

Empaths at SemEval-2025 Task 11: Retrieval-Augmented Approach to Perceived Emotions Prediction

Lev Morozov[✉], Aleksandr Mogilevskii[■], Alexander Shirnin[✉]

[✉]HSE University, [■]Independent researcher

Correspondence: ashirnin@hse.ru

Abstract

This paper describes EmoRAG, a system designed to detect perceived emotions in text for SemEval-2025 Task 11, Subtask A: Multi-label Emotion Detection. We focus on predicting the perceived emotions of the speaker from a given text snippet, labeling it with emotions such as joy, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, and disgust. Our approach does not require additional model training and only uses an ensemble of models to predict emotions. EmoRAG achieves results comparable to the best performing systems, while being more efficient, scalable, and easier to implement.

1 Introduction

SemEval-2025 Task 11 (Muhammad et al., 2025b) introduces a new task and a multilingual, multi-label, emotion-annotated dataset of texts. This task focuses on perceived emotion detection, aiming to determine the emotions that most readers would infer a speaker is experiencing based on a given text snippet. It does not concern the emotions evoked in the reader or the speaker’s true emotions. Instead, it addresses how emotions are commonly interpreted, recognizing that perception may be influenced by cultural context, individual expression differences, and the nuances of text-based communication. The shared task consists of three subtasks: (A) **Multi-label Emotion Detection**, that involves predicting which emotions are perceived in the speaker’s words; (B) **Emotion Intensity Prediction**, which quantifies the strength of an expressed emotion on an ordinal scale; and (C) **Cross-lingual Emotion Detection**, which assesses how well models generalize perceived emotion detection across languages using training data from a single language.

This paper proposes EmoRAG, a Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) system (Lewis et al., 2020) for the Subtask A, Multi-label Emotion Detection. However, its flexible design allows for

seamless adaptation to the other subtasks, Emotion Intensity Prediction (Subtask B) and Cross-lingual Emotion Detection (Subtask C), with minimal modifications. This versatility makes EmoRAG a robust solution for the diverse challenges posed by SemEval 2025 Task 11.

2 Background

Related work A common approach to multi-label emotion classification involves fine-tuning a pre-trained transformer model with a linear classification head (Kulkarni et al., 2021; Kane et al., 2022), often with minor architectural modifications to adapt to the specific task. Although such methods have shown strong performance in monolingual settings, emotion classification in a multilingual context presents additional challenges due to linguistic variability and cultural nuances in emotional expression (Kadiyala, 2024). To address these issues, we propose an alternative framework based on RAG. Unlike standard systems that rely solely on encoded representations, our method leverages the annotated training data as a retrieval corpus, enabling the model to draw on relevant emotional instances during inference, and thereby improve its robustness across languages and cultures.

Datasets The BRIGHTER dataset (Muhammad et al., 2025a) is a multilingual, multi-labeled collection of textual data annotated for emotion recognition in 28 languages. The dataset primarily addresses the disparity in emotion recognition resources, particularly for low-resource languages spoken in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America.

The data is drawn from diverse sources, including social media posts, personal narratives, speeches, literary texts, and news articles, ensuring a broad representation of emotional expression across different cultural and linguistic contexts.

Each instance in the BRIGHTER dataset is man-

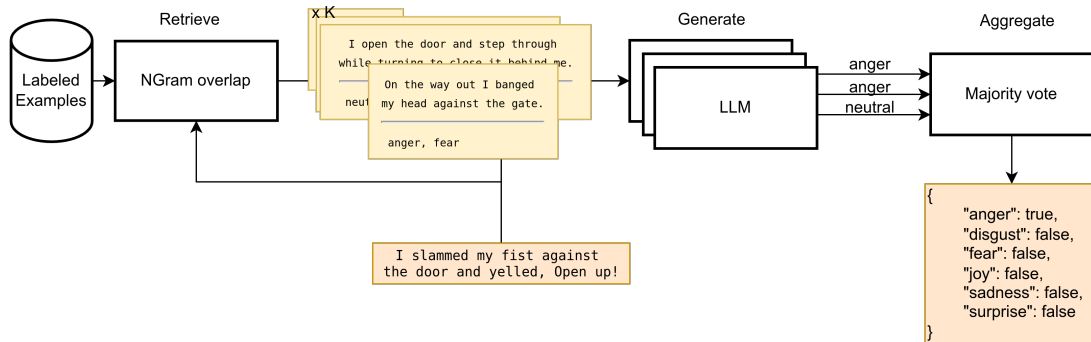


Figure 1: The EmoRAG pipeline involves a database, a retriever, a generator, and an aggregation model.

