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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Permalink

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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 48(0)

Authors

Tal-Or, Nurit

Razpurker-Apfeld, Irene

Publication Date

2026

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Peer reviewed

Pronouns and Mental Simulation While Reading Narratives

Previous research shows that first-person pronouns prompt readers to adopt a character's perspective, generating mental simulation from an internal viewpoint, whereas brief character descriptions can shift them toward an observer perspective. We hypothesized that when a character appears in a full story and is described as an ingroup member, fostering identification, first-person narration would encourage readers to perceive events from the character's viewpoint. In an online experiment (N = 348), participants read a story about an ingroup or outgroup protagonist, narrated in first- or third-person. They then viewed images of story-related activities shown from internal or external perspectives and selected the picture that best matched the story. As expected, participants most often chose internal-perspective images when the story featured a first-person ingroup protagonist. These findings suggest that when the protagonist resembles the reader, first-person narration more strongly draws readers to experience the story from within the character's perspective.

Pronouns, Mental Simulation, and Narratives