

## **Considering popular language ideology in revitalizing the language of the Mayangna of Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast**

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This paper draws on ethnographic research into Mayangna discourses about the revitalization and maintenance of their language, Sumu-Mayangna, carried out over the last six years in selected communities of Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast region. In these communities (as in many others of the region), another indigenous language, Miskitu, also forms part of the community repertoire, in degrees ranging from functional multilingualism to apparent wholesale 'language shift'. The relationship with Miskitu, and the tendency of peoples of the Coast to adopt each others' languages and even to change ethnic ascription, have long historical roots in the region.

Since 1985, an Intercultural-Bilingual Education Programme (PEBI) in Sumu Mayangna and Spanish has operated in the indigenous and ethnic minority communities of the Coast. One of its declared goals is to revitalize the indigenous and minority ethnic languages of the Coast and the cultures they express. However, the programme's conception and practical implementation are rooted in European assumptions about the association of discrete languages with equally discrete ethnic identities and territories.

This has induced among the Mayangna an apparent conflict of discourses: the official, essentializing discourse of the PEBI, which is important in the Coast's heated politics of identity, conflicts with local language ideologies expressed in informal discourse around language and in daily linguistic practice. I shall examine the interaction of these discourses and practices and explore their implications for language revitalization in these communities.

This kind of conflict is relevant beyond the Nicaraguan context, wherever comparable multilingual conditions obtain. The research also raises questions concerning some aspects of the classic conceptualisation of 'language shift'.