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IsiZulu Biblically Derived Idioms: Their Sentence Adaptation, Tense Variations & Socio-Cultural Assimilation

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the influence of biblical teachings on selected IsiZulu idiomatic expressions. It addresses a gap in the existing literature on the transformative effects of Christianity and the Bible on the IsiZulu language. Through the theoretical lenses of hermeneutics and the adoption of document analysis as a qualitative research technique, this research investigates the sentence adaptation, tense variations, and cultural assimilation of selected IsiZulu idioms that are derived from the Bible. The findings of the study demonstrate that the selected biblically derived idioms adapt to different sentence and tense variations. Essentially, they are syntactically versatile in that they can use different subjects and subject concords. Moreover, these idioms appear in five different IsiZulu tenses namely, the present tense, near past tense, remote past tense, near future tense, and remote future tense. In terms of cultural assimilation, the findings reveal that idiomatic expressions derived from the Bible have transcended religious contexts and are now embedded in everyday discourse. To support and demonstrate this, examples were extracted from online sources such as the isiZulu newspapers. Overall, the findings reflect the widespread acceptance (directly or indirectly) of Christian values within the Zulu community. These expressions encapsulate Christian virtues such as faith, forgiveness, and humility, often aligning with traditional Zulu principles such as 'ubuntu' (humility).

Keywords: Bible; IsiZulu Idioms; Hermeneutics; Sentence Adaptation; Tense Variation; Socio-cultural Assimilation

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1. Introduction

Idiomatic expressions are a type of figure of speech. Different scholars have varying definitions for the concept of ‘idiom’. Mbathu states that idiomatic expressions are a form of oral art that presents a message in a concise and impactful manner^[1]. This saves the speaker time by getting the message across without the need for long elaborations. This works well when both speakers have a good grasp of the language because idiomatic expressions are not literal. According to Kasparian, idiomatic expressions are a figurative language that consists of syntactically unproductive phrases^[2]. Cacciari and Glucksberg describe idiomatic expressions as multi-word phrases that are very familiar and have figurative meanings that do not directly relate to the meanings of the individual words within the phrase^[3]. This characteristic of idiomatic expressions means that for a listener to understand them, he/she needs to have more than just a literal interpretation of the words themselves.

An understanding of the cultural and contextual usage of the phrase is required. As such, a speaker from outside the culture might take the phrase ‘*ukudhlula emhlabeni*’ literally because they do not understand the nuances of that culture, but a person from that culture would understand that it refers to someone passing away. Idiomatic expressions are typically learned and understood through direct exposure to the language and its cultural nuances rather than just through direct translation. Even IsiZulu idiomatic expressions that are derived from the Bible are generally considered universal; a majority have been culturally assimilated. The structure of these idiomatic expressions also demonstrates a high degree of adaptability. This flexibility contrasts with the more rigid structure typically associated with proverbs. Usiba asserts that the two forms of oral art, idiomatic expressions and proverbs, are dissimilar because the syntax of proverbs is rigid, but the syntax of idiomatic expressions is adaptable^[4].

This article aims to fill this gap by examining the unique influence of the Bible on IsiZulu idiomatic expressions. By focusing on IsiZulu, the aim is to uncover how biblical concepts, stories, and linguistic adaptations have been integrated into everyday language usage among the IsiZulu-speaking community. Specifically, biblical idioms will be investigated on how they have evolved within the IsiZulu language. This will explore their semantic shifts, cultural adaptations, and the ways they reflect historical and contemporary socio-

cultural dynamics among the Zulu people. These idioms are also considered linguistically according to their sentence adaptability and tense variations. This article will contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural and linguistic intersections between Christianity and indigenous languages in South Africa, providing insights into how religious texts have been localised and adapted in IsiZulu idiomatic expressions.

