The Bantu poetic traditions

Interfaces between language and versification

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The aim of this paper is to analyse the versification practices of four Bantu languages—Swahili, Tswana, Zulu and Chewa—in a comparative perspective. This comparison is based on the fact that the suprasegmental phonologies of these four languages share a common feature, penultimate lengthening. It will be claimed that penultimate lengthening is the main linguistic feature that organises the line in the poetic traditions taken into account. As a linguistic phenomenon, penultimate lengthening shows some variation in its function among the four languages: it will be shown that this corresponds to analogous variations in the versification practices. The ultimate aim of this paper is to encourage further research in the field of stylistics of Bantu poetic traditions, a domain where joint work between linguists and scholars in literary studies could lead to innovative and fruitful results.

Keywords: Bantu, poetry, stylistics, penultimate lengthening, literature.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to start an investigative analysis in a field that has so far received relatively scarce attention, namely metre and stylistics in African Literatures. More specifically, the focus will be on the literary traditions of some Bantu languages, namely Swahili, Tswana, Zulu and Chewa. Studying the versification practices of these particular idioms and the related literatures is interesting for several reasons. For some of them, introductory investigations into the question of metre and prosody have already been carried out by scholars, but their results have received little attention and, unfortunately, have never been analysed collectively from a comparative perspective.

The four languages taken into account are geographically close to each other, being placed along or near to the East African coast: contacts between people in these zones have been widely documented, and will be briefly outlined in the first section of this paper. All these languages, moreover, share a prosodic feature, that Hyman (2009: 195) defines as 'penultimate lengthening' (PL). For the moment, this can be defined as a suprasegmental trait consisting in the lengthening of the

penultimate syllable of one or more domains (which, depending on the language, can be the word, the prosodic phrase or the utterance). PL as a shared linguistic phenomenon will be introduced in the second section; later, it will be dealt with in greater detail for each of the languages examined.

This article aims, more specifically, to discuss a hypothesis that I advanced in my PhD thesis (Minerba 2021: 155-156), where I presented my analysis of the metres of archaic Swahili poetry.[1] Briefly, my hypothesis assumes that the archaic Swahili metric system does not represent an isolated case, but can find correspondences in other languages presenting PL. I will give an outline of what we currently know about Bantu[2] versification practices, discussing whether and how further comparative research should be done to investigate their development.

The main topic of this paper, then, is the role of PL in the organisation of the line in four Bantu poetic traditions. It should be noted that the expression "organisation of the line" does not necessarily mean metre. The patterns of the lines in these texts often correspond to what I have named in my PhD thesis *distinct verse* (Minerba 2022: 73). By distinct verse I mean a kind of versification, different from both metrical and free verse, where line-boundaries are always marked by one or more linguistic devices, but it is not possible to know in anticipation which devices will be employed for any given line-boundary. This contrasts both with free-verse, where line-boundaries are not marked linguistically, and with metrical verse, where they are marked linguistically and it is also known by which devices they will be marked. For example, in the Swahili *utenzi* line-boundaries are always marked, and the linguistic marker is always predictable: the constant number of 8 syllables per line. This makes *utenzi* metrical.[3]

On this premise, it can be stated that the task of this investigation is to analyse the role of PL in the construction of distinct verse in the poetic traditions examined. This investigation must, naturally, start by an analysis of PL as a linguistic phenomenon, and then look at how its features are employed

[1] That is, poetry dating back to the period before the strong literary influence of the Arabic poetic tradition,

[2] For the sake of brevity, in this paper I use the term "Bantu" in expressions such as "Bantu verse," "Bantu poetries" to refer in general to the stylistic and literary traditions observed in poems composed in the languages taken into accounts, all of them belonging to the Bantu family. It is, of course, a simplification at many levels; the existence of a Bantu family does not at all imply the existence in the past of one or more communities that identified themselves as "Bantu." I should also add that the results of this research could be generalised only to a subset of Bantu languages, those presenting PL; therefore, my work is not representative of the whole Bantu area even on a linguistic side. For these reasons, I invite the reader to take into account that here I use the term Bantu only to be linguistically more concise, and that none of the simplifications here mentioned is implied in this choice.

[3] For a more detailed explanation of this concept and its application, see Minerba (2022: 58-88).

in versification practices. This will be done from the third to the sixth sections of this paper, each one dedicated to a particular language.

2. Historical contacts

The investigation presented here started on the premise that the versification practices of Swahili, Tswana, Zulu and Chewa (and other Bantu languages) present such remarkable shared features that they could be historically interrelated. Tracing a parallel with historical linguistics, it is possible, in other words, that they derive from the same *Urform*. That said, if this *Urform* existed, it is in my opinion not yet possible to point out the exact historical moment in which it was used. Moreover, the fact that their poetries have been oral until recent times[4] makes it difficult to assign an exact date to each text.

Naturally, the first historical feature shared by these languages is their common Bantu origin. It is nevertheless impossible to think that a versification based on PL dates back to this period, since PL was not a trait of Proto-Bantu (Hyman 2009: 207). However, leaving this hypothesis apart, the four languages examined have been in reciprocal contact for long periods in the course of history.

Among the four languages, Swahili seems at first glance the most unlikely to have been in close contact with the others: as pointed out by Nurse and Hinnebusch (1993: 30), linguistic innovations mostly spread from north to south along the Swahili coast, and, given the cultural prestige of zones like Mombasa in the 16th century (Pouwels 2002: 425), and the northern archipelago later (Vernet, 2005:48–50), one could assume the same for literary innovation. Nevertheless, an earlier south-to-north direction of influence can not be excluded, if one considers the importance of the city of Kilwa before it was sacked by the Portuguese in 1505 (Vernet 2005: 62–70). Up to its destruction, Kilwa was an important Swahili trade centre, located on the southern coast of present-day Tanzania. Kilwa had strong trade relations with the Mutapa empire (which included the Tswana area) in Zambezia, and its hegemony covered a huge part of the Swahili-speaking population along the Mozambican coast: there is evidence of Swahili settlements up to Sofala (Da Costa e Silva 1992: 335–337). The Swahili were thus in contact with several Southern Bantu cultures, and Kilwa was the main node of these contacts. This

[4] The oldest Swahili manuscript known to us, *Chuo cha Herekali*, dates back to 1728 (Bertoncini-Zúbková 2000: 20). Tswana written poetry seems to be more recent: Moloto (1970: 242-243) provides a survey of it, where all the written works of original poetry quoted date from the 1940s or later. The same period seems to have seen the development of Zulu written poetry (Cope, 1984: 13). Chewa written literature seems to be even more recent, if still in 2003 Kishindo (2003: 327-328) can observe that written Chewa poetry 'does not appear regularly.' The collection of poems that I have, *Akoma akagonera* (edited by Mvula), dates to 1981.

is witnessed, for example, by the structure of the gold trade. The paths of the sixteenth-century gold trade are well documented: gold reached the coast from the interior at the littoral city of Sofala (south of Kilwa), heading towards the Middle East and India. However, Sofala was too far south for ships to reach these destinations with one monsoon. Instead, gold was transported up to Kilwa by local Swahili sailors on dhows, and from there shipped across the Indian Ocean (Pearson 1998: 104–105). Kilwa was thus exposed to influences both from the northern Swahili coast and from the southern coast and hinterland; in the same way, it could spread these influences in other directions. Kilwa's hegemony in the Swahili world, as mentioned, ended abruptly in 1505; but, ironically, such a dramatic end could have given this city the opportunity of exercising an even deeper influence on the rest of the Swahili coast. According to Vernet (2005: 70), after the fall of the city many former inhabitants moved to other, more stable Swahili centres, mainly in the north. It is not unlikely that their arrival led to the spread of southern literary forms.

As already remarked, the position of Kilwa made it geographically near to the other languages taken into account here. It has been mentioned that this Swahili city used to have strong trade relations with the Mutapa Empire. The same is true of the Chewa population: in fact, it seems that the trade relations between southern Zambezia (the zone of the Mutapa empire) and southern lake Malawi increased significantly after their settlement in the region. The trade networks established by the Chewa made them able to import merchandise from Asia and Europe, such as glass beads, which reveals a connection with the Indian Ocean trade (Juwayeyi 2020: 186). Under emperor Muzura, in the seventeenth century, the Maravi state also had a strong influence on the territories along the left bank of the Zambezi up to the Mozambican coast (Juwayeyi 2020: 198-199): they are the same territories that were, just a century earlier, under Kilwa's hegemony.

