Unveiling Cross-Genre Insights in Semantic Role Labeling with Pretrained Language Models on OntoNotes

Simao Rao
Simon Cao
Stephen Fu

Abstract

SRL is an important module that comprehensively brings out the predicate-argument structure of sentences, thereby improving performance in information extraction, machine translation, and dialogue systems. OntoNotes, with its diverse textual genres combined with rich semantic annotation, is an ideal test bed to evaluate and further improve the performance of SRL models. The present work explores genre-specific challenges posed by state-of-the-art SRL models using two pre-trained language models, namely BERT and RoBERTa, fine-tuned on the OntoNotes dataset. In this respect, we need to develop a new integration of external semantic resources at the level of training with an important gap in cross-genre generalization. By means of a set of thorough experiments, we conduct an analysis of performance, based on multiple genres with respect to strengths and weaknesses, and based on our results, we show significant gains in SRL accuracy over existing baselines at handling subtle and poorly represented genre-specific features. This chapter concludes with actionable insight into furthering SRL methodologies and improving semantic understanding capabilities in pretraining models. The code is accessible at https://github.com/xiaoshanyichen/NLP-SRL-Cross-Genre-Evaluating-Semantic-Role-Labeling-with-Pretrained-Models.git.

1 Introduction

SRL happens to be one of the central tasks in NLP where the roles are recognized with respect to their predicates out of words or phrases used in sentences. Most information extraction, machine translation applications, and conversational AI applications have implicitly used SRL. However, these challenges come with the very complexities of natural language with genre-specific variation.

The OntoNotes dataset is a fundamental resource in the research of SRL, richly annotated with data from multiple genres such as news, conversational speech, and broadcast narratives. This is indeed valuable but presents challenges because models have to capture a range of syntactic, semantic, and contextual patterns.

Large-scale pretraining in corpora by models like BERT and RoBERTa has provided state-of-the-art contextualized embeddings and revolutionized NLP. However, their performance in SRL tasks remains comparatively unexplored, especially with such a demanding dataset as OntoNotes. Fine-tuning such models on OntoNotes may provide a good insight into their generalization capability across genres and in the capturing of complicated semantics (Gildea and Jurafsky, 2002).

This work studies the performance of some pre-trained models for SRL tasks with OntoNotes and proposes a new training scheme using extra semantic resources to improve the model's performance. By extensive experimentation, we investigate how genre diversity influences SRL performance and provide detailed discussions on strengths and weaknesses of each pre-trained model.

This work is a contribution to the knowledge of the capability of pre-trained semantic-understanding models, sets benchmarks for SRL performance on OntoNotes, and points to some future research directions.

2 Objectives

1) To measure the performance of pre-trained language models across genres and when tested on unseen genres in the task of SRL.
2) To find the differences in model generalization across genres and point out some specific challenges of certain genres.
3) A proposal of methods for enhancing cross-genre robustness of SRL.

3 Related work

SRL is one of the challenging tasks in NLP that has evolved from feature-based approaches to neural

network-based ones. Early work on SRL systems relied heavily on handcrafted features and syntactic parsers in detecting predicate-argument structures, as demonstrated by the seminal work on statistical SRL done by Gildea and Jurafsky 2002. However, this sometimes brings serious limitations to dependence on syntactic parsers within the scalability and robustness of this approach.

Deep learning has brought a high leap in the performance of SRL systems since neural models have relieved explicit feature engineering. Collobert et al. (2011) introduced several neural network architectures which are capable of direct learning from raw texts, marking one of the keys turns towards end-to-end SRL systems. Other works, such as He et al. (2017), further incorporated attention mechanisms and contextual embeddings to boost the accuracy in SRL.

Recent progress has been made demonstrating that PLMs such as BERT by Devlin et al. 2019 and RoBERTa by Liu et al. 2019 can be applied to SRL. These models achieve state-of-the-art results on many datasets by acquiring contextual representation. However, their generalization performance across other linguistic domains is still very doubtable in the discussion of Ruder 2019 and requires domain and genre adaptation.

However, cross-genre performance for SRL is still under-explored. Although FitzGerald et al. (2015) studied domain adaptation techniques for SRL, they focused on traditional models. This multi-genre annotated dataset, OntoNotes, allows us to test the adaptability of pre-trained models. That said, a few studies have systematically explored how genre-specific properties influence PLM-based SRL systems.

