

Charles University in Prague

Faculty of Education

Department of English Language and Literature

Bachelor's Thesis

**RED DWARF WORD TRACKS:
Suggestions for Vocabulary-focused English Lessons
Using a Video Resource**

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I hereby declare that this bachelor's thesis is completely my own work and that no other sources were used in the preparation of this thesis than those listed on the Works Cited page.

Prague, April 2012

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ABSTRACT AND KEY WORDS IN ENGLISH AND CZECH LANGUAGE

Abstract:

This thesis attempts to introduce some of the possibilities of using a piece of pop culture video for teaching English vocabulary. Its aim is to provide a ready-made teaching material in the form of a detailed and easy to follow lesson plan for three 45-minute-long consecutive classes based on a single episode of the British BBC series Red Dwarf, as well as to discuss the use of this type of resources more generally and by the means of the suggested activities inspire language teachers to invent similar lessons.

Key words:

Vocabulary, video, idiolect, characters, register, pronunciation, accent, learning and teaching strategies, neologism, semantic field

Abstrakt:

Tato práce se snaží představit některé možnosti využití videa z popkulturní oblasti pro výuku anglické slovní zásoby. Jejím cílem je jednak poskytnout konkrétní, detailní a snadno použitelný plán tří po sobě následujících 45minutových vyučovacích hodin vycházejících z jedné epizody britského seriálu televize BBC Červený trpaslík, jednak se vyjádřit obecněji k užití daného typu materiálu a pomocí navržených aktivit inspirovat učitele jazyků k vytváření podobně zaměřených hodin.

Klíčová slova:

Slovní zásoba, video, idiolekt, postavy, registr, výslovnost, akcent, výukové strategie, neologismus, sémantické pole

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I. Introduction

The range of materials employed in language teaching is wide, even wider in case of English as the most common foreign language taught and learned worldwide¹. It can even seem too wide to many teachers who struggle to make good use of the less usual resources and prefer to stick to regular course books. It might, however, be rather refreshing to enrich English lessons with material not primarily designed for language learning. For no matter how hard course books try to come close to the real world, they remain a world of their own and tend to be perceived by students as such.

I. 1. Using video in an English classroom

Despite the fact that video has been used in classrooms for several decades now, there are still many teachers reluctant to work with it and probably even a greater number of those misusing it. “This is the obvious way of using visual equipment: sit students in front of the TV. Switch it on. Let them watch the programme through,” Jim Scrivener describes the effortless approach in his *Learning Teaching* (Scrivener 350). Anyway, if we really want to see any results of language learning in our class, we must realize, as Scrivener mentions further on, that “video is simply another classroom tool; it doesn’t do the teaching for you.”(Scrivener 351)²

We should therefore treat video as other tools we are familiar with: We must decide about the purpose we use it for, exploit it in all relevant ways and ensure appropriate presentation. Regarding the presentation, it is perfectly understandable that the fact of technical device taking part in the lesson may be scary to some, on the other hand, in 2012 we are offered much more complicated conveniences than a DVD player and mastering this at least could become a positive step towards new options and reduce the gap between teachers and students as regards proficiency in handling technology.

¹ „Some 380m people speak it as their first language and perhaps two-thirds as many again as their second. A billion are learning it, about a third of the world's population are in some sense exposed to it and by 2050, it is predicted, half the world will be more or less proficient in it.“ (The Economist, 20 December 2001)

² Compare also Geddes 108

The first important piece of advice for using video in a classroom thus is: Forget your technophobia.³

The development of audiovisual technologies helps us in this matter. DVDs are unquestionably easier to use in class than video tapes used to be. Their advantages include an easy way to jump to a specific moment, often several language and subtitle tracks present, clear still images when paused or possibility to choose the speed of the recording.

However, the greatest advantage of audiovisual materials in general is simply their audiovisual nature. It represents a code people are used to nowadays. It intensely attracts attention. The sometimes hard to achieve situation of the majority of a class fully focused on the subject matter comes naturally. It would be considered waste of such opportunity to make the class only watch and be exposed to the language (although they should certainly be encouraged to do this in their spare time⁴) without further exploitation of the material. That does not mean forgetting the fun video brings, it only means making use of it.

I. 2. Advantages of comedy series for teaching

The choice of video resources varies greatly from the news broadcasting to feature films, each serving different purpose and allowing different techniques to be used within the lesson. There are many factors we need to take into consideration when choosing the right material – composition of the class and consequent attractiveness of the video, complexity of the language, length...

Let us now look at the reasons why this thesis chooses a comedy series for an exemplary form. First of all, we must note the word comedy. As society nowadays seeks entertainment in all possible fields, comic nature of the material is quite likely to

³ Only the technologically easiest procedure – viewing video – is considered in our plan, not other possibilities such as recording or editing video. Suggestions for own recordings only appear in extension outlines and recording of these is exclusively the students' job.

⁴ The role of language input in second language acquisition is viewed differently by different teaching schools (see Ellis, chapter 6), but we generally consider exposure to authentic language a crucial complement to simplified in-class language, especially for higher level students.

ensure its attractiveness. Another key factor is related to time: On one hand, comedy series usually contain relatively short episodes which can be easily used as discrete units fitting in the standard forty-five or sixty-minute-long lesson (the dilemma related to a feature film presentation – whether to spend hours of our precious time just watching or to choose the rather demanding way of extracts – is eliminated or at least reduced). On the other hand, the phenomenon of a particular successful series is normally long-term. Television presents the episodes regularly, the series becomes a part of its viewers lives and partly also of the lives of people who do not watch it at all. While regarding feature films there will always be a problem of the class divided into two groups: those who have seen it and those who have not, a popular comedy series often proves familiar to the majority. It is likely that if someone had not watched it regularly, they have still seen some of it, heard other people talking about it or at least have a vague notion of its characters.

And it is mainly the characters, what provides us with a great opportunity to exploit comedy series for language work. Main characters are the keystone of the series. They are the one fixed element throughout the episodes, the image of the series depends on their appearance, their behaviour... and well, their language.

