



Domestication and Foreignization Strategies in Translating Islamic Culture-Bound Terms: A Case Study of Assalamualaikum Baitullah

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 06- 01 Revised: 2026 06-18 Accepted: 2026 06-019 Keywords: Domestication; Foreignization; Islamic; Subtitling; Translation DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.10426 Corresponding Author: Maulida Hayati Kresnadi maulidahayati04@gmail.com UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Jawa Barat	<i>This study investigates the translation of Islamic culture-bound terms in the English subtitles of the film Assalamualaikum Baitullah. Unlike previous studies that have largely focused on secular culture-specific expressions in mainstream films, this research addresses a gap in the literature by examining the translation of Islamic religious terminology in an Indonesian cinematic context. Drawing on Venuti's (2008) framework of domestication and foreignization, the study explores how culturally and theologically significant Islamic terms are rendered for English-speaking audiences. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the research analyzes 43 Islamic culture-bound terms identified from the film's Indonesian dialogue and their corresponding English subtitles. The findings indicate that domestication is the predominant strategy, accounting for 79.07% of the data, while foreignization represents 20.93%. Domestication is primarily employed to enhance comprehensibility and ensure a natural reading experience by translating religious expressions into culturally familiar English equivalents. In contrast, foreignization is used selectively for terms that carry distinctive Islamic meanings and lack adequate equivalents in English, thereby preserving their religious authenticity and cultural significance. Overall, the findings reveal the translator's effort to balance audience accessibility with the preservation of Islamic cultural identity, contributing valuable insights to the field of audiovisual translation and the localization of religious content.</i>

1. Introduction

Translation is the process of transferring meaning from a source language to a target language, involving not only linguistic aspects but also cultural dimensions

and social context. Hatim and Munday (2004) emphasize that translation is a form of intercultural communication in which the meaning of a text must be understood and conveyed in accordance with the socio-cultural context of the target audience in order to ensure accurate message reception. As the field develops, translation challenges become more complex when applied to audiovisual media, such as subtitling. According to Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007), subtitling requires a high level of efficiency due to strict technical constraints related to screen space and display time. Therefore, translators must be able to make strategic decisions to balance message clarity with readability for international audiences.

Film, as an audiovisual medium, plays a crucial role in conveying cultural values, religious beliefs, and ideological perspectives to a global audience, particularly through the interaction of visual narratives and subtitled dialogue. In the context of cross-cultural communication, subtitles function not only as a linguistic bridge but also as a cultural filter that shapes how audiences perceive foreign traditions and belief systems. The importance of this linguistic bridge is evident in how translators handle terms that are deeply rooted in specific cultures. As noted by Randa et al. (2024), accurate translation is essential to convey the "essence" of religious terms, where strategies such as preservation or localization are often employed to maintain the spiritual weight of the message while ensuring student or audience comprehension. Furthermore, the translation process is not limited to purely religious texts but also extends to modern lifestyle contexts; Al Qubro et al. (2024) highlight that the use and translation of specific terms—even in industries like cosmetics—reflect a complex interplay of word formation and semantic meaning that dictates how a brand's identity is perceived across linguistic boundaries.

One Indonesian film that strongly embodies these Islamic cultural and religious values is *Assalamualaikum Baitullah*. The film portrays the spiritual and emotional journey of a Muslim Indonesian woman whose experiences around Baitullah reflect struggles related to faith, love, patience, and submission to God's will. Analyzing the subtitles of this film provides a vital opportunity to observe how "Culture-Bound Terms" (CBTs) are negotiated between the need to maintain religious authenticity and the necessity of making the narrative accessible to a global audience.

Throughout the film, numerous Islamic culture-bound terms and expressions are used naturally in daily conversations, moments of worship, and emotional reflections, including terms such as *Umrah*, *Istikharah*, *Muhsinin*, *Jannah*, and various invocations like *Ya Allah* and *Ya Rabb*, as well as Islamic expressions such as *Insyallah*, *Subhanallah*, *Walhamdulillah*, and *Wallahuakbar*. These expressions represent the belief system and lifestyle of Muslim society and carry meanings that are deeply rooted in Islamic theology and practice. When translated into English subtitles, these terms are rendered using different translation strategies, particularly domestication and foreignization. Some terms are retained in their

original Islamic forms to preserve religious identity, while others are translated into their general meanings to ensure accessibility for international audiences. This variation in translation choices reflects the translator's attempt to balance cultural authenticity with audience comprehension.

