



The reception of Liu Cixin's *Remembrance of Earth's Past* among Portuguese-speaking readers: A corpus-based study

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Abstract: *Remembrance of Earth's Past*, Liu Cixin's trilogy beginning with *The Three-Body Problem*, has gained global recognition for its ambitious scientific vision and philosophical depth, redefining contemporary science fiction. While its reception has been explored in several linguistic and cultural contexts—including English-, Japanese-, and Spanish-speaking readerships—Portuguese-language contexts remain underrepresented in scholarship. This study addresses this gap by examining Portuguese-speaking readers' engagement with the trilogy, seeking to understand its popularity, interpretative trends, and the thematic and linguistic patterns shaping responses. Additionally, it assesses the interplay between positive reception and critical perspectives. Grounded in Reception Theory, particularly the perspectives of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, the analysis investigates how readers' expectations, interpretive strategies, and cultural frameworks shape their understanding of the work. Methodologically, it crawls the data and analyzes the Portuguese-language reviews from three major platforms—Amazon.br, Goodreads, and Skoob—spanning the period from April 2014 to March 2025. The reviews were compiled into the reader corpus and compared against the Portuguese reference corpus using Sketch Engine, a computational linguistics tool. The study employs keyword analysis to identify distinctive themes and linguistic patterns within the Portuguese comments. The findings indicate a strong and predominantly positive reception of *Remembrance of Earth's Past* across Portuguese-speaking regions. Four interrelated thematic dimensions emerge from high-frequency word analysis: recognition of Liu Cixin's authorship, engagement with scientific speculation, character complexity, and reflections on cultural paradigms. The reception of the trilogy reveals an ongoing negotiation between readers' established literary expectations and the novel's unique cultural-scientific framework. Through selective accommodation and cultural analogy, readers navigate potential comprehension gaps, adapting the text to their interpretative contexts. This study contributes to translation and reception studies by offering insights into the cross-cultural dynamics of literary engagement.

Keywords: reception; Liu Cixin; *Remembrance of Earth's Past*; Portuguese-speaking readers; corpus.



I. Introduction

Liu Cixin's *Remembrance of Earth's Past* trilogy has emerged as a seminal work in contemporary science fiction, garnering international acclaim and sparking widespread discussion among readers and critics alike (Gaffric, 2017; Gaffric & Peyton, 2019; Peyton, 2021). Since the publication of its first volume, *The Three-Body Problem* in China in 2006, the trilogy has been translated into numerous languages, including English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese, reaching a global audience. The trilogy's intricate narrative, profound scientific concepts, and philosophical depth have captivated readers worldwide, making it a cornerstone of modern speculative fiction. This study seeks to explore the reception of *Remembrance of Earth's Past* among Portuguese-speaking readers, with a particular focus on Brazil, where the novel has achieved significant popularity.

I.1 Research background

The global success of *Remembrance of Earth's Past* is a testament to its universal themes and innovative storytelling. Beginning with the first book, *The Three-body Problem* (《三体》), the trilogy's exploration of astrophysics, quantum mechanics, and the Fermi paradox, combined with its speculative vision of humanity's future, has resonated with readers across different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The English translation of 三体, *The Three-body Problem*, published in 2014, played a pivotal role in introducing the novel to a broader audience, leading to its recognition with prestigious awards such as the Hugo Award for Best Novel in 2015. Subsequent translations into other languages have further cemented its status as a global literary phenomenon.

In the Portuguese-speaking world, particularly in Brazil, the trilogy has found a receptive and enthusiastic readership (Zhang & Huang, 2023). Brazil, with its large and vibrant literary community, represents a significant market for translated works. The Brazilian edition of the trilogy, *O Problema dos Três Corpos* (The Three-Body Problem, the first volume), *A Floresta Sombria* (The Dark Forest, the second volume), and *O Fim da Morte* (Death's End, the third volume), particularly translated by Leonardo Alves and published by Suma in 2016, has been well-received, with readers praising its complex narrative and thought-provoking themes. The trilogy's popularity in Brazil is also reflected in the active discussions and reviews on platforms such as Skoob, Goodreads, and Amazon.br, where readers engage with the text and share their interpretations and evaluations (Huang & Zhang, 2025).

I.2 Research problems

Despite the growing body of research on its literary depth and global reception, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding its reception among Portuguese-speaking readers. While studies have examined the novel's impact in English-speaking (Gao & Hua, 2021; Qin, 2022; Zhang, 2019), Japanese (Bao & Gao, 2021) and Chinese contexts (Zhou, 2023), little attention has been given to how it is received in Portuguese-speaking countries, particularly Brazil. The only two existing studies on this topic focus on translation strategies (Lu & Han, 2023, 2024). This gap is significant given the unique cultural and linguistic characteristics of the Portuguese-speaking world, which may influence readers' interpretations and evaluations of the novel.



Understanding the reception of the trilogy among Portuguese-speaking readers requires an analysis of how psychological, cultural and ideological factors shape readers' engagement with the text. This includes analyzing how readers interpret the novel's scientific and cultural paradigms, as well as identifying the specific elements of the novel that resonate with Portuguese-speaking readers. By addressing these questions, this study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the novel's global impact and the factors that influence its cross-cultural reception.

1.3 Research objectives

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the reception of *Remembrance of Earth's Past* among Portuguese-speaking readers, based on data from Amazon.br, Skoob and Goodreads. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. How popular is *Remembrance of Earth's Past* among Portuguese-speaking readers, and what trends can be observed in its reception across platforms?
2. What are the dominant themes and recurring topics in Portuguese-language reader reviews, and how can corpus linguistics methods reveal underlying patterns in content and language use?
3. Is the reception of *Remembrance of Earth's Past* among Portuguese-speaking readers predominantly positive, or are there significant criticisms?

By achieving these objectives, this study contributes to translation and reception studies by examining how linguistic and cultural factors shape reader engagement. It also offers insights into how literature is reinterpreted in a cross-cultural context.

2. Theoretical framework

Reception Theory, primarily developed by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser in the late 1960s and early 1970s, provides a robust framework for analyzing how literary works are received and interpreted by readers (Iser, 1993; Jauss, 1982b, 1994). This theory shifts the focus from the author and the text to the reader, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between the text and its audience. In the context of Liu Cixin's *Remembrance of Earth's Past* and its reception among Portuguese-speaking readers, Reception Theory offers valuable insights into how different linguistic and cultural backgrounds influence the interpretation and appreciation of the text.

