

An Analysis of Singers' and Fans' Attitudes Toward Translanguaging in Pop Songs

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Abstract

Translanguaging in popular music has attracted growing scholarly attention, yet how the practice is received by the people who produce and consume it remains largely unexamined. This survey-based study addresses that gap by examining the attitudes of 15 singers and 617 fans toward translanguaging in the Thai pop songs of CGM48, a Japanese-franchised idol group based in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. Most singers welcomed the incorporation of multiple languages, including Japanese, English, Southern Thai, and Northern Thai, into their songs. They saw translanguaging as making the music more interesting, more distinctive, and more internationally accessible, and they stressed the symbolic weight of local varieties in constructing the group's Chiang Mai – based identity. Fans were similarly positive, valuing the distinctive sound, the stylistic play, and the cultural depth that multiple languages afford; the great majority also wanted to hear more Northern Thai in Thai pop. Read together, the two perspectives show how language ideology, identity construction, and audience reception jointly shape multilingual practice in popular cultural production.

Keywords: translanguaging; Thai pop songs; identity; dialects; attitudes

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, translinguaging in music has attracted growing research attention (Aliagas Marín, 2017; Alim, 2022; Cru, 2017; Deng, 2021; Kovačič, 2022; Lin, 2014), and recent work has extended the lens from lyrics alone to the multimodal and intertextual work that songs perform (Picone, 2024). What remains poorly understood is how that practice is received socially, particularly when the varieties brought into a song are not national languages but regional ones that carry little institutional prestige. This study therefore examines how the artists and fans of CGM48, a Chiang Mai – based idol group, regard the (critical) translinguaging that draws together English, Japanese, standard Thai, and the Northern Thai dialect. In doing so, it offers new evidence on the social reception of multilingual pop and on the agency that singers and listeners alike exercise in shaping the linguistic texture of Thai popular music.

2. Literature Review

Translinguaging refers to the flexible and holistic use of one's linguistic resources. Otheguy et al. (2015) defined it as “the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (p. 281). It differs from code-switching, which proceeds from a monolingual paradigm that treats languages as separable systems (Goodman & Tastanbek, 2021). Translinguaging can be spontaneous or planned (Cenoz, 2017). Spontaneous translinguaging arises as an instinct of multilingual speakers and writers but can be inhibited by monolingual ideologies (Dovchin & Wang, 2024). Planned translinguaging, in contrast, is deliberate and systematic, and it is often intended to disrupt the monolingual ideologies, policies, and practices that govern educational and academic spaces. Its ultimate purpose is to decolonize language education (Darvin & Zhang, 2023; García, 2019; W. Li & García, 2022) and academic writing (Canagarajah, 2022; Christiansen et al., 2025; Xie & Sun, 2024). More recently, Li (2024) has recast translinguaging as a transformative pedagogy in which co-learning is paired with transpositioning, a willingness to take up another's linguistic and cultural standpoint, so that no repertoire is treated as a deficient version of another.

Embracing a translinguaging vision of the world, advocates challenge ideologies, policies, and practices that normalize colonial relations between languages and, by extension, between speakers of diverse languages (Darvin & Zhang, 2023; Kubota, 2022; W. Li & García, 2022; Tyler, 2023). They problematize the ways languages are hierarchically named (García, 2019), and they interrogate English-medium-instruction (EMI) policies in former British colonies in Asia (Fang et al., 2023). Because translinguaging allows multilingual learners to participate actively in knowledge-making and knowledge-sharing (Jiang & Zhang, 2023), advocates often regard (critical) translinguaging as a pursuit of social justice that raises the social status of marginalized languages (Sah & Kubota, 2022; Sah & Li, 2020). On this view, decolonization through translinguaging is a process of liberating multilingual subjects from colonial habits of mind that lead them to belittle themselves, their linguistic backgrounds, and knowledge systems (Rajendram, 2022; Wang, 2022). Translinguaging thus may facilitate the growth of multilingual selves, which requires learners to balance the relationship between majority

and minority languages in their life journeys (Teng & Zhang, 2025). Li (2022) regards the theorization of translanguaging as a political act that challenges monolingual pedagogies, monolingual communication, and de-contextualized analysis, and that therefore contributes to a decolonizing project resisting racialized ways of relating to languages and their users.

