

THE ROLE OF MULTILINGUALISM IN ENHANCING THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE OF K-POP FANS

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the role of multilingualism in enriching the language experiences of K-pop fans. The study is driven by the need to understand how multilingual interactions among fans and idols contribute to language acquisition, emotional engagement, and cultural exchange within fandom communities. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, data were gathered through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, focusing on fans from the LUNÉ and ARMY fandoms. This study addresses the gap in previous research, which rarely examines fans' emotional and social experiences with multilingual content. Findings reveal that multilingualism not only motivates fans to learn languages such as Korean, Japanese, and English but also enhances their engagement in transnational fan communities. Fans actively participate in code-switching, use translation tools, and engage in multilingual conversations on platforms like WhatsApp, Weverse, and Twitter. The research concludes that multilingualism significantly shapes fans' linguistic practices, strengthens emotional bonds with idols, and promotes meaningful cross-cultural communication. These findings underscore the educational and social value of multilingualism within global fandoms, positioning it as a powerful driver of informal language learning.

Keywords: K-pop fandom, Language motivation, Multilingualism

INTRODUCTION

The Korean Wave, or *Hallyu* in Korean, symbolizes the rapid growth of Korea's cultural industry and the global export of its popular culture. While the Korean Wave began in 1997, it has since emerged as a truly transnational cultural phenomenon. *Hallyu* encompasses a wide range of Korean entertainment content such as K-pop music, K-dramas, Korean films, and even digital games that has spread far beyond the borders of South Korea, gaining widespread popularity across Asia, Europe, America, Africa, and the Middle East (Jin, 2018).

According to a survey conducted by the Korea Foundation, by the end of 2022, the number of *Hallyu* fans worldwide exceeded 178 million, nineteen times more than the 9.26 million counted in the first survey in 2012 (Korea Foundation, 2024). Based on information provided by 149 Korean diplomatic missions, *Hallyu* had established a presence in 118 countries by

2022. The survey classified *Hallyu* statistics across four continents to evaluate whether the Korean Wave had succeeded in positioning itself as a pioneer of global popular culture. The Asia-Oceania region remains *Hallyu*'s strongest base, with approximately 130 million fans.

Figure 1. Global 'Hallyu' Fans Exceed 178 million



Source: Korea Foundation Newsletter (2023)

The New Korean Wave is led by the spread of K-pop. The rapid growth of social networking services such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter has allowed the Korean Wave to expand beyond Asia and into Europe (Jang & Paik, 2012). K-pop has spearheaded the Korean Wave, particularly among Western audiences, along with dramas and films that have gained extraordinary popularity in those regions. The Korean Wave has also increased the popularity of other Korean cultural products, such as K-dramas, K-films, K-pop music and dance (B-boy), and video games. To a lesser extent, fashion, food, tourism, and language have also been influenced.

K-Pop is not only known for its captivating music and performances but also for its significant influence on fans' interest in language learning. Many K-Pop idols come from diverse countries, resulting in groups that often consist of members fluent in multiple languages. This situation encourages fans to learn new languages to better understand their idols and engage with the global community. This strategy is supported by major Korean entertainment agencies such as HYBE, SM Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment, which actively debut idols from various countries. For example, HYBE now has three main branches in Korea, the United States, and Japan, strengthening linguistic and cultural diversity within the K-Pop industry while expanding its global reach.

The researcher's personal experience as a K-pop fan serves as the starting point to explore how idols' multilingual abilities influence fans in their language-learning journeys. Many fans feel inspired by idols who can communicate in multiple languages, motivating them to acquire new languages to get closer to and better understand their favorite idols. For instance, the group &TEAM, which debuted at the end of 2022, consists of members with diverse language skills, ranging from bilingual to multilingual. This linguistic diversity within the group becomes a real motivation for fans to develop their language abilities and deepen their experience as part of the global K-Pop community. Based on this background, this study focuses on how the language abilities possessed by K-pop idols and fans can enrich language learning experiences. Furthermore, the research aims to examine the extent to which multilingual interactions can strengthen the bonds between fans and idols as well as among fans within the international community.