2.1 Reader-text interaction

At the core of Reception Theory is the concept of the "horizon of expectations" (Jauss, 1982a). This refers to the set of cultural, historical, and personal expectations that readers bring to a text. These expectations shape how readers interpret and evaluate the text. For *Remembrance of Earth's Past*, Portuguese-speaking readers may have different horizons of expectations compared to



Chinese or English-speaking readers. These differences can be attributed to varying cultural contexts, literary traditions, and exposure to science fiction.

Jauss argues that the reception of a literary work is not static but evolves over time as readers' horizons of expectations change. This is particularly relevant for *Remembrance of Earth's Past* in Portuguese world, where foreign science fiction, particularly from the Anglophone world, has historically dominated the genre (Ferreira, 2008; Silva, 2015). The evolving reception of the novel can be traced through reader reviews and discussions on platforms like Skoob, Goodreads, and Amazon.br (Bartl & Lahey, 2023; Mawa, 2024; Silva & Curcino, 2023). An analysis of these reviews reveals patterns in readers' expectations and interpretations, especially concerning dominant themes and the tension between popular appeal and critical response.

2.2 The role of the implied reader

Wolfgang Iser's concept of the "implied reader" complements Jauss's ideas by focusing on the text's structure and how it guides the reader's interpretation. The implied reader is a hypothetical figure who responds to the text's cues and fills in its gaps, actively participating in the construction of meaning (Miner, 1975). In the case of *Remembrance of Earth's Past*, the novel's original implied reader was primarily a Chinese audience, familiar with the historical, political, and cultural references embedded in the narrative. The novel assumes a readership that not only has a basic understanding of complex scientific concepts and philosophical dilemmas but also possesses contextual knowledge of China's intellectual traditions and historical events. These elements are central to the novel's world-building and character motivations, particularly in shaping the ideological struggles of Ye Wenjie.

However, as *Remembrance of Earth's Past* gained global recognition, its implied reader expanded beyond the Chinese context to include international audiences who may lack familiarity with these cultural references. This shift necessitates different reading strategies, as non-Chinese readers must bridge the cultural and historical gaps through translation, footnotes, or prior knowledge. The varying degrees to which readers can engage with these layers of meaning influence their interpretations and overall reception of the novel.

For Portuguese-speaking readers, the experience of reading *Remembrance of Earth's Past* may differ based on their familiarity with science fiction and their ability to engage with the novel's thematic depth. Iser's theory suggests that the text's gaps and ambiguities invite readers to actively participate in the meaning-making process (Khrais, 2017; Yurdakul, 2024). This active engagement can lead to diverse interpretations and emotional responses, which can be analyzed through reader reviews and comments.

2.3 Empirical analysis using corpus linguistics

To operationalize Reception Theory in this study, we employ corpus linguistics methods to analyze reader reviews. Recent studies have explored the application of corpus linguistics methods to analyze reader reception of literature. Holur et al. (2021) developed computational tools to model reader responses from Goodreads reviews, extracting shared narrative models, character



impressions, and event sequencing. This approach offers insights into non-professional readers' interpretations of popular novels. Similarly, Fidler and Cvrček (2015) used keyword analysis to reconstruct historical reader viewpoints, demonstrating how corpus-linguistic methods can reveal divergences in text interpretation across different time periods. Wood *et al.* (2020) examined reception theory in Shakespeare studies, highlighting the importance of audience and reader reactions in creating meaning. Sera (2020) examines emotional responses to Kazuo Ishiguro's works using online reviews, finding 'sad' as the predominant emotion. Boot (2013) advocates for a comprehensive corpus of online book responses to facilitate research into reader understanding and literary popularity. Whiteley and Canning (2017) argue for the importance of reader response research in stylistics, highlighting both experimental and naturalistic methods. These studies collectively demonstrate the potential of corpus linguistics to operationalize reception theory, providing novel ways to analyze reader responses and interpretations across various literary contexts and historical periods.

Corpus analysis captures the spectrum of reader responses, from positive to negative evaluations (Ho, 2022; Römer, 2008; Sera, 2020). Positive reviews may praise the novel's innovative ideas, complex characters, and thought-provoking themes. Negative reviews, on the other hand, may critique the pacing, translation quality, or perceived cultural biases.

By categorizing and analyzing these evaluations, we can gain a nuanced understanding of how *Remembrance of Earth's Past* is received by Portuguese-speaking readers. This analysis can reveal the factors that contribute to the novel's popularity and the challenges it faces in crossing cultural and linguistic boundaries.

3. Methodology

According to Iser (1993), every text is structured with a hypothetical reader in mind, yet the actual meaning of the text only materializes through the interaction between real readers and the text. In this context, the use of corpus analysis serves as a methodologically grounded way to capture this interaction.

By identifying lexical items that are statistically overrepresented in the review corpus compared to a general Portuguese reference corpus, keyword analysis allows the voices of actual readers to emerge from their spontaneous textual engagements. This data-driven approach does not impose predefined categories, but instead infers themes, patterns, and evaluative tendencies inductively from what real readers highlight as salient or meaningful. In doing so, the methodology operationalizes Iser's concept of the "reader-text" relationship: it reveals how readers actively fill textual gaps, assign relevance, and negotiate meaning.

3.1 Data collection

The initial data collection was conducted in November 2022 using web crawlers to extract reader reviews and corresponding timestamps from three platforms: Amazon Brazil, Goodreads, and Skoob. These three platforms were selected due to their wide reach and influence among Portuguese-speaking readers. Skoob is Brazil's largest online literary community, known for hosting



detailed reader discussions. Goodreads, though global, includes a substantial Brazilian user base and is frequently cited in reception studies. Amazon.br, as the leading bookseller in Brazil, provides direct access to verified buyer reviews.

This collection specifically targeted user comments on the Suma’s Portuguese editions of the *Remembrance of Earth’s Past*. The thematic coding and interpretation were completed in November 2022. A supplementary data collection using the same methodology was subsequently performed in March 2025 to expand the dataset. The expanded dataset was incorporated into the quantitative overview of review volume and reception trends.

3.2 Corpus construction

The primary corpus (PtgRC_Trilogy) comprises 601 Portuguese-language reviews collected during the initial phase, spanning April 2014 to November 2022. The distribution across works is as follows:

Table 1: The distribution across works

Book	Reviews
Problema dos Três Corpos	341 reviews
A Floresta Sombria	136 reviews
O Fim da Morte	124 reviews

Source: Authors (2025)

This corpus contains 87,303 tokens, 76,169 lexical words, and 3,657 complete sentences. PtgRC_Trilogy serves as the target corpus for specialized linguistic analysis of reader responses to the trilogy.

