Abstract

Images are often more significant than only the pixels to human eyes, as we can infer, associate, and reason with contextual information from other sources to establish a more complete picture. For example, in Figure 1, we can find a way to identify the news articles related to the picture through segment-wise understandings of the signs, the buildings, the crowds, and more. This reasoning could provide the time and place the image was taken, which will help us in subsequent tasks, such as automatic storyline construction, correction of image source in intended effect photographs, and upper-stream processing such as image clustering for certain location or time.

In this work, we formulate this problem and introduce TARA: a dataset with 16k images with their associated news, time, and location, automatically extracted from New York Times (NYT), and an additional 61k examples as distant supervision from WIT (Srinivasan et al., 2021). On top of the extractions, we present a crowdsourced subset in which we believe it is possible to find the images’ spatio-temporal information for evaluation purpose. We show that there exists a 70% gap between a state-of-the-art joint model and human performance, which is slightly filled by our proposed model that uses segment-wise reasoning, motivating higher-level vision-language joint models that can conduct open-ended reasoning with world knowledge. The data and code are publicly available at https://github.com/zeyofu/TARA.

1 Introduction

Vision and language are two of most important information sources, and the fact that humans reason jointly with both sources has motivated artificial intelligence research to consider visually-grounded language understanding. Most work in this area has focused on reasoning with local evidence (Suhr et al., 2019; Hudson and Manning, 2019; Lu et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021), e.g. asking factoid questions such as the colors or shapes of objects and numbers of people, yet very few works (Cui et al., 2021) encourage open-ended reasoning where a model needs to look beyond task inputs. However, humans can relate visual cues to corresponding contextual information that could be multi-modal, and draw on background knowledge when interpreting and grounding images. For example, as Figure 1 shows, people that are familiar with the news can infer that the location is Times Square through the iconic screen panels, and further estimate the period of time by looking at the crowds and the signs. And, this can be done without explicitly including related news pieces as input. In fact, even though some people would not have the prior knowledge to identify the relevant events, it is likely that they would have good estimate of the location and time by interpreting textual evidence in the image, the language in the signs, entity names, building styles, and other details in the input image.

In this work, we identify and formulate this problem, spatio-temporal grounding of images, a
Figure 2: What is the time and location for this image?

Figure 3: An example of potential joint reasoning on Figure 2 to ground its time and location. Note that people with different backgrounds may need to use different levels of reasoning, resulting in a completely accurate or just partial grounding (e.g., the decade and country), and we only show one such reasoning route. We start with grounding multiple scene text, faces, and objects segments from the image, and use the information to conduct a constrained search in a large news-base, until it locates specific textual information related to the image.

Task aiming at identifying the **time** and **location** in which the given image was taken. Specifically, we develop a novel dataset **TARA** (Time and Place for Reasoning beyond the Image), a challenging dataset that tasks models with grounding images to real-world spatial and temporal information. In our collection, we make sure that for models to accurately find images’ creation time and location, they would need to successfully ground the visual clues in texts such as news, stories and encyclopedias. As a result, this task motivates models to consider the association between visual information, language, and background knowledge, more closely and in a more open-ended setting. Figure 2 shows an example from TARA, and Figure 3 shows a possible way for a model to ground the image to its spatio-temporal information. The system starts with grounding multiple segments from the image, and uses the information to conduct a constrained search in a large news-base, until it locates specific textual information related to the image. This demonstrates the complexity and significance of this task.

TARA is collected via a rigorous process that involves rule-based distant supervision extraction from news-images data which results in 16k image examples. While the training data has high label correctness (around 95%), we further run a crowdsourced validation on 3k examples to form the evaluation dataset. During the validation, annotators are asked to verify that there exists a potential path for humans to derive the correct answer, which encourages proper reasoning in future works. To better support the study of domain transfer and supervision for the reasoning process, we collect an additional 61k examples from the Wikipedia domain. We apply the state-of-the-art joint model CLIP (Radford et al., 2021) and show that it only
achieves accuracy of 11.11% and 0.46% for time and location, respectively, on our dataset. Additionally, we present a new CLIP-based baseline model that reasons on object and facial segments and achieves 16.46% and 1.07% accuracy for time and location, respectively. We show that there exists a large gap (around 70% in accuracy) between state-of-the-art models and human performance, suggesting that the TARA data will provide a benchmark to motivate reasoning based approaches and support significant future work.