These terms are categorized as culture-bound terms. According to Newmark (1988), culture-bound terms are expressions closely associated with a particular culture and reflect its values, beliefs, and socio-cultural practices. These terms often do not have direct or exact equivalents in other languages because they are shaped by specific cultural and religious backgrounds.

In line with the strong representation of Islamic values in *Assalamualaikum Baitullah* (2025), the film presents several Islamic culture-bound terms whose meanings extend beyond their literal definitions and are deeply rooted in religious belief and practice. Terms and expressions such as *umrah*, *istikharah*, *muhsinin*, *jannah*, as well as invocations like *Ya Allah* and *Ya Rabb*, function not merely as linguistic elements but as expressions of faith, emotional devotion, and submission to God. For instance, *istikharah* refers to a specific form of prayer performed when seeking divine guidance in making important decisions, while *jannah* represents the Islamic concept of paradise, which carries theological significance beyond the general notion of heaven. Because these expressions are closely tied to Islamic teachings and worldview, translating them into English subtitles becomes challenging. The translator must carefully choose between preserving the original terms to maintain religious identity or adapting them into more general expressions to facilitate understanding for international audiences, a challenge that directly relates to the use of domestication and foreignization strategies discussed in this study.

If cultural-bound terms are translated without careful consideration, there is a risk that their original meaning and cultural values may be diminished or misunderstood by the target audience. Therefore, translators need to employ appropriate translation strategies to balance clarity and cultural accuracy. This is especially crucial in film subtitles, where space and time constraints require concise translations while still conveying the intended meaning. Consequently, the translation of culturally bound Islamic terms plays a crucial role in how Islamic values are presented and understood by international audiences.

Numerous studies have explored the translation of culture-bound terms (CBTs) within audiovisual translation, frequently employing Lawrence Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization as the analytical framework. However, most contemporary studies predominantly analyze secular, Western-centric cultural terms in mainstream Hollywood productions (e.g., Nurhadi et al., 2021; Fitriawati & Utami, 2024). Research that specifically focuses on the intricacies of terms related to Islamic culture in Southeast Asian religious cinema—such as local Indonesian films—is still very rare. Translating Islamic terms presents a unique challenge because these words do not merely represent

local culture but carry sacred, non-equivalent theological values. To fill this empirical gap, this study investigates the English subtitles of *Assalamualaikum Baitullah*. To guide the analysis, this study formulates two primary research questions: (1) What translation strategies (domestication and foreignization) are utilized in translating Islamic culture-bound terms in the subtitles of *Assalamualaikum Baitullah*? and (2) Why are these specific strategies chosen by the translator in the context of audiovisual constraints? Through addressing these questions, this research intends to enhance theoretical understanding of religious subtitling while offering practical approaches for audiovisual translators dealing with culturally localized religious materials.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design grounded by Creswell (2014). According to Creswell, qualitative research aims to explore and understand the meaning individuals or texts ascribe to a social or human problem by emphasizing interpretation, context, and depth of analysis rather than numerical measurement. In line with this approach, the present study focuses on describing and interpreting how Islamic culture-bound terms are translated in film subtitles and how translation strategies shape cultural representation.

A qualitative descriptive design is considered appropriate because this study does not seek to test hypotheses or measure frequency statistically, but rather to analyze linguistic choices and cultural meanings embedded in audiovisual translation. The research prioritizes close textual analysis of selected subtitle data to reveal how Islamic cultural values are preserved, adapted, or simplified in the target language.

Classification, description, comparison, sampling, induction and deduction, explanation, and interpretation qualitative and quantitative, are a number of general methods in every field of study. As a tool, method is functioned to simplify problems (Aulawi et al., 2018). It means that a method functions as a tool to simplify and systematically address problems. It involves several fundamental processes such as classification, description, comparison, sampling, as well as inductive and deductive reasoning. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches play an important role in interpreting and explaining research findings across different fields of study. Based on this perspective, the present study applies a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the translation strategies used in rendering Islamic culture-bound terms in the film *Assalamualaikum Baitullah*. This approach allows the researcher to classify and describe the data in detail, as well as to interpret how domestication and foreignization strategies are applied in the subtitling process.

