

# K-pop stars want to teach their fans Korean



South Korean group BTS has a huge international fan base, and is possibly the biggest boy band in the world right now.  
[Photo: LG Electronics]

*Globally, music has always been a powerful force in spreading awareness about other languages, writes CHEW WEI SHAN.*

If you are familiar with Korean pop or K-pop, you will probably have heard of the band BTS. BTS is short for “Bangtan Sonyeondan”, a Korean expression meaning “bulletproof boy scouts”. The seven-man South Korean group has a huge international fan base, and is possibly the biggest boy band in the world right now.

Just this February, BTS released their latest album, *Map of the Soul: 7*. Within only a few days they sold 4.1 million copies, making it the best-selling album of the year worldwide. The album even **debuted** at number one on American Billboard charts.

BTS sings and raps about a range of meaningful topics, including mental health, friendship, and loving yourself. But, as most of their fans around the world do not know Korean, they are not able to fully appreciate BTS’ lyrics. Many passionate fans around the world began asking the band to add English **subtitles** to their music videos.

So, the group is launching a web series to help their fans learn the language. Starting from 24 March, the seven celebrities will host 30 Korean lessons on the social media app, Weverse.

The episodes are “designed to make it easy and fun for global fans who have difficulty enjoying BTS’ music and contents due to the language barrier,” said BTS’ record label. Each episode will teach viewers simple Korean expressions and basic grammar.

### Spreading languages through music

BTS songs contain some English and even Japanese, but their lyrics are mainly Korean and they have no plans to translate their songs into other languages.

On the other hand, many stars record and perform their music in many languages. Singer Andrea Bocelli’s native language is Italian,

but he also sings in French, Spanish, English, Latin, and Portuguese. Celine Dion speaks English and French, but she has also sung in Spanish, German, Japanese and even Mandarin. Artists like these not only use a variety of languages to spread their music beyond their shores, but also help to grow their listeners’ curiosity about languages other than their own.



Celine Dion speaks English and French, but she has sung in many different languages. [Photo: Anirudh Koul]

Just as popular Western pop stars helped spread the English language across the globe, K-pop stars like BTS, Blackpink, and EXO are **piquing** the world’s interest in Korean language and culture.

Globally, music has always been a powerful force in spreading awareness about other languages. Spanish, for example, has long been a part of mainstream consciousness because of big international hits. From “La Bamba” to “Macarena” in the fifties and nineties to current global chart-topper, “Despacito”, Spanish lyrics reach millions around the world. This has encouraged many to learn common Spanish phrases, and discover more about Spanish-speaking cultures.

Experts say that music is a great way to learn another language. Of course, if you really like a song, you would want to know what the lyrics mean so you can connect more deeply with the music. This will motivate you to learn. Also, did you know that the side of the brain which controls language learning is the same side that makes sense of music?

Moreover, musical elements like tone and rhythm are very useful in helping us remember new vocabulary. Every song conveys emotion or tells a story, and when we learn new words within that context, it helps us understand not only what a word means, but also how a word can be used to express our feelings or experiences.

## ***Non-English expressions made famous through music***

### **Hakuna matata**

“Hakuna Matata” (1994) is a song from the popular Disney movie, *The Lion King*. The music was written by Elton John, with lyrics by Tim Rice. The song is sung by Timon and Pumbaa in the movie. “Hakuna matata” is a Swahili saying. It means “no problem” or “no worries”. Sing these verses if you know how:

*Hakuna matata! What a wonderful phrase.  
Hakuna matata! Ain't no passing craze!*

*It means no worries  
For the rest of your days  
It's our problem-free philosophy  
Hakuna matata!*

### **Que sera, sera**

“Que Sera, Sera” (1956) was written by Jay Livingston and Ray Evans, made popular by American singer Doris Day. The Spanish phrase means “what will be, will be”, and the chorus goes like this:

*Que sera, sera  
Whatever will be, will be  
The future's not ours to see  
Que sera, sera  
What will be, will be*

### **Auld lang syne**

“Auld Lang Syne” (1788) is a Scottish poem written by Robert Burns, and later sung to the tune of a traditional Scottish folk song. Around the world, people sing it on the stroke of midnight on new year’s eve to bid farewell to the old year. The phrase can roughly be translated to “days gone by”, or “old times”. Do you know the melody?

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
and never brought to mind?  
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
and auld lang syne?

### **Jai guru deva om**

“Jai guru deva om” is a lyric in the legendary song, “Across the Universe” (1970), by The Beatles. The band famously travelled to India to study meditation with respected Indian guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The mantra, “Jai guru deva om” is in Sanskrit. Its words can carry many meanings, but it is most widely understood to mean “glory to the shining remover of darkness” or “hail to the divine guru”. Ask your parents or grandparents if they know this Beatles song and can sing these lyrics to you:

*Jai Guru Deva, Om  
Nothing's gonna change my world  
Nothing's gonna change my world*

### **VOCAB BUILDER**

**debuted** (say “day-biu’d”; verb) = performed publicly for the first time.

**subtitles** (say “sab-tai-tels”; noun) = text at the bottom of the screen that translates what is said in the show.

**piquing** (say “pee-king”; verb) = arousing curiosity.