Uncivil Twitter: A Sociopragmatic Analysis

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Abstract

Using four tweets by Steven Salaita about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that resulted in the retraction of his academic job offer in September 2014 as our case study, we investigate the role of Twitter in the shaping and reception of the controversial messages. Our analysis combines Gricean pragmatics with im/politeness and hate-speech research to reveal a complex layering of potential meanings stemming from what is linguistically encoded in each Tweet. Their construal as hate speech, in particular, depends on which of these potential meanings critics chose to focus upon. We account for this finding by considering the diversity of potential audiences of a Tweet and suggest that the effects of context collapse on implicated meanings can be especially detrimental. Competition for attention among incoming tweets, Twitter's central affiliative function and applicable length restrictions can, nevertheless, place a premium on communicating such meanings.

1. Introduction

On August 1, 2014, the administration of the University of Illinois decided not to pursue further the potential appointment of Steven Salaita, who had been offered a position as Associate Professor on the University's American Indian Studies Program the previous fall. That decision came in the aftermath of a series of tweets[1] he had posted over the previous months criticizing ongoing Israeli military operations in Gaza. Following criticism by faculty and national organizations, the Chancellor of the University later released a statement in which she referred to the need for "new concepts and differing points of view to be discussed in and outside the classroom in a scholarly, *civil* and productive manner", for "personal views [to] be expressed and ... philosophical disagreements with a faculty member [to] be debated in a *civil*, thoughtful and mutually respectful manner," and to '*civility*' as a "tradition ... upon which our university is built" (emphasis added).[2]

These references to civility raise pressing questions regarding the existence of recognizable standards of civility, who determines what they are and how, the relationship between civility and free speech, and civility as a criterion for academic hiring decisions. While these questions continue to be debated,[3] we focus on a far less

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[1] Tweets are 140-character text fragments that publicly broadcast emotions, thoughts, experiences and information. Zappavigna (2014, 139) refers to these length-delimited posts as "micro-posts".

[2] Phyllis M. Wise, "The Principles on Which We Stand," University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign Chancellor's Blog, August 22, 2014. https://chicagotonight.wttw.com/sites/default/files/; accessed April 15, 2018.

[3] This incident was one among many calling attention to issues of free speech in US Universities. For a recent commentary, see *The Economist's* article "Hard to say", accessed May 2, 2015,

discussed aspect of this case: the role of the medium of Twitter in shaping the production and reception of the controversial messages. Using this as a case study, we ask: (1) How did the design of Twitter affect how speaker(s), hearer(s) and context were understood? (2) How did these understandings affect the production and interpretation of these tweets?

Our analysis focuses on four of Salaita's tweets singled out as among the most incendiary in the days following the controversy,[4] and combines insights from Grice's ([1975] 1989) theory of conversational implicature with literature on im/politeness and hate speech under the integrative framework of Pragmatics and Critical Discourse Analysis (Wodak 2007). Two aspects of our analysis in combination set it apart from previous research on language use on Twitter: first, its concern with a sequence of tweets on the same topic by a single user taking into account their immediate co-text and broader socio-temporal context; and second, its im/politeness focus. These aspects enable us to bring out the richness of potential meanings inherent in these tweets and further to explore when and why this richness may have failed to be recognized by audiences. Our results highlight the 'vulnerability' of implicated meanings on Twitter, leading us secondarily to explore users' reasons for opting to communicate these meanings.

We begin with a brief overview of Twitter's design features, focusing on those most relevant to implicature generation by directing messages to particular audiences and/or providing context for them. We then move on to the theoretical framework for our

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http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21689603-statement-heart-debate-over-academic-freedom-hard-say.

[4] These are by no means the only tweets Salaita posted about these events. For a more comprehensive list, including some 'nicer' tweets provided by his lawyers once the court case was under way, see AAUP, *"Academic Freedom and Tenure: The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,"* April 2015, 20-21, accessed July 28, 2016 https://www.aaup.org/report/UIUC.

analysis, which draws on work on in/civility, im/politeness and hate-speech, including the triangulation approach exemplified in Wodak (2007). Finally, we present our analysis of the four tweets and conclude with the implications of this analysis and directions for future research.

2. A (brave, new) world of Twitter affordances

While early research on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), and Twitter in particular, saw several of its features as responding to practical constraints of the medium, newer research is emphasizing how users enlist these features to construct their social identities and create bonds of affiliation online. The use of abbreviations is a case in point: evidence that abbreviations are more common in shorter tweets than longer ones (Eisenstein 2013; Squires 2016, 241) challenges the widely held assumption that their use is a response to Twitter's 140-character limit (Finin et al. 2010). Similarly, the need for brevity does not deter users from repeating letters or punctuation marks, leading Brody and Diakopoulos (2011) to relate their use to the speaker's heightened emotional involvement. Emoticons are another feature originally linked to the speaker's emotional state, serving as a substitute for intonation and other paralinguistics in a medium that lacks physical co-presence. Extending these earlier explanations, recent research provides

evidence that these non-standard features in fact carry social meaning (Zappavigna 2012, 71).[5]

Interpersonal functions are also important to features newly introduced by Twitter. Hashtags, @mentions, and Retweets are all powerful devices for achieving intertextuality, while also affecting interpretation by amplifying the pool of potential recipients of tweets. Hashtags—word strings prefixed with a '#' that trigger "an automatic search for other tweets containing the same tag" (Squires 2016, 241) — can be used to provide a context, producing what Zappavigna calls "searchable talk" (2011). Furthermore, their use can create affiliation among users interested in a particular topic, a phenomenon Zappavigna (2011) calls "ambient affiliation". In our analysis, we draw on this feature to help us identify the intended audience(s) of a Tweet — which, as we show, is essential to its characterization as hate speech (see section 4). Further to hashtags, ambient affiliation can be created with the help of 'at-mentions'—usernames prefixed with '@' — used to initiate a conversation with other users or to alert them to content they should read by creating an automatic link to their profile.

Another feature promoting affiliation on Twitter is the 'follow' function, which grants easy access to the profiles and tweets of other users one takes an interest in. The act of following is usually taken to imply friendship, support, affiliation, or affinity of some kind. Related to following, retweeting, that is, "re-broadcasting another user's tweet

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[5] Examples include noseless emoticons (e.g., :)) preferred by younger users vis-à-vis nosed emoticons (e.g., :-)) preferred by older ones, and female-associated words (some pronouns, emotion terms, CMC lexicon, and hesitation markers) as opposed to male-associated ones (numbers, technology terms, and swear words; Squires 2016, 245-246; and Katy Steinmetz, "What Twitter says to linguists," *Time* magazine, September 9, 2013, accessed February 13, 2016, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2150609,00.html). More generally, Eisenstein (2013, 3) argues that non-standard language use "signals resistance to norms imposed from above" and as such is at the center of identity work in social media.

through one's own stream" (Squires 2016, 243), may be used to spread information, entertain a specific audience, demonstrate agreement or friendship, or self-promote (ibid.). Retweeting thus "contributes to a conversational ecology in which conversations are composed of a public interplay of voices that give rise to an emotional sense of shared conversational context" (boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010, 1). Users generally retweet posts that echo their views (Conover et al. 2011) and for most Twitter users, the default interpretation of a Retweet is endorsement.[6] Nevertheless, authoring and retweeting a Tweet are not the same. The difference between them is best captured by Goffman's (1981) distinction between 'author' and 'animator': an author is "someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded", whereas an animator is merely "the talking machine" (Goffman 1981, 144) who delivers the words.[7] A Retweet might, then, serve to echo a sentiment or indicate solidarity without constituting full endorsement. This point is relevant to our analysis of Tweet (5) below.

Retweeted and quoted tweets are de- and re-contextualized for specific purposes, demonstrating the portability of these text fragments. Like the use of hashtags, such re-contextualization can boost the number of one's followers, serving what Squires (2016) identifies as two distinct goals of Twitter: creating multiple networks with people one

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[6] User profiles often specify how retweeting should be interpreted. Some users equate saying nothing with endorsement, as in Berkeley SJP's (@KumarsSaheli): "Nothing = endorsement unless we say so", accessed April 26, 2015, https://twitter.com/KumarsSalehi?lang=es. Others, like the U.S. Army Twitter profile, specify that following, retweeting and sharing links do not equal endorsement: "Following, RTs and links =/ endorsement", accessed February 12, 2016, https://twitter.com/USArmy.

