Character-Based Generation

11/12/2024
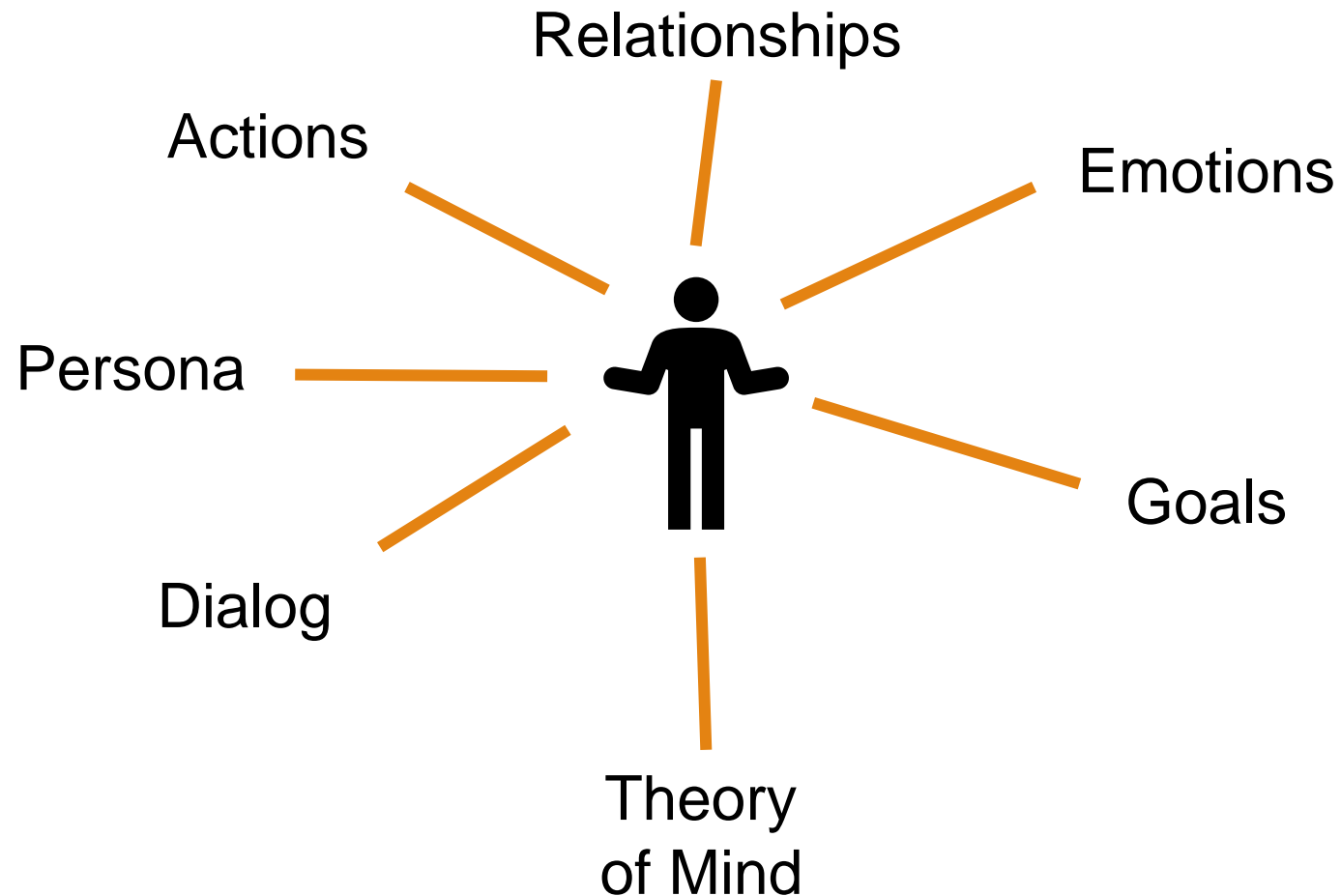
CMSC 491/691 - INTERACTIVE FICTION AND TEXT GENERATION

DR. LARA J. MARTIN

Learning Objectives

o Remember the details of ATOMIC

o Consider how modeling various aspects of characters affects a story

o Speculate on how a system can be created to make rich characters

What makes up a character?

Relationships

Actions

Emotions

Persona

Goals

Dialog

Theory of Mind

What else might you want to model about a character?

Actions

Category:	Graveyard
Description:	Two-and-a-half walls of the finest, whitest stone stand here, weathered by the passing of countless seasons. There is no roof, nor sign that there ever was one. All indications are that the work was abruptly abandoned. There is no door, nor markings on the walls. Nor is there any indication that any coffin has lain here... yet.
Backstory:	Bright white stone was all the fad for funerary architecture, once upon a time. It's difficult to understand why someone would abandon such a large and expensive undertaking. If they didn't have the money to finish it, they could have sold the stone, surely - or the mausoleum itself. Maybe they just haven't needed it yet? A bit odd, though, given how old it is. Maybe the gravedigger remembers... if he's sober.
Neighbors:	Dead Tree, south, following a dirt trail behind the mausoleum Fresh Grave, west, walking carefully between fallen headstones
Characters:	gravedigger, *thief, peasant, mouse, bat*
Objects:	wall, *carving, leaf, dirt*

(a) Example room created from the room collection and labelling tasks.

Actions

Query:	chicken	pirate	coffin	rake	tavern	meadow
objects	chicken coop	Pirate swords	the remains	shovel	Ale bottles	flower pot
	eggs	dock	remains	garden	beer	fruit
	a pen for the chickens	cargo	bones	a garden	mug of mead	An enchanted amulet.
	chimney	ship	bones of the innocent	Hand carved stone	a large ornate table	citrus fruit
	corn	seagulls on the dock	adventurer's remains	garden bench	beer keg	fruit trees
characters	chickens	boat captain	spirits of our ancestors	gardener	tavern owner	a deer
	fox trying to steal chickens	captain	mourner	stable hand	bartender	a songbird
	farmers	merchant	zombies	Garden dog	Goblin King's bartender	fruit bats
	The farmers	boat workers	families	stable boy	A serving wench	parent
	farmer	workers	bandit	A stable boy	Serving wench	butterfly
locations	Chicken Pen	Pirate Ship	Old Crypt	Across the King's Garden	The werewolves tavern	Lush meadow
	Corn field	Dock at the Port	sacristy	Hidden garden	Tavern of Browntavia	Flower Field
	Farmer's house	Loading Dock	Disposal area	The garden courtyard	Port Tavern	flower garden
	Large Farm	Fishing Dock	inside temple crypt	Church garden	The bar	Mushroom Hut
	Pig Pen	crew berthing	Sacrifice Chamber	Tool Shed	bazaar outside the royal city	Archery zone
actions	get chicken	hug pirate	put torch in coffin	get rake	hug tavern owner	get flower from meadow
	hug chicken	hit pirate	get torch from coffin	drop Rake	give food item to tavern owner	put flower in Meadow
	hit chicken	steal sword from pirate	put bone in coffin	steal Rake from gardener	give telescope to tavern owner	give Flower to a deer
	give cowbell to chicken	steal cargo from pirate	get bone from coffin	give Rake to thing	drink drink	give Flower to deer
	steal sword from chicken	give cargo to pirate	hit archaeologist	give Rake to person	drop drink	steal Flower from a deer
vocabulary	bock	crew	archaeologist	vegetable	drink	flower
	tasty	ye	robber	carved	drinks	amulet
	bawk	port	crypt	alice	regular	songbird
	moo	sea	loss	hook	item	wasp
	egg	seas	adventures	exorcisms	tip	an

Table 3: Neighboring Starspace phrase embeddings (no pretraining from other data) for different types of entities and actions. The first row are arbitrarily chosen queries (chicken, pirate, coffin, rake, tavern, meadow), and the subsequent rows are their nearest objects, agents, locations, actions and vocabulary in embedding space.

