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Baatonum Toponymy of Nigeria-Benin Border Area: Notes on the Methodology of Collecting Toponymic Data

Abstract

The collection of toponymic data can be a time-consuming, complex, and potentially unproductive process, particularly if not carefully managed. A key challenge lies in failing to engage community members who possess necessary knowledge, typically preserved through oral tradition. Such oversight may lead to inaccurate or disputed results. Identifying such key informants — bearers of historically rooted knowledge — can be especially challenging in unfamiliar sociocultural environments. This paper examines these methodological difficulties, with particular attention to locating informants, documenting toponymic information, and addressing potential resistance or unease among participants. The methodology discussed addresses several challenges inherent in oral history-based linguistic fieldwork. These include (but are not limited to): navigating unfamiliar environments; identifying suitable informants; forming focus groups; maintaining ethical standards to minimize suspicion; managing entry, presence, and departure from the field site; selecting appropriate informants for varying research contexts; and eliciting toponymic data. The article draws on the author's fieldwork in Baruten, a region on the border between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin in West Africa, and presents part of the data collected. While the approach is grounded in this specific area, it is argued to be adaptable to a range of contexts. Although rural settings may facilitate the elicitation of toponymic legends, the method is equally applicable to urban toponymy and socio-onomastic studies, which often require a synchronic approach.

Keywords

toponymy; oikonymy; Baatonum (Bariba) language; Baatombu people; methods of field linguistics; oral tradition; Baruten; Nigeria; Benin

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Топонимия нигерийско-бенинского пограничья: к методологии сбора топонимической информации

Аннотация

Сбор топонимических данных может быть трудоемким и в ряде случаев непродуктивным процессом, особенно если он плохо подготовлен. В полевых условиях основная задача исследователя заключается в поиске членов местного сообщества, которые обладают необходимыми знаниями, обычно передающимися изустно. Невозможность работы с компетентными информантами может привести к неточным или спорным результатам. Выявление таких ключевых информантов — носителей устной традиции — может быть особенно сложным в незнакомой исследователю социокультурной среде. Настоящая статья посвящена методологическим трудностям полевой работы по сбору историко-фольклорной топонимической информации, при этом особое внимание уделяется способам поиска информантов, документированию топонимической информации и методам минимизации потенциального сопротивления или беспокойства среди опрашиваемых местных жителей. Обсуждаемая методология учитывает ряд проблем, типичных для полевых исследований, которые связаны с документированием информации, относящейся к устной традиции. К таким проблемам, в частности, относятся: ориентирование в незнакомых условиях; выявление подходящих информантов; формирование фокус-групп; соблюдение этических стандартов для снижения недоверия информантов; правила вхождения на местность и выхода из нее; выбор подходящих информантов для различных исследовательских задач; собственно сбор топонимических данных. Статья основана на полевых исследованиях автора в Барутене — регионе на границе Нигерии и Республики Бенин в Западной Африке; в работе представлена часть собранных данных. Хотя описываемый в статье подход основан на опыте работы в конкретной области, утверждается, что он может быть адаптирован к другим обстоятельствам. Несмотря на то что топонимические легенды проще собирать в сельских условиях, метод в равной степени применим к городской топонимии и социономастическим исследованиям, которые часто требуют синхронного подхода.

Ключевые слова

топонимия; ойконимия; язык баатонум (бармба); народ бармба (бармба); методы полевой лингвистики; устная традиция; Барутен; Нигерия; Бенин

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1. Introduction

Wright [1929: 140] identifies two main approaches to toponyms research: accumulative and ecological. Accumulative research examines place-names on a micro level, focusing on their role within a specific language and culture. It involves compiling lists of individual toponyms and investigating their origins, meanings, and historical context. Ecological research, on the other hand, takes a macro perspective. It uses toponyms to understand and theorize about sociological, linguistic, and environmental issues. This approach analyzes collections of place-names in relation to their physical and human environments, both past and present. Tent [2015: 67–70] refers to both as “intensive” and “extensive” toponymy respectively.

