

A Comparative Document-Based Pragmatic Study of Politeness Strategies Across Selected Asian Cultures

Hendrikus Evaristo Sihura
HKBP Nommensen University
hendrikus.sihura@student.uhn.ac.id

Abstract

This study investigates the use of politeness strategies across selected Asian cultures through a comparative document-based pragmatic analysis. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, the study examines how speakers from India, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea employ bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies in interpersonal communication. The research adopts a qualitative comparative design using document analysis as the primary method of inquiry. Data were collected from conversational excerpts extracted from selected films representing each cultural context. A total of 100 excerpts were analyzed and categorized according to the four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson. The findings reveal both similarities and differences in the realization of politeness across the selected cultures. Negative politeness emerged as the dominant strategy in Japanese and South Korean interactions, reflecting cultural values associated with hierarchy, respect, and social distance. Indonesian interactions showed a greater preference for positive politeness strategies, emphasizing solidarity and interpersonal closeness, while Indian interactions demonstrated a relatively balanced use of politeness strategies depending on contextual factors and social relationships. The study concludes that although maintaining face and social harmony is a common communicative goal across Asian cultures, the realization of politeness is strongly influenced by culturally specific norms and expectations. These findings contribute to the field of cross-cultural pragmatics and provide insights into the relationship between language, culture, and communication in contemporary Asian societies.

Keywords: Asian cultures, cross-cultural pragmatics, document-based analysis, politeness strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

Politeness plays a fundamental role in human communication because it enables individuals to maintain social relationships, negotiate interpersonal meanings, and minimize potential conflict during interaction. In pragmatics, politeness is generally understood as the linguistic and behavioral strategies speakers employ to manage social relationships and protect the public self-image, or "face," of both speakers and hearers. Brown and Levinson (1987) define face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (p. 61), and they argue that speakers strategically use politeness to mitigate face-threatening acts that may potentially damage interpersonal relationships. Their framework, which distinguishes between bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies, has become one of the most influential models in politeness research.

Despite its widespread influence, Brown and Levinson's model has been subject to considerable criticism, particularly regarding its claim of universality. Numerous scholars have argued

that politeness is deeply embedded in cultural values and social norms rather than being solely determined by individual face needs. Ide (1989) contends that politeness in many Asian societies is not merely a matter of strategic choice but also involves socially prescribed behavior based on discernment and social expectations. Similarly, Watts (2003) argues that politeness cannot be fully understood without considering the sociocultural context in which communication occurs. These perspectives suggest that the interpretation and realization of politeness may vary significantly across cultures.

Asia provides a particularly rich context for investigating politeness because the region encompasses diverse linguistic, cultural, and social traditions while sharing certain common values such as collectivism, respect for hierarchy, and the maintenance of social harmony. In many Asian societies, politeness extends beyond linguistic expressions and is closely associated with social obligations, moral values, and culturally appropriate behavior. For instance, Japanese communication emphasizes *wakimae* (discernment), whereby speakers select linguistic forms according to social roles and relationships (Ide, 1989). In China, concepts such as *mianzi* and *lian* highlight the importance of social reputation and collective honor. Similarly, Indian politeness is strongly influenced by hierarchy, respect for elders, and the preservation of *izzat* (honor), while Indonesian politeness is often associated with *rukun* (social harmony) and *malu* (social shame).

These cultural characteristics frequently result in communication patterns that differ from those commonly described in Western politeness theories. Hall (1976) explains that many Asian cultures are characterized as high-context cultures, where meaning is often conveyed indirectly and relies heavily on contextual cues rather than explicit verbal expression. Consequently, communicative behaviors that are considered polite in one cultural context may be perceived differently in another. As Thomas (1983) notes, misunderstandings in intercultural communication often arise not from linguistic incompetence but from differences in pragmatic conventions and sociocultural expectations.