This research highlights how K-pop fans experience, process and utilize the multilingualism used by their idols and fellow fans on various social media platforms to enrich their fandom language experience. The phenomenon of multilingualism in K-pop is increasingly common. As K-pop has gone global, it has attracted many people from different countries to learn K-pop music and dance, with many becoming trainees and auditioning to debut as the next generation of K-Pop idols. Multilingualism in K-pop fandom plays an important role in this study, as fans from different language backgrounds come together and interact, sharing their love for the music and their idols. International fans who do not speak Korean as their native language have shown a remarkable ability to overcome language barriers and develop a deep affinity for K-pop.

However, most existing research tends to focus on the linguistic strategies employed by K-pop agencies or the learning outcomes among fans, without exploring how multilingualism is emotionally experienced and socially constructed within fan communities. There is still limited research investigating how fans themselves perceive, respond to, and engage with multilingual content as part of their everyday fandom practices. This research aims to fill that gap by examining the emotional, social, and linguistic dimensions of multilingualism as experienced by international K-pop fans in digital spaces.

Multilingual people are those who have the ability to communicate in more than one language, both actively (such as speaking and writing) and passively (such as understanding through reading and listening). Interestingly, their backgrounds are very diverse - some have only mastered one language (L1) since childhood and then learned another language later in

life, while others have been accustomed to two or more languages since birth (early multilingual). (Li & Moyer, 2008).

The term *multilingual* is defined as “(of people or groups) able to use more than two languages for communication, or (of a thing) written or spoken in more than two different languages” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Multilingual in simple terms, refers to an individual who is able to speak in multiple languages. Whereas, multilingualism refers to the condition or phenomenon where individuals or groups use more than one language in their daily lives.

According to Saptadi (2024) in his book *Pendidikan Multilingual*, multilingualism refers to the ability of individuals or groups to use more than one language in their daily lives. This phenomenon encompasses the skills of speaking, writing, reading, and comprehending multiple languages with varying degrees of proficiency. Conez (2013) explains that multilingualism is a dual phenomenon, functioning both as an individual ability and as a social practice. It can be regarded as a personal competence or as the use of languages within a society. These two aspects are not entirely separate, as individuals living in multilingual communities are more likely to speak multiple languages compared to those residing in monolingual societies.

The phenomenon of multilingualism shows that the acquisition of multiple languages does not always go through the same process. Environmental factors, such as a multilingual family or formal education, greatly influence how a person becomes multilingual (Humaera et al., 2023). In addition, passive skills (such as understanding without actively speaking) are often undervalued even though they are important to multilingualism. This proves that the definition of “language proficiency” is not always absolute, but rather flexible depending on the social context and individual needs. In other words, being multilingual is like having many keys to open many doors, it does not matter when or how we get them, it matters how we use them.

Multilingualism can enrich a person’s social experience by enabling them to understand different cultural perspectives and adapt to diverse communicative situations. Psychologically, the ability to speak two or more languages also helps individuals feel more connected to different cultural identities.

From a social point of view, multilingualism does not merely reflect linguistic ability but also influences an individual’s identity and relationships with different communities. Mastery of several languages often reflects a person’s engagement with various cultures and identities, making language an important bridge to understanding and appreciating cultural diversity (Saptadi, 2024).

Multilingualism can be categorized into several types depending on how and when a person acquires these languages. Multilingualism, in terms of ability, is divided into two types: active or productive, and passive or receptive. Active or productive multilingualism is the ability to speak and understand more than one language proficiently, both orally and in writing. Passive or receptive multilingualism is the ability to understand more than one language but not yet be able to speak it fluently.

Multilingualism can also be categorized by type into two categories: balanced multilingualism and dominant multilingualism. Balanced multilingualism refers to the ability to master two or more languages equally well. A person is said to have balanced multilingualism if they master more than two languages at an equal level. Dominant multilingualism is the ability to master one language more dominantly than others. A person is said to have dominant multilingualism if they are proficient in more than two languages, but one language is more prominent than the others (Suhardi in Luthf Annisa, 2023).

According to Sahril, Harahap, and Hermanto in Saptadi, multilingualism can be distinguished based on its scope concerning the existence of individuals or the surrounding community. Individual multilingualism refers to a person's ability to use several languages, either actively or passively. People with this ability often use different languages in different contexts, such as using one language at home and another language at work or school. Social multilingualism occurs when a community or country actively uses more than one language in daily social, economic, and political interactions (Saptadi, 2024).

