

The “foreigner” : Preschool and school children’s graphic and verbal representation *

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Summary. *Taking into account the central role recently assumed by racial/ethnic themes, we have explored the spontaneous representation of the foreigner among Italian preschool and school children (n = 122). The children produced a drawing and participated in a semi-structured interview related to meeting two newcomers, one of them a foreigner. Ability to give elements which allow to identify a person as a foreigner – related to somatic, linguistic, geographic, cultural and/or social aspects – increases with age and is associated with contact with foreign people. At a methodological level, the analysis of the verbal reports reveals a richer – and never contradictory – elaboration of the concept of foreigner with respect to the drawings.*

Key-words: *foreigner, representation, children, drawings, verbal reports*

The rapid demographic shifts currently underway both in Italy and in other countries (Bonifazi, 2007) – impacting life at different levels, including the family context – are urging scholars from different disciplines to focus on themes related to foreign immigration and on relationships between people from different racial/ethnic groups (Quintana, Aboud, Chao, Contreras-Grau, Cross, Hudley, Hughes, Liben, Nelson-Le Gall, & Vietze, 2006). Over the last two decades an increasing number of scholars have addressed these themes also within the field of developmental psychology.

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Particular attention has been devoted to minority children in terms of a wide range of constructs regarding relationships between children's normative development and identity formation, intergroup relations and attitudes – including ethnic/racial prejudice – and contextual factors such as parental socialization (McLoyd, 2006; Quintana et al., 2006; Spencer, 2006).

The rapid demographic shifts currently underway both in Italy and in other countries (Bonifazi, 2007) – impacting life at different levels, including the family context – are urging scholars from different disciplines to focus on themes related to foreign immigration and on relationships between people from different racial/ethnic groups (Quintana, Aboud, Chao, Contreras-Grau, Cross, Hudley, Hughes, Liben, Nelson-Le Gall, & Vietze, 2006). Over the last two decades an increasing number of scholars have addressed these themes also within the field of developmental psychology. Particular attention has been devoted to minority children in terms of a wide range of constructs regarding relationships between children's normative development and identity formation, intergroup relations and attitudes – including ethnic/racial prejudice – and contextual factors such as parental socialization (McLoyd, 2006; Quintana et al., 2006; Spencer, 2006).

To add to the above mentioned corpus of knowledge, the present work aims to investigate the spontaneous representation of the concept of 'foreigner' among Italian preschool and school children. The underlying idea is that verbal and nonverbal performances are privileged ways to understand people's representations of the world. This could be analysed considering theoretical approaches such as the Social Representation Theory, according to which a social representation is a socio-cognitive system relating to one aspect of the world, created and shared by a community with the function to guide actions (Gruev-Vintila & Rouquette, 2007; Moscovici, 1961). Accordingly, assuming children's perspective is a useful way to have access to their thoughts, taking also into account that early on they already possess theories to understand both the internal and external world.

Among early naive theories that help children to understand different aspects of reality (Piaget, 1965; Wellman & Gelman, 1992) two can be particularly helpful for the theme introduced here: 'folk sociology' and 'theory of mind'. On the one hand, Hirschfield (2001) has underlined that even young preschoolers possess lay theories about society, which they use to reflect on human aggregates, based, for example, on race. Following Quintana et al. (2006), race is here intended as "its socially constructed meaning, in which differences between racial groups [are] perceived to be immutable because of the belief that racial differences are based on genetic and biological characteristics" (p. 1131), and not as those presumed differences. Race is associated with differences both in status and related processes about the formation of identity, beliefs and attitudes (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2006). Children achieve early on this adult-like concept of race as a social category: in categorizing people 4-year-olds rely not only on

perceptual information, but also on racial types, conceiving race as constant notwithstanding time and superficial properties (Hirschfeld, 2001). Moreover, infants and young children are sensitive to other ways of aggregating persons, for example by language (Hirschfeld, 1989), which is seen as another fundamental social marker and plays a role in the formation of both ethnic identity and prejudice (Durkin & Judge, 2001). On the other hand, children's representation of foreign people can be analysed taking into account that 5-year-olds already possess a 'theory of mind' (ToM), intended as the knowledge that other people have an internal world different from one's own, and currently recognised as a key instrument to adapt to external demands and to be socially competent (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995; Lecce & Pagnin, 2007). The possession of a ToM about everyday contexts can be indexed by children's production of psychological lexicon related to physiological, volitional, emotional, and cognitive mental states, whose complexity gradually develops during preschool years (Gobbo & Raccanello, 2010; Lecce & Pagnin, 2007). On the whole, children are able to understand that people differ according both to internal and external elements. Consequently, they would be able to report those features that allow to distinguish people belonging to different social groups.