J. Urbanek *et al.*, "Learning to Speak and Act in a Fantasy Text Adventure Game," in *EMNLP-IJCNLP*, 2019. doi: 10.18653/v1/D19-1062.

Actions

"The currently played role fills in once the player initiates conversation. It has information regrading the character's personality, profession, age, gender, marital status, physical appearance, and their reason for being at the current location (work, errands, leisure, etc.)"

"When not updating the simulation, the wizard has time to explore the history of the town and the interweaving relationships of its denizens. When he unearths narratively interesting tidbits, he communicates them to the actor via a chat window. "

B. Samuel, J. Ryan, A. J. Summerville, M. Mateas, and N. Wardrip-Fruin, "Bad News: An Experiment in Computationally Assisted Performance," in *ICIDS*, 2016.
https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-48279-8_10

Actions
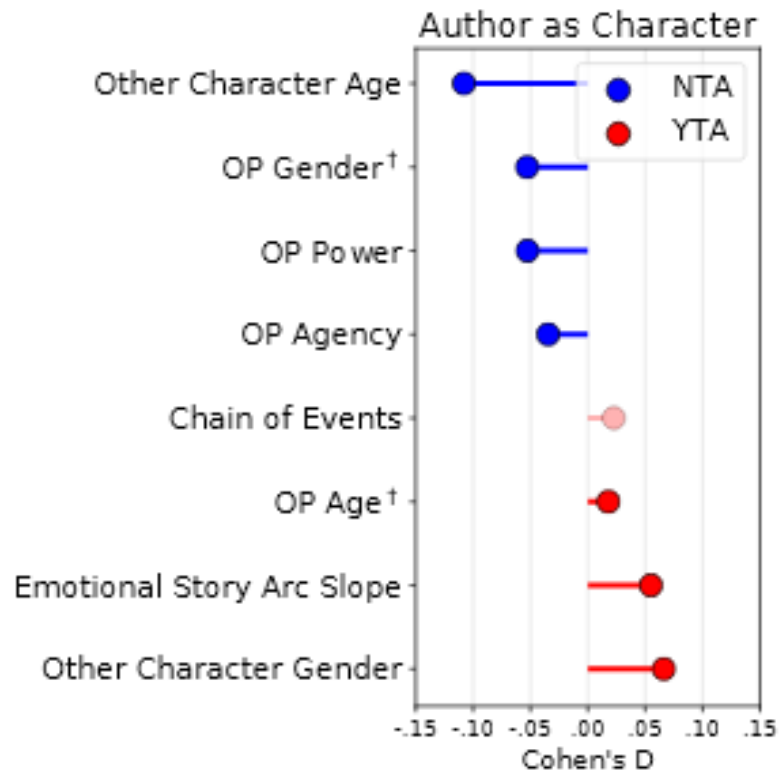
(a) Cohen's D values showing the correlation of features for YTA & NTA classes. Lighter shaded points are not significant at a with Benjamini-Hochberg corrected significance $\alpha < 0.05$). The higher the absolute effect size, the more that feature is associated with the YTA/NTA class. † includes a binary covariate equal to 1 for undisclosed age/gender when calculating significance via the logistic regression (Cohen's D is a bivariate measure and, thus, unable to account for this covariate).

S. Giorgi, K. Zhao, A. Feng, and L. J. Martin, "Author as Character and Narrator: Understanding Moral Judgements of Storytellers within the r/AmITheAsshole Reddit Community," *ICWSM*, 2023. doi: 10.1609/icwsm.v17i1.22141.

Actions

Control Feature	Description	Expected Impact on Model's Output
Player ID	Player writing a given dialog turn	Connects the current turn to the player's previous turns, which is important in multi-party conversations.
IC versus OOC	Whether a player is in-character or out-of-character for a given dialog turn	Changes whether the generated text is more like descriptive text found in a novel, or more like a discussion of rules and strategies.
Character Name	Name of the character being played by the player of a given dialog turn	IC descriptions use the character's name.
Character Class	D&D classes	Character classes perform different actions (e.g. wizards cast spells, thieves pick locks)
Character Race	D&D fantasy races	Different physical characteristics (e.g. halflings are small, dragonborn have scales).
Character Pronouns	The character's pronouns	Uses the correct pronouns when describing the character.
Character Actions	List of actions taken by the character in the current turn	Allows a description to be generated for a given action. The action can be thought of as a goal for the description.
Combat	Whether the players are currently engaged in combat or not during a given dialog turn	Affects the likelihood of actions (e.g. attacks are more likely during combat and investigations checks are more likely outside of combat)

Table 2: Our LLMs are conditioned on a variety of control features that allow the models to better learn what kind of text to generate for the next utterance prediction task

C. Callison-Burch, G. Singh Tomar, L. J. Martin, D. Ippolito, S. Bailis, and D. Reitter, "Dungeons and Dragons as a Dialogue Challenge for Artificial Intelligence," in *EMNLP*, 2022. doi: 10.18653/v1/2022.emnlp-main.637.

Persona

Model	Output
LLM-Dialog	moon_monk you can just join our discord conversation. it's free and easier to deal with
LLM-DND	I cast Ice Knife (I'm assuming this is not one of the ones I can't do?)
LLM-DND-CURRENT-CTRL Responding as Magnus (human fighter, inventory: axe) In combat	I turn from the goblin and go to help Merle and Taako with getting this wagon moving again. Magnus can't see them anymore with such a dense forest. They're likely in a battle right now... I have to find them as fast as I can!
LLM-DND-CURRENT-CTRL Responding as Taako (elf wizard, inventory: spellbook) In combat	If the goblins still don't look like they're getting closer, Taako will yell, "Alright you little monsters! Let's see what ya got!" And he'll cast Chill Touch on one of the goblins that isn't dead/on its doorstep. Attack: 22 Damage: 6
LLM-DND-CURRENT-CTRL Responding as Mearle (dwarf cleric, inventory: holy symbol) In combat	Merle steps away from the wagon. He draws his sword and takes aim at the hidden goblin! Attack: 27 Damage: 8 He puts his free hand on the pommel of his sword and shouts his battle cry, "For Clanggeddin!" His eyes glow brightly red as he strikes!

Table 5: Example model outputs for the next utterance prediction task, given the sample gameplay from Table 8 as input. The 3 LLM-DND-CURRENT-CTRL examples use the same model with different control features (in red).

C. Callison-Burch, G. Singh Tomar, L. J. Martin, D. Ippolito, S. Bailis, and D. Reitter, "Dungeons and Dragons as a Dialogue Challenge for Artificial Intelligence," in *EMNLP*, 2022. doi: 10.18653/v1/2022.emnlp-main.637.

Actions

Character:	Thief	Gravedigger
Persona:	I live alone in a tent in the woods. I steal food from the townspeople and coal from the blacksmith. The village police can not find me to put me in jail.	I am low paid labor in this town. I do a job that many people shun because of my contact with death. I am very lonely and wish I had someone to talk to who isn't dead.
Description:	The thief is a sneaky fellow who takes from the people and does so in a way that disturbs the livelihood of the others.	You might want to talk to the gravedigger, specially if your looking for a friend, he might be odd but you will find a friend in him.
Carrying:	meat, potatoes, coal	shovel
Wearing:	dark tunic, cloak	*nothing annotated*
Wielding:	knife	*nothing annotated*

(b) Example characters annotated via character collection tasks.

