

Politeness Strategies and Cultural Scripts in the *Past Lives* Movie: a Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Analysis

Strategi Kesopanan dan Skenario Budaya dalam Film Past Lives: Analisis Pragmatik Lintas Budaya

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Submitted 25 June 2025

Revised 7 January 2026

Accepted 12 January 2026

Abstract

This study examines how politeness strategies are used and interpreted across cultures in the Past Lives (2023) screenplay. The research addresses the problem of how characters from Korean and American backgrounds express politeness differently based on their cultural values. Using a qualitative descriptive method and purposive sampling, selected dialogue excerpts were analyzed through Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and Wierzbicka's cultural scripts framework. The findings reveal that the characters employ various strategies; bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record, depending on context, relationship, and cultural background. Hae Sung often uses indirect and deferential strategies, shaped by Korean norms of emotional restraint and relational harmony. In contrast, Nora tends to express herself directly and openly, in line with American cultural scripts that favor autonomy and emotional clarity. Additional data show how teasing, refusal, and naming function as sites of cultural negotiation. The study concludes that politeness is not a universal formula but is deeply influenced by culturally specific expectations about language, identity, and emotional expression.

Keywords: cross-cultural pragmatics; cultural scripts; movie screenplay; politeness strategies

Introduction

Contemporary cinema frequently serves as a powerful mirror reflecting the complexities of human interaction across diverse cultural landscapes (Hu et al., 2024). Films often transcend geographical boundaries (Mahida, 2023), presenting narratives where individuals from different societal backgrounds converge,

form relationships, and navigate cultural nuances (Khasan, 2024). This cinematic phenomenon offers a compelling and accessible lens through which to examine real-world cross-cultural communication (Glotov, 2023). The *Past Lives* movie screenplay, for instance, stands out as a prime example, masterfully depicting the intricate dynamics between characters deeply rooted in both Korean and

American cultures, making it an invaluable text for a pragmatic inquiry into intercultural exchanges (Stoddard, 2022).

Increasingly, scholars have recognized the potential of films as rich data sources in applied linguistics and intercultural communication studies. Films offer scripted yet authentic-like dialogue embedded within cultural narratives, thereby reflecting both idealized and contested forms of social behavior (Nelmes, 2011). As a result, cinematic texts not only entertain but also serve as pedagogical and analytical tools for understanding language use in context (Scher, 2011). Unlike natural conversation, film scripts are carefully constructed to reveal character, relationship, and culture through language, making them particularly suitable for investigating nuanced phenomena such as politeness, identity negotiation, and cultural interpretation (Yang & Qin, 2024).

Central to understanding successful, or indeed unsuccessful, cross-cultural interactions is the concept of politeness (Rehman et al., 2025), which plays a pivotal role in maintaining social harmony and managing interpersonal relationships (Handriani et al., 2025). However, politeness is not universally expressed or interpreted; it is deeply intertwined with underlying “cultural scripts” (Vaishnav, 2025). These scripts, often implicit and unconscious, represent shared, culture-specific norms, assumptions, and expectations that guide how people communicate, including their choices in enacting polite behavior (Bartali, 2022). When individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact, their divergent cultural scripts can lead to varied perceptions of politeness (Grainger, 2023), potentially resulting in misunderstandings or breakdowns in communication if these unstated rules are not recognized or appropriately managed (McConachy & Spencer, 2021).

Past research on politeness in film has predominantly relied on Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory. An examination of prior research reveals a recurring

methodological tendency: the application of Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory through qualitative descriptive analyses of character interactions. For instance, research by Musyafaah et al. (2022) explored politeness strategies used by main characters in a classic period drama film. Similarly, Fitri (2022) analyzed politeness strategies employed by the main character and her family in an animated film, while Imran et al. (2023) investigated these strategies within the script of a biographical romantic drama. Further, Putri and Fitrawati (2022) focused specifically on requesting strategies in a contemporary family comedy, and Sulalah (2025) conducted a cross-cultural pragmatic analysis of politeness strategies used by characters from different national backgrounds in a drama film.

While many of these studies acknowledge the impact of culture on politeness strategy choice, their core contribution lies in identifying and classifying these universal politeness strategies within cinematic contexts. From this body of research, a notable gap becomes apparent. While many studies succeed in identifying what politeness strategies are used in film dialogue, they often stop short of explaining why these strategies are chosen within specific cultural contexts. In particular, none of the reviewed studies incorporate Wierzbicka’s (1991) concept of cultural scripts, which could offer deeper insight into the cultural norms, expectations, and values that shape pragmatic behavior across different societies.

