Emotions are universal – the language of emotions as well?

Marie-Christine Kloes, Britta London

Johannes Gutenberg-University, Mainz, Germany

Abstract

There is no doubt about the fact that humans develop feelings such as crying, laughing, fear and love while reading books. According to Mar and Oatley (2008), the events displayed in an exciting crime novel or a romantic love story shall be seen as simulations of the social world. The reader might not only be drawn into the plot experiencing the events as if they were a part of it, they might even learn to get along with their own interpersonal relationships. Our ongoing study whose current results will be part of the poster presentation aims to investigate not only the type of emotions which are experienced during the reading process but also which types of fictional texts induce which reaction. It is clear that these emotions cannot be the ones negotiated in the text itself but rather closely related ones.

Our research focus lies on the following questions:

(1) Are there certain lexicogrammatical and stylistic patterns that elicit these different emotions in the reader like words, structures, associations, etc.?

(2) In which way do these patterns contribute to the development of negative or positive feelings towards a text / character?

(3) How does the author use these "linguistic tools" to guide the reader towards an intended direction?

(4) Why do the experienced emotions vary from reader to reader?

The analysis is conducted within the framework of J.R. Martin’s and P.R.R. White’s (2005) Appraisal theory which will be applied to various novels of different authors. Special attention will be paid to German and Swedish fictional texts of different genres, such as crime novels and short stories.

This study, by closely examining the social interactions taking place in specific, so far only little recognized fictional texts, sheds new light on the almost inexhaustible language of emotions.

Keywords: emotions in fiction, appraisal theory, social interaction.