ually curated and annotated by fluent speakers to capture six primary emotions: *joy*, *sadness*, *anger*, *fear*, *surprise*, *disgust*, and a *neutral* category. The annotations are multi-labeled, allowing each text snippet to be associated with multiple emotions.

The dataset encompasses both high-resource languages such as English and German and predominantly low-resource languages, including Hausa, Kinyarwanda, Emakhuwa, and isiZulu. The distribution of data sources varies across languages, with some relying on re-annotated sentiment datasets, human-written and machine-generated texts, and translated literary works. Notably, some datasets, such as Algerian Arabic, include translated excerpts from literary texts like *La Grande Maison* by Mohammed Dib, whereas others, such as Hindi and Marathi, incorporate sentences generated by native speakers based on given prompts.

Some examples of the BRIGHTER dataset are shown below:

- “I can’t believe this happened! I’m so excited and grateful!” (Emotion labels: Joy, Surprise, Intensity: 3)
- “Why do people always have to be so cruel? This is heartbreaking.” (Emotion labels: Sadness, Anger, Intensity: 2)
- “Walking through the dark alley gave me chills. I couldn’t shake off the fear.” (Emotion labels: Fear, Surprise, Intensity: 3)

Track A of the SemEval 2025 focuses on prediction emotions, ignoring intensity.

In addition, the EthioEmo dataset (Belay et al., 2025), introduced in a separate study, expands multilingual emotion recognition by incorporating four Ethiopian languages: Amharic, Afan Oromo, Somali, and Tigrinya. This extension further improves

coverage for underrepresented languages, providing valuable benchmarks for evaluating large language models in multi-label emotion classification tasks.

It is important to note that the languages Zulu (zul), Xhosa (xho), Javanese (jav), and Indonesian (ind) were not part of the competition; therefore, the results for these languages are not presented in this paper.

3 EmoRAG

First, we overview the EmoRAG pipeline. Next, we detail the procedures for the database, retriever, generators, and aggregation model.

Overview The EmoRAG pipeline consists of several components designed for emotion recognition:

- The database is created using labeled training examples.
- A retriever is used to fetch the top- K most similar examples from the training data.
- The retrieved examples are used as few-shot prompts for the decoders, which are a collection of large language models (LLMs).
- An aggregation model combines the predictions from the generators to produce the final output.

The overview of the EmoRAG pipeline is shown in Figure 1.

To make a prediction for a new entry in a known language, the system first uses the retriever to obtain the most similar examples from the database.

Once the most similar examples are retrieved, these examples are used as few-shot prompts for the decoder models. Models utilize these prompts to predict the perceived emotions in the new text entry.

Each decoder model produces a set of emotion predictions, which are then aggregated to form the final prediction.

The aggregation model combines the outputs from the different decoder models. This can be done using various strategies, such as majority voting or weighted averaging based on model performance metrics. The final output is a multi-label prediction indicating the perceived emotions present in the text.

4 Experiments

The main three components of EmoRAG are the retriever, the generator models, and the aggregation model.

Retrievers We experimented with an n-gram based retriever and a sentence embedder-based retriever *BGE-M3*¹ (Chen et al., 2024). The n-gram based retriever is hypothesized to perform better for low-resource languages due to its reliance on surface-level text features. We have used the n-gram retriever from the LangChain module² (Chase, 2022).

The number of retrieved examples (K) is fixed to 30 for low-resource languages and 100 for high-resource languages. The reason for this is that low-resource languages consume more tokens and thus more compute.