Building on this gap, the present study aims to offer a more interpretive and culturally grounded analysis of politeness in film by integrating Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory with Wierzbicka’s concept of cultural scripts. Through its subtle, emotionally charged dialogue, *Past Lives* offers a compelling case for exploring how politeness is not only a matter of interpersonal negotiation but also a site where deeper cultural meanings are enacted. The interactions between characters do not merely reflect personal feelings or intentions

but are shaped by culturally embedded ways of speaking, interpreting, and relating.

Past Lives (2023), directed by Celine Song, follows the intertwined lives of Nora and Hae Sung, two childhood friends from South Korea who are separated when Nora's family emigrates to the United States. Reconnecting twice over the next two decades, once online and later in person in New York, Nora and Hae Sung navigate the emotional complexities of what might have been, all while confronting their evolving identities shaped by different cultural environments. Nora, now a writer living in America and married to an American man, embodies a Korean-American perspective, whereas Hae Sung remains rooted in South Korean cultural norms. This cross-cultural backdrop is central to the characters' interactions and serves as fertile ground for examining politeness strategies and cultural scripts embedded in their communication.

To thoroughly analyze the intricate interplay of politeness and cultural influences within the *Past Lives* screenplay, a robust theoretical framework is essential. Brown and Levinson's (1987) seminal politeness theory provides a fundamental basis for identifying and classifying universal politeness strategies. This theory is widely recognized for its ability to analyze how speakers mitigate Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) to maintain social harmony. Complementing this, Anna Wierzbicka's (2003, 2009) theory of cultural scripts offers a crucial interpretive layer by uncovering culture-specific ways of thinking and interacting through semantic primes.

Brown and Levinson's theory conceptualizes face as an individual's public self-image (Goffman, 1967), encompassing positive face and negative face. To mitigate face-threatening acts, speakers employ four main strategies: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. The selection of these strategies is influenced by social distance, relative power, and the ranking of imposition. Although highly influential, the theory has been critiqued for its

assumption of universality, particularly in non-Western cultural contexts.

Addressing this limitation, Wierzbicka's theory of cultural scripts (1991, 2003) provides a culture-sensitive explanation of communicative behavior. Cultural scripts represent implicit norms embedded in language that guide how people express thoughts, emotions, and social relations. While semantic primes are universal, their configuration into cultural scripts varies across cultures. For example, Korean cultural scripts tend to emphasize restraint, indirectness, and attentiveness to others' feelings, whereas Anglo cultural scripts often encourage explicit self-expression and emotional openness (Wierzbicka, 2003).

Using these two frameworks in tandem enables a more nuanced understanding of politeness in intercultural dialogue. In a bicultural narrative such as *Past Lives*, politeness strategies cannot be fully understood without considering the cultural scripts that inform them. Therefore, this study seeks not only to identify politeness strategies used by the characters but also to explain how these strategies are shaped by Korean and American cultural scripts, contributing to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural communication in cinematic discourse.

A number of previous studies have employed Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to examine how politeness strategies are realized in film dialogue. These studies are relevant to the present research because they establish film as a valid site for pragmatic analysis and demonstrate the applicability of politeness theory to scripted cinematic interactions.

Musyafaah, Yuliasri, and Pratama (2022), for instance, analyzed politeness strategies used by the main characters in *Pride and Prejudice* and found that all four strategies were present, with positive politeness occurring most frequently. This study is cited to show how Brown and Levinson's framework has been successfully used to identify politeness

strategies in Western cultural settings and to highlight how politeness functions to maintain interpersonal relationships. However, the study primarily focuses on categorization and frequency, offering limited explanation of the cultural reasoning behind the characters' strategic choices.

Similarly, Fitri (2022) examined politeness strategies in the film *Mulan* using Brown and Levinson's model. The findings revealed the dominance of positive politeness, followed by bald-on-record and negative politeness strategies. Fitri's study is particularly relevant because it acknowledges the influence of Chinese cultural values, such as respect for hierarchy and social harmony, on linguistic behavior. Nevertheless, culture is treated as a background influence rather than being systematically analyzed through a specific cultural framework, leaving the underlying cultural logic of politeness largely implicit.

Putri and Fitrawati (2022) narrowed their focus to requesting strategies in *Yes Day*, finding that bald-on-record strategies dominated family interactions. This study is cited to demonstrate how situational factors such as family relationships, age differences, and emotional closeness affect politeness strategy selection. While the findings highlight contextual influences, the analysis remains descriptive and does not explore how broader cultural norms shape participants' perceptions of appropriateness and politeness.

