



Spanish Borrowings Preserved in the Toponymy of Aïn Témouchent, Algeria

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Submitted

04/12/2024

Accepted

27/05/2025

Published

01/06/2025

Abstract: This study explores the enduring influence of Spanish toponyms in the region of Aïn Témouchent, Algeria, highlighting their role as cultural and historical markers. Through ethnographic and dialectological research, the paper inventories Spanish-derived place names preserved in local speech, despite official efforts to rename them. The study reveals how these toponyms, often phonetically and morphologically adapted, reflect the region's history of Spanish migration and language contact. Data were collected from oral testimonies, archival sources, and fieldwork, focusing on beaches, coasts, islands, capes, and urban areas. Findings indicate that these names are deeply embedded in the collective memory, serving as emotional identity markers for the inhabitants. The research underscores the resilience of Spanish toponyms, their socio-cultural significance, and their transmission across generations, offering insights into the intangible heritage of western Algeria. It will also demonstrate that this fragile and latent richness, due to the absence of inventory, most often refers to mythical narratives that reflect a rich cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Spanish heritage; Language and cultural speech; Spanish toponyms; language contact*

1. INTRODUCTION

Place names serve as linguistic fossils, preserving the traces of historical migrations, cultural exchanges, and societal transformations. This study examines the Spanish toponyms embedded in the speech of Aïn Témouchent, Algeria—a region that once functioned as a contact zone between Spanish settlers and local communities. Besides, it emerges from extensive research dedicated to documenting the Spanish toponyms preserved in the linguistic practices of Aïn Témouchent's inhabitants. These toponyms, though often phonetically and morphologically adapted through processes like assimilation, hybridization, and lexical blending, remain enduring markers of a shared past. By documenting these

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names, this research not only illuminates a neglected dimension of Algeria's intangible cultural heritage but also underscores the resilience of linguistic memory amid shifting socio-political landscapes.

The linguistic landscape of Aïn Témouchent, a coastal region in north-western Algeria, bears indelible traces of its multicultural past, particularly through the preservation of Spanish toponyms, thus the choice of this region as a case study is deliberate. Historically, the region was a hub of cross-cultural interaction, particularly during the Spanish colonial presence (1831–1936), and its toponymic traditions still reflect this legacy. Through oral testimonies from elderly residents, fishermen, and farmers—coupled with archival research, including French colonial records, municipal archives, and audiovisual materials—this study reconstructs the origins, adaptations, and enduring significance of these place names.

Beyond linguistic analysis, this work highlights how toponyms function as vessels of collective identity. Passed down generations, they encode tacit knowledge of land use, trade, and coexistence, resisting erasure even as globalization homogenizes local lexicons. By interrogating their etymological roots and socio-cultural roles, this paper aims to: (1) preserve a vanishing heritage by documenting Spanish toponyms preserved in local speech, (2) demonstrate the interplay between language and identity by evaluating their socio-cultural role as identity markers, drawing on ethnographic data from oral testimonies, and (3) advocate for policies that protect such toponymic diversity as a resource for education and cultural tourism.

In doing so, this article bridges gaps between onomastics, historical linguistics, and anthropology, offering a model for similar studies in multilingual contact zones across the Mediterranean.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Characteristics of Aïn Témouchent speech community

An examination of Aïn Témouchent Arabic dialect reveals a remarkable linguistic equilibrium resulting from contact between multiple languages, including the vernacular. This multilingual characteristic stems from Algeria's history of successive invasions, representing significant sociolinguistic phenomena. Aïn Témouchent society is inherently bilingual, with community members demonstrating varying degrees of proficiency in multiple languages - ranging from active to passive bilingualism (Crystal, D., 2018). In fact, the linguistic landscape of Aïn Témouchent typically incorporates three or more

languages, rendering the local vernacular a multilingual or specifically a trilingual dialect heavily influenced by loanwords. The accompanying tables illustrate representative loanwords from the three major historical invasions that have most profoundly influenced.

The significant linguistic variation observed in Aïn Témouchent today at all levels of language can likely be attributed to prolonged historical contact with imperial powers, particularly during the Spanish and French colonizations, which profoundly influenced the region's linguistic landscape. Additionally, socio-cultural factors shape speech patterns in Aïn Témouchent, leading speakers to adjust their verbal behaviour based on the addressee, setting, topic, age, and other contextual factors—unlike the sociolinguistic dynamics found in broader Algerian speech communities.

Interestingly, linguistic variation in Aïn Témouchent is less tied to socioeconomic status; speakers tend to use similar language regardless of social standing. Instead, differences emerge primarily along ethnic lines, age groups, and, to some extent, gender.

Unlike the other speech communities, the speech community in region of Aïn Témouchent is divided into three distinct dialects:

- The dialect of Aïn Témouchent city which regroups the cities of Sidi Ben Adda, Oued El Kihel, Chaabat El Leham, El Malah, Terga, Ouled Boudjemâa, Hassi El Ghella, El Messaid, El Amria, and Bouzedjar. This dialect is close to the Oranese dialect. It evolved gradually, shaped by centuries of conquest—from the Spanish (1505–1518) and Ottomans (1515–1830) to the French (1830–1962). Though all left their mark, the earliest influences forged a linguistic legacy that persists to this day.

- The dialect of Béni Saf is characterized by unique pronunciation and vocabulary, setting it apart from other regional varieties. This dialect incorporates elements from multiple languages, including French and Spanish. Notably, individuals from outside the region can often identify Béni Saf residents based on certain linguistic traits, consisting in a particular rhythm and intonation.

One of the most striking features of this community is the frequent use of Spanish, which marks their speech as different from that of other cities. Interestingly, Spanish words and phrases appear so naturally in daily conversation that speakers often employ them unconsciously.

- The dialect of Oulhaça El-Gheraba vernacular exhibits distinct linguistic patterns that differ from those of Aïn Témouchent city proper. Geographically situated between Aïn Témouchent and Tlemcen provinces, Oulhaça dialect represents a subtle hybrid of these two regional varieties. While these differences

may not be immediately apparent, they become noticeable in direct linguistic exchanges between Oulhaça and Aïn Témouchent speakers. The table below illustrates select lexical variations between the Oulhaça Arabic dialect and Aïn Témouchent Arabic dialect.

