

**A Report on the English-Lexifier Creole of Nicaragua,
also known as Miskito Coast Creole,
with special reference to Bluefields and the Corn Islands**

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Contents

- 1.0 Introduction and purpose
- 2.0 Geographic location of English-Lexifier Creole speech communities in Nicaragua
- 3.0 Previous scholarship
- 4.0 History of people
- 5.0 Social factors relevant to the sociolinguistic environment
 - 5.1 Economics
 - 5.2 Population distribution
 - 5.3 Religion
 - 5.4 Politics
 - 5.5 Education
 - 5.6 Immigration/Emigration
- 6.0 Linguistics
 - 6.1 Linguistic systems
 - 6.2 Literary development
- 7.0 Social relations
 - 7.1 Interaction with other local language groups
 - 7.2 Interaction with Creoles from other locations
- 8.0 Bilingualism
- 9.0 Language attitudes
- 10.0 Language vitality
- 11.0 Conclusions

Appendices

Appendix 1

The Creole Speech of Rama Cay, with mention of the Chibchan language—Rama

Appendix 2

Nicaraguan Sign Language

Bibliography

1.0 Introduction and purpose

In January 12 to 17, 1998, Ken Decker and Andy Keener made a very rapid trip to Nicaragua. The purpose of this study was to investigate sociolinguistic aspects of the English-Lexifier Creole language, known as Miskito Coast Creole (MCC), spoken along the eastern coast of Nicaragua. During this brief study Ken and Andy visited Managua, Bluefields, and Big Corn Island.

2.0 Geographic location of English-Lexifier Creole speech communities in Nicaragua

Nicaragua is divided into two major regions: the Pacific, or western side and the Caribbean, or eastern side. The Pacific side of the country is more mountainous and is inhabited predominantly by Spanish speakers. The eastern side is called the Atlantic Coast or Miskito Coast. It is more or less flat and inhabited by several different ethnic groups speaking several different languages. The national constitution of 1987 granted autonomy to the eastern 52% of the country. This autonomous region is divided into northern, Región Autónoma Atlántico Norte (R.A.A.N.) and southern regions, Región Autónoma Atlántico Sur (R.A.A.S.).¹ Most Creoles live in the southern autonomous region.

According to Hale and Gordon (1987), the main concentration of the Creole population is the town of Bluefields on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. Other communities of Creoles are found in Pearl Lagoon and Puerto Cabezas (also known as Bilwi) to the north of Bluefields and the Corn Islands, about 30 miles east of Bluefields. There are Creoles in the mining communities of Bonanza and La Rosita on the Bambana River, and Siuna on the Prinzapolka River. Cape Gracias a Dios and Waspan, a village on the Rio Coco which divides Nicaragua and Honduras, each had a few Creole families in 1971 when Jones and Glean did their research (1987:57). According to Holm (1978, 1983), there were also Creoles in Prinzapolka (Puerto Isabel). There are also Creoles in Managua (Holm 1989), Corinto and Puerto Sandino on the Pacific coast (Hale and Gordon 1987). San Juan del Norte (also known as Greytown), on the southeastern coast near the border with Costa Rica, was once the administrative center of the English protectorate of the Miskito Shore but has apparently declined to a minor village (Jones and Glean 1971); we were unable to find out if the inhabitants are Creoles.

Bluefields is the most important commercial and political center of Nicaragua's Caribbean coast. The distance between Puerto Cabezas (Bilwi), the northernmost community, and Bluefields, the southernmost community, is approximately 125 miles. The two Corn Islands (Big and Little) are approximately 30 miles east of Bluefields. There are no roads connecting these locations, and travel to Managua and the rest of the country is difficult. In fact, until the 1950s "communication and transportation from Bluefields to New Orleans was much easier, quicker, and cheaper than to Managua". (Holm 1978:460) There are occasional boats between Bluefields and Pearl Lagoon. There is regular air service between Managua, Bluefields, and Big Corn Island.

