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BRIEF REPORT

Children's Sociolinguistic Evaluations of Nice Foreigners and Mean Americans

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Three experiments investigated 5- to 6-year-old monolingual English-speaking American children's sociolinguistic evaluations of others based on their accent (native, foreign) and social actions (nice, mean, neutral). In Experiment 1, children expressed social preferences for native-accented English speakers over foreign-accented speakers, and they judged the native-accented speakers to be "American." In Experiments 2 and 3, the accented speakers were depicted as being nicer than the relatively meaner native speakers. Children's social preferences and judgments of others' personalities varied as a function of behavior; in particular, children disliked individuals who committed negative social actions. In contrast, children's judgments of nationality hinged exclusively on accent; across all conditions, children evaluated native-accented English speakers to be "American," regardless of whether they were nice or mean. These findings contribute to an understanding of the nature of children's reasoning about language as a social category and have implications for future research investigating children's thinking about language as a marker of national group identity.

Keywords: language, nationality, social cognition

Children's social evaluations of others take on myriad forms. Some of these include evaluations that are based on an individual's history of behaviors. For example, children judge others based on their social actions and can use previous behavior to predict an individual's future acts (e.g., Cain, Heyman, & Walker, 1997). Others include evaluations of individuals based on their social group membership. For instance, children express social preferences for novel individuals (who have yet to display any actions) based on their race, gender, and accent (e.g., Aboud, 1988; Kinzler, Shutts, DeJesus, & Spelke, 2009; Ruble, Martin, & Berenbaum, 2006). Although potentially misleading, inferences based on social group membership have consequences for interpersonal evaluations and interactions throughout the lifespan (e.g., Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Building on research indicating that children express robust social preferences for novel individuals who share their native accent (Kinzler, Dupoux, & Spelke, 2007; Kinzler et al., 2009), the current research compares the judgments children make of others based on their accent and their past history of nice or mean behaviors. We investigate (a) whether children's preferences for native individuals are impacted by knowledge of a particular individual's social actions and (b) how the types of inferences that children make about others based on their accent versus their behaviors compare.

Language and accent provide an important guide for children's early social preferences, but the reasons for this phenomenon remain unclear. Past research provides evidence that infants prefer to look at individuals who previously spoke in the native language of the infants' home environments, and older infants preferentially reach for toys and foods offered by a native speaker (Kinzler et al., 2007; Shutts, Kinzler, McKee, & Spelke, 2009). Preschool-aged children selectively trust the testimony of a native-accented speaker of their native language relative to a foreign-accented speaker, even when learning nonverbal object functions (Kinzler, Corriveau, & Harris, 2011). By 5–6 years of age, monolingual children express robust social preferences for native-accented speakers of their native language (in this example, native-accented speakers of English compared with French-accented speakers of English). This is the case even though children understood the content of the foreign-accented voices. Moreover, these social preferences for native-accented speakers maintained in the face of contrasting visual properties (e.g., race) that have otherwise been found to guide young children's social judgments (Kinzler et al., 2009).

One account of children's early preferences for speakers of their native language posits that accent serves as a form of familiarity, and, like adults (e.g., Bornstein, Leone, & Galley, 1987; Zajonc, 2001), children may generally prefer social entities that are familiar to them (Cameron, Alvarez, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2001). Under a "familiar as positive" account, once a category is familiar (and thus preferred), that category might yield preferences across a variety of tasks. For instance, a child who likes native-accented individuals

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might not only prefer them as social partners but also infer that they possess a variety of undifferentiated positive social attributes. Indeed, some research suggests that children's assessments of others are susceptible to a "halo effect," whereby preferred individuals are positively assessed across a variety of domains (e.g., someone who is smart is also considered to be nice; Brosseau-Liard & Birch, 2010).

An alternative account of the social meaning of accent posits that rather than simply being familiar, accent is a particularly persuasive and informative cue to social group membership. Certainly by adulthood people imbue accent with social meaning, and subtle variations in accent are seen as indicating social identity and group membership (Giles & Billings, 2004; Labov, 2006). Moreover, in some circumstances children express preferences for high-status languages or dialects, even if they are not the children's primary language (Day, 1980; Kinzler, Shutts, & Spelke, in press). Thus, beyond familiarity, accent may provide meaningful social information, such as social or regional group membership or status within a group. Some researchers propose that dialect provides a highly reliable cultural group marker or tag (Cohen, in press; McElreath, Boyd, & Richerson, 2003), in part because a non-native accent is particularly difficult to fake (Flege, Yeni-Komshian, & Liu, 1999; Henrich & Henrich, 2007; Nettle & Dunbar, 1997). This account of the social meaning of language would predict that children may see accent as a particularly reliable indicator of social and regional group membership and thus draw inferences about an individual's identity from his or her accent.

