



Nationality cognition in India: Social category information impacts children's judgments of people and their national identity

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ABSTRACT

The present research assessed 5- to 10-year-old Indian children's attention to social category information and status when evaluating the nationality and characteristics of novel individuals. In Study 1, children chose which of two targets was "more Indian" (with the option to choose "both"). Targets varied on three social dimensions: *Skin Tone* (White, Lighter-skinned South Asian, Darker-skinned South Asian), *Religion* (Hindu, Muslim), and *Language* (Tamil [local state language], Hindi [India's lingua franca], British-accented-English, Indian-accented-English). Children reliably chose Lighter-skinned South Asian, Hindu, and Tamil-speaking targets as more Indian. In Study 2, focusing on the language contrasts from Study 1, we replicated our nationality findings and extended them to person judgments (kindness, intelligence, and leadership). Children chose Tamil speakers as more "Indian," and "kind," Tamil and British-accented-English speakers as more "intelligent," and British-accented-English speakers as "better leader[s]." Children's responses reflected attention to markers of social familiarity, representativeness, and status.

1. Introduction

A global rise in nationalism has brought to the forefront new questions about who is and who should be considered a legitimate member of a nation (Cox, 2019; Roth, 2017). Although citizenship has stringent parameters, the extent to which someone is considered a bona fide member of a nation may also be tied to their social group membership (DeJesus, Hwang, Dautel, & Kinzler, 2018; Devos & Banaji, 2005). In addition to studies conducted by psychologists, scholars across the social sciences have noted that the extent to which a person is perceived to be part of a national group often relies on their participation in a common culture, such as speaking the same language or sharing values that are thought of as central to the nation's identity (Guan & Suryadinata, 2007; Puteh, 2006; Soysal, 1998). In light of this view of nationality as a construct intertwined with social category membership, the present research examines the extent to which a variety of social category markers (including skin tone, religion, and language) inform children's nationality cognition, concepts of status, and judgements about people. We examined these constructs in the world's second-most populous country: India. India's cultural makeup offered a unique opportunity to explore lesser studied social markers (e.g., colorism), and helped to disambiguate the role of familiarity from status considerations in conceptions of nationality. In these studies, we asked

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children to evaluate the perceived “Indianness” of a series of targets spanning different dimensions of social categories and status, as well as evaluate a range of judgments about people (kindness, intelligence, and leadership).

2. Social category membership and nationality cognition

Nationality can serve as a strong and independent identity marker (Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Keillor & Hult, 1999), and is often used as a means to unite groups that are otherwise in conflict (Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999; Levendusky, 2017). Although national identity may be viewed through an objective, legal lens, perceptions of national identity may also be influenced by subjective perceptions about which social groups best represent a nation, which extend beyond objective parameters. For example, even though citizenship in many countries is conferred by the state and can be granted based on a standardized procedure for naturalization, people often conceptualize nationality as an immutable trait or resulting from biological properties. In one study, adults in England who showed negative attitudes towards foreigners had both strong national identities and endorsed an essentialist view that nationality was tied to ethnicity (Pehrson, Brown, & Zagefka, 2009). Indeed, even young children conceptualize nationality as having a biological basis, for example, perceiving people from different countries as having differences in their brains (Davoodi, Soley, Harris, & Blake, 2020; Hussak & Cimpian, 2019). These beliefs can have important downstream consequences. For example, adults and children use nationality cues as a basis for inclusion and exclusion of peers (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2008; Lappalainen, 2009). In some contexts, social categories can be explicitly tied to nationality (e.g., official languages or state religions, in some but not all nations). Yet, categories such as language, religion, and race or ethnicity often have no explicit relationship at all with national group membership, but can nonetheless indirectly impact nationality cognition through inference or subjective judgment.

Although belonging to a particular racial group has no legal relevance to national status in the U.S., seminal work by Devos and Banaji (2005) showed that both White- and Asian-American adults exhibited an American = White bias (i.e., they were faster to associate White faces with American concepts and artifacts), and this association was stronger for those with a strong sense of national identity. Mirroring these findings, a study by Brown (2011) asked children to rate how American they feel on a 4-point scale, and found that by 5-years-old, children with a strong American identity showed an American = White bias. Extant research on nationality has primarily focused on race-nationality associations. However, in the U.S., given that White people occupy both high status and numerical majority status, it is unclear whether the White = American bias is a product of associating nationhood with a majority group or whether there is also a complementary status component to nationality cognition. One way to examine this latter consideration more closely is to examine perceptions of colorism *within* a particular racial group. In many countries, people of color with lighter skin have, or are perceived to have, higher status or access to more opportunities in the income, education, housing, and marriage market compared to people of color with darker skin, even though people with lighter skin are the numerical minority in many of these contexts (Darj, Infanti, Ahlberg, & Okumu, 2015; Hunter, 2007; Karnani, 2007; Li, Min, Belk, Kimura, & Bahl, 2008). This “light-skin bias” is evident around the world and manifests in different ways – for example research shows that countries participating in global pageants systematically choose lighter-skinned contestants, even when these contestants do not represent the modal skin tone of the nations they are representing (Jha, 2015). As such, a closer examination of colorism may not only offer a more nuanced lens into race, but also help to dissociate familiarity from a social group’s relative status.

A few studies have also examined religion as a social group marker that influences nationality cognition. Countries vary in the extent to which they operate under a religious doctrine – some countries have an official religion that is codified into law (e.g., Islam in Saudi Arabia, or Catholicism in Vatican City), whereas other countries are explicitly secular or have laws codifying the free expression of any religion. Across countries with diverse relationships between religion and the state, religion may have informed the state’s formation in important ways. Nevertheless, the relationship between religion and nationality cognition is complex across these diverse contexts. For example, despite being a secular state, recent evidence suggests that Indian children as young as 9-years of age have both implicit and explicit “Indian=Hindu” biases (Ellwood-Lowe, Berner, Dunham, & Srinivasan, 2020). That said, this association was not as strong among Muslim Indians. In fact, the degree to which people associate a nation with a majority religion may even lead minority groups to show reduced national identification. In one study, Turkish-Dutch Muslim participants showed less Dutch national identification, in some cases even showing evidence of disidentification from a Dutch identity (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). The aforementioned studies observe important differences between majority- and minority-group members in their beliefs about the relationship between religion and citizenship. It is unclear how this divergence is moderated by one’s social environment or whether the representation of minority members in one’s immediate environment makes a difference in one’s judgments about the relationship between religion and nationality. In addition, given growing evidence that some associations (e.g., nationality-race) emerge early in development, there is reason to believe that a nationality-religion association may similarly emerge in a younger population than has previously been studied.

Language also plays a critical role in considerations of nationality. Throughout history, the spread and erasure of languages have coincided with the rise and fall of nations (Buck, 1916; Shell, 2001). Language may be especially critical in establishing a unified national identity (Guan & Suryadinata, 2007; Puteh, 2006) because language is an important driver in constructing “symbolic boundaries” that create a dynamic of us vs. them (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). As such, language can play an important role in conceptions of nationhood. When asked which other national groups were similar to their own, Scottish children described people from Australia as similar because of their shared English language (Jahoda, 1962). In fact, across cultures, children often use language as a determinant of nationality. For example, whether children were raised in Basque- or Spanish-speaking homes predicted their self-identification as being from Basque or from Spain (Reizábal, Valencia, & Barrett, 2004) and young American and Korean children (including bilingual Korean-American children) explicitly categorized both White and Asian English speakers as American, and Korean speakers as Korean (DeJesus et al., 2018). When asked what makes a person British, Carrington and Short (1995) found that birthplace

and speaking English were the most popular responses, even above other more objective standards such as legal citizenship. Accent can similarly signal national belonging. Indeed, 5-year-old children in Canada inferred that foreign-accented speakers were from a different place than them and even associated accent strength with geographic distance (Weatherhead et al., 2016; Weatherhead et al., 2019). Moreover, nationality cognition may be influenced by the relative status of a language and/or accent given evidence that people confer high status to specific languages and accents. For example, Kinzler, Shutts, and Spelke (2012) found that Xhosa children attending English-medium schools preferred English speakers even when tested in a Xhosa-speaking environment. This finding suggests that children's language-based preferences do not necessarily reflect what is most familiar in their environment alone, but also extend to status considerations. As such, status considerations in language and accent may play a key role in nationality cognition.

