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Translating the Hobby through Player Translators and Fanzines in Spain from 1981 to 1991

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Article

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Abstract

This article reconstructs how tabletop role-playing became linguistically and materially playable in Spain between 1981 and 1991. It focuses on a Barcelona-centred network of clubs, specialist magazines, fanzines, translators, and small publishers whose work exerted influence beyond that local setting. The study combines close reading with a purpose-built database of 94 documented appearances: 79 case-normalised English labels, 89 English–Spanish pairings, and evidence drawn from MS, Líder, Troll, early rulebooks, published errata, and retrospective testimony. Rather than treating chronological priority as proof of influence, the analysis distinguishes documented appearance, probable continuity, acknowledged transmission, and interpretation. It shows that basic terms such as juego de rol, personaje, campaña, director de juego, hoja de personaje, and puntos de vida circulated before or alongside the first licensed Spanish editions. It then follows selected forms into Joc Internacional's Call of Cthulhu, RuneQuest, and Middle-earth Role Playing, where player-translators combined literary precedents, knowledge of other games, and practical experience at the table. Translation therefore included lexical choice, source criticism, rules repair, interface design, and the coordination of terminology across game lines. Errata in MS, Líder, and Troll further show that publication redistributed authority without closing the text: translators and readers continued to test and repair books through the print networks that had first made the hobby accessible. The article conceptualises this work as cultural infrastructure with lexical, material, and institutional dimensions. The Spanish case offers a print-based genealogy of participatory translation in which commissioned and non-commissioned roles overlapped, while also showing that not every early solution survived standardisation.

Introduction

In November 1981, the sixth issue of *MS: Revista de Maquetismo y Simulación* introduced its readers to "juegos Role-Playing" while explaining the science-fiction game *Traveller*. The expression still carried its English form and required description: players created a "personaje," adventures could be linked into a "campaña," and an "árbitro" prepared the worlds and situations through which the group would move (Soteras Broto 1981, 18–21). Three years later the same publication headed its section "Juegos de ROL." Between those formulations, an unstable foreign label had become a concise Spanish name for a recognisable activity. The shift may appear minor when detached from the magazines, clubs, imported rulebooks, photocopies, correspondence, demonstrations, shops, and conversations that sustained it. Read within that material network, however, the movement from *Role-Playing* to *juego de rol* condenses a larger historical problem. Tabletop role-playing entered Spain principally through foreign-language objects, and its users needed not only to understand those objects but also to develop words, formats, and authorities through which play could be repeated in Spanish.

Accounts of the early Spanish hobby have understandably been organised around publication milestones: Dalmau Carles Pla's Spanish *Dungeons & Dragons* in 1985, Joc Internacional's *La llamada de Cthulhu* and *RuneQuest* in 1988, *El Señor de los Anillos* in 1989, and Diseños Orbitales' *Traveller* in the same year (Mentzer 1985; Petersen 1988; Perrin et al. 1988; Coleman 1989; Miller 1989; Sevillano Pareja

2009). These editions mattered because they gave complete rule systems a stable commercial form and widened access beyond groups with an English reader at the table. Yet a chronology built from finished products obscures the years in which players learned from imports, translated passages for friends, coined terms in club publications, compared French and British editions, and corrected books already on sale. The sources examined here illuminate one especially dense Barcelona-centred network around Maquetismo y Simulación, Joc Internacional, Líder, Auryn, and Troll. That network should not be mistaken for the whole of Spain, but its magazines, conventions, mail circulation, and published games allowed locally acquired competence to travel into a national market during the consolidation of a specialist role-playing sector.

The careers of the principal mediators make the inadequacy of a fixed amateur–professional opposition particularly clear. Ana Isabel Utande, co-translator of *RuneQuest*, later described herself and Luis Serrano as players who became “traductores de manera accidental”; before their commission from Joc Internacional, they circulated translated fragments among people who wanted to play but lacked sufficient English (Rol de los 90 2019a). Jordi Zamarreño moved from explaining games and correcting Dalmau’s *Dungeons & Dragons* in *MS* to translating *Call of Cthulhu* for Joc. José López Jara translated *Middle-earth Role Playing* while editing *Líder* and publicly acknowledged lexical precedents associated with Zamarreño and Serrano. Colombina’s audit of the Spanish *MERP* in *Troll*, by contrast, remained a non-commissioned intervention even though it applied a systematic bilingual comparison to a commercial edition. These trajectories are better described as movements among modes of production and intervention than as transitions from a pure amateur sphere into a self-contained profession.

This article asks three connected questions. How did recurrent role-playing terms move among clubs, periodicals, private translation, and licensed editions, and which forms stabilised or failed to stabilise? How did practical expertise as players alter the scope of commissioned translation, particularly when translators restored rules, redesigned interfaces, or coordinated terminology across games? How did errata and reader correction redistribute authority after publication? The argument is that translation provided cultural infrastructure for Spanish tabletop role-playing in three analytically distinct but historically entangled senses. Lexically, it supplied portable names for roles, procedures, and objects. Materially, it helped produce usable sheets, tables, abbreviations, and repaired rule systems. Institutionally, it made some mediators visible and authorised them to select, explain, or contest published language. The concept therefore does not reduce translation to an invisible support service. It identifies the practical work through which an imported game became repeatable and socially reproducible, while leaving room for unsuccessful proposals, competing authorities, and bilingual forms that never disappeared.

