



UDC 811.163.42'27

Original scientific paper

Accepted for publication on 26 September 2003

## A Linguistic Analysis of the Croatian Verb *brijati*

Vlatko Broz  
Faculty of Philosophy, Zagreb

This paper examines different linguistic aspects of the verb *brijati* in urban spoken Croatian. It explores an unusually wide range of meanings that this verb and its derivatives have in authentic sentences taken from Internet newsgroups and interviews with a great number of native speakers of Croatian. The verb's polysemic structure is briefly described but the semantic motivation for extending its meaning remains a puzzle.

### 1. Introduction

The early 1990s saw the polysemic expansion of the verb *brijati*<sup>1</sup> in urban spoken Croatian. The semantic diversity of this hitherto low-frequency verb has become unusually vast in a rather short period of time. *Brijati* literally means 'to shave' and the first image that comes to mind is the everyday habit of men cutting hair from their face, very close to the skin, using an electric shaver or a safety razor. In its non-literal senses this verb continually acquires new meanings in conversations of younger urban speakers of Croatian. Its ubiquity has reached unprecedented proportions that could be compared to those of the English verb *to get*.

The recent metamorphosis of the verb *brijati* has followed a highly unconventional pattern in terms of semantic shifts in the Croatian language, emerging as one of the most frequent verbs in the vocabulary of young people, who no longer associate it with beards and moustaches.

Another striking feature of this semantic phenomenon is that this verb can take on completely opposite meanings, such as "to interpret" and "to misinterpret".

---

<sup>1</sup> The idea for this paper occurred to me during a postgraduate lecture in *Semantics*, when prof. dr. Milena Žic Fuchs remarked that *brijati* was an idiosyncratic example of polysemy in urban spoken Croatian.



Dictionaries of contemporary Croatian such as Anić (1998:85), and the one edited by Šonje (2000:100) do not list the new meanings of this verb but only its primary meaning *to shave*.

## 2. Sociolinguistic Situation

The verb *brijati* in meanings other than “to shave” is used mainly by younger people in Croatian urban centres. It is a standard part of vocabulary of all subcultural formations, ranging from rockers to ravers, each of whom adjust its meanings to their own world.

A great number of older speakers of Croatian are irritated at the way young people use this verb so often and in such a wide range of meanings. They think it unnecessarily obfuscates their communication even when its meaning is obvious from the context. They believe it narrows their vocabulary because in place of each instance of this verb they could use different verbs – verbs that they could understand too. But this is exactly one of the reasons why slang is used – to exclude others – and perhaps more importantly, as Crystal (1997:53) puts it in rhyme, “the chief use of slang is to show that you’re one of the gang”. In this case the gang is any group of young Croatians who want to differentiate themselves from their elders. *Brijati* is one of those lexical items that mark the linguistic identity of Croatians roughly between the ages of 12 and 40.

When a mother asks her son if he had a good time out last night, he would tell her it was fun using the standard word “*provod*” but he would undoubtedly tell his friend that it was fun using the stylistically marked word “*brija*”, which communicates more meaning to his friend (and probably less to his mother). If he described his time out as *provod*, it would represent the way of having fun as perceived by his parents, and on no account would he want to make an impression on his friend that he did not quite have fun. In other words, different generations have a different concept of fun. Consequently, speakers of some languages, like Croatian in this case, express this with a different word – particularly if there is a word that enjoys high prestige among their peers.

A small number of older Croatians, who have 20-year-olds as children, use *brijati* because they want to identify with the young. They adopt their vocabulary in order to prove to themselves and to their juniors that they are still young at heart and that the generation gap between them is not that wide. On the other hand, there are many young Croatians who avoid metaphorical extensions of *brijati* because they want to show that they are more mature and more grown up than the people their age. This social group wants to identify with their seniors and share the same view like them, sometimes arguing even more forcefully that the verb *brijati* is a major threat to the Croatian language, and that it is a sign of bad style and lack of education.

This confirms the views expounded by Labov (1972), Aitchinson (1991) and Milroy (1998:58), who say that people usually react negatively to language change, feeling that the language has gone ‘downhill’. One never seems to hear older people commenting that



the language of their children or grandchildren's generation has improved compared to the language of their own youth.

### 3. The Data

Two different sources have been used for this research. The first one was the Internet, which provided an endless number of sentences containing the verb *brijati*. Most of them were taken from various newsgroups that can be found at [www.deja.com](http://www.deja.com), a specialized database just for searching newsgroups. A newsgroup is a discussion that takes place online, devoted to a particular topic. The discussion takes the form of electronic messages called "postings" that anyone with a newsreader (standard with most browsers) can post or read. There are over 10,000 newsgroups in existence, covering every imaginable topic. What is characteristic of the language of newsgroups is highly informal register and slang, swear words, odd Anglicism if the language is not English and so on. Newsgroups that featured the highest number of examples of different forms and meanings of the verb *brijati* were: hr.alt.hip-hop, hr.alt.rave, hr.soc.politika, hr.alt.sex, hr.alt.drugs, hr.comp.hardver, hr.comp.igre, hr.fido.religija, hr.rec.automobili, hr.alt.romanse, hr.alt.punk, hr.alt.filozofiranje, hr.rec.film. That was to be expected, as these are the topics young people are interested in.

