

Notes on Filipino-Hallyu Pop Culture: Exploration of a Korean Proto-Lexicon Framework on Tagalog Speakers

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ABSTRACT

Hallyu or the Korean wave has swept through nations especially the Philippines. This exploratory study offers a dip into the effects of the *Hallyu* wave on a Filipino speaker through ambient exposure, consequently on the development of a Korean proto-lexicon through indirect vocabulary acquisition. Finally, a focus group discussion and a preliminary assessment tested out the waters of the effects of *Hallyu* on casual Filipino speakers. A thorough statistically comprehensive qualitative study on the acquisition framework is recommended to provide substantial evidence to support the framework..

Keywords: *Hallyu, Korean Wave, Korean language, Tagalog language, Second Language Acquisition, Vocabulary Acquisition, Proto-Lexicon*

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Introduction

With the ubiquity of K-culture in the Philippines, from the airwaves of radio and television to the packaging of beauty drugstore essentials, only time will tell when certain Korean words or certain aspects of Korean culture become integrated into the quintessential Filipino culture — if such a case has not happened yet. Undoubtedly, the Philippines has been swept away in the tidal waves of *Hallyu*.

Hallyu is a Chinese term that translates to “Korean Wave”, a collective term used to refer to the phenomenal growth of Korean culture and popular culture encompassing everything from music, movies, drama to online games and Korean cuisine, just to name a few.

Hallyu: Globalization of South Korean Culture Generally, Yong et al. (2018) attributed the humble beginnings of *Hallyu* to a 1999 music CD compiled by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Korea that was distributed to its neighboring countries branded as *Korean Pop Music*. Alternatively, the Chinese version of the CD was called *Hallyu - Song from Korea*. Around the same time, *Hallyu* branded Korean serials started gaining popularity — a success that soon spread to Taiwan and Japan. By around the 2000s, Korean serials also started to rise in Southeast Asian countries including Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia.

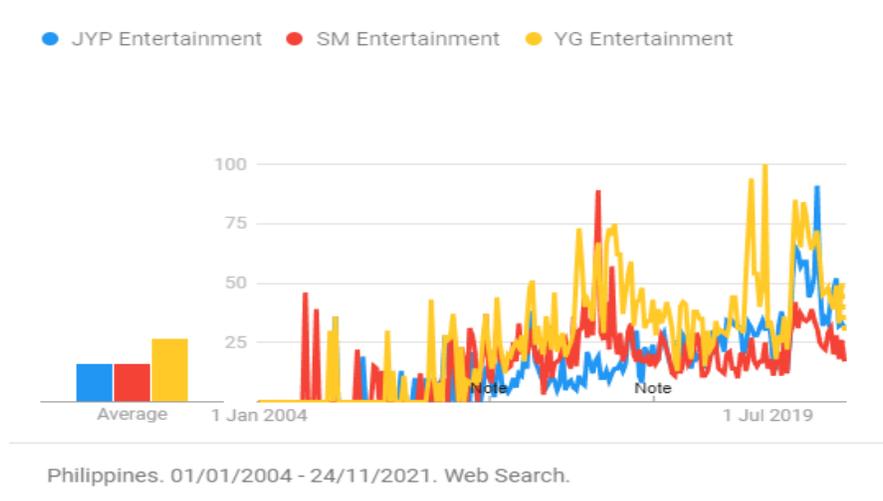
Around a decade later, the rise of *Hallyu* content in the early 21st century was first critically analyzed in a paper by Chua and Iwabuchi, branding it as the *Korean Wave* (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008). The end of the decade then sought out a brand-new crest of the Korean wave with the global smash hit single *Gangnam Style* by Korean artist Psy. This may have further propelled the status of Korean pop media from the shared influence on its Asian neighbors and onto the further reaches of the globe, allowing it through the rise of social media platforms.

Korean Wave in the Philippines Locally, the *Hallyu* scene has taken a foothold on local pop culture. To understand this, a 2016 review paper by Igno & Cenidoza offered a cultural and socio-political perspective on Filipino-*Hallyu* pop culture.

The Filipino *Hallyu* scene was first introduced in the country, like in Taiwan and Japan, through the airwaves of television serials that were commonly dubbed in Filipino (Tagalog), a competitive branding that soon came to be known as *Koreanovela*. The market success of such was commonly attributed to unique, melodramatic plotlines that were fresh takes from homegrown serials.

