

The Use of Pun as a Poetic Device in Duma *INqanawe Yangempela's* Poem Titled: 'Hloma'



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ABSTRACT

Puns are often recognized as a poetic technique that provides humor. Poetry puns can, however, fulfill a variety of functions, such as provoking thoughts, emphasizing particular themes, and drawing attention to specific phenomena. This paper's central argument is that Duma employed puns not only as a source of humor but also as a powerful poetic device that provokes thoughts, reinforces themes, and introduces ambiguity. This paper thus explored the use of puns in Duma's poem titled 'Hloma.' Duma's talent for conveying meanings through various indirect methods, what we refer to as puns in this poem, should not be overlooked. This study conducted a semantic exploration of all the puns present in the poem. A qualitative approach was adopted, as this study emphasized a descriptive analysis of an audio poem, while other textual sources served as secondary references. The findings indicate that Duma's skill and artistry in utilizing language within his contemporary recorded poems on social networks are truly remarkable. This suggests that his artful use of puns enhances the interpretative depth of contemporary poetry, particularly in the digital era. This study concluded by stating that puns not only create emotional gravity, but they also create a surprising emotional impact. This study will contribute to the scholarship by illustrating how puns transcend humor and serve as a comprehensive poetic device that deepens interpretation.

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INTRODUCTION

Playful twisting of words in a language exists in every corner of the world. Given that the world consists of people in diverse contexts, words reflect this variety as well. Engaging in wordplay or twisting words, whether in conversations or writing, is a common practice, and it can evoke humor, irony, ambiguity, or satire. Words often have common, everyday meanings, but in different contexts, they can take on surprising or humorous interpretations. Through humor, humans can learn various aspects of life. This wordplay, being referred to, is also considered a 'pun.' Pun is often utilized by poets to bring the element of ambiguity or humor while delivering certain messages to readers or listeners. This potential for wordplay is what makes a pun a powerful tool in poetry, as observed in Duma's oral isiZulu poem titled 'Hloma,' which simply means to arm oneself.¹ This title has multiple meanings, as the word can refer to different contexts. In the context of war, it signifies preparing for battle; in a marital sense, it means preparing for marriage. Both scenarios require preparation and commitment. IsiZulu, like any other

¹ N. M. Duma, " 'Hloma' in Imibhalo Inamandla," 2021, <https://youtu.be/0MW3LakPtMg?si=Ioc-55X7PLId6jwK>.

language, contains words that sound very similar but have multiple meanings; this is the basis for many puns.

Pun is a literary technique frequently employed in poetry, yet it remains relatively underexplored in South African languages' literary studies, specifically in isiZulu literature. Not only in African languages but also in other fields where puns can be explored, they have not received much scholarly attention. Garsiel states that "the evaluation of this device has undergone vicissitudes. In the past, it was poorly regarded by many scholars..."² This is because it was believed that puns bring the element of ambiguity and distract readers' attention from the content and meaning of the literary unit and its sounds. It went as far as advising students in workshops not to focus on puns when reading texts for such reasons.³

In Duma's poem 'Hloma,' the pun is excessively utilized to create multiple layers of interpretation, challenging listeners to engage critically with the language used. Nonetheless, there is limited scholarly attention on how puns function within poetry, particularly in shaping emotions, artistic expression, and the delivery of messages. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the role of pun in 'Hloma' to demonstrate how its ambiguity and double meanings contribute to the poem's theme. This paper seeks to highlight the messages that are brought by the use of puns in Duma's poem, demonstrate how puns as a poetic device can contribute to the overall richness and sophistication of his poem, and examine the poet's creative skill and ability to manipulate language in a manner that captivates listeners. This paper further seeks to highlight Duma's use of puns and its contribution to a deeper understanding of literary discourse from a new perspective. The undertaking of this study is motivated by the need to emphasize the significance of puns in poetry, an area that has received adequate scholarly attention but not from this perspective. In analyzing the selected poem, the writers aim to showcase how Duma uses linguistic creativity to educate, entertain, and provoke thoughts. Additionally, the poem is analyzed to enhance the understanding and functions of puns in isiZulu literature within the context of African oral and written traditions to ensure that Indigenous literary devices receive the academic recognition they deserve.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literary concept of puns is less explored and considered as constructed through various forms of ambiguity that introduce uncertainty, enhance humor and satire, and serve as tools for social commentary while relying on meaning, homophony, and context for their effect.⁴ This concept of poetic technique did not receive much attention in research and was only studied at the educational level (basic and tertiary education). This kind of poetic technique did not receive much exposure in the South African languages, as poetic technique on its own is an underdeveloped segment in literature as compared to other literary aspects, such as imagery. Although literary authors and artists employ it as a linguistic feature in their texts to bring the elements of humor and satire, it relies more on live or oral performances, as it is more audible in those performances than in written texts.

Despite not receiving much attention in research, some scholars have attempted to study the concept of puns. Giorgadze studied puns as linguistic features, examining their typology and classification within one-liner jokes.⁵

This scholar highlighted that while ambiguity is a convention of punning, context is important for a pun to be effective. The assertion suggests that although puns are constructed on various linguistic levels, they inherently possess ambiguity; however, context is crucial for readers' comprehension when they are used. Gan, in her paper, adopted Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory to analyze how the humor effects of puns are constructed.⁶ The scholar concluded by mentioning that puns play an essential

² Moshe Garsiel, "Puns upon Names as a Literary Device in 1 Kings 1-2," *Biblica* 72, no. 3 (1991): 379.

