

Humour of *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada*

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Abstract

*This article is about the Bosnian animated series *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* which deals with contemporary social issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina, focusing on *Švrakino selo*, a predominantly working-class neighbourhood on the outskirts of Sarajevo. The series' creators are Helem Nejse, a Sarajevo-based hip-hop band. The humour stands out because of the linguistic subtlety through which contemporary society is portrayed, focusing especially on the Sarajevo area. Stylistically, the slang, the wordplay, the counter-images of real-life politicians, criminals and events are all part of a layered storyline, painting an image of a society trapped for over three decades in the limbo of expectations of a better life. The analytical framework consists of the following units, superficially functioning as general knowledge scripts: names, nationalism, (local) patriotism, know-it-all and corruption. However, these scripts, in the context of the analysed material, become restricted, making the humorous interpretation challenging not only to an international audience, but also to native speakers in some instances. Stylistic traits of the selected material are observed, together with additional linguistic devices that enhance humour. Culture-specific expressions and other important contextual segments are also explained where necessary.*

*Keywords: humour, *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* series, Bosnian language, cultural transmission, scripts.*

1. Introduction

This article is about the Bosnian animated series *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* (commonly initialised as *BBBB*) which deals with contemporary social issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina, focusing on *Švrakino selo*, a predominantly working-class neighbourhood on the outskirts of Sarajevo. The analysis will look at selected examples from different episodes of the series, presented in parallel, in Bosnian and in English, and examine them through the lens of Victor Raskin's semantic scripts. We argue that the humorous content, although covering broad and

familiar social themes such as politics, crime, corruption, etc., falls within the framework of restricted scripts due to the slang and colloquialisms used in the series, which makes comprehending their humour increasingly challenging for audiences the further away geographically and linguistically they are from Sarajevo. In that respect, the humour of *BBBB* can be seen as a new and interesting form of satirical expression in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The series' creators are *Helem Nejse*, a Sarajevo-based hip-hop band known for their diversity of expression, be it in combining hip-hop with other musical styles (they held a concert with the Sarajevo Philharmonic Orchestra on 4 November 2024), or in hosting a radio show (*Rejdio Šou*), and engaging in visual arts (the *BBBB* channel). Their work can be viewed as a very vocal, satirical criticism of the contemporary political, economic and social situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹ The *BBBB* series focuses on four main characters (their nicknames are contained in the series' title), residents of *Švrakino selo*. The episodes usually open with a dog owned by one of the main protagonists breaking the fourth wall: *U rubnoj ulici jedne od gradskih opština, ništa se značajno nije dešavalo. Bruca, Braca, Bruda i Brada su se standardno prepušavali*. [Not much was happening on the outskirts of one of the city's municipalities. Bruca, Braca, Bruda and Brada have been getting high as they always do.]

1.1. The context

The series' humour stands out because of the linguistic subtlety through which contemporary society is portrayed, focusing especially on the Sarajevo area. Stylistically, the slang, the wordplay, the counter-images of real-life politicians, criminals and events are all part of a layered storyline, painting an image of a society trapped for more than three decades in the limbo of expectations of a better life. Not only does Bosnia and Herzegovina still feel the devastating consequences of the 1990s war, but the country has long been struggling in the throes of political crisis that has taken a heavy toll on the population: bureaucracy and corrupt politicians are a major obstacle to its development.

More specifically, Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, saw considerable economic development in the 1970s and 1980s, owing to the highly successful domestic companies that operated internationally at the time (e.g. *Energoinvest*, *Unioninvest*, etc.). The city also hosted the 1984 Winter Olympic Games. However, following the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, forces loyal to Serbian President Slobodan Milošević, aided by the former Yugoslav People's Army, launched an aggression against several former Yugoslav republics, and most brutally against Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the period from 1992 to 1995, Sarajevo lived through a siege, its citizens were deprived of food and water, prevented from free movement, exposed to heavy shelling and sniper fire. The damage to the city was immense (destroyed infrastructure, homes of many, with significant loss of civilian life).²

While Sarajevo has slowly recovered in many respects, the political crisis continues to directly affect the lives of its citizens. This situation is fairly common to varying degrees in the countries of Eastern Europe, which saw the transition from communism to democracy. Shirley Williams (1992) summarised the process as "agonising". In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina and much of the former Yugoslavia, this "agony" has been ongoing, even though over 30 years have passed since the breakup of the country.

¹ The *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* series is published on the YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@brucabracabrudabrada>) and on the *BBBB* website (<https://bbbb.ba/>). It has gained considerable popularity with regional audiences: the number of YouTube subscribers in mid-January 2025 was 89,400, with over 19,876,600 views.

² This was the period when Europe saw the destruction and atrocities on its soil for the first time since World War Two. The atrocities have been documented by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), with an extensive database on the circumstances, cases and events of the period, available at: www.icty.org.

Still, even in the hardest of days, the city saw art as a form of resistance. Citizens of Sarajevo will never forget the brave visits and encouragement by many intellectuals and artists, such as Susan Sontag, Annie Leibowitz, Bernard-Henri Lévy, Bianca Jagger, Bono Vox, Bruce Dickinson and his band, just to name a few. Today, as was the case then, Sarajevo takes pride in hosting important film and theatre festivals, concerts and exhibitions, and humour has been an underlying trait of the city's spirit. Therefore, this animated series can be seen as another important form of artistic resistance to the current difficult political situation.³

1.2. The Bruca Braca Bruda Brada series

The general thematic framework of the series consists of the following three broad themes: politics and the connections of politicians to organised crime; nationalism and societal decadence; and the resulting lack of education and prosperity. It is important to emphasise that the general topics discussed in the series are also familiar to other regional societies, primarily in the former Yugoslav countries.

