ON THE POWER OF CURRICULUM LEARNING IN TRAINING DEEP NETWORKS

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NOT MY FIRST JIGSAW PUZZLE
My first Jigsaw puzzle
LEARNING COGNITIVE TASKS (CURRICULUM):
NOT MY FIRST CHAIR
Learning about objects’ appearance

Avrahami et al. Teaching by examples: Implications for the process of category acquisition. The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology: Section A, 50(3): 586–606, 1997
SUPERVISED MACHINE LEARNING

- Data is sampled randomly
- We expect the train and test data to be sampled from the same distribution

- Exceptions:
  - Boosting
  - Active learning
  - Hard data mining

  but these methods focus on the more difficult examples...
Curriculum Learning (CL): instead of randomly selecting training points, select easier examples first, slowly exposing the more difficult examples from easiest to the most difficult.

Previous work: empirical evidence (only), with mostly simple classifiers or sequential tasks.

⇒ CL speeds up learning and improves final performance.

Q: since curriculum learning is intuitively a good idea, why is it rarely used in practice in machine learning?
A?: maybe because it requires additional labeling...

Our contribution: curriculum by-transfer & by-bootstrapping.
PREVIOUS EMPIRICAL WORK: DEEP LEARNING

- (Bengio et al, 2009): setup of paradigm, object recognition of geometric shapes using a perceptron; **difficulty is determined by user from geometric shape**

- (Zaremba 2014): LSTMs used to evaluate short computer programs; **difficulty is automatically evaluated from data – nesting level of program.**

- (Amodei et al, 2016): End-to-end speech recognition in english and mandarin; **difficulty is automatically evaluated from utterance length.**

- (Jesson et al, 2017): deep learning segmentation and detection; **human teacher (user/programmer) determines difficulty.**
OUTLINE

1. Empirical study: curriculum learning in deep networks
   - Source of supervision: by-transfer, by-bootstrapping
   - Benefits: speeds up learning, improves generalization

2. Theoretical analysis: 2 simple convex loss functions, linear regression and binary classification by hinge loss minimization
   - Definition of “difficulty”
   - Main result: faster convergence to global minimum

3. Theoretical analysis: general effect on optimization landscape
   - Optimization function gets steeper
   - Global minimum, which induces the curriculum, remains the/a global minimum

⇒ theoretical results vs. empirical results, some surprises
**Definitions**

- *Ideal Difficulty Score (IDS)*: the loss of a point with respect to the optimal hypothesis $L(X, h_{opt})$

- *Stochastic Curriculum Learning (SCL)*: variation on SGD. The learner is exposed to the data gradually based on the *IDS* of the training points, from the easiest to the most difficult.

- SCL algorithm should solve two problems:
  - Score the training points by difficulty.
  - Define the scheduling procedure – the subsets of the training data (or the highest difficulty score) from which mini-batches are sampled at each time step.
Curriculum Learning: Algorithm

- Data,  \[ X = \{(x_i, y_i)\}_{i=1}^{N} \]
- Scoring function,  \[ f : X \rightarrow \mathbb{R} \]
- Pacing function,  \[ g_\theta : [M] \rightarrow [N]. \Rightarrow X_1', \ldots, X_M' \subset X \]

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**Algorithm**  
Curriculum learning method

**Input:** pacing function \( g_\theta \), scoring function \( f \), data \( X \).

**Output:** sequence of mini-batches \( [B'_1, \ldots, B'_M] \).

sort \( X \) according to \( f \), in ascending order

\[
result \leftarrow []
\]

for all \( i = 1, \ldots, M \) do

\[
size \leftarrow g_\theta(i) \\
X'_i \leftarrow X[1, \ldots, size] \\
uniformly sample \( B'_i \) from \( X' \) \\
append \( B'_i \) to \( result \)
\]
end for

return \( result \)
RESULTS

- Vanilla – no curriculum

- Curriculum learning by-transfer
  - Ranking by Inception, a big public domain network pre-trained on ImageNet
  - Similar results with other pre-trained networks

- Basic control conditions
  - Random ranking  (benefits from the ordering protocol per se)
  - Anti-curriculum  (ranking from most difficult to easiest)
RESULTS: LEARNING CURVE

Subset of CIFAR-100, with 5 sub-classes
RESULTS: different architectures and datasets, Transfer Curriculum always helps

