



An appraisal of attitude in Shasha's poem *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba* (They stab each other while starving)

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Abstract: This article investigates how evaluative language operates in the poem *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba*, written by Shasha (1992) in isiXhosa. The main objective of this article is to explore and discuss the emotional, ethical, and environmental Judgments constructed through linguistic choices in the poem. The study employs the Attitude subsystem (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation) of Appraisal Theory, within the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. This study examines these Attitude categories (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation), expressed in the poem as evaluative attitudes that provide attitudinal resources for its evaluative meanings. A mixed-methods approach is used, combining qualitative textual analysis with quantitative frequency analysis of evaluative expressions across the poem's 28 lines. The results show that there are 320 evaluative instances. The evaluative instances are categorised into 135 instances of Judgment (89 negative and 46 positive), 97 instances of Affect (64 negative and 33 positive), and 88 instances of Appreciation (52 negative and 36 positive). The findings illustrate that the high frequency of negative evaluative instances in this poem has led to Judgment becoming the dominant attitudinal resource that establishes the poet's moral stance towards the structural inequality and personal struggle inherent in the poem. This study examined how evaluative language establishes metaphors, repetitions, and symbols that convey the poem's evaluative meanings and determine how the poem's attitudes prompt the audience's emotions and values regarding social injustices. This study, therefore, demonstrates that Appraisal Theory offers a systematic framework for analysing evaluative stance in isiXhosa poetry and advances African literary linguistics and evaluative stylistics.

Keywords: Appraisal Theory; Attitude subsystem; metafunctions; Evaluative meaning; Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

1. Introduction

African poetry has been a means of expressing the plight, struggles, and ethical issues of various communities in Africa. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), the relationship between literature and the sociopolitical and cultural issues affecting African societies is one of creating identity and historical consciousness. Makhenyane (2015) and Tabu (2007) share this view that most African poets use metaphors, symbols, imagery, and rhythm to condemn social dissolution. They add that, in general, poetry has been considered a performative language used by communities to address issues of equality and morality.

Poetry, in general, has been considered a performative language used by communities to address issues of equality and morality. Therefore, IsiXhosa poetry is an integral part of the African literary tradition. IsiXhosa poetry, as affirmed by poets (Moletsane, 1983; Opland, 1998; Sibula, 2001), has a rich tradition of using symbolic language, including imagery and allegory, to address social and political issues. In essence, metaphors, imagery, and the performance of poetry were seen as tools for critiquing social inequalities, creating identity, and portraying the historical experiences of communities.

Shasha's poem *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba* is a social critique. He describes starving cattle that charge one another, using the metaphor of their charged bodies to convey deprivation, inner strife, and hunger. The imagery can be likened to the struggles faced by disadvantaged communities related to social injustices, poor governance, and poverty. Although the thematic and symbolic components of African and isiXhosa poetry have been discussed extensively in literary theory, none of the studies have employed Appraisal Theory, the model proposed by scholars Martin & White (2005), Coffin (2006), and Martin & Rose (2007), which could provide a new perspective on the emotional and evaluative language used in these poems. Similarly, Macken-Horarik and Isaac (2014) note that the Appraisal Theory has not yet been fully employed to investigate the linguistic resources that construct the evaluative meaning in African poetic texts. Likewise, there is no research on how Appraisal resources are employed to link affective components in poetry or on how poets evaluate moral standards. So, this study aims to explore the discourse-semantic features of socio-political critique encoded in poetic discourse.

Therefore, in Shasha's poem *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba*, he sought to address and fill the gap in the underexplored field of appraisal language in African poetry. The study is guided by the Attitude subsystem as explained by SFL linguists (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Hood, 2010; Gebhard & Accurso, 2020) and sought to answer the following research questions:

- (i) How does the poem employ the Affect to construct emotional meanings?
- (ii) In what way does the Judgment pass a verdict on personal behaviour and on the surrounding society?
- (iii) Appreciation as a Genre of Social Realism Appreciation lays bare the social surroundings and living conditions of poverty.

2. Literature review

Research on African literature shows that most scholars link African poetry to politics and Africa's colonial history. This is due to the marginalisation that Africa has faced under Western colonial power (Busha *et al.*, 2021). Taoua & Musila (2023) state that African poetry has long been a site of resistance, celebration of blackness, and critique of the social order in post-colonial Africa. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), literature in postcolonial societies plays a key role in the retrieval of African cultural memory and the rejuvenation of African historical consciousness through its unique linguistic and narrative capacity.

Chinweizu & Madubuike (1983) argue that a number of the characteristic features of modern African poetry are inherited from the communal basis of traditional African oral poetry. Therefore, socially and morally acceptable principles determine the aesthetics and morality of communal poetry in Africa. Ojaide (1996) agrees that modern African poetry has preserved its militant heritage by blending traditional forms of artistic expression with modern postcolonial critical perspectives. He believes that it transforms immediate experience into aesthetic forms through which the poet enters into a dialogue with the surrounding social and political world.

Tajjiou (2024) notes that African poetry should be regarded as an act aimed at effecting ideological change and eliciting an immediate public reaction. Ojuola (2024) notes that African and diasporic literature challenges colonial legacy, undermines racism, and reconstructs self through the recovery of indigenous cosmology and values. Many poems have been written in Southern Africa that give us a clear picture of the social challenges African people face.

According to Kunene (1971) and Mtshali (1971), in poetry, images of oppression transform the realities of racism, inequality, and poverty into metaphors and symbols. In this way, these methods serve to liberate the people. Rycroft (1963) and Jordan (1973) explain that imagery of cattle, the land, and hunger was used as a metaphor to discuss poverty, loss, and social conflict, and to endow poverty and injustice with moral, political, and cultural meaning. According to Diko (2023), isiXhosa is a cultural guardian because it plays a role in preserving cultural meanings through the language and symbols it uses to preserve communal history and culture. Diko (2025) further affirms that the circulation of IsiXhosa poetic forms within the global cultural economy undermines their politicisation. At the same time, this circulation shows the dynamism of African oral forms as they become relevant across different contexts, within the education system and in transnational space.