2.1 Translanguaging in pop culture

Pop culture presents a distinctive social context for translanguaging. Compared to formal education, pop culture tends to be less concerned with ideological correctness and favors heteroglossia, encouraging the use of multiple languages and registers (Lin, 2014). Pop culture originates in but also counters mainstream cultures, which normalize traditional, orthodox, monolingual values, views, and expressions. As Fiske (2010) put it, “Popular culture is made by subordinated peoples in their own interests out of resources that also, contradictorily, serve the economic interests of the dominant” (p. 2). This simultaneously dependent yet rebellious character gives pop culture the energy to trespass on linguistic boundaries through translanguaging.

Translanguaging studies have explored flexible language use in pop culture such as social media (Dumrukic, 2020; Lee & Li, 2025; Qi & Li, 2022; Zhang & Ren, 2020), comic books (DeHart et al., 2025; Istighfaroh et al., 2022), subtitle translation (Guo et al., 2025), and hip-hop (Aliagas Marín, 2017; Lin, 2014; Sharma, 2023). For instance, an analysis of two Little Dim Sum Warrior comic books (Istighfaroh et al., 2022) shows their verbal, visual, and contextual translanguaging practice. Although written in English, the books embed words (verbal translanguaging), clothes (visual translanguaging), and values (contextual translanguaging) from Chinese language and culture. Similarly, in a study on the use of Chinese fangyan or dialect in the subtitle translation of hip-hop songs, Wang and Zhang (2024) found it necessary to broaden the conceptualization of translanguaging to include the assemblage of both linguistic and non-linguistic resources, especially through the mediation of the Internet. Work on music fandom points in the same direction: Li and Hiramoto (2025) showed that fans of Chinese popular music take up stances toward artists through finely graded multilingual address terms, so that the linguistic resources circulating around a song are as consequential as those inside it. These studies suggest the fertility of pop culture as a site for translanguaging, although such attempts may be inhibited by language ideologies (Aliagas Marín, 2017).

2.2 Translanguaging in pop songs

The study of translanguaging in pop songs is relatively new (e.g., Banda, 2019; Kovačič, 2022; Lumban Batu & Sukamto, 2020). Several studies have used code-switching or code-mixing—two related terms—to explore linguistic and stylistic hybridity in African (Davies & Bentahila, 2006), Latin (Balam & Shelton, 2023), Nepalese (Saud, 2022), and Thai (Likhitphongsathorn & Sappapan, 2013) pop songs. Analyzing translanguaging in three Indonesian pop songs, Lumban Batu and Sukamto (2020) found that Indonesian and English played distinctive roles: whereas Indonesian affirmed the artists’ local affiliations, English helped them construct a global identity. Adding a third language complicates the picture further. By using Javanese, Indonesian pop singers also laid claim to a regional identity (Sagimin & Sapitri, 2023). These studies point to the need to situate pop song

translanguaging in its multiple contexts while attending to singers' own intentions behind their language choices.

Beyond Southeast Asia, comparable work shows how popular music becomes a site where regional varieties are re-valued. Chik (2010) documented the creative multilingualism of Hong Kong popular music, in which Cantonese, English, and Mandarin are layered for stylistic and identity work rather than out of communicative necessity, and Sleeper (2025) shows how Welsh-language rock musicians align code-switching with musical structure to claim a minoritized identity inside an anglophone market. Picone (2024) argues further that lyrical code-switching is best read multimodally, as one strand in a wider intertextual assemblage of sound, image, and persona. Such studies indicate that the question is not simply which languages appear in a song, but what social work their co-presence is made to do.

A dual vision is needed. On the one hand, researchers need to scrutinize how colonization may have assisted the global spread of pop cultures from the West (Shuker, 2001) or shaped linguistic hegemony within a nation (Ferguson, 2010). On the other hand, researchers should recognize that decolonization, with its emphasis on the emergence of self-affirming local cultural identities, may have influenced multilingual features in song composition (Alifa & Degaf, 2024). For instance, Konoshenko's (2024) analysis shows that Guinean pop music was heavily influenced by the country's history of colonization (1898 – 1958), the Decolonial Socialist Regime of Sekou Touré (1958 – 1984), and the Liberalisation period (1984 – present). Today, Guinean pop singers prefer translanguaging through local languages, particularly Susu, Malinka, and Pular (Konoshenko, 2024). The global spread of K-pop is similar. Sinsomboonthong (2020) analyzed its possible causes as follows:

global recognition of K-Pop and its transnational linkages are both utilized to reconstruct its own identity following the Korean War (as the US's proxy) and the Asian financial crisis (as one of the most affected countries). The transnationality of K-Pop music is considered as the key to the national identity. Then, it can be alternatively understood that, instead of being determined and influenced by the US, this country's [South Korea] nationalism is formed in response to international recognition and transnational linkages. (p. 80)

Translanguaging thus may function as a strategy through which pop song singers simultaneously construct their local, national, and international identities in global contact zones (Pratt, 1991).

