NATURAL LANGUAGE COMPUTING
What is natural language computing?

Getting computers to understand everything we say and write.

In this class (and in the field generally), we are interested in learning the statistics of language.

Increasingly, computers give insight into how humans process language, or generate language themselves.
Today

• Basic definitions in natural language processing (NLP).

• Applications
  • Translating between languages
  • Speech recognition
  • Answering questions
  • Engaging in dialogue

• Course logistics.
What can natural language do?

The ultimate in human-computer interaction.

“translate Also Sprach Zarathustra”

“take a memo...”

“open the pod bay doors”

“how far until Jupiter?”

“Can you summarize 2001: A Space Odyssey?”

open(podBay.doors);

We’re making progress, but why are these things still hard to do?
A little deeper

• Language has **hidden structures**, e.g.,
  • How are **sounds** and **text** related?
    • e.g., why is this: not a ‘ghoti’ (enough, women, nation)?

• How are words **combined** to make sentences?
  • e.g., what makes ‘colourless green ideas sleep furiously’ **correct** in a way unlike ‘furiously sleep ideas green colourless’?

• How are words and phrases used to produce **meaning**?
  • e.g., if someone asks ‘**do you know what time it is?**’, why is it **inappropriate** to answer ‘**yes**’?

• We need to organize the way we think about language...
Categories of linguistic knowledge

- **Phonology**: the study of patterns of speech sounds.
  e.g., “read” → /r iy d/

- **Morphology**: how words can be changed by inflection or derivation.
  e.g., “read”, “reads”, “reader”, “reading”, ...

- **Syntax**: the ordering and structure between words and phrases (i.e., grammar).
  e.g., $\text{NounPhrase} \rightarrow \text{article adjective noun}$

- **Semantics**: the study of how meaning is created by words and phrases.
  e.g., “book” → 

- **Pragmatics**: the study of meaning in contexts.
  e.g., explanation span, refutation span
Ambiguity – Phonological

• **Phonology**: the study of patterns of speech sounds.

- “read” → /r iy d/ as in ‘I like to read’
- “read” → /r eh d/ as in ‘She read a book’
- “object” → /aa₁ b jh eh⁰ k t/ as in ‘That is an object’
- “object” → /ah⁰ b jh eh¹ k t/ as in ‘I object!’
- “too” ← /t uw/ as in ‘too much’
- “two” ← /t uw/ as in ‘two beers’

• Ambiguities can often be **resolved** in context, but not always.
  • e.g., /h aw t uw r eh¹ k ah ?? n ay² z s (b|p) iy ch/ → ‘how to recognize speech’
    → ‘how to wreck a nice beach’
Resolution with syntax

• If you hear the sequence of speech sounds
  \[/b\ a\ h\ f\ a\ e\ l\ ow\ b\ a\ h\ f\ a\ e\ l\ ow\ b\ a\ h\ f\ a\ e\ l\ ow\ b\ a\ h\ f\ a\ e\ l\ ow\ ...
  b\ a\ h\ f\ a\ e\ l\ ow\ b\ a\ h\ f\ a\ e\ l\ ow\ b\ a\ h\ f\ a\ e\ l\ ow\ b\ a\ h\ f\ a\ e\ l\ ow/\]

  which word sequence is being spoken?
  → “Buff a low buff a lobe a fellow Buff a low buff a lobe a fellow...”
  → “Buffalo buff aloe buff aloe buff aloe buff aloe buff aloe ...”
  → “Buff aloe buff all owe Buffalo buffalo buff a lobe ...”
  → “Buff aloe buff all owe Buffalo buff aloe buff a lobe ...”
  → “Buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo buffalo buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo”

• It’s obvious (to us) that the last option is most likely because we have knowledge of syntax, i.e., grammar.
Ambiguity – Syntactic

• **Syntax**: the *ordering and structure* between words. Words can be grouped into ‘parse tree’ structures given grammatical ‘rules’.

  e.g., “I shot an elephant in my pyjamas”
Resolution with semantics

- It’s obvious (to us) that the elephants don’t wear pyjamas, and we can discount one option because of our knowledge of **semantics**, i.e., meaning.
Ambiguity – Semantic

• **Semantics**: the study of how meaning is created by the use of words and phrases.