The other source of data for this research was a survey conducted among 50 randomly selected people. They were all native speakers of Croatian coming from different parts of Croatia, ranging in age from 10 to 75, and of different educational background. All the sentences in this paper were verified by other informants who confirmed that they really are part of Croatian slang. Translations of these sentences into English aim at achieving the same effect as in Croatian, so equivalent English colloquialisms abound in translations.

### 4. "Trivial" Verbs

In Croatian slang there is a tendency to extend the meaning of verbs which denote everyday or 'trivial' actions. When such verbs begin to gain currency, the associative link between the literal and metaphorical meaning of those verbs can still be recognized. This link fades with time and frequent usage. Sometimes it breaks down completely, which is the case with the verb *brijati*.

The verb *brijati* could be categorized as one of the so-called 'trivial' verbs, along with the verbs such as *štrikati* (to knit<sup>2</sup>), *heklati* (to crochet<sup>2</sup>), *štemati* (to chisel<sup>2</sup>), *peglati* (to iron<sup>2</sup>), *prati* (to wash), *kuhati* (to cook), *dinstati* (to braise<sup>2</sup>), *bariti* (to scald<sup>2</sup>) and many other.

---

<sup>2</sup> German loan words; due to historic links with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, some dialects (especially in Northern Croatia including Zagreb urban slang) contain a large number words borrowed from German.



The following examples illustrate how other ‘trivial’ verbs take on new meanings.

a) *štrikati* – (literally: to knit) to dance; to be nervous

(1) ***Kao najveća noćna mora shvatim da štrikam ko zadnja seljačina.***

Like in a worst nightmare I realized I was dancing like a redneck.

(2) ***Naš kak sam štrikala jučer prije ispita...***

‘You should have seen me how edgy I was before the exam yesterday’

b) *heklati* – (literally: to crotchet) to elaborate, to explain in detail

An anecdote has it that a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy was examining a student and encouraged her to elaborate her answer using the following words:

(3) ***Heklajte, kolegice, heklajte.***

‘Elaborate, miss.’

At this she walked out the room in protest, taking it as a chauvinistic insult. Indeed, what is the likelihood that the professor would say that to a male student?

c) *kuhati* – (literally: to cook) to cheat; to seduce etc.

(4) ***Cijelu večer me kuvala jedna fenomenalna riba...***

A gorgeous chick was flirting with me all evening.

d) *bariti* – (literally: to scald) to seduce

(5) ***Imam dugu kosu i barim napaljene trebe u izrezanim trapericama.***

I have long hair and I ogle chicks in torn jeans.

Many young people are not even aware that the verb *bariti* originally belongs to the domain of cooking but think it is just an arbitrary slang word.

e) *prati* – (literally: to wash) to scold, to tell off; be under the influence of a psychological or physical condition or drugs). Its finite counterpart *oprati* can also mean ‘to rip off’.

(6) ***Tak me oprala zato kaj sam joj strgala naočale.***

‘She told me off for breaking her glasses.’

(7) ***Pere me nostalgija.***

*I’m wallowing in nostalgia* or , *I’m overwhelmed by nostalgia.*

(8) ***Špica me prala do tri ujutro...***

I was peaking until three in the morning.

(9) ***U Italiji te za cestarine operu svakih 100 metara.***

In Italy you get ripped off on motorway tolls every 100 metres.

f) *peglati* – (literally: to iron) to have fun, to go out; to dance; to be on drugs; etc.

In Dalmatia the verb *peglati* co-exists with the verb *brijati*. The semantic field of the verb *brijati* overlaps with that of the verb *peglati*, but that of the former is much wider. Young people in Split resisted accepting *brijati* at first because it had sprung from Zagreb.



For this reason not all the meanings of *brijati* have been added to the lexical repertoire of the young in Split. However, both verbs (including their derivatives) function as synonyms in a great deal of contexts, so for example the expression '*ići u briju*' (to go out and have fun) means exactly the same thing as '*ići u peglu*'.

The young in Split say that *peglanje* (verbal noun) is a name for a robotic dance reminiscent of the movements on an assembly line in a factory, and of course suggestive of hand movements in ironing clothes. The verb *peglati* has not gained ground outside Dalmatia.

- (10) ***Peglali smo cilu noć.***  
*We were partying the whole night.*
- (11) ***Nemoj me peglat.***  
*Give me a break.*

## 5. The Polysemic Structure of the Verb *brijati* in Croatian Slang

Let us now consider the new meanings of the verb *brijati*. A structure such as *on brije* (literally: *he is shaving*) cannot conventionally be used in standard Croatian because an object would be missing, but in its metaphorical slang use it becomes intransitive and can be used to refer to an indefinitely large number of situations, including the following: (i) he is having a good time, (ii) he regularly goes out (and has fun), (iii) he takes drugs, (iv) he is crazy, (v) he is talking nonsense, (vi) he is mistaken about something, (vii) he is imagining things, (viii) he is hallucinating, (ix) he is exaggerating, (x) he is lying, (xi) he is saying the same thing, or (xii) he is doing the same thing. Do these senses seem related? If they are not related, then it is not an instance of polysemy. Lyons (1977 : 553) argues that most native speakers see a metaphorical connection between the different senses of what they take to be the same word. Furthermore, he arrives at a conclusion that there is no requisite degree of relatedness of meaning for words to be polysemous. He views polysemy (1977 : 557) as "the product of metaphorical creativity" and claims it is "essential to the functioning of languages as flexible and efficient semiotic systems".

