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Travelling from the city to the countryside: Depictions of urban and rural scenarios in two Portuguese picturebooks

Viajando da cidade para o campo: representações de cenários urbanos e rurais em dois livros ilustrados portugueses

ABSTRACT - Research has shown that Nature is frequently found as an important element in children's literature. Despite being depicted in a rather superficial and stereotypical way and touched by humanity, it is usually represented as a fun, harmonious and even idyllic component of the story. This construction of the natural world depends on the power of language to create scenarios, shaping the way Nature is perceived, merging the aesthetic, recreational and pedagogical dimensions of children's literature. The objective of this study is to identify how these dimensions intersect and how the theme of ecoliteracy is dealt with by focusing on two main perspectives: (a) linguistic perspective: resorting to the principles of the identification of frames and their interpretative repertoire; (b) literary and semiotic perspective: establishing text-picture relationships and dynamics according to the postmodern theories on picturebooks. In order to do this, the study focuses on two children's picturebooks published in 2009, which tell stories of car journeys involving families travelling from an urban setting to a rural one. These two picturebooks represent various forms of subjective appropriation of space and promote ecoliteracy through the relationship between the child protagonists and the surrounding environment.

Keywords: children's literature, picturebook, nature, ecoliteracy, linguistic constructivism

RESUMO - A investigação mostra que a natureza é presença frequente na literatura infantojuvenil e que é habitualmente configurada como uma entidade prazerosa, harmoniosa e até idílica, ainda que superficial, humanizada e estereotipada. Esta construção do mundo natural repousa sobre o poder da linguagem verbal para criar realidade, moldando a forma como a natureza é percecionada, fundindo as dimensões estética, lúdica e pedagógica da literatura para crianças e jovens. Este estudo objetiva identificar as linhas de intersecção destas dimensões, mais especificamente a questão da ecoliteracia, adotando duas perspetivas fundamentais: (a) uma perspetiva linguística, recorrendo à identificação de quadros conceptuais e ao reportório interpretativo nos quais estes são constituídos; (b) uma perspetiva literária e semiótica, estabelecendo relações e dinâmicas texto-imagem, segundo teoria pós-modernas de abordagem do livro ilustrado (álbum). Para cumprir o seu objetivo, este estudo analisa dois livros (álbuns) para crianças publicados em 2009 que apresentam narrativas de viagens de carro em família de áreas urbanas para áreas rurais. Estes dois livros representam diversas formas de apropriação subjetiva do espaço, no quadro da relação entre as crianças e o meio na sociedade contemporânea e ambos promovem a ecoliteracia dos leitores.

Palavras-chave: literatura infantojuvenil, livro ilustrado, natureza, ecoliteracia, construtivismo linguístico.

Introduction

Contemporary Portuguese children's literature frequently offers the young reader a happy and pleasant picture of the world around them, especially as far as nature is concerned. Moreover, children's literature suggests implicit or explicit principles, behaviours and values to its readers, which coincide with those established in the domain of Environmental Education, thus conveying a specific worldview as well as desirable patterns of socially acceptable behaviour. This view is supported by work carried out by John Stephens, who has shown the different representations of nature in children's literature for English speaking children. According to him:

> By the 1980s, textual representations of the natural world in children's literature could draw upon one of three ideologically grounded perspectives. The first of these continues to promote mastery over nature, whereby the natural world exists for the benefit of humanity and must be subordinated to its desires and needs. The second assumes or promotes an attitude of caring, wonder and understanding of the natural world, or an awareness of environmental issues. There is only a limited degree of embeddedness, however, and humans are positioned as outside

of nature and as the source of value and meaning. The third perspective draws on a nature-associated position which has affinities with deep ecology: intrinsic value is ascribed to all living beings, and human beings are not attributed with any kind of privileged status (Stephens, 2006, p. 40).

The author seems to be taking in account specially those books dealing explicitly with natural environment or ecology, and defends that most of them fall within the second perspective. This study, however, focuses on two children's picturebooks published in Portugal in 2009 which do not explicitly advocate for ecological awareness or ecoliteracy but perform this goal in an indirect way; moreover, these books do not depict a real natural world, but built upon an environment deeply marked by human presence.

