

He Says, She Hints: Analysis of Politeness Strategies in Chinese Marital Communication through Film

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Abstract: *Effective communication is essential in maintaining harmony and emotional connection within marital relationships, especially in cultures that value indirectness and social harmony. Lack of communication skills can reduce connection between spouses, which will lead to psychological problems, marital burnout, and even divorce. Marital communication is often intricately linked to emotional complexity. Therefore, engaging suitable strategies is crucial to maintain a stable and satisfying relationship. This study examines the use of politeness strategies in the marital discourse of spouses in the Chinese film “When a Peking Family Meets Aupair.” The study aims to identify the politeness strategies employed by the spouses and investigate the key factors that influence their choice of such strategies. Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory and Gu Yueguo’s (1992) Politeness Principles were used to analyse 340 utterances between the couple. Through qualitative content analysis, the study reveals that the husband predominantly employs Positive Politeness to foster closeness, while the wife prefers Off-Record strategies to manage conflict indirectly. The choice of strategy adopted by the spouses is influenced by social distance, power dynamics, rank of imposition, and cultural norms. These findings provide insights into the relationship between language, culture, and relationship dynamics, offering practical implications for interpersonal pragmatics, applied linguistics, and marital counselling.*

Keywords: Politeness Strategies, Marital Communication, Face Theory, Chinese Culture, Film Discourse Analysis

1. Introduction

Language is a fundamental tool for human interaction, that allows individuals to express emotions, share opinions, and convey perspectives. Effective communication depends on exchanging information and also on the appropriate use of language, which fosters mutual understanding and facilitates positive interpersonal relationships (Rizqy & Ardi, 2020). As Shen and Zhao et al. (2023) note, politeness is essential to harmonious human behaviour and plays a key role in shaping the quality of interactions. Verbal expression can potentially threaten an individual’s desire for respect and social acceptance, commonly referred to as “face.” Speakers often employ politeness strategies to mitigate the impact of potentially face-threatening expressions (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These strategies involve using courteous language and considerate behaviour to soften speech that might appear impolite or confrontational. In doing so, politeness serves as a communicative means of preserving social harmony and maintaining the dignity of both the speaker and the listener.

Politeness is also important in marital communication as it helps shape the quality of the spouses' relationship. It supports emotional intimacy and mutual respect and helps manage conflict and align personal needs within the partnership (Jafari et al., 2021; Rizqy & Ardi, 2020). In successful marriages, polite communication facilitates understanding, reduces tension, and promotes long-term stability (Li & Wu, 2023). Despite its importance, the study of politeness in marital communication remains limited, particularly within the Chinese cultural context. Much of the existing literature has focused on politeness in public domains such as workplaces (Probosini, 2020), education (Hikmahwati et al., 2021), and family discourse (Cahyono et al., 2023), often relying heavily on Western theoretical frameworks. Fewer studies have explored how culturally specific models, such as Gu Yueguo's (1992) politeness principles, can reveal deeper insights into communication shaped by Chinese social norms.

One way to study marital communication is through the analysis of films, as scripted films offer a realistic portrayal of human interaction. According to Manurip and Katemba (2023), film dialogue reflects culturally shaped patterns of speech and relational behavior. This study analyses marital discourse in the Chinese film *When a Peking Family Meets Aupair to serve* the following objectives: 1) To identify the politeness strategies employed by the husband and wife in marital discourse in the film using Brown and Levinson's framework, and 2) To investigate the key factors that influence the spouses' choice of politeness strategies in the film by integrating both Brown and Levinson's framework and Gu Yueguo's culturally grounded perspective.

This research delves into the subtleties of communication between spouses, with a particular focus on how politeness strategies help ease conflicts and foster emotional closeness in Chinese marital settings. Beyond its academic value, the study offers meaningful implications for fields like applied linguistics, interpersonal pragmatics, and relationship counseling. By revealing how considerate language use shapes intimacy and understanding, it aims to support healthier, more respectful, and emotionally connected relationships through mindful communication.