Persona

Context: · · · Artur Boruc, a Polish national pilot, was going to get the group infiltrated into the area and prepared for the attack. · · · Metal began to tear through the thin wings outside the small windows and pinged heavily off the underside of the plane, a quiet arrival in Poland wasn't going to be an option anymore.

**Persona A:** [Boruc] A skilled pilot, trained in operating flight controls on the most common planes.
Generated Story by CONPER Conditioned on Persona A: · · · He had been doing this much before, almost a week ago. He took a long pull of the airlock, checked his controls, and made a quick mental note of the exact sequence of instructions. He knew that he couldn't be sure if this would be safe for much longer· · ·

Persona B: [Boruc] An unskilled pilot, and never trained in operating flight controls.
Generated Story by CONPER Conditioned on Persona B: · · · He cursed as the plane suffered a complete failure and in a way had caused it to come to a stop, · · · He'd never flown before, so he didn't know how to pilot in this situation and his experience of the controls had not been good either· · ·

Table 1: An example for controlling the protagonist's persona in story generation. The **Context** and **Persona A** are sampled from the STORIUM dataset (Akoury et al., 2020). The protagonist's name is shown in the square bracket. And we manually write **Persona B** based on **Persona A**. We highlight the sentences which embody the given personas in red.
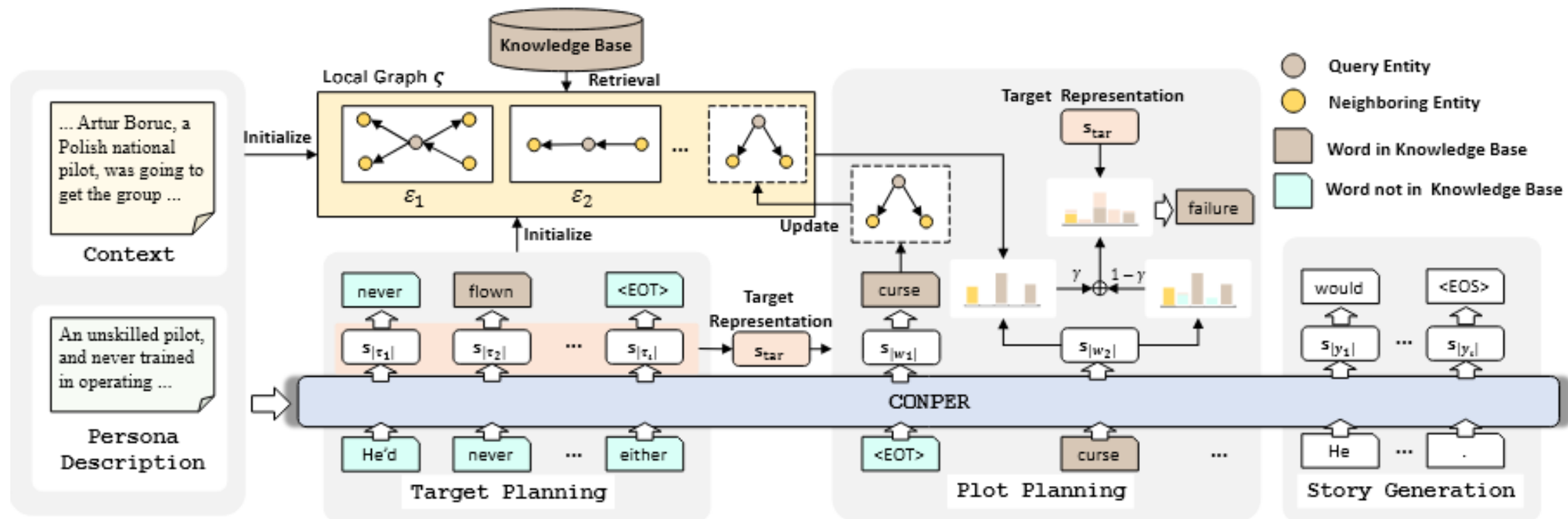
Z. Zhang, J. Wen, J. Guan, and M. Huang, "Persona-Guided Planning for Controlling the Protagonist's Persona in Story Generation," in *NAACL,* 2022. 10.18653/v1/2022.naacl-main.245.

Persona

Z. Zhang, J. Wen, J. Guan, and M. Huang, "Persona-Guided Planning for Controlling the Protagonist's Persona in Story Generation," in *NAACL,* 2022.
10.18653/v1/2022.naacl-main.245.

Theory of Mind (ToM)
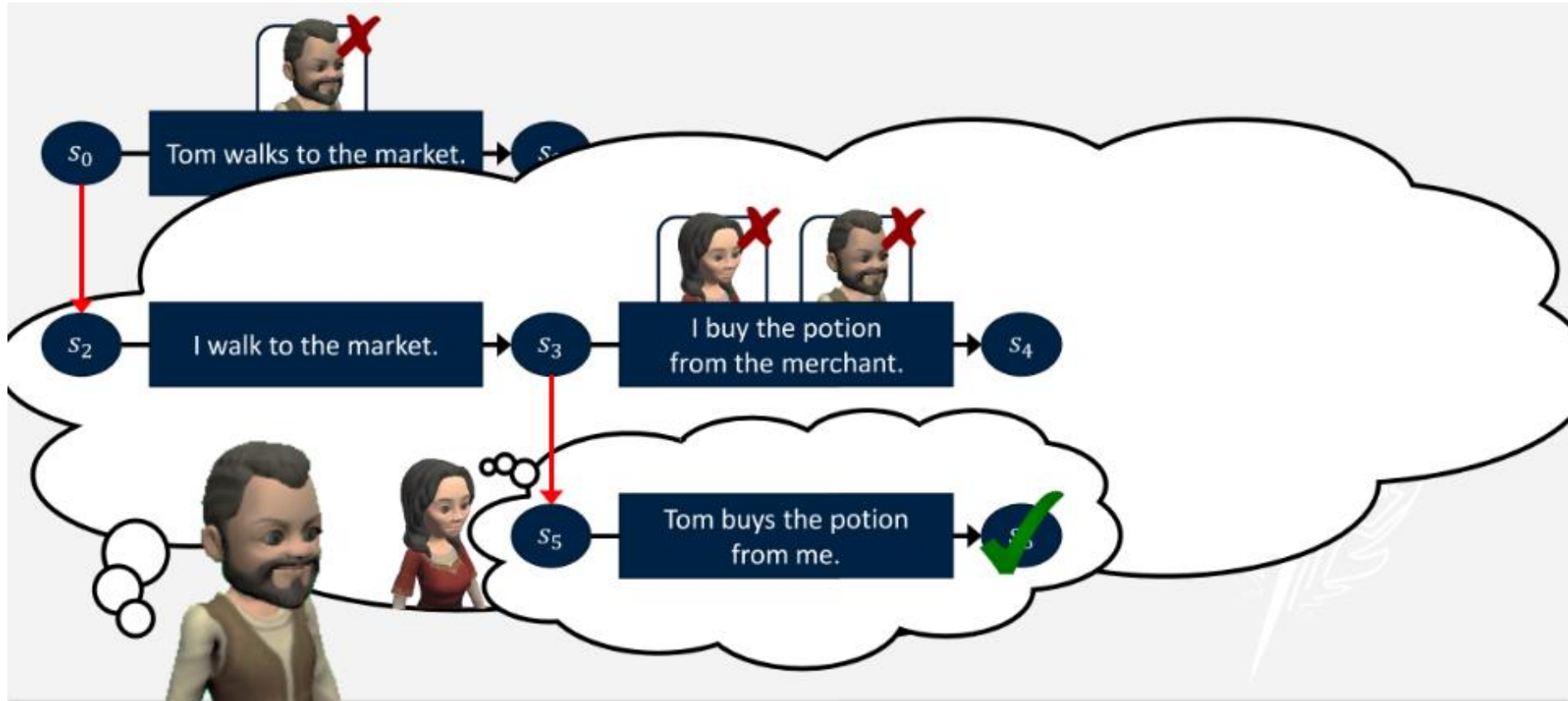
S. G. Ware and C. Siler, "Sabre: A Narrative Planner Supporting Intention and Deep Theory of Mind," *AIIDE*, 2021, doi: 10.1609/aiide.v17i1.18896.