Most native speakers of Croatian would agree that the verb *brijati* in meanings [i-xii] is a single lexeme with numerous related senses, but what properties do they share and thus meet the criterion of relatedness of meaning?

The meanings can be broadly divided into physical activities ([i-iii] and [xii]) and mental activities and conditions [iv-xi]. Relations within the physical sphere are transparent – somebody could be having a good time [i] because he derives pleasure from going out [ii], or he could be taking drugs [iii] and thus be having a good time [ii]. Even the last combination makes perfect sense: somebody who regularly goes out [ii] could be on drugs [iii], though not necessarily each time he goes out. Relations within the mental sphere are also justifiable: it is not strange to hear somebody who is crazy [iv] to talk



nonsense [v], to imagine things [vii], to hallucinate [viii], exaggerate [ix] and lie [x] for that matter. If somebody is mistaken about something [vi], the others could easily accuse him of talking nonsense [v]. When a person is hallucinating [viii], it means that he is imagining things [vii], but it is not always so the other way round because hallucinating implies a drug-induced state or illness. In the same pattern exaggerating [ix] implies lying [x], but one does not need to exaggerate in order to lie. It is not difficult to find common semantic components for meanings within each of the two spheres. But what happens if we try to find a component between the members of the two different sets? There is a certain degree of relatedness. If somebody takes drugs [iii], he could be considered to be crazy [iv], to be talking nonsense [v], to be imagining things [vii], to be hallucinating [viii], exaggerating [ix], or saying the same thing [xi]. But what does going out [ii] have to do with being mistaken about something [vi]? Or having a good time [i] and lying [x]? Any attempt at finding a link here would be far-fetched. But just as far-fetched seems to be the connection between the literal and metaphorical meanings of the verb.

The following examples illustrate the different meanings of the intransitive verb *brijati*.

(1) ***Kako smo jučer dobro brijali.***

We had such a good time yesterday.

(2) ***Ma briješ!***

You're exaggerating! You're imagining things!

(3) ***Ma pusti ga, brije.***

Don't listen to him, he's talking nonsense. / he is wrong.

(4) ***Bože, kako ovaj brije.***

Good Lord, this guy is crazy.

(5) ***Kaj briješ stalno jedno te isto?!***

Why do you keep doing/saying the same thing?!

(6) ***Brij, brij!***

You just go on! or Have fun! or Keep telling yourself this!

(7) ***Brijali smo mi i prošlo ljeto tamo.***

We hung out there last summer, too.

The last example is transitive and is related to the meaning [ii]. It is not listed as a separate meaning because it requires a proverbial of place in order to acquire that meaning – both in English and in Croatian.

So far we have just shown the meanings of the intransitive verb *brijati*, which is just the tip of the iceberg. When the verb is transitive, its true semantic treasure is revealed.

(8) ***Brijem da je on glup.***

I think he's stupid.

(9) ***Mislim da ipak trebaš malo bolje upoznat osobu s kojom si na faksu prije nego krenete brijat.***



I think you should get to know the person you study with before you go to bed together.

(10) *Vratiš se na ono staro pitanje – što je bilo prije – jezik ili govor – i dalje briješ po tome...*

You go back to the old question – what came first – language or speech – and then you elaborate it.

(11) *Znaš da je ona po horsu brijala.*

You know that she was on smack.

(12) *Ajmo se strgat i brijat po gradu.*

Let's get high and paint the town red.

(13) *Upoznala sam jučer tipa koji fenomenalno brije – kaos u glavi totalno.*

Yesterday I met a guy who is so cool – brimming with totally unconventional ideas.

(14) *Ne brij okolo da me ne poznaješ jer si stvarаш reputaciju lažljivca.*

Don't go around pretending that you don't know me because you'll incur the reputation of a liar.

(15) *Čujem da si brijala s nekim likom na tulumu.*

I heard that you talked/made love/made out/had fun with a guy at the party.

(16) *Nemoj mi brijat da si napiso sinopsis kad znam da nisi.*

Don't lie to me that you've written the synopsis – I know that you haven't.

(17) *Ajde nemoj brijat gluposti.*

Come on, stop talking/thinking rubbish..

(18) *... ali ipak brijem da treba gledat in the future a ne brijat po rupama ...*

but I still believe that you should look ahead and not waste your time in a dump.

(19) *A da ljudi briju po svom - briju.*

And people insist on their own things – and they keep on doing them.

(20) *S kim to Lea brije u zadnje vrijeme?*

Who has Lea been hanging out with recently?