2.2. Onomastics

According to Dauzat A., onomastics is “a systematic research into the etymology of proper names” (1994: p07) which is sometimes divided into anthroponymy (concerning proper names of people) and toponymy (concerning names of places). This science studies proper names in all their forms, focusing on the etymology of their formation and their use(s) across languages and societies. It aims to research their meaning, their history, their evolution and their impact on societies. It is thus any study “relating to, or connected with naming [...] consisting or dealing with names” (Little, William, *et al.*, 1980: p1448). Generally speaking, it indicates that the category of proper name includes first names, family names, names of dynasties, names of peoples as well as geographical names. On the one hand, this branch of onomastics highlights the identity, history, geography, sociology and tangible and intangible heritage of: countries, cities, wadis, rivers, tribes, etc.

2.3. Toponymy

Toponymy, is a word derived from the Greek *tópos* (place) and *ónoma* (name), encompasses “the toponyms of a country or district as a subject of study.” (Little, William, *et al.*, 1980: p2328). It is also a branch of onomastics: the science that studies proper names of all kinds. In other words, toponymy is the name of a locality, a region or another part of the earth's surface, in opaque natural features such as cities, artificial streams.

2.4. Language contact

It would be more appropriate to speak of language contact and mixed languages than of language contact only, because in this type of linguistic situation (that of mixed languages), the result is not only through contact but also through the fusion of languages (Chambers, J. K., 2004). Language contact is the primary factor of lexical exchange between the foreign language and the host language. This exchange takes place most of the time in the urban environment leading to the appearance of linguistic borrowings.

2.5. Linguistic borrowing

Linguistic borrowing is one of the direct consequences of language contact, it occurs when: “a dialect 'A' uses and ends up integrating a linguistic unit or feature that previously existed in a dialect 'B' (called the source language) and that 'A' did not possess.” (Dubois, J. *et al.*, 2002: p30). It is not uncommon for a language to integrate a linguistic unit via a third language, in which case we speak of secondary borrowing or interdialectal borrowings (Morton, W., Bloomfield, *et al.*, 1965: p365). In some cases, the borrowing can be a lexical unit, a phonetic unit or even a morphosyntactic unit. As soon as a dialect calls upon these linguistic units, they take on communication functions in society, and whatever the meaning that these borrowings may take, they fulfill essential functions in the act of communication, despite their phonetic, grammatical or semantic adaptation: “sounds are converted into meaning (transcoding), which in turn are reused (transmission) the whole is obtained following the appropriation or even the deconstruction of the word and the meaning.” (Zemb, J-M., 1972: p96). The Spanish language, like Spanish culture, is considered to be the language that has had a considerable influence due to the number of lexical units (Chami, A., 2018: p5) used in the dialect of western Algeria just after the French language.

3. Historical Framework

Contrary to what some may believe, the influence of the Spanish language on Algerian speech did not take place during the Spanish conquest and occupation that lasted from 1505 to 1792, but was the direct result of waves of migrants from Spain who settled in the main cities of the western coast (Ricoux, R., 1883: p59). This migratory flow occurred following:

- a. The French policy that encouraged European migration to support colonization and impose a colonial presence in the region – in 1895 the number of Spaniards reached 85,552 immigrants (Bautista, V. J., 1975: p107);
- b. The political tensions that Spain experienced between 1848 and 1850;

Besides, despite the protective measures taken by the French authorities in 1849 to stop the waves of immigration, these migrations continued without interruption towards western Algeria in general and the city of Oran in particular until 1914 (reaching a number of 99,405 immigrants) (Bonmati, F. J., 1992: p54)

Between 1919 and 1929, a significant decline in the number of Spanish immigrants was recorded due to the economic crisis that Algeria experienced, but after 1931, following the severe drought, the ineffectiveness of the republican system in improving the daily lives of the Spanish, as well as the civil war in Spain, the number of Spaniards arriving in Algeria exceeded the economic

potential of the country, making Algeria a bastion of the trend of political immigration until the end of the civil war in 1936 (Bonmati, F. J., 1992: p57).

In 1939, a group of ‘refugees’ arrived in Algeria after the capitulation of ‘Madrid’ (Figure 1). Moreover, the French authorities in Algeria did not appreciate the arrival of these Spanish ‘exiles’ in Algeria and in the city of Oran in particular where their migration was highly politicized. Their arrival in March of the same year coincided with the celebration by the mayor of Oran of the victory of ‘Francisco Franco’. The refugees were placed on probation and mobilized in camps from which they only left to work in the companies of the ‘Compagnies des Travailleurs Étrangers’, or were subject to recruitment within the ‘French Foreign Legion’ and spent five years with the French armies (Celaya, Diego Gaspar, 2012: p7), following the policy of ‘voluntary or forced recruitment’ practiced by the colonial authority in Algeria. However, after the Truce of June 22, 1940, the situation of Spanish refugees worsened due to the racist practices promulgated by the laws of Marshal Philippe Pétain's government (Charaudeau, Anne, 1992: p23-25). It should be noted here that in addition to the so-called economic immigrants who came to Algeria in search of a better life; Algeria was a destination for Spanish political refugees – Republicans – who constituted the largest group of refugees (the exiled). The latter settled in Algeria after the Second World War (Belazzouz, L., 2017: p109). Due to the political and economic conditions in which they lived and after being “convinced that the deferred struggle to restore the republic in Spain is not just an unattainable dream” (Dreyfus-Armand, G., 2013: p109), many Spanish refugees decided to leave Algeria after 1945.



