



## My light novel's title can't be this short! The evolution of light novel titles in another world!!!

João V. Tomotani

Universidade de São Paulo; São Paulo, Brazil.

E-mail: t.jvitor@gmail.com

Light novels are a subculture of Japanese literature primarily targeting the young adult demographic, with the average length of 50,000 words, a dense publishing schedule, and usually illustrated with an anime/manga art style (Wikipedia, 2020). Due to their demographic, light novels are generally written in a simpler, more approachable fashion, and there is often an overlap between them and novels classified as young adult, middle grade, and children's literature. This is most evident when you find translated foreign novels, redesigned into a light novel style (English Light Novels, 2020).

Still, a more clear-cut definition of light novels has not yet been achieved, as they contain a lot of different features. Japanese literary critic Enomoto Aki, for instance, defined light novels as "entertaining literary work for readers in junior high school or high school", while the publishing house Nikkei Business Publications defines them as "books using anime pictures as covers and aimed at young readers" (Teipei Teen Tribune, 2020).

The term 'light novel' originated from "user participation" and was coined around 1990 by Kamikita Keita, the system operator of the Science Fiction and Fantasy forum in the Nifty Serve BBS (Saito, 2014). The light novel trend in juvenile novel markets was testified by the science fiction writer Ōhara Mariko in a book review for a newspaper in 1994 (Saito, 2016). Ōhara was impressed and confused with the increasing popularity of a group of novels referred to as 'light

novels', one of the earliest examples of the use of this term (then still a neologism mostly restricted to online communities).



**Figure 1:** Cover of the light novel *Isekai Onsen ni Tensei shita Ore no Kounou ga Tondemosugiru* ("I was Reincarnated as a Hot Spring in an Alternate World, and I'm way too Effective"; Kadokawa, 2017): shallow or deep content? (Pun intended). Image extracted from MyAnimeList.

Ōhara's negative tone when using the term indicated her ambivalent position towards it, criticizing the proximity to manga for prioritizing characters over story, unrealistic settings, and shallow content (Fig. 1). She concluded that those works could not be

categorized as novels (*shōsetsu*) and should be only consumed as a passing entertainment that did not produce lasting emotional impact on the readers (Saito, 2016).

Light novels are an evolution of pulp magazines in Japan. In the 1970s, many pulp magazines began to put illustrations in their stories and included anime, movies and video game articles to cater to their audience. Arai Motoko, a science fiction and fantasy writer active mainly in the young adult market, is considered one of the harbingers of the breathless, chatty style of literature, typical of light novels (SFE, 2020). She is also credited with the popularization of the term 'otaku' in Japanese popular culture by using it in her works. Other famous work from this period is the heroic fantasy novel *Guin Saga*, by Kurimoto Kaoru, in continuous publication since 1979 (though the original author died in 2009, at which time this novel was the longest single-writer's work in the world).

Other very famous light novels (also in the West) are: *Record of Lodoss War* and *Slayers*, published in the 1980s, which contributed to the development of the fantasy and high fantasy genres in Japan; *Boogiepop* and *Full Metal Panic*, published in the 1990s, that mixed the action, fantasy and military themes with everyday student lives; the phenomenon *Haruhi Suzumiya*, published in 2003 and possibly a major turning point in the light novel and anime industry, by playing with the anime and manga tropes of the time, reflecting otaku culture, and being wildly popular on the Internet; and *Sword Art Online*, initially published as a web novel in 2002, that vastly contributed to the popularization of the 'isekai' genre (literally "different world", a genre that revolves around a normal person from Earth being transported to or reborn in another fantastical universe) – a commercially successful genre today, as seen in novels like *KonoSuba*, *Overlord* and *Re:Zero* (Fig. 2).

As argued by Saito (2015), with the participatory culture of the Internet, story writing became the major source of small narratives for its ease in creating consumable media content. While the *Haruhi Suzumiya*

franchise mimics this participatory culture of the digital age, *Sword Art Online* was born out of the actual user participation in the creation and dissemination of the media content. The success of *Sword Art Online* has contributed to the creation of many write-your-own-fiction websites in Japan over the past years.



