

Scene Text Detection and Recognition: The Deep Learning Era

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Abstract—With the rise and development of deep learning, computer vision has been tremendously transformed and reshaped. As an important research area in computer vision, scene text detection and recognition has been inevitably influenced by this wave of revolution, consequentially entering the era of deep learning. In recent years, the community has witnessed substantial advancements in mindset, methodology and performance. This survey is aimed at summarizing and analyzing the major changes and significant progresses of scene text detection and recognition in the deep learning era. Through this article, we devote to: (1) introduce new insights and ideas; (2) highlight recent techniques and benchmarks; (3) look ahead into future trends. Specifically, we will emphasize the dramatic differences brought by deep learning and the grand challenges still remained. We expect that this review paper would serve as a reference book for researchers in this field. Related resources are also collected and compiled in our Github repository: <https://github.com/Jyouhou/SceneTextPapers>.

Index Terms—Scene Text, Detection, Recognition, Deep Learning, Survey

1 INTRODUCTION

UNDoubtedly, text is among the most brilliant and influential creations of humankind. As the written form of human languages, text makes it feasible to reliably and effectively spread or acquire information across time and space. In this sense, text constitutes the cornerstone of human civilization.

On the one hand, text, as a vital tool for communication and collaboration, has been playing a more important role than ever in modern society; on the other hand, the rich, precise high level semantics embodied in text could be beneficial for understanding the world around us. For example, text information can be used in a wide range of real-world applications, such as *image search* [127], [144], *instant translation* [25], [113], *robots navigation* [23], [90], [91], [128], and *industrial automation* [18], [42], [51]. Therefore, automatic text reading from natural environments (schematic diagram is depicted in Fig. 1), a.k.a. scene text detection and recognition [184] or PhotoOCR [10], has become an increasing popular and important research topic in computer vision.

However, despite years of research, a series of grand challenges may still be encountered when detecting and recognizing text in the wild. The difficulties mainly stem from three aspects [184]:

- **Diversity and Variability of Text in Natural Scenes** Distinctive from scripts in documents, text in natural scene exhibit much higher diversity and variability. For example, instances of scene text can be in different languages, colors, fonts, sizes, orientations and shapes. Moreover, the aspect ratios and layouts of scene text may vary significantly. All

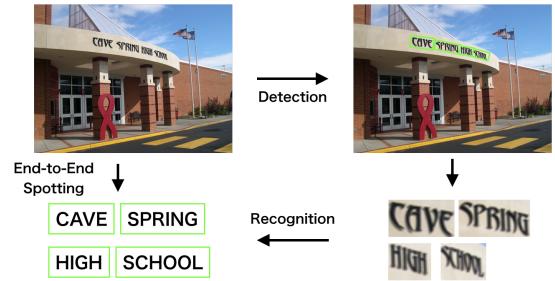


Fig. 1: Schematic diagram of scene text detection and recognition. The image sample is from Total-Text [17].

these variations pose challenges for detection and recognition algorithms designed for text in natural scenes.

• **Complexity and Interference of Backgrounds** Backgrounds of natural scenes are virtually unpredictable. There might be patterns extremely similar with text (e.g., tree leaves, traffic signs, bricks, windows, and stockades), or occlusions caused by foreign objects, which may potentially lead to confusions and mistakes.

• **Imperfect Imaging Conditions** In uncontrolled circumstances, the quality of text images and videos could not be guaranteed. That is, in poor imaging conditions, text instances may be with low resolution and severe distortion due to inappropriate shooting distance or angle, or blurred because of out of focus or shaking, or noised on account of low light level, or corrupted by highlights or shadows.

These difficulties run through the years before deep learning showed its potential in computer vision as well as in other fields. As deep learning came to prominence after AlexNet [72] won the ILSVRC2012 [126] contest, researchers turn to deep neural networks for automatic feature learning and start with more in-depth studies. The community are now working on ever more challenging targets. The progresses made in recent years can be summarized as follows:

- **Incorporation of Deep Learning** Nearly all recent methods are built upon deep learning models. Most importantly,

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deep learning frees researchers from the exhausting work of repeatedly designing and testing hand-crafted features, which gives rise to a blossom of works that push the envelope further. To be specific, the use of deep learning substantially simplifies the overall pipeline. Besides, these algorithms provide significant improvements over previous ones on standard benchmarks. Gradient-based training routines also facilitate to end-to-end trainable methods.

- **Target-Oriented Algorithms and Datasets** Researchers are now turning to more specific aspects and targets. Against difficulties in real-world scenarios, newly published datasets are collected with unique and representative characteristics. For example, there are datasets that feature long text, blurred text, and curved text respectively. Driven by these datasets, almost all algorithms published in recent years are designed to tackle specific challenges. For instance, some are proposed to detect oriented text, while others aim at blurred and unfocused scene images. These ideas are also combined to make more general-purposed methods.

- **Advances in Auxiliary Technologies** Apart from new datasets and models devoted to the main task, auxiliary technologies that do not solve the task directly also find their places in this field, such as synthetic data and bootstrapping.

In this survey, we present an overview of recent development in deep-learning based text detection and recognition from still scene images. We review methods from different perspectives, and list the up-to-date datasets. We also analyze the status quo and future research trends.

There have been already several excellent review papers [146], [166], [172], [184], which also organize and analyze works related text detection and recognition. However, these papers are published before deep learning came to prominence in this field. Therefore, they mainly focus on more traditional and feature-based methods. We refer readers to these paper as well for a more comprehensive view and knowledge of the history. This article will mainly concentrate on text information extraction from still images, rather than videos. For scene text detection and recognition in videos, please also refer to [65], [172].

The remaining parts of this paper are arranged as follows: In Section 2, we briefly review the methods before the deep learning era. In Section 3, we list and summarize algorithms based on deep learning in a hierarchical order. In Section 4, we take a look at the datasets and evaluation protocols. Finally, we present potential applications and our own opinions on the current status and future trends.

2 METHODS BEFORE THE DEEP LEARNING ERA

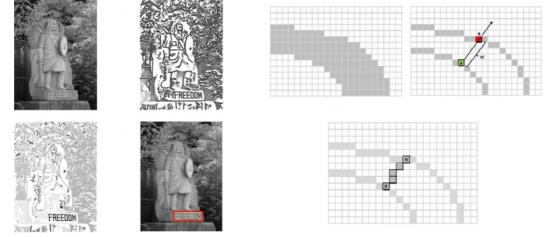
2.1 Overview

In this section, we take a brief glance retrospectively at algorithms before the deep learning era. More detailed and comprehensive coverage of these works can be found in [146], [166], [172], [184]. For text detection and recognition, the attention has been the design of features.

In this period of time, most text detection methods either adopt **Connected Components Analysis** (CCA) [26], [57], [63], [110], [145], [168], [171] or **Sliding Window** (SW) based classification [19], [74], [152], [154]. CCA based methods first extract candidate components through a variety of ways (e.g., color clustering or extreme region extraction), and then



MSER features



SWT features

Fig. 2: Illustration of traditional methods with hand-crafted features: (1) **Maximally Stable Extremal Regions** (MSER) [110], assuming chromatic consistency within each character; (2) **Stroke Width Transform** (SWT) [26], assuming consistent stroke width within each character.

filter out non-text components using manually designed rules or classifiers automatically trained on hand-crafted features (see Fig.2). In sliding window classification methods, windows of varying sizes slide over the input image, where each window is classified as text segments/regions or not. Those classified as positive are further grouped into text regions with morphological operations [74], **Conditional Random Field** (CRF) [152] and other alternative graph based methods [19], [154].

For text recognition, one branch adopted the feature-based methods. Shi *et al.* [136] and Yao *et al.* [165] propose **character segments** based recognition algorithms. Rodriguez *et al.* [121], [122] and Gordo *et al.* [38] and Almazan *et al.* [4] utilize **label embedding** to directly perform matching between strings and images. **Strokes** [12] and **character key-points** [116] are also detected as features for classification. Another discomposed the recognition process into a series of sub-problems. Various methods have been proposed to tackle these **sub-problems**, which includes text binarization [75], [105], [149], [179], text line segmentation [167], character segmentation [112], [125], [137], single character recognition [14], [130] and word correction [67], [106], [148], [156], [176].

There have been efforts devoted to integrated (i.e. end-to-end as we call it today) systems as well [109], [152]. In Wang *et al.* [152], characters are considered as a special case in object detection and detected by a nearest neighbor classifier trained on HOG features [21] and then grouped into words through a Pictorial Structure (PS) based model [28]. Neumann and Matas [109] proposed a decision delay approach by keeping multiple segmentations of each character until the last stage when the context of each character is known. They detect character segmentations using extremal regions and decode recognition results through a dynamic programming algorithm.

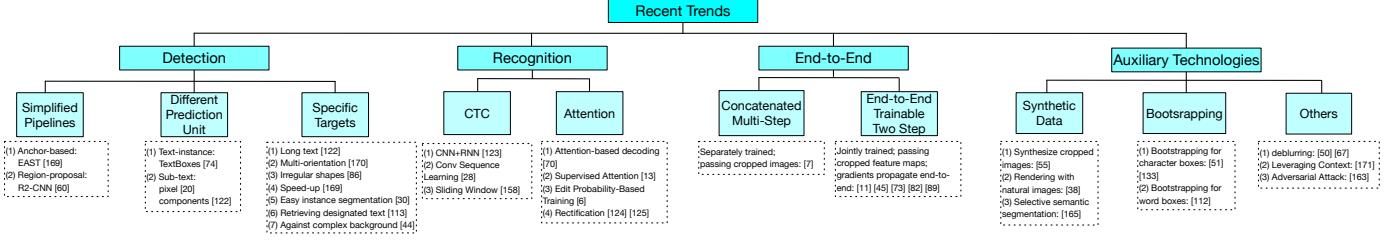


Fig. 3: Overview of recent progresses and dominant trends.

