

Codewords Detection in Microblogs Focusing on Differences in Word Use Between Two Corpora

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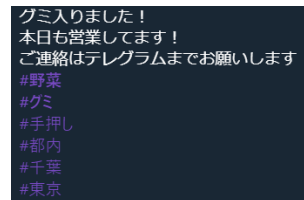
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Abstract—In recent years, drug trafficking using microblogs has risen and become a social problem. A common method of cyber patrols for cracking down on crimes, such as drug trafficking, involves searching for crime-related keywords. However, criminals who post crime-inducing messages make maximum use of "codewords" rather than keywords, such as enjo kosai, marijuana, and methamphetamine, to camouflage their criminal intentions. Research suggests that these codewords change once they become popular; therefore, searching for a specific word requires significant effort to keep track of the latest codewords. In this study, we focused on the appearance of codewords and those likely to be included in incriminating posts with aim to detect codewords with the high likelihood of inclusion in incriminating posts. We proposed new methods for detecting codewords based on differences in word usage and conducted experiments on concealed-word detection in order to evaluate method effectiveness. The results showed that the proposed method was capable of detecting concealed words other than those in the initial list and to better degree relative to baseline methods. These findings demonstrated the ability of the proposed method to rapidly and automatically detect codewords that change over time and blog posts that induce crimes, thereby potentially reducing the burden of continuous monitoring of codewords.

Index Terms—codewords, detect, microblog, Twitter, word embedding


I. INTRODUCTION

There have recently been numerous incidents related to enjo kosai (subsidized companionship) and illegal drugs promoted using microblogging. According to a previous study, enjo kosai "A is the label used for young women who agree to meet strange men for dates, which might involve sex, in exchange for money or gifts" [1]. In particular, enjo kosai for young women under the age of 18 years of age has become a problem. Posters of enjo kosai and illegal-drug-related activity are wary of their posts and accounts being removed by cyber patrols from social networking service companies or their arrest by police. Therefore, only those aware of the meaning of codewords carry out illegal transactions (Fig.1).



グミ入りました！
本日も営業してます！
ご連絡はテレグラムまでお願いします
#野菜
#グミ
#手押し
#都内
#千葉
#東京

(a) Writing in Japanese (Example).



Gummy are in stock now!
We're open today!
Please contact the Telegram.
#vegetables.
#gummies.
#HandPush.
#metropolitan.
#Chiba.
#Tokyo.

(b) Translation of (a).

Fig. 1. Example sentences with codewords from Twitter.

For example, the word "ganja" is popularly codeword used for marijuana, while the words "es" and "shabu" are mainly used for methamphetamine. Generation of keyword lists and use of countermeasures for their detection have limited success due to the frequency with which they are changed to avoid surveillance [2]. For example, in the case of marijuana, the words "grass", "weed", and "joint" have previously been used. Similarly, for methamphetamine, the words "ice" and "crystal" have previously been used. Thus, cyber patrols need to continuously track new cryptograms and the possible addition of words to these cryptograms; thereby increasing the monitoring burden. Therefore, to support the prevention of crimes, such as drug trafficking and enjo kosai on microblogging sites (especially Twitter), we developed a method to detect crime-related tweets containing codewords. Previous studies of codeword use on the Internet, such as in bulletin boards, have been published; however, there are few studies targeting short sentences, such as microblogs, involving a limited number of characters in a single post, which makes it difficult to understand the meaning of sentences. This suggests that discovery of codewords in such sentences would be potentially

significant for crime prevention due to early detection. In this study, we focused on differences in usage of the same words between two corpora based on the idea that similar words appear interspersed with others in malicious communications. This method allows the detection of codewords likely included in crime-related tweets and among words likely to occur along with the codewords. This method builds a word distribution expression model using Word2vec [3] for each of the two corpora and detects codewords based on differences between words appearing higher in cosine similarity with respect to similar words.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Increase in the number of crimes involving drug trafficking and enjo kosai

A news article based on a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime report noted increases in online drug trafficking via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram [4]. Additionally, according to National Police Agency (Japan) data on enjo kosai, the number of smartphone victims of crimes and the number of children who fall victim to crimes originating from social networking sites (SNSs) increases annually, with the latter reaching an all-time high in 2019 (Fig.2). Moreover, among SNSs, Facebook and Twitter are often used [5], and Twitter reportedly has highest number of children victims (40%) (Fig.3). Therefore, in this study, we focused on Twitter.

