

Break theme question: **What are you looking to get out of this class?**

What is NLP?

- Computer analysis of a natural language (wait, what's a natural language?)
 - answers the question “what is property z of language segment x?”
- Computer generation of a natural language
 - given context c (which includes instruction), produce appropriate natural language segment x
- Since this is all AI, we assume that a human can do the analysis and generation tasks we’re asking a computer to do; goal is to be suitably indistinguishable

What do we want NLP to do?

- ...you tell me!
- Chatbots
- Customer service agents
- Question Answering (search)
- Translation
- Grammar Correction
- Summarization
- Article/patent/report/fiction? Writing
- Opinion/sentiment analysis
- Essay evaluation/plagiarism detection
- Knowledge base construction
- Author identification

What is the purpose for teaching computers to do these things that humans can do?

How might NLP/CL research help us learn about language?

What will you learn in the class and how will you learn it?

- You are likely already good at class taking; as a PhD student, what’s most important now is learning how to conduct research in a complicated topic and then to write and speak at an academic level about that research. My job is to introduce you to tools you need to get started in the topic (here, NLP) and to guide you in the research, writing and speaking.
- Here is the general approach to the class:
 - The first five weeks will cover the basic tools you need to understand the majority of current and slightly older research and some experimentation and data fundamentals. You may have experienced parts of this in other ML/AI classes, but there will generally be an NLP “spin.”
 - Thereafter we’ll discuss the dominant NLP “fields” and “tasks” that are generally the settings for research products. There are various special topics, especially near the end, and there is some fluidity in what we cover so if you don’t see a topic you wanted to learn more about, let me know!

- Starting roughly in October, each class will begin with a 15 minute presentation by a student on a paper from this year's NAACL conference and a discussion of the paper.
- We'll take a break at about 11 each class, have a snack, and discuss a question I will prompt you with ahead of time.
- The class works better when you're engaged, interrupting me, asking questions, challenging my assertions, bringing up extra points from your own experience, etc.

Who am I?

- Research Associate Professor based at ISI (in Marina del Rey) – means I do more research, less teaching
- areas of interest: machine translation, multilinguality, low-resource issues, dialogue, game playing, automata theory, transfer learning
- I got my PhD here in 2010, I've been working here since 2014.

What other professor-types working at USC work in this space (there may be more than I have here so please correct me)?

- Mostly on campus
 - Xiang Ren
 - Shri Narayanan
 - Robin Jia
 - Jesse Thomason
 - Swabha Swayamdipta
 - Dani Yogatama
 - Morteza Dehghani
- Mostly at ISI (MdR)
 - Xuezhe Ma
 - Muhao Chen
 - Jerry Hobbs
 - Ulf Hermjakob
- Mostly at ICT
 - David Traum
 - Kallirroi Georgila
 - Jonathan Gratch
 - Andrew Gordon
 - Ron Artstein
- Mostly at ISI (Boston)
 - Elizabeth Boschee
 - Marjorie Freedman
 - Scott Miller
 - Ralph Weischedel

Who are you? In small groups of 2-3 find out about each other, then we'll reconvene and you'll

introduce **each other** to the rest of the class. Here are some things to tell us about the person you are introducing:

- What they like to be called
- What their research interests are
- What they find interesting about language, linguistics, NLP, etc
- Anything personal they feel comfortable sharing with the class

More logistics!

- If you stay actively engaged (ask questions and contribute to class and on piazza, get your work in on time, apply recommendations to how to improve in HWs/project) it's an easy A.
 - There is no punishment curve and there is always a reward curve (I have no problem with everyone getting an A if everyone deserves it)
 - If you are concerned about your grade, come and see us at office hours and we can assess how we think you're doing
 - Note the drop dates and how they mesh with assignment due dates; you can do an assignment early and have us look at it if you're concerned and a deadline is approaching: (This is for 2022)
 - 9/9: deadline to add/change to PNP/drop and get a refund (hw1 out but not yet due)
 - 10/7: deadline to withdraw w/o W (hw1 and project proposal should be graded; hw2 out but not yet due)
 - 11/11: drop deadline (hw1+2 graded, hw3 just submitted, project report v1 hopefully graded)
- Reading
 - Usually from the two (freely available) textbooks, maybe also some papers relevant to lecture
 - NLP moves fast – probably you don't want to buy any books
 - Eisenstein is in print but it was printed in 2019 and released in 2018; there's barely any transformer in it!
 - Jurafsky and Martin 3rd edition has been written and rewritten continuously; they no longer have an anticipated publication date!
 - Papers that are presented in class
 - Expected to be read before the class
 - I may ask questions, socratically (i.e. I call people out by name) – be prepared!
- Evaluation
 - Homework (30%)
 - Three of them, each 3 weeks long, each 10% of grade
 - In each, you will write the code for, train, and evaluate one or more NLP models. You will try to make the models better using ideas from
 - Write the code in python (scripts, not notebooks)
 - Write the report in LaTeX

