

Giving Invitations Is Like Borrowing Money for Chinese Speakers of English: A Cognitive Sociolinguistic Study of Email Invitations

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Abstract—Cognitive linguists have recently made great efforts to integrate their research interests with Labovian sociolinguistics. One of the promising areas of investigation in cognitive sociolinguistics is metaphor variation. In this study, we aimed to compare metaphor differences in email invitations from Chinese speakers of English and native speakers of English. Twenty-nine college students in Taiwan were recruited to write English email invitations in four hypothetical situations, so a total of 114 invitation emails were collected, which constituted the Chinese English corpus. These students were also asked to download 56 email invitations from the Internet to constitute the non-Chinese English corpus. Our preliminary observations led us to identify two metaphors for the respective corpora: “Giving invitation is borrowing money” for the Chinese English corpus, while “Giving invitation is delivering messages” for the non-Chinese English corpus. To test our hypothesis, we compared these two sets of data in terms of information sequencing and verb usage. For information sequencing, Chinese speakers of English tend to locate their invitation sentences in the later part of an email because they consider invitation as a face-threatening act, which requires small talk before they actually state their purposes. As for verb usage, Chinese speakers of English preferred to use WANT, NEED, and HOPE in their invitation sentences since these three verbs express their personal needs. A VARBRUL analysis was conducted to identify three factor groups that could best account for the use of these three verbs: i.e., email sender’s role, gender and perceived distance between the sender and the recipient.

Index Terms—cognitive sociolinguistics, invitation, email, information sequencing

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, writing emails in English has become one of the most important communication tools in our daily life. We use English invitation emails widely in the occasions such as weddings, conferences, and business. It is important to know how to write an email invitation not only to show our politeness but also to successfully get other people to join the activities we hold.

As email is a new issue, previous research focusing on request emails has shown that many students are unable to make requests in emails appropriately. The reasons for this could be that students have not mastered English or they are unaware of the cultural differences between L1 and L2. As Chen (2006) pointed out, “For L2 learners, the challenge of composing this type of e-mail can be greater due not only to their limited linguistic ability but also their unfamiliarity with the target culture’s norms and values” (p. 35). However, there has not been any study on email invitation, although several papers have investigated the speech act of “invitation” and the strategies of refusing/declining invitations. For example, Garc ía (1996) focused on teaching the performance of declining an invitation. As a guidance paper of making an oral invitation, Garc ía (1999) mentioned different stages and types of invitations and responses of Venezuelan Spanish. The three stages were “making an invitation”, “insistence-response”, and “wrap-up”. Félix-Brasdefer (2003) investigated the direct and indirect invitation strategies used by native speakers and advanced non-native speakers of Spanish when they declined an invitation in three different situations. This study not only discussed declining an invitation but also put emphasis on cross-cultural investigation of pragmatic strategies in American English and Latin American Spanish. The result showed that Americans were more direct when they were speaking English (ENG-ENG) than Latin Americans when they were speaking Spanish (SPN-SPN). For instance, the SPN-SPN group of people would adopt the indirect strategy like: “Perfect. I’ll come by after I finish the exam”, even if he could not attend the graduation dinner of his student. However, no one used this *Explicit Acceptance strategy* in the ENG-ENG group. On the other hand, the ENG-ENG group of participants preferred using direct strategies such as *Excuse/Explanation strategy*: “...but, I just have a prior commitment.” Salmani-Nodoushan (2006) conducted a study that contrasted the differences between

two language strategies. Based on Clark and Isaacs' (1990) work, he conducted a comparative sociopragmatic study to test if Persian ostensible and genuine invitations could be distinguished by the features including pretense, mutual recognition, collusion, ambivalence and off-record purpose. The findings confirmed his hypothesis. Another study on invitation was also conducted by Felix-Brasdefer (2008). In his study, the learners had to role-play how to decline an invitation and verbally report their retrospections immediately after the role-plays. This study helped us understand the strategies the Spanish learners used and the cognitive processes and perceptions of Spanish learners when they refused invitations from a person of equal and higher status.

