

Computational analysis and translation of wordplay

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- Overview of this talk:
 1. Automatically scoring/ranking jokes by humorousness
 2. Relating linguistic features of puns to humorousness
 3. Machine and machine-assisted translation of wordplay

Part I: A Bayesian approach to humorousness prediction

- Humour is a complex phenomenon that remains challenging for computational processing
- An important first step is to recognize its presence in a text
- Previous computational approaches have treated humour detection as a binary classification task
- However, the level of appreciation (**humorousness** or **funniness**) of humour can vary

Why model the level of appreciation?



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- Writing assistants should identify weak jokes (and suggest better ones)
- Machine translation systems should preserve the level of humour in the target language

Sourcing manual humorousness annotations

- Numerical/categorical scoring
- Preference judgments

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 - ✓ Conceptually simple to process
 - ✗ Annotators can assign scores inconsistently over time
 - ✗ Annotators can interpret scores differently
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- Our approach: learn from sparse pairwise annotations

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 - 4.1 word embeddings and linguistic features can be used to predict humorousness

1. Four novel tasks for quantifying humorousness
2. An annotated data set of pairwise comparisons of humorousness
3. A Bayesian approach (GPPL) for scoring humorousness given sparse pairwise annotations
4. An empirical investigation showing that
 - 4.1 word embeddings and linguistic features can be used to predict humorousness
 - 4.2 GPPL outperforms standard approaches (best–worst scaling, or BWS) on sparse data

Part I: A Bayesian approach to humorousness prediction

Background and related work

- Preference learning models (e.g., Bradley–Terry, Thurstone–Mosteller) infer **rankings** from pairwise comparisons
- Best–worst scaling (BWS): annotator chooses the best and worst instances from a set
- Models such as MaxDiff infer **numerical scores** from BWS data

Gaussian process preference learning (GPPL)

- GPPL: A Thurstone–Mosteller model that accounts for features of instances when inferring scores
 - ✓ Can make predictions on unseen instances
 - ✓ Copes well with sparse data
 - ✓ Copes well with noisy data
 - ✗ Does not scale well ($\mathcal{O}(n^3)$)

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 - ✓ Can make predictions on unseen instances
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 - ✗ Does not scale well ($\mathcal{O}(n^3)$)
- We use a **scalable** method for GPPL that permits arbitrarily large numbers of instances/pairs
 - Uses stochastic variational inference to limit computational complexity
 - Outperforms SVM and BiLSTM regression models on ranking the convincingness of arguments

Part I: A Bayesian approach to humorousness prediction

Experimental data

- SemEval-2017 pun recognition challenge data (Miller, Hempelmann, et al. 2017)
 - ✓ Purely verbal humour
 - ✓ From professional or curated sources
 - ✓ Has seen wide use outside SemEval
 - ✓ Jokes have been pre-classified by type
- 4030 one-liners: 3398 humorous and 632 not

- 28 210 unique, randomly generated pairs
- Each of the 4030 texts appears in exactly 14 pairs
- Each pair was presented to five crowdsourced annotators
- Annotators were asked to indicate which text (if either) is funnier

- We applied BWS on the entire annotated data set to get gold-standard funniness scores
- Mean interannotator agreement: $\alpha = 0.80$
- Using fewer (1, 2, 3, 4) annotations per pair still results in good correlation ($\rho = 0.81, 0.92, 0.97, 0.99$) with the gold-standard scores

Part I: A Bayesian approach to humorousness prediction

**Experiment 1:
Convergence to gold standard**

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 - Train the model on all available annotations but **without** using any feature data
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Task definition

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- Evaluation:
 - Compare this ranking to BWS using Spearman's ρ

- Spearman's $\rho = 0.917$
- Unlike GPPL, BWS assigns many instances the same score, which may affect the ranking correlation
- To test this, we computed new rankings without ties, resulting in $\rho = 0.951$

