

## Know the Language, Know the Culture, and Know the Bases (Basis) of Translingualism in KBO and MLB Baseball

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Hye Hyon Kim writes about code-switching between languages in the sport of baseball. She analyzes how certain baseball terms switch and change depending on where the sport is played. In comparing MLB to KBO (Korean Baseball Organization) League, Hye Hyon explains how differences in space and culture can influence how the game is constructed and how the sport is perceived within the fan culture. Hye Hyon distinguishes the difference in the terms and delves into how KBO has implemented some English terms such as *strike* and *bunt*, but also researches how KBO has created new terms to suit the sports culture in Korea.

It all began when my friends and I went to see a baseball game a couple of weeks ago, and being a huge fan of the Nexen Heroes in KBO (Korean Baseball Organization) League, I was excited to go see an MLB game for the first time. Curious and trying to find out more about the sports culture in the US, I texted my friend a day before going to St. Louis.

“Hey, would it be OK to wear my team’s jersey to the Cardinals’ game tomorrow?” I asked, as that is what many fans do in Korea. There are ten teams in the Korean baseball league, and oftentimes fans go to another team’s game wearing their own team’s shirt. So in a game between the Nexen Heroes and the Doosan Bears, for example, you will be able to see a lot of uniforms, such as fans wearing blue Samsung Lions jerseys or grey Hwanha Eagles shirts, or even someone wearing an LA Dodgers baseball cap. Wearing your team’s uniform, regardless of whether they are playing or not, is a fun way to dress and still cheer for your team, as it also becomes a sense of identity in where you stand in the league. I was going to an MLB game, but as I was a bigger fan of my home team, I asked my friend because I wanted to show off my burgundy jersey with sixteen signatures on it, all signed by meeting the players in person, thank you very much.



Figure 1: My friends and I at Busch Stadium.

“I don’t know about the jersey thing. I would say maybe not . . . ?” my friend replied and I shrugged it off and bought a Cardinals T-shirt the next day. If I couldn’t wear mine, I might as well buy one of the team’s, as a part of the experience. Turns out, it was a good thing that I bought one and became one with the crowd.

### The Game and the Terms

Although I didn’t know the players, and I had never seen an MLB game before, it was easy enough to recognize what was going on. After all, baseball was a sport that originated from the U.S, and that had made its way across the world. Just like what I was used to seeing in KBO

League matches, whether that was on the field in Seoul or Gwangju, there were no surprises at St. Louis’s Busch Stadium. In any game, there are three bases, four including the home plate, and ten players on the field, nine in defense and one being the offence hitter. The point is to follow the ball, whether it is a hit or miss, literally. So, what was different? Surprisingly, many things.

The first thing I noticed was the terms and language of the rules in the game. Let me give you an example. When the pitcher throws four balls out of the strike zone, the hitter gets to go to the first base. While this is called a *walk* or *bases on balls* in the MLB, as the hitter walks to the first base without having to hit the ball, it is called *dead ball* in Japan, and in Korea, it is called 볼넷, which literally translates to *ball four*. This really fascinated me so I decided to look at other terms and see if I could identify a pattern of how the terms were translated or created in another language and culture.

### Translingualism in Baseball

I think this is a good time to explain a term here, and that is **translingualism**, which is a fancy word describing how language is not stagnant but can be used in multiple ways across and within different languages. Su Yin Khor,

author of several *Grassroots* articles, illustrates the terms as “when we translingual our writing, we bring together two or more languages to make sense of something we might not have fully understood if we had only used one language” (155). Therefore, by using multiple languages we are able to understand a term or a concept in many layers. Have in mind that the understanding can come from and depends on the situation, setting, and even cultural resources. You can definitely see translingualism happening with the different patterns of terms used in both English and Korean baseball. What is fascinating is that although translingualism is easy to identify in situations where there are many different nationalities involved, translingualism is also possible in cases where one language is used. So it can even occur in one English classroom, when you make decisions on which vocabulary to use when you are talking to the professor, or whispering to your friends, or secretly passing a note, or presenting in front of the whole class. So, how is this related? In a lot of ways. Especially in sports, where in a game, each rule or action will be named somewhat similarly, or very differently, depending on where the sport is played.

Let me give you some examples. First, we have Exhibit A: English terms that are translated into Korean.