The term 'ecoliteracy' is used to involve the confluence of two dimensions: knowledge and attitude. First, being ecoliterate means recognising the complexity of the world and understanding that, in any system, the constituent parts are interrelated rather than isolated, and that the nature of the whole is always different from the mere sum of its parts (Capra, 2002). This complexity can be represented and materialised in words and, as David Orr notes, the words used in this process have power, and are not unbiased or hollow. The author adds that words "can enliven or deaden, elevate or degrade, but they are never neutral, because they affect our perception and ultimately our behaviour" (Orr, 1992, p. 91).

Second, being ecoliterate demands the assumption of an attitude, going beyond a passive knowledge to the adoption of a particular frame of mind. Ecoliteracy involves a sense of responsibility for our individual acts and a recognition of the place and role of every human being, interacting with others, human and non-human, sharing time and space in both local and global environments: "ecological literacy [...] includes the more demanding capacity to observe nature with insight, a merger of landscape and mindscape" (Orr, 1992, p. 86).

Thus, in this perspective, to be ecologically literate means changing the way we think and conceptualize the world (Ramos and Ramos, 2011).

Object of study

The object of this study is made up of two picturebooks published in Portugal in 2009 which provide narratives of car journeys involving families in urban and rural backgrounds: *Ainda falta muito?* [*Are we there yet?*], by Carla Maia de Almeida and Alex Gozblau, and *As duas estradas*[1] [*The two roads*], by Isabel Minhós Martins

and Bernardo Carvalho. These two books represent, in an original way, various forms of personal and subjective appropriations of space, particularly concerning the landscape, thereby stimulating a variety of readings and interpretations[2]. Both text and images depict, in their own language and style, the relationship between children and the environment in contemporary society.

As pointed above, it is important to highlight the fact that the books under analysis do not set out to increase environmental awareness or ecoliteracy as a dominant dimension, but focus more on the ludic and aesthetic aspects in detriment of an educational standpoint.

This strategy matches some of Lakoff's suggestions on how to develop knowledge and attitude toward a sustainable relationship with the ecosystem:

provide a structured understanding of what you are saying. Don't give laundry lists. Tell stories that exemplify your values and rouse emotions. Don't just give numbers and material facts without framing them so their overall significance can be understood. Instead find general themes or narratives that incorporate the points you need to make (Lakoff, 2010, p. 79-80).

Theoretical framework

This study takes as a starting point the theoretical methodological framework defined by Discourse Analysis in its broadest sense, recognises the central role of enunciation in language use[3] and uses two key concepts, that of *interpretative repertoire* and that of *frame*. Both originate in approaches which are not directly linked to Discourse Analysis, but provide tools and procedures which are relevant to this particular research.

The former, developed by social psychologists and adopted by the constructionist perspective, emphasises discourse as a "vehicle through which the self and the world are articulated" (Tuominen *et al.*, 2002, p. 273). This concept contrasts sharply with the positivist view, which states that language is an instrument which is detached from the individual, and thus language defines a context which is alien to the speaker, and precedes them and their perception/construction of the world around them.

Followers of this linguistic standpoint include Halliday (2001), for example, who highlights the concept of *linguistic constructivism*. This concept evokes the power of verbal language to shape the speaker's awareness and offers each person the theory that underpins their interpretation and their manipulation of reality. From this perspective, language is not neutral and does not reflect reality passively in that it allows humankind to relate to the world, thus creating its own reality.

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[1] Winner of the 2nd CJ Picture Book Award, 2009 (South Korea).

[2] For a similar analysis of picturebooks that deal with urban and rural landscapes, see Ramos and Ramos (2012).

[3] Fonseca claims that "enunciation plays such a broad ranging role in the organisation of language that it should be referred to as the backbone of the language" (1992, p. 253, our translation). See also Benveniste (1978).

The concept of frame was initially described by Bateson (1972) in the field of anthropology, but it was Fillmore who used it in the area of linguistics to describe

certain *schemata or frameworks of concepts or terms* which link together as a system, which impose structure or coherence on some aspects of human experience and which may contain elements which are simultaneously parts of other such frameworks (Fillmore, 1975, p. 123).

The concept of frame points to lexemes, grammatical rules and categories which may be associated with prototypical scenarios and conceptualisations that acquire meaning within the boundaries of each specific culture and language. These in turn represent what the speakers perceive to be natural, possible, plausible, pertinent, as well as society's rules, restrictions, taboos and fears (Vilela, 1994).