Figure 1: The Stanbrook, the last Spanish refugee ship in Oran in 1939

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/etecemedios/214917873/?rb=1> (Downloaded on November 16th 2024 at 17:23)

In 1962, France announced its withdrawal from Algeria and in the same year, in anticipation of the return of a large number of Europeans from Algeria to their country of origin (including 2000 Spanish refugees). The French government did everything possible to give them all the guarantees of a stable and safe life in Algeria (Peigné, M., 2004). As a result, the ‘Spaniards of Algeria’ adopted the French position, while a few supported the National Liberation Front (Vilar, J-B., 2006: p341) and preferred to stay in Algeria where they were born and raised, and where all their property is located. Despite all the harassment imposed by the French government on the Spanish settlers (such as the withdrawal of the residence permit), most of them spontaneously sympathized with the Algerians in their struggle against the colonizer (López, M. M., 2004: p231). Even after most of the settlers left Algeria, many Spaniards decided to stay in Algeria working in the agricultural and fishing sectors until 1975 – the year of Franco's death.

4. Methodology

The work carried out on the Spanish toponyms in the region of Aïn Témouchent was done thanks to the collection of a corpus of 1500 borrowings from Spanish used in the speech of the inhabitants of the western part of Algeria aimed at inventorying, evaluating and presenting the Spanish linguistic borrowings. The research was carried out with anonymity maintained throughout, and since "consent is the cornerstone of ethical research practice" (Podesva, R. J. and Sharma, D., 2013: p14) it's worth mentioning that some participants preferred to participate anonymously. We have selected and sampled our participants according to their hometowns, sex, age, education level, and job; ensuring our study should be “generalizable, reliable, and valid.” (Moyer, G. M. and Wei, L., 2010: p29).

4.1. Study environment

The study area, the department (Wilaya) of Aïn Témouchent is located in the north-west of Algeria, (at 400 km of Algiers) with Mediterranean climate. The department of Aïn Témouchent, located in the North-West of Algeria at 35°, 11’ of western longitude and 1°, 08’ of latitude, is in the North-West of Algeria, It is limited to the East by the Wilaya of Oran, to the west by the Wilayas Tlemcen; To the south by the Wilaya of Sidi Bel Abbas. The following map shows the different study areas, represented in red (Figure 2).

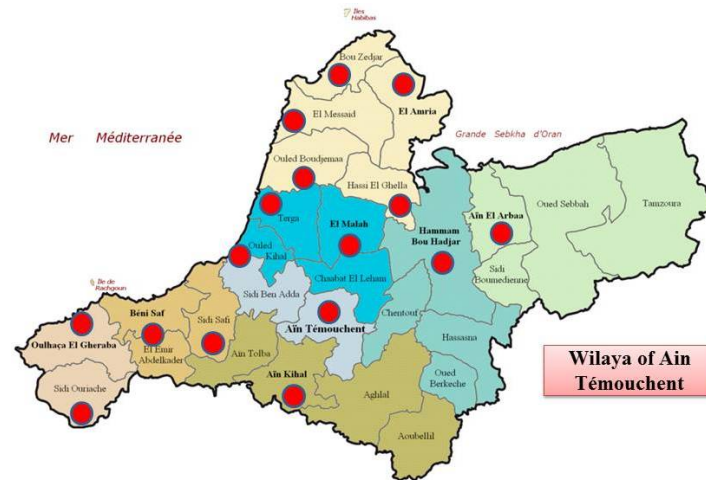


Figure 2: Map of the ethnolinguistic survey

Source: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communes_de_la_wilaya_d%27A%C3%AFn_T%C3%A9mouchent

4.2. Population sample

The conduction of any research requires the use of certain methods to verify either the exactness of the claimed hypothesis, the existence or the nonexistence of relations between variables, or even the effectiveness or the efficiency of an experiment within the research. Accordingly, one of the main methods is sampling. According to Stevens R. E., *et al.*, sampling “consists of selecting some part of a population to observe, so that one may estimate something about the whole population” (2006: p01).

4.3. Gender of membership and target population

In the region of Aïn Témouchent, men and women as well as children share this onomastic knowledge. The effective population size, defined as the number of individuals influencing genetic diversity and inheritance within a population (Kjellson, G., 2011, p99), is estimated in this study to be two hundred fifty (250).

- **Gender:** Both sexes

- **Age range and means:** They are between 12 and 87 years-old, no matter if they are literate or illiterate.

- **Ethnicity:** All of them are living in the region of Aïn Témouchent (not obligatory natives of this part of Algeria)

5. Spanish toponyms

5.1. Beaches, shores, coves and bays

To make my approach more logical, I have classified the place names according to their category, starting with beaches and coves, shores, bays, islands

and islets, sea capes, and finally known rocks, going from west to east. Then I moved cities and finally intramural place names.

- **Madrid:** It is From the Spanish ‘Madrid’ proper name given to the capital of Spain (Forodona, E. P., 2007). This beach is located west of the city of ‘Béni Saf’ and east of the seaside town of ‘Rachgoune’. The name has never been changed and no attempt to ‘re-toponomize’ this beach has been made by the authorities.
- **bahaburro:** It is composed of the Spanish words ‘bajar’ meaning ‘to descend’ and ‘burro’ meaning ‘mule’. It was named thus because the only possible access to this beach was on the back of mules for Spanish families who sought a little privacy. This beach, located east of ‘Madrid’ and four nautical miles west of ‘Béni saf’, remained wild and unsupervised with the only possible access being a path descending the cliff or by boat. During the black decade it was named ‘Lkhwidem’ (the servant or the slave in dialectal Arabic) in allegory to the presence of a black rock in the shape of a black slave accompanied by her daughter, but all the natives know it under the name of ‘Bakhabourrou’.
- **Playa Bolitchi:** It is compound name made up of the Spanish words ‘playa’ meaning ‘beach’ and ‘boliche’ a type of small fishing net. Located three nautical miles west of ‘Béni Saf’, this beach has remained wild and unsupervised with only one possible access by sea. I have had two versions of its name: the first is that the Spaniards frequented this beach to fish using small nets called ‘boliche’, and the second version is that the fishermen came to this beach in order to clean their nets (boliche).
- **Plassinda or ‘Playa Sinda:** regarding its etymology, I had three different oral versions: The first version is that the name is composed of ‘playa’ meaning ‘beach’ and ‘senda’ meaning ‘track’ since the only access to this beach is by a narrow track; the second version is that it is composed of ‘playa’ and ‘sin salida’ meaning the dead-end beach because it can only be accessed from its eastern side; and the third version gave ‘playa de la hacienda’ composed of ‘playa’ and ‘de la hacienda’ literally the ‘farm beach’ because the beach is located below an old Spanish farm. This beach has remained wild but is very popular because of its turquoise water and fine sand. It is also accessible by the sea.
- **Playa Captan:** It is composed of the words ‘playa’ and ‘captáne’, literally ‘the captain’s beach’. This beach, of which only a small piece of sand remains, takes its name from the fact that it is located just opposite the old harbor office

(capitainerie), now the maritime inspection of 'Béni Saf'. It is located between the south-eastern end of the port of 'Béni Saf' and 'Sidi Boucif beach'.

