Sociolinguistic Representations of the French Spoken in Rouen

(Methodological Aspects)

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1. Introduction

The article describes the methodology of investigation established to collect linguistic data in an urban situation and, specifically, in Rouen. After a preliminary presentation of the sociolinguistic situation of this city, I propose to set out the various stages of this work: it will first explore the sociolinguistic hypothesis, later, the research itself, especially the tools intended to collect the sociolinguistic representations of the locally spoken forms of French. In succession, the verbal samples, the written responses, and the questionnaires will be described. Diagrams will help us to visualize the spatial distribution of the various forms at hand.

This inquiry[1] forms part of a larger research project (subject: verbalization of urban boundaries) and is centered particularly on the real or imaginary fractures which structure urban space, and on the relationship between linguistic mobility and territorialization. In other terms, it is a study showing how the inhabitants of a given city socially structure an urban area, transform it into a social space[2] (Ostrowetsky S., 1996), and further, into a territory[3] or place of identity,, i.e. a place linked to their identity feeling.

2. Methodology

2.1. The area

Although it is not essential here to show the characteristics of the urban area, it is necessary, at least, to recognize that the city in general produces norms of all kinds, some of which are linguistic[4]. As a city, Rouen does not escape this process, yet it is an unusual city. It is necessary to seek its specificity elsewhere than in the obvious contrasting features. Rouen is not actually typical, although its location on the two banks of the River Seine follows the example of other cities, creating a «left bank» and a «right bank». Its specificity is not found in the presence of communities resulting from immigration: multilingualism is one of the characteristics of modern cities. Nor is Rouen's uniqueness due to its location in a dialectical area, the Normandy - Picardy continuum (Brasseur P., 1982), where one finds some traces of substrata in regional French forms (normalized or not)[5].

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What makes Rouen unusual, above all, is the unequal distribution between the two banks (Guermont Y., 1990), making it the French city with the highest rate of social segregation (Lajoie G., 1998). There exists, then, in the regional conscience, an urban variety of French specifically Rouennais, localized on the left bank of the city, the bank characterized by stigmatization. It is there that one finds, in the stereotypic speech of the city, the urban variety recognized as the *accent of Rouen*.

Beyond the speech patterns, the real linguistic practices (as opposed to those which concern only stereotypes) relate to a model (Bulot T., 1998a) with three axes; the **regional axis** marks the dialectical substratum of local regional French, the **ethnic axis** accounts for the ways of speaking French with an accent perceived as exogenic, and the **urban axis** affirms the singularity of the location of the city, insofar as the latter exists in the Rouennais collective conscience.

2.2.   *A sociolinguistic hypothesis*

There is no recent and systematic linguistic description of Rouennais urban speech. Therefore, the working hypothesis is that the social evaluation of urban speech patterns contributes to the production of the socio-spatial formations (Di Meo G., 1990) of the city, taking into account the attitudes[6] bearing on the standardized or stigmatized linguistic practices of others, whether these are actually perceived or symbolically represented. For that reason, our working group developed an epilinguistic study with two central concerns. The initial concern was to validate a model of investigation of linguistic attitudes in the monolingual urban milieu (Remy J., Voye L., 1992) so as to extend it to sites other than Rouen[7], and the second concern was to report on the process of «**topolectisation**»[8], the setting in words or verbalization of the urban space and its organization based on the discourses held about the speech patterns of others.

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3.   **The study**

3.1.   *General information*

Collecting the data involved two important moments, the first qualitative (Figure 1 next page) and the second quantitative (Figure 2 next page). In fact, it was first necessary to conduct interviews for a pre-inquiry. This was intended to select the qualifying items (Tsekos N., Bulot T., Grosse S., 1996) from the samples of local speakers[9] and to confront the empirical categorizations of the researchers with those in the field. This then posed problems for the delimitation, the relevance, and the analysis of the mode of production of each item. Next, a written questionnaire was proposed with a second identical sample of local speakers. Their answers were then placed on an evaluative scale in relation to the items, which posed strictly methodological problems in making the instructions as clear as possible.

The procedure was the same[10] for both assessment recordings: the subjects heard pre-recorded representative verbal samples, which were distinct for each phase and differentiated by linguistic elements only.