Furthermore, the massive popularity of *Hallyu* gave birth to the *Koreana* aesthetic, as evident in movies like *Kimmy Dora* and *Born to Love*, as well as Filipino remakes of K-drama classics termed, *Hanoyvela* (Vito-Cruz, 2018). Moreover, this became an opportunity for foreign Korean nationalities in the country to seek success so that, by the start of the new decade, Korean-nationals like Sandara Park, Grace Lee, and Ryan Bang rose in popularity locally. In fact, a search engine trend analysis suggests a gradual increase of search indexes on major Korean entertainment labels over the past 17 years (see *Figure 1*).

Figure 1: Search Trend Data of 3 Major Korean Entertainment Labels over 17 years¹



By the start of the new decade, Korean drama and music fanaticism in the country has extended into group fandoms, which further evolved into social network circles dubbed as *stan culture* that predominantly catered to Millennials and Generation Z communities. To add, the exponential rise of on-demand streaming platforms across the decade further empowered the consumption of *Hallyu* media en masse. *Hallyu*, globally, extended to Korean food, automobiles, cosmeceuticals, webtoons, and movies; such that, it penetrated the western market with the Hollywood critical success of filmmaker Bong Joon Ho's *Parasite* and the infiltration of K-pop idols in American music charts like *BTS* and *Blackpink*.

In retrospect, the thing with *Hallyu* is, as Igno & Cenidoza (2018) pointed out, that it was not a movement that exploded beyond a fad, unlike similar trends in former decades such as Mexican telenovelas and J-Pop; although

¹ Data Source: Google Trends (google.com/trends)

the latter has seen a resurgence in recent years. Furthermore, the Korean wave undoubtedly had massive global cultural influences and sociopolitical implications: Igno & Cenidoza (2018) used Joseph S. Nye's concept of *soft power* to explain Korean culture imperialism through *Hallyu*, with its materialist and consumerist nature being a tool for cultural diplomacy to forward foreign policy objectives.

With the sociopolitical nature of language, in general, being a well-established concept (Lippi-Green, 1997), the onslaught of the Korean wave in the country brought influences on the Filipino language in recent years.

Significance of the Study

Hanguk-eo and Hangul Learning Trends

In fact, language blog WordTips conducted independent market research entitled *Which Language Does Every Country Want to Learn?*, wherein they used search phrase analytics of over 119 languages and then calculated the number of yearly searches per 1,000 internet users; on which, they claim that Korean was the most sought-after language to learn in the Philippines.

Furthermore, an evaluation of the Korean Foreign Language (KFL) curricula in the Philippines by Bae & Igno (2012) saw an increase in the number of learners from top local universities enrolling in a KFL elective. More so, an increase that saw the need to import South Korean instructors, under a memorandum of agreement, as well as the need to train local, non-native Filipino KFL teachers.

Moreover, under their evaluation at their time, the basic syllabus is generally acceptable and practical for KFL learners. Furthermore, a qualitative evaluation saw the likelihood of code-switching behavior in non-native Filipino KFL teachers designing a bilingual syllabus. A monolingual approach, however, was also seen among some teachers which were regarded as a way to encourage regular immersion in the language.

Outside the constraints of formal education, however, learning a new language has been made entirely possible sans the need for an instructor. This is evident in a 2021 case study involving a Filipino migrant worker who showed effective self-instruction through online video clips, owing to the capability of a self-paced learner to create personal context and educational design (Hiromi, 2021). With language instruction more accessible than ever,

especially through internet media platforms like YouTube, a search trend data of relevant search terms over the decade suggests a slight increase in queries relating to Korean language learning; which, alternatively, may suggest a slight increase in learning motivations over the years (see *Figure 2*).

Figure 2: YouTube Search Trend Data of Relevant Search Terms Over 13 Years¹



Frankly, the KFL learning scene in the Philippines is far from the shadows of being a polyglot's niche. With a population actively consuming Korean media, just how easy is it for Filipinos to passively learn Korean?

Comparisons Between Hangeul-eo and Tagalog

Answering this question will require a bit of descriptive linguistics. Note that for the sake of this comparison, Tagalog refers to the standard Filipino language in official use as opposed to using the more politically-correct Filipino term. The South Korean dialect will also be in focus instead of its divergent counterpart North Korean dialect.

