A Case Study of Spanish Text Transformations for Twitter Sentiment Analysis

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Abstract

Sentiment analysis is a text mining task that determines the polarity of a given text, i.e., its positiveness or negativeness. Recently, it has received a lot of attention given the interest in opinion mining in micro-blogging platforms. These new forms of textual expressions present new challenges to analyze text given the use of slang, orthographic and grammatical errors, among others. Along with these challenges, a practical sentiment classifier should be able to handle efficiently large workloads.

The aim of this research is to identify which text transformations (lemmatization, stemming, entity removal, among others), tokenizers (e.g., words $n$-grams), and tokens weighting schemes impact the most the accuracy of a classifier (Support Vector Machine) trained on two Spanish corpus. The methodology used is to exhaustively analyze all the combinations of the text transformations and their respective parameters to find out which characteristics the best performing classifiers have in common. Furthermore, among the different text transformations studied, we introduce a novel approach based on the combination of word based $n$-grams and character based $q$-grams. The results show that this novel combination of words and characters produces a classifier that outperforms the traditional word based combination by 11.17\% and 5.62\% on the INEGI and TASS'15 dataset, respectively.

1 Introduction

In recent years, the production of textual documents in social media has increased exponentially; for instance, up to April 2016, Twitter has 320 million active users, and Facebook has 1,590 million users\textsuperscript{1}. In social media, people share comments about many disparate topics, i.e., events, persons, and organizations, among others. These facts have had the result of seeing social media as a gold mine of human opinions, and consequently, there is an increased interest in doing research and business activities around opinion mining and sentiment analysis fields.

Automatic sentiment analysis of texts is one of the most important tasks in text mining, where the goal is to determine whether a particular document has either a positive, negative or neutral

\textsuperscript{1}http://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/
Determining whether a text document has a positive or negative opinion is becoming an essential tool for both public and private companies. (Liu, 2015) (Peng et al., 2008). Given that it is a useful tool to know what people think about anything; so, it represents a major support for decision-making processes (for any level of government, marketing, etc.) (Pang and Lee, 2008).

Sentiment analysis has been traditionally tackled as a classification task where two major problems need to be faced. Firstly, one needs to transform the text into a suitable representation, this is known as text modeling. Secondly, one needs to decide which classification algorithm to use; one of the most widely used is Support Vector Machines (SVM). This contribution focus on the former problem, i.e., we are interested in improving the classification by finding a suitable text representation.

Specifically, the contribution of this research is twofold. Firstly, we parametrize our text transformations with different techniques such as: lemmatization, stemming, and entity removal, just to mention a few (Table 3 contains all the transformations explored). This parametrization is used to exhaustively evaluate the entire configurations space to know those transformations that produce the best SVM classifier on two sentiment analysis corpus written in Spanish. Counterintuitively, we found that the complexity of techniques used in the pre-processing step is not correlated with the final performance of the classifier, e.g., a classifier using lemmatization, which is one of the pre-processing techniques having the greatest complexity, might not be one of the systems having the highest performance.

Secondly, we propose a novel approach based on the combination of word based n-grams and character based q-grams. This novel combination of words and characters produces a classifier that outperforms the traditional word based combination by 11.17% and 5.62% on the INEGI and TASS’15 dataset, respectively. Hereafter, we will use n-words to refer to word n-grams, and q-grams to character q-grams just to make a clear distinction between these techniques.

This manuscript is organized as follows. Section 1 introduces the paper and the problem being tackled. Section 2 deals with literature review. The text transformations are described in Section 3, meanwhile the parameters settings and definition of the problem are presented on Section 4. Section 5 describes our experimental results. Finally, Section 6 and Section 7 present the discussion and conclusions of our results along with possible directions for future work.

2 Related Work

The sentiment analysis task has been widely studying due to the interest to know the people’s opinions and feelings about something, particularly in social media. This task is commonly tackled in two different ways. The first one involves the use of static resources that summarize the sense or semantic of the task; these knowledge databases contain mostly affective lexicons. These lexicons are created by experts, in psychology or by automated processes, that perform the selection of features (words) along with a corpus of labeled text as done in (Ghiassi et al., 2013). Consequently, the task is solved by trying to detect how the affective features are used in a text, and how these features can be used to predict the polarity of a given text.

The alternative approach states the task as a text classification problem. This includes several distinguished parts like the pre-processing step, the selection of the vectorization and weighting schemes, and also the classifier algorithm. So, the problem consists of selecting the correct techniques in each step to create the sentiment classifier. Under this approach, the idea is to process the text in a way that the classifier can take advantage of the features to solve the problem. Our contribution focus in this later approach; we describe the best way to pre-process, tokenize, and vectorize the text, based on a fixed set of text-transformation functions. For simplicity, we fix our classifier to be Support Vector Machines (SVM). SVM is a classifier that excels in high dimensional datasets as is the case of text classification, (Joachims, 1998). This section reviews the related literature.

\footnote{Albeit, there are other variations considering intermediate levels for sentiments, e.g. more positive or less positive.}
There are several works in the sentiment analysis literature which use several representations; such as dictionaries \cite{Alam2016, Khan2016}; text content and social relations between users \cite{Wu2016}; relationships between meanings of a word in a corpus \cite{Razavi2014}; co-occurrence patterns of words \cite{Saif2016}, among others.

Focusing on the $n$-grams technique, a method that considers the local context of the word sequence and the semantic of the whole sentence is proposed in \cite{Cui2015}. The local context is generated via the “bag-of-n-words” method, and the sentence’s sentiment is determined based on the individual contribution of each word. The word embedding is learned from a large monolingual corpus through a deep neural network, and the $n$-words features are obtained from the word embedding in combination with a sliding window procedure.

A hybrid approach that uses $n$-gram analysis for feature extraction together with a dynamic artificial neural network for sentiment analysis is proposed in \cite{Ghiassi2013}. Here, a dataset over $10,000,000$ of tweets, related to Justin Bieber topic, was used. As a result, a Twitter-specific lexicon with a reduced feature set was obtained.

The work presented in \cite{Han2013} proposes an approach for sentiment analysis which combines an SVM classifier and a wide range of features like bag-of-word (1-words, 2-words) and part-of-speech (POS) features, etc., as well as votes derived from character $n$-words language models to achieve the final result. The authors concluded that lexical features (1-words, 2-words) produce the better contributions.

In \cite{Tripathy2016} different classifiers and representations were applied to determine the sentiment in movie reviews, taken from internet blogs. The classifiers tested were Naive Bayes, maximum entropy, stochastic gradient descent, and SVM. These algorithms use $n$-words, for $n \in \{1, 2, 3\}$ and all the combinations. Here, the results show that the value of $n$ increases the classification accuracy decreases, i.e., using 1-words and 2-words the result achieved is better than using 3-words, 4-words, and 5-words.