A more explicit attempt to connect politeness with culture is found in Sulalah's (2025) cross-cultural study of *Lion*, which compares Indian and Australian characters. By integrating Brown and Levinson's politeness theory with Wierzbicka's cultural scripts, Sulalah shows that Indian characters tend to employ indirect strategies associated with hearer-oriented cultural norms, whereas Australian characters favor more direct strategies. This study is particularly important for the present research because it demonstrates how cultural scripts can explain not only *what* strategies are used but also *why* they are

preferred in specific cultural contexts. Sulalah's work thus directly informs the analytical approach adopted in this study.

Imran, Moelier, and Asyrafunnisa (2023) analyzed politeness strategies in *Becoming Jane* and found only bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies, suggesting a communicative environment that encourages emotional expressiveness and interpersonal closeness. Their study is cited to illustrate how social variables such as power and distance influence politeness strategy selection. However, similar to most prior research, the analysis focuses on identifying strategies rather than interpreting the cultural motivations underlying their use.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that previous research has successfully applied Brown and Levinson's framework to classify politeness strategies in film dialogue and to relate them to situational and social factors. However, with the exception of Sulalah (2025), most studies stop at the level of description and do not systematically engage with cultural scripts as an explanatory framework. This limitation results in an underexploration of the cultural meanings and values that motivate politeness behavior.

Addressing this gap, the present study builds on previous findings by combining Brown and Levinson's structural categorization of politeness strategies with Wierzbicka's theory of cultural scripts. By applying this integrated framework to *Past Lives*, the study aims not only to identify politeness strategies but also to explain how they are shaped by Korean and American cultural norms. In doing so, this research extends prior work by moving beyond classification toward a culturally grounded interpretation of politeness in intercultural film discourse.

Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the use of politeness strategies and cultural scripts in the *Past Lives*

film screenplay. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research focuses on interpreting language use within its natural social and cultural contexts, emphasizing depth of understanding over numerical data (Hennink, 2008). Qualitative methods are particularly well-suited for pragmatic and discourse-based research, as they allow researchers to uncover the layers of meaning embedded in human interaction (Linell, 2011).

The descriptive element of this approach focuses on identifying patterns of communication that reflect politeness and cultural values (Mambetniyazova et al., 2024). Rather than seeking to generalize, the goal is to produce a rich, detailed account of the specific ways language is used in the film. By treating the screenplay as a sociocultural text, this approach aims to reveal how pragmatic meaning is constructed through character dialogue.

The primary data source in this study is the official screenplay of the film *Past Lives* (2023), written by Celine Song. This screenplay contains rich dialogue involving characters from Korean and American cultural backgrounds, making it highly relevant for a cross-cultural pragmatic analysis. The film script serves as the basis for exploring how politeness strategies are realized and interpreted across different cultural frameworks.

Importantly, the screenplay is publicly accessible online, allowing researchers to retrieve and examine the original text without legal or ethical restrictions. Unlike raw conversational data, film scripts offer well-structured, intentional dialogue that reflects deliberate representations of social norms and emotional nuance (Nelmes, 2011). As such, they provide an ethically sound and analytically rich data source in pragmatics research. Furthermore, because the language is scripted, it allows for repeated, consistent analysis of key scenes, enhancing reliability in the interpretation process (Chand, 2025).

The data were collected through close reading and purposive sampling. The researcher

carefully read the screenplay and selected dialogue excerpts that explicitly or implicitly reflect acts of politeness, including requests, responses, refusals, or emotionally significant exchanges (Li & Wongwaropakorn, 2024). Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the selected data were directly relevant to the research objectives, focusing on scenes that involve clear interpersonal negotiation or cultural contrast (Akkas & Meydan, 2024).

From this process, a total of 16 dialogue excerpts were identified and analyzed for politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's framework. In addition, 7 dialogue excerpts were selected for the analysis of cultural scripts, as these interactions most clearly revealed culturally embedded norms, values, and expectations underlying the characters' communicative behavior. This distinction allows the study to systematically address both the structural realization of politeness strategies and the cultural logic that informs their use (Usmani & Almarshham, 2024).

Each line of dialogue was considered in its situational context to preserve pragmatic meaning and relational dynamics. Scenes were chosen not only for their linguistic relevance but also for their cultural positioning, such as moments involving identity negotiation, emotional conflict, or intercultural misunderstanding (Lacroix et al., 2024). By applying pragmatic theories to these carefully selected excerpts, the analysis aims to capture both surface-level politeness strategies and the deeper cultural meanings they reflect (Siregar et al., 2024).