**Figure 2:** Isekai Quartet promotional art. A crossover show featuring characters from the popular isekai series *Overlord*, *Re:Zero*, *KonoSuba* and *The Saga of Tanya the Evil*. Image extracted from Wikipedia (Studio Puyukai, 2019).

A similar phenomenon was identified by Hansen (2016) with the 'cell phone novels' (or 'keitai novels'), that became a significant commercial success in Japan. Keitai novels also generated considerable literary criticism, but that had little impact on their continued success, which is presenting challenges not only to traditional critical interpretation of fiction, but also to the very manner that literature is created, disseminated and received. For an interesting analysis on the Japanese pop culture trends of fiction since the 2000s, with the popularization of themes like *seikaikei* ("end-of-the-world crisis"), *sabaibukei* ("survival"), and *nichijōkei* ("slice of daily life"), refer to Tanaka (2014).

## GOD'S BLESSING ON THESE WONDERFUL LIGHT NOVELS

A very peculiar feature of light novels is their titles. The titles are (in)famous for being unusually long, often composed of large sentences that give a summary of the plot, interjections, and filled with excessive punctuation marks such as exclamation and interrogation marks (Fig. 3). An article from the satirical anime news website Anime Maru, even joked about the possibility of the release of a light novel composed solely of a 196-page-long title (Anime Maru, 2016).



**Figure 3:** Cover of the light novel *Me, a Genius? I was Reborn into Another World and I think they've got the Wrong Idea!* (J-Novel Club, 2018). One can only wonder what the plot for this light novel entails. Image extracted from MyAnimeList.

Two analyses of the increase in the size of light novel titles have been done in the past. The first one was conducted by Twitter user @GenreCodeLovers, who compiled a list of light novel titles from the website Ranobe Mori and analyzed the number of Japanese characters (apparently not corrected for polysyllabic kanji) in them (reported by Parker-Dalton, 2019). The second one was made by YouTuber Red Bard (2019),

who compiled a list of English titles from the website MyAnimeList and counted the number of words, in order to identify the moment in which titles became so long. She concluded that the movement started between 2009 and 2013, but really caught on in 2014.

The objective of the present work is to expand on those studies, following a more structured and scientific protocol and analyzing results via statistical tests. Using the original Japanese titles, we will evaluate the progression in title size by counting the number of characters. In addition, we will try to identify whether the larger title sizes are related to the novels' literary genre. Finally, we will identify which are the most common themes and words among the titles.

## LIST ART ONLINE - BUILDING A LIST OF LIGHT NOVELS

Our light novel list was composed from two complementary online sources: the website English Light Novels (<https://englishlightnovels.com/list-of-light-novels-alphabetical/>) and Wikipedia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_light\\_novels](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_light_novels)). While the titles acquired from the former website were restricted to novels officially published in English, Wikipedia listed all titles (regardless of publication in English) that have their own Wikipedia page (mostly due to having a sufficiently successful anime or manga adaptation).

For each title, we extracted the following information:

- Original title of the light novel, in the Hepburn Romanized form. For almost all cases, the Romanized form was provided by the website itself. In case this information was not available, we searched for a Romanization in either Baka Updates (<https://www.mangaupdates.com/>) or MyAnimeList (<https://myanimelist.net/>). Whenever the titles contained words originally in English, they were left unchanged (katakana forms of foreign words, however, were Romanized as usual). Punctuation was

also left unchanged.

- Translated title of the light novel to English. Whenever the light novel was formally released in English, the official title was used. Otherwise, a literal translation was used.
- Year of publication (in Japan) of the light novel's first volume (or the year the first chapter was published online, in the case of web novels).
- Genre(s) of the light novel. For most novels, the list of genres was provided by the two websites mentioned above; otherwise, they were obtained from MyAnimeList.

The list was compiled on August 9th, 2020, and had a total of 498 different titles.

