Stance Detection: Concepts, Approaches, Resources, and Outstanding Issues [Part 1]

ACM SIGIR 2021 Tutorial

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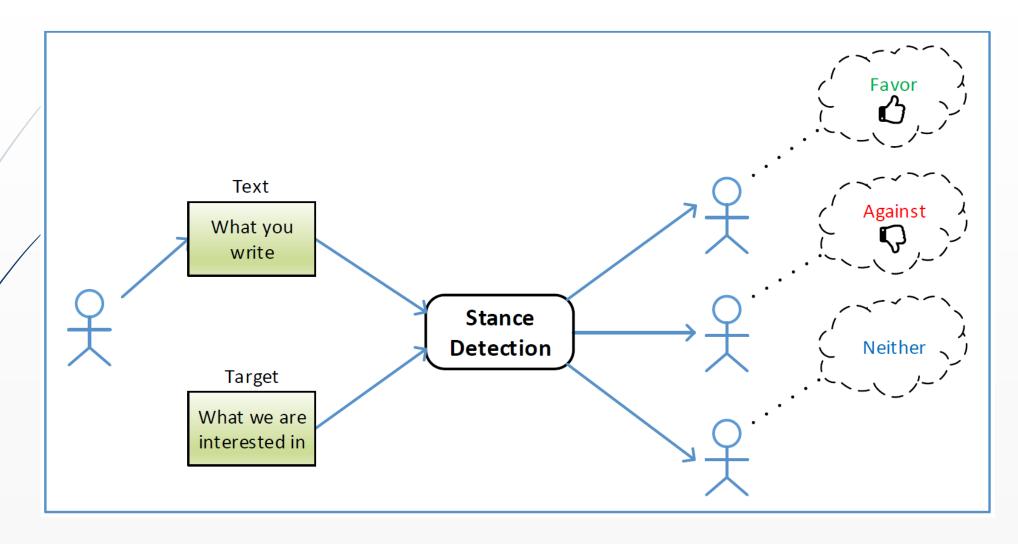
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Outline (Part 1)

- Introduction
- Core Concepts and Related Problems
- Stance Detection Competitions (Shared Tasks)
- Historical and Contemporary Approaches
- Resources (Datasets and Tools)

Introduction



Küçük, D. and Can, F. (2020). Stance Detection: A Survey. ACM Computing Surveys, 53, 1.

Introduction

- **Stance detection** is also known as:
 - stance classification
 - stance identification
 - stance prediction
 - debate-side classification
 - debate stance classification

- Stance detection is at the crossroads of:
 - Natural language processing
 - Social media analysis
 - Information retrieval

Introduction

- Other common class labels used in stance detection research:
 - ► Favor, Against, None
 - Favor, Against, Neutral
 - For, Against
 - Support, Oppose
 - Pro, Con
 - Pro, Anti

The topics in stance detection research include controversial topics, political/ideological debates, and elections/referendums, among others.

Core Concepts

Definition 1.1 (Stance Detection). For an input in the form of a piece of text and a target pair, stance detection is a classification problem where the stance of the author of the text is sought in the form of a category label from this set: {Favor, Against, Neither}. Occasionally, the category label of Neutral is also added to the set of stance categories [Mohammad et al. 2016b] and the target may or may not be explicitly mentioned in the text [Augenstein et al. 2016a; Mohammad et al. 2016b].

Definition 1.2 (Multi-target Stance Detection). For an input in the form of a piece of text and a set of related targets, multi-target stance detection is a classification problem where the stance of the text author is sought as a category label from this set: {Favor, Against, Neither} for each target and each stance classification (for each target) might have an effect on the classifications for the remaining targets [Sobhani 2017].

Definition 1.3 (Cross-target Stance Detection). Cross-target stance detection is a classification problem where the stance of the text author is sought for a specific target as a category label from this set: {Favor, Against, Neither}, in a settings where stance annotations are available for (though related but) different targets, i.e., there is not enough stance-annotated training data for the target under consideration [Augenstein et al. 2016a; Xu et al. 2018].

Küçük, D. and Can, F. (2020). Stance Detection: A Survey. ACM Computing Surveys, 53, 1.

Core Concepts

Definition 1.4 (Rumour Stance Classification). For an input in the form of a piece of text and a rumour pair, rumour stance classification is a problem where the position of the text author towards the veracity of the rumour is sought for, in the form of a category label from this set: {Supporting, Denying, Querying, Commenting}. As the set of possible category labels, a subset of this set such as {Supporting, Denying} is occasionally employed [Zubiaga et al. 2018].

