



Language Attitude of Youths in Malaysia Towards Korean Language

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Abstract: Culture and language are closely interrelated. Exposure to one would increase awareness of the other. While the Korean Wave has succeeded to enter Malaysian industries, the culture has also introduced Malaysian youths to the Korean language. This research aims to analyse the language attitudes of youths in Malaysia towards the Korean language. A new questionnaire was developed expressly for this study, focused on the participants' affective attitudes towards the language. This study included 86 participants, and the findings suggested that adolescents in Malaysian have a favourable attitude about the language. The participants' backgrounds are also found to be contributing to their positive attitude.

Keywords: Language Attitude, Malaysian Language Attitude, Korean Language Learning, Attitude Towards Korean, Korean Wave

1. Introduction

Culture and language are inextricably linked. Exposure to either one would raise awareness of the other. The emergence of a new culture in another country will also introduce the people to the language. Acceptance of the language varies according to how an individual or a group of people perceives the language. It will then represent the linguistic attitude of the individual or group.

Language attitude is a branch of sociolinguistics that focuses on an individual's, a group of people's, or a community's attitude towards a certain language. According to Saidat (2010), an individual's linguistic attitude is his inclination to respond positively or adversely to a language and its users. There are several aspects that influence a person's linguistic attitude towards a language. Baker (1992) uncovered a significant number of factors in his examination of linguistic attitudes, and he believes that variables such as sex, age, language, social, and background are crucial in shaping people's perspectives.

1.1 Korean Wave

Korean Wave or Hallyu refers to the dramatic increase in Korean culture's international visibility. The term was initially used by a Chinese journalist to refer to the Korean pop culture craze in the 1990s. Starting in East Asia in the 1990s, the Korean Wave then extended to the United States, some regions of Europe, South America, and the Middle East (Yang, 2012). The Korean Wave, which began with media items like drama, film, and music, is expanding more and more to include K-culture, which comprises clothing, cosmetics, lifestyle, and cuisine (Chae, Park & Ko, 2020). According to Jalaluddin and Ahmad (2011), in the process of spreading their culture, South Korea concentrates on commercialising and exporting its culture through dramas, pop music and language.

The initial spread of Korean Wave in Southeast Asia began in Vietnam and then quickly expanded to Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia (Suh, Cho & Kwon, 2006). Malaysia joined the wave somewhat later than other countries, and the first reaction was unfavourable. Following that, "Malaysia has embraced the Korean Wave quicker and more forcefully" (Cho, 2010). Many Malaysians have acquired an interest in Korea and its culture as a result of the Korean cultural wave sparked by Korean movies and TV dramas. Korean drama is the first Korean Wave product to enter Malaysia, followed by movies and popular music. In fact, Korean popular music (K-pop) has "entered the country in association with Korean dramas" (Suh et al., 2006).

As a result of the Korean Wave, it appears that interest in anything Korean has surged throughout Malaysia. This includes the rising of Korean product consumption, the importation of numerous Korean cosmetics items into Malaysia, outbound travel to Korea, the acceptance of more Korean entertainment by Malaysians, and the establishment of Korean language programmes in higher education. This acceptance involves people across ages in Malaysia, especially adolescents. Jalaluddin and Ahmad (2011) stated that dramas, K-pop music, skin care products of Korean brands and the Korean language are progressively becoming very popular in Malaysia, especially among adolescents. In line with that, Zailin et al. (2013) found that Korean Wave had a huge following among Malaysian youths. This is due to the increasing number of social media platforms that serve as a medium to spread the new trend.

Ariffin, Othman and Abdullah (2014) stated that "Based on the observation distributed to Malaysian teenagers, it is evident that Hallyu (Korean Wave) is more popular and has successfully been absorbed into the life of Malaysian teenagers in particular and Asian teenagers in general". This is because youths are more receptive towards new things or new trends compared to other age groups. Meanwhile, Ing and Osman (2018) in their study found that Malaysian young adults held rather positive attitudes towards Korean drama and K-pop songs. The acceptance towards Korean Dramas and songs have also increased the awareness of the Korean language among Malaysian youths. The number of people who are interested in learning the Korean language increases day by day due to this.

