Children’s Literature in Translation

McMartin, Jack, Van Coillie, Jan

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Translation and the formation of a Brazilian children’s literature

Lia A. Miranda de Lima & Germana H. Pereira

Abstract
This chapter examines the historical role of translations in the constitution of Brazilian children’s literature. Resting on a systemic view informed by Antonio Candido and Itamar Even-Zohar, it provides a historical panorama of the translation of children’s literature in Brazil since the end of the nineteenth century to the present day. It also presents a brief analysis of the current state of translated literature for children in Brazil, looking particularly at books for small children. Translations are shown to be a fundamental aspect in the building of a literary tradition and in the emergence of a national canon of Brazilian works and authors.

Introduction
This chapter embraces a historical perspective in order to provide an overview of Brazilian children’s literature (BCL). Using a theoretical framework informed by the studies of Itamar Even-Zohar and the Brazilian scholar and literary critic Antonio Candido, its aim is to emphasize the historical role of translations in the constitution of a local children’s literary system and demonstrate the persistent importance of translations in the emergence and development of BCL. This historical perspective consists in examining the interrelations between literary works over time and connecting their internal, aesthetic components to the position these texts take up in a certain social context. This approach demands the integration of translated works into the reconstruction and analysis of the historical course of a national literature.¹

This chapter is organized in four parts. First, we consider the notions of ‘literary system’ and ‘formation’ of a literature according to Candido, and of ‘polysystem’ according to Even-Zohar. Second, we present a historical

overview of the first literary works for children in Brazil. Third, we focus on the period between 1930 and 1945, known as *Estado Novo* [New State], during which Brazil lived under the dictatorial regime of Getúlio Vargas. During these years, Brazil experienced significant economic and social changes that boosted the production of books for children. One particularly important change was the expansion of the educational system. Finally, adding to the already well-developed historiographical works on BCL (see Hallewell 1982; Arroyo 1990; Lajolo and Zilberman 2007; Coelho 2010), we situate foreign works in the contemporary Brazilian literary children’s system, taking as examples the books distributed by the state to nurseries and kindergartens.² Our analysis points to the centrality of translation in the development of BLC.

The literary system

Translation, alongside criticism and anthologizing, is one of the main forms of rewriting literature. It impacts the circulation of literary works, their reception, the reputation of writers and the constitution of the canon (Lefevere 1992). We understand the canon as a group of works that are “accepted as legitimate by the dominant circles within a culture and whose conspicuous products are preserved by the community to become part of its historical heritage” (Even-Zohar 1990, 16). Translation is also an instrument for universalizing literature by introducing foreign works into the receiving literary system (Casanova 2007). Therefore, the study of translations becomes imperative to a more complete understanding of a literature’s development. This point has been aptly made by scholars in the last two decades of the twentieth century, especially in the field of Descriptive Translation Studies.

Drawing on these contributions, we follow polysystem theory as formulated by Itamar Even-Zohar here. According to Even-Zohar, a literature is seldom a uni-system, but is rather a multiple system (polysystem) of activities considered by its members to be literary. In the polysystem, these members define their values in relation to one another. Such an approach allows for the examination of correlations between repertoire and system, production, products, and consumption. It rejects the idea of literature as a conglomerate of disconnected items. Translations constitute a system of their own, which connects to the polysystem via a net of cultural and verbal relations. According to Even-Zohar, translated works correlate in at least two ways: in the principles of source text selection by the target literature, and in the way translations

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² In Brazil, children attend kindergarten from birth to five years of age.
use the literary repertoire, adopting norms, behaviors and specific policies (Even-Zohar 1990, 47). Even-Zohar considers translations not as a closed system within a literary polysystem but as an active system that can assume a central or a peripheral position within a literature (ibid). In the case of the Brazilian literary system for children’s literature, translations occupied a central position at least until the 1960s and remain significant today.3