³ Garsiel, "Puns upon Names as a Literary Device in 1 Kings 1-2," 379.

⁴ Meri Giorgadze, "Linguistic Features of Pun, Its Typology and Classification," *European Scientific Journal* 2, no. 1 (November 2014): 27-275; Turkey Bulut and Najah Almabrouk, "The Functions of Puns in 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,'" *The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal* 20, no. 1 (2020): 172-85.

⁵ Giorgadze, "Linguistic Features of Pun, Its Typology and Classification."

⁶ Xiaoli Gan, "A Study of the Humor Aspect of English Puns: Views from the Relevance Theory," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 5, no. 6 (2015): 1211.

role in languages, shine their lusting wisdom, and add colour to the language, but their main characteristic is humor.

Bulut and Almagrouk explored the role of puns in literature, with a focus on children's classics (literature). They studied this technique in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Their paper used semantic and pragmatic analysis to illustrate that puns are not merely humorous devices; they serve critical and aesthetic roles. In this instance, puns contribute to satirical effects and enhance the overall aesthetic appeal of a text.⁷ Santoro and Ramakrishnan indirectly showed that puns play a significant role in language and communication and contribute to its form and beauty.⁸ Pun contributes to verbal humor, irony, and figurative meaning while also serving as a tool for linguistic creativity and innovation.⁹

Both above-reviewed sources posit that puns are created by structural-semantic ambiguity and show how ambiguity is used to create literary effects. This means ambiguity is a key aspect of puns. At the same time, they demonstrate that puns are a versatile linguistic tool with various roles in literary and everyday discourse, are constructed through different forms of ambiguity, and can be used for critical, humorous, and aesthetic purposes.¹⁰ Some scholars, as mentioned in the introduction, refer to puns as a form of wordplay. Bauer's paper aimed to explore the dynamic nature of wordplay across different contexts, including literature, advertising, and social discourse, highlighting its transitory yet insightful role in language and communication.¹¹ Similarly, Gan mentions that "puns are wittily applied in advertisements, daily conversations, riddles, etc."¹² Bauer found that defining wordplay is complex, as well as its role in linguistic innovation and social interaction, highlighting the interdisciplinary approaches necessary to fully grasp its functions.¹³ The scholars highlighted that while puns are a significant linguistic feature, their study has been largely limited to one-liner jokes in literature. Further research is needed to explore the full potential and application of puns in various literary contexts.

Pun is also extensively researched in biblical studies; Ausloos and Kabergs aimed to rectify or clarify the pun or wordplay or paronomasia as utilized in the biblical book of Hebrews by addressing the confusion around the use of those concepts.¹⁴ These authors highlighted that Hebrew wordplay is significant due to its capability to enhance literary interpretation and understanding of biblical texts. Garsiel explored the use of puns as a literary device, specifically those based on proper names in the biblical text, 1 Kings 1-2, and aimed to study the function and the potential significance of puns.¹⁵ The author revealed that using puns on names in the biblical text of 1 Kings 1-2 was a deliberate literary device employed by the author of the biblical text. Therefore, this technique aims to construct a sense of order and coherence within the biblical text to suggest a predetermined plan orchestrated by God. Waldman aimed to illustrate how the concept of pun, in its different forms, enhances the meaning of biblical texts. The author concluded by stating that punning enhances the meaning of biblical passages and has a relationship to assonance, alliteration, and chiasmic structure.¹⁶

As it has already been alluded to, that pun is less explored; some scholars explored homonyms in different fields. Homonyms are a linguistic feature that is represented using similar words with common patterns and pronunciations but differ in meaning. Similarly, puns are the use of similar words that possess common spelling and pronunciations but differ in meaning. The difference is that homonym is commonly used in 'linguistics,' while pun is used in 'literature.' Al Aboud explored homonyms from a medical perspective, alluding to the fact that there is a prerequisite for practitioners to be careful about

⁷ Bulut and Almagrouk, "The Functions of Puns in 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.'"

⁸ Elena Santoro and M Ramakrishnan, "BEAUTY AND FORM," *International Journal of Management (IJM)* 11, no. 7 (2020).

⁹ Santoro and Ramakrishnan, "BEAUTY AND FORM."

¹⁰ Bulut and Almagrouk, "The Functions of Puns in 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'"; Giorgadze, "Linguistic Features of Pun, Its Typology and Classification."

¹¹ Matthias Bauer, "Secret Wordplay and What It May Tell Us," *Wordplay and Metalinguistic/Metadiscursive Reflection: Authors, Contexts, Techniques, and Meta-Reflection* 1 (2015): 269.

¹² Gan, "A Study of the Humor Aspect of English Puns: Views from the Relevance Theory." 1211.

¹³ Bauer, "Secret Wordplay and What It May Tell Us."

¹⁴ Hans Ausloos and Valérie Kabergs, "Paronomasia or Wordplay?: A Babel-Like Confusion. Towards a Definition of Hebrew Wordplay," *Biblica* 93, no. 1 (2012): 1–20.

¹⁵ Garsiel, "Puns upon Names as a Literary Device in 1 Kings 1-2."