The literature about intergroup relations and attitudes – which is one of the most studied themes about racial/ethnic issues – could be useful to examine the role of factors such as age and gender and contact between racial/ethnic groups, in order to explain differences in children's representation of the foreigner. A central concept is racial/ethnic prejudice, which implies predisposition to negatively evaluate members of a social group because of their ethnic affiliation (Aboud, 1988; Brown, 1995). The use of prejudice, and the subsequent evaluation of other people on the basis of their membership, and not of their individuality, is particularly risky for human societies because it can foster social and political inequality (Dunham et al., 2006). Children – at least those belonging to majority groups – start to show racial/ethnic prejudice early on. As young as 3 years of age, they show clear preference for the ingroup and negative evaluation of the outgroup. The bias increases particularly between 4 and 7 and then it gradually declines (Aboud, 2003; Doyle & Aboud, 1995). Ingroup preferences have been identified mostly with reference to racial differentiation (i.e., skin colour), but they seem to be present also about national identities and language. For example, specific bias against foreign speakers was found in 6- and 8-year-olds, but not in 10-year-olds (Durkin & Judge, 2001). In addition, at least from the age of 10, children can describe explicitly the concept of ethnic discrimination, in terms of not justified reference to a minority child's name, and less frequently in terms of unfair resource distribution and social exclusion (Verkuyten, Kinket, & van der Wielen, 1997). However, no differences emerged between Dutch majority and minority group children, as would be expected on the basis of the Social Representation Theory. Indeed,

given that the children shared the same social context – in terms of school and neighbourhood – the Authors hypothesised some sort of consistency in the understanding of the concept because of the social sharing of its central elements (Verkuyten et al., 1997). Going back to ethnic prejudice, besides explicit – consciously expressed – bias, also implicit – less conscious – bias has been identified, underlying an asymmetry in their development. Considering 6-year-olds, 10-year-olds and adults, they found that the former declined and became more egalitarian as age increased, while the latter was stable (Baron & Banaji, 2006; Dunham et al., 2006). Implicit attitudes seem to be particularly relevant, given that they predict discriminatory behaviour better than explicit behaviour, as pointed out by a recent meta-analysis (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009).

Allport's intergroup contact theory (1954) can be referred to as a way to reduce prejudice, assuming that interactions between diverse racial/ethnic groups contribute to decreased cognitive biases under specific conditions, such as close contact, equal status, and cooperative interdependence. Nowadays, several research studies have verified this hypothesis, leading to the conclusion that close interactions with members of other racial/ethnic groups play a significant role in prejudice reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005). Thus, particular relevance is assumed by the construct of friendship – characterized by an initial meeting with the other – as corresponding to all the conditions proposed by contact theory (Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003; Kawataba & Crick, 2008). However, data show that among elementary school children interracial friendships are less frequent than same-race friendships and further decline in number with age irrespective of children's race/ethnicity, even if they are associated with positive developmental outcomes and are as beneficial and important as same-race/ethnic friendships (Aboud et al., 2003; Kawataba & Crick, 2008).

From a theoretical point of view, it seems particularly relevant to extend the corpus of knowledge on the representation of the concept of foreigner, given the lack of knowledge on how this concept develops in children and is expressed by them and on how it is mediated by culture and inclusion in majority or minority groups (McLoyd, 2006; Quintana et al., 2006; Spencer, 2006). This knowledge could yield both conceptual and methodological hints to address themes related to foreigners with preschool and school children for professionals working in different contexts. Being aware of spontaneous conceptualisations which characterize individuals – in particular children – could help to reduce negative attitudes such as the presence of prejudice (Aboud & Fenwick, 1999). At the same time, it could give a new observational lens through which to understand people's visions about social relationships, considering, for example, how complex it is to join a new peer group for racially/ethnically and linguistically diverse children (Howes & Lee, 2008).

