

Episodic Memory Question Answering

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Abstract

Egocentric augmented reality devices such as wearable glasses passively capture visual data as a human wearer tours a home environment. We envision a scenario wherein the human communicates with an AI agent powering such a device by asking questions (e.g., “where did you last see my keys?”). In order to succeed at this task, the egocentric AI assistant must (1) construct semantically rich and efficient scene memories that encode spatio-temporal information about objects seen during the tour and (2) possess the ability to understand the question and ground its answer into the semantic memory representation. Towards that end, we introduce (1) a new task — Episodic Memory Question Answering (EMQA) wherein an egocentric AI assistant is provided with a video sequence (the tour) and a question as an input and is asked to localize its answer to the question within the tour; (2) a dataset of grounded questions designed to probe the agent’s spatio-temporal understanding of the tour; and (3) a model for the task that encodes the scene as an allocentric, top-down semantic feature map and grounds the question into the map to localize the answer. We show that our choice of episodic scene memory outperforms naive, off-the-shelf solutions for the task as well as a host of very competitive baselines and is robust to noise in depth, pose as well as camera jitter.

1. Introduction

Imagine wearing a pair of AI-powered, augmented reality (AR) glasses and walking around your house. Such smart-glasses will possess the ability to “see” and passively capture egocentric visual data from the same perspective as its wearer, organize the surrounding visual information into its memory, and use this encoded information to communicate with humans by answering questions such as, “where did you last see my keys?”. In other words, such devices

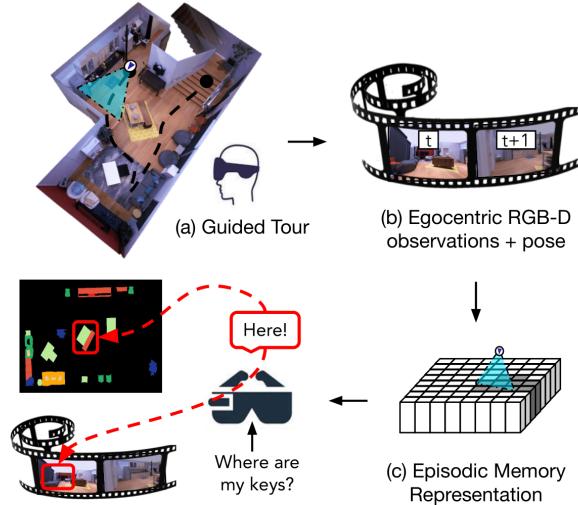


Figure 1. (a) An egocentric AI assistant, assumed to be running on a pair of augmented reality glasses, is taken on a guided exploratory tour by virtue of its human wearer moving about inside the environment. (b) The agent passively records an egocentric stream of RGB-D maps, (c) builds an internal, episodic memory representation of the scene and (d) exploits this spatio-temporal memory representation to answer (multiple) post-hoc questions about the tour.

can act as our own personal egocentric AI assistants.

There has been a rich history of prior work in training navigational agents to answer questions grounded in indoor environments – a task referred to as Embodied Question Answering (EQA) in literature [9, 15, 29, 32]. However, egocentric AI assistants differ from EQA agents in several important ways. First, such systems passively observe a sequence of egocentric visual frames as a result of the human wearer’s navigation, as opposed to taking actions in an environment. Second, AI systems for egocentric assistants would be required to build scene-specific mem-

ory representations that persist across different questions. This is in direct contrast with EQA where contemporary approaches have treated every question as a clean-slate navigation episode. EQA agents start navigating with no prior information about the scene (even if the current question is about a scene that they have witnessed before). And third, EQA agents respond to questions by uttering language token(s). Responding to a question such as, “where did you last see my keys?” with the answer — “hallway” isn’t a very helpful response if there are multiple hallways in the house. In contrast, our setup presents a scenario wherein an egocentric assistant can potentially localize answers by grounding them within the environment tour.

Therefore, as a step towards realizing the goal of such egocentric AI assistants, we present a novel task wherein the AI assistant is taken on a guided tour of an indoor environment and then asked to localize its answers to post-hoc questions grounded in the environment tour (Fig. 1). This pre-exploratory tour presents an opportunity to build an internal, episodic memory of the scene. Once constructed, the AI assistant can utilize this scene memory to answer multiple, follow-up questions about the tour. We call this task – Episodic Memory Question Answering (EMQA).

More concretely, in the proposed EMQA task, the system receives a pre-recorded sequence of RGB-D images with the corresponding oracle pose information (the guided agent tour) as an input. It uses the input tour to construct a memory representation of the indoor scene. Then, it exploits the scene memory to ground answers to multiple text questions. The localization of answers can happen either within the tour’s egocentric frame sequence or onto a top-down metric map (such as the house floorplan). The two output modalities are equivalent, given the agent pose.

