Sesame Street in Korea: Another Case of Globalization

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*Sesame Street*, one of the most successful educational broadcasting programs, was launched in the United States in November 1969 by Children’s Television Workshop (CTW). CTW’s co-founders Joan Ganz Cooney and Lloyd Morrisett created an educational television program that has both educational goals and entertaining purposes (Morrow, 2006). They also intended to make this show for racial minorities to develop their academic achievement, social skills, and cultural values. *Sesame Street* was the first program that had pursued to show both various educational goals and entertainment purposes for the preschool children (Fisch, Truglio, & Cole, 1999; Gettas, 1990; Morrow, 2006).

The purpose of this study is to highlight two separate, previously-unrevealed stories of *Sesame Street* in Korea. The broadcast history of *Sesame Street* in East Asian countries has not been studied extensively despite the difference of coproduction and adaptation process. Most of the studies which have investigated the globalization of this show have focused on the cases of South America and Europe. Korean and Japanese educators had a different idea for broadcasting this show from broadcasters in other countries. They focused on the different educational role of *Sesame Street*: television programs for English teaching. Therefore, they expanded the target audience from children to adults and published new educational materials, such as *Sesame Street* textbooks with scripts of all episodes to help to study English and toys for preschoolers. In addition, the story of *Sesame Street* in South Korea is a story of how the show influenced the beginnings of educational television created by Korean producers for preschoolers.

Initial Formats of Adaptation: Co-production and Open Sesame

Since the beginning of its globalization, *Sesame Street* has been broadcast in other countries with two dominant formats, Co-production and Open Sesame (Lesser, 1988; Palmer et al., 1976). Co-production combined video segments from the original American version of Sesame Street with
segments produced with local characters, created in the regions or countries where the co-produced show was intended to appear. *Plaza Sesamo* in Mexico and *Vila Sesame* in Brazil were representative programs of the co-production format. Another format of adaptation was *Open Sesame*. This format was operated with the original version of *Sesame Street* and included a block of video segments, all selected from the CTW version with voice dubbing in the language of the adapting country (Palmer et al., 1976). *Open Sesame* versions consisted of either 13 or 27 minutes per each episode, including a local version of the opening. Programs in this format were *Sesamo Apriti* in Italy, *Sesame* in Montreal (French version of *Sesame Street* in Canada), *Bonjour Sesame* in Belgium, and *Abre-te Sesamo* in Portugal. (Palmer et al., 1976; Palmer et al., 1978). These programs were originally established for countries that wished to be partners with the Workshop in a co-production format; the cultural content of local countries were not involved in these formats (CTW, 1981).

Those were not the only formats for international broadcasts. *Sesame Street* in Japan began broadcasting through NHK in 1971 without using either a Co-production or Open Sesame model. Instead, it was broadcast in English because Japanese educators and producers adapted this program as a new tool for teaching English for middle school students as well as preschoolers (Lesser, 1988). NHK, the national broadcasting organization in Japan, promoted *Sesame Street* to expose Japanese middle-school students to vernacular American English to improve English listening and speaking skills. CTW forced NHK to create a Japanese version of *Sesame Street* with the co-production model, but Japanese educators did not want the localization of *Sesame Street* because the purpose of broadcasting this show was not creating a local version, but for learning American English (Freedman, 2014; Palmer et al., 1976).

**The Beginning of Sesame Street in Korea**

The first airing of *Sesame Street* in Korea was in 1974, broadcast by the American Forces Korean Network (AFKN). AFKN was the broadcasting station operated by the US Armed Forces in Korea. With the broadcasting of *Sesame Street* by AFKN, Korean educators realized the importance of educational broadcasting for preschool children (Baek, 2014).

During the next several years, several major broadcasting stations in Korea recognized the
power of television and educational broadcasting programs for their preschool children. Since the 1980s, the national government attempted to operate the educational broadcasting programs for children. Two major governmental broadcasting institutes, the Korean Broadcasting Station (KBS) and the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), played a major role in developing educational broadcasting programs for preschool children.

The primary purpose of KEDI’s educational broadcasting in the 1970s was to develop the quality of education in Korea by expanding educational broadcasting to support teachers in rural areas. All educational broadcasting programs in the 1970s were planned to help teachers in classroom and contents of these programs mostly were composed of the explanation for understanding textbooks (Masoner & Klassen, 1979). The trend of educational broadcasting programs which was designed to the subject content for school learning has changed since the 1980s because many Korean educators began to emphasize the importance of preschool education, and KEDI developed several educational broadcasting programs for preschool children (Korean Educational Development Institute, 1983; Lim, 1988; Baek, 2014; Park et al., 1982).

In terms of Sesame Street, KBS and KEDI began to broadcast Sesame Street early in 1980. KEDI was responsible for the production for educational programs transmitted through KBS and other broadcasting stations (Kreamer, 1984). The enactment of the July 30 Educational Reform was a key moment of television education broadcasting in Korea. One of main purposes of this education reform was the development of educational broadcasting program through television for preschoolers in Korea (Ministry of Education, 1981; Seth, 2002). After the enactment of the July 30th Educational Reform, several educational broadcasting programs for preschoolers began to air since the early 1980s, and Sesame Street lost some of its value as a unique television program. Therefore, Sesame Street in Korea began to be perceived by Korean students as a program for English learning, not for general preschool education.
The change of educational broadcasting systems in Korea helped to begin broadcasting of *Sesame Street*, but not for the original purpose of this show or the usual reasons why international broadcasting partners chose either the Co-production or the Open Sesame model. *Sesame Street* in Korea quickly became a tool to teach English to school students, and local programs were produced entirely separately for preschool education. The case of Korea, to some extent, showed similar aspects with the case of Japan. Japanese educators also intended to broadcast *Sesame Street* for teaching English and showing images of real life of American. However, the drastic change of educational broadcasting policies in Korea played a key role in defining *Sesame Street*’s position in Korean education.

**Conclusion**

The adaptation of educational broadcasting across national boundaries proceeded within each local context, with such relevant issues as its perceived educational value, social context, and local educational policies. In the case of globalization of *Sesame Street*, local countries adopted these programs considering their indigenous circumstances and inevitably co-production models with CTW.
enabled making local versions of this program for their children.

The case of Korea was different from other countries. They initially intended to adapt Sesame Street for preschool education, but the central government’s policy preferences changed the purpose of broadcasting this program, from promoting preschool education to teaching English to older children. In this context, the case of Korea shows another different example that how the influence of Sesame Street could be changed by the policy context of local countries. Not all countries which adapted Sesame Street shared the same goals for its broadcasting. The globalization of Sesame Street was conducted with various types and indigenous contexts of foreign countries made different versions of Sesame Street for their children.
References

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