



The use of K-pop in teaching Korean language

Narae Jung¹

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore¹

Abstract

As K-pop (Korean popular music) gains global popularity, a growing number of students want to learn Korean as a foreign language. K-pop is their major motivation in learning Korean, but it can be a great tool to learn Korean. The purpose of this study is to show how K-pop can be used in a beginning level of Korean class and how students perceive it. Several research studies have shown that using songs in a foreign language class has positive effects on vocabulary acquisition, text recall and lowering the anxiety level. However, it is not easy for educators to choose the right song and prepare the lesson. This paper provides the list of K-pop related to the basic grammar and gives teaching guides how to use them. The survey was conducted after a semester of Korean course with K-pop at the university in Singapore. The result shows that the use of K-pop is effective in engaging students, reinforcing concepts, and linking the grammar elements to actual use. It was also found that K-pop helps students remember the expressions better and improve their listening skills. Based on these findings, this paper put forward a suggestion on how to keep up with the changing trends of K-pop as a teaching aid.

Keywords: *K-pop, songs, language, Teaching Korean, language learning.*

1. Introduction

This study aims to provide teaching guides on how to use K-pop(Korean popular music) in a beginning level of Korean class and to show students' feedback on learning Korean with K-pop. K-pop has gained a huge following all over the world in the past decade. Starting with Psy's Gangnam style, which helped introduce millions of people in countries outside of South Korea to K-pop in 2012 when it was perhaps the single most viral video of the year, countless Korean singers and idol groups including BTS, Blackpink, Exo and Twice are receiving much love from people around the world.

Riding on the global popularity of K-pop, Korean language became a want-to-learn foreign language. The registration numbers of the modern language courses over the last 10 years show that Korean is the most popular foreign language at the university in Singapore. From the results of the survey(Jung, 2017), it was found that one of the major motivating factors in learning Korean is the cultural interest, which means many students want to learn Korean because they like K-pop or K-drama and want to enjoy Korean cultural contents better by understanding Korean without translation. To maintain the motivation of these students, it is important to use K-pop as an educational tool. However, it requires a lot of time and effort for teachers to find the right song and prepare lessons with it. This paper provides the list of K-pop related to the basic grammar and expressions and shows how K-pop can be used in Korean as a foreign language course.

2. The effects of using songs in a foreign language class

Several research studies have shown that using songs in a foreign language class has many advantages. Since Murphey(1990) used the term, 'SSIMH(Song-stuck-in-my-head) phenomena' to explain that songs have more staying power than others, Wallace(1994) proved that the melody of a song can facilitate learning and recall in the initial learning phase as well as in the delayed-recall task. Salcedo(2010) also suggested the use of song in the foreign language classroom may aid memory of text. Due to the memory effect, songs have been used to teach vocabulary in a foreign language class, not to mention that the children's song 'Head, shoulders, knees and toes' have been used in various languages to teach the words of body parts. Metaxa(2013) found out that using authentic songs in the introduction of new vocabulary items is effective on vocabulary acquisition and retention for the second language learners.

Music not only has the advantage in the long-term memory and vocabulary acquisition, but also has a real-world communicative advantage. As a song introduces native and colloquial use of the language, K-pop can be used to learn Korean collocations (Hwang, 2020) and to improve Korean pronunciation (Lee, 2017). A song also presents cultural phenomena and point of view in the lyrics, and it can be a good source to teach culture of the country (Kim, 2014). Teaching a foreign language with a song has the affective value as well as the linguistic value. Using a song in a foreign language classroom can



increase students' academic performance, and indirectly, has the potential to decrease the average level of foreign language classroom anxiety(Dolean, 2016).

Jang(2019) conducted the survey with Korean teachers, and it was revealed that the biggest benefits of using K-pop in Korean class is holding the attention and interest of students, and followed by improving language proficiency such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

3. How to choose and use K-pop in Korean class

K-pop is a genre of music originating in South Korea as part of South Korean culture. In this paper, K-pop is used to teach Korean as a foreign language, therefore, K-pop lyrics written only in English such as BTS's Dynamite and Butter will be excluded. However, K-pop with English mixing in lyrics will be used focusing on Korean parts. To select the right song for Korean class, Jang(2019) proposed the criteria such as the appropriate vocabulary and grammar, popularity, students' interest, and the reflection of Korean culture. In this paper, the most important criterion is that the lyrics include the grammar and expressions related to the topic of the class. It is because the course has the curriculum to follow at the university, and the song is not the main content but the supporting tool to facilitate learning.

After searching the songs with the lyrics including the expressions from the search engine, the next step is checking the popular singer's song first to draw students' attention. From the global research by KOFICE(2020), it was found that the most popular K-pop singers or groups around the world are BTS, Blackpink, Psy, Twice and Bigbang. IU, AKMU and Day6 are added from the pre-course survey on K-pop with the students at the university in Singapore. These singers and groups' songs are prioritized to check the lyrics, and then the level of the whole lyrics should be considered.

