



Sharing a Joke Could Help Human and Robot Interact

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Julia Taylor and Lawrence Mazlack of the University of Cincinnati in Ohio have built a bot " that is able to get a specific type of joke - one whose crux is a simple pun. They say this budding cyber wit could lend a sense of humour to physical robots acting as human companions or helpers, which will need to be able to spot jokes if they are to be accepted and not just annoy people.

To teach the program to spot jokes, the researchers first gave it a database of words, extracted from a children's dictionary to keep things simple, and then supplied examples of how words can be related to one another in different ways to create different meanings.

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.

Taylor notes that past experiences are often the key to why some people find things hilarious when others don't. "If you've been in a car accident, you probably won't find a joke about a car accident funny," she says. She is now working to personalise the bot's sense of humour by flagging certain links between words as either funny or not, depending on the experiences of people it might converse with.

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