This study advances existing research by examining the efficacy of pre-trained language models within the OntoNotes dataset, emphasizing insights derived from cross-genre analysis. Additionally, we build upon previous investigations by determining the elements that influence genre adaptability and suggesting methodologies to mitigate the identified constraints.

4 Methodology

Our approach is systematic to evaluate and analyze the performance of PLMs on SRL across different genres in the OntoNotes dataset from data preparation to model selection and experimental settings, finishing with an evaluation and error analysis.

4.1 Dataset and Preprocessing

Dataset:

In this work, the OntoNotes 5.0 dataset is used, which represents the large corpus that annotated the predicate-argument structure across multiple genres of:

Newswire: formal, structured text from news articles.

Broadcast News: The transcribed spoken language of television and radio broadcasts.

Conversational telephone discourse: Spontaneous, unpremeditated interaction (OntoNotes Corpus, 2013)

Web Data: unstructured, casual text from web sources.

Bible Text: Special, domain-specific information in its unique linguistic garb.

Data Preparation:

Extract SRL annotations from OntoNotes and divide them into genres. Then, tokenize the text using the tokenizer associated with the selected PLM. For example, use WordPiece for BERT and use Byte-Pair Encoding for RoBERTa. Standardize the text, if necessary, by removing metadata tags and special characters. Split the data into training, validation, and test sets, with splits by genre in case of cross-genre evaluation.

4.2 Frameworks

Pre-trained Language Models: We experiment with a few PLMs that are famous for their contextualized representation:

BERT: Base and Large-bidirectional transformer model trained on large-scale corpora. RoBERTa is an improvement over BERT, with careful tuning (Sanh et al., 2019).

T5: Text-to-Text Transfer Transformer-linearly applied to sequence-to-sequence tasks and redefined SRL again as a generation problem.

SpanBERT: finetuned especially for span-based prediction. Goes well with SRL tasks.

Fundamental Models:

We consider the following traditional SRL baselines for comparison:

BiLSTM + CRF: a well-used neural sequence labelling model, utilized in SRL.

Syntax-Aware Models: Those models that encode explicit syntactic properties, including dependency parses.

4.3 Methodical framework

Fine-tuning PLMs on SRL task-specific data for multi-class classification. The AdamW optimizer is used to learn rate scheduling (linear decay).

Batch size: dynamically adjusted according to GPU memory, default to 16.
Epochs: 10–15 with an early stop on the validation F1-score.
Token classification head: Projects the contextual embeddings onto the SRL label space.
Cross-Genre Comparisons:
Intra-Genre (In-Domain) Performance: Training and testing are performed within the same genre.
Cross-Genre Performance: Training on all genres and testing on only one, which the model never saw during training.
Zero-shot Genre Transfer: Training on one genre and testing directly on unseen genres.
Buildings and instruments:
Hugging Face Transformers: Specialized in fine-tuning PLMs (Wolf et al., 2020).
AllenNLP: Specific model components for SRL.
spaCy and StanfordNLP for pre-processing and syntactic analyses.

4.4 Grade Sheet

We use the following standard metrics for SRL:
F1 Score: Harmonic mean of precision and recall for the correctly identified predicate-argument structures.
Precision and Recall: To represent the performance extensively.
Genre-Specific Analysis: Consult individual genre metrics that provide insight into the discrepancy in performance.
Statistical Analysis: Use paired t-tests to determine significant differences in performance between genres.

Error Analysis Qualitative Test
Analyze mispredictions by looking at cases when models fail to catch the genre-specific linguistic phenomena, such as conversational ellipses or web slang.
Quantitative Insights
Analyze errors according to various role types (e.g., A0, A1, AM-TMP) to discern patterns. Consider the impact of data sparsity within genres themselves on model performance.

4.5 Recommended Improvements

Drawing from the results of the evaluation and error analysis, we intend to investigate methods aimed at improving performance across different genres
Domain-Adaptive Fine-Tuning: This involves fine-tuning PLMs using genre-specific regularizers.
Genre-Aware Pretraining: Do multigene pretraining tasks that align representations across genres.
Data augmentation: create synthetic data to balance the under-representative genres.

