

**Spatial-Topographical Metaphor and Its Function in Akbarpour's
*The Emperor of Words***

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Introduction

Writers of children's and adolescents' literature should take into consideration not only the limitations of age group of audience for representation, but also the social taboos. Nevertheless, these writers, just like the writers of adult literature, are free to choose any subject matter. Literary works, whether for children, adolescents or adults, can be divided into three categories based on how they deal with their subject matters: a) those in which the pleasure aspect or the evocation of the audience's aesthetic sense is dominant; b) those which pay attention not only to the aesthetic aspect but also to the ideological and hegemonic aspects of the subject matter; in other words, those in which the aesthetic aspect serves the representation of a specific belief system; c) those which are concerned with the epistemology of a specific subject matter while showing some traces of the previous aspects. One of these subject matters is the significations of existence or identity-finding from ontological or social perspectives which is used in some of children's narratives, too. *The Emperor of Words* uses such a subject matter.

Methodology, Review of Literature and Purpose

In this essay, the representational aspects of the spatial-topographical metaphor have been analyzed with a descriptive-analytical approach. There are three previous researches conducted on the novel *The Emperor of Words*: Hesampour (2010) in a section of the article “A Study of the Implied Reader in Stories by Ahmad Akbarpour Based on Aidan Chambers’ Theory” identifies the implied reader and his/her orientation. Aghapour and Hesampour (2016) in “A Study of the Carnavalesque Elements in Iranian Adolescent Novels Based on Mikhail Bakhtin’s Theory” analyze the carnivalesque aspects of the story *The Emperor of Words* which represent the fracture in the dominance of adults in explaining and determining the geographical, racial and class boundaries. Jamali and Qorbani (2016) in “Analyzing *The Emperor of Words* Based on Karl Mannheim’s Theory of Distance” have tried to explain different aspects of eliminating distance between author-narrator and audience.

In the present research, the implications of spatial-topographical metaphors in *The Emperor of Words* on two levels of “identity as loss” and “ways of its suspension” are analyzed in order to decode the cognitive-narrative ambiguity of the text.

Discussion

Based on the philosophy of children’s literature and its didactic aspect and also in harmony with the cognitive-ontological world of children, *The Emperor of Words* represents an interdisciplinary subject matter (combining mysticism, philosophy, psychology, psychoanalysis and postcolonial studies) in order to show that although signification leads

to identity-formation, it also entails different types of loss. The representative axis of the novel is based on the spatial-topographical metaphor which is one of the concepts of postcolonial studies. It is argued that topography as an identity-formative action gives agency to the other/others while imposing various types of omission and humiliation on them.

The author-narrator has employed topographical metaphor, usually used for disclosing inequalities in cultural-political relationships, to represent an onto-epistemological process. Accordingly, relying on the tools of this metaphor which are lines and words in one level of the novel, the writer represents its dual and simultaneous function of “identification-loss”.

In this novel, the author-narrator shows that the lines that give the characters their identities by setting boundaries between cities, rivers, countries and characters, simultaneously impose different types of loss such as separation, war and trial on them. The characters of the novel have to endure all these hardships when dealing with geographical boundaries such as the border between Korea and China or other fictional borders.

In addition to lines, words impose similar misfortunes to the story’s subject-objects, too. The characters of the story are all identified with words that are imprisoned behind the lines of the book and in the limits of fiction and reality.

On another, parallel level of the story, the author-narrator, who knows that signification and identity-formation is inevitable, tries to reveal how they are suspended in order to show that one can elude from the loss in a symbolic fashion. The basis for this symbolic action is

observable in two forms: deferment of the self and the suspension of signs and aspects such as tendency toward poetry, pretention to madness and illiteracy, tendency toward rebellion and breaking the boundaries of the narrative which create a slippery and fluent situation in dealing with the subjects and prevents the imposition of loss on the subject-objects of the story.

The companionship of the boy, Sani, the emperor, the poet, the boatman, the soldier and the rest and their success in overcoming all these hardships testifies to this claim. Even at the end of the story, when the boy and Sani are imprisoned in two adjacent cabins, the separation of the two seems to fade away by using the pattern of deferment of the self and the suspension of signs which resides in the namelessness of the boy and eliminates the duality and distinction between the two characters in a symbolic way.

Keywords: Akbarpour, *The Emperor of Words*, Persian adolescent novel, loss, mapping, identity

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