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# Using Multimodal Information to Enhance Addressee Detection in Multiparty Interaction

Usman Malik, Mukesh Barange, Julien Saunier and Alexandre Pauchet

Normandie University, INSA Rouen, LITIS – 76000 Rouen, France  
firstname.surname@insa-rouen.fr

**Keywords:** Human-Computer Interaction, Intelligent Agents, Machine Learning

**Abstract:** Addressee detection is an important challenge to tackle in order to improve dialogical interactions between humans and agents. This detection, essential for turn-taking models, is a hard task in multiparty conditions. Rule based as well as statistical approaches have been explored. Statistical approaches, particularly deep learning approaches, require a huge amount of data to train. However, smart feature selection can help improve addressee detection on small datasets, particularly if multimodal information is available. In this article, we propose a statistical approach based on smart feature selection that exploits contextual and multimodal information for addressee detection. The results show that our model outperforms an existing baseline.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Human-Agent Interaction has been a prominent research topic for the past three decades. While addressee detection is straightforward in dyadic interaction it becomes a challenge in multiparty interaction as the speaker can address any of the other participants, the whole group, or a sub-group. However, detecting whom the speaker is speaking to is crucial for seamless continuation of the dialogue. Usually, speakers exploit multimodal information such as hand gestures, speech utterances, focus of attention, ... in order to express hints as to which participant is being addressed. Contextual factors like previous speaker and addressee, type of previous and current utterances can also play a role in addressee identification.

In dyadic and multiparty interaction, each participant produces Dialogue Acts (DAs), either verbally or non-verbally. A DA is defined as the meaning of an utterance at the level of illocutionary force (Searle, 1969). DAs are addressed to one or multiple conversation participants: to the speaker itself, or to one or more other participants. According to (Goffman, 1981), an utterance affects three types of recipient: *over-hearers*, the ones whose dialogue states are not changed and are not concerned by the interaction; the *participants* whose dialogue states are affected by the speaker utterances but are not addressed by the speaker, and finally the direct *addressees* of the DA. In this article, we focus only on the direct addressee(s) of an utterance. A direct addressee is defined in (Goff-

man, 1981) as “*those ratified participants oriented to by the speaker in a manner to suggest that his words are particularly for them, and that some answer is therefore anticipated from them, more so than from the other ratified participants*”. Thus, in order for a virtual agent to be able to decide who the next speaker should be, detecting the agent(s) addressed in the current utterance is of uttermost importance.

In the literature, both statistical and rule based approaches have been developed for direct addressee detection. However, these works tend to be dependant on specific tasks or settings and do not generalize to other situations, *e.g.* a different number of participants. Furthermore, to train deep learning models, a large amount of data is required. To the best of our knowledge, currently no such dataset containing a large number of instances for multiparty interaction with annotated multimodal information exists.

Section 2 presents related work on addressee detection. Our theoretical model is proposed in section 3. Section 4 describes a statistical analysis on a multimodal corpus. The proposed approach along with experimental results are presented in section 5. Section 6 concludes the article.

## 2 RELATED WORK

This section reviews some of the existing rule based and statistical main approaches for addressee

Reference	Approach	Dataset	Salient Features	Accuracy	Accuracy on AMI	Limitations
(Traum et al., 2004)	Rule Based	Mission Rehearsal Exercise	Current & previous utterance current & previous speaker	65-100% (Bbsed on DA)	36%	Low accuracy Not generic
(Akker and Traum, 2009)	Rule Based	AMI	Gaze, current and previous speaker, current and previous utterance, current and previous addressee	65%	65%	Low accuracy
(Jovanovic, 2007)	Bayesian Network	M4	Current utterance, previous utterance, speaker, topic of discussion, gaze and several meta features	81%	62%	Fixed participant positioning, works only for 4 participants hence Less generic
(Akker and Akker, 2009)	Logistic Model Trees	AMI	Current utterance, previous utterance, speaker, topic of discussion, gaze and several meta features	92%	92%	Fixed participant positioning, works only for 4 participants hence not generic
(Baba et al., 2011)	SVM	Custom Data generated using Wizard of OZ	head orientation, acoustic features and text as input features	80.28%	NA	Binary classification Not generic
(Le et al., 2018)	CNN, LSTM	GazeFollow dataset	Utterance and gaze information	62%	NA	Addressee detection from third party angle, limited Accuracy

Table 1: Summary of existing works for addressee detection.

detection and then identifies the features that can be exploited.

