

Korean Wave as Symbolic Capital: A Case Study of Learning Korean Language out of Class in China

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Abstract

A bulk of literature on foreign language education have revealed the interconnection between identity and language learning. However, the existent studies seem to draw on the English learning experiences as monolingual orientation. Adopting the concept of language investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015), this study examines how a cohort of Chinese university students mobilize their resources to learn Korean language out of class and how learning Korean language shapes their identities and educational and employment trajectories. The study can provide some insights on the valorization of multilingual education in a wider process of China's integrating into the world system and the rise of Korean Wave as global culture.

Key words: Learning Korean language; Korean Wave; Language investment; Chinese students

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1. INTRODUCTION

China is a language learning country with over 300 million people learned or are learning foreign languages (Li, 2010). English as a lingua franca has been widely used all over the world. Moreover, China regards English as an extremely important tool for its economic development after China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 (Lin, 2011; Chen, 2020; Sun,

2020). English as a working language for Chinese people is not only in the domain of education but also for its globalization in 21st century (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). However, since the promotion of "One Belt and One Road" in 2011, Chinese government aims at developing its national language competence by multilingualism. At the same time, more and more scholars are challenging the hegemony of English in China's higher education (Shen, 2015). Accordingly, language learning in China is also multilingualism-oriented, to some extent. In order to adapt to the current China's language planning, a majority of language learners have realized that acquisition of English only is not enough (Wang, 2016), which has spawned the trend of learning foreign languages out of class.

Republic of Korea (hereinafter Korea/ ROK), one of neighboring countries of China, which has a close relationship with China even nowadays. According to data from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China (MCT 2016), Korea ranked the first in the number of tourists coming to China in 2015 (about 4.4 million). Both China and Korea are each other's largest source of inbound tourists and overseas students (Niu, 2017). Korea still listed the third with the influence of political issues between China and Korea (MCT, 2020). Korean Wave also came into China and became familiar to Chinese people gradually which arose the Korean language learning fever in China. Among those Korean language learners, there are many non-Korean language major students and they are learners who learn Korean language out of class (Tian & Xu, 2020).

Previous studies conducted in foreign language learning mainly focus on the English language learning, such as the Korean youth in English study abroad (Jang, 2017), identity and investment with English as an international language (Norton, 2015), and learning a foreign language as leisure and consumption: enjoyment, desire and the business of oral English (Kubota, 2011). However, studies about Korean language learning are

SLA (Second Language Acquisition) learners which means those participants are professional Korean language learners and taught by teachers who have learned Korean language for many years. However, the participants of this study are Korean language learners who are not majoring in Korean but learn Korean language out of class with the influence of Korean Wave. It is the sense of cool attached to Korean Wave that contributes to the Korean language. To learn Korean language in turn helps learners to get familiar with Korean Wave. This sense of cool represented by kinds of symbolic capital which includes Korean traditional and popular culture (songs, dramas, movies, cosmetics etc.). Therefore, how symbolic capital of Korean Wave attributes to more and more Korean language learners appearing in China will be discussed in this study with the interview with my participants. By so doing, the authors hope to shed light on Korean language, culture and Chinese Korean language learners out of class, and to contribute to the multilingual education for globalization of China.

2. RESEARCH CONTEXTS

2.1 Korean Language and Korean Wave

Since all the language textbooks, besides the historical, cultural and literature related textbooks, are only based on the standard South Korean language especially the dialect in the capital city, Seoul. So, all the Korea and Korean language in this paper are actually the south country of Korean Peninsula, Republic of Korea.

