

Learn Korean Ep. 127: 뿐이다 & 따름이다 “Only”

There are many ways to translate “only” depending on the context, as well as many ways to use each of them. Before starting this lesson, make sure you’re already familiar with using the particles **만** and **밖에**.

Noun + 뿐이다

To make this form, attach **뿐** directly after a noun (without a space), and then conjugate **이다**.

This form **뿐이다** is used to add more *emphasis* to the meaning of “only” after a noun. You can think of **뿐이다** in this way as meaning “To be nothing but (noun).”

Note that you wouldn’t simply emphasize a short sentence that only contained one noun and **뿐**; there should be a real reason why you’re emphasizing something within a sentence – so think longer sentences, and not shorter ones when using this form. Here’s an example.

필통에 있는 건 지우개뿐이에요.

“The only thing at all that’s in my pencil case is an eraser.”

Simply saying **지우개뿐이에요**, while grammatically correct, sounds awkward by itself. This is because there’s no reason to be emphasizing the eraser on its own.

Here are two more examples.

우리에게 남은 것은 시간뿐이에요.

“The only thing that we have left is time, and nothing else.”

숙제를 다 한 건 철수뿐이었어요.

“It was only Chul-soo, and nobody else, who did all of the homework.”

Verb Stem + (을/ㄹ) 뿐이다

To make this form, take a verb stem and attach 을 if it ends in a *consonant*, or ㄹ if it ends in a *vowel*. Remember that some verbs also have different conjugation rules (e.g. 살다 will become 살). This verb stem can also be in the past tense (e.g. 하다 can become 할 or 했을). Finally add a space followed by 뿐, and conjugate 이다.

This form 뿐이다 is also used to add more *emphasis* to the meaning of "only" in the sentence; you can think of this meaning as similar to the feeling of the adverb 그냥, meaning "just" or "only." By using the form 뿐이다, the speaker is saying that there's only one *option* to choose from (Action Verbs), or only one way *to be* (Descriptive Verbs).

그저 기다릴 뿐이다.

"All I do is wait (and nothing else)."

그저 ("only") is an adverb, and means that you're not doing anything else, except only whatever verb that comes after it.

저는 들은 대로 말했을 뿐이에요.

"All I said was just what I had heard."

잠을 못 자서 피곤할 뿐이에요.

"I couldn't sleep, so all I am is tired."

In addition, sentences using this 뿐이다 form can also use the particle 만 (after a noun) to add even more emphasis. Here's just one example.

손님이 몇 명이 올지 대략적으로만 알 뿐이에요.

"All I have is just a rough guess of how many customers will come (here)."

There's one more thing you should know about this form when it's used with the verb 이다. This will become 일 뿐이다, and is attached directly after a noun.

우리는 친구일 뿐이에요.

"We are *only* friends."

일 뿐이다 can be used in a *negative* way, almost as if you're complaining about something being nothing more than a noun. It's similar to saying 그냥 before the noun. 그냥 친구예요 ("We're just friends, and not a couple or anything else besides friends.").

So if you wanted to say that a noun is "only" something, and you don't want it to sound negative or like you're complaining about it, just use 뿐이다 instead, or even just use the adverb 그냥. Here's an example.

내가 원하는 게 너뿐이야.

"All that I want is you (and no one else)."

Verb Stem + (을/ㄹ) 따름이다

To use this form, take a verb stem and attach 을 or ㄹ as usual. Then add 따름, and conjugate 이다.

The 따름이다 form has the same meaning and usage as 뿐이다, but sounds more formal – and is therefore less commonly used.

In addition, while the literal meaning and usage of this form is the same as 뿐이다, it tends to get used in formal situations where the speaker is expressing their emotions about something (including hope, regret, surprise, etc.). For example, you might express something like "I only feel grateful/sorry" (e.g. 감사할 따름입니다).

Besides this, it is interchangeable in any sentence with 뿐이다 when used with a verb.

이걸 혼자 다 했다니 놀라울 따름이네요.

"I have nothing but surprise to find out that you did all of this by yourself."

ADVANCED NOTES

오직

오직 can also optionally be added to a sentence (along with the particle 만) to add further emphasis to a sentence that contains the meaning of "only." This adds emphasis to the meaning of "only" right in the beginning of the sentence (before using another form such as 뿐이다 or 따름이다), and means "solely" or "only one (and no other)."

이건 오직 철수 씨만이 할 수 있는 일입니다.

"This is something that only Chul-soo and no one else can do."

In addition, you might find 뿐 used on its own without 이다. This can happen in the middle of a sentence (when a thought is incomplete), but not at the end of a sentence. The meaning of this form is the same, without the "to be" meaning that 이다 adds. Keep an eye open for it, but know that it will still use 이다 at the end of a sentence.

이름만 알 뿐, 아무것도 몰라요.

"I don't know anything besides only their name."

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!