[7] A Retweet can be described as an instance of 'echoic use' in Relevance Theory, which is defined as "attribut[ing] some aspect of [the] form or content [of a representation] to someone other than the speaker herself at that moment and express[ing] an attitude to that aspect" (Carston 2002, 298).

would not normally come in contact with, and reaching the widest audience possible.[8]

Another feature potentially serving these goals is the "tendency to upscale", that is, the tendency to "intensify interpersonal systems as a way of increasing solidarity through emphasizing both positive and negative appraisal as shared experience" (Zappavigna 2012, 67). This tendency is not only seen in the use of capitalization and repeated characters (Zappavigna 2012, 67-68; cf. Tweet (21)), but may also partly explain the use of expletives and expression of extreme meanings (exemplified in (1) and (5) below); it could be argued that in their quest to capture audiences' attention, Twitter users exaggerate opinions and emotions that may have come across as more nuanced had they been expressed in more words or face-to-face. This is understandable in a medium as fast paced and public as Twitter. With an average of 6,000-7,000 tweets per second,[9] competition for users' attention can be fierce; and "[n]othing is more effective than a message that compels response or affirmation" (Abram Olmstead, cited in Cecilia Kang's article).[10]

At the same time, the more successful one is at spreading one's message, the more likely this message will be read by diverse audiences, who share little to no background with its author. This can be a problem in light of 'context collapse', that is, the social media phenomenon whereby "diverse social contexts [are collapsed] into one, making it

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[8] Users may decide to keep their profiles private, making their tweets visible only to their followers. However, that defeats the purpose of Twitter (Squires 2016, 247).

[9] "Twitter usage statistics", *Internet live stats*, accessed February 10, 2016, http://www.internetlivestats.com/twitter-statistics/#trend and http://www.internetlivestats.com/one-second/#tweets-band.

[10] Cecilia Kang, "Twitter: A live megaphone for lobbying groups, companies," *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2013, accessed February 13, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/twitter-a-live-megaphone-for-lobbying-groups-companies/2013/02/13/dbe023ac-758d-11e2-aa12-e6cf1d31106b_story.html.

difficult for people to engage in the complex negotiations needed to vary identity presentation, manage impressions, and save face" (Marwick and boyd 2011, 123). Marwick and boyd identify two ways for dealing with context collapse. The first is polysemy or coded communication, which allows users to simultaneously appeal to diverse, even oppositional, audiences by using messages that will mean different things to each of them. The second is by mixing personal and informative tweets, which allows them to maintain parallel conversations with multiple audiences. The negative impact of context collapse is magnified when tweets are broadcast beyond a narrow circle of followers, and even more so when they are taken outside the medium of Twitter itself, as has been the case with Salaita's tweets analyzed below.

3. Civility, im/politeness and hate speech

The references to 'civility' by Salaita's critics bring to mind the notion of 'tone-policing', a known problem on Twitter when "a person expressing anger, hurt, or other strong emotions about an injustice is assailed by interlocutors who ignore the substance of their complaints and shift the focus to their tone".[11] Indeed, our analysis suggests an explanation for tone-policing, in that Twitter tends to focus attention away from the subtler, implicated meanings toward a Tweet's more direct (e.g., lexically encoded)

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[11] Conor Friedersdorf, "In defense of civility on Twitter," *The Atlantic*, November 4, 2015, accessed February 13, 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/in-defense-of-civility-on-twitter/413860.

aspects. They also compel us to engage the notion of civility and in particular how (or even whether) it can be made amenable to linguistic research.

Papacharissi (2004) briefly reviews how the term evolved after being coined as a Latin translation of Aristotle's *koinōnía politikḗ*, meaning involvement with public life as a free citizen, and illustrates how, despite early emphasis on participatory aspects, over time its meaning shifted closer to what is nowadays understood by 'politeness', that is, consideration for others and the observance of social mores. Yet, like politeness itself, which for some (e.g., Leech 2014) consists in only verbally signaling that *ego* has *alter*'s best interests at heart without that necessarily being so (what Leech calls 'communicative altruism'), while for others intrinsically involves the 'moral order' (Haugh 2014), some contention surrounding the relation of civility to morality and democratic debate remains.

While such meaning ambivalence constitutes a point of contact between the two notions, 'civility' and 'politeness' remain distinct in other ways. Linguistic analyses of 'civility' have focused on name-calling, aspersion, hyperbole, synonyms for 'lie', non-cooperation, pejorative words for speech, and vulgarity (Papacharissi 2004), whereas scholars of im/politeness have typically focused on strategies for making a speaker's message more or less indirect involving e.g., deictic devices, verbal mood, tag-questions, implicatures, etc. Crucially, im/politeness scholars predict that estimations of Power and Distance curtail the directness of one's message, while some have also argued that first-order politeness (how politeness is understood and used by people in daily life) is an attribute of the upper middle classes (also referred to as 'polite society'; Mills 2003; Watts 2002). But if civility is equated with politeness, then like polite discourse, civil discourse, too, would be unavailable to lower social strata, further excluding them from

democratic debate. While historically, civility, like politeness, has been used to achieve social distinction (Nehring 2011, 321), this goal is at odds with the goals of political debate to promote democracy and inclusiveness. It is no accident that parliamentary discourse was among the earliest areas of research into *im*politeness (Harris 2001). Further elaborating on the differences between impoliteness and incivility, Papacharissi notes that, "conversational impoliteness is frequently a sincere and spontaneous reflection of emotions, and should be conceptualized as such. Incivility, on the other hand, is fundamentally linked to attitudes and beliefs, and as such could have graver repercussions" (2004, 281). For all these reasons, we agree with Papacharissi that "we need to move away from a definition [of civility] that relies on vocabulary, morality, and simple good manners" toward a theory of

> civility as collective politeness, with consideration for the democratic consequences of impolite behavior. […] Civility can then be operationalized as the set of behaviors that threaten democracy, deny people their personal freedoms, and stereotype social groups. This definition becomes especially pertinent in cyberspace. The anonymity of cyberspace makes it easier for individuals to be rude, although not necessarily uncivil. (Papacharissi 2004, 265-267)

This may, however, be easier said than done. By emphasizing the asymmetries between the two notions, Papacharissi is attempting to free up civility from the yoke of superficial propriety, so it can better serve its original participatory mission. This strategy is adopted by Salaita himself in a few of the tweets analyzed below (e.g., Tweet (21)),

which can be read precisely as a commitment to civility as distinct from (emotional) politeness and promoting democratic dialogue. However, other tweets, especially those that are offensive to a group but do not directly threaten it (e.g., Tweet (1)) blur this boundary, suggesting that the desired separation between im/politeness and in/civility may be possible to enforce only up to a point. These examples highlight the difficulty of formulating a (linguistic) theory of in/civility, calling into question the feasibility of the task itself. Although less than ideally suited to our goals, this leaves us to draw on the existing theories of im/politeness and hate speech in order to broach the topic of in/civility in language use.

In the most recent addition to this literature, Leech (2014) analyses politeness as 'communicative altruism', which refers to the idea that a speaker, in order to be polite, "expresses or implies meanings that associate a favorable value with what pertains to O[ther] or associates an unfavorable value with what pertains to S[elf]" (2014, 90). This is achieved through a set of ten Maxims, such as Agreement ("give a high value to O's opinions") and Modesty ("give a low value to S's qualities"), which fall in two camps: neg-politeness, which reduces negative effects in the interaction, and pos-politeness, which assigns a positive value to the interlocutor. The assumption is that heeding the Politeness Maxims yields polite transactions, whereas violating them generates impoliteness. An originality of Leech's approach, which builds on his earlier work (Leech 1983), extending it with the addition of four new maxims and the notions of neg- and pos- politeness corresponding roughly to what others have called Face-Threatening and Face-Enhancing Acts, respectively (Brown and Levinson 1987; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1996), is that politeness is made a matter of the beliefs expressed, i.e. a matter of

contents, rather than a matter of strategies, as is more common in other im/politeness research. As the first in-depth application of this approach to analyze *im*politeness data on Twitter, our analysis serves as a test of the applicability of Leech's approach to this kind of data.

