Lost in Translation: Modern Image Classifiers still degrade even under simple Translations

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Abstract

Modern image classifiers are used potentially in safety-critical applications and thus should not be vulnerable to natural transformations of the image as it can happen due to variations in the image acquisition. While it is known that image classifiers can degrade significantly in performance with respect to translations and rotations, the corresponding works did not ensure that the object of interest is fully contained in the image and also introduce boundary artefacts so that the input is not a natural image. In this paper we leverage pixelwise segmentations of the ImageNet-S dataset (Gao et al., 2021) in order to search for the translation and rotation which ensures that the object is i) fully contained in the image (potentially together with a zoom) and ii) the image is natural (no padding with black pixels) such that the resulting natural image is misclassified. We observe a consistent drop in accuracy over a large set of image classifiers showing that natural adversarial changes are an important threat model which deserves more attention.

1. Introduction

Due to the usage of neural networks in various safety-critical applications, it is of paramount importance to study their behaviour and failure modes.

2. The Task

For tasks in computer vision, we would expect models deployed on real world-tasks to have a minimum level of robustness towards natural input changes. Previous works have considered various changes, for example corruptions (Hendrycks & Dietterich, 2018; Taori et al., 2020), changes in the background (Xiao et al., 2020) or chains of simple, restricted transformation functions like noise-injection, flow-field or color-distortion (Suzuki & Sato, 2019). This paper focuses on the geometric transformations of translations and rotations, which can naturally follow from a slightly different angle or position of the camera, due to e.g. movement. While existing work has already shown the brittleness of existing models to these simple geometric transformations (Engstrom et al., 2019), in their study it was not guaranteed that i) the translated/rotated image still contains the object and ii) the images were not natural as padding with black pixels or other variants has been used which leads to an image which would be considered unnatural. In contrast, we leverage the recent work of Gao et. al (2021), who published Imagenet-S dataset containing a subset of ImageNet images, with full semantic segmentations according to the ImageNet classes. Using these groundtruth segmentations, we ensure that the object corresponding to the class of the image is fully contained in the translated/rotated version of the image and all images are "natural", in the sense that there are no black pixels or other forms of padding like reflection. This pipeline is illustrated by Figure 1. Since we manage to transform the input without the use of padding, the generated images could naturally occur by a slight translation/rotation of the camera configuration and thus no potential bias is

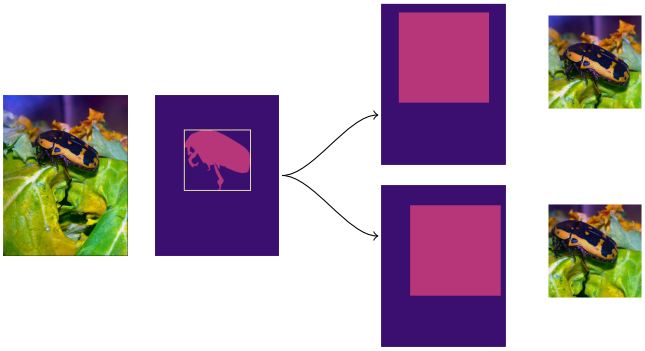

Figure 1. Illustration of the work flow for translations. We generate from the segmented images translated versions of the image always containing the bounding box of the object. The cropped regions and the resulting images are shown on the right.

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introduced and thus our benchmark yields a realistic worst-case evaluation. The worst-case translation/rotation is found by a grid-search which is adaptively refined for improved efficiency. While it has been argued that CNN architectures are not necessarily translation invariant (Kayhan & Gemert, 2020), it is nevertheless surprising that state-of-the-art models trained typically with heavy data augmentation still show significant performance degradation when such simple transformations such as translation and rotation are used. We also observe quite different degradation of SOTA ImageNet models, showing that certain architectures/training schemes lead to significantly more robust models.

To guarantee full visibility of the objects to classify, we need to track their position during the transformations. To achieve this, we use the segmentation Imagenet-S Dataset (Gao et al., 2021). We have chosen the Imagenet-S 300 version for the validation partition, which is the only partition for which the data can be accessed. This dataset in turn is based on the relabeled imagenet from Beyer et. al (2020). We perform a rudimentary cleaning of the dataset by sorting out the data points where the classes from the segmentation-annotation do not agree with the new labels from Beyer et. al (2020). The segmentation-data and the labels can be downloaded with instructions on the respective repositories.

