

Keep your English up to date

Toy boy

Professor David Crystal

There's a class of very unusual words in English, they're called "reduplications" or "reduplicated forms": "bow wow, says the dog". Well, you can hear the reduplication, the two words are almost the same, it's just the first part changes: "helter-skelter", "namby-pamby"...

Words like this are reduplicated forms, and new ones are really rather unusual. But "toy boy" has come along in the last 10 or 15 years. It's British slang, from the 1980s. It refers to an attractive young man being kept as a lover by another person, by an older person, that's the crucial thing: the older person is keeping the younger man as that person's "toy boy".

It's the rhyme that made it popular. "Toy girl" seems rather boring by comparison.



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