The period 1981–1991 captures a transition rather than a complete national history. It begins with the earliest sustained technical vocabulary located in this corpus and extends through the first cluster of licensed Spanish core books and the periodical discussion that followed them. By 1991, the problem was no longer simply how to name a scarcely known practice; publishers and players were working within a recognisable Spanish role-playing field whose lexical conventions could be reused, disputed, or

marketed. The article reconstructs that transition through documented appearances and acknowledged connections. It does not claim that the earliest located form was the first ever uttered, or that temporal sequence alone proves direct influence. This distinction between chronology and transmission is central to the analysis that follows.

Translation as cultural infrastructure

Research on fan translation has largely developed around digital circulation: fansubbing, scanlation, videogame modification, crowdsourcing, and other forms of user-generated translation. O'Hagan (2009) describes a movement from unsolicited fan activity towards forms of community translation increasingly recognised or incorporated by industries, while Pérez-González (2014) treats participatory translation as a mode of self-mediation through which audiences acquire productive agency. The broader literature on non-professional translation has usefully challenged the assumption that translation belongs only to credentialed practitioners and formal markets, although it also warns against turning "the non-professional" into a homogeneous social identity (Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva 2012; Antonini et al. 2017). Game-localisation research has meanwhile demonstrated that playable translation coordinates language with interfaces, assets, technologies, and audience expectations rather than replacing verbal strings in isolation (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013; Bernal-Merino 2015). Earlier fan studies similarly located cultural production within organised interpretive communities rather than isolated acts of consumption (Jenkins 1992). The Spanish materials invite these conversations to be historicised through a print-based genealogy: translation circulated through stapled magazines, photocopied fragments, club meetings, mail orders, imported boxes, convention demonstrations, and specialist shops before networked digital media supplied an obvious vocabulary for participatory production.

Periodical scholarship helps explain why those modest formats mattered. Alternative publications do not merely carry content that originates elsewhere; their production routines, low entry costs, correspondence networks, and proximity to readers can establish different relations of authorship and authority (Atton 2002). Work on translation in nineteenth-century periodicals likewise shows that material format and serial publication shape what translation can do, how it is framed, and how it reaches readers (O'Connor 2019). The magazines and fanzines considered here were not equivalent in resources or reach, but their seriality created recurrent occasions for explanation, anticipation, correction, and reply. A term could pass from a club table into an article, from an article into a licensed manual, and from that manual back into a public erratum. The absence of a digital platform did not prevent participatory mediation; it gave that mediation a slower, issue-bound temporality in which authority accumulated through visible repetition and named intervention.

Tabletop role-playing also complicates a text-centred account of translation. A rulebook is read, but it is also performed by a group that repeatedly converts written procedures into speech, calculation, fictional description, and social negotiation. Fine's early ethnography defined fantasy role-playing as the collective construction of shared fantasy (Fine 1983), and subsequent work has emphasised the interdependence

of text, performance, system, and imagined world (Mackay 2001; Zagal and Deterding 2018). Evans's account of board-game translation is especially relevant because it treats play as an effect of the relation among verbal rules, material components, and player action rather than as the reception of words alone (Evans 2013). In a role-playing game, a mistranslated threshold, a missing result on a critical-hit table, or an English abbreviation left inside a Spanish chart can interrupt play or alter the probabilities that organise fictional action. Conversely, a word such as *pifia* acquires force because it is memorable in speech, compatible with a rule, and portable across games.

The relevant unit of analysis is therefore larger than the published book. It includes what Buzelin (2005) describes as the networked production of translation, here formed by translators, editors, clubs, source editions, prior literary translations, magazines, play sessions, and readers who acted as unofficial proofreaders. It also includes repair. Jackson (2014) argues that maintenance and repair reveal sociotechnical relations that narratives of innovation often render secondary; in the present corpus, errata expose which defects prevented use, who possessed the competence to diagnose them, and which channels could redistribute a correction. Repair is not treated as evidence that all translated editions were defective, nor as a metaphor detached from material practice. It is a documented continuation of translation when a character sheet is replaced, a table cell restored, or a mistranslated rule made playable.

Cultural infrastructure brings these strands together while remaining operational rather than ornamental. Its lexical dimension concerns recurring equivalents, abbreviations, and distinctions that let players move among texts and games. Its material dimension concerns the organisation of manuals, sheets, tables, and correction layers through which written rules become usable objects. Its institutional dimension concerns the relationships that authorise particular actors to explain, publish, revise, or challenge those objects. This tripartite definition also prevents "community" from becoming an undifferentiated cause. Publishers controlled commissions, licences, print runs, and branded titles; clubs supplied practical expertise and recruitment networks; periodicals made some interventions public; literary translations constrained setting vocabulary; and repeated play tested consequences that editorial proofreading could overlook. The argument is not that community labour replaced the industry, but that the two were historically interdependent in ways that a finished-book chronology conceals.

For the same reason, "amateur" and "professional" are not used here as stable descriptions of persons. Zamarreño's 1984 explanations in *MS* belonged to an enthusiast publication, whereas his 1988 *Call of Cthulhu* translation was commissioned editorial work; his vocabulary nevertheless crossed those settings. Utande and Serrano entered publishing with expertise acquired through playing and privately translating *RuneQuest*. Colombina's correction of *MERP* was community-initiated, but it applied a bilingual collation that the commercial workflow had not supplied. Wenger's concept of a community of practice is useful because competence emerged through participation, shared problems, and circulating solutions rather than through a single credential (Wenger 1998). The database accordingly codes the mode of each recorded act—original source, non-commissioned community mediation, commissioned

editorial work, hybrid intervention, public correction, or retrospective testimony—rather than assigning each historical actor a permanent identity.

