Analyzing the Potential of Pre-Trained Embeddings for Audio Classification Tasks

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Abstract—In the context of deep learning, the availability of large amounts of training data can play a critical role in a model’s performance. Recently, several models for audio classification have been pre-trained in a supervised or self-supervised fashion on large datasets to learn complex feature representations, so-called embeddings. These embeddings can then be extracted from smaller datasets and used to train subsequent classifiers. In the field of audio event detection (AED) for example, classifiers using these features have achieved high accuracy without the need of additional domain knowledge. This paper evaluates three state-of-the-art embeddings on six audio classification tasks from the fields of music information retrieval and industrial sound analysis. The embeddings are systematically evaluated by analyzing the influence on classification accuracy of classifier architecture, fusion methods for file-wise predictions, amount of training data, and initial training domain of the embeddings. To better understand the impact of the pre-training step, results are also compared with those acquired with models trained from scratch. On average, the OpenL3 embeddings performed best with a linear SVM classifier. For a reduced amount of training examples, OpenL3 outperforms the initial baseline.

Index Terms—audio classification, transfer learning, audio embeddings, industrial sound analysis, music information retrieval

I. INTRODUCTION

With the availability of large audio datasets in recent years (e.g. AudioSet [1]), many audio classification tasks based on deep learning techniques have seen improved classification accuracy. This has mostly occurred in scenarios where data is abundant or easily collected, such as speech or environmental sounds. However, for many audio classification tasks, large scale data collection is unrealistic. One such example in the field of Music Information Retrieval (MIR) is classification of non-western music (e.g. regional traditional music). For musicological analysis, automatic classification can be a powerful tool; however, performing annotations at large scale is restricted, among other things, by the amount of domain knowledge required for the annotations. A similar problem arises in the field of Industrial Sound Analysis (ISA) for acoustic quality control applications [2]. The goal is to assess the health of a given machine by analyzing the sound it produces. However, large amounts of training examples are very costly to obtain for every product, machine, and possible fault. With this in mind, this work focuses on training and evaluating a number of ISA and MIR classifiers, under the premise that only a small amount of annotated training data will be available.

Transfer Learning (TL) is a powerful technique for building classifiers for small datasets. The main idea behind TL is to pre-train models on tasks where data is abundant, and re-use the knowledge gained during training for tasks where data is limited [3]. There are two main TL approaches: In the first approach, a trained model (obtained with a large dataset) is fine-tuned on the task-specific dataset. In the second approach, learned feature representations, also called embeddings, are used to train additional classifiers on task-specific datasets. TL was shown to be a promising training strategy for a variety of research fields such as Image Classification [4], Natural Language Processing [5], Environmental Sound Classification (ESC) [6]–[8], and several MIR tasks like genre classification [9] and instrument recognition [10].

This work focuses on the second type of TL and analyzes the classification capabilities of learned embeddings for six MIR and ISA tasks. While the MIR tasks mostly deal with music signals that are predominantly harmonic, the ISA tasks deal with signals with transient- and noise-like characteristics. Evaluating both types of tasks allows us to get a broad overview of the performance of these embeddings on a wide variety of audio signals. Results obtained with the embeddings are compared to baseline systems where the classifiers are trained from scratch using only the task-specific dataset. Furthermore, the influence on performance of the choice of classifier, the number of training examples in the final task, the fusion technique for getting file-wise predictions, and the size of the embeddings is investigated.

II. PRE-TRAINED EMBEDDINGS FOR AUDIO

Initial work on the use of embeddings for audio classification proposed using pre-trained image networks for classification [11], [12] due to the lack of large annotated audio datasets at the time. However, results were still below state-of-the-art performance for the evaluated tasks. In [13], a VGG network architecture (originally proposed for image classification in [13]) was modified and trained...
in a supervised fashion with audio data from the Million Song Dataset [14]. On all the evaluated tasks, the embeddings outperformed a baseline using Mel Frequency Cepstral Coefficients (MFCCs) as input representation. However, performance was still below the state-of-the-art (except for speech/music classification where nearly perfect classification was achieved with all methods).

The VGGish embeddings were initially proposed in [15] by training a modified VGG model using mel spectrograms as input. Google later published a trained model\(^1\) using a very weakly labeled dataset which was a preliminary version of the YouTube-8M dataset [16]. Besides having weak labels, the dataset had overlapping tags and events which, while visible in the video, were not necessarily audible. The problems with overlapping tags and very weak labels were addressed with the release of AudioSet [1] which contains 2 million audio clips with a duration of 10 seconds each. The sound clips were manually labeled, and an ontology of 527 tags of audible events was proposed. While the labels were correct for the full audio clip, it could still happen that the annotated sounds were not present in some time frames.