Poets (e.g., Kebede, 2025; Raghavan, 2024; Simon, 2021) argue that the context of the discussion of African poetry as a radical praxis of criticizing and addressing the issues of poverty, among others, as it is reflected in the poems, looks into the construction of value judgment in African poetry with particular reference to poems that discuss the thematics of poverty. Other recent studies in the field of Africanist poetry that could be related to this study include Jaxa (2024), who analyses the stylistic and semantic resources that are employed in some examples of contemporary isiXhosa poetry using the framework of *Text World Theory*, and Makhenyane (2024), who uses augmented reality to stimulate readers' engagement with poetic imagery and cultural values embedded in a poetic text. In this regard, Monyakane and Maletle (2023) use Appraisal Theory to discuss the various appraisal possibilities in Sesotho poetry and how the poet, Maphalla, uses lexical choices in his poem *Ditema* to evaluate phenomena and the social honour and respect associated with them.

The study examines how the poem employs evaluations of Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation, which are central to its critique and condemnation of social deviance, as Ntswane (2023) highlights. This work, therefore, advances African literary criticism. It also contributes to the expanding field of linguistic appraisal studies advocated by Mahlangu (2024).

3. Theoretical framework

This study applies Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as its main theoretical framework, which underpins the analysis and interpretation of Shasha's poem. It is derived from Appraisal Theory, especially the attitude subsystem, as its analytical tool for analysing evaluative meaning in isiXhosa in Shasha's poem *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba*.

3.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

The theorist Halliday (1978) primarily developed Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). According to SFL linguists (e.g., Derewianka & Jones, 2023; Accurso, 2017; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), SFL is a functional theory of language that views language as a social semiotic system. It is a resource for meaning-making within specific cultural and situational contexts. Thompson (2014) contends that SFL does not view language as a

system of abstract grammatical structures. Rather than this abstract view, SFL sees language as a network of choices in grammar and lexis that speakers and writers use to make meaning in real contexts of use.

According to Eggins (2004) and Accurso (2017), this approach views language as a system of resources for meaning, potentially available to language users, and their choices as functionally relevant to specific contexts. Derewianka and Jones (2023) and Schulze (2011) assert that SFL views language as a dynamic semiotic system that is shaped and that shapes social life. Christie & Derewianka (2008), Kartika-Ningsih & Rose (2021), and Brisk (2011) note that meaning is constructed through the interactive operation of the three metafunctions, including:

- (i) Ideational metafunction, which represents experience and reality.
Example: Participant (*the boy*), Process (*went*), Circumstance (*to school*).
- (ii) Interpersonal metafunction, which negotiates relationships and attitudes.
Example: Affect (*love, suffer, hunger*), Judgment (*cruel, thief, liar*), Appreciation (*boring, heavy, pretty*).
- (iii) Textual metafunction, which organises discourse into clear, coherent messages.
Example: Theme: (*The bus*)
Rheme: (*leaves at 05:00 every morning*)

The three metafunctions are very useful for literary linguists because they provide a way to analyse how the author uses language to convey their ideology, emotions, and social message. In African poetry, SFL provides a framework for examining how poetic language reflects social and political realities and constructs shared meaning. This study, therefore, uses SFL to analyse evaluative meaning in Shasha's poem *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba*.

Achugar and Carpenter (2018) emphasise that language must be interpreted within the social and cultural contexts where texts are created and understood. Consequently, every word and grammatical choice in the poem is viewed as a deliberate resource for meaning within its social and cultural setting (Martin & White, 2005; Martin & Rose, 2008). Molohe (2022) argues that poetic discourse should be viewed as a contextual linguistic event shaped by socio-political realities. According to SFL, language choices constitute social experience and are constituted by it (Rose & Martin, 2012; Derewianka, 2022). Many forms of African poetry are particularly suited to explore the experience of hardship, resistance and ethical thinking.

3.2 Appraisal Theory

Appraisal Theory, as introduced by Martin and White (2005), extends the interpersonal metafunction in SFL and provides a discourse-semantic framework for evaluating how Appraisal resources are used in texts. Oliveira and Smith (2019) state that through Appraisal Theory, we can explain how speakers and writers convey Affect, evaluation, and ideology in a text, and this goes far beyond the clause level. Evaluation, therefore, is a socially organised system of linguistic resources used for evaluating people, actions, events, or objects. According to appraisal linguists (e.g., Humphrey & Feez, 2016; Nguyen & Habók, 2024; Xiang, 2022), these evaluations are realised prosodically through appraisal patterns that traverse the text, guiding the reader through a series of approvals and criticisms and regulating the relationship between the writer and the reader.

Humphrey and Feez (2016) state that this theory views evaluation as a socially organised system of language resources that speakers and writers select and combine to evaluate people, behaviours, events, and phenomena, to agree or disagree with other evaluations, and to modify the force of the evaluation.

In this context, White (2021) points out that appraisal is not marginal but central to the construction of stance, identity, and community. Hoang (2021) notes that Appraisal Theory is a strong theory that explains how evaluative meanings are created, shared, and negotiated in texts, genres, and social contexts. Feindt (2020) and Boehm (2021) add that this theory goes beyond allegorical interpretation by revealing the semiotic construction of the moral critique, established through patterns of appraisal language. The research explains the literary devices Shasha uses in his poem, *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba*, to create attitudes and value judgments that, in turn, strengthen the interpersonal and ideological meanings. As a result, the poem becomes an effective medium for exploring Appraisal Theory.

