# A Pointer Network-based Approach for Joint Extraction and Detection of Multi-Label Multi-Class Intents

 $1$ Ankan Mullick  $1$ Sombit Bose  $1$ Abhilash Nandy  ${}^{2}$ Gajula Sai Chaitanya and  ${}^{1}$ Pawan Goyal

{ankanm, sbcs.sombit.24, nandyabhilash}@kgpian.iitkgp.ac.in gsaichai@qti.qualcomm.com pawang@cse.iitkgp.ac.in <sup>1</sup>Computer Science and Engineering Department, IIT Kharagpur, India <sup>2</sup>Qualcomm, India

### Abstract

In task-oriented dialogue systems, intent detection is crucial for interpreting user queries and providing appropriate responses. Existing research primarily addresses simple queries with a single intent, lacking effective systems for handling complex queries with multiple intents and extracting different intent spans. Additionally, there is a notable absence of multilingual, multi-intent datasets. This study addresses three critical tasks: extracting multiple intent spans from queries, detecting multiple intents, and developing a multilingual multi-label intent dataset. We introduce a novel multi-label multi-class intent detection dataset (MLMCID-dataset) curated from existing benchmark datasets. We also propose a pointer network-based architecture (MLMCID) to extract intent spans and detect multiple intents with coarse and fine-grained labels in the form of sextuplets. Comprehensive analysis demonstrates the superiority of our pointer network based system over baseline approaches in terms of accuracy and F1-score across various datasets.

### 1 Introduction

Task-oriented dialogue systems have become a major field of study in recent years, significantly advancing the capabilities of Natural Language Understanding (NLU). These systems execute command-based tasks, demonstrating versatility in handling diverse user queries through a set of predefined skills, known as intents. Users interact with dialogue systems to fulfill their needs, and intent detection plays a pivotal role in comprehending user queries and generating appropriate responses in task-oriented conversations, thereby maintaining user engagement. The task of intent detection involves identifying the *intent(s)* within a given statement or query, which represents the underlying meaning conveyed by the user. For example, the query "How is the weather today?" would be associated with the GetW eather intent. Dialogue systems rely on detecting these intents to understand user queries and provide suitable answers.

However, in real-world conversation, a query or a statement often contain multiple different intents. For instance, as shown in Fig. [1,](#page-1-0) for the query (from Facebook English dataset): "remind me to pick up contact lenses tomorrow, set the alarm for 5 mins and 30 seconds", contains two distinct intent categories with following spans: 'remind me to pick up contact lenses tomorrow' ('set reminder' intent) and 'set the alarm for 5 mins and 30 seconds' ('set alarm' intent). Both of these are fine intent categories. Multiple similar fine intents can be merged to create one coarse intent as explained in Table [1.](#page-2-0) Thus, the above query contains 'reminder\_service' and 'change\_alarm\_content' coarse intents as shown in Fig. [1.](#page-1-0) In case of multiple intents in a sentence, one intent which is dominant and most important in that sentence can be termed as 'Primary' intent while the other intents can be considered 'Non-Primary'. For example, in the query (From Mix-SNIPS dataset) "How is the weather today? It would be lovely to go for a movie" is a combination of two simple sentences 'How is the weather today?' and 'It would be lovely to go for a movie', whose intents are GetW eather and  $BookMovieTicket$  respectively. Out of the two possible intents,  $BookMovieTicket$  is primary (primary and main focus of the sentence) and GetW eather becomes non-primary. It would require an intent span extraction algorithm to extract multiple intent spans and a multi-label, multi-class classifier to detect different fine and coarse intents.

Over the past few years, researchers concentrate on intent identification across different domains. Flexible and adaptive intent class detection models have been developed for dynamic and evolving realworld applications. [\(Liao et al.,](#page-9-0) [2023;](#page-9-0) [Kuzborskij](#page-9-1)

<span id="page-1-0"></span>

<b>Input Sentence</b>	coarse intent 1	coarse intent 2 fine Intent 1		fine Intent 2
I tried withdrawing money in another country and the exchange rate was wrong. What should $I$ exchange rate do if my card is stolen? (BANKING)	query	<b>Card Problem</b>	wrong exchange rate for cash withdrawal	lost or stolen card
remind me to pick up contact lenses tomorrow, set the alarm for 5 mins and 30 seconds (FACEBOOK)	reminder service ontent	change alarm c	set reminder	set alarm
Show me walking directions to MOMA and book a cab (SNIPS)	<b>Location Service App Service</b>		GetDirections	RequestRide

Figure 1: Examples of multi-label multi intent datasets (SNIPS, Facebook and BANKING)