3.3 Reference corpus

The Portuguese Web 2018 (ptTenTen18) corpus was selected as the reference corpus, representing general Portuguese language patterns (Monteiro et al., 2018; Sardinha & Ferreira, 2014). As a web-derived corpus, ptTenTen18 contains 8.73 billion tokens, 7.41 billion lexical words, 357 million sentences and 25.5 million web pages. Spanning both European and Brazilian Portuguese variants, with texts collected between February and April 2018, this corpus provides a robust baseline for comparative linguistic analysis.

3.4 Analytical framework

Corpus analysis was conducted using Sketch Engine, a web-based corpus management system. Word frequency was calculated and classified by part of speech. Keyword identification was performed using Sketch Engine’s “Simple Maths” algorithm. This method calculates a keyness score by comparing the normalized per-million-word frequency of a term in the target corpus (PtgRC_Trilogy) to its frequency in the reference corpus (ptTenTen18), with a smoothing parameter N=1 applied to mitigate zero-frequency bias. The formula is:



$$\text{Keyness Score} = \frac{f_{\text{focus}} + N}{f_{\text{ref}} + N}$$

Where f_{focus} and f_{ref} are the normalized frequencies (per million words) of the term in the target and reference corpora, respectively. Terms with scores significantly greater than 01 indicate higher salience in the target corpus (Sketch Engine, 2025).

Keywords in reader responses to the works were categorized into five thematic groups, drawing inspiration from Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, particularly the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions that organize experiential and evaluative meanings:

1. **Narrative and Character Description:** This category includes references to the names, actions, and relationships of characters, such as “Ye Wenjie” and “Da Shi”, which reflect how readers engage with the experiential dimension of the novel.
2. **Thematic Abstraction:** This includes reflections on major cultural, political, or philosophical issues, with abstract terms like “China”, “women”, “culture”, “science” and “society”, capturing readers’ interpretation of the trilogy’s conceptual concerns.
3. **Contextual Observations:** This group captures references to geographical, climatic, and historical context, including terms like “Communism”, “Cultural Revolution” and “Mao Zedong”.
4. **Literary Critique:** This category encompasses criticism of literary techniques, authorial intent, or symbolic elements, using terms such as “novel”, “Cixin”, “metaphor”, and “realism.”
5. **Sentimental Evaluation:** This includes assessments of the novel’s quality through descriptive and evaluative language, often reflecting positive or negative attitudes with terms like “brilliant”, “vivid”, and “great”.

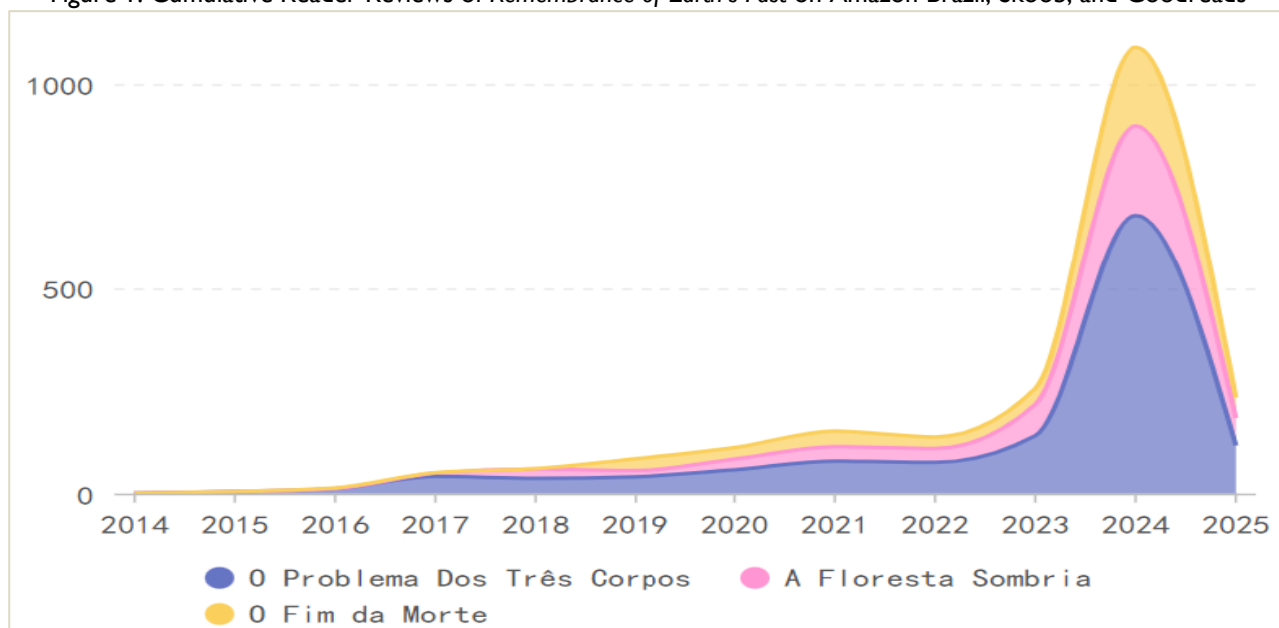
4. The popularity and reception trends of *Remembrance of Earth's Past* among Portuguese-speaking readers

The reception of Liu Cixin’s *Remembrance of Earth's Past* among Portuguese-speaking readers has demonstrated a significant upward trend over the years, with a notable surge in engagement in 2024. Since 2025 is not yet complete, the chart shows a relatively lower number for this year. However, the trend suggests that 2025 is expected to be on par with 2024. Figure 1 reveals a steady increase in online annual reviews and discussions on literary platforms such as Amazon.br, Skoob, and Goodreads.

Between 2014 and 2016, engagement with *Remembrance of Earth's Past* remained minimal, with fewer than 20 reviews per year. Although the Portuguese translation of *The Three-Body Problem I* (*O Problema dos Três Corpos*) by Suma was published in 2016, Portuguese-speaking readers had already shared their thoughts on the novel, likely based on the English or Chinese editions. From 2017 onward (51), engagement steadily increased, accelerating notably in 2023 (256) and rising exponentially in 2024 (1090).



Figure 1: Cumulative Reader Reviews of *Remembrance of Earth's Past* on Amazon Brazil, Skoob, and Goodreads



Source: Authors (2025)

This surge was likely driven by greater availability and cross-media adaptations. In 2021, the Portuguese publisher Relógio D'Água released the first volume of the trilogy, translated directly from Chinese by Telma Carvalho. This marked an important shift, as the previous Brazilian edition (Suma, 2016) had been translated from English. By 2024, the entire trilogy had been published, significantly broadening its accessibility to Portuguese-speaking readers.