¹There is a word in Creole that is spelled the same as this acronym, which is considered very vulgar.

Census figures from 1987 state that 61% of the population of Bluefields is Spanish-speaking immigrants. There are three areas, or “barrios”, that are predominantly Creole: Beholdin, Old Bank, and Cotton Tree.

3.0 Previous scholarship

Holm (1978) gives an extensive listing of literature mentioning MCC going back to 1681. Holm himself has done the most extensive linguistic study of MCC. Of special note is Guillermo McLean’s (1976) *Some Characteristics of Bluefields English*, because he is a native speaker of MCC. *Ethnic Groups and the Nation State* (CIDCA 1987) discusses the social factors affecting the Creoles and other ethnic groups on the Miskito Coast in recent years.

4.0 History of people

Holm (1978) gives an exhaustive description of the development of MCC on the eastern coast of Nicaragua from the 1570s. An initial stage of the development of MCC was the emergence of the Miskito, or Miskitu, people, descendants of Macro-Chibcha,² Amerindians, and African slaves who were shipwrecked on the coast around 1640. Interaction between the Miskito and large numbers of African slaves with their British owners during the 1700s resulted in the eventual development of MCC.³ Most slaves were brought to the Miskito Coast from Jamaica. The Miskito Coast settlement was a British colony from 1740 to 1787. Then, as a result of wars and negotiations in Europe, Britain was forced to disband the colony and move the settlers and their slaves, many of whom moved to Belize. Many settlers remained and lost nearly all contact with Britain.

During the mid-1800s fruit and logging companies brought more laborers, primarily from Jamaica into the area. In 1894, Nicaragua annexed the Miskito Coast. An economic boom in the area in the early twentieth century brought some measure of prosperity to the area and people. The boom also brought an increasing number of Mestizo workers and families to the area. (Gordon 1987) The new National Constitution of 1987 granted autonomy from the Managua-based national government to the eastern 52% of the country. Part of the new constitution allows for the promotion and development of the languages of the Caribbean Coast. As of 1992, there was bilingual education in English and Spanish (Craig).

5.0 Social factors relevant to the sociolinguistic environment

In general, it can be expected that there are social differences between the lives of Creoles living in the different regions of the country: those who live in the northern autonomous area, the Creoles in Bluefields, the Creoles in Managua, and the Creoles on the Corn Islands. These differences are due to their numbers in relationship to other ethnic groups, their histories, their access to services, their economic status, their expectations of their role in the nation, and many other factors.

²Macro-Chibcha is a broad linguistic category of Amerindian languages found in Central America.

³The Miskito survive as an independent ethnic group, speaking their own language—Miskito.

5.1 Economics

Holm (1978:5) relates that after the annexation of the Miskito Coast in 1894, Ladinos (Spanish speakers) began replacing Creoles in the professions, business, and government. The control of Spanish has become very important for jobs, education, and status. However, Gordon (1987) describes how, over the centuries, the Creoles had gained prestige and economic power on the Miskito Coast. He explains that part of Creole identity is the expectation of their rights of hegemony in the area. While, at the present time, the Creoles are not in an economically strong position, the potential for economic growth with the new autonomous status may bring Creoles back into a leadership role in their region. Our observation while walking around Bluefields is that most shops are owned by Ladinos, or mestizos.

5.2 Population distribution

Holm (1989) cites a population of 118,000 for the Miskito Coast; including 57% Miskito, 22% Creoles (Afro-Europeans), 15% Ladinos (Spanish-speaking mestizos), 4% Sumu-Mayanga⁴ (Amerindians), 1% Garifuna (Afro-Indians), 0.5% Rama (Amerindians), and 0.5% Chinese and foreigners. At the time of this investigation, our informants estimated that mestizos account for 45% of the population of the autonomous region, this is followed in size by the Miskito, then the Creole populations.