The Kumar embeddings were proposed as a solution to weak labels in AudioSet. In [7], the authors trained a supervised convolutional neural network (CNN) with mel spectrograms as input on the AudioSet by pooling the embeddings over time for each file. This is referred to as early fusion. A linear Support Vector Machine (SVM) classifier was trained on these embeddings achieving 83.5% accuracy with fine-tuning of the model, and 82.8% without an ESC task (ESC50 dataset [17]). Global max pooling across time for each of the 1024 embedding dimensions performed better than average pooling. For this reason, global max pooling is used as the early fusion strategy in this work.

Instead of training with weak labels in a supervised fashion, an auxiliary task for creating an audio embedding model (\textit{L3-Net}) was proposed in [6]. A video with matching or non-matching audio is fed into two separate CNN branches for video and audio feature extraction. The outputs of both networks are concatenated, and a fully connected neural network classifier is trained with the CNNs to detect whether the audio corresponds to the video or not. In this way, large amounts of unlabeled videos can be used for training the network in a self-supervised way. The pre-trained audio branch is used for extracting the audio embeddings. Training a linear SVM classifier on the audio embeddings achieved 79.3% on the ESC50 dataset by summing the class likelihoods over each file, and picking the highest for file-wise prediction. This approach is referred to as late fusion.

The OpenL3 embeddings were proposed in [8] as an extension to L3-Net. Different models were trained on the AudioSet dataset by summing the class likelihoods over each file, as input. Google later published a trained model by training a modified VGG model using mel spectrograms as input. The VGGish embeddings were initially proposed in [15] by training a modified VGG model using mel spectrograms as input. Google later published a trained model\(^1\) using a very weakly labeled dataset which was a preliminary version of the YouTube-8M dataset [16]. Besides having weak labels, the dataset had overlapping tags and events which, while visible in the video, were not necessarily audible. The problems with overlapping tags and very weak labels were addressed with the release of AudioSet [1] which contains 2 million audio clips with a duration of 10 seconds each. The sound clips were manually labeled, and an ontology of 527 tags of audible events was proposed. While the labels were correct for the full audio clip, it could still happen that the annotated sounds were not present in some time frames.

Three MIR and three ISA tasks were selected to cover a wide variety of application fields and signal characteristics. A description is provided below for each task, baseline model and dataset used. Furthermore, a short summary of all the datasets is presented in Table I. The dataset splits have been standardized for all presented experiments to get comparable results between all embeddings and networks trained from scratch. Therefore, the baseline results may differ slightly from the ones previously reported in the literature.

1) Task 1: Ensemble Size Classification in Music (T1): This task deals with counting the number of active instruments in a music recording. The ACMUS-MIR dataset,\(^2\) which includes recordings of music composed for one instrument family and is, hence, narrowly focused, was selected for evaluation. The task was defined as a 5-class classification problem, covering solo recordings (one instrument) to large ensembles (five or more instruments). The best performing model reported in [19] is used as baseline, where the best classification result (80.7% file-wise accuracy) was obtained with a feedforward neural network classifier with two hidden layers (512 and 128 units, respectively), and Rectified Linear Unit (ReLU) activation. Results show that the domain of the training data does not necessarily need to correspond to the final task domain.

## III. Experimental Design

### A. Tasks and Datasets

Three MIR and three ISA tasks were selected to cover a wide variety of application fields and signal characteristics. A description is provided below for each task, baseline model and dataset used. Furthermore, a short summary of all the datasets is presented in Table I. The dataset splits have been standardized for all presented experiments to get comparable results between all embeddings and networks trained from scratch. Therefore, the baseline results may differ slightly from the ones previously reported in the literature.

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### 2) Task 2: Musical Instrument Family Recognition (T2):

For the task of instrument family recognition, we use an in-house dataset called DB-MTC [20], which contains 50 commercial recordings of different composers of Western classical music. Each recording is a polyphonic piece of music composed for one instrument family and is, hence,
monotimbral. The five instrument families are woodwinds, brass, piano, vocal, and strings. As a baseline, we intended to use the instrument recognition CNN model proposed in \cite{21}. However, this model showed a tendency to overfit on DB-MTC leading to a classification accuracy of 72%. Therefore, we removed two of the original four convolutional blocks to decrease the number of trainable parameters to 10%. With this modification, state-of-the-art performance was achieved with a file-wise accuracy of 94%. Full details about the baseline model can be found in the study website.\(^3\)