Although previous studies compared and listed the different strategies of invitations, the cognitive concepts of invitation have rarely been addressed. Hummert (1999) suggested that social cognitive processes are important to understand the complex impact on our self perception and interpersonal interactions. One issue she mentioned was age stereotypes as person perception schemas. Her approach was different from the traditional way of sociology to investigate stereotypes. She argued that using the traditional perspectives, i.e., the sociocultural and psychodynamic perspectives, to discuss age stereotypes would discourage us from acknowledging the ways in which age stereotypes influence our own perceptions and behaviors (p.177). Thus, she believed people can know more about age stereotypes from social cognitive perspective. Wolf (2008) mentioned two advantages of a cognitive sociolinguistic approach in her discussion of World Englishes. First and foremost, the conceptualizations underlying language are systematic in their universal and culture-specific dimensions. Therefore, cognitive sociolinguistics can explain culture-specific patterns such as keywords, prototypical differences, and conceptualizations.

However, the schema of people is not fixed but there are some variations due to factors such as gender, class, or age. Labov (1972) has demonstrated to us that linguistic variations exist within a given group. In his experiment, he went to three levels of department stores to investigate the use of (r) by New York people. His hypothesis was that if any two subgroups of New York City speakers are ranked in a scale of social stratification, they would be ranked in the same order by their differential use of (r). The result revealed that the salespeople in the highest-ranked store had the highest values of (r); and those in the lowest-ranked store showed the lowest values. One approach to address linguistic variations is to use metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) mentioned that metaphor is everywhere in our daily life because our conceptual system is largely metaphorical. Although we may not be aware of our conceptual system, our act and thought are influenced by the system. Fiksdal (2008) used metaphors to describe seminars, and she found that variations exist when the metaphors are categorized by the genders of the speakers. However, her study was primarily qualitative without providing any quantitative analysis to strengthen her argument.

In sum, the above review indicates that the research on invitations initiated by Chinese English speakers has been scarce. Furthermore, as pointed out by Hummert (1999), cognitive sociolinguistics can provide us the information of how perceptions and behaviors become so salient during interactions. Therefore, we would like to test our assumptions of metaphorical concepts of invitations. The tests are conducted from two perspectives—information sequencing and invitation sentence verbs because we consider the metaphorical assumptions can be revealed from the construction of an entire email and the verb choice in the invitation sentences. This is important because only when we know the metaphors and schemata toward invitation emails of the target language can we control the skills and write appropriate English email invitations.

Therefore, three research questions are posed:

1. Is there any difference in the information sequencing expressions of invitation emails between Chinese and English? Can the difference be accounted for by their different cognitive concepts of invitation? If the answer is yes, then what features are reflected from the different information sequencing expressions?
2. Is there any difference in the use of verbs in the main invitation sentences? If the answer is yes, then what are the special verbs they used?
3. Can the difference in the use of verbs in the main invitation sentences be accounted for by distance between the receivers and the senders, the gender of the sender, or the representation of the sender?

II. METHOD

Since the aim of this paper was to investigate the conceptualization of making an invitation by comparing the corpus data with students' works to explain the different usages of their email invitations, we would like to assume that invitation concepts can be described by metaphors and the variations of metaphors can be accounted for by linguistic and social variables (Geeraerts, Kristiansen and Peirsman, 2010; Kristiansen and Dirven, 2008).

A. *Participants*

The participants were twenty-nine college students. The students consisted of 20 sophomores and 9 juniors who were recruited from the department of applied English of a university of technology in Taiwan. They had taken the writing courses for at least one year.

B. *Instrument*

A Discourse Completion Task (DCT) with four situations was designed as prompts to elicit email invitations from the students. The situations were selected based on what they would probably encounter in their campus life. For

instance, a situation involved students asking one of their course teachers to be an external reviewer for the oral defense after they finish the graduation project writing. The emails were divided into four situations according to the combination of two variables $\pm R$ (Representation) and $\pm D$ (Distance). *Representation* refers to whether the email sender is writing the email for himself/herself or as the representative of a group. *Distance* refers to the relationship between the student (the sender) and the professor (the receiver), particularly in terms of whether they know each other or not. Table 1 shows the four DCT situations for the email invitations (see also Chen and Huang, 2012, pp.208-209).