- **Communication is most important** – reports should resemble a paper, addressing the research questions, how they were addressed, what the finding was. Tell a story of the research (not a log of the tasks you did!)
- Project (40%)
 - Proposal (5%), Report v1 (5%), presentation (10%), final report (20%)
 - Reproduction of a current year ACL paper (see project handout for details)
 - Must form groups – scoring is done for the whole group
- Class participation (30%)
 - Coming to class, asking questions, engaging on piazza in useful ways (10%)
 - Questions before in-class selected paper presentation, assigned questions during final project presentations; may be supplemented with in-class quizzes too! (10%, evenly divided)
 - Your in-class paper presentation (10%)
 - Presentation of a current year NAACL paper in 15 minute presentations
- Deadlines
 - Code and written work for homeworks, project proposal and report v1 due 23:59:59 AoE on announced due date
 - 20% off for every calendar day (AoE) thereafter; don't bother if it's >5 days late
 - For these items **only** you have four cumulative late days to be used as you like
 - If a project milestone is late, all group members are assessed late days (or deduction)
 - Final report is due at the announced final exam period time (check website) – no late days allowed
 - Piazza questions before paper presentation should be done the day prior to allow the presenter to be able to respond to them
 - In-person elements must be done in-person
- Extra credit vs extra mile
 - There is no extra credit in this class
 - You cannot get full credit on anything without “going the extra mile.” This means trying something novel, in addition to the requirements of the assignment (and along the same lines; examples will be suggested). It's not a box to tick – we will judge how much of an extra mile your ‘extra mile’ contributions are.
- Ethical participation in class
 - Read the USC honor code; it applies, and I will abide by it.
 - Respect others' opinions and backgrounds; honor requests and understand that you may cause offense without intending to – you still caused offense and you need to own and understand that. I have my own biases and may offend. It's up

to me to understand when I've done that and be up front about it but if you want to call me out on that I very much appreciate the assistance!

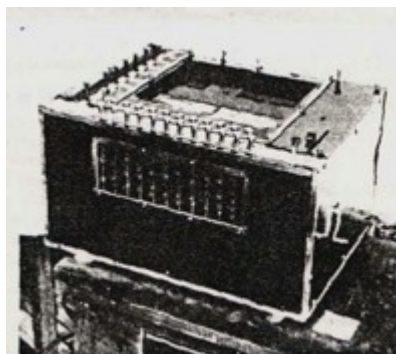
- All code and all writing must be your own and not copied from the web or any other person. Attempts to modify others' code or writing by changing small elements are easier to detect than you may think
- Everything you do in this class must be newly done for the class; you can't submit work you submitted elsewhere here. That's self-plagiarism and it's also plagiarism.
- If we have determined you have violated the honor code we will invoke punishments as deemed necessary; this can mean a zero on an assignment, a reduced letter grade in the class, and/or even a failing grade. Punishments can occur at any time after violations (usually they will occur at the worst possible time). I hate doing this but I will if necessary (ask around) – the consequences can be very severe!
- Office hours (2022)
 - Jon: 9-9:50 MW...right now SAL 311 but I want to find somewhere closer

Connections to other areas

- Machine Learning -- the biggie, now. NLP: ML is a tool we use. ML: NLP is a data set we use.
- Linguistics -- ML folks might think of this as 'guided search' both within a problem and when considering what the problems are. But also consider we are trying to understand language and can use NLP/CL techniques to do so
- Cognitive Science / Psychology -- see also Linguistics, but a level up. We are fascinated by humans' ability to learn language that is far better than computers' and we're not quite sure why this is. How do theories of learning in humans correlate with theories of humans in machines? If an adequate model can be built, that avoids the trouble that comes with doing HSR (especially when studying learning, which is often on young children). Currently
- information theory -- language is a means by which humans communicate and the communication capacity/compression/confusability of communications is baked in to our studies, particularly when discussing (cross-)entropy and mutual information. How much redundancy is naturally in our language stream? How much needs to be there? Does it matter when we shift modality?
- theory of computation -- very important for search over complex spaces (e.g. for a syntactic tree or semantic graph) and for recognizing what transformations are and are not possible. Strongly connected via chomsky hierarchy, of which we'll only talk a little
- data science, political science, etc. -- NLP: these are good subdomains to try our stuff. X science: NLP is a good tool to demonstrate my theories. Currently looking (in 2022) at using NLP to recognize and combat (e.g. state-sponsored) influence campaigns, en masse analysis of traits of different populations online, detection in bots
- Other areas you're interested in not covered here?

