

## BOOK REVIEW

**Youssef A. Haddad.** (2018). *The Sociopragmatics of Attitude Datives in Levantine Arabic*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. x + 169 pp. ISBN 978-1-4744-3407-2.

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*The sociopragmatics of attitude datives in Levantine Arabic* is a compelling treatment of a syntactic phenomenon from a pragmatic perspective. Attitude Datives (ADs) are optional clitics that do not add to the truth conditions of the utterance but contribute significant pragmatic overlays. A typical example of this phenomenon in English would be the following (the clitic is in bold):

(1) He's gonna buy **him** a pick-up for his son.

([Haddad 2018](#), 3 [1])

Research into this phenomenon, which lies at the interface of syntax and pragmatics, reflects the academic background and interests of the author, whose aim is to explore the various meaning contributions of ADs in the four Levantine Arabic dialects: Syrian, Lebanese, Jordanian, and Palestinian. The study, therefore, provides a wealth of insights into how the use of language, in general, and of ADs, in particular, is informed by the rich contextual factors and the overall socio-cultural values and shared beliefs of speakers. The author focuses exclusively on the Levantine dialect group, and argues that the four dialects within this category exhibit a uniform structural, semantic, and pragmatic behavior in relation to ADs ([Haddad 2018](#), 16). In this sense, this study is non-contrastive. However, this uniformity of behavior is contrasted with the behavior of ADs in other Arabic dialects such as Egyptian and Moroccan Arabic, and this difference is worthy of further research. Thus, this study sets the scene for a promising contribution to the field of variational pragmatics ([Kaniklidou 2020](#)).

The book is divided into five chapters as follows: the first introductory chapter sets the scene, states the purpose of the study, and provides various examples of the types of ADs. The introduction also explores and justifies the data collection method and presents a roadmap for the rest of the book. The rest of the chapters are organized thematically in accordance with the types of ADs. In addition to discussing topic/affectee ADs (TOP/AFF-ADs), the second chapter introduces the theoretical tools which will be used for the analysis of the data throughout the

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study and proposes a hybrid model of analysis. The third chapter deals with speaker-oriented ADs (SP-ADs), the fourth chapter with hearer-oriented ADs (HR-ADs), and the last chapter is devoted to the fourth type, which is the subject-oriented AD (SUB-ADs). The study concludes with general remarks about the topic and suggestions for further research. Each chapter begins with an introduction in which the function and general meaning of the AD is explained and then progresses into a detailed exposure of their use within utterances that perform different speech acts. The structural similarity of the chapters adds to the overall cohesion of the book and makes it a smooth read.

The author draws on [DuBois's \(2007\)](#) Theory of Stance Taking and Langacker's Stage Model in suggesting a visual model, which he calls the Stancetaking Stage Model. Haddad uses this model to capture vividly the basic function of attitude dative constructions (ADCs), which is to influence the hearer and have him/her adopt whatever stance or attitude the speaker holds towards the person, event, activity, etc. to which the AD refers. This function of ADs is influenced by such contextual factors as the sociocultural values shared by the speakers at large, the identities and the roles of the participants-at-talk, and the linguistic environment of the ADC.

The data are taken from a large corpus of written discourse from various sources. Haddad mainly uses scripted data from Syrian, Lebanese, Jordanian, and Palestinian TV series, plays, and movies, in addition to Facebook posts. The obvious advantage of such data is that they are easier to obtain than fieldwork data. The author anticipates reservations concerning scripted data and argues that they "should not undermine the quality of the data as far as Attitude Dative Constructions (ADCs) are concerned" ([Haddad 2018](#), 20). He adds that native speakers judge the examples to be natural. Moreover, the study does not aim at generalizations regarding the modern form of the four dialects under investigation: the analysis of the data is valid only as far as the respective worlds of the series/movies/plays are concerned. A natural question arises at this point as to the implications this project has on real life AD usage. The author remains true to his purpose of explaining the various meanings of ADs only within the context of the data sources. By extension, this analysis has the potential of drawing attention to the way ADs are used in real life under the influence of different social factors, though this conclusion needs to be considered with caution given the fact that the data are non-natural.