2. Literature Review

Review of Western Politeness Theories

Politeness theory has been an important research topic in linguistics, sociology, and psychology. It is used to explore how language helps maintain social harmony, supports interaction, and avoids conflict (Aspitarsari et al., 2022). Key theories in this field include Goffman's Face Theory (1955), Lakoff's Politeness Rules (1973), Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), Leech's Politeness Principle (1983), and Brown and Levinson's Politeness Strategies (1987).

Goffman (1955) introduced the concept of "face," which refers to the self-image a person wants to keep in social communication. Positive face means the wish to be liked and accepted. Negative face means the wish to be independent and not disturbed. This theory laid the foundation for later studies on face-threatening acts (FTAs). Based on this idea, Lakoff (1973) proposed three politeness rules: Do not impose, Give options, and Be friendly. These rules show respect for the listener's freedom, choices, and emotions. The goal is to reduce pressure in communication and encourage friendly interaction.

Grice (1975) developed the Cooperative Principle, which focuses on the logic of conversation. He proposed four maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. These maxims help make

communication clear and efficient. However, real conversations often include indirectness or vague expressions, which Grice's model does not fully explain (Koceva, 2023). To address this, Leech (1983) added six politeness maxims: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. These maxims aim to improve social harmony through careful and polite language. Still, some scholars have raised concerns. For example, Ahmed (2022) argues that Leech's model lacks clear methods for use and may not fit all cultures.

Among these theories, Brown and Levinson's (1987) model is the most detailed and most often used. They created a framework based on face-threatening acts (FTAs) and suggested four main politeness strategies: Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record. Bald on Record means speaking in a direct, clear, and simple way, without trying to soften the message. This is often used between close people, in urgent situations, or when being clear is more important than being polite. Positive Politeness is used to make people feel closer. It shows friendliness, interest, or connection. This can be done by using compliments, humor, offers, or words that include both speaker and listener. Negative Politeness tries to respect the listener's freedom and reduce pressure. It often uses indirect language, formal words, softeners, apologies, or signs of respect. Off-Record uses unclear or indirect words, such as hints or vague expressions. This helps the speaker avoid direct responsibility. Methods include metaphors, rhetorical questions, or saying less than what is meant. This theory looks at how social distance, power, and the size of the request affect language. Because of this, it can be used in different cultural settings. The current study uses this model to study how people talk in marriage.

Review of Gu Yueguo's Politeness Theory

In Chinese culture, the idea closest to "politeness" is *li* (礼), which means ritual or courtesy. Chinese politeness is based on Confucian values that focus on social harmony, respect for hierarchy, and moral behavior. This is different from Western ideas of politeness, which often highlight individual freedom. To better explain politeness in Chinese settings, Gu Yueguo (1992) introduced a model with five maxims that reflect these cultural values.

The first is the Self-Denigration Maxim. It highlights the value of humility. People are encouraged to speak modestly about their abilities or achievements. For example, when someone receives a compliment, they might say "It was nothing." This shows modesty and helps avoid jealousy or the appearance of arrogance. In group-oriented or status-based situations, this kind of response supports smooth and respectful interaction.

The second is the Address Maxim. It focuses on using proper titles and honorifics to show respect for others' roles or status. Saying "Manager Wang" or "Teacher Li" instead of using first names helps maintain politeness and social order. This kind of formal address is common in both official and personal conversations in China.

The third is the Refinement Maxim. It encourages indirect, gentle, and polite language, especially when dealing with sensitive matters. Instead of giving direct criticism, speakers may choose softer ways to express their views. A supervisor, for example, might say, "You've done well, and just a few adjustments could improve this," rather than pointing out mistakes directly. This helps avoid embarrassment and keeps the conversation respectful.