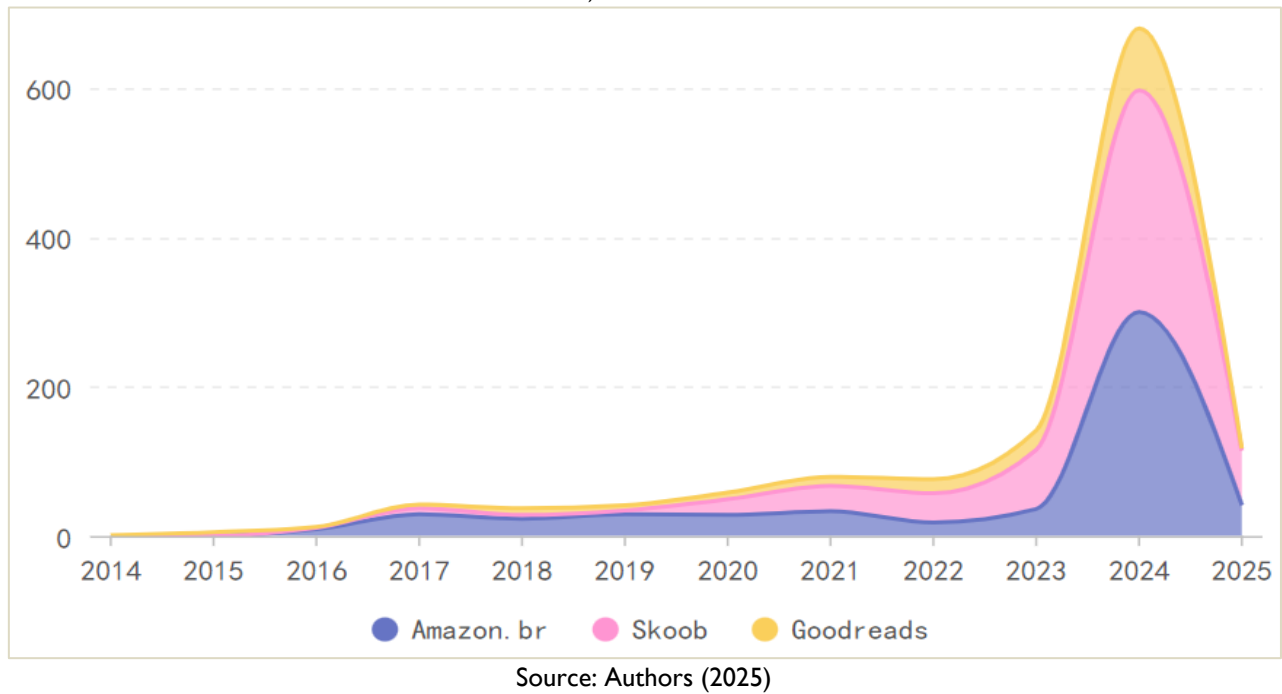
Notably, international screen adaptations also contributed to renewed attention. The animated adaptation of *The Three-Body Problem* premiered on Bilibili in China on December 10, 2022 and the live-action series launched in January 2023 on Tencent Video and other platforms, were released with English subtitles and became available globally via Tencent's official YouTube channel. While no reader reviews directly mention these adaptations, the temporal correlation between their release and the spike in Portuguese-language engagement suggests a likely influence—especially considering the increasing presence of Brazilian fans on global fandom forums like Reddit, Twitter, and YouTube (Golubeva, 2023). These channels often circulate content originating from platforms like Bilibili and Tencent, making them indirect but significant pathways of exposure for Portuguese-speaking audiences. Notably, the series' groundbreaking visual effects relied on Shenzhen-based Renderbus, whose technological innovation reflects Guangdong's Lingnan tradition of openness and creativity in contributing to the global dissemination of Chinese science fiction.

Furthermore, the sharp rise in 2024 aligns with Netflix's 2023 announcement of its own adaptation, which catalyzed global media coverage and intensified discussions across multiple language communities. For Brazilian readers in particular, the trilogy's rising visibility coincided with a growing appetite for hard science fiction and interest in Chinese speculative storytelling, positioning the series as both a literary discovery and a cultural phenomenon.

Breaking down the trilogy's reception by volume, *O Problema dos Três Corpos* consistently maintains the highest number of reviews, followed by *A Floresta Sombria* and *O Fim da Morte*. This pattern suggests that while many readers engage with the first book, fewer continue through the

entire trilogy, a common trend in serialized works (Bornet & Kaplan, 2015). The dominant proportion of readership is female for the first book, but shifts to males for the second and third books (Huang & Zhang, 2025), suggesting that those who persist through the entire trilogy are predominantly male.

Figure 2: Cumulative Reader Reviews of the *O Problema dos Três Corpos* (Book I) (2016 by Suma) on Amazon Brazil, Skoob, and Goodreads



Platform-wise, Skoob and Amazon.br saw the most significant rise in engagement in 2024 in *O Problema dos Três Corpos*, each accumulating nearly 300 reviews, whereas Goodreads displayed more moderate growth. Figure 2 suggests that local Brazilian platforms may play a crucial role in popularizing the trilogy.

5. Dominant themes in Portuguese-speaking reader reviews

Sketch Engine identifies two types of keywords: single words and multi-word terms. Single-word keywords include individual lexical items, with lemmas capturing their base forms by ignoring inflectional variations. Multi-word terms, consisting of two or more words, offer broader semantic coverage and greater precision, making them more effective in reflecting key discussion themes.

This paper presents the top 50 multi-word term keywords from the PtgRC_Triology corpus, refined from the top 100 by removing redundancy (see Table 2). While single-word keywords appear more fragmented, they remain insightful, highlighting discussions on the story, *Liu Cixin*, key characters (e.g., *Ye Wenjie*, *Luo Ji*, *Wang Miao*, *Cheng Xin*, *Da Shi*), and antagonistic forces (e.g., *Trisolarans*, *Trisolaris system*, *extraterrestrials*). Notable scientific and narrative elements, such as *protons* and *doomsday battleships*, also feature prominently.

Integrating both keyword types, the following discussion examines Portuguese-speaking readers' responses to *Remembrance of Earth's Past*.



