

## A Review of Korean Slangs: A Case Study of *Running Man*

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### Abstract

This article presents a study on the use of Korean slang, particularly secondary slang, in the popular Korean TV show *Running Man*. The researcher applied Chapman's (1988) theory to distinguish and categorize the types of Korean slang used in the show, limiting the types of slang to only secondary slang and particularly applying the category of loan words based on Choo and Kwak's (2008) model. Using the descriptive method, the researcher classified slang expressions used in two episodes of *Running Man* and found that 312 secondary slang expressions were elicited. The study suggests that *Running Man* is a window to visualize the Korean language and helps foreign audiences learn the slang easily and memorably while having fun. This information can be useful for researchers who are interested in studying the use of slang in different languages and contexts. The findings of the study are beneficial for students, instructors, and researchers who want to understand the characteristics of Korean slang expressions, particularly loan words from the English language into Korean. The study also highlights the importance of authentic language use in entertainment media for language learners.

*Keywords:* Korean Slang; Loan Words; Secondary Slang; TV Show

### 1. Introduction

Slang is a type of language that is familiar and used by people who share a certain social background. The meaning of some slang words is difficult to understand and only makes sense to the specific group of people who use them, such as teenagers (Leech & Svartvik, 1981). Nugraha (2013, p. 1) states that slang is very casual words and expressions that are more often used in spoken language and are not considered appropriate for formal situations. Slang has become a different secret language, to talk about something forbidden. Therefore, only the speakers know what it means (Faisal, 2017, p. 2). Slang is a non-formal language, it can be rude, insulting, taboo, and has a new meaning that is different from the actual meaning (Faisal, 2017, p. 2). Slang is an informal language, it can be vulgar, offensive, taboo, and has a new

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meaning which is something different from literal meaning (Faisal, 2017, p. 24). In the same vein, Hornby (1995) states that slangs are very informal words and expressions that are more common in spoken language, thought not to be suitable for formal situations, and are sometimes limited to one specific group of people (as cited in Nugraha, 2013). Andersson and Trudgill (1990, p. 87) state that slang is always used intentionally, with the aim of creating a distinct identity. According to Pei and Gaynor (1954), slang is a style that is widely used, created by changing and expanding the meaning of existing words and inventing a new word without following the academic standard and linguistic rules for making words; usually unique to certain classes and social or age group (p. 57).

As Sohn (2006) states slang was seen to have some changes in form and meaning since the 1990s in Korea. Slangs made and used in Korea can be formed by humor and vulgar expressions, shortening of syllables, sound symbolism, and wordplay as they have been used since the 1990s (Sohn, 2006, p. 129). Any words that are newly created in Korea are considered slang because they generate a new culture (Sohn, 2006, p. 130). According to Dovie (2020), Koreans are likely to shorten their articulation, for example, the compound words to make a new word and this new word would act as slang. Anam (2017) adds that slang is not only used by people, but also by other forms of media such as newspapers, magazines, novels, music, and movies. In this way, the entertainment industry in Korea is a source through which their audiences can learn the Korean language and its slang as it is used in its authentic setting (Nugroho & Shepia, 2019). In this regard, Korean TV variety shows in this entertainment industry are a channel to teach the Korean language, specifically its slang. Accordingly, based on the background mentioned above, the present study aimed to investigate the number of Korean slang expressions that have been used in Korean TV variety shows that help audiences acquire the Korean language. Therefore, a Korean television variety show named *Running Man* was selected as a corpus of the study. This variety show called *Running Man* has gained so much public interest in recent years and has also ranked number one as the top best Korean variety show in 2021 (Arensshi, 2021).

## **2. Review of Literature**

### *2.1 Types of Slang*

Reviewing the concept of slang as mentioned previously, a language that contains vernacular words, phrases, sentences, and expressions is called slang and it is specified to be used as a way of informal spoken language within a community or a group of people. Slang or informal language refers to words or phrases that replace or more common terms among younger people and other groups with specific interests (Yule, 2010, as cited in Unaifah, 2017). Mattiello (2007) thinks that slang is a phenomenon that shows differences among different languages and which is therefore supposed to be complicated (i.e., related to many socio-linguistic factors and pragmatic functions) and hard to translate. Slang, according to Linhua (2006), is part of a language that is usually used outside of formal or standard use and may include both newly created words and phrases as well as new or extended meanings added to existing terms (as cited in Nugroho & Shepia, 2019). Slangs make utterances more interesting and cause dynamic, friendly, and bright interactions between people and that is why it is a part of daily communication (Anam, 2017). In this regard, word formations enable creativity in

making slang, especially for secondary slang, there are shortened words, combining, taking, reverse-formation, shortening, and mixing (Zore,1993, as cited in Unaifah, 2017). Mattiello, (2007, pp. 10-18) has also subdivided slang into four types regarding their function including;

