

Learn Korean Ep. 70: Adjectives

An *adjective* in English, as many of you know, is a word used to *describe* a noun.

For example, you can have just "a house," or you can have "a big house," or "a small house" et cetera. House is the *noun* while **big** and **small** are *adjectives*.

In Korean, adjectives also come before the noun. Let's take a look at an example.

First we have just 집, for "a house." But we can add 큰 to the beginning and get "a big house" – 큰 집. Or "a small house" – 작은 집.

큰 here is an **adjective**, and 집 is a **noun**.

If this is your first time seeing adjectives, you might be thinking this to yourself:

"If I just learn a bunch of these adjectives, like 큰 or 작은, and a bunch of nouns like 집, then I'll be fine."

But actually, these adjectives aren't quite what they seem. In Korean, adjectives like these actually originally come from **verbs**. Specifically, these are called "descriptive verbs," because they're verbs which are used for *describing* things, and can be changed into adjectives. This is different from an action verb such as "to do" or "to eat," which are actions. So in Korean, a *verb can become an adjective*.

Verb Stem + ㄴ/은

The verb for "to be big" is 크다. To change "to be big" into an adjective, "big," we'll first need to remove the 다 at the end, just like when conjugating any verb.

크다 → 크

After removing the **다**, take a look at the stem that's left over – here we just have **크**. If the stem ends in a **vowel**, you'll want to add just a **니은** to the end, and if the stem ends in a **consonant**, you'll add **은** to the end.

큰

Since **크** ends in the — vowel, we'll add **ㄴ**, so it becomes **큰**. Now we can use the verb “to be big” as an adjective – “big.”

The same goes for the verb “to be small” – **작다**.

작다 → 작

After removing the **다** we're left with **작**, which ends in a *consonant*, so we'll add **은** to the end and get **작은** – the adjective for “small.”

작은

After we've made the adjectives for these verbs, we can stick them before any noun we'd like. Previously we used **집**, but you can use any noun, such as **머리** for “head.” You can have **큰 머리** or **작은 머리**, “a big head” or “a small head,” or any noun you'd like.

You need to know how to conjugate verbs into adjectives because verbs can be used in many ways. If you were to only memorize **큰** and **작은** but not memorize **크다** and **작다**, then you'd be unable to use **크다** and **작다** for anything. Basically, you need to know how to conjugate verbs so that you'll have a larger vocabulary without having to memorize thousands of extra combinations. It might seem a pain at first, but once you've practiced it a bit, conjugating a verb into an adjective will become much easier, and you won't have to think about it.

철수 씨는 **친절한** 사람이에요.
“Chul-soo is a nice person.”

정말 **좋은** 생각입니다.

"That's a really good idea."

So now we know how to change a descriptive verb which has a stem ending in a vowel, such as 크다, and also ones that end in a consonant, such as 작다. But there are a few other types of verbs and they'll conjugate into adjectives differently.

Verb Stems Ending in ㅁ

After removing the 다 at the end of a *descriptive verb*, if the stem ends in a single ㅁ, it'll conjugate differently. To conjugate it as an adjective, first remove the ㅁ, then add the syllable 우. Finally, add ㄴ to the bottom.

Let's take a look at the verb 어렵다, "to be difficult."

어렵다 → 어렵

First remove the 다.

어렵 → 어려

Then remove the ㅁ.

어려 + 우 → 어려우

Then add the syllable 우.

어려우 + ㄴ → 어려운

Then add ㄴ to the bottom.

어제 **어려운** 시험을 봤어요.

"Yesterday I had a difficult test."

It seems like a lot of steps, but when you've adjusted to it, all you're doing is removing the ㅁ and adding 운 to the end. So once you've had some practice, you'll be able to quickly go from 어렵다 to 어려운.

Verb Stems Ending in ㄹ

If the verb stem ends in ㄹ, it's pretty simple to change it to an adjective. Just remove the ㄹ at the bottom, and replace it with ㄴ.

Let's take a look at the descriptive verb 멀다, "to be far," or "to be distant."

멀다 – ㄹ → 머

First take away the ㄹ.

머 + ㄴ → 먼

Then add ㄴ, and you're done.

먼 나라로 여행가고 싶어요.

"I want to travel to a distant country."

Remember that this is only for verb stems that end in a *single* ㅍ, and not a double one, such as the descriptive verb 예쁘다, "to be pretty," which simply becomes 예쁜.

~있다

If the descriptive verb ends in 있다, such as 맛이 있다, "to be delicious," it also conjugates differently.

있다 will become 있는.

맛(이) 있다 → 맛(이) 있는

So the verb 맛이 있다 will become 맛이 있는.

맛있는 음식을 먹고 싶어요.

"I want to eat delicious food."

Or for a more natural translation, "I want to eat something good."

However, and this is a bit technical, but know that the verb 있다, which means “to exist,” is actually not a descriptive verb, but is an **action verb**. I’ve included it in this lesson though since it does appear inside of many descriptive verbs.

Conclusion

You’ll use these rules often in Korean, so take note of them and practice as much as possible.

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

