Toponyms between Linguistic Variation and Language Change
A Case Study in Sidi Bel Abbes urban context

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Abstract

Speakers living in the same society are said to share the same language norms. However, in reality, the language behaviour differs among them. These disparities in language use are the main concern of many studies. Linguists in general and sociolinguists, especially language variationists, who pay particular attention to the study of language variation.

Linguistic diversity in a multilingual society shows that no linguistic system is homogeneous in a society. A case in point is the language variety used in the urban context of Sidi Bel Abbes (hence after SBA). This language variety has changed in many ways, apparently adapting features of the language varieties with which it has been in contact. Diachronic changes and synchronic variations make up the topic of our study as attested in toponyms or place names. Our scope is to explore some changes in the language behavior (i.e., Algerian Arabic) used today in SBA to show the effects of foreign languages uses particularly the substratum effect of Turkish, French and Spanish, in other words, we will attempt to examine the linguistic traces of past historical contacts.

To explore these differences, one should pay attention to loanwords: exactly toponyms. To reach our designed objective, our work includes a description of some selected toponyms which constitute the crux of the study. Finally, some implications will be raised to rightly seek for an adequate and useful strategy to toponyms as a linguistic entity and as reflecting a socio-cultural/ historical aspect.

Key Words

Toponymy
Linguistic variation
Language change
Linguistic borrowing
Language contact
Apparent vs. Real time

1 Introduction

The assumption we start from in this study is the investigation of toponyms in a language contact situation.

The progress of research in linguistics in general, and socio-linguistics in particular, has led many linguists to stress the fact that no language is a monolithic and a homogeneous object with respect to its regional varieties (e.g., Bell 1976). In their view, language is a heterogeneous and dynamic system. Sociolinguists, therefore, aim to relate language and language users to the Speech Community where people interact.

The present study is a sociolinguistic investigation which aims to relate some aspects of language to other social aspects to examine some linguistic features in Algerian Arabic (hereafter AA) which reflect linguistic variation in apparent time that rightly correspond to language change in real time in Sidi Bel Abbès (hereafter SBA) speech community. The tested dialect is AA which is an Arabic vernacular restricted to the spoken mode of daily expression.

The historical events, since the Turkish, Spanish and French consecutive presences in Algeria, have wrought many changes in most Algerian cities, and the present city is no exception. Particularly after independence (1962), the social changes were apparently great. These namely include changes in the individual social mobility. In addition, the contact between people from different parts of the society has increased, through the new available trade and employment opportunities.

Algeria, therefore, has made a big step toward a new look of a developed country. The same period has also witnessed the urbanization process and a change in demographic patterns, as the migration of large numbers of people, especially from rural areas to cities, have led to the mixing of all these migrants and to the reducing of the

differences among them. Furthermore, because of the improved means of transport, more contact between people from different regions has been established. Thus, linguistic studies are beginning to show that these social changes have also had an enormous impact on the individual's language behaviour.

Besides, the educational system itself has witnessed many changes, the most prominent one being the Arabisation of the teaching / learning process. The Arabisation process was introduced in nearly all domains; to the extent that cities and districts were also arabised. Place names were labeled by either names of "chahid" or by famous national events, for instance: "1st November- the date of the Algerian revolution against French colonialism" and "5th July- the date of Algerian Independence". But, what is recognized in the recent years, despite the enormous effort done by the state most of the colonial toponyms still exist in Algerians' usage. The problem lies, then, in the dual use of toponyms in SBA city. as a case study.

The present study seeks to explore the issue from a sociolinguistic point of view. That is to say, concrete data have been collected from different real set-ups, aiming to provide true evidence to our scope

Indeed, to study toponyms as an aspect of linguistic variation and language change one has to ask some inter-related questions in order to better understand and to try to explain, to some extent, the relationship between linguistic variation and language change. These questions are:

1) Which toponyms are more resistant to variation and change and which are less?

2) How can non-linguistic factors such as age influence speakers' language behaviour and lead to linguistic differences of the uses of toponyms.

2 Socio-historical characteristics of the study area: Sidi Bel Abbes

This part gives an overall picture of the context of SBA city in relation to language use. It deals with the geographical situation, a historical sketch and some demographic aspects of the population. The extra-linguistic aspects are thought to reflect the history of the population and the people's language behaviour in this area through different periods.