Previous studies have examined politeness within individual Asian cultures, including research on Japanese honorific systems, Chinese facework, Indian honorific practices, and Indonesian indirectness strategies. However, most existing studies focus on a single cultural context, making it difficult to identify broader patterns and distinctive characteristics of politeness across Asian societies. Moreover, relatively few studies have systematically compared politeness strategies across multiple Asian cultures using a unified analytical framework and comparable discourse data. This limitation restricts our understanding of how cultural values influence the realization of politeness in different Asian contexts.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a comparative document-based pragmatic approach to examine politeness strategies across selected Asian cultures. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, the study analyzes naturally occurring interactions represented in cultural documents, including film dialogues and conversational transcripts from India, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea. By comparing the use of politeness strategies across these contexts, the study seeks to identify both shared characteristics and culturally specific features of Asian politeness. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of cross-cultural pragmatics research and provide insights into the relationship between language, culture, and social interaction in contemporary Asian societies.

Furthermore, this study offers practical implications for intercultural communication, language education, and cross-cultural understanding. As globalization continues to increase interaction among people from diverse cultural backgrounds, awareness of different politeness systems becomes increasingly important for reducing pragmatic failure and fostering effective communication across cultures.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Pragmatics and Politeness

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics concerned with how language is used and interpreted in context. Unlike semantics, which focuses on literal meaning, pragmatics examines how speakers convey meaning through interaction and how listeners interpret intended messages within specific social and cultural situations. According to Yule (2020), pragmatics is "the study of speaker meaning" (p. 127), emphasizing the relationship between language users and the contexts in which communication occurs.

One of the central topics in pragmatics is politeness. Politeness refers to the linguistic and behavioral practices that individuals employ to maintain harmonious social relationships and avoid conflict during interaction. As communication often involves requests, refusals, disagreements, and other potentially face-threatening acts, speakers must select appropriate linguistic strategies to achieve their communicative goals while preserving interpersonal relationships.

Politeness has attracted considerable attention in linguistic research because it reflects the interaction between language, culture, and society. According to Lakoff (1973), politeness serves as a mechanism for reducing friction in social interaction. Similarly, Leech (1983) argues that politeness functions as a principle that helps maintain social equilibrium and facilitates cooperative communication among interlocutors.

2.2 Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory remains one of the most influential frameworks in cross-cultural pragmatics. Their model is based on Goffman's concept of face, which refers to an individual's desired public self-image during social interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) define face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (p. 61).

The theory distinguishes between two aspects of face. Positive face refers to an individual's desire to be appreciated, approved of, and accepted by others. Negative face refers to an individual's desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. Because many communicative acts have the potential to threaten either positive or negative face, speakers employ politeness strategies to minimize such threats.

2.2.1 Brown and Levinson identify four major politeness strategies:

a. Bald-on-Record Strategy

This strategy involves direct and unmitigated communication. Speakers prioritize efficiency over face concerns. Examples include commands, urgent requests, and direct instructions.

b. Positive Politeness Strategy

Positive politeness seeks to reduce social distance and emphasize solidarity. Speakers express friendliness, approval, and shared identity. Compliments, jokes, and inclusive language frequently characterize this strategy.

c. Negative Politeness Strategy

Negative politeness aims to respect the hearer's autonomy and minimize imposition. Speakers often use indirect requests, hedges, apologies, and formal expressions.

d. Off-Record Strategy

Off-record strategies are highly indirect and allow speakers to avoid direct responsibility for their intended meaning. Hints, implications, and ambiguous statements are common examples.

Although Brown and Levinson proposed these strategies as universal, subsequent research has demonstrated considerable cultural variation in how they are realized and interpreted across societies.

2.3 Alternative Perspectives on Politeness

While Brown and Levinson's theory has significantly influenced pragmatics research, several scholars have challenged its universality. One major criticism concerns its emphasis on individual face needs, which are often associated with Western cultural values.

Ide (1989) introduces the concept of *wakimae* or discernment, arguing that politeness in Japanese society is frequently determined by social norms and role obligations rather than individual strategic choices. According to Ide, speakers often select polite forms because social conventions require them to do so. Similarly, Matsumoto (1988) argues that Japanese politeness reflects social relationships and group membership more than individual autonomy. This perspective suggests that politeness should be understood as a culturally situated phenomenon rather than a universal linguistic strategy.