TABLE 1.
THE DCT SITUATIONS

Situation 1: You are the member of the Student Association. At the upcoming School Anniversary celebrations, the association will sponsor a series of contests. You would like to invite one of your course teachers to be a judge in the English Speech Contest. How would you write the invitation by email? (+R, -D)
Situation 2: You are a senior student. After you finish the graduation project writing, you need to invite one of your course teachers to be an external reviewer for the oral defense. How would you write the invitation by email? (-R, -D)
Situation 3: You are the head of the Student Association. During the upcoming Christmas vacation, the association will organize an English Camp. You would like to invite the president of SK to give the opening speech. Although you are a student at SK, you have never had a chance to talk to the president in person. How would you write the invitation by email? (+R, +D)
Situation 4: You are a senior student. You are asked to invite a guest speaker to give a speech on job interviews. How would you write the invitation by email? (-R, +D)

C. Data Collection

In this study, the student participants were asked to respond to the four email invitation situations under the exam condition for their Creative English Writing course. Each student was also asked to find three invitation letters on the Internet as their homework assignment. As a result, two corpora were constructed: one with 114 students' invitation emails (one of the students only responded to situations 1 and 2) and the other with 56 Internet downloads. The Internet data came from three different sources: real invitation emails, the sample emails provided by the teaching websites, and finally, the emails which cyber friends would ask how to write invitation emails in the Yahoo Knowledge and Baidu. The advantage of the Internet data is that the data is easily accessible. However, its disadvantage is that we lacked the background of the email such as the relationship between the receivers and the senders.

D. Data Analysis

First of all, we read the invitation emails of the Internet corpus data and tried to explore the verb usage of the main invitation sentences. However, we needed to know which sentence issues the major invitation. We considered the main invitation sentence to be the one in which the first referee "you" refers to the email receiver, and the sentence has the words or phrases such as "invite you", "could you come...", or "we hope you can come..." Having located the main invitation sentences, we not only focused on the verbs of invitation sentences but also looked at the sentences which are positioned prior to invitation sentences in order to know how people sequence the information. That is, in order to know information sequencing, we would also examine the place of the invitation sentences. Then, we counted all of the verbs in the invitation sentences. When an invitation sentence used two verbs, we counted them as two different types of tokens. For instance, in an invitation sentence "We would invite you to be a judge in the English Speech Contest, hope you can take it", there are two types of verbs: the WOULD LIKE TO type and also HOPE type. After that, we used VARBRUL, a logistic regression analysis, to examine whether there were variations in the writing of email invitations.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An overview of the entire data led us to make two different metaphorical assumptions: for Chinese, invitation is like "borrowing money," so Chinese tend to make an invitation after they provide reasons and motivations of their requests. On the other hand, for native English speakers, invitation is like "delivering a message", so they tend to make the invitation right in the beginning of an invitation email.

Our assumptions were examined from three perspectives, each of which provides answers to our research questions. For research question 1, we provide the differences between Chinese and English in terms of information sequencing in invitation emails. For research question 2, we provide different verb usages of Chinese EFL students and Internet corpus data when they make an invitation sentence. For research question 3, we conducted statistical analyses to see if the cognitive variations can be accounted for by the distance between receivers and the senders, the gender, or the representation of the sender.

A. Differences in Information Sequencing

1. Chinese students' invitations: Giving motivations and reasons before invitation

The Chinese students tended to provide the background of the invitation first, such as the motivations and the reasons why they had to make the invitations before they actually issued the invitations. In the data, there were 81 cases (71.05%) of students' productions using the "motivation + invitation" sequence when they made an invitation. We can see such type of information sequencing in (1):

(1) Dear president of SK:

I am the head of Student Association in SK University of Technology. The Student Association will organize an English Camp during the upcoming Christmas vacation. It is the biggest activity for school. Therefore, **I would like to invite you to give opening speech on 12/25/11 Sunday 10:00 a.m.** It is my pleasure to invite you to give opening speech during English camp. R.S.V.P.

Wish you have a wonderful day.

Sincerely, Sophia

This finding is in line with Zhang (1995), who argued that Chinese indirectness is associated with information sequencing. And there are two approaches to be adopted to compare the degree of indirectness of one's utterances. Firstly, we can examine whether the inviter starts his/her intended proposition with small talk or supportive moves. Secondly, we can examine how many words the person uses to convey his/her communicative intention before bringing out the major invitation. As Zhang argued: "The degree of indirectness is determined by the length of the supportive moves which do not contain explicitly the intended proposition" (p. 82).

