

Transfer learning

Vlad Shakhuro

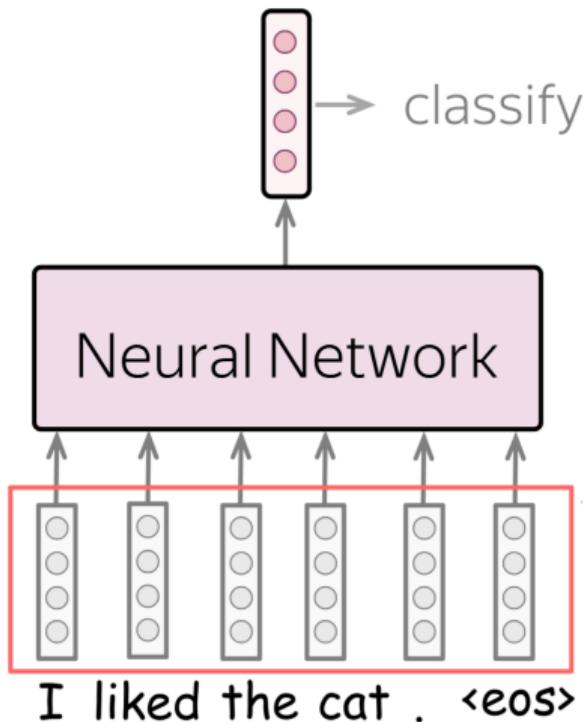


21 November 2025

Outline

1. Recap: word embeddings
2. Idea 1: Words — Words in context
3. Idea 2: Task-specific — Unified
4. BERT analysis

Word embeddings

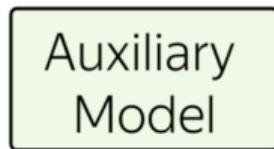
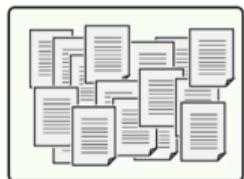


Input word embeddings:

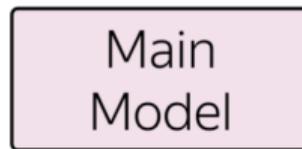
- train from scratch
- take pretrained (word2vec, GloVe)
- initialize with pretrained, then finetune

Transfer learning idea

Source task



knowledge



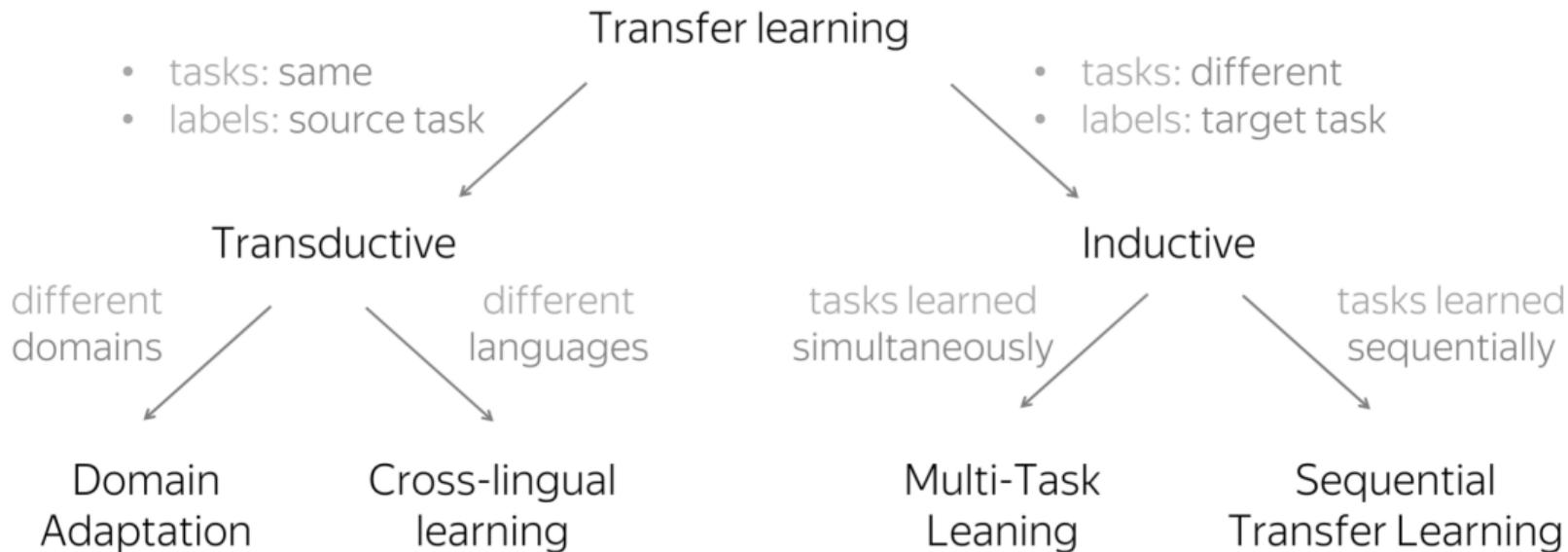
“transfer”



