International Journal of Computer Information Systems and Industrial Management Applications
ISSN 2150-7988 Volume 18(5s) 2026 pp. 262-267
https://doi.org/10.70917/ijcisim-2026-2705
Article

TOWARDS FIGURATIVE-AWARE SENTIMENT ANALYSIS: A COMPARATIVE REVIEW ON DEEP LEARNING AND TRANSFORMER MODELS

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Abstract: — Sentiment analysis is a main task in NLP which includes social media analytics, e-commerce, opinion mining, and customer feedback. However, transformer models and deep learning techniques have enhanced contextual understanding; sentiment analysis continues to exhibit endless challenge in figurative language. Sarcasm and metaphor frequently reverse expected sentiment, which causes misclassification in many natural language processing models. Despite this, most studies treat sarcasm and metaphor as separate tasks rather than within a unified framework. This paper presents a comparative review of sentiment analysis techniques, determining the purpose of handling figurative languages across different domains. This analysis highlights the limitations in existing models and enhanced the need for unified frameworks that jointly model sarcasm and metaphor. Index Terms— deep learning, sarcasm detection, metaphor detection, metaphor detection, sentiment analysis, figurative language, natural language processing, transformer models.
Keywords: NA

1. INTRODUCTION

Sentiment analysis is a core task in natural language processing deriving an applications towards customer feedback, opinion mining, social media monitoring [3],[6]. In NLP, despite the significant advancement, sentiment classification remains challenging due to figurative expressions. Polarity detection becomes difficult in figurative language: metaphor provides a conceptual framework for organizing thoughts and communications [1], whereas sarcasm intentionally reverses polarity [4],[5], hence creating ambiguity in sentiment interpretation. Early sentiment analysis models relied on lexicon-based methods and traditional machine learning which lacked with figurative contexts [2],[3]. The advancement of deep learning architectures such as LSTMs and CNNs improved significantly in handling complex linguistic cues and feature extraction [9],[11] Though attention mechanism, transformer approaches enhanced contextual modeling improving performance [10]. But, recent studies specifically highlights that they still struggle in understanding

figurative language often treating sarcasm and metaphor as distinct challenges [17],[18]. This study integrates comparative findings, outlines their strengths and limitations and proposes a unified multitask framework [19, 26, 29] prioritizing sarcasm detection while incorporating metaphor awareness. It maps the advancement from lexicon-based models to transformer architectures, we aim to enhance research towards figurative-aware sentiment systems that are interpretable, robust and are capable of handling figurative language across domains.

2. A CONTRIBUTION TO THE PAPER

This paper makes the following contributions:

a. It traces an evolutionary timelines of sentiment analysis with emphasizing figurative aspects of language.
b. It provides a comparative study of deep learning models and transformer-based models.
c. It identifies research gaps on unified modeling of sarcasm and metaphor.
d. It presents future avenues of research for figurative-aware sentiment analysis.

3. RELATED WORK

Figurative-aware sentiment analysis has undergone a several methodological stages, from rule-based sentiment approaches [1], [2] and recently transformer based architectures [5]. Initial contributions concentrated on literal polarity detection [6], whereas later studies expanded attention towards sarcasm recognition [7] and metaphor identification [8] as independent tasks. Although significant improvements has achieved, the fragmented handling of figurative elements have restricted the development of unified framework of approaches for managing various types of non-literal language together. TABLE 1 presents a chronological overview of influential contributions, highlighting datasets, techniques and findings across different domains

TABLE 1

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF FIGURATIVE AWARE SENTIMENT ANALYSIS

Ref	Author(s), year	Methodolog y/ focus	Datasets/ Domains	Strengths	Limitations	Key contributio n
[1]	Lakoff & Johnson, 1980	Conceptual metaphor theory	Linguistics/ Philosophy	Groundbreaking metaphor theory and established a basis for figurative language	No conceptual theory	Initiated conceptual metaphor framework
[2]	Caruana, 1997	Multitask learning	ML tasks	Generalization was improved in transformer models and deep learning models	Not applied to NLP figurative contexts and lacks neural architectures	The basis of multitask learning to train models
[3]	Pang & Lee, 2008	Survey of sentimen t analysis	Multiple domains	Extensive survey of methods, datasets and challenges	Not applied to figurative NLP	Foundational overview in framing sentiment analysis and opinion mining
[4]	Tsur et al., 2010	Semi-supervised ML	Product reviews	Initial sarcasm detection	Narrow scalability	Attempt to find first sarcasm detection computation
[5]	Riloff et al., 2013	Rule-based linguistic	Social media	Novel sentiment situation insight in sarcasm detection research	Less robust, rule based approaches	Sarcasm detection framework
[6]	Liu, 2015	Book on sentiment analysis	Multiple domains	Authoritative survey	Limitation in figurative aspects like sarcasm/metaphor	Standard sentiment references

