1 Introduction

Learning to know the neighbourhood requires the identification of significant localities, such as street corners and architectural landmarks, within the neighbourhood space. Objects and places are centers of value.\(^1\)

Space is a central element in human cognition as it envelops all our being, actions, and conceptions. From real and lived space to invented and metaphorical space, it is a constant in human cognition.\(^2\) As space constantly surrounds any human civilization, its perception and classification are key elements of navigating that space, either in reality, or cognitively.\(^3\) As language in its broadest sense needs a certain consensus of common knowledge and reference, so too does language that references space.\(^4\) This can either occur through a lengthy and hard-to-follow description by an interlocutor or, as is much more common for a space coinhabited by a community of people, by place names, also called toponyms. The notion of place name conveys exactly the specifics of the object or area being referred to, i.e. names for specific places.\(^5\) Places that can be referred to in names include

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5 There is an ongoing discussion of the specificities and demarcation of place names, be they settlement names, rural names, or others, which would exceed the limits of what would be
geomorphological elevations, specific houses, trees, or agricultural areas, and even crossroads and former settlements. In this chapter I analyze those names as a source in general, without focusing on specific names, apart from a couple of illustrative examples.

The base data are those that I amassed for my PhD research on the toponomastic landscape of Luxembourg and its potential for compiling a linguistic history of the Luxembourgish language. In place name data, the focus is on names of unsettled (or formerly settled) places – so-called anoikonyms or rural names. However, for simplicity, the term place name, specifically denoting such rural names, will be used in this chapter.

In place name studies, the term hybridity is usually used when referring to names whose morphological structure exhibits elements that can be traced to multiple (and different) language varieties. However, this phenomenon is rather specific to settlement names (so-called oikonyms or names of currently settled places), rather than rural names. Furthermore, it represents only a very small aspect of the hybrid nature of place names. This chapter does not dwell on this general notion of hybrid names, nor does it really focus on hybrid practices or the need for them in general. The focus lies rather on the hybridity of the source, with a slight nod to such hybrid practices in digital humanities research, while pragmatic and productive for this chapter. Hence the discussion can be followed via, for example, Rob Rentenaar, “Mikrotoponymie aus nordwestgermanischer Sicht. Einige Bemerkungen zur Definition und Terminologie,” in Mikrotoponyme, Jenaer Symposion, 1. und 2. Oktober 2009, ed. Eckhard Meineke and Heinrich Tiefenbach (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011), 197–205; Teodolius Witkowski, “Probleme der Terminologie,” in Namenforschung. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Onomastik, ed. Ernst Eichler et al., vol. 1 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995), 288–294; and Erika Windberger-Heidenkummer, Mikrotoponyme im sozialen und kommunikativen Kontext. Flurnamen im Gerichtsbezirk Neumarkt in der Steiermark (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), 102–5.


concentrating on the similarities of the analog and the digital when concerned with place name studies.

I analyze the types of source that exhibit such place name data on their hermeneutic potential, primarily by an external source criticism that balances the hybridity of the source itself and its provenance or textualization. I compare analog and digital processes to get insights into common problems that both exhibit, and some of the advantages of one over the other, and take internal source criticism into account when demonstrating specific provenance issues of the sources. However, information structure hermeneutics and linguistic hermeneutics are omitted, as are hermeneutics of another nature.

2 The hybridity of the source

2.1 The place name as a source

Rural names as place names do not exist as singular instances. Although every place name is a unique linguistic identifier of a given place, that name only exists in the naming system which is used to reference all relevant space for cultural interaction.\(^9\) The scope of influence of the naming systems can vary but, typically, it is more or less limited to the speaker or user culture that uses the microspace that is named: the latter is roughly equivalent to the people living in a nearby settlement.\(^10\) In the past, when life was rather more bound to locality, place names were more actively in use by the user culture(s), but had less widespread use.

Places can be ranked according to their respective informative values in space, and these rankings also relate directly to the place names and how they are used.\(^11\) The further away a place is that is still referred to in a speaker culture, the more important the place and its name are, in general. This also means that

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individual very important places and their names have a much wider audience. In fact, the closer but less important the place (in a global sense), the smaller the influence on speakers in general. Rural names as place names occupy the least influential slot in this hierarchy, as they are closely bound to very small local spaces, important only to a settlement area and its inhabitants.