The lesson plan suggested in this thesis reflects our perception of TV series characters as individuals with an individual way of speaking. The concept of idiolect⁵ is easily introduced and worked with, which helps us examine the problems of vocabulary choices, e.g. the problem of registers⁶, as well as sound specifics of individual speech and its consequences on comprehension.

I. 3. Red Dwarf, its specifics

There were several factors involved in the choice of the particular comic series for the following lesson plan. As the lessons were primarily designed for teaching teenagers and young adults in the Czech Republic, the material sought was supposed to be well

⁵ “idiolect (ling) - The linguistic system of individual speaker.” (Crystal 423)

⁶ “register 2 (socio) – A socially defined variety of language, e.g. scientific, legal, etc.” (Crystal 429)

known, preferably long established in the Czech Republic⁷, presenting well distinguished and characterized figures, and of course rich in language material.

Red Dwarf is a British science-fiction sit-com broadcasted by the television BBC since 1988. Its authors Rob Grant and Doug Naylor based it on their radio sketches written earlier⁸ (www.reddwarf.co.uk). That contributes to the fact that the humour is mainly verbal, which makes the series convenient for language learning.

The number of main characters is extremely limited and relationships between them stable, physical appearance of each is very specific as well as their character and language, which makes the above mentioned work with characters well possible.

Although a piece of science fiction, Red Dwarf is not excessively demanding in terms of technical terminology – focus on characters and plot prevails. The fictional world is relatively easy to orient oneself in due to the authors managing to establish clear logical connections within the improbable situations. No matter how twisted the reality we watch is, it has certain integrity and the stories thus always seem to “hold water”.

There have been eight series of Red Dwarf so far with a total of fifty-two episodes (www.reddwarf.co.uk). The episodes are thirty minutes long, which makes them fit well in the time of a lesson. Most of them are quite usable for teaching English.

However, a single episode had to be chosen for this thesis. The choice of Legion, the second episode of the sixth series, is connected to the main focus of the thesis: figures and their characterization through language. In this episode we meet a creature that is made up of the main characters’ personalities combined.

I. 4. The choice of vocabulary to be covered

“It is the experience of most language teachers that the single, biggest component of any language course is vocabulary,” Michael McCarthy’s book *Vocabulary* begins

⁷ The lesson plan, however, does not work with the nationality of the original target group in any other way. Few references to either L1 (cognates) or specific cultural background are involved, the lessons can be therefore used with multilingual classes as well. We should only make sure that at least half of the class is familiar with the series.

⁸Actually, the two authors have only co-written the first six series before falling out. Grant then left the project. (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094535/trivia>)

(McCarthy xiii). It is then quite natural that the field of vocabulary was chosen among language systems and skills to be focused on in our Red Dwarf lessons.

The series presents surprising lexical density, the students' attempts to watch it in the original are often abandoned due to subjective feeling of overwhelming amount of unknown words. The help our lessons offer lies mainly in an insight into the organization of the lexical system. Learners must be able to find a place for the lexical item in their mental lexicon. "Learners do not get any real grasp of a word anyway until they have performed some sort of mental contextualization upon it," McCarthy says.

We thus use several criteria for the choice of vocabulary focus:

a) Register⁹ – In concord with our focus on characters and their language, some of the items significant for particular registers will be chosen, as "vocabulary choice is probably the main feature which characterizes registers." (McCarthy 62)

b) Lexical/ semantic fields¹⁰ - From the field of television entertainment in the early stage of the first lesson we proceed to personality describing expressions. Moreover, the newly presented lexis taking part in vocabulary pre-teaching stage is also divided into semantic fields for easier orientation.

c) Frequency – We must consider frequency of the particular items within the presented episode as well as the overall frequency elsewhere. If a word is likely to be used in other contexts – has greater range (McCarthy), it is certainly most useful to the learners. However, we also pay attention to items with very restricted use, namely neologisms, which are typical of Red Dwarf. Their record indirectly contributes to comprehension of other words, because thinking about their structure enhances awareness of word formation.

e) Geographical distribution – Observing the speech of the individual characters, we also notice their variety of English and any lexical items belonging to it.

9 "Vocabulary choice is significantly governed by who is saying what, to whom, when and why. It is this relationship between the content of the message, its sender and receiver, its situation and purpose, and how it is communicated, which is often called register." (McCarthy 61)

10 "lexical fields are the realization (or flesh and bones, as it were) of the abstract notion of semantic fields" (McCarthy 21)

d) Learnability¹¹ – Some items are simply easier to learn than other. Students of the supposed age are likely to learn items that are equipped with humour – prominent words in the punch lines of individual jokes, funny sounding words... Nevertheless, learnability depends greatly on the individuality of the learner. That is the reason why a certain number of new words acquired in these lessons are actually picked by the students themselves (see the next chapter).

It must be also noted that majority of technical terms are (apart from being generally unimportant as indicated above) subject to easy understanding by speakers of other European languages as they are derived from Latin and represent cognates.

I. 5. Working with words - learning and teaching strategies

In our lesson plan we do not follow any particular teaching method as a complex system of techniques and strategies, yet we are definitely inclined towards communicative approach, which is the prevailing tendency at the time this thesis is being written.

A significant feature of the lesson conduct is respect of individual differences between the students and making use of them. A variety of activities taking into consideration differing learning styles or sensory preferences¹² is provided and learner autonomy encouraged. Let us, once again, cite Michael McCarthy: “Effective memorizing and assimilation of words is probably not the result of any single method, and the good learner will operate a variety of techniques, some of which will be highly individual and idiosyncratic; indeed, encouraging learner autonomy in such matters is probably the best way to foster good vocabulary memorization.” (McCarthy 120)

Learner autonomy plays an important role particularly during the video viewing – the students themselves decide which lexical items they consider important or interesting in relation to the problem of registers. The students thus find their own way to the language, especially lexis of formal register.