From a literary analysis point of view, it is important to highlight the relevance and the descriptive approach used in picturebooks. They are characterised by the way in which they combine text and image, thus creating a hybrid language, considered by Peter Hunt (2001) as the biggest and best contribution to children's literature, to the area of Literature generally and possibly to Art itself, due to their ingenuity, originality, experimental creativity and innovation. The picturebook has been the target of numerous studies (Sipe, 1998; Lewis, 2001; Nikolajeva and Scott, 2001; Bellorín, 2005; Linden, 2007; Sipe and Pantaleo, 2008; Colomer *et al.*, 2010; Ramos, 2010; Zaparaín and González, 2010), and offers multiple analysis possibilities, from an aesthetic point of view, linked to its creation and construction, to how it is received and interpreted by the child reader. Within the scope of this study, it is important to highlight the way in which the books under analysis integrate and balance the aesthetic, ludic and developmental aspects of children's literature. The verbal and visual narratives which comprise the books propose a realist revisitation of recognisable scenarios. These narratives encourage the child to follow the situations which are recreated, marked by the presence of the family and the car journeys from an urban to a rural environment. Picturebooks have an open structure and allow the audience to create its own interpretation, without explicitly conditioning the reader.

Findings

Ainda falta muito? [*Are we there yet?*], by Carla Maia de Almeida and Alex Gozblau, is a narrative in the first person, told by the daughter on a journey between the city where the family live and the village where her grandmother lives. Marked by the impatience of her younger brother, who is taking the trip for the first time, the narrative intersects, in the form of short flashbacks, the memories the narrator has of previous journeys and her parents' attempts to calm the children when they are anxious and fidgety. The title is used repeatedly throughout the book to express a mixture of nervousness and curiosity, but also of tiredness and of what is to come, allowing both younger and older readers and travellers to align with the context portrayed in the book. Alex Gozblau's illustrations, mostly in light hues and full of rays of sunshine, manage to capture the characters' emotions, the different discourses and actions both in and outside the car very expressively. Different spaces and times, emotions and moods intersect in the narrative, underpinned by a fluent, good-humoured and well-organised register, all of which work together to explore the rhythm in its repeated parallel structure. The images play with and alternate between the action in the closed space inside the vehicle and the open space on the outside. The latter is generally created by the memories of the narrator and her future projections in a clever combination of time references. The cover, recreating the inside of the car, combined with the question in the title, allows initial inferences to be made about the story, creating expectations and opening reading perspectives.

The endpapers, when read together, suggest the passage of time, simulating movement during the journey, as well as the transition between spaces and environments. In the initial and final endpaper a more neutral shade is symbolically associated to an urban landscape, whereas in the final endpaper the use of green and the leaf pattern suggests a more natural landscape, characteristic of a rural environment (see Figures 1 and 2).

The location of the vehicle and its cross section, spread across the two endpapers allow the reader to align with the family who are travelling, distinguishing children from adults, and the different interpretations the children and parents make of space and the passage of time.

The response of the parents to the insistent question *Are we there yet?* by the younger child is to comment on the scenery, flora, smells and even taste, in a subtle physical and affective proximity to their destination. In this way, not only are certain references avoided, such as time or distance, which are objective and measurable but which children do not understand, but also help to configure and give meaning to the environment, drawing attention to what is around them and heightening their power of observation. With this, the interpretative repertoire created, organised by a structure of repeated parallel temporals, incorporates terms which describe the following transformations between the urban and the rural:

All these segments end with the promise *we'll be closer*, which punctuates the different places they drive through on their journey and the senses which are stimulated along the way.

The reading of the daughter's memories express the differences in the characterisation of the two spaces within which the characters move, creating a pejorative connotation of the city, where they live, whilst euphori-

Quando [...] as casas ficarem pequenas	When [...] houses become small
Quando [...] os semáforos se transformarem em árvores	When [...] traffic lights become trees
Quando [...] os carros não passarem na estrada	When [...] the streets become empty
Quando [...] o vento trouxer o cheiro do Verão	When [...] the wind brings the smell of Summer
Quando [...] houver espaço no céu para as nuvens	When [...] there is enough space in the sky for clouds
Quando [...] a montanha chegar ao fim	When [...] a mountain reaches its end
Quando [...] cruzarmos a ponte que atravessa o rio	When [...] we cross the bridge over the river
Quando [...] houver amoras na beira da estrada	When [...] there are berries at the side of the road
Quando houver [...] lagartixas deitadas ao sol	When there are [...] lizards basking in the sun
Quando [...] passarmos a fonte de pedra	When [...] we walk past the stone fountain
Quando [...] ouvirmos os sinos da igreja	When [...] we hear the church bells

Figure 1. Initial endpaper.

