

Learn Korean Ep. 115: 다 못해 “Extreme”

다 못해 is an intermediate level grammar form, so I only recommend learning it if you can already hold a full conversation (but don't let me tell you what to do).

It's used to show that something is extreme, but its translation can vary depending on the sentence it's used in.

Present Tense Verb Stem + 다 못해

다 못해 is used to show that what comes before it is extreme (an action or a situation) or an extreme amount, and therefore can't go on any longer or can't maintain something any longer. The key to understanding this form is that it's only used when talking about *extremes*.

To use this form, take a **present tense verb stem** and attach 다 못해, then complete the rest of the sentence. 다 못해 is a sentence connector, and therefore isn't used at the end of a sentence by itself.

Note that a present tense verb stem with 다 will appear the exact same as a regular unconjugated verb.

For example, 하다 (“to do”) will become 하다 못해, and 먹다 (“to eat”) will become 먹다 못해.

Here are some example sentences.

너무 행복하다 못해 눈물이 났어요.

I was so happy that I cried.

When used with a descriptive verb you can think of the 다 못해 form as having a similar meaning as the adverb 너무 (“so much,” “too,” “too much”) with the grammar form ~서 (showing a cause and effect). Here, saying 행복하다 못해 is like saying 너무 행복해서 – “because I am too happy....” Therefore, saying 행복하다 못해 means that you were so happy, that it was extreme, and that you couldn't go on any longer (so you cried).

개미를 괴롭히는 아이들을 보다 못해 소리를 질렀어요.

I couldn't stand looking at the kids torturing the ants, so I yelled at them.

When used with an action verb you can think of the 다 못해 form as meaning that you can no longer do that verb, or that it's impossible to keep doing that verb – because it is extreme.

이 사탕은 너무 달다 못해 입이 아파요.

This candy is so sweet, my mouth hurts.

Here, 달다 못해 means that the candy is sweet – to an extreme amount – and that you can no longer keep eating it and your mouth even hurts.

추위를 참다 못해 해외 여행을 갔어요.

I couldn't stand the extreme cold, so I went on a trip abroad.

Here, 참다 못해 means that you can no longer endure the cold, and that it's extreme – so much that you left the country to go on a trip abroad.

배가 고프다 못해 기절할 것 같아요.

I'm so hungry, I think I'm going to faint.

Here, 배가 고프다 못해 means that you're so (extremely) hungry and it can't go on any longer, so you think you're going to faint.

친구들이랑 시험 공부로 밤을 새우다 못해 다 같이 좀비가 되어 버렸어요. I stayed up all night with my friends studying for tests (and we can't stay up any longer), and we all became zombies.

Here, 밤(을) 새우다 ("to stay up all night") with 다 못해 means that you can no longer keep staying up – since you stayed up all night – and that staying awake all night was extreme. Therefore, you became a sleep deprived zombie.

어려운 한국어 문법을 공부하다 못해 집 밖으로 뛰어 나갔어요.

I was studying difficult Korean grammar (and I couldn't any longer), and I ran outside my house.

Here, 공부하다 못해 means you studied an extreme amount, and were no longer able to keep studying. Therefore, you ran outside of your mouth.

그 친구는 PC 방을 거의 매일 가다 못해 이제는 거기서 살다시피 하고 있어요.

That friend goes to the internet café so much, nearly every day, and now he's almost living there.

Here, 가다 못해 means that your friend goes to the internet café so much, that it's extreme – so extreme that it can't continue any longer. In fact, it's like he's almost living there. For a review of 다시피 하다 (here, as 살다시피 하고 있어요), check out "Learn Korean Ep. 114."

This doesn't mean that your friend is unable to go the internet café anymore, but just that they're going there so much that it's an extreme amount.

Advanced Notes

Here are some tips for more advanced learners.

1) This 다 못해 form is originally from 다(가) 못하여 – or 다(가) 못해 in more modern usage.

That means the literal meaning of this form is **Verb + 다(가)**, or “while (doing verb)” something interrupted (doing verb). This 다(가) form is also used as another way to say “while” – literally, “while something (A) happens, something else (B) interrupts A, therefore A doesn’t complete.)

Therefore, you can think of 다 못해 as literally meaning “while something happens or while something is a certain way, something else interrupts that, and it can no longer continue (못해 ‘can’t’).” So 참다 못해 can become “while enduring, something interrupts the act of enduring, and (I) can no longer do it anymore (못해)... therefore...”

2) Also note that this form is most often 다 못해, but you might also come across 다 못한 (as an adjective) when it’s attached to an action verb and comes before a noun. This usage is much less common. It can be used this way when describing a noun, and has the same meaning.

3) And finally, with 생각(을) 하다 (“to think”), you can use either 생각하다 못해 or just 생각다 못해 – both are natural and correct.

Conclusion

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

