

IMPROVING YORÙBÁ DIACRITIC RESTORATION

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Paper under double-blind review

1 INTRODUCTION

Yorùbá is a tonal language spoken by more than 40 Million people in the countries of Nigeria, Benin and Togo in West Africa. The phonology is comprised of eighteen consonants, seven oral vowel and five nasal vowel phonemes with three kinds of tones realized on all vowels and syllabic nasal consonants (Akinlabi, 2004). Yorùbá orthography makes notable use of tonal diacritics, known as *amí ohùn*, to designate tonal patterns, and orthographic diacritics like underdots for various language sounds (Adegbola & Odilinye, 2012; Wells, 2000).

Diacritics provide morphological information, are crucial for lexical disambiguation, pronunciation and are vital for any computational Speech or Natural Language Processing task. To build a robust ecosystem of *Yorùbá-first* language technologies, Yorùbá text must be correctly represented in computing environments. The ultimate objective of automatic diacritic restoration (ADR) systems is to facilitate text entry and text correction that encourages the correct orthography and promotes quotidian usage of the language in electronic media.

1.1 AMBIGUITY IN NON-DIACRITIZED TEXT

The main challenge in non-diacritized text is that it is very ambiguous (Orife, 2018; Asahiah et al., 2017; Adegbola & Odilinye, 2012; De Pauw et al., 2007). ADR attempts to decode the ambiguity present in undiacritized text. Adegbola et al. assert that for ADR the “prevailing error factor is the number of valid alternative arrangements of the diacritical marks that can be applied to the vowels and syllabic nasals within the words” (Adegbola & Odilinye, 2012).

Table 1: Diacritic characters with their non-diacritic forms

Characters	Examples
à á ǎ	a gbà (<i>spread</i>), gba (<i>accept</i>), gbá (<i>hit</i>)
è é ẹ ẹ ẹ	e èsè (<i>dye</i>), ẹsẹ (<i>foot</i>), esé (<i>cat</i>)
ì í	i ìlù (<i>drum</i>), ilu (<i>opener</i>), ìlú (<i>town</i>)
ò ó ọ ọ ọ ọ ọ	o arọ (<i>an invalid</i>), aró (<i>indigo</i>), àrò (<i>hearth</i>), àrọ (<i>funnel</i>), àrọ (<i>catfish</i>)
ù ú ǔ	u kùn (<i>to paint</i>), kun (<i>to carve</i>), kún (<i>be full</i>)
̀ ́ ̃	n ̀n (a negator), n (<i>I</i>), ́n (continuous aspect marker)
ş	s şà (<i>to choose</i>), şá (<i>fade</i>), sà (<i>to baptise</i>), sá (<i>to run</i>)

1.2 IMPROVING GENERALIZATION PERFORMANCE

To make the first open-sourced ADR models available to a wider audience, we tested extensively on colloquial and conversational text. Early models suffered from domain-mismatch generalization errors and appeared particularly weak when presented with contractions, loan words or variants of common phrases. Because they were trained on majority Biblical text, we attributed these errors to low-diversity of sources and an insufficient number of training examples. To remedy this problem, we aggregated text from a variety of online public-domain sources as well as actual books. After scanning physical books, we successfully employed commercial Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software to concurrently use English, Romanian and Vietnamese characters, forming an *approximative superset* of the Yorùbá character set. Text with inconsistent quality was put into a special queue for subsequent human supervision and manual correction.

2 METHODOLOGY

Experimental setup Data preprocessing, parallel text preparation and training hyper-parameters are the same as in (Orife, 2018). Experiments included evaluations of the effect of the various texts, notably for JW300, which is a disproportionately large contributor to the dataset. We also evaluated models trained with pre-trained FastText embeddings to understand the boost in performance possible with word embeddings (Alabi et al., 2019; Bojanowski et al., 2017). Our training hardware configuration was an AWS EC2 p3.2xlarge instance with OpenNMT-py (Klein et al., 2017).

