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CHAPTER

16 Geography: Documenting Terms for Landscape Features



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Abstract

This article describes the influence of geography in documenting terms for landscape features. Documentation of a language includes investigation of the semantics of terms in the language. The landscape constitutes an important domain of human experience, which is sometimes inadequately covered in language documentation activities. By landscape the article means features such as mountains, rivers, valleys, and forests. Voegelin and Voegelin recognized topography as a fundamental domain for language documentation. It also includes large water and vegetation features in our idea of the landscape domain. Geographic objects tend to have fuzzy or graded boundaries, and there seems to be considerable variability in what gets delimited and how the objects are categorized and named. Another complication is that geographic objects are almost always very large and in fixed locations, hence it is difficult to elicit terms by showing real examples directly. These characteristics of the landscape domain provide the researcher with a number of methodological challenges regarding the elicitation of landscape terms. Since the landscape domain is a key aspect of place, and vice versa, it is an important component of culture and language for all people, especially for those indigenous peoples who have an unbroken intimate association with a particular area of 'country' that has lasted hundreds, perhaps thousands, of generations. However, the nature of landscape means that there is great potential for different types of classification systems to arise within different languages, even in very similar environments. Hence it is not possible to provide a generic template for investigation of landscape terms.

Keywords: [geography](#), [landscape features](#), [language documentation](#), [geographic object](#), [topography](#)

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