

British Post-Colonial Legacies, Toponymy, and Cultural Continuity in Selangor State, Malaysia

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Abstract ID: 395

Event: Linguistics 2026 Paris

Subject: 12. Historical linguistics

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Abstract

This study examines the village toponymic system in Selangor, a state in Malaysia, from the perspective of critical toponymy, with particular attention to the relationship between British colonial legacy, national identity and cultural memory. Place naming has become an important discourse in understanding how colonial powers shaped spatial identity, political authority, and cultural hegemony through geographical naming practices. Unlike many former colonies where indigenous place names were extensively replaced by colonial names, Selangor demonstrates a more complex process of cultural negotiation under British indirect rule between 1874 and 1957. This research aims to analyse the categories and concepts of village names in five major districts of Selangor and to evaluate the extent to which these naming systems reflect colonial influence, cultural continuity, and societal development. The study employed a qualitative research design grounded in the framework of critical toponymy. Data were collected from Malaysia's Official Open Data Portal involving 282 village names across the districts of Sabak Bernam, Kuala Selangor, Gombak, Klang, and Petaling Jaya. The data were analysed through qualitative content analysis, thematic classification, and comparative interpretation. The findings reveal that traditional village names remain highly dominant and continue to preserve Malay linguistic elements, geographical references, agricultural activities, ethnic identity, and local cultural memory. Only a minimal number of village names contain English loanwords despite prolonged British colonial administration. The study concludes that the British indirect rule system contributed to the continuity of local cultural identity rather than the total replacement of indigenous toponymic structures. These findings contribute to global discussions on colonialism, decolonization, spatial identity, and the preservation of linguistic heritage within multicultural societies.

Keyword: toponymy, village name, national identity, British postcolonial, Selangor, Malaysia.