Graph Neural Networks for Adapting Off-the-shelf General Domain Language Models to Low-Resource Specialised Domains

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Abstract

Language models encode linguistic proprieties and are used as input for more specific models. Using their word representations as-is for specialised and low-resource domains might be less efficient. Methods of adapting them exist, but these models often overlook global information about how words, terms, and concepts relate to each other in a corpus due to their strong reliance on attention. We consider that global information can influence the results of the downstream tasks, and combination with contextual information is performed using graph convolution networks or GCN built on vocabulary graphs. By outperforming baselines, we show that this architecture is profitable for domain-specific tasks.

1 Introduction

Numerous types of word vector are used as word representations for NLP tasks. These vectors encode useful semantic proprieties and are often used as weights or input of generic tasks models. For quite some time, Word2Vec (Mikolov et al., 2013) and GloVe (Pennington et al., 2014) were the go-to off-the-shelf embeddings that many systems used. FastText (Bojanowski et al., 2017) came as a way to deal with OOV words and still offers a better representation for words than most systems since it takes into account the morphological complexity of words by dealing with n-grams instead of whole words. Over the last few years, a new generation of deep neural approaches brought forth by transformers has brought significant improvements in many downstream applications. Language models, like BERT (Devlin et al., 2019), already encode so much knowledge and can capture semantic and syntactic information remarkably well (Coenen et al., 2019). They can be further trained on new tasks for adapting it to a new task or domain and further improve the quality of the representations (Peters et al., 2019).

When using neural-based models, the conventional way of integrating further knowledge about specialised domains into models pretrained on general corpora is to leverage pretraining by doing transfer learning and fine-tuning the model, tweaking its original weights to suit the tasks at hand better. If fine-tuning BERT is the most used adaptation method, it will rapidly hit a performance ceiling if the domain is too specialised or small, and some methods (Schick and Schütze, 2020) exist to tackle this problem. BERT will heavily rely on the context to build representations of too specialised or rare words. Each layer of the encoder's attention mechanism enriches the new representation of the input data with contextual information by paying attention to different parts of the text. Nonetheless, this particular feature of BERT may make it more challenging for it to consider the more global place a word occupies within a corpus's vocabulary, especially for these words.

Many data structures are hierarchical or graphs structures in nature, such as social networks, paper citations networks, ontologies and semantic relations, such as hypernymy of hyponymy. Global relations between words within a sentence, a document or a corpus can be represented as a graph. Using such graphs as inputs, Graph Neural Network (GNN) (Wu et al., 2021) captures general knowledge about the words and how they interact in a corpus. Several variants of GNN for text classification tasks exist. As presented by (Kipf and Welling, 2017), Graph Convolutional networks (GCN) is an approach for semi-supervised learning on graph-structured data based on an efficient variant of convolutional neural networks that operate directly on graphs. GCN is typically built using an adjacency matrix (based on a given relationship graph). The GCN's central idea is to take the weighted average of a node and all its neighbours during the convolution operation and uses both node features and the structure for the training. Text GCN (Yao et al., 2019) is a particular version of GCN, jointly learning both

words and documents embeddings, and suited for situations with less training data. Graph methods do not encode positional information, and when information about position or context is needed, it might not be enough. Hence, pairing a GCN with a model that can grasp contextual information, like BERT, seems necessary.

There has not been much work trying to combine BERT and GNN. Since experts make inferences with relevant domain knowledge when performing domain-specific tasks, previous work has been conducted to integrate this knowledge into language models using knowledge graphs. Knowledge-enabled language representation model K-BERT (Liu et al., 2019) injects triples from a knowledge graph into the sentences as domain knowledge. BERT-MK (He et al., 2020) also take into account knowledge graph contextualised knowledge. (Shang et al., 2019) embedded a medical ontology with Graph Attention Networks (GAT) and combined it with BERT for medication recommendation. (Jeong et al., 2020) concatenates the output of GCN and the output of BERT for citation recommendation tasks. Obviously, these methods presuppose the existence of a knowledge graph or an ontology. These resources are expensive to build and do not always exist for the domain and task in hand. Vocabulary graphs, on the other hand, are easy to build. (Lu et al., 2020) propose VGCN-BERT, a model which combines BERT with a Vocabulary GCN (VGCN), and where local and global information interacts from the first layer of BERT down, building an augmented representation jointly.

We build upon their work to adapt BERT to our specialised tasks and corpora. As (Lu et al., 2020) conveniently pointed out in their work, the utility of capturing global dependencies with a graph embedding instead of conventional non-contextualised embedding models (Mikolov et al., 2013; Pennington et al., 2014; Bojanowski et al., 2017) can be questioned (Srinivasan and Ribeiro, 2020). These methods provide additional information, but these models' small text window limits the connections between words. Long-range connections are more easily captured with GCN. In addition, by building a graph on a task-specific corpus, task-dependent dependencies are captured, in addition to the general dependencies already encoded in the pre-trained models.