Research aims and hypotheses

The present research aims to investigate some aspects of the development of the concept of foreigner among Italian preschool and school children by studying the ability to represent this social concept both graphically and verbally.

We investigated the role played by three factors – age, gender, knowledge of foreigners – on some elements used to represent foreigners, in terms of how to identify a person as a foreigner and the features that lead to it. As regards age, we hypothesised progress in the ability to represent the concept at issue in relation to greater ability to describe elements which allow to characterize an individual as a foreigner, taking into account children's increasing ability to describe both world and personal events, even in their psychological nuances (e.g., Bartsch & Wellman, 1995; Lecce & Pagnin, 2007; Piaget, 1965; Raccanello & Gobbo, 2007; Wellman & Gelman, 1992). As regards gender, the literature reports that in narrating personal events females are more attentive to psychological aspects, especially emotional ones (Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000). However, research on discrimination understanding, albeit involving children older than those of the present study, has not revealed any gender differences (Verkuyten et al., 1997). Therefore, gender differences in the ability to characterize a person as a foreigner were not contemplated. However, in case of differences, we expected higher reference to psychological aspects among girls. In addition, we assumed greater contact with foreign people to be associated with a more complex representation of the concept at issue, in line with contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettygrew & Tropp, 2005). Finally, a methodological question was addressed by investigating differences between graphic and verbal performance, in order to support the usefulness of combining the analysis of drawings and their associated verbal descriptions, as suggested in the literature (Bombi, Pinto, & Cannoni, 2007).

Method

Participants

The participants were 130 Italian children attending schools in the Mantua, Verona and Trento provinces. Among them, 8 were excluded due to: disability ($n = 1$), interviewer's use of wrong instructions ($n = 1$), no production of the requested drawing ($n = 6$). The final sample included 122 children: 61 attended the last year of kindergarten (mean age: 5 years, 11 months; range: 63-76 months; 38 M, 23 F) and 61 were fourth-graders (mean age: 9 years, 10 months; range: 110-124 months; 30 M, 31 F).

For ethical reasons, the parents gave their written consent for the children's participation.

Material and procedure

Pilot phases.

A first pilot phase was run in order to investigate whether children the same age as those involved in our study knew the term *foreigner*, which was to be used in the experimental phase to request the production of a drawing. The critical term was proposed to 31 Italian children attending the last year of kindergarten ($n = 13$) and the fourth grade ($n = 18$). Each child was asked to verbally define the word foreigner («What makes you think that a child is a foreigner?»), with subsequent general prompts (e.g., «Do you want to say something else?»). In case of non-plausible answers, instructions were repeated at least once. Answers were audio-taped, transcribed and coded according to their plausibility (0 = non-plausible; 1 = plausible). They were considered plausible when they included references to somatic traits (e.g., «who has a black face») and/or linguistic aspects (e.g., «who does not speak our language») and/or other kind of plausible elements (e.g., «who comes from another city») which allow to identify a person as a foreigner. The protocols were coded by 2 judges (mean agreement: 94%). Disagreements were solved through discussion. Results indicated that most children gave plausible answers ($\chi^2_{(1, 31)} = 14.226, p < .001$; non-plausible: $n = 5, 16\%$; plausible: $n = 26, 84\%$), with non-plausible ones characterizing only the younger children. The data suggested the existence of age differences in the children's concept of foreigner, stimulating further examinations. In addition, given that most children gave plausible answers, we decided to use the term foreigner in the experimental phase.

A second pilot phase was run to evaluate the feasibility of the task of the experimental phase, involving 2 children attending, respectively, the last year of kindergarten and the fourth grade. Given the absence of difficulties, we did not modify our instructions.

Experimental phase

All the children had to do two tasks: they were asked to produce a drawing and to participate in a semi-structured interview related to a meeting with two new children, one of them a foreigner. In the present work, only data about the new foreign child are analysed.