Further to accusations of incivility, Salaita's tweets have been characterized as "hate speech,"[12] analyses of which are only beginning to emerge in the pragmatics literature (e.g., Culpeper, Iganski and Sweiry forthcoming). Interesting work in this vein within Communication has provided in-depth overviews of hate speech phenomena (e.g., Leets and Giles 1997; Leets 2003) , including concepts such as 'verbal aggression' and definitions from a legal perspective. Leets and Giles define hate speech as "speech that denigrates persons on the basis of their race or ethnic origin, religion, gender, age, physical condition, disability or sexual orientation" (Sedler 1992, cited in Leets and Giles 1997, 261), emphasizing that hateful speech aims at the "intentional infliction of emotional distress" (Leets and Giles 1997, 264). Much of the definition of hate speech thus centers around its perlocutionary effects – its ability to make the addressee feel hurt, angry, embarrassed, discouraged or experience other types of psychological pain (Infante and Wigley 1986, 67; Leets and Giles 1997, 261). In fact, the strongest arguments for why hate speech should be legally sanctioned are tied to an attempted "elicitation of anxiety and distress" (Leets and Giles 1997, 263).

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[12] This characterization by the Chancellor of the University on the "Report on the Investigation into the Matter of Steven Salaita", https://cfaillinois.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/caft-report-on-steven-salaita-case.pdf, was echoed by many others (https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/08/06/u-illinois-apparently-revokes-job-offer-controversial-scholar#comment-1529960929; http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-salaitia-board-decision-20140911-story.html#page=2).

To help ground their claims, Leets and Giles investigated reactions to 'direct' and 'indirect' hateful speech by white (European American) speakers to non-white (Asian, African or Hispanic American) addressees. 'Direct' instances of hate speech in this context refer to racist slurs, whereas statements that merely implicated offensive ideas (e.g., "You must be a good role model for Blacks. Your intelligence stands out"; Leets 2003, 163) were deemed 'indirect'. They found that members of the group targeted judged indirect expressions as more harmful, while out-group participants thought direct expressions inflict more emotional distress. Additional experiments found that members of 'high-context' cultures (Hall 1976) were more disturbed by indirect hate speech, while members of 'low-context' ones found direct messages more harmful (Leets 2003, 158). In her study of hate speech specifically on the Internet, which she calls "a key organizing tool for hate groups" due to its "broad reach, interactivity, and multi-media capability to disseminate information" (Leets 2001, 288), Leets found that purveyors of white supremacist hate groups' ideas have the capability to reach large audiences, but those audiences "must be more active in seeking information" (ibid.). Moreover, participants' responses to white supremacist websites showed that, although they judged these Internet-based instances of hate speech as 'moderately harmful' to themselves and to society as a whole, they were not personally persuaded by them. She concluded that, although online hate speech is unlikely to incite short-term effects, it carries with it a potential for long-term harmful consequences (Leets 2001, 314-316).

These findings furnish a closer understanding of the consequences of hate speech, relativizing its effects to different audiences and types of speech. This is important for the case at hand, as Salaita's tweets — in their very nature as public posts —are potentially

addressing a multitude of diverse audiences. If what counts as hate speech depends crucially on the perlocutionary effects produced in the audience, the audience(s) of Salaita's tweets, intended or otherwise, will be an important consideration in a proposed analysis. Put differently, the audience(s) of Salaita's tweets are relevant to determining the gravity and extent of the perlocutionary effects of his tweets – helping us establish the extent to which they constitute hate speech in the first place.

4. A Sociopragmatic Analysis of Salaita's Tweets

Our analysis of Salaita's tweets follows the type of triangulation analysis laid out in Wodak's (2007) account of hate speech. Wodak details the 'procedures and stages' of such an analysis as follows: (1) in-depth exploration of the 'co-text' of each utterance (the utterances preceding or following it); (2) assessment of the 'con-text' of the macro-text or genre analysis; (3) investigation of the socio-political context and (4) understanding of the "intertextual and interdiscursive relationships of the respective speech event to other relevant events" (2007, 210). Further to the gradual amplification of meaning achieved by successively embedding an utterance in increasingly larger discourses, Wodak (2007, 205) emphasizes "the construction of 'differences' which serve ideological, political and/or practical discrimination on all levels of society". In this framework, Salaita's tweets may be understood as operating within larger processes of constructing difference, in which language serves to create and sustain an affectively-loaded 'US' versus 'THEM' dynamic. These "discursive macro-strategies of *positive* self

and *negative* other presentation" (2007, 207; original emphasis) emerge once the tweets are successively considered in conjunction with their co-text, genre, socio-political context and other relevant events.

We begin our analysis by highlighting the socio-historical context of the four tweets (stages 3 and 4), following which we present an analysis of their linguistic content (stages 1 and 2). The tweets in question were posted between June and July, 2014, during a time of heightened tension between Israel and Palestine. The hostilities of the summer of 2014 are part of a long history of conflict between the two populations that has been ongoing since the interwar period. The modern phase of this conflict evolved after the declaration of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948. On June 12, 2014, three Israeli teenagers were abducted and later found dead, allegedly killed by activists from Hamas, a Palestinian militant movement. Placing the responsibility for their disappearance on Hamas, on July 8 the Israeli government launched 'Operation Protective Edge', a counter-attack operation in the Hamas-ruled Gaza strip, first with an airstrike and later with a ground invasion. The Israeli government justified the operation as a response to an ongoing rocket attack by Hamas – who were reacting to an earlier Israeli operation in the Palestinian occupied territories of the West Bank – and not as revenge for the killing of the three teenagers. As a result of the attack, more than 2,000 Palestinians were killed, most of them civilians .[13]

4.1 "You may be too refined to say it"

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[13] Jackie Northam, "Gaza violence tests once-unshakeable allies U.S. and Israel," in Matt Martinez (producer), *All things considered*, National Public Radio, Washington, D.C, August 20, 2014, accessed February 13, 2016, http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/08/20/341903726/gaza-violence-tests-once-unshakable-allies-u-s-and-israel.

When the three teenagers disappeared, they were assumed kidnapped after one of them placed a phone call to the police from inside the kidnappers' car. Public outcry blamed Hamas for the kidnapping, although there was no evidence of this at the time. Two days later, over 2,500 soldiers began scouring the area for the teenagers, arresting over 240 Palestinians on suspicion of involvement in the incident. One week later, Salaita posted the first of his four controversial tweets.

(1) "You may be too refined to say it, but I'm not: I wish all the fucking West Bank settlers would go missing" (June 19, 2014, 9:59 PM)[14]

Eleven days later, the bodies of the three teenagers were found and they were confirmed dead.[15] This timing is important: the fact that Salaita posted Tweet (1) before the status of the three teenagers was confirmed signals his continued engagement with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

4.1.1 The Socio-Political Context

The "settlers" referred to in (1) are Israelis living in the occupied territories (West Bank, East Jerusalem, Golan Heights), specifically, those in West Bank settlements, ranging from farming communities to urban suburbs. These settlements are often frowned upon

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[14] Times cited are US Central Time.

[15] Ruth Eglash and William Branigin, "Israeli army says three kidnapped teenagers found dead," *The Washington Post*, June 30, 2014, accessed February 13, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/three-kidnapped-israeli-teenagers-found-dead-reports-say/2014/06/30/4e6a271a-007a-11e4-8572-4b1b969b6322_story.html.

by the international community and have been fueling controversy since the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Through this reference, Salaita links the teenagers' kidnapping to Israel's expansionist policies providing a larger context for the recent events.

4.1.2 The Co-text

Given that tweets are "highly temporally bound" (Zappavigna 2012, 177), their co-text can include either tweets posted in close temporal proximity or others that are temporally removed if particular lexical or topic choices indicate that they are related (e.g., (23) and (24) below). Tweet (1) is the last in a series of four tweets Salaita posted within eleven minutes starting at 9:48 pm on June 19. Reading through them reveals an aggressive crescendo culminating with Tweet (1). The first in this series relates the kidnapping of the three teenagers to the Israeli military action in Gaza.