## 2.1 Addressee Detection Approaches

One of the earliest approach for addressee detection in multiparty interaction was proposed by Traum *et al.* (Traum et al., 2004). The proposed technique contains a set of rules depending upon the current utterance, the previous utterance, the current speaker and the immediate previous speaker. Though the algorithm reports F1 scores of 65% to 100% on different dialogues in the Mission Rehearsal Exercise domain (Traum et al., 2006), the algorithm does not generalize well to multimodality such as on the AMI corpus (McCowan et al., 2005) with a reported accuracy of 36% (Akker and Traum, 2009).

In this latter work, the initial rule based approach is improved using gaze as additional information for predicting the dialogue. They report an accuracy of 65% on the AMI dataset. In addition to combining gaze and utterance information, the authors have also tested gaze as the only source of information for predicting the addressee. The rule defines that, if during the utterance the speaker looks more than 80% of the time at an individual, then it is addressed to that particular individual. Otherwise, the utterance is addressed to the group. An accuracy of 57% is found

with this approach on the AMI dataset.

Several statistical approaches have also been proposed for addressee detection. Jovanovic *et al.* have introduced a Bayesian network based approach for addressee detection (Jovanovic, 2007) using utterance, previous utterance, speaker, topic of discussion, gaze and several meta features to train the Bayesian network (Friedman et al., 1997) on the M4 multimodal, multiparty corpus (Jovanovic et al., 2006), and reporting an accuracy of 81.05%. Akker and Traum use the algorithm developed by (Jovanovic, 2007) on the AMI corpus and report an accuracy of 62% (Akker and Traum, 2009).

(Akker and Akker, 2009), in trying to answer the question *are you being addressed* for the participants of the AMI corpus, report a best case accuracy of 92% using logistic model trees (Landwehr et al., 2005). However, the output of this work is a special case of binary classification. Moreover, it cannot be extended to a different number of participants since classification depends upon the position of the addressee and not on the role or on the addressee name.

(Baba et al., 2011) propose a model that distinguishes whether an utterance is addressed to an agent or a human, using human-human-agent triadic conversations collected through Wizard of OZ experiments. They report an accuracy of 80.28 for the binary classification task using SVM with head orienta-

tion, acoustic features and text as input features.

Deep learning methods have also been proposed for addressee detection by (Le et al., 2018), however they require very large datasets. They use CNN (Krizhevsky et al., 2012) to identify the addressee from visual scenes. The experiments are performed on the *GazeFollow* dataset (Recasens et al., 2015). For utterance understanding, RNN (LSTM (Hochreiter and Schmidhuber, 1997)) is used. An overall recognition performance of 62.5% is reported. Another limitation of the model is that addressee detection is performed through third party angle.

## 2.2 Features for Addressee Detection

Existing works explore the best features for dialogue management tasks such as addressee detection.

To this end, Galley *et al.* state that adjacency pairs can be used as an indicator for the addressee (Galley et al., 2004). An adjacency pair is a pair of utterances where the second utterances (also known as b-pair) is a response to the first utterance (known as a-pair).

DAs are also known to play a role in the identification of addressee. For instance, if a speaker asks a *yes-no question* (a type of question that can have only answer in the form of yes or no) and the addressee generates a positive response, the addressee is most probably the previous speaker. The use of DA in combination with other lexical cues are shown in (Jovanovic and op den Akker, 2004).

Focus of attention is another important feature for addressee detection. Vertegaal showed that 77% of the time the person to whom the speaker is looking at is the addressee of the utterance (Vertegaal, 1998).

## 2.3 Discussion

Table 1 summarizes some existing works on addressee detection in multiparty interaction, describing approaches, data set, features, model accuracy and main limitations.

Although several researchers have tackled the problem of addressee detection, most of them have either solved binary classification problems *e.g.* if the addressee is an agent or an individual to, or the approaches depend on the positioning of the participants and is henceforth limited to a specific number of participants (Akker and Akker, 2009). Deep learning models such as (Le et al., 2018) have also been introduced but the results do not outperform rule-based approaches and require huge amount of training data.