Foremost and most importantly, Korean and Tagalog came from vastly different language families with Korean being an isolated language (although an Altaic origin is debated amongst scholars) and Tagalog being a Malayo-Polynesian language from the larger Austronesian family of languages. Both have agglutinative grammar structures and an alphabetic writing system.

Furthermore, both Korean and Tagalog heavily feature morphemes from their respective language families and loanwords from European languages; Chinese influence is also evident in Korean while Tagalog had strong

Spanish influence due to colonization. Table 1 provides a summary of some key points of comparison between the two languages.

In summary, Korean and Tagalog offers little to no intersections aside from a few convergences in the lexicon; as in, 고무 & *goma* (rubber) originated from Japanese and Spanish, respectively, where both stemmed from Latin *gumma*, 티켓 & *tiket* (ticket) both originated from English *ticket*, and 센터 & *sentro* (center) originated from English & loaned from Spanish, respectively, where both stemmed from Latin *centrum*.

Table 1: Notable Comparisons Between Korean and Tagalog Language

	Korean	Tagalog
Language Family	Koreanic; isolate but probably of Altaic origin	Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian)
Script	Hangul 40-character alphabet	Latin-based 28 character alphabet Baybayin (archaic)
Grammar	Agglutinative; S-O-V	Agglutinative; verb-initial
Lexicon	Native Korean (Polysyllabic morphemes) Sino-Korean (Monosyllabic morphemes) Phoneticized Japanese Loanwords English Loanwords	Native Austronesian Spanish loanwords Indo, & Japanese loanwords Chinese loanwords (predominantly Hokkien and Cantonese) Taglish
Major Dialects	Hanguryeo (South Korean) Chong-son mal (North Korea) Jejun-mal (Jeju language)	Northern Tagalog (Bulacan dialect) Central Tagalog (Manila dialect) Southern Tagalog (Batanagas dialect) Marinduque Tagalog

Considering this argument, one may assume that an individual well past a critical age for language learning will have very little passive knowledge of a new language. However, a 2020 research article suggested otherwise in the case of non-Māori, English-speaking New Zealanders (Oh, et al., 2020). Experimental word identification and well-formedness rating tasks were given to non-Māori-speaking New Zealanders and Māori-speaking New Zealanders. Statistical analysis of the test scores found that non-Māori speakers seemed to possess a Māori proto-lexicon that most likely came from ambient exposure.

To contextualize, infants start at learning in their native language by building up a proto-lexicon of common utterances like *mommy* and *daddy* sans an actual, definitive meaning to those words. This furthers into attaching words to objects or people as labels until basic lexical semantics is built up before any sort of formal education (Johnson, 2016).

Background of the Study

Second Language Learning vs Acquisition

The distinction between learning and acquisition is one of the hypotheses established by Krashen (1983) in his highly regarded theory of foreign language acquisition known as the Natural Approach. Krashen stated that the concept of language learning refers to a conscious knowledge of a second language — knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them. In other words, language learning is based upon less communication and more explanation of grammar rules.

On the other hand, language acquisition refers to the process of natural assimilation, involving intuition and subconscious learning, which is the product of real interactions between people where the learner is an active participant. Basically, acquiring a second language is being generally unconsciously aware of the rules and is based on the “feeling” of correctness that may sound or feel right. (Diessel, n.d)

Through the years, researches were conducted with the aim of establishing a second language acquisition pattern that may be useful in designing responsive training and welfare programs. The study of Meniado (2019) examined how the Filipino migrant workers acquire their second language (L2) and what factors influence their rate and success in L2 learning as adult learners who struggle in learning the local language of their host countries to native-like proficiency level. The study utilized mixed methods research design and it revealed that immersion and actual use of the target language in authentic communicative situations can make language acquisition easier. Findings of this study also confirm that instrumental and integrative motivation coupled with strong target language (TL) community support can make L2 learning faster, while old age and non-necessity of the L2 at work can make the whole process slower.

