



Korean Ladder Study Note

뭐 먹어

Wh-Question Intonation Without a Rising End

Level	Topic	Focus
B1 · Intermediate TOPIK 3	Pronunciation Intonation	뭐 먹어 Wh-Question Intonation Without a Rising End

Study Links

Open this lesson on Korean Ladder

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

Watch the full video on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPxE6im5DLc>

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

<https://www.koreanladder.com>

Core Idea

I keep making every Korean question rise at the end, like English. I say 어디 가? with this big lift, and it feels awkward.

그건 아주 흔한 습관이에요. In English, many questions rise. So your ear thinks every question must rise. 하지만 한국어는 달라요.

특히 의문사가 있을 때 그래요. When there is a question word, like 뭐, 어디, 언제, the sentence is already a question.

오늘의 핵심은 이거예요. 의문사가 있으면 끝을 올리지 않아도 질문으로 들려요. 평평하거나 살짝 내려가도 괜찮아요.

Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	뭐 먹어? —	What are you eating?



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	김밥 먹어. 어디 가? —	I'm eating gimbap. Where are you going?
Junho	집에 가. 언제 와? —	I'm going home. When are you coming?
Hana	이따 와. —	I'll come later.

Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
뭐 · 어디 · 언제 mwo · eodi · eonje	what · where · when	특히 의문사가 있을 때 그래요. When there is a question word, like 뭐, 어디, 언제, the sentence is already a question.
의문사 + 평평한 끝소리 uimunsa + pyeongpyeonghan kkeutsori	question word + flat ending sound	바로 그 느낌이에요. Korean question meaning can come from grammar and words, not only from pitch.



Grammar / Structure Notes

뭐 · 어디 · 언제

뭐 · 어디 · 언제 — what · where · when

Question words carry the question meaning.

뭐 먹어?

뭐 먹어? — What are you eating?

Flat or gently falling pitch still sounds like a question.

뭐 먹어?

뭐 + 먹어? — What are you eating?

먼저 들어 보세요. 뭐 먹어? My voice can settle down at the end, and it is still a real question.

어디 가?

어디 + 가? — Where are you going?

또 하나요. 어디 가? Where are you going? 끝이 올라가지 않고 살짝 내려가요.

언제 와?

언제 + 와? — When are you coming?

언제 와? When are you coming? 여기서도 언제가 이미 질문을 만들어요.

Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
뭐 먹어?	mwo meogeo?
어디 가?	eodi ga?

Self-Check

- 1 Say 뭐 먹어 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
가요 끝을 올리면 질문이 돼요	A1 Pronunciation: compare 가요 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-INT-001
끊어 읽기 Where to Pause So a Long Sentence Stays Clear	C1 Pronunciation: compare 끊어 읽기 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-C1-PRON-INT-002
나열의 억양 Rising Pitch When You List Things	A2 Pronunciation: compare 나열의 억양 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-PRON-INT-002
부탁과 제안의 억양 Softening Requests with Pitch	A2 Pronunciation: compare 부탁과 제안의 억양 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-PRON-INT-001

My Notes

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