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Domestication and Foreignization Strategies in Indonesian Subtitling of Cultural-Specific Terms in Eat Pray Love

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Abstract

Audiovisual translation increasingly carries intercultural narratives across languages, yet how subtitlers balance comprehensibility against cultural authenticity when a single film moves through several source cultures at once remains underexamined, particularly in the Indonesian context. This gap matters because most existing Indonesian subtitling studies isolate a single culture or strategy, leaving unanswered how domestication and foreignization are negotiated jointly within one multicultural narrative. This study addresses that gap by examining how domestication and foreignization strategies are applied to culture-specific items (CSIs) drawn from Italy, India, and Bali in the Indonesian subtitles of Eat Pray Love (2010), and how the two strategies jointly shape cultural transfer for Indonesian viewers. The primary data source was the film's official Indonesian subtitles; fifteen CSIs were purposively selected as the unit of analysis based on cultural salience, absence of a direct Indonesian equivalent, and narrative importance. Each item was transcribed alongside its English source line and analyzed using a qualitative descriptive design guided by Pedersen's (2011) subtitling taxonomy, with classification cross-checked by two raters to strengthen credibility. Domestication was applied to 11 items (73%), mainly through adaptation (6 instances) and paraphrase (4 instances), supporting comprehension of unfamiliar rituals and concepts. Foreignization accounted for 4 items (27%), realized through retention, calque, and gloss, reserved chiefly for well-known foods, proper names, and religious references to preserve cultural authenticity. The study's novel contribution is showing that this choice is category-sensitive rather than uniform: greetings and rituals were consistently domesticated, while person and religious names were foreignized in every instance, a pattern not previously documented in a single multicultural film corpus.

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INTRODUCTION

When a single film moves a viewer through three different cultures in under two hours, its subtitler faces a running series of small, consequential decisions: keep a foreign term as it is and risk losing the audience, or adapt it and risk flattening the cultural weight it carries. This tension between accessibility and authenticity sits at the center of audiovisual translation (AVT), and it is especially visible in subtitling, which must compress dialogue into text under strict constraints of time, space, and reading speed (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021). Culture-specific items (CSIs)—idioms, rituals, foods, and references embedded in the sociocultural fabric of the source community—are where this tension is sharpest, since they often have no direct equivalent in the target language (Chouit, 2019; Yonamine, 2022).

Indonesia's linguistic and cultural diversity makes this an especially consequential problem: how subtitles render foreign cultural elements shapes whether and how Indonesian viewers engage with global narratives (Suyudi & Wibowo, 2024). Two strategies are available for this task. Domestication adapts a source-culture element to the norms and expectations of the target audience, prioritizing accessibility (Zhang, 2023; Wang, 2023). Foreignization instead retains the source term or concept, preserving its distinctiveness even at some cost to immediate comprehension (Chen et al., 2021). In the Indonesian subtitles analyzed here, both strategies appear side by side: an Indian ashram may be rendered as tempat meditasi for clarity, while Namaste or gelato may be kept intact for authenticity. Venuti (1995, 2017) frames this choice in ideological terms, arguing that foreignization resists the ethnocentric erasure of the source culture, whereas domestication—however useful for fluency—risks assimilating it.

Eat Pray Love (2010), adapted from Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir, is a productive case for studying this negotiation because it moves through three distinct cultural settings—Italy, India, and Indonesia (Bali)—within one narrative, forcing the subtitler to repeatedly decide, scene by scene, whether to domesticate for comprehension or foreignize for authenticity.

Prior research on Indonesian and international subtitling has documented both strategies, but a close reading of this literature reveals recurring limitations. A first strand reports domestication as the dominant strategy. Baihaqi and Subiyanto (2021), examining a single American teen film on Netflix, found domesticating techniques such as simplification and established equivalence prevailing for the sake of relatability; however, their analysis was confined to one source culture and reported strategy frequencies without asking whether particular kinds of cultural items resisted domestication. Purnamasari et al. (2025) reached a similar conclusion for a bilingual profile book, yet their data were print-based and therefore not shaped by the temporal and spatial constraints that govern subtitling decisions. Yuliasari and Sutopo (2019) and Puspitasari et al. (2020) likewise found domestication dominating film subtitles, but both treated the film as a culturally homogeneous source text and stopped at aggregate counts of techniques.