[et al.,](#page-9-1) [2013;](#page-9-1) [Scheirer et al.,](#page-10-0) [2012;](#page-10-0) [Degirmenci and](#page-9-2) [Karal,](#page-9-2) [2022\)](#page-9-2) focus on streaming data to identify evolving new classes using incremental learning. SENNE [Cai et al.](#page-8-0) [\(2019\)](#page-8-0), IFSTC [\(Xia et al.,](#page-11-0) [2021\)](#page-11-0), SENC-MaS [\(Mu et al.,](#page-9-3) [2017b\)](#page-9-3), SENCForest [\(Mu](#page-9-4) [et al.,](#page-9-4) [2017a\)](#page-9-4), ECSMiner [\(Masud et al.,](#page-9-5) [2010\)](#page-9-5) aim at SENC (streaming emerging new class) problem on intents on streams. [\(Sun et al.,](#page-10-1) [2016\)](#page-10-1) work on emergence and disappearance of intents. [\(Wang](#page-11-1) [et al.,](#page-11-1) [2020\)](#page-11-1) uses high dimensional data for streaming classification. [\(Mullick et al.,](#page-10-2) [2022d\)](#page-10-2) identifies multiple novel intents using a clustering framework. [\(Na et al.,](#page-10-3) [2018;](#page-10-3) [Zhan et al.,](#page-11-2) [2021;](#page-11-2) [Larson et al.,](#page-9-6) [2019;](#page-9-6) [Yan et al.,](#page-11-3) [2020;](#page-11-3) [Zhou et al.,](#page-11-4) [2022;](#page-11-4) [Firdaus](#page-9-7) [et al.,](#page-9-7) [2023\)](#page-9-7) detect new intents in the form of outlier detection. Unlike the previous single-intent detection models, which can easily utilize the utterance's sole intent to guide slot prediction, multi-intent SLU (Spoken Language Understanding) encounters the challenge of multiple intents, presenting a unique and worthwhile area of research. [\(Mul](#page-10-4)[lick et al.,](#page-10-4) [2023,](#page-10-4) [2022b;](#page-10-5) [Mullick,](#page-9-8) [2023b,](#page-9-8)[a;](#page-9-9) [Mullick](#page-10-6) [et al.,](#page-10-6) [2022a\)](#page-10-6) explore intent detection in different directions. AGIF [\(Qin et al.,](#page-10-7) [2020\)](#page-10-7), GL-GIN [\(Qin](#page-10-8) [et al.,](#page-10-8) [2021\)](#page-10-8), [\(Gangadharaiah,](#page-9-10) [2019\)](#page-9-10), [\(Song et al.,](#page-10-9) [2022\)](#page-10-9) work on multiple intent identification problem but these approaches do not detect the sentence spans related to different intents and also do not distinguish the primary and non-primary intents. Based on Convert [\(Henderson et al.,](#page-9-11) [2019\)](#page-9-11) backed framework, [\(Coope et al.,](#page-8-1) [2020\)](#page-8-1) extract spans for different slots but does not extract and identify multiple intents. [\(Mullick et al.,](#page-10-10) [2024;](#page-10-10) [Guha et al.,](#page-9-12) [2021;](#page-9-12) [Mullick et al.,](#page-10-11) [2022c\)](#page-10-11) focus on entity extraction in different forms. Previous research also includes both pipeline-based approaches [\(Jiang et al.,](#page-9-13) [2023\)](#page-9-13) and end-to-end methods [\(Ma et al.,](#page-9-14) [2021;](#page-9-14) [Cui et al.,](#page-9-15) [2019;](#page-9-15) [Ma et al.,](#page-9-16) [2022\)](#page-9-16). However, our work is different from the fact that we identify multiple intent spans along with their corresponding fine and coarse labels.

Our work differs from the fact that, we extract multiple intent spans from a given sentence and detect its coarse and fine intent labels. In this paper, we seek to address the following research questions in the field of multi-label multi-class intent detection with span extraction:

1. We introduce a novel multi-label multi-class intent detection dataset (MLMCID-dataset) utilizing a diverse set of existing datasets with various intent sizes in multilingual settings (English and non-English languages), including coarse and finegrained intent labeling along with primary and nonprimary intent marking.

2. We thereafter, build a pointer network based encoder-decoder framework to extract multiple intent spans from the given query.

3. We propose a feed-forward network based intent detection module (MLMCID - Multi-Label Multi-Class Intent Detection) to automatically detect multiple primary and non-primary intents for coarse and fine categories in a sextuplet form. We evaluate the performance of MLMCID for full and few shot-settings across several MLMCID datasets. 4. We experiment with different LLMs (Llama2, GPT) to assess their efficacy, comparing them with our approach, and providing a detailed qualitative analysis along with a specialized loss function for multi-label multi-class intent detection.

Empirical findings on various MLMCID datasets demonstrate that our pointer network based RoBERTa model surpasses other baselines methods including LLMs, achieving a higher accuracy with an improvement in macro-F1.

## 2 Dataset

We conduct different experiments to evaluate our framework on various datasets - all of which are benchmark datasets in NLU domain. We consider three different sizes of the datasets (as per intent class count - mentioned within bracket) -

(i) *Small*: a) SNIPS (10 intents) [\(Coucke et al.,](#page-9-17) [2018\)](#page-9-17), b) ATIS (21 intents) [\(Tur et al.,](#page-10-12) [2010\)](#page-10-12), c) Facebook Multi-lingual (12 intents) [\(Schuster et al.,](#page-10-13) [2018\)](#page-10-13) (consisting of the comparable corpus of English, Spanish and Thai data), abbreviated as Fb.

(ii) *Medium*: a) HWU (64 intents) [\(Liu et al.,](#page-9-18) [2019a\)](#page-9-18), b) BANKING (77 intents) [\(Casanueva](#page-8-2) [et al.,](#page-8-2) [2020\)](#page-8-2).

(iii) *Large*: a) CLINC (150 intents) [\(Larson et al.,](#page-9-6) [2019\)](#page-9-6).

Intents of similar domains which convey a similar broader meaning and are manually grouped together to make coarse-grained labels from original fine-grained labels  $<sup>1</sup>$  $<sup>1</sup>$  $<sup>1</sup>$ . Table 1 shows an exam-</sup> ple of Facebook-English (Fb-en) combining multiple fine intents (like - 'cancel reminder', 'set reminder', 'show reminders') which are closely similar and convey similar broader meaning of 'reminder service' so these are grouped together to form one single broad coarse grained intent label - 'reminder\_service' and an example of SNIPS combining multiple fine intents (like - 'GetTrafficInformation', 'ShareETA') are merged into one single course intent class ('Traffic\_update'). Finally, we end up with course intent class of 4 for SNIPS, 5 for Facebook, 18 for HWU, 12 for Banking and 1[2](#page-2-2)0 for CLINC<sup>2</sup>. Due to space shortage, the details are in Appendix Table [12](#page-14-0) and [13.](#page-15-0)

<span id="page-2-0"></span>

Table 1: Fine-Course Intent for Fb-en and SNIPS

All the above datasets are of single intent. In order to validate the broad applicability of the model, we follow the MixAtis and MixSNIPS datageneration guidelines [\(Qin et al.,](#page-10-7) [2020\)](#page-10-7) to prepare multi-intent datasets for Fb, HWU, BANKING and CLINC. We also use MixATIS and MixSNIPS datasets [\(Qin et al.,](#page-10-7) [2020\)](#page-10-7). All datasets are in English except for Facebook - which contains Spanish and Thai also along with English. Three annotators are selected after several discussions and conditions of fulfilling criteria like annotators should have domain knowledge expertise along with a good working proficiency in English. Each formed sentence instance is manually checked for correctness, coherence, grammatically meaningful and filter out many sentences which do not qualify. Annotators mark Multiple intents and their respective spans within the specified sentence. Annotators

also point out which intent is *Primary*[3](#page-2-3) and which one is *non-Primary*. If *Primary* and *non-Primary* intents can not be distinguished then both of the intents are considered as *Primary*.

