

# The Effect of Perspective-Taking on Linguistic Intergroup Bias

Journal of Language and Social Psychology  
2020, Vol. 39(2) 183–199  
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DOI: 10.1177/0261927X19874383  
journals.sagepub.com/home/jls



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## Abstract

In this experiment, we examined the effect of perspective-taking—actively contemplating others’ psychological experiences—on linguistic intergroup bias. We asked some participants to adopt the perspective of a character (an Italian or a Maghrebian), while others did not receive similar instructions, and complete a short dialogue comprised of a series of vignettes, resulting in a 2 (perspective-taking: presence vs. control) × 2 (group: ingroup vs. outgroup) between-participants design. We analyzed the texts produced on the basis of the linguistic category model. As expected, participants were more likely to describe the outgroup member using less abstract terms when we asked them to take the perspective of a Maghrebian. Since the level of abstraction of the terms used to describe a person’s behavior is considered an index of stereotype use, one might describe Maghrebians less stereotypically when he or she can see the world from their perspective. The results extend previous findings on the role of perspective-taking as it relates to reducing intergroup stereotypes.

## Keywords

perspective-taking, linguistic intergroup bias, implicit bias, intergroup interaction

## Perspective-Taking and Intergroup Relations

Perspective-taking entails the active consideration of another’s point of view, such as imagining what that person’s life and situations are like and walking a mile in that person’s shoes. Gasiorek and Ebesu Hubbard (2015) defined perspective-taking as

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a situated process of forming ideas about the content of another person's mental state, supported by an underlying (1) social cognitive ability with a developmental trajectory and (2) a general tendency for spontaneous engagement, which varies as an individual difference. (p. 20)

The literature in this field indicates several benefits of strategic perspective-taking. Piaget (1932) asserted that the ability to shift perspectives is a key to progress in cognitive development, and Davis (1983) found that perspective-taking was positively correlated with both social competence and self-esteem. In addition, the presence of perspective-taking can promote helping behavior (Batson, 1991; Boca, Garro, Giammusso, & Scaffidi Abbate, 2018; Scaffidi Abbate, Isgró, Wicklund, & Boca, 2006), reduce the false-consensus effect (Scaffidi Abbate, Boca, & Gendolla, 2016), and influence attributional thinking (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). Moreover, the ability to adopt another person's perspective has been identified as a critical component of social functioning that predicts levels of empathic concern for other individuals and the number of category-based responses to outgroups (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000).

In this experiment, we investigated the efficacy of perspective-taking as a strategy for decreasing the abstraction level in the description of outgroup members' behavior. In fact, as Maass, Milesi, Zabbini, and Stahlberg (1995) pointed out, speakers tend to describe congruent-expectancy behaviors of outgroups with abstract terms. Differently, when the outgroups' behaviors violate speaker's expectancies as in counter-stereotypical behaviors, these are described with concrete terms. Thus, language plays a subtle but important role in stereotype communication since it is an indirect indicator of stereotype endorsement.

While, on one side, stereotypes are powerful cognitive tools allowing everyone to optimize mental functioning during social interaction. On the other side, contemporary Western societies commonly dislike the overt expression of stereotypes (Castelli, Vanzetto, Sherman, & Arcuri, 2001). Given the wide range of interpersonal benefits resulting from perspective-taking, social psychologists have pointed out the idea that actively assuming outgroup members' psychological perspectives could be an efficacious strategy for cultivating more positive intergroup relations and avoiding stereotypical thinking (Batson et al., 1997; Dovidio et al., 2004; Galinsky & Ku, 2004; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003; Vorauer & Sasaki, 2009).

Though there is a considerable amount of literature demonstrating the benefit of perspective-taking on tempering overt expressions of biases (e.g., deliberate evaluations) in intergroup contexts (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Galinsky & Ku, 2004; Vorauer & Sasaki, 2009), little is known about whether perspective-taking similarly tempers the more indirect and automatic forms of discrimination. An exception are the studies of Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) and of Todd, Bodenhausen, Richeson, and Galinsky (2011), which demonstrated that perspective-taking attenuates automatic expressions of racial bias. In particular, Todd et al. (2011) showed that perspective-taking can also create approach-oriented actions with perspective takers more willing to sit closely to a member of a stereotyped group.

