

Etymological Embeddings for Contextless Definition Modeling

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Abstract

Definition modeling is the problem of estimating the probability of an output definition given an input word embedding. There exist some methods of creating word embeddings concatenated that take the input word concatenated with the context of the word. However, the context is not always available. Additionally, progress has been made in research for *etymology modeling* where the etymology of a word can be estimated from the input word embedding. In this paper, we propose a definition modeling method that uses etymological information.

1 Introduction

Word embeddings are vector representations of words that allow us to use words as inputs to machine learning models for natural language processing tasks (Mikolov et al., 2013). There are many word embedding methods that achieve state-of-the-art performance on NLP problems, such as sentiment analysis. Additionally, contextualized word embeddings have been shown to improve performance with models such as ELMo and BERT (Peters et al., 2018; Devlin et al., 2019).

Dictionary definitions can yield value for sentiment aware models, however, crowdsourced annotations are costly. The task of definition modeling was proposed to address this problem. The goal of definition modeling is to estimate the probability of an output definition given an input word embedding (Noraset et al., 2016).

Wiktionary¹ is a free online dictionary that provides details about many words, including definitions, etymologies, pronunciation, and examples. Some research has used the large data dumped from Wiktionary to support NLP research such as etymology modeling and word sense disambiguation (Wu and Yarowsky, 2020).

¹wiktionary.org

The etymology of a word is a tree structure that describes the word’s origin. Although contextualized embeddings show improvement in NLP tasks, the context of a word is not always available. With advances in etymology modeling, if we know the source language of a word, we can predict the etymology of the word. Using this observation, we propose a word embedding with etymological information for the task of definition modeling. This work intends to show improvement for contextless definition modeling, although it may be used in conjunction with a contextualized embedding for even better performance.

2 Related Work

Definition modeling was initially described by Noraset et al. (2016). Their research is based on a recurrent neural network language model (Mikolov et al., 2010) with a modified recurrent unit. They use the word to be defined placed at the beginning of the definition so the model will see the word only on the first step.

Chang and Chen (2019) explore contextualized embedding for definition modeling. They reformulate the problem of definition modeling from text generation to text classification. Their results show state-of-the-art performance on the task of definition modeling.

Washio et al. (2019) proposed a method for context-based definition modeling that considers the semantic relations between both the word to be defined and the words in the definition. They apply semantic information to both the definition encoder and decoder.

Barba et al. (2021) introduce exemplification modeling, an adjacent problem to definition modeling that uses a definition embedding to generate possible example sentences. They use a sequence-to-sequence based approach and show near human-

level annotation performance. Their problem is similar in that they use the definition as context to create example sentences.

3 Overview

In this section, we investigate the parsed wiktionary dump from Wu and Yarowsky (2020) and discuss the relevant aspects of the dataset.

3.1 Definition

Word	Definition
free	(<i>lb en social</i>) Unconstrained.
free	Not imprisoned or enslaved.
free	Generous; liberal.

Figure 1: Parsed wiktionary example definitions for the english word *free*.

The definition dataset includes information on the source language, the word to be defined, the part of speech, and the definition of the word. The definition of a word can also contain a specific context in which the definition is used. Figure 1 shows some example definitions from the dataset for the word *free*.

3.2 Etymology

Similar to the definition dataset, the etymology dataset includes information on the source language, the word to be analyzed, and the etymology of the word. The etymology is a tree structure that describes the word’s origin, including roots from other languages. Figure 2 shows an example etymology from the dataset for the word *free*.

4 Methodology

From the definition and etymology datasets, we use only the words with the english source language. For the definitions, we remove self-referential definitions and utilize a maximum of three definitions per word. Although the context-based definitions may provide some benefit for a context-based model, we aren’t interested in using this method for generating context-based definitions, so we remove them from the dataset. Additionally, the definition of some words are completely context-based, and are also

free [(eng—free)(root)(eng—ine-pro—*preyH-)]

Figure 2: Parsed wiktionary example etymology for the english word *free*.

Type	Amount
Words	100
Average Definitions Per Word	1
Etymology (Average Length)	100
Definition (Average Length)	100

Figure 3: Dataset statistics for the combined datasets.

removed. For the etymologies, we use only the first etymology for each word if there exist multiple. Dataset statistics are shown in Figure 3.

5 Experimental Results

6 Conclusion

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