Recognizing Conflict Opinions in Aspect-level Sentiment Classification with Dual Attention Networks

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Abstract

Aspect-level sentiment classification, which is a fine-grained sentiment analysis task, has received lots of attention these years. There is a phenomenon that people express both positive and negative sentiments towards an aspect at the same time. Such opinions with conflicting sentiments, however, are ignored by existing studies, which design models based on the absence of them. We argue that the exclusion of conflict opinions is problematic, for the reason that it represents an important style of human thinking – dialectic thinking. If a real-world sentiment classification system ignores the existence of conflict opinions when it is designed, it will incorrectly mixed conflict opinions into other sentiment polarity categories in action. Existing models have problems when recognizing conflicting opinions, such as data sparsity. In this paper, we propose a multi-label classification model with dual attention mechanism to address these problems.

1 Introduction

Aspect-level sentiment classification is a fine-grained sentiment analysis task (Pang et al., 2008). Given aspect categories or target entities in the text, this task aims at inferring the sentiment polarity (e.g., *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral*) of the aspects. A recent study (Kenyon-Dean et al., 2018) on sentiment analysis dataset construction brings attention to sentiments beyond the scope of *positive*, *negative*, and *neutral* categories, indicating that they will benefit the real-world sentiment analysis systems. We find that there is a similar type of sentiment labeled as *conflict* in SemEval dataset for aspect-level sentiment classification (Pontiki et al., 2014). *Conflict* label applies when both positive and negative sentiment is expressed about an aspect. For example, the sentence "*The atmosphere is attractive, but a little uncomfortable.*"

expresses *conflict* sentiment towards *ambience* aspect. However, most of existing studies ignore *conflict* opinions, for the reason that they are sparse in the dataset (Tang et al., 2016b; He et al., 2018). In this work, we argue that the exclusion of *conflict* opinions is problematic.

The *conflict* opinions are the production of an important style of human thinking – dialectic thinking. Dialectic thinking, unlike the thinking constrained by the laws of formal logic, shows a degree of tolerance of contradiction (Peng and Nisbett, 1999). If a real-world sentiment classification system ignores the existence of *conflict* opinions when it is designed, its predicted *positive* opinions may contain negative expressions and its predicted *negative* opinions may contain positive expressions. Considering the existence of sentiment expressions of both sites, it is unreasonable to put *conflict* opinions into either *positive* or *negative* sentiment classes.

There are problems when including *conflict* opinions in aspect-level sentiment classification. Based on our observation, existing methods have significant lower accuracy on recognizing *conflict* sentiment than recognizing other sentiments. We analyse that the reasons are as follows: 1) *Conflict* opinions are sparse in dataset, which is difficult for a model to learn its class-specific features during training; 2) Existing models have difficulty in recognizing the complex expressions of *conflict* sentiment, which are the combination of positive and negative sentiment expressions.

In this paper, we propose a method to address the two problems. Firstly, we model the task as a multi-label classification problem. In contrast to mutually exclusive 4-class (*positive*, *negative*, *neutral*, and *conflict*) classification, our model predicts two labels for each aspect: 1) Whether positive sentiment is expressed towards the aspect; 2) Whether negative sentiment is expressed towards

the aspect. Then, we transform the 2-label predicted results into 4-class labels by rules (e.g., if both positive and negative expressions exist, then apply *conflict*). During training, the 4-class training labels in dataset are transformed into 2-label targets. In this way, we utilize the relation between *conflict* label and *positive/negative* labels, which makes the model learn to recognize *conflict* opinions from abundant *positive* and *negative* data. It is also based on the fact that neural network is good at recognizing positive or negative sentiments, which are indicated by compact and concrete expressions. On the contrary, we find that the expressions of *conflict* opinions usually are lengthy and implicit. Faced with *conflict* opinions, existing attention-based models (Wang et al., 2016) (with single attention) usually attend on a portion of a *conflict* expression and ignore the other portion, which make its predicted result prone to be *positive* or *negative*. Instead, we use two independent attentions in the proposed model to focus on positive or negative expressions separately.