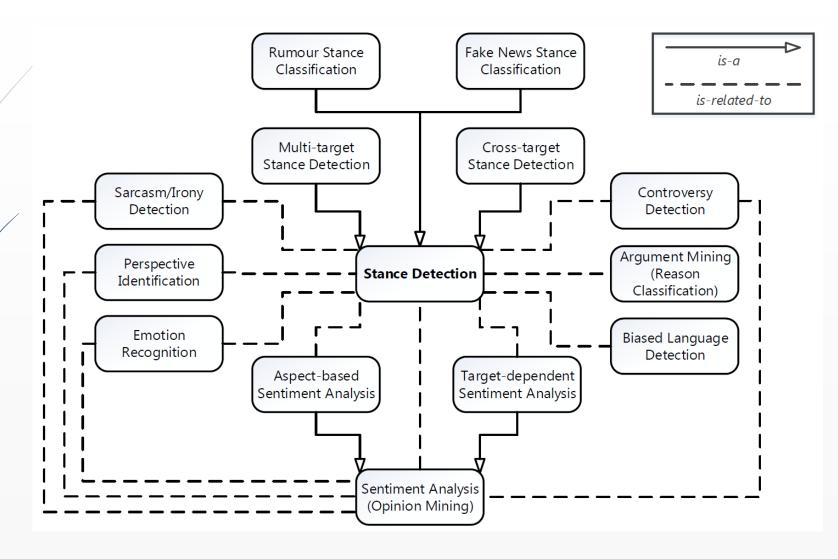
Definition 1.5 (Fake News Stance Detection). For an input in the form of news headline and a news body pair (where the headline and body parts may belong to different news articles), this is a classification problem where the stance of the body towards the claim of the headline is sought for, in the form of a category label from this set: {Agrees, Disagrees, Discusses} (the same topic), Unrelated}. This problem is defined in order to facilitate the task of fake news detection [FNC 2017].

Core Concepts

Table 1. Sample Tweets from SemEval 2016 Stance Dataset [Mohammad et al. 2016b].

Tweet	Stance Target	Stance	Sentiment
RT @TheCLF: Thanks to everyone in Maine who contacted their legis-	Climate Change	Favor	Positive
lators in support of #energyefficiency funding! #MEpoli #SemST	is a Real Con-		
	cern		
We live in a sad world when wanting equality makes you a troll	Feminist Move-	Favor	Negative
#SemST	ment		
I don't believe in the hereafter. I believe in the here and now. #SemST	Atheism	Favor	Neither
@violencehurts @WomenCanSee The unborn also have rights #de-	Legalization of	Against	Positive
fendthe8th #SemST	Abortion		
I'm conservative but I must admit I'd rather see @SenSanders as presi-	Hillary Clinton	Against	Negative
dent than Mrs. Clinton. #stillvotingGOP #politics #SemST			
I have my work and my faith If that's boring to some people, I can't	Atheism	Against	Neither
tell you how much I don't care. ~Madonna Ciccone #SemST			
@BadgerGeno @kreichert27 @jackbahlman Too busy protesting :)	Hillary Clinton	Neither	Positive
#LoveForAll #BackdoorBadgers #SemST			
@ShowTruth You're truly unwelcome here. Please leave. #ygk #SemST	Legalization of	Neither	Negative
	Abortion		
@Maisie_Williams everyone feels that way at times. Not just women	Atheism	Neither	Neither
#SemST			

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- Sentiment analysis is usually considered as polarity detection: a classification output as Positive, Negative, or Neutral is expected.
 - Aspect-oriented (aspect-based, or aspect-level) sentiment analysis: sentiment polarities towards a target entity and different aspects of this entity are considered (Pontiki et al., 2015)
 - Target-based (target-dependent) sentiment analysis: sentiment polarity towards the target is explored within the text, given a text and a target pair (Jiang et al., 2011)

- Differences between stance detection and target-based sentiment analysis:
 - Stance target may not be explicitly given in the input text
 - Stance target may not be the target of the sentiment in the text
 - Stance target may be an event while the target is usually an entity or an aspect in (aspect-based or target-based) sentiment analysis.