Social attitudes shape musical translanguaging too. A study (Ibarra, 2024) compared 50 Spanglish (translanguaging between Spanish and English) pop songs with 50 Frenglais (translanguaging between French and English) songs, and found that the latter attracted more support and popularity on social media and distribution channels such as Spotify—a difference that mirrors Canadian acceptance of Frenglais and US rejection of Spanglish. Likewise, an interview-based study showed that even “monolingual” fans' presence and attitudes toward translanguaging play an important role in sustaining K-pop's translingual practice in online communities (Kwon & Lynch-Kimery, 2025). Listeners' expectations are themselves genre-specific: Squires (2019) demonstrates that hearers relax their grammatical expectations once they recognize a text as pop lyric, which helps explain why

linguistic mixing that would be censured elsewhere passes unremarked in song. Studies on translanguaging in pop songs thus need to take account of shifting social discourses on translanguaging, especially when dialects are involved ([Aliagas Marín, 2017](#); [Howard, 2010](#)).

Although not focusing on translanguaging, several earlier studies illustrate the diversity of language attitudes among Thai people toward pop songs. One early study offered valuable insights from a Thai musician's perspective, showing the entanglement between Thai artists' creative expression and a national identity in transition ([Eamsa-Ard, 2006](#)). Another study surveyed 50 Thai nationals, half of them middle-aged and the other half adolescents ([Chairat, 2014](#)). Participants' attitudes toward the use of both English and Thai in pop songs were found to be somewhat ambivalent: both groups regarded such language mixing as "annoying," yet most of the adolescent participants favored it, regarding it as a sign of being "knowledgeable," of showing "a good taste," and of possessing "a higher social status." More recently, Ruanglertsilp ([2024](#)) studied Thai rap songs from a World Englishes perspective, while Nitsaisook et al. ([2026](#)) traced the language ideologies that have underwritten four eras of English education policy in Thailand and that continue to position English above the country's regional varieties. No study we know of has yet adopted a translanguaging perspective on Thai pop songs from both artists' and fans' perspectives. This study therefore asks: (1) How do singers perceive and experience the use of multiple languages, including the Northern Thai dialect, in pop songs? (2) How do fans perceive and respond to the use of multiple languages, including the Northern Thai dialect, in pop songs?

3. Material and methods

3.1 Data collection

Data were collected through Google Forms. The participants were the members of CGM48 and its fans. CGM48 is a Thai franchise of Japan's AKB48, a group that has been described as one of the best-selling girl groups worldwide and that has multiple branches in other Asian countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia. CGM48 has a strong social media presence and fandom: 203k followers on Facebook, 173k on YouTube, and 63.6k on X. Like its sister group in Bangkok, CGM48 mostly sings Thai versions of Japanese songs. In translation, however, English, standard Thai, the Northern Thai dialect, and Japanese are woven together, so that the resulting songs are themselves multilingual. The group currently has 30 songs; apart from two "original" ones, 28 were translated from Japanese.

The co-author is the first-generation lead singer in CGM48, which had 16 members. Her status gave her easy access to other singers in the group and fans through social media. Her firsthand experience also provides an insider perspective on translanguaging.

The surveys were bilingual in English and Thai, and participants could respond in either language. The co-author, who is proficient in both Thai and English, translated the Thai responses into English. Fifteen of the group's 16 members responded, along with 617 fans.

3.2 Data analysis

We used descriptive statistics to summarize participants' age, regional identity, and attitudes toward translanguaging in pop songs. We then analyzed the written responses through coding and theme development. Initial codes were generated manually by highlighting significant phrases relating to attitudes, motivations, or experiences with multilingual and dialect use in Thai pop songs. These codes were then reviewed and grouped into broader themes that responded directly to the two research questions. For the artist members, common themes included "Northern Thai identity," "challenging," and "mixing languages to reach more people." For the fans, common themes included "pride in hearing local language and cultural identity," "difficulty understanding," "creative," and "reaching a wider audience." Participant quotations are used throughout to convey the texture of these perceptions.

4. Results

4.1 Artists' attitudes toward translanguaging in pop songs

The singers were all young adults. Most (60%) were aged 18 – 20, with the remainder aged 21 – 23 (33.3%) or 15 – 17 (6.7%). Three regions of Thailand were represented: northern (53.3%), central (40%), and northeastern (6.7%).