Zhang's argument is also supported by Chen (2006), who did a longitudinal case study of a Taiwanese student who wrote English request emails to her professors. Chen's findings revealed that the student tended to write a lot of reasons before requesting because the student considered herself to be an indirect and polite person; thus, she assumed that it would be polite for her to make a request with the "reason + request" sequence. This strategy is similar to that found in the invitation emails of our Chinese students. Compared to native speakers of English, Chinese students tended to invite the invitees in the sentences that followed. This phenomenon can explain our cognitive assumption. For Chinese, invitation is like what we have to request others to do. When we invite others, we might be afraid of wasting the invitee's time on the things we request. Therefore, invitation is like borrowing money, which is a face-threatening act. As a result, Chinese have to provide many reasons and small talks before starting the main topic: invitation. Such a finding of information sequencing is similar to that of Chang and Hsu (1998), who compared the email request strategies of Chinese English learners and native English speakers. They provided the schemata and strategies that an email request should contain. Specifically, they found that Chinese learners of English used indirect structures while native speakers of English used direct structures. For example, in one English email request, a Chinese hedged for several sentences, and finally wrote his/her request using the words "Please give me a ride on March 5 to the airport." The hedging strategy is called indirect structure. On the other hand, native speakers of English tend to request directly at the beginning of the email without hedging.

II. Internet corpus invitations: Direct Invitation right after the self-introduction

In Internet corpus data, the inviters tended to make invitations right after their self-introduction, as shown in (2):

(2) Dear Mr. Moriarity:¹

The purpose of this letter is to formally invite you, on behalf of the Board of Directors, to be the Closing Keynote Speaker at the upcoming 2010 IDCRI Conference.

The theme of this conference is "Disabling the Disability - Looking It Straight In the Eye". It will be held at the Mountainview Conference Facility, in Montpelier, Vermont from December 3 to 5, 2010.

[...]

In closing, we would be pleased and honored if you would consent to be our closing speaker at the 2010 IDCRI Conference.

I will call you in a week or so to follow up on this.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Bagnall

In the Internet corpus invitations, the self-introductions include the inviters' names, and the organizations/groups they represent. Then, their motivations or the activity information are shown in the invitation sentence. There are 45 cases (80.36%) of corpus invitations using this strategy. This figure can demonstrate that for the inviters of the corpus data, invitation is like delivering a message, so they would express it in a direct way.

B. Differences in Verb Usages

We also found that the verb usages can prove our metaphorical assumptions of invitations. That is, the different conceptualizations of Chinese and English also cause the different verb usages of invitation sentences.

For Internet corpus, the emails would use the phrases: "It's a pleasure to invite you", "We would like to invite you", and "The purpose of this letter is to invite you to..." to invite the email receivers in their main invitation sentence.

On the other hand, specifically, the Chinese learners of English would use the verbs: "WANT", "NEED", and "HOPE" as the verbs to invite the invitees in their main invitation sentences. However, there is not any invitation sentence which uses this verb in corpus data. This is the most salient difference between Chinese learners of English and native speakers of English when writing invitation letters. Sample 3 is the example of Chinese students who used WANT to make an invitation while sample 4 is the example of Chinese students who used the verb NEED to make an invitation. And sample 5 is the example of HOPE invitation sentence of a Chinese student's email.

(3) Dear Ms. Sue Wang,

Hello, teacher! I'm Moira. I'm the member of the student association. Our school's anniversary celebration is coming,

¹ The deleted sections refer to the other speakers of the conference, which are irrelevant to this study.

and we'll sponsor a series of contests. I **want** to invite you to be our judge for the English speech contest. It'll be held on October, 23.

I looking forward to you.

Yours sincerely,

Moira Cheng

(4) Dear Mr.Lee

We will hold the School Anniversary celebrations and sponsor a series of contests. And we need a judge in English Speech Contest. We think you are the best choice for us. We **need** you very much. If you have the free time, please make contact with us.

Yours truly,

STUDENT Mickey.

(5) Dear Mr. Huang

We will invite teachers to be a judge in the English speech Contest. We **hope** that you can come to be us judge.