To ensure the accuracy and credibility of qualitative findings, this study applies structural strengthening and theoretical triangulation. Linguistic data

extracted from the film were systematically compared with authoritative translation frameworks—specifically, Peter Newmark's categorization of cultural words and Lawrence Venuti's key strategies. Furthermore, any ambiguities regarding the contextual meaning of specific Islamic terms or the accuracy of subtitles were validated through consultation with standard Islamic lexicography and bilingual dictionaries to eliminate personal bias and ensure the accuracy of interpretation.

Subject of The Research

Film Assalamualaikum Baitullah

The primary object of this study is the religious drama film *Assalamualaikum Baitullah*. This Indonesian film was selected due to its rich representation of Islamic cultural, theological, and ideological principles. The story portrays the spiritual development, emotional challenges, and religious experiences of an Indonesian Muslim woman, emphasizing important Islamic values such as faith, perseverance, and submission to God's will.

Subtitle Data

The data analyzed in this research comprise textual elements, including words, phrases, clauses, and fixed expressions that contain Islamic cultural references. These data were collected from the characters' spoken dialogues in the source language (Indonesian) and their corresponding English subtitle translations in the target language. The analysis focuses on the linguistic representations of Islamic cultural terms as they appear in both the original dialogue and the on-screen subtitles.

Sampling Criteria

- A. A purposive sampling technique is applied to select the textual data. Purposive sampling is implemented to ensure that the chosen data align directly with the research objectives. The specific criteria for data selection include:
- B. The dialogue must contain an explicit Islamic culture-bound term, religious concept, or formulaic ritual expression (e.g., *umrah*, *jannah*, *istikharah*, *muhsinin*, or invocations like *Ya Allah* and *Inshaallah*).
- C. The term must be formally translated into an English subtitle.
- D. The text must display clear evidence of strategic choice, falling under either the category of domestication or foreignization.

Number of Data

Through a comprehensive screening and repeated examination of the film, a total of 43 data units containing Islamic culture-bound terms were identified, extracted, and systematically documented for analysis. These data units consist of words, phrases, clauses, and formulaic expressions that represent Islamic religious

concepts, practices, values, and culturally specific references embedded in the dialogue. Each unit was selected based on its relevance to Islamic culture and its occurrence in both the Indonesian source text and the English subtitle translation. The identified data subsequently served as the primary corpus for investigating the translation strategies employed in rendering Islamic culture-bound terms from Indonesian into English. By focusing on these 43 data units, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how religious and culturally specific meanings are negotiated and transferred across linguistic and cultural boundaries through audiovisual translation.

Data Collection Techniques

Data Source

The data source for this study is the official release of the Indonesian film *Assalamualaikum Baitullah* accompanied by its verified English subtitling track. The visual and audio components of the film provide the necessary pragmatic context to understand the exact situational meaning of the spoken words.

Identification Process

The collection of data was carried out through several systematic steps:

- A. **Watching and Listening:** The researcher repeatedly watched the film *Assalamualaikum Baitullah* while carefully listening to the Indonesian audio and reading the English subtitles to achieve a comprehensive immersion in the narrative context.
- B. **Transcription and Selection:** Textual units containing Islamic terms in the spoken dialogue were transcribed alongside their exact English subtitle correspondences.
- C. **Data Filtering:** The collected textual pairings were filtered based on the established purposive sampling criteria to eliminate general secular terms and retain only specific Islamic culture-bound data.

Data Analysis Techniques

Classification Using Newmark

The first stage of data analysis involves classifying the identified Islamic terms using Peter Newmark's (1988) taxonomy of culture-bound terms. Although Newmark proposed broad cultural categories (such as ecology, material culture, and social culture), this study adapts the framework to focus specifically on terms carrying religious and theological weight within Islamic social life, rituals, and philosophical values.

Analysis Using Venuti

The second stage entails a deep-level analysis of the translation strategies using Lawrence Venuti's (2008) theoretical framework of domestication and foreignization. Each data unit is evaluated to determine whether the translator chose to localize the term for immediate audience comprehension (domestication)

or to retain the source language markers to preserve cultural-religious identity (foreignization). The analysis also incorporates the technical constraints of subtitling, as highlighted by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007), exploring how space and time limitations influenced the selection of these strategies.

