Contrastive Bootstrapping for Label Refinement

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Abstract

Traditional text classification typically categorizes texts into pre-defined coarse-grained classes, from which the produced models cannot handle the real-world scenario where finer categories emerge periodically for accurate services. In this work, we investigate the setting where fine-grained classification is done only using the annotation of coarse-grained categories and the coarse-to-fine mapping. We propose a lightweight contrastive clustering-based bootstrapping method to iteratively refine the labels of passages. During clustering, it pulls away negative passage-prototype pairs under the guidance of the mapping from both global and local perspectives. Experiments on NYT and 20News show that our method outperforms the state-of-the-art methods by a large margin.¹

1 Introduction

Traditional text classification often categorize into a set of coarse-grained classes, which falls short in real-world scenarios where finer categories emerge. To this end, coarse-to-fine text classification is introduced (Mekala et al., 2021), which performs fine-grained classification given only annotation of coarse-grained categories and the coarse-to-fine mapping. Then, it finetunes a pre-trained language model for each coarse prototype.² However, this two-step method could be sub-optimal. For example, it is vulnerable to the noise which is propagated and accumulated through the pipeline. Besides, it requires finetuning and saving a pre-trained language model for each coarse prototype which is heavyweight.

To this end, we propose a lightweight bootstrapping method based on contrastive clustering to iter-

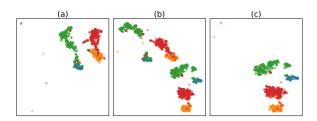


Figure 1: Passages with "Arts" coarse prototype on NYT dataset. Colors are used to denote different fine prototypes. (a) warm-up. (b) bootstrapping w/o selection strategy. (c) bootstrapping w/ selection strategy.

atively refine the labels of passages.³ To be more specific, the method starts with an epoch of warmup on the weakly-labeled dataset. During warm-up, it pulls away negative passage-prototype pairs under the guidance of the mapping from both global and local perspectives, *i.e.*, coarse inter-cluster and fine inter-cluster perspectives. After the warm-up, the distances between clusters are not significant which causes misclassification. Instead of continuing training on the weakly-labeled dataset which might greatly increase the noise (Figure 1(b)), we perform a bootstrapping process which finetunes the model on the selected dataset and updates the selected dataset by the finetuned model alternately. To mitigate the noise, we propose a selection strategy to identify high-quality pairs in terms of similarity and distinction. To further boost our method, we adopt a modified similarity metric from (Lample et al., 2018) and use the gloss knowledge to augment the prototype representation. As shown in (Figure 1(c)), the resulting clusters are well separated with less noise.

Our contributions are summarized as follows:

• We propose a lightweight bootstrapping method based on contrastive clustering to ad-

¹Code is available at https://github.com/recorderh ou/contrastive_bootstrapping_label_refinement

²We use prototype and category interchangeably.

 $^{^{3}}$ We focus on passage-level classification as it is consistent with prior studies (Mekala et al., 2021). Though, without loss of generality, the studied problem as well as the proposed method can be extended to classifying natural language text in other granularities.

dress the problem of coarse-to-fine text classification.

• Our method outperforms the state-of-the-art methods on two widely-used datasets. Further analysis verifies the effectiveness of our proposed techniques.

2 Proposed Method

This section describes the technical details of the proposed method, starting with the task description.

2.1 Task Description

We follow the task definition of coarse-to-fine text classification in previous work (Mekala et al., 2021). Given n passages $\{p_1, ..., p_n\}$ with their corresponding coarse-grained labels $\{c_1, ..., c_n\}$, along with the coarse-to-fine mapping \mathcal{T} , our goal is to assign a fine-grained label to each passage. The key notations used in our paper are defined as follows: (1) $\mathcal{C} = \{\mathcal{C}_1, \mathcal{C}_2, ..., \mathcal{C}_m\}$ denotes the coarse prototypes. (2) $\mathcal{F} = \{\mathcal{F}_1, \mathcal{F}_2, ..., \mathcal{F}_k\}$ denotes the fine prototypes. (3) $\mathcal{T} : \mathcal{C} \to \mathcal{F}$ denotes the coarse-to-fine mapping, a surjective mapping which separates \mathcal{F} into $|\mathcal{C}|$ non-overlapping partitions. (4) $S_{pf} = \mathcal{T}(c_i)$ denotes the fine-grained candidate prototype of p_i , which is also dubbed as p for simplicity. (5) $S_{nf} = \mathcal{F}/S_{pf}$ denotes fine prototypes not belonging to $\mathcal{T}(c_i)$. (6) $\mathcal{S}_{nc} = \mathcal{C}/c_i$ denotes coarse prototypes in C other than c_i .