Figure 2. Final endpaper.

Figure 3. Page 12.

cally valuing, almost idyllically one could say, the countryside that they are driving towards, either to visit or to go on holiday. The following examples create a clear dichotomous frame of the city/countryside:

(1)   'Do que eu mais gostei na aldeia da Avó foi de correr por todo o lado. Porque não havia carros, nem camiões, nem pessoas aos encontrões.'

(1') 'What I most liked about my grandmother's village was running around everywhere. Because there were no cars, lorries or people bumping into each other.'

(2)   'Dizem que o céu é o mesmo para todas as pessoas que vivem na Terra, mas não sei se acredito. O meu céu está cheio de telhados, chaminés e antenas de televisão.'

(2') 'They say that the sky is the same for everyone on Earth, but I don't know if I believe them. My sky is full of roofs, chimneys and television antennae.'

This dichotomy is underpinned by strong cultural – perhaps even literary – roots, linked to the idealisation of natural space, which is more often than not symbolically rather than faithfully represented. The myth of a natural paradise, drawn from the biblical roots in Western Judaeo-Christian culture, or even of a certain ongoing bucolic *aurea mediocritas* continues to show its potential, particularly in texts which are generally read by children from an urban environment, as is the case with contemporary children's literature. In this way, the natural space can be created as an idealised, almost wondrous, frame, contrasting with the frame of what is familiar to them.

It seems pertinent to call upon an interdiscursive connexion to the pastoral genre, which has always been characterized by nostalgia, by the idealization/ a memory/ a fiction of a better past:

Since the Romantic movement's poetic responses to the Industrial Revolution, pastoral has decisively shaped our constructions of nature. Even the science of ecology may have been

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shaped by pastoral in its early stages of development and [...] the founding text of ecocriticism, *Silent Spring*, drew on the pastoral tradition. No other trope is so deeply entrenched in Western culture, or so deeply problematic for environmentalism. With its roots in the classic period, pastoral has shown itself to be infinitely malleable for differing political ends, and potential harmful in its tensions and evasions. However, its long history and cultural ubiquity mean that the pastoral trope must and will remain a key concern for ecocritics (Garrard, 2004, p. 33).

Curiously, this apparent opposition between city and countryside is attenuated at the end of the narrative, on arrival at the village, when the narrator sees something different to what she remembers, noticing the changes and how the gap between both models is becoming smaller.

The creation of the image of the grandmother's house, with the garden all around it, where the children can play and run freely, with the smoking chimney, the dog and two cats, the raspberries lining the paths and the lizards basking in the sun (close to the *pastoral* trope), all based on the memories and expectations of the narrator and her parents' suggestions, occurs in the characters' minds in a kind of stream of consciousness where various discourses, contexts, thoughts, memories, dreams and projects inter-sect. The illustrations clearly show these two dimensions which overlap in the text, combining different techniques and perspectives. Created using a number of techniques, combining drawings, colours, cut-outs and collage, the illustrations explore the effects of composition and pagina-tion to good effect.

An ecological awareness and an understanding of the characters' environment are created using a varied interpretative repertoire, including the creation of the temporality associated to movement and the linguistic construction of the environment where the characters move. The interaction with the environment exists, de-spite being limited and marked by anthropocentrism. In some way, this book illustrates the 'second perspective' of textual representations of the environment identified by Stephens (2006).

The second book under analysis, *As duas estradas* [*The two roads*], by Isabel Minhós Martins and Bernardo Carvalho, is organised using two verbal and iconic nar-ratives which tell the story of two partially simultaneous journeys, from Lisbon to Alcobia do Tejo (a small village), in two different cars and by two groups of people from the same family. The sub-headings clarify the specificity of each of the routes: N126 vs A1 (National Road 126 *versus* Motorway M1) and A1 vs N126, implicitly showing the differences between both including the distances covered, the places driven through and the lengths of the journeys.

This book is a prime example of a *two-in-one* and challenges the different abilities of the readers, demand-ing attention in order to distinguish between the verbal and visual aspects of the two narratives (A and B) and discover the suggested relationships between them. Both

narratives, each with its own cover (see Figures 4, 5 and 6), are organised in such a way that the book can be read in either direction.