The Mutapa Empire's language was Shona, a Southern Bantu language. Southern Bantu languages are a subset of the Bantu languages, corresponding to the zones of what are today Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe (Doke 1954: 20), and to group S of Guthrie's classification. Tswana (S31) and Zulu (S42) are part of this group (Van de Velde *et al.* 2022: 52). Southern Bantu languages are related not only linguistically: they share an important literary form, that of praise-poetry (Rycroft 1976: 155-159). It is plausible, therefore, that their versification practices share common features. The Swahili traders settled in Mozambique could have had contacts with the Southern Bantu communities: not only the Shona, but also the Tsonga (S52/S53), among others. There

are other possible points of contact, like the *mfecane,*[5] which interested all these communities more or less intensely, but which I consider too late with respect to the time this mutual literary influence must have taken place. For the sake of this preliminary investigation, one can conclude that there could have been mutual influence between Swahili, Chewa and Southern Bantu versification practices at some time in history.[6] The most evident result of this influence is the role accorded to PL in the building of the line. This fact, naturally, requires a first look at PL as a linguistic phenomenon.

3. Penultimate Lengthening

According to Hyman (2009: 195) PL is the lengthening of the penultimate syllable of a domain, which, depending on the language, can be the word, the prosodic phrase (PP) or the utterance. PL as such is a subset of a range of interrelated phenomena of "penultimate prominence," which affect a great number of Bantu languages. In Swahili, for example, one finds a fixed stress position on the penultimate syllable of a word or phrase (Tucker and Ashton 1942: 78). There can be, in addition, a lengthening of that syllable, but this is not phonematically distinctive and its presence depends on several factors, such as the tempo of the utterance (Tucker and Ashton 1942: 83). Concerning the domain this "penultimate prominence" applies to, Tucker and Ashton (1942: 83) note that, though Swahili has a word stress, 'in the middle of a phrase or sentence the penultimate syllables of words lose their length and very often their stress as well, unless there is a shifting of emphasis.' Therefore, in Swahili any (phonetic) word has a stress; in the utterance, stress tends to be more prominently realised at the end of a phrase.[7]

In other Bantu languages, however, the lengthening of the penultimate syllable is distinctive. Hyman (2009: 198) reports in several cases a situation similar to that of Swahili: namely, PL happens in first instance at word-level, but it is more prominently realised at a broader level, such as utterance (as

[5] The *mfecane* (literally 'scattering') was a historical period of military conflict and migration that took place in Southern Africa in the first half of the 19th century due to the expansion of the Zulu nation under Shaka. See Eldredge (1992) for an introduction to and a critical reconsideration of this period.

[6] Naturally, at this point of the research the role that can be attributed to these contacts cannot yet be identified with scientific certainty and remains hypothetical. The same must be told of the role played by the structural similarities between the phonologies of these languages. Understanding whether and how each of these factors have contributed to shape, in the languages taken into account, metrical systems with a certain degree of similarity is one of the aims of this research in the long term.

[7] Since in the case of Swahili the lengthening of the penultimate vowel is not phonematically distinctive, one should not *stricto sensu* talk of PL in the definition given by Hyman, but generally of "penultimate prominence." However, for the sake of simplicity and since the two phenomena are interrelated, here the label PL will be used in reference to Swahili as well.

in Southern Sotho) or phrase (Chewa, Tumbuka, Makonde, Matengo). Hyman (2009: 198) continues noticing that in some languages, such as Tswana and Shona, the presence of two levels (word and phrase) produces two different degrees of PL: the word-penultimate syllable in the middle of the phrase is distinctively lengthened, but not as much as the phrase-penultimate one.

Thus, PL shows a considerable degree of variation in relation to the domains it affects (prosodic words, phrases, utterances). The features of PL in the languages considered here will be outlined in depth in the corresponding sections. As will be remarked, these variations correspond to different ways of organising the line.

4. Penultimate Lengthening in archaic Swahili poetry

As an introductory remark, I have observed that in several Bantu poetries lines are organised in such a way that each of them tends to have the same number of syllables with PL, and tends to have these syllables in the same positions. The occurrence of PL-affected syllables creates a sound recurrence that gives regularity to the composition. The first example that will be analysed here is that of Swahili archaic poetry. In my PhD dissertation (Minerba 2022: 27) I have defined, following Bertoncini's periodisation, the "archaic" period of Swahili literary history as the one preceding the beginning of the influence of Arabic poetry (which marks the beginning of the 'classical' period). Archaic Swahili poems, unlike classical ones, do not have a syllabic metre: each line can have a different number of syllables. However, I have demonstrated (Minerba, 2022: 116-175) that these poems are still metrical: they do not present syllabic metres, but rather syllabo-tonic ones. Küper (2011: 24) defines syllabo-tonic metres as metres where 'the number of metrical positions is constant while the number of stressed syllables is variable.' The examples that will be given here from Swahili archaic poetry will shed light on this definition.

Compared to the other cases examined here, Swahili PL has some linguistic peculiarities. As we have noted, the actual lengthening of the penultimate syllable is not constant, is not phonematically distinctive, and depends on many factors, such as the tempo of the utterance (Tucker and Ashton 1942: 83). Length, one should add, is not phonologically distinctive in any of the Sabaki[8] languages except Mwiini, which is a variety of Swahili (Nurse and Hinnebusch 1993: 177). It is remarkable, however, that in Mwiini length contrasts appear only in penult or antepenult position, as noted by Nurse and

[8] Here I report for Sabaki the definition given by Nurse and Hinnebusch (1993: 4): 'Sabaki, taken from the name of the Kenyan river entering the Indian Ocean between Malindi and Mambrui and thus approximately bisecting the Sabaki language area, is a purely linguistic label for six closely related languages of the East African littoral. The best known Sabaki language is Swahili.'

Hinnebusch (1993: 259): 'Not only can length contrasts only appear on the penult or antepenult of a P-phrase, not only is length reduced in antepenult position if the penult itself is heavy (i.e., has a branching rhyme), but conversely, a short final vowel will be lengthened if it stands in P-phrase antepenult or penult position (unless of course followed by a penult with a branching rhyme).'

The lack of tonal distinctiveness means we cannot study Swahili PL in relation to how it affects tonal patterning, as scholars have done with the other languages presented here. Instead, it is phonematically realised through stress. Despite this peculiarity, it has been linguistically proven that what should more exactly be called "penultimate stress" in Swahili derives from PL. Gérard Philippson has contributed to Nurse and Hinnebusch's *Swahili and Sabaki* with the chapter *Tone (and Stress) in Sabaki* (Nurse and Hinnebusch 1993: 248-264). He states that, in Proto-Sabaki and in other proto-languages of the north-eastern coast, the Proto-Bantu tone contrast evolved into a pitch-accent system: unlike in tonal systems, in a pitch-accent system there can be only one tonal mark per morpheme (and, often, in the whole word; Nurse and Hinnebusch 1993: 262). From this stage, Proto-Sabaki and Proto-Seuta underwent a process of tone spread, by which a H tone can spread over one or more following syllables. Proto-Sabaki tone spread happened word-internally up to the penult syllable (Nurse and Hinnebusch 1993: 263). Philippson calls this stage "Stage 1," adding that it is also the stage where Pokomo stopped. In "Stage 2" there was a further tone spread, this time up to PP boundaries. Philippson assumes that at this stage PP boundaries were marked by 'some kind of penult prominence,' which could have had vowel lengthening as marker. Consequently, he considers vowel length to be still distinctive at this stage for the whole Sabaki group (Nurse and Hinnebusch 1993: 264). In "Stage 3," a subset of the Sabaki languages (which included Swahili) no longer based the pitch-accent placement on syllable counting, but on constituent construction, always within the PP boundary. Again, the existence of PL might have played a role in this development. Modern Swahili (excluding Mwiini) represents an outcome of this stage, where the function played by pitch-accent has been taken over by stress.