<span id="page-2-5"></span>

<b>Dataset</b>	<b>Train</b>	Dev	<b>Test</b>
Mix-SNIPS	11000	2197	2198
Mix-ATIS	13161	600	829
<b>FB-EN</b>	800	100	100
<b>FB-ES</b>	800	100	100
FB-TH	800	100	100
<b>HWU64</b>	780	97	97
<b>BANKING</b>	1156	144	144
<b>CLINC</b>	1353	169	169
Yahoo	498	62	162
<b>MPQA</b>	284	36	136

Table 2: MLMCID-dataset statistics

To show the real world applicability of our framework, we also experiment on two different practi-cal datasets: a) MPQA<sup>[4](#page-2-4)</sup> (Multi Perspective Question Answering) [\(Mullick et al.,](#page-10-14) [2016,](#page-10-14) [2017\)](#page-10-15), b) Yahoo News article [\(Mullick et al.,](#page-10-14) [2016,](#page-10-14) [2017\)](#page-10-15). Intent can be broadly categorised as opinionated or factual. Each sentence from MPQA and Yahoo news articles is marked as opinion and fact. Further, opinions can be of four different subcategory [\(Asher et al.,](#page-8-3) [2009\)](#page-8-3) - 'Report', 'Judgment', 'Advise' and 'Sentiment' and facts can be subcategorised into five types [\(Soni et al.,](#page-10-16) [2014\)](#page-10-16) - 'Report', 'Knowledge', 'Belief', 'Doubt' and 'Perception'. So coarse intent can be sub-categorized in four opinionated fine-intents and five factual fine-intents. In MPQA and Yahoo news article, annotators are told to identify different clauses of compound and complex sentences and mark the fine label intent categories for opinion and fact. In all the annotation tasks - initial labeling is done by two annotators and any annotation discrepancy is checked and resolved by the third annotator after discussing with others. Overall inter-annotator agreement is 0.89 which is considered good as per [\(Landis and Koch,](#page-9-19) [1977\)](#page-9-19). The detail statistics of train-dev-test divisions of different dataset intent dataset are shown in Table [2.](#page-2-5) We term this dataset as MLMCID-dataset.

We use the Facebook data from **MLMCID**dataset comprising 1000 text instances and corresponding intent labels are annotated for its 3 vari-

<span id="page-2-1"></span> $1$ Course intent is a combination of multiple similar meaning or closely matching finer intents of higher hierarchy. One coarse-grained intent is a cluster of multiple closely matching fine-grained labels.

<span id="page-2-2"></span><sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>For ATIS we keep fine intents as it is, without coarse intents due to high dis-similarity among intents

<span id="page-2-3"></span> $3B$ etween two intents, we define one as primary which is more important than others and main focus of the sentence

<span id="page-2-4"></span><sup>4</sup> https://mpqa.cs.pitt.edu/



Figure 2: Pointer Network Based multi-label, multi-class intent detection (MLMCID) architecture

ations - English, Spanish and Thai. The text instances of English, Spanish and Thai languages are termed as Facebook (English), Facebook (Spanish) and Facebook (Thai) dataset respectively.

#### 3 Problem Definition

To formally describe the multi-label, multi-class intent detection (MLMCID) problem setting, let there be an input sentence  $S_i = \{w_1, w_2, ..., w_n\}$  contains  $n$  words. The model aims to extract multiple intent spans along with their coarse and fine classes in the form of a sextuple,  $ST = \{out_i | out_i =$  $[(st_i^{p_1}, e_i^{p_1}), in_i^{c_1}, in_i^{f_1}, (st_i^{p_2}, e_i^{p_2}), in_i^{c_2}, in_i^{f_2}]\}_{i=1}^{|ST|};$ 

where  $t_i$  denotes the  $i^{th}$  triplet and  $|ST|$  denotes the length of the sextuple set.  $st_i^{p_1}$  and  $st_i^{p_2}$  represents the beginning position of first intent span and second intent span respectively for the  $i^{th}$  sextuple. Similarly,  $e_i^{p_1}$  and  $e_i^{p_2}$  denotes the end position of first intent span and second intent span for the  $i<sup>th</sup>$ sextuple. So  $(st_i^{p_1} \text{ and } e_i^{p_1})$  mark the first intent span for the *i*<sup>th</sup> sextuple. Similarly,  $(st_i^{p_2} \text{ and } e_i^{p_2})$ mark the second intent span for the  $i^{th}$  sextuple.  $in_i^{c_1}$  and  $in_i^{f_1}$  represents the possible coarse and fine intent class of the first intent span. Similarly,  $in_i^{c_2}$  and  $in_i^{f_2}$  represents the possible coarse and fine intent class of the second intent span.  $p_1$  and  $p_2$  denote the two pointer network models. Pointer Network Model has the following advantages: it is a joint model for entity extraction and relation classification. Pointer network model can detect an intent in a sentence in a form of triplet (intent span,

coarse intent label, fine intent label) even if there is an overlap with other intents.  $c_1$  and  $c_2$  mark the course labels.  $f_1$  and  $f_2$  indicates fine labels.  $out_i$ is the  $i^{th}$  output sextuple.

### 4 Solution Approach

For the task of multi-label, multi-class intent detection (MLMCID), our goal is to jointly extract the intent spans along with detecting multiple coarse and fine intents. Our MLMCID output representation is a sextuple format. We employ pointer network based architecture for joint extraction of the sextuple. Following are the different components of solution framework approach:

#### 4.1 Encoder

We use four different embeddings in the encoder block (for English language datasets): a) BERT ('bert-base-uncased') [\(Devlin et al.,](#page-9-20) [2019\)](#page-9-20), b) RoBERTa ('roberta-base-uncased') [\(Liu et al.,](#page-9-21) [2019b\)](#page-9-21), c) DistilBERT [\(Sanh et al.,](#page-10-17) [2019\)](#page-10-17) and d) Electra [\(Clark et al.,](#page-8-4) [2020\)](#page-8-4). For non-English language datasets (Facebook Thai and Spanish), we utilise mBERT (multilingual BERT) [\(Pires](#page-10-18) [et al.,](#page-10-18) [2019\)](#page-10-18), XLM-R (XLM-RoBERTa) [\(Conneau](#page-8-5) [et al.,](#page-8-5) [2020\)](#page-8-5) and mDistilBERT [\(Sanh et al.,](#page-10-17) [2019\)](#page-10-17). mBERT architecture pre-trained on Wikipedia articles from 104 languages. XLM-RoBERTa is a large multi-lingual language model based on RoBERTa, trained on 2.5TB of filtered CommonCrawl data. mDistilBERT is a distilled version of mBERT containing 134 million parameters.