- Perspective identification is the automatic determination of the point-of-view of the author of a piece of text, from the textual content
 - **Democrats** or **Republicans** in the context of US elections
- Sarcasm/irony detection is a classification problem where the existence of sarcasm/irony in a given text is explored
 - Sarcasm is defined as the verbal form of an irony

- In **controversy detection**, a (relevant) controversy score is generally calculated and associated with each unit of content
- Biased language detection explores the existence of an inclination/tendency towards a particular perspective within text (Recasens et al., 2013)
 - In terms of stance, biased language detection can be defined as the detection of textual content which includes a particular nonneutral stance

- Argument (argumentation) mining is the extraction of possible argument structure in a given text (Lippi and Torroni, 2016)
 - 1. Detection of the argumentative sentences
 - 2. Extraction of argument components (claims and evidences/premises)
 - 3. Forming the final argument graph by connecting the extracted components
- **Emotion recognition** determines emotions in a given text
 - Joy, sadness, fear, etc.

SemEval-2016 Task 6: Detecting Stance in (English) Tweets

Shared Task of Stance Detection in Chinese Microblogs at NLPCC-ICCPOL-2016

Shared Task of Stance Detection in Spanish and Catalan Tweets at IberEval-2017

SardiStance: Stance Detection Task in Italian Tweets at EVALITA-2020

1. SemEval-2016 Shared Task (on Twitter)

- ▶ By Mohammad et al. (2016) on English tweets (4,870 tweets)
- **Targets:** Atheism, Climate change is a real concern, Feminist movement, Hillary Clinton, Legalization of abortion, Donald Trump
- Two subtasks:
 - A. supervised stance detection
 - B. weakly supervised stance detection
- An RNN-based system outperforms other participants in subtask-A (F-score: 67.82%)
- SVM-based approach (baseline system) by the organizers attains an F-score of 68.98% for subtask A
- ► A CNN-based system outperforms others in subtask-B (F-score: 56.28%)

2. NLPCC-ICCPOL-2016 shared task (on Weibo)

- By Xu et al. (2016) on Chinese microblog posts (4,000 annotated, 2400 unannotated)
- **Targets:** iPhone SE, Set off firecrackers in the Spring Festival, Russia's anti terrorist operations in Syria, Two child policy, Prohibition of motorcycles and restrictions on electric vehicles in Shenzhen, Genetically modified food, Nuclear test in DPRK
- Supervised and weakly supervised stance detection subtasks.
 - The best performing system for subtask-A is based on SVM and random forest (maximum F-score is 71.06%)
 - The best system for subtask-B achieves an average F-score of 46.87%.

3. IberEval-2017 shared task (on Twitter)

- By Taulé et al. (2017) on Spanish and Catalan tweets (5,400 tweets in Spanish, 5,400 tweets in Catalan)
- **Target:** Independence of Catalonia
- Best performing system
 - for Spanish is based on SVM
 - for Catalan is based on logistic regression

4. SardiStance-2020 shared task (on Twitter)

- By Cignarella et al. (2020) on Italian tweets (a total of 3,242 tweets)
- **Target:** Sardines Movement
- > 2 subtasks: (A) textual stance detection, (B) contextual stance detection
- Best performing systems for tasks utilize pre-trained transformer-based (deep learning) models
 - Versions of BERT* (Devlin et al., 2018) trained on Italian tweets

^{*} Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers

Other Competitions Related to Stance Detection

Fake News Challenge-2017 [http://www.fakenewschallenge.org/]

- The first stage in this competition is fake news stance detection
 - Given a headline and a body text
 - An output classification label from this set was expected from the participants: {agrees, disagrees, discusses, unrelated}
 - 49,972 annotated and 25,413 unannotated headline-body pairs exist in the dataset.
 - https://github.com/FakeNewsChallenge/fnc-1

Other Competitions Related to Stance Detection

RumourEval-2019 shared task: determining rumour veracity and support for rumours

- Subtask A of RumourEval-2019 is on rumour stance detection
 - Given a rumour (as target) in a source tweet, a number of tweets are classified
 - The class labels are: **support**, **deny**, **query**, and **comment**.
- The competition was previously conducted in 2017 as RumourEval-2017.

Gorrell, G., Kochkina, E., Liakata, M., Aker, A., Zubiaga, A., Bontcheva, K., & Derczynski, L. (2019). SemEval-2019 task 7: RumourEval, determining rumour veracity and support for rumours. In Proceedings of SemEval-2019.