Investigating children's reasoning about others' social behaviors provides an interesting comparison case to accent. An individual's actions might provide insight into who he or she is as an individual, rather than to what social group he or she belongs. As with accent, social evaluation based on others' social actions begins early in life. Even in infancy, children preferentially engage with agents who help, rather than hinder, others (Hamlin & Wynn, 2011; Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007; Hamlin, Wynn, Bloom, & Mahajan, 2011). Preschool-aged children categorize others as nice or mean and make inferences about others' future prosocial or antisocial behaviors based on knowledge of their past actions (Heyman & Gelman, 1998, 1999). Children also discount the testimony of an individual who was antisocial in the past (Mascaro & Sperber, 2009) and make global evaluations of others based on their behavior. For instance, children report that someone who is nice is also likely to have high academic ability (Heyman, Gee, & Giles, 2003). Finally, although there is evidence that children's thinking about personality traits as stable and enduring increases throughout middle childhood (e.g., Ferguson, van Roozendaal, & Rule, 1986; Rholes & Ruble, 1984), by 5–6 years of age, children can nevertheless meaningfully interpret others' nice or mean actions as indicators of their future behaviors (Boseovski & Lee, 2006). It is unknown, however, whether the evaluations and inferences children make about others based on their accent and social actions are similar or diverge, a goal that the current study aims to address.

Past research provides evidence that children positively evaluate native-accented speakers, but no research to date has investigated the limits of these native-accent preferences. First, how would a child respond if a native-accented speaker were mean and a foreign-accented speaker were nice? A child's evaluation of an individual might depend on that person's actions, rather than his or her status as a native speaker; nonetheless, it is possible that preferences for native-accented speakers may be resilient, even when contrasted with information that native-accented speakers are not desirable social partners. Second, do the kinds of inferences that children make about others based on their accent and their behaviors dissociate? If children view native speakers in a generally positive light, they might evaluate them positively on a variety of attributes, regardless of the domain in question. If, however, children treat accent as a marker of an individual's social group membership and social behavior as indicating an individual's character, then accent and behavior may guide different types of inferences. For instance, behavior may be more relevant for guiding assessments of an individual's personality or social desirability, whereas accent may be more important for inferences about an individual's social or national group membership.

To explore these questions, the current study investigates the evaluations and inferences children make about others based on their native- versus foreign-accented speech, as well as their history of past nice or mean behavior. The current project tested 5- to 6-year-old children given that past research on children's social reasoning about accent observed robust social preferences for native-accented speakers among children in this age group (Kinzler et al., 2007; Kinzler et al., 2009). Moreover, studies of children's reasoning about social actions provides evidence that children of this age can make inferences about others based on their past history of actions (Boseovski & Lee, 2006; Heyman & Gelman, 1998, 1999). In Experiment 1, monolingual English-speaking American children were presented with pairs of faces matched with neutral-content speech in native- and French-accented English. In Experiments 2 and 3, the same procedure was followed, yet the content of the individuals' speech was manipulated such that accented speakers were portrayed as "nicer" than the relatively "meaner" native speakers. In all experiments, children's social evaluations and expectations about individuals' personality traits and national group membership were assessed.

Experiment 1: Native Versus French Accent (Neutral Content)

Children in Experiment 1 viewed a series of individuals paired with native- or foreign-accented speech that was neutral in emotional content, following the method of Kinzler et al. (2009). To expand on past research, in addition to testing participants' friendship preferences, children's sociolinguistic judgments and expectations about individuals' geographic origins and national group membership were also assessed.

Method

Participants. Participants included 24 monolingual English-speaking 5- to 6-year-old children from Chicago (12 girls, 12 boys; *M* age = 72.3 months, range = 61.7–83.3 months; 46% White, 25% biracial, 17% African American, 4% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 4% other). Participants were recruited from a volunteer database at the University of Chicago and from public and private schools located in relatively affluent areas in the Chicago area. Overall, parents of participants tended to be well-educated; among parents who provided information about their educational background, 93.6% reported their highest level of education as a bachelor's or post-graduate degree.

Materials. Face stimuli consisted of 16 faces of racially ambiguous adults (eight female, eight male) created by morphing

White and Black faces. Faces were presented in gender-matched pairs against a white background on a laptop. Voice stimuli consisted of 16 clips of American- or French-accented English recorded by adult bilingual speakers of English and French living in Chicago; recordings were approximately 3 s in length and neutral in emotional content (e.g., "At school, children learn to read and write"). See the Appendix for a full list of statements.