Incidental Lexical/Vocabulary Acquisition

Incidental acquisition of vocabulary is an indirect way of learning new words through different means like consumption of media and ambient exposure (Ramos, 2014). Studies involving incidental acquisition of lexicon through media was mostly facilitated through subtitling. This is seen in Letola et al.'s 2019 study involving English natives learning the Italian language. Similarly, this was also evident in Alsubaie et al.'s 2020 study involving Bangladesh ESL learners who watch subtitled Japanese animation. As a third language, Arabic Japanese Foreign Language learners (Alsubaie & Alabbad et al., 2020) and an Indonesian avid consumer (Karimah et al., 2019) showed positive results in vocabulary acquisition with exposure to Japanese animation although the type and consistency does not support the process (Alsubaie & Alabbad, 2020). Incidental learning has also been shown through participation in competitive MMORPG games (Hussein, 2019).

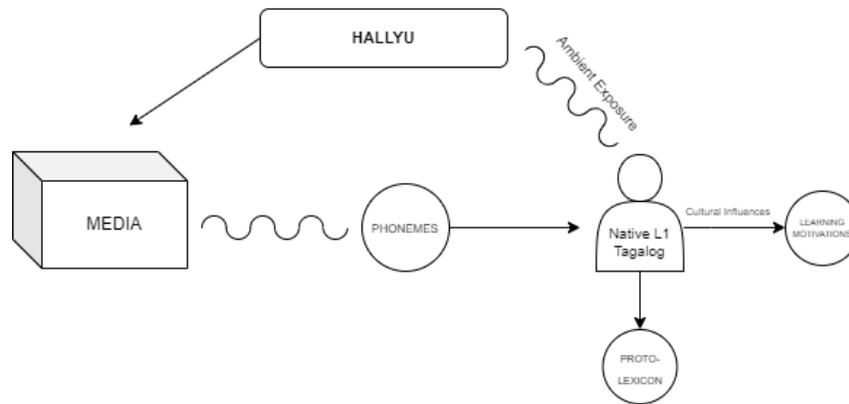
Filling Out Gaps and Designing a Framework

All in all, this research seeks to create a framework for an indirect lexical acquisition of the Korean language by native Tagalog speakers, through Korean pop media, in an attempt to fulfill the following research gaps:

- How do certain cultural aspects of *Hallyu* affect KFL learning motivations in native Tagalog Speakers?
 - In film and serials?
 - In music?
 - In print media?
 - With peers?

Conceptual Framework

Figure 3: Framework for Indirect Lexical Acquisition of Korean in Native L1 Tagalog Speakers through Hallyu Media



The framework was conceptualized on the basis that *Hallyu* has effects on the acquisition of vocabulary in L1 Tagalog speakers. *Hallyu* infiltrates media and ambient exposure exposes the native to the Korean language, which subsequently leads to the development of learning motivations and a possible proto-lexicon.

Methodology

Cultural Influences on Learning Motivations

A small focus group discussion was conducted with participants from Tagalog-speaking regions. Open-ended questions were asked based on several themes which are as follows: interests in consuming media, indirect Korean language learning, Korean language learning motivations, collective Korean language learning with peers, the influence of Korean popular culture on language learning, interest in the Korean Language Proficiency Test (TOPIK), and overall viewpoint on Korean popular culture and language learning. Additionally, the group interview was conducted using a virtual video conference platform and answers from participants were written and summarized.

Preliminary Assessment of Proto-Lexicon

To explore the conceptual framework, a preliminary assessment of the existence of a proto-lexicon was examined through convenience sampling.

As per the methodology of Oh et.al (2021), participants were grouped into three: A. I am a consumer of k-media but not fluent in Korean, B. I am neither a consumer nor fluent in Korean., and C. I am fluent or nearly fluent in Korean. Each participant was then asked if the presented group of morphemes are a Korean word, which were formed through the synthesis of different morphemes together. Since the study will only be an exploration of the framework, no statistical analysis will be conducted.

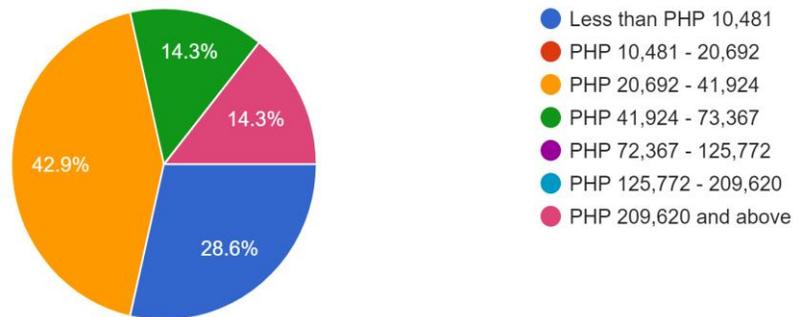
Results and Discussion

Cultural Influences on Learning Motivations

Participants are all young adult L1 Filipino speakers from 18 to 22 years old. With social classes identified by the Philippine Institute for Developmental Studies, 2 are from the poor class, 3 are in the lower middle class, 1 is from the middle class, and 1 is rich.

