

Reconstructing diversity: The Marañón river basin in North Peru

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Dr Overall works with South American Indigenous languages and has published a comprehensive grammar of Aguaruna. Since 2013, he has also worked with speakers of Kandozi-Chapra, a language isolate in the north of Peru.

The Marañón River basin is an area of remarkable linguistic diversity. Some of its languages are members of widespread families, or form small families without members outside the area, and some are isolates. The modern-day situation is what remains of an even more complex one that existed at the time of 16th-century European incursions. A number of now-extinct languages are attested in colonial records, but the scant data only give hints of their possible genetic affiliations. This talk reports on work in reconstructing the genetic and areal connections between languages in the Marañón basin. It addresses the challenges presented by the extant evidence and asks whether insights from studies on language obsolescence can help to interpret some of the incomplete data available.

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