From those, we distinguished titles that were not originally light novels. For instance, light novels based on a manga (e.g., *Attack on Titan* and *Death Note*), anime (e.g., *Eureka Seven*, *Anohana*, *Sarazanmai*), OVA or movie (e.g., *FLCL*, *The Boy and the Beast*, and those by Makoto Shinkai), video game or visual novel (e.g., *Kingdom Hearts*, *Danganronpa*, *Higurashi*, and the *Fate/Stay Night* franchise). Also, we distinguished the origi-

nal novels from sequels, side stories or spin-offs, such as *The Reprise of the Spear Hero* (from the *Shield Hero* series), *Is It Wrong to Try to Pick Up Girls in a Dungeon? On the Side: Sword Oratoria* (side story of the *Danmachi* light novel), *Wolf and Parchment: New Theory Spice and Wolf* (sequel of *Spice and Wolf* light novel). After this, we concluded that 406 out of the 498 listed titles were original light novels, while the remaining 92 were not.

### Re:SULTS - STARTING AN ANALYSIS IN THIS ARTICLE

For our analyses, we used only those 406 light novels that were original titles. Since many of the novels that were sequels or spin-offs included the title of the original novel in their own titles (e.g., *Is It Wrong to Try to Pick Up Girls in a Dungeon? On the Side: Sword Oratoria*) and thus, were naturally longer, they would have biased the analyses.

Firstly, we evaluated how the average number of characters in the title changed from year to year. For this analysis, we used the original Japanese title in romanized

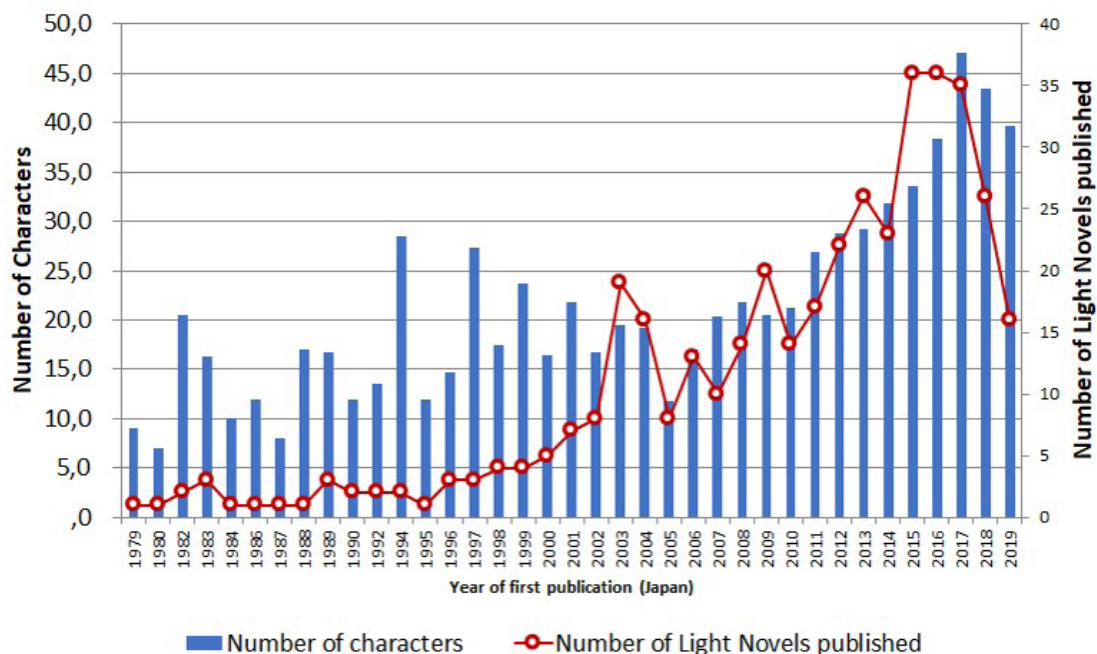


Figure 4: Average number of characters from the novels' titles, and number of light novels published per year, considering only "original" novels.

form, also including any punctuation and spaces, and considered the year of the novels' first publication in Japan. The results can be seen in Figure 4.