Theory of Mind (ToM)
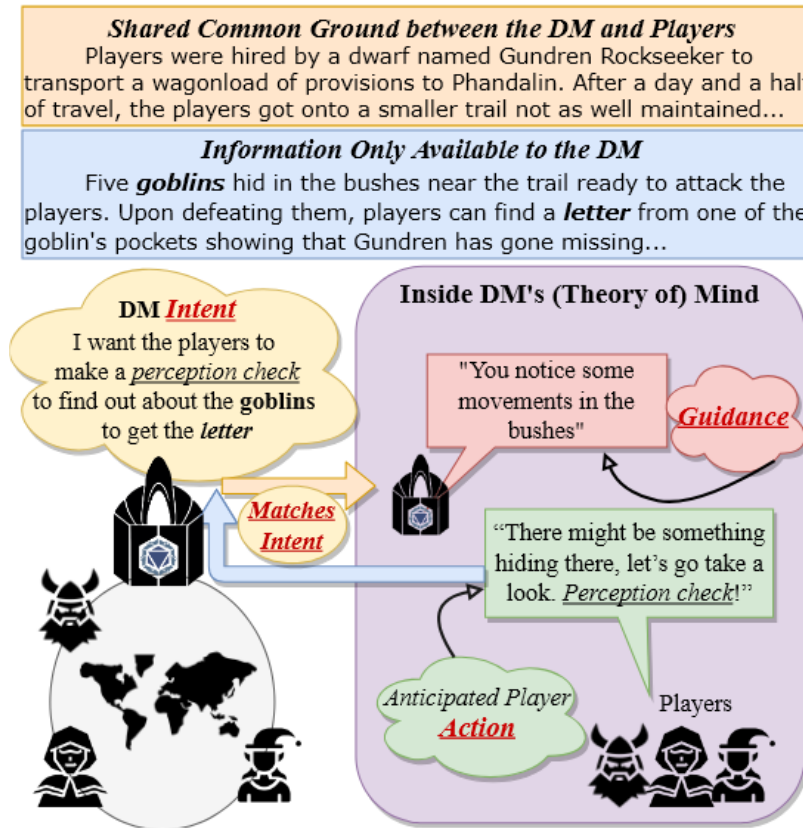
P. Zhou *et al.*, "I Cast Detect Thoughts: Learning to Converse and Guide with Intents and Theory-of-Mind in Dungeons and Dragons," in *ACL*, 2023. doi: 10.18653/v1/2023.acl-long.624.

Theory of Mind (ToM)
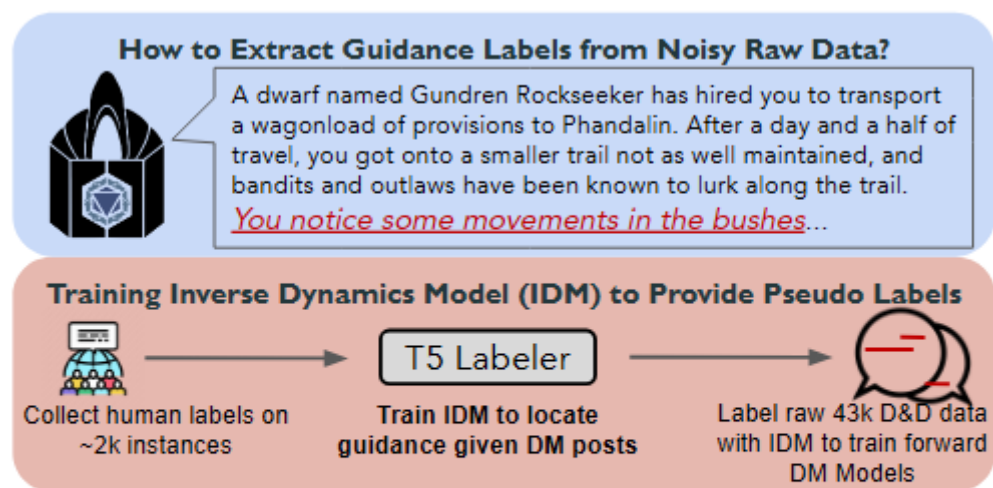
Figure 2: Illustration of IDM. We collect 2.5k human labels on guidance and train an IDM labeler to generate pseudo labels for unlabeled large corpus.
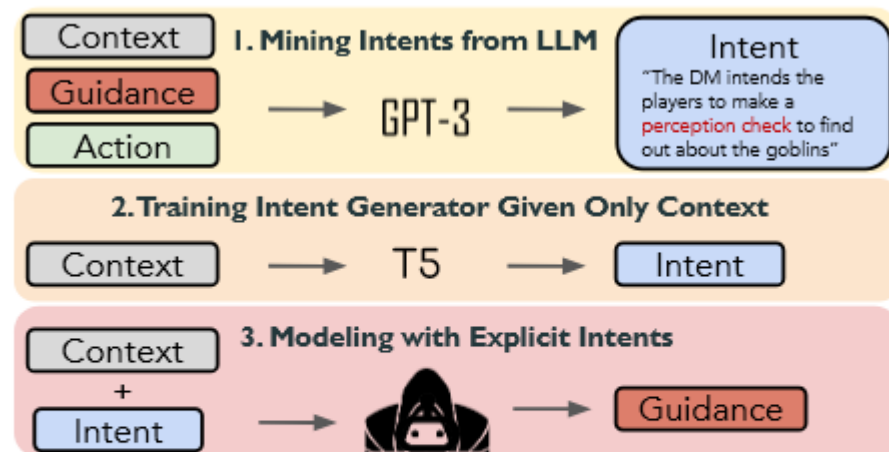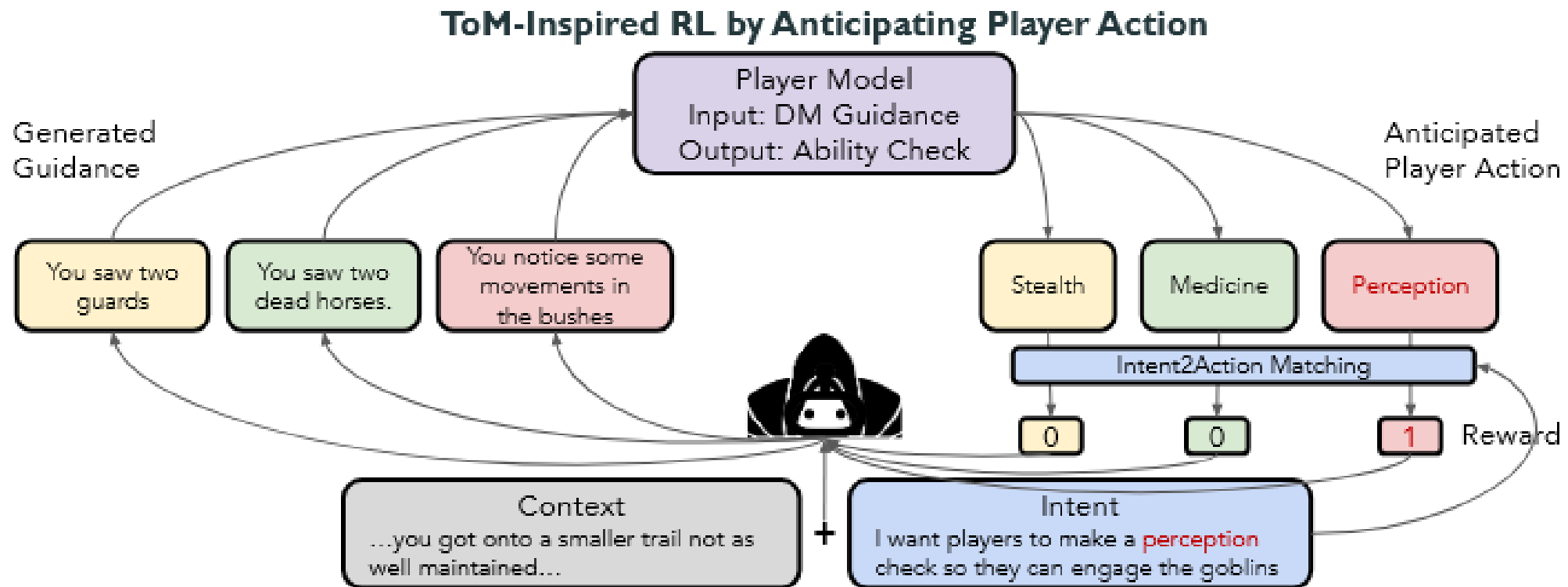