As regards drawings, instruction and materials were arranged according to the literature (Bombi et al., 2007). The children were divided in groups (4-5 children each) and they did the task in a quiet room of their school. Each child was given an A4-size sheet of paper and 12 coloured felt-tip pens; the

sheet was positioned diagonally in order not to suggest the orientation of the drawing. The children were asked to imagine that two new children of their same gender, one of them a foreigner, were joining their class and to draw themselves together with the two new children («Imagine that two new children are joining your class... one is a foreigner. Draw yourself together with them»). They were told that their drawing should be their own original production and that it would not be evaluated for school purposes. When they finished the drawing, the children were accompanied to their classroom.

Subsequently, they took part in a semi-structured interview about their drawings and were first of all asked to identify the three children they had drawn. Then they were asked to tell the instructor which elements made it possible to understand that one of the children in the drawing was a foreigner («What makes you think that this child, and not that one, is a foreigner?»), prompting their explanations («Why?»). In addition, the children were asked if they knew any foreign people («And do *you* know any foreign people?»). The interview included other questions not considered here. All the answers were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

Coding

The material was coded according to the possibility of identifying the child as a foreigner and to the presence/absence of different elements that allowed identification, via the analysis of both the nonverbal and verbal performance.

Drawings

The drawings were coded in order to understand whether the graphic representation allowed to identify a child as a foreigner. Hence, the first judgement related to the *possibility* of identifying the drawn child as a foreigner (0 = not identifiable, 1 = identifiable).

Then, we coded the absence/presence (0 points, 1 point, respectively) of graphic elements which allowed to identify a child as a foreigner, considering references to *somatic traits* (e.g., skin colour, eye shape) and to *cultural/social elements* related to cultural membership or social position (e.g., Africa written on the t-shirt; a red spot on the forehead to signify the Indian culture).

Interviews

We coded the *plausibility* of the answers, in terms of the possibility to identify a child as a foreigner, distinguishing between no (e.g., «I don't know») and non-plausible answers (e.g., «one is bigger and the other is a bit smaller») on the one side, and plausible answers on the other (0 points, 1 point, respectively). We defined plausibility as the presence of at least one element which allowed to characterize the child as a foreigner.

Then, we coded the absence/presence (0 points, 1 point, respectively) of reference to those elements, in terms of:

- *somatic traits* (e.g., «from the skin colour»; «from the eyes»; «his face is black»);
- *linguistic elements* (e.g., «she speaks another language»; «because he doesn't know the language well»; «she doesn't speak Italian»);
- *place of origin* (e.g., «he is Arabic»; «she is Chinese»; «he comes from Russia»);
- other *cultural and/or social elements* such as cultural belonging and social position (e.g., «he had different habits in the school he came from»; «from the way she was dressed»; «foreigners don't have much money»).

All the data were coded by a first judge and 15% of them also by a second judge (mean agreement: 94%). Disagreements were solved through discussion.

Results

We ran non-parametric tests with level of significance $p < .05$. We used Chi Square tests to evaluate the effect of Age (5 years, 9 years), Gender (male, female) and Knowledge of foreign people (absent, present) on the dependent variables. As regards the drawings, the variables were: (a) possibility to identify a child as a foreigner and (b) absence/presence of elements which allow to identify a child as a foreigner (somatic traits, cultural and/or social elements). As regards the interviews, the variables were: (a) plausibility of the answers and (b) absence/presence of elements which allow to characterize a child as a foreigner (somatic traits, linguistic elements, place of origin, other cultural and/or social elements). We ran McNemar tests to compare the drawings and the interviews.

Preliminary analyses revealed no effect of gender, which was therefore not considered in the subsequent analyses.

Drawings

Possibility to identify a child as a foreigner

The possibility to identify a child as a foreigner was related to Age ($\chi^2_{(1, 122)} = 21.317, p < .001$). As age increased, the ability to represent a foreign person graphically in a plausible way also increased. Most 9-year-olds included at least one graphic element which allowed to identify the foreign child (non-identifiable foreigner: $n = 24$; 39%; identifiable: $n = 37$; 61%), contrary to what happened for 5-year-olds (non-identifiable: $n = 49$; 80%; identifiable: $n = 12$; 20%) (Figure 1).