Procedure. Children first saw eight "friendship" trials to replicate the method of Kinzler et al. (2009). In each trial, the experimenter said, "Here are pictures of two people. Let's hear what they sound like." She pointed to each face in turn and played a voice clip of either native- or French-accented English. Children were asked to choose whom they preferred as friends. Next, children saw the same series of faces and voices presented a second time. In the sociolinguistic block (four trials), children were asked, "Who do you think is nicer," "Who do you think is smarter," and "Who do you think is in charge?" Sociolinguistic questions were chosen in light of research suggesting that adults' perceptions of others' warmth, intelligence, and status are three dimensions that are often influenced by accent (Anisfeld, Bogo, & Lambert, 1962; Labov, 2006; see Giles & Billings, 2004, for a review). In the geography block (four trials), children were asked, "Who do you think lives around here," and "Who do you think is American?" The order of sociolinguistic and geography blocks was counterbalanced across participants.

Design. Voices were paired with faces using a matched-guise technique such that for each pair of faces, the same individual spoke in English with both an American accent and a French accent to control for pitch, warmth, and other aspects of voice quality (see Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, & Fillenbaum, 1960). The pairings of accent to faces were counterbalanced across participants, and the order in which native- and foreign-accented voices were presented was counterbalanced within and across participants. Additionally, the order of the sociolinguistic evaluation and geography blocks and the question order within those blocks were counterbalanced across participants. Choices of native-accented voices were compared to chance (50%) using one-sample two-tailed *t* tests. If a child responded, "I don't know," "both," or "neither" instead of selecting one of the two presented targets, his or her response for that trial was scored as a 0. This occurred rarely (less than 1% of trials).

Results

Friendship. Children robustly chose faces paired with native-accented voices as friends (M_{native} = 82.3%, SE = 3.76), $t(23)$ = 8.60, $p < .0001$, d = 1.76.

Sociolinguistic evaluation. Children chose faces paired with native-accented voices as nicer (M_{native} = 65.6%, SE = 5.79), $t(23)$ = 2.70, p = .013, d = 0.55. Although they chose slightly more native speakers than accented speakers as "in charge," their choices did not differ from chance (M_{native} = 59.4%, SE = 6.53), $t(23)$ = 1.44, p = .17, d = 0.29. Children's choices for "smarter" also did not differ from chance (M_{native} = 47.92%, SE = 7.04), $t(23)$ = 1.92, p = .77, d = 0.06).

Geography. Children selected the native-accented speakers as both "living around here" (M_{native} = 67.7%, SE = 7.13), $t(23)$ = 2.48, p = .021, d = 0.51, and "American" (M_{native} = 71.9%, SE = 7.27), $t(23)$ = 3.01, p = .006, d = 0.61.

See the top of Table 1 for nonparametric reports of the number of participants who chose a majority of native- and foreign-accented individuals by trial type.

Discussion

In Experiment 1, children were presented with novel individuals who spoke in native versus foreign accents, yet who did not reveal any information about themselves as social actors. As in past research, children robustly preferred the native-accented speakers as friends. Children also rated native-accented speakers as "nicer," "living around here," and "American." Interestingly, children did not globally rate native speakers more positively than foreign-accented speakers. As illustration, they showed no systematic preference for native- or foreign-accented speakers when asked who was "smarter." Although this observation is anecdotal, several children commented that the foreign-accented speakers were smarter because they spoke multiple languages. The results of Experiment 1 offer two suggestions. First, like adults (e.g., Giles & Billings, 2004), children make inferences about others' personalities and geographic origins based on their accent. Second, though children positively evaluated the native speakers in many cases, this positivity did not necessarily extend to all domains. Thus, preferences for native speakers may not always reflect a general positivity toward native speakers, independent of the domain of evaluation. This initial experiment lays the groundwork for the following two experiments, where we tested this latter suggestion directly.

Experiment 1 provided evidence that—all else being equal—children express preferences for native- over foreign-accented speakers. Nonetheless, children had no other information about the individuals whom they encountered. Experiment 2 sought to probe the robustness of children's social preferences for native speakers by creating a situation in which the native speakers were presented as less desirable social partners than the foreign-accented speakers. It seems plausible that children's social reasoning about others may be advantageously flexible. When provided with additional information about individuals' past behavior, children may rely on that information, rather than evaluating individuals exclusively based on their accent. An individual's behavior may therefore be more important than his or her accent in guiding children's social evaluations of others. Additionally, Experiment 2 aimed to test whether the inferences children make about an individual based on his or her accent and past behaviors diverge. If accent is indeed a primary cue to social group membership, then an individual's accent may be more important than his or her behaviors in guiding children's estimations of national group membership, whereas information about past behavior might be critical for evaluating an individual's personality and social desirability.