Super Brief and Selective History of NLP:

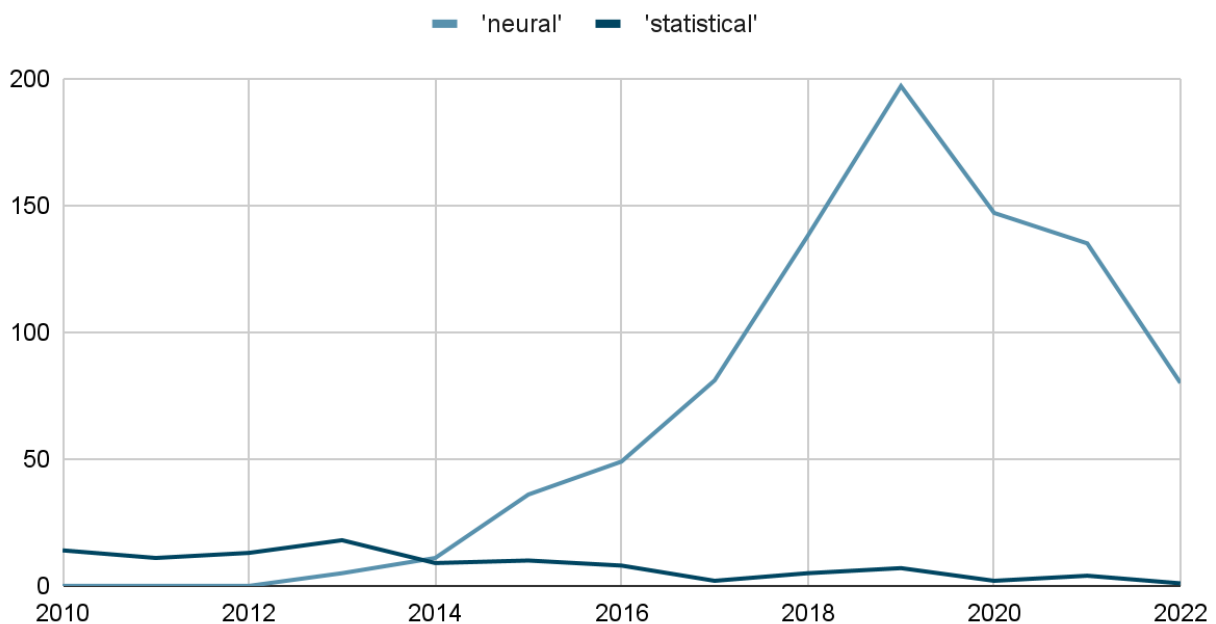
- NLP was indistinguishable from MT for a long time for some weird reason
- Athanasius Kircher -- 'polygraphy' (1630) for translation without understanding
 - side note: kircher is really weird guy! he
 - incorrectly deciphered hieroglyphics
 - Went into Vesuvius' erupting crater for his geology research
 - invented a cat piano
 - check him out at the Museum of Jurassic Technology just outside Culver City
- Becher mechanical meta-language for language-to-meaning (in the service of NLP): 1666
- Georges Artsruni mechanical brain (1930)
- Computers proposed for translation (1949...3 years after computer invented)
- ACL founded (as the "Association for Machine Translation") in 1962; produced ACL conference (since 1962 but records at <https://aclanthology.org/> go back to 1979) and CL journal (since 1975). EACL started in 1983, NAACL in 2000 but is merged with HLT which started in 1986. IJCNLP in 2005 merging with AACL in 2020. COLING started in the 60s? (1980 is the 8th, 1965 is the oldest in the anthology, it's roughly but not exactly every two years). It's all a bit confusing! EMNLP started in 1996; more below



- The US defense department has long had a desire to gain situational awareness, know what the Russians were saying, etc. So DARPA/ARPA/IARPA has always been part of the underlying funding and support of this work.

