

Developing Conversational Data and Detection of Conversational Humor in Telugu

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Abstract

In the field of humor research, there has been a recent surge of interest in the sub-domain of Conversational Humor (CH). This study has two main objectives. (a) develop a conversational (humorous and non-humorous) dataset in Telugu. (b) detect CH in the compiled dataset. In this paper, the challenges faced while collecting the data and experiments carried out are elucidated. Transfer learning and non-transfer learning techniques are implemented by utilizing pre-trained models such as FastText word embeddings, BERT language models and Text GCN, which learns the word and document embeddings simultaneously of the corpus given. State-of-the-art results are observed with a 99.3% accuracy and a 98.5% f1 score achieved by BERT.

1 Introduction

Humor as a phenomenon has interested scholars from diverse fields since time immemorial (Morrell, 2012). The abundance of research studies dedicated to humor is not only due to the fascinating nature of the domain but also due to its impact in everyday life (Martin and Lefcourt, 1983)(McGee and Shevlin, 2009).

In a conversational discourse between interlocutors, their attitude, present state of mind, psychological distance between the topic of humor and the individual (McGraw and Warren, 2010) determine whether what is intended to be humorous is perceived so. Conversational Humor (CH) is a subset of verbal humor. Verbal humor exists in the verballity of what is being spoken. Canned jokes (such as light-bulb jokes, knock-knock jokes) are a part of verbal humor, where they are not context-dependent, i.e., they can be removed from a conversation and still perceived as humorous. On the other hand, CH is heavily dependent on various factors including speakers' personalities, the relevant culture that is referenced, and current events. Numerous studies that focus on the detection of humor

in short jokes/tweets rely on the contrastive discourse relation present in humorous instances (Liu et al., 2018). However, in conversations, participants' personalities, their sense of humor, and the relationship between the participants, add unique complexities to the task of detection of CH. The following example (translated) from a Telugu stage play, *Kanyasulkam*.

Putu: *Where is he?*

Madhu: *You don't listen to me, I have already told you that the person you're looking for is not here!*

Context:

Giri and Rama are hiding under Madhu's bed. Putu is looking for Giri and the latter is hiding because he is scared of Putu. The audience, Giri and Rama know that Madhu is lying about Giri's whereabouts. This irony is recognized by the audience and causes Dramatic Irony (Dempster, 1932)(Pamulapati et al., 2020). This depicts how the participants contribute to CH.

There have been attempts at formulating a typology for CH. Dynel (2009) defined CH and enlisted the different types of verbal discourses that cause CH. Similarly, Pamulapati et. al (2020) developed a hierarchical framework that considers whether it is a monologue/dialogue, the benignity of the utterance, the type, and techniques used to cause CH. Despite the recent interest in CH, there is a need for more computational work in this field as researchers are striving to make virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa produce more human-like discourses. This paper aims to further the research in this direction by working on the task of detection of CH. For low resource languages such as Telugu, finding conversations for the purposes of this study proved to be a challenge. To the best of our knowledge, this work is the first attempt to compile conversational data in Telugu. To compensate for the paucity of data, pre-trained neural

network models such as FastText and BERT and the state-of-the-art Text GCN model are used for the task of detection of CH.

2 Related Work

Chaudhary, et. al (Chaudhary et al., 2021) used features at several levels such as morpho-syntactic, lexico-semantic and pragmatic level and architectures including Logistic Regression, Gaussian Nāive Bayes, and SVM to detect and generate CH. They utilized an existing dataset on Kaggle that comprises 200k+ Reddit jokes in English.

Weller and Seppi (Weller and Seppi, 2019) employ a Transformer architecture for humor detection and explain the advantages over traditional classifiers such as CNN and compare their results with human annotated data. Existing datasets such as Short Jokes dataset on Kaggle and Pun of the Day were used. Apart from these they had mined Reddit jokes and used the number of upvotes to demarcate the humorous jokes from the non-humorous jokes.

Annamoradnejad and Zoghi (2020) use BERT to generate embeddings for their combined dataset of several existing humorous datasets, including the dataset provided by Khandelwal et. al (2018). Different classifiers such as SVM and XLNet are compared with their proposed model, the latter giving an F1 score of 98.2 percent.

Yao et. al (2019) proposed a Graphical Convolutional Networks architecture (GCN) for text classification. The framework builds a text graph based on word co-occurrence using the dataset’s text. These aforementioned studies provided motivation to incorporate BERT, FastText and TextGCN architectures in the experiments for detecting Conversational Humor.