Our contributions are summarized as follows: 1) To the best of our knowledge, this is the first work that discuss the necessity of including *conflict* opinions in aspect-level sentiment classification task; 2) We propose a model that can recognize the complex expressions of *conflict* opinions and deal with sparsity problem of *conflict* data; 3) The experiment results on SemEval dataset indicate that our model performs well on recognizing *conflict* opinions and outperforms all baselines.

2 Related Work

Kenyon-Dean et al. (2018) states that there are opinions cannot be properly annotated as *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral* sentiment polarities. Their experiment shows that existing classifiers have significant lower accuracy on recognizing sentiments in these opinions. Their work is about sentence-level sentiment analysis and does not propose a model. Our work is different from theirs since we propose a model capable of recognizing *conflict* opinions in existing aspect-level sentiment classification dataset.

Traditional methods in aspect-level sentiment classification leveraged sentiment lexicons (Mohammad et al., 2013), while recent work tends to use neural network to generate text representations automatically. TD-LSTM and TC-LSTM (Tang et al., 2016a) encode contextual informa-

tion with respect to the target. Methods based on memory network (Tang et al., 2016b; Zhu and Qian, 2018) instead generate aspect-related representation. Attention-based recurrent neural network (Wang et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2017; Cheng et al., 2017) selectively attends to aspect-related regions and calculates the weighted sum of the hidden states of these regions. Xue et al. (2018) instead utilize gated convolutional neural network to extract aspect-related representations, which increase computational efficiency. Our work differs from these works since we address two problems of recognizing *conflict* opinion which they ignore.
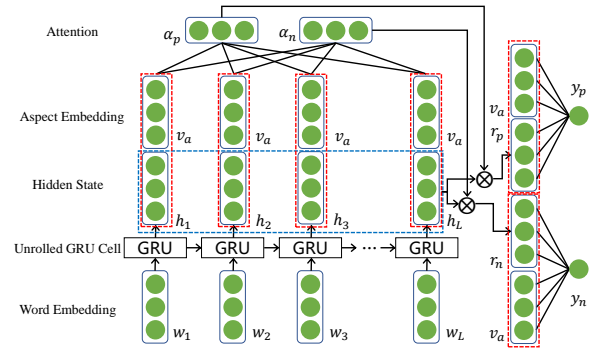
3 Model: Dual Attention-based GRU

Figure 1: The network architecture of D-AT-GRU.

3.1 Network Architecture

The architecture of the proposed Dual Attenition-based GRU (D-AT-GRU) is illustrated as Fig. 1. Given a sentence with L words and an aspect (or aspect term) as inputs, the model first transforms them into word embeddings $[w_1, ..., w_L]$ and aspect embedding v_a. Then, it extracts aspect-related text features through recurrent neural network and dual attention mechanism. Lastly, it produces 2-label predictions through classification layers and transforms them into 4-class labels.

Aspect embedding. We use an embedding matrix $V_A \in \mathbb{R}^{|A| \times d_a}$ to represent aspects, where d_a is the dimension of aspect embedding and $|A|$ is the number of aspects in dataset. Each row in V_A is a representation vector v_a for aspect $a \in A$. The aspect embeddings are randomly initialized and learned as parameters.

Text feature extraction. We use Gated Recurrent Unit (GRU) (Cho et al., 2014) to extract contextual information of words in our model. Long short-term memory (LSTM) (Hochreiter

2

and Schmidhuber, 1997) is an alternative choice, which is often used in previous models (Wang et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2017; He et al., 2018). However, we find that GRU performs better than LSTM in our model. Thus, we choose GRU. Let matrix $H = [h_1, ..., h_L] \in \mathbb{R}^{L \times d}$ denotes the hidden states produced by GRU.