In each archaic Swahili poem that I have analysed, all the lines are composed of the same number of feet. By *foot*[9] I mean a sequence of two to five syllables where two parts can be identified. The last part, the *rhythmic core*, is the one that contains the rhythmic unit of the metre: it consists of two syllables, the first stressed, the second unstressed. This rhythmic core can be (but is not always) preceded by the other part, that of the *auxiliary syllables*, consisting of up to three syllables that can be

[9] I borrow the term "foot" from the Classical metrical terminology (see for example Boldrini: 35-38). It has been however employed also to refer to elements of other metrical systems: for example, in his work on the Classical Arabic metres, Paoli (2008: 95.98) employs the French term *pied* as translation of the Arabic *tafʿīla*.

indifferently stressed or unstressed. A stressed syllable belonging to this part of the foot will not represent a rhythmical unit for the metre. This structure can be schematised as follows:

[x][x][x]óo

where the square brackets indicate an element that does not necessarily need to occur; *ó* and *o* represents respectively a stressed and an unstressed syllable; *x* a syllable indifferently stressed or unstressed. Thus, in this schema *óo* represent the rhythmic core and *[x][x][x]* the optional auxiliary syllables. The stressed vowel of the rhythmic core occupies a strong metrical position (SMP).

It is easy to derive the form of the rhythmic core from linguistic considerations: as remarked earlier, the stress in Swahili falls on word-penultimate syllables, and consequently any stressed syllable is followed by a word-final syllable, which is necessarily unstressed. One can therefore state that the archaic Swahili metrical foot is an example of metre based on PL.

It is worth looking at some examples of archaic Swahili metrical feet. The following are lines 3-5 of the composition *Uṯumbuizo wa Liyongo Fumo* (source text and translation from Miehe *et al.* 2004: 40; the symbol · indicates caesura and | *foot boundary*):

Text 1
*Muka**k'e**ṯi* | ***yu**u* | *la uli**li**ye* · *waku**sa**nya* | *wa**ṯe**zi* | *wa **ri**ngo*
*Waku**sa**nya* | *wa**ṯe**zi* | *hi**ya**ri* · *wayu**wa**o* | *ku**tu**nga* | *zi**fu**ngo*
*Wayu**wa**o* | *kufu**wa**sa* | ***zi**na* · *na ku**ṯe**za* | *kwa ku**mi**ya* | ***shi**ngo*

Take your places on the ceremonial *ulili*, you, who select the graceful dancers
you, who gather the best dancers, skilled in composing enigmatic verses,
those who are masters of the art of rhyme and who dance elegantly with swaying necks.

The syllables occupying a SMP are in bold. As one can see, there are 6 SMPs in each line (more specifically, 3 in each hemistich). In the case of this poem (but not in general for all archaic Swahili poetry) hemistichs also have the same number of syllables, 10, and the disposition of the SMPs is also almost constant: the first one contains the 3rd syllable, the second the 5th (*Mukak'eṯi yuu la uliliye*), 6th (*wakusanya waṯezi wa ringo*; this is also the most frequent case in the whole poem) or 7th syllable (*Wayuwao kufuwasa zina*), and the last the 9th syllable.

I have chosen these three lines as my first example because they represent the most simple case for metrical scansion: in them, stressed syllables occur in all the SMPs and only in SMPs.[10] This is also the most frequent case: in my analysis (from Minerba 2022: 136) I have calculated that, among all the hemistichs of the all lines in my corpus, 426 out of 616 (69.2%) present this pattern; 40 (9.2%) present one stressed syllable less than the number of SMPs; 113 (25.9%) have one stressed syllable more; finally, 27 (4.4%) present two stressed syllables more, and only 3 (0.5%) have three stressed syllables more. The statistics thus show that the basic tendency is to use stressed syllables for SMPs and only for them. However, it is worth looking at an example with more complex metrical scansions. The following are lines 1-7 of *Uṯumbuizo wa Kikowa* (source text and translation from Miehe *et al.* 2004: 36):

Text 2
Pijyani[11] ***p'e****mbe* | *vigoma****m****le* | *na ṯo****wa****zi*
Ṯ'e*ze* | *na* ***Mbwa****sho* | *na K'u****nda****zi*
*Pija mu****wi****wa* | *k'umbuke* ***mwa****na* | *wa sha****nga****zi*
Yu wapi ***si****mba* | *ezi li* ***ka****na* | *mṯe****mbe****zi*
Fumo wa ***Sha****nga* |, *sikiya,* ***sha****mba* | *mitaa* ***pwa****ni*
Fumo wa ***Sha****nga* |, *chambiya* ***Wa****ṯwa* | *fungi****ya****ni?*
Fu*mo* | *a****cha****mba* | *mfu****nge****ni*

Strike for me the horns, the long drums and the cymbals,
so that I may dance with Mbwasho and K'undazi.
Strike, you who owe a debt (of Kikowa), so that I may remember (my) cousin.
Where is the mighty lion? He is an inveterate wanderer!
Fumo of Shanga, reckon well, (roams) the land and the coastal areas.
Fumo of Shanga asked the Watwa people: 'Why are you putting me in fetters?'
Fumo (Mringwari) ordered: 'Tie him up!'

First of all, we notice in this poem that isosyllabism is not a constraint for Swahili archaic poems: as an example, the last two lines have respectively 14 and 9 syllables. Both of them, however, have the same number of SMPs. The disposition of the SMPs also has a larger degree of variation in this example. The basic pattern is a line of 14 syllables, with the SMPs containing the 4th, the 9th and the 13th syllables, as in lines 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6. It is worth noting that in these lines there are more stressed syllables than SMPs

[10] The reader not competent in Swahili should consider that all the monosyllabic words occurring in the example (*la*, *wa*, *na*, *kwa*) are proclitic, and therefore do not have their own stress.

[11] *Pijiyani* in the text; however, synaeresis is allowed in Swahili poetry and changes such as *jiya* → *jya* are common.

to occupy, but the fact that the base pattern is respected allows the reader/listener to identify the ones occupying the SMPs. On the other hand, lines 2 and 7 are shorter and do not respect the basic pattern; nevertheless, there is the same number of stressed syllables and SMPs, so also here the parsing is unambiguous.

It is interesting to draw a parallel between the situation in lines 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and the behaviour of PL. As pointed out above, PL tends to work both at word level and at broader levels (phrase, clause, utterance), and this behaviour has been observed for Swahili. It is worth noticing that, where there are more stressed syllables than SMPs, the latter tend to correspond to syntactic boundaries. In line 1, *pijyani pembe* ('Strike for me the horns') is a verbal phrase, as well as *k'umbuke mwana* ('so that I may remember the son [of my aunt]'); before it, in the same line, *pija muwiwa* ('Strike, you who owe a debt') is a verb followed by a vocative. In lines 5 and 6 *Fumo wa Shanga* ('Fumo of Shanga') is a genitive construction. In line 6 the second foot, *chambiya Waṯwa* ('[he] asked the Watwa people') is again a verbal phrase consisting of a verb and one object. In line 5, second foot, we have a similar construction. In *sikiya, shamba* ('reckon well, [roams] the land') *sikiya* 'listen' is an incidental phrase, and *shamba* ('the land') the object of a dropped verb.

On the base of this evidence one could conclude that in archaic Swahili metres syntactic organisation is a constraint, but more attentive observation reveals that syntax plays only an indirect role. In the poem quoted, it seems that SMPs are marked by PP breaks, rather than syntactic ones. For example, it is true that line 1 consists of a whole verbal phrase, *pijyani p'embe | vigomamle | na ṯowazi*; the foot boundaries, however, fall between the adjuncts of the object noun phrase (*p'embe, vigomamle, na ṯowazi*), ignoring the syntactic break in the VP between the verb and the object. Syntactic breaks are therefore not systematically represented, whereas the PP breaks derived by asyndeton and coordinative conjunction in the object are: *p'embe | vigomamle | na ṯowazi* 'the horns, the long drums and the cymbals.' Moreover, there are syntactic units which are treated differently in the poem, such as the two genitive constructions *Fumo wa Shanga* ('Fumo of Shanga,' lines 5, 6) and *mwana | wa shangazi* ('the son | of the aunt,' line 3): the latter is split by a foot boundary, the former isn't. For this reason, I maintain that in archaic Swahili metres it is not syntactic organisation that marks the SMPs, but rather PL at word- and PP-level.

