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Kasey L. Garrison
Charles Sturt University

Danielle E. Forest
Old Dominion University

Sue C. Kimmel
Old Dominion University, skimmel@odu.edu

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Translated literature in your library: The Mildred L Batchelder Award

Kasey L Garrison, Danielle E Forest and Sue C Kimmel

Biographies

Kasey L Garrison is a lecturer with the teacher librarianship team in the School of Information Studies at Charles Sturt University's Wagga Wagga campus in New South Wales, Australia. Kasey earned a PhD in Education with a focus on Curriculum and Instruction from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, USA, in August 2012. Kasey has her master's degree in Education, bachelor's degree in Spanish and experience at the pre-school through secondary levels in the library and teaching Spanish and students with special needs. Her research interests are focused on diversity within children's and young adult literature.

Danielle E Forest is a doctoral student in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, USA. She currently works as a graduate teaching assistant instructor, teaching language arts methods. Before beginning doctoral studies, she was a fourth grade teacher in Massachusetts and worked with children between nine and 10 years old. She earned a master's degree and teaching licence from the University of Massachusetts at Lowell and a Bachelors degree from Franklin Pierce University of New Hampshire, both in the USA.

Sue C Kimmel earned her PhD in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA, in 2010. She is currently an Assistant Professor at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, USA. Previously a selector for The Elementary School Library Collection, she has extensive experience reviewing children's literature and has served on the ALSC Caldecott, Newbery and Notable Books for Children committees. Her research interests include multiple literacies and the socio-cultural impacts of children's literature.

Abstract

Translated books represent a unique bridge between cultures for young readers. This article discusses recent trends and practical applications for award-winning literature that has been translated into English and published in the United States. Winner and honour titles earning the Mildred L

Batchelder Award for their publishers often include European languages of origins and settings. Despite this homogeneity, the books represent a quality option as a way to diversify your library collections for English-speaking patrons, particularly young adults, and to enhance your teaching lessons with the integration of this global literature.

Translated literature is a unique way for a reader to experience a cultural group they may otherwise be disengaged with due to the language barrier. Such engagement with others is critical considering the shrinking nature of the world. Today more than ever, economic, political and environmental decisions made in one part of the globe hold implications in another. This combined with advances in technology, communication and transportation means that we must equip our students with the tools to achieve understanding, empathy and knowledge of the diverse cultures around our world.

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) specifically identifies the need for 'Asian Literacy' as one of the Cross-Curriculum Priorities (ACARA n.d.). Asian Literacy is defined as giving students with 'the skills to communicate and engage with the peoples of Asia so they can effectively live, work and learn in the region' (ACARA n.d., para. 4). In support of this priority, the Asian Education Foundation (AEF) tasks Australian educators with providing students with Asia-focused classroom resources (2011). This call has implications for the way teacher librarians develop library collections and resources for teaching. Books written and published in one language and then translated to another are a useful and authentic resource in supporting cultural awareness and competency skills like those needed to be 'Asian literate'.

For English speakers, the Association of Library Services to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), honours translated titles each year with the Mildred L Batchelder Award. The Batchelder Award is unique in that it is

given to a US publisher that has published a book originally written and published in a language other than English and outside of the US. This linguistic connection is what makes the award a good choice for Australian teacher librarians looking to fill their shelves with literature originating from across the globe. The Batchelder Award is named for Mildred L Batchelder, who was a US children's librarian working in public and school libraries and active in both ALA and ALSC. Batchelder was a keen believer in the power of translated books to help young readers become closer to people from other cultures, learning about the heritage of those cultures and building bridges of communication among cultures (Batchelder 1972 p. 307–15, as cited by Kruse). Her efforts to promote these goals led to ALSC's creation of the Mildred L Batchelder Award.

First established in 1966, Alfred A Knopf won the first award in 1968 for the German translation of *The Little Man* by Erich Kästner. Each year, a committee of appointed ALSC members culls through the collection of translated titles that publishers send them from that publication year. They use a variety of criteria to evaluate the books. First, they must consider the translated title's 'relationship to the original work' as well as the quality of the translated title itself (ALSC 1987). The translated book must maintain the original style, elements and tone of the author. One of the most notable pieces of criteria for this award is that the books 'should not be unduly "Americanized"'. The book's reader should be able to sense that the book came from another country' (ALSC 1987). While some of these criteria may present a challenge for the award committee unfamiliar with the original titles and languages, they help to ensure that the quality and integrity of the original work remains intact to the translated title.

Until 1979, the Batchelder Award honoured a publisher for a book published within the two previous years and nominees were announced publicly. Since that time, it has been awarded annually for titles published in the previous year and the list of books under consideration for the award is not shared publicly. In 1994, the committee

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began to name one to three honour titles as well to gain greater diversity within the award winners. Also, there is the option in any year for the committee to decline to name a winner and/or honours if no titles seem fit, as happened in 1993 and 1996, respectively.