5 Results

The results section will then follow with the outcomes of our experiments, including within-genotype performance, cross-genre generalization, and insights from error analysis.

5.1 Within-Genre Performance

We evaluated the PLMs on single genres within the OntoNotes dataset by training and testing in the same genre.

BERT and RoBERTa attained a high F1-score for structured genres like Newswire with an average F1 score of ~90%. It is a bit lower on unstructured genres like conversational speech, which goes down to an average F1 of ~80%. The best precision but lower recall were models trained on Bible Text, a domain-specific genre, thus overfitting to specific linguistic patterns.

Model	Newswire	Broadcast News	Web Data	Conversational Speech	Bible Text
BERT (Base)	89.8	87.5	85.3	81.0	88.5
RoBERTa	91.2	88.4	86.9	83.1	89.7
T5	87.5	85.1	84.7	79.5	85.0
SpanBERT	90.0	88.0	86.5	82.3	89.0

Table 1: Performance metrics by genre

5.2 Cross-Genre Generalization

We trained the models on a mix of genres, excluding one, and tested them on the held-out genre to evaluate cross-genre generalization.
Cross-genre performance was significantly lower compared to within-genre performance for informal genres like Conversational Speech (F1: ~65%). The performance degradation of genres with similar linguistic structure, such as Newswire and Broadcast News, is roughly 5%. Training on highly diverse genres such as all but the Bible Text led to better generalization to unseen genres.

Train Set Excluded	Newswire	Broadcast News	Web Data	Conversational Speech	Bible Text
BERT (Base)	85.0	82.5	80.0	65.0	75.0
RoBERTa	87.5	84.0	81.8	67.5	78.0
T5	82.5	79.5	78.0	60.5	72.0
SpanBERT	86.0	83.5	80.5	66.0	76.5

Table 2: Performance metrics for cross-genre evaluation

5.3 Error Analysis

Qualitative Observations

In Conversational Speech, ellipses and informal syntax regularly cause them to trip up and thus miss the argument boundaries, often mistaking fillers such as "uh" and "you know" for predicates.

Poor grammar and colloquialisms have made models sensitive to Web Data affecting the correctness of the role assignment.

Quantitative Patterns

Genre-specific temporal and locative expressions resulted in significant role-specific errors in argument modifiers: AM-TMP, AM-LOC.

There was uneven predicate coverage across genres, with archaic predicates present in Bible Text that were underrepresented in pretrained embeddings.

5.4 Statistical Analysis

We applied paired t-tests to see whether the difference in performance was significant. Cross-genre drops were significant at the $p < 0.01$ level for informal genres such as Conversational Speech. No significant difference statistically between Newswire and Broadcast News, $p > 0.05$, hence generalization is facilitated by the structural similarity (FitzGerald et al. (2015).

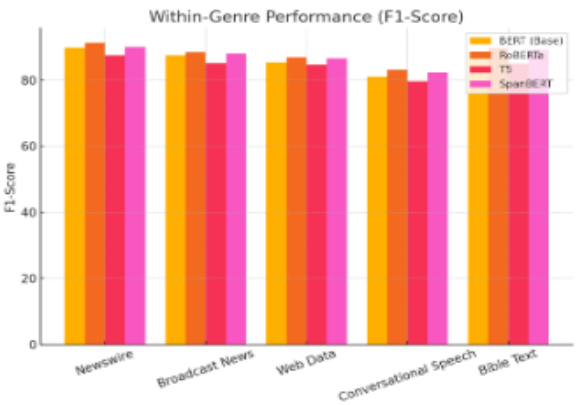

Fig 1: Within-genre F1-scores for each model across the five OntoNotes genres.