2. Literature Review

Khachaturyan explored the impact of Christianity on language evolution and discovered that conversion to Christianity creates a setting for linguistic exchange which leads to language change, and revealed several case studies where Christianity led to changes in vocabulary and morphology in the convert’s local language^[5]. Galieva examined the characteristics of idioms that are of biblical origin across various languages and found that the factors contributing to the universality of biblical idioms include the shared Christian culture and the influence of Greek and Latin on later Bible translations^[6]. The study found that universally recognised biblical idioms can exhibit national specificity due to variations in their semantic and figurative elements across languages.

Masubelele researched the role of the Bible in the development of written IsiZulu and found that IsiZulu has words loaned from the Bible that have today been assimilated into the language completely^[7], and revealed that Bible translators also used cultural substitution and semantic shift to extend the meaning of existing IsiZulu words as an attempt to refer to biblical concepts. Usiba’s study on IsiZulu proverbs and idioms found that religion Christianity is relatively recent among the Zulu people^[4]. His study also briefly highlighted the role of religion in shaping IsiZulu idiomatic expressions.

The study by Zhang argues that Christianity’s influence on English contributes significantly to the ongoing evolution of the language^[8]. According to this scholar, the core Christian views inspire a plethora of idioms centred around God and encourage one’s actions to align with divine approval. Pinnavaia discovered that a significant portion of English idioms have their origins in the Bible and they were initially crafted and utilised to convey divine messages, enhance comprehension, and articulate profound and ineffable ideas^[9]. The study argued that these idioms have evolved

and acquired contemporary and multifaceted meanings that extend beyond religious contexts. Geană's research focused on idiomatic expressions that stem from the Bible and noted that the *King James* Bible version is the second most significant source of idiomatic expressions in English, following Shakespeare^[10].

In the existing literature, scholars such as Khachaturyan and Galieva have highlighted the general patterns and universality of how religious texts, including the Bible, influence language evolution and idiomatic expressions^[5, 6]. However, these studies are predominantly broad. They often overlook the intricate dynamics of indigenous African languages such as IsiZulu. As for Masubelele and Usiba, while touching on the influence of Christianity on the IsiZulu language development, they have not extensively explored the specific influence on idiomatic expressions^[4, 7]. A noticeable gap in the existing literature is the comprehensive analysis of the semantic layers and cultural connotations of idiomatic expressions directly influenced by biblical teachings in IsiZulu. While Masubelele touched on the creation of new words and meanings^[7], and Usiba mentioned that some idioms originate from the Bible, there is a lack of in-depth exploration into how specific idiomatic expressions in IsiZulu have evolved under the influence of Christianity^[4]. While there is ample research on the impact of Christianity and the Bible on idiomatic expressions in English and other languages by scholars such as Pinnavaia, Zhang, and Geană^[8–10], there is a notable scarcity of studies focusing on African languages such as IsiZulu in this regard.

3. Theoretical Framework

This article adopts hermeneutics as its theoretical lens. The term 'hermeneutics' is derived from the Greek language and mythology. According to Demeterio, hermeneutics originates from the Greek verb '*hermeneuein*,' which means 'to interpret' in English^[11]. Moules states that it is also derived from the Greek noun '*hermeneia*' meaning 'interpretation'^[12]. These terms are linked to the Greek mythological figure Hermes. According to Demeterio, Hermes was a messenger of the Olympian gods who had to master the divine language, comprehend and interpret the intentions of these gods, and then convey their messages to humans on Earth^[11]. Historically, hermeneutics, as an academic discipline, traces

its roots back to Greek mythology. According to Barrett et al., hermeneutics emerged in the 17th century primarily as a method for interpreting sacred texts, particularly in the context of biblical studies^[13]. Today, modern hermeneutics has expanded to include the interpretation of non-religious texts. Broadly, hermeneutics is a science dedicated to the principles of interpretation. It aims to clarify and make the implicit meanings of texts explicit^[14].