Sources and method

The study is based on a purpose-built database in which one “appearance” is one documentable use or decision in a dated source. An appearance may record an English–Spanish equivalence, an untranslated borrowing, an explanatory gloss, an editorial choice, a published correction, an English source form included for comparison, or testimony about a translation process. Each row records date, source, English label, Spanish form, named translator or mediator, mode of production or intervention, context, game, club, publisher, commentary on the decision, later correction, evidence, page or locator, evidence type, confidence, local file, URL, and a stable identifier. The present dataset contains 94 appearances. When source-language labels are normalised without distinction of case, they yield 79 labels; the same records contain 89 distinct English–Spanish pairings because one source label may receive more than one Spanish form and the same pairing may recur in different contexts. These counts describe the constructed dataset, not the complete vocabulary of Spanish role-playing in the period.

The source base is organised through a separate inventory of 85 items. It covers *MS* nos. 6–17 (1981–1985), the second and third series of *Líder* from 1986 to 1991, *Troll* nos. 1–25, selected English and Spanish rulebooks, published errata, bibliographic records, and interviews with Zamarreño, Utande, López Jara, Luis d’Estrées, Francesc Matas, and other participants. “Inventory” means that the item’s existence, location, access status, and state of processing have been recorded. It does not mean that every page of all 85 items has been converted into a lexical concordance. Close reading concentrated on sources in which terminology or translation practice became explicit: *MS* 6, 9, 13, 14, 16, and 17; *Líder* 4, 5, 7, 8, and 13 of its third series; *Troll* 23; Mentzer’s 1983 English *D&D Basic Rules Set*; and Joc’s 1989 *MERP*. The larger periodical runs were inventoried at issue level and searched where OCR was available, but several scans remain unreadable or await systematic extraction. Table 1 therefore distinguishes issue-level inventory from the evidential subset used in the article.

Search and verification proceeded in two stages. OCR was used to locate English game titles, recurrent technical terms, Spanish candidates, translator names, and explicit metalinguistic signals such as *traducción*, *traductor*, *en inglés*, *fe de erratas*, and *corrección*. Candidate passages were then checked manually against page images before being quoted, assigned a page locator, or coded as high confidence. Obvious OCR noise was not counted as lexical variation. An appearance received high confidence when it came from a contemporary primary source or when retrospective testimony was corroborated by primary print; 84 appearances meet that threshold. Ten appearances are coded medium confidence because they depend on a bibliographic record, a secondary reproduction, or a reasonable inference not yet checked against a complete copy. No low-confidence record is used to establish a chronological first. The supplementary workbook exposes these classifications and the unresolved acquisition tasks instead of smoothing them away in the prose.

The comparison proceeds diachronically and relationally, but it separates four strengths of claim. An “appearance documented” claim means only that a form is visible in a dated source. “Probable continuity” requires a compatible form to recur across sources or contexts but does not by itself establish direct borrowing. “Acknowledged influence” is reserved for cases in which an actor names a predecessor or a retrospective claim is corroborated by contemporary evidence. “Interpretation” identifies the analytical account offered here—for example, that brevity helped a term travel or that an erratum redistributed authority. This hierarchy is essential because the earliest located public use may have been preceded by speech, private notes, or an unpreserved local publication. Chronological priority is therefore treated as a condition for possible transmission, never as proof of transmission on its own.

The analysis also distinguishes the circumstances of each act rather than dividing people into fixed groups. “Community non-commissioned” records club journalism, private circulation, or reader correction; “commissioned or licensed editorial” records work produced for a publisher; “hybrid community–editorial” records interventions that cross those settings; “public correction” specifies repair after publication; “retrospective testimony” records later recollection; and “source original” identifies an English comparison text. This scheme permits the same person to occupy different positions at different dates. It also keeps publisher power visible: an expression might circulate in a club, but only a licence holder could place it throughout a commercial rulebook, while a periodical could publicise or contest that decision.

The retrospective interviews are read as situated testimony rather than transparent records. They clarify working arrangements, self-understandings, and relationships rarely preserved in a rulebook, but they were conducted years after the events and frequently for fan-history websites. Whenever possible, their claims are checked against contemporary print. Utande’s account of Serrano pressing for public corrections is corroborated by the *RuneQuest* errata signed by Serrano in *Líder* 8. Zamarreño’s recollection that his correction of Dalmau’s *Dungeons & Dragons* preceded his work for Joc can be placed beside the 1985 errata in *MS* 16. López Jara’s later biographical account is secondary to his contemporary article on translating *MERP*, where his terminology can be examined directly. The interviews are strongest when they explain how actors understood their work and weakest when they alone are asked to establish chronology or unseen textual content.

The corpus has two further limits. Geographically, its most continuous evidence comes from Barcelona and Catalan club networks, even though the books and periodicals they produced circulated more widely. Claims about “Spain” therefore concern a documented route into the Spanish-language market, not an exhaustive map of regional practice. Materially, complete copies are uneven. *MERP* and the cited periodical pages could be examined directly, whereas the full Dalmau box, the Spanish *Traveller*, the complete Joc editions of *RuneQuest* and *Call of Cthulhu*, and all four *Mundo Fantástico* booklets remain partially represented. Their bibliographic existence and some peripheral evidence are secure, but claims requiring line-by-line collation are withheld. These limitations turn the database into a reproducible research instrument as well as a record of findings: it specifies what is known, how it is known, and what remains to be acquired.

