

## 나의 한국어 학습 경력 My NUS Korean language journey

### Secondary school/JC 중학교 고등학교 시절

Throughout my secondary 1 and 2 days, I was crazily obsessed with c-pop and had absolutely no idea about what kpop was all about. My first encounter with kpop only started when I was in secondary 3 when I stumbled upon a music video on YouTube (F.T Island- 나쁜 여자야) and that's when I got dragged into the world of kpop. I started listening to kpop songs and began researching more about idol groups thereafter (my first being F.T.Island).

K-dramas were something I watched during my childhood times like 마녀유희, 궁, 아내의 유혹, 커피프린스, 대장금 just simply because these were broadcasting on channel u and not because I had a great interest in it or anything at that time. Furthermore the dramas were dubbed in Chinese so it was more like a Chinese drama rather than a korean drama to me. However, the korean drama that got me interested in korean and caught my attention was boys over flowers (꽃보다 남자). Probably because the 4 male leads were really handsome unlike the other k-dramas I watched previously that got me hooked onto the drama like any teenage girl! That's when I began watching korean dramas online since new dramas were not being broadcasted on Singapore's free to air channels. However, since the drama was in korean, I remember the "painful" long wait for the english subbed version to be released every single week so as to be able to understand what the story was all about.

I also remember how me and my friends used to memorize the lyrics for every single ost in that drama too! But this was slightly challenging especially since it was in a foreign language unlike Chinese where I could read the Chinese characters and sing along. Although romanizations could be easily found online, i still found it hard to pronounce certain words in the lyrics despite the romanizations. That's when I started writing my own romanizations (in a way that I can easily read and pronounce) while listening to the song numerous times.

Being the crazy c-pop fan whom used to be obsessed over chinese songs and taiwanese dramas, I found myself preferring korean music and dramas over taiwanese dramas at some point in time. However, at that time, I was still unable to read a single korean word or make out what the main leads were saying without subtitles since I relied heavily on subtitles when watching k-dramas. Probably because I was busy with tons of school work and tuition at that time, I didn't really had the urge to want to learn korean and simply watched korean dramas and variety shows like running man as a form of entertainment and outlet for stress-relief.

### Pre-uni Days (대학 들어가기 전)

After my A-levels, I did had an urge to learn korean just so that I could watch unsubbed versions of the drama to get a main gist of the story before the subbed version gets released. However, that was never fulfilled partly because of my lack of determination to self-study and also due to

the expensive lesson fees if I were to attend Korean language courses in a Korean academy. Therefore, I came across the Language Preparation Programme (LPP) while planning for my modules in NUS and decided to enrol myself for the program so as to force myself to study for the language knowing how lack of self-discipline I have.

## **University Days (대학 시절)**

Korean lessons were by far, even up till now, the best decision I've ever made and something I did not regret taking at all. It was the most enjoyable and probably the only lessons I looked forward to every week. The Korean teachers made lessons even more fun and easy to understand with their superb teaching. Plus, they were really patient when explaining difficult grammar to us and were very approachable especially if we had any doubts or queries.

Learning Korean in NUS was not just about K-dramas and K-pop but getting exposed to the rich culture and history of Korea that I previously did not know about. Having a deeper understanding of the Korean culture not only increased my love and understanding for the language (한글) but also helped widen my perspectives, and made me more open to different types of cultures as well.

Unlike Malay where it's easy to practice in Singapore due to Malay being one of the spoken languages in Singapore, there isn't as much opportunity to practice Korean in Singapore as compared to Malay unless one goes to Korea for SEP. While I do agree that the best way to master a language quickly is to continuously practice and speak with the natives, going to Korea for SEP isn't the only option. Since the Korean professors knew that it was not possible for every student to go for SEP, they were very proactive in finding opportunities for students to be exposed to Korean culture, communicate with native Koreans like short 3-week immersion programmes, summer/winter school programmes in Korean universities, campus tour with Korean university students, Korean cooking classes etc. Therefore, although I did not manage to go to Korea for SEP, I felt that the opportunities offered by the dedicated Korean professors were sufficient enough for me to practice my Korean, not to mention make new foreign friends, which had always been something daunting for me since young due to the increased difficulty of having to articulate one's thoughts in a totally different language from one's own mother tongue. I can't believe that I am able to strike conversations with native Koreans in just a short span of 3 years, taking into account that I learnt Korean from scratch in NUS, and it's all thanks to the cheerful and passionate Korean teachers that put in their very best to make learning Korean so enjoyable.

## **Present (현재의 나)**

I am really honoured to have been awarded the CLS Korean Language Prize, which came as a surprise since I didn't even expect myself to receive such an award at all due to the large number of classmates that were much more fluent than me in Korean. I would like to thank all the dedicated Korean teachers that taught me in the past 3 years and all the hard work that they

put in in order to allow me to understand complex korean grammar and the passion they put in to make korean lessons so engaging and fun.

Learning a new language is definitely not an easy task but it is really a rewarding experience and a useful skill to acquire in the future, be it when travelling or in the workforce. While I must admit that there were tough times when juggling with exams and language modules to the point that I wanted to give up, I did not regret my decision of taking all 6 of the korean language modules in NUS and if given a chance again, I would still make the same decision :) Learning a language really broadens one's perspectives in the way one views something and through korean language, I was not only able to learn more about the korean culture and history, but also learn more about my own country as well, through cultural and social differences.

One of the most rewarding things about learning a new language would be the people I must say, having to meet new friends of a different nationality and being able to communicate with them through their language. Because of that, I feel like it really changed my character and personality over the 3 years from someone whom was afraid to step out of my comfort zone to talk to people of other nationalities to someone who is more comfortable to talking to strangers and it definitely helped boost my confidence level as well. It's really sad that this has come to an end but Korean lessons are by far the best memory in my 4 years in NUS and something that will definitely be etched in me even after I graduate! A big thank you to all the dedicated 선생님들 that taught me throughout the 3 years as well as the classmates that persevered and went through this 한국어 journey with me. 이 3년동안 정말 수고 많으셨고 다시 한번 진심으로 감사드립니다.