

ACL 2023

**The 61st Conference of the the Association for Computational  
Linguistics**

**Proceedings of the Conference  
Volume 1: Long Papers**

July 9-14, 2023

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## Message from the General Chair

Welcome to ACL 2023, the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics! The conference will be held in Toronto, Canada, July 9-14, 2023. Following the succession of the recent conferences in our field, ACL 2023 will adopt a hybrid format. While the impact of Covid has considerably diminished in terms of traveling, obtaining visas to Canada entails a very long process. Moreover, the global economic conditions pose challenges for many individuals to travel to conferences. Recognizing these circumstances, we know many participants may not be able to attend the conference in person. Therefore, we are committed to providing a great virtual platform so everyone has the opportunity to interact with other participants and enjoy the conference. Based on the current registered participants, approximately 30% have chosen to attend the conference virtually. Whether you join us in person or virtually, we sincerely hope everyone has a remarkable conference experience.

This General Chair's message is where I express my gratitude to the many individuals who have made enormous contributions to the conference over the past year.

First and foremost, I am grateful for the tremendous efforts by the program chairs: Anna Rogers, Jordan Boyd-Graber, and Naoaki Okazaki. The rapid growth of our field is challenging from the perspective of organizing a conference. Program chairs have admirably handled a huge number of submissions and implemented novel review criteria to improve the quality of reviews and the paper decision process. They responded promptly after ChatGPT was launched and provided guidelines for using it in paper writing. Beyond their responsibilities as program chairs, they have assisted me with various other decisions. Their efforts have truly shaped the conference. Also, thanks to all the senior area chairs, area chairs, reviewers, and the best paper committee, whose commitment and dedication made paper review and selection possible.

Next, I would like to thank the entire organizing committee for their service. It has been an honor for me to collaborate with such a dedicated team. This includes:

- Industry track chairs: Beata Beigman Klebanov, Jason Williams, and Sunayana Sitaran. An addition to this year's ACL is the introduction of a separate industry track. This is motivated by two factors. First, ACL is held in North America this year (and thus no NAACL), and NAACL has an established tradition of hosting an industry track. Second there was an increasing number of industry track submissions at EMNLP last year from previous years. We hope that a separate industry track can foster the dissemination of research on real-world applications in industry settings. Thanks to the industry track chairs for their efforts in coordinating all the logistics associated with this track.
- Demo chairs: Alan Ritter, Danushka Bollegala, and Ruihong Huang, who managed demo submissions and accepted 58 demos that will be presented in the main conference.
- Student research workshop (SRW) chairs: Gisela Vallejo, Vishakh Padmakumar, and Yao Fu, who showed remarkable enthusiasm and dedication in organizing the workshop. They selected 45 papers to be presented in the main conference program. Also thanks to the faculty advisors: Ivan Vulic and Lu Wang, for providing guidance to the SRW chairs and obtaining NSF support for the workshop.
- Workshop chairs: Annie Louis, Eduardo Blanco, and Yang Feng, who collaborated with EACL workshop chairs to select 22 workshops, and served as the vital link between the conference and individual workshop organizers.
- Tutorials chairs: Margot Mieskes, Siva Reddy, and Vivian Chen, who also worked with EACL chairs to select 6 high quality tutorials that cater to the interest and needs of our conference.

- Ethics chairs: Dirk Hovy and Yonatan Bisk, who checked papers flagged with ethics issues. Thanks for their meticulous work to ensure our papers uphold the ethical standards.
- Publication chairs: Ryan Cotterell, Chenghua Lin, Jesse Thomason, Lei Shu, and Lifu Huang, who prepared the conference handbook, ensured proper formatting of papers, and produced the conference proceedings.
- Virtual infrastructure chairs: Jiacheng Xu, Martín Villalba, and Pedro Rodriguez, who worked hard to develop a virtual platform to ensure an engaging conference experience for both in-person and remote participants. They also made various innovations and enhancement on top of the Underline platform, which the conference utilizes.
- Publicity and social media chairs, Devamanyu Hazarika, Eva Vanmassenhove, and Tong Xu, who communicated and publicized the conference through various social media channels, enhancing the visibility and reach of the conference.
- Website chairs: Jinho Choi and Zhongyu Wei, who updated and maintained the conference website to keep participants informed.
- Diversity and inclusion (D&I) chairs: Daniel Beck, Maryam Fazel-Zarandi, and Nedjma Djouhra Ousidhoum, who arranged support to participants facing financial hardships, and organized a diverse array of activities aimed to promoting diversity and inclusion in our community.
- Student volunteer chairs: Ayah Zirikly and Tao Yu, who reviewed applications and selected student volunteers for the conference.
- Sponsorship chairs: Alla Rozovskaya and Lei Li. Thanks to them and Chris Callison-Burch, the ACL sponsorship Director for their efforts in securing sponsorships and managing the relationship between sponsors and the conference. The generous support from our sponsors has played a crucial role in enabling us to maintain a reasonable registration cost for attendees, and the additional sponsorship for D&I initiatives helps our commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive environment.
- Visa assistance team: Ayana Niwa, Qingwen Liu, Renxiang Zhang, Samridhi Choudhary, and Tao You. Many participants require visas to attend the conference, and we fully understand this lengthy process. This team has been diligently handling visa requests by sending out numerous invitation letters to facilitate visa applications.
- Infrastructure support from Softconf (Richard Gerber) and Underline (Damira Mrsic, Sol Rosenberg). Both platforms kindly accommodated our many, many requests and implemented several new features.

I also want to specially thank Jennifer Rachford, the ACL event director, who handled all the local arrangement for this conference. Though she was relatively new to the role, and often times needed to juggle multiple ACL conferences, she remained well organized, and consistently provided all the necessary information to all members of the organizer committee. Her contributions ensure the success of this conference.

Thanks to previous ACL/EMNLP conference chairs for sharing their knowledge, tips, and best practice on organizing this conference, and ACL Exec for the support they provided throughout the entire planning and execution of this conference.

Lastly, I extend my appreciation to every participant. Regardless of your role, whether as authors or presenters, workshop organizers, tutorial speakers, student volunteers, session chairs, or simply attendees, your involvement is essential in creating a memorable conference.

Welcome everyone to the conference!

ACL 2023 General Chair

Yang Liu

Alexa, Amazon

## Message from the Program Chairs

It's hard to believe that we're actually going to be seeing the program come together in Toronto. We're really looking forward to it and to seeing you all there!

Most of the work of a program chair is behind the scenes: herding reviewers and chairs, wrangling data from various sources, and answering lots and lots of email. This is a volunteer position, so the only reward we get for this is our chance to make the process of submitting and reviewing papers to our conference better. This letter will outline some of those experiments.

First, we asked reviewers for two scores: soundness and excitement. Our goal was that any sound paper would be accepted to some ACL affiliated venue, but that the “main conference” distinction (limited by space) would be focused on the most exciting papers. Our hope was that soundness would be less noisy than a single “overall recommendation” score, which would help reduce the randomness of decisions. Judging by the exit surveys, this change was well received: over 80% of the chairs, reviewers and authors either expressed support or did not object to this change.

Next, we developed a new process for matching papers to reviewers based on keywords for not only the subject matter of the paper, but also its type of contribution and target language(s). This allowed more fine-grained control over the paper-reviewer matches, and we were also able to provide the chairs with context for the paper-reviewer matches.

To improve review quality, we also updated the reviewer guidelines, and developed a system for the authors to flag specific types of issues with reviews. Finally, we have also proposed a new initiative for recognizing outstanding reviewers and chairs (73 awards at ACL'23).

Finally, we have tried to give more options for presentations. Findings papers now have an in-person presentation spotlight slot and virtual posters in addition to recording videos. Virtual posters have portals to link in-person attendees to virtual posters. We have also brought back Miniconf and RocketChat to allow for better virtual communication between papers (regardless of where the authors are).

This conference is a result of the joint efforts of over ten thousand people. We deeply thank them all, and apologize for the many nagging emails we had to send out. In particular:

- the general chair Yang Liu, who led the whole process;
- the incredible team of 70 SACs, 438 ACs, and 4490 reviewers, who were able to handle our record number of submissions;
- the 13,658 authors for their phenomenal scientific contributions, which we were honored to shepherd through the reviewing process;
- the ACL Executive (esp. Iryna Gurevych, Tim Baldwin, David Yarowsky, Yusuke Miyao, Emily M. Bender) for their support of many of our crazy ideas;
- 21 ethics committee reviewers, chaired by Dirk Hovy and Yonatan Bisk, for their hard work to uphold the ACL code of ethics;
- Our Best Paper Award committee (Jonathan Berant, Jose Camacho-Collados, Danqi Chen, Benjamin Van Durme, David Jurgens, Desmond Elliott, Sasha Luccioni, Jonathan May, Tom McCoy, Yusuke Miyao, Ekaterina Shutova, Emma Strubell, Jun Suzuki, Xiaojun Wan, Luke Zettlemoyer), who reviewed a record number of nominated papers under tight schedule;
- Our assistant Youmi Ma, for reducing our email and Softconf workload significantly and suggesting ideas to make the job run smoothly;
- Past ACL PCs, including Smaranda Muresan, Preslav Nakov and Aline Villavicencio (ACL 2022), Yoav Goldberg, Zornitsa Kozareva, Yue Zhang (EMNLP 2022), Anna Rumshisky, Luke Zettlemoyer, Dilek Hakkani-Tur (NAACL 2021), for their advice and suggestions;

- Publication chairs Ryan Cotterell, Chenghua Lin, Jesse Thomason, Lei Shu, and Lifu Huang, who ensured the proper formatting of camera-ready papers;
- Emma Strubell, Ian Magnusson, and Jesse Dodge for their help in preparing publishable versions of Responsible NLP checklist;
- ACL Anthology director Matt Post;
- TACL editors-in-chief (Asli Celikyilmaz, Roi Reichart, Ani Nenkova) and CL Editor-in-Chief Hwee Tou Ng for coordinating TACL and CL presentations with us;
- Workshop chairs Annie Louis, Eduardo Blanco, and Yang Feng, for helping us to connect the Findings papers to possible presentation slots at workshops;
- Rich Gerber at Softconf, who answered countless emails and implemented several new features on our request;
- Kyle Lo and Semantic Scholar team, who kindly assisted us with data for paper-reviewer matching;
- Our virtual infrastructure chairs (Pedro Rodriguez, Jiacheng Xu, Martín Villalba) and Underline team (Damira Mrsic, Sol Rosenberg) for enabling a new kind of hybrid experience, combining miniconf and Underline;
- the ACL event director Jennifer Rachford and our visa support team (Ayana Niwa, Qingwen Liu, Renxiang Zhang, Samridhi Choudhary, and Tao You), who did everything possible to facilitate the Canada visa situation for ACL attendees.

## **Submission and Acceptance**

We had two routes to submit papers to ACL 2023: directly to the conference or through ACL Rolling Review (ARR). We received a record number of direct submissions (3601 long papers and 958 short papers) in January 2023. In addition, we received 305 commitments from ARR (271 long papers and 34 short papers) in March 2023. In total, we considered 4864 (3872 long and 992 short) papers with 70 senior area chairs, 438 area chairs, 4024 reviewers, 445 secondary reviewers, and 21 ethics reviewers in 27 tracks. We accepted 910 (23.50%) long and 164 (16.53%) short papers for the main conference, and 712 (41.89% including the long papers for the main conference) long and 189 (35.58% including the short papers for the main conference) short papers for Findings. To sum long and short papers, ACL 2023 accepted 1074 (22.08%) papers for the conference and 901 (40.60% including the papers for the main conference) papers for Findings. The ACL 2023 program also features 46 papers from the Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics (TACL) journal, and 7 from the Computational Linguistics (CL) journal.

## **Limitations Section and Responsible NLP Checklist**

Following EMNLP 2022 and EACL 2023, we required that each submitted paper must include an explicitly named Limitations section, discussing the limitations of the work. This was to counterbalance the practice of over-hyping the take-away messages of papers, and to encourage more rigorous and honest scientific practice. This discussion did not count towards the page limit, and we asked reviewers to not use the mentioned limitations as reasons to reject the paper, unless there was a really good reason to. In addition to the mandatory discussion of limitations, a new element at ACL 2023 is that the Responsible NLP Checklist for the accepted papers is not only considered by the reviewers, but also published together with the accepted papers as a special appendix, in an effort to improve transparency and accountability in the field.

## **Areas**

To ensure a smooth process, the submissions to ACL 2023 were divided into 26 areas. The areas mostly followed these of previous ACL, and more broadly \*ACL conferences, reflecting the typical divisions in the field. Following EMNLP 2022, we split the “Large Language Models” track away from “Machine learning in NLP”, reflecting the growth of submissions in the area. We also offered two new tracks (“Linguistic diversity” and “Multilingualism and Cross-Lingual NLP”). For the papers authored by SACs, the final recommendation decisions were made by a separate SAC team. The most popular areas (with over 250 submissions) were “Dialogue and Interactive Systems”, “Information Extraction”, “Large Language Models”, “Machine Learning for NLP”, and “NLP Applications”.

## **Best Paper Awards**

ACL’23 implemented the new ACL award policy, aiming to expand the pool of work that is recognized as outstanding. In total, 73 papers were nominated by the reviewers or area chairs for consideration for awards. These papers were assessed by the Best Paper Award Committee, and with their help we selected 4 best papers, 3 special awards (social impact, resource, reproduction), and several dozen outstanding papers. The best and outstanding papers will be announced in a dedicated plenary session for Best Paper Awards on July 10 2023.

## **Presentation Mode**

In ACL 2023, there is no meaningful distinction between oral and poster presentations in terms of paper quality. The composition of the oral sessions were proposed by the SACs of their respective tracks, so as to compose a thematically coherent set of papers on a shared topic or method, which would allow for an engaging discussion. The decisions were not based on the authors’ virtual or on-site attendance.

We hope you enjoy the program and the new elements we introduced (but let us know either way). We are looking forward to a great ACL 2023!

Anna Rogers (IT University of Copenhagen, Denmark)

Jordan Boyd-Graber (University of Maryland, USA)

Naoaki Okazaki (Tokyo Institute of Technology, Japan)

ACL 2023 Programme Committee Co-Chairs

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Samridhi Choudhary, Amazon

Tao You, Fudan University

**ACL Event Director**

Jennifer Rachford, Association for Computational Linguistics

# **Program Committee**

## **Computational Social Science and Cultural Analytics**

Walid Magdy, Daniel Preotiuc-Pietro, Md. Shad Akhtar, Nikolaos Aletras, Kalina Bontcheva, Karim Darwish, Mai Elsherief, Kiran Garimella, Marco Guerini, Kokil Jaidka, Barbara McGillivray, Yelena Mejova, Usman Naseem, Bjorn Ross, James Thorne, Marco Viviani, Soroush Vosoughi, Ingmar Weber

## **Dialogue and Interactive Systems**

Y-Lan Boureau, Mary Ellen Foster, Minlie Huang, João Sedoc, Luciana Benotti, Paul Crook, Maryam Fazel-Zarandi, Michel Galley, Kallirroi Georgila, Alborz Geramifard, Devamanyu Hazarika, Baotian Hu, Wenqiang Lei, Gina-Anne Levow, Piji Li, Andrea Madotto, Fei Mi, Seungwhan Moon, Lili Mou, Natalie Parde, Baolin Peng, Oleg Rokhlenko, Samira Shaikh, Lei Shu, Kurt Shuster, Ruihua Song, Yiping Song, Shabnam Tafreshi, Ryuichi Takanobu, David Traum, Stefan Ultes, Charles Welch, Min Yang, Zhou Yu, Wei-Nan Zhang, Hao Zhou

## **Discourse and Pragmatics**

Christian Hardmeier, Jey Han Lau, Jacob Andreas, Chloé Braud, Luis Fernando D'haro, Junyi Jessy Li, Sharid Loaiciga, Nafise Sadat Moosavi, Anna Nedoluzhko, Juntao Yu, Amir Zeldes

## **Ethics and NLP**

Vinodkumar Prabhakaran, Diyi Yang, Kai-Wei Chang, Sunipa Dev, Karen Fort, Jack Hessel, Debora Nozza, Zeerak Talat, Yulia Tsvetkov

## **Generation**

Sebastian Gehrmann, Mohit Iyyer, Nina Dethlefs, Nan Duan, Greg Durrett, Angela Fan, Claire Gardent, Albert Gatt, Yeyun Gong, Srinivasan Iyer, Meng Jiang, Sujian Li, Ankur Parikh, Nanyun Peng, Lianhui Qin, Sudha Rao, Hannah Rashkin, Jinsong Su, Hiroya Takamura, John Wieting, Rui Yan, Jiajun Zhang

## **Information Extraction**

Lifu Huang, Chin-Yew Lin, Aaron White, Yixin Cao, Shiyu Chang, Muhamo Chen, Brian Davis, Antoine Doucet, Xinya Du, Radu Florian, Xianpei Han, Filip Ilievski, Diana Inkpen, Reno Kriz, Lane Lawley, Manling Li, Kang Liu, Zhiyuan Liu, Bonan Min, Thien Nguyen, Qiang Ning, Alan Ritter, Benjamin Roth, Lei Sha, Jingbo Shang, Ge Shi, Xianzhi Wang, Wenpeng Yin, Mo Yu, Dongyan Zhao, Jun Zhao, Christos Christodoulopoulos

## **Information Retrieval and Text Mining**

Benjamin Piwowarski, Qifan Wang, Yi Fang, Fuli Feng, Yiqun Liu, Jian-Yun Nie, Xiaojun Quan, Yi Tay, Hongning Wang, Jingang Wang, Zenglin Xu, Grace Hui Yang

## **Interpretability and Analysis of Models for NLP**

Carolin Lawrence, Ana Marasovic, Chenhao Tan, Jasmin Bastings, Dallas Card, Samuel Carton, Oana Cocarascu, Nadir Durrani, Jacob Eisenstein, Mor Geva, Ivan Habernal, Peter Hase, Alon Jacovi, Yangfeng Ji, Divyansh Kaushik, Piyawat Lertvittayakumjorn, Zaiqiao Meng, Pasquale Minervini, Isar Nejadgholi, Danish Pruthi, Abhilasha Ravichander, Roi Reichart, Swabha Swamy-dipta, Martin Tutek, Elena Voita, Sarah Wiegreffe, Tongshuang Wu

## **Language Grounding to Vision, Robotics, and Beyond**

Zhongyu Wei, Mark Yatskar, Yoav Artzi, Yi Cai, Jingjing Chen, Zhihao Fan, Daniel Fried, Jia-sen Lu, Lin Ma, Aishwarya Padmakumar, Zhaochun Ren, Freda Shi, Carina Silberer, Alessandro Suglia, Alane Suhr, Chen Sun, Hao Tan, Meng Wang, Tong Xu

## **Large Language Models**

Dipanjan Das, Bhuwan Dhingra, Mike Lewis, Xuezhe Ma, Miguel Ballesteros, Kenneth Church, Kumar Dubey, Orhan Firat, Marjan Ghazvininejad, Hila Gonen, Junxian He, Harsh Jhamtani, Mandar Joshi, Xiang Kong, Ni Lao, Moontae Lee, Bing Liu, Peter Liu, Eric Malmi, Huan Sun, Lijun Wu, Chunting Zhou

## **Linguistic Diversity**

Constantine Lignos, Emily Prud'hommeaux, Rebecca Knowles, Zoey Liu, Teresa Lynn, Lane Schwartz, Francis Tyers, Marcos Zampieri

## **Linguistic Theories, Cognitive Modeling, and Psycholinguistics**

Afra Alishahi, Nadjoung Kim, Lisa Beinborn, Abdellah Fourtassi, Nan-Jiang Jiang, R. Thomas McCoy, Aida Nematzadeh, Grusha Prasad

## **Machine Learning for NLP**

Marie-Francine Moens, Anna Rumshisky, Kevin Small, Heike Adel, Mikhail Burtsev, Giuseppe Castellucci, Trevor Cohn, Danilo Croce, Julian Eisenschlos, Francis Ferraro, Matthias Galle, Dan Goldwasser, Hannaneh Hajishirzi, Ricardo Henao, Estevam Hruschka, Pei Ke, Parisa Kordjamshidi, Omer Levy, Zemin Liu, André Martins, Ashutosh Modi, Ndapa Nakashole, Thanh Tam Nguyen, Giannis Nikolentzos, Barbara Plank, Steven Schockaert, Freda Shi, Vivek Srikumar, Jun Suzuki, Hao Tang, Lu Wang, Taro Watanabe, Ningyu Zhang

## **Machine Translation**

Markus Freitag, Tom Kocmi, Lei Li, Boxing Chen, Colin Cherry, George Foster, Roman Grundkiewicz, Francisco Guzman, Shujian Huang, Philipp Koehn, Qun Liu, Chi-Kiu Lo, Haitao Mi, Jan Niehues, Stephan Peitz, Maja Popović, Ricardo Rei, Felix Stahlberg, Zhaopeng Tu, David Vilar, Mingxuan Wang, Joern Wuebker, Tong Xiao, Jingjing Xu, François Yvon, Yue Zhang, Hao Zhou

## **Multilingualism and Cross-Lingual NLP**

A. Seza Doğruöz, Sunayana Sitaram, Muhammad Abdul-Mageed, David Ifeoluwa Adelani, Alham Fikri Aji, Antonios Anastasopoulos, Mikel Artetxe, Yoshinari Fujinuma, Dan Garrette, Shruti Rijhwani, Sebastian Ruder, Xinyi Wang

## **NLP Applications**

Sophia Ananiadou, Mark Dras, Jing Jiang, Makoto Miwa, Vincent Ng, Hadi Amiri, Riza Batista-Navarro, Jose Camacho-Collados, Fenia Christopoulou, Giovanni Da San Martino, Dina Demner-Fushman, Luigi Di Caro, Haibo Ding, Mariano Felice, Wei Gao, Sanda Harabagiu, Seung-Won Hwang, Naoya Inoue, Shafiq Joty, Ekaterina Kochmar, Mamoru Komachi, Wei Lu, Shervin Malmasi, David Mimno, Preslav Nakov, Maria Leonor Pacheco, Marek Rei, Kirk Roberts, Sara Rosenthal, Alla Rozovskaya, Tulika Saha, Hiroki Sakaji, Matthew Shardlow, Shuohang Wang, Jason Wei, Qianqian Xie, Jianfei Yu, Chrysoula Zerva, Aston Zhang, Arkaitz Zubiaga

## **Phonology, Morphology, and Word Segmentation**

Miikka Silfverberg, Ekaterina Vylomova, Ryan Cotterell, Xuanjing Huang, David R. Mortensen

## **Question Answering**

Eunsol Choi, Mrinmaya Sachan, Rishiraj Saha Roy, Priyanka Agrawal, Chitta Baral, Gianni Barracchi, Hao Cheng, Danish Contractor, Pradeep Dasigi, Tushar Khot, Rik Koncel-Kedziorski, Bill Yuchen Lin, Bang Liu, Ismini Lourentzou, Sewon Min, Liangming Pan, Panupong Pasupat, Peng Qi, Ashish Sabharwal, Xiaoyu Shen, Veselin Stoyanov, Yu Su, Kai Sun, Mihai Surdeanu, Di Wang, Ziyu Yao, Yuhao Zhang

## **Resources and Evaluation**

Sarvnaz Karimi, Nathan Schneider, Karin Verspoor, Rachel Bawden, Asma Ben Abacha, Doina Caragea, Jennifer D'souza, Rotem Dror, Ondrej Dusek, Steffen Eger, Jorge Gracia, Udo Hahn, Lifeng Han, Radu Tudor Ionescu, David Janiszek, Sudipta Kar, Jin-Dong Kim, Jonathan Kummerfeld, John P. Lalor, Fabrice Lefèvre, Jochen Leidner, Roser Morante, Gabriella Pasi, Maja Popović, German Rigau, Yves Scherrer, Manish Shrivastava, Sowmya Vajjala, Lucy Lu Wang

## **Semantics: Lexical**

Marianna Apidianaki, Gabriella Lapesa, Chris Biemann, Guy Emerson, Allyson Ettinger, Goran Glavaš, Dieuwke Hupkes, Nancy Ide, Andrey Kutuzov, Alessandro Lenci, Mohammad Taher Pilehvar, Yuval Pinter, Edoardo Maria Ponti, Vered Shwartz, Lonneke Van Der Plas, Ivan Vulić

## **Semantics: Sentence-level Semantics, Textual Inference, and Other Areas**

Yuki Arase, Roberto Navigli, Roy Schwartz, Tommaso Caselli, Simone Conia, Lei Cui, Li Dong, Lea Frermann, Atsushi Fujita, Christophe Gravier, Luheng He, Germán Kruszewski, Tommaso Pasini, Adam Poliak, Jakob Prange, Michael Roth, Keisuke Sakaguchi, Abulhair Saparov, Ji-Rong Wen, Wei Xu, Sho Yokoi, Chen Zhao

## **Sentiment Analysis, Stylistic Analysis, and Argument Mining**

Lun-Wei Ku, Henning Wachsmuth, Khalid Al Khatib, Elena Cabrio, Hao Fei, Anette Frank, Lin Gui, Yufang Hou, Ting-Hao Huang, Kentaro Inui, Anne Lauscher, John Lawrence, Saif Mohammad, Joonsuk Park, Shabnam Tafreshi, Orith Toledo-Ronen, Serena Villata, Shuai Wang

## **Speech and Multimodality**

Grzegorz Chrupała, Frank Rudzicz, Laurent Besacier, Manaal Faruqui, Sharon Goldwater, Florian Metze, Okko Rasanen, Andrew Rosenberg, Hao Tang, Wenwu Wang, Xin Wang, Shinji Watanabe

## **Summarization**

Chenghua Lin, Shashi Narayan, Reinald Kim Amplayo, Avi Caciularu, Chung-Chi Chen, Gong Cheng, Markus Dreyer, Xiaocheng Feng, Kathleen McKeown, Stuart Middleton, Richard Yuanzhe Pang, Xiaojun Wan, Xingxing Zhang, Yao Zhao

## **Syntax: Tagging, Chunking, and Parsing**

Wanxiang Che, Djamé Seddah, Xinchi Chen, Leyang Cui, Lifeng Jin, Zhenghua Li, Joakim Nivre, Kenji Sagae, Meishan Zhang

## **Theme: Reality Check**

Ehud Reiter, Xiang Ren, Malihe Alikhani, Jan Buys, Jesse Dodge, Antske Fokkens, Robin Jia, Daniel Khashabi, Emiel Krahmer, Saad Mahamood, Margaret Mitchell, Richard Sproat, Byron Wallace, Adina Williams

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# Keynote Talk: Two Paths to Intelligence

Geoffrey Hinton

University of Toronto (emeritus)



**Monday, July 10 – Time: 9:30 - 10:30 EDT – Room: Metropolitan**

**Abstract:** I will briefly describe the forty year history of neural net language models with particular attention to whether they understand what they are saying. I will then discuss some of the main differences between digital and biological intelligences and speculate on how the brain could implement something like transformers. I will conclude by addressing the contentious issue of whether current multimodal LLMs have subjective experience.

**Bio:** Geoffrey Hinton received his PhD in Artificial Intelligence from Edinburgh in 1978. After five years as a faculty member at Carnegie-Mellon he became a fellow of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research and moved to the University of Toronto where he is now an emeritus professor. He is also the Chief Scientific Adviser at the Vector Institute.

He was one of the researchers who introduced the backpropagation algorithm and the first to use backpropagation for learning word embeddings. His other contributions to neural network research include Boltzmann machines, distributed representations, time-delay neural nets, mixtures of experts, variational learning and deep learning. His research group in Toronto made major breakthroughs in deep learning that revolutionized speech recognition and object classification.

He is a fellow of the UK Royal Society and a foreign member of the US National Academy of Engineering, the US National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His awards include the David E. Rumelhart prize, the IJCAI award for research excellence, the Killam prize for Engineering, the Royal Society Royal Medal, the NSERC Herzberg Gold Medal, the IEEE James Clerk Maxwell Gold medal, the NEC C&C award, the BBVA award, the Honda Prize and the Turing Award.

# **Keynote Talk: Large Language Models as Cultural Technologies: Imitation and Innovation in Children and Models**

**Alison Gopnik**

University of California at Berkeley



**Wednesday, July 12 – Time: 14:00 - 15:00 EDT – Room: Metropolitan**

**Abstract:** It's natural to ask whether large language models like LaMDA or GPT-3 are intelligent agents. But I argue that this is the wrong question. Intelligence and agency are the wrong categories for understanding them. Instead, these AI systems are what we might call cultural technologies, like writing, print, libraries, internet search engines or even language itself. They are new techniques for passing on information from one group of people to another. Cultural technologies aren't like intelligent humans, but they are essential for human intelligence. Many animals can transmit some information from one individual or one generation to another, but no animal does it as much as we do or accumulates as much information over time. New technologies that make cultural transmission easier and more effective have been among the greatest engines of human progress, but they have also led to negative as well as positive social consequences. Moreover, while cultural technologies allow transmission of existing information cultural evolution, which is central to human success, also depends on innovation, exploration and causal learning. Comparing LLM's responses in prompts based on developmental psychology experiments to the responses of children may provide insight into which capacities can be learned through language and cultural transmission, and which require innovation and exploration in the physical world. I will present results from several studies making such comparisons.

**Bio:** Alison Gopnik is a professor of psychology and affiliate professor of philosophy at the University of California at Berkeley, and a member of the Berkeley AI Research Group. She received her BA from McGill University and her PhD. from Oxford University. She is a leader in the study of cognitive science and of children's learning and development and was one of the founders of the field of "theory of mind", an originator of the "theory of cognitive development", and the first to apply Bayesian probabilistic models to children's learning. She has received both the APS Lifetime Achievement Cattell and William James Awards, the Bradford Washburn Award for Science Communication, and the SRCD Lifetime Achievement Award for Basic Science in Child Development. She is an elected member of the Society of Experimental Psychologists and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a Cognitive Science Society, American Association for the Advancement of Science, and Guggenheim Fellow. She was 2022-23 President of the Association for Psychological Science.

She is the author or coauthor of over 140 journal articles and several books including "Words, thoughts and theories" MIT Press, 1997, and the bestselling and critically acclaimed popular books "The Scientist in the Crib" William Morrow, 1999, "The Philosophical Baby; What children's minds tell us about love,

truth and the meaning of life” 2009, and “The Gardener and the Carpenter” 2016, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, the latter two won the Cognitive Development Society Best Book Prize in 2009 and 2016. Since 2013 she has written the Mind and Matter column for the Wall Street Journal and she has also written widely about cognitive science and psychology for The New York Times, The Economist, The Atlantic, The New Yorker, Scientific American, The Times Literary Supplement, The New York Review of Books, New Scientist and Slate, among others. Her TED talk on her work has been viewed more than 5.2 million times. She has frequently appeared on TV, radio and podcasts including “The Charlie Rose Show”, “The Colbert Report”, “Radio Lab” and “The Ezra Klein Show”. She lives in Berkeley with her husband Alvy Ray Smith and has three children and five grandchildren.

# The Future of Computational Linguistics in the LLM Age

## Panel Discussion

**Chair: Iryna Gurevych**  
Technische Universität Darmstadt  
**Tuesday, July 11 - Time: 14:45-15:45**

This is a panel discussion with:

- Dan Klein (UC Berkeley)
- Meg Mitchell (Hugging Face)
- Roy Schwartz (the Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

They will present short statements (5 to 7 min.) related to the main topic of the panel

- New opportunities (e.g., artificial general intelligence, responsible NLP);
- Technical challenges (e.g., multimodality, instruction-tuning, etc.)
- Real life problems & societal implications (e.g., hallucinations, biases, future job market);
- LLMs and the future of NLP; and
- Open-science vs. commercial LLMs

Followed by discussion with the panel and audience.

## **Memorial: Dragomir Radev**



**Tuesday, July 11, 2023 - Room: Metropolitan - Time: 13:00–13:30**

Dragomir Radev, the A. Bartlett Giamatti Professor of Computer Science at Yale University, passed away this year on Wed, March 29th. Drago contributed in substantial ways to research in NLP, to the organization of the ACL and to mentoring the next generation of computational linguists. Drago's role in our ACL community spans four decades. He was recognized for his work over this period through his selection as an ACL Fellow in 2018 for his significant contributions to text summarization and question answering, and through his receipt of the Distinguished ACL Service Award in 2022. In this session, speakers from different time periods of his life will discuss his contributions to the field and the impact his life had on so many of us.

## **Ethics Panel**

**Karën Fort, Min-Yen Kan and Yulia Tsvetkov, Luciana Benotti, Mark Dredze, Pascale Fung, Dirk Hovy, Jin-Dong Kim, Malvina Nissim**

**Tuesday, July 11, 2023 - Room: Pier 4&5 - Time: 16:15–17:45**

We present our ACL Ethics Committee's progress over the last few years. Of core interest, we will present the results of the ACL stakeholder survey about the role of ethics and ethics training exposure. Results from the survey respondents indicate that ethics is of primary interest to the community and that there is a mandate for the further creation and dissemination of ethics related training for authors, reviewers and event organisers. We will briefly review the survey results and feature a lengthened question and answer session in support of extended dialogue with our community. Our session will culminate through a dialogue with our session's participants in a moderated panel that includes participation from the entire ethics committee.

# **Transitioning to Rolling Review Discussion**

**Mausam, Professor, IIT Delhi (ARR EIC), Jonathan K. Kummerfeld, Assistant Professor,  
University of Sydney (ARR CTO)**  
**Tuesday, July 11, 2023 - Room: Metropolitan - Time: 14:15–14:45**

This session will contain a presentation on progress in ARR over the past year and provide an opportunity for community questions and discussion.

# Program Chairs’ Report on Peer Review at ACL 2023

Anna Rogers<sup>◊</sup> Marzena Karpinska<sup>♡</sup> Jordan Boyd-Graber<sup>♣</sup> Naoaki Okazaki<sup>♦</sup>

<sup>◊</sup>IT University of Copenhagen    <sup>♡</sup>University of Massachusetts Amherst  
<sup>♣</sup>University of Maryland    <sup>♦</sup>Tokyo Institute of Technology

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## Abstract

We present a summary of the efforts to improve conference peer review that were implemented at ACL’23. This includes work with the goal of improving review quality, clearer workflow and decision support for the area chairs, as well as our efforts to improve paper-reviewer matching for various kinds of non-mainstream NLP work, and improve the overall incentives for all participants of the peer review process. We present analysis of the factors affecting peer review, identify the most problematic issues that the authors complained about, and provide suggestions for the future chairs. We hope that publishing such reports would (a) improve transparency in decision-making, (b) help the people new to the field to understand how the \*ACL conferences work, (c) provide useful data for the future chairs and workshop organizers, and also academic work on peer review, and (d) provide useful context for the final program, as a source of information for meta-research on the structure and trajectory of the field of NLP.

## 1 Introduction

With the continued growth of our field and the rising number of conference submissions, peer review draws more and more attention from the community—as an application area (Hua et al., 2019; Anjum et al., 2019; Stelmakh et al., 2019, *inter alia*), in meta-research (Rogers and Augenstein, 2020; Church, 2020, *inter alia*), in initiatives to organize and release peer review data (Kang et al., 2018; Jecmen et al., 2022; Dycke et al., 2022, *inter alia*), and, of course, in the regular heated social media discussions during submission deadlines, review release dates, and acceptance notifications. It is unlikely that peer review will ever be perfect – it remains ‘the least bad system’ we have for ensuring the quality of scientific publications (Smith, 2010). Still, with each iteration we should learn a little more about what works better for organizing peer review at such scale, and in a community so diverse in expertise and experience.

As a step in that direction, ACL’23 makes its peer review report public and an official part of the conference proceedings, complementing the introduction and other administrative materials. The goal is to increase the visibility of the results of the conference process, as well as any incidental findings from conference organizations and the lessons learned the hard way that may be useful to the future chairs and workshop organizers. Such publications also provide extra incentives for the future program chairs to invest more effort in the analysis of their process, and they provide a useful background to the composition of the final program that may be useful for meta-science research (since they essentially document the selection process for that program). Last but not least, such publications will improve the transparency of the \*ACL conference process, which may be useful to the researchers who are new to the field.

We present the core statistics per track (§2), analysis of resubmissions (§3) and core demographics (§4), our efforts for improving peer review quality (§5), improving decision support for the chairs (§6), our analysis of various factors contributing to review scores and final decisions (§7), ethics review and best paper selection (§8), and our efforts towards improving incentives for the authors, reviewers and chairs (§9). We conclude with overall recommendations for future conference organizers (§10). The materials we developed will be available at a dedicated repository<sup>1</sup>.

The results presented here are based on the analysis of internal data of ACL’23, as well as exit surveys that we sent to the chairs, authors and reviewers. We received responses from 25 senior area chairs (SACs)

<sup>1</sup><https://github.com/acl-org/acl-2023-materials>

Track	Direct submissions			ARR submissions		
	Submitted	Main	Findings	Submitted	Main	Findings
Computational Social Science and Cultural Analytics	113	22.12	19.47	10	90.00	10.00
Dialogue and Interactive Systems	269	24.54	15.24	19	21.05	42.11
Discourse and Pragmatics	52	21.15	34.62	1	100.00	0.00
Ethics and NLP	54	22.22	31.48	7	42.86	42.86
Generation	175	25.71	20.57	6	66.67	16.67
Information Extraction	279	25.45	16.13	33	24.24	36.36
Information Retrieval and Text Mining	94	14.89	21.28	9	44.44	0.00
Interpretability and Analysis of Models for NLP	189	24.34	28.04	20	35.00	55.00
Language Grounding to Vision, Robotics, and Beyond	147	24.49	21.77	5	40.00	40.00
Large Language Models	252	28.17	21.03	10	50.00	30.00
Linguistic Diversity	18	27.78	22.22	1	0.00	100.00
Linguistic Theories, Cog. Modeling & Psycholinguistics	38	23.68	23.68	8	50.00	37.50
Machine Learning for NLP	313	21.09	23.32	37	56.76	2.70
Machine Translation	198	25.25	18.18	7	0.00	57.14
Multilingualism and Cross-Lingual NLP	85	20.00	30.59	12	25.00	16.67
NLP Applications	354	22.88	19.77	25	52.00	8.00
Phonology, Morphology, and Word Segmentation	21	28.57	19.05	0		
Question Answering	197	18.78	18.78	22	45.45	18.18
Resources and Evaluation	213	28.17	19.72	23	56.52	0.00
Semantics: Lexical	54	25.93	25.93	3	66.67	33.33
Semantics: Sentence-level Semantics	81	27.16	11.11	9	22.22	22.22
Sentiment Analysis, Stylistic Analysis, Arg. Mining	107	17.76	30.84	10	30.00	0.00
Speech and Multimodality	72	27.78	36.11	7	57.14	14.29
Summarization	139	23.02	21.58	12	33.33	8.33
Syntax: Tagging, Chunking, and Parsing	69	23.19	21.74	5	20.00	20.00
Theme: Reality Check	110	26.36	30.91	1	100.00	0.00
Total	4559	20.73	18.36	305	42.30	20.98

Table 1: Number of submissions and acceptance rates per track for direct and ARR submissions to ACL’23.

(35.7% response rate), 134 area chairs (ACs) (30.5% response rate), 510 reviewers (11.4% response rate), and 556 authors (4.07% response rate of all authors<sup>2</sup>).

## 2 Tracks and Acceptance Statistics

ACL’23 had 26 tracks, most of which have also been offered at other recent NLP conferences. At the suggestion of EMNLP 2022 chairs, we kept their separation of “*Large Language Models*<sup>3</sup>” track from “*Machine Learning for NLP*” track. At community requests we added the following tracks: “*Linguistic Diversity*” and “*Multilingualism and Cross-lingual NLP*”. Each track had at least two Senior Area Chairs (SACs), who then recruited area chairs (ACs) for that track. The full list of senior chairs per track is available at the conference website.<sup>4</sup>

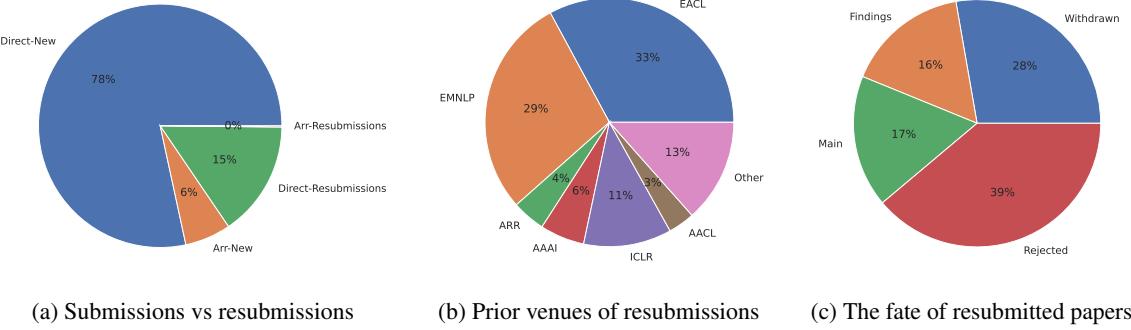
Internally, in the START system there were also two special tracks: “*Ethics review*” track (which handled the reviews of papers that were flagged for ethical issues), and “*Conflicts of interest*” (COI) track, which handled the papers with which the SACs of the relevant tracks had a COI.

ACL’23 implemented a hybrid process, in which it was possible to submit papers either directly to the START system (to be reviewed through ACL’23 internal peer review process to be described in this report), or commit it through ACL ROLLing Review (ARR) with reviews already performed at ARR. Most submissions to ACL’23 were direct submissions (4559), and 305 more came through ACL Rolling Review (ARR). Table 1 shows acceptance for each type of submission and in each track.

<sup>2</sup>Assuming that in most cases at most one author per paper responded to the survey, the upper bound on the response rate for author feedback per paper would be 11.4% of all direct and ARR submissions that were reviewed. 37.9% of the authors who responded to the survey indicated that they disagreed with the outcome for their submission.

<sup>3</sup>The EMNLP original name was *Language Modeling and Analysis of Language Models*. In our version it was simply *Large Language Models*, as they are the most frequent topic currently, but in retrospect the original version is preferable as it is more inclusive.

<sup>4</sup><https://2023.aclweb.org/committees/program/>



(a) Submissions vs resubmissions      (b) Prior venues of resubmissions

(c) The fate of resubmitted papers

Figure 1: Resubmissions at ACL'23

**ACL Rolling Review (ARR).** Table 1 shows that in most tracks, ARR submissions had a much higher acceptance rate, sometimes twice higher. This is to be expected because ARR submissions self-select for high scores and positive reviews before committing to ACL.

Since in the hybrid process ARR submissions and direct submissions directly compete for acceptance, a question arises to what extent this is a fair competition. We asked that question to our SACs. 58.3% believe that this process is fair enough, 12.5% - that it is unfair to the direct submissions, and 29.6%—that it is unfair to the ARR submissions. Of 17 SACs who believed that this situation is unfair in some way, 23.5% suggested that they should have separate acceptance rate, 41.2%—that they should have a separate process and acceptance criteria, and 47.1%—that there should be some other solution (many comments pointing to the confusion, the apples-to-oranges comparisons of reviews performed with different evaluation, the less-than-ideal import of openreview data into START (browsing attachments takes more time)). Many expressed a preference for a non-hybrid process.

As program chairs, our biggest challenge with ARR was that by design it provides reviews and meta-reviews, but the acceptance decisions are then made by our SACs—who generally do not provide extra feedback to either direct submissions or ARR submissions (nor can they be expected to: some tracks had over 300 papers per 3 SACs). For direct submissions, nobody expects SAC-level feedback. But to ARR authors, who likely self-selected for high scores and positive reviews, to be rejected without explanation is more frustrating, and we received a lot of angry emails demanding extra feedback (even though neither we nor ARR promised that). It seems that by design, a process where there are acceptance quotas, and decisions are fully decoupled from feedback, will necessarily leave the majority of authors rejected without explanation—and hence disappointed and unsure what they could do to improve their work (and we agree that this would indeed be frustrating to the authors).

The above factors could transform into a bigger problem in the future. We only had 305 ARR submissions, but if a majority of our submissions came with high scores and positive reviews—this just would not be a useful signal anymore. The acceptance odds of direct submissions would decrease (as compared to a process where everyone starts at the same stage of peer review). The SAC-ing would become harder (since selecting among high-quality papers is less easy than among papers of varying quality), and the authors would be disappointed because many would be rejected with high scores and no idea what they could do differently.

### 3 Resubmissions

Among the 4559 direct submissions to ACL'23, 754 indicated that they were resubmissions (see fig. 1a). The biggest “donors” were EACL<sup>5</sup> (296), EMNLP (258), ICLR (103), AAAI (52), and ACL Rolling Review<sup>6</sup> (39). Although the selectivity of top-tier conferences means that the majority of papers are

<sup>5</sup>Because our submission deadline was shortly before EACL and ICLR notification deadlines, we made an exception to no-cross-submission policy and allowed their submissions to be also submitted to ACL. After their respective notifications many such papers withdrew from our pool, which explains the high withdrawal rate in Figure 1c.

<sup>6</sup>There were 11 resubmissions from October 2022, 6 from September, and 1-3 from many other months of 2022.

