
Man, I Just Love Writing Research Papers

Anonymous Author(s)

Affiliation

Address

email

Abstract

1 State of the art language models have been shown to perform well across a broad
2 spectrum of language modeling tasks like natural language inference (NLI), ques-
3 tion answering (QA), and next token generation tasks as seen in applications like
4 ChatGPT [8]. However, it is still quite simple to find examples that confuse lan-
5 guage models and cause significant degradation in performance metrics. In this
6 work, we propose one such set of "tricky" examples. We analyze the performance
7 of the ELECTRA-SMALL model [3] on the NLI task [1] across three subsets of
8 tricky examples: sarcasm, grammatically incorrect dialect, and idiomatic speech.
9 We show that the model struggles to accurately classify such examples. While the
10 model achieves a strong 85.8% accuracy on the Stanford NLI (SNLI) dataset [1],
11 it is only able to achieve 50.9% accuracy on the holdout portion of our curated
12 tricky dataset. We also show that simply fine tuning the model on a small training
13 portion of these examples improves the models ability to accurately classify new
14 tricky examples while incurring almost no additional loss on the original SNLI
15 dataset. Hence, we provide some evidence that providing higher quality, more
16 diverse examples of real, albeit complex language patterns in training data can
17 improve a model's ability to generalize across tricky examples.

1 Introduction

18 Models like GPT 3 [2], BERT [4], and [9] GPT 4 have left the world speechless at the awe-inspiring
19 capabilities of large language models (LLMs). In contrast, LLM failures like those in the early
20 versions of Bing + ChatGPT have served as comedic inspiration for memes as well as the inspiration
21 of nightmares for Microsoft stakeholders. This raises the question: given the strong results of LLMs
22 in some domains, which problem classes cause LLMs to experience performance degradations? This
23 work begins to explore this question.

24 Drawing inspiration from some of the well-known LLM failures mentioned earlier, we devised a set
25 of "tricky" examples to test LLMs against, and we observed their behavior. These tricky examples
26 are all examples of real language patterns that humans can decipher with relative ease. The examples
27 are subdivided into three groups: sarcasm, grammatically incorrect dialect, and idiomatic speech.
28 We provide examples from each of these groups in a later section. A criticism the reader may levy
29 against the use of sarcasm in text is that the notions of tone, body language, rate of speech, inflection,
30 etc. aren't signals which are included in the text. The authors encourage those with such criticisms to
31 consider times where they have been able to decipher sarcasm in text messages without any additional
32 context. While the authors acknowledge the limitation that even humans cannot perfectly decipher
33 sarcasm via text alone, it is certainly an achievable task and therefore still within the scope of our
34 research question.

35 We interrogate this question by training an instance of the ELECTRA-SMALL model. Despite its
36 proven capabilities on other datasets, the model struggles with our tricky examples. Sarcasm, dialect,
37 and idioms are often context dependent, non-literal, and difficult to parse grammatically. The authors
38

39 expected when devising these examples that the model would struggle with these examples for the
40 following reason: the "default mode" of speech in most language training data is literal, mostly
41 grammatically correct, and directly interpretable with respect to its meaning (not sarcastic).

42 Given this expectation, we also hypothesize that simply fine tuning a well-performing model on
43 a carefully curated set of difficult examples can dramatically improve its ability to decipher these
44 complex language patterns. To test this, we conducted an in-depth analysis of the ELECTRA-SMALL
45 model, initially trained on the SNLI dataset and later fine tuned on our curated tricky examples.

46 **2 Background**

47 **2.1 Challenges in Natural Language Processing**

48 Modern LLMs perform exceedingly well across a broad range of language modeling tasks. Particu-
49 larly massive, multi-hundred billion parameter models are approaching near superhuman language
50 capabilities in some domains. However, smaller more practical models (like those which may realisti-
51 cally fit on a mobile device for example) still struggle with more complicated constructs of language
52 like sarcasm and idioms. To emphasize this point, if an NLI model were to classify the hypothesis
53 "the author loves research papers" given the title of this work as the premise, it would inaccurately
54 label the example as supportive rather than a contradiction. In contrast, the subtleties of using the
55 words "Man," and "just" are enough for most humans to accurately decipher the sarcastic tone.

56 **2.2 The ELECTRA-SMALL Model**

57 The ELECTRA-SMALL model was selected simply because it is a small, quickly trained model.
58 Despite its small memory footprint, it is a robust model that outperforms many larger models.
59 Furthermore, it was one of few models which were accessible to train given the authors' limited
60 access to hardware accelerators.

61 **2.3 Adversarial Examples**

62 We drew inspiration for curating our tricky dataset from previous works exploring the concept of
63 adversarial examples [5, 6, 7]. An adversarial example is one which is devised with the sole intent of
64 causing the model to become confused or to navigate areas of its search space which cause instability
65 in the model's outputs. Some works have shown that including adversarial examples in training data
66 (as we have done via fine tuning) improve a models ability to be resilient to adversarial data. In our
67 case, this improves the model's ability to generalize to more nuanced and complicated language
68 patterns.