All singers were multilingual. Almost all (93.3%) could understand and speak English, and more than half (66.7%) could understand and speak the Northern Thai dialect, the primary language used in Chiang Mai. 33.3% of them understand and speak the northeastern Thai dialect and 20% of them can understand and speak Japanese. Some of them (13.3%) can also understand and speak Chinese or Korean. However, only 6.7% of them can understand and speak southern Thai dialect. The group's linguistic profiles were thus more complex than their geographical backgrounds.

The survey asked the singers about their attitudes toward singing songs that include languages other than Thai. Four options were provided — "Excited," "Challenged," "Neutral," and "Uncomfortable"—together with an open field for further comment. Nearly half of the artist members (46.7%) chose "challenged," a quarter (26.7%) chose "excited," and 20% chose "neutral." None chose "uncomfortable." One member (6.7%) wrote instead that singing multilingual songs makes the songs more interesting (see Figure 1). Since no singer reported discomfort, and since "challenged" indexes engagement with the practice rather than aversion to it, the great majority of the group (73.4%) can be read as favorably disposed toward translanguaging in pop songs.

How do you feel about singing a song that include multiple languages other than your native Thai? (others , please specify) คุณรู้สึกยังไงบ้างที่ต้องร้อง...น ๆ ด้วยนอกเหนือจากภาษาไทยกลาง (อื่น ๆ ถ้ามีโปรดระบุ)
15 responses

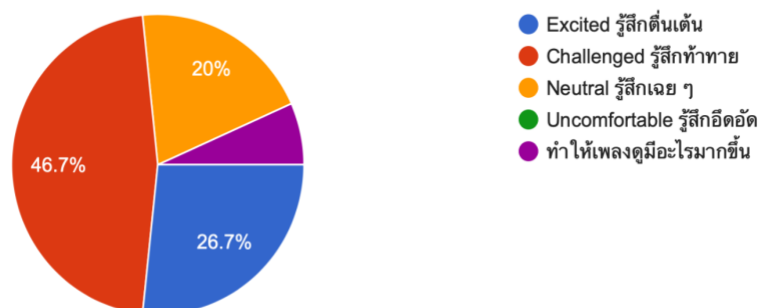


Figure 1. Artist Members' Feelings about Singing a Song That Includes Multiple Languages

Pronunciation was by far the greatest difficulty in singing multilingual songs, reported by 80% of the artist members. Memorization followed (46.7%), and emotional expression and grasping the meaning of the lyrics were each named by 26.7% (see Figure 2). No written explanations were provided.

What difficulties do you face with the songs that use different languages? (check all that apply. Other, please specify.) อะไรคือความท้าทายของการที่...นัดในการร้องเพลง? (ติ๊กได้หลายข้อ , อื่น ๆ โปรดระบุ)
15 responses

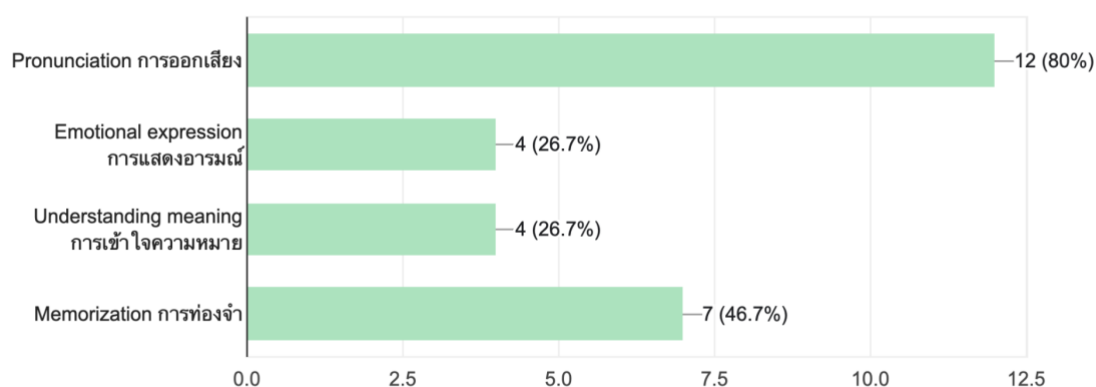


Figure 2. Difficulties Faced by Artist Members When Using Different Languages in Pop Songs

An open-ended question asked the artist members how they prepare to sing a song that includes languages other than their first. Almost all reported the same strategy: repeated practice. One singer explained that she prepared by working out the way words in an

unfamiliar language are pronounced, copying and comparing them with the sound guide, and deliberately singing them with the correct accent. Another described using standard Thai, her first language, to transcribe the pronunciation of lyrics in other languages—a strategy that made those lyrics easier to articulate. Translanguaging, in other words, was not only what the singers performed on stage but also how they prepared to perform it.

