

LEVEL 3 LESSON 27

So far, through our previous lessons, we have introduced various sentence structures and verb endings. However, all of the sentence endings that we have introduced so far are in the **존댓말** politeness level.

There are three main levels of politeness/formality and now we think it is time for you to learn about the **반말** level (casual language).

What are the three main levels of politeness in Korean?

The politeness level is determined by the end of the verb.

Type 1. -습니다 [-nida] ending = honorific, most polite, most formal

Type 2. -(아/어/여)요 [-(a/eo/yeo)yo] ending = polite, natural, a bit formal

Type 3. -아/어/여 ending = casual, informal, intimate

Type 1 and 2 are called **존댓말** [jon-daet-mal] and Type 3 is called **반말** [ban-mal]. And in this lesson, we are looking at how to use **반말**, and when NOT to use it.

When do you use 반말?

Generally, **반말** is considered to be the most intimate and casual way of speaking with others in Korean. Therefore, it has no formality in it at all. You can only use **반말** to someone who is obviously and certainly younger than you, someone of the same age as you, or (if the other person is older than you) someone with whom you agreed to mutually use **반말**.

If you don't know the other person's age or social status, you should not use **반말** in any case. Once you know the other person's age and find out the he or she is younger than you, you can use **반말** but it is a nice gesture and also safe to ask the person first whether you can use **반말** to him or her.

Here are some common cases in which you can use 반말

1. You are much older than the other person and you know for sure that the other person won't get offended if you use **반말**.
2. You are older than the other person and you got his or her permission to use **반말**.

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3. You are of the same age as the other person and you got his or her permission to use 반말.
4. You are in elementary school, middle school or high school and you know that all your classmates are of the same age as you.
5. You are talking to yourself or writing in your diary.

Here are some common cases in which you SHOULD NOT use 반말

1. You know the other person only through work, and not personally.
2. You are older than the other person but he or she is your business client or customer.
3. You are older than the other person but you are talking to the person in an official environment such as seminars, lessons, etc.
4. You don't know the other person. You just met him/her.
5. You are younger than the other person. You never got permission from him/her that you can use 반말 to him/her.
6. You are the same age as the other person. But you are both adults now and you don't know him/her that well.
7. You are older than the other person but he or she is your boss or the spouse of your older sibling.
8. You are talking to a large group of people or in a video blog.

How do you ask for and give permission to speak in 반말?

There are certain expressions that people say in order to get permission from the other person.

If you are the older one:

1. 말 놔도 돼요?

[mal nwa-do dwae-yo?]

= Can I speak in 반말 with you?

** 말을 놓다 [ma-reul no-ta] literally means to "put down the language" or "lower the language".

2. 말 편하게 해도 돼요?

[mal pyeon-ha-ge hae-do dwae-yo?]

= Can I speak comfortably with you?

If you are the younger one:

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1. 말 놓으셔도 돼요.

[mal no-eu-syeo-do dwae-yo.]

= You can speak casually with me.

2. 말 편하게 하셔도 돼요.

[mal pyeon-ha-ge ha-syeo-do dwae-yo.]

= You can speak comfortably with me. / You can speak 반말 with me.

If you are of the same age as the other person:

1. 우리 말 놓을까요?

[u-ri mal no-eul-kka-yo?]

= Shall we speak in 반말 to each other?

2. 말 편하게 해도 되죠?

[mal pyeon-ha-ge hae-do doe-jyo?]

= I can talk in 반말 with you, right?

How to change 존댓말 to 반말

Present tense

-아/어/여요 ---> -아/어/여

-이에요 / -예요 --> -이야 / -야

Past tense

-았/었/였어요 ---> -았/었/였어

Future tense

-(으)ㄹ 거예요 --> -(으)ㄹ 거야

Examples

1. What is this?



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존댓말: 이거 뭐예요? [i-geo mwo-ye-yo?]

반말: 이거 뭐야? [i-geo mwo-ya?]

2. I'm going to work tomorrow.

존댓말: 내일 일할 거예요. [nae-il il-hal geo-ye-yo.]

반말: 내일 일할 거야. [nae-il il-hal geo-ya.]

3. I met a friend yesterday.

존댓말: 어제 친구 만났어요. [eo-je chin-gu man-na-sseo-yo.]

반말: 어제 친구 만났어. [eo-je chin-gu man-na-sseo.]

Calling names

When speaking in 존댓말, you add the word "씨" to address the person politely, as in 경은 씨, 현우 씨, 석진 씨, 소연 씨, and 현정 씨. Or you add the title of the person's job or status after that, like 경은 선생님, 현우 선생님, etc.

But when you speak in 반말, you just say the name of the person without "씨". But in order to make the name sound more natural when you are calling the person by name, you need to add "아" or "야" at the end. Names that end WITHOUT a consonant are followed by 야 [ya] and names that end WITH a consonant are followed by 아 [a].

Examples:

경은 ----> 경은아! (Hey Kyeong-eun!)

현우 ----> 현우야! (Hey Hyunwoo!)

Talking about names

For the same reason as above, when Korean people add the letter "이" after the names that end with a consonant, when they are talking about the person using their name. So names like 경은 and 석진 are followed by 이 in sentences.

If 현우 wants to talk about 석진 in a sentence, he says 석진's name as "석진이".

Ex) 석진이가 했어. [seok-jin-i-ga hae-sseo.] = Seokjin did it.

This is the basic information about 반말 and we will look at more expressions using 반말 in the following lesson.