A Historical Perspective

Earlier Work on Stance Detection [2006 - 2015]

- Earlier work are carried out on
 - Congressional-floor debates
 - Company internal discussions
 - Online social, political, and ideological debates (in public forums)
 - Online debates about products
 - Spontaneous speech (a single study by Levow et al. (2014))
 - Student essays
 - Tweets (few studies)
- Approaches in earlier work
 - Few rule-based methods
 - Supervised learning methods (SVM, decision tree, random forest, HMM, CRF, ILP, ...)

Approaches to Stance Detection

Table 5. Temporal Distribution of Published Papers on Stance Detection

Publication Year	Number of Papers
2006 - 2010	5
2011 - 2014	8
2015 - 2016	38
2017 - 2019	78

Küçük, D. and Can, F. (2020). Stance Detection: A Survey. ACM Computing Surveys, 53, 1.

* We have come across more than 40 papers related to stance detection published in 2020 and 2021

Approaches to Stance Detection

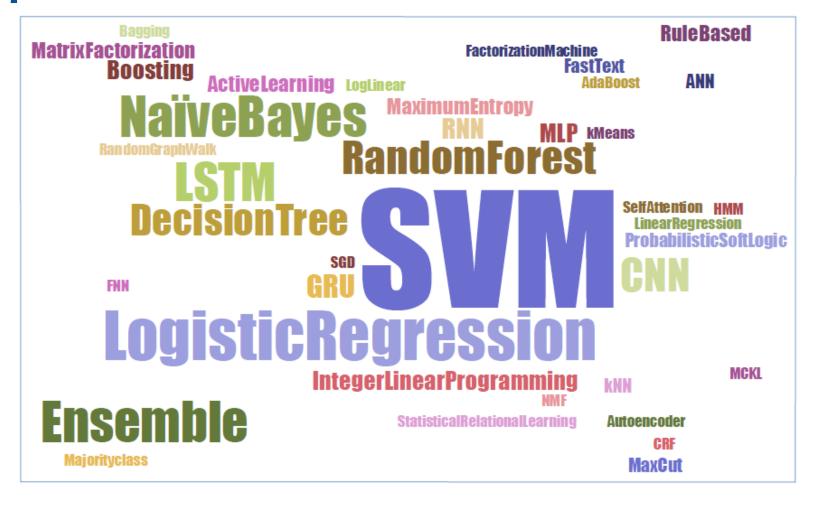


Fig. 4. A word cloud of the algorithms used for stance detection problem in the published papers included in this survey paper.

Küçük, D. and Can, F. (2020). Stance Detection: A Survey. ACM Computing Surveys, 53, 1.

- Feature-based machine learning approaches
 - ► SVM, Logistic Regression, Naïve Bayes, Decision Trees, ANN, ILP, kNN, ...
- Deep learning approaches***
 - LSTM (RNN), Bi-LSTM, RNN, GRU (RNN), CNN
 - Pre-trained deep learning based language models such as BERT
- Ensemble learning approaches
 - Random Forest, Majority Voting, Proprietary ensemble learners, Boosting, Bagging, ...

- Common Features Used by Learning Systems
 - ► Lexical features (bag-of-words, word and character n-grams, skip-grams, hashtags, stance-indicative words, theme and context words, ...)
 - ► Features based on interactions among posts and users (retweets, replies, agreement/disagreement links, quotes, ...), and temporal information regarding the posts,
 - Occasionally also referred to as contextual features
 - ► Features based on sentiment, subjectivity, arguing/argumentation lexicons, emotion indicator words...

- Common Features Used by Learning Systems (cont'd)
 - Word vector representations such as word2vec [Mikolov et al., 2013] and GloVe [Pennington et al., 2014] vectors
 - **Topic modeling related features** such as those based on Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA), and TF-IDF vectors of lexical features
 - Features based on POS tags, named entities, dependency relations, syntactic rules, and coreference resolution

- The topics in stance detection datasets used by related research include controversial topics, political/ideological debates, and elections/referendums, among others.
- If the stance detection problem is stated in the form of three-way classification from the set {Favor, Against, Neither}, then a two-phase pipelined approach is commonly employed:
 - classifying the stance of the tweet as Relevant (Favor or Against) and Irrelevant (Neither) towards the target,
 - 2. further classifying the Relevant tweets as having the Favor or Against stance towards the target.
- If there are more than one target in the stance detection settings, it is a common and effective practice to train a separate classifier for each stance target.