Let,  $S_i$  be the  $i^{th}$  sentence containing  $w_1, w_2 ...$  $w_n$  words. After sentence encoding, the encoder generates a vector  $(\mathbf{V}_i^E)$  from the  $i^{th}$  sentence  $S_i$ . It is shown in the 'Encoder Block' in Fig 2.

#### 4.2 Decoder

We apply a Pointer Network-based approach along with LSTM-based sequence generator, attention model and FFN (Feed-Forward Network) architecture (Similar to [\(Nayak and Ng,](#page-10-19) [2020\)](#page-10-19)) to identify intent spans and predict the coarse and fine intent labels. Different blocks are as following:

LSTM-based Sequence Generator: The sequence generator structure is based on an LSTM layer with hidden dimension  $D<sub>h</sub>$  to produce the sequence of two intent spans. Using the attention layer sentence encoding  $(a_i^E)$ , pointer network based previous tuple  $(tup_i)$  and hidden vectors  $(h_{i-1}^D)$  as input to generate the hidden representation of the current token  $(h_i^D)$ . The  $tup_0 = (\overrightarrow{0})$ denotes the dummy tuple. Following are LSTM outcomes:

$$
\mathbf{t}\mathbf{u}\mathbf{p}_{i} = \sum_{j=0}^{i-1} \mathbf{t}\mathbf{u}\mathbf{p}_{j} \tag{1}
$$

$$
\mathbf{h}_i^D = \text{LSTM}(\mathbf{a}_i^E \|\mathbf{t}\mathbf{u}\mathbf{p}_{i-1}, \mathbf{h}_{i-1}^D)
$$
 (2)

$$
\hat{st}_i^1 = w_{st}^1 h_i^m + b_{st}^1, \quad \hat{e}_i^1 = w_e^1 h_i^m + b_e^1 \tag{3}
$$

$$
st_i^{p_1} = \text{softmax}(\hat{st}_i^1), \quad e_i^{p_1} = \text{softmax}(\hat{e}_i^1) \tag{4}
$$

Attention Modeling: Utilizing [Bahdanau et al.](#page-8-6) [\(2014\)](#page-8-6) attention algorithm we use previous tuple  $(tup_{i-1})$  and hidden vector  $(h_{i-1}^D)$  as input at timestamp  $t$  to produce the attention weighted context vector  $(a_i^E)$  for the current input sentence.

Pointer Network: A Bi-LSTM layer with hidden dimension  $D<sub>H</sub>$ , followed by two FFN (Feed Forward Networks), constitutes a pointer network. Here we use two-pointer networks for extracting two intent spans. We concatenate  $\mathbf{h}_i^D$  and  $\mathbf{V}_i^E$ (obtained from the encoding layer) to provide the input of a Bi-LSTM model (forward and backward LSTM), which provides a hidden representation to be fed to FFN models. Two FFNs with softmax provide scores between 0 and 1, the start  $(st)$  and end (e) index of one intent span.

where  $w_{st}^1$  and  $w_e^1$  are the weight parameters of FFN.  $b_{st}^1$  and  $b_e^1$  are the bias parameters of the feedforward layers (FFN).  $\hat{s}t_i^1$  $\hat{e}_i^1$  and  $\hat{e}_i^1$  are normalized

probabilities of the  $i^{th}$  source sentence.  $st_i^{p_1}$  and  $e_i^{p_1}$  denotes the begin and end token of the first intent span in the first pointer network model of the  $i<sup>th</sup>$  source sentence. Then, the second pointer network model extracts the second entity. After concatenating the first Bi-LSTM output vector  $(\mathbf{h}_i^m)$ with decoder sequence generator output  $(\mathbf{h}_i^D)$  and sentence encoding  $(\mathbf{V}_i^E)$ , we feed them to the second pointer network to obtain the position of the begin and end tokens of the second intent span. Together, these two pointer networks produce the feature vectors  $t u p_i$  containing intent span 1 (span<sup>1</sup>) and span 2 ( $span_i^2$ ).

**Intent Detector:** We concatenate  $\text{tup}_i$  with  $\text{h}_i^D$ and pass it through a feed-forward network (FFN) with softmax to produce the normalized probabilities over intent sets and thereby predict the coarse  $(in_i^{c_1}, in_i^{c_2})$  and fine  $(in_i^{f_1}, in_i^{f_2})$  intent labels for first and second spans.

### 4.3 Baselines

We employ different open-source LLMs with prompt based fine-tuning on the training set to generate the two different intent spans and detect coarse and fine intents.

**Llama2:**<sup>[5](#page-4-0)</sup> We apply Llama2-7b ([\(Touvron et al.,](#page-10-20) [2023\)](#page-10-20)) using Quantized Low-Rank Adaptation (QLoRA) [\(Dettmers et al.,](#page-9-22) [2023\)](#page-9-22) (to optimize training efficiency) for supervised fine-tuning using MLMCID-Datasets.

GPT: We also use state-of-the-art large-size LLMs, developed by OpenAI: GPT-3.5 [\(gpt\)](#page-8-7)<sup>[6](#page-4-1)</sup> and GPT-4 [\(OpenAI,](#page-10-21) [2023\)](#page-10-21) [7](#page-4-2) with example based prompting to extract intent spans and identify coarse and fine intents (Computed on April, 2024).