Regarding the use of $q$-grams; in \cite{Aisopos2011} a method that captures textual patterns is introduced. This method creates a graph, whose nodes correspond to $q$-grams of a document and their edges denoted the average distance between them. A comparative analysis on data from Twitter is performed between three representation models: term vector model, $q$-grams, and $q$-grams graphs. The authors found that vector models are faster, but $q$-grams (especially 4-grams) perform better in terms of classification quality.

With the purpose to attend sentiment analysis in Spanish tweets, a number of works has been presented in the literature, e.g. several sizes of $n$-grams and some polarity lexicons combined with a Support Vector Machine (SVM) was used in \cite{Almeida2015}. Another approach which uses polarity lexicons with a number of features related to $n$-words, part-of-speech tag, hashtags, emoticon and lexicon resources is described in \cite{Araque2015}.

Features related to lexicons and syntactic structures are commonly used, for example, \cite{Alvarez-Lopez2015, Camara2015, de-la-Vega2015, Borda2015, Deas2015}. In the other hand, features related to word vectorization, e.g. Word2Vec and Doc2Vec, are also used in several works, such as \cite{Diaz-Galiano2015, Valverde2015}.

Following with the Spanish language, in the most recent TASS (Taller de Análisis de Sentimientos '16) competition, was presented some works still using polarity dictionaries and vectorization approach; such is the case of \cite{Casasola2016}, where an adaptation of Turney dictionary \cite{Turney2002} over 5 millions of Spanish tweets was generated. Furthermore, \cite{Casasola2016} in the step of vectorization uses $n$-grams and skip-grams in combination with this polarity dictionary. \cite{Quirnos2016} proposes the use of word embedding with SVM classifier. Despite the explosion of words using word embeddings, the classical word vectorization is still in use, citemontejo2016participacion.

A new approach is using ensembles or a combination of several techniques and classifiers, e.g. the work presented in \cite{Ceron-Guzman2016} proposes an ensemble built on the combination of systems with the lowest correlation between them. \cite{FerranPla2016} presents another ensemble method where the Tweetmotif’s tokenizer, \cite{OConnor2010}, is used in conjunction with Freeling \cite{Padro2012}. These tools create a vector space that is
the input for an SVM classifier.

It can be seen that one of the objectives of the related work is to optimize the number of n-words or q-grams (almost tackled as independent approaches), to increase performance; clearly, there is not a consensus. This lack of agreement motivates us to perform an extensive experimental analysis of the effect of the parameters (including n and q values), and so, we determined the best parameters on the Twitter databases employed.

3 Text Representation

Natural Language Processing (NLP) is a broad and complex area of knowledge having many ways to represent an input text [Giannakopoulos et al., 2012, Sammut and Webb, 2011]. In this research, we select the widely used vector representation of a text given its simplicity and powerful representation. Figure 1 depicts the procedure used to transform a text input into a vector. There are three main blocks: the first one transforms the text into another text representation, then the text is tokenized, and, finally, the vector is calculated using a weighting scheme. The resulting vectors are the input of the classifier.

In the following subsections, we described the text transformation techniques used which have a counterpart in many languages, the proper implementation of them rely heavily on the targeted language, in our case study the Spanish language. The interested reader looking for solutions in a particular language is encouraged to follow the relevant linguistic literature for its objective language, in addition to the general literature in NLP [Jurafsky and Martin, 2009, Bird et al., 2009, Sammut and Webb, 2011].

3.1 Text Transformation Pipeline

One of the contributions of this manuscript is to measure the effects that each different text transformation has on the performance of a classifier. This subsection describes the text transformations explored whereas the particular parameters of these transformations can be seen in Table 3.

3.1.1 TFIDF (tfidf)

In the vector representation, each word, in the collection, is associated with a coordinate in a high dimensional space. The numeric value of each coordinate is sometimes called the weight of the word. Here, \( tf \times idf \) (Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency) [Baeza-Yates and Ribeiro-Neto, 2011] is used as bootstrapping weighting procedure. More precisely, let \( D = \{D_1, D_2, \ldots, D_N\} \) be the set of all documents in the corpus, and \( f_w^D_i \) be the frequency of the word \( w \) in document \( D_i \). \( tf_w^D_i \) is defined as the normalized frequency of \( w \) in \( D_i \):

\[
 tf^i_w = \frac{f_w^D_i}{\max_{u \in D_i} \{f_u^D_i\}}. 
\]

In some way, \( tf \) describes the importance of \( w \), locally in \( D_i \). On the other hand, \( idf \) gives a global measure of the importance of \( w \):

\[
 idf_w = \log \frac{N}{|\{D_i \mid f_w^D_i > 0\}|}. 
\]
The final product, $tf \times idf$, tries to find a balance between the local and the global importance of a term. It is common to use variants of $tf$ and $idf$ instead of the original ones, depending in the application domain [Sammut and Webb, 2011]. Let $v_i$ be the vector of $D_i$, a weighted matrix $TFIDF$ of the collection $D$ is created by concatenating all individual vectors, in some consistent order. Using this representation, a number of machine learning methods can be applied; however, the plain transformation of text to $TFIDF$ poses some problems. On one hand, all documents will contain common terms having a small semantic content such as articles and determiners, among others. These terms are known as stopwords. The bad effects of stopwords are controlled by $TFIDF$, but most of them can be directly removed since they are fixed for a given language. On the other hand, after removing stopwords, $TFIDF$ will produce a very high dimensional vector space, $O(N)$ in Twitter, since new terms are commonly introduced (e.g. misspellings, URLs, hashtags). This will rapidly yield to the Curse of Dimensionality, which makes hard to learn from examples since any two random vectors will be orthogonal with high probability. From a more practical point of view, a high dimensional representation will also impose huge memory requirements, at the point of being impossible to train a typical implementation of a machine learning algorithm (not being designed to use sparse vectors).

3.1.2 Stopwords ($del-sw$)

In many languages, like Spanish, there is a set of extremely common words such as determiners or conjunctions (the or and) which help to build sentences but do not carry any meaning themselves. These words are known as Stopwords, and they are removed from the text before any attempt to classify them. A stop list is built using the most frequent terms from a huge document collection. We used the Spanish stop list included in NLTK Python package [Bird et al., 2009].

3.1.3 Spelling

Twitter messages are full of slang, misspelling, typographical and grammatical errors among others; however, in this study, we focus only on the following transformations:

Punctuation ($del-punc$). This parameter considers the use of symbols such as question mark, period, exclamation point, commas, among other spelling marks.

Diacritic ($del-diac$). The Spanish language is full of diacritic symbols, and its wrong usage is one of the main sources of orthographic errors in informal texts. Thus, this parameter considers the use or absence of diacritical marks.

Symbol reduction ($del-d1$, $del-d2$). Usually, twitter messages use repeated characters to emphasize parts of the word to attract user’s attention. This aspect makes the vocabulary explodes. Thus, we applied two strategies to deal with these phenomena: the first one replaces the repeated symbols by one occurrence of the symbol, and the second one replaces the repeated symbols by two occurrences to keep the word emphasize at the minimal level.

