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Talking to a friend or a K-pop idol?

Parasocial relationships in K-pop fandom discourse on Twitter

Jay Suikkanen

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Supervisor: Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen

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Author: Felix Jay Moon Suikkanen

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Abstract: This MA-thesis examines sentence types and speech acts used on Twitter by the fans of Korean pop music when replying to tweets by Korean pop idols. In addition to analysing the sentence types and speech acts, the aim is to draw conclusions on how parasocial relationships can be observed based on the choice of speech acts and how they appear in relation to the target of the message. With the globalisation of Korean pop music, fans from all over the world have created large fandom communities online and are able to interact with idols through multiple different online platforms such as Twitter, TikTok or Weverse. Speech acts have been studied from the point of view of celebrities and as a part of fan-to-fan communication, but they have not, however, been connected to parasocial relationships in fandom context. Parasocial relationships have been the target of fandom studies previously, but adding a linguistic point of view is novel. Online environments evolve rapidly in a short period of time and because of new norms of online communication new approaches are required.

The data was collected from Twitter manually by choosing posts made by Korean pop idols on their official accounts and the first six English replies under the posts. The corpus consists of 34 celebrity tweets and 204 fan replies. The idols' tweets were tagged in terms of the sentence type and the replies were tagged in terms of the sentence type, target, speech act and how the speech acts were delivered. Sentence types were categorised based on their syntactic form into five categories (Oxford handbook of English grammar, 2019) and with speech acts the division was done following the division by Searle (1979) into five categories. The material was analysed by using simple descriptive statistics with discourse analysis. By comparing the results to previous research on speech acts and parasocial relationships separately, conclusions about the relationship between the fans and the Korean pop idols were drawn.

The results show that Korean pop idols and their fans have established the type of relationship, where neither the original posts made by the idols, nor the replies written by fans require a reply, but both still imply a close relationship between both sides of the parasocial interactions. Both the idols and the fans express feelings such as love, worry and thankfulness with declarative sentences and in the fan replies, expressive speech acts are very prominent when it comes to fan-to-idol interactions, taking the form of multiple sentence types in addition to declaratives.



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1 Introduction

The internet and online language have intrigued multiple researchers since the spread of online forums and social media (see Crystal, 2001; Hoffmann & Bublitz, 2017; Herring, et al., 2013; Xie & Yus, 2021). Even modern themes such as memes (see Milner, 2012; Grundlingh, 2018) and online identity and language (see Dayter 2016; Boy & Uitermark, 2022; Ellison, et al., 2007) have been topics of interest. Earlier studies on internet language focused on for example, e-mails and early online message boards (Crystal, 2001), whereas more recently, due to the rapid evolution of online platforms and technology, researchers have included themes such as emojis as speech acts (Dainas & Herring, 2021) and self-presentation on the online chat app WhatsApp (Maíz-Arévalo, 2021).

In this thesis I am focusing on internet pragmatics and online discourse, more specifically sentence types and speech acts used by fans of Korean idol pop (known as K-pop for short) and K-pop fan discourse in relation to parasocial bonds between the celebrities and fans on the online microblogging platform *Twitter*. The term *parasocial* refers to the type of relationship in which an individual feels close to a person who they have no real-life connection to (Horton and Wohl, 1956). Fandom discourse and parasocial relationships have been studied previously from other points of view such as: social media usage and parasocial relationships (see e.g., Gleason, Theran and Newberg, 2017; Ozge, 2021; Kim & Kim, 2020), online identity (see Takahashi, 2014; Boy & Uitermark, 2022) and fan identity in fandom discourse (see e.g., Smutradontri & Gadvanij, 2020; Lee et al., 2020). Speech acts on Twitter have also been studied from the celebrities' point of view (Nemer, 2016). Parasocial relationships, fan identity and celebrity speech acts have therefore been studied previously but this thesis aims to analyse the norms in fan-celebrity communication in the Twitter K-pop fan community and attempts to discuss what can be said about the relationship between fans and K-pop idols based on these speech acts.

In this thesis I am conducting discourse analysis on K-pop fandom discourse. With the following research questions, I aim to find out how celebrities communicate with their fans and how fans tend to reply to them:

1. What kind of content appears in K-pop celebrities' tweets and the fans' replies?
 - a. What sentence types are used in K-pop celebrity tweets?
 - b. What kind of sentence types and speech acts do fan replies consist of?
2. How does the target audience of the reply tweet change which sentence types and speech acts are used?
3. What is the relationship between the target audience of the reply tweet and the sentence types and speech acts used?

With these questions I hope on getting some insight on the communicative norms that have been born in the K-pop fan community on Twitter when it comes to directly addressing celebrities, other fans or friends in the same fandom. With these norms better identified and determined, I will in relation to previous research draw conclusions on the relationships between the fans and the K-pop idols and whether parasocial relationships can be identified based on the speech acts.

In chapter two I will provide background information on speech acts, social media as well as explain what Korean pop music is and how it has turned into a global phenomenon. The material and analysis method used in this thesis will be discussed in chapter three. In chapter four I will provide the results and analysis, which will then be discussed with more detail in chapter five.

2 Background

In this section I will introduce the speech act theory as well as how sentence types can be distinguished and categorised. I will also discuss previous research on social media, how speech acts appear in online context and the K-pop fan identity.

2.1 Sentence types and speech acts

The speech act theory has been used to explain meaning making in communicating (Vanderveken, 2001) and includes three concepts of *locutionary*, *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary* acts (Austin 1975). According to Austin locutionary act is the meaning of the utterance in a sense where the receiver can understand what the message is. Illocutionary act is the communicative and performative meaning of the utterance. Perlocutionary act is the end result that happens due to the speech act. Although none of the three acts can exist individually without the others (Austin, 1975), when studying the meaning making and speech acts on *Twitter* it is important to focus most on the locutionary and illocutionary acts of written attempts of communication.

Sentence types can be distinguished based on their morpho-syntactic properties and potential. The locutionary properties of the clause have a big impact when classifying sentences, whereas speech acts focus on the illocutionary meaning of an utterance. It can be difficult to classify clauses without taking into consideration the illocutionary speech acts within them (König, 2019).

König states in the Oxford handbook for English grammar (2019) that when we form sentences, we can make a distinction between five main types of clauses, each holding a different kind of purpose. These types are declarative, closed interrogative, open interrogative, imperative and exclamation (see Table 1.). Each clause type can be said to consist of certain formal properties, but in order to define the specific type of clause, the illocutionary meaning of the clause needs to be taken into account (König, 2019).

	<i>Utterance/locutionary act</i>	<i>Illocutionary act</i>
<i>Declarative</i>	"The door is closed."	To inform that the door is currently closed.
<i>Closed interrogative</i>	"Did you close the door?"	To know whether the door has been closed. (Yes/no answer)
<i>Open interrogative</i>	"When did you close the door?"	To know when the door has been closed. (Cannot be answered with yes/no)
<i>Imperative</i>	"Close the door."	An order or request to close the door
<i>Exclamation</i>	"Omg the door!"	To perhaps move the attention to the state of the door.

Table 1 Sentence types (Aarts, et al., 2020)

Marcondes de Souza Filho compared speech acts to physical acts. When a physical act is done with a certain intent behind it, the act does lead to some kind of a result or a goal. A spoken utterance can be said to hold the same kind of power. The final end result of a physical action or a spoken utterance depends on whether the receiver can understand the meaning, which makes it important to analyse the meaning and intention of the speech acts in the context they appear in (Marcondes de Souza Filho, 1985).

The same result can be achieved with various different kinds of utterances (Cooren, 2005), for example, a suggestion could be made in a formal manner (a) or an indirect informal manner (b).

(a) I suggest you come see me after you finish work.

(b) Do you have time to see me after work?

Although example (b) is in the form of an interrogative, the receiver would probably assume that the person asking the question is wanting for them to meet after work rather than merely wanting to know whether or not they have time after work.

Searle (1979) makes a distinction between five speech act types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives. These speech act types are further explained in Table 2.

	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<i>Assertive</i>	Stating something as a fact. True/False	stating, believing, hypothesizing,
<i>Directive</i>	An attempt to make the hearer perform an action.	commanding, ordering, requesting, daring, challenging
<i>Commissive</i>	The speaker commits to an action to occur in the future	promising, committing
<i>Expressive</i>	Expresses the psychological feeling of the speaker	thanking, congratulating, apologizing, complimenting
<i>Declaration</i>	Alters the status of the situation	announcing, declaring

Table 2 Speech act types (Searle, 1979)

Although speech acts can be observed to appear with certain sentence types more often, indirect speech acts can take the form of another clause type as stated previously. A clause having the morpho-syntactic form of a declarative can actually take the illocutionary meaning of something other than assertive (König, 2019).

Hashim (2015) conducted speech act analysis on politicians, whereas Basra & Thooyibah (2017) focused on “teacher-talk” and speech acts teachers use in EFL classrooms. Hashim (2015) stated that politicians tend to use commissive utterances the most. During election periods promises are made in order to get as many people as possible on their side. Basra & Thooyibah noticed how majority of teacher-talk in the classroom included directives. During interviews the teachers claimed they did not even pay attention to the speech acts they used but explained the use of directives as wanting the students to practice their language and to have them communicate (Basra & Thooyibah, 2017). The position of the speaker can therefore affect the speech acts that one may commonly use, and certain speech acts can be a part of the “professional language”.

Sometimes the meaning behind an utterance may not be as easily spotted as in examples (a) and (b) as stated previously (see König, 2019). Some speech acts can give the listener a good idea of the person performing such acts and are also, according to Airaksinen, dependent on the audience's understanding of the matter stated. Airaksinen discussed irony and sarcasm as types of speech acts. He describes irony as calling "bad things good" and sarcasm as "calling good things bad". Using irony can become a problem when communicating with people one might not be close to and it can become difficult to identify when the speaker is actually stating their opinion instead of depending on irony. In the case of sarcasm, the user of sarcastic language is showing a cynical side of themselves (Airaksinen, 2020).

2.2 Social media and social interactions

Social interaction can be seen as an "act" where the participants take up the roles of performers and audiences (Goffman, 1959), and although such theory has been used to analyse and describe face-to-face interactions it can also be applied to larger scale online interactions. Boy and Uitermark (2022) discussed the role of one's "self" when it comes to social media activity. Social media allows people to display a different kind of "self" and it gives the power to leave out whatever they wish of their offline persona. Boy and Uitermark call this "self-branding". Our interactions then are based on social roles and the ways we present ourselves to each other (Goffman, 1959).