Nevertheless, even though there is a huge popularity of Korean culture in Malaysia, an extensive review revealed that there is no systematic empirical research on the language attitudes of Malaysian towards the Korean language that has been carried out. Therefore, it could be worthwhile to study whether the popularity of Korean culture in Malaysia has any influence on the language attitude of youths in Malaysia towards Korean as a foreign language.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study attempts to look at how youths in Malaysia perceived the Korean language after they are exposed to the Korean language as part of the Korean Wave. Therefore, the objective set for this study is to find out the language attitude of youths in Malaysia towards the Korean language. Meanwhile, the research question set to guide this study is 'What is the language attitude of youths living in Malaysia towards the Korean language?'.

2. Methods

The purpose of this quantitative study is to determine the language attitude of youths living in Malaysia towards Korean language. There were 2 phases involved in this study. The first stage was the pilot study while the second stage was the comprehensive study. The descriptions of each stage are as follows:

2.1 Pilot Study

In the initial stage, a questionnaire was designed around three interconnected components of language attitude: cognitive, emotive, and behavioural based on Lambert's (1967) mentalist approach and Wenden's (1991) comprehensive definition of the attitude concept. The cognitive component includes beliefs, thoughts, or points of view concerning the object of the attitude. The emotional component refers to a person's sentiments and emotions about an object, whether he or she likes or dislikes it while the behavioural component entails the tendency to engage in specific learning practices.

A questionnaire was designed based on adaptation from Liu (2011) and Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, and Alzwari (2012). Liu and Abidin et al. included all three components of language attitude in their questionnaires and the questionnaires were meant to assess participants' linguistic attitudes towards English language learning. In order to meet the current study goal, additional customised questions were created to focus on linguistic attitudes towards the Korean language which is regarded as a foreign language in Malaysia. The questionnaire was disseminated using a Google form through WhatsApp to random Malaysian because the study was initially not intended to focus on any specific age group of Malaysian. There were 36 questions in the questionnaire and the responses were evaluated using a Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree. Thirty-three responses managed to be collected and analysed. The sample questions are as follow:

Table 1: Sample questions for pilot study

	Cognitive Component
1	Korean language sounds very nice.
2	Korean language has a high status in Malaysia.
3	Korean language is superior to Bahasa Malaysia.
4	If I use Korean, my status is raised.
5	Speaking Korean language is the mark of an educated/knowledgeable person.
6	Knowing Korean is an important goal in my life.
7	Learning Korean is important because it will make me more educated.
8	I will have more knowledge and more understanding when I learn Korean.
9	Learning Korean helps me to have good relationships with friends.
10	In my opinion, Korean language is difficult and complicated to learn.
11	If I use Korean, it means that I am not patriotic.
12	If I speak Korean, I do not feel that I am Malaysian anymore.
	Affective Component
1	I love listening to Korean language.
2	I wish I could speak Korean fluently.
3	I am interested to learn Korean.
4	I wish I could have many Korean speaking friends.
5	I feel excited when I know someone who can speak Korean language.
6	I feel proud for learning Korean language.
7	I feel excited when I can speak Korean with others.
8	I feel more confident when I speak Korean language.
9	I love Korean drama, films and songs.
10	I have good emotions/feelings when listening to Korean language.
11	I feel uncomfortable listening to Malaysian speaking Korean.
12	To be honest, I really have little interest to learn Korean.
	Behavioural Component

1	I love to find opportunities to learn Korean.
2	I would take Korean even if it is not a compulsory subject in school/university.
3	I love to learn Korean through Korean drama, films and songs.
4	I like to try to think in Korean to practise it.
5	I like to practice Korean the way native speakers do.
6	I like to practise speaking Korean with my family and friends.
7	I learn Korean by linking the new information with my previous knowledge.
8	I like to practice speaking with someone who speaks Korean well.
9	I enjoy doing activities to practice my Korean.
10	My curiosity helps me to learn Korean well.
11	I look forward to learn more Korean in the future.
12	I prefer to study my mother tongue rather than Korean language.

Nevertheless, because this study did not focus on Korean language learning, some questions and responses were deemed invalid, particularly the behavioural questions that asked respondents about their attitudes towards Korean language learning. The majority of respondents chose neutral options because the questions were irrelevant to them. Several respondents even told the researcher that they were unsure about their responses because they had never studied Korean. As a result of the pilot research, revisions and improvements were made.

2.2 Comprehensive Study

The pilot research questionnaire has been modified. In constructing the new questionnaire, questionnaires by Liu (2011) and Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, and Alzwari (2012) were still utilised as references. This is due to the fact that their questionnaires contain the most closely related elements to the study's emphasis. To achieve the study's objective, the new questionnaire focused solely on the affective component of language attitude. This is because the emotional component is the most closely related aspect in assessing people's perceptions, preferences, and attitudes towards something. The study was further narrowed down to focus on youths in Malaysia.