I look forward to hearing from you

Sincerely yours,

Gordon

The three main verbs "WANT", "NEED", and "HOPE" which Chinese students would use in invitation sentences associate with the needs of individuals. Just like people are borrowing money, they would satisfy their own personal needs: Be not short of money. In addition, when the phrases "I want..." (wǒ xiǎng...), "I need..." (wǒ xū yào...), and "I hope..." (wǒ xī wàng...) are translated into Chinese, they are meaningful and acceptable in Chinese invitations. Our previous study (Li, Chen, and Rau, 2011) also showed that that learners tended to use these three verbs in their email requests to their professors.

C. Differences in Verb Usage with Respect to Social Variables

To answer research question 3, we would like to know in this section if the three verbs WANT, NEED, and HOPE used by the Chinese learners are subject to the distance of receivers and the senders, the gender of the sender, and the representation of the sender of those Chinese students.

1. WANT, NEED and HOPE with respect to gender

Table 2 shows VARBRUL result of factors for email invitations. Although the chance of informants' choice of the verb HOPE was averagely only 11%, the total value of Chi-square is 7.0798 (df= 3; chi-square=7.82, $p < 0.05$), which did not exceed the critical value. Therefore, the result is reliable, and it shows the distance, representation, and gender are independent variables and they do not interact with each other.

TABLE 2.
VARBRUL RESULT OF FACTORS FOR THE USE OF "HOPE" IN EMAIL INVITATIONS

	Input= 0.111		
	Weight	%	Number/Total
- Distance	[0.431]	12.1	7/58
+Distance	[0.571]	14.3	8/56
- Representation	[0.578]	15.8	9/57
+Representation	[0.422]	10.5	6/57
Gender			
Male	0.985	83.3	5/6
Female	0.442	9.3	10/108
Range	.527		
Token = 114			
Total Chi-square = 7.0798			
Chi-square/cell = 0.8850			
Log likelihood = -35.192			

In Table 2, it shows that males prefer using HOPE as the invitation verb. In addition, we can see the gender significance = 0.000 (< 0.05) from step-up and step-down procedure analysis, which means that the factor "gender" has significance. Consequently, this result shows that there are clear distinctions between males and females in the use of HOPE because the factor weights of males and females are 0.985 and 0.442, respectively.

From the VARBRUL results, we know that males prefer HOPE, and Table 3 shows the frequencies of occurrence of the three verbs used by males and females. Figure 1 shows the verb usages of females when making invitations and it also shows us the verb preference of males.

TABLE 3.
GENDER BY VERB TYPE

	Variations					
External Factor	[+WANT]	[-WANT]	[+NEED]	[-NEED]	[+HOPE]	[- HOPE]
Male	0	6	0	6	5	1
Female	31	77	7	101	10	98
Total	31	83	7	107	15	99

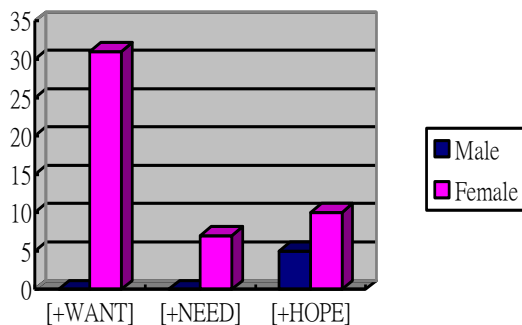


Figure 1: The Frequency of Gender by Verb Type

Table 3 indicates the raw frequencies of occurrence of each invitation verb used by males and females. In Figure 1, it shows that females would use WANT and NEED while males would use HOPE. The possible reasons for the gender preferences of the verbs may be caused by the different concept for the verbs in Chinese culture. Although these three verbs are considered to show people’s requirement, there are still some differences when the verb is transferred to Chinese. When WANT and NEED are translated into Chinese “xiǎng yào” and “xū yào”, the verbs express more about personal needs. Therefore, when these two verbs are used, the status of the inviter becomes lower. However, the Chinese verb HOPE “xī wàng” does not contain the meaning of lowering the inviter’s own status. On the other hand, when a person says “I hope...,” it would not lower the inviter’s status but may even raise it because it is the invitee who should do something for him/her. In addition, females would tend to reveal their own problems more, so they would use the two verbs, WANT and NEED, to invite. On the contrary, males tend not to say their own personal needs, so they would not use WANT and NEED as invitation verb. When it comes to cognitive concept, we would think that males do not reveal their problems, especially if the problem is to borrow money, which is seen as an act threatening others’ face. When they try to use the verbs “WANT and NEED”, they would feel they are showing their weaknesses and put themselves in a lower position, but females tend not to be afraid of showing their weakness. Howden (1994) also mentioned in her study that boys avoid talking about feelings for fear of showing weaknesses, but girls discuss feelings and events in detail, seeking sympathy and support from close friends. Thus, we can know that females tend to show their weaknesses in order to seek sympathy and support from their friends.