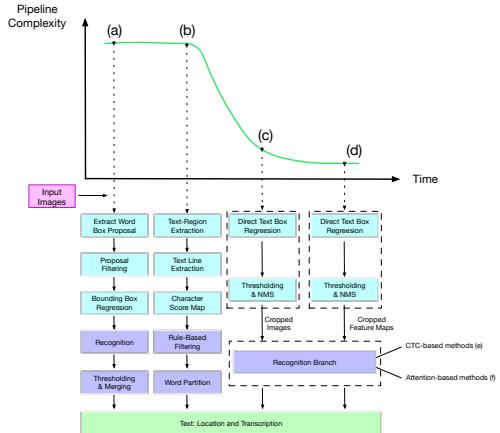


Fig. 4: Typical pipelines of scene text detection and recognition. (a) [60] and (b) [164] are representative multi-step methods. (c) and (d) are simplified pipeline. (c) [180] only contains detection branch, and therefore is used together with a separate recognition model. (d) [49], [92] jointly train a detection model and recognition model.

In summary, text detection and recognition methods before the deep learning era mainly extract low-level or mid-level hand crafted image features, which entails demanding and repetitive pre-processing and post-processing steps. Constrained by the limited representation ability of hand crafted features and the complexity of pipelines, those methods can hardly handle intricate circumstances, e.g. blurred images in the ICDAR2015 dataset [68].

3 METHODOLOGY IN THE DEEP LEARNING ERA

As implied by the title of this section, we would like to address recent advances as changes in *methodology* instead of merely new *methods*. Our conclusion is grounded in the observations as explained in the following paragraph.

Methods in the recent years are characterized by the following two distinctions: (1) Most methods utilizes deep-learning based models; (2) Most researchers are approaching the problem from a diversity of perspectives. Methods driven by deep-learning enjoy the advantage that automatic feature learning can save us from designing and testing the large amount potential hand-crafted features. At the same time, researchers from different viewpoints are enriching and promoting the community into more in-depth work, aiming at different targets, e.g. faster and simpler pipeline [180], text of varying aspect ratios [131], and synthetic data [41]. As we can also see further in this section, the incorporation of deep learning has totally changed the way researchers approach the task, and has enlarged the scope of

research by far. This is the most significant change compared to the former epoch.

In a nutshell, recent years have witnessed a blossoming expansion of research into subdivisible trends. We summarize these changes and trends in Fig.3, and we would follow this diagram in our survey.

In this section, we would classify existing methods into a hierarchical taxonomy, and introduce in a top-down style. First, we divide them into four kinds of systems: (1) text detection that detects and localizes the existence of text in natural image; (2) recognition system that transcribes and converts the content of the detected text region into linguistic symbols; (3) end-to-end system that performs both text detection and recognition in one single pipeline; (4) auxiliary methods that aim to support the main task of text detection and recognition, e.g. synthetic data generation, and deblurring of image. Under each category, we review recent methods from different perspectives.

3.1 Detection

We acknowledge that scene text detection can be taxonomically subsumed under general object detection, which is dichotomized as one-staged methods and two-staged ones. However, the detection of scene text has a different set of characteristics and challenges that require unique methodologies and solutions. Thus, it would be more suitable to classify these algorithms based on their characteristics instead of the aforementioned dichotomy in general object detection. Nevertheless, we encourage readers to refer to recent surveys on object detection methods [43], [85].

There are three main trends in the field of text detection, and we would introduce them in the following sub-sections one by one. They are: (1) pipeline simplification; (2) changes in prediction units; (3) specified targets.

3.1.1 Pipeline Simplification

One of the most important trends is the simplification of the pipeline, as shown in Fig.4. Most methods before the era of deep-learning, and some early methods that use deep-learning, have multi-step pipelines. More recent methods have largely simplified and much shorter pipelines, which is a key to reduce error propagation and simplify the training process. In the last few years, separately trained two-staged methods are surpassed by jointly trained ones. The main components of these methods are end-to-end differentiable modules, which is an outstanding property.

Multi-step methods: Early deep-learning based methods [164], [178]¹, [45] cast the task of text detection into a multi-step process. In [164], a convolutional neural network is

1. Code: https://github.com/stupidZZ/FCN_Text

used to predict whether each pixel in the input image (1) belongs to characters, (2) is inside the text region, and (3) the text orientation around the pixel. Connected positive responses are considered as a detection of character or text region. For characters belonging to the same text region, Delaunay triangulation [66] is applied, after which a graph partition algorithm groups characters into text lines based on the predicted orientation attribute.

Similarly, [178] first predicts a segmentation map indicating text line regions. For each text line region, MSER [111] is applied to extract character candidates. Character candidates reveal information of the scale and orientation of the underlying text line. Finally, minimum bounding box is extracted as the final text line candidate.

In [45], the detection process also consists of several steps. First, text blocks are extracted. Then the model crops and only focuses on the extracted text blocks to extract text center line(TCL), which is defined as a shrunk version of the original text line. Each text line represents the existence of one text instance. The extracted TCL map is then split into several TCLs. Each split TCL is then concatenated to the original image. A semantic segmentation model then classifies each pixel into ones that belong to the same text instance as the given TCL, and ones that do not.

Simplified pipeline: More recent methods follow a 2-step pipeline, consisting of an end-to-end trainable neural network model and a post-processing step that is usually much simpler than previous ones [48]², [64], [79], [80]³, [93], [131]⁴, [94]⁵, [102]⁶, [78], [83]⁷, [20], [93], [177]. These methods mainly draw inspiration from techniques in general object detection [29], [33], [34], [46], [86], [119], and modify the region proposal and bounding box regression modules to localize text instances directly. We briefly introduce some representative works here.

As shown in Fig.5 (b), TextBoxes [80] adapts SSD to fit the varying orientations and aspect-ratios of text by defining default boxes as quadrilaterals with different specs.

A variant of the standard anchor-based default box prediction method is EAST [180]⁸. In the standard SSD network, there are several feature maps of different sizes, on which default boxes of different receptive fields are detected. In EAST, all feature maps are integrated together by gradual upsampling, or U-Net [124] structure to be specific. The size of the final feature map is $\frac{1}{4}$ of the original input image, with c -channels. Under the assumption that each pixel only belongs to one text line, each pixel on the final feature map, i.e. the $1 \times 1 \times c$ feature tensor, is used to regress the rectangular or quadrilateral bounding box of the underlying text line. Specifically, the existence of text, i.e. text/non-text, and geometries, e.g. orientation and size for rectangles, and vertexes coordinates for quadrilaterals, are predicted. EAST makes a difference to the field of text detection with its highly simplified pipeline and the efficiency. Since EAST is

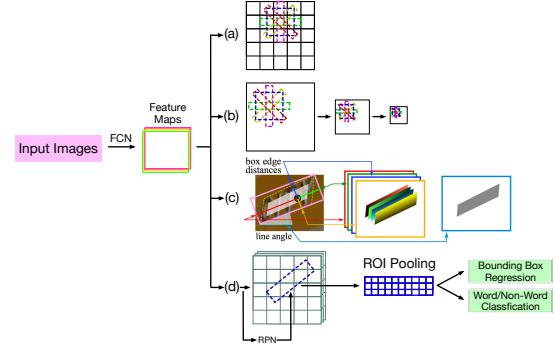


Fig. 5: High level illustration of existing anchor/ROI-pooling based methods: (a) Similar to YOLO [117], predicting at each anchor positions. Representative methods include rotating default boxes [93]. (b) Variants of SSD [86], including TextBoxes [80], predicting at feature maps of different sizes. (c) Direct regression of bounding boxes [180], also predicting at each anchor position. (d) Region Proposal based methods, including rotating RoIs [102] and RoIs of varying aspect ratios [64].

most famous for its speed, we would re-introduce EAST in later parts, with emphasis on its efficiency.

Other methods adapt two-staged object detection framework of R-CNN [33], [34], [119], where the second stage corrects the localization results based on features obtained by Region of Interest (ROI) pooling. Rotation Region Proposal Networks [102] generates rotating region proposals, in order to fit into text of arbitrary orientations, instead of axis-aligned rectangles. Similarly, R2CNN [64] uses region proposals of different sizes. In FEN [177], weighted sum of region proposals with different sizes are used. The final prediction is made by leveraging the textness score for poolings of 4 different sizes.

The aforementioned methods simplify the overall pipeline and improves efficiency greatly. However, the performance is still limited when faced with irregularly shaped text and long text. Therefore, deep-learning based multi-staged methods are re-introduced. These methods, as discussed below, use neural network to predict local attributes, and a post-processing step to re-construct text instances. Compared with early multi-staged methods, they rely more on neural networks and have shorter pipelines.

3.1.2 Decomposing into Sub-Text

A main distinction between text detection and general object detection is that, text are homogeneous as a whole and show locality, while general object detection are not. By homogeneity and locality, we refer to the property that any part of a text instance is still text. Human do not have to see the whole text instance to know it belongs to some text.

Such a property lays a cornerstone for a new branch of text detection methods that only predict sub-text components and then assemble them into a text instance. In this part, we take the perspective of the granularity of text detection. There are two main level of prediction granularity, *text instance level* and *sub-text level*.

Text instance level methods, as mentioned in the last section, follows the standard routine of general object detection. A region-proposal network produces initial guess for

2. Code: <https://github.com/BestSonny/SSTD>
3. Code: <https://github.com/MhLiao/TextBoxes>
4. Code: <https://github.com/bgshih/seglink>
5. Code: <https://github.com/Yuliang-Liu/Curve-Text-Detector>
6. Code: <https://github.com/mjq11302010044/RRPN>
7. Code: <https://github.com/MhLiao/RRD>
8. Code: <https://github.com/zxytim/EAST>

the localization of possible text instance. Optionally, some methods then use a refinement part to filter false positive and also correct the localization.

Contrarily, **sub-text level** detection methods [101], [22]⁹, [45], [159], [164], [48]¹⁰, [44], [131], [178], [142]¹¹, [150], [183] only predicts parts that are combined to make a text instance. Such sub-text mainly includes *pixel-level* and *components-level*.