Experiment 2: Nice Foreigners Versus Mean Americans

Following the same procedure as Experiment 1, participants in Experiment 2 were asked to evaluate "mean" native-accented speakers and "nice" foreign-accented speakers.

Method

Participants. Participants included 20 monolingual English-speaking 5- to 6-year-old children from Chicago (11 girls, nine

Table 1
Results for Experiments 1, 2, and 3

Variable	% (neutral) native selections	No. participants chose majority neutral-native	No. participants chose majority neutral-accent	No. participants chose at chance
Experiment 1 ($N = 24$)				
Friendship	82.3*	22	1	1
Nice	65.6*	13	3	8
Smart	47.9	8	9	7
In charge	59.4	12	5	7
Lives here	67.7*	16	5	3
American	71.9*	17	6	1
Variable	% (mean) native selections	No. participants chose majority mean-native	No. participants chose majority nice-accent	No. participants chose at chance
Experiment 2 ($N = 20$)				
Friendship	26.3*	3	15	2
Nice	8.8*	1	18	1
Smart	16.3*	2	16	2
In charge	41.3	8	11	1
Lives here	50.0	8	10	2
American	63.8	11	6	3
Variable	% native choices	No. participants chose majority *meaner*-native	No. participants chose majority *nicer*-accent	No. participants chose at chance
Experiment 3, collapsed ($N = 24$)				
Friendship	51.6	11	12	1
Nice	25.0*	3	18	3
Smart	38.5*	4	12	8
In charge	36.5*	2	13	9
Lives here	64.6*	12	4	8
American	70.8*	12	2	10

Note. Significant results (from one-sample t tests, $p < .05$) are marked with asterisks.

boys; M age = 71.5 months, range = 60.7–83.6 months; 60% White, 20% African American, 10% biracial, 5% Asian, 5% other). As in Experiment 1, children were recruited from schools in relatively affluent areas, and parents of participants were well-educated: 85.7% held bachelor's or post-graduate degrees.

Procedure. The materials, procedure, and design followed that of Experiment 1, yet instead of speaking neutral content, each American-accented speaker described one antisocial ("mean") action he or she had committed (e.g., "I pushed someone down on the playground"). Each French-accented speaker described one prosocial ("nice") action he or she had performed (e.g., "I helped someone up on the playground"). See the Appendix for a full list of statements.

Results

Friendship. In dramatic contrast to Experiment 1, children preferentially chose to be friends with nice French-accented individuals ($M_{native} = 26.2\%$, $SE = 5.66$), $t(19) = 4.20$, $p < .0001$, $d = 0.94$.

Sociolinguistic evaluation. Children preferentially chose nice French-accented individuals as nicer ($M_{native} = 8.75\%$, $SE = 4.54$), $t(19) = 9.08$, $p < .0001$, $d = 2.03$, and smarter ($M_{native} = 16.2\%$, $SE = 6.61$), $t(19) = 5.11$, $p < .0001$, $d = 1.14$, than mean native-accented speakers. Children's judgments of who was "in charge" did not differ from chance ($M_{native} = 41.2\%$, $SE = 10.3$), $t(19) = 0.85$, $p = .406$, $d = 0.19$.

Geography. Children's choices did not differ from chance when asked who lives "around here" ($M_{native} = 50.0\%$, $SE = 8.31$), $t(19) = 0.00$, $p = 1.00$, $d = 0.00$. However, their choices reflected a marginally significant pattern of selecting the mean native-accented speakers as American ($M_{native} = 63.8\%$, $SE = 7.58$), $t(19) = 1.98$, $p = .086$, $d = 0.41$.

See the middle of Table 1 for a summary of results from Experiment 2.

Discussion

With potentially adept social reasoning, children do not favor native-accented speakers of their native language at any cost. Rather, when presented with mean native-accented speakers and nice foreign-accented speakers, children demonstrated flexibility in their social assessments. In contrast to Experiment 1, where children expressed robust social preferences for native-accented speakers, participants in Experiment 2 chose foreign-accented speakers as friends, as nicer, and as smarter than their meaner native counterparts. This research provides evidence that although children in past studies expressed robust social preferences for native speakers, there are limits to children's favor for native-accented individuals. The children tested here judged individuals' social attributes on the basis of those individuals' behaviors, rather than their accent.

Interestingly, children did not selectively choose nice foreign-accented speakers over mean native-accented speakers in the ge-

ography block; instead, they chose the mean native-accented speakers as "American." Thus, children's inferences based on an individual's accent and his or her behaviors diverged. This dissociation is of particular interest, as it provides evidence that children make different kinds of inferences about others based on their behaviors and their accent. Moreover, this study begins to shed light on children's beliefs about what it means to be "American." Although children's friendship judgments revealed a preference for nice over mean actors, children nevertheless acknowledged that native-accented antisocial individuals might be members of their national group. The results of this study demonstrate a potential link between children's reasoning about national group membership and linguistic group membership, a topic to which we return in the general discussion.