II. WANT, NEED, and HOPE with respect to representation

Table 4 shows the raw frequencies of the three verbs when the variable is Representation. Figure 2 shows the trend of the three verb usages with respect to the representation factor.

TABLE 4. REPRESENTATION BY VERB TYPE

External Factor	Variations					
	[+WANT]	[-WANT]	[+NEED]	[-NEED]	[+HOPE]	[- HOPE]
[+R]	13	44	3	54	6	51
[- R]	18	39	4	53	9	48
Total	31	83	7	107	15	99

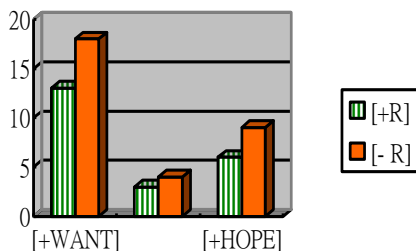


Figure 2: The Frequency of Representation by Verb Type

In Table 4, we can see the raw frequency of occurrence of each verb when the inviters are representatives of a group or not. In Figure 2, we can see easily that when the variable is [-R], the students would use these three verbs more frequently. That is, when Chinese students wrote emails on behalf of themselves, they would use the three verbs more frequently; on the other hand, when they wrote emails on behalf of a group, some of the students would not choose these verbs. One explanation could be that the meanings of the verbs in Chinese express personal needs to a fuller extent, so students would use the three verbs when writing emails for themselves. As for the cognitive concept of Chinese and English emails, we also have the speculation that when Chinese have to borrow money for their personal needs, they tend to say more about their own problems, how pitiful they are, and why they need the money. Therefore,

when they send the invitation emails by themselves, they would use the three verbs more often to show their personal requirements. On the other hand, when people have to borrow money on behalf of their companies or organizations, they would not use this strategy to put themselves in such a low status. They would instead explain their purpose by the words which do not directly represent their requirements but show their politeness (e.g., “We sincerely would like to invite you to attend our opening ceremony...”)

III. WANT, NEED, and HOPE with respect to distance

Table 5 shows the number of the tokens of WANT and NEED with respect to the distance variable. In Figure 3, it shows us directly that Chinese students use more WANT and NEED when they do not know the email receiver.

TABLE 5.
DISTANCE BY VERB TYPE (WANT AND NEED)

Variations	[+WANT]	[-WANT]	[+NEED]	[-NEED]
External Factor				
[+D]	14	42	0	0
[-D]	17	41	7	107
Total	31	83	7	107

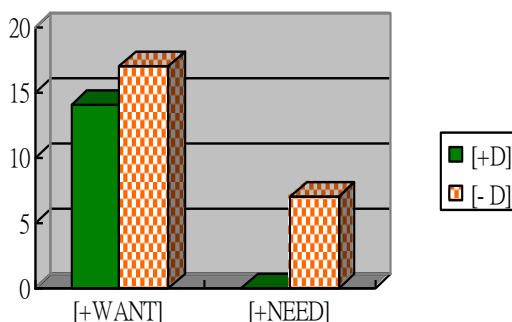


Figure 3: The Frequency of Distance by Verb Type (WANT and NEED)

Table 5 indicates that the verbs of Chinese students' invitation emails were related to social distance. We can know this clearly in Figure 3. When the email senders and receivers do not know each other, the email senders would tend to use the verbs WANT less often or do not use any NEED. On the other hand, they would use these two verbs more frequently when they know the invitees.