Beyond highlighting the relative benefits of perspective-taking in intergroup evaluations and behaviors, researchers have also deepened the study of the mechanisms underlying intergroup perspective-taking. In their review, Todd and Galinsky (2014) suggested that perspective-taking may have a positive effect on intergroup outcomes through both affective and cognitive mechanisms. On the affective side, in fact, several researchers have documented increased empathic responding following perspective-taking (Batson, 2011; Esses & Dovidio, 2002; Vescio et al., 2003). On the cognitive side, two different processes have been proposed: shifts in attributional style and self-outgroup merging. The former refers to a change in causal attribution style—specifically, stronger non-dispositional attributions and weaker dispositional attributions—following perspective-taking. Vescio et al. (2003), for example, showed that perspective-taking increases judgments relying on non-dispositional factors in the explanation of negative outgroup behaviors. The latter, self-outgroup merging, refers to an overlap in mental representations of the self and the other (Todd, Bodenhausen, & Galinsky, 2012). Todd and Burgmer (2013) suggested an associative self-anchoring account of automatic intergroup evaluation change following perspective-taking. This explanation entails a causal sequence whereby adopting an outgroup member's perspective strengthens the association between a targeted outgroup and the self, which, in turn, enables more positive automatic intergroup evaluations. In fact, because most people's self-associations are positive, this associative link, in general, generates greater positivity toward the outgroup. As a result of this increased self-outgroup overlapping, implicit intergroup evaluation becomes more positive.

Thus, in this study, we investigate whether perspective-taking may reduce stereotypic thinking as reflected by the use of different levels of linguistic abstraction as suggested by the Linguistic Intergroup Bias (LIB; Maass et al., 1995; Maass, Salvi, Arcuri, & Semin, 1989). The LIB, in fact, affirms that people show a different use of language when it describes behaviors of the ingroup and of outgroups and it provides information about people's stereotypical beliefs.

## The Linguistic Intergroup Bias

Language offers communication partners implicit tools that make it possible to differentiate between the representation and perception of social groups in a subtle, and therefore particularly insidious, way. The dimension “concreteness-abstraction” is a structural, meta-semantic property of language that allows interpersonal terms to be distinguished on the basis of the cognitive inferences they generate (Semin, 2007). This subdivision was initially proposed by Semin and Fiedler (1988) in the linguistic category model (LCM), which, in its original version, classified interpersonal terms into categories corresponding to four increasing levels of abstraction. The most concrete terms are *descriptive action verbs* (DAVs) such as “A hits B” that present an objective description of a precise event. Interpretive action verbs (IAVs) are a little more abstract because they explain a larger class of behaviors (“A hurts B”), even if they refer to a specific behavior in a precise situation. State verbs (SVs) describe a psychological state (e.g., hate or desire); they have no direct reference to a specific

behavioral episode or to a specific situation, but do refer to a specific object (“A hates B”). Lastly, at the highest level of abstraction are adjectives (Adjs), such as aggressive or creative, which describe highly abstract dispositions or characteristics of a person (“A is aggressive”). Adjs provide generalizations that pertain to specific behavioral events, situations, or objects.

The most interesting aspect of the model is that terms belonging to different categories, even when they are part of the same semantic domain (e.g., “kick” and “hit”), guide the observer’s attention to different aspects of the same episode. More precisely, information encoded with abstract terms reveals considerable details about the person described and little about the situation, implies greater temporal stability, and is considered more generalizable to other contexts and more predictive of future behavior than information expressed in concrete terms.

Almost three decades of research with the LCM showed that the degree of abstraction with which people and their behavior are described is a powerful and simultaneously unintentional medium for manifesting subtle prejudices and stereotypes. In particular, Maass et al. (1989; see also Maass, 1999; Menegatti & Rubini, 2009; Wigboldus & Douglas, 2007) observed a systematic tendency in the use of language, defined as LIB, such that the positive behaviors of the ingroup’s members and the negative behaviors of the outgroup’s members are described in more abstract terms than the negative behaviors of the ingroup’s members and the positive behaviors of the outgroup’s members.