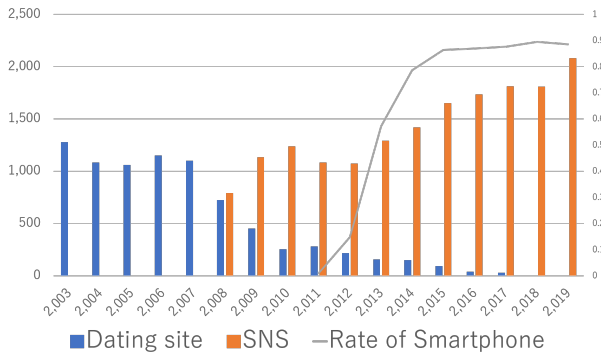


Fig. 2. Number of children victimized by SNSs according to data from the National Police Agency (JAPAN) [6] [7] and an undisclosed dating site (2018 and 2019)

B. Codewords

Codewords are used in various industries and expressed using various words. In this study, we defined codewords as those used in illegal transactions in order to avoid police surveillance. Different words with similar meanings can be used as codewords. For example, Yuan et al. [2] described a codeword as "Dark Jargon". In this study, we targeted the following codeword types.

1) Camouflaged words

These words are used to camouflage with an innocuous word that generally has a different meaning. For example, in the genre related to drug trafficking, codewords,

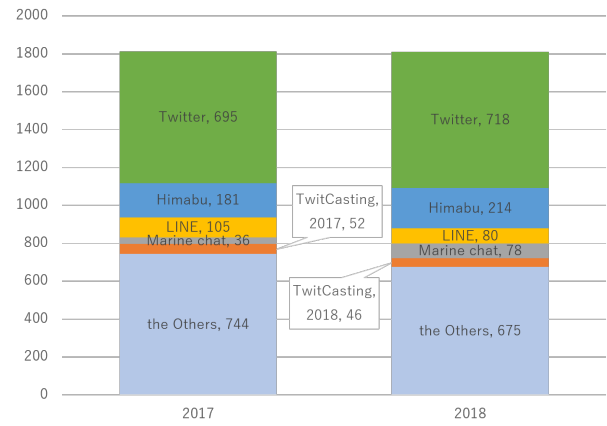


Fig. 3. Sites with multiple child victims according to data from the National Police Agency (Japan)) [8]

such as "vegetable" and "grass", are used for marijuana and "ice" and "crystal" for methamphetamine.

2) Words replaced by pronunciation

These include words replaced with other Chinese characters having the same sound when pronounced. Although the words are not generally used, they can be associated with the sound.

3) Words not commonly used

These words are unpopular, and even when used, is only understood by a limited number of people. For example, "White Kush" and "White Widow", which are codewords for marijuana, fall into this category.

In this study, we focused on codewords related to drug trafficking and enjo kosai. Although such codewords from websites have been previously analyzed [9], they are not applicable to microblogging sites, such as Twitter. De la Rosa et al [10] described the following three features of microblogs.

- Short character lengths

Microblogs comprise as little as a single word and at most less than a paragraph. In the case of Twitter, there is a limit of 140 characters per post.

- Informal and unstructured formats

Microblogs contain slang, misspellings, and abbreviations.

- The text is semi-structured according to traditional NLP definitions

Therefore, it is difficult to maintain up-to-date dictionaries using prepared matching methods, given the frequency of codeword changes and accounting for slang use and misspellings. Furthermore, machine learning methods for detecting codewords are difficult to apply due to the limited length of the sentences and word presentation, which eliminates context. However, analysis of tweets in which codewords appeared indicated multiple cases involving the appearance of similar words, suggesting that codewords might be detected if a word-dispersion representation can be used to vectorize the words and identify similar words in their vicinity. In this study,

we proposed a new method for detecting unknown words by focusing on the similarity of known words.

III. RELATED WORKS

A. Core idea

TABLE I. Top 10 similar words to "paper" in each corpus. (Bolded words are those defined as codewords.)

the top 10 similar words in the Bad Corpus were codewords. To discover unknown codewords, we focused mainly on two points: 1) similar words, W , in the Good Corpus differ from those in the Bad Corpus; and 2) searches for similar words in the Bad Corpus result in similar metonymy and related maliciousness. We selected a list of codewords related to drug trafficking and *enjo kosai*.

The outline of the system is shown in Fig. 4. The detailed

Fig. 4. Schematic of the system.

- 1) For each word in the word list, calculate the score for each of the two corpora (Function *SIMILAR*).
 - a) For each word, similar words up to the top N of the cosine similarity are searched using the pre-constructed word distribution expression model (Good_Corpus, Bad_Corpus) (*Get similar words*). In this experiment, we set N to 20.
 - b) Match the retrieved N similar words individually against the matching list (Codeword_List).
 - c) If a match is found in the codeword list, add points ($X=X+1$) to a maximum of 20 points.
 - d) If the word, W , does not match any in the codeword list, it is possible that the word is not registered as a codeword; therefore, similar words up to the $N/2$ highest cosine similarity to the word W are

considered. If the score is greater than or equal to the threshold, points are added to X ($X=X+1$).

- e) For each of similar word to W , if the word does not match any in the hidden word list, $N/4$ similar words are searched based on the similar word, and word W is evaluated.

