

Comparison of Linguistic Hybridization Phenomenon in K-Pop to C-Pop

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Abstract

This study aims to find why people use English in K-Pop and C-Pop and compare the linguistic hybridization phenomenon in K-Pop and C-Pop culture. The examination of K-Pop and C-Pop songs in the 2010s reveals that they both use English frequently in the chorus, and that English is used to express intense feelings and to imitate or pay homage to original western pop songs. However, K-Pop and C-Pop songs show a considerable difference in their linguistic hybridization level, frequency of English in artists' names and the song titles, and reasons for using English lyrics.

I. Introduction

1. Background

The K-Pop industry emerged in the 1990s, and by the late 2000s, K-Pop had become popular around the world. Linguistic hybridization refers to the phenomenon of code-mixing, which is common to K-Pop given its frequent use of English.

Several researchers have studied the linguistic hybridization in K-Pop music. A study of K-Pop songs from 1992-2015 identified two types of artists who use English in their songs: artists who are fond of using hip-hop and non-hip-hop artists (Max 2016). Hip-hop artists integrate English into their own culture in creative and semantically relevant ways. In contrast, non-hip-hop artists use English as a marketing strategy and/or to conform to trends. Other scholars such as Lawrence (2014) argue that the use of English in K-Pop is determined by the structure and content of the song. He concluded that English is most used in K-Pop choruses, intros, titles, and verses. By investigating the content of these English lyrics, the study suggested that English is used as a simplified language of resistance against Korean conservatism as well as English hegemony. This study aims to contribute to past literature by investigating how

English is currently used in K-Pop and the linguistic hybridization in both K-Pop and C-Pop culture.

Unlike K-Pop, C-pop is a relatively new music industry. Open trade and other exchanges with the United States resulted in the exposure to American pop music. This globalization of popular music impacted many East Asian countries, especially Korea and Japan. The huge success of the K-pop and J-Pop industries paved the way for the rise of the C-pop industry.

C-Pop is still in its infancy. Therefore, it is an area that few researchers have studied. Some scholars have examined the role of English in Chinese advertisements, movies, and TV shows. One such study (Ye 2017) points to the fact that the Chinese have become much more open to the commodified Western culture that has accompanied globalization and the spread of English, while still maintaining the importance of more traditional aspects of Chinese culture. This study aims to investigate the linguistic hybridization phenomenon in 2010s C-Pop and compare it to the linguistic hybridization in 2010s K-Pop.

2. Research Question

What are the similarities and differences in the linguistic hybridization of K-Pop and C-Pop?

3. Purpose of the study

Linguistic hybridization is a common phenomenon in K-Pop. In this study, we seek to understand the level of linguistic hybridization in K-Pop and its characteristics. As C-Pop is strongly influenced by K-Pop, this study also aims to uncover the similarities and differences between C-Pop and K-Pop, particularly in their level of linguistic hybridization.

II. Data Collection and Analyzation

1. Source of the data

The data used in this study are from K-Pop and C-Pop music charts of the 2010s. For K-Pop, the Melon Music chart is used, which contains 100 songs. Melon Music is a website used frequently by Koreans. For C-Pop, the China Music Awards chart and Line Music chart are used, collectively totalling 150 songs. China Music Awards has been the dominant Chinese music award since 199 and reflects the most popular Chinese songs in mainland China. Line Music is a website used frequently by people from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. Using these music charts, we collected the frequency of English words in song titles, singers' names, and lyrics.

2. Data analyzation

We recorded the frequency of English words in song titles, singers' names, and lyrics from the collected data. To be categorized as English in this study, the words needed to possess real meaning and be pronounced in an English tone. Therefore, exclamatory words such as "Oh", "Na", and "Ha" were counted as English words if they were enunciated in the English tone. Other words like "ba-ba-ba-baby" were counted as one single word.