3. India as a cultural context

In a nation home to 1.3 billion people – the second most populous nation in the world – what do people think it means to be Indian? Today, the word “Indian” officially refers to one's nationality, not an ethnicity, religion, or language, but to what extent does this reflect how people in India actually conceptualize Indian people? Although India's explicit stance on national identity may be colorblind, secular and undefined by a single language, underlying cultural messages and attitudes might reveal a chasm between India's overt position and people's lay reality. Growing calls to put “India first” has led to the political rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a nationalist and largely Hindu party led by current prime minister Narendra Modi (Palshikar, 2015). An upsurge of nationalist ideas and policies has been met with renewed interest in nationality cognition, which may intersect with race, religion, and language in unique ways. In this section we situate our cultural context, India, with a focus on colorism, religion, and language, each carrying important status implications.

In India, fair skin confers status, including social and economic advantages (Karnani, 2007). In fact, the skin whitener market is a \$200 million dollar industry, with one poll showing that 90% of Indian women use whiteners because it is “aspirational” (Luce & Merchant, 2003; Nadeem, 2014). Indeed, it is even common for newspapers to carry matrimonial advertisements asking for brides and grooms with “wheat skin complexion” (Ramakrishnan, 2012). Moreover, there is a historical link between colorism and caste (Parameswaran & Cardoza, 2009; Shankar & Subish, 2007), where lighter skin is associated with higher castes and darker skin is associated with lower castes (even in contexts where darker-skinned people are the numerical majority). Although the practice of explicit caste discrimination was legally abolished in 1947, the social exclusion of historically marginalized castes/tribes has been extensively documented (Borooah, Diwakar, Mishra, Naik, & Sabharwal, 2014; Teltumbde, 2010). Thorat and Attewell (2007) assessed employment discrimination based on caste and religion by sending resumes with similar qualifications but different family names (which can be used to infer caste through historical stereotypes). Higher-caste Hindu applicants were more likely to be hired. Given the relevance of colorism and caste as social categories, we contend that nationality cognition may benefit from probing further the unique relevance of colorism in this community. Not only this, but this cultural context allowed us to separate familiar, numerical majority groups (e.g., darker-skinned Indians) from high status numerical minority groups (e.g., Whites, lighter-skinned Indians).

Although India is a secular state by law, 81% of the population is Hindu and 13% is Muslim, the next largest group (Census of India, 2011b). Nonetheless, in 2019, the Indian parliament passed a controversial Citizenship Amendment Bill (Sharma, 2019) to protect persecuted religious minority immigrants by fast-tracking their citizenship. This list included Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Christians, with one notable omission: Muslims. An increase in reported attacks against religious minorities have been documented (USCIRF, 2020) and has been tied to the rise of Hindu nationalism (Dhar, 2017; Jain & Lasseter, 2018). In January of 2018, two elected representatives of the ruling party claimed that the rising Muslim population was a threat (Mallapur, 2018). To quote a member of this same party: “Everyone born in [India] is a Hindu...even Muslims are Hindus by nationality, they are Muslims by faith only” (Ians, 2017). Apart from the proliferation of anti-Muslim sentiment in politics and local communities, religious minorities also face economic hardships at disproportionate rates (Census of India, 2011c; Shaikh, 2016). Segregation between Hindu and Muslim communities remains high, with many Muslims preferring to get their education from Muslim institutions (Susewind, 2017). The rise of emboldened nationalists and religious intolerance calls into question the veracity of India's claim to secularism. A critical question remains, when do these beliefs start to emerge in childhood?

Regarding language, India does not have a national language, though Hindi and English are used for official purposes in Parliament (The Official Languages Act, 1963). Since India is home to over 20 official languages and over a thousand dialects, language is often more closely associated with regional state identity than national identity (Karna, 1999). While local, state-based languages play a role in forging a strong sense of state identity, there has also been a steady rise in schools that teach exclusively in English (referred to as “English-medium schools”), as well as teaching English as a secondary or tertiary language (Dubey et al., 2009). Increasingly, India is becoming a society in which English proficiency guarantees economic and social upward mobility (Azam, Chin, & Prakash, 2013; Ramanathan, 2016). It is as yet unclear how language and accent relate to nationality cognition, particularly in a linguistically diverse nation. This diversity also offers an opportunity to test the role of linguistic status on nationality cognition.

4. The present studies

The present studies seek to examine how social category information influences children's nationality cognition, as well as how

judgments about nationality compare to other kinds of person judgments. We present children with three dimensions of social category membership: skin tone, religion, and language/accents. An exploration of multiple social categories allows us to evaluate more comprehensively the degree to which different categories are relevant to nationality cognition. In Study 1, children were presented with pairs of people who either differed in skin tone (White, lighter-skinned South Asian, darker-skinned South Asian), religion (Hindu, Muslim), or language (Tamil, Hindi, Indian-accented English, British-accented English) and were asked to evaluate which person was “more Indian.” Notably, to ensure that our colorism findings were indeed about skin color and not about other properties of the faces, we manipulated the skin tone of the same face (such that half the participants saw a face as lighter-skinned and the other half of participants saw the same face as darker-skinned). In Study 2, we examined how children’s judgments about nationality compared to other types of person judgments. Children were presented with pairs of people who differed in language (Tamil, Hindi, Indian-accented English, British-accented English) and asked to evaluate which person was “more Indian,” “more intelligent,” “more kind,” and “a better leader.” We conducted these studies in Southern India. In this location, a vast majority of individuals have a darker South Asian skin tone and speak Tamil as their native language (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2012; Mallick et al., 2013; Sarkar & Nandineni, 2018). Yet, there is little empirical evidence that either of these categories are thought of as being traditionally “high status” in India just because they represent the majority of people in the region. Therefore, our population allowed us to begin to differentiate the relative impact of familiarity and status on children’s nationality judgments.

5. Study 1: skin tone, religion, and language on children’s nationality judgments

In Study 1, children were asked to evaluate which individual between two targets they considered to be “more Indian” (with the explicit option given on every trial of choosing “both the same”). Targets varied based on skin tone, religion, and language. Within each category, stimuli were constructed to examine whether children would choose people who are representative of their local community (i.e., the numerical majority) as “more Indian” or whether children would choose people who might be viewed as high status due to the political and sociological trends described previously. In the context of language, Tamil is the local language, and the native and most familiar language to these children (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2012). Children are likely familiar with Hindi given that it is the familiar unofficial lingua franca of India, yet they may not speak it fluently (LaDousa, 2014). Likewise, children are generally exposed to English (though their degree of fluency may depend on whether or not they attend an English schooling environment). Indian-accented English is the most familiar accent in English, whereas British-accented English is less familiar but generally considered a high status accent (Bernaisch & Koch, 2016; Giles & Watson, 2013). Similarly in the context of skin tone, darker-skinned South Asians are more prevalent in this local context (Mallick et al., 2013; Sarkar & Nandineni, 2018) whereas lighter-skinned South Asians may be viewed as higher in status (Karnani, 2007). In the context of religion, Hinduism is both familiar and presumably perceived as high status (at least among Hindus; Dunham, Srinivasan, Dotsch, & Barner, 2014); nonetheless religion may be especially interesting to document in the context of increased exposure to national dialogue and controversy surrounding the relationship between religion and Indianness.

5.1. Participants

Ninety-six children between the ages of 5 and 10 years old (42 girls, $M_{\text{age}} = 6.96$, $SD = 1.72$ years) participated in this study. Participants were recruited through five schools and two community centers in Chennai, India. Children in the community centers ($n = 30$) came primarily from families earning less than RS 10,00,000 (approximately 14,000 USD) annually, and children in the schools ($n = 66$) came from families earning a median annual income between RS 25,00,001 to RS 50,00,000 (approximately 34,000 to 68,000 USD). For more demographic information, see Appendix A. All children were native or fluent in the local language (Tamil). Due to restrictions in the community centers, further demographic information was only collected for the children participating from schools. Although we could not obtain information about students’ skin color and religion, in this region of India, a majority of people have darker skin tones and only around 6% are Muslim (Census of India, 2011a; Mallick et al., 2013; Sarkar & Nandineni, 2018). For compensation, participants were given a small gift, and a donation was made to the school/center equivalent to 5 USD per child.