Watts (2003) further criticizes traditional politeness theories for treating politeness as a fixed set of strategies. He argues that politeness is a dynamic social practice negotiated by participants during interaction. What counts as polite behavior depends largely on cultural expectations and contextual interpretation. These alternative perspectives are particularly relevant to cross-cultural studies because they emphasize the role of sociocultural norms in shaping communicative behavior.

2.4 Politeness in Asian Cultural Contexts

Politeness occupies a central role in many Asian societies. Although Asian cultures are highly diverse, they often share values related to collectivism, hierarchy, respect, and social harmony. In Japan, politeness is strongly associated with hierarchical relationships and the use of honorific language (*keigo*). Speakers carefully adjust linguistic forms according to age, status, and social distance. Ide (1989) notes that appropriate language use reflects an awareness of social expectations and role relationships.

In South Korea, politeness is influenced by Confucian values emphasizing respect for elders and social hierarchy. Honorific expressions and speech levels serve as important indicators of social relationships and interpersonal respect. Chinese politeness is closely linked to the concepts of *mianzi* (face) and *lian* (moral reputation). According to Gu (1990), maintaining face and avoiding embarrassment are central concerns in Chinese interaction. Speakers frequently employ indirectness and self-restraint to preserve social harmony.

In Indonesia, politeness is often associated with cultural values such as *rukun* (social harmony) and *malu* (social sensitivity or shame). Indonesian speakers frequently avoid confrontation and prefer indirect expressions to maintain positive interpersonal relationships.

India presents another important context for politeness research. Communication practices are influenced by social hierarchy, age differences, and cultural concepts of respect and honor. Honorific forms, indirect requests, and respectful address terms are commonly used to maintain appropriate social relationships. These examples illustrate that although Asian cultures may share certain values, each society develops unique politeness norms that shape communicative behavior.

2.5 Document-Based Pragmatic Studies

Document analysis has become an increasingly valuable method in pragmatics research. Rather than collecting data directly from participants, researchers analyze naturally occurring language represented in documents such as films, television programs, interviews, transcripts, and digital media. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents” (p. 27). Documents provide rich sources of linguistic data and allow researchers to investigate communication patterns in authentic social contexts.

Film dialogues and conversational transcripts are particularly useful for cross-cultural pragmatics because they reflect culturally recognizable interactional practices while providing accessible and comparable datasets. Previous studies have successfully employed films and television programs to examine speech acts, politeness strategies, facework, and intercultural communication patterns.

The present study adopts a document-based approach because it enables the systematic comparison of politeness strategies across multiple Asian cultures using a common analytical framework.

2.6 Previous Studies

Numerous studies have explored politeness strategies in different cultural contexts. Brown and Levinson (1987) established the foundational framework for analyzing face-threatening acts and politeness strategies. Subsequent studies have applied and modified this framework in diverse linguistic and cultural settings.

Ide (1989) examined Japanese politeness and demonstrated that social norms play a central role in language choice. Gu (1990) investigated Chinese politeness and found that concepts of face and social morality significantly influence communicative behavior. Similarly, Matsumoto (1988) argued that Japanese politeness reflects collective social relationships rather than individual face needs.

More recent studies have focused on politeness in media discourse, film interactions, and intercultural communication. These studies consistently reveal that cultural values shape the selection and interpretation of politeness strategies. However, most existing research focuses on a single country or language community.

Comparative studies involving multiple Asian cultures remain relatively limited, particularly those employing document-based data sources and a unified analytical framework. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by comparing politeness strategies across selected Asian cultures using Brown and Levinson’s politeness model. The study aims to identify both common patterns and culturally specific features of politeness in Asian communication contexts.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The Research Methods section describes in detail how the study was conducted. A complete description of the methods used enables the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of the research methodology.

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative comparative document-based pragmatic research design. The study aimed to investigate and compare politeness strategies across selected Asian cultures by analyzing naturally occurring interactions represented in documentary sources. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding and interpreting linguistic phenomena within their sociocultural contexts rather than measuring variables statistically.

The research adopted a comparative perspective to identify similarities and differences in the realization of politeness strategies across four Asian cultural contexts: India, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea. The analysis was guided by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which classifies politeness strategies into four categories: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies.