Hale and Gordon (1987) give the following population figures for Creoles living on the Miskito Coast:

Bluefields	11,258
Corn Island	3,030
Pearl Lagoon	1,285
Puerto Cabezas	1,733
other locations	8,417 ⁵
TOTAL	25,723

During our visit to Bluefields we were able to pick up a census report from the Centre for Investigation and Documentation of the Costa Atlántica (CIDCA) library. Their charts give a detailed break down of populations in 1987 by political zones in the southern autonomous region. In short, they list a Creole population in Bluefields of 11,212 and the total population of 35,612. For the Corn Islands they list a Creole population of 2,966 and a total population of 4,966. For the entire southern autonomous region they list a Creole population of 19,872 and a total population of 68,024. Another census we were able to obtain gives total population figures for 1995, but not listed by ethnic groups. The Bluefields population had grown to 36,292 and Corn Island had dropped to 4,868.

⁴Sumu-Mayanga is a name presently being used as the people transition from being called Sumu to a name that they desire, Mayanga.

⁵Prinzipalca may have one thousand to two thousand Creoles.

Some members of the other ethnic groups of the Miskito Coast have shifted to MCC as their first language. Hale and Gordon (1987) give a population estimate of 1,487 Caribs (Garifuna) on the Miskito Coast. Information from several sources claim that most of the Garifuna speak MCC as their first language today. Hale (1987) comments that in several Miskito communities the people tend to favor the use of MCC over Miskito. Therefore, an estimate of approximately 25,000 to 30,000 mother tongue MCC speakers in Nicaragua should be fairly accurate.

5.3 Religion

Moravian missionaries have had a long history of involvement on the Miskito Coast. Historically, the Creoles and Miskito along the coast have identified with the Moravian church. Their church services are in “English” or Miskito. They have major educational facilities at Puerto Cabezas and Bluefields. The Anglican church has schools and churches in Puerto Cabezas, Pearl Lagoon, Big Corn Island, and Bluefields. The Catholic church has moved to the coast in more recent times. They have churches in Puerto Cabezas, the mining communities of Bonanza and La Rosita on the Bambana River, and Siuna on the Prinzapolka River, and Bluefields. There is also a Catholic school in Bluefields. All of these institutions tend to maintain the place of English in their communities, even though Spanish may be the required language of instruction, (Jones and Glean). We spoke with a Catholic priest in Bluefields who said that their church services are mainly in MCC, and they use the *Good News Bible* because they don’t understand the English of other versions very well. He said that the Baptist, Moravian, and Anglican church services are also in MCC.

Gordon (1987) notes that Creoles tend to identify with the Moravian church and that conversion to Catholicism implies a shift to mestizo culture. However, we were told that the largest cathedral in Bluefields has mass in MCC. He maintains that the Moravian High School in Bluefields is a focal point of Creole ethnic pride and identity.

5.4 Politics

An imposed program of hispanicization which began after annexation of the coast in 1894 was not welcomed by the Creoles. Holm (1983:98) reports that after initial bitterness the Creoles became “resigned to being part of Spanish-speaking Central America”. However, Jones and Glean (1971:52) report that the law has caused no significant decrease in the “Englishness” of Bluefields. Gordon (1978) also comments that MCC language maintenance is the single most important factor in Creole identity.

Craig reports that the Sandinista Revolution of 1979 was rejected by the people of the Miskito Coast. An organization called MISURASATA, that began as an indigenous language literacy campaign, became one of the major Contra forces in the region opposing the Sandinista government. In an effort of reconciliation, the government included the Autonomy Statute as part of the National Constitution in 1987. This statute specifies that the government is to promote the development of the languages of the Atlantic coast of the country. The Ministry of Education has been implementing bilingual programs in English, Miskito, and Sumu up to the fifth grade in some schools. Other linguistic work sanctioned by the government seems to have focused on the Amerindian languages. There are two universities (URUCAN and BICU⁶) and a teachers college in Bluefields that are beginning to train young people for positions of leadership in various fields.