3.2.1 The Attitude Subsystem

Attitude, in Appraisal Theory, refers to evaluation, opinions, and attitudes expressed in a text (Martin & White, 2005; Martin & Rose, 2007). Attitudes can relate to the evaluation of the emotional, ethical, or aesthetic value of language in a text (Gilroy, 2017). Attitudes help readers establish the degree of identification and relate to ideological manipulation of the audience in diverse contexts (Gee, 2018; Feindt, 2020; Boehm, 2021). Attitudes in a text are made up of three main aspects, which include polarity (negative or positive), evaluation meaning, and social norms of evaluation (Humphrey & Vale, 2020; Coffin, 2006; Halliday & Williams, 2023).

These three aspects are further broken down to Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation (Martin & Rose, 2007; Coffin, 2006). Affect is the personal feeling of the evaluator towards the evaluated object; Judgment is to do with social and moral standards of evaluation of human behaviour, and Appreciation refers to the social and aesthetic values assigned to objects, processes, or environments evaluated. Hood (2010) argues that the use of evaluative words can make attitudes explicit. They can be made implicit through the use of metaphors, similes, modality, nominalisation, and discourse prosody (Martin & White, 2005; Eggins, 2004). In African poetry, attitudes are exemplified through symbolic imagery and metaphor; as such, the poetry's content is highly subjective, and ethical and socio-political values are expressed indirectly.

(i) Affect: evaluating emotions and moods

Affect is the emotion expressed in language, either directly or indirectly through descriptions of states and situations (Martin & White, 2005; Derewianka, 2022). As mentioned earlier, positive and negative emotions are part of the interpersonal metafunction in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) and are realised through adjectives, mental and behavioural processes, modality, and expressed inclination (Derewianka & Jones, 2023). Therefore, in the poem *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba*, the reader's affect is shaped by emotions of despair, fear, and anger at starvation, imprisonment, and violence. The Affect is therefore the component of the poem that connects the audience to its moral and political message (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Martin & White, 2005).

(ii) Judgment: evaluating human behaviour

According to Martin & White (2005:143), Judgment is concerned with the appraisal of oneself or others in terms of social and moral codes and is pertinent to evaluating the ethics of what is described in the text. Judgment can be evaluative language, metaphor, or context (Accurso & Lévasseur, 2022). In the poem, the visual images of people fighting each other elicit the appraisal of Judgment as a negative feeling. Furthermore, Mona (2024) emphasises that, despite the poem's depiction of the oppressed state, it is the system that sustains it. In this regard, Judgment is seen as pertinent to the ethics of

socio-political critique and appraisal analysis of African-language poetry (Matiyenga, 2026).

(iii) Appreciation: evaluating objects and processes

Appreciation involves evaluating things, actions, or events from the perspective of beauty or society (Martin & White, 2005; Phan, 2025). In *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba*, the speaker evaluates instances of scarcity, lack of freedom, and environmental degradation negatively, revealing structural inequalities in society. The evaluations form a consistent prosody that underpins the moral and ideological critique. This study explores how the Appreciation provided in the poem offers insight into the socio-political theme, thereby showing that Appraisal Theory can be an appropriate framework for the critical discourse analysis of literary texts in an African language (Mtumane & Tabu, 2007).

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This combination enabled a deeper linguistic and semantic exploration of the evaluative meaning assigned to objects, states, or actions through the Appraisal Theory Attitude subsystem, as well as the quantification of attitudinal resources employed within the text.

4.2. Data Source

The data used for this study is the 28-line isiXhosa poem *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba* by Shasha (1992). The poem was chosen because it uses the most poetic devices, including metaphors, symbols, and evaluative language, to address social and political issues of inequality, such as hunger, civil unrest, and structural poverty. These devices are relevant to the study's overall objective because they address moral, emotional, and ideological evaluations of phenomena in the text.

4.3. Data Coding

In this study, the data from a 28-line poem will be examined line by line to identify examples of words and phrases that constitute the Appraisal Theory Attitude subsystem. The lines will be categorised and analysed into the three stages.

4.4. Analytical Procedure

The whole analysis will be developed in three stages. Stage one is called the identifying stage, where the poem's analysis of the evaluative and interpretive values will be identified. Stage two will be called the classifying stage, in which the attitudes of Appraisal Theory (Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation) will be determined, whether positive or negative. Stage three will be called the quantitative stage, in which the frequency and percentages of the attitude resources that appeared in the poem will be statistically counted, and the data obtained from this stage will be expressed by means of tables and illustrations to show the frequency of the evaluative values assigned to the elements appearing in the poem.

Table 1: The summary of the analysis of the evaluative and interpretive aspects of the attitudinal subsystem

Text excerpt	Metaphorical expression and evaluative meaning.	Poetic tone and mood	Appraisal Type	Polarity (positive or negative)
(1) <i>Govu! Bhokro-o-o, zahlabana!</i> (They stab each other!)	The ideophones 'Govu!' and 'Bhokro-o-o!' illustrate how the horns clash as they endeavour to exemplify that the Black people are like cattle fighting each other over an inch of land and limited resources. The ideophones also use explosive sound words to dramatize a violent crash, evoking agitation, hostility, and chaotic intensity.	The ideophones and onomatopoeia, stretched-out sounds in the poem, build up to a very loud, noisy scene. The shock of the exclamation and the violent scenes scattered throughout the poem ensure that the mood is maintained from the very beginning and stays tense and turbulent throughout.	Affect Judgment	<i>Negative:</i> The ideophones convey intense emotional agitation and alarm. <i>Negative:</i> The phrase 'they stab each other' elicits condemnation of destructive behaviour.
(2) <i>Kuhlaba'n' iinkomo zomthonyama!</i> (The native cattle stab each other!)	The allegory in <i>iinkomo zomthonyama</i> depicts indigenous people as exploitable assets, with the cattle metaphor illustrating that violence is fundamentally driven by scarcity and commodification.	The repetition of violent scenes helps maintain the picture's tension and horror. The tragic irony of victims attacking each other heightens the degree of pathos and creates an atmosphere of immense psychological turmoil and sadness.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Negative:</i> Collective suffering and frustration. <i>Negative:</i> Critique of harmful internal division. <i>Negative:</i> Tragic assessment of the situation.
(3) <i>Nanzi iimazi zamasi!</i> (Here are dairy cows!)	<i>Iimazi zamasi</i> symbolizes nourishment, fertility, and economic value. Milk represents generative labour and wealth creation, suggesting that the oppressed sustain the system	The repeated scenes of violence keep the picture tense and unsettling, and the fact that the victims turn on each other makes it even more tragic. As this unfolds, the mood inside becomes increasingly somber and tense. This helps clarify the poem's meaning when it refers to <i>iinkomo zomthonyama</i> , highlighting the pain of an oppressed group hurting itself from within.	Affect Appreciation	<i>Positive:</i> Implicit pride or satisfaction. <i>Positive:</i> Valued for productivity and nourishment.