Target task

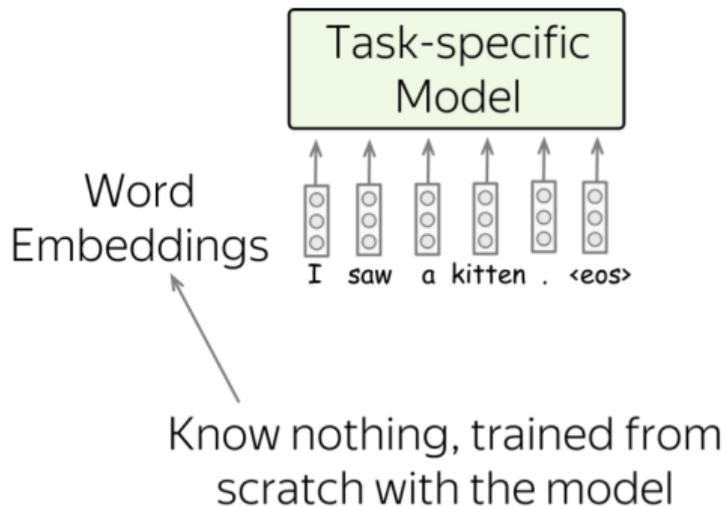


A taxonomy of transfer learning in NLP

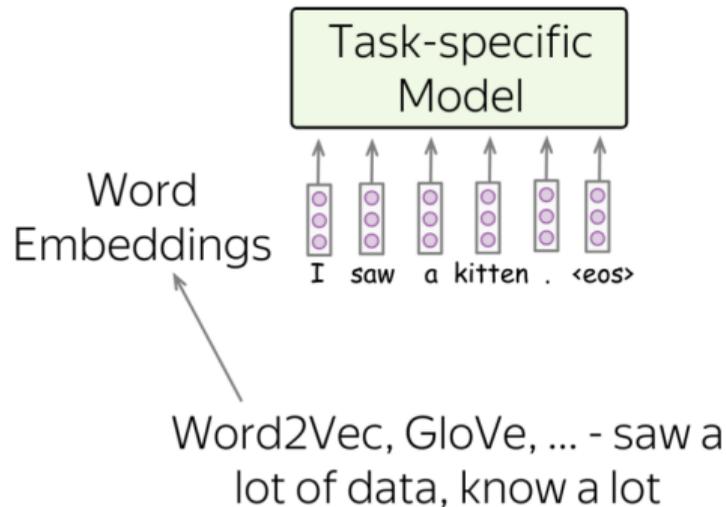


Transfer through word embeddings

Before



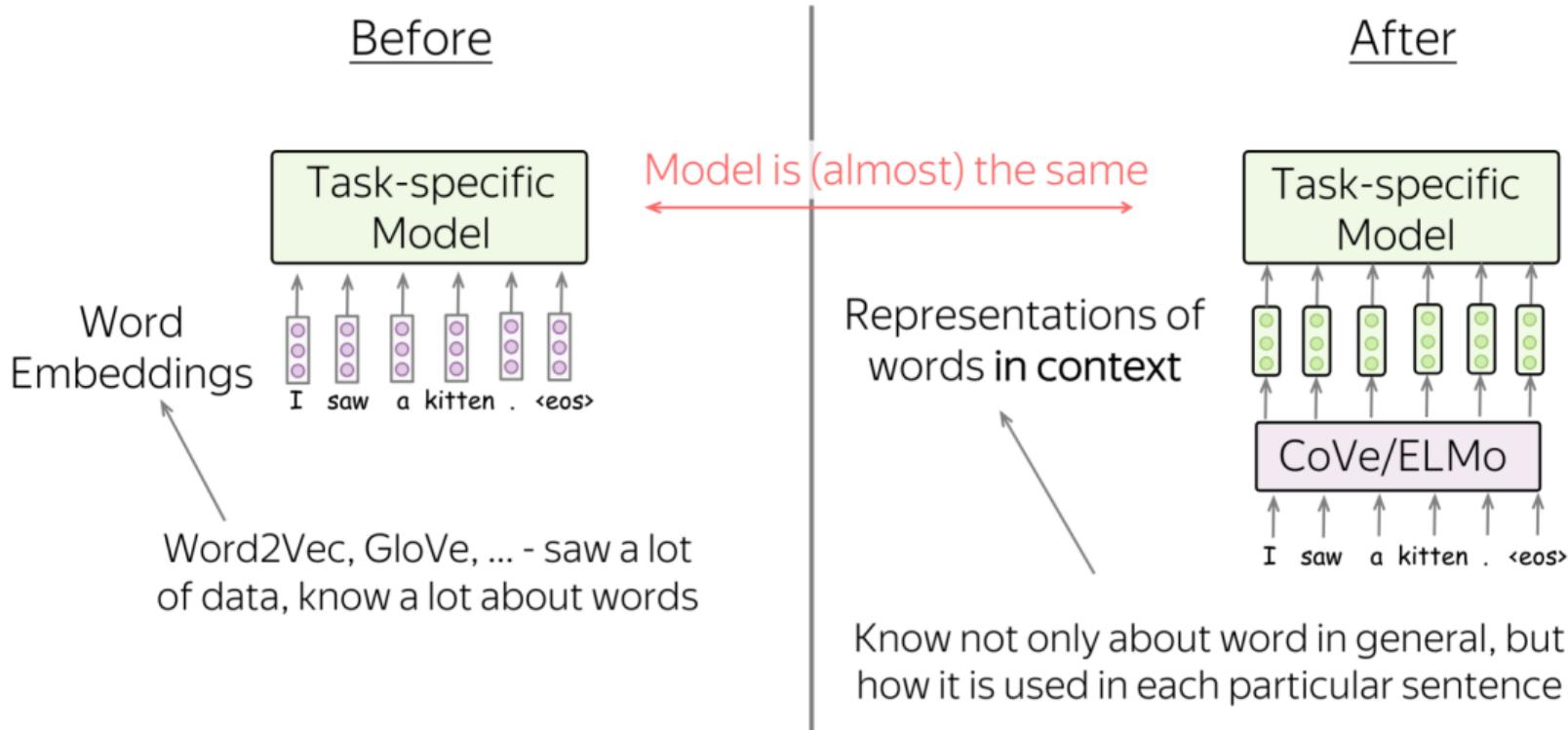
After



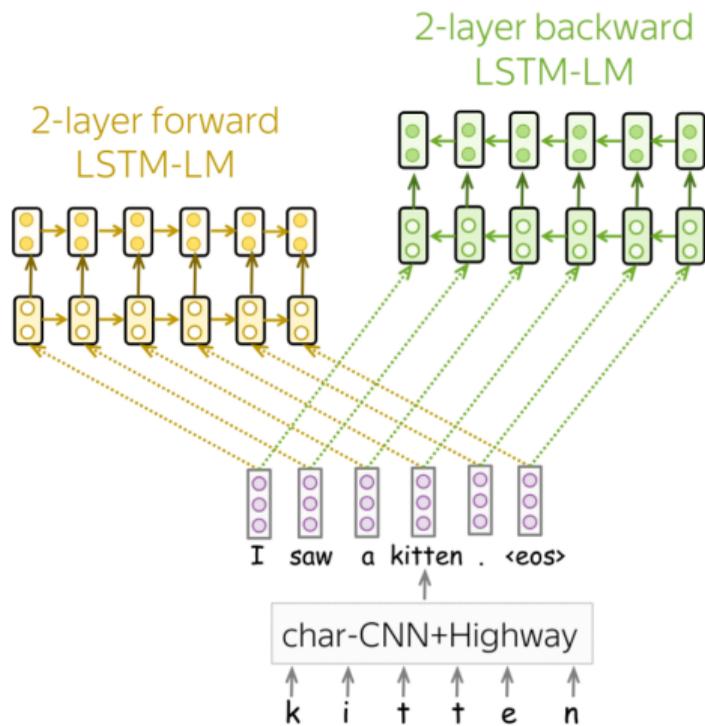
Outline

1. Recap: word embeddings
2. Idea 1: Words — Words in context
3. Idea 2: Task-specific — Unified
4. BERT analysis

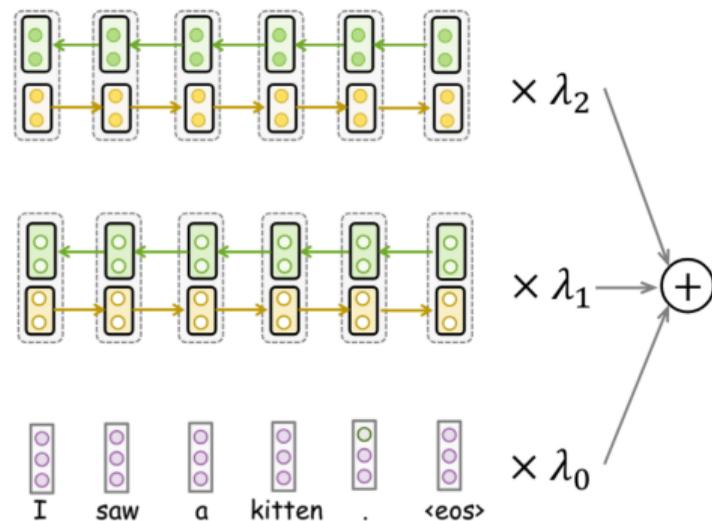
From words to words in context



ELMo: From words to words in context

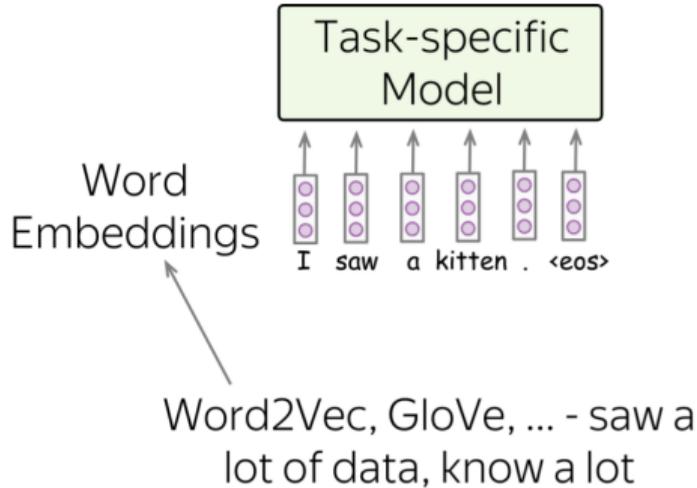


