



## So, a Computer Walks Into a Bar...

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Scientists have taught a computer program to recognize a particular kind of joke, a small but significant early step toward creating robots with a sense of humor, reports Michael Reilly [1] [in the New Scientist](#).

The human sense of humor is so subjective and complex that researchers have focused on getting robots to solve easier problems, such as recognizing objects. But Julia Taylor and Lawrence Mazlack of the University of Cincinnati have managed to develop a program that allows computers to recognize some puns. To be sure, the puns it gets are generally groaners, and the program's appreciation of them is purely mechanical.

The scientists gave their program a database of words and examples of how the words can be related to each other. When the program analyzes a passage, it uses that knowledge to find a word that doesn't fit with the words around it.

When an outlier appears, the program checks a pronunciation guide for similar-sounding words that would make better sense in the sentence. If a more logical term is identified, the program flags the sentence as a pun.

New Scientist offers the example of a boy who tells his mother that he has been in the garden so much because "teacher told me to weed a lot." The program recognizes that "weed" doesn't go well with "teacher" and that the similar-sounding "read" would be a better fit. As far as the scientists are concerned, the computer gets the joke. The program doesn't spot all puns, however. A patient says, "Doctor, doctor I swallowed a bone." "Are you choking?" the doctor asks. "No, I really did," the patient replies. The computer doesn't recognize this as a joke because the punning word "choking" makes sense in the context of a doctor's office. – *Robin Moroney*

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<http://www.newscientisttech.com/article/mg19526156.400-sharing-a-joke-could-help-man-and-robot-interact.html>

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