- Cross-target (or weakly-supervised) stance detection is a harder problem to solve
 - the corresponding detection performance is often lower than supervised stance detection.
- In addition to the actual textual content under consideration (post, tweet, etc.), it is beneficial to represent user information and conversational interactions (contextual features) when performing stance detection.
- Traditional feature-based ML approaches, deep learning methods, and ensemble classifiers are all employed for stance detection in different studies.
 - It can be concluded that all of these types of learning systems are reported to attain favorable and competitive performance for the stance detection problem

Resources: Annotation Guidelines

Target of Interest: [target entity]

Tweet: [tweet with query hashtag removed]

Q1: From reading the tweet, which of the options below is most likely to be true about the tweeter's stance or outlook towards the target:

· We can infer from the tweet that the tweeter supports the target

This could be because of any of reasons shown below:

- the tweet is explicitly in support for the target
- the tweet is in support of something/someone aligned with the target, from which we can infer that the tweeter supports the target
- the tweet is against something/someone other than the target, from which we can infer that the tweeter supports the target
- the tweet is NOT in support of or against anything, but it has some information, from which we can
 infer that the tweeter supports the target
- we cannot infer the tweeters stance toward the target, but the tweet is echoing somebody else's favorable stance towards the target (in a news story, quote, retweet, etc.)
- We can infer from the tweet that the tweeter is against the target

This could be because of any of the following:

- the tweet is explicitly against the target
- the tweet is against someone/something aligned with the target entity, from which we can infer that the tweeter is against the target
- the tweet is in support of someone/something other than the target, from which we can infer that the tweeter is against the target
- the tweet is NOT in support of or against anything, but it has some information, from which we can
 infer that the tweeter is against the target
- we cannot infer the tweeters stance toward the target, but the tweet is echoing somebody else's negative stance towards the target entity (in a news story, quote, retweet, etc.)
- We can infer from the tweet that the tweeter is neutral towards the target

The tweet must provide some information that suggests that the tweeter is neutral towards the target – the tweet being neither favorable nor against the target is not sufficient reason for choosing this

• There is no clue in the tweet to reveal the stance of the tweeter towards the target (support/against/neutral)

[Mohammad et al., 2017]

Resources: Datasets

Authors	Domain	Annotation	Target(s)	Size
		Classes		
[Mohammad	Tweets	Favor, Against,	Atheism, Climate change is a	4,870 tweets
et al. 2016a]	(English)	Neither	real concern, Feminist movement,	
			Hillary Clinton, Legalization of	
			abortion, Donald Trump	
[Mohammad	Tweets	Favor, Against,	Atheism, Climate change is a	4,870 tweets
et al. 2017]	(English)	Neither for stance;	real concern, Feminist movement,	
		Positive, Negative,	Hillary Clinton, Legalization of	
		and Neither for	abortion, Donald Trump	
		sentiment		
[Xu et al.	Microblogs	Favor, Against, None	iPhone SE, Set off firecrackers in the	4,000 annotated
2016b]	(Chinese)		Spring Festival, Russia's anti terror-	and 2,400 unanno-
			ist operations in Syria, Two child	tated tweets
			policy, Prohibition of motorcycles	
			and restrictions on electric vehicles	
			in Shenzhen, Genetically modified	
			food, Nuclear test in DPRK	
[Taulé et al.	Tweets	Favor, Against, None	Independence of Catalonia	5,400 tweets in
2017]	(Catalan &			Spanish and 5,400
	Spanish)			tweets in Catalan

Resources: Datasets

	Authors	Domain	Annotation	Target(s)	Size
			Classes		
	[Sobhani	Tweets	Favor, Against,	$\label{lem:conders} \mbox{\{Clinton-Sanders\}, \{Clinton-Trump\},}$	4,455 tweets
	et al. 2017]	(English)	Neither	{Cruz-Trump}	
	[Küçük	Tweets	Favor, Against	Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe	700 tweets
	2017b]	(Turkish)			
_	[Küçük and	Tweets	Favor, Against	Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe	1,065 tweets
	Can 2018]	(Turkish)			
	[Murakami	Online	Support, Oppose	Selected five ideas	481 comments
	and Ray-	debates			about five ideas
	mond 2010]	(Japanese)			
	[Darwish	Tweets	Favor (Positive),	Transfer of two islands from Egypt	33,024 tweets
	et al. 2017]	(Arabic)	Against (Negative)	to Saudi Arabia	
	[Hercig et al.	News	In Favor, Against,	Miloš Zeman, Smoking ban in	5,423 news com-
	2017]	comments	Neither	restaurants	ments
		(Czech)			

- **X-Stance**: dataset of 67,000 comments in German, French, and Italian
 - Annotated for stance detection
 - Targets: 150 political issues
 - **■**Stance classes:
 - favor, against

Vamvas, J., & Sennrich, R. (2020). X-stance: A multilingual multi-target dataset for stance detection. arXiv preprint arXiv:2003.08385.

