

# Reduplication and the IsiZulu novel: A morpho-stylistic critique



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While reduplication qualifies as a pure linguistic entity, little has been done to investigate this aspect in the context of literary works. This article thus seeks to attempt to close this gap by exploring a linguistic stylistic analysis of reduplication with reference to the isiZulu novel. The main aim of this is to blend and harmonise literary criticism and linguistics by discussing both the form (linguistic description) and function (literary effects) of reduplication, observing four isiZulu novels as primary data. This suggests that the study uses textual analysis as a qualitative research technique. Linguistic stylistics is proposed as the theoretical framework to validate and ground the findings. This theory is seen as suitable as it considers both form and function of language. Reduplication with reference to the selected novels is discussed through the following linguistic sets: complete reduplication and incomplete reduplication. Within these descriptive sets, the literary findings reveal that reduplication is used to emphasise the recurring nature of actions as reflected in the novels. This plays a significant role in the creation of vivid effects when the text is read.

**Contribution:** This study is significant because it provides a different way of examining style in the African indigenous languages' novel genre. This genre has been approached from different perspectives, but there seem to be limited perspectives that opt for approaches that lean on descriptive linguistics. The study is thus believed to be valuable to the study of African indigenous languages of South Africa, as it demonstrates that a linguistic approach to literature can aid analysis and understanding of the novel genre. Using reduplication as a reference point, the study seeks to demonstrate that linguistics and literary criticism can co-exist and operate in harmony.

**Keywords:** reduplication; linguistic stylistics; morpho-stylistics; style; literature; novel.

## Introduction

The word 'reduplicate' means to repeat or reproduce in its simplest form. According to Alsamadani and Taibah (2019:114), reduplication is a morphological process that entails the copying and repetition of some parts of a word's base. They further explain that even though the process is morphological in nature, there are semantic effects associated with it. Inkelas and Downing (2015:502) move along these lines by explaining reduplication as a process of doubling components of a base. Similarly, Crystal (2008:407) maintains that reduplication occurs when there is repetition of certain phonological characteristics. From the above insights, the words 'copying', 'repetition' and 'doubling' are central to the explanation of reduplication. Reduplication can then be explained as a morphological process where certain aspects of the base are copied or doubled and then repeated. Even though this process is regarded as a morphological one, it has phonological and semantic effects as well.

In this article, a distinction between literary stylistics and linguistic stylistics is made. The proposed argument here is that when it comes to the use of language in literary texts, style can be analysed according to two approaches: a literary approach (literary stylistics) and a linguistic approach (linguistic stylistics). Both approaches are similar in that they analyse the artistic usage of language; however, they differ in their methodology and emphasis. Literary stylistics can be compared to literary criticism, which intends to evaluate the nature and quality of a literary work. Literary stylistics focuses mainly on the artistic function and effect of language in a literary text. For a literary stylistician, language is more like a means to an end. The focus is not on its description and structure but on its interpretation for the sake of decoding the embedded meaning. It is the aesthetic value of a literary work that literary stylistics seeks to discover (Darshak' Lar 2018:47). Linguistic stylistics, on the other hand, approaches literature from a purely descriptive linguistic point of view. It seeks to describe the systematic elements of language in a literary text

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(Taylor 1980:18). It is for this reason that such an approach is usually undertaken through heavy reliance on linguistic levels, such as the lexical, semantic, phonological and syntactic levels. In short, linguistic stylistics leans more on descriptive linguistics in its approach to analyse a literary text as compared to literary stylistics. While literary stylistics focuses more on the artistic effect of language usage, linguistic stylistics considers both the description of language and artistic effects.

Morphological reduplication has been given more attention in linguistic studies, and this is because this aspect is generally regarded as a pure linguistic aspect. With the understanding of the proposed distinction of the two approaches to style highlighted above, linguistic stylistics is adopted in this article because reduplication, a linguistic aspect, is analysed in context of a literary text. When it comes to the novel genre of the isiZulu language, there seem to be very few studies that have adopted the angle provided by linguistic stylistics. The identified studies in the African context have analysed the use of English in novels, and not necessarily African indigenous languages. For instance, Nnadi (2010) analyses Chukwuemeka Ike's *Toads for Supper*, *The Naked Gods*, *The Potter's Wheel*, *Sunset at Dawn*, *The Children Chasers*, *Expo '77*, *The Bottled Leopard*, *Our Children are Coming!*, *The Search and Conspiracy of Silence*. Clara (2013), on the other hand, examines Nigerian Biafra novels, namely: *Sunset in Biafra*, *Never Again*, *Come Thunder* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, while Darshak'Lar (2018) examines Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and *Measure Time*. All these studies adopt linguistic stylistics, but all the analysed novels are written in English, as stated above. Similarly, Alaje (2019) examines Sony Labou Tansi's *L'anté-people* and *Les yeux du Volcan* and Calixthe Beyala's *La Petite Fille du Reverbere* and *Maman a un amart*. These novels are written in French.