Part I: A Bayesian approach to humorousness prediction

Experiment 2:

Predictive ability with full data

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- Method:
 - Train the model on 60% of the instances (using both annotations and features)
 - Predict the scores on a separate 20% of the instances
 - Rank the instances according to these scores

Task definition

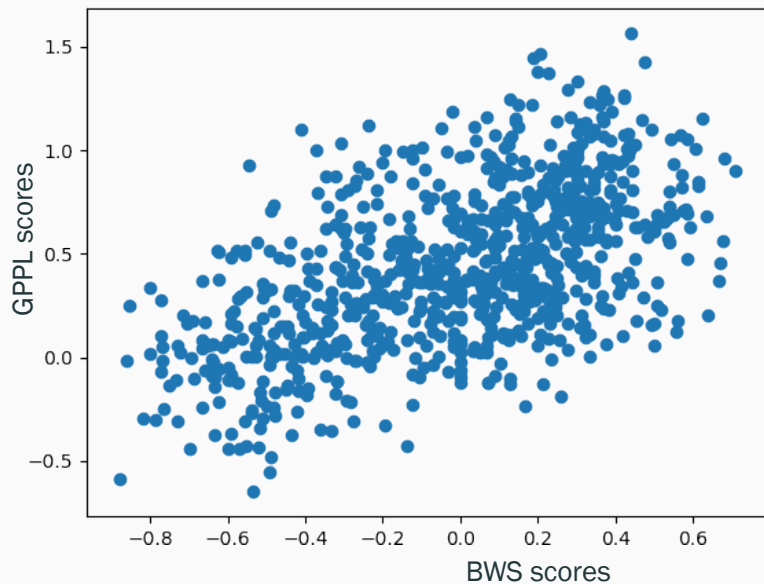
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We tested various combinations of the following features:

- 300-dimensional average word embeddings, using word2vec trained on Google News
- average token frequency (from a 2017 Wikipedia dump)
- polysemy (from WordNet 3.0)
- average bigram frequency (from Google Books Ngrams)

features				ρ
word2vec				0.531
word2vec	frequency	polysemy		0.552
word2vec	frequency		bigrams	0.561
word2vec		polysemy	bigrams	0.537
word2vec	frequency	polysemy	bigrams	0.542

BWS vs. GPPL scores



Part I: A Bayesian approach to humorousness prediction

**Experiment 3:
Predictive ability with sparse data**

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 - With a sparser set of pairwise training labels, the model can exploit feature data to produce more accurate predictions than BWS

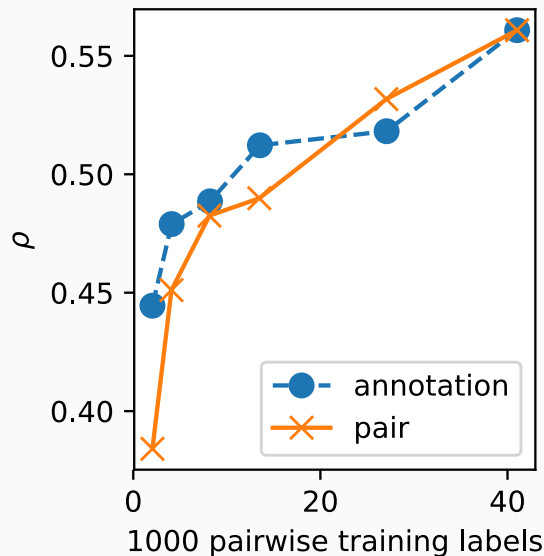
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Results



- smaller training sets do not reduce performance by much
- **annotation** strategy better when data is sparse, possibly due to better coverage over the feature space

