Can We Use Word Embeddings for Enhancing Guarani-Spanish Machine Translation?

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Abstract

Machine translation for low-resource languages, such as Guarani, is a challenging task due to the lack of data. One way of tackling it is using pretrained word embeddings for model initialization. In this work we try to check if currently available data is enough to train rich embeddings for enhancing MT for Guarani and Spanish, by building a set of word embedding collections and training MT systems using them. We found that the trained vectors are strong enough to slightly improve the performance of some of the translation models and also to speed up the training convergence.

1 Introduction

In recent years the performance of machine translation systems has grown alongside with the rise of neural architectures (Zhang and Zong, 2020; Castilho et al., 2017) that infer the translation patterns while consuming a huge amount of data at training time. However, this high performance is hard to achieve when one (or both) of the languages is considered a low-resource language (Mager et al., 2018). That is the case for Guarani, an indigenous language spoken by nearly 10 million people in South America. It has the characteristic of being one of the few indigenous languages used for daily communication, both by people who identify with indigenous ethnicity as well as people who do not. According to the Paraguayan census office almost 70% of Paraguayans speak some form of Guarani at home\(^1\), but despite this, it remains a low-resource language in the NLP community (Joshi et al., 2020), and the existing attempts at building machine translation systems for this language have not achieved very high results yet.

Qi et al. (2018) found that using pretrained word embeddings could be useful when building machine translation systems for low-resource scenarios. Considering the scarcity of Guarani-Spanish parallel text, the aim of this work is to evaluate if it is possible to enhance a MT system by incorporating word embeddings built with the available monolingual data. In order to do this, we first trained a set of word embedding collections and selected the best of these models according to some intrinsic tests. Finally we trained machine translation experiments using the different embeddings and compared them to the base scenario where no pretrained embeddings were used.

The intrinsic tests and other resources used in this paper are available on GitHub\(^2\).

2 Related work

Although there have been some efforts on developing resources for Guarani, it remains largely under-explored in NLP. The current reference corpus for Guarani is COREGUAPA (Secretaría de Políticas Lingüísticas del Paraguay, 2019), it can be queried online but not be downloaded. Other resources include a Spanish-Guarani parallel corpus built from news sites and blogs (Chiruzzo et al., 2020), two corpora for sentiment analysis (Ríos et al., 2014; Agüero-Torales et al., 2021), and a small Universal Dependencies corpus of the Mbya Guarani dialect (Thomas, 2019; Dooley, 2006). Except COREGUAPA, which cannot be downloaded, all of these resources are rather small for building accurate statistical models.

Interest towards machine translation for indigenous languages of the Americas has increased lately. An important antecedent is the First Workshop on NLP for Indigenous Languages of the Americas (AmericasNLP) (Mager et al., 2021), which organized a shared task on MT from Spanish to several indigenous languages, including Guarani, with several participants. The test set for this shared

\(^{1}\text{https://www.ine.gov.py/news/news-contenido.php?cod-news=505}\)

\(^{2}\text{https://github.com/sgongora27/Guarani-embeddings-for-MT}\)
task was a subset of the XNLI corpus (Conneau et al., 2018) translated to all languages. However, Guarani–Spanish machine translation still remains under-explored. There are some works that take into account the lack of available data (Alcaraz and Alcaraz, 2020; Gasser, 2018; Rudnick et al., 2014; Abdelali et al., 2006), or try to use the rich Guarani morphology to enhance the translation results Borges et al. (2021).

The use of word embeddings to enhance machine translation in low-resource scenarios has been previously explored (Qi et al., 2018), obtaining good results overall. They report that using pre-trained embeddings for both the source and target languages seem to improve results for translating low-resource languages, but the improvement is much lower for languages with large amounts of data. Furthermore, (Shapiro and Duh, 2018) explores alternatives to include pre-trained embeddings in MT systems for a morphologically rich language, and (Nguyen and Chiang, 2017) uses a transfer learning approach for enhancing translation for a low-resource pair, but considering data from other related low-resource pairs as well.

3 Word embeddings

In a previous work (Góngora et al., 2021) we carried a first round of experiments with Guarani word embeddings, collecting text from news sites, tweets and the Guarani Wikipedia\footnote{https://dumps.wikimedia.org/gnwiki/ - February 2021.}. We classified each tweet in one of three categories (A: very reliable, B: reliable, and C: unreliable) according to the probability of being in Guarani using a heuristic based on the number of Guarani tokens from a frequent words list. Finally, for evaluating the then trained embeddings, we also presented two sets of intrinsic tests based on the original tests from Mikolov et al. (2013). One of them is a translation of the original \textit{capital-common-countries} (ccc) set, while the other is a new set for \textit{family} relations, inspired in the original one.