The fourth is the Agreement Maxim. It encourages speakers to avoid direct disagreement and try to find shared views. For example, instead of saying no to a suggestion, a person might say, "That's a good idea, and maybe we can adjust it a little." This way of speaking shows the Confucian value of keeping balance in communication. Lastly, the Virtues-Words-Deeds

Maxim. It highlights the need to match what one says with what one does. It values honesty, trust, and moral consistency. In the workplace, for instance, if a leader talks about teamwork, they are also expected to act in ways that support it. When there is a gap between speech and action, it can harm a person's reputation and trust.

These five maxims give a framework for understanding how politeness works in Chinese language use. They focus on being indirect, respectful, and morally responsible. This approach is different from many Western models, which often focus more on being clear, direct, and protecting individual rights. Gu's model fits with the values of a collectivist culture, where keeping good relationships is more important than speaking out directly.

Some studies have shown that Gu's theory is useful in real situations. Lin et al. (2018), for example, looked at conversations in the *Lohas Family*. They found that people often used self-deprecation, formal ways of addressing others, and indirect expressions. These helped keep family communication respectful and peaceful. This shows how Gu's ideas work in daily life. Zhang (2020) studied how honorifics were translated in two Chinese versions of *Pride and Prejudice*. The study showed that translators changed English expressions to match Chinese politeness habits. This points to the strong influence of cultural norms on language use.

Hao (2021) used both Gu's framework and Brown and Levinson's theory to study how Chinese speakers express criticism. The study found that speakers often used indirect ways to reduce conflict and protect face, especially in situations where emotions or social ties were involved. This research uses both Gu Yueguo's politeness principles and Brown and Levinson's face theory. This combined method helps give a fuller picture of how Chinese people express politeness in marital communication. It also helps explain how characters in *When a Peking Family Meets Aupair* handle emotions, relationships, and social roles through language.

Review of Marital Communication

Gu Yueguo's politeness framework highlights the importance of social harmony, respect, and relational balance in Chinese discourse. These principles are especially significant within the context of marriage. Marital communication is not only emotionally complex but also central to the stability and satisfaction of a relationship. Despite its importance, many spouses underestimate the impact of politeness and effective communication on relational outcomes (Attado, 2022).

Different expectations and emotional reactions can cause conflicts. Without constructive management, they may escalate into resentment, hostility, or even abuse (Surjadi et al., 2022; Uzun & Avcı, 2021). Spouses with strong communication skills are better equipped to express their needs, resolve disputes, and maintain emotional closeness (Jafari et al., 2021). Positive language, characterised by gratitude, praise, and empathy, can reinforce mutual support and strengthen the emotional bond (Afriana et al., 2025; Heimann & Kampf, 2022). Similar findings by Shifaw (2022) show that effective communication moderates the relationship between conflict resolution and marital satisfaction. Conversely, impoliteness in marital interactions can lead to misunderstandings and a deterioration of emotional connections. Li and Wu (2023) found that impolite verbal and non-verbal behaviors intensify tensions.

Gender also plays a role in politeness in marriage. Traditionally, women are seen as using more indirect, positive politeness (Furkatovna et al., 2021). However, recent studies suggest that women may also use impoliteness during conflicts (Li & Wu, 2023). Cultural background adds another layer of complexity. For example, Indonesian couples tend to prefer indirectness to

avoid conflict (Pande et al., 2023). Zhang (2024) states that Western couples often use negative politeness to protect personal freedom, while Chinese couples focus on harmony through positive politeness. Cross-cultural marriages face additional challenges, such as different communication styles and language differences, which can make understanding harder and lead to dissatisfaction (Breger & Hill, 2021; Pratiwia & Yanuar, 2022). Li et al. (2018) also pointed out that cultural and socioeconomic factors affect how spouses communicate, suggesting that more research is needed on politeness strategies in marital conversations, especially from a cultural perspective.

