Machine Learning Applications in Natural Language Processing: A Systematic Review

Abstract

This paper presents a comprehensive systematic review of machine learning applications in natural language processing (NLP) from 2019 to 2024. We analyzed 156 peer-reviewed articles to identify trends, methodologies, and performance metrics. Our findings indicate that transformer-based models have dominated the field, achieving state-of-the-art results in 78% of surveyed tasks. We also identify key challenges and future research directions in multilingual NLP and low-resource languages.

1. Introduction

Natural Language Processing (NLP) has experienced rapid advancement with the integration of machine learning techniques. The ability to automatically process and understand human language has applications ranging from translation to sentiment analysis. This systematic review examines the current state of ML applications in NLP, focusing on methodological trends and performance benchmarks. Previous surveys (Chen et al., 2020; Kumar & Singh, 2021) have examined specific aspects of NLP, but a comprehensive analysis of recent developments is lacking. Our contribution is threefold: (1) we provide a taxonomy of ML approaches in NLP, (2) we analyze performance metrics across different tasks, and (3) we identify emerging trends and research gaps.

2. Methodology

We followed the PRISMA guidelines for systematic reviews. Our search strategy included five major databases: IEEE Xplore, ACM Digital Library, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, and arXiv. Search terms included combinations of "machine learning", "deep learning", "natural language processing", and specific task names. Inclusion criteria: - Published between January 2019 and December 2024 - Peer-reviewed conference or journal articles - Empirical evaluation on standard benchmarks - English language publications From an initial pool of 1,247 papers, we selected 156 after applying our criteria and removing duplicates. Each paper was coded for ML methodology, NLP task, dataset used, and performance metrics.

3. Results

Our analysis reveals several key findings: 3.1 Dominant Architectures Transformer-based models appeared in 122 papers (78.2%), with BERT variants being the most common (45 papers). GPT-style models were used in 38 papers, primarily for generation tasks. Traditional RNNs and CNNs appeared in only 12 papers (7.7%), mostly as baselines. 3.2 Task Distribution The most studied tasks were: - Text Classification: 42 papers (26.9%) - Machine Translation: 31 papers (19.9%) - Named Entity Recognition: 28 papers (17.9%) - Question Answering: 23 papers (14.7%) - Text Generation: 20 papers (12.8%) 3.3 Performance Trends Average performance improvements over baseline methods: - BERT-based models: +12.3% F1 score - GPT variants: +8.7% BLEU score - Multi-task learning: +6.2% across tasks

4. Discussion

The dominance of transformer architectures reflects their superior performance across diverse NLP tasks. However, this trend raises concerns about computational requirements and accessibility for researchers with limited resources. We identified several research gaps: 1. Limited work on low-resource languages (only 11 papers) 2. Insufficient attention to model interpretability 3. Few studies on energy efficiency of large models These gaps suggest important directions for future research, particularly as NLP systems are deployed in resource-constrained environments.

References

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