69 **2.4 The SNLI Dataset**

70 The Stanford Natural Language Inference (SNLI) dataset has been pivotal in training numerous NLP
71 models, including ELECTRA-SMALL. While it provides a broad spectrum of linguistic examples,
72 its coverage of intricate language patterns is limited [1]. This limitation prompted our exploration of
73 supplemental training data to bridge these gaps.

74 **3 Examples of Errors**

75 **3.1 Grammatically Incorrect Dialect**

- 76 • Premise: He doesn't hardly speak to anyone.
- 77 • Hypothesis: He is very outgoing.
- 78 • Gold label: 2
- 79 • Actual: 0

80 3.2 Sarcasm

- 81 • Premise: What a pleasant surprise, another bill in the mail.
- 82 • Hypothesis: I do not enjoy paying my bills.
- 83 • Gold label: 2
- 84 • Actual: 0

85 3.3 Idiomatic Speech

- 86 • Premise: Come on, spill the beans about the party plans!
- 87 • Hypothesis: Someone wants them to spoil the party plans.
- 88 • Gold label: 0
- 89 • Actual: 1

90 4 Discussion on Tuning the Model

91 The categories of mistakes that we tested were: sarcasm, grammatically incorrect dialect, idiomatic
 92 speech. In the sarcasm category, the meaning is often the opposite of the literal text and is often
 93 signaled only by small nuances in the text. In the grammatically incorrect dialect category, the text
 94 often includes a double negation where the meaning is actually meant to be interpreted as a single
 95 negation. For example, in some parts of the southern United States the phrase "That ain't nothing to
 96 be scared of." simply means "That isn't something to fear." In the idiomatic speech category, the text
 97 simply contains some idiom or figure of speech which has a non-literal meaning. These categories are
 98 difficult for the model to interpret because each have unorthodox or non-literal usages. Our findings
 99 suggest that the model struggles most with context-dependent or counter-intuitive examples. We
 100 show that providing more context through fine tuning data allows the model to perform significantly
 101 better. Figure 1 shows the prediction error rates for the three categories of tricky examples.

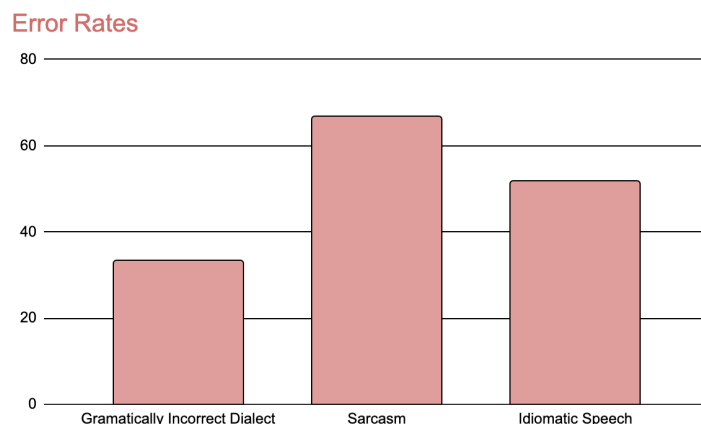


Figure 1: prediction error rates $\in [0, 100]$ for each category of tricky example

102 Using a confusion matrix, we can more deeply understand what kind of misclassifications the model
 103 is making. We can see from the data that the model has a very difficult time classifying examples
 104 where the true label is contradiction (2), as compared to those with a true label of entailment (0)
 105 or neutral (1). This is expected, because many of our tricky examples are designed to seem like
 106 entailments, when in reality they are contradictions. Figures 2 and 3 show the confusion matrices
 107 on our tricky dataset and the SNLI dataset for an untuned ELECTRA-SMALL model. When we
 108 evaluated the ELECTRA-SMALL model on the SNLI dataset it achieved an accuracy of 85.8%.

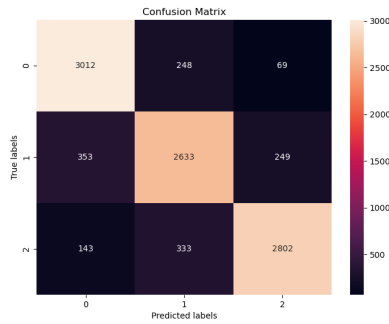


Figure 2: SNLI dataset before fine tuning. lighter regions are better. notice that a clear diagonal emerges.

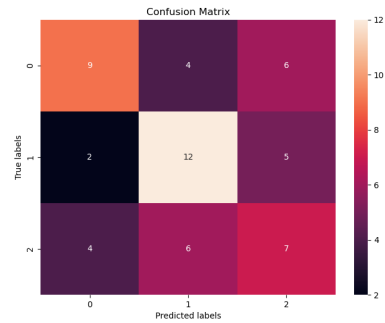


Figure 3: our tricky dataset before fine tuning. lighter regions are better.

