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## Book Review

**Treichel, Bärbel and Guillermo Bartelt, (eds.). 2012. *Don Decker's Apache Odyssey. Approaches to Autobiography, Narrative, and the Developing Self*. Berlin: Frank & Timme**

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This volume is divided into two parts. The first one is a written autobiography of Don Decker – an Indian poised between the San Carlos Apache people's world and the white Anglo culture. It constitutes an empirical base for the second part of the book, which consists of four analytical chapters (by Guillermo Bartelt, Erica Gericke, Bärbel Treichel, and Fritz Schütze) examining and discussing Don Decker's life history and the development of his biographical identity (*the self*). Thus, this is an excellent opportunity for scientific and lay readers to see how different interpretative approaches are applied to written recollections in order to reconstruct and discuss the development of the "marginal" or "hybrid" self.

The book is a result of Guillermo Bartelt's fascination with Don Decker (both holding the position of Indian counselors at colleges) who dropped to his office and with a vigorous handshake and verbal enthusiasm (what he saw as different from the usual Indian reserve behavior) introduced himself. Bartelt

felt that Don Decker's voice needs to be heard. He (a linguist himself) contacted a sociolinguist working with the autobiographical narrative interview method by Fritz Schütze – Bärbel Treichel. She was so impressed by Don Decker's manuscript that organized a symposium at the 2008 AILA World Congress of Applied Linguistics in Essen that was devoted to analysis of this captivating autobiography. The volume contains revised and extended versions of those discussions.

Nowadays, Don (Denny) Decker lives on the Yavapai Apache Reservation in Camp Verde. He is a teacher and an Indian counselor at college, as well as a quite successful folk musician. In March 1997, he has finished writing his life history entitled *Apache Odyssey. A modern Journey of an Apache*. His recollections consist of two parts. The former deals with the history and the final defeat of the Apache nation, as well as provides a detailed and in-depth ethnographic description of the San Carlos Apache's be-

liefs, rites, values, cultural patterns, and family life. This part of his account shows the collective identity and collective fate of the Apache Indians. The latter is a straightforward written narrative rendering in which the informant deals with his marginal position and painful experiences of transgression of cultural borders.

Don Decker was born in 1944 in Phoenix Indian Hospital. His mother was only 15 years old when giving birth to her son. She was one of five children sent off by their father (who could not provide for the family) to the distant boarding school for Indians in Phoenix. The identity of his father is unclear. Shortly after his birth, Don Denny (this was his name by birth) was placed in a German foster family for two years and then his grandfather and his wife (Don's step-grandmother) got custody of Don. This means that he grew up on the San Carlos Apache Reservation and experienced extreme poverty, deprivation, violence, and social exclusion. At the age of 18, he was adopted by a white family – Don's high-school chorus teacher, Donald Decker, and his wife – Barbara (and therefore, his name had been changed from Don Denny to Don Decker). For the autobiographer, it is, however, intriguing why his grandfather, to whom he was very much attached to, never gave his consent to his adoption (but probably, also saw better opportunities for his grandson's development outside the reservation). Don's adoptive mother offered him an opportunity to start over without former burdens (*a clean slate*), and to get rid of his past in order to be accepted in his new middle-class white community and to win acceptance across ethno-cultural borders. In the analytical chapter, Fritz Schütze argues that he started

to play the role of the covert convert and perfectly enculturated stranger (p. 206), and put a lot of effort into passing as a member of his new we-community and hiding his native Indian background. But, this process usually forces some sort of fading out practices that may threaten one's biographical identity development and may exhaust one's energy. This happened in young Don Decker's life course. He lost his track and experienced some sort of disorder and suffering in his daily life: he had severe problems in high school (problems in concentration and truancy), later on, he flunked out of university being much lured by the world of pop, rock, and folk music, and having a lot of fun rather than studying. His biographical orientation and schemes of reference were dramatically changed after one of his friends was killed in Vietnam. Finally, he graduated from Eastern Illinois University nine years after he left the San Carlos Apache Reservation. Soon after, he got his first teaching position as an art teacher. Then, he was already married for one year. Three years later, his first child was born.

This very interesting life history of a marginal man, or a cultural hybrid, is discussed in four chapters written by four renowned scholars who – drawing on common theoretical and methodological backgrounds – look at the empirical data from many diverse points and/or put an emphasis on different analytical and theoretical frames.

