Exploring Prompt Strategies for Joke Generation Under Input Constraints

Abdulmujeeb Lawal
Howard University AI4PC Lab, lawalmujeeb78@gmail.com

Saurav Aryal
Howard University AI4PC Lab, saurav.aryal@howard.edu

A number of studies have explored what makes jokes funny. Conversely, only a few have actually tackled generating them, mostly leaving humor-generation relatively unexplored. The SemEval MWAHAHA Challenge tasks participants with generating jokes under different constraints with the aim of pushing models beyond memorization towards genuine joke creation. In Subtask A, inputs were either keyword pairs or news headlines, and jokes had to incorporate both keywords or draw from the given headline. For headlines, we prompted the model to write reaction-style tweets, which produced more natural humor, while for the keyword pairs, we had the model adopt Dave Chappelle's comedic persona to create observational jokes about some everyday situations and disappointments. We experimented primarily with open-source models (Llama and Qwen) and ended up using Llama for our final submission.

In our preliminary results, we found that persona-based prompting consistently outperformed generic prompting approaches. The Chappelle-style observational jokes for keyword pairs also seemed to elicit more reactions than the standard outputs, and the tweet-format jokes for headlines felt more natural and appropriate for the given context. We also observed that models struggled a lot more with keyword pairs than with headlines, most likely because combining two unrelated words into coherent humor may require a bit more creative reasoning.

Our findings show that tailoring prompting methods based on input type, rather than applying a singular approach, decently improves humor generation. Our work also shows the value of using personas when guiding models toward more diverse and naturally funny jokes.

CCS CONCEPTS • Computing methodologies • Artificial intelligence • Natural language processing • Natural language generation

Additional Keywords and Phrases: Humor generation, Prompt engineering

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