Figure 3: Illustration of intent modeling. We first mine intents from LLM and then train an intent generator to generate intent as additional context to train the DM model.

P. Zhou *et al.*, "I Cast Detect Thoughts: Learning to Converse and Guide with Intents and Theory-of-Mind in Dungeons and Dragons," in *ACL*, 2023. doi: 10.18653/v1/2023.acl-long.624.

Theory of Mind (ToM)

ToM-Inspired RL by Anticipating Player Action

P. Zhou *et al.*, "I Cast Detect Thoughts: Learning to Converse and Guide with Intents and Theory-of-Mind in Dungeons and Dragons," in *ACL*, 2023. doi: 10.18653/v1/2023.acl-long.624.

Theory of Mind (ToM)

Figure 1: A solution plan for the Drink Refill domain's planning problem. Green actions are successfully performed actions. Red actions are ones that are attempted but that fail because their material preconditions are not all met in the world state where they are attempted.

Definition (Belief State). *Given a world frame $W = \langle GL, C \rangle$, a belief state for some character $c \in C$ is a tuple $BS_c = \langle B_c^+, B_c^-, U_c \rangle$ such that B_c^+, B_c^- and U_c together form a partition of GL, where B_c^+ designates all the ground literals that c believes to be true, B_c^- includes all the ground literals that c believes to be false and U_c designates all the ground literals that c does not believe to be true and does not believe to be false.*

R. Sanghrajka, R. M. Young, and B. Thorne, "HeadSpace: Incorporating Action Failure and Character Beliefs into Narrative Planning," *AIIDE,* 2022.
https://ojs.aaai.org/index.php/AIIDE/article/view/21961

Goals

Self: guard	Partner: archer
Persona:	I guard the castle. I guard the king. I would kill to protect the royal family
Setting:	The armory, Inside Tower. The near top of the tower 6 feet before the very top. Where the watchers keep their eye...
U_0^{player}	This is the armory! The king keeps the best weapons here. Take a look -
U_0^{env}	Hello, I need to get into the palace to see the king. I think he might like to see these weapons.
A_0^{env}	get weapon

Self: swimmer	Partner: turtles
Persona:	I am a huge fan of deep sea exploration, but I take any chance I can get to go for a swim...
Setting:	Bank, Swamp This is a grassy area that surrounds much of the swamp. It's a plain field with some trees nearby along...
U_0^{player}	Just keep taking good care of your beautiful little turtle family! Your species is quite unique and I love to see you about when I go for a swim.
U_0^{env}	Well, thank you for that. Do you happen to know where my other turtle friend is? You haven't captured any turtles have you?
A_0^{env}	hug swimmer

Table 2: Example 1-step episodes where after the Topic RL agent's utterance U_0^{player} the environment agent's response action A_0^{env} was equal to the RL agent's goal g. Our RL agent both makes natural utterances given the situation, and that elicit the desired goal.
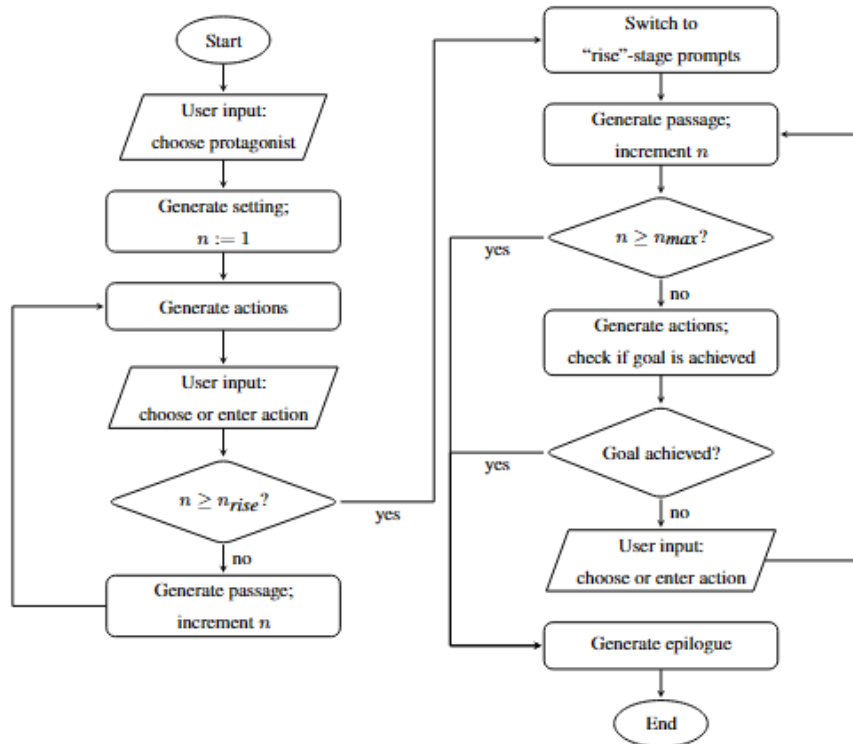
S. Prabhumoye *et al.*, "I love your chain mail! Making knights smile in a fantasy game world: Open-domain goal-oriented dialogue agents," in *Wordplay: When Language Meets Games Workshop,* 2020. https://wordplay-workshop.github.io/wordplay2020/pdfs/4.pdf

Goals

Figure 4: Story generation workflow. The left-hand side corresponds to the "low" stage of the story, the right-hand side to the "rise" stage.