As the sub-heading indicates, it is a matter of comparing routes, on different roads – a fast motorway and a slow traditional road – assessing not only the speed (or slowness) at which the journeys are made, but also the implications, which are very often subjective opinions, that each route provides.

On the motorway, with a total of 384 graphic words, the narrative is based on a frame of the journey focusing on the destination, the instrument (vehicle), its performance and whatever is directly associated to it. The interpretative repertoire identified includes the following terms:

Estrada (4 x)	Road (x4)
Placas [indicativas]	Signs [directions]
Curvas	Bends
Subidas	Upward slopes
Descidas	Downward slopes
Rota certa	Right route
Mapa	Map
Quilómetros (2 x)	Kilometres (x2)
Estação de serviço	Service Area
Portagem	Toll booth
Conta-quilómetros	Speedometer
Aceleramos (2 x)	Accelerate (x2)

All these terms focus on the vehicle and the road, with their respective characteristics, and exclude the physi-cal space outside the boundaries of the road.

In this frame, an emphasis is given to speed, with a view to quickly reaching the destination, as can be clearly seen in the following group of terms:

|	
Num tirinho estamos lá	We'll be there in no time at all
Aceleramos (2 x)	Accelerate (x2)
Grande velocidade	Great speed
Passa depressa	Overtake quickly
Campos a perder de vista	Fields as far as the eye can see
As imagens são apenas riscos e num instante ficam para trás	The images are just lines and in an instant they are gone
Ultrapassamos e somos ultrapassados	We overtake and are overtaken
Ir depressa	Go quickly
Velocidade inimaginável	Unimaginable speed
Tempo também é dinheiro	Time is money too
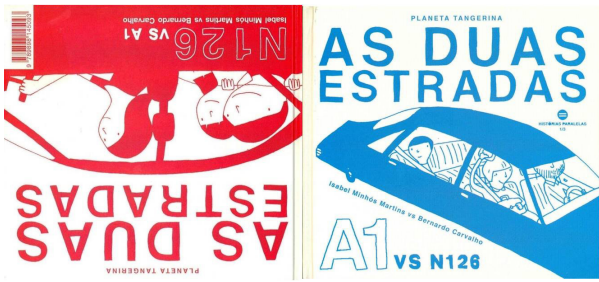
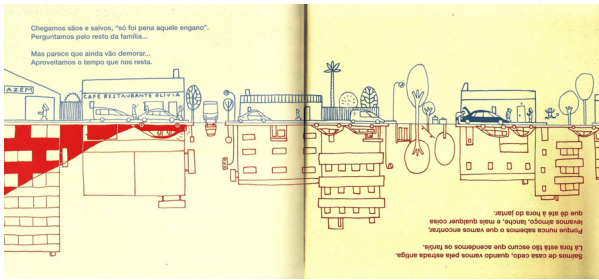**Figure 4.** Front cover (narrative A and narrative B).
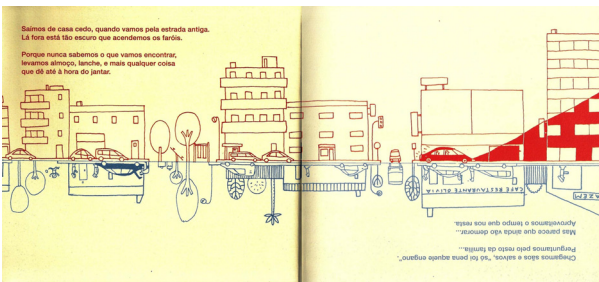

Figure 5. 13th opening of the book (narrative A).

Figure 6. 1st opening of the book (narrative B)

Não nos sentimos bem-vindos	We don't feel welcome
Uma muralha de metal colorida impede-nos de ver o lado de lá	A wall of coloured metal prevents us from seeing the other side
Quem mora aqui não gosta de nos ver	Whoever lives here doesn't want to see us
Quem mora aqui não gosta de nos ouvir	Whoever lives here doesn't want to hear us
Não há cruzamentos, não há curvas, quase não há subidas nem descidas	There are no crossroads, no bends, almost no upward or downward slopes
Campos a perder de vista	Fields as far as the eye can see
Fila com tabuleiros	Queues with trays
Sopa cara	Expensive soup
Salada de fruta pouco fresca	Fruit salad which isn't very fresh

The importance attributed to speed is compatible with the emphasis on the ultimate objective rather than the journey itself, so much so that the latter becomes indistinct – the narrator notes that there are *fields as far as the eye can see* and *the images are just lines and in an instant they are gone*.