Despite the solid case Haddad presents for his data collection methodology, I think that the choice of one Syrian TV series poses a limitation on the comparability of the data, one of the stated purposes of the study ([Haddad 2018](#)). The series, a Syrian period drama titled *The Neighborhood Gate*, has been the target of ample criticism for its historical inaccuracies and false depiction of the Syrian social scene at the turn of the 20th century. The author himself is aware of this criticism, which he documents in the text, but he suggests that accuracy does not matter as long as the data achieve the desired outcome of showing how the social beliefs and expectations of any virtual society figure in the use of ADs. Moreover, Haddad maintains that the series is ideal as it showcases a great variety of social activities and situations in which ADs may be used. Even if we accept this point of view, the choice of this series remains risky in the presence of more accurate period dramas, which show the same diversity of social activity, thus, allowing for a more fruitful and realistic comparability with the data from the other contemporary Syrian TV series, *The Four Seasons*. The significance of a careful choice of data source is even more amplified given the author's constant reference to the central role of the values and the social beliefs shared by people as social actors in the activation and negotiation of the different potential meanings of ADs.



Facebook posts contribute a sizable amount of data in each chapter. Facebook users are chosen based on their nationalities, and the general content of the posts is a social and/or political phenomenon. Facebook users are assumed to contribute their opinions on this platform based on their sociocultural norms, beliefs, and the different identity values they attribute or associate with themselves. However, psychology research has shown that Facebook users, being part of a network that requires more or less accurate information about them to be shared, tend to present an identity that is deviant from their true identities in many respects. For example, [Gil-Or et al. \(2015\)](#) dub this new identity “the Facebook-self.” Most importantly in relation to the book at hand, [Gil-Or et al. \(2015\)](#) point out that, although this may not always be a harmful behavior, people on Facebook often present who they are in a way that is incongruent with their real sets of beliefs and values. In a similar vein, [Chik & Taboada \(2020, 161\)](#) refer to the issue of self-representation or “self-profiling” in online book reviews through which the writers present themselves as objective and unbiased reviewers. Again, the implication is that such presentations may not always be an accurate reflection of the real character of the reviewer or his/her use of language. These observations, generally, and those related to Facebook posts, more specifically, raise serious concerns about the validity of Facebook-based data in this research. Admittedly, the issue of false self-presentation does not undermine the quality of the analysis in each example, if we are to accept the reality users present as it is. However, the fact that they may have presented a false reality or a comment that does not reflect what they really believe does weaken any claim that Facebook examples are representative of real-life modern language usage and how it reflects underlying values, belief systems, and cultural norms.

The discussion in chapters 2 through 5 focuses on a number of important issues concerning the influence of sociolinguistic factors on the communicative usage of language in general and ADs in particular. Specifically, the author addresses the interaction between relationship types and the use of ADCs that perform directive, representative, and commissive speech acts ([Austin 1962](#); [Searle 1969](#)). The role of the social factors of power and distance as well as the shared sense of belonging to a certain group cannot be made more clear. For example, SP-ADs (Chapter 3) are used to issue directives and make complaints (representatives) about the behaviors of others by speakers who profile themselves as having a certain type of authority. Similarly, HR-ADs (Chapter 4) are used to make representatives, in the form of gossip events regarding a third party, to judge and evaluate the doings of others. In this regard, HR-ADs are not different from SP-ADs and the two can be substituted for each other in the same utterance. This leads the author to make a generalization, based on frequency, in his own data: SP-ADs are used to complain about a perceived wrong behavior whereas HR-ADs are used to praise the behavior of a third party.

In order to test the associated meaning preference of this observed frequency, the author presents native speakers of Lebanese Arabic with two sentences in which the only difference is the type of AD used. The participants are then asked to act out how they would imagine each sentence is going to be said in real life. The experiment, in my opinion, should be treated with caution for the following reasons. First, the two sentences are ambiguous between two readings: the first reading is where the dative is interpreted as a core argument and the second is where it is understood as an attitude dative or a non-core argument. In fact, in the absence of other contextual elements that further clarify the utterance, it would seem that the default reading would be the core-argument reading. Let’s consider the pair of sentences on page 124.