Regardless of the chosen approach, Taylor [2016: 7] emphasizes that toponymic data can be gathered from both oral and written sources. Oral sources require fieldwork that involves interviewing local residents and observing the environment firsthand to collect data on the meaning and usage of place-names. As Taylor [Ibid.] suggests, “getting out and about <...> not just interrogating those who live in a landscape, but also interrogating the landscape itself” is crucial. Written sources involve desk research, analyzing toponyms found in maps, gazetteers, atlases, books, and electronic databases. It offers researchers a more comfortable setting compared to fieldwork. Written sources are prevalent in societies with strong literacy and record-keeping traditions. Oral traditions can be used to compensate for the lack of written materials in other communities.

Wright [1929], Tent [2015], and Taylor [2016] all agree that the goals of toponymic research remain consistent regardless of the data source (oral or written). These goals include: describing correct spelling, pronunciation, and variations of place-names; determining the meaning and grammatical structure of names; investigating the origin and motivation behind naming practices; understanding the identity and various uses of place-names; and comparing official, unofficial, and archaic forms of place-names. Tent [2015: 67–70] summarizes these goals by suggesting that toponyms research essentially seeks to answer the “five wh-questions” (who, what, when, where, why) about place-names. However, he acknowledges that complete information might not always be available due to potential historical gaps.

While the goals of toponymic collection remain the same in both desk and field research, the specific techniques for collecting data using field or oral sources differ. These challenges include navigating unfamiliar research environments, selecting appropriate interviewees and focus group participants, upholding ethical procedures to gain trust, and ensuring safe and smooth entry, stay and exit from the research area. The types of informants, field situations encountered, and techniques for retrieving

reliable data are all crucial considerations. The methodology I am going to describe in this work focuses on these specific issues. It draws upon the author's experience documenting the toponyms of the Baatombu people in Nigeria and Republic of Benin [see Williams 2023a]. However, the discussion strives to maintain broader relevance and applicability across various research contexts.

The Baatombu society, which serves as the inspiration for this onomastic method, is an aristocratic one [Williams 2023b: 307–309]. Within this culture, Baatombu princes and kings are supposed to possess a better knowledge about not only of genealogy, but also the community history and history of toponyms. They take such knowledge seriously, as if entrusted with its future transmission.

The 2006 Nigeria's census figure puts the population of Baatombu people in Baruten (Nigeria) as 209,459 people which are spread in four administrative districts of Ilesha in the south, Gwanara in the west, Okuta in central zone, and Yashikira in the north. Each of the districts is headed by a district chief called *emir*. Across the border, in the Republic of Benin, Baatombu people make up one-twelfth of the population and occupy almost the entire northern part of the country [Schottman 2000: 79]. The people and the abovementioned territories in the two West African countries were one until the partitioning of the area into British and French colonies. The Baatombu people called themselves *Baatombu* (plural), a member of the ethnic group being called *Baatonu* (singular, the suffix *-tombu* is the plural form of *-tonu*), they speak the Baatonum language belonging to the Gur sub-group of the Niger-Congo language family. The people and their language are also known under alternative names: Yoruba people call both the language and the people *Bariba* and *Baruba*, the terms that have no meaning in Baatonum and are thus considered offensive; Hausa/Fulani people called them *Borgawa* (from *Borgu*, the erstwhile precolonial name of the area). Other terms used to identify the people and their language include *Baatonum*, *Batonu*, and *Baatonũ*.

The motivation to document the toponyms of the area was initially due to Nigerian government's efforts to develop the area through a new road linking it to Lagos and the establishment of the Faculty of Agriculture of Kwara State University. These projects aim to boost the area's economic and agricultural potential, particularly Nigeria's trade with its francophone neighbors. However, this development poses a threat to the language and culture of the people; hence the urgent need to document and preserve the toponymy in the area of future development, in line with UNGEGN's recommendations to mitigate the negative impacts of urbanization on toponymy and to provide a historical record of the area's linguistic and anthropological heritage.

