

# Contemporary translated children's literature in Sweden with a focus on literature from French-speaking regions

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## ABSTRACT

This article sheds light on translated children's literature in Sweden during the period 2015–2020. A relatively large portion of children's literature in Sweden (36% in 2020), from books for toddlers to young adult literature, comes from translations. It has been shown in polysystem research, that 'semi-peripheral' countries such as Sweden, or places having a so-called 'dominated language', are known to import much literature because, for example, their internal production is rather limited, which *a priori* is not the case in Sweden. We first present a panorama of the kinds of books that are translated to Swedish and the languages they are translated from. We then focus on the particular position in Sweden of African children's literature from French-speaking regions and assume that French is used as a tool that enables this literature to reach a Swedish audience, as part of the global phenomena of serial books and the emerging *wimmelbooks*. We conclude that even if Sweden's national production is greater than book importing and translation, there is still a not insignificant number of translated picturebooks through which authors and illustrators from French-speaking regions occupy a stable share of this production, and may in this way transport cultural values from more peripheral countries.

**Keywords:** translated literature, children's literature, Sweden, literature from French-speaking regions, emerging literature

## Sodobna prevedena otroška književnost na Švedskem s poudarkom na književnosti iz francosko govorečih regij

### IZVLEČEK

V prispevku se osredotočava na prevedeno otroško književnost na Švedskem v obdobju 2015–2020. Na Švedskem je prevedeno razmeroma velik delež otroške književnosti (36 % leta 2020), od slikanic za najmanjše do mladinske književnosti. Polisistemske raziskave so pokazale, da za »polperiferne« države, kakršna je Švedska, ali območja, kjer uporabljajo »podrejen jezik«, velja, da je pri njih velik delež književnosti uvožen, saj je morda njihova interna književna produkcija precej omejena, kar sicer za Švedsko *a priori* ne velja. Najprej celostno predstaviva, kakšne vrste knjig se prevajajo v švedščino in iz katerih jezikov so prevedene. Nato se osredotočiva na specifičen položaj, ki ga na Švedskem zavzema afriška otroška književnost iz francosko govorečih regij, in postavlja domnevo, da se francoščina uporablja kot orodje, ki omogoča tej književnosti, da doseže švedsko občinstvo, in sicer predvsem kot del popularnih knjižnih serij in vedno pogostejšega pojava tako imenovanih

*wimmelbilderbuch*, slikanic brez besedila. Na koncu pokaževa, da je švedska nacionalna književna produkcija sicer obsežnejša kot uvožena in prevedena književnost, kljub temu pa na švedskem tržišču še vedno obstaja nezanemarljivo število prevedenih slikanic iz francosko govorečih regij, ki predstavljajo stabilen delež uvožene produkcije in prek katerih avtorji in ilustratorji lahko prenašajo kulturne vrednote iz bolj perifernih držav.

**Ključne besede:** prevedena književnost, otroška književnost, Švedska, književnost francosko govorečih regij, uveljavljajoča se književnost

## 1. Introduction

This article sheds light on translated children's literature in Sweden in the period 2015–2020, during which the number of translations drastically declined and national production dominated. We focus on translations from French, as we previously observed a stable number of translations from this language and a growing interest in these works by Swedish editors (Alfvén and Lindgren 2019). Following Heilbron's (1999) theory on the world translation system, this study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of recent changes in children's literature in the Swedish literary field and of the kinds of books that are imported from French children's literature into a semi-peripheral language such as Swedish (Alvstad and Borg 2020, 2). Firstly, through a quantitative study, we aim to observe whether French children's literature is maintaining its position in the field, by confirming an interest in these works. Secondly, through a qualitative study, this article attempts to throw light on three different tendencies that are suggested by our more general results. We first consider the translated African literature from French-speaking regions; we then discuss the phenomenon of serial books, i.e., books published as a series, and finally introduce the coming of a different kind of picturebook called a *wimmelbook*, a wordless picturebook with very detailed illustrations.

## 2. Conceptual framework and method

Our study is based on four main theoretical points (theorized by Heilbron 1999; Casanova 2002; Even-Zohar 1990 and Toury 1995, 2012) that we refer to throughout the article, as presented here.

Heilbron described a cultural world system, consisting of the translations of books and the international flows that result from these translations (1999). This system is built into a core-periphery structure (2000, 14). In this hierarchical structure, languages may be central, semi-peripheral or peripheral. Heilbron (1999, 431) shows that “uneven flows of translations between language groups” and “the varying role of translations within language groups” may have consequences on the system. As Swedish is spoken

by around 10 million people (mostly in Sweden and Finland) and French by almost 300 million people around the world, it is clear that there is an imbalance between the two languages. The number of speakers does not necessarily have a direct relation to the language significance in the cultural world system, but its significance lies “in the total number of translated books worldwide” (1999, 433). French and its literature may be placed in the core of the cultural world system, whereas Heilbron categorizes Swedish as semi-peripheral (1999, 434). This is noteworthy for our study, as it means that our focus is on the translation flow from a core language to a semi-peripheral one.