From this first analysis, we can clearly see an increase in the number of novels published and a clear increase in the average number of characters since the late 1970s. The years of 2018, in particular, had a whopping average of over 45 characters per title. The longest title award, though, goes to the R18 novel published in 2016 *Yami Zokusei no Mahoutsukai daga, naze ka Yuusha ni Natte Shimatta ~Sore wa Tomokaku Yome ni Ii Kurashi wo Saseru Tame ni Ganbatte Nariag-arou to Omou*, or “Busy Wizard: This Warlock Just Wants to Provide for his Wives!” (Fig. 5).

In order to identify the precise year when the increase in title length started, we used a continuous piecewise linear model, popularly referred to as broken-stick model. In regression models, it is often assumed that the regression function has the same parametric form throughout the domain of interest. However, it might be possible that a regression function is composed of a sequence of submodels, that is, multiple linear segments (Das et al., 2016). The segments can form a continuous function, but with discontinuities in slope at “transition points” between each segment.

It is relatively easy to fit the segmented curves when it is known in advance where each transition point is. When the transition points are unknown, as in our case, the problem becomes more difficult and we need to use the data to estimate where the transition points are. Hudson (1966) developed an algorithm to obtain the best fit iteratively. With a large number of transition points, this iterative procedure can be very complex, but as we are assuming the existence of a single point (that is, a specific year when the trend started), it is much simpler to proceed testing every point for the best fit for the method of least squares.



**Figure 5:** Cover of *Yami Zokusei no Mahoutsukai daga, naze ka Yuusha ni Natte Shimatta ~Sore wa Tomokaku Yome ni Ii Kurashi wo Saseru Tame ni Ganbatte Nariag-arou to Omou* (Panty Press, 2018; yes, that's the name of the publisher), our wordiest title, and probably the lewdest novel in our list as well. Image extracted from Goodreads.

After applying this procedure in our data, we see two possible transition points with the same fit: 2004 and 2010 (Fig. 6). Looking at the results, with the error bars for each year, we can see that until 2010, the average number of characters per title changed very little – one could say that it almost remained unchanged, considering the error bars – but that an increase is very noticeable after 2010. The transition point in 2004 being a good fit, though, is most likely due to 2005 being an outlier with some very short titles (including the shortest one in our list, the yaoi novel *Esu or S*, Fig. 7). Thus, it is more likely that the transition point is truly 2010. This result is aligned with the one estimated by YouTuber Red Bard (2019), who eyeballed the start of this trend between 2009 and 2013.