Since 1968, 77 titles have earned their publishers the Batchelder Award winner or honour status. Despite the possibilities of diversity for the Batchelder Award, research analysing different characteristics of the titles suggests mixed results on the range of settings, characters, translated languages, format and genre (Garrison & Kimmel in press; Lo & Leahy 1997; Nist 1988). These findings also reveal further issues within the children's book publishing industry in the US and around the world.

Nist (1988) investigated trends with the award winners from 1968 to 1987 and found a distinctly Western European bias in the setting and original language of the winners, specifically Germanic. These titles were often in the historical fiction genre, with a particular trend towards books about World War II set in the European theatre. Nist (1988) also noted the topics of the Batchelder winners often addressed more serious themes and issues like war and death. Lo and Leahy (1997) extended Nist's study, examining the next eight years of winners and found very similar patterns in language, genre and topic. They also looked at format and found that a picture book had never won the award. More recent analysis of the Batchelders reveals a bit more diversity in the areas of language, setting, genre and theme, but there is still underrepresentation of many of these areas. The following discussion will explore these areas and the implications for translated literature in school libraries.

Languages

Garrison and Kimmel (in press) took up where Lo and Leahy (1997) left off and examined the collection of 45 titles and honours from 1996–2013. See Appendix A for a full list of these titles. The findings in Table 1 show the original published languages for the 45 books.

Languages	Total titles
German	13
French	12
Dutch	5
Japanese	4
Swedish	4
Danish	3
Hebrew	2
Norwegian	1
Italian	1
Totals	45

Table 1: Translated languages for Batchelder Award winners and honours

As you can see, there is still a strong tendency toward European languages and Western European, in particular. Japanese is the only Asian language represented and there are no African or South American languages shown.

This trend in languages keeps with trends in the children's book publishing industry. In the US context, research of recommended translated books for children published between 1990 and 2000 revealed the dominant language as German, followed by French, Swedish, Japanese and then Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Danish and Russian (White & Cox 2004). A total of 28 languages including Afrikaans, Hindu, Iroquois and Swahili were also identified, suggesting a greater linguistic diversity than that of the 45 Batchelder Award winner and honour titles studied by Garrison and Kimmel (in press). A study by Maczka and Stock (2006) surveyed the translated books reviewed in the US review journal *Publisher's Weekly* in 2004 and 2005 and found similar trends. French and German titles made up over 40% of the 329 translated titles reviewed during these two years.

A review of the professional literature regarding the state of translations in the world reveals further issues into why there may be such a lack of diversity with the languages represented by the Batchelders. First, US publishers often have relationships with publishers in Western

Europe, specifically Germany (Bean 2003). This is shown in the publishers who have won the Batchelder Awards for books published in such languages as French, German and Dutch. During the 1997–2013 award years, there were 17 publishers who received the award once for 17 of the 45 titles and nine publishers winning it more than once for the remaining 28 books. It is also notable that of these nine publishers, some, like Delacorte and Dial, belong to the same company and Arthur Levine is an imprint of Scholastic. These two publishing companies were responsible for 14 of the total 45 titles, or over 30% of the Batchelder Award winners and honours published since 1997. Also, US publishers may be more likely to speak these Western European languages, making these books more accessible to them (Bean 2003). In her dissertation study surveying US publishers, Goldsmith (2012) found that being bi- or multilingual was an important factor in seeking out translated books. Bilingual publishers were more likely to choose translations than monolingual publishers speaking only English. Hoyle (2008) notes this connection as well in sharing two stories about how Delacorte editors whose books have won Batchelder Awards found the original versions of the titles. Editor Beverly Horowitz who is married to a Frenchman discovered the 2007 winner *The Pull of the Ocean* (Mourlevat 2006) in a bookstore while travelling in France with her husband and the French-speaking editor Francoise Bui found the 2005 winner *The Shadow of Ghadames* (Stolz 2004).

Further, the publishing industries in some countries are stronger than others. Biamonte (2002) noted the book publishing industry is more prominent in developed countries with a literate adult population. Dickey (2011) investigated the state and history of translations for six countries including Bolivia, Chile, Germany, Poland, South Africa and Thailand. According to his data looking at the number of translations published in each country since 1880, close to 400,000 translations were published in Germany and only 780 in Bolivia. Something else quite important to note with the difference in languages represented by translations are the differences in the

way many cultures communicate and share stories. Some do not use or even value the written word, but more visual or verbal ways of communicating outside of books and paper. Thus, it is possible that translated books would inherently not represent these languages.

Settings

While the original languages of the last 16 years of Batchelder winners and honours did not reflect much global diversity, the settings are slightly more representative of the world. Countries in Africa (Egypt, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Tanzania), Asia (Georgia, India, Iran, Israel, Japan, Lebanon) and South America (Brazil, Chile) were included. However, despite this small increase, over half are set in areas of Europe. Other settings included fantastical places and undefined, universal places like a town or forest that could be any town or forest as in *The Collector of Moments* (Buchholz 1999) and *Big Wolf, Little Wolf* (Brun-Cosme 2009), respectively. One of the books was even set in outer space as it relayed the experience of *The Man Who Went to the Far Side of the Moon: The Story of Apollo 11 Astronaut Michael Collins* (Schyffert 2003), offering a scrapbook format with handwritten notes, family photographs and news-clippings from the 1969 moon landing. Many of the books also spanned settings including immigrants' journeys and soldiers' movements across Europe, Asia and Africa, as well as fantasy places. For example, *Brave Story* (Miyabi 2007), the 2008 fantasy winner, featured Wataru, a Japanese fifth grader, who travelled between his home in Tokyo to the fantastical setting of Vision.