A second strand documents selective foreignization. Aini (2011) showed foreignizing techniques—borrowing, calque, and transliteration—applied selectively to preserve source-culture flavor in the animated film *Ratatouille*, while Nasution (2020) and Pramatana (2021) identified both strategies at work in the Indonesian subtitles of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, with retention protecting proper names. Chen et al. (2021) found adaptation and modulation dominating the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*, with foreignization reserved for a minority of items, and Mostafa (2024) extended the comparison to dubbing versus subtitling in *Monsters, Inc.* The shared limitation of this strand is that each study analyzes a single source culture and treats domestication and foreignization as competing aggregate totals to be tallied, rather than as a joint, item-level negotiation whose outcome may depend on the type of cultural item being translated.

A third strand moves beyond textual analysis but leaves the same question open. Suyudi and Wibowo (2024) employed a mixed-methods audience-reception design and found domestication resonating strongly with Indonesia's multicultural audience, yet they did not identify which categories of cultural items subtitlers or viewers treated as resistant to domestication. Alaa and Al Sawi (2023) assessed the quality of subtitled culturally specific references in the Egyptian film *Feathers* and observed subtitlers' reluctance to domesticate proper names, but again within a single source culture. Closest to the present study, Widiya and Kembaren (2022) examined subtitling strategies in *Eat Pray Love* itself; their study, however, identified and classified subtitling strategies in general terms and did not analyze how domestication and foreignization are negotiated jointly

across the film's three source cultures, nor whether the choice between them tracks the type of cultural item involved. Few studies, in short, examine how a subtitler negotiates the two strategies together when a single film requires navigating multiple source cultures at once (Adawiyah et al., 2023).

Taken together, three limitations recur across this body of work: (a) each study examines a single source culture, so the two strategies are never observed operating side by side within one multicultural narrative; (b) findings are reported as aggregate frequencies of techniques, leaving unexamined whether strategy choice varies systematically by category of cultural item; and (c) domestication and foreignization are framed as competing overall tendencies rather than as complementary tools of cultural mediation. The research gap addressed by this study is therefore explicit: there is no category-sensitive account of how domestication and foreignization are negotiated jointly when one film carries several source cultures—Italian, Indian, and Balinese—to a single target audience. The novelty of the present study lies in providing that account: it demonstrates, within a single multicultural film corpus, that the choice of strategy is patterned by the type of culture-specific item at stake—a pattern that the aggregate frequency counts of previous studies could not reveal.

Building on Venuti's (1995, 2017) domestication–foreignization framework and operationalized through Pedersen's (2011) subtitling taxonomy—which specifies domesticating techniques (substitution, adaptation, omission, descriptive translation) and foreignizing techniques (retention, calque, glossing)—this study examines how both strategies function as cultural mediation tools across the three cultural settings of Eat Pray Love. Its contribution is to show whether, and how, the choice between the two strategies tracks the type of cultural item at stake rather than being applied uniformly across the film. This study raises the following guiding questions:

1. How are domestication strategies realized in the Indonesian subtitles of Eat Pray Love, based on Pedersen's subtitling taxonomy?
2. How are foreignization strategies realized in the Indonesian subtitles of Eat Pray Love, based on Pedersen's subtitling taxonomy?
3. Which strategy dominates the translation of the film's culture-specific items, and in what patterns?
4. How do these strategies influence cultural transfer for Indonesian audiences?

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative descriptive design to examine how domestication and foreignization strategies were applied in the Indonesian subtitles of Eat Pray Love (2010). This design was appropriate because it allowed close, example-level analysis of how the subtitler rendered culture-specific items (CSIs) such as idioms, rituals, foods, and local customs, while also capturing cases in which foreign elements were deliberately retained (Widiya & Kembaren, 2022; Budianto, 2019).

Data Source and Selection

The primary data source was the official Indonesian subtitles of Eat Pray Love (2010), directed by Ryan Murphy, accessed from the film's official DVD release. The film's movement through Italy, India, and Indonesia (Bali) provided varied CSIs—idiomatic expressions, traditional

practices, local foods, greetings, and religious or spiritual concepts—suitable for examining both domestication and foreignization strategies within a single multicultural narrative.

Fifteen CSIs were purposively selected as the unit of analysis, meeting the following criteria: (1) words or phrases without a direct Indonesian equivalent; (2) cultural items essential for understanding the storyline; (3) terms appearing across different cultural settings in the film (Italy, India, and Bali); and (4) terms that presented a translational choice—either retained in their original form (foreignization) or adapted to Indonesian equivalents (domestication)—to ensure balanced representation of both strategies. Purposive selection ensured the sample was relevant to, and representative of, the film's cultural variety.