With the growth of technology and social media, especially the younger generation has easy access to a very wide global environment (Takahashi, 2014). Social media has been said to help people (especially younger students) keep up with their previous offline communities and friends when moving forward in their lives to different environments and communities (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). Ethnographic research by Takahashi (2014) explains how social media has given individuals the power to belong to multiple different in-groups. In his research with young Japanese college students as participants, Takahashi found out how the students, much like in previously mentioned research (see Boy & Uitermark, 2022; Goffman, 1959), present a different version of themselves in different spaces and this is done to momentarily distance themselves from the culture norms they in their offline life belong to. What Takahashi also pointed out, was the use of Twitter, a microblogging platform, as a way of both communicating with people in your social

circle as well as complete strangers. This means on social media, the user has the power to present that version of themselves they best see fit for the situation. Their social status in that situation can also affect the way they interact with others (Takahashi, 2014).

Dayter studied self-disclosure in online environments. Speech acts relating to one's personality or life events are common on social media, such as complaining and complimenting. Complaining online can be compared to everyday face-to-face interactions where one participant proceeds to for example, complain about a very busy workday they might have had. What makes complaining online somehow different from offline complaining is user anonymity, which makes it possible for complaints to be more direct (Dayter, 2016). When it comes to the tone and emotions of complainants online, social media customer service must have a way to counter possible negative comments. In these cases, private speech acts (speech made towards a certain individual), opposed to socially entrenched acts (targets a larger social mass), are seen as the best method for raising brand credibility and create a more positive reputation (Argyris et al., 2021).

Complimenting online has been linked to self-praise, where the "speaker" presents a desired version of themselves (Boy & Uitermark, 2022; Goffman, 1959; Takahashi, 2014) and the receiver of the message further then agrees on the statement. In these cases, the valence of such acts is either negative or positive. Dayter (2016) also pointed out the possibility, in the case of compliments, of the compliment not being sincere.

Twitter can be considered as a platform for public "self-talk" (Dayter, 2016). Unlike on *Facebook* (a private profile platform), anyone may follow the content posted on one's account, unless the account has been set to private. However, Dayter stated that the audience of a tweet is not in all cases the whole following of an account, but more likely those people the original poster has thought of when publishing the Tweet.

Nemer (2016) discussed differences in speech acts and targets of celebrity tweets. According to Nemer, celebrities could be seen to target their tweets to fans, friends, family, other celebrities and the general public. Although there were differences among different celebrities in how they usually target their tweets, there was still variation, and no one only tweeted to one target. Most common speech acts overall

were mentioned to be “claim”, “inform”, “thanking” and “inquiring” (Nemer, 2016). This focus on celebrity speech acts should be linked to the attempts of communication from the other (fan) perspective and the differences in speech acts received based on the output celebrities post on social media. Nemer (2016) focused on western media, so by focusing on another kind of Twitter community (the international K-pop fans on Twitter) we can draw conclusions on fandom discourse from another point of view. Whether there are fandom exclusive norms of communicating on Twitter should be further studied with multiple other fandoms.

In online environments, such as discussion forums, multiple other acts also appear, such as greeting, joking, apologising or requesting (Chaka, 2020). Chaka discussed how in spaces where a community more likely interacts with other members of the community, these speech acts arise much like they would in offline context. Also compared to how self-praise or other self-narratives appear (see Dayter, 2016), these expressive speech acts seem more likely to be a part of regular online conversations (Chaka, 2020).

When it comes to common discourse in fandom spaces such as *Tumblr* or other online forums dedicated to fandom talk, Fazekas noticed how speech acts in fandom communities tend to overlap. There were common types of written messages typical to fandom communities such as romantically “shipping” two characters together or sharing one’s own interpretations or ideas about certain characters (known as “head cannoning”). These were mostly considered expressive speech acts due to the emotional attachment the fans have to the characters and are actions done by fans for other fans (Fazekas, 2021). How this differs from celebrity targeted speech acts will offer a new perspective to fandom discourse.

Online spaces also give users the possibility to use multimodal means of communication. Linking and attaching images, videos, or even audio is possible in today’s social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These images and animated images (GIFs), known as “memes” are nowadays used as communicative tools (Grundlingh, 2018). Earlier meme studies (see e.g., Milner, 2012) have broken memes into different categories, but Grundlingh (2018) analysed memes as non-verbal speech acts. Memes can carry the same illocutionary meaning as traditional written text and require the same mutual understanding in order to be successfully functional. Another image-based communicational tool are emoticons

and emojis. Riordan (2017) investigated if the use of emojis would affect the way a text message is perceived. The research did not look into the emojis as speech acts but rather as tools that are meant to convey or emphasize certain emotions. While emojis can help give more information and detail, they cannot change the valence of the message. When it comes to analysing emojis as speech acts, they tend to appear as very emotionally charged, which leads to a lot of emojis being considered as expressive speech acts (Ge & Herring, 2018).

2.3 The *Hallyu* wave and the spreading of K-pop

The spread of Korean popular culture is known by the term *Hallyu* wave, and it widely includes Korean media such as television dramas and now lately Korean pop, or better known as K-pop. Korean media first began to spread in China and later Japan, Vietnam, and further into the west (Choi & Maliangkay, 2015). Maliangkay (2013) studied the history of the development of Korean music and has stated that as Korean music grew more popular overseas the more it affected the image of the celebrities. He talks mostly about male celebrities and how there was a shift from the previously popular tough and masculine image to a softer western-like boy band image that was more desirable to the female gaze with the rise of the first idol bands in the late 90s. Maliangkay explains this need for change to be connected to the Korean history as the previously desired masculinity was no longer as necessary as it had been.

Choi and Maliangkay mentioned how the focus changed from the music itself to the image of the celebrities by emphasizing the styling, choreography and other visual elements that go along with the music. Due to this, the newly formed idol groups were depending on their fans more than before. Later the groups were made global by adding members from other countries like Thailand, Japan or China, hoping that would attract more fans. Entertainment companies started marketing their music to a bigger audience and names of composers and producers from outside of Korea started to become a more occurring view on song credits (Choi and Maliangkay, 2015). There was a significant rise in the popularity of K-pop globally from the early 2000s to 2013, which can be explained with both, the wider global marketing of the K-pop brand as well as social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and

Facebook becoming more common. Fans from all over the world could be reached easily and fandoms could come together to form a solid fan community (Jin, 2016).

K-pop can be seen as a product and due to social media, entertainment companies have access to important information about their target audience such as their location, age, gender as well as the size of the community (Jung, 2015). The development of social media and online fandom communities have also enabled the birth of global fan-to-fan communication. Fans are now able to show support from all over the world and new type of K-pop fandom culture has emerged in the form of, for example hashtag promotion campaigns and “*selca days*”, which are fandom specific dates when fans upload a picture of themselves and their favourite member from the specific idol group showing support (Malik & Haidar, 2020).

2.3.1 K-pop fan-idol relationship

In social media platforms where K-pop celebrities, or better known as “idols”, post updates of their day and interact with fans, the fan activity is strongly related to parasocial love rather than just parasocial friendship (Ozge, 2021). There are still differences in how each fandom perceives their relationship with their favourite idols and based on their interactions we can determine whether the relationship is more romantic or platonic (Souders, 2022). As Kim and Kim (2020), as well as Ozge (2021) have mentioned, the amount of time spent on social media and on the profiles of celebrities is linked to not only the self-congruity of the fans but also the commitment they have to the idols.

Souders (2022) found out fan-idol interactions are more frequent during the idols’ “active time”. Different social media platforms were considered, such as *YouTube*, *Twitter*, *V Live* (a live streaming application where K-pop idols can host live streams to interact with fans) and *Weverse* (a social media platform where mostly K-pop idols and fans can post and interact with each other). Active time means the time-period in which artists are promoting a new release or are perhaps touring. When increasing the interactions between the fans and the idols, the parasocial relationship is also made stronger, which could affect possible sales of physical albums or other merchandise (Souders, 2022; Mohd Jenol, 2020).

Abd-Rahim (2019) analysed two fandoms and their social media posts and noticed how the ability to be able to invest in your favourite idol groups is important when it comes to competing against other fans. Although fan consumerism is connected to the group and fandom status overall as Abd-Rahim says, purchasing physical albums, official merchandise or even idol-advertised products can be said to be an important part of a fan's identity and is connected to their personal relationship with their idols (Mohd Jenol, 2020). Not only does purchasing goods help fans develop their own identities, but there can also be multiple benefits such as being able to participate in a face-to-face *fan meeting* where fans get to meet and talk to celebrities for a certain amount of time. Fan meetings help groups boost their album sales as fans take part in a lottery in which your chances of getting to meet your favourite group increases the more albums one buys (Mohd Jenol, 2020; Tinaliga, 2018).

Although social media platforms are a popular way to maintain a close relationship there are other ways the entertainment companies behind the idols try to keep fan loyalty and the feeling of parasocial love high such as mobile roleplaying games (Pramesthi, 2021).

2.4 Fandom identity and discourse

“Identity” is a term that takes a huge role in fandom studies as the participants of fandom culture tend to intertwine themselves into the image the fandom has (Smutradontri & Gadavani, 2020). Smutradontri & Gadavani (2020) discussed the various ways by which fans explore their identities or include themselves in the media they are a fan of. These activities include for example written fiction in the form of self-insert fanfiction or roleplaying with other fans.

This relates to the different “online-self” and “real world-self” mentioned earlier (Boy & Uitermark, 2022; Goffman, 1959; Takahashi, 2014), as online fan activity and identity might not be similar to how one acts in a group that does not belong to their fan community. The fan identity and the need to differentiate ones-self from the non-fandom has been the target of multiple studies (e.g., Smutradontri & Gadavani, 2020; Lee et al., 2020). Smutradontri & Gadavani (2020) use the term “fan talk” to describe the in-fandom interactions that are both meant to bring the fandom closer together and to alienate those who are not part of the specific community. Lee et al. (2020) also studied the group identity fandoms have by analysing English texts

written by ARMY, the fandom of the K-pop band BTS. An interesting phenomenon of using plural pronouns such as “us” and “we” when a single person is posting, appeared in the data. Lee et al. (2020) talked about group identity as a performance where the purpose is not to appear as a single individual but as the fandom as a whole.