The paper makes several important contributions. **First**, we introduce the task of Episodic Memory Question Answering. We generate a dataset of questions grounded in pre-recorded agent tours that are designed to probe the system’s spatial understanding of the scene (“where did you see the cushion?”) as well as temporal reasoning abilities (“where did you first/last see the cushion?”). **Second**, we propose a model for the EMQA task that builds allocentric top-down semantic scene representations (the episodic scene memory) during the tour and leverages the same for answering follow-up questions. In order to build the episodic scene memory, our model combines the semantic features extracted from egocentric observations from the tour in a geometrically consistent manner into a single top-down feature map of the scene as witnessed during the tour [5]. **Third**, we extend existing scene memories that model spatial relationships among objects [5] (“what” objects were observed and “where”) by augmenting them with temporal information (“when” were these objects observed), thereby making the memory amenable for reason-

ing about temporal localization questions.

Fourth, we compare our choice of scene representation against a host of baselines and show that our proposed model outperforms language-only baselines by $\sim 150\%$, naive, “off-the-shelf” solutions to the task that rely on making frame-by-frame localization predictions by 37% as well as memory representations from prior work that aggregate (via averaging [13], GRU [4], context-conditioned attention [14]) buffers of observation features across the tour.

Finally, in addition to photorealistic indoor environments [6], we also test the robustness of our approach under settings that have a high fidelity to the real world. We show qualitative results of a zero-shot transfer of our approach to a real-world, RGB-D dataset [26] that presents significantly challenging conditions of imperfect depth, pose and camera jitter - typical deployment conditions for egocentric AR assistants. In addition to that, we break away from the unrealistic assumption of the availability of oracle pose in indoor settings [11, 33] and perform a systematic study of the impact of noise (of varying types and intensities) in the agent’s pose. We show that our model is more resilient than baselines to such noisy perturbations.

2. Related Work

Question-Answering in Embodied Environments. Training embodied agents to answer questions grounded in indoor environments has been the subject of several prior works. Specifically, [9, 32] present agents that can answer questions about a single and multiple target objects in simulated scenes, respectively. [29] presents an instantiation of this line of work to photorealistic scenes from the Matterport3D simulator and 3D point cloud based inputs whereas [15] presents an extension of the task that requires the agent to interact with its environment. In all of the above, the agents are setup to carry out each question-answering episode with a “clean-slate” i.e. with no avenues for the agent to potentially re-use scene information gathered during prior traversals of the same scene. Although the agent in [15] has a semantic spatial memory storing information about object semantics and free space, it is not persistent across different question-episodes from the same scene. Moreover, all prior work involves generating a ranked list of language answer tokens as predictions. Our task formulation allows for the sharing of a semantic scene memory that is persistent across the different questions from a scene and localizes answers to questions – a much more high-fidelity setting for egocentric AI assistants.

Video Question Answering. Our work is also reminiscent of video question-answering (VideoQA) tasks. VideoQA has witnessed a rich history of prior work with the introduction of datasets sampled from “open-world” domains (movies [27], TV shows [19], cooking recipes [10, 34]) and tasks involving detecting/localizing actions and answering

questions about events that transpire in the videos. Our EMQA dataset instead, comprises of egocentric videos generated from navigation trajectories in indoor environments. In addition to localization within the input video sequence, this setting enables additional output modalities, such as grounding over scene floor-plans, that are incompatible with existing VideoQA domains. Moreover, existing VideoQA datasets are accompanied with rich, per-frame annotations such as subtitles, plot scripts and other sub-event metadata. In contrast, EMQA assumes no such additional annotations. [16] is concurrent with our work and proposes a large-scale dataset of egocentric videos paired with 3D meshes of environments in which the recorded activities took place.

Localization via Dialog. [12, 17] present a task wherein an entity having access to the top-down floorplan of an environment needs to localize an agent (on the top-down map) navigating within a scene through first-person vision alone. Both assume that the top-down floorplan of the scene is provided to the agent as input whereas our model constructs the map representation from scratch from the guided tours.

Scene Memory Representations. Building representations of scenes for assisting agents in embodied tasks has a rich history of prior work with early examples adopting the hidden state of an LSTM navigation model as a compact representation of the scene [21, 30]. To overcome the limited expressive power of a single state vector representing complex, 3D scenes, more recent approaches have modelled scene memories as either a buffer of observed egocentric features [13, 14], 2D metric grids [1, 3, 5, 7], topological maps [24, 31] or full-scale 3D semantic maps [8, 23, 28]. Storing observed egocentric features in a buffer does not explicitly model the geometric and spatial relationships among objects in the scene. Topological graphs are not optimal for precise metric localization (a desideratum for our task). The memory constraints involved with constructing voxel-based 3D scene representations restricts the feature maps proposed in [8, 28] to simple scenes (handful of objects placed on a table-top). On the contrary, our task deals with indoor environments of significantly higher visual complexity. Our scene memory (allocentric, top-down semantic feature map) is most similar to [5]. We present a novel extension to the scene features from [5] by incorporating temporal information with the semantic features (“when” was “what” observed and “where”).

