

Multilingual Hate Speech Detection Using Ensemble of Transformer Models

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Abstract

The classification of hate speech and offensive language presents significant challenges, primarily due to the scarcity of low-resource datasets and the absence of pre-trained models. This paper offers a comprehensive overview of offensive language identification results in the context of HASOC-2023 across various languages and tasks, including Sinhala and Gujarati, Bengali, Assamese, and Bodo, and Hateful span detection. To address these challenges, we harnessed the power of BERT-based models, leveraging resources such as XLM-RoBERTa-large, l3-cube, BanglaHateBert, and BenglaBERT. Our research findings yielded promising results, notably showcasing the superior performance of XLM-RoBERTa-large over monolingual models in the majority of cases. For Task 3, SpanBERT performed outstandingly.

Notably, our team FiRC-NLP contributions were acknowledged with top-ranking achievements, securing the first position in Task 1, and Task 3, while clinching the second position in Task 4.

Keywords

Hateful Span Detection, Conversational Hate Detection, SpanBERT

1. Introduction

Social media is a widely popular and convenient platform for open expression and online communication with others. Unfortunately, it also provides the means for distributing abusive and aggressive content such as sexism, racism, politics, cyberbullying, and blackmailing. Nockleby [1] stated that "hate speech disparages a person or group based on some characteristics such as race, color, and ethnicity". Addressing offensive language on social media is now a major challenge. Various shared tasks and data-sharing initiatives within the research community aim to motivate researchers to develop innovative solutions for detecting abusive content. Among the initiatives, HASOC has gained significant popularity, with its previous editions: HASOC-2019 [2], HASOC-2020[3], HASOC-2021[4] and HASOC-2022[5]. These editions focus on Hate speech and offensive language identification in English, German, and Hindi. SemEval is another noteworthy initiative. SemEval-2019 [6] focuses on the detection of hate speech against immigrants and women in Spanish and English messages extracted from Twitter. SemEval-2020 [7] extends its scope to include Arabic, English, Danish, Greek, and Turkish content. In SemEval-2023 [8], the focus is on detecting and identifying comments and tweets containing

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sexist expressions. Additionally, other shared tasks are proposed, such as GermEval [9] for the German language, EVALITA[10] for Italian languages, and OSACT [11] for Arabic content, all of which contribute to this important area of research.”

The best models developed for including models such as Roberta [12], DeBERTa [13], ALBERT [14] and XLM-RoBERTa [15]. In SemEval 2023 task 10-A, the top-performing models [16] and [17] are based on DeBERTa. The best performing models in SemEval 2022 task 12-A [18] used an ensemble of ALBERT models of different sizes, while the second-ranked team [19] used Roberta-base and XLM-Roberta. Monolingual Transformers give better results when addressing challenges related to low-resource languages, compared to Multilingual. The winning team in SemEval-2020 Task 12-A for Arabic [20] and Danish [21] languages achieved highest performance by using AraBERT [22] and Nordic BERT ¹, respectively.

Hate speech detection becomes more challenging when social posts are written in a Code-Mixed (CM) language. Code-mixing, the practice of blending words from two languages within a single sentence, is becoming increasingly common in various bilingual communities, which renders the automatic making detection task more challenging [23, 24]. In HASOC-2022, three tasks were hosted: Task 1 and Task 2 involved binary and multi-class classification for both German and code-mixed languages, while Task 3 focused on identifying offensive language in Marathi. The highest performance in Task 1 [25] was achieved using Google-MuRIL ² (BERT model pre-trained on 17 Indian languages). HASOC 2023 introduced Task 1 and Task 4, focusing on the detection of hate speech, offensive content, and profanity. Task 3 centered on detecting hate speech spans within social media posts. We actively engaged in this competition, taking on Task 1 for languages including Bengali, Gujarati, Sinhala, Assamese, and Bodo, additionally, we took on Task 3 which involved English hate speech span detection. To accomplish these tasks, we made use of the HASOC-2023 shared dataset for both training and validation purposes without any external data.

Our strategy predominantly relied on cutting-edge transformer models to tackle these challenges. This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents a detailed description of the tasks and datasets, Section 3, we provides an in-depth look at our methodology and model architecture. Lastly, the conclusion section offers definitive statements and delineates potential directions for future research.

2. Task Description

This section presents the task descriptions for HASOC 2023 [26] as follows:

Task 1 and 4 focus on identifying hate speech, offensive language, and profanity in different languages using natural language processing techniques [27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33]. These task mainly involves classifying tweets into two categories: Hate and Offensive (HOF) or Non-Hate and Offensive (NOT).

- Task 1A: deals with identifying hate and offensive content in Sinhala, a low-resource Indo-Aryan language spoken in Sri Lanka.

¹https://github.com/certainlyio/nordic_bert

²<https://huggingface.co/google/muril-base-cased>

- Task 1B: focuses on identifying hate and offensive content in Gujarati, another low-resource Indo-Aryan language spoken by approximately 50 million people in India. The training set for this task consists of around 200 tweets.
- Task 4: aims to detect hate speech in Bengali, Bodo, and Assamese languages. Data is primarily collected from Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube comments.