5.2. Materials

The Skin Tone trials included 6 women’s faces (2 White and 4 South Asian faces) chosen from Stock images. We presented only women targets because there is little evidence that children show a strong gender-nationality association, and because we wanted enough power to prioritize our main question of interest: how evaluations change across these social categories. All faces were age- and attractiveness-matched by 100 participants on MTurk (See Supplemental Materials Tables S1-S3). The Skin Tone trials involved 4 South Asian faces and 2 White faces ($M_{\text{age}} = 28.68$; $SD = 4.92$; $M_{\text{attractiveness}} = 3.52$, $SD = 1.02$). Using Photoshop, the 4 South Asian faces were manipulated such that half the participants were presented with a face as a lighter-skinned South Asian (*Light-SA*), and the other half of participants were presented with the same face as a darker-skinned South Asian (*Dark-SA*) – see Fig. 1. It was counter-balanced across participants which target faces were presented as lighter versus darker, thus ensuring that our results were about skin tone and no other properties of the stimuli presented. The Religion trials included 4 South Asian women’s faces ($M_{\text{age}} = 31.88$,



Fig. 1. Same target presented as Light-SA (left) for half of the participants and Dark-SA (right) for half of the participants.

$SD = 4.61$; $M_{\text{attractiveness}} = 3.49$, $SD = 1.05$) and the Language trials included 12 South Asian women's faces $M_{\text{age}} = 28.60$, $SD = 4.69$; $M_{\text{attractiveness}} = 3.66$, $SD = 1.08$). Audio clips consisted of 2-second neutral phrases (e.g., "in general, dogs are bigger than cats") spoken in *Tamil*, *Hindi*, *Indian-English* (Indian-accented English) or *British-English* (British-accented English). All recordings were made by native speakers of these languages/accents.

5.3. Procedure

Participants took part in the following three tasks, in a fixed order: 1) Skin Tone, 2) Religion, 3) Language. Although an ideal design would counterbalance task order, we chose to fix the order because the Skin Tone trials involved no explanation on the part of the experimenter, whereas the Religion trials involved the experimenter telling the child the target's religion, and Language trials naturally involved playing the child a language. Pilot data revealed that flipping the order would result in the child (for instance) asking what religion or language the person had during the silent Skin Tone trials. All participants completed all tasks, with the exception of 24 children who completed only the Language trials. The Language trials had a higher number of contrasts compared to the Religion and Skin Tone trials, and because of this we had a higher planned sample size; results did not meaningfully differ if we excluded additional participants who completed only the language trials, and so we depict all data collected here. In all three tasks, participants were presented with two targets on a screen and asked the same question: "who is more Indian, this one [Target A], this one [Target B], or both the same?" The reason we chose to qualify Indian with "more" is because our primary interest was in children's graded notions of nationality (see [Ellwood-Lowe et al., 2020](#) for another example of a non-binary response measure for nationality); we also wanted to give children the explicit option of "both the same." Participants in the community centers were tested in Tamil (this was their native language and the language of the community context); participants in the school environment were tested in English because this was an English-medium schooling environment.

5.4. Skin Tone trials ($n = 72$)

In each trial (total of 3 trials), children were presented with two targets with different skin tones. There were 3 types of skin tones depicted: *Light-SA*, *Dark-SA*, and *White*, each contrasted with each other. The order of contrasts was counterbalanced across participants, as was the presentation of each South Asian face as "lighter-skinned" or "darker-skinned" (i.e., one child saw face A as lighter-skinned and face B as darker-skinned, whereas another child would see face A as darker-skinned and face B as lighter-skinned). The side on which the target was presented was counterbalanced. No verbal information was given about the targets – participants were simply shown the targets and asked which one (or both equally) they thought was "more Indian."

5.5. Religion trials ($n = 72$)

In each trial (total of 2 trials), children were presented with two lighter-skinned South Asian targets and were told verbally that the targets had different religious identities: *Hindu* or *Muslim*. The order of each religion presented, and the pairing of face to religion was counterbalanced across participants. Across two 2-trial sequences, each religion was presented on the left side of the screen an equal number of times and each religion was paired with the face on the left for half the sequences, and paired with the face on the right for half the sequences. Each targets' religious affiliation was explicitly conveyed (e.g., "she is Hindu"), along with additional supporting contextual information about their place of worship (i.e., "she goes to the temple" versus "she goes to the mosque") or important holidays (i.e., "she celebrates Diwali" versus "she celebrates Ramadan").

5.6. Language trials ($n = 96$)

In each trial (total of 6 trials), children were presented with 2 lighter-skinned South Asian targets. Each spoke one of four languages/accents: *Tamil*, *Hindi*, Indian-accented English (*Indian-English*), or British-accented English (*British-English*). The order of languages presented and the pairing of languages to faces were counterbalanced across participants. Across twelve 6-trial sequences, each language was presented on the left side of the screen an equal number of times, and each language was paired with the face on the left for half the sequences and paired with the face on the right for half the sequences. Within a single trial, the sentences spoken by the two targets remained the same. In addition to playing the audio clips, children were explicitly told what language the targets were speaking (e.g., “she speaks English”). For half the trials, the audio was paired with the face on the left, and for the other half of trials, the audio was paired with the face on the right.

6. Results

6.1. Analysis plan

First, for each set of trials, we present the percentage of times each target type (e.g., *Light-SA*) was picked across all contrasts in which that target was featured as a possible response option (e.g., the percentage of times *Light-SA* was chosen in the *Light-SA vs. Dark-SA* and *Light-SA vs. White* contrasts). Next, for each individual contrast (e.g., *Light-SA vs. Dark-SA*), we used binomial exact tests (against 50% chance) to more closely observe children’s choices for the two options, excluding “both the same” responses. To supplement these findings, using binomial logistic regressions, we observed how children’s target choices varied as a function of age for each contrast (i.e., *Light-SA vs. Dark-SA*). Likelihood ratio tests confirmed that the addition of testing site, language of testing, and child gender did not explain significantly greater variance and so these were not included in the final logistic regression models. Finally, chi-square goodness of fit tests were used to examine whether the choice to pick “both the same” varied as a function of which paired contrast children were observing (e.g., if children were more likely to pick “both the same” in the *Light-SA vs. Dark-SA* contrast than the *Light-SA vs. White* contrast).

6.2. Skin Tone

Across all trials in which *Light-SA* targets were featured as a possible response option (i.e., *Light-SA vs. Dark-SA* and *Light-SA vs. White*), a *Light-SA* target was chosen as “more Indian” 68% of the time. Across trials in which *Dark-SA* targets were featured as a response option (i.e., *Dark-SA vs. Light-SA* and *Dark-SA vs. White*), a *Dark-SA* target was chosen as “more Indian” 39% of the time. And across trials in which *White* targets were featured as a possible response option (i.e., *White vs. Light-SA vs. White vs. Dark-SA*), a *White* target was chosen as “more Indian” 33% of the time.

We also broke the data down by individual contrasts (See Fig. 2). Notably, binomial exact tests (excluding “both the same” responses) confirmed that children chose *Light-SA* targets above chance when compared to *Dark-SA* (Binomial Exact $p = .025$) and *White* targets (Binomial Exact $p < 0.001$). However, children were at chance when choosing between *Dark-SA* and *White* targets (Binomial Exact $p = 1$). To observe differences based on participants’ age, we constructed binomial logistic regressions for each contrast and found no age-related differences (See Appendix B).

Finally, the choice to pick “both the same” did not vary as a function of which contrast children were observing, $\chi^2 = .728, p = .695$ (See Appendix D).