5. Tswana praise-poems

In versification in other Bantu languages, PL produces similar patterns. A suggestive example is that of Tswana. As remarked by Hyman (2009: 198), Tswana presents PL at two levels, word and phrase, the latter being more marked than the former. This peculiarity of Tswana was observed already in the

1950s by Cole (1955: 55); more recent research has confirmed this fact. The paper by Schubö, Bekker, Pretorius, Wagner and Zerbian (Schubö *et al.* 2022) provides a detailed quantitative investigation of PL in Tswana. In this article, PL is studied together with the other phenomenon of Final Lengthening, which consists of the lengthening of the final syllable before a PP boundary. The research questions that were to be answered included whether PL and Final Lengthening are interrelated phenomena or occur independently; to what extent they affect the length of the penultimate and final syllables (considering for each of them the length of the onset consonant and the vowel separately); and finally, whether PL affected also word-penultimate syllables in PP-medial position, and to what extent (Schubö *et al.* 2022). The results obtained are highly significant. First, they observed that in PP-final position both PL and Final Lengthening do occur. Moreover, in PP-final position Final Lengthening seems to be more marked than PL; this is in contrast to the fact that, while the former has received little or no attention by scholars, the latter has often been noted and reported. The authors explain this by remarking that the syllable affected by PL normally follows a much shorter syllable, the ante-penultimate, and due to this contrast PL is clearly perceived. The final syllable, however, follows a syllable which, due to PL, is only slightly shorter (62.2% instead of 62.3%), and consequently not easily perceivable as longer (Schubö *et al.* 2022: 29). The fact that the lengthening of penultimate and final syllables is quantitatively comparable leads the authors to state that PL and Final Lengthening are, in Tswana, two independent mechanisms. Tswana Final Lengthening, in particular, seems to correspond to patterns found in other languages (German, Japanese, Turkish, American English: see Schubö *et al.* 2002: 28-29): Final Lengthening, therefore, 'might be a universal phenomenon' (Schubö *et al.* 2002: 30). On the other hand, PL 'constitutes a language-specific mechanism that applies independently [of Final Lengthening]' (Schubö *et al.* 2002: 30).

Another result of this research is that the application of PL (but not Final Lengthening) at word level in PP-medial position is empirically confirmed. The investigation has pointed out that, in PP-medial position, the vowel in the penultimate syllable is on average 14% longer than that in the final syllable (Schubö *et al.* 2002: 28). This confirms the above-mentioned observation by Cole that Tswana PL operates on two levels (word and phrase) to two different extents (the latter higher than the former).

Concerning PL's influence on tonal pattern, Zerbian and Barnard (2010: 3) include it in their algorithm for deriving word-level tone in Sotho-Tswana languages. In particular, the Tswana word must respect the Finality Rule: PP-final syllables cannot be the target of High Tone Spread. High Tone Spread is another process affecting the formation of the lexical pattern: it consists in the extension of the high tone of a syllable to the following one, if this syllable is not itself followed by a high tone. For

the sake of clarity I report here the same example given in Zerbian and Barnard (2010: 3): the word *mo̲otlwa* 'thorn' has an underlying tone (represented by underlining) on the second syllable *o*; the application of High Tone Spread adds a high tone on the following syllable, and consequently the final realisation is *moótlwá*. This, however, applies only when the word is not PP-final; in this case, the Finality Rule applies and High Tone Spread is prevented, the realisation becoming *moótlwa*. The Finality Rule, however, does not apply to words having a lexical High Tone on the final syllable.

A last, important remark needs to be made. Zerbian and Barnard apply this rule only for PP; they specify that at PP-level PL does not apply, whereas it occurs at Intonational Phrase (IP) boundaries, together with a falling tone. The fact that PL applies only at IP level, and not at PP, seems to contradict what has been stated so far. Indeed, in the paper by Schubö *et al.* (2022), which counts Zerbian among the authors, this view seems to be discussed:

> Zerbian (2007)[12] suggests the distinction between the Phonological Phrase and the Intonation Phrase in Tswana: the former shows partial reset of high tones across a boundary whereas the latter shows such a reset pattern in combination with a boundary tone and PL. [...] However, durational patterns have not yet been investigated empirically, and the very clear perception of PL on final words in declarative sentences might not contradict a lesser amount of PL on phrase-final words within utterances.

The observations so far outlined for Tswana PL can be resumed as follows:

- it may occur together with Final Lengthening, but the two phenomena are independent from each other;
- it occurs at two levels, word and PP, the latter being more marked than the former;
- it involves a tonal rearrangement (Finality Rule);
- according to recent research, it seems to apply at both IP and PP levels (albeit to a different extent)

Having outlined the linguistic features of Tswana PL, it is interesting to look at how it is used in versification. Schapera (1965: 16-17) seems to put PL at the base of the Tswana verse structure: he makes the following remarks about Tswana praise-poems (*mabôkô*):

> In Tswana the emphasis is produced by lengthening the appropriate vowel or syllabic consonant, and when the word comes at the end of a phrase the lengthening in the penultimate syllable is more marked than usual; that, and the brief pause, are in fact the clues that enable literate Tswana to divide a praise-poem into lines ("verses") when they record it from dictation.

[12] The work quoted is Zerbian (2007).

> [...]
>
> A random sample of eight poems (two from each tribe), consisting altogether of 432 lines, showed the following distribution of words per line: two, 24; three, 188; four, 176; five, 42; six, 1; seven, 1. In all, 364 lines (84 per cent) consisted of either three or four words. This suggests that there is an optimum length to a line, which surely is not due solely to the necessity of pausing for breath.

Thus, on the base of Schapera's statistical analysis, the number of words per line is an important constraint; moreover, he explains this constraint on the base of the PL.

Compared to archaic Swahili poetry, the number of words per line seems to be a much stricter constraint in Tswana. This can be explained, in my opinion, by the fact that Tswana PL works also at word level, as mentioned above. Thus, in a versification based on PL, the Tswana word naturally becomes a bearer of rhythm. Later in this paper we will see that Chewa, a language where PL doesn't apply at word level, does not possess this tendency.

Schapera's observations have been further elaborated by Moloto (1970) in his PhD thesis, *The Growth and Tendencies of Tswana Poetry*. Moloto (1970: 26) states clearly that 'the balance of the praise-words is conveyed also by the matching length of the penultimate syllables.' Moloto adds some observations concerning the role of tone in Tswana versification. Regarding tone, Moloto (1970: 27) observes that 'the hightoned syllables are more prominent than the lowtoned,' and 'the long syllables are more prominent than the short'.[13] However, the occurrence of PL seems to be the only fundamental device in the patterning of the line: a regular disposition of high tones can be observed in certain cases, but it doesn't have the same importance (Moloto 1970: 27-28).

A last, important remark by Moloto (1970: 26) is that PL—both at phrase and word levels—is a linguistic feature of Tswana and not a performative device:

> In fast declamation one who is uninitiated would probably only notice the length-bearing syllable that stands second last in a word-group or sentence, but this feature inheres to every second last syllable of every word and is clearly sensed by those who are versed in the language.

Moloto's assertion is relevant and can be applied to other Bantu contexts in analyses of the relation between versification and performance. An open debate among metricists is whether the linguistic devices that a metre is built upon need to be emphasised in performance. In the Tswana context, this

[13] Here the reader should remember than in Tswana vowel length is not phonemic, and that lengthening occurs only due to PL and Final Lengthening (Schubö *et al.* 2022: 20).

point is supported by Shole (1981), who, commenting on Moloto's claims concerning the role of PL in Tswana versification, observes:

> Unfortunately in normal recital of the lines such nodes are not recognizable and he attributes this to speedy delivery of the poem. One is inclined to feel that any feature which is not recognizable once the poem is delivered as such, cannot be of any aesthetic significance.

In my opinion, however, Shole's view does not take into account that versification is a matter of language and not of music: a (more or less) regular line pattern builds its regularity on the arrangement of linguistic materials. These linguistic materials are recognised by the listeners independently of their rendering in performance, simply because the listeners know the language. As observed by Jakobson (1966: 51-22; translation mine) at the very beginning of his study on Serbo-Croatian verse:

> 1. That theory of verse that works with sounds as physical, physiological or sensory-psychological phenomena is misguided from the point of view of linguistic thought. It is not the acoustic sound, but the linguistic phone as such that is utilised as the basic unit of verse. What is relevant about phones is their phonological value, or in other words, those phonetic properties that can serve to differentiate the sense in a given language. It is this value that makes the sounds a part of the speech or the verse line.
>
> [...] The so-called ear-philology[14] remained insensitive to the linguistic values of phones. It did not understand the difference between the phoneme and its realisations and confused phonological problems with phonetic ones, verse theory with verse performance theory. It is typical of this approach to require from the verse theorist that he 'take the standpoint of the foreigner who listens to verse without understanding the language of verse'. But firstly, poetry reckons with people who understand the language of verse and consequently understand verse not phonetically but phonologically. Secondly, the foreigner mentioned is also a fiction [...].