Case sensitive ($lc$). This parameter considers letters to be normalized in lowercase or to keep the original text. The aim is to cut the words that are the same in uppercase and lowercase.

3.1.4 Stemming ($stem$)

Stemming is a heuristic process in Information Retrieval field that chops off the end of words and often includes the removal of derivational affixes. This technique uses the morphology of the language coded in a set of rules; to find out word stems and reduce the vocabulary collapsing derivationally related words. In our study, we use the Snowball Stemmer for the Spanish language implemented in NLTK package [Bird et al., 2009].
3.1.5 Lemmatization (lem)

Lemmatization process is a complex task from Natural Language Processing that determines the lemma of a group of word forms, i.e., the dictionary form of a word. For example, the words went and goes are the verb conjugations of the verb go; and these words are grouped under the same lemma go. To apply this process, we use Freeling tool [Padró and Stanilovsky, 2012] as Spanish lemmatizer. All texts are prepared by the Error correction process before applying lemmatization to obtain the best results of part-of-speech identification.

Error correction Freeling is a tool for text analysis, but the assumption is that text is well-written. However, language used in Twitter is very informal, with slang, misspellings, new words, creative spelling, URLs, specific abbreviations, hashtags (which are especially words for tagging in Twitter messages), and emoticons (which are short strings and symbols that express different emotions). These problems are treated to prepare and standardize tweets for the lemmatization stage to get the best results. All words in each tweet are checked to be a valid Spanish word or are reduced according to the rules for Spanish word formation.

In general, words or tokens with invalid duplicated vowels or consonants are reduced to valid or standard Spanish words, e.g., (ruiiidoooo → ruido (noise); jajajaaa → jaja; jijijji → jaja). We used an approach based on Spanish dictionary, a statistical model for common double letters, and heuristic rules for common interjections. In general, the duplicated vowels or consonants are removed from the target word; the resulting word is looked up in a Spanish dictionary (approximately 550,000 entries) to be validated, it is included in Freeling. For words that are not in the dictionary are reduced at least with valid rules for Spanish word formation. Also, colloquial words and abbreviations are transformed using a regular expression based on a dictionary of those sort of words, figure 2 illustrates some rules. The text on the left side of the arrow is replaced by the text of the right side. Twitter tags such as user names, hashtags (topics), URLs, and emoticons are handled as special tags in our representation to keep the structure of the sentence.

In Figure 3 we can see the lemmatized text after applying Freeling. As we mentioned, the text is prepared with the Error correction step (see Figure 3(a)) then Freeling is applied to normalize words. Figure 3(b) shows Freeling’s output where each token has the original word followed by the slash symbol and its lexical information. The lexical information can be read as follows; for instance, token orgulloso/AQ0MS0 (proud) stands for adjective as part of speech (AQ), masculine gender (M), and singular number (S); the token querer/VMIP1S0 (to want) stands for lemmatized main verb as part of speech (VM), indicative mood (I), present time (P), singular form of the first person (1S); positive_tag/NTE0000 stands for noun tag as part of speech, and so on.

Lexical information is used to identify entities, stopwords, content words among others, it depends on the settings of the other parameters. The words are filtered based on heuristic rules that take into account the lexical information shown in Fig. 3(b). Finally, lexical information is removed in order to get the lemmatized text depicted on Figure 3(c).

3.1.6 Negation (neg)

Spanish negation markers might change the polarity of the message. Thus, we attached the negation clue to the nearest word, similar to the approaches used in [Sidorov et al., 2013]. A set of rules was designed for common Spanish negation structures that involve negation markers, namely, no (not), nunca, jamás (never), and sin (without). The rules are processed in order and, when one of them matches, the remaining rules are discarded. We have two sorts of rules; it depends on the input text. If the text is not parsed by Freeling, a few rules (regular expressions) are applied to negate the nearest word to the negation marker using only the information on the
@username ` el siempre estar´ a contigo, muy orgulloso de tiiiii
y del graaaaannn
ser humano que eres :) ... Tqe!! Buen jueves.
(@username he will always be with you, so proud of you and great human being that you are :) ... ILY!!!!
good Thursday.)

After Error Correction step:
user_tag el siempre estar contigo muy orgulloso de ti y del gran
ser humano que eres positivo_tag te
quiero mucho Buen jueves
(user_tag he will always be with you, so proud of you and great human being that you are positive_tag I
love you good Thursday.)

(a) Error correction step

user_tag/NT00000 el/PP3MS000 siempre/RG estar/VAIF3S0 contigo/PP2CS00
muy/RG orgulloso/AQ0MS00 de/SPS00 ti/PP2CS00 y/CC de/SPS00 el/DA0MS00
gran/AQ0CS00 ser/NCMS000 humano/AQ0MS00 que/PR0CN000 ser/VSIP2S0

(b) The output of a Spanish sentence parsed with Freeling

@username el siempre estar contigo muy orgulloso de ti y de el gran ser humano que ser
positive te querer mucho bueno jueves
(@username he always be with you, so proud of you and the great human being that you be
positive I love you good thursday.)

(c) After removing lexical information

Figure 3: A step-by-step lemmatization of a tweet.

--- Pattern 1: el coche no es ni bonito ni espacioso (the car is neither nice nor spacious)
(no/RN)\(s+(ser/VS\{w+/AQ\})s+ni/CC\{\(w+/\AQ\)\}\s+ni/CC\{\(w+/\AQ\)\}\) → \2 no\_3 y/CC no\_4

--- Pattern 2: no es (de) madera (X is not made of wood)
(no/RN)\(s+(ser/VS\{w+/S\})s+(\{w+/N[^TP]\}w+)\?)\(w+/N[^TP]\}\)w+) → \2 \3 no\_4

Figure 4: An example of negation rules

text, e.g., avoiding pronouns and articles. The second approach uses a set of fine-grained rules to
take advantage of the lexical information, approximately 50 rules were designed considering the
negation markers. The negation marker is attached to the closest word to the marker.

In the box below, Pattern 1 and Pattern 2 are examples of negation rules (regular expressions).
A rule consists of two parts: the left side of the arrow represents the text to be matched, and
the right side of the arrow is the structure to be replaced. All rules are based on a linguistic
motivation taking into account lexical information. The set of negation rules are available3.

For example, in the sentence El coche no es ni bonito ni espacioso (The car is neither nice
nor spacious), the negation marker no is attached to its two adjectives no_bonito (not nice) and
no_espacioso (not spacious), as it is showed in Pattern 1, the negation marker is attached to group
3 (\3) and group 4 (\4) that stand for adjective position because of the coordinating conjunction
ni. The number of group is identified by parenthesis in the rule from left to right. Negation
markers are attached to content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and some adverbs), e.g., ‘no
seguir’ (do not follow) is replaced by ‘no_seguir’, ‘no es bueno’ (it is not good) is replaced by ‘es
no_bueno’, ‘sin comida’ (without food) is replaced by ‘no_comida’. Figure 4 exemplifies a pair of
these negation rules.

