

Hongli Zhan

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Education

2021 – Ph.D. in Computational Linguistics.

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

- Advisor: Dr. Junyi Jessy Li
- Committee: Dr. Desmond C. Ong, Dr. David I. Beaver, Dr. Kyle Mahowald

2017 – 2021 B.A. in English Linguistics.

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

Industry Experience

Summer 2025 Research Scientist Intern, IBM Research.

IBM Thomas J. Watson Research Center, Yorktown Heights, NY

- Manager: Dr. Raya Horesh; Mentors: Dr. Muneeza Azmat & Dr. Pin-Yu Chen
- Developed a scalable method for continuous safety governance of LLMs; the pipeline directly supports the safety and trustworthiness of IBM's [Granite](#) models
- Work in preparation for a first-authored paper & a first-authored U.S. patent

Summer 2024 Research Scientist Intern, IBM Research.

IBM Thomas J. Watson Research Center, Yorktown Heights, NY

- Manager: Dr. Raya Horesh; Mentors: Dr. Muneeza Azmat & Dr. Mikhail Yurochkin
- Designed and implemented SPRI, a context-aware, principle-guided framework that enables LLMs to achieve human-level alignment with minimal manual oversight; SPRI forms the core synthetic data generation pipeline for IBM's [Granite Guardian](#) models
- Work led to a first-authored paper at ICML 2025 [C6] & a first-authored U.S. patent [P1]

Refereed Publications

* denotes equal contributions

(C stands for conference publications, J for journals, and P for patents)

In Conference Proceedings

- [C6] 2025 **Hongli Zhan**, Muneeza Azmat, Raya Horesh, Junyi Jessy Li, and Mikhail Yurochkin. SPRI: Aligning large language models with context-situated principles. In *Proceedings of the 42nd International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML)*, 2025. [26.9% acceptance rate (3,260 out of 12,107 submissions)] [🔗](#)
- [C5] 2024 **Hongli Zhan**, Allen Zheng, Yoon Kyung Lee, Jina Suh, Junyi Jessy Li, and Desmond C. Ong. Large language models are capable of offering cognitive reappraisal, if guided. In *Proceedings of the 1st Conference on Language Modeling (COLM)*, 2024. [28.8% acceptance rate (299 out of 1,036 submissions)] [🔗](#)
- [C4] 2024 Yoon Kyung Lee, Jina Suh, **Hongli Zhan**, Junyi Jessy Li, and Desmond C. Ong. Large language models produce responses perceived to be empathic. In *Proceedings of the 12th IEEE International Conference on Affective Computing and Intelligent Interaction (ACII)*, 2024. [36.7% acceptance rate (44 out of 120 submissions)] [🔗](#)

- [C3] 2023 **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 (EMNLP Findings)*, pages 14418–14446, Singapore, December 2023. Association for Computational Linguistics. [45.4% acceptance rate (1,758 out of 3,868 submissions)] 
- [C2] 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) (ACL)*, pages 9550–9569, Toronto, Canada, July 2023. Association for Computational Linguistics. [23.5% acceptance rate (910 out of 3,872 submissions)] 
- [C1] 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 (EMNLP)*, pages 9436–9453, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, December 2022. Association for Computational Linguistics. [22.1% acceptance rate (715 out of 3,242 submissions)] 

Patents

- [P1] **Hongli Zhan**, Mikhail Yurochkin, Raya Horesh, Adriana Alvarado Garcia, Heloisa Caroline de Souza Pereira Candello, and Muneeza Azmat. Context-aware principle-guided (framework and system) for synthetic data generation. **U.S. Patent Application** [Filed and Pending].

Professional Activities

Organization and Service

2023 – 2024 **Organizer**, *Natural Language Learning Reading Group*, UT Austin.

Student Volunteer, *ACL 2023*.

Reviewing

2025 **Conference on Language Modeling**, (*COLM*).

2025 **Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics**, (*ACL*).

2024 **IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation**, (*ICRA*).

2023 **Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing**, (*EMNLP*).

Teaching Experience

The University of Texas at Austin

Fall 2024 **LIN 371: Machine Learning for Text Analysis**, *Guest Lecturer*.
Instructor: Prof. [Junyi Jessy Li](#)

Spring 2024 **LIN 371: Machine Learning for Text Analysis**, *Graduate Teaching Assistant*.
Instructor: Prof. [Junyi Jessy Li](#)

Spring 2023 **LIN 306: Intro to the Study of Language**, *Guest Lecturer*.
Instructor: Seyeon Park

Fall 2022 **LIN 373N: Machine Learning Toolbox for Text Analysis**, *Graduate Teaching Assistant*.
Instructor: Prof. [Junyi Jessy Li](#)

Fall 2021 **LIN 350: Computational Semantics**, *Graduate Teaching Assistant*.
Instructor: Prof. [Katrin Erk](#)

Mentoring

2023 – 2024 **Allen Zheng**, *B.S. in Computer Science (Turing Honors) & Mathematics*, UT Austin.

Fellowships & Awards

IBM Internal Awards

- May 2025 **Patent File Award**, *IBM Research*, 867 USD.
[Awards from The University of Texas at Austin](#)
- Fall 2024 **Professional Development Award for Attending COLM 2024**, *UT Austin*, 1,200 USD.
- 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.
[Awards from Shanghai Jiao Tong University](#)
- 2021 **Outstanding Graduate**, *Shanghai Jiao Tong University*.
- 2021 **Outstanding Undergraduate Thesis Award**, *Shanghai Jiao Tong University*.

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.