The results of Experiment 2 suggest that when reasoning about social desirability, children rely more on an individual's history of behaviors than on her accent, and when evaluating nationality, children rely more on accent than behaviors. Nonetheless, the differences in behaviors depicted in Experiment 2 were stark: Nice foreigners committed prosocial actions, and mean native-speakers were antisocial. A third experiment compared both types of events to a neutral condition: Nice-accented individuals were paired with neutral-native individuals, and mean-native individuals were paired with neutral-accented individuals. We sought to test whether a similar pattern of results would be observed if children were presented with a more subtle behavioral contrast. Furthermore, by comparing nice and mean actions to those that were neutral in content, we aimed to test whether children's selections of nice over mean individuals were driven by a preference for nice individuals or by an aversion to mean individuals, thereby providing insight into the mechanism underlying children's responses in Experiment 2.

Experiment 3: Nicer Foreigners Versus Meaner Americans

Following the procedure of the first two experiments, Experiment 3 presented children with more subtle contrasts of relatively nicer accented speakers paired with relatively meaner native speakers. Nice-accented individuals were presented with neutral-native individuals, and mean-native individuals were presented with neutral-accented individuals.

Method

Participants. Participants included 24 monolingual English-speaking 5- to 6-year-old children from Chicago (12 girls, 12 boys; *M* age = 75.2 months, range = 63.2–83.5 months; 83% White, 8% biracial, 4% African American, 5% other). As in the first two experiments, children were from relatively affluent areas and parents of participants tended to be well-educated: 95.7% reported their highest education as a bachelor's or post-graduate degree.

Procedure. The procedure followed Experiments 1 and 2 with the following exceptions: For half of the trials, children saw a contrast of nice-accented speakers paired with neutral-native speakers. For the other half of the trials, children saw a contrast of neutral-accented speakers paired with mean-native speakers. The total number of friendship trials was doubled. The order in which contrast types were presented was counterbalanced within and across participants, and block and question order were counterbalanced as in Experiments 1 and 2.

Results

Friendship. When presented with relatively nicer accented speakers and meaner native speakers, overall, children's friendship selections did not differ from chance (M_{native} = 51.6%, SE = 5.35), $t(23) = 0.29$, $p = .773$, $d = 0.06$. Nonetheless, further analyses revealed a significant effect of contrast (neutral-native vs. nice-accent; mean-native vs. neutral-accent) as a within-subject factor, $F(1, 23) = 16.0$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .41$. Children were more likely to select the native-accented speakers as friends in the neutral-native versus nice-accent contrast (M_{native} = 64.6%) than they were in the mean-native versus neutral-accent contrast (M_{native} = 38.5%).

Sociolinguistic evaluation. Children selected the relatively nicer accented speakers over the native speakers as nicer, smarter, and in charge: nicer M_{native} = 25.0%, SE = 5.21, $t(23) = -4.80$, $p < .0001$, $d = 0.98$; smarter M_{native} = 38.5%, SE = 5.42, $t(23) = -2.11$, $p = .046$, $d = 0.43$; in charge M_{native} = 1.46, 36.5%, SE = 4.75; $t(23) = -2.85$, $p = .009$, $d = 0.58$. Again, a repeated-measures analysis of variance revealed a significant effect of contrast (neutral-native vs. nice-accent; mean-native vs. neutral-accent) on children's responses, $F(1, 23) = 57.3$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .71$, with no significant interaction with type of sociolinguistic judgment, $F(2, 46) = 1.79$, $p = .18$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. Children were more likely to positively evaluate the native speaker on the neutral-native versus nice-accent contrast than they were on the mean-native versus neutral-accent trials. This was the case for all sociolinguistic evaluations (nice: 37.5% vs. 12.5%; smart: 62.5% vs. 14.6%; in charge: 52.1% vs. 20.8%).

Geography. Children selected native-accented speakers as the individuals who "live around here" (M_{native} = 64.6%, SE = 6.54), $t(23) = 2.23$, $p = .036$, $d = 0.45$, and as "American" (M_{native} = 70.8%, SE = 6.14), $t(23) = 3.39$, $p = .003$, $d = 0.69$. There was no effect of contrast on children's evaluations of geographical or national group origins, $F(1, 23) = 0.00$, $p = 1.00$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$.

See the bottom of Table 1 for a summary of all results from Experiment 3; see Table 2 for results broken down by contrast (i.e., neutral-native vs. nice-accent; mean-native vs. neutral-accent).