2 Related Work and Datasets

Vision and Language Learning Language understanding in the context of images has been widely studied in various datasets covering a wide range of tasks including visual question answering, image retrieval, image and video captioning, etc. Earlier datasets mostly focus on simple local object properties identification (Antol et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2016). Later on, datasets start to focus on compositional visual reasoning. For example, Suhr et al. (2017) and Johnson et al. (2017) use synthetic images or synthetic language to study spatial relations. Recently, datasets using real images and real languages such as (Hudson and Manning, 2019; Liu et al., 2021) were proposed for reasoning about natural language descriptions of photos. However, all of the datasets focus on local grounding on segments inside the image, but not globally ground beyond the image with open-ended reasoning.

While there are various tasks and datasets, the underlying associations between language and visual concepts are often common across different tasks (Lu et al., 2020). Therefore, we use CLIP (Radford et al., 2021) to study the TARA dataset in this paper. CLIP is a recently released state-of-the-art image representation model which has shown impressive performance on various tasks through pre-training on 400 million image and captions pairs collected from the internet.

Spatio-temporal IE from Texts There has been extensive work on identifying temporal expressions and their associations with events in texts. Uz-Zaman et al. (2013); Ning et al. (2018) focus on temporal information extraction within the local contexts, and Zhou et al. (2020, 2021) further extends the scope to consider contextual information from external texts. The NLP community has also investigated spacial information extraction, with geocoding (Gritta et al., 2018; Kulkarni et al., 2020), which maps mentions to geological coordinates, being closest to our scope.

3 Dataset Collection

Each example in TARA includes a news image, along with its time, location, caption, and corresponding news background such as headline, abstract, and news type. These are included for training or analysis purposes, but the task is to guess the correct time and location as accurately as possible given only the image. In developing the dataset, our goal is to collect a large corpus of semantically rich images that human with world knowledge can correctly identify the time and location, using evidence from the image, background knowledge, and appealing to external knowledge (which we call “reasoning” here). We design the process of collecting and identifying the images so that it facilitates this type of reasoning, and then use crowd sourcing to label a random 20% of high-quality images for development and testing. Figure 4 illustrates our data collection procedure.

3.1 Image collection

We first collect all the news between January 2010 and May 2021 using the NYT API. We did not collect news that are earlier than 2010 because earlier news articles contain much fewer images. Each news article comes with a list of attributions such as headline, abstract, news type, and possibly a main image. We first filter the news articles that have a valid image, and then scrape image caption for each image. Since the NYT covers news in several multimedia formats, the images follow a range of formatting practices, such as representative news images, image collages, images sampled from slideshows and descriptive natural thumbnails for videos. We setup a NYT specific pipeline to scrape image captions. We define a separate scraping procedure to get image specific text information for the different media types mentioned above and remove instances where multiple and/or ambiguous captions are returned.

Image Pruning and Labeling Next, we describe how we automatically collect time and location of an image from corresponding news articles and captions. First, we filter out the images with

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2https://developer.nytimes.com/docs/archive-product/1/overview