#### 5 Experiments

To validate our proposed framework, we compare the Pointer Network Model (PNM) of MLMCID while taking various embeddings as input: BERT, RoBERTa, DistilBERT, and Electra on all datasets. We also explore different large language models (Llama2-7b, GPT-3.5 and GPT-4) to check how effectively they can extract multiple intent spans and detect different intents. After that, we experiment with different variations of overall best performing RoBERTa model - varying the training data

<span id="page-4-0"></span><sup>5</sup> <https://ai.meta.com/llama/>

<span id="page-4-1"></span><sup>6</sup> https://chat.openai.com/

<span id="page-4-2"></span><sup>7</sup> https://openai.com/gpt-4

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<b>Dataset</b>		$\overline{\text{BERT}}$ (p, av)	RoBERTa (p, av)	DistilBERT $(p, av)$	Electra $(p, av)$	$\overline{\text{Llam}}$ a2 (p, av)	$GPT-3.5$ (p, av)	$GPT-4$ (p, av)
<b>MIX SNIPS</b>	A	89.2.80.2	90.0.81.9	89.2.80.2	89.8.80.7	48.3.41.2	60.4.55.8	64.7.61.1
	F1	89.0.80.1	89.7.82.1	88.5.79.4	89.5.80.5	42.6.40.5	60.2.56.2	62.5.60.3
<b>FACEBOOK</b>	A	98.0.80.8	98.5.81.2	97.2.80.2	97.4.80.5	21.0.19.2	70.7.62.1	75.6.76.5
(English)	F1	98.2.88.2	92.8.82.8	92.8,82.2	92.8.83.1	20.6, 19.6	65.3,60.8	72.6.70.5
<b>MIX ATIS</b>	A	71.3.64.6	70.2.63.5	72.2.63.6	70.6.59.7	16.9,15.0	29.5.32.5	38.7.32.8
	F1	51.7.38.6	53.4.38.8	50.3,35.8	46.3,35.5	15.7.14.0	27.2,31.5	36.8,32.6
<b>HWU64</b>	А	83.5.68.0	85.5.70.0	82.5.66.2	83.0.66.2	35.8.38.1	56.0.52.3	59.1.53.1
	F1	81.9.65.9	80.0.63.7	79.9.64.1	79.4.62.5	32.9.30.5	50.6,51.2	57.3.56.4
<b>BANKING</b>	A	84.0.76.9	85.4.78.5	78.8.70.9	79.9.71.8	31.5.31.6	25.4.20.5	47.9.47.4
	F1	82.7.71.4	85.2.75.2	79.2.67.9	79.4.68.1	28.2.29.1	20.2.20.3	45.2.43.6
<b>CLINC</b>	A	86.3.72.7	92.3.81.3	79.8.68.0	88.7.71.7	57.5.55.9	58.7.57.2	64.3.56.6
	F1	77.1.64.1	88.3.75.5	71.7.60.0	81.3.63.0	51.2.50.3	56.3.55.3	63.7.54.3
Overall Average	A	84.1.75.7	88.2.78.5	82.2.73.2	85.7.72.2	34.1.37.0	49.2.38.1	60.6.53.3
	F1	80.8.73.9	85.2.75.8	81.4.70.6	80.9.71.3	30.5.32.8	44.9.41.4	58.7.53.6

Table 3: Overall Accuracy (A) and Macro F1-score (F1) in (%) of different models in **MLMCID** and LLMs for coarse labels (on English Datasets) - primary intent (p) and average(av). (The best outcomes are marked in Bold)

size to understand how much training data is required for decent performance. We also perform zero-shot and few-shot experiments to check the approach's usefulness in the presence of minimal data. Tables [3,](#page-5-0) [4](#page-5-1) and [5](#page-6-0) show the overall performances of different models for the English (Mix-SNIPS, Mix-ATIS, Facebook, HWU, BANKING and CLINC) and Non-English (Facebook Thai and Spanish) datasets. We use prediction accuracy and macro F1-score as evaluation metrics. Table [3](#page-5-0) and [4](#page-5-1) infer performances on primary and overall average of coarse and fine intent labels on English datasets. Following are the details of our findings:

Findings 1: For coarse label intent detection, as shown in Table [3,](#page-5-0) RoBERTa (with PNM) in MLM-CID achieves superior performances in terms of accuracy and F1-score across all datasets of different intent sizes (Mix-SNIPS, Mix-ATIS, HWU, BANKING, CLINC) for both primary intent detection and overall average except for Facebook English where BERT is more effective in terms of F1-score for both primary and overall average.

Findings 2: Similar to coarse intent detection, for fine label intent detection, RoBERTa (with PNM) in MLMCID also produce better results than others

in terms of accuracy and F1-score for most of the cases across all English datasets except for Facebook English dataset, where Electra provides better outcome in terms of accuracy and F1-score for both primary and overall intent detection. It is shown in Table [4.](#page-5-1)

Findings 3: For all English datasets, BERT, RoBERTa, DistilBERT and Electra performs almost similar with decent accuracy and F1-score which signifies the utility of pointer network model based MLMCID architecture.

Findings 4: We observe that the LLMs (Llama-2- 7b, GPT-3.5, GPT-4) fall behind in performance from Pointer Network based approaches with different encoders, even though they are much larger than our proposed framework, thus strengthening the need for such a specialized MLMCID architecture. Llama2-7b performs poorly among three LLMs - this may be due to the fact of less contextual understanding in this specific task. More details in Appendix [A.](#page-11-5)

Findings 5: RoBERTa with PNM in MLMCID performs better than any other models for overall average accuracy and F1-score across all English datasets for both primary and average course and

<span id="page-5-1"></span>

Table 4: Overall Accuracy (A) and Macro F1-score (F1) in (%) of different models in **MLMCID** and LLMs for fine labels (on English Datasets) - primary intent (p) and average(av). (The best outcomes are marked in Bold)

<span id="page-6-0"></span>

<b>Dataset</b>			$\overline{\text{mBERT}}$ (p, av)	$\overline{\text{XL}}$ M-R (p, av)	mDistilBERT $(p, av)$	Llama- $2(p, av)$	$\overline{\text{GPT-3.5}}$ (p, av)	$GPT-4$ (p, av)
	Coarse	A	98.0.80.7	98.5.81.5	98.0.80.2	51.2.39.9	64.6.61.6	70.7.75.6
<b>FACEBOOK</b>		F1	91.3.82.2	92.5.82.7	91.1.82.9	47.2.39.6	62.6.61.3	69.4.69.3
(Spanish)	Fine	A	96.7.80.0	97.5.81.0	96.5.80.2	38.3.27.2	57.6.56.6	69.7.74.2
		F1	84.6.80.0	86.0.81.7	84.3.76.8	36.2,30.6	55.4.55.0	66.2,65.6
	Coarse	A	96.5.79.8	97.0.80.0	96.8.79.0	28.0.24.2	69.7.58.6	73.4.71.5
<b>FACEBOOK</b>		F1	88.4.75.8	96.6.78.8	94.2.73.4	25.6.24.8	67.8.57.2	71.6.69.3
(Thai)	Fine	A	96.0.79.5	96.5.79.7	95.5.77.2	16.3.15.2	18.2.18.7	68.7.64.9
		F1	84.1.74.2	82.5.75.5	68.8.62.7	15.7.14.9	17.9.16.8	59.2.58.7
	Coarse	A	97.2.80.3	97.8.80.8	97.4.79.6	39.6.32.1	67.2.60.1	72.1.73.6
Average		F1	89.8.79.0	94.6.80.8	92.6.78.2	36.4.32.2	65.2.59.3	70.5.69.3
	Fine	$\mathsf{A}$	97.3.79.7	97.0.80.8	96.0.78.7	27.3.21.2	37.9.37.7	69.2.69.6
		F1	84.3.77.1	84.3.78.6	76.5.69.8	25.9.22.8	36.7.35.9	62.7.62.2