3. EMQA Dataset: Questions Grounded in Scene Tours

We now describe the dataset for the task. Recall that the task involves taking the assistant on an exploratory tour of an indoor environment, and then asking multiple, post-hoc questions about the guided tour. The EMQA model must localize answers to the questions in the scene.

Guided Exploration Tours We instantiate our task in

the Habitat [21] simulator using Matterport3D [6] (MP3D) scans (reconstructed 3D meshes from 90 indoor environments). For any given indoor scene, we use the manually recorded exploration paths from [5]. These multi-room navigation trajectories were optimized for coverage, comprise of egocentric RGB-D maps, ground-truth pose and are, on an average, 2500 steps in length.

Questions Grounded in Tours For a given exploration path through an indoor scene, we now describe our process of generating grounded questions about objects witnessed by the egocentric assistant. Following [5], we restrict ourselves to 12 commonly occurring object categories such as sofa, bed etc. (see Suppl. for the full list).

We start by generating the ground-truth top-down maps labelled with object instances for each scene via an orthographic projection of the semantically annotated MP3D mesh. These generated maps contain ground-truth information about the top-down layout of all objects in all parts of a scene. Each cell in these maps is of a fixed spatial resolution of 2cm × 2cm and therefore, the spatial dimensions of the maps depend on the size of the indoor scenes. Although the exploration tours have been optimized for coverage, they do not cover all observable parts of all scenes (leaving out some hard-to-reach, niche areas of environments during the manually guided exploration process). Therefore, to ensure the relevance of questions in our dataset, next, we compute the subset of “observed” locations from within the ground-truth semantic map of the entire scene.

In order to do that, we project the depth maps from each step of the tour onto the top-down scene map, giving us the per-time step mask over locally observed locations (Fig. 2, “Inputs”). Summing across all time steps and overlaying the resulting mask over the ground-truth semantic map, gives us the subset of objects and their locations observed during the tour. This serves as our source for generating questions.

From each such “observed” top-down semantic map (representing the tour), we generate templated questions that broadly belong to the following two categories: (1) *spatial* localization questions and (2) *spatio-temporal* localization questions. For the former, we generate a question of the form, “where did you see the <X>?”, where <X> is an object category (from the pre-selected vocabulary of 12 objects) with at most 5 instances witnessed during the tour. Along with every question, we also record the information regarding (a) top-down map pixels corresponding to all instances of the object category in question that serves as the ground-truth answer, (b) the tour time-steps when each answer instance was observed during the tour. This is done by computing the intersection between the per-step mask of observed locations (described above) with the object instance on the top-down map. If, at any time step, the observed mask covers more than a heuristically determined fraction (10%) of the object instance in question, then, we