Jakobson made these statements from his perspective, in which the *poetic function* is a function of a language, or part of the language (Jakobson 1979). Similarly, I maintain that versification is a feature of the text, and not of something, such as the performance of the text, which, despite being interrelated with it, is outside its scope.

On this premise, it is now possible to analyse some *mabôkô*. The following poem is the praise-poem of Molefe (source text and translation by Schapera 1965: 46):[15]

[14] *Ohrenphilologie* in the original.

[15] Unfortunately, I have not been able to find transcriptions of Tswana poems where tone is marked. However, since PL in Tswana occurs regularly at word-level, and since the base of Tswana versification seems to be the number of words rather than tonal patterning, this issue should not affect our analysis.

Text 3

Lengana lethibêdi	Hookthorn that obstructs,
Rramathibêdi wadikgabo tsagae.	Obstructer for the Apes at home.
Megogolope yaMabulê yalwa;	The roosters of Mabule fought;
omotsho okobilê omohubidu,	the black one drove away the red,
waosutlhisa seêma kwamoragó,	pushing it through the back fence
waolebisa kwaborwa osianye.	and making it run to the south.

One can easily see that all the lines except the first one contain three words.

Looking only at this example, one would be tempted to define a metre for Tswana poetry, based on the constancy of words (or, equivalently, of occurrences of word-level PL). Other poems, however, present a more complex situation, which can be better described as distinct-verse poetry rather than metrical poetry. The following poem is the praise-poem of Pheto (source text and translation by Schapera 1965: 48-50):

Text 2

Rrammôpyane aBakgatla, tshukudu,	RaMmopyane of the Kgatla, rhinoceros,
tshukudu yagamphetêng, keêmê;	rhinoceros of 'Pass me by, and let me be;'
gê lesamphete letlhôla dillo,	if you don't pass me by you foredoom laments,
letlhôla bommaêno gobeolwa,	you foredoom your mothers to mourn,
letlhôla bommaêno golala balla,	you foredoom your mothers to weep all night;
babilê basenya matlhaku abatho,	they even spoil people's fences,
baagasa digôtlhôla lemamina.	bespattering them with mucus and phlegm.
Rrammôpyane kata samosubêlô,	RaMmopyane is a rag that plugs,
asubêtse mogatsa-mongwe gaatsale;	he plugged someone's wife and she is barren;
mogatsa-Legwale gaabône mosese,	Legwale's wife does not menstruate,
mogatsa-Legwale otshotse botlhoko,	Legwale's wife is afflicted with sorrow,
otshotse balegakabe lêlegolo;	inflicted by a big white-breasted crow;
obophutêtse kwaselemô otswang.	she got it where she came from in summer.
Tsibogô lebophalaphala;	The ford is a swelling flood;
bofêlêlê botsaya tshopya tsabatho,	in the end it takes people's hornless cattle,
botsêre tshopya tsôôNtaganyane aMokwêna.	it took the hornless cattle of Ntaganyane the Kwena.
Rrammôpyane osebô otshwaêtse;	RaMmopyane, do not follow others;
kgôsi gaetshwaêle, Rrasekakanyô,	a chief does not follow others, Debater,
gaetshwaêle, Rramosadiathêbê;	he does not follow others, RaMosadiathebe;
morêna keênê otshwaêllwang,	a chief is the one whom others follow,
morêna keênê, obolaya pele.	he is the chief, he kills first.

The number of words per line still tends to be 3, but there are several variations. Lines 4 and 5, *letlhôla bommaêno gobeolwa,/ letlhôla bommaêno golala balla,* contain 3 and 4 words respectively. Probably, this addition is not accidental but intentional, since it completes a syntactic parallelism that starts with an anaphora ('you foredoom your mothers to mourn, / you foredoom your mothers to weep all night). In this case, line boundary is not marked by the constancy of the number of words but by syntactic parallelism. In lines 8-10 the constancy of number of words is respected:

asubêtse mogatsa-mongwe gaatsale;	Legwale's wife does not menstruate,
mogatsa-Legwale gaabône mosese,	Legwale's wife is afflicted with sorrow,
mogatsa-Legwale otshotse botlhoko,	inflicted by a big white-breasted crow;

Each line contains 3 words, counting the compounds of *mogatsa* 'wife' as one. However, it is worth noting that all three lines contain a compound of *mogatsa*: in lines 9 and 10 it is the same compound that occurs at the beginning of the line, forming an anaphora. One could say that these two devices (occurrence of compounds with the same base and anaphora) are the main markers of the line boundaries for these three lines: the constancy of number of words is respected only if the compound words are treated as one. In lines 14-16 the constancy of number of words is again absent:

Tsibogô lebophalaphala;	The ford is a swelling flood;
bofêlêlê botsaya tshopya tsabatho,	in the end it takes people's hornless cattle,
botsêre tshopya tsôôNtaganyane aMokwêna.	it took the hornless cattle of Ntaganyane the Kwena.

In line 14 one word is missing; this is compensated by the number of 4 words each in lines 15 and 16. These two lines are also linked by a polyptoton of the verb *-tsaya* ('to take:' *botsaya* 'it takes,' then *botsêre* 'it took'[16]) and the repetition of the noun *tshopya* ('cattle'). From this example, one could say that constancy of number of words is the main linguistic device used in Tswana praise-poems for marking line-boundaries; however, it is not so regularly employed that it can be defined as a metrical constraint. It is more correct to consider Tswana versification as a form of distinct verse where word-level PL is the main linguistic device employed.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that allowing for variation is something that Moloto (1970: 28-29), too, observes (and defends). In fact, he thinks that the continuous variation of the versification

[16] *-tsêrê* is a form of the perfective stem of *-tsaya*, alternative to the regular *-tsêilê* (Cole 1955: 226).

pattern (which is what characterises distinct verse) is a studied effect and a mark of poetic artistry: 'Indigenous *mabôkô* must not be criticised for lack of a persistently uniform system whereas they are intended to display a consistently uniform technique. It is the case of the irregularity which is a regularity.' Thus, variation (and distinct verse) is not a deficiency of Tswana versification: rather, it is its strong point, and it is evaluated as such.

6. Zulu poetry

In the case of Zulu (and other Nguni languages), as in the case of Tswana, PL has been a known phenomenon for long time, being quoted in Doke's *Textbook of Zulu Grammar*, first printed in 1927 (Aunio *et al.* 2023: 145). Systematic investigation of the phenomenon, however, is more recent. In a first stage, PL in Nguni languages has been an object of interest mainly as the marker of a prosodic boundary. As Aunio *et al.* (2023: 109) remark, it has been observed only in the binary opposition of presence/absence, and with the final aim of investigating the relation between prosodic and syntactic phrasing. PL was first analysed as a marker of prosodic phrasing in Xhosa by Jokweni in his PhD thesis, *Aspects of Isixhosa Phrasal Phonology*, in 1995 (Zerbian 2004: 72). His work has been referred to in a study of Zulu by Cheng and Downing (2007: 51), who state that Durban Zulu's prosodic patterning is substantially identical to that of Xhosa, with the exception of restrictive relative clauses (which constitute the topic of their study). Quantitative analyses of PL as a phonetic phenomenon appeared later: an interesting result is that, as in Tswana, in Zulu PL may also occur at different levels. In Zeller *et al* (2017) PL is studied together with tone patterning in the behaviour of three verb forms (present, past and future tense) in phrase-medial and phrase-final (but utterance-medial) position. Their result is that in the latter case verbs present a small but stable lengthening of the penultimate syllable, and they leave open for further research the question whether this lengthening 'is less salient than that found with sentence-final words' (Zeller *et al* 2017: 317). They add, moreover, than even if the lengthening of the penultimate syllable is not very salient in phrase-final and utterance-medial positions, it does affect tonal patterning in the same way sentence-final PL does (Zeller *et al* 2017: 317). It seems, in other words, that in Zulu, too, there are two degrees of PL: the higher degree is at utterance-level and the lower at PP level (unlike in Tswana). The study by Zeller, Zerbian and Cook is referred to in Aunio *et al.* (2023: 112-113), where evidence is offered concerning Ndebele of a three-level PL (utterance-final, phrase-final, phrase-medial, the last presenting no vowel lengthening at all; Aunio 2023: 112-113).