The selected data were analyzed in two main stages. First, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory was applied to identify and classify politeness strategies into bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. Each strategy was examined in relation to its linguistic form and interactional function. Second, the data were interpreted using Wierzbicka's (1991, 2003) cultural scripts theory, which provided a framework for

uncovering the underlying cultural norms, values, and assumptions that guide the characters' speech behavior. This dual-framework analysis enabled the researcher not only to identify the strategies used but also to explain the cultural motivations behind them, particularly in the contrast between Korean and Western communicative styles (Nelmes, 2011).

Finally, in order to ensure credibility and trustworthiness, researcher reflexivity was maintained during interpretation, and contextual consistency was prioritized. Each excerpt was situated within its narrative arc to preserve character intent and relational dynamics, key elements in pragmatics, and cultural analysis.

Result and Discussion

The analysis of the *Past Lives* screenplay reveals that characters employ a variety of politeness strategies, as conceptualized by Brown and Levinson (1987). These strategies serve different purposes, some mitigate potential threats to the interlocutor's face, while others aim to build closeness or assert independence. The following table presents representative excerpts categorized according to the four main strategies: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record.

Tabel 4.1 Politeness Strategies in *Past Lives*

Utterances	Speaker	Hearer	Strategy Type
울지마, 이 또라이야 (<i>Don't cry, you psycho</i>)	Hae Sung	Na Young	Bald-on-record
야! 난 맨날 너땀에 등하는데, 안 울잖아 (<i>Hey! I'm always second place to you, but I never cry</i>)	Hae Sung	Na Young	Positive politeness
Can I just call you Na Young?	Hae Sung	Nora	Negative politeness
그래서 못 찾았구나. (<i>That's why I couldn't find you</i>)	Hae Sung	Nora	Off-record
울지마 (<i>Don't cry</i>)	Hae Sung	Na Young	Bald-on-record
난 장난이 아니었는데. 난 정말 열심히 찾았어 (<i>It wasn't a joke for me. I really tried to find you</i>)	Hae Sung	Nora	Positive politeness
Go and eat right now	Hae Sung	Nora	Bald-on-record
I want us to stop talking to each other for a while	Nora	Hae Sung	Off-record
Why? (after being told to stop talking)	Hae Sung	Nora	Bald-on-record
Can I even say something like this?	Hae Sung	Nora	Negative politeness
Thank you for introducing me to your husband	Hae Sung	Nora	Positive politeness
You got the worst room	Nora	Arthur	Positive politeness
That's cool. Where's Montauk	Hae Sung	Nora	Positive politeness
You should come to New York to learn English	Nora	Hae Sung	Bald-on-record
I always wanted to learn Mandarin. And it's also helpful for my work	Hae Sung	Nora	Off-record
He's really masculine, in this way I think is so Korean	Nora	Arthur	Off-record

The analysis of politeness strategies in *Past Lives*, as shown in the expanded Table 4.1, illustrates the nuanced use of language by characters navigating complex emotional and cultural dynamics. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), speakers employ four main types of politeness strategies; bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record, to manage face-threatening acts in interaction. These strategies are selected based on the speaker's intentions, the closeness of the relationship, and the cultural context of the exchange.

Politeness Strategies in *Past Lives*

Bald-on-record strategies, which are the most direct and unmitigated, are commonly used by Hae Sung, especially in moments of emotional intensity or familiarity. Utterances such as “울지마, 이 또라이야” (*Don't cry, you psycho*), “울지마” (*Don't cry*), and “Go and eat right now” show how Hae Sung uses direct commands without softeners, often to comfort or assert care toward Na Young and Nora. Similarly, when Nora tells Hae Sung, “You should come to New York to learn English,” she uses a bald-on-record directive that reflects her alignment with Western norms of clarity and assertiveness. Hae Sung's brief, emotionally charged question “Why?” delivered after Nora's decision to stop talking, also exemplifies a bald-on-record response that signals vulnerability and emotional exposure.