Another related theoretical perspective is that of Antonio Candido. Candido has devoted himself to the historical study of Brazilian literature, consistently in connection to literary criticism. In 1962, he published his most important work, Formação da Literatura Brasileira [Formation of Brazilian Literature]. In this book, Candido understands the literary system as the corollary of the historical shaping of a literature, which follows the phases of the first literary manifestations (single productions of little repercussion) and the early configuration of the system (the drafting of a literature as a shaped cultural fact). He calls formation the whole process of emergence and development of a literature until it becomes a system. Candido distinguishes between literary manifestations and literature as such, which constitutes a “system of works connected by common denominators, which allow recognizing the dominant tones of a phase” (Candido 2000, 23).4 This system consists of producers of literature, readers, means of distribution and circulation, and elements of style. It acts as a symbolic whole that organically integrates civilization. The system presumes a literary continuity, aesthetically punctuated by phases of rupture, surpassing, and recovering, which originate a tradition. Candido’s method consists in articulating each one of these stages, outlining a flow that allows us to picture literary phenomena in a complex way.

In his essay “The First Baudelarians” (1989), Antonio Candido uses several terms and expressions to refer to a foreign author’s position in the receiving system (in this case, Baudelaire in Brazil), in each historical moment. Candido uses the term ‘sistema receptor’ [receiving system] to refer to a literature that welcomes translations. (We have chosen to keep his expression instead of

3 In the 1940s, translations represented more than 70 percent of children’s books in Brazil. Between 1975 and 1978, the share of translations dropped to around 50 percent according to Marisa Lajolo and Regina Zilberman (2007, 121). Currently, there are no statistics regarding translated children’s literature in particular, but more general data can point to tendencies. The survey Produção e Vendas no Setor Editorial Brasileiro [Production and Sales in Brazilian Editorial Sector], carried out by the Câmara Brasileira do Livro (CBL), Sindicato Nacional dos Editores de Livros (SNEL) and Fundação Instituto de Pesquisas Econômicas (Fipe), indicated that in 2016 and 2017, 40 percent of new titles (across all genres) were translations.

4 In Portuguese: “sistema de obras ligadas por denominadores comuns, que permitem reconhecer as notas dominantes duma fase.” All English translations are by Lia Miranda.
replacing it with the most current term in translation studies: ‘target system’). The foreign author can be an influence, an inspiration, nourishment, a master, a model; s/he can be translated, adapted, paraphrased, imitated, assimilated, unfolded; s/he can be emulated by others in his/her themes, ways and typical images; or s/he can have “a normal presence in the writers’ sensitivity” (ibid.).\(^5\) According to Candido, Baudelaire’s historical importance in Brazilian literature was a result of deformations and adjustments in his poetry in order to meet the needs of the society that received his work. This partial, altered, and modified vision of the foreign author, which highlights certain elements and attenuates others, is what allows the receiving system to evolve. Therefore, the theoretical framework that we embrace to observe translations is primarily descriptive, avoiding prescribing rules for the translation process. Otherwise, it would be impossible to situate translations in the receiving system and understand their role in the evolution of this system.

We regard translations as a fundamental aspect of literary continuity in BLC and in the constitution of its tradition, which has enabled the emergence of a national canon. In other words, following Even-Zohar, we postulate the feasibility and the relevance of integrating translated literature into the historical trajectory of children’s literature.

**Historical background**

As seems to be the rule among young or small literary systems (Even-Zohar 1990, 49), the first stage of literary production for children in Brazil was the importation of foreign literary works. The first translations came from Portugal during the second half of the nineteenth century and were intended especially for schools. Among the translated authors were Marquise de Lambert, Madame de Beaumont, Fedro, Andersen, De Amicis, Verne, Giulio Cesare Croce, Emilio Salgari, and Christoph von Schmid. The first Brazilian translations, which were actually localized adaptations, emerged soon afterwards, motivated by protests of intellectuals against the European translations. The pioneers who undertook this task were educators who left us abridged versions of classics such as *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Don Quixote*, as well as fables and short stories by Perrault, Andersen, and the Brothers Grimm, between the 1880s and 1890s.

