

Formal trends in children's poetry in Spanish in the 21st century

Recursos formales en la poesía infantil en español del siglo XXI

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Abstract

In the 20th century, children's poetry was greatly influenced by folk orality. However, several critics have pointed out that it has undergone a formal transformation in the first decades of the 21st century. Through a literary and statistical study, this article aims at determining which are the most used formal trends in contemporary children's poetry. Specifically, the length of the verse, the general form of the poem (prose poetry, free verse, and metrics), and the use of visual poetry are analyzed. The corpus of this work consists of the winners of the Hispanic American Prize for Children's Poetry and is made up of 16 books and 423 poems. It was found that, in 21st century children's poetry, the most frequent form is free verse; the metrics is still employed, but with many innovations; the use of various visual poetry resources is common; and prose poetry has begun to take hold. In conclusion, a period of true formal renovation is being experienced those points to new sensitivities, didactic strategies, and forms of reading.

Keywords: Children's literature; children's poetry; visual poetry; free verse; metrics; quiet reading.



INTRODUCTION

During the 20th century, children's poetry drew from the rich tradition of folk orality (Cerrillo-Torremocha, 1990; Cerrillo-Torremocha & Sánchez-Ortiz, 2017; Frenk, 2013; Luján-Atienza, 2016; Sotomayor, 2002). *Arte menor* and folk-inspired metrics styles such as couplets, quatrains, *romance*, and *seguidilla* were linked to oral life and, therefore, to specific forms of using children's poetry, such as reading aloud, singing, playing, and dancing: phono-rhythmic materiality gives the poem a sensory power that leaves no room for indifference; it's even capable of moving the body to performativity in the form of steps, jumps, gestures, claps, glances and various vocal emissions (Herrera-Rojas, 2017, p. 350).

Nevertheless, several critics have pointed out that children's poetry has undergone a true transformation in the first decades of the 21st century. (Bajour, 2013; Munita, 2013). Folk orality still has a great influence, but children's poetry has incorporated new forms such as free verse, visual poetry, and prose poetry. This paper aims at pinpointing the most used formal trends in children's poetry in Spanish in present times through a comparative study that combines literary analysis with descriptive statistics. The main focus will be on the verse length, the general poem form (prose poetry, free verse, and metrics), and the use of visual poetry.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Quilis (1975), it is not easy to distinguish between the different poetic forms, for the limits that divide them are blurry: there are several nuances that result in free poems, rhythmic prose, prose poems, etc. (pp. 13-14). To simplify the complex panorama, I will divide my analysis into three mutually exclusive formal categories: metrics, free verse, and prose poetry. I will also engage with visual poetry, although it can be found in any of the above.

Metrics

Metrics can be understood as a configuration of phonic and linguistic elements in such a way that the poem acquires a regular, systematic rhythm (Beristáin, 2006, p. 332; Quilis, 1975, p. 13). There are two important categories: *arte menor* and *arte mayor*. The first one englobes poems consisting of verses with eight syllables or less. During the 20th century, this was the most usual form of writing children's poetry:

We may assume that kids are more attracted to short stanzas composed of *arte menor* verses and, among them, hexasyllabic and octosyllabic verses. The musicality and easy pronunciation of these verses in a single voice emission are among the reasons for these preferences. Stanzas do not need to be isosyllabic. The *seguidilla* is one of the most pleasant stanzas. And variations in metrics, prevalent in popular poetry, are valid as long as the compositions are presided by the rhythm and serve as a support for the game. (Cervera, 1991, p. 93).

Amongst the most popular *arte menor* metrics forms in the context of children's poetry we can find: the *copla* (Baehr, 1997, p. 245), the *romance*, the *seguidilla* (Baehr, 1997, p. 248; Luján-Atienza, 2016, p. 44), the haiku (de-la-Fuente-Ballesteros, 2009; Hernández-

Esquivel, 2012) and *pie quebrado* verses. *Arte mayor* is also used, although to a much lesser extent.

Free verse

In contrast to metrics poetry, there is no pre-established number of syllables for the verses in free-verse poetry. Jaimes-Freyre (2012) defines it as the arbitrary mix of verses with different prosodic periods and even the combination of sentences without any regular rhythm (p. 114). It appeared at the end of the 19th century in the works of authors such as Gustave Kahn, Jules Laforgue, Emile Verhaeren, and Walt Whitman, where it fulfilled a need for expression (Utrera-Torremocha, 2003, p. 303). Understanding free verse as a homogenous, unified poetic form would be a mistake since its nourishing theories are very varied (Paraíso, 1985; Utrera-Torremocha, 2003, 2010). For example, some authors link it to a non-syllabic accent metrics, while Whitman links it to biblical verses and Borges to prose. We may understand the free verse as a search for a personal, inner rhythm instead of a pre-established one. In other words, every poet creates it, following the flow of their feeling, reflecting the range and intensity of their expressive drive in every line and the totality of the work (Paraíso, 1985, p. 55).

According to Paraíso (1985, p. 389), it is possible to classify free verse into two large groups. The first one is based on phonic rhythms, including clause-free poetry, rhyming free verse, and free verse based on metrics tradition. The latter is the most important type and can be defined as every poem that, for its rhythmic morphology, reminds of other forms of Hispanic metrics heritage (Paraíso, 1985, p. 395). It is important to highlight several subtypes within the category of free verse with a traditional base, such as free *silvas* and songs. The second group is based on the rhythm of thought, i.e., on reiterating one or many semantic elements, such as enumerations, anaphora, or metaphors (Paraíso, 1985, p. 389). These texts include an accumulation of images, a widespread phenomenon in avant-garde poems. It is essential to point out that this dichotomy [between phonic rhythm and rhythm of thought] does not mean exclusion. It only means the greater predominance or the greater perceptibility of one or another element (Paraíso, 1985, p. 390).

