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Fandom, Social Media, and Identity Work: The Emergence of Virtual Community Through the Pronoun "We"

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The K-pop fandom community has transnationally evolved through social media, making itself known and represented through the pronoun "we" for identity work. Although the pronominal register for self-referencing reflects social identity beyond egocentric consciousness, it also evokes perceived proximity of the addressee with the utterance for group cohesion. We, therefore, performed computational text analysis using 179,350 English-written comments on the Facebook page for fans of a globally emerging K-pop boyband Bangtan Sonyeondan from May 2013 to March 2018. This study found the following: (a) that the first-person plural pronoun "we" was on the rise in the linguistic organizing, (b) that we-words were more likely to be paired with words about interpersonal processes rather than ones about intrapersonal processes, and (c) that the primacy given to "we" for self-referencing over "I" predicted the greater level of group interactions, manifested by giving a "like" to or making a "comment" on messages from each other. We further discuss why the plural pronoun "we" in fandom language is tied to the coming of a new cultural identity in a digital age.

Public Policy Relevance Statement
Tracing the use of personal pronouns ("I" and "we") is a useful method for measuring how group identity is constructed within a virtual community. We found that when individual fans used "we" to refer to themselves more than "I" in their interactions with other fans online, their messages were more likely to encourage not only a sense of social connectedness but also fans becoming more engaged in the community.

Keywords: K-pop fandom, Facebook community, identity work, we-words, computational text analysis

K-pop fandom is one of the most dynamic features of contemporary culture and community building. Beginning with *Gangnam Style* by the Korean musician Psy, K-pop has become an emerging social phenomenon representing how, through the media, fans are extending youth culture beyond racial and linguistic boundaries (Yoon, 2018). More recently, Bangtan Sonyeondan (BTS, hereafter) has emerged as the most popular Korean group worldwide. BTS made its debut on June 12, 2013, and immediately began enjoying great success in major music markets. The band's popularity is rooted in the exponential growth of its strong fan base, who refer to themselves as the *ARMY* that actively promotes the boy band through social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

The widespread expansion of social media through mobile phones has been considered an unprecedented opportunity for such fans—especially young people—to experience interpersonal bonds and construct collective identity in cyberspace (Booth, 2015; Lee & Lim, 2019). Within a virtual fandom community, individual fans have the reduced cost of accessing group experiences that transcend conventional boundaries of social structures and ideologies for identity construction (Booth, 2008; Jenkins, 2018). In this sense, virtual fandom communities transcend cases of social, geographical, or mobility-related isolation (Rodham, McCabe, & Blake, 2009) and address the unavailability of proximate, offline sources of support (Savic, Best, Rodda, & Lubman, 2013).

The social process of community building reflects Festinger's (1950) definition of cohesion as "the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group" (p. 164). In that regard, group cohesion is manifested by the causal mechanism through which individual fans' attitudes and behaviors are constructed to encourage interpersonal interactions (Friedkin, 2004). That is to say, group cohesion within a fandom community affords structural conditions to produce collective identity and group participation, but it is also maintained reciprocally by interpersonal interactions among individual members. For instance, an individual fan's message on a social-media fandom page for fandom activity creates a vibrant venue for interpersonal interactions by receiving "likes" or "comments" from other fans. This view suggests that linguistic

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practices render certain structural conditions for social cohesion that engage individuals in group experiences for collective-identity construction and behavioral coordination. But it is unclear about the linguistic mechanism through which fandom messages encourage interpersonal interactions for these social experiences.

We argue that group cohesion of a fandom community in cyberspace is encouraged by the pronominal deixis that opens up an interactive context for identity work. Here, our conceptualization of identity work rests on the view of Bucholtz and Hall (2005) that identity should be considered the emergent product of linguistic practices than their preexisting source. Given that pronominal deixis indicates personal pronouns the referents of which need to be identified in an understanding of their context (Zupnik, 1994), linguistic expression produces identity work to distinguish between the speaker (the sender of the message), the addressee (the message's intended recipient), and everyone else (intended audience, a person who is not a member of the speaker but may be considered part of the conversational group). In particular, the first-person plural pronoun "we" situates intersubjective consciousness in fandom messages to the extent that its utterance represents multiple nonspeakers who are not necessarily its referents (Stawarska, 2008). As a result, the utterance of we-words (e.g., *we*, *our*, *us*) for self-referencing rather than I-focus words (e.g., *I*, *my*, *me*) encourages interpersonal interactions: We-words not only express the speaker's perception of social distinctions and categorization (Papapavlou & Sophocleous, 2009) but also indicate the addressee, who is included in or excluded from its referents.

Of course, based on Anderson's (2006) well-traveled idea of "imagined community," much has been learned about the functioning of group-identity work among those who share a text and create artifacts to interact with each other in online settings (Feenberg & Bakardjieva, 2004; Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011). But few empirical investigations have examined the effects of pronominal deixis, especially the collective plurality marker "we," on the construction of cohesiveness in virtual communities. Thus, by exploring whether such linguistic registers induce the behavioral engagement of nonspeakers in fandom interactions, this study fills a gap in research on the social role of language in identity work.

Theoretical Framework

Social Media, Fandom Language, and Social Identity

In the contemporary media environment, a fandom community is often contextualized in a social-media setting, because the digitally enabled means of communications is adept at facilitating a new form of cultural flow without traditional gatekeepers in the mass-cultural industry (Booth, 2015; Jenkins, 2018). Using digital platforms of social interactions and narrowcasting, fans customize the texts from the mass-media industry to suit their own needs and interests; indeed, they have autonomy in selecting and using language that expresses and maintains their own interests (De Kosnik et al., 2015). From this perspective, fandom language on social media constitutes communicative practices that mobilize social and cultural identities to be reconstituted in the present period (see Morley & Robins, 2002). In other words, language is a key marker in a socially constructed experience of identity formation (Labov, 2010).