Lee (2018) talked about the growing trend of studying the Korean language. Although Korean is not widely spoken like English, K-pop fans wish to learn it in order to get closer to their idols. Many online posts with code-mixing or Korean culture related terms were found and Lee explained how this can be seen as a way to create a feeling of a close relationship. Not only can such code-mixing be a “fan talk” trait, but it can also indicate fan-idol parasocial relationships. Many Korean terms that were used were terms indicating kinship (Lee, 2018). Similarly, Smutradontri & Gadavanij (2020) in their study on Thai fandom culture, noticed how fans tend to use kinship terms. In the Thai language, such terms include the personal pronouns: “พี่” [phi] meaning senior/older sibling and “น้อง” [nong] meaning junior/younger sibling. The use of these terms indicates a close relationship between the communicating participants and shows how fans tend to see themselves and their idols as family or friends. Lee (2018) said global fans of K-pop like to use Korean kinship terms and informal language when addressing celebrities either in Korean or in English, which indicates fans also tend to adopt cultural terms that are not part of their own daily way of communicating with other people.

When it comes to social media and communication in the K-pop fan community, Tinaliga talked about the competitive nature of the fans. Such competitiveness is not tied only to fandom against fandom but is also very prominent inside the fandom. Such in-group competitiveness might occur in situations where the opportunity to meet the idols has been limited in some way (Tinaliga, 2018). Previously mentioned fan meetings are a good example of in-group competitiveness because the fan meeting spots are often very limited, which then leads to trying to “out buy” your fellow fans (Tinaliga, 2018; Mohd Jenol, 2020).

Whether others have positive or negative interactions with the members of a specific fandom has a big influence on how the group is then perceived (Tinaliga, 2018). Due to fandoms having different reputations based on their fandom-fandom interactions,

it is crucial to have a wide sample with different fandoms when it comes to studying fandom-idol interactions in order to avoid bias.

2.5 Parasocial relationships

Horton and Wohl first used the term “parasocial relationship” to describe the feeling of closeness in a situation of mass communication. They explained this relationship as a public figure, for example a radio host or an actor on television making a gesture or a spoken act that can to the audience feel like a personal message. This leads to the feeling of a personal relationship between two individual who have no real-life connection to each other (Horton and Wohl, 1956). However, parasocial relationships are not limited to real life public figures but can also be born with fictional characters (Giles, 2011). Gleason, Theran and Newberg (2017) in their research on parasocial relationships in adolescence discussed how those who have formed a closer relationship with a public figure used more time trying to maintain said relationship as opposed to those who saw their favourite celebrities just as public figures rather than someone, they have a personal relationship with. Similar results have been introduced in other research (see Ozge, 2021; Kim and Kim, 2020) which implies how social media may have a big role in helping fans form closer relationships with celebrities and how depending on the nature of the relationship, it may be rather time-consuming to maintain the feeling of closeness.

Fans may feel they have a closer relationship to their favourite celebrities if their beliefs, interests and other preferences are similar. Although this information comes from what the celebrities themselves want to publicly say, it helps fans form their own idea of how they (the celebrities) are (Kim and Kim, 2020). This thesis takes into account the possible parasocial relationship the fans might have with the celebrities they are replying to, and this can be further analysed based on the content of the tweets. Related to the celebrity-fan interactions, Kim and Kim discussed how the level of self-congruity of the fans (the degree in which the fan feels close to the celebrity) is strongly linked to how satisfied they are with their lives, which then leads to a higher degree of commitment and loyalty to the celebrity. Fans follow celebrities’ social media accounts hoping for direct interactions (Kim and Kim, 2020).

Hoffner and Bond (2022) similarly to Kim and Kim (2020) discussed parasocial relationships as a coping mechanism. According to Hoffner and Bond, parasocial

relationships can be therapeutical, with people sharing possible problems or issues they might be having in their lives, without expecting anyone to reply. For young social media users these relationships can also be a mean of self-exploration because they can involve themselves with public figures in the way they wish (romantically or sexually) without actually having a physical relationship (Hoffner and Bond, 2022).

3 Material and methods

In this section I will introduce the data used in this research as well as analysis methods and justifications for data categorisation.

3.1 Data

For this thesis a small corpus consisting of 204 public Twitter replies has been collected. 34 random K-pop idol Twitter posts were selected and from each, the first six English replies were picked. On Twitter, most K-pop idols have two official accounts, one for official updates on new music or events that is usually run by the company officials, and one where the idols update fans on how they have spent their day or how they are otherwise doing. The members of K-pop idol groups usually share an account which means many people use the group's account. The replies were collected from the accounts that post the every-day updates. The idol updated accounts may occasionally hold short events called "mention parties" in which the idols actively read replies under the original tweet and respond to fans. In this thesis such mention parties have not been taken as a part of the data sample because they do not occur often and not much data could have been collected. In order for the data to not be limited to one certain fan base, 29 different idol group Twitter accounts were randomly selected. Due to my language repertoire, only those idol tweets were chosen that consisted of either English, Korean or both.

The data was collected between 13th of October 2022 and the 31st of December 2022, so the groups selected for the data sample are ones who were active during the data collection period either due to ongoing or upcoming promotional activities.

3.2 Analysis methods

I used a mixed method design of quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. Descriptive statistics was used to determine in how many tweets a certain type of sentence or speech act appeared in, and discourse analysis was used to analyse in what kind of context the speech acts were used in. The material consists of text tweets as well as images, which is why a multimodal point of view has also been considered.

With discourse analysis, I took into account the context of the data and the culture that is surrounding it. I used the speech act theory (Austin, 1959; Searl, 1969, 1979) with discourse analysis to draw conclusions on the parasocial communication and relationship between K-pop idols and their fans. The material was divided into multiple categories in terms of syntactic properties for the sentence types and the semantic meaning for the speech acts. How the speech acts appeared in the material was also considered. Due to the multimodality of the material, I have analysed how images are used in K-pop idol-fan communication.

Based on previous research (Smutradontri & Gadavanij, 2020; Ozge, 2021; Souders, 2022; Kim & Kim, 2020; Pramesthi, 2021) we can assume that to a certain extent a relationship exists, but the aim was to further explore the norms of K-pop fandom Twitter and the nature of the relationship based on speech acts.

The original tweets (the tweets of the K-pop celebrities) were tagged in the following manner:

- a. Sentence type(s)
- b. Does the post have an image, a video or is it text only?

The replies were then categorised as followed:

- a. Is the reply relevant to the context? (yes/no)
- b. The sentence type(s)
- c. Speech act category
- d. Speech act(s)
- e. Target audience (idol/friend/fandom or general audience/no one/several of these)

Tweets were classified into sentence types based on their syntactic form and function by the definition of the Oxford grammar handbook (2019) introduced in the background subsection 2.1. These five sentence types are: declaratives, open interrogatives, close interrogatives, imperatives and exclamations. Most tweets consisted of more than one clause despite the lack of punctuation. Context relevancy refers to whether or not the reply takes into consideration the caption or visual attachments in the celebrity tweets. Speech acts were divided into five main

categories: assertives, declaratives, directives, expressives and declarations (Searle 1969, 1979). Under each speech act category, the speech acts were further divided into sub-categories as new type of acts appeared in the material. The target audience refers to whom the reply is aimed at.

3.3 Limitations and ethics

The data collection and the reporting of the results has been done by taking into consideration the Finnish Data Protection Act (1050/2018) and the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679). According to these data protection acts no personal identifiers are to be shown and the owners of the account are to be anonymous as there is no consent form for participation.

The data was collected from those accounts that have chosen to show their Twitter content publicly without restrictions. The data is anonymous and non-celebrity account names, although pseudonyms, have been excluded from the information shown in this thesis.

The gender distribution in the randomly selected idol tweets was 25 tweets by members of male groups and 9 tweets by members of female groups. It is however difficult to say whether the fandoms of female and male groups differ in terms of Twitter discourse and have therefore been treated as equal. Other limitations include the time of the year the data was collected and the random sample being researcher specific. Other researchers can get an entirely different sample with entirely different idol groups when building the original tweet corpus. Even using the same original tweets, the replies might appear in different order, making the corpus completely different despite the same original material. Different idol groups are active online during different times as their active time is spread differently around the year (Souders, 2022).

4 Results and analysis

In this part of the thesis, the results of the research are introduced. The original tweets will be briefly introduced, and the sentence types used by idols will be discussed. The reply tweets will be discussed in terms of target, sentence type, speech act and how speech acts appear.

4.1 The original posts

The language of the original posts was mainly Korean, but some idols had English with the Korean. Those celebrities who were posting from their tour used English. In these cases, the tweet was either asking for recommendations or expressing their feelings after/before a concert. However, some posts either had no caption at all or only emojis as caption. Table 3 shows the different sentence types in the 34 original tweets collected. The number of sentences separately was not calculated and what is included are only whether the tweet included sentences of certain types. N refers to the number of tweets that include said sentence types. The letter in

Sentence types in Tweets	N
Declarative (K)	10
Imperative (K)	7
Interrogative (K)	4
Exclamation (K)	2
Declarative (E)	2
No caption	2
Declarative (K) + Interrogative (K)	2
Declarative (K) + Imperative (K)	2
Interrogative (K) + Interrogative (E)	1
Declarative (K) + Declarative (E)	1
Declarative (K) + Exclamation (K)	1
Interrogative (E)	0
Imperative (E)	0
Exclamation (E)	0
	34

parentheses indicates whether the sentence was written in Korean (K) or in English (E). Based on the language division the idols do target their tweets more towards their Korean fan bases and rely on the option to translate the tweets when it comes to international audience.

Out of the 34 idol tweets, only one did not include any kind of image or media. The captions of different types of tweets are shown in the following examples (1) to (5). Translated parts are in *italics*. The full images of the original tweets and replies used in examples can be found on appendix 1. Original tweets are referred to as OT and reply tweets as RT.

Table 3 Sentence types in the idol Tweets

Example (1) [OT]<Declarative> [#Yongha] *Rui ddaranghae*¹ ❤️ *image*

Example (2) [OT]<Interrogative> [#Geonu] Anyone tell me what kind of food should I try in Canada cause I'm super excited 🤩 *Only B*², *recommend me something to eat while visiting Canada* 🤔 #JustB #JustB #Geonu *image*

Example (3) [OT]<Declarative + imperative> *Ririka* (Ririka) Only:1³
 ♡♡♡ *Let's get through this week again together* ❤️ *It's really cold so try not to catch a cold okay???* *I miss you a lot but wait a little bit more*
 👍🌟🌸 *Ririka loves you a lot* ❤️❤️❤️ #ILY1 #ILY1 #Ririka #Ririka
 image

Example (4) [OT]<Exclamation> *Me too, a duck!!!* *image*

Example (5) [OT]<No caption> ❤️❤️❤️ #SUNOO #Sleepwell *image*

Declaratives and imperatives were the most common sentence types in the idols' tweets in terms of syntactic features. Interrogatives were the third most common sentences. These are the most likely to invite fans to reply to them and most likely have the purpose of receiving some kind of information whether it is suggestions or just wanting to find out about the kind of day the fans have had.