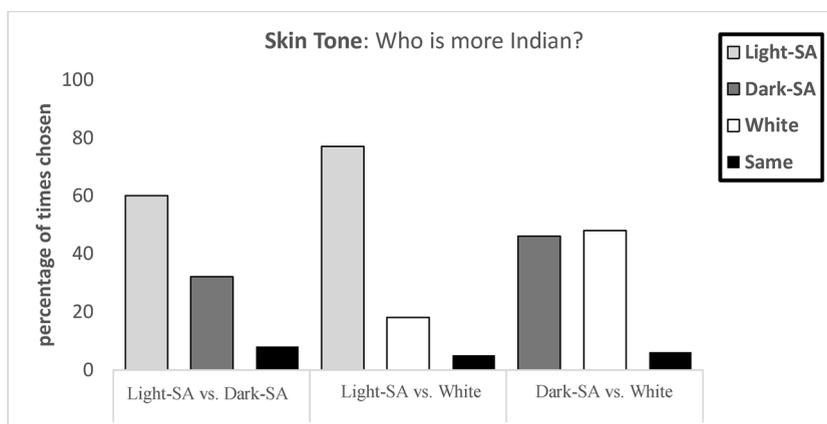


Fig. 2. Percentage of times children chose *Light-SA*, *Dark-SA*, *White*, and “both the same” as “more Indian” for each contrast.

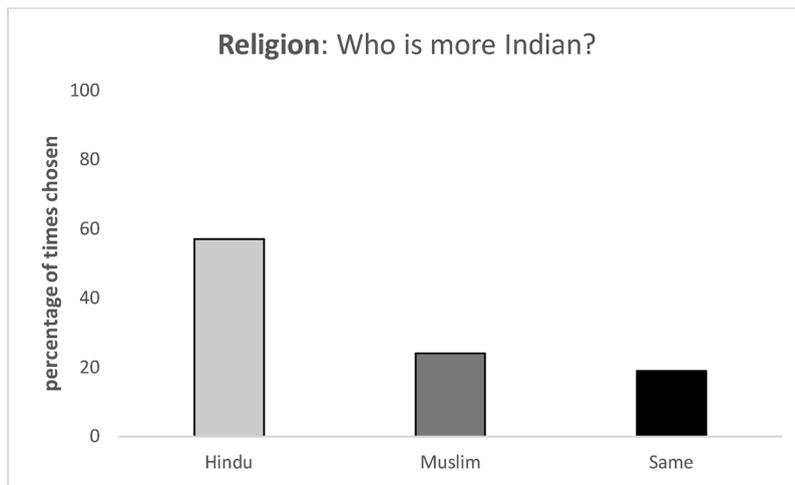


Fig. 3. Percentage of times children chose *Hindu*, *Muslim*, and “both the same” as “more Indian”.

6.3. Religion

Across two trials, children chose *Hindu* targets 57% of the time, *Muslim* targets 24% of the time, and “both the same” 19% of the time (See Fig. 3). A binomial exact test (excluding “both the same” responses) confirmed that *Hindu* targets were chosen above chance (Binomial Exact $p < .001$) and a binomial logistic regression showed no age-related differences (See Appendix B).

6.4. Language

Collapsing across all trials in which *Tamil* speakers were featured as a possible response option (i.e., *Tamil* vs. *Hindi*, *Tamil* vs. *Indian-English*, and *Tamil* vs. *British-English*), a *Tamil* speaker was chosen as “more Indian” 62% of the time. Across trials in which *Hindi* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *Hindi* vs. *Tamil*, *Hindi* vs. *Indian-English*, and *Hindi* vs. *British-English*), a *Hindi* speaker was chosen as “more Indian” 46% of the time. Across trials in which *Indian-English* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *Indian-English* vs. *Tamil*, *Indian-English* vs. *Hindi*, and *Indian-English* vs. *British-English*), an *Indian-English* speaker was chosen as “more Indian” 24% of the time. And across trials in which *British-English* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *British-English* vs. *Tamil*, *British-English* vs. *Hindi*, and *British-English* vs. *Indian-English*), a *British-English* speaker was chosen as “more Indian” 29% of the time.

Breaking our results down by each individual contrast (See Fig. 4), binomial exact tests (excluding “both the same” responses) confirmed that *Tamil* speakers were chosen above chance across all contrasts (*Tamil* vs. *Hindi*, $p = .010$, *Tamil* vs. *Indian-English*, $p < .001$, and *Tamil* vs. *British-English*, $p < .001$). In addition, children chose *Hindi* speakers above chance when compared to *Indian-English* (Binomial Exact $p = .032$) and *British-English* speakers (Binomial Exact $p = .034$). Finally, children were at chance between *Indian-English* and *British-English* speakers (Binomial Exact $p = .072$). Binomial logistic regressions showed that with age children were more

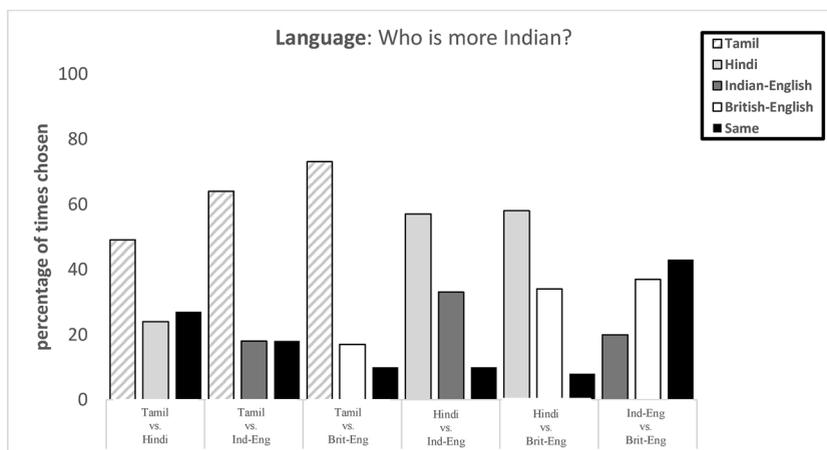


Fig. 4. Percentage of times children chose *Tamil*, *Hindi*, *British-English* and *Indian-English*, and “both the same” as “more Indian” for each contrast.

likely to pick *Hindi* speakers as compared to *Indian-English* or *British-English* speakers (*Hindi* vs. *Indian-English*: $\beta = 0.282$, $SE = .127$, $p < 0.026$; *Hindi* vs. *British-English*: $\beta = 0.251$, $SE = .125$, $p < 0.044$), and more likely to choose *British-English* speakers as compared to *Indian-English* speakers ($\beta = .594$, $SE = 0.181$, $p < 0.001$) – See Appendix B for regression results for all contrasts.

The choice to pick “both the same” varied based on the contrast, $X^2 = 37.903$, $p < .001$. This option was chosen most often when contrasting *Indian-English* vs. *British-English* (43 %), and when contrasting *Tamil* vs. *Hindi* (27 %) – see Appendix D.

7. Discussion

When evaluating who was more Indian, children were more likely to choose *Light-SA* targets than *Dark-SA* or *White* targets. Notably, in this design, we used both lighter- and darker-skinned South Asian versions of the same face (between-subjects), and participants still reliably picked the *Light-SA* target. Moreover, when evaluating the relative “Indianness” of *Dark-SA* and *White* targets, children chose *White* targets as often as *Dark-SA* targets, despite the majority status of darker-skinned South Asian faces in children’s local social environments. By extending considerations of race to include colorism, these findings contribute to existing literature on the role of race in influencing people’s person judgments (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) and nationality judgments (Devos & Banaji, 2005). Although we did not provide children with explicit caste information or collect information about any participant’s caste background (as this would be considered sensitive and potentially offensive to ask), skin tone is sometimes used as a proxy for caste (Parameswaran & Cardoza, 2009; Shankar & Subish, 2007) and conceptualizations of caste may relate to colorist judgments. Regarding religion, despite being a secular state and choosing *Muslim* targets at a higher rate than their baseline prevalence would predict, children robustly chose *Hindu* targets as more Indian than *Muslim* targets, mirroring findings by Ellwood-Lowe et al. (2020). Indeed, in their study, children rated how “Indian” Muslim Indians and Hindu Indians were on a 5-point scale, and similarly found that although Muslims were perceived as Indian, Hindus were perceived as more Indian on average. Importantly, in their study, the youngest children tested were 9-years of age, whereas we observed this pattern of results in children as young as 5-years old. Overall, our results – especially the skin tone results – suggest the important intersection of status with social category membership. Although people in this Southern region of India are generally darker-skinned (Mallick et al., 2013; Sarkar & Nandineni, 2018), children robustly viewed *Light-SA* faces as “more Indian.” As further evidence of the role of colorism in guiding children’s judgments, children were equally likely to judge the highly familiar *Dark-SA* and highly unfamiliar *White* faces as “Indian,” despite the fact that *White* faces were dramatically underrepresented in the participants’ local communities.