These place names have always been used for local narratives, for location in space, when referring to the known space of a settlement.\textsuperscript{12} Hence, they are often used for some sort of legal demarcation of the boundaries of larger areas such as settlements, communes, or rural districts.\textsuperscript{13} Even though speakers of a language can shape names in a similar fashion, resulting in some onomastic overlap in different geographical areas, the use of a place name while referring to a specific place is always unique.

Rural names are essentially a very informal and oral onomastic category—and they derive their usability through multigenerational tradition. When a name is handed down from generation to generation the human-nature relationship is expressed by the name allotted to a place.\textsuperscript{14} This can either be on perceptual grounds, how the community sees and interprets a landscape, or on interactional grounds, how the community has manipulated a landscape in order to make it more profitable to them. Since such uses and perceptions mainly remained unchanged, the names often did, too.\textsuperscript{15} It is only when a place does not fulfill its cultural role any more that it is abandoned—however, its


\textsuperscript{13} As can be seen from multiple narratives in Luxembourgish deeds, such as the Weisthüm von Besch from 1541 or the Weisthüm von Beaufort from 1557. See Mathias Hardt, ed., Luxemburger Weisthümer. Als Nachlese zu Jacob Grimm’s Weisthümern (Luxembourg: Bück, 1868), 62–5 and 91–100.


\textsuperscript{15} Blanár, Theorie, 20–3.
name, having become part of local tradition, often remains. Hence, such names can still be used to refer to space as a human cultural and cognitive expression.

When a place name no longer reflects its initial setting – when the human relationship with the landscape described is abandoned – the name becomes a source for historical information. Thanks to their close link to the land, place names can offer us a multitude of indications of different strata of information on how human culture has used and shaped a landscape. These strata include environmental interference (such as the creation of agriculturally fertile areas of land through draining wetlands or as in the medieval deforestation), as much as information on agriculture (what crops were grown where), and also on other areas such as legal history (when names refer to legal agricultural districts or frontiers), or language history (offering insight into everyday language beyond evidence from the administrative jargon in historic deeds).

2.2 The living and the petrified

The documentation of place names in general, and in Luxembourg particularly, is quite varied. As these names refer to specific places, they can be mentioned in early property deeds when land plots are concerned. The names are specifically mentioned in such cases because they were legally binding. It was only the place names that made it possible to refer to and identify a place in such documents. Even though the names are no longer legally binding they are still mentioned as a reference point, through tradition. Some of these mentions date back over a millennium, such as that for *heliberc* (meaning “healing mountain”) in 902, this being modern-day Helperknapp, located just west of the geographical center of the modern Grand Duchy. It is named as such due to the still recognized legend of a healing well at the top of a hill, that mentions the visits of Charlemagne, and Willibrordus, the Northumbrian missionary saint – but has a

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much older history. The narrative regarding Willibrordus is still recognized each Pentecost with a yearly procession to the hilltop. The oral name tradition is still very active, with many place names having been spawned with the linguistic motif of that hill – all relaying the idea of a procession to the mountain. But only the hill itself has been mentioned in historic documents and, apart from two tenth century mentions, only from the fifteenth century onward.

Most place names, however, only experienced solely oral transmission until the nineteenth century, and were only written down when the first land registries emerged. This cataloging was begun in Luxembourg in 1795, by the Département des forêts, when Luxembourg was still under French occupation, and was finished in the second half of the nineteenth century. This constituted the first emergence of a quantitatively relevant collection of place names for Luxembourg and later became the basis for the modern place name database of the Administration du cadastre et de la topographie (the Luxembourg land registry or cadastral office). The names became binding once they were written down, which means that in any official documentation the name would emerge in the exact form of the land registry entry. This of course creates a few specific problems, the first being the way these names were collected.

When a name is written down in a distorted form and then becomes official, it does not reflect the name and language use at the given place. Technically, this is not an issue when the “unofficial” names are in frequent use, and an official name and its dynamic form can coexist side by side. However, after World War II, with less of the population being employed in the agrarian sector, much of the local landscape knowledge, including place name knowledge, was lost.

It was the knowledge about the true local name as it was spoken that was lost.