The Baatonum language in general and Baatonum toponymy in particular are still poorly documented. The virtually only comprehensive study of Baatonum

[Welmers 1952] was limited to phonology and morphology. While Welmer's morphological outline was not exhaustive, some appellative words identified in his work overlapped with some lexical elements found in the toponyms of the area. These were used to validate the lexical units in Section 3 due to the absence of a comprehensive Baatonum-English dictionary. This study attempts a comprehensive place-names analysis. It includes the retrieval of both accurate and inaccurate spellings of place-names. Google Maps often presents erroneous variants which necessitate a systematic documentation of all identified spellings. Local informants were consulted to try establish the correct forms, and the evolution of incorrect variants was then analyzed. Notably, some corrupted spellings have been perpetuated through government gazettes and road signs which lead to their adoption by the local population. These were also noted and documented. This research further explores the motivations behind the place-names, including toponymic legends. Prior to this study, and excluding a partial publication of previous place-names collection of the area [Williams 2023a], there was no comprehensive documentation of the area's place-names.

The method of collecting field data I am going to describe in this paper emerged during the work on the place-names of this area.

2. Description of the Methodology

Scholars in oral toponomastics typically rely on qualitative research techniques like focus groups, interviews, naturalistic and document observation. However, the key lies in understanding how to utilize these techniques in the field. Figure 1 illustrates this process.

Node **A** represents the researcher entering the speech community, prepared to interact with the culture, people, and environment. Points **B** and **C** are members of the community or informants who possess necessary toponymic competence. **B** is often a leader, owner, or namer within the community. They might hold knowledge of both the toponyms and the surrounding area, thus encompassing linguistic and ecological aspects of the toponymic landscape. Alternatively, their knowledge might be limited to the environment itself. **B** can act as a gatekeeper or field assistant, leveraging their influence to appoint or recommend an associate (**C**) to assist the researcher. Alternatively, they might fulfill this role themselves.

C holds a reputation for possessing extensive toponymic information, potentially even surpassing that of **B**. Finding such individuals by chance is uncommon. Therefore, unless the researcher is already familiar with the research environment, it is crucial to meet **C** through **B**. The downward arrow from **B** to **C** represents recommendation or delegation.

While encounters between **A** and **C** can yield valuable data, obtaining official information on toponyms is prioritized, hence the dotted line connecting **A** and **C**. As established authorities within the community, we propose that researchers acquire **B**'s consent on what constitutes official toponymic information. This process ensures authenticity and contextual verification. By approaching **C** through **B**, the researcher acknowledges the community's official stance on both official and unofficial toponymic units.

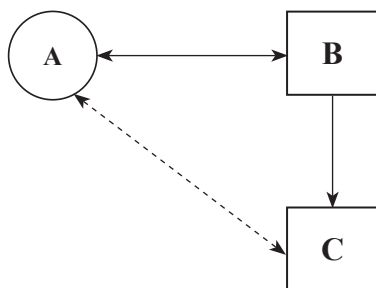


Fig. 1. Process of Toponyms Collection

This approach offers several advantages over synchronic studies. It helps mitigate misinformation and disagreements regarding the status of collected toponyms. Additionally, it fosters trust and prevents suspicion between the researcher (**A**), informants (**B** and **C**), and the broader speech community.

Figure 2 presents three types of informants (and respective field situations) arising from Fig. 1. In our fieldwork we call them “Confident Informant” which has two variants (i) and (ii), “Best of Possible Informants” (iv), and “Collaborative Informant” (iii).

Types (i) and (ii) of Figure 2 depict situations where either **B** or **C** acts as the only confident informant, for example because of their desire to be the sole source of information or their unwillingness to share credit with others. Researchers might be drawn to these informants' enthusiasm and overlook seeking out others. However, an opportunity exists to leverage their network. In our research, we typically asked these informants to introduce us to other people who shared their interests in the area's toponyms. Caught between their ego and desire to help, they would reluctantly provide contact information for one or two new leads. We would then repeat this process with the new recruits (if they exhibited similar traits), and so on. This snowball approach allowed us to expand our network of field assistants and enhance the research findings' authenticity.