The main characters are animated in a minimalistic manner, as stick figures. However, the voiceovers are striking, featuring different accents, characteristic of people from different parts of former Yugoslavia (e.g. Croatia, more precisely, Dalmatia), different regions of Bosnia, and, most importantly, different neighbourhoods of Sarajevo, where the subtlety of speech is observed most notably between two parts of the city: *Švrakino selo* and *Vratnik*, one of the oldest neighbourhoods of Sarajevo. This is a rare example of presentation of the dialectal diversity of the Sarajevo area, although the phenomenon has been the subject of linguistic research in the past several years, especially in a prominent study of Sarajevo speech by Halilović et al. (2009).

The linguistic diversity of the Sarajevo area has been of interest to many researchers for decades, since Sarajevo, as is the case with other large cities in the world, has welcomed different groups of people during historical migrations. The most recent significant population influx occurred during the war in the 1990s, when people from different parts of Bosnia permanently settled in various parts of the city. Such circumstances naturally brought about changes in the linguistic landscape of the spoken language in Sarajevo, observed especially in changes of its phonetic and lexical characteristics. Dialectological traits have been described by linguists, particularly from the lexicological angle, but it would also be interesting to see more research on the current phonetic differences in spoken language across Sarajevo's neighbourhoods, primarily the contrast between the Old Town (*Vratnik* being one of the most famous quarters) and the neighbourhoods encompassed by the Novo Sarajevo and Novi Grad municipalities (*Švrakino selo*, for example). Such phonetic differences can be observed in the *BBBB* episodes where characters from *Švrakino selo* and *Vratnik* meet, most noticeably in the pronunciation of vowels (more elongated in *Vratnik*), as well as in the pronunciation of fricatives /s/ and /z/ (friction intensified in *Vratnik*).⁴

Apart from that, certain character traits are portrayed through particular ways of speaking. For example, a corrupt local politician speaks at a speed that makes him almost unintelligible, which is a deliberate tactic to confuse the listener and make room for manipulation; *Braca*, one of the main characters and the spoiled son of a politician, speaks with a vocal fry, pronouncing certain words with what could be interpreted as functional dyslalia, although he is almost 30.

³ Interestingly, very little has been written about humour in Bosnia, especially outside the country. This is somewhat surprising given the country's versatile forms of humorous expression seen in jokes and other humorous content (literature, TV series, films, etc.). Valuable scholarly papers and studies published in English on the matter are few and far between, and include mainly those in the field of anthropology and/or ethnography, e.g.: Srdjan Vucetic (2004), Ivana Maček (2009), Nebojša Šavija-Valha (2016) and David Orlov (2021).

⁴ When creating the episodes and characters, the creators of the series have been in contact with the local population in the said neighbourhoods. Still, the material for a proper research on the phonetic features of Sarajevo's neighbourhoods is insufficient.

Also, the voice of *Bruda*, another of the four protagonists, is hoarse, in contrast to the soft but unrefined speech of his friend *Bruca*. A peculiar phonetic feature of Bruda's speech is the pig-like grunt that he utters when speaking passionately about something. Observing the sound quality of the characters' speech could be an interesting angle of analysis from the phonetic perspective, for these character traits also generate humour, but that is an entirely different point of analysis suitable for further research.

Given the series' considerable local and regional popularity, there have been some (expected) attempts at establishing connections with another highly popular TV show filmed in Sarajevo during the 1980s, *Top lista nadrealista* [The Surrealist Top List], as well as with the famous US animated series *South Park* (some commentators on YouTube even called the *BBBB* series "the Bosnian *South Park*"). Such comparisons could be interesting for a study on the evolution of the Sarajevo-area humour (particularly to investigate if such distinctive traits even exist, or if they are only part of a romanticised or stereotypic view of the city and its humour), especially given the city's outstanding artistic production in the 1970s and the 1980s, or, in the case of *South Park*, for a study on the contemporary humorous universalities between the two animated series. However, in this paper we focus on the contemporary humour presented in the *BBBB* series as such.

2. Methodology

The humour we will observe within the abovementioned three broad themes arises because of the familiar connections the listeners make with real-life politicians, encounters with corruption and crime and their general understanding and approach to life, inevitably marked either by personal experience of war and post-war struggles, or as part of the trans-generational experience.

These themes may appear universal, but are realised in the *BBBB* series as highly localised humorous content, which means that understanding of the *BBBB* humour is in many respects either increasingly limited or even impossible not only for audiences the further away geographically or linguistically they are from Sarajevo, but also for Sarajevans, native speakers of Bosnian.

Linguistic subtleties contained in phrases characteristic of the slang or the colloquial Sarajevo speech, or characteristic of Bosniaks in general,⁵ the usage of vulgarisms and names of people and invoking God by different names in the context of empty promises and emotions will also be analysed as humour triggers and/or enhancers.

It is important to emphasise that we are not discussing the translation process and the strategies that can be employed, but rather analysing the humorous potential that is inevitably lost in some examples due to the restrictive nature of these stylistic markers. This also means that where the humorous effect may be compromised in English, the authors will provide additional comments. Humorous themes are frequently limited in cultural transposition, which means that they are a distinctive feature of particular cultures. This can easily be observed in attempts to translate humour into different cultures, where significant constraints appear (Chiaro, 2010).

We have transcribed and translated the speech sequences from the *BBBB* YouTube channel, from different episodes contained in the four seasons of the series. In addition to relevant names of characters, we have also analysed 11 examples, selected from different episodes, and, although the selection may appear random, it best reflects the series' overall thematic framework

⁵ South Slavs, mainly living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the majority of whom are Muslim, practicing or not (see more in Mujanović, J. (2024)).

introduced above. The analysed material will be presented in tables that contain the text in Bosnian and English, in parallel.