	Song & Singer's Name	Release Time	Number of English words in the Title	Number of English words in Singer's Name	Number of English words in the Lyrics						
50	마지막처럼 - BLACKPINK	2017	0	2	86						
51	땀방방 (BANG BANG BANG) - BIGBANG	2015	3	2	85						
52	눈의 눈 - 박효신	2013	0	0	0						
53	에너제틱 (Energetic) - Wanna One (워너원)	2017	1	2	135						
54	All For You - 서인국, 정은지	2012	3	0	34						
55	불꽃남 - BLACKPINK	2016	0	2	82						
56	영화대리 - Zion.T	2014	0	2	0						
57	연아름 - 정은미	2011	0	0	0						
58	소나 - 오지	2015	0	0	0						
59	오늘부터 우리는 - 여자친구 (GFRIEND)	2015	0	2	21						
60	비가 오는 날엔 - 빅스트 (BEAST)	2011	0	1	0						
61	별 달카야 - 불발간사준기	2017	0	0	0						
62	시차 (We Are) (Feat. 로꼬 & GRAY) - 유원재	2017	2	0	120						
63	어렸을까 (Feat. 박경림) - 케이 (PSY)	2012	0	1	0						
64	몰아오지마 (Feat. 용준형 Of 빅스트) - 헤이즈 (Heize)	2016	0	1	8						
65	눈, 코, 입 - 태양	2014	0	0	0						
66	비 - 폴킴 (Paul Kim)	2016	0	2	24						
67	시간을 달린서 (Rough) - 여자친구 (GFRIEND)	2016	1	2	0						
68	버비 (BBIBI) - 아이유 (IU)	2018	2	1	162						
69	음 - 박효신	2016	0	0	0						
70	이런거면 그러저런지 (Feat. Young K) - 백아연	2015	0	0	3						
71	I (Feat. 박명진) - 태연 (TAEYEON)	2015	1	0	59						
72	피해자인 - 원오 (HUMONG)	2014	0	1	42						
73	별불 - 크로렌디 (MOMOLAND)	2018	0	1	76						
74	광화문에서 (At Gwanghwamun) - 주영 (JUYOUNG)	2014	2	0	0						
75	애 사랑 - 다훈	2016	0	0	0						
76	OCH-AHH하게 - TWICE (트와이스)	2015	2	1	116						
77	그대가 좋다 - 셀러티머스 (M.C the MAX)	2014	0	3	0						
78	준원할 뿐 - 로꼬 & 유주	2015	0	0	7						
79	그때와는 사뭇 - 황동진	2016	0	0	0						
80	스물셋 - 아이유 (IU)	2015	0	1	11						
81	Dance The Night Away - TWICE (트와이스)	2018	4	1	175						
82	동백 (Feat. M.C)	2010	0	0	0						
83	적용받은 사랑처럼 - 빅스 빅스 (Buster Buster)	2013	0	2	0						
84	너의 모든 것 - 김지민	2014	0	0	0						
85	그때 헤어지던 날 - 로이킴 (Roy Kim)	2018	0	2	0						
86	그중엔 그대를 만나 - 이서진	2014	0	0	0						
87	오늘 취하면 (Feat. 장도) (Prod. SUGAR) - SURAN (수란)	2017	0	1	30						
88	나의 옛날이야기 - 아이유 (IU)	2014	0	1	0						
89	피 땀 눈물 - 맵시소년단 (BTS)	2016	0	1	24						
90	200% - ANMU (안동주지선)	2014	0	1	132						
91	Boys Are Girls (Feat. Babylon) - 지코 (ZICO)	2015	3	1	148						
92	Marry Me - 마크툼 (MARKTUM) 구윤희	2014	2	1	16						
93	? (음용치) (Feat. 최자, Zion.T) - 크라이미 (primary)	2012	0	1	2						
94	별이 빛나는 밤 - 마마무 (Mamamoo)	2018	0	1	19						
95	오랜 날 오랜 밤 - ANMU (안동주지선)	2017	0	1	0						
96	all of my life - 박진	2017	4	0	42						
97	같은 시간 속의 너 - 나얼 (Naul)	2015	0	1	0						
98	커네 멋대로 - Zion.T	2015	0	2	0						
99	꿈이 끝나?? - 10CM	2016	0	1	0						
100	You Are My Everything - 거미 (Gummy)	2016	4	1	30						
Average					0.59	0.05	29.65				

Table 1. Data Analysis for K-Pop Songs

Song & Singer's Name	Release Time	Number of English words in the Title	Number of English words in Singer's Name	Number of English words in the Lyrics						
76	사랑, 사랑해	2013	0	0	0					
77	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
78	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
79	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
80	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
81	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
82	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
83	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
84	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
85	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
86	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
87	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
88	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
89	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
90	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
91	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
92	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
93	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
94	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
95	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
96	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
97	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
98	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
99	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					
100	사랑을 떠나줘	2013	0	0	0					

Table 2. Data Analysis for C-Pop Songs

Table 1 shows that for K-Pop, 24 out of 100 songs (24%) contained English words in the song title; 68 out of 100 songs (68%) contained English words in singer's names; 55 out of 100 songs (55%) contained English words in the song; and the average English word count in those 55 songs was 53.9. Table 2 shows that for C-Pop, 6 out of

150 songs (4%) contained English words in the song title; 31 out of 150 songs (21%) contained English words in singer's names; 36 out of 150 songs (24%) contained English words in the song; and the average English word count in those 36 songs was 20.9.