Part I: A Bayesian approach to humorousness prediction

**Experiment 4:
Best annotation strategy**

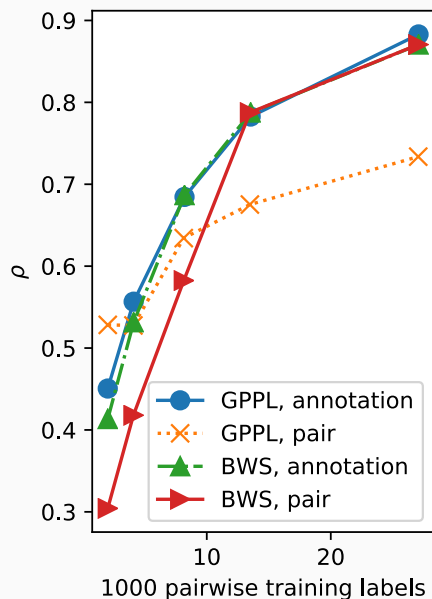
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Results



- GPPL exceeds BWS on very sparse data; BWS converges to GPPL as data increases
- **annotation** strategy is generally preferable, which may inform future crowdsourcing efforts

Part I: A Bayesian approach to humorousness prediction

Conclusion

- New tasks for evaluating the degree of humorousness of short texts
- A new data set of crowdsourced preference judgments¹
- A GPPL-based approach for estimating humorousness given word embeddings and shallow linguistic features
- Experiments showing that GPPL generalizes well, and outperforms BWS when labels are sparse

¹<https://github.com/UKPLab/acl2019-GPPL-humour-metaphor>

Part II: What's in a pun? Relating humorousness to linguistic features

Punning

A **punning joke** is a form of language play where a word (the **pun**) evokes the meaning of a similar-sounding word (the **target**)

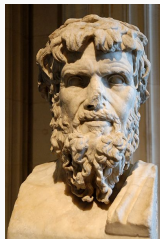
Egal wie still Du bist,
Ben ist Stiller.



No matter how still you are,
Ben is Stiller.



- Most linguistic analyses are taxonomic or phonological:
 - types of articulatory features involved
 - number of phonetic segments affected
 - location of changes in the lexical/syllabic structure
- Native speakers have implicit knowledge of these transformational rules; computers do not



Cratylistic syllogism (Cratylus, c. 425 BCE)

Meaning motivates sound, so the meaning of similar-sounding words must be similar.



Arbitrariness of the sign (Saussure, 1916)

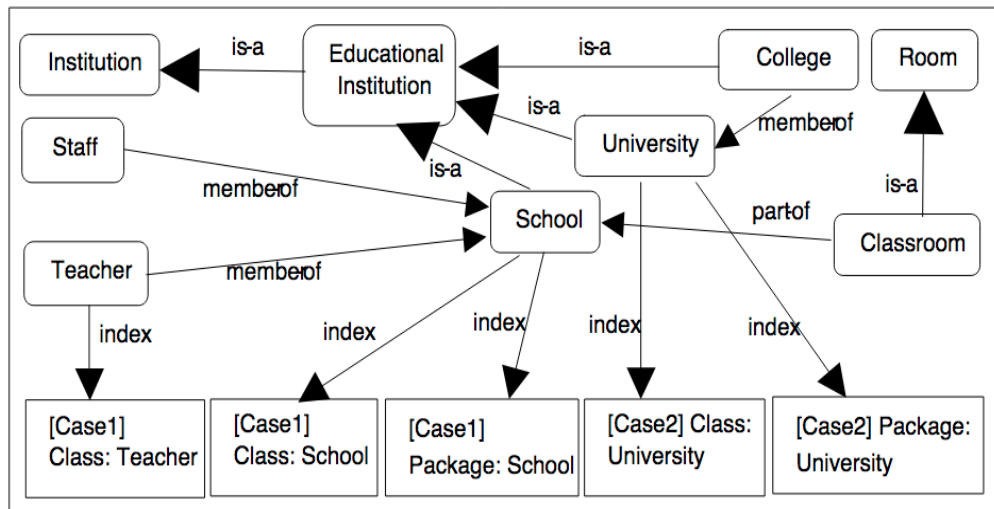
The relation between words and their meanings is arbitrary.