**Guillermo Bartelt**, in the chapter entitled "Negotiating the Traditional and Modern Self," refers to the ethnography of communication in order to understand the Apache's cultural system from the insider's perspective (manifesting itself in an autobiographical

account of Don Decker) and to examine the constructive processes of the self under very complex life circumstances. The identity formation of Don Decker seems to be very tangled since he must cope with ordinarily incompatible reality sets (Scollon and Scollon 1979) that give rise to clashing ordering structures. Moreover, Bartelt focuses on the language production in autobiographical accounts and discusses the role of different strategies (e.g., insertion of seemingly trivial details into the main story line, introduction of foregrounding constructions) that allow the informant to deal with inconsistent experiences resulting from conflicting traditional and modern values and from his marginal position that causes severe suffering and feelings of reduction of personhood and of powerlessness.

**Erica Gericke**, in "Discourses of Identities: Applying Critical Discourse Analysis," views Don Decker's autobiographical account as a discourse since we may find its four basic features in the Apache Odyssey (i.e., intertextuality, interdiscursivity, recontextualization, and orders of discourse). She points our attention to multiple layers of meaning in Don Decker's text that may reveal the Apache identity: at the (pure) collective discourse level, he talks, for instance, about being an Apache and being a survivor of the Apache world, being a victim of harsh life conditions on the San Carlos Apache Reservation, et cetera (the world of white Anglos is here a second pair of the contrast-set); at the collective-personal discourse level, he introduces the formulation "me and my people," which is discussed both in a positive and negative light, he also mentions here respect for animals, honesty, and spiritual well-being; and finally, at the personal discourse level and the intra-personal dis-

course level, he deals with his own attitude towards life and biographical orientation.

**Bärbel Treichel** deals in her part – "Identity Work, Narrative Analysis, and Biographical Processes. A Sociolinguistic Approach to Identity Constructions in an Apache Autobiography" – with the process of Don Decker's identity transformation. At the beginning, Treichel points out two things which make the written historical account of the Apache different from linguistic narrative analysis: (1) it is written down (not told) and (2) it presents the story of a large segment of life (not a sporadic, short narration of events). Then, she refers to Fritz Schütze's approach and proves that it may be applied to the analysis of this autobiography. Yet, we must keep in mind that the authenticity and reliability of the autobiographical narrative account is guaranteed through the dynamic recollection of extempore storytelling and the power of its narrative constraints – the written text seems to contradict the rule. Fritz Schütze (1980) argues, however, (also in this book) that this sort of written autobiography may be analyzed according to the principles of the autobiographical narrative interview method in a productive and reliable way. Next, taking into account Erving Goffman's notion of social identity, she compares it to the concept of personal identity, as conceived of by Mead, and biographical identity that is defined as emerging from a self-reflexive process of ascription of social categories, self-identifications, and individual life courses (Pp. 138-139). In this light, she conducts a detailed sequential analysis of the key moment in Don Decker's narrative: his adoption (that inevitably entails transition from the Apache world to the white Anglo world) in which a story of his grandfather's death is

embedded. The adoption process is seen here (and this is grounded in linguistic realization of the text) as a starting point of his biography transformation.

**Fritz Schütze**, in his section "Biographical Process Structures and Biographical Work in a Life of Cultural Marginality and Hybridity: Don Decker's Autobiographical Account," first of all, discusses the concept of cultural marginality (referring to Park [1950; 1961], Stonequist [1961], and Schütze [1980]) and hybridity (referring to Bhabha [1994]), and claims that living in two meaningfully different cultures brings about serious biographical consequences. In Don Decker's biography, the most dramatic experiences are connected with transgressing the demarcation line between his former world and his new "unaccustomed" we-community. It seems that a person entering new (usually dominant) group culture endeavors to be "much too good" or a "more than identical" member of the

approached community and does not want "to look back" at his past. The idealized picture of the new community and the derogatory image of one's culture of origin may result in serious biographical turmoil and estranging and chaotic biographical trajectory process of suffering. Consequently, a life in-between two cultures usually involves a lot of biographical work that must be done in order to understand, and to be able to cope with, chaos in one's biographical orientation and one's self-alienation. One of the possible positive outcomes of this work may be the development of bi-culturalism (Kłoskowska 1992).

This volume is a perfect example of the application of the autobiographical narrative interview method, the ethnography of communication, sociolinguistics, and theories stemming from symbolic interactionism to a written autobiography. It might be useful both for the advanced readers, as well as for the beginners in the field.

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