The results of the language trials provide a more complex view of the ways in which familiarity and status may intersect. Children systematically picked the *Tamil* speakers as being more Indian, followed by *Hindi*, *British-English*, and then *Indian-English* speakers. *Tamil* occupies a dual role as both familiar and strongly tied to local state identity (Ramawamy, 1997) which may contribute to children selecting *Tamil* speakers most often as “more Indian.” In addition to considerations of familiarity and local identity, children’s choices in other contrasts may reflect considerations of other aspects of status, such as their increased selection of *British-English* speakers compared to *Indian-English* speakers as “more Indian” with age. Notable consistency across ages was observed, but children’s consideration of specific languages and accents, or knowledge of cultural stereotypes is one aspect of language attitudes that may change with age (see Kinzler and DeJesus, 2013, for analogous findings). Although children may hear Indian-accented English speakers more often, older children may be considering India’s colonial history or absorbing broader messages about geopolitical or socioeconomic status.

This complex interplay of familiarity and status (including potential age-related patterns), especially in the language trials, lends itself to further questions about how nationality judgments may be understood among other kinds of person judgments. Asking children their views about who is more Indian across three categories offered insight into the ways in which children think about social categories, familiarity, and status across multiple domains. In Study 2, to get a more nuanced picture of how nationality cognition is situated among other person judgments, children evaluated targets on their nationality, kindness, intellect, and leadership ability. We focus exclusively on the language trials given that the results from Study 1 indicated that children showed age-related changes, and exhibited nuanced judgments relating both to familiarity and status.

8. Study 2: Nationality cognition and other person judgments

In Study 2, we situate nationality cognition among other types of person judgments. To do this, we focused on replicating and extending the findings from our Language trials in Study 1. The Language trials were chosen both because they offered the most variance in reflecting influences of familiarity and status, and because they captured age-related patterns. In addition to asking children to make nationality judgments, we extended our investigation to person judgments pertaining to intelligence, kindness, and leadership. A large corpus of existing literature suggests that on the one hand, people make person judgments on divergent axes of warmth and competence, and that people generally associate high status targets with high competence but low warmth (2002, Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999). On the other hand, evidence that people exhibit a halo effect or positivity bias when evaluating themselves or their ingroup (Boseovski, 2010; Pfeifer et al., 2007) suggests that evaluations of warmth and competence do not always diverge. Open questions concern the role of familiarity and status in these evaluations, and whether children will exhibit biases toward high status but unfamiliar targets. We predicted that children would relate traits pertaining to competence (e.g., intelligence and leadership) to high status languages, but that children may choose more familiar languages when considering traits that connote warmth or solidarity (e.g., kindness). Differences observed in the relative choice of languages and accents among different person judgments can provide information about children’s dual considerations of familiarity and status when evaluating novel social targets.

8.1. Participants

A new group of ninety-six children between the ages of 5 and 10 years old (49 girls, $M_{\text{age}} = 6.79$, $SD = 1.68$ years) participated in this study. Participants were recruited through two schools and two community centers across Chennai, India. Children recruited from the community centers came from families earning less than RS 10,00,000 (approximately 14000 USD) annually, and children from the schools came from families earning a median annual income between RS 50,00,001 to RS 75,00,000 (approximately 68,000 to 102,000 USD). For more demographic information, see Appendix A. In all reported results, there were no differences between the results from children tested in the community centers and those in schools. For compensation, participants were given a small gift and a donation was made to the school/center equivalent to 5 USD per child.

8.2. Procedure

The procedure involved a replication and extension of the Language trials in Study 1. In each trial, children were presented with two targets, each spoke in one of four ways: *Tamil*, *Hindi*, *Indian-English*, or *British-English*. There were six trials in total, with each language contrasted against one another. For each trial, participants were asked a series of four questions: “who is more Indian?”, “who is more intelligent?”, “who is more kind?”, and “who is a better leader?”. The order of languages presented, the pairing of languages to faces, and the order of the questions were counterbalanced across participants. As in Study 1, children were given the option of picking either of the targets or both targets (i.e., they were asked “[Target A], [Target B], or both the same?”).

9. Results

9.1. Analysis plan

As in Study 1, we first present the percentage of times each target type (e.g., *Tamil*) was picked across all contrasts in which that target was featured as a possible response option (e.g., *Tamil* vs. *Hindi*, *Tamil* vs. *Indian-English*, and *Tamil* vs. *British-English*). To closer examine children’s target choices (e.g., *Tamil*) for each contrast (e.g., *Tamil* vs. *Hindi*), we conducted binomial exact tests (against 50% chance) excluding “both the same” responses. Binomial logistic regressions were used to observe age-related differences; likelihood ratio tests confirmed that the addition of testing site, language of testing, and child gender did not explain significantly greater variance and so these were not included in the final regression models (see Table 1 for all results). Last, using chi-square goodness of fit tests, we examined whether the choice to pick “both the same” varied based on which paired contrast children observed.

9.2. Indian

We replicated the findings from Study 1. Across all trials in which *Tamil* speakers were featured as a possible response option (i.e., *Tamil* vs. *Hindi*, *Tamil* vs. *Indian-English*, and *Tamil* vs. *British-English*), a *Tamil* speaker was chosen as “more Indian” 63% of the time. Across trials in which *Hindi* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *Hindi* vs. *Tamil*, *Hindi* vs. *Indian-English*, and *Hindi* vs. *British-English*), a *Hindi* speaker was chosen as “more Indian” 44% of the time. Across trials in which *Indian-English* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *Indian-English* vs. *Tamil*, *Indian-English* vs. *Hindi*, and *Indian-English* vs. *British-English*), an *Indian-English* speaker was chosen as “more Indian” 22% of the time. And across trials in which *British-English* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *British-English* vs. *Tamil*, *British-English* vs. *Hindi*, and *British-English* vs. *Indian-English*), a *British-English* speaker was chosen as “more Indian” 29% of the time.

Notably, *Tamil* speakers were chosen above chance for all contrasts (Binomial Exact Tests: *Tamil* vs. *Hindi*, $p = .004$; *Tamil* vs. *Indian-English*, $p < .001$; *Tamil* vs. *British-English*, $p < .001$). *Hindi* speakers were chosen above chance when compared to *Indian-English* (Binomial Exact $p < .001$) and *British-English* speakers (Binomial Exact $p < .005$). And *Indian-English* speakers were chosen below chance when compared to *British-English* speakers (Binomial Exact $p < .053$). Logistic regressions revealed that with age, children were more likely to choose *Hindi* speakers as compared to *Indian-English* or *British-English* speakers (*Hindi* vs. *Indian-English*: $\beta = .305$, $SE = .128$, $p < .017$; *Hindi* vs. *British-English* $\beta = .622$, $SE = .152$, $p < .001$), and more likely to choose *British-English* speakers as compared to *Indian-English* speakers ($\beta = .721$, $SE = .179$, $p < .001$) – See Appendix C for regression results for all contrasts.

The choice to pick “both the same” varied based on the contrast, $X^2 = 12.169$, $p < .033$. This option was chosen most often when contrasting *Indian-English* vs. *British-English* speakers (28 %) and *Tamil* vs. *Hindi* speakers (26 %) – See Appendix D.