(a) *Group identification and Creativity*: The role of group identification and the impact of creativity is particularly evident in college and teenage slang, where young individuals often employ innovative and unique language to signify their affiliation with a specific group and foster a sense of unity among its members, while simultaneously creating a distinction from the older generation.

(b) *Privacy and Secrecy*: The objectives of confidentiality and privacy are associated with marginalized or isolated factions within society, such as drug addicts and criminals. To conceal confidential information from those in authority, criminals often employ jargon, while drug addicts use such language to strengthen their group cohesion and exclude outsiders.

(c) *Informality and Intimacy*: The significance of informality and the influence of intimacy are apparent in slang language, which speakers deliberately employ to diverge from formal language and shift the tone of communication towards familiarity. It shows the speakers' desire to reject norms and their need to be informal, to relax social interactions, and to create friendliness.

(d) *Vulgarity and Offensiveness*: The use of vulgarity in general slang is often accompanied by an offensive impact, particularly when speakers employ it to insult others' appearance or behavior. This demonstrates their intention to be impolite, utilize inappropriate language, and employ negative and even taboo words that frequently pertain to the semantic domain of sexuality.

To sum up the points, Mattiello (2007) notes that college and teenage slang is used for social motives, mostly to be inventive with one's language, and to display and enhance in-group belonging. Criminal and drug slang is used for secret purposes, to strengthen group unity and to conceal secret information from people in power, and general slang may be used either to alter the level of discourse towards casualness and to relax close relationships or to impolitely hurt other people by mocking their behavior/looks.

Chapman (1988) states that there are two kinds of slang; primary slang and secondary slang:

(a) *Primary Slang*: A common slang expression that is frequently heard or used by speakers in their daily talk is called primary slang, which is not related to a specific group of a community because the speakers are just people who want to escape conventions and seriousness and are not only some people in a certain group. It is used instead of clichés and standard language to alter the level of formality. For example, public slang: footy which means football (Merisabel et al., 2020).

(b) *Secondary Slang*: It refers to a form of language that is used to convey a message in a covert manner, understood only by a select few who are familiar with its meaning. Typically, this type of speech is employed by members of a particular group, with some groups even developing their own unique slang, often associated with illicit activities. For example, drug users may use the term "smack" to refer to heroin (Merisabel et al., 2020).

According to Unaifah (2017), the majority of slang words possess a figurative nature that cannot be comprehended solely based on their literal meaning. For instance, the phrase

"What is the hell?" deviates significantly from our conventional understanding of a place of divine punishment. Instead, this expression serves the purpose of conveying astonishment, equivalent to "what is that?" This theory also elucidates the various functions of slang, which include:

- a) Establishing connections and fostering group identity
- b) Distinguishing one group from another
- c) Challenging standard language by employing words and expressions that lack definition in the standard lexicon
- d) Infusing informality into conversations
- e) Implying shared knowledge among the individuals being addressed
- f) Conveying the speaker's attitude through the utilization of words and expressions that deviate from standard language conventions.

These elements demonstrate the function of slang as a social tool, employed in informal conversations and settings to establish connections within a group, while also defying conventional language norms. Additionally, slang serves to convey the speaker's emotional state and their confidence in the listener's ability to understand and relate to the message being conveyed (Unaifah, 2017).

## 2.2 Korean Slangs

Kim (2016) said that the English language has a significant role in the everyday communication of Korean people as they tend to use English to make new words. According to Choo and Kwak (2008), the vocabulary of the Korean language is always in development; new words and phrases are continuously being formed by more often upgrading existing words, but by borrowing from Western languages. Choo and Kwak (2008) classified these borrowing types or loan words into three subcategories including *Innovations in loan words*, *Phonetic changes to loan words*, and *grammar of loan words*.