Furthermore, the study employed document analysis as its primary method of data collection and analysis. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents to obtain meaningful information relevant to a research problem. This method enabled the researcher to examine authentic communicative practices embedded within cultural texts and compare politeness patterns across different societies.

3.2 Participants (Data Sources)

Since this study did not involve human participants directly, the primary sources of data consisted of conversational excerpts obtained from selected films representing four Asian cultures. The films were purposively selected because they contained rich interpersonal interactions and reflected culturally recognizable communication practices.

Table 1 presents the documentary sources used in this study.

An example of a heading	Column A (t)	Column B (T)	
India	English Vinglish	2012	Hindi/English
Indonesia	Laskar Pelangi	2008	Indonesian
Japan	Good Morning Call	2016	Japanese
South Korea	Reply 1988	2015	Korean

The selected films were chosen based on three criteria: (1) they portrayed everyday social interactions, (2) they represented culturally specific communicative practices, and (3) official subtitles or transcripts were available for analysis. From each film, conversational exchanges containing requests, refusals, apologies, compliments, suggestions, and other potentially face-threatening acts were identified and extracted for analysis. A total of approximately 100 conversational excerpts were collected, with 25 excerpts representing each cultural context. These excerpts served as the units of analysis in the study.

3.3 Instruments

The primary research instrument was a document analysis checklist developed based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework. The checklist was designed to identify and categorize politeness strategies occurring in the selected conversational excerpts.

The instrument consisted of four analytical categories:

1. Bald-on-record strategies
 - a) Direct requests
 - b) Commands
 - c) Explicit instructions
2. Positive politeness strategies
 - a) Expressions of solidarity
 - b) Compliments
 - c) Inclusive language
 - d) Friendly interaction markers
3. Negative politeness strategies

Hendrikus Evaristo Sihura

- a) Indirect requests
 - b) Apologies
 - c) Hedging expressions
 - d) Respectful forms of address
4. Off-record strategies
- a) Hints
 - b) Implications
 - c) Ambiguous statements
 - d) Indirect suggestions

In addition, an observation sheet was used to record contextual information, including the relationship between speakers, social status, age differences, communicative purpose, and situational context. This contextual information assisted in interpreting how politeness strategies were influenced by cultural norms and social relationships.

To enhance representativeness, the study selected documents from multiple publicly available sources, including governmental communications, educational materials, public speeches, media interviews, and intercultural communication examples. These documents were chosen because they reflect commonly accepted communicative practices within their respective cultural contexts.

A coding sheet based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework was developed. All extracted utterances were categorized into Bald-on-Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record strategies. To enhance analytical consistency, the coding process was conducted twice with a two-week interval, and discrepancies were resolved through re-examination of the data.

4. RESULTS

This study examined the use of politeness strategies across four Asian cultural contexts represented in selected films from India, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea. A total of 100 conversational excerpts were analyzed, comprising 25 excerpts from each cultural context. The analysis was conducted using Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, which categorizes politeness strategies into bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies.

4.1 Distribution of Politeness Strategies Across Asian Cultures

Table 2. Frequency of Politeness Strategies

Politeness Strategy	India	Indonesia	Japan	South Korea	Total
Bald-on-Record	8	5	3	4	20
Positive Politeness	7	10	5	7	29
Negative Politeness	6	6	11	10	33
Off-Record	4	4	6	4	18
Total	25	25	25	25	100

The findings indicate that negative politeness was the most frequently employed strategy across the four cultural contexts (33%), followed by positive politeness (29%), bald-on-record strategies (20%), and off-record strategies (18%).

Japanese and South Korean interactions exhibited the highest frequencies of negative politeness, whereas Indonesian interactions showed the highest occurrence of positive politeness strategies. Indian interactions demonstrated a relatively balanced distribution, although bald-on-record strategies appeared more frequently than in the other cultural contexts.

4.2 Bald-on-Record Strategies

Bald-on-record strategies occurred most frequently in the Indian data and least frequently in the Japanese data.