Casanova’s work, unlike systemic theories, no longer speaks of the core and periphery of a world system, but rather of the dominated and dominant relationship between languages (Casanova 2002, 2), which, according to her, highlights “a structure of domination and relations of force” existing between literary fields rather than a relationship of spatial opposition. Translation thus takes on a special meaning by becoming either a “means of accumulation of capital or [...] of consecration” (Casanova 2002, 8).

The work of Even-Zohar, who introduced the polysystem theory (1990), and Toury’s norms (1995, 2012) also form the basis of our study. Even-Zohar argues that the translation system usually has a peripheral position in a literary system, but, if a translation system is active, it could play a role by obtaining a core position, while, for example, introducing new models that fill a vacuum in the system. Translation may have an impact on a system depending on its position in it. Another important aspect of the polysystem theory is Even-Zohar’s discussion of open or closed systems. When there is, in a system, a greater importation of translated works than national production, it is called an open system. On the contrary, if the national production is self-sufficient, that is to say, more important than the number of translations, it is a closed system in which translations occupy a more peripheral position and are therefore less active in the system. For a long time, the Swedish children’s literature system was an open one, but since 2010 the trend has reversed, showing more national production than translations – thus closing the system and making the role of the translation literary system less active. According to statistics from the Swedish Institute for Children’s Books (Svenska Barnboksintitutet, SBI), such books are mostly translated from English. However, the place of French remains stable and relatively privileged, a phenomenon we will address in greater depth later in this article.

Toury (1995, 2012) builds on Even-Zohar’s theory by describing translation activity as governed by ‘norms’ that are more or less strong. Norms are regular practices or habits of different types and are related to place and time (Toury 2012, 64). To understand what is translated in Sweden today is also to understand what position translated literature occupies in the Swedish children’s literary (poly)system. Toury describes different kinds of norms in which the *initial norms* are important for our

study, as they concern the kind of translated texts, their origins, original language, sources, etc. Children's literature often has a peripheral position within a literary system, and norms are often stronger or more visible in this system (Shavit 1986), due to the strong pedagogical aspect of the work (see e.g., Nières-Chevrel 2009, 95). This is another reason to pay attention to what circulates between two (or more) countries.

To provide an overview of translated children's literature in Sweden for the period 2015–2020, we used both qualitative and quantitative methods. The Swedish Institute for Children's Books (SBI) provided us with analysed data on children's books publication in Sweden during the past five years. We then searched in the database of the Royal Library (Kungliga Biblioteket, KB) for all the children's books translated from French published in this period. Based on these results, that we classified by genre, we perform a qualitative analysis where we chose to shed light on three very specific aspects. This choice could be considered as a limitation of the study but it is based on the actual situation of the children's literary field in Sweden. Another limitation is that there is no categorization of *wimmelbooks* under a specific genre in the database of KB or SBI. Those books are included in the category of picturebooks for children aged 0-6, so in order to extract them we searched in the SBI's catalogue ELSA and had a mail correspondence with the SBI's librarians. We discuss that point a bit later (see Section 4.3).

### 3. Translation and children's literature in Sweden

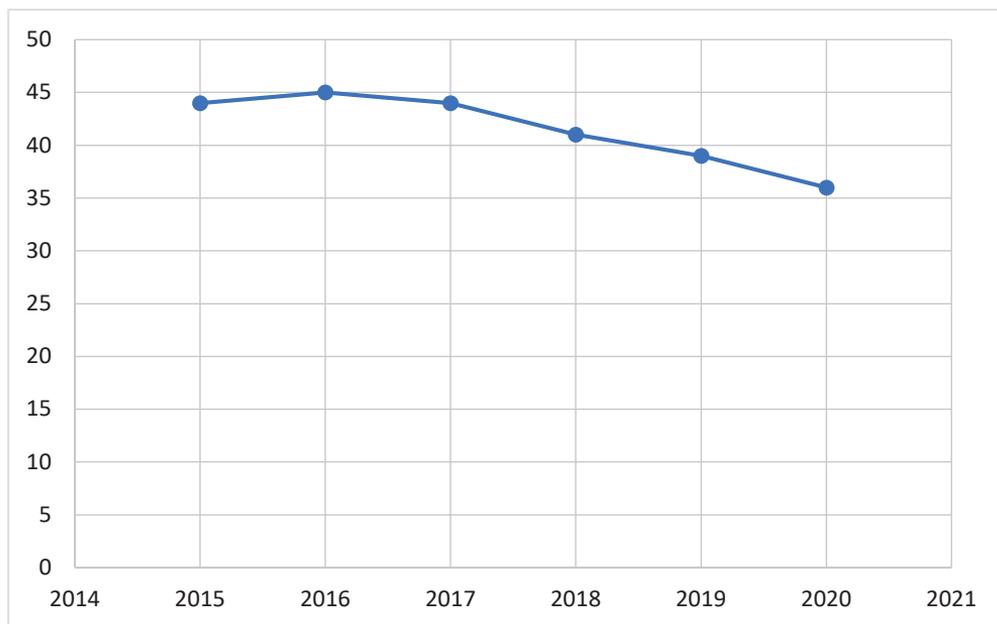
Every year, the Swedish Institute for Children's Books publishes statistics on publications, as well as on the number of translations among these works. For the period we are interested in, we can see in Figure 1 that the number of translations decreased from 846 to 667 books, which is to say in total percentage (compared to the number of publications), a decrease from 44 to 36%.