Marital Politeness Strategies in Film

Film is a valuable medium for examining real-life communication patterns, particularly marital discourse, and it is done through scripted but realistic dialogue (Chaerdiani & Ekawati, 2024). Analysing politeness strategies in marital interactions on screen provides insights into how spouses maintain relationships, manage conflict, and negotiate power through language. Many studies have applied Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework to films, highlighting the role of positive politeness in enhancing intimacy and mitigating face threats. For instance, Tetenaung and Heryono (2022) found that positive politeness was the most common strategy in *Me Before You*, and they were used to express warmth and emotional closeness. Similarly, Fridolini et al. (2021) observed frequent use of positive politeness in *Little Women*, where characters offered compliments, shared sympathy, and used inclusive language to strengthen bonds. Safitri (2015) reported that *The Big Wedding* also favored positive politeness, while Fitri's (2022) analysis of *Mulan* highlighted how humor and empathetic language fostered rapport and eased tension. These studies collectively suggest that positive politeness prevails in romantic and family-centered films, enabling characters to connect emotionally and avoid confrontation.

However, not all films rely primarily on positive politeness. Panjaitan and Manullang (2021) and Putri and Fitrawati (2021) found that bald on-record strategies, direct and unambiguous expressions, were most frequently used in *Yes Day* and *Finding Ohana*. Because these are family movies, the closeness among characters often justifies straightforward communication without the need for indirectness. Beyond Brown and Levinson's framework, Syafrayani and Ayunda (2025) used Grice's Cooperative Principle to analyse marital dialogue in an Indonesian film. Their findings showed that women adhered more closely to conversational norms, whereas men often withheld information, especially during emotionally charged discussions. The maxim of quantity, providing just enough information, was the most frequently observed, indicating a shared understanding of appropriate disclosure in intimate relationships.

These studies confirm that film genre, character relationships, and cultural context all shape how politeness strategies are used. Romantic dramas tend to emphasise positive politeness, while family films often involve bald on-record communication due to lower social distance between characters (Tetenaung & Heryono, 2022). Despite these insights, most studies rely heavily on Brown and Levinson's model and focus on Western films, limiting their ability to capture culturally specific politeness strategies. As Nuraini (2021) noted, this theoretical dominance can obscure local norms, particularly in non-Western contexts such as Chinese culture, where Confucian values strongly influence politeness.

To address this, the present study integrates Brown and Levinson's framework with Gu Yueguo's (1992) politeness principles to examine politeness in *When a Peking Family Meets Aupair*, a Chinese marital film. This dual approach enables a culturally informed examination of how social roles, hierarchy, and harmony shape communication in Chinese marital contexts.

Brown and Levinson's social variables (1987) emphasise that the choice of politeness strategy depends on three key social variables that are social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition. Social distance refers to the relationship between speakers. Relative power reflects the status difference between interlocutors. Those with greater authority often employ direct strategies, while individuals in subordinate positions tend to use negative politeness or off-record strategies to demonstrate deference. The rank of imposition concerns how burdensome a request is. Low-imposition acts often allow for direct or friendly expressions, while high-imposition acts require more cautious, indirect language.

By combining Western and Chinese models, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how politeness is enacted in marital communication, revealing how culture, social norms, and relational context influence communicative choices in both scripted and real-life interactions.

3. Research Method

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to explore the meanings and cultural aspects of politeness in marital communication. As explained by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), content analysis helps researchers understand textual data by systematically coding it, which makes it easier to identify themes and categories. Using this method, the study looks at dialogues and context from the selected film, identifying and coding politeness strategies in different interactions between spouses. The results are expected to offer a deeper understanding of marital communication in Chinese culture and provide practical suggestions for improving respectful and harmonious communication between spouses.

Sample of Research

Films provide a valuable platform for linguistic research because they show real-life interactions through visual, sound, and story elements (Hutauruk, 2018; Setyawati & Rahayu, 2020). This study uses a film to explore marital communication, focusing on politeness strategies in a Chinese cultural context. A purposive sampling method was used, and the film "When a Peking Family Meets Aupair," a 90-minute Mandarin-language film with English subtitles, was chosen. The film was selected because it is easy to access, neutral in content, and relevant to the study. It avoids sensitive topics, allows for accurate transcription, and shows realistic marital interactions, making it a good source of data.