1) Loan Words: Choo and Kwak (2008) have observed that Western loan words tend to deviate from the pre-existing native Korean and/or Sino-Korean words that convey similar meanings. In such cases, these loan words are typically associated with a contemporary interpretation of the concept, as exemplified by the authors on page 89:

- \* Native Korean 춤 (Choom)
- \* Sino-Korean 무용 (Mu-Yong)
- \* Loan words 댄스 (Dance)

Loan words sometimes refer to items for which no Korean word exists such as 껌 [Gum], 커피 [Coffee], 버스 [Bus], 잼 [Jam], 택시 [Taxi] (Choo & Kwak, 2008). In other cases, borrowed words may be used instead of Korean words, and Korean words may, as a consequence, be pushed aside by their corresponding borrowed equivalents, namely, 사진기 [sajingi] by 카메라 [camera], 사증 [sajeung] by 비자 [visa], 포도주 [podoju] by 와인 [wine], and 정구 [jeong-gu] by 테니스 [tennis], etc. (Choo & Kwak, 2008). Moreover, Foreign expressions are considered to be more informal and colloquial until they become fully Koreanized (Choo & Kwak, 2008). For instance, using the terms 파킹 'parking' and

컨셉 'concept' are common in conversation among younger people in casual situations; however, using them in formal writing and speech should be avoided (Choo & Kwak, 2008).

a) Innovations in loan words: Loan words in Korean often have a distinct interpretation compared to their original language, as highlighted by Choo and Kwak (2008). This discrepancy arises either due to the adoption of a single meaning or a change in meaning after borrowing. For instance, the term "플라스틱" (plastic) exclusively refers to hard plastic, while "비닐" (vinyl) solely denotes soft plastic (Choo & Kwak, 2008, p. 90). Consequently, when Korean individuals visit American stores for the first time, they may encounter confusion regarding the intended meaning of a "plastic bag" as conveyed by the cashier. Several other instances of such linguistic variations exist:

- \* 사인 [sign] autograph; signature
- \* 서비스 [service] complimentary; free of charge
- \* 스킨십 [skinship]; romantic touch

Furthermore, English-borrowed terms are sometimes mixed in novel ways (Choo & Kwak, 2008):

- \* 핸드폰 [hand phone]; cell phone
- \* 모닝콜 [morning-call ]; a wake-up call
- \* 오토바이 [auto-bi]; motorcycle

Occasionally, new words are created by mixing segments of words that are taken from other languages with other words (Choo & Kwak, 2008):

- \* 오피스텔 [opistel] < office-(ho)tel > a place where one can do office work and sleep
- \* 웰빙버거 [welbingbeogeo] < well-being burger > healthy burger

b) Phonetic changes to loan words: The pronunciation of a loan word is altered to meet the Korean phonetic pattern (Choo & Kwak, 2008). The following examples are the most common changes in the sound pattern of the Korean language (Choo & Kwak, 2008):

- The sound 'f' becomes 프 [p]:
  - \* 팬 [paen] fan
  - \* 카페인 [capein] caffeine
  - \* 유니폼 [unipom] uniform

c) The grammar of loan words: You can make verbs from nouns that are borrowed from other languages by attaching -하다 [hada], -나다 [nada], or similar endings depending on the situation (Choo & Kwak, 2008).

- \* 오바하다 [obeohada] over-hada; overreact / over-interpret
- \* 이메일하다 [imeilhada] e-mail-hada; do e-mail
- \* 다운로드하다 [daunrodeuhada] download-hada; download
- \* 폼나다 [pomnada] form-nada look stylish

To make descriptive verbs in Korean, you often use -하다 [hada] with nouns that come from adjectives in the original language (Choo & Kwak, 2008).

- \* 쿨하다 [kulhada] cool-hada; be cool

- \* 스마트하다 [seumateuhada] smart-hada; be smart
- \* 섹시하다 [segsihada] sexy-hada; be sexy
- \* 유머러스하다 [yumeoreoseuhada] humorous-hada; be humorous

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Corpus of the Study

There are many famous and entertaining programs and TV shows in Korea, however, the researcher chooses to work on a television variety show entitled *Running Man*. This television variety show has been one of the most famous worldwide TV shows in Korea during the past 10 years and is incredibly more suggestive in the recent decade. Therefore, the corpus of this study was limited to the slang, especially secondary slang, in two selected episodes of a television variety show named *Running Man*. This television variety show has reached 675 episodes since 2010 and among 675 episodes of the aforementioned program, only episodes 147 and 539 are analyzed as the most high-rated episode.