We try not to take vocabulary learning out of the context of other systems and skills taking part in an English classroom. Listening as well as reading is employed in the video presentation as we use English soundtrack together with English subtitles – the

¹¹ Term used by McCarthy

¹² Term used by Scrivener

focus is on lexis and this allows us to present the orthographic and phonological shape (McCarthy 35) of words at the same time and help prevent both spelling and pronunciation difficulties.

Pronunciation is paid close attention to, for two reasons: Firstly, there are three different accents in the series – RP, North American and above all the hard to understand Scouse accent¹³, which determine the impression of the characters' speech. Secondly, the major productive skill employed in the lesson is speaking, that is why the students need to get the phonological shape right.

In accordance with communicative approach teacher talking time is kept to a minimum, the preferred types of interaction are group work and pair work.

I. 6. Comment on the structure of the following text

As the main aim of the following pages is to present a ready-made, easy to follow lesson plan, the main body of the text will only deal with the information necessary for conducting the lesson (descriptions of the activities, instructions to give the students). However, the thesis also pursues a secondary aim: to offer a general approach to video use in the classroom which could serve as inspiration for creating similar lessons based on different material. Readers considering this aspect might find useful comments on particular activities, techniques or linguistic concepts. These will be presented in footnotes.

¹³“The accent of the city of Liverpool and its immediate surroundings (now the county of Merseyside) is known as Scouse.” (Wells 371)

II. Lesson plan

This section introduces a ready-made lesson plan exploiting the Legion episode of the Red Dwarf series in three consecutive 45-minute-long lessons. If the standard length of the lesson is 60 minutes, some of the included additional suggestions (found in Appendix 2 and throughout the text) can be used to spend the rest of the time with.

The overview of the lesson plan in a chart is provided as appendix 2.

II. 1. General information on the lessons: class – age, level, presumed knowledge, material and other requirements

The lessons were designed for groups of teenagers or young adults – the choice of material is based on popularity of Red Dwarf among these age groups. As the plan employs group work, it is recommended to be used with larger classes. Nevertheless, by slight adjustments it can be adapted for a minimum of two students. (Not suitable for one-to-one courses.)

The assumed level is upper-intermediate and above. It needs to be realized that classes of higher levels are typically characterized by great differences in various areas of the students' competence. That is the reason for both student autonomy and group work being employed. Competition is used, but between groups, not individuals.

As the form of a series has been selected due to its high potential of work with characters and their description, a wide range of vocabulary of the personality characterization field is expected to be used. It is thus more than welcome to have this semantic field covered in some of the previous sessions, the session directly preceding ours most conveniently, as the Red Dwarf lessons serve well as a follow-up. They involve rather practice of this vocabulary than its presentation, although some extension takes place.

Other knowledge assumptions account for general vocabulary and grammar of approximately upper-intermediate level. Note that in these sessions grammar is not specifically dealt with at all. (For suggestions on grammar work, see Appendix 3.)

In addition to the above mentioned, the teacher is supposed to know the Red Dwarf series reasonably well.

The lesson plan attempts to be user-friendly, therefore the amount of material and aids needed for the lesson is kept to a minimum. We will obviously need a DVD (preferably with English subtitles), a player and a screen, but the rest consists purely of objects regularly involved in language teaching and learning – paper and pen for the students, board with pens/ chalks for the teacher and several volumes of monolingual dictionaries, preferably Advanced Learner's editions (which we also expect to be a standard part of lessons of this level.) A single handout (list of sentences for activity under the point II. 2. 3. 2.) is provided, but is designed solely for the teacher and does not have to be copied or given out to the students.

The Red Dwarf lessons are supposed to be an example of involving fun and entertainment in a language classroom, positive atmosphere is therefore vital.

II. 2. Lesson 1 - lead-in

In the first session we introduce the series and its characters and discuss their personal register. Only first two minutes of the video are used in this lesson.

II. 2. 1. Lead-in: Introducing the series, its basic concepts

Before the beginning of the lesson, prepare the video and arrange the seating, so that everyone could see well. However, the students should not be able to see what is going to be presented till the right moment – for the beginning cover the screen. Get the board and markers or chinks ready.

If you start your lesson with socializing, make sure the conversation is directed at TV and entertainment.

When all the student are present, tell them you are going to play a SIGNATURE TUNE (can be written on the board, possibly together with the American variant THEME SONG) and you want them to give a signal (e.g. clap) – but otherwise remain quiet – when they recognize it.¹⁴ When most of them have clapped, stop the tune and ask them to discuss their guess with their partner.

Collect feedback. Elicit the name of the series and words such as: series, sit-com, sci-fi, spacecraft... (the basic concepts).

Ask some of the students (ideally four) who were the first to clap to prepare brief characteristics of the four main characters while you discuss more details of the series (the basic plot line, concept of time etc.) with the others.¹⁵ During the discussion ask the class if the fact of Red Dwarf being sci-fi means there will be a lot of technical

¹⁴ This will help you recognize how familiar they are with the series – you will see clearly the division of the class that you should consider in the following lessons: which students are obviously fans and who, on the other hand, sees it for the first time etc. The tune also helps to raise expectations and instantly relax the atmosphere.

¹⁵ The fastest ones to clap are expected to be the ones most familiar with the series, they might therefore find introduction of it boring. By performing a different task simultaneously with the group discussion they not only keep themselves occupied but also help us save time in the next stage with the whole class working towards the figures' characterization.

terms to deal with. (The conclusion: although it uses them a lot, as a sit-com it makes fun of the terminology, twists it and creates its own pseudo-terminology¹⁶.)

Make sure you keep teacher talking time to a minimum and elicit as much as you can.

II. 2. 2. The characters: discussing their features using the personality describing vocabulary

Ask the students who worked on the characterization to write their descriptions (or their key words) on the board without stating the names of the characters.

Play the first two minutes of the Legion episode and ask the students to assign the characteristics to the figures they have just seen – discuss in pairs.

Collect feedback.