¹⁶ Nahum M Waldman, "Some Aspects of Biblical Punning," *Shofar*, 1996, 38–52.

homonyms in the medical field to protect the patient's safety.¹⁷ This can be done by paying attention to the pronunciation and spelling of medical terms to prevent possible mistakes. Altai and Abu-Humeid provided a comprehensive contrastive study of homonymy in English and Arabic, showing similarities and differences in definitions, types, and causes of homonyms in both languages.¹⁸ The scholars also illustrated the implications of homonymy on lexical and syntactic ambiguity, emphasizing the importance of context in resolving such ambiguities. Homonyms, like puns, depend on context; if used incorrectly, readers or listeners may misinterpret the meaning, leading to ambiguity. However, this current paper overlooks the concept of homonyms and solely focuses on puns.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The word 'pun' has an ambiguous and uncertain origin in terms of its etymology. Its origin is not clear. However, according to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the word originated from the Latin word '*pundrigo*,' meaning the same thing, or '*puntiglio*,' meaning humorous alliteration. Literarily, the pun is defined as a form of wordplay that suggests two or more meanings of words that are identical in sound but have different meanings, i.e., multiple meanings.¹⁹ Linguistically, a pun is classified as homophony, while paronymy is also based on sound similarity.²⁰ According to Garsiel, the pun is referred to as 'punning' and is defined as a common technique that is used in different contexts at various linguistic levels, including private conversation, political debate, newspapers, and both ancient and modern literature.²¹ From the definitions above, it can be deduced that a pun is an expression in which a word is used in two different ways, pronounced alike or nearly alike, presenting an odd or ludicrous idea.

A pun is a form of wordplay that involves the deliberate use of language where two words have similar phonetic sounds but possess entirely different meanings.²² Similarly, Waldman describes a pun as a wordplay that can be found in both serious and humorous contexts.²³ However, humor is deeply rooted in culture, meaning that something considered funny in one culture may be offensive in another. A pun involves comparing or contrasting two words that share sounds but have different meanings or interpreting a single word as having two simultaneous meanings. Puns enhance literary meaning and showcase the storyteller's skill. In biblical studies, Kabergs and Ausloos define a pun as a "wordplay or paronomasia," a linguistic phenomenon that creates ambiguity by playing on both the sound and meaning of words.²⁴ Pun is a playing of words that often creates humor, irony, satire, or a playful twist in social discourse or writing. It relies on homophones, i.e., words that sound alike but have contrasting meanings, or they can play on the multiple meanings of a single word. By juxtaposing these sound-alike terms, puns often evoke a humorous response or provoke thought, making them a popular technique in literature, jokes, and everyday communication.

It is, therefore, highlighted by the authors above that puns might seem simple. They are sophisticated literary devices that can enhance a text's depth and complexity. Furthermore, puns engage readers by requiring them to think critically about language and its various meanings, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the text. Furthermore, they reveal the author's creativity and linguistic skills, making the work more memorable and impactful. Therefore, this paper analyzes puns to reveal Duma's creativity and unique skills in playing with words in his poem.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employed the qualitative research methodology to explore the use of a pun as a poetic device in Duma's poem 'Hloma.' Qualitative research methodology focuses on how individuals understand, interpret, or experience the world. The goal is to produce a well-rounded understanding based on rich,

¹⁷ Khalid Al Aboud, "Homonyms in Medicine; a Perspective," *Our Dermatology Online* 6, no. 1 (2015): 109.

¹⁸ Ahmed Mohammedali Altai and Ameer Abu-Humeid, "Homonymy in English and Arabic: A Contrastive Study Ahmed Mohammedali A. Ameer Abu-Humeid Arij Asad Jaafar Altai," *University of Babylon Journal* 4, no. 18 (n.d.): 964–84.

¹⁹ Merriam-Webster, "Online Dictionary," 2009, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/orientation>.

²⁰ Bauer, "Secret Wordplay and What It May Tell Us."

²¹ Garsiel, "Puns upon Names as a Literary Device in 1 Kings 1-2."

²² Bulut and Almabrouk, "The Functions of Puns in 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.'"

²³ Waldman, "Some Aspects of Biblical Punning."

²⁴ Ausloos and Kabergs, "Paronomasia or Wordplay?: A Babel-Like Confusion. Towards a Definition of Hebrew Wordplay."

contextual, and detailed data.²⁵ Thete and Thwala say that qualitative research methodology is understood as “a subcategory of social science study that collects and analyzes non-numerical data.”²⁶ Sibanda describes qualitative research methodology as a means to understand individuals’ behaviors, experiences, and interpretations of their social environments.²⁷ The qualitative research approach captured the overall methodological framework of this study, while the audio analysis served as the main method for this study. Audio analysis is a methodological process that is used to examine and interpret the recorded sound content.²⁸ Audio analysis seeks to understand, interpret, and extract valuable information from sound data. Adopting this methodological approach, text samples from Duma’s recorded poem are explored to determine how pun is used in it. The selected poem is ‘Hloma,’ a recorded poem available on YouTube, Spotify, and other social networks since 2021. This literary piece was chosen because it is rich in puns, wordplay, humor, and irony. It has gained significant popularity among listeners, indicating its quality, yet it has not received much scholarly attention. This indicates that Duma’s poem is used as a primary source in this paper, and additional resources such as articles, books, journal articles, and other academic texts are consulted as secondary sources for backing claims made in this paper.

DISCUSSION

In this section, a selected poem, ‘Hloma,’ is analyzed to demonstrate how the use of puns as a literary device reveals the poet’s linguistic creativity in effectively conveying messages to the audience. It first provides a summary of the poem to help readers understand its content. Lastly, it will be analyzed from the pun’s perspective.