21 Debus, Namenkunde, 141.
23 See also Damaris Nübling, Fabian Fahlbusch, and Rita Heuser, Namen. Eine Einführung in die Onomastik (Tübingen: Narr, 2015), 239.
together with its possible link to the landscape. The form that was written down persists, “petrified” in whichever way it was originally documented. Hence, the potentially distorted forms can also serve as a basis for place name knowledge for a population that does not possess this traditional knowledge any more, and thus the petrified names, written down for economic purposes, also function as a linguistic and cultural marker of place again. There is still a need to reference space in a cultural landscape. In Luxembourg, for example, many of these place names still fulfill their original purpose of referring to space – even though a lot of the knowledge was initially lost – with older place names used when naming bus and tram stops, and also serving in a name-giving function as new industrial and real estate landscapes are created. The petrified forms are thus revived and continue to function as a living source, even though this is a distorted image of the original.

Place names constitute a living and constantly used source. The loss of oral tradition is only problematic when the written documentation distorts the name’s identity, with some misinterpretations of a name leading to a distortion of past cultural identity too. An example of this would be for the name originally spelled Horekaul – literally a hollow, sometimes flooded, used in linen production. The first word is etymologically connected to the word “hair”, as in the threads woven into cloth. However, the agent writing down the name for the land survey seemingly did not know this specific cultural background and wrote the name down as Hurenkaul, literally interpreting it as “well of the whores.”

Such clearly misinterpreted names, however, are not that common. More often, names have been handed down orally for such a long time before they were ever documented, that the original cultural knowledge reflected in a place name has been lost due to cultural changes. An example of this is the place name Verluerekascht, which occurs in many places, but is best known in Luxembourg City (in the Bonnevoie district). The name initially hints at the ruins of a derelict castle, its literal meaning being “lost castle.” But later on, when the link to the castle was no longer culturally relevant, it was reinterpreted as a place of “lost food,” which is also hinted at in the earliest land registry documentation due to its German translation as Verloren Kost.


25 It is not clear if the reinterpretation had already occurred prior to the documentation in the first land registry or was a result of it. However, the wide dispersal of the name, as well as the regular development of the Latin *castellum* into the Luxembourgish *Kascht*, and the homophony with the Luxembourgish *Kascht* “food,” suggests that the reinterpretation occurred prior to the first documentation, as the error seems to be widespread in many German forms of the name.
Place names are difficult to put into historiographical source categories. The oral character of place names shows both of the characteristics of the traditional historiographic division into tradition and remnant.\textsuperscript{26} The oral knowledge of place names served the specific purpose of portraying space, and maintaining and sharing that knowledge within the community, thus making it clearly part of the tradition category, as it was an intentional means of conserving the knowledge, be it only in oral tradition.\textsuperscript{27} However, when the name is preserved, but not the cultural link it initially portrayed, it is in fact a remnant, as the initial goal of creating the name was not to archive knowledge in case it got lost or forgotten.\textsuperscript{28} The documentation of oral names, however, has the clear goal of preserving information – making it part of the tradition branch of source categorization – even though the documentation was not originally intended to preserve the initial knowledge, which was the reference in space itself. This reference was only documented in order to link to the cultural conception of place, so as to be able to link ownership with space and hence tax revenues. The documents then inadvertently become remnants because they convey information about past cultural events, linguistic history, identity, and other cultural influences, without that having been intention.

In the end, the only seriously detrimental outcome of the loss of the oral tradition is when no documentation exists at all, resulting in absolute loss of knowledge, which of course cannot be documented or scientifically evaluated in any form.

3 External source criticism of Luxembourgish place names

3.1 Hybrid provenances

The initially oral character of place names has already been mentioned above but, when it comes to provenance, there is not really much that can be said. As discussed, the names do not exist by themselves, but only in collections of all place names as a reference for the cognitive impression of space in a specific community. And as names themselves are a linguistic expression, they also

\textsuperscript{26} As in the German coining of Tradition and Überrest by Ahasver von Brandt, Werkzeug des Historikers. Eine Einführung in die historischen Hilfswissenschaften (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966), 58–75.

\textsuperscript{27} Von Brandt, Werkzeug des Historikers, 71–4.