- 2) Calculate the difference (*Diff*) between the calculated Good (*Cnt_Good*) and Bad (*Cnt_Bad*) point totals.
- 3) If the Bad point total exceeds the threshold, it is identified as a codeword. If the *Diff* is above a certain level, the threshold value for the Bad point total decreases.

Algorithm 1 *Main*

Input: Word_List, N, Good_Corpus, Bad_Corpus

Output: Codewords

```

for all Word in Word_List do
  Cnt_Bad  $\leftarrow$  SIMILAR(Word, N, Bad_Corpus, 1)
  Cnt_Good  $\leftarrow$  SIMILAR(Word, N, Good_Corpus, 1)
  Diff  $\leftarrow$  abs(Cnt_Bad - Cnt_Good)
  if (Cnt_Bad/N  $\geq$  0.2) or ((Diff/N  $\geq$  0.15) and
    (Cnt_Bad/N  $\geq$  0.1)) then
    Codeword_List.append(WORD)
  end if
end for
return(Codeword_List)

```

Algorithm 2 Function *SIMILAR*

Input: Word, N, Corpus, Loop_count

Output: Number of matches with codewords

```

X  $\leftarrow$  0
Sim_words  $\leftarrow$  Corpus.Get_similar_words(Word, N)
for all Sim_word in Sim_words do
  if Sim_word in Codeword_List then
    X  $\leftarrow$  X + 1
  else if Loop_count  $\leq$  2 then
    Y  $\leftarrow$  SIMILAR(Sim_word, N/2, Corpus, Loop_count + 1)
    if Y/N  $\geq$  0.2 then
      X  $\leftarrow$  X + 1
    end if
  end if
end for
return(X)

```

V. EXPERIMENT

A. Summary of the experiment

We performed an experiment to detect codewords using 950 pre-annotated words and included 10 of 45 known codewords among the 950 words in a known-codeword list for matching. The system then evaluated the similarity of words to codewords in an attempt to identify the remaining 35 words. The experiment was performed using the following steps.

B. Experiment process

1) *Data collection:* Twitter data (47 days; 5.4 GB) were collected using the Twitter API, and only text was used for analysis. The following words not considered to be related to the pre-processed codewords were removed prior to analysis.

- Single-byte alphanumeric characters
- URLs
- Full-width symbols
- Line-feed characters
- Words frequently appearing on Twitter (e.g., "RT", "Favorite", etc.)

2) *Creating corpora:* The pre-processed Twitter data were analyzed to identify 10 words (words judged as having been posted for criminal purposes related to drug trafficking and/or enjo kosai) in each tweet, followed by classification into the following two corpora.

- Bad Corpus (8 MB)

This represented a group of tweets containing one or more of the 10 words. We assumed that words from tweets related to illegal transactions were collected in this corpus.

- Good Corpus (4 GB)

This represented a group of tweets not including words from the Bad Corpus. We assumed that most of these tweets were general interactions.

3) *Morphological analysis:* We focused on Twitter due to its use of short sentences, new words and slang, and limited sentence lengths. This suggested that some sentences might not be correctly separated. Moreover, the Japanese language has a unique sentence structure not separated by spaces; therefore, segmentation was necessary prior to word distribution. We segmented sentences from Twitter using Sudachi [19] for the following reasons:

- Sudachi is continuously improved and maintained, its dictionary is regularly updated, and it is expected to have the most up-to-date word list; and
- a word-division unit can be selected.

4) *Word embedding:* After split writing, word distribution was performed using Word2vec using parameters shown in Table II.

TABLE II. parameters of Word2vec

Parameter	Value
Size	200
min_count	20
window size	5
SG or CBow	Skip-Gram [20]

5) *System execution:* We created a word list from the corpus model generated by word distribution and extracted 940 nouns common between the two corpora models and 10 nouns from the Bad Corpus model. We then executed method using this word list.

C. Comparative Approach

To perform comparative analyses, we prepared a baseline method in which all nouns in tweets containing words used in a malicious exchange were defined as codewords. The results of comparison of the proposed method with the baseline method are shown in Fig. 5.

The baseline method for detecting codewords is described as follows.

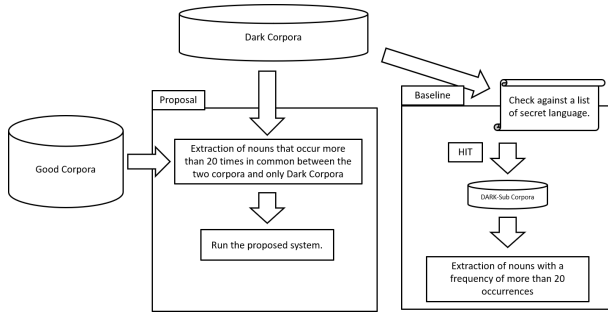


Fig. 5. Relationship between the proposed and baseline methods

- the Bad Corpus is used to analyse the codeword list used in the proposed method.
- All sentences containing words from the hidden word list were extracted, and a Bad subcorpus was created.
- from the Bad subcorpus, only nouns were extracted, with these considered hidden words.