2.1 The Geographical Situation

SBA city is located in the North West of Algeria. It is bordered by- Oran in the North, Ain Temouchent in the North West, Mascara in the North East, Tlemcen in the West, Naama and El-Bayadh in the South, and Saida in the South.

Geographically, this town has a central strategic position which occupies 15% of the territory of the North – West region of the country. Therefore, it has a very important proportion of area that is equivalent to $9150.63 Km^2$. This city with its privileged position is considered as the meeting ground of the principal road axes of that part of the country.

2.2 A Historical Sketch of SBA

Few documents are available about the history of SBA. In fact, the following information is based on a manual by "Méneau Printing (1959)." The town of SBA is built on an ancient swamp in which the lower ground is occupied by a wide expanse of water coming from the infiltration of the"Mekkerra" river. It has taken the "Marabout's" [2] name; whose grave, the "Qubba", is situated on the left hill of the river.

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[2] The Marabout's name is Sidi Bel Abbès; his grandfather is Sidi El-Bouzidi, who came from "Makkah", he taught in the "Medersa" in Tlemcen.

The first inhabitants of the region were the "Maures": sedentary Berber tribes who were attracted by the streams of water and the rich alluvions neighbouring the Mekkerah. They were devoted to farming and gardening .Old traces of irrigation canals and the remnant fountains are chiefly considered as a real evidence of their presence.

The Carthaginians and the Phoenicians had passed by the town but never ventured inside it. In contrast, the Romans occupied "strategically" the zone of "Tessala", though, no Roman ruin exists inside the town. In the 14th century, there was an Arab invasion by a powerful "Hilalian" Arabic family the "Beni-Ameur"[3] divided into numerous tribes. The Amarnas" is one tribe, which had settled in the region, in the actual location of the town.

From the 16Th to the end of the 18Th centuries, this territory witnessed a mixture and conflict between the tribes themselves, on the one hand, and between the Spanish and the Turkish on the other. In 1509, the Spanish took Oran by force and their influence spread widely to reach SBA, too.

After the invasion of Algiers in 1830, and the abdication of the "Bey" of Oran, the French government of Louis-Philippe took the administrative charge of the province. In 1835, there was an expedition by Maréchal Clauzel, who was the first to fight against the Beni-Ameur.

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[3] Azza (1979 : 144) says : [La tribu de Beni-Ameur est une] confédération de tribus s'étendant sur un vaste territoire dont Sidi Bel Abbès occupe à peu près le centre. Ces tribus descendraient d'un ancêtre commun Sagr Beni Ameur qui aurait eu huit enfants. Chacun d'eux a laissé son nom à une branche de la confédération.
[The "Beni-Ameur" tribe is] a confederation of tribes which spread on a wide territory of which Sidi Bel Abbès occupies approximately the centre. Those tribes came from a common ancestor Sagr Ben Ameur; who had eight children .Each one of them left his name to a branch of the confederation. (my translation)

In 1840, military installations were built near the "Qubba" of the "Marabout" and the town developed rapidly; this attracted the colonizers' attention as witnessed the coming of free soldiers and families.

The military "foreign legion" had widely extended to this small town in 1848. It started to spread from one side to another around the River of Mekkera which had a good reputation of fertility on the soil. This small colonial town had 160.000 inhabitants who were farmers or had an experience in Mediterranean agriculture; most of them came from Spain.

The people occupying the area were devoted to the agriculture of wheat and other agricultural products which were traded to the nearby towns. Nevertheless, the recent state of the agricultural sector of SBA town has showed a dramatic decrease of production .This is due to the presence of two types of constraints. On the one hand, the industrial revival of the region by the appearance of factories and trade centers. On the other hand, the urbanization process minimizes the surface of the agricultural areas.

The creation of the town was in 1856. Therefore, the colonizers were first attracted by this town and settled in it. Then there was a flow of Algerians at the dawn of independence in 1962, which came to live in the city. This is the concern of the next section.

2.3   Some Socio-demographic Aspects of the Population

SBA town has a population of 446,277 inhabitants in the census of 1987 (i.e., RGPH), and 519,313 inhabitants according to the last 1998 census. Thus, the rate of population growth between 1987 and 1998 was of 1.54%. This is considerably inferior to the national rate, which is evaluated to 2.15%of the same period. On the basis of the rates of the population growth observed during both periods 1987/1998 the results were obtained to classify the population in SBA.