- (2) a. karim    shtare-li            sayyara    bi-ishrin    alef            dolar  
       Karim    bought-me.D    car            for-twenty    thousand    dollars  
       ‘Karim bought [me] a car for twenty thousand dollars.’
- b. karim    shtare-lak            sayyara    bi-ishrin    alef            dolar  
       Karim    bought-you.D    car            for-twenty    thousand    dollars  
       ‘Karim bought [you] a car for twenty thousand dollars.’

(Haddad 2018, 124 [29])

In both (2a) and (2b), there is an obligatory reading, in which the dative assumes the thematic role of the recipient, and it would be glossed as “bought for me/bought for you.” This leads to the second point, which is related to the first observation. How do we decide which of the obligatory/non-obligatory readings is the default reading? In other words, how does the author make sure that the participants are going to interpret the datives as ADs unless he had specifically instructed them to consider them as such? It is actually peculiar that the author opted out of any explanation that is not pragmatic for a phenomenon that is a prime example of syntax-pragmatics interface, despite having provided a criterion for disambiguating such cases in an earlier article on ADs in Lebanese Arabic. Haddad (2014) explains that ADs are necessarily clitics and that for the core-argument reading there needs to be a conscious subject, who is capable of intentional action, in addition to the presence of optional modificational elements such as the adverbs “especially” and “personally,” which clarify that the recipient is an intentional recipient. It might have been useful for the author to add more details related to the test in order to avoid any confusion that may make the validity of the test results questionable.

A welcome addition to the analysis of the data is the treatment of the different meanings of ADCs in terms of politeness in chapters 3 and 5. This seems like an inevitable next step given the importance of politeness research and the fact that evaluations of (im)politeness may arise in any context. Drawing on the model of rapport management (Spencer-Oatey 2002, 2005, 2008) and Brown & Levinson’s (1987) model of politeness, the author raises the question in chapter 3 as to whether SP-ADs increase or decrease the face-threatening nature of directives. SP-ADs are embedded in utterances used to issue directives by speakers, who profile themselves as having one of three forms of authority: hierarchical, reciprocal, and knowledge authorities. In Haddad’s analysis, no utterance is inherently (im)polite, and the answer to this question lies in a consideration of the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, on the one hand, and the rights and obligations of each as dictated by the context, the type of activity, and the identities of the participants, on the other hand. The basic insight is that SP-ADs are interpersonal pragmatic markers, and their use is tolerated as having positive effects if it is issued by a hierarchical authority figure (as in parent-to-child interactions) in accordance with the rights and obligations of each person and where the relationship is based on love and mutual respect. On the other hand, if it is issued in contradiction with such rights and obligations in a hostile and tense relationship, the AD is viewed as increasing the offensive potential of the directive (Haddad 2018, 77–78).

The explanations that the author provides for how facework and rapport are managed as far as SP-ADs are concerned, in an example by example manner, are applicable to a wide range of



cases. However, the categorization of the types of face, rights and obligations, and interactional goals, on which the analysis is built, seems to be somewhat rigid when it comes to accommodating less straightforward interactions. More often than not, the different types of face (quality, social identity, and relational faces) figure in unity in a negotiation of an interactional goal that does not necessarily have to be transactional (concerned with task-achievement) or relational (having to do with the affective aspect of relationships). This is clearly seen in the text when the author supports his argument by explaining how a number of previously analyzed examples fit into the proposed analysis. Remarkably, however, Haddad, excludes one example, example (25), because it presents an unusual and less clear situation. Specifically, in this example, the speaker is a bossy father, who issues commands using ADs and expects complete obedience from his sons just by virtue of being a father in a patriarchal society. The reason why this is a deviant case is that the relationships between the speaker and the hearers do not really reveal how the AD is to be evaluated in terms of politeness. Is the construction overall more offensive because, as is made clear in the text, the father's respect is not related to personal merit but to traditions and obligations and so respect here is rather ritual and is not indicative of positive feelings? Or is it not offensive because the obligation the sons feel towards their father overrides any consideration of positive feelings, and thus, acquiesce to the father's demands comes naturally as part of the sociocultural expectations of the period? The answer is left to speculation, which, it must be noted, is no fault of the author but of most frameworks that attempt to account for language in use against the backdrop of social factors.