Discussion

When presented with a relatively nicer foreign-accented speaker and a relatively meaner native-accented speaker, children's overall choices of friends did not differ from chance. At first glance, it appears that there may be a point at which social preferences for native speakers and for prosocial actors are equated. Nonetheless, an analysis of the two different contrasts presented in Experiment 3—neutral-native versus nice-accent, and mean-native versus neutral-accent—revealed a more nuanced pattern of results. Children were far more likely to prefer native speakers on neutral-native versus nice-accent trials than they were on mean-native versus neutral-accent trials. These results provide evidence that children do not just prefer any relatively nicer individual. Instead, children here were more likely to take behavioral information (rather than information about one's linguistic group membership) into account

Table 2
Results for Experiment 3 (N = 24)

Variable	% native choices (collapsed)	% native choices (mean-native vs. neutral-accent)	% native choices (neutral-native vs. nice-accent)
Friendship*	51.6	38.5	64.6
Nice*	25.0	12.5	37.5
Smart*	38.5	14.6	62.5
In charge*	36.5	20.8	52.1
Lives here	64.6	64.6	64.6
American	70.8	70.8	70.8

Note. Percentages of trials in which children selected the native-accented speaker are presented collapsed across contrast types and individually for each contrast (mean-native vs. neutral accent; neutral-native vs. nice-accent). Question types are marked with asterisks if a repeated-measures analysis of variance revealed a significant effect of contrast.

when presented with a contrast between a mean and a neutral individual, and children were more likely to consider one's accent when reasoning about a neutral versus a nice individual. Thus, it seems that children's preference for nice-accented over mean-native individuals in Experiment 2 was likely driven by their disfavor for the mean information presented, rather than a preference for nice information presented. The finding that children may be particularly invested in avoiding mean individuals is consistent with past findings demonstrating a "negativity bias" in children's and adults' selective attention to, and memory for, threatening individuals (Baltazar, Shutts, & Kinzler, 2012; Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Kinzler & Shutts, 2008; LoBue, 2009; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Vaish, Grossman, & Woodward, 2008). Furthermore, the observation that children treated positive and neutral actors somewhat similarly relates to research suggesting a positivity offset in adults' and children's evaluations of neutral characters (Cacioppo & Bernston, 1994, 1999; Vaish et al., 2008), a point to which we return in the general discussion.

The difference in children's responses to the two different contrasts (neutral-native vs. nice-accent; mean-native vs. neutral-accent) persisted across multiple types of judgments. When queried about which individual was nicer, smarter, and in charge, there was a significant effect of contrast for all three sociolinguistic questions. Children expressed relatively more positive evaluations of the native speaker when the native individual was neutral and the foreign individual was nice than when the native individual was mean and the foreign individual was neutral. Interestingly, children's evaluations of others in the Geography block were consistent across contrasts. Children rated the native individual as "American," regardless of whether he or she was neutral or mean. The impenetrability of children's assessments of nationality to social knowledge is striking and provides further evidence that though children depend on both accent *and* behavior when socially evaluating others, children may rely on accent, not positive versus negative behavior, when assessing others' nationalities (see Figure 1).

General Discussion

The present research provides evidence of children's nuanced sociolinguistic evaluations of others based on their accent and their social actions and also of the resoluteness with which young children equate "native accent" with "American." Across three studies, 5- to 6-year-old monolingual English-speaking children were presented with individuals who spoke in native and foreign accents, and who recounted information about nice, mean, or neutral events. When selecting individuals as friends and evaluating their personality traits and national group identity, children's responses revealed several broad findings. The first is that, like adults, children rely on an individual's accent to make inferences about his or her personality and national origins. In Experiment 1, children selected native speakers as friends over foreign speakers, replicating the findings of Kinzler et al. (2009). Children also made judgments about individuals' personalities and nationality on the basis of accent, evaluating the native speakers as "nicer," "living around here," and "American," compared with French-accented speakers. Interestingly, children did not evaluate the native speakers as "smarter" than the French-accented speakers, suggesting that there may be limits to children's attribution of positive properties to native-accented speakers.

The present studies also provide evidence that children's knowledge of an individual's past negative behavior can outweigh social preferences based on accent. In Experiment 2, children chose to be friends with foreign-accented speakers who were nice, compared with native-accented speakers who were mean. They also evaluated the nice foreign-accented speakers more positively than the mean native-accented speakers in terms of being "nicer" and "smarter." While past research demonstrates young children's early and robust social preferences based on language and accent (e.g., Kinzler et al., 2009), the current studies provide evidence that children are not intransigent in their favor for native speakers. Rather, when evaluating novel others, children consider information about past behaviors—behaviors that can override baseline preferences for native speakers.