In Figure 2,<sup>1</sup> we see that the majority of translated books are still picturebooks and factual study books, although the numbers vary. This is interesting, since if the standard assumption is that a country imports books to compensate or complement a field in which its publications are scarce, this does not reflect the situation in Sweden, which still publishes many picturebooks. In 2020, as in the previous five years, this is the most published category among new books (559 books out of a total of 1,779 first editions in 2020, both Swedish and translated books).

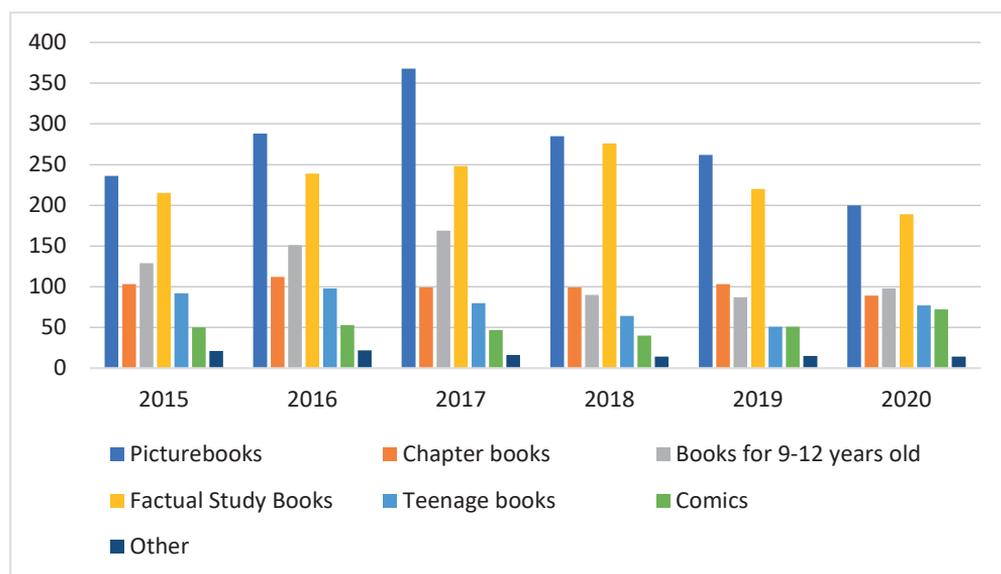
In terms of intrinsic quantity, which is not shown in Figure 2, factual study books and comics are the categories where the proportion of translations is highest: 55% of

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1 The categories used in Figure 2 are from SBI who makes a difference between "chapter books", "books for 9 to 12 years old" and "teenage books" (for those older than 12 years old).