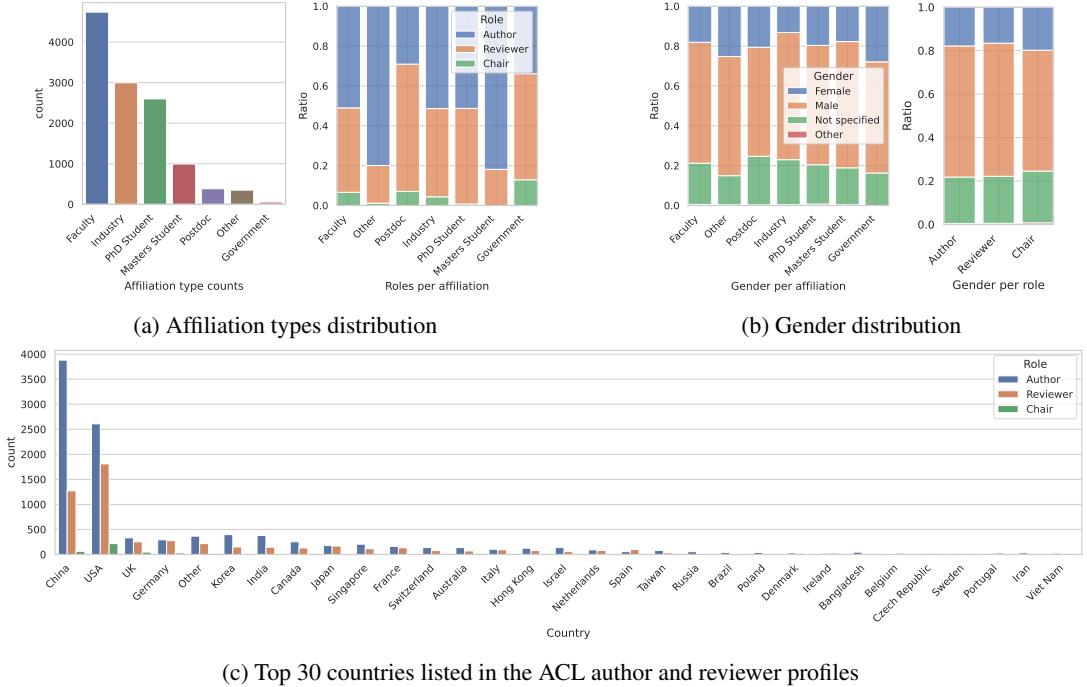


Figure 2: Author and reviewer pool at ACL'23\*

\* All information is self-reported, not independently verified, and does not correspond to any specific definition of affiliation, gender, or country (e.g., some authors from Edinburgh may elect to list their country as “Scotland” rather than “UK”).

rejected, the bulk of the ACL’23 submissions are new, which means that at this point **the burden of re-reviewing is relatively low**. It is possible that this is due to the wider acceptance of Findings as a publication channel, as more \*ACL conferences continue to offer this option.

Moreover, ACL’23 authors had the option to submit previous reviews as an attachment, but only 243 submissions used this option, which suggests that most resubmitters preferred to have a completely new set of reviewers. ARR allows that option within ARR, but the ARR submissions themselves did not have a high rate of revise-and-resubmit (only 8/305), as shown in [fig. 1b](#).

Intuitively, one could expect that resubmissions have a higher chance of acceptance, since these are the papers that have received feedback and had a chance to revise. But [fig. 1c](#) suggests otherwise. See more analysis in §7.3.

## 4 Authors and Reviewers at ACL’23

We received a record 4864 submissions (4559 direct, 305 from ARR) from the total of 13,658 authors, reviewed by 4490 reviewers. This section reviews our recruitment process and the three demographic variables (country, affiliation type, and gender) to which we had access in the global START profiles of all participants of ACL peer review process.

**Reviewer recruitment.** We initially sent review invitations to the reviewer list which we had received from the organizers of previous conferences. We also required the authors of all submissions to nominate at least one experienced reviewer, whom we also sent invitations.

As we elicited reviewer data, we found that **for a quarter of our reviewers<sup>7</sup> there is no reliable Semantic Scholar publication history data that can be used for paper-reviewer matching**. For conferences that fully rely on automated paper–reviewer matching based on publication history, this factor obviously sets a bound on their possible performance. Often the author pages exist because Semantic Scholar automatically created them, but the authors did not claim them and did not clean them up, which

<sup>7</sup>Out of the reviewers who filled in our sign-up forms, only 75.4% confirmed that their Semantic Scholar profile is accurate and can actually be used to estimate their areas of interest and expertise. In addition to that, 8.9% reviewers listed in START did not specify their Semantic Scholar IDs in their profiles.

may result in the addition of publications by namesake authors (e.g. the automatically created profile for “Anna Rogers” originally had contributions from at least three researchers with that name.) This is particularly worrying because at this point many venues have used this information for paper-reviewer matching, and urged the NLP community to maintain their Semantic Scholar profiles. We also specifically reminded about this, but still a quarter of our sign-up pool stated that their publication history is not accurate. In addition to this problem, matching based on publication history has the issue with establishing expertise of different authors on multi-author publications. Hence, we developed an alternative matching approach described in §5.2.

**Affiliation types.** Figure 2a presents the overall distribution of the affiliations of our authors and reviewers (as stated in START profiles). The biggest group of authors, reviewers, and chairs are academic faculty. The second biggest group (by absolute numbers) in all three categories is industry, which is relevant to the recent concerns about the influence of industry on academic NLP research (Abdalla et al., 2023). Furthermore, students form at least 26% of reviewer pool (Ph.D. 22.7%, M.Sc. 3.3%). This was also our experience as area chairs at other recent conferences, and it highlights the need to **continue the reviewer training efforts**.

**Gender distribution.** Based on the information in softconf profile, about 20% of ACL peer review participants in all roles did not answer the question about their gender (Figure 2b). For a part of this population this is likely a deliberate choice, but judging by how many other fields in the START profiles were not accurately filled in or updated, in many cases this likely signals simply the lack of desire to fill in forms, especially for the new authors who had to register in START last minute in order to make a submission. Considering only those profiles that responded to this question, we see a heavy imbalance for “male”, in agreement with the reports on under-representation of women in Computer Science (Jaccheri et al., 2020; Pantic and Clarke-Midura, 2019), where a lot of NLP research is currently happening. This underscores the need to **continue the Diversity and Inclusion efforts**.

**Top contributing countries.** The analysis of the countries of all authors and reviewers suggests that the balance between reviewing and submitting papers is considerably off for many locations, and particularly China.<sup>8</sup> We believe that this is at least partly due to the fact that our recruitment efforts started with the pool of the previous conferences. That pool needs to be deliberately expanded by **more active and targeted reviewer recruitment efforts among Chinese institutions**.

Church (2020) estimates that at 20% acceptance rate the authors of published papers “owe” the community at least 15 reviews per each publication (3 for their own paper, and 4x3 for the papers that didn’t get in). While some dis-balance between the author and reviewer list is to be expected (e.g., since many junior authors are not yet qualified to review, and many senior authors perform other organization roles)—we clearly need to decrease it in order to decrease the reviewer load. Our default quota was six papers<sup>9</sup> per reviewer, in line with most recent conferences. This is a significant workload, and it can hardly be expected to improve the quality of reviews. Moreover, the more reviewers are in the pool, the smaller the trade-off between optimizing for best matches or smaller workload per reviewer.

## 5 Efforts towards improving review quality

This section describes the following steps that ACL’23 proposed and implemented within its peer review process to improve review quality: review tutorials (§5.1), Area-Contribution-Language paper-reviewer matching (§5.2), flagging of review issues by the authors (§5.3). The efforts to improve the overall incentives are decribed in §9.2 and §9.3.

<sup>8</sup>In absolute numbers: 3881 authors vs 1271 reviewers for China (ratio 3.05, absolute difference 2610). For the US: 2608 authors, 1809 reviewers (ratio 1.4, absolute difference 799). While the reviewer:author ratios are also high for India (2.6) and Korea (2.64), from the point of view of a conference organizer China stands out due to the sheer volume of submissions.

<sup>9</sup>We gave the reviewers a chance to request a lighter load at sign-up, and respected those quotas in our automated assignments, but there were still some over-assignments due to manual corrections of assignments by the chairs.

## 5.1 Reviewer training

As part of reviewer training, we prepared the following public materials (as a revision of an earlier tutorial<sup>10</sup>, developed by Anna Rogers and Isabelle Augenstein for ARR):

- **ACL'23 Peer Review Process:** the general tutorial about review process for novice reviewers, that covers the basic structure of \*ACL peer review process, author response, and discussion period, as well as tips for planning the time, reporting conflicts of interest and assessing whether to ask for reassignment. These materials were optional for experienced reviewers, and could be used across different \*ACL venues as is.
- **ACL'23 Peer Review Policies:** the tutorial explaining our review form and responsible NLP checklist (§9.1), as well as our peer review policy: specific, professional reviews with scores supported by the text. Our list of reviewer heuristics such as “reject if not SOTA” currently contains 14 heuristics (continued from the original eight heuristics pioneered at EMNLP 2020 (Cohn et al., 2020)). We asked even experienced reviewers to read this tutorial. The future chairs could reuse parts of this tutorial, with necessary updates to the review form description and review policies.

**Feedback.** The exit survey indicates that the reviewers found the materials clear (43% respondents rated them as at 4 out of 4 and 40.5% - as 3 out of 4 on 4-point scale). One avenue of improvement suggested in many free comments was adding examples of good reviews.

We also asked the reviewers about their preferences for alternative formats, and the self-paced text-based tutorial was the majority choice (62.5% vs 13% preferring video tutorials and 9.6% preferring interactive tutorial with quizzes). But 13.4% respondents said that they would probably never be able to spend time on reviewer training, no matter what format it is offered in. This suggests that reviewer training, while valuable, will not help in all cases, and could perhaps be interpreted as an upper bound on the effect of any reviewer training.

## 5.2 ACL paper-reviewer matching: Area-Contribution-Language

One of the peer review issues that authors (and chairs) often complain about is “meh” reviews: the reviewer does not really find any significant problems with methodology or execution of the paper, but the overall recommendation is middling. This could be a symptom of paper-reviewer mismatch: the reviewer just is not sufficiently interested in the overall topic or approach, and hence no matter how good the paper is, it would not elicit much enthusiasm. In a recent survey (Thorn Jakobsen and Rogers, 2022) of authors, reviewers and ACs about their prior experience at NLP venues, many reviewers stated that “*the area match was right, but... the subject of the paper was not interesting to me (e.g. I would prefer another NLP task, model, or data)*” (54%), or *“the paper was not asking a research question that would be interesting for me”* (45%). At the same time, over 27% of the author respondents in that survey reported that they had experience of reviews where the reviewer was not interested in the subject of the paper.

Most recent \*ACL conferences and ARR work with some version of an automated paper-reviewer matching system that computes affinity scores between the abstract and title of the submission and the candidate reviewer, based on their publication history. Interestingly, the same survey by Thorn Jakobsen and Rogers (2022) found that both authors, reviewers, and ACs generally considered these scores to be the least important factor for paper-reviewer matching. Besides the limitations of the current systems, one factor here is probably the noise in the reviewer publication history data (only 75% of our reviewers indicated that their Semantic Scholar profiles were accurate enough to use for review assignments, see §4). Then there is also the inherent difficulty with establishing level of expertise on a particular topic in multi-author papers.

A traditional alternative to affinity scores, that also addresses the issue with reviewer interest, is bidding: the reviewers explicitly say which papers they would be interested in. But this process is rather laborious: for a big track, a reviewer would need to indicate their interest for hundreds of papers. It also opens up the possibility of collusion rings (Littman, 2021). In our experience, many reviewers do not even respond to bidding calls on time, which once again leads to some part of assignments being essentially random.

<sup>10</sup><https://aclrollingreview.org/reviewertutorial>

Match by area	Match by contribution	Match by language	Review count	Review %
✓	✓	English	8996	71.36
n/a*	n/a	n/a	1052	8.35
✗	✓	English	691	5.48
✓	✗	English	558	4.43
✓	✓	✓	476	3.78
✓	✓	✗	345	2.74
✗	✓	✓	164	1.3
✗	✗	English	142	1.13
✗	✗	✓	52	0.41
✓	✗	✓	50	0.40

Table 2: The number of reviews matched to submission by different combinations of ACL (Area-Contribution-Language) criteria. The ‘n/a’ row corresponds to manual assignments by ACs, for which we do not have the match information.

Thus, we experimented with a new workflow that we dub **ACL (Area-Contribution-Language) paper-reviewer-matching**. It is a keywords-based matching process that explicitly targets three dimensions of submissions: track sub-areas (topical match), contribution types (match by focus/methodology), and target language (for submissions not focusing on English). To the extent possible, the paper-reviewer matching aimed to provide matches across all these dimensions. This approach further enabled us to provide the ACs with explanations for the specific matches (see §6.3).

**Track sub-areas.** Each track at ACL 2023 had an associated set of keywords describing its potential sub-areas. The goal was to describe the biggest expected sub-areas, and hopefully provide the authors with a better idea of the kind of work that the track was inviting. The full list of our keywords is publicly available in our blog post.<sup>11</sup> Our keywords were provided by the SACs of all tracks independently, but the future chairs may wish to take a more top-down approach to editing this list, and to ask their SACs to check that the list still describes the sub-areas for which the most submissions are expected, and the individual keywords are sufficiently clear for the authors.

**Language(s).** Due to the “default” status of English (Bender, 2019), submissions targeting other languages may be perceived as “niche” by reviewers. Additionally, the lack of expertise in a language may make it harder for reviewers to spot potential issues. Hence, for papers on languages other than English, we endeavoured to also maximize reviewer matches along this dimension.

**Contribution types.** The contribution types cross-cut tracks, and we hope they would help to decrease the amount of cases where the reviewer just fundamentally does not recognize a certain type of work (Bawden, 2019) and hence scores it down, or has unreasonable expectations (e.g. experimental results in a position paper). For example, the category of compute/data-efficiency creates a de-facto equivalent of efficiency track spread across all tracks.

Our contribution types are based on COLING 2018 classification (Bender and Derczynski, 2018), which we extended as follows: (1) NLP engineering experiment (most papers proposing methods to improve state-of-the-art), (2) approaches for low-compute settings, efficiency, (3) approaches for low-resource settings, (4) data resources, (5) data analysis (6) model analysis & interpretability, (7) reproduction studies, (8) position papers, (9) surveys, (10) theory, (11) publicly available software and pre-trained models.

**Implementation.** To collect the information for this kind of matching, we asked the authors at submission time to specify their preferred track (up to two), the best-matching keywords in that track (multiple selection possible, or “other” option with free text entry), the best matching contribution type(s) and target language(s). Correspondingly, at reviewer recruitment stage we asked the reviewers to fill in a form specifying their preferences for the tracks, keywords, contribution types, and the language(s) the work on which they could review. The matching itself was based on Integer Linear Programming, aiming to maximize matches across the three keyword types (with more types of matching being more valuable than

<sup>11</sup><https://2023.aclweb.org/blog/reviewer-assignment/>

e.g. more matches only by area). As a fallback, we also retrieved Semantic Scholar profile data for the reviewers and computed the similarity between submission abstracts to the abstracts in the publication history of candidate reviewers, but this factor was given the lowest priority in the assignment strategy.

The Area-Contribution-Language matches, as well as the most similar paper of the reviewer, then also became the basis for the rationales for the match (see §6.3). The SACs were given the opportunity to selectively check and adjust the matches as described in §6.2 (although few of them did), and the ACs and SACs were able to see the rationales for the matches when considering the reviews.

From the analysis of the final 12606 reviews in START, 1052 (8.3%) did not have the match information (due to manual reviewer reassignment by the chairs, most likely emergency reviewers). Of the remaining 93.7% reviews made by our criteria, only 1.13% reviews with automated assignment were assigned based on the similarity scores from publication history, after exhausting the possible keywords-based matches in the reviewer pool. 82.9% reviews had at least one match by the type of area, 84.97% - by contribution type. Importantly for DEI efforts and development of NLP for languages other than English, we had 1167 reviews for submissions that specified at least one target language other than English – and we were able to provide a reviewer matching by (at least one) language in 63.58% such reviews.

**Feedback.** When asked to rate on 4-point scale how well the paper-reviewer matching worked for them, 85.5% ACL’23 reviewers rated it positively (35.7% at 4/4, 49.8% at 3/4). When asked for the kinds of mismatch, if any, 28.4% pointed at the topic, 13.7% at the methods, 10.4% at the type of contribution, 4.5% at languages, and 5.7% at other kinds of mismatch.

We conclude that Area-Contribution-Language assignments are overall a promising direction that can contribute to DEI efforts in the field and diversity of its contributions (see also §7). The matches could be further refined by (a) revising the area keywords<sup>12</sup>, and (b) more targeted reviewer recruitment to include speakers of various languages. One of our SACs suggested providing a glossary together with the list of keywords. We also recommend investing effort into a dedicated interface for checking reviewer assignments that would enable ACs to help with reviewer assignment checks while seeing the up-to-date reviewer availability information, and highlighting the possible problems with the current assignments (such as imperfect matches, rare types of contributions or languages that may need extra attention, insufficient pool for a area or a contribution that turns out to be more popular this year).

### 5.3 Review issue flagging

Even with all the above efforts, we anticipated that there would still be problematic and mismatched reviews. Given that the only people with the incentive to read the reviewer guidelines and enforce them are the authors, we developed a way for them to flag reviews for specific issues, which the ACs could be given specific instructions about, and be able to address more systematically.

Unfortunately, the START system does not have an editor for the author response form or meta-review form. Hence we had to provide the authors and ACs with the list of possible issues, and ask them to specify their type and rationale in plain text form, as shown in Figure 3. As could be expected, even with a template there were many format errors. We recommend that the future conferences use a form with a multi-selector, per each reviewer.

The authors actively used this feature at ACL’23, flagging 12.9% of all reviews. This is reassuring: judging by the intensity of online discussions of peer review at each review release day, *most* reviews are bad). The frequency of various reported issues is shown in Table 3. The biggest reported problem is the heuristics such as “not novel”, “not surprising”, “too simple”, and “not SOTA”. Particularly concerning are the rude/unprofessional reviews: even though there are only 1.69%, they have the most potential to impact the mental health of the authors, and we should strive for that number to be 0.

The author-reported issues should be interpreted as a lower bound on the number of review issues, because of 100 papers were reviewed but withdrew before the final decisions. It is possible that they did because they (a) agreed with the criticism and wished to revise the paper, or (b) that they disagreed but did not see a chance to persuade the reviewers. Assuming the latter, and that all their reviews were problematic, this would raise the upper bound of problematic reviews to 15.3%. But it is unlikely that all

<sup>12</sup>In particular, our Language Grounding SACs indicated that their keywords should be revised and clarified.

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#### Response to Chairs

In rare cases reviews may be of unacceptably low quality, which violates the conference [peer review policy](#). If this happened to you, you can use the box below to report the type of the issue and explain your rationale to the chairs. This mechanism should only be used for serious issues. It is not in the authors' interest to make their meta-reviewers investigate cases where the authors disagree with the reviewers, but the reviewers have done due diligence and provide their arguments/evidence/references.

The following types of issues are known from past conferences:

- A. The review is not specific enough, e.g. missing references are not specified
- B. The review exhibits one of the heuristics discussed in the ACL23 [review policy blog post](#), such as "not novel", "not surprising", "too simple", "not SOTA". Note that these criticisms may be legitimate, if the reviewer explains their reasoning, and backs up the criticism with arguments/evidence/references. Please flag only the cases where you believe that the reviewer has not done due diligence.
- C. The [scores](#) do not match the review text. Note that in ACL23, the "soundness" score is meant to reflect the technical merit of the submission, and low soundness should be backed up with serious objections to the work. The "excitement" score is more subjective, and its justification may not be reflected in the text.
- D. The review is rude/unprofessional
- E. The review does not evince expertise (incl. texts that seem to be synthetic and not based on a deep understanding of the submission)
- F. The review does not match the paper type (e.g. short paper expected to produce more experiments than is necessary to support the stated claim)
- G. The review does not match the type of contribution (e.g. experimental work expected of a paper stating a different kind of contribution)
- H. The review is missing or too short and uninformative
- I. The review was late and could not be addressed in the author response
- J. Other (please explain)

If you feel that you have such a problem, please use the following format to report it in the text box below (without the #comment lines, 250 words max). In this example, Reviewer 1 had issue A (unspecific review) and Reviewer 2 had issues C and D (rude review, scores don't match the text).

```
# review problem type(s), as a capital letter corresponding to the issue type in the above list of possible issues. If there is more than one, list them comma-separated (e.g. A, I)  
R1: A  
# explanation  
R1 states [reviewer statement], which we believe corresponds to the review issue type A. It is unreasonable in this case because [rationale].  
R2: C,D  
R2 states [reviewer statement]...
```

Submit

Figure 3: Review issue flagging: minimal plain-text implementation in START

withdrawn papers were of the (b) type, and the comments from ACs also suggest that many issues were not fully justified.

**Feedback.** When asked to rate the utility of this system at ACL’23 on 4-point scale, with 4 being the highest score, 42.1% of the authors in our exit survey rated it at 4/4, and 40.3% - at 3/4. We interpret it as overwhelming support, and recommend that this feature is maintained in the future conferences. However, the qualitative analysis of the authors’ comments suggests that in some cases the ACs did not respond to the flagged issues properly, which entails the need for further training and monitoring by the SACs.

Our follow-up analysis suggests that ACs reported addressing the author-flagged issues in at least 30.59% submissions (judging by their using a similar template to Figure 3 in the “confidential notes to chairs” in the meta-review. This should be interpreted as a *lower* bound: since the interface was very clunky, it is possible that some ACs did consider the flagged issues, but did not report their actions. But, clearly, many issues were not properly addressed, and there is much room for improvement and further training of ACs. Still, given that this is the first implementation of this system, this is a promising approach and it should improve in the future.

#### 5.4 Reviewer discussion

Similarly to most of the recent \*ACL conferences, we implemented the author response period: a week during which the authors have the opportunity to read the reviews and send their response. The goal of this process is improving the quality of the reviews, and we supplemented that goal with the above new option for the authors to flag specific types of review issues (§5.3). The authors could (but didn’t have to) provide a response and flag review issues; this was done for 88.3% of reviewed submissions. In 57.3% review forms the reviewers indicated that they read the response (it is possible that more did read the response but did not fill in the form).

Those comments were seen by the ACs, not the reviewers. The ACs had the *option* to initiate reviewer discussions for the cases where they saw significant disagreements, quality issues, or misunderstandings. Each paper had an associated “forum” on START, where the reviewers could communicate in an

Type of issue	Number of reviews	% of reviews
A: The review is not specific enough	272	2.16
B: Review heuristics such as “not novel”, “not surprising”, “too simple”, “not SOTA”	678	5.38
C: The scores do not match the review text	448	3.55
D: The review is rude/unprofessional	213	1.69
E: The review does not evince expertise	542	4.3
F: The review does not match the paper type	98	0.78
G: The review does not match the type of contribution	152	1.21
H: The review is missing or too short	205	1.63
I: The review was late	12	0.1
J: Other	162	1.29

Table 3: Review issue statistics

anonymized fashion (as R1, R2, R3). The ACs were provided with instructions and suggested starter message template.

In total, out of 4559 direct submissions to ACL, 4069 had received reviews, and for 2901 out of those the ACs initiated discussions. In total, ACL review process generated 8553 messages (3879 by the ACs). However, only 2107 discussions (72.63%) had at least one response from at least one reviewer. Somewhat consistently, the discussions were overall initiated by 77.4% of all ACs. We conclude that both AC and reviewer involvement have room for improvement.

We reviewed one case of a strong paper that ended up being rejected. The AC could have been persuaded by a “champion” reviewer, and there was one such expert in the set who was surprised by the final outcome—but they did not engage in the forum discussion. We followed up with the reviewer, and they explained that since their review was already positive, they did not feel that they needed to be “on the case” anymore. We cannot establish how common this misconception is, but we would urge all reviewers to always read all reviews and author response, and when certain of the merit of a paper—to try to make sure that the AC is convinced.

## 6 Improving decision support for the chairs

In addition to the efforts for improving the quality of peer review (§5), we implemented the following steps for facilitating the decision support by ACs and SACs: revised SAC and AC guidelines (§6.1), guidance for assignment checking (§6.2), match rationales (§6.3), *Soundness/Excitement* scores (§6.4).

### 6.1 Updated SAC and AC guidelines

We updated the SAC/AC guidelines that we received from the program chairs of ACL’21 in following ways. We reformatted it to Markdown to utilize the ecosystem of GitHub (e.g., version control, asynchronous collaboration among PCs, automated deployment). The guides were built by Sphinx<sup>13</sup> with MyST extension<sup>14</sup>, which enables to use Markdown and variables (making it easy to keep the consistency of dates and external URLs between SAC and AC guides and for the future chairs to adapt to their timeline). We also adjusted the existing instructions and created new instructions to incorporate everything we developed, from the new reviewer guidelines to guidelines for making recommendations. We shared the guides before the review process so that SACs and ACs can be prepared for the tasks and workloads.

**Feedback.** 83.3% SACS and 90.3% ACs rated the clarity of instructions at 3/4 or 4/4. Some of the free-text comments indicated a preference for shorter guidelines, but since the process is complex, and the guidelines need to serve both new and experienced chairs, there are limits to how much they can be shortened.

<sup>13</sup><https://www.sphinx-doc.org/>

<sup>14</sup><https://myst-parser.readthedocs.io/>

## 6.2 Support for checking assignments

As mentioned above, the usual workflow in large conferences is that the assignments are made automatically based on affinity scores between candidate reviewers' publication history and submissions. Usually, the automated assignments are then shown to the ACs and SACs to check manually, but this is very difficult in practice: SACs cannot process such a large volume on their own, so they need to rely on ACs. But ACs, at least on START, do not have access to the list of possible reviewers together with their current number of assignments and all their COIs, which means that even if they spot an error—it is difficult for them to identify and recommend an available alternative. Providing the up-to-date quota and COI information on all reviewers in track to the ACs is not possible in the current START platform. There are also no detailed guidelines for this step, which means that even if ACs had the reviewer information, everybody would be suggesting alternatives based on different criteria.

In our experience as SACs in previous conferences, although the automated assignments are not perfect, very few ACs actually report the problems or propose alternatives. To see whether this was widespread, we asked our SACs in the exit about whether, in their experience, the ACs asked to check the automated assignments usually recommend many changes. Only 9 of our respondents previously served as SACs in this set-up, but most of them (6/9) concurred with our experience, reporting that ACs adjust very few assignments. When asked why the ACs do not recommend more changes, 33.3% SACs stated that there are no adjustments because the ACs don't really check, 29.9%—that it happens because the automated assignments are already good enough, 29.2%—because of the difficulty with sharing up-to-date reviewer availability information with them, and 20.8%—that there are no better candidates even if the ACs check. 37.5% indicated that there are also other issues contributing to the ACs not recommending more changes.

We interpret these results as pointing to the fundamental issue of systematically sharing up-to-date reviewer availability information together with their preferences, experience, and profile information, in a way that would make it easy for the ACs to perform such checks and recommend alternatives.

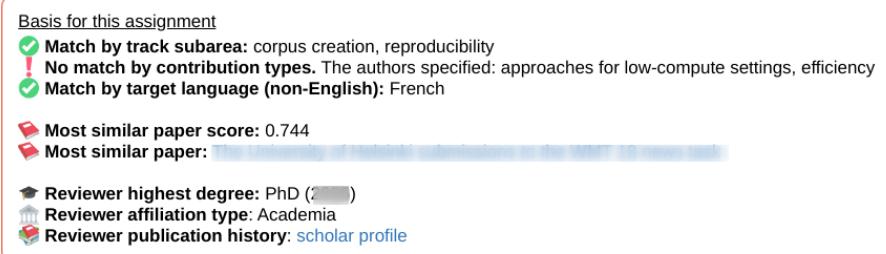
Given that the above factors make it unrealistic to adjust assignments with help of ACs, and that the volume of assignments to check was too large for SACs, we experimented with an alternative approach: since we had the “explanations” for the matches and also the quantitative information about different types of contributions, languages and area keywords, this information would make it possible for SACs to identify the types of submissions most in need of extra checks, and to focus on those. This way the workload would remain manageable, and the SACs would be able to do that while having full access to the latest reviewer availability data. To assist in this process, we developed Jupyter notebooks with quantitative analysis per track (identifying which keywords, types of contributions and languages were rare and could need extra attention)—as well as reviewer lookup functionality by preferred keywords, languages or types of contribution (or any combination thereof). This solution was better than nothing, but admittedly clunky and could be much improved.

**Feedback.** 66.7% of SACs stated that they believed selective checking to be overall sufficient given sufficiently strict reviewer pool criteria (although in our specific case not all reviewers in our pool were up to all SAC's standards).

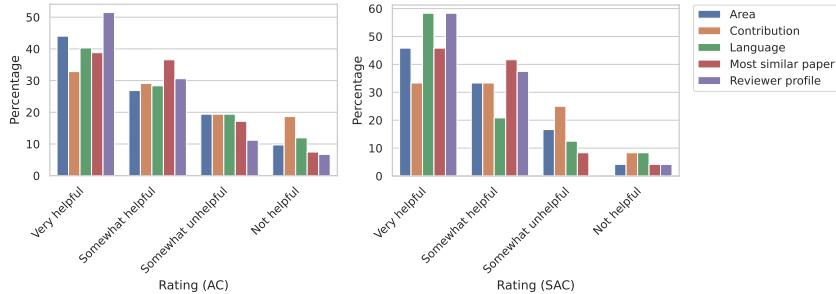
Caveat: we encountered difficulty with uploading the final automated assignments due to dynamic computation of conflicts-of-interest in START. Because of that, several hundred automated assignments had to be redone manually at the last minute. For the conferences based on START, we strongly recommend that this computation is frozen after the main part of reviewers and chairs are added to the tracks.

## 6.3 Paper-reviewer match rationales

Given the information for the paper-reviewer matches that we had collected (§5.2), we were able to provide the ACs with a list of rationales for each match (except for those reviewers who were added manually by the chairs, and for whom we did not have this information.) A sample “explanation” for a match is shown in [Figure 4a](#). The idea was to provide the AC with not only the general information about the reviewer, but also what are their interests that match this submission. Importantly, we highlighted the cases where the author-stated type of contribution or language was *not* among the reviewer's stated



(a) Example of paper-reviewer match rationales. The most similar paper titles directly link to the papers (based on Semantic Scholar). For contributions and languages, the rationales either show the match, or alert to the lack of the match, so that the AC could take that into account.



(b) Chair feedback on which features of the match explanation they found the most useful.

Figure 4: Example explanation for paper-reviewer matches, and AC utility ratings for individual features displayed.

interests, which would ideally provide the AC with grounds to check potential bias against certain kinds of work.

**Feedback.** This feature received overwhelming support from the chairs: 87.5% SACs and 73.9% ACs rated its utility at 3 or 4 out of 4 (Figure 4b). Among the suggestions for the future improvement, the SACs suggested indicating whether the reviewer was an emergency reviewer, and how late the review was, as well as some elements of reviewer history (e.g. whether they were late for other conferences). The numerical similarity scores were less useful than the titles of the most similar papers. While predominantly the ACs were very positive about easily accessible links to reviewer profiles (Figure 4b), some ACs raised fair concerns about the effect of this feature on reviewer deanonymization: the reviewers are already visible to ACs since they need this information for chasing late reviews, but providing links to reviewer profiles increases the saliency of the reviewers’ identities, and hence may by itself increase bias against, for instance, student reviewers.

#### 6.4 Soundness/Excitement scores

While most of the experimental aspects of the ACL 2023 process was focused on matching reviewers to papers more effectively, a larger change visible to authors and reviewers was the introduction of two new scores on the review form to replace the *Overall Recommendation* that was previously the centerpiece of \*CL review forms.

We asked reviewers for two scores: *Soundness* and *Excitement*.<sup>15</sup> Our goal was that any sound paper would be accepted to some ACL affiliated venue (i.e., Findings), but that the “main conference” distinction (limited by space) would be focused on the most exciting papers. Our hope was that *Soundness*, as a more specific rubric with more objective criteria, would be less noisy than a single *Overall Recommendation* score, which would help reduce the randomness of decisions. The AC guidelines had explicit instructions for how these scores should map to their recommended status.

One more factor motivating our proposal was that the *Soundness/Excitement* distinction could help with the author-reviewer communication during the author response. When a reviewer points out issues with

<sup>15</sup>See our definitions and rubrics for the review form and extra explanation here.

*Soundness*, the authors generally have a fair chance to clear any misunderstandings or issues with review quality, and the chairs are interested in this kind of discussion. The *Excitement*, however, is subjective, and the authors do not have a fair chance to convince reviewers that their general views or research agenda are wrong. The *Soundness/Excitement* distinction helps to focus the response on the *Soundness* issues, and hence have a more productive discussion.

**Feedback.** Judging by the exit surveys, this change was overall well received: over 80% of the chairs, reviewers and authors either expressed support or did not object to this change. 38.1% authors, 35.1% reviewers and 29.9% ACs indicated that while the idea was good, it could be better executed. Among the named issues was the clarity of communication about what these scores meant, the difference in granularity (our scale for *Excitement* had 9 points, and *Soundness* only 5), and the wording could be adjusted to remove the semblance to *Overall recommendation* score. We made these recommendations to the program chairs of EMNLP 2023, who decided to keep this system.

From the communication with the authors who expressed dislike for this system, our impression is that one of the factors here is the mistaken impression that the final decisions are overall based on scores, and the papers with similar scores should be guaranteed the same outcome—whereas in reality the chairs know that scores can be noisy and miscalibrated, and hence the final decisions are made on case-by-case basis, with the full view of the reviews and meta-review, and also taking into account the acceptance quotas and their editorial priorities.<sup>16</sup> The *Soundness/Excitement* scores were rather intended to make it harder for the chairs to just sort by the scores.

## 7 What Factors Contribute to ACL Peer Review Outcome?

Here we present the results of statistical analysis of ACL’23 data, with the goal of explicating what factors contributed to the final decisions and to the quality of individual reviews. We hope that this process both improves the transparency around chair decision-making, and highlights the potential biases and points of improvement for future conferences.

For the new authors, we should explain the general process for the acceptance decisions at ACL’23. First, the reviewers contribute their reviews. At the author response the authors see the reviews and have an opportunity to respond: a process mostly intended to clarify any misunderstandings (we disallowed submitting new results). Then the ACs initiate the reviewer discussion, with the goal to clarify misunderstandings and improve the quality of the reviews. Based on the final reviews and their own expertise, they write the meta-reviews and make recommendations for acceptance (Main track or Findings) or rejection. They are *not* concerned with the acceptance quotas. Their recommendations and meta-reviews (as well as reviews and author response if necessary) are then considered by the SACs, who have the constraint of the target acceptance quota (which we set at about 22% for the main track and 35% for Findings). Their decisions are based on three main factors: meta-reviews, quotas, and editorial priorities (with case-by-case consideration as needed). If they run out of their quota, they may additionally rank more papers by priority that may be accepted to main/track Findings if there is space (e.g., because some tracks did not use their quota fully). The final step is that the program chairs confirm the SAC decisions, and try to fit in as many papers of the ranked “maybes” as possible. In our case, that resulted in accepting more Findings papers than we originally planned based on prior conferences.

### 7.1 Review Scores: Overall Distribution

We start by exploring the overall distribution of the new *Excitement* and *Soundness* scores (described in §6.4) and how they mapped to the three possible decision outcomes (Rejection, acceptance to the Main track, or Findings). Both *Excitement* and *Soundness* are ordinal variables, and we use the mean as a rough estimate of the central tendency. Figure 5a shows that for both scores the means are higher for main track than for Findings, and for Findings they are higher than for rejections. For *Excitement* this is fully in line with our instructions to the chairs. For the main track, this suggests that higher (above 3) *Soundness* scores

<sup>16</sup>This is a general problem, and we imagine this would have also happened in the case of an *Overall recommendation* score. The drawback of the *Soundness* plus *Excitement* system is that less noisy decision cutoffs make outliers more salient

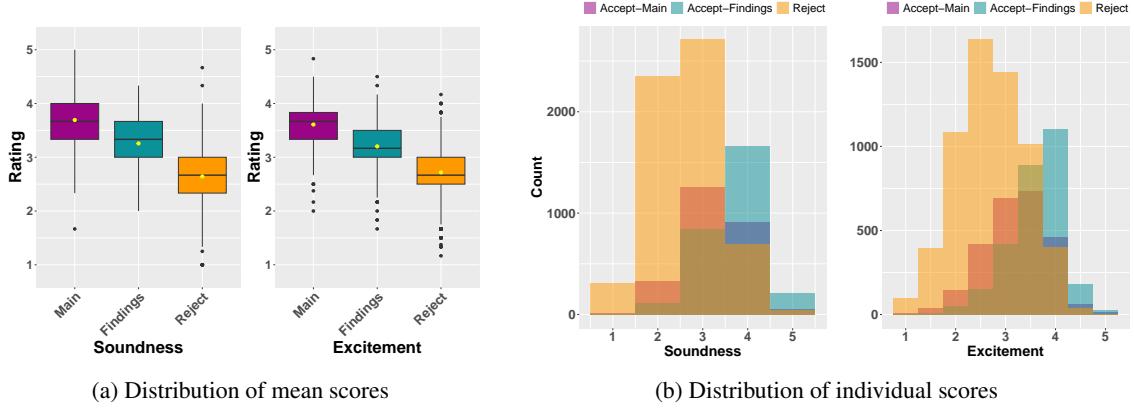


Figure 5: *Soundness* and *Excitement* scores per acceptance status

	Findings Coeff	Main Coeff	Findings SE	Main SE
(Intercept)	-1.48	3.77	0.79	1.43
Soundness Mean	0.71	0.76	0.22	0.37
Excitement Mean	0.61	0.03	0.23	0.42
AC Recommendation (L)	2.66	4.50	0.50	0.94
AC Recommendation (Q)	-1.16	-0.05	0.43	0.81
AC Recommendation (C)	-0.04	0.10	0.31	0.58
AC Recommendation (^4)	0.04	-0.27	0.19	0.37
SAC Recommendation (L)	5.84	28.26	0.47	0.71
SAC Recommendation (Q)	-1.06	13.59	0.34	0.77
SAC Recommendation (C)	1.18	7.82	0.60	0.82
SAC Recommendation (^4)	1.52	4.48	0.64	0.74

Table 4: Coefficients and Standard Errors (SE) for the Multinomial Logistic Regression Model predicting the final acceptance decisions given the mean scores and AC/SAC recommendations. Each row corresponds to a predictor in the model, with separate coefficients reported for each level of the outcome variable (Findings and Main). The ‘L’, ‘Q’, ‘C’, and ‘ $\hat{4}$ ’ subscripts for AC\_ordinal and SAC\_ordinal represent linear, quadratic, cubic, and quartic polynomial terms, respectively, reflecting the assumed shape of the relationship between these ordinal predictors and the log-odds of the outcomes.

also played a role in main vs Findings decisions, although the difference is less than between Findings and rejection. The overall score distribution is shown in Figure 5b.

## 7.2 Factors Impacting the Final Acceptance Decisions

### 7.2.1 Reviewer Scores and Chair Recommendations

To establish the odds of a paper being accepted into Findings or the Main track vs it being Rejected, based only on reviewer and chair recommendations, we fit a multinomial log-linear model with `multinom()` function from the `NNET` package in R (Venables and Ripley, 2002).<sup>18</sup> The dependent variable (DV) is the *Outcome* coded as a three-layer categorical variable (Main track, Findings, or Reject) with Reject being set as the reference level. The independent variables (IVs) are *AC Recommendation* (ordinal), *SAC Recommendation* (ordinal), mean *Soundness* score (interval), and mean *Excitement* score (interval).<sup>19</sup> The analysis is performed on the papers submitted directly to the conference as the ARR submissions were reviewed through a different process and had different scores. The model coefficients are shown in Table 4. The model is a good fit for the data with McFadden’s pseudo- $R^2$  of 0.777 (McFadden, 1973).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Signif. codes: ‘ $p < 0.001$ ’ ‘\*\*\*’, ‘ $p < 0.01$ ’ ‘\*\*’, ‘ $p < 0.05$ ’ ‘\*’, ‘ $p < 0.1$ ’ ‘.’, ‘ $p > 0.1$ ’ ‘’.

<sup>18</sup>While ordinal regression would be more fit to represent the ordinal order of the possible outcome (Main track > Findings > Reject) we use the multinomial model as it does not have the proportional odds assumption.

<sup>19</sup>Note both, the *Excitement* and *Soundness* are ordinal variables. Here, we employ the mean to obtain a rough estimate of the central tendency.

<sup>20</sup>Please note the pseudo- $R^2$  for logistic models cannot be directly interpreted as the proportion of variance explained as in linear models. Nevertheless, the high value observed here signifies a good fit to the data. We also report Cox and Snell

	LR Chisq	Df	Pr(>Chisq)	
Soundness Mean	10.88	2	0.0043	**
Excitement Mean	9.67	2	0.0080	**
AC Recommendation	209.71	8	0.0000	***
SAC Recommendation	1438.12	8	0.0000	***

Table 5: Type III Analysis of Deviance for Multinomial Logistic Regression in Table 4.<sup>17</sup>

To obtain the significance values for each IV (Table 5), we use the ANOVA() function in R on the fitted model (Type III Anova). As expected, all four IVs are significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) but at different levels. The SAC *Recommendation* ( $\chi^2(8) = 1438.12, p < 0.001$ )<sup>21</sup> and AC *Recommendation* ( $\chi^2(8) = 209.71, p < 0.001$ ) significantly predict the *Outcome* with the SAC *Recommendation* appearing to be a better predictor (as expected, since AC *recommendation* are made without regards to the acceptance quotas). The mean *Soundness* score ( $\chi^2(2) = 10.88, p = 0.0043$ ) and mean *Excitement* score ( $\chi^2(2) = 9.67, p = 0.0080$ ) are also significant at  $p < .05$ .

To establish the exact contributions of mean *Soundness* and *Excitement* scores to acceptance decisions for the Main track and Findings, we can look at Table 4 again. Note that since it is a multinomial regression model, the coefficients indicate an increase in log odds rather than directly interpretable odds (for which the coefficients need to be exponentiated). The “Findings Coeff” and “Main Coeff” correspond to the log-odds of being accepted into the Findings and Main track as opposed to being rejected.

**Soundness.** In the case of the mean *Soundness* score the coefficient is positive for both Findings (0.71) and the Main track (0.76). This means that for one unit increase in the mean *Soundness* score the log-odds of being accepted as opposed to being rejected increase by 0.71 for Findings and 0.76 for the Main track. By taking the exponential of these values, we see that for one unit increase in the mean *Soundness* score the odds to be accepted increase 2.03 times for Findings and 2.14 times for the Main track.

**Excitement.** Similarly, both coefficients are positive for the mean *Excitement* score for both Findings (0.61) and the Main track (0.03). This means that for one unit increase in the mean *Excitement* score the log-odds of being accepted vs rejected increase by 0.61 for Findings and 0.03 for the Main track. By taking the exponential of these values we see that for one unit increase in the mean *Excitement* score the odds of being accepted increase 1.84 times for Findings and 1.03 times for the Main track. While the values are still positive, this increase is much lower<sup>22</sup> than for the mean *Soundness* scores, especially for the Main track. The overall distribution of these scores per acceptance status is shown in Figure 5b.

**AC Recommendations.** Since AC *Recommendation* is an ordinal variable, it is coded using polynomial contrast, so the L indicates linear effect, Q a quadratic effect, C a cubic effect, and so on. Here we look mostly at the linear effect since it has a direct (linear) effect on the outcome. We see that both coefficients are positive, indicating that with an increase of one unit, the log-odds of being accepted vs being rejected increase by 2.66 units for Findings and 4.50 units for the Main track. By taking the exponential of these values we see that one unit increase in AC *Recommendation* corresponds to a 14.30-fold increase in the odds of being accepted into Findings (vs being rejected) and 90.02-fold increase in the odds of being accepted into the Main track (vs being rejected).

**SAC Recommendations.** SAC *Recommendation* is also an ordinal variable, hence we see the same types of coefficients. However, the magnitude of the SAC’s decision appears to be much greater with a greater effect on the final outcome. With one unit increase in SAC *Recommendation* the log-odds of being accepted vs being rejected increase by 5.84 units for Findings, and 28.26 units for the Main track.

pseudo- $R^2=0.794$  (Cox and Snell, 1989) and Nagelkerke pseudo- $R^2=0.913$  (Nagelkerke, 1991).

<sup>21</sup>  $\chi^2$  denotes likelihood ratio chi-square statistic.

<sup>22</sup> This latter finding seems counter-intuitive, given that our AC guidelines stressed that Findings is a venue for all sound work, while “sound& exciting” would be the basis for recommendations to the main track—but even among the papers accepted to the main track 39% have at least one “negative” *Excitement* score (Figure 7b). At the same time, even among the Findings papers, only 49% have predominantly negative *Excitement* ratings, so there is a preference for at least some *Excitement*. This could be related to the confusion about the meaning of the scores in the initial iteration (see subsection 6.4).

	LR Chisq	Df	Pr(>Chisq)	
Paper Type	12.47	2	0.0020	**
Review Issues	43.61	2	0.0000	***
Preprinted	47.96	2	0.0000	***
Previous Submissions	4.38	2	0.1120	
Languages Number	0.57	2	0.7528	
Languages not only English	3.53	2	0.1711	
Contribution: Efficiency	1.18	2	0.5540	
Contribution: Resource	4.34	2	0.1139	
Contribution: Reproduction	16.59	2	0.0002	***
Contribution: Theory	7.70	2	0.0213	*
Contribution: Software	19.62	2	0.0001	***

Table 6: Type III Analysis of Deviance for Multinomial Logistic Regression, predicting submission *Outcome* (Main, Findings, Reject) conditioned on the variables listed in the table.<sup>24</sup>

Converting these values to their exponentials, we see that one unit increase in *SAC Recommendation* corresponds to a 343.78-fold increase in the odds of being accepted into the Findings (vs being rejected) and a massive increase of  $1.88 \times 10^{12}$  for the odds of acceptance into the Main track (vs being rejected).

