

# Translation Criticism in the Digital Literary Sphere: Reader Responses to Portuguese Literature Across the Globe and Translated Literature in Lusophone Countries

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to address a gap in research on the critical reception of translated literature, as it centres on the conceptualisations, evaluations and responses to translation as encountered in digital reading ecologies. The focus of the paper is on the critical reception of both Portuguese literature abroad, and translated literature in Lusophone countries. To tap into the cognitive-evaluative concepts employed by “ordinary” readers, data from the DIOPRA-L is gathered and processed with the use of modern distant-reading methods. The aim of this paper is to break new ground in research on translation research and to illustrate how digitally available material can be leveraged to gain insight into day-to-day reading practices by a non- and less professional readership.

**Keywords:** Translation criticism. Digital literary sphere. Big data. Reading ecologies.

## *Crítica de tradução na esfera literário-digital: respostas dos leitores à literatura portuguesa no mundo e à literatura traduzida nos países lusófonos*

**Resumo:** O presente artigo busca compreender como a literatura traduzida é recebida e avaliada por leitores “comuns” num contexto digital. Para isso, os autores coletam e processam dados do DIOPRA-L usando métodos modernos de leitura à distância, com o objetivo de explorar os conceitos cognitivos-avaliativos utilizados pelos leitores. O estudo tem como foco tanto a recepção da literatura portuguesa no exterior quanto da literatura traduzida nos países lusófonos. A pesquisa pode contribuir para a compreensão das práticas de leitura cotidianas de leitores não profissionais e mostrar como o material digitalmente disponível pode ser utilizado para esse fim.

**Palavras-chaves:** Crítica de tradução, Espaço Literário Digital. Big data. Ecologias de leitura.

## 1. Introduction

The position of the literary critic and the sociological foundations upon which translation criticism rests are topics that remain under-researched in Translation Studies. In structuralist approaches to translation sociology, translation criticism is traditionally seen as a means of symbolic production in the literary field (Van Rees & Dorleijn 1993, 2006; Bourdieu 1993). This means that criticism is believed to exert a certain influence on conceptualisations, evaluations of and responses to literature and translation in society,

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and in the literary field in particular. In *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova states that the position occupied by the critic is one of prominence: they hold ‘immense power of consecration, of determining literary quality’ (2002, p. 22). Up to some point, they can be considered authorities who not only consolidate cultural norms in society, but who also construe and sometimes impose those norms.

Claims made in sociological research seem to make intuitive sense: translation criticism, as encountered in literary journals and newspapers, is often used as a yardstick to assess the reception of a foreign author or a translated work in the target culture. However, the theoretical frameworks that are being employed in these context can be said to be stuck in time (as well as in place). What is overlooked in traditional reception research, is that the literary field as outlined by Bourdieu remains firmly rooted in the context of late 20<sup>th</sup> century French culture (see Broomans 2019). However, field theory is heralded as a theory which not only allows for the explanation of prevailing norms in society, it also allows for the explanation of normative differences between fields, both nationally and internationally, and norm dynamics within fields (Bourdieu 1984). A literary field is subject to constant change, not only because ideas tend to evolve in the minds of actors in the literary field, but because the structure itself is altered by continuous social repositioning, by an evolution in the *prises de positions* of actors (ibid.). This means that the sway professional critics hold over the cultural ideas on the quality of literature and translation can vary strongly, depending on temporal and cultural context in which criticism is voiced.

In the Western world, it seems safe to say that the power of professional critics has been crumbling in the past few decade (see also McDonald’s notion of “the death of the critic” (2007)). In part, this is due to the ongoing commercialisation of the literary field. As Heilbron and Sapiro point out, commercialisation affects the terms of reception, distribution and production of literary goods in the modern Western world quite heavily (2008). Commercialisation can be considered a driver in the devaluation of the symbolic capital of the (professional) literary critic, since the quality of a literary good is increasingly measured by its profitability. However, an increasingly liberalised bookmarket is not the only force at play here. The weakened position of the literary critic in the Western world is also a direct consequence of digitalisation, which has led to the creation of new platforms where profiles of actors and acting collectives that engage in literary criticism have emerged (for a discussion of the reconfiguration of the literary space, see Murray 2018).

Digitalisation has led to a democratisation in literary criticism: everyone is allowed and encouraged to spread ideas about literary phenomena, through blogs, vlogs,

podcasts, social media, and so on. This democratisation has given rise to new forms of symbolic capital that have now become common currency in a great many literary fields – capital that is strategically employed to help shape ideas on the quality of translation and literature. Today, amateurs accrue symbolic capital by accumulating followers (see Van Egdom & Kotze forthcoming); the size of their following is indicative of the power they exert in their respective field. Some amateurs even become so influential that they are offered rewards, sponsorship deals, and what not, to voice their opinion about a book (which blurs the lines between professional and non-professional criticism).

Less visible, but no less influential is a group of critics that is active on websites like Amazon, Goodreads and LibraryThing. Van Egdom & Kotze (forthcoming) state that “the impact of individual book reviewers in those communities is limited compared to those of non- and semi- professional social media personae with a large following, but research within Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has clearly shown that the impact of a digital reviewer ecology – taken as a unit of analysis – on the reception, distribution and (even the) production of cultural goods is considerable.” (see also: Henning-Thurau *et al.* 2004; Hai-Jew 2017). The social impact of digital reading communities on the reception of translation is measured by 1) the type of platform where criticism is expressed, 2) the number of reviews on the platform, 3) the combination and proportion of ratings and textual space in which reviewers voice their opinion.