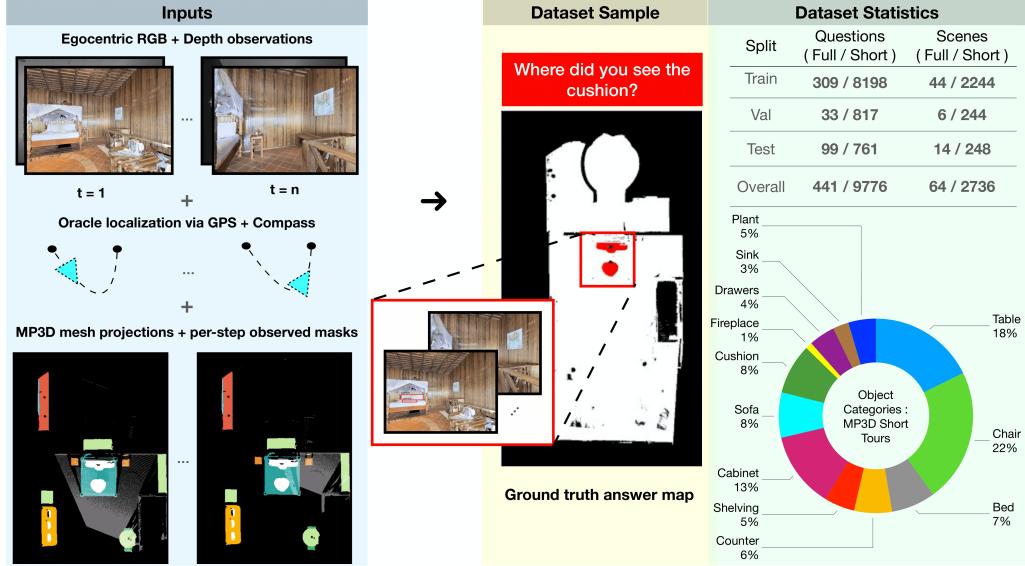


Figure 2. A schematic overview of our dataset generation process. The ground-truth top-down maps are created from the orthographic projection of the MP3D mesh with semantic labels, via egocentric RGB + Depth observations and pose information, and filtered out by the per-step observed masks.

consider that instance to be “seen” at that particular time step of the tour (Fig. 2, “Dataset Sample”).

Similarly, for the spatio-temporal subset, we generate questions with the format, “where did you first/last see the $\langle X \rangle$?” for each object category $\langle X \rangle$ with atleast 2 instances sighted during the tour. To select the first (or, the last) viewed instance of the object, we query the the metadata (described above) comprising of the time steps wherein each instance of the object was viewed during the tour. The instance with the earliest (latest) time step among the first (last) observed time steps of all instances becomes the first (last) viewed instance of the object. Note that, in certain situations, the first and last seen instance of an object might coincide (the tour comprising of a “loop” within its tour), presenting a challenging scenario for learning.

Generating “short” tours for training As stated above, the exploration tours in the EMQA dataset are, on an average, 2500 steps in length. To make the memory requirements and speed during training tractable, we follow the protocol laid down in [5] and consider 20-step “short” tour segments randomly sampled from the originally curated “full” tours. The top-down maps encompassing the area covered by these 20-step tour subsets are of fixed spatial dimensions of 250×250 cells across all “short” tours (as compared to varying spatial dimensions, depending on the environment size for “full” tours). We use the same question generation engine (described in the preceding sub-section) to generate questions corresponding to the “short” tour data splits. In addition to easing up speed and memory requirements during training, this also greatly increases the number

of training samples to learn from. We would like to emphasize that our original task (and all results that follow) are defined on the full-scale tours.

Fig. 2 (“Dataset Statistics”) shows the distribution of the total number of scenes and questions across train, val and test splits for both “short” and “full” tours. We use mutually exclusive scenes for the train, val and test splits, evaluating generalization on never-before-seen environments. We also show a distribution of object categories across all questions in our dataset. For more qualitative examples and statistics (analysis of the sizes and spatial distribution of objects in scenes), please refer to the Suppl. document.

4. Models

Any model for the EMQA task must, broadly speaking, comprise of modules for the following two sub-tasks: (1) scene memory representation and (2) question-answering. The former takes the scene tour (RGB-D video frame sequence and associated ground-truth pose) as an input and generates a compact representation of the scene that ideally encodes information about objects, their relative spatial arrangements and when they were viewed during the tour. The latter takes the question as an input, operates on this episodic scene memory and generates its predicted answer as the output. In this section, we describe our choices regarding the specific instantiations of the two modules.

Scene Memory Representation. As our preferred choice of scene representation, we use allocentric, 2D, top-down, semantic features [5]. These representations are computed via projecting egocentric visual features onto an allocentric, top-down floor-plan of the environment using the knowl-