Free verse was the characteristic form of 20th century poetry (Paraíso, 1985, p. 13). Nevertheless, the case of children's poetry was quite different, since its use of free verse during that period was rather scarce. In fact, only recently, after an article by Córdova (2021) was published, the tradition of free verse in children's poetry started to be rescued from oblivion. This is because, for a long time, children's poetry was considered to be fundamentally oral, so several authors claimed that free verse was not appropriate for it. For example, Luján-Atienza (2016) wrote that the existence of truly free verse seems to go against the characterization that we have been doing of a fundamentally musical, sound-based poetry (p. 59). This started changing at the end of the 20th century and the turn of the 21st (Bajour, 2013; Munita, 2013). At this time, the writer Fran Alonso (2002) asked himself why the access to free verse was still denied to young readers. A few years later, García-Montero (2015) suggested that children are capable of writing verses without rhyme or metrics, i.e., free verse (p. 115). Gradually, free verse has increased its importance in children's poetry.

Prose poetry

As for prose poetry, [Utrera-Torremocha \(1999\)](#) writes that within modern literature, the need was born for finding a language to renew lyrical conventions, which some poets found obsolete. Therefore, it should be understood as a negation of the primacy of verse as the only possible vehicle for poetry (p. 11). Baudelaire can take the credit of writing the first remarkable examples of prose poetry since this author had the goal of creating prose poetry born from the soul, without rhythm or rhyme, which would express the waving movement of dreams but also the tremors of modern consciousness ([Utrera-Torremocha, 1999, p. 21](#)). If free verse was barely used in children's poetry during the 20th century, the use of prose poetry was even scarcer. Most of the texts that analyze children's poetry in this period wonder why free verse was so rarely used ([Bajour, 2013](#); [Flor-Ada, 1990](#); [Herrera-Rojas, 2017](#); [Luján-Atienza, 2016](#); [Sotomayor, 2002](#)), but don't even mention prose poetry. The only exception is the recent article by [Córdova \(2021\)](#), but the author does not deepen the analysis of this poetic trend.

Visual poetry

Visual poetry can be defined as poetry where graph elements act as signifiers in the poem ([de-Cózar, 1991](#)). In other words, the poetic message depends not only on linguistic components but also on visual ones. These works have a long history that can be traced back to antiquity ([Giovine-Yáñez, 2018](#); [Zárate, 1976](#)). It was Mallarmé who, by the end of the 19th century, introduced visual poetry into high literature. In his poem *Un coup de dés*, he explored the changing function of language in light of the appearance of new media, such as newspapers and publicity ([Prohm, 2004, p. 2](#)). This was an innovative work, for Mallarmé placed the words and the verses in different places on the page—left, right, center, top, bottom—and he used different font sizes and styles, creating a poetic of space, where the disposition of the page became a vital element of the poem's meaning ([Prohm, 2004, p. 4](#)). This way of placing the verses in different positions has been called active blanks ([Giovine-Yáñez, 2018, p. 8](#)). By doing this, Mallarmé laid the basis for the foundation of modern visual poetry through the intensive formal quest led by avant-garde authors such as Apollinaire and Marinetti ([Bohn, 2001, p. 19](#)). During the 20th and the 21st centuries, visual poetry had an extensive expansion, covering several literary movements, from Apollinaire's calligrammes and Marinetti's words-in-freedom to Mexican stridentism ([Giovine-Yáñez, 2018](#)) and concrete poetry ([Aguilar, 1999](#)).

Undoubtedly, visual poetry and childhood have a strong link. Didactic activities often invite children to combine text and images, both when reading and engaged in creative tasks ([García-Carcedo, 2001](#); [Santiago-Ruiz, 2020](#)). Hence it is not surprising that, in the 21st century, visual elements are often present in children's poetry. It is nevertheless important to establish a distinction. [Neira-Piñeiro \(2012\)](#), following the category of *children's picturebooks*, traditionally applied to narrative, refers to the books for children we are dealing with as *lyric picturebooks*. Although children's picturebooks and lyric picturebooks are very similar objects, both usually having beautiful double-page illustrations, it is important to highlight a fundamental difference. As many authors have pointed out, the text and the image work together in a specific sequence within the children's picturebook to convey meaning ([Moebius, 1986](#); [Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000](#); [Santiago-Ruiz, 2021](#)). This is not necessarily the case in the so-called lyric picturebooks. These could have their images modified or removed without changing the sense of the

text. The illustrations for the books I analyzed for this paper were created after the texts were finished. It is important to highlight this fact, for all of the books that constitute my corpus are lyric picturebooks, but not all of them fall in the category of visual poetry.

CORPUS

The corpus of this paper consists of the books that won the Hispanic American Prize for Children's Poetry, organized by the Fondo de Cultura Económica and the Fundación para las Letras Mexicanas. This award was created in 2004 and, since then, has been delivered every year¹. As [table 1](#) shows, the corpus consists of 16 books, 423 poems and 4,477 verses.