3.1.7 Emoticon (emo)

In the case of emotions, we classify more than 500 popular emoticons, including text emoticons, and
the whole set of emoticons (close to 1600) defined by [Unicode, 2016] into three classes: positive,
negative or neutral, which are replaced by a polarity word or definition associated to the emoticon according to the Unicode standard. The emoticons considered as positive are replaced by the word positive, negative emoticons are replaced by the word negative, neutral emotions are replaced by the word neutral. Emoticons that do not have a polarity, or are ambiguous, are replaced by the associated Unicode text. Table 1 shows an excerpt of the dictionary that maps emoticons to their corresponding polarity class.

Table 1: An excerpt of the mapping table from Emoticons to its polarity words.

| Emoticon | Polarity |
|----------|----------|
| :) :D :P | positive |
| :( :-{ :(' | negative |
| :-| U_U -,- | neutral |
| emoticon without polarity | unicode-text |

3.1.8 Entity (del-ent)

We consider entities to be proper names, hashtags, urls or nicknames. However, nicknames (see usr parameter, Table 3) is a particular feature in Twitter messages; thus, user names is another parameter to see the effect on the classification system. User names, urls and numbers (see url, num parameters, Table 3) could be grouped under an especial generic name. Entities such as user names and hashtags are identified directly by its corresponding especial symbol @ and #, and proper names are identified using Freeling, the lexical information used to identify a proper name is “NP0000”.

3.1.9 Word-based n-grams (n-words)

N-words are widely used in many NLP tasks, and they have also been used in sentiment analysis by Sidorov et al., 2013, Cui et al., 2015. N-words are word sequences. To compute the n-words, the text is tokenized and n-word are calculated from tokens. NLTK Tokenizer is used to identified word tokens. For example, let $T = \text{"the lights and shadows of your future"}$, its 1-words (unigrams) are each word alone, and its 2-words (bigrams) set are the sequences of two words, the set ($W_2^T$), and so on. For example, let $W_2^T = \{\text{the lights, lights and, and shadows, shadows of, of your, your future}\}$, then, given a text of $m$ words, we obtain a set with at most $m - n + 1$ elements. Generally, n-words are used up to 2 or 3-words because it is uncommon to find good matches of word sequences greater than three or four words Jurafsky and Martin, 2009.

3.1.10 Character-based q-grams (q-grams)

In addition to the traditionally n-words representation, we represent the resulting text as q-grams. A q-grams is an agnostic language transformation that consists in representing a document by all its substring of length $q$. For example, let $T = \text{abra cadabra}$, its 3-grams set are

$$ Q_T^3 = \{\text{abr, bra, ra, a_c, _ca, ca, ca, cad, ada, dab}\}, $$

so, given text of size $m$ characters, we obtain a set with at most $m - q + 1$ elements. Notice that this transformation handle white-spaces as part of the text. Since there will be q-grams connecting words, in some sense, applying q-grams to the entire text can capture part of the syntactic information in the sentence. The rationale of q-grams is to tackle misspelled sentences from the approximate pattern matching perspective Navarro and Raffinot, 2002, where it is used for efficient searching of text with some degree of error.

A more elaborated example shows why the q-gram transformation is more robust to variations of the text. Let $T = \text{I like vanilla}$ and $T' = \text{I lik3_vanila}$, clearly, both texts are different and a plain algorithm will simply associate a low similarity between both texts. However, after
Figure 5: Examples of text representation.

extracting its 3-grams, the resulting objects are more similar:

\[ Q_T^3 = \{ I, _l, _l1, lik, ike, ke, e, _v, _va, van, ani, nil, ill, ila \} \]

\[ Q_T' = \{ I, _l, _l1, lik, ik3, k3, _3, _v, _va, van, ani, nil, ila \} \]

Just to fix ideas, let these two sets to be compared using the Jaccard’s coefficient as similarity, i.e.

\[ \frac{|Q_T^3 \cap Q_T'|}{|Q_T^3 \cup Q_T'|} = 0.448. \]

These sets are more similar than the ones resulting from the original text split as words

\[ \frac{|\{I, like, vanilla\} \cap \{I, lik3, vanilla\}|}{|\{I, like, vanilla\} \cup \{I, lik3, vanilla\}|} = 0.2 \]

The assumption is that a machine learning algorithm knowing how to classify \( T \) will do a better job classifying \( T' \) using \( q \)-grams than a plain representation. This fact is used to create a robust method against misspelled words and other deliberated modifications to the text.

3.2 Examples of Text Transformation Stage

In order to illustrate the text transformation pipeline, we show the examples in Figure 5(a) and Figure 5(b). In Figure 5(a) we can see the resulting text representation for a configuration for words on INEGI benchmark, i.e., the parameters used to transform the original text into the new representation are stemming (\( st \)), reduced repeated symbols up to one symbol (\( del-d1 \)), the removal of diacritic (\( del-diac \)), and coarsening users (\( usr \)), and negations (\( neg \)). The final text representation is based on 1-words.

The other example, Figure 5(b), is a configuration for character 4-gram representation on the same benchmark using the following parameters: the removal of diacritic (\( del-diac \)), coarsening emoticons (\( emo \)), coarsening users (\( usr \)), changing words into lowercase (\( lc \)), negations (\( neg \)), and TFIDF is used to weight the tokens, it has no text representation. The final representation is based on character 4-grams, and the underscore symbol is used as space character to separate words and it is part of the token in which it appears.

4 Benchmarks and Parameter Settings

At this point, we are in the position to analyze the performance of described text representations on sentiment analysis benchmarks. In particular, we test our representations in the task of
Table 2: Datasets details from each competition tested in this work

| benchmark | train | test |
|-----------|-------|------|
| INEGI     |       |      |
| name      |       |      |
| classes   |       |      |
| positive  | 2,908 | 26,911|
| neutral   | 986   | 8,868 |
| negative  | 1,110 | 9,571 |
| none      | 409   | 3,361 |
| total     | 5,413 | 48,711|
| TASS’15   |       |      |
| name      |       |      |
| classes   |       |      |
| positive  | 2,884 | 22,233|
| neutral   | 670   | 1,305 |
| negative  | 2,182 | 15,844|
| none      | 1,482 | 21,416|
| total     | 7,218 | 60,798|

determining the global polarity — four polarity levels: positive, neutral, negative, and none (no sentiment) — of each tweet in two benchmarks.

Table 2 describes our benchmarks. The INEGI benchmark consists on tweets geo-referenced to Mexico; the data was collected and labeled between 2014 and 2015 by the Mexican Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI). The INEGI’s tweets come from the general population without any filtering beyond its geographic location. INEGI benchmark has a total of 54,124 tweets (in the Spanish language). The tagging process of INEGI dataset was conducted through a web application (called pioanalisis, it was designed by the personnel of the Institute). Each tweet was displayed and human tagged it as positive, neutral, negative or none. After this procedure, every tweet was tagged by several humans, the label with major consensus was assigned as a final tagged. We discard tweets being on tie.