**Figure 1.** Number of translations by percent out of all children's books published in Sweden 2015–2020 (source: SBI).



**Figure 2.** Books translated by genre for the period 2015–2020 (source: SBI, 2021, 38).

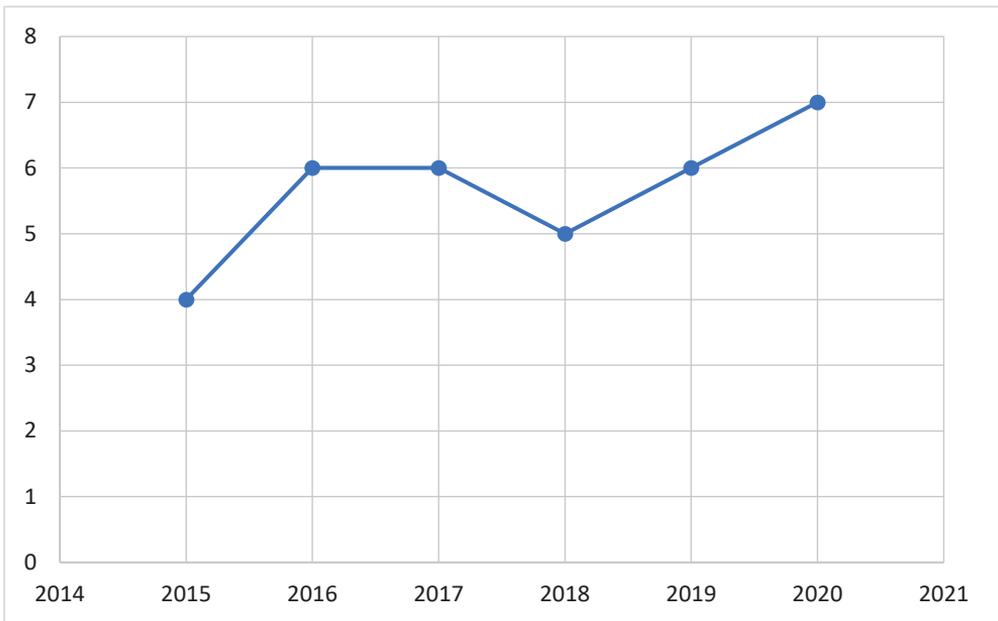
factual study books are translations and 83% of comic books, according to SBI (2021, 21). The Institute points out that publications are, as a rule, declining: "In the case of printed books, publishing has declined in most categories, but most of all in picturebooks and books for young people. Picturebooks have now fallen by 25% in three years and books for young people by as much as 38% in four years" (SBI 2021, 5, our translation). But it is above all translations that have recorded the largest percentage drop since the beginning of SBI's statistics in 2002: "[2020 has p]robably the lowest rate ever noted in the history of Swedish children's book publishing" (SBI 2021, 5, our translation). The Institute presents several explanations for this, such as the difficulty of finding an audience; the difficulty of financing translation projects; the quality of Swedish productions, which are easier to manage, especially for the contact between the publishing house and the author; and the fact that Swedish readers who speak English well prefer to read books in the original English version (*ibid.*). Note here that only English is mentioned, as it represents 64% of the translations in 2020. The Institute notes that few languages outside of the Western languages are represented in the translations (SBI 2021, 44 figure 7) and that the titles coming from Africa, South America and Latin America or Asia are therefore practically non-existent (SBI 2021, 21). Here are the languages from which translations were made in first editions in 2020: English (429 books), Swedish<sup>2</sup> (76), French (44), Danish (38), Norwegian (21), German (18), Dutch (7), Finnish (5), Italian (5), Spanish (4), Korean (3), Persian (3), Polish (3), Catalan (2), Arabic (1), Icelandic (1), Chinese (1), Latvian (1), Russian (1) and Turkish (1). However, translations do not decrease significantly in the category of books for young people, which is therefore set apart (2021, 26). Further, we should point out that the number of comics increased from 50 in 2015 to 72 in 2020.

Regarding translations from French, the percentages may seem low, ranging from 4 to 7% from 2015 to 2020. Because the overall number of publications has decreased, the percentage of books translated from French almost doubled in five years, even though the absolute number of books translated from French on the Swedish children's market is constant, with an average of about 50 books per year (see Figures 3 and 4).

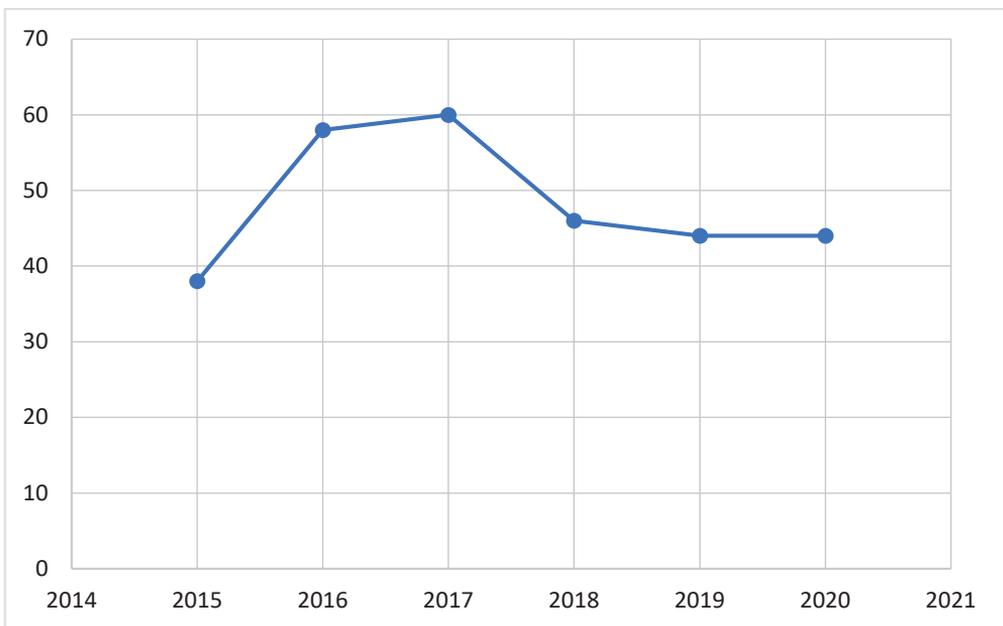
As we have shown previously (Alfvén and Lindgren 2019), even though English makes the possibility of entry into the Swedish market for other languages more difficult, French has taken a challenger position. From sixth position behind English, Danish, German, Norwegian and Swedish published in Sweden in 2015, French has thus moved to the top of the pack, to number 3 in 2017 and 2018, as well as in 2020. Moreover, the statistics have evolved in accordance with our prediction (see Alfvén and Lindgren