\textsuperscript{28} Von Brandt, Werkzeug des Historikers, 66–71.
adhere to linguistic rules. While a person can try to coin a word or a name for a specific purpose, the usefulness of that linguistic instance is only proven if somebody else can interpret it and put it into linguistic relation. Language is a communication system and hence is the common reference of place names. Thus, it is not really possible to pinpoint a specific inventor or author of a name, as the existence of the name is strictly linked to its broad acceptance. Technically, that means that authorship of a name lies with the wider speaker (or user) culture, even when a single specific person invented it first. The name is only valid when it is accepted as a semiotic entity in multiuser communication. Given this situation and the oral tradition, it is rarely possible to narrow the authorship down further than to a specific speaker group, possibly a dialectal subvariety. However, this narrowing down is already part of internal source criticism, as is the relative chronology of the names, which often has to be constructed via linguistic methodology, specifically the historical comparative method – thus it will not be discussed further here.29

Even though place names are essentially an oral (and living) source, they are mostly only tangible for science purposes when documented in writing. Retracing their provenance (and transmission history) can broadly be split into two categories: textual and digital.

In place name research, textual provenances exhibit the same problems as any other material or textual sources. Apart from the first land registries, or possibly an early rural map, older instances of place names can only be found in legal deeds. As such, the place name has to be considered using the same criteria of source criticism as the deed – i.e. What material was the deed written on? Who wrote it? For what purpose? and When? However, there is one key element that needs to be distinguished. Regarding the deed itself, the parties involved have rather to be looked upon within the scope of internal source criticism, i.e. by considering the textual evidence. For the name, that evidence would be the exact graphematic transcription of the name (an aspect not discussed in this chapter). However, there are a few other key data that need to be evaluated as part of the external source criticism. First comes the issue of where the places are to be located. Place names are used to refer to space, so the narrative of the space is very much part of the external criteria for the precise allocation of the

29 I am preparing a full overview of hermeneutical aspects and source criticism concerning Luxembourgish place names, including internal source criticism, especially linguistic hermeneutics, as part of my PhD thesis.
names. A place name can only be truly analyzed if its whereabouts are known. More important is the why. This is not the same as for the deed itself, as in why the contents of this document were written down, but rather why these names in particular were used. When a specific plot of land is mentioned by name as the object of a transaction, this makes answering that question relatively easy. When, however, place names are used to refer in space – meaning to give a pathway, as for example regarding where a legal frontier is to be located – the correspondence is different. Why were these names chosen and not others? Were they more important or better known? Were there only that many names or is this just a selection of a few? Who chose the names to be used as reference markers? The general scope of external source criticism is the same as for internal criticism, but the details differ.

There is one general map for Luxembourg from the eighteenth century that covers all of the modern Grand Duchy’s rural terrain. It is the so-called Ferraris map that covered, among other areas, the old duchies of Luxembourg and Limburg. It is the oldest map of Luxembourg that covers all rural areas and it also exhibits a few hundred place names. The who, what, and where are generally well known. It is a military map covering the Austrian Netherlands, which was started circa 1770 and finished by 1778, under the supervision of Count Joseph de

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30 The occurrence of a place name in a deed does not guarantee its exact location, which is sometimes needed to discern the meaning of the name. When looking at the *Weisthum von Beaufort* (1557), we can identify a place name *Weigerwiesz*, which at first glance seems to denote a possessive relation of a pasture plot – see Matias Hardt, ed. *Luxemburger Weisthümer. Als Nachleise zu Jacob Grimm’s Weisthümern*, 64. The place cannot be located as such today. However, the modern land registry files offer a place called *Weiherwies* in the village of Beaufort, which is located in the vicinity of a river. This leaves the conclusion that the “g” of the name from the deed was in fact not pronounced (or only very slightly) and that there is no personal name to be identified with it (and hence no possessive relation), but rather the lexeme *Weier*, which denotes a pond. See Ministère de la Culture, ed., “LOD,” 2007, s.v. *Weier*, accessed August 31, 2020, http://lod.lu (hereafter cited as LOD). Hence, the identification of an exact place through the digitally available modern data helps in discerning the etymology of a place. See also geoportail.lu, “Zoom in on place name Weiherwies in Beaufort,” accessed August 31, 2020, https://map.geoportail.lu/theme/main?lang=fr&version=3&zoom=18&amp;X=698408&amp;Y=6415761&amp;layers=320&amp;opacities=1&amp;bgLayer=basemap_2015_global.