Although behaviors can overshadow accent in some domains, the studies reported here nonetheless demonstrate the stringency with which children base judgments about nationality on accent. Across all studies, children chose the native-accented individuals as "American," regardless of their behavior. The results of Experiment 3 provide particularly compelling evidence that children's judgments of nation-

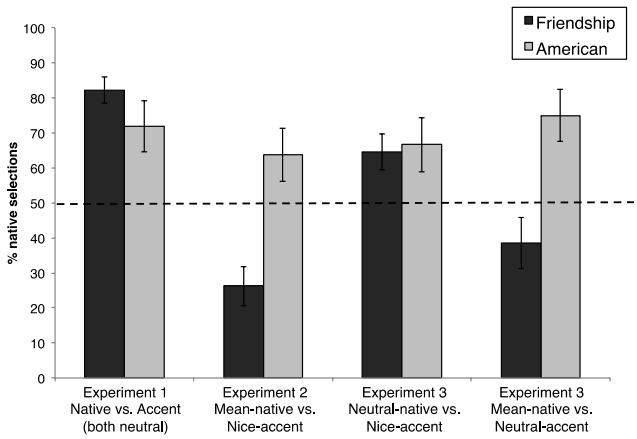

Figure 1. Friendship and nationality judgments across experiments. Error bars represent standard errors.

ality differ from their social evaluations. Children's sociolinguistic evaluations of native and foreign individuals were highly dependent on the context in which speakers were presented: Children more favorably evaluated the native-accented speaker as a "friend," as "nicer," as "smarter," and as "in charge" when presented with a contrast of a neutral-native speaker versus a nice-accented speaker than when presented with a contrast of a mean-native speaker versus a neutral-accented speaker. Children's judgments about nationality were consistent regardless of which contrast type they saw: Across contrasts, children evaluated the native-accented speakers as being American, suggesting that judgments of nationality based on accent are impervious to the social information presented. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that children acknowledged native antisocial individuals as members of their own national group.

The findings reported here make several broader contributions to our understanding of cognitive development. First, returning to the discussion of the mechanism guiding children's accent-based social preferences, the results presented here suggest that, rather than generally preferring native-speakers and casting them in a familiar and thus positive light regardless of domain, children make specific inferences about others based on their speech. In particular, although children's social evaluations of others are strongly influenced by information about their social actions, children's evaluations of others' national group membership are influenced by their accent (regardless of whether those individuals are nice or mean). This finding accords with hypotheses that accent serves as a particularly reliable signal indicating an individual's social group identity (Cohen, in press; Henrich & Henrich, 2007). More generally, the research presented here provides evidence that the types of inferences children make from accent and behaviors diverge, suggesting that children's beliefs about and evaluations of an individual's actions and his or her membership within a social category are not analogous.

Second, the difference observed between children's responses to neutral versus negative and to neutral versus positive trials reveals compelling support for both a "negativity bias" and a "positivity offset" in children's social reasoning, an assertion that fits well with existing literature (see Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994, 1999; Vaish et al., 2008). In regard to the negativity bias, past research provides evidence of children's and adults' heightened attention to, and memory for, negative social information (Baltazar et al., 2012; Baumeister et al., 2001; Kinzler & Shutts, 2008; LoBue, 2009; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Beginning as early as infancy, children preferentially attend to negative over positive social information (see Vaish et al., 2008, for a review). As illustration, infants selectively interact with objects toward which adults have displayed positive, rather than negative, emotion. When each object is presented in comparison to a neutral object, infants engage with the neutral object over the negative object, yet they treat positive and neutral objects the same (Hornik, Risenhoover, & Gunnar, 1987; Mumme & Fernald, 2003). By preschool age, children's patterns of visual search reflect an advantage for monitoring faces displaying negative over neutral or positive expressions (LoBue, 2009), and children similarly exhibit better memory for individuals who are described as mean, rather than nice (Baltazar et al., 2012; Kinzler & Shutts, 2008). Enhanced attention to and memory for negative events may serve a protective function in guarding children against harmful future situations. In the research presented here, we similarly find that children disprefer individuals who are paired with negative information compared with either positive or neutral actors (in Experiments 2 and 3, respectively), yet children do not differentiate neutral from positive actors. Thus, it seems that avoiding mean actors (rather than preferring any actor who is relatively nicer) may facilitate children's evaluations of others.