2.1. An overview of Victor Raskin's notion of semantic scripts

The angle of analysis relies on Victor Raskin's notion of scripts (Raskin, 1985; Attardo & Raskin, 1991), more precisely, his general knowledge and/or restrictive scripts. Although the Semantic Script Theory of Humour was developed by Victor Raskin and later encompassed by Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin in the ground-breaking General Theory of Verbal Humour (as one of the six knowledge resources – KR_s) (1991), a full account of the notion of scripts is beyond the scope of this paper, so we will present only the following most relevant aspects:

(1) A script is a cognitive network of associations surrounding a word, which is reflective of one's experience, education, culture, etc. As Raskin exemplifies, the script APPLE is connected to the script FRUIT and to other scripts (FLESH, PEEL, STEM, etc.).

(2) Scripts can be linguistic (known to average native speakers of a language), general knowledge (known to a large group of people, unaffected by language), restricted (known to a smaller group of people), or individual (available to an individual).

(3) Raskin (1985) postulates that a text is humorous if the following conditions are met: 1. the text corresponds to two different scripts. This is, essentially, script overlap, as exemplified by Attardo (2002): GETTING UP, FIXING BREAKFAST, LEAVING THE HOUSE – events that can be compatible with both GO TO WORK and GO ON A FISHING TRIP scripts; 2. the scripts are in opposition (a kind of antonymy), which leads to humour. Scripts will most frequently be in opposition at the following different levels: *real* vs. *unreal*, *actual* vs. *nonactual*, *normal* vs. *abnormal*, *possible* vs. *impossible*, as well as at the lowest levels of opposition: *life* vs. *death*, *good* vs. *bad*, etc. (Raskin & Attardo, 1991).

3. Analysis

The analytical framework consists of the following themes: names, nationalism, (local) patriotism, know-it-all and corruption. These are the general scripts observed in the humorous scenes, but, as has already been pointed out, they narrow down once closely analysed and translated, signalling that those are restricted scripts by nature. As we have already emphasised, stylistic traits of the selected material will be observed, as well as any additional linguistic devices that enhance humour, and considered as part of the analytical framework. Culture-specific expressions and any other contextual segments important for understanding of the text will be explained.

3.1. Names

In her article about the (extra)linguistic criteria in selecting baby names in our region, linguist Elma Durmišević (2022) emphasises that the frequent motivation behind deciding on a certain name may be, *inter alia*, the intended meanings of the given names. This is precisely the case in the *BBBB* series, where the characters' names reflect their personalities. However, in contrast to the typically positive intended meanings of baby names, here the characters' names (first and last) reflect their negative characteristics.

The very title of the series contains different slang expressions meaning “brother”: *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* [Bro Bruvver Bruv Beard]. The only exception is *Brada* [Beard], and his character is even drawn with a long beard. His nickname is the odd one out, which indicates that consonance was important for the series' creators, as well as that the character himself is more vague and stands apart from the others.

Also, the title of the series is humorous because these words are difficult to pronounce in succession even for native speakers (and that is one of the reasons why the acronym is frequently used when referring to the series), and we can conclude that the title is a tongue twister, which can also function as a mechanism for creating a humorous effect (Wowro, 2021).

The main protagonists' last names denote their personalities, and this is where humour arises. Their first names are common in Bosnia: *Dženan*, *Ajnur* and *Dino*. *Brada*'s name is also fairly common, but will be presented separately.

Their last names, however, are humorous because they are made-up in order to reflect their personalities: *Braca*'s last name is *Varijantaš* [chancer], which is meant to indicate that he always engages in various dubious and criminal schemes for his own gain; *Bruca* is *Dumina*, reflecting his intellectual traits. He is the most educated of the four, with a strong inclination to overthinking, worrying about the general problems in the *Švrakino selo* neighbourhood and beyond. The last name *Dumina* is the superlative form derived from the verb *dumati* which means "to think" (Halilović et al., 2010, p. 240). In the case of this particular character, it is denotative of pronounced thinking effort, but not necessarily the depth of his thoughts and conclusions.

Bruda's last name is *Horor* (literally – horror). He is the main criminal in *Švrakino selo* as the son of a drug lord whose business continues to flourish while he is incarcerated (reflecting a strong bond between the government and organised crime). His last name denotes the horrors of such a life, the dangers and despair of people living the ghetto life, engaging in different criminal activities.

Brada's real name is *Slobodan Milošević*. The analysis of his last name would prove futile, since both his first and last name are frequent in Bosnia and in the region. In contrast to the other three main characters, humour is achieved in this case through a clear connection with the infamous Serbian politician *Slobodan Milošević*, who died in custody while on trial for war crimes at the Hague. *Brada*'s character stands in sharp contrast to his political namesake, for he is a drug addict but rather peaceful and friendly. It is noteworthy, however, that in certain sequences of the series, when war scenes are presented, *Brada* is indeed portrayed as a Serb nationalist.

One of the reasons why it is important to analyse the humour of (last) names in the series is that certain Bosniak families have, on the one hand, been considered "Bosnian royalty", in the sense that they have drawn a long tradition of education, wealth and political influence, running through generations, but, on the other hand, many such families have profited from the war, gaining political influence and power through their embroilment in different forms of corruption and organised crime, all under the wing of some of the strongest political parties.

Such last names have traditionally been recognised by the titles they contain. For example, *Begić* or *Hadžispahić*, contain morphemes *bey* and *spahi*, which were titles granted in the Ottoman period, as well as *haji*, an honorific used by Muslims who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The feature that generates humour in the series is that the politicians' last names are exaggerated, many of them overly long, denoting both a clear resemblance to local politicians, as well as a metaphor for the hypocritical behaviour of such people who use their family legacy, frequently under the banner of "the righteous Muslims" to gain material wealth and preserve their positions of political power: *Hadžimusadervišahmedbegović*, *Hadžimusadervišahmedbajrić*, etc.

Some names in the series also generate humour because the real-life characters that are depicted and the names given to them in the series are contrasted. One of the most prominent examples is the Federal Minister of Interior, *Ramo Isak*. His absurd real-life persona is just as humorous as that portrayed in the *BBBB* series. He comes from Zenica, a town in Bosnia, where he is known for owning a security company and has been considered a person operating at the

edge of legality. He is a strikingly uneducated person. Hence, the comic effect achieved by the name *Njutm Isak* (a reference to Isaac Newton) is increased through comparison with the famed polymath. Speaking in Raskin's terms, the opposing scripts here would be DUMB/SMART (cf. Ruch et al., 1993), with the current Bosnian interior minister being the Target (TA) (Attardo, 1994), all in the framework of the restricted script.