The evaluative modalisation developed by the enunciator / narrator becomes negative, stemming from an interpretative repertoire of a dysphoric landscape:

Novelo complicado de estradas que se enrolam, desenrolam e voltam a enrolar	Complicated knot of roads which wind, unwind and wind again round each other
Dezenas de placas indicam cidades e pontos cardeais	Dozens of signs indicating cities and points on the compass
Sobrevivemos a tanta informação	We survive so much information

This negative/dysphoric effect is possible using various linguistic resources, in particular the metaphor in the *complicated knot of roads which wind, unwind and wind again round each other*, with its ability to evoke the difficulty in finding a solution to the problem. This metaphor is linked to the extreme quantification of *dozens of signs* and the semantics of the verb to *survive* [*so much information*], creating an anti-expectation between the expected functionality of the information on the motorway and the way exaggeration is used to confuse the drivers. It is important to also highlight the repeated use of negatives, either with the adverb *not*, which occurs several times, or with the semantic power of the verb *prevents* [*us from seeing the other side*]. Furthermore, we have the dysphoric adjectivisation used to describe the food eaten in the service area, *expensive soup* and a *fruit salad which isn't very fresh*.

Finally, the driver on the journey is male, the father of the family, thus fulfilling expectations and *clichés* associated to the male gender: speed and linear thought and giving greater importance to what is direct, effective, functional, pragmatic and purposeful.

In this way, the narrative emphasises the result of the journey rather than its process, putting its ecological or contextual dimension to one side. Therefore, a wider awareness of each character's interaction with the environment is not promoted. In this case, the environment is just an unspecified space where the characters move. In Environmental Education, this is the most basic concept of the environment (Drouin and Astolfi, 1987) and the one which manifests the lowest level of ecoliterate development.

In contrast, the journey along the national road is longer: it has 484 graphic words, exactly one hundred more than the motorway journey.

More important than being longer, the narrative is different in that it values the journey as a multifaceted experience, associating it to space and time. Its linguistic repertoire is more varied and takes as its starting point the element of surprise and the unknown:

Nunca sabemos o que vamos encontrar	We never know what we're going to find
Quase não há indicações	There are almost no signs
Razões inesperadas	Unexpected reasons
Não sabe a que horas chegaremos	We don't know what time we are going to arrive
Restaurante com letras quase invisíveis	Restaurant with letters which are almost invisible

If we take into consideration the fact that this journey is told by a child narrator, the *surprise* factor is appealing and contributes decisively to the construction of a euphoric image of the action.

On this journey, the space outside the car becomes a source of delight to the travellers:

Cidade	Cities
Fábricas	Factories
Armazéns abandonados	Abandoned warehouses
Quintais com limoeiros	Yards with lemon trees
Carros ferrugentos	Rusty cars
Famílias de gatos	Families of cats
Cidade termina [...] estrada antiga	The city ends [...] old road
Quintais ficam do tamanho de quintas	Yards which become the size of farms
O céu começa a clarear	The sky begins to clear
Rebanho de ovelhas	Flock of sheep
Tractor	Tractor
Placas com nomes de terras que nos fazem rir	Signs with names of villages which make you laugh
Vacas	Cows
Passagens de nível	Level crossings
Árvores	Trees
Semáforos	Traffic lights
Estradas	Roads
Recta	Stretch of road
Portão	Gate
Piquenique	Picnic
Árvore	Tree
Serra	Mountain
Subidas em contracurva	Upward sloping s-bends
Fonte	Fountain
Bomba	Petrol station
Cruzamento	Crossroads
Ponte antiga	Old bridge

Um ribeiro	A creek
Miúdos tomam banho	Kids have a swim
Velhote	Old man
Bicicleta	Bicycle

The identification of all these things is essential to create an ecological awareness, so that each act is part of a network of actions and states with which the character interacts and becomes operational through the use of referentiation.

Besides focusing on space, this narrative highlights the duration of the journey and the numerous stops made:

O céu começa a clarear	The sky begins to clear
Lentamente	Unhurriedly
Devagar	Slowly
Parar/Paramos (6 x)	Stop/We stop (x6)

In this way, time becomes important and is reflected in actions, so that we become aware of its existence.