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2 Books translated from Swedish into another language and published in Sweden.



**Figure 3.** Percent of translations from French for the period 2015–2020 (source: SBI).



**Figure 4.** Number of books translated from French for the period 2015–2020 (source: SBI).

2019, 19).<sup>3</sup> As mentioned in note 2, the Institute includes in the category 'Swedish' books translated from Swedish into another language but published in Sweden. This category has risen sharply in the last five years from fifth (in 2015) to second position behind English every year since 2016. It is worth noting that if this category was not counted in the statistics, the position of French would be even more prominent.

In the qualitative part of the study, we looked at exactly what is translated from French, according to the lists of the Royal Library of Sweden (KB). We were mainly interested in what can be learned from the publications. In previous research (Gossas and Lindgren 2014), it was highlighted that the main publications before the 2000s were mostly approximately six groups of books consisting of the classics (especially Jules Verne and Alexandre Dumas); the rather classic Franco-Belgian comics (such as Asterix, Tintin, Lucky Luke); the illustrated books "almost exclusively represented by Babar and Barbapapa" (2014, 239 our translation); Perrault tales and fables; books from Disney cartoons; and two novels (*The Little Prince* and the Six Companions series). In the early 2000s, in addition to these publications that still remain in print, there are mostly illustrated books, factual study books and novels. In Alfvén and Lindgren (2019), we particularly focused on comics, the field of which is much more varied than Asterix and Tintin and has been a real success, books for 0-3 years and those for 3-6 years, particularly appreciated by Swedish critics. In this article, we want to know what is behind the figures for publications translated from French from 2015 to 2020. Quantitatively, the largest number of publications comes from comics: sometimes again Asterix or Tintin, but also contemporary authors. There are still some Disney books, as mentioned above, to which we will return. The older the reader (apart from the comics, traditionally intended for 7 to 77 years old according to the famous Tintin albums), the fewer French translations we found – since the vast majority of the translated illustrated books are intended for children under 9 years old.

#### 4. Three perspectives

We have chosen to look at books translated from French from three perspectives. First, we focus on books translated from the French-speaking world. Then, we present the translated books belonging to series, and finally, we look at the books called *wimmelbooks*.

The French language, present on five continents, is known for its literature for both adults and children. A part of the literature in French is written by authors who have

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3 In an article from 2019, we mentioned that "since 2015, French is on the way to dethroning [the Scandinavian languages]" (2019, 49), which are traditionally in the leading position after English, and that's what has in fact happened.

their origins outside France, and we use the term French-speaking in this article, which is a translation from the French word *Francophone*, and refers to French literature written outside France. Such authors may be from an African country, the Caribbean, Belgium or Quebec, to provide just a few examples. In Sweden, such books for adults are beginning to break through on the market, thanks to the work of specialized publishing houses and committed translators. One example is the author Maryse Condé, from Guadeloupe (Caribbean), who has written twenty novels, with six of them having been published in Swedish since 2007. Regarding children's literature, we chose to focus on African literature from French-speaking regions.

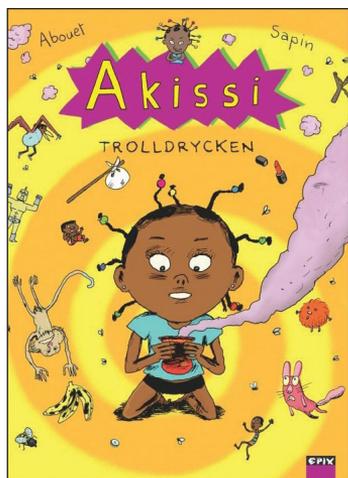
Concerning the serial children's books, we noted in our previous study (Alfvén and Lindgren 2019) the presence (in quantity) of this genre. The serial books continue to be represented in the translated books published in Sweden. Kümmerling-Meibauer mentioned that the "picturebooks series, [...] introduce children to the series concept, which plays an increasingly dominant role in our media driven times" (2017, 107). Therefore, it is important to be aware of what circulates in this field between France and Sweden (or rather, French and Swedish). We will review some authors who are recognized in this field, authors of several books in translated series. Finally, we highlight the *wimmelbooks*, whose quality is interesting, especially from an aesthetic point of view. In our previous research (Alfvén and Lindgren 2019), we showed that French illustrators were emerging in the field of Swedish children's books.