Small CNN trained from scratch

- CIFAR-10: 76% ± 1%
- CIFAR-100: 46% ± 1%

Cats (from imagenet)

Pre-trained competitive VGG

- CIFAR-10: 91% ± 2%
- CIFAR-100: 68% ± 2%

Accuracy
CURRICULUM HELPS MORE FOR HARDER PROBLEMS

3 subsets of CIFAR-100, which differ by difficulty
ADDITIONAL RESULTS

- Curriculum learning by-bootstrapping
  - Train current network (vanilla protocol)
  - Rank training data by final loss using trained network
  - Re-train network from scratch with CL

![Accuracy Chart]

- vanilla
- curriculum
- anti
- random
- self-taught
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⇒ theoretical results vs. empirical results, some mysteries
THEORETICAL ANALYSIS: LINEAR REGRESSION LOSS, BINARY CLASSIFICATION & HINGE LOSS MINIMIZATION

- **Theorem**: convergence rate is monotonically decreasing with the *Difficulty Score* of a point.

- **Theorem**: convergence rate is monotonically increasing with the *loss* of a point with respect to the *current hypothesis*.

- **Corollary**: expect faster convergence at the beginning of training.

* when Difficulty Score is fixed
**Definitions**

- **ERM loss** $L_D(h) = \mathbb{E}_{X_t \sim D}(L(X_t, h))$

- **Definition**: **point difficulty** $\Leftrightarrow$ loss with respect to optimal hypothesis $\bar{h}$

  $$\Psi(X) = g(L(X, \bar{h}))$$

- **Definition**: **transient point difficulty** $\Leftrightarrow$ loss with respect to current hypothesis $h_t$

  $$\Upsilon(X) = g(L(X, h_t))$$

- $\lambda = \|\bar{h} - h_t\|_2$  
  $\lambda_t = \|\bar{h} - h_{t+1}\|_2 = f(x)$

- $\Delta(\Psi, \Upsilon) = \mathbb{E}[\lambda^2 - \lambda_t^2] \quad \lambda = \|\bar{h} - h_t\|_2$
THEORETICAL ANALYSIS: LINEAR REGRESSION LOSS

- **Theorem**: convergence rate is **monotonically decreasing** with the *Difficulty Score* of a point $\Psi$

  Proof:
  \[
  \frac{\partial \Delta(\Psi)}{\partial \Psi} \leq 0
  \]

- **Theorem**: convergence rate is **monotonically increasing** with the *loss* of a point with respect to the *current hypothesis* $\Upsilon$

  Proof:
  \[
  \frac{\partial \Delta(\Psi_0, \Upsilon)}{\partial \Upsilon} + O(\eta^2) \geq 0 \quad \forall \Psi_0
  \]

- **Corollary**: expect faster convergence at the beginning of training (only true for regression loss)

  Proof:
  \[
  \frac{\partial \Delta(\Psi)}{\partial \lambda} \geq 0 \quad \text{when} \quad \eta \leq \frac{\mathbb{E}[r^2 \cos^2 \vartheta]}{\mathbb{E}[r^4 \cos^2 \vartheta]}
  \]
MATCHING EMPIRICAL RESULTS

- Setup: image recognition with deep CNN
- Still, average distance of gradients from optimal direction shows agreement with Theorem 1 and its corollaries
SELF-PACED LEARNING

- Self-paced is similar to CL, preferring easier examples, but ranking is based on loss with respect to the current hypothesis (not optimal).

- The 2 theorems imply that one should prefer easier points with respect to the optimal hypothesis, and more difficult points with respect to the current hypothesis.

⇒ Prediction: self-paced learning should decrease performance.
All conditions

- **Vanilla**: no curriculum
- **Curriculum**: transfer, ranking by inception
- **Controls**:  
  - anti-curriculum  
  - random
- **Self taught**: bootstrapping curriculum:  
  - training data sorted after vanilla training  
  - subsequently, re-training from scratch with curriculum
- **Self-Paced Learning**: ranking based on local hypothesis
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Effect of CL on optimization landscape

- **Corollary 1**: with an ideal curriculum, under very mild conditions, the modified optimization landscape has the same global minimum as the original one.