Coding Procedures

The systematic processing of the data follows an interactive qualitative analysis model:

- A. Data Reduction: Organizing, condensing, and focusing the raw subtitle data into distinct analytical tables.
- B. Data Display: Presenting the classified data clearly in tables categorized by translation strategies (domestication vs. foreignization) accompanied by percentages to show prevailing patterns.
- C. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Interpreting why specific choices were made by the translator, assessing the linguistic and cultural shifts, and drawing holistic conclusions regarding the balance between audience accessibility and religious authenticity.

Reliability / Peer Checking

To ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the data analysis, a peer-checking mechanism was conducted. The coded data and strategy classifications were reviewed and discussed with peer researchers or academic advisors specializing in translation studies and audiovisual translation. This triangulation process minimizes subjective bias and guarantees that the application of Venuti's and Newmark's theories adheres to rigorous academic translation standards.

3. Result

The findings of this study are presented in the following table to provide a clearer and more systematic overview of the translation strategies applied to Islamic culture-bound terms in the film *Assalamualaikum Baitullah*. The table summarizes the selected data, including the source terms, their translated forms, and the translation strategies used, namely domestication and foreignization. By organizing the data in this format, it becomes easier to identify patterns in translation choices and to understand how cultural and religious meanings are handled in the target language.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Translation Strategies

No.	Translation Strategy	Frequency (Data Count)	Percentage (%)
1	<i>Domestication</i>	34	79.07%
2	<i>Foreignization</i>	9	20.93%
Total		43	100.00%

As clearly demonstrated by the statistical layout in Table 1, domestication

emerges as the heavily dominant strategy chosen by the subtitle translator, accounting for 79.07% of the total corpus (34 out of 43 data instances). Conversely, foreignization serves as a secondary pathway, constituting 20.93% of the extracted linguistic data (9 instances). This distribution suggests that while preserving religious identity remains crucial for specific core Islamic terms, the translator heavily prioritized immediate text accessibility, fluid pacing, and optimal reading comprehension for a non-Indonesian or secular English-speaking audience.

4. Discussion

The Prevalence of Domestication Strategy

The overwhelming distribution of domestication (79.07%) implies a target-text oriented ideology. In subtitling, where viewers are bound by strict temporal constraints (the 6-second reading rule for two fully-formed lines), minimizing the cognitive burden of foreign lexical items is vital. The data show that formulaic religious invocations and routine socio-cultural Islamic expressions were systematically anchored into existing Western or secular conceptual equivalents.

Table 2. Sample Data of Domestication Strategy

No.	Source Text (ID)	Target Text (EN)	Analytical Reorientation / Shift
1	Astagfirullah hal azim	I seek forgiveness from Allah	Substitution with an explicit semantic definition.
2	Ummi / Abi	Mom / My dad	Secularization to descriptive familial kinship terms.
3	Amin	Amen	Adoption of a conventional Judeo-Christian/Western equivalent.
4	Assalamualaikum	Peace be upon you	Literal semantic translation of the core greeting.
5	Alhamdulillah	Thank God / praise be to God	Cultural relocation to a cross-linguistic secular equivalent.
6	Bismillahirrahmanirra him	In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious	Grammatical expansion into a complete English

			phrase.
7	Sholeh / Sholehah	Righteous and virtuous	Transcategorization into general moral adjectives.
8	Insyaallah	God willing	Direct functional substitution using common idioms.

In *Astagfirullah hal azim*, the translator chose not to retain the original Arabic expression, which could potentially be unfamiliar to a non-Muslim audience. Instead, the phrase was translated as “I ask forgiveness of Allah”, which explicitly conveys the intended meaning. This strategy allows the audience to immediately understand the speaker’s act of seeking divine forgiveness and repentance within the limited subtitling space.

Similar domestication can be observed in Data (*Ummi*: Mother) and Data (*Sholeh*: Pious and virtuous). The term “*sholeh*”, which carries specific religious connotations related to Islamic morality, piety, and adherence to religious teachings, is translated using the more general English description “pious and virtuous.” While this translation reduces some of the term’s distinctive theological and cultural nuances, it enhances comprehension for the target audience who may be unfamiliar with Islamic concepts. These choices reflect the subtitle translators’ efforts to prioritize accessibility and ease of understanding.