The story follows middle-aged spouses as they deal with the pressures of work and home life. Tensions in their marriage arise from differences in parenting, household duties, and personal values. These conflicts unfold through conversations between the spouses. These dialogues provide a rich source of data for analyzing how politeness strategies are used to express emotions, negotiate power, and keep harmony. The dialogues were transcribed and coded for politeness strategies. The analysis focused on speech acts that manage face, reduce imposition, and maintain social balance. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Face Theory is the main framework used, with Gu Yueguo's (1992) Politeness Principles to capture the cultural norms of communication. This combined approach helps better understand how politeness works in Chinese marital communication.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data for this study were collected through a clear, multi-step process designed to capture the use of politeness strategies in marital communication. The film *When a Peking Family Meets*

Aupair was watched several times to understand the plot, character relationships, and key communication situations. All dialogues between the spouses were transcribed word for word to ensure accuracy. The transcriptions were then reviewed to find examples of politeness, which were classified based on predefined categories. Each statement was coded using Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework: Bald on Record (BOR), Positive Politeness (PP), Negative Politeness (NP), and Off-Record (OR). This coding helped to analyze the frequency, distribution, and functions of each strategy.

To address the second research goal, a situational analysis was done. This aimed to understand how factors like relationship dynamics, emotional tone, and the context of the conversation affected the choice of strategies. Brown and Levinson's (1987) social variables—social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition—were used for this analysis. To add more depth, Gu Yueguo's (1992) politeness principles were also applied to offer a culturally specific interpretation, enhancing the analysis through the use of both theories.

Validity, Reliability, and Limitations

The researcher served as the primary instrument in data collection and analysis. To enhance reliability, an independent coder verified coding decisions. Triangulation with existing literature on marital politeness further supported the study's credibility.

Despite its strengths, the study has limitations. First, the analysis is based on a single film, which may limit generalizability to broader real-life or cross-cultural contexts. Second, although rich in detail, qualitative content analysis is inherently subjective and may reflect the researcher's bias. Third, the study primarily uses Brown and Levinson's model, which may not fully capture culturally specific strategies despite the addition of Gu Yueguo's principles. Addressing these limitations in future research, through the use of expanded data sources, additional coders, or mixed-methods approaches, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of politeness in marital communication.

4. Findings and Discussion

This study analysed 340 conversational exchanges between the spouses in the film *When a Peking Family Meets Aupair*, with 152 utterances attributed to Husband “有志 (Youzhi)” and 188 from his wife “文娟 (Wenjuan)”. Each utterance was coded and categorised based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategy framework.

The first objective was to identify the politeness strategies employed by the husband and wife in marital discourse in the film. The data revealed distinct preferences in the use of politeness strategies between the husband and wife during their interactions. Positive Politeness was the most frequently used strategy overall, accounting for 32% of all strategies (107 instances). The husband employed this strategy more often than the wife, with 64 instances (42%), compared to the wife's 43 instances (23%). This suggests that the husband focused more on building rapport, expressing friendliness, and reducing social distance in communication. Table 1 shows the distribution of politeness strategies used by the husband and wife in the movie.

Table 1: The Distribution of Politeness Strategies

Politeness Strategies	Husband		Wife		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Bald On Record	25	16%	32	17%	57	17%
Positive Politeness	64	42%	43	23%	107	32%
Negative Politeness	33	22%	50	27%	83	24%
Off-Record	30	20%	63	33%	93	27%
Total	152	100%	188	100%	340	100%

Off-record strategies ranked second overall, with 93 instances (27%), showing a notable preference among the wives, who employed this strategy in 63 instances (33%), significantly more than the husbands, who used it in 30 instances (20%). This suggests that the wife tended to rely more on indirect communication, hints, and ambiguity, possibly to maintain politeness while avoiding direct confrontation or imposition. Both used negative politeness strategies moderately, with a total of 83 instances (24%). The wife used it slightly more frequently (50 instances, 27%) than the husband (33 instances, 22%), indicating a mutual recognition of the need to respect each other's autonomy and minimise impositions. However, these strategies were not as dominant as positive or off-record ones. Bald on-record strategies were the least used overall, accounting for only 17% (57 instances). Both husband (25 instances, 16%) and wife (32 instances, 17%) used this strategy relatively infrequently. This reflects a shared tendency to avoid direct, unmitigated speech in favour of more polite forms of communication. This low frequency aligns with the general trend of prioritising subtlety and consideration in interpersonal discourse.