In **pixel-level** methods [22], [45], [48], [159], [164], [178], an end-to-end fully convolutional neural network learns to generate a dense prediction map indicating whether each pixel in the original image belongs to any text instances or not. Post-processing methods then group pixels together depending on which pixels belong to the same text instance. Since text can appear in clusters which makes predicted pixels connected to each other, the core of pixel-level methods is to separate text instances from each other. PixelLink [22] learns to predict whether two adjacent pixels belong to the same text instance by adding link prediction to each pixel. Border learning method [159] casts each pixels into three categories: text, border, and background, assuming that border can well separate text instances. In Holistic [164], pixel-prediction maps include both text-block level and character center levels. Since the centers of characters do not overlap, the separation is done easily.

In this part we only intend to introduce the concept of prediction units. We would go back to details regarding the separation of text instances in the section of *Specific Targets*.

Components-level methods [44], [101], [131], [142], [150], [183] usually predict at a medium granularity. Component refer to a local region of text instance, sometimes containing one or more characters.

As shown in Fig.6 (a), SegLink [131] modifies SSD [86]. Instead of default boxes that represent whole objects, SegLink defines default boxes as having only one aspect ratio. Each default box represents a *text segment*. Besides, links between default boxes are predicted to indicate whether the linked segments belong to the same text instance.

Corner localization method [101] proposes to detect the four corners of each text instance. Since each text instance only has 4 corners, the prediction results and their relative position can indicate which corners should be grouped into the same text instance.

SegLink [131] and Corner localization [101] are proposed specially for long and multi-oriented text. We only introduce the idea here and discuss more details in the section of *Specific Targets*, regarding how they are realized.

In [150], pixels are clustered according to their color consistency and edge information. The fused image segments are called *superpixel*. These superpixels are further used to extract characters and predict text instance.

Another branch of component-level method is Connectionist Text Proposal Network (CTPN) [142], [158], [183]. CTPN models inherit the idea of anchoring and recurrent neural network for sequence labeling. They usually consist of a CNN-based image classification network, e.g. VGG, and stack an RNN on top of it. Each position in the final feature

map represents features in the region specified by the corresponding anchor. Assuming that text appear horizontally, each row of features are fed into an RNN and labeled as text/non-text. Geometries are also predicted.

Generally speaking, sub-text level methods are more robust to the size, aspect ratio, and shape of different text instances. However, the efficiency of the postprocessing step may depend on the actual implementation, and is slow in some cases. The lack of refinement step may also harm the performance.

3.1.3 Specific Targets

Another characteristic of current text detection system is that, most of them are designed for special purposes, attempting to tackle specific difficulties in detecting scene text. We broadly classify them into the following aspects.

3.1.3.1 Long Text: Unlike general object detection, text usually come in varying aspect ratios. They have much larger width-height ratio, and thus general object detection framework would fail. Several methods have been proposed [64], [101], [131] to detect long text.

R^2CNN [64] gives an intuitive solution, where ROI pooling with different sizes are used. Following the framework of Faster R-CNN [119], three ROI-poolings with varying pooling sizes, 7×7 , 3×11 , and 11×3 , are performed for each box generated by region-proposal network, and the pooled features are concatenated for textness score.

Another branch learns to detect local sub-text components which are independent from the whole text [22], [101], [131]. SegLink [131] proposes to detect components, i.e. square areas that are text, and how these components are linked to each other. PixelLink [22] predicts which pixels belong to any text and whether adjacent pixels belong to the same text instances. Corner localization [101] detects text corners. All these methods learn to detect local components and then group them together to make final detections.

Zhang *et al.* [175] propose to perform ROI and localization branch recursively, to revise the predicted position of the text instance. It is a good way to include features at the boundaries of bounding boxes, which localizes the text better than RPN network.

While methods on text instance level may fail due to limited receptive field, sub-text methods may suffer from lack of end-to-end optimization. Therefore, the challenge of long text still remains unsolved.

3.1.3.2 Multi-Oriented Text: Another distinction from general text detection is that text detection is rotation-sensitive and skewed text are common in real-world, while using traditional axis-aligned prediction boxes would incorporate noisy background that would affect the performance of the following text recognition module. Several methods have been proposed to adapt to it [64], [80], [83], [93], [102], [131], [180], [151]¹².

Extending from general anchor-based methods, rotating default boxes [80], [93] are used, with predicted rotation offset. Similarly, rotating region proposals [102] are generated with 6 different orientations. Regression-based methods [64], [131], [180] predict the rotation and positions of vertexes, which are insensitive to orientation. Further,

9. Code: https://github.com/ZJULearning/pixel_link

10. Code: <https://github.com/BestSonny/SSTD>

11. Code: <https://github.com/tianzhi0549/CTPN>

12. Code: <https://github.com/zlmzju/itn>

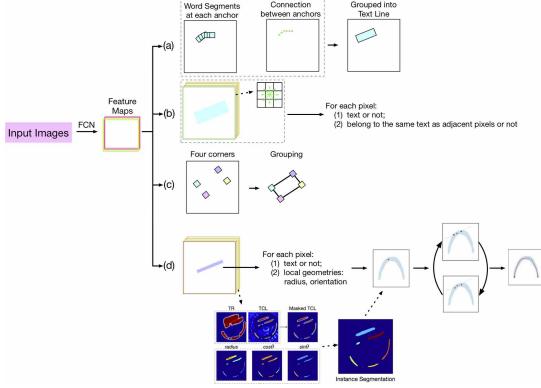


Fig. 6: Illustration of representative bottom-up methods: (a) SegLink [131]: with SSD as base network, predict word segments at each anchor position, and connections between adjacent anchors. (b) PixelLink [22]: for each pixel, predict text/non-text classification and whether it belongs to the same text as adjacent pixels or not. (c) Corner Localization [101]: predict the four corners of each text and group those belonging to the same text instances. (d) TextSnake [97]: predict text/non-text and local geometries, which are used to reconstruct text instance.



Fig. 7: (a)-(c): Representing text as horizontal rectangles, oriented rectangles, and quadrilaterals. (d): The sliding-disk representation proposed in TextSnake [97].

in Liao *et al.* [83], rotating filters [181] are incorporated to model orientation-invariance explicitly. The peripheral weights of 3×3 filters rotate around the center weight, to capture features that are sensitive to rotation.

While the aforementioned methods may entail additional post-processing, Wang *et al.* [151] propose to use a parametrized *Instance Transformation Network* (ITN) that learns to predict appropriate affine transformation to perform on the last feature layer extracted by the base network, to rectify oriented text instances. Their method, with ITN, can be trained end-to-end.

3.1.3.3 Text of Irregular Shapes: Apart from varying aspect ratios, another distinction is that text can have a diversity of shapes, e.g. curved text. Curved text poses a new challenge, since the regular rectangular bounding box would incorporate a large proportion of background and even other text instances, making it difficult for recognition.

Extending from quadrilateral bounding box, it's natural to use bounding 'boxes' with more than 4 vertexes. Bounding polygons [94] with as many as 14 vertexes are proposed, followed by a Bi-LSTM [53] layer to refine the coordinates of the predicted vertexes. In their framework, however, axis-aligned rectangles are extracted as intermediate results in the first step, and the location bounding polygons are predicted upon them.

Similarly, Lyu *et al.* [100] modify the Mask R-CNN [46] framework, so that for each region of interest—in the form of axis-aligned rectangles—character masks are predicted solely for each type of alphabets. These predicted characters are then aligned together to form a polygon as the detection

results. Notably, they propose their method as an end-to-end system. We would refer to it again in the following part.

Viewing the problem from a different perspective, Long *et al.* [97] argue that text can be represented as a series of sliding round disks along the text center line (TCL), which is in accord with the running direction of the text instance, as shown in Fig.7. With the novel representation, they present a new model, *TextSnake*, as shown in Fig.6 (d), that learns to predict local attributes, including TCL/non-TCL, text-region/non-text-region, radius, and orientation. The intersection of TCL pixels and text region pixels gives the final prediction of pixel-level TCL. Local geometries are then used to extract the TCL in the form of ordered point list, as demonstrated in Fig.6 (d). With TCL and radius, the text line is reconstructed. It achieves state-of-the-art performance on several curved text dataset as well as more widely used ones, e.g. ICDAR2015 [68] and MSRA-TD500 [145]. Notably, Long *et al.* propose a cross-validation test across different datasets, where models are only fine-tuned on datasets with straight text instances, and tested on the curved datasets. In all existing curved datasets, TextSnake achieves improvements by up to 20% over other baselines in F1-Score.

A simple substitute for bounding box regression is polygon regression. Wang *et al.* [155] propose to use an RNN attached to the features encoded by RPN-based two-staged object decoders, to predict the bounding polygon with variable length. The method requires no post processing or complex intermediate steps, and achieves a much faster speed of 10.0 FPS on Total-Text.

Similar to SegLink, Baek *et al.* [6] propose to learn the character centers and links between them. Both components and links are predicted in the form of heat map. However, this method requires iterative weak supervision as real-world datasets are rarely equipped with character-level labels. It's likely that such iterative methods are Knowledge Distillation [30], [52] (KD) themselves, and therefore it's unsure whether the improvement comes from the method itself or the iterative KD process.

Despite the improvements achieved by these methods, few methods except TextSnake have considered the problem of generalization ability. As curved text mainly appear on street billboards, curved text dataset in other domain may be less available. Therefore, the generalization ability will be important under this circumstance.

3.1.3.4 Speedup: Current text detection methods place more emphasis on speed and efficiency, which is necessary for application in mobile devices.