But the increased opportunity for accessing fandom communications is insufficient, though necessary, to enhance a sense of community or encourage group cohesiveness. A fandom community here is conceptualized as being manifested by behavioral engagement in certain forms of interaction and coordination among individual fans beyond their membership. In our view of community, it is important for a sense of group identity to emerge, so that fans share and reciprocate their communication practices (Pearson, 2010). And the infrastructure of communications is crucial to the identity work in which individual fans perform membership behaviors to sustain fandom energy and productivity for shared meaning-making processes (De Kosnik et al., 2015). For example, through social networks on Facebook, a loosely networked community emerges through coordinated action such as "liking" others' comments or "commenting" on others' messages among people who could not be in contact otherwise.

Of course, we acknowledge that identity work is possible to result from being a community member, not vice versa. It is also a convincing counterargument that identity construction is especially crucial at some stages in development that may not serve as the cause of joining fan communities. Nevertheless, in the context of online communities, identity work is flexibly invited and reformed by the technology-enabled structure for a participatory culture and social networks. Jenkins (2018) shed light on emerging practices of cultural production that take participatory forms: Producers and consumers are all brought together in the negotiation process by which popular texts are defined and evaluated. Moreover, social media afford loosely tied, opt-in/opt-out networks in which social identifications are flexibly enabled by inclusive personal expression rather than by preexisting group affiliation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). In doing so, online communicative practices around fandom discourse encourage rich experiences of social connectedness and common identities. This line of reasoning suggests that we should look at fandom language to account for what factors affect not only a sense of belonging but also levels of behavioral engagement within a fandom community.

Certainly, there have been scholarly attempts to explore how the new communal identities have emerged and evolved through the language use of the groups (Goel et al., 2016). In the field of psycholinguistics, language style has been related to the dynamics of interpersonal relationships; for instance, the increase in using personal pronouns creates interpersonal connectedness for the speaker to build a shared reference with listeners (Chung & Pennebaker, 2018; Pennebaker, 2011). From this perspective, the utterance of the "we" pronoun always involves a matter of "what kind of *relation* [is] established between the addresser and the addressee" (Stawarska, 2008, p. 410). But the importance of pronominal deixis is also manifested in the social process by which group identity emerges and is maintained in the online setting (Bäck, Bäck, Sendén, & Sikström, 2018). Bennett and Booth (2015) showed that diverse fans develop a strong sense of community through using certain linguistic markers together online, and their shared quest for learning such a language serves to hold and maintain their unique group identity. In the following sections, we review the psychological meaning of the pronoun "we" and its social impact on identity work.

The Psycholinguistic Aspects of the Pronoun "We" as Identity Marker

Regarding the psychological meaning of pronoun use, Maitland and Wilson (1987) argued that choices between first-person singular and plural reflect the speaker's perceived relation with the hearer. In a similar vein, the pronoun "we" has been analyzed to reveal the speaker's sense of inclusivity and belonging (Pennebaker, 2011). And this psychological view of language as an identity marker extends to the online setting, confirming the relationship between frequent use of we-words and group-identity orientations (Michinov, Michinov, & Toczek-Capelle, 2004; Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997). For example, Pennebaker and Chung (2013) found an increase in the use of we-words during crisis situations, such as terrorist attacks and natural disasters, by analyzing 75,000 blog entries from about 1,000 bloggers. This linguistic change is attributable to the growing primacy given to unaccounted social interactions and group coordination in such uncertain circumstances (Carrithers, 2008). By prioritizing we-words for self-referencing over I-words, therefore, self is identified with intersubjective consciousness (Stawarska, 2008). The use of pronominal deixis is also aligned to show not only how strongly people feel a sense of belonging to a group but also how exclusively they position their group against others.

According to self-categorization theory, identity builds on cognitive categorizing of self between personal and social identity (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Personal identity is characterized by the individual's perceived differences from other (in-group) persons. On the other hand, social identity emphasizes self-categories that bond with members of certain categories based on their shared similarities rather than other social categories (Turner et al., 1994). To be sure, the two forms of identity are not mutually exclusive—but can work in tandem. Nevertheless, a person perceives self more as "we" (social identity) than "I" (personal identity) when the self is defined in relation to the experience of other people (Turner et al., 1994). Given this definition of identity, the priority given to the plural "we" for self-referencing over the singular "I" indicates the primacy of shared social identity in such a way that individual self-perception is *depersonalized*. That is to say, the self becomes defined and experienced with similarities within "us" and differences from "them" so that idiosyncratic personal differences become marginalized in contrast to a perceived social distance from other groups. This linguistic manifestation of identity is likely to occur in the fandom community. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> *Hypothesis 1-1:* The use of we-words in individual fans' messages is positively associated with their fandom community's progress.