K-pop, or Korean Pop, is a genre of popular music originating from Korea, which combines elements of traditional Korean music with Western musical influences. It is characterized by the frequent use of English phrases in Korean song lyrics and is usually performed by young solo singers or groups, with complex dance moves and distinctive, colorful costumes designed to attract international audiences. ("K-pop, N." - Oxford English Dictionary)

Previous research shows that K-pop is not only a form of entertainment for its fans but also serves as a motivation for learning various languages. On average, K-pop fans are influenced by the multilingual abilities of their idols, leading to the perception that an idol must be able to speak multiple languages in order to communicate with global fans. Fans also feel that if they can master their idols' languages, their connection and communication with the idols will become closer (Putri, et al., 2024). Multilingualism in K-pop plays an important role in increasing fan engagement by breaking down language barriers and building deeper relationships between idols and global fans.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research analyzes the use of language and the experiences of K-pop fans by uncovering the various ways in which fans, especially those who are not native Korean speakers, utilize their multilingual abilities to engage with the international K-pop fan community while simultaneously enhancing their own language skills.

The research method used by the researchers in this study is the descriptive qualitative method. According to Moloeng (in Fiantika, 2020), qualitative research is research that aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions, holistically by utilizing various natural methods. Therefore, this research on the phenomenon of multilingualism in K-pop fans uses a qualitative method that aims to describe in detail and in-depth the multilingualism of K-pop fans in enhancing their language experience.

1. Data Collection Techniques

The researchers collected data through observation, interviews, and documentation.

a. Observation

Observation is a systematic process of recording human behavioral patterns, objects, and events without using questions or communicating with the subjects. This process transforms facts into data (Adiwijaya et al., 2024).

The type of observation carried out in this study was Non-Participant Observation, where the researchers did not directly engage with the individuals or activities being studied. Instead, the researchers collected data purely through observation.

Observations were conducted within K-pop fan communities on several social media platforms, such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp groups. The data observed included language usage patterns in fandom discussions, translanguaging or code-mixing practices in communication, and the role of fans in translating and disseminating information related to their idols.

b. Interviews

Interviews are a process of communication or interaction to gather information through question-and-answer sessions between the researcher and the informants or research subjects. With advancements in information technology today, interviews can be conducted without face-to-face meetings, for instance through telecommunication media (Fadhallah, 2021).

This study employed semi-structured interviews, where the researchers prepared a list of key questions while allowing flexibility to ask additional questions beyond the list to gather more in-depth data according to the informants' responses.

Due to the geographical distance between the researchers and the informants, interviews were conducted through WhatsApp chats to obtain data regarding the languages used by fans within fandoms, their reasons for using more than one language, their experiences and challenges in understanding idol content in various languages, as well as the impact of multilingualism on fans' emotional attachment to their idols. WhatsApp was chosen as the interview platform because it allows for more practical communication and supports direct documentation of the conversations. Through this interview method, informants could provide written responses that were subsequently analyzed in line with the research objectives.

c. Documentation

In addition to using observation and interviews as data collection techniques, the researchers also utilized documentation to support the validity of the data obtained from observations and interviews. Documentation in this study included visual documents such as screenshots of multilingual interactions observed on various social media platforms, and WhatsApp chat transcripts as evidence that interviews had been conducted.

1. Research Informants

According to Notoatmodjo in Kumara, purposive sampling is a sampling technique based on certain considerations, such as characteristics or attributes of a population (Kumara, A. R., 2018).

The researchers applied purposive sampling to determine the informants in this study. Purposive sampling is a method of selecting informants who meet specific criteria and fulfill the research needs (Prasanti, D., 2018).

The selected informants in this study were K-pop fans from two fandom communities, LUNÉ and ARMY.

The descriptions of the research informants or subjects in this study are as follows:

1. AS from the LUNÉ fandom (West Java)
2. RR from the ARMY fandom (Jambi)
3. NS from the ARMY fandom (Jambi)

This research was conducted over a period of three months, from December 2024 to March 2025. The purpose of this research was to demonstrate and describe how the phenomenon of multilingualism can enhance the language experiences of K-pop fans.

2. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis by identifying and grouping key themes emerging from interviews, observations, and documentation. The analysis process followed several stages: data familiarization, coding, theme development, reviewing themes, and drawing conclusions. This approach enables researchers to comprehensively describe how the phenomenon of multilingualism influences the linguistic experiences of K-pop fans. This analytical framework follows the model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which is widely recognized for its flexibility in interpreting qualitative data. Furthermore, to enhance the credibility and structure of the analysis, the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) was also considered complementary.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Fans' Multilingualism Experience

Based on the observations and interviews conducted, the researchers were able to elaborate on how multilingualism enhances the language experiences of K-pop fans. In this study, the researchers obtained findings regarding the phenomenon of multilingualism experienced by K-pop fans.

From the results of interviews with the selected informants, it was found that the majority of K-pop fans have bilingual or multilingual experiences, although with varying levels of proficiency. These experiences were formed naturally through interactions with other fans and the consumption of K-pop content they watched. This aligns with the perspective of Sahril, Harahap, and Hermanto (2019) regarding individual multilingualism, which refers to a person's ability to use multiple languages in different contexts. In this study, K-pop fans utilized various languages to understand content and to interact with other fans in their fandom communities.

The informants in this study had different multilingual backgrounds. AS, a fan of &TEAM from the LUNÉ fandom, used Indonesian, Arabic, and English in daily activities and also had varying levels of proficiency in Korean, Japanese, and Mandarin. This was largely influenced by AS's background in how they were introduced to K-pop. AS mentioned, that she had been familiar with K-pop since childhood through her parents but became an active fan in 2019. Her father is a fan of the K-pop boy group "BigBang," and her mother is a fan of Korean dramas (K-dramas), so she naturally followed in her parents' interests.

Meanwhile, RR and NS only used Indonesian in their daily lives and had basic abilities in Korean and English, which were still in development. Their introduction to K-pop differed from AS. RR discovered K-pop through social media in 2023, while NS became interested in 2019 when they were still in high school.

Referring to Suhardi's concept, AS can be categorized as having dominant multilingualism, as they master several languages, but their first language (Indonesian) remains more dominant than the others. Meanwhile, RR and NS tend to have passive or receptive multilingualism, as they understand several other languages but are not yet fully able to use them actively in daily communication.

Furthermore, Luthf Annisa's (2023) explanation regarding balanced and dominant multilingualism can also be applied to this study's findings. From the interviews, none of the informants demonstrated truly balanced multilingualism, as none of them mastered two or more languages equally. AS leans more toward dominant multilingualism because, despite understanding multiple languages, their first language remains the strongest. On the other hand, RR and NS have basic abilities in several languages but are still in the learning phase, making them more suitable to be categorized as receptive multilinguals.

2. Fan interaction with the idol and other fellow fans (Engagement)

According to AS, one of the informants in this study said that the language she most often uses when interacting in the fandom is Indonesian and English, just like the confession of NS who said that the fanbase application mostly uses English. Still, there are some fans who also use Korean, in contrast to RR who admitted that she had never been directly involved with idols or other fans but was only limited to saying "Sarangheo (사랑합니다)" when watching K-pop content.

The frequency with which informants used more than one language while consuming K-pop content was not very high. AS used their multilingual skills when watching their idol's live broadcasts and listening to music. NS occasionally used them on social media platforms such as Telegram and Weverse, specifically in English. RR estimated using more than one language for about three hours a day, mainly because they watched fan-edited content that appeared on their social media feed rather than actively searching for it on YouTube.

Table 1. WhatsApp Group &TEAM X LUNÉ 🐱

Time	Member	Language	Content of Message
06.15 WIB	M1	English	“Good morning lune”
07.28 WIB	M2	Japanese	“ohayou gozaimasu” (Selamat pagi)
07.31 WIB	M3	Japanese	“はい、私もおはようございます”(Yes, good morning to you too)
07.48 WIB	M4	Indonesia	“ajarin dong pengen bisa Bahasa jepang juga” (Please teach me, I also want to learn Japanese)

Source: WhatsApp observation, (2025)

During observations in a WhatsApp group consisting mostly of Indonesian fans with some international members, instances of multilingual interaction were identified. The researchers found that several fans actively used English, Japanese, and Indonesian. In one conversation, participants switched between Indonesian, English, and Japanese, illustrating dynamic code-switching practices. For example, M1 initiated a discussion in English, followed by M2 who replied in Japanese, and M3 who also responded in Japanese using Japanese characters. M4 then expressed their interest in learning Japanese in Indonesian. These multilingual exchanges demonstrate the members' linguistic flexibility and their desire to engage in global fan culture, enhancing a sense of inclusion and shared identity among participants.