The first work to gain significant speedup is EAST [180], which makes several modifications to previous framework. Instead of VGG [139], EAST uses PVANet [71] as its base-network, which strikes a good balance between efficiency and accuracy in the ImageNet competition. Besides, it simplifies the whole pipeline into a prediction network and a non-maximum suppression step. The prediction network is a U-shaped [124] fully convolutional network that maps an input image $I \in R^{H,W,C}$ to a feature map $F \in R^{H/4,W/4,K}$, where each position $f = F_{i,j,:} \in R^{1,1,K}$ is the feature vector that describes the predicted text instance. That is, the location of the vertexes or edges, the orientation, and the offsets of the center, for the text instance corresponding to that feature position (i, j) . Feature vectors that correspond

to the same text instance are merged with the non-maximum suppression. It achieves state-of-the-art speed with FPS of 16.8 as well as leading performance on most datasets.

3.1.3.5 Instance Segmentation: Recent years have witnessed methods with dense predictions, i.e. pixel level predictions [22], [45], [114], [159]. These methods generate a prediction map classifying each pixel as text or non-text. However, as text may come near each other, pixels of different text instances may be adjacent in the prediction map. Therefore, separating pixels become important.

Pixel-level text center line is proposed [45], since the center lines are far from each other. These text lines can be easily separated as they are not adjacent. To produce prediction for text instance, a binary map of text center line of a text instance is attached to the original input image and fed into a classification network. A saliency mask is generated to indicate detected text. However, this method consists of non-differentiable steps. The text-line generation step and the final prediction step can not be trained end-to-end, and error propagates.

Another way to separate different text instances is to use the concept of border learning [114], [159], [161], where each pixel is classified into one of the three classes: text, non-text, and text border. The text border then separates text pixels that belong to different instances. Similarly, in the work of Xue *et al.* [161], text are considered to be enclosed by 4 segments, i.e. a pair of long-side borders (*abdomen* and *back*) and a pair of short-side borders (*head* and *tail*). The method of Xue *et al.* is also the first to use DenseNet [56] as their basenet, which provides a consistant 2 – 4% performance boost in F1-score over that with ResNet [47] on all datasets that it's evaluated on.

Following SegLink, PixelLink [22] learns to link pixels belonging to the same text instance. Text pixels are separated into groups for different instances efficiently via disjoint set algorithm. Likewise, Liu *et al.* [96] propose to predict the composition of adjacent pixels with Markov Clustering [147], instead of neural networks. The Markov Clustering algorithm is applied to the saliency map of the input image generated by neural networks and indicates whether each pixel belongs to any text instances or not. Then, the clustering results give the segmented text instances.

Tian *et al.* [143] propose to add a loss term that maximizes the Euclidean distances between pixel embedding vectors that belong to different text instances, and minimizes those belonging to the same instance, to better separate adjacent texts.

Segmentation based methods have proven successful. However, the lack of end-to-end training may limit their performance. It remains a challenge how to implement end-to-end optimization to these methods.

3.1.3.6 Retrieving Designated Text: Different from the classical setting of scene text detection, sometimes we want to retrieve a certain text instance given the description. Rong *et al.* [123] present a multi-encoder framework to retrieve text as designated. Specifically, text is retrieved as required by a natural language query. The multi-encoder framework includes a Dense Text Localization Network (DTLN) and a Context Reasoning Text Retrieval (CRTR). DTLN uses an LSTM to decode the features in a FCN network into a sequence of text instance. CRTR encodes

the query and the features of scene text image to rank the candidate text regions generated by DTLN. As much as we are concerned, this is the first work that retrieves text according to a query.

3.1.3.7 Against Complex Background: Attention mechanism is introduced to silence the complex background [48]. The stem network is similar to that of the standard SSD framework predicting word boxes, except that it applies inception blocks on its cascading feature maps, obtaining what's called Aggregated Inception Feature (AIF). An additional text attention module is added, which is again based on inception blocks. The attention is applied on all AIF, suppressing the influence of background noises.

3.2 Recognition

In this section, we introduce methods that tackle *text recognition*. Input of these methods are cropped text instance images which contain one word or one text line.

In traditional text recognition methods [10], [137], the task is divided into 3 steps, i.e. image pre-processing, character segmentation and character recognition. Character segmentation is considered the most challenging part due to the complex background and irregular arrangement of scene text, and largely constrained the performance of the whole recognition system. Two major techniques are adopted to avoid segmentation of characters, namely Connectionist Temporal Classification [39] and Attention mechanism. We introduce recognition methods in the literature based on the main technique they employ. Mainstream frameworks are illustrated in Fig.8.

3.2.1 CTC-based Methods

CTC computes the conditional probability $P(L|Y)$, where $Y = y_1, \dots, y_T$ represent the per-frame prediction of RNN and L is the label sequence, so that the network can be trained using only sequence level label as supervision. The first application of CTC in the OCR domain can be traced to the handwriting recognition system of Graves *et al.* [40]. Now this technique is widely adopted in scene text recognition [140], [88], [132]¹³, [31], [169].

Shi *et al.* [132] propose a model that stacks CNN with RNN to recognize scene text images. As illustrated in Fig.8 (a), CRNN consists of three parts: (1) convolutional layers, which extract a feature sequence from the input image; (2) recurrent layers, which predict a label distribution for each frame; (3) transcription layer (CTC layer), which translates the per-frame predictions into the final label sequence.

Instead of RNN, Gao *et al.* [31] adopt the stacked convolutional layers to effectively capture the contextual dependencies of the input sequence, which is characterized by lower computational complexity and easier parallel computation. Overall difference with other frameworks are illustrated in Fig.8 (b).

Yin *et al.* [169] simultaneously detect and recognize characters by sliding the text line image with character models, which are learned end-to-end on text line images labeled with text transcripts.

13. Code: <https://github.com/bgshih/crnn>

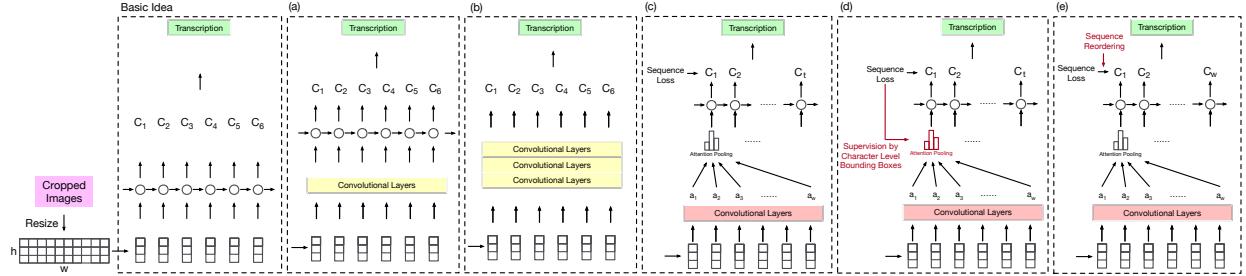


Fig. 8: Frameworks of text recognition models. The basic methodology is to first resize the cropped image to a fixed height, then extract features and feed them to an RNN that produce a character prediction for each column. As the number of columns of the features is not necessarily equal to the length of the word, the CTC technique [39] is proposed as a post-processing stage. (a) RNN stacked with CNN [132]; (b) Sequence prediction with FCN [31]; (c) Attention-based models [16], [32], [73], [95], [133], [162], allowing decoding text of varying lengths; (d) Cheng *et al.* [15] proposed to apply supervision to the attention module; (e) To improve the misalignment problem in previous methods with fixed-length decoding with attention, Edit Probability [8] is proposed to reorder the predicted sequential distribution.

3.2.2 Attention-based methods

The attention mechanism was first presented in [7] to improve the performance of neural machine translation systems, and flourished in many machine learning application domains including scene text recognition.

Lee *et al.* [73] present a recursive recurrent neural networks with attention modeling for lexicon-free scene text recognition. The model first passes input images through recursive convolutional layers to extract encoded image features, and then decodes them to output characters by recurrent neural networks with implicitly learned character-level language statistics. Attention-based mechanism performs soft feature selection for better image feature usage.

Cheng *et al.* [15] observe the attention drift problem in existing attention-based methods and proposes to impose localization supervision for attention score to attenuate it, as shown in Fig.8 (d).

In [8], Bai *et al.* propose an edit probability (EP) metric to handle the misalignment between the ground truth string and the attention's output sequence of probability distribution, as shown in Fig.8 (e). Unlike aforementioned attention-based methods, which usually employ a frame-wise maximal likelihood loss, EP tries to estimate the probability of generating a string from the output sequence of probability distribution conditioned on the input image, while considering the possible occurrences of missing or superfluous characters.

In [95], Liu *et al.* propose an efficient attention-based encoder-decoder model, in which the encoder part is trained under binary constraints to reduce computation

Among those attention-based methods, some work made efforts to accurately recognize irregular (perspectively distorted or curved) text. Shi *et al.* [133], [134] propose a text recognition system which combined a Spatial Transformer Network (STN) [61] and an attention-based Sequence Recognition Network. The STN predict a Thin-Plate-Spline transformations which rectify the input irregular text image into a more canonical form.

Yang *et al.* [162] introduce an auxiliary dense character detection task to encourage the learning of visual representations that are favorable to the text patterns. And they adopt an alignment loss to regularize the estimated attention at each time-step. Further, they use a coordinate map as a second input to enforce spatial-awareness.

In [16], Cheng *et al.* argue that encoding a text image as a 1-D sequence of features as implemented in most methods is not sufficient. They encode an input image to four feature sequences of four directions: horizontal, reversed horizontal, vertical and reversed vertical. A weighting mechanism is applied to combine the four feature sequences.

Liu *et al.* [87] present a hierarchical attention mechanism (HAM) which consists of a recurrent ROI-Warp layer and a character-level attention layer. They adopt a local transformation to model the distortion of individual characters, resulting in an improved efficiency, and can handle different types of distortion that are hard to be modeled by a single global transformation.

3.2.3 Other Efforts

Jaderberg *et al.* [58], [59] perform word recognition by classifying the image into a pre-defined set of vocabulary, under the framework of image classification. The model is trained by synthetic images, and achieve state-of-the-art performance on some benchmarks containing English words only. But application of this method is quite limited as it cannot be applied to recognize long sequences such as phone numbers.

