

**Should we sing in their languages?:
How language choices influence K-pop's charting across national borders on Spotify
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Though the acoustic components of a musical piece are fundamental in defining its appeal, the lyrical elements are equally important, especially for contemporary popular commercial music. Lyrics not only enrich the emotional experiences of individual listeners (Barradas & Sakka, 2022), but also reflect the constantly shifting cultural values and the broader sociocultural contexts in which these musical works are created (Jin & Ryoo, 2014; Varnum et al., 2021). In the trend of transnational cultural flow, global digital platforms have increasingly enabled local audiences' access to foreign content. While this trend has expanded local audiences' choices in cultural consumption, it was found that their preferences are still largely shaped by the regional language that they speak (Biltereyst, 1992; Ng & Taneja, 2023).

Recent years have seen a rise of K-pop, a music genre from South Korea and originally written in Korean, among the globe. Shaped by K-pop industry's highly commercialized and industrialized production practices, as well as its need for global expansion (Deubel, 2023), K-pop increasingly demonstrates a linguistic feature of hybrid language choice combining Korean and English (Jin & Ryoo, 2014; Schneider, 2023). Some K-pop songs are even fully translated into or written in English, Chinese, and Japanese as K-pop aim to broaden their reach in these countries (Lee, 2018). However, as record labels actively adopt foreign languages lyrics to appeal broader global audiences, performing in languages other than Korean could be a challenge for some artists, exemplified by Jin from BTS (Kwak, 2020; Kwaak, 2021). As an attempt to facilitate the music production in non-Korean languages, HYBE, a leading entertainment company in the K-pop industry, has begun experimenting with AI voice synthesis technology, which allows the conversion of artists' singing from Korean into other languages with the artists' unique voices preserved (Robinson, 2023).

Although the K-pop industry endeavors to overcome language barriers by adopting non-Korean lyrics in expanding across national borders, this strategy has also raised concerns about diminishing the cultural authenticity of K-pop songs and limiting the expression of artists. This project originates from broadly inquiring whether, for music from marginalized cultures and peripheral regions to break into the global market, compromising or even abandoning native language is necessary for commercial success. Specifically, focusing on the potential concerns around K-pop's transnational commercial success and the

preservation of native language in its lyrics, this project explores how writing lyrics in non-Korean local languages influences the K-pop songs' charting Spotify "Weekly Top Songs" in various countries.

To explore this question, I plan to involve three types of data in the analysis. First, I plan to collect Spotify Weekly Top Songs in different countries through MusicID to evaluate the regional commercial success of K-pop. These Spotify charts reflect the contemporary music consumption trends in various countries on this global streaming platform. Considering that currently, most K-pop songs with non-Korean lyrics are in English, Japanese, and Chinese, I focus on countries and regions where these languages are predominant, including Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the UK, the US, Japan, China's Hong Kong and Taiwan. Charts from 2017 till present will be collected. Second, I plan to analyze the language used in K-pop songs' titles and lyrics, by gathering lyrical information from third party sources. Lastly, song features will also be collected as controls—such as artist details, song release timing, and acoustic features—using Spotify API and other reliable sources. In addition to descriptively analyzing the trends across countries from the Spotify charts, I also intend to use a quasi-experimental design and the statistical tool, propensity score matching, to explore how the K-pop industry's practices of writing lyrics in the local languages of non-Korean audiences on these regional audiences' consumption of K-pop music, reflected by the K-pop songs' rankings on Spotify charts in these countries.

From an industry perspective, this project aims to contribute to our understanding of the role of language choice for the lyrical components of musical pieces in the context of contemporary transnational music production and consumption. This project aims to generate a paper to be presented at the *Mapping Hallyu* Symposium, which will be held in Singapore at the end of 2024, as well as a journal paper after the symposium.

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