

# Hongli Zhan

Ph.D. Candidate, UT Austin

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## Education

Aug 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

Sep 2017 – **B.A. in English Linguistics.**

June 2021 School of Foreign Languages, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, China

## Industry Experience

Jan 2026 – **Research Scientist Intern (Part-Time), MBZUAI Institute of Foundation Models.**

May 2026 Silicon Valley Lab, Sunnyvale, CA

- Post-training

May 2025 – **Research Scientist Intern, IBM Research.**

Aug 2025 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

May 2024 – **Research Scientist Intern, IBM Research.**

Aug 2024 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.