You are a language model for writing WHOLESOME children's fairy tales suitable for six-year-olds [...] The protagonist of the fairy tale is {name}. Their goal is to {goal}.
The child will submit an action undertaken by the protagonist, and you will write the next plot point of the story [...]
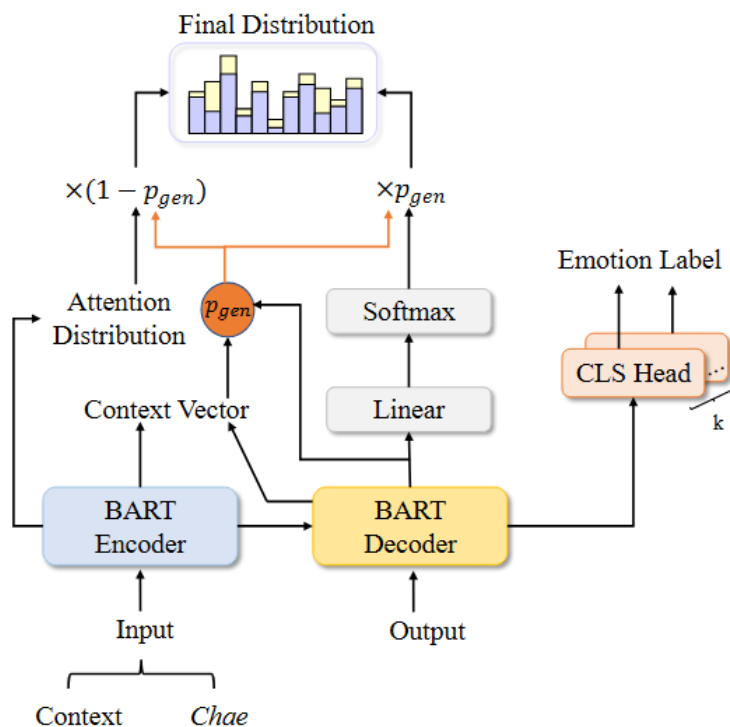Your answers develop the plot and logically follow from the protagonist's actions. However, the protagonist always faces challenges and NEVER reaches their goal [...]

You are a language model for writing WHOLESOME children's fairy tales suitable for six-year-olds [...] The protagonist of the fairy tale is {name}. Their goal is to {goal}.
The child will submit an action undertaken by the protagonist, and you will write the next plot point of the story. [...]
Your answers develop the plot, logically follow from the protagonist's action, and bring them closer to their goal [...]

Figure 2: System prompt templates for passages in the "low" (left) and "rise" (right) stages of the story. Placeholders for story-specific information are highlighted in red
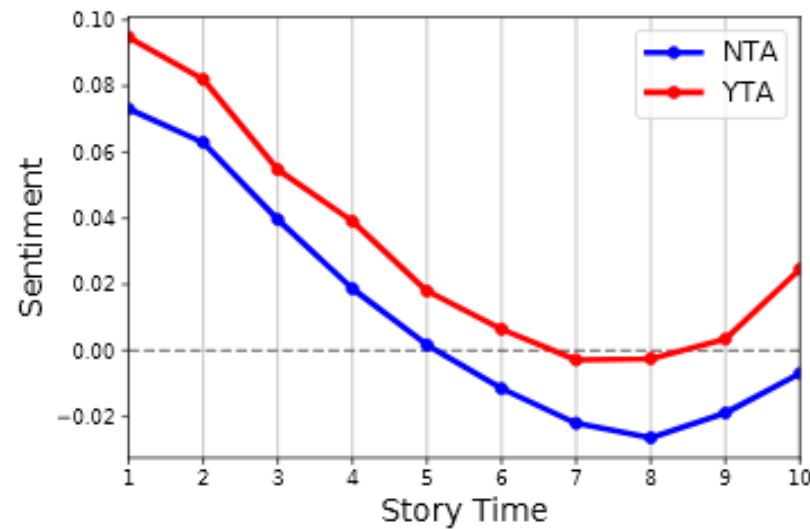
M. Ermolaeva, A. Shakhmatova, A. Nepomnyashchikh, and A. Fenogenova, "How to tame your plotline: A framework for goal-driven interactive fairy tale generation," in *Workshop on Narrative Understanding (WNU)*, 2024. https://aclanthology.org/2024.wnu-1.2

Emotions

Table 6: Case study of controllability.

Context	A polite thief was making robberies in the small town.
Chae1	$\langle SEP \rangle$ $\langle soc \rangle$ People $\langle soa \rangle$ $\langle no\_action \rangle$ $\langle soe \rangle$ fear $\langle SEP \rangle$ $\langle soc \rangle$ **Man** $\langle soa \rangle$ to catch the thief $\langle soe \rangle$ anger
Result1	One day, a **man** walked up to him and **asked him to stop** .
Chae2	$\langle SEP \rangle$ $\langle soc \rangle$ People $\langle soa \rangle$ $\langle no\_action \rangle$ $\langle soe \rangle$ fear $\langle SEP \rangle$ $\langle soc \rangle$ **Man** $\langle soa \rangle$ $\langle no\_action \rangle$ $\langle soe \rangle$ **joy**
Result2	The **man** who was supposed to stop him was a **nice man** .
Chae3	$\langle SEP \rangle$ $\langle soc \rangle$ People $\langle soa \rangle$ $\langle no\_action \rangle$ $\langle soe \rangle$ fear $\langle SEP \rangle$ $\langle soc \rangle$ **Tom** $\langle soa \rangle$ **to catch the thief** $\langle soe \rangle$ anger
Result3	**Tom** decided to investigate and **caught the thief** .
Chae4	$\langle SEP \rangle$ $\langle soc \rangle$ **People** $\langle soa \rangle$ **call the police** $\langle soe \rangle$ **fear** $\langle SEP \rangle$ $\langle soc \rangle$ **Tom** $\langle soa \rangle$ **call the police** $\langle soe \rangle$ **anger**
Result4	**Tom** **called the police** and **they** **told him** to **call the police** .

X. Wang, H. Jiang, Z. Wei, and S. Zhou, "CHAE: Fine-Grained Controllable Story Generation with Characters, Actions and Emotions," in *COLING*, 2022. https://aclanthology.org/2022.coling-1.559/

Emotions

(b) Emotional Story Arc. Average VADER sentiment across 10 equally-sized sentence-level chunks. Positive values are positive sentiment, negative values are negative sentiment.