2 Intrintic Evaluation Tasks

I2B2 (Uzuner et al., 2011) deals with automatic medical concept extraction and deals with the extraction of concepts (problems, tests and treatments) from anonymised medical reports. This task was proposed by the 2010 edition of the I2B2/VA Natural Language Processing Challenges for Clinical Records [1]. Medical reports tend to be unstructured, arbitrarily expressed, and sometimes roughly thrown together, leading the NLP practitioner to deal with noisy documents.

Concept	Training	Test
Problem	7,073	12,592
Test	4,608	9,225
Treatment	4,844	9,344
Total	16,525	31,161

Table 1: Frequencies of concept types in the I2B2 2010 annotated corpus

BioCreative V CDR (BC5CDR) is a collection of 1,500 PubMed titles and abstracts selected from the CTD-Pfizer corpus and was used in the BioCreative V chemical-disease relation task. We use the standard training and test set in the BC5CDR shared task to extract the entities, and we do not perform entity linking.

Dataset	Training	Dev	Test
Disease	4,182	4,244	4,424
Chemical	5,203	5,347	5,385
Total	9,385	9,591	9,809

Table 2: Frequencies of entities in BC5CDR (chemical and disease) annotated corpus

3 Experimental Methodology

Graph Convolutional Networks (GCNs) are often used for hierarchical representation problems. By performing convolution operations on neighbouring nodes (words) in the graph, a representation of a word will be enriched with information about its neighbours, which will allow the integration of information about the global context of the word. Since we are using the vocabulary to build the graph, we use VGCN. VGCN can take into account more global information about the vocabulary but often fail to capture some of the local information, which is why we use them combined with BERT (*bert-base-cased*). This paper considers lexical relations in a language, the vocabulary graph, to be global information about the task-specific language. This vocabulary graph is constructed using both wordpieces

[1] https://portal.dbmi.hms.harvard.edu/projects/n2c2-nlp/

Model	I2B2			BC5CDR		
	P	R	F1	P	R	F1
BiLSTM-CRF	81.2 ± 0.4	84.4 ± 0.6	82.0 ± 0.3	78.2 ± 0.1	80.1 ± 0.8	79.2 ± 0.2
GCN	71.4 ± 0.5	52.1 ± 0.2	63.7 ± 0.1	79.9 ± 0.9	77.2 ± 1.0	78.6 ± 0.9
BERT	87.4 ± 0.3	87.0 ± 0.1	87.2 ± 0.8	86.0 ± 0.7	85.0 ± 0.8	85.5 ± 0.1
+ $GCN_{vanilla}$	87.7 ± 1.2	86.5 ± 0.2	87.4 ± 0.2	86.3 ± 0.6	**86.1 ± 0.7**	86.2 ± 0.3
+ GCN_{add}	**89.7 ± 0.4**	86.0 ± 0.7	87.7 ± 0.1	87.7 ± 0.4	85.7 ± 0.3	86.3 ± 0.2
+ $GCN_{embedding}$	89.0 ± 0.2	**88.8 ± 1.0**	**88.9 ± 0.2**	**87.9 ± 0.5**	85.7 ± 0.1	**86.7 ± 0.4**

Table 3: Analysis (in % F1-Score) of the outputs of our different models for the sequence labelling. This is an averaging of 3 runs for each experiment.

(Wu et al., 2016) and word's co-occurrences alongside documents. We first select the relevant part of the global vocabulary graph according to the input token and transform it into an embedding representation. We then combine it with BERT token embedding and use multiple layers of attention mechanism to merge both.

The vocabulary graph is constructed using weighted positive point-wise mutual information (PPMI) (Levy and Goldberg, 2014), where a higher PPMI indicate a higher semantic correlation between words. With BERT subword segmentation method, the word *epistaxis*, for example, will be represented as five tokens by BERT: *ep*, *##ista*, *##xi* and *##s*), since it is not in the model's training vocabulary. We are left with having to average or sum these embeddings to get a final embedding for our word. It puts us at a disadvantage when dealing with domain-specific corpora because most of the words in the area do not exist in the model's vocabulary, and the model will rely heavier on the context to get embeddings for these wordpieces. We build our adjacency matrix, and later our vocabulary graph, using both full words and wordpieces to build the vocabulary graphs to counteract it.

Given an undirected graph $G = (V, E)$ with a set N nodes $v_i \in V$, a set of edges (v_i, v_j), respectively, an adjacency matrix $A \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times N}$, a degree matrix $D_{ii} = \sum_j A_{ij}$ and a feature matrix $X \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times C}$, with C the number of dimensions of a feature vector, a forward 2-layer GCN model Z is computed as follow :

$$Layer_1 = f(X, A) = ReLU(\hat{A}XW^{(0)})$$

$$Z = f(X, A) = softmax(\hat{A} \cdot Layer_1 W^{(1)})$$

with $\hat{A} = (\tilde{D}^{-\frac{1}{2}}\tilde{A})(\tilde{D}^{-\frac{1}{2}}X)$, the average of all neighbours feature vectors, scaled over both the rows and the columns of the matrix, putting more weights on low-degree nodes and reducing the impact of high-degree ones, and computed using $\tilde{A} = A + \lambda I_N$ (usually, $\lambda = 1$, but it can be treated as a trainable parameter) and $\tilde{D}$, its degree matrix. The adjacency matrix A corresponds to the weighted PPMI as the vocabulary graph and the feature matrix X to pre-trained embedding from BERT.