These developments in the literary field of the 21st century broaden the perspective on literary criticism. They challenge long-standing and widely shared beliefs on symbolic production and spur new research on criticism in non- and less-professional contexts. This paper is one fool’s attempt to cast a wider net in translation criticism. In this contribution, attention will be drawn to the general appraisal of translation of (translated) literature in the Lusophone context and the appreciation of translated Lusophone literature in the Goodreads reading community. It will be shown how big data and computational methods can help further our understanding of the concepts that are used by “ordinary” readers to conceptualise, assess and respond to the phenomenon of translation in present-day society, and to detect patterns in critical behaviour within and across cultures.

## **2. The role of the reader in translation reception and translation criticism**

Before delving into the data that have been gathered to investigate the concepts used in non- and less-professional context, it is imperative that a closer look at the role of the reader in translation research is taken. The most important conclusion that

one will reach when taking stock of research on reader reception in general, is that the reader is often overlooked in translation research. This is quite remarkable, since the paramount role of the reader has been acknowledged since the 1980's. The theoretical approaches that have gone down in history as approaches that drew scholarly attention to the pivotal role of readers, are Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS, or norm theory) and functionalism. In DTS, for example, the expectation of the reader is seen as a key driver in the formation and consolidation of translation norms (Toury 1995). Chesterman (1993) has even gone so far as to state that the professional norms of translators are informed by the expectancy norm of the target audience. In functionalist theories, the communicative function of the target text is not solely defined by the translation brief or by authorial or translatorial intentions, it is the reader who ultimately decides whether a text can fulfill its intended function (Nord 2005). Despite the general acknowledgment of the importance of the reader, and the ensuing fact that many ideas in Translation Studies seem to rely on assumptions about audiences, remarkably little is known about how readers engage with translations, particularly in the literary context.

When looking for empirical investigation of normative expectations of readers, we stumble upon some relatively recent (quasi-) experimental research that has been conducted, with the aid of eye tracking, to assess reading behaviour (Kruger 2013), affective responses to metaphor use (Rojo *et al.* 2014) and effects of the literary style in translation (Walker 2021). In addition to (quasi-) experimental research, there are also a few survey and rating approaches that are worth mentioning. Puurtinen (1994) and Liang (2007) have employed such a approaches to investigate preferences for translation styles.

Despite the merits of these approaches, without exception, these studies deal with decontextualised reading experiences, which means that experimental and survey conditions have always been 'manipulated'. More importantly, it is still unclear whether generalisations can be made from these studies, as they involve a relatively small number of readers. Steering clear of non-naturalistic research, some ethnographic studies have been carried out: for example, Tekgül (2019) has focused on the interplay between aesthetic and normative expectations of translated books in the "microcosm" of book clubs.

All these approaches may well yield insights into the way translation is received by readers, no generalisations can be attempted. Within the domain of translation criticism, the situations seems even more deplorable. Traditionally, research in this field has homed in on the consideration bestowed upon literary translation by (semi-) professional critics (e.g. Vanderschelden 2000; Fernández 2011). Still, the digital literary space has given rise to new phenomena, such as digital reading ecologies, that can offer unprecedented insights

into the critical reception of translated literature by “ordinary” readers. Tapping into User-Generated Content requires innovative thinking and ditto methods, but it is high time that the role of the reader in the critical reception of (translated) literature is acknowledged: whereas the role of the reader in symbolic production has been traditionally seen as rather passive (see Van Rees & Dorleijn), they are now an integral part of a “participatory culture (...) where producers and consumers interact with each other according to a new set of rules which none of us fully understands” (Jenkins 2008: 3). With the analysis of Goodreads reviews, undertaken in this article, new ground can be broken for research on new forms of translation criticism. It offers a glimpse into the cognitive templates that shape our ideas on translation and translation quality (see Kotze & Van Egdom 2021, Kotze *et al.* 2021, Van Egdom & Kotze forthcoming, Van Egdom forthcoming).

### **3. Methodology**

The aim of this case study was to triangulate findings from distant- and close-reading analyses of a subset of the DIOPTRA-L (Digital Opinions on Translated Literature) corpus to glean an idea of the general appraisal of translation in Lusophone cultures and of translated Lusophone literature across the globe, and of the concept underlying this general appreciation. In this section, an outline will be provided of the subset that has been used in this study, and of the analytical steps taken to extract conceptual information from this dataset.

#### **3.1 Materials**

For the present study, around 16,000 reviews have been selected from the DIOPTRA-L corpus, which consists of nearly 300,000 reviews written in 8 different (but mainly European) languages (for details on the composition of the entire corpus, see Kotze *et al.* 2021). The subset used for this study can be broken down into three categories:

1. reviews of Portuguese literature translated into Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish (8119);
2. reviews of Lusophone translations of Dutch, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish literature (6849);
3. Lusophone reviews of non-translated literature (1089).

Each review in the dataset is accompanied by metadata on the date of review, a tag for the text producer, the rating, the review language, the language of the source text, and the language of the target text).