Table 2: Top 50 multi-word term keywords from the PtgRC Trilogy corpus

List	Multi-word Terms	English Meaning	PtgRC_Triology Freq	ptTenTen18 Freq	PtgRC_Triology Relative Frequency (per million)	ptTenTen18 Relative Frequency (per million)	Keyness
1	Cixin Liu	Cixin Liu	123	30	1408.88635	0.00344	1405.059
2	três corpos	three body	86	92	985.07495	0.01054	975.794
3	floresta sombria	dark forest	82	200	939.25751	0.0229	919.203
4	revolução cultural	cultural revolution	93	5682	1065.25549	0.65072	645.933
5	Luo Ji	Luo Ji	55	0	629.98981	0	630.99
6	ficção científica	science fiction	248	40150	2840.6814	4.59812	507.614
7	Ye Wenjie	Ye Wenjie	41	13	469.62875	0.00149	469.929
8	Cheng Xin	Cheng Xin	24	0	274.90463	0	275.905
9	costa vermelha	red coast	21	8	240.54156	0.00092	241.32
10	Wang Miao	Wang Miao	21	10	240.54156	0.00115	241.265
11	Rey Diaz	Rey Diaz	15	0	171.8154	0	172.815
12	projeto barreiras	barriers project	15	14	171.8154	0.0016	172.539
13	base costa vermelha	red coast base	14	0	160.36104	0	161.361
14	autor chinês	Chinese author	13	42	148.90668	0.00481	149.189
15	prêmio Hugo	Hugo award	12	394	137.45232	0.04512	132.475
16	Liu Cixin	Liu Cixin	11	11	125.99796	0.00126	126.838
17	conceitos científicos	scientific concepts	13	2534	148.90668	0.2902	116.188
18	Wenjie Ye	Wenjie Ye	10	0	114.5436	0	115.544
19	explicações científicas	scientific explanations	11	940	125.99796	0.10765	114.655
20	civilização alienígena	alien civilization	10	354	114.5436	0.04054	111.042
21	invasão alienígena	alien invasion	11	1706	125.99796	0.19538	106.241
22	ficção científica hard	hard science fiction	9	68	103.08924	0.00779	103.285
23	livro de uma trilogia	book of a trilogy	9	375	103.08924	0.04295	99.803
24	Isaac Asimov	Isaac Asimov	10	1587	114.5436	0.18175	97.773
25	Miao Wang	Miao Wang	8	0	91.63488	0	92.635
26	civilização extraterrestre	extraterrestrial civilization	8	258	91.63488	0.02955	89.976
27	jogo três corpos	three-body game	7	0	80.18052	0	81.181
28	three-body problem	three-body problem	7	11	80.18052	0.00126	81.078
29	cultura chinesa	chinese culture	9	2531	103.08924	0.28986	80.698
30	revolução chinesa	chinese revolution	8	1370	91.63488	0.1569	80.072
31	Chinês Cixin	Chinese Cixin	6	0	68.72616	0	69.726

32	ficção científica chinesa	chinese science fiction	6	0	68.72616	0	69.726
33	chinês Cixin Liu	Chinese Cixin Liu	6	0	68.72616	0	69.726
34	livro de FC	SF book	6	14	68.72616	0.0016	69.615
35	Carl Sagan	Carl Sagan	8	2908	91.63488	0.33303	69.492
36	trilogia de ficção científica	Trilogy of science fiction	6	44	68.72616	0.00504	69.377
37	vida inteligente	intelligent life	8	3192	91.63488	0.36556	67.837
38	fãs de ficção científica	science fiction fans	6	322	68.72616	0.03688	67.246
39	seres extraterrestres	extraterrestrial beings	7	1825	80.18052	0.20901	67.147
40	fãs de ficção	fiction fans	6	399	68.72616	0.04569	66.679
41	história chinesa	Chinese history	6	423	68.72616	0.04844	66.504
42	desenvolvimento de personagens	character development	6	687	68.72616	0.07868	64.64
43	ideias interessantes	interesting ideas	6	837	68.72616	0.09586	63.627
44	história de ficção	fiction story	6	930	68.72616	0.10651	63.015
45	vida alienígena	alien life	6	936	68.72616	0.10719	62.976
46	civilização humana	human civilization	7	2632	80.18052	0.30143	62.378
47	teorias científicas	scientific theories	7	2741	80.18052	0.31391	61.786
48	interação de Luo Ji	Luo Ji interaction	5	0	57.2718	0	58.272
49	trilogia o problema	the problem trilogy	5	0	57.2718	0	58.272
50	trissolaris o plano	the plan of trissolaris	5	0	57.2718	0	58.272

Source: Authors (2025)

5.1 Liu Cixin as a national literary brand and a challenge to Western sci-fi traditions

The prominence of multi-word keywords reveals (Liu) Cixin (140 mentions) as a central figure in reader discussions, with his name frequently embedded in phrases like “author Liu Cixin” and “teacher Liu Cixin”, indicating a strong sense of admiration. High-frequency phrases such as “China’s Liu Cixin” and “Chinese author” suggest that Liu functions as a national literary brand, shaping readers’ perceptions of China. The reasons for this acclaim span various aspects, including his personal background, the evaluation of his works, narrative techniques, plot construction, character development, thematic scope, and intellectual depth.

This strong association between Liu and Chinese identity coexists with another notable trend in the type 4 single-word keywords, rather than the multi-word expressions presented in Table 2): the frequent juxtaposition of Liu with canonical Western sci-fi authors like Asimov and Clarke. The most frequently mentioned authors in the reviews include Arthur C. Clarke (39), Isaac Asimov (33),



Carl Sagan (8), Philip K. Dick (4), Frank Herbert (3), Ursula K. Le Guin (3), along with Ted Chiang, Pierre Boulle, and others. This comparative framing exemplifies what Hans Robert Jauss termed the “horizon of expectations” (Erwartungshorizont) in literary reception. Readers’ attempts to position *The Three-Body Problem* within an established sci-fi genealogy—evident in labels such as “China’s Asimov”—reflect a desire to assimilate Liu’s work into a Eurocentric paradigm of the genre.

“O Problema dos Três Corpos já nasceu um clássico. É fácil de ler e traçar paralelos com Isaac Asimov, pois Cixin Liu aparenta estar no mesmo patamar visionário do autor russo-americano”.

“The Three-Body Problem is a born classic. It is easy to read and draw parallels with Isaac Asimov, as Cixin Liu appears to be on the same visionary level as the Russian-American author” (Beatriz Cruz, 2020,08.29, Skoob).