Learn specific $\lambda_0, \lambda_1, \lambda_2$ for each task

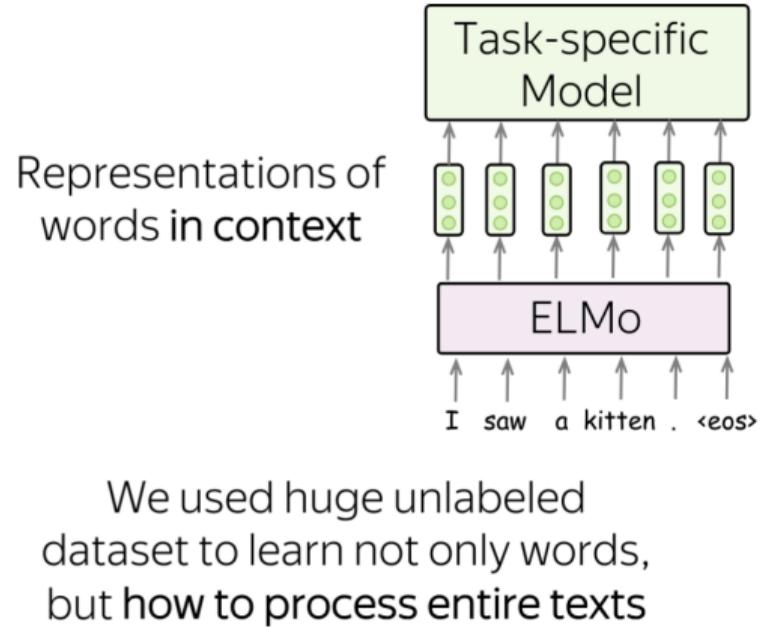


ELMo usage

Before



After

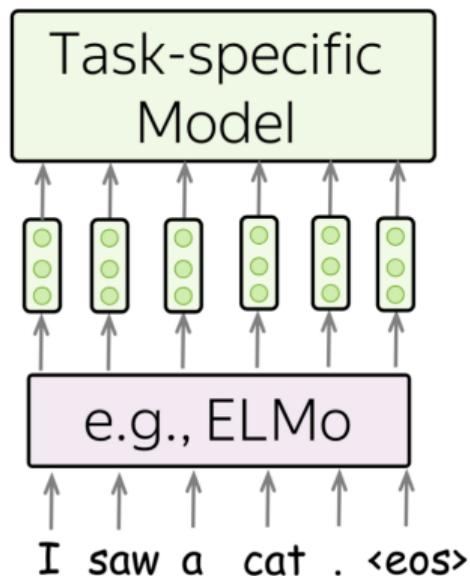


Outline

1. Recap: word embeddings
2. Idea 1: Words — Words in context
3. Idea 2: Task-specific — Unified
4. BERT analysis

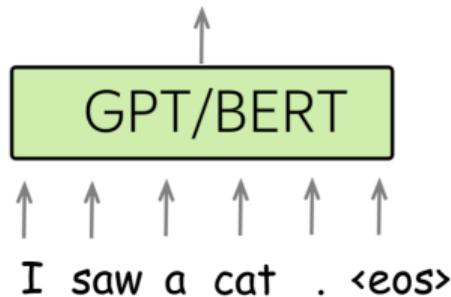
From task-specific models to unified

Before

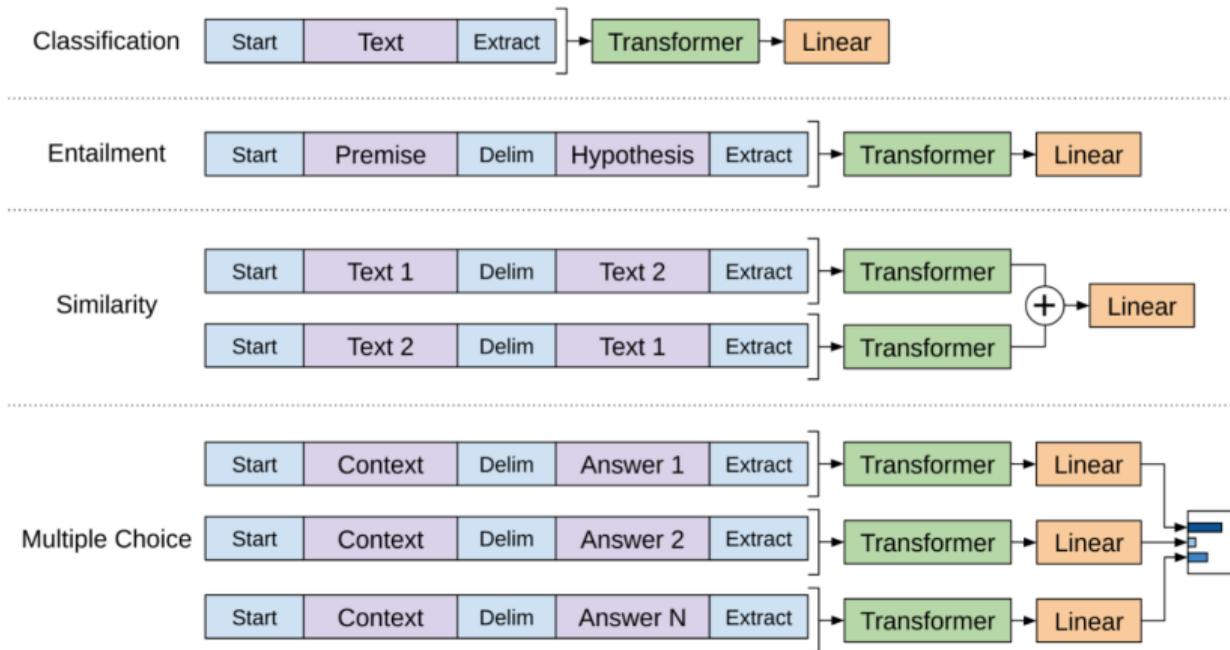
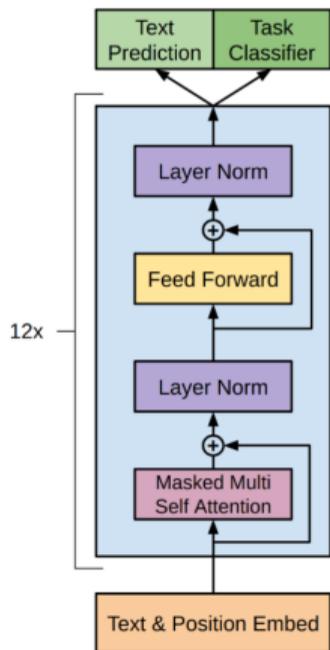


After

No task-specific models!



GPT-1 arch and training



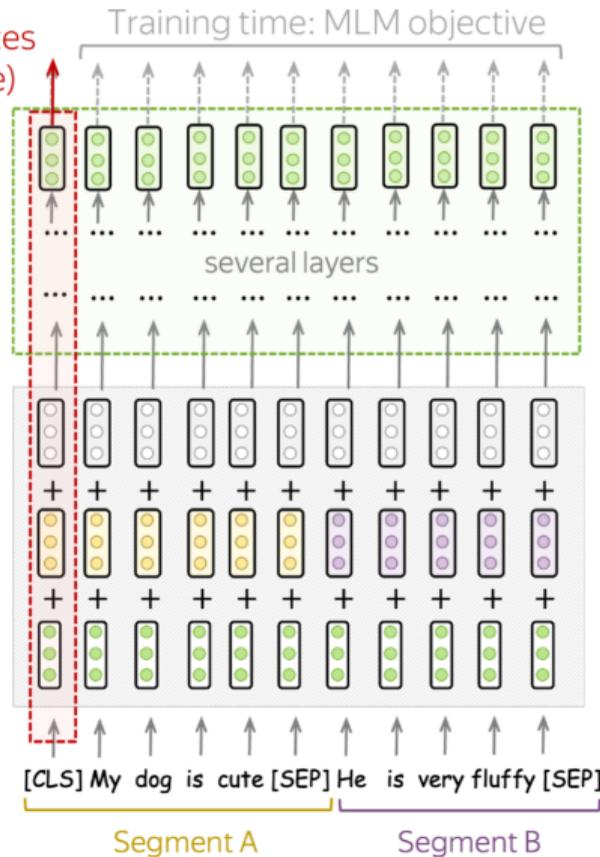