Attention mechanism. Based on the hidden states H and the embedding v_a of given aspect, attention mechanism gives importance weights which indicate aspect-related context region. Given that a *conflict* opinion consist of positive and negative expressions, attention usually fails to capture the full expression and only attends to a portion of it. Affected by previous *positive* or *negative* training samples, attention tends to think that just a portion of the *conflict* expression is enough to determine sentiment label and omit the other portion which also contains sentiment words. We therefore propose to use two attentions separately: one is responsible for finding positive expression, the other is responsible for finding negative expression. The positive attention is calculated by:

$$g_i^p = u_p^T tanh(W_p[h_i; v_a] + b_p), \quad (1)$$

$$\alpha_i^p = \frac{exp(g_i^p)}{\sum_{j=1}^{L} exp(g_j^p)}, \quad (2)$$

where $W_p \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times 2d}, u_p \in \mathbb{R}^d$ and $b_p \in \mathbb{R}^d$ are parameters. The negative attention is calculated through following functions:

$$g_i^n = u_n^T tanh(W_n[h_i; v_a] + b_n), \quad (3)$$

$$\alpha_i^n = \frac{exp(g_i^n)}{\sum_{j=1}^{L} exp(g_j^n)}, \quad (4)$$

where $W_n \in \mathbb{R}^{d \times 2d}, u_n \in \mathbb{R}^d$ and $b_n \in \mathbb{R}^d$ are parameters.

For the reason that positive sentiment and negative sentiment usually are expressed in different regions, the two attentions should not overlap. Thus, we utilize orthogonal regularization (He et al., 2017):

$$\mathcal{R}_o = ||M^T M - I||_2, \quad (5)$$

where $M = [\alpha^p; \alpha^n], M \in \mathbb{R}^{2 \times L}$ contains attention scores.

Text representation. According to the positive and negative attention scores, corresponding aspect-related text representations are calculated

through the weighted sum of hidden states H:

$$v_p = \sum_{i=1}^{L} \alpha_i^p h_i, \quad (6)$$

$$v_n = \sum_{i=1}^{L} \alpha_i^n h_i. \quad (7)$$

Classification layer. An expression may have various meanings when describing different aspects. Therefore, we take aspect information into account in classification layer by concatenating text representations with aspect embeddings.

$$y_p = \sigma(W_{py}[v_p; v_a] + b_{py}), \quad (8)$$
$$y_n = \sigma(W_{ny}[v_n; v_a] + b_{ny}), \quad (9)$$

where y_p is predicted positive sentiment distribution, y_n is predicted negative sentiment distribution; $W_{py}, W_{ny} \in \mathbb{R}^{2d}$ and $b_{py}, b_{ny} \in \mathbb{R}^1$ are parameters.

3.2 Objection Function

The model can be trained in an end-to-end way by backpropagation, where the objective function is the sum of the binary cross-entropy losses of positive and negative sentiments:

$$\mathcal{L}_p = -\hat{y}_p log(y_p) - (1 - \hat{y}_p)log(1 - y_p), \quad (10)$$
$$\mathcal{L}_n = -\hat{y}_n log(y_n) - (1 - \hat{y}_n)log(1 - y_n), \quad (11)$$

where $\hat{y}_p, \hat{y}_n$ are target distributions. During training, 4-class sentiment labels are transformed into 2-label targets (e.g., *conflict* is transformed into $(\hat{y}_p, \hat{y}_n) = (1, 1)$). The goal of training is to minimize the following function:

$$\mathcal{L} = \mathcal{L}_p + \mathcal{L}_n + \lambda \mathcal{R}_o, \quad (12)$$

where λ is a hyperparameter used to balance the weight of orthogonal regularization. We set λ to 1 in our experiment.

3.3 Label Transformation

Given the predicted distributions y_p, y_n, we transform them into 4-class labels. If $y_p > p, y_n > p$, the predicted label will be *conflict*. If $y_p \leq p, y_n \leq p$, the predicted label will be *neutral*. If $y_p \leq p, y_n > p$, the predicted label will be *negative*. If $y_p > p, y_n \leq p$, the predicted label will be *positive*. In this paper, we directly use $p = 0.5$ to minimize human interference, although it can be tune manually as a hyperparameter.