Table 1 presents a complete breakdown of the reviews of categories 1) and 2). The table clearly shows that English is the dominant language in the dataset; more than 30 percent of the reviews of Lusophone translations dealt with Anglosaxon literature, and almost 70 percent of the reviews of translated Portuguese literature were written in English. This uneven distribution of reviews (per (source) language) has been taken into consideration in interpreting the data. In a number of cases, available data were not sufficient to carry out a reliable quantitative analysis.

	NL	EN	FR	DU	IT	SP
<i>Translated into Portuguese</i>	298	2394	1052	854	1037	1214
<i>Translated Lusophone literature</i>	109	5650	39	67	707	1547

Table 1. The absolute number of reviews per category (excl. category 3)

### 3.2. Analyses

The data were processed in three consecutive steps. First, a quantitative analysis of the data was carried out in which the star ratings were correlated with edition languages. By doing so, insight was gained into the attitudinal differences between reviews of Portuguese literature, translated literature in Lusophone countries and Portuguese literature abroad.

In the second phase, distant reading techniques were applied to reviews of texts mentioning translation in the translated subsets ( $L^n > PT$ ,  $PT > L^n$ ), using the Graphcoll function in Lancsbox 6.0 (Brezina *et al.* 2015; Brezina *et al.* 2020). With Graphcoll, collocational networks can be modelled upon words and lemmata present in a corpus: past research has shown that these networks yield conceptual information on the way readers construe and assess translations (Kotze *et al.* 2021). Given the limited number of reviews for Dutch, French and German, collocational networks were only produced for English, Italian and Spanish reviews in the translated subset ( $PT > L^n$ ). In all cases, a collocational network analysis was carried out by focusing on the lemma *TRADUZIR*, and its equivalents in the different review languages. As a measure of collocational strength, the word span was limited to 5 words before and after the translation lemmata, and a Mutual Information

(MI) score of over 5.0 was used as a measure for collocational strength. In some cases, a close reading of a collocate was required to interpret its occurrence in the network; for this, reviews in I-Analyzer were filtered, by inserting the collocate and analysing the context in which the word appeared.

Collocational networks have the advantage of allowing the analyst to home in on co-textual patterns, but they seem to warrant complementary analyses that take into account the entire set of reviews. Additional analysis seems all the more important in the case of reviews of translated literature, as the invisibility of translation has been a theoretical mainstay for decades (Venuti 2008; see also Van Egdom & Kotze forthcoming). In Antconc (Anthony 2020), a keyword analyses were performed for the reviews produced in the Lusophone context. Keyword analyses show the words that stand out in a specific corpus, in comparison to the words used in a reference corpus. For this study, keyword lists were produced for the translated literature set (L<sup>n</sup>>PT), and reviews in the original set (O) were used as a reference corpus. To equal the amount of the group with the fewest reviews, a random selection was performed on the translated subset, using the spreadsheet add-on Ablebit (1089 reviews for each corpus).

#### **4. Findings: Quantitative Analysis**

Figure 1 shows the proportional frequencies of star ratings per subset. The three curves in the figure seem to bear some resemblance: in all cases, and especially in the reviews produced in Lusophone countries, a rise in the proportional frequency is evident. This signals an overall more positive rating of books in the corpus, regardless of the translated status of books. However, the curve is less steep in the case of translated Portuguese literature: no more than 38 percent of the written reviews were accompanied by a 5-star rating, suggesting that the general appreciation of Portuguese literature abroad is less positive. Another detail that stands out is that the likelihood of an extremely positive evaluation (5-star rating) drops when the piece of literature has been translated (0.53, vs. 0.61 for literature originally written in Portuguese), suggesting that cultural myopia might be at play in Lusophone countries as well.