Table 2: Data sources, prevalence and category of text

# words	Source or URL	Description
24,868	rma.nwu.ac.za	Lagos-NWU corpus
50,202	theyorubablog.com	language blog
910,401	bible.com/versions/911	Biblica (NIV)
11,488,825	opus.nlpl.eu	JW300
831,820	bible.com/versions/207	Bible Society Nigeria (KJV)
177,675	GitHub	Embeddings dataset (mixed)
142,991	GitHub	Language ID corpus
47,195		Yorùbá lexicon
29,338	yoruba.unl.edu	Proverbs
2,887	unicode.org/udhr	Human rights edict
150,360	Private sources	Conversational interviews
15,281	Private sources	Short stories
20,038	OCR	Hàà Ènìyàn (Fiction)
28,308	yo.globalvoices.org	Global Voices news

A new, modern multi-purpose evaluation dataset To make ADR productive for users, our research experiments needed to be guided by a test set based around modern, colloquial and not exclusively literary text. After much review, we selected Global Voices, a corpus of journalistic news text best from a multilingual community of journalists, translators, bloggers, academics and human rights activists (Global Voices, 2005).

3 RESULTS

We evaluated the ADR models by computing a single-reference BLEU score using the Moses `multi-bleu.perl` scoring script as well as the predicted perplexity of the model’s own predictions. The results are summarized in Appendix A. All models with additional data improved over the 3-corpus baseline, with the JW300 providing a 33% boost in BLEU. Error analyses revealed the Transformer model’s robustness to loan or code-switched words in the sequence, usually predicting something reasonable and continuing correctly afterward. The FastText embedding provided a small boost in performance for the Transformer, but was flat for the soft-attention architecture.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Promising next steps include further automation of our human-in-the-middle data-cleaning tools, further research on tools for contextualized embeddings in Yorùbá and deploying or serving these improved ADR models¹ in user-facing applications and devices.

¹<https://github.com/Niger-Volta-LTI/yoruba-adr>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are grateful for all the support received from Yorùbá Name, Masakhane and Data Science Nigeria.

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A APPENDIX

Table 3: BLEU, predicted perplexity & WER scores on the Global Voices testset

Model	BLEU	Perplexity	WER
Soft-attention model from (Orife, 2018)	26.53	1.34	-
+ Language ID corpus	42.52	1.69	-
++ Interview text	42.23	1.59	-
+ All new text <i>minus JW300</i>	43.39	1.60	-
+ All new text	59.55	1.44	-
+ All new text with FastText embedding	58.87	1.39	-
Transformer model			
+ All new text <i>minus JW300</i>	45.68	1.95	-
+ All new text	59.05	1.40	-
+ All new text + FastText embedding	59.80	1.43	-

Table 4: Example Yorùbá ADR Sentences

Source:	iriri akobuloogu zone9 ilu ethiopia je apeere .
Reference:	irírí akóbúlògù zone9 ilú ethiopia jé àpẹẹrẹ .
Prediction:	irírí akobuloogu orílẹ ilú ethiopia jé àpẹẹrẹ .
Source:	mo awon ondiye si ipo aare naijiria odun 2019
Reference:	mọ àwọ̀n ò̀ndíjẹ sí ipò ààrẹ̀ nàìjíríà ọ̀dún 2019
Prediction:	mọ àwọ̀n ondije sí ipò ààrẹ̀ nàìjíríà ọ̀dún 2019
Source:	mo ro o wipe awon obirin ti o ronu lati se ise ti okunrin maa n se gbodo gberaga .
Reference:	mo rò ó wípé àwọ̀n obìrìn tí ó ronú látí ẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ tí ọ̀kùnrin máa ń ẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ gbòdò gbéraga .
Prediction:	mo rò ó wípé àwọ̀n obìrìn tí ó ronú látí ẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ tí ọ̀kùnrin máa ń ẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ gbòdò gbéraga .
Source:	alaga akoko ilu-ti-ko-fi-oba-je ti china mao zedong ti yo awon eniyan ninu isoro .
Reference:	alága àkókó ilú-tí-kò-fi-oba-je ti china mao zedong ti yọ àwọ̀n ènìyàn nínú ìṣòro .
Prediction:	alága àk òkò ilu-ti-ko-fi-oba-je ti china mao tse ti yọ àwọ̀n ènìyàn nínú ìṣòro .