3.2.   *The pre-recorded recordings*

The constitution of this indispensable sound material poses a number of difficulties, technical as well as methodological. The collection of a quite considerable amount of sound data is required in order to ensure valid verbal samples, enabling a speaker to be identified by another so that the

stereotypes associated with each way of speaking emerge. In addition it proves almost impossible to collect dissociated spontaneous forms of easily recognizable social traits. Systematically, to avoid this difficulty, the option selected was to have each subject read the same text, but naturally, some of the most remarkable structures were lost, since the interviewee would tend to control and correct him/herself. The preserved recordings were, however, well set in terms of the preliminary model of linguistic practices; that which was important was the perceptible aspect of variations on a continuum, however vague,

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were recognized as a form between prestigious and stigmatized. Concretely, the first phase consists of four recordings of the same text read by four different men[11]. The second, more complex, consists of, in the same order, «the exercises»: a played dialogue, a short read text, and a series of phrases spoken by six different people.

Identification and validation of the markers of the Rouennais speech (recourse to the dialectal substrate / evaluation of the forms by the control group)

Production of the sound tracks of the first session based on the continuum: normalized French, regional French, regional urban French

Reading of a single text read by the subjects (men and women)

Collection: Evaluation of the bands and production of the qualifying items (distinction between what concerns the interaction and the elicitation of the stereotypes) on the basis of identification by semi-directed interviews made by a third party involved in the inquiry

Interactional analysis ("dialogic" and dialogical) of the interviews

Constitution of a model of the linguistic practices (in particular integrating the forms resulting from immigration) marking the ethnic, regional, and urban membership
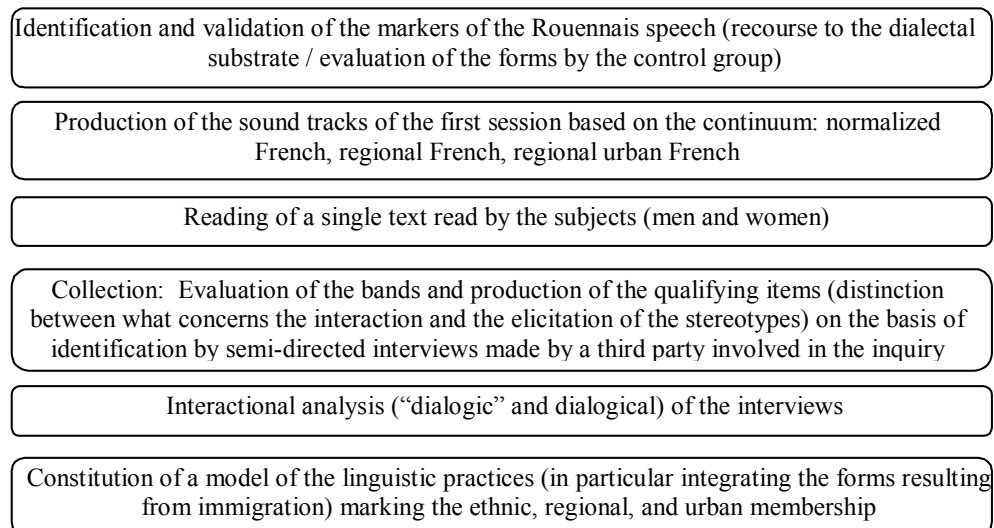
Figure 1 (production of the qualifying items)

> Identification and validation of the markers concerned with the model produced from the compilation of the first bands (recourse to the dialectal substrate / collection of statements / evaluation of the forms by control group)

> Production of the sound tracks of the second session (pre-evaluation of the bands) on the basis of model: seven bands on a continuum integrating the local French forms and two artifacts (out of the region and vague ethnical marking), under the auspices of the test bands

> Three texts distinct and from different kind read by the control group based on the model: a short dialogue / a text "reversed to restore" / a series of short and partially stereotyped statements

> Quantitative analysis of the results

Figure 2 (evaluation of the qualifying items)

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In preparing the recordings intended to be assessed by questionnaire, there is one difficulty was not overcome: the collection of female voices. Initially, the women were even more controlled than the men, and later, it proved impossible to find women literate enough in French and thus suitable readers for the recordings concerned with the ethnic axis.