III. Results and Discussion

This study further examines the English usage in 10 K-Pop songs and 10 C-Pop songs with the highest frequency of English words. We focused primarily on the English lyrics and their grammar, the relation between the English lyrics and Korean or Chinese lyrics, the relation between the English lyrics and the song itself, and the relation between the English lyrics and the artist.

1. K-Pop

In general, English in K-Pop songs reflects the desire for globalization and attracting more global audiences. English lyrics are used to express romantic or other intense feelings, and to imitate or reference original western pop songs.

i. Globalization

One of the noticeable traits of globalization in K-Pop is the use of English in the artist's name, title, and song chorus. Consider the following example:

(1) TWICE – *Dance the Night Away*

You and me in the moonlight.

다 같이 Party all night long. Yeah, it's good.

One, two, three, let's go. 저 우주 위로.

날아갈 듯 춤추러 가 Hey. Let's dance the night away.

The song chorus, artist's name, and song title all contain English. The artist sings

about how the summer night is relaxing, and invites other people to come and join them. The English lyrics used in the chorus par – "yeah, it's good" and "let's dance the night away" — deliver this song's central message. Using these phrases helps foreign audiences understand the song's meaning quickly.

Additionally, K-Pop songs use English to communicate the concept of a singer or group. "Concept" is a unique and essential characteristic of K-Pop. Some singers, especially idol groups, have a very specific concept that defines them. For example, if a group's concept is cute and energetic, they sing upbeat and dynamic songs instead of sad songs. An artist's concept is relatively constant across their songs, and English is one of the critical strategies used to convey these concepts to foreign listeners. Consider the following example:

(2) BLACKPINK - *DDU-DU DDU-DU*

두 손엔 가득한 Fat check.

궁금하면 해봐 Fact check.

좀 독해 난 Toxic. You 흑해 I'm foxy.

The concept of the idol group BLACKPINK is young, rich, independent, and charismatic. Their lyrics include words like "fat check", "toxic", and "foxy". Such words fit their group concept, and similar words appear in most of their songs. These words reinforce the foreign audience's impression of these artists, thereby making them more memorable.

Lastly, many K-Pop songs mix Korean with English. Both languages are combined cleverly to form, for example, a pun. Consider TWICE's OOH-AHH 하게 as an example. OOH-AHH is an English phrase, but can also be written in Korean as 우아. In

Korean, *우아하게* means to be elegant, making this TWICE song itself a play on languages. Though OOH–AHH does not have an actual meaning in English, it is easier for foreign audiences to follow, while the Korean words can be understood by the Korean audience. K–Pop is not just trying to appeal to foreign fans. Instead, the genre tries to attract both Korean speakers and international listeners. This is one of the key reasons why K–Pop is so popular worldwide.

ii. Romantic or other intense feelings

K-Pop uses English words to express romantic or other intense feelings. A prime example of this is:

(3) TWICE – *TT*

I love you so much.

Tell me that you'd be my baby.

These two English sentences are repeated throughout the song. Korean culture is strongly influenced by Confucianism, which holds that people should be calm and suppress their intense feelings. Because of this, Korean people would find it strange to express strong emotions with Korean lyrics as those expressions are seldom used in daily life. Hence, English lyrics are used instead to convey such strong emotions.

iii. Imitate/reference western pop songs

K-Pop also uses English words to recreate or pay homage to western pop songs. Some K-Pop songs entirely use English in their rap verses. Consider the following example:

(4) BLACKPINK – *마지막처럼*

Uh, I'ma fall in love, baby
 You gon' finna catch me, uh
 Give you all of this, baby
 Call me pretty and nasty
 'Cause we gonna get it, my love
 You can bet it on black
 We gon' double the stack on them, whoa!
 I be the Bonnie and you be my Clyde.
 We ride or die, Xs and Os.

The entirety of the rap is composed in English. Many of the lyrics are used in a casual and colloquial manner, such as “I'ma”, “gon' finna”, and “gon' double”. The line, “I be the Bonnie and you be my Clyde” includes a reference to “Bonnie and Clyde,” the infamous American criminal couple. Bonnie and Clyde references also commonly appear in western pop songs, for example, Beyoncé's *Bonnie and Clyde*. These English words and sentences are used to evoke characteristics of western pop songs. Doing so creates more opportunities for globalization. Western audiences listening to K-Pop songs are able to identify the familiar western elements contained in them.