32 This is a map consisting of 275 separate sheets.
Ferraris.\textsuperscript{33} It is important to note the fact that, as a military map, it was supposed to highlight the military potential of the landscape – and, as with all maps used in onomastic research, needs the right kind of scrutiny.\textsuperscript{34} The latter also reflects the choice of the place names that were selected for the map.\textsuperscript{35}

Most place names, however, are to be found in place name collections, including land surveys by cadastral offices and private collections. For the study of Luxembourgish toponymy, there are two major collections that exhibit different characteristics in how they were collected.

The most important collection for Luxembourg is that of the national cadastral office. The way in which the names in this collection were documented has been described above. However, a key feature that needs to be highlighted here is that, in the case of the Luxembourg’s early land registries, both the names of the surveyors and the years of their surveys are known.\textsuperscript{36} The original (textual) land registries also sometimes give an indication of the people who provided information for specific surveys. What they do not record is the name of the persons collating the surveys over time; neither is there detailed documentation of copies or the variations in these copies, some of which may be errors, some perhaps legitimate changes. The most important hermeneutical insight regarding this source is linked with the digitization of the cadastral offices that occurred in Luxembourg in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{37} Here the source underwent a technical transformation of the media that it used. The handwritten registries still exist as archival material but the land registry database itself was converted into a digital format, which is mostly concerned with geographical and geomorphological data, but also records place names. As far as is known, however, there is no

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{34} Anreiter, Zur Methodik der Namendeutung. Mit Beispielen aus dem Tiroler Raum, 57.
\textsuperscript{35} Most names refer to natural resources useful for a traveling battalion, such as forests. Others refer to favorable geomorphology, as in names of mountains to navigate or hide in, as well as hiding places like valleys that were easy to defend. A few also render the usefulness of the land, mentioning land plots used annually for specific staple crops.
\textsuperscript{36} See Administration du cadastre et de la topographie, ed., Administration du cadastre et de la topographie, Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. Cinquantenaire 1945–1995, (Luxembourg: Service information et presse du gouvernement, 1996), 13–6; and Administration du cadastre et de la topographie, Dates. The names of the surveyors were always mentioned on the cadastral maps drawn up, most of which are accessible via geoportail.lu, “Urplang JPG 400,” accessed May 6, 2020, https://map.geoportail.lu/urplang/JPG_400/.
\textsuperscript{37} Administration du cadastre et de la topographie, Cinquantenaire, 61.
\end{footnotesize}
documentation on what transitions were made, except for the institution of the initial systems and some broad administrative choices.\textsuperscript{38} Nor is there information on the identity of the specific users who maintained and changed the data. As a land registry is a living source, with plots being changed from time to time, this also leads to the loss or creation of some names – but, as far as is known, there is no equivalent of the “Wayback Machine” that has tracked all the changes made within the different systems and software versions used since digitization.\textsuperscript{39} No need seemed to have arisen to establish a detailed documentation of the technical exploits and renderings of the data, nor to publish it in an open setting, which is quite indicative, given that the cadastral office is the most prolific data contributor on Luxembourg’s national open data portal.\textsuperscript{40} A methodological description of the technical aspects and changes seems either not to have been deemed necessary or, perhaps, feasible – with too many changes having occurred in the last four decades when it comes to technical innovation in computing. However, land registries are not an exception per se, as such transitions and subsequent changes have been successfully documented in many sectors, both public and private.

Another very important collection of place names for Luxembourg is that of the Institut Grand-Ducal – Section de linguistique, d’onomastique et d’ethnologie, which offers initial oral fieldwork data, together with official land registry correspondences. The collection itself has mostly been lost, with just a few pages having been rediscovered in 2019. From these originals, it was possible to discern that the oral survey was undertaken via official channels, with local district commissioners gathering both cadastral and oral names from the mayors of all communes in the year 1935. There is no indication as to why and on whose orders this collection took place, with the original directive being untraceable for now. A complete version of the collection does exist in the form of a copy though – this is the print-out of a database file created by a former member of the institute. The source database file has, unfortunately, been lost. The creator of the file, now a nonagenarian, has not been able to give a detailed account of its documentation and can only remember some of the processes involved – although he maintains that the print-

\textsuperscript{38} Administration du cadastre et de la topographie, Cinquantenaire, 61–2.

