Language and Computers
LTS: Grammatical Error Detection

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What Is Grammatical Error Detection?

We will be talking about errors made by learners in a second language acquisition context.

Language learners often make non-native-like mistakes when constructing sentences:

- We arrived to the station.
- There is the garden in my house.
- I eat rice, nikujiaga and salada yesterday.

Grammatical error detection entails trying to find these mistakes automatically.

Recommended reading: Leacock et al 2014, Automated Grammatical Error Detection for Language Learners

Where Is This Useful?

- Automatic grading
- Language teachers
- Standardized testing
- Analysis and annotation of learner data for research
- Language learning software (ICALL)

Where Error Detection Fits In

(a bit of a review)

- CALL: Computer Assisted Language Learning
  - Using computers and media in language learning and teaching
  - e.g., Rosetta Stone, eLanguage
  - Exercises are typically very simple in design, and offer little feedback
- ICALL: Intelligent Computer Assisted Language Learning
  - Utilize computational linguistics tools, such as POS tagging & parsing along with statistical language modeling strategies (e.g., n-grams)
  - These tools often need to be altered to expect and diagnose errors, or at least handle learner data better
  - We can also build software for specific kinds of errors. (today's discussion)
  - Focus on precision; we don't want to tell a learner that they've made a mistake when they haven't!

Learner Errors

Learners typically make different kinds of mistakes than native speakers.

- Content Word Choice (19.9% of all errors in CLC)
  - We need to deliver *the* merchandise on a daily basis.
- Preposition Error (13.4%)
  - Our society is developing *in/at high speed.
- Determiner Error (11.7%)
  - There is *the/a garden in my house.

CLC = Cambridge Learner Corpus

Motivation

Some common areas of research in English error detection are articles, prepositions, and collocations. We'll look a little more in depth at prepositions.

- Because prepositions make up a large portion of errors commonly made by learners, there has been a good deal of research on how to find and diagnose preposition errors
- Also, crucially: prepositions are a closed set, so it's a problem that's easier to define than a more open error type like use of the wrong content word
  - Prepositions can be treated as a confusion set where we know that one is being substituted for another
  - This is not the case with many parts of the grammar
Choosing the correct preposition can be a tough task even for native speakers.

There has been concern over syncing phone contacts with Facebook. "As long as you are aware of who is in the group it can be a great privacy tool. If it gets out of hand it could give you a sense of false security." The roll out of new products comes reports that a syncing feature the iPhone lets Facebook access contact data and share it on the site. "It's very possible that your private phone numbers - and those lots of your and their friends - are on the site," said Charles Arthur of the Guardian newspaper.

Negative Transfer: in the garden, at home, on (the) campus: same preposition in Arabic

Adjuncts: on the beach vs. at the beach

Arguments: The loaded the hay on the wagon vs. The loaded the wagon with hay

Phrasal Verbs: add up the numbers, add the numbers up

Idioms: on the house

PP Attachment: I put the ring on the table in the safe

Lexical Ambiguity: eat with a fork, view with anxiety, strike with fear, combine with others, furnish with supplies

See section 3.3.1 of Leacock et al (2014)

Machine Learning: give examples to a computer system & have it learn what the patterns are

- We will explore this topic in more detail when we get to the document classification unit

Example: based on your previous purchases, what coupons should you receive?

We will need two sets of data:
- Training Set - needs to be big
- Testing Set - usually smaller
The data sets are full of events (instances) that contain features that describe the circumstances of the event and a class that is the answer we are trying to guess.

Basic process:
- Open a file
- Extract bits of text (features) that you deem useful
- Print those bits of text on a single line for each instance

**Challenge:** select appropriate features

Let's consider a real-world example:
- The Task: We want to classify the weather as either good or bad.
- We would want features like:
  - temperature
  - sunny?
  - cloudy?
  - windy?
  - humidity level
  - rain/snow/none

Tetreault and Chodorow used a maximum entropy classifier to try to find preposition confusions and extraneous uses.

They extracted 25 features including:
- words/POS tags in a 2 word window(+/-) around preposition
- the head verb and noun of the preceding VP and NP
- the head noun of the following NP
- John *went to the store this morning.*
- head of previous VP = VBD, the
- head of previous NP = John
- Their system achieved 84% precision and 19% recall.
  - This might sound low, but keep in mind, we want to get the best possible precision, even if it means losing recall.

**Systems differ in terms of:**
1. the kinds of features they use
   - surface level features, syntactic features, L1 information, etc.
2. the training data they use
   - correct usage, artificially generated errors, real errors
3. the kinds of models (e.g., classifiers) they use
   - classifiers, language models, web counts, etc.