2. C-Pop

In general, C-Pop uses English to draw attention. The linguistic hybridization level of C-pop is relatively lower than in K-Pop. English lyrics in C-Pop are used to express romantic or other intense feelings and in reference to other western pop songs.

i. Draw attention

Many C-Pop songs have English lyrics before the main content, and this is intended to draw attention to the following Chinese lyrics. Consider the following example:

(5) 蔡依林 — 大艺术家

WAKE UP, 你是大艺术家, 你真心创作的爱无价;

WAKE UP, 别再做慈善家, 你其实没有那么爱他。

爱是缪斯女神的吻, 谁都应该被宠爱纹身。

GO GET IT. GO GET IT. 那种美能让维纳斯诞生。

“Wake up” precedes “大艺术家,” and “go get it” is before the last line of the chorus. The English lyrics themselves do not provide any essential meaning to the song, but they function as a reminder. This combination of English and Chinese lyrics helps draw the listener’s attention to the critical Chinese lyrics that follow it.

ii. Lower linguistic hybridization level

The use of English in C-Pop is less accurate than in K-Pop. At times, some of the English sounds unnatural and might be accompanied by grammatical mistakes. For example:

(6) 五月天 — 派对动物

Let’s go party party all night oh oh.

And many many good times oh oh.

Both English lines are repeated throughout the song. The English lyrics are straightforward, yet grammatically incorrect. This stylistic choice is made so that Chinese audiences are better able to follow the song.

iii. Romantic or other intense feelings

Like Koreans, Chinese people are also strongly influenced by Confucianism. Therefore, C-Pop also uses English words to express romantic emotions or other intense feelings. Usually, the English lyrics cooperate with Chinese lyrics to express these

sentiments:

(7) 高尔宣 OSN – Without You

So...I don't wanna live without you.

我没有办法。'Cause I've been through that.

重蹈覆辙。I can't do that. 没得负责。

Oh damn too bad.

I need you right now yo where you at? 先把我的面子放两边。

This song utilizes a strong contrast between the Chinese and English lyrics. “没得负责” (I can't be responsible for it) and “先把我的面子放两边” (I would first put my face away) are relatively conservative and indirect. In contrast, the English lyrics, “I don't wanna live without you” and “I need you right now” express more intense and forthcoming emotions.

iv. Imitate or honor western pop songs

In China, there exists a stereotype that most western pop songs contain expletives. When C-Pop artists seek to imitate the style of western pop songs, therefore, they usually incorporate such explicit language:

(8) 玖壹壹 – 嘻哈装脚情

老天再不下雨。MADER FUCKER.

眼看小妞走经过。真正盖 SO BEAUTIFUL.

听着我的乡村 HIPHOP. 然后再带妳回家。

The song includes “mader fucker”. However, there is no actual meaning to the phrase and it is inconsistent with the rest of the song lyrics. Additions like this are often

used in C-Pop songs to imitate western pop songs and conform to a stereotype.

V. Conclusions

1. Similarities and differences

The comparison of the linguistic hybridization pattern in K-Pop and C-Pop songs released in the 2010s revealed similarities and differences with respect to the usage of English, the purpose of English, and the linguistic hybridization level. Both K-Pop and C-Pop songs used English in the chorus to express intense emotion or to reference western pop songs. However, K-Pop had a higher linguistic hybridization level than C-Pop, as the latter genre's use of English lyrics were more unnatural and grammatically incorrect. While many K-Pop artists used English in their names and song titles, this was less common for C-Pop artists. The purpose of English lyrics in K-pop choruses was to make the song easier to understand by global fans. In contrast, English lyrics in C-pop choruses were used to draw attention to the following Chinese lyrics. K-Pop used casual English words to pay homage to western pop songs and attract western fans, while C-Pop did so to imitate the western pop song stereotype. Lastly, English in K-Pop songs reflected a desire to attract more global audiences, whereas there was no evidence for this motive in C-Pop.

2. Implications

The K-Pop industry is a pioneer of music, and C-Pop is strongly influenced by it. This study investigates the similarities and differences between K-Pop and C-Pop, which might provide insights for speculating the future of C-Pop based on K-Pop.

This investigation has found that English in K-Pop is strongly associated with globalization. By analyzing the usage of English in K-Pop, we can conclude that

English is critical to K-Pop's success worldwide – an insight that may be helpful to other developing music industries.

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