Finally, for the quantitative part of the collection of data, seven male voice recordings were established to represent, on the descriptive axes of the Rouennais situation, the regional pronunciations of the same French-speaking material: French of Rouen with a foreign accent (FRE), normed French of Rouen (FRN), French African immigration (FIA), everyday French of Rouen (FRC), non-regional French of Rouen (FRH), and a typically Rouennais French (FRV). The order of the recordings is not left to chance: the position of FRE is justified by the need to teach the subjects the mode of response (even if the band also occupies the role of control band in the fashion of FRH, its tendency is essentially to train); the final position of FRV is justified by the need to consider all the contrasting effects before comparison with the form we clearly wish to determine takes place.

Each recording lasts approximately thirty seconds and consists of three types of verbalization produced by the subjects: a list of short sentences (Figure 3), a brief text to read (Figure 4), and a dialogue (Figure 5).

Figure 3 (Short sentences)

Ma mère, elle habite à Rouen
Son argent, elle l'a bien gagné et rapidement
Je te le dis deux fois, ça n'a rien à voir
C'est maintenant, tout de suite ou dimanche
L'autre est resté
Il y en a quatre

Figure 4 (Text read in reverse direction (Agnès Malandain et...)

pénitentiaire l'établissement à soir hier rendus sont se Rouen de camarades ses et Malandain Agnès.

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Figure 5 (Dialogue)

> *« Salut, ça va? »*
> *« ouais il faut pas se plaindre, et toi »*
> *« Bah je dirais qu'il y a des jours avec et des jours sans »*
> *« t'es pas garagiste? »*
> *« euh, oui pourquoi? »*
> *« Tu gagnes bien dans la région, non »*
> *« C'est vrai, allez, bonjour chez toi »*

Each time, the presence of markers (stereotyped or not) makes each tape clearly distinguishable[12].

3.3.   Writings

The   pre-inquiry protocol proposed axes of evaluation based on accent, level of education, place of residence, etc. The demarcation of the items[13] (Figure 2) was not a problem: it was achieved, in particular, by pinpointing their immediate or defered reiteration in the dialogue, and by their thematic relevance. The difficulty came from the proceeds of the interaction - from the hesitations, the ruptures, the various reformulations - apparently contradictory, but altogether coherent having regard to the stereotypes. Here is an extract which shows the gap between sense and significance, hence showing the difficulty of saying and extracting the pertinent qualifying item. In this situation it was a question of choosing between *choquant* and *normand* (the first will be retained).

> *.../...*
> *11. A et ça te /tu trouves ça agréable ou désagréable ou*
> *12. B on est obligé de faire avec de toute façon (rires) mais c'est vrai que par moment ça choque*
> *13. A pourquoi ça choque enfin pourquoi*
> *14. B non mais certains c'est peut-être à la limite peut-être les actualités de normandie il y en a un qui a un accent aussi vachement normand je te jure ça / ça fait vraiment tu sais ça fait vraiment l'impression de sortir de la campagne si tu veux ouais*

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> *15. A et heu pourquoi sinon à part l'aspect campagnard pourquoi ça te choque*
> *.../...*

The questionnaires proposed evaluative scales (Figure 6), i.e. attitudinal scales designed to take into account the multiple dimensions of

the linguistic attitudes (involvement, acceptance or rejection) of the speaker, who is put in a position to make judgements and designate heterogeneous linguistic forms.

Figure 6 (Extract from the questionnaire related to the research on the localization of forms.)

Q2La personne entendue a un accent :

Campagnard ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ de la ville

Q4La personne entendue a un accent :

d'ailleurs ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ de Rouen

Q16On entend parler de cette façon davantage dans :

la banlieue de Rouen ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ le centre ville de Rouen

Q17On entend parler de cette façon davantage :

Rive Gauche ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ Rive Droite

Q18On entend parler de cette façon davantage aux Sapins

Non ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ Oui

Q19On entend parler de cette façon davantage à La Grand Mare

Non ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ Oui

Q20On entend parler de cette façon davantage à Rouen Saint Sever

Non ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ Oui

Q21On entend parler de cette façon davantage à Bois Guillaume

Non ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ Oui

Q22On entend parler de cette façon davantage à Darnétal
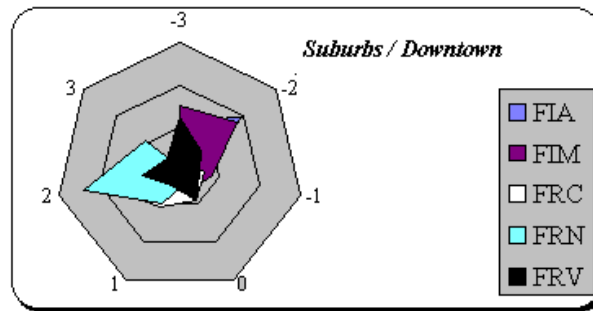
Non ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ ❏ Oui