– **La Playa:** It is pronounced with the Spanish definite article 'La'. This beach is also located in the coastal town of 'Béni Saf'. Also known as 'Sidi Boucif', due to the presence of the mausoleum of the town's patron saint 'Sidi Boucif' which overlooks it. The natives differentiate between this beach and main beach (La Plage du Puits') by adding the definite article 'La' to the word playa.

– **Playamorro:** Literally the Moor's beach, a name composed of the Spanish words 'playa' and 'moro', meaning Arab and Muslim inhabiting North Africa (Forodona, E. P., 2007: p856). This cove, located east of Béni Saf between 'Sidi Boucif' and 'Playa Pedra Khoubza', has remained wild and unguarded. It was named so because it was the only cove in the region of 'Béni Saf' where the natives (Arabs) were allowed to bathe during the colonial period. Today, non-natives call it 'Sidi Ali' because of a water source located on the path leading to the cove, named after it. In his book 'Il était une fois Béni Saf' (Once upon a time Béni Saf), the writer Brahami Omar (2014: p64) refers to the fact that this beach was named Playa Molino' (The Mill Beach), this toponym no longer exists.

– **Camerata:** I got two oral versions: The first one says that it is a phonetic deformation of 'cama de rata', literally 'the rat litter – bed' since this beach, was known by the proliferation of rats. The second oral version says that it was named in honor of the iron ore cargo ship 'Camerata' (Figure 3) which first anchored in front of this beach. Accessible by road, it was renamed 'Sidi Djelloul' because of the presence of the mausoleum of the saint 'Sidi Djelloul', (a weekly visit place for all followers, located at the entrance to the beach), but the locals still call it 'Camerata'.

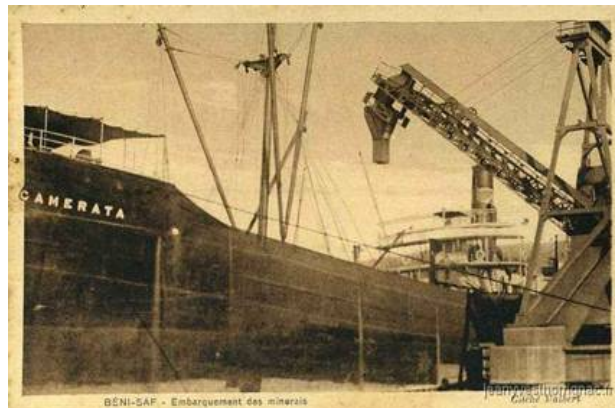


Figure 3: The iron ore cargo ship 'Camerata'
Source: Credit photo ©Cliché Malber (SD)

- **Playa Morta:** This toponym is composed of the Spanish words ‘playa’ and ‘muerta’, literally the dead beach. It was named so because of its shape enclosed in the cliff which makes it a calm beach in all weathers. It is located to the east of ‘Béni Saf’ with only access to the N96A national road. It is supervised in summer but without any amenities. It was toponymized ‘Marsat Errouaouat’ by the authorities, but it is better known by holidaymakers as ‘Plage Nedjma’.
- **Plage Rio Salado:** This name is composed of the Spanish words ‘rio’, river, and ‘salado’, salty. This name comes from the fact that the river called ‘Rio Salado’ (El Oued El Malah) flows into this beach whose official name is ‘Terga’.
- **Pinika Plage:** Name composed of the Spanish word ‘pino’, meaning pine and the suffix ‘-ika’ used as a diminutive in the Spanish language (Moussaoui, M., 2004). The name literally means ‘the little pine’. According to the natives of the city of Bousfer, this beach was named so because of a small pine forest that no longer exists.

5.2. Islands and islets

- **Trizilia:** This is a phonetic assimilation of the Spanish words ‘Tres Islas’ (literally: the three islands), these are three small islets located east of Cape Milonia to the north of ‘Ouardania’ beach, they are known by cartographers as the Islets of Cape Milonia (Gueydon, J., 2005: p56).
- **Lilanegra:** This name is composed of ‘isla’, meaning island, and ‘négra’ meaning ‘black’, (literally the black island), it is an islet that emerges from the water twelve nautical miles east of Béni Saf north of Honaine. Non-natives of the region call it ‘l’Île Noire’, it is also called ‘Île Mokrane’ which is none other than the phonetic deformation of ‘Île Mokreum’ (Gueydon, J., 2005: p56).
- **Cigala:** It is derived from the Spanish, ‘cigarra de mar’ in reference to the cicada of the seas, a crustacean of the lobster family (Forodona, E. P., 2007). This islet is located opposite the west bank of Rachgoune beach, its name comes from its shape strangely resembling a cicada of the seas and also from the proliferation, in the past, of this crustacean (*Scyllarides latus*). The holidaymakers (non-natives) call it ‘le Chameau’ (the camel).
- **Layela:** This toponym is derived from the Spanish ‘la isla’ meaning the island. It is one of the main islands of the coast after the ‘Habibas Islands’ (Islands located off the Magagh Beach, commune of Ain El Kerma – Oran).

All the natives of the region nickname it 'Layela', the holidaymakers mean 'l'Île de Rachgoune'.

– **Lila Plana:** It is also known as 'Lila Paloma'. This toponym is composed of the Spanish words 'isla' and 'plana', literally 'the Flat Island'. This almost island takes its name from its flat relief shape with a height not exceeding 18 meters (Gueydon, J., 2005: p54). Officially, it is called the Flat Island.