There were instances where Informant **B**, as an individual or group, was unavailable (type (iv) in Fig. 2). This created time lags which could last hours, days, or even weeks, and thus could be problematic for researchers with tight budgets and timelines. While we encountered this situation less frequently, to overcome it we employed a third technique, which we call the “Best of Possible Informants”. This involved approaching family and friends of the target experts for recommendations of research assistants. These recommendations often yielded one of the following options: the opportunity to interview Informants **B** or **C** via phone, the chance to meet an expert in a different location, and the ability to compare and contrast the perspectives of multiple experts. When no other appropriate informant was available, we left the location to document other place-names. Only toponyms that went through any of the situations in Figure 2 were collected.

- i. $A \leftrightarrow B (C)$
- ii. $A \leftrightarrow (B)C$
- iii. $A \leftrightarrow B + C$
- iv. $A \leftrightarrow -(B)(C)$

Fig. 2. Informants/Field Situations in Toponyms Collection

The “Collaborative Informant”, i.e. type (iii), functions similarly to the “Confident Informant”, possessing deep knowledge of local toponyms, whether acting as an individual or a group. However, the “Collaborative Informant” recognizes limitations in their own expertise and actively seeks out partners who can complement their knowledge. This approach serves as our model for documentation of undocumented toponyms, and we normally strive to achieve this level of collaboration depending on the initial field situation we encounter.

3. Toponyms on the Border between Nigeria and Republic of Benin

This is an ongoing project to document the toponyms along the Nigeria–Benin border using the proposed method. In this research, place-names were collected primarily through qualitative methods. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted, often held within the community head’s palace, where residents sometimes gathered to observe our work. Open-ended interviews and focus groups were conducted in each community, with participant numbers ranging from one to ten. Sessions were held in English, or in Baatonum with English interpretation provided by two interpreters for the non-native researcher. A native University graduate and secondary school teacher served as the researcher’s primary guide.

Community interpreters were also occasionally available. Naturalistic observation, including topographical surveys of the area, supplemented these primary methods.

The first set of toponyms was published in [Williams 2023a]. This section presents a sample of recently documented ones, forming the second set. Both sets of toponyms were collected using the techniques described in this paper. These proved crucial in documenting the legends and spellings/pronunciation of the toponyms without bringing together key contributors from the respective communities for collaborative discussion which would have been extremely challenging.

Tembonu /tembònú/, a landmark town on the border between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin, reportedly gets its name from the Baatonum *tem* ‘land’ (also ‘ground, dirt’ [Welmers 1952: 92]) and *bònú* ‘divide’, literally meaning ‘boundary’ or ‘border’, which perfectly reflects its geographical position: the community is divided by the international border, which simplified the process of reaching agreement on the toponym’s legend via the Collaborative Informant method (type iii). The legend behind the toponym *Chikanda* /tʃikàndá/, a crucial border town and outpost, was particularly challenging to obtain. We have summarized the story provided by our Collaborative Informants (type iii). We learned that *Chikanda* was originally called *Tikande* which means ‘to become useful’. This community exemplifies the stakeholder role as they not only provided valuable information but also arranged a meeting with the district head or *emir* at Yashikira. According to local accounts, *Chikanda* was founded by Suno (< *sùnò* ‘a chief’ [Ibid.: 84]) *Tikandugi*, a hunter and prince from Wasa in the Republic of Benin. While the Wasa people considered him a prodigal, the princes of Yashikira welcomed him and recognized his virtues, thus naming him *Tikande* ‘useful’. Our informants believe the name evolved over time: *Tikande* > *Tikando* > *Tikanda* > *Chikanda*. Therefore, the place-name *Chikanda* is considered to be an eponym derived from the name of the town founder.