The model hence shows that the SAC recommendation is a much stronger predictor than the AC recommendation, which helps to explain why it is possible for a paper to be rejected even with a positive meta-review. AC recommendations are made without regards to the acceptance quotas, and SACs necessarily have to override them in many cases.

### 7.3 The Impact of Other Submission Properties

There are many properties of submissions that could systematically make a difference to their final outcome. In this section we investigate the possible effect of the type of contribution, the target languages, whether the reviews were problematic (as reported by the authors), and whether the paper was available as a preprint. To establish the importance of these factors, we fit another `multinom()` model, similarly to what we did in Table 4, and obtain the significance levels for each variable using Type III Anova. While the ordinal model would potentially better preserve the natural order of the final outcome (rejection being the worst and acceptance to the main track being the best outcome), the fitted model violated the assumptions of the ordinal model.

Since this model does not include strong predictors such as reviewer scores and chair recommendations, the fit of this model is relatively poor<sup>23</sup> compared to the model in Table 4, which has a McFadden's pseudo- $R^2$  of approximately 0.80 (indicating a substantial improvement over the null model). In contrast, this model has a McFadden's pseudo- $R^2$  of approximately 0.01, suggesting that it barely improves upon the null model. Nevertheless, this model can still be used to establish the individual contributions of the submission-level properties, which likely interact in complex ways in the scores and recommendations. Statistically significant factors are also not necessarily strong predictors by themselves.

The results of this experiment are shown in Table 6. According to this analysis, the following factors have a statistically significant impact on submission outcome: low-quality reviews, preprinting, short/long paper type, and three types of contributions (software, reproduction, and theory).

To also assess the relative importance of our predictors in forecasting the final outcome, we employed a Random Forest algorithm (Liaw and Wiener, 2002). The results are shown in Figure 6. The most crucial predictor was *Review Issues* (i.e., author complaints about reviews<sup>25</sup>) with a Mean Decrease Gini value of 46.09. This suggests that this predictor played the most significant role in reducing the Gini impurity, and therefore, in improving the precision of our model. The second factor with the biggest Mean Decrease Gini is *Preprinting* (22.84). This analysis does not state the absolute importance of any factor (e.g., that

<sup>23</sup>Its 3-class accuracy is 52%, vs 90% for the model shown in Table 4. This is the accuracy of the model on the withheld test set when the model is fitted with 70% of the data. The accuracy of the model on all data is about 1% higher.

<sup>24</sup>Signif. codes: ‘ $p < 0.001$ ’ ‘\*\*\*’, ‘ $p < 0.01$ ’ ‘\*\*’, ‘ $p < 0.05$ ’ ‘\*’, ‘ $p < 0.1$ ’ ‘.’, ‘ $p > 0.1$ ’ ‘’.

<sup>25</sup>The number of author complaints likely reflects (at least) two factors: the reviews that were truly problematic, and simply negative reviews since the authors are more likely to complain about those. In the latter case the leading cause for rejection is the negative review.

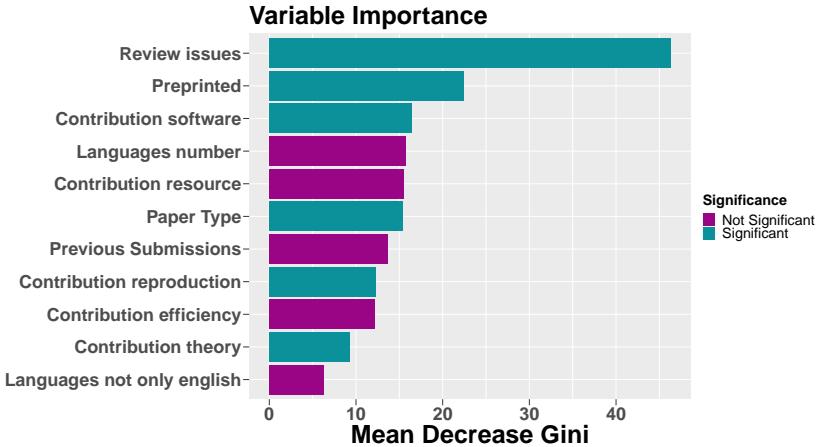


Figure 6: The importance of predictors in predicting the *Outcome*, ranked by mean decrease in Gini impurity. Predictor significance is indicated by color, with dark purple for not significant and dark green for significant predictors as per levels of significance indicated in Table 6.

Contribution type	% submissions	Match	Mismatch	Match-Mismatch
Efficiency	9.62	50.27	46.56	3.71
NLP engineering experiment	61.5	46.66	47.33	-0.67
Software and pre-trained models	12.14	56.75	45.56	<b>11.19</b>
Data resources	19	49.25	46.37	2.88
Data analysis	10.48	48.14	46.78	1.36
Reproduction studies	2.08	66.25	46.51	<b>19.74</b>
Approaches for low-resource settings	18.22	49.79	46.28	3.51
Surveys	1.64	44.44	46.96	-2.52
Interpretability	25.29	51.8	45.27	6.52
Theory	3.8	56.85	46.53	<b>10.32</b>
Position papers	2.57	53.54	46.74	6.8

Table 7: Acceptance rate among direct submissions that were reviewed and considered for acceptance, with (*Match*) and without (*Mismatch*) given contribution types. The average acceptance rate in this pool is 46.92%.

*Preprinting* increases the chances of acceptance by X%), and we are not claiming that these effects are independently large—but they do appear to be statistically significant. We will discuss these factors further: short/long papers in §7.3.1, contribution types in §7.3.2, review issues in §7.5.5, preprints in §7.5.7.

### 7.3.1 Short/long papers

Short papers have had significantly lower acceptance rates at most recent \*ACL conferences. To mitigate that, we highlighted the problem in the reviewer instructions, had a separate *Soundness* formulation for short papers, and asked the SACs to consider the short and long papers separately, with their own target acceptance quotas. Despite all that, the significant effect of paper type (Table 6) is obvious: the long papers had 23.50% acceptance rate to main track vs 16.53% for short, and for Findings, the rate was respectively 41.89% vs 35.58%. The core reason seems to be that the source reviewer scores are systematically lower, despite all calls to not expect 120% thoroughness of short papers.

### 7.3.2 Types of contribution

We were pleasantly surprised to find a significant positive effect for the contributions of theory, reproductions, and pre-trained models and software (Table 6). The two latter types are in line with the findings by (Magnusson et al., 2023) who report that reproducibility efforts are rewarded. This effect is also visible from simply considering the differences in acceptance rates for papers with and without these contribution types, shown in Table 7. In fact, the “average” acceptance rate of 46.92% is the closest to the most “mainstream” type of contribution (NLP engineering experiment, 61.5% submissions) – and all other contribution types except surveys have the acceptance rate at least slightly higher than that.

<i>Submissions subset</i>	<i>Contribution type</i>	<i>% submissions</i>	<i>Match</i>	<i>Mismatch</i>	<i>Match-Mismatch</i>
Resources & Evaluation	Resource	5.48	48.39	48.21	0.18
All tracks without Resources & Evaluation	Resource	94.52	49.48	46.34	3.14
Interpretability and Analysis of Models	Interpretability	4.89	52.69	57.14	-4.45
All tracks without Interpretability	Interpretability	95.11	51.61	45.18	6.43

Table 8: Acceptance rate among direct submissions inside and outside tracks that targeted a resources and interpretability contributions, with (*Match*) and without (*Mismatch*) given contribution types. The average acceptance rate in this pool is 46.92%.

		Accepted papers only		Rejected papers only		All papers	
		%	$\alpha_{[CI]}$	%	$\alpha_{[CI]}$	%	$\alpha_{[CI]}$
Ordinal	<i>Soundness</i>	20.72	0.093 <sub>[0.047, 0.137]</sub>	17.68	0.116 <sub>[0.076, 0.156]</sub>	19.10	0.318 <sub>[0.294, 0.340]</sub>
	<i>Excitement</i>	12.68	0.120 <sub>[0.075, 0.169]</sub>	10.65	0.134 <sub>[0.094, 0.173]</sub>	23.23	0.311 <sub>[0.287, 0.334]</sub>
Categorical	<i>Soundness</i>	77.28	0.032 <sub>[-0.052, 0.112]</sub>	37.39	0.092 <sub>[0.064, 0.119]</sub>	53.80	0.221 <sub>[0.194, 0.248]</sub>
	<i>Excitement</i>	37.11	0.087 <sub>[0.055, 0.120]</sub>	49.60	0.074 <sub>[0.039, 0.114]</sub>	43.74	0.233 <sub>[0.212, 0.255]</sub>

Table 9: Inter-reviewer agreement on soundness and excitement scores, measured as raw % agreement (%) and Krippendorff’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ) with 95% confidence interval [CI].<sup>26</sup> We consider only direct submissions to ACL’23 that were fully reviewed, and for which the final decisions were made: 3847 in total, 1805 “accept” (to either Main track or Findings), and 2042 “reject”.

The *lack* of a visible disadvantage in acceptance rates for non-mainstream types of contributions is a very positive finding. Consider the case of efficiency-oriented papers: they did not have a dedicated track, but their acceptance rate was not lower (and even a bit higher) than for the average in the pool (where the majority of engineering-oriented submissions focuses on performance). In effect, *every* track was an efficiency track, allowing both access to the area expertise and reviewers with interest in this type of contribution. We cannot establish to what extent this is due to Area-Contribution-Language matching or an overall increased interest in the need for efficient NLP solutions. But as long as such contributions are in the minority, we would recommend ensuring the matches by this criterion.

A complication for our analysis arises for two contribution types that also had large associated tracks: resources and interpretability. In this case, it is possible that the lack of difference in acceptance rate is due to the extra effort of ensuring the reviewers with matching interests through the track mechanism. To check for that, we compare the acceptance rates for these types of contributions inside and outside of the dedicated tracks (Table 8). We find that in all cases the match between tracks and contribution types yields a 3-6% increase above the average acceptance rate of 46.92%. An interesting case is interpretability and model analysis, which has a 4.45% higher acceptance rate *outside* of its dedicated track (probably indicating an appreciation for papers that perform analysis in addition to some other type of contribution).

#### 7.4 How Much do ACL Reviewers Agree?

The issues with consistency of peer review were recently highlighted in the ML community by the two NeurIPS experiments (Price, 2014; Cortes and Lawrence, 2021; Beygelzimer et al., 2021). By treating peer review as an annotation problem (Rogers and Augenstein, 2020), we can apply the existing methodology for analyzing inter-annotator agreement (IAA). We consider three reviewers (annotators) per paper, discarding the rare cases of 4 reviews (from emergency assignments). We compute Krippendorff’s  $\alpha$  (Krippendorff, 2011) on the *Soundness* and *Excitement* scores (Table 9). We treat these scores as ordinal data. We also experiment with mapping both scores to binary “positive/negative” categories (3–5 > “sound” for *Soundness* and 3.5–5 > “exciting” for *Excitement*, since the borderline scores were 2 for *Soundness* was 2 and 3 for *Excitement*).

<sup>26</sup>“Ordinal” refers to the  $\alpha$  coefficient computed using raw scores treated as ordinal variables. The percentage agreement for *Soundness* was computed using the raw scores (5-point scale). In order to match the scale length the percentage agreement for *Excitement* was computed on the rounded scores (i.e., 3.5 was treated as 4.0, etc.). “Categorical” denotes scores converted into either positive or negative decisions based on the given threshold (3.0 for *Soundness* and 3.5 for *Excitement*).

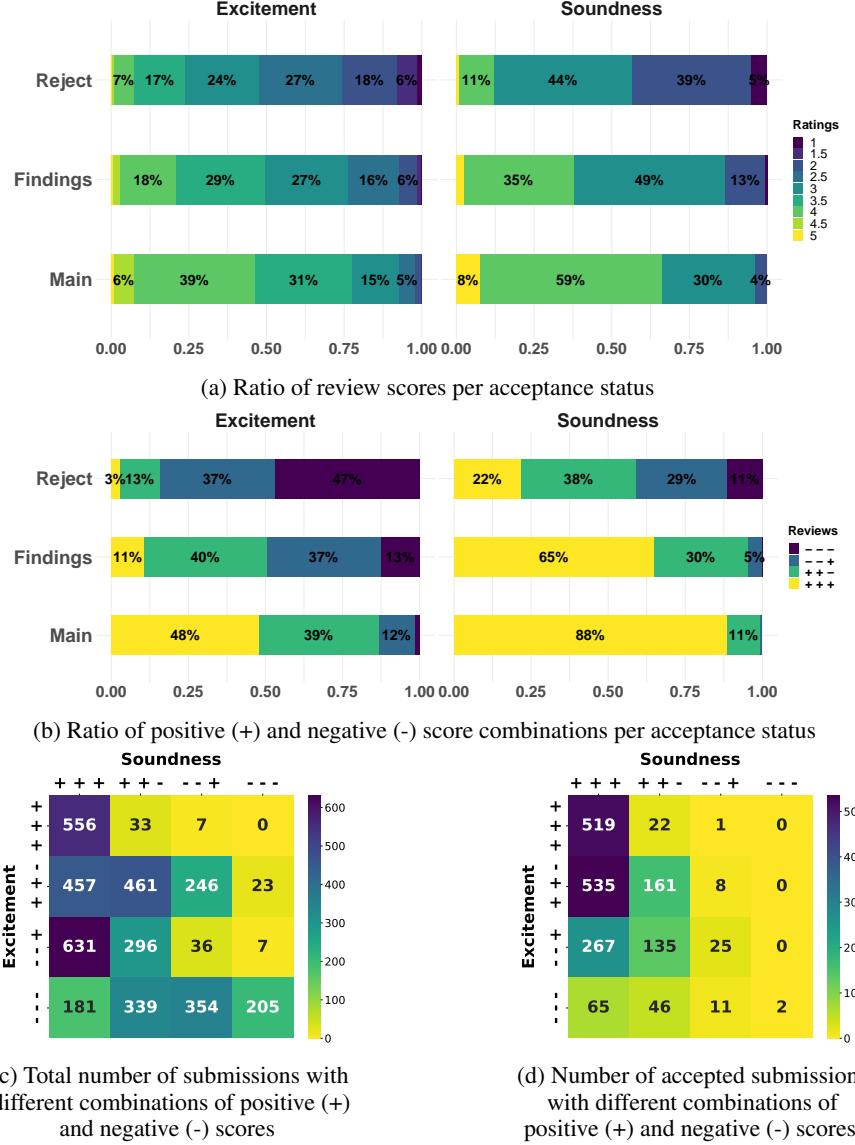


Figure 7: Review scores vs acceptance outcome. “Positive” scores (+) refer to the above-borderline scores (*Soundness*  $\geq 3$ , *Excitement*  $\geq 3.5$ ), and “negative” (-) to the number of scores below borderline.

Consistent with the general perception of inconsistency in peer review,  $\alpha$  shows a level of IAA that seems far too low (the rule of thumb is that “substantial” agreement is in the range of 0.6-0.8 (Artstein and Poesio, 2008; Paun et al., 2022)). However, **the raw agreement for the accepted papers (in the categorical view, i.e. as sound/unsound, exciting/unexciting) is almost twice higher for Soundness than for Excitement**. We interpret this as an indication that although the scores are still noisy, it helps to ask more specific questions with more objective criteria. The much lower raw agreement on the *Excitement* is also in line with our point that this is overall a less relevant direction for the author response and reviewer discussion. Arguably we do not even want a high agreement on *Excitement*: everybody interested in the same thing could indicate that the field is ossifying and stagnating.

As a sanity check, we also analyzed IAA for the raw reviewer scores of EMNLP 2022 and EACL 2023. Both of these conferences used a single “overall recommendation” score, formulated differently for short and long papers. In EMNLP 2022, for 3092 observations for 3 reviewers (discarding R4 data), with scores treated as ordinal data, we got  $\alpha$  0.316 for the short papers, 0.31 for long, and 0.318 for the whole distribution – which is almost exactly the same as our  $\alpha$  for both our scores (in the ordinal case). In EACL 2023, for 1121 subjects for 3 reviewers we got  $\alpha$  0.317 for the short papers, 0.34 for long, and 0.348 for the whole distribution.

A related question is “what kind of disagreements do we actually have?” [Figure 7a](#) shows the distribution of individual score values for all papers in a given acceptance status, which suggests that even papers accepted to the main conference had some very negative reviews. [Figure 7b](#) breaks down the scores into “positive” (*Soundness*  $\geq 3$ , *Excitement*  $\geq 3.5$ ) and “negative”, and considers the combinations of three reviews as “all positive” (+ + +), “all negative” (- - -), “2 positive, 1 negative” (+ + -) and “2 negative, 1 positive” (- - +). We can see that despite disagreements on the exact scores, the papers accepted to the main track have a high ratio of “positive” review combinations for *Soundness* (88%, only 11% papers with one negative *Soundness* score). But for *Excitement* our SACs accepted to the main track 39% papers with one negative *Excitement* score, and 37% papers with a single “champion” reviewer. For Findings, they even accepted 37% papers which only 1 reviewer was excited about. [Figure 7c](#) shows the total number of submissions with various combinations of positive and negative *Soundness* and *Excitement* scores, and [Figure 7d](#) shows the same categories, but with the number of accepted papers with that score combination.

Our data indicates that despite noisy scores and high disagreement, the mechanism of ACs and SACs does “rescue” many papers with one negative review, and at least the raw agreement does improve for the more specific *Soundness* score. Judging by the community feedback ([§5](#)), in this first implementation there was a lot of confusion about what the scores meant, and we expect that in future iterations the agreement could improve further.

## 7.5 Analysing Reviews and Review Scores

In this section, we take a step back from the final acceptance decisions and look only at the individual reviews and their scores, rather than the final outcome of the submission.

### 7.5.1 Do the Area-Contribution-Language matches impact reviewer scores?

To answer this question, [Figure 8](#) shows the distributions of the individual reviewer scores for *Soundness*, *Excitement*, reviewer *Confidence*, and *Reproducibility* for all cases where the reviews were or weren’t matched by the area, contribution type, or language. The biggest visible impact is in reviewer *Confidence*, where the contributions are not matched by area: the ratio of reviews with high scores (4+) is decreased by about 14%. A worrying observation is that there is a 5% increase in high *Confidence* scores for the submissions where the reviewer is *not* matched by language and could be expected to feel less rather than more confident. We also observe an 11% increase in *Soundness* ratings 3+ from reviewers matched by language vs those mismatched, and 7% in *Reproducibility*.

### 7.5.2 Do the Area-Contribution-Language matches impact the reviewer activity?

To establish whether Area-Contribution-Language matching had any effect on reviewer activity, we counted the reviewers as “active” if they had at least one forum message or more than one review edit. The distributions of active/inactive reviewers that are/aren’t well-matched to submissions by Area-Contribution-Language criteria are shown in [Figure 9](#). At a glance, there are a lot more matched & active reviewers, but since generally a lot more reviewers were matched than mismatched (see [Table 2](#)), we would generally expect that to be the case even by chance.

To establish whether there are any statistically significant effects, we first fit a generalized linear model (GLM) using the `glm()` function in R.<sup>27</sup> The dependent variable was binary (the activity of the reviewer). The predictors were a contribution match (binary variable), a studied language match (three-layer categorical variable),<sup>28</sup> and an area match (binary variable), all of which were treated as categorical variables (at least one matching keyword of the correct type). The link function was logit, corresponding to a binomial distribution of the response variable (logistic regression).

<sup>27</sup>To validate the assumptions of the GLM, we examined the variance inflation factors (VIFs) using the `vif()` function in R to assess multicollinearity among predictors. The VIFs were all close to 1, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern. We also visually inspected residual plots to assess the model fit and did not find any obvious deviations from homoscedasticity or linearity.

<sup>28</sup>For the language we consider three categories: (1) non-English language match, (2) non-English language mismatch, and (3) match only by English; under the assumption that all reviewers will be familiar with English.

<sup>29</sup>Signif. codes: ‘ $p < 0.001$ ’ ‘\*\*\*’, ‘ $p < 0.01$ ’ ‘\*\*’, ‘ $p < 0.05$ ’ ‘\*’, ‘ $p < 0.1$ ’ ‘.’, ‘ $p > 0.1$ ’ ‘’.

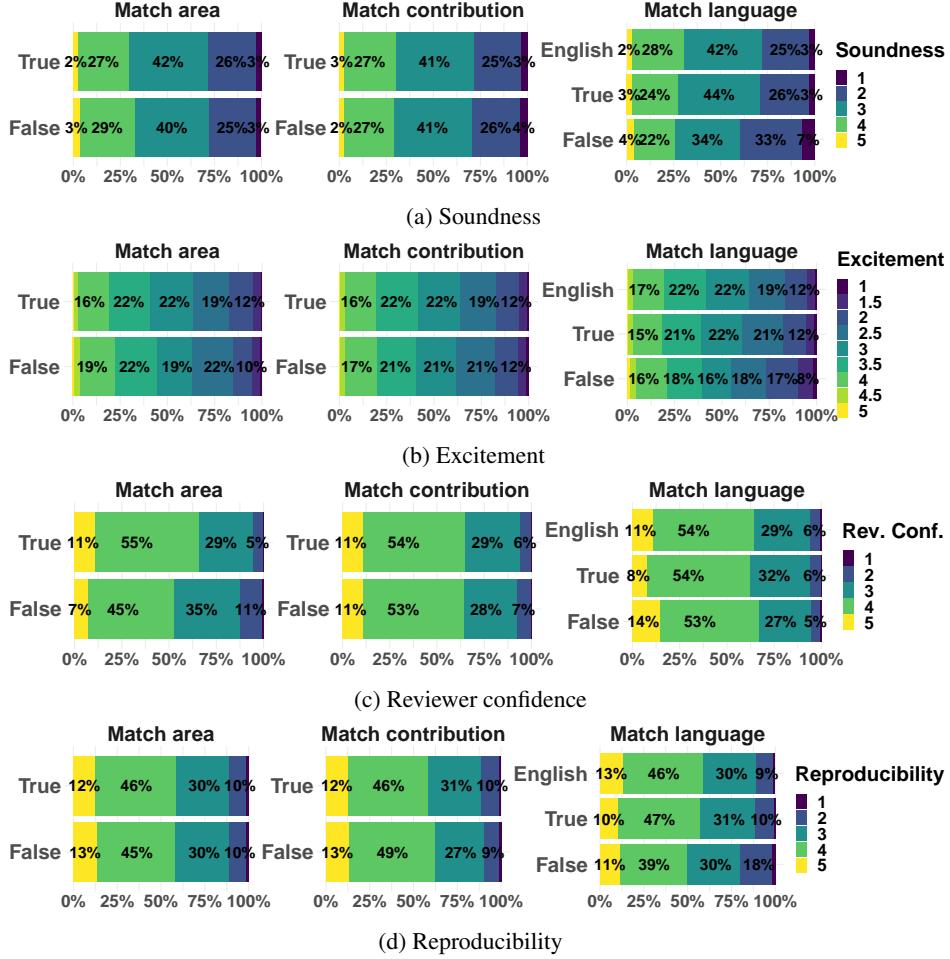


Figure 8: Area-Contribution-Language Matches impact on reviewer scores. In each plot, True/False refers to the reviews where the submissions were/weren't matched by area, contribution or language.

The results of the GLM (see Table 10) suggest that contribution match is a significant predictor of the reviewer's activity ( $\beta = 0.16$ , SE = 0.08,  $z = 1.97$ ,  $p = 0.048$ ). Since the estimates relate to log-odds we consider the exponential of the reported value (1.178) which suggests that the odds of the reviewer being active when the contribution type is well-matched are 1.178 times higher than when the contribution does not match the reviewer's expertise. The remaining variables, that is language match and area match, are not significant predictors in this model ( $p > 0.05$ ).<sup>30</sup>

Finally, we considered the language match as a binary variable, excluding English language papers. We conduct a Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) to examine the association between the language match (excluding English) and reviewer activity Table 11. The test reveals no significant association between the language match and reviewer activity ( $\chi^2(1)=0.73432$ ,  $p = 0.3915$ ). The chi-square test was performed using Pearson's Chi-squared test with Yates' continuity correction with the chisq.test() function in R.

We conclude that of the Area-Contribution-Language matching rubrics, only the contribution type contributes to improvement in reviewer activity. Although the effect is modest (1.178 times increase in likelihood of reviewer activity), given that reviewer activity post-submission is very important, and its level needs to be improved (§5.4), we would urge the future chairs to consider this criterion in the assignments. It also provides a quick and interpretable way to consider the variety of the types of work

<sup>30</sup>McFadden's pseudo- $R^2$  of the model is 0.0008231973, which is very low. This suggests that our model does not explain much of the variability in the data. However, it is important to note that in the context of generalized linear models, the interpretation of pseudo- $R^2$  is not as straightforward as it is in ordinary least squares regression. The pseudo- $R^2$  is not necessarily a measure of the proportion of variance explained by the model in the data. Instead, it is a measure of the likelihood improvement per observation relative to the null model. Despite the low pseudo- $R^2$ , our model could still provide valuable insights into the relationships between the independent variables (match type) and the reviewer's activity.

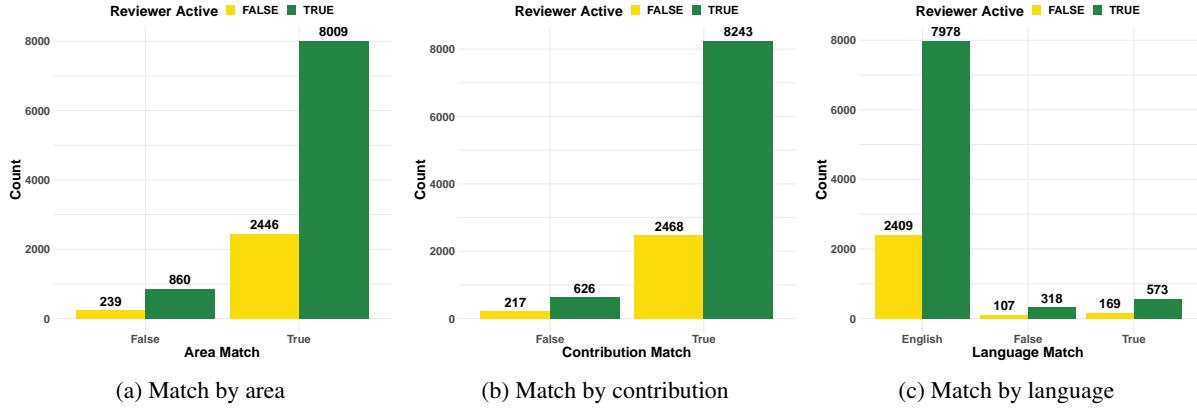


Figure 9: Area-Contribution-Language matches vs reviewer activity. In each plot, True/False refers to reviews where the reviewers weren't matched to the submission by area, contribution or language<sup>29</sup>

	Estimate	Std. Error	<i>z</i> value	Pr(>  <i>z</i>  )	
(Intercept)	1.1511	0.1012	11.38	0.0000	***
Match Contribution (True)	0.1638	0.0830	1.97	0.0484	*
Match Language (False)	-0.1076	0.1142	-0.94	0.3461	
Match Language (True)	0.0114	0.0921	0.12	0.9015	
Match Area (True)	-0.1151	0.0786	-1.46	0.1432	

Table 10: Generalized linear model (GLM) estimates for predicting reviewer activity using match categories. Each row represents a different predictor.<sup>29</sup>

Test	Chisq	df	p-value
Pearson's Chi-squared (Yates' correction)	0.73432	1	0.3915

Table 11: Results of Pearson's Chi-squared test with Yates' continuity correction for the effect of language match (excluding English) on the reviewer's activity

that are being submitted, and to provide extra attention to the assignments for the non-mainstream kinds of work.

### 7.5.3 Do reviewer confidence scores reflect their experience?

START profiles contain self-reported reviewer experience labels (“never”, “first time”, “3 or fewer events”, “4 events and more”). We explored the relationship between this data and reviewer *Confidence* scores but found no strong effect. We do observe a small (about 4%) increase in the volume of 4+ *Confidence* scores for the most experienced reviewers, and it's significant according to the ordinal logistic regression model<sup>31</sup>. But the effect is quite small, and judging by this data we don't recommend relying on confidence as a proxy for reviewer experience. Moreover, we observe no relation between this reviewer experience data and the number of review issues reported by the authors. This is a rather depressing finding from the perspective of reviewer training, and we hope that it is rather due to START profiles not being updated by the reviewers.

### 7.5.4 Do the reviewer scores correlate with length of the reviews?

The ACL review form had the following text input fields: summary, reasons to accept, reasons to reject, questions to the authors, missing references, suggestions&typos, and confidential notes to the chairs. We roughly estimated the length of these inputs by splitting on the whitespace, and computed Spearman's correlation (Spearman, 1987) between these variables and reviewer scores for *Soundness*, *Excitement*,

<sup>31</sup>We fit model in R using the `polr()` function from the MASS package (Venables and Ripley, 2002) with reviewer's confidence as an ordinal DV and experience as a three-layer categorical IV. We compare this model to an intercept-only model using the `Anova()` function. While the difference between these models is significant, McFadden's *pseudo-R<sup>2</sup>* is extremely low ( $4.247533 \times 10^{-4}$ ).

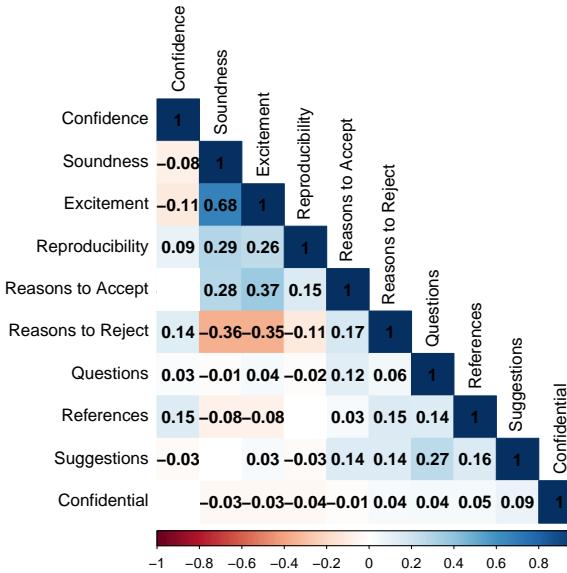


Figure 10: Spearman’s correlation between reviewer scores, confidence, and the length of review text fields. The insignificant correlation was left blank ( $p>0.05$ ).

*Confidence*, and *Reproducibility*. The results are shown in Figure 10.

As could be expected, we observe a significant negative correlation (-0.35-0.36) between the length of *Reasons to Reject* and both *Soundness* and *Excitement* scores, and the opposite trend for the *Reasons to Accept* (0.28-0.37). Interestingly, the length of *Reasons to Accept* also correlates positively with the *Reproducibility* score, indicating that the community appreciates this factor (0.15). *Confidence* has a similar correlation with the length of missing references. Finally, there is a high correlation between the length of “questions to the authors” and “suggestions”, indicating that the reviewers who engage with the submission deeply use both of these fields.

The highest positive correlation is between our *Soundness* and *Excitement* scores<sup>32</sup> (0.68), which is in line with the intuition that unsound work would probably not be found exciting either.

### 7.5.5 What factors are associated with review issues?

As discussed in §5.3, we introduced a mechanism for the authors to flag specific types of issues with reviews, and we received such flags for 12.9% of the reviews. Figure 11 shows the ratio of reviews with complaints (True) and without (False). For both *Soundness* and *Excitement* there is a clear trend towards more complaints with lower scores, but there are also complaints for high scores (e.g., 43.1% of reviews which the authors complained about had *Soundness* 4). This makes more sense if we consider the figure Figure 11d, which shows that 95% complaints are made about reviews where at least one of the scores is 3 or less. This suggests that reported review issues are associated with negative reviews, even for *Excitement* (although we tried to make it clear that this score is subjective and does not need arguing).

To explore other possible factors that could make the reviews more likely to be reported we fit a GLM model using the `glm()` function in R. The dependent variable is the presence or absence of reported issues (binary variable), and the predictors are the *Excitement* score (ordinal), *Soundness* score (ordinal), *Confidence* score (ordinal), *Reproducibility* score (ordinal), length of *Reasons to Reject* (interval), length of *Reasons to Accept* (interval), the *Contribution Match* (binary), *Area Match* (binary), *Language Match* (three-layer factor), *Reviewer’s Experience* (three-layer factor), and *Reviewer’s Activity* (binary). The link

<sup>32</sup>This finding is important for the model reported in Table 4: the acceptance decisions are indeed based on both factors, and they are meant to capture different information, but the high correlation between these two variables suggests that the estimates obtained in Table 4 should be interpreted with caution.

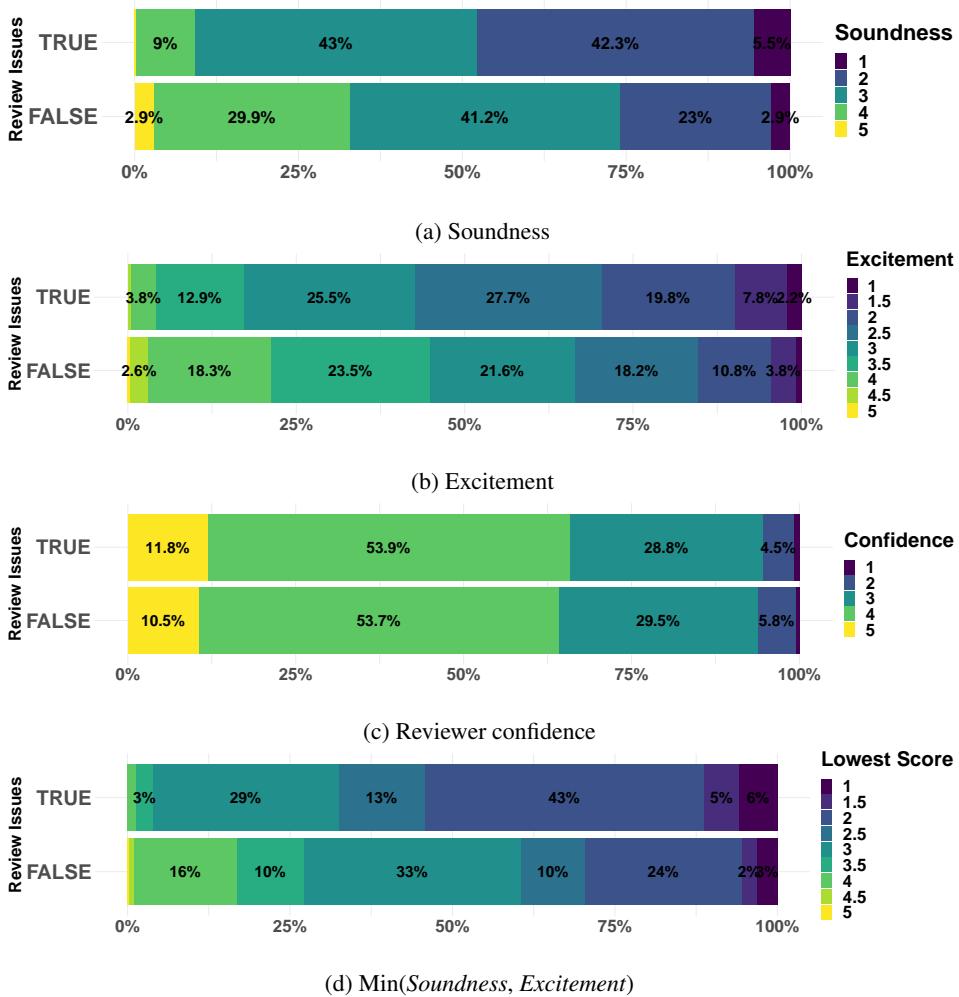


Figure 11: Reviewer scores vs the amount of issues reported with reviews. In each plot, True/False refers to the reviews which were or were not flagged for review issues by the authors.

function was logit, corresponding to a binomial distribution of the response variable (logistic regression).<sup>33</sup> The coefficients of the fitted model are presented in Table 12.

We further employ the type III Anova using the ANOVA() function in R in order to obtain significance levels for each factor which are presented in Table 13. While McFadden's pseudo- $R^2$  of the fitted model is only 0.067, several variables of this model are significant predictors of the review issues.

The most significant factors are *Soundness*, *Excitement*, and the length of *Reasons to Accept*. All of these variables have a negative relationship with the reviewer issues, perhaps unsurprisingly, with higher scores the review is less likely to be reported. Similarly, longer text in the *Reason to Accept* field leads to less chance of the review being reported. Counter-intuitively, the positive coefficient associated with the reviewer being active suggests that when the reviewer is active (i.e. with at least one review revision or a forum message) the log-odds of the review issue increase by about 0.32, all else being equal. That is, the more active reviewers (putting in more effort) are actually receiving *more* complaints.

Other significant factors are *Language Match* and the reviewer's confidence; both associated with negative coefficients. This suggests that when the reviewer is familiar with the non-English language investigated in the study, the log-odds of a review issue decrease by approximately 0.26 (i.e., the review is 1.29 times less likely to be flagged for issues). Similarly, the negative coefficient of the reviewer's

<sup>33</sup>We inspect the residuals plots and compute the variance inflation factor to assure that the assumptions of GLM are not violated.

<sup>34</sup>Signif. codes: ‘ $p < 0.001$ ’ ‘\*\*\*’, ‘ $p < 0.01$ ’ ‘\*\*’, ‘ $p < 0.05$ ’ ‘\*’, ‘ $p < 0.1$ ’ ‘.’, ‘ $p > 0.1$ ’ ‘’.

<sup>35</sup>Signif. codes: ‘ $p < 0.001$ ’ ‘\*\*\*’, ‘ $p < 0.01$ ’ ‘\*\*’, ‘ $p < 0.05$ ’ ‘\*’, ‘ $p < 0.1$ ’ ‘.’, ‘ $p > 0.1$ ’ ‘’.

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z )	
(Intercept)	0.5999	0.2570	2.334	0.0196	*
Soundness	-0.3816	0.0479	-7.967	1.63e-15	***
Excitement	-0.4584	0.0549	-8.349	< 2e-16	***
Confidence	-0.0855	0.0393	-2.176	0.0295	*
Reproducibility	0.0609	0.0335	1.816	0.0693	.
Reasons to Reject	0.0004	0.0002	1.508	0.1315	
Reasons to Accept	-0.0052	0.0011	-4.748	2.06e-06	***
Match Contribution (True)	0.0763	0.1148	0.664	0.5066	
Match Area (True)	-0.1352	0.1030	-1.313	0.1892	
Match Language (False)	0.0270	0.1476	0.183	0.8550	
Match Language (True)	-0.2639	0.1275	-2.070	0.0384	*
Experience (Experienced)	-0.0744	0.0684	-1.087	0.2769	
Experience (Zero)	-0.0274	0.1164	-0.235	0.8143	
Reviewer Active (True)	0.3172	0.0737	4.303	1.69e-05	***

Table 12: Coefficients of the Generalized Linear Model predicting the review issues. The table includes the coefficient estimate, standard error, z-value, and p-value for each predictor.<sup>34</sup>

	LR Chisq	Df	Pr(>Chisq)	
Soundness	64.65	1	0.0000	***
Excitement	70.45	1	0.0000	***
Confidence	4.71	1	0.0300	*
Reproducibility	3.31	1	0.0688	.
Reasons to Reject	2.23	1	0.1353	
Reasons to Accept	24.17	1	0.0000	***
Match Contribution	0.45	1	0.5035	
Match Area	1.69	1	0.1940	
Match Language	4.61	2	0.0998	.
Experience	1.24	2	0.5386	
Reviewer Active	19.35	1	0.0000	***

Table 13: Type III Analysis of Deviance for the variables in the Generalized Linear Model predicting whether issues were reported for the given review.<sup>35</sup>

*Confidence* suggests that with an increased *Confidence* score the likelihood of the review to be reported decreases though by a small margin.

### 7.5.6 Do we have bad actors?

To explore the possibility that many reported review issues are due to individual unprofessional reviewers, let us consider the fact that 1,620 reviews with reported issues were authored by 1311 reviewers, i.e. about a third of our total pool. But most of these reviewers had more than three reviews, and 1060 of them were only reported once. Of the remaining reviewers, 201 were flagged twice, and 50 reviewers had more than 3 complaints. We conclude that while there are indeed some unprofessional reviewers, and conferences need to systematically share such information and develop a system to address this problem, there are few such cases (6.2% if we consider all reviewers with more than 2 flags, and 1.2% with more than 3 flags). An interesting takeaway from Figure 11c is that the reviews that are problematic according to the authors, do *not* have lower confidence scores, so these are unlikely to be the new reviewers or the reviewers unfamiliar with the area.

According to folk wisdom, the bad reviewer is usually Reviewer2 (sometimes Reviewer3). We clear their good name: at ACL’23, the most issues were reported for Reviewer1, as shown in Figure 12.

### 7.5.7 Can the reviewers tell who the authors are?

In 567/12606 (4.5%) reviews the reviewers indicated that they have seen the paper, either by seeing a preprint (533) or by other means (34). Additionally, 513 (4.1%) reviewers indicated that they had a good guess of the author identity based on the paper content. 11460 (90.9%) ACL’23 reviews were reported as fully anonymous.

The community “recall” on the preprinted submissions is as follows: we had 628 submissions (13.8%

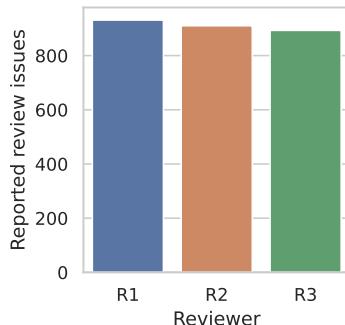


Figure 12: The number of review issues reported for R1, R2, and R3

of all direct submissions) for which the authors had disclosed preprints. The reviewers identified 306 (49%) of them. Hence, we estimate that although in our sample the number of “guesstimates” based on content is about the same as the number of preprinted papers, if the current 1-month embargo period was to be lifted, and the volume of preprints were to increase – the latter would also increase, while the volume of “guessed” authorship cases should stay the same (at about 4-5%). Interestingly, our reviewers reported another 102 submissions, for which preprints were not disclosed by the authors. We recommend that the future chairs investigate at earlier stages whether such cases are due to false memories of similar preprints, or preprint policy violations.

### 7.5.8 Do preprints affect the peer review process?

Having established that reviewers do have a high recall for preprints (§7.5.7), we investigate the possible connection between the reviewer’s awareness of the author identity on their *Soundness*, *Excitement*, and *Confidence* scores by fitting Cumulative Link Mixed Effect models with the Laplace approximation using the `c1mm()` function for the `ordinal` package in R (Christensen, 2022). The response variable is the given score and the predictor is the *Anonymity* answer (fixed effects). We also employ random intercepts for the paper (`SubmissionID`) and reviewer (`ReviewerID`) to account for this variability (random effects).<sup>36</sup>

**Soundness.** The results of the model fitted for the effect of *Anonymity* on the *Soundness* scores are present in Table 14. The *Anonymity* has five possible values: (1) the reviewer does not know the authors (reference level), (2) the reviewer may know the authors, (3) the reviewer knows the authors via means other than online posting, (4) the reviewer knows the authors via online posting prior to the anonymity period, and (5) the reviewer knows the authors via online posting post to the anonymity period. Estimates for different answers to the anonymity question presented in Table 14 suggest that the reviewers were 1.59 times more likely to assign higher *Soundness* scores when they thought they may know the authors, and 1.75 times more likely to assign higher *Soundness* scores when they have seen the preprint online.<sup>37</sup>

**Excitement.** The results of the model fitted for the effect of *Anonymity* on *Excitement* are present in Table 15. Estimates for different answers to the anonymity question presented in Table 15 suggest that the reviewers were 1.49 times more likely to assign higher *Excitement* scores when they thought they may know the authors, and 1.73 times more likely to assign higher *Excitement* scores when they have seen the preprint online.

**Confidence.** The results of the model fitted for the effect of *Anonymity* on reviewer’s *Confidence* are present in Table 16. Estimates for different answers to the anonymity question presented in the table suggest that the reviewers were 1.29 times more likely to report higher *Confidence* scores when they

<sup>36</sup>We validate the model fit by examining residual plots and convergence criteria. The residual plots showed no clear patterns or extreme outliers, and the satisfactory convergence indicates a reasonable model fit. We further observe that, perhaps unsurprisingly, both `SubmissionID` and `ReviewerID` account for a substantial portion of the variability in each of the response variables.

<sup>37</sup>We take the exponential of each coefficient.

	Estimate	Std. Error	<i>z</i> -value	Pr(>  <i>z</i>  )
<i>Random effects:</i>				
SubmissionID (Intercept)	2.2427	1.4976		
ReviewerID (Intercept)	0.7806	0.8835		
<i>Fixed effects:</i>				
Anonymity (2)	0.46037	0.11744	3.920	8.85e-05 ***
Anonymity (3)	0.02567	0.41291	0.062	0.9500
Anonymity (4)	0.55947	0.13081	4.277	1.90e-05 ***
Anonymity (5)	0.36749	0.27565	1.333	0.1820

Table 14: Cumulative Link Mixed Model Results for the effect of *Anonymity* on the *Soundness* scores. The reference level is Anonymity (1) (i.e., not knowing the authors).

	Estimate	Std. Error	<i>z</i> -value	Pr(>  <i>z</i>  )
<i>Random effects:</i>				
SubmissionID (Intercept)	1.6675	1.2913		
ReviewerID (Intercept)	0.5163	0.7185		
<i>Fixed effects:</i>				
Anonymity (2)	0.39828	0.10629	3.747	0.000179 ***
Anonymity (3)	0.13179	0.37724	0.349	0.726816
Anonymity (4)	0.54498	0.11816	4.612	3.98e-06 ***
Anonymity (5)	0.08329	0.24708	0.337	0.736049

Table 15: Cumulative Link Mixed Model Results for the effect of *Anonymity* on the *Excitement* scores. The reference level is Anonymity (1) (i.e., not knowing the authors).

thought they may know the authors, and 1.80 times more likely to assign higher *Confidence* scores when they saw the preprinted online.