Decoder Models The EmoRAG system employed four different LLMs: *Llama-3.1-70B*³ (Grattafiori et al., 2024), *Qwen2.5-72B-Instruct*⁴ (Yang et al., 2024), *gpt-4o-mini-2024-07-18* (hereafter referred to as *gpt-4o-mini*), and *gemma-2-27b-it*⁵ (Team et al., 2024). The LLM system prompt is in English and only specifies the language of the input text. We experimented with prompts in the target language for which predictions were made but found that English prompts yielded better results. We provide the whole system prompt in the appendix A.

Aggregation Strategies We tested five aggregation strategies to combine predictions from different models:

- **Single Model:** Outputs the prediction of a fixed model, such as *gpt-4o-mini*.

¹hf.co/meta-llamaBAAI/bge-m3

²python.langchain.com

³hf.co/meta-llama/Llama-3.1-70B-Instruct

⁴hf.co/Qwen/Qwen2.5-72B-Instruct

⁵hf.co/google/gemma-2-27b-it

- **Majority Vote:** Each label’s prediction is the majority vote across all LLM predictions.
- **Macro/Micro Majority Vote:** Weighted averages of predictions from different LLMs, with weights based on macro/micro F1 scores on the dev data.
- **Label-F1 Majority Vote:** Weighted averages for each label, with weights based on macro/micro F1 scores for each label and model.
- **GPT-4o Aggregation:** Provides results from different models to *gpt-4o-mini*, along with few-shot examples, to aggregate a response.

5 Results

The results of our experiments are summarized in the Table 1. More detailed results are provided in Table 2, which includes the performance of each model separately on the development set. The EmoRAG system demonstrated strong performance across a wide range of languages, with the *majority_vote_by_label_f1* aggregation strategy generally yielding the best results.

Performance Across Languages The system achieved high F1-micro and F1-macro scores in high-resource languages such as English, Spanish, and Russian, with scores exceeding 0.80. In low-resource languages, the performance was more variable, but the system still achieved competitive results, particularly with the use of the n-gram retriever.

Best Models For each language, the best-performing model and aggregation strategy were selected based on the development set results. The *majority_vote_by_label_f1* strategy was often the best choice, indicating the effectiveness of leveraging label-specific F1 scores for aggregation.

General Observations The experiments highlighted the importance of selecting appropriate retrievers and aggregation strategies based on the language and resource availability. The EmoRAG system’s flexibility in adapting to different languages and tasks makes it a robust solution for multilingual emotion detection.

Overall, the EmoRAG system achieved an average test F1-micro score of 0.638 and an F1-macro score of 0.590 across all languages, demonstrating its effectiveness in the SemEval-2025 Task 11.

Language	Language Code	Best Model	Dev F1 Micro	Dev F1 Macro	Test F1 Micro	Test F1 Macro
Afrikaans	afr	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.662	0.557	0.7153	0.667
Amharic	amh	gpt-4o-mini	0.637	0.503	0.6613	0.5578
German	deu	gpt-4o-mini	0.745	0.694	0.2694	0.2156
English	eng	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.821	0.818	0.8066	0.7885
Spanish	esp	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.813	0.809	0.8204	0.8174
Hindi	hin	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.842	0.849	0.8658	0.8661
Marathi	mar	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.943	0.947	0.8559	0.864
Oromo	orm	gpt-4o-mini-ngram	0.607	0.501	0.6023	0.4903
Portuguese (Brazil)	ptbr	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.766	0.645	0.4809	0.372
Russian	rus	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.880	0.880	0.8829	0.8794
Somali	som	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.519	0.477	0.5422	0.5082
Sundanese	sun	gpt-4o-mini-ngram	0.757	0.612	0.7256	0.5294
Tatar	tat	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.749	0.710	0.7884	0.7763
Tigrinya	tir	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.397	0.342	0.2597	0.2044
Arabic (Algerian)	arq	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.687	0.677	0.5464	0.5203
Arabic (Moroccan)	ary	gpt-4o-mini-ngram	0.576	0.512	0.4089	0.3701
Chinese (Mandarin)	chn	gpt-4o-mini-ngram	0.748	0.604	0.7416	0.6252
Hausa	hau	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.735	0.731	0.7039	0.6954
Kinyarwanda	kin	gpt-4o-mini-ngram	0.576	0.489	0.6167	0.5627
Nigerian Pidgin	pcm	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.638	0.591	0.6416	0.5993
Portuguese (Mozambique)	ptmz	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.565	0.558	0.535	0.4927
Swahili	swa	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.440	0.409	0.43	0.3856
Swedish	swe	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.736	0.582	0.6353	0.4926
Ukrainian	ukr	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.634	0.621	0.638	0.6161
Emakhuwa	vmw	gpt-4o-mini	0.300	0.211	0.2556	0.2157
Yoruba	yor	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.564	0.443	0.5257	0.3818
Igbo	ibo	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.614	0.550	0.6125	0.5379
Romanian	ron	majority_vote_by_label_f1	0.794	0.774	0.773	0.7608
Average					0.638	0.590