In contrast, positive politeness strategies are used to reduce social distance and express solidarity. Hae Sung's line “야! 난 맨날 너땀에 등하는데, 안 울잖아” (*Hey! I'm always second place to you, but I never cry*) uses humor and shared experience to comfort Na Young, while “난 장난이 아니었는데. 난 정말 열심히 찾았어” (*It wasn't a joke for me. I really tried to find you*) reveals his emotional investment in their past connection. Nora also

uses positive politeness with Arthur, her husband, in playful remarks like “You got the worst room,” which function as teasing to strengthen intimacy. Similarly, Hae Sung's statement “That's cool. Where's Montauk?” shows friendly curiosity and interest, fostering closeness with Nora.

Negative politeness strategies, which aim to avoid imposition and show deference, appear in emotionally sensitive contexts. For example, when Hae Sung asks Nora, “Can I just call you Na Young?” and “Can I even say something like this?” he is being cautious and respectful of boundaries, especially given Nora's new identity and marital status. These utterances demonstrate his awareness of potential imposition and reflect Korean cultural values of indirectness and emotional sensitivity, as also noted in Wierzbicka's (2003) discussion of Asian politeness norms.

Off-record strategies, the most indirect type, are used when speakers imply rather than state their intentions. Hae Sung's reflective line “그래서 못 찾았구나” (*That's why I couldn't find you*) subtly conveys regret without direct accusation. Likewise, his explanation “I always wanted to learn Mandarin. And it's also helpful for my work,” given in response to Nora's suggestion, functions as an indirect refusal. Nora's statement “I want us to stop talking to each other for a while” is off-record in its vague justification, softening the emotional impact. Finally, her observation about Arthur “He's really masculine, in this way I think is so Korean”, is not only an indirect comment but a culturally framed reflection that avoids confrontation while revealing personal perception.

Together, these findings show that characters in *Past Lives* select politeness strategies in ways that align with their cultural identities and relational positions. Hae Sung, rooted in Korean cultural scripts, tends to use negative politeness and off-record strategies that reflect modesty, emotional restraint, and respect for social boundaries. Nora, who has internalized American cultural norms, employs

more bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies, emphasizing openness, emotional directness, and individual agency. These contrasting strategies reveal not only personal communication styles but also the influence of deeper cultural values. Thus, politeness in *Past Lives* is not simply a matter of politeness or impoliteness. It is a reflection of how cultural context, identity, and emotion shape language choices in subtle and meaningful ways.

Cultural Scripts

To complement Brown and Levinson's universalist theory of politeness, Anna Wierzbicka (2003, 2009) introduces the notion of cultural scripts to highlight how cultural values shape not only what people say but also how they interpret speech. Cultural scripts are culture-specific norms or expectations about appropriate ways of speaking, feeling, and interacting, expressed through semantic primes, simple, universal meanings found in all languages. These scripts are not arbitrary; they reflect deeply embedded social values that guide communicative behavior, emotional expression, and interpersonal relationships.

Wierzbicka argues that cultural scripts allow us to understand communication within its sociocultural logic. For example, English-speaking Western cultures tend to favor scripts that promote individual autonomy, emotional openness, and egalitarianism. In contrast, Korean cultural scripts emphasize hierarchy, modesty, emotional restraint, and relational harmony. By examining character interactions in *Past Lives*, it becomes clear how these cultural scripts subtly guide the way characters speak, what they choose to express, and what they leave unsaid.

Several excerpts from the screenplay illustrate the presence and tension between these differing scripts. One of the most direct illustrations of identity negotiation is found in this exchange.

Hae Sung: "*Can I just call you Na Young?*"

Nora: "*Now it's Nora. But nowadays, even my mom doesn't call me Na Young.*"

This brief dialogue encapsulates a cross-cultural tension. Hae Sung's question is grounded in a Korean cultural script that views names as symbols of emotional and historical continuity. His desire to use her Korean name is an attempt to preserve a shared past and reestablish intimacy. Nora's response, however, reflects a Western individualist script: she has fully embraced her new identity, and even her family has adapted to this change. Her renaming signifies not just immigration, but self-authorship, a hallmark of American cultural scripts surrounding identity. Another telling moment occurs during a confrontation late in the film.

Hae Sung: "*I didn't know that liking your husband would hurt this much.*"

This confession disrupts typical Korean emotional scripts that prize restraint, face-saving, and non-confrontational communication. Here, Hae Sung verbalizes a deeply personal emotional truth, acknowledging pain, jealousy, and perhaps regret. The fact that he prefaces many of his disclosures with hedging (e.g., "*Can I even say something like this?*") demonstrates that he is aware of crossing a cultural boundary. His struggle reflects an internal conflict between what he feels and what he has been culturally taught to suppress.

