

“You Listen to K-Pop? Me Too!”
How K-Pop Fans Westernized the Genre

by Moranda M. Johnson

K-pop, or Korean pop music, has always included Western elements. These elements are R&B, hip-hop and other music genres typically found in the United States. K-pop was not very popular in Western society until recently, when certain groups like BTS and BlackPink gained international popularity and caused K-pop to become mainstream. Within K-pop, there appears to be an increased trend of Westernization as K-pop fans and idols continue to interact with each other on a global scale, but how, and why, is this occurring? The purpose of this study is to better understand Westernization and the effects it can have on other languages and cultures. I analyze trends of Westernization within K-pop, and in particular how English has been incorporated into K-pop songs over time. Three songs from four K-pop groups were selected (debut song, middle song, and latest song), and the percentage of words in English calculated. Results show an increase in the amount of English in the songs throughout the years, correlating with the groups' increased popularity in Western countries. I also analyzed K-pop artists with and without Asian ancestry as well as conducted interviews with members in K-pop fandoms to determine if they believed K-pop was becoming more Westernized. Based on these results, I conclude that as more people from Western countries begin to take an interest in K-pop, the more influence these fans had over the music genre. Through this research, I hope to be able to explain why Westernization affects so many different aspects of non-Western cultures today.