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CHAPTER

17 Toponymy: Recording and Analysing Placenames in a Language Area

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Abstract

This article demonstrates toponymy recording and analyzing placenames in a language-specific area. Placenames are the most direct link between a language and its territory, current or ancestral. For many speech communities, placenames are an important part of their cultural heritage, encapsulating rights to land and recalling events, activities, and knowledge. Coming to grips with the placenames of a speech community involves understanding its landownership system, and the ways in which the people interact with the land. Knowing something of the history and prehistory of the area is also important, as placenames may be taken over from earlier inhabitants who spoke a different language; even if the earlier inhabitants spoke an earlier form of the modern language, the relevant vocabulary and morphological structures may have changed since the initial bestowal. This is easy to see in the case of languages with written records, such as English, and can sometimes be conjectured in the case of speech communities without written records. This article is directed at the situation of a language as spoken away from an urban area, in rural or more remote landscapes which the speakers have occupied for some generations. Placenames live on as landmarks long after the historical circumstance that made them once important.

Keywords: [toponymy recording](#), [placenames](#), [language area](#), [speech communities](#), [cultural heritage](#)

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