The interpretation of the place-name *Yashikira* also stems from the collaborative discussion held in the district head’s palace. According to our informants, initially called *Kari* (*Kali*) ‘fenced area’ due to its origins as a war camp for the Lafiaru royal clan, the place seems to have got a new name in the 19th century. Prince Umaru Bakatara of the Lafiaru clan, who ruled between 1830 and 1876 [see Cahoon 2021–2024], rebelled against the Makararu clan led by the feared Woru Kasakperegi, nicknamed *Yaa* ‘Beast’ or ‘Ferocious Animal’. Bakatara ultimately killed Kasakperegi, which led to a lot of people visiting his tomb. Consequently, *Kari* (*Kali*) transformed into *Yashikiru*, meaning ‘the grave/tomb of the beast’ (< *yaa* ‘beast’ → ‘animal’, ‘meat’ [Welmers 1952: 84–85], and *sikiru* ‘tomb, grave’ [Ibid.: 91]). However, the toponym has further evolved or been distorted into *Yashikira* on official documents and community signposts and even *Yashikera* on Google Maps.

The information on the toponyms below was also collected using the “Collaborative Informant” fieldwork technique. Thus, we were informed that the name of the village Sanre was originally pronounced and spelled *Saarú* and meant ‘shade’. The legend reported by our informants says that a blacksmith frequently rested under a tree along the road, which became a landmark for travelers. Variations like *Sare* and *Saare* emerged over time as evidenced on some of the community’s signposts. The noun class suffix *-ru* is indeed found in some local toponyms, which makes this etymology of the place-name quite plausible.

The village name *Yanri* /jãnrĩ/ was corrupted to *Yanni* or *Yanrin*, this oikonym reportedly comes from a hydronym of the rivulet in the area. Apparently, the early inhabitants of the community usually went there to fetch water.

Tɛu /tèù/ was interpreted by the locals as meaning ‘to last long’, the toponym refers to a permanent stream in the area, unlike others that dry up seasonally.

Tumbuya /tumbùjǎ/, originally *Batumbuyã*, meaning ‘to dig pond continuously’, reflects the area’s chronic water scarcity, forcing residents to dig repeatedly for wells that quickly dry up (*batum* stands for ‘continuous’ or ‘frequent’, while *buya* means ‘pond’ or ‘well’).

Derived from the Yoruba word meaning ‘stone’, the toponym *Okuta* /òkùtá/ was given by Yoruba traders. The original Baatonum toponym, *Serunkperu* (< *serun* ‘egg’ and *kpèru* ‘stone’ [Welmers 1952: 87]), described a nearby rocky hill shaped like an egg. The town is the headquarters of Okuta district.

Yakparu /jàkparu/ is a village in Okuta district. The toponym is interpreted by the locals as ‘home of wildlife’ because this area was once a haven for wild animals (< *yaa* ‘animal’, ‘meat’ [Welmers 1952: 84–85], *kparu* ‘settlement’).

The name *Fonfon* (< *fɔ̃nfɔ̃n* ‘stinking’) was purportedly inspired by the stench of a dead lion discovered by hunters several days after it was shot and killed by the same hunters. It was reported that the putrescent odor emanating from the deceased lion facilitated the hunters’ discovery of their take. This episode is believed to have motivated the toponym upon the establishment of a settlement in the area.

Yabereku /jãberekú/ is supposed to be named after the place where hunters kept their weapons (*bereku*) used for hunting wild animals (*yaa*).

Bankubu /bánkubu/ community also in Okuta district was established in the 1930s. The name means ‘palm wine brewing site’ (combination of *ban* ‘palm wine’ and *kubu* ‘to do something’, i.e. ‘to brew’), reflecting the then primary activity of the inhabitants of the place.

The toponyms listed below were recorded through the “Best of Possible Informants” methodology (type iv).

Wondu (*Womdu*), pronounced /womdú/, is believed to be a compound derived from the words *wom* ‘air’ [Welmers 1952: 92] and *dú* ‘fresh’. The toponym is

interpreted to mean ‘freedom’. During further discussion on this toponym with other participants, we were informed that the name reflects the sense of liberation the people felt after fleeing a murderer who had plagued their previous community.

Siansenbu /siànsénbu/ is also believed to be a compound derived from *sian* ‘to settle’ and *senbu* ‘peace’ → adv. ‘peacefully’. Some informants opine that the name suggests how the people finally found a peaceful place to settle after previous unsuccessful attempts elsewhere.