Table 1. Analyzed corpus

Title	Abbreviation ²	Author	Illustrator	Year awarded	Poems
<i>La suerte cambia la vida</i>	Suerte	Javier España	¿?	2004	56
<i>Tigres de la otra noche</i>	Tigres	María García Esperón	Alejandro Magallanes	2005	21
<i>Las aventuras de Max y su ojo submarino</i>	Max	Luigi Amara	Jonathan Farr	2006	19
<i>Rutinero</i>	Rutinero	Níger Madrigal	María Wernicke	2007	24
<i>Los espejos de Anaclara</i>	Espejos	Mercedes Calvo	Fernando Vilela	2008	30
<i>Árbol de la vida</i>	Árbol	Marco Aurelio Chavezmaya	Manuel Monroy	2009	57
<i>Huellas de pájaros</i>	Huellas	Ramón Iván Suárez Caamal	Mauricio Gómez Morín	2010	25
<i>Lo que no sabe Pupeta</i>	Pupeta	Javier Mardel	Cecilia Rébora	2011	23
<i>El vuelo de Luci</i>	Luci	Gerardo Villanueva	Ixchel Estrada	2012	29
<i>Cielo de agua</i>	Cielo	Aramís Quintero	Betania Zacarías	2013	21
<i>Lunática</i>	Lunática	Martha Riva Palacio	Mercé Lopez	2014	23
<i>Ema y el silencio</i>	Ema	Laura Escudero Tobler	Roger Ycaza	2015	18
<i>Esto que brilla en el aire</i>	Brilla	Cecilia Pisos	Ana Pez	2016	23
<i>Una extraña seta en el jardín</i>	Seta	Luis Eduardo García	Adolfo Serra	2017	27
<i>Cuando fuiste nube</i>	Nube	María José Ferrada	Andrés López	2018	16
<i>El mar</i>	Mar	Micaela Chirif	Armando Fonseca Amanda Mijangos Juan Palomino	2019	11
				Total	423

METHODOLOGY

I started by doing a conventional literary analysis to feed a database, subsequently analyzed with R studio version 2022.02.1. I classified the poems into three mutually exclusive groups: free verse, metrics, and prose poetry. Distinguishing between these categories can be difficult, so to increase my study's reproducibility, I will now explain the specific rules that I followed for the classification.

A poem fits into the metrics category if A) it follows a well-known metrics scheme, such as the sonnet, the *romance*, the *seguidilla*, etc.; B) It is the modification of a well-known metrics scheme, such as the four syllables *copla* or the pentasyllabic *romance*; or C) If it shows any regularity in the count of syllables, for example, a combination of tetrasyllabic and hendecasyllabic verses. It is not always easy to distinguish between the metrics found in anisosyllabism and free verse, so I decided to include in the 'metrics' category all the poems where 75% or more of the verses had the same number of syllables. I followed the Spanish versification rules for the syllable count, such as *sinalefa*, oxytone, paroxytone, and proparoxytone verses. Whenever necessary, metrics licenses were also applied (Baehr, 1997, p. 38; Quilis, 1975, p. 39).

As for free verse, all the works that fall into any of the two large groups established by Paraíso were included in this category (1985, p. 389): the ones that follow a phonic rhythm and the ones that use the rhythm of thought.

Visual poetry is a completely different category, since it can be combined with any of the previously mentioned forms. A calligramme might be composed with *seguidillas*, for example. In this article, a text is considered visual poetry if: A) it plays with different styles of typography, such as italics, crossing out of words, font size and font color; B) it uses active blanks, i.e., the words or verses are situated in areas of the page that differ from the traditional left, right or center alignment; C) the visual dimension is predominant, as in calligrammes; D) it resorts to other visual resources, such as verses written backward, lines that encourage writing or repeated letters.

RESULTS

The verse

Figure 1 shows a graph for the frequency of verses of n syllables. The analyzed corpus shows that the most used verses have eight syllables or less. This can be explained from a rhythmic perspective, for children's poetry tends to rely on brief verses to make the texts livelier through a shorter rhythmic period. As shown in figure 1, some types of verses are much more common than others. The most used verses, in decreasing order, are the following: heptasyllabic, octosyllabic, pentasyllabic, and hendecasyllabic.

Although some authors have argued that octosyllabic verses are the most common type of verse in children's poetry (Herrera-Rojas, 2017, p. 350; Munita, 2013, p. 110), this is not the case for this corpus, where heptasyllabic verses are predominant. Octosyllabic verses are only dominant in the metrics category (figure 2), while seven-syllable verses are the most common within the free verse category (figure 3). What is the reason for this preference for heptasyllabic verses? Two possible explanations come to mind. The first is that a shorter verse can produce briefer and merrier verses. The second one is that poets put a great effort into introducing formal innovations, as we will see in detail. Heptasyllabic verses seem to be a way of staying close to tradition and simultaneously reinventing it.

Figures 2 and 3 respectively show the frequency of verses with n syllables in the metrics and free verse categories. As expected, in the metrics category (figure 2) there is an extensive use of octosyllabic, pentasyllabic, heptasyllabic and hendecasyllabic verses. In contrast, the amount of verse sizes within the free verse category (figure 3) is much more homogenous, but not completely random, for there is a predominance of

heptasyllabic and pentasyllabic verses. This can be explained by the fact that free verse is closely linked to metrics tradition, and also strives to create a phonic rhythm (Paraíso, 1985; Utrera-Torremocha, 2003, p. 333).