Synopsis of the isiZulu Poem Hloma

The poem ‘Hloma’ is a powerful and motivational piece that emphasizes the importance of education (*imfundo*) as a tool for personal and societal transformation. It addresses the challenges and hardships faced by learners, urging them to persevere and remain dedicated to their studies despite obstacles. The poet uses vivid imagery and metaphors to convey the message that education is a lifelong investment that requires patience, hard work, and resilience. The poem begins with a call to action, encouraging learners to build their futures using the tools of education, symbolized by a pen and paper (*ngepeni nephepha*). It warns against the consequences of neglecting education, such as poverty and regret, and highlights the fleeting nature of opportunities if one does not heed the guidance of teachers. The poet contrasts the temporary struggles of learning with the lasting rewards of knowledge, comparing education to a floating reed in water that rises above challenges. Throughout the poem, the poet emphasizes the value of perseverance, urging learners to study even in the darkest hours (*ufunde nasezinzulwini zobusuku*) and to avoid laziness.

The poem also critiques societal attitudes, pointing out that success through education often earns respect and recognition, even from those who once doubted or ignored the learner. It emphasizes self-reliance and the importance of shaping one’s future (*umuntu nomuntu ikusasa lakhe uyazakhela*) rather than depending on others. The poem concludes with a reminder to remain humble and grateful, honoring those who supported one’s journey while staying focused on personal growth. Through encouragement, critique, and wisdom, the poet inspires learners to strive for success through education, ultimately shaping their destinies and contributing to their communities. ‘Hloma’ celebrates education as a transformative force and serves as a call to action for learners to rise above challenges, work hard, and build a brighter future for themselves and those around them.

²⁵ Bonny Ball Copenhaver, *The Portrayal of Gender and a Description of Gender Roles in Selected American Modern and Postmodern Plays* (East Tennessee State University, 2002).

²⁶ Igneciah Pocia Thete and Gcinile Beauty Thwala, “The African National Congress’s Individualistic Culture as Expressed in Duma Nqanawe Yangempela Poem: ‘Not Yet Uhuru,’” 2024.195.

²⁷ S. D. Sibanda, “Approaches to the Teaching of Literacy Skills in English First Additional Language to Learners in Grade 3.” (2018). 10.

²⁸ I. McLoughlin, “Audio Analysis,” in *Applied Speech and Audio Processing: With Matlab Examples*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Many of the puns used by Duma in this poem have a rhetorical effect; they add layers of meaning or emphasize a point. The following are the puns found in the same poem titled “Hloma.” The following lines reveal the use of puns:

Qeda lento yokuthi ngezimpelasonto uyoma
Uma ungilalele kahle ikini liyoma
Noma kungathiwa selimanti
Izinyembezi zokuhlupheka ziyoma

The poet’s use of the words “*uyoma*” (thirst), “*liyoma*” (stand), and “*ziyoma*” (dry) is a pun that shares the same stem “*-yoma*” with the use of different prefixes. This pun draws a parallel between physical thirst and the metaphorical thirst for progress. This linguistic artistry not only enriches the poem but also highlights its central theme of the choice between fleeting pleasures and long-term fulfillment. The poet’s call to students to prioritize education over distractions like alcohol is a timeless and universal message. It speaks about the transformative power of learning, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. By framing education as a means to break the cycle of poverty and uplift families, the poet taps into a deeply emotional and motivational narrative. This message resonates strongly with young people who may feel trapped by their circumstances, offering them a path to empowerment and hope.

The comparison of the physical act of being thirsty (*uyoma*) with the idea of standing firm (*liyoma*) in one’s commitment to education and self-betterment is particularly striking. It suggests resilience, determination, and the ability to rise above challenges. The poet’s message in these lines is clear by choosing to “stand” for something meaningful, like education, one can overcome the “thirst” for immediate gratification and build a more sustainable and fulfilling future. This poem is not just a piece of art but also a call to action, urging its audience to reflect on their choices and their potential to shape their destinies. It’s a powerful reminder that education is not just about personal success but also about creating a ripple effect that can benefit entire families and communities. Puns have a unique way of making messages stick, adding clarity and humor that resonate deeply. This discussion demonstrates just how effective they can be in communicating ideas. The following lines are another example of the use of puns from the same poem:

Ufunde nasezinzulwini zobusuku
Ungalalali kungafanele uzozumeka
Bese uyakhulelwa
Imfundo ke mfundi ayikhulelwa

Duma’s use of the stem *-khulelwa* in lines 3 and 4 (*uyakhulelwa* and *ayikhulelwa*) demonstrates remarkable linguistic creativity, blending wordplay with a profound message about education. The contrast between the positive present tense morpheme *uya-* (indicating action or progression) and the negative morpheme *ayi-* (indicating negation) highlights the poet’s artistry in conveying dual meanings. This pun not only shows the poet’s linguistic skills but also reinforces the central theme, which is the importance of education, regardless of life’s challenges. In lines 1 and 2, the poet advises against engaging in activities that could lead to teenage pregnancy, urging learners to prioritize their education. This advice is particularly relevant in the South African context, where teenage pregnancy remains a significant issue. According to Statistics South Africa, the teenage pregnancy rate among girls aged 10-19 years is alarmingly high, with approximately 6.5% of girls in this age group falling pregnant annually.²⁹ This statistic stresses the urgency of the poet’s message, as teenage pregnancy often disrupts educational trajectories, leading to higher dropout rates among girls. The poet’s warning is both timely and timeless, addressing a persistent social challenge while encouraging young people to make informed decisions about their futures.