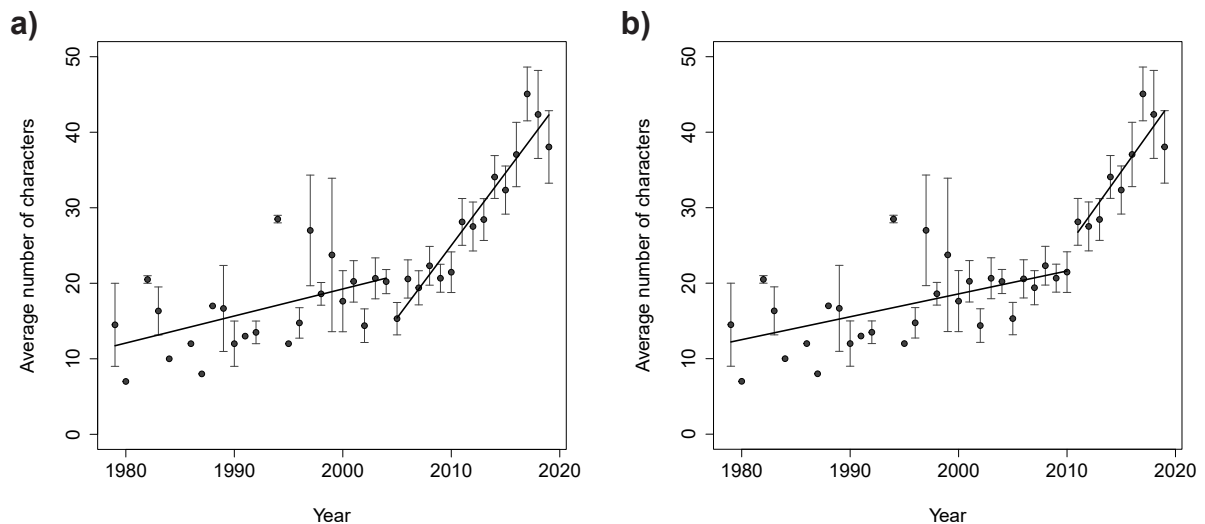


Figure 6: Results of the broken-stick model with a) the transition point in 2004; and b) the transition point in 2010.



Figure 7: Cover of *Esu* (Taiyoh Toshio, 2005), the novel with the shortest title in our list. Image extracted from Wikipedia.

### NO GENRE, NO LIFE

To analyze how the genre of the light novels affected the expected number of characters of the title, firstly we identified the 10 most “popular” genres, that is, the

ones with the largest number of novels. The ten most popular genres were: fantasy; comedy; romance/romcom; action; adventure; isekai/virtual reality; drama; science fiction; harem; and mystery. One could argue that some of these are not really literary genres, such as isekai or harem (and one would most likely be right according to most literary experts), but given the source material at hand, we obviously had to consider them.

Table 1: Average number of characters in the title per genre.

Genre	Average Number of characters	Number of Titles
All	28.990	406
Fantasy	33.079	215
Comedy	31.421	152
Romance / RomCom	27.291	127
Action	26.565	92
Adventure	27.679	84
Isekai / Virtual Reality	39.329	82
Drama	24.075	67
Sci-fi / Science Fiction	23.782	55
Harem	30.221	68
Mystery	21	26

Once the “most popular” genres were defined, we calculated the average number of characters per title for each genre. The results are shown in Table 1.

From the results in Table 1, we can see

that the wordiest titles are by far in the isekai genre, followed by fantasy. This was not really a surprise, considering how many of the longest titles were classified as isekai or fantasy, as seen in the longest titles (Table 2).

**Table 2:** List of the top longest novel titles.

English Name	Japanese Name	Year of first publication	Genres	Nr characters
Busy Wizard: This Warlock Just Wants to Provide for his Wives!	Yami Zokusei no Mahoutsukai daga, naze ka Yuusha ni Natte Shimatta ~Sore wa Tomokaku Yome ni Ii Kurashi wo Saseru Tame ni Ganbatte Nariagarou to Omou	2016	R18, Fantasy, Ecchi, Harem	149
ROLL OVER AND DIE: I Will Fight for an Ordinary Life with My Love and Cursed Sword!	Omae Gotoki ga Maou ni Kateru to Omou na' to Gachizei ni Yuusha Pāti wo Tsuihou Sareta node, Outo de Kimama ni Kurashitai	2018	Action, Fantasy, Horror	121
A Mysterious Job Called Oda Nobunaga	Oda Nobunaga to Iu Nazo no Shokugyou ga Mahou Kenshi yori Chīto Datta node, Oukoku o Tsukuru Koto ni Shimashita	2017	Fantasy, Kingdom Building	111
Banished from the Hero's Party, I Decided to Live a Quiet Life in the Countryside	Shin no Nakama ja Nai to Yuusha no Pāti wo Oidasareta node, Henkyou de Surō Raifu suru Koto ni Shimashita	2018	Fantasy, Comedy, Romance	104
I'm a Behemoth, an S-Ranked Monster, but Mistaken for a Cat, I Live as an Elf Girl's Pet	S-ranku monsutā no “Behīmosu” dakedo, Neko to Machigawarete Erufu Musume no Pet toshite Kurashitemasu	2018	Adventure, Ecchi, Isekai, Comedy	101
Woof Woof Story: I Told You to Turn Me Into a Pampered Pooch, Not Fenrir!	Wanwan Monogatari: Kanemochi no Inu ni Shite to wa Itta ga, Fenriru ni Shiro to wa Itte Nee!	2017	Isekai, Fantasy, Comedy	92
Suppose a Kid From the Last Dungeon Boonies Moved to a Starter Town	Tatoeba Rasuto Danjon Mae no Mura no Shōnen ga Joban no Machi de Kurasu Yō na Monogatari	2017	Adventure, Fantasy	88
My Instant Death Ability is So Overpowered, No One in This Other World Stands a Chance Against Me!	Sokushi Chīto ga Saikyou Sugite, Isekai no Yatsura ga Marude Aite ni Naranai n Desu ga	2016	Isekai, Fantasy, Adventure, Comedy	86