Table 1: Test set performance metrics for each language using the best model according to the development dataset results.

Language	llama-3.1-70b	qwen2.5-70b	gpt-4o-mini	gpt-4o-mini-ngram	gemma29b	gemma29b_ngram	majority_vote	majority_vote_macro	majority_vote_by_label_f1
amh	0.534/0.448	-	0.637/0.503	0.633/0.493	0.609/0.488	0.582/0.474	0.659/0.535	0.659/0.535	0.655/0.539
arq	0.584/0.575	0.623/0.597	0.613/0.596	0.663/0.655	0.614/0.589	0.578/0.531	0.645/0.615	0.653/0.665	0.687/0.677
ary	0.542/0.490	0.540/0.485	0.552/0.499	0.576/0.512	0.575/0.521	0.584/0.484	0.607/0.526	0.526/0.599	0.616/0.540
afr	0.560/0.444	0.629/0.527	0.662/0.567	0.646/0.572	0.584/0.481	0.484/0.398	0.601/0.494	0.546/0.646	0.662/0.557
chn	0.676/0.603	0.589/0.570	0.698/0.579	0.748/0.604	0.693/0.572	0.709/0.543	0.749/0.642	0.652/0.757	0.759/0.659
deu	0.745/0.588	0.521/0.499	0.745/0.694	0.738/0.662	0.632/0.559	0.659/0.593	0.738/0.659	0.672/0.741	0.752/0.695
eng	0.735/0.726	0.779/0.775	0.807/0.803	0.770/0.781	0.769/0.759	0.720/0.723	0.801/0.808	0.823/0.820	0.821/0.818
esp	0.751/0.744	0.788/0.778	0.793/0.785	0.799/0.793	0.778/0.772	0.782/0.778	0.786/0.778	0.807/0.812	0.813/0.809
hau	0.610/0.602	0.607/0.598	0.669/0.662	0.696/0.687	0.682/0.676	0.698/0.689	0.735/0.728	0.734/0.738	0.735/0.731
hin	0.780/0.791	0.707/0.728	0.805/0.803	0.811/0.812	0.796/0.799	0.798/0.806	0.838/0.842	0.833/0.830	0.842/0.849
ibo	0.531/0.486	0.502/0.452	0.572/0.514	0.564/0.499	0.574/0.508	0.574/0.520	0.609/0.532	0.534/0.608	0.614/0.550
kin	0.443/0.385	0.443/0.382	0.555/0.491	0.576/0.489	0.477/0.404	0.514/0.466	0.589/0.515	0.501/0.570	0.575/0.512
mar	0.874/0.883	0.904/0.908	0.937/0.939	0.937/0.939	0.883/0.883	0.897/0.900	0.942/0.946	0.935/0.931	0.943/0.947
orm	0.467/0.369	0.521/0.415	0.552/0.455	0.607/0.501	0.519/0.404	0.488/0.362	0.585/0.446	0.493/0.608	0.608/0.488
pcm	0.532/0.508	0.573/0.535	0.599/0.542	0.628/0.573	0.608/0.572	0.585/0.548	0.621/0.574	0.590/0.633	0.638/0.591
ptbr	0.686/0.547	0.662/0.569	0.731/0.633	0.707/0.603	0.726/0.617	0.710/0.525	0.766/0.626	0.658/0.760	0.766/0.645
ptmz	0.454/0.456	0.539/0.532	0.515/0.484	0.478/0.443	0.521/0.486	0.494/0.445	0.565/0.558	0.543/0.552	0.565/0.558
ron	0.758/0.749	0.745/0.726	0.756/0.741	0.778/0.763	0.745/0.719	0.754/0.724	0.773/0.751	0.771/0.790	0.794/0.774
rus	0.835/0.836	0.861/0.857	0.839/0.833	0.812/0.806	0.841/0.834	0.824/0.817	0.879/0.877	0.881/0.883	0.880/0.880
som	0.361/0.296	0.379/0.338	0.518/0.469	0.528/0.491	0.426/0.381	0.428/0.382	0.494/0.420	0.464/0.514	0.519/0.477
sun	0.674/0.496	0.707/0.491	0.734/0.596	0.757/0.612	0.708/0.532	0.733/0.565	0.754/0.537	0.564/0.750	0.757/0.614
swa	0.357/0.329	0.376/0.345	0.391/0.366	0.416/0.401	0.401/0.366	0.407/0.372	0.435/0.396	0.401/0.435	0.440/0.409
swe	0.684/0.475	0.680/0.502	0.709/0.528	0.708/0.529	0.699/0.518	0.671/0.501	0.734/0.555	0.547/0.727	0.736/0.582
tat	0.652/0.611	0.663/0.631	0.712/0.671	0.702/0.660	0.669/0.634	0.637/0.592	0.727/0.673	0.688/0.732	0.749/0.710
tir	-	-	0.377/0.321	0.384/0.319	-	-	0.322/0.263	0.321/0.377	0.397/0.342
ukr	0.521/0.512	0.601/0.579	0.581/0.567	0.550/0.537	0.587/0.553	0.535/0.469	0.622/0.611	0.621/0.625	0.634/0.621
vmw	0.158/0.145	0.261/0.184	0.300/0.211	0.226/0.158	0.246/0.206	0.186/0.159	0.190/0.140	0.180/0.230	0.257/0.205
yor	0.354/0.255	0.415/0.300	0.474/0.374	0.506/0.420	0.436/0.317	0.472/0.347	0.564/0.443	0.423/0.532	0.564/0.443
Average	0.563/0.515	0.590/0.556	0.631/0.590	0.641/0.601	0.617/0.576	0.607/0.566	0.661/0.617	0.646/0.634	0.678/0.634