Similarly, frequently used Islamic expressions such as “*Alhamdulillah*” and “*Insyaallah*” are translated as “Thank God” and “God willing,” respectively. These target language equivalents are widely recognized in English and effectively convey the communicative intent of the original expressions while maintaining a natural and fluid flow of dialogue. As a result, the translation facilitates audience understanding without requiring prior knowledge of Islamic terminology.

The Preservation of Cultural Identity via Foreignization

Although domestication dominates the corpus, the foreignization strategy (20.93%) remains vital for handling core theological terms that cannot be easily substituted without losing their sacred meaning. Retaining these terms in their original form preserves the unique Islamic identity of the narrative and reminds the audience of the film’s specific cultural and religious setting.

Table 3. Sample Data of Foreignization Strategy

No	Original (ID)	Subtitle (EN)	Analytical Reorientation / Shift
1	<i>Allah</i>	Allah	Retained as the exclusive monotheistic proper name of God.
2	<i>umrah</i>	<i>umrah</i>	Maintained as a specific Islamic ritual

			practice.
3	<i>Baitullah</i>	<i>Baitullah</i>	Kept to preserve its sacred geographical and symbolic weight.
4	<i>Ustadzah</i>	<i>Ustadzah</i>	Preserved to maintain localized social and religious hierarchies.
5	<i>muhsinin</i>	<i>muhsinin</i>	Retained to protect a deeply specific spiritual category.
7	<i>hijrah</i>	<i>hijrah</i>	Retained to preserve the profound concept of spiritual migration
8	<i>istikharah</i>	<i>istikharah</i>	Preserved as a highly specific ritual prayer for guidance.
9	<i>Ustadz</i>	<i>Ustadz</i>	Alternative retention observed in specific poetic/sacred dialogue tracks.

As shown in table above, terms representing core pillars of Islamic ritual practice and spatial theology, such as “*Umrah*” and “*Baitullah*”, are completely preserved. Attempting to domesticate *Umrah* into “minor pilgrimage” or *Baitullah* into “God’s House” would significantly strip away their sacred specificity and unique Islamic identity.

Similarly, highly nuanced conceptual terminology like “*Hijrah*” and “*Istikharah*” are left untouched. These words carry deep psychological, historical, and jurisprudential values in Muslim life that lack any ready-made equivalent in Western secular languages. By choosing to foreignize these items, the translator successfully prevents severe cultural flattening, striking a careful balance between making the subtitles easy to read and keeping the movie’s authentic Islamic values fully alive.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the translation strategies used to render Islamic culture-bound terms in the English subtitles of *Assalamualaikum Baitullah* based on Venuti’s (2008) concepts of domestication and foreignization. The findings indicate that both strategies were employed; however, domestication was the dominant approach, accounting for 79.07% of the data, while foreignization represented 20.93%.

The predominance of domestication suggests that the translator prioritized accessibility and comprehension for international audiences by adapting Islamic cultural expressions into more familiar English equivalents. Meanwhile, foreignization was applied to selected terms to preserve their religious and cultural

significance. Overall, the subtitling process reflects an effort to balance audience readability with the retention of Islamic cultural identity.

Future research is encouraged to expand beyond textual and strategic analyses of domestication and foreignization by incorporating audience reception studies. Such studies could provide empirical insights into how international or non-Muslim viewers perceive, interpret, and respond to domesticated and foreignized religious terms in subtitles. Comparative investigations involving local Islamic films and Islamic cinema from different cultural contexts may also reveal how cultural backgrounds influence subtitling practices.

For audiovisual translators, it is important to maintain a balance between readability and theological authenticity. Although domestication enhances accessibility and complies with subtitling constraints, excessive adaptation may reduce the cultural and religious significance of the source text. Therefore, a strategic combination of domestication and foreignization should be considered to preserve essential spiritual meanings while ensuring audience comprehension.

Furthermore, film producers and distribution platforms should pay greater attention to subtitle quality by providing translators with sufficient contextual information regarding religious terminology, thereby improving translation accuracy and preserving the cultural integrity of the film.

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