Tell them to work in groups to come up with some more. Encourage them to exploit this semantic field, use their notes from the previous session and/ or dictionaries.¹⁷

II. 2. 3. Idiolects of the characters

While collecting feedback, note if any of the groups had commented on the characters' language. Make the discussion head this direction. Try to elicit words like accent, formal, informal.

II. 2. 3. 1. The concept of idiolect

Provide terms register (if not elicited previously) and idiolect. Ask for their guess what an idiolect is. Explain that it is a language system of an individual, that every person

¹⁶ Here is the first reference to neologisms which will be dealt with later on.

¹⁷ Outcomes may be compared to the information provided in the database of characters on the sit-com's official website (www.reddwarf.co.uk/database/index.cfm) or thorough characters descriptions on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Red_Dwarf_characters

has their own way of expressing themselves. Personalize it: Ask them whether they can see any specifics of their language compared to the language of their parents, other people in the class, you...¹⁸

Note that all the characters in the series are written by the same authors, so all the idiolects here reflect the authors' language and their intention in the characters' description!

II. 2. 3. 2. The main activity – game: Who says that?

(You will need Appendix 1: List of words and sentences for activity II. 2. 3. 2.)

Ask the students if it is easier to see the individual nature of a person's language on their grammar or vocabulary.

Ask them if they know anybody who uses some specific words that have become typical of him or her.

Tell them you are going to look at some words used by the Red Dwarf characters and decide who says them.

Divide the class into teams (2 or more, depending on the number of students). Tell them that each team has 1000 points (dollars, crowns...) to bet. You will keep a record of their points but it is a good idea to have "an accountant" in their team too, who is responsible for their wealth. Give each team a board marker / chalk of different colour and a monolingual dictionary.

Divide the board in two halves. One of them will be further divided into four columns with the names of the characters as titles. The other half will be used for writing the vocabulary.

Give the instructions:

¹⁸ They may spontaneously come up with many factors that constitute an idiolect. This can be valuable for their reflection of language, nevertheless, this is not a linguistic course and any detailed formal classification of idiolect as a linguistic concept is irrelevant.

“I am going to write a word on the board. Your team has twenty seconds to decide who says the word – Lister, Rimmer, Kryten or Cat?¹⁹ You must also evaluate how sure you are about it – you will be betting your points. When I give a signal, a representative of each team comes to the board and writes number of points you decided to bet under the name of the character you decided for. Please do not hesitate, you have only five seconds²⁰ to write the number.” (Demonstrate with the example item – “sir”, ask instruction checking questions if you are not sure whether everybody understood.)

“Then I am going to give you the whole sentence the word comes from. You have now another twenty seconds to change your decision.²¹ You can change the amount of points you bet. You can also change the character you bet on, but in that case an extra fee of one hundred points will be charged. The procedure is the same as in the first part: twenty seconds for decision making – signal – five seconds for writing on the board.”

Once again, demonstrate on the example and ask instruction checking questions (e.g. Does it cost you anything if you want to change your decision “three hundred points on Rimmer” to “fifty points on Rimmer”?).

Play the game and collect all relevant feedback – especially on how it influenced their opinion when the context for the word was provided.

II. 2. 3. 3. Follow-up activity: Writing a list of favourite words and words never used for a specific character

The follow-up activity can be either done in class (option for 60-minute-long lessons) or set as homework. The students are asked to think about a favourite character of theirs – from Red Dwarf or other series, film, even a book – and make up a list of five

¹⁹ The period of twenty seconds should also be sufficient for the students to look up the word in the dictionary if they do not know it. You do not need to tell them specifically to do it, it will probably come naturally.

²⁰ We set such a short limit to make sure the teams write their bets simultaneously and do not copy from each other.

²¹ This strengthens the students’ awareness of the importance of context in the process of assessing the word.

expressions they think the character likes to use and five expressions they think he or she would never use. Encourage them to use their fantasy. They should not stick with the actual words they heard coming out of the character's mouth, but rather try to imagine the character and their way of speaking as such and come up with expressions that would (and would not) fit in.

Feedback involves discussing what their choices were based on.

II. 3. Lesson 2 – video lesson

In this lesson the whole episode will be viewed. As it is twenty-seven minutes long excluding credits, it will fill most of the lesson's time. The rest is divided into a vocabulary pre-teaching session and first part of post-viewing feedback, which will be continued in the next period.

Before the beginning prepare the recording – switch on English subtitles, skip the credits, adjust sound – and arrange seating.

II. 3. 1. Pre-teaching vocabulary

Start the class by telling your students you are this time going to actually watch the whole Red Dwarf episode, but before you do so, there are some words appearing there which need to be clarified.

Most words in the chosen set take part in the punch-lines of the individual jokes. A neologism closes the first list as a bridge to the main activity setting.

Lists of words for pre-teaching:

List 1: weevil, prise, moose, swirl, vessel, missile, decoy, coward, suction, connoisseur, antimatter, dignity, tune, considerate, chainsaw, munificent, lair, malice, consciousness, grip, mutton, penetrate, ignition, smegger

List 2: lager, spring, derelict, classified, long johns, impeccable, stalemate, surrender²²

Procedure: Ask the students to work in groups. Number of groups depends on the number of dictionary volumes at your disposal – each group should be given one. Distribute board markers – one for each group.

²² Just like in any regular pre-teaching session, we do not include all unknown words the students are going to encounter in the episode. Neither are these words all expected to be completely unknown to them. The main purpose is to provide a list which: a) serves as a reference during viewing, and includes words that are useful for b) further watching of Red Dwarf, c) in real life

Tell the class they are going to look up words in their dictionary and place them in categories. Write on the board a heading “Words related to:” and subheadings of columns: “Technology and space”, “Animals”, “People’s qualities and skills” and “Movement”. There will be two more columns labelled “Other words” and “Not in the dictionary”²³.

Choose several items (an equal proportion) of List 1 for every team to look up and write in the appropriate column. Set time limit: five minutes.²⁴

While they are working, write the words from List 2 in the column “Other words” and provide synonyms / short definitions or drawings.²⁵







Accompany some of the words written by the students by simple drawings. You can ask early finishers to help you with that.