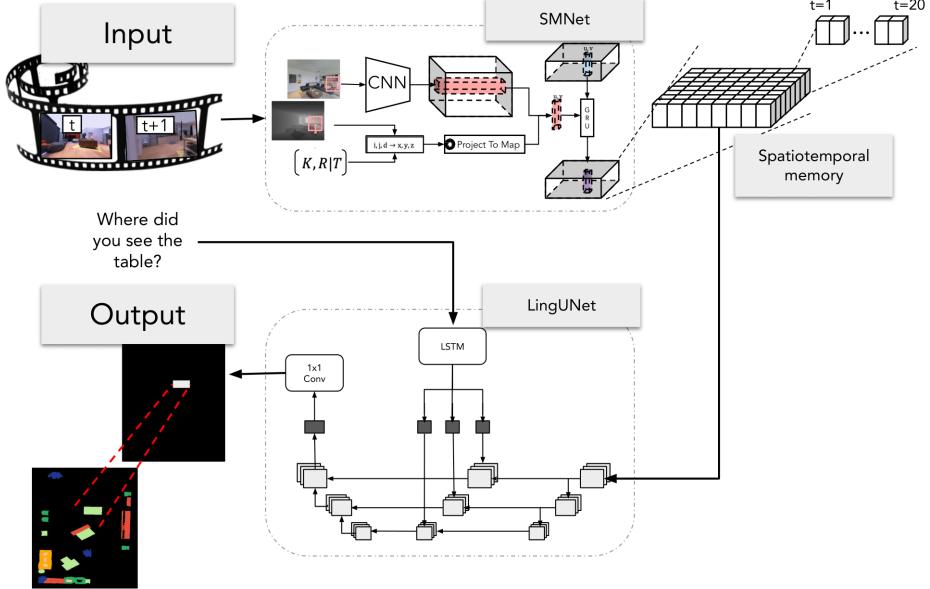


Figure 3. A schematic diagram of our proposed EMQA agent. Our agent first constructs an episodic memory representation of the tour and then grounds answers to questions on the top-down scene floorplan using a LingUNet-based answering model.

edge of camera pose and depth.

More specifically, as shown in Fig. 3 (SMNet), at each step of the tour, we first extract convolutional features from the input RGB-D video frame via a RedNet [18] model that has been trained for egocentric semantic segmentation on indoor scenes from the SUN-RGBD [25] dataset and then fine-tuned on egocentric frames from Matterport3D. Next, these per-step egocentric semantic features are projected onto the scene’s top-down floor-plan. The resulting feature map is of a fixed resolution – each “cell” in the map corresponds to a fixed, $2\text{cm} \times 2\text{cm}$ metric space in the real world and encodes semantic information about the objects present in that space (as viewed top-down). These local, per-step, projected features from each time step are accumulated using a GRU into a consolidated spatial memory tensor that serves as an “episodic memory representation” of the tour. The GRU is pre-trained to decode the top-down semantic segmentation from the scene memory tensor [5] with the ground truth top-down semantic map for the tour being computed from the annotated Matterport3D semantic mesh, as described in Sec. 3.

On account of how these 2D scene features are derived, they have greater expressive capacity, model inter-object spatial relationships better (due to geometrically consistent pin-hole feature projections) and do not suffer from memory constraints of voxel-based representations.

Spatiotemporal memory. While the above is a sensible choice for representing objects in scenes, it doesn’t encode temporal information about the tour (when were the objects observed?). Therefore, in this work, we present a novel ex-

tension to the scene representations from [5] by augmenting information about when each metric cell in the representation was observed during the tour. As shown in Fig. 3 (Spatiotemporal memory), this is done by a channel-wise stacking of the per-step masks over “observed” locations (from Sec. 3). Refer to the Suppl. for more details.

Question-Answering. We adopt the LingUNet [3] architecture to ground answers to input questions by exploiting the constructed scene memory (Fig. 3 (LingUNet)). LingUNet is an encoder-decoder architecture with language-conditioned skip connections. Prior work [1, 3, 17] has demonstrated that it is a highly performant architecture for tasks such as grounding of language-specified goal locations onto top-down maps of scenes for agent navigation.

The input questions are encoded using a 64-dim, single-layer LSTM. Our 3-layer LingUNet-based question-answering model takes the constructed scene memory features and the LSTM embedding of the question as inputs and generates a spatial feature map over the 2D floorplan (refer to Suppl. for the layer-wise architectural details of the LingUNet model). The spatial feature map is further processed by a convolutional block to generate the spatial distribution of answer predictions scores. This predicted “heatmap” represents the agent’s belief with respect to the localization of the target object in question over the top-down scene floorplan. Both the question-encoder LSTM and the LingUNet models are trained end-to-end with gradients from the question-answering loss.

Training Details The visual encoder (RedNet) is first trained to perform egocentric semantic segmentation via

Method	Top-down map output space			Egocentric pixel output space		
	IoU	Recall	Precision	IoU	Recall	Precision
LangOnly	4.75 ± 0.14	14.41 ± 0.62	6.98 ± 0.18	5.26 ± 0.18	14.57 ± 0.62	7.86 ± 0.19
EgoSemSeg	22.89 ± 0.69	35.85 ± 1.06	38.45 ± 1.07	23.42 ± 0.73	36.06 ± 1.06	40.13 ± 1.15
SMNetDecoder	26.92 ± 1.12	43.86 ± 1.25	40.95 ± 1.26	27.13 ± 1.12	43.39 ± 1.58	41.96 ± 1.22
EgoBuffer-Avg [13]	0.07 ± 0.01	0.37 ± 0.06	0.24 ± 0.03	0.11 ± 0.01	0.40 ± 0.06	0.34 ± 0.03
EgoBuffer-GRU [2]	0.01 ± 0.00	0.01 ± 0.00	0.02 ± 0.00	0.01 ± 0.00	0.01 ± 0.00	0.04 ± 0.00
EgoBuffer-Attn [14]	0.12 ± 0.02	0.16 ± 0.02	0.85 ± 0.15	0.14 ± 0.03	0.17 ± 0.03	1.01 ± 0.17
Ours	27.42 ± 0.64	60.81 ± 1.28	31.94 ± 0.60	28.04 ± 0.94	60.96 ± 1.41	32.83 ± 0.96
Ours (+temporal)	29.11 ± 0.44	62.27 ± 1.13	33.39 ± 0.51	29.78 ± 0.59	62.68 ± 1.08	34.36 ± 0.73

