the activities can be annotated using the semantic labels.

Workflow, activity, and data repository tools (within the *Repository Hub*) are used to aggregate collections of the respective objects. They include semantic and keyword-based search functionality. The search interface is closely related to the label type hierarchies and works by gradually refining results using tick boxes (in a similar fashion to the faceted-search of online catalogues or shops).

A matching algorithm compares a given set of labels (e.g. for a data port) to a collection of label sets (e.g. from a data collection). It calculates a match score for each pair of label sets, allowing for partial matches (i.e. when a label on one side is of a higher level but similar category that a label on the other side). The more the “search labels” match the labels of a searchable object the higher is the match percentage (each non-match reducing the match score heuristically). This allows for flexible searches where the results are sorted by match score (high to low) and not restricting the search to 100% matching objects. Match details show which aspects (labels) match well and which do not. In addition to labels, also data types can be included in the search. Data type matching is strict and requires exact matches. Apart from a few primitive types (string, integer, float), data types are user-defined.

The source code and UML diagrams can be found at the authors’ GitHub profile [22].

In general, labelling and matching are used to add assistive features to the workflow framework (search, composition, validation etc.).

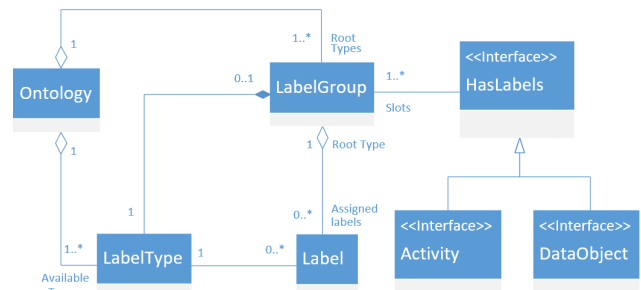


Figure 1. Ontology and labels (UML diagram). A label group represents sub-tree of the ontology for a specific root label type (i.e. a category). An object that can be labelled has slots for labels from different categories. Activities (i.e. software methods) and data objects can be labelled (have the HasLabels interface). The ontology represents the label type hierarchy but has no actual Label instances. Label instances (each having a specific label type) are attached to objects with the HasLabels interface.

### IV. DISCUSSION

This section describes general thoughts, application scenarios and labelling examples.

Although the framework allows the creation of new ontologies, better interoperability can be achieved by using the proposed ontology and extending it where necessary. Such extension activities would require central access and a consortium or a community which manages changes (including a full life cycle with versioning). Problems arising from the size of the ontology (high quantity of label types) can be solved on the user interface layer by only using a subset of labels depending on the domain of the application and by providing convenience tools such as a label quick search (e.g. by keyword). Backwards compatibility of already labelled datasets can be achieved by using migration rules that are part of the ontology itself (already implemented within the software framework).

#### A. Applications

Existing document image datasets could be annotated using the proposed label-based approach. Both individual items (images, ground truth files) and complete datasets

can be labelled. A dataset could also have a combination of top-level labels to allow searching across different datasets, for example. Individual items could be labelled in more detail. A common use case is search and retrieval of training data for document image analysis methods. Often, data of a very specific nature is required, which, at the moment, can only be searched for by keywords (e.g. using Internet search engines).

The labelling scheme can be combined with existing description mechanisms such as METS [1], the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF) [15], or the PAGE format [16]. For this purpose, labels can be stored in a serialised form:

<ID Level 1>.<ID Level 2>.<ID Level 3>...

The matching and search algorithms can be applied independently from the overall software framework. Ontology versioning should be kept in mind and the version number should be stored together with the labels.

In addition to data repositories, semantic labelling can also enhance *software* and *workflow repositories* such as those of the IMPACT Centre of Competence for Digitisation in the EU [17] or the myExperiment platform [18], which typically only allow a search by keywords or by category. Semantic labels could make a significant difference in the ease of workflow composition by describing input and output data of tools as well as properties of the methods themselves.

The primary use of the proposed ontology and framework is in workflow composition and retrieval. While the developed framework is fully functional with respect to workflow composition, it does not contain a workflow execution (enactment) component. Instead of implementing such a component, the labelling approach could be ported to existing workflow systems such as Taverna [19] or Kepler [20].