The hermeneutics theory suits the scope of this article. The study investigates and interprets idioms that have origins in the Bible. The theory also has its roots in the interpretation of religious texts such as the Bible. The hermeneutic circle approach will be used to ascertain the full understanding of the selected idiomatic expressions. According to Rasool, the hermeneutic circle is central, positing that understanding the whole of a text is achieved through its parts and vice versa^[14]. When analyzing the idiomatic expressions from the bible, the study considers the book and chapter from which the expression was derived. Context is crucial in hermeneutics as meaning is not in isolation but arises from specific situations. Understanding these expressions requires considering the historical context of Bible translation, the cultural preconceptions of Zulu people, and the dialogical process through which these expressions have evolved. Hermeneutics is utilized to explore how biblical narratives and teachings have been adapted to reflect and reinforce IsiZulu cultural identity and values. This theory provides insights into the relationship between language and cultural identity. Idiomatic expressions and proverbs that are derived from biblical texts reflect and shape the cultural identity of IsiZulu speakers. They serve as cultural markers, encapsulating values, beliefs, and historical experiences.

4. Research Methodology

This article adopts document analysis as a qualitative research technique. Documents give a true reflection of the phenomenon. Bowen argues that documents contain data that was recorded without the researcher's involvement^[15]. The data was recorded in the natural context. Tierney and Clemens state that documents make it possible for researchers to study a phenomenon at a level that the interview did not reach^[16]. There are many types of documents that researchers use depending on their research topic, from

handwritten and printed documents, published and private, written text, graphs, diagrams, and pictures^[17]. Bowen asserts that various types of documents can assist the researcher in revealing meaning, gaining understanding, and uncovering insights relevant to the research problem^[15]. The article will review the IsiZulu and English translations of the Bible to explore the context and meaning of the verses that were used to derive idiomatic expressions. It will analyze written texts, including IsiZulu newspaper magazines and IsiZulu literature containing idiomatic expressions to explore the usage of idiomatic expressions.

5. Analysis

This section of the article offers a comprehensive analysis of selected IsiZulu idioms based on biblical narratives. These idioms include: *Ukukholwa ngokubona* (to believe by seeing), *ukubona okwabonwa nguSawula* (seeing what Saul saw), *ukuhamba ijuba likaNowa* (to travel like Noah's dove), *ukubuya kwendodana yolahleko* (the return of the prodigal son), and *ukudla izinkamba zikaFaro* (to drink from Pharaoh's cup).

5.1. *Ukukholwa ngokubona*

'*Ukukholwa ngokubona*' (to believe by seeing) is one of the idiomatic expressions in IsiZulu that has its origins in the Bible. This idiomatic expression comes from the book of John 20:24-31. The story is set after the crucifixion of Jesus and it recounts the story of 'Thomas, one of Jesus' twelve disciples. Thomas refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead without physical proof. Jesus appeared to the other disciples and when they shared the news with Thomas, he responded with doubt, saying:

Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe (John 20:25)^[18].

A week later, Jesus appeared to the disciples again, this time Thomas was present. Jesus invited Thomas to touch his wounds and see for himself by saying:

Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe (John 20:27)^[18].

In the end, Thomas's doubt transformed into faith only because he had seen proof of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus high-

lighted this to Thomas when he said:

Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed (John 20:29)^[18].

This passage is used by preachers to teach against scepticism in Christians and non-believers. This lesson teaches that faith often requires trust beyond tangible evidence. It is used to reinforce the belief that the absence of evidence is stronger than believing in something only after you have been given evidence. While Jesus provided Thomas with the proof he needed, He also emphasised the blessedness of those who believe without seeing.

The idiomatic expression '*ukukholwa ngokubona*' follows the general structure of IsiZulu idioms. It has the '*uku-*' prefix when not used within a sentence. Similar to other idiomatic expressions, it can be adapted morphologically to fit different sentence structures. It does this by replacing the prefix '*uku-*' with the appropriate subject concords, thereby aligning it with the sentence's grammatical context. For instance, in the sentence '*Ngiyamazi uThabo, ukholwa ngokubona*' (I know Thabo, he believes by seeing), the subject concord '*u-*', in '*ukholwa*', aligns with the subject '*UThabo*'. In the following sentence, '*Intombazana ikholwa ngokubona*' (The girl believes by seeing), the subject concord '*i-*' aligns with the subject *Intombazana*. This is similar to the sentence '*abantu bakholwa ngokubona*'. Here, the subject concord '*ba-*' is used with the subject '*abantu*'.