From the studies so far mentioned, we can assume that Zulu PL operates at two levels, as in Tswana; however, the lower level is the PP and not the word, and this difference probably affects

versification, too. The case of Zulu versification is indeed interesting not only for its similarities with Tswana (and Swahili) versification, but also because a theoretical reflection on the role of PL in poetry has already been made far before Moloto's investigation on the Tswana case. The paper by Vilakazi (1938) is very interesting in this respect. While one can hardly agree with his claims that many aspects of Zulu poetry, and the way people experience it, derive from "the untampered mind of [the] primitive Bantu man", which, as he states, quoting Lestrade, "is not analytical and not direct" (Vilakazi 1938: 109), this article is still today, as far as I know, the deepest analysis of Zulu stylistics.

Before reporting what Vilakazi says about PL in Zulu poetry, it is worth mentioning another point where, in my opinion, he falls into contradiction. In his study (Vilakazi 1938: 112) he states that a 'unit of poetry or verse in Zulu is a breath-group of words:'

> I have made the phonetic mouth-tracings of the whole poem, and divided it according to how the poem was recited to me with a slow movement. From the oral recitation of the poet I discovered that a unit of poetry or verse in Zulu is a breath-group of words. Allow the poet to recite slowly, and he will always breathe at certain intervals, and inhale before starting on another verse. But if you allow the poet to be carried away with ecstasy, he may take two verses in one breath. Further, if you notice very intently, you will detect in the middle of the verse a very short break, which I would mark with a caesura.

While it is definitely interesting that Vilakazi observed the division of the poem into verses or lines during performance, in my opinion he interprets his data wrongly when he states that this is merely explainable as a division into breath-groups. Rather, one should say that the performer is aware that in a certain position he/she needs to express a line boundary, and consequently takes advantage of that moment for breathing, in the same way a player of a wind instrument would adapt his breathing to the pauses in the melody played. The identification of lines with breathing-groups has been disproved in other Bantu languages, such as Tswana by Schapera (1945: 16-17). In the case of Zulu, Vilakazi contradicts his statement in my opinion when he observes how the timing of breathing changes according to the speed of performance. If he is able to say 'allow the poet to recite slowly, and he will always breathe at certain intervals, and inhale before starting on another *verse*' and then 'allow the poet to be carried away with ecstasy, he may take two *verses* in one breath,' this means that he is still able to identify the lines, and lines boundaries, independently of the breathing groups, otherwise he would have no ground to say that a different number of verses, i.e. lines, correspond to one breathing group.

Despite these critical remarks, Vilakazi's analysis is interesting for other reasons. Discussing the stylistics of Zulu poetry, he talks about its "rhythm" quality (Vilakazi 1938: 111), comparing it to the

rhythmic features of Greek and Latin quantitative metres. He then observes that Zulu poetry has no precise metrical pattern as in Greek and Latin, but that nevertheless there is a degree of constancy: naming hemistichs as poetic bars, he states (Vilakazi 1938: 112) that 'the Zulu poem is a series of poetic bars occurring in pairs as a verse,' so that each line contains a caesura in the middle, and that 'the rhythmic pattern of the poem rests on the regular arrangement of poetic bars on each side of the caesura' (Vilakazi 1938: 115). This rhythm is given by the disposition of "stresses" (that is the term adopted by him) along lines and hemistichs, as observable in the text, *Umcayi Kavuma* ('Mcayi the Daughter of Vuma') which Vilakazi himself reports, comments and provides a metrical parsing of (1938: 114; source text and translation by him). Here I give the text with the orthography adopted by Vilakazi, but with a different metrical notation, for the sake of readability. In its notation, Vilakazi distinguishes between what he calls "stressed" and "unstressed" syllables; actually, he refers to a quality of metrical prominence rather than to phonetic stress, so one should refer to them respectively as (metrically) *strong* and *weak* syllables (or of syllables in strong and weak metrical positions; for the sake of this article, the two formulations can be considered equivalent). I will mark the strong syllables with an acute accent diacritic ´; the weak syllables will be left unmarked; the sign for caesura will be the central dot ·. In the right column, I report in the format *n+n* the number of strong syllables that Vilakazi marks respectively in the first and second hemistich of each line:

Text 5	
Úsijikáne · siyápha siyajíka	2 + 2
Síph'abaphándle · nábasendlíni	2 + 2
Únjiyanjiyán · 'esémva kwamadóda	2 + 2
Inyóka lé, · emqhím'esesangwéni	2 + 2
ivimb'él'izinkómo · námathóle	2 + 2
Úgagajáne · limbála mibíli	2 + 2
Libáng'ubunkóne · labáng'ubonála	2 + 2
Umyádl'ungcibá · zábantwána	2 + 2
Nkóbe zaphékw'edwaléni · zaxháphazéla	3 + 2
Zákhwezélwa yinsimángo · nensiyáthi	2 + 1 (*sic!*)
Yáth'imámba yéhla · ngokuziphákulúla	3 + 2

Isivánd'esilinywé · ngákwaboGéza	2 + 2
Láthi khon'igéza · liyákumphakuléla	2 + 2
Úmgunqubézi · káMgunqubézi	2 + 2
Nónembokódw'ebuxhántabézi · angáwuxhantabéza	3 + 2 (*sic!*)
Malúme ziyamlúm · 'úmalokazána	2 + 2
Ziyamesáb · 'ubusílw'esinoválo	1 + 2
Zesáb'umalokazána,	2
Zimesába · náns'ingengéma	1 + 2

She's like a ball which rolls to and fro.
She's generous to strangers as well as family members

She is the strong woman who inspires men.

She is like unto a snake coil'd at the gate,
and denies entrance to cows and their calves.

She's the smart woman with a combination of two colours,
As she fights between the striped and the white.

She's as tall as legs of children.

Can mealies be boiled on rocks,
while fire is kindled by wild buck?

Even the mamba feared and slipped away cautiously from tree tops.

Her mealie-fields are ploughed near her lover's home
so that he should see and choose her.

She plays tricks upon tricksters:
let those who can tame her try to do so, even with grinding stones.

O, my uncle, the cattle hate the bride,
they fear she's a wild beast,
they fear the bride,
they fear her, behold here comes the mighty one.

This is Vilakazi's scansion. One can observe that he obtains a very remarkable result in terms of regularity: among 19 lines, 12 present a 2 + 2 scansion, 3 a 3 + 2 scansion, 2 a 1 + 2 scansion, 1 a 2 + 1 scansion, 1 a 2 scansion (no middle caesura). One can say, therefore, that this poem is an example of distinct verse where PL is the main linguistic device employed. Later I will argue that, on the base of the linguistic behaviour of PL, it is possible to achieve a higher level of regularity in this poem. First, however, it is interesting to look at how Vilakazi identified the SMP. He bases his considerations 'on the principle that Zulu words are disyllabic in nature, and that the stress [PL] falls on the penult' (Vilakazi 1938: 115). Using the metrical signs — for strong syllables and ˘ for weak ones, he states (Vilakazi 1938: 115-116) that:

- disyllabic words are always scanned as — ˘;
- trisyllabic words are always scanned as ˘ — ˘;

For longer words, he introduces the possibility of what he calls "secondary stress" falling on the first syllable. Therefore:

- tetrasyllabic words can be scanned either as — ˘ — ˘ or ˘ ˘ — ˘;
- pentasyllabic words can be scanned either as — ˘ ˘ — ˘ or ˘ ˘ ˘ — ˘;

Therefore, for Vilakazi syllables affected by PL are always strong; in words with four or more syllables the first one can be either strong or weak; in all the other cases a syllable is weak. Vilakazi's considerations of the role of the "secondary stress"[17] are interesting in a comparative perspective, because there is a similar pattern in archaic Swahili poetry. With Text 2. I have presented an example from Swahili archaic poetry where lines contained more stressed syllables than SMPs; in my corpus, however, a small number of lines (47) present one stressed syllable less than the number of SMPs. An example is *Uṯumbuizo wa Uchi na Embekungu* (Miehe *et al.* 2004: 50):

Text 6

***E**we m**te**shi wa **u**chi · wa m**ba**ta u**li**o u**ṯu**ngu*

*Nite**ke**ya wa kikasi**ki**ni · teshe**we**o ni m**ge**ma **wa**ngu*

*Nite**ke**ya na wa kiṯu**pa**ni · uyayo**nga**o kwa **zu**ngu*

[17] I put this expression in quotation marks to emphasise that it comes from Vilakazi's work, but I don't find it accurate. In my opinion, these syllables do not receive a phonetic stress, even if "secondary." I don't know any evidence of such a secondary stress in Zulu phonetics. What these syllables receive is metrical strength: this is a metrical device, and as such it doesn't belong to the phonology of the language.