Based on the LCM, LIB predicts that differential language use for ingroup and outgroup behaviors has a number of important implications for the maintenance and communication of stereotypic beliefs (Maass et al., 1989). Studies conducted in everyday contexts analyzing spontaneous linguistic production, and in the laboratory using the so-called paradigm of “minimal groups” have subsequently demonstrated the solidity and pervasiveness of LIB (Maass, Corvino, & Arcuri, 1994; Mannetti, Catellani, Fasulo, & Pajardi, 1991). Although under specific conditions individuals can control linguistic bias (e.g., if they provide descriptions in a comparative framework; Douglas, Sutton, & Wilkin, 2008), neither communicators nor recipients are aware of such a strategic use of language (Maass, Castelli, & Arcuri, 2000).

Overall, these findings showed that a systematic bias in the use of linguistic abstraction in intergroup contexts serves two functions. On the one hand, it fosters the maintenance of a positive social identity and, on the other, it helps to confirm expectations concerning the behavior of members that are both in one’s own group and other groups (Maass et al., 1995).

## **The Study**

The primary purpose of the study is to examine the impact of perspective-taking on participants’ LIB toward a stereotyped outgroup member. The rationale is that the literature on LIB states that people exhibit a negative bias toward outgroup members describing their negative behavior using abstract terms. Assuming the perspective of an outgroup member should reverse the negative bias either because of the merging of

self and outgroup representation (Vescio et al., 2003) or because of the shift in causal attributional style (Todd et al., 2012). The effect of perspective-taking should not appear when one describes ingroup behavior who tend to be depicted positively anyway. Thus, in the experimental design, conditions where the manipulation of perspective-taking is expected to produce differences in the level of abstraction of the terms used are compared with conditions in which this variable are not expected to produce any effect.

After giving their consensus to take part in the experiment, participants were presented with a series of vignettes. In all the vignettes there were two people talking: one in front of the other. The topic of the dialogue was migration from Maghreb, particularly in all of the vignettes the focus of the conversation was migrants' behavior. One of the two conversation partners portrayed in each image was clearly recognizable as Maghrebian (outgroup member) and the other as Italian (ingroup member). The conversation was incomplete, and we asked participants to fill in the empty dialogue in response to the sentence of the other characters. Playing the role of one of the conversation partners, participants described migrants' behavior either from the point of view of his/her outgroup (the Maghrebian character) or ingroup (the Italian character). We asked half of the participants to assume the perspective of the character whose dialogue they were going to complete and the other half to fill in the dialogue box in a logical way.

In line with the results of previous studies on LIB, the outgroup member (the Maghrebians character in the vignettes) should be described with positive terms at a low level of abstraction and negative terms at a high level of abstraction. When taking the point of view of the outgroup member (the Maghrebians character of the vignettes) ingroup and outgroup merges (Vescio et al., 2003) or, if we take the alternative explanation for granted, there is a shift in attributional style that brings participants to use less dispositional explanation (that commonly are expressed by more abstract verbs; Todd et al., 2012), so in this condition the LIB, intended as an implicit strategy to favor one's own group, should not appear.

## Method

**Participants and Design.** The sample consisted of 80 students and workers, 36 men and 44 women, (mean age = 28.04;  $SD = 4.5$ ), who were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 (perspective-taking: presence vs. absence)  $\times$  2 (group: *ingroup* vs. *outgroup*) between-participants design.

**Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate.** The ethics committee of the Department of Psychological, Pedagogical and Educational Sciences, University of Palermo, Italy, reviewed the methods of the study and approved it. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institution, the national research committee, and with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki. We obtained written informed consent from all individual participants included in the study. We informed the participants that they could withdraw from participation

at any time and without any consequences, and we fully debriefed them at the end of the experiment.

**Procedure and Measures.** We contacted the participants individually and invited them to take part in the experiment without knowing the study's real aim. We told them that they would be participating in research on the social use of language. Our intent for this explanation was to avoid any strategic use of stereotypes in the study.

We printed three vignettes on different sheets of paper and gave them to the participants. These vignettes depicted an Italian and a Maghrebian man, one in front of the other, engaging in talk about the issue of immigration. We constructed the vignettes so that the dialogue of one of the characters was already written inside the balloon, the dialogue of the other was missing, and in its place were some dots. Which of the dialogues was missing and which was already present (that of the Italian or that of the Maghrebian) depended on the experimental condition. The participants' task was to fill in the missing dialogue. An example of dialogue was a Maghrebian saying, "Immigrants come here looking for a chance to build a future for themselves and their loved ones," or an Italian saying, "Not all immigrants respect the laws and know how to behave in a civil manner." Focusing on *outgroup* characteristics and behavior was necessary to complete the dialogue. We considered the terms used to compose the missing parts of the conversation, coded the level of abstraction of the positive and negative terms about *outgroup* characteristics and behavior according to the LCM and submitted them to subsequent analysis. There was no limit on either time or the number of sentences to insert.