In the final chapter, the issue of politeness is raised again. As a native speaker of Syrian Arabic, I will have to disagree with one aspect of the analysis, which results from a misinterpretation of politeness facts within the context of the Syrian and the Lebanese communities alike. In order to situate the problem, the function of SUB-ADs needs to be mentioned. SUB-ADs are embedded in utterances that issue representative and directive speech acts. Thus, they have the function of evaluating the at-issue content of the utterance either as insignificant or surprising. The evaluation results from the speaker's familiarity with the subject of the verb to which the AD refers.

As is already mentioned, SUB-ADs are used in utterances that perform requests and suggestions (directives). The author suggests that, in the context of making a request, SUB-ADs are used as negative politeness redressive strategies that lessen the imposition in face-threatening acts such as requests (Brown & Levinson 1987). The author then gives many examples drawing mainly on Syrian and Lebanese Arabic data. The conclusions he draws from these data go against my intuitions and the intuition of several other native speakers I have consulted. Although it is tempting to label societies as categorically positive or negative politeness societies, researchers have criticized Brown & Levinson's (1987) model for being too narrow and Anglo-centric. For example, Mills & Kádár (2011) argue that Brown and Levinson's negative/positive politeness generalization does not hold as such divisions stem from a stereotypical view of the cultural and social norms of the dominant group within a society. Therefore, while such generalizations hold on the stereotypical level, we must take into consideration the fact that "each group does make use of both types of politeness to a greater or lesser extent" (Mills & Kádár 2011, 27).

Bearing the above criticism in mind, then, we can say that there are dominant tendencies in Arab societies that verge towards positive politeness. Nydell (2006) explains how the general lack of orientation towards individuality and personal, physical boundaries among Arabs is



manifested in their body language: they feel comfortable getting close to their addressee and find no trouble in repeatedly touching people if they are making a specific point. Also, as far as speech act research is concerned, studies have shown that Arab speakers tend to emphasize solidarity over deference. For example, [Al-Khatib \(2006\)](#), who investigated invitation strategies by native speakers of Jordanian Arabic, points out that Jordanian speakers tend to exploit the negative face of the addressee in order to boost his/her positive face wants. Based on this research on Jordanian Arabic, we can assume that the Syrian and the Lebanese people also lean towards positive politeness, as speakers of the same dialect group as the Jordanians.

Haddad argues that negative politeness is used in low distance and equal status relationships such as the one between friends and couples to make requests sound less intrusive, which contradicts what some research has shown about positive politeness being the norm in Arab societies. Moreover, this analysis does not sound natural when it comes to the examples he uses to support his claims. The SUB-AD is performed in a bald on-record construction, which is the least polite of all forms as it contains imperative forms with no mitigation at all. If anything, in its evaluative function of the request as insignificant, the SUB-AD only increases the potential of face-threat and over-entitlement. For a native speaker of Syrian Arabic, the construction is highly intrusive and would hardly be accepted even in the context of addressing family members and close friends.

The pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of language are important if one desires to understand language as a social tool that conveys meaning as constrained and informed by the social and cultural values of its speakers and by the different aspects of their identities. Since the author draws on the relation between the meanings of ADs, politeness, and the role of the speakers' attitudes, values, and norms in using ADs, the study has obvious connections to intercultural politeness ([Spencer-Oatey & Kádár 2020](#)), in that it paves the way for further research into the way in which the participants' culturally-rooted expectations about social factors such as hierarchical relationships, role-relations, face, and rights and obligations come to bear in any intercultural interaction and influence the way in which politeness is evaluated. All in all, this well-organized book is a valuable contribution to the field of socio-pragmatics. Despite being a highly technical text, the author presents a remarkably lucid and coherent argumentation, aided by an abundance of well-illustrated examples. The book does, for the most part, what the author intends it to do: bridge a gap in the literature by giving a comprehensive explanation of the use of ADs in Levantine Arabic, which has largely been neglected in favor of an interest in this phenomenon in Western languages. By stressing the all-important role of social factors, the study should be of interest not only to pragmaticians but also to students and scholars alike, who have an interest in sociolinguistics and the sociology of language.

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