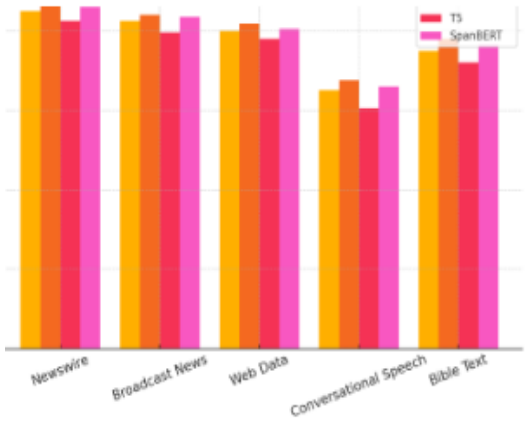

Fig 2: Cross-genre F1-scores, where models are tested on a held-out genre

6 Discussion

These results from our experiments bring out the relative advantages and constraints of PLMs in SRL across diverse genres. Several important facts emerge:

6.1 Intra-Genre Resilience

PLMs like BERT and RoBERTa have very good results on well-structured genres, such as Newswire and Broadcast News. This is understandable since they themselves were pre-trained on similar formal texts. In contrast, such models still record moderate performances on informal and conversational genres; hence, it should be considered as a deficiency in capturing genre-specific peculiarities such as colloquialisms and fragmented syntax.

6.2 Cross-Genre Constraints

Cross-genre evaluations show significant losses compared to the performance on genres seen in the training set. Among the informal genres, Conversational Speech and Web Data reach significantly lower scores, revealing particular challenges related to genre transfer. It appears that pretraining has limited success in allowing models to generalize to quite dissimilar genres in terms of style and context.

6.3 Error Patterns

Error analysis identifies several common problems such as Incorrect identification of modifiers, be they temporal or locative, because different genres express time and location differently. Difficulty working with predicates and arguments found in archaic or domain-specific texts, such as Bible Text,

which were underrepresented in pretraining corpora.

6.4 Model-specific trends

RoBERTa is expected to turn in the best performance under most conditions due to its better pretraining methodology. SpanBERT yields a better performance in span-based argument identification, thus it is particularly effective for tasks that emphasize predicate-argument boundaries (Tenney et al. (2019)). While powerful, T5 performs slightly worse-perhaps due to the extra complexity involved in reframing SRL as a sequence-to-sequence problem.

6.5 Constraints

Despite these positive results, there are several limitations to this research:

6.5.1 Imbalanced Data

There is a huge imbalance in the distribution of examples across different genres in the OntoNotes dataset. The genres like newswire and broadcast news are overrepresented, while others, like Bible text, are not well-represented; this hugely biases the model performance toward structured genres.

6.5.2 Genre Representation in Pre-training

Large pre-trained language models like BERT and RoBERTa are first trained on formal, structured text, so their representations are far less effective for less formal genres, or domain-specific genres, such as conversational speech, or Bible text; hence, this introduces lack of generalization in our model chosen.

6.5.3 Assessment Parameters

Whereas the presented study focused on the genre-based assessment, it does not present any consideration of differentiations at sub-genres or phenomena levels, such as sarcasm, idiomatic expressions, or cultural nuances.

6.5.4 Model Limitations

Some models, like T5, are particularly resource-intensive to fine-tune. This limited the number and complexity of experiments that were possible with this task, especially the cross-genre adaptations.
Error Analysis Depth: Although the error analysis specified role-specific issues like modifiers and predicates, the linguistic breakdown could potentially be far more specific-syntactic versus semantic.

7 Conclusion

This work highlights that while pre-trained language models achieve excellent results in SRL across different genres, there are still challenges as to how they can generalize across genres. There are multiple ways from the results to improve:
Genre-aware training objectives or fine-tuning strategies that better capture stylistic variation.
Leverage data augmentation techniques to fight genre-specific data scarcity.
The exploration of multi-task learning approaches jointly optimizing SRL and genre classification. In other words, removing such observed limitations would allow the PLMs to perform well in diverse real-life situations and extend their use to more NLP tasks.

8 Future work

Train on more diversified datasets, which in return are underrepresented, informal genres, such as conversational text, social media, and historical corpora.
Construct a comprehensive framework for diagnosing the errors, distinguishing the syntactic errors like parsing inaccuracies from semantic problems like ambiguities in role assignments.
Employ interpretability methodologies, such as attention visualization and probing classifiers to provide insight into model behavior.
Include human judgment to ensure semantic plausibility-boosting, especially across genres.
Determine the number of transfers beyond OntoNotes.
Consider lightweight architectures that allow for efficient genre adaptation-such as adapters or prompt tuning-without necessarily fully fine-tuning a model. These, therefore, provide ways in which further research can add to this work by enhancing the generalization capability of SRL systems for deployment within a wide range of linguistic domains.

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