Of course, pronouns are referred to as "function words" that have little meaning on their own but exist to integrate more meaning-laden vocabulary elements into a coherent linguistic expression. Given this emphasis on content over language style, social identity should be also manifested by words in semantic relation with interpersonal processes. Since the development of the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), the psychosocial categories of words have indeed confirmed their effects on social relationships (Pennebaker, Boyd, Jordan, & Blackburn, 2015). When it comes to intragroup dynamics in online communities, Dino, Reysen, and Branscombe (2009) found different patterns of word usage between high and low status members: The former use more words referring to social processes such as *talk* and *friend* as a means of welcoming newcomers, whereas the latter use more affective words such as *happy* and *bitter* along with first-person singular pronouns. This relationship between word usage and membership status suggests that the first-person plural pronoun "we" produces intersubjective contexts for deictically positioning self and other in relation with in-group solidarity or out-group distancing. But the impact of pronominal deixis on identity has not yet been confirmed by its relationship with word usage in dealing with an interpersonal/social process rather than an intrapersonal one. Adding to the understanding of what effects pronominal deixis has on identity work, the following hypothesis is thus posed:

> *Hypothesis 1–2:* The pronoun "we" for self-referencing, rather than "I," is positively associated with the use of words referring to interpersonal processes (e.g., "talk," "friend," and "benefit") beyond intrasubjectivity (e.g., "happy," "feel," and "see").

The Social Impact of the Pronoun "We" on Identity Work

The pronoun "we" is not just related to psychological processes that reflect intrapersonal states. The deictic term for plural collectivity is also important in interpersonal processes that encourage social identity and cohesiveness (Smith & Witten, 1993). This idea is linked with how identity is flexibly (re)constructed in discourse contexts of interactions rather than being fixed in a stable structure of individual psyches or social categories (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In this view of identity as a product of socially situated experiences, deictic expressions such as personal pronouns situate both addresser and addressee in the social context of identity work.

Particularly, because the pronoun "we" does not refer to aggregate egos of the speaker (if such a thing existed), its referents can be either *inclusive* or *exclusive* of the addressee. In the former case, flexible relations emerge to encompass preexisting categories of identity because the referents of "we" include not only the speaker but also the one at whom the expression is aimed (Stawarska, 2008). But the latter case indicates other persons or groups than the addressee who are isolated from the in-group. In both cases, nevertheless, using "we" for self-referencing rather than "I" emphasizes the context of interpersonal relations between the addresser and the addressee. This view echoes the agency of person-referencing through pronoun use for distancing from, involving, or aligning with interaction partners (De Fina, 2003). The in-group-designating pronoun "we" is therefore effective in the building of a sense of community and interpersonal interaction, because such textual cues enhance group identification, comparison with other groups, and collective behaviors (Michinov et al., 2004).

Of course, it is already known that the group-reference pronoun "we" encourages active participation among online members because the person deixis reflects a shared sense of purpose as well as group unity (Ubon, 2005). In the virtual environment without mutual coexistence of "I" and "you," especially, uttering the plural "we" situates undesignated referents into the interpersonal relatedness that the addressee has with the addresser. Specifically, the shift for self-referencing from "I" to "we" opens the addressee to

anyone who wants to be *included* in the referent. In this view of the deictic impact, the pronoun plays a key role in identity work in which individual fans' consciousness of relational plurality is developed into coordinated behaviors for group cohesion. And the functions of a social-media fan page for interpersonal interactions provide structural conditions of group cohesion to the extent that individual users' comments receive "likes" or "comments" from each other.

But still unclear is whether the linguistic context of identity encourages coordinated behaviors among individual fans beyond their national and cultural borders. For instance, K-pop fans in Canada have had to experience an identity-negotiation process through which they question or challenge the pervasive racial stereotyping of Asian culture fandom (Oh, 2017; Yoon, 2018). It is also possible that Korean fans of BTS distance their virtual community from "other" fans who are considered *excluded* from a cultural boundary. Nevertheless, social networks engage individual fans in everyday contexts of discourse and practices to flexibly negotiate "the cultural and geographic distance of the foreign content" (Yoon, 2018, p. 14). In this process of creating loosely networked communities, fandom discourse cuts across already established identities by encompassing those with and without a voice (Sarlin, 2017). And using we-words for self-referencing opens a sense of potential in "us" that is not predicated on strict national, ethnic, and cultural consensus or domination (Costello, 2018). Thus, the pronoun "we" facilitates a form of cross-cutting engagement in community socialization by dislodging such social labels.

In fact, the social effects of deictic expressions are not exclusive to we-words. In the virtual environment, people's feelings of copresence with a set of distant objects is facilitated by the use of local and remote deixis,[1] as well as personal pronouns (Kramer, Oh, & Fussell, 2006). A similar study also found that online interpersonal interactions were related to contextual factors beyond psycholinguistic features of the words used: They comprised individual participants' status in online groups, posting replication, and rhetorical features of messages such as topical coherence and messages that included testimonials or requests (Arguello et al., 2006). However, the literature lacks a clear description of the evidence on the effects of social deixis, especially first-person plural references, on group interactions among individual fans. The following hypotheses are therefore proposed:

> *Hypothesis 2-1:* If an individual fan's message includes more we-words for self-referencing, the message will be more likely to receive "likes."

> *Hypothesis 2-2:* If an individual fan's message includes more we-words for self-referencing, the message will be more likely to receive "comments."

Method

Data

A web-crawled corpus was constructed using English-written comments on the BTS official Facebook page, which engages people in the boy band's activities.[2] The fan page on Facebook is the most vibrant venue in cyberspace for fandom interaction and communications, with more than 8 million followers. All of the comments posted on the page from May 19, 2013, to March 30, 2018, were retrieved by way of a Graph Application Programming Interface, which allowed us to gather the data on the comments in meta, such as the post ID upon which comments were made, posting date, and posting order within the same post ID.[3]

The comments were then preprocessed to construct the corpus in the following order: (a) each comment was parsed into sentences that were then detected by Google's Compact Language Detectors 2 and 3 to remove sentences written in languages other than English; (b) using the *textclean* package in the R environment, common cleaning and normalization tasks were performed to replace contractions, emoticons, Internet slang, word elongations, shorter abbreviations, and acronyms with semantically appropriate word equivalents[4]; and (c) the text-cleaning task included transforming all the characters into lowercase letters and removing URLs, HTML tags, mentions of money, non-ASCII characters, date and time stamps, numbers, and symbols. In all, 179,350 comments were thus preprocessed, which were retrieved from 920 posts on the BTS official Facebook page. From the corpus, we analyzed contextual and linguistic features in English-written comments to predict fandom interaction.