Genre

While the Batchelder Award criteria do not specify genre or format, the winners and honours are predominantly fiction in a novel format. There have been some picture books in the more recent years, including *Big Wolf and Little Wolf* (Brun-Cosme 2009), *Garmann's Summer* (Hole 2008), *Henrietta and the Golden Eggs* (Johansen 2002) and *The Collector of Moments* (Buchholz 1999), but most of the winners and honours are novels. The genres of the last 45 winners and honours from 1997 to 2013 are shown in Table 2. The year 1980 was used as the cut-off date to determine historical versus contemporary realistic fiction.

Table 2: Genres of the Batchelder Award winners and honours

Genres	Total titles
Realistic fiction	16
Fantasy	13
Historical fiction	12
Non-fiction Auto/Biography	4
Totals	45

As you can see, realistic fiction represents the most common genre for the Batchelder titles during this time, which is a shift from the emphasis on historical fiction found by both Nist (1988) and Lo and Leahy (1997) during the first 28 years of the award.

Theme

Conversely, the tendency towards serious topics that both Nist (1988) and Lo and Leahy (1997) found in the Batchelders from 1968 to 1996 continues in the winners and honours from 1997 to 2013. Topics dealing with war or conflict dominated one-quarter of the newer recipients. Eight of those books addressed issues and situations during World War II in Europe like the 2013 winner *My Family for the War* (Voorhoeve 2012) and 2004 winner *Run, Boy, Run* (Orlev 2003) where children of Jewish descent flee their Nazi-ridden countries. Books also explored dark topics including war and murder in the 2013 honour *Son of a Gun* (de Graaf 2012) where a brother and sister become child soldiers during the Liberian civil war of the 1990s to the spiritual and civic transformation in an 18-year-old French-Israeli during her compulsory military service (in *When I Was a Soldier*, Zanetti, 2005). Sex, while not a common focus, was referred to in a violent fashion as in *Tiger Moon* (Michealis 2008) where a beautiful young Indian woman is forced into marriage to earn her family money, and *Nothing* (Teller, 2009) where bored, philosophical teenagers demand each other to give up things of meaning, including one girl's virginity. Although the Batchelder defines its audience as birth to age 14 following the ALSC definition, it is evident that the winners of the Batchelder Award tend toward the narrow upper end of this range and beyond in both format, with typically few or no illustrations at a novel length and topic, with generally more mature and violent themes (Garrison, Kimmel & Forest 2013). For these reasons, we strongly believe secondary librarians will find value in this award and should include these titles in their collections and teaching units.

Practical application

In addition to looking at the characteristics of the books, we are also engaged in multiple studies analysing the cultural depictions and portrayals in the 45 Batchelder titles as well as the value and application pre-service teachers and teacher librarians see in using the books with kids (Forest, Garrison & Kimmel 2013; Forest, Kimmel & Garrison 2013). Our research suggests that, despite the linguistic and environmental homogeneity of the Batchelder titles, the global origins and award status of these books shows their value as a quality resource to use with children and young adults in libraries. Many of the books

address important social issues and represent a safe springboard to use in introducing and discussing these issues with kids (Forest, Garrison & Kimmel 2013; Forest, Kimmel & Garrison 2013). Other researchers suggest using global literature like these translations as a way to promote global citizenship and understanding with young students in the same way Mildred L. Batchelder encouraged the use of translations (de Groot 2006; Jewett 2011; Smolen & Martin 2011). Martin, Smolen, Oswald and Milam (2012) used books set in other countries and dealing with issues like those in the Batchelder titles including poverty, education and hunger to engage students in discussions about global injustices. Then in small and whole groups, the students devised an action plan researching micro-financing organisations, presented their findings to each other, voted on a cause and then used class funds to support the organisation. This lesson empowered students to become critical citizens considering social issues outside of their own communities and developing 'a deeper understanding of what it means to be a global citizen in the twenty-first century' (Martin *et al.* 2012, p. 163).

The Batchelder titles hold the same potential for English speakers. These books offer young people a glimpse into other cultures and languages that may initially seem unfamiliar or strange. The introduction of an unknown country or culture through literature can help youth develop empathy and understanding as well as greater knowledge about the world (Buck *et al.* 2011; Louie & Louie 1996). Finally, international books like the Batchelder titles give readers an opportunity for greater access to outstanding literature from around the world (Louie & Louie 1996). No child should 'miss the rich treasure in foreign books' (Louie & Louie 1996, p. 34).

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Appendix A: Batchelder Award Winners and Honours 1997–2013

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- Bondoux, AL 2006, *The Killer's Tears*, Delacorte, New York.
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