5 Tuning on Adversarial Examples

To increase the model’s resilience against tricky examples, we fine tune the model on a training portion of our tricky example dataset. The dataset is comprised of 60 hypotheses for each of the three categories discussed earlier (sarcasm, grammatically incorrect dialect, and idiomatic speech). Each hypothesis is paired with three premises where one is an entailment, one is neutral, and one is a contradiction. This results in a total of 180 examples. These 180 are then split into a training portion and an evaluation portion. The train/eval split was roughly 70/30 resulting in 125 training examples and 55 evaluation examples. The seed used to randomly split examples was 123. After fine tuning the model on our examples, the accuracy achieved improved to 60.0% on the “tricky examples”, up from 50.9%. The confusion matrices for our tricky dataset before and after fine tuning are shown in Figures 4 and 5 respectively.

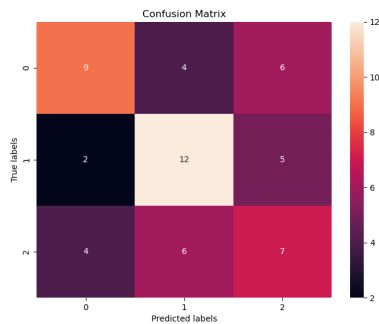


Figure 4: our tricky dataset before fine tuning. lighter regions are better. note this figure is identical to Figure 3.

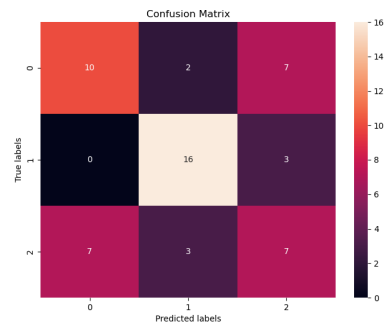


Figure 5: our tricky dataset after fine tuning. lighter regions are better. note the emergence of a diagonal as in Figure 2.

When re-evaluating the tuned model on the SNLI dataset, the model still achieved commensurate performance as the untuned model. Only a small decrease in accuracy from 85.8% to 84.6% was observed. This drop in accuracy is expected behavior since we fine tuned the model on examples that were significantly different from the original SNLI examples. The authors expect that given a larger curated dataset of tricky examples, the trends we observed would continue. The models ability to accurately pick up sarcasm, dialect, and idioms would continue to improve, while its ability to perform the original SNLI task would continue to degrade as the fine tuning dataset increases in size. At some point, the fine tuning dataset would become large enough as to induce catastrophic forgetting, where the model will begin to unlearn the patterns of the original dataset altogether and start to overfit to sarcastic, dialectic, and idiomatic speech. The confusion matrices for the untuned model and the tuned model on the original SNLI dataset are shown in Figures 6 and 7 respectively.

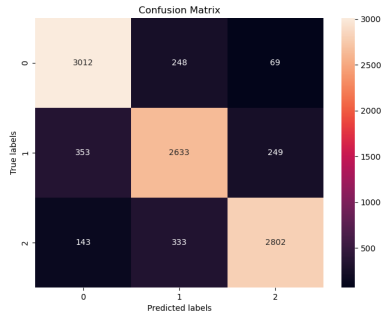


Figure 6: SNLI dataset before fine tuning. lighter regions are better. note that this is identical to Figure 2.

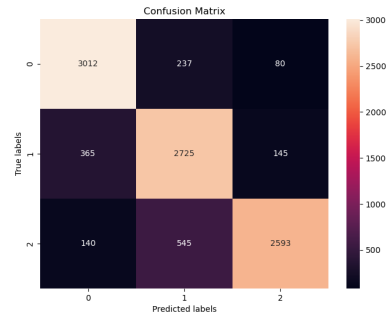


Figure 7: SNLI dataset after fine tuning. lighter regions are better.

We also report the accuracy, precision, recall, and f1 scores for each of our treatments. All treatments achieve tight clusters overall with each metric being within 1% of each other. This suggests that fine tuning on the tricky examples improves the models general ability to correctly classify tricky examples, rather than only improving precision or recall alone. Figure 8 provides a table of these metrics.

Dataset	Accuracy	Precision	Recall	F1
SNLI	85.8	85.8	85.8	85.8
SNLI (tuned)	84.6	85.1	84.6	84.6
Tricky	50.9	51.1	50.6	50.5
Tricky (tuned)	60	58.7	59.3	58.9

Figure 8: reported metrics for each model-dataset treatment.

6 Conclusion

This work strengthens existing evidence for methods that effectively enhance the performance of NLP models in processing complex language structures. Namely, we show the effectiveness of including adversarial examples in a fine tuning dataset on the NLI modeling task. We demonstrate that fine tuning a model with a thoughtfully selected set of hand-annotated examples specifically designed to challenge the model can lead to a more resilient, robust model. We also note that there is a trade-off point when fine tuning, and that it is critical to use caution to avoid catastrophic forgetting. Specifically consideration of the number and the nature of examples used is needed. This approach underscores the potential of targeted tuning as a powerful tool in refining state-of-the-art models.

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