This act of literary mapping aligns with a preexisting “science fiction tradition expectancy”, where audiences anticipate grand narratives and techno-philosophical inquiry reminiscent of the Golden Age of Western sci-fi. Yet Wolfgang Iser’s concept of the “implied reader” reveals a deeper tension: Liu’s narrative strategies both fulfill and subvert these expectations (Dougherty, 2022; Gaffric & Peyton, 2019; Song, 2015). His dark forest theory, for instance, conforms to the hard sci-fi tradition’s demand for rigorous scientific extrapolation while introducing a distinctly Sinocentric epistemology that challenges Western anthropocentrism (Afflerbach, 2023; Lyu, 2022; Zhao & Peng, 2020).

Some readers acknowledge how *The Three-Body Problem* challenges the conventional Anglo-American sci-fi framework, offering a fresh perspective on humanity’s place in the cosmos:

“A série tem então argumentos que eu acho ótimos para uma história de ficção científica. Não são exatamente originais, mas são bons o suficiente para eu querer ler os três livros. Chama bastante a atenção também o fato de que essa é uma ficção científica chinesa, que foge do eixo anglo-saxônico e permite sonhar sobre nosso contato com o espaço sideral para além das lentes do eixo América do Norte-Europa”.

“The series presents arguments that I find excellent for a science fiction story. They are not exactly original, but they are compelling enough to make me want to read all three books. What also stands out is that this is Chinese science fiction, breaking away from the Anglo-Saxon axis and allowing us to imagine our contact with outer space beyond the lens of the North America-Europe axis” (Nathaniel Figueire, 11/05/2022, Skoob).

Beyond broadening the genre’s geographical scope, Liu’s portrayal of humanity, morality, and survival is seen as distinct from Western sci-fi, particularly in its blend of pessimism and detachment:

“A abordagem sobre a humanidade é única. Mistura um pessimismo com uma frieza difícil de ver num escritor ocidental. Recomendo a todos”.

“The approach to humanity is unique. It blends pessimism with a coldness that is rarely seen in Western writers. I recommend it to everyone” (Fascinante, 11/03/2022, Amazon.br).

In this way, Liu’s text ceases to be a passive object of reception and instead becomes an active agent, destabilizing the very sci-fi tradition it is often framed within and revealing the limitations of reading global sci-fi through a monocultural lens.



5.2 Scientific terminology: The reception threshold and cognitive restructuring in hard science fiction

The frequent recurrence of terms such as “quantum” (23), “sophon” (19), “astrophysicist/astrophysics” (27), and “(hard) sci-fi” (43) single-word keywords in discussions of *Remembrance of Earth’s Past* illustrates how scientific terminology shapes reader reception, as is shown in type 2 keywords. While the frequency of “quantum” offers only a preliminary indication, it nonetheless points to the interplay between the reader’s horizon of expectations and the cognitive demands imposed by the text.

Hard science fiction traditionally carries an implicit expectation of scientific rigor, and readers anticipate a certain level of technical accuracy in its worldbuilding (Shippey, 2016; Westfahl, 1996). However, *Remembrance of Earth’s Past* presents a particularly high density of specialized terminology, such as “high-energy gamma rays”, “eleven-dimensional unfolding”, which often surpasses the scientific literacy of the general readership. This discrepancy is evident in reader responses that express sentiments like:

“Não entendo quase nada de física, mas sou curiosa e já li alguns livros sobre física quântica e relatividade escritos para leigos, de forma que fiquei encantada com a abordagem da ciência, se bem que, em alguns momentos, ela se torna meio prolixa e complexa”.

“I don’t understand much about physics, but I’m curious and I’ve read some books about quantum physics and relativity written for laypeople, so I was enchanted by the approach to science, although at times it becomes a bit verbose and complex” (Monica de Castro, 2018/1/29, Amazon.br).

Such reactions indicate two primary reception strategies: some readers adopt tolerance for ambiguity, accepting scientific incomprehension in favor of narrative immersion, while others actively engage in cognitive restructuring, seeking additional knowledge to reconcile their understanding with the text’s demands. While the novel assumes a reader with a degree of scientific competence, it simultaneously mitigates comprehension barriers through literary techniques. For instance, the personification of “sophons” (subatomic particles weaponized for surveillance and intelligence suppression) not only serves as a plot device but also functions as a didactic tool, transforming abstract quantum concepts into more graspable narrative elements.

Additionally, the frequent repetition of key scientific terms throughout the text reinforces a sense of scientific authority, subtly conditioning readers to accept the internal logic of the novel, even in cases where their actual understanding remains partial. In this way, *Remembrance of Earth’s Past* negotiates the tension between hard science fiction’s epistemic demands and the diverse cognitive capacities of its audience. By blending rigorous scientific speculation with narrative accessibility, Liu Cixin expands the genre’s reception beyond its traditional technically proficient readership, fostering engagement even among those without formal scientific training.

5.3 Cultural symbols: The reception and misinterpretation of heterogeneous cultures

In the reception of *Remembrance of Earth’s Past*, cultural symbols play a crucial role in shaping non-Chinese readers’ engagement with the text. Terms in type 3 keywords related to “cultural



revolution” (93) “(Mao) Zedong” (6) “Chinese history” (6) and “Chinese/China” (143) frequently appear in discussions, signaling a strong awareness of the novel’s cultural specificity. However, these elements are often framed within an external interpretive framework, where readers attempt to assimilate them into familiar paradigms. Many Portuguese-speaking readers perceive historical references such as the Cultural Revolution and the Red Coast Base as part of an “exotic spectacle”, or they seek parallels within their own historical and cultural experiences. For instance, one reader notes:

“O autor mistura um pouco de história chinesa (especialmente na época da Revolução Cultural), traz alguns cientistas famosos para dentro do livro além de assuntos atuais. Me chamou atenção o fato de a civilização extraterrestre ser muito semelhante a China atual, coincidência?”

“The author mixes in a bit of Chinese history (especially during the Cultural Revolution), brings some famous scientists into the book, and discusses current affairs. I was struck by the fact that the extraterrestrial civilization is very similar to modern-day China. Is that a coincidence?” (Luciano, 07/07/2020, Amazon.br).

This interpretation reflects an effort to map the novel’s depiction of extraterrestrial civilization onto contemporary China, suggesting an externalized reading strategy rather than an engagement with the text’s internal logic. The readers often utilize cultural analogies to bridge understanding gaps, engaging in a process of meaning-making through their own cultural lenses.

