Learn Korean Ep. 4: "To be" and "To exist"

Of course "to be" and "to exist" are different verbs, but they're often confused by beginning students when learning Korean. In English we sometimes use the verb "to be" to mean "to exist," such as in the sentence "there **is** a book on the table." The "is" in that sentence comes from the verb "to be," but we understand it to mean "there exists" when we read it. In Korean, "to be" ("이다") and "to exist" ("있다") are two separate verbs entirely, so it's important to know when we're referring to something "being" (equaling something else) or "existing."

In this lesson we'll go over the differences between "이다," "to be," and "아니다," "to not be." We'll also cover "있다," "to exist," as well as its opposite, "없다," "to not exist."

이다 "to be"
아니다 "to not be"

"이다" means "to be," but you can also think of it as meaning "to be equal to." If you wanted to say "That is a cat," you would use "이다" because what you are really saying is "That is equal to a cat."

그 것은 고양이**예요**.
"That is a cat."

저는 미국 사람**이에요**.
"I am an American."

저는 좋은 학생**입니다**.
"I am a good student."

When using "이다," it attaches directly to the word it comes after, as you can see in the example sentences above.

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"아니다" means "to not be," and is therefore the opposite of "이다." While English simply turns words like "to be" or "to exist" negative by adding "not," Korean sometimes has separate words for them, as you'll see again when we go over "있다" and "없다." Because "아니다" is the opposite of "이다," you can also think of it meaning "to not be equal to."

그 것은 고양이**가 아니에요**.

"That <u>is not</u> a cat."

When using "아니다," the subject marker (이 when followed by a consonant, and 가 when followed by a vowel) comes after the noun you are describing (the subject marker may be left off in casual speech). "이다," however, does not use the subject marker.

난 바보 **아니야**!

"I <u>am not</u> stupid!"

"난" is an abbreviation of "나는." This sentence would be for casual situations only.

저는 미국 사람**이 아니에요**.

"I <u>am not</u> an American."

When using "아니다," there will be a space between itself and the word it comes after, as you can see in the example sentences above.

Common conjugations for "이다" and "아니다"

"이다"
- 입니다   (more polite)
- 입니까?   (more polite – as a question)
- 이에요   (polite – when following a consonant)
- 예요   (polite – when following a vowel)
- 이야   (casual – when following a consonant)
- 야   (casual – when following a vowel)

"아니다"
- 아닙니다   (more polite)

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- 아닙니까?   (more polite – as a question)
- 아니에요   (polite)
- 아니야   (casual)

Note that while "이다" has different conjugations depending on whether it follows a consonant or a vowel, "아니다" does not.

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있다 "to exist"
없다 "to not exist"

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Just as "이다" and "아니다" are opposites, "있다" and "없다" are also opposites.

Because "있다" means "to exist," it is commonly used to mean "to have," as in "I have money." "없다" is also commonly used to mean "to not have," as in "I do not have money."

When using either of these, it's most common to use the subject marker after what it is that you're saying exists or doesn't exist. It is also fine to use the topic marker (은 after a consonant and 는 after a vowel), though this usage is less common and has a slightly different meaning; I go over the differences between the subject marker and the topic marker in Episode 9, but for the time being just **use the subject marker with "있다" and "없다."**

저는 돈**이** 많이 **있어요**.
"I <u>have</u> a lot of money."
This seems to mean "As for me, there is a lot of money," though because "있다" and "없다" can mean "to have," this sentence would better translate to "I <u>have</u> a lot of money."
"많이" is an adverb that means "a lot (of)." An example would be the sentence, "많이 먹었어요!" – "I ate a lot!"

저는 돈**이** 많이 **없어요**.
"I <u>do not have</u> a lot of money."

저기 고양이**가 있어요**.

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"There is a cat there."
저기 means "there," as in "over there."

그는 학교에 **있다**.
"He is at school."
Although we're saying "is" in this sentence, what we mean is "exists," so "있다" is used in this sentence and not "이다." If we were to write this sentence using "이다," it would mean something like this: "He is equal to at school." Even if we remove "at" from that sentence, it is still incorrect.
"에" is a marker that shows where something or someone exists **at**. It is also used to mean **to**, as in "to a location" (e.g. "I go to school.") I'll go over this marker more in a later lesson.

그는 학교에 **없다**.
"He is not at school."
You can also think of this sentence as meaning "He does not exist at school."

깨끗한 옷**이** 하나도 **없어요**.
"I don't have even one clean article of clothing."
"깨끗하다" means "to be clean."
"옷" means "an article of clothing," or just "clothes."
"하나도" means "even one," since "하나" means "one" and "도" means "even" or "also."

일주일 뒤에 시험**이 있어요**.
"I have a test after a week."
"일주일" means "a week" or "one week."
"뒤" means "after," and is also used *after* the word you're referring to.
시험 means "a test."

그는 항상 학교에 **있는** 사람**이에요**.
"He is a person who is always at school."
Note that this sentence uses both "있다" and "이다."
"항상" is an adverb that means "always."
"있는" is just "있다" changed into a different form so it can be used to describe something or someone. Here, it's describing "a person" ("사람"). Changing verbs like this to describe

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other people and things is more of an advanced topic, and I'll go over it later in another lesson.

Common conjugations for "있다" and "없다"

"있다"
- 있습니다   (more polite – as a statement)
- 있습니까?   (more polite – as a question)
- 있어요   (polite)
- 있어   (casual)

"없다"
- 없습니다   (more polite – as a statement)
- 없습니까?   (more polite – as a question)
- 없어요   (polite)
- 없어   (casual)

Well, that's all for this lesson. Practice by making your own sentences using what we've gone over today. I hope this lesson could be useful in helping you to achieve your goals for learning the Korean language.

그럼, 다음에 또 봐!

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