### *Variable Manipulation*

**Group.** We presented half of the participants with three vignettes in which the missing dialog was that of the Italian character. Therefore, they had to write sentences in the balloons of the ingroup member (ingroup condition). We presented the other half of the participants with three vignettes in which the missing dialogue was that of the character recognizable as Maghrebian. Therefore, they had to write sentences in the dialogue box of the outgroup member (outgroup condition).

**Perspective-taking.** To manipulate the perspective-taking process, we asked half of the participants to take the perspective of the character who was presented in the vignettes with the dialogue to be filled. We asked them to imagine what they might be thinking, feeling, and experiencing if they were Marco (or Kamal), looking at the world through his eyes and walking in his shoes as he talks with Kamal (or Marco).<sup>1</sup>

We gave the participants in the ingroup perspective-taking condition ( $N = 18$ ) the following instructions:

Now you'll see three vignettes showing a dialogue between two people, one is named Marco and the other is named Kamal. Your task is to put yourself in the shoes of Marco and imagine yourself in his place. Please imagine what you might be thinking, feeling, and experiencing if you were Marco, looking at the world through his eyes and walking

in his shoes as he talks with Kamal in the three different vignettes. Your task is to complete the missing dialogue.

We gave the participants in the outgroup perspective-taking condition ( $N = 24$ ) the same instructions but asked them to take Kamal's point of view.

Finally, we asked the participants in the two control conditions ( $N = 20$  each) to complete the missing text of the sketches in a logical way without any additional instructions.

**Manipulation Check.** To test the effectiveness of the procedure of perspective-taking, the participants completed a manipulation check item assessing the depth of their merging with the characters of the vignettes: "To what extent did you try to imagine what you might be thinking, feeling, and experiencing if you were Marco/Kamal?" Participants made this rating on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *no merging* to 7 = *complete merging*.

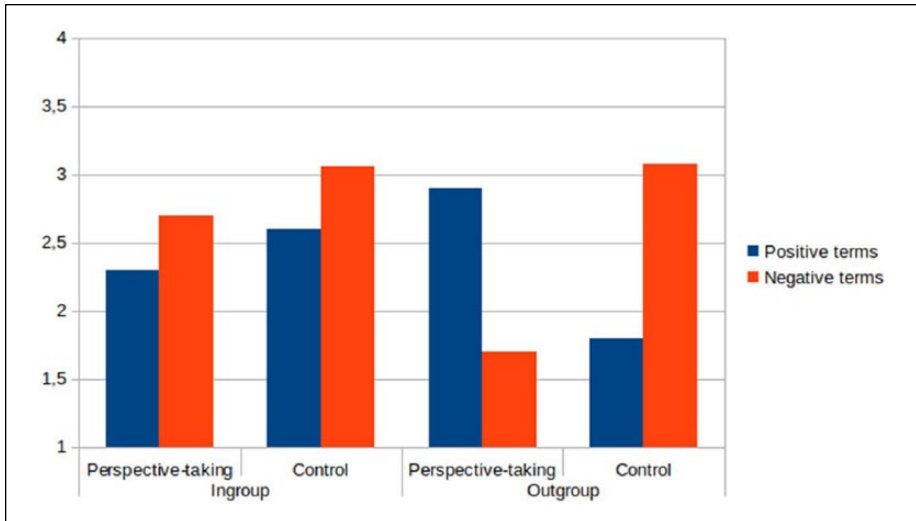
### **Dependent Variable**

**Linguistic Abstraction.** Two independent research assistants, blind to the experimental conditions, coded the participants' wording. Following the procedure of Semin and Fiedler (1988) and Maass et al. (1989), the coders distinguished between DAVs, IAVs, SVs, and Adjs. The semantic valence of the predicates (positive vs. negative) was also coded by referring to the positive/negative evaluations of the behaviors that could be inferred from the participants' descriptions (Moscatelli & Rubini, 2011).