  • “Every man loves a woman”
    \[ \forall x \text{ man}(x) \exists y : (\text{woman}(y) \land \text{loves}(x, y)) \]
    \[ \exists y : \text{woman}(y) \land \forall x (\text{man}(x) \rightarrow \text{loves}(x, y)) \]

  • “I made her duck”
    \[ \rightarrow \text{I cooked waterfowl meat for her to eat.} \]
    \[ \rightarrow \text{I cooked waterfowl that belonged to her.} \]
    \[ \rightarrow \text{I carved the wooden duck that she owns.} \]
    \[ \rightarrow \text{I caused her to quickly lower her head.} \]

  • “Give me the pot”
    \[ \rightarrow \text{It’s time to bake.} \]
    \[ \rightarrow \text{It’s time to get baked.} \]
Resolution with pragmatics

• It’s obvious (to us) which meaning is intended given knowledge of the context of the conversation or the world in which it takes place.

• “Every man loves a woman”
  \[ \forall x \text{ man}(x) \exists y : (\text{woman}(y) \land \text{loves}(x, y)) \]
  \[ \exists y : \text{woman}(y) \land \forall x (\text{man}(x) \rightarrow \text{loves}(x, y)) \]

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  \[ \rightarrow \text{It’s time to bake.} \]
  \[ \rightarrow \text{It’s time to get baked.} \]
Ambiguity – miscellaneous

• Newspaper headlines (spurious or otherwise)

  Kicking Baby Considered to be Healthy

  Squad Helps Dog Bite Victim

  Canadian Pushes Bottle Up Germans

  Milk Drinkers are Turning to Powder

  Grandmother of Eight Makes Hole in One

  Kids Make Nutritious Snacks

  Juvenile Court Tries Shooting Defendant

  Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half
NLP as Artificial Intelligence

• NLP involves **resolving ambiguity** at all levels.
  • **Reasoning with world knowledge.**
    • In the early days knowledge was **explicitly encoded** in artificial
      **symbolic** systems (e.g., context-free grammars) by **experts**.

• Now, algorithms learn using **probabilities** (or pseudo-probabilities)
  to distinguish subtly different competing hypotheses.
  • E.g., is **Google** a **noun** or a **verb**?
  • Examples where **Google ∈ Nouns** ("**Google makes Android**"),
    does **not** mean that Google is never a verb ("**Go Google yourself**").

  • \[ P(\text{Google ∈ Nouns}) > P(\text{Google ∈ Verbs}) > 0 \]
The Turing Test

• **First** and most **fundamental** test of machine intelligence.

• A machine (A) imitates a human using nothing but a text-based instant messenger.
  • If a human interrogator (C) cannot reliably differentiate a real human (B) from the machine, that machine is said to be ‘intelligent’.

Aside – Chatbots

• ELIZA (Weizenbaum, 1966): simple pattern matching to imitate a psychiatrist.
• Surprisingly effective despite no linguistic knowledge.
• e.g.,
  User: Men are all alike.
  ELIZA: In what way?
  User: They’re always bugging us about something or other.
  ELIZA: Can you think of a specific example?
  User: My boyfriend made me come here.
  ELIZA: Your boyfriend made you come here.  
  (Jurafsky and Martin, 2009)
Course outline (approximate)

• Introduction, linguistic data, language models (3 lectures)
• Features and classification (1 lecture) *
• Neural language models (2 lectures) *
• Hidden Markov models (3 lectures) *
• Machine translation (3 lectures) **
• Articulatory and acoustic phonetics (2 lectures) *
• Automatic speech recognition (2 lectures) **
• Speech synthesis (1 lecture) **
• Entropy and information theory (2 lectures) *
• Information retrieval (1 or 2 lectures) **
• Dialogue and chatbots (1 lecture) **
• Review (1 lecture)

* techniques ** applications
Preview: Machine translation

- One of the most prized applications in NLP.
- Requires both **interpretation** and **generation**.
- Over $100B spent annually on human translation.
According to the data provided today by the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, as of November this year, China has actually utilized 46.959B US dollars of foreign capital, including 40.007B US dollars of direct investment from foreign businessmen.