Still, some name examples achieve humour by foregrounding some of the most beautiful traits of Bosnia – such as its interfaith marriages: *Marija Hajrija*, whose parents are Ivan (a Catholic) and Amina (a Muslim). The baby's two names give rise to humour because they never appear in combination in Bosnia. In addition, *Hajrija* is a name characteristic to the Bosniak tradition, but has become outdated. To a Bosnian, this combination of names may appear like a deliberate attempt by parents to give their child outlandish names (Durmišević, 2022).

3.2. Nationalism

Although interfaith marriages are common in Bosnia, sadly, the country (as well as the rest of the region) is burdened with nationalism, mainly resulting from the 1990s war. Still, the nationalism present among the characters in the series does not appear deliberate or aimed against any group of different ethnic or religious affiliation. Rather, it is a feeling of cautiousness and mistrust that stems from the direct experience of war, such as is the case with *Berso*, a war veteran of the Bosnian Army, who describes a meeting with his friend's fiancée:

(1)

BERSO: Ja pogledam, a ona se zove Danila. Kakvo je to ime, kontam, pa je pitam, od kojih si ti kuća. Kaže od onih na dvije vode. I meni odmah sve jasno bi.	BERSO: And I realised her name was Danila. What kind of a name is that, I said to myself, and so I asked her “your folk is from which houses?” “The ones with gabled roofs.” And I immediately understood it all.
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This example depicts the mistrust of a Bosniak (Muslim) towards a Serb (Orthodox Christian) girl. He was unsure about her name and asked her about her origin. She replied using an ontological metaphor mapping her ethnic origin to an architectural form – a roof of a house with two slopes (gabled).

It should be emphasised that the view that Bosniaks and Serbs built houses with hip or gabled roofs is a stereotype, with a very limited number of people, mainly older generations, being even familiar with it. The reason could be that the hip-roofed houses were most probably introduced to the region with the arrival of the Ottoman Empire, with its own architectural style. Many architects and art historians have written about the development of the traditional Bosnian architectural style (Nedžad Kurto's 1998 study is especially noteworthy), but, to our knowledge, the view that hip or gabled roofs were an expression of ethnic affiliation only exists as a fading stereotype.

Therefore, this reply sounds incongruous to many speakers of Bosnian, especially to younger generations, with a high probability that it will fail to find a resolution, which means that the script is highly restricted.

As a result, the humorous content is lost in this example. Hence, this joke is stylistically highly marked and the translation could also contain a replacement of the culture-specific metaphor to a more universal mapping, for example, “with the cross-shaped skylights”, and even if awareness of this historical/architectural fact was absent, “cross-shaped” would be more readily interpreted as a reference to Christianity.

Also, the mistrust, or even subconscious nationalism of the characters in the series, born either at the very end or immediately after the war, arises from their upbringing due to which they subconsciously feel the divide. The following sequence contains Bruda's monologue when he is explaining to his dog which of his two girlfriends he should marry and why:

(2)

<p>BRUDA: E ovako, hajmo realno sagledat' stvari, kontaš. Luda je tu nekako čvrst oslonac, tu vazda za mene i u poslu, pet puta skakala na metak za mene, prava žena, ba, kraljica, lavica moja. Al opet, joj kake sise ima Teodora, brateroni dragi, šta je ono 'nolko, majko draga, joj hurija, tobe jarabi, đecu za Teodoru reć' da je Hurija, al' realno, boginja, brate ba. Kontaš, ba, Brudina Venera, ba, Ajle mi ba. A Luda opet Mutetova rod'ca će ću njemu to uradit', ba. Taj raskid bi nam na pos'o udario direktno, ba, ma nije mi pametno to nikako kad malo bolje skontam, ba. Ma šta ću, odo' raskinut s Teodorom, ba, dede'm, ba, ma iz svoje bašče beri cvijet, Bruda, ba.</p>	<p>BRUDA: Well, now, let's look at things realistically, ya know. The Crazy One has been firm support, always there for me and in business also, she took a bullet for me five times, a real woman, ya know, a queen, my lioness. But again, my God, Teodora's tits, dear God, the immensity, dear God, she's a <i>houri</i>, <i>tobe ya rabbi</i>⁶, I can't say Teodora is a <i>houri</i>, but she is a goddess, bruv. Ya know, Bruda's Venus, I swear on my sister Ajla! Then again, The Crazy One is Mute's cousin, I can't do that to him, man. That breakup would directly affect our business, man, come to think of it. Ya know what, forget it. I have no other option than to break up with Teodora, I swear on my grandpa. Pick flowers from your own garden, Bruda, dude.</p>
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In this example, there are several scripts that can be characterised as general knowledge scripts: the perception of mobster women as strong lionesses, fearless and ready for sacrifice; the perception of the female body as a sexual object, especially referring to her breasts; the perception of a relationship between mobsters that would be difficult to terminate.

However, Bruda's speech is characterised by intensifiers that contribute to the humorous effect, since there is a semantic incongruity that arises from the script of a fierce local mobster and his position of dealing with love issues. These expressions are very difficult to transpose to a foreign language, and we can say that they are stylistic markers, prominently culture-specific: *ba, joj, majko draga, brate, dede'm, ma*. Not only are these markers culture-specific, but also characteristic of the Sarajevo speech, making the transposition almost impossible. The expression *dede'm* is, in fact, an abbreviated form of swearing by his grandfather. The frequency of occurrence of such intensifiers has been observed by Bosnian linguists, most notably discussed by Durmišević-Cernica (2017, pp. 201-211).

