Abstract

The present thesis focuses on the non-standard forms of the pronoun “you” which have emerged in the varieties of English in the last centuries. In the Early Modern English period thou-forms (expressing singular) dropped out of the pronominal paradigm, as you-forms assumed the singular reference in addition to the plural one. As a result, horizontal homophony on the level of second person became a possible source of ambiguity. In the following decades, non-standard 2nd person plural (2PP) forms started emerging to fill the lexical gap in the pronominal paradigm in the respective varieties of English. These innovative 2PP forms can be classified into following categories. While some of them are formed synthetically by addition of a plural suffix -s to you, the others are constructed periphrastically by certain quantifiers, numerals or noun phrases standing in apposition to you.

The analytical part is a corpus-based study of 100 examples extracted from the following corpora. The examples of you guys and y’all were obtained from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). While the examples of youse were extracted from the International Corpus of English-Ireland corpus (ICE-IC), the sample of you lot was obtained from the British National Corpus (BNC). For each of the 2PP forms, a random sample of 25 examples was extracted from the respective corpora. The examples were then analyzed to investigate whether they all express plurality, what would be in accordance with the general assumption that non-standard forms emerged to rectify the deficiency in the pronominal system. Furthermore, the contexts were examined for other occurrences of the same type of 2PP form or whether the unmarked you occurs in the proximity of these 2PP forms. The present study also investigated whether you guys has undergone semantic bleaching. All four 2PP forms were also examined for the sentence types and syntactic functions in which they can occur. The main objective of the present study was to determine to what extent are these non-standard 2PP forms behaving as regular personal pronouns.