

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of this study, problem identification, limitations of the study, research question, purpose of the study, and significance of the study.

1.1 Research Background

In this era, common people use Korean expressions such as ‘aigoo’, ‘omoo’, and ‘saranghae’ in everyday communication, both in face-to-face conversations and online interactions. The increase of Korean Culture is not only about language but also television drama, music, fashion, food, and celebrities (Shim, 2006). This form of Korean popular culture is called the “Korean Wave” or, in simplify form, “K-Wave” (*Hallyu* or *Hanryu* in Korean), which has spread worldwide, particularly in Indonesia. The Korean Wave began to enter and develop in Indonesia around 2002, starting with the emergence of music CDs and Korean dramas broadcast on television stations (Rafdinal et al., 2023). Over time, Korean content has become more accessible through websites; as a result, people have also found it easier to incorporate Hallyu into their everyday lives. Furthermore, Korean culture has Eastern cultural values that are similar to Indonesian cultural characteristics, so it is not surprising that its influence and spread in Indonesia are very strong.

Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Minister YU In Chon, MCST, in collaboration with the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange, President JUNG Kil Hwa, KOFICE, did a survey in 2024 about the

use and perception of *Hallyu* in each main foreign country. The survey shows that most participants' responses regarding Korean content are positive, with Indonesia having the highest percentage (86.3%), followed by India (84.5%), Thailand and the United Arab Emirates (83.0%), and Vietnam (82.9%). The data show the countries with the highest levels of preference for Korean content, particularly in Southeast Asia.

Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) also stated that the consumption of Korean content per person per month reaches 11.6 hours, where the countries with the highest consumption of Korean content include India (18.6 hours), Thailand (18.4 hours), Indonesia (17.0 hours), and Vietnam (16.4 hours). Then, other data shows that Korean pop (K-pop) topped the list of associations with Korea for seven consecutive years with a response from the respondents of 17.2%, followed by Korean food (K-food) of 13.2%, Korean drama (K-drama) of 7.0%, Information Technology (IT) products/brands of 6.3%, and beauty products of 5.2%. Various aspects of Korean culture that are in demand with the top positions include K-pop, K-food, and K-drama. The popularity of Korean content significantly influences the widespread use of the Korean language in everyday communication.

The emergence of *Hallyu* in Asia proves how the community follows the dialogues in Korean dramas and becomes part of the habits of many people (Nuranisa, 2015). This phenomenon led to the emergence of a community of Korean culture enthusiasts known as *Hallyu* fans. According to Abd-Rahim (2019), *Hallyu* fans are individuals loyal to South Korean culture, including music, drama, and film. *Hallyu* also triggers fans to learn the Korean language

and culture (Nuranisa, 2015). The influence of foreign cultures causes people to start adapting and learning foreign languages (Meliani et al., 2021). Some fans mentioned that the Korean language is the part of Korean culture that most increases their interest (Reindra et al., 2024). Consuming Korean drama, film, or music can help fans understand and even use Korean expressions in their daily communication, either directly or by combining them with their native language.

In addition to the use of expressive expressions, many fans also use swear words that they encounter in the lyrics of Korean pop songs or in the dialogue of a drama. People are more interested in using swear words than good words because they think that swear words are more interesting to them (Saniada et al., 2023). According to Crystal (as cited in Prayuda et al., 2019), swear words are the most common signals to be used as emotional expression, especially when one is angry. A person swears to do something, to another individual or entity, and occasionally an individual swears when they lose control (Prayuda et al., 2019). The use of swear words may be considered inappropriate in formal contexts, but it can also be part of social communication and interaction in some cultures (Meliyana, 2024).

Swearing is highly context-dependent, including the relationship between the speaker and the listener and the location of its use, so it is not always considered rude or impolite (Timothy & Janschewitz, 2008). Because people also tend to use various languages without being tied to strict language standards (Wedananta, 2023). People also typically use language based on social behaviors that are agreed upon and accepted within their community (Purandina et al., 2014). Timothy & Janschewitz (2008) also explained that the level of sensitivity

to swear words by native and non-native speakers is different, where native speakers tend to be more flexible in assessing the appropriateness of using swear words in a particular context.