5.3. Capes and sea landmarks

5.3.1. The sea capes

Capes are plots of land that extend into the sea. A large number of capes and marine landmarks on the western Algerian coast have preserved their Spanish names. These capes still serve as landmarks for fishermen to navigate during fishing trips and campaigns (day and night). It is also important to note that due to the absence of the sound /p/ (voiceless bilabial plosive) in the majority of language habits, this sound has been replaced by the sound /b/ (voiceless bilabial plosive).

– **Cabo nowel:** This is a name composed of cape and a phonetic deformation of 'Noé'. This cape was named in homage to the Spanish fisherman who discovered it. This cape is located north of the port of Honaïne. It is officially listed under the official name of 'Cap Noé'.

– **Cabo Gordo:** This name is composed of the Spanish words 'capo' and 'gordo', meaning 'big cape', this cape is located east of Béni Saf between the beach of Sidi Ali and Sidi Djelloul. It is also called 'Cap Gros' or 'Cap Oulhassa'.

– **Cabo Punta Caballo:** This toponym is composed of 'capo', meaning 'Cape', 'Punta', meaning 'point', and 'caballo', meaning horse. Literally this gives cape of the point of the horse. It is located east of 'El Hillal Beach' (formerly 'Oued El Hallouf').

– **Cabo Cigala:** This name literally means: the cape of the cicada. This toponym actually comes from a false etymology because it is not the crustacean 'the cicada' or the insect 'the grasshopper', but the French proper name 'Sigale', whose official name, 'Cap Sigale'. This point is located 32 kilometers east of 'Cap Figalo' between 'Bouzedjar' and 'Cap Blanc'.

5.3.2. Marine landmarks

These markers allow fishermen, whether on large fishing boats or just small-scale fishing boats, to find their way at sea day and night.

- **Berranco:** The name comes from the Spanish ‘barranco’ meaning slope or ravine (Forodona, E. P., 2007). This ravine is located on the eastern side of ‘Sassel’ beach, east of ‘Béni Saf’ and is used as a marine landmark by the fishermen of the region.
- **Bocana:** (literally, the mouth). This is the gateway giving access to the port of Béni Saf, located to the east of the port. Fishermen use this name to announce their position in relation to the port (putting in and/or leaving).
- **Faro:** Literally, the word means ‘the lighthouse’ (Forodona, E. P., 2007). It refers to the lighthouse located at the top of ‘Rachgoune Island’ (Layela), used by sailors at night as a landmark. This lighthouse is distinguished from other lighthouses by the color and frequency of appearance and disappearance of the light beam, namely, red beam giving two flashes every 10 seconds (ONMS). Unlike the other lighthouses on the Algerian coast, it is the only one that fishermen call ‘faro’.
- **Farora:** The name means the small ‘the lighthouse’ (Forodona, E. P., 2007). This landmark is none other than the ‘bocana’ of the port of Béni Saf with its two red and green lights that indicate to boats the entrance of the port. This landmark is also called ‘**punta molé**’ by the elders of Béni Saf (this name certainly comes from what the elders call ‘la palabra negra’, a type of patois specific to Béni Saf).
- **Lbenk:** Name coming from the Spanish ‘obenque’, meaning wrapped, covered with (Forodona, E. P., 2007). This name is given to a rock that was once visible on the surface of the water. Today it is located 30 meters under water, west of the ‘Habibas Islands’ opposite ‘Sassel’ beach.
- **Montiterga:** Literally, the name means ‘the mountain of Terga’, this name is given to the cliff that overlooks the beach of ‘Terga’ (Rio Salado). The cliff is used as a marine landmark to indicate the position of fishing boats or to turn towards the open sea.
- **Ratchéra:** This toponym probably belongs to the ‘palabra negra’. It is a name given to a place near the ‘Habibas Islands’, it allows the sailor (fishermen) to find their way and give an exact position of the boat’s location when launching nets or when the Global Positioning System (GPS) of the boat breaks down.
- **Révéra:** Name derived from the Spanish ‘rivera’, meaning short water (De Echegaray, D. E., 1889: p197). It is the name of a marine landmark next to the port of ‘Bouzedjar’, used by fishermen to navigate. According to an informant (B. Krime, 85 years old) who rubbed shoulders with the Spanish, this name was that of the only bar and brothel in the region run by a Spanish woman, a

place of debauchery where all the sailors (Arabs and Spanish) met after a week of exhausting fishing. The bar no longer exists, but the place has preserved its name. Another source informed me that this building in the shape of a boat's prow was built by a Spaniard for one of his two sons, the back of the boat being in 'Arzew' (Figures 4 and 5). Unfortunately, the villa of 'Bouzedjar' was demolished by its owner in 2021.



Figure 4: Riviera 'Bouzedjar'

Credit photo: ©Abdelkader Kechiti (2019)



Figure 5: Riviera 'Arzew'

Credit photo: ©author unknown (1948)

– **Vivario:** Name derived from the Spanish 'vivero' which means 'the fishpond'. For the natives of Béni Saf, this word designates the aquarium of Béni Saf, or more precisely the tower of the aquarium which is visible from twenty nautical miles, thus indicating to fishermen that they are facing the bay of Béni Saf.

5.4. Sea rocks and fishing zones

5.4.1. Sea rocks

The following rock names represent the main names of rocks used for rod and line fishing or as diving boards by young people on the coast.

- **Pedra Lansa:** Literally the 'rock of the spear'. This name is composed of 'piedra' (the stone) and 'lanza', meaning 'the spear'. It takes its name from its spear shape. It is located west of Rachgoune Island. It is frequented by fishermen and scuba divers.
- **Pedra Plata:** Literally, the 'flat stone'. This rock is located east of 'La Plage du Puits' (main beach of Béni Saf) just after the aquarium of Béni saf. Very popular due to its large surface, some call it 'Pierre Plate'.
- **Pedra Del Camello:** It is derived from the Spanish 'Piedra del Camello', literally the 'camel stone'. This rock is located east of 'La Plage du Puits'

between the Aquarium of 'Béni Saf' and 'Pedra Plata'. Having the shape of a crouching camel, today's youth prefer to call it 'Le Chameau' (the Camel).

