Foundations for NLP-assisted formative assessment feedback for short-answer tasks in large-enrollment classes

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Motivation

- Formative assessment benefits both students & instructors (GAISE, 2016; Pearl, et al., 2012)
- "Write-to-learn" tasks improve learning outcomes (Graham, et al., 2020)
- Critical for citizen-statisticians to communicate statistical ideas effectively (Gould, 2010)
- Continual practice with communicating improves statistical literacy and promotes retention (Basu, et al., 2013)
- Human-machine collaboration is a promising mechanism to assist rapid, individualized feedback at scale (Basu, 2013)
- NLP-assisted feedback has primarily only been presented for essays or long-answer tasks (see e.g., Attali, et al., 2008; Page, 1994)

Research Questions

- **RQ1**: What level of agreement is achieved among trained human raters labeling (i.e., scoring) short-answer tasks?
- **RQ2**: What level of agreement is achieved between human raters and an NLP algorithm?
- **RQ3**: What sort of NLP representation leads to good clustering performance, and how does that interact with the classification algorithm?

Preprint

Susan Lloyd, Matthew Beckman, Dennis Pearl, Rebecca Passonneau, Zhaohui Li, & Zekun Wang (in review). Foundations of NLP-assisted formative assessment feedback for short-answer tasks in large enrollment statistics classes. Preprint URL: http://arxiv.org/abs/2205.02829

Spoilers?!

- **RQ1**: What level of agreement is achieved among trained human raters labeling (i.e., scoring) short-answer tasks?
- **RQ2**: What level of agreement is achieved between human raters and an NLP algorithm?
- **RQ3**: What sort of NLP representation leads to good clustering performance, and how does that interact with the classification algorithm?

Spoilers?!

- RQ1: substantial inter-rater & intra-rater agreement
- RQ2: substantial agreement among human & NLP labeling
- RQ3: work in progress, but promising

Methods (Sample)

Study utilized de-identified extant data & scoring rubrics from an unrelated previous study (Beckman, 2015)

- 6 short-answer tasks
- 1,935 students total
- 29 class sections 15 distinct institutions

Methods (Humans)

- 3 human raters typical of large-enrollment instruction team
- responses allocated such that 63 student responses in common for each combination of raters to quantify agreement
- only constraint: sufficient data for intra-rater analysis for person that had labeled a previous set of 178 responses 6 years prior

Methods (NLP)

The set of task-responses were randomly split four ways:

- 90% were split into the typical division of training (72%), development (9%) and test (9%)
- 10% held in reserve for more rigorous testing

Two NLP algorithms were compared for accuracy using a subset of student responses (Li et al., 2021).

- LSTM: a logistic regression combined with a Long Short-Term Memory for learning vector representations
- SFRN: Semantic Feature-Wise Transformation Relation Network

Results (RQ1)

RQ1: What level of agreement is achieved among trained human raters labeling (i.e., scoring) short-answer tasks?

Comparison	Reliability
Rater A & Rater C	QWK $= 0.83$
Rater A & Rater D	QWK $= 0.80$
Rater C & Rater D	QWK $= 0.79$
Rater A: 2015 & 2021	QWK $= 0.88$
Raters A, C, & D	FK $= 0.70$

Reliability interpretation[1]: $0.6 <$ substantial $< 0.8 <$ near perfect < 1.0

[1] Viera & Garrett (2005)

Results (RQ2)

RQ2: What level of agreement is achieved between human raters and an NLP algorithm?

The SFRN algorithm achieved much higher classification accuracy than LSTM (83% vs. 72%)[2]. Human & SFRN agreement:

Comparison	Reliability
Rater A & SFRN	QWK $= 0.79$
Rater C & SFRN	QWK $= 0.82$
Rater D & SFRN	QWK $= 0.74$
Raters: A, C, D, & SFRN	FK $= 0.68$

Reliability interpretation[3]: $0.6 <$ substantial $< 0.8 <$ near perfect < 1.0

[2]SFRN & LSTM comparison excludes instances when human labels disagree
[3]Viera & Garrett (2005)

Results (RQ3)

RQ3: What sort of NLP representation leads to good clustering performance, and how does that interact with the classification algorithm?

- SFRN learns a high-dimension (D = 512) vector representation on training data.
- Experiments with K-means and K-medoids clustering showed SFRN produce more consistent clusters when retrained (0.62), in comparison to other classifiers.[4]
- Highest consistency (0.88; D = 50), however, was achieved using a matrix factorization method that produces static representations (WTMF; Guo & Diab, 2011)

[4]Consistency is measured as the ratio of all pairs of responses in a given class per question that are clustered the same way on two runs (in the same cluster, or not in the same cluster).

Discussion

- **RQ1**: Substantial agreement achieved among trained human raters provides context for further comparisons
- **RQ2**: NLP algorithm produced agreement reasonably aligned to results achieved by pairs/groups of trained human raters
- **RQ3**: Classification and clustering have competing incentives for dimensionality; Low D is better for cluster stability, High D better for classification reliability.

Future work:

Currently working to evaluate human-generated feedback provided to the short answer tasks being studied. Early indications reveal promising economy of scale for feedback provided when conditioned on consensus labels applied to task-responses.

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Thank You

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