The swear words that are used in Korean are ‘*ssibal*’, ‘*jenjang*’, ‘*saekkya*’, and many others (Az’Zahrah et al., 2019). For example, in the song titled “Daechwita” by Suga from BTS, where the lyrics are ‘*Saekkya geulae neo ye-oeeobs-i*’, the lyrics mention the word ‘*ssaekkya*’ which means ‘*asshole*’ in English. Then, another example of a Korean drama that is popular in 2024 is entitled “Squid Game 2”, in which episode 7 contains a dialogue that contains swear words such as ‘*ssibal*’, and there are many more Korean dramas whose dialogue contains swear words. Frequent consumption of these contents can cause fans to start using swear words in their daily communication. Without understanding the meaning and context of their use in depth, they may not realize that these swear words can be considered inappropriate by native Korean speakers. In addition, Korean swear words are often used when fans mimic expressions used by drama characters or idols, without understanding the sociocultural nuances associated with these words or their degree of harshness. This can lead to misunderstandings, as the use of swear words is associated with rudeness and linguistics does not provide written rules about when or where swear words are considered appropriate (Timothy & Janschewitz, 2008).

In cross-cultural communication, the use of Korean swear words by *Hallyu* fans is a crucial issue. Someone should be careful in choosing the words when communicating with other people because the wrong choice of words can hurt someone’s feelings and can cause social offense (Setyaningtias et al., 2023).

This phenomenon is not only theoretical but also observed in real-world contexts through social media interactions. For example, on TikTok and X (formerly Twitter), various posts show the different reactions of *Hallyu* fans to the use of the word ‘*ssibal*’. One of the TikTok videos accessed on May 6, 2025, depicts the user telling her story while using the word ‘*ssibal*’ in public spaces. The video received more than 80,000 likes and over 900 comments. In the comments section, several responses reflected diverse perspectives among *Hallyu* fans. Some fans said that the swear word sounded humorous, while others emphasized that it should not be used carelessly because it is very rude. In the comment section, there was also a user who told about her experience of using the word ‘*ssibal*’ and then being given a look of dislike by the Korean Native Speaker. This phenomenon exhibits significant differences in perception and is highly diverse, so it warrants further research. Therefore, this research is not only important but also necessary, as many *Hallyu* fans use Korean swear words without understanding their meanings within social and cultural contexts.

In this study, the author focuses on perceptions of the use of Korean swear words in *Hallyu* fans' communication, which remains very limited. Most existing studies discuss swear words only in broad terms or in the context of media such as films and social media platforms, as in the study by Meliyana (2024), entitled “Types and Functions of Swear Words Used in Bad Santa Movie”. However, within the *Hallyu* community, the use of rude Korean phrases is increasingly common in the daily interactions of international fans, whether consciously or unconsciously. This research aims to explore Korean swear words commonly used by *Hallyu* fans, their perceptions of their use, the situations in

which they are typically used, and the social factors that influence their use. The results of this study are expected to make an academic contribution to sociolinguistic research and enrich the understanding of linguistic dynamics in global popular culture.

1.2 Problem Identification

The issue is interesting to explore because it involves a semantic shift and has the potential to cause miscommunication between native and non-native speakers. Previous studies have examined how non-native speakers perceive the use of Korean swear words by native speakers. However, one problem that emerges is the lack of understanding of the sociocultural context surrounding the use of these swear words by non-native speakers. Given this, the main problem identifications are as follows:

1. There is a need for a deeper understanding of the use of Korean swear words. What is considered inappropriate and rude in the Korean environment may not be considered the same by international fans. This points to the need to explore factors such as cultural influences, language context, and how fans interpret rude language in both digital and offline settings.
2. Many fans use Korean swear words without knowing their true meaning, which can lead to misunderstanding and misapplication, possibly causing conflict in cross-cultural communication.