## B. Examples

This subsection provides selected examples for image conditions taken from the Europeana Newspapers Dataset [7] and the Census 1961 dataset [8]. The properties and conditions were chosen because they can have influence on recognition performance or require specialised methods.

Following selection of image characteristics and conditions from different categories are illustrated below:

- Data properties – Intended / production-related features (Figure 2. )
- Data condition – Unintended properties / flaws / issues
  - Production-related – Limitations of production method or imperfections (Figure 3. )
  - Wear/use – Problems due to (heavy) use (Figure 4. )
  - Ageing – Storage conditions or exposure (Figure 5. )
  - Acquisition- or conversion-related – Problems introduced by copying or digitisation (Figure 6. )

A given image from the Europeana set can be labelled as follows (label type hierarchy: top level – ... – lower level):

- Original source – produced data – physical medium – paper document – newspaper
- Age – historical

- Physical production method – printed – typeset
- Content type – data
- Content encoding – raster image – colour
- Content of interest – visual – text
- ... – visual – graphical
- Topic – Economy – financial / business
- Data granularity – physical – page
- Data properties – language – mixed languages
- ... – document-related – visual – text – font – typeface class – blackletter
- ... – text – font – multi-font – mixed typefaces
- ... – text – font – multi-font – mixed font sizes
- ... – columns – multiple
- Data condition – noisy – speckles
- ... – production-related – doc. characteristics – halftoning
- ... – flaws – touching characters – horizontally
- ... – flaws – broken characters
- ... – wear / use – medium damage – folds
- ... – wear / use – additions – stamps
- ... – ageing – warping
- ... – ageing – discolouration
- Acquisition- / conversion-related – geometric – perspective distortions
- ... – background-related – included parts / objects – paper clips
- ... – method flaws – imaging-related – show-through

### Data Attributes / Properties



Figure 2. Selected image / document conditions and properties for category “Data attributes / properties”. Percentages indicate how widespread the properties are in the Europeana Newspapers set.

Finally, it should be noted that the labelling approach is not only suitable for images but also for related data such as page ground truth. A ground truth file can be labelled with:

- Original source – produced data – physical medium – paper document – newspaper
- Content type – data
- Content type – metadata

- Content encoding – structured
- Content of interest – visual – text
- Content of interest – visual – graphical
- Topic – Economy – financial / business
- Data granularity – physical – page
- Data granularity – physical – region / zone
- Data properties – language – mixed languages


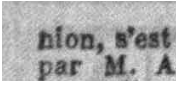
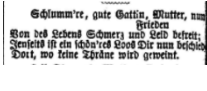
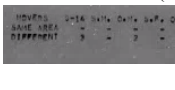

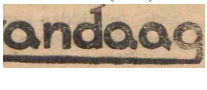

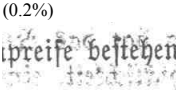
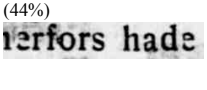
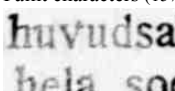
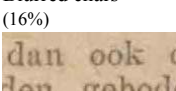
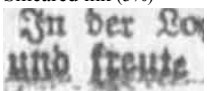
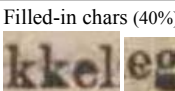
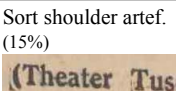
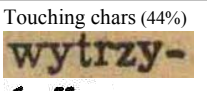


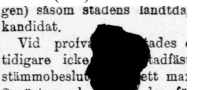

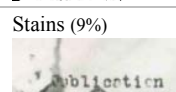



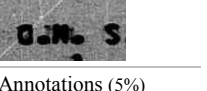

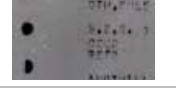
Data Condition		
<i>Production-related</i>		
Pasted clippings 	Textured paper (1%) 	Narrow margin (0.5%) 
Low text contrast (2%) 	Halftoning (10%) 	Uneven ink (25%) 
Bleed-through (4%) 	Ink from facing page (0.2%) 	Broken characters (44%) 
Faint characters (15%) 	Blurred chars (16%) 	Smeared ink (3%) 
Filled-in chars (40%) 	Sort shoulder artef. (15%) 	Touching chars (44%) 
<i>Wear / use</i>		
Folds (15%) 	Tears (7%) 	Holes (1%) 
Missing parts (2%) 	Stains (9%) 	Microfilm scratches (5%) 
Paper repairs (4%) 	Punch holes 	Annotations (5%) 
Handwritten correction 	Stamps (8%) 	

Figure 3. Selected image / document conditions and properties for category “Data condition – production-related”. Percentages as in Europeana Newspapers set.

