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Abstract

People's writing style is affected by many factors, including topics, sentiment, and individual personality. In this paper we show that writing tasks that impose constraints on the writer result in the author adopting a different writing style compared to tasks that do not. As a case study, we experiment with a recently published machine reading task: the story cloze task (Mostafazadeh et al., 2016). In this task, annotators were asked to generate two sentences: one which makes sense given a previous paragraph and another which doesn't. We show that a linear classifier, which applies only simple style features, such as sentence length and PoS counts, obtains state-of-the-art results on the task, substantially higher than sophisticated sequence-to-sequence models. Importantly, our model doesn't even look at the previous paragraph, just the two candidate sentences, which, out of context, differ only in the constraint put on the authors. Our results indicate that such constraints dramatically affect the way people write. They also suggest that careful attention to the instructions given to the authors needs to taken when designing new NLP tasks.

References

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