(21) *Možete vi brijat šta god hoćete ali Čačić je izjavom da je Varaždin žabokrečina postao najveća legenda.*

You may think / believe / say what you want, but Čačić's statement that Varaždin is a backwater has made him a real legend.

In sentences (18) and (19) the verb *brijati* is used twice and in different meanings. Evidently speakers, as well as their hearers, do not mind if the verb is repeated within the same sentence but with a different meaning, although this could give rise to confusion.

Sentence number (20) was taken out of context where it meant 'spending time with' or 'associating with'. In some other contexts it could also mean 'going steady with' or even 'having sex with'. Sentence (15) is ambiguous, as can be seen in translation.

The last sentence (21) also shows the ambiguous nature of this verb, which the speaker perceives as an advantage. He does not want to state clearly which of the three actions he means – 'thinking', 'believing' or 'saying'. He is either deliberately vague or he wanted to include all three possible meanings.



If we keep the same broad division of meanings elaborated above, then the following transitive meanings would be added to the physical sphere: to hang out with someone (xiii), to be in a relationship with someone (to go steady) (xiv), to chat (xv), to have sex with someone (xvi), to be on drugs (xvii), and to the mental sphere: to think (xviii), to believe (xix), to suppose (xx), to interpret (xxi), to elaborate (xxii), to pretend (xxiii), to insist on something (xxiv), to be cool (to have characteristics other people admire) (xxv), and to be full of creative ideas (xxvi).

The number of meanings has risen to 26 now, and some of the verb's most important meanings are here. Most informants said that the basic figurative meanings of *brijati*, as they perceive its frequency, are (1) to think [xviii], (2) to hang out with someone [xiii], (3) to be in a relationship with someone [xiv], (4) to have sex with someone [xvi] and (5) to be on drugs [xvii]. So the top five includes only transitive verbs, which means that speakers are somewhere on the trace of a metaphorical connection with the literal meaning of the verb, which can only be transitive.

## 6. Verb Patterns

The verb *brijati* can be followed by several prepositions, as the following examples show.

(a) *brijati s nekim* -to go out with somebody, to have a kind of relationship with someone.

Sentences (15) and (20) have this verb pattern.

(b) *brijati po nečemu* – to go in for something; to take drugs (sentence 11)

(22) *Imaš brijaća koji briju po kvantnoj teoriji i Heisenbergu...*

*There are people who are into quantum theory and Heisenberg.*

(23) *Danas svi briju po Internetu.*

*These days everyone surfs the Net.*

(24) *Ekipa koja brije po techno partyjima...*

*People who go to techno parties.*

(c) *brijati na nešto* – to be into something

(25) *Siniša brije na jedrenje.*

*Siniša is bitten by the sailing bug.*

(26) *Ecija brije na makrobiotiku.*

*Ecija is obsessed with macrobiotics.*

(d) *brijati na nekoga* – to admire someone

(27) *Tomislav brije na Metallicu.*

*Tomislav is a fan of Metallica.*

(28) *Ivana brije na Chomskog.*

*Ivana admires Chomsky.*





(29) **Tip voli nogomet i brije na Štimca.**

The guy likes soccer and Štimac (a Croatian soccer player) is his role model.

## 7. Prefixation of the verb *brijati*

Croatian morphology allows verbs to combine with about twenty different prefixes (Težak, 1973:186), which derive from prepositions. When a prefix is added to a verb, the verb's meaning is modified but rarely completely changed, which is not the case with English phrasal verbs. Out of these twenty prefixes, only six can be attached to the verb *brijati*, and these are *za-*, *pro-*, *pre-*, *od-*, *iz-* and *na-*. The verb *brijati* can also take the prefix *o-*, as in *obrijati*, meaning 'to shave completely', but it does not take on any metaphorical meanings in slang.

These prefixes are all polysemous and they form perfective aspect when attached to the imperfective verb stem *brijati*. Perfective aspect indicates that the action has been completed. Most Croatian verbs have two aspects, and the other is imperfective, which indicates that the action is still in progress. So the imperfective counterparts of all prefixed combinations of *brijati* would take the verb stem *\*brijavati*.

(a) **zabrijati** – to start a relationship; to misinterpret; to have a good time; to get carried away, to dedicate oneself to something

(30) **Ma to si ti zabrijo.**

You got it all wrong.

(31) **Jučer smo zabrijali do pol pet.**

Last night we stayed out until five.

(32) **E, kak smo zabrijali.**

*Oh, we got carried away.* or *We had such a good time.* or *We got so into it.*

(33) **On je totalno zabrijo.**

*He is completely focused on only one thing.* or *He's got a screw loose.*

(34) **Zvuči jednostavno, ali u praksi svako zabrije u neki svoj film.**

It sounds simple, but in practice everybody does it in their own way.

(35) **Ma blesavo je kad si neko zabrije protiv te amerikanizacije jer je danas valjda sve američko...**

It's silly when somebody is against Americanisation because today everything is American...

(36) **Zabrijala sam da sam izgubila novčanik.**

It seemed to me that I lost my wallet.