In this work, four model requirements are considered: firstly, the model should not be limited to

any number of participants (r1); secondly, the tackled problem should be addressee detection and not a binary classification problem (r2); thirdly the model should not depend upon the sitting positions of the participants (r3) and finally the model should not require a huge dataset (r4). The rationale behind the three first requirements is that the participants who are actually not being addressed should also be aware of who is being addressed, independently of how they are located in the room and how many participants there are. The last requirement acknowledges the absence of large annotated corpora, thus limiting the machine learning algorithms that can be used.

To the best of our knowledge, only one work (Akker and Traum, 2009) has used multimodal information in the AMI dataset for multiclass classification of the addressee, yielding an accuracy of 65%. We propose to consider this work as baseline because all the requirements are respected.

## 3 THEORETICAL MODEL

The proposed approach intends to overcome the limitations of the existing models by proposing a generic model that solves multiclass classification problem on small datasets. To fulfill these requirements, in the proposed theoretical model the feature selection is done so that i) the features are not dependent on any particular dataset, ii) the features do not require huge amount of data to yield good results. **Adjacency Pair:**

Literature work has shown that adjacency pairs is a marker for addressee detection (Galley et al., 2004). Intuitively, a response in an adjacency pair is addressed to the speaker of the first utterance in the adjacency pair.

**Dialogue Act:** DAs play an important role in conversational tasks such as addressee detection (Jovanovic and op den Akker, 2004). If a DA is a question to an individual, the response is normally addressed to the speaker of the question.

**Focus:** Generally extracted from gaze information, focus of attention is another feature used for addressee detection (Vertegaal, 1998; Akker and Traum, 2009; Le et al., 2018). The person in focus is frequently the addressee of the utterance.

**Previous and Current Speaker:** Previous and current speakers have also been used as features for addressee detection (Traum et al., 2004; Jovanovic, 2007), although they, alone, may not provide information (reported accuracy of only 36% on the AMI dataset (Akker and Traum, 2009)).

**Previous Addressee:** Previous addressee is also an

important feature for addressee detection (Akker and Traum, 2009).

**You Usage:** Research works show that utterances that contain ‘you’ are usually addressed to an individual user (Gupta et al., 2007).

**Conjunction Usage:** Since utterances can contain multiple DAs and if addressees are annotated at DA level, an intuition is that a new DA in an utterance may start with a conjunction such as *and*, *or*, *but*, etc., with the addressee remaining the same.

Features that are too specific to a particular dataset are not considered since the proposed model focuses on generality. Unlike the chosen baseline model (Akker and Traum, 2009), the usage of name and role of the participants in the utterances have not been taken into account for two reasons: i) different datasets can have different participant names or roles and ii) even if a user name is used in the utterance, it does not always correspond to the addressee. For instance, *A tells B that C will perform X*.

In the next section, a statistical analysis of these features have been performed on the AMI corpus.

## 4 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSED FEATURES

This section describes the AMI corpus and statistical evaluation of the proposed features on the dataset.

### 4.1 The AMI corpus

The AMI corpus (McCowan et al., 2005) is a multi-modal interaction corpus consisting of 100 hours of meeting recordings. The corpus includes two types of meetings involving four participants: task oriented sessions and open discussions. Task oriented meetings come up with an innovative design of a remote control while open discussion meetings have no restriction on the topic of discussion. The four participants in the task oriented meetings are PM (Project Manager), UI (User Interface Expert), ID (Industrial Designer) and Marketing Executive (ME).

Several annotations are available for different subsets of meetings including DA annotation, speaker and listener information, focus of attention, adjacency pairs, addressee information, hand gesture, etc. The corpus contains over 117,000 utterances that have been annotated with DAs, out of which 9,071 utterances have been annotated with speaker focus and 8,874 utterances have been annotated with addressee information. The number of utterances where the three annotations - speaker focus, addressee, and DA-

are available is only 5,628. The utterances are categorized into 15 DAs. The utterances with back-channels, stalls and fragments have not been assigned any addressee, therefore technically only 12 categories remains for DAs.

In addition to utterances, the focus of attention is also preprocessed. During the course of a DA, the focus of attention can be any individual (PM, ME, UI, and ID), or any object such as laptop, table and slide-screen. For the sake of simplicity, if the speaker looks at more than one individual or thing during the course of a DA, the focus of attention is labelled “Multiple”.

### 4.2 Analysis of the selected Features

The AMI dataset is first exploited to test and select the features of our theoretical model that either come from existing research works, or are new features.