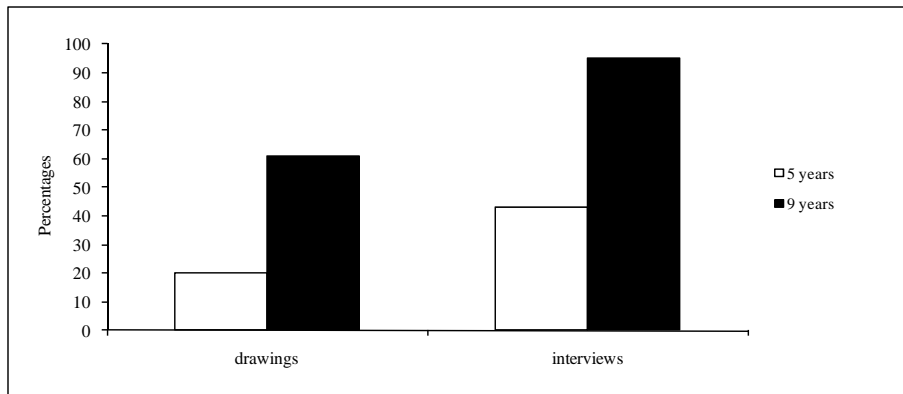


Figure 1 – Percentages of the possibility to identify a child as a foreigner by means of graphic and verbal performance, according to Age

Knowledge was also significant ($\chi^2_{(1, 122)} = 22.599, p < .001$). Children who reported they knew some foreign people (non-identifiable: $n = 33$; 43%; identifiable: $n = 43$; 57%) included more elements which allowed to identify the foreign child than children who said they did not know any foreign people (non-identifiable: $n = 40$, 87%; identifiable: $n = 6$; 13%) (Figure 2).

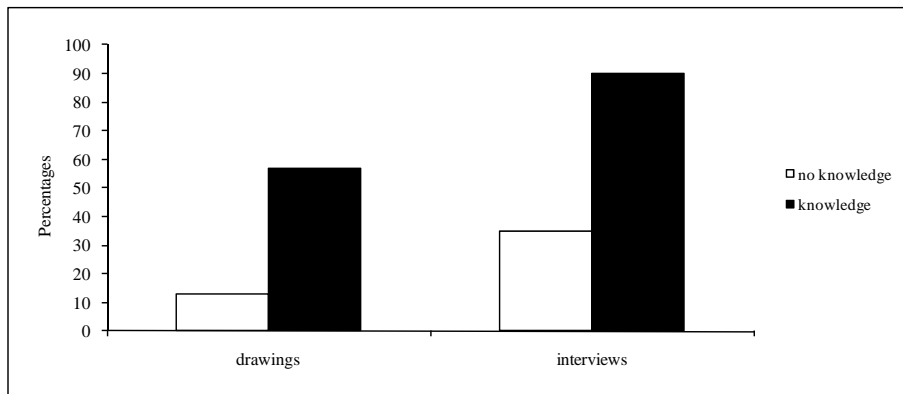


Figure 2 – Percentages of the possibility to identify a child as a foreigner by means of graphic and verbal performance, according to Knowledge of foreigners

Elements which allow to identify a child as a foreigner

Reference to both somatic traits and cultural and/or social elements varied with Age ($\chi^2_{(1, 122)} = 15.53, p < .001$; $\chi^2_{(1, 122)} = 22.60, p < .001$, respectively). On the one hand, 9-year-olds (absence of somatic traits: $n = 28$; 46%; presence: $n = 33$; 54%) represented somatic traits more frequently than 5-year-olds (absence: $n = 49$; 80%; presence: $n = 12$; 20%). On the

other hand, 5-year-olds did not include cultural/social elements (absence: $n = 61$; 100%), which were considered only by a few 9-year-olds (absence: $n = 51$; 84%; presence: $n = 10$; 16%).

Knowledge was also significant (somatic traits: $\chi^2_{(1, 122)} = 18.03, p < .001$; cultural/social elements: $\chi^2_{(1, 122)} = 6.59, p = .01$). Drawing somatic traits was more frequent among children who said they knew some foreigners (absence: $n = 37$; 49%; presence: $n = 39$; 51%) than among children who said they did not know any (absence: $n = 40$; 87%; presence: $n = 6$; 13%). In addition, cultural/social elements, if present, were included by the children who said they knew some foreigners (absence of knowledge, absence: $n = 46$; 100%; knowledge, absence: $n = 66$; 87%; presence: $n = 10$; 13%).

