

THE HISTORY WORKSHOP

War and Society: Considering Justice, Violence, and the Military in History
(2011-2012)

and

The Center for Philippine Studies

Present

Weaponizing Language: US Counterinsurgency and the Politics of Translation

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Friday October 7; 2:30-4:00pm
History Department Library
2530 Dole Street, Sakamaki Hall A201



Much has been written recently about the rise of counterinsurgency stressing the “protection of the population” as the preferred strategy of the U.S. in its permanent “global war on terror.” This talk will focus on two of the most prevalent tropes in the discourse of counterinsurgency: the “weaponization” and “targeting” of foreign languages. How is the counterinsurgent notion of languages as “weapons” and “targets” linked to the strategic imperative of deploying translation as a means for colonizing the lifeworld of occupied populations? How does the American military seek to expropriate the practice of translation through the development of automatic translation systems and exploitation of the mediating power of native interpreters? What are the limits and contradictions to the targeting of speech and the militarization of linguistic exchange between occupiers and occupied? What do these limits on the weaponization of translation tell us about the vicissitudes of counterinsurgency as a strategy for sustaining the U.S. empire? Finally, are there other ways of conceiving translation in ways that exceed the terrifying demands of war?



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