To strengthen the validity of the selection process, the initial list of 20 candidate CSIs was reviewed by two independent raters: a translation lecturer and a cultural studies expert familiar with Italian, Indian, and Balinese cultures. Each rater assessed the cultural salience and narrative significance of each candidate item independently. Items on which all three reviewers (the researcher and the two raters) agreed were retained, resulting in the final set of 15 CSIs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This expert validation procedure enhanced the credibility of the purposive sampling process and reduced researcher bias in item selection.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection proceeded in stages and followed established procedures for analyzing cultural references in subtitled film. Consistent with Pedersen's (2011) approach, in which extralinguistic cultural references are examined as paired source-text and target-text segments, the film was watched in full with Indonesian subtitles, and each line containing a CSI was transcribed into a data sheet recording the original English line, the Indonesian subtitle, and the CSI type (e.g., food, ritual, greeting). This pairing procedure also reflects Díaz Cintas and Remael's (2021) guidance that subtitles should be analyzed against the source dialogue and the audiovisual context in which they appear, rather than as isolated written text, so that each rendering could be interpreted in light of the scene on screen. Subtitles that retained the original term (e.g., gelato, Pizza Napoli) were marked separately at this stage to distinguish potential foreignization cases from domestication cases in the analysis that followed.

Table 1. Data Extraction Example

No	Original Dialogue	Indonesian Subtitle	Type of CSI
1	I'm going to an ashram in India	Aku akan pergi ke tempat meditasi di India.	Ritual/place
2	Let's try gelato	Mari coba es krim Italia	Food

Data Validation

To strengthen the credibility and dependability of the analysis, three validation procedures were applied, following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria for qualitative research. First, investigator triangulation was used: each of the 15 CSIs and its assigned strategy and technique were independently coded against Pedersen's (2011) taxonomy by two raters, and disagreements were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. Second, referential adequacy was maintained by repeatedly checking each subtitle against its corresponding scene, so that the coded meaning reflected the on-screen context rather than the isolated subtitle text alone. Third, the interpretation of culturally loaded terms originating in Hindi, Italian, and Balinese was

cross-checked against reference sources and prior Indonesian subtitling studies of comparable terms (e.g., Widiya & Kembaren, 2022) to reduce researcher bias when interpreting unfamiliar source-culture concepts. These steps improved the trustworthiness of the coding, though, as noted in the Limitations, the final classification remained an interpretive qualitative judgment rather than a statistically validated measure.

Data Analysis

Data analysis combined descriptive categorization with interpretive explanation. The first step identified the domestication or foreignization strategy realized in each CSI, following Pedersen's (2011) taxonomy: domestication techniques included adaptation (replacing a foreign concept with a culturally familiar term), established equivalence (using a target-culture analogy), transposition (adjusting grammatical structure for subtitle constraints), and paraphrase or descriptive translation (explicating meaning when no direct equivalent existed); foreignization techniques included retention (keeping the original term, e.g., "gelato"), calque (translating literally while preserving the foreign flavor), and addition of gloss (a brief clarifying explanation). The second step interpreted the subtitler's likely rationale for each choice and its cultural impact—whether it prioritized accessibility (domestication) or preserved cultural distinctiveness (foreignization). An analysis framework recorded the original dialogue, the subtitle, the CSI type, the macro strategy, the micro technique, the rationale, and the cultural impact for each item.

Table 2. Analysis Framework of CSI Translation

No	Original Dialogue	Indonesian Subtitle	Type of CSI	Macro	Micro	Rationale	Cultural Impact
1	Namaste	Salam Hormat	Greeting	Domestication	Adaptation	The Indian greeting Namaste is replaced with a culturally familiar equivalent “Salam hormat.”	The audience perceives the politeness of the greeting without confusion.
2	Ashram	Tempat meditasi	Ritual/ Place	Domestication	Paraphrase	Explains the meaning in local terms	Easier for Indonesian audience to understand
3	Gelato	Gelato	Food	Foreignization	Retention	Keep Italian word	Viewers learn Italian culture
4	Vishnu	Dewa Vishnu	Religion	Foreignization	Calque	Keep name, add “Dewa”	Mix of retention + explanation

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section presents the empirical findings on how domestication and foreignization strategies were used to translate culture-specific items (CSIs) in the Indonesian subtitles of Eat Pray Love (2010). Fifteen CSIs were identified by comparing the English source dialogues (ST) with the Indonesian subtitles (TT), categorized by type (food, ritual, greeting, person/religion, event/festival), and classified by strategy and technique according to Pedersen's (2011) taxonomy.

