



Korean Ladder Study Note

는데 /

Setting Up Background and Soft Contrast

Level	Topic	Focus
B1 · Intermediate TOPIK 3	Grammar Connectors	는데 / Setting Up Background and Soft Contrast

Study Links

[Open this lesson on Korean Ladder](https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B1-GRAM-CON-001)

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B1-GRAM-CON-001>

[Watch the full video on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrbyZnvUQhc)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrbyZnvUQhc>

[Visit Korean Ladder for all free lessons](https://www.koreanladder.com)

<https://www.koreanladder.com>

Core Idea

Okay, real question. I keep seeing **는데** everywhere, but every time I look it up I get a different meaning. Sometimes 'but', sometimes nothing. What is going on?

Right, I thought it just meant 'but'. So I said **비싸는데** for 'it's expensive, but', and Hana made a little face.

그 마음 **알아요**. I understand that feeling. **는데** looks confusing because it is not really 'but'. **는데** sets up background, the situation before the main point.

정확해요. The English 'but' is too narrow. **는데** means something like 'given that' or 'as for the situation' — and then you add your point. Sometimes that point contrasts, sometimes it does not.

Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	어서 오세요. 뭐 드릴까요? —	Welcome. What can I get you?



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	아메리카노 마시고 싶은데, 따뜻한 거 있어요? —	I'd like an americano — do you have a hot one?
Hana	네, 있는데 조금만 기다려 주세요. —	Yes, we do — please wait just a moment.
Junho	괜찮아요. 안 바쁘데 천천히 하세요. —	It's fine. I'm not busy, so take your time.

Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
는데 neunde	sets up background, then continues	그 마음 알아요. I understand that feeling. 는데 looks confusing because it is not really 'but'. 는데 sets up background, the situation before the main point.
배경 + 는데 + 핵심 baebyeong + neunde + haeksim	background + 는데 + the main point	정확해요. The English 'but' is too narrow. 는데 means something like 'given that' or 'as for the situation' — and then you add your point. Sometimes that point contrasts, sometimes it does not.
먹는데 meogneunde	I'm eating, and (background)...	먼저 형태부터 봐요. First, the form. With action verbs and 있다 있다, you add 는데 to the stem. 가다 가다 becomes 가는데, 먹다 먹다 becomes 먹는데.
비싼데 bissande	it's expensive, and (background)...	그리고 형용사는 달라요. Adjectives are different. With a descriptive word, you use (으)ㄴ데 instead. 비싸다 비싸다, 'to be expensive', becomes 비싼데 — not 비싸는데.
동사 → 는데 / 형용사 → (으)ㄴ데 dongsa → neunde / hyeongyongsa → (eu)nde	verbs take 는데, adjectives take (으)ㄴ데	Oh, so that's why 비싸는데 sounded wrong. Adjectives take ㄴ데, verbs take 는데.
학생인데 haksaeng-inde	is a student, and (background)...	맞아요. And after a noun with 이다 이다, it becomes 인데. 학생이다 becomes 학생인데, 'is a student, and...'. 배경을 깔아줘요 baebyeong-eul kkalajwoyo
배경을 깔아줘요 baebyeong-eul kkalajwoyo	it lays down the background	여기서 는데는 '그런데' 같은 거예요. Here 는데 is just gentle context. The rain is the background; the umbrella question is the point. No strong 'but' at all.



Word	Meaning	Example
는데 (부드럽게) vs 지만 (분명하게) neunde (budeureopge) vs jiman (bunmyeonghage)	는데 = soft / conversational · 지만 = clear, firm 'but'	바로 그거예요. Exactly that. 는데 never shouts 'BUT'. It is soft. If you want a strong, clear 'but', you would use 지만 — 어렵지만 어렵지만. 는데 is the warmer, more conversational cousin.

KOREAN LADDER



Grammar / Structure Notes

는데

는데 — sets up background, then continues

Think: "the situation is X — and..."

배경 + 는데 + 핵심

배경 + 는데 + 핵심 — background + 는데 + the main point

The glue between a setup and a payoff

먹는데

먹 + 는데 — I'm eating, and (background)...

먼저 형태부터 봐요. First, the form. With action verbs and 있다 있다, you add 는데 to the stem. 가다 가다 becomes 가는데, 먹다 먹다 becomes 먹는데.

비싼데

비싸 + ㄴ데 — it's expensive, and (background)...

그리고 형용사는 달라요. Adjectives are different. With a descriptive word, you use (으)ㄴ데 instead. 비싸다 비싸다, 'to be expensive', becomes 비싼데 — not 비싸는데.

동사 → 는데 / 형용사 → (으)ㄴ데

동사 → 는데 / 형용사 → (으)ㄴ데 — verbs take 는데, adjectives take (으)ㄴ데

Oh, so that's why 비싸는데 sounded wrong. Adjectives take ㄴ데, verbs take 는데.

Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
시간 있는데 같이 갈래요?	sigan itneunde gachi gallaeyo?
좀 피곤한데 괜찮아요.	jom pigon-hande gwaenchanayo.
피곤한데 (O) / 피곤하는데 (X)	pigon-hande (O) / pigon-haneunde (X)

Self-Check

- 1 Say 는데 / 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
아서 / 어서 Saying 'Because' and 'And Then'	A2 Grammar: compare 아서 / 어서 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-CON-001
관형형 Turning Verbs into Modifiers	B1 Grammar: compare 관형형 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B1-GRAM-MOD-001
(으)ㄹ 거예요 The Korean Future Tense and Plans	A2 Grammar: compare (으)ㄹ 거예요 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-TNS-002
고 싶어요 Saying What You Want to Do	A2 Grammar: compare 고 싶어요 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-END-001

My Notes

Free Korean lessons, one rung at a time. This PDF, the website, and the video lessons are free for personal study.