	that exploits them.			
(4) <i>Nanzi iinkab' ezimaxhaka!</i> (Here are stunning horned oxen.)	<i>Iinkab' ezimaxhaka</i> symbolises strength, dignity, resilience, and latent defensive power. Horns evoke both aesthetic beauty and potential resistance, implying suppressed capability beneath exploitation.	The descriptive praise stirs admiration and dignity, briefly shifting the tone to celebration even as the broader context reveals its irony, creating a mood where pride mixes with tragedy. The image of strong, horned oxen symbolizes both physical strength and resilience—suggesting a hidden power that remains suppressed under oppressive conditions.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Positive:</i> Admiration and dignity. <i>Positive:</i> Respect for strength and vitality. <i>Positive:</i> Aesthetic Appreciation
(5) <i>Zivalelwe kuthango lwabathakathi hi</i> (Enclosed in the witches' kraal.)	<i>Kuthango lwabathakathi</i> symbolises systemic confinement; a traditionally protective kraal becomes a space of sinister control, with the 'witches' representing malevolent authority and deliberate structural oppression.	Dark metaphors and imagery of confinement set an ominous, foreboding tone. The mood shifts to oppression and unease. The 'witches' kraal reimagines a traditional enclosure as a space of intentional, manipulative oppression.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Negative:</i> Fear and oppression. <i>Negative:</i> Moral condemnation of oppressors. <i>Negative:</i> Confinement is negatively valued.
(6) <i>Ingca ziyayiphoselwa</i> (grass is thrown into them;)	The act of 'throwing' the grass symbolizes neglect, minimal support, dependency, and a loss of dignity for those who receive it.	Using the passive voice and unpleasant language creates a cold, indifferent tone that makes the mood dismal and embarrassing, revealing how little care was given. The fact that the grass was just tossed away instead of being seen makes the violence worse. It demonstrates that the people in the subjects' lives are neglected and are kept around only out of duty, not out of respect.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Negative:</i> Discarded grass indicates disrespect and a lack of care. <i>Negative:</i> The action reduces worth and shows dehumanizing treatment. <i>Negative:</i> Low-quality

				provision.
(7) <i>Kodw' uqaqaqa udlal' abantwana;</i> (But kikuyu grass is plenty;)	Kikuyu grass represents abundance, in contrast to limited access, and emphasizes injustice, as plentiful resources are controlled and rationed.	The contrast creates sharp irony, shaping a tone that is both critical and reflective, while the mood exposes the injustice of abundance existing alongside deprivation. Although kikuyu grass is naturally plentiful, controlling its distribution reveals systemic inequality. It becomes a symbol of corrupted abundance, representing plenty that is kept within reach yet withheld as a tool of power, illustrating how suffering arises not from scarcity but from restricted access.	Affect Appreciation	<i>Positive:</i> Kikuyu grass symbolizes abundance and the potential for prosperity. <i>Positive:</i> Valuing abundance indicates positive resources.
(8) <i>Kusikwa ngerhenqe kuphoswe.</i> (It is cut by a sickle and thrown.)	The sickle symbolizes control over labour, with small patches of grass highlighting systemic exploitation and inequality.	The repeated mechanical actions and carefully controlled visuals create a feeling of deliberate dominance, establishing a mood that feels both limited and oppressive. The sickle, as a symbol, represents control over the production process, highlighting the exploitation and the structural power that shapes the system.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Negative:</i> The act of cutting and throwing suggests restriction. <i>Negative:</i> An implicit critique of exploitative control. <i>Negative:</i> Controlled distribution is viewed negatively.
(9) <i>Zilwe zona ngaloo nketshe-nketshe;</i> (They fight about that small portion,)	The small portion signifies a limited chance, with conflicts over it highlighting divisions caused by enforced scarcity.	When there is not enough of something and conflict arises, it can feel tragic and sad as the characters fight over crumbs. Their fight over a 'small portion' shows how a lack of resources can tear groups apart. It demonstrates that the conflict isn't caused by hostility but by the overwhelming stress of limited resources.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Negatives:</i> Competing for a small share. <i>Negatives:</i> Irrational competition and lack of unity. <i>Negatives:</i> A small share is undervalued.
(10) <i>Zihlabana nje</i>	'Stabbing while starving' represents self-	The refrain maintains a mournful, accusatory tone, deepening the mood of suffering and despair. By	Affect	<i>Negative:</i> Starvation signifies