- Government programs tried (and still try) to get researchers to solve very complicated end-to-end tasks such as “extract all useful knowledge from ship-to-ship communications.” We have been breaking them down to their component parts, this leads to the tasks I’ll describe next
- Through the mid-1980s a CL/NLP paper would be a description of a system or a grammar or formalism along with, perhaps, some examples of what it could do/represent. Rule-based, by thinking carefully about the various ways, e.g. “a psychiatrist would respond to a paranoid patient” or “interpret this word problem about physics”
- Starting in the mid-1980s more attention was paid to corpus-based or statistical approaches that used data, learned probabilistic models, and actually started to work well on *unseen* data.
- Starting in the mid-2010s we were able to use GPUs to seriously train neural networks, getting often really nice results, and attracting more attention from big business. As data and compute availability have grown we can increasingly complete larger end-to-end tasks.

Count of word in ACL proceedings title



So can't we just use GPT-3 to do everything we want to do?

Create a list of three reasons why I want to study natural language processing:

1. I want to be able to develop systems that can automatically understand and respond to human language.
2. I want to be able to analyze large amounts of text data to extract useful information.
3. I want to be able to build chatbots and other conversational agents.

But also

Playground

If x is twice the square of 20 percent of y, and y is 45, what is x?

x is the square of 40.

And while it might work in some other languages too, it really starts to fall down hard! Plus, we don't quite know what is happening (even the authors don't). As context and information grow things start to get worse. We don't have a real end to end dialogue system that could have this conversation:

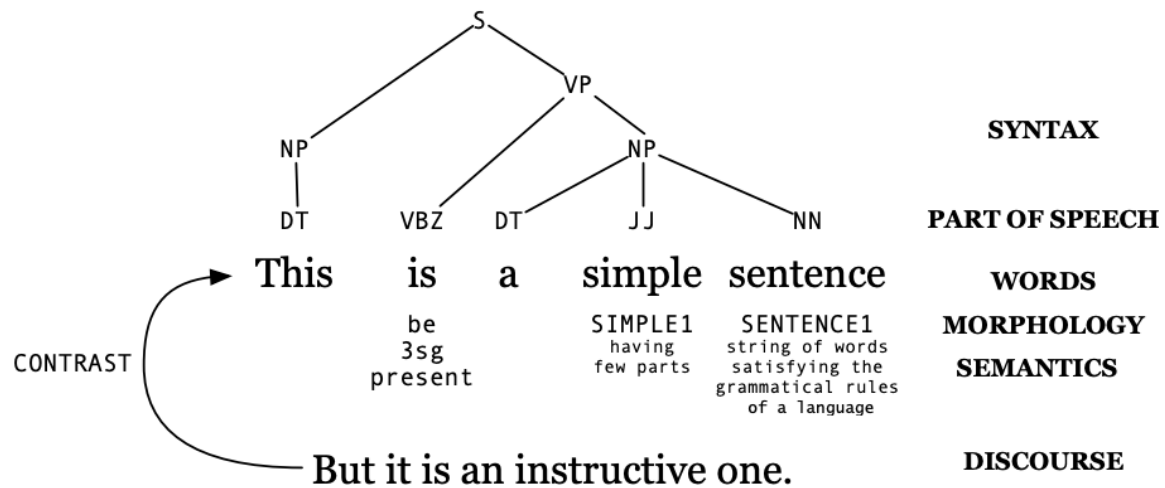
- Human: Can you get me a table at N/Naka tomorrow at 7?
- AI: How many?
- H: Four of us.
- A: Sorry, there's nothing at 7 PM. They have an opening at 10 PM.
- H: Ugh, that's sort of late. What about Sakura?
- A: Sakura has an opening at 9:30 PM.
- H: Can you email Brooke, Mike, and Liz, and ask if 9:30 is too late?
- A: OK, email sent.
- A: Liz says it's fine.
- H: OK, let's book the table at Sakura.
- A: OK, all set for 4 people at 9:30 PM.
- [some time later...]
- H: You know what, just take the N/Naka one at 10 PM.
- A: OK, N/Naka is booked at 10 PM for 4 people and I cancelled the reservation at Sakura.

[adapted from semantic machines website from ~ 2017]

We can do some of it though!

Why is NLP hard and interesting? Ambiguity. It exists at all levels, so let's discuss those levels.