On the other hand, our second benchmark is the one used in TASS’15 workshop (Taller de Análisis de Sentimientos en la SEPLN) [Román et al., 2015]. Here, the whole corpus contains over 68,000 tweets, written in Spanish, related to well-known personalities and celebrities of several topics such as politics, economy, communication, mass media, and culture. These tweets were acquired between November 2011 and March 2012. The whole corpus was split into a training set (about 10%) and test set (remaining 90%). Each tweet was tagged with its global polarity (positive, negative or neutral) or no polarity at all (four classes in total). The tagging process was done in a semi-automatically way where a baseline machine learning algorithm classifies them, and then all the tagged tweets are manually checked by human experts; for more details of this database construction see [Román et al., 2015].

We partitioned INEGI in 10% for training and 90% for testing, following the setup of TASS’15; this large test-set pursues the generality of the method. Hereafter, we name the test set as the gold-standard, and we interchange both names as synonyms. The accuracy is the major score in both benchmarks, again because TASS’15 uses this score as its measure. We also report the macro-F1 score to help to understand the performance on heavily unbalanced datasets, see 2.

In general, both benchmarks are full of errors, and these errors vary from simple mistakes to deliberate modification of words and syntactic rules. However, it is worth to mention that INEGI is a collection of an open domain, and moreover, it comes from the general public; then we can see the frequency of misspellings and grammatical errors as a major difference between INEGI and TASS’15.

Figure 6 shows the size of the vocabulary as the number of words in the collection increases. The Heaps’ law, [Baeza-Yates and Ribeiro-Neto, 2011], states that the growth of the vocabulary follows $O(n^\alpha)$ for $0 < \alpha < 1$, for a document of size $n$. The figure illustrates the growth rate of our both benchmarks, along with a well-written set of documents, i.e., classic Books of the Spanish literature from the Gutenberg project [Gutenberg, 2016]. The Books collections curve is below than any of our collections: its growth factor is clearly smaller. The precise values of $\alpha$ for each collection are $\alpha_{TASS’15} = 0.718$, $\alpha_{INEGI} = 0.756$, and $\alpha_{Books} = 0.607$, these values were determined

4http://cienciadedatos.inegi.org.mx/pioanalisis/#/login
with a regression over the formulae. There is a significant difference between the three collections, and it corresponds to the high amount of errors in TASS’15, and, the higher one in INEGI.

4.1 Parameters of the text transformations

As described in Section 3, the different text transformation methods explored in this research. Table 3 complements this description by listing the different values these transformations have. From the table, it can be observed that most parameters are either the use or absence of the particular transformation with the exceptions n-words and q-grams.

Based on the different values of the parameters, we can count the number of different text transformation which is $7 \times 2^{15} = 229,369$ configurations (the constant 7 corresponds to the number of tokenizers). Evaluating all these setups, for each benchmark, is computationally expensive. Also, we perform the same exhaustive in the test set to compare the achieved result and the best possible under our approach. Along with these experiments, we also evaluate a number of experiments to prove and compare a series of improvements. In the end, we evaluated close to one million configurations. For instance, using an Intel(R) Xeon(R) CPU E5-2630 v2 @ 2.60GHz workstation, we need $\sim$12 minutes on average for a single configuration, running on a single core. Therefore, it needs roughly 24 years of computing time. Nonetheless, we used a small cluster to compute all configurations in some weeks. Notice that the time of determining the part-of-the-speech, needed by parameters stem and lem, is not reported since it was executed only once for all texts and loaded from a cache whenever is needed. The lemmatization step needs close to 56 minutes to transform the INEGI dataset in the same hardware.

5 Experimental Analysis

This section is devoted to describe and analyze the performance of the configuration space, provide the sufficient experimental evidence to prove that q-gram tokenizers are better than n-words, at least under the sentiment analysis domain in Spanish. Furthermore, we also provide the experimental analysis for the combination of tokenizers, which improves the whole performance without moving too far from our text classifier structure.

We use both training and test datasets in our experiments. The performance on the training set is computed using 5-fold cross validation, and the performance on test set is computed directly on the gold-standard. As previously described, training and test are disjoint sets, see Table 2 for details of our benchmarks. As mentioned, the classifier was fixed to be SVM; we use the

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5The tweets were slightly normalized removing all URLs and standardizing all characters to lowercase.
Table 3: Parameter list and a brief description of their functionality

| weighting schemes / removing common words | name | values | description |
|-----------------------------------------|------|--------|-------------|
|                                         | tfidf | yes, no | After the text is represented as a bag of words, it determines if the vectors are weighted using the TFIDF scheme. If it is no then the term frequency in the text is used as weight. |
|                                         | del-sw | yes, no | Determines if the stopwords are removed. It is related to TFIDF in the sense that a proper weighting scheme assigns a low weight for common words. |

| morphological reductions | name | values | description |
|--------------------------|------|--------|-------------|
|                          | lem | yes, no | Determines if words sharing a common root are replaced by its root. |
|                          | stem | yes, no | Determines if words are stemmed. |

| transformations based on removing or replacing substrings | name | values | description |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------|--------|-------------|
|                                                          | del-punc | yes, no | The punctuation symbols are removed if del-punc is yes, they are left untouched otherwise. |
|                                                          | del-ent | yes, no | Determines if entities are removed in order to generalize the content of the text. |
|                                                          | del-d1 | yes, no | If it is enabled then the sequences of repeated symbols are replaced by a single occurrence of the symbol. |
|                                                          | del-d2 | yes, no | If it is enabled then the repeated sequences of two symbols are replaced by a single occurrence of the sequence. |
|                                                          | del-diac | yes, no | Determines if diacritic symbols, e.g., accent symbols, should be removed from the text. |

| coarsening transformations | name | values | description |
|---------------------------|------|--------|-------------|
|                           | emo | yes, no | Emoticons are replaced by its expressed emotion if it is enabled. |
|                           | num | yes, no | Determines if numeric words are replaced by a common identifier. |
|                           | url | yes, no | Determines if URLs are left untouched or replaced by a unique url identifier. |
|                           | usr | yes, no | Determines if users mentions are replaced by a unique user identifier. |
|                           | lc | yes, no | Letters are normalized to be lowercase if it is enabled. |

| handling negation words | name | values | description |
|-------------------------|------|--------|-------------|
|                         | neg | yes, no | Determines if negation operators in the text are normalized and directly connected with the modified object. |

| tokenizing the transformation | name | values | description |
|-------------------------------|------|--------|-------------|
|                               | n-words | {1, 2} | Determines the number of words used to describe a token. |
|                               | q-grams | {3, 4, 5, 6, 7} | Determines the length in characters of the q-grams (q). |
implementation from the Scikit-learn project [Pedregosa et al., 2011] using a linear kernel. We use the default parameters of the library; no additional tuning was performed in this sense.