The artist members were also asked whether singing a song that includes multiple languages is more appealing than singing in a single language. The majority (86.7%) found multilingual songs more appealing, compared with a minority (13.3%) who disagreed (see Figure 3).

Do you think singing a song that includes multiple languages is more appealing than using a single language? คุณคิดว่าการใช้หลายภาษาในหนึ่งเพลง ทำให้เพลงนั้นน่าดึงดูดกว่าเพลงที่ใช้ภาษาเดียวหรือไม่?

15 responses

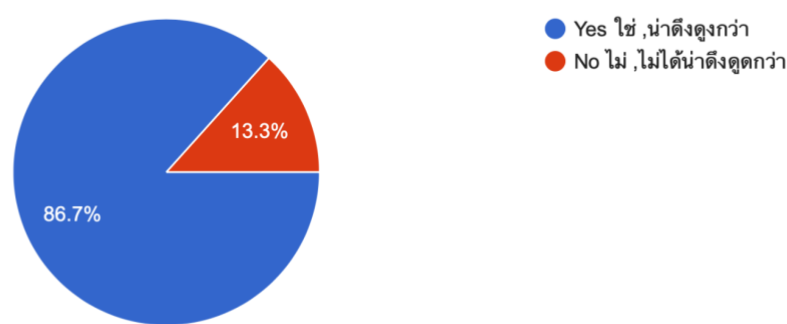


Figure 3. Artist Members' Attitudes toward Using Multiple Languages in a Song

In their written responses, the singers explained that multiple languages make a song sound more interesting, more unique, and more international, and allow it to reach wider audiences. Using a local language, they added, showcases the local culture associated with it. One singer observed that much depends on the listener's personal experience with different languages: if people can relate to the languages used in a song, they may be impressed by it; if not, they might feel alienated by the artists' use of unfamiliar languages. Singing multilingual songs thus emerged as a deliberate act of connection with the audience.

All members reported that their fans had responded very positively to the use of the Northern Thai dialect in the group's earlier songs, treating it as a signature feature of CGM48. The same attachment surfaced, in reverse, when Northern Thai receded from recent releases: fans, the singers said, felt that the group was ignoring, abandoning, or losing what made it a Chiang Mai band. Three singers wrote, respectively:

Singer 1: I received negative feedback from the fans for disusing the Northern Thai dialect in the lyrics. Without Northern Thai dialect lyrics in the songs, we are losing the identity of being a Chiang Mai group – making our group no different from any other typical idol girl group.

Singer 2: Fans have expressed concern that the band appears to be distancing itself

from its original identity,—trying too hard to create songs that follow current trends.

Singer 3: Some fans have noticed that recent singles contain less of the Northern Thai dialect, which may create a sense that something is missing from the group. Personally, I think this can be adjusted depending on what suits each song. It doesn't always have to be all Northern Thai dialect, nor should the Northern Thai identity disappear entirely. For example, elements of it can still be incorporated through musical arrangement, instrumentation or anything else.

Singer 3's comment especially highlights a dynamic approach to maintaining the group's Northern Thai cultural identity. Besides translanguaging, resources such as “musical arrangement, instrumentation or anything else” can also index that local identity.

4.2 Fans' attitudes toward translanguaging in Thai pop songs

Of the 617 fans who responded, most (84.9%) reported fluency in Standard Thai, and fewer than one in ten in other Thai dialects—Northern Thai (7.5%), northeastern Thai (1.6%), and southern Thai (1.9%). A further 1.8% reported fluency in English. Almost all fans (95%) said they could understand standard Thai and most (83.8%) could also understand English; over half (52.2%) could understand Northern Thai, and close to a fifth (15.6%) could understand Japanese.

Fans reported enjoying pop songs that incorporate multiple languages, and their feelings about such songs were predominantly positive (Figure 4). Over half (59.8%) chose the statement “I love it! It makes the music more interesting,” compared with a third (32.9%) who chose “I enjoy it, but sometimes it's hard to understand.”