Figure 1: Social Class Percentage of Participants

Average Monthly Income of Household (Data from Philippine Institute for Developmental Studies)
7 responses



All say that Filipino is their most used language at home.

Interests in Consuming Media Most participants started getting into Korean pop culture (k-drama, k-pop, etc.) after the boom of the Korean wave post-2015 with idol groups like *Blackpink* and *Twice*. One significant note is that a lot reported that their interest took a k-drama to k-pop route. Furthermore, production value was most accredited to their interest in the consumption of Korean media in general as well as the fresh alternative it offers from the usual Western foreign media available to the Philippines, in addition to local productions.

“I do have the same sentiments because we know that the Philippines is a country with a colonial society especially with the influence of the west after their colonialization so k-entertainment in general is like a source of fresh air for us Filipinos to consume. That’s what makes the entertainment special because it’s different from what we have been used to.”

Indirect Korean Language Learning

Participants considered studying the Korean language but did not continue the daunting task. Those who were informally studying the language claim that they were able to pick basic phrases and interjections from k-drama. Language apps and online videos were most popular for those informally studying the Korean language. However, among the participants, only two claim to have had casual conversations with a native speaker.

“What really prompted me to study Korean is kdrama. It was a big help because there were conversations. [As well as] YouTube videos. I also read Korean websites randomly.”

Korean Language Learning Motivations

The ability to engage with native speakers was the most listed benefit of learning the Korean language. The participants agree that learning any foreign language is beneficial as it can be a great asset to show off, especially in their personal resumes. Learning the Korean language specifically will make it easier to consume the content but not very important in doing so.

“Learning any language in general is really beneficial since in the instance that u actually get to converse with the actual native from a certain country, you could have actual conversation — just converse your thoughts in a free manner.”

Collective Korean Language Learning with Peers

All the participants have friends who consume some form of Korean pop culture. They prefer to learn with their peers. One participant is part of an organization of fellow Korean language learners and enthusiasts.

“Yeah, I have few friends who like kpop and listen to kpop. I have one friend who is very loyal in his [series]. He updates his Twitter account everyday per episode, and ,yeah, online friends too.”

Influence of Korean Popular Culture on Language Learning While participants offered no concrete, explicit assumptions about the question, it was unanimously agreed among participants studying the language that Korean media must have had some extended degree of motivation for them to consider studying the language.

Korean Drama and Film Consumption and Language Learning One participant offered an explicit number of around 5 to 7 hours in a day, with participants in the same room agreeing that their consumption frequency is also around the number. A binge-watching behavior was reported by most participants—as expected from the general easier access to content that streaming platforms offer these days.

Korean Popular Music Consumption and Language Learning Participants report differing numbers of consumption frequency ranging from 3 hours to 9 hours a day. Additionally, patterns in consumption seemed best when passive during instances of doing chores or accomplishing academic tasks.

Manhwa and other Printed Works Consumption and Language Learning Only one participant consumed *manhwa* content—translated into English—religiously while other participants claim to have come across some type of similar content usually in the form of *webtoons*. Two participants claimed that they can read *hangul* to an extent.

Overall Viewpoint on Korean Popular Culture and Language Learning The consumption of Korean popular culture in general helps in acquiring knowledge about the Korean culture itself, as well as in grasping the Korean manner of speech and communication. If given the opportunity to go to Korea, the participants do not consider their knowledge of the Korean language to be enough for them to get by for their daily living and everyday needs.

“I think initially when you discover a new culture, it’s through their creative output like their art, music, all of that. When it comes to these said avenues, it has pieces of their culture in it. Most of the time they show their culture, traditions, phrases that are easy to remember, and manner of speech as well sometimes that you can piece from kdrama or manhwa and k-idols.”