This distribution of the population takes into account tw fundamental socio-demographic aspects: age and se

Figure 1 Pyramid Showing the Distribution of the Population in SBA

Province by Age and Sex

2.4   The Flux of Migration to SBA

Migration is a social process by which large cities and towns, in particular, witness important population movements. The mobilization of people from one place to another is due mainly to the need for better life and employment. In fact, this is what most-if not all Algerian cities happened to know at the dawn of independence in 1962. Therefore, most Algerian cities after the country's independence knew some processes of social change, and SBA city is no exception. These changes (- in addition to migration) are:

• First, **industrialization**, this aspect, in effect has always "triggered off migratory movements and this can adversely affect the linguistic stability of an area, in the same way as other major economic changes." (Hoffman, 1991: 189)

• Secondly, **urbanization** is another phenomenon which is significantly related to both migration and industrialization which has brought important numbers of rural people into large towns and cities i.e., the rural exodus. This movement is, therefore, linked to **"the improvement in transport and communication systems [which] contributes to the dispersal of linguistic communities and brings them into increased contact with the high prestige language or other linguistic groups"** (idem.)

Thus, one can mention that SBA city has attracted people from all the country, and the migration rate was measured to 19,639 which is equivalent to nearly 10% of the whole population.

In fact, we have tried to determine the physical layout or the social life of the community. To understand language variation and change, according to Labov, we need to understand the way in

which people live and how they view themselves in their community, under what circumstances they constitute their groups and their social identities. In other words, as Labov (1972) believes, the social forces have a significant impact on the individuals and their language behaviour.

3 Linguistic Survey
3.1 Toponymy
The present survey will show the evolutionary character of toponymy in the French tradition, merely, because it is based on French bibliography but not to underestimate any other claims about the subject matter in any other cultural or linguistic spheres.

Toponymy is seeking to study the origins of place names, their significant meanings and their transformations, too. This discipline has found a fascinating field of study especially, in Europe, where some countries like France was a meeting ground of various peoples to become a melting pot of different populations.

Generally speaking, toponyms are frequently the outcome of a creative process, a subjective interpretation by the local inhabitants at the time of naming. They often survive changes in the local landscape, thus becoming historical documents of landscape dynamics or changes in land use.

Some toponyms usually have a clearly defined lexical meaning at the time of naming "transparent toponyms", but they may lose their transparency in the course of time. This may be due to changes in the original feature that inspired the name, to changes in local languages or to name distortion during oral transmission. Toponyms that survive changes in the original feature are likely to become historical documents and reflect their cultural heritage, providing basic information on different scientific fields such as settlement history, population history.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that toponymy has been a vital field of interest and a passionate object of study, it is only in the 19th c. that it has considered linguistics as its essential principle and there appeared works of Honzé Quicherat, Cocheris and especially those of d'Arbois de Jubainville, Auguste Longnon. The latter is the first who made from French toponymy a systematic and empirical study. But, his masterpiece "Les Noms de Lieux de la France" (Names of Places in France) appeared only in 1920, after his death. It was preceeded by that of H. Groehler, Ueber Ursprung und Bedeut ung der Franzosis schen Ortsnamen, for which the first volume was devoted to vocabulary whose origin derived from Ligurien, Iberian, Phoenician, Greek, Gallic, Latin appeared in Heidelberg in 1913. This volume was followed by second one in 1933 including the medieval formations.

Meanwhile, in 1926 M.A. Dauzat had published a manual entitled "Les Noms de Lieux", which encompassed in addition to toponymy, oronymy, and hydronomy.

Then, in 1937 M.A. Vincent has edited another volume in Bruxelles about toponymy of France, his work has given birth to a scientific approach to the study of toponymy stressing on authentic documentation and a rigorous method.

In 1963, M. L'Abblé Nègre has published another manual in the same year there appeared the 1st dictionnary of toponyms in France by Dauzat.

Toponymy as a science is flourishing, it is in 1938, the 1st International Congress of Toponymy and anthroponymy that has taken place, 19 representative nations have met there attempting to develop toponymy in particular. This congress is a new event demarcated its importance.

In 1947 and 1948 Dauzat published in Paris a journal entitled Onomastica which was replaced by "La Revue Internationale d'Onomastique", since 1949. A year after, in 1950 there appeared "Onoma" (Bulletin d'information ET de Bibliographie) by "le comité International des Sciences Onomastiques" founded in Louvain (Belgique) after the congress in Bruxelles.

In fact, toponymy as a passionate science and a meeting ground of many disciplines, has taken many hard knocks on its way. It showed, nevertheless, other important steps of success toward an authentic investigation of names of places.