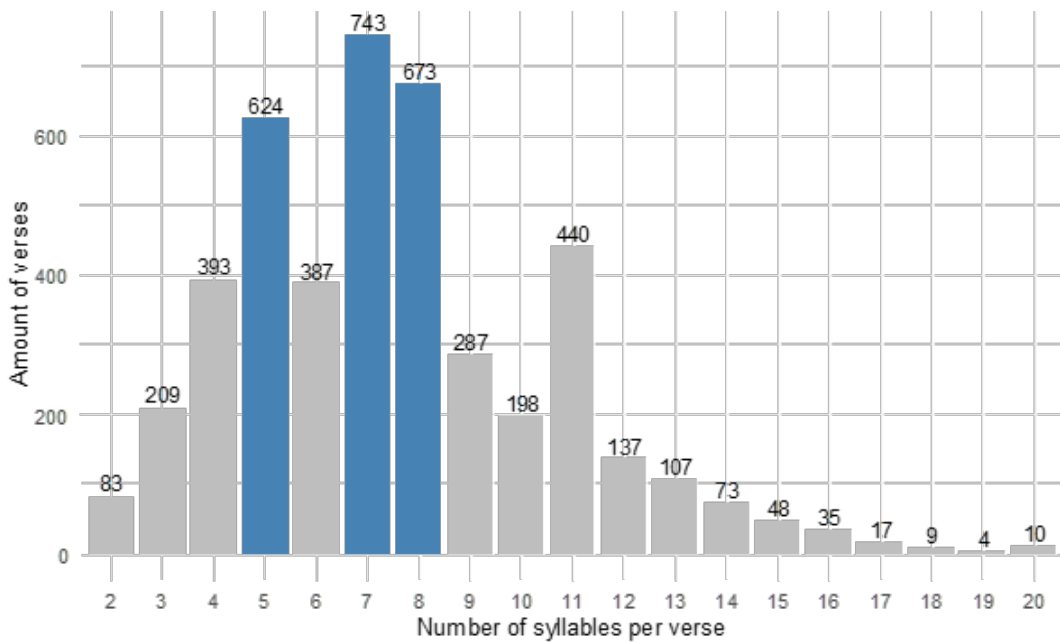


Figure 1. Number of verses with n syllables in all the poetic trends

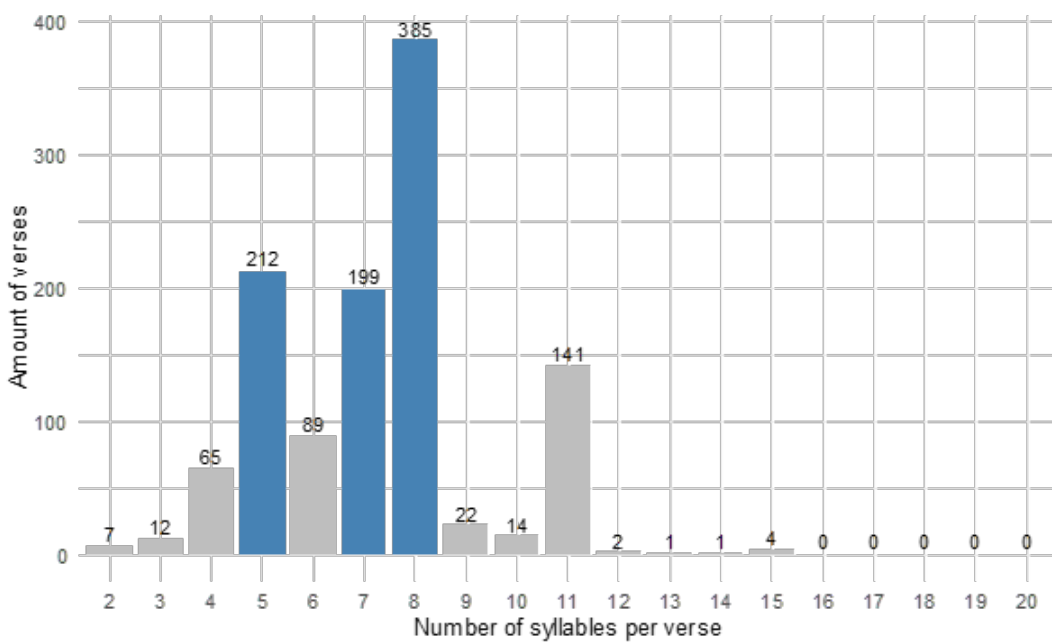


Figure 2. Number of verses with n syllables in the metrics category

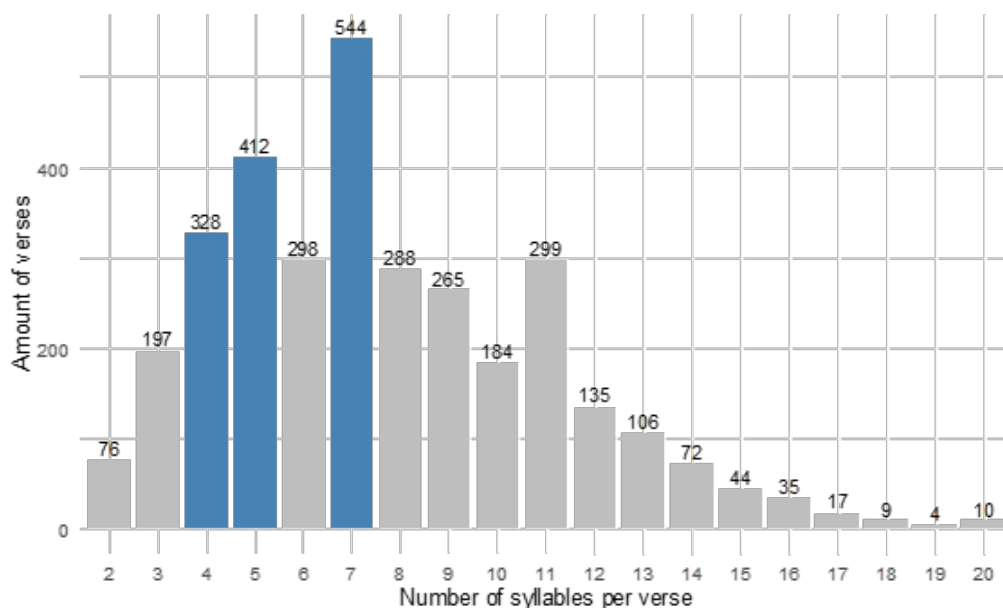


Figure 3. Number of verses with n syllables in the free verse category

These figures show that hendecasyllabic verses are the most common representatives of *arte mayor*. It might seem strange to find them in children's poetry, but their presence is not only due to their use in classical forms such as sonnets and single hendecasyllabic verses. They are also prevalent in the free verse category, as figure 3 shows. This is yet another proof of the close relationship between free verse and classical forms.

Length of the poem

For figure 4, I made a graph with information about the length of the texts in every book of poems. The length of the poems that form the corpus varies from one to forty-four verses. The average is 11.53, the median is 10 and the mode is 5. The poems with 16 or less verses constitute 75% of the corpus. These numbers show that there is a preference for shorter texts.