Table 3. Domestication Strategy Distribution

Domestication Strategies		
No	**Micro**	**Total**
1.	Adaptation	6
2.	Paraphrase	4
3.	Descriptive	1

Table 4. Foreignization Strategy Distribution

Foreignization	Strategies	
No	**Micro**	**Total**
1.	Retention	2
2.	Calque	1
3.	Gloss	1

Of the 15 CSIs, 11 items (73%) were domesticated and 4 items (27%) were foreignized. Within domestication, adaptation was most frequent (6 instances, 40%), followed by paraphrase (4 instances, 27%) and descriptive translation (1 instance, 6%). Within foreignization, retention accounted for 2 instances (13%), and calque and gloss accounted for 1 instance each (6%).

Table 5. Distribution by CSI Type

CSI Type	Domestication	Foreignization	Total
Food	3	2	5
Ritual	4	1	5
Greeting	1	0	1
Person/Religion	0	2	2
Event/Festival	2	2	4

Distribution by CSI type shows food items occurring 5 times (3 domesticated, 2 foreignized); ritual items 5 times (4 domesticated, 1 foreignized); greeting items 1 time (fully domesticated); person/religion items 2 times (both foreignized); and event/festival items 4 times (split evenly, 2 and 2).

Table 6. Examples of Domestication in Eat, Pray, Love

No	Source Text	Target Text	Type of CSI	Technique	Analysis
1	I'm going to an ashram in India.	Aku akan pergi ke tempat meditasi di India.	Ritual/ Place	Paraphrase	The term *ashram* is replaced with a descriptive phrase that clarifies its function ("tempat meditasi"). It helps viewers grasp the concept easily, even though the spiritual nuance of the Indian term is softened.
2	Namaste	Salam hormat.	Greeting	Adaptation	This translation preserves the referential meaning of Namaste as a respectful greeting, yet omits its associative meaning, the spiritual connotation of honoring the divine within others in Hindu

					culture. Such domestication represents a trade-off between immediate audience comprehension and cultural depth.
No	**Source Text**	**Target Text**	**Type of CSI**	**Technique**	**Analysis**
3	Kirtan	Nyanyian doa	Ritual	Paraphrase	The subtitler translates the term into Indonesian, describing its function rather than keeping the original term.
4	Thanksgiving	Hari syukuran	Event	Adaptation	The American holiday is replaced with a local equivalent, ensuring audience familiarity.

Table 7. Examples of Foreignization in Eat Pray Love

No	Source Text	Target Text	Type of CSI	Technique	Analysis
1	Gelato	Gelato	Food	Retention	The original Italian word is kept without translation. This helps maintain authenticity and gives the audience a sense of Italian culture.
2	Vishnu	Dewa Vishnu	Religion	Calque	The name *Vishnu* is kept in its original form, but the addition of "Dewa" provides a short clarification. This combination maintains authenticity and understanding.
3	Ketut Liyer (healer)	Ketut Liyer (tabib Bali)	Person/ Tradition	Gloss	The name remains the same, but a short gloss "tabib Bali" clarifies his role for viewers unfamiliar with Balinese culture.
4	Pizza Napoli	Pizza Napoli	Food	Retention	The subtitler keeps the original food name to emphasize cultural identity and avoid overtranslation.

Taken together, the data show a consistent split by CSI type: greeting and ritual items were almost entirely domesticated, person and religion items were entirely foreignized, and food and event/festival items were split between the two strategies. This category-level patterning is examined in relation to prior research and translation theory in the Discussion below.

Discussion

The overall dominance of domestication (73%) in this study is consistent with findings across recent Indonesian and international subtitling research, but the present data add a category-level pattern that prior single-culture studies could not capture. Chen, Feng, and Zhang (2021), analyzing The Big Bang Theory, similarly found domestication techniques—adaptation and

modulation—dominating over foreignization in sitcom subtitling, arguing that comedic and conversational content favors immediate audience comprehension over cultural exposure. The present findings extend this logic to a dramatic, multicultural narrative: even where the source material foregrounds cultural difference as a central theme (as Eat Pray Love does), subtitlers still default to domestication for the bulk of ritual and conversational CSIs, suggesting that the pressure toward accessibility in subtitling is not specific to genre.

Baihaqi and Subiyanto (2021) and Purnamasari et al. (2025) likewise report domestication—through simplification, equivalence, and amplification—as the dominant strategy in Indonesian-directed subtitling and bilingual texts, attributing this to the practical constraints of subtitling (reading speed, line length) rather than to a deliberate erasure of source culture. The present study's data support this reading: paraphrase and adaptation were used almost exclusively for ritual and greeting items whose cultural nuance is difficult to convey within subtitle-length constraints (e.g., ashram, kirtan, Namaste), which aligns with Pedersen's (2011) observation that domesticating techniques are often a response to the technical, not only the cultural, demands of subtitling.