Table 2 (cont.)

Middle-Aged Businessman, Arise in Another World!	Around 40 Eigyō-man, Isekai ni Tatsu!: Megami Pawa de Jinsei Nidome no Nariagari	2017	Isekai, Slice-of-Life, Fantasy	81
Mapping: The Trash-Tier Skill That Got Me Into a Top-Tier Party	Hazure Skill "Mapping" wo Te ni Shita Shounen wa Saikyou Pātī to Danjon ni Idomu	2018	Fantasy, Adventure, Action	80
If It's for My Daughter, I'd Even Defeat a Demon Lord	Uchi no Musume no Tame Naraba, Ore Moshikashitara Maou mo Taoserukamo Shirenai.	2015	Fantasy, Adventure, Slice-of-Life	79
My Next Life as a Villainess: All Routes Lead to Doom!	Otome Gēmu no Hametsu Furagu shika nai Akuyaku Reijou ni Tensei shite shimatta...	2015	Comedy, Video Game Isekai, Romance, Otome	79
I've Been Killing Slimes for 300 Years and Maxed Out My Level	Suraimu Taoshite Sanbyaku-nen, Shiranai Uchi ni Reberu Makkusu ni Nattemashita	2017	Comedy, Isekai, Fantasy, Slice-of-Life	78
Of Dragons and Fae: Is a Fairy Tale Ending Possible for the Princess's Hairstylist?	Kamiyuishi wa Ryuu no Tsugai ni Narimashita (Yappari Machigai Datta Sou Desu)	2019	Fantasy, Romance	77
Can Someone Please Explain What's Going On?!	Dareka Kono Joukyou wo Setsumeishite Kudasai!: Keiyaku kara Hajimaru Uedingu	2013	Fantasy, Romance, Shoujo	76
The White Cat's Revenge as Plotted from the Dragon King's Lap	Fukushuu wo Chikatta Shironeko wa Ryuuou no Hiza no Ue de Damin wo Musaboru	2016	Isekai, Shoujo, Romance	75
Ascendance of a Bookworm: I'll Do Anything to Become a Librarian!	Honzuki no Gekokujou: Shisho ni Naru Tame ni wa Shudan wo Erandeiraremasen	2015	Isekai, Fantasy, Drama	74
Do You Love Your Mom and Her Two-Hit Multi-Target Attacks?	Tsujo Kogeki ga Zentai Kogeki de Ni-kai Kogeki no Okasan wa Suki desu ka?	2017	MMO Isekai, Comedy, Fantasy	73
Seriously Seeking Sister! Ultimate Vampire Princess Just Wants Little Sister; Plenty of Service Will Be Provided!	Tonikaku Imouto ga Hoshii Saikyou no Kyuuketsuki wa Mujikaku Gohoushichuu	2018	Yuri, Comedy, Fantasy	73
WorldEnd: What Do You Do at the End of the World? Are You Busy? Will You Save Us?	Shuumatsu Nani Shitemasuka? Isogashii desuka? Sukutte Moratte Ii desuka?	2014	Drama, Romance, Fantasy	72
My Mental Choices are Completely Interfering with my School Romantic Comedy	Ore no Nōnai Sentakushi ga, Gakuen Rabu Kome o Zenryoku de Jama Shiteiru	2012	Comedy, romance, slice of life	72