In the current work, we collected more data from the different sources and added datasets such as \textit{The Bible}\footnote{https://biblics.com/gn - July 2021.} and \textit{The book of Mormon}\footnote{https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm?lang=grn - July 2021.}. We also translated the classic similarity test MC-30 (Miller and Charles, 1991) to Guarani in order to have another intrinsic test to perform (in addition to the family and \textit{capital-common-countries} tests).

We trained a set of 24 different word embedding models in Guarani with different configurations. All of them were built using the gensim library (\v{R}ehušek and Sojka, 2010) implementation of the word2vec C-Bow algorithm (Mikolov et al., 2013). The configurations differ in how much text was used (see below), the embeddings size (150 or 300) and the window size (6, 7 or 8). The number of tokens used in the different experiments varies between 1.9M and 2.7M depending on the different data sets we use, as shown in table 1. The \textit{base text} set is used in all models, while some models also include the A, A+B, or A+B+C tweet sets.

| Set                  | Tokens | Sentences (s)  |
|----------------------|--------|----------------|
|                      |        | \textit{or Tweets (t)} |
| The Bible            | 760,697| 99,689 s       |
| The Book of Mormon   | 204,434| 58,995 s       |
| Guarani Wikipedia    | 504,730| 28,123 s       |
| News                 | 433,134| 51,753 s       |
| Base text (the four sets above) | 1,902,995 | 238,560 s |
| Very reliable tweets (A) | 11,791 | 811 t          |
| Reliable tweets (B)  | 75,493 | 6,498 t        |
| Unreliable tweets (C)| 706,907| 71,767 t       |
| Total                | 2,697,186|               |

Table 1: Number of tokens for each of the sets used for training the word embedding models.

3.1 Analogy and Similarity tests

In order to perform a preliminary evaluation of these models we used the previously mentioned analogy (\textit{family} and \textit{ccc}) and similarity (MC-30) tests. Table 2 shows the results for these tests, indicating the configuration of each of the twenty-four models. The results of the analogy tests (\textit{family} and \textit{ccc}) are precision using top 1 (T1) or top 5 (T5) matches, while the similarity test (MC-30) is Spearman’s rank correlation. In order to compare the performance we also include a row for a \textit{baseline} consisting of the best result for each of the intrinsic tests achieved by the models in our previous work (Góngora et al., 2021), which were trained with size 150, window 7 and did not use any of the tweet sets.

Overall we can see a great improvement over the results of the analogy tests reported in the previous work (\textit{baseline}), which can be explained in part because we are using a larger amount of text for training the models. However, there is a noticeable gap between the results for \textit{family} and the \textit{ccc} tests. This difference may be due to the type and style of texts used during training: neither the Bible nor...
For those models using pre-trained word embeddings we had to choose both the Spanish embeddings and the Guarani embeddings. For Spanish we chose a collection of size 300 trained by Azzinnari and Martínez (2016) using a corpus of 6 billion words. Due to limitations of OpenNMT, the Guarani embeddings size must also be 300. Therefore we chose some of the twenty-four models trained according to their size (300), their Spearman’s correlation score for the MC-30 test (see table 2) and the subsets of tweets used for training them:

- **s300w6none**: size 300, window 6, no tweets
- **s300w9ab**: size 300, window 9, tweets A+B
- **s300w7abc**: size 300, window 7, tweets A+B+C

We trained three translation models in each direction (Guarani-Spanish and Spanish-Guarani) using them as pre-trained word embeddings. We also trained an additional model in each direction without using pre-trained word embeddings (i.e. using randomly initialized embeddings). In all cases the models were trained for 80K steps — saving a checkpoint every 5K steps — using the training set from Chiruzzo et al. (2020) (Train2020) and the training set from the parallel data we presented in our previous work (Góngora et al., 2021) plus 383 new parallel sentences collected for this work (we call this union Train2021).

We then chose, for each model, the checkpoint that maximized the ChrF metric for the dev set (Dev2020+Dev2021). The test results will be reported over the test set from (Chiruzzo et al., 2020) (Test2020), the test partition of our own parallel set (Test2021), and the dev and test sets from (Mager et al., 2021) (ANLP Dev and ANLP Test), using the BLEU (Papineni et al., 2002) and ChrF (Popović, 2015) scores. Table 3 shows the size of all the aforementioned datasets.

| Corpus | Set Name | Sentences | Guarani Tokens | Spanish Tokens |
|--------|----------|-----------|---------------|---------------|
| Our parallel set | Train 2021 | 12,129 | 274,734 | 528,018 |
| | Test 2021 | 1,532 | 34,238 | 65,940 |
| | Dev 2020 | 1,481 | 26,606 | 37,355 |
| | Test 2020 | 1,549 | 27,351 | 38,908 |
| (Chiruzzo et al., 2020) | Train 2020 | 11,301 | 241,741 | 404,912 |
| | Dev 2020 | 1,481 | 26,606 | 37,355 |
| (Mager et al., 2021) | ANLP Dev | 996 | 7,216 | 11,180 |
| | ANLP Test | 1,004 | 6,501 | 10,074 |