Verbs and adjectives of 24 sentences among those the participants produced (4.27% of the total sentences), equally distributed between ingroup and outgroup descriptions, were not coded for abstraction because they were generic and did not refer to the topic of the vignettes (e.g., "I do not know"). The research assistants coded a grand total of 562 verbs and adjectives. All terms were coded according to the LCM classification. The intercoder agreement was high (Cohen's  $\kappa = .90$  for predicate categorization and  $\kappa = .90$  for predicate valence). On average, each participant used 3.33 ( $SD = 2.53$ ) positive terms and 4.92 ( $SD = 2.84$ ) negative terms.

## **Results**

**Manipulation Check.** To manipulate the perspective-taking variable, we asked half of the participants to adopt the point of view of one of the characters in a short dialogue in a series of vignettes (the perspective-taking condition). We asked the other half of the participants to complete the missing text of the vignettes in a logical way. We conducted an analysis of variance on the depth of merging which results revealed that, during the dialogue, the participants referred that they put themselves in the character's shoes significantly more in the perspective-taking condition ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) than in the control condition ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ ),  $F(1, 79) = 6.38$ ,  $p = .013$ . Moreover, we checked if there were participants in the perspective-taking condition that reportedly did not merge with the character (Manipulation check item



**Figure 1.** The means of the abstraction indexes for positive and negative terms in the different conditions.

rated as 1 = *no merging*) and in this way we removed 2 participants from all subsequent analysis.

**Linguistic Abstraction.** We computed positive and negative abstraction indexes for each participant. Considering positive and negative terms separately, we assigned weights of 1, 2, 3, and 4 to DAVs, IAVs, SVs, and Adjs, respectively, and then divided the summed weights by the total number of terms used (Moscatelli, Hewstone, & Rubini, 2017). The scores on each index ranged from 1 (lowest abstraction) to 4 (highest abstraction). We submitted the scores to a 2 (group condition)  $\times$  2 (perspective-taking condition)  $\times$  2 (valence of language) ANOVA, with the last factor within-participants.

The analysis revealed a main effect of the “Group” variable on the abstraction of the verbs and adjectives used: Globally ingroup behavior is described in more abstract terms ( $F[1, 62] = 5.76, p = .02, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .09$ ). A significant perspective-taking by valence of language interaction emerged,  $F(1, 62) = 22.00, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .26$ . The participants in the perspective-taking condition used positive terms to complete the missing text in the vignettes at a higher level of abstractions ( $M = 2.77; SD = 0.92$ ) than the participants in the control condition ( $M = 2.20; SD = 0.96$ ),  $F(1, 64) = 6.04, p = .017, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .086$ . Conversely, negative terms that the participants in the perspective-taking condition used to complete the missing text were less abstract ( $M = 2.05; SD = 0.68$ ) than the negative terms used by participants in the control condition ( $M = 3.07; SD = 0.34$ ),  $F(1, 64) = 58.90, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .48$ . This interaction was qualified by a significant perspective-taking by group by valence of language three-way interaction,  $F(1, 62) = 21.18, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .26$  (see Figure 1).

**Table 1.** The Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Abstraction Indexes Broken Down for Valence of Terms, Character Played, and Perspective.

Valence	Group	Perspective	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Negative terms	Ingroup	Perspective-taking	2.75	0.76	10
		Control	3.06	0.26	13
		Total	2.93	0.55	23
	Outgroup	Perspective-taking	1.75	0.36	24
		Control	3.08	0.40	19
		Total	2.34	0.77	43
	Total	Perspective-taking	2.05	0.68	34
		Control	3.08	0.35	32
		Total	2.55	0.75	66
Positive terms	Ingroup	Perspective-taking	2.39	0.38	10
		Control	2.68	1.01	13
		Total	2.55	0.80	23
	Outgroup	Perspective-taking	2.92	1.03	24
		Control	1.87	0.80	19
		Total	2.46	1.06	43
	Total	Perspective-taking	2.77	0.92	34
		Control	2.20	0.96	32
		Total	2.49	0.97	66

The interaction only pertains to the abstraction of positive and negative terms when the participants completed the dialogues of an outgroup member in the presence or absence of perspective-taking. In fact, a closer look reveals that the participants completing the task of filling in the dialogue of an outgroup member used more abstract forms of negative terms ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ) and less abstract forms of positive terms ( $M = 1.87$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) in the control condition. Just the opposite, when they stepped into an outgroup member's shoes, they tended to use more abstract forms of positive terms ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ) and less abstract forms of negative ones ( $M = 1.75$ ,  $SD = 0.35$ ). When the participants filled in the dialogues of an ingroup member, perspective-taking did not show any effect. No other main effect or interaction proved to be significant. Means and standard deviations are displayed in Table 1.