On the other hand, according to interview results, one informant revealed that they often joined K-pop communities on Instagram, where most members were from France. Occasionally, French was used in communication, which posed challenges for the informant but also provided opportunities to gradually learn French. Nonetheless, English remained the dominant language used for communication, both in text messages and voice notes.

Regarding their feelings about interactions with idols, the informant stated they felt indifferent if their idol could speak Indonesian, due to a perceived significant status gap between themselves and the idol. Additionally, when asked whether they had ever translated K-pop content for other fans, the informant said they had never done so.

However, the researchers' social media observations revealed many international fans translating and sharing idol-related content into various languages. On platform X (formerly Twitter), there are numerous global, Korean, and Japanese fan accounts. Global fanbases typically use English, Korean fanbases use Korean, and Japanese fanbases use Japanese.

3. Motivations for Multilingualism in K-pop Fans

Based on interviews and observations, it was found that K-pop fans have strong motivations to learn foreign languages, particularly Korean, Japanese, and English—the most frequently used languages by K-pop idols. This motivation is driven by their desire to understand song lyrics, interviews, and idol social media content directly without relying on translations, to interact more comfortably with their idols, and to communicate with global fans in international fandom communities, where English often serves as the primary lingua franca.

One informant stated that their love for K-pop became the gateway to learning foreign languages, especially English and Korean. They hoped to one day speak directly with their idol without language barriers and to broaden their international friendships.

“That’s right, I became interested in learning English because of K-pop, and the same with Korean. As K-pop fans, we definitely have a dream to meet our idols, so if that happens someday, we can interact with them. Besides that, we can also make more friends.” (Informant 3)

Moreover, fans are aware that many of their idols are multilingual, which motivates them to follow in their idols’ footsteps by mastering more than one language. These research findings are consistent with Putri et al. (2024), which shows that K-pop not only serves as entertainment but also acts as a primary motivation for learning various foreign languages. Their study explained that K-pop fans are influenced by their idols’ multilingual abilities, which reinforces the idea that an ideal idol should be able to speak several languages to reach international fans.

Similarly, in this study, informants clearly stated their desire to learn foreign languages especially Korean, Japanese, and English was rooted in their need to understand and connect more deeply with their idols. Informants even expressed the hope of someday meeting their idols, where language skills are seen as a vital bridge to enabling meaningful interactions.

Putri et al. (2024) also emphasized that fans’ mastery of their idols’ languages can strengthen communication and emotional bonds. This aligns with the findings in this study, where fans feel a closer emotional connection when they can directly understand the messages or lyrics conveyed by their idols, without relying on translators.

These findings confirm that multilingualism within K-pop fandoms is not merely passive responding to content but also an active motivation for fans to expand their linguistic networks and enhance their language experiences within the fandom. As such, K-pop not only creates a global music trend but also fosters authentic, emotionally driven spaces for foreign language learning.

4. Strategies and Challenges of Multilingualism in Fandom

Based on the interview results, informants encountered several challenges related to multilingualism within the fandom. They also employed various strategies to learn and understand song lyrics, interviews, and idol social media posts to overcome these challenges. Some of these strategies included enrolling in language courses, frequently listening to their idols' songs or content while reading lyrics or transcripts, and utilizing automatic translations provided in videos or reposted by fellow fans.

In their efforts to comprehend K-pop content, informants often faced difficulties, particularly when idols used languages they had never studied or when the language level was too advanced. To overcome these obstacles, they employed various methods, such as referring to automatic translations available on idol content videos, checking the comment sections for clarifications, and using technology like AI-powered assistants (Siri, Bixby) or Google Translate.

Regarding the use of automatic translations and assistance from other fans, most informants admitted to relying on these tools quite frequently. They realized that the language they had learned was generally formal, which made it difficult to understand informal language or slang used by idols. Some informants preferred using automatic translations because they did not have friends who shared their interest in K-pop, while others chose translations provided by fellow fans because they found them more accurate and easier to understand.