Task 3 aims to detect the various hateful spans within a sentence already considered hateful [34]. The input texts are all in English. The detection of hateful spans is achieved by mapping this into a sequence labeling problem. For every token of the sequences, human annotators have manually annotated the start and end of a hateful span. This is achieved by the BIO notation tagging, where 'B' represents the beginning of the hate span, 'I' forms the continuation of a hate span, and 'O' represents the non-hate tag.

Table 1

Example of datasets of task 1 and 4

Sentence	Translation	Label	Task, Language	Train and Test size
"বালের শিক্ষা মন্ত্রী"	Stupid Education Minister	HOF	Task4, Bengali	1281, 320
"কুকুৰ বুলি কয় কৈছে অসভ্য ক'ৰবাৰ, লাজ নাই"	Why are you calling me a dog, rude somewhere, no shame	HOF	Task4, Asamee	4036, 1009
"মোসৌ খুয়ায়াব এমফৌ নাঁৰায় নোঁনাব সৈম"	Both are drunkards f***rs	HOF	Task 4 Bodo	1679, 420

3. Methodology

This section offers a comprehensive overview encompassing the model architecture description and the strategies employed to address each task. Due to the similarities between Task 1 and Task 4, we have consolidated them into a single section, while Task 3 are separately described.

3.1. Task 1 and 4 Model Architecture

For Task 1 and Task 4, we adopted two main strategies:

1. Utilizing Different BERT Models: We conducted experiments with both multilingual and monolingual BERT models.
2. Augmenting Training Data: Our second approach involved enhancing the training data through automatic annotation.

We assessed several models, including multilingual ones such as XLM-RoBERTa-large and IndicBERT, and monolingual models like L3-cube, Bangla BERT, and Bangla Hate BERT.

Following our experiments, we selected XLM-RoBERTa-large as the baseline model due to its superior performance when compared to all the monolingual models. This performance difference may be attributed to the age of some monolingual models, such as Bangla Hate BERT, which is considerably older compared to XLM-RoBERTa-large. However, for the Bangla L3-cube monolingual model, it exhibited a slightly better performance by +0.06 F1 score compared to XLM-RoBERTa-large. Nevertheless, since XLM-RoBERTa-large outperformed most monolingual models in most cases, we opted to choose it as the baseline model.

Table 2
Task 1 F1 Scores for Different Models by Language

Language	Model	F1 Score
Gujarati	Indic-Bert (trained on 12 major Indian languages)	73.4
	L3-cube Gujarati (monolingual)	79.1
	XLM-RoBERTa-large	81.6
Sinhala	Indic-Bert (trained on 12 major Indian languages)	74.5
	L3-cube Sinhala (monolingual)	78.6
	XLM-RoBERTa-large	80.4
Bengali	Indic-Bert (trained on 12 major Indian languages)	70.5
	L3-cube Sinhala (monolingual)	75.6
	XLM-RoBERTa-large	75.1
	banglaBERT	68.1
	BanglaHateBERT	65.5

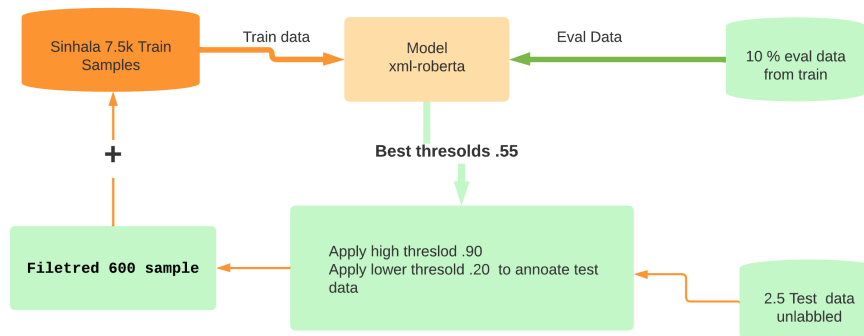


Figure 1: Illustration of the Approach to Enhance Model Performance: Incorporating Annotated Test Data into Training Data for Sinhala (Similar approach tested with public data).

To further enhance our model’s performance, we pursued a second strategy, which involved expanding our training dataset. However, due to a lack of suitable datasets for most of these languages, we hypothesized that incorporating automatically annotated test data into the training data could improve model learning. To implement this, we initially trained the model using 90% of the training data and 10% of the evaluation data. We then determined the optimal thresholds during evaluation and applied upper and lower thresholds to automatically annotate a part of the test data. For example, we used a 0.90 upper threshold and a 0.20 lower threshold. After automatically annotating that portion of test data with these thresholds, we retrained

the model by adding this part of test data to the training data and observed a 3% improvement in model performance. This hypothesis was further tested with external public data, where automatic annotations were applied using these upper and lower thresholds, resulting in a 1-2% improvement. Additionally, we also employed the ensemble of 5 models, which contributed to a 0.4% increase in F1 scores (see Table 3).