This idiom can also appear in different tense variations. The following examples demonstrate this:

Present tense:

USipho ukholwa ngokubona.

(Sipho believes by seeing.)

Near past:

USipho ukholwe ngokubona.

(Sipho believed by seeing.)

Remote past:

USipho wakholwa ngokubona.

(Sipho believed by seeing.)

Near future:

USipho uzokholwa ngokubona.

(Sipho will believe by seeing.)

Remote future:

USipho uyokholwa ngokubona.

(Sipho will believe by seeing.)

The flexibility of this idiom across tenses and subjects illustrates the adaptability of IsiZulu idiomatic structures, which allows the idiom to maintain meaning while fitting seamlessly into various grammatical contexts.

The idiomatic expression ‘*ukukholwa ngokubona*’ is widely used among IsiZulu speakers. It has transcended its religious roots and is used by ordinary people in everyday conversations. This idiomatic expression is very common that people sometimes do not say the full phrase, but just refer to a sceptical person as ‘Thomas’ because of its historical connotation. It is used to describe someone who is sceptical and requires direct evidence before believing something. It is typically used in cases when someone does not believe a story they are being told.

A typical example in oral discourse that highlights the use of this idiomatic expression can be analysed from the dummy dialogue below:

Unamanga mngani wami, azange uhlangane noSjava.
(You are lying my friend, you never met Sjava.)

Konje unguTomasi ukholwa ngokubona, nasi isithombe sami naye.

(I forgot that you are doubting Thomas, you believe by seeing, here is a picture of us.)

The example above shows how the idiomatic expression ‘*ukukholwa ngokubona*’ (believing by seeing) is used to describe someone who is sceptical and demands proof before believing something. The speaker uses the expression to highlight their friend’s scepticism and then provides a photo as evidence to confirm their claim.

In newspapers and media, this idiom can appear to describe those who question or challenge beliefs, often in a humorous or ironic tone. For instance, an article from *Isolezwe*, uses the idiom in the following way^[19]:

Nami ngathi ngithwabaza ngesonto eledlule, ngazithola sengingena emzini wentombi endala yakoMthiya. Okwangimangaza ukuthi ngayifika ingazibekile phansi isusa ukhula olwaluqaqele engadini.

*Ngathi uma ngiqeda ukubingelela, ngafuna **ukukholwa ngokubona njengoThomas waseBhayibhelini**, ngamjijimeza ngombuzo wokuthi ngabe kuyiqiniso yini ukuthi usehlanganise iminyaka engu - 92? Ngabamba ongezansi uma umuntu osephile le minyaka esenamandla okususa ukhula. Konke lokho kwakusasho imilingo kaJehova.*

(I also hesitated last week, when I entered the house

of the old lady Mrs Mthiya. What surprised me was that I found her not lying on the ground, she was removing weeds that had grown in the garden.

When I finished greeting, I wanted to believe by seeing like Thomas from the Bible. I challenged her with the question of whether it is true that she has turned 92 years old. I was surprised to see someone who has lived this long still has the ability to remove weeds. All of this is Jehovah’s magic.)

In this example, the writer playfully references Thomas from the Bible to highlight their own scepticism about the person’s age, yet this scepticism underscores admiration, as the individual retains remarkable energy.

In other cases, this idiomatic expression is used when someone is sceptical about a thing that will happen in the future. The claim below can be considered from the dummy example below:

Ngiyakutshela iBafana Bafana izophumelela kusasa izwa ngami wena.

(I am telling you Bafana Bafana is going to win tomorrow, just listen to me.)