The phrase “*Imfundo ayikhulelwa*” (education has no age limit) serves as a reminder that education is a personal journey that requires active pursuit. This message is particularly resonant for individuals who face setbacks, such as teenage pregnancy, and may feel discouraged from continuing their education. The poet emphasizes that it is never too late to return to school and achieve one’s

²⁹ Statistics South Africa, *Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa: A Statistical Overview.*, 2021.

educational goals. This sentiment aligns with global efforts to promote lifelong learning, as advocated by UNESCO, which highlights the importance of education as a tool for personal and societal development, irrespective of age or circumstances.³⁰ The poet's use of wordplay and the thematic focus on education's transformative power make this pun both engaging and impactful. By addressing the issue of teenage pregnancy and encouraging resilience in the face of adversity, the poet not only entertains but also conscientizes the audience, particularly the youth. The message that "*Imfundo ayikhulelwa*" is also a call to action, urging the students to take control of their educational journeys and seize opportunities for self-improvement, regardless of past challenges. This aligns with broader educational policies in South Africa, such as the Second Chance Matric Program, which provides learners who did not complete their schooling with an opportunity to obtain their National Senior Certificate.³¹ The use of the pun above revealed the ambiguous meaning of the pun 'ukukhulelwa'. The following lines show examples of pun -*nzima* with different prefixes in three successive lines:

Unganaki ukuthi uphuma ekhayeni elidonsa kanzima
Masishane uzoba nezimali uhambe ngezimoto ezinzima
Yebo ke asiphikile imfundo inzima

The use of the pun -*nzima* (hard) in the lines "*Unganaki ukuthi uphuma ekhayeni elidonsa kanzima / Masishane uzoba nezimali uhambe ngezimoto ezinzima* and *Yebo ke asiphikile imfundo inzima*" exemplifies a pun employed by the poet to underline the challenges associated with education in South Africa. This pun, rooted in the repetition of the stem -*nzima*, serves as a literary mechanism to convey both the literal and metaphorical dimensions of hardship, thereby enriching the poem's linguistic texture.

In the first line, the phrase *elidonsa kanzima* (that pulls hard) metaphorically alludes to the socio-economic struggles faced by families, suggesting a burdensome environment from which students emerge. Here, the poet advises learners to transcend these familial hardships, urging them not to be defined by their challenging circumstances. The second line, *uhambe ngezimoto ezinzima* (you will drive expensive cars), employs the same stem -*nzima* to signify luxury or success, comparing the earlier notion of hardship with the aspirational rewards of perseverance. This duality in meaning highlights the transformative potential of education, while simultaneously acknowledging its inherent difficulties. The third line, *imfundo inzima* (education is hard), directly addresses the difficult nature of acquiring education in South Africa, a context marked by systemic inequalities, resource limitations, and socio-economic barriers. For instance, the "Fees Must Fall" movement that took place in 2015 in South African Universities and the ongoing protests at the beginning of the year in higher education illustrate these struggles.

The pun on -*nzima* not only reinforces the central theme of the poem but also demonstrates the poet's mastery of linguistic play, where a single lexical item is strategically repurposed to evoke multiple layers of meaning. This technique aligns with the broader tradition of African oral and written poetry, where wordplay and repetition are often employed to amplify thematic resonance and engage the audience. Furthermore, the use of -*nzima* as a unifying thread across the three lines creates a rhythmic and semantic cohesion, enhancing the poem's aesthetic and rhetorical impact. The poet's choice of the stem -*nzima* as a pun device reflects a noted understanding of the challenges and aspirations embedded within the South African educational landscape. By situating this analysis within the broader discourse on African literature, one can appreciate how such linguistic strategies not only convey meaning but also serve as a form of cultural expression and resistance, capturing the complexities of lived experiences in a post-colonial context. Thus, the pun on -*nzima* transcends mere wordplay, emerging as a powerful tool for articulating the intertwined struggles and hopes of students navigating the difficult path of education. The pun used in these lines played a significant role in bringing rhythm to the poem, leading to a flowing connection of ideas.

The puns in the isiZulu sound and are written the same; however, the following example shows a noun with an English term:

³⁰ UNESCO, *Education for Sustainable Development: A Roadmap.*, 2020.

³¹ South Africa Department of Basic Education, *Second Chance Matric Programme* (Pretoria: Government Publishers, 2020).

Sebenza kusakhanya kuhle kwesolar
Usebenze kanzima ukhohlwe abangani ngeke wazisola

The pun in the first two lines employs the words “*kwesolar*” and “*wazisola*.” While “*kwesolar*” refers to solar energy, “*wazisola*” translates to “regret.” Despite their distinct meanings, the words are phonetically similar, creating a linguistic interplay that deepens the poem’s thematic resonance. Here, Duma used the technique known as paronomasia, which is a hallmark of African oral literature and is used here to highlight the tension between seizing opportunities and the consequences of inaction.³² Duma’s choice of these homophones not only adds a layer of auditory richness but also emphasizes the cultural significance of sound and meaning in isiZulu poetry.³³ The first line, “*Sebenza kusakhanya kuhle kwesolar*,” is a call to action, urging the students to work diligently while there is still light. This metaphorical use of solar energy symbolizes the finite nature of time and opportunity in life. Just as solar panels capture energy during the day, students are encouraged to gather their resources and act with purpose before darkness falls, representing hardship or the loss of opportunities.³⁴