Via the linguistic object, the speaker is given an opportunity to express an opinion about the other person, engaging thereby in a intentional behavioral

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which establishes a social link with this other person, while focusing at the same time on the task which consists in putting a " + " or a " - " in each box of the evaluative scale. This is called *normative engagement*, respectively positive or negative. The speaker can accept the opinions of others on the same social reality, and accept what the others think of the social link by noting " + ". This is called *attitudes of acceptance*. And finally the speaker can reject the opinions attributed to others, viz. the values others possess about this same social reality, and consequently deny what the others see as a social link by noting " - ". This is called *attitudes of rejection*. Here is an example of an answer obtained:

Q4La personne entendue a un accent :
d'ailleurs ⊞ ⊟ ⊟ ⊟ ⊟ ⊛ ⊞ de Rouen

Thus, the person questioned here accepts that the form can be regarded as Rouennais by some persons and non-Rouennais by others (which is not contradictory in terms of attitude), and engages in an identification of "Rouennais".

The essential problem was to explain to the interviewees the operating mode of this kind of question, deliberately retained to distract them from an "opinion poll mentality". Each box was to be marqued with a cross according to the following instructions: "put a ' + ' whenever you agree with the proposal made to you", "put a ' - ' whenever you do not agree with the proposal made to you", and finally "circle the one answer which corresponds best to what you think". The analysis of the results, however, shows a great coherence in the responses and, consequently, the relevance of such questioning.

3.4.   The diagrams (presentation of the results)

As the research relates to social-spatial representations of the urban area, I have opted for a presentation of the results in the form of diagrams[14]. Their value

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is in giving a good description of the superimposition (in terms of representation) of the various types, but their drawback is that the results must be divided with sufficient salience so that the diagram increases in relevance.

Starting from the table of figures which reports the answers (for this example, to question 16: Q16 One hears speech of this type more often in: The suburbs ❏ (-3) ❏ (-2) ❏ (-1) ❏ (0) ❏ (1) ❏ (2) ❏ (3) the city center), given in percentages:

| NB Recordings	Recordings					
Boxes	FIA	FIM	FRC	FRN	FRV	Total
-3	23%	30%	0%	0%	25%	16%
-2	38%	35%	6%	4%	13%	19%
-1	10%	17%	12%	0%	9%	10%
0	12%	13%	17%	8%	17%	13%
1	6%	4%	21%	19%	9%	12%
2	8%	2%	38%	48%	19%	23%
3	4%	0%	6%	21%	8%	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

one obtains the following picture:

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Here, both in the table and in the graphic representation of the answers, each box is indicated by a value (from -3 to +3) relative to the greatest or smallest proximity to or distance from the place. Here, the responses relate to the complete sample, which covers the two banks of the city, as much the city itself as the agglomeration and the surrounding towns and countryside. It is necessary to note the salience of the normalized form of French (FRN), placed without ambiguity downtown, but otherwise not very clear-cut: the analysis (Bulot T., 1998a) makes the town center seem an unstable category in the present context and this form is not uniformly represented.

