

ANOTHER LOOK AT STAGES IN THE ACQUISITION OF STANDARD ENGLISH

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The age-range between child- and adulthood has been relatively neglected in socio- and psycholinguistics. This paper presents an attempt to examine in more detail the developmental phases in phonological variation and attitudes towards language varieties of 9 to 18 year olds. The prevailing concept of a continuous linguistic and metalinguistic acculturation in terms of a gradually increasing conformity to adult norms is challenged on the basis of the findings of an empirical study of youths in Norwich, England. Patterns of phonological variation and evaluation of both male and female speakers of Standard and Nonstandard English (elicited in a "matched-guise test") show that there is an interval of significant regression in the stages of acquisition of Standard English. The group of 15 to 16 year olds strongly reject the Standard norm by both their actual linguistic behaviour as well as their partly unconventional attitudes towards nonprestigious speech varieties. These findings are tentatively discussed in the frame of interactional developmental psychology as linguistic and metalinguistic correlates of sex-role identification and identity formation processes in adolescence.