3For each news, the API provides attributes as listed here: https://developer.nytimes.com/docs/archive-product/1/types/Article
unwanted news types such as reviews, series, and obituaries, and unwanted news topics such as food, fashion, and movies, because images from these articles may not be informative enough. Then, we filter out the images whose caption does not contain location and time. For those that contain temporal and spacial cues, we assign each image a possible time label and location label. Specifically, we use the Spacy NER model\(^4\) to find if the caption has both exactly one “DATE” entity for time and one “GPE” or “LOC” typed entity for location. Note that each news comes with a publication date and possible locations in attributes. We would either directly use our NER-extracted time entity as the possible time label if it’s a valid time, or adjust the publication date using the time entity. For example, if the time entity is “1936” and publication date is “2015-07-18”, then we will use “2015-06” as the possible time label. We also compare our NER-extracted location entity with the news attribute locations. If the only difference is granularity, e.g. one is New York, United States and the other is United States, then we will use the fine-grained one “New York, United States” as possible location label. Otherwise, we will filter our this image. Finally, we add missing hierarchies for each possible label. For time labels, we add the decade and the century. For location labels, we use Geopy\(^5\) to identify the location and add missing hierarchies such as country and continent.

### 3.2 Validation

We randomly select an equal number of images from each month, such that a total of about 20% images are assigned to development and test. On

\(^4\)https://spacy.io/models/en

\(^5\)https://geopy.readthedocs.io/en/stable/
these images, we use two crowdsourcing tasks to (1) prune unanswerable images, and (2) verify correctness of the labels.

In the first task, we display a single image, and ask a worker to answer, without searching online, if any person can guess the time and location of the image. We offer different hierarchies in the choices – date, year, decade, and century for time and exact location, city, country, and continent for location – so that workers can choose one of these. If the majority of workers agree that human cannot reason time or location based on the image itself, we will mark the corresponding label as null. Otherwise, if the majority of them agree on a certain hierarchy, we adjust the possible label to that specific hierarchy. Check step(c) in Figure 4 for criteria and positive and negative examples.

The second task further verifies the correctness of current time and location labels. Specifically, we provide the same image, but including its caption, news headline, abstract, and extracted time and location labels. We ask the workers to verify if the background event is the same as in image, and if the labels are correct after reading the additional information. We use the Semantic Role Labeling (SRL) model6 from AllenNLP to detect the main verb in the image caption by selecting the verb with most arguments, and mark it as the possible main event to provide to the workers. Detailed examples can be found in step(d) in Figure 4.

3.3 Test Set of Interest

We further select a small set of 30 interesting images as shown in Figure 5, that are related to most famous news happening after January 2021, the CLIP model date.7 This adversarial test set is specifically chosen to cover unseen images by baseline models to better test their generalization instead of memorization.

Additionally, regarding to human baseline, annotators need to have enough knowledge to extract and interpret the key evidence segments, in order to reason about the answer. For instance, a person with an American cultural background and speaks English but not Hindi may find Figure 1 is easier to infer the precise time and location than Figure 2, compared to a person with Indian cultural background and speaks Hindi but not English, and vice versa. This test set of interest is chosen to cover most well-known news for the purpose that human baseline annotators are more likely to have enough knowledge about the key evidence so that the comparison with neural models can be more fair.

3.4 Additional Weak Supervision

We apply the same image pruning and labeling procedures on the WIT dataset (Srinivasan et al., 2021), which contains 11.5M Wikipedia images and the surrounding paragraphs and captions. Since this dataset is much unorganized, we only select images in English Wikipedia articles, and apply two additional NER models (Lample et al., 2016; Peters et al., 2017) from AllenNLP8 to select locations. We further use zero-shot CLIP model to prune unwanted image types. Specifically, we provide each image with text sentences in the format of “a photo of”, with type being photograph, map, paint, and paper, and retrieve the sentence with highest similarity score. We only keep images of type photograph, and use these as additional weak supervision. The benefit of adding this additional weak supervision is that it has a wider range of time and location labels than the NYT images, especially because that all the NYT images are taken from news between 2010 and 2021.

4 Dataset Analysis

4.1 Dataset Statistics

Dataset statistics can be found in Table 1. TARA contains about 16K images from New York Times. After crowd-sourcing validation on development and testing, about 94% of the images that either has a valid location label or time label are kept, indicating that our training set can serve as a good weak supervision. In addition, TARA provides a 61K weak supervision dataset built upon WIT.

| Dataset          | Train | Dev  | Test  | All    |
|------------------|-------|------|-------|--------|
| TARA before validation | 12,306 | 1,644 | 1,644 | 15,652 |
| TARA             | 12,306 | 1,552 | 1,571 | 15,429 |
| WIT              |       |       |       | 61,325 |

Table 1: Dataset statistics for TARA and additional WIT supervision.

