Q&A about Watson, the iHuman supercomputer

September 27 2017, by Refilwe Mabula

In 2011, a faceless, emotionless voice named Watson famously defeated two of the greatest champions of Jeopardy!, an American TV gameshow.

The victory of Watson, a cognitive computing system developed by IBM, wowed the Tech industry. Watson can answer questions posed in natural language. Watson can understand all forms of data, interact naturally with people, and learn and reason at scale. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is on the rise and more companies are relying on AI for cognitive solutions to complex problems.

Refilwe Mabula spoke to Andrew Quixley, IBM's Watson Platform Sales Leader in Africa, to learn more about this super system named after the tech giant's first CEO, Thomas J. Watson.

How does Watson understand human language?

Watson's ability to extract meaning from language manifests in three ways. Firstly, through understanding the intent of what somebody is saying, Watson can extract intention from a statement or question.

Secondly, Watson understands emotions.Watson is trained to detect a series of emotions and uses these to respond accordingly. Humans can respond intuitively to each other because we have emotions of our own and empathy. We know how to respond to frustration, for example, something a machine is usually unable to detect. Watson can, however.

Thirdly, Watson has a handle on humans through words. The words we use when we write indicate something about our personality. Watson can take a handwriting sample or a sample of you speaking and determine your personality from your word choice and verbal expression.

Which languages does Watson understand?

Watson is being trained to communicate with people in their native languages as a native speaker would. This means being able to understand idioms, metaphors, and turns of phrase unique to a language. Originally Watson reached an audience of 400 million English language speakers. Today Watson also understands Arabic, Brazilian, German, Italian,

Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish. Watson also has conversation

Watson also has conversation and language translation capabilities such as Dutch, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese, for companies looking to build conversational agents or chatbots.

How old is Watson?

In the '90s, we set ourselves a challenge of beating one of the world's greatest chess players and we developed a computing system called Deep Blue. The rise of big data – 2.5 billion gigabytes of data are created daily – and the world's need to make sense of it ultimately resulted in Watson.

In competing in Jeopardy! Watson demonstrated that it was possible for systems to understand how human beings communicate with each other. Watson is on track to reach 1 billion people by the end of 2017.

Where can we find Watson?

Watson is a cloud-based cognitive service that can be embedded in anything digital. Access Watson from your home, phone, or office – anywhere you have an internet connection. Learn more at [watson](#)" target="_blank">www.ibm.com/[watson](#).

Provided by Wits University

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