Table 3

F1 Scores for Different Models by Language after Adding part of Test Data to Training and Using Ensemble Model

Language	Model	F1 Score
Gujarati	XLM-RoBERTa-large	81.6
	XLM-RoBERTa-large 5 ensemble model	82.0
	XLM-RoBERTa-large (200 train data + adding filtered test data 401 sample)	84.8
Sinhala	XLM-RoBERTa-large	80.4
	XLM-RoBERTa-large 5 ensemble model	80.9
	XLM-RoBERTa-large (7.5k train data + adding filtered test data 600 sample)	83.8

3.2. Task 3 Model Architecture

In Task 3, the goal is to find all the hateful spans. A hateful span is a group of words that together express the hatred in the sentence. In this task, the provided data size: 1936 training samples, 485 validation samples, and 606 test samples, and the specific labels used for this task, such as "B-HateSpan" to denote the first token in a hateful span and "I-HateSpan" to indicate tokens inside a hateful span. Additionally, the section includes an analysis of the model's performance and an in-depth explanation of the outcomes.

The architecture of our best submitted model for Task 3 employs a teacher-student framework and utilizes the SpanBERT-base-cased model along with Conditional Random Fields (CRF) for sequence tagging. The approach can be summarized as follows:

- **Teacher Model:** Ensemble of k SpanBERT-base-cased models, each combined with CRF.
- **Student Model:** A single SpanBERT-base-cased model, also integrated with CRF. The student model is distilled from the teacher model using a specific formula:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{loss}} = (1 - \alpha) \cdot \text{CE}(\text{student_score}, \text{target}) + \alpha \cdot \text{MSE}(\text{student_logits}, \text{teacher_logits}) \quad (1)$$

1. **Model Comparison:** Table 5 provides a comparison of different base models with varying configurations, including casing, k-fold cross-validation, and tagging schemes (BIO and IO). It is observed that SpanBERT-large with lower casing and a 5-fold cross-validation scheme achieved the highest private score of 62.322, indicating its effectiveness in identifying hateful spans.
2. **Impact of Casing:** The casing of the model input, whether lower case or true case, seems to affect the model's performance. Lower casing generally performs better, as indicated by the higher private and public scores in several configurations.

Table 4

Evaluation of hate span detection performance utilizing various models, with the submitted model highlighted in bold.

Base Model	Casing	K-fold	Tagging	Private Score	Public Score
SpanBERT-large	Lower case	5	BIO	62.322	55.052
SpanBERT-base	True case	-	BIO	41.528	33.755
SpanBERT-base	True case	5	BIO	55.547	48.566
SpanBERT-base	Lower case	10	BIO	57.541	51.013
SpanBERT-base	Lower case	5	BIO	57.605	53.378
SpanBERT-base	True case	-	BIO	55.177	45.602
DeBERTa-v3-xlarge	True case	-	BIO	43.102	38.249
DeBERTa-v3-large	True case	-	BIO	47.433	39.222
DeBERTa-v3-large	True case	-	IO	15.426	12.446

3. **Tagging Scheme:** The choice of tagging scheme (BIO vs. IO) also influences performance. Models using the BIO tagging scheme tend to yield better results, as seen in higher private and public scores.
4. **Ensemble vs. Single Model:** The ensemble approach using multiple SpanBERT-base-cased models as teachers seems to provide valuable knowledge transfer to the student model, resulting in improved performance.
5. **Distillation Effect:** The use of distillation with an α value of 0.95 for transferring knowledge from teachers to the student model helps enhance performance compared to a standalone student model (See Eq.1).

Overall, the model architecture involving an ensemble of SpanBERT models with CRF, especially when using lower casing and BIO tagging, demonstrates strong performance in identifying hateful spans in text. The distillation process further boosts the student model's effectiveness.

Table 5

The official outcomes from our participation in the HASOC-23 encompassing Task 1, 3, and 4, best models are presented

Team name	Task, Language	Base model	Macro F1	Rank
FiRC-NLP	Task 1b (Gujrate)	XLM-RoBERTa-large	0.848	1/17
	Task 1a (Sinhala)	XLM-RoBERTa-large	0.838	1/16
	Task 3 (English)	SpanBERT-base	0.570	1/12
	Task 4 (Bengali)	XLM-RoBERTa-large	0.764	2/20
	Task 4 (Assamese)	XLM-RoBERTa-large	0.725	2/20
	Task 4 (Bodo)	XLM-RoBERTa-large	0.848	4/19

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented a comprehensive analysis of hate speech and offensive language identification across multiple languages and tasks in HASOC-2023 competition. In Task 1 and Task 4, our research involves identifying offensive language in Sinhala, Gujarati, Bengali, Assamese, and Bodo languages, and Task 3, which involves hateful span detection in English text.

Our research not only showcased the effectiveness of transformer-based models in these shared tasks but also emphasized the importance of model selection, task-specific customization, and innovative strategies to address the challenges posed by low resource languages, multilingual and cross-lingual contexts.

As future work, further investigations are needed to explore the use of more diverse and specialized transformer models, as well as fine-tuning model parameters to achieve even better results. Additionally, we need to inspect the application of ensemble techniques and the incorporation of multiple thresholds for automatic annotation represents promising avenues for improving model robustness and generalization.

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