

Learn Korean Ep. 111: Colors

The Korean word for "color" is 색 or 색깔 – either is fine.

In order to properly learn about colors in Korean, we first have to talk about nouns, adjectives, and even *verbs*.

Colors in English

English colors are simple; colors can be used in a sentence as both an adjective (describing a noun) and as a noun (like an object or a "thing").

For example, "red" can be used as an adjective ("red car") or a noun ("I like red.")

If you learn the name of a color in English, you can use it anywhere – and there's only one word to memorize. "Red" is just "red." "Dark red" is just "dark red."

Color Verbs in Korean

Some colors you'll find in Korean are nouns, while others are actually verbs (you'll see those verbs conjugated into adjectives too).

First, let's look at a color that's a verb – specifically, a descriptive verb (a verb that is used to describe something).

빨강다 means "to be red," and it's a (descriptive) verb.

Since it's a verb, if we want to say "red car" then we'll need to get the adjective "red." To do that we can conjugate 빨강다 as 빨간 – this is now an adjective.

빨간 차
"red car"

Or we can make it into a complete sentence by conjugating 이다 ("to be") at the end.

빨간 차예요.
"It's a red car."

But here, some people may wonder "Can I just learn 빨간 instead of 빨강다?" No, because you might not always want to conjugate 빨강다 as 빨간. You might want to use it as an adjective (빨간), but other times you might want to use it at the end of a sentence to describe something that you're talking about.

For example, instead of just saying 빨간 차 ("red car"), you might want to say this.

차가 빨개요.
"The car is red."

Or you might want to conjugate 빨강다 to the past tense (among other conjugations).

차가 빨갼어요.
"The car was red."

빨강다 conjugates in the 요 form as 빨개(요). Note this conjugation – color descriptive verbs will end with ㅎ when conjugating, and verbs with ㅎ will add the vowel sound ㅏ to the end when conjugating the 요 form (such as in 빨개요).

Because it depends on how you want to use it, it's important to learn the original descriptive verb for each color.

Color Nouns in Korean

Not all colors in Korean are descriptive verbs, and many are just nouns (which are easier to use and don't need to conjugate).

초록색 means "green" and it's a noun. Here's an example.

초록색을 좋아해요.
"I like green."

Color nouns in Korean can also be used as adjectives, or at the end of sentences, but without any changes or conjugating.

초록색 차
"green car"

차가 초록색이에요.
"The car is green."

Common Colors in Korean

Let's learn some of the most common colors in Korean. If a definition starts with "to be" or ends with ~다 you can know that it's a descriptive verb and will (probably) need to be conjugated. If a word ends with 색 then you can know that it's a noun, and can be used as-is.

빨강다 "to be red"

초록색 "green"

파랑다 "to be blue"

주황색 "orange"

노랑다 "to be yellow"

보라색 "purple"

하얗다 "to be white"

회색 "gray"

갈색 "brown"

In Korean there can also be more than one way to say each color. I don't mean "blue," "light blue," and "dark blue." I mean "blue" as a noun, adjective, or descriptive verb.

You can make another form for each descriptive verb color by taking the verb and conjugating it to an adjective, and then attaching 색 – now you have a noun form of the descriptive verb which can be used anywhere.

For example, 빨강다 can become 빨간 (which is only an adjective), or 빨간색 (which is a noun). 빨간색 can therefore be used as a noun, or as an adjective as we've learned.

빨간색을 안 좋아해요.

"I don't like red."

We can also use 빨간색 just like 빨간, since 빨간색 is a noun – both ways are natural and common.

빨간 차

빨간색 차

"red car"

Some of you might be wondering "Can we change every descriptive verb into a noun by adding 색, and just ignore the original descriptive verb form? These seem much easier to work with." Yes, you can do that when making your own sentences, and this is useful especially if you're still a beginner. It's also less stressful if you're learning about colors for your first time. And best of all, you won't be incorrect.

However, you will still see and hear all of the forms used (빨강다, 빨간, 빨간색, and others), so you should still be aware the descriptive verb forms exist and know how to use them – even if you don't use them yourself yet. This way, if someone says 파래요 you can know that it came from 파랗다, without having to memorize a new conjugation separately for every descriptive verb color.

Example Sentences

파란 새가 아주 예뻐요.

"The blue bird is very pretty."

저의 머리가 까맣요.

"My hair is black."

저는 까만 머리가 좋아요.

"I like black hair."

하얀색 티셔츠를 사고 싶어요.

"I want to buy a white T-shirt."

노란 병아리가 5 마리 있어요.

"There are 5 yellow chicks."

원숭이 엉덩이는 빨개요.

"The monkey's butt is red."

우리 엄마 손은 작고 하얘요.

"My mom's hands are small and white."

초록색 가방을 찾고 있어요.

"I'm looking for a green bag."

For the color black, there are a few options. 까맣다 ("to be black") conjugates to 까만 or 까만색 – this is often used for natural things such as animals (black cat) or nature (black sky). 검정색 ("black") is another possibility – this is often used for inanimate black things (black car). However, both colors are used commonly for any situation, so learn both.

Conclusion

This is not a complete list of all the colors in Korean – there are more words for each color, and more colors. Hopefully this will give you a good introduction to how colors work, so you can learn new ones on your own more easily.

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