$$\text{Fine-tuning loss: } L = L_{xent} + \lambda L_{task}$$

BERT: Transformer encoder with novel training

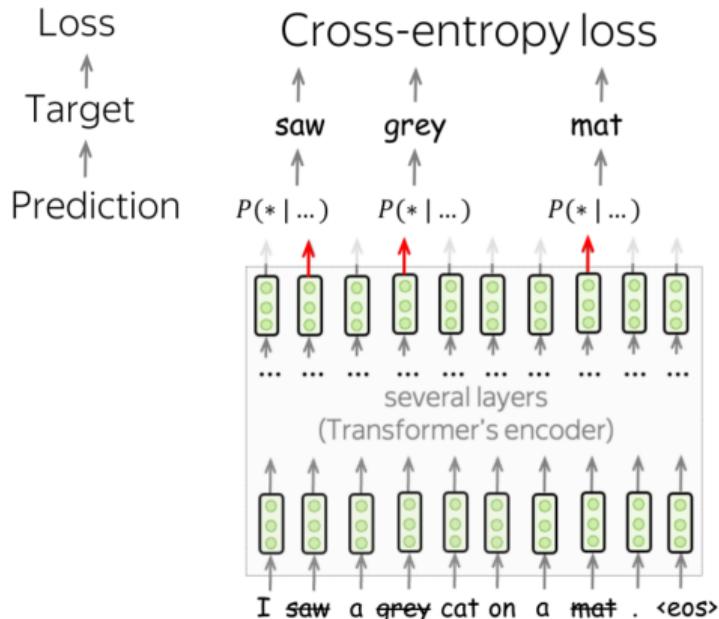
Training time: predict if sentences
are consecutive (NSP objective)
Test time: classification

Model
(Transformer
encoder)

Input



BERT: Masked language modelling



At each training step:

- pick randomly 15% of tokens
- replace each of the chosen tokens with something
- predict original chosen tokens

- [MASK], with $p = 80\%$
- Random token, with $p = 10\%$
- Original token, with $p = 10\%$