These first translations blended external references and local re-creation and constituted the germ of the autochthonous children’s literature that flourished

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\(^5\) In Portuguese: “presença normal na sensibilidade dos escritores.”
during the following decades. With the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889, Brazil met the political, economic, social, and productive conditions to allow the emergence of a system of books for children. The young Republic promoted the industrialization and the urbanization of the country, which, combined with the emergence of a consumer market, made the regular circulation of children’s books possible for the first time.

Antonio Candido argues that Brazilian literature, although modified by the conditions of the New World, is an organic part of Western literature (Candido 2000, 11). The same holds true for BCL. Its beginnings are distinguished by a project of stating a national identity in accordance with the ideals of Romanticism that spread in Brazil after its independence from Portugal in 1822. The wish of the new independent state to affirm its disconnection from the Portuguese colonizers (only to align itself with other influences) required that BCL embraced Brazilian themes and language.

Nonetheless, in the absence of a national children’s repertoire that could serve as a reference, Brazilian authors sought out models for these first literary productions in European works. Maybe the most remarkable example is the Italian *Cuore* (1886), by Edmondo de Amicis and translated into Portuguese by João Ribeiro (1891), a book that circulated with great success in Brazil and which bequeathed patriotism to national production. Another emblematic case is *Le tour de la France par deux garçons* (1877), by G. Bruno, which inspired *Através do Brasil* (1910) by Olavo Bilac and Manuel Bonfim, a book that marked the childhood of several generations of Brazilians.

An increase in the production of children’s books by Brazilian authors at the turn of the twentieth century, especially for school use, did not hinder translations. On the contrary: the increase in the means of production and circulation, and the school demand, boosted the publishing of translations and local works simultaneously. Moreover, several authors both wrote and translated children’s literature. Prominent authors who also translated include the Parnassian poet Olavo Bilac, who translated *Max und Moritz* (1865) by Wilhelm Busch, Monteiro Lobato (active in the 1930s and 1940s), and other authors of Brazilian modernism, such as Henrique Lisboa.

It is only from the 1930s on, during the New State regime, that we may speak of regular literary activities for children in Brazil, with a set of authors, dissemination vehicles, and a dedicated audience. Monteiro Lobato (1882–1948) was a pioneer, not only due to the literary works he left to children but also for his editorial activities, which were innovative in the production and the circulation of books in the country at a time where there was not yet a strong national tradition that could serve as a model for new authors.
Monteiro Lobato: When inspiration becomes originality

In the late 1920s, Brazil experienced an economic crisis that was aggravated by the Great Depression. This situation displeased the industrial elites, the new politicians, and the army, who planned a coup d’état that led to the so-called Revolution of 1930. Getúlio Vargas was made president and Brazil’s economic structures underwent significant transformations, including an accelerated process of industrialization and the expansion of the school system.

During the 1930s, modernist aesthetics already dominated Brazilian literature, and BCL started to show autonomous and original elements, overcoming the imitations of its first stages. Monteiro Lobato was the great figure in this transitional period and became an inspiration for authors that would emerge in the following decades. Lobato radically renovated the language in BCL and appropriated a European collection of works as well as Brazilian folklore in an innovative fashion, with an anthropophagic spirit consonant with modernist aesthetics.

Lobato is a remarkable example of the participation of foreign literature in the formation of Brazil’s national literature. His children’s books comprise a series of fantastic stories situated on a family farm called ‘Sítio do Picapau Amarelo’ [Yellow Woodpecker Farm]. In this series, he evokes the European tradition of fairy tales and retrieves characters from the European and North American cultural industries, such as Peter Pan and Felix the Cat, merging them with national folklore figures – saci-pererê and cuca, for instance. Furthermore, Lobato punctuated a change in influences in Brazilian literature: from French to British and North American literature. In 1908, he wrote:

French is making me sick. How dull is that same old tale of a man that has taken someone else’s woman – as if life were nothing, nothing but this! English literature is far more airy, varied, with more horizons, trees, and beasts. There are no tigers or elephants in French literature, while English literature is a whole Noah’s Ark.  