Liao *et al.* [82] cast the task of recognition into semantic segmentation, and treat each character type as one class. The method is insensitive to shapes and is thus effective on irregular text, but the lack of end-to-end training and sequence learning makes it prone to single-character errors, especially when the image quality is low. They are also the first to evaluate the robustness of their recognition method by padding and transforming test images. Also note that, 2-dimensional attention [160] can also be a solution to such curved text, which has been verified in [77]

Despite the progress we have seen so far, the evaluation of recognition methods falls behind the time. As most detection methods can detect oriented and irregular text and some even rectify them, the recognition of such text may seem redundant. On the other hand, the robustness of recognition when cropped with slightly different bounding box is seldom verified. Such robustness may be more important in real-world scenarios.

3.3 End-to-End System

In the past, text detection and recognition are usually cast as two independent sub-problems that are combined together to perform text reading from images. Recently, many end-to-end text detection and recognition systems (also known as text spotting systems) have been proposed, profiting a lot from the idea of designing differentiable computation graphs. Efforts to build such systems have gained considerable momentum as a new trend.

While earlier work [152], [154] first detect single characters in the input image, recent systems usually detect and recognize text in word level or line level. Some of these systems first generate text proposals using a text detection model and then recognize them with another text recognition model [41], [60], [80]. Jaderberg *et al.* [60] use a combination of Edge Box proposals [185] and a trained aggregate channel features detector [24] to generate candidate word bounding boxes. Proposal boxes are filtered and rectified before being sent into their recognition model proposed in [59]. In [80], Liao *et al.* combine an SSD [86] based text detector and CRNN [132] to spot text in images. Lyu *et al.* [100] propose a modification of Mask R-CNN that is adapted to produce shape-free recognition of scene text, as shown in Fig.9 (c). For each region of interest, character maps are produced, indicating the existence and location of a single character. A post-processing that links these character together gives the final results.

One major drawback of the two-step methods is that the propagation of error between the detection and recognition models will lead to less satisfactory performance. Recently, more end-to-end trainable networks are proposed to tackle the this problem [9]¹⁴, [13]¹⁵, [49], [76], [92].

Bartz *et al.* [9] present an solution which utilizes a STN [61] to circularly attend to each word in the input image, and then recognize them separately. The united network is trained in a weakly-supervised manner that no word bounding box labels are used. Li *et al.* [76] substitute the object classification module in Faster-RCNN [119] with an encoder-decoder based text recognition model and make up their text spotting system. Lui *et al.* [92], Busta *et al.* [13] and He *et al.* [49] develope a unified text detection and recognition systems with a very similar overall architecture which consist of a detection branch and a recognition branch. Liu *et al.* [92] and Busta *et al.* [13] adopt EAST [180] and YOLOv2 [118] as their detection branch respectively, and have a similar text recognition branch in which text proposals are mapped into fixed height tensor by bilinear sampling and then transcribe in to strings by a CTC-based recognition module. He *et al.* [49] also adopt EAST [180] to generate text proposals, and they introduced character spatial information as explicit supervision in the attention-based recognition branch.

3.4 Auxiliary Techniques

Recent advances are not limited to detection and recognition models that aim to solve the tasks directly. We should also give credit to auxiliary techniques that have played

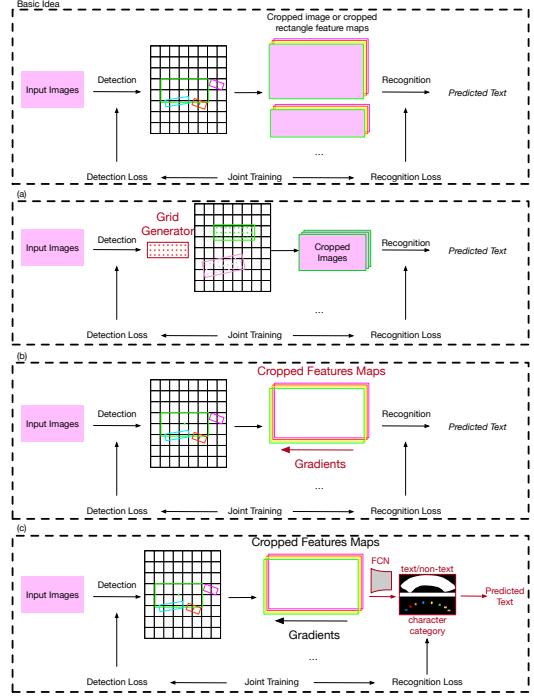


Fig. 9: Illustration of mainstream end-to-end framework. The basic idea is to concatenate the two branch. (a): In SEE [9], the detection results are represented as grid matrices. Image regions are cropped and transformed before being fed into the recognition branch. (b): In contrast to (a), some methods crop from the feature maps and feed them to the recognition branch [13], [49], [76], [92]. (c): While (a) and (b) utilize CTC-based and attention-based recognition branch, it's also possible to retrieve each character as generic objects and compose the text [100].

an important role. In this part, we briefly introduce these promising aspects: synthetic data, bootstrapping, text de-blurring, and context information incorporation.

3.4.1 Synthetic Data

Most deep learning models are data-thirsty. Their performance is guaranteed only when enough data are available. Therefore, artificial data generation has been a popular research topic, e.g. Generative Adversarial Nets (GAN) [37]. In the field of text detection and recognition, this problem is more urgent since most human-labeled datasets are small, usually containing around merely 1K – 2K data instances. Fortunately, there have been work [41], [59], [81], [174] that generate data of relatively high quality, and have been widely used for pre-training models for better performance.

Jaderberg et at. [59] propose to generate synthetic data for text recognition. Their method blends text with randomly cropped natural images from human-labeled datasets after rendering of font, border/shadow, color, and distortion. The results show that training merely on these synthetic data can achieve state-of-the-art performance and that synthetic data can act as augmentative data sources for all datasets.

SynthText [41]¹⁶ first propose to embed text in natural scene images for training of text detection, while most

14. Code: <https://github.com/Bartz/see>

15. Code: <https://github.com/MichalBusta/DeepTextSpotter>

16. Code: <https://github.com/ankush-me/SynthText>

previous work only print text on a cropped region and these synthetic data are only for text recognition. Printing text on the whole natural images poses new challenges, as it needs to maintain semantic coherence. To produce more realistic data, SynthText makes use of depth prediction [84] and semantic segmentation [5]. Semantic segmentation groups pixels together as semantic clusters, and each text instance is printed on one semantic surface, not overlapping multiple ones. Dense depth map is further used to determine the orientation and distortion of the text instance. Model trained only on SynthText achieves state-of-the-art on many text detection datasets. It's later used in other works [131], [180] as well for initial pre-training.

Further, Zhan *et al.* [174] equip text synthesis with other deep learning techniques to produce more realistic samples. They introduce selective semantic segmentation so that word instances would only appear on sensible objects, e.g. a desk or wall in stead of someone's face. Text rendering in their work is adapted to the image so that they fit into the artistic styles and do not stand out awkwardly.

Liao *et al.* [81] propose to use the famous open-source game engine, Unreal Engine 4 (UE4), and UnrealCV [115] to synthesize images. Text are rendered with the scene together, and thus can achieve different lighting conditions, weather, and natural occlusions.

While the training of recognizers has largely shifted to synthetic data, it remains a challenge how to synthesize images that help in training strong detectors.

3.4.2 Bootstrapping

Bootstrapping, or Weakly and semi supervision, is also an important track [55], [78], [141]. It's mainly used in word [78] or character [55], [141] level annotations.

Bootstrapping for word-box Rong *et al.* [78] propose to combine an FCN-based text detection network with Maximally Stable Extremal Region (MSER) features to generate new training instances annotated on box-level. First, they train an FCN, which predicts the probability of each pixel belonging to text. Then, MSER features are extracted from regions where the text confidence is high. Using single linkage criterion (SLC) based algorithms [35], [138], final prediction is made.

Bootstrapping for character-box Character level annotations are more accurate and better. However, most existing datasets do not provide character-level annotating. Since character is smaller and close to each other, character-level annotation is more costly and inconvenient. There have been some work on semi-supervised character detection [55], [141]. The basic idea is to initialize a character-detector, and applies rules or threshold to pick the most reliable predicted candidates. These reliable candidates are then used as additional supervision source to refine the character-detector. Both of them aim to augment existing datasets with character level annotations. They only differ in details.

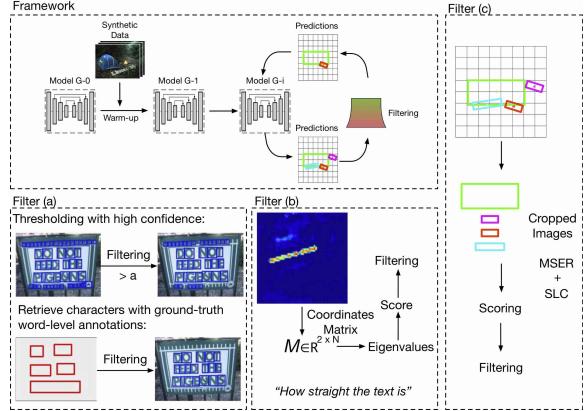


Fig. 10: Overview of semi-supervised and weakly-supervised methods. Existing methods differ in the way with regard to how filtering is done. (a): WeText [141], mainly by thresholding the confidence level and filtering by word-level annotation. (b) and (c): Scoring-based methods, including WordSup [55] which assumes that text are straight lines, and uses a eigenvalue-based metric to measure its *straightness*; Rong *et al.* [78] evaluate each predicted text region with MSER features combined with SLC algorithm.

WordSup [55] first initializes the character detector by training $5K$ warm-up iterations on synthetic dataset, as shown in Fig.10 (b). For each image, WordSup generates character candidates, which are then filtered with word-boxes. For characters in each word box, the following score is computed to select the most possible character list:

$$s = w \cdot \frac{\text{area}(B_{\text{chars}})}{\text{area}(B_{\text{word}})} + (1 - w) \cdot (1 - \frac{\lambda_2}{\lambda_1}) \quad (1)$$

where B_{chars} is the union of the selected character boxes; B_{word} is the enclosing word bounding box; λ_1 and λ_2 are the first and second largest eigenvalues of a covariance matrix C , computed by the coordinates of the centers of the selected character boxes; w is a weight scalar. Intuitively, the first term measures how complete the selected characters can cover the word boxes, while the second term measures whether the selected characters are located on a straight line, which is a main characteristic for word instances in most datasets.