Analytical Approaches

The use of I- and we-words for self-referencing in the corpus was analyzed as follows. To begin with, each sentence in the comments was parsed to extract the words in syntactic relationship with first-person pronouns. Using the Stanford Dependencies parser (de Marneffe et al., 2014) implemented in the R package *cleanNLP*, a parsing task was performed to identify "the grammatical relationship between pairs of tokens within a sentence" (Arnold, 2017, p. 253). In particular, we focused on the detailed dependency tagset of three general relation types in which I- or we-words occurred in the most informative relations: verb–subject, verb–object, and modification (Nulty, 2017). Counting the occurrences of these syntactic relations, we measured the degree to which linguistic organizing of each message included each type of first-person pronoun as: (a) nominal subject (*nsubj*), (b) possessive form of nominal modifier (*nmod:poss*), (c) direct object (*obj*), (d) indirect object

[1] "Local and remote deixis" refers to the linguistic expression of the speaker's perceived position in three-dimensional physical space, such as "here," "there," "this," and "that" (Fillmore, 1997).

[2] Of course, there are numerous unofficial BTS pages on Facebook that were created to engage fans, but the language is constrained by the community's social structures, which consist of different ethnic groups, genders, or age-groups. As a result, we performed a textual analysis within the same structure of social interactions by focusing only on the official page. However, future studies may consider pooling data across various fan pages.

[3] The time period of data collection was determined to take into account temporal characteristics of fandom activity during different stages of community development in the virtual setting. Therefore, our data covered all the comments that had been made on the posts from the launch date of the BTS Facebook page (May 19, 2013) until the date of data retrieval with a hive of fandom activity (March 30, 2018).

[4] Our text preprocessing task normalized the word elongation of personal pronouns such as "youuuuu" and "meeeee," and the abbreviated forms of second-person pronouns—"u" and "ur"—were also included in our parsing and tagging work.

(*iobj*), and (e) passive form of nominal subject (*nsubj:pass*). Also, we could account for repetition of pronouns in a message, which was common in online fandom language. Table 1 summarizes the data on syntactic relations with first-person pronouns.

We identified all the syntactic relations of first-person pronouns with content words that appeared in at least more than nine comments. For instance, from a comment "we love you more BTS and I cannot wait for 2018 too because my family take me to South Korea to meet you <3," our parsing recognized four dependency relations: we–love, I–wait, my–family, and take–me. In doing so, we analyzed psychosocial categories of words that were paired with I- or we-words in the fans' comments. This analysis was performed using the "LIWC 2015" program for studying "various emotional, cognitive, and structural components present in individuals' verbal and written speech samples" (Pennebaker et al., 2015, p. 1).

Through the application, we identified terms that denoted *drives*, *social processes*, and *relativity*. These word categories in LIWC are presumably linked with the interpersonal context of psychosocial states, insofar as they refer to affiliation, achievement, power, reward, and risk focus (*drives*), or social coordination and group cohesion (social processes, *social*), or motion, position, and time deixis (relativity, *relativ*) used to emphasize the context of interaction beyond intrapersonal processes. Also, our analysis accounted for the word categories characterizing intrapersonal states of an individual with affective (*affect*), cognitive (*cogproc*), perceptual (*percept*), and biological (*bio*) processes.

Moreover, we measured summary-language features such as scaled scores of each comment on analytical thinking (*Analytic*), clout (*Clout*), authenticity (*Authentic*), and emotional tone (*Tone*), as well as the percentage of words with six letters (*Sixltr*) that could affect the complexity of the language.[5] The standardized scores were converted to percentiles ranging from 0 to 100. The inclusion of these summary-language variables was to isolate the effects of using specific words in psychosocial categories from the overall linguistic structure of the message. Table 2 provides a descriptive summary of the LIWC variables from Facebook comments.

Finally, coordinated behaviors for interpersonal interaction were operationalized by measuring (a) the number of "likes" that each comment received ($M = 3.68$; $SD = 36.16$) and (b) whether or not it was commented upon by others (Yes = 10,090; No = 60,172). To predict these two forms of interaction on Facebook by deictic expressions of fandom messages, the percentages of word categories were computed from the comments that included I- or we-words in syntactic relations.

Table 1
A Summary of the Syntactic Relations With First-Person Pronouns

Categories of syntactic relations	I-words	We-words
Number of verb and subject relations	89,426	13,277
Number of verb and subject-in-passive-voice relations	673	164
Number of possessive modification relations	31,863	6,371
Number of verb and object relations	9,404	2,660
Number of verb and indirect-object relations	2,093	726

Modeling

For Hypothesis 1-1, we computed the percentages of I- and we-words in syntactic relations among weekly aggregate comments and examined how their relative occurrences changed over time. A series of logistic-regression models were thus fitted to the metadata on the comments, including the week of posting and the total number of comments posted during each week, to predict the relative frequencies of each type of first-person pronouns out of total word counts in the week time-bin.