(37) **Kak se ono zove onaj film sa Cageom kad zabrije da je vampir, ludilo od filma i odglumio je to... mrak.**

What's the name of that movie with Cage in which he starts thinking he is a vampire, it's a great movie and his acting is sublime.

(38) *Gle, to ti sve ovisi kak zabriješ...*

Look, it all depends on what you make of it.

(39) *Zabriješ li nešto protuzakonito, MUP će te naći potpisivao se pravim imenom ili screen nickom...*

If you do something illegal, the police will find you no matter if you sign your real name or a screen nick...

(40) *Fora je u tome da marihuana ne izaziva ovisnost, ali ako zabriješ na nju u žešćoj mjeri život ti stane jer ti se ne da ništa radit ...*

The thing is marijuana does not cause addiction, but if you start taking it too often, your life stops because you don't feel like doing anything.

(41) *...samo pazi da ne zabriješ na bed.*

...just be careful not to become pessimistic. (or 'you should think positive')

(42) *Joooooj, stvarno nekad zabriješ totalka.*

Oh, you really get weird ideas sometimes.

(43) *Ja sam predaleko zabrijal.*

I'm too deep in trouble.

The last example was the only result of the search *zabrija%* in the Croatian National Corpus.

(b) *probrijati* – to start going out; to start taking drugs; to stay up (the whole night)

(44) *On je probrijao prošlo ljeto.*

*He started going out last summer. or He started taking drugs last summer.*

(45) *Probrijao je on nekoliko noći.*

He partied away a couple of nights.

(c) *prebrijati* – to overtake a vehicle at a high speed; to overcome

(46) *Kak je prebrijao pokraj nas, imal sam filing ko da stojimo.*

He just flashed past – it made me feel like we were not moving at all.

(47) *Ak prebrije Marka, skidam mu kapu.*

If he surpasses Marko, I take my cap off to him.

(d) *odbrijati* – to get lost; to disappear; to change the subject

(48) *Kam ste vi odbrijali sinoć?*

Where did you get lost last night?

(49) *A sad si fakat odbrijo.*

Now you really got off the subject.

(e) *izbrijati* – to misunderstand; to do something successfully; to set forth a theory

(50) *Ja fakat ne znam kaj je ona izbrijala.*

I really don't know what she made out of it / has done.

(51) *Jakov je za doktorat izbrijao teoriju katastrofe.*

Jakov set forth the theory of catastrophe in his PhD.



(52) ***Super je [profesorica] izbrijala predavanje.***

She [the teacher] really gave a great lecture.

(53) ***Već sam si izbrijala cijeli taj film.***

I already got myself into the mood.

(54) ***Kak je ona dobro izbrijana.***

She looks so cool.

**(f)** *nabrijati* – to improve one or more characteristics, to talk somebody into something.

(55) ***Dobar je kompjuter, samo ga treba malo nabrijati.***

The computer is good, it just needs some upgrading.

(56) ***Nabrijao je svog starog da mu kupi Nokiju 8210.***

He talked his father into buying him a Nokia 8210.

**(f.i)** *nabrijati se* - the reflexive form – to get interested into something, to get turned/ hooked on something.

(57) ***Otkad su bili u Španjolskoj, nabrijao se na U2.***

Since they came back from Spain he's become crazy about U2.

**(f.ii)** *nabrijan* - the past participle

(58) ***Atmosfera je bila ful nabrijana.***

The atmosphere was quite euphoric.

(59) ***Onda smo upoznali neku nabrijanu ekipu.***

Then we met some cool people.

It means they were active in some way, or they looked different – had different clothes, or were on drugs, were rowdy or ready to fight or had some other distinguishing features.

(60) ***Ful smo se nabrijali na tu spiku.***

We got so interested in that topic.

(61) ***Kužiš kak su nabrijali ovaj shopping centar.***

See how lavishly they decorated this shopping mall.

(62) ***Vidio sam je neki dan nabrijanu na partyju.***

I saw her stoned at the party the other day.

When *nabrijan* means ‘under the influence of a substance’, the substance is not usually alcohol or drugs that make one feel relaxed or sleepy. It usually implies the influence of a synthetic drug with a stimulating effect, since the component of intense activity is quite marked in the meaning of *nabrijan*.

A search under the word *nabrijati* in the Croatian National Corpus<sup>3</sup> yields the following result:

<sup>3</sup> The Croatian National Corpus is the largest corpus of standard Croatian, which is currently being compiled at the Institute of Linguistics, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb. It currently contains about 10 million tokens and is fully available and searchable at [www.hnk.ffzg.hr](http://www.hnk.ffzg.hr)



Rezultat pretrage: **nabrija%**  
 tile Disc, do sada niste mogli ne čuti ili naići na ovaj '**nabrijani**' CD. Jedno od mjesta na koje ste u posljednje vr  
 u momčad! I stigla je zaslužena kazna, dobro posloženi i »**nabrijani**« Talijani (iako je bila riječ o revijalnoj utakm  
 albumu 'Dani ponosa i slave' Prljivo kazalište ponovno je **nabrijano** i bezobrazno kao prije 20 godina </FONT><P> "Ja  
 upravo kao i vremena ispred nas. Prljivo kazalište je tu, **nabrijano** i bezobrazno kao 1978., a lukavo kao onaj stari  
 bavit ću još jedan razgovor s Jeličićem i ako ga uspijem »**nabrijati**«, tada ću ga i postaviti u momčad. Želimo na svo

Pojavnica za upit **nabrija%: 5**

FRQ : **0.000055 %**

(63) Quick View Plus je nabrijani bratić onog istog programa koji dolazi sa Windowsom 9.x. Zašto, nabrijan? Prvenstveno zato što je u stanju prepoznati i prikazati više od 200 različitih formata.