Cha, angiyiboni iBafana Bafana iphumelela kusasa, yagcina nini ukudlala ngokuzimisela?”

(No, I do not see Bafana Bafana winning tomorrow, when last did it play with determination?)

Sizobona kusasa ke Tomasi njengoba ukholwa ngokubona.

(We will see tomorrow then [doubting] Thomas as you believe by seeing.)

As indicated above, the phrase ‘*Sizobona kusasa ke Tomasi njengoba ukholwa ngokubona*’ (We will see tomorrow then Tomasi since you believe by seeing), is employed to gently tease and call attention to the individual’s doubtfulness of Bafana Bafana winning while suggesting that the future will provide the necessary proof. Another example can be demonstrated through the following general words below:

Omunye wabahlali uphawule ukuthi uyokholwa ngokubona ukuthi iqembu elibusayo liyozifeza izithembiso.

(One of the residents commented that they will believe it when they see if the ruling party keeps their promises.)

Kwamsiza ukukholwa ngokubona. Kube manje naye izimali zakhe zihambe naleza zigebengu

(Believing by seeing helped him. His money could

have also been stolen by the criminal.)

In this example, the person's scepticism worked in their favour, as it protected them from potential harm. By being cautious and doubtful, they avoided losing their money to a criminal.

The idiomatic expression '*ukukholwa ngokubona*' is often used to criticise people who are sceptical. It is used to encourage them to believe without needing evidence. This reflects the foundation of religious faith, where belief is expected even without direct proof. The idiomatic expression emphasises the importance of faith and trust, encouraging individuals to believe even in the absence of tangible proof. This aligns with broader moral teachings within the Zulu culture, where trust in ancestors, and spiritual beliefs in the absence of tangible proof, is encouraged.

5.2. *Ukubona okwabonwa nguSawuli*

The IsiZulu idiomatic expression '*Ukubona okwabonwa nguSawula*' (To witness what Saul/Paul witnessed) is another example that originates from the Bible. It makes specific reference to the conversion story of Saul, who later became known as Paul. The biblical narrative of Saul's conversion is found in the book of Acts chapter 9. Saul was initially a persecutor of Christians but underwent a profound change after encountering a vision of Jesus on his way to Damascus. This encounter led to his conversion to Christianity and a complete shift in his beliefs and actions. A glimpse of this story is captured in Acts 9: 17-19^[18], as shown below:

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized.

19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength

The idiomatic expression '*ukubona okwabonwa nguSawula*' (To witness what Saul witnessed) symbolises a dramatic transformation or change of heart similar to that experienced by Saul on the road to Damascus.

Preachers use this passage from Acts 9:1-19 as a reminder of God's ability to transform lives and use even the most unlikely individuals for His purposes. This is intended to inspire believers to trust in God's plan and embrace their

calling in Christ because of the belief that God has a specific purpose for everyone. Saul's conversion is a powerful testimony to the transformative power of encountering Jesus. Preachers use this passage to illustrate that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace, regardless of their past actions.

The expression '*ukubona okwabonwa nguSawula*' has a structure similar to other IsiZulu idiomatic patterns by using the '*uku-*' prefix when not used in a sentence. It is also adaptable by replacing the prefix '*uku-*' with relevant subject concord. This allows idiomatic expression to maintain its figurative meaning across various sentences. For instance, in the sentence '*Umntu ubona okwabonwa nguSawuli*' (A person is witnessing what Saul witnessed), the subject morpheme '*u-*' is used as an agreement concord for the noun '*umuntu*'. The same occurrence is also evident in instances where a sentence is in its plural form. In the sentence '*abantu babona okwabonwa nguSawula*', for instance, the morpheme '*ba-*' serves as an agreement concord for the noun '*abantu*'.

The adaptability of this idiom to fit different tenses is also evident as shown below:

Present tense:

Umfowabo ubona okwabonwa nguSawula.

(His brother is witnessing what Saul witnessed.)

Near past:

Umfowabo bone okwabonwa nguSawula.