To prepare the data for the transformations, we first fit a bounding box around the object and enclose the bounding box with a best-fit centered square of the desired input dimension t for the model, usually $224px$, which encodes the current crop. The crop is the section of the image that the model will see later. To allow for batch-processing, we have to bring the image into a uniform representation. We do this by padding, or cropping, the image to t pixels around crop-area of length t, so an starting with an image of arbitrary (h, w) dimensions, we arrive at $(3t, 3t)$. Summing up, we arrive at the padded image-data with dimension $(3t, 3t)$ and the metadata consisting of the bounds of the embedded image, the position of the crop and the position of the object inside the crop-area. This process is visualized in Figure 1. Not every object is embedded in an image with enough background so that it can be fully shown without leaving the image area. We discard those image and arrive at a total number of 2013 instances to classify. In the rare case that multiple instances are on the same image, we treat them as separate classification targets.

2.1. Translation

We now have everything we need to compute the bounds for our transformations. Starting with the translation, we first zoom out up to 20% to gain the freedom to translate without the object leaving our crop-area. We then compute the bounds both from the crop-area to the surrounding image-space, but also to the enclosed object and combine them into

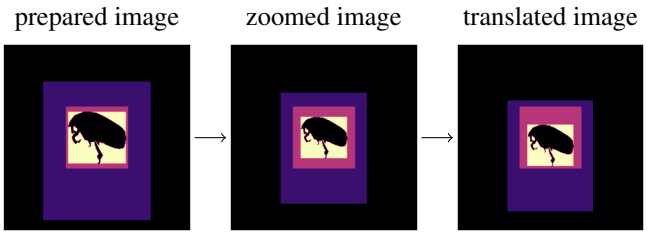

Figure 2. This figure visualizes the translation pipeline from the perspective of the meta-information.

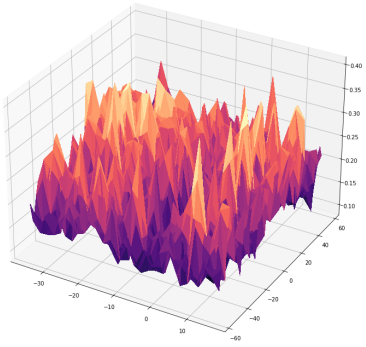

Figure 3. A surface plot for the translation of an image with an ice cream for the BEIT model from Bao et. al (2021). Shown here is the confidence for the correct class over translations in h and w directions.

our maximum translation bounds. This pipeline is visualized in Figure 2.

Unfortunately, the surface is highly non-convex with often drastic changes in the confidence score, as can be observed in Figure 3. Curiously, we also notice a $1px$-periodic pattern in the confidence surface for most samples. To work under those constraints without excessive runtime, we perform adaptive sampling. First, we try to find the minimum for the period by a dense sampling of a small patch near the origin, a linear detrending and fitting minimums under the $1px$ period assumption. We then perform a coarse sampling using $2px$ steps over the whole parameters-space and investigating, recursively, the neighborhood of the minimums found. It takes about 90 minutes to analyze the 2013 samples on a Nvidia Tesla V100-SXM2.

2.2. Rotation

Analyzing the rotation is conceptually easier, since the parameter space is only one-dimensional and quite restricted. We first try to zoom out to nearly 29.28% to get more freedom for the rotation. Next, we compute the maximum possible rotation both with respect to the image bounds and

to the object bounds. The minimum over those values defines our parameter-space. We then sample the parameter evenly spaced 500 times and record our results. It takes about two hours to analyze the 2013 samples on a Nvidia Tesla V100-SXM2.

3. Analysis

We evaluate a range of recent state-of-the-art models and classical models to compare the performance and assess whether improvements were made. We employ the pre-trained BEIT (Bao et al., 2021) (beit_large_patch16_224), Swin Transformer (Liu et al., 2021) (swin_large_patch4_window7_224) and SEResNeXt (Hu et al., 2017) (seresnext50_32x4d) from the PyTorch Image Models (timm)-library (Wightman, 2019). We also study the pre-trained ConvNext model (Liu et al., 2022) in the large-configuration. Additionally, pre-trained Resnet50 (He et al., 2015), Resnet18 (He et al., 2015) and VGG16 (Simonyan & Zisserman, 2015) from the torch-vision model-zoo are investigated. All models expect the input to be of dimension $(224, 224)$.