How do you feel about listening to songs that use multiple languages? (Other, please specify) เมื่อคุณฟังเพลงที่มีความหลากหลายของภาษาในเพลงนั้น คุณรู้สึกอย่างไรบ้าง? (อื่นๆ โปรดระบุ)
617 responses



Figure 4. Fans' Feelings about Listening to Multilingual Songs

Together, these two responses mean that 92.7% of fans took a positive view of multilingual songs, which suggests broad acceptance of translanguaging in pop. One fan explained: “I feel excited about how the writer would make the songs with multiple languages, I think it makes the songs more interesting.” Another wrote: “I think it is

interesting, even though I don't know about some words but it is good to get to learn new words in other languages." The shared positivity, then, rests on somewhat different motives. By contrast, and as Figure 4 also shows, only a small fraction of the fans (3%) felt either ambivalent or negative: 2.8% chose "I don't mind it, but I prefer songs in a single language," and only 0.2% chose "I don't like it; I find it confusing."

A further question, which allowed multiple selections, asked what makes multilingual songs more appealing than monolingual ones. Most fans (72.1%) pointed to their unique sounds and styles; over half (59.5%) chose cultural diversity and richness; and almost as many (58.2%) chose the connections that multilingual songs open up to different languages and identities.

Fans were more divided about the difficulty of following multilingual lyrics (Figure 5). Over half (57.9%) reported some difficulty, whereas the remainder (42.1%) reported either no difficulty at all or positive enjoyment of the challenge. The difficulties they named concerned understanding the lyrics and sustaining an emotional connection when unfamiliar languages are used; a few also stressed the importance of keeping a Thai identity while integrating other languages.

Have you ever faced difficulty understanding or enjoying a song because of the multiple languages used? (please explain in the next question) คุณ...ซ้หลายภาษาในเพลงหรือไม่? (กรุณาอธิบายในข้อถัดไป)
617 responses

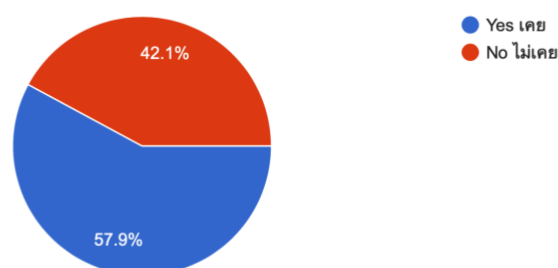


Figure 5. Fans' Difficulties in Understanding or Enjoying Multilingual Songs

Open-ended responses revealed what those challenges consist of. Most fans mentioned understanding lyrics in languages with which they are unfamiliar. The responses mixed positive and negative appraisals. For example, one fan commented: "I do not understand the meaning, I can not translate it and I am not sure if what I understand is correct." Another wrote, "Sometimes I don't understand the vocabulary of other languages." Fans also described occasions on which language and music failed to sit well together. One critiqued, "When [singers] translating songs from Japanese to Thai lyrics, some words do not go well with the original melody used with Japanese lyrics. Making it hard to understand for some parts." Another observed, "Sometimes it [the translation] doesn't match the [original] song [in Japanese]." International (non-Thai) fans reported a further obstacle: Northern Thai meanings are largely unavailable online. As one fan wrote,

"As a Chinese I just learned a little bit of Standard Thai. So for me if a song includes some Thai dialects, and most of them maybe cannot be translated, it will confuse me a

bit. (Example: Song XXX took me almost a month to figure out that it is not all using Standard Thai till the day I put the lyrics into the translator).” and also “I experienced difficulty when translating Northern Thai dialect, I have to ask someone who knows Northern Thai dialect.”

For some fans the difficulty lay less in the language itself than in how it was voiced. One shared, “Some English words that are pronounced in a Japanese accent on the song are different from the English accent.” Others found it “confusing [to match] the pronunciation and meaning of a [multilingual] song.”

Nonetheless, fans still expressed positive feelings toward translanguaging pop songs. They wrote:

“I have fun with listening to multilingual songs, I have fun exploring the meanings in the songs.”

“I listen due to my preference, guessing the meanings from the contexts. Sometimes it is not right, I have to find more meaning about it but overall I still enjoy it.”

“I don’t know the meaning. I focus more on enjoying the vibe of the songs.”

“If I don’t understand it, I can look for the translation. Multilingual [multilinguals] can make the songs sound more catchy.”

“Sometimes I have to pause the song and find the meaning of some words (which are not my native language) in the lyrics to understand the whole lyrics, but that’s not really a big deal for me.”