Examples (1) to (5) already imply there is a close relationship between the celebrities and their fandom. The original tweets were targeted at fans and the idols expressed concern and love. Example (3) shows the idol's concern for the health of the fans' as well as explicitly expresses her love and how she misses everyone. Similarly, examples (1) and (5) have been made to express love in addition to the images uploaded with the caption. The visual mean of communication can be seen in two ways: the use of images and the use of emojis. On some occasions these emojis can be used as personal tags, which helps international fans, who do not know how to read Hangul.

4.2 The replies

The replies were tagged based on their relevance, target, sentence type, speech acts and how the speech acts appeared, as previously mentioned. Finding English replies under some randomly selected posts was challenging. The most English that was related to the original tweets would have been found in the "quote re-tweets", where

¹ Rui is the fandom name of Wei and "ddaranghae" is a cute way to say "I love you" in Korean.

² Only B is the fandom name of Just B

³ Only:1 is the fandom name of ILY:1

the fans would not be addressing the idols but rather sharing their own comments to their followers.

4.2.1 Relevancy and target audience

Most of the replies were relevant when it came to the content and context. From the sample of 204 tweets, 69.1% of the replies (141 tweets) were relevant when it came to the original tweet. A lot of the replies would either react to the pictures that are uploaded in the tweet or base their reply on the text in the tweets. In the case of irrelevant replies, the content did not take into consideration neither the caption nor the media in the original tweets. There were no direct compliments or references that could have been related to the images or other implications of them relating to the caption. Following example (6) shows how relevant and irrelevant fan interactions relate to the original tweet, in which an idol from the group *The Boyz* posted images of him holding an award his group won and thanked the fans for it (see appendix 1).

Example (6) <OT> [*Ju Haknyeon*] *Wouldn't have happened without TheB*⁴ 🙄❤️ *image*

Example (6.1) [RT]<Relevant reply> v proud of u hak ilysm mwah⁵

Example (6.2) [RT]<Irrelevant reply> I'm so proud of you graduate congratulations 🍷🍰🙄

Although example (6.2) could be related to the images in the original tweet, it does not fit the context. It could however be a misunderstanding or misuse of English. Irrelevant replies could be divided into three different categories:

1. General “I love you” s and pet names.
2. Comments unfitting for the context.
3. Tagging/inviting someone else to see the original post.

Example (6.2) can be put into the second category of “comments unfitting for the context”. Although some replies were irrelevant when it came to the context and content in the original tweet, they were still attempts of communication, whether it is announcing one’s love for the original tweeter, sharing parts of one’s own day,

⁴ TheB is the fandom name of The Boyz

⁵ “Very proud of you Haknyeon I love you so much” with “mwah” as a kissing sound

promoting on-going voting campaigns for idol groups or tagging one's friends into the post. Of these irrelevant replies mentioned, promoting on-going voting campaigns were the most out of place and irrelevant replies in terms of the context in the original tweets. These types of replies did not target the idol or the replier's friends but rather work as a notification for the fandom on how they should "do their job" as fans and vote for their favourite idols in order for them to gain more attention (see examples (7) and (8))

Example (7) [RT]<Irrelevant reply> Hello everyone. Please make sure to create and register emails for MAMA⁶ voting. Thank you

Example (8) [RT]<Irrelevant reply> Like this post for #TEMPEST *image*

For the target audience analysis, the replies were divided into four categories: the target is the idol, the target is the fandom or other large audience, the target is a friend and target unspecified.

<i>Target</i>	<i>Idol</i>	<i>Fandom</i>	<i>Friend</i>	<i>Unspecified</i>	<i>Idol + Friend</i>
<i>Number of replies</i>	146	14	20	23	1

Table 4 Target audience of the replies

Replies were mostly written for the idols but could also target friends, the fandom in general or the target audience was otherwise unclear. When the target of the tweet was the idol, the fans either addressed them by mentioning their names or simply using the pronoun "you" referring to the idol. Other mention of pronoun use should be the use of plural pronouns when fans refer to themselves. Although personal pronouns such as "me" and "I" were more common, fans also had the tendency to group themselves with a whole community with pronouns such as "we" or "us" with which they referred to their fandom as a whole.

When the target was a friend, their account was tagged into the reply and the replies addressed them instead of the idol. Unspecified target replies did not directly address anyone. One reply targeted both a friend and the idol. In this case the fan tagged two friends of theirs and continued with the text "I love you three", referring to the two friends and the idol, under whose post the reply was posted. The target might in some

⁶ Mnet Asian Music Awards

cases be difficult to determine if no one is directly being addressed and the content of the tweet does not explicitly state to whom the person is speaking to.

4.2.2 Sentence types

The fans' replies consisted mostly of declarative sentences, followed by imperatives and exclamations. In Table 5, the numbers indicate in how many tweets the sentence type appeared in. Similar to the idol tweets, one reply could consist of multiple sentences and could therefore include more than one sentence type.

The total number of clauses shows that out of the 204 tweets some of them had more than one clause in one tweet. Out of the 52 imperative sentences only 32 appeared alone without other clauses. The sentence types that appeared alone the most were declaratives, of which 92, and exclamations of which 41 appeared independently. Uncategorised

Sentence types in Tweets	Tweets appeared in
Declarative	114
Imperative	52
Exclamation	48
Interrogative close	8
Interrogative open	3
Uncategorised	8
	233

Table 5 Sentences in the fan replies

tweets were fan translations that did not include any extra notes from the translator. These tweets could be put into the same sentence type categories as the original tweets but in this thesis, they have been separated, unless they include other content in addition to the translation. The following examples (9) to (14) show how each type of sentence appeared in the data. On some occasions these sentence types overlapped with one another, and one sentence could be put into multiple categories. The content of the replies will be further analysed in subsection 4.2.2.

Example (9) [OT]<Declarative> [#Dongpyo] *My dear baby Nows⁷ ❤️❤️ Thank you so much for spending the promotional activities of 'Drip N' Drop' together with me. Thank you for making our important time shine 🥰👍 I hope Nows will have good time I love you ❤️👍*
image

[RT]<Declarative> dongpyo you did great for this promotion 😊😊😊

Example (10) [OT]<Imperative> [17'S Hoshi] *Have a comfortable evening Carats⁸ 💚* *image*

⁷ Now is the fandom name of Mirae

⁸ Carat is the fandom name of Seventeen

[RT]<Exclamation> BASSKSMODNDKSNISMSKSKSNKSNKSNKSN LOVE YOU

Example (11) [OT]<Declarative> In Tokyo 😊 *image*

[RT]<Imperative + Exclamation> Please try this hair style again at Japan concert Heeseung! It's suit you well! You looks gorgeous *image*

Example (12) [OT]<Close interrogative> [#LEW] *No one has seen it yet right? (woongseong-woongseong⁹)* *image*

[RT]<Open interrogative> Why are you so handsome 😭😭😭 *image*

Example (13) [OT]<Close interrogative + Declarative > *Have you been well? It's been a long time.* *image*

[RT]<Close interrogative> Is it delicious, Oppa¹⁰? 😊😂😂 *image*

Example (14) [RT]<Uncategorised> [eng] DIVE11 thank you for the 1st place in Music Core!! #IVE #IVE #ANYUJIN #ANYUJIN

Examples from (9) to (14) show common fan replies in both terms of syntax and content. In the replies, declaratives was the most common sentence type under all original tweets. Figure 1 shows which sentence types appeared most often with certain types of original tweets. The horizontal line indicates percentage.

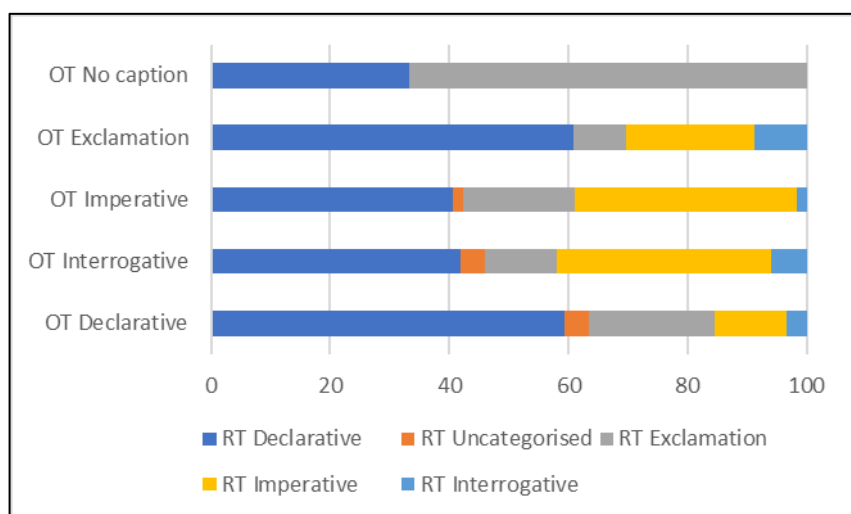


Figure 1 Percentage of most common sentence types in the replies under the original tweets

Declarative replies were the most common under all original tweets, except those without a caption in which exclamations were more common than declaratives. In the case of “no caption” original tweets the replies were reactions to the images, which

⁹ The sound multiple people whispering and making noise

¹⁰ An honorific term with which younger females refer to older males. Could be translated as “brother”.

¹¹ Dive is the fandom name of IVE

might result in more exclamations being used. Declaratives were followed by imperatives. Exclamations were the second most common types of replies only under declaratives. The results indicate fan interactions between fans and idols on K-pop Twitter are mostly statements or requests. Replies in the form of imperative sentences were more often wishes of well-being rather than requests for certain action. The original tweet in example (2) was asking for recommendation from the fans, which resulted in all six replies collected to be imperatives, out of which four were actual recommendations.

Examples (12) and (13) show both types of interrogative replies, which were not common in the data that was collected. Reply in example (12) is an open interrogative based on syntax, but it can be seen as a question that does not require an answer unlike example (13), which is the only one out of all examples from (6) to (14) that indicates the fan was hoping for a reply back.

4.2.3 Speech acts and how they appear

In this section I will explain how the replies were divided based on the speech act categories as well as how these acts were delivered. Similarly, to the sentence types, each speech act has not been separately marked, but what is taken into account is whether one reply includes a certain speech act type and a speech act.

Speech acts that were most found from the data were expressives and directives. However, assertives appeared individually more often than directives which were usually paired with expressive and assertive acts. Tables 6 and 7 show the division of speech act types. Table 6 shows the overall number whereas Table 7 shows the split values of how the speech acts appeared together in the data.

When a directive act was meant for an idol, the reply also included another phrase, often expressive. Directives paired with assertives were mostly the replier tagging a friend and stating that an idol has posted something. The act of tagging is to be considered a directive act as it directs the tagged account owner to look at the post in which they have been tagged in.