We performed the analysis following the parametric method used by other authors to analyze linguistic abstraction (Moscatelli et al., 2017). However, considering that the four levels of abstraction are, *stricto sensu*, ordinal data, we repeated the hypothesis testing using nonparametric analysis. First of all, we computed the frequency of occurrence for each level of abstraction. We considered such levels independent ordinal categories along a dimension of abstraction whose metric is unknown. We did it separately for both the perspective-taking and control conditions and for positive and negative valence of language (see Tables 2 and 3).

**Table 2.** Contingency Table of Positive Terms for Abstraction Levels for Each Condition and Group Variables.

Group	Perspective	1 (DAVs)	2 (IAVs)	3 (SVs)	4 (Adjs)	Total
Ingroup	Perspective-taking	4	8	5	7	24
	Control	6	7	10	6	29
Total		10	15	15	13	53
Outgroup	Perspective-taking	10	24	11	41	86
	Control	37	25	4	16	82
Total		47	49	15	57	168

Note. DAVs = descriptive action verbs; IAVs = interpretive action verbs; SVs = state verbs; Adjs = adjectives.

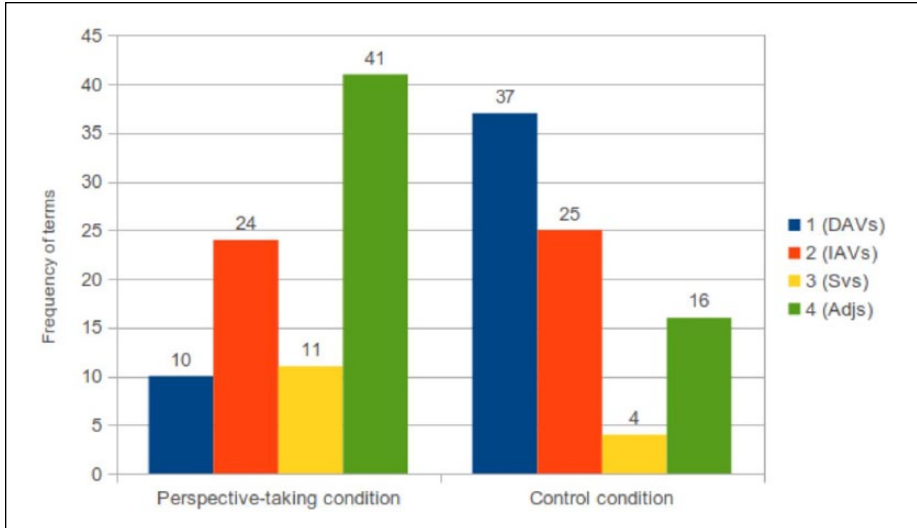
**Table 3.** Contingency Table of Negative Terms for Abstraction Levels for Each Condition and Group Variables.

Group	Perspective	1 (DAVs)	2 (IAVs)	3 (SVs)	4 (Adjs)	Total
Ingroup	Perspective-taking	6	8	12	12	38
	Control	7	15	26	27	75
Total		13	23	38	39	113
Outgroup	Perspective-taking	52	41	15	1	109
	Control	9	22	31	39	101
Total		61	63	46	40	210