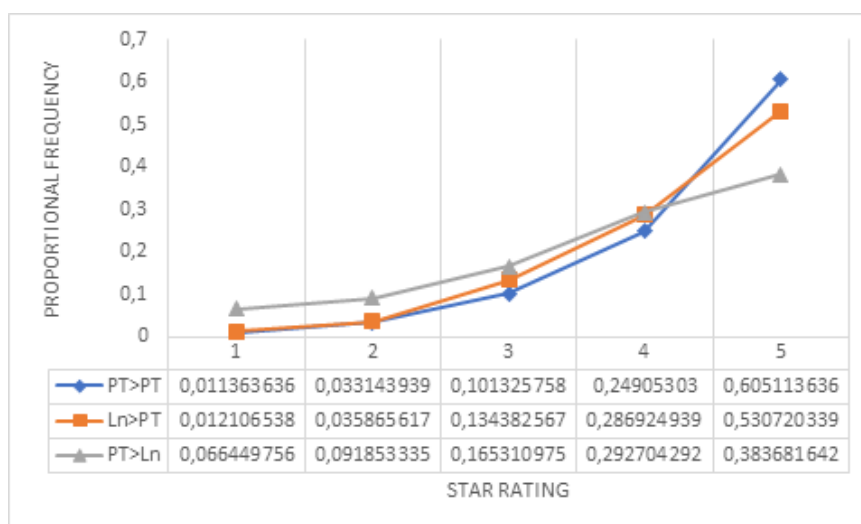


Figure 1. Proportional frequency of star ratings per subset

To find a possible explanation for the relatively high proportional frequency of 1- and 2-star ratings and the relatively low proportional frequency of 5-star ratings for translated Portuguese literature, the PT>L<sup>n</sup> subset was split by language family (Germanic vs. Romance languages). Earlier research had already suggested that general appraisal and reviewing styles differ according to cultural background (Kotze & Van Egdom 2021). Figure 2 clearly shows that reviewers who have read a translation in one of the Romance languages look more kindly upon translated Portuguese literature. The curve of Romance language reviews are more in line with those witnessed in the Lusophone context (with a proportional frequency of 0.02 for 1-star ratings, and 0.49 for 5-star ratings). Readers within the Germanic language communities seem to be less outspoken when asked to rate translated Portuguese literature (0.32 for 5-star ratings), except in cases where they disliked the book (0.08 for 1-star ratings, and 0.1 for 2-star ratings). These results seem to suggest that a linguistic and cultural rapport affects the appreciation of translated literature.

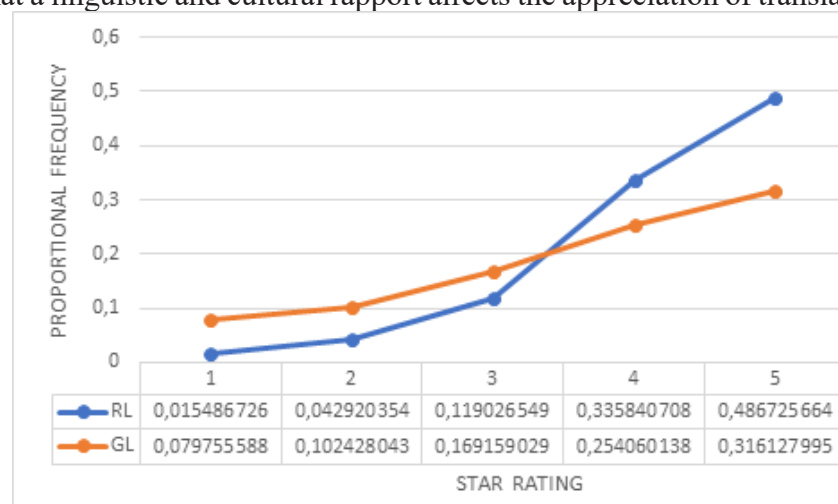


Figure 2. Proportional frequency of star ratings: Romance languages vs. Germanic Languages



## 5. Findings: Collocational network analysis

In an attempt to gain a firmer handle on the concrete critical reception of translation in Lusophone countries, the focus shifted to the concepts used by Lusophone readers when a translation is commented upon. The 6849 reviews (somewhere in the range of 750,000 words) dealing with translated foreign literature were processed in Lancesbox to produce a collocational network for the lemma *TRADUZIR*. Portuguese-language reviews mostly commented on literary fiction books (4908 reviews), with English (35%), Spanish (18%), French (15%) and Italian (15%) as the most common source languages. Given the size of the dataset, a collocational frequency of 4 (in addition to the MI score of 5.0) was set as a cut-off point. The settings used for the collocational analysis were likely to also yield non-informative collocates such as function words; these have been removed from the visualised network.

Figure 3 shows the collocational network for *TRADUZIR*. The distance of collocates from the node shows the strength of the collocation and the placement visualises the occurrence of a collocate before or after the node word. First, it should be noted that Lusophone readers appear to show great linguistic awareness (*línguas, portuguesa, português, latím*). They also tend to refer to the artact of translation quite often (*editora, edição, trabalho*). This is broadly in line with findings in earlier research (see Kotze *et al.* 2021). What is most remarkable about the network visualisation, is that the translator seems to play a key role (*marcos, barbosa, mauricio, santana*) in the critical reception. This also aligns with findings from previous research: in cases where translated literary fiction is discussed, the translator rises to a place of prominence. It should be noted here that references to the translator sometimes occur when the translator has already cemented a reputation in the cultural field, mostly as a writer. This is evident in the case of Dom Marcos Barbosa, a Brazilian monk who enjoys a reputation as an author. However, there are numerous translators who receive (mainly positive) appraisal not so much because of their accrued symbolic capital as an author, but solely or predominantly on the merits of the target text (e.g. Mauricio Santana, but also Modesto Carone, Mário Quintana, Gilda Lopes Encarnação). This rather overwhelming presence of translatorial references, shows that the role of the the work/role of the translator is taken into account in cases where the translatedness did not remain unnoticed. Furthermore, the visualised network shows some evidence of competition or even rivalry: the collocate ‘revisão’ is indicative of the rise in importance of a target text when multiple editions exist.

Lastly, there is also some evidence of an evaluative and attitudinal response. The collocate ‘recomendo’ (I recommend) appears 7 times in the dataset. This collocate can be

said to point in the direction of a positive evaluation of translation, but closer inspection of the data reveals that in 2 cases the word ‘recomendo’ is accompanied by ‘não’ (i.e. I do not recommend) – a common pitfall in opinion mining and sentiment analysis. Collocates like ‘sensação’. ‘palavras’ and ‘nome’ also take on a relevant meaning when inspected from up close. When the reader levels criticism against the translation, it often has to do with the fact that words (*palavras*) and names (*nome*) have not been translated correctly. In other words, Lusophone readers tend to criticise translation by focusing on minute details, and not so much on stylistic matters. This finding is corroborated by the presence of hedge terms (*alguns, algumas*): readers spot “alguns erros”, “alguns brasileirismos”, “algumas expressões” (that strike the reader as odd). In some cases, as in the case of “sensação” (feeling, sensation), there is a faint idea that something is amiss; in these cases, translation is an easy target and receives the blame.