Table 5: Overall Accuracy (A) and Macro F1 (F1) in (%) of different models in MLMCID and LLMs for coarse and fine grained labels of Facebook Spanish and Thai datasets - primary intent (p) and overall average(av). (The best outcomes are marked in Bold)

fine intent detection after intent spans extraction.

Findings 6: For non-English languages like Spanish (Facebook) and Thai (Facebook) datasets , we observe that for both fine and coarse grained intent labels, XLM-R and mBERT both produce good results but XLM-R outperforms mBERT in all aspects across all datasets and overall for both primary intent detection and overall average intent detection with intent span extraction.

Findings 7: To check the effectivity of span extraction by pointer network, we vary the similarity (extracted intent span vs actual intent span) threshold utilise that extracted span to check the overall accuracy. We check for 50% - 90% similarity threshold range and overall framework (RoBERTA with PNM) accuracies (for both primary and average intent) across all datasets for coarse and fine intent labels are shown in Table [6](#page-6-1) and [7.](#page-6-2) It is seen a good performance even with 50% similarity which shows the efficacy of the system.

#### Ablation Studies

1. K-shot setting: To evaluate the RoBERTa based PNM model of MLMCID architecture, we utilize K samples for all English datasets where  $K = 5$ (5-shot) and 10 (10-shot) for coarse and fine intent labels. The accuracy and F1-score of primary and average intents are shown in Table [9.](#page-7-0) This shows even with very limited number of data-points (like in 5-shot), the system is able to achieve a decent performance across different datasets.

2. Practical Datasets: We test the trained RoBERTa models with PNM (using SNIPS, BANKING and CLINC dataset) in MLMCID to evaluate on external MPQA and Yahoo datasets. We also check LLMs - Llama2-7b (vanilla and finetuned), GPT-3.5 and GPT-4 on MPQA and Yahoo but RoBERTa based PNM in MLMCID outperfomrs LLMs in most of the cases and show decent performance as shown in Table [8.](#page-7-1) It is seen that, for Llama2-7b vanilla model performs poorly and

<span id="page-6-1"></span>

Th	Dataset (primary (p) and average (av) intent) in $\%$							
	<b>MIX SNIPS</b>	FB en	FB es	FB th	<b>MIX ATIS</b>	<b>HWU64</b>	<b>BANKING</b>	<b>CLINC</b>
50 %	89.2.80.9	96.0.78.5	94.5.77.4	89.9.82.4	95.1.90.2	85.5.70.0	81.8.74.7	90.1.79.2
60 $%$	87.7.78.9	95.0.77.9	86.5.71.2	77.4.70.3	91.9.90.2	85.5.68.9	79.4.72.0	88.4.77.5
70%	79.4.70.8	91.0.74.6	75.6.63.1	75.2.67.7	85.1.89.2	84.6.68.1	75.9.68.3	84.0.73.0
80%	70.4.63.5	83.0.68.8	72.6.59.4	71.4.62.9	83.8.88.2	81.9.66.6	69.9.62.8	79.1.67.6
90%	59.2.54.2	75.0.63.2	61.6.50.3	69.4.59.6	80.9.86.2	77.5.62.6	63.4.56.0	67.5.58.2

Table 6: Overall Accuracy (A) in (%) of RoBERTa model in MLMCID for coarse grained labels (on English Datasets) - primary (p) and average (av) intents. ('Th' indicates threshold value)

<span id="page-6-2"></span>

Th	Dataset (primary (p) and average (av) intent) in $\%$							
	<b>MIX SNIPS</b>	FB en	FB es	FB th	<b>MIX ATIS</b>	<b>HWU64</b>	<b>BANKING</b>	<b>CLINC</b>
50 %	83.6.80.7	93.5.78.1	91.5.75.9	89.6.81.1	95.1.90.2	83.0.67.1	77.1.69.8	86.6.78.9
60%	82.1.78.9	92.5.77.0	85.6.70.2	82.4.79.6	91.9.90.2	80.4.65.0	74.8.67.5	86.1.77.4
$70\%$	76.1.72.3	87.6.71.9	78.7.63.8	75.9.67.2	85.1.89.2	79.5.64.3	69.1.62.2	82.9.70.9
80%	68.6.64.8	78.7.65.9	74.8.60.6	68.4.61.0	83.8.88.2	75.2.62.4	64.5.56.0	77.0.68.0
90%	55.2.52.4	72.8.61.0	63.0.50.7	65.4.57.3	80.9.86.2	67.5.55.1	57.7.49.4	66.4.62.8

Table 7: Overall Accuracy (A) in (%) of RoBERTa model in MLMCID for fine grained labels (on English Datasets) - primary (p) and average (av) intents. ('Th' indicates threshold value) ,

<span id="page-7-1"></span>

<b>Dataset</b>		Llama2-7b Fine-	Llama2-7b	GPT 3.5(p, av)	$GPT-4$ (p, av)	RoBERTa-	RoBERTa-	RoBERTa-
		tune (p,av)	Vanilla (p, av)			SNIPS(p, av)	<b>BANKING(p,av)</b>	CLINC(p, av)
<b>MPQA</b>	Fine	42.8.27.1	18.8.16.9	20.0.14.2	48.5.37.1	45.0.42.5	44.5.42.0	43.9.41.5
	Coarse	65.7.64.2	51.9.50.0	62.8.59.9	68.5.45.6	75.6.43.7	73.0.41.9	72.8.42.6
YAHOO	Fine	48.3.37.5	18.8.15.8	11.4.10.6	58.0.56.2	55.3.54.9	54.0.53.8	52.9.54.2
	Coarse	61.2.49.9	52.8.50.0	50.0.50.0	61.2.49.1	66.3.65.7	64.5.62.9	63.2.60.8

Table 8: Overall Accuracy (A) in (%) of RoBERTa model in MLMCID (trained on SNIPS, BANKING and CLINC) and LLMs for fine and course grained labels - primary (p) and average (av) intent.

fine-tune version perform better but does not outperform GPT and RoBERTa based models.