\textsuperscript{39} However, ArcGIS, one of the most widespread software implementations of geographical information systems, is (or at least was in 2018) apparently also used by the Luxembourg cadastral office.

out was not generated by him and exhibits some false data entry. Upon comparison to certain originals, it can be established that about a third of the printout contains duplicate entries that are not found in the original manuscripts. Although the database creator asserts that he transmitted every place name instance into the database, after close scrutiny of the remaining originals, it can be estimated that about 5% of the original entries were not transferred. This data source lacks complete documentation with many discrepancies of provenance, textual changes, and redundant entries and the loss of most of the original data. Even though the data represented in this source are highly interesting – and though they represent the only dataset that contains a quantitatively relevant amount of place names in local vernacular – the source still needs to be closely scrutinized due to its problematic provenance.

3.2 Misspelled and wrongly encoded

Despite the hybrid provenance of Luxembourgish place name sources, there are still quite a few areas that are common to both analog and digital sources, specifically regarding textual mistakes occurring due to external factors.

When a scribe misspelled a name in historic deeds, the information that was supposed to be contained in the document was accidently distorted. When that name was then copied in this distorted form, the misspelling became tradition and changed the perception and reference of that name. When there is no oral evidence to veto this minute distortion it becomes strengthened and generalized, and the identity of the place name is permanently changed.

The same is the case with non-analog approaches. As seen above, the cadastral office in Luxembourg switched to digital systems in the 1980s. This meant that all place names were digitized by typing them in manually. Human error always occurs, whether data is handwritten or typed into a computer, but the potential problem lies in the level of trust placed in the veracity of the

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41 It is unclear what implications this assertion has for the veracity of the data and its provenance, as the creator did not specify further even after repeated enquiries.


43 A good example is found in the official, non-Luxembourgish forms for the name Luxembourg, where the “x” is actually the result of a phonemic misinterpretation from the seventeenth century, and it should be read as an /s/ not /ks/, as in the name Brussels, French Bruxelles. See Christian Kollmann, “Woher kommt das x in Luxemburg?,” *Beiträge zur Namenforschung* 46, no. 2 (2011): 165–210.
computer data. An important issue here relates to the boundaries of text formatting at the time. The first Unicode character chart was only devised in the late 1980s, while the earlier American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) was originally developed in the 1960s and was widely dispersed even in countries that used a very different writing system or typography, than did American English. For the study of Luxembourgish place names specifically, this means that certain characters in the Luxembourgish alphabet could not be displayed, out of sheer technical impossibility. This has a lot of repercussions, as for example with the lack of diacritics or any non-ASCII characters. Taking the Luxembourgish word for forest, i.e. Bësch, this was often transcribed in the first land registry as Büsch. When the land registry was digitized, something had to be done about the diacritic shown as ‹ü›. So, on occasion, forest was spelled Buesch – the ‹ue› being a common way to represent the vowel ‹ü› in German\(^{44}\) – or the graphematic difference was simply omitted, making it Busch. This may not seem hugely significant but, from a linguistic standpoint, the origin of the form changes depending on whether the name is written with a ‹ü/ue› or a ‹u›. The effect was that the name became distorted. In many cases, the distortion was kept, making it the official form of that name.\(^{45}\)

A similar issue can be seen in the copy of the Institut Grand-Ducal’s collection. The problems of this source’s provenance have already been discussed, but less so the presentation of the names in this copy. The names are shown here in capital letters only, except for the diacritic forms. The full capitalization is of course already a form of distortion, not relaying the true graphematic image of the original – but it is one that can generally be ignored, as it does not produce distortions per se. However, in some cases, diacritics from the originals seem to have been ignored and not rendered in any form, resulting in the same distortion as discussed for the cadastral data. It has to be kept in mind that this file was created in 1990 (at least according to the title allotted to the collection) and that Unicode compatibility was not yet widespread then. The author of the lost digital file that preceded the printed collection was able to code some diacritic characters which, incidentally, were never capitalized. The diacritics do not seem to mirror the originals though, as can be seen from the few remnants that still exist in the archive of the Institut Grand-Ducal. The author had therefore used an unknown, undocumented encoding system, while ignoring some

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\(^{44}\) See Schneider, Paläographie, 94–5.