A last schematization accounts for the socio-spatial representations solely of the inhabitants of Rouen. In addition, it should be noted that positive normative engagement is only taken into account here. The low number of answers of negative normative engagement[15] prevents us from taking it into account yet.
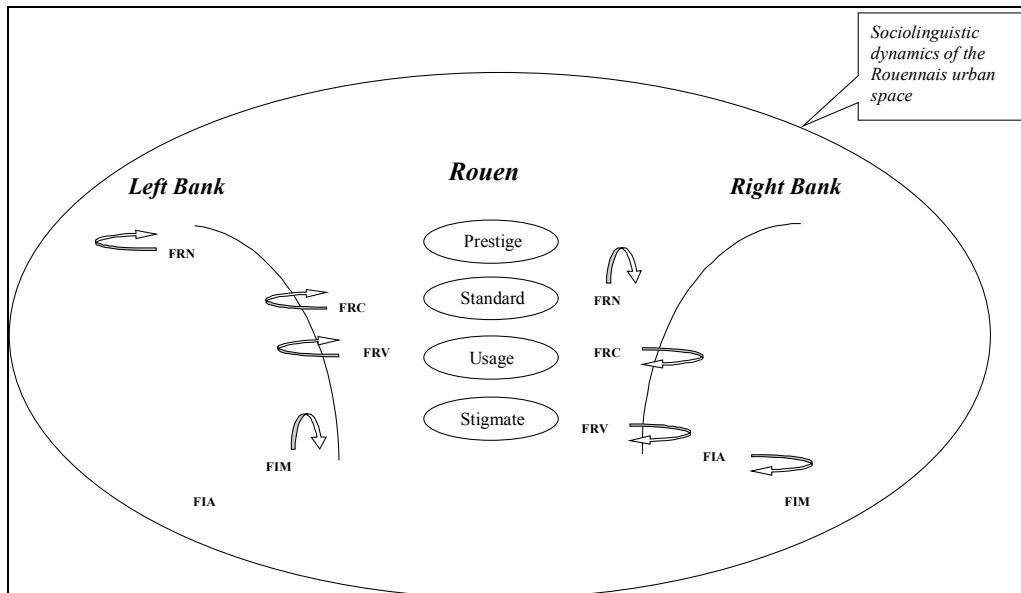
The area included under the term "Rouen" is that of the Rouennais localization of the named varieties; those varieties external to the curves in the

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diagram - which mark the borders - are considered non-Rouennais. At first glance, one can see that, on the two banks, the same hierarchization of the endogenous varieties is recognized: FRN as the high form, FRC as the intermediate form, and FRV as the low form. A gap, however, is perceived: the standard of one group appears not to be shared by others if one combines the hierarchy of the places[16] with that of the forms. Furthermore, the social evaluation of the places shows that the inhabitants of the right bank of Rouen will identify the normalized forms as their current practice, since they locate them in the center of the city and on their bank. Conversely, the inhabitants of the left bank allot another form as standard, insofar as they locate the intermediate form (FRC) on the left bank of downtown. According to the same relationship, what is stigmatized by the inhabitants of the right bank of Rouen is not, as much, by those of the left: the first systematically locate the low form in the stigmatized places, whereas the second do not.

Depending on the direction in which the arrows point, two divergent attitudes are brought to light: the speakers from one riverbank accept one form of speech as their own, or they refuse it and return it to the other bank. The visual analysis, then, shows that the inhabitants of the left bank project onto the other bank all of the endogenous forms (FRN/FRC/FRV) but paradoxically consider the normed form as external to their city. The inhabitants of the right bank entirely locate the normed form in their social space, reject for themselves the forms perceived as less standardized (FRC and FRV), and project them onto the left bank of the city.

4. Conclusion

It is obviously difficult to conclude on a methodology. It is very tempting to say the validity of the process is contained within the results. Our research projetc intended to produce a methodology that was not unique to urban sociolinguistics, but it reveals that a methodology combining the social evaluation of verbal samples and the measurement of attitudes could be appropriate in accounting for the complex encounters between several representations of urban space. Being an inhabitant of a city, from within its limits, entails, among other things, the ability to organize a place as linked to one's own identity feeling, to found a social territory where the relationships with others is related to ways of speaking.

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[1] The presentation of the results appears in particular in Bulot T. (1996, 1988a and 1998b).

[2] I.e. how they make sense of the perception of a linguistic space through the perception of the various markers and reference points.

[3] Without entering too far into a complete definition of the term «territory» (see, in particular, Tizon P., 1996), I perceive it as social territory founded at the same time on material realities, places and representations (what one says of these places and precisely what one says one speaks in these places).

[4] Urban speech oscillates constantly between vehicularity and identity (Calvet L.J., 1994).

[5] In particular one will find in the regional forms a pronunciation of personal pronouns (third person feminine singular, *elle*), as in /a/ in place of /ɛ/ in /alɛparti/ instead of /ɛlɛparti/.