<i>ziyalamba;</i> (They stab each other while starving:)	destructive conflict driven by hunger and socio-economic marginalization.	connecting violence directly to hunger, the poem shows aggression not as a moral failing but as a desperate response to systemic deprivation and ongoing suffering.	Judgment Appreciation	suffering. <i>Negative:</i> Condemned self-destructive reaction. <i>Negative:</i> State of starvation.
(11) <i>Zihlabana nje ziyalamba!</i> (They stab each other while starving!)	The repetition reinforces the imagery of cyclical entrapment, illustrating how systemic inequality sustains normalized violence.	The exclamatory repetition increases the emotional intensity, making the tone more assertive and anguished. As a result, the mood darkens with feelings of frustration and hopelessness. This repetition emphasizes the critique of cyclical self-destruction by illustrating how ongoing deprivation continually fuels repeated outbreaks of violence.	Affect Judgment	<i>Negative:</i> Anguish <i>Negative:</i> Stronger condemnation
(12) <i>Bayahluth' abazisengayo,</i> (Those milking them are well-fed,)	Those 'milking' the cattle symbolize exploitative elites, representing greed and deliberate economic exploitation.	The stark contrast between good and evil creates a mood of bitter irony. The wealthy or powerful "milkers" and their poorer or oppressed victims, the "cattle," exemplify the capitalist class that profits from the labour of working people, while the 'cattle' survive on nothing but air. The stark contrast between the rich milkers and their starving, emaciated cattle powerfully illustrate the great social inequality of that age.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Negative:</i> Resentment implied. <i>Negative:</i> Condemnation of greed and exploitation. <i>Negative:</i> Unequal enrichment.
(13) <i>Basengel' eselweni nasemlonyeni,</i> (They milk into calabashes and their mouths,)	The calabash and 'their mouths' symbolize accumulated wealth and indulgent consumption, representing exploitation and systemic inequality.	Concrete imagery heightens the feeling of greed and indulgence, creating a mood of moral outrage at such excess. The line shows milkers harvesting and drinking the milk themselves, revealing the exploitation and deep moral imbalance involved.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Negative:</i> Moral outrage implied. <i>Negative:</i> Strong condemnation of excess. <i>Negative:</i> Exploitative actions are viewed negatively.
(14) <i>Kodwa abavumi</i>	The closed gate symbolizes	The way the words are arranged makes it sound like something is	Affect	<i>Negative:</i> Denial and

<i>kuzivulela</i> (But they deny them exit;)	restricted freedom and limited movement, representing intentional political, economic, and social barriers.	wrong and should be punished. The mood is tense and oppressive. The line suggests that oppressors deliberately deprive people of freedom and make it harder for them to be free.	Judgment Appreciation	frustration. <i>Negative:</i> Condemnation of oppression. <i>Negative:</i> Refusal of freedom.
(15) <i>Banya bethe qhutsu kuba ziyakhaba.</i> (They suck them vigilantly, as they are wild.)	Describing the cattle as ‘wild’ justifies harsh control and exploitation as discipline, masking domination as moral order.	The use of predatory language creates a harsh, accusatory tone, which in turn creates an unsettling and tense atmosphere, highlighting the ongoing nature of exploitation. Moreover, the statement suggests that those in power label the cattle as ‘wild’ to justify their control, thus disguising exploitation as a form of moral guidance.	Affect Judgment	<i>Negative:</i> Aggression or tension. <i>Negative:</i> Condemned ruthless persistence.
(16) <i>Bath’ abakahluthi ngumphehlulu!</i> (They claim some more of the foamy cream.)	The demand for ‘foamy cream’ symbolizes insatiable greed, reflecting excessive extraction and increasing exploitation.	Images of greed heighten the satirical and critical tone. The mood reveals anger at endless excess. Wanting more cream signifies insatiable greed. Beyond simple extraction, exploitation persists and worsens.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Negative:</i> Insatiable greed. <i>Negative:</i> Moral condemnation of greed <i>Negative:</i> Excess is portrayed negatively
(17) <i>Zihlabana nje ziyalamba</i> (they stab each other while starving.)	The refrain prompts hunger-driven violence, with ‘stabbing while starving’ representing cyclical deprivation, marginalization, and internal conflict.	The repetition of the line accentuates the prevailing gloomy atmosphere. This cyclical pattern reinforces a sense of despair and entrapment. The refrain's recurrence serves to link systemic oppression with internalized aggression, thereby illustrating to the audience that deprivation can precipitate self-destructive behaviours.	Appreciation	<i>Negative:</i> Hunger causes self-destructive conflict.
(18) <i>Zihlabana nje ziyalamba!</i> (They stab each other while	The repeated exclamation highlights how aggression becomes inevitable and normalizes during	Climactic repetition intensifies the sense of anguish. The mood becomes overpowering and accusatory, reflecting a shared lament. The repetition worsens the cycle of suffering, reinforcing the tragic deadlock where both	Appreciation	<i>Negative:</i> Self-destructive conflict fuelled by hunger

starving!)	scarcity.	hunger and aggression persist.		
(19) <i>Bekungasekh o nempunde na?</i> (Could there be any volunteers?)	The volunteer represents the emerging agency, with the rhetorical question sparking communal desire and hinting at internal resistance.	The rhetorical question shifts the tone toward possibility and appeal, establishing a mood that is uncertain yet hopeful. It also indicates discontent and hints at the potential for collective action.	Affect Judgment	<i>Positive:</i> Hopeful yearning <i>Positive:</i> Potential admiration of a volunteer
(20) <i>Enokurholihl ahl'ivulisango?</i> (To pull out a twig for the entrance?)	The 'twig' symbolizes a small but vital obstacle. Its removal signifies decisive political action, implying liberation through brave intervention rather than brute force.	Each symbol creates a mood of expectation and hope for a positive outcome, with an underlying caution. The twig is an obstacle that may seem insignificant at first, but it can hinder our goals of change, freedom, or progression. Overcoming this obstacle requires the strength and willpower to do so, which in itself is an important act.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Positive:</i> Hopeful anticipation <i>Positive:</i> Courage and initiative are appreciated. <i>Positive:</i> Valuing freedom.
(21) <i>Sakuyithiya sithi 'Rolihlahla'</i> (We shall name him 'Twig puller').	' <i>Rolihlahla</i> ' symbolizes resistance, with the act of pulling the twig representing the breaking down of structural barriers. Naming the liberator signifies a progressive step, framing leadership as ethical and transformative.	Ceremonial naming is a powerful activity that can create a noble, heroic, uplifting, and hopeful mood. Naming the liberator a 'twig puller' transforms him into a great hero and a strong moral leader. It changes the liberator from a regular brawler, who simply 'bashes in the gate,' into someone who finds the 'special key,' the peg at the bottom of the gate, and opens it by lifting.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Positive:</i> Honor, pride <i>Positive:</i> Respect for liberators or heroic actions <i>Positive:</i> Symbolic naming valued
(22) <i>Siphinde sithi kuye 'Vulisango'</i> (Again we call him 'Entrance opener').	<i>Vulisango</i> symbolizes restored access and dignity. The open gate represents collective liberation and renewed participation in social and economic life.	Names of the mood that appear in parallel express its celebratory, affirming character, which can shift into a mood of hope. We call these names 'entrance openers' because they express liberation, freedom, mobility, and access to things that have been blocked or missing.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Positive:</i> Affirmation <i>Positive:</i> Transformative leadership praised <i>Positive:</i> Freedom positively valued
(23) <i>Zophuma zigamz'</i>	Free grazing symbolizes reclaimed	Free grazing is an image of autonomy and access to the land, the polar opposite of an economy	Affect	<i>Positive:</i> Relief, satisfaction