#### 4.1 African French-speaking world showing up in the field of illustrated books

Heilbron places French in the core of the cultural world system, but does not make a distinction between the different French-speaking countries. And according to Pascale Casanova's criteria (2002, 13), Sweden is one of those countries with a so-called dominated language, i.e. with few speakers, but with ancient literary traditions giving it a relatively important status and literary capital in the cultural world system. Svedjedal (2012, 33–35) and Lindqvist (2019, 606) state that Sweden is maintaining a very strong transnational position in certain genres, such as children's and young people's literature. Hedberg even states that "Swedish children's books have a stronger position abroad than fiction for adults" (2019, 19, our translation). The fact remains, according to Lindqvist (2019, 606), that Swedish is one of the ten biggest source languages in the world. African children's literature from French-speaking regions belongs to a peripheral region, but is circulating through a core language to a semi-peripheral region.

We extracted from the lists works whose authors are either native, or originate from, or are linked, notably by the themes treated and/or the illustrations in their books, to

French-speaking Africa. We are well aware that this kind of classification is not without problems, but it is not the purpose of this article to discuss them. We also discuss the publishing houses who published those books, as Toury's (2012) initial norms may play a role for a further discussion on, for example, a possible consecration or status and establishment in Sweden of this imported literature.



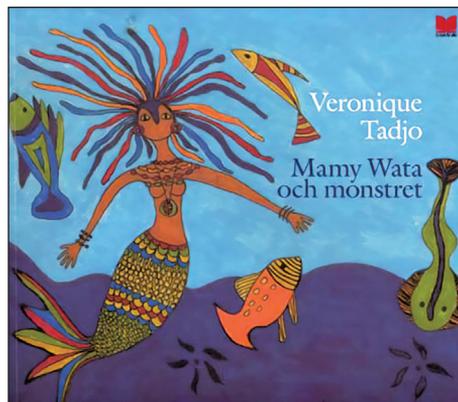
Aboutet, M. *Akissi*,  
Trolldrycken, 2019.

Marguerite Aboutet is a writer born in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Among her works, there are two series translated into several languages: the *Akissi* series (illustrated by Mathieu Sapin) and the *Aya de Yopougon* series (illustrated by Clément Oubrière), which has also been filmed (the movie *Aya de Yopougon* was released in France in 2013). For the years that concern our study, we can see the publication in 2015 of the translation in Swedish of *Akissi, super-héros en plâtre* (2011) (in Swedish, *Superhjälte på hett plåttak*), in 2018 of *Akissi Rentrée musclée* (2013) (*Den stränga läraren*) and in 2019 of *Akissi mixture magique* (2014) (*Trolldrycken*). In 2016, an electronic version of *Aya de Yopougon*, already translated into Swedish in 2010, was published. Several public libraries and university libraries in Sweden have the *Akissi* series in

Swedish, but also in French or English. For example, *Trolldrycken* is available in Swedish in 54 libraries across the country. The books in the *Akissi* series are all published by Epix. Since its creation in 1984, Epix Förlag has aimed to present the world's best comics creators to Swedish readers, in all categories. This publisher tries to be independent from other large book publishers who have a kind of monopoly on the market, but distinguishes itself with a catalogue of quality books. The publishing house's website draws attention to the French-speaking side for the first volumes by mentioning the location of the story: "seven funny stories about Akissi, a spunky little mischievous girl in the city of Abidjan on the Ivory Coast. Marguerite Aboutet [...] depicts an everyday Africa, warm but certainly not idealised and far from the usual Western clichés and images of disaster". From volume 4, the link to Africa tones down, i.e., there are no longer allusions to Africa or the country, as if the character was now well anchored in the collection of this publishing house and no longer needed a contextual link with Africa.

We also find three books of Véronique Tadjou, an Ivorian author and illustrator. *Le Bel oiseau et la pluie* (*Den vackra fågeln och regnet*) was translated into Swedish in 2017 and is now well diffused throughout the country (available in 55 libraries). Another book, *Mamy Wata et le monstre* (*Mamy Wata och monstret*), was translated in

2017. It was first published by a very small publishing house but is now produced by Mantra Lingua, a London-based publisher known for its multilingual books, and is available in a bilingual version with Swedish and, for example, English, Arabic, or Polish. There is also a pedagogical document available, published with the support of the Swedish school administration, to work with this book in schools (*Världslitteratur* website).