3.1. Translation

When analyzing the translations, the first thing to notice is how much the worst-case performance of the models depends on the possible degrees of freedom, instead of e.g. the sampling rate. This is visualized in Figure 4. The more degrees of freedom for the translation, measured by $max(h, w)$ where h and w are the translation bounds for with and height in pixels, the wider the gap. Note that this changes the set of images we can work with and thus we report the original performance on these images too. Results for all models are shown in Table 1. The differences in performance are astounding and when investigating the locations of the label flips, we often find localized areas, usually disconnected between models, in closed parts of the parameter-space. A visualization of this phenomena can be found in the Appendix. When visualizing the various translated images, the similarity between correctly classified images and wrongly classified is striking. The reason for the miss classification of the models is usually not obvious, they appear very similar to humans, an example is shown in Figure 5. The drop in accuracy is astounding when considering that we only translate the visible crop inside the image bounds, without changing anything about the image itself.

3.2. Rotation

Rotation does not lead to as drastic effects as translation, but one can still observe a drop in worst-case accuracy as shown in Table 2. Similar to translation, we see a dependence on the freedom of rotation available, with drastically better results if we restrict ourselves to instances with a minimum of 30 degrees rotation available.

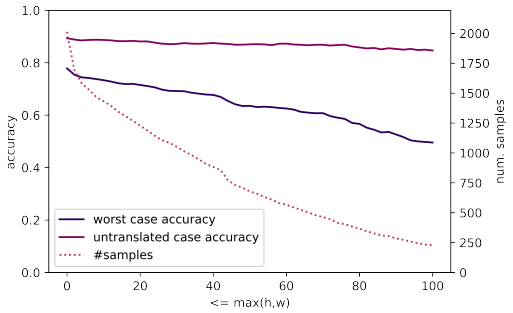

Figure 4. The gap between untranslated and worst-case performance widens when we filter by a minimum degree of freedom, measured by $max(h, w)$. We visualize the results for the SEResNeXt-model, additional models can be found in the appendix.

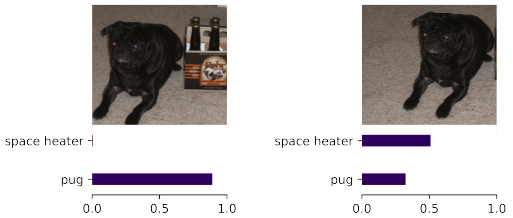

Figure 5. A correctly and an incorrectly classified sample for the BEiT-Model.

4. Conclusion

In this paper we have analyzed various existing models on ImageNet with respect to their behavior with respect to translation and rotation. In contrast to previous work we ensure that the object is always visible and there are no artefacts from potential padding of the image. Even though the full class information is available in every transformed image we see large drops in worst case accuracy. Thus even SOTA models can be fooled by this simple shifts mimicking variations in the camera position. In particular for images where one can test larger translations and rotations the performance drops are very high. On the other hand we see also quite significant differences in the worst-case accuracy of the models even though the original ImageNet performance is very similar. It is therefore an interesting open question if this is due to the employed architecture, the data augmentation or the training data.

References

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Table 1. **Translation:** For all models we report top-1 ImageNet-accuracy $acc_{ImageNet}$. For the subset of 2013 images from ImageNet-S (Gao et al., 2021) we report the accuracy for the untranslated subset $acc_{untrans}$ and the worst case accuracy acc_{worst} over all translations leaving the object fully visible. Additionally, we report separately for the subset of 229 images which allow translations of at least 100 pixels ($max(h, w) \geq 100$) the accuracy on these (untranslated) images and with the worst case over all possible translations. Note the significant drop in accuracy of up to 17% for all images and up to 40% for the images which allow larger translations. The BEiT and ConvNext model are significantly more robust than the Swin Transformer even though having similar ImageNet accuracy.