(Lobato 2010)

English literature had a significant influence on the Farm’s exuberance, with its varied characters (children, old women, a talking cloth doll, a wise

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6 In Portuguese: “O francês anda a me engulhar todas as tripas. Como cansa aquela eterna historininha dum homem que pegou a mulher do outro – como se a vida fosse só, só, só isso! A literatura inglesa é muito mais arejada, variada, mais cheia de horizontes, árvores e bichos. Não há tigres nem elefantes na literatura francesa, e a inglesa é toda uma arca de Noé.”
corn cob, a pig), its agile narrative, and the striking presence of fantasy, which was recovered in BCL in this modernist phase.

Besides his authorial activities, Monteiro Lobato devoted himself to the translation and adaptation of world literature classics such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1930), *Alice in Wonderland* (1931), *Pinocchio* (1933) and *Gulliver's Travels* (1937). His production was so abundant that the critics of his day came to doubt that all translations were his. Lobato’s adapting procedures were conscious and intentional, as indicated in his correspondence with his friend and writer Godofredo Rangel: “I need a D. Quixote for children, more fluent and more in the local language than the editions by Garnier and the Portuguese” (Lobato 2010).

Although theoretical approaches that value foreignizing translations are nowadays in vogue, Lobato’s domesticating adaptations should not be condemned without considering their place in history. Lobato, as Brazil’s first Baudelairian poets (Candido 1989, 26) had done before him, deformed foreign literature according to the expressive needs of BCL, selecting from the texts the aspects more suitable to the renewal that he intended to promote.

We argue that the well-worn discussions over fidelity and equivalence should be dealt with from a historical perspective, considering the role of translations in a certain stage of the development of a literary system. The deforming appropriation of foreign literature by Lobato enabled his dissent from the conservative aesthetics that dominated Brazil’s incipient children’s literature. One could say that, for the first time, the pleasure of reading overtook pedagogical goals in children’s books, and Lobato searched in Anglophone literature for the ingredients to compose works that combined fantasy, adventure, humor, and irony.

The 1930s and 1940s can be considered decisive moments in the formation of BCL. The adaptation of universal forms to the local reality, which had been happening since the end of the nineteenth century, now questioned the universal project for the first time. Monteiro Lobato, alongside other authors such as Graciliano Ramos, one of the greatest Brazilian novelists who also wrote for children, took up a new, critical relationship with the Brazilian national project. They mistrusted the official propaganda of progress – at least the rural ideal – being spread in the young Republic and exposed its contradictions, as we may observe in *Geografia de D. Benta* (1935), by Lobato, and *Histórias de Alexandre* (1944), by Graciliano. In these books, the authors suggest to children that there is a difference between the official story that the dominant classes tell and the real story of the defeated. Monteiro

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7 In Portuguese: “Estou precisando de um D. Quixote para crianças, mais correntio e mais em língua da terra que as edições do Garnier e dos portugueses.”
Lobato, along with other less prolific yet representative authors such as the above-mentioned Graciliano Ramos and José Lins do Rego, were not yet fully inserted into an earlier tradition of Brazilian authors for children. They would form their own tradition for posterity. This process of accumulation had its upshot during the 1960s and 1970s, when, after a short democratic period (1945–1964), Brazil was again under a dictatorship. This regime was legitimated by discourses against the threat of communism and the social agenda of the legally constituted government of João Goulart.

A military coup took place in 1964. Only in 1979 did a progressive re-democratization process begin. During these years of political repression and censorship, original and politically engaged books for children emerged in a phenomenon that became known among scholars and educators as the BCL boom. At that moment, authors felt the need to refer to the national tradition, even if to question it, and external influences began to be offset (Lajolo and Zilberman 2007). The legacy of Monteiro Lobato was retrieved as an instrument of political satire and liberation from the formal and thematic conventions of the previous decades. Two authors who emerged in the 1960s and 1970s would go on to become Hans Christian Andersen Prize-winners: Lygia Bojunga (1982) and Ana Maria Machado (2000).