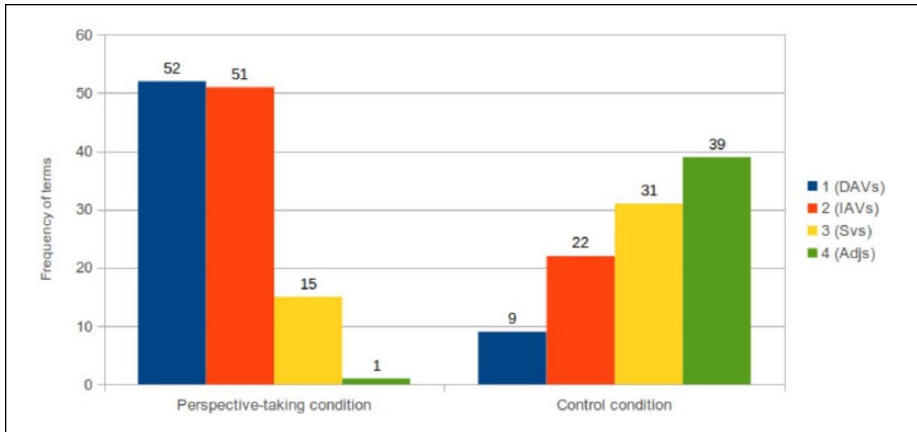
Note. DAVs = descriptive action verbs; IAVs = interpretive action verbs; SVs = state verbs; Adjs = adjectives.

Then, we submitted these counts to chi-square tests of independence to examine the relation between perspective-taking and level of abstraction. In the case that the relation was significant, we performed a chi-square test for trend to verify the presence of a linear trend in the data against the null hypothesis of no trend.

In line with the results obtained through parametric methods, taking or not taking the perspective of the ingroup member in completing the dialogue boxes was not related to the level of linguistic abstraction of the verbs and adjectives used by participants for both positive ( $\chi^2[3, N = 53] = 1.75, p = .625$ ) and negative ( $\chi^2[3, N = 113] = 1.14, p = .767$ ) valence of language. As to the relation of perspective-taking with the level of linguistic abstraction of terms the participants used to fill in the dialogue boxes of the outgroup character, the results were in line with those obtained through parametric methods for both positive and negative valence of terms. Specifically, in the case of positive terms, the relation between these variables was significant:  $\chi^2(3, N = 168) = 29.68, p < .001$ . Thus, we further explored this relation through a chi-square test for trend. The result of the analysis was significant:  $\chi^2 \text{ trend}(df = 1) = 26.95, p < .001$ . The participants in the perspective-taking condition showed a higher level of abstraction in the positive terms used to complete the missing text in the vignettes than the participants in the control condition (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Effect of taking the perspective of the outgroup’s member character on the level of language abstraction of positive terms.



**Figure 3.** Effect of taking the perspective of the outgroup’s member character on the level of language abstraction of negative sentences.

In the case of negative valence of the terms, the relation between perspective-taking and the level of language abstraction used to complete the dialogue of an *outgroup* character was significant as well:  $\chi^2(3, N = 210) = 77.51, p < .001$ . Again, the results of the chi-square test for trend was significant:  $\chi^2 \text{ trend}(df = 1) = 76.67, p < .001$ . The participants in the perspective-taking condition showed a decreasing level of abstraction in the negative terms used to complete the missing text in the vignettes compared with the participants in the control condition (Figure 3).

## Discussion

Although we can say that forms of ethnic stereotyping are less blatant today than in previous decades, to say that contemporary forms of bias are present and continue to affect the realization of full ethnic equality is also true. Research on linguistic bias and intergroup comparisons indicates that subtle yet systematic differences in the use of abstract versus concrete language benefit group identity needs by implicitly supporting favorable intergroup comparisons (Wigboldus, Semin, & Spears, 2000). Among the various strategies to favor positive interethnic experiences, social psychology has shown that perspective-taking can improve social relationships by decreasing stereotyping and prejudice toward the target and the target's group (Galinsky & Ku, 2004; Todd et al., 2011; Vescio et al., 2003). Nevertheless, only a handful of studies have investigated the effect of perspective-taking on automatic intergroup biases and no one used the LIB as a tool for assessing outgroup stereotyping. In the present study, the participants in the control condition in which they received no instruction regarding the assumption of perspective globally tended to use more abstract terms, which denote stable and predictable characteristics, to describe the negative behavior, and they used less abstract terms, which characterize occasional behaviors and characteristics, to describe the positive behavior of the Maghrebian character in the vignettes compared with the experimental conditions. These findings nicely replicate the common results of studies on LIB (Maass, 1999; Maass et al., 1989; Menegatti & Rubini, 2009; Wigboldus & Douglas, 2007).

