Abstract

Story events are a psychological cause of emotional reactions, which in turn, motivate subsequent actions. This study addresses the degree of specificity of readers' inferences about fictional characters' emotions. In Experiment 1 (off-line), participants read short stories and selected the emotional term that was more consistent with the protagonist's emotion. Results indicated that participants tended to favor the specific emotional word. In Experiment 2 (on-line), reading times were longer when a target sentence described the protagonist in an emotional state that differed in family from the adequate emotional state, but belonged to the same class and valence of emotions, but no differences were found between emotions belonging to the same family. Overall, these results indicate that emotional inferences are more specific than valence and class, but not specific enough to differentiate subtleties within a family of emotions.