<i>uqaqqa;</i> (They will exit and graze the kikuyu grass;)	autonomy and direct access to natural resources. The imagery reverses previous rationed distribution, replacing scarcity with abundance.	at war and with rationing and queues for groceries. Free grazing is an image of a future with greater food availability and lower food prices than we know today. An image of a future that is prospective rather than nostalgic can therefore foster optimism and an open-minded attitude.	Judgment Appreciation	<i>Positive:</i> Restored agency valued. <i>Positive:</i> Appreciates abundance
(24) <i>Zithwal' amatshoba zigqotsa!</i> (Lifting their tails and running!)	Raised tails and running symbolize exuberance, vitality, and embodied freedom, with movement replacing confinement as the main image.	A sudden outpouring of dynamic imagery bursts across the page, filling the sunny meadow with unconfined joy. As the reader swallows hard to fill expanding lungs for the sigh of relief to come, the fawns' spry tails shoot back in a frenzy of boundless leaps as they career over the grassland in an unrelenting cascade of freedom, like the uncontrollable flow of fresh water bursting through a dam; an unrestrained manifestation of joy, dynamism and freedom, highlighted by more poignancy because of the oppressive bleakness of their unnatural confinement.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Positive:</i> Joy, celebration <i>Positive:</i> Vitality admired <i>Positive:</i> Energetic imagery valued
(25) <i>Kwanga ke ngoku sekunjalo!</i> (As if it is the time!)	The time represents a historic shift, marking the divide between oppression and liberation.	The optative expression is the expression of a distant goal, something that the stretched-out hand can only aspire to, because it is infinitely distant, like the hand stretching out towards the infinite horizon. It is always an expression of hope, and thus it is charged with a tremendous emotional force, which makes the speaker and the audience stand at the very threshold of time, at the threshold of dawn, and at the threshold of a new life. The exclamatory form of the expression adds to this emotional charge, expressing the desire and the feeling of shared longing that is like a whirlwind of air flowing through the space between the present and the future, rushing towards the moment when freedom suddenly appears.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Positive:</i> Desire, anticipation <i>Positive:</i> Confidence in change <i>Positive:</i> Moment valued as timely
(26)	Numbered days	A prophetic declaration is a light	Affect	<i>Positive:</i>

<i>Akusentsuku zatywa-a-ala!</i> (Days are numbered!)	symbolize the coming end of oppression, signifying inevitable change and democratic renewal.	breaking like the flash of a lantern shining in the face of an advancing dawn. The air vibrates with an unprecedented sense of history, as the declaration of prophecy heralds the end of tyranny and announces the first tremors of revolution.	Judgment Appreciation	Assertive confidence <i>Positive:</i> Justice affirmed. <i>Positive:</i> Valuing the end of oppression
(27) <i>Nde-e-e-gram!</i> <i>Ndawudl' uqaqqa!</i> (Nde-e-e-gram! I'm grazing the kikuyu grass!	The celebratory grazing cry echoes earlier ideophones, shifting from violence to joy and symbolizing participation, freedom, empowerment, and triumph.	The celebratory ideophone is the triumphant banner that suddenly bursts into the light. It is an ecstatic, victorious atmosphere, together with the electric atmosphere of a long-awaited release. It is the liberating cry that transmits freedom, power, and joy in rhythmic waves that shake the whole body like the drumbeat of liberation.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Positive:</i> Triumph and fulfilment. <i>Positive:</i> Restored dignity. <i>Positive:</i> Celebrating freedom and abundance
(28) <i>Zihlabana nje ziyalamba!</i> (They stab each other while starving!)	The final act of stabbing while starving symbolizes cyclical disillusionment, showing that liberation remains a goal while structural injustice continues.	Their singing revived the refrain, bringing back the tragic tone. Irony and desperation creep in because it is clear that the pattern of oppression will persist. Their singing then ends with hunger and violence, leaving their struggle for liberation unfinished. The oppression of the people remains unrelieved.	Affect Judgment Appreciation	<i>Negative:</i> Renewed anguish and suffering <i>Negative:</i> Warning against division <i>Negative:</i> Tragic condition reaffirmed

5. Findings

Table 1 above shows the complete coding results for *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba*, illustrating the distribution of the attitude subsystem (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation) and their polarity (positive and negative). The detailed distribution of the analysis outcomes is displayed in the bar chart in Figure 2 and the pie chart in Figure 3 below.