Tadjou, *Mamy Wata och monstret*, 2017.

Grutman (2006, 17) suggests that “asymmetrical relations between dominating and dominated literatures need not be negative *per se*, but can lead to the recognition of minority writers”. This is an interesting idea that is slightly more complex in our case, as those authors, Tadjou and Abouet, are not from a dominating literature but are using a dominating language. In this way, they are able to be introduced (maybe more easily) to the Swedish market, instead of coming from peripheral literature directly to a semi-peripheral one.

#### 4.2 Serial books continue to grow – a global phenomenon

Among the publications from French to Swedish in the period in question, a large number of books are what we call serial books, sometimes over several years. In general, there is the same main character in each book. As Kümmerling-Meibauer wrote, they “cover all genres and age groups” (2017, 103) and include “books for toddlers, wordless picturebooks, crossover picturebooks and informational picturebooks” (*ibid.*). In the field of children’s literature, “serial illustrated books” do not always enjoy good press, having the reputation of being of lesser quality, a bit like mass-produced books (Kümmerling-Meibauer 2017, 104; Kümmerling-Meibauer 2018, 167; Nikolajeva 2013, 198; Al-Yaquot 2011, 74). Kümmerling-Meibauer also states that some of these books, if not most of them, are rather mainstream with strong merchandising, while some are more artistic (2018, 167). We use the definition of a “serial book” proposed by Nikolajeva (2013), making a clear difference between a serial book and a book with a prequel and/or a sequel. Nikolajeva specifies that, if a sequel is “connected to the core or lead text, not only through theme and character but through temporal and causal relationships” (2012, 198), then serial books are atemporal. She mentions that they look like “more of the same” (2012, 199) and “are all more or less sidequels

to each other” (2013, 199). A typical example is *Akissi*, which was described earlier among books from African French-speaking communities. Nevertheless, these series are often loved by the public (*a priori*, a series that is not commercially successful is halted), and the characters are often beloved by child readers – and there is no exception to this in Sweden, as shown in our statistics.

Serial books are often connected to the concept of globalization. Borodo (2017, 8) mentions this in his book “the translation industry” and compares the circulation of translated products for younger audiences such as novels, picturebooks, comics, TV series, etc., to a “flow”. He also underlines the fact that globalization leads to a homogenous cultural landscape, but at the same time to a complex procedure of local hybridization that he calls “indigenization” (*ibid.*). Quoting Fraustino (2004, 7), Borodo writes that a publication for young readers is nowadays “global [...] controlled by a small number of huge conglomerates [...] and ‘Anglocentric’” (2017, 9). This is clearly a state that we observed in our study, and one that has an impact on the initial norms (Toury 1995, 2012) that concern the way publishers choose books to publish. For example, French books for readers 0 to 3 years of age translated into Swedish is the category where we found the most serial books. They were by seven authors, and the one with the most volumes is Marion Billet (8), an illustrator and graphic designer from Paris. She is published by Gallimard Jeunesse<sup>4</sup> in France and by Rabén and Sjögren<sup>5</sup> in Sweden. Many of her books published from 2015 to 2020 are available in several libraries in Sweden, such as *Djurens Karneval (Le carnaval des animaux)* (22 libraries) or *Var är jultomten? (Où est le Père Noël?)* (28 libraries). Another example could be in the category of books for 3- to 6-year-olds: Stephanie Blake (7) is published in France by L'école des loisirs<sup>6</sup> and in Sweden by Berghs Förlag.<sup>7</sup> Her latest book, published in 2020, *Hur gör man bebisar? (Comment on fait les bébés?)*, is available in 125 libraries in Sweden. A real counterexample previously cited is *Akissi*, which is published by a publishing house (Epix) that has a stated policy of fighting against international conglomerates. Two other examples would be Alain M. Bergeron, who published four books for readers 6 to 9 years old, and Fabrice Erre, who also published four books but in the category of books for readers 9 to 12 years old.

4 Founded in the early 20th century and considered one of the most important and influential publishing houses in France.

5 A well-established and leading publishing house. It is also known for publishing the famous Swedish children's book author Astrid Lindgren.

6 Founded in 1965, it is one of the best-known publishers of children's literature in France, especially known for its quality literature.

7 A publishing house with quality publications for children and young people, which also has high status in the industry.

Both are published in Sweden by Hegas.<sup>8</sup> These two documentary series are published respectively by Éditions Michel Quintin, a French-speaking publishing house in Canada, and by Dupuis, a French publishing house specializing in comics since 1938. *Fatta grejen med spindlar* (2020) (*Savais-tu ? Les araignées*) by Alain M. Bergeron is available in 104 libraries in Sweden.

