

Korean Topic Markers & Subject Markers



Today we are going to talk about **은/는**, the **topic markers**, and **이/가**, the **subject markers**. Topic markers and subject markers make the meaning of sentences clearer. English does not have this concept, so it might be tricky to understand at first.

That's why I'm here to help you. Let's get to know this concept!

Topic markers: -은/는

은/는 is placed right after a noun, which is the topic of the sentence. ‘은’ is used with the word ends with 받침, final consonant, while ‘는’ is used with the word ends with a vowel.

For example,

내 이름은 수현이에요. My name is Suhyun.

나는 수현이에요. I am Suhyun.

이름 ends with consonant ㅁ, so you put 은; 이름은, because it is hard to pronounce ‘는’ right after a consonant. Try yourself, 이름은 vs 이름는. Feel the difference?

On the other hand, 나 ends with just a vowel ㅏ, so 는 comes after; 나는.

Let’s get back to the meaning of 은/는. 은/는 indicates the topic of the sentence, shows you what is being talked about.

나는 한국인이에요. I am Korean.

내 책은 예뻐요. My book is pretty.

한국어는 재미있어요. Korean language is interesting.

나는 선생님이에요. I am a teacher.

이것은 내 스마트폰이에요. This is my smartphone.

When you say 은/는 in sentence, the listener will know what topic you are going to talk about even you don’t finish the sentence.

Also, 은/는 is used to express contrast or opposite meaning.

For example, if someone asks,

소주 좋아해요? Do you like soju?

And you answer,

맥주는 좋아해요. I (only) like beer. (I don’t like soju.)

It means you don’t like soju, and you only like beer.

Here’s another question:

한국에 간 적 있어요? Have you ever been to Korea?

서울은 가 봤어요. I have (only) been to Seoul.

It means you have been to Seoul in Korea, but not to Busan, Jeju, or Suwon.



Let's say you are going somewhere to eat with your friend. And your friend says
나 비빔밥 먹고 싶어. I want to eat Bibimbap.

But your answer is:

나는 불고기 먹고 싶어. I want to eat Bulgogi (not Bibimbap).

It means you don't want to eat Bibimbap, you want to eat Bulgogi.

As you can learn from these example, 은/는 is used to emphasize the contrast.

Subject markers: -이/가

As for the subject makers 이/가, they are placed right after a subject. Just like 은/는, 이 is used with the word ends with a consonant, 가 is used with the word ends with a vowel.

For example,

그 책 제목이 뭐예요? What is the title of that book?

취미가 뭐예요? What is your hobby?

이/가 shows you the direct subject of the verb used in the sentence, so usually 이/가 shows you the answer to who/what/which do or did it.

For example,

누가 이 김치 만들었어요? Who made this kimchi?

내가 만들었어요. I made it.

What is the verb in this sentence? It's make, 만들다. And who made 김치? "I" did it. So we use "가".

So we learned the basic concept of 은/는/이/가. But what if they are used in one sentence?

For example,

저는 일본인이 아니예요. I am not Japanese.

In this sentence, main topic is "I", so we use "는", which means "when it comes to me". And here comes the answer "what" that "am not Japanese", so we use "이".

Here is another example:

한국 음식은 떡볶이가 제일 맛있어요. As for Korean food, tteokbokki is the most delicious.

You are talking about "Korean food" in this sentence. So you use "은" to indicate main topic. And what is the most delicious food that you are saying? You are saying tteokbokki is the most delicious. So you use "가".

I hope this helps you to get a grasp on 은/는/이/가. We all know 'practice makes perfect', let's keep practicing the sentences we've learned today. And eventually you'll be able to understand the difference.

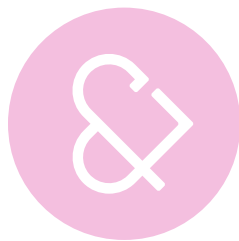


Practice

Please fill the blanks with a proper word.

1. 이 카페_____ 커피_____ 맛있어요.
2. 제니_____ 집에 같이 가자고 했어.
3. 내 강아지_____ 귀여워!
4. 오늘_____ 날씨가 좋다.
5. 나는 학생_____ 아니야.
6. 한국어 공부_____ 재미있어요.
7. 해물 먹을 수 있어요?
문어_____ 먹어요.
8. 그 책 살 거야?
책_____ 너무 비싸.

은 는 이 가



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