3. Intent Counts: All datasets have two intents (primary and non-primary) in one sentence except for Yahoo, 2.6% cases with more than 2 intents so we show all results considering the case of 2 intents in a sentence. Our system is also effective for more than two intents by utilizing more pointer network block in the decoder framework, as shown in Appendix [A.2.](#page-11-6)

<span id="page-7-0"></span>

<b>Dataset</b>				Fine $(p, avg)$
	$5-$ shot	A	61.0.49.2	70.9.53.3
<b>SNIPS</b>		F1	58.1.46.4	67.9.51.7
	$10$ -shot	A	61.4.52.1	75.9.63.1
		$_{\rm F1}$	60.7,47.4	75.1,61.0
	$5-$ shot	$\mathsf{A}$	83.5.62.0	76.0.58.3
<b>FACEBOOK</b>		F1	58.0.42.8	26.7.20.4
(English)	$10$ -shot	$\overline{A}$	87.5,67.8	83.5,64.3
		F1	59.5, 45.9	34.3.25.2
	5-shot	$\mathsf{A}$	57.2.39.3	47.8.29.6
<b>HWU-64</b>		$_{\rm F1}$	49.3,34.7	35.5.22.1
	$10$ -shot	A	62.2.43.5	62.2.43.3
		$_{\rm F1}$	58.2.39.2	46.2.31.9
	5-shot	A	36.0.28.2	62.3.38.6
<b>BANKING</b>		F1	32.5.25.0	56.7.34.4
	$10$ -shot	A	46.0.32.9	76.1.52.9
		F1	46.1.31.4	71.2,48.0
	$5-$ shot	A	78.4,50.4	76.3.53.4
<b>CLINC</b>		$_{\rm F1}$	69.9.44.0	65.8,44.6
	$10$ -shot	$\mathsf{A}$	87.3.65.9	89.6,69.7
		F1	79.3.58.5	79.3,58.5

Table 9: Accuracy (A) and F1-Score for coarse and fine intents by RoBERTa(in %) for k-shot,  $k = \{5, 10\}$ 

Experimental Settings: Our experiments are conducted on two Tesla P100 GPUs with 16 GB RAM, 6 Gbps clock cycle, GDDR5 memory and one 80GB A100 GPU, 210MHz clock cycle, 2\*960 GB SSD with 5 epochs. We use Adam optimizer with learning rate:  $10^{-5}$  with cross-entropy as the loss function, weight decay:  $10^{-5}$  and a dropout rate of 0.5 is applied on the embeddings to avoid overfitting for all experiments (Details are in Appendix). All methods took less than 120 GPU minutes (except Llama2: ∼4-5 hrs) for fine tuning and ∼2 hrs for inference. All the hyperparameters are tuned on the dev set. We have used NLTK, Spacy, Scikit-learn, openai (version=0.28), huggingface\_hub, torch and transformers python

packages for all experiments and evaluation <sup>[8](#page-7-2)</sup>.

### 6 Loss Function

We calculate loss of different intent classes across all samples for primary, non-primary intents and their respective primary and non primary spans as shown in equation [5,](#page-7-3) [6](#page-7-4) and [7](#page-7-5) respectively. For training our model, we minimize the sum of negative log-likelihood loss for classifying the intent and the four pointer locations corresponding to the primary and non primary intent spans as shown in equation [8.](#page-8-8)

<span id="page-7-3"></span>
$$
\mathcal{L}_p = -\frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \Big[ \sum_{j=1}^C (y_1)_{ij} log(p_{ij}) - \frac{1}{J} \sum_{j=1}^J log((y_1)j^n) \Big]
$$
(5)

<span id="page-7-4"></span>
$$
\mathcal{L}_{np} = -\frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} \Big[ \sum_{j=1}^{C} (y_2)_{ij} \log(p_{ij}) - \frac{1}{J} \sum_{j=1}^{J} \log((y_2)j^n) \Big]
$$
(6)

<span id="page-7-5"></span>
$$
\mathcal{L}_{span} = -\frac{1}{N \times J} \sum_{n=1}^{N} \sum_{j=1}^{J} \left[ \log((st^{p_1})j^n \cdot (e^{p_1})j^n) + \log((st^{p_2})j^n \cdot (e^{p_2})j^n) \right]
$$
\n
$$
(7)
$$

Here, C is the number of intent classes and  $(y_1) \in$  $\{in^{c1}, in^{f1}\}$  and  $(y_2) \in \{in^{c2}, in^{f2}\}$ .  $(y_1)$ *ij* and  $(y_2)$ *ij* are the one-hot ground truth labels for sample  $i$  and class  $j$  for the primary and non-primary intents respectively, and  $p_{ij}$  is the predicted probability for sample *i* and class *j*. *n* represents the  $n^{th}$ training instance with  $N$  being the batch size,  $j$  represents the  $j<sup>th</sup>$  decoding time step with J being the length of the longest target sequence among all instances in the current batch.  $st^p, e^p$ ;  $p \in \{p_1, p_2\}$ respectively represent the softmax scores corresponding to the true start and end positions of the primary and non primary spans. Fig [3](#page-8-9) shows the

<span id="page-7-2"></span><sup>8</sup>All Code / Data details are in [https://github.com/](https://github.com/ankan2/multi-intent-pointer-network) [ankan2/multi-intent-pointer-network](https://github.com/ankan2/multi-intent-pointer-network)

<span id="page-8-9"></span>

Figure 3: By RoBERTa based pointer network (PNM) model in *MLMCID*

variation of the overall loss for course and fine intents with respect to the training progress (in terms of epochs) across different datasets. Loss decreases with larger epochs and after 10 epochs the loss decrement is significant to obtain decent outcome.

$$
\mathcal{L} = \mathcal{L}_p + \mathcal{L}_{np} + \mathcal{L}_{span} \tag{8}
$$

