



Korean Ladder Study Note

여보 / 자기 / 오빠

How Korean Couples and Partners Address Each Other

Level	Topic	Focus
A2 · Elementary TOPIK 2	Honorifics Titles & Address	여보 / 자기 / 오빠 How Korean Couples and Partners Address Each Other

Study Links

Open this lesson on Korean Ladder

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-HON-ADR-002>

Watch the full video on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fi4FC-67dPk>

Visit koreanladder.com for all free lessons

<https://www.koreanladder.com>

Core Idea

My Korean friend called her boyfriend 오빠. I thought 오빠 meant older brother, so I got confused.

Good question. 오빠 can mean an older brother, but a woman can also use 오빠 for an older male partner or close older man.

Today's pattern is address terms between partners. We will separate married, dating, age-based, and nickname-style words.

여보 is usually for spouses, especially married couples. Dating couples may use it playfully, but it can sound like marriage role-play.

Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	여보, 우산 챙겼어요? —	Honey, did you take an umbrella?



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	네, 챙겼어요. 고마워요. —	Yes, I took one. Thank you.
Hana	자기야, 영화 몇 시에 시작해? —	Babe, what time does the movie start?
Junho	일곱 시에 시작해. —	It starts at seven.
Hana	오빠, 저녁 먹었어요? —	Oppa, did you eat dinner?
Junho	아직 안 먹었어요. 같이 먹을까요? —	Not yet. Shall we eat together?

Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
오빠 oppa	older brother for a woman; also an affectionate term for an older boyfriend or close older man	Good question. 오빠 can mean an older brother, but a woman can also use 오빠 for an older male partner or close older man.
여보 · 자기야 · 오빠 · 누나 · 애칭 yeobo · jagiya · oppa · nuna · aeching	honey · babe · oppa · nuna · nickname	Today's pattern is address terms between partners. We will separate married, dating, age-based, and nickname-style words.
여보, 잘 다녀와요 yeobo, jal danyeowayo	Honey, have a good day.	First, 여보 is very common between spouses. It sounds like honey or dear in a married-couple setting.
여보 yeobo	honey; dear, usually between spouses	여보 is usually for spouses, especially married couples. Dating couples may use it playfully, but it can sound like marriage role-play.
자기야 jagiya	babe; honey; sweetheart	자기 literally connects to self, but as an address term it means babe, honey, or sweetheart.
여자가 나이 많은 남자에게: 오빠 yeojaga nai maneun namja-ege: oppa	A woman to an older male: oppa	Yes. The key is who is speaking. A woman says 오빠 to an older male. A man does not call his girlfriend 오빠.
이름보다 관계가 먼저 들릴 때가 있어요 ireumboda gwangyega meonjeo deullil ttaega isseoyo	Sometimes the relationship is heard before the name.	Exactly. Korean address terms carry relationship information. English often just uses a name, honey, or babe.



Word	Meaning	Example
누나 nuna	older sister for a man; also an older girlfriend or close older woman	For an older girlfriend, a man may say 누나. But some couples prefer names or nicknames instead, depending on comfort.



Grammar / Structure Notes

오빠

오빠 — older brother for a woman; also an affectionate term for an older boyfriend or close older man

Meaning changes with relationship and context.

여보 · 자기야 · 오빠 · 누나 · 애칭

여보 · 자기야 · 오빠 · 누나 · 애칭 — honey · babe · oppa · nuna · nickname

Choose by relationship, age, and closeness.

여보, 잘 다녀와요

여보, + 잘 + 다녀와요 — Honey, have a good day.

First, 여보 is very common between spouses. It sounds like honey or dear in a married-couple setting.

여보

여보 — honey; dear, usually between spouses

Most natural in marriage.

자기야, 뭐해?

자기야, + 뭐 + 해? — Babe, what are you doing?

Exactly. Now 자기야 is more flexible. Married couples use it, but dating couples use it a lot too.

Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
자기야	jagiya
자기야, 영화 몇 시에 시작해?	jagiya, yeonghwa myeot si-e sijakhae?
오빠, 저녁 먹었어요?	oppa, jeonyeok meogeosseoyo?

Self-Check

- 1 Say 여보 / 자기 / 오빠 three times: slow, natural, then inside a short sentence.
- 2 Write one original sentence that was not in the video.
- 3 Rewatch the YouTube lesson and pause when the same pattern appears.

Related / Subsequent Studies



Lesson	Why study it next	Link
님 / 씨 Korean Titles and Address	A2 Honorifics: compare 님 / 씨 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-HON-ADR-001
귀하 / 귀사 / 본인 Formal Written Address in Letters	C1 Honorifics: compare 귀하 / 귀사 / 본인 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-C1-HON-ADR-003
그쪽 / 본인 / 당신 The 'You' Words That Can Backfire	B1 Honorifics: compare 그쪽 / 본인 / 당신 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B1-HON-ADR-002
부장님 / 과장님 / 대리님 Addressing Coworkers by Rank	B2 Honorifics: compare 부장님 / 과장님 / 대리님 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B2-HON-ADR-001

My Notes

Your ladder to fluent Korean. This PDF, the website, and the video lessons are free for personal study.