For Hypothesis 1–2, drawing on Pennebaker and Chung's (2013) psycholinguistic analysis, we examined whether the we-words were more related to the words referring to interpersonal processes than were I-words. Two levels of analysis were conducted to examine the relations of social and psychological features in the words as a syntactic governor, with preference given to the plural for self-referencing over the singular. First, at the word level, the log-odds ratios of all words in syntactic relations with we-words versus I-words were computed using their lemmas. A linear-regression model was fitted to this dummy outcome variable with normal distribution.[6] The explanatory variables were two categorical variables: (a) five types of syntactic relations that the content words had with pronouns and (b) seven psychosocial categories of the words: affective processes (*affect*), cognitive processes (*cogproc*), perceptual processes (*percept*), biological processes (*bio*) as intrapersonal variables, and *drives*, social processes (*social*) and relativity (*relativ*) as interpersonal dimensions.

Second, at the comment level, the syntactic relations with first-person pronouns were pooled across comments to predict preference given to we-words for self-referencing by psychosocial word choices in commenting with at least 10 words or more. The count of we-words with excessive zeros was thus regressed on (a) the percentages of psychosocial categories, (b) the percentages of summary-language dimensions, and (c) the count of I-words in each comment. A zero-inflated negative binomial (ZINB) model was used to account for overdispersed count outcome variable. Also, because the comments were nested within postlevel data, a mixed-effects ZINB model was fitted to the data in a hierarchical structure using Magnusson et al.'s (2018) R package "glmmTMB." This modeling accounts for both fixed and random effects, given that the content of language in each comment is subject to the postlevel context in which it was made. Also, the log transformation was applied to those explanatory variables that were highly skewed.

Regarding Hypothesis 2-1, the count of "likes" on each comment was predicted by the percentages of words in each of the

[5] According to Pennebaker et al. (2015), a high score of *Analytic* means "formal, logical, and hierarchical thinking," whereas its lower scores suggest "more informal, personal, here-and-now, and narrative thinking" (p. 21). *Clout* measures the degree to which writing or talking is authoritative, confident, and exhibiting leadership. High numbers in *Authentic* reflect "more honest, personal, and disclosing text," but "lower numbers suggest a more guarded, distanced form of discourse" (p. 22). Finally, *Tone* is scored such that a high number is more positive and upbeat and lower numbers show "greater anxiety, sadness, or hostility" (p. 22). For a detailed description of the word categories in linguistic, psychological, and social processes, see Pennebaker et al. (2015).

[6] Weights were included using the occurrence frequency of the words in the comments.

Table 2
A Summary of the Percentages of Word Categories per Comment (N = 70,262)

Psychosocial categories	*M*	*SD*	Summary dimensions	*M*	*SD*
Affective process (*affect*)	10.7	8.6	Analytical thinking (*Analytic*)	41.6	32.9
Cognitive process (*cogproc*)	9.2	7.7	Clout	60.1	35.9
Perceptual process (*percept*)	5.2	7.0	Authenticity (*Authentic*)	40.7	37.0
Biological process (*bio*)	5.0	8.1	Emotional tone (*Tone*)	70.6	37.9
Drives (*drives*)	7.9	7.3	Six-or-more-letter words (*Sixltr*)	12.8	8.8
Social process (*social*)	11.8	9.3			
Relativity (*relativ*)	10.4	8.3			

Note. Entries are the percentages points (%). Each comment includes 10 or more words.

LIWC categories beyond summary-language features and contextual information such as posting date and commenting order within a post. Contextual data also included postlevel variables that could affect engagement in fandom activity on Facebook. This modeling scheme relied on the method of counting specific linguistic features to measure interactions in online communities that were hierarchically operationalized (Arguello et al., 2006; Dino et al., 2009; Kramer et al., 2006). In particular, individual users' interaction with each other is nested within a post on the fandom page; for example, the activity of giving a "like" to a comment is subject to the popularity of the post that the comment is made on. In regard to the hierarchical structure of user interactions on Facebook, a mixed-effects ZINB model was thus fitted to let the random intercept vary across postlevel units and to predict the overdispersed count variable with excessive zeros. Last, Hypothesis 2-2 was tested using a mixed-effects logistic model to predict whether a comment was commented on. For doing so, a dummy binary variable was created to distinguish the comments that received a comment more than once.

To sum up, stepwise regression models were estimated to predict the likelihood that an individual's comment would elicit a "like" or a "comment" from another fan. To examine the factors affecting fandom interaction or group cohesiveness, the four models focused on contextual factors such as number of comments on a post, week time-bin ID, commenting order in a post, and duplicate message (Model 1); addition of summary-linguistic factors such as *Analytic*, *Clout*, *Authentic*, *Tone*, and *Sixltr* (Model 2); addition of psychosocial factors such as *affect*, *cogproc*, *percept*, *bio*, *drives*, *social*, and *relativ* (Model 3); and addition of pronominal deictic factors such as the frequencies of syntactic relations with we- and I-words (Model 4).

Results

Hypothesis 1-1 was tested by the logistic regression to predict the relative frequencies of I- and we-words among the total number of words used across weekly time-bins. As seen in Figure 1, our analysis of diachronic linguistics revealed the increasing frequencies of we-words in all syntactic relations, except the verb–object one, with the content words over time. Of course, the diachronic dynamics of word usage should be interpreted in regard to the increasing tendency of fandom engagement on Facebook. However, our data analysis shows that there was no distinct pattern in the effects that the weekly sum of comments posted had on the usage of pronominal deixis. By contrast, I-words in all relations except the passive-form-of-subject one decreased as the community grew, whereas many of them increased as the number of comments became greater. The findings suggest that the plural pronoun "we" became increasingly preferred for self-referencing over the singular "I" among the BTS fans' comments.

Hypothesis 1–2 was examined at two levels. First, at the word level, the log-odds ratio of we-words versus I-words was predicted by the psychosocial categories of the words. By comparing these words in syntactic relations with the plural "we" for self-referencing rather than the singular "I," a semantic analysis was performed to reveal their meaning. For example, the words "bulletproof," "together," "family," "fandom," and "friend" were more likely to be paired with we-words than I-words, as they denote the social identity of fans as a group.