5. Social Media as a Means of Multilingualism in Fandoms

Social media has become the primary medium for K-pop fandom communities to establish communication and build networks among members from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In the context of global K-pop fandoms, social media enables interactions that transcend geographical boundaries, creating inclusive and transnational communication spaces. One of the most interesting aspects of this phenomenon is the use of multilingualism in fan interactions, both in understanding idol content and communicating with fellow fans.

Observations conducted on a WhatsApp group comprising mostly Indonesian members, with some international participants demonstrated multilingual practices in their interactions. In one conversation, group members simultaneously used four different languages: Indonesian, English, Korean, and Japanese. For example, one member began the discussion with a mixed-language greeting (English and Indonesian): “Good morning LUNÉ tersayang” (“Good morning, beloved LUNÉ”), followed by another member who replied in English with “MORNING.” Another member responded in Indonesian: “@viera luné @~Nanad Cihuyy

@reka 🙏 luné @~Rizky Febrianza izin ya gak nimbrung dulu 🙏 mau fokus bahasa Korea dulu 🙏. Makasih” (“Excuse me, I won’t be joining the chat for now 🙏 I want to focus on studying Korean 🙏. Thank you”), followed by additional messages in Korean such as “화이팅!! (Hwaiting!!).”

These interactions show that WhatsApp serves as a real-time communication platform that facilitates spontaneous code-switching and language mixing among participants. The use of various languages not only reflects the linguistic abilities of the members but also serves as a strategy to engage all participants within the community. In this context, English often acts as the lingua franca, bridging communication between members who do not share the same native language. Meanwhile, the use of Japanese reflects a cultural closeness to the idol group they support.

In addition to WhatsApp, other social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter) also play an essential role in facilitating multilingual communication within fandoms. Observations revealed that several fan accounts actively translate official information released by idol groups initially shared in Japanese or Korean into English. Some fan accounts even provide additional translations in Korean or Japanese, depending on the target audience of their fanbase. These practices demonstrate not only the language proficiency of fandom members but also their collective awareness of the need to broaden access to information for fans worldwide.

In a reply to a fan post about an idol group, one fan commented: “Bilingual/multilingual fans supporting a bilingual/multilingual group.” This statement reflects an understanding that the multilingual skills of fans are part of their support for idol groups that also use multiple languages in their public activities. In this case, fans are not only consumers of content but also producers of information who contribute to distributing content across languages.

Social media platforms serve not only as spaces for information dissemination and fan interaction but also as direct communication channels between idols and fans. Weverse, as one of the platforms specifically designed for exclusive communication between idols and their global fandoms, offers a virtual space that allows real-time conversations. In one observed live streaming session, a Korean member of &TEAM broadcasted while speaking in both Korean and Japanese. This bilingual approach demonstrates the idol’s awareness of the linguistic diversity of their audience and their efforts to reach a broader fanbase.

The fans’ responses during the live stream also showcased dynamic multilingual practices. Most comments were written in Korean and Japanese, aligned with the languages spoken by the idol in the stream. However, there were also many comments in English, indicating the role

of English as the lingua franca in global fandom communities. One fan commented, “I don’t speak Korean but I’m using a translator to talk to you,” demonstrating an active effort to participate in the conversation despite language barriers. This also highlights the role of translation technology in supporting cross-language communication in social media spaces.

Other comments such as “K-pop music makes my life happy” illustrate the emotional connection built through music and communication between idols and fans. These multilingual interactions not only strengthen the sense of closeness between idols and fans but also create an inclusive communication space where fans from different linguistic backgrounds feel accommodated.

6. The Impact of Multilingualism on Identity and Fandom Engagement

Based on the results of the interviews, it can be concluded that multilingualism significantly contributes to the engagement of fans within K-pop fandoms. Informants acknowledged that by mastering more than one language, they could interact more easily with idols and other fans from various countries. This finding aligns with Saptadi’s (2024) statement that multilingualism can enrich an individual's social experiences, allowing them to understand different cultural perspectives and adapt to various communicative situations. In the context of K-pop fandoms, multilingualism enables fans to connect with global communities and expand their social networks.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that multilingualism impacts not only linguistic abilities but also helps fans better understand Korean culture and other cultures. This supports Saptadi’s (2024) view that multilingualism is not merely a linguistic skill but also influences one’s identity and relationships with different communities. The informants expressed that understanding the language alone was not sufficient; it was also important to understand their idol's culture. This shows that language serves as a bridge for understanding and appreciating cultural diversity, as mentioned in the aforementioned source.

