Speech segmentation with a neural encoder model of working memory

Micha Elsner and Cory Shain
What is unsupervised segmentation?

The infant hears a stream of utterances
And has to pick out lexical units
What can the infant do?

- Learn some words as early as 6 months (Bergelson+ 12)
- Rarely produce partial words, but do run words together (Peters 83)
- Distinguish function words from non-words by 12 months (Shi+ 06)

“Word knowledge” in this sense may be very partial and incomplete
Models of word segmentation

- Phonotactic: Fleck 08, Rytting+ 07, Daland+ 11 and others
  Track transitional probabilities between phones
- Bayesian: Brent 98, Goldwater+ 09, Boerschinger+ 14 and others
  Balance predictive power with innate bias against rare words
- Feature-based unigram: Berg-Kirkpatrick+ 10
  Generative maxent model with features like #vowels per word
- Process-oriented: Lignos+ 11
  Subtractive segmentation removes known words from beginning of utterance
Hard to adapt these to speech

Separately trained acoustic units:

- External phone recognizer: de Marcken 96, Rytting 07 and others
- Hybrid neural-Bayesian: Kamper+ 16

Learn their own acoustics, but less flexible:

- Gaussian-HMMs: Lee+ 12, 15, see also Jansen 11
- Syllable discovery and clustering: Räsänen 15
Our model

Audio or character-based input
Multilevel autoencoder
Constrained by memory capacity
(*But not state-of-the-art results)
Why a new model?

● Explain learning biases using memory mechanism
  ○ Links biases in previous work to memory
  ○ Lower-level basis for Bayesian “small lexicon”-type priors?
  ○ “Phonological loop” (Baddeley+ 74) as modeling device

● Cope with variable input
● Explore unsupervised learning in neural framework
Why a new model?

- Explain learning biases using memory mechanism
- Cope with variable input
  - No need for a separate phone recognizer
  - Neural nets can extract features from audio
  - Latent numeric word representations robustly represent variation
- Explore unsupervised learning in neural framework
Why a new model?

- Explain learning biases using memory mechanism
- Cope with variable input
- Explore unsupervised learning in neural framework
  - Modern neural net technology still isn’t dominant in unsupervised learning
  - Previous neural segmenters (Elman 90, Christiansen+ 98, Rytting+ 07) use distant supervision/SRNs
  - Other current efforts (Kamper+ 16) use hybrid neural-Bayesian mechanisms
  - We use autoencoders (cf. Socher’s latent tree models)
    - Another new model (Chung+ 17) use latent neural segmentation for different tasks
Idea: words are chunks you can remember

Input sequence: watizit
Hypothesized segmentations: wat iz it
Autoencoder network:
Reconstruct, calculate loss: waaaaaat
Distribution over segmentations: watizit

Network retraining
Key ideas:

● Autoencoder doesn’t predict segmentation directly
  ○ But provides a loss function for segmentation
● Need different imperfect reconstructions based on segmentation
  ○ Due to limited memory capacity
  ○ Model shouldn’t be at ceiling
● Assumption: real words are easier to remember
Model part 1: phonological encoding

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one-hot characters / MFCCs for each frame

Fixed-length with padding

see Cho+ 14, Vinyals+ 15, etc.
Model part 1: phonological encoder-decoder

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LSTM

LSTM
Model part 2: utterance encoding

$u$-dimensional latent utterance representation
Model part 2: utterance encoder-decoder

Autoencoder loss: reconstruction of the original sequence
Real words are easier to memorize

(using the phonological network alone)

Reconstruction acc

Real words
Length-matched non-words

Memory capacity
Cognitive architecture simulates memory

- Memory separated into **phonological** and **lexical** units
  - *Phonological loop vs episodic memory*
- Levels must work together to reconstruct the sequence
  - Utterance level wants few words with predictable order
  - Word level wants short words with phonotactic regularities…
- Balancing these demands leads to good segmentations
Training: gradient estimates with sampling

Network gives reconstruction loss for any segmentation

**Search** the space of segmentations for good options

1. Sample some segmentations
2. Score them with the network
3. Compute importance weights
4. Sample posterior segmentation, update network parameters

see Mnih+ 14 and others
Learn the proposal distribution

Train another LSTM on the whole sequence to produce the proposal:

WAtlzIt

W 7.6e-05  A 0.002  t 0.30  | 0.004  z 1.0  | 2.1e-05  t 1.0  | X 6.9e-06
Increasing confidence over time: iteration 1

Distribution over segment boundaries after encode/decode

Proposed segment boundaries
Increasing confidence over time: iteration 12

Distribution over segment boundaries after encode/decode

Proposed segment boundaries
## Characters (Brent 9k utterances)

Phonemically transcribed child-directed speech

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<th>Method</th>
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<th>Token F</th>
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<td>Johnson syllable-collocation</td>
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<td>Berg-Kirkpatrick maxent</td>
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<td>Fleck phonotatic</td>
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<tr>
<td>This work: neural</td>
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Our results: comparable to Fleck+ 08
Sample segmentations

yu want tu si D6bUk
IUk D*z 6b7 wIT hlz h&t
&nd 6d Ogi
yu want tu IUk&t DIs
IUk&t DIs
h&v 6d rINk
oke nQ
WAts DIs
WAts D&t
WAt lz It

IUk k&n yu tek It Qt
tek It Qt
yu want It In
pUt D&t an
D&t
yEs
oke
op~ It Ap
tek D6 dOgi Qt
9T INk It wll kAm Qt
Acoustic input: Zerospeech 2015

English casual conversation (also provides Xitsonga: future work!)
Important limitation: not child-directed

Few alterations from character mode…

- Dense input: MFCCs, deltas, double-deltas
- Mean squared error loss function
- No utterance boundaries (some hacky estimates)
- Initial proposal from voice activity detection
- Simplified one-best sampling (ask later!)
Acoustics (Zerospeech ‘15 English)

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Räsänen+ 15</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Räsänen+ 15 (corrected)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kamper+ 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>This work</td>
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Our results: comparable to Räsänen et al
Conclusions

● Unsupervised neural model for character and acoustic input
● Performance driven by memory limitations
● Supports cognitive theories of memory-driven learning

Future work

● Search problems: importance sampling is bad!
● Better architecture: beyond frame-by-frame LSTMs
● More levels of representation, more tasks
  ○ Phones vs words
  ○ Clustering and grounding representations
● Multilingual (Xitsonga and others)
Thank you!

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Memory

Working memory has multiple components:

- **Phonological loop**: limited recall of acoustics (nonword repetition)
- **Episodic memory**: syntactic/semantic encoding

Baddeley+ (98): phonological loop is critical for word learning
Ability to remember plausible non-words correlates with vocabulary

As in our model, words that are hard to remember are harder to learn
Annoying technical details

- Memory capacity and dropout:
  - Two *capacity* parameters (character and word)
  - Two *dropout* layers (delete characters and words)

- Fixed-length padding (for implementational tractability):
  - Requires an estimate of number of words per utterance

- Some additional parameters:
  - Penalty for one-letter words; otherwise lexical layer can learn phonology
  - Penalty for deleting chars by creating super-long words; functions as a max word length
Tuning on Brent
Learning curves
Increasing confidence over time: iteration 4

Distribution over segment boundaries after encode/decode

Proposed segment boundaries
Increasing confidence over time: iteration 8

Distribution over segment boundaries after encode/decode

Proposed segment boundaries