The use of the term solar energy also evokes themes of productivity and sustainability, reinforcing the idea that one must make the most of their resources before they diminish. The second line, “*Usebenze kanzima ukhohlwe abangani ngeke wazisola*” builds on this message by emphasizing the sacrifices required for hard work. It suggests that while dedication may demand neglecting social ties, the reward is a life free from regret. This juxtaposition of “*kwesolar*” (opportunity) and “*wazisola*” (regret) serves as a poignant reminder of the consequences of inaction. The poet accurately uses these contrasting ideas to drive home the value of hard work and the importance of acting decisively to avoid future remorse. This discussion highlights how the poem’s linguistic playfulness, rooted in African oral traditions, enhances its thematic depth. The use of homophones like “*kwesolar*” and “*wazisola*” not only reflects the poet’s artistry but also invites students to reflect on the interplay between sound and meaning. By weaving together metaphors of solar energy, hard work, and regret, the poem delivers a powerful message about the urgency of seizing opportunities and the enduring impact of our choices. The pun in the discussion above focuses on rhyming and rhythm. Therefore, the author chose an English term that would fit well with the theme of the poem. Below is another example of the use of a pun:

Uma uthisha ekunika umsebenzi ethi chaza, chaza
Ungabuyi ungawenzanga uthemb’ ukuthi uzochaza
Ngiqinisile ngiqinisile lapho kothisha wobachaza

The poet’s use of the word “*chaza*” in this stanza is an example of linguistic artistry, employing a pun to convey multiple layers of meaning within the context of education. By repeating the word stem four times, the poet not only emphasizes its significance but also demonstrates how a single term can carry diverse interpretations depending on its usage. This technique enriches the stanza, making it a profound commentary on the dynamics of teaching and learning. In the first line, “*Uma uthisha ekunika umsebenzi ethi chaza, chaza*,” the word “*chaza*” is used to mean “*engage*.” Here, the poet addresses the students, urging them to actively participate in the learning process. This is a call for students to be present not just physically but also mentally and emotionally, to immerse themselves in the lesson and contribute meaningfully. The repetition of “*chaza*” in this line emphasizes the importance of engagement as the foundation of effective learning. Without active participation, the process of education becomes one-sided and less impactful.

The second line, “*Ungabuyi ungawenzanga uthemb’ ukuthi uzochaza*,” shifts the meaning of “*chaza*” to “*explain*.” Here, the poet warns students against neglecting their responsibilities, such as completing assignments or preparing for lessons. The line suggests that students should not come to school unprepared, hoping to offer excuses or explanations for their lack of effort. This interpretation of “*chaza*” highlights the consequences of procrastination and irresponsibility in an educational setting. It serves as a reminder that learning requires consistent effort and accountability. In the third line,

³² D. B. Z. Ntuli and C. F. Swanepoel, *Southern African Literature in African Languages* (Pretoria: Acacia Press, 1993).

³³ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Open Book Publishers, 2012).

³⁴ S. Moyo, “Metaphor and Symbolism in African Poetry,” *Journal of African Literature* 12, no. 3 (2018): 45–60.

“*Ngiqinisile ngiqinisile lapho kothisha wobachaza,*” the word “*chaza*” takes on the meaning of “*impress.*” The poet concludes this stanza by affirming that if students follow the advice given, engage actively in lessons and fulfill their academic responsibilities, they will earn the admiration and approval of their teachers. This final use of “*chaza*” ties the stanza together, showing the positive outcome of diligence and active participation. It also reflects the reciprocal nature of the teacher-student relationship, where effort from the student leads to recognition and encouragement from the teacher.

The poet’s use of a pun in this stanza is not merely a stylistic choice but a deliberate strategy to emphasize the theme of education. By assigning multiple meanings to the word “*chaza,*” the poet illustrates the interconnectedness of engagement, responsibility, and achievement in the learning process. This technique also mirrors the complexity of education itself, where words, actions, and attitudes all play a role in shaping outcomes. Furthermore, the repetition of “*chaza*” creates a rhythmic and memorable quality to the stanza, making the message more impactful. It draws the reader’s attention to the central theme and encourages reflection on the different facets of learning. The poet’s ability to weave these meanings together demonstrates a deep understanding of both language and educational experience. Duma is very skilled in wordplay. This can be seen in the following lines:

Bakhona abomndeni abazokuthembisa mawuqeda isikole umsebenzi
Nakuthina babekhona sathi siqeda babebehona
Sekuyithina ekumele sibenzele umsebenzi
Lento yokuthembela komunye umuntu kulo mhlaba ayisebenzi

This stanza is a touching reflection on the realities faced by many students, particularly within the context of black communities, where promises of support and employment often fall short of expectations. The poet uses the word “*umsebenzi*” as a pun, assigning it different meanings in different lines to highlight the disparity between promises and reality, as well as to underline the importance of self-reliance and resilience. This technique not only enriches the text but also deepens its message, making it a powerful observation of societal expectations and personal responsibility. In the first line, “*Bakhona abomndeni abazokuthembisa mawuqeda isikole umsebenzi,*” the word “*umsebenzi*” refers to “*a job*” or “*employment.*” Here, the poet addresses a common experience among students, the promises made by family members that once they complete their education, they will help them to get employment. These promises often come from a place of hope and encouragement, but they can also create unrealistic expectations. The poet slightly critiques this dynamic, suggesting that such promises, while well-meaning, can lead to disappointment when they are not fulfilled. This line captures the optimism and excitement that often surrounds educational achievement, but it also hints at the potential for discouragement when the reality of the job market sets in.