3.2 Language Variation and Change

Language, like all existing things, is subjected to change. It is a dynamic phenomenon in the sense that it changes in diverse ways, in different places and at different times. The exploration of such a process is the province of "historical linguistics", "a branch of linguistics which studies the development of language and languages over time." (Crystal, 1983:174), that is to say Historical Linguistics.

Throughout the history of linguistics, it has been noted that language is not only changeable but also variable, though language change process was hardly conceived and linguistic variation was ignored in linguistic theorising. On the one hand, this may be explained due to the majority of linguists who were convinced that language change was unobservable. Most of them simply accepted that it happened, but could never pinpoint its evolution (Aitchison, 2001).

Besides, it was also assumed that language change was a continuous but very slow process, like the rotation of the earth, or like the opening of a flower. It happens so slowly and gradually, it is not the case that one night we go to bed using a particular form only to wake up the next morning to find the form categorically replaced by another one. It was generally considered as an abrupt process, as was quite impossible to detect its occurrence.

On the other hand, linguists acted as if languages were not variable. Most linguistic theories have started from the assumption that variability in languages is unmanageable or uninteresting or both. In other terms, linguists rejected it so that it might not put obstacles in their language description. For them, variability was a heterogeneous property of language and this heterogeneity involved a great deal of randomness. This point could evoke misapprehension and confusion in their process of linguistic theorising.

Therefore, linguists were content with the homogeneous property of languages as constituting a uniform entity, towards an adequate framework of linguistic theory.

However, the past half century (wolfram, 2005) has witnessed remarkable growth in the study of language variation, and it has now become a highly productive subfield of research in sociolinguistics. Designing its prime locus of study is to allow researchers interested in the investigation of language variation to make a distinction between individuals, groups, and communities. Because it is believed that if language change is at the heart of language, and if grammatical structures are the bones of language, variation, then, defines its soul.

Besides, sociolinguistics knew important progress, especially in the study of language change. Since it becomes possible to observe changes in language that naturally are originated and are reflected in variations.

This was highlighted by Labov's contribution, by his quantitative paradigm to the study of language in society. He assumes that to examine language in a systematic way, and relating language variation to the speakers' variables will lead crucially to the understanding of the distinct mechanisms of linguistic change. It is upon this assumption that he built his hypothesis of his study (1972:3), stating that: **one cannot understand the development of a language change apart from the social life of the community in which it occurs. Alternatively, to put it another way, social pressures are continually operating upon language, not from some remote point in the past, but as immanent social force acting in the living present.**

This view is also shared by Anderson (1973), that is the social design and its mutation, i.e., the Social Change [4] reflects the modifications of a language.

Comparing language to any other living thing, such as a plant can be described Bell (1973:01) with reference to its structure or composition. Similarly, its function in the universe can be stated in a general way. However, we are still confronted with some questions, to know the adequate mechanisms of the functioning of this object in relation to many other factors present in the environment such as light, heat and energy. "**These components then become part of the description which is no longer simply structural and functional.**" (Bell, ibid.)

Anderson (1973: 2) focuses on the fact that linguists' major goal in studying language change should not to isolate

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[4] Rocher (1968) distinguishes between *social evolution* and *social change*. He mentions that social evolution differs from social change. The former is known by the modifications of the social context during a long period of time (one generation or more.) Whereas, the second term refers to the transformations that a generation witnesses in a short period of time (such as the social developments.)

but "to relate the environments to the...overall linguistic structure and determine the motivations of change by reference to the interaction of linguistic...and extra-linguistic variables."

In other words, the interaction of the social forces with the particular structure of the linguistic system under consideration has to account for language change within a broad perspective.

Thus, it is not possible to capture language change because it is an unconscious process; it cannot be immediately observed. Then, investigating this phenomenon is thought to be much time- consuming. Therefore, linguists in particular, Labov have overcome this obstacle by adapting the so-called the "apparent time" method (see below). In this way, the observation of language change in progress becomes possible.

3.2.1 Apparent Time and Real Time

The empirical study of variation has yielded a second major discovery: language change can be observed as it occurs (op.cit.). This is possible using the apparent time method, a substantive advance in the study of language.

In historical studies of language change in progress, the most satisfactory method was obviously to investigate a particular community, then, return, ten years later, and carry out a further investigation. This way of study of language change was known as the "real time" method (that corresponds to diachronic study). However, this way has shown some disadvantages, it is not convenient to wait a decade or more if we want to find out what is going on right of the linguistic changes, today.