Sonfidi /sònfidì/ is most likely a blend of two lexemes: *sòn* ‘(ethnonym) Somusu, Sosso, Susu’ and *fidì* ‘field’. Our investigation into the motivation of the toponym outside the settlement makes us think that it likely originated from the ethnonym designating the Mande-speaking Sosso people. This group of immigrants is believed to have originated from Guinea, Sierra Leone, or Senegal and initially worked as labourers for the Baatõmbu people before becoming farmers.

The toponyms *Bõriya* /bõrijá/ and *Sinawu* /sìnawú/ were initially investigated through a “Confident Informant” (types i and ii). The findings were subsequently reviewed by engaging other collaborative informants in the field, leading to the following conclusion.

The place-name *Bõriya*, which at first was collected based on the “Confident Informant” procedure, was interpreted as ‘best-loved’ or ‘favorite’ by the confident informant, the chief of the community, a septuagenarian, who informed us that the community began as a bustling marketplace. Its founder was Morangobi (Bagidi), a Nikki prince, who established the settlement around 1860. While other informants (situation iv) consulted about the toponym could neither confirm the confident informant’s interpretation nor offer an alternative. When asked for the Baatõnum word for ‘market’, they provided two dialectal words: *yàburu* (Benin) and *àburu* (Nigeria). The former aligns with Welmers’ [1952: 91] findings. Thus, the toponym’s motivation remains unclear.

The settlement *Sinawu* was reportedly founded by Sabi Dagbara, a prince of Sandiro in the Republic of Benin. *Sinawu* means ‘the king’s town’ (< *sùno* ‘chief, king’ [Welmers 1952: 84]). Driven by the ambition to become the king of Ilesha-Baruba, Dagbara consulted a priest who advised him to first become a king elsewhere. Following this guidance, he and his followers migrated north of Ilesha-Baruba and established Sinawu. He ultimately achieved his goal of becoming the king of Ilesha-Baruba between 1898–1906 [cf. Cahoon 2021–2024]. In this case, the Confident Informant (type i) was the chief of Sinawu and direct descendant of Sabi Dagbara. Other consulted informants (type iv) corroborated this interpretation of the toponym and identified the founder as the individual who later became the king of Ilesha.

This next set of toponyms also follows the “Collaborative Informants” procedure: at the request of the chief, other informants also came to the meeting with the researchers. For Kenu¹ communities, we met in the chief’s palace.

Kenu communities are said to be named after the name of its founder’s clan in Nikki, Republic of Benin. Established around 1754 by the warrior Daudu and his children, Kenu must be the oldest town in the studied area [see Cahoon 2021–2024]. The town *Gamudi* /gáámúdí/ was named after its Hausa-Fulani founder, *Mudi*, the place-name is thus interpreted as meaning ‘the home of Mudi’ in Yoruba (< *gáá* ‘home’ → adj. ‘big, tall’, n. ‘royal house, palace’). While the community considers changing it to *Múdíkpàru* (the Baatonum equivalent), locals still predominantly use the original name. *Aroguru/Temidire* community was said to be founded by a Yoruba migrant Salami, a farmer from Iseyin. The founder is believed to have named the town *Temidire* /tèmídirè/ ‘mine has become goodness’, reflecting his desire for a prosperous life. While officially renamed *Aroguru* (probably form *Aro*, the name of a rivulet near the community, and *guru* ‘upland, highland’, or ‘mountain’ [Welmers 1952: 90]), the locals and travelers continue to use the older name, *Temidire*. *Alafiaru* is said to derive from the Hausa word *àlàáfíà* meaning ‘to be in peace’ (< *lāfiyá* ‘peace’ → adv. ‘safely, in good health, in good condition’ [Newman 2007: 137–138]). This name reflects the hope for well-being after the community’s previous inhabitants faced hardship in prior locations. *Budo Ayiki* /bùdó ajíkí/ is reported to have been named after its founder, a Beninese hunter Ayiki, the place-name thus means ‘the camp of Ayiki’ in Yoruba (< *bùdó* ‘camp’ → ‘hamlet, farm settlement’). *Bukuro* /búkúro/ was reportedly founded in the 1920s by the Beninese called Atagara. This toponym signifies ‘elder’ or ‘leader’ in Baatonum. *Damera*, originally known as *Domaru* /domàru/, has other names varying in spelling and pronunciation, e.g. *Dameru* and *Damira* — these distorted forms are visible on signposts in the community. However, *Damera* is most often used by both traders and natives. The name is interpreted by the locals as ‘a kind of prayer’.