[6] To go back to the distinction made by Nicolas Tsekos between *attitudes linguistiques* and *attitudes langagières*, it is not only a question of collecting the attitudes concerning the language as a system, but especially of those which relate to linguistic practices as markers of a categorization of reality (Tsekos N. 1996: 27-28.).

[7] The research undertaken in Rouen is currently used as a reference for similar studies in three other cities: Athens, Berlin, and Venice, with respectively Nicolas Tsekos (University of Rouen), Sybille Grosse (University of Potsdam), and Gabrielle Gamberini (University of Venice). It is also useful for other towns of Upper Normandy: Le Havre, Evreux, and Dieppe.

[8] I recently (Bulot T, 1998b) proposed a definition of this concept envisaged under the two-way rapport between linguistic mobility and social mobility in the urban situation in these terms: « (la) ***topolectisation*** (est) *une mise en mots des lieux corrélée à l'espace, au temps et au changement social de sous-communautés urbaines, de groupes posés en discours comme distincts mais par ailleurs potentiellement identiques car liés à l'identification à ce même lieu.*».

[9] The parameters of sampling were as follows: each subject was to be between 18 and 25 years old, to have a homogeneous level of education (either in the final year at Lycee [senior in high school] or in the first year of an undergraduate course), to be respectively located either left or right bank of Rouen, to be French-speaking without dialect background, and to be a native or resident of one of the two banks (including the agglomeration).
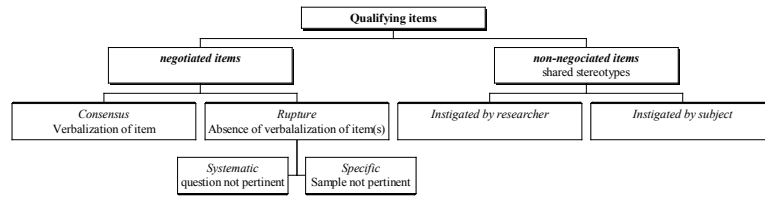
[10] It is question here of the **paradigm of evaluation of the speaker** introduced by W.E. Lambert, which consists of having the subjects listen to verbal samples differentiated by linguistic elements only. According to Lambert (1967: 91-109), two processes are then in play: **identification** of a speaker as pertaining to a group, and **elicitation** of the stereotypes of this group. In fact, other research works are and have been inspired by this type of methodology, including these, among others: Comiti, J.M. (1991), Lafontaine, D. (1986), Moreau, M.L. (1992).

[11] The text, inspired by the dispatch of a press agency, makes it possible to reveal pronunciations marked on a regional level, such as (regional/standard): /gʲɑrd/ for /gard/ (gardes) or /rwã/ for /ruã/ (Rouen).

[12] In fact, the recordings FRH (non-regional French of Rouen) and FRE (French of Rouen with a foreign, even strange, accent) are to be put aside for the benefit of the general

methodology in this type of data collection: the first band is of a partly Southern French pronunciation and the second of a Greek pronunciation intermingled with the local forms.

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                        ┌──────────────────┐
                        │  Qualifying items│
                        └──────────────────┘
              ┌─────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────┐
              │ negotiated items│      │ non-negociated items │
              │                 │      │  shared stereotypes  │
              └─────────────────┘      └──────────────────────┘
   ┌───────────────┐ ┌───────────────────────────┐ ┌──────────────────────┐ ┌──────────────────────┐
   │   Consensus   │ │         Rupture           │ │Instigated by researcher│ │ Instigated by subject│
   │Verbalization  │ │ Absence of verbalalization│ │                        │ │                      │
   │   of item     │ │      of item(s)           │ │                        │ │                      │
   └───────────────┘ └───────────────────────────┘ └──────────────────────┘ └──────────────────────┘
        ┌──────────────────┐ ┌──────────────────┐
        │   Systematic     │ │    Specific      │
        │question not      │ │Sample not        │
        │  pertinent       │ │ pertinent        │
        └──────────────────┘ └──────────────────┘
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[14] These diagrams are known as of the radar type under Microsoft Excel.

[15] I.e. at the moment when this article is written.

[16] This hierarchy is as follows: downtown (considered as center right bank of Rouen), Bois Guillaume (middle-class community, right bank), Rouen St-.Sever (center left bank), Darnetal (working-class community, right bank), Les Sapins (a district considered a deprived quarter of the right bank but often associated with the left in the representations).