2.2 Our Method

Training Process As illustrated in Figure 2, we start with an epoch of warm-up, during which we optimize two contrastive losses \mathcal{L}_{global} , \mathcal{L}_{local} on the weakly-labeled dataset and only the \mathcal{L}_{global} on the unlabeled dataset. The two contrastive losses are detailed in the following paragraphs. Then, we conduct several epochs of bootstrapping with the above model. At each bootstrapping step, we first select a small set of passages on which labels are predicted with high confidence by the model. Then, we finetune the model on the selected dataset with the same losses as warm-up. We repeat the finetuning and the selection alternately.

Initial Weak Supervision Following previous work, we consider samples that exclusively contain the label surface name as their respective weak supervision. More details can be referred to the prior study.

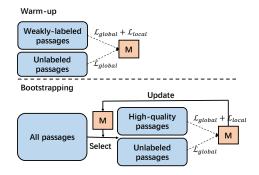


Figure 2: Illustration of our training process.

Passage and Prototype Representation We encode passages $\{p_1, ..., p_n\}$ and all prototypes $C \cup F$ into the same embedding space with a pretrained language model. The resulting passage representation and prototype representation are denoted as p and l respectively. During the training process, the prototype representations are dynamically updated to fit the current passage representations. Specifically, we use the last hidden representation of [CLS] as their representations.

Similarity Metric Cosine similarity is often used to measure semantic similarity of embedding representations. However, in high-dimensional spaces, some "hub" vectors may be close to many other vectors while some other vectors are instead being isolated. For example, a passage's representation pmay get high cosine with a large number of labels in S_{pf} due to such hubness issues. In this case, a high similarity score does not necessarily lead to a high discrepancy among labels. Selecting a highlyscored label from the hub as the seed is potentially detrimental to our pairing-based method. Inspired by cross-domain similarity local scaling (Lample et al., 2018), we adopt a modified similarity metric $c(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l})$ to prevent passage vectors from becoming hubs:

$$c(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l}) = \cos(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l}) - KNN(\boldsymbol{p})$$
(1)

$$KNN(\boldsymbol{p}) = \frac{1}{K} \sum_{\boldsymbol{l} \in \mathcal{F}} K\{\cos(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l})\}$$
(2)

where KNN(.) denotes K nearest neighbors.

Warm-up Viewing a passage as an anchor, we expect that its semantic similarity to the correct fine-grained prototype should be closer than any other fine-grained candidate prototypes. We regard the distance in the representation space as the similarity. Specifically, we optimize the following

margin ranking loss:

$$\mathcal{L}_{global} = \frac{1}{|S_{pf}|} \sum_{\substack{l \in S_{pf} \\ l' \in S_{nf}}} \max\{c(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l}) - c(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l'}) + \gamma, 0\}$$
(3)

where γ is a hyper-parameter denoting the margin. We use all fine candidate prototypes in S_{pf} as positive examples and randomly sample the same number of prototypes from S_{nf} as negative examples. We view this loss as a global loss to cluster samples according to their coarse labels (Figure 3).

For instances labeled in the initial weak supervision stage, we adopt another margin ranking loss:

$$\mathcal{L}_{local} = \max\{sec_max - c(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l}) + \sigma, 0\} \quad (4)$$

$$sec_max = \max_{l' \in S_{pf}, l'! = l} c(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l'})$$
(5)

We regard this loss as a local loss to cluster samples according to their fine-grained labels (Figure 1 (a)).

Bootstrapping After the warm-up, representations show an inclination to form clusters. Yet, the distances between them are not significant enough to separate the classes. To further get compact clusters, we perform bootstrapping which finetunes the model on the selected dataset and updates the selected dataset by the finetuned model alternately. Instead of using the initial weak supervision which might greatly increase the noise as observed, we propose a selection strategy to select high-quality passage-prototype pairs. Specifically, we assign a pseudo label to each passage by their similarity (Eq.(6)). Apart from **similarity**, we assume high-quality pairs should also be **discriminative** (Eq.(7)):

$$l = \arg \max_{l \in S_{pf}} c(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l}) \tag{6}$$

$$c(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l}) - \max_{l' \in S_{pf}, l'! = l} c(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l'}) > \beta$$
(7)

where β is a threshold updated at each epoch. We construct a confident set CS with top r% pairs satisfying these two conditions. We update β with the lowest similarity in CS. Then, we optimize Eq.(4) and Eq.(3) on CS and the rest passages accordingly.