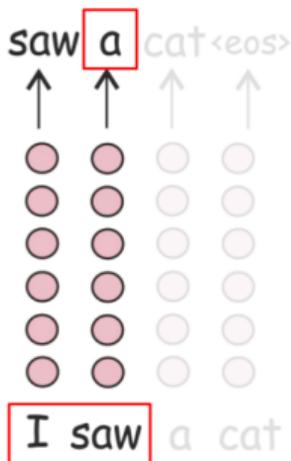
Training objectives: LM vs MLM

Language Modeling

Target: next token

Prediction: $P(* | \mathbf{I} \text{ saw})$

left-to-right, does
not see future

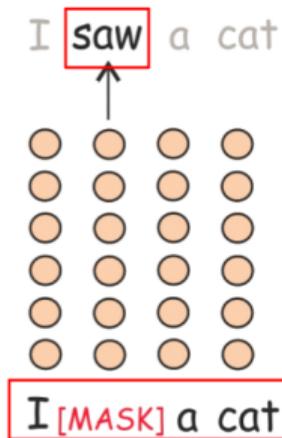


Masked Language Modeling

Target: current token (the true one)

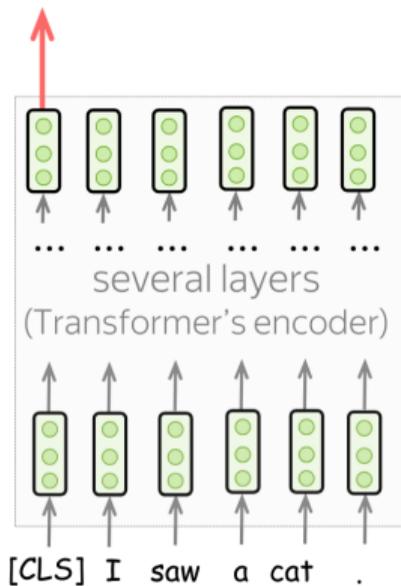
Prediction: $P(* | \mathbf{I} [\text{MASK}] \text{ a cat})$

sees the whole text, but
something is corrupted



Finetuning BERT: classification

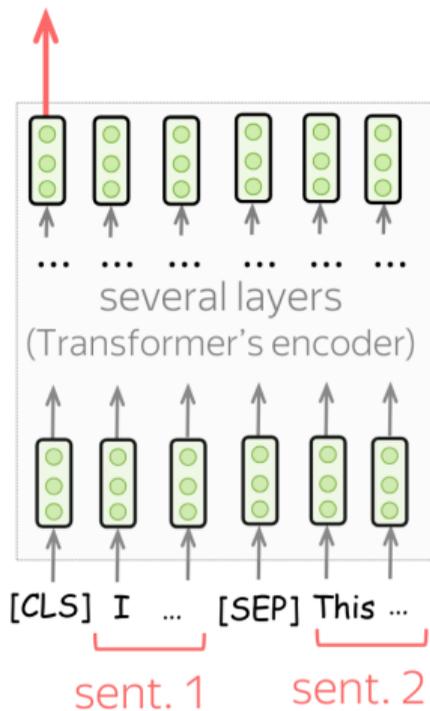
class label



No second sentence!

Finetuning BERT: sentence pair classification

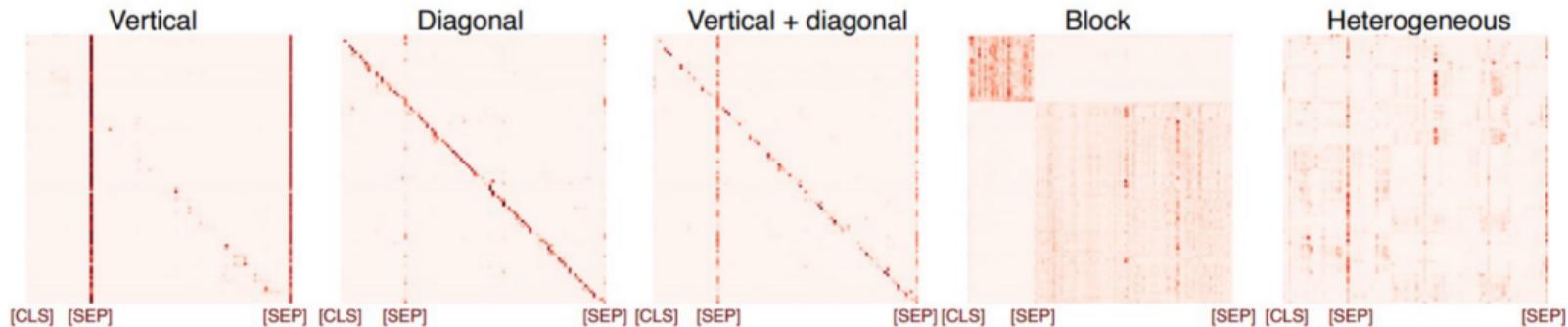
class label



Outline

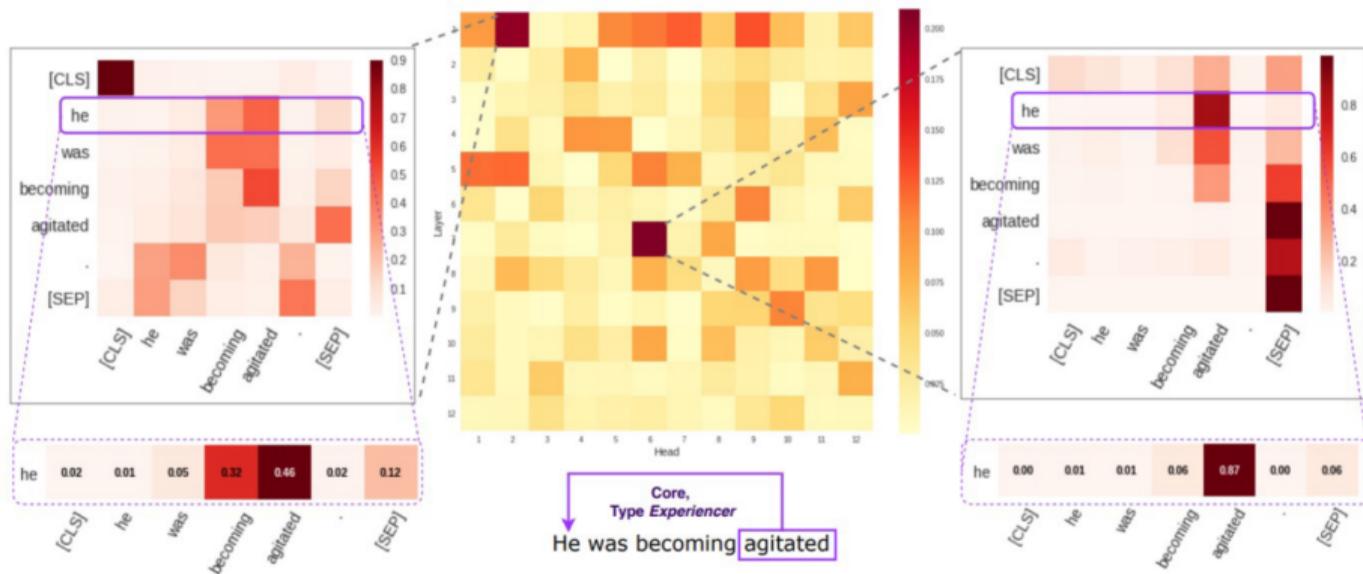
1. Recap: word embeddings
2. Idea 1: Words — Words in context
3. Idea 2: Task-specific — Unified
4. BERT analysis