Humour also arises from Bruda's subconscious nationalism and these traits are also culture-specific. He first decides on the advantages of both women: *Luda* (his Bosniak girlfriend, also a mobster, known by her nickname The Crazy One) and Teodora (an Orthodox Christian). He compares Teodora to a *houri* (a beautiful woman, companion to the faithful Muslim men in paradise), and immediately corrects himself, implying that a Christian girl cannot be a *houri*, and says she is a goddess and a Venus. To that he adds *iz svoje bašče beri cvijet* [pick flowers from your own garden], which is an implicature that he will choose *Luda* (The Crazy One) after all. "Pick flowers from your own garden" is a verse from a song by *Dino Merlin*, a regionally popular musician, and has been used widely by many Bosnians to warn against marrying women of different ethnic backgrounds.

⁶ The expression is a local form of *istighfar*, seeking forgiveness from God in the Islamic tradition.

3.3. (Local) patriotism

Apart from the ethnic/religious bigotry, the series also presents a very common trait of some Sarajevans – resentment towards people coming from other parts of Bosnia, especially from eastern Bosnia. People from these other areas are stereotyped as being stingy, crime-prone war profiteers whose primitivism contributed to the demise of Sarajevo, and Bosnian society in general.

(3)

BRUDA: Joj, Bruca, što ne mogu ovih papaka, došljaka, Bošnjaka, iz kojeg je ono sela šljeglo, odakle je ono došlo, Bog zna, gospodara mi. Ma sve go papak, ba. To nikakih manira nema. Fuj, Alaha mi, ba. BRACA: Jes', vala, slažem se, Bruda, nema šta, u pravu si, 100% si u pravu. BRUDA: Šta se ti javljaš, Fočak, jebem li te u ta usta seljačka, ba.	BRUDA: God, Bruca, I just can't stand these thugs, immigrants, Bosniaks, which village did that tumble down from, where did it come from, God knows, my God. They're all primitives, dude! They's got no manners! Yuck, I swear by Allah! BRACA: Well, yes, Bruda, I totally agree, you're 100% right. BRUDA: Who gave you permission to speak, you Foča-arrival, fuck you motherfucker.
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Humour here can be observed again at two levels – a general knowledge script that stems from Bruda's frustration with primitive people, who lack culture, education and the like, without realising he himself is a prototype of what he describes, and a restricted script, where the targets are people from Foča, and Braca being one of them. As we have already mentioned, Braca's last name is *Varijantaš*, [chancer] which depicts the common trait of his entire family.

This made-up last name reflects the perception of people from Foča, and we can say that they are a separate target in this series. His father is a war profiteer, a local politician who is one of the key representatives of the link between the government and organised crime, which will also be discussed later in the text. In this instance, there is also clear intent to offend Braca, for Bruda addresses Bruca in Braca's presence, stating he cannot stand primitive people.

The expression *Fuj, Allaha mi* (Yuck, I swear by Allah) is another stylistic marker where swearing by God is contrasted by an expression of disgust, enhancing the humour of the entire scene.

Additionally, the vulgar response to Braca brings forth scripts in opposition – VULGAR/DECENT; PRIMITIVE/SOPHISTICATED, and the humour arises because of the reversal of perception, where Bruda only affirms his own primitivism. It is also important to note that the verb *šljegnuti* is used in the Bosnian language to describe a primitive person arriving from a small town or a village, perceived as disturbing the urban character of Sarajevo. This is a highly stylised humorous device and the closest translation in English is *tumble-down*. Another humour-increasing device is the usage of the indefinite pronoun *to* [it], which aims at humiliating such persons, stripping them of even their basic humanity.

Another characteristic of Sarajevans is resentment (of varying intensity) that arises towards people from different parts of the city. The series depicts the resentment between two rival gangs, one from *Švrakino selo* (the *BBB* gang) and that of a local *Vratnik*-area gang. The two gang members, *Bruda* from *Švrakino selo* and *Pepi* from *Vratnik*, engage in battle rap.⁷ In a

⁷ Although the series contains a separate section with hip-hop and rap songs by Bruda, the creators of the series consider it a completely separate artistic process from that of the *BBB* episodes. Hence, the songs will not be analysed in this paper, but it is noteworthy to emphasise that they too are an interesting corpus for humour research. This one small example is considered because the battle rap scene occurs during one of the episodes and because it is a characteristic example of inter-city and gang bigotry.

series of insults the two characters utter, one stands out, that when Pepi from *Vratnik* says the following to Bruda:

(4)

PEPI: Čuj “sila/moć” bolje da se zove na Vratnik ne smiješ doć.	PEPI: Why “force/power”, better say “I’m afraid of Vratnik forever”.
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Humour arises in this instance from a very restricted script SILA, MOĆ [force, power] which is the title of Bruda’s hip-hop album. It stands in opposition to Bruda being afraid to come to *Vratnik*, Pepi’s part of town. Without knowing the name of Bruda’s album, even a native Bosnian speaker would not be able to understand the mockery found in this example. That said, humour in this case is limited not only to people familiar with different parts of Sarajevo, but also to people familiar with the franchise and the music that follows the series as a spin-off.

3.4. Know-it-all

This section of analysis focuses on how Bosnian society portrayed through the *BBBB* series lens looks at the stereotypical trait of Bosnians discussing global political and/or historical issues. This does not necessarily entail that a know-it-all on many matters is a distinctive feature of Bosnians, or a trait characteristic only of them, but is a stereotype worth discussing.

