



Korean Ladder Study Note

밖에 / 뿐

Two Ways to Say 'Only' and 'Nothing But'

Level	Topic	Focus
B1 · Intermediate TOPIK 3	Grammar Particles	밖에 / 뿐 Two Ways to Say 'Only' and 'Nothing But'

Study Links

Open this lesson on Korean Ladder

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B1-GRAM-PRT-002>

Watch the full video on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPJAX4-C3P8>

Visit koreanladder.com for all free lessons

<https://www.koreanladder.com>

Core Idea

Here's my problem. I know 만 means only, so I want to say 천 원만 있어요. But I keep hearing 천 원밖에 없어요. Why is it suddenly negative?

좋은 질문이에요. 영어로는 both can feel like only, but Korean chooses different shapes for different feelings.

The big mistake is using 밖에 with a positive verb. In natural Korean, 밖에 needs a negative ending, like 없어요, 안 해요, 못 해요.

오늘의 핵심은 세 가지예요. 만 is neutral only, 밖에 is only with a negative verb, and 뿐이다 is it is only, or nothing but.

Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	오늘 회의에 누가 왔어요? —	Who came to today's meeting?



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	민수 씨밖에 안 왔어요. —	Only Minsu came.
Hana	정말요? 한 명뿐이에요? —	Really? Just one person?
Junho	네. 그래서 커피만 마시고 끝났어요. —	Yes. So we just drank coffee and ended it.

Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
밖에 + 부정 bakke + bujeong	nothing but; only, with a negative verb	The big mistake is using 밖에 with a positive verb. In natural Korean, 밖에 needs a negative ending, like 없어요, 안 해요, 못 해요.
만 / 밖에 / 뿐이다 man / bakke / ppunida	three Korean ways to say “only”	오늘의 핵심은 세 가지예요. 만 is neutral only, 밖에 is only with a negative verb, and 뿐이다 is it is only, or nothing but.
N밖에 + 없어요 / 안 해요 / 못 해요 N-bakke + eopseoyo / an haeyo / mot haeyo	There is nothing but N; only N	Let's name the pattern first. 밖에 literally points outside the limit, so with a negative verb it means there is nothing outside that one thing.
천 원밖에 없어요 cheon won-bakke eopseoyo	I only have 1,000 won.	For example, 천 원밖에 없어요. It sounds like, sadly or surprisingly, I have only one thousand won.
시간밖에 없어요 sigan-bakke eopseoyo	I have nothing but time.	Another one. 시간이 없어요 means I have no time. 시간밖에 없어요 means I have nothing but time.
밖에 ↔ 부정 표현 bakke ↔ bujeong pyohyeon	밖에 pairs with a negative expression	So 밖에 plus 없어요 is not just negative in meaning. It's a grammar pair.
N만 N-man	only N	Exactly. Now compare 만. 만 is simple and flexible. It does not require a negative verb.
커피만 마셨어요 keopi-man masyeosseoyo	I drank only coffee.	커피만 마셨어요 means I drank only coffee. It is neutral. No special feeling of shortage is required.



Grammar / Structure Notes

밖에 + 부정

밖에 + 부정 — nothing but; only, with a negative verb

천 원밖에 없어요 = I have only 1,000 won

만 / 밖에 / 뿐이다

만 / 밖에 / 뿐이다 — three Korean ways to say “only”

They overlap, but the grammar and nuance are different.

N밖에 + 없어요 / 안 해요 / 못 해요

N밖에 + 없어요 / 안 해요 / 못 해요 — There is nothing but N; only N

밖에 is normally followed by a negative expression.

천 원밖에 없어요

천 원 + 밖에 + 없어요 — I only have 1,000 won.

For example, 천 원밖에 없어요. It sounds like, sadly or surprisingly, I have only one thousand won.

천 원밖에 없어요

천 원 + 밖에 + 없어요 — I have nothing but 1,000 won.

Notice the ending, 없어요. That negative verb is not optional with 밖에 here.

Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
천 원밖에 있어요	cheon won-bakke isseoyo
천 원밖에 없어요	cheon won-bakke eopseoyo
너뿐이야	neo-ppuniya
뿐	ppun

Self-Check

- 1 Say 밖에 / 뿐 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
마다 / 씩 / 꽤 Saying 'Each', 'Per', and 'Every'	B1 Grammar: compare 마다 / 씩 / 꽤 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B1-GRAM-PRT-001
(으)로 Saying 'By', 'With', and 'Toward' in Korean	A1 Grammar: compare (으)로 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-PRT-012
도 Saying 'Also', 'Too', and 'Even' in Korean	A1 Grammar: compare 도 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-PRT-006
만 Saying 'Only' and 'Just This' with the Particle 만	A1 Grammar: compare 만 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-PRT-011

My Notes

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