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Parsing, fast and slow: a two-systems approach to some topics in linguistics

Daniel Kahneman's influential book *Thinking, fast and slow* brought to popular attention the so-called 'dual process' theory from psychology. This posits that there are two distinct kinds of thought process: a fast, intuitive, automatic kind (System 1), and a slow, deliberative, controlled kind (System 2). It also suggests that the two can be in conflict, and that, despite what economists might like to believe about 'rational actors', we rely on the former kind of thinking rather more than the latter. Parsing, i.e. the processing of linguistic information, is generally of the automatic, System 1 type, but in this talk I explore the idea that drawing the same distinction, between fast/automatic and slow/deliberate processes, can offer a useful explanatory lens through which to re-contextualise a fairly diverse array of linguistic phenomena, from psycholinguistic findings, to the nature of literary language, the relationship between linguistic theory and large language models, and the possibility of socially-motivated language change.