Difficulty, however, did not translate into dislike: 88.3% of fans still found the songs enjoyable. These listeners appear to treat multilingual pop songs as a genre to be enjoyed in its own right, with or without full access to the meanings.

Asked whether they would like to see more Thai pop songs with multilingual features, almost all fans (93.3%) said yes (see Figure 6).

Would you like to see more Thai pop songs incorporating multiple languages? คุณต้องการเห็นเพลงป๊อปไทยมีการผสมผสานหลายภาษาในเพลงมากขึ้นหรือไม่?
614 responses

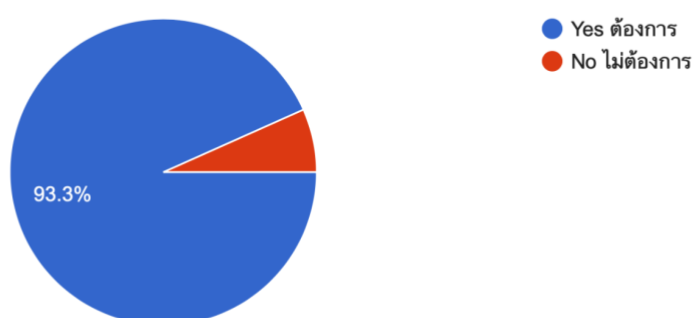


Figure 6. Fans’ Attitudes toward Seeing More Thai Pop Songs Incorporating Multiple Languages

Open-ended responses show that most fans associated multilingual songs with greater

relatability, personal appeal, cultural diversity, and international reach. Fans wrote, for instance: “This might bring Thai songs to internationally easier”; “It increases the diversity and makes the songs more unique”; “It makes the songs more appealing and gets people to learn new languages also.” One fan wrote:

Multilingual helps break barriers in understanding songs and the underlying culture. If we want to expand our pop songs popularity to a wider audience, I imagine that songs with both Thai and English lyrics will be easier to adopt by listeners.

From the fans’ perspective, then, translanguaging in Thai pop songs is not merely welcome but strategic—a means of reaching “a wider audience.”

Some fans also expressed a desire for Thai pop song lyrics to incorporate more varieties of Thai dialects. For instance, two fans wrote respectively:

I am not from the central part of Thailand, for me I would like to see more of local Thai dialects in the songs. I think it is also lovely to see other languages with local Thai dialects, it widens our world.

I want people to know that [standard] Thai language is not [the] only one language in Thai language, there are also other Thai dialects. Using other Thai dialects in the songs is like spreading cultural awareness to people and also it is one of the ways to record the existence of the language.

For the first fan, the use of multiple Thai dialects alongside other languages signals a broadened worldview. For the second, incorporating those dialects serves the dual function of raising public awareness and of documenting varieties that might otherwise go unrecorded. Fans also showed critical awareness of the power dynamics between standard and non-standard varieties in Thai society. As one fan put it: “Local dialects, though often marginalized, are deeply embedded in Thai cultural heritage. Integrating them into pop music makes them more approachable to the general public, while preserving and highlighting the aesthetic value of the language.” Northern Thai was singled out repeatedly: “Because I personally really like Northern Thai, I wish there were more Thai songs that use Northern Thai to listen to”; “Northern girl idol group blended Japanese lyrics with Thai pop and also added Northern Thai, creating a distinct and authentic sound of their own. I’d love to see more songs like that.”

A minority of fans disagreed, citing personal preference or the appropriateness of language mixing. One fan wrote, “I prefer just only Thai language.” Another was ambivalent: “For Thai people, personally, it sounds a bit off, but it’s also part of what can help Thai songs go international. Korean and Japanese songs also mix in English all the time.” A third wrote: “If the aim is to promote cultural diversity, [multilingual songs are acceptable]; however, many modern songs tend to insert English in a forced and unnecessary way.” Few though these voices were, they show that translanguaging in Thai pop is not beyond social critique.

In sum, most fans welcomed Thai pop songs that incorporate other languages, especially English, which they saw as the main route to a global audience, and as a way of updating and internationalizing Thai music. They were equally positive about Thai dialects, and about Northern Thai in particular, which they regarded as a crucial means of presenting the distinctive cultural character and identity of a Chiang Mai – based group.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study explored singers' and fans' attitudes toward the use of multiple languages, including the Northern Thai dialect, in Thai pop songs. The artists were overwhelmingly positive about multilingual songs, despite the difficulty of singing them, and most found such songs both appealing and exciting. As in other studies, the singers believed that translanguaging can help them reach wider audiences while constructing diverse identities (Banda, 2019; Lumban Batu & Sukanto, 2020; Saud, 2022). These Chiang Mai – based artists used planned translanguaging as both a performance tool and a cultural strategy (Pennycook, 2007). By integrating English, they performed transnational identities in the global cultural contact zones they inhabit (Pratt, 1991), as comparable groups have done (Ahn, 2021); by integrating local languages, they maintained cultural solidarity with their fans (Kovačič, 2022) while displaying self-acceptance, as in the case of BTS (Kim, 2025).