This negotiation process also manifests in rewriting choices. The Portuguese edition of *The Three-Body Problem* strategically adapts the novel’s structure to align with Western readers’ expectations. In the original Chinese text, the chapter “Os Anos de Loucura” (“The Years of Madness”, referring to the Cultural Revolution) appears in the seventh section of the novel. However, in the Portuguese edition, this chapter is placed at the very beginning, immediately foregrounding historical and political themes. This structural shift reinforces an interpretive frame that prioritizes political intrigue, aligning with many Western readers’ preconceptions (Nusinovich, 2015; Wang, 2023). In this sense, some seemingly externalized or politically inflected readings may not solely reflect the readers’ cultural assumptions, but are also shaped by the translation’s framing itself. The reception of this adaptation suggests that readers readily embrace this framing, as reflected in one review:

“Do chocante início sobre a revolução cultural chinesa e do suspense sobre o que está acontecendo a descoberta do destino da humanidade a curiosidade só aumenta a cada página. Uma obra fantástica de ficção científica”.

“From the shocking beginning about the Chinese cultural revolution and the suspense about what is happening to the discovery of the fate of humanity, curiosity only increases with each page. A fantastic work of science fiction” (Eliel Jorge Ribeiro, 23/11/2020, Amazon.br).

Despite these interpretive shifts, the novel actively encourages readers to move beyond regional particularities by embedding its cultural symbols within universal themes such as human nature and the survival of civilizations (*civilização extraterrestre*, 8; *civilização humana*, 7). Through this interplay of familiarity and foreignness, *Remembrance of Earth’s Past* introduces Chinese historical

and ideological motifs in ways that align with Western interpretive habits, yet also leave space for more nuanced intercultural reflection.

5.4 Narrative elements: Empathetic projection of characters and plot

One key aspect of *Remembrance of Earth's Past*'s reception lies in how readers engage with its narrative elements, particularly the characters and plot structure. Figures in type 1 keywords such as “Ye Wenjie” (84 mentioned), “Da Shi” (11), “Zhang Beihai” (9) and the “Wallfacer Project” (15) frequently appear in discussions, reflecting the novel's emphasis on intricate character arcs and strategic conflicts. However, the story's structure challenges traditional expectations of a linear, plot-driven science fiction narrative. Readers accustomed to strong narrative momentum may find themselves reorienting their approach to the text.

This shift in narrative expectations is evident in reactions to Ye Wenjie, whose worldview is marked by profound pessimism. While some readers criticize her relentless pessimism, others empathize with her plight, leading to a divided reception. One reader comments:

“Sua visão pessimista sobre a vida não tem fim. No alto de sua genialidade, ela não consegue encontrar uma saída para a raça humana”.

“Her pessimistic outlook on life is endless. At the height of her genius, she cannot find a way out for humanity” (Paulo Vinicius F. dos Santos, 12/09/2018, Amazon.br).

Ye's dual role as both a victim and an agent of destruction forces readers into an ongoing process of moral negotiation, aligning with Wolfgang Iser's theory of “gaps” that require active interpretation. Some readers emphasize her victimhood, as seen in remarks such as:

“Ela talvez seja a maior vítima de tudo o que aconteceu ao longo da história”.

“She is perhaps the biggest victim of everything that has happened throughout history” (Paulo Vinicius F. dos Santos, 12/09/2018, Amazon.br).

This fluid positioning invites readers to continuously adjust their stance, filling in the moral and psychological spaces left open by the text. By leaving certain aspects of its characters and their motivations open to interpretation, *Remembrance of Earth's Past* fosters an interactive reading experience. Instead of relying solely on exposition, the novel encourages readers to engage with the moral and psychological complexities of its characters, making sense of their choices and consequences through their own intellectual and emotional engagement.

6 Evaluating the reception: Positive reception vs. significant criticisms

The corpus analysis of Portuguese-language reader reviews reveals a predominantly positive reception of Liu Cixin's trilogy, though nuanced criticisms emerge regarding its structural complexity and cultural accessibility, as shown in type 5 words. These keywords correspond to the “Sentimental Evaluation” category outlined in the analytical framework, which captures readers' affective and



evaluative responses. This section synthesizes the findings to evaluate the balance between acclaim and critique.

6.1 Predominance of positive evaluations

The lexical prominence of positively charged adjectives—captured through the evaluative keywords discussed above—underscores readers’ enthusiasm for the trilogy. Terms like *bom* (“good”, mentions 180, rank 4), *melhor* (“better”, mentions 146, rank 5), and *interessante* (“interesting”, mentions 134, rank 6) dominate the discourse, often coupled with praise for the trilogy’s scientific rigor, narrative ambition, and philosophical depth. For instance, *científico* (“scientific”, rank 1) appears 402 times, frequently collocating with *ficção científica* (“science fiction”) and *conceitos científicos* (“scientific concepts”), and *físico* (“physicist” or “physical”, 193 mentions, rank 3), frequently appearing in references to scientific characters or themes, which underscores readers’ engagement with the trilogy’s astrophysical and theoretical dimensions. Similarly, *primeiro* (“first”, 249 mentions, rank 2,) highlights readers’ recognition of the trilogy’s groundbreaking status as their introduction to Chinese science fiction (e.g., “minha primeira obra chinesa”—“my first Chinese work”).

High-frequency modifiers such as *incrível* (“incredible”, mentions 55, rank 19), *ótimo* (“excellent”, mentions 50, rank 25), and *fantástico* (“fantastic”, mentions 30, rank 44) further emphasize the trilogy’s perceived originality. Readers frequently framed their praise through comparisons to Western sci-fi classics, as in “a melhor trilogia de ficção científica que já li” (“the best sci-fi trilogy I’ve ever read”), suggesting that Liu’s work not only met but exceeded genre expectations. The recurring use of *complexo* (“complex”, mentions 50, rank 24,) also carries a dual valence: while acknowledging the narrative’s challenging layers, readers often framed complexity as a marker of intellectual richness rather than a flaw.

6.2 Criticisms: Navigating complexity and cultural barriers

Despite the overwhelmingly positive tone, criticisms clustered around three themes: cultural dissonance, narrative difficulty, and pacing issues. The adjective *difícil* (“difficult”, rank 18) appears 55 times, primarily addressing the trilogy’s dense scientific explanations and unfamiliar Chinese nomenclature. One comment observed that:

“Os nomes chineses podem ser difíceis de lembrar”.

“Chinese names can be hard to remember” (Anonymous, 16/08/2020, Amazon.br).