Table 3. Bald-on-Record Strategy Examples

Country	Example
India	"Sit down and listen to me."
Indonesia	" <i>Tolong datang sekarang.</i> "
Japan	Limited occurrence; mostly emergencies
South Korea	Direct instructions among family members

The analysis revealed that direct commands and explicit instructions were typically used in situations involving urgency, close interpersonal relationships, or hierarchical authority. In India and South Korea, direct speech frequently appeared in family interactions where social roles were clearly established.

4.3 Positive Politeness Strategies

Positive politeness was most prominent in the Indonesian data.

Table 4. Positive Politeness Strategy Examples

Country	Example
India	Expressions of encouragement and solidarity
Indonesia	Inclusive language and compliments
Japan	Friendly support among peers
South Korea	Expressions of group belonging

Positive politeness strategies included compliments, expressions of appreciation, shared identity markers, and inclusive language. Indonesian interactions frequently employed phrases emphasizing togetherness and social harmony.

For example:

"Mari kita kerjakan bersama-sama."

This expression illustrates the speaker's attempt to reduce social distance and create a sense of solidarity with the hearer.

4.4 Negative Politeness Strategies

Negative politeness emerged as the dominant strategy in Japan and South Korea.

Table 5. Negative Politeness Strategy Examples

Country	Example
India	Respectful requests to elders
Indonesia	Indirect requests
Japan	Honorific expressions and apologies
South Korea	Formal speech levels and hedging

The Japanese and Korean data contained numerous instances of indirect requests, apologies, and honorific expressions. Speakers frequently employed linguistic forms designed to minimize imposition and demonstrate respect.

For example:

"Would it be possible for you to help me?"

Hendrikus Evaristo Sihura

Such expressions allow speakers to communicate requests while preserving the hearer's autonomy and social dignity.

4.5 Off-Record Strategies

Off-record strategies appeared least frequently in the dataset.

Table 6. Off-Record Strategy Examples

Country	Example
India	Indirect criticism
Indonesia	Hints regarding obligations
Japan	Implicit requests
South Korea	Suggestive statements

These strategies often relied on contextual interpretation rather than explicit communication. Speakers avoided direct responsibility for potentially face-threatening messages by expressing their intentions indirectly.

For example:

"It is quite cold in here."

In context, this utterance functioned as an indirect request for someone to close a window rather than a simple statement about temperature.

4.6 Cross-Cultural Patterns of Politeness

Several cross-cultural patterns emerged from the analysis.

First, all four cultural contexts demonstrated a preference for maintaining interpersonal harmony through politeness strategies. However, the specific forms of politeness varied considerably.

Second, Japan and South Korea exhibited a stronger tendency toward negative politeness, reflecting greater sensitivity to hierarchy, social distance, and respect. The frequent use of honorific expressions and indirect requests suggests that speakers carefully manage interpersonal relationships through deference and formality.

Third, Indonesian interactions displayed a greater reliance on positive politeness strategies. Speakers frequently emphasized solidarity, cooperation, and group cohesion through inclusive expressions and supportive language.

Finally, Indian interactions showed a more balanced distribution of strategies, combining directness with respect depending on social context and interpersonal relationships.

Overall, the findings indicate that while politeness serves a common social function across Asian cultures, its realization is strongly influenced by cultural values, social norms, and communicative expectations.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that politeness strategies are widely employed across the four selected Asian cultural contexts; however, the frequency and realization of these strategies vary considerably according to cultural norms and social expectations. Although all cultures analyzed in this study exhibited concern for maintaining interpersonal harmony and protecting face, the ways in which speakers achieved these goals differed substantially. These findings support the view that politeness is not merely a universal linguistic phenomenon but is deeply embedded within specific sociocultural contexts.

One of the most notable findings is the predominance of negative politeness strategies in the Japanese and South Korean data. Speakers in both cultural contexts frequently employed indirect requests, apologies, honorific expressions, and other forms of linguistic mitigation designed to

minimize imposition on the hearer. This finding aligns closely with Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of negative face, which refers to an individual's desire to maintain autonomy and freedom from interference. By using indirect and deferential expressions, speakers demonstrated sensitivity toward the hearer's personal territory and social status.