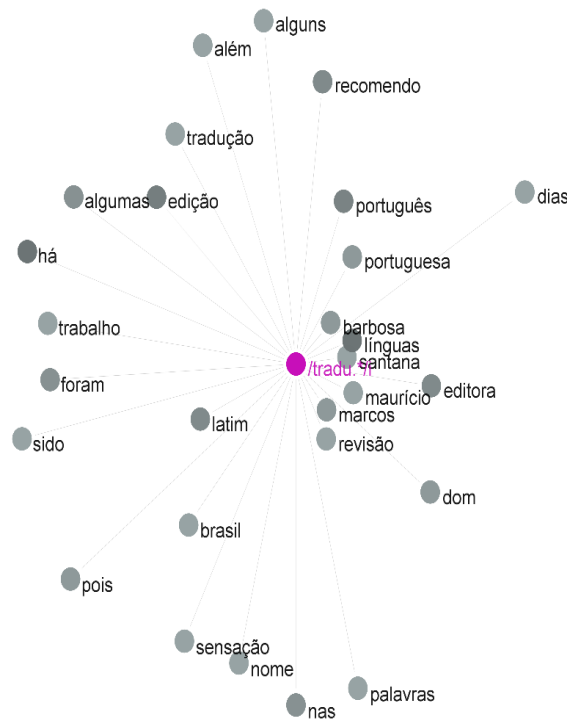


Figure 3. Collocational network for the lemma TRADUZIR

The English dataset, consisting of 5650 reviews (over 800,000 words), was processed in the same way, to produce a collocational network for the lemma TRANSLATE. The only difference is that a minimal collocational frequency of 5 was set for this dataset, so as to increase the readability of the visualised network. Figure 4 shows that the source language (*portuguese*) is named, alongside the target language (*english*). Also quite prominent is the presence of other languages (*french*). A close reading in I-Analyzer

reveals that the English audience is rather heterogeneous: some readers have read the French (or Spanish) and the English version in tandem, and they were able to strike a comparison between versions; others simply want to reach a bigger audience and provide an account of their reading experience of the French target text in English, even though they have indicated that they comment upon the English edition. Words associated with textual production also occur (*version, language, text, edition, written, job*). These words are often accompanied by references to the translator (*translator*): those that seem worthy of mention are regarded as ambassadors (*giovanni, pontiero, richard, zenith, margaret, jull, costa*) of modern Portuguese literature in Anglosaxon culture, who have earned their spurs translating the works of Pessoa and Saramago. This comes as no surprise, since nearly 80% of the reviews in this subset were about novels of Saramago, and almost 17% of the reviews dealt with Pessoa. Often translators are simply credited for having produced the translation, but occasionally they also receive praise for their work. Also worthy of note is the fact that ‘revision’ also appears in the collocation network. A close reading suggests no rivalry between versions; reviewers simply refer to the untimely death of Pontiero, who, as a consequence thereof, did not manage to revise (or complete) his translation. Again, the visualisation seems to suggest that the work of translators of literary fiction is being acknowledged when translation is mentioned. This is in accordance with findings in earlier research, where the names of translators had even been removed from the collocational network visualisation for the purpose of readability (Kotze *et al.* 2021).

The graph also provides evidence of evaluative and attitudinal responses to translation. Collocates of an evaluative nature support the findings in the quantitative analysis: there are words expressing positive sentiment (*liked, better*), but they are eclipsed by words expressing negative sentiment (*least, issue, bad*). Even positive terms often appear in negatively charged reviews (1):

(1) ...It was a horrible translation, and when I read the note at the end telling us the translator died in the course of it, my feelings were mixed between sympathy and relief. I'm undecided about whether I would have enjoyed a better translation better. Perhaps I must return to my previous premise (prejudice? preconception?) that the Nobel Prize is political and that it was Portugal's turn to be preferred. (I hope you enjoyed that alliteration!) (Alan Blanco, review\_2710029014)

The commonness of a negative attitude toward translation is undeniable when a closer look is taken at the collocate ‘lost’: loss in translation is cited no less than 31 times as an explanation for disliking a text. As shown in previous studies, the collocate clearly



absence. However, the network does signal awareness of the textual artifact (*edición*). Readers seem able to enjoy the literary feats of authors like Saramago and Pessoa, but not without the indispensable help of the translator (*losada, castro, pizarro, antonio, sáez, perfecto, cuadrado*). The acute awareness of the intervention of the translator was brought to light even more convincingly after a close reading in I-Analyzer: often, different translators are named and compared, though not necessarily in outspoken evaluative terms, in one single review (2-3):

(2) Me dedico a los estudios pessoanos gracias a este libro. Para la traducción al castellano recomiendo Manuel Moya por la literariedad (aunque ya el concepto es bastante obsoleto) y para una lectura académica recomiendo O livro do Desassocego de Jerónimo Pizarro. La de Perfecto Cuadrado es la más normalizada porque viene en realidad de la disposición que planteó Richard Zenith que consiste en encontrar un orden temático a los fragmentos (Manuel Moya por ejemplo encuentra un orden poético). No recomiendo leer la edición de Ángel Crespo porque te va a horrorizar. Para ser una traducción simultánea está bien, pero es farragoso, denso, no tiene mucho sentido y se hace muy pesada la lectura. (Lucas, review\_3074676607)