We thus conclude that submissions with preprints, as well as submissions where the reviewers believe they could guess the authors, systematically receive higher ratings for both *Soundness* and *Excitement*, as well as higher *Confidence* scores. We further note that preprinted papers are disproportionately recommended for consideration for best paper awards (and without such a recommendation from at least one reviewer the submissions are not considered by the best paper committee). In total, only 1.6% papers received any reviewer nominations at all, and for 30% of those papers, the authors had disclosed preprints.

While our data shows the pattern of higher scores, acceptance chances, and best paper nominations for preprinted submissions, the causal mechanism remains a question: is it because such papers are inherently higher quality, or because of the benefits of community feedback they may receive, or because of the well-documented reviewer biases towards famous names and institutions ([Peters and Ceci, 1982](#); [Tomkins et al., 2017](#), among many others)? Since these possibilities necessitate different actions on the part of the chairs who strive for higher-quality program, the causal question needs to be answered for informed policy decisions. Since we observe an increase in likelihood of higher scores both for real preprints and for submissions where the reviewers only thought that they might know the authors (although the effect is smaller in that case), we can conclude that the social factor is definitely present—but more research is needed to establish its exact contribution. But the fact that we only had 13.8% preprints suggests that the current 1-month embargo policy is effective in at least reducing the volume of the problem.

## 8 Special Review Processes

### 8.1 Ethics review

Following the practice started at NAACL 2021, we formed an Ethics Committee (EC) dedicated to ethical issues. The review process was based on work in prior conferences and further developed by ARR and recommendations from the ACL ethics committee. Initially there were 235 technical reviews flagging 218 papers for ethics concerns, and the SACs narrowed down the list based on the [guidelines developed by the ethics chairs](#)) to 75 papers, 6 of which did not make it to the ethics review (either withdrawn or cleared).

	Estimate	Std. Error	<i>z</i> -value	Pr(>  <i>z</i>  )	
<i>Random effects:</i>					
SubmissionID (Intercept)	0.416	0.645			
ReviewerID (Intercept)	3.413	1.847			
<i>Fixed effects:</i>					
Anonymity (2)	0.2576	0.1227	2.099	0.0358	*
Anonymity (3)	0.4210	0.4194	1.004	0.3155	
Anonymity (4)	0.5874	0.1342	4.376	1.21e-05	***
Anonymity (5)	0.3413	0.2864	1.192	0.2334	

Table 16: Cumulative Link Mixed Model Results for the effect of *Anonymity* on the *Confidence* scores. The reference level is Anonymity (1) (i.e., not knowing the authors).

20 papers under ethics review were labeled accept as-is, 43 received conditional accepts, and 6 were recommend for rejection. Of those recommended for rejection, 1 was accepted nonetheless, 1 was rejected as a result, and 4 were rejected on technical grounds. Of the conditionally accepted ones, 26 were rejected on technical grounds, and 1 was withdrawn. 16 passed the technical review and were conditionally accepted, meaning the ethics issues had to be addressed in the camera-ready version, to be verified by the SAC (based on EC guidance) prior to final acceptance.

The authors of all conditionally accepted papers submitted the camera-ready version and a short response that explained how they had made the changes requested. The SAC double-checked these revised submissions and responses, and confirmed that the ethical concerns had been addressed. As a result, all conditionally accepted papers were accepted to the main conference or Findings.

## 8.2 Best paper selection

ACL’23 implemented the new ACL award policy, aiming to expand the pool of work that is recognized as outstanding. In total, only 73 papers, i.e. 1.6% of all direct<sup>38</sup> submissions were nominated by the reviewers or ACs for consideration for awards. These papers were assessed by the **Best Paper Award Committee**, and with their help we selected 4 best papers, 4 special awards (social impact, resource, reproduction, theme paper), and 39 outstanding papers. The best and outstanding papers will be announced in a dedicated plenary session for Best Paper Awards on July 10 2023.

We encountered several issues with implementing the best paper policy as described in the wiki. With 73 nominated papers, to keep it down to 10 papers per judge and have 2 reviews per paper, we had to recruit 15 judges. At this scale, the workload is compatible with organizing a separate track: recruitment, paper assignments, chasing late reviews – only this time recruiting exclusively very senior and busy people, and it is very important to uphold diversity considerations (which we weren’t able to do full justice). For the future, we recommend that a separate chair role is created for managing this process, similar in scope to the role of the ethics review chairs.

Furthermore, since the diversity considerations in the committee selection entail incompatible time zones, we found it impractical to require the judges to meet and jointly decide on the cases where they disagree (as recommended in the policy). Hence, after the judges cast their votes<sup>39</sup>, the PCs made the final decisions on the basis of their recommendations (in particular, in the cases where one judge recommended outstanding paper and the other recommended not considering it further), we upheld the objections to flaws in the papers, shallowness of analysis, and ethical issues, which left us with 39 papers (a little short of the 1-1.5% total submissions policy target for the outstanding papers).

Finally, the ACL award policy described an Area Chair Award: the award that the SACs of a given track can give to one paper in their track, fully on their own authority. This was part of the guidelines for the final SAC recommendations, but we did not require them to be made at the same time. We sent out reminders after that, but received such nominations from only 12/26 tracks (with the theme

<sup>38</sup>This is only for the direct submissions to ACL. Due to the difficulty of seeing ARR nominations in START, we did not notice the 2 nominations out of 305 ARR submissions until it was too late.

<sup>39</sup>We found the agreement on the best paper committee votes to also be not very high: only 24/73 nominated papers received a unanimous vote to either consider for (any) award or not consider further.

track nomination transformed into the special Theme paper award). We recommend batching these recommendations with the final SAC recommendations as a single task.

## 9 Improving the Incentives

### 9.1 Improving Reporting Incentives for the Authors: Responsible NLP checklist

Following the effort started by NAACL 2022 and continued at ACL Rolling Review (Carpuat et al., 2021), we used the Responsible NLP Checklist as a way to ensure that all submissions conform to a certain minimum standard of reporting on their reproducibility efforts, data collection principles, and consideration of broader impacts. However, at NAACL 2022 and ACL Rolling Review, these checklists are only used internally during peer review.

To improve the transparency of NLP research and create a stronger incentive to invest effort in this work, we made the Responsible NLP Checklists an official part of all published papers. The authors filled out the checklist information in a special form, and we later used that form to generate pdf versions of the checklist, which was appended to every paper pdf for the ACL Anthology.

This change was announced in our Call for Papers, and we additionally communicated it to the authors. The authors had the opportunity to update the checklist form during the preparation of the camera-ready version of their papers.

One modification to the checklist was introducing a mandatory question about AI writing assistance. This was motivated by the introduction of OpenAI’s ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2022), the precedent of AI-assisted scientific paper writing of Meta’s Galactica (Taylor et al., 2022), and, more importantly, a massive wave of promotion for AI “writing assistants” shortly before our direct submission deadline. We did not aim to completely ban AI-assisted writing (which does have legitimate use cases such as assistance to non-native English speakers), but to improve transparency: just like with the other ethics-related questions in the checklists, our posted [policy](#) required authors to explicitly state what they did. Our question and policy were subsequently adopted by ACL Rolling Review.

Magnusson et al. (2023) have reported that the higher rate of “yes” responses to the Reproducibility checklist at 4 NLP conferences. Given that our checklist includes reproducibility questions, and reproducibility positively correlates with both *Soundness* and *Excitement*, we would expect the Responsible NLP checklist to perform the same role. The reviewers themselves were predominantly positive about it: 66.99% rated it as “somewhat useful”, 18.13% as “very useful”, and only 14.35% — as “not useful”.

[Table 17](#) shows the ratios of submissions answering ‘yes’ to the questions of the checklist, and the acceptance rates for the submissions that answered ‘yes’ vs those that didn’t. For most questions of the checklist, there is a small increase in acceptance rate for submissions that answer ‘yes’. The most significant increases are for reporting limitations (so we recommend that the conferences keep mandating this section), reporting hyperparameters and computation budget (in line with the high correlation between reproducibility ratings and reviewer scores §7.5), citing relevant work, contributing scientific artifacts such as models and software (in line with our finding of a significant effect for this contribution type discussed in §7.3).

An interesting case is the “catch question” A3 (does your abstract accurately summarize your work?). It drew some criticism as “meaningless bureaucracy”, since all submissions should respond “yes” to it. It was actually intended to see that the responders were not just clicking through the checklist. Most authors did respond ‘yes’, but those 2.24% that didn’t saw a -25.4 decrease in acceptance rate. We interpret this as suggesting that the sloppiness in filling out the checklist correlates with sloppiness elsewhere in the work.

Finally, our new question about the use of writing assistants is the only one where the response ‘Yes’ is associated with a *decrease* in acceptance rate, although not very large.

### 9.2 Improving Incentives for Reviewers: Reviewer Awards

Arguably the biggest source of issues with peer review quality is the lack of incentives to invest more work in invisible service labor. One direction is *reputational* awards, eg via creating reviewer profiles, as in Publons. Another is *material* awards, such as monetary prizes similar to the best paper awards. Yet

<i>Checklist question</i>	<i>% submissions</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Not Yes*</i>	<i>Yes-Not_yes</i>
A1 (limitations)	46.92	47.62	17.05	<b>30.57</b>
A2 (risks)	56.23	49.28	43.88	5.4
A3 (catch question)	97.76	47.49	22.09	<b>25.4</b>
A4 (AI-assisted writing)	7.3	41.28	47.36	-6.08
B (artifacts)	72.45	50.09	38.58	<b>11.51</b>
B1 (cite)	71.02	49.96	39.46	<b>10.5</b>
B2 (license)	37.8	52.48	43.54	8.94
B3 (intended use)	45.28	49.48	44.8	4.68
B4 (PII)	22.02	49	46.33	2.67
B5 (documentation)	48.95	50.93	43.08	7.85
B6 (statistics)	70.47	49.76	40.14	9.62
C (computation)	92.31	47.76	36.82	<b>10.94</b>
C1 (parameters)	78.58	48.96	39.44	9.52
C2 (hyperparams)	85.5	48.49	37.63	<b>10.86</b>
C3 (stats)	81.02	48.19	41.51	6.68
C4 (packages)	76.01	47.16	46.15	1.01
D (humans)	28.98	52.11	44.8	7.31
D1 (instructions)	20.95	53.85	45.08	8.77
D2 (payment)	21.19	53.5	45.15	8.35
D3 (consent)	17.31	51.2	46.02	5.18
D4 (IRB)	9.62	53.24	46.25	6.99
D5 (demographics)	14.61	54.27	45.66	8.61

Table 17: The ratio of ‘Yes’ responses to checklist questions vs the responses other than ‘yes’ (i.e. both ‘no’ and ‘no response’). The average acceptance rate in this pool is 46.92%.

another is *punitive* incentives, such as penalizing the late reviewers by delaying the reviews for their own submissions (Hauser and Fehr, 2007), or even blocking them from reviewing at future conferences.

All of these approaches are not without issues. Punitive incentives generally shift the focus to not getting penalized, rather than delivering high-quality reviews. Material awards may introduce the wrong incentives (Squazzoni et al., 2013), and, depending on the institution and the country, the prize may be taxed or not even make it to the recipient. Conference fee waivers also may also reward the reviewer’s institution rather than the reviewer, since the institutions usually bear the registration costs. While a survey found that reviewers generally prefer reputational awards over material (Warne, 2016), their value also depends on whether the reviewer’s institution rewards such work.

We proposed to the ACL exec (and received their approval for) an initiative to match the new **ACL best paper award policy** with recognizing about 1-1.5% of outstanding reviewers and chairs. This combines reputational and material incentives. Instead of monetary prizes, we proposed awarding vouchers for virtual attendance of any \*ACL (ACL, NAACL, EACL, AACL, EMNLP) conference of the awardee’s choice, to be used within a year of the award date. Since many institutions do not support the attendance of conferences without accepted papers (or even with papers accepted to workshops and Findings), we hope that this measure will increase the overall number of conferences that the awardees can attend.

We asked the area chairs to nominate the reviewers in their pool who provided extra helpful reviews, high-quality emergency reviews, “champion” reviews, reviewers who were particularly active in the discussion phase, or demonstrated exceptional open-mindedness or expertise. We received 51 such nominations. We also asked the Senior Area chairs to nominate exceptional area chairs, receiving 13 nominations. Finally, we as the program chairs also nominated the (3) SACs of the track who were the most on-time, provided the most helpful feedback, and followed our instructions the most closely. Excluding the duplicates, this resulted in 67 total nominations. All awards will be announced on the conference website<sup>40</sup>.

Since the total number of nominations was within our target number of awards (1-1.5% of total reviewers and chairs), we were able to award all 66 nominations (out of 4998) without creating a selection committee. In the future, we recommend that an extra volunteer role is created for managing the selection of awardees and managing the awards.

<sup>40</sup>[https://2023.aclweb.org/program/best\\_reviewers](https://2023.aclweb.org/program/best_reviewers)

Caveats: despite our calls to nominate reviewers and chairs, relatively few ACs and SACs did that: only 7/70 SACs and 28/438 ACs. We recommend that the AC/SAC guidelines are expanded with a section about these awards, and that ACs are asked to start keeping track of potential outstanding reviewers at the (a) review quality check stage, (b) discussion stage, rather than only during meta-reviews (as we did). The SACs could be asked to start keeping track of outstanding ACs at the (a) assignment checks, if that is the process used by the venue, (b) meta-reviews, (c) nominating on the basis of quantitative analysis of the activity in the discussion forum and the number of author-reported review issues that the AC addressed.

### 9.3 Improving Incentives for Chairs: Peer Review Reports

Our final proposal for improving the incentives for peer review work was to increase its visibility by placing the program chair reports and any findings from their analysis of the internal conference data as an official part of the proceedings for the respective conference. This report is aiming to create a precedent for that. In the past, there have been two options for publishing such work: standalone research papers that undergo their own peer review, and miscellaneous blog posts and reports published in ACL wiki. But the former is not appropriate for reporting on incidental findings (since most of the program chairs work is not executed as a research project targeting a specific research question). The latter is unfortunately too difficult to discover, especially for the people outside of our field or new organizers who may not know which blog posts and wikis to search.

This initiative aims to improve the transparency of the overall process, and lets the younger members of the community have more insight into how the \*ACL conferences work. Moreover, given the increasing attention to peer review in NLP community (Gao et al., 2019; Caragea et al., 2019) and more broadly in ML conferences (Price, 2014; Stelmakh, 2020; Beygelzimer et al., 2021), it would be useful to make the incidental findings from the conferences more easily discoverable, incl. to the researchers in the ML community and other fields.

The main difficulty for the program chairs and the publication chairs with implementing this proposal is that the full report needs to be prepared before the conference, when there is a lot of other work. To implement this, the set of volunteer roles would need to be expanded (see [section 10](#)). We also recommend that to the extent possible, the future chairs start documenting their workflow for the report early on (perhaps during the main review cycle).

## 10 Recommendations

**Improving logistics.** There are several sources of papers to the ACL main conference that the program chairs have no control over: TACL, CL, Industry Track Papers, SRW papers. This means that the PCs need to ingest four different sources of information with potentially little means of interacting with the relevant authors (in contrast to direct submissions). ARR is in a liminal space between direct submissions and these other papers. The timing and format of how the papers enter ACL should be standardized.

**Desk rejections.** Desk reject requirements should be clearly stated in the call for papers or in the ACL Paper formatting guidelines. The guidelines omit rules or lack clear thresholds for rejection. For example, there is no minimum separation between captions and tables/figures nor between section titles and the text above and below. Nor are there minimum text sizes for text within tables or figures. Adding clear rules would make the first pass reviewing more efficient and fair. ACL also needs to communicate more clearly about the role of the `aclpubcheck` script: it's a necessary but not sufficient check. Many authors assume that if they pass the `aclpubcheck` script, then they have followed all formatting guidelines.

**Soundness/Excitement scores.** With predominantly positive feedback in the exit survey ([§6.4](#)), and evidence of significant improvement in raw agreement ([§7.4](#)), we believe this experiment was successful and should be continued. The formulation of the scores and the review form should be improved, and care should be taken to reduce the overall complexity of the form.

**Review issue flagging.** This feature received overwhelming support from the authors, and should be continued and standardized (i.e., cleanly incorporated into author response form)—especially since it

is likely to improve after several iterations, when everybody is more familiar with it and the reviewer guidelines. More AC training is needed to address the flagged issues.

**Continued reviewer policy publications.** 12.9% of all ACL’23 reviews were flagged by the authors for various issues, with the most frequent problem being reviewer heuristics such as “too simple” and “not SOTA”. It is reassuring to know that the ratio of bad reviews is already not very high, but of course we should strive to further decrease it. The reviewer guidelines, in combination with the review issue flagging mechanism, serve a double purpose: even if the reviewers do not read them, the authors will (since they have the incentive to call out problematic reviews), and then the area chairs also will (to handle the author-flagged issues). Hence, eventually, these policies will become widely known across the community, and enforced by it. We urge the future chairs to continue publishing their reviewer policy or simply re-use ours, and explicitly point to it in review, author response, and meta-review forms.

**Reviewer assignment check support.** There is currently no convenient interface for the ACs to look up the assigned reviewers and browse the alternatives with up-to-date availability information. Its lack is a major hurdle for the chairs, and it may cause either delays in the process or skipping the checks.

**Reviewer match explanations.** Our area chairs were very positive about this feature. For venues not using an interpretable assignment algorithm such as our keywords-based process, at the very least, the reviewer profiles and relevant papers should be provided directly with the review, without any extra search.

**Post-acceptance decision litigation.** Having increased the acceptance rate for Findings, we were surprised to still receive a large volume of emails from the authors who, considering their scores and meta-review, argued that either their paper should have been accepted to the main track, or that it shouldn’t have been rejected. It appears that some subcommunities share their scores with each other, under the mistaken impression that if one paper with certain scores was accepted, others with similar scores should be too. We had no capacity for anything beyond checking for clerical errors. The peer review process is by no means perfect, and there was certainly some noise in the decisions—but it is also certain that many authors who disagree with their decisions would try to argue their case if given the chance. If such litigation is not an announced an official part of the conference process—doing so for the select few would not be fair to all the other authors who also disagree with their decisions. We recommend that the future chairs either build this into their process and dedicate time and resources to it, or pre-announce that decisions are final and will not be reconsidered, beyond the cases of clerical errors.

**Area-Contribution-Language matching.** The results of our experiment with exactly matching the reviewers with submissions by these areas allowed us to establish that it is possible to ensure a fair acceptance rate for most “non-mainstream” contribution types, and for the 63.8% of the submissions that had target languages other than English, we were able to provide a reviewer competent in that language. These results are by no means perfect, and it is important that the future venues improve on them, perhaps with other methods. But Area-Contribution-Language matching could be considered a fair baseline for the future conferences, when considering the success rates for different types of submissions and languages. All that is needed from the chairs is to include in submission forms the checkboxes for different types of contributions, and input fields for the target languages other than English. At the very minimum, the chairs would then be able to analyze the acceptance rates of different types of submissions, and compare it with ours ([Table 7](#)). One step further would be to also solicit this information from the reviewers, and estimate the quality of automated matches by the explicit keyword matches (see [Table 2](#)).

One more practical takeaway for future work is that if we used a solution relying purely on publication history from Semantic Scholar—25% of our matches would have been made on unreliable information. For embeddings-based solutions to work better, we would first need to provide them with better data, and this will take a bigger Semantic Scholar cleaning campaign than what we were able to elicit.

**Reconsidering the acceptance rate for Findings.** The initial iterations of Findings starting with EMNLP 2020 had the Findings acceptance rate at about 35%. This is the target rate we gave to our SACs, and then we tried to accommodate as many of their ranked preferences as we could. Although

we had over 40% rate with Findings, still, in many SAC comments we saw that they were overriding acceptance recommendations of ACs only to meet the quotas. While the quota for the Main track will stay at 20-25% for venue ranking reasons, we do not see why Findings could not be further extended to have room for most sufficiently sound work. About 60% of our direct submissions had at least two positive (above-borderline) reviews for *Soundness* and at least one for *Excitement*. Assuming some noise in the negative reviews for *Soundness*, it would be only reasonable to expect that at least 45%-50% submissions are Findings-worthy. Of course, the track SACs would not *have* to accept that many (the ratio of high-quality papers may vary between tracks and years), but when they do not see good reasons to reject — they should not be constrained by the Findings quota. This step would presumably also further decrease the burden of re-reviewing for resubmissions. We also recommend developing a standard process for Findings authors to apply for presentation at topically matching workshops, and for at least virtual poster presentation slots at the main conference.

**Further research on the effect of preprinting on peer review.** We find that the preprinted papers have consistently higher ratings (for both *Soundness*, *Excitement*, and reviewer confidence), get more recommendations for awards, and a higher acceptance rate. There are several possible underlying causes (from reviewer biases to higher initial paper quality and benefits of community feedback), which likely all contribute to this effect. Since these factors necessitate different actions if they were the major contributor to the observed effect, for informed policy decisions it is necessary to establish how they intermix. We observe however that although the present 1-month embargo policy does not solve this problem, it is effective at mitigating it, since we only had 13.8% such papers.

**Consistently working to improve peer review consistency.** Our analysis shows that the inconsistency in numerical reviewer score ratings is remarkably consistent across \*ACL conferences (at about  $\alpha \approx 0.3$  across EMNLP’22, EACL’23, and ACL’23). Among the likely culprits are miscalibrated scales, different interpretations of scales, at least some reviewers not even reading the guidelines, and reviewer biases. That said, we do see almost twice the raw agreement for our *Soundness* score (that is supposed to be more objective) over *Excitement* (more subjective), when the scores are mapped to the sound/unsound vs exciting/unexciting categorical variables. This suggests that asking more concrete questions does help (as long as the reviewer form does not become too complicated), and we can continue improving peer review on the basis of the general NLP methodology for iterating on guidelines and measuring agreement.

**Ethics review.** The innovation of the ethics review is useful and necessary, but it should be explicitly built into the timeline. We particularly struggled with the conditional accepts.

**Responsible NLP Checklist.** With predominantly positive reviewer feedback and evidence of improved acceptance rates for submissions that follow the best reporting practices, we believe that this is an important instrument for creating the right incentives for better science. We also recommend continuing to make it public, to strengthen these incentives.

**AI-assisted reviews.** We did not expect this happen so soon, but already at ACL’23 some chairs reached out to us with questions about reviews that they suspected to be at least partly generated. The reviewer guidelines will need to be updated with respect to that as well, including how sending papers to cloud-based language models may violate confidentiality.

**Review policy updates.** The rise of popular commercial systems such as ChatGPT that are claimed to be general-purpose, made an unfortunate match with our field’s tendency to expect the popular systems in all papers as universal baselines. We did not consider this at ACL’23, since ChatGPT fell out of scope of 3-month policy for considering contemporaneous work, but we did already have at least one precedent of a reviewer asking for a comparison with ChatGPT. We recommend that future chairs develop a clear policy in the reviewer guidelines about requests for comparisons with “closed” systems, to avoid numerous issues with evaluation methodology and benchmark data contamination (Rogers, 2023).

**Expanding the set of volunteer roles.** Our experience suggests that PC-ing a conference of ACL’23 size is a job that can no longer be realistically done by 3 volunteers. Early on, we introduced a *visa*

*support team*<sup>41</sup> to start early with issuing the letters of invitation for Canada. We also had crucial help from two **PC assistants**: Youmi Ma, an administrative assistant who handled much of the conference email, and Marzena Karpinska, who helped with analysis of peer review data in this report. In the future, we recommend that a dedicated role of a **peer review chair** is created, whose responsibility will be to supplement PC report with analysis of the data of the respective conference and comparing it with any records from previous conferences (so as to establish the effect of any new policies), and to coordinate the peer review awards selection and logistics (see §9.2). The growing volume of nominations for best papers requires a **best paper chair**, handling in effect the organization of a separate track and review process. Finally, we could have used a lot of help in the conference schedule: ideally there would be a dedicated **schedule chair**, ideally serving at several conferences so as to reduce friction and reuse the skill set as much as possible, as well as incorporate feedback from several events. Given that ACL had papers from SRW, Industry, ARR, TACL, CL, Findings, and the Main Conference, it's not necessarily feasible that the main track PCs can effectively coordinate scheduling all of these papers.

Another option would be for each conference to have **two sets of PC chairs, one remaining from the previous year and one new**. This would lighten the workload and ensure a smoother process (since people do not learn how to do everything from scratch each time). The first-year PCs would do the bulk of the work after the paper notifications are sent, and the second-year PCs would concentrate on the review process, analysis and the report. The first-year PCs would observe that and have better knowledge for designing the review process (CFP, SAC nominations, review criteria, etc). The second-year PCs would observe the COI requirements.

## 11 Acknowledgements

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Our work is built on many iterations of previous \*ACL conferences, including the AC and SAC guidelines developed at ACL 2021, and peer review tutorials developed by Anna Rogers and Isabelle Augenstein for ACL Rolling Review.

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<sup>41</sup><https://2023.aclweb.org/blog/visa-info/>

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## Table of Contents

<i>One Cannot Stand for Everyone! Leveraging Multiple User Simulators to train Task-oriented Dialogue Systems</i>	
Yajiao LIU, Xin Jiang, Yichun Yin, Yasheng Wang, Fei Mi, Qun Liu, Xiang Wan and Benyou Wang .....	1
<i>SafeConv: Explaining and Correcting Conversational Unsafe Behavior</i>	
Mian Zhang, Lifeng Jin, Linfeng Song, Haitao Mi, Wenliang Chen and Dong Yu .....	22
<i>Detecting and Mitigating Hallucinations in Machine Translation: Model Internal Workings Alone Do Well, Sentence Similarity Even Better</i>	
David Dale, Elena Voita, Loic Barrault and Marta R. Costa-jussà .....	36
<i>Explainable Recommendation with Personalized Review Retrieval and Aspect Learning</i>	
Hao Cheng, Shuo Wang, Wensheng Lu, Wei Zhang, Mingyang Zhou, Kezhong Lu and Hao Liao	
51	
<i>Binary and Ternary Natural Language Generation</i>	
Zechun Liu, Barlas Oguz, Aasish Pappu, Yangyang Shi and Raghuraman Krishnamoorthi .....	65
<i>Span-Selective Linear Attention Transformers for Effective and Robust Schema-Guided Dialogue State Tracking</i>	
Björn Bebensee and Haejun Lee .....	78
<i>EM Pre-training for Multi-party Dialogue Response Generation</i>	
Yiyang Li and Hai Zhao .....	92
<i>ACLM: A Selective-Denoising based Generative Data Augmentation Approach for Low-Resource Complex NER</i>	
Sreyan Ghosh, Utkarsh Tyagi, Manan Suri, Sonal Kumar, Ramaseswaran S and Dinesh Manocha	
104	
<i>Natural Language to Code Generation in Interactive Data Science Notebooks</i>	
Pengcheng Yin, Wen-Ding Li, Kefan Xiao, Abhishek K Rao, Yeming Wen, Kensen Shi, Joshua Howland, Paige Bailey, Michele Catasta, Henryk Michalewski, Oleksandr Polozov and Charles Sutton	
126	
<i>Subset Retrieval Nearest Neighbor Machine Translation</i>	
Hiroyuki Deguchi, Taro Watanabe, Yusuke Matsui, Masao Utiyama, Hideki Tanaka and Eiichiro Sumita .....	174
<i>MIL-Decoding: Detoxifying Language Models at Token-Level via Multiple Instance Learning</i>	
Xu Zhang and Xiaojun Wan .....	190
<i>Dependency resolution at the syntax-semantics interface: psycholinguistic and computational insights on control dependencies</i>	
Iria de-Dios-Flores, Juan Pablo Garcia Amboage and Marcos Garcia .....	203
<i>Open-ended Long Text Generation via Masked Language Modeling</i>	
Xiaobo Liang, Zecheng Tang, Juntao Li and Min Zhang .....	223
<i>A Method for Studying Semantic Construal in Grammatical Constructions with Interpretable Contextual Embedding Spaces</i>	
Gabriella Chronis, Kyle Mahowald and Katrin Erk .....	242

<i>Holographic CCG Parsing</i>	
Ryosuke Yamaki, Tadahiro Taniguchi and Daichi Mochihashi .....	262
<i>Prompts Can Play Lottery Tickets Well: Achieving Lifelong Information Extraction via Lottery Prompt Tuning</i>	
Zujie Liang, feng wei, Yin Jie, YUXI QIAN, Zhenghong Hao and Bing Han .....	277
<i>Retrieve-and-Sample: Document-level Event Argument Extraction via Hybrid Retrieval Augmentation</i>	
Yubing Ren, Yanan Cao, Ping Guo, Fang Fang, Wei Ma and Zheng Lin .....	293
<i>WeCheck: Strong Factual Consistency Checker via Weakly Supervised Learning</i>	
Wenhai Wu, Wei Li, Xinyan Xiao, Jiachen Liu, Sujian Li and Yajuan Lyu .....	307
<i>AMR-based Network for Aspect-based Sentiment Analysis</i>	
Fukun Ma, Xuming Hu, Aiwei Liu, Yawen Yang, Shuang Li, Philip S. Yu and Lijie Wen ....	322
<i>Text Adversarial Purification as Defense against Adversarial Attacks</i>	
Linyang Li, Demin Song and Xipeng Qiu.....	338
<i>SPEECH: Structured Prediction with Energy-Based Event-Centric Hyperspheres</i>	
Shumin Deng, Shengyu Mao, Ningyu Zhang and Bryan Hooi.....	351
<i>Rule By Example: Harnessing Logical Rules for Explainable Hate Speech Detection</i>	
Christopher Clarke, Matthew Hall, Gaurav Mittal, Ye Yu, Sandra Sajeev, Jason Mars and Mei Chen.....	364
<i>What about em"? How Commercial Machine Translation Fails to Handle (Neo-)Pronouns</i>	
Anne Lauscher, Debora Nozza, Ehm Miltersen, Archie Crowley and Dirk Hovy .....	377
<i>What Is Overlap Knowledge in Event Argument Extraction? APE: A Cross-datasets Transfer Learning Model for EAE</i>	
Kaihang Zhang, Kai Shuang, Xinyue Yang, Xuyang Yao and Jinyu Guo .....	393
<i>Tailor: A Soft-Prompt-Based Approach to Attribute-Based Controlled Text Generation</i>	
Kexin Yang, Dayiheng Liu, Wenqiang Lei, Baosong Yang, Mingfeng Xue, Boxing Chen and Jun Xie .....	410
<i>Knowledge of cultural moral norms in large language models</i>	
Aida Ramezani and Yang Xu .....	428
<i>Songs Across Borders: Singable and Controllable Neural Lyric Translation</i>	
Longshen Ou, Xichu Ma, Min-Yen Kan and Ye Wang .....	447
<i>Fantastic Expressions and Where to Find Them: Chinese Simile Generation with Multiple Constraints</i>	
Kexin Yang, Dayiheng Liu, Wenqiang Lei, Baosong Yang, Xiangpeng Wei, Zhengyuan Liu and Jun Xie .....	468
<i>Revealing Single Frame Bias for Video-and-Language Learning</i>	
Jie Lei, Tamara Berg and Mohit Bansal .....	487
<i>Learning with Partial Annotations for Event Detection</i>	
Jian Liu, Dianbo Sui, Kang Liu, Haoyan Liu and Zhe Zhao .....	508
<i>World-to-Words: Grounded Open Vocabulary Acquisition through Fast Mapping in Vision-Language Models</i>	
Ziqiao Ma, Jiayi Pan and Joyce Chai .....	524

<i>A Causal Framework to Quantify the Robustness of Mathematical Reasoning with Language Models</i>	
Alessandro Stolfo, Zhijing Jin, Kumar Shridhar, Bernhard Schoelkopf and Mrinmaya Sachan	545
<i>Evaluating Open-Domain Dialogues in Latent Space with Next Sentence Prediction and Mutual Information</i>	
Kun Zhao, Bohao Yang, Chenghua Lin, Wenge Rong, Aline Villavicencio and Xiaohui Cui	562
<i>Increasing Diversity While Maintaining Accuracy: Text Data Generation with Large Language Models and Human Interventions</i>	
John Joon Young Chung, Ece Kamar and Saleema Amershi	575
<i>Pruning Pre-trained Language Models Without Fine-Tuning</i>	
Ting Jiang, deqing wang, Fuzhen Zhuang, Ruobing Xie and Feng Xia	594
<i>When Does Translation Require Context? A Data-driven, Multilingual Exploration</i>	
Patrick Fernandes, Kayo Yin, Emmy Liu, André Martins and Graham Neubig	606
<i>Causal Intervention and Counterfactual Reasoning for Multi-modal Fake News Detection</i>	
Ziwei Chen, Linmei Hu, Weixin Li, Yingxia Shao and Liqiang Nie	627
<i>LexSym: Compositionality as Lexical Symmetry</i>	
Ekin Akyurek and Jacob Andreas	639
<i>Layer-wise Fusion with Modality Independence Modeling for Multi-modal Emotion Recognition</i>	
Jun Sun, Shoukang Han, Yu-Ping Ruan, Xiaoning Zhang, Shu-Kai Zheng, Yulong Liu, Yuxin Huang and Taihao Li	658
<i>CASN: Class-Aware Score Network for Textual Adversarial Detection</i>	
Rong Bao, Rui Zheng, Liang Ding, Qi Zhang and Dacheng Tao	671
<i>Do Androids Laugh at Electric Sheep? Humor Understanding Benchmarks from The New Yorker Caption Contest</i>	
Jack Hessel, Ana Marasovic, Jena D. Hwang, Lillian Lee, Jeff Da, Rowan Zellers, Robert Mankoff and Yejin Choi	688
<i>Making More of Little Data: Improving Low-Resource Automatic Speech Recognition Using Data Augmentation</i>	
Martijn Bartelds, Nay San, Bradley McDonnell, Dan Jurafsky and Martijn Wieling	715
<i>CLCL: Non-compositional Expression Detection with Contrastive Learning and Curriculum Learning</i>	
Jianing Zhou, Ziheng Zeng and Suma Bhat	730
<i>Multi-VALUE: A Framework for Cross-Dialectal English NLP</i>	
Caleb Ziems, William Held, Jingfeng Yang, Jwala Dhamala, Rahul Gupta and Diyi Yang	744
<i>Self-Edit: Fault-Aware Code Editor for Code Generation</i>	
Kechi Zhang, Zhuo Li, Jia Li, Ge Li and Zhi Jin	769
<i>Cold Fusion: Collaborative Descent for Distributed Multitask Finetuning</i>	
Shachar Don-Yehiya, Elad Venezian, Colin Raffel, Noam Slonim and Leshem Choshen	788
<i>Test-time Adaptation for Machine Translation Evaluation by Uncertainty Minimization</i>	
Runzhe Zhan, Xuebo Liu, Derek F. Wong, Cuilian Zhang, Lidia S. Chao and Min Zhang	807
<i>Multi-CLS BERT: An Efficient Alternative to Traditional Ensembling</i>	
Haw-Shiuan Chang, Ruei-Yao Sun, Kathryn Ricci and Andrew McCallum	821

<i>On-the-fly Cross-lingual Masking for Multilingual Pre-training</i>	855
Xi Ai and Bin Fang .....	
<i>How About Kind of Generating Hedges using End-to-End Neural Models?</i>	877
Alafate Abulimiti, Chloé Clavel and Justine Cassell.....	
<i>DiffusionDB: A Large-scale Prompt Gallery Dataset for Text-to-Image Generative Models</i>	893
Zijie J. Wang, Evan Montoya, David Munechika, Haoyang Yang, Benjamin Hoover and Duen Horng Chau .....	
<i>From Key Points to Key Point Hierarchy: Structured and Expressive Opinion Summarization</i>	912
Arie Cattan, Lilach Eden, Yoav Kantor and Roy Bar-Haim .....	
<i>When to Use What: An In-Depth Comparative Empirical Analysis of OpenIE Systems for Downstream Applications</i>	929
Kevin Song Pei, Ishan Jindal, Kevin Chen-Chuan Chang, ChengXiang Zhai and Yunyao Li ..	
<i>Subjective Crowd Disagreements for Subjective Data: Uncovering Meaningful CrowdOpinion with Population-level Learning</i>	946
Tharindu Cyril Weerasooriya, Sarah Luger, Saloni Poddar, Ashiqur KhudaBukhsh and Christopher Homan .....	
<i>Post-Abstention: Towards Reliably Re-Attempting the Abstained Instances in QA</i>	967
Neeraj Varshney and Chitta Baral .....	
<i>UniLG: A Unified Structure-aware Framework for Lyrics Generation</i>	983
Tao Qian, Fan Lou, Jiatong Shi, Yuning Wu, Shuai Guo, Xiang Yin and Qin Jin .....	
<i>FC-KBQA: A Fine-to-Coarse Composition Framework for Knowledge Base Question Answering</i>	1002
Lingxi Zhang, Jing Zhang, Yanling Wang, Shulin Cao, Xinmei Huang, Cuiping Li, Hong Chen and Juanzi Li .....	
<i>Does GPT-3 Grasp Metaphors? Identifying Metaphor Mappings with Generative Language Models</i>	1018
Lennart Wachowiak and Dagmar Gromann .....	
<i>Being Right for Whose Right Reasons?</i>	1033
Terne Sasha Thorn Jakobsen, Laura Cabello and Anders Søgaard .....	
<i>ALERT: Adapt Language Models to Reasoning Tasks</i>	1055
Ping Yu, Tianlu Wang, Olga Golovneva, Badr AlKhamissi, Siddharth Verma, Zhijing Jin, Gargi Ghosh, Mona Diab and Asli Celikyilmaz .....	
<i>Glot500: Scaling Multilingual Corpora and Language Models to 500 Languages</i>	1082
Ayyoob ImaniGooghari, Peiqin Lin, Amir Hossein Kargarani, Silvia Severini, Masoud Jalili Sabet, Nora Kassner, Chunlan Ma, Helmut Schmid, André Martins, François Yvon and Hinrich Schütze ..	
<i>Joint Constrained Learning with Boundary-adjusting for Emotion-Cause Pair Extraction</i>	1118
Huawen Feng, Junlong Liu, Junhao Zheng, Haibin Chen, Xichen Shang and Qianli Ma ....	
<i>Pretrained Bidirectional Distillation for Machine Translation</i>	1132
Yimeng Zhuang and Mei Tu .....	
<i>Pivotal Role of Language Modeling in Recommender Systems: Enriching Task-specific and Task-agnostic Representation Learning</i>	1146
Kyuyong Shin, Hanock Kwak, Wonjae Kim, Jisu Jeong, Seungjae Jung, Kyungmin Kim, Jung-Woo Ha and Sang-Woo Lee .....	

<i>Improving Continual Relation Extraction by Distinguishing Analogous Semantics</i>	1162
Wenzheng Zhao, Yuanning Cui and Wei Hu .....	
<i>Improving Pretraining Techniques for Code-Switched NLP</i>	1176
Richeek Das, Sahasra Ranjan, Shreya Pathak and Preethi Jyothi .....	
<i>A Theory of Unsupervised Speech Recognition</i>	1192
Liming Wang, Mark Hasegawa-Johnson and Chang D. Yoo .....	
<i>ThinkSum: Probabilistic reasoning over sets using large language models</i>	1216
Batu M Ozturkler, Nikolay Malkin, Zhen Wang and Nebojsa Jojic .....	
<i>NLG Evaluation Metrics Beyond Correlation Analysis: An Empirical Metric Preference Checklist</i>	1240
Iftitahu Nimah, Meng Fang, Vlado Menkovski and Mykola Pechenizkiy .....	
<i>DialoGPS: Dialogue Path Sampling in Continuous Semantic Space for Data Augmentation in Multi-Turn Conversations</i>	1267
Ang Lv, Jinpeng Li, yuhan chen, GAO XING, Ji Zhang and Rui Yan .....	
<i>TECHS: Temporal Logical Graph Networks for Explainable Extrapolation Reasoning</i>	1281
Qika Lin, Jun Liu, Rui Mao, Fangzhi Xu and Erik Cambria .....	
<i>Consistency Regularization Training for Compositional Generalization</i>	1294
Yongjing Yin, Jiali Zeng, Yafu Li, Fandong Meng, Jie Zhou and Yue Zhang .....	
<i>NUWA-XL: Diffusion over Diffusion for eXtremely Long Video Generation</i>	1309
Shengming Yin, Chenfei Wu, Huan Yang, Jianfeng Wang, Xiaodong Wang, Minheng Ni, Zhen-gyuan Yang, Linjie Li, Shuguang Liu, Fan Yang, Jianlong Fu, Ming Gong, Lijuan Wang, Zicheng Liu, Houqiang Li and Nan Duan .....	
<i>Synthetic Text Generation with Differential Privacy: A Simple and Practical Recipe</i>	1321
Xiang Yue, Huseyin A Inan, Xuechen Li, Girish Kumar, Julia McAnallen, Hoda Shajari, Huan Sun, David Levitan and Robert Sim .....	
<i>A Close Look into the Calibration of Pre-trained Language Models</i>	1343
Yangyi Chen, Lifan Yuan, Ganqu CUI, Zhiyuan Liu and Heng Ji .....	
<i>DIONYSUS: A Pre-trained Model for Low-Resource Dialogue Summarization</i>	1368
Yu Li, Baolin Peng, Pengcheng He, Michel Galley, Zhou Yu and Jianfeng Gao .....	
<i>MS-DETR: Natural Language Video Localization with Sampling Moment-Moment Interaction</i>	1387
Wang Jing, Aixin Sun, Hao Zhang and Xiaoli Li .....	
<i>Diverse Demonstrations Improve In-context Compositional Generalization</i>	1401
Itay Levy, Ben Beglin and Jonathan Berant .....	
<i>Self-Adaptive In-Context Learning: An Information Compression Perspective for In-Context Example Selection and Ordering</i>	1423
Zhiyong Wu, Yaoxiang Wang, Jiacheng Ye and Lingpeng Kong .....	
<i>On the Efficacy of Sampling Adapters</i>	1437
Clara Meister, Tiago Pimentel, Luca Malagutti, Ethan Wilcox and Ryan Cotterell .....	
<i>Cross-Domain Data Augmentation with Domain-Adaptive Language Modeling for Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis</i>	1456
Jianfei Yu, Qiankun Zhao and Rui Xia .....	

<i>Compositional Data Augmentation for Abstractive Conversation Summarization</i>	1471
Siru Ouyang, Jiaao Chen, Jiawei Han and Diyi Yang . . . . .	
<i>PMAES: Prompt-mapping Contrastive Learning for Cross-prompt Automated Essay Scoring</i>	1489
Yuan Chen and Xia Li . . . . .	
<i>Marked Personas: Using Natural Language Prompts to Measure Stereotypes in Language Models</i>	1504
Myra Cheng, Esin Durmus and Dan Jurafsky . . . . .	
<i>On Prefix-tuning for Lightweight Out-of-distribution Detection</i>	1533
Yawen Ouyang, Yongchang Cao, Yuan Gao, Zhen Wu, Jianbing Zhang and Xinyu Dai . . . . .	
<i>GEC-DePenD: Non-Autoregressive Grammatical Error Correction with Decoupled Permutation and Decoding</i>	1546
Konstantin Yakovlev, Alexander Podolskiy, Andrey Bout, Sergey I Nikolenko and Irina Piontkovskaya . . . . .	
<i>Measuring Progress in Fine-grained Vision-and-Language Understanding</i>	1559
Emanuele Bugliarello, Laurent Sartran, Aishwarya Agrawal, Lisa Anne Hendricks and Aida Nezhadzadeh . . . . .	
<i>Vision Meets Definitions: Unsupervised Visual Word Sense Disambiguation Incorporating Gloss Information</i>	1583
Sunjae Kwon, Rishabh Garodia, Minhwa Lee, Zhichao Yang and hong yu . . . . .	
<i>Chain-of-Skills: A Configurable Model for Open-Domain Question Answering</i>	1599
Kaixin Ma, Hao Cheng, Yu Zhang, Xiaodong Liu, Eric Nyberg and Jianfeng Gao . . . . .	
<i>Elaboration-Generating Commonsense Question Answering at Scale</i>	1619
Wenya Wang, Vivek Srikumar, Hannaneh Hajishirzi and Noah A. Smith . . . . .	
<i>Neural Unsupervised Reconstruction of Protolangauge Word Forms</i>	1636
Andre W He, Nicholas Tomlin and Dan Klein . . . . .	
<i>DaMSTF: Domain Adversarial Learning Enhanced Meta Self-Training for Domain Adaptation</i>	1650
Menglong Lu, Zhen Huang, Yunxiang Zhao, Zhiliang Tian, Yang Liu and Dongsheng Li . . . . .	
<i>On Evaluating Multilingual Compositional Generalization with Translated Datasets</i>	1669
Zi Wang and Daniel Hershcovitch . . . . .	
<i>FAA: Fine-grained Attention Alignment for Cascade Document Ranking</i>	1688
Zhen Li, Chongyang Tao, Jiazhan Feng, Tao Shen, Dongyan Zhao, Xiubo Geng and Dixin Jiang . . . . .	
<i>Fine-tuning Happens in Tiny Subspaces: Exploring Intrinsic Task-specific Subspaces of Pre-trained Language Models</i>	1701
Zhong Zhang, Bang Liu and Junming Shao . . . . .	
<i>Facilitating Multi-turn Emotional Support Conversation with Positive Emotion Elicitation: A Reinforcement Learning Approach</i>	1714
Jinfeng Zhou, Zhuang Chen, Bo Wang and Minlie Huang . . . . .	
<i>Query Enhanced Knowledge-Intensive Conversation via Unsupervised Joint Modeling</i>	1730
Mingzhu Cai, Siqi Bao, Xin Tian, Huang He, Fan Wang and Hua Wu . . . . .	

