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# A STUDY ON THE USE OF KIM GWANG-SEOK'S SONG "AROUND THIRTY" AS TEACHING MATERIAL FOR KOREAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Abstract:	Keywords:
<p>The purpose of this study is to examine ways of using the famous song "Around Thirty" (서른 즈음에) by singer Kim Gwang-seok as teaching material for advanced-level Korean language learners.</p> <p>The song deeply reflects the symbolism of the age "thirty" in Korean society and the awareness of time.</p> <p>It offers a rich range of advanced-level lyrical expressions through the "self-reflective monologue" of the lyrical persona.</p> <p>Based on an analysis of expressions of memories of the past and abstract-thinking vocabulary presented in the song lyrics, a three-stage teaching and learning model is proposed.</p> <p>The study suggests that Korean language education can develop toward reflective education, enabling learners to understand Koreans' attitudes toward life and their life philosophy beyond simple language acquisition—particularly the philosophy that "a song is something that wraps and heals the wounds of life."</p>	<p>Kim Gwang-seok, Seoreun Jeume-e ("Around Thirty"), Korean language teaching methodology, metaphor, emotional education</p>

## Introduction

### 1.1 Necessity and Purpose of the Study

At the advanced level of Korean language learning, learners experience difficulties in expressing complex and abstract concepts, especially emotional expressions related to time and life.

The song "Around Thirty" is an ideal text that addresses universal yet profound themes: regret over youth, the burden of life, and anxiety about the time to come.

The objectives of this study are:

- To analyze the awareness of time and generational sentiments in Korean society as reflected in the song.
- To identify the educational value of expressions of memory, monologue, and abstract vocabulary for advanced learners.

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- To propose a practical teaching model to improve skills in self-reflective writing and discussion.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Reflective Learning and Language Acquisition**

A self-reflective text such as “Around Thirty” requires learners to engage in subjective interpretation, which maximizes motivation to express inner feelings in the Korean language. This reflective process is effective in simultaneously enhancing both the depth and fluency of language use.

### **2.2 Application of Narrative Grammar Theory**

The song is highly suitable for integrated instruction in tense and aspect in advanced Korean, as it organically connects complex temporal expressions: past (“~던”), present (“~아/있/는”), and future (“~나야 할”).

## **3. Analysis of the Lyrics of “서른 즈음에” (“Around Thirty”)**

The song “Around Thirty” is constructed in the form of a monologue in which the lyrical persona addresses not the listener but himself. This creates a space for empathy for the audience, allowing them, as “borderline wanderers,” to look into their own souls.

### **The temporal nature of “즈음에”:**

The expression “~즈음에” (around, approximately) does not indicate an exact moment but rather an approximate period, reflecting the psychological state of the protagonist, who cannot fix time and remains in a state of confusion. This symbolizes the instability experienced by a person at a significant life crossroads in Korean culture, where memories and maturation intersect, as shown in the study by Jeon Hye-gyeong (2009).

### **Oppositional lexical units:**

The lyrics explore the essence of life through a structure based on the opposition between “what has remained” and “what must leave.” The contrast between “forgotten love” and “what remains in the heart” poses a philosophical question about what a person should preserve and what must be sacrificed over time.

### **Metaphors of feelings:**

Metaphors such as “an empty heart” (텅 빈 가슴) and “youth that has stopped” (머물러 있는 청춘) transform abstract emotions into concrete images, effectively conveying the lyricism of the Korean language to learners.

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### 3.2 Reflection of Social Suffering in Korean Society

This song raises fundamental questions about individual life and especially reflects the symbolic significance of the age “thirty” in Korean society. In Korea, turning thirty signifies the “completion of growing up” and the “end of youth”—a moment when pressure from social expectations (employment, marriage, financial stability) and personal ideals reaches its peak. Kim Gwang-seok, acting as a “borderline wanderer,” embodies the act of pausing and gazing into one’s own soul against the backdrop of such social pressure, offering the public cultural consolation and support.

## 4. Educational Value: Linguistic and Cultural Aspects

### 4.1 Linguistic Value: Teaching Monologic Style and the Expression of Time

The song serves as rich material for learning Korean, especially for expressing the flow of time and inner monologue.

- **Expression of the flow of time:**

The song includes expressions such as “서른 즈음에” (around thirty) and “또 하루 멀어져 간다” (another day moves farther away). Learners study the use of “~즈음에” to indicate indefinite time and “~져 가다” to express a dynamic process of departure or distancing over time.

- **Expression of memories of the past:**

Examples such as “잊혀진 것” (what has been forgotten) and “가슴에 남아있는 것” (what remains in the heart) help learners master the precise use of complex tenses (participial forms of completed aspect) and develop a written style of expression.

- **Monologic style of self-analysis:**

- Phrases such as “아무 것도 남은 게 없어” (there is nothing left) allow learners to study expressions located at the boundary between spoken and written styles and to develop the ability to naturally express deep emotions.

### 4.2 Cultural Value: Learning the Life Stance and Philosophy of Koreans

#### 1. The feeling of regret (悔恨, 회한):

The song “Around Thirty” most vividly reflects the feeling of regret and sorrow that Koreans experience when reflecting on their lives. Studying this emotion helps learners understand the theme of “reconciliation with the past,” which frequently appears in Korean literature.

#### 2. Pace of life and consolation:

Kim Gwang-seok’s music teaches a paradoxical attitude toward life, in which inner value is placed above external achievements in a competitive society. The “enveloping cultural atmosphere” of his music helps learners understand emotional exchange in Korean society. In

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addition, his musical legacy extends into spatial formats such as “The Street Where Kim Gwang-seok Is Drawn Again,” acquiring neo-retro characteristics and continuing to communicate with the contemporary generation.

## 5. Detailed Lesson Plans and Pedagogical Effect

### 5.1 Detailed Lesson Plans

**Activity type:** Vocabulary/Grammar

**Title:** Using “Grammar of Time”

- **Content:** Creating sentences to reflect on personal history using various past participial forms, such as “사랑했던 것” (what one loved), “잊혀진 것” (what has been forgotten), and “남아있는 것” (what has remained).

- **Educational goal:** To enhance the ability to use complex tenses and written-style expression.

**Activity type:** Writing

**Title:** Writing a “Diary of Regret”

- **Content:** Creating a diary entry in a monologic style, reflecting on the most regrettable or sorrowful moments of one’s life, using the atmosphere of the song “Around Thirty.”

- **Educational goal:** To improve the ability to use literary lyrical expressions and a monologic style.

**Activity type:** Speaking/Discussion

**Title:** Discussion “Choices in Life”

- **Content:** Discussion on the topic: “If you could return to your twenties, what would you change?” Justifying one’s life position by citing the song lyrics.

- **Educational goal:** To develop advanced argumentation skills and self-analytical expression.

### 5.2 Pedagogical Effect and Expected Outcomes

#### 1. Linguistic outcome:

Learners acquire the ability to accurately use written-style expressions containing abstract reasoning, especially complex tenses and monologic style.

#### 2. Emotional outcome:

Through Kim Gwang-seok’s songs, learners enhance the emotional depth of expressing their own lives in Korean by empathizing with the burden of life and Koreans’ reflections on time.

## Conclusion

The song “서른 즈음에” (“Around Thirty”) in Korean language education for foreigners can function not merely as a song but as educational material that explores the meaning of life. Its monologic structure and profound expression of time play a decisive role in the simultaneous development of linguistic skills and reflective thinking skills among intermediate and advanced learners. The model of integrating self-reflection proposed in this study sets a new direction for

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advanced Korean language teaching and demonstrates the possibility of combining language learning with humanistic development.

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