5.1 A Performance Comparison of \( n \)-words and \( q \)-grams

Figure 7 shows the histogram of accuracies for our configuration-space in both training and test partitions. Figures 7(a) and 7(c) show the performance of configurations with \( n \)-words as tokenizer (unigrams and bigrams), for training and test datasets respectively. It is possible to see that the form is preserved, and also that TFIDF configurations can perform slightly better than those using only the term frequency. However, the accuracy range being shared by both kinds of configurations is large.

In contrast, Figure 7(b) shows the performance of configurations with \( q \)-grams as tokenizers. Here, the improvement of the TFIDF class is more significant than those configurations not using TFIDF; also, the performance achieved by the \( q \)-grams with TFIDF is consistently better than the performance of the all \( n \)-word configurations in our space. This is also valid for the test dataset, see Figure 7(d).

Figure 8 shows the performance of INEGI on configurations using \( q \)-grams as tokenizers. On the left, Figures 8(a) and 8(c) show the performance of configurations without TFIDF. In train, the best performance is close to 0.57, and less than 0.58 in the test set. The best performing tokenizer is 7-grams. When TFIDF is allowed, Tables 8(b) and 8(d) the best performances are achieved, in both training and test, close to 0.61 in the training set and higher in the gold-standard. The best
Figure 8: Accuracy’s histogram for q-gram configurations in the INEGI benchmark. As before, the performance on the training set was computed with 5-folds.

configurations are those with 5-grams and 6-grams. The 5-grams is consistently better, it achieves accuracy values of 0.6065 and 0.6148 for training and test sets, respectively.

5.1.1 Performance on the TASS’15 benchmark

The performance on TASS’15 is similar to that found in the INEGI benchmark; however, TASS’15 shows a higher sparsity of the accuracy along the range on n-words, ranging from 0.35 to close than 0.61. In the training set, the best performances are achieved using TFIDF.

The best configurations are those using q-grams, as depicted in Figure 9(b) and 9(d) where accuracy values achieve close to 0.63 in both training and test sets. In contrast to INEGI and the training set of TASS’15, the best performing q-gram tokenizer has no TFIDF, however the configurations with TFIDF are tightly concentrated which means that is more easy to pick a good configuration under a random selection, or by the insight of an expert.

Figure 10 shows a finer analysis of the performance of q-grams tokenizers in TASS’15. We can observe that 5-grams appear as the best in the training set and in the gold-standard with TFIDF, but the best performing configuration uses 6-grams tokenizers and no TFIDF; please note that TFIDF has the best accuracy on the training set, so we have not way to know this behaviour without testing all possible configurations in the gold-standard. Also, the difference between the best TFIDF and the best no-TFIDF configurations is of around 0.005; that is quite small to discard the current bias that suggest to use TFIDF configurations.
Figure 9: Accuracy’s histogram, by tokenizer’s class, for the TASS benchmark. The performance on the training set was computed with 5-folds. We select to divide each figure to show the effect of TFIDF, which it is essencial for q-grams’s performance.

5.2 Top-k Analysis

This section focus on the structural analysis of the best k configurations (based on the accuracy score) of our previous results. We call this technique top-k analysis, and it describes the configurations with the empirical probability of a parameter to be enabled among the best k configurations. The score values are defined as the minimum among the set. The main idea is to discover patterns on the composition of best performing configurations. As we double k at each row, then k and 2k share k configurations which produces a smoothly convergence to 0.5 for each probability. At the best of our knowledge, this kind of analysis has never been used in the literature.

All tables in this subsection are induced by the accuracy score (i.e., best k as measured with accuracy). Also, we display the macro-F1 score as a secondary measure of performance that can help to describe the behaviour of unbalanced multi-class datasets. We omit to show the tokenizer probabilities in favor of Figures 8 and 10; please remind that almost all top configurations use q-grams.

Table 4 shows the composition of INEGI’s best configurations in both training and test sets. As previously shown, almost all best setups enable TFIDF, and properly handle emoticons and users. The parameters del-sw, lem, del-d1, del-d2, num, and url, are almost deactivated in both training and test sets. The rest of the parameters (stem, del-diac, del-ent, and neg) do not remain between training and test sets. However, the later set of parameters are disabled in the gold-standard best configurations, excepting for neg. Such fact supports the idea that faster configurations also can produce excellent performances. Please notice that lemmatization (lem) and stemming (stem) are
Figure 10: Accuracy’s histogram for q-gram configurations in the TASS benchmark. As before, the performance on the training set was computed with 5-folds.

Table 4: Analysis of the $k$ best configurations for the INEGI benchmark in both training and test datasets.

| k | accuracy | macro-F1 | tfidf | del-sw | lem | stem | del-d1 | del-d2 | del-punc | del-diac | del-ent | emo | num | url | usr | k | neg |
|---|----------|----------|-------|--------|------|------|--------|--------|----------|----------|--------|-----|-----|-----|----|--|--|
| 1 | 0.6065   | 0.4524   | 1.00  | 0.00   | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.00     | 0.00     | 1.00   | 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00|
| 2 | 0.6065   | 0.4524   | 1.00  | 0.00   | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.00     | 0.50     | 1.00   | 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 0.50|
| 8 | 0.6059   | 0.4511   | 1.00  | 0.00   | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.50     | 1.00     | 1.00   | 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 0.50|
| 16 | 0.6058  | 0.4508   | 1.00  | 0.19   | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.00   | 0.00   | 0.44     | 0.13     | 0.81  | 1.00| 0.38| 0.19| 0.19| 0.5625|
| 32 | 0.6052  | 0.4507   | 1.00  | 0.31   | 0.00 | 0.69 | 0.25   | 0.00   | 0.47     | 0.19     | 0.56  | 1.00| 0.31| 0.38| 1.00| 0.44| 0.5312|
| 64 | 0.6047  | 0.4516   | 1.00  | 0.22   | 0.00 | 0.78 | 0.44   | 0.00   | 0.50     | 0.33     | 0.66  | 1.00| 0.38| 0.19| 1.00| 0.53| 0.5156|
| 128 | 0.6037 | 0.4643   | 1.00  | 0.20   | 0.00 | 0.77 | 0.45   | 0.03   | 0.50     | 0.31     | 0.53  | 1.00| 0.42| 0.28| 1.00| 0.58| 0.4922|
| 256 | 0.6024 | 0.4889   | 1.00  | 0.14   | 0.00 | 0.72 | 0.36   | 0.09   | 0.50     | 0.40     | 0.51  | 1.00| 0.44| 0.43| 1.00| 0.62| 0.5078|
| 512 | 0.6008 | 0.4315   | 1.00  | 0.17   | 0.00 | 0.73 | 0.42   | 0.17   | 0.50     | 0.43     | 0.41  | 1.00| 0.41| 0.48| 0.99| 0.62| 0.5098|

(a) Performance on the training dataset (5-folds)  
(b) Performance on the gold-standard dataset
also disabled, which are the linguistic operations with higher computational costs in our pipeline of text transformations.

