Twitter Thread by Marco Godano ■■■■



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I've been following the game localization/translation discourse, and there's something which I think hasn't been mentioned yet but is very important regarding the divide between how professionals and laymen use the word "localization" and its dangers.
[thread]

First, just to clear things up, the "industry professional" definition of localization is the process necessary to prepare a game to be prepared for foreign release. This includes translating the text, redrawing the UI, writing the promotional copy, preparing the manual,

dubbing, timing and writing subtitles, designing the foreign cover and logo, etc.
If localization is like preparing dinner, translation is like slicing the vegetables. It's an important step, sure, but it's just a single step.
Now, what has "localization" come to mean for the

average joe? Changing certain details during translation so that the translated text, rather than strictly following the original, focuses on being more easily viable to its "foreign" target audience. According to this definition, "translation" is instead a more literal,

strict rendering of the text in another language.
So, people use a word to describe something different than its original meaning. Big deal, you say. The problem here is that, when you frame it like that, you necessarily create a dichotomy between translation and localization.

You can either have a translation, where onii-chan itadakimasus his onigiri, or a localization where big bruddah eats his hamburgers. This comes from the belief that there are "literal" translations which are 100% true to the original. No such thing exists.

By the very nature of translation, meaning is lost and added with EVERY SINGLE WORD. So, every single translation in existence makes certain compromises to make the text more understandable to its target audience.

Even if I write "onii-chan said he'd eat his onigiri", which, by the way, would immediately confuse most readers, I've already made compromises. You see, when he ate, he didn't "taberu" the onigiri, he "itadaku" them. And, if you speak Japanese, that already tells you a lot.

And when he "said" that, he didn't just "iu" it; he "ossharu" it. When you choose an English word to express these Japanese concepts, you lose some of the meaning. So much for literal translation! Those sneaky translators, they were "localizing" right under your nose!

So, I hope we are now on the same page and you agree that every translation has to do that. But not all translations are the same, you say. "onii-chan said he hate his onigiri" might be "localized", but not as much as "big bro said he ate his goddamn hamburgers", you say.

And you'd be right. Which is my whole point. There is no such thing as "translation vs. localization". There are just several translations on a smooth scale which goes from "as foreign as possible" to "as domestic as possible". Which side of the scale is right?

That's definitely a story for another day. I just want people to understand that compromise is inherent in all translation, and how many loanwords you leave in there ultimately doesn't necessarily make a translation more genuine.

And this (gestures towards the thread) is why using the term "localization" like that creates a false dichotomy in that nuanced scale which is "foreignization" vs. "domestication".
Thanks for reading all of this and Merikuri to all my oniichans & oneechans.