S. Giorgi, K. Zhao, A. Feng, and L. J. Martin, "Author as Character and Narrator: Understanding Moral Judgements of Storytellers within the r/AmITheAsshole Reddit Community," *ICWSM*, 2023. doi: 10.1609/icwsm.v17i1.22141.
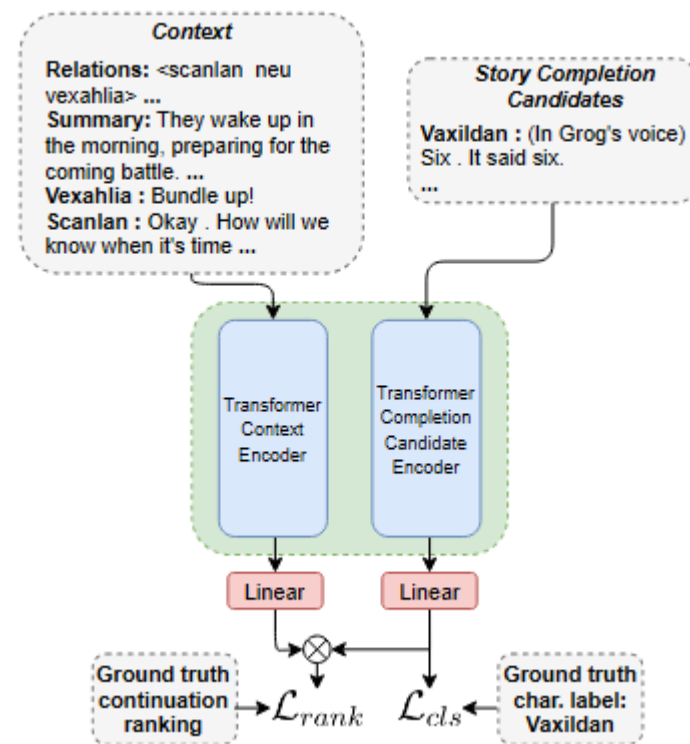
Emotions
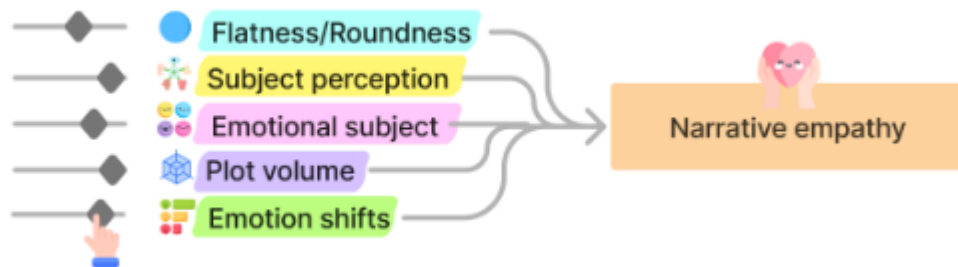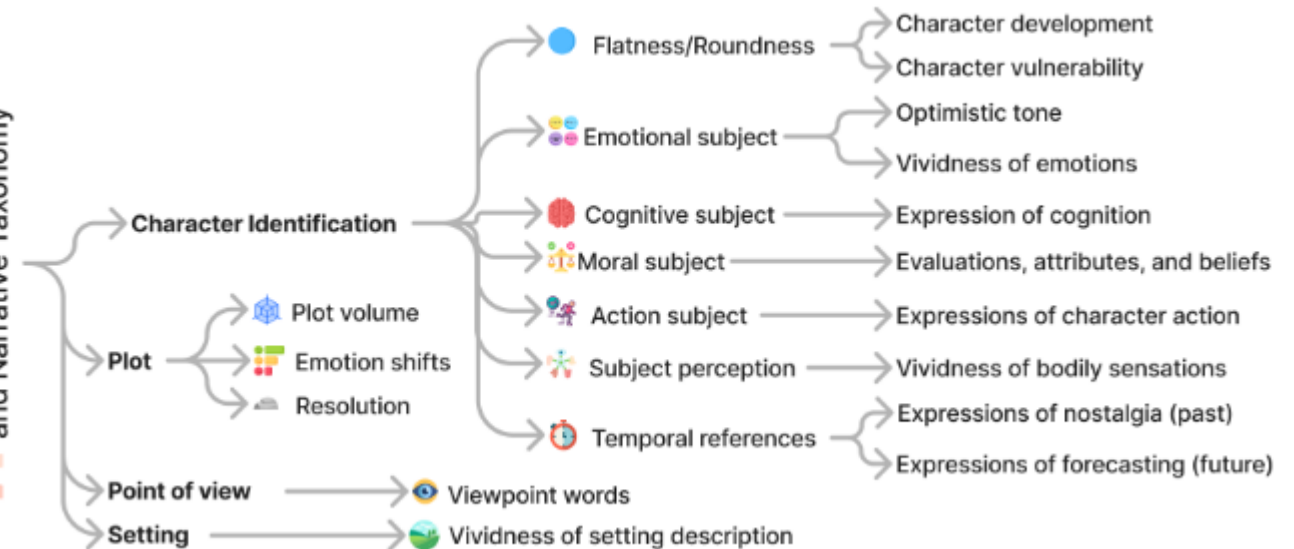
J. Shen, J. Mire, H. W. Park, C. Breazeal, and M. Sap, "HEART-felt Narratives: Tracing Empathy and Narrative Style in Personal Stories with LLMs," in *EMNLP*, 2024. https://aclanthology.org/2024.emnlp-main.59/.

Relationships

Relations	⟨ Scanlan, neutral, Vexahlia ⟩, ⟨ Keyleth, positive, Scanlan⟩, ⟨ Grog, negative, Vexhalia⟩, ⟨ Scanlan, positive, Vaxildan ⟩ ...
Summary	They wake up in the morning, preparing for the coming battle. Scanlan turns them all into Ravenites with light clothing. The sleet storm is starting. ...
Vexahlia:	Bundle up!
Scanlan:	Okay. How will we know when it's time for me to release? We have to wait for Tooma to go report.
Vexahlia:	Is Vorugal back? He's back.
Scanlan:	I assume.
Vexahlia:	Do we see Larkin around?
DM:	No, you do not see Larkin around.
Scanlan:	Vax , do you want to go look?
Vaxildan:	For Larkin? No Larkin. *I attempt to see see if Tooma is coming.* I don't want to release this
Scanlan:	thing before Tooma is there reporting to Vorugal.
Vaxildan:	(Grog voice) Six. It said six.

Table 1: A sample from CRD3 extended, showing: pairwise character relationships; historical context via the summary; and current character interactions in the form of dialogue, *first-person* (green), and second-person (blue) narration. DM refers to the Dungeon Master who provides arbitration and additional context to players.

Context
Relations: <scanlan neu vexahlia> ...
Summary: They wake up in the morning, preparing for the coming battle. ...
Vexahlia : Bundle up!
Scanlan : Okay . How will we know when it's time ...

Story Completion Candidates
Vaxildan : (In Grog's voice) Six . It said six.
...

Transformer Context Encoder

Transformer Completion Candidate Encoder

Linear

Linear

Ground truth continuation ranking → $\mathcal{L}_{rank}$ $\mathcal{L}_{cls}$ ← Ground truth char. label: Vaxildan

W. M. Si, P. Ammanabrolu, and M. O. Riedl, "Telling Stories through Multi-User Dialogue by Modeling Character Relations," in *SIGDIAL*, 2021. https://aclanthology.org/2021.sigdial-1.30
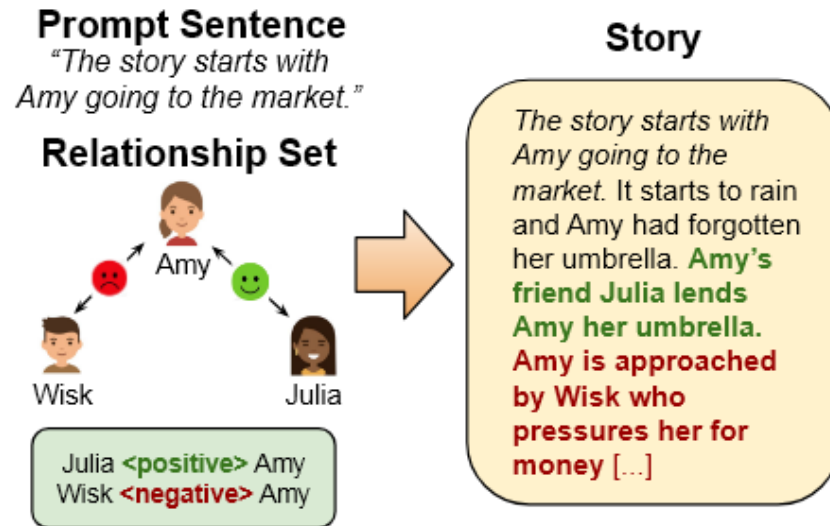
Relationships