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6https://demo.allennlp.org/semantic-role-labeling
7https://github.com/openai/CLIP/blob/main/model-card.md
8https://demo.allennlp.org/named-entity-recognition/fine-grained-ner
Figure 5: Some example images in our test set of interest as described in Section 3.3. These very recent images require open-ended reasoning with world knowledge and are specifically chosen such that our human baseline annotators probably have enough knowledge about the key evidence. For example, in the first image, people need to know what “BLM” is so that they can start to search statues in United States. Also in the second image, people need to know it is the President Biden for further reasoning.

4.2 Time and Location Distribution
Figure 6 shows the time and location distribution in TARA. We can see that most images are taken in North America, Asia, and Europe, between 2010 and 2021. This can be the effect of using NYT as image source.

5 Baselines
We assess the quality of our dataset through human annotation, and evaluate on existing visual reasoning approaches.

5.1 Human Performance
As introduced in Section 3.3, an expert annotator works on our test set of interest to gain a better understanding of the human performance on TARA. The expert is not allowed to directly search the image online, but can search for anything else such as the keywords she/he infers from the image. The expert is presented with all the labels in the test set just as neural models.

5.2 Evaluation Systems
We use the state-of-the-art systems in machine reading comprehension for this task: CLIP (Radford et al., 2021). CLIP is the state-of-the-art image representation model and has shown impressive progress on visually grounded language understanding tasks. Specifically, we use the “ViT-B/32” model\(^9\) for zero-shot classification and analysis. During prediction, the model is given a single image and needs to classify the correct label. We use a similar prompt template “A photo taken in {label}.” following the original paper, to encode all the labels. We compare the similarity between the image and each label prompt, and the highest one is the predicted label.

We also add several variants of CLIP. The first is CLIP+, which is the zero-shot CLIP model fine-tuned on NYT training data. Note that CLIP uses contrastive loss to train on image and text pairs. We concatenate the time and location labels into a

\(^9\)https://github.com/openai/CLIP
natural language sentence to serve as the text part for an image.

CLIP+Seg is another variant where we first extract object and face segments, and then finetune the CLIP model on the whole images along with the segments, both with time and location labels concatenated together as the final goal. As for object detection, we use the YOLOv5\textsuperscript{10} method, specifically with model “yolov5s”. The intuition is that for objects such as iPhone, the model benefits from training it to times later than 2010. We add a limit to the segments so that we only consider important objects that have size larger than 50. We further restrict the number of people segments to be no more than 3, since many of the images have crowds and adding more people do not bring in much additional information. As for face segments, we use the InsightFace (Guo et al., 2022) facial detection model\textsuperscript{11}. The intuition is that for famous people such as President Biden, we will benefit from training the segments to location “United States”. During implementation, we also add a limit to the segments so that we only consider face that have size larger than 50, which are more likely to be most important faces.

CLIP+WIT is the variant of CLIP where we finetune on the training images along with the 61K weak supervision Images extracted from WIT. We concatenate the possible time and location labels as the paired text.

6 Experiments and Results

6.1 Evaluation metrics

Two metrics are adopted in this work: Accuracy and Example-F1 (also known as micro-Dice coefficient) following previous studies (Shen et al., 2021). Accuracy is calculated without considering hierarchies – the predicted label needs to exactly match the gold label. In contrast, Example-F1 calculates the average F1 scores considering each hierarchy as follows:

$$\text{Example-F1} = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} \frac{2 |L_{i}^{\text{true}} \cap L_{i}^{\text{pred}}|}{|L_{i}^{\text{true}}| + |L_{i}^{\text{pred}}|}$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

where $L_{i}^{\text{true}}$ ($L_{i}^{\text{pred}}$) is the true (model predicted) hierarchical label set of image $i$. For example, if the true labels for an image are “1967-7-14” and “Newark, New Jersey, United States, North America” respectively, then its true hierarchical label sets are [“Newark, New Jersey, United States, North America”, “United States, North America”, “North America”] and [“1967-7-14”, “1967-7”, “1967”, “1960s”, “20th century”].

