РАЗДЕЛ VI. ФИЛОЛОГИЯ

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English-speaking mass media titles in Rhyming Slang

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Abstract

The given article is devoted to the analysis and sociocultural description of some rhyming slang expressions involving the use of printed mass media titles in the English-speaking community that serve as rhymes or as basis for rhymes. The rhymes are taken from modern dictionaries of rhyming slang.

Key words: rhyming slang, printed mass media, English-speaking community, linguistic and sociocultural description of rhyming slang expressions

Hardly anyone, it seems, would argue that information in the modern world is a powerful force that affects people in any field of activity and any walk of life. Interaction and intersection of fields of activity is directly linked to communication of information. In this light it is evident that mass media is a broad-spectrum agent to create, shape and influence man's conception of the visual environment and phenomena [1], [3]. Mass media, newspapers and periodicals, in the first place, are the most important means of informing and mirroring public opinion, and media texts are, perhaps, one of the most widespread forms of language existence.

The language of mass media is an operative part in effective impact on public mind. Mass media by executing societal demands not only inform the audience but have a noticeable impact on mentality and attitudes of people at large.

Printed mass media in the UK are represented by newspapers of three categories. There are quality newspapers: *The Times* and *Sunday Times*, *The Financial Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Independent* and *Independent on Sunday*, there are popular newspapers intended for the broad masses: *The Mail*, *Mail on Sunday*, *The Express* and *Sunday Express* and tabloid newspapers or 'red-tops' called so from the colour of the masthead on these publications, characterized by sensationalism: *The Sun* and *Sun on Sunday*, *The Mirror* and *Sunday Mirror*, *The Daily Star* and *Daily Star Sunday*. The rhymes for the newspapers described in the article are taken from modern Dictionaries of Rhyming Slang [4], [5], [6]. The article is related to the Russian text of the authors [2].

Our analysis of the rhymes starts with the rhymes for the word *newspaper*. We have found three rhymes - *linen draper*, *Johnny Raper*, and *skyscraper*.

The rhyme *linen draper* dates from the mid-19th century, when the term *linen draper* for 'a seller of linen and other cloth, a dealer in fabrics and sewing materials' would still have been generally familiar, but it survived well into the 20th century. It has been abbreviated to *linen* and is used in the reduced form to name especially a newspaper which is folded [6, p 20]. The rhyme *Johnny Raper* is of Australian origin. It is based on the name of a well-known Rugby player of the post-World War II period. A new rhyme, *skyscraper*, like the rhyme *linen*, is a general rhyme for *paper*, but 'newspaper' is a frequent application.

We may assume that since the main rhyming slang speakers are first of all East Enders and working class people who appear to prefer reading mass and tabloid papers, we shall find more rhymes for the popular and tabloid titles and the use in rhyming slang of popular and tabloid titles than those of qualities. The search and analysis of the data confirmed this supposition. London cockneys use the popular and tabloid titles *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, and *The Sun* in various contexts. But the winner's laurels go to the quality *The Times*, which has bagged two rhymes *Captain Grimes* and *nursery rhymes*. *Captain Grimes* was coined for the *Times* of London in the 1980s. The rhyme presumably refers to the dubious character in Evelyn Waugh's novel *Decline and Fall* (1928), the schoolmaster Captain Grimes. The second rhyme is ironical and may be perceived as a jibe at the *Times*'s much vaunted reputation as the UK's 'newspaper of record' [4, p. 238].

The rhyme *currant bun* refers to several referents and dates from the end of the 19th century: it denotes (1) the *sun* (both the sun and bun are round); (2) a *son* (He's awfully proud of his *currant*) and (3) a *nun*. The meaning "newspaper *The Sun*" was added in the 1980s: '*Must be true cos I read it in the Currant Bun*'. The *Sun* happens to be the most read newspaper with the current circulation of 2.5 million. It is noted for the regular Page 3 Girl photograph, a feature formerly included in the paper. The phrase originates with the publication of a large photograph of a topless, bare-breasted female glamour model which was usually published on the print edition's third page. Page 3 was popular with *Sun* readers, but it also attracted sustained controversy. Critics argued that Page 3 objectifies and demeans women, while others believed that it should not appear in a generally circulated national newspaper.

The new rhyme *Jack and Vera* is London Cockney rhyming slang for *the Daily Mirror* newspaper now called *The Mirror*. This tabloid, founded in 1903, was conceived as a cheap publication for housewives and home reading. The *Mirror* is the *Sun*'s major rival. The *Jack and Vera* forming the rhyme are Coronation Street's *Jack and Vera Duckworth*, one of the best-known couples in television history. "*Jack*" Duckworth was a long-standing fictional character from the soap opera played by actor Bill Tarmey. Jack's storylines have focused on his long-standing marriage to his wife Veronica "*Vera*" Duckworth (née Burton), played by Elizabeth Dawn. Both characters have been immortalized in wax by Madame Tussauds.