4 Experiment

4.1 Dataset and Preparation

We experiment on SemEval 2014 datasets (Ponti-ki et al., 2014) (Table 1) to evaluate the proposed model. For the reason that there are too few *con-flict* test instances regarding aspect term to show significance, we choose to experiment on aspec-t category data. Our model is compared with the state-of-the-art methods in aspect category senti-ment classification, which are adapted to 4-class classification.

In our experiment, dimension sizes d, d_a, d_w are all set to 300. Word embeddings are initial-ized with 300-dimension pre-trained GloVe vec-tors (Pennington et al., 2014). All the other pa-rameters are initialized by sampling from a normal distribution $\mathcal{N}(0, 0.01)$. We use Adagrad (Duchi et al., 2011) with a batch size of 10 samples, ini-tial learning rate of 0.01, and maximum epochs of 30. We use development set chosen by Tay et al. (2018). The patience value of early-stopping is 3.

	positive	negative	neutral	conflict
Train	1759	704	442	187
Dev	420	135	58	8
Test	657	222	94	52

Table 1: Statistics of datasets.

4.2 Result and Analysis

Model	Overall	Conflict
AT-LSTM	77.13%	11.54%
ATAE-LSTM	78.00%	23.08%
GCAE	78.30%	25.00%
AT-GRU	77.22%	19.23%
AT-GRU 2-label	77.02%	26.92%
D-AT-GRU w/o orthogonal	77.22%	26.92%
D-AT-GRU	**78.50%**	**40.38%**

Table 2: Experiment results on SemEval 2014 dataset.

Table 2 shows that D-AT-GRU model outper-forms all baseline methods. Given that AT-LSTM (Wang et al., 2016) has strong correlation to our base model (AT-GRU), their work can be catego-rized as a baseline to our model. In contrast, the results prove that the additional components are helpful to recognize *conflict* opinions. We also

compare our model to the recently proposed G-CAE (Xue and Li, 2018), which is based on gat-ed CNN. D-AT-GRU performs competitively with GCAE overall and significantly better on *conflict* category.

We also compare with ablated versions of D-AT-GRU: 1) Replace the LSTM in AT-LSTM with GRU and directly do 4-class classification (AT-GRU); 2) Use AT-GRU with two separate classifi-cation layers to do 2-label classification (AT-GRU 2-label); 3) Remove orthogonal regularization (D-AT-GRU w/o orthogonal). Their performance suf-fers from the ablations, which proves that every component is essential for the proposed model.

4.3 Quality Analysis

Figure 2 is a test case in our experiment. AT-LSTM attends to "*uncomfortable*" and ignores the existence of "*attractive*", which causes it to in-correctly predict *negative* label. With our D-AT-GRU model, the negative attention finds "*uncom-fortable*" in the second part of the sentence, which makes the model predict that there is negative sentiment; the positive attention instead gives the highest score to "*attractive*", which leads the mod-el to predict that there is positive sentiment. Given the existence of both positive and negative senti-ments, D-AT-GRU correctly predict *conflict* label. This shows that the dual attention mechanism of D-AT-GRU model can more accurately capture the complete expression of a *conflict* opinion.
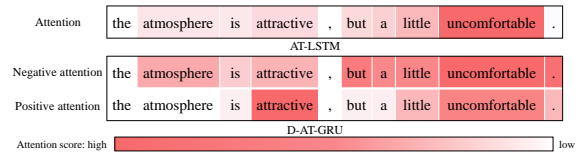

Figure 2: The visualizations of attention.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, we present a method to recognize *conflict* opinions in aspect-level sentiment classi-fication task. By transforming the problem into recognizing simpler sentiments, we alleviate the s-parsity problem of *conflict* data. Our model utilize dual attention mechanism and orthogonal regular-ization, which are capable of recognizing the com-plex expressions of *conflict* opinions. Experiment on SemEval dataset demonstrates the effectiveness of the proposed model.

4

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