

Learn Korean Ep. 97: Korean Numbers Part 1 (Sino-Korean)

The first thing to know about Korean numbers is that there are actually *two* separate number systems. For example, to count "1, 2, 3" you can either say "일, 이, 삼" or "하나, 둘, 셋." This lesson will cover the first of these two systems, which is called the Sino-Korean number system. *Sino* means that it's from Chinese, and these numbers originally came from Chinese characters (一, 二, 三, etc.). The second system we'll talk about in the next episode, and those are Pure Korean numbers.

Fortunately learning two separate number systems isn't as complicated as it might sound. In some ways learning two systems is simpler than learning only one. So let's learn the first 10 numbers in the Sino-Korean number system.

1 - 10

- 1 → 일
- 2 → 이
- 3 → 삼
- 4 → 사
- 5 → 오
- 6 → 육
- 7 → 칠
- 8 → 팔
- 9 → 구
- 10 → 십

Here's the easy part. Once you know these 10 numbers, you can use them create any number up to 99. To do this, it only takes simple math. For example, to make the number 11, simply break apart the two digits – 10 and 1.

The first digit is in the tens place, and is just 10, so we can say 십. The second digit is just 1, so we can say 일. 십 and 일 makes 십일, and now we have 11.

Let's make 59. The first digit in the tens place is 50. To make 50 we need a 5 and a 10, so 오 and 십. 오십 is 50. Then the next digit is just a 9, 구. So we put them together and get 오십구.

Advanced Notes: In addition to these, the number for 0 in the Sino-Korean number system is 영. You'll only need to use 영 when the number itself is simply 0, and not when a 0 appears somewhere in a number.

So let's review before we go further. Here are the numbers for 11 to 19.

11 – 19

11 → 십일

Note that 11 is just 십일, not 일십일 (one ten one). If the number is the same as the digit that it represents (here 10 is in the 10s place), then you don't have to say 1 before it. This will be important to know later as well for larger numbers.

12 → 십이

13 → 십삼

14 → 십사

15 → 십오

16 → 십육

16 is pronounced "심륙" (not 시륙). This is due to sound change rules, and the fact that these numbers come from Chinese.

Advanced Notes: *The in-depth reason is because 육 is originally from a Chinese character that is pronounced in Korean as 륵 when not at the start of a word, so the ㅛ at the bottom of 십 and ㅛ at the front of 륵 change to become ㅛ+ㄹ. You can review sound change rules in my "Learn Hangeul" series.*

17 → 십칠

18 → 십팔

18 can sound similar to a common Korean swear word, so be careful when pronouncing it. Make sure to say 8 as 팔 (using ㅍ as it's spelled) and **not** incorrectly as 발.

19 → 십구

Practice #1

Practice reading these numbers on your own first. The answers are at the bottom.

29

35

42

51

66

77

84

99

Answers: 이십구, 삼십오, 사십이, 오십일, 육십육, 칠십칠, 팔십사, 구십구

Note that 십육 in 66 is also pronounced as 심륙, even when another number comes in front of it such as in this example.

Over 100

To go further we'll need to know the number for the 100s place. We can't just say 십십 to make "10 10" equal 100. The number for 100 is 백.

So to say 100, you can just say 백 (not 일백, as we learned before). To say 110 you can say 백십 (100 + 10), and to say 111 you can say 백십일 (100 + 10 + 1).

Practice #2

Practice reading these numbers on your own first. The answers are at the bottom.

120

241

350

404

590
600
777
819
963

Answers: 백이십, 이백사십일, 삼백오십, 사백사, 오백구십, 육백, 칠백칠십칠, 팔백십구, 구백육십삼.

Note that 404 is just 사백사. Any time there's no digit in a place (such as here with no digit in the 10s place), we can just ignore it.

Over 1,000

The counter for 1,000 is 천. For example, 1,234 is 천이백삼십사.

Now, using 십 for 10, 백 for 100, and 천 for 1,000, we can count all the way to 9,999.

After 9,999 we can use the counter 만 (10,000). For example, 10,400 is 만사백.

Practice #3

Practice reading these numbers on your own first. The answers are at the bottom.

1010
2300
5802
8687
12050
15000
20000
33100
54321
99999

Answers: 천십, 이천삼백, 오천팔백이, 팔천육백팔십칠, 만이천오십, 만오천, 이만, 삼만삼천백, 오만사천삼백이십일, 구만구천구백구십구

To 100,000 and Beyond

In Korean there's no counter for a hundred thousand. Instead, 만 becomes 십만 (10 10 thousand). This continues. A million is 백만 (100 10 thousand) and ten million is 천만 (1,000 10 thousand). This is quite different from how numbers in English work.

You don't need to master Korean numbers overnight. In fact, practice with small numbers just to get the hang of it. Through practicing *how* the number system works, you'll be better able to create larger numbers. Practicing with larger numbers is just unnecessary and demotivating. Regardless, here are some larger numbers to look at for reference.

100,000 → 십만
200,230 → 이십만이백삼십
410,000 → 사십일만

Note that 410,000 must be 사십일만 and not just 사십만 because that would be 400 thousand (40 * 10,000).

401,000 → 사십만천
1,000,000 → 백만
3,000,050 → 삼백만오십
10,000,000 → 천만
90,800,000 → 구천팔십만

100,000,000 and More

Currently using 십, 백, 천, and 만 we can go up to 99,999,999. In order to go higher the next digit is 억, which is 100,000,000 (a hundred million). 억 works just like 만, becoming 십억 (a billion), 백억 (10 billion), and 천억 (100 billion).

Of course there are digits even higher than 억 (such as 조 for a trillion), but those won't be necessary for any sort of regular conversation (unless you're studying to become a financial analyst for a giant company, in which case you know where the Donate button on my web site is).

When to Use Sino-Korean Numbers

This system is used in many situations, the most common being counting *money*. Specifically, Sino-Korean numbers are used when counting Korean Won (원). At the time of this lesson, 1 US dollar is worth approximately 1,000 원, but it fluctuates daily.

To count currency in Won, simply put the amount before 원 using Sino-Korean numbers.

So to say a thousand 원 (approximately \$1), just say 천원. To say ten thousand 원 (approximately \$10), just say 만원.

Typical Korean yearly salaries will be expressed using increments of 천만원 (10s of thousands of dollars – 10,000,000 원). Higher paying jobs will be expressed using 억원 (100,000,000 원 or higher).

Conclusion

You don't need to master these numbers overnight. Take the time to practice them, and focus on smaller numbers when learning how the number system works. After time and with practice you'll slowly get faster at both understanding and saying these numbers for yourself.

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

