Unsettling translation:
Towards a sociolinguistics of translation in the pursuit of linguistic justice

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In recent years, sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have increasingly turned towards exploring how linguistic diversity relates to justice and what role language plays in processes of discrimination and exclusion (see e.g. Piller 2016, Rickford & King 2016, Avineri et al. 2019). In this context, the use of interpreters or translators is generally viewed as a remedy to linguistic inequality, but often without engaging systematically with the question of how translation practices are pragmatically and metapragmatically conditioned, or with the fact that language is a "non-neutral medium" (Duranti 2011), making equality in translation inherently unachievable. Drawing on examples from studies of face-to-face interpreting in judicial contexts and of written translation in linguistic landscapes, this talk will explore how practices of translation can themselves contribute to inequality and discrimination, and – in the words of Rosa and Flores (2017) – contribute to "producing governable subjects that support the raciolinguistic status quo." Conversely it will explore how other practices of translation and multilingual language use may challenge this status quo. In this talk, I argue that sociolinguistic studies of multilingualism have much to gain from examining what is translated, by whom, how, and to what end, and from embedding the study of translation practices in a wider context of language contact and in relation to phenomena such as code-switching, translanguaging, second language acquisition, mock languages, and language shift. This includes exploring the role of interpreters as bilingual mediators, institutional gatekeepers, or advocates, but also the use of machine translation that is becoming more and more ubiquitous in this age of globalization and mass migration.

References
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