

# Hongli Zhan

Ph.D. Student at UT Austin

Department of Linguistics  
The University of Texas at Austin  
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🌐 [Personal Website](#)  
🐙 [Github](#)

## Education

2021 – **Ph.D. in Computational Linguistics (Minor in Computer Science).**

Department of Linguistics, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX

- *Advisor:* Prof. [Junyi Jessy Li](#)

- *Qualifying Paper Readers:* Prof. [Junyi Jessy Li](#), Prof. [Desmond C. Ong](#), Prof. [David I. Beaver](#)

2017 – 2021 **B.A. in English Linguistics (Second Major in Law).**

School of Foreign Languages, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, China

## Research Appointments

Summer 2024 **(Incoming) Inclusive Language Technologies Intern.**

Tech for Justice group, IBM Research, Yorktown Heights, NY

- *Manager:* Dr. [Raya Horesh](#)

Fall 2021 – **Graduate Research Assistant.**

Department of Linguistics, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX

- *Supervisor:* Prof. [Junyi Jessy Li](#)

## Research Interests

The ambition of my Ph.D. research is to **build emotionally intelligent AI systems in a broader social context**. Specifically, I focus on Affective Computing, which tries to build NLP models with a deeper emotional understanding.

⇒ **EMNLP 2022 & ACL 2023:** We tapped into the questions of “How do people feel about and make sense of what took place in their lives during major social events?”, and proposed \*Emotion Detection and Trigger Summarization\*, a new task to detect perceived emotions in text automatically and abtractively summarize triggers of each emotion.

⇒ **EMNLP 2023 Findings:** Grounded in Psychology theories, my work further explored the capability of LLMs on complex emotional understanding tasks: are they able to assess and explain \*cognitive appraisals\* (how individuals subjectively interpret and evaluate a situation) that lead to diverse emotional experiences.

## Refereed Publications

\* denotes equal contributions

EMNLP 2023 (Findings) **Hongli Zhan**, Desmond C. Ong, and Junyi Jessy Li. Evaluating subjective cognitive appraisals of emotions from large language models. In Houda Bouamor, Juan Pino, and Kalika Bali, editors, *Findings of the Association for Computational Linguistics: EMNLP 2023*, pages 14418–14446, Singapore, December 2023. Association for Computational Linguistics.

ACL 2023 Tiberiu Sosea\*, **Hongli Zhan\***, Junyi Jessy Li, and Cornelia Caragea. Unsupervised extractive summarization of emotion triggers. In Anna Rogers, Jordan Boyd-Graber, and Naoaki Okazaki, editors, *Proceedings of the 61st Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics (Volume 1: Long Papers)*, pages 9550–9569, Toronto, Canada, July 2023. Association for Computational Linguistics.

EMNLP 2022 **Hongli Zhan\***, Tiberiu Sosea\*, Cornelia Caragea, and Junyi Jessy Li. Why do you feel this way? summarizing triggers of emotions in social media posts. In Yoav Goldberg, Zornitsa Kozareva, and Yue Zhang, editors, *Proceedings of the 2022 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing*, pages 9436–9453, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, December 2022. Association for Computational Linguistics.

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## Professional Service

**Reviewer**, *EMNLP 2023*, *ICRA 2024*.

**Student Volunteer**, *ACL 2023*.

Spring 2023 – **Organizer**, *Natural Language Learning Reading Group*, UT Austin.

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## Teaching Experience

The University of Texas at Austin

LIN 371 **Machine Learning for Text Analysis**, *Graduate Teaching Assistant*, Spring 2024.

Instructor: Prof. Junyi Jessy Li

LIN 306 **Intro to the Study of Language**, *Guest Lecturer*, Spring 2023.

Instructor: Seyeon Park

LIN 373N **Machine Learning Toolbox for Text Analysis**, *Guest Lecturer*, Fall 2022.

Instructor: Prof. Junyi Jessy Li

LIN 373N **Machine Learning Toolbox for Text Analysis**, *Graduate Teaching Assistant*, Fall 2022.

Instructor: Prof. Junyi Jessy Li

LIN 350 **Computational Semantics**, *Graduate Teaching Assistant*, Fall 2021.

Instructor: Prof. Katrin Erk

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## Mentoring

Fall 2023 – **Allen Zheng**, *B.S. in Computer Science (Turing Honors) & Mathematics*, UT Austin.

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## Fellowships & Awards

Fall 2023 **Professional Development Award for Attending EMNLP 2023**, *UT Austin*, 1,160 USD.

Fall 2022 **Professional Development Award for Attending EMNLP 2022**, *UT Austin*, 1,200 USD.

Spring 2022 **COLA Supplemental Graduate School Fellowship**, *UT Austin*, 5,000 USD.

2021 **Outstanding Graduate**, *Shanghai Jiao Tong University*.

2021 **Outstanding Undergraduate Thesis Award**, *Shanghai Jiao Tong University*.

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## Conference Presentations

ACL 2023 **Unsupervised Extractive Summarization of Emotion Triggers**, *Toronto, Canada*, presented in-person on July 11th, 2023.

EMNLP 2022 **Why Do You Feel This Way? Summarizing Triggers of Emotions in Social Media Posts**, *Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates*, presented in-person on Dec 9th, 2022.

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## Invited Talks

Oct 11, 2023 **Can I Cheer You Up? Psychologically-Grounded Emotional Support: Leveraging LLMs for Targeted Re-Appraisals**, *Computational Affective and Social Cognition Lab (CASCogLab)*, Department of Psychology, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX.

Feb 22, 2023 **An Introduction to Computational Linguistics**, *Westlake High School*, Austin, TX.

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## Open-Source Contributions

CovidET <https://github.com/honglizhan/CovidET>.

CovidET (**E**motions and their **T**riggers during **Covid**-19) is a dataset of 1,883 English Reddit posts related to COVID-19, which contains manual annotations of perceived emotions and abstractive summaries of their triggers described in the post.

CovidET-[EXT](https://github.com/tsosea2/CovidET-EXT) <https://github.com/tsosea2/CovidET-EXT>.

EXT CovidET-EXT is a dataset that augments Zhan et al. (2022)'s abstractive dataset CovidET (in the context of the COVID-19 crisis) with extractive triggers. The result is a dataset of 1,883 Reddit posts about the COVID-19 pandemic, manually annotated with 7 fine-grained emotions (from CovidET) and their corresponding **extractive** triggers.

CovidET-[Appraisals](https://github.com/honglizhan/CovidET-Appraisals-Public) <https://github.com/honglizhan/CovidET-Appraisals-Public>.

Appraisals CovidET-Appraisals is the most comprehensive dataset to-date that assesses 24 cognitive appraisal dimensions of emotions, each with a natural language rationale, across 241 Reddit posts. CovidET-Appraisals presents an ideal testbed to evaluate the ability of large language models — excelling at a wide range of NLP tasks — to automatically assess and explain cognitive appraisals.

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## Language Skills

Mandarin **Native.**

English **Near-Native.**

- TOEFL iBT: 112/120
- GRE: Verbal 162/170, Quantitative 167/170, Analytical Writing 5.0/6.0
- Test for English Majors Band 8 (TEM-8): Good
- Test for English Majors Band 4 (TEM-4): Excellent (90/100)

Japanese **Upper-Intermediate.**

- Japanese was taught as my Second Foreign Language course at SJTU

Italian **Intermediate.**