The course aims to teach the beginning level 3 of Korean which is equivalent to the level of A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages(CEFR). If the lyrics have the vocabulary and grammar beyond this level, the extra explanation or English subtitles should be prepared. The speed of the song can be edited slower with the audio/video editing program if it is too fast to understand. 18 songs are selected through this process for 18 sessions in one semester, and the list of K-pop related to the basic grammar and expressions are as follows:

	Grammar and Expressions	Singer	Title of the song
1	*A/V(으)면 (if, condition)	Yoona	Introduce me a good person
2	V고 싶다(to want to V)	BTS	Boy with luv, Spring Day
3	V(으)ㄹ 수 있다/없다 (can/ cannot V)	Davichi	This love
4	V(으)ㄹ게요(I will V)	Sam Kim	Who are you
5	V(으)면서, V(으)러 가다 (while V, to go to V)	BTS	The truth untold
6	항상, 자주, 가끔 (always, sometimes, often)	Day6	Days gone by
7	V거나, N(이)나 (V or, N or)	BTS	Anpanman
8	V는 것 (the thing to V)	IU	Palette
9	V(으)ㄴ (adnominal ending)	AKMU	Time and fallen leaves
10	A/ V 지 않다 (negation)	Urban Zakapa	I don't love you
11	V아/어 보다 (have tried to V)	JYP	Had enough parties
12	A(으)ㄴ데, V는데, N인데 (conjunction)	G-dragon	Missing you
13	A/V(으)ㄹ 것 같다, N인 것 같다 (it seems)	IU	Blueming
14	A/V 왔/였으면 좋겠다 (I wish)	Zico	Summer hate
15	A/V(으)까요? (Will it be?)	GOD	Road
16	A/V(으)니까 (becuase)	BTS	DNA
17	N(으)로 (direction to N)	2PM	My house
18	V(으)면 되다 (it is ok to V)	BTS Jungkook	Only then

Table1. The list of K-pop related to the basic grammar and expressions

* A(Adjective), V(Verb), N(Noun)

These songs were used every session for one semester to introduce the topic, to draw the attention, or to find the learned expression from the song with the fill in the blank activity. For example, to teach the expression, 'V고 싶다' on the second session, BTS's spring day was played at the beginning of



the class. Students were asked to count how many ‘보고 싶다’, which means ‘I want to see you’ in English, they can listen from the song. This expression is repeated 9 times in the song and can be caught easily. By explaining what it means after listening the song, the grammar of the session was introduced naturally, and students were excited to learn more. After learning and practicing the expression, students were asked to fill in the blank of the paper while listening to BTS’s ‘Boy with luv’. Every blank was supposed to write with ‘보고 싶다’ such as ‘I want to put your pictures, I want to be with you, and I want to meet your eyes’. From this activity, students could learn how this expression can be widely used in many situations and remember it longer with one of the most popular songs of BTS.

4. Students’ feedback and suggestion

At the end of the semester, students left comments at the online course feedback regarding their experience on learning Korean with K-pop. They mentioned that K-pop helped them more engaged, remember the expressions better, and improve their listening skills. They also wrote that K-pop was good to reinforce concepts and link the grammar elements to actual use.

There is no doubt that students like to learn Korean with K-pop, however, the song’s popularity fades away quickly, and the new songs come out every day, even though teachers spent a long time to choose the song and prepare the lesson. To use the same song longer, it can be used with a new music video covered by a popular singer. For example, GOD’s ‘Road’ is an old song, but it was covered by young singers such as Henry and Kim Feel. Students might not know GOD, but they liked the song, because they could listen to it from the popular TV shows like ‘Begin again’ and ‘Immortal songs’. It is still important for educators to keep up with the new song to follow the students’ interest. It is suggested to share the ideas with other teachers to update the songs and teaching materials.

References

- [1] Dolean, D.D. (2016). The effects of teaching songs during foreign language classes on students’ foreign language anxiety, *Language Teaching Research*, 20(5), 638–653.
- [2] Hwang, K. (2020). A study on Korean collocation teaching method using Korean popular songs. Hankuk University of Foreignn Studies Master’s Thesis.
- [3] Jang, H. (2019). A study on auxiliary textbook development for korean language class utilizing songs. Chungnam National University Master’s Thesis.
- [4] Jung, N. (2017). Korean learning motivation and demotivation of university students in Singapore. *Foreign Languages Education*, 24(3), 237-260.
- [5] Kim, J. (2014). A study on Korean culture educaiton plans using K-pop, Chungnam National University Master’s Thesis.
- [6] KOFICE (2020). Global Hallyu Trends, Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange, Seoul.
- [7] Lee, D. (2017). A study on Chinese Korean learners pronunciation teaching method using songd. Hanyang University Master’s Thesis.
- [8] Metaxa, X. T. (2013). The effect of authentic songs on vocabulary acquisition in the English foreign language classroom. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- [9] Murphey, T. (1990). The Song Stuck in My Head Phenomenon: A Melodic Din in the LAD? *System* 13, 53-64.
- [10] Salcedo, C. S. (2010). The Effects Of Songs In The Foreign Language Classroom On Text Recall, Delayed Text Recall And Involuntary Mental Rehearsal. *Journal of College Teaching and Learning*, 7(6), 19
- [11] Wallace, W.T. (1994). Memory for music: effect of melody on recall of text. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 20, 1471-1485.