Although translations still dominated the Brazilian literary market for children in the 1970s, during that period the dynamics between national and translated children’s literature did not curtail the aesthetic development of BCL, which found grounds for innovation departing from external references, just as Lobato had done.

**Translations in Brazilian schools**

The re-democratization process initiated in the late 1970s was characterized by contradictions that exist to the present day. On the one hand, freedom of the press and the end of censorship seemed to favor artistic creation. On the other hand, the political shift was followed by an economic and cultural liberalization that allowed cultural projects to be imported in large quantities. Books became consumer goods, and book producers and distributors turned more and more to pulpy, commercially motivated titles. At the same time, and in contrast, from the 1980s onward, specialists began to participate in the selection of books to be published (in publishing houses) and purchased (in governmental institutions). Opportunities increased for new writers and illustrators, and the printing quality of books improved. Bordini describes this dialectic as follows:
Alongside these tendencies of renewal or of productive and provoking continuity, the need to serve a market with consumption features and to professionalize the authors led children’s literature of the 80s to other not always so well-recommended paths. Series and collections, often single-authored, multiplied. (...) The ravenous demand for novelties led to a thematic and stylistic pulverization where a lot is written, but always on the same subject. ⁸ (Bordini quoted in Serra 1998)

Contemporary BCL is a result of these contradictions. Many of the authors who emerged during the 1970s, such as Ana Maria Machado, are still working, while young authors have emerged during the last decades with more up-to-date offerings, especially in the field of illustration, such as Ângela-Lago and Roger Mello – the latter a 2014 Andersen Illustrator’s Award-winner. However, books of dubious literary quality still have considerable room in the market, among which we find translations with no authorship, perpetuating the same old public domain narratives that barely differ from one another.

During the 1980s, the school system was expanded significantly, and the state, faced with stocking literature books for many new schools and libraries, became the main customer of the publishing industry. Two other relevant moments of expansion of the Brazilian school system came at the end of the nineteenth century, with the proclamation of the Republic, and in the 1930s, under Getúlio Vargas. Until 2014, the main channel of distribution of literature to state schools was the Programa Nacional Biblioteca da Escola (PNBE) [National School Library Program], of the Ministry of Education, created in 1997. To give an idea of the program’s size, in 2014 more than nineteen million books were delivered to more than 253,520 schools all over the country serving more than twenty-two million students in basic and secondary education (FNDE 2016). Citing a lack of resources due to the economic crisis in the country, the program was discontinued in 2015. In 2017, following a project of dismantling the Brazilian social state, the Ministry of Education proposed alterations to the PNBE, integrating the purchase of literature books in the Programa Nacional do Livro Didático (PNLD) [National Didactic Books Program]. This measure put books directly in the hands of students rather than on school libraries’ shelves.

⁸ In Portuguese: “A par dessas tendências de renovação ou de uma continuidade produtiva e instigante, as necessidades de atender a um mercado com características de consumo e de profissionalizar os autores conduziram a literatura infanto-juvenil dos anos 80 por outros caminhos às vezes nem tão recomendáveis. Multiplicaram-se as séries ou coleções, frequentemente de autoria única. (...) A demanda gulosa por novidades conduziu a uma pulverização temática e estilística em que muito se escreve, mas sempre sobre o mesmo.”
Based on the collections delivered to nurseries and kindergartens in 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014, we have compiled the following table:

Table 1. Distribution of translations in the PNBE collections (2008–2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of translations</th>
<th>Number of titles (total)</th>
<th>% share of translations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We observe that non-translations prevail but that the share of translations trended upward from 2010 onward. One hypothesis is that publishing houses might be presenting more and more translations to the PNBE, offering the evaluators a wider range of foreign options in contrast to Brazilian ones.

