

South Korea

## K-beauty, hallyu and mukbang: dozens of Korean words added to Oxford English Dictionary

Justin McCurry in Tokyo

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The Korean culture wave has swept through the editorial offices of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), which has added more than 20 new words of Korean origin to its latest edition.

The “definitive record of the English language” included words alluding to the global popularity of the country’s music and cuisine, plus one or two whose roots in the Korean language may be less obvious.

The K- prefix is prominently featured, as you might expect given that so many people outside of South Korea now listen to K-pop - which was added to the OED in 2016 - watch K-dramas or use K-beauty products.

The new words include *hallyu* - the Korean original for the wave of pop culture that has made BTS one of the world’s most popular bands and Squid Game the Netflix sensation of 2021.

“The increase in international interest in South Korea and its popular culture, esp. as represented by the global success of South Korean music, film, television, fashion, and food,” the dictionary says in its definition. “Also: South Korean popular culture and entertainment itself. Frequently as a modifier, as in hallyu craze, hallyu fan, hallyu star.”

But as the dictionary’s new additions make clear, there is much more to Korean cuisine than its spicy staple kimchi, which appeared in the OED as long ago as 1976. New food-related entries include *bulgogi* - thin slices of beef or pork - and *chimaek* - Korean-style fried chicken and beer.

Traditional culture is represented by *hanbok* - formal attire worn by both men and women - and Hangul, the Korean alphabet devised by King Sejong in 1443.

*Aegyo*, a certain kind of cuteness or charm considered characteristically Korean, and similar to the Japanese word *kawaii*, has been included as both a noun and adjective. There is room, too, for *mukbang*, or livestreams of people eating extraordinary amounts of food while talking to the online audience.

The inclusion of “skinship” is more surprising. Commonly used in South Korea, where it is rendered as *seukinsip*, and Japan (*sukinshippu*) it captures the emotional bond that comes from close physical contact between a parent and child, lovers and friends, the dictionary said.

The OED said the inclusion of so many Korean words was recognition of a shift in language usage beyond the English-speaking world.

“The adoption and development of these Korean words in English also demonstrate how lexical innovation is no longer confined to the traditional centres of English in the United Kingdom and the United States,” it said.

“They show how Asians in different parts of the continent invent and exchange words within their own local contexts, then introduce these words to the rest of the English-speaking world, thus allowing the Korean wave to continue to ripple on the sea of English words.”

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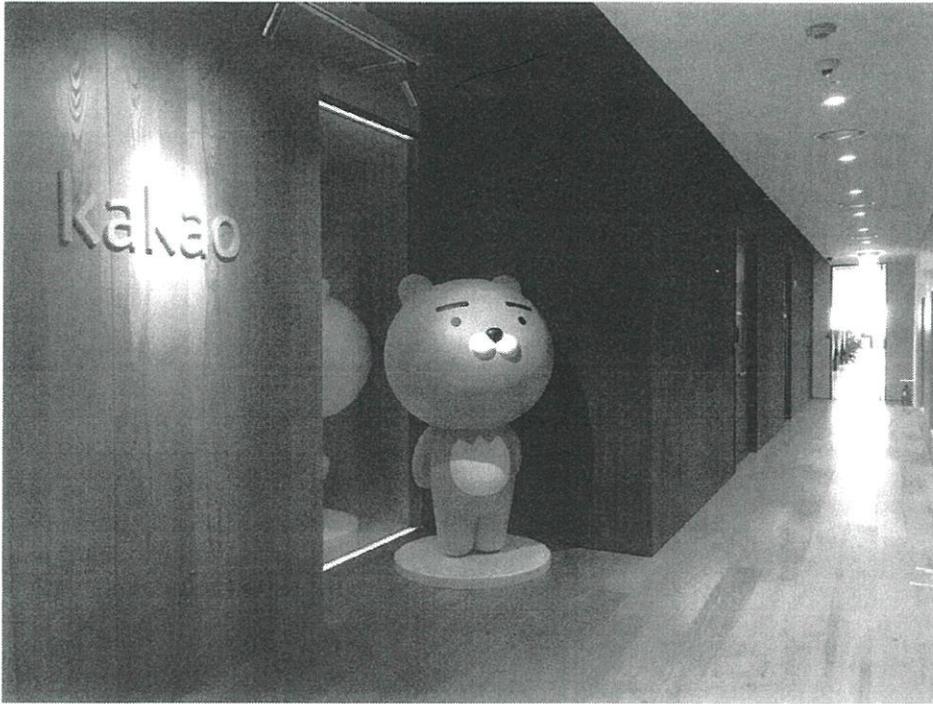
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## [Column] Can Big Tech be reined in?