- **E-FRA and R-ITA:** distinct tweet datasets in French and Italian
 - Annotated for stance detection (1,116 French tweets and 833 Italian tweets)
 - Targets: election candidates (Macron & Le Pen) for E-FRA and constitutional reform for R-ITA.
 - Stance classes:
 - favor, against, none

Lai, M., Cignarella, A. T., Farías, D. I. H., Bosco, C., Patti, V., & Rosso, P. (2020). Multilingual stance detection in social media political debates. Computer Speech & Language, 63, 101075

- **WT-WT:** financial dataset of 51,284 tweets in English
 - Annotated for rumour stance detection
 - **Targets:** Five mergers and acquisition operations
 - Rumour stance classes:
 - support, refute, comment, unrelated

Conforti, C., Berndt, J., Pilehvar, M. T., Giannitsarou, C., Toxvaerd, F., & Collier, N. (2020). Will-They-Won't-They: A Very Large Dataset for Stance Detection on Twitter. In Proceedings of ACL.

- Stance-annotated datasets exist for several languages:
 - Arabic
 - Catalan
 - Chinese
 - Czech
 - English
 - **■** English-Hindi
 - French

- German
- Italian
- Japanese
- Russian
- Spanish
- Turkish

Resources: Data Augmentation

- **Data augmentation** is used to cope with training data scarcity in ML research by extending the dataset with modified versions of existing data.
- Even simple methods like synonym replacement and random swap are known to help improve performance.

Wei, J., & Zou, K. (2019). EDA: Easy Data Augmentation Techniques for Boosting Performance on Text Classification Tasks. In *Proceedings of the EMNLP-IJCNLP*.

Data augmentation techniques can also be used to generate data to improve stance detection performance

Li, Y., & Caragea, C. (2021). Target-Aware Data Augmentation for Stance Detection. In Proceedings of NAACL-HLT.

Resources: Evaluation Metrics

$$F = \frac{F_{Favor} + F_{Against}}{2} \qquad F_{Favor} = \frac{2 * P_{Favor} * R_{Favor}}{P_{Favor} + R_{Favor}} \qquad F_{Against} = \frac{2 * P_{Against} * R_{Against}}{P_{Against} + R_{Against}}$$

$$P_{Favor} = \frac{Correct_{Favor}}{Correct_{Favor} + Spurious_{Favor}} \qquad P_{Against} = \frac{Correct_{Against}}{Correct_{Against} + Spurious_{Against}}$$

$$\frac{Correct_{Favor}}{ect_{Favor} + Missing_{Favor}} \qquad R_{Against} = \frac{Correct_{Against}}{Correct_{Against} + Missing_{Against}}$$

$$F = \frac{F_{Favor} + F_{Against} + F_{Neither}}{3}$$

$$Accuracy = \frac{Correct\ classifications}{All\ classifications}$$

Resources: Software and Tools

- Few papers present visualization systems/tools for stance detection.
- Many papers use the following machine learning tools, libraries in their stance detection experiments:
 - Weka
 - Scikit-learn package
 - Keras
 - Theano
 - Gensim
 - SVMlight
 - FastText
 - Brainy

Pre-trained deep learning based models like BERT (Devlin et al., 2018) are also commonly used for stance detection.

- Augenstein, I., Rocktäschel, T., Vlachos, A., & Bontcheva, K. (2016). Stance detection with bidirectional conditional encoding. arXiv preprint arXiv:1606.05464.
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Additional Readings

Bibliography file of additional readings as supplementary material to this tutorial are available at:

https://github.com/dkucuk/Stance-Detection

Additional Readings for Stance Detection

Supplementary Material to SIGIR 2021 Tutorial Titled "Stance Detection: Concepts, Approaches, Resources, and Outstanding Issues" by Dilek Küçük & Fazli Can

- D. I. Adelani, R. Kobayashi, I. Weber, and P. A. Grabowicz, "Estimating community feedback effect on topic choice in social media with predictive modeling," EPJ Data Science, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 25, 2020.
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Thank You