

**A role for sociolinguistics in language documentation?
The case of Northern Sumu in Nicaragua's multilingual Caribbean Coast region.**

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This talk is based in my fieldwork over the last 6 years with the Mayangna Indians of the Caribbean Coast region of Nicaragua. This is an ethnically heterogeneous region where different ethnic/indigenous communities live in shared or closely contiguous territories, and where multilingualism is the norm.

My work does not involve linguistic documentation in the usual sense, which is being carried out very effectively by another colleague. Rather, it focuses on (sociolinguistic) questions of language use and language ideology as they relate to efforts to revitalize the language of the Mayangna (known to linguists as Northern Sumu).

Nevertheless, my work has caused me to question some of the assumptions underlying language documentation in the more orthodox sense, about which I have enjoyed stimulating discussions with my linguist colleague, since they have implications for the documentation task. They centre principally on what speakers and linguists mean when they say 'we/they speak language X'. Does the signifier 'language' have the same referent for both parties? Why does this matter, and how much?

I shall suggest that such questions may be more significant in multilingual regions such as Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast than in others, that therefore documentation of endangered languages may not be the same task in all contexts. My aim is to stimulate discussion about whether language documentation needs to add sociolinguistics to its toolkit, and how that might be achieved.

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