Quick View is a technically advanced cousin of the same programme that comes with Windows 9.x Why technically advanced? First of all because it can recognize and present more than 200 different formats.

**nabrijan** - technically advanced; referring to cutting edge technology:

**nabrijani motor/auto/kompjuter** - (often used of engines, cars, computers etc. having one or more distinguishing features in the positive sense

(64) **nabrijani film** – a movie with stunning post-production effects.

(65) **nabrijana ženska** – a woman that is angry, nervous, hysterical; flirtatious; drugged; heavily made-up; horny (mostly negative characteristics). In a smaller number of cases it can mean *enthusiastic* or *good-looking*.

When the adjective *nabrijan* is put before a noun which denotes a living being, it is usually used to intensify a negative characteristic of that living being. However, when describing technical achievements, it always means 'impressively designed or produced'.

(66) **Komad je bil tak nabrijan na sex.**

She was turned on.

(67) **Nabrijan sam da to napravim kak se spada.**

I'm very eager to do it the right way.

(68) **playboyevski nabrijane cice**

Playboy-style tits

(69) **nabrijani kokteli**

strong cocktails

(70) **Moj frend je tak nabrijan na mene - jučer smo se tak posvađali.**

My friend is so upset with me – we had a big fight yesterday.



(71) *Svi dečki iz ulice su nabrijani na Nikolinu.*

All the guys from the street are crazy about Nikolina.

(g) imperfective counterparts of prefixed forms of the verb *brijati*

1) *izbrijavati*

(72) *Nemoj sad izbrijavat neku pravdu.*

Don't push for justice now.

2) *nabrijavati*

(73) *Nabrijavao je priču.*

He was blowing up his story.

3) *zabrijavati*

(74) *On povremeno zabrijava u takve teme.*

He sometimes gets obsessed with such issues

## 8. Derivatives of the Verb *brijati*

(a) the noun *brija* - fun; a relationship between two people; an extreme state of mind; lifestyle; wild partying that often includes an after-hour party etc. *Fiju briju* is the name of a concert and famous music festival, an onomatopoeic slogan for rock'n'roll lifestyle.

(75) *Di ste bili u briji jučer?*

Where did you hang out yesterday?

(76) *Jučer je bila mrak brija.*

We had one hell of a time yesterday.

(77) *Koja brija!*

What a party!

(b) the augmentative of the noun *brija*: *brijačina* - all-night partying; drug-fuelled partying for several days; revelry; wantonness, rapture, exaltation, sex etc.

(78) *Zbrojili smo sve brijačine u zadnjih dva mjeseca i ispada da smo zabrijali samo tri puta.*

We took count of all the outings over the last two months, and it turned out that we had a blast only three times.

(79) *Brija je bila čisto OK, ali na kraju je bila brijačina totalna.*

The party was pretty cool, but in the end we totally cut loose.

(80) *Brijačina je esencijalni motiv urbanog stanovnika.*

Having fun is an ulterior motive of an urban person.

The augmentative *brijačina* often collocates with so-called radical adjectives such as *opak* (*wicked*), *žestok* (*intense*), *totalan* (*total*), *generalan* (*overall*), *ful* (*complete*),



*čist* (*pure*) etc. In this case they are synonymous, so the following syntagms have basically the same meaning:

(81) **opaka brijčina** or **žestoka brijčina** or **totalna brijčina**

wicked partying or non-stop partying or partying hard

(c) diminutive of the noun *brija*: **brijica**

(82) **Kako je bilo? – Brijica.**

*How was it? - It was neat; or It could've been better.*

(83) **To ti je lagana spikica, brijica, film...**

*That's easy stuff, nothing much...*

(84) **Solidna brijica.**

*A minor party. or A party without too much excitement or complications.*

(d) verbal noun: **brijanje** - wild partying; youthful behaviour; reasoning; taking drugs etc.

(85) **Takvo brijanje će te daleko dovest.**

*Living/thinking like this will be the end of you.*

(e) doer of the action: *brijač/brijačica* - somebody who is cool, or having fun etc

(86) **Kada je bila mlada Maja je bila na glasu kao prava brijčica.**

*When she was young, Maja had a reputation of a real bombshell.*

(87) **Baka je super brijčica.**

*Grandma is totally cool.*

(88) **On ti je teški brijač.**

*He is a party animal. or He is a cool guy. or He goes in for something (defined by the context).*

If it refers to a scientist, it would mean that he is a great scientist, or a scientist whose field of observation often veers into the abstract. If the sentence is taken from a drug-milieu, it means that he does a lot of drugs, which remains a positive characteristic because of the worldview of the people from that milieu.

f. the qualitative adjective: *brijački* - modern, fashionable, trendy

(89) **brijačka jakna** a snazzy jacket

(90) **brijačke šuže** stylish shoes

(91) **brijački auto** a kick-ass car

(92) **brijačke naočale** cool sunglasses

It is interesting to note that the adjective *brijački* put before glasses automatically defines those glasses as sunglasses.