9.3. Kindness

Across all trials in which *Tamil* speakers were featured as a possible response option (i.e., *Tamil* vs. *Hindi*, *Tamil* vs. *Indian-English*, and *Tamil* vs. *British-English*), a *Tamil* speaker was chosen as “more kind” 60% of the time. Across trials in which *Hindi* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *Hindi* vs. *Tamil*, *Hindi* vs. *Indian-English*, and *Hindi* vs. *British-English*), a *Hindi* speaker was chosen as “more kind” 35% of the time. Across trials in which *Indian-English* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *Indian-English* vs. *Tamil*, *Indian-English* vs. *Hindi*, and *Indian-English* vs. *British-English*), an *Indian-English* speaker was chosen as “more kind” 39% of the time. And across trials in which *British-English* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *British-English* vs. *Tamil*, *British-English* vs. *Hindi*, and *British-English* vs. *Indian-English*), a *British-English* speaker was chosen as “more kind” 18% of the time.

Once again, *Tamil* speakers were chosen above chance for all three contrasts (Binomial Exact Tests: *Tamil* vs. *Hindi*, $p = .044$; *Tamil*

vs. *Indian-English*, $p < .001$; *Tamil* vs. *British-English*, $p < .001$). *Hindi* speakers were chosen at chance when compared to *Indian-English* speakers (Binomial Exact $p = .450$) but above chance compared to *British-English* speakers (Binomial Exact $p = 0.041$). And children chose *Indian-English* speakers above chance when compared to *British-English* speakers (Binomial Exact $p < .001$). Binomial logistic regressions revealed that with age, children were less likely to choose *British-English* speakers when compared to *Hindi* and *Indian-English* speakers (*British-English* vs. *Hindi*: $\beta = -0.267$, $SE = .125$, $p < .033$; *British-English* vs. *Indian-English*, $\beta = -0.300$, $SE = .129$, $p < .020$) – See Appendix C for regression results for all contrasts.

The choice to pick “both the same” did not vary as a function of which paired contrast children were observing, $X^2 = 9.105$, $p < .105$ (See Appendix D).

9.4. Intelligence

Across all trials in which *Tamil* speakers were featured as a possible response option (i.e., *Tamil* vs. *Hindi*, *Tamil* vs. *Indian-English*, and *Tamil* vs. *British-English*), a *Tamil* speaker was chosen as “more intelligent” 47% of the time. Across trials in which *Hindi* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *Hindi* vs. *Tamil*, *Hindi* vs. *Indian-English*, and *Hindi* vs. *British-English*), a *Hindi* speaker was chosen as “more intelligent” 22% of the time. Across trials in which *Indian-English* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *Indian-English* vs. *Tamil*, *Indian-English* vs. *Hindi*, and *Indian-English* vs. *British-English*), an *Indian-English* speaker was chosen as “more intelligent” 33% of the time. And across trials in which *British-English* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *British-English* vs. *Tamil*, *British-English* vs. *Hindi*, and *British-English* vs. *Indian-English*), a *British-English* speaker was chosen as “more intelligent” 47% of the time.

Once again, *Tamil* speakers were chosen above chance for all three contrasts (Binomial Exact Tests: *Tamil* vs. *Hindi*, $p < .001$, *Tamil* vs. *Indian-English*, $p = .019$, and *Tamil* vs. *British-English*, $p = .049$). Children chose *Hindi* speakers below chance when compared to *Indian-English* (Binomial Exact $p = 0.001$) and *British-English* speakers (Binomial Exact $p < .001$). And *Indian-English* speakers were chosen below chance when compared to *British-English* speakers (Binomial Exact $p < .001$). Binomial logistic regressions revealed that with age, children increased their likelihood of choosing *British-English* speakers as compared to *Hindi* speakers, $\beta = .520$, $SE = .204$, $p < .011$ – See Appendix C for regression results for all contrasts.

The choice to pick “both the same” varied as a function of which contrast children were presented with, $X^2 = 26.00$, $p < .001$. Children chose this option most often when contrasting *Tamil* vs. *British-English* speakers (47 %) – See Appendix D.

9.5. Leadership

Across all trials in which *Tamil* speakers were featured as a possible response option (i.e., *Tamil* vs. *Hindi*, *Tamil* vs. *Indian-English*, and *Tamil* vs. *British-English*), a *Tamil* speaker was chosen as “a better leader” 27% of the time. Across trials in which *Hindi* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *Hindi* vs. *Tamil*, *Hindi* vs. *Indian-English*, and *Hindi* vs. *British-English*), a *Hindi* speaker was chosen as “a better leader” 38% of the time. Across trials in which *Indian-English* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *Indian-English* vs. *Tamil*, *Indian-English* vs. *Hindi*, and *Indian-English* vs. *British-English*), an *Indian-English* speaker was chosen as “a better leader” 35% of the time. And across trials in which *British-English* speakers were featured as a response option (i.e., *British-English* vs. *Tamil*, *British-English* vs. *Hindi*, and *British-English* vs. *Indian-English*), a *British-English* speaker was chosen as “a better leader” 49% of the time (Table 1).

Unlike in previous contrasts, *Tamil* speakers were chosen below chance for all three contrasts (Binomial Exact Tests: *Tamil* vs. *Hindi*, $p = .006$ and *Tamil* vs. *Indian-English*, $p = .008$, and *Tamil* vs. *British-English*, $p = .011$). *Hindi* speakers were chosen at chance when

Table 1

Proportion of responses for which children chose Tamil, Hindi, Indian-English, British-English, and “both the same” for each contrast as “more Indian,” “more kind,” “more intelligent,” and “a better leader.” Binomial exact tests and logistic regression outputs for each contrast exclude “both the same” responses.

Question Type	Tamil vs. Hindi	Tamil vs. Indian-English	Tamil vs. British-English	Hindi vs. Indian-English	Hindi vs. British-English	Indian-English vs. British-English
Indian (proportion of times chosen)	Tamil: .50	Tamil: .65	Tamil: .74	Hindi: .58 [†]	Hindi: .51 [†]	Ind-Eng: .27
	Hindi: .24	Ind-Eng: .16	Brit-Eng: .18	Ind-Eng: .24	Brit-Eng: .25	Brit-Eng: .45 [†]
	Both: .26	Both: .19	Both: .08	Both: .18	Both: .24	Both: .28
Kindness (proportion of times chosen)	Tamil: .47	Tamil: .59	Tamil: .74	Hindi: .29	Hindi: .50 [†]	Ind-Eng: .59 [†]
	Hindi: .28	Ind-Eng: .20	Brit-Eng: .11	Ind-Eng: .37	Brit-Eng: .30	Brit-Eng: .14
	Both: .25	Both: .21	Both: .15	Both: .34	Both: .20	Both: .27
Intelligence (proportion of times chosen)	Tamil: .58	Tamil: .49	Tamil: .34	Hindi: .23	Hindi: .19	Ind-Eng: .20
	Hindi: .24	Ind-Eng: .27	Brit-Eng: .19	Ind-Eng: .52	Brit-Eng: .64 [†]	Brit-Eng: .60
	Both: .18	Both: .24	Both: .47	Both: .25	Both: .17	Both: .20
Leader (proportion of times chosen)	Tamil: .27	Tamil: .27	Tamil: .27	Hindi: .31	Hindi: .27	Ind-Eng: .25
	Hindi: .53 [†]	Ind-Eng: .52	Brit-Eng: .51	Ind-Eng: .27	Brit-Eng: .55 [†]	Brit-Eng: .43
	Both: .20	Both: .21	Both: .22	Both: .42	Both: .18	Both: .32

Bold: Significant binomial exact tests.

†: Significant binomial logistic regressions (target choice increasing with age).

compared to *Indian-English* speakers (Binomial Exact test $p = .689$) but below chance when compared to *British-English* speakers (Binomial Exact $p = .006$). And *Indian-English* speakers were chosen below chance when compared to *British-English* speakers (Binomial Exact $p = .046$). Binomial logistic regressions revealed that older children were more likely than younger children to choose *Hindi* speakers as compared to the *Tamil* speakers, $\beta = .386$, $SE = .148$, $p < .009$ – See Appendix C for regression results for all contrasts.