Figure 4. Selected image / document conditions and properties for category “Data condition – wear / use”. Percentages as in Europeana Newspapers set.



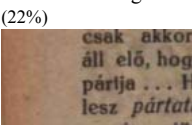
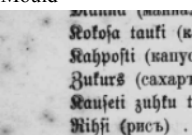
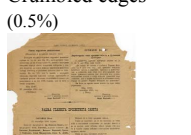
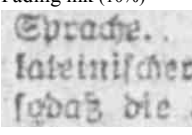
Ageing		
Warped paper (11%) 	General paper discolouration (10%) 	Discoloured edges (22%) 
Mould 	Crumbled edges (0.5%) 	Fading ink (10%) 

Figure 5. Selected image / document conditions and properties for category “Data condition - ageing”. Percentages as in Europeana Newspapers set.




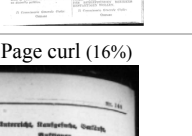
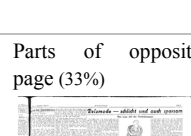
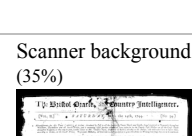
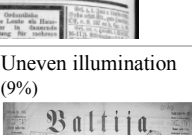
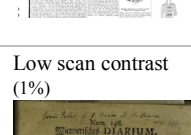

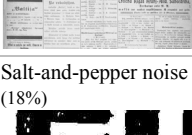
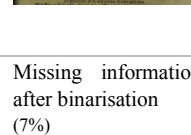
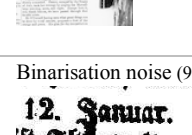
Digitisation / copying		
Skew (9%) 	90 degrees rotated 	Upside down 
Page curl (16%) 	Parts of opposite page (33%) 	Scanner background (35%) 
Uneven illumination (9%) 	Low scan contrast (1%) 	Paper clips (2%) 
Salt-and-pepper noise (18%) 	Missing information after binarisation (7%) 	Binarisation noise (9%) 

Figure 6. Selected image / document conditions for category “Data condition – digitisation / copying”. Percentages as in Europeana Newspapers set.

## V. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FUTURE WORK

A semantic labelling framework for data and software methods was presented. The labels describe the nature of objects in different aspects and can be used in conjunction with existing metadata formats.

The ontology, currently targeting document analysis and recognition, could be extended to other domains and

complemented with further languages and scripts (e.g. using IDs from ISO standards), for instance. The intention is to offer a generic model which applies to many use cases and is open for extensions and specialisations. Further semantic concepts such as relations and literals can be added to the model if necessary.

As a demonstration, an existing public dataset (the Europeana Newspapers set [7], for instance) might be labelled using the proposed scheme and an online interface can be developed to access the information.

The complete version of the presented ontology and the software framework are available on GitHub [22].

TABLE I. DATA OBJECT LABELS (235 OUT OF 350 TOTAL LABELS FOR DATA AND SOFTWARE METHODS). HIGH-LEVEL TYPES ON THE LEFT, LOWER-LEVEL TYPES ON THE RIGHT.

Lev.1	Lev. 2	Lev. 3	Lev. 4	Lev. 5	Lev. 6	Lev. 7
<b>Original Source</b>						
	Produced data					
		Physical source medium				
			Paper document			
				Book		
				Newspaper		
	Captured data					
		Real / natural scenes				
<b>Age</b>						
	Historical					
		Medieval				
	Contemporary					
	Ancient					
<b>Physical Production Method</b>						
	Manual					
	Machine					
		Printed				
			Typeset			
			Computer printout			
		Typewritten				
<b>Acquisition / Replication Method</b>						
	Analog / physical to digital					
		Scanning				
		Camera				
	Copied					
		Photocopy				
		Microfilm / microfiche				
	Synthesis					
<b>Precision</b>						
	Ground Truth / gold standard					
	Measured					
	Estimated					
	Random					
	Fuzzy					
<b>Content Type</b>						
	Data					
	Metadata					
		Quality				
			Performance Information			
		Features				
		Structure				
			Table of contents			
		Annotations				
		Authorship				
		Spatial				
			Location			
	Settings					
	Model					
	Lexicon / index					
	Corpus / database					
<b>Content Encoding</b>						
	Textual					
		Annotated				
	Structured					
	Raster image					
		Colour Image				
		Bitonal				
	Mathematical / geometrical					
		Vector-based				
			Stroke-based			
		Polygonal				
<b>Content of Interest</b>						
	Visual content					
		Text				
		Graphical				
			Separators			
			Barcode / QR Code			
		Image				