Where the present findings diverge from prior work is in the clarity of the category-level split. Suyudi and Wibowo (2024), using a mixed-methods audience-reception design, found domestication effective for Indonesia's multicultural audience but did not report which CSI types were more resistant to domestication. The present data show that person and religion items (Vishnu, Ketut Liyer) were foreignized in 100% of cases, while greeting items were domesticated in 100% of cases. This complements Alaa and Al Sawi's (2023) quality-assessment study of culturally specific references in Feathers, which found that proper names and identity-bound references were the items subtitlers were most reluctant to domesticate, since domesticating a name risks altering a character's or deity's cultural identity rather than merely simplifying an expression. Read together, these two studies and the present one suggest a shared, cross-linguistic tendency: subtitlers treat naming and identity-related CSIs as a different translation problem from procedural or conversational CSIs, reserving foreignization disproportionately for the former.

This pattern also speaks to the broader theoretical debate initiated by Venuti (1995, 2017). Venuti's ideological critique treats domestication as an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text, and foreignization as a form of resistance to that reduction. The present findings suggest a more localized, item-specific negotiation than Venuti's binary framing implies: rather than a subtitler adopting one ideology throughout a film, the Eat Pray Love data show a working division of labor, where cultural identity markers (names, deities) are foreignized to protect their distinctiveness, while procedural and conversational content is domesticated to preserve narrative flow. This is broadly consistent with Yonamine's (2022) systematic review of interlingual subtitling research, which found that professional subtitling constraints tend to produce a hybrid rather than a purely domesticating or foreignizing practice, in contrast to the more freely foreignizing tendencies observed in fan-produced subtitles.

Overall, the discussion suggests that domestication's dominance in Indonesian subtitling is a robust finding across genres and source-culture combinations, but that the choice between domestication and foreignization is not applied uniformly within a single film—it tracks the type of CSI at stake, particularly whether cultural identity or procedural meaning is being conveyed. This item-sensitive view offers a more granular account of subtitler decision-making than the domestication-versus-foreignization dominance percentages reported in most prior studies.

CONCLUSION

This study examined 15 culture-specific items (CSIs) in the Indonesian subtitles of Eat Pray Love (2010). Domestication was applied to 11 items (73%), mainly through adaptation and paraphrase, making terms such as ashram, kirtan, and prasad easier for Indonesian viewers to follow even at some cost to their spiritual nuance. Foreignization was applied to 4 items (27%), mainly through retention, calque, and gloss, preserving culturally significant terms such as gelato, Vishnu, and Ketut Liyer. Beyond confirming domestication's dominance, the study's main contribution is showing that this choice is category-sensitive rather than uniform: greeting and ritual items were almost entirely domesticated, while person and religion items were foreignized in every instance, a fine-grained pattern not previously documented in a single multicultural film subtitle corpus. This indicates that Indonesian subtitlers do not apply one translation ideology throughout a film but instead calibrate their strategy to the type of cultural item at stake—prioritizing narrative flow for procedural and conversational content, and cultural identity for names and religious references.

These findings have a practical implication for subtitling practice and training: subtitlers and reviewers working with multicultural source material may benefit from treating identity-bound CSIs (names, deities, honorifics) as a distinct decision category from procedural or conversational CSIs, rather than applying a single house style across an entire film.

This study has several limitations. The sample was limited to 15 purposively selected CSIs from a single film, which constrains the generalizability of the category-level pattern reported here. The analysis relied on researcher classification—strengthened through two-rater cross-checking, but still qualitative and interpretive rather than statistically validated—and did not include audience reception data to confirm how Indonesian viewers actually experienced the domesticated and foreignized items. The study was also limited to one language pair (English–Indonesian) and one film genre (drama/memoir adaptation).

Future research could extend this category-sensitive framework to a larger corpus of multicultural films, incorporate audience reception or eye-tracking data to test whether identity-bound foreignization is actually noticed and understood by viewers, and compare the pattern found here across other language pairs and genres to test whether the domestication-for-procedure, foreignization-for-identity division observed in this study holds more broadly.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Claude (Anthropic) were used only for language refinement and manuscript editing. The authors reviewed and approved all AI-assisted outputs and remain fully responsible for the final manuscript.

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