The choice to pick “both the same” varied based on the contrast children were observing, $\chi^2 = 17.890$, $p = .003$. Children chose this option most often when contrasting *Hindi* vs. *Indian-English* speakers (42 %) and *Indian-English* vs. *British-English* speakers (32 %) – See Appendix D.

10. Discussion

In evaluating nationality, we replicated our initial findings: *Tamil* speakers were perceived as more Indian across contrasts, followed by *Hindi*, *British-English*, and *Indian-English* speakers. With age, children were more likely to choose *Hindi* speakers over *Indian-English* and *British-English* speakers, and *British-English* speakers over *Indian-English* speakers. In evaluating kindness, children favored *Tamil* speakers, followed by *Hindi* and *Indian-English* speakers, and then *British-English* speakers. In evaluating intelligence, children once again favored *Tamil* speakers, followed by *British-English*, *Indian-English* speakers, and *Hindi* speakers. In evaluating leadership, children favored *British-English* speakers, *Indian-English* and *Hindi* speakers, and then *Tamil* speakers. Children exhibited a general positivity bias towards people who spoke the familiar, local language (i.e., choosing *Tamil* speakers as “more Indian,” “more kind,” and “more intelligent.”) However, we did not observe a *Tamil* bias in children’s leadership choices. One possibility is that the leadership question most closely captured children’s status inferences (compared to the other person judgments we probed), revealing contexts in which status trumps familiarity as a priority. This attention to status also complements existing literature suggesting that status considerations emerge early in childhood (Olson, Shutts, Kinzler, & Weisman, 2012; Shutts, Brey, Dornbusch, Slywotzky, & Olson, 2016). Children’s nationality judgments were considerably stable across development, with some notable exceptions primarily for the contrasts involving *British-English* speakers, where we observed age-related trends. With age, children were more likely to choose *British-English* speakers as “more Indian” and “more intelligent” and less likely to choose these speakers as “more nice” for specific language contrasts. This may reflect an interesting separation between children’s relatively stable judgments about highly familiar languages (e.g., *Tamil*) compared to their relatively malleable judgments about culturally high status but less familiar languages (e.g., *British-English*); the latter of which may hinge on children’s growing awareness of cultural messages about different social and linguistic groups (Kinzler and DeJesus, 2013).

Viewing these judgments together, the data suggest that children attend to both the familiarity *and* relative status of a language or accent in evaluating someone’s likely traits. Importantly, we observed that a child’s local language bias (i.e., nationality, kindness, and intelligence) is selective: Children selected *British-English* speakers (rather than *Tamil* speakers) as the best leaders. Children’s non-*Tamil* bias in their choice of leaders may reflect an attention to status. As children learn the relative popularity of languages in their local, national, and global environments, they may reflect these considerations in their leadership judgments. Indeed, children’s intuitions about leadership may even reflect the leadership-language relationship evident in national contexts such as Indian government (e.g., English and Hindi are the official languages of Indian parliament even though India has no official national language; *The Official Languages Act, 1963*). Although children may be exposed to examples of leaders who speak their local language, higher-level cultural messages may still be absorbed early in development.

As such, children may be breaking down their assessments of speakers of different languages into loose clusters that reflect warmth and competence; children were more likely to assign competence-like traits to high status (yet less familiar) languages and accents, and assign warmth-like traits to familiar languages. Children’s nationality cognition includes attention to both the relevant status and the familiarity or representativeness of different social attributes in their environment.

11. General discussion

Although citizenship may be construed through an objective, legal lens, beliefs about nationality are influenced by considerations of social category membership and status. Strikingly, we observe these subjective nationality judgments in India, a cultural context that is explicitly colorblind, secular, and bears no national language. In Experiment 1, 5–10-year-old children were asked to evaluate which targets (who varied in skin tone, religion, and language) they considered to be “more Indian.” Although children were explicitly given the option across all trials to choose “both the same,” they were more likely to pick individuals who were lighter-skinned South Asians, said to practice Hinduism, and who spoke Tamil. Moreover, we found evidence of children’s dual attention to both status and familiarity. In some cases, children’s choices reflected what was familiar in their local communities (e.g., *Tamil* speakers and *Hindu* practitioners), and in other cases, their choices reflected status considerations: despite the larger numerical presence in the region of people who would be categorized as darker-skinned South Asians, children were more likely to choose lighter-skinned South Asians as being more Indian. In Experiment 2, to further probe at the relationship between familiarity and status, we replicated and extended our findings about language, querying children about a range of person judgments, in addition to nationality. We observed that children often assigned less familiar (yet high status) languages to competence-like traits (i.e., intelligence and leadership) and familiar languages to warmth-like traits. These findings indicate that conceptions of nationality may include dual conceptions about familiarity and representativeness as well as notions of cultural status. That is, nationality cognition seems to reflect children’s attention to both familiarity *and* status, but open questions remain regarding the weight that different factors have, and how individual factors or environmental and cultural contexts may influence how a child thinks. Furthermore, children may have multiple representations of what it means to be “Indian” and different contexts might bring one representation to the forefront.

To avoid presenting children with a binary conception of nationality, we asked “who is *more* Indian?” (instead of “who is Indian?”) and also gave children the option of choosing “both the same” on each trial. Given the diversity and breadth of what it likely means to be Indian in the second-largest population in the world (which is also both linguistically diverse and secular), we felt it was more appropriate to use a qualifier, and to provide the explicit option of choosing both targets as equally Indian. Existing research using non-binary measures of nationality (e.g., Ellwood et al., 2020) suggest that children may conceive of nationality as being along a continuum, and not always binary. Although children may hold essentialist beliefs about nationality (i.e., that all Indians carry a shared “essence”), they may also conceptualize this category as “fuzzy” (Oden, 1977), where some *kinds* of people best represent this category more than others. Interesting open questions for future research concern the ways in which a child’s mental representations hinge on beliefs about not only who *fits*, but perhaps also who *doesn’t fit* a national group. Indeed, our findings may be extended to examine whether children evaluate nationality on the basis of who they think best represents a nation, or who they think doesn’t (or shouldn’t) represent the nation (or a combination of the two).

Our findings on the role of status raise further questions about the boundary conditions of nationality cognition. For example, it is unlikely that *any* high status target would be perceived as best representing a given nation, but insofar as a target can be a reasonable contender (e.g., as in our studies, where *British-English* speakers had South Asian faces), status considerations may prevail (although it is worth noting that in the skin tone trials, children chose *White* faces as “more Indian” as often as *Dark-SA* faces). An examination of these questions may help further elucidate the extent to which status considerations influence nationality cognition.

In future research, exploring children’s understanding of a broader range of social categories (either intersectionally or by including groups that were not included here), and in different cultural contexts, is important to better understand the nuances in children’s reasoning about groups and status. Though we examined these social categories separately, to explore the role of *relative* status on children’s nationality considerations, future work might compare across different intersecting identities (e.g., a lighter-skinned South Asian Muslim target and a darker-skinned South Asian Hindu target). Further, how might children perceive English accents spoken by groups that do not have the same cultural and historical ties as the British? Similarly, how might other religious minorities fare as compared to Hindus (including those who have been granted recent legal protections), especially when there are visual markers of faith (e.g., wearing a hijab). These questions help to construct a more comprehensive picture of social categories (and combinations of social categories) that are relevant to nationality cognition across development. In addition, future work might further probe the relationship between children’s own social group membership and their nationality judgments. On the one hand, we find evidence that children confer nationality to their own social group (e.g., Tamil-speaking children chose *Tamil* speakers as “more Indian”). On the other hand, we also find evidence that children make nationality judgments that extend beyond their own social group (e.g., children chose *White* and *Dark-SA* targets at similar rates, and *British-English* and *Indian-English* targets at similar rates). Although we didn’t explicitly test this, one possibility is that children’s nationality choices may be informed by the degree to which they identify with a particular social group.