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Today’s available data of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation shows that China’s actual utilization of November this year will include 40.007B US dollars for the foreign direct investment among 46.959B US dollars in foreign capital.
Preview: Machine translation

- In the 1950s and 1960s direct **word-for-word** replacement was popular.
- Due to semantic and **syntactic ambiguities** and **differences** in source languages, results were mixed.

"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak"

US English

"The vodka is good, but the meat is rotten"

Russian
Preview: Machine translation

- One problem is disparity of meanings in languages.

**nation** *n.* a large body of people, associated with a particular **territory**, that is sufficiently conscious of its **unity** to seek or to possess a **government** of its own

**nation** *n.* an aggregation of persons of the same **ethnic family**, often speaking the same **language** or cognate **languages**
Preview: Machine translation

- **Solution**: automatically learn statistics on parallel texts

  … citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership …

  e.g., the *Canadian Hansards*: bilingual Parliamentary proceedings

  … citoyen canadien a le droit de vote et est éligible aux élections législatives fédérales ou provinciales …
Statistical machine translation

• Much of modern statistical machine translation is based on the following perspective...

When I look at an article in Russian, I say: ‘This is really written in English, but it has been **coded** in some strange symbols. I will now proceed to **decode**.’

Warren Weaver
March, 1947

Claude Shannon
July, 1948
Aside – Machine translation

- [http://www.translationparty.com](http://www.translationparty.com) uses Google Translate to go back and forth between English and Japanese until we get two consecutive identical English phrases.
Preview: Machine translation

Start with an English phrase:

that's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind

find equilibrium

that's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind

それは人間にとっては小さな一步だが、一大転機

It is but one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind

それは人間にとっては小さな一步だが、大きな一歩

It is step by step for man, but a giant leap for humanity, the

人類にとっては小さな一歩ステップは、男性にとって理想的な

Step One small step for mankind, this hotel is ideal for men

人類にとっては小さな一歩ステップ、このホテルは、男性にとって理想的な

Step One small step for mankind, this hotel is ideal for men

Equilibrium found!
Okay, I get it, you like Translation Party.
Preview: Speech recognition

My hands are in the air.

Buy ticket... AC490... yes

Put this there.
Speech waveforms

“Two plus seven is less than ten”
Spectrograms

- Speech sounds can be thought of as overlapping sine waves.
- Speech is split apart into a 3D graph called a ‘spectrogram’.
- Spectrograms allow machines to extract statistical features that differentiate between different kinds of sounds.
Speech recognition

beet /bɪt/  bat /bæt/  bott /bat/  boot /but/
Preview: Speech recognition

• In order to classify an unknown observation (e.g., $X$), we need a **statistical** model of the distribution of sounds.

What is $Y$?
Preview: Questions and answers

Which woman has won more than 1 Nobel prize?

(Marie Curie)

- **Question Answering (QA)** and **Information Retrieval (IR)** involve many of the same principles.
Preview: Information retrieval

Google

WolframAlpha

What woman won more than one Nobel Prize?

Marie Curie won the Nobel Prize in 1903 for Physics and 1911 in Chemistry; Linus Pauling in 1954 (for Chemistry) and 1962 (for Peace); John Bardeen in 1956 (for Physics) and 1972; Frederick Sanger in Chemistry in 1958 and 1980. Who has won more than one Nobel Prize? Apr 1, 2007

Who has won more than one Nobel Prize? - Times of India
timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home...won-more-than-one-nobel-prize/1839923.cms

People also ask
Who has won Nobel Prize twice? 
What women won the Nobel Prize? 
How many women have won the Nobel Prize? 
How many women have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize?
Aside – Question answering

WolframAlpha:

How much potassium is in 450,000 cubic kilometers of bananas?

Input Interpretation:

| banana | amount | 450000 km³ (cubic kilometers) | potassium |

Result:

\[ 1.5 \times 10^{12} \text{ t (metric tons)} \]

Siri:

“Should I bring an umbrella next Monday”

There’s no rain in the forecast next Monday:

<table>
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<th>Max</th>
<th>Min</th>
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<tr>
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<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Answer questioning?