- To be recognized as wordplay, the pun and its target must be similar-sounding
- But does the degree of similarity determine how funny the pun is?
- Some studies posit such a correlation; others reject it
- Recent empirical evidence from humorous but non-punning wordplay suggests phonetic distance is indeed a factor
- Open question: Does this finding apply to puns as well?

	homophonic	heterophonic
homographic	A political prisoner is one who stands behind her <i>convictions</i> .	A lumberjack's world revolves on its <i>axes</i> .
heterographic	She fell through the window but felt no <i>pane</i> .	The sign at the nudist camp read, " <i>Clothed</i> until April."

- Any pair of words can be characterized by their (perceived) similarity in terms of sound or pronunciation.
- Studying pairs with a phonologically constrained relationship can help us model that relationship.
- Conversely, a model that quantifies perceived sound differences between words can assess the probability of a given relationship.
- In particular, a model of sound similarity could help detect or generate puns.

Semantic similarity



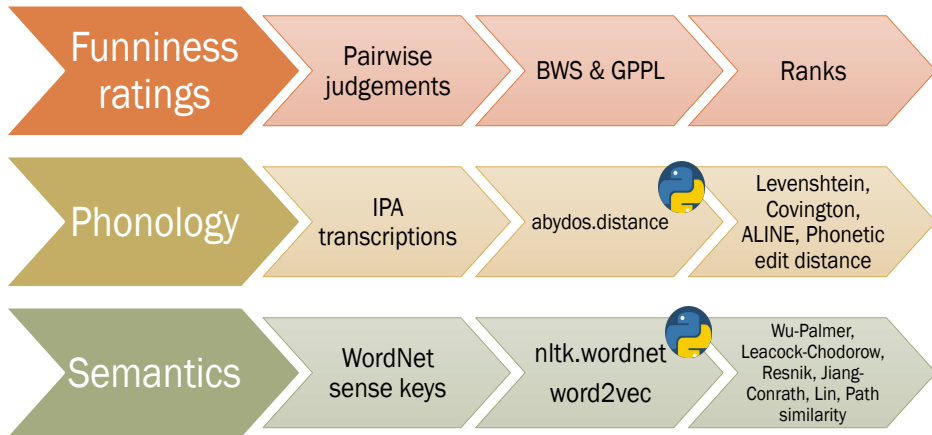
Part II: What's in a pun? Relating humorousness to linguistic features

Research questions and methods

Research questions

1. What is the relationship between the **phonological distance** between pun and target word and the perceived funniness of a punning joke?
2. What is the relationship between the **semantic distance** between pun and target word and the perceived funniness of a punning joke?

- Dataset: 2772 punning jokes (1185 **heterographic**, 1587 homographic)



Phonological distance measures

- Compare pun and target word based on phonetic features
- `abydos.distance` package (Little, 2018)
- Levenshtein distance
- Covington's distance
- ALINE distance
- Phonetic edit distance

Semantic similarity measures

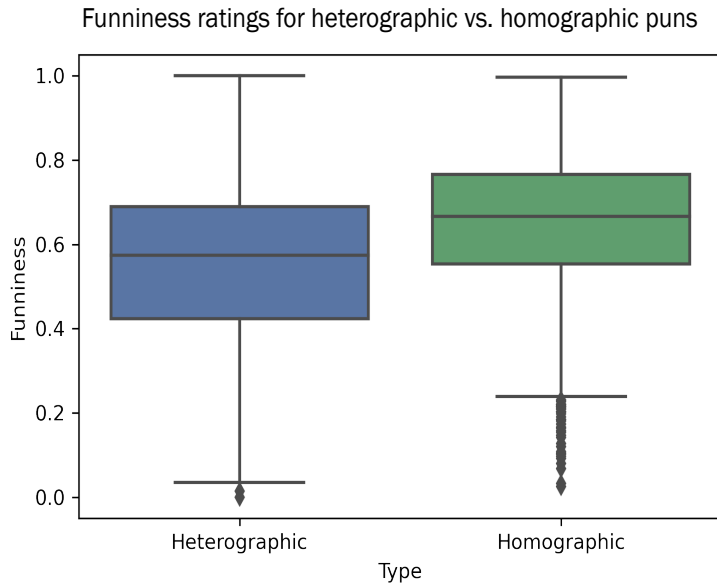
- Path similarity
- Leacock-Chodorow similarity network-based
- Wu-Palmer similarity
- Resnik similarity
- Lin similarity information-based
- Jiang-Conrath similarity information- & network-based
- Word2Vec similarity

