

STUDY GUIDE



THE FUTURE PERFECT (EL FUTURO PERFECTO)

a Film by NELE WOHLATZ

ARGENTINA/2016/65 MIN
Spanish and Mandarin with English subtitles



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BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before watching a foreign film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country where that film comes from. Find two or three articles on contemporary Argentina and write a brief summary on what is happening and what has happened in the country. Please use reliable sources.

INTRODUCING THE FILM

A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film's narrative, genre, style, and key participants in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for *The Future Perfect*:

Xiaobin is 17 years old and does not speak a single word of Spanish when she arrives in Argentina. But a few days later, she already has a new name, Beatriz, and a job in a Chinese supermarket. Her family lives in a parallel world in a launderette, far removed from the Argentinians. Xiaobin secretly saves money and enrolls at a language school. She tries out in the street what she learns there. After having learned how to “make appointments,” she arranges to meet a supermarket customer, Vijay. He comes from India, and although they can barely communicate with each other, they start a secret romance. And when she practices the conditional, the form of possibility, Xiaobin starts thinking about the future. What would happen if her parents learned about Vijay? The more she masters the Spanish language, the more she interferes in the scenario.



- ☐ From the film synopsis text, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film? From this same text, try to identify the main elements from the film's plot and the socio-political background to the film.
- ☐ How does the trailer, poster, and image stills encourage you to watch the film?
- ☐ Can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about just from the marketing materials (i.e. trailer, poster, and image stills)?

AFTER WATCHING THE FILM

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ☐ What do the close up and medium shots of the different characters aim to portray? What can you uncover from the characters' emotions from these shots? Do these emotions vary throughout the narrative? Cite specific scenes in your answer and connect them to the plot.
- ☐ The director states in an interview¹, “I came up with idea of using the scenes in the language school as the structuring elements of the film...I thought of Xiaobin's classmates as a Greek chorus that interrupts the life of the protagonist and comments on it, judges or predicts.” Summarize the organization of the film's plot by explaining how the language school scenes work as different chapters of Xiaobin's story.



(continued on next page)

¹ Beck, G (2016). Language as a rehearsal space: An interview with Nele Wohlatz. *Notebook by MUBI*. <https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/language-as-a-rehearsal-space-an-interview-with-nele-wohlatz>

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES *(continued)*

- The minimal dialogue in the beginning of the narrative invites the audience to pay closer attention to the *mise-en-scène*². Compare this minimal dialogue and *mise-en-scène* to scenes that occur later in the film. What happens to the *mise-en-scène* and dialogue as Xiaobin changes? Why does this change occur?
- Think about the color scheme throughout the film. Is the palette bright, or dull? Vibrant or pale? Does the color palette change throughout the narrative, or does it stay the same? How do the colors reflect the tone and themes of the narrative?

² "Mise-en-scène...is used in film to refer to everything that goes into the composition of a shot--framing, movement of the camera and characters, lighting, set design and the visual environment, and sound."
"Term Index." *The Columbia Film Language Glossary*. <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/>

NARRATIVE

- What assumptions can you make about the film from the first scene (00:57-03:35)? What do you think the film is about? Do these assumptions evolve or stay the same as the film continues?
- How is Xiaobin introduced to the audience (00:57-10:37)? Think about her behavior and dialogue. What emotions does she exhibit? Does she verbalize any of her anxieties? What can you tell about her personality just from her behavior?
- Why do you think the filmmaker chose a woman as the main character?
- As the narrative unfolds, what do you learn about Xiaobin's values, motivations, and aspirations?
- How does Xiaobin handle the process of assimilating to Argentine culture? How does she balance her Chinese, immigrant identity while adapting to her new surroundings? Why do you think Xiaobin wants to learn Spanish while her mom calls her studying "useless"? Cite specific scene(s) to support your response.
- How does the relationship between Xiaobin and Vijay advance the plot? What are the similarities and differences between the two characters? How does this relationship benefit Xiaobin? Does it create any problems, and if so, do these problems get resolved?
- Xiaobin's siblings are Argentine; yet, their experiences are different from other native-born Argentines. Select and analyze scene(s) that demonstrate these differences
- Describe how Xiaobin and her classmates connect with other Argentines, despite the language barrier.
- Think about the scene where the Argentine actor attempts to teach Xiaobin and the other two Asian immigrants how to cry. What is the symbolism of the scene? Why is the Argentine teaching Xiaobin a primal, human emotion?
- How does Xiaobin's character develop as she learns to speak more Spanish? What is the filmmaker trying to say about the capabilities of language?
- What occurs in the plot when Xiaobin learns the conditional verb tense? Does Xiaobin start to experience character development or change? If so, what does the conditional verb tense symbolize for Xiaobin? Pay close attention to the dialogue in the classroom scene (44:08-46:15) when formulating your response.
- Is the narrative suspended, or is there a resolution in the final scene (1:00:06-1:02:20)? Why do you think Xiaobin imagines, or actually captures, the cat as a pet? What does that scene symbolize?
- What did you enjoy most about the film? Was there something you did not like or fully understand?



THEMES

- ❑ Explain how the opening minutes introduce the narrative's major themes.
- ❑ The director states in an interview³, "The language school could be understood as a rehearsal stage for a new identity after immigration." How does language offer Xiaobin a new way to experience life in Argentina? How does language not only influence her present, but also her future?
- ❑ Analyze the scene in Vijay's apartment (35:01-38:36). How does this scene connect to the main theme(s) that emerge in this narrative?
- ❑ What message do you believe the director wants the audience to understand about immigration, and more specifically, the process of identity formation in a new country? Analyze her intentions using key scenes throughout the film.
- ❑ How does the director create a positive image of diversity and immigration? Think about Xiaobin's interactions with different Argentines and immigrants and cite specific scene(s) in your response.
- ❑ Compare and contrast *The Future Perfect* to other films about immigrants that you have seen. Are there any similarities or differences in theme(s)? Think about issues such as xenophobia, sexism, and racism. Does this film include these issues? How does the inclusion or exclusion of these issues impact the tone?
- ❑ How does the language barrier influence our interactions with others? How does language give us an identity; and how does the lack of language strip us of an identity?
- ❑ How is Xiaobin's immigrant experience similar to the immigrant experience in the United States? How is it different?
- ❑ Does the last scene (1:00:06-1:02:20) give the audience a concluding message regarding the film's theme(s)? Why or why not? What tone does the film end on? How does this tone impact the theme(s) that emerge throughout the film?
- ❑ Explain whether you believe the themes that emerge from the narrative are universal, or whether they can only apply to Argentine society.

³ Beck, G (2016). Language as a rehearsal space: An interview with Nele Wohlatz. *Notebook by MUBI*. <https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/language-as-a-rehearsal-space-an-interview-with-nele-wohlatz>