Gloss Knowledge Since the surface names alone can not well represent the semantics of labels, we enrich them with external semantic knowledge. To be more specific, we select the first two sentences in each surface name's first Wikipedia webpage to augment the original surface name with a predefined template (Table 3). We adopt the format of "template, surface name, gloss" and use the last hidden representation of [CLS] as their representation.



Figure 3: Passage representations after warm-up on 20News dataset. Colors are used to denote different coarse prototypes.

Prediction It is worth noticing that applying our similarity metric c(p, l) do not change the relative ranking among labels in S_{pf} compared with the cosine similarity. For simplicity, we use cosine similarity for prediction.

$$l = \arg\max_{l \in S_{nf}} \cos(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l}) \tag{8}$$

3 Experiments

In this section, we describe the experimental evaluation for the proposed method.

3.1 Datasets and Metrics

For a fair comparison with prior work, we use the same hierarchical datasets used by We report both Macro-F1 and Micro-F1 for evaluation on the following two datasets.

The 20 Newsgroups (20News) The passages in 20News was organized into 5 coarse-grained newsgroups and 20 fine-grained newsgroups corresponding to different topics (Table 2). Passages in 20News were partitioned evenly across the 20 different fine-grained newsgroups.⁴ Following (Mekala et al., 2021), we omitted the 3 miscellaneous newsgroups ("misc.forsale," "talk.politics.misc" and "talk.religion.misc") and expanded the abbreviation to full words.

The New York Times (NYT) This dataset contains 5 coarse-grained topics and 25 subtopics (Table 2). The NYT dataset is highly skewed with the coarse-grained topic "sports" containing more than 80% passages.

3.2 Main Results

We compare our model with the previous work (Mekala et al., 2021), as well as several zeroshot weakly supervised text classification methods

⁴http://qwone.com/~jason/20Newsgroups/

	N	ΥT	20N	lews
	Mi-F1(%)	Ma-F1(%)	Mi-F1(%)	Ma-F1(%)
LOT-Class	79.26	63.16	56.38	54.80
X-Class	58.15	60.50	52.95	53.47
C2F	89.23	84.36	75.77	75.24
C2F w/ our select \star	89.64	82.72	77.20	76.41
Ours	92.64	89.90	77.64	77.22
w/o fine	91.15 (↓ 1.49)	84.90 (↓ 5.00)	74.34 (↓ 3.30)	73.78 (↓ 3.44)
w/o bootstrap	89.49 (↓ 3.15)	82.50 (↓ 7.40)	76.01 (↓ 1.63)	75.46 (↓ 3.30)
w/o gloss	89.91 (↓ 2.73)	80.48 (↓ 9.42)	72.68 (↓ 4.86)	70.31 (↓ 6.91)
w/o select	87.56 (↓ 5.08)	81.98 (↓ 8.02)	79.74 († 2.10)	79.21 († 1.99)
w/o similarity	89.25 (↓ 3.39)	82.44 (↓ 7.46)	61.21 (↓ 16.43)	54.76 (\ 22.46)
w/ Manhattan similarity †	33.45 (↓ 59.19)	39.47 (↓ 50.43)	41.83 (↓ 35.81)	36.50 (↓ 40.72)
w/ Euclidean similarity ‡	$92.46 (\downarrow 0.18)$	$89.17 (\downarrow 0.73)$	72.11 (↓ 5.53)	70.65 (\ 6.57)

Table 1: Results on NYT and 20News. "*" equips C2F with our selection strategy. "†" replaces our similarity metric with Manhattan distance. "‡" replaces our similarity metric with Euclidean distance.

(Wang et al., 2021b; Meng et al., 2020a) following previous works. We reproduce them using their implementation.⁵⁶⁷

As shown in Table 1, our method outperforms the baselines by 5.67% in Micro-F1 and 5.54% in Macro-F1 on the NYT dataset, as well as 3.97% in Micro-F1 and 3.04% in Macro-F1 on 20News dataset.

3.3 Analysis

To verify the effectiveness of different model components , we conduct ablation studies to test each of those.

Effect of Bootstrapping The "w/o bootstrap" results in Table 1 report the performance with warm-up only. These results are consistently lower than those with bootstrapping. Specifically, bootstrapping improves the warm-up by 3.15% Micro-F1, 7.40% Macro-F1 and 1.63% Micro-F1, 3.30% Macro-F1 on NYT and 20News respectively. Figure 1(a)(c) shows passage representations are more separated from each other.