## <span id="page-8-8"></span>7 Conclusion

Intent detection is crucial in task-oriented conversation systems. Earlier works focus on scenarios with the presence of a single intent and do not extract intent spans. This work is one of the first to consider multiple intents in a single sentence within a conversation system, including primary and non-primary intents. First, we create novel datasets using stateof-the-art datasets with coarse and fine intent labels. Then, we develop a Pointer Network-based encoder-decoder framework (MLMCID - multilabel multi-class intent detection) using RoBERTa (for English data) and XLM-R (for non-English data) to jointly extract intent spans from sentences and detect corresponding coarse and fine intents. We show that the MLMCID model even outperforms various LLMs for these specific tasks across different datasets. The approach demonstrates efficacy even in few-shot scenarios. Qualitative analysis shows a reasonable grasp of primary and secondary intent concepts. Overall, this highlights the importance of multi-intent modeling for real-world conversational AI, with the datasets and models providing a strong foundation for future research.

### Limitations and Discussion

Table [3,](#page-5-0) [4,](#page-5-1) [5](#page-6-0) shows that even when our model fails to give the correct predictions exactly, it predicts the primary intent correctly most of the time. This is due to the fact we are using the top-2 intents to infer the primary and non-primary intents using the same classifier. Also, in some examples, the primary and non-primary intent Labels, when predicted wrongly, are swapped, suggesting that the model is still able to grasp the notion of intent. We shall work on these limitations in future.

### Ethical Concerns

We use publicly available codes and datasets so there is no ethical concerns.

#### Acknowledgements

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## <span id="page-11-5"></span>A Experimental Findings

### A.1 Why encoder decoder model performs well

Pointer Network model is a state-of-the-art approach which is ideal for extracting multiple spans from a sentence using the pointing mechanism to directly select positions in the input sequence, allowing for variable-length outputs and precise boundary identification. Their attention mechanism effectively handles context, enabling accurate span extraction in a computationally efficient manner. It is effective also because of -

- Dynamically predict entity spans within a sequence, enhancing adaptability across various NLP tasks
- capture the interdependence between spans and intents, crucial for tasks where one intent's prediction relies on another characteristics within the same context.
- Reduce the need for manual feature engineering, learning to predict spans directly from input data for more efficient models
- Finally, enable end-to-end learning by directly predicting entity span positions, facilitating seamless integration with other neural network components.

<span id="page-11-7"></span>

Dataset	Intent $1 \ (\%)$	Intent $2 \left( \% \right)$	Intent $3(%)$	Average $(\%)$
MIX SNIPS (fine)	81.2	73.8	60.3	71.7
MIX SNIPS (coarse)	85.4	74.4	62.3	74.0
<b>BANKING</b> (fine)	79.3	60.0	56.3	65.2
<b>BANKING</b> (coarse)	83.3	68.9	59.6	70.6
CLINC (fine)	80.7	69.2	55.4	68.4
CLINC (coarse)	81.9	717	58.3	70.6

Table 10: 3-Intent Detection by Roberta based PNM

## <span id="page-11-6"></span>A.2 PNM for more than two intent cases

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Pointer Network framework for more than two intents, we experimented with a small sample from the MIX\_SNiPS, BANKING, and CLINC datasets, incorporating three intents. For instance, the sentence "Will it snow this weekend? Please help me book a rental car for Nashville and play that song called 'Bring the Noise'" includes the intents: weather, car\_rental, play\_music. Table [10](#page-11-7) presents the performance of RoBERTa on this annotated sample. The results demonstrate the effectiveness of our system in handling a larger number of intents, as reflected by the accuracy (in  $\%$ ).

## A.3 Scalability

We experiment with datasets composed of two intents with the P100 server with 16GB GPU [B](#page-11-8) where 6-9 GB GPU VRAM has been utilised. Further we experiment on the dataset with three intents in the same server which use 12-13 GB GPU VRAM so our approach is scalable and applicable in resource constrained environments. It is also seen that in case of larger numbers of intents with the introduction of additional pointer networks - the system is scalable and does not require large computational costs. So the framework can be useful in real time processing for large scale systems. Though it is also to be noted that most of the datasets are composed with two intents even in the real life sentences.

## A.4 Single Intent Detection

We perform additional experiments on three datasets with various intent sizes - SNIPS (small), BANKING (medium) and CLINC (large) and detect the single-intent text using RoBERTa based pointer network architecture - which is shown in the following table (in  $\%$ ). It shows the effectiveness of our model for coarse (c) and fine (f).

## <span id="page-11-8"></span>B Experimental Settings

Our experiments are conducted on two Tesla P100 GPUs with 16 GB RAM, 6 Gbps clock cy-

Dataset	coarse $(\% )$	fine $(\% )$
<b>SNIPS</b>	90.0	85.9
<b>BANKING</b>	83.9	81.8
CLINC.	80.0	75.3

Table 11: Single Intent Detection

cle, GDDR5 memory and one 80GB A100 GPU, 210MHz clock cycle, 2\*960 GB SSD with 5 epochs. We use Adam optimizer with learning rate:  $10^{-5}$  with cross-entropy as the loss function, weight decay:  $10^{-5}$  and a dropout rate of 0.5 is applied on the embeddings to avoid overfitting for all experiments. All methods took less than 120 GPU minutes (except Llama2: ∼4-5 hrs) for fine tuning and ∼2 hrs for inference. All the hyperparameters are tuned on the dev set. We have used NLTK, Spacy, Scikit-learn, openai(version=0.28), huggingface\_hub, torch and transformers python packages for all experiments and evaluation.

## C Example

Figure [4](#page-13-0) shows some examples from MLMCID dataset. Table [12](#page-14-0) and [13](#page-15-0) shows some examples of fine to coarse label conversion for MLMCID dataset. Table [14](#page-16-0) shows some examples of the intent classes predicted with their respective confidence for PNM.

<span id="page-13-0"></span>

Figure 4: Examples in *MLMCID* Dataset

<span id="page-14-0"></span>

Table 12: Fine to Coarse Labels Conversion Examples for SNIPS and BANKING Dataset

<span id="page-15-0"></span>

Table 13: Fine to Coarse Labels Conversion Examples for Facebook and CLINC Dataset

<span id="page-16-0"></span>

Table 14: Prediction of best-performing models and Respective Confidence