(3) A la primera versión en castellano, a cargo de Ángel Crespo (Seix Barral, 1984; 2011), siguieron las traducciones de Perfecto E. Cuadrado (El Acantilado, 2002; 2007; 2013), Manuel Moya (Baile del Sol, 2010), y Antonio Sáez Delgado (Pre-Textos, 2014). Amén de las continuas ediciones españolas y portuguesas de parte o totalidad del corpus inicial —cada una de las cuales corrige y aumenta (o disminuye) las anteriores, así como sugiere nueva ordenación— cuya selección bien puede llevar al lector a la más absoluta desesperación, bien a satisfacerlo enormemente. (Raquel C. Arco, review\_2766324008)

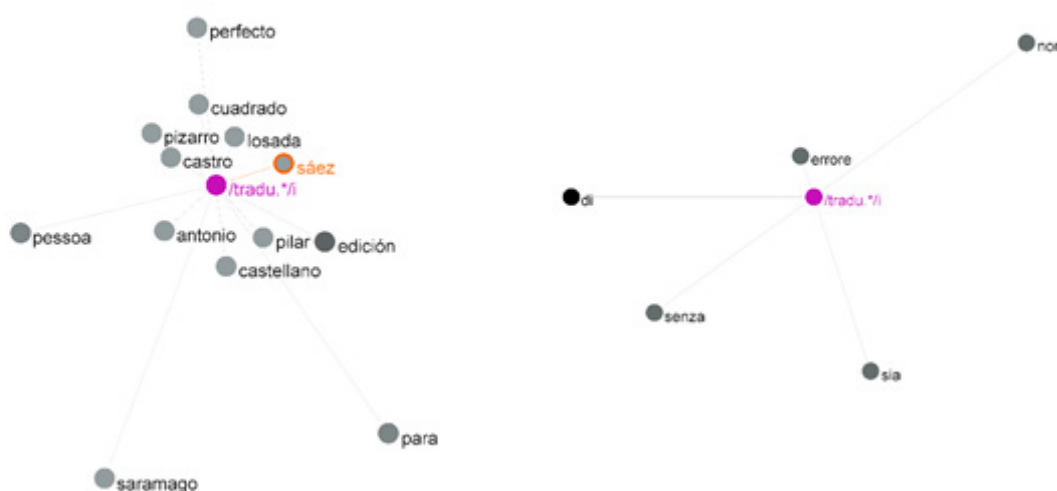
Evaluative and attitudinal responses are lacking in Figure 5: the collocate ‘perfecto’ is misleading, as it refers not to the great quality of translations (‘perfect’), but to Perfecto E. Cuadrado, a retired professor of Galician and Portuguese philology, who has written profusely about the works of Pessoa, and translated *Livro do desassossego*.

The collocational network for TRADUZIONE reveals fairly little about the concepts used by Italian readers when referencing to translation. However, the network does seem to include a reference to the source and to source material: readers talk about a ‘traduzione di aforismi’ for example. Still, the only pattern of interest that truly emerges from the network, is one that suggests a negative evaluation: ‘errore’ (errors), ‘non’ (not, no) and even ‘senza’ (without). Despite the overwhelming number of 4- and 5-star ratings in Italian-language reviews, a sense of deficiency permeates the collocational network visualisation of the lemma TRADUZIONE, suggesting that translation is only brought to the fore when

something is lacking in the target target. However, close reading suggests that translation seldom receives the full blame for a negative reading experience (4-5):

(4) Nelle prime pagine, per un paio di volte si salta dal tempo passato al tempo presente, senza motivo. Non so se sia colpa del traduttore o se sia voluto dall'autore, nel secondo caso la scelta è a mio avviso infelice mentre nel primo caso mi domando come la cosa sia sfuggita a qualsiasi controllo, essendo subito all'inizio del libro. (Tanabrus, review\_132409522)

(5) Il libro mi sembra una enorme occasione perduta (...) c'è una suprema inconsistenza nell'uso dei tempi verbali, che saltabeccano avanti e indietro nella stessa frase. Non so se è la traduzione (ma dubito, sarebbe un errore troppo marchiano) o l'autore, ma è una delle cose che trovo più indisponenti in assoluto in un libro. (Loscrittoroculo, review\_1442989113)



Figures 5 and 6. Collocational networks for the lemmata TRADUCCIÓN, AND TRADUZIONE

## 6. Findings: keyword analysis

As said, collocational networks tend to focus on the direct co-textual environment of node words, but they fail to take into account the complete texts that make up a corpus. As a result, a collocational network does not always paint a nuanced picture of social construals. In the case of translation, the call for additional analysis resonates even louder, since translation has been proven to be a cultural phenomenon that is often passed over in silence (see Kotze & Van Egdom 2021; Kotze *et al.* 2021; Van Egdom & Kotze forthcoming). In the Lusophone context, complementary analysis also seemed imperative:

the lemma *TRADUZIR* appears 31 times (viz. in 0.5 per cent of reviews in the L<sup>n</sup>>PT subset, which is considerably less than in the reviews in others languages (see Kotze *et al.* 2021, Van Egdom & Kotze forthcoming). Therefore, this study was concluded with a keyword analysis of reviews produced in the Lusophone context.