Table 1
Corpus and analytical use

Corpus segment	Dates	Coverage used here	Primary analytical function
MS nos. 6–17	1981–1985	Issue-level availability inventory; close reading of nos. 6, 9, 13, 14, 16, and 17; some scans incomplete	Early terminology, explanation, and D&D errata
Líder	1986–1991	Second and third series inventoried; close reading of third-series nos. 4, 5, 7, 8, and 13	Editorial mediation and RuneQuest and MERP translation
Troll nos. 1–25	1986–1990	Issue-level availability inventory; article-level indexing; close reading of no. 23	Fanzine correction and reader quality control
Rulebooks	1983–1989	Direct access to English D&D Basic and Spanish MERP; partial or bibliographic evidence for other first editions	Source comparison, glossary evidence, and limits of collation
Published interviews	2004–2019	Zamarreño, López Jara, d'Estrées, Matas, Utande, and related actors; claims checked against contemporary print where possible	Situated testimony on workflow, access, and agency

Before the first stable editions

The earliest layer of the corpus places role-playing vocabulary inside an established culture of wargaming and simulation. *MS* belonged to Maquetismo y Simulación, a Barcelona association whose publication assumed familiarity with campaigns, scenarios, referees, statistics, and complex rules. Soteras Broto's 1981 presentation of *Traveller* could therefore explain the unfamiliar genre through concepts that already had practical value for readers. *Campaign* became *campaña*, drawing on military gaming; *referee* became *árbitro*, emphasising adjudication; *character* became *personaje*, joining a quantified game entity to fiction; and *scenario* appeared through both *escenario* and *aventura* (Soteras Broto 1981, 18–21). These are documented appearances, not proof that Soteras Broto coined the words. Their significance lies in the way a public article assembled them into an explanatory vocabulary for a readership learning how the new kind of game worked.

The title *Traveller* illustrates the difference between explanation and renaming. *MS* glossed it as "Viajero" but continued to identify the game by its English mark. When Diseños Orbitales published a Spanish edition in 1989, it retained *Traveller* and translated the descriptor as "aventuras de ciencia ficción en un futuro distante" (Miller 1989). The sequence is compatible with continuity, but the available evidence does not establish that the publisher copied the 1981 gloss or consciously followed a convention set by *MS*. What it does establish is a persistent division of labour: the brand remained internationally recognisable while surrounding Spanish prose made the object intelligible. That solution recurs elsewhere in the market and helps explain why lexical naturalisation did not require the disappearance of English titles.

By *MS* 9 in January 1984, “juegos de rol” had replaced “juegos Role-Playing” as a section heading and generic category. The issue introduced *Dungeons & Dragons*, *RuneQuest*, and *Tunnels & Trolls*, while announcing *Mundo Fantástico* as a Spanish version of *Warhammer* (Soteras Broto 1984, 24–25). The later success of *juego de rol* is consistent with its brevity, morphological productivity, and independence from any one brand: it could support *jugador de rol*, *JdR*, and later *rolero*. That explanation remains interpretive rather than causal, because the corpus cannot measure every alternative in speech. What can be observed is that the phrase became increasingly portable. Zamarreño’s 1984 “Guía para un principiante absoluto” defined it and proposed *JdR*, yet also noted that players commonly called the *director de juego* the *master*. His list of materials combined the same registers: *pantalla del master*, *módulo*, *manual del master*, *manual de los jugadores*, and *hoja de personaje* (Zamarreño 1984, 27–31). Mixed language was not simply an imperfect phase waiting for monolingual completion; it was a durable way of coordinating imported products with Spanish explanation.

Several expressions later visible in licensed rulebooks were already public in these articles. Zamarreño paired *hit points* with *puntos de vida* in 1985, three years before Joc’s *RuneQuest* and four years before *MERP* included *puntos de vida* and *puntos de conmoción* in its glossary (Zamarreño 1985a, 27, 31; Coleman 1989, 12–13). His discussion of *Call of Cthulhu* called its referee the *Guardián de los Arcanos*, a game-specific title retained in Joc’s edition. *Monstruo errante*, *módulo*, and *hoja de personaje* also circulated as explanatory terms. These sequences demonstrate prior or parallel public availability, not automatic lines of borrowing. In the stronger cases, influence is shown by acknowledgement: López Jara explicitly situated several of his choices in relation to earlier Joc translators. Elsewhere, the safer conclusion is that commercial translation entered a field with an existing repertoire from which editors could select, converge independently, or depart.

The language barrier appears in the contemporary record as a condition of access. *MS* answered questions about when *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* might appear in Spanish and discussed translated or foreign editions for readers who did not all command technical English. Shortly before Joc’s *Call of Cthulhu*, *Líder* described a familiar alternative with revealing economy: dependence on an “amigo que traduce,” sometimes selectively (Líder 1988, 6). The phrase is stronger evidence than a general assertion about prices or distribution because it names an actual social arrangement. Translation governed access to rules and also the power to decide which rules were available. A friend translating for immediate play could choose a spell, procedure, or adventure; a commercial edition could place a common text before groups without that intermediary. Publication thus redistributed access and authority, although later errata show that it did not eliminate community interpretation.

Player-translators and editorial mediation

Joc Internacional’s translations at the end of the 1980s were shaped by people whose authority came partly from clubs and play. Matas later described a publishing project that recruited translators, reviewers, and advisers through the existing network around Maquetismo y Simulación and other associations, an account broadly consistent with the club affiliations and named credits in contemporary

sources (Rol de los 90 2019b). Utande's testimony supplies a more detailed case: she and Serrano had played *RuneQuest*, translated fragments for fellow players, and discussed terminology before receiving a commission. She emphasises both their lack of previous professional translation experience and the practical expertise they possessed, recalling that they divided the book, agreed shared terms, and advised Matas about which titles and supplements might merit publication (Rol de los 90 2019a). The interview cannot by itself reconstruct every editorial decision, but it shows how the actors understood the relation between linguistic work, rules knowledge, and product selection. Contemporary articles in *Líder* then demonstrate that this expertise entered the public presentation of the edition.

