how to aim for delight and diversion?

jussi karlgren

what is funny?

can we identify what is funny reliably?

can we build a generative something that is funny?

it is difficult to be funny

most of us know this and those who do not should be told

"Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it."

but here we are and we are interested, right?

some empirical observations

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but

only about 20-30% of laughter events in recorded material are responses to humorous utterances or acts

note:

humour comprehension (is this funny) is not the same as
humor appreciation (does it make me laugh)

some empirical observations

repeated display of cartoons reduces

- funniness rating
- displayed mirth

(again, a point in favour of the unexpected)

some empirical observations

subjects were asked to listen to a somewhat funny comedy routine and rate its funniness.

some were told that a lab environment acts as a damper on mirth.

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those indeed showed less mirth than the control group

but they rated the results to be funnier

some empirical observations

environment influences assessment of funniness: a joke is considered funnier if it evokes mirth in an inappropriate context

funniness has many facets

- unexpected turns in events
- ambiguity (and its resolution)
- anomalies and incongruity (and its resolution)
- absurdity and nonsense
- sexuality and other boundary pushing topics
- aggressiveness, bullying, and Schadenfreude
- potential offensiveness

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in general, a breach of expectation in some way

   many studies have been conducted for this sort of thing

some of those things ought to be
identifiable and emulable?

breaking conventions

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how are those convention breaches expressed and signaled?

my interest in humour

(besides knowing that it is difficult to be funny)

- i study (among other things) stylistic difference in human language
- the difference between several ways of saying the same thing
- quantitatively, mostly
- recently i have worked on retrieval of recorded speech
- now i work with quality metrics for generative language models
- i wonder if the notion of humour appreciation can be linked to the content and form of the (potentially) humorous expression
- especially with respect to stylistic variation

what is style?

idiosyncratic

situational

what is style?

idiosyncratic

situational

dialectal

sociolectal

what is style?

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conventional but not rule-bound

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consistent stylistic variation conditioned for context is the path to genre

humour is a genre (or, actually, several genres)

style is part of the message

different ways of saying the same thing appeal variously to
the intended or unintended audience

humour is strongly affected by this!

"i know it's a joke but it's not funny"

Rice is great if you're really hungry and want to eat two thousand of something.

mitch hedberg

information access systems

are built and optimised and evaluated for topical task fulfilment

not for enjoyment and momentary diversion

how might use cases for humour influence system design (and evaluation)?

topical focus has ramifications

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- removing noise means taking out stylistic variation
- gold standards to measure linguistic performance are strongly biased towards referential semantics (i.e. nouns)
- washes out precisely the difference between funny and unfunny

My belt holds my pants up, but the belt loops hold my belt up. I don't really know what's happening down there. Who is the real hero?

building entertainment systems

- use cases very different from task-based systems

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  - "entertain me"

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- often high recall
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  - search and exploration is part of entertainment
- often requires high precision in user model
  - moving the effort onto recommendation rather than search
  - recommender systems are mostly usage based ("social filtering") rather than content feature based

let's look at some use cases

"entertain me"

- one click query
- "for you" feed
- precision modelling of user
- hi recall feed
- low-ish precision is ok
- content and style features based on known history

how can we measure delight, happiness, and contentment here?

- through one bit feedback?

explore and search

- exploration is part of the entertainment
- searching is not a threshold but a vehicle
- high recall
- low precision
- quite similar to "entertain me"
- content features - broad but improving over session?
- style features -"-

how can we measure delight, happiness, and contentment here?

- through listening history?

how about trying for content features?

known-item search

- frequently ill-informed queries
- humming is difficult
- "what's his name who played in that movie you know"
- something about aristocrats?
- high precision
- high robustness

known case, we can work on this using standard metrics

TREC Podcast Challenge

- Find 120s segments of podcast that are topically relevant to a query
- Also rate them for being "entertaining"
- Result: all over the place

Many Entertaining	66	**how to handle failing a job interview:** Any material on how a job interview fails or how a candidate was rejected due to the interview: tips, advice, or personal anecdotes and testimonials are all relevant. If a rejection is not about the interview, even if the segment mentions an interview, it is not relevant.
Few Entertaining	85	**personality disorders:** Discussions about any personality disorder are relevant. Passing claims that someone (e.g. a criminal, a celebrity, the speakers themselves) has a personality disorder without discussing the disorder itself are not.

speech is a richer signal

the TREC task was intended to nudge participants into looking at audio

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they did not

speech is a richer signal

funny voice is a humorous vehicle

sends signal to process message differently

localises and emphasises the funniness

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lost in transcription

An escalator can never break: it can only become stairs. You should never see an Escalator Temporarily Out Of Order sign, just Escalator Temporarily Stairs. Sorry for the convenience.

mitch hedberg

it is difficult to understand what is funny

circling back to Joker lab

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content search for fun is **hard** (humming is difficult)

style might be a path forward

suggested task

search for funniness

use features related to form and presentation

(content search for fun is hard: cf. searching for poetry or for VHS tapes at a rental)

suggested task

identify jokes by their form

in material across cultures (will they translate?)

identify subgenres by content and form

suggested task

identify level of anomaly in jokes across cultures

comparing similar topical utterances with humorous utterances

suggested task

expand from wordplay to constructionplay

(the real linguist task)

I haven't slept for ten days, because that would be too long.

mitch hedberg

suggested task

use audio features to pinpoint intended funniness

compare narrative, argumentative, entertaining utterances

across cultures