(2) "Three Israeli settlers go missing in the West Bank, so Israel, naturally, bombs the Gaza strip." (June 19, 2014, 9:48 PM)

The ironic use of the parenthetical "naturally" in (2) construes the Israeli response as absurd. The Tweet in (3), posted two minutes later, spells out why:

(3) "Look, if Arabs took the 3 West Bank settlers, they won't be found in Gaza. Palestinians aren't allowed to travel between the two colonies." (June 19, 2014, 9:50 PM)

In (3), Salaita cites the fact that Palestinians are not allowed to travel between Gaza and the West Bank as proof that the attack – at a time when there was no definitive proof that Palestinians were involved – is wholly unjustified: even if they were involved, they could not have taken the kidnapped teenagers from the West Bank to Gaza. Posted five minutes later, the next Tweet spells out what Salaita thinks is the real reason behind this attack. Compared with the first two, the language and tone of this Tweet are more aggressive.

(4) "Israel's bloodthirsty leaders probably high-five each other whenever a pretext for bombing, maiming, and displacing innocent people arises." (June 19, 2014, 9:55 PM)

The juxtaposition of "bloodthirsty" and "innocent" in (4) sets up an US vs. THEM dichotomy, making clear where Salaita's allegiances lie. Posted four minutes later, Tweet (1) concludes this line of argumentation. Having gone over the facts in the first three tweets, in (1) Salaita expresses his personal feelings about the incident ("I wish...") and links this to the broader Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

4.1.3 Linguistic analysis

Following Leech (2014, 91), the opening statement, "You may be too refined to say it but I am not", gives a high value to Other's qualities, making it an application of the Approbation maxim. Salaita is being polite to his readers by attributing to them the (presumably socially desirable) quality of being "refined". At the same time, by stating (through ellipsis) that he is "not [refined]", he is placing a low value on his own qualities, as mandated by the Modesty maxim (ibid.).

However, before jumping to the conclusion that Salaita is being polite, it is worth looking more closely at his choice of words. 'Refined' as opposed to 'kind', 'considerate', 'courteous', or any of a number of adjectives that populate the semantic field of 'polite' in English, evokes socially stratified understandings of politeness similar to how 'polite society' refers to people of higher socioeconomic status (section 3). By placing himself outside this privileged group, Salaita constructs an oppositional identity as someone not only 'not privileged' but also with a license to say things that members of this 'refined' group themselves may not dare utter. However, by drawing a contrast between being refined and speaking one's mind, Salaita goes further: he is playing up an opposition between 'polite' vs. 'sincere' that is inherent in several Western secular understandings of first-order politeness (Terkourafi 2011), including some of the foundational texts in the field (e.g., Lakoff 1973). He thus pre-emptively frames what he is about to say as not obscured by the niceties of polite speech – in other words, as honest. This may be understood as an implicit act of self-validation, which, in Leech's (2014) terms, should detract from its politeness and may even appear threatening to his audience.

However, the fact that his audience would 'not say' what he is about to say does not preclude their thinking it. This interpretation arises as a scalar implicature (Horn 1984) from Salaita's suggesting 'not say' in light of a contextually set-up opposition

between 'saying' and 'thinking'.[16][17] Assuming a scale <say, think>, where 'saying p' entails 'thinking that p', reversed under negation, Salaita's suggesting 'not say' Q-implicates 'not (not think)'– i.e., think. Thus, unpacking the first part of Tweet (1) yields (1'):

(1') 'You may be too refined to say it (though you may be thinking it) but I am not (too refined to say it and therefore I will say it)'.

Through this implicature, Salaita effectuates a delicate dance between disaffiliating from, and affiliating with, his audience: having first distinguished himself from them (they are "too refined" while he is "not"), he suggests that there may still be some common ground between them: specifically, they may already be thinking what he is about to say.

This opening statement sets the scene for what comes next, which, as he has already warned us, is 'not refined': "I wish all the fucking West Bank settlers would go missing". Salaita's use of the expression "go missing" in this subsequent statement echoes media reports of the disappearance of the three teenagers. Predicated of "all the West Bank settlers", this expression sounds deliberately vague: it is not clear if it means to die, be displaced, be violently removed, or simply not be heard from ever again. This vagueness contravenes the maxim of Manner (Grice [1975] 1989), which enjoins

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[16] Scalar implicatures arise when use of an informationally weaker expression is taken to mean that an informationally stronger one does not apply. In neo-Gricean approaches (Horn 1984), they arise against the background of the Q-Principle ("Say as much as you can") which operates on items ranked on a scale of semantic strength <S, W>. Scales are reversed under negation, so the relevant scale becomes <not think, not say>, with the weaker item (now 'not say') Q-implicating the negation of the stronger one (not [not think]).

[17] Salaita does not assert "not say", yet the construction "A is too X to do Y" normally means that A will not do Y.

speakers to speak clearly and unambiguously. Salaita is thus licensing a range of potential Particularized Conversational Implicatures (PCIs), some more severe than others.[18] While the precise meaning of "go missing" is thus unclear, Salaita's choice of expression merely asserts that he wished all settlers the same (ill-)fate as the missing teenagers – a fate as yet unknown at the time of posting. Clarifying his intent in a newspaper article published more than three months later, Salaita explained that by "go missing" he was issuing "a call for an end to the settlements, which the international community largely agrees are counterproductive to peace, not a call to violence".[19] Nevertheless, his choice of words was clearly loaded since it echoed a phrase concurrently used by the media to describe an unresolved criminal case.[20]

The final point about this Tweet concerns Salaita's use of the expletive "fucking". Salaita does not often use expletives in his tweets, as seen from an indicative sample extracted using Tweet Tunnel.[21] In roughly 2,660 of his tweets posted between May 24 and October 14, 2014, only 29 contained a variant of 'fuck' – most of them referring to the events surrounding Gaza's bombing. A 0.009% rate of occurrence makes this a very marked usage for Salaita. Paired with the escalating tone of the three preceding tweets, the use of the expletive can be interpreted as an indication of high emotional involvement. But does it also constitute hate speech?

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[18] Conversational implicatures are both cancellable and indeterminate, granting the author indemnity against accusations that he meant whatever others may have understood based on his/her utterance (Grice [1975] 1989, 39-40).

[19] Steve Salaita, "Steven Salaita: U. of I. destroyed my career," *Chicago Tribune*, September 29, 2014, accessed February 13, 2016, http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-steven-salaita-tenure-jews-twitter-tweets-unive-20140929-story.html.

[20] On the definition of echoic use in Relevance Theory, see note 7.

[21] Tunnel is an online program enabling users to use special features not normally found on Twitter. Accessed February 12, 2016, http://tweettunnel.info/msgbx.php.

To answer this question, we return to the beginning of the Tweet and consider who the opening "you" refers to. According to Leets and Giles, hate speech "must be directed (one-to-one expression) at an individual and be an intentional statement to comprise fighting words" (1997, 263). Since tweets are by default public, the opening "you" in (1) could refer to any and all eventual readers of the Tweet. However, Salaita's use of hashtags suggests that his intended audience was more restricted. Contrary to other tweets by him, including those analyzed below, tweets (1)-(4) do not contain any hashtags that would have automatically made them available to those following a particular topic, such as #FreePalestine, #Gaza, and #Israel. This omission cannot be put down to Twitter's 140-character limit: Tweet (1) is 105 characters-long and Tweet (2) contains only 94 characters, allowing plenty of space for hashtags, had he wished to use them. This suggests that this omission was intentional. In the absence of hashtags, the only way to come across these tweets would have been to be already following Salaita. It is reasonable, then, to assume that the intended audience of this series of tweets was his followers rather than anyone following a particular topic, including those critical of his views.[22] In other words, absence of hashtags restricted the audience of this series of tweets to an in-group of like-minded individuals, excluding those likely to be offended by them, among whom the targets of his remarks (the "settlers"). But if those targets were not among his intended audience, then these remarks cannot qualify as hate speech under Leets and Giles's definition above.