In the context of the South African indigenous languages, specifically isiZulu, most studies that have broadly utilised stylistics, such as those of Mokoko (1995), Msimang (1995), Ngwenya (2002) and Mbathu (2018), focus on analysing novels using the literary stylistics approach and not necessarily the linguistic stylistics one. In other words, these studies do not lean on descriptive linguistics in their analysis of the use of language in novels. It is this identified gap that this article seeks to fill.

## Theoretical framework

Style and stylistics cannot be separated. Style is not a theory, but stylistics is. While style maintains its position as a mere concept, stylistics is a discipline that studies this concept. In essence, stylistics theorises about style. This discipline is interested in a literary work's aspects of style, and this is largely measured through language usage, as literature is written and received through language. Supporting this in their definition of stylistics, Jeffries and McIntyre (2010:1) explain stylistics as a linguistics subdiscipline that evaluates the style of language and how it contextually differs according to different authors. Ramtirthe (2017:3) cites Lucas, who

highlights that stylistics devotes itself to studying how language is effectively used to arouse emotions in literary texts. Dehghan and Aghagolzade (2012:931) consider stylistics as a linguistic discipline that intends to interpret literary texts by identifying linguistic features and their functions. These linguistic features are analysed to ascertain how they inform the reader's interpretation (Myers 2009:338).

In their definition of the term 'stylistics', most scholars comment on the interdisciplinary nature of stylistics. For instance, Bakuuro (2017:37) contends that stylistics aims to draw the link between the linguistic and literary effects of the text to determine the reasons behind the quality of a written work of art. Manqoush and Al-Wadhab (2021:19) also argue that stylistics is a linguistics entity which was extended to include literature and other disciplines. They further state that stylistics is not only limited to the study of style in the context of linguistics but may also be extended to include structuralism, semiotics and hermeneutics. This is to highlight how broadly stylistics can be extended. Even though this is true, it should be noted that the study of style is examined in the context of language and literature in this article, hence the adoption of the notion of 'style in text' as proposed by Leech and Short (1981:11).

According to the insights given above, it is evident that stylistics, broadly, has to do with understanding style through language usage. As indicated earlier, the manner in which style is perceived can differ according to approaches and emphasis. This article particularly uses linguistic stylistics, as reduplication is examined according to both its linguistic description and artistic significance.

## Methodology

The systematic collection, interpretation and organisation of data are carried out through the qualitative research method in this article. This is a scientific research method that intends to collect evidence to answer questions (Mack et al. 2005:1). It interprets data in the form of words rather than numbers (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger 2020:2). The qualitative research method adopts different techniques, and one of them is textual analysis. This technique focuses on constructing the meaning of a text. It highlights the ideological and cultural assumptions of the text (Arya 2020:173). As compared to techniques such as interviews and observations, used in empirical studies, textual analysis relies on the text to answer questions from the perspective of the local population. Because the analysed novels, namely *Kungasa Ngifile* (2002), *Ngidede Ngifile* (2006), *Ngiyolibala Ngifile* (2010) and *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020), are primary sources in this study, this suggests that textual analysis is the adopted technique to collect, organise and interpret data in this article. The selected novels will be analysed to determine how reduplication is used for artistic effects as reflected in the novels.

## Data analysis

From the analysed data, reduplication is explored through the following subheadings: complete word reduplication and

incomplete word reduplication. While the complete word reduplication section covers the reduplication of ideophones and reduplication of ideophonic nouns, the incomplete reduplication section covers the reduplication of verb roots and verb stems.

## Complete word reduplication

Under complete reduplication, the repetition of full words is considered. In other words, these are not morphemes that constitute a word, but complete words. This type of reduplication is evident in the selected four novels and will be explained by making reference to ideophones and ideophonic nouns as complete words below.