#### 4.2.1 Adjacency Pair

To see if adjacency pairs actually play a role in addressee detection, the percentage of utterances where the previous speaker is the current addressee is computed. The result shows that of all the utterances addressed to individual participants, only 32% utterances has the current addressee as the previous speaker, whereas 31% of the utterances are addressed to the whole group. These results show that adjacency pairs alone are not a good indicator of addressee.

#### 4.2.2 Dialogue Act

Data analysis shows that if the current DA is *elicit-info* and the focus of the speaker is participant X, 76.97% of the time X is the addressee. Another important observation is that if the previous DA is *elicit-info* and the previous speaker is any participant X and the previous addressee is participant Y, if the current speaker is participant Y, then 93% of the time, current addressee is participant X. The data analysis thus shows that, at least some of the DAs are actually important indicators for addressee detection.

#### 4.2.3 Focus of attention

Existing works from literature show that focus is an important feature for addressee identification. This claim has been evaluated on the AMI dataset as well.

Table 2 shows the percentage of addressee against the focus of the speaker. The table depicts that when the focus is on an individual during an utterance, the individual is the addressee almost half of the times. The values of 0.48, 0.52, 0.50 and 0.47 for ID, ME, PM and UI substantiates this argument. Furthermore,

Focus	ID	ME	PM	UI	Group
<b>ID</b>	<b>0.48</b>	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.42
<b>ME</b>	0.03	<b>0.52</b>	0.03	0.02	0.38
<b>PM</b>	0.01	0.02	<b>0.50</b>	0.03	0.44
<b>UI</b>	0.03	0.01	0.02	<b>0.47</b>	0.44
<b>Multiple</b>	0.05	0.05	0.07	0.07	<b>0.74</b>
<b>no</b>	0.10	0.08	0.15	0.08	<b>0.57</b>
<b>Slide Screen</b>	0.08	0.05	0.27	0.06	<b>0.52</b>
<b>Table</b>	0.07	0.12	0.14	0.10	<b>0.55</b>
<b>Whiteboard</b>	0.05	0.14	0.11	0.07	<b>0.60</b>

Table 2: Frequency of Focus vs Addressee (in percentage)  
ID: Industrial Designer, ME: Marketing Executive, PM: Project Manager, UI: User Interface Expert

if the individual under focus is not the addressee, the utterance is normally addressed to the whole group. Only in rare cases does the speaker look at one individual to then address another individual.

Similarly, if the speaker is looking at multiple users, 74% of the time the utterance is addressed to the whole group. If the Slide screen is the focus of the speaker, he normally addresses the group as shown in the table. The results show that the speaker focus is actually crucial for addressee detection in this corpus.

#### 4.2.4 Speaker Information

Figure ?? shows distribution of speaker role against utterances. Since the corpus deals with task oriented meetings, the utterances addressed to the PM are naturally more numerous than those to the rest of the participants since the PM is anchoring the interaction. The result shows that the speaker actually play an important role. Also, current and previous speaker alone may not play an important role in addressee detection, but in combination with DA and previous addressee they can be an important indicator.

#### 4.2.5 Addressee Information

Figure 1 shows frequency of addressees. More than half of the utterances are addressed to the whole group rather than individual participants. The addressee count is higher for PM among individuals because the PM has the highest frequency of speaking, and there is thus a higher chance that people reply to her.

#### 4.2.6 You Usage

Statistical analysis reveals that of all the utterances where the word “you” is used, the utterance is addressed to individuals and the focus of attention is also an individual, only 42.44% of utterances are addressed to the focused individual. However this number increases to 78% when the group is addressed and multiple objects are in focus. This indicates that the

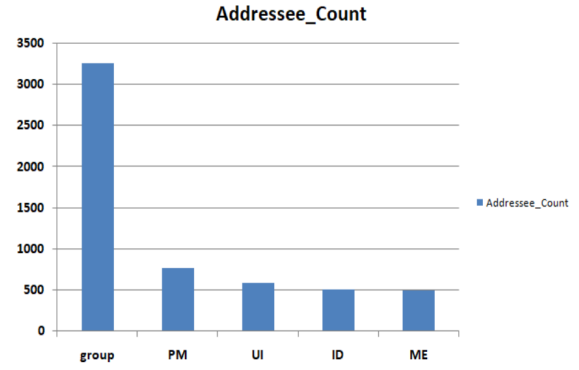


Figure 1: Distribution of Addressee Role across utterances

you usage can be exploited to distinguish between individual and group addressees.