- **Corollary 2**: when using any curriculum which is positively correlated with the ideal curriculum, gradients in the modified landscape are steeper than the original one.
THEORETICAL ANALYSIS: OPTIMIZATION LANDSCAPE

Definitions:

- **ERM optimization:**
  \[ \mathcal{L}(\vartheta) = \hat{E}[L_{\vartheta}] = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} L_{\vartheta}(X_i) \]
  \[ \tilde{\vartheta} = \arg\min_{\vartheta} \mathcal{L}(\vartheta) = \arg\max_{\vartheta} \prod_{i=1}^{N} e^{-L_{\vartheta}(X_i)} \]

- **Empirical Utility/Gain Maximization:**
  \[ \mathcal{U}(\vartheta) = \hat{E}[U_{\vartheta}] = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} U_{\vartheta}(X_i) \triangleq \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} e^{-L_{\vartheta}(X_i)} \]

- **Curriculum learning:**
  \[ \mathcal{V}(\vartheta) = \hat{E}_p[U_{\vartheta}] = \sum_{i=1}^{N} U_{\vartheta}(X_i)p(X_i) = \sum_{i=1}^{N} e^{-L_{\vartheta}(X_i)}p(X_i) \]

- **Ideal curriculum:**
  \[ p(X_i) = P(X_i|\tilde{\vartheta}) \propto P(\tilde{\vartheta}|X_i) \]
**SOME RESULTS**

For any prior:

\[ \mathcal{V}(\theta) = \mathcal{U}(\theta) + \text{Cov}[U_\theta, p] \]

For the ideal curriculum:

\[ \mathcal{V}(\tilde{\theta}) = \mathcal{U}(\tilde{\theta}) + \frac{1}{C} \text{Cov}[U_\theta, U_{\tilde{\theta}}] \]

which implies

\[ \mathcal{V}(\tilde{\theta}) - \mathcal{V}(\theta) \geq \mathcal{U}(\tilde{\theta}) - \mathcal{U}(\theta) \quad \forall \theta : \text{Cov}[U_\theta, U_{\tilde{\theta}}] \leq 0 \]

and generally

\[ \mathcal{V}(\tilde{\theta}) - \mathcal{V}(\theta) \geq \mathcal{U}(\tilde{\theta}) - \mathcal{U}(\theta) \quad \forall \theta : \text{Cov}[U_\theta, U_{\tilde{\theta}}] \leq \text{Var}[U_{\tilde{\theta}}] \]
Remaining unclear issues, when matching the theoretical and empirical results...

Empirical findings

- CL steers optimization to better local minimum
- Curriculum helps mostly at the beginning (one step pacing function)

Theoretical results

- Steeper landscape
- Predicts faster convergence at the end, anywhere in final basin of attraction
NO PROBLEM… IF LOSS LANDSCAPE IS CONVEX

Densenet121 (Tom Goldstein)
Back to the regression loss...

\[ L(\omega, (x, y)) = (\omega \cdot x - y)^2 \]

\[ s = \frac{\partial L(\omega)}{\partial \omega} \bigg|_{\omega=\omega_t} = 2 \left( \omega_t \cdot x - y \right) x \]

\[ \Delta = E[||\omega_t - \bar{\omega}||^2 - ||\omega_{t+1} - \bar{\omega}||^2] \]
Computing the gradient step

difficulty score $\Psi/r^2$

$$\Psi(X) = g(L(X, \bar{\omega}))$$

$$\frac{1}{4} \Delta(\Psi) = \eta \mathbb{E}[r^2 \lambda^2 \cos^2 \vartheta] - \eta^2 \mathbb{E}[r^4 \lambda^2 \cos^2 \vartheta] - \eta^2 \Psi^2 \mathbb{E}[r^2]$$
**Theoretical Analysis: Linear Regression Loss**

- **Theorem**: convergence rate is monotonically decreasing with the *Difficulty Score* of a point.
  
  \[
  \frac{\partial \Delta(\Psi)}{\partial \Psi} \leq 0
  \]

- **Theorem**: convergence rate is monotonically increasing with the *loss* of a point with respect to the *current hypothesis*.

- **Corollary**: expect faster convergence at the beginning of training (only true for regression loss)
  
  \[
  \frac{\partial \Delta(\Psi)}{\partial \lambda} \geq 0 \quad \text{when} \quad \eta \leq \frac{\mathbb{E}[r^2 \cos^2 \vartheta]}{\mathbb{E}[r^4 \cos^2 \vartheta]}
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THEORETICAL ANALYSIS: LINEAR REGRESSION LOSS

- **Theorem**: convergence rate is monotonically decreasing with the *Difficulty Score* of a point.