According to the Korea Tourism Organization, a blended word (Hallyu) called Korean Wave has been widely used as popular culture preference in the last few decades, including K-pop music, Korean dramas, movies, etc (Korea Tourism Organization, 2013). The reasons for Korean Wave's success is largely related to the support of Korean government. From 1998, Korea has begun its Cultural Diplomacy by setting up many government organizations (e.g. Presidential Council on Nation Branding, Korea Culture Promotion Inc.), helping large-scale enterprises develop their international businesses, and setting social organizations (e.g. the Korea Foundation for Advanced Study, International Scholar Exchange Fellowship) to attract more abroad scholars to study in Korea (Liu, 2013). The Korean Wave fan clubs have already spread over 86 countries and Korean Wave is also a representative case of breaking through the Western culture pattern which is represented by the United States (Jin, 2017). Korean Wave does not only refer to the popular culture but also the Korean food, household appliances, clothing style, and cosmetics etc (Du 2020). Influenced by Korean Wave, many Chinese people start to learn Korean Language (Du, 2020; Shin, 2005). Many previous studies about Korean Wave have demonstrated that the cultural transmission and relationship between

China and Korea are the analysis of Korea cultural export (Du, 2020), the construction of soft power (Li, 2020; Lee & Zhang, 2021), the influence of Korean cultural industry on China's economy (Miao, 2016), the convergence strategy of Korean Wave into China's culture development (Zhang, 2020), and the development of China's cultural development from the perspective of Korean Wave (Zhou & Zhu, 2007).

2.2 Chinese University Students Who Learn Korean Language Out of Class

Korea is a key partner for China. China and Korea aim at building a deeper cooperation, and 2021 and 2022 will be the China-ROK Cultural Exchange Year with the consensus between President Xi and President Moon Jae-in (MCT, 2021). Many Chinese universities have set up the Korean language major since the establishment of diplomatic relationship between China and Korea in 1992 (Yan, 2011). Korean language becomes one of the popular foreign languages in China, and more students choose to learn Korean language in universities.

To learn a second foreign language is one of compulsory courses for Chinese university students who learn English. However, students are limited to selecting one of foreign languages such as Japanese, Spanish and French. Moreover, the Korean language is not on the list for students to choose, especially in the southwest of China. Four participants for my study are or were students who major in English related majors that are English Language and Literature, Master of Translation and Interpreting, and Normal English. Although they study in different universities during the undergraduate period, there is no Korean in their curriculum schedules. With the passion of Korean language and Korean culture, they utilize different channels and methods to learn Korean language out of class and some of them have already acquired certificates in Korean language and one participant (P2) have found part-time job because of her Korean proficiency.

In this study, the study explores their experiences and perspectives during their Korean language learning process with the following question:

How do Chinese university students learn Korean language out of class with the influence of Korean Wave?

What are opportunities and challenges faced by students learning Korean language out of class?

We employ the concepts of symbolic capital and language investment to answer these questions, and to understand the relationship between Korean Wave and Korean language learning out of class.

3. LANGUAGE INVESTMENT AS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Darvin and Norton proposed a mode of investment that integrates identity, ideology and capital for language

learning (Darvin & Norton, 2015). It depends on the language ideologies and language identities of language learners whether he or she will invest capital on one language learning. The valuing of learner's capital presents their identity, and with the pull of ideology learners utilize their possessed capital to gain more capital (Darvin & Norton, 2015). That is to say in this study, if he or she thinks that learns Korean language is not worth than learns English, and then he or she will not spend time and money learning Korean language. And he or she also

is less interested in capital related to Korean language. However, all participants doesn't think so.

According to Kubota's study, the concept of language investment is related to social inclusion which means language learners' aspirations to be included in the target language speaking country (Kubota, 2011). Learners expect a return by investing in learning a foreign language, which in forms of material resources and symbolic capital. In order to be recognized by society, especially the time of job finding, learners can acquire certificates of Korean language.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Participants Selection

Table 1
Background information of participants

	Gender	Age	Occupation	Educational background	Self-identified foreign language proficiency
P1	male	24	student	Postgraduate (English language and Literature)	English(TEM8), Korean(TOPIK6), Japanese
P2	female	22	tutor	BA (English)	English(IELTS 7.0), Korean(TOPIK5)
P3	female	22	student	Postgraduate (Master of Translation and Interpreting)	English (TEM8), Korean, Japanese
P4	female	26	Teacher	MfA (English language and Literature)	English(TEM-8), French, Korean

The participants interviewed are and used to students who major in English related majors, such as English Language and Literature, Master of Translation and Interpreting, and Normal English. In consequence, Korean is not their first foreign language and it isn't their second foreign language (this will be shown in the data collection and analysis part). However, all of them are interested in Korean Wave and fond of Korean idols or actors, and it is the driving force for them to learn Korean language (Tian & Cai, 2020).

fond of Korean films (dramas, movies, variety shows, music programs etc.) drove them to be interested in Korean culture and Korean language (Tian & Xu, 2020). Nowadays, K-dramas, K-pop songs, celebrities or idols are only part of Korean Wave because Korea's government invest much for its cultural transmission. Korean foods and drinks, domestic appliances, fashion industries, tourism and Korean cosmetics are "New Korean Wave" which can motivate Korean language learners continuously (Zhang, 2004; Du, 2020).