Table 2: A distributive bar chart of the frequency of evaluative language across the attitude subsystem

Type of attitude	Total per instance	Negative	Positive	TOTAL
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Affect	97	64	33	97
Judgment	135	89	46	135
Appreciation	88	52	36	88
TOTAL	320			

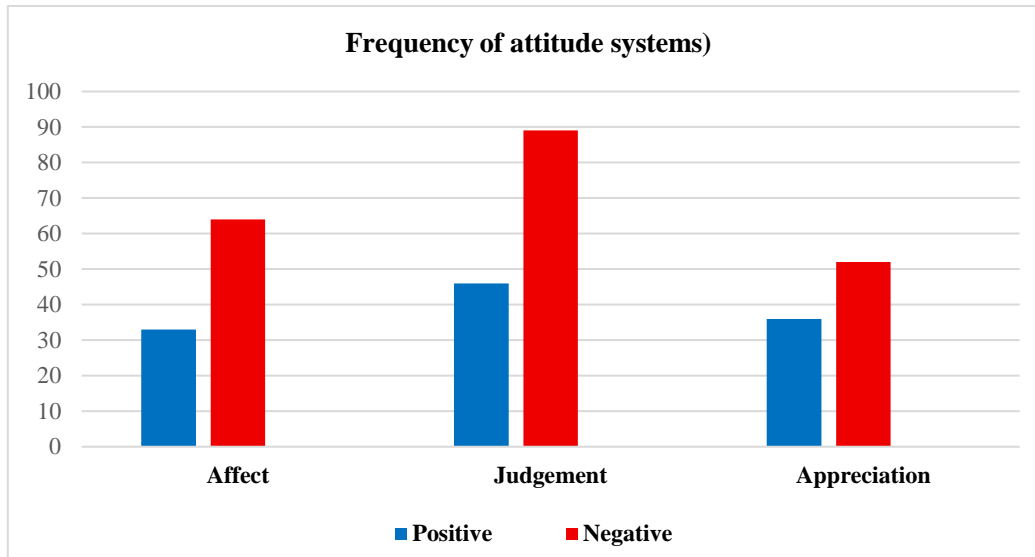


Figure 1: Bar graph of the evaluative language across each attitude subsystem

The poem's attitudinal language shows that the affective, Judgmental, and appreciative instances that constitute it function as a highly integrated system to express the poem's socio-political critique. The total number of attitude instances used in the poem is 320, as explained below.

5.1 Affect: Emotional Intensification

Affect appears 97 times, 64 of them negatively and 33 positively. Negative Affect shows how people suffered through the harsh structural circumstances of their lives. The positive Affect, however, shows how people fought for freedom, possibilities, and empowerment. The Affect is a strong negative reinforcement, evoking imagery of hunger, war, and oppression, but the poem's positive affective moments are strategically placed to lift people's spirits.

5.2 Judgment: Ethical Evaluation

The keyword Judgment occurs 135 times, 89 negatively and 46 positively. The 89 negative Judgments are almost all condemnatory and qualifying expressions, aimed at criticising various forms of authority and behaviour that perpetuate inequality and respond to poverty with violence. The 46 positive Judgments relate to names such as *Rolihlahla* and *Vulisango*. In each case, the individuals are depicted as being just in particular circumstances and endowed with qualities such as courage, intelligence, or the power to change, thus widening the spectrum of moral values that enable viewers to judge the structure of society and the behaviour of individuals, both of which are susceptible to critical analysis.

5.3 Appreciation: Valuing Structural Conditions

Appreciation appears 88 times, 52 of them negative and 36 positive. The 52 negative appearances reflect the themes of lack, confinement, and the unequal distribution of objects, all of which are mentioned in the critique of the existing social order. The 36 positive appearances reflect the themes of the dignity of man, the value in itself of things, and the renewal of society, which are expressed through the openness of grazing fields and the freedom of movement for people. The cyclical return to lack prevents the positive aspects from having a lasting effect, and this, in turn, confirms the difficulties in bringing about lasting change in the social order. The balance of Appreciation is therefore relatively different from the other values. The negative instances remain more numerous than the positive ones, thereby reinforcing the critique of the existing social order. It also recalls the value of objects in themselves and the moments of renewal in society.

Total polarity	Negative	Positive
320	205	115
100%	64%	36%

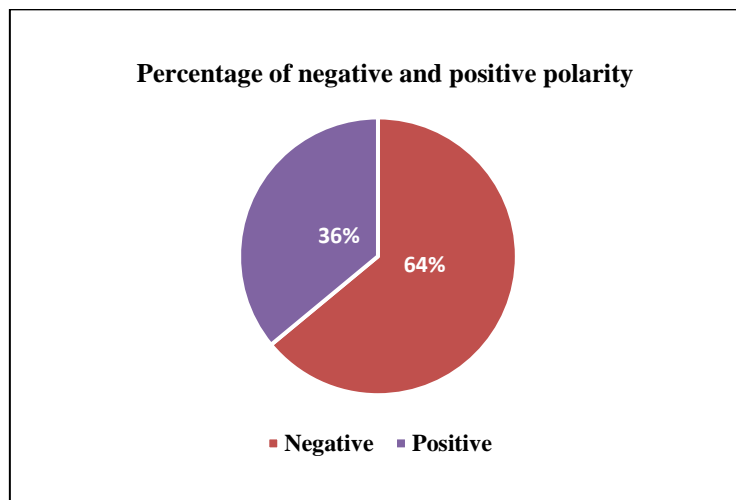


Figure 2: A pie chart illustrating the total percentage showing the proportion of positive and negative polarity in the poem

5.4 Polarity analysis and interpretative integration

The total number of the overall evaluative polarity in the poem is 320 (100%). 205 (64%) are negative instances, and 115 (36%) are positive instances. Thus, the dominant evaluative polarity of the poem is negative, with 64%. The negative instance has the strongest polarity and thus focuses ethical condemnation on the evil of exploitation and on the structures of oppression and injustice. The positive elements, which amount to 36%, represent hope, resistance, and possibilities for change instead. The dominant negative polarity underscores the poem's critical and warning functions, while the positive polarity represents its moral and redeeming aspects, as well as its tendency toward renewal and transformation.