		$max(h,w) \geq 0$			$max(h,w) \geq 100$		
Models	$acc_{ImageNet}$	$acc_{untrans}$	acc_{worst}	Δ	$acc_{untrans}$	acc_{worst}	Δ
BEiT	**87.4**	**89.5**	**84.8**	**4.7**	82.0	**69.3**	**12.7**
Swin Transformer	86.3	**89.4**	77.8	11.5	**84.6**	49.6	35.1
ConvNext	84.3	87.9	81.4	6.5	80.8	61.1	19.7
SEResNeXt	81.2	86.1	75.3	10.9	77.2	50.0	27.2
Resnet50	76.1	82.9	68.7	14.2	76.0	39.7	36.2
VGG16	71.5	78.5	63.7	14.8	69.7	37.3	32.5
Resnet18	69.7	78.0	61.1	17.0	71.1	30.7	40.4

Table 2. **Rotation:** For all models we report top-1 ImageNet-accuracy $acc_{ImageNet}$. For the subset of 2013 images from ImageNet-S (Gao et al., 2021) we report the accuracy for the unrotated subset $acc_{unrotated}$ and the worst case accuracy acc_{worst} over all rotations leaving the object fully visible. Additionally, we report separately for the subset of 109 images which allow rotations of at least 30 degrees the accuracy on these (unrotated) images and the worst case over all possible rotations. Note that for the worst case over images allowing rotations of at least 30 degrees we see performance drops of up to 35%. Again we observe that the BEiT and ConvNext model are significantly more robust than the Swin Transformer even though having similar ImageNet accuracy.

		$min(deg) \geq 0$			$min(deg) \geq 30$		
Models	$acc_{ImageNet}$	$acc_{unrotated}$	acc_{worst}	Δ	$acc_{unrotated}$	acc_{worst}	Δ
BEiT	**87.4**	**90.5**	**89.5**	**1.0**	87.6	**80.0**	**7.6**
Swin Transformer	86.3	90.6	87.8	2.8	88.6	61.0	27.6
ConvNext	84.3	89.4	82.8	6.6	84.6	69.2	15.4
SEResNeXt	81.2	87.0	84.8	2.2	83.8	61.9	21.9
Resnet50	76.1	85.4	82.0	3.4	81.0	45.7	35.2
VGG16	71.5	80.7	77.1	3.6	75.2	43.8	31.4
Resnet18	69.7	79.9	76.3	3.6	74.3	40.0	34.3

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A. The Accuracy Gap - Translation

