

# LANGUAGE STRUCTURE AND RAPLINE'S POETICS

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The BTS Rapline have unique poetic styles  
that shine through all their work.

But what makes each style unique?

One possible answer lies through the lens of language structure.

Sound, construction, meaning, delivery.

Even though every member utilizes *the whole spectrum of lyrical devices* of form and meaning, each has  
an aspect of language as their *main lyrical weapon*.

In their lyrics, Namjoon, Yoongi and Hobi  
each focus on one level of language.

Let's explore that.

BTS

# ELEMENTS OF Language Structure

Sound

All the possible sounds a human can produce

Phoneme

The collection of sounds belonging to a specific language

You make I to an O

I to an O

너 땀에 알았어

I learned thanks to you

왜 사람과 사랑이 비슷한 소리가 나는지

why person [saram] and love [sarang] sound similar

[Trivia: Love](#)

This is an example of a **minimum pair**:

two words with different meaning that differ only in one sound used to establish that sound as a distinct phoneme.

J-hope

His rap style is characterized by his unique and varied **flow**:  
the rhythm and rhyme schemes of a hip-hop song's lyrics and how they interact

Plays with sound: rhyme and rhythm, accent and pronunciation.

Works with the sound of words and his own delivery of those words.

Often uses **onomatopoeias**: words that imitate the sounds of the things they refer to

But 난 입질 왔담 뽀끼  
모든 언니s call me 뽀뽀

But I felt a bite, bait  
All the girls call me, **beepbeep**

뽀끼 (bbikki) is a slang for a night club barker

Wordplay: 뽀뽀 (bbibbi) is a pager/beeper: "all the girls, call me, page me."

Also bbi- is commonly used for censoring sounds: "all the girls call me [censored]"

[Cypher PT.3 : KILLER](#)  
[LISTEN >](#)

힙합? 땡  
Rap style? 땡  
강 래퍼, 땡  
방탄=땡

Hip hop? **ddaeng**  
Rap style? **ddaeng**  
Just a rapper, **ddaeng**  
Bangtan = **ddaeng**

But 현실, bang  
Worldwide, bang  
차트 위 bang bang, 땡

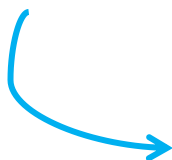
But the reality is **bang**  
Worldwide, **bang**  
On top of the chart **bang bang, ddaeng**

[Ddaeng](#)  
[LISTEN >](#)



The elements that make words.

“the smallest unit of language that has its own meaning, either a word or a part of a word”  
(Cambridge Dictionary)



► Likes taking words apart and putting them back together.

splits words into their components  
builds puns and wordplay out of different interpretations  
that grow from how the words are divided

**Re-spect**

말 그대로 보고 자꾸 보는 거

**Re-spect,**

like the word itself, **it's to look and look again**

*“The word respect can be etymologically broken into “re” (back, again) and “spectāre” (to observe, to look at).” (doolsetbangtan)*

[Respect](#)

[LISTEN>](#)

**“creative morphology”**: splits words in ways that do not correspond to their grammatical components  
instead finds in them other words to create new meanings

여긴 왕국, 나는 킹 너는 덤

This is a **kingdom**, I'm a **king**, you're **dumb**

*King + dumb*

*King + 덤 (dum; an extra, a freebie)*

*The word “kingdom” is not actually made of “king” and “dumb”, but RM finds those words in it to create wordplay.*

[Cypher PT. 2 : Triptych](#)

[LISTEN>](#)



The study of the relationship  
between word and meaning



The most well-known trait of Namjoon's lyricism are how he **plays with meaning**. Creates unusual combinations.

캐서 계산 소리 땡  
어릴 적 좋아함 얼음땡  
난 땡땡, 난 땡  
넌 7곳, 난 땡  
라면 먹고 잔 얼굴 땡

The sound of the cashier checking me out, **ka-ching**  
I liked it when I was young – **unfrozen** [release call from freeze tag]  
I'm correct, you're **wrong**  
You are 7-kkeut, I have a **good hand** [of cards]  
Sleeping after eating ramen, the face gets **puffy**

Verse of "[Ddaeng](#)" which uses the word with 5 different meanings. [LISTEN>](#)

Uses **metaphors**, allegories, images.

Outside was a whole **battlefield so I bring out the chopper**

밤마다 내 안에 있는 나 스스로와 싸워  
심장은 뛰고, 내 동료들은 내 뒷통수를 쳐

(...)

이 말들은 아니야 **wordplay**,

**it just a warplay the world plays**

우린 다시 병정처럼 싸울 뿐 errday

Yehh 난 제대로 걸어 비트 위에 목숨을 걸 땡

Outside was a whole **battlefield so I bring out the chopper**

Every night **I fight myself** inside me

My heart pounds, and my colleagues **stab me in the back**

**These words are not a wordplay,**

**it just a warplay the world plays**

**We just fight again like soldiers errday**

Yehh I bet right when I bet my life on the beats

[Awakening](#)

[LISTEN>](#)

**Develops a metaphor** throughout the whole song. Other examples are *Singularity*, *Magic Shop*, *134340*

어머니는 바다가 푸르다 하셨어

멀리 힘껏 니 목소릴 내라 하셨어

그런데 어떡하죠

여긴 너무 깜깜하고

온통 다른 말을 하는 다른 고래들 뿐인

Mom said that the ocean is blue

She told me to raise my voice with all my strength to reach farther

But what should I do?

