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'Should banter be banned?'

By Richard Haugh BBC News

Offensive and derogatory or just a bit of harmless fun? The word banter is more than 300 years old but is increasingly finding itself under the spotlight, with questions being asked about its true meaning. But some would say a more sinister use of the word has developed alongside this - one which was pointed out by teacher Mike Stuchbery.

Mr Stuchbery made a stand against banter, saying it had become an "excuse for inappropriate behaviour" in his classroom, in Gorleston, Norfolk. "If I catch somebody nicking someone's pencilcase, calling another student a derogatory name or thumping them on the back, nine times out of ten I'll be met with a 'Siiiiir, it's just bantaaaaaaah!", he wrote on his blog.

Author and journalist Musa Okwonga said the evolution of the word was partly the work of magazines such as Loaded and Nuts.

It's becoming a popular word which could cover up a whole host of more problematic meaning. The lads' mags may have gone now but their legacy was this demeaning commentary disguised as jokes," he said. "Banter blurred with innuendo."

He said this banter usage was propelled by comments made by Premier League manager Malky Mackay, and before that Andy Gray and Richard Keys, who made sexist comments about a female referee.

"The defence about the comments was that it was just banter," Mr Okwonga said. "That showed the extent that it was acceptable, that someone in the public eye who works for a major broadcaster thinks that it's totally fine to use this language in the circle he was living in."