Speech act categories	Replies appeared in
Expressive	141
Directive	49
Assertive	39
Commissive	5
None	8

Table 6 Different speech acts in the replies

None of the replies used in this thesis were explicitly negative as all fans only expressed positivity or referred to possible unpleasant or inconvenient situations in a neutral manner.

Expressives were the most common

types of speech acts. Assertive acts and expressive acts can both be stating something but what differentiates the expressives from the assertives is the involvement of the fans' personal perspective and emotions. These results seem to be in line with the sentence types shown in subsection 4.2.2. The relationship between the sentence types and speech acts will be analysed with more detail in subsection 4.2.4.

The three most common acts were complimenting, expressing gratitude (e.g., "I love you" or "thank you") and suggesting or demanding. Other acts included: expressing longing, asking questions and expressing hope or luck. In addition to these acts, fans also replied with only a nickname or with emojis, which are listed as expressive acts but were not further put as a sub-category. These were expressive speech acts that appeared the most as spam in the replies. Table 8 shows in how many tweets certain speech acts were found. How the speech acts appeared is shown in Table 9 with examples.

Speech act categories	Replies
Expressive	119
Assertive	23
Directive + Expressive	17
Directive	17
Assertive + Directive	12
Uncategorised	8
Commissive	2
Assertive + Expressive	2
Commissive + Directive	1
Commissive + Directive + Expressive	1
Assertive + Directive + Expressive	1
Commissive + Expressive	1
	204

Table 7 Speech acts in the replies, separate values

Speech act	In how many replies it appears in
Complimenting	73
Showing gratitude (I love you, thank you)	48
Suggestion or demand	45
Expressing longing (I miss you)	11
Asking a question	7
Expressing hope or luck	6

Table 8 Speech act sub-categories in the replies


How an act appears in the data	Example(s)
As stating	[RT]<Expressive: compliment>”super proud of you my love” [RT]<Expressive: Expressing longing> “I miss you too junie :(“
Reaction to the image without a compliment	[RT]<Assertive> “as expected from you 😊😊👉😊”
Tagging another account	[RT]<Assertive + Directive> “@ACCOUNT hihi hes here”
Meme	[RT]<Expressive: Compliment + showing gratitude> 
Spam	[RT]<Expressive>”my baby” [RT]<Expressive>”OH MY SWEET PUMPKIN”
Comment out of context	[RT]<Expressive: Suggestion/demand> “bby enjoy your stay in Japan!!” ¹² [RT]<Assertive>”I never thought my vision can come true..”
Translation	[RT]<None>”For the last (FNC) KINGDOM performance tomorrow, fighting!! 👍 #P1Harmony #THEO”

Table 9 How speech acts appear

¹² The original tweet did not imply that the idol was currently in Japan.

I will give a definition for some of the categories. “Reacting to the image without a compliment” refers to the type of comment that was related to the image that was posted but did not compliment the looks, talent or other feature of the idol. These comments were for example stating a change in the looks of the idol, commenting on food that was shown in the images or simply stating something that was related to the theme of the images. Memes can be both images and written text. I have defined meme as a well-known phrase, image, joke or reference to a joke that can be copy-pasted and keeps the meaning of it the same. Spam was difficult to determine and detect in this context. What has been determined as spam were replies that had very little content such as keyboard smashing, exclamations such a “omg”, “my baby”, “oh holy forehead flick” or replies that did not fit into the other categories and did not necessarily fit the context either.

Over half of the replies included expressive speech acts where the fans expressed their feelings and personal opinions regarding the idol they were replying to, and the situation at hand. Fans publicly expressed their love by directly replying to the idols’ tweets in public rather than sending private messages. Next to show the occurrence of showing love or gratitude as well as complimenting on K-pop fandom Twitter. The word “love” appeared in the data 34 times and the act of thanking occurred 17 times. In addition to thanking and announcing love, expressives also included compliments. Two types of compliments were observed: direct compliments and indirect compliments.

Example (15) [OT] Passion ❤️ *image*

Example (15.1) [RT]<Direct compliment> u are so fine hello????

Example (15.2) [RT]<Indirect compliment> Junseo your arms
ASHSGSJAH

Example (15.2) shows a typical indirect compliment. Although the locutionary meaning is drawing attention to the idol’s arms and does not mention anything outside that, the illocutionary meaning is to compliment the idol on their looks as he is showing his arms in the pictures uploaded in the tweet (see appendix 1). The emotional “burst” is also emphasized with the nonsense at the end known as “keyboard smashing” that can also be seen previously in example (10).

Direct compliments were more common than indirect compliments. Direct compliments were either commenting on the looks of the idols, which is a reaction to the images in the posts, expressing pride or congratulating them on their achievements or promotional activities. All previous examples except (10), (13) and (14) have been categorised as compliments. They show the range from being proud (example (9)) to congratulating (example (6.1)) to complimenting the looks of the idol (examples (11), (12)). Congratulating replies appeared under posts where the idols thank their fans for awards or after they have successfully completed a live performance.

The third most observed content in the replies were suggestions and demands, which were further divided into two sub-categories:

1. Directives giving suggestions or orders on what should be done.
2. Expressives “ordering” the idol to rest, sleep well, have a good night etc...

As mentioned previously, interrogatives and imperatives received the most imperatives back compared to other types of original tweets. Directive type suggestions were often replies to idols’ interrogatives asking for the fans’ opinion (see example (16)) and expressive type orders and suggestions to imperatives (see example (17)). Other directive type replies were context irrelevant suggestions, such as the one in example (11) or “marry me”, “reply if you’re my favourite forever”, or “tell everyone we’re married” also classified as spam.

Example (16) [OT] 🧡💬 *If I had short hair👇👇 would it have this kind of feeling?? #STAYC #STAYC #YOON #YOON *image**

Example (16.1) [RT]<Suggestion or demand> do wolf cut

Example (16) as well as example (2) received suggestions back. Although the idol in the original tweet in example (16) was asking for the fans’ opinion on their hairstyle and how they should cut it, in addition to suggestions the idol received compliments based on the images. This was different from the replies to example (2), which did not receive any compliments. The difference is that example (16) was in Korean, whereas example (2) had both English and Korean, which resulted in more actual suggestions back from the English-speaking audience.

When the content in the original tweet included phrases such as “*have a good morning*” or “*have a good day*”, fans had the tendency to reply with similar phrases.

Example (17) [OT] [#J-Min] *Have a good day* #BAE173 #BAE173 #JMIN
image

Example (17.1) [RT]<Expressive order> Same for you ❤️

Example (17.2) [RT]<Expressive order> You too. Fighting¹³!! 🙌❤️

Example (17) and the replies to it (examples (17.1) and (17.2)) were typical idol-fan interactions which included an imperative being replied to with expressive imperatives. Expressives were mostly associated with idol-targeted replies. When the target was a friend or general fandom, the data showed the reply was more likely to be a directive. This can indicate that despite the parasocial bond between the celebrities and fans, there is some distance and fans do not directly give orders to their idols.

4.2.4 Regularities and irregularities in sentence types and speech acts

When we group certain sentence types together based on what type of speech acts are expected to appear in the content, the following division is done:

1. Declaratives and exclamations
 - a. Assertives
 - b. Expressives
 - c. Commissives
2. Imperatives and interrogatives
 - a. Directives
3. Uncategorised
 - a. Unspecified/no acts

This division was done based on the syntactic form of the sentences and what speech acts typically appear in the form of such sentences as stated by König (2020).

¹³ Fighting (화이팅 [hwaiting] or 파이팅 [paiting] in Korean) is an exclamation expressing encouragement.

Declaratives as a sentence type appeared the most in the data, which indicates the most common speech acts should have been either expressives or assertives. As shown in Table 6, expressives did appear the most in the data.

Declaratives and exclamations together were the most common sentence types as shown in Table 5, with 70% of the sentence type appearances being these two. Imperatives and interrogatives as a group formed 27% of the data and uncategorized only 3%.

Figure 2 shows how many percents of the replies were of certain sentence type and contained which speech acts.

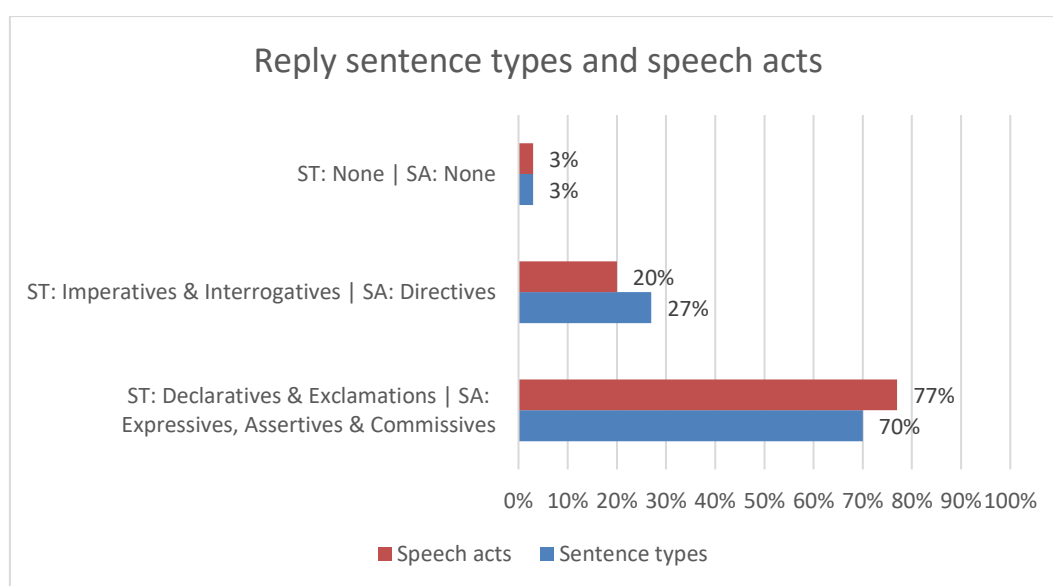


Figure 2 Relationship between sentence types and speech acts in the replies

This implies that most of the speech acts on K-pop fandom Twitter are direct acts. Although the speech acts seem to correlate with the corresponding sentence types there were irregularities in the data.

Although suggestions and demands were the third most common speech acts in fan replies, these suggestions also included the expressive suggestions shown in examples (17.1) and (17.2) which were not categorised as directives. Out of the 44 tweets that were marked to include suggestions or demands, almost half of them (20) were expressives, where the text reply was a greeting or other type of expression where the fan was wishing for the well-being of the idol. Some directive speech acts also

appeared in the data as declaratives or exclamations when a fan tagged a friend. Out of the 20 replies, in which the fan tagged another account, only two were in imperative form and one had both an imperative phrase and an exclamation. Another irregularity in the data can be seen in example (12) which is an open interrogative but was categorised as an expressive due to it being a compliment rather than an actual question.