The new questionnaire has 18 statements excluding the questions on demographic information. The demographic questions asked about the participants' gender, age, native language(s), and whether they have ever learnt the Korean language. There are 2 follow-up questions given to those who answered 'YES' to 'Have ever learnt the Korean language'. They are: 'If your answer is YES to question number 4 above, please indicate how long were you learning Korean' and 'If your answer is YES to question number 4 above, please indicate your level of fluency'. In terms of age, youths are defined as those 15 to 30 years old (Yunus & Landau, 2019). Therefore, there are 3 age range options for the participants. They are 15 to 20 years old, 21 to 25 years old and 26 to 30 years old. All these demographic questions are made compulsory to answer except for the follow up questions. Otherwise, the participants' responses cannot be submitted and assessed.

There are 2 parts in the questionnaire where the first part (9 statements) is assessing the positive affective attitudes towards the Korean language while the second part (9 statements) is assessing the negative affective attitudes towards Korean language. The negative statements in the questionnaire are the opposite statements of positive attitudes. For example, if a positive statement says 'I love the Korean language', the negative statement is 'I hate Korean language'. The questionnaire was designed in such a way in order to test the internal consistency of the respondents' answers. Salazar (2015) stated that negative items are used to reduce the biases, which occurs when people tend to agree with statements without regard for their actual content. Negative items act to reduce response speed and promote cognitive reasoning in the subjects (Podsakoff et al., 2003). They also contribute to the validity of the measure by expanding the way in which individuals think and arrange their beliefs related to the construct under study.

An expert in sociolinguistics was consulted and revised the questionnaire to ensure its reliability. Similar to the pilot questionnaire, the respondents' responses were evaluated using a Likert scale of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The Google form and WhatsApp applications were used again to disseminate the new questionnaire, but this time to a different group of participants. This study's intended participants are youths living in Malaysia, regardless of their citizenship. The Google form received 86 answers in less than two days. The replies were then evaluated using descriptive statistics.

3. Results and Discussion

Demographic data collection showed that 16.3% of the participants are male while another 83.7% are female. In terms of age groups, 15.1% of the participants are 15 to 20 years old, 82.6% are youths aged 21 to 25 and 2.3% of the participants are in 26 to 30 years old. When asked about their native language, the participants wrote Malay (74), English (1), Malay and English (4), Japanese (2), Chinese (1), Vietnamese (3) and Bangla (1). 65.1% of the participants reported that they never learnt the Korean language while another 34.9% stated that they have learnt the Korean language. Of 34.9% of those who have learnt the Korean language, 18 participants said that they have learnt the language less than a year and are still at the beginner level while 12 more participants have learnt the language longer where some of them are in beginner and intermediate levels and 1 participant at advanced level.

3.1 Overall Pattern of Positive Attitudes

The mean of each item in the questionnaire was calculated to establish an overall pattern of the participants' positive feelings about the Korean language. The statements were ranked based on the means. Table 2 summarises the findings.

Table 2: Overall pattern of the participants' positive language attitudes towards Korean language

No	Statement	Mean (M)	Rank
1	I love Korean language.	3.68	5
2	I love listening to Korean language.	3.84	4
3	I have good emotions when listening to Korean language.	3.61	7
4	I love Korean drama, films and songs.	4.02	2
5	I wish I could speak Korean language fluently.	4.06	1
6	I am interested to learn Korean language.	3.95	3
7	I feel that knowing Korean language is important.	3.24	9
8	I feel excited when I know someone who can speak Korean language.	3.60	8
9	I wish I could have many Korean speaking friends.	3.62	6

Based on the means and rank, the two highest ranking statements are 'I wish I could speak Korean language fluently' and 'I love Korean drama, films and songs', both having a mean of higher than 4.0, indicating agreement. Statements 7, 2, 1, 9, 3, 8, and 7 had the highest mean range of 3.24 to 3.95, indicating moderate agreement. There is no statement with a mean value less than 3.00 signifying that all 86 youths in Malaysia are positive towards Korean language. The responses show that the participants desired to be able to speak the language fluently. A positive attitude towards the language makes them want to learn the language so that they can use the language fluently. Besides, the participants also love Korean drama, films and songs. This proved that the Korean Wave does influence the youths to have positive attitude towards Korean language. Overall, the youths' positivity towards Korean language is parallel to the study by Larisa, Fumitaka and Nurliana (2020).