#### 3.2 Theoretical Framework

The researcher applied Chapman's (1988) theory to distinguish and determine the type of slang uttered in the Korean television variety show entitled *Running Man*. This model concludes with two categories that are categorized to describe the type of Korean slang used. These categories are primary slang and secondary slang. Therefore, this categorization provided by Chapman (1988) helped the researcher to categorize the types of Korean slang terms, particularly secondary slang. Using Chapman's (1988) theory, the researcher has limited types of slang to only secondary slang and particularly applied the category of loan words based on Choo and Kwak's (2008) model.

### 4. Results

The present study was conducted to elicit Korean slang expressions, particularly secondary slang types which were loaned from English into the Korean language in a popular Korean TV show entitled *Running Man*. Using the descriptive method, the researcher classified slang expressions, that are used in the TV variety show called *Running Man*. The results revealed that 312 secondary slangs were elicited from episodes 147 and 539 of the *Running Man* television variety show. Some examples of elicited secondary slang expressions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Samples of Slang Expressions based on Chapman's (1988) Model*

| No. | Source Slang      | Secondary Slangs<br>(Loan Words) |
|-----|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1   | 불타는 18 어게인 레이스인데요 | Race                             |
| 2   | 프로틴괴물             | Protein Monster                  |
| 3   | 우리 에이스야 우리 에이스!   | Ace                              |
| 4   | 어느 정도의 터치감은 있어야지! | Touch feeling or sense           |

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|    |   |                                    |
|----|---|------------------------------------|
| 5  | 활약을 못하고나, 너무 재미가 없거나, <b>노잼</b> 이런것까지 다 | No잼 – No Jam<br>(no enjoyment/fun) |
| 6  | <b>레이백</b> 레이백                          | Laidback                           |
| 7  | <b>게스트</b> 는 봐줘요                        | Guest                              |
| 8  | <b>오케이!</b> 오케이!                        | Okay                               |
| 9  | 애써 <b>쿨한</b> 척                          | Cool                               |
| 10 | <b>미션중</b> 에 학생주임이 신규진님이 지켜보시다가         | Mission whilst                     |
| 11 | 잠깐만!!! <b>타임!!!</b>                     | Time                               |
| 12 | <b>매치포인트</b> 이야?                        | Match point                        |
| 13 | 선생님 <b>화이팅</b>                          | Fighting                           |
| 14 | 선생님 애는 약간 <b>프로틴중독</b> 이에요              | Protein addict                     |
| 15 | <b>텐션</b> 끌어올리는 댄스부부터 등장                | Tension                            |

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## 5. Conclusion

This study investigates the slang, particularly secondary slang, of a Korean television variety show called *Running Man*. Regarding the specific corpus of this study and the significant number of identified secondary slang expressions in the selected episodes, it can be declared that this Korean variety show is a brand of entertainment, helping spread the Korean language, particularly Korean slang, around the world because they are authentic as they are used by Korean natives and more realistic in contrast with movies and dramas. This variety show is a window to visualize the Korean language at the same time helps the (foreign) audiences to learn the slang and makes the process of learning easy and memorable as well as having fun.

The findings of this study are beneficial for those students (especially translation students), instructors, and researchers who want to read and recognize the theories and models related to the characteristics of Korean slang expressions, particularly the terms that are loaned from the English language into Korean. Additionally, the findings of the current study are also practical for learners, and novice translators (especially in Korean, English, and Persian languages) to be aware of different slang models. The study distinguishes and categorizes the types of Korean slang used in *Running Man*, particularly secondary slang. This information can be useful for language learners who want to understand the different types of Korean slang and how they are used in different contexts. Additionally, this information can be useful for language learners who want to expand their vocabulary and understand the influence of English on the Korean language.

However, the study is limited to the use of slang, particularly secondary slang, in selected episodes of the Korean TV show *Running Man*. This limited corpus may not be representative of the use of slang in other Korean TV shows or everyday conversations. The study only analyzed two episodes of *Running Man*, which may not be enough to provide a comprehensive analysis of the use of slang in the show. The researcher applied Chapman's theory to distinguish and categorize the types of Korean slang used in *Running Man*. The study focuses on the use of secondary slang in *Running Man*, particularly loan words based on Choo and Kwak's model. In this regard, there are also various options to expand research in the same area of the current study, i.e., identification of other categories of slang types or loan words.

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