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- **Corollary**: expect faster convergence at the beginning of training (only true for regression loss)
**Loss with respect to current hypothesis**

\[ \gamma(\mathbf{X}) = g(L(\mathbf{X}, \omega_t)) \]

\[ \frac{1}{4\eta} \Delta(\Psi_0, \gamma) = \Psi_0^2 + \gamma^2 + 2\Psi_0 \gamma \nabla \]

\[ \nabla = \frac{f(\frac{\Psi + \gamma}{\lambda}) - f(\frac{\Psi - \gamma}{\lambda}) - f(\frac{-\Psi + \gamma}{\lambda}) + f(\frac{-\Psi - \gamma}{\lambda})}{f(\frac{\Psi + \gamma}{\lambda}) + f(\frac{\Psi - \gamma}{\lambda}) + f(\frac{-\Psi + \gamma}{\lambda}) + f(\frac{-\Psi - \gamma}{\lambda})} \]

**Theorem**  
Assume that the gradient step size is small enough so that we can neglect second order terms \( O(\eta^2) \), and that \( \frac{\partial \nabla}{\partial \gamma} \geq \frac{\Psi}{\Psi} - \frac{\gamma}{\Psi} \) \( \forall \gamma \). Fix the difficulty score at \( \Psi_0 \). At time \( t \) the expected convergence rate is monotonically increasing with the local difficulty \( \gamma(\mathbf{x}) \).

**Corollary**  
For any \( c \in \mathbb{R}^+ \), if \( \nabla \) is \((c - \frac{1}{c})\)-Lipschitz then \( \frac{\partial \Delta(\Psi, \gamma)}{\partial \gamma} \geq 0 \) for any \( \gamma \geq c \Psi \).
**Hinge Loss**

\[
L(X, w) = \max(1 - (x \cdot w)y, 0)
\]

\[
\Delta(\Psi) = \mathbb{E} \left[ \frac{w_{t+1} \cdot \tilde{w}}{\|w_{t+1}\| \|\tilde{w}\|} - \frac{w_t \cdot \tilde{w}}{\|w_t\| \|\tilde{w}\|} \right]
\]

\[
= \int_{-\infty}^{B(\Psi)} \eta [(1 - \Psi) \sin^2 \vartheta - x_2 \sin \vartheta \cos \vartheta] \cdot f(x_2) \, dx_2 + O(\eta^2)
\]

**Theorem** Assume that the gradient step size is small enough so that we can neglect second order terms \(O(\eta^2)\). The expected convergence rate decreases monotonically as a function of \(\Psi\) for every \(\Psi > (1 - \cos \vartheta)\) when \(\cos \vartheta > 0\) (\(\tilde{w}, w_t\) are positively correlated), and for every \(\Psi < (1 - \cos \vartheta)\) when \(\cos \vartheta < 0\). Monotonicity holds \(\forall \Psi\) when \(\cos \vartheta = 0\).

**Theorem** Assume that the gradient step size is small enough so that we can neglect second order terms \(O(\eta^2)\). Assume further that \(\cos \vartheta \geq 0\). Fixing \(\Psi\) and \(\forall \Psi\), the expected convergence rate is monotonically increasing with \(\Upsilon\) for every \(\Upsilon > 0\).
**Summary and Discussion**

1. First theoretical demonstration that curriculum learning indeed helps, speeding up convergence during training. Previous related results have relied mostly on empirical evidence.

2. The literature is confusing, with 2 apparently conflicting methods:
   - Curriculum learning, giving preference to easier examples
   - Methods like hard example mining and boosting, which focus on the more difficult examples

   **Resolution**: results are consistent, it’s all in how one measures difficulty:
   - **Curriculum**: *Easy*, with respect to *final hypothesis*.
   - **Hard example mining**: *Difficult*, with respect to *current hypothesis*.

3. Curriculum learning made practical:
   - **CL by transfer**: source network, which is bigger and more powerful, is used to sort the examples for the weaker network.
   - **CL by bootstrapping**: same pre-trained network is used to sort the examples
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