3 Data and Preparation

To compile humorous data for the task of humor recognition, jokes from various sources were scraped including jokes section of news websites like Times of India (Samayam)¹, and other miscellaneous sources such as Blogspot websites². As the area of focus is Conversational Humorous data, the dataset was filtered to assemble jokes that followed a conversational format.

¹<https://telugu.samayam.com/telugu-jokes/funny-jokes/articlelist/49228696.cms>

²<https://bit.ly/3yL2HuX>

Though extensive attempts to obtain conversational data from movies or TV shows were made, due to reasons such as unavailability of transcripts, manual transcription needed, and unavailability of multilingual OCRs³, this direction proved to be unfeasible. Despite jokes being used, in the final dataset several conversational features are intact. All instances of the final humorous data used are of the same format as

Speaker 1: *utterance 1*

Speaker 2: *utterance 2*

...

Speaker n: *utterance n*.

Therefore, features such as turn taking and sequence organization are present. Turn-taking organization is where participants alternate their utterances, minimizing the noise arising from clashing of utterances to have a smooth or effective communication (Sacks et al., 1978). Sequence organization is the organization of these turns. If the conversational goal is to seek information, the first turn is the question, and the second turn is the answer (Schegloff et al., 1977).

3.1 Humorous Data

After filtering, a total of 2,047 conversational jokes were compiled. These jokes did not follow a standard structural format. Therefore, manual intervention was applied to make a homogeneous conversational humorous dataset (translated example given below) as the model could distinguish humorous and non-humorous data based on structural features, rather than semantic.

Original Conversational Joke:

“Hey! Your dog is exactly like a tiger!”, said Suresh. “That is (emphasis) a tiger. It has been going around talking and thinking about love and has turned into a dog!”, replied Mahesh.

Manually Converted to:

Suresh: Hey! Your dog is exactly like a tiger!
Mahesh: That is (emphasis) a tiger. It has been going around talking and thinking about love and has turned into a dog!

3.2 Non-Humorous Data

To assemble non-humorous conversations, tweets and their replies were scraped to form conversations. A reply to a tweet engages with the original tweet’s user and their audience. Any subsequent

³As the Telugu script was abundantly mixed with Roman script in the movie dialogues

replies are either directed at the original tweet’s user or at the other replies’ users.

Every tweet is assigned several attributes such as tweet ID, user ID, timestamp, etc. Using a tweet’s ID, conversation ID and timestamp, tweets and their replies were compiled to form a conversation. A combination of Twint⁴, an advanced Twitter scraping tool, and Twitter’s API v2 endpoint⁵ were used to assemble the data.

To avoid the non-canonical forms of words obtained from scraping Telugu tweets written in roman script, ‘lang: te’ (aiming to fetch tweets written in Telugu script) was used as a filter when scraping tweets. In addition, in order to build a multidomain non-humorous dataset (Mihalcea and Strapparava, 2005), hashtags such as ‘#cinema’, ‘#politics’, ‘#cooking’, etc. were used as filters when collecting tweets.

Usernames were not used as speakers in the conversation for two reasons. Firstly, for the sake of anonymity, and secondly, usernames and names contain numbers and special characters. Consequently, to generate a natural conversation, the usernames were replaced by common Telugu names. Using the tweet’s author ID, speaker identity was preserved. For instance,

User123: *Hello, how is today’s weather?*

User456: *It seems to be very sunny.*

User123: *Oh, wonderful!*

In both instances, ‘User123’ is replaced by the same common Telugu name. This resulted in a corpus of 10,156 conversations. Tweets that contained hashtags such as ‘#funny’, ‘#joke’, ‘#hahaha’, or smiling/laughing emojis were removed to improve the dataset. After checking the corpus, conversations that contained profanity were removed to avoid ambiguity whether the conversation was humorous (Fägersten, 2012), finally resulting in 6,202 non-humorous conversations.

3.3 Attempts at Homogenizing Entire Dataset

To make the non-humorous data and humorous data as similar as possible in structure, several changes were made to the collected jokes and non-humorous conversations (statistics in Table 1)

- Preprocessing steps such as removal of URLs, hashtags, and emojis were performed. In the

⁴<https://github.com/twintproject/twint>

⁵<https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/twitter-api/early-access>

case of a tweet, if emojis comprised the entirety of an utterance, the predecessor utterance was demarcated the end of the conversation, as removing that utterance is essentially changing the conversation.