### 1. Translation from English to Korean

The first pattern I recognized was how a term could be translated. It wasn't a word-by-word translation, but there was definitely a resemblance of meaning that remained, even in Korean. A *single*, which is a hit that allows the batter to make it to the first base without being caught out, is called 1루타 (*base 1 hit*). Likewise, a *double* is 2루타 (*base 2 hit*), and a *triple* is 3루타 (*base 3 hit*). Another example would be *ground out*, which means that the hitter bats the ball so that it lands somewhere in the infield, which makes it easy to be caught and counted as an out. This is 땅볼 in Korean, meaning *ground ball*, so this is also easy to grasp. Similarly, a *sacrifice hit* is when the hitter bats the ball high and far across the field, which makes it easy to be caught by the outfielders and counted as an out but gives the chance to a runner to move to the next base or even to the home plate. This is a sacrifice hit and a 희생타 in Korean.

English Terms	Korean Terms	Translations
Single	1루타	Base 1 hit
Double	2루타	Base 2 hit
Triple	3루타	Base 3 hit
Ground out	땅볼	Ground ball
Sacrifice hit	희생타	Sacrifice hit

These are simple and straight forward in that in many cases, there wouldn't need to be some kind of extra explanation on what was going on. However, this is just the beginning. Let's look at other patterns: Exhibit B, when English terms are replaced with different English terms (in Korea).

## ***2. English to Different English Terms***

This one is interesting, because here the English terms of rules are now being transformed not to Korean, but to other English terms. The choice of terms and language are completely different, but technically, it is still in the same language.

Since it is still used as English, many will be able to recognize the word, however, with different terminology, people may not get the meaning right away. Calling a *walk* as *four ball* in the beginning of this article is a good example of this category. Let's look at some more.

When the batter succeeds in hitting the ball but it flies up high making it easier for the defense to catch it and count it as an out, in the MLB it is a *pop-up*. The same occurrence in Korea is called a *fly out*.

For these examples, there may need to be some kind of explanation, but there still doesn't seem to be much of a difference in what they entail in meaning. It also helps that the new terminology is still in English. Imagine going to a baseball game in Korea, and after making a trip to the bathroom, you ask your friend what happened. If they reply, "Oh it was *four ball*," or "It was a *fly out*," I assume you would still be able to nod your head and have some kind of understanding on what just happened. No? Well, how about this?

About an hour before the game starts, the teams announce the main players that will be on the field. What would this be called in MLB? *A batting order*. But would a *lineup* of players still make sense? I think you get the message.

Here is a table of the terms mentioned:

MLB English Terms	KBO English Terms
Walk	Ball four
Pop-up	Fly out
Batting order	Lineup

Last but not least, we have the most fascinating category, Exhibit C, where MLB English terms are in Korean, and translated in meaning like in the first category, but coined into completely new Korean terms.

### 3. English to Different Korean Terms

Things get a little complicated when the rules or the terms are now in Korean, and there isn't a direct correlation to MLB English terms. Instead, there are new meanings and connotations that are added that convey the Korean sports culture. For example, when the pitcher allows the offensive team to score, it is called an *earned run* in MLB. When the earned run numbers are counted and divided into the innings he has pitched out of the total innings, you get the ERA, which is the *earned run average*. This makes sense, as each pitcher has an ERA, and this is important because these numbers would become one of the prime factors of choosing the starting pitcher. I knew about this concept and, being a Korean baseball fan, I have also noticed there was an ERA for every pitcher, but I didn't know what it was or what the acronym stood for until I looked it up, because in Korea we use different terminology. *Earned run averages* or *earned runs* are called 평균자책점 and 자책점 in Korea. If we look at the translation, apart from 평균 which means *average*, *earned runs* and 자책점 mean something completely different. The way I interpreted *earned runs* was from the point of view of the hitter: He was able to score and earn runs whether that was because he was able to bat really well or there were bases on balls (*four balls*) and he was able to walk to the base. The term carries a positive connotation, because he earned something; he was able to earn points for his team to get closer to winning the game. However, the tables are turned when we look at the Korean term, 자책. If you take each letter and look at the meaning, 자 means *self* and 책 means *responsibility*. The letters together form the word 자책, and as a verb, 자책하다 means *to be taking the fault*, or taking the blame for something that they have done wrong as a mistake. There is also an emotional connotation that comes with the word, so the person may also feel guilty. So in Korea, we look at ERA as something of the pitcher's fault. They weren't able to throw in a way that could benefit the team, but gave the offensive team an opportunity to score. Interesting, huh?