From a psychological perspective, multilingualism allows individuals to feel more connected with different cultural identities. This was also reflected in the informants’ answers, as they felt closer to their idols when the idols spoke languages they understood. They mentioned that when an idol used a familiar language, it created a sense of emotional closeness and, in some cases, gave the impression that the idol was more “reachable.” This supports the argument that language can influence emotional attachment and the sense of belonging within a community.

Thus, the interview results support Nobertus' view, which asserts that multilingualism offers more than linguistic benefits; it also enhances social experiences, increases emotional bonds, and strengthens cross-cultural understanding within K-pop fandoms.

Overall, this study shows that the phenomenon of multilingualism in K-pop fandoms is not just a response to the need for cross-language communication but also a strong motivation for fans to expand their linguistic skills. Multilingualism plays a crucial role in enhancing fans' language experiences, both in understanding K-pop content and in interacting with idols and fellow fans from different countries.

The observations and interviews demonstrate that most of the K-pop fans who were informants in this study possessed multilingual abilities, although their levels of proficiency varied. AS, RR, and NS each showed that their backgrounds and experiences influenced the degree of their multilingualism. AS, who had been familiar with Korean culture from an early age through K-pop and K-dramas, demonstrated dominant multilingualism, while RR and NS tended to fall into the receptive category.

Using various languages within fandom communities, particularly on social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram, and direct communication platforms such as WhatsApp and Weverse, highlights a rich tapestry of multilingual practices and code-switching. In these interactions, English frequently serves as a lingua franca, facilitating communication among international fans. However, other languages like Korean, Japanese, and even French also emerge in conversations, showcasing the diversity of the fanbase.

One of the primary motivations for fans to learn multiple languages is their desire to engage more deeply with the content created by their idols. By mastering languages such as Korean, Japanese, and English, fans aim to understand song lyrics, interviews, and social media posts directly, without translating. Furthermore, the aspiration to interact with idols in their native languages is a powerful incentive for fans' language-learning endeavors.

Despite the enthusiasm for multilingual engagement, fans often encounter challenges in navigating multilingual content. Differences in formal and informal language usage by idols can create confusion, along with limited vocabulary knowledge. To address these difficulties, fans frequently turn to technology, utilizing tools like Google Translate and AI-based applications, while also relying on translations provided by fellow fans within their communities.

Overall, these findings support the notion that multilingualism transcends mere linguistic competence; it significantly influences emotional engagement, cultural understanding, and social identity among fans in the global K-pop community. This dynamic interplay underscores

the importance of language in fostering connections within fandoms, ultimately enriching the fan experience.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it has been proven that the phenomenon of multilingualism significantly enriches the language experiences of K-pop fans. The ability to understand and use more than one language provides fans with the opportunity to access a variety of content without having to rely entirely on translations. Fans become more active in comprehending song lyrics, interviews, and content shared by their idols across various platforms. This process not only improves their linguistic skills but also offers an authentic and meaningful language learning experience, driven by personal interest in their idols and the K-pop culture.

In addition, multilingualism encourages fans to engage directly with international communities, including both fellow fans and K-pop idols themselves. Mastery of multiple languages such as Korean, English, Japanese, and others enables them to expand their social networks and build cross-cultural communication. These interactions actively occur across various social media platforms, such as Weverse, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, and others, where fans freely share information, translate content, and engage in discussions using multiple languages. This condition creates a dynamic language learning environment while also fostering a sense of belonging within the fandom community.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of multilingualism in K-pop is not just a trend, but also an effective means of improving fans' language skills. Through the practice of multilingualism, fans not only deepen their understanding of Korean and other cultures but also strengthen their emotional attachment to their idols and fellow fans. This research contributes to popular culture studies and the field of education by showing that multilingualism in K-pop fandom can create informal learning spaces that enhance foreign language skills, learning motivation, and meaningful cross-cultural communication. Thus, multilingualism plays an important role in shaping a richer, more inclusive, and globally connected language experience for K-pop fans.

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