

London as a source of innovation and change in present day English

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We will discuss ongoing changes in the morphology and syntax of London English, based on the results of our recent project 'Linguistic Innovators'. This project, as the first large-scale sociolinguistic study of London English, investigates earlier claims that many widespread current changes in British English originate in London, and that an adolescent multicultural vernacular English in London has an effect on language change.

Our analyses reveal innovations in inner London in many areas of the grammar, including the pronoun system, plural marking, interrogative structures, the verb phrase, the relativiser system and the quotative system. Some innovations appear to be diffusing to outer London and, perhaps, beyond. Some changes that are widespread in Britain are more advanced in inner London; others, however, diverge from national or regional trends. We consider explanations for these complex patterns of variation and change in terms of language-internal factors such as dialect and language contact, and language-external factors such as the ethnicities of speakers, the nature of their friendship groups, and the social and personality types of the speakers who lead innovative changes.