WeText [141] start with a small datasets annotated on character level. It follows two paradigms of bootstrapping: semi-supervised learning and weakly-supervised learning. In the semi-supervised setting, detected character candidates are filtered with a high thresholding value. In the weakly-supervised setting, ground-truth word boxes are used to mask out false positives outside. New instances detected in either way are added to the initial small datasets and re-train the model.

3.4.3 Text Deblurring

By nature, text detection and recognition are more sensitive to blurring than general object detection. Some methods [54]¹⁷, [70] have been proposed for text deblurring.

Hradis *et al.* [54] propose an FCN-based deblurring method. The core FCN maps the blurred input image and

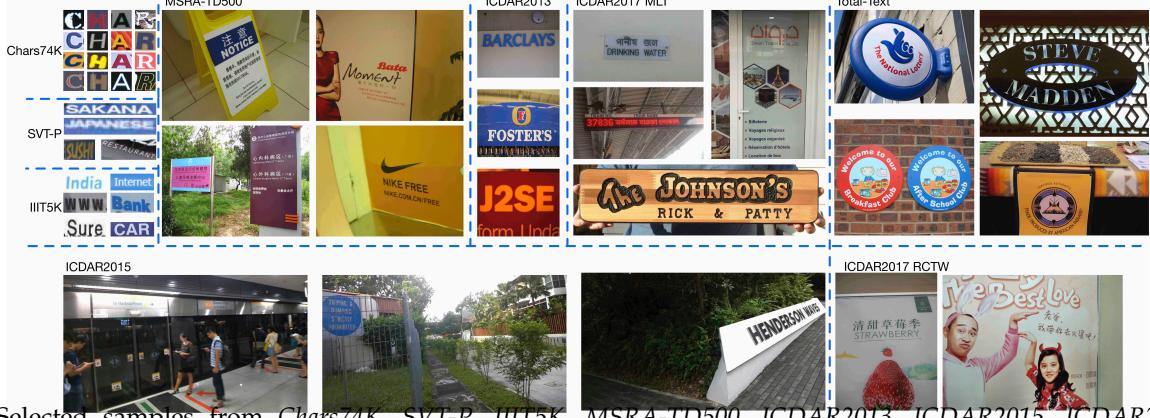


Fig. 11: Selected samples from *Chars74K*, *SVT-P*, *IIT5K*, *MSRA-TD500*, *ICDAR2013*, *ICDAR2015*, *ICDAR2017 MLT*, *ICDAR2017 RCTW*, and *Total-Text*.

generates a deblurred image. They collect a dataset of well-taken images of documents, and process them with kernels designed to mimic hand-shake and de-focus.

Khare *et al.* [70] propose a quite different framework. Given a blurred image, g , it aims to alternatively optimize the original image f and kernel k by minimizing the following energy value:

$$\begin{aligned} E = & \int (k(x, y) * f(x, y) - g(x, y))^2 dx dy \\ & + \lambda \int wR(k(x, y)) dx dy \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

where λ is the regularization weight, with operator R as the Gaussian weighted (w) $L1$ norm. The optimization is done by alternatively optimizing over the kernel k and the original image f .

3.4.4 Context Information

Another way to make more accurate predictions is to take into account the context information. Intuitively, we know that text only appear on a certain surfaces, e.g. billboards, books, and etc.. Text are less likely to appear on the face of a human or an animal. Following this idea, Zhu *et al.* [182] propose to incorporate the semantic segmentation result as part of the input. The additional feature filters out false positives where the patterns look like text.

4 BENCHMARK DATASETS AND EVALUATION PROTOCOLS

As cutting edge algorithms achieved better performance on existing datasets, researchers are able to tackle more challenging aspects of the problems. New datasets aimed at different real-world challenges have been and are being crafted, benefiting the development of detection and recognition methods further.

In this section, we list and briefly introduce the existing datasets and the corresponding evaluation protocols. We also identify current state-of-the-art approaches on the widely used datasets when applicable.

4.1 Benchmark Datasets

We collect existing datasets and summarize their statistics in Tab.1. Then we discuss their characteristics in the following parts. We also select some representative image samples from some of the datasets, which are demonstrated in Fig.11. Links to these datasets are also collected in our Github repository mentioned in *abstract*, for readers' convenience.

4.1.1 Datasets with both detection and recognition tasks

The ICDAR datasets: The ICDAR Robust Reading Competition [68], [69], [98], [99], [129], [135] was started in 2003, held every two years with different topics. They brought about a series of scene text datasets that have shaped the research community. Among the horizontal text sections, ICDAR 2013 was modified from and replaced ICDAR 2003/2005/2011 as evaluation in later works. ICDAR 2013 is characterized by large and horizontal text. State-of-the-art results of ICDAR 2013 are shown in Tab.2 for detection and Tab.8 for recognition.

The ICDAR 2015 incidental text channel introduced a new challenge. The images are taken by Google Glasses without taking care of the image quality. A large proportion of text in the images are very small, blurred, occluded, and multi-oriented. State-of-the-art results are shown in Tab.3 for detection and Tab.8 for recognition.

The ICDAR 2017 Competition on Reading Chinese Text in the Wild proposed a Chinese text dataset. It is comprised of 12,263 images, making it the largest dataset at that time and the first large Chinese dataset.

The Chinese Text in the Wild (CTW) dataset [173] contains 32,285 high resolution street view images, annotated at the character level, including its underlying character type, bouding box, and detailed attributes such as whether it uses *wordart*. The dataset is the largest one to date, and the only one that contains detailed annotations. However, it only provides annotations for Chinese text and ignores other scripts, e.g. English.

Total-Text has a large proportion of curved text, while previous datasets contain only few. These images are mainly taken from street billboards, and annotated as polygons with variable number of vertices. State-of-the-art results for Total-Text are shown in Tab.4 for detection and recognition.

TABLE 1: Existing datasets: * indicates datasets that are the most widely used across recent publications. Newly published ones representing real-world challenges are marked in **bold**. EN stands for English and CN stands for Chinese.

Dataset (Year)	Image Num (train/test)	Text Num (train/test)	Orientation	Language	Characteristics	Detection Task	Recognition Task
ICDAR03(2003)	258/251	1110/1156	Horizontal	EN	-	✓	✓
*ICDAR13 Scene Text(2013)	229/233	848/1095	Horizontal	EN	Character stroke annotations	✓	✓
*ICDAR15 Incidental Text(2015)	1000/500	-/-	Multi-Oriented	EN	<i>Blur Small</i>	✓	✓
ICDAR RCTW(2017)	8034/4229	-/-	Multi-Oriented	CN	-	✓	✓
Total-Text (2017)	1255/300	-/-	<i>Curved</i>	EN, CN	Polygon label	✓	✓
SVT(2010)	100/250	257/647	Horizontal	EN	-	✓	✓
*CUTE(2014)	-/80	-/-	<i>Curved</i>	EN	-	✓	✓
CTW (2017)	25K/6K	812K/205K	Multi-Oriented	CN	<i>Fine-grained annotation</i>	✓	✓
CASIA-10K (2018)	7K/3K	-/-	Multi-Oriented	CN	-	✓	✓
*MSRA-TD500 (2012)	300/200	1068/651	Multi-Oriented	EN, CN	<i>Long text</i>	✓	-
HUST-TR400 (2014)	400/-	-/-	Multi-Oriented	EN, CN	<i>Long text</i>	✓	-
ICDAR17MLT(2017)	9000/9000	-/-	Multi-Oriented	9 langanges	-	✓	-
CTW1500 (2017)	1000/500	-/-	<i>Curved</i>	EN	-	✓	-
*IIIT 5K-Word(2012)	2000/3000	2000/3000	Horizontal	-	-	-	✓
SVTP(2013)	-/639	-/639	Multi-Oriented	EN	<i>Perspective text</i>	-	✓
SVHN(2010)	73257/26032	73257/26032	Horizontal	-	House number digits	-	✓

TABLE 2: Detection on ICDAR2013 based on DetEval. *

means multi-scale.

Method	Precision	Recall	F-1	FPS
Zhang <i>et al.</i> [178]	88	78	83	-
SynthText [41]	92.0	75.5	83.0	-
Holistic [164]	88.88	80.22	84.33	-
PixelLink [22]	86.4	83.6	84.5	-
CTPN [142]	93	83	88	7.1
He <i>et al.</i> * [45]	93	79	85	-
SegLink [131]	87.7	83.0	85.3	20.6
He <i>et al.</i> * [50]	92	80	86	1.1
TextBox++ [80]	89	83	86	1.37
EAST [180]	92.64	82.67	87.37	-
SSTD [48]	89	86	88	7.69
Lyu <i>et al.</i> [101]	93.3	79.4	85.8	10.4
Liu <i>et al.</i> [96]	88.2	87.2	87.7	-
He <i>et al.</i> * [49]	88	87	88	-
Xue <i>et al.</i> [161]	91.5	87.1	89.2	-
WordSup * [55]	93.34	87.53	90.34	-
Lyu <i>et al.</i> * [100]	94.1	88.1	91.0	4.6
FEN [177]	93.7	90.0	92.3	1.11
Baek <i>et al.</i> [6]	97.4	93.1	95.2	-

The Street View Text (SVT) dataset [152], [153] is a collection of street view images, and is now mainly used in evaluating recognition algorithm.

CUTE [120] focuses on curved text. It only contains 80 images and is currently only used in recognition.

4.1.2 Datasets with only detection task

MSRA-TD500 [145] represents long and multi-oriented text that have much larger aspect ratios than other datasets. Later, HUST-TR400 [163] are collected in the same way as MSRA-TD500 to serve as additional training data.