Models of human social and emotion perception also posit a positivity offset: Although negative information may have powerful influences on many aspects of social perception, a neutral stimulus can have a baseline positive value (see Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994, 1999; Vaish et al., 2008). While a negativity bias can serve a protective function against entities that may be harmful in the future, a positivity offset is similarly useful in motivating people to explore and learn about their surroundings and to engage in social interactions with others. Thus, children and adults alike may treat novel individuals with unknown behavioral histories as positive. Recent research has demonstrated pronounced positivity effects in children's judgments of other individual's personalities (Boseovski, 2010). As a baseline, children assume that other individuals have positive personality characteristics. Young children are reluctant to describe others as being intentionally or persistently mean, even when given information about a negative action that individual committed (Boseovski & Lee, 2006; Jones & Thomson, 2001; Rholes & Ruble, 1984). Our finding that children evaluate neutral and positive actors somewhat similarly is consistent with past research suggesting that children have the default assumption that unknown individuals are "nice" (Boseovski & Lee, 2008). One open question for future research concerns whether children see any novel individuals as truly "neutral." The findings of the current studies provide evidence that the presentation of positive information per se is not required to elicit a social preference for one individual over another; instead, children may assume that individuals who are presented with neutral information are, in fact, nice. Future research that continues to explore the nature of children's naive judgments of novel others, and how positive and negative information about those individuals influences children's evaluations, would be of interest.

Third, this research contributes to our understanding of children's reasoning about nationality and provides motivation for future study in this area. Although children's reasoning about what exactly constitutes a national group may be somewhat impoverished, children nonetheless express ingroup preferences based on national identity (Barrett, 2007). As suggested by the seminal work of Piaget and Weil (1951) and Jahoda (1962) and further supported here, children's reasoning about a common language may scaffold their reasoning about a common national group identity. Nonetheless, a tendency to equate linguistic and national group membership can have nefarious consequences in adulthood for diverse linguistic communities that share common political borders (Matsuda, 1991; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1994; Shell, 2001). Relatedly, research with American adults suggests that people equate race with national group membership (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos & Ma, 2008). Research on how children incorporate social category information in their assessments of nationality, and how language and race compare, is important for future investigations.

To conclude, the studies presented here provide evidence that children evaluate others based on both their accent and their actions, yet the tenor of those evaluations differs by domain. Children's social preferences and evaluations of others' personalities vary as a function of their behaviors, yet children's beliefs

about who is "American" hinges on accent. This research suggests that children view accent as an important marker of identity, providing the impetus for future research on children's reasoning about nationality. Nonetheless, the present study has several limitations that might be addressed through future research. The current research tested a limited range of behaviors using a forced-choice design. It is possible that though the positive and negative behaviors depicted here did not contribute to children's assessments of nationality, some behaviors might. This would be particularly interesting to test with a design that allowed for more subtle judgments to be captured (e.g., rating targets individually on a scale instead of a forced-choice comparison). While there is some evidence that older British children view language as important for determining nationality (Carrington & Short, 1995), research designs that provide children with opportunities to consider multiple pieces of information that could be potentially relevant to nationality would be useful. Additionally, the current research tested a single accent contrast. Research with adults and older children suggest that people become attuned to linguistic status and cultural stereotypes about the meaning of different accents (Giles & Billings, 2004). It is possible that beliefs about the status of different groups may impact whether their accent is considered to be "American." Finally, and perhaps most critically, the research presented here is limited in that it tests children of a single age group, in the United States, who are of relatively affluent backgrounds and who are monolingual English-speakers. Questions about how children from diverse linguistic environments (both in the United States and in other nations) interpret accent as a marker of national group membership are important. Studies of how and whether children's age and exposure to diverse social experiences guide their beliefs about nationality will be interesting areas for future inquiry.

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(*Appendix follows*)

Appendix

Stimuli Phrases From Experiments 1, 2, and 3

Neutral Phrases

April is a month when it rains a lot.
At night, people can see the stars in the sky.
At school, children learn to read and write.
Babies begin to talk when they are one year old.
During the spring, people go outside and pick flowers.
Hide and seek is a very popular game.
In general, dogs are bigger than cats.
Ice cream is a food that is very sweet.
In the fall, the leaves on trees change color.
People can go swimming during the summer.
Penguins are birds even though they don't fly.
There are three meals: breakfast, lunch, and dinner.
There are four seasons and the winter is the coldest one.
There are seven colors in the rainbow.
There are many different kinds of animals at the zoo.
When the sun shines, children can play outside.

Nice Phrases

I fixed my brother's bicycle.
I helped build a sandcastle.
I helped my sister with her homework.
I helped someone up on the playground.
I made cookies for everyone to eat.
I'm having a party today. Would you like to come?
I finished all of my chores.
I shared my favorite toy with my friend.

Mean Phrases

I broke my brother's bicycle.
I knocked over a sandcastle.
I ripped up my sister's homework.
I pushed someone down on the playground.
I ate all the cookies and didn't share.
I'm having a party today. I don't want you to come.
I didn't do any of my chores.
I won't let anyone play with my favorite toy.

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