4.3 Images as communication

As mentioned previously in subsection 4.1, out of the 34 original tweets only one did not include an image. The original images are the most common topic in the replies and fans tend to get the context of the tweet from the pictures rather than the text. Short original tweets that are easily translated with the Twitter translation such as “I love you” or “I miss you” did receive direct replies that were related to the text rather than the images.

Overall, 29 replies had a still image, GIF or a video attached. There were four different kinds of multimodal replies in the data:

1. Reaction images/GIFS (8 replies)
2. Text in the image (6 replies)
3. Re-posting the original tweet’s images (6 replies)
4. Other image/video of the idol/something other fitting the context (10 replies)

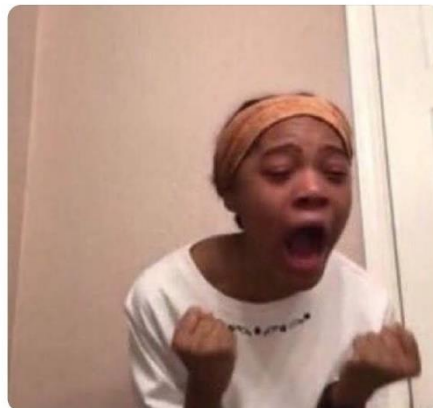
These were the attachments in the tweets. Emojis were another multimodal mean of communication in the data in addition to the attached images. 24 original tweets and 99 replies included one or more emojis or emoticons in the text. Emojis are the little images, that are nowadays a part of digital keyboards and emoticons are traditionally typed, for example “^^” or “<3”. Emojis and emoticons can be seen in most of the previously used examples. In example (5) the emojis were even used as the only communicative tool in addition to the attached image. The most common emojis appeared to be different heart emojis but face, and other non-face emojis were also used. The emojis were related to the text or image content of the tweet such as the party emojis in example (6.2) which are related to the congratulating message.

Reaction images and GIFs visualised the emotion of the replier (see examples (18) and (19)). These images did not have text in them but were considered memes just like the images that did contain text (examples (20) and (21)). Re-posting means the replier took one or multiple images that were uploaded in the original tweet and included them in the reply post (see example 12 in appendix 1). Multimodal replies in the fourth category included images that were not taken from the original tweet. These images were for example pictures of the idol the fan has taken themselves at a concert or other event (example (22)), reference images for suggestions (example (11) in appendix 1), other images that were related to the context or theme of the tweets (example (23)) or “*fancams*” which are videos focusing on one idol dancing or singing.

Example (18) [RT] <Reaction image/GIF>

Replying to @IM_LESSERAFIM

YOU DID WELL TODAY, YOU'RE SO COOLL



Example (19) [RT] <Reaction image/GIF>

Replying to @BLANK2Y_Member

Great job 🍀



Examples (18) and (19) used reaction images to show different emotions. Example (18) shows a compliment in the text part, but it also had an image of a woman yelling which emphasises the excitement and the feeling of being proud. The text was written in all capital letters which can also be taken as talking loudly or yelling. In example (19) the fan used both an emoji as well as a GIF to show their support and love.

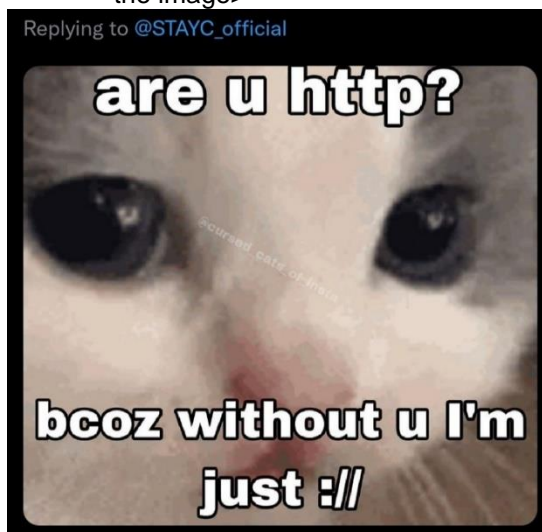
Example (20) [RT] <Text in the image>

Replying to @Hi_Goldenness



Example (20) can be understood as the fan missing their idol, and the images that were uploaded in the original post help them with the feeling and are like very good food to the fan. It relies on the use of both visual and textual communication to carry the meaning it is supposed to. Without the text in the image the meaning of the meme would not be understood. This reply did not have any additional text outside of the image.

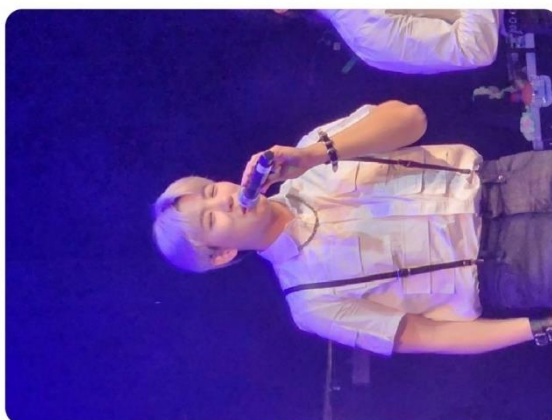
Example (21) [RT] <Text in the image>



Example (21) does not rely on the image unlike example (20). The flirtatious punchline “are you http? bcoz without u I’m just ://” would work by itself without being added to the context of the image. It does however rely on the multiuse of “://” by making it look like an emoticon. It is implying that the other person not only makes them complete, but that without them the speaker would only feel neutral or numb even.

Example (22) [RT] <Other image>

Replying to @Hi_Goldenness
You were amazing!! ❤️



Example (22) was uploaded as a reply to an original tweet completely in English. The idol group had been touring and the idol was thanking the audience. The fan in the reply showed they attended the concert by uploading a picture they took at the event of the idol to whom they are replying to. The same message could be received from the text only, but the image has been attached as proof.

Example (23) [RT] (A reply to example 4) <Other image>

Replying to @chowoodz
 조승연 i can only make sand duck
 since there's no winter here 😅



Example (23) related to the context of the original post shown in example (4) in appendix 1. The original post showed a duck made of snow, to which the fan replied that where they are from it does not snow. The image of a sand duck was attached to show what they mean.

From these examples, (18), (19), (20), and (21) were tagged as memes. Images and text image memes can be placed into other categories as well as they served multiple purposes. An image could perform the act of, for example compliments, flirting, or expressing longing.

5 Discussion

This section of the thesis will focus on discussing the results and drawing conclusions based on them with comparison to previous research discussed in section 2.

The research questions to be discussed are as followed:

1. What kind of content appears in K-pop celebrities' tweets and the fans' replies?
 - a. What sentence types are used in K-pop celebrity tweets?
 - b. What kind of sentence types and speech acts do fan replies consist of?
2. How does the target audience of the reply tweet change which sentence types and speech acts are used?
3. What is the relationship between the target audience of the reply tweet and the sentence types and speech acts used?

Subsections 5.1 and 5.2 will be focusing on the sentence types and speech acts used in the tweets by the idols and the fans. In these sections I will be discussing the results and answering research questions 1 and 2. In subsections 5.3 and 5.4 I will discuss the parasocial aspect of the communication and draw conclusions that will answer research question 3.

5.1 K-pop idols' tweets

The results show that K-pop idols tend to use declarative sentences the most often, with the content being thanking, expressing love, wishing their audience a good day or asking questions or recommendations. Since positive messages and expressive greetings are a popular way of interacting with fans it shows that a certain way of communicating between the idols and their fans has been established. These results are similar with those of Nemer's (2016) and show how celebrity tweets do follow a certain pattern. What, according to the results, makes the K-pop fandom different in terms of celebrity tweets, are the K-pop fandom culture and Twitter norms known by both fans and the idols, where replies to these posts do not necessarily need a further reply back from the idol or anyone else. This means there is a "statement to statement" way of communicating, where neither the original post nor the reply really invite anyone to continue the "conversation" and it is not clear whether this could be counted as mutual interaction.

The declaratives make the tweets seem like a diary and a personal microblog (Dayter, 2016) where the idols update about their day or simply express their feelings in a declarative form. The same can be said about the imperatives since they are mostly greetings. Only interrogatives can be considered an invitation to reply.

The original tweets by celebrities were all friendly in nature. Much like discussed earlier (see Kim and Kim, 2020) the results show that idols try to keep up with an image of them as close friends who are updating about their day online. They address their fans directly by mentioning fandom names and thanking them directly of their achievements, which already makes the target audience of their tweets smaller than the whole Twitter community as they are intended for their fans especially. These private acts can help the idols to build trust and create a positive online atmosphere (Argyris et al., 2021)

It could also be argued that the idols are trying to express the feeling beyond friendship too by explicitly using the phrase “I love you”. This shows the bond the idols are trying to form with their fans. However, the main attraction of the tweets appears to be the pictures that are posted. Short captions can be translated on Twitter and are therefore more accessible for the international audience.

5.2 Relevancy, target, speech acts and how they appear

The replies were more likely to be relevant than irrelevant as the results show. While the context relevant tweets were more direct attempts of communication in terms of the quality of the content, the irrelevant replies also can be accounted as a form of interacting with the idols.

Twitter is known as a platform for self-talk (Dayter, 2016) and this phenomenon does appear in the data as well but not as frequently as targeted replies. Because the target audience of the replies was not limited to the idols alone, it can be stated that the K-pop fandom community on Twitter does use the replies for multiple purposes and not only to send messages to celebrities.

Regarding the sentence types, it has already been stated, that due to declaratives being the most common sentence type, the most common speech acts should have been assertives and expressives. Because expressives were the most common speech acts, it explains why declaratives and exclamations were so prominent in the data.

When compared to other online forum discussions studied by Chaka (2020) apologising and requesting were not that common acts when it comes to parasocial fan to idol talk.

Because expressives were the most common speech acts that appeared in the data, it can be concluded that the fans openly share their feelings with their idols. It is fair to say the compliments should be considered expressives rather than assertives due to the idol-fan attachment. However, there is some overlapping in speech acts used by fans. This shows how such overlapping is not only associated with fandom blogs or forums where the communication is mostly between two fans (Fazekas, 2021) but can appear when the fans interact with the target of their admiration also.