That broader conception became explicit in *Líder* 7. Presenting the forthcoming Spanish *RuneQuest*, Serrano and Utande explained that the edition was based on the American Standard version, itself an abridgement assembled by removing sections from *RuneQuest Deluxe*. The source retained references to tables and information that the abridged book no longer contained. The Spanish team responded by restoring combat modifier tables, multipliers for hit points by location, expanded spell material, and other elements from the Deluxe edition (Serrano and Utande 1988, 9–10). They also organised the player-facing material around a *Hoja del Aventurero* and used *PJ* for *personaje jugador*. The published book was consequently not a transparent copy of a single English object. It was a reconstructed edition assembled from more than one source, revised for readers who might encounter the system without an experienced English-speaking intermediary. Translation became textual criticism, instructional design, and rules repair.

Zamarreño's public role around *La llamada de Cthulhu* reveals another kind of mediation. Before the book appeared, *Líder* opened a "Hilo directo con el traductor," where he answered expectations about the game, explained its investigative style, and anticipated terminology. *SAN*, the English abbreviation for Sanity, became *COR* for *Cordura*; the referee remained the *guardián de los arcanos*; and the translator addressed prospective players in the same humorous register that had characterised his earlier writing in *MS* (Zamarreño 1988, 4). The column made the translator visible as a named participant in the hobby and allowed terminology to circulate before the manual. In a later interview, Zamarreño explained that he consulted Fernando Torres Oliver's Spanish translations of Lovecraft when resolving the mythos vocabulary (Leyenda.net 2004). This choice connected the game to an existing literary reception rather than translating every proper name anew. It also gave the tabletop edition cultural continuity with books that Spanish Lovecraft readers already recognised.

José López Jara described his work on *Middle-earth Role Playing* even more explicitly in *Líder* 13, an account consistent with his later recollection of the route from Tolkien reader and player to editor and translator (Juegos y Dados 2016). The English acronym *MERP* was pronounceable and already established, whereas a literal Spanish title, *Juego de Rol de la Tierra Media*, produced the awkward *JRTM*. Joc instead foregrounded the best-known literary name: *El Señor de los Anillos, el juego de rol de la Tierra Media*. The decision sought recognition among Tolkien's Spanish readership and made the role-playing product legible through the novel. López Jara then separated two lexical problems. For the fictional world, he followed the existing Spanish Tolkien vocabulary, including *montaraz* for *ranger* and *Bárbol* for

Treebeard. For game mechanics, he preferred terms already used in *La llamada de Cthulhu* and *RuneQuest*—*característica*, *habilidad*, *crítico*, and *pifia*—and retained *clase de armadura* as a deliberate nod to *Dungeons & Dragons* (López Jara 1989, 24). The translation thus belonged simultaneously to a literary lineage and an emerging intergame lexicon.

These cases show why the category of localization, although useful, requires historical specification. Contemporary game localization often names a coordinated industrial process designed for simultaneous international release. Spanish tabletop publishing in the 1980s worked on a smaller scale, after imported games had already acquired local users, and with personnel recruited from those users. The editions were therefore "localized" through accumulated play before they entered a formal production schedule. Translators knew which English words players already pronounced, which Spanish literary names carried authority, and which rules produced difficulty at the table. Their decisions were creative, but they were rarely arbitrary. They answered to several publics at once: newcomers who needed intelligible instruction, experienced players who wanted continuity with imported books, literary readers who expected familiar proper names, and editors who needed a marketable title. The translator's task was to coordinate these expectations inside a usable manual.

Lexical lineages across games and media

The database makes it possible to follow selected choices as trajectories rather than isolated equivalents, provided that different relations among appearances are not collapsed. *Árbitro*, for example, is documented in the 1981 explanation of *Traveller* and again in *MS* 9. *Director de juego* and *master* coexist in Zamarreño's 1984 guide, Dalmau retained *Dungeon Master* as a proprietary office, *Call of Cthulhu* gave the role the game-specific title *Guardián de los Arcanos*, and the 1989 *MERP* glossary records *Director de Juego* with the abbreviation *DJ*. This sequence documents diversification and partial stabilisation; it does not prove that every later form descended from one article. The semantic contrast nevertheless matters. *Árbitro* foregrounded adjudication, *director* coordination, *master* community familiarity or brand inheritance, and *Guardián* a fictional office. Generic standardisation could therefore coexist with game-specific titles and persistent speech habits.

The vocabulary of characters and interfaces shows a related combination of stability and local redesign. *Personaje* appears in 1981 and recurs in 1984; later publications specify *personaje jugador* and *personaje no jugador*, with *PJ* visible in the 1988 presentation of *RuneQuest* and both *PJ* and *PNJ* in the 1989 *MERP* glossary (Coleman 1989, 12–13). *Hoja de personaje* is documented in Zamarreño's 1984 list of materials, whereas *RuneQuest* used *Hoja del Aventurero* and then publicly replaced that sheet through the errata in *Líder* 8. The generic expression supplied portability; the branded expression attached a system-specific identity to the same material function. Table 2 summarises these and other trajectories while naming the evidential relation involved.

Crítico and *pifia* provide the clearest case of acknowledged intertextual transmission in the lexical subset. The database does not establish their absolute first Spanish use, nor does one 1989 article

measure their frequency in speech. It does establish that López Jara named Zamarreño and Serrano as precedents when explaining why *MERP* would use game-mechanical vocabulary familiar from *La llamada de Cthulhu* and *RuneQuest* (López Jara 1989, 24). The evidential strength comes from that acknowledgement, not simply from chronological order. The same article records *característica*, *habilidad*, and *clase de armadura*, showing a translator who sought intelligibility through an emerging intergame repertoire even while maintaining distinctions required by *MERP*.