<i>Why Aren't We NER Yet? Artifacts of ASR Errors in Named Entity Recognition in Spontaneous Speech Transcripts</i>	Piotr Szymański, Lukasz Augustyniak, Mikolaj Morzy, Adrian Szymczak, Krzysztof Surdyk and Piotr Żelasko .....	1746
<i>Precise Zero-Shot Dense Retrieval without Relevance Labels</i>	Luyu Gao, Xueguang Ma, Jimmy Lin and Jamie Callan .....	1762
<i>White-Box Multi-Objective Adversarial Attack on Dialogue Generation</i>	Yufei Li, Zexin Li, Yingfan Gao and Cong Liu .....	1778
<i>A Cautious Generalization Goes a Long Way: Learning Morphophonological Rules</i>	Salam Khalifa, Sarah Payne, Jordan Kodner, Ellen Broselow and Owen Rambow .....	1793
<i>Few-shot Adaptation Works with UnpredicTable Data</i>	Jun Shern Chan, Michael Pieler, Jonathan Jao, Jérémie Scheurer and Ethan Perez .....	1806
<i>Cross-lingual Science Journalism: Select, Simplify and Rewrite Summaries for Non-expert Readers</i>	Mehwish Fatima and Michael Strube .....	1843
<i>HuCurl: Human-induced Curriculum Discovery</i>	Mohamed Elgaar and Hadi Amiri .....	1862
<i>kNN-TL: k-Nearest-Neighbor Transfer Learning for Low-Resource Neural Machine Translation</i>	Shudong Liu, Xuebo Liu, Derek F. Wong, Zhaocong Li, Wenxiang Jiao, Lidia S. Chao and Min Zhang .....	1878
<i>Do language models have coherent mental models of everyday things?</i>	Yuling Gu, Bhavana Dalvi Mishra and Peter Clark .....	1892
<i>Rogue Scores</i>	Max Grusky .....	1914
<i>Instruction Induction: From Few Examples to Natural Language Task Descriptions</i>	Or Honovich, Uri Shaham, Samuel R. Bowman and Omer Levy .....	1935
<i>In-Context Analogical Reasoning with Pre-Trained Language Models</i>	Xiaoyang Hu, Shane Storks, Richard L. Lewis and Joyce Chai .....	1953
<i>Peek Across: Improving Multi-Document Modeling via Cross-Document Question-Answering</i>	Avi Caciularu, Matthew Peters, Jacob Goldberger, Ido Dagan and Arman Cohan .....	1970
<i>Tailoring Instructions to Student's Learning Levels Boosts Knowledge Distillation</i>	Yuxin Ren, Zihan Zhong, Xingjian Shi, Yi Zhu, Chun Yuan and Mu Li .....	1990
<i>REV: Information-Theoretic Evaluation of Free-Text Rationales</i>	Hanjie Chen, Faeze Brahman, Xiang Ren, Yangfeng Ji, Yejin Choi and Swabha Swayamdipta	2007
<i>ELQA: A Corpus of Metalinguistic Questions and Answers about English</i>	Shabnam Behzad, Keisuke Sakaguchi, Nathan Schneider and Amir Zeldes .....	2031
<i>Divide, Conquer, and Combine: Mixture of Semantic-Independent Experts for Zero-Shot Dialogue State Tracking</i>	Qingyue Wang, Liang Ding, Yanan Cao, Yibing Zhan, Zheng Lin, Shi Wang, Dacheng Tao and Li Guo .....	2048
<i>BIG-C: a Multimodal Multi-Purpose Dataset for Bemba</i>	Claytone Sikasote, Eunice Mukonde, Md Mahfuz Ibn Alam and Antonios Anastasopoulos .	2062

<i>Schema-Guided User Satisfaction Modeling for Task-Oriented Dialogues</i>	
Yue Feng, Yunlong Jiao, Animesh Prasad, Nikolaos Aletras, Emine Yilmaz and Gabriella Kazai	
2079	
<i>Robust Multi-bit Natural Language Watermarking through Invariant Features</i>	
KiYoon Yoo, Wonhyuk Ahn, Jiho Jang and Nojun Kwak .....	2092
<i>KALM: Knowledge-Aware Integration of Local, Document, and Global Contexts for Long Document Understanding</i>	
Shangbin Feng, Zhaoxuan Tan, Wenqian Zhang, Zhenyu Lei and Yulia Tsvetkov .....	2116
<i>AtTGen: Attribute Tree Generation for Real-World Attribute Joint Extraction</i>	
Yanzeng Li, Bingcong Xue, Ruoyu Zhang and Lei Zou .....	2139
<i>Extractive is not Faithful: An Investigation of Broad Unfaithfulness Problems in Extractive Summarization</i>	
Shiyue Zhang, David Wan and Mohit Bansal .....	2153
<i>Improving Translation Quality Estimation with Bias Mitigation</i>	
Hui Huang, Shuangzhi Wu, Kehai Chen, Hui Di, Muyun Yang and Tiejun Zhao .....	2175
<i>Breeding Machine Translations: Evolutionary approach to survive and thrive in the world of automated evaluation</i>	
Josef Jon and Ondřej Bojar .....	2191
<i>MoralDial: A Framework to Train and Evaluate Moral Dialogue Systems via Moral Discussions</i>	
Hao Sun, Zhixin Zhang, Fei Mi, Yasheng Wang, Wei Liu, Jianwei Cui, Bin Wang, Qun Liu and Minlie Huang .....	2213
<i>Denoising Bottleneck with Mutual Information Maximization for Video Multimodal Fusion</i>	
Shaoxiang Wu, Damai Dai, Ziwei Qin, Tianyu Liu, Binghuai Lin, Yunbo Cao and Zhifang Sui	
2231	
<i>SimLM: Pre-training with Representation Bottleneck for Dense Passage Retrieval</i>	
Liang Wang, Nan Yang, Xiaolong Huang, Binxing Jiao, Linjun Yang, Daxin Jiang, Rangan Majumder and Furu Wei .....	2244
<i>From Ultra-Fine to Fine: Fine-tuning Ultra-Fine Entity Typing Models to Fine-grained</i>	
Hongliang Dai and Ziqian Zeng .....	2259
<i>Controlling Learned Effects to Reduce Spurious Correlations in Text Classifiers</i>	
Parikshit Bansal and Amit Sharma .....	2271
<i>What Makes Pre-trained Language Models Better Zero-shot Learners?</i>	
Jinghui Lu, dongsheng zhu, weidong Han, Rui Zhao, Brian Mac Namee and Fei Tan .....	2288
<i>Z-ICL: Zero-Shot In-Context Learning with Pseudo-Demonstrations</i>	
Xinxi Lyu, Sewon Min, Iz Beltagy, Luke Zettlemoyer and Hannaneh Hajishirzi .....	2304
<i>Learning Optimal Policy for Simultaneous Machine Translation via Binary Search</i>	
Shoutao Guo, Shaolei Zhang and Yang Feng .....	2318
<i>Better Simultaneous Translation with Monotonic Knowledge Distillation</i>	
Shushu Wang, Jing Wu, Kai Fan, Wei Luo, Jun Xiao and Zhongqiang Huang .....	2334
<i>StoryARG: a corpus of narratives and personal experiences in argumentative texts</i>	
Neele Falk and Gabriella Lapesa .....	2350

<i>Injecting knowledge into language generation: a case study in auto-charting after-visit care instructions from medical dialogue</i>	2373
Maksim Eremeev, Ilya Valmianski, Xavier Amatriain and Anitha Kannan .....	2373
<i>Sequence Parallelism: Long Sequence Training from System Perspective</i>	2391
Shenggui Li, Fuzhao Xue, Chaitanya Baranwal, Yongbin Li and Yang You .....	2391
<i>MUSTIE: Multimodal Structural Transformer for Web Information Extraction</i>	2405
Qifan Wang, Jingang Wang, Xiaojun Quan, Fuli Feng, Zenglin Xu, Shaoliang Nie, Sinong Wang, Madian Khabsa, Hamed Firooz and Dongfang Liu .....	2405
<i>Augmentation-Adapted Retriever Improves Generalization of Language Models as Generic Plug-In</i>	2421
Zichun Yu, Chenyan Xiong, Shi Yu and Zhiyuan Liu .....	2421
<i>TableVLM: Multi-modal Pre-training for Table Structure Recognition</i>	2437
Leiyuan Chen, Chengsong Huang, Xiaoqing Zheng, Jinshu Lin and Xuanjing Huang .....	2437
<i>Can NLI Provide Proper Indirect Supervision for Low-resource Biomedical Relation Extraction?</i>	2450
Jiashu Xu, Mingyu Derek Ma and Muhamo Chen .....	2450
<i>Dynamic Routing Transformer Network for Multimodal Sarcasm Detection</i>	2468
Yuan Tian, Nan Xu, Ruike Zhang and Wenji Mao .....	2468
<i>What Are You Token About? Dense Retrieval as Distributions Over the Vocabulary</i>	2481
Ori Ram, Liat Bezalel, Adi Zicher, Yonatan Belinkov, Jonathan Berant and Amir Globerson	2481
<i>Cold-Start Data Selection for Better Few-shot Language Model Fine-tuning: A Prompt-based Uncertainty Propagation Approach</i>	2499
Yue Yu, Rongzhi Zhang, Ran Xu, Jieyu Zhang, Jiaming Shen and Chao Zhang .....	2499
<i>Training-free Neural Architecture Search for RNNs and Transformers</i>	2522
Aaron Serianni and Jugal Kalita .....	2522
<i>CrossSum: Beyond English-Centric Cross-Lingual Summarization for 1,500+ Language Pairs</i>	2541
Abhik Bhattacharjee, Tahmid Hasan, Wasi Uddin Ahmad, Yuan-Fang Li, Yong-Bin Kang and Rifat Shahriyar .....	2541
<i>Improving Gradient Trade-offs between Tasks in Multi-task Text Classification</i>	2565
Heyan Chai, Jinhao Cui, Ye Wang, Min Zhang, Binxing Fang and Qing Liao .....	2565
<i>Bi-Phone: Modeling Inter Language Phonetic Influences in Text</i>	2580
Abhirut Gupta, Ananya B. Sai, Richard Sproat, Yuri Vasilevski, James S Ren, Ambarish Jash, Sukhdeep S Sodhi and Aravindan Raghuveer .....	2580
<i>Cross2StrA: Unpaired Cross-lingual Image Captioning with Cross-lingual Cross-modal Structure-pivoted Alignment</i>	2593
Shengqiong Wu, Hao Fei, Wei Ji and Tat-Seng Chua .....	2593
<i>Plan-and-Solve Prompting: Improving Zero-Shot Chain-of-Thought Reasoning by Large Language Models</i>	2609
Lei Wang, Wanyu Xu, Yihuai Lan, Zhiqiang Hu, Yunshi Lan, Roy Ka-Wei Lee and Ee-Peng Lim .....	2609
<i>RetroMAE-2: Duplex Masked Auto-Encoder For Pre-Training Retrieval-Oriented Language Models</i>	2635
Zheng Liu, Shitao Xiao, Yingxia Shao and Zhao Cao .....	2635

<i>DecompX: Explaining Transformers Decisions by Propagating Token Decomposition</i>	
Ali Modarressi, Mohsen Fayyaz, Ehsan Aghazadeh, Yadollah Yaghoobzadeh and Mohammad Taher Pilehvar .....	2649
<i>Symbolic Chain-of-Thought Distillation: Small Models Can Also Think Step-by-Step</i>	
Liunian Harold Li, Jack Hessel, Youngjae Yu, Xiang Ren, Kai-Wei Chang and Yejin Choi ..	2665
<i>Generating EDU Extracts for Plan-Guided Summary Re-Ranking</i>	
Griffin Adams, Alex Fabbri, Faisal Ladakh, Noémie Elhadad and Kathleen McKeown .....	2680
<i>A Survey on Asking Clarification Questions Datasets in Conversational Systems</i>	
Hossein A. Rahmani, Xi Wang, Yue Feng, Qiang Zhang, Emine Yilmaz and Aldo Lipani ..	2698
<i>Towards Understanding Chain-of-Thought Prompting: An Empirical Study of What Matters</i>	
Boshi Wang, Sewon Min, Xiang Deng, Jiaming Shen, You Wu, Luke Zettlemoyer and Huan Sun 2717	
<i>Small Data, Big Impact: Leveraging Minimal Data for Effective Machine Translation</i>	
Jean Maillard, Cynthia Gao, Elahe Kalbassi, Kaushik Ram Sadagopan, Vedanuj Goswami, Philipp Koehn, Angela Fan and Francisco Guzman .....	2740
<i>RMLM: A Flexible Defense Framework for Proactively Mitigating Word-level Adversarial Attacks</i>	
Zhaoyang Wang, Zhiyue Liu, Xiaopeng Zheng, Qinliang Su and Jiahai Wang .....	2757
<i>Gradient-based Intra-attention Pruning on Pre-trained Language Models</i>	
Ziqing Yang, Yiming Cui, Xin Yao and Shijin Wang .....	2775
<i>Learning to Substitute Spans towards Improving Compositional Generalization</i>	
Zhaoyi Li, Ying Wei and Defu Lian .....	2791
<i>DiffusEmp: A Diffusion Model-Based Framework with Multi-Grained Control for Empathetic Response Generation</i>	
Guanqun Bi, Lei Shen, Yanan Cao, Meng Chen, Yuqiang Xie, Zheng Lin and Xiaodong He	2812
<i>BREAK: Breaking the Dialogue State Tracking Barrier with Beam Search and Re-ranking</i>	
Seungpil Won, Heeyoung Kwak, Joongbo Shin, Janghoon Han and Kyomin Jung .....	2832
<i>Faithful Low-Resource Data-to-Text Generation through Cycle Training</i>	
Zhuoer Wang, Marcus Collins, Nikhita Vedula, Simone Filice, Shervin Malmasi and Oleg Rakhlenko .....	2847
<i>Towards Stable Natural Language Understanding via Information Entropy Guided Debiasing</i>	
Li Du, Xiao Ding, Zhouhao Sun, Ting Liu, Bing Qin and Jingshuo Liu .....	2868
<i>Dynamic and Efficient Inference for Text Generation via BERT Family</i>	
Xiaobo Liang, Juntao Li, Lijun Wu, Ziqiang Cao and Min Zhang .....	2883
<i>Learning to Generate Equitable Text in Dialogue from Biased Training Data</i>	
Anthony B Sicilia and Malihe Alikhani .....	2898
<i>Hierarchical Verbalizer for Few-Shot Hierarchical Text Classification</i>	
Ke Ji, Yixin Lian, Jingsheng Gao and Baoyuan Wang .....	2918
<i>Summary-Oriented Vision Modeling for Multimodal Abstractive Summarization</i>	
Yunlong Liang, Fandong Meng, Jinan Xu, Jian Wang, Yufeng Chen and Jie Zhou .....	2934

<i>Helping a Friend or Supporting a Cause? Disentangling Active and Passive Cosponsorship in the U.S. Congress</i>	
Giuseppe Russo, Christoph Gote, Laurence Brandenberger, Sophia Johanna Schlosser and Frank Schweitzer .....	2952
<i>TREA: Tree-Structure Reasoning Schema for Conversational Recommendation</i>	
Wendi Li, Wei Wei, Xiaoye Qu, Xian-Ling Mao, Ye Yuan, Wenfeng Xie and Dangyang Chen	2970
<i>CATS: A Pragmatic Chinese Answer-to-Sequence Dataset with Large Scale and High Quality</i>	
Liang Li, Ruiying Geng, Chengyang Fang, Bing Li, Can Ma, Rongyu Cao, Binhu Li, Fei Huang and Yongbin Li .....	2983
<i>Multilingual Multifaceted Understanding of Online News in Terms of Genre, Framing, and Persuasion Techniques</i>	
Jakub Piskorski, Nicolas Stefanovitch, Nikolaos Nikolaidis, Giovanni Da San Martino and Preslav Nakov .....	3001
<i>Learning Action Conditions from Instructional Manuals for Instruction Understanding</i>	
Te-Lin Wu, Caiqi ZHANG, Qingyuan Hu, Alexander Spangher and Nanyun Peng .....	3023
<i>StoryWars: A Dataset and Instruction Tuning Baselines for Collaborative Story Understanding and Generation</i>	
Yulun Du and Lydia Chilton .....	3044
<i>Did You Read the Instructions? Rethinking the Effectiveness of Task Definitions in Instruction Learning</i>	
Fan Yin, Jesse Vig, Philippe Laban, Shafiq Joty, Caiming Xiong and Chien-Sheng Jason Wu	3063
<i>Do PLMs Know and Understand Ontological Knowledge?</i>	
Weiqi Wu, Chengyue Jiang, Yong Jiang, Pengjun Xie and Kewei Tu.....	3080
<i>CORE: Cooperative Training of Retriever-Reranker for Effective Dialogue Response Selection</i>	
Chongyang Tao, Jiazhan Feng, Tao Shen, Chang Liu, Juntao Li, Xiubo Geng and Dixin Jiang	3102
<i>Exploring How Generative Adversarial Networks Learn Phonological Representations</i>	
Jingyi Chen and Micha Elsner .....	3115
<i>Interpretable Word Sense Representations via Definition Generation: The Case of Semantic Change Analysis</i>	
Mario Julianelli, Iris Luden, Raquel Fernandez and Andrey Kutuzov .....	3130
<i>Learning to Simulate Natural Language Feedback for Interactive Semantic Parsing</i>	
Hao Yan, Saurabh Srivastava, Yintao Tai, Sida I. Wang, Wen-tau Yih and Ziyu Yao .....	3149
<i>InfoMetIC: An Informative Metric for Reference-free Image Caption Evaluation</i>	
Anwen Hu, Shizhe Chen, Liang Zhang and Qin Jin .....	3171
<i>An Invariant Learning Characterization of Controlled Text Generation</i>	
Carolina Zheng, Claudia Shi, Keyon Vafa, Amir Feder and David Blei .....	3186
<i>HistRED: A Historical Document-Level Relation Extraction Dataset</i>	
Soyoung Yang, Minseok Choi, Youngwoo Cho and Jaegul Choo .....	3207
<i>A Critical Evaluation of Evaluations for Long-form Question Answering</i>	
Fangyuan Xu, Yixiao Song, Mohit Iyyer and Eunsol Choi .....	3225
<i>HyPe: Better Pre-trained Language Model Fine-tuning with Hidden Representation Perturbation</i>	
Hongyi Yuan, Zheng Yuan, Chuanchi Tan, Fei Huang and Songfang Huang .....	3246

<i>Generating User-Engaging News Headlines</i>	
Pengshan Cai, Kaiqiang Song, Sangwoo Cho, Hongwei Wang, Xiaoyang Wang, hong yu, Fei Liu and Dong Yu .....	3265
<i>Word sense extension</i>	
Lei Yu and Yang Xu .....	3281
<i>PVGRU: Generating Diverse and Relevant Dialogue Responses via Pseudo-Variational Mechanism</i>	
Yongkang Liu, Shi Feng, Daling Wang, Yifei Zhang and Hinrich Schütze .....	3295
<i>Decoding Symbolism in Language Models</i>	
Meiqi Guo, Rebecca Hwa and Adriana Kovashka .....	3311
<i>A Survey on Zero Pronoun Translation</i>	
Longyue Wang, Siyou Liu, Mingzhou Xu, Linfeng Song, Shuming Shi and Zhaopeng Tu .....	3325
<i>We Understand Elliptical Sentences, and Language Models should Too: A New Dataset for Studying Ellipsis and its Interaction with Thematic Fit</i>	
Davide Testa, Emmanuele Chersoni and Alessandro Lenci .....	3340
<i>MPCHAT: Towards Multimodal Persona-Grounded Conversation</i>	
Jaewoo Ahn, Yeda Song, Sangdoo Yun and Gunhee Kim .....	3354
<i>DOC: Improving Long Story Coherence With Detailed Outline Control</i>	
Kevin Yang, Dan Klein, Nanyun Peng and Yuandong Tian .....	3378
<i>Dual-Alignment Pre-training for Cross-lingual Sentence Embedding</i>	
Ziheng Li, Shaohan Huang, Zihan Zhang, Zhi-Hong Deng, Qiang Lou, Haizhen Huang, Jian Jiao, Furu Wei, Weiwei Deng and Qi Zhang .....	3466
<i>Exploring Better Text Image Translation with Multimodal Codebook</i>	
Zhibin Lan, Jiawei Yu, Xiang Li, Wen Zhang, Jian Luan, Bin Wang, Degen Huang and Jinsong Su .....	3479
<i>FEDLEGAL: The First Real-World Federated Learning Benchmark for Legal NLP</i>	
Zhuo Zhang, Xiangjing Hu, Jingyuan Zhang, Yating Zhang, Hui Wang, Lizhen Qu and Zenglin Xu .....	3492
<i>A Gradient Control Method for Backdoor Attacks on Parameter-Efficient Tuning</i>	
Naibin Gu, Peng Fu, Xiyu Liu, Zhengxiao Liu, Zheng Lin and Weiping Wang .....	3508
<i>History Semantic Graph Enhanced Conversational KBQA with Temporal Information Modeling</i>	
Hao Sun, Yang Li, Liwei Deng, Bowen Li, Binyuan Hui, Binhua Li, Yunshi Lan, Yan Zhang and Yongbin Li .....	3521
<i>From the One, Judge of the Whole: Typed Entailment Graph Construction with Predicate Generation</i>	
Zhibin Chen, Yansong Feng and Dongyan Zhao .....	3534
<i>Alleviating Over-smoothing for Unsupervised Sentence Representation</i>	
Nuo Chen, Linjun Shou, Jian Pei, Ming Gong, Bowen Cao, Jianhui Chang, Jia Li and Dixin Jiang .....	3552
<i>Memory-efficient NLLB-200: Language-specific Expert Pruning of a Massively Multilingual Machine Translation Model</i>	
Yeskendir Koishekenov, Alexandre Berard and Vassilina Nikoulina .....	3567

<i>DAMP: Doubly Aligned Multilingual Parser for Task-Oriented Dialogue</i>	
William Held, Christopher Hidey, Fei Liu, Eric Y Zhu, Rahul Goel, Diyi Yang and Rushin Shah	
3586	
<i>From Characters to Words: Hierarchical Pre-trained Language Model for Open-vocabulary Language Understanding</i>	
Li Sun, Florian Luisier, Kayhan Batmanghelich, Dinei Florencio and Cha Zhang .....	3605
<i>MatSci-NLP: Evaluating Scientific Language Models on Materials Science Language Tasks Using Text-to-Schema Modeling</i>	
Yu Song, Santiago Miret and Bang Liu.....	3621
<i>Code4Struct: Code Generation for Few-Shot Event Structure Prediction</i>	
Xingyao Wang, Sha Li and Heng Ji .....	3640
<i>GENEVA: Benchmarking Generalizability for Event Argument Extraction with Hundreds of Event Types and Argument Roles</i>	
Tanmay Parekh, I-Hung Hsu, Kuan-Hao Huang, Kai-Wei Chang and Nanyun Peng .....	3664
<i>Efficient Semiring-Weighted Earley Parsing</i>	
Andreas Opedal, Ran Zmigrod, Tim Vieira, Ryan Cotterell and Jason Eisner .....	3687
<i>Tree-Based Representation and Generation of Natural and Mathematical Language</i>	
Alexander Scarlatos and Andrew Lan .....	3714
<i>ParaLS: Lexical Substitution via Pretrained Paraphraser</i>	
Jipeng Qiang, Kang Liu, Yun Li, Yunhao Yuan and Yi Zhu.....	3731
<i>Peer-Label Assisted Hierarchical Text Classification</i>	
Junru Song, Feifei Wang and Yang Yang .....	3747
<i>Free Lunch for Efficient Textual Commonsense Integration in Language Models</i>	
Wanyun Cui and Xingran Chen.....	3759
<i>A Probabilistic Framework for Discovering New Intents</i>	
Yunhua Zhou, Guofeng Quan and Xipeng Qiu .....	3771
<i>MultiTACRED: A Multilingual Version of the TAC Relation Extraction Dataset</i>	
Leonhard Hennig, Philippe Thomas and Sebastian Möller.....	3785
<i>Towards Higher Pareto Frontier in Multilingual Machine Translation</i>	
yichong huang, Xiaocheng Feng, Xinwei Geng, Baohang Li and Bing Qin .....	3802
<i>Small Pre-trained Language Models Can be Fine-tuned as Large Models via Over-Parameterization</i>	
Ze-Feng Gao, Kun Zhou, Peiyu Liu, Wayne Xin Zhao and Ji-Rong Wen .....	3819
<i>Entity Tracking in Language Models</i>	
Najoung Kim and Sebastian Schuster .....	3835
<i>A Textual Dataset for Situated Proactive Response Selection</i>	
Naoki Otani, Jun Araki, HyeongSik Kim and Eduard H Hovy .....	3856
<i>DiffusionNER: Boundary Diffusion for Named Entity Recognition</i>	
Yongliang Shen, Kaitao Song, Xu Tan, Dongsheng Li, Weiming Lu and Yueting Zhuang ...	3875
<i>WACO: Word-Aligned Contrastive Learning for Speech Translation</i>	
Siqi Ouyang, Rong Ye and Lei Li .....	3891

<i>Cross-lingual Continual Learning</i>	Meryem M'hamdi, Xiang Ren and Jonathan May .....	3908
<i>Faithful Question Answering with Monte-Carlo Planning</i>	Ruixin Hong, Hongming Zhang, Hong Zhao, Dong Yu and Changshui Zhang .....	3944
<i>Unbalanced Optimal Transport for Unbalanced Word Alignment</i>	Yuki Arase, Han Bao and Sho Yokoi .....	3966
<i>Guiding Computational Stance Detection with Expanded Stance Triangle Framework</i>	Zhengyuan Liu, Yong Keong Yap, Hai Leong Chieu and Nancy Chen .....	3987
<i>Analyzing and Reducing the Performance Gap in Cross-Lingual Transfer with Fine-tuning Slow and Fast</i>	Yiduo Guo, Yaobo Liang, Dongyan Zhao, Bing Liu and Nan Duan.....	4002
<i>Improving Self-training for Cross-lingual Named Entity Recognition with Contrastive and Prototype Learning</i>	Ran Zhou, Xin Li, Lidong Bing, Erik Cambria and Chunyan Miao .....	4018
<i>MM-SHAP: A Performance-agnostic Metric for Measuring Multimodal Contributions in Vision and Language Models &amp; Tasks</i>	Letitia Parcalabescu and Anette Frank.....	4032
<i>Towards Boosting the Open-Domain Chatbot with Human Feedback</i>	Hua Lu, Siqi Bao, Huang He, Fan Wang, Hua Wu and Haifeng Wang .....	4060
<i>Knowledge-enhanced Mixed-initiative Dialogue System for Emotional Support Conversations</i>	Yang Deng, Wenxuan Zhang, Yifei Yuan and Wai Lam .....	4079
<i>UTC-IE: A Unified Token-pair Classification Architecture for Information Extraction</i>	Hang Yan, Yu Sun, Xiaonan Li, Yunhua Zhou, Xuanjing Huang and Xipeng Qiu .....	4096
<i>Social-Group-Agnostic Bias Mitigation via the Stereotype Content Model</i>	Ali Omrani, Alireza Salkhordeh Ziabari, Charles Yu, Preni Golazizian, Brendan Kennedy, Mohammad Atari, Heng Ji and Morteza Dehghani.....	4123
<i>Revisiting the Gold Standard: Grounding Summarization Evaluation with Robust Human Evaluation</i>	Yixin Liu, Alex Fabbri, Pengfei Liu, Yilun Zhao, Linyong Nan, Ruilin Han, Simeng Han, Shafiq Joty, Chien-Sheng Jason Wu, Caiming Xiong and Dragomir Radev .....	4140
<i>FIREBALL: A Dataset of Dungeons and Dragons Actual-Play with Structured Game State Information</i>	Andrew Zhu, Karmanya Aggarwal, Alexander H Feng, Lara J. Martin and Chris Callison-Burch 4171	
<i>A fine-grained comparison of pragmatic language understanding in humans and language models</i>	Jennifer Hu, Sammy Floyd, Olessia Jouravlev, Evelina Fedorenko and Edward Gibson .....	4194
<i>Counterfactual Multihop QA: A Cause-Effect Approach for Reducing Disconnected Reasoning</i>	Wangzhen Guo, Qinkang Gong, Yanghui Rao and Hanjiang Lai .....	4214
<i>Causal-Debias: Unifying Debiasing in Pretrained Language Models and Fine-tuning via Causal Invariant Learning</i>	Fan Zhou, Yuzhou Mao, Liu Yu, Yi Yang and Ting Zhong .....	4227
<i>Parameter-Efficient Fine-Tuning without Introducing New Latency</i>	Baohao Liao, Yan Meng and Christof Monz .....	4242

<i>MANNER: A Variational Memory-Augmented Model for Cross Domain Few-Shot Named Entity Recognition</i>	
Jinyuan Fang, Xiaobin Wang, Zaiqiao Meng, Pengjun Xie, Fei Huang and Yong Jiang .....	4261
<i>MASSIVE: A 1M-Example Multilingual Natural Language Understanding Dataset with 51 Typologically-Diverse Languages</i>	
Jack FitzGerald, Christopher Hench, Charith Peris, Scott Mackie, Kay Rottmann, Ana Sanchez, Aaron Nash, Liam Urbach, Vishesh Kakarala, Richa Singh, Swetha Ranganath, Laurie Crist, Misha Britan, Wouter Leeuwis, Gokhan Tur and Prem Natarajan .....	4277
<i>Distilling Script Knowledge from Large Language Models for Constrained Language Planning</i>	
Siyu Yuan, Jiangjie Chen, Ziquan Fu, Xuyang Ge, Soham Pranav Shah, Charles Jankowski, Yanhua Xiao and Deqing Yang.....	4303
<i>RED<sup>&lt;sup&gt;FM&lt;/sup&gt;</sup></i> : a Filtered and Multilingual Relation Extraction Dataset	
Pere Lluís Huguet Cabot, Simone Tedeschi, Axel-Cyrille Ngonga Ngomo and Roberto Navigli .....	4326
<i>Modeling Appropriate Language in Argumentation</i>	
Timon Ziegenbein, Shahbaz Syed, Felix Lange, Martin Potthast and Henning Wachsmuth ..	4344
<i>CELDA: Leveraging Black-box Language Model as Enhanced Classifier without Labels</i>	
Hyunsoo Cho, Youna Kim and Sang-goo Lee .....	4364
<i>MvP: Multi-view Prompting Improves Aspect Sentiment Tuple Prediction</i>	
Zhibin Gou, qingyan guo and Yujiu Yang.....	4380
<i>ACCENT: An Automatic Event Commonsense Evaluation Metric for Open-Domain Dialogue Systems</i>	
Sarik Ghazarian, Yijia Shao, Rujun Han, Aram Galstyan and Nanyun Peng .....	4398
<i>Explanation-based Finetuning Makes Models More Robust to Spurious Cues</i>	
Josh Magnus Ludan, Yixuan Meng, Tai Nguyen, Saurabh Shah, Qing Lyu, Marianna Apidianaki and Chris Callison-Burch .....	4420
<i>CAME: Confidence-guided Adaptive Memory Efficient Optimization</i>	
Yang Luo, Xiaozhe REN, Zangwei Zheng, ZHUO JIANG, Xin Jiang and Yang You .....	4442
<i>On Second Thought, Let's Not Think Step by Step! Bias and Toxicity in Zero-Shot Reasoning</i>	
Omar Shaikh, Hongxin Zhang, William Held, Michael S Bernstein and Diyi Yang .....	4454
<i>Solving Math Word Problems via Cooperative Reasoning induced Language Models</i>	
Xinyu Zhu, Junjie Wang, Lin Zhang, Yuxiang Zhang, Yongfeng Huang, ruyi gan, Jiaxing Zhang and Yujiu Yang .....	4471
<i>Exploiting Biased Models to De-bias Text: A Gender-Fair Rewriting Model</i>	
Chantal Amrhein, Florian Schottmann, Rico Sennrich and Samuel Läubli.....	4486
<i>Early Discovery of Disappearing Entities in Microblogs</i>	
Satoshi Akasaki, Naoki Yoshinaga and Masashi Toyoda .....	4507
<i>DiffusionBERT: Improving Generative Masked Language Models with Diffusion Models</i>	
Zhengfu He, Tianxiang Sun, Qiong Tang, Kuanning Wang, Xuanjing Huang and Xipeng Qiu	4521
<i>Lifting the Curse of Capacity Gap in Distilling Language Models</i>	
Chen Zhang, Yang Yang, Jiahao Liu, Jingang Wang, Yunsen Xian, Benyou Wang and Dawei Song .....	4535

<i>Towards Faithful Dialogues via Focus Learning</i>	Yifan Deng, Xingsheng Zhang, Heyan Huang and Yue Hu .....	4554
<i>Back Translation for Speech-to-text Translation Without Transcripts</i>	Qingkai Fang and Yang Feng .....	4567
<i>Prompter: Zero-shot Adaptive Prefixes for Dialogue State Tracking Domain Adaptation</i>	Ibrahim Taha Aksu, Min-Yen Kan and Nancy Chen .....	4588
<i>Enhancing Dialogue Generation via Dynamic Graph Knowledge Aggregation</i>	Chen Tang, Hongbo Zhang, Tyler Loakman, Chenghua Lin and Frank Guerin .....	4604
<i>Multi-modal Action Chain Abductive Reasoning</i>	Mengze Li, Tianbao Wang, Jiahe Xu, Kairong Han, Shengyu Zhang, Zhou Zhao, Jiaxu Miao, wenqiao zhang, Shiliang Pu and Fei Wu .....	4617
<i>Exploring the Capacity of Pretrained Language Models for Reasoning about Actions and Change</i>	Weinan He, Canming Huang, Zhanhao Xiao and Yongmei Liu .....	4629
<i>Unified Demonstration Retriever for In-Context Learning</i>	Xiaonan Li, Kai Lv, Hang Yan, Tianyang Lin, Wei Zhu, Yuan Ni, GUOTONG XIE, Xiaoling Wang and Xipeng Qiu .....	4644
<i>Movie101: A New Movie Understanding Benchmark</i>	Zihao Yue, Qi Zhang, Anwen Hu, Liang Zhang, Ziheng Wang and Qin Jin .....	4669
<i>Enhancing Language Representation with Constructional Information for Natural Language Understanding</i>	Lvxiaowei Xu, Jianwang Wu, Jiawei Peng, Zhilin Gong, Ming Cai and Tianxiang Wang .....	4685
<i>Query Structure Modeling for Inductive Logical Reasoning Over Knowledge Graphs</i>	Siyuan Wang, Zhongyu Wei, meng han, Zhihao Fan, Haijun Shan, Qi Zhang and Xuanjing Huang	4706
<i>DimonGen: Diversified Generative Commonsense Reasoning for Explaining Concept Relationships</i>	Chenzhengyi Liu, Jie Huang, Kerui Zhu and Kevin Chen-Chuan Chang .....	4719
<i>Incorporating Attribution Importance for Improving Faithfulness Metrics</i>	Zhixue Zhao and Nikolaos Aletras .....	4732
<i>Reward Gaming in Conditional Text Generation</i>	Richard Yuanzhe Pang, Vishakh Padmakumar, Thibault Sellam, Ankur Parikh and He He ..	4746
<i>Hidden Schema Networks</i>	Ramses J Sanchez, Lukas Alexander Conrads, Pascal Welke, Kostadin Cvejoski and Cesar Ali Ojeda Marin .....	4764
<i>Towards Robust Low-Resource Fine-Tuning with Multi-View Compressed Representations</i>	Linlin Liu, Xingxuan Li, Megh Thakkar, Xin Li, Shafiq Joty, Luo Si and Lidong Bing .....	4799
<i>An Ordinal Latent Variable Model of Conflict Intensity</i>	Niklas Stoehr, Lucas Torroba Hennigen, Josef Valvoda, Robert West, Ryan Cotterell and Aaron Schein .....	4817
<i>Multilingual Conceptual Coverage in Text-to-Image Models</i>	Michael S Saxon and William Yang Wang .....	4831

<i>Pre-Training to Learn in Context</i>	Yuxian Gu, Li Dong, Furu Wei and Minlie Huang . . . . .	4849
<i>Ethical Considerations for Machine Translation of Indigenous Languages: Giving a Voice to the Speakers</i>	Manuel Mager, Elisabeth Albine Mager, Katharina Kann and Ngoc Thang Vu . . . . .	4871
<i>Revisiting non-English Text Simplification: A Unified Multilingual Benchmark</i>	Michael Joseph Ryan, Tarek Naous and Wei Xu . . . . .	4898
<i>Don't Generate, Discriminate: A Proposal for Grounding Language Models to Real-World Environments</i>	Yu Gu, Xiang Deng and Yu Su . . . . .	4928
<i>Privacy-Preserving Domain Adaptation of Semantic Parsers</i>	Fatemehsadat Mireshghallah, Yu Su, Tatsunori Hashimoto, Jason Eisner and Richard Shin .	4950
<i>Guide the Many-to-One Assignment: Open Information Extraction via IoU-aware Optimal Transport</i>	Kaiwen Wei, Yiran Yang, li jin, Xian Sun, Zequn Zhang, Jingyuan Zhang, Xiao yu Li, Linhao Zhang, Jintao Liu and Guo Zhi . . . . .	4971
<i>Actively Supervised Clustering for Open Relation Extraction</i>	Jun Zhao, Yongxin Zhang, Qi Zhang, Tao Gui, Zhongyu Wei, Minlong Peng and Mingming Sun	4985
<i>ConvGQR: Generative Query Reformulation for Conversational Search</i>	Fengran Mo, Kelong Mao, Yutao Zhu, Yihong Wu, Kaiyu Huang and Jian-Yun Nie . . . . .	4998
<i>KILM: Knowledge Injection into Encoder-Decoder Language Models</i>	Yan Xu, Mahdi Namazifar, Devamanyu Hazarika, Aishwarya Padmakumar, Yang Liu and Dilek Hakkani-Tur . . . . .	5013
<i>VSTAR: A Video-grounded Dialogue Dataset for Situated Semantic Understanding with Scene and Topic Transitions</i>	Yuxuan Wang, Zilong Zheng, Xueliang Zhao, Jinpeng Li, Yueqian Wang and Dongyan Zhao	5036
<i>NLPeer: A Unified Resource for the Computational Study of Peer Review</i>	Nils Dycke, Ilia Kuznetsov and Iryna Gurevych . . . . .	5049
<i>IM-TQA: A Chinese Table Question Answering Dataset with Implicit and Multi-type Table Structures</i>	Mingyu Zheng, Yang Hao, Wenbin Jiang, Zheng Lin, Yajuan Lyu, QiaoQiao She and Weiping Wang . . . . .	5074
<i>Z-Code++: A Pre-trained Language Model Optimized for Abstractive Summarization</i>	Pengcheng He, Baolin Peng, Song Wang, Yang Liu, Ruochen Xu, Hany Hassan, Yu Shi, Chenguang Zhu, Wayne Xiong, Michael Zeng, Jianfeng Gao and Xuedong Huang . . . . .	5095
<i>Mixture-of-Domain-Adapters: Decoupling and Injecting Domain Knowledge to Pre-trained Language Models' Memories</i>	Shizhe Diao, Tianyang Xu, Ruijia Xu, Jiawei Wang and Tong Zhang . . . . .	5113
<i>Unsupervised Graph-Text Mutual Conversion with a Unified Pretrained Language Model</i>	Yi Xu, Shuqian Sheng, Jixing Qi, Luoyi Fu, Zhouhan Lin, Xinbing Wang and Chenghu Zhou	5130
<i>Randomized Smoothing with Masked Inference for Adversarially Robust Text Classifications</i>	Han Cheol Moon, Shafiq Joty, Ruochen Zhao, Megh Thakkar and Chi Xu . . . . .	5145

<i>SESCORE2: Learning Text Generation Evaluation via Synthesizing Realistic Mistakes</i>	5166
Wenda Xu, Xian Qian, Mingxuan Wang, Lei Li and William Yang Wang .....	
<i>Tokenization and the Noiseless Channel</i>	
Vilém Zouhar, Clara Meister, Juan Luis Gastaldi, Li Du, Mrinmaya Sachan and Ryan Cotterell	5184
<i>Contextual Distortion Reveals Constituency: Masked Language Models are Implicit Parsers</i>	
Jiaxi Li and Wei Lu .....	5208
<i>MetaAdapt: Domain Adaptive Few-Shot Misinformation Detection via Meta Learning</i>	
Zhenrui Yue, Huimin Zeng, Yang Zhang, Lanyu Shang and Dong Wang .....	5223
<i>Tackling Modality Heterogeneity with Multi-View Calibration Network for Multimodal Sentiment Detection</i>	
yiwei wei, Shaozu Yuan, Ruosong Yang, Lei Shen, zhangmeizhi li, Longbiao Wang and Meng Chen.....	5240
<i>COLA: Contextualized Commonsense Causal Reasoning from the Causal Inference Perspective</i>	
Zhaowei Wang, Quyet V. Do, Hongming Zhang, Jiayao Zhang, Weiqi Wang, Tianqing Fang, Yangqiu Song, Ginny Y. Wong and Simon See .....	5253
<i>MEMEX: Detecting Explanatory Evidence for Memes via Knowledge-Enriched Contextualization</i>	
Shivam Sharma, Ramaneswaran S, Udit Arora, Md. Shad Akhtar and Tanmoy Chakraborty	5272
<i>WikiHowQA: A Comprehensive Benchmark for Multi-Document Non-Factoid Question Answering</i>	
Valeriia Bolotova-Baranova, Vladislav Blinov, Sofya Filippova, Falk Scholer and Mark Sanderson	5291
<i>Making Language Models Better Reasoners with Step-Aware Verifier</i>	
Yifei Li, Zeqi Lin, Shizhuo Zhang, Qiang Fu, Bei Chen, Jian-Guang LOU and Weizhu Chen	5315
<i>Distributed Marker Representation for Ambiguous Discourse Markers and Entangled Relations</i>	
Dongyu Ru, Lin Qiu, Xipeng Qiu, Yue Zhang and Zheng Zhang .....	5334
<i>MISGENDERED: Limits of Large Language Models in Understanding Pronouns</i>	
Tamanna Hossain, Sunipa Dev and Sameer Singh .....	5352
<i>Reasoning with Language Model Prompting: A Survey</i>	
Shuofei Qiao, Yixin Ou, Ningyu Zhang, Xiang Chen, Yunzhi Yao, Shumin Deng, Chuanqi Tan, Fei Huang and Huajun Chen .....	5368
<i>Tackling Ambiguity with Images: Improved Multimodal Machine Translation and Contrastive Evaluation</i>	
Matthieu Futeral, Cordelia Schmid, Ivan Laptev, Benoît Sagot and Rachel Bawden .....	5394
<i>Hybrid Knowledge Transfer for Improved Cross-Lingual Event Detection via Hierarchical Sample Selection</i>	
Luis Fernando Guzman Nateras, Franck Dernoncourt and Thien Huu Nguyen .....	5414
<i>BLEURT Has Universal Translations: An Analysis of Automatic Metrics by Minimum Risk Training</i>	
Yiming Yan, Tao Wang, Chengqi Zhao, Shujian Huang, Jiajun CHEN and Mingxuan Wang	5428
<i>Cross-modal Attention Congruence Regularization for Vision-Language Relation Alignment</i>	
Rohan Pandey, Rulin Shao, Paul Pu Liang, Ruslan Salakhutdinov and Louis-Philippe Morency	5444

<i>Enhancing Personalized Dialogue Generation with Contrastive Latent Variables: Combining Sparse and Dense Persona</i>	
Yihong Tang, Bo Wang, Miao Fang, Dongming Zhao, Kun Huang, Ruifang He and Yuexian Hou	
<b>5456</b>	
<i>Can LMs Learn New Entities from Descriptions? Challenges in Propagating Injected Knowledge</i>	
Yasumasa Onoe, Michael J.Q. Zhang, Shankar Padmanabhan, Greg Durrett and Eunsol Choi	
<b>5469</b>	
<i>Explaining How Transformers Use Context to Build Predictions</i>	
Javier Ferrando, Gerard I. Gállego, Ioannis Tsiamas and Marta R. Costa-jussà	
<b>5486</b>	
<i>DISCO: Distilling Counterfactuals with Large Language Models</i>	
Zeming Chen, Qiyue Gao, Antoine Bosselut, Ashish Sabharwal and Kyle Richardson	
<b>5514</b>	
<i>Non-Sequential Graph Script Induction via Multimedia Grounding</i>	
Yu Zhou, Sha Li, Manling Li, Xudong Lin, Shih-Fu Chang, Mohit Bansal and Heng Ji	
<b>5529</b>	
<i>SCOTT: Self-Consistent Chain-of-Thought Distillation</i>	
Peifeng Wang, Zhengyang Wang, Zheng Li, Yifan Gao, Bing Yin and Xiang Ren	
<b>5546</b>	
<i>Clinical Note Owns its Hierarchy: Multi-Level Hypergraph Neural Networks for Patient-Level Representation Learning</i>	
Nayeon Kim, Yinhua Piao and Sun Kim	
<b>5559</b>	
<i>Incorporating Distributions of Discourse Structure for Long Document Abstractive Summarization</i>	
Dongqi Pu, Yifan Wang and Vera Demberg	
<b>5574</b>	
<i>Evaluating Open-Domain Question Answering in the Era of Large Language Models</i>	
Ehsan Kamalloo, Nouha Dziri, Charles Clarke and Davood Rafiei	
<b>5591</b>	
<i>No clues good clues: out of context Lexical Relation Classification</i>	
Lucia Pitarch, Jordi Bernad, Lacramioara Dranca, Carlos Bobed Lisbona and Jorge Gracia	
<b>5607</b>	
<i>Won't Get Fooled Again: Answering Questions with False Premises</i>	
Shengding Hu, Yifan Luo, Huadong Wang, Xingyi Cheng, Zhiyuan Liu and Maosong Sun	
<b>5626</b>	
<i>What the DAAM: Interpreting Stable Diffusion Using Cross Attention</i>	
Raphael Tang, Linqing Liu, Akshat Pandey, Zhiying Jiang, Gefei Yang, Karun Kumar, Pontus Stenetorp, Jimmy Lin and Ferhan Ture	
<b>5644</b>	
<i>Zero-shot Faithful Factual Error Correction</i>	
Kung-Hsiang Huang, Hou Pong Chan and Heng Ji	
<b>5660</b>	
<i>Open-Domain Hierarchical Event Schema Induction by Incremental Prompting and Verification</i>	
Sha Li, Ruining Zhao, Manling Li, Heng Ji, Chris Callison-Burch and Jiawei Han	
<b>5677</b>	
<i>Zero-shot Approach to Overcome Perturbation Sensitivity of Prompts</i>	
Mohna Chakraborty, Adithya Kulkarni and Qi Li	
<b>5698</b>	
<i>Free Lunch: Robust Cross-Lingual Transfer via Model Checkpoint Averaging</i>	
Fabian David Schmidt, Ivan Vulić and Goran Glavaš	
<b>5712</b>	
<i>Cross-View Language Modeling: Towards Unified Cross-Lingual Cross-Modal Pre-training</i>	
Yan Zeng, Wangchunshu Zhou, Ao Luo, Ziming Cheng and Xinsong Zhang	
<b>5731</b>	
<i>Unsupervised Discontinuous Constituency Parsing with Mildly Context-Sensitive Grammars</i>	
Songlin Yang, Roger Levy and Yoon Kim	
<b>5747</b>	

<i>Simplicity Bias in Transformers and their Ability to Learn Sparse Boolean Functions</i>	5767
Satwik Bhattacharya, Arkil Patel, Varun Kanade and Phil Blunsom .....	
<i>Counterspeeches up my sleeve! Intent Distribution Learning and Persistent Fusion for Intent-Conditioned Counterspeech Generation</i>	5792
Rishabh Gupta, Shaily Desai, Manvi Goel, Anil Bandhakavi, Tanmoy Chakraborty and Md. Shad Akhtar .....	
<i>DITTO: Data-efficient and Fair Targeted Subset Selection for ASR Accent Adaptation</i>	5810
Suraj N Kothawade, Anmol Reddy Mekala, D.Chandra Sekhara SS Hetha Havya, Mayank Kotthiyari, Rishabh K Iyer, Ganesh Ramakrishnan and Preethi Jyothi .....	
<i>Verify-and-Edit: A Knowledge-Enhanced Chain-of-Thought Framework</i>	5823
Ruochen Zhao, Xingxuan Li, Shafiq Joty, Chengwei Qin and Lidong Bing .....	
<i>Bridging the Domain Gaps in Context Representations for k-Nearest Neighbor Neural Machine Translation</i>	5841
Zhiwei Cao, Baosong Yang, Huan Lin, Suhang Wu, Xiangpeng Wei, Dayiheng Liu, Jun Xie, Min Zhang and Jinsong Su .....	
<i>Node Placement in Argument Maps: Modeling Unidirectional Relations in High &amp; Low-Resource Scenarios</i>	5854
Iman Jundi, Neele Falk, Eva Maria Vecchi and Gabriella Lapesa .....	
<i>Towards a Common Understanding of Contributing Factors for Cross-Lingual Transfer in Multilingual Language Models: A Review</i>	5877
Fred Philippy, Siwen Guo and Shohreh Haddadan .....	
<i>Toward Human-Like Evaluation for Natural Language Generation with Error Analysis</i>	5892
Qingyu Lu, Liang Ding, Liping Xie, Kanjian Zhang, Derek F. Wong and Dacheng Tao .....	
<i>Connective Prediction for Implicit Discourse Relation Recognition via Knowledge Distillation</i>	5908
Hongyi Wu, Hao Zhou, Man Lan, Yuanbin Wu and Yadong Zhang .....	
<i>What is the best recipe for character-level encoder-only modelling?</i>	5924
Kris Cao .....	
<i>Unifying Cross-Lingual and Cross-Modal Modeling Towards Weakly Supervised Multilingual Vision-Language Pre-training</i>	5939
Zejun Li, Zhihao Fan, Jingjing Chen, Qi Zhang, Xuanjing Huang and Zhongyu Wei .....	
<i>Learning OHelps for Learning More: Handling the Unlabeled Entity Problem for Class-incremental NER</i>	5959
Ruotian Ma, xuanting chen, zhang lin, Xin Zhou, Junzhe Wang, Tao Gui, Qi Zhang, Xiang Gao and Yun Wen Chen .....	
<i>Scene Graph as Pivoting: Inference-time Image-free Unsupervised Multimodal Machine Translation with Visual Scene Hallucination</i>	5980
Hao Fei, Qian Liu, Meishan Zhang, Min Zhang and Tat-Seng Chua .....	
<i>CoLaDa: A Collaborative Label Denoising Framework for Cross-lingual Named Entity Recognition</i>	5995
Tingting Ma, Qianhui Wu, Huiqiang Jiang, Börje F. Karlsson, Tiejun Zhao and Chin-Yew Lin .....	
<i>Dialect-robust Evaluation of Generated Text</i>	6010
Jiao Sun, Thibault Sellam, Elizabeth Clark, Tu Vu, Timothy Dozat, Dan Garrette, Aditya Siddhant, Jacob Eisenstein and Sebastian Gehrmann .....	