5.2.1 Hidden meanings

Compliments can be seen in many different forms such as, for example indirect questions (as in example (12)) or exclamations (as in example (10)). However, as mentioned in the analysis, when grouped together, the sentence types and speech acts were correlated, which indicates that despite the irregularities there were not that many indirect speech acts.

If we compare this to Airaksinen's (2020) discussion about the use of sarcasm and irony, we can agree that these are not common means of communication in K-pop fandom discourse. Although sarcasm nor irony were found in the data, the issue of the acts working only if the content is understood by the receiver is still relevant. Example (21) shows an image that uses a pun in order to create a flirtatious message. Similarly indirect acts can be misunderstood if the receiver (the idol) does not understand what the fan is truly meaning (Airaksinen, 2020).

5.2.2 Multimodality of K-pop Twitter

The idols tackle the issue of the language barrier with image-based communication that includes images, videos and GIFs. This image exchange can be mutual, and it can be argued that the K-pop fan community bases a lot of its understanding of the original tweets on the images. It can also be said that the idols themselves acknowledge this and use the images as means of communication by for example directly referring to the image in the actual text part of the tweet. Another use of visual aids in the idols' tweets was observed of being the emojis that they use to show

their own feelings or as personal tags. Previous research on emojis and their purpose of being the carrier of emotions in online environment where the speaker's nonverbal cues cannot be seen, have shown that emojis can emphasize the emotions the speaker has tried to convey (Riordan, 2017). This can be seen in the data used in this thesis and much like discussed by Ge & Herring (2018) these emojis are often linked to expressive acts due to them being the carrier of emotional meanings.

Multimodality is also a part of fan communication. The use of memes or GIFs can emphasize and visualize the feelings the fans are attempting to express. In example (18) the meme that has been used indicates that the fan was yelling. The meme can be understood like that when it is paired with the text that is written fully in capital letters. The images themselves also work as speech acts as Grundlingh (2018) mentioned and they do not necessarily need any additional text outside of the image in order to be understood as a communicative tool. The data showed a lot of the image communication by the fans was composed of expressive speech acts.

5.3 Fan-Idol relationship

The results were similar to those of previous fandom research (see Kim & Kim, 2020; Ozge, 2021; Souders, 2022) which have stated that there is indeed a relationship between the fandom and the idols, and in this thesis, based on the way the celebrities often mention the name of their fandom in their tweets, it can be taken as a method of getting closer to ones fandom. This can also help the idols keep a closer relationship to their fans and it also makes their messages more personal to the fans. As Horton and Wohl (1956) discussed, a parasocial bond is built on gestures or spoken acts that feel personal to the receiver, which is a prevalent part of the idol-fan interactions. When the idols create personal messages, it creates a stronger parasocial bond between them and their fans.

The fans like to group themselves as a fandom community, similar to what Lee et al. (2020) mentioned in their research but that does not take away the individual parasocial love that can be seen from the replies. Lee et al. (2020) discussed the community identity in only one fandom who used pronouns that refer to multiple people, stating how "we" as a whole love them or are thankful of them. In this thesis the Twitter behaviour of multiple fandoms has been observed, and this type of fandom community and the feeling of unity is similar despite the fandom.

When taking away the group identity and discussing the individual feelings of the fans', the results show how fans express their own personal feelings and opinions when it comes to direct attempts of communication with their idols as mentioned before. Compliments, expressing love, pride and thanking show the emotional bond between the fans and the idols. As Chaka (2020) mentioned in their research, greeting, joking, apologising and requesting are common in online interactions. As these are mostly expressive acts, the results discussed in this thesis further confirm this as a common way of communicating online and despite having its own norms the K-pop fandom community does rely on common online norms also.

When it comes to the parasocial communication, the expression of love seems mutually common based on the Twitter interactions of idols expressing their love and fans saying it back. The tone of the original tweets and the replies is positive, and the speech acts in the replies further indicate, a close relationship between the idols and their fans exists. As Kim and Kim (2020) discussed, the idols talk in a manner that makes them appear to be on the same level as their fans. Showing snippets of one's day and showing appreciation for the fans whether it be trusting them when it comes to food recommendation or simply thanking them for their effort and attention, brings them to the same level as their fans, which then creates a stronger parasocial bond between them as Kim and Kim (2020) stated.

However, there are some issues that might affect the relationship between the idols and non-native speaker fans. There is a language barrier between the idols and those fans who do not speak Korean, making it difficult to say if English speaking fans would reply the same way, if the captions were in English. Even if there are some accounts that post the translations in the replies, they can fall behind and not be noticed. Unlike stated in previous research by Lee (2018), Korean kinship terms did not appear in the data often, but some code-mixing does still occur. English speaking fans have adopted some terms that are a part of the Korean language and Korean culture such as "fighting" when encouraging someone online.

The results indicate the international fan base tends to mainly focus on the images rather than the caption. Similarly to what Choi and Maliangkay (2015) have discussed, the image of the idols seems more important than the music they release, as most of the time their work does not appear as a main topic in the original tweets nor the replies. Fans see the non-verbal communication, the uploaded images, and

react to them accordingly whether it be complimenting how the idols look in the pictures, tagging their friends so they can also see the pictures, or just replying something that is related to the images, such as commenting on the food looking delicious if a food image has been uploaded.

5.4 K-pop community discourse

There are some similarities between the idols' tweets and their fans' tweets. I discussed a mutual agreement between the idols and the fans where the interactions are rather one-sided. Idols' tweets as well as fan replies do not usually require anyone to reply to them, with the exception of interrogatives. This gives a contrast to what Kim and Kim (2020) argued on fans hoping for direct interactions. The replies can be a place to share personal issues and parts about one's everyday life that fans wish to show their idols. This could be taken as a coping mechanism as Hoffner and Bond (2022) mentioned and expressing emotions online could possibly be easier than doing it in real life. Direct interactions could be the aim of Twitter interactions during "mention parties" but in average everyday updates this might not necessarily be true. With one-sided interactions, what is the perlocutionary act that happens as a result of the illocutionary speech acts the fans perform in the replies?

This K-pop fandom discourse, when it comes to Twitter interactions and especially replies to celebrity tweets, shows how there is a common understanding among the international fan base, that the idols usually do not reply back to them, which could be the reason for the replies being flooded with compliments and love confessions. Tweets such as greetings and expressions of love can be left as such and do not require a reply back, which could be the reason why they are popular among K-pop fans when replying to celebrities. Despite the sample including tweets from multiple different fandoms under multiple different celebrities' tweets, the results show unity. This indicates that the K-pop fandom in general has created its own norms when it comes to direct interactions with the idols, which can be called K-pop fan discourse.

Smutradontri & Gadavani (2020) use the term "fan-talk" when they speak of in-group communication. Similarly, as Hashim (2015) drew conclusion on "politician-talk" and Basra & Thoyyibah (2017) discussed about "teacher-talk", it is fair to say that the communication patterns of the K-pop fan community can be included in Smutradontri & Gadavani's (2020) "fan-talk". This "fan-talk" would include the use

of expressives and compliments (either direct or indirect) as the main content seen in the replies. This fan-talk is idol-targeted rather than fandom in-group targeted.

5.5 Discussion on further research

A varied version of this thesis could involve a specific sample of participants, whose Twitter activity within the community would be followed. This investigation could be paired with an interview study that would help receive information from the fans directly. Interviews could further back up the data collected and could give detailed information about the personal feelings of the fans and whether or not they themselves have noticed that they follow certain patterns and “unwritten rules”. At the same time fan attitudes towards parasocial relationship should be studied with more detail. With interviews, fan attitudes could be studied and the point of view of Choi and Maliangkay (2015) could be adopted in attempt to receive information of why fans choose certain idols and why they decide to interact with them the way they do.

These results only show how K-pop fans interact with idols on Twitter. Communication and social interactions on other social media platforms such as TikTok or Weverse could vary despite the community also consisting of K-pop fans. This thesis also takes into account only the replies, which can be argued to be the most direct attempt for fan-idol interactions based on the results. However, in order to understand K-pop fan discourse outside of idol-fan talk, the quote re-tweets of the original posts could be studied in a similar manner.

For further Twitter analysis, a comparison between parasocial interactions and speech acts used by the fans of K-pop idols and the fans of popular western music could be conducted. This could give more insight on the Twitter interaction norms that have been established within different fandoms.

6 Conclusion

K-pop idols tend to write messages to fans in the form of declaratives and imperatives, which seem rather personal. There is not much implication that the idols are asking for interactions from the fans, but this does on some occasions occur in the form of interrogatives with which idols are able to receive answers from a big mass of fans. Fans' interactions consisted mostly of expressive speech acts in the form of declaratives. Similar to the idols' tweets, imperatives were a common way of communicating as the fans tend to reply to greetings in the same manner.

There is a difference in common speech acts depending on the target of the reply. Expressives are mostly for the idols and other speech acts such as directives target other fans. Idol targeted expressives show the attachment between the fans and their idols. There is a bond that can be seen by the messages sent by both participants in the parasocial relationship. Fans express their feelings openly and directly at the target of their admiration. The communication is highly based on the visuals in the original tweets and the interactions are mutually based on images or emojis.

These results provide a new point of view when it comes to research about fandom discourse because similar studies on the fans of K-pop have not yet been published.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Examples of original tweets and replies

