

Learn Korean Ep. 95: Causative Verbs

This lesson will cover “causative verbs” and how to use them. Don’t be scared by hearing the word “causative.” A causative verb is just a verb that *causes* someone else (or something else) to do something.

In fact, this isn’t a new concept. In a previous episode we already learned how to “cause” someone to do something, using this form:

Verb Stem + 게 하다 (or 만들다)

To make the sentence, “I made my friend angry,” we can say either of these sentences:

제 친구를 화나게 했어요.
제 친구를 화나게 만들었어요.

Here, we’re *causing* the friend to be angry. Causative verbs just give us an easier way to do this same thing, without using that form. And causative verbs will help your Korean to sound more natural, because their literal meaning is different – we’ll talk about this.

First, here’s another example using the previous grammar form.

저는 철수가 일어나게 만들었어요.
“I made Chul-soo wake up.”

This sentence makes perfect sense, but the sentence sounds a bit boring and literal. There is a more natural way that we could say this sentence in Korean... but actually there’s even a more natural way we could say this in English too. How about instead of making him wake up, we just “wake” him up? The sentence “I woke Chul-soo up” would have practically the same meaning, but would sound a lot more natural in both English and Korean. This is an example of a causative verb that we can use in Korean. Here it is:

깨우다 “to wake (someone) up”

And when we use causative verbs, we don't need any special grammar forms. They can be used more simply. The previous sentence can be translated like this:

저는 철수를 깨웠어요.
"I woke up Chul-soo."

This sentence is much shorter, and more natural. It's also simpler to make because we didn't need the previous grammar form.

Now you might be wondering if you have to learn a new causative verb for every Korean verb. Fortunately, the answer is "no." There are only a handful of commonly used causative verbs that you should learn right away. The rest you can learn through conversation practice and regular exposure. I'll talk about why this is in a bit.

Here are 10 common causative verbs.

먹이다 → "to feed" ("to make someone eat")

This comes from 먹다 ("to eat").

죽이다 → "to kill" ("to make someone die")

This comes from 죽다 ("to die").

깨우다 → "to wake up" ("to make someone wake up")

This comes from 깨다 ("to wake oneself up").

앉히다 → "to seat" ("to make someone sit down")

This comes from 앉다 ("to sit down").

울리다 → "to make (someone) cry"

This comes from 울다 ("to cry").

낮추다 → "to lower"

This comes from 낮다 ("to be low").

높이다 → “to raise”

This comes from 높다 (“to be high”).

태우다 → “to give (someone) a ride”

This comes from 타다 (“to ride [a vehicle]”).

알리다 → “to inform” (“to make someone know”)

This comes from 알다 (“to know”). This is also where the verb 알려주다 (“to tell”) comes from.

시키다 → “to force” (“to make someone do”)

This is the causative form of the regular action verb 하다 (“to do”). You can use this verb instead of 하게 하다 or 하게 만들다. For example, instead of saying 일하게 만들었어요 (“I made someone work.”) you can say 일을 시켰어요.

Note about Causative Verbs

If the concept of “causative verbs” confuses you, don’t think of these as being *causative verbs* at all. Instead, just memorize them the same way you’d memorize any verbs. For example, just memorize 죽이다 as “to kill,” 높이다 as “to raise,” and so forth.

Now let’s talk more about how to use causative verbs. Let’s make the sentence “I made Chul-soo work.” First, here is how we can say it *without* using causative verbs:

저는 철수가 일하게 만들었어요.

And here’s how we can say it with a causative verb.

저는 철수에게 일을 시켰어요.

Notice how the sentence using a causative verb (here, 시키다) also uses 에게 instead of the Subject Marker (이/가) after 철수. I want to explain why this is. I should note that this might

seem complicated, but it is interesting and worth learning in order to better understand exactly how causative verbs work and how to use them.

Let's look at the literal meaning of each sentence. The first sentence (저는 철수가 일하게 만들었어요) literally means "I made it so that Chul-soo works" or "I made things so that Chul-soo works." It means that you are doing something (what it is isn't stated) in order to cause the situation to be so that Chul-soo works. We use the Subject Marker (이/가) after 철수 because he is the person who we are making do the work. This is what the 게 하다 or 게 만들다 forms literally mean. More naturally translated, we would just say "I made Chul-soo work."

Causative verbs don't translate in that way. The second sentence (저는 철수에게 일을 시켰어요) literally means "I forced the work to Chul-soo." Here, we mark work (일) with the Object Marker (을/를) because that shows what it is that we're forcing. And we mark 철수 with 에게 because he is the person we are forcing that work *to*. You'll often see 에게 used with causative verbs for this reason.

Here are two more examples:

저는 철수가 빵을 먹게 만들었어요.

"I made Chul-soo eat bread."

저는 철수에게 빵을 먹였어요.

"I fed bread to Chul-soo."

The first sentence literally means "I *made things so that* Chul-soo eats bread." The second sentence literally means "I fed bread *to* Chul-soo." This is why it can be simpler to memorize causative verbs the same way as any other verb – because here, 먹이다 translates as "feed" or "make someone eat." 빵을 먹였어요 means "I fed bread" or "I made someone eat bread." Causatives are also easier to use because of this, so I recommend using them whenever possible.

Advanced Notes

시키다 can also be used in one more way – when ordering *food* (and only food). You can translate 시키다 as “to order” when you’re ordering food for *delivery*. In this way, it can be used in the same way as 주문(을) 하다 (“to order”).

Recognizing Causative Verbs

Memorize the sounds 이히리기우구추 for easily recognizing causative verbs. These are the 7 sounds that you will find in causative verbs. For example, 먹이다, 앉히다, 올리다, 웃기다, 태우다, and 낮추다. Of these 7, 구 is rarely used.

에게 and 에

When what you are causing to do is not a person, but an *object*, use 에 instead of에게.

More Causative Verbs

Here are a few more useful and common causative verbs:

재우다 → “to put someone to sleep.” This comes from 자다 (“to sleep”).

웃기다 → “to make someone laugh.” This comes from 웃다 (“to laugh”). This is also used simply to mean “to be hilarious” or “to be laughably funny.” A funny joke can be 웃기다.

입히다 → “to dress.” This comes from 입다 (“to wear”). You can use this whenever you’re dressing someone, or something (such as putting clothes on a doll).

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!