López Jara also made economy an explicit criterion. He reduced *soft leather* to *cuero* where the contrast with hardened leather remained clear, preferred *coraza* to the more expansive *armadura de placas*, and shortened *one-handed edged weapon* to *arma de filo* because two-handed weapons occupied a separate category. Elsewhere he retained the initially awkward *maniobra estática* and the emphatic difficulty label *locura completa* because they functioned within the classification system (López Jara 1989, 24). These explanations provide direct evidence that recurrence, table space, and speed of consultation entered the translator's reasoning. A form repeated in an equipment list imposes different demands from a phrase encountered once in narrative prose. Brevity improves usability only when the rule's operative distinctions survive; the practical task is compression under systemic constraint.

Cross-media authority imposed a different discipline, although the routes are asymmetrically documented. In retrospective testimony, Zamarreño recalled consulting Fernando Torres Oliver's Lovecraft translations; López Jara's contemporary article explicitly described following existing Spanish Tolkien vocabulary for *montaraz*, *Bárbol*, and related names (Leyenda.net 2004; López Jara 1989, 24). These sources support a claim of deliberate consultation, but they do not justify treating literary translation as the source of every Spanish mythos or Middle-earth form. What they reveal is a division within the same rulebook. Setting vocabulary answered to established reading and brand recognition, while mechanical vocabulary answered to intergame legibility and use at the table. The tabletop adaptation reorganised literary worlds into characteristics, skills, manoeuvres, hit points, and tables, but it did so under constraints inherited from both prior translations and game systems.

Not every early solution became infrastructure. The medium-confidence records for *Mundo Fantástico*, drawn from later reproductions rather than a fully collated set of booklets, include *elfos de altura* for *High Elves*, *elfos nocturnos* for *Night Elves*, *duendes* for *Goblins*, and *duendones* for *Hobgoblins* (Surf 2019). These entries are not used to establish first use, and the present corpus does not document all of them as later standards. Their evidential value is different: they show that naturalisation could be highly inventive while remaining uncertain or short-lived. A history limited to surviving standards would make the process look more orderly than it was. The displaced or weakly attested form reveals the range of solutions available before licences, literary precedent, player recognition, and repetition narrowed that range.

Table 2
Selected lexical trajectories and evidential relations

Concept	Earlier documented form	Later form or intervention	Evidential relation and outcome
Name of the activity	juegos Role-Playing (MS 6, 1981)	juegos de rol (MS 9, 1984); JdR (MS 13, 1984)	Documented replacement and later recurrence; no claim of individual coinage
Game-running role	árbitro (MS 6, 1981)	director de juego / master (MS 13, 1984); DJ (MERP, 1989)	Layered coexistence; generic and game-specific offices remain available
Character interface	hoja de personaje (MS 13, 1984)	Hoja del Aventurero (Líder 7, 1988); replacement sheet (Líder 8)	Generic form plus system-specific redesign and documented repair
Hit-point concept	puntos de vida (MS 14, 1985)	puntos de vida / puntos de conmoción (MERP, 1989); pv (Troll 23, 1990)	Stable generic core with system-specific distinction and abbreviation
Player roles	personaje (MS 6, 1981)	PJ (Líder 7, 1988); personaje jugador and PNJ (MERP, 1989)	Documented specification and abbreviation across editions
Critical results	No earliest-use claim in present corpus	crítico and pifia (Líder 13, 1989)	Acknowledged borrowing from earlier translators, not inferred from chronology alone
Fantasy creatures	elfos de altura, duendes, duendones (Mundo Fantástico, 1984)	Not all forms are documented as later standards in this corpus	Medium-confidence secondary reproduction; counterexample to linear standardisation

Publication, errata, and distributed quality control

If commercial publication stabilised vocabulary, it did so provisionally. The errata are especially revealing because they expose the maintenance work that a finished-book chronology hides. In *MS* 16, Zamarreño published a substantial correction to Dalmau's 1985 *Dungeons & Dragons*. Some entries recovered distinctions blurred in Spanish: *rod*, *staff*, and *wand* became *vara*, *bastón*, and *varita*. Others repaired false friends or unnatural calques: *trapdoor* changed from "puerta de rampa" to *trampilla*, "almacenes de hobby" became *tiendas especializadas*, and "recarga mágica" lost a prefix that altered its meaning. The rendering of *Charisma* as "Gracioso" prompted *agraciado* or *hermoso*, while *Halfling* became *Hobbit* (Zamarreño 1985b, 30). The present corpus documents that proposal but does not directly document the later adoption of *mediano*, so the relevant conclusion is narrower: the errata made alternatives public without fixing a final dictionary.

Zamarreño accompanied those corrections with a broader complaint about "traducciones macarrónicas" and discussed *dungeon* through the alternatives *mazmorra* and *subterráneo* (Zamarreño 1985b, 34–35). The article did more than list mistakes. It asserted that the hobby required its own careful Spanish usage

and that experienced players could judge a publisher's work. This public correction became professional capital. Zamarreño later recalled that Matas contacted him and López Jara after the D&D errata, drawing the magazine's mediators into Joc's editorial project (Leyenda.net 2004). The boundary between criticism and production was porous: the person who challenged a translation could become the next translator, and the periodical that exposed defects could also recruit the expertise needed to prevent them.