- Retrieving information can be a clever combination of many very simple concepts and algorithms.
Overview: NLP

• Is natural language processing (the discipline) hard?
  • Yes, because natural language
    • is highly ambiguous at all levels,
    • is complex and subtle,
    • is fuzzy and probabilistic,
    • involves real-world reasoning.
  • No, because computer science
    • gives us many powerful statistical techniques,
    • allows us to break the challenges down into more manageable features.

• Is Natural Language Computing (the course) hard?
  • More on this soon...
NLP in industry
Natural language computing

- **Instructor**: Frank Rudzicz and Sean Robertson (csc401-2020-01@cs)
- **TAs**: Julia Watson, KP Vishnubhotla, Mohamed Abdalla, Shuja Khalid, Amanjit Kainth, Zhining Zhu
- **Meetings**: MF (lecture, MB128), W (tutorial, SF1105) at 10h-11h
- **Languages**: English, Python.
- **Website**: [http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~frank/csc401/](http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~frank/csc401/)
- **You**: Understand basic **probability**, can **program**, or can pick these up as we go.
- **Syllabus**: Key **theory** and **methods** in statistical natural language computing. Focus will be on **Markov and neural models**, **machine translation**, and **speech recognition**.
Office hours

• **Time:**
  • Mondays, 11h00-12h00

• **Location:**
  • The Vector Institute (MaRS West, Suite 710)
  • The streets
Evaluation policies

- **General**: Three assignments: 15%, 20%, 25% (ranked by your mark)
  Final exam: 40%

- **Lateness**: 10% deduction applied to electronic submissions that are 1 minute late.
  Additional 10% applied every 24 hours up to 72 hours total, at which point grade is zero.

- **Final**: If you fail the final exam, then you fail the course.

- **Ethics**: Plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration can result in a grade of zero on the homework, failure of the course, or suspension from the University. See the course website.
Theme – NLP in a post-truth society

• The truth is the most important thing in the Universe.
  • At the very least, the truth allows us to rationally optimize legal, political, and personal decisions.

• The truth can sometimes be obscured deliberately via deception, or inadvertently through bias, fallacy, or intellectual laziness.
  • Nowhere is this perhaps more obvious than on social media or in pseudo-journalism.

• Natural language processing gives us tools to combat this scourge.
Assignments

- **Assignment 1:** Corpus statistics, sentiment analysis
  - task: analyze bias on Reddit
  - learn: statistical techniques, features, and classification.

- **Assignment 2:** Statistical machine translation
  - task *: translate between political extremes
  - learn: neural seq2seq and language models.

- **Assignment 3:** Automatic speech recognition
  - task: detect lies in speech
  - learn: signal processing, phonetics, and hidden Markov models.
Assignment 1 – Bias in social media

• Involves:
  • Working with social media data
    (i.e., gathering statistics on some data from Reddit),
  • Part-of-speech tagging (more on this later),
  • Classification.

• Announcements: Piazza forum, email.
• You should get an early start.
Projects – graduate students only

• Graduate students can optionally undertake a full-term project worth 60% of their grade instead of the assignments.
  • Good for those, e.g., who prefer to work in teams.

• Teams must consist of 1 or 2 humans (no more, no fewer).
• Projects must contain a significant programming and scientific component.
• Projects must be relevant to the course.
Some possible ideas for projects include:
- A deception filter for news media online.
- A novel method of using data in language $A$ to train a classification system in language $B$ for $A \neq B$.

If you decide to take this option, you have to notify us by email about your team by 18 January!

You will need to periodically submit checkpoints that build on their antecedents.
  - See course webpage for detailed requirements!
Reading

Optional (and FREE online!)

https://search.library.utoronto.ca/details?10552907

Optional
Stats from 2017-2019

Consider the waitlist!
Assignment 1 and reading

- **Assignment 1** available by Friday (on course webpage)!
  - Due 11 February
  - TAs: Julia Watson; KP Vishnubhotla.

- **Reading:**
  - Manning & Schütze: Sections 1.3—1.4.2, Sections 6.0—6.2.1.