3.2 Overall Pattern of Negative Attitudes

Negative attitudes are also evaluated among the participants. It is to see if the participants have any negative perception towards the language and to measure the internal consistency of the respondents' answers in comparison to the positive attitudes. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3: Overall pattern of the participants' negative language attitudes towards Korean language

No	Statement	Mean (M)	Rank
1	I hate Korean language.	1.41	2
2	I don't like listening to Korean language.	1.04	1
3	I don't have good emotions when listening to Korean language.	1.53	5
4	I don't like Korean drama, films and songs.	1.45	3
5	I don't wish to speak Korean language.	1.52	4
6	I'm not interested to learn Korean language.	1.52	4
7	I don't feel that knowing Korean language is important.	1.60	7
8	I don't feel excited when I know someone who can speak Korean language.	1.60	7
9	I don't wish to have Korean speaking friends.	1.56	6

If positive attitudes are determined by the greatest mean value, negative attitudes are determined by the lowest mean value. All negative attitude statements had mean values of 1.60 or below, suggesting that the participants strongly disagreed with the negative attitudes. It demonstrates the internal consistency in the respondents' responses for positive attitudes, implying that the youths have favourable attitudes towards the Korean language. Further analysis shows that the participants strongly disagree to the statements 'I don't like listening to Korean language' (first rank) and 'I hate Korean language' (second rank). This shows that the participants are really enthusiastic about the language.

3.3 Types of Language Attitudes

A critical review of each statement in the questionnaire indicates that several types of attitudes towards the target language were analysed. The linguistic trait in each sentence was used to establish the type. Because the participants answered favourably to all statements, it suggests that they are favourable about practically all aspects of affective attitudes regarding Korean language. Table 4 shows the different categories of attitudes assessed by the questionnaire.

Table 3: Types of attitudes evaluated in the questionnaire

Statement	Type of attitude
I love Korean language.	Affection towards the language
I love listening to Korean language.	Attitude towards the sound of the language
I have good emotions when listening to Korean language.	Good feeling towards the language
I love Korean drama, films and songs .	Attitude towards the entertainments in the language
I wish I could speak Korean language fluently .	Ambition/aspiration towards ability in using the language

I am interested to learn Korean language.	Curiosity to know more about the language
I feel that knowing Korean language is important .	Perception towards the prestige of the language
I feel excited when I know someone who can speak Korean language.	Enthusiasm towards the language specialty
I wish I could have many Korean speaking friends .	Attitude towards social connection through the language

3.4 Relationship between Language Attitude with Participants' Demographic Profile

It is believed that there is a relationship between the participants' positive attitude towards Korean language with their background. The participants' gender might influence the results of the questionnaire. 83.7% of the participants in this study are female where female youths are believed to be more enthusiastic towards Korean Wave. This is in line with the study by Putri and Reese (2016) which stated that most of K-Wave-enthusiasts are teenage to adult females. Result from the questionnaire also reveals that the statement 'I love Korean drama, films and songs' was ranked the second highest by the participants. It implies that the Korean Wave gives huge influence towards females. Zailin et al., (2013) stated that "women of all ages tend to watch Korean Dramas across Asian countries, and studies in Malaysia indicated Malaysian youths as those who are most likely consuming the Korean Wave, in particular, Korean dramas". This has impacted their acceptance towards Korean language too. Furthermore, some of the participants who have prior experience studying Korean may contribute to the language's high positive rate. Several individuals even acknowledged learning Korean through Korean dramas and music. This proves that Korean entertainment, as part of the Korean Wave, motivated people to be favourable towards the language.

4. Conclusion

This study investigates the language attitude of youths in Malaysia towards Korean language. Analysis reveals that the youths have positive attitudes towards the language. Korean Wave in Malaysia is believed to have influenced the youths' acceptance and positive attitude. The youths' background is also believed to have a relationship with their attitude. Overall, this study has achieved its objective. It should be noted that this study employed a questionnaire purposely designed to measure the affective component of language attitude. It is safe to say that the questionnaire is a new reliable instrument that can be used to evaluate language attitude. It is hoped that the questionnaire and the overall study can contribute to Sociolinguistics knowledge. Lastly, it is suggested for future studies of related topic to look at cognitive component of language attitude to measure participants' attitude towards Korean language prestige.

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