3) Task 3: Speech Music Classification (T3): This task is an extended version of speech/music classification which considers four classes: speech, solo singing, choir, and instrumental music. The dataset of ethnomusicological field recordings from \cite{22} is used as baseline.\(^4\) Initially, the model proposed in \cite{22} was considered as a baseline. This model achieved a final accuracy of 94% with data enrichment from several speech/music datasets and augmentation via pitch shifting and time stretching. Additionally, \cite{22} reports that a multilayer perceptron with 16 units trained on VGGish embeddings achieved 86.7%. For comparability between the other tasks of this paper, no additional augmentation methods or other datasets were used. The reduced amount of training data led to overfitting and unstable training with the initial model from \cite{22}.\(^3\) Therefore, the smaller CNN architecture from \cite{19} is used as baseline, leading to a file-wise accuracy of 88.6%.

4) Task 4: Classification of Operational States in Electric Engines (T4): Electric engines are used in a variety of products such as industrial fans and car seats. This task deals with classifying three operational states of such engines: “good”, “heavy-load” and “broken”. The IDMT\textunderscore ISA\textunderscore ELECTRIC\textunderscore ENGINE dataset\(^5\) is used for this task. As a baseline, the system using a feedforward neural network proposed in [2] is applied. The proposed baseline achieved an average file-wise accuracy of 97.2% on the test set with six different background noises while being trained only on recordings without background noise.

5) Task 5: Metal Surface Classification (T5): Metal balls inside ball bearings may suffer from abrasion leading to damaged surfaces. In this study, the IDMT\textunderscore ISA\textunderscore METAL\textunderscore BALL dataset for surface detection is used, which includes three surface conditions: “eloxed”, “coated”, “broken”.\(^6\) As baseline, the feedforward neural network proposed in \cite{2} is used. This model achieved 98.8% file-wise accuracy on the balanced test set.

6) Task 6: Plastic Material Classification (T6): Changes or faults inside plastic material products can potentially be detected by analyzing their acoustic response from being struck. The IDMT\textunderscore ISA\textunderscore PUCKS\(^7\) dataset is used in this study, and includes the acoustic response of several plastic pucks printed from four different materials. Furthermore, recordings of background noise without any pucks were added as an additional class. Each one minute recording contains several hit events of the same puck. The exact times and quantity of these hit events during each recording are unknown. This characteristic distinguishes this task from the others since the relevant sound events are not audible during the entire file. The CNN proposed in \cite{23} was trained without background noise and tested only on noisy recordings. Without additional task-specific pre-processing, the CNN achieved a file-wise accuracy of 91.5% at the highest background noise level.

B. Evaluated Embeddings and classifiers

VGGish, Kumar, and OpenL3 embeddings were chosen for this study since they have already shown state-of-the-art performance on the ESC50 dataset. VGGish are embeddings trained in a supervised fashion with weak labels, the Kumar embeddings are trained in a supervised fashion considering weak labels and with improved annotations from AudioSet, and OpenL3 are self-supervised embeddings learned from AudioSet. Available source code and models were used to extract all the embeddings.\(^1\) The published default values for sampling rate, window and hop sizes, as well as additional parameters have been kept in all experiments. The sampling rate for VGGish is only 16 kHz compared to 44.1 kHz (Kumar) and 48 kHz (OpenL3). VGGish are the smallest embeddings with 128 values, Kumar comprises 1024 values, and OpenL3 can be extracted with 512 or 6144 values. We use OpenL3 embeddings with 512 output values trained on music data with mel spectrogram (256 bins) as input since this configuration achieved the best accuracy over evaluated datasets \cite{8}. All embeddings are normalized between 0 and 1 on the training set. The calculated normalization values are applied to the validation and test set.

The validity of the processing pipeline has been confirmed for all embeddings using ESC50 dataset leading to results comparable to the ones reported in the initial papers. However, a tendency to overfit was observed during the training of the feed forward neural network classifier used in \cite{8} (two hidden layers of size 512 and 128 as well as an output layer) on OpenL3 embeddings. A modification to this classifier is proposed here, where dropout \cite{24} of 0.5 was added between the hidden layers and before the classification layer. This led to an improved accuracy from the reported 79.8% to 81.35% on the ESC50 dataset. This classifier is referred to as D512 in the remainder of this paper. Additionally, a smaller non-linear classifier denoted as D128 was used, containing one hidden layer (128 units), ReLU activation and dropout of 0.5 before the classification layer. D128 has 20% of the parameters of D512. As a third classifier, the commonly used linear SVM \cite{6}, \cite{7} was chosen with regularization parameter C set to 1 (default). These three classifiers were selected to evaluate the influence of classifier complexity on the overall performance. To achieve file-wise results, both early fusion (on a feature level) and late fusion (on a prediction level) methods are evaluated. For each task, the performance is compared with