The shortest poems, i.e., those with only one verse, are only two: "B", from *Rutinero*, and "Toma la luna por los cuernos", from *Lunática*. It is worth mentioning that the latter is also a calligramme. One of the longest poems is "Pero hay días", from *Lunática*, with 43 verses. The longest poems are "Un ojo demasiado inquieto", "Peligro en el salón de clase", "Una madrugada tenebrosa", and "Historia de la perla mutante". They are all from the book *Max* and are composed of eleven *coplas*, i.e., they have a total of 44 verses each.

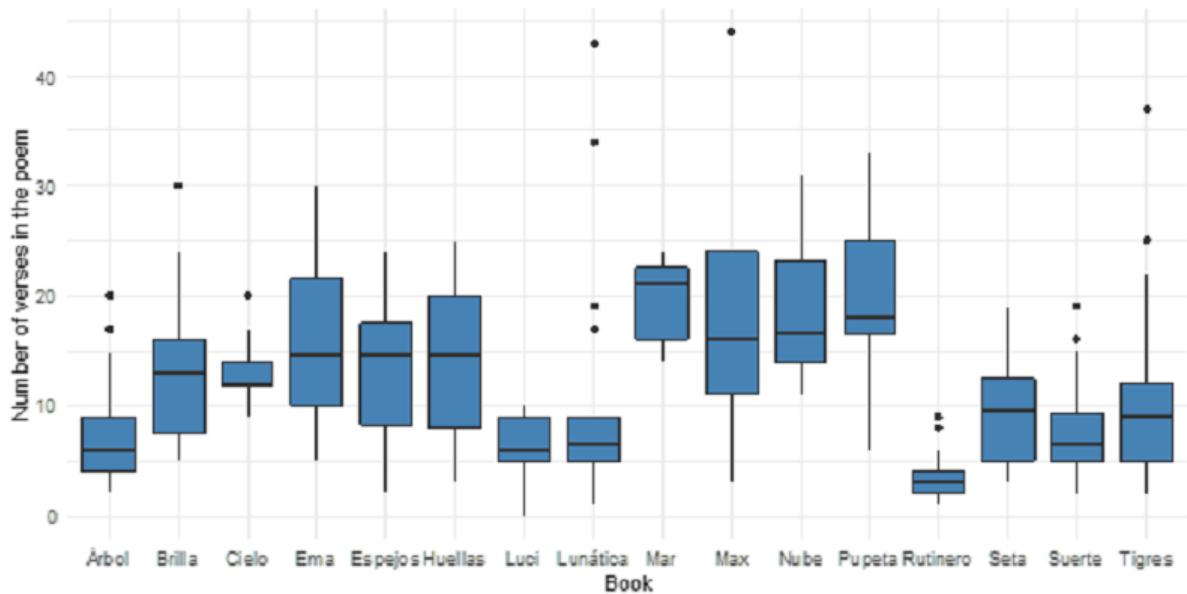


Figure 4. Length of the texts in each book

Poetic trend

Free verse is the most common trend, for it represents 69% of the analyzed corpus. On the other hand, 23% represents a substantial decrease for metrics, especially if we take consider it was almost omnipresent in past decades. Prose poetry's apparition with 8% is noteworthy. As figure 5 shows, the latter is limited to certain books, such as *Huellas*, *Luci*, *Lunática*, and *Seta*. It might seem like a rather low number, but it is more used than sonnets, romances, and even coplas. This means prose has become an important trend in contemporary children's poetry.