- **Pun type:** comparison of funniness ratings for homo- vs. heterographic puns
homographic puns – higher funniness ratings
- **Phonology:** correlation of phonological distance & funniness ratings
lower phonological distance – higher funniness ratings
- **Semantics:** correlation of semantic similarity & funniness ratings
semantic similarity in middle range – higher funniness ratings

Part II: What's in a pun? Relating humorousness to linguistic features

Results

Results: Pun type

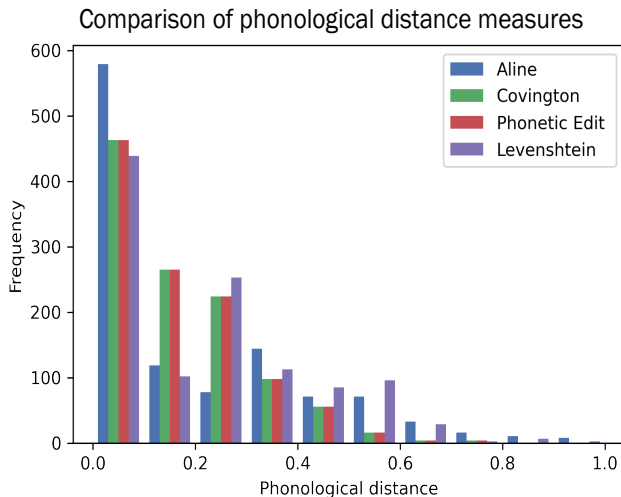


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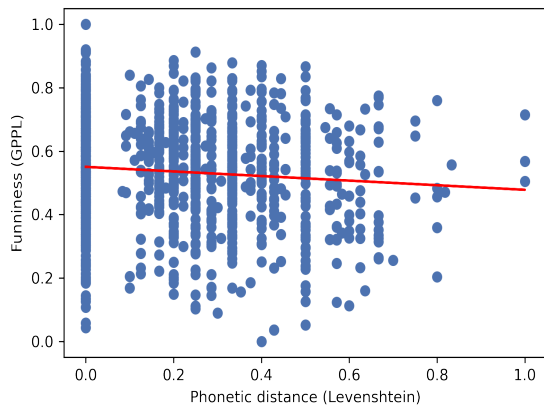
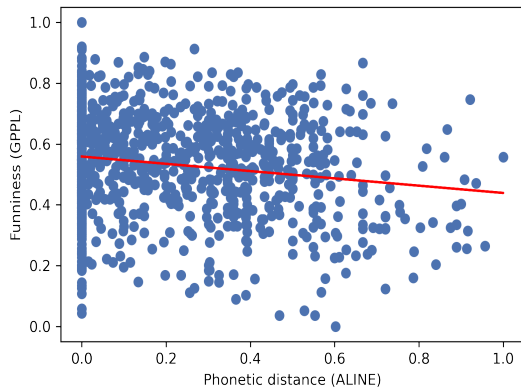


Results: Phonological distance





→ significant correlation of funniness ratings with ALINE and Levenshtein distance