*Nite**ke**ya u**li**o nyu**ngu**ni · ulo**pi**kwa kwa **k'u**ni na **nyu**ngu*
*K'ishi**ra**bu ni**ke**ma ku**we**wa · nili**ṯa**ke embe**ku**ngu **la**ngu*
*Embe**ku**ngu la **ma**ni ya **chu**ma · mpi**ni**we **m**bwa ṯungu**ṯu**ngu*
*Embe**ku**ngu k'a**ngi**ka cha**ngo**ni · pangi**kwa**po **si**wa na ma**vu**ngu*
*Pangi**kwa**po ma**go**ma ya **e**zi · na ma**wa**no ma**wa**no ya **ba**ngu.*

O, you, the server of pure palm wine,
serve me the one from the jar, tapped by my own tapster,
and that intoxicating wine, bring it in a little flask.
Pour for me also the one from the earthen pot, brewed and without its lees,
so that when I am well wined, I demand my old hoe.
The old heavy hoe, made of iron, whose handle is made of the mtupa-wood,
the old hoe that hangs on the peg where the royal siwa-horn and the quivers are also placed,
(and) where the royal drums and battle arms are kept.

As one can see, the general pattern of the hemistichs in this poem is 10 syllables, with three SMPs: these are the 3rd, the 6th, and the 9th syllables. However, three hemistichs contain only two phonetic stresses. They are the first hemistich in line 2 and both in line 3:

*Nite**ke**ya wa kikasi**ki**ni*
*Nite**ke**ya na wa kiṯu**pa**ni*
*uyayo**nga**o kwa **zu**ngu*

Despite the lack of phonetic stress, however, these lines adhere to the pattern: in *Nitekeya wa kikasikini* and *Nitekeya na wa kiṯupani* there are still two phonetic stresses, on the 3rd and the 9th syllables. The line *uyayongao kwa zungu* has two syllables less, but its two phonetic stresses are still on the 2nd and 5th syllables from the line end, as the last two stresses of the base pattern. It seems, therefore, that one can resolve this irregularity by placing a SMP exactly where it should fall following the metrical pattern, even if that place is occupied by a phonetically unstressed syllable:

*Nite**ke**ya wa **ki**kasi**ki**ni*
*Nite**ke**ya na **wa** kiṯu**pa**ni*
***u**yayo**nga**o kwa **zu**ngu*

However, the scansion can be resolved in this way only if there is enough space (that is, a sufficiently long sequence of unstressed syllables) to reproduce the original disposition of the SMPs. This is

analogous to Vilakazi's statement that additional "secondary stresses" can be put only on the first syllables of tetra- or pentasyllabic words.

Coming back to Vilakazi's text, it is possible in my opinion to scan it in a more accurate way. While Vilakazi has been attentive enough to recognise the role of word-internal "secondary stresses" in versification, he has not taken into consideration that Zulu PL, which is the primary marker for metrically strong syllables, does not occur at word-level (as in Tswana) but at phrase and utterance-level, as previously mentioned. Let us reconsider in this light the "irregular" lines, that is, those which do not present a 2 + 2 pattern:

9	*Nkóbe zaphékw'edwaléni · zaxháphazéla*	3 + 2
10	*Zákhwezélwa yinsimángo · nensiyáthi*	2 + 1 (*sic*)
11	*Yáth'imámba yéhla · ngokuziphákulúla*	3 + 2
15	*Nónembokódw'ebuxhántabézi · angáwuxhantabéza*	3 + 2 (*sic*)
17	*Ziyamesáb · 'ubusílw'esinoválo*	1 + 2
18	*Zesáb'umalokazána,*	2
19	*Zimesába · náns'ingengéma*	1 + 2

Concerning lines 10, 17 and 19, which present a 2 + 1 or 1 + 2 pattern, it is unclear to me why Vilakazi didn't apply the device of "secondary stress" that he himself had introduced to resolve this exception. It is possible that he was affected by his listening to the performance of the text, which unfortunately we don't dispose of. However, in all these three lines the defective hemistich consists of a tetrasyllabic word, parsed as ⏑ ⏑ — ⏑, without the "secondary stress" on the first syllable; it is sufficient to add it to make these lines regular, as Vilakazi himself did with line 8: *Umyádl'ungcibá · zábantwána*. In line 10, first hemistich, Vilakazi marks three strong syllables in his own transcription of the text even if he reports two in his own counting: *Zákhwezélwa yinsimángo*. Since the first strong syllable derives from the application of "secondary stress," one can just drop it to make the line regular. The scansion of lines 10, 17, 19 then becomes (in bold my modifications):

10	*Z**a**khwezélwa yinsimángo · n**é**nsiyáthi*	2 + 2
17	*Z**í**yamesáb · 'ubusílw'esinoválo*	2 + 2
19	*Z**í**mesába · náns'ingengéma*	2 + 2

Concerning the other exceptions, line 15 can be resolved in the same way, by deleting a "secondary stress:"

15 *N**o**nembokódw'ebuxhántabézi · angáwuxhantabéza* 2 + 2

Line 9 presents a more complex situation, since in the first hemistichs there are three word-penultimate "stresses:" *Nkóbe zaphékw'edwaléni*. This irregularity can be resolved by looking at how PL works at phrase level. Lines 9 and 10 form one sentence, where the word *nkóbe* 'mealie, maize,' is the subject of the independent clause and, presumably, also the topic:

Nkóbe zaphékw'edwaléni · zaxháphazéla	Can mealies be boiled on rocks,
Zákhwezélwa yinsimángo · nensiyáthi	while fire is kindled by wild buck?

As Cheng and Downing (2009: 226-227) show for Durban Zulu, topics in Zulu are left dislocated, as in this case, and followed by a prosodic break. Therefore, even if *Nkóbe zaphékw'edwaléni* contains three occurrences of word-level PL, the first and the last are more intense since they mark prosodic breaks: after the topic (*nkóbe*) and at the end of a clause (*edwaleni*). The middle occurrence marks no prosodic break and can therefore be ignored. One then obtains the regular scansion:

9 *Nkóbe zaph**e**kw'edwaléni · zaxháphazéla* 2 + 2

Similar remarks apply to the first hemistich of line 11: *Yáth'imámba yéhla · ngokuziphákulúla*. Syntactically, the first hemistich is a verbal phrase followed by an embedded complementiser phrase: *Yáth'imámba yéhla* , literally 'they say that the mamba ran away.' Even here I tend to consider *imamba* as a topic, and therefore followed by a prosodic break. *Yathi* ('they say'), as a verbal form, introduces a complementiser phrase: in this case, no prosodic break is attested in Zulu (at least not in Durban Zulu: see Cheng and Downing 2007: 52). Therefore we can scan the line as:

11 *Y**a**th'imámba yéhla · ngokuziphákulúla* 2 + 2

which is regular. Thus, a more attentive look at how PL shapes versification reveals an extremely uniform structure: all the lines except 18, for which I cannot see how to resolve the irregularity[18], have a 2 + 2 scansion.

[18] It is possible that Vilakazi made an error in transcription and that lines 18 and 19 are actually two hemistichs of the same line. Then the scansion would be: **Zesáb'umalokazána, · Zimesába n**a**ns'ingengéma* 'they fear the bride, / they fear her, behold here comes the mighty one.' But having neither a recording of the performance of this text nor other transcriptions, I can provide no evidence for this hypothesis.

7. The Chewa *ndakatulo*

A last interesting case is that of Chewa *ndakatulo* poems. Unlike the cases discussed so far, this is a genre comparable to lyric poetry, as it often expresses the inner life of the author in his/her individuality (Wendland 1993: 82). Among the Bantu languages presented here, Chewa is the one that has received most attention in respect of phrasal prosody, with Kanerva's (1990) PhD thesis, which represents a milestone in this field, and Downing and Mtenje's (2017) monograph on the topic. In both these studies PL is strictly described as a PP level phenomenon; Downing and Mtenje (2017: 116-117), referring to it as "penult lengthening", define it in the following way:

> Penult lengthening: The penult vowel of a word is lengthened when it occurs in prosodic-phrase-final position. Words in isolation are, of course, in phrase-final position.