- The average number of utterances of all the conversational jokes was calculated to be approximately 3. Hence, the non-humorous conversations were trimmed to result in an average of 3 utterances to prevent the model learning patterns based on structural features.
- As previously mentioned, only those conversational jokes and tweets in Telugu script were included in the data. For the tweets, the filter ‘lang: te’ was used for this purpose. This filter is applied on an average to the characters of a tweet. Therefore, if most characters are in the Telugu script, then it is considered ‘lang: te’. Due to this, a tweet may not entirely be in Telugu script but may contain words written in roman script. These words can belong to either English or Telugu languages. For example, the words underlined are written in Roman script, some are English words while others are Telugu. These words written in Roman script were detected using the Python package Langdetect⁶. Subsequently, a Python API, Google Transliteration⁷, was used.
- In Telugu culture, it is common that the name of the target/butt of the jokes is named *Subbarao*, or *Apparao* and so on. These are similar in theme to *Sardarji* jokes⁸. These names, found abundantly in the humorous dataset, replaced speaker’s names in the non-humorous dataset. This was to prevent the model learning that conversations involving speakers having these names implied humor, which is not the case.

4 Outline of Methodology

There are two approaches that are chosen as part of our proposed methodology (Fig. 1). The first is the use of pre-trained models, which is then further used for our downstream task of Conversational

⁶<https://github.com/shuyo/language-detection>

⁷<https://pypi.org/project/google-transliteration-api/>

⁸https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sardarji_joke

	Humorous Data	Non-Humorous Data
Collected Data	6,107	10,156
Post Filtration	2,047	6,202

Table 1: Statistics of Conversational Dataset

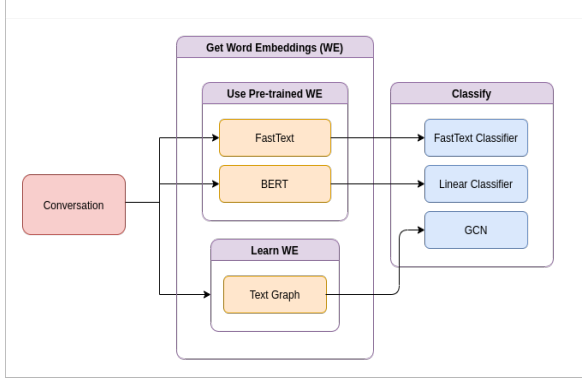


Figure 1: Outline of Methodology

Humor detection. The second is by learning the word embeddings of the conversations using a heterogeneous text graph over which a convolutional neural network is optimized to classify the text. For the first approach we use FastText and BERT’s pre-trained models (non-English or dedicated to Indian languages such as Multilingual-BERT or MuRIL) as they have been trained on a large quantity of data. Subsequently, for the second approach, the Text Graphical Convolutional Network (GCN) framework proposed by Yao et. al (2019) is implemented and fine-tuned.

5 Text GCN

5.1 Heterogeneous Graph

There have been several attempts at learning word representations by mapping words and the documents they are a part of to a graph and learning the word-word and word-document relations using different features. In the paper by Yao et. al (2019), using unsupervised learning, they build a heterogeneous graph of words and documents. First, this graph is built using word co-occurrence and document-word relations, after which a Text Graphical Convolutional Network is learnt on the corpus.

Using term frequency-inverse document frequency (TF-IDF), edges are constructed between words and documents. Similarly, based on word co-occurrence, edges are constructed between words to make word-word relations. Instead of focusing on word co-occurrence in a single document (in our

case, a conversation), a fixed sliding window on all the documents of the corpus is used to calculate global co-occurrence information.

Using PMI (point-wise mutual information), word associations are calculated. These word associations help us capture the relation between word nodes. A positive PMI implies a high association between words. Whereas a negative PMI implies little or no relation between words x and y . Yao et. al (2019) considered only positive values, and only these edges were considered for the heterogeneous text graph.

5.2 GCN for Text Classification

A two layered GCN is applied on the built heterogeneous graph. A single layer GCN captures information about a node’s immediate neighbors, further stacking of such layers integrates a larger neighborhood in its understanding. (2019) experimented with 2 layers of GCN and observed that further stacking of layers did not improve performance. After experimenting, the first layer’s embedding size was limited to 200, whereas the window size was set to 20, along with learning rate as 0.02 and dropout rate as 0.5. The training and test data were split into 80:20 ratio and the number of training epochs was stopped early if after 10 successive epochs the validation loss did not decrease.