5.5 Education

Most Creole children receive their education in Spanish. We were unable to talk with any teachers to discover if students receive any explanation in MCC. A Catholic priest with whom we spoke said that some Baptist and Moravian schools start the lower level classes in English, and then transition to Spanish at higher levels. From the information we were able to gather, it appears that schools are available for most Creoles who live in larger communities.

As mentioned in §5.4, there are two universities (URUCAN and BICU) and a teachers' college in Bluefields. We were not able to talk with anyone from the universities, but we were told that classes at the teacher's college, Bluefields Normal School, are conducted in Spanish. We were given copies of a report (*Situación Educativa en la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua*) and plans for training teachers in bilingual education, but this program is only in its initial stages of development. We were told of a Baptist bilingual school in Bluefields, but we were not able to speak with anyone from there. The principal of the Normal School said that they have the mandate to teach multicultural and multilingual programs, but they have little expertise or money to implement such programs. He said that teachers are very poorly paid, so it is not a job that draws many people.

On Big Corn Island we spoke with several officials who said that they could appreciate the benefit Creole education would have for language appreciation and preservation, but felt that the cost and effort of implementing a multilingual educational program would be prohibitive. They felt quite certain that the Creole children would definitely learn more easily in MCC.

From the evidence of our observations, it would seem that there is an obvious need for greater recognition and/or inclusion of MCC in the educational system for Creole children. There are some efforts in early stages to consider and test bilingual educational strategies. The thing that seems to be missing is a coordinated effort. There also seems to be little awareness of work that is being done in other English-Lexifier Creole communities.

⁶University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (URUCAN) and Bluefields Indian Caribbean University (BICU).

5.6 Immigration/Emigration

As mentioned in §5.2, and I refer here to §7.1, there are speakers of MCC who have moved from the east coast areas to west coast communities, and that increasing numbers of Ladinos have been moving into eastern Nicaragua in recent decades. For those Creoles who have moved to Managua and the west, we might assume greater contact with Spanish speakers and, therefore, increased motivation to, at least, learn Spanish. Our informants told us that in Managua the Creoles do not live in any one specific location, and the only social institution that might draw Creoles into contact with one another is the Moravian church. Political policies of the earlier part of this century (see § 5.4) and the immigration of Ladinos to the Miskito Coast has brought Spanish speakers into contact with the Creole communities in the east. Holm (1989) mentions that some Ladinos have learned MCC, and our information is that most Creoles on the Miskito Coast have learned Spanish for speaking with their new neighbors.

Jones and Glean (1971:55) noted that they found less emigration from Bluefields to the United States than from any other Creole settlement they had visited. However, Gordon (1987:139) notes that “there are few black families living on the Coast today who do not have at least one member who has migrated to Brooklyn, Miami or San Francisco”.

6.0 Linguistics

It appears that all linguistic data that has been analyzed for describing MCC has come from Bluefields. Jones and Glean appear to have visited many of the Creole towns along the Coast. Our informants in Bluefields said that the speech of Corn Island was “pretty similar” with that of Bluefields, but that Puerto Cabezas sounds a little bit different. They said that Rama Cay Creole (RCC) is noticeably different, but that speakers of MCC and RCC can understand one another. Informants on Big Corn Island felt that their speech and that of Bluefields is the same.

The most complete description of MCC is that of Holm 1978. Holm 1983 includes two texts in MCC. Being that most slaves in Belize and on the Miskito Coast came from Jamaica, and that in 1787 about two thousand settlers and slaves moved from the Miskito Coast to Belize, we would expect that there is a greater similarity of these Creole varieties than with the Creole speech of the Lesser Antilles.

6.1 Linguistic systems

The phonemic systems of Creole speech of Jamaica, Belize, and MCC are all quite similar. Holm (1978:13) lists the diphthongs “ie” [i^e], as in [k i^e k] “cake”, and “uo” [u^o], as in [b u^o t] “boat”, in his phonemic inventory. Cassidy and LePage, in their description of Jamaican Patwa, include these same two diphthongs, although the latter is described as [u^o]. While these phonemes have been noted in Belize, these pronunciations are considered archaic.