6.2 Experimental results

In Table 2, we report the experimental results using the CLIP based baselines on the TARA. We can see that all of the model performance still have a large gap with human performance. Also, the object and facial segments boosts the model to be the highest on location prediction, proving that segment level reasoning is needed in this task. In contrast, adding the WIT weak supervision does not show consistent improvement or reduction on the performance. It can be due to that WIT images are not similar.
to news images, and that WIT images are mostly taken in older times than 2010, thus not providing enough supervision for our test set. There is also an obvious gap between the location prediction and time prediction, showing that temporal reasoning in vision language learning is much under explored and needs further research. Note that the Example-F1 value is consistently higher than accuracy because if the model predicts the highest two hierarchies correctly (e.g. century and decade), then it gets an Example-F1 around 40%.

### 6.3 Analysis

We perform qualitative and quantitative analysis of the baseline results to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of CLIP based models, and hypothesize avenues for future work. Specifically, we look into: model performance on test set of interest; effects on performance by using news abstract.

**Test Set of Interest** Since we conduct human evaluation only on the test set of interest, we examine how models perform on this set and show the results in Table 3. Note that we use the same setting for the models and human experts – both are given the entire test set labels. From the results, we observe a large gap between the model performance and human performance, indicating that existing sota model still lacks a certain level of reasoning capability required to solve a such hard task as defined in the TARA dataset. Comparing the results in Table 3 to those in Table 2, we can see that there is little performance difference for each model, indicating that our human performance on the test set of interest can serve as a good reference to human performance on the whole test set, under the assumption that the annotators have enough knowledge about the key evidence segments.

**News Abstracts** We also experiment with news abstracts being the classification goal instead of time and location labels given an image, under the assumption that models are given corresponding news abstract for each label. The intuition is that the news abstract might provide more descriptions that can map to several local segments, and thus providing additional information. Comparing the results shown in Table 4 to Table 2, we can see that providing news abstracts improves the performance a lot, despite that there is still a large gap with human performance.

### 7 Conclusion

In this work, we introduce TARA, a new dataset and task for spatio-temporal grounding of images that requires open-ended joint reasoning with world knowledge. TARA provides a dataset of 16K high-quality images from NYT and Wikipedia-based supervision for additional 61K images. Compared to previous visual-language understanding datasets, TARA requires more complicated reasoning ability and existing state-of-the-art models such as CLIP...
are far from human levels, suggesting that our task remains a significant challenge with large room for improvement. We hope that TARA will inspire future work on reasoning beyond image’s local segments in vision-language understanding.

8 Ethical Considerations

We collected data for TARA by downloading raw data from the official NYT API at https://developer.nytimes.com. According to the Terms of Use at https://developer.nytimes.com/terms and NYTimes.com Terms of Service located at https://help.nytimes.com/hc/en-us/articles/115014893428-Terms-of-service, NYT granted us a license to access the NYT APIs and scrape their data. We ensure that our dataset has been collected in a manner which is consistent with the terms of use of NYTimes.

We only release our dataset TARA for academic purpose. In order to retrieve the same raw data we scraped from the NYT API, multiple requests for months between January 1, 2010 and May 31, 2020 need to be made following the instructions at https://developer.nytimes.com/docs/archive-product/1/overview.

As introduced in Section 3.2, we annotated the data using crowd-workers through Amazon Mechanical Turk. They are voluntary participants who were aware of any risks of harm associated with their participation. We require the workers to be located in either Australia, Canada, Great Britain or the United States such that they are English speakers. We also require the workers to have HIT Approval Rate (%) for all Requesters’ HITs greater than or equal to 98%. All crowd-workers were compensated by a fair wage determined by estimating the average completing time of each annotation task. Each worker earn $2.4 per 10 queries and each query should take less than a minute to annotate. Example screenshots of the NYT data and our annotation interface can be found in Appendix A.