The two interesting examples are again Berso and Bruda. Berso considers the current global situation as threatened by war, which is, according to him, part of human nature, and contextualises the region within the global scene:

(5)

BERSO: E vidi, pičko. Dok je prvi insan obitav'o na ovim prostorima sam, k'o i bilo je nekog mira. Al' čim je kročio drugi, počeo je rat, prijatelju, koji nikad nije stao. E, sad su ti na jednoj strani Amer, Švabo i Francuz, a na drugoj Rus, Kinez i Iranac, pičko. Čeka se da se Turčin odluči, al' Brko vaga, boga mi. A mi, mi se k'o i vazda bavimo sobom.	BERSO: Now look here, pussy. While the first man walked alone in these areas, there was some peace. But as soon as another arrived, the war began, my friend, and it has never stopped. Now, you have Yankees, Krauts and Frenchies on one side and Russians, Chinese and Iranians on the other. But we wait for the Turk to decide, yet the Moustached is weighing his options, dude. And we, we are always dealing with ourselves.
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In this example, humour is also multi-layered, from the universal script presenting war as part of human nature, to the regional and local positions. The humour rests on the premise that peace in human history only lasted while there was just one man on earth. As soon as another appeared, war started and has been ongoing ever since. This is in line with Raskin’s general knowledge script. The seriousness of Berso’s expose is contrasted by a vulgarity, which can be interpreted as an emphatic expression, without the intention to cause offence.

A fairly limited script is contained in the description of Turkish President Erdogan, recognisable for his moustache. Finally, the script that reflects POWER, be it political, economic and/or military, is also noticeable in the monologue, for BiH as a country (as well as the region in its entirety) is insignificant in the positioning of European and, especially, global powers, to the extent that the only possible option for the people of BiH is to deal with local issues and passively wait for the outcome of those global processes that will, inevitably, affect the lives of them all.

(6)

<p>BRUDA: Bruda, ba, red uspostavlja. Ma ja ti mogu riješit' svaki problem kume, ba, Dine mi, ba. Fol ono nešto Izrael, vu ha, ma ja bih dao Izraelcima ono Ukrajine što hoće i jebo te taj konflikt, ba. A 'vamo Vijetnam gori, ba, ne mogu s Jemenom nikako brate, ba. Ne razumiju se, brate, a isti jezik pričaju, i to francuski. Ma njih su, brate, Francuzi kolonizali prije 1000 godina.</p>	<p>BRUDA: Bruda establishes order, dude. I can solve every problem, my friend, I swear. Like, the issue with Israel, dude, I would give the Israelis the section of Ukraine they want and fuck that conflict, dude! And Vietnam's burning, dude, for they cannot stand Yemen. They don't understand each other although they speak the same language, and the language is French. The French had colonised them 1000 years ago, dude.</p>
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The script is universal, meaning that the themes are familiar worldwide, but humour rests in the main script opposition TRUE/NOT TRUE. Bruda's perception of global affairs and history is incorrect. He mentions some current and past conflicts in the world but misinterprets them. In addition, his perception of his ability to solve all problems, including those of global affairs is within the script opposition REAL/UNREAL. He presents the hypothetical conflict between Israel and Ukraine as a triviality which he could solve without trouble, and this is emphasised by the vulgarity used emphatically, not intended to offend.

3.5. Corruption

In this section of the paper, we will present another prominent thematic framework of the series: the corruptive activity of politicians and organised crime. The series reflects upon this issue, present in many layers of Bosnian society, in almost every episode, and the following examples will serve as an illustration.

Employment of "suitable" individuals in public companies based on personal connections and political affiliation has been a major obstacle to the country's progress. Public administration abounds with such examples, burdening the BiH budget and drawing public companies into collapse. This is the result of illegal political activities:

(7)

<p>MUTEVELIJA: Ma znate teška je situacija. Mislim, jest', mi smo stara begovska porodica, ima se, al' brine me ovo oko staža, neće da mi priznaju ono '93. u Njemačkoj, ne mogu nikako to da uvežem, dever mi je to vel'ki, ne mogu da se opustim...</p> <p>BRACA: A fala Bogu, čika punac, nema toga što ovaj džemat za ovim hastalom ne može riješit'. Jel' tako čika Naile?</p> <p>NAIL: A to, pa što odma ne kažeš, ba, Nijaze, đe ima upražnjeno mjesto?</p> <p>NIJAZ: Ima u BH Gasu, viši referent za pravne poslove.</p>	<p>MUTEVELIJA: You know, it is a difficult situation. I mean, we are an old Bosniak family, but my work years worry me, for they don't want to consider the time I spent in Germany in 1993. That is a considerable worry for me, I can't relax...</p> <p>BRACA: God bless, my dear uncle-father-in-law, there is nothing that this little congregation sitting at this table can't solve, isn't that right, uncle Nail?</p> <p>NAIL: Well, why didn't you say so immediately? Tell me, Nijaz, where do we have a vacancy?</p> <p>NIJAZ: There is one in BH Gas, a senior legal affairs officer.</p>
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Braca's father-in-law (*Mutevelija*) expresses concern over an employment interruption that could cause problems for his pending retirement. Braca urges *Nail* (his father's good friend) to resolve the issue. Nail asks *Nijaz* (his party colleague, municipal mayor) to intervene. He finds a solution in employing *Mutevelija* in *BH Gas* (a public gas company). Here, humour is tied to

the script of CRONYISM, part of, as we have emphasised, the familiar experience of BiH citizens. Such corruption is especially prominent in the activities of politicians who hide behind faith and good intentions.

Stylistically marked expressions in Mutevelija's and Braca's speech: *old Bosniak traditional family*, *dever* [worry], *džemat* (Muslim community belonging to a certain area)⁸ and *hastal* [table] are all words that had been introduced into the Bosnian language through Turkish, and contribute to humour, for they signal the connection between certain privileged Bosniak families and corrupt activities. These words have become archaic as well. Another humorous aspect is that this conversation occurs while they are all sitting at a table, casually talking, and also from Nail's reaction to solving the problem: he views resolving the issue through illegal activities as natural, even normal (*why didn't you say so immediately*).