In the equation aforementioned, the GCN has two layers, as it is usually the standard (Kipf and Welling, 2017). With one layer, each node can only get the information from its immediate neighbours. By adding another convolutional layer, we repeat the aggregation (or pooling process), but this time, the neighbours already have information about their neighbours from the previous step. The number of layers is the maximum hops that each node can reach to capture global information. However, we usually do not go too far in the graph. Otherwise, we may smooth out the graph, erasing important information, making the representation less meaningful and resulting in a drop of performance (Kipf and Welling, 2017). Since the GCN's nodes are task entities, this architecture requires all entities, including those from the training set, validation set, and test set, present in the graph during all the phases [2].

In the same fashion as (Lu et al., 2020), to combine these representations with BERT and to leverage both local and global information, we combine the vocabulary graph embedding obtained by our GCN and the BERT embedding and feed them to the first encoder. It will allow for the words' order in the sentence to be maintained and local information to be used, all the while the global information obtained by GCN will interact with BERT representation over the 12 layers of encoders. We also test two other combination methods: as for the first one, instead of integrating the GCN into the BERT embedding module, we add it to BERT embedding before passing it to the encoder. The second one consists of producing two outputs, one of the GCN and one of BERT, concatenat-

[2] Masks are used during training to only use training nodes.

ing it just before applying a RELU and feeding it to the fully connected classification layer. To summarise, multiple models are tested here, with several baselines in addition to the BERT and GCN combinations:

- **Bi-LSTM model**: BERT embeddings are used as input of a 256 hidden units and 2-layers bidirectional LSTM with an additional CRF layer.
- **GCN**: 2-layer GCN with BERT embeddings as input, with a simple fully-connected layer as output. This model only leverages global information.
- **BERT**: pretrained BERT for token classification, with a simple fully-connected layer as output.
- **BERT+GCN$_{add}$** or **BERT with added graph embedding**: Two representations are generated using BERT and GCN and are then summed. The combined representation is passed through a fully-connected layer for classification.
- **BERT+GCN$_{embedding}$** or **BERT with integrated graph embedding**: Instead of only using the regular BERT embeddings as input, we feed both the graph embedding obtained by the GCN and the BERT embedding to the BERT encoders.
- **BERT+GCN$_{vanilla}$** or **BERT with concatenated graph embedding**: Two representations are generated using BERT and GCN and are then concatenated. The combined representation is passed through a fully-connected layer for classification.

4 Results

The results of the experiments are shown in Table 3. Performance is are measured in macro-averaged scores (exact match). We report our results for the standard approaches first, and we contrast them with different combinations and architectures. Overall, all the BERT models with additional GCN global information perform better than the other baseline models, namely, the BiLSTM-CRF, the simple GCN and BERT. This confirms our intuitions and shows that it is beneficial to merge local and global information, and those resulting representations seem more worthwhile for the downstream tasks. A tendency seems to be showing (see Table 3): while getting a better F1-score, most of the boost in the overall score for the BERT with added global information goes to have better precision than the vanilla BERT and a lower recall simultaneously, indicating an actual decrease in false positives and these tendencies are similar across the board.

Future analysis can also be conducted on subwords since BERT breaks words down into wordpieces. The problem for specialised domains is that a more domain-oriented subword tokenisation method is probably more appropriate. For example, with BERT wordpieces tokeniser, *"adenocarcinoma"* will be broken into *"aden"*, *"oca"*, *"rc"*, *"ino"*, *"ma"* and, surprisingly, *"carcinoma"* will be broken into *"car"*, *"cino"*, *"ma"*, making *"ma"* the only subword that they share, even if the two words are semantically very close. Some methods have been developed, particularly for clinical text (Nguyen et al., 2019). However, using them means that we have to retrain the whole BERT model (similar to ClinicalBERT, for example), which defeats the purpose of adaptation. We rely on the GCN to fetch these missing pieces of information, connect them and integrate them back into the BERT model.

There is still a lot of room for improvement. One major limitation of this work — and work on graph neural networks in general, is the need to use all entities, including those from the training set, validation set, and test set, to build in the vocabulary graph.

5 Conclusion

The quality of word representations obtained through language models are often correlated to the volume of data available, and, in the case of specialised domains, these methods might be less efficient due to the usually modest size of the corpora. This is particularly exacerbated in the case of specialised and low-resource domains, and the models might need to go through an adaptation phase. This work seeks to understand how these methods can be adapted on the fly by using additional features from GCN. The achieved results outperform the baselines across the board. It shows that it is beneficial to merge local and global information, and those resulting representations yield some additional advantages and are more worthwhile for the downstream task. Future work will cover analysis of attention layers before and after adding more global information. It will also involve considering more sophisticated relations than simple mutual information into the GCN, such as exploiting oriented graphs to encode dependencies, synonymy, hypo- and hyperonymy, and different architecture such as Graph Attention Networks.

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