Effect of Selection Strategy We replace the selection strategy in bootstrapping with the initial weakly-labeled samples. From the "w/o bootstrap" results in Table 1, we can see that, our selection strategy brings an improvement of 4.26% Micro-F1, 7.46% Macro-F1 on NYT. It is better to use the seed dataset on 20News. We hypothesize that this observation is because the seed dataset has a more balanced label distribution than our selected

high-quality samples on 20News. We also incorporate our selection strategy to the C2F baseline in the bootstrapping stage. As shown in Table 1 row "C2F w/ our select," this strategy improves the performance of C2F by 1.43% Micro-F1, 1.17% Macro-F1 on 20News and 0.41% Micro-F1 on NYT, exhibiting the effectiveness of our strategy.

Effect of Similarity Metric We replace our similarity metric with the cosine similarity. From Table 1 "w/o similarity" we can see that, our similarity metric brings along an improvement of 3.39% in Micro-F1, 7.46% in Macro-F1 on NYT, and 16.43% in Micro-F1 and 22.46% in Macro-F1 on 20News. From Figure 4, we can see that 63% of samples belonging to the "Law Enforcement" prototype are misclassified using the cosine similarity. However, 18% are misclassified using our similarity metric, verifying its effectiveness. Besides, results for "w/ Manhattan similarity" and "w/ Euclidean similarity" show that alternating cosine similarity in $c(\mathbf{p}, \mathbf{l})$ causes performance drops of 35.81% (5.53%) in Micro-F1, 40.72% (6.57%) in Macro-F1 and 50.19% (0.18%) in Micro-F1, 50.43% (0.73%) in Macro-F1 on 20News and NYT data, further proving the effectiveness of our similarity metric.

Effect of Gloss Knowledge We remove the gloss knowledge and use the label surface name only. Comparing the "w/o gloss" results in Table 1 with the full-setting ones, we observe that the gloss knowledge brings an improvement of 2.73% in Micro-F1, 9.42% in Macro-F1 on NYT and 4.86% in Micro-F1, 6.91% in Macro-F1 on 20News. Figure 5 further shows the effect of gloss knowledge on different prototypes.

⁵https://github.com/yumeng5/LOTClass

⁶https://github.com/ZihanWangKi/XClass

⁷https://github.com/dheeraj7596/C2F

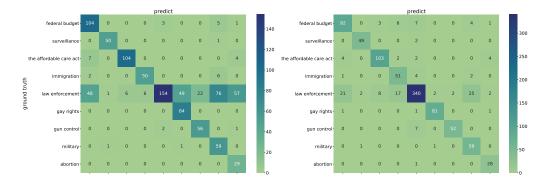


Figure 4: Confusion matrix on "Politics" coarse prototype. Our similarity metric (right) outperforms cosine similarity (left) by 12.25% Macro-F1 and 16.68% Micro-F1 under "Politics."

Extending to the setting without coarse-to-fine mapping We extend our method to the setting without the coarse-to-fine mapping. In other words, the only supervision is the gold coarse labels. We modify \mathcal{L}_{alobal} as follows:

$$\mathcal{L}_{c_global} = \max\{c(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l_c}) - c(\boldsymbol{p}, \boldsymbol{l'_c}) + \gamma, 0\} \quad (9)$$

where we use the golden coarse label l_c as the positive example and randomly sample one coarse label l'_c from S_{nc} as the negative example. The "w/o fine" results in Table 1 show that the performance does not degrade much when the association between coarse and fine-grained labels does not exist, showing the feasibility of our method in a more general setting.

4 Related Work

Previous works in weakly supervised text classification have explored different kinds of weak supervision. (1) a set of related keywords. (Mekala and Shang, 2020) augment and disambiguate the initial seed words with contextualized and highly labelindicative keywords. (Meng et al., 2020b) identify keywords for classes by querying replacements for class names using BERT and pseudo-labels the documents by heuristics with the selected keywords. (2) a few labeled documents. (Tang et al., 2015) represent the labeled documents and different levels of word co-occurrence information as a largescale text network. (Meng et al., 2018) propose a pseudo-document generator that leverages the seed labeld documents to generate pseudo-labeled documents for model pre-training. (3) label surface names. (Wang et al., 2021b) propose an adaptive representation learning method to obtain label and document embedding, and cluster them to pseudolabel the corpus. Our setting is different from theirs

in that we use coarse-grained annotation to improve the fine-grained text classification.