[7]	Veale, 2016	Metaphor in NLP systems	Computational linguistics	Perceptive study on metaphor detection	Minimal empirical validation with models deep learning	Overview of metaphor in NLP systems
[8]	Joshi et al., 2018	Survey on sarcasm detection	Multiple datasets	Comprehensive coverage, establishes taxonomy of approaches	Introduction to some deep learning models	Integrating sarcasm detection, methods and datasets
[9]	Zhang et al., 2018	CNN + LSTM	Social media	Strong sequential modeling , improved performance compared to traditional models	Inadequate figurative handling, lacks in interpretability of models	Establishing DL models for sentiment detection
[10]	Devlin et al., 2019	BERT	General NLP corpora	Revolutionized NLP; Strong contextual embedding's	Lack of figurative specifications	Introduced a transformer model-BERT
[11]	Mishra et al., 2019	Deep learning	Twitter	Improvement in sarcasm detection	Limited datasets scope, less robust than transformers compared to DL	DL models were applied for detecting sarcasm in tweets/ comments
[12]	Ghosh et al., 2020	Shared task report	Figurative language workshop	Standard dataset and comparative evaluation across multiple systems	Limited to only Task-specific	Shared task was organized to detect sarcasm
[13]	Khattri et al., 2020	Attention-based models	Social media	Improvement in context capture	Lack of generalization compared to the transformer architecture	Incorporated attention models in detecting sarcasm
[14]	Choi et al., 2021	MelBERT	Social media	Detected figurative models and increased the strength of transformers	Limited scope in metaphor	Proposed CNN models like MelBERT; Detected metaphor through transformer based models
[15]	Hazarika et al., 2021	Transformer models	Conversations	Powerful conversational modeling	Dataset size relatively small; challenges in modeling nuanced conversational cues remain	Conventional sarcasm detection
[16]	Chakrabarty et al., 2021	Transformer-based generation	EMNLP dataset	Novel metaphor generalization	Lack of evolution in metaphor generation	Transformer metaphor generations
[17]	Dankers et al.,	Survey	NLP figurative	Comprehensive	Introduced few	Overview of figurative
	2022		language	coverage on sarcasm, metaphor, irony; highlights challenges.	practical evaluations, limited technical depth on specific models like LLMs	awareness In NLP
[18]	Liu et al., 2022	Multitask learning	Social media	Unified sarcasm+ sentiment models to improve	Limited scalability, not fully explored	Introduction to Sentiment detection +multitask

				performance		sarcasm
[19]	Kumar et al., 2023	Multitask transformers	Springer LNCS	Joint figurative detection	Initial stage; lacks extension to other figurative phenomena like irony or humor.	Proposed Multitask transformers for figurative tasks
[20]	Chandra et al., 2023	Deep learning	E-commerce reviews	Implemented DL models to real world	Domain specific, limited generalization to social media	Established sarcasm detection in e commerce reviews
[21]	MDPI, 2023	Review of transformers	Multiple datasets	Provided a effective study on transformer models	Lacks coverage of multimodal approaches	Focus on detecting sarcasm through transformer based models
[22]	Li et al., 2024	Pre-trained transformers	ACL dataset	Demonstrate Powerful metaphor detection using modern architectures	Less focus on figurative scope	Pre-trained models were introduced to detect metaphor
[23]	Zambre & Bobde, 2024	Deep CNN	Social media	Proposed CNN models are effective and efficient, improved accuracy.	Lack of figurative handlings	Proposed deep CNN based sarcasm detection techniques
[24]	Bodige et al., 2024	Large language models	IEEE Access	Pioneering Cutting-edge LLMs	Early exploration, computationally expensive	Established LLMs for sarcasm detection
[25]	Bodige et al., 2025	Survey	Multiple datasets	Comprehensive and up-to-date overview on DL, transformer models	Rapidly evolving fields	Study on recent advances in sarcasm detection
[26]	Kumar et al., 2025	Unified framework	Expert Systems	Integrates Figurative integration into a single architecture	Needs broader validations and evolution limited to selected datasets	Proposed a Unified figurative language detection in NLP
[27]	Liu et al., 2024	LLM survey	Sentiment analysis	Wide coverage of methods, challenges in sarcasm detection	Limitation in figurative aspects	Review/survey of LLMs for sentiment analysis
[28]	Zhang et al., 2024	Context-aware transformers	IP&M dataset	Emphasized Powerful contextual modeling in sarcasm detection	Domain oriented, evolution limited to certain datasets	Developed Context-aware sarcasm detection
[29]	Kumar et al., 2025	Multitask learning	Expert Systems	Demonstrated Unified figurative tasks, improved performance compared to single task baselines	Focus is less on empirical scope, requires diverse datasets for efficient performance	Understanding of multitask figurative language