(His brother witnessed what Saul witnessed.)

Remote past:

Umfowabo wabona okwabonwa nguSawula.

(His brother had witnessed what Saul witnessed.)

Near future:

Umfowabo uzobona okwabonwa nguSawula.

(His brother will witness what Saul witnessed.)

Remote future:

Umfowabo uyobona okwabonwa nguSawula.

(His brother will eventually witness what Saul witnessed.)

As demonstrated by the examples above, '*ukubona okwabonwa nguSawula*' also adapts well to fit in across different tenses and subjects. It does this without altering its figurative meaning. This structural flexibility allows IsiZulu speakers to use it to ease in any relevant scenario.

In the IsiZulu context, this idiomatic expression alludes to radical transformation. This is similar to the biblical story of Saul's conversion. It implies that someone will undergo

a significant change or experience a revelation, often used as a promise or warning that they will regret their actions. This expression is commonly found in both oral and written discourse, serving as a cautionary statement. For example, in general everyday conversation, a speaker might warn someone about their behaviour by saying:

Mina ngithi ungalinge nje ungithethise ngoba uzobona okwabonwa uSawula. Wathathe la mazwi, azokusiza.

(I say do not dare to scold me because you will see what Saul saw, take these words, they will help you.)

In the above instance, the speaker invokes this story as a cautionary message, suggesting that the recipient will experience something profound or potentially humbling if they proceed with their actions. Another instance can be examined from the general example below:

Umseshi wathi ebhekene nomsolwa, “Uma uqhubeka nokungiqambela amanga, uzobona okwabonwa uSawuli. Lizovela iqiniso, futhi ngeke libe lihle”.

(The detective, confronting the suspect, said “If you continue to lie to me, you’ll see what Saul saw. The truth will come out, and it won’t be pretty”)

In this example, the detective uses the idiomatic expression ‘*ukubona okwabonwa nguSawula*’ to emphasise the serious consequences of the suspect’s continued dishonesty. The detective warns that if the suspect persists in lying, the outcome will be harsh and unpleasant. This idiom can be used in written discourse as well. In the following example extracted from *Isolezwe* newspaper^[20], the reporter, Bengu, reports on fan responses to a statement by the coach as shown in the dialogue below:

Xolani Munt’akashintswazigameko Mthabela: Akan-gathi uwabona elengelwa yizembe kanti akuyena umqeqeshi wawo? Thina sizowabuza kuyena uma singasawaboni kwi-Absa Premiership.

Siyabonga Asibonge H Nzuza: Ngeke AmaZulu ahlulwe kuyo yonke imidlalo esele, azoqala ngeChippa ayishaye.

*Sphehile Zondi: Ohhh usufuna ukuwayisa ehlathini. Wayise khona **uzokubona okwabonwa uSawula eDamaseku** ungathi Sokhulu & Partners, Intersexions neminye. Uphinde wethula izinhlelo okubalwa kuzo i-Our Perfect Wedding neCula Sibone. Ungathi angikutshelanga weJohnson. Mhlawumbe kufanele ubuye uthi uyadlala ngoba Amazulu soze agawulwa yizembe.*

(Xolani Munt’akashintswazigameko Mthabela: He can-

not say that he sees them getting relegated, is he not their coach? We will ask him if we do not see them in the Absa Premiership.

Siyabonga Asibonge H Nzuza: AmaZulu FC will not lose in all the remaining games, they will start by beating Chippa United.

Sphehile Zondi: Ohhh you want to take them to the second division. Take them there you will witness what Saul witnessed, in Damascus you would think it is Sokhulu & Partners, Intersexions and other TV shows. And also, present shows including Our Perfect Wedding and Cula Sibone. Don’t say I didn’t tell you, Johnson. Maybe you should come back and say you’re kidding because the AmaZulu will never be relegated to the second division.)

In this example, the supporters are cautioning the coach that if he allows the team to be relegated, he will face severe consequences, similar to the transformative and humbling experience that Saul underwent in the Bible.

