

Can You Learn a New Language by Listening to Music?

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Throughout the last decade, as technology and streaming services grew in popularity, so did the idea of exploring genres from across the globe. Having the entire music industry at one's fingertips allowed for average music listeners to listen to music languages that are completely foreign to them, and thus, exposing culture to brand new, and actively listening, audiences. As global artists grew in popularity, it raised the question: Can listening to music in other languages help you learn new languages and lead to learning new cultures?

Can You Learn a New Language with Music?

Trigger Interest in Learning a New Languages:

“Since I don’t know what they’re saying, I should find out.” What starts as merely going to YouTube and finding a translated lyric video might turn into wanting to know certain phrases or words in that language, to wanting to learn the entire language through e-learning platforms like Babbel or Duolingo. This transitions into wanting to learn another language for the sole purpose of understanding new tunes not only expands

upon your music taste but also acts as an entertaining way of gaining language-learning skills.

Listening to music in other languages exposes them to the sound, rhythm and intonation of different languages helps them to discriminate between sounds, which is an important component of language acquisition. It also encourages concentration and the practice of active listening.

In addition to listening, following foreign artists also provide an outlet of contact where the language is being used by native speakers in real life scenarios. Many artists are active on social media, whether through Twitter, Instagram or Youtube, modern communication allows for instant interactions between artists and their fanbase. By following foreign artists, learners can practice listening, reading and even writing. On top of that, by engaging in a fanbase with such a diversity of listeners, it can become easy to make foreign friends, who speak the language you are trying to learn, natively, creating yet another source for one to utilize to increase learning abilities, and help prevent social distance between learners and their language they are learning.

Develop an Appreciation for Other Cultures:

When it comes to music in a foreign language, often the music reflects some aspect of a culture dissimilar to your own. Listening to just one song in a foreign language is enough to spur a desire to learn more about other cultures, enabling you to be more empathetic to other peoples' beliefs or experiences. Listening to music of another culture is also a great way to experience the idea that we live in a diverse world with people of all sorts of backgrounds and values.

As explained before, social media allows for artists to have instant connection with their fanbase and allows them to provide content of all kinds. Video behind the scenes of either music videos, shows or even vlogs, exposes fans to a new culture, seeing the societies of other countries and the small mannerisms and customs that are different than their own.

As the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once said, "Music is the universal language of all mankind."

Listening to music is arguably the easiest act a person can do. Because it's such a simple task, there's no reason not to listen to music in a foreign language and get more out of it than you would with your native language.

Anyone who refuses to listen to music in other languages simply because "they aren't speaking English" is one of the most lackluster excuses, and depending on their attitude, can be somewhat xenophobic. By refusing, you are limiting yourself, and you

will never know what kind of content might exist out there simply because you refused to listen.

These days, almost all music videos and content contain closed captions with English subtitles, or there are videos and websites that have already translated the content posted. On top of that, bilingual fans are common within these communities, many of which provide translated content for the artists they support, many posting almost real-time.

Does Listening to Foreign Music *Actually* Expose You to New cultures?

Exposure to Culture



BTS (방탄소년단 *Bangtan Sonyeondan*)

When it comes to popular foreign artists, one of the first ones to come to mind is Korean boy group BTS, having a fanbase of over 45 million worldwide.

BTS are known for showcasing Korean culture and language worldwide through their music,

where they often express their thoughts about pertinent issues such as mental health, coming-of-age, individualism, loss, and self-love.

In fact, despite cultural medals traditionally being given to recipients with more than 15 years of notable achievements, BTS became the youngest ever recipients honored with the [Order of Cultural Merit](#) by the [President of South Korea](#) in 2018, five years after debuting, due to their noteworthy contributions in spreading Korean culture and language.

But are fans actually learning about the culture? Well, yes!

According to HRI, 796,000 foreigners visit South Korea annually because of BTS, promoting the local tourism industry. Out of the 10.41 million people, 7.6% of the visits in 2017 were influenced by the Korean group.

Additionally, on Dec, 2018, the Hyundai Research Institute (HRI) reported that BTS generates an estimated amount of **4 trillion won (\$3.54 billion) as economic value** to the country per year and **1.42 trillion won (\$1.26 billion) as added value** per year.

BTS also lead a **22% increase** of Korean Hallyu fans worldwide in 2018 (Korean Hallyu means the increase in popularity of Korean music, films, TV shows and language), exposing their listeners not only to music, but other popular forms of media within Korea and providing even more forms of content for language learning.

When it comes to the number of Korean language learners overall, U.S. college student enrollment in Korean language classes has risen 78% from 2009 to 2016. Therefore, artists, like BTS, have triggered a spark for learning the Korean language by sharing their messages through their music, while also constantly showing their pride for their Korean heritage.

[IDOL BTS MMA 2018 Performance](#) (0 - 2:47 Intro, 2:47- End Group)



In 2018, BTS gave one of their all time greatest performances (still agreed upon by fans in 2022) to the song “[IDOL](#),” which is a song about loving yourself; your background, your culture, and your identity.

They started the performance using a remixed version of the song which integrated traditional Korean

instruments, then panned to each of the group’s main dancers, where each member did a traditional Korean dance. Member j-hope started with the traditional drum dance which is known as Samgo-Mu dance, Jimin then entered doing a traditional fan dance called Buchae dance, then followed by Jung Kook, who performed a traditional mask dance.

All the members then show up on stage wearing modernized Korean Hanbok as the main song begins, leading to the audience to shout out with the members, “You can’t stop me lovin’ myself.”

Bad Bunny (Benito Antonio Martínez)

In recent years, Latin music has continued to grow in popularity, and one of the biggest acts in the industry is Puerto Rican singer, rapper and producer Bad Bunny. He has a fanbase of over 40 million fans worldwide and when asked to describe his music and style in three words, Bad Bunny goes with “original,” “energetic,” and “different.”



His unabashed pride for Latino communities and the Spanish language, defiance of traditional gender norms and push for justice on a range of social issues makes him a de facto political icon. “He not only won my heart and allegiance through his incredible music but also through his distinct strides to redefine masculinity and his desire to use his platform to advocate for women’s rights, LGBTQ+ issues, and the [Puerto Rican community](#)”

Spanish speaking fans of this music have said, “He was the first artist I felt connected to in all the ways that the American-based artists I listened to couldn’t address.”

“The music allowed me to meet and interact with other young [Latinx people](#) who are bicultural and have similar life experiences. I feel welcome in both his music but also in his message as a person.”

Fans have also expressed how integrating more Spanish music into their lives has increased their confidence in speaking or messaging, as well as sharing social media posts in Spanish, and incorporating slang into conversations.

What Does this Mean?

Music is a universal language, no matter where you are from or what your background is. There are artists that have proved they can break through language barriers and introduce cultures to fans across the world, connecting people across the globe through a common love of music. Not only can you learn a new language and improve your language learning ability, but just being open to the idea of other cultures introduces you to new communities and allows you to connect with people, regardless of what languages you speak.

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