This place is too dark

and full of other whales that speak other languages

[Whalien 52](#) uses the 52-hertz whale to express loneliness and the fear that nobody is listening.

[LISTEN>](#)

Word Meaning Semantics

## Resemantization:

process through which a new meaning is assigned to an existing word in a language (Castañeda et al., 2019)

B/M

Starting from the song [Sea](#), the words “sea/ocean” had the added meaning of success as musicians, and “desert” as its absence.

*Ocean, desert, the world, everything is the same thing*

*Different name*

*I see ocean I see desert I see the world*

*Everything is the same thing but with different name*

*It's life again*

[Sea](#)

모든 빛이 침묵하는 바다

Sea where all light sinks into silence

길 잃은 내 발목을 또 잡아

It again seizes my ankle that lost the path

어떤 소리도 들리지 않아

No sound can reach me

(...)

홀린 듯 천천히 가라앉아

As if I'm bewitched, I slowly sink down,

몸부림쳐봐도 사방이 바닥

Though I try struggling, I'm at the bottom of the sea

[Black Swan](#) [LISTEN>](#)

The graphic representation of a sound in a language.

“The smallest functional unit of a writing system”  
(Coulmas, 1996)

Phoneme (sound)

≠

Grapheme (letter)

Different letters can be used  
for the same sound

Different sounds can be represented  
by the same letter/s

사람을 사랑 으로 만들 사람

that you are the one who will make a **person** into a **love**  
널 알기 전 내 심장은 온통 직선뿐이던 거야

before knowing you, my heart was filled with **straight lines only**

the consonant ㅁ ( phoneme /m/) is comprised of four straight lines.

그 위에 살짝 앉음 하트가 돼

When we gently sit on it [o in 랑], it becomes a heart

[Trivia: Love](#) [LISTEN>](#)

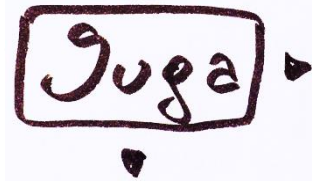
# Pragmatics

Language use in context

The meaning linguistic utterances can have beyond their literal one  
(Woensdregt & Smith, 2017)

Includes the use of Prosodic elements (intonation, tone, stress, rhythm)

and **non-lexical speech sounds** or **liminal signs** (Dingemanse, 2020) .



Suga is a storyteller that uses non-lexical speech sounds (like coughs, *hms*, and prosodic elements (like changes in tone) to convey meaning.

Those non-lexical elements are not adlibs, but part of the lyrics and accounted for in the metric/rhyme

Use of non-linguistic sounds and vocalizations:

[Intro: Nevermind](#) [LISTEN>](#)

Ending “Yah” in **BTS Cypher PT2:Triptych** [LISTEN>](#)

Woo 매일 설렜지 내가 어디까지 갈지  
정신없이 달리다 보니 어느새 여기까지 왔지  
**Yeah 음** 발밑의 그림자  
고개 숙여보니 더 커졌잖아

Woo, every day, I was excited about how far I'd go  
I was running frantically and somehow reached here  
**Yeah, hmm**, the shadow at my feet  
Looking down, it's gotten even bigger

[Interlude: Shadow](#): notice how the “hm” is part of the lyrics [LISTEN>](#)

Using his voice to convey different emotions, attitudes and relationships to the poetic “you” of the song.

(안녕?) **안녕**  
어떻게 지내? **나는 뭐 잘 지내**  
왠지 터질듯한 내 심장과는 달리

(Hello?) **Hello**  
How are you? **I'm... well, doing fine**  
In contrast to my heart that feels like it's about to explode,

[134340](#), in which he uses tone to convey an awkward meeting between ex lovers [LISTEN>](#)

Embodying different characters in his rap:

“내가 떠나도 걱정은 하지 마  
넌 스스로 잘 해낼 테니까  
널 처음 만났던 그때가 생각나  
어느새 훌쩍 커버렸네 니가  
우리 관계는 마침표를 찍지만  
절대 내게 미안해 하지 마  
어떤 형태로든 날 다시 만나게 될 거야  
그때 반갑게 다시 맞아줘”

“Don't worry even if I leave  
because you'll do well on your own  
I remember when I first met you  
Without my noticing, you grew up so much  
Although we're putting an end to our relationship  
Don't ever feel sorry for me  
You'll see me again in any form  
Greet me again then”

[First Love](#) in which he raps as his piano. [LISTEN>](#)

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## FULL PLAYLIST OF SONGS REFERENCED

Stream Dynamite! Luv, amí.