### Reduplication in ideophones

Ideophones are regarded as complete words, as they are an independent word category. Even though this is the case, it should be noted that the focus is on reduplication and not on them per se here. The first example of reduplication through ideophones is analysed from the following passage in *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020):

*Njengomfula wona ongagelizi ubuyele emuva, kwathi kuthiwa usakhsha, waqhubeleka phambili, wayeqhumisa ngasikhathi sinye. Phathaphatha, wathatha unyawo.*

[Like a river that does not flow backwards, as she was still crawling, she went forward one step at a time. With hesitation, she took a step.] (Sibiya 2020:43)

The scenario above describes MaSibisi's daughter Nosipho's attempt to walk. As indicated in bold above, the repetitive ideophone *phathaphatha* is used to describe how hesitant she is to take the first step. The basic form of this ideophone is *phatha* and it is used to denote the idea of something taking place in a brief space of time or the idea of hesitation, contextually. Reduplication is achieved through the repetition of the full word *phatha*. The repetition of this ideophone suggests that the action is recurring. The reader is able to understand that the child's hesitation to put a step forward is not a once-off action but a repetitive one. Ideally, the idea of a continuous tense is represented by this reduplication. Repetition, generally, plays an important role in marking emphasis. The reduplication of this ideophone, as a complete word, is thus artistically used to emphasise an idea.

The use of the ideophone *pheqepheqe*, in the same novel, also marks reduplication. This is analysed from the scenario below:

*Wakhumbula amaphetha anemininingwane yezinkampani, wathi pheqepheqe, wathola inombolo yale nsizwa. Wathatha ucingo zaveva izandla ngenkathi ezama ukushaya inombolo kumakhalekhukhwini wale nsizwa.*

[He remembered documents with companies' details and paged through, and found that man's numbers. He picked up the phone and his hands were shaking as he tried to call this man in his phone.] (Sibiya 2020:147)

The ideophone *pheqe* signifies the idea of paging through. Just like the first example above, this word is reduplicated to

indicate that the action is recurring. This indicates that Mthokozisi is paging through several papers. The ideophone would not have been reduplicated if he only paged through once. The fact that the ideophone is reduplicated suggests that he pages through several times. The author does not state that he pages several times. He relies on this reduplication to do this on his behalf. Such is the artistic effect of reduplication. A mere repetition magnifies the nature and degree of occurrence.

Reduplication is also evident in *Kungasa Ngifile* (2002). The example below is considered:

*Athi angakulungisisa ukudla uMaMemela aqonde ekhosombeni lakhe ayebeka khona izinto zakhe ezibalulekile. Mpumpumpu ipheshana elaligoqe umuthi wesichitho.*

[After MaMemela prepared food she went to the closet where she kept all her essential items. She searched for the piece of paper that contained the traditional medicine of cursing.] (Sibiya 2002:63)

The ideophone *mpu* is a complete word, and it expresses the idea of 'searching'. MaMemela is searching for the traditional medicine she has arranged to curse Senzo and Nokuthula's relationship. This ideophone is repeated to indicate that MaMemela's act of searching is reoccurring. She is earnestly searching for the medicine, and the reduplication of this complete word assists in the painting of this image.

There are other general examples of reduplication in some ideophones. These may include, for instance, examples such as *qalaqala*, *po-po-po*, *co co co*, *qathaqatha* and many others. Sibiya applies reduplication in the presentation of the highlighted ideophones to stress and to indicate the recurrence of something.

### Reduplication in ideophonic nouns

Ideophonic nouns are nouns that are formed by ideophones (Nyembezi 1981:74). In this discourse, they are called ideophonic nouns because they morphologically constitute a nominal prefix and a root that can stand independently as an ideophone. Essentially, they are different as nouns are generally made up of a prefix and noun stems which do not have any semantic value. The example below, from *Ngidedele Ngife* (2006), illustrates reduplication in nouns of this nature:

*Athi angajeda ukuwakhuza, kukhala ubukhwahlakhwahla nobukhencekhence, awachithe phansi amathambo.*

[After he was done shaking them, there was a rattling sound and that of breaking, he then threw the bones down.] (Sibiya 2006:57)

After Ndabayakhe goes missing, his mother, MaSibya, decides to consult a traditional healer. In the example above, the traditional healer is depicted shaking his bones, and there is rattling and a metallic sound. These are marked by the nouns *ubukhwahlakhwahla* and *ubukhencekhence*, respectively. Both these nouns are made up of the prefix *ubu-* and the stems *khwahlakhwahla* and *khencekhence*, respectively. An analysis of these stems reveals that they are reduplicated

ideophones. *Khwahla* is an ideophone that depicts the sound of rattling noise, while *khence* depicts the sound of something metallic. As shown, the two ideophones, which serve as noun stems in this regard, are reduplicated. They both depict sound, and their reduplication marks the idea that the sound is reoccurring, as the traditional healer shakes the bag containing bones.