– **Pedra Mariya:** It is a name composed of 'pedra', stone, and the phonetic deformation of the Spanish word 'amarillo', meaning yellow. It is so called because of the yellow colour of the mineral that composes it. It is located in the beach of 'Sidi Boucif'.

– **Pedra Paloma:** Literally, 'the pigeon rock', this rock is located between 'Playamorro' and 'Playa Pedra Khobza'. Very popular, it is used as a diving board by beginners. It takes its name from the presence of dozens of pigeons which land on it.

– **Santo:** Literally the 'saint', it is a rock that emerges from the water and stands like a pike (Figure 7). According to the natives of the region, its shape recalls that of a saint praying for the return of the fishermen. It is located at the base of 'Cape Figalo' between 'Plage Sbiâat' and the port of 'Bouzedjar'. I heard young people from the region calling it 'Le Monsieur' (The Mister), others 'Enab' (from the Arabic 'ennab, meaning the canine).



Figure 7: Santo (Source: Credit photo © Abdelkarim Chami (August 2024))

– **Lmina:** Name coming from the Spanish 'la mina' meaning 'the mine'. These are cavities dug into the rock used in the exploitation of copper ore in the region. This site is located east of 'Bouzedjar' between 'Bouzedjar Plage' and 'Plage Madagh'.

5.4.2. Fishing zones

– **Séca Byuda:** This name is composed of the Spanish words 'seca' meaning 'dry' and 'viuda' meaning 'widow' (the letter 'v' being pronounced /b/ in Spanish). Literally the name means the 'widow's reef'. This rock, very frequented by fishermen, is located opposite 'Sassel beach'.

– **Séca Blanca:** Literally the 'White Reef', this name comes from the fact that this reef takes on a white colour due to the waves and currents that cause

the formation of (white) foam on its surface. It is located west of 'Rachgoune Island' (Layela) and is frequented by lots of fishermen.

- **Séca Nweva:** This name comes from the Spanish 'nueva' meaning the 'recent' reef. This reef took its name from the fact that it was recently discovered. It is located west of 'El Hillal Beach'.
- **Séca Khaimi' [*haymi*]:** Literally 'the reef of Jaimi', this name was given to this reef in honor of the Spanish fisherman 'Jaimi' who first discovered it and who fished there all year round. It is located north of 'El Hillal Beach'.

5.5. Cities

I have found one Spanish toponym related to a city.

- **Rio Salado:** This name is composed of the Spanish words 'rio', river, and 'salado', salty. This village was renamed 'El Malah'. It is located 11 kilometers northeast of the city of Aïn Témouchent. This name was given by the Spanish settlers who settled in this region in 1857.

5.6. Intramuros toponyms

- **Barawar:** From the Spanish 'abaloar' is the place at the water's edge from where ships are pulled in order to place them on the quay of the port of Béni Saf.
- **Bokamina:** Mine entrance in 'Béni Saf'
- **Circo:** 'Circo' or Sidi Boucif district, Béni-Saf, most of the young inhabitants think the name comes from the Spanish 'circo' (meaning 'circus'). In fact the name is a phonetic distortion of the Spanish word 'zoco', meaning the souk, since during the French colonisation, the place was a weekly Arab market known as 'the souk'.
- **Cuevas:** Literally the caves, these are caves dug into the rock in the cliffs of Sidi Boucif beach (Figure 8). The caves contain containing rooms in a row. They served as dwellings for Spanish miners and fishermen who could not afford housing in the city.



Figure 8: Cuevas

Source: Credit photo-screenshot © L'escalier de Béni Saf (July 2024)

Web link:

https://www.facebook.com/aomarbrahami1954/videos/588168781759315/?locale=hi_IN

- **Fitri:** It is from Spanish 'filtro' (meaning the filter). It refers to a neighborhood in the city of 'Béni Saf'. Formerly, it was a huge filter used to purify the air in the galleries of the iron mines.
- **Fitri:** It is from the Spanish 'El filtre'. An area in the south east of Béni Saf.
- **Fontagera:** It is from the Spanish 'fuente + higuera' meaning (Literally, the fountain of fig trees'). It is a place near the new urban area (la zhune) in Béni Saf.
- **Gliziya:** Literally, it means 'the church'. It is used to refer to 'mosque' in the area of Sidi Boucif.
- **Garéça:** From the Spanish 'garita', meaning shelter of a sentry. Formerly, it was a check point found between the iron mine and the port of Béni Saf to and point out the number of iron ore rods entering the port.
- **Kalaganiya:** It is derived from the Spanish 'cala gallina', a place that was formerly used for loading ships carrying iron ore. Even if the crane no longer exists, people still use this name to refer to the same place.)
- **Kargawer:** It is from the Spanish 'cargador' (literally 'the charger'), a place formerly used to load ships carrying iron ore. Even if the crane no longer exists, people still use this name to refer to the same place in the port of Béni Saf.
- **Kurba:** From the Spanish 'curva' (Literally the 'curve'), it is a place the outside the wall surrounding the port of Béni Saf, where children gather to swim and frequented by fishermen.
- **Lkubaniya:** From the Spanish 'La compañía' meaning 'the factory', the name given to the offices of the management of the 'FERPHOS' company,

specialized in iron ore exploration. The mine was closed but the place kept its name.

- **Lmarina:** The port of Béni Saf
- **Lpinopako:** Is composed of the Spanish words 'pino + paco' (meaning the 'yellow pine') a small forest near the new urban area (la zhune) in Béni Saf.
- **Lpuha:** It is from the Spanish 'puja' meaning 'auction'. It refers to the market where fish are sold wholesale in the port of Béni Saf.
- **Lyerro:** It is from the Spanish 'hierro' meaning iron. It refers to a bridge made of railway alloys. Today it is a pile of iron in the area called 'Al-Maqam' located in the city of 'Béni Saf'.
- **Placeta:** A name of Catalan origin (Forodona, E. P., 2007). It represents a small square, located in the center of 'Aïn Témouchent'. It was named 'Placeta' by the Spanish during the French occupation of Algeria.
- **Şalawer:** It is derived from the Spanish 'salar' (add salt) and the suffix – war (referring to the action of). It is the former fish processing and canning factory in Béni Saf (Plage du Puits). The factory was closed but the place kept its name.