On the other hand, there are also terms that have negative connotations in English that are not in Korean. An example would be *benchwarmers*. So, when the *lineup* (batting order! Haha, did you even notice? Ahhhh Translingualism!) of players is decided, it doesn't mean that just those nine hitters and one pitcher are getting ready. There are also other players who will still take part in training and are ready in their uniforms, but are watching the game in the dugouts, waiting to be called if there needs to be a substitute in case of an emergency, in case a player is injured, or there needs to be a change in the game of some sort. In MLB, they are called *reserved players* or *benchwarmers*. When I heard this term, it didn't take me long to understand where the term came from. Some of these players may be in

the dugouts, spending more time on a bench than on the field. *Benchwarming* or *benchwarmer* has a connotation here, too, but it is not positive, as the athlete is warming a seat rather than being on the field playing. But in Korea, they are called 대체선수 which directly translates to *substitute player*. No deeper meanings or layers there.

Let's look at another example. I think I can speak for many baseball fans when I say that one of the thrills of watching a game is when there are runners at each base and you wish the next hitter would hit a home run so all four runners can make it home. In MLB, this is called a *grand slam*. I didn't know this term, and it led me to do some research in effort to find out where this term originated. Turns out, it doesn't even come from athletics and it comes from cards! It is a term that was first used in card games and the history goes all the way back to 1814, meaning a "*complete success*" when the player is in the most desirable or ideal situation to gain points and win. It was only in 1953 that the term was used in baseball (*Oxford English Dictionary*). This is interesting to me, because there are no references to the baseball game itself, but this term is still used and every fan will not only know it, but hope for it, and may shout and yell it in a game. On the other hand, the term in Korean is 만루홈런, which can be translated to *full base home run*, when a home run is hit when all three bases are full. Very simple, yet clear description of what is happening, in both Korean and English.

One other thing I would like to point out, though, speaking of lineups and who starts pitching and who gets to warm the benches, is that the person in charge who makes all these important decisions is called as a *manager* in MLB. However, there are no managers in Korean baseball teams. The term *manager* certainly exists in Korea, but not in baseball or sports. *Manager* is an English word, but in the code of Korean culture, a manager would be someone who oversees and plans someone's (most likely someone very busy and famous) schedule and finances, like a personal secretary. So, if I may talk a little bit about Kpop here, every Kpop group will definitely have a manager, if not multiple within a group for every singer. A manager would be hired to schedule their events and appointments and follow them everywhere to check if they were OK and drive them to the place of the event. Returning to the topic of baseball, it can be understood how the term does not apply to baseball. The players would be responsible for their own well-being and they would not hire a separate person to take care of their schedule or oversee their personal lives. So, instead of the term *manager*, in KBO the person in charge of the team is called 감독, a *director*. If certain film directors come to your mind, then you are definitely on the right track. If you think about it, baseball can be seen like making a successful film. A director decides who

will be starring (playing) on the show (field) and how they should be acting (signaling how to bat or defend).

MLB English Terms	KBO Korean Terms	Meaning
ERA	평균자책점	Average fault score
Benchwarmer	대체선수	Substitute player
Grand slam	만루홈런	Full base home run
Manager	감독님	Director

## Recap of Translingualism

We have looked at different terms, so let's recap how translingualism is actually being shown here. Well, the first pattern (going from English to Korean translations) is an example of how translingualism takes place between two languages.

Here we have two languages, and in a situation where a Chicago Cubs fan and a Nexen Heroes fan were to see a game together, when the first batter walks to the first base, the Cubs fan might be thinking *walk* while the Heroes fan may be thinking *ball four*. They would call it different names, but they would still be thinking of the same thing.

A fan may ask, "What's the lineup for today?" and the other would answer, "Oh, the batting order? Let me see." This is still translingualism because they are technically speaking in the same language but they are using different cultural terms. There is one language spoken, but what is implied in that language and how it is used is vastly different, and we can also call it translingualism because the language is transcending all the differences, allowing the speakers to still communicate.

But instead of thinking that this is impossible to communicate, think of it this way: Each country has a different language and culture, but they still share the same sport. One particular concept and how it is phrased isn't going to stop the game from happening. They will just continue to do so in a different language. Sure, baseball comes from America, but while it is still very foreign for Korean fans to go see an MLB game and recognize the terms, they will still be able to recognize the game and the rules. Also, let's not forget that baseball doesn't just exist in Korea and America. There is also LMB (Liga Mexicana de Béisbol, the Mexican baseball league), NPB (Nippon Professional Baseball, the Japanese baseball league), CPBL (Chinese Professional Baseball League), and more, and I am sure there are going to

be different names and titles for rules there too. So here it is, translingualism happening in just a different culture and setting!