The main hypothesis of this study concerned the capacity of perspective-taking to reduce LIB in social interaction. The collected results show that when participants responded by identifying themselves with the Maghrebian, they used more abstract terms to describe the positive behaviors of the target and less abstract terms for negative behavior compared with those who were not asked to identify with that character. In general, these findings are consistent with recent literature on the effect of perspective-taking on intergroup relations (Batson et al., 1997; Dovidio et al., 2004; Galinsky & Ku, 2004; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Vescio et al., 2003; Vorauer & Sasaki, 2009). Differently, perspective-taking did not affect the levels of abstraction of terms used by participants who described ingroup's behavior. This result is not unexpected. In fact, perspective-taking affects stereotype use by favoring the merging between the self and the other group, and by favoring a causal attributional style characterized by stronger situational explanations and weaker dispositional ones for negative behaviors. Both these processes are part of the experience of being a member of the ingroup.

This study extends the findings of Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) about the success of perspective-taking in reducing stereotyping and intergroup bias and provides further evidence that perspective-taking attenuates not only overt expressions of bias but also more indirect and automatic forms of racial bias. Several authors (Franco & Maass, 1996; Maass & Arcuri, 1996; Schmid & Fiedler, 1996) have argued that people have little awareness of the subtle variations in linguistic abstraction. In the case of LIB, people may well be aware of the fact that they are describing a given group positively or negatively, but they may inadvertently use a greater or lesser degree of abstraction without acknowledging this fact.

Regarding the mechanisms that could underlie the observed effects, this study was not intended to test which one of the two different cognitive processes proposed over the years in literature—shifts in attributional style and self-outgroup merging—best explains the observed data. The role of perspective-taking in reducing the degree of linguistic abstraction could probably be accounted for by both processes. Indeed, on the one hand, it is possible that perspective-taking has increased judgments relying on non-dispositional factors in the explanation of negative outgroup behaviors. This would explain why the participants completing the task of filling in the dialogue of an outgroup member used less abstract forms of negative terms. On the other hand, it is possible that having adopted an outgroup member's perspective strengthened the association between the targeted outgroup and the self, which, in turn, enabled more positive automatic intergroup evaluations.

Perhaps a limitation of this study is that, because the topic of the vignettes concerned immigration, one might think that the effect of perspective-taking is solely related to the unique context of immigration and cannot be extended to a general attitude of the Italians toward the Maghrebians or even to a general disposition toward any other outgroup. The research paradigm we used is easily adaptable to future research varying discussion topic and outgroups to clarify this issue. Moreover, it may be questioned whether changes in language use really correspond to changes in attitude toward the outgroup. Further research should highlight this point.

Another critical point of this study lies in the nature of the task participants completed: completing a dialogue of another person. It may be that given the experimental procedure, participants are actually engaging in some baseline degree of perspective-taking even when they are not requested to. Nevertheless, the instructions were clear: Participants in the perspective-taking condition were explicitly asked to complete the dialogue taking the character's point of view while participants in the control condition were asked to complete the dialogue in a rational and logical way.

This study has demonstrated the capacity of perspective-taking to reduce the use of stereotypical language when talking about an outgroup member in a laboratory experiment. If further research confirms this favorable outcome in field studies, then perspective-taking may be seen as an empirical and theoretical pillar in the definition of social interventions aimed to foster intergroup relations in classes, schools, and larger communities.

### **Acknowledgments**

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers that contributed to enhance the present work with their comments.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Note

1. As Todd and Galinsky (2014) reported in their review, a standard perspective-taking induction involves the following sequence: The participants are first introduced to an individual group member, either directly (Vorauer, Martens, & Sasaki, 2009) or indirectly—for instance, by reading a vignette (Finlay & Stephan, 2000), watching a video clip (Dovidio et al., 2004), or listening to an audio recording (Batson et al., 1997) featuring the person. A related procedure involves having the participants write about a day in the life of a photographed person (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). The participants are then asked to take the target's perspective, by either (a) imagining the person's mental states (imagine-other) or (b) imagining their own mental states as if they were the person or were experiencing the person's situation (imagine-self). Others receive instructions designed to discourage perspective-taking (objective-focus), or they receive no instructions (no-instruction control). Later, usually during an ostensibly unrelated task, the participants complete dependent measures assessing their reactions to the target and/or the target's social group. The few studies that have directly compared the effects on intergroup outcomes have generally found no differences between imagine-self and imagine-other perspective-taking instructions (e.g., Todd et al., 2011, Experiment 1). Thus, we do not differentiate between imagine-self and imagine-other perspective-taking here.

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