Table 5: Analysis of the $k$ best configurations (top-$k$) for the TASS'15 benchmark in both training and test datasets.

| k  | accuracy | macro-F1 | tfidf | del-sw | lem | stem | del-d1 | del-d2 | del-punc | del-diac | del-ent | emo | num | url | usr | lc | neg |
|----|----------|----------|-------|--------|-----|------|--------|--------|----------|---------|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|
| 1  | 0.6286   | 0.4951   | 1.00  | 1.00   | 0.00| 0.00 | 1.00   | 1.00   | 1.00     | 1.00    | 1.00    | 0.00| 0.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00|
| 2  | 0.6286   | 0.4951   | 1.00  | 1.00   | 0.00| 0.00 | 1.00   | 0.50   | 1.00     | 0.00    | 0.00    | 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00|
| 4  | 0.6281   | 0.4947   | 1.00  | 0.75   | 0.00| 0.00 | 0.75   | 0.50   | 1.00     | 0.00    | 0.00    | 0.50| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00|
| 8  | 0.6279   | 0.4955   | 1.00  | 0.50   | 0.00| 0.00 | 0.50   | 0.50   | 1.00     | 0.00    | 0.00    | 0.50| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00|
| 16 | 0.6270   | 0.4864   | 1.00  | 0.38   | 0.00| 0.00 | 0.38   | 0.06   | 0.44     | 0.88    | 0.00    | 0.50| 0.50| 0.88| 1.00| 1.00| 1.00|
| 32 | 0.6265   | 0.4884   | 1.00  | 0.25   | 0.00| 0.00 | 0.34   | 0.06   | 0.47     | 0.69    | 0.00    | 0.38| 0.59| 0.62| 1.00| 0.62| 1.00|
| 64 | 0.6258   | 0.4852   | 1.00  | 0.20   | 0.00| 0.00 | 0.42   | 0.22   | 0.50     | 0.62    | 0.00    | 0.48| 0.56| 0.48| 0.94| 0.61| 0.88|
| 128| 0.6254   | 0.4862   | 1.00  | 0.20   | 0.00| 0.00 | 0.46   | 0.27   | 0.48     | 0.67    | 0.00    | 0.56| 0.59| 0.38| 0.81| 0.68| 0.77|
| 256| 0.6247   | 0.4846   | 1.00  | 0.21   | 0.00| 0.12 | 0.38   | 0.32   | 0.50     | 0.66    | 0.02    | 0.47| 0.60| 0.42| 0.77| 0.73| 0.69|
| 512| 0.6240   | 0.4848   | 1.00  | 0.14   | 0.00| 0.24 | 0.38   | 0.36   | 0.50     | 0.65    | 0.02    | 0.47| 0.61| 0.42| 0.77| 0.67| 0.63|  

Table 5 shows the top-$k$ analysis for TASS’15. Again, TFIDF is a common ingredient of the majority of the better configurations in the training set; however, the best ones deactivate this parameter to use only the frequency of the term; reflected in a minimum improvement. The transformations that remain active in both training and test set are del-sw, del-d1, url, usr, lc, and neg. The deactivated ones in both sets are lem, stem, del-d2, and del-ent, and emo. The rest of the parameters that change between training and test sets are tfidf, del-diac, and num. Note that as $k$ grows, del-punc and emo, are close to be random choices. It is counterintuitive to see the emo parameter outside the top-k items, the same happens for the del-ent parameter. The emo parameter is used to map emoticons and emojis to sentiments, and del-ent is an heuristic designed to generalize the sentiment expression in the text (see Table 3). This behaviour remember us that, in the end, everything depends on the particular distribution of the dataset. In general, it is clear that there is no a rule-of-thumb to compute the best configuration. Therefore, a probabilistic approach, as it is the output of top-k analysis, is useful to reduce the cost of the exploration of the configuration space.

5.3 Improving the Performance with Combination of Tokenizers

In previous experiments, we performed an exhaustive evaluation of the configuration space; then, to improve over our results we need to modify the configuration space. Instead of adding more complex text transformations, we decide to use more than one tokenizer per configuration. More detailed, there exists 127 possible combinations of tokenizers, that is, the powerset of

$$\{2\text{-words, } 1\text{-words, } 3\text{-grams, } 4\text{-grams, } 5\text{-grams, } 6\text{-grams, } 7\text{-grams}\},$$

minus the empty set. For this experiment, we only applied the expansion of tokenizers to the best configurations found in the previous experiments, since performing an exhaustive analysis of the new configuration space becomes unfeasible. The hypothesis is that the previous best configurations will be also compose some of the best configurations in the new space, this is a fair assumption that never get worst under an exhaustive analysis.

Figure 11(a) shows the performance of 4064 configurations that correspond to all combinations of tokenizers over the top-32 configurations on the training set, see Table 4. The performance in
both training and test sets is pretty similar, and significantly better than that achieved with a single tokenizer (Table 4). In Table 6 and Figure 11 we can see a significant improvement with respective to single tokenizers. The top-k analysis for the test set is listed in Table 6. In this table we focus on describe the composition of the tokenizers, instead of the text transformations. The analysis shows that 1-words, 2-words, 3-grams, 4-grams, and 7-grams are commonly present on the best configurations.

We found that TASS’15 also improves its performance under the combination of tokenizers, as Figure 11(b) illustrates. In this case, the performance in the gold standard does not surpasses the performance on the training set, as is the case of INEGI, but it is pretty close. Table 6 shows the composition of the configurations, here we can observe that best performances use 1-words, and 3-grams, 4-grams and 6-grams. It is interesting to note that 2-words are not used for the top-8 configurations, in contrast to the best configurations for INEGI.

As mentioned, any datasets will need to adjust the configuration and search for the best combination in the training set, and then, apply to their particular gold-standard. This is a costly procedure, but it is possible to reduce the search space to a sample lead by the probability models of the top-k analysis. The presented top-k analysis are particularly useful for sentiment analysis in Spanish, other languages may present different models but they are beyond the scope of this manuscript.