In *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020), reduplication is studied from the ideophonic nouns *ubungqongqongqo* and *ubuqhwaqhwaqhwa*. The first example below depicts the use of the ideophonic noun *ubungqongqongqo*:

*Makhathaleni kuzwakale ongqongqozayo emnyango. Zithule lezi zimambana ezimbili. Buphinde futhi ubungqongqongqo. 'Ngena!' kusho uMaSibisi engabheki nangasemnyango ukubona ukuthi ngubani owabe engqongqoza.*

[After some time, there was a knock at the door. Those two boys kept quiet. There was a knock again. 'Come in!' said MaSibisi without even looking at the door to see who was knocking.] (Sibiya 2020:28)

The noun *ubungqongqongqo* is made up of the Class 14 noun prefix *ubu-* and the stem *ngqongqongqo*. *Ngqo* is an ideophone that signifies the idea of knocking, and its repetition suggests that the action of knocking is recurring. Just like the two nouns in the first example, the stem of this ideophone stands independently because it is a complete word.

Another example is examined from the excerpt below:

*Wenza njengokuyalela kwezwi ayengambonanga umnikazi walo uMthokozisi. Akasaqhamuki nomuntu amelekelele nje bakithi? Lutho. Kunalokho kuzwakale ubuqhwaqhwaqhwa bezicathulo busuka endlini encane sengathi buyanyelelela buqhela kuMthokozisi, umfo kaNdlovu.*

[Mthokozisi did as instructed by the voice of a person he did not see. Is there no one who can assist him? Nothing. Instead of that, a sound of shoes from the toilet was heard as if it was departing from Mthokozisi, Ndlovu.] (Sibiya 2020:46)

The noun *ubuqhwaqhwaqhwa* is made up of the prefix *ubu-* and the stem *qhwaqhwaqhwa*. The ideophone *qhwa* signifies the idea of the sound made by shoes when one is walking, and its reduplication expresses that the action takes place repeatedly. In the excerpt above, Mthokozisi is being bullied by another learner in the toilet. The noun *ubuqhwaqhwaqhwa* is thus used to describe the sound of this mysterious learner's shoes as he walks towards Mthokozisi.

## Incomplete word reduplication

Incomplete reduplication refers to the process of reduplicating morphemes and not necessarily words. In this instance, reference is made to verb roots and stems.

## Reduplication of verb roots

A verb root is the part of the word that does not change whether the verb is in the positive or negative or different tense forms. That part of the verb cannot stand on its own

and make sense. The example below, in *Ngiyolibala Ngijfile* (2010), illustrates reduplication that occurs through a verb root:

*Konke kumnandi kuyo. Impilo innandi: yazi ukudla nokulala nje kuphela. Idlaladlale isikhashana igcine izunywe wubuthongo, ziye kakhulu.*

[Everything is good for him. Life is good; he only just knows eating and sleeping. He played for a while up until he slept, he had deep sleep.] (Sibiya 2010:6)

The verb *idlaladlale* is made up of the agreement concord *i-*, the reduplicated verb root *dlal-* and the last vowel *-a*, for the first verb root (*dlala*) and *-e* for the last one (*dlale*). The two final vowels signify two tenses; the present tense is marked by the vowel *-a* and the past tense by the vowel *-e*. Written separately, the verbs would be *idlala* (he plays), which is in the present tense, and *idlale* (he played) past tense. The use of the two tenses indicates that the child is playing, and the playing comes to an end. It is for this reason that the baby is said to have fallen asleep. As shown in bold, the root *-dlal-* is repeated twice. The reduplication of the entire word is useful in the emphasis of the idea that the baby is playing with his feet repeatedly and this eventually comes to an end.

Another example is seen from the example below in *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020):

*Wayicabanga, wayicabanga, wayicabangisisa le nkinga kodwa lutho isixazululo. Beso efikelwe wukuthi athathe ipeni nephepha abhalabhale phansi konke abelokhu ekucabanga mayelana nale nhlangano.*

[He thought about it, he thought about it, he really thought about this problem but there was no solution. And then it came to him to take pen and paper and then wrote down everything he was thinking about pertaining to the organisation.] (Sibiya 2020:116)

Reduplication occurs through the repetition of the verb root *-bhal-* in the word *abhalabhale* (he writes and wrote). The verb is made up of the agreement concord *a-*, the reduplicated verb root *-bhal-* and the respective final vowels *-a* and *-e*. Written separately, the verb would be divided as *ubhala* (he writes), which is present tense, and *ubhale* (he wrote), which is in the past tense. As highlighted in bold, the process of reduplication occurs through the repetition of the verb root *-bhal-*. Just like the previous example, two tenses are denoted in the word *abhalabhale*, and this suggests that Mthokozisi's writing takes place and ends.