D. Evaluation methods

The word list extracted from the corpora models comprised 950 nouns and was classified into the following three categories based on the tweets of two to three people with no prior knowledge of the words.

- “Codewords”
These were words judged to have a meaning different from their original meaning.
- “Related words”
Although these words could not be categorized as codewords, they tended to appear alongside codewords and were judged as rarely appearing in general tweets (e.g., “stock” and “price”).
- “Unrelated words”
These were words not meeting the criteria of the previous two definitions.

E. Result

Annotation resulted in 45 codewords, of which 10 were prepared as a known-codeword list. The system was executed using 940 words that excluded these 10 words. Thirty-nine words were detected as predicted codewords, with 17 of these identified as true codewords. The results of the proposed method and the baseline method are shown in Table III. Table

TABLE III. Evaluation results of evaluation

Classified	All Words		Proposed Method		Baseline Method	
	Quantity	Rate	Quantity	Rate	Quantity	Rate
Codewords	35	3.7%	17	43.6%	23	5.7%
Others	905	96.3%	22	56.4%	379	94.3%
SUM	940		39		402	

III, shows that the proposed method detected codewords at a higher rate than the baseline method; however, the number of codewords detected by the proposed method was lower than that by the baseline method. Furthermore, we determined four indicators of method performance (precision, recall, accuracy, and F-Score) (Table IV).

TABLE IV. Details of the results

Evaluation Method	Proposed	Baseline	Difference
Precision	0.436	0.057	0.379
Recall	0.486	0.657	-0.171
Accuracy	0.957	0.584	0.373
F-score	0.459	0.105	0.354

Table IV shows that the proposed method returned better results in terms of precision, accuracy, and F-Score relative to the baseline method. Moreover, the proposed method detected words, such as “diesel”, “skunk”, “gummi”, “lemon”, and “joint”.

VI. DISCUSSION

A. Detection Challenges

In this study, we developed a method to detect known codewords from short sentences, such as those used in tweets on Twitter. Although we anticipated lower recall in the proposed method relative to that in the baseline method, which uses a wide range of codewords, we observed minimal differences between the two results, and the proposed method showed higher precision, accuracy, and F-Score than the baseline method. These results indicated that the proposed method was able to detect codewords with higher accuracy than the baseline method. However, the proposed method was unable to detect “typical” codewords, such as “ice” and “vegetable”. Therefore, we identified similar words to “ice” in the word-distributed expression model created from the Bad Corpus (Table V).

TABLE V. Words similar to “ice”.

Rank	Result	Meaning	Annotation
1	市内	Within The City	△
2	郵送	Posts	△
3	営業中	In Business	△
4	野菜	Vegetables	○
5	極上	The Best	△
6	業販	Commercial Sales	△
7	ブラック	Black	○
8	おはようございます	Good Morning	×
9	メニュー	Menu	△
10	テレ	Tele	△

Table V shows that multiple words used for malicious communications were identified as being similar to “ice”. However, the number of matching words was small, because the number of words in the known-codeword list was too small. Therefore, using more words in the known-codeword list might improve the recall of the proposed method. Further, it was found that many related words defined in Section IV.D such as “Post” and “In Business” also appeared. Therefore, it can also be expected that the recall can be improved by introducing a mechanism for matching related words.

B. Detection of Related Words

Table VI shows results from including both codewords and related words. Table VII shows that the precision for

the proposed method was high (0.718), and that multiple related words were identified, even if they were not codewords. Therefore, our future work will introduce a mechanism capable of detecting codewords and related words.

TABLE VI. Results evaluations involving related words.

Classified	All Words		Proposed Method		DIFF
	Quantity	Rate	Quantity	Rate	
Codewords	35	3.7%	17	43.6%	+39.9%
Related word	119	12.7%	11	28.2%	+15.5%
Unrelated	786	83.6%	11	28.2%	-55.4%
SUM	940		39		

TABLE VII. Results generated by the inclusion of related words.

Evaluation Method	Proposed
Precision	0.718
Recall	0.182
Accuracy	0.854
F-score	0.290

C. Applicability of the model to other languages

Although we used the proposed method to analyse sentences written in the Japanese language, the method is versatile enough to apply to other languages.

VII. CONCLUSION

In summary, we developed a method to support cyber patrol detection of codewords in Twitter data. The method successfully detected codewords not included in the known-codeword list and outperformed a baseline method in terms of precision, accuracy, and F-Score. These findings suggest the efficacy of this method for automatic detection of frequently changing codewords.

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