4.2 Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data are collected from the audits and notes from semi-structure interviews by both face to face and Wechat phone call. Before the interview, participants have provided background information, such as gender, ethnicity, age, language proficiency, educational background.

During the data analysis, the Content Analysis (Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004) is adopted to explore the motivations, purposes and methods for Korean language learners who learn it out of class, and then analyze the existent challenges and opportunities for them. With data analysis and findings, the authors aim to answer questions which are proposed in the introduction part. Since the pandemic of COVID-19 was not ending when during the data collecting, audio records and notes are main materials for my analysis procedure.

The songs sung by Taeyeon and her experience as an idol group leader and solo singer motivated me to learn Korean language and encouraged me to face the difficulties in my life. She is the leader of Girls Generation from 2007 and had her first solo performance in 2015. It is not easy for Korean women idol group to be active in such a long time(13 years). (interview with p1)

Therefore, Participants involved in this study utilized all kinds of material to learn Korean language that were online free or non-free courses (e.g. *CCtalk*, *Bilibili*, *XDF.cn*) and textbooks and kinds of Korean app (e.g. *Naver*, *KBS News*, *MBC Radio* etc.). Learning Korean out of class could also help increase the competence of learners. Especially for language major students in China since learning English was not enough. Chinese students had to learn English from at least the primary school and then it was essential to acquire other foreign language or languages for the English major students just as non-English language major students must know well of English.

After passing TOPIK6 in 2021, I am currently preparing for CATTI (Korean) translation level 3 exam(interview with P4).

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Opportunities of Learning Korean Language

5.1.1 Accessibility of Korean Media

The main purposes for them to learn Korean language were to enjoy various forms of Korean Cool and knew more about the country of Korea. Idol worship and the

5.1.2 Providing Chance for Studying Abroad

In the context of globalization, many Asian countries are emerging as popular destinations for international

students. In South Korea, Chinese students constitute the largest number of international students. Despite the fact that my participants are all English majors, they do not choose Anglophone countries for study.

According to P2, if she wanted to study abroad in Korea after graduating from her undergraduate school, and then she had to pass the Korean language proficiency test even she was competent in English language. Her interest in Korean Wave did many favors for learning Korean language. At least she was more interested in Korean language than English. In July 2021, P2 received the admission letter from Ewha Womens University for her master degree study in Korean Language Teaching.

After passing TOPIK 5, then I prepare to study in South Korea after the COVID-19 is over. To study in South Korea, I need to take the TOPIK exam in China or take the exam in Korean after studying in the Korean Language School. Only when I meet the (language) requirements of the target school can I be eligible to apply for studying abroad (interview with P2).

5.1.3 Increasing Employability

Learning Korean could also help increase the employment prospect. Many English majors feel it insufficient to acquire English only in China given that there are over 300 million English language learners in China. My participants do not find themselves competitive to get a good job after graduation from university. Some of them start to develop a serious interest in learning Korean by taking relevant exams just to enhance their employability as indicated by the interview with P4. It was also the P2 who had already transfer her Korean ability into actual benefits.