Interviews

Answer plausibility

Also for the interviews Age ($\chi^2_{(1, 122)} = 39.14, p < .001$) was linked to differences in the possibility to identify a child as a foreigner. Five-year-olds (non-plausible: $n = 35$; 57%; plausible: $n = 26$; 43%) gave fewer plausible answers than 9-year-olds (non-plausible: $n = 3$; 5%; plausible: $n = 58$; 95%) (Figure 1).

Finally, differences related to Knowledge also emerged ($\chi^2_{(1, 122)} = 39.97, p < .001$) as regards the possibility to identify a child as a foreigner. Children who said they did not know any foreigners (non-plausible answers: $n = 30$; 65%; plausible: $n = 16$; 35%) gave fewer plausible answers than children who declared they knew some (non-plausible: $n = 8$; 10%; plausible: $n = 68$; 90%) (Figure 2).

Elements which allow to identify a child as a foreigner

Age resulted significant for all the elements considered, such as somatic traits, linguistic elements, place of origin, other cultural and/or social elements (Table 1): they were more frequent among 9-year-olds than 5-year-olds.

Table 1 – Frequencies (percentages) and Chi Square tests of verbally reported elements which allow to identify a child as a foreigner, according to Age

Elements		5 years	9 years	$\chi^2_{(df)}$	p
Somatic traits	Absence	45 (74%)	15 (25%)	29.52 (1,122)	<.001
	Presence	16 (26%)	46 (75%)		
Linguistic elements	Absence	54 (89%)	30 (49%)	22.02 (1,122)	<.001
	Presence	7 (11%)	31 (51%)		
Place of origin	Absence	52 (85%)	42 (69%)	4.64 (1,122)	.031
	Presence	9 (15%)	19 (31%)		
Cultural/ social elements	Absence	61 (100%)	40 (66%)	25.37 (1,122)	<.001
	Presence	0 (0%)	21 (34%)		

In addition, Knowledge resulted significant for somatic traits, cultural/social and linguistic elements (Table 2), found more frequently among children

who said they knew some foreign people. As regards place of origin no differences emerged, even if percentages revealed the same trend as the other dimensions considered here (Table 2).

Table 2 – Frequencies (percentages) and Chi Square tests of verbally reported elements which allow to identify a child as a foreigner, according to Knowledge of foreigners

Elements		Absence	Knowledge	$\chi^2_{(df)}$	<i>p</i>
Somatic traits	Absence	37 (80%)	23 (30%)	28.86 _(1,12)	<.001
	Presence	9 (20%)	53 (70%)		
Linguistic elements	Absence	42 (91%)	42 (55%)	17.36 _(1,12)	<.001
	Presence	4 (9%)	34 (45%)		
Place of origin	Absence	37 (80%)	57 (75%)	.48 _(1,12)	.489
	Presence	9 (20%)	19 (25%)		
Cultural/ social elements	Absence	45 (98%)	56 (74%)	11.72 _(1,12)	.001
	Presence	1 (2%)	20 (26%)		

Comparison between drawings and interviews

In order to compare graphic and verbal performance, a McNemar test was run. The variable concerning the possibility to characterize a child as a foreigner through the coding of the drawings was compared with plausibility of answers given in the interviews. The test was significant ($\chi^2_{(1, 122)} = 33.03, p < .001$) and pointed to differences between graphic and verbal representation as regards the possibility to identify a child as a foreigner: possibility of identification was higher through the analysis of the verbal rather than the graphic material (Table 3). All the children who reported graphic elements allowing to identify a child as a foreigner also reported verbal elements, but not vice versa. In other words, not all the children who reported verbal elements allowing to identify a child as a foreigner reported the same elements graphically.

Table 3 – Frequencies (percentages) of possibility to identify a child as a foreigner and of representation of somatic traits, distinguishing between graphic and verbal performance

	Non-plausible verbal performance		Plausible verbal performance	
	Identific. foreigner	Somatic traits	Identific. foreigner	Somatic traits
Non-plausible graphic performance	38 (31%)	59 (48%)	35 (29%)	18 (15%)
Plausible graphic performance	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	49 (40%)	44 (36%)

In consideration of the fact that it is difficult to graphically represent some elements, we ran a further test including only somatic traits, which are

easy to draw and also to report verbally. The test was significant ($\chi^2_{(1, 122)} = 33.029, p < .001$) with percentages in line with the previous data. Thus, reliability about differences between the two kinds of performances was supported (Table 3).