This interpretation fits in with the escalating emotion displayed by this series of tweets. Having adopted an ironic but rather impersonal tone in the first three, in the last

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[22] This assumption was confirmed by Salaita himself during a public event in October 2015.

one Salaita shifts gears, voicing his own emotions about what is going on. It did not do him any favors, of course, that he used an expletive to do so. Words that encode face-threat in their semantics are the most transparently offensive and easily picked up by the out-group (Leets 2003, 163). Although this same Tweet contains more subtle instances of aggressive speech, such as the vague expression "go missing", it is its use of the expletive that most likely flagged it as 'uncivil' in the ensuing controversy. In sum, our analysis of (1) showed that it contains aggravating language but it cannot be characterized as hate speech. This is because the absence of hashtags limits its audience to members of the in-group.

4.2 Jeffrey Goldberg's Story and the Shiv

Our second Tweet was originally posted by user @djkilllist (under the profile name 'Free Palestine') on July 7, 2014 at 8:15am, and retweeted by Salaita two hours later. Tweet (5) has been interpreted as a suggestion that American journalist Jeffrey Goldberg should have been killed.

(5) "Jeffrey Goldberg's story should have ended at the pointy end of a shiv" (July 7, 2014, 8:15AM)

The fact that this is a Retweet is important to fully appreciate its meaning and whether it constitutes an instance of hate speech. As mentioned in section 2, a Retweet may be multiply motivated: was Salaita publicly agreeing with @djkilllist or simply

disseminating information? The fact that the original Tweet was clearly an opinion makes the latter highly unlikely. Additionally, the co-text indicates that Salaita was endorsing the original Tweet. First, as a known critic of Israel and its supporters, he tweeted and retweeted other tweets critical of Israel around that time. For example, in (6) below from the same day, Salaita accused "Jewish mobs" of "kidnapping" and "murdering" Palestinian children.

(6) "Jewish mobs are kidnapping and murdering Palestinian children. There is no space on the hierarcky of oppression in which this is irrelevant." (June 7, 2014, 7:50PM).

(5) can be interpreted as part of this disapproving thread. Second, he had used retweeting to promote criticism of Israel before, as in (7), originally posted by @reggibarbossa on July 6, 2014, at 7:34pm, and retweeted by Salaita that same day.

(7) "@stevesalaita I'm not a fan [sic] expletives but I so want to say #FuckYouIsrael too!" (July 6, 2014, 10:02PM)

Finally, Salaita was also a follower of @djkilllist on Twitter. This relationship is illustrated clearly in (8), where @djkilllist @mentions Salaita directly when responding to another user.

(8) "Oh I don't write for intifada, @stevesalaita does." (July 7, 2014, 8:20PM)

4.2.1 The Socio-Political Context

Tweet (5) is in line with other anti-Israel tweets Salaita posted during June-July 2014 but is unique in addressing a specific person: Jeffrey Goldberg. Goldberg is a highly influential journalist on matters related to Israel and a correspondent for *The Atlantic*.[23] In his Twitter profile at the time (5) was posted, he described himself as a "Mule of the Jews" (a description since removed). Goldberg moved to Israel to serve in the Israeli Defense Forces as a military prison guard during the first Intifada (1987-1991). His 2008 book *Prisoners: A Muslim and a Jew Across the Middle East Divide* recounts his experiences during that time.

4.2.2 The Co-text

Retweet (5) is not an isolated occurrence but part of an ongoing exchange between several users and Jeffrey Goldberg that peaked on July 7 and 8, 2014. In the co-text of the original Tweet posted by @djkilllist, @djkilllist was particularly judgmental of Goldberg, issuing a series of negative comments, including direct challenges to his intelligence and work as a journalist, as in (9) and (10).

(9) "@JeffreyGoldberg goddamn you're stupid @haaretzcom." (July 7, 2014, 7:59AM)

(10) "@JeffreyGoldberg note my verb tenses, genius." (July 7, 2014, 8:08PM)

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[23] The *Atlantic* was founded in 1857 in Boston and deals with topics such as culture, politics, business, technology, literature, and the arts. Before joining *The Atlantic* in 2007, Goldberg was a Middle East correspondent and the Washington correspondent for *The New Yorker*. He was previously a correspondent for *The New York Times Magazine* and *New York* magazine and has written for the *Jewish Daily Forward* and *The Jerusalem Post*. Accessed February 12, 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/jeffrey-goldberg/.

Other tweets contained insults and/or expletives ((9) above and (11) below), and referred to Goldberg's service as a prison guard in Israel ((12) below, posted by another user and retweeted by @djkilllist).

(11) "Jeffery [sic] Goldberg needs to go eat shit, pronto." (July 8, 2014, 1:09 PM)

(12) "I think @JeffreyGoldberg is feeling triggered by memories of beating Palestinians during his time as an Israeli prison guard." (July 7, 2014, 7:58 AM).

4.2.3 Linguistic Analysis

The first thing to note about (5) is that it allows multiple interpretations: 'Jeffrey Goldberg should have been stabbed', 'The story in Jeffrey Goldberg's book (and/or articles) should have ended with a stabbing', 'The story in Jeffrey Goldberg's book (and/or articles) should have been cut (or censored)', etc. Given this vagueness, it can be argued that (5) violates Manner (Grice [1975] 1989) in several ways. First, it does not avoid obscurity of expression. 'Shiv' is a highly marked word, referring to a sharp or pointed implement used as a makeshift weapon, often by inmates in prison. It is certainly not the unmarked or most common way to refer to a weapon. This choice of word is not accidental but rather references Goldberg's job as a prison guard in Israel from 1987 to 1991.

Next, it is unclear what @djkilllist meant by "Jeffrey Goldberg's story". The genitive construction is well known to allow multiple interpretations:[24] does "Jeffrey Goldberg's story" refer to a story he wrote (his book), a story he reported, the story of his

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[24] Genitive constructions are an oft-cited example of semantic underdetermination at the phrasal level (e.g., Sperber and Wilson 1986, 188; Bach 1994, 151-152).

life, or, metonymically, to his life itself? The expression "ended at the pointy end of a shiv" is also unclear: not only does it violate the third sub-maxim of Manner ("Avoid unnecessary prolixity") by containing a periphrasis ("the pointy end"=edge), but also, depending on whether "story" is taken to refer to an animate, viz. a person's life, or an inanimate referent, viz. a narrative, "ended at the pointy end of a shiv" could mean 'stab', or 'censor, cut'. In either case, @djkilllist is violating Manner by using a sentence that is obscure, not brief, and does not avoid unnecessary prolixity. We can recognize that the author is playing with words here, as this meaning (assuming it was his intended one) could have been expressed much more clearly, as in (13):

(13) Jeffrey Goldberg should have been stabbed.

Given the co-text and context of this remark, the multiple violations of Manner listed above give rise to the conversational implicature in (13). Nevertheless, this implicature is cancellable, and only one of several potentially generated by (5). By being deliberately vague and indirect through use of multiple off-record strategies (obscure and prolix expressions, metonymies, etc.), @djkilllist could always exonerate himself by claiming he did not mean what others may have inferred from his Tweet (Brown and Levinson 1987, 216).

Coming to whether (5) constitutes hate speech, we are led to conclude that it does, since it can indeed provoke "psychological pain" in its target (Infante and Wigley 1986, 67; Leets and Giles 1997, 261). This is corroborated by the uptake of this Tweet, which suggests that the implicature in (13) was evident to its target (14) as well as others (15).

Goldberg retweeted the Tweet ironically describing it as an "example of non-violent protest."

(14) "This is an example of non-violent protest, I guess: (link to original Tweet by @djkilllist)." (July 8, 2014, 4:05AM)

(15) "RT @ZNovetsky: .@ericowensdc: @stevesalaita also hoped for @JeffreyGoldberg to be stabbed: (link to original Tweet by @djkilllist." (July 24, 2014)

And @djkilllist himself later revealed what he meant, when he paraphrased his original Tweet using "killed" in (16) and "shivving" in (17).