6 FastText

6.1 Word Embeddings

FastText uses sub-word information to capture a word’s representation (Bojanowski et al., 2017). A word is split into character n-grams, and these collectively make up the embedding for a word. FastText is highly advantageous for an agglutinative language such as Telugu (Srinivasu and Manivannan, 2018). In an agglutinative language, a lexeme is attached with suffixes which carry information such as gender, number (singular/plural) or tense. For instance, the word below is made up of smaller morphemes.

intikochindhannamaata

Morphemes that make up the word:

illu + ki + ochuta + i + anamata + emphasis

337 Translation:

338 *house + to + come + past tense marker +*
339 *apparently + emphasis*

340 Facebook has released its pre-trained FastText
341 word embeddings for 157 languages⁹ including
342 Indian languages like Telugu. For the purposes of
343 this study, Telugu pre-trained word embeddings are
344 used.

345 6.2 FastText Classifier

346 The classifier considers a text given as a bag of
347 n-grams. These n-grams are hashed so that their
348 lookup is easier and faster. After fetching the n-
349 grams' embeddings, they are averaged to form the
350 hidden variable of the linear classifier. FastText
351 fetches the pre-trained word vectors of the bag of
352 n-grams and averages it to result in the text's rep-
353 resentation. The model was trained for 15 epochs,
354 with the dimension of word embeddings set to 300,
355 the number of word n-grams set to 2 (bigrams),
356 learning rate set to 1.0, and loss set to hierarchi-
357 cal softmax. As it is an imbalanced dataset, class
358 weights are also considered for classification.

359 7 BERT

360 7.1 Language Modeling

361 An important distinction must be made between
362 FastText and BERT. FastText is a Facebook library
363 that offers a word embedding algorithm. However,
364 BERT is a language model. Given a corpus of text,
365 a word embedding algorithm learns a distributed
366 representation of a word based on a window of con-
367 text. On the contrary, a language model learns the
368 likelihood of a word's appearance in a sequence
369 based on its context (unidirectionally or bidirec-
370 tionally). BERT can be summed up as a pre-trained
371 model on massive unstructured data using bidirec-
372 tional encoder representations from Transformers.

373 BERT considers the complete context surround-
374 ing a word and is trained on unlabeled data. BERT
375 contains a stack of encoders such as the Vanilla
376 Transformer that has multi-headed attention layers.
377 It is layered by a feedforward neural network and
378 softmax layer for the purpose of downstream tasks.
379 However, Vanilla Transformers are modeled to look
380 at a word's context unidirectionally. Therefore, to
381 mitigate this disadvantage, BERT uses masking
382 of words/tokens at random so the model can learn
383 the probability of the word appearing in its entire

⁹<https://fasttext.cc/docs/en/crawl-vectors.html>

384 surrounding context over iterations (Devlin et al.,
385 2018).

386 This pre-trained model can be plugged in for
387 many downstream tasks by taking the pooled out-
388 put of BERT and passing it to a neural network suit-
389 able for the task at hand. An important feature of
390 BERT to be noted is that it does not consider whole
391 words like Word2Vec but rather 'word pieces', and
392 hence is useful for agglutinative languages such
393 as Telugu and can handle unknown or erroneous
394 spelled words.

395 Numerous pre-trained models are available on
396 HuggingFace. Instead of restricting to using BERT
397 pre-trained models, BERT's cousins AIBERT and
398 DistilBERT are also experimented with. AIBERT
399 and DistilBERT strive to reduce the computational
400 complexity. Specified below are the pre-trained
401 models used for the purposes of this study:

- 402 • BERT: Multilingual base model (cased,
403 trained on top 104 languages with the largest
404 Wikipedia), MuRIL (Multilingual Representations
405 for Indian Languages, trained on 17
406 Indian languages),
- 407 • AIBERT: Indic-BERT (ALBERT model pre-
408 trained only on 12 major Indian languages),
- 409 • DistilBERT: A distilled version of Multilin-
410 gual base model (cased)

411 7.2 Linear Classifier

412 The pooled output of the BERT (or AIBERT or
413 DistilBERT) encoders is directly sent to a classifier
414 and, after that to a softmax layer. Class weights
415 are considered here, too, due to the imbalanced
416 dataset (2,047 humorous conversations, whereas
417 6,202 non-humorous conversations). A Pytorch
418 classifier that applies a linear transformation to the
419 given data is used. Subsequently, Cross Entropy
420 loss function is chosen.

421 8 Results and Discussion

422 After collecting and pre-processing the tweets and
423 their replies to form non-humorous conversations,
424 experiments were run with Text GCN, FastText and
425 various BERT models (refer to Table 3). The re-
426 spective model is trained on 80% of the data and is
427 tested on 20% of unseen data. As there are 2,047 in-
428 stances of humorous conversations whereas 6,202
429 total instances of non-humorous conversations, this
430 makes it an unbalanced dataset. The weights of the

Nearest Neighbors	Translation
iMxulO	in this
vAtiLO	in those
xIniLO	in this
xAniLO	in that
axi	that
vItiLO	in these

Table 2: FastText nearest neighbors of word 'aNxulO'

classes are taken into consideration. Accuracy and F1 score are used as evaluation metrics.