Table 1. EMQA results for our proposed model and baselines in the “top-down map” and “egocentric pixel” output space.

pixel-wise CE loss on egocentric frames. Features from this pre-trained and frozen RedNet are used by the scene memory encoder to generate our episodic memory (via pixelwise CE loss on top-down semantic maps). Finally, the episodic memories from the pre-trained and frozen scene encoder are used to train the question-answering model. To do that, we use the ground truth answers (as described in Sec. 3) and train using a per-pixel binary cross entropy loss that encourages the model to correctly classify each “cell” in the top-down map as belonging to the answer category or not. Since the optimization process in our case is dealing with a severe class imbalance problem (only a few hundreds of pixels belong to the answer class among several tens of thousands of “background” pixels), we leverage the dynamic weighting properties of Focal loss [20] that adjusts the contribution of the easily classified “background” pixels to the overall loss in order to stabilize training for our model. In our experiments, we also found that setting the bias of the last layer to the ratio of the number of positive to negative samples and using the normalization trick from [20] helps.

5. Baselines

In this section, we present details of a range of competitive baselines that we compare our approach against.

Language-only (LangOnly). We evaluate baselines which answer questions from the language input alone for EMQA. Such baselines have been shown to demonstrate competitive performance for embodied question answering tasks [9, 29]. Specifically, we drop the episodic scene memory features (while keeping the temporal features) from our inputs and train the question-answering model to predict the answer to the input question. Performance of this baseline is an indication of the spatial biases present in the dataset (are beds almost always present in the same corner of the map?).

Egocentric semantic segmentation (EgoSemSeg). This baseline serves as a naive, “off-the-shelf” solution for the EMQA task. We perform semantic segmentation on each of the egocentric RGB frames that comprise the scene tour (using the same pre-trained RedNet model as used in our ap-

proach). Then, we extract the subset of the model’s predictions corresponding to the object in question and that serves as the final prediction for this baseline.

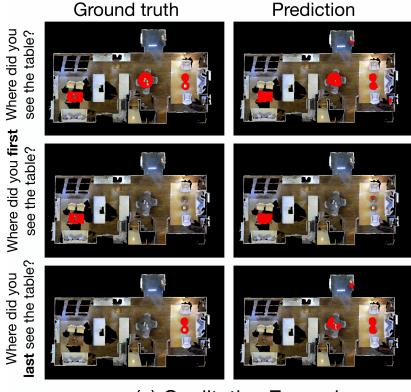
Decoding top-down semantic labels (SMNetDecoder). In this baseline, we use the decoding section of the network that was used to pre-train our scene memory features and directly predict the top-down semantic segmentation of the floorplan as seen during the tour. We follow that with the same step as above: extracting the subset of top-down prediction pixels corresponding to the object in question to get the answer prediction for this baseline. Note that both the EgoSemSeg and SMNetDecoder baselines do not have access to the temporal features.

Buffer of egocentric features as scene memory. For this family of baselines, we store a buffer of visual features extracted from the egocentric RGB-D frames of the tour. These features are extracted via the same pre-trained RedNet model used in our approach as well as the EgoSemSeg and SMNetDecoder baselines. We then condense the per-step features in the buffer using the following different techniques to give rise to specific instantiations of baselines from prior work: (a) averaging [13] (**EgoBuffer-Avg**), (b) GRU [2] (**EgoBuffer-GRU**) and (c) question-conditioned, scaled, dot-product attention [14] (**EgoBuffer-Attn**).

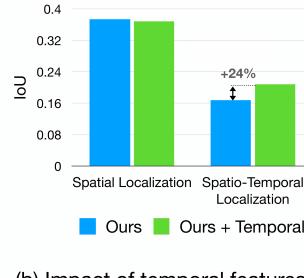
Having generated the 1-D scene embedding vector using either of the above approaches, we use a network of deconvolutional layers to generate a top-down, 2D “heatmap” prediction of the agent’s answer. For more details about the architecture of these baselines, please refer to the Supplementary material. Note that these baselines implicitly convert the scene embedding derived from egocentric observations into an allocentric top-down answer map (via the deconvolutional layers). On the contrary, our model has this transformation explicitly baked-in via geometrically consistent projections of egocentric features.