Discussion and conclusions

The main aim of the present research was to investigate the representation of the concept of foreigner among Italian preschool and school children, taking into account the central role recently assumed by racial/ethnic themes (McLoyd, 2006; Quintana et al., 2006; Spencer, 2006). We considered nonverbal and verbal performances as privileged ways to understand people's representations about the world (Bruner, 1991; Gruev-Vintila & Rouquette, 2007; Moscovici, 1961). Specifically, studying personal narratives and drawings is one of the main ways to enter the world of children, as if it were a window on their internal representations. Both modalities are an expression of what Bruner (1991) called the narrative thought, as an instrument to interpret the world and give sense both to external phenomena and to one's own self, fostering understanding. The use of multi-methods is based on the concept of triangulation, according to which the knowledge of a specific phenomenon is favoured by the use of more than one source of analysis (Baumgartner, 2004) and it is strengthened by the possibility that the verbal representation of a concept does not perfectly correspond to the underlying nonverbal representation (Nelson, 1986). In addition, the tasks are highly ecological and similar to those performed by children every day. Consequently, the risk of influencing children's spontaneity – typical of more structured tasks – is reduced. High relevance to children's perspectives about concepts that permeate their life is supported also by some research studies about ethnic/racial themes, focusing for example on the understanding of the concept of ethnic discrimination (Verkuyten et al., 1997).

The present data show that children of different ages are characterized by different abilities in reporting elements that allow to identify a person as a foreigner, and this emerged both in the analysis of the drawings and of the verbal reports. These abilities become more complex as age increases, consistent with children's psychological development, and in particular with their increasing abilities to use graphic and verbal symbolic instruments in representing reality (e.g., Bartsch & Wellman, 1995; Lecce & Pagnin, 2007; Piaget, 1965; Raccanello & Gobbo, 2007; Wellman & Gelman, 1992). Such increasing abilities emerge in all the different elements, from somatic traits to all the cultural and social elements considered, including language and place of origin.

No gender differences were found, consistent with studies on ethnic aspects such as discrimination, even if involving older children – from 10 to 13 years – than those considered in this work (Verkuyten et al., 1997). However, future studies could investigate more in depth girls' ability to introduce psychological elements, and specifically affective elements (Fivush et al., 2000), by focusing on the emotional aspects that characterize children's representation of the foreigner.

Particularly noteworthy seems the result on children's direct contact with foreigners, which emerges consistently from both the drawings and the interviews. The children who reported they knew some foreign people were characterized by a more complex representation of the foreign child. Even if we are aware of possible limitations related to the way in which information about knowledge was obtained – and future studies could investigate whether knowledge declared by children is confirmed by significant adults, such as parents and/or teachers –, the data obtained in the present work give precise indications about the relevance of personal experience in the building of social concepts that have a key role in the construction and maintenance of civil communal life. In other words, considering the role played by direct contact with foreign people in favouring a more complete and complex representation, we need to underline the importance of all socialization agents, from families to schools, in order to promote the peaceful living together of people characterized by different nationality and/or ethnic group.

Finally, some differences emerged between the graphic and the verbal production, in the sense that the analysis of verbal reports, compared with drawings, produced richer – albeit never contradictory – elaboration of the concept under issue. Through the comparison of drawings and interviews, we showed that the representation of a child as a foreigner can be expressed in graphic and verbal ways, or only in verbal ways, but it is never expressed only in graphic ways. A similar outcome was obtained by considering only somatic traits, in both drawings and interviews, and that supported the idea that these differences did not depend on some elements being represented graphically more easily than others. At the methodological level, this suggests that, when studying children's representations, nonverbal and verbal performances need to be carried out and analysed together in order not to underestimate their abilities.

In conclusion, the present work outlines how a socially built representation like the concept of foreigner evolves with age, and is more complex when there is direct contact with foreigners. Future studies could investigate whether there is a correspondence between better articulated representation and more positive relationships, considering approaches such as the contact theory, and also involving foreign children.

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