When the students have finished, you should end up with a chart similar to this:

²³ Assigning an item to a semantic field helps organization of the mental lexicon. (Compare McCarthy.)

²⁴ If the number of students is low and there are for instance only two teams, reduce the number of items on List 1 reasonably, leaving only the most valuable vocabulary for your students’ use. Consider whether to omit the rest or move it on List 2, consequently processing it yourself.

²⁵ The drawings should not be too elaborate. Each should take a maximum of ten seconds of your time – some authentic examples are provided in the chart below. They are supposed to be means of easy reference (especially appreciated by visual type of learners), not demonstration of your artistic skills.

WORDS RELATED TO:					OTHER WORDS	NOT IN THE DICTIONARY
TECHNOLOGY	ANIMALS	PEOPLE'S PERSONALITY AND SKILLS	MOVEMENT			
vessel	weevil	coward	pride	smegger	lager = light beer	
missile		connoisseur	swirl		spring = twisted wire	
antimatter	moose	considerate	suction		derelict = old and empty	
ignition		malice			classified = top secret	
	decoy	dignity			long johns = long underwear	
		munificent			impeccable = faultless, perfect	
	lair	consciousness ²⁶	penetrate		stalemate = situation in chess – not winning and not losing,	
					surrender = give up	
						
	mu				chainsaw	

²⁶ May appear in the section Other words as it not really a quality or skill

Provide quick feedback – rearrange wrongly placed items, ask individual students to define their words as simply as possible and help them with the more difficult concepts (antimatter, consciousness) if needed.

Stop by the word smegger. Explain that words with the root “smeg” are common swearwords in Red Dwarf. However, they are not in general dictionaries as they are neologisms²⁷. Ask somebody to explain what a neologism is. Tell them there are many neologisms in the Red Dwarf series and it will be one of their tasks in the following stage of the lesson to recognize them²⁸.

The chart is going to stay on the board while they watch the video, for reference.

II. 3. 2. Watching the video, looking for particular words and neologisms

Set tasks for video viewing. There will be three:

The first one was indicated previously: write down every word you think you would not find in the dictionary (neologisms).

The second one refers to the subject of the previous session: Choose one of the characters. Write down some of the words or phrases he uses that are somehow typical of him. (You may remind the students of the idiolect concept and related factors mentioned last time – formality/ informality, semantic field, attitudes.) They will be obviously preparing a variant of the “Who says the word” activity from the previous session, they should therefore, naturally, avoid the vocabulary they had worked with last time and rather come up with original suggestions. Encourage them to also list words that are not typical as such, but the way the character says them (ironic use, pronunciation etc.) makes them significant for him.

Tell them to write legibly, the two lists will be handed in.

²⁷ They can, on the other hand, be found in slang dictionaries such as <www.urbandictionary.com>. You can use the opportunity to introduce this type of resource - students of the given age and level are very likely to enjoy working with it and find it helpful when dealing with up-to-date nonstandard language forms encountered in pop-culture. It must be, however, noted that <www.urbandictionary.com> in particular is an open resource and as such provides very limited reliability - we must rely on approving and disapproving votes of other users.

²⁸ Expectation of neologisms also prevents students from desperately trying to understand every word – they know there would be some they simply cannot understand.

The third task is simple: Enjoy the show. Remind them that they do not necessarily have to understand every word. Tell them they will be able to listen and read at the same time as English subtitles will be on, however, as they certainly know from their own experience, there are never all of the audible words featured.²⁹

Play the video. Stop before the final credits (for time saving reasons).

II. 3. 3. Feedback on idiolect and neologisms – part 1

(Feedback will spread out to the next session.)

Tell the students they have now a few minutes to finalize their lists. Ask them to compare it with another person monitoring the same character. (“Who was writing down Rimmer’s words? Come together and compare your lists.”) They may also consult the dictionary.

Collect the lists.

For the next session, go through the lists of neologisms and assemble them into one, adding any missing examples. Look at the idiolect lists and compare them, write down the most frequent or interesting items.

²⁹ This can also be set as a specific activity: Write down words not featured in the subtitles. We suggest it as an alternative activity for this lesson in case we have either a very strong student we want to challenge or, on the contrary, a student who struggles with the original task because they find the concept of idiolect difficult to grasp.

II. 4. Lesson 3 – Follow-up

In this lesson the key concepts and vocabulary will be concluded, summarized and subjected to freer speaking practice. The aim of the lesson is to have the students adopt the previously discussed concepts and give a chance of expression to their creativity in language based on awareness of the language system structures.

You will need the video and the students' lists from the previous lesson.

II. 4. 1. Feedback on idiolect and neologisms – part 2, revision

The lesson will begin with a brief revision of the video content watched last time through describing still images. We suggest images found in the following segments: 01:35, 05:15, 9:28, 10:56, 13:21, 19:09, 21:10 and 24:31.

Before the lesson starts, prepare the video: Find the time 01:35 and pause the recording there, on an image of Kryten presenting the space weevil on the grill. The students will see the image on entering the classroom. Ask them what the image shows. Ask clarifying questions to ensure the use of key vocabulary. Continue with the other still images.

Prepare the joint list of neologisms and write them one by one on the board. Practice their pronunciation. Initiate a discussion about their meaning and form: When do the characters use them? How were they formed? Can we tell the word class?

Then write names of Lister, Rimmer, Kryten and Cat on the board and elicit the typical expressions the students had noticed previously. Discuss their choices. Add those items of the students' lists that they could not remember.

Ask about the language of Legion – can we just circle the featured lists and claim that is his vocabulary? (The answer is no. Legion speaks “Queen’s English”, because “the whole becomes far greater than the sum of its parts”.)

II. 4. 2. Role play

Comment on the items on the board. Say for example: “I could most easily play the role of Cat, because I really like to talk about clothes, I do not like to be very formal in language, and I love this ‘singing’ kind of intonation.”