Beyond nationality, our findings contribute to the larger corpus of literature on children’s social concept and category formation. Recent work on children’s prototypes suggests that children as young as 5-years old not only perceive some groups as more prototypical than others (Lei, Leshin, & Rhodes, 2020), but also rely on extreme features (e.g., the very fastest cheetah) rather than average exemplars (e.g., an average-speeded cheetah; Foster-Hanson & Rhodes, 2019). In the context of nationality, children may be more motivated to represent nationality through ideal exemplars than average exemplars – thus perceiving high status groups as better representatives of one’s nation, even when these high status groups are neither the numerical majority nor familiar in the child’s environment. Open questions concern the consequences of a status-based versus familiarity-based approach to nationality prototypes. One possibility is that children learn to extend nationality prototypes to their own self-concepts, affecting the extent to which they identify with a nation. Another possibility is that status-based versus familiarity-based prototypes can contribute to developing attitudes about which social groups should have more access to resources and/or legal protections within a country.

Finally, how is information about different groups transmitted to children in different contexts? This process may differ by age – we only observed age trends in the language trials, but not the skin tone or religion trials. This may be because messages about the latter two social categories are learned earlier on; topics surrounding caste and religion may be more explicitly addressed or observable in schools and in typical household conversations, whereas some associations (e.g., associating a language with nationality) may be less commonly addressed. An examination of adolescent and adults’ nationality beliefs may offer insight into the factors that shape these beliefs at different time points, and the relative weight that is placed on familiarity and status across development. In addition, implicit nationality measures may be particularly informative with adult samples who may not express their explicit beliefs as readily as children (Baron & Banaji, 2006). An examination of individual- and group-level differences in nationality judgments can help to reveal the processes by which children not only start to think about nationality, but also the mechanism(s) by which children come to make sense of nationality judgments through the lens of social category membership. This would be an important enterprise to undertake in research with children in diverse national contexts.

In light of a global surge in nationalism, we believe an understanding of how people conceptualize nationhood is critical as nations start to experiment with different national policies and practices to put their country first. On the surface, though many policies bear no affiliation to specific social categories (though some overtly do), underlying beliefs about who constitutes a *bona fide* or legitimate citizen may in fact be influenced by the group to which someone belongs, or doesn’t belong. An exploration of just how early these beliefs and associations manifest, can help us to think about the relevant mechanisms and factors involved in shifting and shaping these beliefs. We contribute to the growing literature on nationality cognition, with a focus on how membership to a social category, as well as a group’s relative status, may matter in forming ideas about nationhood.

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Appendix A. Demographic Information

Note: Demographic information was only collected from participants in schools (not in lower-income community centers)

Participant Characteristics	Study 1 (<i>n</i> = 48)	Study 2 (<i>n</i> = 32)
Native Language		
English	14	12
Tamil	21	14
Both English and Tamil	7	4
Other	2	2
Language Status		
English only	13	18
Tamil only	4	2
English and Tamil	21	10
Other	6	2
Socioeconomic Status		
Less than RS 10,00,000	10	1
RS 10,00,001 to RS 25,00,000	10	7
RS 25,00,0001 to RS 50,00,000	4	6
RS 50,00,001 to RS 75,00,000	9	7
RS 75,00,001 to RS 1,00,00000	3	3
More than RS 1,00,00,000	7	3
Parent Political Orientation		
Extremely Liberal	5	3
Liberal	9	3
Slightly Liberal	11	6
Moderate	10	15
Slightly Conservative	8	0
Conservative	1	0
Extremely Conservative	1	0
Parent Highest Education Level		
Less than High School	0	0
High School	1	0
At least one year of college	2	0
Associate's Degree	4	9
Bachelor's Degree	7	7
Some graduate training	0	2
Graduate degree	19	6
Other	8	6

Appendix B. Study 1: Binomial logistic regression output using age as a predictor

Skin Tone: Binomial logistic regression outputs for each contrast in the Skin Tone trials

Light-SA vs. Dark-SA	Light-SA vs. White	Dark-SA vs. White
$\beta = .096$	$\beta = .106$	$\beta = .261$
$SE = .152$	$SE = .176$	$SE = .161$
$p < .528$	$p < .547$	$p < .105$

Religion: Binomial logistic regression output for the Religion trials

Hindu vs. Muslim
$\beta = -.187$
$SE = .123$
$p < .129$

Language: Binomial logistic regression output for the Language trials (Study 1)

	Tamil vs. Hindi	Tamil vs. Ind-Eng	Tamil vs. Brit-Eng	Hindi vs. Ind-Eng	Hindi vs. Brit-Eng	Ind-Eng vs. Brit-Eng
Language	$\beta = -.192$ SE = .123 $p < .120$	$\beta = -.229$ SE = .128 $p < .075\dagger$	$\beta = -.189$ SE = .136 $p < .166$	$\beta = .282$ SE = .127 $p < .026^*$	$\beta = .251$ SE = .125 $p < .044^*$	$\beta = .594$ SE = .181 $p < .001^{***}$

* $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$
 *** $p < .001$
 † Marginally significant

Appendix C. Study 2: Binomial logistic regression output using age as a predictor

	Tamil vs. Hindi	Tamil vs. Indian-English	Tamil vs. British-English	Hindi vs. Indian-English	Hindi vs. British-English	Indian-English vs. British-English
Indian	$\beta = -.100$ SE = .120 $p < .404$	$\beta = -.063$ SE = .125 $p < .618$	$\beta = -.198$ SE = .140 $p < .156$	$\beta = .305$ SE = .128 $p < .017^*$	$\beta = .622$ SE = .152 $p < .001^{***}$	$\beta = .721$ SE = .179 $p < .001^{***}$
Kindness	$\beta = -.230$ SE = .136 $p < .091$	$\beta = -.235$ SE = .126 $p < .062\dagger$	$\beta = -.198$ SE = .140 $p < .156$	$\beta = -.230$ SE = .132 $p < .091$	$\beta = -.267$ SE = .125 $p < .033^*$	$\beta = -.300$ SE = .129 $p < .020^*$
Intelligence	$\beta = -.123$ SE = .123 $p < .185$	$\beta = -.079$ SE = .120 $p < .511$	$\beta = .168$ SE = .131 $p < .200$	$\beta = -.164$ SE = .145 $p < .258$	$\beta = .520$ SE = .204 $p < .011^*$	$\beta = .125$ SE = .152 $p < .411$
Leader	$\beta = .386$ SE = .148 $p < .009^{**}$	$\beta = .091$ SE = .135 $p < .502$	$\beta = .165$ SE = .137 $p < .229$	$\beta = -.151$ SE = .131 $p < .248$	$\beta = -.135$ SE = .140 $p < .336$	$\beta = -.121$ SE = .138 $p < .378$

* $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$
 *** $p < .001$
 † Marginally significant

Binomial logistic regression outputs for each contrast in the Language trials (Study 2).

Appendix D. Percentage of times children chose “both the same”

Skin Tone Trials

X^2 statistic	Light-SA vs. Dark-SA	Light-SA vs. White	Dark-SA vs. White
$X^2 = .728, p = .695$	.08	.05	.06

Chi-square goodness of fit test statistic comparing “both the same” responses for each contrast in the Skin Tone trials (Study 1)
Language Trials

	X^2 statistic	Tamil vs. Hindi	Tamil vs. Ind-Eng	Tamil vs. Brit-Eng	Hindi vs. Ind-Eng	Hindi vs. Brit-Eng	Ind-Eng vs. Brit-Eng
Indian (Study 1)	$X^2 = 37.903, p < .001$	.27	.18	.10	.10	.08	.43
Indian (Study 2)	$X^2 = 12.169, p = .033$	.26	.20	.08	.18	.24	.28
Kindness	$X^2 = 9.105, p = .105$	.25	.21	.15	.34	.20	.27
Intelligence	$X^2 = 26.00, p < .001$	.18	.24	.47	.25	.17	.20
Leader	$X^2 = 17.890, p = .003$	.20	.21	.22	.42	.19	.32

Chi-square goodness of fit test statistics comparing “both the same” responses for each contrast in the Language trials (Studies 1 and 2).

Appendix E. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogdev.2020.100990>.

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