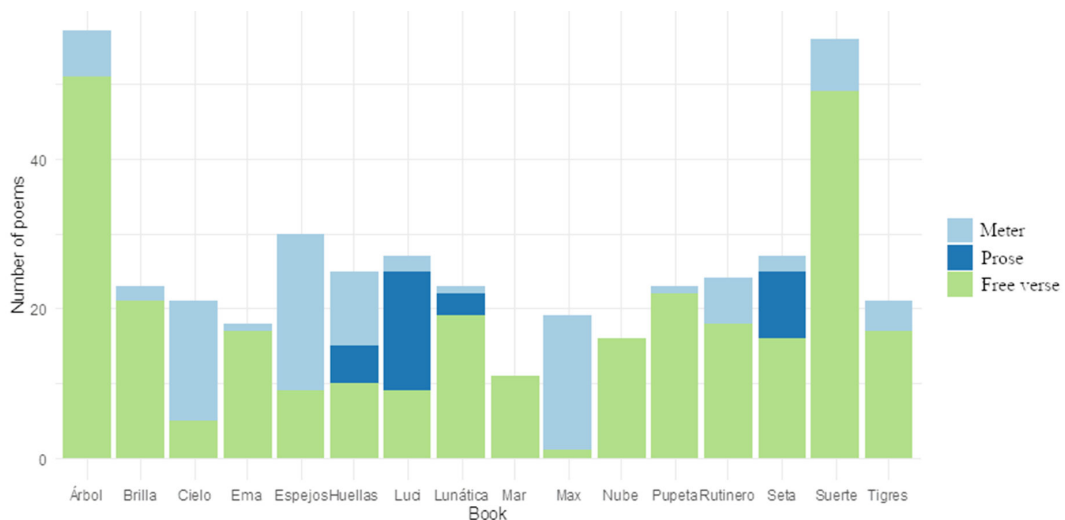


Figure 5. Poetic trends in each book

Metrics

Metrics is mainly found in the books *Max*, *Especjos*, and *Cielo* (figure 5). Some poems with metrics can be found in the other books, but they only make sporadic appearances. Some classical forms are used in the corpus. Take for instance “La luna empieza a salir”, from *Especjos*, which is a ten-line stanza: or “El oso bipolar”, from *Max*, which is a sonnet. Nevertheless, the poets show a clear tendency towards a quest for innovation. They often make modifications to classical metrics schemes, especially by reducing the number of syllables. This trend can be seen in the poem “En la noche,” from *Tigres*, which revisits the *copla*, a folk metrics scheme that is very popular in children’s poetry, transforming it through the use of tetrasyllabic verses:

- (4) En la noche
 (4) de Bengala
 (3) las luces
 (4) se hacen rayas (García-Esperón, 2017, p. 16)³.

Arte menor forms are the most abundant, for they represent 84% of the metrics category. Examples of “pure” metrics schemes are hard to find, since the authors introduce many formal innovations. Therefore, it is not pertinent to talk about, for instance, the *seguidilla*. It would be more befitting to talk about the *seguidilla* family, i.e., a whole group of texts that bear a resemblance to the *seguidilla*. Figure 6 shows the metrics families that are most used in *arte menor*.

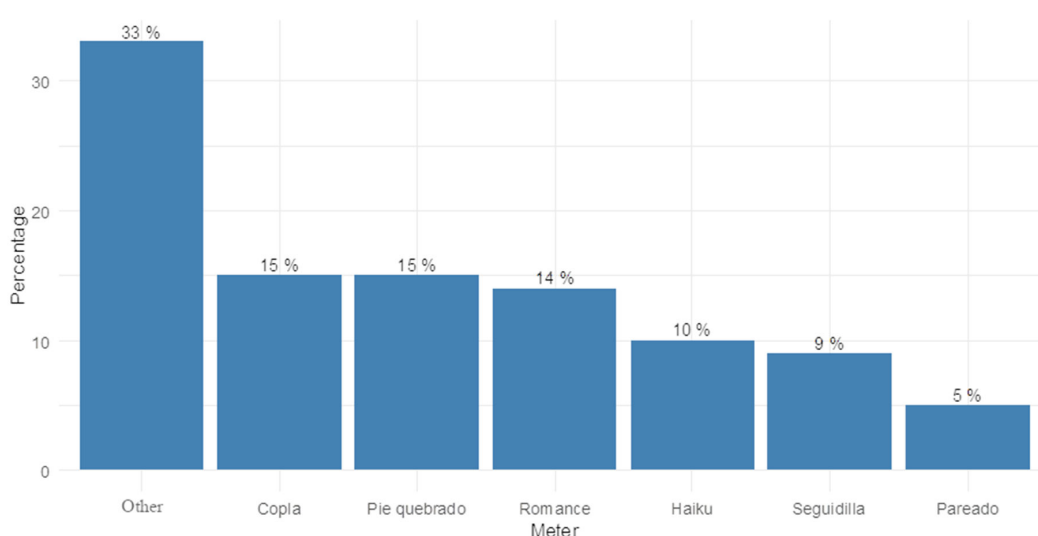


Figure 6. Percentage of metrics forms in *arte menor*

Arte mayor is very scarce in this corpus, only represented by two sonnets and five single hendecasyllabic verses. There are also a few poems with extravagant metrics forms, such as “La chica clorofila”, from *Max*, which is made of hendecasyllabic four-line stanzas following an ABAB-ABBA rhyme and grouped in pairs that work as a refrain. Most of the *arte mayor* poems from the corpus can be found in *Max*.