Ask several students which role they would choose. Tell them they will now have a chance: they will prepare a short sketch. Ask them to form groups, ideally consisting of one Kryten, one Lister, one Cat, one Rimmer and possibly Legion, but the composition of the cast is entirely up to them as well as the content of the sketch. The only restriction is an obligation to include at least five of the expressions on the board (no matter if neologisms or idiolect items). The performance should not exceed three minutes.³⁰

Set time limit for preparation: fifteen minutes.

Monitor carefully. If you see any group entirely hopeless, lacking original ideas, suggest choosing an extract of the actual video for replaying. Encourage students to speak English when planning the show. Do not be afraid to support peculiar ideas. Encourage expressive pronunciation, especially intonation³¹.

II. 4. 3. Feedback

Students perform their sketches to the class. Elicit comments. Evaluate language work as well as originality and content.

³⁰ If, however, any students wish to create a longer piece, do not discourage them – ask them to prepare it for the following lesson and for the time being only provide a little sample.

³¹ This is particularly important for the speaker of languages such as Czech, whose intonation tends to be rather flat and they find it awkward to make it more dynamic in English. Role plays are unique opportunity for them to release their inhibitions and try it

III. Possible extensions / follow-up activities

If your Red Dwarf lessons had been successful, you and your students might like to stay with Red Dwarf for a bit longer. We list some additional suggestion which can complement the previous activities. The focus stays on vocabulary – for extensions to other fields see Appendix 3.

- If the students enjoyed the role-play and came up with some interesting ideas, encourage them to record their sketch on video – with every second student owning a mobile phone with a camera, it should not pose a technical problem. The shooting can be done in our outside the class (especially if they are keen on more sophisticated editing), the recording will then be presented to the class. After providing feedback you can initiate a discussion on film realization.
- While we focused on the more general vocabulary, the proper nouns mentioned in the episode were neglected. However, they are also components of the lexis the students had perceived and may raise questions. They are all deeply rooted in the cultural background of the series, which means they provide excellent opportunity of culture comparisons. You can for example have the students brainstorm names of actors they would replace Doug McClure (as a symbol of bad films of a certain category – sci-fi in this case) with. Alternatively, they can suggest variants for “liquorice allsorts”.
- Talking about cultural concepts, another feature is yet to be mentioned: Ask the student if they had noticed presence of any other language apart from English in the episode. Discuss where French expressions were used and why.
- List the curious types of cutlery mentioned in the episode and ask students to invent some more.
- If you have an ardent Red Dwarf fan in your class, you can give them a funny quiz “Are you a Red Dwarf Addict?”³² for homework reading to pick more

32 see <<http://djdrevil69.insanejournal.com/2009/11/05/>>

useful vocabulary items. There are many other quizzes and information for reading on the sit-com's official web site. Encourage your students to visit it and have some fun.

Moreover, if you managed to arouse enthusiasm and creative atmosphere, your students may come up with some ideas of extensions by themselves.

IV. Conclusion

In the suggested lesson plans, a comedy series is used for teaching vocabulary. Apart from bringing variety of material into the classroom we saw how video can help us deal with the complex nature of vocabulary by applying different kinds of knowledge about the word, such as meaning, written and spoken form of the word, its register or frequency (Schmitt 5). Several memory strategies suggested by Rebecca L. Oxford were taken into account when designing activities for the lessons – creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds or employing action (Oxford 41).

The plans are aimed at practical use and are to be offered to the international community of English teachers. The lessons have been taught to a sample group of students in order to check whether the plans are realistic and to detect possible problems (see the results below). Nevertheless, new outcomes can be produced by every use of the plan. The most valuable evaluation of the plan is thus going to be the feedback provided by other teachers who try using it.

IV. 1. Reflection of the practical use of this lesson plan

The three above described lessons were put into practice in two ninety-minute-long sessions with a group of young adults aged twenty-two to thirty-one. There were ten students ranging in level from upper-intermediate to advanced.

The students were asked to fill in a feedback questionnaire commenting on the strategies and particular expressions learnt. The data are presented in appendix 4.

All of the students knew the series well, but only one of them had ever tried to watch it in the original³³. The others were therefore surprised to hear the character's original speech, appreciated the variety of registers and accents and claimed to be willing to watch some of the next episodes in their spare time.

The simultaneous use of subtitles and soundtrack in the same language was agreed on as a great technique for self-study and some extensions to that were suggested (playing a short extract repeatedly switching the subtitles on and off for listening practice, turning the sound off using the subtitles for dubbing – practice of pronunciation, especially prosody etc.).

Overall the lessons had very relaxed and enthusiastic atmosphere and even the usually rather shy students participated well. A spontaneous discussion followed the activities.

IV. 1. Possible outcomes

Let us now look more generally at the possible outcomes of the lessons, as they are not intended for a single use:

After taking part in the three lessons the students should have acquired better awareness of lexical system, which might help them not only in their further study of English, but also in other languages including their L1.

They will have understood the problem of registers better and might become able to apply it to their own language production. Some particular expressions of both formal and informal language might be remembered.

Discussing neologisms can spark up the student's reflection of word origins as well as encourage language experiments. Moreover, as mentioned above, by expecting

³³ Most foreign programmes are dubbed for Czech TV broadcasting. In case of Red Dwarf, the translation is interesting especially due to code switching. The problem is referred to by Tereza Mlčáková in her bachelor's thesis from 2007 (Mlčáková).

neologisms in the video, they become more relaxed about understanding every word, which can pose significant development in their listening skills.

In addition, the students will also have encountered some ways of using video which may not have been known to them – consequences can follow in their self-study. They might feel tempted to watch their favourite British or American series in the original, focus more on individual differences between speakers, start using English subtitles together with English soundtrack to compare pronunciation and spelling etc.

They may also extend their knowledge of Red Dwarf in particular by reading trivia or reviews on the internet, discover sites such as imdb.com if they have not used it previously and thus explore a whole new area usable for their language learning.