Highest accuracy results are obtained by Multilingual BERT by Google. Multilingual BERT is trained on 104 languages using Wikipedia dumps of the respective language. This model is pre-trained with both objectives: Masked Language Modeling (MLM) and Next Sentence Prediction. Additionally, it is observed that FastText and BERT models perform comparatively better than Text GCN. The low F1 score implies a low precision and low recall. This means that the model does not predict that the text is humorous well and sufficiently. In Section 5.1, it is specified that the edges between word-word nodes are given weights based on PMI (point-wise mutual information). The word pair with the highest PMI(12.34) is

<aMxulO, kaxA>

Translation:

<in that, right (in the sentence 'you finished your homework, right?')>

It is evident that both words have no syntactic or semantic relation. Thus, the heterogeneous graph does not capture word relations well. In comparison, FastText's nearest neighbors defined in the pre-trained model for the word 'aNxulO' (translates to 'in that') are shown in Table 2.

By inspecting the nearest neighbors of the queried word, FastText captures syntactic (plural of 'in that' is 'in those') and semantic relations (antonym of 'in that' is 'in this'). This highlights the importance of word embeddings for the model's overall performance for the task to be carried out. Word representations is a key aspect that contributes to the effectiveness and performance of text classification (Shen et al., 2018)(Wang et al., 2018).

As mentioned in Section 3.3, conversational text written in Roman script was transliterated to Telugu script using Google Transliterate API. The API produces an array of most probable transliterations

of the input given, after which the first element is considered by default. However, at times, the API does not produce accurate results with a slight margin of error. Thus, potentially producing word(s) that do not exist in the language's vocabulary.

For instance, if the API produces the word '*rANiMcina*', when it should correctly be '*rAniMcina*' (an error difference of one character) and Text GCN or word embedding algorithms such as Word2Vec encounter this incorrectly transliterated word, it will treat it as an out-of-vocabulary word. Hence, not capturing this unknown word's relation with the correct word '*rAniMcina*'.

FastText and BERT fill this inadequacy by taking sub-word or word-piece information. As the difference between the incorrectly transliterated word and the actual word from the language is one-character, both FastText and BERT will produce word embeddings which will be closer as compared to what TextGCN would produce. For a language such as Telugu, where suffixes are attached to carry semantic and syntactic information, breaking a word into sub-words or word-pieces becomes crucial. Another advantage that transfer learning applications such as FastText and BERT models provide is that they are pre-trained on vast amounts of Wikipedia data and can therefore generalise a word's meaning in a context better (Table 3).

Architecture	Accuracy	F1 Score
Text GCN	0.592	0.374
FastText	0.973	0.946
Multilingual BERT	0.993	0.985
MuRIL	0.988	0.977
Indic-BERT	0.992	0.982
Multilingual DistilBERT	0.990	0.980

Table 3: Performance of architectures implemented for Conversational Humor recognition

9 Conclusion and Future Work

In this work, the problem of conversational humor detection in Telugu is addressed. Different word embedding algorithms or language models, coupled with different classifiers are used to solve the work at hand. The performances of the various models are evaluated and analyzed to glean insights regarding the mechanisms employed. For low-resource Indian languages such as Telugu, the hurdles that lack of data pose are avoided as pre-trained models on a substantial amount of Telugu

511 data are used effectively.

512 The BERT model trained on 104 languages, Mul-
513 tilingual BERT base (cased) by Google, delivered
514 the best performance with an accuracy of 99.3%
515 and an f1 score of 98.5%. Comparatively, Fast-
516 Text comes close with merely a 2% difference in
517 accuracy, 97.3% and an f1 score of 94.6%. State-
518 of-the-art results are thus produced by utilizing
519 transfer learning techniques and methodologies.

520 Telugu movie scripts could be analyzed to com-
521 prehend the trends in the types of humor used in
522 Telugu culture, the influencing factors, and the im-
523 portance of shared knowledge of culture in the per-
524 ception of humor (Pamulapati et al., 2020). Instead
525 of using premeditated conversations, real-time con-
526 versations transcribed from humorous Telugu inter-
527 views would capture the essence of conversational
528 humor better. Detection of humor in conversations
529 could be taken one step further to detect a particular
530 technique(s) or type(s) of Conversational Humor.

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