5.7. Extramuros toponyms

- **Hwabra:** It is the name of a farm in Béni Saf, named after its Spanish owner, 'Jober'.
- **Kameraṭa:** This is the name given to a small forest located to the east of Béni Saf and overlooking the small beach of 'Camérata' ('Sidi Djelloul').
- **Lbuher:** From the Spanish 'agujero' (meaning the hole) It names a hole found on the eastern side of 'Béni Saf'.
- **Lkampō:** It is from the Spanish 'El campo' meaning 'the camp', referring to a place near 'Sidis Brek' in Béni Saf. It was a gathering place for strangers and Bedouins who were called by the nickname of 'Genté de Fuera' meaning 'the simpleton'.
- **Lkompeşor:** It is from the Spanish 'compressor' (Literally the air pump). It refers to two places near Béni Saf. The first is in the place called 'Ghar El Baroud' (Figure 10) and the second is towards the top of the beach of 'Sidi Jelloul'. Formerly, it was chimney used to pump fresh into the galleries of the iron mines.



Figure 10: The Compressor

Source: Credit photo © Abdelkarim Chami (July 2024)

- **Lpwertō:** A small port on the eastern side of the isle called ‘layela’.

6. Discussion and analysis of the results

In parallel with the etymological research of these toponyms, it became necessary to consider all the changes that had taken place in these words over the years or even while the name was being studied and this by the attitudes of the speakers: new uses in new contexts and new nuances in the connotations that, in the meantime, had taken place giving new meanings. For example, cigala (cigarra? or Sigala?). Besides, 85% of the listed toponyms are in Béni Saf and its surroundings. This is probably due to two factors. The first is the fact that this city brought together the fishing, mining and agricultural activities. Unlike the other cities in the region whose main activity was limited to vine agriculture. The second factor concerns the fact that the city of Béni Saf remained landlocked and closed in on itself without any main activity other than fishing.

The study reveals the following results:

- A number of nicknames are the result of social convention.
- Contrary to what characterizes the proper name: its “great morphological and semantic stability” (Benramdane F., 2007, in Cheriguen F., 2007: p38), the Spanish toponyms were subject to morphological and phonological alterations.
- All the toponyms mentioned in this article refer to a unique referent therefore, they do not generate other meanings since “the dominant idea is that the proper name is asemantic” (Grévisse and Goosse, 1993). In fact, they are “meaningless words which acquire meaning upon contact.” Wilmet (2010: p78)
- Almost all interviewees answered that they prefer to use Spanish Geographical Names. This is due (according to the participants) to the fact that they grew up

with these place names and when using place names they feel more like these, "Témouchenti", "Béni Safian", or even if many of them tell us that they prefer Arabic names; because "geographical names are associated with human actions and reflect the identity of the one who uses them. They carry historical, cultural and geographical references" (Tilmatine, Mohand, 2010: p65).

- I found myself in front of a situation of onomatopoey characterized by the presence of place names with common characteristics in their construction where the same word fits into the composition of several place names: piedra plata, piedra picou, piedra khoubza ..., seca blanca, seca khaimi, seca lanza, seca hormiga ..., playa sinda, playa bilitchi, playa morro, playa morta, playa captan, ... This is due in my opinion to the fact that there is no substitute for these words, even if sometimes the word cabo (cape) is substituted by the word punta (point), the only exception noted.
- Despite all the efforts made by the authorities to redevelop the coastline, these names of places have remained frozen in time due to the fact that they are not only historically established, but also socio-cultural markers that reveal a linguistic or ethnolinguistic dynamic and creativity.
- Often taken in their contexts, these toponyms take on new connotations, new uses and new meanings. For example, in parallel with etymological and motivational research, and in order to filter the corpus, it became necessary to consider all the changes that have occurred in the words over the years or even while the name was being studied through the attitudes of the speakers: the latter can, depending on the context, change a toponym into a nickname or adjective epithet.
- Several toponyms result from the hybridization process between Spanish and dialectal Arabic or Spanish and French. This is due, in my opinion, to the fact that these place names were put in place by the natives of the region after the Spanish presence in the region. Let's not forget that 75% of the population could not read or write. It should also be remembered that speakers can contribute to generating popular place names that do not obey any defined linguistic logic, but which carry meanings of their own the collective popular consciousness.
- Apart from their (official) toponymical characters, these toponyms refer more to a wealth of intangible cultural heritage, and knowledge transmitted from generation to generation, because when asked about the fact of adopting a new name, the participants were unanimous that they prefer the existing names.
- It also happens that some places have exactly the same toponym, in particular the toponym 'Paloma' (pigeon - dovecote) which is repeated more than six times

and this because of the commonality of these places, as well as 'revera', and 'pedra plata'.

- Certain place names use the diminutive suffixes 'ika' and 'ita' to refer to small things Pinika (pino + ika). Others are portmanteaux (blend words) (Crystal, D., 2003: p54) such as plasinda (formed by playa and senda), Bakhabourro (formed by bajar and burro). Many descriptive names refer to physical peculiarities of the relief and inform about the nature of a site (blanca, negra, picou, barranco, lanza, amarilla...).
- Like many toponymical studies, many place names bear the name of their owners or inhabitants or the person who first discovered the site.
- As carriers of cultural and historical memory, the names of places carry cultural and memorial values that are fundamental to the construction of the individual and national identity.
- But unlike other knowledge related to intangible heritage, such as knowledge of medicinal plants and traditional medicine, whose custodians are the elderly, onomastic knowledge in this wilaya is not limited to a specific age or gender.