Jones and Glean (1971:54) comment that “Dialect and intonation in Belize and Bluefields are remarkably similar, probably closer than any two communities in the English-speaking Caribbean”. Ken’s observation, coming from his awareness of Belize Kriol, is that the two speech varieties seem very similar.

In Holm 1977, there is a discussion of the presence of Miskito words in Belize Kriol. Holm found that in a comparison of 1,474 words, 12% were common to Belize and MCC but not found in Jamaican. Another 13% were unique to Belize and not found in either Jamaican or MCC. He also states that 75% of the words were shared by Jamaica and Belize; I would assume that there is a similar high percentage shared by Jamaica, Belize, and MCC. We note that Holm's original list specifically excluded words which are also commonly used in English; and had a sampling of these words been included, there would be much higher lexical similarity. Holm (1989) notes that in recent years there has been heavy borrowing of lexical items from Spanish, especially terms connected with government, education, and modern life.

While Holm's (1978) discussion of syntactic structures is not intended to be a thorough presentation of the grammar of MCC, he does describe many features which are shared with other western Caribbean Creole varieties. A cursory comparison of Belize Kriol and MCC reveals that there is a great deal of similarity in the syntactic structures. Holm's (1989:407) chart of verbal markers shows that there is some significant difference between MCC, Belize Kriol, and Jamaican, but that there is considerable similarity with his data from Panama.

We played taped speech samples of Creole speech from other locations (Panama, Belize, Jamaica) for our informants. In their opinion, all of the samples sounded different. They felt they could understand most of the speech. Most felt that the Belize Scripture portions were easier to understand than the Jamaican translation.

6.2 Literary development

We only heard of a few poems or stories that have been written in MCC. There hasn't been anything published or distributed widely. As for other media factors related to the linguistic environment; virtually all media is in Spanish. However, there is some time given on Bluefields radio to "English" programming, as well as other regional languages. Very recently a TV cable system was set up in Bluefields; there may be a few English channels available.

7.0 Social relations

7.1 Interaction with other local language groups

All of the communities where MCC is spoken are mixed with speakers of other languages, most prominent of which are Spanish speakers. "In 1976 about two-thirds of the people in Bluefields spoke MCC as their first language, while the remaining third spoke Spanish. However, the proportions may have changed during the 1979 revolution, when many Spanish speakers fled Managua for the relative safety of Bluefields." (Holm 1983:98) Our informants report that about half of the population of Bluefields now is Spanish-speaking.

Our informants on Big Corn Island reported that a recent large immigration of Miskito have made them the largest ethnic group on the island. Barbour reports that Little Corn Island has seen a steady growth of the Miskito and Spanish-speaking population, but that MCC continues to function as the language of wider communication.

Puerto Cabezas and Prinzapolka are in an area where Miskito is the predominant language. The villages of Bonanza, La Rosita, and Siuna also have Sumu speakers. There are Garifuna, or Black

Caribs, in the Pearl Lagoon area, but most of them, as well as the Rama living near Bluefields, are reported to have shifted to MCC. MCC is the second language of most Miskito and some Ladinos (Holm 1989).

7.2 Interaction with Creoles from other locations

Jones and Glean (1971:55) note that while contact with Belize, Jamaica, San Andrés, Limón, Bocas del Toro, and other Creole-speaking communities was fairly common in the 18th and 19th centuries, it has been virtually lost in the 20th century. This included a significant amount of immigration from Jamaica, the Cayman Islands, and San Andrés around one hundred years ago. They report that there is even very little contact with the other Creole settlements along the Miskito Coast, except between Bluefields and Pearl Lagoon which has twice weekly boat service. Today there are daily flights between Bluefields and Big Corn Island, as well as Managua.

