

“That Doesn’t Sound Like the Phil Coulson I Used to Know”: Language and Change in *Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*

Malgorzata (Gosia) Drewniok

Language is one of the most distinctive features of Joss Whedon’s work. It has been particularly noticed in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) – the language used in this series has been extensively explored by scholars from many disciplines, including Karen Eileen Overbey and Lahney Preston-Matto (2002), Michael Adams (2003), Jesse Saba Kirchner (2006) and others in the whole special issue of *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association* devoted to *Buffy* language (*Slayage* 20), as well as Susan Mandala (2007), and Malgorzata Drewniok (2012; 2013). Mandala (2010) also examined *Firefly* (2002).

This paper stems from my recent doctoral research into vampire transformations in *Buffy* and how they are signaled in language. However, here I would like to discuss Whedon’s latest creation – *Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* I want to show that Whedon has not stopped his discussion of transformation/change at *Buffy*. *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* echo the language of change present in *Buffy*, and take it to another level. Through examples, and comparison to quotes from *Buffy*, I will demonstrate that change is always on Whedon’s mind and that this preoccupation is visible in the language used by the *Agents*. I will focus on Agent Phil Coulson, examining his lexical choices, his politeness strategies, and his conversation behavior.