Finally, we found that *Gwanara* /gwànàrà/ was originally pronounced *Gbànàru* [cf. Cahoon 2021–2024] meaning ‘fortress’ before it was corrupted by visitors and traders. The name of this town, founded by Sabi Gobi around 1810, indicates to the fact that the community, which is the headquarters of Gwanara district, was found during territorial conflicts. The *emir* was ill during our visit, so our main informant was a retired government administrator. This case exemplifies the situation (iv).

¹ *Kenu* is the name of a historical state in Nigeria founded in 1784. It split into Kenu and Gwanara in 1810 [see Cahoon 2021–2024]. *Kenu* and *Gwanara* are also the names of two towns in the present-day Kwara State.

Besides providing new information about the toponymy of the region, the study identifies two patterns of place-names that serve to differentiate between immigrant and aboriginal communities within the area. Aboriginal place-names are most often motivated by natural features or directly derive from the corresponding clan name and suggest spontaneous creation. In contrast, resettlers' place-names appear planned, they embody the founders' names, reflect the founders' aspirations and ambitions, and are sometimes based on elements of their languages (Yoruba, Hausa).

4. Conclusion

The highpoints of the described methodology are the process of recruiting and constituting stakeholders in the field and defining their characteristics, as described in section 2 of the paper. In our fieldwork practice, there were no instances of deliberate obstruction by any Baatombu prince or king (denoted as **B** for anonymity) during the research and data collection process. This absence of obstruction likely stems from the aristocratic nature of Baatombu society, where princes and chiefs consider immersing themselves in and sharing community history and knowledge as a duty and a source of pride. Furthermore, the mode of succession, exclusive to the royal families of indigenous Baatombu, as well as belonging to the lineage of the first settlers for migrant communities make the heads of communities valuable sources of information on history and genealogy. This explains the importance of such informants and the very structure of our methodology of collecting toponymy, which aligns with the prevailing traditional system of administration within Baatombu society. As demonstrated in Section 3, a chief might act as a Confidential Informant (i) serving as the only source of toponymic legends, or as part of a Collaborative Informant group (iii) by sharing the collection process with other princes or community members. However, as can be deduced from Figures 1 and 2 and Section 3, we also factored in and encountered situations where more knowledgeable community members lead the discussion (ii) or the data are retrieved from other available informants (iv).

To avoid conflicts of interest within the research area, we emphasized the role played by the chiefs, represented by the $A \leftrightarrow B \pm C$ relationship, which is in line with the aristocratic setting of the place where the channel of communication for matters of general interest flows from the community's head to the people. However, in this study, we looked at what could be considered close to official toponymic information for the purpose of documenting the toponyms. Therefore, all things being equal, situation (iii) could have been an ideal field setting for data collection in the context of the studied area.

Conversely, in an egalitarian society, researchers would need to rely on their ability to build rapport with local inhabitants to identify knowledgeable informants. In such a situation, this methodology also proves particularly useful. Preliminary fieldwork can involve randomized surveys about specific toponyms among various local residents. The researcher would then collect spontaneous information about these target toponyms from personal contacts or random locals. This information can then be used to cross-examine the information provided by designated informants. In some instances, these preliminary surveys may even lead to encounters with individuals who could fulfill the role of **B** and **C** during formal interviews or focus group discussions. Data obtained through this method could then be analyzed with appropriate analytical methods [see Williams, 2023a].

Collecting toponymic legends might be easier in rural settings where cultural knowledge and toponymy expertise are generally higher. Additionally, rural environments often experience less frequent changes of landscapes and public spaces, with more stable human movement and population density. However, the method can be applied to the more complex realm of urban toponymy, which often favors a synchronic approach.

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