

Learn Korean Ep. 107: 아니고 vs 말고

아니고 and 말고 can both translate as “not,” and therefore are often confused – but each is used in a different situation and the two words can’t be swapped.

아니고 and 말고

아니고 comes from the **descriptive verb** 아니다 [“to not be”]. It’s the opposite of 이다 [“to be”].

말고 comes from the **action verb** 말다 [“to stop,” “to not do something”]. You’ll often find 말다 being used in the ~지 말다 form when telling someone “Don’t (do something).” For example, it’s the same form used in the expression 하지 마세요 (“Don’t do it.”).

Example 1

Only one of these sentences is correct:

이거 **말고** 그거 주세요.

이거 **아니고** 그거 주세요.

Not this, give me that please.

Please give me that, not this.

말고 comes from 말다 and means “don’t do... but...” In the first sentence, 이거 말고 means “don’t do this, but 그거 주세요 (“please give me that.”).” This sounds natural, because you’re telling the other person, “No, not this thing. Give me that.” Or it can be like saying, “Don’t do this, but give me that.” The first sentence is correct.

아니고 comes from 아니다 and means “it’s not, and...” So in this sentence 이거 아니고 would mean “It’s not that, and...” This would be like telling someone, “It’s not this. Give me that.” This would sound awkward, because the two parts of the sentence sound unrelated.

Example 2

Only one of these sentences is correct:

영국 사람이 **아니고** 미국 사람이에요.
영국 사람 **말고** 미국 사람이에요.
I'm not British, but I'm American.

The first sentence means "I am not a British person," because it uses **아니고** from **아니다**.

The second sentence means "Don't a British person," so unless you're asking for someone to hand over a different person (... maybe your friend set you up on a blind date with a British person?), this sentence is already wrong and sounds awkward.

Example 3

Both of these examples are correct.

물이 **아니고** 사이다예요.
It's not water, it's soda.
It's soda, not water.

물 **말고** 사이다를 주세요.
Don't give me water, give me soda.
Give me soda, not water.

Conclusion

Here's another tip. Think of 아니고 as meaning this: "You're wrong, it's not that." And think of 말고 as meaning this: "No, stop. Don't do that. Let's ignore that."

Also, remember to use the Subject Marker (이/가) together with 아니다, but not with 말다.

If you have any questions, feel free to send me a message through my web site or on YouTube. Good luck in your studies!