ICDAR2017-MLT [107] contains 18K images with scripts of 9 languages, 2K for each. It features the largest number of languages up till now. However, researchers pay little attention to multi-language detection and recognition.

CASIA-10K is a newly published Chinese scene text dataset. As Chinese characters are not segmented by spaces, line-level annotations are provided.

TABLE 3: Detection on ICDAR2015. * means multi-scale.

Method	Precision	Recall	F-1	FPS
Zhang <i>et al.</i> [178]	71	43.0	54	-
CTPN [142]	74	52	61	7.1
Holistic [164]	72.26	58.69	64.77	-
He <i>et al.</i> * [45]	76	54	63	-
SegLink [131]	73.1	76.8	75.0	-
SSTD [48]	80	73	77	-
EAST [180]	83.57	73.47	78.20	13.2
He <i>et al.</i> * [50]	82	80	81	-
R2CNN [64]	85.62	79.68	82.54	0.44
Liu <i>et al.</i> [96]	72	80	76	-
WordSup * [55]	79.33	77.03	78.16	-
Wang <i>et al.</i> [151]	85.7	74.1	79.5	-
Lyu <i>et al.</i> [101]	94.1	70.7	80.7	3.6
TextSnake [97]	84.9	80.4	82.6	1.1
He <i>et al.</i> * [49]	84	83	83	-
Lyu <i>et al.</i> * [100]	85.8	81.2	83.4	4.8
PixelLink [22]	85.5	82.0	83.7	3.0
Baek <i>et al.</i> [6]	89.8	84.3	86.9	8.6
Zhang <i>et al.</i> * [175]	87.8	87.6	87.7	-
Wang <i>et al.</i> * [155]	89.2	86.0	87.6	-
Tian <i>et al.</i> * [143]	85.1	84.5	84.8	-

TABLE 4: Detection on Total-Text.

Method	Detection			Word Spotting	
	P	R	F	None	Full
Lyu <i>et al.</i> * [100]	69.0	55.0	61.3	52.9	71.8
TextSnake [97]	82.7	74.5	78.4	-	-
Baek <i>et al.</i> [6]	87.6	79.9	83.6	-	-
Zhang <i>et al.</i> [175]	87.6	79.3	83.3	-	-
Wang <i>et al.</i> [155]	80.9	76.2	78.5	-	-

TABLE 5: Detection on CTW1500.

Method	Precision	Recall	F-1	FPS
CTD+TLOC [94]	77.4	69.8	73.4	-
TextSnake [97]	67.9	85.3	75.6	-
Baek <i>et al.</i> [6]	86.0	81.1	83.5	8.6
Zhang <i>et al.</i> [175]	85.7	76.5	80.8	-
Wang <i>et al.</i> [155]	80.1	80.2	80.1	-
Tian <i>et al.</i> [143]	82.7	77.8	80.1	-

TABLE 6: Detection on MSRA-TD500.

Method	Precision	Recall	F-1	FPS
Kang <i>et al.</i> [66]	71	62	66	-
Zhang <i>et al.</i> [178]	83	67	74	-
Holistic [164]	76.51	75.31	75.91	-
He <i>et al.</i> [50]	77	70	74	-
EAST [180]	87.28	67.43	76.08	13.2
Wu <i>et al.</i> [159]	77	78	77	-
SegLink [131]	86	70	77	8.9
PixelLink [22]	83.0	73.2	77.8	
TextSnake [97]	83.2	73.9	78.3	1.1
Xue <i>et al.</i> [161]	83.0	77.4	80.1	-
Wang <i>et al.</i> [151]	90.3	72.3	80.3	-
Lyu <i>et al.</i> [101]	87.6	76.2	81.5	5.7
Liu <i>et al.</i> [96]	88	79	83	-
Baek <i>et al.</i> [6]	88.2	78.2	82.9	-
Wang <i>et al.</i> [155]	85.2	82.1	83.6	-
Tian <i>et al.</i> [143]	84.2	81.7	82.9	-

SCUT-CTW1500 (CTW1500) is another dataset which features curved text. Annotations in CTW1500 are polygons with 14 evenly placed vertices. Performances on CTW1500 are shown in Tab.5 for detection.

4.1.3 Datasets with only recognition task

IIIT 5K-Word [106] is the largest recognition dataset, containing both digital and natural scene images. Its variance in font, color, size and other noises makes it the most challenging one to date.

SVT-Perspective (SVTP) is proposed in [116] for evaluating the performance of recognizing perspective text. Images in SVTP are picked from the side-view images in Google Street View. Many of them are heavily distorted by the non-frontal view angle.

The Street View House Numbers (SVHN) dataset [108] contains cropped images of house numbers in natural scenes. The images are collected from Google View images. This dataset is usually used in digit recognition.

4.2 Evaluation Protocols

In this part, we briefly summarize the evaluation protocols for text detection and recognition.

As metrics for performance comparison of different algorithms, we usually refer to their precision, recall and F1-score. To compute these performance indicators, the list of predicted text instances should be matched to the ground truth labels in the first place. Precision, denoted as P , is calculated as the proportion of predicted text instances that can be matched to ground truth labels. Recall, denoted as R , is the proportion of ground truth labels that have correspondents in the predicted list. F1-score is then computed by $F_1 = \frac{2*P*R}{P+R}$, taking both precision and recall into account. Note that the matching between the predicted instances and ground truth ones comes first.

4.2.1 Text Detection

There are mainly two different protocols for text detection, the IOU based PASCAL Eval and overlap based DetEval. They differ in the criterion of matching predicted text instances and ground truth ones. In the following part, we use these notations: S_{GT} is the area of the ground truth bounding box, S_P is the area of the predicted bounding box, S_I is the area of the intersection of the predicted and ground truth bounding box, S_U is the area of the union.

TABLE 7: Characteristics of the three vocabulary lists used in ICDAR 2013/2015. S stands for *Strongly Contextualised*, W for *Weakly Contextualised*, and G for *Generic*

Vocab List	Description
S	a per-image list of 100 words all words in the image + selected distractors
W	all words in the entire test set
G	a 90k-word generic vocabulary

- **DetEval:** DetEval imposes constraints on both precision, i.e. $\frac{S_I}{S_P}$ and recall, i.e. $\frac{S_I}{S_{GT}}$. Only when both are larger than their respective thresholds, are they matched together.
- **PASCAL** [27]: The basic idea is that, if the intersection-over-union value, i.e. $\frac{S_I}{S_U}$, is larger than a designated threshold, the predicted and ground truth box are matched together.

Most datasets follow either of the two evaluation protocols, but with small modifications. We only discuss those that are different from the two protocols mentioned above.

4.2.1.1 ICDAR2003/2005: The match score m is calculated in a way similar to IOU. It is defined as the ratio of the area of intersection over that of the minimum bounding rectangular bounding box containing both.

4.2.1.2 ICDAR2011/2013: One major drawback of the evaluation protocol of ICDAR2003/2005 is that it only considers one-to-one match. It does not consider one-to-many, many-to-many, and many-to-one matchings, which underestimates the actual performance. Therefore, ICDAR2011/2013 follows the method proposed by Wolf *et al.* [157], where one-to-one matching is assigned a score of 1 and the other two types are punished to a constant score less than 1, usually set as 0.8.

4.2.1.3 MSRA-TD500: Yao *et al.* [145] propose a new evaluation protocol for rotated bounding box, where both the predicted and ground truth bounding box are revolved horizontal around its center. They are matched only when the standard IOU score is higher than the threshold and the rotation of the original bounding box is less than a pre-defined value (in practice $\frac{\pi}{4}$).

4.2.2 Text Recognition and End-to-End System

Text recognition is another task where a cropped image is given which contains exactly one text instance, and we need to extract the text content from the image in a form that a computer program can understand directly, e.g. *string* type in C++ or *str* type in Python. There is no need for matching in this task. The predicted text string is compared to the ground truth directly. The performance evaluation is in either character-level recognition rate (i.e. how many characters are recognized) or word level (whether the predicted word is 100% correct). ICDAR also introduces an edit-distance based performance evaluation. Note that in end-to-end evaluation, matching is first performed in a similar way to that of text detection. State-of-the-art recognition performance on the most widely used datasets are summarized in Tab.8

The evaluation for end-to-end system is a combination of both detection and recognition. Given output to be evaluated, i.e. text location and recognized content, predicted text instances are first matched with ground truth instances, followed by comparison of the text content.

TABLE 8: State-of-the-art recognition performance across a number of datasets. “50”, “1k”, “Full” are lexicons. “0” means no lexicon. “90k” and “ST” are the Synth90k and the SynthText datasets, respectively. “ST⁺” means including character-level annotations. “Private” means private training data.