Contrastive learning (He et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Khosla et al., 2020) aims at learning representations by contrasting the positive pairs and negative pairs. In NLP, existing works can be primarily categorized into two distinct streams. Unsupervised contrastive learning seeks to contrast grouped or perturbed instances to generate more robust representation of unlabeled textual data (Gao et al., 2021; Wei et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021a). On the contrary, supervised contrastive learning (Suresh and Ong, 2021; Zhou et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2022) is label-aware and seeks to create representations for differently labeled data with more discrepancy. Our work has shown that supervised contrastive learning incorporating label names, with minimal external knowledge, improves the model's performance in label refinement.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, we study the task of coarse-to-fine text classification. We propose a novel contrastive clustering-based bootstrapping method to refine the label in an iterative manner. Experiments on two real-world datasets for coarse-to-fine text classification verify the effectiveness of our method. Future work could consider extending this method to other fine-grained decision-making tasks that could potentially benefit from coarse-grained labels, such as various kinds of lexical semantic typing tasks (Huang et al., 2022). Another meaningful direction is to consider incorporating other partial-label learning techniques (Zhang et al., 2016) that are relevant to coarse-to-fine prediction tasks.

Limitations

Our paper has the following limitations: (1) In realworld applications, the label hierarchy may be more than two levels. It is worth extending our method to such a setting and empirically verifying it. (2) Our selection strategy simply takes top r% confident samples, which might result in class imbalance problem. Alleviating the imbalance problem may further improve our performance. We leave them as future work.

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A Dataset Statistics

We list the statistics of the datasets in Table 2.

B Templates

We list the templates used in Table 3.

C Effect of gloss knowledge on different prototypes

We show the confusion matrix over all fine prototypes in Figure 5.

D Implementation Details

We use RoBERETa-base (Liu et al., 2019) as the encoder. The models are trained on one GeForce RTX 3090 GPU. We set the batch size as 8. We do one epoch of warmup and four epochs of bootstrapping. We use the predictions from the last epoch as the final predictions. We use AdamW (Loshchilov and Hutter, 2017) as the optimizer. r is set as 15 for NYT and 1 for 20News. γ and σ are set as 0.05 for both NYT and 20News. We run our model 3 times using different random seeds. We used t-SNE (Pedregosa et al., 2011; Buitinck et al., 2013) for the visualization in this paper.

E Selection of *r*

We select the value of r from set {1, 5, 10, 15, 20}. For each coarse prototype C_i , we calculate the ratio of initial weak supervision W_{C_i} in category C_i to the total number of instance I_{C_i} in C_i , we denote the ratio as $R_{C_i} = W_{C_i}/I_{C_i}$. After that, we select the r closest to $\min_{C_i \in C} \{R_{C_i}\}$. As shown in Table 4a and Table 4b, the minimal R_{C_i} in NYT dataset is 13.43%, closest to 15, while the minimal R_{C_i} in 20News dataset is 2.05%, closest to 1.

Dataset	Passage	$ \mathcal{C} $	$ \mathcal{F} $	Coarse Prototype	Fine Prototype
20News	16468	5	17	computer, politics, recreation,	graphics, windows, ibm, mac, x window, mideast, guns, autos, motorcycles,
				religion, science	baseball, hockey, christian, atheism, encryption, electronics, medicine, space
NYT	11744	5	26	arts, business, politics, science, sports	dance, music, movies, television, economy, energy companies, international business, stocks and bonds, abortion, federal budget, gay rights, gun control, immigration, law enforcement, military, surveillance, the affordable care act, cosmos, environment, baseball, basketball, football, golf, hockey, soccer, tennis

Table 2: Dataset Statistics.

Dataset	Template
NYT	1 : The news is about, 2 : The news is related to, 3 : The topic of this passage is
20News	1 : The topic of this post is , 2 : They are discussing , 3 : This post mainly talks about

Table 3: Three variants of templates used to concatenate the gloss knowledge and the surface name. The first template is best for NYT and the third template is best for 20News.

\mathcal{C}_i	$W_{\mathcal{C}_i}$	$I_{\mathcal{C}_i}$	$R_{\mathcal{C}_i}$ (%)
arts	184	1043	17.64
business	132	983	13.43
politics	216	989	21.84
science	42	90	46.67
sports	1890	8639	21.88

(a) Ratio of the initial weak supervision in NYT

(b) Ratio of the initial weak supervision in 20News

Table 4: Ratio of the initial weak supervision

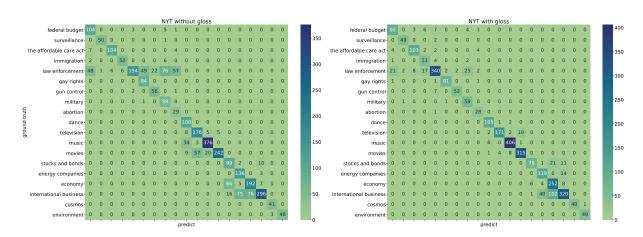


Figure 5: Confusion matrix over all fine prototypes without (left) and with (right) the gloss knowledge.