Due to the epidemic, I cannot go to South Korea to study now. However, due to my Korean language skills, I am now working as a tutor for children from Korean families in Chengdu. While making money, I can also prepare for the future study in Korea (interview with P2)

5.2 Challenges of Learning Korean Language

5.2.1 Time limitation in Learning Korean Language:

Participants didn't have abundant spare time for their Korean language learning was one of the challenges. On the one hand, they wanted to improve their Korean proficiency. On the other hand, their Korean language learning was always interrupted by pressure from their subjects. P1 complained that he wanted to pass TOPIK 6 before getting the Bachelor degree, but he found that he couldn't because he didn't have enough time to prepare for the Korean language test during the undergraduate period. For P2 who attended the offline courses from her junior year, she felt exhausted for arranging limited between English and Korean (she has to at least pass TOPIK 4 for studying in Korea). For P3 and P4, they never thought about taking the TOPIK examination because their purpose for learning Korean language was getting familiar with K-pop stars, they still frustrated by

their slow paces of Korean language proficiency due to time limitation.

After graduation, I was busy looking for a job and had no time to systematically learn Korean. Although I started learning the Korean language early, I still stayed at the beginning stage of phonetics. (interview with P4)

There are many compulsory courses and the language tests for English majors, such as TEM4, TEM8, CET-4 made me stressful. They severely occupied the time of my Korean language learning. (interview with P1, P2, P3)

5.2.2 Limited Resources for Korean Language Learning

Since the college did not offer Korean as the second language course during undergraduate period, I had to take another non-Korean language course and learned Korean outside the classes (interview with P1).

P1 told the author that he heard there was Korean language course in his previous university, but he found the so-called Korean lesson was provided by non-university organization and it charged students at high prices. And none of participants told the author there was Korean lesson in their university. What's more, they had to learn another foreign language, such as French or Japanese, even if they were not interested in it. They couldn't get resources from their school.

5.2.3 Difficulties in Learning the grammar of Korean Language

Korean language is different from both English and Chinese. Korean is a **교착어** (agglutinative language). An agglutinative language is a language that sentences are formed by combining postpositional particles which have grammatical meaning and are critical to construct sentences (NAVER Dictionary).

Even if there are many words are similar between Korean and Chinese, but I am always confused with postpositional particles. Those particles will influence the meaning of a sentence, so if I cannot use them correctly I will get low points in the examination (interview with P2).

What's more, the order of Korean sentences are SOV which means that verbs need to be put at the end of each sentence. It is totally different from Chinese or English.

"I am confused about the meaning of some sentences even if I've already known every word. First, I cannot recognize those postpositional particles correctly because some of them are same to me. Second, verbs are put at the end of sentences and I need time to reorganize sentences in order to understand them (interview with P3).

6. DISCUSSION

Through learning languages, language learners invest different kinds of capital into their study and do strive to gain some other capital (Kubota, 2011). In this study,

P2 is the only one who pays money for offline language learning courses, but other participants have also paid money during their learning processes even if they hadn't attended offline courses. For example, the language textbooks P1 and P2 bought and online grammar courses P1 bought are also the investment for them. Learners invest because they recognize that the capital they possess can serve for their learning (Darvin & Norton, 2015). These learners have the ideology that the learning of Korean language means to get familiar with Korean Wave. They want to be included in the imagined community where Korean language is used and Korean Wave originates from. Learners desire to acquire more capital through investing money and other materials.

And Korean language is kind of symbolic capital (Steinmetz, 2011) which learners want to hold for. Korean Wave is intangible but perceptible cultural capital which attracts participants in this study to be interested in Korea and Korean language. In order to possess this kind of capital, learners have to invest. For non-Korean major students, TOPIK (Test of proficiency in Korean) is an official certificate to evaluate their Korean language proficiency (<http://www.Test of Proficiency in Korean.com>). Learners have to pay the exam fee (for 400 RMB now), buy kinds of textbooks or online courses, and spend time preparing for the exams. Even those learners who do not want to participate the exam or learn Korean for leisure, at least they also have to invest time to it.

7. CONCLUSION

This study explores the informal foreign language learning of non-Korean major university students, how they are attracted by different forms of Korean Cool and what opportunities and challenges are faced by them. With this study, we can find that the cultural influence is the key point for the national promotion especially during the young people who are eager to catch up with fashion and new things. And through investing economic capital, those foreign language learners in turn acquire cultural, social and symbolic capital, for example, the integration of Korean culture or improving of employability as participants did in this study. I also expect this study can contribute to the transmission of Chinese Cool to foreigners who are interested in China and its culture.

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