

**Analyzing the Concept of Empowerment in Selected Persian, English
and French Picturebooks in White Ravens' List in 2015**

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Introduction

The International Youth Library in Munich is the world's largest library of children's literature which holds more than six hundred thousand books in this field. In 1949, Jella Lepman founded this library and since then it has managed to promote and empower children's literature throughout the world (Lepman, 2002). Every year, publishers and writers around the world send their works to the library to participate in White Ravens' big challenge. The library publishes White Ravens' List every year in fifty languages and it includes works of poetry, novel, picturebook, and fiction. This list is published based on languages and is arranged alphabetically. For each selected book, there comes an abstract and keywords in English. Being chosen for this list would make publishers and writers known worldwide; furthermore, there are a lot of researchers who use these books in their research.

Thereby, in this paper, I have studied the concept of empowerment in picturebooks in 2015's list and in order to make the matter clear, I have

provided the analysis of three picturebooks from three languages. After making a short overview of empowerment in children's literature and its models, I have classified in a chart the degree of empowerment in all the picturebooks on the list. Afterwards, I have focused on three picturebooks from three languages as examples.

Methodology, Review of Literature and Purpose

I believe that employing empowerment in works written for children and young adults is of essential importance. Children, youth and adults are all members of the society and their empowerment equals the empowerment of the society. This idea alludes to Marah Gubar's (2013) "kinship model" where she takes children and adults as related and very close to one another. Accordingly, the impossibility of children's literature, adults' power and imperialism in children's literature become diluted because by diminishing or scaling down the difference between children and adults, children's literature writers and mediators can create empowering works to have a share in the empowerment of their audience. This, in my opinion, is the main idea behind empowerment in children's literature.

I came across the empowerment theory in sociology while I was working on my MA thesis. Elisheva Sadan (2004) proposes the theory of empowerment for the marginalized people in a society. By getting some ideas from Sadan and adapting them to children's literature, and also by getting some scattered ideas of empowerment from children's literature scholarship and other empowering concepts, I presented a model for

empowerment in YA fiction in my Ph.D. dissertation. Finally, in order to reduce the overlaps, I used Benjamin Blume's (1956) categories for improvement of educational goals. Hence, the final model divides empowerment in three categories of affective, cognitive, and psychomotor (Farnia, 2017).

Discussion and Results

Altogether, there are twenty picturebooks in White Ravens' list 2015 in three languages (English, French and Persian). After analyzing these twenty books, I have put them in a chart based on their estimated degree of empowerment: excellent, good, fair and poor. Hereby, from among the four Persian picturebooks, three are considered as fair and one as poor; among the ten English books, two are excellent, five good and two are fair; and finally, among the six French picturebooks, one is excellent, three good and two are fair. Then, in order to better illustrate the matter, I chose three samples from excellent, good and poor examples.

Use Your Imagination, But Be Careful What You Wish for! (2015) written and illustrated by Nicola O'Byrne is the English sample. From an affective aspect, we see artistic and psychological empowerments. Paratext and intertextuality are rich and creative and are considered as artistic empowerment. The optimistic attitude and the happy ending are psychological empowerment here, as they promulgate a positive ideology. Suspense, unfinished sentences and foreshadowing intrigue readers' affections. In cognitive aspect, we have psychological empowerment and

especially critical thinking, 'oscillation between centration and decentration' (Khosrownejad 2005, 2011), gaps, interpretive illustrations and paratext. Parody, story writing, and some literary elements are put in literary empowerment. In linguistic empowerment we have critical reading and language learning. And finally, in philosophical empowerment, we have the playful exchange of reality and imagination.

The French sample is *Tu grimpes drôlement bien aux arbres!* [*You Climb Trees Really Well!*] (2015) written by Silvia Härrä and illustrated by Cristina Pieropan. From an affective perspective, we deal with psycho-philosophical empowerment, in which we see the ideological approach (the optimistic and pessimistic outlook to life), caring thinking and sympathy. The most important emotions aroused here are loneliness and homesickness. In cognitive aspect, we have psychological and literary empowerments. Similes play important roles in literary empowerment. The 'useful themes for the addressee' (Picturebook Group at SUCCLS, 2016) here is immigration and loneliness. Child's emotions are significant in this book and there is no direct ethical message. Of other empowering techniques, we see 'oscillation between centration and decentration', gaps and closed-open ending.

The Persian sample, *The Sweet Yogurt* (2015) is written by Afsaneh Sha'bannejad and illustrated by Sahar Haghgoo. According to the textual and visual narratives and also the theme, it seems that this picturebook has few positive or empowering messages for its implied readers and it might actually lead them to disempowerment.

Conclusion

By comparing these three picturebooks from empowerment point of view, it seems that the English one makes good use of artistic empowerment and overall, is marked as “excellent”. The French book has made a good use of a practical theme and interpretive illustrations; therefore, it is taken as “good”. However, the narrative and the illustrations in the Persian sample seem to be cursory and it might even lead to disempowerment; therefore, it is regarded “poor”. In any respect, the main aim of this article was to study empowerment in White Ravens’ List of 2015 and to put emphasis on the significance of empowerment in children’s literature.

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Keywords: empowerment, model of empowerment in Children’s Literature, picturebooks, White Ravens’ List in 2015, power, psychological empowerment, child, adolescent

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