(g) Diminutivized verb *brijuckati* – to do something in small amounts and/or time intervals

(93) **Kaj vi opet brijuckate?**

*Do you still have fun sometimes? or*

*Do you still have occasional sex, even after you broke up?*



Funnily enough, *brijačnica* (barber's shop) is not a place where people go out and have fun, but only to get shaved.

## 9. Folk Etymologies

There are quite a few theoretical frameworks which could explain the origin of metaphorization of the verb *brijati*. Lakoff (1987 : 452) stresses the importance of folk etymologies because they help people find motivating links that make sense of idioms. Besides, since the real history of an idiom is usually unknown, folk etymologies are “just about all there is for a historical linguist to go on”.

### *I. A theory of world-view relativization*

A great majority of informants did not know how *brijati* came to be used in non-literal meanings. A small group, however, 7 informants to be precise, said they knew when it began to be used and, surprisingly enough, all of them mentioned the same year –1991.

The Croatian sociologist Perasović (2001 : 212) discusses the slang of Croatian subcultures in his book *Urbana plemena* ('Urban tribes') and gives a detailed account of the origin of the verb in question, specifically explaining its three phases of usage. Among other slang expressions, Perasović singles out the word *brijanje* as the most essential word in different youth cultures in Croatia. The first phase is the one when it actually came into existence, which dates back to the mid-1970s, the time of the hippy movement in Croatia. The music scene played an important role in everyday lives of the young, and many young people occasionally experimented with illicit drugs such as cannabis and LSD. These young people first started using the term *brijanje* to denote a condition, a form of experience and behaviour under the influence of hallucinogenics. Other young people they mixed with, such as their schoolmates, simply liked the word and adopted it. After a while, they realized that being lively and offbeat is not something that can be achieved only through the use of psychedelics, so they transferred the term onto a wider range of meanings. When the second phase began in the early 1980s, it started denoting any intense experience at a party, a concert, a café, a club or life in general, growing into a symbol of any action or situation that is intense, offbeat, boisterous or out of the ordinary. It was in this phase that the first derivatives of the verb came into existence, as a result of the shift in the slang of the group of people who originally began to use it. They were put out by the fact that the expression that marked their linguistic identity gained such wide currency, so they started forming variations and other unusual derivatives of the word. By the beginning of the 1990s when the third phase started, the word had entered the mainstream culture and media, had spread all over Croatia and became adopted by different generations.



Perasović (2001 : 216) gives an alternative etymology of the word which is also based on the expression referring to a drug-induced state but this time not by psychedelics. It refers to a condition caused by opiates, when the drug user would be so intoxicated that he would prop up his head against his hand, occasionally stroking his face as if scratching it, which was supposedly suggestive of the act of shaving. Perasović prefers the first etymology, although this one suggests a more convincing motivating link.

Perasović only briefly mentions the phenomenon of using one word to denote an array of different ideas and situations. He says that speakers consciously reduce them to one word because the intended meaning is already determined by context, intonation, gestures and non-verbal communication.

Perhaps there is more to it. Other factors should be considered too. The beginning of the 1990s, when the verb *brijati* really came to be used on a wide scale, was a time of important changes in Croatia. This was the period when socialism ended, the war began and the country was converted to a capitalist mode of thinking, which opened the door to consumerism that was assimilated from the West and became generally accepted. The commercial boom led to a greater presence of mass media which thrived on aggressive advertising that abounds in superlatives. People reacted to it with an unconscious change of their world-view. They started relativizing the world around them and reducing the words to a common denominator. For this reason perhaps, the verb *brijati* has an unseemly number of different meanings whose only common property is a rhetoric extreme.

## II. A Barber at the Faculty of Philosophy

The inflated metaphorical extension of the verb *brijati* could be explained by means of the popular Chaos Theory, borrowed by linguists from the natural sciences (Butters: 2001). A small circle of people launched the first metaphorical extension of this verb and then other circles started accepting it. The verb was 'neutral' enough and suitable for the shift, so it caught on rapidly. An urban legend has it that it all started right at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb.

The chapter on logic paradoxes is included in the syllabus of the course on Logic, taught at the University of Zagreb by professor Goran Švob, from whom the anecdote is said to originate. Logic paradoxes are very important in the history of symbolic logic of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By means of the paradox of "classes that are members of themselves" Russell refuted Frege's theory (these two are considered to be the founders of contemporary symbolic logic).

For example, "a set of apples" is not a member of itself because it is not itself an apple.

"The class of all classes" is a member of itself, because it is itself a class.

"The class of all classes that are not included in themselves" – The paradox arises from asking the question of whether *this* class is in itself. It is if and only if it is not.