In Antconc (Anthony 2020) a keyword analysis was performed on the reviews produced in the Lusophone context: the focus was on words that stand out in reviews in the translated literature set (L<sup>n</sup>>PT) in comparison to words used in a reference corpus consisting of Lusophone reviews of Portuguese literature (O). To equal the amount of the group with the fewest reviews (in this case the reference corpus), a random selection was performed on the translated subset, using Ablebits: 1089 reviews for each corpus.

Out of the 14,940 types in the corpus, no more than 64 were identified as keywords. After careful analysis and categorisation of the keywords, it became evident that the findings yielded through the collocational network analysis had only been solidified to some extent. There are some indications that readers are aware of the foreign nature of the text and the fact that communication has been mediated by a translator. The foreignness is also highlighted in the keyword ‘*estrangeiro*’ (abroad, foreign, foreigner), which remained absent in the visualised network. However, most keywords, especially those with great keyness strength, are indicative of the limited perceptibility of translation. In the majority of cases, keywords refer to general aspects like book titles (*metamorfose, príncipe, potter*) and original authors (*ferrante, márquez, camus*), and to superficial aspects of the translated text (protagonists: *personagem(s), Hazel, Gregor*, and themes: *família, amor, insecto*). In other words, readers do not seem to pay a lot of attention to translation in general or to stylistic features of the translated texts. Textual indicators of an evaluative or attitudinal response are also lacking; the only word that stands out, is ‘*muito*’, an intensifier that, as shown in the following examples, is often combined with a textual indicator of evaluative response (6-7):

(6) É um livro sem dúvida muito mais que extraordinário. Que história linda ♥ Uau! (Camila Silva, review\_1694700913)

(7) acho que gostei do livro muito mais do que imaginava. (Emmanuel K., review\_2546962283)

Lastly, the keyword analysis also revealed that female authors are better represented in the reviews dealing with translated text. An excellent case in point is the occurrence of ‘*autora*’ in the corpus (3<sup>rd</sup> keyword in the list).

In order to get a more panoramic view of the similarities and differences between reviews of translated text and reviews of original texts, a list of negative keywords was also produced. This list could be considered a list of words that are typical of reviews of non-translated works. The keywords in this list seem to echo the findings presented above: a lot of attention is paid to general aspects such as book titles (*cegueira, jesu, desassossego*) and authors (*poeta, antunes, pessoa*). The origin of the text is highlighted as well, and even more so than in the translated set: the words ‘português’ and ‘portuguesa’ are used way more frequently in the reference corpus. Unsurprisingly, the relative frequency of references to superficial aspects, like book characters (*jesu, maria, madalena*) and themes (*cego, escuridão, epidemia*), is also high. This might suggest that the review styles in both sets bear great resemblance. However, the negative keyword list reveals that Lusophone reviewers of Portuguese literature do pay attention to stylistic aspects (*pontuação, prosa, estilo*). This may be due to the fact that Saramago, who is known for his page-long sentences, is well-represented in the reference corpus: his last name is the first keyword to appear in the list. Textual indicators of an evaluative or attitudinal response are absent in the ‘negative’ keyword list. Relatively prominent is the place occupied by ‘penso’, but closer inspection reveals that it appears high in the list because a great many readers have cited a passage from *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*: ‘Penso que não cegámos, penso que estamos cegos, Cegos que veem, Cegos que, vendo, não veem.’ (60 times!).

## 7. Discussion

The findings presented in this article have shown that the perspective on literary criticism can be broadened by homing in on the critical reception of literature by non- and less-professional readers. The computational methods used in this study allowed for a deeper understanding of concepts used by those readers to conceptualise, assess and respond to the phenomenon of translation. Table 2 summarises the findings that were set out in previous sections. They show that, in general terms, Lusophone readers look favourably upon literature, be it original Portuguese literature or translated literature. In their reviews of translations, they show awareness of the textual product and of the effort that the translator has gone through to produce the target text. However, the results from the collocational analysis suggests that Lusophone readers sometimes consider the translation to be deficient, but at the same time the experienced deficiency boils down to uncertainty: they pick on petty details that are misrepresented in the translation or just



indicate that they have a feeling that the translation might be to blame. On the upside, when Lusophone readers take a positive stance toward the translated text, they regularly resort to intensifiers. As was evidenced in the keyword list analysis, the reviews of translated literature tend to follow the same line of argument as reviews of Portuguese books. In the Lusophone context, book reviews are lengthy but rather superficial. Still, the reviews of Portuguese books left more room for discussions of style and narration.