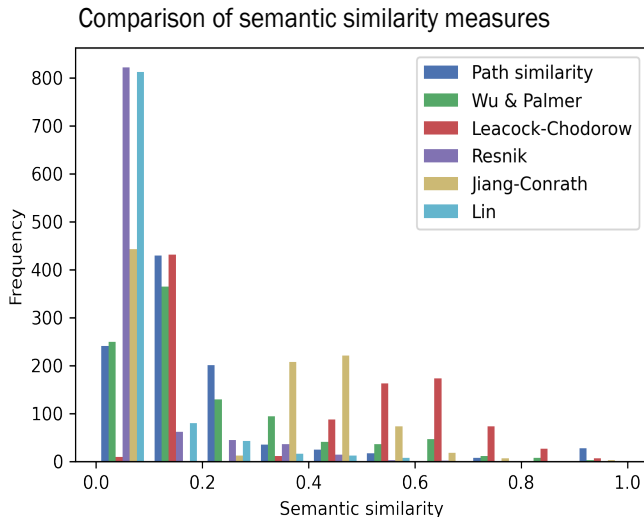
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→ no significant correlation with funniness ratings

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Part II: What's in a pun? Relating humorousness to linguistic features

Discussion

Discussion: Phonological distance

- Homographic puns rated as funnier than heterographic puns → homography \approx homophony
- Lower phonological distance – higher funniness ratings → in line with the literature (e.g. Lagerquist, 1980)
- Negative correlation only significant for Levenshtein and ALINE distance – why?

Discussion: Semantic distance

- No significance – why?
- Generally low semantic similarity values
- Maybe not semantic *similarity*, but other aspects (e.g. contextual fit)
- Semantic similarity calculations not accurate enough

- Lower phonological distance – higher funniness
- Facilitation of target recovery → necessary for incongruity resolution
- Many other influencing factors on funniness ratings
→ punning is a multi-layered phenomenon

Part III: Towards the machine(-assisted) translation of wordplay

- Wordplay is tricky to translate, and so is widely researched in translation studies
- Translation is now a highly technologized profession
- Little/no prior work on using computers for wordplay translation
- Most language technology, including machine translation (MT), is not geared towards literary texts
- Existing digital tools ignore or eliminate linguistic anomalies and ambiguities

- Punning is a particularly common form of wordplay
- Puns employ sophisticated semantic and pragmatic mechanisms
- Puns are often held to be “untranslatable”, particularly by MT
- Can language technology nonetheless play some role in pun translation?

- PunCAT is our tool for computer-mediated translation of puns
- Evaluation in user study with puns from published texts
- Research questions:
 - Does PunCAT support, improve, or constrain the translation process?
 - If so, in what ways?
 - What are the tool's benefits as perceived/described by the participants?

Part III: Towards the machine(-assisted) translation of wordplay

Background

- **Functional equivalence:** Aim for target-language solutions that prioritize the **intention** over the literal meaning of the text
- In the case of puns, this intention is to amuse the reader in the context of the discourse
- Implications: For puns, it's OK to...
 - ...substitute a different pun
 - ...substitute a different form of humour
 - ...omit the pun/humour altogether, as long as you compensate
- Translation strategies that preserve wordplay are preferable, but challenging to pull off

Machine(-in-the-loop) translation for literature

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Machine(-in-the-loop) translation for literature

- Current MT can't yet produce publication-quality output for conventional language, let alone humour and wordplay
- AI can still play an important role in literary translation
- Rather than model the entire end-to-end translation task, put the machine in the loop:
 1. Study how human translators approach the problem
 2. Provide them with tools that support rather than replace these approaches
- Apply language technology to those subtasks it performs best
- Leave tasks that depend heavily on real-world knowledge to the human

Part III: Towards the machine(-assisted) translation of wordplay

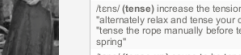
Experiment

PunCAT user interface

File
PunCAT

« < > »

I was using the subjunctive instead of the past tense. Yes, we're a way past tense; we're living in bungalows now.



