

Printed August 06, 2007 09:34pm AEST

Sense of humour for bots

August 07, 2007

EXPERTS in artificial intelligence have built a computer program that can understand simple jokes, marking an important step in making robots seem friendlier to humans, the weekly New Scientist reports.

Previous attempts at getting machines to understand humour have failed miserably, because what is funny to humans is subjective, complex and very hard to program.

Julia Taylor and Lawrence Mazlack of the University of Cincinnati in Ohio have, however, come up with prototype joke detection software.

They began by loading a program with a database of words, extracted from a children's dictionary to keep things simple, and then supplied it with examples of how the same word can have different meanings depending on the context.

When presented with a text, the program uses that knowledge to work out how new words may relate to each other, and what they probably mean.

If it fails to find a word that matches its context, it rummages in a digital pronunciation guide for similar sounding words, and if any of those words are a better fit for the rest of the sentence, the passage is flagged, ha ha, as a joke.

So far, the joke-bot only understands rather leaden puns and still delivers a blank look when facing more complex stuff or deadpan humour.

Even so, researchers hope it will add a kinder touch to robots that will act as human companions or helpers.

The research was presented at a conference of the American Association for Artificial Intelligence in Vancouver, Canada.

AFP

Copyright 2007 News Limited. All times AEST (GMT +10).