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 lin-
guistic 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 sig-
nificant 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.