Another instance of universal humour occurs in the following example, where politicians change parties and form new ones to suit their interests. However, in Bosnia, a political party was recently formed under the guise of bringing corruption to an end, after decades of perpetuating social decay. Still, time has shown that the intentions had been all but straightforward: corruptive activities continued, with some politicians changing sides. The following example contains segments of a conversation that have been presented to the public in real life:

(8)

<p>NAIL: Ja sam Bakiru govorio ne može ti stranka bit' preča od naroda razumiješ, ja sam ti prvi do Asima bio zato sam ja preš'o vamo razumiješ, ba, volim, svježa ba krv, dobra energija, zato sam ja kod Kifle otiš'o kontaš, ba. Imamo mi grupu na Viberu, Transfer se zove, Kifla se raspis'o Naile haj' s nama Trinidad i Tobago, ambasada, 10-15 inča, što ka'e to da proberem i dali lađu da me sklone, al' ja volim ovaj lokalni nivo tu sam bliži s narodom razumiješ.</p>	<p>NAIL: I used to say to Bakir that the party cannot be more important than the people, ya know, and I used to rub shoulders with Asim, and that's why I've transferred here, ya know, I love it here, fresh blood, good energy, that's why I went to Kifla's party, ya know. We have a Viber group called the Transfer, and Kifla started writing intensely, telling me, Nail, come with us to Trinidad and Tobago, to the embassy, 10-15 inches, one could say I could choose, they gave me a niche to hide in, but I love this local level because here I'm closer to the people, ya understand.</p>
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Asim and *Kifla* are two real-life politicians in BiH. One of them has been indicted for corruption (*Asim*) and the other is currently a minister, increasingly under investigation. *Bakir* is the son of a prominent, long-deceased BiH political figure, but his party has been part of the corruptive activities for decades. Here, humour is localised, and it arises because the segments of the conversation occurred in real-life, as mentioned above in the text. *Kifla* is the politician who formed a new party, having spent years in the party he now blames for corruption. He earned his nickname *Kifla* [a bun] when he once bought buns for all members of the city council (he served as a delegate then).

However, his corruptive activities continued and they are observed as humorous in this scene for two reasons: private messaging and discussing ambassadorship positions (the Viber group called Transfer – indicating political inter-party transfers) and the verb *skloniti* [hide] indicating fear over indictment. In addition to such practices being corrupt, this happened in real-life with some ambassadorships.

⁸ The translation of this word in this particular context is “congregation” in order not to lengthen the utterance. Also, in Bosnian, the word itself can entail the meaning of a congregation in a mosque.

Another script is Nail's utterance about operating at a *local level*, where he presents his care for the people as being close to them at the local level, while in reality this means he is able to manipulate finances more easily, since he decides on the financing of projects and many other activities that easily pass under the radar at lower levels of government.

A very obvious segment of corruption presented in the series also concerns widespread illegal construction activities. This trend has been ongoing for thirty years throughout the former Yugoslav region. Regardless of whether the parties involved are to the right or left of centre, they have been responsible for allowing the construction of buildings and various other facilities in areas where no construction permits should have been issued.

Not only is the urban landscape of Sarajevo, Zagreb, Belgrade, Skopje, etc., permanently disfigured, not only are the structures of poor quality, but they have also recently been the sites of disasters resulting in a significant number of casualties. Two such examples stand out: first *Jablanica*, a municipality in BiH, where almost an entire village was wiped out when an illegal quarry gave way due to heavy rains (26 dead, railway line destroyed), as well as *Novi Sad* (Serbia), where a "reconstructed" canopy at the railway station collapsed, killing 15 people. The latter triggered the ongoing student demonstrations aimed at ending the long reign of the current Serbian President. The following example is from an episode related to such activities:

(9)

ADNAN: Ovi dok su bili na vlasti ček'o sam 10 godina da mi legalizuju dva objekta. A ovi kako su na vlasti, ba, za dva mjeseca mi fra'er završio.	ADNAN: While those were in power I waited for 10 years for them to legalise my two buildings. And with these in power, a dude finished it all for me in two months.
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The reversal of the common sequence of activities in the construction process gives rise to humour in this example: instead of first obtaining the construction permit, the character had first constructed two buildings and complains about waiting for the buildings to be legalised for a long time.

Another source of humour is the hypocritical stance of the local investor in the sense that the new party that has come to power is better because they are more responsive to his illegal needs.

The public health system in BiH has also been gravely affected by decades of corruption. The result is that many healthcare professionals have either left the country, or have transferred to private healthcare institutions. The situation proved especially dire during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many died due to the lack of clear protocols that have been called *put pacijenta* [patient pathway]. The following example illustrates the frustration many patients and their families feel because of inadequate service and the lack of resources in the public sector:

(10)

<p>BRUDA: Joj jebem li im familiju onu lopovsku, ba, čuj nemaju vozila, ba, ja im plaćam, ba. Sad ću im otić' gore, Ajle mi, popalit ću im sva auta, dede mi.</p>	<p>BRUDA: Those motherfuckers, they told me they had no vehicles at their disposal, dude, and I'm paying for that shit. I'll go there now and I'll burn all their vehicles, dude, I swear on my sister Ajla and my grandpa!</p>
<p>BRACA: A džaba trošimo vrijeme, hajmo mi odmah kod doktora Karagavranmehmedhamidovića. On je prijatelj mog babe i vel'ki specijalista za ove stvari.</p>	<p>BRACA: We're wasting our time. Let's immediately go to doctor Karagavranmehmedhamidović, who is a dear friend of my dad and who specialises in these things.</p>

Humour arises because Bruda, a criminal, is complaining about the bad situation in healthcare, claiming he is the one paying for the system like every other citizen. The issue is that he does not observe the reality which entails that he is personally part of the problem (meaning that the opposition rests within the REAL vs. UNREAL scripts). Apart from that, his swearing is the result of frustration and contributes to the comical effect. As was the case in some previous examples, he is again swearing by family members, this time by his sister Ajla and his grandfather.