1.3 Research Limitation

This study focuses on *Hallyu* fans who are non-native Korean speakers, specifically Indonesian *Hallyu* fans at Ganesha University of Education, as the

phenomenon also occurs on the university campus. Therefore, the findings may not represent the perception of *Hallyu* fans, that of native Korean speakers, or broader communities. This research focuses on perception, which is a subjective opinion based on respondents' personal experiences; therefore, the results of this study may not reflect perceptions grounded in linguistic theory. Because swear words have varying weights and meanings depending on one's cultural background, what is considered “rude” or “offensive” can vary significantly from person to person and cannot be broadly generalized.

1.4 Statement of Research Problem

Based on the identified problems, the research questions can be proposed as follows:

1. What Korean swear words are commonly used by *Hallyu* fans?
2. In what situations do the *Hallyu* fans use the Korean swear words?
3. What is the perception of the *Hallyu* fans of using Korean swear words in everyday communication?
4. What are the factors that influence *Hallyu* fans' use of Korean swear words in everyday communication?

1.5 Research Objectives

Based on the research question above, the objective of the study could be obtained as follows:

1. To identify the Korean swear words that are commonly used by *Hallyu* fans.
2. To identify in what situations the *Hallyu* fans use the Korean swear words.
3. To explore how the *Hallyu* fans' perceptions of the use of Korean swear words in everyday communication.

4. To analyze the factors that influence the use of Korean swear words by the *Hallyu* fans.

1.6 Research Significances

This research is expected to enhance theoretical and practical understanding of *Hallyu* fans' use of Korean swear words and how non-native speakers use and understand these words in everyday communication. This research also investigates the socio-cultural context, politeness standards, and media exposure in how *Hallyu* fans perceive and respond to rude expressions in Korean.

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

This research is expected to contribute to linguistic studies, particularly in the fields of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and cross-cultural communication. This research can deepen the understanding of how swear words in Korean are received and interpreted by non-native speakers, as well as how cultural context affects the understanding of rude language, in addition, the results of this study can also be an additional reference in the study of politeness, impoliteness, and the phenomenon of language adaptation in the context of globalization and popular culture.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

The findings of this research are expected to be useful for:

- a. For Government

The findings of this study are expected to inform the government about the influence of Korean culture on the use of abusive language

among the younger generation, thereby supporting efforts to promote responsible media consumption and respectful communication.

b. For Ganesha University of Education

The results of this study can serve as a valuable source of information for students and teachers at Ganesha University of Education, especially in the areas of linguistics, education, and cross-cultural communication, to gain more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of Korean swear words use and its influence on the way language is used in daily interactions. The findings from this study could also serve as an important resource for students at Ganesha University of Education, particularly for those participating in student exchange programs to Korea. By understanding how rude expressions in Korean are interpreted and applied, students can improve their cross-cultural communication skills and reduce the chances of misunderstandings, especially when interacting with native Korean speakers.

c. For *Hallyu* Fans

The results of this study can offer important insights for *Hallyu* fans, allowing them to better recognize the cultural and linguistic elements of Korean pop, especially the use of swear words in everyday communication. This knowledge can promote more conscious media consumption and deepen appreciation of the linguistic and cultural nuances of the Korean entertainment industry

d. For Korean Language Learners and Teachers

Teachers and students of Korean can use this study to understand how swear words are perceived and used in the *Hallyu* fan community. Understanding these cultural and linguistic nuances supported learners not only in understanding Korean grammar and vocabulary but also in navigating the social contexts in which the language is used in daily communication, especially in the Korean entertainment industry.

e. For Other Researchers

Other researchers can rely on this study as a reference for further investigating the relationship among language, culture, and media, particularly in the context of *Hallyu* and its impact on language use. This research lays a foundation for future studies on the function of swear words in global popular culture, offering insight into how cultural phenomena, such as Korean content, influence language norms and communication practices across social context