The Independent, a quality newspaper first published in 1986, is ideologically close to the Liberal Democratic Party. It has the smallest circulation of all the dailies. There is a slangy term for the newspaper - *Indie*, which rhymes with *Mork & Mindy*. The rhyme is based on an American sitcom broadcast from 1978 to 1982 on ABC. *Mork & Mindy* stars Robin Williams as *Mork*, an extraterrestrial who comes to Earth from the planet Ork in a small, one-man egg-shaped spaceship. Pam Dawber co-stars as *Mindy* McConnell, his human friend and roommate.

The rhyme *Beans on Toast*, reduced to *beans*, can refer to a *goal post* (as in: My penalty hit the *beans*) as well as to the newspaper *Evening Post*, as in: Go and buy *the beans on toast* will you son. Beans on Toast is a popular snack advertised as a 'great snack to munch on while watching your favorite British programs' that is good with Strongbow cider. The rhyme *Beans on Toast* has recently been fortified by the stage name of a British musician, folk singer and author Jay McAllister who rose to prominence out of the UK folk scene in 2005. His songwriting openly deals with the topics of politics, drugs and love. Beans on Toast traditionally releases a new record each year on 1 December, McAllister's birthday.

In Australian rhyming slang there is a rhyme for any newspaper with *Herald* in the name – *Jim Gerald*. John Ayto thinks it an arbitrary choice, not based on any particular Mr. Gerald: Melbourne's evening newspaper was, and sometimes still is, called *Jim Gerald (Herald)* which would simply confuse the Cockneys. [4, p. 238]. Yet there appears to have been "a particular Mr. Gerald": it looks very likely that the rhyme exploits the name of a well-known Australian comedian and circus performer *Jim Gerald* (1891 - 1971) who is credited

to be the “last of the ‘big three’ of Australia’s 20th century comics – Gerald, George Wallace and Roy Rene”.

Of no less interest are the cases when newspaper titles, in their turn, serve as rhymes for ordinary everyday things. The use of the titles in this function is evidence of their wide popularity with cockney speakers. Two of the dailies – *the Daily Express* (known simply as *The Express*) and *the Daily Mail* (now called *The Mail*) belong here.

The *Daily Express*, founded in 1900, conservative in outlook, was the first to publish a crossword. The title rhymes with *dress* (as a noun and verb).

The *Daily Mail*, founded in 1896, is probably the most intellectual of the popular papers. It is widely read by a range of social groups [7, p. 93] and is today the only newspapers to boast a 50% female readership. The newspaper was sued for libel on several occasions. The rhyme was first recorded in the 1930s and is often shortened to *daily*. *Daily Mail* rhymes with a number of referents: (1) *tail*, the backside, the buttocks (*up one’s daily* = following close behind); the sex, copulation (*tail*); (2) a *tale*, a lie (the rhyme probably contains a comment on the believability of the paper); (3) *ale*; (4) *bail*; (5) *nail*.

Completing our analysis of rhyming slang units used as rhymes for some printed mass media titles and the mass media titles that serve as rhymes for ordinary things, we shall dwell on *the Sporting life* newspaper that was published from 1859 until 1998, was known for covering horse racing and was popular with horse racing fans, bookies and jockeys who were likely to use the rhyme *Sporting life* to refer to one’s *wife*. The *Sporting Life* was said to be the late Queen Mother’s favourite newspaper. Latterly it has continued as a multi-sports website. The rhyme has been backed by a 1963 British feature film based on the novel *This Sporting Life* by David Storey. The film directed by Lindsay Anderson recounts the story of a rugby league footballer, whose romantic life is not as successful as his sporting life. The rhyme *Sporting life* to refer to one’s *wife* (there are more than two dozens rhymes, for example, *bit of tripe*, *Carving Knife*, *Fork and Knife*, *drum and fife*, *Duchess of Fife*, *Struggle and Strife*, *Trouble and Strife*, *war and strife*, *worry and strife* etc.) reflects “the male-dominated club” of prototypical rhyming slangsters [4, p. xii].

To sum it up: the rhymes presented in the article give clear evidence of reading tastes and preferences of London cockney speakers and the reading matter that shape their conception of the visual environment and phenomena. There are the rhymes *linen draper*, *Johnny Raper*, and *skyscraper* for the word *newspaper*, *Captain Grimes* and *nursery rhymes* for The Times, *currant bun* for The Sun, *Mork & Mindy* for the Indie, *Beans on Toast* for the Evening Post, while the titles *The Express*, *The Mail* and *The Sporting Life* serve as rhymes themselves.

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