Free verse

As shown in Paraiso's book (1985), the free verse category has incredible diversity. This corpus is no exception, so it is impossible to encompass in a few lines all the different free verse types found in the books. I would nevertheless like to highlight two significant trends. The first one points to the fact that many of these poems are closely linked to orality since they follow a precise rhythm that makes them appropriate for declaiming and singing. An example of this is "Mamboretá", from *Ena*, which is a free *silva*, a form that is characterized by verses of 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 and 14 syllables (Baehr, 1997, p. 383). Due to its use of alliterations, rhymes and long pentasyllabic verse sequences, "Mamboretá" has an intense phonic materiality. Its first verses are the following:

- (9) Mamboretá mamboretá,
- (7) perá perá, ¿no e'?
- (5) Mamborecuá,
- (5) ¿mamborecuá?
- (7) Palo palito e'
- (3) ¿Será?
- (5) Mamboreté
- (5) ¿Mamborequé?
- (5) Mamboretero
- (5) tamborilero (Escudero-Tobler, 2016, p. 14).

In a book presentation, the author, Laura Escudero-Tobler (2017), reads the poem aloud and says, "this is like a song." Indeed, like many others in the free verse category, this work has great musicality and easily perceptible phonic rhythms.

The second trend that I would like to highlight is a very different kind of free verse, for its rhythm is not based on sound but on thought. In other words, instead of being built through rhymes, alliterations, or regular verses, rhythm is created through juxtapositions and repetitions of rhetorical figures or syntactic structures. An example of this trend is "Un nuevo comienzo I", from *Seta*:

- (18) Marmotas en una nube. Liebres patinando sobre el hielo.
- (11) Tiranosaurios bailando la polka.
- (12) Murciélagos en un globo de cristal.
- (5) El mundo puede
- (8) y debe ser otra cosa (García, 2018, p. 9).

The first three verses belong to *arte mayor* and base their rhythm on chaotically enumerated semantic and syntactic parallelisms. The rhythm changes in verses four and five, resorting to a lower number of syllables. This change highlights a semantic modification in the poem, for the last two verses close the poem by explaining the enumeration that precedes them.

In the book *Mar*, by Micaela Chirif, free verse resorts to the rhythm of thought. An example is the following verses of the poem "El mar":

- (6) El mar no es un río
- (5) El mar no duerme

- (17) El mar no tiene uñas ni pierde las hojas con el frío
 (7) El mar no tiene plumas
 (15) El mar no se peina ni sabe subir escaleras
 (5) El mar no viaja
 (5) El mar no muere
 (8) El mar suena suena suena
 (15) El mar tiene la misma forma de día y de noche
 (9) El mar es grande como el mar
 (13) Si unes los puntos verás la forma del mar
 (13) Si no ves nada es porque estás dentro del mar (Chirif, 2020, p. 33)

The first verses juxtapose images of what the sea is not. This vast body of water is characterized as something different from human beings and animals, for they do sleep, have feathers, or lose their leaves with the passing of seasons. This part finishes with “el mar no muere,” highlighting that we deal with an immortal entity, profoundly different from living beings. The poem continues by explaining what the sea actually is, with verses like “el mar es grande como el mar,” which reminds us of religious or philosophical formulae. This poem brings readers closer to the experience of infinity through the accumulation of rhetorical figures and rhythm of thought.

As the reader may see, the rhythm of this kind of poem is not necessarily the rhythm of a song, nor can it be easily sustained through the body's performativity. On the contrary, it's a rhythm that moves away from pre-established models, marking parallelisms or contrasts in the stream of ideas the poet wants to convey.

Visual Poetry

The poems that include any kind of visual poetry make up 24% of the corpus. [Figure 7](#) shows the number of visual pieces in each book. The typography category, i.e., the one covering texts that make use of larger font sizes, changes of color, italics, crossed-out letters, and similar resources, includes 31 poems. An example of this is “Ilógica lunática,” from *Lunática*, where the letter ‘i’ is crossed out in the title, alluding to a deep sense of the seeming senselessness. In “Galopa un caballo,” from *Espejos*, the letter ‘c’ is larger than the others, insinuating a horse's belly. “De puño y letra”, from *Luci*, uses typography that resembles handwriting, just as the title suggests.