It is worth to mention that the best performance is high dependent of the particular dataset; however, based on Tables 4 and 5 it is interesting to note that simpler configurations are among the best performing ones when q-grams are used as tokenizers. This allows to create a model that reduces the computational cost and even improves the performance of the top-1 of both, INEGI and TASS’15, datasets with a single tokenizer. We create a configuration created by activate tfidf, emo, num, usr, and lc; and deactivate del-sw, lem, stem, del-d1, del-d2, del-punc, del-diac, del-ent, and neg. All the activated parameters are relatively simple to implement, even without...
Table 7: Top-$k$ analysis of a configuration handcrafted to reduce the computational cost.

| $k$ | accuracy | macro-F1 |
|-----|----------|----------|
| n=2 | n=1     | n=3     | n=4     | n=5     | n=6     | n=7     |
| 1   | 0.6546   | 0.5279   | 1.00    | 1.00    | 0.00    | 0.00    | 1.00    |
| 2   | 0.6538   | 0.5268   | 1.00    | 1.00    | 0.00    | 0.00    | 1.00    |
| 4   | 0.6525   | 0.5266   | 0.50    | 1.00    | 0.00    | 0.00    | 1.00    |
| 8   | 0.6519   | 0.5257   | 0.63    | 0.75    | 0.00    | 0.00    | 1.00    |
| 16  | 0.6513   | 0.5237   | 0.69    | 0.75    | 0.25    | 0.00    | 1.00    |
| 32  | 0.6503   | 0.5270   | 0.59    | 0.50    | 0.50    | 0.50    | 0.50    |
| 64  | 0.6478   | 0.5225   | 0.55    | 0.61    | 0.47    | 0.59    | 0.67    |
| 96  | 0.6435   | 0.5250   | 0.55    | 0.60    | 0.54    | 0.54    | 0.55    |
| 120 | 0.6412   | 0.5128   | 0.54    | 0.54    | 0.55    | 0.55    | 0.55    |
| 127 | 0.5736   | 0.3946   | 0.50    | 0.50    | 0.50    | 0.50    | 0.50    |

The performances of this simple configurations are pretty close to the best possible ones with our scheme, that is, the gold-standard performance shown in Tables 4 and 5 while it can be easily implemented and optimized.

5.4 Performance Comparison on the TASS'15 Challenge

In the end, a sentiment classifier is a tool that helps to discover the opinion of a crowd of people, the effectiveness is crucial. So, there exists many researchers interested in the field, and for instance, TASS’15 ([Román et al., 2015]) is a forum that gathers many practitioners and researchers for the Spanish version of the problem. As described in §2, the problem is commonly tackled with the use of affective dictionaries, distant supervision methods to increase the knowledge database, word-embedding techniques, complex linguistic tools like lemmatizers, deep learning based classifiers, among other sophisticated techniques. Beyond the use of the SVM, there is no complex procedure that limits the adoption of our approach only to expert users.

However, the question is, how good our approach is as compared with both the state-of-the-art and the state-of-the-technique? We use the TASS’15 benchmark to answer this question. Section 2 reviews several of the best papers in the workshop. Figure 12 shows the official scores of TASS’15 participants, the best scores achieve 0.72 and the worst ones are below 0.43. The gross of the participants are between 0.59 and 0.61; there lies the best sentiment classifier based on $n$-words (0.6051). The best configuration that uses $q$-grams, as a single tokenizer, surpasses that range, i.e., 0.6330. The classifiers based on the combination of tokenizers produce a slightly better performances, and our configuration handcrafted for speed is not too distant from these performances, as figure shows.

The magnitude of the improvement is tightly linked to the dataset; for instance, as compared with the best $n$-words sentiment classifier, the performance of INEGI is improved in 11.17% after applying the combination of tokenizers. In the case of TASS’15, the improvement is of 5.62%, smaller but significant in any case. It is important to take into account this effect in the design of new sentiment classifiers.

6 Discussion

In this study, we covered many traditional techniques used to prepare text representations for sentiment analysis. The majority of them are too simple to be aware of their complexities. However, it is important to know its contribution to the solution of the task being tackled, as we
showed, sometimes applying some technique is counterproductive. Therefore, the transformation pipeline should be carefully prepared. Other techniques, like lemmatization and stemming, are too complex to be implemented each time they are needed; therefore, a mature implementation should be used. However, as our experimental results support, for the sentiment analysis task in Spanish, there is no need to use these complex linguistic techniques if our approach, based on the combination of tokenizers, is used.

More detailed, a lemmatizer is tightly linked to the language being processed, we use Freeling by [Padró and Stamilosky, 2012] for Spanish, and it is designed to work on mostly well-written text. The stemming procedure is another sophisticated tool, in our case, we used the Snowball for Spanish, available in NLTK package by [Bird et al., 2009]. Since it is based mostly on the removal of suffixes, then it is more robust to errors than a lemmatizer. Both techniques are computationally expensive, and both are not used by best-performing configurations; therefore, they should not be applied when the text is full of errors. This is the case of Twitter, the source of our data.

From the perspective of practitioners, the simpler approach is to find the best tokenizer’s combination as applied to a set of simple setups; this gives us 127 combinations if our \{2-word, 1-word, 3-gram, 4-gram, 5-gram, 6-gram, 7-gram\} set is used. Supported by the patterns found in our top-k analysis, the combinations should have at least three tokenizers, and 1-words and 3-grams can always be selected. So, if the complexity of the model selection is an issue, only \(\binom{5}{3} + \binom{5}{4} + \binom{5}{5}\) = 16 combinations are needed.

7 Conclusions

We were able to improve the performance of our sentiment classifiers significantly. Our approach is simple; given a good initial configuration, we can enhance its performance using a set of tokenizers that include both n-words and q-grams. We exhaustively prove the superiority of q-grams over n-words, at least for our case of study (sentiment analysis in the Spanish language). At first
glance, large $q$-grams ($q = 5, 6, \text{ or } 7$) are quasi-words; however, the $q$-grams are sliding windows over the entire text, meaning that many times they cover the connection between two words or even three words. In relatively large words, the suffixes and prefixes are captured, when $q$ is small, affixes and word’s root are also captured. Nonetheless, this process creates many noisy substrings, and that is the reason behind our best configurations almost always use TFIDF, which weights the tokens to reduce this effect. It is necessary to produce a better process to filter out tokens that not contribute beyond creating larger vectors.

However, a naive implementation of the multiple tokenizers will multiply the necessary memory, i.e., actually it increases the memory needs by a factor of $q$ for $q$-grams. This can be a problem on very large collections. Further research is needed to solve this issue.

The initial configuration can be a little tricky. In this study, we provide several top-$k$ analysis; the tables produced can be seen as probabilistic models to create good performing classifiers. These models should be valid at least for Spanish. In practice, this means that we need to evaluate the performance of a few dozens of configurations to select the best performing one among them. In a modern multicore computing architecture, this means a relatively fast procedure.

Finally, we conjectured that our approach would generalize to different languages because it works using a few language-specific techniques. However, this claim should be supported by experimental evidence. Also, we provide a list of simple rules to find a sentiment classifier based on our findings; nonetheless, the best setup is dependent of the dataset, the classes, and many others task-dependent properties. In this paper, our approach consists in performing an exhaustive evaluation of the parameter’s space and then expand the search using a combination of tokenizers. We will require a faster algorithm to find good setups on large configuration’s spaces that work on different languages. Finally, we want to make evident that we used SVM as classifier because of its popularity in the community, this paper mainly focuses on the treatment of the text regardless, so the proper selection and tuning of the classifier is left as future work.

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