Tu or Vous: The Second Person Singular Pronoun in Online French Media

Many of the world’s languages make use of words that, besides encoding the semantic meaning of those words, also encode an additional piece of information that the speaker of such words wishes to communicate to his or her audience. One way that this occurs is through social deixis, which allows speakers to “point”, in a less than overt linguistic fashion, to certain aspects of the speech situation, including the speaker and/or hearer’s relationship with the setting in which the speech situation is being performed, and the relationship between the two speakers involved in the speech situation. In this paper, I look at the social deixis that is used in the second person pronouns in French, specifically at the manner in which speakers utilize these pronouns when communicating with other speakers in an electronic, online setting via Internet discussion forums and dating websites. While researching the use of various second person pronouns in a variety of French online social media, which encode aspects of both politeness and plurality, I expect to find that the polite form of the second person pronoun is most widely used, given that many online interactions occur between people who do not know each other.