In another study, Downing (2008: 49), referring to prosodic phrasing in Chewa, Tumbuka and Durban Zulu, makes another interesting remark:

> In all three languages, lengthening of the phrase penult syllable is the easiest to identify – and most consistent—correlate of prosodic phrasing. (Parentheses in the data indicate prosodic phrasing.) Although this cannot be effectively transcribed, it should be noted that in all three languages, the penult of the sentence-final prosodic phrase is noticeably longer than the penults of sentence-medial prosodic phrases. That is, sentence penult vowels have culminative lengthening at the sentence level.

Thus, even in Chewa, prosodic lengthening happens at two levels, namely the PP and the sentence. There are, too, other relevant phenomena at narrower levels. Both Kanerva (1990: 38-44) and Downing and Mtenje (2017: 209-220) provide evidence for disyllabic minimality, that is, prosodic words need to be at least disyllabic. The two studies provide different interpretations of the phenomenon: Kanerva (1990: 44-54) sees it, together with PL, as evidence for the existence of a metrical foot in Chewa, while Downing and Mtenje (2017: 227) discard this assumption. It is, however, possible to say that, since every prosodic word in Chewa is at least disyllabic, then any PP can potentially undergo PL.

The analysis of *ndakatulo* poems reveals that PL plays a similar role in the organisation of the line. As remarked also by Kishindo (2003: 351), '[in Chewa poetry] the achievement of a rhythm effect must be based on different factors, such as a number of syllables, length of words, the penultimate length

characteristic of words or groups of words.' The example that will be presented here first is *Kutsanzika* ("Farewell"), by Sam A. Mchombo (in Mvula 1981: 31):[19]

*Pamasaya **o**nse tsopano mits**i**nje.*	On all the cheeks there are rivers now.
*Mis**o**zi yachita kusefuk**i**ra,*	Tears have been overflowing,
*kusefuk**i**ra mpaka m'mpenem**e**ne.*	overflowing for a week.
*Kul**i**ra ndi kudandaula mumt**i**ma.*	Crying is complaining in the heart.
*Mtima kulir**a**di ndi kuwaw**i**dwa,*	Crying of the heart is bitter,
*kuwaw**i**dwa pakuti uku nkusiy**a**na.*	bitter for being different.
*K**o**ma tisapitirize kulir**a**ku,*	However, let's not keep on with this crying,
*kudandau**u**la ndi kuwawidwa moy**o**ku.*	complaining and suffering from this life.
*Moyo pamodzi ndi chik**o**ndi zilip**o**be.*	life and love still exist
*Kuchoka kw**a**nga mkos**a**ti*	Leaving my bride,
*kudtetsa mpat**u**ko nkusaon**a**na,*	bringing a separation means not seeing each other,
*ife ndi ul**i**mbo tingotam**u**ka.*	we are birdlime; we are just leaving.

I have marked in bold the vowels in the syllables that undergo PL. Here again, one can observe that each line has two syllables presenting PL: that means, each line has two PP boundaries, one regularly at the end of the line and one in the middle. The first line can be considered as an independent sentence beginning with locative inversion (*pamasaya onse* 'on all the cheeks') and with the implied verb *pali* 'there is;' in this case the preverbal locative forms a separate phrase, and therefore undergoes PL, whereas the subject is part of the verbal phrase (Downing 2017: 232). In line 2, the subject of the sentence, *misozi* 'tears,' forms a phrase separate from the VP as a marker of topicalisation. Regarding line 3, Downing (2017: 234) reports that one regularly finds a PP break before place and time adverbials, such as the PP *mpaka m'mpenemene* ('for six days'). The prosodic break before this PP causes PL on *kusefukira*: *kusefukira mpaka m'mpenemene*. In the same way, in line 6 one can place a middle caesura before *pakuti* 'where.'

[19] The translation is mine. In the transcription of the original I render the grapheme *ŵ* ([β]) as *w*. See Downing and Mtenje's (2017: 44) critical remarks on the phonemic status of [β] (especially in contrast with [w]) in Chewa.

In lines 4, 5, 8 one sees the same syntactic construction: a topic, which can be a noun phrase (NP) (*kulira*, line 4; *kudandaula*, line 8; both of them are substantive infinitives) or a complementizer phrase (CP) (*Mtima kulir**a**di* 'Crying of the heart'), the copula *ndi*, expressing identity and features not subjected to change, and a predicate, which can be again a NP (*kuwawidwa* 'being bitter' line 5) or a CP (*kudandaula mumtima* 'complaining in the heart,' *kuwawidwa moyoku* 'suffering from this life'). Here again, the fact that the topic forms a phrase on its own triggers PL on it. A similar remark can be made for line 11 *kudtetsa mpat**u**ko nkusaon**a**na* ('bringing a separation means not seeing each other'), where the copula *ndi* has merged with the predicate: *ndi kusaonana* → *nkusaonana*.

In line 7 there is a verb phrase (VP) (*tisapitirize kuliraku* 'let's not keep on with this crying') preceded by a conjunction, *koma* 'but' (I have translated it as 'however' in the poem). It is unlikely, given the structure of this sentence and of the previous one, that *koma* here has an actual coordinative-adversative function: rather, it introduces a sense of general contrast between what has been so far told by the lyrical I and what follows. For this reason, I assume it is legitimate to regard it as a separate phrase. In line 9 the phrase break marks what is a hidden asyndeton. In the first part of the line, *moyo* 'life' (class 3) is introduced as topic and *pamodzi ndi chikondi* 'together with love' as comment. The second part of the line consists of the locative copula (*zilipobe* 'they still exist'), which is, however, in class 10: therefore, it is not in agreement with *moyo* but is a plural that refers generally to both *moyo* and *chikondi*. This reproduces a question-answer schema, which could be rendered as: 'Life together with love? There still exist,' and that is partially hidden from the asyndeton. The PP-break in correspondence with *chikondi*, is therefore necessary to make this structure evident.

In line 10 a PP break separates two noun phrases: *kuchoka kwanga* 'my leaving' and *mkosati* 'bride.' In line 12, one again finds an asyndeton marked by a PP break: (*ife ndi ulimbo*) (*tingotamuka*) '(we are birdlime;) (we are just leaving).'

8. Conclusion

The above analyses lead to interesting comparative remarks. First of all, the role of PL in the versification traditions examined has been found to be fundamental: in archaic Swahili poetry, Tswana and Zulu praise-poems and Chewa *ndakatulo* it seems to be the main linguistic device used to mark line-boundaries. Moreover, PL organises the line in a more or less regular pattern, based on the number and disposition of the SMPs marked by it. While many texts are not regular to the extent that it is possible to speak of metrical lines (as for example Text 2), one can definitely state that PL is the main device in the organisation of a distinct-verse style of composition in these poetries. Moreover, it has been observed that in the majority of the examples a more attentive analysis of how PL affects the line at

different levels (word, PP, utterance) reveals structures which have a regularity comparable to that of metrical verse.

Naturally, the way PL affects versification is not the same for all the poetic traditions examined, and this is also an interesting topic of analysis. The feature of Tswana of presenting PL both at word- and phrase-level, with full realisation of the lengthening only in the latter, corresponds to a line which is essentially based on word counting. Chewa lines, by contrast, can be said to be "PP-counting" lines. Swahili and Zulu are more innovative, since both of them seem to allow, albeit exceptionally, the instantiation of SMPs by syllables which are not word-penultimate, and therefore not affected by PL. Concerning the Swahili case, in my opinion this is due to the fact that the poems examined belong to a transitional phase of Swahili literary history, when the archaic, PL-based metrical system, was transitioning to the classical, syllabic one. The Zulu case seems to represent the transition to a syllabo-tonic organisation of the verse, rather than syllabic.

The data presented in this article are not representative of the totality of Bantu languages presenting PL: hopefully, this introductory investigation will encourage scholars to do more research in this field. At the moment, there are many open questions not only in Bantu versification *per se*, but also in the linguistic behaviour of PL and other suprasegmental phenomena in many Bantu languages. The stylistics of Bantu versification may be considered as a privileged area for encouraging collaboration between researchers in linguistics and literary studies. PL is not the only device employed in versification that could be the object of joint studies: syllabic metres are also a diffused phenomenon in Bantu poetries (classical Swahili poetry, Kinyarwanda pastoral poetry; Coupez and Kamanzi 1965: 12), as well as tonal patterning (tonal rhyme in Chiluba; Madiya 1975: 471-472), tonal patterns in Kinyarwanda dynastic poetry; Coupez and Kamanzi 1965: 14). Thus, this topic is a promising domain for further research.

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