



FAN
PHENOMENA

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER



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Chapter 4

Buffyspeak: The Internal and External Impact of Slayer Slang

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- Apparently Buffy has decided the problem with the English language is all those pesky words.
- Xander, 'Bad Eggs' (Season 2, Episode 24), *BtVS*



Fig.1: Disgusted by Buffy's questions about a dead guy found stuffed in a locker, Cordelia replies with, 'Morbid, much?'

The way we speak says a lot about who we are. Accents, dialects, the use of slang, and other verbal cues are strong indicators of our background, and people tend to adopt the speech patterns of those close to them. In this way, groups often distinguish themselves through their particular shared way of speaking. As the above quote from Xander demonstrates, language is something that is consciously played with in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Buffy's way of speaking is explicitly identified as out of the ordinary. Throughout the series, Buffy and her friends, a group referred to as the 'Scooby Gang', consistently use language in a creative and unique way, effectively doing away with 'all those pesky words' and inventing their own form of language that is much more expressive and relevant to their teenage context: *Buffyspeak*.

Buffyspeak is a term that refers to the very distinctive way of speaking used by some of the main characters in the *Buffyverse*, encompassing both the show itself and its spin-off series *Angel*, which may be considered part of the *Buffy* canon, as well as the non-canonical productions of the *Buffy* fan community, including message board postings and fanfiction. *Buffyspeak* both draws on and influences the conventions of standard American slang, and in some instances, British, and acts as a prime example of language's ability to form group identities and structure communities, both within the show and in the real world.

The style of *Buffyspeak*

The distinctiveness of *Buffyspeak* is established very early on in the series. In the very first episode, for example, both Buffy and Xander use the phrase 'What's the sitch?', Buffy says that the library gives her the 'wiggins', and Cordelia reacts to Buffy's enquiries about a dead guy stuffed in a locker with 'Morbid, much?' All of these are classic *Buffyisms* and immediately set the tone for the unique linguistic style of the series. It's hard to pinpoint what exactly characterizes *Buffyspeak*, although various elements are identifiable, as evidenced by several in-depth studies of the show's dialogue.

In *Slayer Slang: A 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' Lexicon* (2003), author Michael Adams addresses the phenomenon of *Buffyspeak* as a whole, which includes slayer slang as well as slayer jargon and slayer style. An extensive glossary of *Buffyisms* from both the show (the 'canonical' source) and several online communities dedicated to the *Buffyverse* ('non-canonical' sources) are included in the text. Adams also discusses at length the importance of studying 'ephemeral language'— language patterns that more or less constitute a 'fad' and will soon pass, yet still act as a strong force in the structuring of com-

Fan Appreciation no.3

Clinton McClung, Founder of the 'Once More With Feeling' touring sing-along



Clinton McClung is a Seattle-based programmer at SIFF Cinema, an organization that screens films year-round as well as produces the annual 'Seattle International Film Festival'. McClung is best known for creating the innovative and engaging interactive event for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s landmark musical episode, 'Once More With Feeling'. The sing-along toured the United States before being unceremoniously shut-down. McClung shares the whole joyous, turned grievous, story here, what *Buffy* means to him, and how a sing-along can be both a connective and liberatory experience for a fan.

Jennifer K. Stuller (JKS): *'Once More With Feeling' is special to me, because after years of ignoring recommendations from friends and family to watch Buffy I finally gave in and it was the first episode I ever saw. As all my loved ones had suspected, I immediately fell in love. How did you come to the series, and what was your experience of viewing 'OMWF'?*

Clinton McClung (CM): *I'd actually watched the premiere of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* - and I didn't like it. I was actually strangely a fan of the movie. Mostly because I was a fan of Paul Reubens. And I went to see that movie in the theatres and it wasn't terrible, it was kinda fluffy, but, I liked it. So I heard they were making it into a TV show and I was like 'WHAT?' and I watched the first episode and I just didn't 'get it'. And then about two years later, I was living in Boston and my roommate and I were flipping through the channels one night and we landed on the finale for season two - and we got sucked into it instantly. And by the end of it, I was balling my eyes out, and was like 'What's happening to me? I don't even know who half these people are! This show is really great!'*

*That summer they re-ran season two, so I was able to catch up and that's when I got hooked. We would rush home every Tuesday to watch it. Around that same time, I moved in with six girls - in this huge apartment in Boston - and Tuesday night was *Buffy* night. We would just come home and all gather around the TV and I hadn't had an experience like that with a TV show before necessarily, because I'm in movie theatres a lot, so with movies I've always felt that way. And then, to have a show that we all ran home and watched? And then we rewatched it right away? And then talked about it all night? And the next day we watched it again sometimes just to figure out what was going to happen next and how is this character changing? It was one of the first shows I'd seen too, where the characters really evolved. So that's how I got hooked on *Buffy*, and that's how I stayed hooked on *Buffy*.*