Breakdown of parts:



[fig from Nathan Schneider. could also add dependency]

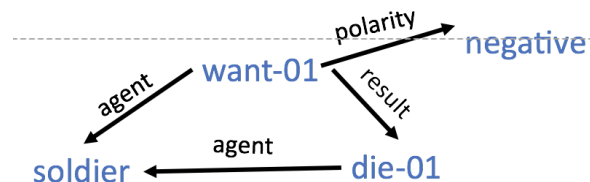
- pre-text (speech channel)
 - phonetics -- what mouth sound has been produced?
 - [l] = alveolar lateral approximant (lace)
 - [ɾ] = alveolar tap (race)
 - [r] = alveolar trill (rey (Spanish))
 - phonology -- what are the meaningfully distinct sounds (governed by each language)?
 - English: [R] vs. [r] conflated
 - Japanese: [R] vs. [r] vs. [l] conflated
 - Hindi: [d] (dental) vs. [dʱ] (dental, glottal) distinct
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindustani_phonology examples (retroflex are good ones to confuse my american ears)
 - example: ðɪs ɪz ə 'sɪmpl 'sentəns
- pre-text (vision channel)
 - orthography -- what makes a character? Particularly difficult when dealing with unknown writing set, especially handwritten:

4174 2384170727 2222508472 2147124240 130172224221052.
 212172522268' 701761227525246756 210726723805252 12160
 70171245213618' 240522250242 17422242210544 28'0244
 14425254 22024 617 70152-2562 130148258'242 72713621072
 12160144246472617130116252. 22246214 130174 2164 22424
 256254 13424647224052178256270 136238017172 82176472

lgdau cand qog 2 diox fobad
 del die floe cuag qollec qllodg zo
 follg aolaud cioe cuellg dau
 getand daz cu dazor cuad dad
 ollox cu aol dthor gol ad cuad
 cu qllcu cuag dau cuellg

- morphology -- what are the minimal meaning-laden parts of a word that are useful to distinguish? (Why distinguish? For handling novelty (wug test), collapsing statistics...)
 - English is pretty weak here (only Chinese is weaker):
 - inflection: 'talks' = 'talk (verb) + s (present 3rd singular)' or 'talk (noun) + s (plural).
 - Turkish agglutination: uygarlaştıramadıklarımızdanmışınızcasına = '(behaving) as if you are among those whom we could not civilize'
- words (lexemes)
 - Fundamental atom of data processing. We can describe it as we like. Could be an intuitive definition...
 - Is a word 'a single unit of meaning?' 'text separated by whitespace'

- What about Chinese? Or Thai? Or long compounds/agglutinations in Turkish, German, Finnish?
- What about whitespace-separated units that function noncompositionally ('New York', 'take out')?
- What about hyphenated and punctuated text? (Tricky example: 'New York-New Haven Railroad')
- In practice we more or less use a half solution: common punctuation is separated, some specific decisions are made about contractions, and otherwise it's just whitespace separated. This is less useful for morphologically rich and whitespace-free languages, where other strategies are used
- syntax -- how to properly put words together to form a sentence
 - part-of-speech tags:
 - the/DT (determiner) blue/JJ (adjective) boat/NN (noun)
 - *boat/NN blue/JJ the/DT
 - Constituencies:
 - S = NP[the blue boat] VP[sailed home]
 - * VP[sailed home] NP[the blue boat]
- semantics -- what does a word in a sentence mean, and how do the words meaningfully relate to each other?
 - Consider the word 'want': What are its distinct definitions?
 - Now consider the sentence 'The soldier did not want to die.': What definition of 'want' is being used?
 - Who is doing the wanting? Who is doing the dying? What is (not) wanted?



- pragmatics -- what does the *speaker* (as opposed to the sentence) mean (often in conversational context)?
 - Human: Can you get me a table at N/Naka tomorrow at 7?
 - *AI: Yes, I have that ability.
 - AI: OK, your reservation is made.
- discourse – how are sentences/clauses/etc related to each other or to the whole text?
 - In a news article, main idea vs supporting argument, background, contrasting opinion
 - I bought a car. Therefore [Result] I had less money.
 - Darwin is a geologist. He tends to be viewed now as a biologist [concession] but on the Beagle his main work was geology [evidence].

Ambiguity

- “Add pineapple sage, pineapple, sage, good and plenties, and mike and ikes to the shopping list” (punctuation/segmentation recognition)
- Teacher strikes idle kids (greedy pos tagging – NN VB JJ NN vs JJ NN VB NN)
- The horse raced past the barn fell (greedy segmentation – (the horse) raced past (the barn) ... vs. (the horse raced past the barn) fell)
- Kids make nutritious snacks (semantics of “make”)
- Stolen painting found by tree (role labeling of “tree” – agent vs. location)
- “Is that window still open?” vs “Please close the window” (pragmatics)
- Dinosaurs didn't read. Now they are extinct. (discourse label. Causal?)