

PLM2026 plenary lecture

The unexpected triumph of language models: What they reveal about language, the mind and the Internet Meme

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In recent years, we have witnessed the practical success of artificial intelligence systems built on large language models — a success that surprised even practitioners in the field. During this talk, we briefly trace the history of statistical language modeling and propose some hypotheses as to why modern AI has crystallized around human language. In parallel, we examine the popularity of Internet memes — a phenomenon widely taken for granted, yet not necessarily well understood. Taken together, the goal is to shed light on the (un)importance of language, and to illuminate what stays hidden: embedding spaces.