

Innovation and levelling in urban dialectology
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We present findings from a large project on language change in London English. Our findings, coupled with those of projects in Reading, Milton Keynes and Ashford, show the spread of a number of phonetic features as part of the contact-induced dialect levelling being observed in south-east England. However, other developments reverse well-established features of London English, especially diphthong shift. These are being generated within the speech community. Two processes seem to be at work: innovation, leading to divergence, and levelling, leading to convergence. Innovation is typically seen in the inner city, especially but not exclusively among ethnic minority speakers. Levelling, on the other hand, is characteristic of the outer city. These patterns have implications for urban dialectology in general. In our presentation we will go into the factors that seem to trigger innovation.