Keywords:

Jiang and Conrath

ALINE

Pun	Target	sem %	phon %
Zeitstufe	Zelt	100	64

Source Target

tense

/tens/ (tense) a grammatical category of verbs used to express distinctions of time

/tens/ (tense up) become tense, nervous, or uneasy; "He tensed up when he saw his opponent enter the room"

/tens/ (strain, tense) become stretched or tense or taut; "the bodybuilder's neck muscles tensed;" "the rope strained when the weight was attached"

/tens/ (tense) increase the tension on; "alternately relax and tense your calf muscle"; "tense the rope manually before tensing the spring"

/tens/ (tense up) cause to be tense and uneasy or nervous or anxious; "he got a phone call from his lawyer that tensed him up"

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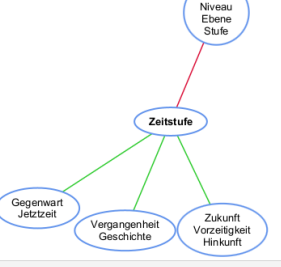
tent

/tnt/ (collapsible shelter) a portable shelter (usually of canvas stretched over supporting poles and fastened to the ground with ropes and pegs); "he pitched his tent near the creek"


/tnt/ (tent) a web that resembles a tent or carpet

/tnt/ (tent) live in or as if in a tent; "Can we go camping again this summer?"; "The circus tented near the town"; "The houseguests had to camp in the living room"

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Jurte

Tipi

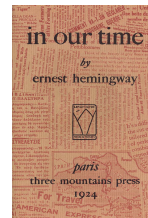
Partyzelt

PunCAT user interface

[illegible]

Source data

- Six puns from six published works
- All have published translations



Experimental setup

- Participants
 - 9 Master's in Translation students at the University of Vienna
- Equipment:
 - Media lab workstation
 - Hard copy of source texts
 - Note paper

Experimental setup

- Participants
 - 9 Master's in Translation students at the University of Vienna
- Equipment:
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- Structure:
 - Two 45-minute sessions
 - Three puns to translate per session
 - PunCAT used in Session 2 only

Part III: Towards the machine(-assisted) translation of wordplay

Results and analysis

Results: Translation strategy, translation quality, and user satisfaction

- 62 target texts produced: 32 with PunCAT and 30 without
- Slightly more of the PunCAT target texts used puns (25 vs. 21)
- No significant difference in translation quality between texts produced with and without PunCAT
- Participants generally appreciated PunCAT's support with brainstorming and felt it reduced the level of stress

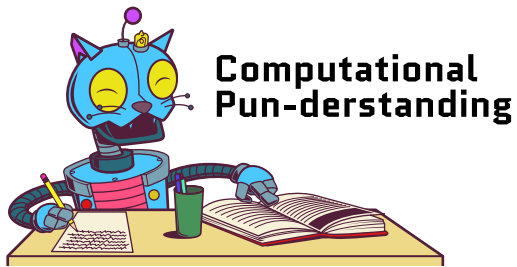
Part III: Towards the machine(-assisted) translation of wordplay

Conclusion

- PunCAT provides users with a specialized environment intended to structure the pun translation process without unduly constraining it
- We find good evidence that PunCAT can effectively support the translation process in terms of
 - facilitating brainstorming
 - stimulating creative thinking
 - providing inspiration
 - broadening the translator's pool of solution candidates
- But working styles vary, and PunCAT may be more suitable for some than others

Future work: Automatic translation of wordplay

- JOKER: Workshop and shared task series at CLEF 2022, 2023, 2024
- Goals:
 - bring together translators and computer scientists
 - develop evaluation frameworks for wordplay translation (data and metrics)
 - foster future work on automatic translation and automatic evaluation of translations







<https://punderstanding.ofai.at/>



<https://www.joker-project.com/>

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