6. Experimental Results

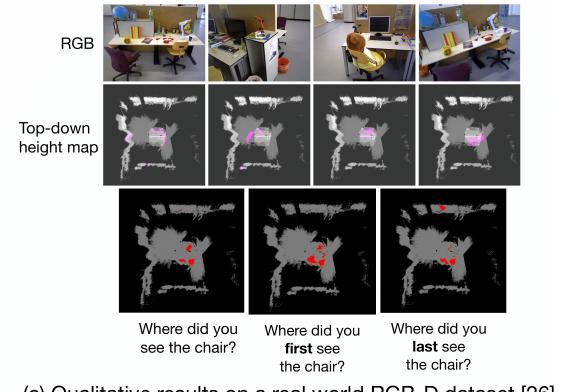
Metrics. Our models generate a binary segmentation map (“answer” v/s “background” pixels) as their output.



(a) Qualitative Examples



(b) Impact of temporal features



(c) Qualitative results on a real world RGB-D dataset [26]

Figure 4. (a) Qualitative examples of the model’s outputs in the top-down map output space from the test split. (b) The improvement in performance due to temporal features. (c) Qualitative results of zero-shot generalization of our model to real-world RGB-D dataset [26].

Therefore, we report from the suite of segmentation metrics for evaluating the output answer localization. Specifically, for each data point (tour+question+answer), we compute: the precision, recall and the intersection-over-union (IoU) between the predicted and GT binary answer maps for the question. We report the aforementioned metrics, averaged across the test splits of our dataset of tours.

Quantitative Results. We report results for our model’s predictions in both the top-down map as well as egocentric tour output modalities in Tab. 1. As stated in Sec. 1, a grounding of answers into the topdown floorplan is equivalent to a localization within the egocentric pixels of the agent tour – we simply back-project top-down map pixel predictions onto the agent’s egocentric frame of reference. Therefore, for simplicity, we discuss trends in the top-down map space in the subsequent text.

We outperform the SMNetDecoder [5] baseline with 8.2%, 42% gains in IoU, recall respectively. This is due to the combination of two factors: the SMNetDecoder baseline doesn’t encode knowledge about the temporal information of tours and our proposed model offers a better mechanism to ground the semantics of questions into the top-down map features via the more expressive LingUNet-based question-answering model. To isolate the gains due to the availability of temporal features, we also train a variant of our model without the same. We see that, even in the absence of temporal features, we are able to out-perform SMNetDecoder (recall of 60.81 v/s 43.86, IoU of 27.42 v/s 26.92). Moreover, the EgoSemSeg baseline performs worse than SMNetDecoder baseline (and by association, our model). This empirically demonstrates the superiority of our proposed approach over naive, “off-the-shelf” solutions for the task. This is consistent with observations made by prior work [5].

All the baselines that rely on a buffer of egocentric RGB-

D frame features as scene memories fail spectacularly at the task. This further verifies the hypothesis that compressed, 1-D representations of scenes are woefully inadequate for tasks such as ours. Encoding spatial knowledge of how objects are laid out in scenes and temporal information regarding when they were observed during a tour into such representations and then decoding precise localizations of answers from such scene memories is an extremely challenging problem. Our findings invalidate such memory representations from being used for our task.

In Fig. 4, we also show qualitatively that our agent learns to distinguish all, first- and last-seen instances of tables within a given scene (refer to Suppl. for more qualitative examples).

Temporal features help. As stated in Sec. 4, having knowledge of when objects were observed during the tour is critical for answering temporal localization questions. To further elucidate this claim, we break down the performance of both variants of our model (Ours v/s Ours(+temporal)) in Tab. 1) by question types (spatial and spatio-temporal). As shown in Fig. 4 (b), we see a 24% relative improvement in IoU for spatio-temporal localization questions upon the addition of temporal features. There is no significant impact on metrics for spatial questions.

Sim2Real Robustness. Moving beyond simulation, we analyze the robustness of our models to typical sources of noise that might arise from the real-world deployment of such systems. First, we test our EMQA model trained in simulation [6] on raw video sequences captured in the real world. We use the RGB-D observations + camera poses from the RGB-D SLAM benchmark in [26] which presents a significantly challenging test-bed with high-fidelity conditions for egocentric AR applications: noisy depth+pose and head-worn camera jitter. Despite these challenges, our approach provides promising results with zero-shot gener-