<i>Understanding and Improving the Robustness of Terminology Constraints in Neural Machine Translation</i>	6029
Huaao Zhang, Qiang Wang, Bo - Qin, Zelin Shi, haibo wang and MING CHEN .....	6029
<i>Language model acceptability judgements are not always robust to context</i>	
Koustuv Sinha, Jon Gauthier, Aaron Mueller, Kanishka Misra, Keren Fuentes, Roger Levy and Adina Williams .....	6043
<i>RobuT: A Systematic Study of Table QA Robustness Against Human-Annotated Adversarial Perturbations</i>	
Yilun Zhao, Chen Zhao, Linyong Nan, Zhenting Qi, Wenlin Zhang, Xiangru Tang, Boyu Mi and Dragomir Radev .....	6064
<i>Morphological Inflection: A Reality Check</i>	
Jordan Kodner, Sarah Payne, Salam Khalifa and Zoey Liu.....	6082
<i>TOME: A Two-stage Approach for Model-based Retrieval</i>	
Ruiyang Ren, Wayne Xin Zhao, Jing Liu, Hua Wu, Ji-Rong Wen and Haifeng Wang .....	6102
<i>Using Neural Machine Translation for Generating Diverse Challenging Exercises for Language Learner</i>	
Frank Palma Gomez, Subhadarshi Panda, Michael M Flor and Alla Rozovskaya .....	6115
<i>Similarity-weighted Construction of Contextualized Commonsense Knowledge Graphs for Knowledge-intense Argumentation Tasks</i>	
Moritz Plenz, Juri Opitz, Philipp Heinisch, Philipp Cimiano and Anette Frank .....	6130
<i>miCSE: Mutual Information Contrastive Learning for Low-shot Sentence Embeddings</i>	
Tassilo Klein and Moin Nabi .....	6159
<i>Learning Non-linguistic Skills without Sacrificing Linguistic Proficiency</i>	
Mandar Sharma, Nikhil Muralidhar and Naren Ramakrishnan .....	6178
<i>Forgotten Knowledge: Examining the Citational Amnesia in NLP</i>	
Janvijay Singh, Mukund Rungta, Diyi Yang and Saif M. Mohammad .....	6192
<i>Measuring the Instability of Fine-Tuning</i>	
Yupei Du and Dong Nguyen .....	6209
<i>FairPrism: Evaluating Fairness-Related Harms in Text Generation</i>	
Eve Fleisig, Aubrie N Amstutz, Chad Atalla, Su Lin Blodgett, Hal Daumé III, Alexandra Olteanu, Emily Sheng, Dan Vann and Hanna Wallach .....	6231
<i>Factually Consistent Summarization via Reinforcement Learning with Textual Entailment Feedback</i>	
Paul Roit, Johan Ferret, Lior Shani, Roee Aharoni, Geoffrey Cideron, Robert Dadashi, Matthieu Geist, Sertan Girgin, Leonard Hussenot, Orgad Keller, Nikola Momchev, Sabela Ramos Garea, Piotr Stanczyk, Nino Vieillard, Olivier Bachem, Gal Elidan, Avinatan Hassidim, Olivier Pietquin and Idan Szpektor .....	6252
<i>SIMMC-VR: A Task-oriented Multimodal Dialog Dataset with Situated and Immersive VR Streams</i>	
Te-Lin Wu, Satwik Kottur, Andrea Madotto, Mahmoud Azab, Pedro Rodriguez, Babak Damavandi, Nanyun Peng and Seungwhan Moon .....	6273
<i>Multilingual LLMs are Better Cross-lingual In-context Learners with Alignment</i>	
Eshaan Tanwar, Subhabrata Dutta, Manish Borthakur and Tanmoy Chakraborty .....	6292
<i>APOLLO: A Simple Approach for Adaptive Pretraining of Language Models for Logical Reasoning</i>	
Soumya Sanyal, Yichong Xu, Shuohang Wang, Ziyi Yang, Reid Pryzant, Wenhao Yu, Chenguang Zhu and Xiang Ren .....	6308

<i>MultiTabQA: Generating Tabular Answers for Multi-Table Question Answering</i>	6322
Vaishali Pal, Andrew Yates, Evangelos Kanoulas and Maarten de Rijke .....	
<i>To Copy Rather Than Memorize: A Vertical Learning Paradigm for Knowledge Graph Completion</i>	6335
Rui Li, Xu Chen, Chaozhuo Li, Yanming Shen, Jianan Zhao, Yujing Wang, Weihao Han, Hao Sun, Weiwei Deng, Qi Zhang and Xing Xie .....	
<i>CoAD: Automatic Diagnosis through Symptom and Disease Collaborative Generation</i>	6348
Huimin Wang, Wai Chung Kwan, Kam-Fai Wong and Yefeng Zheng .....	
<i>Long-Tailed Question Answering in an Open World</i>	6362
Yi Dai, Hao Lang, Yinhe Zheng, Fei Huang and Yongbin Li .....	
<i>Parallel Context Windows for Large Language Models</i>	6383
Nir Ratner, Yoav Levine, Yonatan Belinkov, Ori Ram, Inbal Magar, Omri Abend, Ehud Dov Karpas, Amnon Shashua, Kevin Leyton-Brown and Yoav Shoham .....	
<i>Efficient Transformers with Dynamic Token Pooling</i>	6403
Piotr Nawrot, Jan Chorowski, Adrian Lancucki and Edoardo Maria Ponti .....	
<i>Did the Models Understand Documents? Benchmarking Models for Language Understanding in Document-Level Relation Extraction</i>	6418
Haotian Chen, Bingsheng Chen and Xiangdong Zhou .....	
<i>ContraCLM: Contrastive Learning For Causal Language Model</i>	6436
Nihal Jain, Dejiao Zhang, Wasi Uddin Ahmad, Zijian Wang, Feng Nan, Xiaopeng Li, Ming Tan, Ramesh Nallapati, Baishakhi Ray, Parminder Bhatia, Xiaofei Ma and Bing Xiang .....	
<i>Advancing Multi-Criteria Chinese Word Segmentation Through Criterion Classification and Denoising</i>	6460
Tzu Hsuan Chou, Chun-Yi Lin and Hung-Yu Kao .....	
<i>Infusing Hierarchical Guidance into Prompt Tuning: A Parameter-Efficient Framework for Multi-level Implicit Discourse Relation Recognition</i>	6477
Haodong Zhao, Ruifang He, Mengnan Xiao and Jing Xu .....	
<i>Contrastive Learning with Adversarial Examples for Alleviating Pathology of Language Model</i>	6493
Pengwei Zhan, Jing Yang, Xiao Huang, Chunlei Jing, Jingying Li and Liming Wang .....	
<i>Are Fairy Tales Fair? Analyzing Gender Bias in Temporal Narrative Event Chains of Children's Fairy Tales</i>	6509
Paulina Toro Isaza, Guangxuan Xu, Toye Oloko, Yufang Hou, Nanyun Peng and Dakuo Wang .....	
<i>FutureTOD: Teaching Future Knowledge to Pre-trained Language Model for Task-Oriented Dialogue</i>	6532
Weihao Zeng, Keqing He, Yejie Wang, Chen Zeng, Jingang Wang, Yunsen Xian and Weiran Xu .....	
<i>LAMBADA: Backward Chaining for Automated Reasoning in Natural Language</i>	6547
Mehran Kazemi, Najoung Kim, Deepa Bhatia, Xin Xu and Deepak Ramachandran .....	
<i>PeaCoK: Persona Commonsense Knowledge for Consistent and Engaging Narratives</i>	6569
Silin Gao, Beatriz Borges, Soyoung Oh, Deniz Bayazit, Saya Kanno, Hiromi Wakaki, Yuki Mitsuji and Antoine Bosselut .....	
<i>OpenSR: Open-Modality Speech Recognition via Maintaining Multi-Modality Alignment</i>	6592
Xize Cheng, Tao Jin, Linjun Li, Wang Lin, Xinyu Duan and Zhou Zhao .....	

<i>Retrieval-free Knowledge Injection through Multi-Document Traversal for Dialogue Models</i>	
Rui Wang, Jianzhu Bao, Fei Mi, Yi Chen, Hongru Wang, Yasheng Wang, Yitong Li, Lifeng Shang, Kam-Fai Wong and Ruifang Xu .....	6608
<i>BERM: Training the Balanced and Extractable Representation for Matching to Improve Generalization Ability of Dense Retrieval</i>	
Shicheng Xu, Liang Pang, Huawei Shen and Xueqi Cheng .....	6620
<i>Multiview Identifiers Enhanced Generative Retrieval</i>	
Yongqi Li, Nan Yang, Liang Wang, Furu Wei and Wenjie Li.....	6636
<i>Prompting Language Models for Linguistic Structure</i>	
Terra Blevins, Hila Gonen and Luke Zettlemoyer .....	6649
<i>Trillion Dollar Words: A New Financial Dataset, Task &amp; Market Analysis</i>	
Agam Shah, Suvan Satya Paturi and Sudheer Chava .....	6664
<i>RE-Matching: A Fine-Grained Semantic Matching Method for Zero-Shot Relation Extraction</i>	
Jun Zhao, WenYu Zhan, Xin Zhao, Qi Zhang, Tao Gui, Zhongyu Wei, Junzhe Wang, Minlong Peng and Mingming Sun.....	6680
<i>SQuARe: A Large-Scale Dataset of Sensitive Questions and Acceptable Responses Created through Human-Machine Collaboration</i>	
Hwaran Lee, Seokhee Hong, Joonsuk Park, Takyung Kim, Meeyoung Cha, Yejin Choi, BYOUN-GPIL KIM, Gunhee Kim, Eun-Ju Lee, Yong Lim, Alice Oh, Sangchul Park and Jung-Woo Ha ...	6692
<i>Towards standardizing Korean Grammatical Error Correction: Datasets and Annotation</i>	
Soyoung Yoon, Sungjoon Park, Gyuwan Kim, Junhee Cho, Kihyo Park, Gyu Tae Kim, Minjoon Seo and Alice Oh .....	6713
<i>FLaME: Few-shot Learning from Natural Language Explanations</i>	
Yangqiaoyu Zhou, Yiming Zhang and Chenhao Tan .....	6743
<i>Learning Symbolic Rules over Abstract Meaning Representations for Textual Reinforcement Learning</i>	
Subhajit Chaudhury, Sarathkrishna Swaminathan, Daiki Kimura, Prithviraj Sen, Keerthiram Murgesan, Rosario Uceda-Sosa, Michiaki Tatsubori, Achille Fokoue, Pavan Kapanipathi, Asim Munawar and Alexander Gray .....	6764
<i>Counterfactual Debiasing for Fact Verification</i>	
Weizhi Xu, Qiang Liu, Shu Wu and Liang Wang .....	6777
<i>What social attitudes about gender does BERT encode? Leveraging insights from psycholinguistics</i>	
Julia Watson, Barend Beekhuizen and Suzanne Stevenson .....	6790
<i>Rethinking Multimodal Entity and Relation Extraction from a Translation Point of View</i>	
Changmeng Zheng, Junhao Feng, Yi Cai, Xiaoyong Wei and Qing Li .....	6810
<i>Annotating and Detecting Fine-grained Factual Errors for Dialogue Summarization</i>	
Rongxin Zhu, Jianzhong Qi and Jey Han Lau .....	6825
<i>Improving the Robustness of Summarization Systems with Dual Augmentation</i>	
Xiuying Chen, Guodong Long, Chongyang Tao, Mingzhe Li, Xin Gao, Chengqi Zhang and Xian-liang Zhang .....	6846
<i>Interpretable Math Word Problem Solution Generation via Step-by-step Planning</i>	
mengxue zhang, Zichao Wang, Zhichao Yang, weiqi feng and Andrew Lan .....	6858

<i>TemplateGEC: Improving Grammatical Error Correction with Detection Template</i>	
Yinghao Li, Xuebo Liu, Shuo Wang, Peiyuan Gong, Derek F. Wong, Yang Gao, Heyan Huang and Min Zhang .....	6878
<i>Deep Model Compression Also Helps Models Capture Ambiguity</i>	
Hancheol Park and Jong Park .....	6893
<i>Are Experts Needed? On Human Evaluation of Counselling Reflection Generation</i>	
Zixiu Wu, Simone Balloccu, Ehud Reiter, Rim Helaoui, Diego Reforgiato Recupero and Daniele Riboni .....	6906
<i>PairSpanBERT: An Enhanced Language Model for Bridging Resolution</i>	
Hideo Kobayashi, Yufang Hou and Vincent Ng .....	6931
<i>Compounding Geometric Operations for Knowledge Graph Completion</i>	
Xiou Ge, Yun Cheng Wang, Bin Wang and C.-C. Jay Kuo .....	6947
<i>Few-shot In-context Learning on Knowledge Base Question Answering</i>	
Tianle Li, Xueguang Ma, Alex Zhuang, Yu Gu, Yu Su and Wenhui Chen .....	6966
<i>Fact-Checking Complex Claims with Program-Guided Reasoning</i>	
Liangming Pan, Xiaobao Wu, Xinyuan Lu, Anh Tuan Luu, William Yang Wang, Min-Yen Kan and Preslav Nakov .....	6981
<i>Patton: Language Model Pretraining on Text-Rich Networks</i>	
Bowen Jin, Wentao Zhang, Yu Zhang, Yu Meng, Xinyang Zhang, Qi Zhu and Jiawei Han ..	7005
<i>Soft Language Clustering for Multilingual Model Pre-training</i>	
Jiali Zeng, Yufan Jiang, Yongjing Yin, Yi Jing, Fandong Meng, Binghuai Lin, Yunbo Cao and Jie Zhou .....	7021
<i>Curriculum Learning for Graph Neural Networks: A Multiview Competence-based Approach</i>	
Nidhi Vakil and Hadi Amiri .....	7036
<i>When and how to paraphrase for named entity recognition?</i>	
Saket Sharma, Aviral Joshi, Yiyun Zhao, Namrata Mukhija, Hanoz Bhathena, Prateek Singh and Sashank Santhanam .....	7052
<i>UniEvent: Unified Generative Model with Multi-Dimensional Prefix for Zero-Shot Event-Relational Reasoning</i>	
Zhengwei Tao, Zhi Jin, Haiyan Zhao, Chengfeng Dou, yongqiang zhao, Tao Shen and Chongyang Tao .....	7088
<i>Are Machine Rationales (Not) Useful to Humans? Measuring and Improving Human Utility of Free-text Rationales</i>	
Brihi Joshi, Ziyi Liu, Sahana Ramnath, Aaron Chan, Zhewei Tong, Shaoliang Nie, Qifan Wang, Yejin Choi and Xiang Ren .....	7103
<i>Automatic Annotation of Direct Speech in Written French Narratives</i>	
Noé Durandard, Viet Anh TRAN, Gaspard Michel and Elena V. Epure .....	7129
<i>Automatic Creation of Named Entity Recognition Datasets by Querying Phrase Representations</i>	
Hyunjae Kim, jaehyo yoo, Seunghyun Yoon and Jaewoo Kang .....	7148
<i>Dynamic Transformers Provide a False Sense of Efficiency</i>	
Yiming Chen, Simin Chen, Zexin Li, Wei Yang, Cong Liu, Robby Tan and Haizhou Li .....	7164

<i>Empowering Cross-lingual Behavioral Testing of NLP Models with Typological Features</i>	7181
Ester Hlavnova and Sebastian Ruder .....	
<i>Local Byte Fusion for Neural Machine Translation</i>	7199
Makesh Narsimhan Sreedhar, Xiangpeng Wan, Yu Cheng and Junjie Hu .....	
<i>Where's the Point? Self-Supervised Multilingual Punctuation-Agnostic Sentence Segmentation</i>	7215
Benjamin Minixhofer, Jonas Pfeiffer and Ivan Vulić .....	
<i>Multi-target Backdoor Attacks for Code Pre-trained Models</i>	7236
Yanzhou Li, Shangqing Liu, Kangjie Chen, Xiaofei Xie, Tianwei Zhang and Yang Liu .....	
<i>Learning Better Masking for Better Language Model Pre-training</i>	7255
Dongjie Yang, Zhuosheng Zhang and Hai Zhao .....	
<i>VisText: A Benchmark for Semantically Rich Chart Captioning</i>	7268
Benny J. Tang, Angie Boggust and Arvind Satyanarayanan .....	
<i>Byte-Level Grammatical Error Correction Using Synthetic and Curated Corpora</i>	7299
Svanhvít Lilja Ingólfssdóttir, Petur Orri Ragnarsson, Haukur Páll Jónsson, Haukur Barri Simonarson, Vilhjalmur Thorsteinsson and Vésteinn Snæbjarnarson .....	
<i>Multi-Level Knowledge Distillation for Out-of-Distribution Detection in Text</i>	7317
Qianhui Wu, Huiqiang Jiang, Haonan Yin, Börje F. Karlsson and Chin-Yew Lin .....	
<i>Peeking inside the black box: A Commonsense-aware Generative Framework for Explainable Complaint Detection</i>	7333
Apoorva Singh, Raghav Jain, Prince Jha and Sriparna Saha .....	
<i>MMDialog: A Large-scale Multi-turn Dialogue Dataset Towards Multi-modal Open-domain Conversation</i>	7348
Jiazhan Feng, Qingfeng Sun, Can Xu, Pu Zhao, Yaming Yang, Chongyang Tao, Dongyan Zhao and Qingwei Lin .....	
<i>ByGPT5: End-to-End Style-conditioned Poetry Generation with Token-free Language Models</i>	7364
Jonas Belouadi and Steffen Eger .....	
<i>Envisioning Future from the Past: Hierarchical Duality Learning for Multi-Turn Dialogue Generation</i>	7382
Ang Lv, Jinpeng Li, Shufang Xie and Rui Yan .....	
<i>DualGATs: Dual Graph Attention Networks for Emotion Recognition in Conversations</i>	7395
Duzhen Zhang, Feilong Chen and Xiuyi Chen .....	
<i>Consistent Prototype Learning for Few-Shot Continual Relation Extraction</i>	7409
Xiudi Chen, Hui Wu and xiaodong shi .....	
<i>Matching Pairs: Attributing Fine-Tuned Models to their Pre-Trained Large Language Models</i>	7423
Myles Foley, Ambrish Rawat, Taesung Lee, Yufang Hou, Gabriele Picco and Giulio Zizzo .	
<i>Large Language Models Meet NL2Code: A Survey</i>	7443
Daoguang Zan, Bei Chen, Fengji Zhang, Dianjie Lu, Bingchao Wu, Bei Guan, Wang Yongji and Jian-Guang LOU .....	
<i>When Does Aggregating Multiple Skills with Multi-Task Learning Work? A Case Study in Financial NLP</i>	7465
Jingwei Ni, Zhijing Jin, QIAN WANG, Mrinmaya Sachan and Markus Leippold .....	

<i>Enhancing Grammatical Error Correction Systems with Explanations</i>	7489
Yuejiao Fei, Leyang Cui, Sen Yang, Wai Lam, Zhenzhong Lan and Shuming Shi .....	7489
<i>Linguistic representations for few-shot relation extraction across domains</i>	7502
Sireesh Gururaja, Ritam Dutt, Tinglong Liao and Carolyn Rosé.....	7502
<i>DarkBERT: A Language Model for the Dark Side of the Internet</i>	7515
Youngjin Jin, Eugene Jang, Jian Cui, Jin-Woo Chung, Yongjae Lee and Seungwon Shin .....	7515
<i>MDACE: MIMIC Documents Annotated with Code Evidence</i>	7534
Hua Cheng, Rana Jafari, April D Russell, Russell Klopfer, Edmond Lu, Benjamin R Striner and Matthew R. Gormley .....	7534
<i>Towards Zero-Shot Multilingual Transfer for Code-Switched Responses</i>	7551
Ting-Wei Wu, Changsheng Zhao, Ernie Chang, Yangyang Shi, Pierce I-Jen Chuang, Vikas Chandra and Biing Juang .....	7551
<i>One Network, Many Masks: Towards More Parameter-Efficient Transfer Learning</i>	7564
Guangtao Zeng, Peiyuan Zhang and Wei Lu .....	7564
<i>Can Language Models Make Fun? A Case Study in Chinese Comical Crosstalk</i>	7581
jianquan li, XiangBo Wu, Xiaokang Liu, Qianqian Xie, Prayag Tiwari and Benyou Wang ..	7581
<i>Convergence and Diversity in the Control Hierarchy</i>	7597
Alexandra Cristina Butoi, Ryan Cotterell and David Chiang .....	7597
<i>ConFEDE: Contrastive Feature Decomposition for Multimodal Sentiment Analysis</i>	7617
Jiuding Yang, Yakun Yu, Di Niu, Weidong Guo and Yu Xu.....	7617
<i>Using Domain Knowledge to Guide Dialog Structure Induction via Neural Probabilistic Soft Logic</i>	7631
Connor F Pryor, Quan Yuan, Jeremiah Liu, Mehran Kazemi, Deepak Ramachandran, Tania Bedrax-Weiss and Lise Getoor .....	7631
<i>Are You Copying My Model? Protecting the Copyright of Large Language Models for EaaS via Backdoor Watermark</i>	7653
Wenjun Peng, Jingwei Yi, Fangzhao Wu, Shangxi Wu, Bin Benjamin Bin Zhu, Lingjuan Lyu, Binxing Jiao, Tong Xu, Guangzhong Sun and Xing Xie .....	7653
<i>Answering Ambiguous Questions via Iterative Prompting</i>	7669
Weiwei Sun, Hengyi Cai, Hongshen Chen, Pengjie Ren, Zhumin CHEN, Maarten de Rijke and Zhaochun Ren .....	7669
<i>A Dataset of Argumentative Dialogues on Scientific Papers</i>	7684
Federico Ruggeri, Mohsen Mesgar and Iryna Gurevych .....	7684
<i>Massively Multilingual Lexical Specialization of Multilingual Transformers</i>	7700
Tommaso Green, Simone Paolo Ponzetto and Goran Glavaš .....	7700
<i>RL4F: Generating Natural Language Feedback with Reinforcement Learning for Repairing Model Outputs</i>	7716
Afra Feyza Akyurek, Ekin Akyurek, Ashwin Kalyan, Peter Clark, Derry Tanti Wijaya and Niket Tandon.....	7716
<i>WebIE: Faithful and Robust Information Extraction on the Web</i>	7734
Chenxi Whitehouse, Clara Vania, Alham Fikri Aji, Christos Christodoulopoulos and Andrea Pierleoni .....	7734

<i>NormBank: A Knowledge Bank of Situational Social Norms</i>	7756
Caleb Ziems, Jane Dwivedi-Yu, Yi-Chia Wang, Alon Halevy and Difyi Yang .....	7756
<i>DIP: Dead code Insertion based Black-box Attack for Programming Language Model</i>	7777
CheolWon Na, YunSeok Choi and Jee-Hyong Lee .....	7777
<i>Modeling Structural Similarities between Documents for Coherence Assessment with Graph Convolutional Networks</i>	7792
Wei Liu, Xiyang Fu and Michael Strube .....	7792
<i>HiTIN: Hierarchy-aware Tree Isomorphism Network for Hierarchical Text Classification</i>	7809
He Zhu, Chong Zhang, Junjie Huang, Junran Wu and Ke Xu .....	7809
<i>Contextual Knowledge Learning for Dialogue Generation</i>	7822
Wen Zheng, Natasa Milic-Frayling and Ke Zhou .....	7822
<i>Easy Guided Decoding in Providing Suggestions for Interactive Machine Translation</i>	7840
Ke Wang, Xin Ge, Jiayi Wang, Yuqi Zhang and Yu Zhao .....	7840
<i>Discourse-Centric Evaluation of Document-level Machine Translation with a New Densely Annotated Parallel Corpus of Novels</i>	7853
Yuchen Eleanor Jiang, Tianyu Liu, Shuming Ma, Dongdong Zhang, Mrinmaya Sachan and Ryan Cotterell .....	7853
<i>CMOT: Cross-modal Mixup via Optimal Transport for Speech Translation</i>	7873
Yan Zhou, Qingkai Fang and Yang Feng.....	7873
<i>On the Evaluation of Neural Selective Prediction Methods for Natural Language Processing</i>	7888
Zhengyao Gu and Mark Hopkins .....	7888
<i>Speech-Text Pre-training for Spoken Dialog Understanding with Explicit Cross-Modal Alignment</i>	7900
Tianshu Yu, haoyu gao, Ting-En Lin, Min Yang, Yuchuan Wu, Wentao Ma, chao wang, Fei Huang and Yongbin Li .....	7900
<i>Text Style Transfer with Contrastive Transfer Pattern Mining</i>	7914
Jingxuan Han, Quan Wang, Licheng Zhang, Weidong Chen, Yan Song and Zhendong Mao .	7914
<i>Zero- and Few-Shot Event Detection via Prompt-Based Meta Learning</i>	7928
Zhenrui Yue, Huimin Zeng, Mengfei Lan, Heng Ji and Dong Wang .....	7928
<i>Text Style Transfer Back-Translation</i>	7944
Daimeng Wei, Zhanglin Wu, Hengchao Shang, Zongyao Li, Minghan Wang, Jiaxin GUO, Xiaoyu Chen, Zhengzhe YU and Hao Yang .....	7944
<i>Generating Visual Spatial Description via Holistic 3D Scene Understanding</i>	7960
Yu Zhao, Hao Fei, Wei Ji, Jianguo Wei, Meishan Zhang, Min Zhang and Tat-Seng Chua ...	7960
<i>Continual Knowledge Distillation for Neural Machine Translation</i>	7978
Yuanchi Zhang, Peng Li, Maosong Sun and Yang Liu.....	7978
<i>Query Refinement Prompts for Closed-Book Long-Form QA</i>	7997
Reinald Kim Amplayo, Kellie Webster, Michael Collins, Dipanjan Das and Shashi Narayan	7997
<i>CONE: An Efficient COarse-to-fine Alignment Framework for Long Video Temporal Grounding</i>	8013
Zhijian Hou, Wanjun Zhong, Lei Ji, DIFEI GAO, Kun Yan, W.K. Chan, Chong-Wah Ngo, Mike Zheng Shou and Nan Duan.....	8013

<i>Few-Shot Document-Level Event Argument Extraction</i>	8029
Xianjun Yang, Yujie Lu and Linda R Petzold .....	
<i>ParaAMR: A Large-Scale Syntactically Diverse Paraphrase Dataset by AMR Back-Translation</i>	8047
Kuan-Hao Huang, Varun Iyer, I-Hung Hsu, Anoop Kumar, Kai-Wei Chang and Aram Galstyan .....	
<i>Towards Understanding and Improving Knowledge Distillation for Neural Machine Translation</i>	8062
Songming Zhang, Yunlong Liang, Shuaibo Wang, Yufeng Chen, Wenjuan Han, Jian Liu and Jinan Xu .....	
<i>Multi-Row, Multi-Span Distant Supervision For Table+Text Question Answering</i>	8080
Vishwajeet Kumar, Yash Gupta, Saneem Ahmed Chemmengath, Jaydeep Sen, Soumen Chakrabarti, Samarth Bharadwaj and Feifei Pan .....	
<i>HAHE: Hierarchical Attention for Hyper-Relational Knowledge Graphs in Global and Local Level</i>	8095
Haoran Luo, Haihong E, Yuhao Yang, Yikai Guo, Mingzhi Sun, Tianyu Yao, Zichen Tang, Kaiyang Wan, Meina Song and Wei Lin .....	
<i>ORGAN: Observation-Guided Radiology Report Generation via Tree Reasoning</i>	8108
Wenjun Hou, Kaishuai Xu, Yi Cheng, Wenjie Li and Jiang Liu .....	
<i>Data Curation Alone Can Stabilize In-context Learning</i>	8123
Ting-Yun Chang and Robin Jia .....	
<i>MidMed: Towards Mixed-Type Dialogues for Medical Consultation</i>	8145
Xiaoming Shi, Zeming Liu, Chuan Wang, Haitao Leng, Kui Xue, Xiaofan Zhang and Shaoting Zhang .....	
<i>FiD-ICL: A Fusion-in-Decoder Approach for Efficient In-Context Learning</i>	8158
Qinyuan Ye, Iz Beltagy, Matthew Peters, Xiang Ren and Hannaneh Hajishirzi .....	
<i>S2ynRE: Two-stage Self-training with Synthetic data for Low-resource Relation Extraction</i>	8186
Benfeng Xu, Quan Wang, Yajuan Lyu, Dai Dai, Yongdong Zhang and Zhendong Mao .....	
<i>DSEE: Dually Sparsity-embedded Efficient Tuning of Pre-trained Language Models</i>	8208
Xuxi Chen, Tianlong Chen, Weizhu Chen, Ahmed Hassan Awadallah, Zhangyang Wang and Yu Cheng .....	
<i>CASE: Aligning Coarse-to-Fine Cognition and Affection for Empathetic Response Generation</i>	8223
Jinfeng Zhou, Chujie Zheng, Bo Wang, Zheng Zhang and Minlie Huang .....	
<i>Comparative evaluation of boundary-relaxed annotation for Entity Linking performance</i>	8238
Gabriel Herman Bernardim Andrade, Shuntaro Yada and Eiji ARAMAKI .....	
<i>Do CoNLL-2003 Named Entity Taggers Still Work Well in 2023?</i>	8254
Shuheng Liu and Alan Ritter .....	
<i>READIN: A Chinese Multi-Task Benchmark with Realistic and Diverse Input Noises</i>	8272
Chenglei Si, Zhengyan Zhang, Yingfa Chen, Xiaozhi Wang, Zhiyuan Liu and Maosong Sun .....	
<i>MAD-TSC: A Multilingual Aligned News Dataset for Target-dependent Sentiment Classification</i>	8286
Evan Dufraisse, Adrian Popescu, Julien Tourille, Armelle Brun and Jerome Deshayes .....	
<i>A New Dataset and Empirical Study for Sentence Simplification in Chinese</i>	8306
Shiping Yang, Renliang Sun and Xiaojun Wan .....	

<i>Factual or Contextual? Disentangling Error Types in Entity Description Generation</i>	8322
Navita Goyal, Ani Nenkova and Hal Daumé III.....	
<i>Weakly Supervised Vision-and-Language Pre-training with Relative Representations</i>	8341
Chi Chen, Peng Li, Maosong Sun and Yang Liu.....	
<i>HermEs: Interactive Spreadsheet Formula Prediction via Hierarchical Formulet Expansion</i>	8356
Wanrong He, Haoyu Dong, Yihuai Gao, zhichao fan, Xingzhuo Guo, Zhitao Hou, Xiao Lv, Ran Jia, Shi Han and Dongmei Zhang .....	
<i>ArgU: A Controllable Factual Argument Generator</i>	8373
Sougata Saha and Rohini K Srihari .....	
<i>Learning Answer Generation using Supervision from Automatic Question Answering Evaluators</i>	8389
Matteo Gabburro, Siddhant Garg, Rik Koncel-Kedziorski and Alessandro Moschitti .....	
<i>RECAP: Retrieval-Enhanced Context-Aware Prefix Encoder for Personalized Dialogue Response Generation</i>	8404
Shuai Liu, Hyundong J Cho, Marjorie Freedman, Xuezhe Ma and Jonathan May .....	
<i>Don't Parse, Choose Spans! Continuous and Discontinuous Constituency Parsing via Autoregressive Span Selection</i>	8420
Songlin Yang and Kewei Tu .....	
<i>Laziness Is a Virtue When It Comes to Compositionality in Neural Semantic Parsing</i>	8434
Maxwell Crouse, Pavan Kapanipathi, Subhajit Chaudhury, Tahira Naseem, Ramon Fernandez Astudillo, Achille Fokoue and Tim Klinger .....	
<i>AD-KD: Attribution-Driven Knowledge Distillation for Language Model Compression</i>	8449
Siyue Wu, Hongzhan Chen, Xiaojun Quan, Qifan Wang and Rui Wang .....	
<i>(QA)<sup>2</sup>: Question Answering with Questionable Assumptions</i>	8466
Najoung Kim, Phu Mon Htut, Samuel R. Bowman and Jackson Petty .....	
<i>Attributable and Scalable Opinion Summarization</i>	8488
Tom Hosking, Hao Tang and Mirella Lapata .....	
<i>Targeted Data Generation: Finding and Fixing Model Weaknesses</i>	8506
Zexue He, Marco Tulio Ribeiro and Fereshte Khani .....	
<i>HiFi: High-Information Attention Heads Hold for Parameter-Efficient Model Adaptation</i>	8521
Anchun Gui and Han Xiao .....	
<i>CFSum Coarse-to-Fine Contribution Network for Multimodal Summarization</i>	8538
Min Xiao, Junnan Zhu, Haitao Lin, Yu Zhou and Chengqing Zong .....	
<i>On Scientific Debitin NLP: A Case for More Rigour in Language Model Pre-Training Research</i>	8554
Made Nindyatama Nityasya, Haryo Akbarianto Wibowo, Alham Fikri Aji, Genta Indra Winata, Radityo Eko Prasojo, Phil Blunsom and Adhiguna Kuncoro .....	
<i>End-to-end Knowledge Retrieval with Multi-modal Queries</i>	8573
Man Luo, Zhiyuan Fang, Tejas Gokhale, Yezhou Yang and Chitta Baral .....	
<i>AV-TranSpeech: Audio-Visual Robust Speech-to-Speech Translation</i>	8590
Rongjie Huang, Huadai Liu, Xize Cheng, Yi Ren, Linjun Li, Zhenhui Ye, Jinzheng He, Lichao Zhang, Jinglin Liu, Xiang Yin and Zhou Zhao .....	

<i>Dual Class Knowledge Propagation Network for Multi-label Few-shot Intent Detection</i>	8605
Feng Zhang, Wei Chen, Fei Ding and Tengjiao Wang .....	
<i>VendorLink: An NLP approach for Identifying &amp; Linking Vendor Migrants &amp; Potential Aliases on Darknet Markets</i>	8619
Vageesh Kumar Saxena, Nils Rethmeier, Gijs van Dijck and Gerasimos Spanakis .....	
<i>Element-aware Summarization with Large Language Models: Expert-aligned Evaluation and Chain-of-Thought Method</i>	8640
Yiming Wang, Zhuosheng Zhang and Rui Wang .....	
<i>Efficient Shapley Values Estimation by Amortization for Text Classification</i>	8666
Chenghao Yang, Fan Yin, He He, Kai-Wei Chang, Xiaofei Ma and Bing Xiang .....	
<i>PeerDA: Data Augmentation via Modeling Peer Relation for Span Identification Tasks</i>	8681
Weiwen Xu, Xin Li, Yang Deng, Wai Lam and Lidong Bing .....	
<i>Dynamic Regularization in UDA for Transformers in Multimodal Classification</i>	8700
Ivonne Monter-Aldana, Adrian Pastor Lopez Monroy and Fernando Sanchez-Vega .....	
<i>Conflicts, Villains, Resolutions: Towards models of Narrative Media Framing</i>	8712
Lea Frermann, Jiatong Li, Shima Khanehzar and Gosia Mikolajczak .....	
<i>bgGLUE: A Bulgarian General Language Understanding Evaluation Benchmark</i>	8733
Momchil Hardalov, Pepa Atanasova, Todor Mihaylov, Galia Angelova, Kiril Simov, Petya Osenova, Veselin Stoyanov, Ivan K. Koychev, Preslav Nakov and Dragomir Radev .....	
<i>DuNST: Dual Noisy Self Training for Semi-Supervised Controllable Text Generation</i>	8760
Yuxi Feng, Xiaoyuan Yi, Xiting Wang, Laks Lakshmanan, V.S. and Xing Xie .....	
<i>What does the Failure to Reason with Respectively” in Zero/Few-Shot Settings Tell Us about Language Models?</i>	8786
Ruixiang Cui, Seolhwa Lee, Daniel Hershcovich and Anders Søgaard .....	
<i>BLIND: Bias Removal With No Demographics</i>	8801
Hadas Orgad and Yonatan Belinkov .....	
<i>How do humans perceive adversarial text? A reality check on the validity and naturalness of word-based adversarial attacks</i>	8822
Salijona Dyrnishi, Salah GHAMIZI and Maxime Cordy .....	
<i>Soft Alignment Objectives for Robust Adaptation of Language Generation</i>	8837
Michal Štefánik, Marek Kadlcík and Petr Sojka .....	
<i>The CRINGE Loss: Learning what language not to model</i>	8854
Leonard Adolphs, Tianyu Gao, Jing Xu, Kurt Shuster, Sainbayar Sukhbaatar and Jason Weston .....	
<i>Modeling User Satisfaction Dynamics in Dialogue via Hawkes Process</i>	8875
Fanghua Ye, zhiyuan hu and Emine Yilmaz .....	
<i>Towards Identifying Fine-Grained Depression Symptoms from Memes</i>	8890
Shweta Yadav, Cornelia Caragea, Chenye Zhao, Naincy Kumari, Marvin A Solberg and Tanmay Sharma .....	
<i>SLUE Phase-2: A Benchmark Suite of Diverse Spoken Language Understanding Tasks</i>	8906
Suwon Shon, Siddhant Arora, Chyi-Jiunn Lin, Ankita Pasad, Felix Wu, Roshan S Sharma, Wei-Lun Wu, Hung-yi Lee, Karen Livescu and Shinji Watanabe .....	

<i>My side, your side and the evidence: Discovering aligned actor groups and the narratives they weave</i>	8938
Pavan Holar, David Chong, Timothy R Tangherlini and Vwani Roychowdhury .....	
<i>Characterizing and Measuring Linguistic Dataset Drift</i>	8953
Tyler A Chang, Kishaloy Halder, Neha Anna John, Yogarshi Vyas, Yassine Benajiba, Miguel Ballesteros and Dan Roth .....	
<i>WebCPM: Interactive Web Search for Chinese Long-form Question Answering</i>	8968
Yujia Qin, Zihan Cai, Dian Jin, Lan Yan, Shihao Liang, Kunlun Zhu, Yankai Lin, Xu Han, Ning Ding, Huadong Wang, Ruobing Xie, Fanchao Qi, Zhiyuan Liu, Maosong Sun and Jie Zhou .....	
<i>Synthesize, Prompt and Transfer: Zero-shot Conversational Question Generation with Pre-trained Language Model</i>	8989
Hongwei Zeng, Bifan Wei, Jun Liu and Weiping Fu .....	
<i>FormNetV2: Multimodal Graph Contrastive Learning for Form Document Information Extraction</i>	9011
Chen-Yu Lee, Chun-Liang Li, Hao Zhang, Timothy Dozat, Vincent Perot, Guolong Su, Xiang Zhang, Kihyuk Sohn, NIKOLAY GLUSHNEV, Renshen Wang, Joshua Ainslie, Shangbang Long, Siyang Qin, Yasuhisa Fujii, Nan Hua and Tomas Pfister .....	
<i>MixCE: Training Autoregressive Language Models by Mixing Forward and Reverse Cross-Entropies</i>	9027
Shiyue Zhang, Shijie Wu, Ozan Irsoy, Steven Lu, Mohit Bansal, Mark Dredze and David Rosenberg .....	
<i>Knowledgeable Parameter Efficient Tuning Network for Commonsense Question Answering</i>	9051
Ziwang Zhao, Linmei Hu, Hanyu Zhao, Yingxia Shao and Yequan Wang .....	
<i>BLASER: A Text-Free Speech-to-Speech Translation Evaluation Metric</i>	9064
Mingda Chen, Paul-Ambroise Augustin Duquenne, Pierre Y Andrews, Justine T Kao, Alexandre Mourachko, Holger Schwenk and Marta R. Costa-jussà .....	
<i>NLPositionality: Characterizing Design Biases of Datasets and Models</i>	9080
Sebastin Santy, Jenny T Liang, Ronan Le Bras, Katharina Reinecke and Maarten Sap .....	
<i>Backpack Language Models</i>	9103
John Hewitt, John Thickstun, Christopher D. Manning and Percy Liang .....	
<i>WinoQueer: A Community-in-the-Loop Benchmark for Anti-LGBTQ+ Bias in Large Language Models</i>	9126
Virginia K. Felkner, Ho-Chun Herbert Chang, Eugene Jang and Jonathan May .....	
<i>Grounded Multimodal Named Entity Recognition on Social Media</i>	9141
Jianfei Yu, Ziyan Li, Jieming Wang and Rui Xia .....	
<i>Preserving Commonsense Knowledge from Pre-trained Language Models via Causal Inference</i>	9155
Junhao Zheng, Qianli Ma, Shengjie Qiu, Yue Wu, Peitian Ma, Junlong Liu, Huawei Feng, Xichen Shang and Haibin Chen .....	
<i>Translation-Enhanced Multilingual Text-to-Image Generation</i>	9174
Yaoyiran Li, Ching-Yun Chang, Stephen Rawls, Ivan Vulić and Anna Korhonen .....	
<i>Benchmarking Large Language Model Capabilities for Conditional Generation</i>	9194
Joshua Maynez, Priyanka Agrawal and Sebastian Gehrmann .....	
<i>lilGym: Natural Language Visual Reasoning with Reinforcement Learning</i>	9214
Anne Wu, Kiante Brantley, Noriyuki Kojima and Yoav Artzi .....	

