

Technology

Software still searching for the punchline

Friday, August 3, 2007 | 03:39 PM ET

by Paul Jay, CBCNews.ca

Stop us if you've heard this one before, but two University of Cincinnati professors say they have created a prototype of software that can understand basic jokes.

[According to the New Scientist](#), the University's Julia Taylor and Lawrence Mazlack built a program or "bot" able to recognize simple puns by first giving it a database of words along with examples of how those words can be related to each other to create different meanings. As the New Scientist writes:

When presented with a new passage, the program uses that knowledge to work out how those new words relate to each other and what they likely mean. When it finds a word that doesn't seem to fit with its surroundings, it searches a digital pronunciation guide for similar-sounding words. If any of those words fits in better with the rest of the sentence, it flags the passage as a joke. The result is a bot that "gets" jokes that turn on a simple pun.

The bot, presented last week at the [American Association for Artificial Intelligence conference in Vancouver](#).

The sample joke New Scientist provides, however, is something of a head scratcher. In it, a mother says to her boy: "My, you've been working in the garden a lot this summer," to which the boy responds, "I have to, because teacher told me to work a lot." The computer groks over this as a pun on working the soil and doing schoolwork, which seems like the kind of thing only [Data from Star Trek](#) would find funny.

What I'm waiting for is when the second-generation of this program becomes merged with ELIZA, the 1968 computer program designed to simulate psychoanalysis. And hopefully, it will be able to share its wonky sense of humour online like Kevin's Fox's AOLIZA did seven years ago [when it was set loose on AOL Instant Messenger](#). Now that would be funny.

[« Previous Post](#) | [Main](#) | [Next Post »](#)

This discussion is now Open. [Submit your Comment](#).

Comments

Geekwad

It is only natural that the lowest form of humour should be the first to be electronically detectable.

Posted August 7, 2007 09:07 AM

Carolyn

Working the soil... *laughs*

Posted August 7, 2007 12:37 PM

mt

Ottawa

I wonder how much money is going into this project? Is there really that big a demand for computers that can understand jokes? Really... what's the point to this?

Posted August 7, 2007 01:34 PM

Charlie Bear

Ontario

Maybe if computers understood jokes there would be a lot ore humour whenever a missile went off course or misunderstood headquarters. But enough of me being bitter.

I think it's a neat idea; it's going to contribute to the further development of AI. Someday, if robots fancy it funny enough... the joke might just be on us!

Posted August 7, 2007 04:31 PM

Monkey

Winnipeg

And for some nasty computer humour!

Does the Hard Drive match the Monitor?

Posted August 13, 2007 01:59 AM

[« Previous Post](#) | [Main](#) | [Next Post »](#)

Post a Comment

Disclaimer:

Note: By submitting your comments you acknowledge that CBC has the right to reproduce, broadcast and publicize those comments or any part thereof in any manner whatsoever. Please note that due to the volume of e-mails we receive, not all comments will be published, and those that are published will not be edited. But all will be carefully read, considered and appreciated.

Name:

Email Address: (will not be published)

Location:

Comments:

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Submissions Policy](#)