However, the prevalence of negative politeness in Japan and South Korea may not be explained solely through Brown and Levinson's framework. Several scholars have argued that politeness in East Asian societies is strongly influenced by social obligations and cultural norms rather than individual face needs. Ide (1989) emphasizes that Japanese politeness often reflects *wakimae* (discernment), which refers to the ability to select appropriate linguistic behavior according to social roles and expectations. Similarly, Matsumoto (1988) argues that Japanese communication places greater emphasis on social relationships and group membership than on individual autonomy. The present findings support these perspectives, as many instances of politeness appeared to be motivated by socially prescribed behavior rather than strategic face management.

The Korean data exhibited similar patterns. The frequent use of honorific expressions and formal speech levels reflects the influence of Confucian values, which emphasize respect for elders, hierarchy, and social order. These findings suggest that politeness in Korean communication functions not only as a pragmatic strategy but also as a cultural mechanism for maintaining social structure and interpersonal harmony.

Another important finding concerns the predominance of positive politeness strategies in the Indonesian data. Indonesian speakers frequently employed inclusive language, expressions of solidarity, compliments, and cooperative forms of interaction. These linguistic choices indicate a tendency to reduce social distance and strengthen interpersonal relationships. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness seeks to satisfy the hearer's desire for approval and acceptance. The findings suggest that Indonesian communication places considerable emphasis on creating a sense of togetherness and mutual support.

This tendency may be associated with the Indonesian cultural concept of *rukun*, which emphasizes social harmony and the avoidance of interpersonal conflict. In many Indonesian communities, maintaining harmonious relationships is often considered more important than expressing disagreement directly. Consequently, speakers frequently use language that promotes cooperation and solidarity. The findings therefore support previous observations that Indonesian politeness is strongly influenced by collectivist values and community-oriented social norms.

The Indian data revealed a relatively balanced distribution of politeness strategies compared to the other cultural contexts. While positive and negative politeness strategies were frequently observed, bald-on-record strategies also appeared more often than in the Japanese and Korean data. This finding suggests that Indian communication reflects a combination of respect for hierarchy and situational directness. In contexts involving authority figures, elders, or formal relationships, speakers frequently employed respectful and indirect forms. However, in family interactions and close social relationships, direct expressions were more acceptable.

This pattern may reflect the complex sociocultural structure of Indian society, where hierarchical relationships coexist with strong interpersonal bonds. Respect, honor, and social status remain important cultural values, yet communicative practices also allow for greater directness within established relationships. Therefore, Indian politeness appears to balance relational closeness and social hierarchy depending on the communicative context.

The findings also revealed relatively limited use of off-record strategies across all four cultural contexts. Although indirect hints and implied meanings were occasionally observed, speakers generally preferred strategies that allowed their intentions to remain understandable while still preserving politeness. This result differs slightly from Hall's (1976) characterization of many Asian societies as high-context cultures, where communication often relies heavily on implicit meaning and contextual interpretation. One possible explanation is that the film dialogues analyzed in this study

were designed to ensure audience comprehension, thereby reducing the frequency of highly ambiguous expressions that might otherwise occur in everyday interaction.

More broadly, the findings support Watts' (2003) argument that politeness should not be viewed as a fixed universal phenomenon. Rather, politeness emerges through social interaction and is interpreted according to cultural expectations. While Brown and Levinson's framework proved useful for categorizing politeness strategies across cultures, the results demonstrate that the meanings and functions of these strategies are shaped by local cultural values. Similar politeness strategies may therefore serve different social purposes in different cultural settings.

The present study contributes to cross-cultural pragmatics by demonstrating both similarities and differences in politeness behavior across selected Asian cultures. A common concern for maintaining social harmony and protecting interpersonal relationships was observed in all four contexts. Nevertheless, Japanese and Korean interactions were characterized by greater deference and indirectness, Indonesian interactions emphasized solidarity and group cohesion, and Indian interactions reflected a balance between directness and respect. These differences highlight the importance of considering cultural values when interpreting politeness behavior in intercultural communication.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that language education should incorporate pragmatic competence alongside grammatical and linguistic competence. Learners who possess strong grammatical knowledge may still experience communication difficulties if they are unfamiliar with culturally appropriate politeness strategies. As globalization increases intercultural interaction, understanding how politeness operates across cultures becomes increasingly important for preventing pragmatic failure and promoting effective communication. Therefore, English language instruction should provide learners with opportunities to explore cultural variations in politeness and develop greater awareness of intercultural communication practices.