In the third line, “*Sekuyithina ekumele sibenzele umsebenzi,*” the word “*umsebenzi*” takes on a different meaning, referring to a “*ceremony*” or “*ritual,*” specifically the one performed after a funeral. This shift in meaning is significant as it introduces a metaphorical layer to the stanza. In most black communities, those who succeed in life are the ones who take responsibility for doing everything that was not done by the ones before them; it all falls on them. Including the ceremonies that need to be done for the family. The poet is putting across a message that even those who promised you a job while you were studying end up being your responsibility.

The use of a pun in this stanza is particularly effective because it mirrors the duality of the experiences being described. Just as the word “*umsebenzi*” carries multiple meanings, so too do the experiences of students as they navigate the transition from education to employment. The poet’s skills of use of language capture the complexity of these experiences, blending hope and disappointment, support and self-reliance, in a way that is both relatable and thought-provoking. This stanza is a powerful exploration of the challenges faced by students, particularly within the context of Black communities, where promises of support and employment often fall short of expectations. The poet’s use of puns not only enriches the text but also deepens its message, making it a compelling commentary on the gap between aspiration and reality. By drawing on personal and communal experiences, the poet offers a message of resilience and self-reliance, reminding readers that while the support of others is valuable, it is ultimately up to everyone to shape their future. This is a message that resonates far beyond the

immediate context of the poem, offering a universal lesson in the importance of perseverance and self-determination. The following example of a pun includes a *slang*:

Sebephambanisa esikhundleni sokuthi mshana bathi thayima
Ungakhohlwa-ke inhlonipho yabo esikhundleni nawe wothayima
Ungakhohlwa-ke abakukhulisile yi-oledi nethayima

The stem used as a pun in these three lines is “*thayima*.” In the first line, the word “*thayima*” refers to “father.” In the second line, “*wothayima*” means “being smart” or “clever.” In the last line, the term “*nethayima*” is used to mean “and the father.” All these terms highlight Duma’s linguistic artistry in using puns. In these lines, Duma is found using the word “*thayima*” as a pun, a term borrowed from *tsotsi-taal* (a South African slang), to convey multiple layers of meaning. *Tsotsi-taal* is a language of the streets, often associated with urban youth and marginalized communities. This word, which informally means “father,” is capably employed to explore themes of respect, success, and the importance of remembering one’s roots.

The poet’s message is both a celebration of achievement and a cautionary reminder about humility and gratitude, making it a deeply resonant piece for anyone navigating the complexities of success and societal expectations. In the first line, “*Sebephambanisa esikhundleni sokuthi mshana bathi thayima*,” the poet paints a picture of a young person who has achieved success, perhaps through education. The use of “*thayima*” here is significant because it reflects a shift in how the individual is perceived by their community, particularly by their uncles (*mshana*). In many African cultures, respect is deeply tied to one’s achievements and status. By referring to their nephew or niece as “*thayima*,” the uncles are elevating the young person to a position of honor, akin to that of a father. This is a powerful metaphor for the respect and recognition that come with success. However, the poet is also slightly critiquing this dynamic, suggesting that such respect is often conditional and tied to one’s achievements rather than their inherent worth.

The second line, “*Ungakhohlwa-ke inhlonipho yabo esikhundleni nawe wothayima*,” serves as a cautionary reminder. Here, the poet advises the young person not to let the respect they are shown go through their head. The phrase “*wothayima*” cleverly plays on the dual meaning of the word, suggesting that while the young person is now being honored as a “*thayima*,” they must remain humble and respectful in return. This line highlights the importance of reciprocity in relationships and the need to maintain one’s integrity even in the face of success. It is a call for balance, acknowledging one’s achievements while remaining grounded and respectful of others.

The third line, “*Ungakhohlwa-ke abakukhulisile yi-oledi nethayima*,” brings the focus back to the young person’s roots. The poet reminds them not to forget the people who raised them, which are their parents (*oledi* meaning mother and *thayima* meaning father). This line is an expressive reminder of the importance of gratitude and the role that family plays in shaping one’s journey. It also serves as a critique of the societal tendency to overlook or neglect one’s origins once success is achieved. The poet is urging the young person to remain connected to their roots and to honor the sacrifices made by those who supported them along the way.

The use of “*thayima*” as a pun in this stanza is particularly effective because it captures the complement of the experiences being described. On one hand, it symbolizes the respect and recognition that come with success. The word’s multiple meanings, father, respect, and status mirror the complexities of navigating success in a communal and culturally rich context like South Africa. The poet’s choice to use *tsotsi-taal* adds another layer of meaning to the stanza. By incorporating it into the poem, the poet is grounding the message in the realities of contemporary South African life, where many young people struggle to achieve success amidst systemic challenges. The use of this language also makes the poem more accessible and relatable to its intended audience, while simultaneously elevating *tsotsi-taal* as a legitimate and powerful form of expression.

In the final example, Duma skillfully wraps up the poem, capturing the core message he wants to share with his audience. This conclusion not only ties together the themes explored but also leaves a lasting impression on listeners, inviting them to reflect on the deeper meaning behind his words.