Joc's publications did not escape the same cycle. *Líder* 8 printed Serrano's "Fe de erratas en RuneQuest" only weeks after the book's release. He attributed the problems to the rush to have the edition ready for the JESYR 88 convention and to the impossibility of revising the first proofs. The correction supplied a redesigned *Hoja del Aventurero*, repaired dice formulas, restored missing table cells, corrected ranges, and promised that a second edition would incorporate the changes (Serrano 1988, 28–29). Utande later remembered that Serrano insisted on publication because the translators were dissatisfied with the production errors (Rol de los 90 2019a). The contemporary erratum corroborates the existence and scope of the intervention; the interview adds an account of motivation. Read through repair studies, the episode shows maintenance redistributing responsibility after release: the translator remained publicly answerable for usability and the publisher's magazine became a supplementary layer of the manual (Jackson 2014).

The strongest example of distributed quality control appeared outside the publishing house. In *Troll* 23, a contributor signing as Colombina described buying the Spanish *MERP*, discovering that a result was absent from a critical-hit table during the first sessions, borrowing an English copy from a friend, and checking the book so that the group could continue playing. Her article, "Un capazo de errores," corrected missing ranges and numerical values, distinguished the physical-development bonus from the threshold of death, changed an English *L* for *large* to the Spanish *G* for *grande*, and repaired "listas de subterfugio" as *listas de sortilegios* (Colombina 1990, 28–29). She concentrated on errors that "molestan para jugar," a criterion that joined linguistic accuracy to performance. The analogy with a patch is useful only at the level of function: a separately distributed text modified the use of a published object. Historically, the mechanism was a fanzine article and the diagnostic environment was repeated play.

A planned but unpublished revision of the D&D red box confirms that such labour could also remain invisible. Luis d'Estrées later recalled that a project associated with Míster Game and Doctor Music produced a fully corrected box and commissioned module translations from Xavi Garriga, although the edition never reached the market (Rol de los 90 2018). The episode survives through testimony rather than a published object and should therefore be treated cautiously. It nevertheless indicates how much translation history disappears when attention remains fixed on editions that achieved distribution. Completed drafts, rejected titles, corrected proofs, club glossaries, and private fragments formed part of the same infrastructure, even when commercial failure prevented them from stabilising public language.

Translation, adaptation, and the limits of the edition

Mundo Fantástico occupies the most unstable position in this history. *MS* 9 presented it as a Spanish version of *Warhammer*, but later descriptions and surviving reproductions indicate a composite object that combined mass-battle rules, role-playing procedures, translated concepts, and local rewriting (Soteras Broto 1984, 24–25; Surf 2019). Without the complete booklets and a line-by-line comparison with the relevant English edition, the proportions of translation, adaptation, and original design cannot be settled here. That uncertainty is itself historically instructive. In a small club publication produced before a mature licensed market, borrowing a framework, translating categories, rewriting procedures, and adding locally designed material could belong to one production process. The case marks the limit of an edition-based model in which source, translation, and adaptation are assumed to be cleanly separable objects.

Titles reveal the opposite pressure: the value of retaining foreign recognition. Dalmau published *Dungeons & Dragons, juego de fantasía role-playing*, translating the descriptor only partially even though *juego de rol* already circulated in *MS*. Diseños Orbitales preserved *Traveller* after years in which players had known the English mark. Joc kept *RuneQuest*, translated *Call of Cthulhu* through the established literary title *La llamada de Cthulhu*, and expanded *MERP* into a title built around *El Señor de los Anillos*. Each solution balanced different assets: an international brand, a pronounceable name, a recognised novel, or an explanatory genre label. Translation operated at the level of catalogues and markets as well as sentences. A title had to identify an object already discussed among enthusiasts and also invite readers who had never seen the original box.

These mixed strategies complicate any linear narrative in which Spanish progressively replaces English. The record instead contains selective naturalisation. Generic practices such as *juego de rol*, *personaje*, *campaña*, and *director de juego* acquired portable Spanish forms, while brands such as *Traveller* and *RuneQuest* remained English. Some offices received setting-specific translations, whereas *master* persisted beside generic Spanish alternatives. Experimental creature names in *Mundo Fantástico* did not all survive. These outcomes reflect more than linguistic preference: licences, literary prestige, product recognition, table economy, and publisher reach supplied alternative explanations for why one solution travelled further than another. The result is best described as negotiated bilingualism. Spanish expanded accessibility and cross-game coherence, while English continued to signal brand identity, imported expertise, and continuity with existing play.

Discussion

The lexical dimension of cultural infrastructure is visible not in one act of invention but in the accumulation of portable distinctions. The corpus documents *juego de rol*, *personaje*, *campaña*, *árbitro*, *hoja de personaje*, and *puntos de vida* in specialist print before or alongside the first cluster of licensed editions. Commercial books did not simply reproduce that repertoire: they selected among variants, extended terms across complete systems, introduced game-specific offices, and gave abbreviations such as *DJ*, *PJ*, and *PNJ* the visibility of a rulebook or glossary. The evidence therefore supports neither a community-first triumphalism nor a publisher-first model. Community print made forms available and

comparable; licensed editions amplified some of them and excluded others. Where López Jara names predecessors, transmission can be stated strongly. Where only sequence and similarity exist, continuity remains probable rather than proven.

The material dimension appears when translation changes the object through which play occurs. The *RuneQuest* team restored material absent from its immediate source, reorganised player-facing information, and subsequently issued a replacement sheet. López Jara justified compression by recurrence and category structure. Zamarreño's corrections distinguished magical objects and repaired calques whose meanings affected rules. Colombina's comparison of *MERP* tables began with a missing result encountered during play. These cases do not make all playing a form of translation, but they show that playing supplied a diagnostic method: the table revealed which textual difference mattered operationally. Translation consequently extended into textual criticism, layout, terminology management, and repair whenever the usability of the Spanish object depended on those activities. This is the point at which Evans's multimodal account of games and Jackson's attention to maintenance meet the historical evidence most directly (Evans 2013; Jackson 2014).