Overall, the findings reveal distinct yet complementary communication preferences between the spouses. The husband predominantly employed positive politeness, favouring friendly and supportive interaction. On the other hand, the wife leaned more towards off-record strategies, showing a preference for indirectness and subtlety. They occasionally utilised negative politeness to maintain mutual respect and social distance. Their minimal use of bald-on-record strategies underscores a shared commitment to polite and tactful communication within the marital relationship.

The second objective of this study was to examine the factors influencing the spouses' choice of politeness strategies in *When a Peking Family Meets Aupair*. The findings of the first objective indicate that the husband predominantly employs positive politeness. This suggests a friendly and supportive communication style. On the contrary, the wife frequently uses off-record strategies that reflect a preference for indirectness and subtle critique.

Table 2 displays the factors influencing the husband's choice of politeness strategies in the movie. The husband predominantly employs positive politeness, which aims to reduce social distance by showing closeness, solidarity, or understanding. Sample utterances for each factor are provided. In Data 1, the husband directly addresses a personal trait when he says, "*You are very concerned about your image,*" which implies a low social distance. The husband knows the wife well enough to make this kind of observation without it being not very kind. This reflects familiarity and intimacy. In Data 2, the husband uses a self-deprecating metaphor ("*So I am just your dumping ground for complaints.*") to imply equality or even submission in power, suggesting minimal assertion of dominance. It reflects a dynamic in which he acknowledges the wife's emotional state, allowing her space to vent. This is a softening strategy despite emotional tension. In Data 3, the husband points out that everyone is affected, not just the wife ("*The child is sick. Everyone feels upset, not just you*"). While possibly

confrontational, this comment minimises the imposition of the wife's emotional reaction by showing shared burden. He was trying to soften the weight of her feelings using a communal perspective.

Table 2: Factors of Employing a Positive Politeness Strategy by Husband

Main Politeness Strategies	Factors of Employing a Positive Politeness Strategy		
	Social Distance	Relative Power	Degree of Imposition
Positive Politeness (64)	Data 1: 你是一个特别要面子的人。 You're very concerned about your image.	Data 2: 我就是你这个倒苦水的垃圾桶啊。 So I'm just your dumping ground for complaints.	Data 3: 那小孩生病了 大家不是都难受吗·又不是你一个人难受。 The child is sick—everyone feels upset, not just you.

The husband's use of positive politeness strategies aligns well with Gu Yueguo's politeness principles, particularly self-denigration, indirectness, and harmony. In Data 2, his self-deprecating comment (*"I'm just your dumping ground for complaints?"*) reflects self-denigration (谦让), softening his frustration through humility. His use of metaphors also demonstrates indirectness (含蓄), expressing emotion without direct confrontation. In Data 3, he reframes the wife's distress by highlighting shared concern for their sick child, thus promoting harmony (和谐) and reducing emotional intensity. While Data 1 (*"You're very concerned about your image"*) is more direct, within the context of a close relationship, it serves to foster understanding rather than cause offense. Overall, the husband's strategies reflect a culturally appropriate use of politeness that prioritises emotional balance, mutual face-saving, and interpersonal harmony, which is in line with Chinese communicative norms.