Example 1



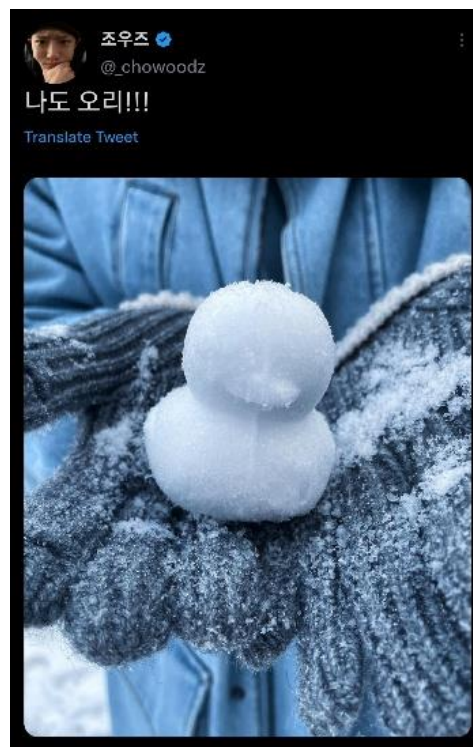
Example 2



Example 3



Example 4



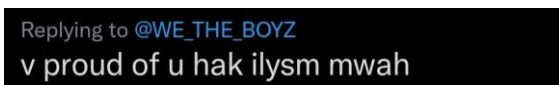
Example 7



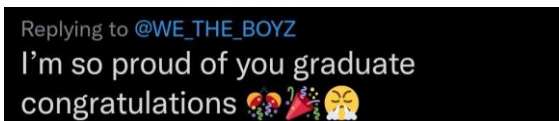
Example 6



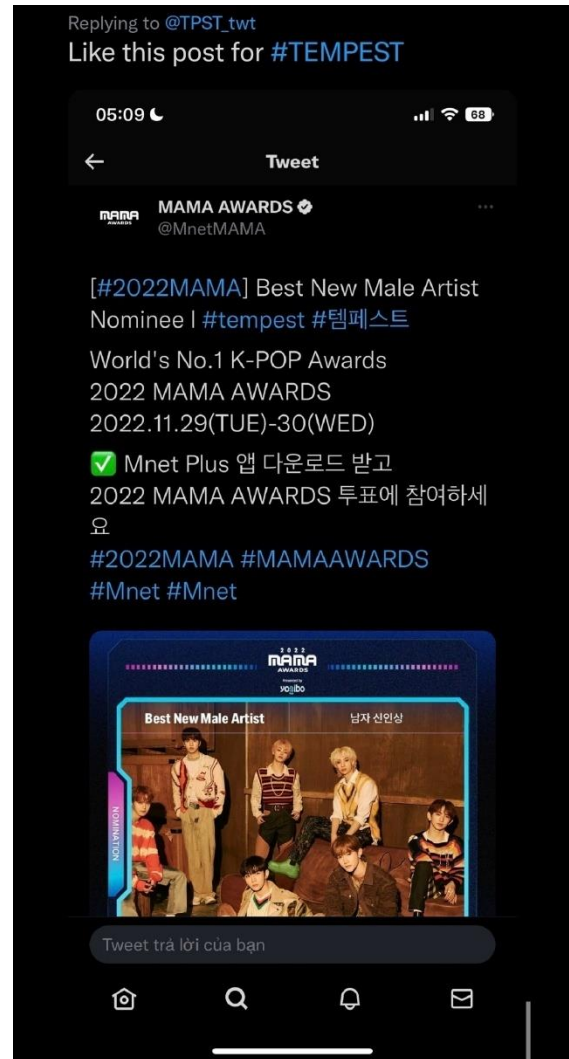
Example 6.1



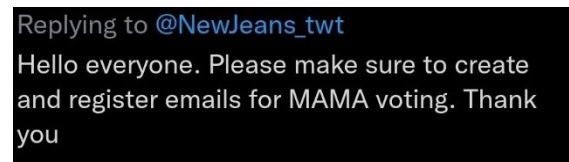
Example 6.2



Example 5



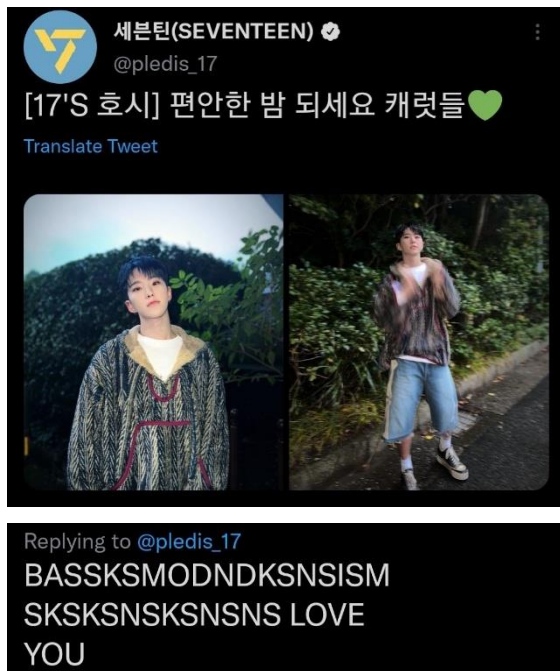
Example 8



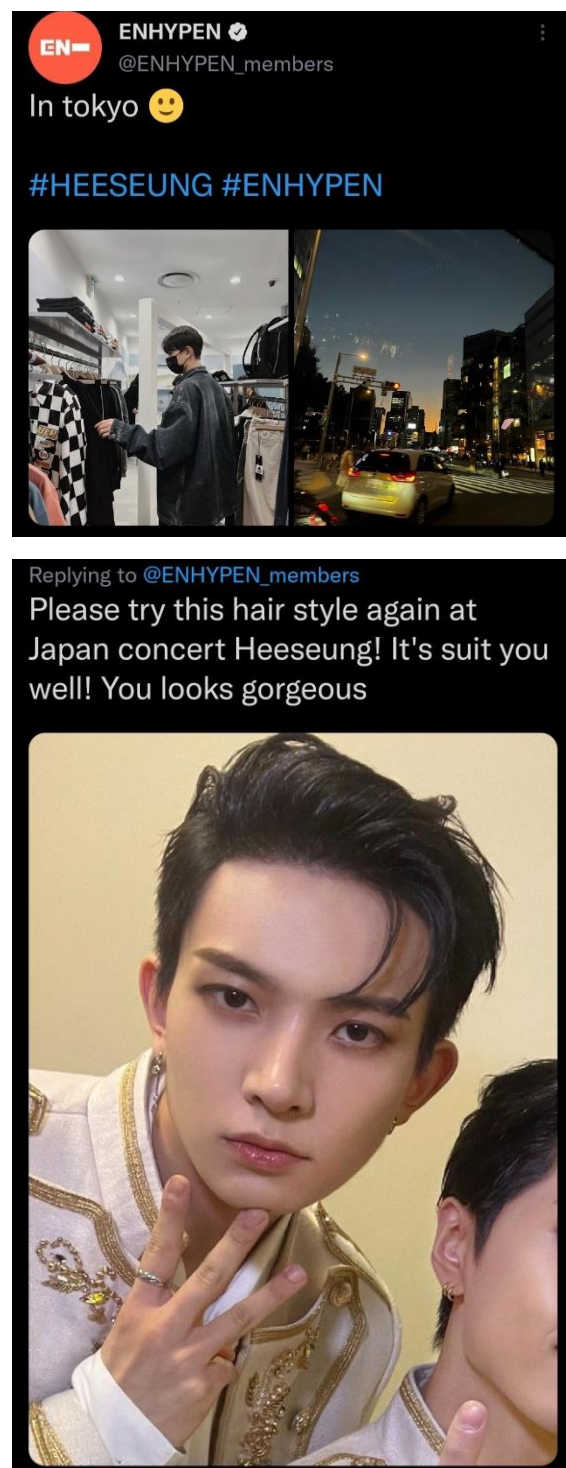
Example 9



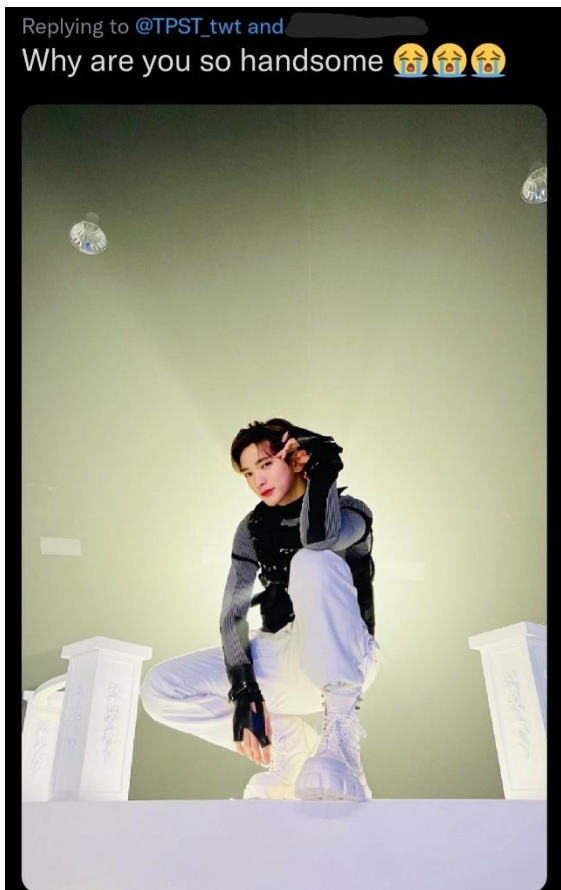
Example 10



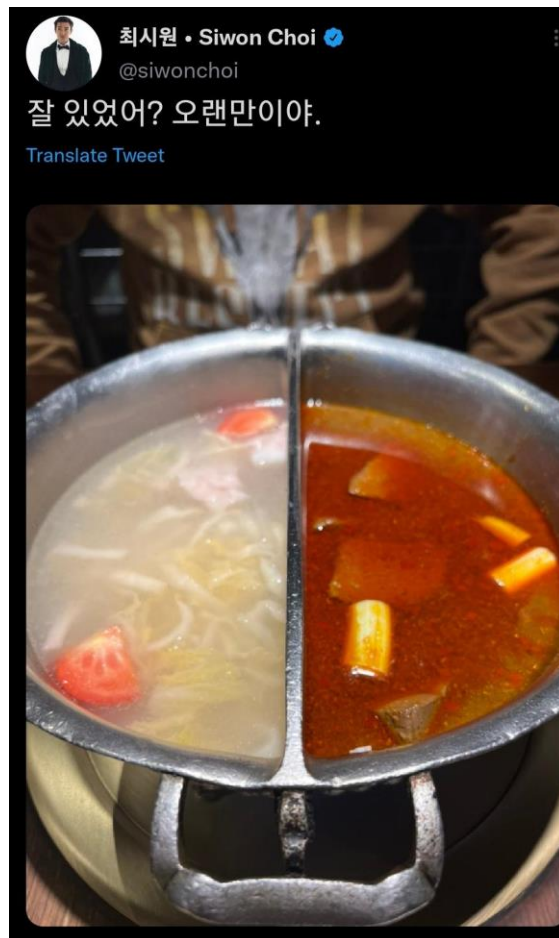
Example 11



Example 12



Example 13



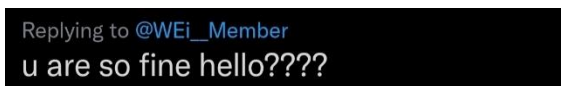
Example 14



Example 15



Example 15.1



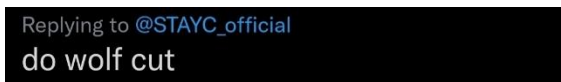
Example 15.2



Example 16



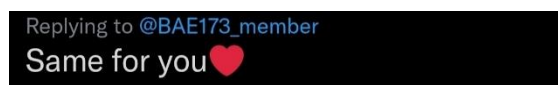
Example 16.1



Example 17



Example 17.1



Example 17.2

