One thing that you can start trying on your own is to work on any of the **SemEval tasks**:

http://alt.qcri.org/semeval2017/index.php?id=tasks
[You may also have a look at the previous editions]

This is an yearly competition, with lot of NLP tasks that come with training and test data, along with reference papers. For instance:

Task 2 -- how can you use word vectors for this task? How can you improve the earlier methods?

Task 10 - can you use your knowledge of information extraction to deal with scientific text? Can you go further and try extracting scientific entities once you have learnt about entities in general?

Similarly, a lot of problems on sentiment, humor and truth, where you can use your knowledge of sentiment analysis.

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Other problems / tasks:

Semantic Question Matching over Quora:

https://engineering.guora.com/Semantic-Question-Matching-with-Deep-Learning

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Useful Resources for NLP:

Books:

Speech and Language Processing Book, 3rd Edition: https://web.stanford.edu/~jurafsky/slp3/
Deep Learning Book: http://www.deeplearningbook.org/

Courses:

CS224n: http://web.stanford.edu/class/cs224n/ (Videos available on Youtube). Also contains lots of project ideas.

Ipython Notebooks:

https://github.com/krishnamrith12/NotebooksNLP

Conferences to Follow:

NLP: ACL 2017 and previous editions of ACL, EMNLP, Coling, EACL, NAACL

ML: ICML, NIPS AI: AAAI, IJCAI

Data Mining: KDD, CIKM, ICDM, SDM Web Mining: WWW, ICWSM, WSDM

Information Retrieval: SIGIR