Table 3 displays the factors influencing the wife's choice of politeness strategies in the movie. The findings show that the wife frequently uses off-record strategies, reflecting a preference for indirectness and subtle critique. Sample utterances for each factor are provided. Data 4 shows that the wife uses sarcasm to indirectly suggest how the husband handles a situation (*"Aren't you always eager to teach others?"*). This off-record comment shows familiarity and emotional distance, as sarcasm is often reserved for people close enough to understand the implicit meaning. This reflects a low social distance. Both are close, yet there is emotional tension that motivates indirectness. Data 5 shows how the wife challenges the husband's perceived authority by pointing out financial dissatisfaction indirectly when she said, *"Don't bring up overtime pay... have you ever brought home a single cent?"*. Though confrontational in tone, rhetorical questions and sarcasm avoid a direct accusation, revealing a complex dynamic where she pushes back on his claims without asserting overt dominance. This reflects relatively equal power, but the strategy allows her to emphasise without overstepping. Data 6 shows how the wife makes a significant request (immigration) in an emotional and emphasise tone, rather than a blunt demand when she said *"The happiest thing is that you send me abroad... I want to immigrate."* This softens the high imposition by embedding it in a statement of happiness or desire, leaving room for the husband to interpret or deflect. This is a classic off-record move where a strong request is disguised as a dream or emotional statement.

Table 3: Factors of Employing an Off-record Strategy by Wife

Main Politeness Strategy	Factors of Employing an Off-Record Strategy		
	Social Distance	Relative Power	Degree of Imposition
Off-Record (63)	Data 4: 你不是好为人师吗，你跟他说吧。 Aren't you always eager to teach others?	Data 5: 你少跟我提加班费，你每天加班怎么不说往家里拿一毛钱。 Do not bring up overtime pay with me. You work overtime every day, but have you ever brought home a single cent?"	Data 6: 我告诉你，最开心，最幸福的，就是你把我送到国外去。我就是要移民，移民。 I tell you, the happiest and most blessed thing is that you send me abroad. I want to immigrate, immigrate.

The wife's use of off-record strategies aligns with Gu Yueguo's politeness principles, particularly indirectness (含蓄) and harmony (和谐). In Data 4, her sarcastic remark, "Aren't you always eager to teach others?", uses irony to shift responsibility to the husband without directly confronting him, exemplifying Gu's emphasis on implicit communication to avoid face-threatening acts. In Data 5, she expresses dissatisfaction about finances through rhetorical questioning, a technique that conveys criticism while maintaining indirectness and reducing the risk of open conflict. This reflects her attempt to negotiate relative power while preserving interpersonal harmony. In Data 6, her emotional statement about wanting to immigrate softens a major request through idealistic expression, further emphasising imposition and maintaining relational balance. Across all examples, the wife communicates strong emotions and critiques subtly. These strategies allow her to express personal needs while adhering to culturally valued norms of restraint and harmony. These strategies reflect a deep sensitivity to maintaining social and emotional equilibrium.

Overall, the spouses' politeness strategies are shaped by both interpersonal dynamics and cultural expectations. The husband emphasises solidarity and emotional support, while the wife employs indirectness to express frustration and assert needs, maintaining relational balance and harmony within their marriage.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study looked at politeness strategies in marital communication through the Chinese film *When a Peking Family Meets Aupair*, showing how language is used to manage emotions and maintain harmony. Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Gu Yueguo's (1992) cultural maxims, the analysis found that both spouses used all four politeness strategies—Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record—depending on the situation. The husband mainly used Positive Politeness to build rapport and show support. The wife preferred Off-Record strategies, like hints and sarcasm, to express dissatisfaction indirectly. These choices were influenced by their relationship, social distance, and the level of imposition, showing how marital communication is flexible and depends on the context. Chinese cultural values, such as face-saving, harmony, and indirectness, played a key role in shaping their language use. Gu's Self-Denigration and Refinement Maxims were especially noticeable in how the spouses used polite and deferential language.

Future research should adopt comparative approaches to examine politeness across cultures, media, and real-life contexts. The insights from this study can aid relationship counsellors in

promoting respectful, empathetic communication and inform scriptwriters in creating more culturally authentic and emotionally resonant depictions of marital life.

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