In the past few years, the state has issued between twice and four times as many non-translated books to state nurseries and kindergartens than translated books. However, this does not necessarily mean that translations are not prevailing in the Brazilian book market. The PNBE’s evaluating committee had the option to intervene to design the profile of the collections according to the guidelines of the Public Notice, and not according to the proportion of applications for selection. Parallel research (Lima and Pereira 2019) suggests that translations are in fact thriving in the Brazilian book market.

From our analysis of the collections, we noted that the main translated language was English (40 percent of all translations), followed by Spanish and French (19 percent each). Around 80 percent of translated books were from one of these languages. Other languages represented in the four years that we analyzed included Italian, German, Japanese, Korean and Dutch.

In general terms, translated books in the PNBE are characterized by: (1) a considerable variety of publishing houses; (2) the prevalence of central countries and languages as sources; (3) translators with diverse profiles, including poets, authors, and scholars; (4) the prevalence of prose over poetry; and (5) good literary and visual quality. The quality of the collections was guaranteed, until 2014, by the specialized consulting board of the Center for Literacy, Reading, and Writing of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (Ceale/FaE/UFMG).

Although they represent an important sample of the translations that had been offered to small children until recent years, the PNBE collections do not
exactly reflect the Brazilian publishing market. Publishing houses must turn at least a small profit in order to survive, which means they cannot publish without considering commercial issues. The state, however, can prioritize literary quality over marketing appeal. It would be fruitful to evaluate separately the weight of translations in the book market at large, since state schools have always been committed to offering children national literature.

Obviously, we cannot disregard the relations between state and market. Having a book selected for state purchases secures massive sales and prestige. Thus, it is likely that without the state and school institutions, the children’s book market would be very different in terms of its pedagogical content, the number of printed books and the rapport between translated and national literature. It will take some time to evaluate the impact of the discontinuation of PNBE on the book market and to insert these first decades of the twenty-first century into the history of BCL.

Final remarks

The aim of this chapter was to examine the role of translations in the historical development of BCL. We have adopted a systemic view, drawing on Antonio Candido and Itamar Even-Zohar, to observe the presence of translations in the constitution of a literary tradition for children in Brazil. Beginning from a historical overview of BCL since the end of the nineteenth century, we drew a line of progress from the first imitations to more recent original creations. It is not possible to fully understand the formation of BCL without considering translations and their interaction with national literature. A literary system demands foreign authors in different degrees, which makes it more or less receptive to imported models (Lefevere 1982). We have seen how this dynamic played out in the beginnings of BCL, and how foreign models were later rejected – although Brazil has never completely freed itself from these models. Whereas the first BCL was committed to local themes and language, it embraced European forms and models. Adaptations, imitations and pastiches worked as accumulation mechanisms in a historical moment in which Brazil still did not hold a tradition of its own. In the case of these first literary manifestations, it was imperative to search for external references.

We recall the association that Candido (2000, 26–28) makes between the formation of the Brazilian literary system and the need to forge a national identity – a question that equally and deeply touches the formation of BCL. The desire to disengage from the colonizers was reflected in BCL in different ways, according to each historical moment. School literature from the early
Republican period represented a cultural continuity with Portugal, although it claimed a Brazilian language. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a home-made, patriotic literature emerged, which adopted national themes and an official and normative Brazilian Portuguese. Romantic ideals and an integrative logic prevailed.

It was from foreign references that BCL was formed, initially by means of literary accumulation and the borrowing of a tradition and, later, by the incorporation and reinterpretation of foreign aesthetic innovations, as we have seen in Lobato. Currently, BCL is consolidated with a consistent local tradition and a set of national authors and works. However, it keeps feeding on translations in a dialectic relation that sometimes inhibits innovation and sometimes encourages it.

As Candido has stated, Brazilian literature is part of Western literature, and we may affirm the same about BCL. Its interaction with central literatures, sometimes taking them as models, sometimes rejecting them, is at the core of its formation. We do not intend to propose a history of translations for children disconnected from the history of BCL but rather to consider translations as a consistent set of works in order to situate translations within BCL and articulate them alongside other elements in the literary polysystem.

Bibliography


