

# Hongli Zhan

Ph.D. Student at UT Austin

Department of Linguistics  
The University of Texas at Austin  
✉ [honglizhan@utexas.edu](mailto:honglizhan@utexas.edu)  
🌐 [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 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 *Findings of the Association for Computational Linguistics: EMNLP 2023*, 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 *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 *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.

## Professional Service & Research Appointments

**Reviewer**, [EMNLP 2023](#), [ICRA 2024](#).

**Student Volunteer**, [ACL 2023](#).

Spring 2023 – **Organizer**, [Natural Language Learning Reading Group](#), UT Austin.

Fall 2021 – **Graduate Research Assistant**, Supervised by Prof. [Junyi Jessy Li](#), UT Austin.

---

## Teaching Experience

### The University of Texas at Austin

- LIN 306 **Intro to the Study of Language**, *Guest Lecturer*, Spring 2023.  
LIN 373N **Machine Learning Toolbox for Text Analysis**, *Guest Lecturer*, Fall 2022.  
LIN 373N **Machine Learning Toolbox for Text Analysis**, *Graduate Teaching Assistant*, Fall 2022.  
LIN 350 **Computational Semantics**, *Graduate Teaching Assistant*, Fall 2021.

---

## Mentoring

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

---

## Fellowships & Awards

- 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*.

---

## 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.

---

## Open-Source Contributions

- CovidET <https://github.com/honglizhan/CovidET>.  
CovidET (Emotions and their Triggers 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>.  
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>.  
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.

---

## 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**.