Controlling for the different types of syntactic relations, our regression analysis shows that we-words were more likely to come with terms referring to biological and social processes (see the left plot in Figure 2). The association between we-words and social processes is reasonable in that the former is part of the latter category in LIWC. In contrast, I-words were more likely to be related with words in cognitive and perceptual processes. This gap in word associations between "I" and "we" reflects the psycholinguistic idea that pronominal deixis is related with the addresser's self-focused or communal (other-focused) identity.

Next, the occurrence rate of we-words was predicted by the comment-level characteristics in the linguistic organizing. As seen in the right plot of Figure 2, the results show that the use of the plural "we" for self-referencing was positively associated with greater occurrences of the words referring to cognitive processes, drives, perceptual processes, relativity and social processes, as well as clout and words of six or more letters. Whereas clout indicates the addresser's status, confidence, or leadership in social relations, the deictic term "we" was more likely to occur in messages that emphasize the interpersonal context through the words in drives, relativity, and social processes.

Different from our expectation, the greater prominence of we-words was also positively associated with using terms that had reference to cognitive and perceptual processes that feature the intrapersonal state of the speaker. Nevertheless, Hypothesis 1–2 is corroborated by the growth of we-words count in association with the decline of words referring to the I-words count, affective and biological processes that feature the self-focused, psychological state of the speaker. Furthermore, the salience of "we-ness" in messages was associated with lower levels of analytical thinking, authenticity, and emotional tone that summarize intrapersonal characteristics such as formal and logical thinking patterns, hon-

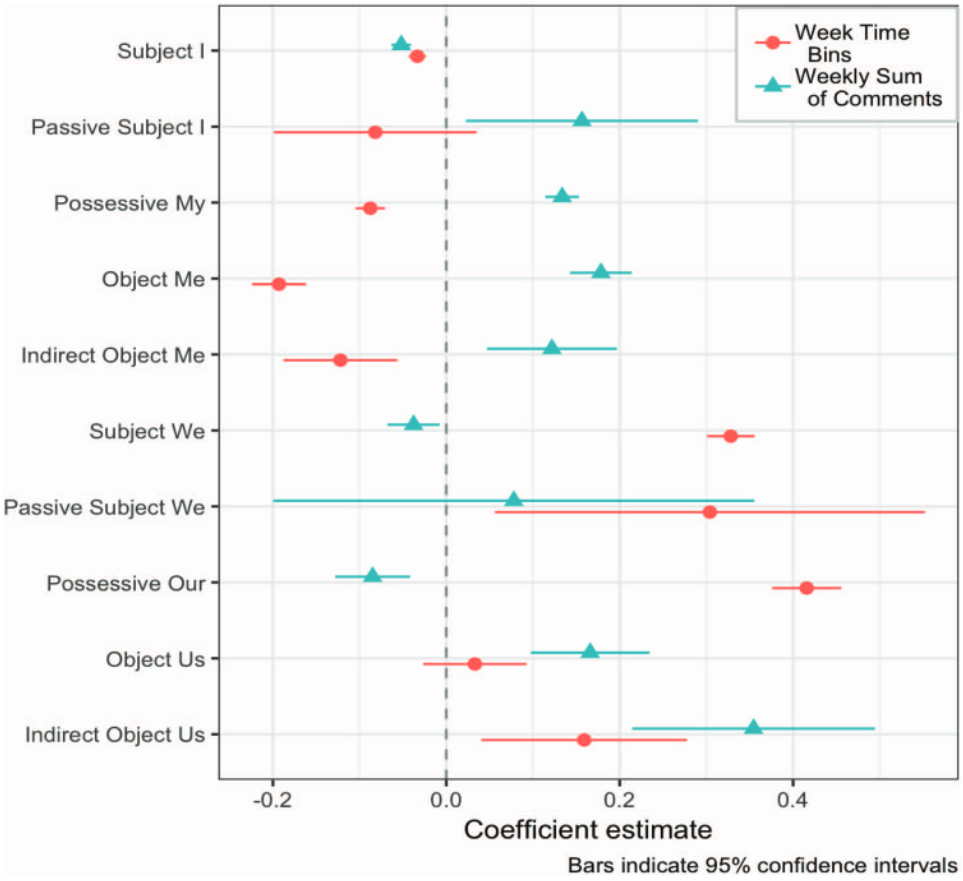

Figure 1. A series of logistic regressions predicting the use of each type of first-person pronouns by the time and number of comments variables. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

esty, and negative emotion. All in all, the pattern of linguistic organizing in Facebook comments supports Hypothesis 1–2.

We tested Hypothesis 2-1 using stepwise mixed-effects ZINB regression models to predict the count in "likes" on each "comment." To do so, the frequencies of I- and we-words were included in Model 4, whereas Models 1, 2, and 3 accounted for the effects of contextual, linguistic, and psychosocial variables. In the left plot of Figure 3, the coefficient estimates for the explanatory variables are displayed along with 95% confidence intervals, which demonstrates the positive effects of the we-words count ($\beta = 0.04$; $p < .01$) and the negative effects of the I-words count ($\beta = -0.06$; $p < .001$) on the count of "likes." Moreover, adding the variables of I- and we-words improved the model fit as Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) declined from 176,929.7 in Model 3 to 176,923.6 in Model 4. The findings suggest that, beyond contextual, linguistic, or psychological characteristics of a message, coordinated behaviors for group interactions through the "like" function were encouraged by a greater emphasis on plural deixis for self-referencing rather than singular deixis. Therefore, Hypothesis 2-1 is supported.