Generally speaking, the invitation verbs, WANT and NEED, which were not used in student corpus emails, are used more in [-D] situations. This is an interesting finding because it is a counter example of Chen (2001), who has found that American students would use different strategies of address terms to show politeness or solidarity. For instance, they would use titles and last names to show deference politeness, but when students would like to show solidarity politeness, they would use first names to be the address forms. In contrast, due to Chinese culture, the learners tended to use formal address forms to show respect to their teachers. However, our research shows that students may show their distinction between politeness and solidarity in the verbs they used. Furthermore, we can know from Table 3 that WANT and NEED are only used by females. When email senders know the receivers, females tended to use more WANT and NEED. We can know that females are more likely to reveal their own personal needs, especially for the people they know. This is also the same as the argument of Howden (1994). She pointed out that “Girls discuss feelings and events in detail, seeking sympathy and support from close friends” (p. 50).

Therefore, from the cognitive sociolinguistic perspective, we would like to know the reasons why distance plays an important role in email invitations. We speculate that inviting someone they know is just like borrowing money from someone they know because the inviters are willing to tell the people their own problems to seek sympathy. Besides, for Chinese, as an old saying goes, “Once a teacher, always a father”, which means that the relationship between teachers and students are like kinship (father and son), especially in most situations in which students have to invite their teachers or university president, so making invitations is just like children asking their parents for money. This could explain why the WANT and NEED verbs are used more in [-D] situations.

However, HOPE is an opposite example to the other two verbs, as shown in Table 6 and Figure 4:

TABLE 6.
DISTANCE BY THE VERB “HOPE”

Variations	[+HOPE]	[-HOPE]
External Factor		
[+D]	8	48
[-D]	7	51
Total	15	99

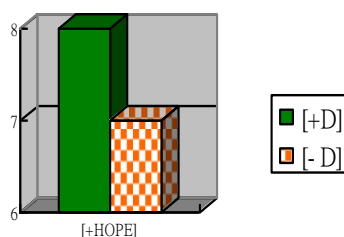


Figure 4: The Frequency of Distance by Verb Type (HOPE)

From Table 6, in contrast, when the verb is HOPE, the Chinese students would use it more often when they do not know the invitees. We can see this clearly in Figure 4. Thus, we think that for students, maybe they think HOPE is a more formal verb than the other two verbs. This table at least shows that the verb HOPE is different from WANT and NEED.

We believe that this result can be linked to Table 3, in which HOPE and WANT/NEED are used by different genders. In Table 3, we know that Chinese meanings of WANT and NEED “xiǎng yào” and “xū yào” are only used by females; on the other hand, most of the males use the Chinese verb HOPE “xī wàng”. Thus, in this case, we know that WANT and NEED are not the same as HOPE, which has the same result as this. The possible answer is that the verbs “WANT and NEED” would express personal needs more while the verb HOPE would not. That is also the reason why males used more HOPE when making an invitation because it is a verb which does not express personal needs like WANT and NEED do.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we use metaphors to describe the influence of different cultures on email invitations. After analyzing the data, we found that an invitation email for Chinese is, in fact, like borrowing money; while an invitation email for native speakers of English is more like delivering messages. Our metaphor has been proven to be tenable from the perspective of information sequencing. According to our data, native speakers of English would make direct invitations in an email since they regard invitation as delivering information. On the other hand, Chinese would put their invitation sentences in the later part of an email because they consider invitation is like borrowing money, a face-threatening act, so they need some warm-ups and small talks before they announce their purposes. Secondly, the metaphorical assumptions can also be proven by the invitation verbs. Chinese would use WANT, NEED, and HOPE in their invitation sentences while the corpus data did not show such use. However, variations also occurred in the use of the three verbs. With respect to gender, females would use WANT and NEED more frequently while males tend to use HOPE. In terms of the REPRESENTATION variable, when the person is not the representative of a group, he or she would use these three verbs more frequently. Finally, DISTANCE also plays an important role in the use of the verbs. That is, WANT and NEED were used more in the [-D] situations, while HOPE is used more often in [+D] the situations. All these variations come from the fact that “WANT and NEED” can express more about the inviter’s personal needs but making his or her status become lower at the same time; however, the verb “HOPE” does not contain such a connotation, and therefore the inviter’s status would not become lower. All in all, this study is an attempt to examine speech acts from the cognitive sociolinguistic perspective and hopes to provide a new research avenue for cross-cultural pragmatics research.

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