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Platforms have permeated into our daily lives, but they've also permeated into politics and statecraft — perhaps irreversibly so



Kakao's offices in Pangyo, Gyeonggi Province (provided by Kakao)

The rapid growth of platform companies is rattling the world, and those companies have gotten a shot of adrenaline as many economic activities have moved online during the pandemic. In South Korea, for example, the two biggest platform companies — Naver and Kakao — both had their best quarters ever last year and have entered the top five companies in terms of market capitalization.

Naver and Kakao have a simple profit model: they earn money through monopolistic networks that Koreans access dozens or even hundreds of times a day, starting from the time they wake up in the morning. The two companies loaded their platforms (Naver's search engine and Kakao's messaging app) with a smorgasbord of services. They serve as intermediaries for virtually every kind of business: finance, mobility, shopping, gaming, golf and even hair salons.

Their profits come from a range of fees extracted from service providers and customers. These fees function as a kind of toll. Once the structure is in place, the money pours in. In fact, that's the obvious business strategy for platform companies that have a monopoly on customers and their data. When 70-80 percent of the public is frequenting your store, no matter what you're selling, it's going to sell well.

At first, the convenience and efficiency of these powerful tech companies were welcome. Kakao's ride-hailing service greatly reduced the tedium of flagging down taxis on the street. But once nearly all taxis were registered with Kakao, things started to change. That's when the company announced a plan to raise its fee for drivers and users. Concerns about the hidden price tag of the tech companies' enticing services were borne out all too soon.

Are the so-called innovations and customer welfare that they tout something they achieve by raiding our pockets?

Similar questions can be asked about their rapid growth. Kakao commands 158 affiliates — more than either Samsung or SK. Another 40 or so were added in the first half of this year alone.

For the most part, it achieved such a feat by preying on the promising startups that would have been its future competitors. Their expansions outpace the growth of major conglomerates in the past and seem to have no brake lever to speak of.

Investor and labor relations have also been transformed.

These rising tech companies rely on contracted labor instead of hiring. They have exacerbated a massive proliferation of atypical work that can't be simplified into irregular positions. Should we just accept that companies will foist the rights and responsibilities of employment onto the state and society?

Perhaps conscious of its negative image, Kakao recently came out with measures for mutual growth, including the withdrawal of some projects and reduced transaction fees.

But it's effectively impossible for a platform company to radically redesign its very profit model — it would be tantamount to demanding that it shut down. Its predator instincts would inevitably start kicking in at some point. That's what makes it such a serious and thorny issue.

Tech monopolies have been clashing with states and the general public throughout the global market. All over the world, new laws and institutions are being created to regulate the new behemoths — leading many to predict a fierce battle to come.

US President Joe Biden kicked things off by naming "Big Tech killers" to key positions in his administration. US competition authorities hinted at a major increase in regulation, admitting their own failure to curb the mergers and acquisitions that have allowed Big Tech to monopolize resources and grow their turf.

Even China has resorted to regulation after challenging so much of its national resources into its information technology industry. Is a pitched battle with tech giants now at hand?

Monopoly issues also surfaced 20 years ago with Microsoft, which can be said to represent the first generation of Big Tech companies. The US government filed an antitrust suit against Microsoft over its web browser bundling practices.

The eventual ruling ordered a breakup of Microsoft, while founder Bill Gates stepped down from the official management front lines. Reflecting on the antitrust case later on, Gates would say that he erred by not going to Washington, where the executive and legislative branches are located. In other words, he regretted focusing only on the technology, while ignoring the politics.

Twenty years later, Microsoft's place has been filled by Google, which the US Justice Department filed an antitrust suit against last year.

Gates's mistake may have provided a lesson. Google spends over US\$15 million a year on lobbying in Washington. As a group, the Big Tech companies that emerged from Silicon Valley are official supporters of the Democratic Party.

Google is also one of the key partners cooperating on US national security. It supplies the most data in response to National Security Agency monitoring program requests. Big data companies like Google are poised to play vanguard roles in the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the battle for dominance with China.

Are the US government and Congress capable of turning Big Tech into an adversary? Not a chance.



By Kim Hoe-seung, senior editor

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Kim Hoe-seung

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rein in, permeate, irreversible, smorgasbord, a range of, tedium, enticing, exacerbate, atypical, thorny

Do you want companies like Kakao and Naver to be reined in?

Do you think you are being harmed monopolistic networks? Do you begrudge them their wealth?

From their smorgasbord of services, what do you regularly use?

Should the government regulate these companies?

What is your opinion of contracted labor?

What thorny issue do you want the government to deal with immediately?

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