#### 4.2.7 Conjunction

Statistical analysis on AMI dataset shows that when the previous and current speaker of an utterance are identical and the current utterance starts with a conjunction, the current addressee is the previous addressee 90.73% of the time. Once again, conjunction alone is not a good indicator, rather current and previous speaker information combined with conjunction is crucial to addressee detection.

#### 4.2.8 Summary

Statistical analysis of the features proposed in the theoretical model shows that apart from adjacency pairs, the rest of the features should give information for automatic addressee detection. It is also worth mentioning that although individually some of the features such as conjunction rule are not very useful, they become good indicators when coupled with other features such as previous and next speaker.

The next section details our approach regarding the classification of the addressee along with the classifier information, evaluation results.

## 5 EXPERIMENTS AND RESULTS

The proposed approach revolves around a selection of the most suitable features from literature review and exploratory data analysis that can help develop a flexible addressee detection model. Traditional machine learning algorithms are used to train the model on the training set and consequently the performance of the models is evaluated on the test set. Note that deep learning models have not been considered due to our hypothesis to use small datasets.

## 5.1 Feature Selection

The features used for training the models are selected according to the literature review (section 2) and statistical analysis of features (section 4.2). They have been divided into three categories: Contextual Features, Focus of attention and Textual Features.

### 5.1.1 Contextual Features

Contextual features are not associated with any interaction modality. The selected contextual features are: *previous speaker*, *current speaker*, *previous DA*, *current DA* and *previous addressee*.

### 5.1.2 Focus of attention

During an utterance, a speaker can have one or multiple focuses of attention. Focus is simplified into individual or multiple categories. If during the whole course of utterance, the speaker looks only at one single participant or object, that participant/object is labelled as the focus of attention. On the other hand, in case of multiple focus of attentions, the focus has been labelled as ‘Multiple’.

### 5.1.3 Textual Features

‘You usage’ and ‘conjunctions’, respectively, can be helpful for addressee detection and hence have been chosen for training the classifiers. The whole textual information is not selected as a feature because full text can be too specific and thus would result in an over-fitted model. For the same reason, features where the name or role of the participant is directly being called are not considered. Such models tend to not generalize well over different scenarios.

## 5.2 Experiments

The task is to predict the role of the addressee given the proposed features. This is multi-class classification problem where the output can be either Group, PM, ID, UI or ME. To perform the experiments, a conventional machine learning pipeline is followed.

During the preprocessing<sup>74</sup> phase, the categorical features are converted into one-hot vectors. 5-fold cross-validation is performed in order to obtain the final results. Six of the most commonly used machine learning classifiers are tested in order to evaluate the performance of the model. Details of the classifiers along with some of the most important hyperparameters are presented in Table 3. The best parameters for each classifier are selected using grid search algorithm (Smit and Eiben, 2009). For the

Classifier	Parameters
Multilayer Perceptron (Kruse et al., 2013)	'activation': 'tanh', 'alpha': 0.05, 'hidden_layer_sizes': 100 'learning_rate': 'constant', 'solver': 'adam'
Naive Bayes (Rish et al., 2001)	No hyper parameters
Support Vector Machine (SVM) (Hearst et al., 1998)	'C': 100, 'gamma': 0.01, 'kernel': 'rbf'
Logistic Regression (Hosmer Jr et al., 2013)	'penalty'='l2', 'regularization' = 100
Random Forest (Liaw et al., 2002)	'bootstrap': True, 'criterion': 'entropy', 'max_features': 'auto', 'n_estimators': 300 max_iter=100
K Nearest Neighbours (KNN) (Zhang and Zhou, 2005)	'n_neighbors': 12

Table 3: Classifiers along with hyper parameter values

hyper-parameters that are not mentioned, default values are used as specified in Python’s Sklearn library (Pedregosa et al., 2011).

In addition to performing cross validation, the performance of the algorithm is evaluated on an unseen test set in order to verify that the model is not over-fitting and to produce an analysis of the classification result for individual classes.

To evaluate the algorithms, accuracy and F1 measure are considered as performance metrics, since the baseline results are reported in terms of accuracy and F1. Nevertheless, the F1 measure should be favored in the analysis of the results due to irregular class distribution: the PM and group addressees are over-represented in the dataset.