The last example below is also examined from *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020):

*Ayipenapene, eziбуza imibuzo ehlukene. Okwakumxaka nakakhulu wukuthi ngakubo kunomuzi wakwaMsimango owawakhise ngamatshe izindlu zakhona...*

[He pondered on it, asking himself different questions. What was amazing him so much was that near his home there was Msimango's household built with stones while there are houses...] (Sibiya 2020:107)

As indicated in the example above, verb root reduplication occurs through the reduplicated root *-pen-* in the word

*ayipenapene*. Morphologically, this word is made up of the agreement concord *a-*, the object morpheme *-yi-*, the reduplicated verb root *-pen-* and the final vowels *-a* and *-e*. Just like the two examples above, two tenses are represented in this single word, the present tense *pena* (ponders) and past tense *pene* (pondered). In this scenario, Mthokozisi is troubled at night, after the conversation he has had with an elder. As a young boy from the rural areas, he is confused as to why white people build houses on top of the mountains, which is not typical in rural areas. He finds himself pondering about this issue repeatedly, and this is marked by the word *ayipenapene*.

### Reduplication of verb stems

As compared to verb roots, verb stems end with a vowel and full syllables, and tend to have meaning when they are read. In this part of the work, reduplication that occurs in the form of verb stems is observed. The first example is analysed from *Kungasa Ngifile* (2002) below:

*Lena iyona indlu umakoti azofikela kuyo. Ngale nkathi uBhibi useke abonakale ezulazula esigodini saseMhlangeni.*

[This is the house the bride will arrive in. At this time, Bhibi was sometimes seen walking around Mhlangeni village.] (Sibiya 2002:76)

The above scenario depicts Bhibi's attempts to find Nokuthula to kill her. He has been hired by MaMemela to do this to stop the prospects of her marriage to Senzo. The verb *ezulazula* (walking or moving around) is used to show Bhibi's constant effort to find Nokuthula. The verb is made up of the agreement concord *e-* and the reduplicated verb stem *-zula*. The reduplication of this verb stem signifies the idea that Bhibi is walking around the village constantly in search of Nokuthula.

Another example is analysed from the following quotation, in *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020):

*Cishe ngeke basizwe naleso siZulu khona ebabingeleta. Wathi ukubhekabheka ephepheni ayebhalelw kulo ukuthi uzohamba kanjani ...*

[They would probably not understand even that isiZulu when he greets them. He looked at the paper for directions he was written for...] (Sibiya 2020:83)

The word *ukubhekabheka* (to look and look) is morphologically made up of the prefix *uku-* and the reduplicated verb stem *-bheka*. This stem is reduplicated to emphasise the idea that Mthokozisi keeps on looking at the paper for the directions he is given.

The last example is examined from the following sentence:

*Waphungaphunga itiye eziba ithumbu elase liqala ukumkhumbuza ukuthi akalikhokhele.*

[He drank tea to try and satisfy hunger.] (Sibiya 2020:145)

The noun *waphungaphunga* (to sip and sip) is made up of the agreement concord *wa-* and the reduplicated verb stem *-phunga*. Reduplication occurs through the repetition of the verb stem *-phunga*. The verb stem *-phunga* means to drink something that

is hot. The reduplication of this verb stem portrays the idea that Mthokozisi's act of sipping his tea is recurrent.

### Findings and conclusion

This study has explored reduplication in Sibiya's novels using a linguistic stylistic approach. The aim was to show the relevance of this pure linguistic aspect in literature. To discuss its form (linguistic description), it was divided into two categories, namely complete reduplication and incomplete reduplication. The discussion of the form of this aspect was also intertwined with function, function in a sense of literary effects on the text. It was discovered that Sibiya uses reduplication to emphasise the recurring nature of actions and how this plays a significant role in the creation of vivid effects when the text is read. The discussion of reduplication in Sibiya's novels indicates that linguistics and literary criticism can co-exist. The selection of linguistic stylistics, as a theory, was motivated by this given that the theory attempts to integrate linguistics and literary criticism. While reduplication is considered purely as a linguistic process in general, its artistic significance and relevance in literature (novels) were also singled out with special reference to the selected four isiZulu novels.

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Data were extracted from novels, which are found in libraries and online stores.

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