7. Future implications and recommendations

7.1. Future implications

The study on Spanish toponyms in Aïn Témouchent underscores their significance as part of Algeria's intangible cultural heritage, emphasizing the need to preserve these historical markers that reflect the region's multicultural past. The linguistic adaptations of these toponyms provide insights into language contact and dialectal evolution, calling for further research in this area. Beyond academia, these names serve as identity markers, fostering community attachment and continuity, which policymakers should consider to avoid disrupting cultural cohesion. The research also provides historical and ethnographic insights into Spanish migration and its societal impact, while highlighting opportunities to leverage these toponyms for cultural tourism, such as through bilingual signage or educational materials. Preserving oral histories associated with these names is crucial, necessitating community engagement to transmit knowledge to younger generations. Urban planning and policy initiatives should integrate traditional toponyms collaboratively, involving local stakeholders to ensure culturally sensitive outcomes. Comparative studies with other North African regions could reveal broader Mediterranean patterns of linguistic exchange. Additionally, integrating these findings into educational curricula and public awareness campaigns can promote appreciation for the region's diversity. However, challenges like globalization and modernization threaten the persistence of these

toponyms, requiring a balanced approach to safeguard cultural heritage while embracing progress. Ultimately, the study not only deepens understanding of Aïn Témouchent's unique heritage but also advocates for actionable measures across identity, tourism, and education.

7.2. Recommendations

The enduring cultural impact of the Spanish toponyms of Aïn Témouchent has led speakers to adopt them as natural elements of their linguistic heritage. These borrowings have become so deeply embedded in French and even Arabic—both phonologically and morphologically—that many third-generation speakers no longer recognize their Spanish roots. Three primary factors may account for this phenomenon:

- a. **Cultural affiliation:** Adopting these terms can signify cultural awareness and belonging (Myers-Scotton, 2006: p217).
- b. **Exotic resonance:** Words from a distinctly foreign culture often carry a sense of novelty or charm (Myers-Scotton, 2006: p217).
- c. **Linguistic absorption:** Over time, well-integrated loanwords blend seamlessly into the native lexicon, becoming indistinguishable to everyday speakers (Hruškar, Đ. & Gadelii, K., 2015: p267).

Spanish cultural influence was particularly strong between 1831 and 1936, leaving a lasting imprint on fields such as fishing, agriculture, food, fashion, and mining. Many of these terms entered local speech through direct interaction with Spanish speakers. Even today, Spanish maintains its role as a *lingua franca* in the fishing industry, and some neologisms continue to emerge from borrowed vocabulary. Unlike French, which was historically tied to prestige and elite circles, Spanish loanwords spread across all social classes, lending informal, localized prestige to everyday speech (Benrabah, 2009: p275). Though government efforts to arabize the place names, Spanish toponyms still surface in Aïn Témouchent.

One factor helps explain their persistence: the oral transmission. Younger generations sustain these toponyms through spoken language, preserving cultural ties and resisting language shift. Many speakers use these borrowings unconsciously, having learned them through oral tradition rather than formal education (Benrabah, 1999: p115).

To safeguard this linguistic heritage, we propose the creation of a specialized thesaurus categorizing Spanish borrowings by subject. As societies change, discourses from one field may encroach upon others (Breeze, 2013: p46),

potentially leading to the gradual erosion or complete disappearance of these valuable linguistic artifacts.

8. Conclusion

The Spanish toponyms in the region of Aïn Témouchent are far more than linguistic remnants; they embody a vibrant cultural and historical legacy forged through centuries of language contact and migration. Their resilience underscores their role as markers of collective memory and identity. They are not merely linguistic artifacts but vessels of intangible heritage, encoding historical narratives, occupational practices (e.g., fishing and mining), and intergenerational knowledge. This study has revealed the remarkable adaptability of these place names, and cultural tapestry, highlighting their profound significance in the collective memory and identity of the local community. These toponyms, preserved in the vernacular of local communities despite official efforts to rename them, serve as living testimonies to the region's multicultural history. By examining their etymological roots and gathering oral testimonies, the research has unveiled the rich narratives embedded in these toponyms—stories of migration, labor, and everyday life that reflect the region's diverse ethnolinguistic heritage.

These toponyms are not frozen in time but are dynamic markers of cultural identity, continually adapting through phonetic adaptations, morphological blending, and semantic shifts, these names—such as *Playa Bolitchi* (from Spanish *playa*, 'beach', and *boliche*, 'fishing net') and *Cabo Gordo* ('Large Cape')—reflect centuries of Spanish influence, migration, and language contact. Their enduring use, even among younger generations, underscores their role as powerful symbols of belonging and historical continuity. The preference for Spanish toponyms over officially imposed alternatives further illustrates a form of cultural resistance, a collective effort to preserve intangible heritage against erasure.

This study also emphasizes the urgency of documenting such linguistic phenomena before they vanish due to the tension between globalization and cultural preservation. While modernization and Arabization policies threaten to erode these toponyms, their continued use demonstrates community resistance to cultural homogenization. The study advocates for urgent documentation—such as a digital thesaurus—and integration into educational and tourism initiatives to safeguard this heritage.

The toponyms of Aïn Témouchent are more than mere labels—they are living narratives of human resilience, cultural exchange, and shared history. Moreover, they are dynamic symbols of a hybrid identity, bridging Algeria's colonial history with its contemporary multicultural reality. Future research could build on these findings by conducting comparative studies in other regions of Algeria or exploring the connections between toponyms and local folklore. Ultimately, this work serves as a call to action, urging the recognition and protection of these linguistic treasures as indispensable elements of the region's cultural patrimony, hence preservation is not just an academic endeavour but a vital act of cultural continuity, ensuring that future generations remain connected to the stories embedded in their land and language.

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10. Appendices

A transliteration system is used in this article to pronounce the words correctly; all the Arabic speech recordings used in this article have been transcribed using the symbols listed in Table 1. The three long vowels (a, i, u) are followed by the symbol >.

Table 1- Transliterating symboles

ط	ض	ص	ش	س	ز	ر	ذ	د	خ	ح	ج	ث	ت	ب	ء
t	ḍ	ṣ	š	s	z	r	ḏ	d	ḫ	ḥ	j	ṭ	t	b	ʾ
v	پ	تش	دج	ي	و	هـ	ن	م	ل	ك	ق	ف	غ	ع	ظ
v	p	tʃ	dʒ	y	w	h	n	m	l	k	q	f	g	ʕ	ḏ

Source: (Holes, C., 2018: pages viv-xv)