The institutional dimension concerns who could convert that knowledge into public authority. Clubs supplied contact, experience, and recruitment, but publishers possessed licences, capital, printing arrangements, and control over the commercial edition. Specialist magazines occupied an intermediate position. *Líder* could introduce a translator before publication, explain source problems, and distribute official errata; *MS* could turn public criticism into visible expertise; *Troll* could challenge a book from outside its publisher. The same person could therefore move among non-commissioned explanation, commissioned translation, editorial commentary, and public correction without those modes becoming identical. Coding acts rather than persons preserves this mobility and clarifies the argument: the overlap of roles was structural, but it did not erase unequal control over what reached the market.

Standardisation was also intertextual and selective. Spanish role-playing did not develop one game at a time. Translators consulted source editions, other games, literary translations, magazine usage, and one another; brands and literary names placed different constraints on generic mechanics. A player who already understood *característica*, *habilidad*, *crítico*, *pifia*, *PJ*, and *PNJ* could approach a new rulebook with part of its conceptual interface already familiar. Yet the unsuccessful *Mundo Fantástico* forms and the continued coexistence of *árbitro*, *director*, *master*, and setting-specific titles show that convergence was neither complete nor inevitable. Literalness alone cannot explain survival. Repetition, brevity, brand recognition, literary precedent, category fit, publisher distribution, and ease of speech all plausibly contributed, and the corpus can document some of those mechanisms more securely than others.

Publication redistributed authority without closing the translated text. A commercial book carried a publisher's logo, fixed pagination, and a complete system, but serial print remained a space where omissions and errors could be named, corrected, and promised for later editions. This temporal openness is particularly consequential for tabletop games because recurrent performance exposes defects that ordinary proofreading may miss. The evidence should not be overstated as a direct

anticipation of digital platforms; an erratum in a bimonthly magazine had a different speed, reach, and material relation to the book. The historical continuity lies at the level of participatory maintenance: users and translators could reopen a released object, generate a correction, and circulate it through a community channel. That print-based genealogy complicates accounts in which user-generated translation begins with online connectivity.

The national frame remains provisional. The archive privileges Barcelona-based institutions, collectors' survivals, and actors later interviewed by fan historians. Madrid, other regional scenes, private groups, and Latin American circulation require separate reconstruction before a comprehensive geography of Spanish-language role-playing can be claimed. Women's participation is especially vulnerable to disappearance: Utande's testimony and Colombina's signed audit are unusually visible within records that often credit clubs or editorial teams collectively. Source access is equally uneven, and medium-confidence reproductions cannot carry the same weight as page-checked primary print. These limits rule out declarations of a single inventor for every term or an exhaustive national lexicon. What the study establishes is a reproducible sequence of public appearances, a smaller set of acknowledged influences, and a model for testing how lexical, material, and institutional infrastructures interacted.

Conclusion

Between 1981 and 1991, a documented Barcelona-centred network helped make tabletop role-playing playable in Spanish through repeated acts of explanation, borrowing, invention, editorial selection, and correction. The corpus locates *juego de rol*, *personaje*, *campaña*, *director de juego*, *hoja de personaje*, *puntos de vida*, and related forms before or alongside the first cluster of licensed editions. It does not convert those appearances into unsupported claims of invention. Instead, it shows how public availability, acknowledged borrowing, publisher amplification, and repeated use combined unevenly. Some forms became portable across games; others remained attached to brands or settings; still others disappeared. Standardisation was a selective historical process, not the automatic victory of the most literal equivalent.

Player-translators were central because their knowledge of use expanded what translation could include. They compared editions, restored omitted material, compressed recurrent labels, aligned mechanical vocabularies, consulted literary precedents, and remained answerable when production errors obstructed play. Their work did not dissolve the distinction between community and industry, since publishers retained decisive control over licences and editions, but it made those spheres interdependent. Errata in *MS* and *Líder*, together with Colombina's audit in *Troll*, show that the published rulebook could return to a public circuit of diagnosis and repair. Translation therefore operated simultaneously as lexicon, playable object, and institution of authority.

This print-based genealogy revises two familiar assumptions. Participatory translation did not depend on digital platforms, although its serial paper channels moved at a different speed and scale; and a local game culture did not emerge simply when complete Spanish editions arrived in shops. It required shared

terms, usable sheets and tables, recognised mediators, and channels through which defects could be contested. The broader contribution is consequently methodological as well as historical. By separating documented appearance, probable continuity, acknowledged influence, and interpretation, translation history can recover cumulative community labour without turning chronology into causality. Future comparison with regional archives, complete first editions, translation drafts, private correspondence, and Latin American circulation can test how far the pattern reconstructed here extended beyond the network that preserved it.

Declarations

Data availability

An English-language, anonymised supplementary workbook accompanies the revised manuscript for peer review and will be deposited in a public repository on acceptance. Historical Spanish terms that constitute primary evidence are retained in the original language, while the analytical and methodological apparatus is provided in English. The workbook contains 94 appearances, 79 case-normalised source-language labels, 89 distinct English–Spanish pairings, an 85-item source inventory, page or item locators, evidence types, confidence ratings, and a codebook. It is an issue-level inventory and selective concordance rather than a claim to have extracted every lexical occurrence from every inventoried source.

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