## Code-Switching

We've looked at how there are different terminologies for baseball. If you are a baseball fan like me, it is easy to memorize them and use them to explain baseball to another fan or they may naturally come to mind when you see a pop-up or an earned run. But what if you were talking to someone who wasn't a baseball fan and said, "Hey, did you see that pop-up? That was a bad hit, but a great catch!" They may look at you and wonder if you were referring to a pop or a soda.

What is going on? What can we call this? There are **codes** in every language. Here, it would be described as one person speaking in the code of baseball, and the other not. If there is a mix-up of codes in a conversation, there may be confusion. But let's change the situation to the classroom. Again, we wouldn't necessarily say the word *steal* or *hit* in a classroom, because those terms have different connotations. The way in which there are different words designated for different settings is how we recognize that there are different codes in different literate activities, and we switch codes to make ourselves fit in with the setting.

**Code-switching** does not just happen with verbal language, however; it also affects us in how we choose to act and how we use certain body language. Let's move on to the fan culture of baseball and how it is different in the US and Korea.

## Fan Culture and Translingualism

Going back to my Nexen Heroes jersey with sixteen signatures, I am glad that I had asked my friend if I could wear it to the Cardinals game before actually going, because as soon as I was near Busch Stadium, I could clearly see that everyone was either a Cardinals fan or not. Not only was the stadium gigantic, but there was Ball Park Village, full of restaurants, bars, and shops that had Cardinals all over the place including the fans wearing their jerseys. It was actually hard to find a fan not wearing a jersey. There was even a Cardinals museum. This was all really cool, and it almost seemed like I was experiencing the sport of baseball all over again, with new eyes. But what fascinated me was how everything came with a price. Literally. You needed a ticket to see an exhibit, you needed to pay and sign up to get a signature from





Figure 2: Cardinal Nation.

a player, and even though jerseys cost over 100 dollars, almost everyone was wearing one. The players were like celebrities, you could buy a jersey with their name on it, but to get a signed shirt or even to ask for a signature was almost impossible.

The reason why I am surprised was because I am used to a very different fan culture in Korea. Have I mentioned my jersey yet? Not only can you meet the players after the game, but the fan culture of Korean baseball is built upon the idea that the teams are able to play because of the fans' support. Many players will gladly greet you and talk to you, and they will sign your baseball or jersey by request, and they might even thank you for buying one in their name. They are famous, but they are expected to be friendly and respect the fans, too, as the fans would for them. So how do fans use their language toward the team and its players? I did some research on online forums and articles from the sports sections of newspapers to look at the terms and code usage of the fans. While I am not sure about the Cardinals or the Cubs, the Nexen Heroes have some nicknames that the team usually goes by. Nexen is a relatively new team based in Seoul and was first established in 2008 (Homeplate). As it is a young team compared to others which were founded more than thirty years ago, the team is known to have younger players who each have strong strengths in pitching, batting, catching, and defense. Each player is known for their talent and fans came up with the term *Nexvengers*, combining the two terms *Nexen* and *Avengers*.

This is fun, but let's take the translingualism aspect in to this again. What happens when we make nicknames for players? Well, there used to be a hitter, Michael Choice, who signed with Nexen in July 2017 to be the cleanup hitter (known for their home runs), and in showing joy for the new player, many fans begin to call him, 선택형 which translates to *brother of choice*, or even 굿초이스, a *good choice*, making a pun in both English and Korean. Another well-known player, Byung Ho Park (who used to play for the Minnesota Twins), is also a cleanup hitter and has been doing incredibly each season, known for batting over forty home runs for three consecutive seasons. Fans love this player so much, and as he is known for his hits, his nickname is 박뱅, *Park Bang*, meaning his bat explodes with points and that he scores whenever he is at bat. You can see how the Heroes shop sells jerseys with Park's nickname in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Nexen Heroes Shop No. 52, Park Bang Jersey.

So here it is, translingualism, in the code of sports, specifically in baseball. If you think about it, translingualism is everywhere. Even in one language, you are consciously making choices and decisions on which terms and words you use depending on where you are and who you are with. Language and literate activities are powerful in that the choice of words you make not only says a lot about who you are, but they also empower your identity within a community.

I remember leaving Busch Stadium thinking how I had just experienced another code of baseball, making notes on how some terms were similar but also different. It also dawned on me that this one single experience shouldn't be generalized to other MLB games or fans. However, I did learn something about MLB, and it was definitely a fun experience. One takeaway that I do want to finish with is the importance of differences: whether that is in a language, in a sport, or even in communication. These can be called codes and just like it is perfectly OK to accept and embrace every part of your identity, be proud of your codes, as they are a big part of you, and at the end of the day, they are what makes you, well, you.

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