Overall, the findings confirm that politeness is both a universal communicative concern and a culturally specific social practice. While speakers across Asian cultures employ various strategies to maintain harmonious relationships, the selection and interpretation of those strategies are strongly influenced by cultural norms, social values, and contextual expectations. These results reinforce the importance of integrating linguistic and cultural perspectives in the study of politeness and cross-cultural communication.

6. CONCLUSION

This study investigated politeness strategies across four selected Asian cultural contexts—India, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea—through a comparative document-based pragmatic analysis. Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, the study examined the occurrence of bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies in conversational excerpts derived from selected films. The findings revealed that all four cultural contexts employed a variety of politeness strategies to maintain interpersonal relationships and social harmony. However, significant differences were observed in the frequency and realization of these strategies across cultures.

The analysis showed that negative politeness was the most dominant strategy in Japanese and South Korean interactions, reflecting strong cultural values related to hierarchy, respect, and social distance. In contrast, Indonesian interactions demonstrated a greater tendency toward positive politeness, emphasizing solidarity, cooperation, and interpersonal closeness. Indian interactions displayed a relatively balanced use of politeness strategies, combining directness with respect according to the communicative context and social relationships. These findings suggest that while the maintenance of face and social harmony is a common concern across Asian cultures, the linguistic realization of politeness is strongly shaped by culturally specific norms and expectations.

The study further demonstrates that Brown and Levinson's politeness theory provides a useful analytical framework for identifying and categorizing politeness strategies across cultures.

Nevertheless, the findings also support alternative perspectives that emphasize the importance of sociocultural norms, social roles, and contextual factors in shaping polite behavior. Consequently, politeness should be understood not only as a universal pragmatic phenomenon but also as a culturally situated practice that reflects local values and social structures.

This study contributes to the field of cross-cultural pragmatics by providing a comparative analysis of politeness strategies across multiple Asian cultures using a unified analytical framework and comparable documentary data. The findings offer valuable insights for researchers, language educators, and intercultural communicators seeking to understand how politeness operates in diverse cultural settings. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of incorporating pragmatic and intercultural competence into language education to prepare learners for effective communication in increasingly globalized environments.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its reliance on documentary sources derived from selected films, which may not fully represent naturally occurring communication in everyday life. Future research may incorporate larger datasets, additional Asian cultural contexts, and multiple forms of authentic discourse such as interviews, social media interactions, television programs, or spoken corpora. Further studies may also explore specific speech acts, such as requests, apologies, refusals, and compliments, to provide a more detailed understanding of politeness practices across cultures.

REFERENCES

- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. Anchor Books.
- Gu, Y. (1990). Politeness phenomena in modern Chinese. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 14(2), 237–257. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(90\)90082-O](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(90)90082-O)
- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. Anchor Press.
- Ide, S. (1989). Formal forms and discernment: Two neglected aspects of universals of linguistic politeness. *Multilingua*, 8(2–3), 223–248. <https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.1989.8.2-3.223>
- Jucker, A. H. (2012). Pragmatics in the history of linguistic thought. In K. Allan & K. M. Jaszczolt (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of pragmatics* (pp. 495–512). Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, R. (1973). The logic of politeness; or, minding your p's and q's. In C. Corum, T. C. Smith-Stark, & A. Weiser (Eds.), *Papers from the ninth regional meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society* (pp. 292–305). Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman.
- Matsumoto, Y. (1988). Reexamination of the universality of face: Politeness phenomena in Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 12(4), 403–426. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(88\)90003-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(88)90003-3)
- Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 91–112. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/4.2.91>
- Watts, R. J. (2003). *Politeness*. Cambridge University Press.
- Yule, G. (2020). *The study of language* (7th ed.). Cambridge University Press.