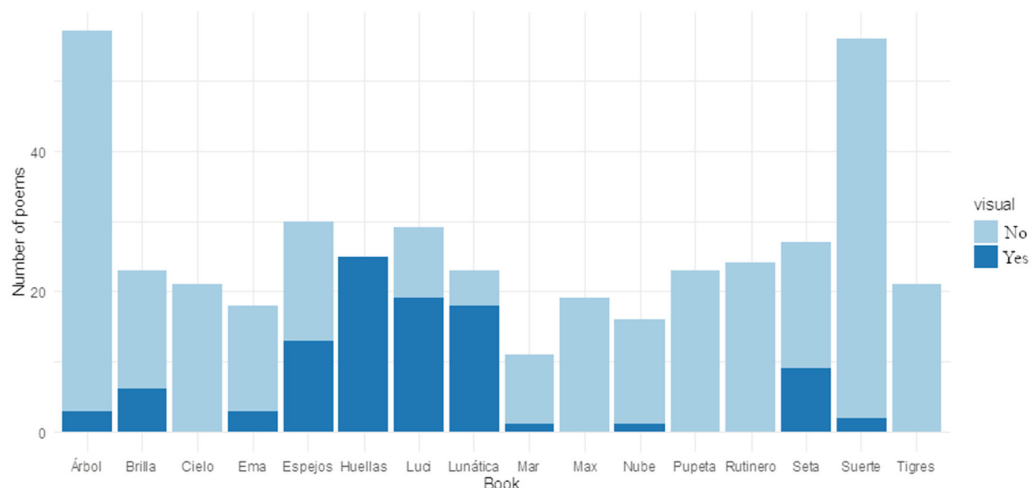


Figure 7. Number of visual poems in each book

The active blanks category includes 34 texts. In some occurrences, this visual resource only consists of one or two verses that do not follow the arrangement of the others; in these cases, the blank space is used to mark important lines or help create rhythm. An example of this is “Ema regresa,” from *Ema*, where, by the end of the poem, three verses form an enumeration, signaled through a slight indentation to the right. In other cases, blank spaces intertwine with the central topic of the poem. For example, in “Canta la lluvia,” from *Brilla*, the arrangement of the stanzas resembles a group of jumping frogs.

Some works resort to uncommon visual effects. In *Espejos* there are texts such as “Detrás de estos ojos,” which is written from right to left, with all the letters backward, so that, to read it correctly, one has to use a mirror. In “Fiesta de aterrizaje,” from *Luci*, a line invites flies to land on it. It is important to highlight that, also in *Luci*, the texts “Cacería” and “Cuadro sinóptico” arrange the words so that it is impossible to identify the way they should be read: the visual poetry disrupts the structure itself of the verse or prose.

The corpus includes 34 calligrammes. Most of them are in *Huellas*, which is wholly composed of calligrammes of texts in metrics, prose, and free verse. Works like “Tengo un problema con los relojes,” from *Espejos*, that draws the picture of an hourglass; “Lunática destorlongada,” from *Lunática*, written in the shape of a spiral that imitates the spins and somersaults of the main character; and “Escondidas II,” from *Seta*, that resembles a smile that hides the bacteria mentioned in the poem, are also worth mentioning.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It should be noted that this paper is limited because it does not analyze all of the existing poetry for children or young adults. This corpus represents the understanding of poetry shared by a particular publishing house and the poets themselves, who make up the prize’s jury. Therefore, it would be interesting to analyze the differences or similarities these works bear with other contemporary kinds of poetry, such as pop poetry (Regueiro-Salgado, 2018) or online poetry (Campos-F-Figares, 2021; Falguera-García & Selfa-Sastre, 2021).

While metrics ruled children's poetry during the last decades, this has radically changed. Metrics has not entirely disappeared, but this corpus shows a veritable explosion of formal trends. In the previous century, a powerful emphasis was made on metrics. This was befitting of the oral life of the texts, which were sung, memorized, or even danced to. But new expressions have arisen in contemporary visual poetry, where metaphors, personal reflection, and the visual dimension are equally important.

The poem *Suerte* reads

(11) No quiero declamar en el colegio.
 (10) prefiero la poesía en voz baja,
 (10) como una lámpara junto a mí,
 (9) alumbrando apenas mis ojos
 (11) para mirar los ojos de mi madre
 (14) o el vuelo breve y secreto de mi breve hermana
 (12) dentro de una noche también de voz baja ([España, 2008, p. 35](#)).

This poem by Eduardo España, found in the first book that received the prize, announces something that the rest of the corpus materializes. Many free verse poems resort to the rhythm of thought, awakening new poetic sensitivities and a more personal, reflexive, quiet way of reading among children.

Formal innovations such as free verse, prose poetry and visual poetry appeared in the history of literature as a quest for new possibilities of expression. Poets did not only want to say something new; they wanted to say it in a new language. Something similar is happening with the texts that form this corpus. Not only the formal experimentation is noteworthy, but also that the content itself is going through a transformation. Many poems strongly emphasize the exploration of the world and the creation of identity. An example of this is "Escalar," from *Lunática*, where the lyrical voice defends its freedom and puts material things or "good manners" on a second level:

(4) Escalar
 (5) sin que te importe
 (8) que se rasgue tu vestido.
 (6) Porque es sólo tela
 (5) y lo que importa
 (7) es alcanzar la cima ([Riva-Palacio, 2017, p. 30](#)).

A quest for new topics can be found in all of the books that constitute this corpus. The lyrical voices in *Espejos* and *Lunática* reflect on their emotions and question their parents. In *Tigres*, there is an appeal to fantasy, and *Max* uses disgust as a mechanism for wonder. Some books, such as *Rutinero*, *Árbol y Mar*, are dominated by lyricism. Finally, many poems reflect on ecology, death, and poetry itself.

The transformation that can be seen in this corpus should not be understood as the fall from grace of orality or metrics but as a disclosure of new forms of using language in a playful, meaningful way. These poems are an invitation to reinvent reading traditions, didactic strategies, and, most of all, to the use of poetry to build identity and the quest for expressive freedom.

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Notes

¹ The book is normally published one year after the granting of the award, but the publication of *El mar*, by Micaela Chirif, was postponed until 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, neither the winner of the 2020 edition (*Gato ¿estás ahí?* by Evelyn Moreno) nor the winner of the 2021 one (*Raíz del nido* by Elizabeth Reinoso) had been published at the moment when this was written.

² For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to the books using their abbreviation both in the text and in the article's graphics.

³ The number inside the parentheses corresponds to the number of syllables in each verse.