Due to the expected intersection between the fantasy and isekai genres, we excluded isekai novels from our analysis, expecting a sharp decrease in the title length of fantasy novels (Table 3). However, the fantasy genre remains the one with the longest titles, dropping from an average of 33.1 characters in the title to 31.2. The comedy and adventure genres, though, were the ones most affected by the removal of isekai novels (respectively, decreasing from 31.4 to 26.8, and 27.7 to 23.7 characters), hinting that a larger number of characters in isekai novels' titles might be related to a more comedic tone (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Average number of characters in the title per genre, excluding isekai novels.

Genre	Average Number of characters (no Isekai)	Number of Titles
All	26.373	324
Fantasy	31.167	156
Comedy	26.783	120
Romance / RomCom	26.593	118
Action	25.272	81
Adventure	23.7	60
Drama	23.317	63
Sci-fi / Science Fiction	22.54	50
Harem	28.118	51
Mystery	21	26

### IS IT WRONG TRYING TO PICK UP CONCLUSIONS IN THIS ARTICLE?

To identify some common themes in light novel titles, we used an online word cloud generator (Davies, 2018) to highlight the most common words used in the titles, in both English and Japanese (Fig. 8).

By looking at the word clouds, the presence of the fantasy and isekai themes is evident in both languages. It is easy to identify words related to (1) a magical setting, such as: magic (mahou in Japanese), magical (majutsu, more literally 'magical arts'), witch (majo); (2) words related to dungeons & to dragons: dungeon (danjon), monster (monsuta), demon (maou), alongside elf and vampire in English translations of the titles, and megami (goddess) in the original Japanese titles; (3) words related to medieval settings, such as: princess (hime), hero (yuusha), alongside king and knight in English translations of the titles; and, finally, (4) words directly related to the isekai concept, such as: another and world (typically used in tandem), reborn, reincarnated in English and sekai (world), isekai (another world), tensei (reincarnation) in Japanese. It is important to note that the titles of isekai novels sometimes have those specific words as a self-referential joke or parody, thus skewing this word cloud.

Other very common themes are school settings. This includes the words school (gakuen) and words related to girls/women in general (considering that the majority of the audience is expected to be male teenagers and young adults). The latter includes the



**Figure 8:** Word clouds with the most common words in light novel titles: a) English titles; b) Japanese titles.

words girl and sister in English titles, but is more varied in Japanese: musume (daughter), otome (maiden), imouto (younger sister), kanojo (girlfriend), and shoujo (girl).



**Figure 9:** Light novels can have their whole title written in their spine, as well as specific and easily recognizable colors to make them easy to find. Image extracted from English Light Novels.

From our analyses, we can conclude that the increase in the length of light novel titles is a true phenomenon that can be observed statistically. Light novels, as argued by Saito (2016), successfully bridged the increasing gulf between the expanding visual media and the conventional print media, having a very strong market in Japan, which is very competitive, where successful novels can have manga and anime adaptations, while successful anime and manga can have light novel prequels, sequels and spin-offs. It is possible that in order to survive in that market, publishers opt to invest in increasingly larger titles, in order to draw the reader's attention and immediately inform them about the genre and content of the light novel through the book's spine alone (Fig. 9), while also investing in colorful and appealing covers.

Thus, the increase in title sizes is a somewhat recent phenomenon. So, for now, let's observe how this trend develops, while hoping for a new *Konosuba* anime season.

## WOLF AND REFERENCES: OLDER THEORY SPICE AND WOLF

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR: THE MELANCHOLY OF JOÃO TOMOTANI

My name is **João Tomotani**, my calling is that of a Mechanical Engineer, the strongest of all Engineers. First off, I’m not interested in ordinary people. But, if any of you are aliens, time-travelers, or espers, please come see me. That is all!