(16) "I stand by what I said about Jeffery [sic] Goldberg: if, during his job of beating Palestinian prisoners, someone killed him: oh fucking well." (August 10, 2014, 10:09AM)

(17) "@NaijaNupe_ uiuc fired him for pro Gaza tweeting but he rtd my tweet about a prisoner shivving jeff goldberg, which prob didn't help." (August 6, 2014, 10:58AM)

What is less certain is that Salaita intended to "incite violence" by retweeting it, as critics accused.[25] According to Nowak, Rotunda, and Young (1986, 942-943), fighting words constitute "speech that holds no intellectual content to be conveyed to the listener, but is merely a provocative emotional message intended and likely to incite an immediate,

[25] Cary Nelson, a former president of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and Emeritus professor of English at Illinois, argued that "when [Salaita] retweets a suggestion that a well-known American reporter should be met with "the point of a shiv" he crosses a line into inciting violence". Accessed February 12, 2016, http://mondoweiss.net/2014/08/reading-salaita-illinois-1.

violent response." As highlighted by @djkilllist in (10) above, (5) refers to an action temporally placed in the past, and, additionally, a wish. Moreover, his explanation in (16) makes clear that he was referring to a past hypothetical event, one he wishes had happened but that did not ultimately take place. Additionally, by retweeting it Salaita himself was merely an animator, a fact that complicates the attribution of intention to him.[26] These two points make the contention that by retweeting (5) Salaita was inciting violence seem problematic. Ultimately, however, what our analysis of (5) illustrates is the difficulties faced by an account of meaning hinging on the notion of speaker's intention when applied to the realm of Twitter.

4.3 "You are an awful human being"

The third of the four controversial tweets we analyze has been interpreted not only as an attack against pro-Israeli opinions but also as evidence of Salaita's intolerance – as a professor – towards opposing views.

(18) "Let's cut to the chase: If you are defending #Israel right now, you are an awful human being." (July 8, 2014, 10:46PM)

4.3.1 The Socio-political Context: "Right Now"

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[26] The speaker's intention is central to delimiting meaning in the Gricean account but less so in subsequent ones.

According to the *New York Times*, on July 8, the day (18) was posted, "... at least 23 people were killed ... in Gaza, where repeated bombardments shook buildings and sent thousands of people into the streets. Israeli officials said two people in Israel were wounded by rocket attacks [the day before]".[27] In a report by *World Vision*, a child sponsorship organization, published two months later, July 8 marks the start of the intensification of the conflict: "Intense fighting between Israeli and Palestinian forces *since July 8* has led to enormous humanitarian needs in Gaza. ... Of the more than 2,100 people who have died in Gaza *since July 8*, at least 500 were children, according to U.N. reports" (emphasis added).[28] The temporal interval referred to by "right now" in (18) is relevant to Salaita's emotional state when composing this Tweet.

4.3.2 The Co-text and Linguistic Analysis

The Tweet opens with the preface: "Let's cut to the chase". According to Cole (1975, 263), 'let's…' can also express a 'you and only you' meaning, which he calls "nonliteral *let's* sentences". Take the example of a lecturer saying "[l]et's think now about what's happening to this ball" (Ariel 2010, 167): the lecturer knows perfectly well what is happening to the ball, it is the audience alone who are supposed to do the thinking. Corroborating this possibility, Cole points out that nonliteral *let's* sentences can be followed by the 'will you?' and 'why don't you?' tags, generating a conventional

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[27] Steven Erlanger and Isabel Kershner, "Israel and Hamas Trade Attacks as Tension Rises," *The New York Times,* July 8, 2014, accessed February 12, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/09/world/middleeast/israel-steps-up-offensive-against-hamas-in-gaza.html?r=1.

[28] Kathryn Reid, "Gaza crisis: World Vision responding to needs of children and families," *World Vision,* September 11, 2014, accessed February 12, 2016, http://www.worldvision.org/news-stories-videos/gaza-israeli-palestinian-conflict-children.

implicature that has "grammatical consequences in the agreement pattern" (Ariel 2010, 167). As a nonliteral *let's* sentence, this opening statement can be interpreted as referring to 'you and only you', the intended audience, informing them of what the author already knows. Additionally, the idiomatic expression "cut to the chase" sets this up as a preamble licensing expediency at the expense of politeness: as in Tweet (1), Salaita is warning his audience that he will not be constrained by the exigencies of politeness because the situation is dire.

The second part of this Tweet follows an 'If p, then q' format, which, according to Geis and Zwicky (1971), conveys not only 'if p then q,' but also 'if not p, then not q' leading to 'if and only if p, then q' – a phenomenon known as Conditional Perfection. Horn (2000) attributes Conditional Perfection to his R Principle ("Make your contribution necessary. Say no more than you must (given Q)"). Conditional Perfection in (18) limits the referents of 'you' only to those who are defending Israel right now. That is, by making "defending Israel right now" not only sufficient but also necessary for being "an awful human being", Conditional Perfection places strict boundaries on membership of this group. This clause, then, invites the inferences in (19) and (20).

(19) If you are not defending #Israel right now, you are not an awful human being.
(20) If and only if you are defending #Israel right now, you are an awful human being.

Aside from an attack on pro-Israeli opinions, (18) has been adduced as evidence of Salaita's intolerance of such opinions, which would be especially problematic in a

classroom setting.[29] Salaita's choice of the Present Progressive over the Simple Present is meaningful in this regard. According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999, 112), the Simple Present refers to "a whole event, not allowing for further development, with no suggestion of change", while the Present Progressive refers to a temporary situation allowing for the possibility of change. In fact, the Simple Present entails the Present Progressive, yet the reverse is not true. Had Salaita tweeted 'If you defend…' instead of "If you are defending…", claims about students feeling unsafe in his class could be valid. However, drawing conclusions inductively by moving from specific – "If you're defending" – to general – 'If you defend' – is unwarranted. This is further highlighted by use of the temporal adverb "right now", which explicitly binds (18) to the time of posting leaving open its applicability beyond that.

Salaita's choice of lexis in (18) is also potentially ambiguous. "Defending Israel" can be interpreted as either 'protecting' or 'justifying, taking the side of'. Given the temporal reference of "right now" discussed earlier, as well as tweets (21) and (22), the second interpretation seems more likely:

(21) "I can banter with Zionists, left or right. I sometimes enjoy the arguments. But if you justify the murder of children, BLLLLOOOOOOCK." (May 21, 2014, 2:57PM)

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[29] University of Illinois Professor Cary Nelson argued that "[w]hen Salaita tweets, '[i]f you're defending Israel right now, you're an awful human being',... he issues a judgment about his future students that would justify them believing they would be academically at risk in expressing pro-Israeli views in [his] class," a view echoed by Noah Feingold, a member of a pro-Israel student group: "[i]t's about feeling safe on campus". See http://chronicle.com/article/Denial-of-Job-to-Harsh-Critic/148211; and http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/13/world/middleeast/professors-angry-tweets-on-gaza-cost-him-a-job.html, accessed February 12, 2016.

(22) "My rather crude moral calculus: never kill a child for profit or to make a point. In fact, don't kill a child for any reason. #Gaza" (July 25, 2014, 10:55PM)

(21) states Salaita's willingness to debate with pro-Israeli supporters, refuting the claim that he is simply intolerant of such opinions. What he cannot tolerate is "justifying the murder of children", with capitalization and character repetition in 'BLLLLOOOOOOCK' evidencing his strong feelings in this regard (Brody and Diakopoulos 2011). The same strong feelings surface in (24), where Salaita condemns the murder of children "for any reason". Considering this co-text as well as the socio-political context, (18) can be interpreted as expressing intolerance not of anyone with pro-Israeli opinions, but only of those 'justifying the specific actions of the Israeli government in Gaza right now that are causing the deaths of civilians, especially children'.

A final point that merits comment is use of the hashtag "#Israel". Contrary to tweets (1)-(4), which did not include any hashtags, the use of '#Israel' in (18) indexes a wish to reach a wider audience, crucially including critics of his opinions. It is among this extended audience (anyone following the hashtag #Israel) that Salaita singles out those "defending Israel right now" and characterizes them as "awful human beings".