An alternative and an immediate method, however, is to investigate linguistic change in apparent time. This method is the simplest way of studying language change. It is based on the analysis of the distribution of linguistic variables across

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different age groups in a community. That is, it works with statistically correlating variant frequency with the age of speakers. If the frequency of a variant increases, or decreases, across generation groups, a change is taking place. Crucially, the apparent time method has significantly shortened the length of time needed to achieve a research.

Accordingly, Bailey (2002:312) agrees on the usefulness of the apparent time method and says that it " **has had an enormous impact both on our knowledge of the mechanisms of change and on our understanding of its motivations"**

Thus, because of the shortening of the time interval in the investigation of language change in progress, Labov's apparent time method is now widely used in many sociolinguistic studies of language change in progress.

4 A Presentation of the Corpus: Selection of Toponyms in Question

A primary impact of languages in contact is the phenomenon of borrowing. This latter is eminently studied by linguists such as Bloomfield (1930), and Weinreich (1953).

Linguistic borrowing is a very common phenomenon to most languages. **"Probably no language whose speakers have ever had contact with any other language is completely free from borrowed words."** (Campbell, 1998:57.)

As exemplified by Campbell (1998:58) a loanword is an item that has been borrowed from another language, a word which originally was not part of the lexis of the recipient language but was taken from some other language and became part of the borrowing language's vocabulary.

Importantly enough, how could distinct systems be intermingled to constitute a mixed language variety? In fact,

the prolonged cultural contact, especially with speakers of the language of colonizers, conquerors who show their superior state or prestige in any society, leads to a considerable amount of borrowing.

Made explicitly, just as societies experience both social change and social evolution, languages are in a continuous state of change. As far as our society is concerned, Algeria knew several dynamic contact situations the most important of which began as early as 1830's, when the French settled in the country. Prior foreign contact was with the Turks, and the Spanish (op. cit.). So, with their consecutive presence and due to the substratum effect of their languages, enhanced consequently the linguistic borrowing that pervaded the vernacular.

Consequently, the presence of distinct peoples in Algeria had an impact not only on the linguistic aspects, but also on the cultural and social spheres e.g.; toponyms that were used in the colonial era, they are still be used in the independent Algeria. Those are so strong as to appear indelible. Instances of these are the following:

Type of place	toponyms used in colonial era	Toponyms substituted in post independence era	Colonial toponyms retained in belabesians' language use	Colonial toponyms substituted by belabesians' language use
Cities	Faubourg Thiers	Sakia hamra	✓	✓
	Crampel	Mimoun Abdelkeder	✓	✓
	Mont plaisir	Hai zaytoun	✓	
	Maconnais	Maconnais	✓	
	Gambetta	Kheira nebia	✓	
Street	Alfred de	Bougourin	✓	

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s	Musset	e boucif		
	Gambetta	c. Ferradj	✓	
	Voltaire	Larich sohbi	✓	✓
	Catinat	s. bendimere d	✓	✓
	John Jack Rousseau	Ben Ali Bekhaled	✓	
	La caya sol(spanish) rue de soleil (french)	Rue de soleil Tarik chams	✓	
Places And schools	Place Carnot	Place 1er Novembre		
	/ʒnān bājlak/(Turkish)	garda(n)	✓	✓
	Cinema Vox	Cinema Vox	✓	
	LaCoupole(le marché ouvert)	La Coupole / lqubba/	✓	
	Marceau (school)	·Amir abdel kader	✓	✓
	Thiers(fille, garçon)(school)	Ibn badis--freres zaoui		✓

Table 1 Some Loan Words indicating Toponyms in SBA

Linguistically speaking, most of the previous toponyms (see appendice) are modified by some linguistic processes. This is due mainly to the illiteracy factor of Algerian people who were unable to utter as rightly as possible these words.

5 Conclusion

At the outset of this paper, our selected linguistic variables: toponyms are a better predictor of the existing linguistic

variation and a better witness of language change as happening and tested in apparent time.

In fact, as far as our case study is concerned, it is a matter of conflicting language behaviour across generations. Nevertheless, we cannot see the linguistic discrepancies on the extreme sides of the pendulum. Indeed, what characterises this situation is a socio-psychological factor. It is, therefore, a factor of affiliation with whom the group they belong and identify themselves with.