Fans perceived translanguaging in Thai pop songs just as positively. Similar to fans' attitudes toward Spanglish in Latin rap (Balam & Shelton, 2023), the fans in this study reported challenges in understanding multilingual songs but continued to appreciate the creative sound and the stylistic and cultural synergy that translanguaging affords. As in an earlier study (Likhithongsathorn & Sappapan, 2013), fans were positive about English usage in Thai pop songs. They also believed that Thai dialects, especially Northern Thai, helped promote Thai cultural and regional identity. Translanguaging in Thai pop songs can thus be taken as a strategy to preserve, pursue, and promote cherished cultures, connections, and identities (Dutton & Rushton, 2021). When multilingual speakers invest in lesser-spoken languages or language varieties, the motivation is often not economic but symbolic—the value of those varieties for constructing identities that exceed monolingual storylines (Canagarajah, 2020; James, 2023). The point is not confined to popular music. Echeverria and Sparling (2024) observe that song has long been one of the most effective vehicles of heritage-language revitalization precisely because it circulates affect rather than instruction, and de la Piedra and Johnson (2025) show that music-making assembles linguistic and non-linguistic resources into a single translanguaging space. The fans' positive attitudes thus provide an affirmative environment for the artists' (critical) translanguaging experiments with Northern Thai lyrics.

Overall, this study contributes new knowledge on translanguaging in Thai pop songs. Like other research on dialect use in songs (Barco, 2025), the artists' and fans' positive attitudes toward the use of Northern Thai in pop songs reflect a general social leniency toward diverse languages in pop culture, especially among the Thai youth who took part in this study and who have grown up under policies favoring bilingual education (Howard, 2010). It may also be read as a Northern Thai assertion of cultural identity against the background of “over a century of Central Thai (Bangkok) cultural and political domination” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 228)—a hierarchy that, as Nitsaisook et al. (2026) show, successive Thai language-education policies have helped to naturalize. The wide acceptance of English in Thai pop songs by artists and fans alike confirms “Pop Song English” as a transnational phenomenon (Gibson, 2024), drawn on by singers across the globe for their own artistic and sociolinguistic purposes (Ahn, 2021; Ruanglertsilp, 2024; Sagimin & Sapitri, 2023), and used as a “currency” to enter the global music market (Schneider, 2024, p. 111). The covert translanguaging involved in translating Japanese pop songs for a Thai

audience aligns with the insight that pop songs are a translocal genre that opens a fertile social space for cultural and linguistic hybridity (Saud, 2022; Sinsomboonthong, 2020). This study further suggests that (critical) translanguaging in pop songs may function as a viable strategy for multilingual communities worldwide to hold the local, the national, and the global in balance (Fairfield, 2017; Gobodwana, 2025; Howard, 2010). Through their fluid language use, drawing on extensive and still expanding repertoires, both the singers and the fans contribute to a shared vision of Thai pop songs that is decolonizing in its orientation.

These findings should not be generalized to the whole musical landscape of Thai pop. The sample is drawn from a single group, participation was self-selected, and the data are self-reported attitudes rather than observed listening practice; the co-author's membership in the group, which secured the access on which the study depends, may also have shaped what singers felt able to say. Future research should include a wider range of artists and fans from other groups and communities, and would benefit from pairing survey data with textual analysis of the songs themselves. Despite these limitations, the findings have important implications. For musicians and producers, they suggest that incorporating local dialects and multilingual elements can enhance audience engagement and cultural relevance. For policymakers and tourism agencies, supporting such artistic expressions could be a creative pathway to cultural preservation and economic development. Ultimately, translanguaging in Thai pop songs—especially through the integration of the Northern Thai dialect—may not only reshape musical aesthetics but also offer a vibrant, authentic way of presenting Chiang Mai, a popular international destination, to the world. The group's ongoing effort to balance internationalization against cultural preservation may offer other multilingual communities a model for surviving and thriving in the global contact zones.

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The authors used ChatGPT to improve language, clarity, and readability. The authors reviewed and edited all AI-generated content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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