\(^{45}\) This discrepancy could only be revealed due to an official data file, established separately by former cadastral officials, now residing at the cadastral office and generously made available to me.
graphematic features and changing others. These discrepancies can only be identified where there are corresponding originals in existence.

The analog and the digital are also comparable as regards mistakes made by interpretation. A scribe might have transcribed a name accurately, but the reader or copyist might have misinterpreted a sign or character and copied it wrongly. This can, of course, also occur when copying from analog to digital but, in the end, it constitutes the same kind of human error. However, it is different when encoding systems come into play. As has already been hinted at, such systems changed during the advancement of computing. The transfer from one such system to another could result in misalignments, creating different forms, as can be seen in the place name *Gonneschwânkels*, for example. The character ‘Å’ does not exist in Luxembourgish or any language varieties in its vicinity and is supposed to mark a diacriticized ‘e’, possibly ‘é’. Misinterpretations can thus occur due to human error or, in this case, computer error.

3.3 Analog vs. digital – the lack of documentation

Lack of documentation is a serious issue for both analog and digital sources, as seen above. With analog documents, the older they are, the less problematic this often seems, as they generally contain far less data – especially when compared to the vast quantity of digital data that exists, be that digitized, born digital or, as in the case of the cadastral office, a hybrid form that is part digitized, part born digital. The fast-growing and ever-changing digital landscape makes the need for documentation even more pressing for any historian or linguist, or indeed for any researcher using data that can be used in an historical analysis.

This fast pace of change enabled by digital methods and tools also exhibits a higher risk of, or potential for, data loss. Permanent changes that are not documented can lead to irreversible loss of information, which could be catastrophic. The loss or absence of data, however, is something inherent to historiographical work, but it is the quantity of data handled and possibly lost that is the key difference of modern day born digital and traditional sources.

Version control will be the most important heuristic feature to the onomastician (historian and linguist alike) using born digital or hybrid digital sources, if their analysis is to be able to extend beyond just the final product. There is a tendency in modern historiography to write not only a historical narrative of the facts, but also of the intermediate steps, as well as the motivations exerted.

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46 This place is located in Bissen, a village in the middle of the Grand Duchy.
and decisions taken by any agents involved in the process. By doing so, a kind of cultural and workflow history can be established, something that has not yet been attempted on a global scale.

4 For the future (synthesis)

In discussing specific sources for place name studies in Luxembourg, it can be maintained that key issues subsist in both analog and (born) digital sources, as well as those sources that started out as analog, were digitized and then enhanced digitally. I have made a case for the hybridity of place name sources, starting from the initial oral character of place names as a source and their function in a cultural environment. I highlighted the issues and methodological problems that arise when writing down and preserving these names, as well as the living nature of some of these sources.

Provenance studies of sources, whether those sources analog or digital, always suffer from the same key issues regarding lack of information. When the documentation of a source is not complete – or is totally lacking – the ability to assess the provenance of a source, along with all the intermediate steps that might have changed that source, is severely hindered.

Although the key aspects are the same for the external criticism of both analog and digital sources, the pace of possible and actual changes effected in the digital realm makes these source types more complicated, or at least more laborious, to deal with. When external source criticism comes to a standstill because of a lack of documentation the use of internal source criticism might be the only way to further examine the origin of a source, be it analog or digital.

When archival practices remain focused solely on the preservation of a final document – failing to record the intermediate steps and changes the document has experienced, nor to archive the software tools previously used with it – the study of provenance will always be unsatisfying. Even though it may be argued that the software itself that is, or was, used by an institution is not their property to archive, at the very least the recording of a coherent and consistent software version history should be considered a must for the future historian. After all, the end result or product is only one facet of the source, a facet that cannot by itself convey all the changes, decisions, or problems that that document has encountered over its lifetime.
References


Dates de l’achèvement des plans-minutes. Copy of a typewritten notice summarising the dates of the establishment of the first land registries. Administration du cadastre et de la topographie, Luxembourg.