Another famous paradox is known from the times of Old Greek sophists is the Liar's Paradox. A philosopher from Crete named Epimenides is not contented with his fellow citizens and exclaims "All Cretans are liars!". If his statement is true, then he is a liar and hence his statement is false. If his statement is false, then he is lying. There is a more succinct variety of this paradox: "The liar says: I am lying".

One of the most famous paradoxes is (as the professor stresses - a pseudo-paradox) Bertrand Russel's Barber Paradox.

There is a barber in a village who shaves all those men, and only those men who do not shave themselves. The question is: does the barber shave himself? If he shaves himself, then he does not shave himself, because he shaves only those men who do not shave themselves. If he does not shave himself, then he should at once go to his shop and shave himself.

And now the anecdote. A student of philosophy takes an exam in logic (one of the most difficult exams at the Department of Philosophy), and does not know anything. The professor asks him "Do you know anything at all?" And he answers: "I know the Barber's Paradox." "So tell it!" "The barber says: I am shaving" (In Croatian: *brijač brije*).

So he confused the Barber's and the Liar's Paradox.

The sentence "he is shaving" (meaning "he does not know anything about anything" or "he does not know what he is talking about") enters the slang of philosophy students. Later the meaning probably extended to all forms of unusual or bizarre activity, only to take on the more general meanings we today have – partying, going out, having sex and so on.

### III. A Garage in Dubrava

The third theory of the metaphorical genesis of the verb at issue takes us to a garage in Dubrava, a vivid neighbourhood in the east of Zagreb. A group of car mechanics started playing upon the onomatopoeic verb *brujati* (to drone) and twisted it into *brijati*, and later formed other derivatives. Many informants claim that the syntagm "*nabrijani motor*" (turbocharged engine) dates from as early as the 1960s.

## 10. Conclusion

This paper is an investigation of a phenomenon that has occurred in spoken Croatian in the past 10 years. The metaphorical extension of the verb *brijati* has had an enormous impact on the language of a great number of Croatian speakers. Their conversations are overwhelmed with it because they want to introduce vivacity, playfulness and even facetiousness into their speech, at the same time neglecting the primary, literal meaning of the verb. A touch of humour is essentially present in most of the metaphorical meanings of the verb in question.



It is only a matter of time before this verb will be on an equal footing with verbs like *misliti* (to think), *provoditi se* (to have fun) and other verbs which it currently often replaces in different contexts.

As language is a living organism, standard language constantly feeds its lexis on colloquial speech. The verb *brijati* is definitely short listed and likely to be granted a higher lexical status. But one question arises – by what mechanism does a language standard accept a new word? Or a new meaning of an already existing word? Considering a small but significant number of tokens in the Croatian National Corpus, the adjective *nabrijan* is likely to become standard much sooner than the verb *brijati* itself.

There is another important question that remains unanswered – what is the causal semantic link between the literal and metaphorical meaning of this verb? One can without much difficulty see that its different figurative meanings are related, but what is the semantic motivation for extending the meaning of the verb *brijati* ('to shave') and creating a highly complex polysemic structure based on different metaphorical links? Despite several different folk etymologies, speakers do not sense the connection in the metaphor. What gives rise to the leap into metaphorization is still an open question.

## REFERENCES

- Aitchison, Jean (1991). *Language change: progress or decay? Second edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Anić, Vladimir (1998). *Rječnik hrvatskoga jezika, third edition*. Zagreb: Novi liber.
- Babić, Stjepan et al. (1991). *Povijesni pregled, glasovi i oblici hrvatskoga književnog jezika*. Zagreb: HAZU - Globus.
- Bauer, Laurie and Trudgill, Peter (editors)(1998). *Language Myths*. London: Penguin Books
- Butters, Ronald (2001). *Chance as Cause of Language Variation and Change*. JengL 29.3 (September 2001)
- Crystal, David (1997). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language, Second Edition*. Cambridge University Press
- Labov, William (1972). *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press
- Lakoff, George (1987). *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things. What Categories Reveal about -the Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lyons, John. (1977). *Semantics, Vol. I/II*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Perasović, Benjamin. 2001. *Urbana plemena, Sociologija subkultura u Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada.
- Šonje, Jure (2000). *Rječnik hrvatskog jezika*. Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod and Školska knjiga.



Težak, Stjepko and Babić, Stjepan (1973). *Pregled gramatike hrvatskoga književnog jezika*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga

[www.pegla.com](http://www.pegla.com)

[www.hnk.ffzg.hr](http://www.hnk.ffzg.hr)

[www.deja.com](http://www.deja.com)

### LINGVISTIČKA ANALIZA HRVATSKOG GLAGOLA *BRIJATI*

Ovaj se članak bavi različitim lingvističkim aspektima glagola brijati u urbanom govornom hrvatskom jeziku. Istražuje se neobično širok spektar značenja koje ovaj glagol i njegove izvedenice imaju u autentičnim rečenicama iz novinskih grupa na Internetu i razgovora s velikim brojem izvornih govornika hrvatskog jezika. Kratko je opisana polisemična struktura tog glagola, no semantička motivacija za značenjsku ekstenziju ostaje zagonetkom.