The interaction between characters in the space/duration of the journey is also taken into account:

Paramos para perguntar: 'Minha senhora…'	We stop to ask: 'Madam…'
Toda a gente tem sempre tempo para nos dar explicações	Everyone always has time to explain things to us
Voltamos a parar, a fazer as mesmas perguntas	We stop again, to ask the same questions
Perguntamos pela quadragésima vez	We ask for the fortieth time

This is an essential dimension for the portrayal of the character as a social being, especially because the interaction described evokes a frame marked by harmony and polite social relationships.

During the stops in the journey, delight is taken in the natural and constructed resources available. One of the stops is explicitly desired and requested by the narrator:

Mãe bebe café	Mum drinks coffee
Jogamos matraquilhos	We play table football
Paramos numa fonte para encher uma garrafa	We stop at a fountain to fill a bottle
Atravessamos uma ponte antiga. Lá em baixo, um ribeiro onde uns miúdos tomam banho	We cross an old bridge. Further down, there is a creek where kids have a swim
"Podemos parar só um bocadinho? Vá lá…"	"Can we stop for just a little while? Go on…"

Finally, the driver on this journey is a woman, the mother of the family, as opposed to the male driver in the other version. As a result, expectations and *clichés* associated to the female gender are activated, with driving that is indirect, slow, peripheral, recreational and epicurean.

In this way, the narrative focuses on the journey as a process and not merely on its destination, showing its ecological or contextual dimension. This increases the awareness on a wider scale of the interaction between a character and their environment. In this case, the environment is not merely an unspecified space where characters move, within a limited, fundamental and deeply anthropocentric dimension, but with notions of interaction and interdependence: a frame where the man is one more element in a complex system (Gómez-Granell, 1988). In other words, this narrative, as opposed to the first one, encourages ecoliteracy, and hence sustainability of life to a greater extent.

Conclusions

The books under analysis in this study allow for diverse levels of readings, for a wide and diversified target audience made up mainly of children, but which also includes adults. Besides the issue of perception of particular spaces and environments, establishing a contrast between the rural and the urban, the books chosen include other themes which are more or less indirectly related to this dichotomy. This is seen in the journey itself, the passage of time, the relationship between past and present, evolution and development, family dynamics and routines, gestures of affection, management of spaces and the (dis)organisation of cities. Underpinning all of this are issues about progress, the country and the future, which considerably widens the target audience and possible interpretations.

In both books, the illustrations corroborate this, proposing the intersecting of these contrasting situations through the use of different aesthetic art forms.

Booth books have the potential to connect to pastoral genre, which is not uncommon in narratives that confront different ecosystems:

> it may be that contemporary pastoral refuge lies within the discourse of ecology itself. At the root of pastoral is the idea of nature as a stable, enduring counterpoint to the disruptive energy and change of human societies. Both Judaeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions imagine a divinely ordained order of nature, and find proof in the remarkable fitness of the Earth as a habitat for its various species (Garrard, 2004, p. 56).

The use of first person in both narratives allows a strong emotional attachment to the characters' perspectives and could be at the service of promoting an environmental ethic (cf. Stephens, 2010), which is one of the dimensions of ecoliteracy.

It can be concluded that environmental education does not need to be explicit to promote environmental awareness and ecoliteracy and the pedagogical dimension of children's literature does not imply the absence of the ludic or aesthetic dimension. The openness of the narratives, as well as a certain amount of interpretative freedom which characterises them, allowing the reader to choose the place they prefer, limits the amount of reflection and conditions the readers' ability to take a definitive standpoint. It is important to highlight the processes, which are durational and complex and marked by interactions between the characters, and not only on the results, which are sporadic and final without any underlying complexity, in the construction of an ecological thinking[4]. The interpretative repertoire, which is the basis for the construction of the stories' contexts, contrasting frames and the modalisation of the narrator guide the reader and promote a degree of ecological awareness and ecoliteracy. The interaction of characters with their environment becomes evident through the discourse developed around the characters themselves. In a discreet way, these works remind us that the character is not oblivious to their environment but acts upon it and suffers its consequences. Through connecting with these narratives, the reader can become more conscious of the fact that they are not alienated from Nature but an integral part of Nature itself.

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[4] In relation to this issue, compare with Capra (2002) and Fill (2000): '– recognizing, defending DIVERSITY (the overall principle): – recognizing MUTUAL INTERACTION; – perceiving WHOLENESS and UNITY rather than fragmentation. The formula "diversity + interaction = wholeness and unity" can be said to summarise ecological thinking' (Fill, 2000, p. 162).

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