This Tweet is impolite within Leech's framework, since it violates two of the Politeness maxims, Agreement and Approbation (2014, 91): by questioning the judgment of those "defending Israel right now", Salaita is giving a low value to Other's opinion and by referring to them as 'awful human beings', he is giving a low value to Other's qualities. However, its 'If p, then q' format strengthened through Conditional Perfection

to 'If and only if p, then q' also gives the audience (those who follow the hashtag #Israel) an 'out': it is *only if* they are justifying Israeli military actions right now that they are regarded as awful human beings. This leaves the choice to be included in or excluded from this group up to the audience, actively encouraging self-reflection by confronting them with the consequences of their opinions.[30]

4.4 "Antisemitism" and Anti-Semitism

The final of Salaita's tweets analyzed here is also the most widely cited, perhaps because by characterizing 'antisemitism' (within quotation marks) as "something honorable" it was considered most offensive, crossing "a line into hate speech."[31]

(23) "Zionists: transforming 'antisemitism' from something horrible into something honorable since 1948 #Gaza #FreePalestine" (July 19, 2014, 7:15 PM)

4.4.1 The Socio-Political Context

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[30] Alternatively, the 'if, then' format in the second part of (18) could be construed as a threat. Political scientists, parenting manuals, and legal experts alike identify this format as a potential vehicle for threats, emphasizing that "[a]lthough the existence of an if, then statement constitutes an objective criterion for identifying cases of attempted influence, the characterization of a particular signal as a threat or a promise is not exclusively dependent on its taking a particular linguistic or logical structure. [...] In order to distinguish rewards from punishments and promises from threats one must first establish the target's baseline of expectations at the moment the sender's influence attempt begins. Threats are contingent improvements in a target's value position relative to its baseline of expectations. Threats are contingent deprivations relative to the same baseline" (Davis 2000, 11-12). Whether "you're an awful human being" represents a deprivation relative to the audience's baseline of expectations depends on the moral authority they are prepared to grant Salaita. Clearly, this proclamation hardly constitutes a deprivation in a target's value position for someone who does not lend any credibility to its author in the first place. This alternative analysis further illustrates the importance of the audience in assessing the import of Salaita's tweets.

[31] Accessed February 12, 2016, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/08/06/u-illinois-apparently-revokes-job- offer-controversial-scholar#comment-1529960929.

In the aftermath of WWII, explicit anti-Semitism in the public sphere became taboo (Wodak 2007, 207) and Holocaust denial was deemed a punishable offense in many countries.[32] Recently, the United Nations' first informal meeting on anti-Semitism called for "stepping up [the] fight against anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia through legislation, financial support and the fostering of dialogue" with special emphasis on "growing online hate speech".[33] This broader historical context and legal framework are necessary to properly understand not only Salaita's use of "'anti-Semitic'" and "Zionist" in (23) and (24) but, perhaps more so, their reception.

Coming to the specific events of July 19, when (23) was posted, "[that] day's death toll appeared to be the highest since July 8, when Israel began airstrikes it said were meant to quell rocket attacks. At one hospital in northern Gaza, the director said that forty casualties arrived in just four hours Saturday morning [July 19], a number that had been typical for an entire day before the ground invasion".[34]

4.4.2 The Co-text and Linguistic Analysis

Tweet (23) was posted a mere two minutes after (24).

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[32] Michael Bazyler, "Holocaust denial laws and other legislation criminalizing promotion of Nazism," *International Institute for Holocaust Studies, Yad Vashem,* https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/holocaust-antisemitism/holocaust-denial-laws.html, accessed February 13, 2016.

[33] Meetings coverage of the 69th session of the United Nation's General Assembly, "Fight against Anti-Semitism 'A Fight for All of Us', Secretary-General Says, as General Assembly Debates Issue Following Rise in Attacks on Jews," January 22, 2015, accessed February 12, 2016, http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/ga11613.doc.htm.

[34] Anne Barnard and Jodi Rudoren, "Despite Israeli Push in Gaza, Hamas Fighters Slip Through Tunnels," *The New York Times,* July 19, 2014, accessed February 12, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/20/world/middleeast/gaza-israel.html.

(24) "If it's 'antisemitic' to deplore colonization, land theft, and child murder, then what choice does any person of conscience have? #Gaza" (July 19, 2014, 7:13 PM)

(24) follows an 'if, then' conditional format. However, unlike (18) analyzed above, the consequent in (24) is a rhetorical question. According to Hernández Ortiz and Fulda (2012, 330), a rhetorical question in the consequent of a conditional has the effect of strengthening the antecedent, such that 'If not now, then when?' conveys the illocutionary force of a call to act 'Now!' Applying this analysis to (24), we get, 'any person of conscience has no choice (but to be labeled 'antisemitic')'. Use of the quantifier 'any' is also noteworthy. (24) would have been equally grammatical had the indefinite 'a' been used ('what choice does a person of conscience have?'). However, 'any' in an interrogative construction such as this can be interpreted as the strongest term in a scale <any, ...not some, ...> that semantically entails the weaker terms to its right,[35] such that 'any person of conscience' amounts to 'no person of conscience [has a choice]'.

Probably the most important thing, however, about (23) and (24) is that the terms 'antisemitism' and 'antisemitic' appear within quotes. The use of quotation marks around a word conventionally signals a departure from its standard meaning. Here, it also violates Gricean Manner by creating obscurity regarding the meaning attributed to these terms. To clarify this, note that in (24) Salaita is equating 'antisemitic' (within quotes) behavior with "deplor[ing] colonization, land theft, and child murder". Since these behaviors are not what anti-Semitic standardly means,[36] Salaita is here arguably echoing

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[35] This scale results from the scale <all, most, many, some, a few, ...> reversed under negation (see also note 13).

[36] The OED defines anti-Semitism as "hostility and prejudice directed against Jewish people; (also) the theory, action, or practice resulting from this." (OED s.v. "antisemitism").

(Carston 2002, 298; see note 7) someone else's use of 'antisemitic'. The question is, whose? To answer this, consider (26), posted by Salaita on July 20 in response to another user's request in (25) for a clarification of his use of these terms the day before.

(25) "@stevesalaita unsure how to respond to this as a jewish anti-zionist" (July 20, 2014, 5:12 AM)

(26) "@mikehesselmial By attacking the discourses of Zionism that cheapen anti-Semitism by likening it to principled stands against state violence" (July 20, 2014, 5:17 AM)

Significantly, (26) uses no quotes around anti-Semitism, indicating that Salaita is using the term in its conventional sense. In (26), Salaita is suggesting that there are Zionist discourses that "cheapen" prejudice and hatred against Jews (= anti-Semitism) by equating it to opposition to the actions of the Israeli government in Gaza and that it is those discourses that should be attacked. In other words, he distinguishes between being opposed to certain Zionist discourses and being opposed to Jews as a whole (being an anti-Semite). In so doing, he is aligning himself with those who feel that the concept of 'new anti-Semitism' – a late-20th-and-early-21st century form of anti-Semitism primarily opposing Zionism and the State of Israel – "conflates anti-Zionism with antisemitism, defines legitimate criticism of Israel too narrowly [...], *trivializes* the meaning of antisemitism, and exploits antisemitism in order to silence political debate" (emphasis added).[37] This explanation sheds light on Salaita's choice of "cheapen" in (26), which is

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[37] Accessed February 12, 2016, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_antisemitism.

otherwise rather infelicitous, in that by stating that anti-Semitism is being 'cheapened', it appears to be suggesting it had value to begin with. Nevertheless, this choice of verb is in line with the idea of 'trivializing' antisemitism in the above quote, that is, of depicting anti-Semitism as less frightful than it actually is. Thus, (26) makes explicit what tweets (23) and (24) were designed to attack: the ideological position of Zionists who label opponents to their actions as 'anti-Semites' (within quotes). It is these Zionists and *their* use of 'antisemitic' as an accusation against anyone who criticizes the Israeli government's actions that Salaita is (disapprovingly) echoing in the tweets of July 19. That his targets are precisely those who use 'antisemitism' as an umbrella-term for all critics of the State of Israel is further made clear in (23) by the temporal reference "since 1948", referring to the year the State of Israel was founded. Moreover, it is supported by (27), which Salaita had posted two days earlier:

(27) "The logic of "antisemitism" deployed by Zionists, if applied in principle, would make pretty much everybody not a sociopath "antisemitic." (July 17, 2014, 12:01 AM)

Under this echoic understanding of 'antisemitism' and 'antisemitic', what (23) and (24) claim is "honorable" and what "any person of conscience" should do is to be critical of the Israeli government's actions against Palestinians.

