

From Microaggressions to Hate Speech: A Spectrum of Aggressive Speech Acts

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1. Dual pushback to microaggressions:

Too small to be worth taking seriously. \rightleftarrows Too serious to count as small.

2. Previous solutions:

- a. Remove association with aggression (O'Dowd)
- b. Remove association with smallness (Liebow)
- c. Embrace cyclical inefficacy of examples (McTernan)

Pre-Theoretic Spectrum of Linguistic Aggression

invisible	discernable	obvious
microaggressions	racist jokes	hate speech
unintentional	less plausible deniability	intentional
only collectively harmful	likely to harm	immediately harmful

3. My proposal:

Microaggressions can become obvious without becoming different in kind.

Studying microaggressions and hate speech in tandem will illuminate both phenomena.

Building from Lynne Tirrell's "Genocidal Language Games":

- a. Even hate speech can be invisible—or at least, invisible to privileged perpetrators.
- b. Even hate speech can be spoken without the intent to harm, and without being immediately harmful.
- c. But even before hate speech becomes obviously violent, it is definitely a big deal to threaten to kill your neighbors!

Hate speech moves along the spectrum from invisible to obvious without becoming larger. Instead, hate speech becomes qualitatively different when it begins to generate permission for physical violence.

Microaggressions too move along spectrum without becoming larger. No matter how obvious, microaggressions remain smaller than hate speech or physical violence.

Spectrum of Aggression

Microaggressions	hate speech	hate crimes	genocide
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Microaggressions are small because they are still several steps away from hate crimes or genocide. But microaggressions are aggressive because they tend to promote such violence.

Hate speech discussion should research whether rampancy of microaggressions (and pushback against objections) is connected to recent uptick in hate speech and hate crime.

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Quotes from convicted *génocidaires*:

Léopard Twagirayezu: “It is awkward to talk about hatred between Hutus and Tutsis, because words changed meaning after the killings... Before, we could fool around among ourselves and say we were going to kill them all, and the next moment we would join them to share some work or a bottle. Jokes and threats were mixed together. We no longer paid heed to what we said. We could toss around awful words without awful thoughts. The Tutsis did not even get very upset. I mean, they didn’t draw apart because of those unfortunate discussions. Since then we have seen: those words brought on grave consequences.” (quoted in Tirrell, 202)

Pio Mitungirehe: “Maybe we did not hate all the Tutsis, especially our neighbors, and maybe we did not see them as wicked enemies. But among ourselves we said we no longer wanted to live together. We even said we did not want them anywhere around us anymore, and that we had to clear them from our land. It’s serious, saying that—it’s already sharpening the machete.” (quoted in Tirrell, 204)

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