We were told of two organizations that are trying to unite Central American “black” people for human rights and social development. They are the Organización Negro Central America (ONCA), or in English—Central American Black Organization (CABO), and the Afro-Caribbean Women’s Association. Presently these organizations represent Creoles and Garifuna and have gathered some support in Honduras and Belize, as well as Nicaragua.

Jones and Glean note that Creole society in Bluefields can be broken into three groups, these are:

- a. Settlers from the West Indies and their descendants, mainly of Jamaican origin.
- b. “Creole” families, frequently lighter-skinned than the first group and the owners of most commercial and landed property in the area.
- c. Poorer, or working class Creoles, many of whom have married for generations with the Indian population of the Coast. This group is sometimes called “Samboes” or “Zambos”.

8.0 Bilingualism

Holm (1989) notes that bilingualism in Spanish has increased to the point where it is beginning to affect syntax, and Spanish constructions are borrowed word for word. He also says that there has been heavy borrowing of lexical items from Spanish, especially terms connected with government, education, and modern life. One of our informants commented on this same fact.

We met an American man who, with his wife, has been studying and working with deaf people who use Nicaraguan Sign Language. (See the note in the appendices.) He has traveled quite extensively along the Miskito Coast and told us that he has met Creoles who could not alter their Creole towards English, ie. monolingual in Creole, but that they had some proficiency in Spanish.

A Catholic priest we spoke with said that his church uses the *Good News Bible* because it is easier for the people to understand. We noted in our discussions with several Creoles in higher social positions that they had difficulty speaking and understanding English, and on one occasion the informant turned to a Spanish dictionary to understand an English word.

9.0 Language attitudes

From our observations and information it seems that the people are more concerned with the loss of their political rights and autonomy than on the threat to MCC. The informants we spoke with couldn't imagine a day when people would shift to the use of Spanish completely. If someone who has left the community returns and pretends that they no longer speak MCC, they are ridiculed for such a choice. While we were in one office in Bluefields, the informant's daughter called from Managua. The daughter spoke in Spanish; the mother rolled her eyes, spoke in MCC and chastised her daughter for speaking to her in Spanish. Another informant said that some elderly people refuse to learn much, if any, Spanish.

Almost everyone we spoke to about language development and translation in MCC felt positive about the idea. Most felt that even translation in one of the other Creole languages (Belize or Jamaica) would be better than any English translation that is available.

There is a desire for access to English, which they believe comes through having MCC as their mother tongue. Several informants pointed out that having "English" proficiency allowed them to go to the States for jobs and to get jobs on cruise ships.

10.0 Language vitality

MCC is reported to be the first language of the majority of Creoles, and a first or second language for some other ethnic groups living on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. It is used in homes, Creole neighborhoods, churches, and some workplaces. It is the first language which all Creole children learn to speak. Informants told us that in the case of a Creole and Spanish marriage, the choice of Spanish is not absolute, sometimes the Spanish-speaking spouse will learn MCC.

However, from the evidences we have, there seems to be reason for concern for the vitality of MCC. The people are cut off from other Creole communities and the rest of the English-speaking world. There is considerable national pressure to conform to and join the rest of the Spanish-speaking people of the country. If there have been concessions on the part of the government towards the recognition of the linguistic needs of the Creole people, the response has been to encourage a more standard form of English. The emigration of Spanish speakers to the Coast and immigration of Creoles to Managua has made language use choices more of a daily concern for many Creoles. However, in their conclusion, Jones and Glean are hopeful that an increased sense of the value of bilingualism may support maintenance of MCC in the future. Our evaluation of the situation is that unless there is some united effort and institutional support of Creole language maintenance and development, they may lose their language.

11.0 Conclusions

Our brief survey found that there is a large Creole-speaking population living on the east coast of Nicaragua. It appears that Creole language use is active and considered an important part of group identity. There are some people who could see a value in language development and would desire it. However, there are no active community efforts for language development. Spanish is the national language, but it appears that some Creoles may lack motivation for pursuing bilingualism in Spanish. English appears to have lost most of its role as an optional second

language. There is interest in Creole translation that would be easier to understand than English translation and more culturally acceptable than Spanish translation.