Nora, on the other hand, often communicates using scripts associated with emotional transparency. Early in the film, she openly tells Hae Sung:

Nora: "*I missed you.*"

This expression of longing is naturalized within an American script that encourages naming feelings as a path toward self-honesty and relational clarity. However, such a declaration may feel overly intimate or forward from a Korean perspective, especially in a context

where ambiguity and unspoken sentiment are culturally valorized. Cultural scripts regarding gender also surface in the film. In one scene, Nora reflects on Hae Sung's demeanor.

Nora: "*He's really masculine, in this way I think is so Korean.*"

This observation points to a cultural construction of masculinity that differs from Western expectations. In Korean culture, masculinity may be expressed through quiet strength, emotional control, and dutiful presence, traits that are not always explicitly verbalized but are felt and understood in action. Nora, having lived between both cultures, recognizes this distinction and articulates it through a comparative frame. Her comment reflects meta-awareness of cultural scripts at work in daily life and interaction. Naming also becomes a rich site of cultural negotiation. In an early scene, Nora's father suggests.

Father: "*How's Leonore? Nora for short.*"

The family's discussion about English names reveals a shift from collective identity (Na Young within a Korean family structure) to individual reinvention (Nora as an American identity). Naming, here, is not just a practical decision but a symbolic entry into a new cultural script, one that values agency, choice, and assimilation.

Further examples expand the scope of cultural divergence. When Nora says to Hae Sung, "You should come to New York to learn English," she is expressing a Western cultural script that values direct suggestion, problem-solving, and forward planning. Hae Sung does not reply with direct disagreement but instead says.

Hae Sung: "*I always wanted to learn Mandarin. And it's also helpful for my work.*"

This off-record response reflects a Korean cultural script of polite refusal through

redirection. He shifts the topic subtly, giving a reason that indirectly declines her invitation. In another moment, Nora tells Arthur.

Nora: "*You got the worst room.*"

While this line could be seen as impolite, its function is teasing, embedded within a Western script where informal critique or irony often reinforces closeness and humor in romantic relationships. This would be far less acceptable in a Korean relational context, where criticism, even playful, is more carefully managed.

These examples show that *Past Lives* operates as a pragmatic narrative of cultural negotiation. Each character speaks from within a web of unspoken values and assumptions about what is kind, appropriate, or loving. The emotional resonance of the film stems not from overt conflict, but from the subtle misalignments and mutual efforts to bridge cultural differences in interpretation. Cultural scripts, as Wierzbicka (2003) posits, do not merely guide speech, they define the landscape of meaning in which interpersonal relations unfold. In *Past Lives*, those scripts quietly shape the characters' ability to reconnect, reveal emotion, and ultimately accept who they have become in different cultural worlds.

Conclusion

By examining these differences through the lens of cultural scripts, this study demonstrates that politeness is not a universal formula but a culturally interpreted act. What is perceived as kind, respectful, or emotionally appropriate in one cultural framework may be misunderstood or evaluated differently in another. The analysis of *Past Lives* reveals that successful communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds requires not only an awareness of politeness strategies but also an understanding of the cultural logic that underpins them. Accordingly, the answers to this study's research questions emphasize the importance of viewing politeness not in

isolation, but as part of a broader, culturally grounded system of meaning.

Despite these contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the analysis is limited to a single film screenplay, which restricts the generalizability of the findings across genres, cultural representations, or forms of interaction beyond cinematic discourse. Second, as the data are drawn from scripted dialogue, the interactions reflect constructed and stylized communication rather than spontaneous, naturally occurring speech. While this allows for a focused pragmatic analysis, it may not fully capture the complexity of real-life intercultural interaction. Additionally, this study concentrates on the main characters, which means that other potentially relevant perspectives within the narrative are not examined.

These limitations provide important directions for future research. Further studies could expand the data set by analyzing multiple films or comparing cinematic texts with naturally occurring intercultural interactions, such as interviews or digital communication. Future research may also explore additional cultural contexts or apply alternative pragmatic frameworks alongside cultural scripts to deepen cross-cultural comparison. In terms of practical implications, this study highlights the value of incorporating cultural script awareness into intercultural communication training and language education. By understanding that politeness is shaped by culturally embedded meanings rather than fixed formulas, learners and practitioners can develop greater sensitivity to difference, reduce misinterpretation, and engage more effectively in intercultural encounters. Ultimately, *Past Lives* illustrates that behind every polite word or indirect gesture lies a deeper cultural scriptone that carries history, belonging, and the often-unspoken weight of where one comes from.

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