Self-attention heads



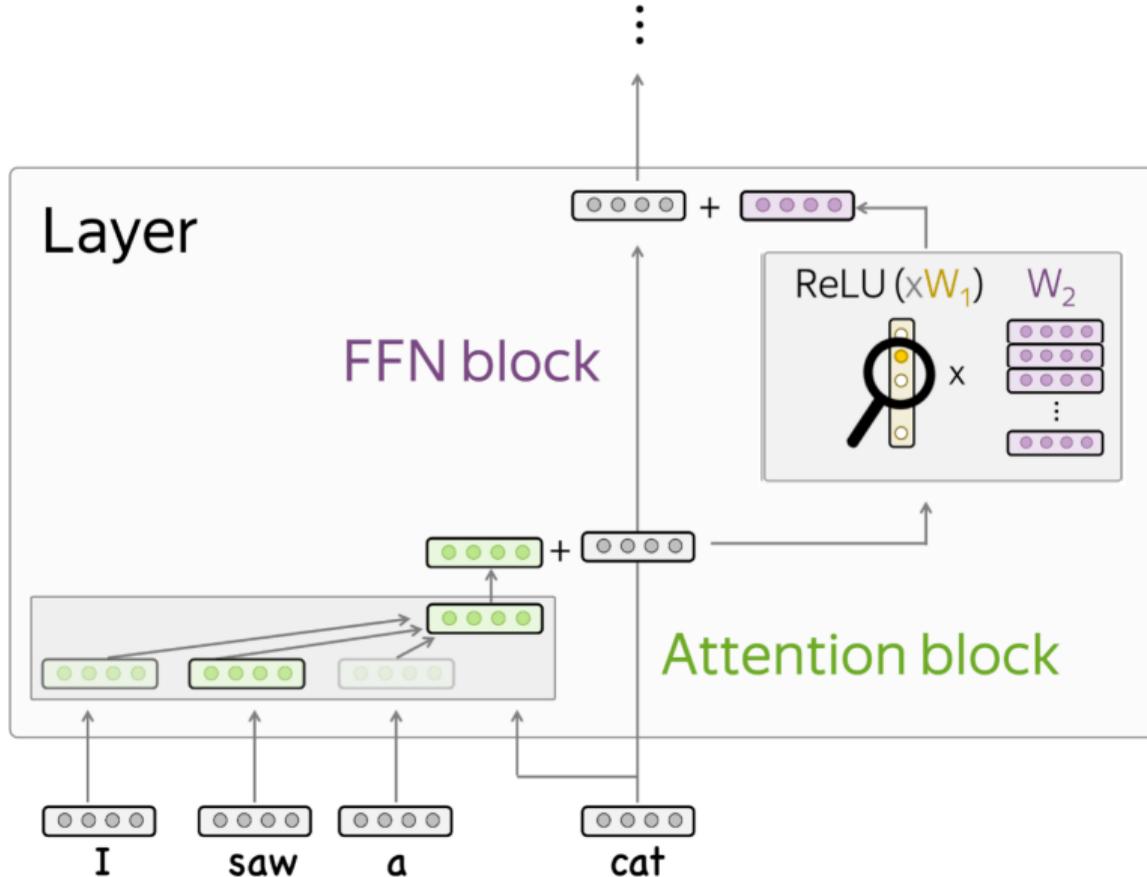
Typical self-attention patterns

Self-attention heads

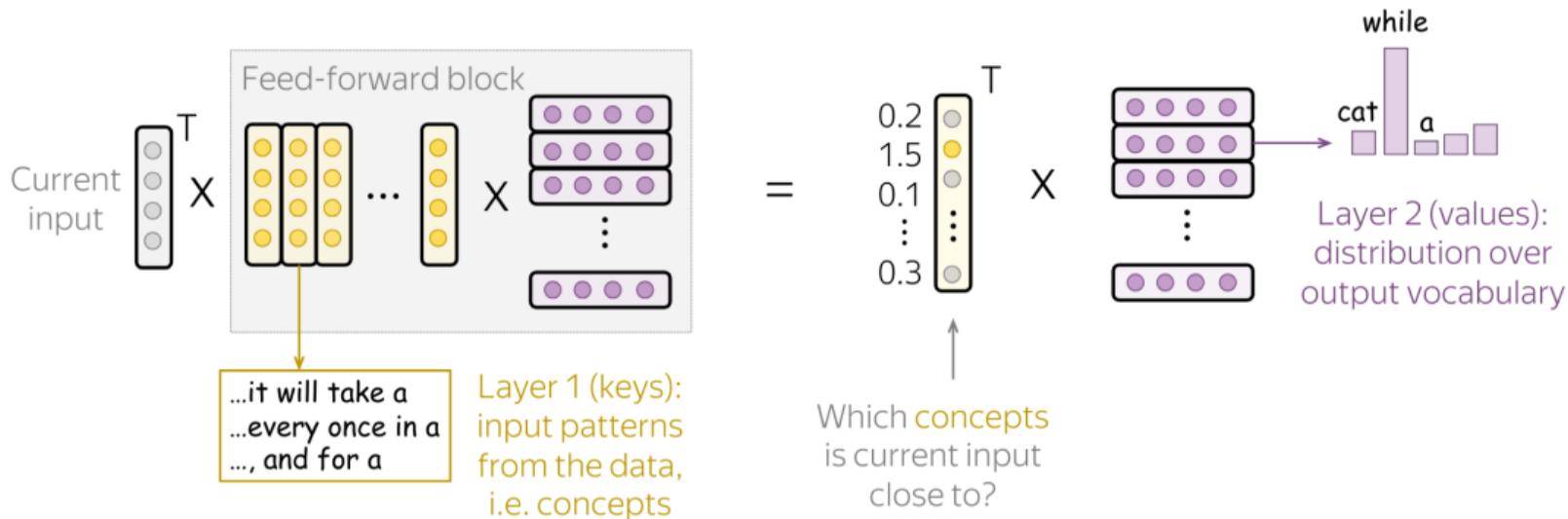


Heads that encode information correlated to semantic links in the input text

FFNs as key-value memories



FFNs as key-value memories



BERT rediscovers the classical NLP pipeline

Part of speech: I want to find more , [something] bigger or deeper . → NN (Noun)