Table 3: Size of the parallel corpora partitions.
Table 4: BLEU and ChrF results of the translation experiments over the different test sets.

| Test Set    | Test2020 | Test2021 | ANLP Dev | ANLP Test |
|-------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
|             | BLEU     | ChrF     | BLEU     | ChrF      |
| Models Gn–Es |          |          |          |           |
| random      | 21.90    | 37.26    | 0.41     | 12.22     | 0.37     | 11.75    |
| s300w6none  | 22.64    | **38.63**| 0.48     | 13.44     | 0.51     | 12.85    |
| s300w9ab    | 22.49    | 38.32    | 0.44     | 13.52     | 0.44     | **12.93**|
| s300w7abc   | 22.54    | 38.46    | 0.57     | **13.65** | 0.50     | 12.75    |
| (Borges et al., 2021) |          |          |          |           |
| Models Es–Gn |          |          |          |           |
| random      | 20.30    |          | -        | -         |
| s300w6none  | 20.19    | **36.95**| 0.27     | 12.77     | 0.49     | 12.91    |
| s300w9ab    | 19.75    | 35.13    | 0.32     | **13.10** | 0.45     | 12.72    |
| s300w7abc   | 18.44    | 33.74    | 0.23     | 11.98     | 0.12     | 12.06    |
| ANLP first place | -      | -        | -        | -         |
| ANLP baseline | -    | -        | -        | -         |
| ANLP last place | -      | -        | -        | -         |

4.1 Guarani-Spanish

Figure 1 shows how BLEU and ChrF scores change at each checkpoint. We observe that, in general, models that use pretrained embeddings tend to converge earlier. This is particularly important when experimenting with several models and having little computing power available.

![Figure 1: BLEU and ChrF evolution on the dev set for each checkpoint while training the Gn–Es models.](image1)

The top rows of table 4 shows the results over the test sets for the best model in each configuration. We also show the only result available for comparison in the direction Gn–Es (Borges et al., 2021), which used the (Chiruzzo et al., 2020) test corpus. We outperformed their results, which probably is because our models use more training data (they used only the train partition from Chiruzzo et al. (2020)).

We can also see that using pretrained word embeddings improved the performance with respect to the randomly initialized model on every test set. However, notice that the performance for the ANLP sets (Mager et al., 2021) drops dramatically. We think this could be explained by the more varied text styles present in these test sets, in contrast with the more uniform news text used for training.

4.2 Spanish-Guarani

Regarding the translation in the Es–Gn direction, figure 2 shows the results over the dev set and we can see the behavior is different. Although the faster convergence is observed again, the randomly initialized model performs as high as the pretrained ones. We can also see some performance stability problems as peaks in the graph. This behavior could be due to the target language embeddings being trained with fewer data, which is in line with what (Qi et al., 2018) reported.

![Figure 2: BLEU and ChrF evolution on the dev set for each checkpoint while training the Es–Gn models.](image2)

As can be seen in table 4 the results in this case are mixed, since the pretrained models do not outperform the randomly initialized model in all cases. Furthermore, the performance over the AmericasNLP sets also drops significantly, which probably has the same cause as the performance difference on the opposite direction.

In this direction it was possible to compare our best models with the performance obtained by AmericasNLP shared task participants (Mager et al., 2021)...
As shown in the bottom rows of table 4, our models perform between the bottom participants and the baseline. However, we did not aim to optimize the performance for this scenario: in this work we tried to focus only on analyze the use of pretrained word embeddings, and further work is needed to improve the training configurations with parameter tuning or different preprocessing techniques.

5 Conclusions

The results obtained in our experiments show that — with the currently available data — we can start to see some improvements when using pre-trained embeddings; at least in the Es–Gn direction. The performance of the Gn–Es models that used pre-trained embeddings was slightly better than the performance of the one that did not use them. Additionally, the developed systems converge faster when using pretrained embeddings, which is especially useful in the scenario that is common for low-resource research labs, that of having little computing power. However, in the Es–Gn direction the results were more mixed, which is aligned with the conclusions of Qi et al. (2018).

There are still many lines to explore. First, trying other methods and algorithms for building embeddings such as FastText, which could be better for morphologically rich languages such as Guarani (Bojanowski et al., 2017; Shapiro and Duh, 2018). Second, we must explore the different OpenNMT configuration possibilities. We could also use back-translation techniques as well, such as the approach explored by (Vázquez et al., 2021), the winning system in AmericasNLP shared task. Finally more diverse text is needed, considering the difference observed while evaluating over the AmericasNLP sets. This diversity is also needed for improving the word embeddings performance. The great differences between both analogy tests suggests that the words in the capital-common-countries test might not be suitable for Guarani, perhaps due to the topics covered in Paraguayan news which refer mainly to countries in the region.

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