Unlike this echoic interpretation, however, (23) and (24) were interpreted as indicating Salaita's own support of anti-Semitism and labeled as hate speech. This is not surprising considering that by using the hashtags #Gaza and #FreePalestine, Salaita was targeting a wider audience following the events in Gaza and/or the Free Palestine

movement. However, unlike the hashtag #Israel used in (18), the selected hashtags this time pick out an audience potentially more favorable to pro-Palestinian views. This may be precisely because he was anticipating a backlash from his use of 'antisemitic' and 'antisemitism' and preemptively attempting to defuse that.

In sum, once the context and co-text of these tweets are taken into account, (23) and (24) can be interpreted as a critique of Israel's treatment of Palestinians in Gaza, as well as of Zionists' labeling critics of their actions as 'anti-Semitic'. With these tweets, Salaita positions himself in opposition to Zionists who use the label 'antisemitic' for critics of Israel and attempts to discredit them by arguing that any reasonable person with a modicum of moral conscience ("not a sociopath") must necessarily fall in that category – simultaneously attacking their expansion of the term as well as their morality. Through appeals to being a "person of conscience" and holding an "honorable" ideological position, these tweets also serve as a call to socially/morally sanction the actions of Israel, albeit only indirectly. Although Salaita subsequently tweeted an explanation for his use of 'antisemitism' in quotes in (26), the public at large did not seem to notice, or accept, this different, echoic interpretation. His tweets were labeled as hate speech, perhaps due to his failed attempt at peeling away the several layers of meaning of 'anti-Semitism' in the compact messages of Twitter, a term so taboo in the public sphere.

5. Conclusion: If you play with Twitter, you may get burned (and why)

We focused on four tweets by Steven Salaita, a Palestinian-American professor of American Indian Studies, posted during a period of renewed conflict between Israel and Palestinians in the summer of 2014, which resulted in the rescindment of his academic job offer. While the case had far-reaching implications for all concerned,[38] our interest has been in the linguistic aspects of the ensuing controversy, specifically, the impact of Twitter on the production and interpretation of the controversial messages.

Our analysis revealed a complex layering of meanings potentially inherent in each Tweet, which can extend far beyond what is linguistically encoded in it. Through a number of semiotic resources, some generally available in language (intertextual references like 'since 1948' in (23), quotation marks indicating echoic use in 'antisemitism' and 'antisemitic' in (23) and (24)), and others made available by Twitter (retweeting in (5), hashtags for audience selection in (18) and (23)), as well as grammatical structures (tense and temporal adverbials, if-then statements in (18) and (24)) and pragmatic devices (scalar implicature in (1), Manner implicatures in (1), (5) and (23), Conditional Perfection in (18)), Salaita's tweets emerge as multi-layered mini-discourses addressed to different audiences and potentially carrying a different meaning for each of them, making them an attempt at coded communication in an effort to counteract the effects of context collapse.

Nevertheless, this semiotic complexity can easily be overlooked by the multiple audiences of a medium as fast-paced and public as Twitter. Users reading through a quick succession of tweets can fail to notice the 'fine-print' (e.g., presence/absence of quotation

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[38] The case was eventually settled outside of court in November 2015 (accessed February 8, 2016, http://uofi.uillinois.edu/emailer/newsletter/84363.html) but not before resulting in the resignation of the Chancellor and several other top administrators at the University of Illinois.

marks to indicate departure from conventional word meaning, contrastive use of tense to fix the temporal reference of a statement), prompting only the occasional clarification (as in (10) and (26)), while leaving other possible sources of miscommunication unaddressed. Moreover, in virtue of being potentially available to anyone with an Internet connection, tweets can reach audiences far beyond those envisioned by their author in the few minutes – sometimes literally seconds, as in (23) and (24) – that it takes to compose them, exacerbating the impact of context collapse.[39]

Pragmatic theories have traditionally assumed that communicators formulate their messages with a particular audience in mind and reference this audience to circumscribe the meaning of the message itself. This is true of Grice's account of meaning ([1969] 1989, 92) as it is of more recent cognitively-oriented accounts (e.g., Sperber and Wilson 1986, 158). However, if the audience of a message is potentially open-ended—especially if knowingly so—so will the interpretations that can be derived from it. Despite this, the characterization of tweets as "casual, unedited written language" (Squires and Iorio 2014, 2) suggests that they are still treated as everyday linguistic communication *par excellence*. This means that their authors (or others who reproduce them) are routinely held accountable for interpretations derived from them. That this applies also to the four tweets analyzed here is shown by the fact that, despite Salaita's sophisticated use of a number of linguistic and semiotic resources, it was most likely his use of openly offensive terms such as the expletive in (1) and indexing of taboo concepts in (23) that were picked up by students, alumni and sponsors of the University of Illinois alike,

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[39] This makes tweets different from other types of public discourse, such as advertising slogans or political speeches, which take longer to compose and are often composed by someone other than the person who delivers them in public.

prompting calls for his dismissal. Based on these findings, we argue that implicated meanings, which are cancelable by definition and therefore more negotiable than encoded ones, become even more 'vulnerable' in social media contexts, heightening the potential for miscommunication in the latter. While this should conceivably push users toward safer (encoded, more explicit) modes of communication, other factors can pull in the opposite direction, including competition for attention in the stream of incoming tweets and Twitter's affiliative function, both of which prompt 'upscaled' expression, as well as the applicable length restrictions.[40]

Our findings confirm the results of Leets and Giles (1997) and Leets (2003), who found that instances of direct hate speech were considered more harmful by members of the outgroup, who nevertheless remained unaware of more subtle instances of indirect hate speech considered damaging by the ingroup. This puts pressure on tweets to follow norms applicable to public discourse in general. Research has shown how tweets incorporated in news segments are 'purged' of non-standard language forms (Squires and Iorio 2014, 356). What our analysis adds is that, as a result of Twitter's public nature, the same normative pressure extends to language that is considered aggravating, impolite or otherwise politically incorrect, and which is equally sanctioned. However, contrary to other types of public discourse and possibly because of some of the reasons already mentioned (competition for attention and tendency to upscale), users may still use such language.

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[40] Alternatively, users may choose to distribute their message over several tweets. However, this option lacks the attention-grabbing potential of shorter, upscaled tweets and is clearly not preferred on Twitter.

This conclusion is relevant to the debate about Twitter's suitability to serve democratic conversation.[41] Research has shown that although young people and minorities engage in political debates on Twitter, the medium is highly partisan and "politically engaged citizens" tend to dominate it (Bekafigo and McBride 2013; Liu and Weber 2014). Himelboim, McCreery, and Smith (2013, 168) argue that "on Twitter, political talk is highly partisan and users' clusters are characterized by homogenous views and are linked to information sources", reinforcing in-group/out-group distinctions. Based on a comparison of Retweets and @mentions, Conover et al. (2011) concluded that the network of political Retweets (the 'retweet network') displayed segregation between leftists and rightists with users choosing to retweet messages that echoed their own views; the '@mention network', on the other hand, exhibited more heterogeneity in that users with divergent viewpoints interacted significantly more than within the Retweet network. Nevertheless, even these online conversations did not lead to meaningful cross-ideological interaction (Himelboim, McCreery, and Smith 2013). This may be because political discourse on Twitter tends to be more opinionated and less fact-based than in other social media.[42] It may also reflect what Lipinski-Harten and Tafarodi (2013, 2492) have argued is a limitation of online discourse in general, namely that it is not conducive to engaging with each other's subjectivities. While it has not been our goal in this article to probe the reasons behind this or the psychological mechanisms involved, we hope to have established the potential richness of Salaita's messages and offered some *prima*

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[41] For arguments against Twitter as a democratic public sphere, see Liu and Weber (2014, 337).

[42] John Wihbey, "Pew Research: Twitter and the 2012 Campaign," *Pew Research Center*, accessed February 13, 2016, http://journalistsresource.org/studies/government/politics/pew-research-twitter-2012-campaign/>.

facie explanations for why this failed to be recognized by at least some of his audiences, on and off Twitter.

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