Another important script is PUBLIC vs. PRIVATE HEALTHCARE. Private healthcare can only be afforded by a small number of (mainly) privileged people, and Braca is the one proposing they go to doctor *Karagavranmehmedhamidović*, which is a direct reference to a famous doctor in Sarajevo who owns a private practice. This is again a signal of corruption, for Braca emphasises the close relationship between his father and the doctor. The stylistically marked expression for father in some Bosniak families is *babo*, and is a humour-enhancing device since the cognitive process of listeners ties this situation with the practice whereby all political power and corruption in Sarajevo primarily rests in the hands of a select few families (as we have already emphasised, mainly Bosniak families assembled around a few political parties). In addition, the doctor's last name is presented through an exaggeration that has been mentioned in the previous segments of the text – mocking a powerful family.

The final example is an illustration of humour sublimating the root cause of corruption in Bosnian society. Bruca, the “intellectual” of the group states his reasons for why he would not attend the wedding of *Ajnur Varijantaš Braca*:

(11)

<p>BRUCA: Pa nisam ti ni kont'o doć' jer neću da podržavam brakove koji se sklapaju iz ekonomskog interesa tranzicijskog neobegovata.</p>	<p>BRUCA: I wasn't even thinking of coming to your wedding for I won't support marriages that are a result of an economic interest of the transitional neo-bey-ism.</p>
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This is an example of stylistically marked humour and the script is restricted. The script TRANSITIONAL NEO-BEY-ISM⁹ is a sublimation of all the corruption, crime and hypocrisy that has burdened Bosnian society for over 30 years, resting in the hands of powerful families assembled around some prominent political parties. In a way, this can be observed as black

⁹ *Begovat* is a noun denoting military commanders or large *prebend*-holders in the provincial cavalry of the Ottoman Empire. *Bey* was a title awarded to the people who were themselves or had ties with the rulers in the areas of the Ottoman Empire. Even today, the word is used colloquially to describe a wealthy person.

humour, for, recognising the implications of this phrase the listeners recognise the harsh reality that is keeping their lives and future prospects at a very low level of expectation.

4. Discussion and concluding remarks

Universal traits of humour, localised in the particular context of the Balkans, of BiH, of Sarajevo, which dictate the scripts in opposition, as well as (im)possible humour resolutions, for foreigners and locals alike, are all noticeable in the analysis.

The humour is layered, containing both general knowledge and restricted scripts. Stylistically marked expressions are very much tied to the personality traits of characters and are typical of the local Sarajevo experience, or stereotypical perceptions of either the Bosniak population, local thugs or politicians.

Intensifiers, curse words and different varieties of swearing by God and by family members (names of sisters and other family members, mentioning grandparents and parents) are prominent in the expressions of different characters and they constitute the restricted script. They are part of the contemporary colloquial speech in Sarajevo, and the usage of vulgarisms as empty semantic categories, enhancing the intensity of speech and contributing to humour, is also present.

There is one example in the analysis that contains a vulgarism with the intention to offend. Also, swearing by Allah is observable in the colloquial speech of younger generations in BiH, mainly by the Bosniak population that is not even devout. In the context of the series, this is reflected in the characters' speech by combining God's name with the expression *fuj* [yuck] and serves as a negative intensifier.

Many colloquial expressions persist in the series and can be observed within the semantic analysis. The scope of this paper does not allow us to reflect upon them, but they could serve as an interesting corpus for future research on the semantics of humour and in other linguistic studies. In that respect, it should again be emphasised that many Bosnian linguists have conducted research on Sarajevo speech and their efforts are ongoing.

Still, phonetic characteristics of the Sarajevo speech have been rather neglected in contemporary linguistic research, and we recognise the necessity of such an endeavour. This especially concerns the need to determine whether the colloquial speech of Sarajevo varies through different neighbourhoods, since there is a possibility that the variety has not been restricted to such a level of locality.

Bosnian humour should also be considered outside the narrow linguistic research. It has been regionally recognised for years as a phenomenon, and most commonly through the Bosnian jokes (including jokes about Bosnians), the TV show *Top lista nadrealista*, the *Audicija* play, and, more recently, some other successful TV projects, such as the *Lud, zbunjen, normalan* [Insane, Confused, Normal] sitcom, also highly popular in the region.

As these are all examples of well-crafted humour, accessible to wider regional audiences in the span of almost 40 years, it would be interesting to conduct a diachronic research of humour in Bosnia, especially in the 20th and 21st centuries, since the country has seen a number of different humorous expressions not only in sketches, but also in literature, visual arts, exceptional screenplays and films (some award-winning, such as *When Father Was away for Business*, *Time of the Gypsies*, *No Man's Land*), etc. In addition, humour in Bosnia is multifaceted not only in terms of subject matter, but also by the level of sophistication, especially in cases of subversive artistic expressions.

On the other hand, stereotypes that arise in relation to Bosnia, its culture in general, have influenced the perception of Bosnian humour to an extent that only some of the humorous forms (the aforementioned *Top lista nadrealista* being the leading example) from Bosnia are connected

to the country's humorous creativity. Although such stereotypes are not always negative by nature, they are most frequently associated with the experience of Generation X in former Yugoslavia, and the experience of life that was relevant before the breakup of the country in the 1990s. Some valuable work mainly in the field of anthropology and ethnography has been published on the matter.

However, it would also be interesting to see fresh research on humour as perceived by the younger generations living in Bosnia, the people now in their 30s and younger, whose experience of life is, naturally, in many respects different compared to the generations of their parents and grandparents.

Also, the Internet has brought about changes that affect humour and its distribution, with aspiring artists gaining popularity on different online platforms, with thousands of subscribers worldwide. This means that humour has not only become easily accessible, but also suitable for different forms of expression, either through videos where content creators act, sing, draw cartoons and create the ever-popular memes through which they also address different social or political issues, etc.

The *Bruca Bruca Bruda Brada* series has gained popularity through the Internet platforms as well, and it would also be interesting to observe some other Bosnian or regional humorous content creators and analyse their work. This would be a worthwhile effort because the layered meanings presented in humour can provide valuable insights into the lives of young people today, including their opinions, reactions and hopes for a different future.

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