\(^1\)Detailed results: https://acmus-mir.github.io/publication/embeddings20/
\(^2\)https://github.com/matijama/field-recordings-db
\(^3\)https://www.idmt.fraunhofer.de/en/publications/isa-metal-balls.html
\(^7\)https://www.idmt.fraunhofer.de/en/publications/isa-ISA-PUCKS.html
the baseline obtained by training a neural network solely on the task specific dataset.


c. Experiments

Three experiments were conducted in this study to assess the influence of different training configurations in classification performance. Each experiment was conducted twice to account for randomness during training, and with 10-fold cross validation if no separate tests set were defined (see Table I). D128 and D512 were trained for 500 epochs using Adam optimizer [25] with a learning rate of 0.001 and a batch size of 256. The training set was kept unbalanced applying class weights as a classifier than the two fully-connected networks. This was retrained to obtain comparable results with the same processing pipeline.

The second experiment evaluates early and late fusion strategies to obtain file-wise classification accuracy. The same data distribution as in the first experiment is used here. The training domain using late fusion for all tasks by comparing OpenL3 music and environmental embeddings. The influence of the embedding size was also evaluated using 512 and 6144 output values from OpenL3. Finally, the training data was reduced to 10% showing the implications of having a smaller annotated dataset for training a classifier.

IV. RESULTS

A. Embeddings & Classifiers

Over all tasks, an average accuracy of 91.2% was achieved with the baseline models in the first experiment (see Table II). While VGGish performs best on T2, the OpenL3 embeddings achieved competitive results compared to the baseline over all tasks, in particular for the MIR tasks. While the OpenL3 results are slightly worse for the ISA tasks compared to the baseline, the VGGish embeddings obtain relatively poor results in all ISA tasks. Even though the best performance for the embeddings on the ESC50 dataset was reported using Kumar embeddings, this cannot be observed for any of the evaluated tasks. The results of this experiment suggest that embeddings trained in a self-supervised fashion can be a powerful alternative to fully supervised training with large annotated datasets.

B. Early and late fusion

Fig. 1 shows the performance of early and late fusion approaches for all tasks using OpenL3 with SVM. Late fusion performs better or similar to early fusion for all tasks except T6. Showing the variability of each class at every time frame to the classifier seems to be a better choice when the classes are present in the majority of the recordings. For tasks such as T6 where the class is only audible at certain time frames, it is beneficial to fuse the features for each file. The early fusion approach outperforms the baseline for T6 indicating that the choice of fusion approach should be task-specific.

C. Trained Domain

In line with the findings in [8], the OpenL3 embeddings trained on the music domain performed best (see Fig. 2). This shows that the initial training domain must not necessarily fit to the final task. The final size of the embeddings does not appear to affect the performance of the classifier, hinting that

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**TABLE II**

Classification accuracy in percent using 80% of the datasets for training with VGGish (V), OpenL3 (O) and Kumar (K) embeddings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emb.</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>T4</th>
<th>T5</th>
<th>T6</th>
<th>Avg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>99.1</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>91.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V-SVM</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>93.0</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-SVM</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>89.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-SVM</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>93.0</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-D128</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>78.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-D512</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>79.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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8See results reported at https://github.com/karolpiczak/ESC-50
the different output sizes between the evaluated embeddings are not purely responsible for their performance.

Finally, reducing the number of training examples to 10% emphasizes the importance of pre-trained networks for small datasets. While performance is comparable when using the entire dataset (baseline: 91.2% vs OpenL3: 91.3%), the OpenL3 embeddings clearly outperform the baseline when fewer training examples are available (baseline: 73.5% vs OpenL3: 82.6%).

V. CONCLUSIONS

From the evaluated embeddings, OpenL3 performed best over all tasks and was on par with the baseline using models trained from scratch. This shows that self-supervised embeddings such as OpenL3 are a promising alternative to pre-training models on large annotated datasets for getting descriptive features. Lowering the amount of training examples changes the performance in favor of pre-trained embeddings. Therefore, embeddings seem to be a good starting point for novel tasks with small datasets, and important for future research. In general, linear SVMs trained on embeddings performed better than non-linear dense models, making them a feasible choice for real-world applications. Even though the initial training domain does not necessarily need to fit the target domain, there was more room for improvement on ISA tasks compared to the baseline and MIR tasks. This suggests that noise-like signal are not fully covered in the evaluated embeddings. As future work, retraining one or several layers as well as combining the intermediate activations as reported in [9], [13], [18] can be a possible extension. Furthermore, the impact of capturing embedding changes over time is another interesting direction.

REFERENCES