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A Example Screenshots from the NYT Website and MTurk Annotation Interface

In this section, we first show an example news screenshot taken from the NYT website located at [https://www.nytimes.com/](https://www.nytimes.com/), where we use the provided API to download the data, as in Figure 7. We then show example screenshot of our data annotation process as described in Section 3.2. For the data annotation tasks, we present the Turkers with step-by-step instructions of the tasks that we require them to do, along with carefully selected examples. More details can be found in Figure 8.
French Strikers Shut Down the Louvre, Setting a New Target in a Pension Fight

Protesters angry about the government’s pension reforms prevented visitors from entering the museum, which is one of the French capital’s most visited sites.

Union workers protested the government’s pension plan outside the Louvre in Paris on Friday. Christophe Petit Tesson/EPA, via Shutterstock

By Aurelien Breeden

Jan. 17, 2020

PARIS — Visitors were turned away from the Louvre on Friday after strikers protesting the French government’s planned pension overhaul blocked entrances to the museum, leaving tourists from around the world befuddled and frustrated.

Figure 7: This is an example news from the New York Times(NYT) website.
Instructions 1:

Here is an image extracted from a New York Times article.

Do not search online, but by only looking at the image, Answer the Questions:

Can you tell which specific event the image is about? Events can be like a speech, celebration, etc. [In these events can be like a city view, natural views, etc.]

1. Yes, I can see the event clearly.
2. No, I can only guess the event.
3. No, I can only guess the event, and it’s just an accident.

Do you think human users or anyone you know in this real world can guess the image content TIME through the information in this image, without searching online?

1. Yes, I can guess the event clearly.
2. Yes, I can only guess the event.
3. No, because there is hardly any information about the time.

Do you think human users or anyone you know in this real world can guess the image content LOCATION through the information in this image, without searching online?

1. Yes, I can guess the event clearly (e.g., building, road view, etc.).
2. Yes, I can only guess the event.
3. No, because there is hardly any information about the location.

Instructions 2:

Look at the image extracted from a NYT article again. Read the caption, article publication date, article headline and article abstract. Answer the questions.

Image Caption:

Urban workers protested the government’s pension plan outside the Louvre in Paris on Friday.

Article publication date: 2009-01-17

Article headline: French Streets Block in Paris to Protest Pension Reforms

Article abstract: Parisians rally against the government’s pension reforms presented yesterday from behind the Louvre, which is one of the French capital’s most visited sites.

We extracted Caption-Time and Caption-Location from the image caption and publication date. They should be the time and location of the main event in the caption.

Caption-Time: 2009-01-17

Caption-Location: Louvre Museum, Rue de losa des Petits Champs, 1st Arrondissement, Paris, France

Answer the question: Does the image show this main event?

No. The image shows a protest, not a protest against pension reforms.

Do you think that the image content time is same as caption time 2009-01-17 extracted from the image caption and publication data?

No, the image content time is 2000-01-17 for the event, and the caption time is 2009-01-17 for the event the caption is about.

Do you think that the content location is same as caption location Louvre Museum, Rue de losa des Petits Champs, 1st Arrondissement, Paris, France extracted from the image caption?

No, the image content location is not the same as the caption location. The image content location is Paris, France, not Louvre Museum, Rue de losa des Petits Champs, 1st Arrondissement, Paris, France.

Do you think the image created image location is same as the caption location we found Lourve Museum, Rue de losa des Petits Champs, 1st Arrondissement, Paris, France extracted from the image caption?

No, the image content location is not the same as the caption location. The image content location is Paris, France, not Louvre Museum, Rue de losa des Petits Champs, 1st Arrondissement, Paris, France.

Figure 8: A screenshot of the MTurk annotation instructions for data validation as introduced in Section 3.2.