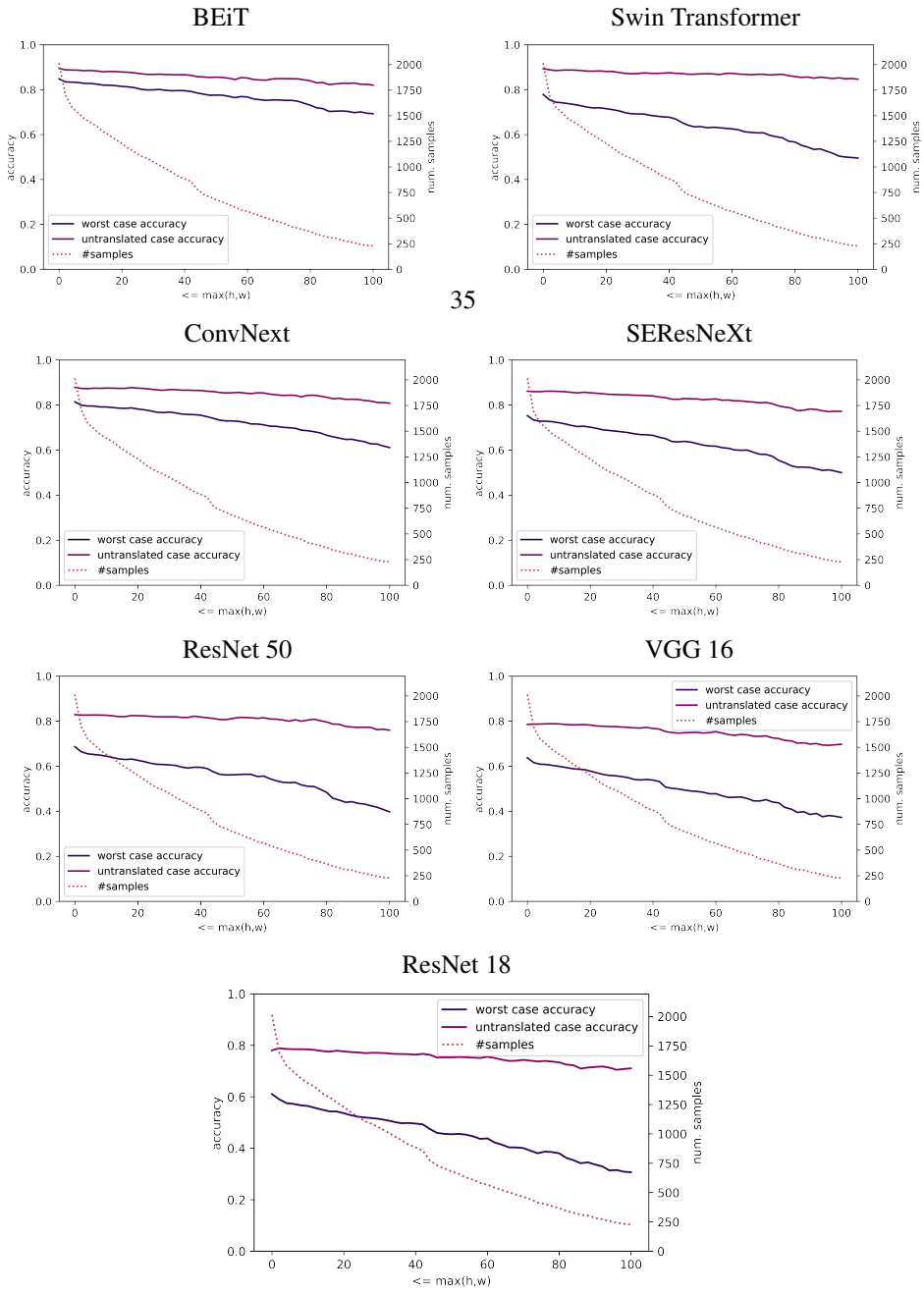
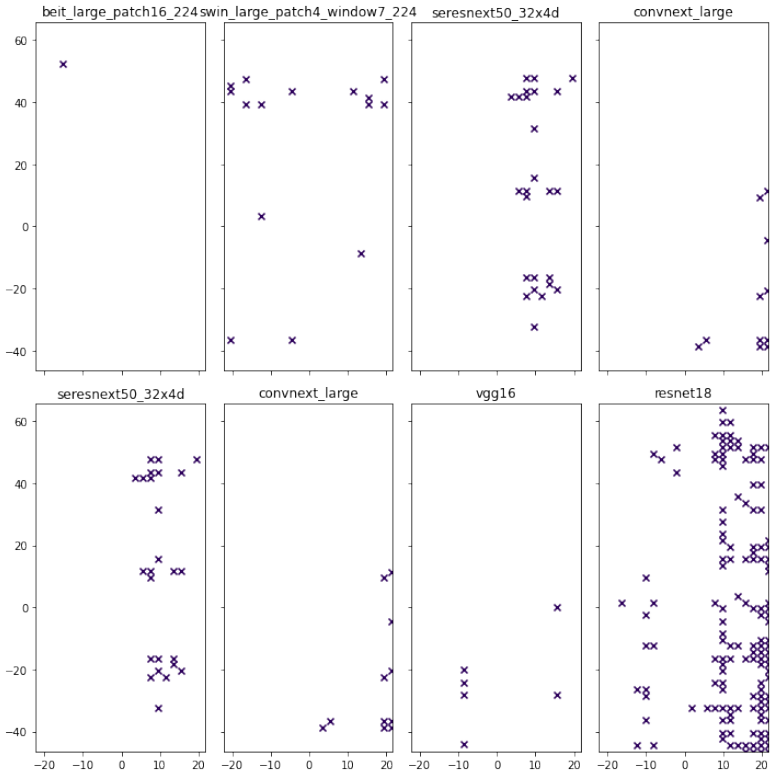


Figure 6. Accuracy gap vs freedom of translation for various models

B. Position of the Label Flips



The corresponding sample of the class *doberman*

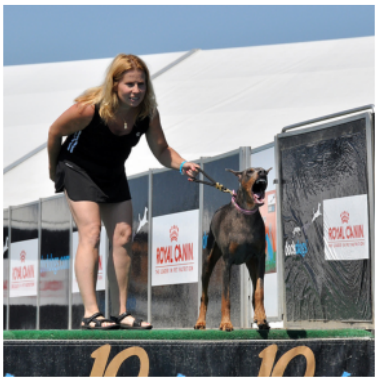


Figure 7. position of the label flips in the parameter-space by model