## 5.3 Results

The results for 5-fold cross-validation are reported in table 4. The table contains the accuracy, standard deviation and F1 measure of the 6 classifiers used for the addressee prediction. The results show that Logistic Regression, with l2 loss function and regularization value of 100, yields an accuracy of 73.44 that outperforms the baseline algorithm in terms of both accuracy and F1 measure. Multi-layer perceptron and SVM are only slightly below.

The detailed classification report for logistic regression for the unseen test set has been reported in table 5. The results show that an F1 value of 80 is achieved for the group. For individual participants the F1 values vary between 0.56 for UI and 67 for ID. The reason for the variation between the F1 values for individual participants is yet to be studied.

Classifier	Accuracy	St Dev	F1
Multilayer Perceptron	73.26 %	0.02	0.722
Naive Bayes	68.25 %	0.01	0.63
Logistic Regression	<b>73.44%</b>	0.02	<b>0.727</b>
SVM	72.52 %	0.02	0.720
Random Forest	69.94 %	0.019	0.68
K Nearest Neighbours	68.19 %	0.006	0.68
Corpus Baseline (Al-ways Group)	54 %	NA	NA
Baseline (Akker and Traum, 2009)	<b>65%</b>	NA	<b>0.55</b>

Table 4: Classification Results for Addressee Detection

Class	Precision	Recall	F1
ID	0.68	0.67	0.67
ME	0.67	0.59	0.63
PM	0.71	0.57	0.63
UI	0.69	0.47	0.56
Group	0.76	0.86	0.80

Table 5: Results for single test set using logistic regression

## 5.4 DISCUSSION

The results show that our best model yields an accuracy of 73.44% which is greater than the baseline accuracy of 65% reported by (Akker and Traum, 2009) for the classification of all the participants. Our model also outperforms the baseline model with almost all algorithms, which indicates the relevancy of the selected features. Furthermore, unlike (Akker and Akker, 2009), our proposed model is not dependent of the location of the participants in the meeting. In addition, the F1 score also shows that our model is better at classifying the dataset with irregular class distribution. For instance, in the case of baseline model the F1 score of 75% was achieved for the class ‘Group’, however our model achieves an F1 score of 80% for the ‘Group’. Similarly, for the baseline model, the average F1 score for the individual addressees is 0.36, while in our model the average F1 score for the individual addressee is 0.62.

The results from the best performing algorithm (logistic regression) are interpreted with the help of logistic regression coefficients (Peng et al., 2002). Mean value of -0.003 is obtained for the coefficients of all the features in the data set. The results show that the features *previous speaker*, *previous addressee*, *current speaker* and *current focus* have coefficient values greater than the mean coefficient values and hence can be regarded as the top contributors to the performance of the algorithm.

Experiments performed with only these four features resulted in an accuracy of 70.57% with an F1 value of 0.70 which verifies the key role of these features in the classification of the addressee. It is impor-

tant to mention that the importance of the remaining four features (previous and current DA, conjunction and you usage) cannot be ignored since they actually contribute to a 3% improvement. However from the results, it is safe to assume information about contextual features *i.e.* previous and current speaker, the previous addressee, and focus features like the focus of the current speaker play a major role on addressee detection compared to textual features such as conjunctions and you usage.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Addressee detection in multiparty interaction is a crucial tasks. To this end, the previous rule based approach yields an accuracy of 65% for all different participants. Works from (Akker and Akker, 2009) achieved an accuracy of 92% but their model solves binary classification problem of “*are you being addressed or not*”. Furthermore, their model depends upon the location of the meeting participants and can only work for a fixed number of participants (four and only four). In this article, a generic addressee detection model has been proposed that solves multiclass class problem of addressee detection (hypothesis h2) and does not depend upon the number (h1) and location of the participants (h3) in the multiparty interaction. Finally, the results show that our model works well on small dataset (h4), and outperforms the baseline model (Akker and Traum, 2009) with an improvement of 8% in accuracy.

Though the approach is promising, certain limitations remain. The approach was only tested on a single dataset and even though the features are generic, how well the model generalizes on other datasets is yet to be studied. Another limitation is the small size of the dataset, which is a major difficulty in the use of more advanced deep learning techniques. Thus, the next step would be to perform an experiment to collect a larger dataset.

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