6. Discussion

In *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba*, Shasha demonstrates, through linguistic analysis, how evaluative meaning in African poetry is constructed through linguistic resources rather than themes. A detailed analysis of the isiXhosa poem shows how the poet employs Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation to deliver specific social and political critique. It also demonstrates how evaluative language resources shape the poet's emotional stance, ethical values, and ideology. Although negative evaluations dominate this critique, it focuses on the lack, restrictions, and criticisms. I have come to understand that a social issue is a major problem in society and must be addressed in the community before hostility occurs. In my opinion, the main social issues in the community are poverty, poor living conditions, discrimination, and limited access to social services.

Shasha strikes a beneficial balance between critique and desire, ultimately conveying a powerful message for the community at large. The appraisal in this poem helps clarify its ideology, its impact on the reader, and how language is used to deliver social critique, demonstrate the poet's ethical values, and express his ideology and aspirations. The poem also illustrates the affective, ethical, and evaluative meanings within attitudinal resources that potentially reveal the values of solidarity and the promotion of politics, as well as the importance of attitudinal meanings in poetry. The argument casts the capitalist as a moral judge of the victim of political violence, exposing the social inequality rooted in capitalist structures. To be able to have that kind of judgment, which is part of the value system that is inherent to our capitalist society, the victim must be made the object of the moral outrage of the oppressor. The oppressor must have the capacity of reconciliation to the victim's deterioration and the afflictions he/she has suffered. A revolutionary leader should aspire to achieve this sort of moral judgment for the people claiming liberation. Thus, Shasha has demonstrated that, through linguistic analysis of Appraisal Theory (evaluative genre analysis) in African poetry, it is possible to construct meaning using linguistic resources rather than depending on themes.

7. Recommendations

Appraisal Theory posits that recommendations, derived from the critical analysis of the isiXhosa poem *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba*, elucidated the complexities of the emotional experience associated with the suffering induced by social injustices and autocratic leadership. The assessment of these emotions led to evaluations of political leaders and incited conflict within groups, thereby fostering hope for a future leader and improved living conditions. The poem expresses sorrow over the pain caused by social inequalities and urges people to come together to fight against these unfair systems.

7.1 Literary research and cultural analysis

The research needs to expand beyond this study by conducting an appraisal analysis and comparing isiXhosa poetry with other African poetic traditions, including *izibongo* (praise poetry). Poets can confirm their interpretations of tone and ideological elements in poetry that attract readers to study African poetry, aligning with the new analysis of evaluative language compared to traditional literary criticism.

7.2 Educational curriculum and pedagogy

The Appraisal Theory poem should be incorporated into the educational curriculum for African languages and literature, and it is recommended that the Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation framework be adopted for teaching literacy and ethics in the African language and literature curriculum. The text includes explicit linguistic and sociopolitical

elements that make it suitable for teaching students to use evaluative language in African languages while they develop ethical reasoning skills for post-apartheid society and historical literary interpretation. It is also important to change teacher training to include an appraisal that helps teachers develop their critical language awareness.

7.3 What approach would the author recommend for analysing African poetry?

The author posits that a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative methodology for literary criticism is essential to substantiate attitudes towards inequitable circumstances in African poetry. The author cites the phrase *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba*, which appears in several poems, as an illustration of the evaluation structure and elaborates on the interplay among its components: Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation. The author supports a comprehensive interdisciplinary methodology for examining African literature, particularly in contexts of inequality.

Thus, this discourse analytical framework for the analysis of African poetry is advocated for in the field of African literary studies, in schools, and in public as an interdisciplinary tool to explore the potential of African poetry to elicit the African human and citizen in societies where, in equal measure human beings are marginalised and treated as less than human, particularly when it comes to inequality.

8. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that Shasha's poem *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba*, by integrating Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation, achieved its impact through a carefully structured pattern of evaluative language that allowed multiple layers of interpretation. Drawing on the Attitude system of Appraisal Theory developed by Martin and White (2005), the analysis showed that the poem constructed its critique through the interaction of negative Judgment, communal Affect, and strategic Appreciation. These evaluative resources collectively formed a strong moral condemnation of social decay and post-independence disillusionment while simultaneously conveying the emotional experience of the community.

This study found that evaluative meanings in isiXhosa poetry are communicated through language resources rather than through interpretation of the theme. The poem's ideology was clearly depicted by the linguistic resources in lines 1-28. This study has contributed to the field of African literary linguistics by applying Appraisal Theory to an analysis of African literature. It has provided an indication of how such a theory can be applied to the study of other poems in African languages.

The repeated line *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba* functioned as the central evaluative anchor of the poem. Through this refrain, the poem expressed both deep ethical disapproval of destructive behaviour and intense communal suffering. Violence was represented not merely as an individual act but as a tragic outcome of hunger, deprivation, and the breakdown of social cohesion. Symbolic imagery, particularly that of cattle and a gluttonous elite, reinforced the portrayal of a society trapped in a destructive social condition.

The article also highlighted the significance of intertextual references to *Rolihlahla* and *Vulisango*, which were used to evoke the symbolism of liberation. These references revealed a tension between the promise of freedom and the persistence of internal struggle after independence. The climactic cry *Zihlabana nje ziyalamba!* encapsulated the poem's warning that when resources remained scarce and expectations of liberation were unfulfilled, communities could turn against themselves.

Finally, the study confirmed the usefulness of Appraisal Theory for analysing African poetic discourse. Consistent with Macken-Horarik's (2003) work, the framework enabled the analysis to reveal how interpersonal linguistic resources constructed emotional, ethical, and ideological meanings in poetry. The findings showed that Shasha's poem functioned not only as an artistic expression but also as a diagnostic reflection on enduring social tensions, illustrating how isiXhosa poetic language critically engaged with historical change and contemporary realities.

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