Constituents: I want to find more , [something bigger or deeper] . → NP (Noun Phrase)

Dependencies: [I]₁ am not [sure]₂ how reliable that is , though . → nsubj (nominal subject)

Entities: The most fascinating is the maze known as [Wind Cave] . → LOC

Semantic Role Labeling: I want to [find]₁ [more , something bigger or deeper]₂ . → Agr1 (Agent)

Coreference: So [the followers]₁ waited to say anything about what [they]₂ saw . → True

BERT rediscovers the classical NLP pipeline

Part of speech:

Constituents:

Dependencies:

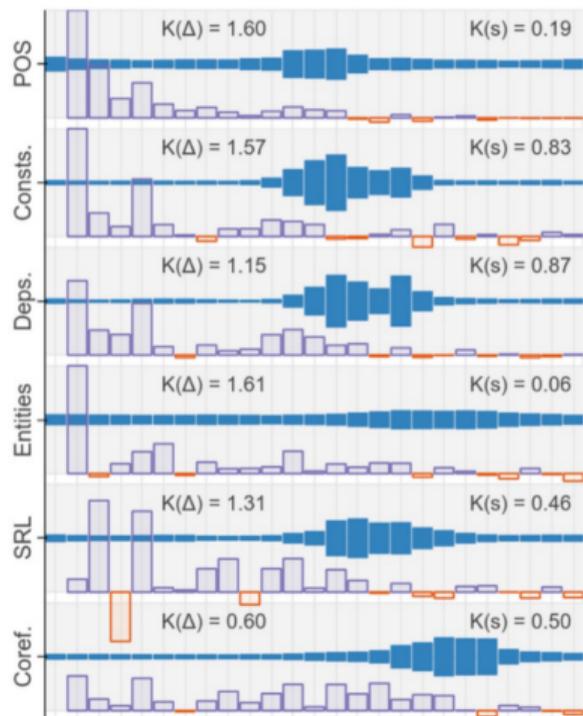
Entities:

Semantic Role
Labeling:

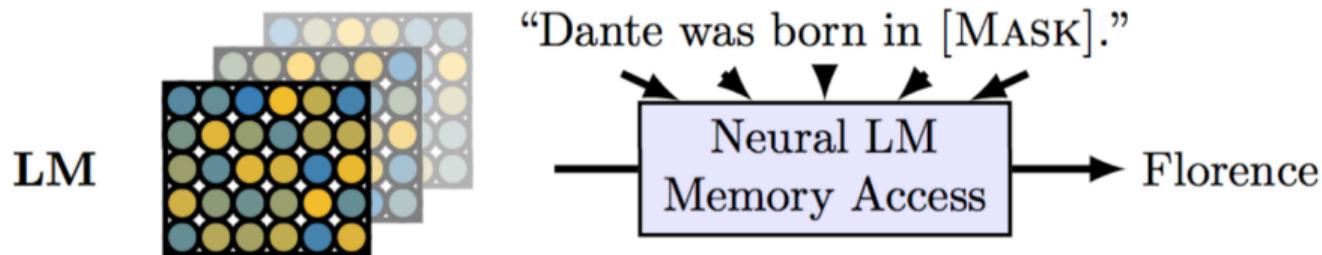
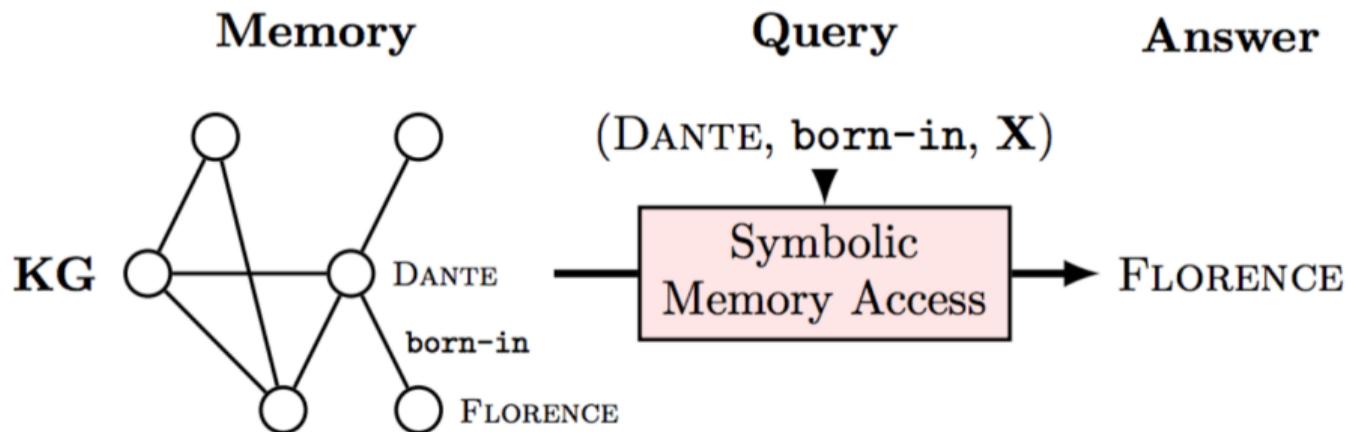
Coreference:



In classical NLP, to solve a subsequent task it was required to solve the previous one