		Photograph			
		Person(s)			
		Drawing			
	Mixed / composite content				
		Tables / forms			
		Charts			
		Maps / plans			
		Mathematical expression			
<b>Data Granularity</b>					
	Physical / visual granularity				
	Document-related				
		Double-page			
		Page			
		Region / Zone			
		Text line			
		...			
	Natural language-related				
		Sentence			
		Token / chunk			
		Syllable			
	Logical granularity				
	Document-related				
		Document			
		Chapter			
		Section			
		Article			
		Paragraph			
<b>Data Condition</b>					
	Noise				
		Speckles			
			Salt-and-pepper noise		
		Clutter			
			Thresholding-related noise		
	Production-related				
	Document characteristics				
		Pasted clippings			
		Textured paper			
		Uneven character spacing			
		Narrow border			
		Low paper-to-content contrast			
		Half-toning			
		Dithering			
	Document faults				
		Bleed-through			
		Ink from facing page			
		Smeared ink			
		Touching characters			
			Horizontally		
			Vertically		
		Uneven ink distribution			
		Filled-in characters			
		Sort shoulder artefacts			
		Broken characters			
		Faint characters			
		Blurred characters			
		Non-straight text lines			
	Wear / use				
	Medium damage				
		Folds			
		Tears			
		Holes			
			Punch holes		
			Unintended holes		
		Missing parts			
		Stains			
		Scratches			
		Staples			
	Additions				
	Visible repairs				
		Paper repairs			
		Clear tape			
	Informative				
		Annotations			
		Stamps			
	Corrections				
		Manual corrections			
<b>Ageing</b>					
	Warping				
	Discolouration				
		Global			
		Edges			
	Disintegration				
		Uneven edges			
	Mould				
	Fading content				
<b>Acquisition / conversion-related issues</b>					
	Geometric issues				
		Skew			
			Global		
			Non-uniform		
		90-degree rotation			

			Upside down	
			Perspective distortions	
			Page curl	
	Content / background-related			
			Incomplete capture	
			Tight / narrow margins	
			Included other objects	
			Part of pre- or succeeding object	
			Medium structure (book cover...)	
			Paper clips	
			Fingers	
			Insects	
			Background (e.g. scan bed)	
	Method flaws			
		Imaging-related		
			Show through	
			Uneven illumination	
			Shadows	
			Out-of-focus	
			Low contrast	
			Missing / changed content	
			Due to thresholding	
<b>Data Attributes / Properties</b>				
	Language			
		Natural language		
			English	
		Mixed languages		
	Document-related			
		Visual properties		
			Text-related	
				Script
				Braille
				Latin
				Font-related
				Cursive
				Monospace
				Hand / Typeface class
				Blackletter
				Antiqua
				Medieval manuscript
				Decorated text
				Flourishes
				Multiple colours
				Reverse video
				Multi-font
				Mixed typefaces
				Mixed font sizes
			Columns	
				Drop caps
				One column
				Two columns
				Multiple columns
			Rotated content	
			Complex background	
				Watermarks
				Impressions / embossing
			Illustrations	
				Multi-coloured
			Decorations	
				Frames / borders
			Line drawing / line-art	
			CAPTCHAs	
	Structural			
			Running titles	
			Footnotes	
			Bibliographic reference	
<b>Topic</b>				
	Economy			
		Financial / business		
			Bank checks	
			Invoices	
	Social science / environmental			
		Maps		
			Topographical maps	
			Road maps	
		Traffic and automotive		
			Number plates	
			Traffic signs	
	Science and Engineering			
		Architectural		
			Floor plans	
			Architectural drawings	
		Medical		
		Engineering drawings		
		Patents		
	Media / entertainment			
		Advertisements		
	Computing			

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