<i>Unsupervised Melody-to-Lyrics Generation</i>	
Yufei Tian, Anjali Narayan-Chen, Shereen Oraby, Alessandra Cervone, Gunnar A Sigurdsson, Chenyang Tao, Wenbo Zhao, Tagyoung Chung, Jing Huang and Nanyun Peng .....	9235
<i>Causality-aware Concept Extraction based on Knowledge-guided Prompting</i>	
Siyu Yuan, Deqing Yang, Jinxi Liu, Shuyu Tian, Jiaqing Liang, Yanghua Xiao and Rui Xie .	9255
<i>Span-level Aspect-based Sentiment Analysis via Table Filling</i>	
Mao Zhang, Yongxin Zhu, Zhen Liu, Zhimin Bao, Yunfei Wu, Xing Sun and Linli Xu .....	9273
<i>Limitations of Language Models in Arithmetic and Symbolic Induction</i>	
Jing Qian, Hong Wang, Zekun Li, Shiyang Li and Xifeng Yan .....	9285
<i>EEL: Efficiently Encoding Lattices for Reranking</i>	
Prasann Singhal, Jiacheng Xu, Xi Ye and Greg Durrett.....	9299
<i>CLAPSpeech: Learning Prosody from Text Context with Contrastive Language-Audio Pre-Training</i>	
Zhenhui Ye, Rongjie Huang, Yi Ren, Ziyue Jiang, Jinglin Liu, Jinzheng He, Xiang Yin and Zhou Zhao.....	9317
<i>Revisiting Cross-Lingual Summarization: A Corpus-based Study and A New Benchmark with Improved Annotation</i>	
Yulong Chen, Huajian Zhang, Yijie Zhou, Xuefeng Bai, Yueguan Wang, Ming Zhong, Jianhao Yan, Yafu Li, Judy Li, Xianchao Zhu and Yue Zhang .....	9332
<i>Learning Dynamic Contextualised Word Embeddings via Template-based Temporal Adaptation</i>	
Xiaohang Tang, Yi Zhou and Danushka Bollegala .....	9352
<i>How poor is the stimulus? Evaluating hierarchical generalization in neural networks trained on child-directed speech</i>	
Aditya Yedetore, Tal Linzen, Robert Frank and R. Thomas McCoy .....	9370
<i>GanLM: Encoder-Decoder Pre-training with an Auxiliary Discriminator</i>	
Jian Yang, Shuming Ma, Li Dong, Shaohan Huang, Haoyang Huang, Yuwei Yin, Dongdong Zhang, Liqun Yang, Furu Wei and Zhoujun Li .....	9394
<i>Linear Guardedness and its Implications</i>	
Shauli Ravfogel, Yoav Goldberg and Ryan Cotterell .....	9413
<i>Searching for Needles in a Haystack: On the Role of Incidental Bilingualism in PaLM’s Translation Capability</i>	
Eleftheria Briakou, Colin Cherry and George Foster .....	9432
<i>Open Set Relation Extraction via Unknown-Aware Training</i>	
Jun Zhao, Xin Zhao, WenYu Zhan, Qi Zhang, Tao Gui, Zhongyu Wei, Yun Wen Chen, Xiang Gao and Xuanjing Huang .....	9453
<i>Learning to Imagine: Visually-Augmented Natural Language Generation</i>	
Tianyi Tang, Yushuo Chen, Yifan Du, Junyi Li, Wayne Xin Zhao and Ji-Rong Wen .....	9468
<i>Generating Hashtags for Short-form Videos with Guided Signals</i>	
Tiezheng Yu, Hanchao Yu, Davis Liang, Yuning Mao, Shaoliang Nie, Po-Yao Huang, Madian Khabsa, Pascale Fung and Yi-Chia Wang .....	9482
<i>NEUROSTRUCTURAL DECODING: Neural Text Generation with Structural Constraints</i>	
Mohaddeseh Bastan, Mihai Surdeanu and Niranjan Balasubramanian .....	9496

<i>The Best of Both Worlds: Combining Human and Machine Translations for Multilingual Semantic Parsing with Active Learning</i>	9511
Zhuang Li, Lizhen Qu, Philip Cohen, Raj V Tumuluri and Gholamreza Haffari . . . . .	9511
<i>Ideology Prediction from Scarce and Biased Supervision: Learn to Disregard the What” and Focus on the How”!</i>	9529
Chen Chen, Dylan Walker and Venkatesh Saligrama . . . . .	9529
<i>Unsupervised Extractive Summarization of Emotion Triggers</i>	9550
Tiberiu Sosea, Hongli Zhan, Junyi Jessy Li and Cornelia Caragea . . . . .	9550
<i>Document-Level Event Argument Extraction With a Chain Reasoning Paradigm</i>	9570
Jian Liu, Chen Liang, Jinan Xu, Haoyan Liu and Zhe Zhao . . . . .	9570
<i>Pre-training Multi-party Dialogue Models with Latent Discourse Inference</i>	9584
Yiyang Li, Xinting Huang, Wei Bi and Hai Zhao . . . . .	9584
<i>Interpreting Positional Information in Perspective of Word Order</i>	9600
Zhang Xilong, Liu Ruochen, Liu Jin and Liang Xuefeng . . . . .	9600
<i>I2D2: Inductive Knowledge Distillation with NeuroLogic and Self-Imitation</i>	9614
Chandra Bhagavatula, Jena D. Hwang, Doug Downey, Ronan Le Bras, Ximing Lu, Lianhui Qin, Keisuke Sakaguchi, Swabha Swayamdipta, Peter West and Yejin Choi . . . . .	9614
<i>More than Classification: A Unified Framework for Event Temporal Relation Extraction</i>	9631
Quzhe Huang, Yutong Hu, Shengqi Zhu, Yansong Feng, Chang Liu and Dongyan Zhao . . . . .	9631
<i>Multi-Source Test-Time Adaptation as Dueling Bandits for Extractive Question Answering</i>	9647
Hai Ye, Qizhe Xie and Hwee Tou Ng . . . . .	9647
<i>Decoupling Pseudo Label Disambiguation and Representation Learning for Generalized Intent Discovery</i>	9661
Yutao Mou, Xiaoshuai Song, Keqing He, Chen Zeng, Pei Wang, Jingang Wang, Yunsen Xian and Weiran Xu . . . . .	9661
<i>DecompEval: Evaluating Generated Texts as Unsupervised Decomposed Question Answering</i>	9676
Pei Ke, Fei Huang, Fei Mi, Yasheng Wang, Qun Liu, Xiaoyan Zhu and Minlie Huang . . . . .	9676
<i>Backdooring Neural Code Search</i>	9692
Weisong Sun, Yuchen Chen, Guanhong Tao, Chunrong Fang, Xiangyu Zhang, Quanjun Zhang and Bin Luo . . . . .	9692
<i>Concise Answers to Complex Questions: Summarization of Long-form Answers</i>	9709
Abhilash C Potluri, Fangyuan Xu and Eunsol Choi . . . . .	9709
<i>Towards Better Entity Linking with Multi-View Enhanced Distillation</i>	9729
Yi Liu, Yuan Tian, Jianxun Lian, xinlong wang, Yanan Cao, Fang Fang, Wen Zhang, Haizhen Huang, Weiwei Deng and Qi Zhang . . . . .	9729
<i>A Measure-Theoretic Characterization of Tight Language Models</i>	9744
Li Du, Lucas Torroba Hennigen, Tiago Pimentel, Clara Meister, Jason Eisner and Ryan Cotterell . . . . .	9744
<i>PAED: Zero-Shot Persona Attribute Extraction in Dialogues</i>	9771
Luyao Zhu, Wei Li, Rui Mao, Vlad Pandelea and Erik Cambria . . . . .	9771
<i>PromptRank: Unsupervised Keyphrase Extraction Using Prompt</i>	9788
Aobo Kong, Shiwan Zhao, Hao Chen, Qicheng Li, Yong Qin, Ruiqi Sun and Xiaoyan Bai . . . . .	9788

<i>When Not to Trust Language Models: Investigating Effectiveness of Parametric and Non-Parametric Memories</i>	Alex Troy Mallen, Akari Asai, Victor Zhong, Rajarshi Das, Daniel Khashabi and Hannaneh Hajishirzi .....	9802
<i>infoVerse: A Universal Framework for Dataset Characterization with Multidimensional Meta-information</i>	Jaehyung Kim, Yekyung Kim, Karin Johanna Denton de Langis, Jinwoo Shin and Dongyeop Kang	9823
<i>SeeGULL: A Stereotype Benchmark with Broad Geo-Cultural Coverage Leveraging Generative Models</i>	Akshita Jha, Aida Mostafazadeh Davani, Chandan K Reddy, Shachi Dave, Vinodkumar Prabhakaran and Sunipa Dev .....	9851
<i>Automated Metrics for Medical Multi-Document Summarization Disagree with Human Evaluations</i>	Lucy Lu Wang, Yulia Otmakhova, Jay DeYoung, Thinh Hung Truong, Bailey E. Kuehl, Erin A Bransom and Byron C. Wallace.....	9871
<i>Say What You Mean! Large Language Models Speak Too Positively about Negative Commonsense Knowledge</i>	Jiangjie Chen, Wei Shi, Ziquan Fu, Sijie Cheng, Lei Li and Yanghua Xiao .....	9890
<i>An Inner Table Retriever for Robust Table Question Answering</i>	Weizhe Lin, Rexhina Blloshmi, Bill Byrne, Adria de Gispert and Gonzalo Iglesias.....	9909
<i>SIMSUM: Document-level Text Simplification via Simultaneous Summarization</i>	Sofia Blinova, Xinyu Zhou, Martin Jaggi, Carsten Eickhoff and Seyed Ali Bahrainian.....	9927
<i>SimOAP: Improve Coherence and Consistency in Persona-based Dialogue Generation via Over-sampling and Post-evaluation</i>	Junkai Zhou, Liang Pang, Huawei Shen and Xueqi Cheng .....	9945
<i>NatLogAttack: A Framework for Attacking Natural Language Inference Models with Natural Logic</i>	Zi'ou Zheng and Xiaodan Zhu.....	9960
<i>Cognitive Reframing of Negative Thoughts through Human-Language Model Interaction</i>	Ashish Sharma, Kevin Rushton, Inna Wanyin Lin, David Wadden, Khendra G Lucas, Adam Miner, Theresa Nguyen and Tim Althoff .....	9977
<i>Dating Greek Papyri with Text Regression</i>	John Pavlopoulos, Maria Konstantinidou, Isabelle Marthot-Santaniello, Holger Essler and Asimina Paparigopoulou .....	10001
<i>Interleaving Retrieval with Chain-of-Thought Reasoning for Knowledge-Intensive Multi-Step Questions</i>	Harsh Trivedi, Niranjan Balasubramanian, Tushar Khot and Ashish Sabharwal .....	10014
<i>Direct Fact Retrieval from Knowledge Graphs without Entity Linking</i>	Jinheon Baek, Alham Fikri Aji, Jens Lehmann and Sung Ju Hwang .....	10038
<i>DisentQA: Disentangling Parametric and Contextual Knowledge with Counterfactual Question Answering</i>	Ella Neeman, Roee Aharoni, Or Honovich, Leshem Choshen, Idan Szpektor and Omri Abend	10056
<i>A New Direction in Stance Detection: Target-Stance Extraction in the Wild</i>	Yingjie Li, Krishna K Garg and Cornelia Caragea .....	10071

<i>Improved Instruction Ordering in Recipe-Grounded Conversation</i>	Duong Minh Le, Ruohao Guo, Wei Xu and Alan Ritter .....	10086
<i>Token-wise Decomposition of Autoregressive Language Model Hidden States for Analyzing Model Predictions</i>	Byung-Doh Oh and William Schuler .....	10105
<i>Document-Level Multi-Event Extraction with Event Proxy Nodes and Hausdorff Distance Minimization</i>	Xinyu Wang, Lin Gui and Yulan He .....	10118
<i>Dialog-Post: Multi-Level Self-Supervised Objectives and Hierarchical Model for Dialogue Post-Training</i>	Zhenyu Zhang, Lei Shen, Yuming Zhao, Meng Chen and Xiaodong He .....	10134
<i>Language Detoxification with Attribute-Discriminative Latent Space</i>	Jin Myung Kwak, Minseon Kim and Sung Ju Hwang .....	10149
<i>Just Like a Human Would, Direct Access to Sarcasm Augmented with Potential Result and Reaction</i>	Changrong Min, Ximing Li, Liang Yang, Zhilin Wang, Bo Xu and Hongfei LIN .....	10172
<i>Adaptive and Personalized Exercise Generation for Online Language Learning</i>	Peng Cui and Mrinmaya Sachan .....	10184
<i>NLP Reproducibility For All: Understanding Experiences of Beginners</i>	Shane Storks, Keunwoo Peter Yu, Ziqiao Ma and Joyce Chai .....	10199
<i>Why Did the Chicken Cross the Road? Rephrasing and Analyzing Ambiguous Questions in VQA</i>	Elias Stengel-Eskin, Jimena Guallar-Blasco, Yi Zhou and Benjamin Van Durme .....	10220
<i>UMRSpell: Unifying the Detection and Correction Parts of Pre-trained Models towards Chinese Missing, Redundant, and Spelling Correction</i>	Zheyu He, Yujin Zhu, Linlin Wang and Liang Xu .....	10238
<i>LAIT: Efficient Multi-Segment Encoding in Transformers with Layer-Adjustable Interaction</i>	Jeremiah Milbauer, Annie Louis, Mohammad Javad Hosseini, Alex Fabrikant, Donald Metzler and Tal Schuster .....	10251
<i>Local Interpretation of Transformer Based on Linear Decomposition</i>	Sen Yang, Shujian Huang, wei zou, Jianbing Zhang, Xinyu Dai and Jiajun CHEN .....	10270
<i>DataFinder: Scientific Dataset Recommendation from Natural Language Descriptions</i>	Vijay Viswanathan, Luyu Gao, Tongshuang Wu, Pengfei Liu and Graham Neubig .....	10288
<i>Multilingual Event Extraction from Historical Newspaper Adverts</i>	Nadav Borenstein, Natália da Silva Perez and Isabelle Augenstein .....	10304
<i>BIC: Twitter Bot Detection with Text-Graph Interaction and Semantic Consistency</i>	Zhenyu Lei, Herun Wan, Wenqian Zhang, Shangbin Feng, Zilong Chen, Jundong Li, Qinghua Zheng and Minnan Luo .....	10326
<i>Do I have the Knowledge to Answer? Investigating Answerability of Knowledge Base Questions</i>	Mayur Patidar, Prayushi Faldu, Avinash Kumar Singh, Lovekesh Vig, Indrajit Bhattacharya and Mausam - .....	10341
<i>Understanding Client Reactions in Online Mental Health Counseling</i>	Anqi Li, Lizhi Ma, Yaling Mei, Hongliang He, Shuai Zhang, Huachuan Qiu and Zhenzhong Lan	
	10358	

<i>Nonlinear Structural Equation Model Guided Gaussian Mixture Hierarchical Topic Modeling</i>	10377
HeGang Chen, Pengbo Mao, Yuyin Lu and Yanghui Rao .....	
<i>Revisiting Token Dropping Strategy in Efficient BERT Pretraining</i>	10391
Qihuang Zhong, Liang Ding, Juhua Liu, Xuebo Liu, Min Zhang, Bo Du and Dacheng Tao .....	
<i>The Benefits of Bad Advice: Autocontrastive Decoding across Model Layers</i>	10406
Ariel Gera, Roni Friedman, Ofir Arviv, Chulaka Gunasekara, Benjamin Sznajder, Noam Slonim and Eyal Shnarch .....	
<i>FACTIFY-5WQA: 5W Aspect-based Fact Verification through Question Answering</i>	10421
Anku Rani, S.M Towhidul Islam Tonmoy, Dwip D Dalal, Shreya Gautam, Megha Chakraborty, Aman Chadha, Amit Sheth and Amitava Das .....	
<i>Naamapadam: A Large-Scale Named Entity Annotated Data for Indic Languages</i>	10441
Arnav Anil Mhaske, Harshit Kedia, Sumanth Doddapaneni, Mitesh M. Khapra, Pratyush Kumar, Rudra Murthy and Anoop Kunchukuttan .....	
<i>CREPE: Open-Domain Question Answering with False Presuppositions</i>	10457
Xinyan Velocity Yu, Sewon Min, Luke Zettlemoyer and Hannaneh Hajishirzi .....	
<i>Joint Document-Level Event Extraction via Token-Token Bidirectional Event Completed Graph</i>	10481
Qizhi Wan, Changxuan Wan, Keli Xiao, Dexi Liu, Chenliang Li, Bolong Zheng, Xiping Liu and Rong Hu .....	
<i>Robust Representation Learning with Reliable Pseudo-labels Generation via Self-Adaptive Optimal Transport for Short Text Clustering</i>	10493
Xiaolin Zheng, Mengling Hu, Weiming Liu, Chaochao Chen and Xinting Liao .....	
<i>Multilingual Knowledge Graph Completion with Language-Sensitive Multi-Graph Attention</i>	10508
Rongchuan Tang, Yang Zhao, Chengqing Zong and Yu Zhou .....	
<i>What are the Desired Characteristics of Calibration Sets? Identifying Correlates on Long Form Scientific Summarization</i>	10520
Griffin Adams, Bichlien H Nguyen, Jake Allen Smith, Yingce Xia, Shufang Xie, Anna Ostropolets, Budhaditya Deb, Yuan-Jyue Chen, Tristan Naumann and Noémie Elhadad .....	
<i>Annotating Mentions Alone Enables Efficient Domain Adaptation for Coreference Resolution</i>	10543
Nupoor Gandhi, Anjalie Field and Emma Strubell .....	
<i>A Universal Discriminator for Zero-Shot Generalization</i>	10559
Haike Xu, Zongyu Lin, Jing Zhou, Yanan Zheng and Zhilin Yang .....	
<i>Syntax and Geometry of Information</i>	10576
Raphaël Bailly, Laurent Leblond and Kata Gábor .....	
<i>GreenKGC: A Lightweight Knowledge Graph Completion Method</i>	10596
Yun Cheng Wang, Xiou Ge, Bin Wang and C.-C. Jay Kuo .....	
<i>Unsupervised Open-domain Keyphrase Generation</i>	10614
Lam Thanh Do, Pritom Saha Akash and Kevin Chen-Chuan Chang .....	
<i>A Cognitive Stimulation Dialogue System with Multi-source Knowledge Fusion for Elders with Cognitive Impairment</i>	10628
Jiyue Jiang, Sheng Wang, Qintong Li, Lingpeng Kong and Chuan Wu .....	

<i>Plug-and-Play Knowledge Injection for Pre-trained Language Models</i>	
Zhengyan Zhang, Zhiyuan Zeng, Yankai Lin, Huadong Wang, Deming Ye, Chaojun Xiao, Xu Han, Zhiyuan Liu, Peng Li, Maosong Sun and Jie Zhou .....	10641
<i>Two Birds One Stone: Dynamic Ensemble for OOD Intent Classification</i>	
Yunhua Zhou, Jianqiang Yang, Pengyu Wang and Xipeng Qiu .....	10659
<i>SWiPE: A Dataset for Document-Level Simplification of Wikipedia Pages</i>	
Philippe Laban, Jesse Vig, Wojciech Kryscinski, Shafiq Joty, Caiming Xiong and Chien-Sheng Jason Wu .....	10674
<i>Are Message Passing Neural Networks Really Helpful for Knowledge Graph Completion?</i>	
Juanhui Li, Harry Aaron Shomer, Jiayuan Ding, Yiqi Wang, Yao Ma, Neil Shah, Jiliang Tang and Dawei Yin .....	10696
<i>A dynamic programming algorithm for span-based nested named-entity recognition in <math>O(n^2)</math></i>	
Caio Corro .....	10712
<i>Target-Side Augmentation for Document-Level Machine Translation</i>	
Guangsheng Bao, ZHIYANG TENG and Yue Zhang .....	10725
<i>Rethinking Masked Language Modeling for Chinese Spelling Correction</i>	
Hongqiu Wu, Shaohua Zhang, Yuchen Zhang and Hai Zhao .....	10743
<i>A Multi-Modal Context Reasoning Approach for Conditional Inference on Joint Textual and Visual Clues</i>	
Yunxin Li, Baotian Hu, Chen Xinyu, Yuxin Ding, Lin Ma and Min Zhang .....	10757
<i>Simple and Effective Unsupervised Speech Translation</i>	
Changhan Wang, Hirofumi Inaguma, Peng-Jen Chen, Ilia Kulikov, Yun Tang, Wei-Ning Hsu, Michael Auli and Juan Pino .....	10771
<i>Modeling What-to-ask and How-to-ask for Answer-unaware Conversational Question Generation</i>	
Xuan Long Do, Bowei Zou, Shafiq Joty, Tran Anh Tai, Liangming Pan, Nancy Chen and Ai Ti Aw .....	10785
<i>CHEER: Centrality-aware High-order Event Reasoning Network for Document-level Event Causality Identification</i>	
Meiqi Chen, Yixin Cao, Yan Zhang and Zhiwei Liu .....	10804
<i>f-Divergence Minimization for Sequence-Level Knowledge Distillation</i>	
Yuqiao Wen, Zichao Li, Wenyu Du and Lili Mou .....	10817
<i>Supervised Adversarial Contrastive Learning for Emotion Recognition in Conversations</i>	
Dou Hu, Yinan Bao, Lingwei Wei, Wei Zhou and Songlin Hu .....	10835
<i>A Novel Table-to-Graph Generation Approach for Document-Level Joint Entity and Relation Extraction</i>	
Ruoyu Zhang, Yanzeng Li and Lei Zou .....	10853
<i>A Synthetic Data Generation Framework for Grounded Dialogues</i>	
Jianzhu Bao, Rui Wang, Yasheng Wang, Aixin Sun, Yitong Li, Fei Mi and Ruifeng Xu .....	10866
<i>MasakhaPOS: Part-of-Speech Tagging for Typologically Diverse African languages</i>	
Cheikh M. Bamba Dione, David Ifeoluwa Adelani, Peter Nabende, Jesujoba Alabi, Thapelo Andrew Sindane, Happy Buzaaba, Shamsuddeen Hassan Muhammad, Chris Chinene Emezue, Perez Ogayo, Anuoluwapo Aremu, Catherine Gitau, Derguene Mbaye, Jonathan Mukiibi, Blessing K Sibanda, Bonaventure F. P. Dossou, Andiswa Bukula, Roowither Mabuya, Allahsera Auguste Tapo, Edwin	

Munkoh-Buabeng, victoire Memdjokam Koagne, Fatoumata Ouoba Kabore, Amelia Taylor, Godson K KALIPE, Tebogo Macucwa, Vukosi Marivate, Tajuddeen Gwadabe, Mboning Tchiaze Elvis, Ikechukwu Ekene Onyenwe, Gratien G. Atindogbe, Tolulope Anu Adelani, Idris Akinade, Olanrewaju Samuel, Marien NAHIMANA, Théogène MUSABEYEZU, Emile Niyomutabazi, Ester Chimhenga, Kudzai Gotosa, Patrick Mizha, Apelete AGBOLO, SEYDOU TRAORE, Chinedu Uchechukwu, Aliyu Yakubu Yusuf, Muhammad Sulaiman Abdulla and Dietrich Klakow .....	10883
<i>Semantic Structure Enhanced Event Causality Identification</i>	
Zhilei Hu, Zixuan Li, Xiaolong Jin, Long Bai, Saiping Guan, Jiafeng Guo and Xueqi Cheng	10901
<i>Weakly-Supervised Spoken Video Grounding via Semantic Interaction Learning</i>	
Ye Wang, Wang Lin, Shengyu Zhang, Tao Jin, Linjun Li, Xize Cheng and Zhou Zhao .....	10914
<i>Rehearsal-free Continual Language Learning via Efficient Parameter Isolation</i>	
Zhicheng Wang, Yufang Liu, Tao Ji, xiaoling Wang, Yuanbin Wu, congcong jiang, ye chao, zhencong han, ling wang, xu shao and wenqiu zeng .....	10933
<i>Label-Aware Hyperbolic Embeddings for Fine-grained Emotion Classification</i>	
Chih Yao Chen, Tun Min Hung, Yi-Li Hsu and Lun-Wei Ku .....	10947
<i>Combo of Thinking and Observing for Outside-Knowledge VQA</i>	
Qingyi Si, Yuchen Mo, Zheng Lin, HUISHAN JI and Weiping Wang .....	10959
<i>AMPERE: AMR-Aware Prefix for Generation-Based Event Argument Extraction Model</i>	
I-Hung Hsu, Zhiyu Xie, Kuan-Hao Huang, Prem Natarajan and Nanyun Peng .....	10976
<i>Your spouse needs professional help: Determining the Contextual Appropriateness of Messages through Modeling Social Relationships</i>	
David Jurgens, Agrima Seth, Jackson Sargent, Athena Aghighi and Michael Geraci .....	10994
<i>TART: Improved Few-shot Text Classification Using Task-Adaptive Reference Transformation</i>	
Shuo Lei, Xuchao Zhang, Jianfeng He, Fanglan Chen and Chang-Tien Lu .....	11014
<i>How Do In-Context Examples Affect Compositional Generalization?</i>	
Shengnan An, Zeqi Lin, Qiang Fu, Bei Chen, Nanning Zheng, Jian-Guang LOU and Dongmei Zhang .....	11027
<i>Attractive Storyteller: Stylized Visual Storytelling with Unpaired Text</i>	
Dingyi Yang and Qin Jin .....	11053
<i>Multitask Pretraining with Structured Knowledge for Text-to-SQL Generation</i>	
Robert Giaquinto, Dejiao Zhang, Benjamin Kleiner, Yang Li, Ming Tan, Parminder Bhatia, Ramesh Nallapati and Xiaofei Ma .....	11067
<i>WSPAlign: Word Alignment Pre-training via Large-Scale Weakly Supervised Span Prediction</i>	
Qiyu Wu, Masaaki Nagata and Yoshimasa Tsuruoka .....	11084
<i>Distill or Annotate? Cost-Efficient Fine-Tuning of Compact Models</i>	
Junmo Kang, Wei Xu and Alan Ritter .....	11100
<i>OD-RTE: A One-Stage Object Detection Framework for Relational Triple Extraction</i>	
Jinzhong Ning, Zhihao Yang, Yuanyuan Sun, Zhizheng Wang and Hongfei LIN .....	11120
<i>I Cast Detect Thoughts: Learning to Converse and Guide with Intents and Theory-of-Mind in Dungeons and Dragons</i>	
Pei Zhou, Andrew Zhu, Jennifer Hu, Jay Pujara, Xiang Ren, Chris Callison-Burch, Yejin Choi and Prithviraj Ammanabrolu .....	11136

<i>Multitask Pre-training of Modular Prompt for Chinese Few-Shot Learning</i>	Tianxiang Sun, Zhengfu He, Qin Zhu, Xipeng Qiu and Xuanjing Huang .....	11156
<i>Is GPT-3 a Good Data Annotator?</i>	BOSHENG DING, Chengwei Qin, Linlin Liu, Yew Ken Chia, Boyang Li, Shafiq Joty and Lidong Bing .....	11173
<i>Multi-Grained Knowledge Retrieval for End-to-End Task-Oriented Dialog</i>	Fanqi Wan, Weizhou Shen, Ke Yang, Xiaojun Quan and Wei Bi .....	11196
<i>Few-shot Event Detection: An Empirical Study and a Unified View</i>	Yubo Ma, Zehao Wang, Yixin Cao and Aixin Sun .....	11211
<i>How to Plant Trees in Language Models: Data and Architectural Effects on the Emergence of Syntactic Inductive Biases</i>	Aaron Mueller and Tal Linzen .....	11237
<i>ClarifyDelphi: Reinforced Clarification Questions with Defeasibility Rewards for Social and Moral Situations</i>	Valentina Pyatkin, Jena D. Hwang, Vivek Srikumar, Ximing Lu, Liwei Jiang, Yejin Choi and Chandra Bhagavatula .....	11253
<i>HINT: Hypernetwork Instruction Tuning for Efficient Zero- and Few-Shot Generalisation</i>	Hamish Ivison, Akshita Bhagia, Yizhong Wang, Hannaneh Hajishirzi and Matthew Peters .....	11272
<i>Measuring Inductive Biases of In-Context Learning with Underspecified Demonstrations</i>	Changlei Si, Dan Friedman, Nitish Joshi, Shi Feng, Danqi Chen and He He .....	11289
<i>An Inclusive Notion of Text</i>	Ilia Kuznetsov and Iryna Gurevych .....	11311
<i>AlignScore: Evaluating Factual Consistency with A Unified Alignment Function</i>	Yuheng Zha, Yichi Yang, Ruichen Li and Zhiting Hu .....	11328
<i>Multi-source Semantic Graph-based Multimodal Sarcasm Explanation Generation</i>	Liqiang Jing, Xuemeng Song, Kun Ouyang, Mengzhao Jia and Liqiang Nie .....	11349
<i>Counterfactual Active Learning for Out-of-Distribution Generalization</i>	Xun Deng, Wenjie Wang, Fuli Feng, Hanwang Zhang, Xiangnan He and Yong Liao .....	11362
<i>Multi-granularity Temporal Question Answering over Knowledge Graphs</i>	Ziyang Chen, Jinzhi Liao and Xiang Zhao .....	11378
<i>A New Aligned Simple German Corpus</i>	Vanessa Toborek, Moritz Busch, Malte Boßert, Christian Bauckhage and Pascal Welke .....	11393
<i>Introducing Semantics into Speech Encoders</i>	Derek Q Xu, Shuyan Annie Dong, Changhan Wang, Suyoun Kim, Zhaojiang Lin, Bing Liu, Akshat Shrivastava, Shang-Wen Li, Liang-Hsuan Tseng, Guan-Ting Lin, Alexei Baevski, Hung-yi Lee, Yizhou Sun and Wei Wang .....	11413
<i>Constrained Tuple Extraction with Interaction-Aware Network</i>	Xiaojun Xue, Chunxia Zhang, Tianxiang Xu and Zhendong Niu .....	11430
<i>MultiInstruct: Improving Multi-Modal Zero-Shot Learning via Instruction Tuning</i>	Zhiyang Xu, Ying Shen and Lifu Huang .....	11445

<i>Single Sequence Prediction over Reasoning Graphs for Multi-hop QA</i>	11466
Gowtham Ramesh, Makesh Narsimhan Sreedhar and Junjie Hu .....	
<i>Contrastive Error Attribution for Finetuned Language Models</i>	11482
Faisal Ladhak, Esin Durmus and Tatsunori Hashimoto .....	
<i>DARE: Towards Robust Text Explanations in Biomedical and Healthcare Applications</i>	11499
Adam Daniel Ivankay, Mattia Rigotti and Pascal Frossard .....	
<i>Neural Machine Translation for Mathematical Formulae</i>	11534
Felix Petersen, Moritz Schubotz, Andre Greiner-Petter and Bela Gipp .....	
<i>Query-Efficient Black-Box Red Teaming via Bayesian Optimization</i>	11551
Deokjae Lee, Jun Yeong Lee, Jung-Woo Ha, Jin-Hwa Kim, Sang-Woo Lee, Hwaran Lee and Hyun Oh Song .....	
<i>SSD-LM: Semi-autoregressive Simplex-based Diffusion Language Model for Text Generation and Modular Control</i>	11575
Xiaochuang Han, Sachin Kumar and Yulia Tsvetkov .....	
<i>Recall, Expand, and Multi-Candidate Cross-Encode: Fast and Accurate Ultra-Fine Entity Typing</i>	11597
Chengyue Jiang, Wenyang Hui, Yong Jiang, Xiaobin Wang, Pengjun Xie and Kewei Tu ...	
<i>MIR-GAN: Refining Frame-Level Modality-Invariant Representations with Adversarial Network for Audio-Visual Speech Recognition</i>	11610
Yuchen Hu, Chen Chen, Ruizhe Li, Heqing Zou and Eng Siong Chng .....	
<i>Understanding Factual Errors in Summarization: Errors, Summarizers, Datasets, Error Detectors</i>	11626
Liyan Tang, Tanya Goyal, Alex Fabbri, Philippe Laban, Jiacheng Xu, Semih Yavuz, Wojciech Kryscinski, Justin F Rousseau and Greg Durrett .....	
<i>GIFT: Graph-Induced Fine-Tuning for Multi-Party Conversation Understanding</i>	11645
Jia-Chen Gu, Zhenhua Ling, Quan Liu, Cong Liu and Guoping Hu .....	
<i>Hybrid Uncertainty Quantification for Selective Text Classification in Ambiguous Tasks</i>	11659
Artem Vazhentsev, Gleb Kuzmin, Akim Tsvigun, Alexander Panchenko, Maxim Panov, Mikhail Burtsev and Artem Shelmanov .....	
<i>BLOOM+1: Adding Language Support to BLOOM for Zero-Shot Prompting</i>	11682
Zheng Xin Yong, Hailey Schoelkopf, Niklas Muennighoff, Alham Fikri Aji, David Ifeoluwa Ade-lani, KHALID ALMUBARAK, M Saiful Bari, Lintang Sutawika, Jungo Kasai, Ahmed Baruwa, Genta Indra Winata, Stella Biderman, Edward Raff, Dragomir Radev and Vassilina Nikoulina .....	
<i>Logic-driven Indirect Supervision: An Application to Crisis Counseling</i>	11704
Mattia Medina Grespan, Meghan Broadbent, Xinyao Zhang, Katherine E Axford, Brent Kious, Zac Imel and Vivek Srikanth .....	
<i>Grounding Characters and Places in Narrative Text</i>	11723
Sandeep Soni, Amanpreet Sihra, Elizabeth F. Evans, Matthew Wilkens and David Bamman	
<i>From Pretraining Data to Language Models to Downstream Tasks: Tracking the Trails of Political Biases Leading to Unfair NLP Models</i>	11737
Shangbin Feng, Chan Young Park, Yuhan Liu and Yulia Tsvetkov .....	
<i>SLABERT Talk Pretty One Day: Modeling Second Language Acquisition with BERT</i>	11763
Aditya Yadavalli, Alekhya Yadavalli and Vera Tobin .....	

<i>Contrastive Novelty-Augmented Learning: Anticipating Outliers with Large Language Models</i>	11778
Albert Xu, Xiang Ren and Robin Jia .....	
<i>Learning to Initialize: Can Meta Learning Improve Cross-task Generalization in Prompt Tuning?</i>	11802
Chengwei Qin, Shafiq Joty, Qian Li and Ruochen Zhao .....	
<i>Rethinking the Role of Scale for In-Context Learning: An Interpretability-based Case Study at 66 Billion Scale</i>	11833
Hritik Bansal, Karthik Gopalakrishnan, Saket Dingliwal, Sravan Bodapati, Katrin Kirchhoff and Dan Roth .....	
<i>Question-Answering in a Low-resourced Language: Benchmark Dataset and Models for Tigrinya</i>	11857
Fitsum Gaim, Wonsuk Yang, Hancheol Park and Jong Park .....	
<i>ESCOXLM-R: Multilingual Taxonomy-driven Pre-training for the Job Market Domain</i>	11871
Mike Zhang, Rob van der Goot and Barbara Plank .....	
<i>CITADEL: Conditional Token Interaction via Dynamic Lexical Routing for Efficient and Effective Multi-Vector Retrieval</i>	11891
Minghan Li, Sheng-Chieh Lin, Barlas Oguz, Asish Ghoshal, Jimmy Lin, Yashar Mehdad, Wen-tau Yih and Xilun Chen .....	
<i>MultiCapCLIP: Auto-Encoding Prompts for Zero-Shot Multilingual Visual Captioning</i>	11908
Bang Yang, Fenglin Liu, Xian Wu, Yaowei Wang, Xu Sun and Yuexian Zou .....	
<i>Transfer and Active Learning for Dissonance Detection: Addressing the Rare-Class Challenge</i>	11923
Vasudha Varadarajan, Swanie Juhng, Syeda Mahwish, Xiaoran Liu, Jonah Keith Luby, Christian C. Luhmann and H. Andrew Schwartz .....	
<i>In-sample Curriculum Learning by Sequence Completion for Natural Language Generation</i>	11937
Qi Jia, Yizhu Liu, Haifeng Tang and Kenny Q. Zhu .....	
<i>Product Question Answering in E-Commerce: A Survey</i>	11951
Yang Deng, Wenxuan Zhang, Qian Yu and Wai Lam .....	
<i>Towards Domain-Agnostic and Domain-Adaptive Dementia Detection from Spoken Language</i>	11965
Shahla Farzana and Natalie Parde .....	
<i>Generalizing Backpropagation for Gradient-Based Interpretability</i>	11979
Kevin Du, Lucas Torroba Hennigen, Niklas Stoehr, Alex Warstadt and Ryan Cotterell ....	
<i>UPPAM: A Unified Pre-training Architecture for Political Actor Modeling based on Language</i>	11996
Xinyi Mou, Zhongyu Wei, Qi Zhang and Xuanjing Huang .....	
<i>Generic Temporal Reasoning with Differential Analysis and Explanation</i>	12013
Yu Feng, Ben Zhou, Haoyu Wang, Helen Jin and Dan Roth .....	
<i>Model-Based Simulation for Optimising Smart Reply</i>	12030
Benjamin Towle and Ke Zhou .....	
<i>Beyond Contrastive Learning: A Variational Generative Model for Multilingual Retrieval</i>	12044
John Wieting, Jonathan Clark, William Cohen, Graham Neubig and Taylor Berg-Kirkpatrick .....	
<i>On the Blind Spots of Model-Based Evaluation Metrics for Text Generation</i>	12067
Tianxing He, Jingyu Zhang, Tianle Wang, Sachin Kumar, Kyunghyun Cho, James Glass and Yulia Tsvetkov .....	

<i>Dealing with Semantic Underspecification in Multimodal NLP</i>	12098
Sandro Pezzelle .....	
<i>Trigger Warning Assignment as a Multi-Label Document Classification Problem</i>	12113
Matti Wiegmann, Magdalena Wolska, Christopher Schröder, Ole Borchardt, Benno Stein and Martin Potthast .....	
<i>WhitenedCSE: Whitening-based Contrastive Learning of Sentence Embeddings</i>	12135
Wenjie Zhuo, Yifan Sun, Xiaohan Wang, Linchao Zhu and Yi Yang .....	
<i>Federated Learning for Semantic Parsing: Task Formulation, Evaluation Setup, New Algorithms</i>	12149
Tianshu Zhang, Changchang Liu, Wei-Han Lee, Yu Su and Huan Sun .....	
<i>Causality-Guided Multi-Memory Interaction Network for Multivariate Stock Price Movement Prediction</i>	12164
Di Luo, Weiheng Liao, Shuqi Li, Xin Cheng and Rui Yan .....	
<i>DSRM: Boost Textual Adversarial Training with Distribution Shift Risk Minimization</i>	12177
SongYang Gao, Shihan Dou, Yan Liu, Xiao Wang, Qi Zhang, Zhongyu Wei, Jin Ma and Ying Shan .....	
<i>A Simple and Flexible Modeling for Mental Disorder Detection by Learning from Clinical Questionnaires</i>	12190
Hoyun Song, Jisu Shin, Huije Lee and Jong Park .....	
<i>Downstream Datasets Make Surprisingly Good Pretraining Corpora</i>	12207
Kundan Krishna, Saurabh Garg, Jeffrey P. Bigham and Zachary Lipton .....	
<i>Towards Open-World Product Attribute Mining: A Lightly-Supervised Approach</i>	12223
Liyan Xu, Chenwei Zhang, Xian Li, Jingbo Shang and Jinho D. Choi .....	
<i>XDailyDialog: A Multilingual Parallel Dialogue Corpus</i>	12240
Zeming Liu, Ping Nie, Jie Cai, Haifeng Wang, Zheng-Yu Niu, PENG ZHANG, Mrinmaya Sachan and Kaiping Peng .....	
<i>PAL to Lend a Helping Hand: Towards Building an Emotion Adaptive Polite and Empathetic Counseling Conversational Agent</i>	12254
Kshitij Mishra, Priyanshu Priya and Asif Ekbal .....	
<i>Bidirectional Generative Framework for Cross-domain Aspect-based Sentiment Analysis</i>	12272
Yue Deng, Wenxuan Zhang, Sinno Jialin Pan and Lidong Bing .....	
<i>Contrastive Decoding: Open-ended Text Generation as Optimization</i>	12286
Xiang Lisa Li, Ari Holtzman, Daniel Fried, Percy Liang, Jason Eisner, Tatsunori Hashimoto, Luke Zettlemoyer and Mike Lewis .....	
<i>Resolving Indirect Referring Expressions for Entity Selection</i>	12313
Mohammad Javad Hosseini, Filip Radlinski, Silvia Pareti and Annie Louis .....	
<i>Accelerating Transformer Inference for Translation via Parallel Decoding</i>	12336
Andrea Santilli, Silvio Severino, Emilian Postolache, Valentino Maiorca, Michele Mancusi, Riccardo Marin and Emanuele Rodola .....	
<i>Hard Sample Aware Prompt-Tuning</i>	12356
Yuanjian Xu, Qi An, Jiahuan Zhang, Peng Li and Zaiqing Nie .....	
<i>WikiBio: a Semantic Resource for the Intersectional Analysis of Biographical Events</i>	12370
Marco Antonio Stranisci, Rossana Damiano, Enrico Mensa, Viviana Patti, Daniele P. Radicioni and Tommaso Caselli .....	