Table 2 also highlights the mixed reception of Portuguese literature abroad. Kindred cultures (France, Italy, Spain) seem highly appreciative of Portuguese literature. The same cannot be said for the reception in Germanic cultures, where readers were less outspoken in their opinion (with lots of 2-, 3- and 4-star ratings). The collocational network analysis revealed that Anglophone readers show awareness of the textual production of the translation, as well as of the role of the translator. Still, the networks signals some negative sentiment toward the translation: it is often scapegoated for a negative reading experience. At the same time, it became apparent that the blame simply falls on translation, because Anglophone readers are not able to put the finger on the exact reason for disliking the book; hence, the presence of hedge terms. Despite the overwhelmingly positive reception of Portuguese literature in Romance cultures, collocates of *TRADUCCIÓN* and *TRADUZIONE* as encountered in the Spanish and Italian datasets painted a less positive picture of readers' critical stance toward translation. When Spanish readers engage with translation, they fairly often mention the translator and demonstrate awareness of the textual product, but the analysis offers no indication of an evaluative and attitudinal response to the translatedness of the text. Italian reviewers, on the other hand, show some awareness of the source materials, but the translator remains completely hidden from view. At the same time, their evaluative and attitudinal response toward translation seems rather negative. To sum up: having read translated Portuguese literature, neither the Spanish nor the Portuguese reader gives the translation credit for the pleasant read.

	<b>Ln&gt;PT</b>	<b>PT&gt;Ln</b>	<b>PT&gt;PT</b>
<b>General appraisal</b>	Positive reception	Mixed reception, particularly in Germanic cultures.	Positive reception
<b>Main critical concepts (collocates)</b>	Rather target-oriented, reference to textual	<i>EN</i> : Source and target oriented, reference to textual product(ion), ~	N/A

	product, ~ to translator.	to translator. (Strong focus on acclaimed authors.)	
	Scapegoating, w/o going into detail.	Scapegoating, w/o going into detail.	
	Mixed sentiment, sense of uncertainty.	Negative sentiment, with hedging.	
		<i>ES</i> : Target-oriented, reference to textual product, ~ to translator.	
		(No sentiment expressed.)	
		<i>IT</i> : Rather source-oriented.	
		Scapegoating, w/o going into detail.	
		Rather negative sentiment.	
<b>Main critical concepts (keywords)</b>	Book titles, authors. Book themes, plot and characters.  Intensifier, predominantly in positive reviews.	N/A	Book titles, authors. Book themes, plot and characters. Language.  Reference to literary features.

Table 2. The absolute number of reviews per category (excl. category 3)

## 8. Conclusion

Traditionally, the formats in which translation criticism is presented in contemporary societies have been reviews for literary journals and newspapers. The critics who write these reviews are thought to hold tremendous sway over the critical reception of literature, and translated literature. While it is true that critics continue to exert a certain amount of power in the literary fields, the literary landscape is rapidly changing, and the power of the traditional critic is dwindling. Therefore, research on translation criticism requires a wider net, if it is to capture the social mechanisms that determine our construed ideas about literature and translation. As new ‘media [are believed to] playing an increasingly influential role [in symbolic production] in the twenty-first century’ (Broomans 2019: 21), the call for innovative methods and tools to unearth the conceptual riches of digitally available material is becoming louder.

In this contribution, it has been shown that big data, in this case data scraped from Goodreads, and computational methods can help further the understanding of how ordinary readers conceptualise, assess and respond to the phenomenon of translation in hyper-contemporary settings, and how cultural differences can be detected in these conceptualisations, assessments and responses. This paper dealt with the critical reception of literature in the Lusophone world, and with the reception of Portuguese literature abroad. Evidence seems to suggest that, in the Lusophone context, readers tend to appreciate foreign literature and that they use pretty much the same terms to discuss (the quality of) translated and non-translated books. The only difference found in these discussions, is that reviews of translated texts hardly focus on literary features determining the quality of the text; readers engage in nitpicking. In the analysis of reviews of translated Portuguese literature, signs of cultural myopia were observed. In general terms, cultural distance seems to have been a key determining factor in the general appraisal of Portuguese literature. Reviews in Romance languages rated Lusophone literature higher than reviews in Germanic languages. However, this cultural nearsidedness was also at play in Romance language reviews: the collocational network analysis revealed that the visibility of translation was mainly heightened when deviations from cultural and esthetic expectations were observed.

These new insights broaden the perspective on translation criticism in the Lusophone context, and on the critical reception of Portuguese literature abroad. Still, it should be noted that there are limitations to this study; the most important caveat being that the analysis of translated Portuguese literature is purely centred on reviews

in which translation is referenced. Additional keyword analyses are required to get a firmer grip on the concepts used in those reviews. Another limitation to this study, is that it only takes into account the critical reception of a small selection of works. Especially for translated Portuguese (or Lusophone) literature, one is often hard-pressed to find literary works that yield sufficient data. For instance, *Os Sertões* (translated as *Rebellion in the Backlands*), a work that is considered to be the absolute masterpiece of Brazilian literature, only generates 106 reviews (in all languages combined). Yet, the scarceness of data is not only problematic, it is also highly indicative of the sociological position of a ('national') literature.

It is hoped that this fool's attempt to broaden the perspective on literary criticism will inspire others to explore digital reading ecologies, and shed more and brighter light on critical construals of translation around the world. For instance, similar research can be conducted to gain a firmer handle on non- and less-professional criticism in other cultures. It may also be worthwhile to look at the critical responses to specific book titles. Materials in DIOPTRA-L and methods used in this study can also be applied to contexts that far removed from the original focus on literature or even translation. Translated popular fiction and non-fiction are still on the rise and merit the attention of scholars. And the DIOPTRA-L also harbors a wide variety of reviews (140,000) that engage with the original text. Needless to state that these data can and ought be salvaged, not only to inform our knowledge about the critical reception of national literatures and the factors impinging on it, but also to compare this reception with critical views on translation. In other words, there is work to be done.

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