Table 2: Development set F1-micro/F1-macro scores for each language and model. The best model for each language is highlighted in bold.

6 Conclusion

This paper presents the EmoRAG system submitted to SemEval-2025 Task 11. Our system achieved strong performance across multiple languages, demonstrating its effectiveness in multilingual emotion recognition. EmoRAG introduces a novel pipeline that integrates RAG with LLMs and an adaptive aggregation mechanism. The combination of diverse retrievers and model-specific

aggregation strategies enables flexible and robust emotion detection, particularly for low-resource languages. We believe this approach holds significant potential for improving multilingual NLP tasks by leveraging retrieved examples to enhance model predictions. Our Future research will be focused on refining retrieval methods, exploring alternative RAG techniques, and investigating the use of smaller, more efficient models to improve scalability and accessibility across different com-

putational environments.

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Limitations

While EmoRAG demonstrates strong performance, it has certain limitations. The current dataset includes a limited set of emotions, making it unclear how the method would generalize to a broader range of emotions. Additionally, the approach may struggle with highly imbalanced class distributions or significant distribution shifts in the data. Future work will focus on addressing these challenges by testing on more diverse datasets and improving robustness to class imbalance and domain shifts.

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A LLM Prompt for Emotion Detection

The following prompt is used to instruct the language model for perceived emotion detection:

Emotion Detection Prompt

You are an expert at detecting emotions in text. The texts are given in {language} language.
Please classify the text into one of the following categories:
Anger, Fear, Joy, Sadness, Surprise, Disgust
Your response should be a JSON object with the following format:

```
{  
  "anger": bool,  
  "fear": bool,  
  "joy": bool,  
  "sadness": bool,  
  "surprise": bool,  
  "disgust": bool  
}
```

Do not give explanations. Just return the JSON object.