Finally, a category somewhat distinct from the others is that of books based on Disney cartoons, which have appeared in our categorizations for several years. A total of 11 of these were published from 2015 to 2020. The main characters are not the same, but we still consider them serial books because of their ‘Disney’ branding. Many of these books have been published and republished. They are published by Story House Egmont, which is one of the leading media companies in the Nordic region. In this respect, regarding translations for young readers, the quote from Borodo (2017, 8) regarding globalization is an illustration of what has been discussed in this domain over the past several years and is sometimes called ‘Disneylization’: “Such flows and networks might be illustrated by the global expansion of the Disney publishing and media empire, accurately described by Kasturi (2002, 40) as ‘a giant media octopus with tentacles in practically every corner of the globe’”.

#### 4.3 *Wimmelbooks*: An emerging literacy and a potential (economic) success

The term *wimmelbook* (*myllerbok* in Swedish) comes from the German word *Wimmelbuch* and is used to describe books for children aged 0 to 6. “‘Wimmel’ can be translated as ‘teeming’ or ‘swarming with’” (Sundmark 2012, 222). More specifically, they “are wordless picturebooks which display a series of panoramas teeming with an immense number of characters and details” (Rémi 2011, 115). So, as there are no accompanying words and “no organising plot principle at work although there is usually some thematic coherence or unity of content” (Sundmark 2012, 222), such as “jungle”, “winter sport”, etc. *Wimmelbooks* are “an emergent literacy” (Rémi 2011). In Sweden, there are only a few titles that would be considered *wimmelbooks* published each year. The Swedish Institute for Children’s Books confirmed in a mail correspondence our experience that there are more *wimmelbooks* translated e.g., from English, than Swedish originals. In addition, we showed in a previous article that French illustrators emerged on the Swedish market for children’s books during the years 2015–2017 (Alfvén and Lindgren 2019), and with the data we collected for this study this finding seems to be confirmed by the place French illustrators have in the production of *wimmelbooks*.

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8 Hegas is a Swedish publishing company founded in 1983, with the ambition of publishing high quality, easy-to-read books.

As we explained in the methodology, *wimmelbooks* are not specifically categorized yet in library databases, it is not easy to obtain a clear picture of them through statistics. After a search in the SBI database, we estimate that this category represents 2% of the total children's book production during this five-year period in Sweden, counting all languages together. Many of those *wimmelbooks* are translated from English, but the place accorded to the French illustrators shows that Swedish publishers are still interested in French illustrators' work (which is in second place with regard to translated languages, after English). As the interest for the French illustrators' work is significant, it seems that there is a vacuum in the Swedish system that is not yet filled by Swedish illustrators, and it appears that the Swedish system may be in search of renewal, from an illustration perspective.

## 5. Concluding thoughts

In this article, through an overview of translated children's literature in Sweden for the period 2015–2020, we shed light on the kinds of books circulating and focus in particular on literature from French-speaking regions. In this way we observed the translation flow from French, a core language, using Heilbron's categorization (2000), to Swedish, a semi-peripheral one, or in other words, from a dominant to a dominated language (using Casanova's (2002) terminology). We observed that while the number of translations of children's literature in general has declined, picturebooks are still the major translated category. As a matter of fact, it is both interesting and unusual to consider more precisely the current literary contact between two (semi)peripheral regions (French-speaking Africa, Sweden) through a core language other than English, i.e., French, into Swedish, as we do in one of our sub-sections. It is interesting to point out that Heilbron does not make the distinction between French literature from France and from the French-speaking regions in Africa and elsewhere. Such a distinction, however, allows us to get a clearer picture of the translation flows.

In Even-Zohar's conceptualization, the Swedish children's literary system has been a closed one since 2010, when the import of translations decreased and the national production became the majority (see SBI 2020, 20). Although the decrease in translated works reduced the general impact of the power of translations on the system, a more detailed look at each category shows a more varied picture. For example, there are almost five times as many comics translated from other languages as there are Swedish comics.

The results of our study show that French children's literature is maintaining its position in the Swedish literary field, which is especially evident in the interest in French illustrators through *wimmelbooks* and serial books. This global phenomenon is therefore also present in Sweden, as we also noticed in our earlier studies (Alfvén and

Lindgren 2019, 2021). Three categories of children's books translated from French have been analysed in greater detail. Apart from the serial books and *wimmelbooks*, there are a few books translated from French originating from French-speaking countries. Despite their relatively small number, these books are important since they testify to the literary contact between two (semi-)peripheral regions through the use of not English but French. In fact, for the circulation of literature from French-speaking peripheral cultures, the French language is an important foundation that gives them a chance to be exported and to circulate in Sweden. As we have shown, African literature, *wimmelbooks* and some series are published by well-established Swedish publishing houses –not always or only in terms of financial success, but also in terms of the high prestige achieved through publishing high-quality literature, and this ensures their circulation among Swedish readers (e.g., through libraries).

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