The Miskito Coast Creole of Nicaragua shows significant linguistic similarity with the other related varieties in Jamaica, Belize and the island communities of San Andrés and Providencia, Colombia. Due to linguistic similarity with these neighboring varieties, it may be possible to adapt written materials from these other groups for MCC.

We believe that the encouragement of local efforts, rather than an “SIL-driven” strategy, would be the best approach to meeting the need for language development. Due to the lack of any local effort, at this point we feel that the best hope for doing anything in support of the Creole community in Nicaragua would be to maintain communication with the contacts we made and keep them informed of progress in the neighboring Creole-speaking communities, and share materials with them. We encouraged our contacts to get together and discuss their interests in language development.

Appendices

Appendix 1

The Creole Speech of Rama Cay, with mention of the Chibchan language—Rama

We did not have any contact with speakers of Rama Cay Creole or Rama while conducting this survey. However, in the course of our research we were able to collect some information which, due to their geographic proximity and historical relationship to MCC, seems appropriate to include here. The main source for general information about these language groups is Holm (1978:360).

Rama Cay (pronounced KEE) Creole (RCC) is spoken by a group of Rama Indians on the small island of Rama Cay in Bluefields Lagoon. The population estimates for the ethnic group vary from 500 (Assadi) to 900 (Craig). The group is reported to be the remnant of a once much larger ethnic group speaking Rama, a Chibchan language, of which there are only 25 speakers living. The rapid shift from Rama to RCC during the last century was encouraged by Moravian missionaries who tried to teach the Indians English. The missionaries themselves were not native English speakers, but were German speakers, and the other local linguistic model was MCC.

RCC is described by Assadi (1983:115) as “lexically based on MCC...which seems to have been influenced by the structure, phonology, and semantics of Rama”. It seems to represent an archaic form of MCC, using forms which MCC speakers recognize but consider unacceptable now. There is also reported to be some pronunciation that sounds like English being spoken as a foreign language by a German, and some lexical items that may come from German.

Rama is now the focus of a major language rescue effort (see Craig). Young-Day reports that continued contact with MCC is causing a rapid process of decreolization.

Appendix 2

Nicaraguan Sign Language

While in Bluefields, we met James and Judy Shephard-Kegl. Since some time in the 1980s this couple has been studying a sign language used in Nicaragua that appears to be completely different from any other sign language. Judy is a linguist from Rutgers and has been studying this language which has apparently developed in complete isolation from any other linguistic input. James has worked with developing a writing system for the language, and worked with teacher training and facilitation as they have developed a program to help the language spread to other deaf people in isolated situations.

From what James told us, it seems that this language began to develop in Managua among deaf people who had no other contact with deaf people, or people knowledgeable in any other sign language. When linguists first became aware of this new developing language, it was at a stage in which it was just beginning to spread from the first people with whom it developed to others. They were requested by some parents of deaf children in Bluefields to introduce the language to their children. So the Shephard-Kegl's brought "speakers" of the language from Managua to Bluefields to "infect" the local deaf population with this new sign language.

From what James told us, most people worldwide do not believe that a sign language can be effectively, or actively, written. He has found great success with a form they have adapted from written American Sign Language. He gave us a demonstration of reading and writing on his computer, which to us as novices in the field, seemed fairly easy. Judy Shephard-Kegl has written numerous articles on their findings to date.

Two INTERNET websites with related information are:

<http://www.signwriting.org/sw110.html>

A report from Darline Clark (djclark@signwriting.org) concerning a one month trip to Bluefields for teaching signwriting in the summer of 1996.

<http://www.manchester-city-coll.ac.uk/deaf/WRIT.HTM>

Information concerning a fund raising campaign for a deaf school in Bluefields.

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