Finally, Hypothesis 2-2 was examined by fitting stepwise mixed-effects logistic regression models to predict whether a comment was commented upon (see the right plot in Figure 3). Similar to the results for the "likes" count, greater occurrences of we-words in a message had positive effects ($\beta = 0.04$; $p < .01$) and those of I-words had negative effects ($\beta = -0.06$; $p < .001$) on the probability of receiving a "comment" beyond other contextual, linguistic, and psychosocial variables. Especially, the more frequent use of "we" pronouns was the only lexical-level stimulus to group interactions through commenting, except for words of six or more letters. Regarding this conversational form of coordinated behaviors, the inclusion of self-referencing pronouns also improved the model fit (BIC decreased from 51,225.0 in Model 3 to 51,220.9 in Model 4). The findings support Hypothesis 2-2.

Discussion

Regarding the relation among the media and identity, Morley and Robins (2002) argued that the challenge is to account for the parameters of language within which social and cultural identities are being (re)constituted, not just look at the mobilizing effects of technologies. In this sense, the study of social identity is considered with the question of what importance communicative practices play in the constitution of that identity (Schlesinger, 1987). Accordingly, this study investigated how a specific K-pop fandom language led to a linguistic context of interpersonal interactions for identity work in an online space. By doing so, we found that BTS's fandom, the self-styled ARMY, manifests coordinated practices

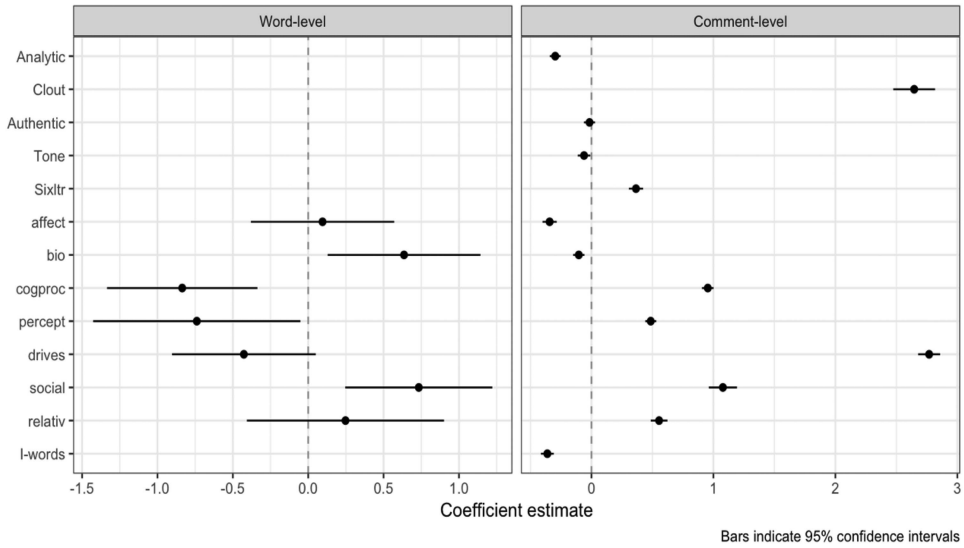

Figure 2. Regression models predicting the log odds ratio of using we- versus I-words by LIWC categories of the words in syntactic relations at the word level (left) and the count of we-words in each comment by its linguistic features as well as the count of I-words at the comment level (right). For the word-level model, coefficient estimates for different types of syntactic relations with pronouns are omitted for clarity. Given adjusted R^2, the word- and comment-level models explain 12.6% and 76.0% of variation in the use of we-words, respectively. LIWC = Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count.

for social cohesion that revolves around first-person-plural pronouns.

Especially, we tested the hypotheses to explicate how pronominal deixis provides a window of rich group experiences, by analyzing comments on the most vibrant fan page on Facebook for the K-pop boy band BTS, who have been successful worldwide. Given Hypothesis 1-1, the use of we-words in individual fans' messages was confirmed to have a positive association with their fandom community's progress. Hypothesis 1–2 was also supported, verifying that the pronoun "we" for self-referencing, rather than "I," was positively associated with the use of words referring to interpersonal processes (e.g., "talk," "friend," and "benefit") beyond intrasubjectivity (e.g., "happy," "feel," and "see"). Accordingly, data were consistent with our expectations: (a) that the

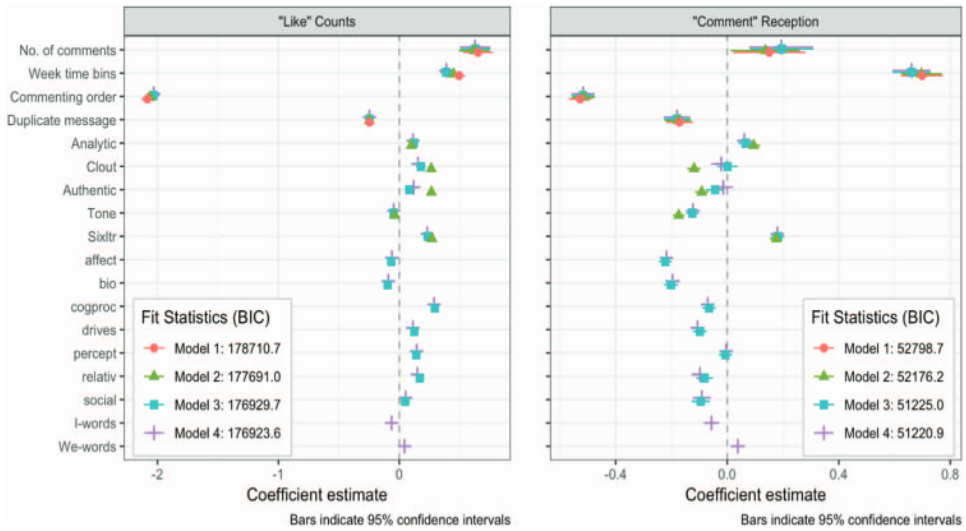

Figure 3. Stepwise mixed-effects ZINB (left) and logistic (right) models predicting the count of "like" and the reception of "comment" in response to a comment, respectively. N = 70,262 comments (with 10 words or more) on 868 posts; given adjusted R^2, the final ZINB and logistic models explain 51.7% and 17.4% of variation in the "like" count and "comment" reception, respectively. ZINB = zero-inflated negative binomial. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