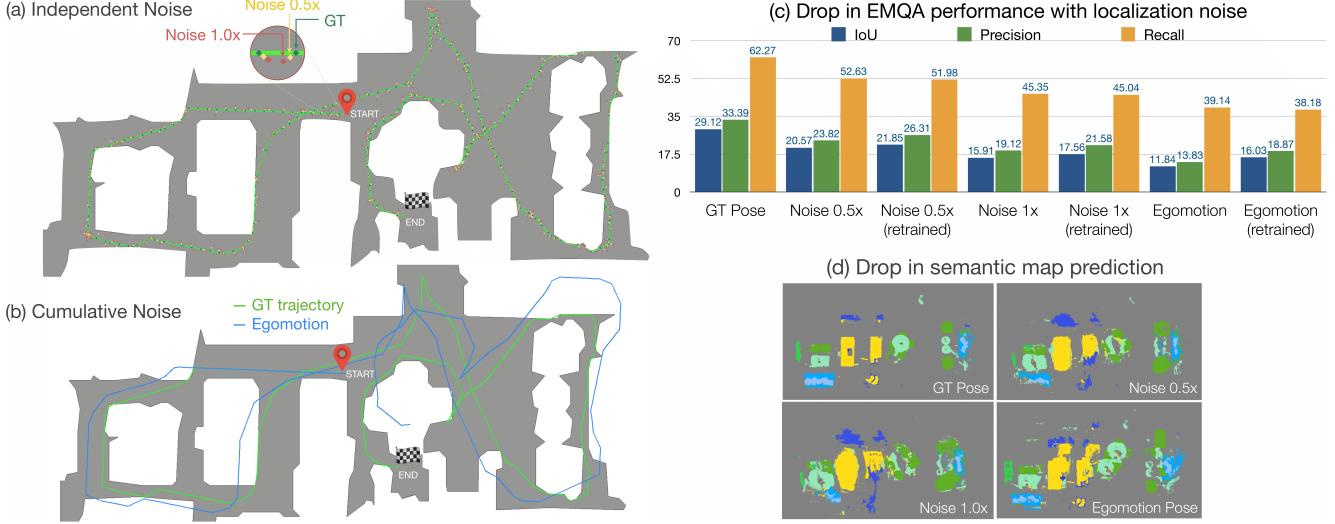


Figure 5. Samples of noisy tours obtained by adding (a) noise sampled from LoCoBot [22] and (b) using a visual odometry model [33]. (c) Quantitative evaluation of our models under these noisy pose settings (d) Qualitative examples of noisy semantic map predictions.

alization (4 (c)). Without any fine-tuning, the agent is able to ground answers to questions and reasonably distinguish between first and last seen instances of objects.

Second, following prior work [11, 33], we remove the assumption of oracle indoor localization and investigate our models under conditions of noisy pose. Specifically, we perturb the ground-truth pose sequence from our dataset in two ways. First, we add noise (independently, at every step) from a distribution estimated with samples collected by a LoCoBot [22] (Fig. 5 (a)). Second, we predict the relative pose change between two successive steps via a state-of-the-art visual odometry model [33] and integrate these estimates over the trajectory to maintain a noisy estimate of the current pose (Fig. 5 (b)). The latter is more realistic as it takes into account drift in the agent’s pose estimates due to cascading errors along the trajectory.

As expected, when EMQA models trained with oracle localization inputs are evaluated with noisy pose, the quality of the scene representations (Fig. 5 (d)) and the task metrics (Fig. 5 (c)) drops proportional to the severity and nature (independent v/s cumulative) of noise being added. We find that the IoU of our proposed model drops by 29%, as compared to a 36% drop for our best-performing baseline, indicating that our model is more resilient to the added noise. Finally, we also show that re-training our models (both the SMNet scene encoder and LingUNet question-answering module) in the noisy settings allows us to regain some of this lost performance (increase in IoU and precision across all three noise models) in Fig. 5 (c). Refer to Suppl. for more details.

Limitations and Ethical Impact. Our approach involves building static scene maps which restricts the setup to ques-

tions about objects (such as furniture items) whose positions in the scene remain largely fixed. One way to overcome this is to update the scene maps (via re-sampling the agent tours) at sufficient frequency so that the constructed scene maps more closely approximate the current environment state.

Egocentric AI assistants residing on wearable devices are always in the “on” state (constantly capturing data). Additionally, our proposed model explicitly builds and stores detailed representations of objects and their locations in houses. We acknowledge that together, these situations have the potential to bring forth serious privacy concerns.

7. Conclusion

We study the task of question-answering in 3D environments with the goal of egocentric personal AI assistants. Towards that end, we propose a model that builds semantic feature representations of scenes as its episodic memory. We show that exploiting such bottleneck scene representations can enable the agent to effectively answer questions about the scene and demonstrate its superiority over strong baselines. Our investigations into the robustness of such a system to different forms of noise in its inputs present promising evidence for future research towards deploying such agents in egocentric AR devices for the real-world.

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