Figure 1: Example of relationship-driven story generation task: given a set of relationships and a prompt sentence, the goal is to generate a story continuing the prompt sentence and reflecting the input relationships. Positive and negative relationships are highlighted.
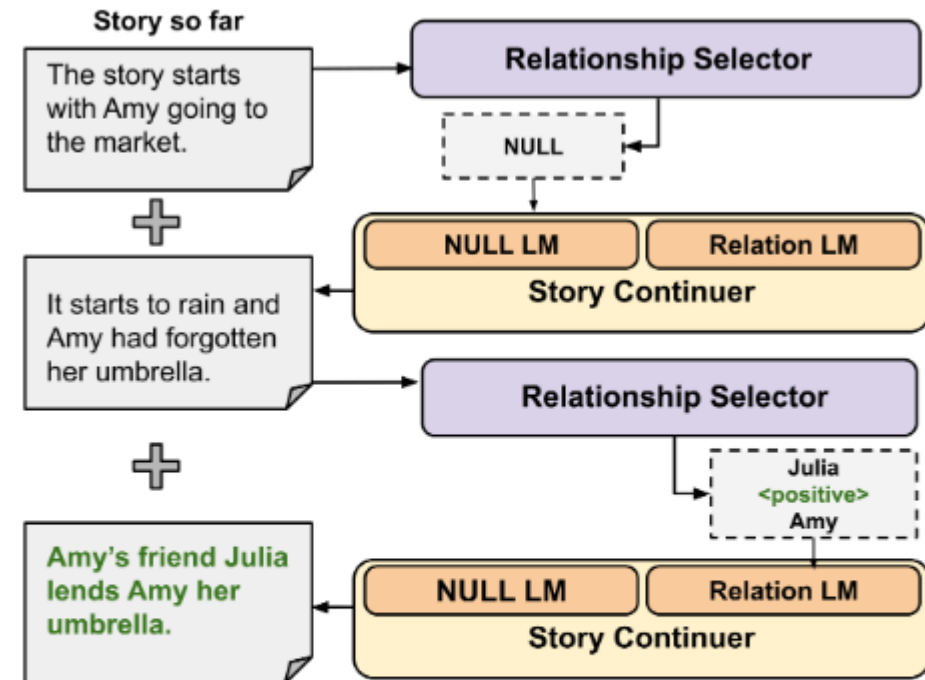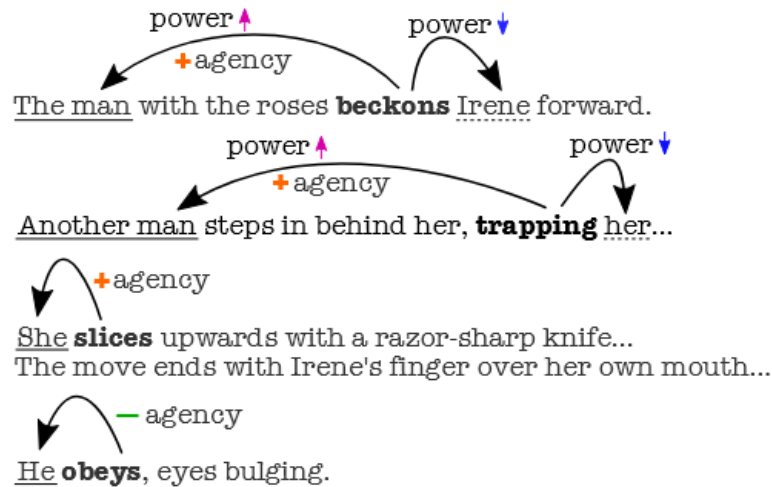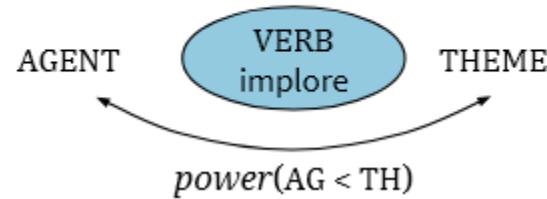

Figure 2: Proposed model RELIST illustrated. RELIST has two components, the relationship selector and the story continuer, which jointly generate the story.
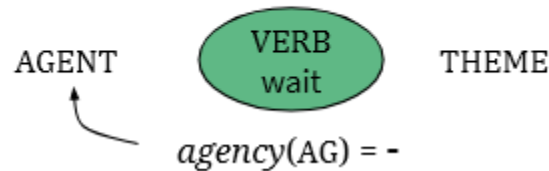
A. Rao Vijjini, F. Brahman, and S. Chaturvedi, "Towards Inter-character Relationship-driven Story Generation," in *EMNLP*, 2022. doi: 10.18653/v1/2022.emnlp-main.613.
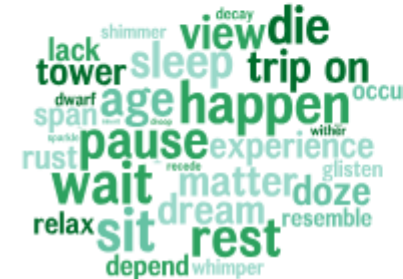
Relationships

Figure 1: An excerpt from a box-office hit, *Sherlock Holmes* (2009). **Bolded** words are the predicates, solid underlined phrases are the agent of the verb, and dash underlined words are the theme. The full example with additional nuanced discussion is available in Figure 6 in the appendix.

Formal Definition

Labels

M. Sap, M. C. Prasetio, A. Holtzman, H. Rashkin, and Y. Choi, "Connotation Frames of Power and Agency in Modern Films," in *EMNLP*, 2017. doi: 10.18653/v1/D17-1247.

Relationships

```
Megan PROPOSE friend_have_lunch Meredith
Lester PROPOSE friend_chat Robert
Suzette PROPOSE friend_chat Silvy
Betty PROPOSE friend_weekend_out Clark
Meredith PROPOSE mate_watch_tv Lester
Clark REJECT-PROPOSAL friend_weekend_out Betty
Lester REJECT-PROPOSAL mate_watch_tv Meredith
Meredith ACCEPT-PROPOSAL friend_have_lunch Megan
Lester affinity with Meredith 87
Violet PROPOSE friend_chat Megan
Clark affinity with Betty 67
Robert REJECT-PROPOSAL friend_chat Lester
Meredith affinity with Megan 72
Silvy ACCEPT-PROPOSAL friend_chat Suzette
Robert affinity with Lester 72
Betty affinity with Clark 50
(...)
```

```
PLOT-PROJECTION 0
    ProposeActivity {activity=friend_weekend_out, proposee=Clark, proposer=Betty}
PLOT-PROJECTION 1
    ProposedActivityAccepted    {activity=friend_weekend_out, proposee=Clark, proposer=Betty}
    AffinityChange  {triggerer=Clark, perceiver=Betty, impact=76}
    AffinityChange  {triggerer=Betty, perceiver=Clark, impact=51-->54}
PLOT-PROJECTION 2
    ProposeActivity {activity=mate_go_to_cinema, proposee=Mary, proposer=Clark}
PLOT-PROJECTION 3
    ProposedActivityRejected    {activity=mate_go_to_cinema, proposee=Mary, proposer=Clark}
    AffinityChange  {triggerer=Mary, perceiver=Clark, impact=95}
    AffinityChange  {triggerer=Clark, perceiver=Mary, impact=84}
    (...)
```

P. Gervás and G. Méndez, "Pruning Worlds into Stories: Affective Interactions as Fitness Function," in *Artificial Intelligence in Music, Sound, Art and Design*, 2024. doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-56992-0_12.

Think-Pair-Share

o Do you think a system can be made that encompasses all of these attributes using today's technology?

o How would you start making a system like this? (Would it be LLM-based? Simulation-based? Planning-based?)

o Would you need all of these to make a "good" story?