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APPENDIX 1

List of words and sentences for activity II. 2. 3. 2

LEXICAL ITEM	UTTERANCE	SAID BY	FACTORS INVOLVED
sir	Unchanged for today, sir.	Kryten	personal attitude, formal code
Listy	How's supper, Listy?	Rimmer	attitude – irony
buddy	What the hell are you, buddy?	Cat	dialect - NAmE, informal code
vitamin freaks	They're for health psychos, vitamin freaks, people who exercise.	Lister	personal attitude, informal code
nostril hairs	My nostril hairs are vibrating faster than the springs on a Spaniard's honeymoon bed.	Cat	semantic field, attitude
warrior	In all my previous lives I've been a soldier, a bold warrior soul, who in this incarnation has been given the body of an abject coward.	Rimmer	attitude, formal code
tank tops	We're deader than tank tops	Cat	semantic field
senior officer	This is acting senior officer... of the Jupiter Mining Corporation transport vehicle Starbug.	Rimmer	attitude – semantic field (ranks)
unique	It has long been a dream of mine to sample its unique flavours.	Kryten	formal code (common word of Kryten's)
sophisticated	Don't let custard stains down Lister's long johns delude you into thinking we're not sophisticated.	Rimmer	attitude – formal code (tries to make an impression)
verruucas	I've been trimming my verrucas.	Lister	semantic field – attitude
pesky little RAM	All I could get from its pesky little RAM was something about classified military research.	Kryten	semantic field, attitude, (dialect)*

*The word “pesky” may suggest certain inclination of Kryten to North American variety of English. (Compare Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary: “**pesky** /'peski/ *adj.* [only before noun] (*informal, especially NAmE*) annoying”.)

APPENDIX 2:

Overview of the complete lesson plan in a chart

LESSON 1				
Stage	Activity	Procedure	Interaction	Time
1	Signature tune	a) T introduces the expression – write on the board b) T plays the tune, waits for the students' signal	T <-> Ss	2 min
2	Basic concepts of Red Dwarf	a) Discuss basic concepts in Red Dwarf with the class b) meanwhile a group of Ss works on character descriptions	a) class discussion b) individual/group work	5 – 10 min
3	Character descriptions	a) The Ss not taking part in the discussion write their descriptions on the board (without characters' names) b) T plays the first 2 minutes of the episode c) Ss (in pairs) assign features to the characters d) Ss (in pairs) add more features	pair work	5 – 10 min
4	Intro of idiolect	T elicits what idiolect could be and asks for example	T <-> Ss	2 min
5	“Who said that?” – main activity	a) Ss are divided in groups and given markers and dictionaries, names of characters are written on the board b) Give instructions: Ss bet on who said a word given, then a contextual sentence is given, they can change bets. Time limits: 20 seconds for decision, 5 for betting c) play the game	group work	20 min
6	Feedback	Collect any interesting comments	class discussion	2 min
7	Follow-up: list character's expressions	Ss individually write a list of presumably often used and never used expressions of their favourite character (Red Dwarf or other)	individual – HW or in class	0/ 10 min + feedback

LESSON 2

Stage	Activity	Procedure	Interaction	Time
1	Lead-in	T informs about vocabulary pre-teaching, hands out dictionaries	T -> Ss	1 min
2	Vocabulary pre-teaching	a) T sets task, writes names of semantic fields on the board b) Ss divided into groups, each given set of words to look up c) Ss perform the task, place the words in categories d) Feedback	group work	10 min
3	Introducing neologisms	T comments on the words in the column “not in the dictionary”	T -> Ss	1 min
4	Setting tasks for video viewing	T sets tasks: 1) Note neologisms, 2) Note anything significant for idiolects, 3) Enjoy and do not try to understand everything	T -> Ss	1 min
5	Video viewing + performing tasks	Ss watch video, make a list	individual	28 min
6	Feedback (part 1)	Ss compare their lists and finalize them	pair work	3 min

LESSON 3

Stage	Activity	Procedure	Interaction	Time
1	Revision	T shows still images, asks individual Ss to describe them	T <-> S	5 min
2	Feedback (part 2)	T writes characters' names on board, elicits words from Ss' lists	Ss -> T	5 min
3	Legion's language	Class comments on the language of the fifth character	class discussion	2 min
4	Setting main task	T introduces role-play activity, sets time limits	T -> Ss	2 min
5	Role-play preparation	Ss prepare performances, T monitors	groupwork	15 min
6	Role-play performance	Ss' groups perform, the others watch	groupwork	10 min (depends on class size)
7	Feedback	Collect any interesting comments	class discussion	5 min (time left)

APPENDIX 3

Suggestions for other language work using the Legion episode

The use of the Legion episode of Red Dwarf series described in our lesson plan of course does not exploit the material to the full extent. As the focus has so far been on lexis, in this place we will suggest activities aimed at the other language systems and skills.

The following activities are divided in two groups: the first one contains activities which can complement the vocabulary lessons conducted previously. They make use of the students already knowing the episode and work either with their memories of it or with replaying selected extracts, which the students, thanks to their previous experience, perceive within the context of the whole episode. The second group of activities employs expectations, prediction and guessing, it is therefore not desired that the students have seen the episode recently.

The activities are largely inspired by activity books *Video in Action* by Susan Stempleski and Barry Tomalin and *Video* by Richard Cooper, Mike Lavery and Mario Rinvoluceri (see references).

Group 1

GRAMMAR:

Activity 1: Follow-up on the previous work with registers – students research use of grammar in formal and informal speech. Print out the script³⁴, cut it in several parts, distribute to groups of students and ask them to find some examples of formal and informal sentence structures. Revise the names of the grammatical phenomena. Ask them to turn some of the utterances into their formal/informal counterparts (e.g. try what Kryten's line would sound like produced by Lister or the other way round). How did the grammatical structure change?

³⁴ Script of the episode can be found for example on the Czech website of the series www.cerveny-trpaslik.cz.