<i>Best-k Search Algorithm for Neural Text Generation</i>	Jiacheng Xu, Caiming Xiong, silvio savarese and Yingbo Zhou .....	12385
<i>Towards Leaving No Indic Language Behind: Building Monolingual Corpora, Benchmark and Models for Indic Languages</i>	Sumanth Doddapaneni, Rahul Aralikatte, Gowtham Ramesh, Shreya Goyal, Mitesh M. Khapra, Anoop Kunchukuttan and Pratyush Kumar .....	12402
<i>Transforming Visual Scene Graphs to Image Captions</i>	Xu Yang, Jiawei Peng, Zihua Wang, Haiyang Xu, Qinghao Ye, Chenliang Li, Songfang Huang, Fei Huang, Zhangzikang Li and Yu Zhang .....	12427
<i>Hybrid Transducer and Attention based Encoder-Decoder Modeling for Speech-to-Text Tasks</i>	Yun Tang, Anna Y Sun, Hirofumi Inaguma, Xinyue Chen, Ning Dong, Xutai Ma, Paden D Tomasello and Juan Pino .....	12441
<i>Improving Domain Generalization for Prompt-Aware Essay Scoring via Disentangled Representation Learning</i>	Zhiwei Jiang, Tianyi Gao, Yafeng Yin, Meng Liu, Hua Yu, Zifeng Cheng and Qing Gu ...	12456
<i>What's the Meaning of Superhuman Performance in Today's NLU?</i>	Simone Tedeschi, Johan Bos, Thierry Declerck, Jan Hajič, Daniel Hershcovitch, Eduard H Hořev, Alexander Koller, Simon Krek, Steven Schockaert, Rico Sennrich, Ekaterina Shutova and Roberto Navigli .....	12471
<i>PromptNER: Prompt Locating and Typing for Named Entity Recognition</i>	Yongliang Shen, Zeqi Tan, Shuhui Wu, Wenqi Zhang, Rongsheng Zhang, Yadong Xi, Weiming Lu and Yueting Zhuang .....	12492
<i>Hints on the data for language modeling of synthetic languages with transformers</i>	Rodolfo Joel Zevallos and Nuria Bel .....	12508
<i>Neural Machine Translation Methods for Translating Text to Sign Language Glosses</i>	Dele Zhu, Vera Czehan and Eleftherios Avramidis .....	12523
<i>Revisiting Event Argument Extraction: Can EAE Models Learn Better When Being Aware of Event Co-occurrences?</i>	Yuxin He, Jingyue Hu and Buzhou Tang .....	12542
<i>HAUSER: Towards Holistic and Automatic Evaluation of Simile Generation</i>	Qianyu He, Yikai Zhang, Jiaqing Liang, Yuncheng Huang, Yanghua Xiao and Yunwen Chen	12557
<i>Large-scale Lifelong Learning of In-context Instructions and How to Tackle It</i>	Jisoo Mok, Jaeyoung Do, Sungjin Lee, Tara Taghavi, Seunghak Yu and Sungroh Yoon ...	12573
<i>Controllable Text Generation via Probability Density Estimation in the Latent Space</i>	Yuxuan Gu, Xiaocheng Feng, Sicheng Ma, Lingyuan Lingyuan Zhang, Heng Gong, Weihong Zhong and Bing Qin .....	12590
<i>Learning Latent Relations for Temporal Knowledge Graph Reasoning</i>	Mengqi Zhang, Yuwei Xia, Qiang Liu, Shu Wu and Liang Wang .....	12617
<i>DT-Solver: Automated Theorem Proving with Dynamic-Tree Sampling Guided by Proof-level Value Function</i>	Haiming Wang, Ye Yuan, Zhengying Liu, Jianhao Shen, Yichun Yin, Jing Xiong, Enze Xie, Han Shi, Yujun Li, lin li, Jian Yin, Zhenguo Li and Xiaodan Liang .....	12632

<i>Unsupervised Selective Rationalization with Noise Injection</i>	Adam Storek, Melanie Subbiah and Kathleen McKeown .....	12647
<i>Understanding In-Context Learning via Supportive Pretraining Data</i>	Xiaochuang Han, Daniel Simig, Todor Mihaylov, Yulia Tsvetkov, Asli Celikyilmaz and Tianlu Wang .....	12660
<i>ETHICIST: Targeted Training Data Extraction Through Loss Smoothed Soft Prompting and Calibrated Confidence Estimation</i>	Zhexin Zhang, Jiaxin Wen and Minlie Huang .....	12674
<i>Effective Contrastive Weighting for Dense Query Expansion</i>	Xiao Wang, Sean MacAvaney, Craig Macdonald and Iadh Ounis .....	12688
<i>Improving the Detection of Multilingual Online Attacks with Rich Social Media Data from Singapore</i>	Janosch Haber, Bertie Vidgen, Matthew S Chapman, Vibhor Agarwal, Roy Ka-Wei Lee, Yong Keong Yap and Paul Röttger .....	12705
<i>Reanalyzing L2 Preposition Learning with Bayesian Mixed Effects and a Pretrained Language Model</i>	Jakob Prange and Man Ho Ivy Wong .....	12722
<i>Socratic Pretraining: Question-Driven Pretraining for Controllable Summarization</i>	Artidoro Pagnoni, Alex Fabbri, Wojciech Kryscinski and Chien-Sheng Jason Wu .....	12737
<i>MatCha: Enhancing Visual Language Pretraining with Math Reasoning and Chart Derendering</i>	Fangyu Liu, Francesco Piccinno, Syrine Krichene, Chenxi Pang, Kenton Lee, Mandar Joshi, Yasemin Altun, Nigel Collier and Julian Martin Eisenschlos .....	12756
<i>MGR: Multi-generator Based Rationalization</i>	Wei Liu, Haozhao Wang, Jun Wang, Ruixuan Li, Xinyang Li, YuanKai Zhang and Yang Qiu .....	12771
<i>BUMP: A Benchmark of Unfaithful Minimal Pairs for Meta-Evaluation of Faithfulness Metrics</i>	Liang Ma, Shuyang Cao, Robert L Logan IV, Di Lu, Shihao Ran, Ke Zhang, Joel Tetreault and Alejandro Jaimes .....	12788
<i>Is Fine-tuning Needed? Pre-trained Language Models Are Near Perfect for Out-of-Domain Detection</i>	Rheeya Uppaal, Junjie Hu and Yixuan Li .....	12813
<i>UniSumm and SummZoo: Unified Model and Diverse Benchmark for Few-Shot Summarization</i>	Yulong Chen, Yang Liu, Ruochen Xu, Ziyi Yang, Chenguang Zhu, Michael Zeng and Yue Zhang .....	12833
<i>RADE: Reference-Assisted Dialogue Evaluation for Open-Domain Dialogue</i>	Zhengliang Shi, Weiwei Sun, Shuo Zhang, Zhen Zhang, Pengjie Ren and Zhaochun Ren ..	12856
<i>An AMR-based Link Prediction Approach for Document-level Event Argument Extraction</i>	Yuqing Yang, Qipeng Guo, Xiangkun Hu, Yue Zhang, Xipeng Qiu and Zheng Zhang .....	12876
<i>PuMer: Pruning and Merging Tokens for Efficient Vision Language Models</i>	Qingqing Cao, Bhargavi Paranjape and Hannaneh Hajishirzi .....	12890
<i>Gloss-Free End-to-End Sign Language Translation</i>	Kezhou Lin, Xiaohan Wang, Linchao Zhu, Ke Sun, bang zhang and Yi Yang .....	12904
<i>TAGPRIME: A Unified Framework for Relational Structure Extraction</i>	I-Hung Hsu, Kuan-Hao Huang, Shuning Zhang, Wenxin Cheng, Prem Natarajan, Kai-Wei Chang and Nanyun Peng .....	12917

<i>Model-Generated Pretraining Signals Improves Zero-Shot Generalization of Text-to-Text Transformers</i>	
Linyuan Gong, Chenyan Xiong, Xiaodong Liu, Payal Bajaj, Yiqing Xie, Alvin Cheung, Jianfeng Gao and Xia Song .....	12933
<i>BITE: Textual Backdoor Attacks with Iterative Trigger Injection</i>	
Jun Yan, Vansh Gupta and Xiang Ren .....	12951
<i>A Crosslingual Investigation of Conceptualization in 1335 Languages</i>	
Yihong Liu, Haotian Ye, Leonie Weissweiler, Philipp Wicke, Renhao Pei, Robert Zangenfeind and Hinrich Schütze .....	12969
<i>Exploring and Verbalizing Academic Ideas by Concept Co-occurrence</i>	
Yi Xu, Shuqian Sheng, Bo Xue, Luoyi Fu, Xinbing Wang and Chenghu Zhou .....	13001
<i>mCLIP: Multilingual CLIP via Cross-lingual Transfer</i>	
Guanhua Chen, Lu Hou, Yun Chen, Wenliang Dai, Lifeng Shang, Xin Jiang, Qun Liu, Jia Pan and Wenping Wang .....	13028
<i>Distantly Supervised Course Concept Extraction in MOOCs with Academic Discipline</i>	
Mengying Lu, Yuquan Wang, Jifan Yu, Yexing Du, Lei Hou and Juanzi Li .....	13044
<i>Extrinsic Evaluation of Machine Translation Metrics</i>	
Nikita Moghe, Tom Sherborne, Mark Steedman and Alexandra Birch .....	13060
<i>ExplainMeetSum: A Dataset for Explainable Meeting Summarization Aligned with Human Intent</i>	
Hyun Kim, Minsoo Cho and Seung-Hoon Na .....	13079
<i>A Cross-Modality Context Fusion and Semantic Refinement Network for Emotion Recognition in Conversation</i>	
Xiaoheng Zhang and Yang Li .....	13099
<i>CAT: A Contextualized Conceptualization and Instantiation Framework for Commonsense Reasoning</i>	
Weiqi Wang, Tianqing Fang, Baixuan Xu, Chun Yi Louis Bo, Yangqiu Song and Lei Chen	13111
<i>The Elephant in the Room: Analyzing the Presence of Big Tech in Natural Language Processing Research</i>	
Mohamed Abdalla, Jan Philip Wahle, Terry Lima Ruas, Aurélie Névéol, Fanny Ducel, Saif M. Mohammad and Karen Fort .....	13141
<i>Language of Bargaining</i>	
Mourad Heddaya, Solomon E Dworkin, Chenhao Tan, Rob Voigt and Alexander K Zentefis	13161
<i>Do Question Answering Modeling Improvements Hold Across Benchmarks?</i>	
Nelson F. Liu, Tony Lee, Robin Jia and Percy Liang .....	13186
<i>VLN-Trans: Translator for the Vision and Language Navigation Agent</i>	
Yue Zhang and Parisa Kordjamshidi .....	13219
<i>Bridging the Gap between Decision and Logits in Decision-based Knowledge Distillation for Pre-trained Language Models</i>	
Qinhong Zhou, Zonghan Yang, Peng Li and Yang Liu .....	13234
<i>Continual Contrastive Finetuning Improves Low-Resource Relation Extraction</i>	
Wenxuan Zhou, Sheng Zhang, Tristan Naumann, Muhamao Chen and Hoifung Poon .....	13249
<i>KGA: A General Machine Unlearning Framework Based on Knowledge Gap Alignment</i>	
Lingzhi Wang, Tong Chen, Wei Yuan, Xingshan Zeng, Kam-Fai Wong and Hongzhi Yin ..	13264

<i>UniCoRN: Unified Cognitive Signal ReconstructioN bridging cognitive signals and human language</i>	
Nuwa Xi, Sendong Zhao, Haochun Wang, Chi Liu, Bing Qin and Ting Liu .....	13277
<i>Dense-ATOMIC: Towards Densely-connected ATOMIC with High Knowledge Coverage and Massive Multi-hop Paths</i>	
Xiangqing Shen, Siwei Wu and Rui Xia .....	13292
<i>Shrinking Embeddings for Hyper-Relational Knowledge Graphs</i>	
Bo Xiong, Mojtaba Nayyeri, Shirui Pan and Steffen Staab .....	13306
<i>CTC-based Non-autoregressive Speech Translation</i>	
Chen Xu, Xiaoqian Liu, Xiaowen Liu, Qingxuan Sun, Yuhao Zhang, Murun Yang, Qianqian Dong, Tom Ko, Mingxuan Wang, Tong Xiao, Anxiang Ma and Jingbo Zhu .....	13321
<i>Attention as a Guide for Simultaneous Speech Translation</i>	
Sara Papi, Matteo Negri and Marco Turchi .....	13340
<i>On Complementarity Objectives for Hybrid Retrieval</i>	
Dohyeon Lee, Seung-won Hwang, Kyungjae Lee, Seungtaek Choi and Sunghyun Park .....	13357
<i>C-STANCE: A Large Dataset for Chinese Zero-Shot Stance Detection</i>	
Chenyue Zhao, Yingjie Li and Cornelia Caragea .....	13369
<i>Wukong-Reader: Multi-modal Pre-training for Fine-grained Visual Document Understanding</i>	
Haoli Bai, Zhiguang Liu, Xiaojun Meng, li wentao, Shuang Liu, Yifeng LUO, nian xie, Rongfu Zheng, Liangwei Wang, Lu Hou, Jiansheng Wei, Xin Jiang and Qun Liu .....	13386
<i>PaCE: Unified Multi-modal Dialogue Pre-training with Progressive and Compositional Experts</i>	
Yunshui Li, Binyuan Hui, ZhiChao Yin, Min Yang, Fei Huang and Yongbin Li .....	13402
<i>MVP-Tuning: Multi-View Knowledge Retrieval with Prompt Tuning for Commonsense Reasoning</i>	
Yongfeng Huang, Yanyang Li, Yichong Xu, Lin Zhang, ruyi gan, Jiaxing Zhang and Liwei Wang 13417	
<i>PEIT: Bridging the Modality Gap with Pre-trained Models for End-to-End Image Translation</i>	
Shaolin Zhu, Shangjie Li, Yikun Lei and Deyi Xiong .....	13433
<i>Topic-Guided Sampling For Data-Efficient Multi-Domain Stance Detection</i>	
Erik Arakelyan, Arnav Arora and Isabelle Augenstein .....	13448
<i>DiSCoMaT: Distantly Supervised Composition Extraction from Tables in Materials Science Articles</i>	
Tanishq Gupta, Mohd Zaki, Devanshi Khatsuriya, Kausik Hira, N M Anoop Krishnan and Mau-sam .....	13465
<i>Self-Instruct: Aligning Language Models with Self-Generated Instructions</i>	
Yizhong Wang, Yeganeh Kordi, Swaroop Mishra, Alisa Liu, Noah A. Smith, Daniel Khashabi and Hannaneh Hajishirzi .....	13484
<i>Disentangled Phonetic Representation for Chinese Spelling Correction</i>	
Zihong Liang, Xiaojun Quan and Qifan Wang .....	13509
<i>Dissecting Transformer Length Extrapolation via the Lens of Receptive Field Analysis</i>	
Ta-Chung Chi, Ting-Han Fan, alexander rudnicky and Peter J Ramadge .....	13522
<i>CHBias: Bias Evaluation and Mitigation of Chinese Conversational Language Models</i>	
Jiaxu Zhao, Meng Fang, Zijing Shi, Yitong Li, Ling Chen and Mykola Pechenizkiy .....	13538

<i>Learning New Skills after Deployment: Improving open-domain internet-driven dialogue with human feedback</i>	Jing Xu, Megan Ung, Mojtaba Komeili, Kushal Arora, Y-Lan Boureau and Jason Weston .	13557
<i>Uncovering and Categorizing Social Biases in Text-to-SQL</i>	Yan Liu, Yan Gao, Zhe Su, Xiaokang Chen, Elliott Ash and Jian-Guang LOU.....	13573
<i>On the Compositional Generalization in Versatile Open-domain Dialogue</i>	Tingchen Fu, Xueliang Zhao, Lemao Liu and Rui Yan .....	13585
<i>What is the Real Intention behind this Question? Dataset Collection and Intention Classification</i>	Maryam Sadat Mirzaei, Kourosh Meshgi and Satoshi Sekine .....	13606
<i>Conjunct Resolution in the Face of Verbal Omissions</i>	Royi Rassin, Yoav Goldberg and Reut Tsarfaty .....	13623
<i>Training Models to Generate, Recognize, and Reframe Unhelpful Thoughts</i>	Mounica Maddela, Megan Ung, Jing Xu, Andrea Madotto, Heather M Foran and Y-Lan Boureau	13641
<i>Learning In-context Learning for Named Entity Recognition</i>	Jiawei Chen, Yaojie Lu, Hongyu Lin, Jie Lou, Wei Jia, Dai Dai, Hua Wu, Boxi Cao, Xianpei Han and Le Sun .....	13661
<i>Holistic Prediction on a Time-Evolving Attributed Graph</i>	Shohei Yamasaki, Yuya Sasaki, Panagiotis Karras and Makoto Onizuka .....	13676
<i>Modeling Instance Interactions for Joint Information Extraction with Neural High-Order Conditional Random Field</i>	Zixia Jia, Zhaohui Yan, Wenjuan Han, Zilong Zheng and Kewei Tu .....	13695
<i>Training Trajectories of Language Models Across Scales</i>	Mengzhou Xia, Mikel Artetxe, Chunting Zhou, Xi Victoria Lin, Ramakanth Pasunuru, Danqi Chen, Luke Zettlemoyer and Veselin Stoyanov .....	13711
<i>A Diverse Set of Freely Available Linguistic Resources for Turkish</i>	Duygu ALTINOK.....	13739
<i>Measuring Consistency in Text-based Financial Forecasting Models</i>	Linyi Yang, Yingpeng Ma and Yue Zhang .....	13751
<i>Optimal Transport for Unsupervised Hallucination Detection in Neural Machine Translation</i>	Nuno M. Guerreiro, Pierre Colombo, Pablo Piantanida and André Martins .....	13766
<i>RankCSE: Unsupervised Sentence Representations Learning via Learning to Rank</i>	Jiduan Liu, Jiahao Liu, Qifan Wang, Jingang Wang, Wei Wu, Yunsen Xian, Dongyan Zhao, Kai Chen and Rui Yan .....	13785
<i>Entailment as Robust Self-Learner</i>	Jiaxin Ge, Hongyin Luo, Yoon Kim and James Glass .....	13803
<i>ReCode: Robustness Evaluation of Code Generation Models</i>	Shiqi Wang, Zheng Li, Haifeng Qian, Chenghao Yang, Zijian Wang, Mingyue Shang, Varun Kumar, Samson Tan, Baishakhi Ray, Parminder Bhatia, Ramesh Nallapati, Murali Krishna Ramanathan, Dan Roth and Bing Xiang .....	13818

<i>EPIC: Multi-Perspective Annotation of a Corpus of Irony</i>	
Simona Frenda, Alessandro Pedrani, Valerio Basile, Soda Marem Lo, Alessandra Teresa Cignarella, Raffaella Panizzon, Cristina Marco, Bianca Scarlini, Viviana Patti, Cristina Bosco and Davide Bernardi . . . . .	13844
<i>Dialogue Summarization with Static-Dynamic Structure Fusion Graph</i>	
Shen Gao, Xin Cheng, Mingzhe Li, Xiuying Chen, Jinpeng Li, Dongyan Zhao and Rui Yan	13858
<i>Large-Scale Correlation Analysis of Automated Metrics for Topic Models</i>	
Jia Peng Lim and Hady Lauw . . . . .	13874
<i>U-CREAT: Unsupervised Case Retrieval using Events extrAction</i>	
Abhinav Joshi, Akshat Sharma, Sai Kiran Tanikella and Ashutosh Modi . . . . .	13899
<i>ArgAnalysis35K : A large-scale dataset for Argument Quality Analysis</i>	
Omkar Jayant Joshi, Priya N Pitre and Yashodhara Haribhakta . . . . .	13916
<i>Reference Matters: Benchmarking Factual Error Correction for Dialogue Summarization with Fine-grained Evaluation Framework</i>	
Mingqi Gao, Xiaojun Wan, Jia Su, Zhefeng Wang and baoxing Huai . . . . .	13932
<i>Minding Language Models' (Lack of) Theory of Mind: A Plug-and-Play Multi-Character Belief Tracker</i>	
Melanie Sclar, Sachin Kumar, Peter West, Alane Suhr, Yejin Choi and Yulia Tsvetkov . . . . .	13960
<i>Don't Retrain, Just Rewrite: Countering Adversarial Perturbations by Rewriting Text</i>	
Ashim Gupta, Carter Wood Blum, Temma Choji, Yingjie Fei, Shalin Shah, Alakananda Vempala and Vivek Srikumar . . . . .	13981
<i>Aggregating Multiple Heuristic Signals as Supervision for Unsupervised Automated Essay Scoring</i>	
Cong Wang, Zhiwei Jiang, Yafeng Yin, Zifeng Cheng, Shiping Ge and Qing Gu . . . . .	13999
<i>Mitigating Label Biases for In-context Learning</i>	
Yu Fei, Yifan Hou, Zeming Chen and Antoine Bosselut . . . . .	14014
<i>QUEST: A Retrieval Dataset of Entity-Seeking Queries with Implicit Set Operations</i>	
Chaitanya Malaviya, Peter Shaw, Ming-Wei Chang, Kenton Lee and Kristina Toutanova . . . . .	14032
<i>Dynamic Heterogeneous-Graph Reasoning with Language Models and Knowledge Representation Learning for Commonsense Question Answering</i>	
Yujie Wang, Hu Zhang, Jiye Liang and Ru Li . . . . .	14048
<i>Do You Hear The People Sing? Key Point Analysis via Iterative Clustering and Abstractive Summarisation</i>	
Hao Li, Viktor Schlegel, Riza Batista-Navarro and Goran Nenadic . . . . .	14064
<i>Ambiguous Learning from Retrieval: Towards Zero-shot Semantic Parsing</i>	
Shan Wu, Chunlei Xin, Hongyu Lin, Xianpei Han, Cao Liu, Jiansong Chen, Fan Yang, Guanglu Wan and Le Sun . . . . .	14081
<i>Explicit Syntactic Guidance for Neural Text Generation</i>	
Yafu Li, Leyang Cui, Jianhao Yan, Yongjing Yin, Wei Bi, Shuming Shi and Yue Zhang . . . . .	14095
<i>What does a Text Classifier Learn about Morality? An Explainable Method for Cross-Domain Comparison of Moral Rhetoric</i>	
Enrico Liscio, Oscar Araque, Lorenzo Gatti, Ionut L. Constantinescu, Catholijn M Jonker, Kyriaki Kalimeri and Pradeep Kumar Murukannaiah . . . . .	14113

<i>Graph-based Relation Mining for Context-free Out-of-vocabulary Word Embedding Learning</i>	14133
Ziran Liang, Yuyin Lu, HeGang Chen and Yanghui Rao .....	
<i>Multimodal Persona Based Generation of Comic Dialogs</i>	14150
Harsh Agrawal, Aditya M. Mishra, Manish Gupta and Mausam - .....	
<i>LLM-Blender: Ensembling Large Language Models with Pairwise Ranking and Generative Fusion</i>	14165
Dongfu Jiang, Xiang Ren and Bill Yuchen Lin .....	
<i>Seen to Unseen: Exploring Compositional Generalization of Multi-Attribute Controllable Dialogue Generation</i>	14179
Weihao Zeng, Lulu Zhao, Keqing He, Ruotong Geng, Jingang Wang, Wei Wu and Weiran Xu	
<i>Generating Structured Pseudo Labels for Noise-resistant Zero-shot Video Sentence Localization</i>	14197
Minghang Zheng, Shaogang Gong, Hailin Jin, Yuxin Peng and Yang Liu .....	
<i>IndicMT Eval: A Dataset to Meta-Evaluate Machine Translation Metrics for Indian Languages</i>	14210
Ananya Sai B, Tanay Dixit, Vignesh Nagarajan, Anoop Kunchukuttan, Pratyush Kumar, Mitesh M. Khapra and Raj Dabre .....	
<i>Weaker Than You Think: A Critical Look at Weakly Supervised Learning</i>	14229
Dawei Zhu, Xiaoyu Shen, Marius Mosbach, Andreas Joseph Stephan and Dietrich Klakow	
<i>Prompt Tuning Pushes Farther, Contrastive Learning Pulls Closer: A Two-Stage Approach to Mitigate Social Biases</i>	14254
Yingji Li, Mengnan Du, Xin Wang and Ying Wang .....	
<i>Towards Understanding Omission in Dialogue Summarization</i>	14268
Yicheng Zou, Kaitao Song, Xu Tan, Zhongkai Fu, Qi Zhang, Dongsheng Li and Tao Gui ..	
<i>Python Code Generation by Asking Clarification Questions</i>	14287
Haau-Sing (Xiaocheng) Li, Mohsen Mesgar, André Martins and Iryna Gurevych .....	
<i>A Compare-and-contrast Multistage Pipeline for Uncovering Financial Signals in Financial Reports</i>	14307
Jia-Huei Ju, Yu-Shiang Huang, Cheng-Wei Lin, Che Lin and Chuan-Ju Wang .....	
<i>Improving the robustness of NLI models with minimax training</i>	14322
Michalis Korakakis and Andreas Vlachos .....	
<i>USSA: A Unified Table Filling Scheme for Structured Sentiment Analysis</i>	14340
Zepeng Zhai, Hao Chen, Ruifan Li and Xiaojie WANG .....	
<i>PAD-Net: An Efficient Framework for Dynamic Networks</i>	14354
Shuai He, Liang Ding, Daize Dong, Boan Liu, Fuqiang Yu and Dacheng Tao .....	
<i>Resolving Ambiguities in Text-to-Image Generative Models</i>	14367
Ninareh Mehrabi, Palash Goyal, Apurv Verma, Jwala Dhamala, Varun Kumar, Qian Hu, Kai-Wei Chang, Richard Zemel, Aram Galstyan and Rahul Gupta .....	
<i>Knowledge Unlearning for Mitigating Privacy Risks in Language Models</i>	14389
Joel Jang, Dongkeun Yoon, Sohee Yang, Sungmin Cha, Moontae Lee, Lajanugen Logeswaran and Minjoon Seo .....	
<i>Unnatural Instructions: Tuning Language Models with (Almost) No Human Labor</i>	14409
Or Honovich, Thomas Scialom, Omer Levy and Timo Schick .....	

<i>To Adapt or to Annotate: Challenges and Interventions for Domain Adaptation in Open-Domain Question Answering</i>	Dheeru Dua, Emma Strubell, Sameer Singh and Pat Verga .....	14429
<i>A Survey for Efficient Open Domain Question Answering</i>	Qin Zhang, Shangsi Chen, Dongkuan Xu, Qingqing Cao, Xiaojun Chen, Trevor Cohn and Meng Fang .....	14447
<i>Script Normalization for Unconventional Writing of Under-Resourced Languages in Bilingual Communities</i>	Sina Ahmadi and Antonios Anastasopoulos .....	14466
<i>Compositional Generalization without Trees using Multiset Tagging and Latent Permutations</i>	Matthias Lindemann, Alexander Koller and Ivan Titov .....	14488
<i>ManagerTower: Aggregating the Insights of Uni-Modal Experts for Vision-Language Representation Learning</i>	Xiao Xu, Bei Li, Chenfei Wu, Shao-Yen Tseng, Anahita Bhiwandiwalla, Shachar Rosenman, Vasudev Lal, Wanxiang Che and Nan Duan .....	14507
<i>Finding the Pillars of Strength for Multi-Head Attention</i>	Jinjie Ni, Rui Mao, Zonglin Yang, Han Lei and Erik Cambria .....	14526
<i>Jointprop: Joint Semi-supervised Learning for Entity and Relation Extraction with Heterogeneous Graph-based Propagation</i>	yandan zheng, Anran Hao and Anh Tuan Luu .....	14541
<i>Reasoning over Hierarchical Question Decomposition Tree for Explainable Question Answering</i>	Jiajie Zhang, Shulin Cao, Tingjian Zhang, Xin Lv, Juanzi Li, Lei Hou, Jiaxin Shi and Qi Tian	14556
<i>Faking Fake News for Real Fake News Detection: Propaganda-Loaded Training Data Generation</i>	Kung-Hsiang Huang, Kathleen McKeown, Preslav Nakov, Yejin Choi and Heng Ji .....	14571
<i>A Length-Extrapolatable Transformer</i>	Yutao Sun, Li Dong, Barun Patra, Shuming Ma, Shaohan Huang, Alon Benhaim, Vishrav Chaudhary, Xia Song and Furu Wei .....	14590
<i>A Survey of Deep Learning for Mathematical Reasoning</i>	Pan Lu, Liang Qiu, Wenhao Yu, Sean Welleck and Kai-Wei Chang .....	14605
<i>A Systematic Study of Knowledge Distillation for Natural Language Generation with Pseudo-Target Training</i>	Nitay Calderon, Subhabrata Mukherjee, Roi Reichart and Amir Kantor .....	14632
<i>Vision Language Pre-training by Contrastive Learning with Cross-Modal Similarity Regulation</i>	Chaoya Jiang, Wei Ye, Haiyang Xu, Songfang Huang, Fei Huang and Shikun Zhang .....	14660
<i>Tell2Design: A Dataset for Language-Guided Floor Plan Generation</i>	Sicong Leng, Yang Zhou, Mohammed Haroon Dupty, Wee Sun Lee, Sam C Joyce and Wei Lu	14680
<i>Are Human Explanations Always Helpful? Towards Objective Evaluation of Human Natural Language Explanations</i>	Bingsheng Yao, Prithviraj Sen, Lucian Popa, James Hendler and Dakuo Wang .....	14698

<i>Rethinking Annotation: Can Language Learners Contribute?</i>	
Haneul Yoo, Rifki Afina Putri, Changyoon Lee, Youngin Lee, So-Yeon Ahn, Dongyeop Kang and Alice Oh .....	14714
<i>Information Screening whilst Exploiting! Multimodal Relation Extraction with Feature Denoising and Multimodal Topic Modeling</i>	
Shengqiong Wu, Hao Fei, Yixin Cao, Lidong Bing and Tat-Seng Chua .....	14734
<i>MultiEMO: An Attention-Based Correlation-Aware Multimodal Fusion Framework for Emotion Recognition in Conversations</i>	
Tao Shi and Shao-Lun Huang .....	14752
<i>Learning Language-Specific Layers for Multilingual Machine Translation</i>	
Telmo Pires, Robin M. Schmidt, Yi-Hsiu Liao and Stephan Peitz .....	14767
<i>Personality Understanding of Fictional Characters during Book Reading</i>	
Mo Yu, Jiangnan Li, Shunyu Yao, Wenjie Pang, Xiaochen Zhou, Zhou Xiao, Fandong Meng and Jie Zhou .....	14784
<i>StoryTrans: Non-Parallel Story Author-Style Transfer with Discourse Representations and Content Enhancing</i>	
Xuekai Zhu, Jian Guan, Minlie Huang and Juan Liu .....	14803
<i>Towards Benchmarking and Improving the Temporal Reasoning Capability of Large Language Models</i>	
Qingyu Tan, Hwee Tou Ng and Lidong Bing .....	14820
<i>Finding the SWEET Spot: Analysis and Improvement of Adaptive Inference in Low Resource Settings</i>	
Daniel Rotem, Michael Hassid, Jonathan Mamou and Roy Schwartz .....	14836
<i>Large Language Models Are Reasoning Teachers</i>	
Namgyu Ho, Laura Schmid and Se-Young Yun .....	14852
<i>Abductive Commonsense Reasoning Exploiting Mutually Exclusive Explanations</i>	
Wenting Zhao, Justin Chiu, Claire Cardie and Alexander Rush .....	14883
<i>PESCO: Prompt-enhanced Self Contrastive Learning for Zero-shot Text Classification</i>	
Yau-Shian Wang, Ta-Chung Chi, Ruohong Zhang and YIMING YANG .....	14897
<i>Visually-augmented pretrained language models for NLP tasks without images</i>	
Hangyu Guo, Kun Zhou, Wayne Xin Zhao, Qinyu Zhang and Ji-Rong Wen .....	14912
<i>Using counterfactual contrast to improve compositional generalization for multi-step quantitative reasoning</i>	
Armineh Nourbakhsh, Sameena Shah and Carolyn Rosé .....	14930
<i>A Needle in a Haystack: An Analysis of High-Agreement Workers on MTurk for Summarization</i>	
Lining Zhang, Simon Mille, Yufang Hou, Daniel Deutsch, Elizabeth Clark, Yixin Liu, Saad Mahmood, Sebastian Gehrmann, Miruna Adriana Clinciu, Khyathi Raghavi Chandu and João Sedoc	14944
<i>TAVT: Towards Transferable Audio-Visual Text Generation</i>	
Wang Lin, Tao Jin, Wenwen Pan, Linjun Li, Xize Cheng, Ye Wang and Zhou Zhao .....	14983
<i>MeetingQA: Extractive Question-Answering on Meeting Transcripts</i>	
Archiki Prasad, Trung Bui, Seunghyun Yoon, Hanieh Deilamsalehy, Franck Dernoncourt and Mohit Bansal .....	15000
<i>FERMAT: An Alternative to Accuracy for Numerical Reasoning</i>	
Jasivan Alex Sivakumar and Nafise Sadat Moosavi .....	15026

<i>Don't Forget Your ABC's: Evaluating the State-of-the-Art in Chat-Oriented Dialogue Systems</i>	15044
Sarah E. Finch, James D. Finch and Jinho D. Choi .....	
<i>Decoder Tuning: Efficient Language Understanding as Decoding</i>	15072
Ganqu CUI, Wentao Li, Ning Ding, Longtao Huang, Zhiyuan Liu and Maosong Sun .....	
<i>The KITMUS Test: Evaluating Knowledge Integration from Multiple Sources</i>	15088
Akshatha Arodi, Martin Pömsl, Kaheer Suleman, Adam Trischler, Alexandra Olteanu and Jackie Chi Kit Cheung .....	
<i>CREST: A Joint Framework for Rationalization and Counterfactual Text Generation</i>	15109
Marcos Treviso, Alexis Ross, Nuno M. Guerreiro and André Martins .....	
<i>Towards Unifying Multi-Lingual and Cross-Lingual Summarization</i>	15127
Jiaan Wang, Fandong Meng, Duo Zheng, Yunlong Liang, Zhixu Li, Jianfeng Qu and Jie Zhou .....	
<i>On Improving Summarization Factual Consistency from Natural Language Feedback</i>	15144
Yixin Liu, Budhaditya Deb, Milagro Teruel, Aaron L Halfaker, Dragomir Radev and Ahmed Hassan Awadallah .....	
<i>From Dogwhistles to Bullhorns: Unveiling Coded Rhetoric with Language Models</i>	15162
Julia Mendelsohn, Ronan Le Bras, Yejin Choi and Maarten Sap .....	
<i>Exploring Large Language Models for Classical Philology</i>	15181
Frederick Riemenschneider and Anette Frank .....	
<i>LayoutMask: Enhance Text-Layout Interaction in Multi-modal Pre-training for Document Understanding</i>	15200
Yi Tu, Ya Guo, Huan Chen and jinyang tang .....	
<i>Hearing Lips in Noise: Universal Viseme-Phoneme Mapping and Transfer for Robust Audio-Visual Speech Recognition</i>	15213
Yuchen Hu, Ruizhe Li, Chen Chen, Chengwei Qin, Qiu-Shi Zhu and Eng Siong Chng .....	
<i>An Extensible Plug-and-Play Method for Multi-Aspect Controllable Text Generation</i>	15233
Xuancheng Huang, Zijun Liu, Peng Li, Tao Li, Maosong Sun and Yang Liu .....	
<i>Double-Branch Multi-Attention based Graph Neural Network for Knowledge Graph Completion</i>	15257
Hongcai Xu, Junpeng Bao and Wenbo Liu .....	
<i>Dual Cache for Long Document Neural Coreference Resolution</i>	15272
Qipeng Guo, Xiangkun Hu, Yue Zhang, Xipeng Qiu and Zheng Zhang .....	
<i>Knowledge Transfer in Incremental Learning for Multilingual Neural Machine Translation</i>	15286
Kaiyu Huang, Peng Li, Jin Ma, Ting Yao and Yang Liu .....	
<i>DisorBERT: A Double Domain Adaptation Model for Detecting Signs of Mental Disorders in Social Media</i>	15305
Mario Ezra Aragon, Adrian Pastor Lopez Monroy, Luis C Gonzalez, David E. Losada and Manuel Montes .....	
<i>Toward Interactive Dictation</i>	15319
Belinda Z. Li, Jason Eisner, Adam Pauls and Sam Thomson .....	
<i>CodeIE: Large Code Generation Models are Better Few-Shot Information Extractors</i>	15339
Peng Li, Tianxiang Sun, Qiong Tang, Hang Yan, Yuanbin Wu, Xuanjing Huang and Xipeng Qiu .....	

<i>Beyond English-Centric Bitexts for Better Multilingual Language Representation Learning</i>	
Barun Patra, Saksham Singhal, Shaohan Huang, Zewen Chi, Li Dong, Furu Wei, Vishrav Chaudhary and Xia Song . . . . .	15354
<i>Bridging The Gap: Entailment Fused-T5 for Open-retrieval Conversational Machine Reading Comprehension</i>	
Xiao Zhang, Heyan Huang, Zewen Chi and Xian-Ling Mao . . . . .	15374
<i>LiveChat: A Large-Scale Personalized Dialogue Dataset Automatically Constructed from Live Streaming</i>	
Jingsheng Gao, Yixin Lian, Ziyi Zhou, yuzhuo fu and Baoyuan Wang . . . . .	15387
<i>Prompting PaLM for Translation: Assessing Strategies and Performance</i>	
David Vilar, Markus Freitag, Colin Cherry, Jiaming Luo, Viresh Ratnakar and George Foster	
15406	
<i>Exploring Lottery Prompts for Pre-trained Language Models</i>	
Yulin Chen, Ning Ding, Xiaobin Wang, Shengding Hu, Haitao Zheng, Zhiyuan Liu and Pengjun Xie . . . . .	15428
<i>A Facial Expression-Aware Multimodal Multi-task Learning Framework for Emotion Recognition in Multi-party Conversations</i>	
Wenjie Zheng, Jianfei Yu, Rui Xia and Shijin Wang . . . . .	15445
<i>TeAST: Temporal Knowledge Graph Embedding via Archimedean Spiral Timeline</i>	
Jiang Li, Xiangdong Su and Guanglai Gao . . . . .	15460
<i>Human Inspired Progressive Alignment and Comparative Learning for Grounded Word Acquisition</i>	
Yuwei Bao, Barrett Martin Lattimer and Joyce Chai . . . . .	15475
<i>Conjunct Lengths in English, Dependency Length Minimization, and Dependency Structure of Coordination</i>	
Adam Przeźiórkowski and Michał Woźniak . . . . .	15494
<i>LeXFiles and LegalLAMA: Facilitating English Multinational Legal Language Model Development</i>	
Ilias Chalkidis, Nicolas Garneau, Catalina Goanta, Daniel Katz and Anders Søgaard . . . . .	15513
<i>Revisiting Commonsense Reasoning in Machine Translation: Training, Evaluation and Challenge</i>	
Xuebo Liu, Yutong Wang, Derek F. Wong, Runzhe Zhan, Liangxuan Yu and Min Zhang . . . . .	15536
<i>NOTABLE: Transferable Backdoor Attacks Against Prompt-based NLP Models</i>	
Kai Mei, Zheng Li, Zhenting Wang, Yang Zhang and Shiqing Ma . . . . .	15551
<i>Revisiting Relation Extraction in the era of Large Language Models</i>	
Somin Wadhwa, Silvio Amir and Byron C. Wallace . . . . .	15566
<i>Pre-trained Language Models Can be Fully Zero-Shot Learners</i>	
Xuandong Zhao, Siqi Ouyang, Zhiguo Yu, Ming Wu and Lei Li . . . . .	15590
<i>Can Large Language Models Be an Alternative to Human Evaluations?</i>	
Cheng-Han Chiang and Hung-yi Lee . . . . .	15607
<i>HyperMixer: An MLP-based Low Cost Alternative to Transformers</i>	
Florian Mai, Arnaud Pannatier, Fabio J Fehr, Haolin Chen, Francois Marelli, Francois Fleuret and James Henderson . . . . .	15632

<i>Unity: Two-pass Direct Speech-to-speech Translation with Discrete Units</i>	
Hirofumi Inaguma, Sravya Popuri, Ilia Kulikov, Peng-Jen Chen, Changhan Wang, Yu-An Chung, Yun Tang, Ann Lee, Shinji Watanabe and Juan Pino .....	15655
<i>Estimating the Uncertainty in Emotion Attributes using Deep Evidential Regression</i>	
Wen Wu, Chao Zhang and Philip C. Woodland.....	15681
<i>Annotation-Inspired Implicit Discourse Relation Classification with Auxiliary Discourse Connective Generation</i>	
Wei Liu and Michael Strube .....	15696
<i>Plug-and-Play Document Modules for Pre-trained Models</i>	
Chaojun Xiao, Zhengyan Zhang, Xu Han, Chi-Min Chan, Yankai Lin, Zhiyuan Liu, xiangyang li, Zhonghua Li, Zhao Cao and Maosong Sun .....	15713
<i>An Empirical Analysis of Parameter-Efficient Methods for Debiasing Pre-Trained Language Models</i>	
Zhongbin Xie and Thomas Lukasiewicz.....	15730
<i>Two-Stage Fine-Tuning for Improved Bias and Variance for Large Pretrained Language Models</i>	
Lijing Wang, Yingya Li, Timothy A Miller, Steven Bethard and Guergana Savova .....	15746
<i>A Comparative Study on the Impact of Model Compression Techniques on Fairness in Language Models</i>	
Krithika Ramesh, Arnav Chavan, Shrey Pandit and Sunayana Sitaram .....	15762
<i>Ranking-Enhanced Unsupervised Sentence Representation Learning</i>	
Yeon Seonwoo, Guoyin Wang, Changmin Seo, Sajal Choudhary, Jiwei Li, Xiang Li, Puyang Xu, Sung hyun Park and Alice Oh.....	15783
<i>To Revise or Not to Revise: Learning to Detect Improvable Claims for Argumentative Writing Support</i>	
Gabriella Skitalinskaya and Henning Wachsmuth .....	15799
<i>Human-in-the-loop Evaluation for Early Misinformation Detection: A Case Study of COVID-19 Treatments</i>	
Ethan Adrian Mendes, Yang Chen, Wei Xu and Alan Ritter .....	15817
<i>Composition-contrastive Learning for Sentence Embeddings</i>	
Sachin J. Chanchani and Ruihong Huang .....	15836
<i>Causes and Cures for Interference in Multilingual Translation</i>	
Uri Shaham, Maha Elbayad, Vedanuj Goswami, Omer Levy and Shruti Bhosale .....	15849
<i>Understanding and Bridging the Modality Gap for Speech Translation</i>	
Qingkai Fang and Yang Feng.....	15864
<i>Few-shot Reranking for Multi-hop QA via Language Model Prompting</i>	
Muhammad Khalifa, Lajanugen Logeswaran, Moontae Lee, Honglak Lee and Lu Wang ...	15882
<i>DICE: Data-Efficient Clinical Event Extraction with Generative Models</i>	
Mingyu Derek Ma, Alexander K Taylor, Wei Wang and Nanyun Peng .....	15898
<i>XSemPLR: Cross-Lingual Semantic Parsing in Multiple Natural Languages and Meaning Representations</i>	
Yusen Zhang, Jun Wang, Zhiguo Wang and Rui Zhang .....	15918
<i>INK: Injecting kNN Knowledge in Nearest Neighbor Machine Translation</i>	
Wenhao Zhu, Jingjing Xu, Shujian Huang, Lingpeng Kong and Jiajun CHEN .....	15948

<i>Uncertainty Guided Label Denoising for Document-level Distant Relation Extraction</i>	.....	15960
Qi Sun, Kun Huang, Xiaocui Yang, Pengfei Hong, Kun Zhang and Soujanya Poria .....		
<i>Cross-Modal Attribute Insertions for Assessing the Robustness of Vision-and-Language Learning</i>	.....	15974
Shivaen Ramshetty, Gaurav Verma and Srijan Kumar .....		
<i>Crosslingual Generalization through Multitask Finetuning</i>	.....	
Niklas Muennighoff, Thomas Wang, Lintang Sutawika, Adam Roberts, Stella Biderman, Teven Le Scao, M Saiful Bari, Sheng Shen, Zheng Xin Yong, Hailey Schoelkopf, Xiangru Tang, Dragomir Radev, Alham Fikri Aji, KHALID ALMUBARAK, Samuel Albanie, Zaid Alyafeai, Albert Webson, Edward Raff and Colin Raffel .....		15991
<i>Evaluate AMR Graph Similarity via Self-supervised Learning</i>	.....	16112
Ziyi Shou and Fangzhen Lin .....		
<i>Analyzing Transformers in Embedding Space</i>	.....	16124
Guy Dar, Mor Geva, Ankit Gupta and Jonathan Berant .....		
<i>Few-Shot Data-to-Text Generation via Unified Representation and Multi-Source Learning</i>	.....	
Alexander Hanbo Li, Mingyue Shang, Evangelia Spiliopoulou, Jie Ma, Patrick Ng, Zhiguo Wang, Bonan Min, William Yang Wang, Kathleen McKeown, Vittorio Castelli, Dan Roth and Bing Xiang		
16171		
<i>FactKG: Fact Verification via Reasoning on Knowledge Graphs</i>	.....	
Jiho Kim, Sungjin Park, Yeonsu Kwon, Yohan Jo, James Thorne and Edward Choi .....		16190
<i>DrBERT: A Robust Pre-trained Model in French for Biomedical and Clinical domains</i>	.....	
Yanis Labrak, Adrien Bazoge, Richard Dufour, Mickael Rouvier, Emmanuel Morin, Béatrice Daille and Pierre-Antoine Gourraud .....		16207
<i>Discriminative Reasoning with Sparse Event Representation for Document-level Event-Event Relation Extraction</i>	.....	
Changsen Yuan, Heyan Huang, Yixin Cao and Yonggang Wen .....		16222
<i>Facilitating Fine-grained Detection of Chinese Toxic Language: Hierarchical Taxonomy, Resources, and Benchmarks</i>	.....	
Junyu Lu, Bo Xu, Xiaokun Zhang, Changrong Min, Liang Yang and Hongfei LIN .....		16235
<i>SpeechMatrix: A Large-Scale Mined Corpus of Multilingual Speech-to-Speech Translations</i>	.....	
Paul-Ambroise Augustin Duquenne, Hongyu Gong, Ning Dong, Jingfei Du, Ann Lee, Vedanuj Goswami, Changhan Wang, Juan Pino, Benoît Sagot and Holger Schwenk .....		16251
<i>Character-Aware Models Improve Visual Text Rendering</i>	.....	
Rosanne Liu, Dan Garrette, Chitwan Saharia, William Chan, Adam Roberts, Sharan Narang, Irina Blok, RJ Mical, Mohammad Norouzi and Noah Constant .....		16270
<i>IDRISI-RA: The First Arabic Location Mention Recognition Dataset of Disaster Tweets</i>	.....	
Reem Suwaileh, Muhammad Imran and Tamer Elsayed .....		16298
<i>FSUIE: A Novel Fuzzy Span Mechanism for Universal Information Extraction</i>	.....	
Tianshuo Peng, Zuchao Li, Lefei Zhang, Bo Du and Hai Zhao .....		16318
<i>What Do NLP Researchers Believe? Results of the NLP Community Metasurvey</i>	.....	
Julian Michael, Ari Holtzman, Alicia Parrish, Aaron Mueller, Alex Wang, Angelica Chen, Divyam Madaan, Nikita Nangia, Richard Yuanzhe Pang, Jason Phang and Samuel R. Bowman .....		16334

<i>Prototype-Guided Pseudo Labeling for Semi-Supervised Text Classification</i>	Weiyi Yang, Richong Zhang, Junfan Chen, Lihong Wang and Jaein Kim.....	16369
<i>LENS: A Learnable Evaluation Metric for Text Simplification</i>	Mounica Maddela, Yao Dou, David Heineman and Wei Xu .....	16383
<i>MeetingBank: A Benchmark Dataset for Meeting Summarization</i>	Yebowen Hu, Timothy Jeewun Ganter, Hanieh Deilamsalehy, Franck Dernoncourt, Hassan Foroosh and Fei Liu .....	16409
<i>UniEX: An Effective and Efficient Framework for Unified Information Extraction via a Span-extractive Perspective</i>	yang ping, JunYu Lu, ruyi gan, Junjie Wang, Yuxiang Zhang, Pingjian Zhang and Jiaxing Zhang 16424	
<i>DEplain: A German Parallel Corpus with Intralingual Translations into Plain Language for Sentence and Document Simplification</i>	Regina Stodden, Omar Momen and Laura Kallmeyer .....	16441
<i>A Neural Divide-and-Conquer Reasoning Framework for Image Retrieval from Linguistically Complex Text</i>	Yunxin Li, Baotian Hu, Yuxin Ding, Lin Ma and Min Zhang .....	16464
<i>RARR: Researching and Revising What Language Models Say, Using Language Models</i>	Luyu Gao, Zhuyun Dai, Panupong Pasupat, Anthony Chen, Arun Tejasvi Chaganty, Yicheng Fan, Vincent Y Zhao, Ni Lao, Hongrae Lee, Da-Cheng Juan and Kelvin Guu .....	16477