Language models as knowledge bases



e.g. ELMo/BERT

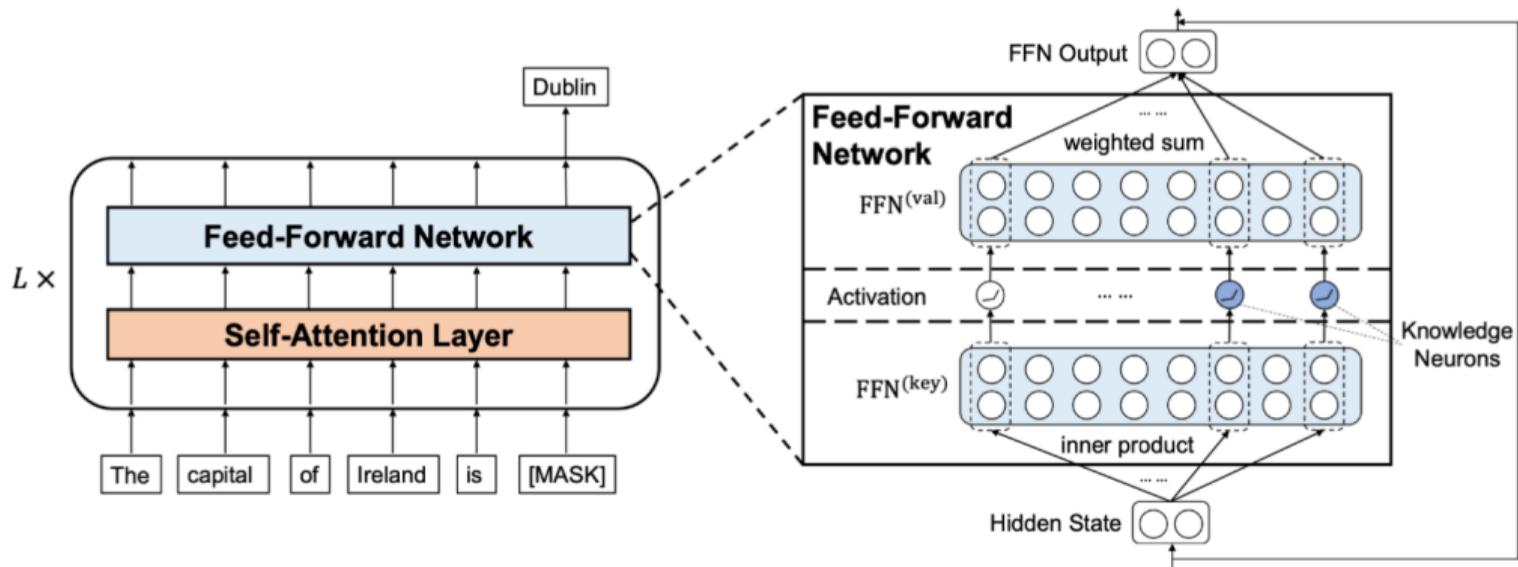
Language models as knowledge bases

Relation	Query	Answer	Generation
P19	Francesco Bartolomeo Conti was born in ____.	Florence	Rome [-1.8], Florence [-1.8], Naples [-1.9], Milan [-2.4], Bologna [-2.5]
P20	Adolphe Adam died in ____.	Paris	Paris [-0.5], London [-3.5], Vienna [-3.6], Berlin [-3.8], Brussels [-4.0]
P279	English bulldog is a subclass of ____.	dog	dogs [-0.3], breeds [-2.2], dog [-2.4], cattle [-4.3], sheep [-4.5]
P37	The official language of Mauritius is ____.	English	English [-0.6], French [-0.9], Arabic [-6.2], Tamil [-6.7], Malayalam [-7.0]
P413	Patrick Oboya plays in ____ position.	midfielder	centre [-2.0], center [-2.2], midfielder [-2.4], forward [-2.4], midfield [-2.7]
P138	Hamburg Airport is named after ____.	Hamburg	Hess [-7.0], Hermann [-7.1], Schmidt [-7.1], Hamburg [-7.5], Ludwig [-7.5]
P364	The original language of Mon oncle Benjamin is ____.	French	French [-0.2], Breton [-3.3], English [-3.8], Dutch [-4.2], German [-4.9]
P54	Dani Alves plays with ____.	Barcelona	Santos [-2.4], Porto [-2.5], Sporting [-3.1], Brazil [-3.3], Portugal [-3.7]
P106	Paul Toungui is a ____ by profession .	politician	lawyer [-1.1], journalist [-2.4], teacher [-2.7], doctor [-3.0], physician [-3.7]
P527	Sodium sulfide consists of ____.	sodium	water [-1.2], sulfur [-1.7], sodium [-2.5], zinc [-2.8], salt [-2.9]
P102	Gordon Scholes is a member of the ____ political party.	Labor	Labour [-1.3], Conservative [-1.6], Green [-2.4], Liberal [-2.9], Labor [-2.9]
P530	Kenya maintains diplomatic relations with ____.	Uganda	India [-3.0], Uganda [-3.2], Tanzania [-3.5], China [-3.6], Pakistan [-3.6]
P176	iPod Touch is produced by ____.	Apple	Apple [-1.6], Nokia [-1.7], Sony [-2.0], Samsung [-2.6], Intel [-3.1]
P30	Bailey Peninsula is located in ____.	Antarctica	Antarctica [-1.4], Bermuda [-2.2], Newfoundland [-2.5], Alaska [-2.7], Canada [-3.1]
P178	JDK is developed by ____.	Oracle	IBM [-2.0], Intel [-2.3], Microsoft [-2.5], HP [-3.4], Nokia [-3.5]
P1412	Carl III used to communicate in ____.	Swedish	German [-1.6], Latin [-1.9], French [-2.4], English [-3.0], Spanish [-3.0]
P17	Sunshine Coast, British Columbia is located in ____.	Canada	Canada [-1.2], Alberta [-2.8], Yukon [-2.9], Labrador [-3.4], Victoria [-3.4]
P39	Pope Clement VII has the position of ____ .	pope	cardinal [-2.4], Pope [-2.5], pope [-2.6], President [-3.1], Chancellor [-3.2]
P264	Joe Cocker is represented by music label ____.	Capitol	EMI [-2.6], BMG [-2.6], Universal [-2.8], Capitol [-3.2], Columbia [-3.3]
P276	London Jazz Festival is located in ____.	London	London [-0.3], Greenwich [-3.2], Chelsea [-4.0], Camden [-4.6], Stratford [-4.8]
P127	Border TV is owned by ____.	ITV	Sky [-3.1], ITV [-3.3], Global [-3.4], Frontier [-4.1], Disney [-4.3]
P103	The native language of Mammooty is ____.	Malayalam	Malayalam [-0.2], Tamil [-2.1], Telugu [-4.8], English [-5.2], Hindi [-5.6]
P495	The Sharon Cuneta Show was created in ____.	Philippines	Manila [-3.2], Philippines [-3.6], February [-3.7], December [-3.8], Argentina [-4.0]

T-Rex

Knowledge neurons in FFNs

Data: (subject, relation) \rightarrow object triplets



Conclusion

We reviewed following topics:

- main idea of transfer learning
- shift from word embeddings to words-in-context embeddings (ELMo)
- from from task-specific to unified models (GPT-I, BERT)
- analysis of BERT model