Methods	ConvNet, Data	IIIT5k			SVT		IC03			IC13	IC15	SVTP	CUTE
		50	1k	0	50	0	50	Full	0	0	0	0	0
Yao <i>et al.</i> [165]	-	80.2	69.3	-	75.9	-	88.5	80.3	-	-	-	-	-
Jaderberg <i>et al.</i> [62]	-	-	-	-	86.1	-	96.2	91.5	-	-	-	-	-
Su <i>et al.</i> [140]	-	-	-	-	83.0	-	92.0	82.0	-	-	-	-	-
Gordo [38]	-	93.3	86.6	-	91.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Jaderberg <i>et al.</i> [60]	VGG, 90k	97.1	92.7	-	95.4	80.7	98.7	98.6	93.1	90.8	-	-	-
Shi <i>et al.</i> [132]	VGG, 90k	97.8	95.0	81.2	97.5	82.7	98.7	98.0	91.9	89.6	-	-	-
Shi <i>et al.</i> [133]	VGG, 90k	96.2	93.8	81.9	95.5	81.9	98.3	96.2	90.1	88.6	-	71.8	59.2
Lee <i>et al.</i> [73]	VGG, 90k	96.8	94.4	78.4	96.3	80.7	97.9	97.0	88.7	90.0	-	-	-
Yang <i>et al.</i> [162]	VGG, Private	97.8	96.1	-	95.2	-	97.7	-	-	-	-	75.8	69.3
Cheng <i>et al.</i> [15]	ResNet, 90k+ST ⁺	99.3	97.5	87.4	97.1	85.9	99.2	97.3	94.2	93.3	70.6	-	-
Shi <i>et al.</i> [134]	ResNet, 90k+ST	99.6	98.8	93.4	99.2	93.6	98.8	98.0	94.5	91.8	76.1	78.5	79.5
Liao <i>et al.</i> [82]	ResNet, ST ⁺ +Private	99.8	98.8	91.9	98.8	86.4	-	-	-	91.5	-	-	79.9
Li <i>et al.</i> [77]	ResNet, 90k+ST+Private	-	-	91.5	-	84.5	-	-	-	91.0	69.2	76.4	83.3

The most widely used datasets for end-to-end systems are ICDAR2013 [69] and ICDAR2015 [68]. The evaluation over these two datasets are carried out under two different settings [2], the *Word Spotting* setting and the *End-to-End* setting. Under *Word Spotting*, the performance evaluation only focuses on the text instances from the scene image that appear in a predesignated vocabulary, while other text instances are ignored. On the contrary, all text instances that appear in the scene image are included under *End-to-End*. Three different vocabulary lists are provided for candidate transcriptions. They include *Strongly Contextualised*, *Weakly Contextualised*, and *Generic*. The three kinds of lists are summarized in Tab.7. Note that under *End-to-End*, these vocabulary can still serve as reference. State-of-the-art performances are summarized in Tab.9.

5 APPLICATION

The detection and recognition of text—the visual and physical carrier of human civilization—allow the connection between vision and the understanding of its content further. Apart from the applications we have mentioned at the beginning of this paper, there have been numerous specific application scenarios across various industries and in our daily lives. In this part, we list and analyze the most outstanding ones that have, or are to have, significant impact, improving our productivity and life quality.

Automatic Data Entry Apart from an electronic archive of existing documents, OCR can also improve our productivity in the form of automatic data entry. Some industries involve time-consuming data type-in, e.g. express orders written by customers in the delivery industry, and hand-written information sheets in the financial and insurance industries. Applying OCR techniques can accelerate the data entry process as well as protect customer privacy. Some companies have already been using these technologies, e.g. SF-Express¹⁸. Another potential application is note taking, such as NEBO¹⁹, a note-taking software on tablets like iPad that performs instant transcription as users write down notes.

18. Official website: <http://www.sf-express.com/cn/sc/>
 19. Official website: <https://www.myscript.com/nebo/>

Identity Authentication Automatic identity authentication is yet another field where OCR can give a full play to. In fields such as Internet finance and Customs, users/passengers are required to provide identification (ID) information, such as identity card and passport. Automatic recognition and analysis of the provided documents would require OCR that reads and extracts the textual content, and can automate and greatly accelerate such processes. There are companies that have already started working on identification based on face and ID card, e.g. MEGVII (Face++)²⁰.

Augmented Computer Vision As text is an essential element for the understanding of scene, OCR can assist computer vision in many ways. In the scenario of autonomous vehicle, text-embedded panels carry important information, e.g. geo-location, current traffic condition, navigation, and etc.. There have been several works on text detection and recognition for autonomous vehicle [103], [104]. The largest dataset so far, CTW [173], also places extra emphasis on traffic signs. Another example is instant translation, where OCR is combined with a translation model. This is extremely helpful and time-saving as people travel or read documents written in foreign languages. Google’s Translate application²¹ can perform such instant translation. A similar application is instant text-to-speech softwares equipped with OCR, which can help those with visual disability and those who are illiterate [3].

Intelligent Content Analysis OCR also allows the industry to perform more intelligent analysis, mainly for platforms like video-sharing websites and e-commerce. Text can be extracted from images and subtitles as well as real-time commentary subtitles (a kind of floating comments added by users, e.g. those in Bilibili²² and Niconico²³). On the one hand, such extracted text can be used in automatic content tagging and recommendation system. They can also be used to perform user sentiment analysis, e.g. which part of the

20. <https://www.faceplusplus.com/face-based-identification/>

21. <https://translate.google.com/>

22. <https://www.bilibili.com>

23. www.nicovideo.jp/

TABLE 9: Performance of End-to-End and Word Spotting on ICDAR2015 and ICDAR2013. * means multi-scale.

Method	Word Spotting			End-to-End			FPS
	S	W	G	S	W	G	
ICDAR2015							
Deep2Text-MO [60], [170], [171]	17.58	17.58	17.58	16.77	16.77	16.77	-
TextProposals+DictNet [36], [59]	56.0	52.3	49.7	53.3	49.6	47.2	0.2
HUST_MCLAB [131], [132]	70.6	-	-	67.9	-	-	-
Deep Text Spotter [13]	58.0	53.0	51.0	54.0	51.0	47.0	9.0
FOTS* [92]	87.01	82.39	67.97	83.55	79.11	65.33	-
He <i>et al.</i> [49]	85	80	65	82	77	63	-
Mask TextSpotter [100]	79.3	74.5	64.2	79.3	73.0	62.4	2.6
ICDAR2013							
Textboxes [80]	93.9	92.0	85.9	91.6	89.7	83.9	
Deep text spotter [13]	92	89	81	89	86	77	9
Li <i>et al.</i> [76]	94.2	92.4	88.2	91.1	89.8	84.6	1.1
FOTS* [92]	95.94	93.90	87.76	91.99	90.11	84.77	11.2
He <i>et al.</i> [49]	93	92	87	91	89	86	-
Mask TextSpotter [100]	92.5	92.0	88.2	92.2	91.1	86.5	4.8

video attracts the users most. On the other hand, website administrator can impose supervision and filtration for inappropriate and illegal content, such as terrorist advocacy.

6 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Status Quo

Algorithms: The past several years have witnessed the significant development of algorithms for text detection and recognition, mainly due to the deep learning boom. Deep learning models have replaced the manual search and design for patterns and features. With improved capability of models, research attention has been drawn to challenges such as oriented and curved text detection, and have achieved considerable progress.

Applications: Apart from efforts towards a general solution to all sorts of images, these algorithms can be trained and adapted to more specific scenarios, e.g. *bankcard*, *ID card*, and *driver's license*. Some companies have been providing such scenario-specific APIs, including Baidu Inc., Tencent Inc. and MEGVII Inc.. Recent development of fast and efficient methods [119], [180] has also allowed the deployment of large-scale systems [11]. Companies including Google Inc. and Amazon Inc. are also providing text extraction APIs.

6.2 Challenges and Future Trends

We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future [89]. We list and discuss challenges, and analyse what would be the next valuable research directions in the field scene text detection and recognition.

Languages: There are more than 1000 languages in the world [1]. However, most current algorithms and datasets have primarily focused on text of English. While English has a rather small alphabet, other languages such as Chinese and Japanese have a much larger one, with tens of thousands of symbols. RNN-based recognizers may suffer from such enlarged symbol sets. Moreover, some languages have much more complex appearances, and they are therefore more sensitive to conditions such as image quality. Researchers should first verify how well current algorithms can generalize to text of other languages and further to mixed text. Unified detection and recognition systems for multiple types of languages are of important academic value

and application prospect. A feasible solution might be to explore compositional representations that can capture the common patterns of text instances of different languages, and train the detection and recognition models with text examples of different languages, which are generated by text synthesizing engines.

Robustness of Models: Although current text recognizers have proven to be able to generalize well to different scene text dataset even only using synthetic data, recent work [82] shows that robustness against flawed detection is not a neglectable problem. Actually, such instability in prediction have also been observed for text detection models. The reason behind this kind of phenomenon is still unclear. One conjecture is that the robustness of models are related to the internal operating mechanism of deep neural networks.

Generalization: Few detection algorithms except for TextSnake [97] have considered the problem of generalization ability across datasets, i.e. training on one dataset, and testing on another. Generalization ability is important as some application scenarios would require the adaptability to varying environments. For example, instant translation and OCR in autonomous vehicles should be able to perform stably under different situations: zoomed-in images with large text instances, far and small words, blurred words, different languages and shapes. It remains unverified whether simply pooling all existing datasets together is enough, especially when the target domain is totally unknown.

Synthetic Data: While training recognizers on synthetic datasets has become a routine and results are excellent, detectors still rely heavily on real datasets. It remains a challenge to synthesize diverse and realistic images to train detectors. Potential benefits of synthetic data are not yet fully explored, such as generalization ability. Synthesis using 3D engines and models can simulate different conditions such as lighting and occlusion, and thus is a very promising approach.

Evaluation: Existing evaluation metrics for detection stem from those for general object detection. Matching based on IoU score or pixel-level precision and recall ignore the fact that *missing parts* and *superfluous backgrounds* may hurt the performance of the subsequent recognition procedure. For each text instance, pixel-level precision and recall are good metrics. However, their scores are assigned to 1.0 once they are matched to ground truth, and thus not reflected in the

final dataset-level score. An off-the-shelf alternative method is to simply sum up the instance-level scores under DetEval instead of first assigning them to 1.0.

Efficiency: Another shortcoming of deep learning based methods lies in their efficiency. Most of the current systems can not run in real-time when deployed on computers without GPUs or mobile devices. Apart from model compression and lightweight models that have proven effective in other tasks, it is also valuable to study how to make custom speedup mechanism for text related tasks.

Bigger and Better Data: The sizes of most existing datasets are much smaller than datasets of other tasks ($\sim 1k$ vs. $>> 10k$). It will be worthwhile to study whether the improvements gained from current algorithms can scale up or they are just accidental results of better regularization. Besides, most datasets are only labelled with bounding boxes and texts. Detailed annotation of different attributes [173] such as *wordart* and *occlusion* may guide researchers with pertinence. Finally, datasets characterized by real-world challenges are also important in advancing research progress, such as densely located text on products.

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