Unganaki ke ukuthi namhlanje ngamazwi bazokujova

Kusasa uwena ozobe uwudokotela usubajova
Sebekubingelela ungababoni yeyi ngiyayazi leya njova (wealthy person)

The poet's use of the word "jova", which means "to inject" or "to sting," is both literal and metaphorical, creating a vivid image of pain, struggle, and eventual triumph. This stanza serves as a reminder that difficult times are temporary and that perseverance can lead to a reversal of fortunes, where the once-painful experiences become the foundation for future success. In the first line, "Unganaki ke ukuthi namhlanje ngamazwi bazokujova," the poet addresses the listener directly, urging them not to pay attention to the hurtful words or actions of others. The word stem "-jova" here is used metaphorically to describe the emotional pain inflicted by others, likening their words to sharp injections that sting and hurt. This imagery is particularly effective because it captures the immediacy and intensity of emotional pain, something many people can relate to. The poet's advice to young people is not to let the negativity of others define one's present or dictate one's future.

The second line, "Kusasa uwena ozobe uwudokotela usubajova," shifts the narrative from pain to empowerment. Here, the poet envisions a future where the listener, once a victim of hurtful words, becomes a doctor, a figure of authority, respect, and healing. The use of "jova" in this line is both literal and symbolic. As a doctor, the listener will inject others, but this act is now one of healing rather than harm. This reversal of roles is a powerful metaphor for personal growth and transformation. It suggests that the struggles we face today can become the source of our strength and success tomorrow. The poet is encouraging the listener to see beyond their current hardships and to envision a future where they are in control, using their experiences to uplift others.

The third line, "Sebekubingelela ungababoni yeyi ngiyayazi leya njova" (wealthy person), completes the transformation narrative. Here, Duma describes a future where the listener has achieved wealth and success, and those who once caused them pain now greet them with respect and recognition. The term "njova" in this line takes on a new meaning, referring to a wealthy or influential person. This shift in meaning is significant because it reflects the changing dynamics of power and respect. The poet is highlighting how success can alter relationships and perceptions, often leading to a reversal of roles where the once-dismissed individual is now celebrated.

The use of "jova" as a pun in this stanza is masterful, as it ties together the themes of pain, transformation, and success. The word's multiple meanings, ranging from the literal act of injecting to the metaphorical stings of hurtful words and the symbolic status of wealth, create a rich tapestry of imagery and meaning. This linguistic artistry not only enhances the poem's aesthetic appeal but also deepens its thematic resonance, making it a compelling commentary on the human experience. The poet's message is both personal and universal. On a personal level, it speaks to anyone who has faced adversity, offering hope and encouragement to persevere. On a universal level, it reflects broader societal dynamics, where success often leads to a re-evaluation of relationships and status. The poet's use of *tsotsi-taal* and colloquial expressions grounds the poem in the realities of contemporary South African life, making it relatable and accessible to a wide audience.

Duma's poem suggests that it is also important for listeners or readers to try to determine whether the pun is used with intent. As much as it can be argued that puns can rule out the emotional gravity of a poem, they can also create a surprising emotional impact. For puns to be understood, readers or listeners should consider the context of the poem, and at times, they are not destructive, just that listeners or readers fail to thoughtfully read beyond the text. This leads to them finding puns irritating and confusing. The researchers suggest that scholars in African languages should focus more on this poetic device, as African language poetry has been insufficiently studied in this context. Duma's use of English and *slang* terms not only reveals his skillful use of puns, but the terms effectively align with the poem's theme, emphasizing that the pun extends beyond just rhyme and rhythm is integral to conveying the entire message of the poem.

CONCLUSION

This paper has analyzed the use of puns as a literary device in Duma's poem titled 'Hloma,' to reveal his linguistic creativity and ability to use wordplay. As previously noted, puns can sometimes divert

readers' attention to the surface level of language, potentially confusing the deeper meaning of a text. However, it is important to acknowledge that puns often function as layers of meaning going beyond mere skillful playing with words. The analysis revealed that puns invite readers to actively interact with the text, prompting them to uncover multiple interpretations of words or phrases. Instead of being destructive, they can enhance the poem's richness and reinforce central themes through linguistic creativity. In Hloma, Duma employed puns to challenge traditional interpretations and encourage listeners to delve into the poem's underlying messages. While some critics contend that puns may diminish a poem's emotional resonance, this perspective overlooks their ability to evoke nuanced and complex emotions. Puns can introduce irony, humor, or double meanings that enhance the emotional texture of the poem, as demonstrated in the discussion. In Hloma, puns are primarily used to convey messages and emphasize the poem's themes. Duma skillfully employed puns to create a contrast between surface-level meanings and deeper implications, enabling listeners to experience a wider range of emotions. With that being said, not all readers or listeners may appreciate puns, which could influence their interpretation of the poem. Poetry, by nature, is subjective, and individuals may bring their own perspectives based on their understanding and experiences. For those unfamiliar with puns, they might perceive them as mere wordplay, which could lead to challenges or misunderstandings. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the artistic value of the poem. Instead, it stresses the importance of context and the ability to interpret poetry in diverse ways. In Hloma, Duma used puns as a tool to enhance the experience for those who appreciate linguistic creativity while maintaining accessibility for those who prefer a more straightforward engagement with the text. This duality reflects the poem's versatility and the poet's intent to cater to a broad audience.

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