Activity 2: Past modals

Write these utterances on the board: “Is it possible you could have made a mis-smelling?” “Whatever they were cooking up must have been pretty special.” Revise (or introduce) the concept of past modals and establish discussion about the episode using them – hypothesise: Why did the scientists create Legion? (Encourage students to use structures must have/ might have.) Comment on the mistakes the characters make: Could/ should they have done anything differently? (For example: They should not have tried the Vampire Bikini Girls plan. They could have expected Legion to know it...)

PRONUNCIATION:

Activity 3: Choose one of Lister’s utterances. Set a competition for “the best Lister” and have the students imitate him. In a feedback session analyse what aspects they had to take into consideration – comment on individual sounds production as well as prosody.

Activity 4: Print out the dialogue from the fourth scene where all four main characters are present. Students work in groups of four and read out the dialogue trying to sound like the particular character. Then they switch the roles. Monitor and take notes of the particular pronunciation features the students noticed and managed to apply. Provide feedback. (This can be also done in the form of dubbing – if possible, slow down the video slightly.)

LISTENING:

Activity 5: Video dictation³⁵ - Choose a short sequence (a dialogue) and play it again, this time without subtitles. Each student is asked to write down the exact words said by one of the characters in the extract.

Activity 6: Song - Exploit the final song using your usual techniques – e.g. gap fill, re-order jumbled lyrics, cross out redundant words, add missing words etc.

READING:

Activity 7: Set a different section from the Red Dwarf official website to each student for reading. Ask the class to discuss the information they encountered in pairs.

Activity 8: L1 soundtrack (only with monolingual classes): Play an extract of the episode with sound in the students' L1 on together with English subtitles. Students read and only focus on the orthographic shape of words. Discuss their experience and explain how reading is always superior to listening being done simultaneously, as sight is considered the primary human sense.

WRITING:

Activity 9: Film review³⁶ – introduce or revise the structure and content of a review and ask the students to write one on Legion.

Activity 10: Students write an additional scene. (This can be done as a written version of the role play performed by the students previously.) Encourage them to include stage directions.

³⁵ Compare Stempleski and Tomalin 117

³⁶ compare Stempleski and Tomalin 58

SPEAKING

Activity 11: Chain story - Ask the class to retell the story of the episode. Each person produces two or three sentences, the next one in the chain continues.

Activity 12: Interview³⁷ - Students work in pairs. One of them is a character of Red Dwarf, the other one an interviewer. Select the type of media the interview is intended for. Note its consequences on the form and content.

Group 2

GRAMMAR:

Activity 1: Expressing future – Play a short extract. Ask the students to predict what happens next (in pairs, then compare). Focus on future tenses and modals.

Activity 2: Viewing backwards³⁸ – Choose an interesting short section of the episode and play it backwards. Ask the students to describe what happened in the right order (again in pairs, then compare), by doing so they revise sequence of tenses.

PRONUNCIATION:

Activity 3: Choose several words with particularly difficult pronunciation. Ask the students to place them in groups according to a vowel sound they include. Check and drill.

³⁷ compare Stempleski and Tomalin 32

³⁸ compare Cooper, Lavery, and Rinvoluceri 14

Activity 4: Present some of the words from the episode in a phonemic script. Ask the students to guess the spelling.

LISTENING:

Activity 5: Cover the screen. Play several lines of individual characters. Stop after each and ask the class to discuss who is speaking. (Follow up to “Who says that” activity.)

Activity 6: Watchers and listeners³⁹ – Divide the students into halves. One half faces the screen, the other half faces away from it. Play a chosen sequence. Put the students in pairs of one watcher and one listener. The listener must ask yes/no questions to find out what was happening on the screen.

READING:

Activity 7: From transcript to voice⁴⁰ - Prepare transcript of a sequence where more characters are speaking. Do not indicate who says what. Hand out copies to groups of students and let them discuss how many characters there are, what the situation is etc.

Activity 8: same as Activity 7 in Group 1

WRITING:

Activity 9: Present still images from different stages of the episode. Ask the students to suggest a story.

³⁹ Compare Stempleski and Tomalin 120

⁴⁰ Compare Cooper, Lavery, and Rinvolutri 24

SPEAKING

Activity 10: Fill that video gap⁴¹ – Play the part of the episode where Legion says the Red Dwarf crew would have to stay with him forever. Then play the ending. Ask the students to discuss what happened in between.

Activity 11: Dubbing guessing – Play a short sequence without sound. Ask students to silently guess what the characters are saying. Divide the class into groups corresponding to the number of characters appearing in the sequence. Play the sequence again, slowed down. The groups try to dub it.

41 Compare Stempleski and Tomalin 56

APPENDIX 4

Students' Feedback Questionnaire

Formulations have been adjusted.

Student	Sex/ Age	Did you know the series before?/ Have you ever seen it in English?	What activity did you find most useful or interesting?	Which activity would you skip?	What new words do you think you will remember after the lesson?	Have you learned anything apart from concrete words?
1	F/28	yes / no	role play	none	space weevil, freak	to watch English video with English subtitles for learning
2	M/31	yes / no	Who says that?	describing characters	penetrate, long johns	to create neologisms
3	F/ 22	yes / no	Who says that?	role play	I don't know	to think about registers
4	F/ 29	yes / no	watching with reading and listening combined	none	chopsticks	to watch English video with English subtitles for learning
5	M/ 30	yes / no	role play	none	dignity, consciousness	to hear different accents
6	M/ 27	yes / no	watching with reading and listening combined	role play	none (I never remember anything)	to use monolingual dictionary
7	M/ 26	yes / no	watching with reading and listening combined	none	smegger, long johns, verruca	to watch English video with English subtitles for learning
8	F/ 29	yes / no	describing characters	still images	considerate, coward, dignity	discovered urban dictionary
9	M/ 29	yes / no	Who says that?	none	nostrils, verruca, mis-smelling	to think about registers
10	M/ 30	yes / yes	Who says that?	introducing the series	smegger, space weevil, antimatter	do many things with video