diachronically increasing use of we-words for self-referencing is related to the fandom community's growth apart from the scale of fandom activity and (b) that the use of we-words indicates enhanced feelings about social identity that bring individuals together in interaction contexts rather than personal identity that distinguishes the self from others. The findings suggest that pronominal deixis in fandom language is an important indicator of tracing grouping processes, as words are the primary means of communicating, influencing, and archiving our experience of events (Pennebaker & Chung, 2013).

Hypotheses 2-1 and 2-2 were posed to examine whether we-words for self-referencing in an individual fan's message were positively associated with the degree to which the message received "likes" and "comments." Data confirmed that the pronoun "we" had a positive impact on such group interactions in the virtual setting. Such a mobilizing impact of pronominal deixis suggests that the K-pop fans' use of plural deixis for self-referencing predicts the extent to which they create and maintain group cohesion in the online setting without mutual copresence. Thus, it is determined that we-words facilitate the process of social-identity construction by which the potential of a cultural community is identified among those who come together for common interests as K-pop fans. And this study adds to the line of knowledge of identity work in cyberspace by revealing how important the pronoun "we" is in mobilizing participation in the culturally imagined community.

The findings also shed light on the possibility that the positive impact of plural deixis for self-referencing facilitates the cross-cutting expansion of a fandom community. Using we-words, BTS fans make their presence as a group known to each other and represented as culturally heterogeneous but coordinated for collective action. In this process, the pronoun "we" affords a loosely networked community in which a sense of social identity transcends the established ethnic—national—cultural boundaries. Although the purpose of this study was not to account for any marker of such preexisting identities, the finding hints that the linguistic agency of pronominal deixis integrates diverse personal or daily experiences into more social experiences of a potential community with shared contexts of interactions and behavioral coordination.

Finally, this study demonstrates that collective identity-formation rests on the fans' consolidating identification with the ARMY as a group through plural deixis for self-referencing that joins them together and coordinates their in-group interactions cohesively. Therefore, the identity marker suggests a growing sense of group coherence. That is to say, the primacy given to we-words over I-words is related to the growing identification of the individual fans within ARMY that integrate themselves into a communal experience and empowers their coherent voice as a collectivity in popular culture. Social media, in this sense, serve as a crucial channel for linguistic practices to enable an imagined community where its members coordinate social action and maintain group cohesiveness to express their lived experiences.

This study is not free from limitations, caused by the issue of reverse causality, the data collection method, and the measurement. It is therefore useful to discuss each limitation along with a recommendation for future research. First, we have demonstrated that using plural deixis for self-referencing indicated the priority of social identity over personal identity in a virtual fandom community. But our research design could not rule out the possibility of reverse causality that needs to be addressed: The use of we-words was encouraged by fandom behaviors to develop social identity. Certainly, fandom is a performing identity enacted through diverse practices around cultural consumption, viewership, and production. It is true that the members of the ARMY have vigorously performed diverse computer-mediated communicative practices for group work, such as watching performances together and developing BTS-related program pamphlets and goods to have a strong emotional bond. And it is common for K-pop fans to take such collective actions to stand for their shared interests. Future studies on fandom and identity may consider a research design to examine the causal relation of the association between pronominal deixis and membership behaviors.

Next, our collection of certain words in fandom messages was limited in accounting for the underlying reasons for the words used. However, in contrast with qualitative interpretations of self-reports by the individual K-pop fans to explain their reason to join (Yoon, 2018), we could measure textual data without being subject to response bias such as social desirability bias. This computational method allowed us to trace a fandom group's online voices over a nearly 5-year period of emerging and expanding K-pop culture. As a result, we found that, as BTS fans developed into the socially recognized group of dedicated personnel who call themselves ARMY, their comments became linguistically formatted differently. Therefore, a quantitative approach to the role of fandom language proved to be a useful way of assessing and showing how online group identities emerge, unfold, and settle down in popular culture.

Furthermore, counting personal deixis used in a message might be inadequate for measuring the parameters of the actual situation, in which the identity of the particular speaker and addresses has an effect on the interpretation of that situation (Yang, 2011). Also, we-words should have different connotations according to the context in which the deictic expression is used; for instance, the social impact of the pronoun could depend on the accompanying negative sentiment toward BTS from antifans. Nevertheless, the virtual fandom community identifies its members' togetherness through their own linguistic practices around pronominal deixis that differentiates who belongs from who does not (Stanfill, 2011). This view corroborates our argument that, when we-words were used to distinguish *us* from *them*, *they* come together to form a fandom collective and become "we" the ARMY. In this sense, we-words enable online fandom communities to become relatively homogeneous yet multidimensional spaces where fans carry unequal forms of cultural power into their new group identity (Hills, 2010). Personal pronouns, formerly dismissed as "junk words," are therefore useful for analyzing how language coordinates different identities to be negotiated and integrated into the virtual community.

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