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a comparative review methodology, chronologically analyzing 29 seminal contributions from 1980 to 2025. Studies were included based on their domain relevance, citation influence and methodological significance within sentiment analysis and figurative language research.

The process carried out in three following steps:

1. **Chronological mapping:** The work were carried in sequential order, initiated with metaphor theory [1] and multitask learning [2], moving forward through seminal sentiment analysis studies [3], deep learning techniques [9],[11], transformer models [10],[14-16] and integrated framework in figurative language processing [17-29].
2. **Comparative dimensions:** All the studies were assessed across three steps: datasets employed, techniques applied and figurative aspects examined.
3. **Gap identifications:**The comparative analysis reveals several: limited metaphor integration, narrow domain scope in sarcasm detection, and there is no unified framework for addressing figurative language in sentiment analysis.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The comparative analysis of 29 foundations works (1980-2025) reveals three major evolutionary phases, methodological contrasts and critical gaps in figurative-aware sentiment analysis.

1. **Evolutionary phase:**
   a) Foundational phase (1980-2000): early studies such as conceptual metaphor theory [1] and multitask learning [2] established theoretical concepts but lacked computational implementation.
   b) Development phase (2000-2018): Initial sentiment survey[3] introduced lexicon-based approaches, while subsequent work [9],[11],[13] improved sarcasm detection. However the progress remained largely domain-specific and dependent on large annotated datasets
   c) Modern phase (2019-2025): transformer architectures [10],[14-16], achieved state-of-the-art performance in detecting sarcasm and metaphor. Recent survey [17-29] has reviewed these advances, yet a unified solution has not emerged.
2. **Methodological differences:**

Early sentiment relied on lexicon-based approaches [3], which used predefined sentiment dictionaries and statistical classifiers. These methods were easy to interpret but lacked in figurative coverage. Deep learning models [9],[11],[13] including CNN, LSTMs and hybrid architectures improved performance significantly, and captures contextual patterns in text. However they remained domain-specific and heavily dependent on annotated data. More recently, transformer based models [10],[14-16],such as BERT and MelBERT enhanced sentiment analysis by achieving state-of-the-art results and better generalization. Despite this enhancement, their computational costs are high and metaphor integration remains incomplete.

3. **Critical gaps:**
   a) Sarcasm and metaphor are rarely integrated within a single framework.
   b) The majority of the work is limited to only single domain.
   c) A unified figurative aware sentiment analysis framework is still absent.

Addressing these gaps points to the demand for unified models that integrate figurative coverage, generalization across domains and maintain computational efficiency.

6. DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis shows a clear progression in sentiment analysis methods, with transformer-based architectures outperforming traditional deep learning models in handling figurative language. While LSTM and CNN models capture contextual cues effectively, they often remain limited to specific domain and show difficulty in handling sarcasm-metaphor integration. These observations partially corresponds the critical gaps noted in prior studies [7],[9],[12], where sarcasm and metaphor are typically addressed separately and frameworks lacked adaptability across domains. The results suggest that future NLP systems particularly those applied to e-commerce and social media must integrate figurative coverage with scalability. This aligns with observations reported in [14]. However, the study also faces certain limitations. The availability of high-quality datasets, especially those annotated for figurative language remains a major challenge. In addition, transformer-based models, despite their strong performance, introduce significant computational overhead. To move forward, future research should focus on developing unified frameworks that can simultaneously handle sarcasm and metaphor, extend applicability across multiple domains, and improve computational efficiency. Exploring multimodal signals—such as the combination of text, emojis, and images—could further enhance the understanding of figurative expressions in real-world scenarios.

7. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comparative evaluation of deep learning and transformer models for figurative-aware sentiment analysis. While transformers consistently outperform CNN and LSTM models, persistent challenges remain. These include domain bias, scarcity of annotated datasets, and the absence of unified frameworks that integrate sarcasm and metaphor. Progress in this area will require expanding domain coverage and improving efficiency, thereby advancing toward a comprehensive figurative-aware sentiment analysis.

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