

To the problem of Cockney rhyming slang genesis

As well as different regions of any country there are various dialects and types of slang. In Britain in different regions there are specific words and expressions too. One of the most popular slang is cockney, which is especially popular in London, in East End. The area of cockney distribution consists approximately of these districts: Aldgate, Bethnal Green, Bow, Limehouse, Mile End, Old Ford, Poplar, Ratcliff, Shoreditch, Spitalfield, Stepney, Wapping. In general they belong to 3 districts: City, Hackney, Tower Hamlets.

With regards to the etymology the word “cockney” means “roster egg”, on the basis of cokene (genitive of “cock” - old rooster). [3] It was a medieval term that referred to a small, deformed egg, presumably deferred by a cock. Very soon the term was used to mean “a spoilt child” or “a sissy” (cf.. Engl. Cocker “spoil”). Cockney was used to mean a lot, but to the XVIII century it became known as urbanite, detached from real life (by which, apparently, understands rustication).

In the first place, people who were born within the confines of surroundings, where the ringing of a London church St Mary-le-bow’s bell, was heard, located in the street in the north of London’s Cheapside, were named “cockney”. As a rule they were the workers, artisans, shipbuilders, vendors and other representatives of the working class. The term cockney was used to express disdain and despise.

Historians and linguists have not yet been agreed, as to how Cockney rhyming slang appeared. Perhaps it was used by market traders so that they could talk to each other at the same time being prevented from understanding by buyers. According to another version, Cockney slang was invented by the participants of criminal groups.

At the heart of Cockney slang is the replacement of ordinary words by rhymed phrase which consists of 2-3 words. Subsequently, the rhyme goes down, and the value of the remaining word has nothing to do with the original. Therefore, the word’s

definition is very difficult to understand even for the native of England if they are not familiar with Cockney slang. Here are some examples:

1. Adam and the ants – Pants

Where did you buy these Adam and the Ants?

2. Adam and Eve – Believe

Would you Adam and Eve it?

3. Ding Dong – Song

It is my favourite ding dong!

4. Cock and Hen – 10

It costs cock and hen pounds.

5. Mickey Mouse – House

Where is your Mickey Mouse? [1].

Nowadays, in connection with population resettlement, as well as with the broadcasting of dialect on local television, it has become popular in the other parts of London and as a result expressions penetrated on the permanent basis into the heart of English. So they are widely used in the other parts of the country.

For instance, such television channels as CBBC and BBC often resort to the use of cockney rhyming slang – «cockney rhyming challenge». CBBC Official Chart Show invites celebrities for this challenge. [3; 4] The presenter reads small utterances in which ordinary words are interchanged by cockney phrases. The celebrities are trying to guess the straight meaning of these phrases:

- «Today's been a long day but just think of the **bees and honey** paid in **sausage** and **mash!**» - «Today's been a long day but just think of the **money** paid in **cash!**»;
- «Look who's on TV! My **trouble and strife**, the **baked bean!**» - « Look who's on TV! My **wife**, the **queen!**»;
- «I need to stretch my **beacon and eggs** and warm up my **biscuits and cheese!**»
- «I need to stretch my **legs** and warm up my **knees!**» [5].

Previously Cockney slang was considered as shameful dialect but now these TV shows are rapidly gaining views on YouTube. Television has raised awareness of Cockney Rhyming Slang to far greater heights. Classic TV shows such as “Steptoe and Son” [6], “Minder”, “Porridge” and “Only Fools and Horses” have done much to spread the slang throughout Britain and to the rest of the world.

To recapitulate, Cockney Rhyming Slang has a great influence on Modern English language. It remains only to find out: is it good?

References

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Liberman, A. Etymology // Dictionaries. 1996. Vol. 17. P. 29–54.

Internet resources

1. <http://www.cockneyrhymingslang.co.uk/>
2. <http://aldertons.com/>
3. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=cockney>
4. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCF59R3Q5iPLX0F1S7BL09rw>
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsgOOG9PYB0>
6. <http://www.albertandharold.co.uk/>