Preliminary Assessment of Proto-Lexicon

Figure 2: Is this a real Korean word or not? - a Preliminary Assessment

	A. I am a consumer of k-media but not fluent in Korean	B. I am neither a consumer nor fluent in Korean.	C. I am fluent or nearly fluent in Korean.
Participants	75	14	7
Mean Score	1717	16	16
n=96			

Out of 96 participants, the test scores were rather impressive. Without a significant control group, the results do not have any statistically significant conclusions that can be drawn. However, the results of the preliminary assessment may offer a promising look into the Korean proto-lexicon that the participants may possess.

Conclusion & Recommendation

Overall, the focus group discussion offered an exploratory dip into the effects of ambient *Hallyu* exposure to the Filipino's lexicon. It is recommended to test out the framework through more rigorous quantitative data analysis to provide substantial evidence to the Filipino-Korean proto-lexicon.

Appendix A Thematic Interview Guide

Preliminary Questions

- Respondent's age, gender
 - School
 - Educational attainment
 - Education Institution Attended
 - Income (in Philippine Pesos)
 - Most used language at home
 - What other languages can you speak/familiar with
 - Have you ever been to Korea?
 - If yes, how often and how long did you stay?
-

Section 1: Interests in consuming Korean media (Kdrama, Kpop, etc)

- When did you start consuming Korean media & how long has it been a part of your life?
 - Preferred type of media
 - genres
 - In a day, how many hours do you consume korean media [avg.]
 - List down some of your favorites
 - Why do you like them?
 - What do you like about the Korean media?
-

Section 2: Indirect Korean language learning (how to they try to learn and understand the korean language)

- Have you ever considered studying the Korean language?
- Methods on how they try to learn korean
 - How did you first learn the Korean language?

- Have you formally studied the Korean language?
 - If yes, how many days/hours in a week do you spend studying?
 - Where? What platform/school/tutor?
 - Can you read & understand Hangul (Korean language script)?
 - Do you think you can engage in a casual conversation with a native speaker with your level of understanding now?
 - What made you interested in learning Korean language?
-

Section 3: Korean language learning motivations (do they make an effort in learning the Korean language beyond watching Korean media? When did it start? What motivated them to learn the Korean language?)

- When did you start putting effort into learning the language?
 - How did consuming Korean media inspire you to learn more about the Korean language?
 - Did you start practicing it outside of just watching Korean media?
 - Did you find it beneficial to learn the Korean language even though you are just interested in their media?
 - How do you learn to read or understand the language?
-

Section 4: Collective Korean language learning with fellow Korean media enthusiasts (how do Korean media content fans learn the Korean language together?)

- Do people in your close circle also consume any form of Korean pop culture?
 - Do you study the language with your friends or a group?
 - Does this help you learn the language faster?
 - Can you watch a show and understand it without subtitles?
 - What expressions or phrases do you hear or encounter frequently?
-

Section 5: The Influence of Korean Popular Culture in Language Learning

- How much of an influence did Korean popular culture affect your decision to study the Korean language?
-

Section 6: Questions on Korean Drama and Film Consumption and Language Learning

- How often do you watch K-drama and/or films?
 - How do you learn the Korean language from watching K-drama and/or films?
 - How are subtitles from K-drama/films useful in learning the Korean language?
 - Can you now watch this content without subtitles? If yes, how were you able to understand the discourses in K-drama/films?
-

Section 7: Questions Korean Popular Music Consumption and Language Learning

- How often do you listen to Korean popular music?
 - Who are your favorite K-pop artists/groups?
 - How does listening to K-pop music affect your learning of the Korean language?
-

Section 8: Questions on Manhwa Consumption and other Printed Work and Language Learning

- How often do you read Manhwa and other printed work that use the Korean language?
 - How did you start learning Hangeul (the Korean alphabet)?
 - How does the consumption of Manhwa and other printed work help in your learning of the Korean language?
 - Do you also use Korean language dictionaries? If yes, how are these useful in your learning of the Korean language?
 - In your self-assessment, are you confident in being able to read and understand street signs, store signs, food menus, and other everyday/essential signs in Hangeul?
-

Section 9: Overall Viewpoint on Korean Popular Culture and Language Learning

- Following your Korean popular culture consumption in general, how does watching Korean drama/films, listening to and singing K-pop music, and/or reading Korean language material complement your learning of the Korean language?
- If you had the opportunity to go to Korea now, do you think that your knowledge of the Korean language is enough for you to get by for your everyday needs? (E.g. ordering food, asking questions for directions, etc.)

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