

Popular Culture Association in the South

Slayer Slang: A Buffy the Vampire Slayer Lexicon by Michael Adams

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Studies in Popular Culture, Vol. 26, No. 2 (October 2003), pp. 125-128

Published by: [Popular Culture Association in the South](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41970403>

Accessed: 27/07/2014 18:44

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Book Reviews

Adams, Michael. *Slayer Slang: A Buffy the Vampire Slayer Lexicon*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.

English professor Michael Adams's *Slayer Slang: A Buffy the Vampire Slayer Lexicon* offers a strange blend of fan dictionary and linguistics textbook. Attempting to map the evolution of slayer slang, the author provides an insightful look at the linguistic devices behind some of *Buffy*'s most recognizable slang terminology. Adams takes on the daunting task of identifying and explaining both the creation of slayer slang and its ability to flourish within if not a mainstream group, at least a sizable and cohesive group. The average *Buffy* fan will probably have trouble sifting through the first half of the text. As Jane Espenson, a writer and Co-Executive Producer of *Buffy*, points out in her introduction to *Slayer Slang*, "I don't even have to understand anything about the inner workings of Buffyspeak. . . . As any linguist knows, being fluent in a language and understanding the mechanisms of that language are two completely different things" (x). So while teenagers the world over are probably more likely to use the slang of which Adams writes, most could not break down the word-formative processes within their own dialogue.

The desire to understand the processes, however, becomes part of the reason for Adams's writing of the book. As he points out, "slayer slang" does not exist within a vacuum. Those who watch the show

appropriate the language and change it over time. Some words now exist which can be defined as Buffyspeak or slayer slang and can be traced directly back to the television series without ever having been uttered on the program. Adams culls his research from seven seasons of *Buffy*, several seasons of *Angel*, the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* movie, just under 100 *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* novels, dozens of affiliated comic books, and, interestingly, two separate Buffycentric message boards. On these boards, *Buffy*-obsessed adolescents mingle with Ph.D. holding professors. Trying to write for both audiences--half the time, in a conversational mode, the other half, in a seemingly didactic one, Adams makes obvious his love for the show, but does not let that prejudice his analysis. Sometimes his back and forth movements from friendly *Buffy* fan to distinguished linguist can be slightly off putting, but overall, the style works in that the author's less scholarly discussions provide a layman's example of his points.

Probably the most delightful part of the book, the glossary, gathers not only the defined slang term, but also documents textual evidence for each term. Recording every possible usage for each term (or entry) (i.e. the term "slay" can be a verb, noun, or an adjective) and giving examples of the term in each context, the glossary aids the reader in understanding one of Adams' key points: that the importance of

"slayer slang" is not simply its ability to coin new terms, but rather, its ability to change the usage of pre-existing words. Illustrating this particularly well in the last chapter of the book, Adams imagines a cocktail party for adverbs: "Mr. and Mrs. Much are having difficulty explaining **much**. . . . Rumor has it she's come out as an adjective"(118). This playful example characterizes the most effective of Adams' arguments. Managing to merge his friendly and scholarly tones, Adams cleverly shows that, in "slayer slang," words usually used as adjectives or adverbs can change their parts of speech.

The most logical audience for this book would be hard-core *Buffy* fans with a degree in linguistics-or, at least, a strong interest in the field, specifically in the evolution of slang. That this group includes fewer people than the publisher would wish for marketing a new book is not as problematic as it may seem. Average fans of the show will find the glossary engrossing, and the fully documented quotations help fans grasp the meaning of the entry as they can see the word or expression in its larger context. More scholarly readers will enjoy the etymological emphasis within both the glossary and the text, as Adams undertakes the task of tracing certain words from their inception on *Buffy* to their acceptance into the American lexicon, at least the lexicon of *Buffy* message board participants, and, in some cases, magazine and journal articles.

Slayer Slang: A Buffy the Vampire Slayer Lexicon assumes that elements of popular culture have a drastic effect on the evolution of language. Adams's attempt to explain the abundance of *Buffy* induced sayings in the American lexicon helps to legitimize Buffy studies, and ultimately, the idea of slang as an important process in language development.

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