Another explicitly referred to “*dificuldades culturais*” (“cultural difficulties”) stemming from the author’s Chinese background:

“Já vou dizendo que é um livro de difícil leitura. Tem as dificuldades culturais, pois estamos falando de um autor chinês”.

“I’ll say upfront that it’s a difficult book to read. There are cultural difficulties, as we’re dealing with a Chinese author” (Osmar, 25/10/2022).



These remarks suggest that some Portuguese-speaking readers experience dissonance when engaging with culturally specific narrative frameworks and philosophical perspectives unfamiliar within Western traditions. Others struggled with the integration of advanced physics into the plot:

“Muita coisa sobre astrofísica... difícil de se ler”.

“Too much astrophysics... hard to read” (Nuno Ferreira, 25/02/2019, Goodreads).

However, such critiques often coexisted with admiration, as seen in “vale o esforço” (“worth the effort”, William Fernandes, 01/07/2019, Goodreads), indicating that difficulty was frequently interpreted as a hallmark of the trilogy’s ambition rather than a failure of execution.

Negative descriptors like *confuso* (“confusing”, mentions 19, rank 70) and *chato* (“boring”, mentions 11, rank 119) were less frequent but highlighted specific frustrations. A minority of readers criticized the pacing of the third book or found certain sections repetitive, particularly the “virtual game” segments. Yet, these critiques were often tempered by broader appreciation; even readers who found the plot “absurdamente confuso” (“absurdly confusing” Paulo Ratz, 14/02/2017, Goodreads) acknowledged the narrative’s eventual coherence. Despite some readers expressing that these scientific concepts can be challenging, many demonstrate a willingness to engage with the complexities, reflecting a tolerance for ambiguity in order to appreciate the narrative’s depth.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined the reception of Liu Cixin’s *Remembrance of Earth’s Past* among Portuguese-speaking readers, leveraging Reception Theory as a framework for understanding the dynamic interactions between the text and its diverse audience. Through this lens, we identified key insights related to three central research questions. Media expansion, reader positioning, and expectations shape how the text is received. Reader evaluations reflect a balance of praise and criticism.

Firstly, the trilogy has achieved significant popularity among Portuguese-speaking readers, particularly in Brazil. The data showed a marked increase in reader engagement over time, with a notable surge in 2024, suggesting that the novel has resonated deeply within this community. This trend suggests that the role of media adaptations and the digital infrastructure supporting global distribution—including cloud-rendering technologies rooted in Guangdong, China.

Secondly, reader responses coalesce around four key themes: authorial recognition, scientific inquiry, character complexity, and cultural reflection. Liu Cixin is simultaneously framed as a national literary figure and a challenger to Western-dominated sci-fi traditions, positioning Chinese science fiction within a global discourse. The trilogy’s hard science fiction elements demand cognitive restructuring, while its cultural symbolism evokes diverse interpretative strategies. Characterization and narrative structure facilitate emotional engagement, bridging cultural and conceptual gaps.

Thirdly, the Portuguese-speaking reception is overwhelmingly positive, driven by its perceived scientific ingenuity, narrative ambition, and cultural novelty. Criticisms, while present, are marginal in frequency and often contextualized within broader praise. Negative evaluations largely



stem from the text's inherent complexity, a feature that many readers reframed as strengths rather than shortcomings.

The reception of *Remembrance of Earth's Past* among Portuguese-speaking readers illustrates a dynamic process of negotiation between established expectations and new cultural and scientific paradigms. As a work that integrates Chinese cultural elements with universal science fiction themes, the trilogy not only challenges the dominance of Western science fiction traditions but also compels readers to expand and reconstruct their cognitive frameworks. The distribution of high-frequency words in reader discussions reflects this ongoing process, reflecting key areas where adaptation and reinterpretation occur.

A fundamental aspect of this negotiation lies in the tension between the text's implied ideal reader and the cross-cultural, diverse realities of its actual audience. The actual Portuguese-speaking readers navigate the textual landscape through selective accommodation. Some mitigate comprehension barriers by accepting a degree of conceptual ambiguity, particularly regarding scientific terminology, while others employ cultural analogy, reinterpreting historical references—such as the Cultural Revolution—through their own local historical experiences.

These findings align with reader-response theory, which posits that meaning is co-constructed through interaction between text and reader. The trilogy requires readers to actively reconcile unfamiliar scientific discourse and culturally specific symbols. The diverse responses among Portuguese-speaking readers suggest that the reception of science fiction across cultural boundaries is not a passive process but an active, iterative negotiation—one that reshapes both textual interpretation and the broader expectations of the genre itself.

This study contributes to the field of translation and reception studies by demonstrating how cross-cultural literary engagement is mediated through media accessibility, cognitive adaptation, and the negotiation of cultural paradigms. Methodologically, integrating high-frequency word analysis with qualitative reception theory offers a structured yet nuanced approach to understanding global readership. Future research could explore how translation strategies influence reader perceptions or compare reception trends across different linguistic and cultural contexts.

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Editorial notes

Authorship contribution

Conceptualization: X. Zhang & X. Huang

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Research dataset

The dataset includes reader reviews collected from Amazon Brazil, Goodreads, and Skoob in two stages. The November 2022 collection was used both as the corpus analyzed in this article and for quantitative counts of review volume and trends, while the March 2025 collection was used only for quantitative counts. All usernames are cited exactly as they appear on these publicly accessible platforms; no pseudonymization was applied, as the names are self-chosen and publicly visible, in line with ethical research practices for open-access online data.

Funding

This research was supported by the Guangdong Provincial Philosophy and Social Sciences Planning Project (Discipline Co-construction Project), 2023, Project No. GD23XLN39, hosted by Xin Huang, the corresponding author of this article.

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Not applicable.

Approval by ethics committee

Not applicable.

Conflicts of interest

Not applicable.

Data availability statement

The data from this research, which are not included in this work, may be made available by the author upon request.



Cadernos de Tradução, 45(Special Issue 3), 2025, e108436
 Graduate Program in Translation Studies
 Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil. ISSN 2175-7968
 DOI <https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-7968.2025.e108436>

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Publisher

Cadernos de Tradução is a publication of the Graduate Program in Translation Studies at the Federal University of Santa Catarina. The journal *Cadernos de Tradução* is hosted by the [Portal de Periódicos UFSC](https://portal.periodicos.ufsc.br/). The ideas expressed in this paper are the responsibility of its authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the editors or the university.

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Article history

Received: 26-04-2025

Approved: 30-06-2025

Revised: 05-07-2025

Published: 09-2025

