

Keep your English up to date

Bling

Professor David Crystal

Bling, bling – it arrived in English in the late 1990s, used to describe diamonds and jewellery and all kinds of showy clothing, accoutrements ...

Well, it became nationally known in the USA when the artist Baby Gangster - Cash Money artist - made a hit hip-hop song called 'Bling Bling'. And it soon arrived in Britain, where it was more usually used without the reduplication, you know, 'bling', by itself. It was in dictionaries by 2002.

Well, the sound-symbolic character of the word - glistening light reflected by metal - it caught popular attention. *The Times* ran an article on it. It was the title of a novel by Erica Kennedy, and its sense began to broaden as people began to use the word in new ways. There's a website, 'Think Bling!' defining it as 'anything shiny and worth a good amount of money'. Cars can now be bling.

And even that definition is passé - a rich meal can be bling. 'Bling Breakfast' was the headline of a newspaper article in New York a couple of years ago.

But the word's takeover by the middle-classes has made it worthless to the rapping community. My rapping contacts tell me – they'd never use it now, except as a joke!



bbclearningenglish.com

© British Broadcasting Corporation 2005