

Abstract

The thesis explores the representation of various optative sentence structures in the present-day spoken British English. The theoretical part of the thesis focuses on how English optative sentences are described by different grammarians (e.g. Dušková et al., Quirk et al., Biber et al., Huddleston and Pullum). The theoretical background of the thesis concentrates primarily on optative sentence structures that are introduced by *I wish* and *If only*, on optative sentences with *may*, optative subjunctive and with the archaic structure *Would (to God) that*. Other means of expressing a wish in English like imperatives (e.g. imperatives with *let*) and verbless sentences (formulae) are included in the theoretical part as well. The analytical part of the thesis is divided into Section 1 and Section 2. Section 1 is dedicated to the quantitative analysis of the optatives structures described in the theoretical part (with the exception of imperatives and verbless sentences). Section 2 focuses on an in-depth analysis of optative sentences introduced by *I wish* and *If only*. From the *Spoken BNC2014*, 60 examples of *I wish* optatives and 40 examples of *If only* optatives were excerpted and analysed. The analysis focuses on the addressee, verbal tense and the usage of modal verbs. There is also an emphasis on the distinction between realizable and unrealizable wishes (defining the time reference) and whether a wish relates to the speaker himself/herself or to other people or actions.

keywords: English optative sentences, quantitative analysis, corpus linguistics