Eventually, we can now consider the progress which toponymic studies have undertaken in the world as a crucial aspect reflecting namely the contact between peoples and their languages over different eras.

We can come to some suggestions rather than conclusions. We hope that these are not demanding ones. First, to constitute "commission of toponymy", which should devote enormous efforts to unite toponyms in the city, as well as to be reported on –and clarified on a map. What about, if the colonial names will be mentioned with the new ones, it is so interesting to keep the historical aspect of any place.

Second, to seek for renewing some toponyms, which lack a linguistic meaning, e.g., "400 logements" "200 logts"...etc, toward adapting an onomastic one?

In summary, the linguistic situation is extremely complex which would rather be considered as richness and a sign of vitality and diversity rather than disparagingly judge it.

Appendix
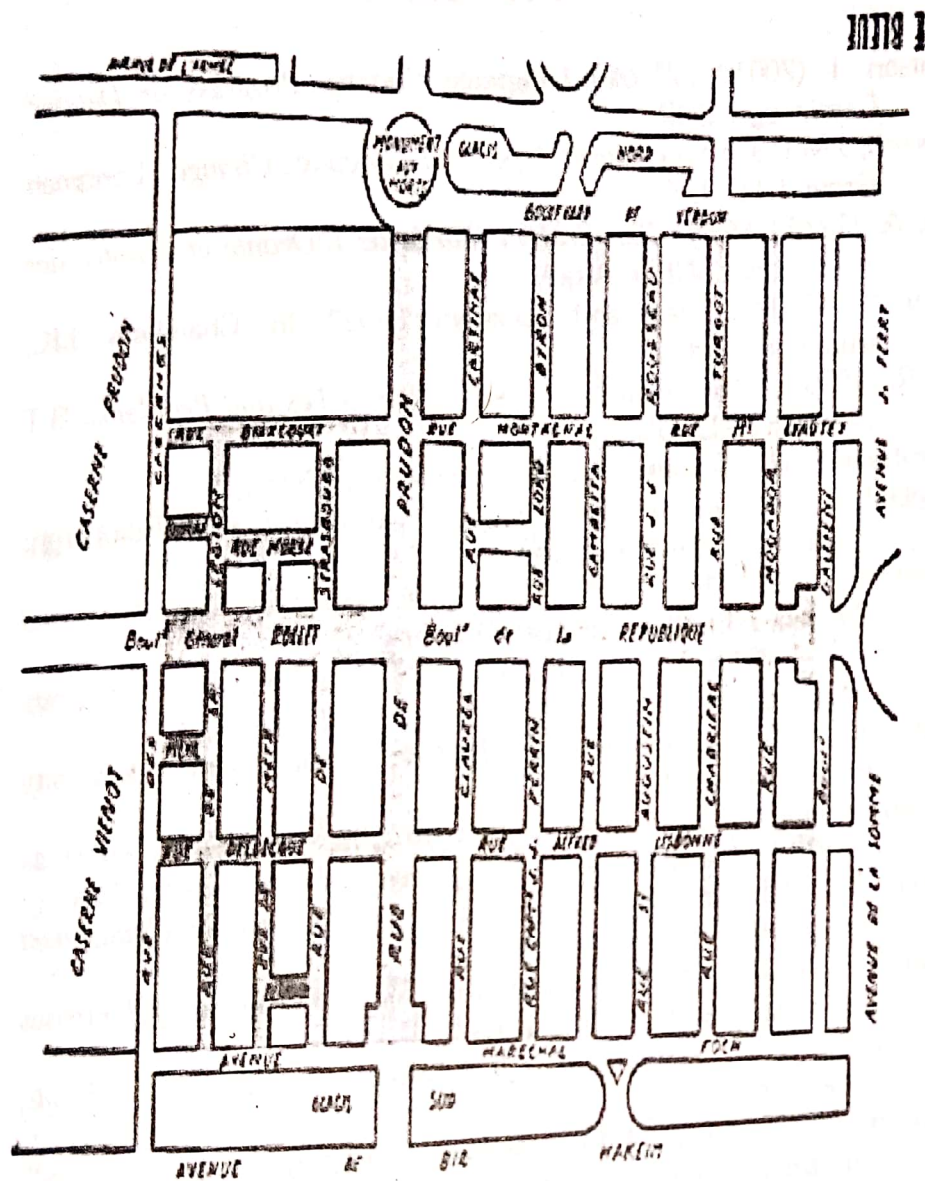
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