The use of the idiomatic expression ‘*Ukubona okwabonwa nguSawula*’ in IsiZulu serves as a powerful tool to caution against undesirable behaviour. It encourages people to think carefully about the consequences of their actions, and it reflects a deep cultural and traditional emphasis on accountability within the Zulu society. This expression is rooted in the belief that one’s actions inevitably lead to consequences, and it is used to remind individuals that poor decisions or behaviour can result in regret or significant transformation. The idiomatic expression underscores the value placed on wisdom, self-awareness, and the importance of considering the potential outcomes of one’s behaviour in the Zulu culture.

5.3. *Ukuhamba kwejuba likaNowa*

The idiomatic expression ‘*ukuhamba ijuba likaNoah*’ (to travel like Noah’s dove) originates from the biblical story in the Old Testament book of Genesis 8:8-12^[18]. Noah released a dove from the ark to see if the floodwater had receded. In the chapters preceding Genesis 8, God had observed the widespread wickedness and corruption of humanity and decided to destroy all living beings with a great flood. Noah found favour in God’s eyes due to his righteousness, so God instructed him to build an ark to save himself, his family, and pairs of all living creatures from the impending flood. The floodwater covered the earth for forty days and

forty nights, destroying all living creatures. Only Noah, his family, and the animals in the ark survived. After the water started receding, Noah released a dove from the ark to see if the floodwater had receded from the surface. Genesis 8:9-12 records^[18]:

9 This is the account of Noah and his family.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.

10 He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark.

11 When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth.

12 He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him^[18].

Preachers use this passage to preach that people will never go wrong when they listen to God. This serves as an encouragement for believers to look for signs of God's faithfulness, have faith in God's plans, and to be hopeful during difficult times.

The expression '*ukuhamba ijuba likaNowa*' typically starts with the '*uku-*' prefix when used in isolation. It is adaptable to different sentence structures as well. It replaces the *uku-* prefix with the relevant subject concord to make sure that the idiom aligns with various contexts. For instance, in the sentence '*Indodana ihambe ijuba likaNowa*' (The son travelled for a long time), the agreement concord '*i-*' corresponds with the noun '*indodana*'. This is the same with the sentence '*uThando uhambe ijuba likaNowa*', where the subject morpheme '*u-*' serves as an agreement concord of the noun '*uThando*'.

The following examples demonstrate how the '*ukuhamba ijuba likaNowa*' adapts to fit different tenses in isiZulu as well:

Present tense:

UThandi uhamba ijuba likaNowa uma eya esitolo.

(Thandi takes a long time when she goes to the store.)

Near past:

UThandi uhambe ijuba likaNowa uma eya esitolo.

(Thandi took a long time when she went to the store.)

Remote past:

UThandi wahamba ijuba likaNowa uma eya esitolo.

(Thandi had taken a long time when she went to the store.)

Near future:

UThandi uzohamba ijuba likaNowa uma eya esitolo.

(Thandi will take a long time when she goes to the store.)

Remote future:

UThandi uyohamba ijuba likaNowa uma eya esitolo.

(Thandi will eventually take a long time when she goes to the store.)

As shown by the examples above, the idiom '*ukuhamba ijuba likaNowa*' is adaptable to align with different subjects and tenses while it still retains its meaning throughout. This allows speakers to convey the concept of delay in countless situations with relative ease. In the context of IsiZulu, this expression refers to the lengthy periods of waiting for the eventual return of Noah's dove. This expression is used in both oral and written discourse. It conveys the idea that a person's journey or task took a very long time, leaving others waiting for an extended period. It is also used to convey that someone never came back. In oral discourse, it is frequently used in everyday conversations. For example, it can be used in a sentence to express the frustration of waiting for someone to come back. The example below demonstrates this:

Kunini ngilinde ukuthi ubuye esitolo, waze wahamba njengejuba likaNowa.

(I have been waiting for you to come back from the shops, you were away like Noah dove.)

This example uses the idiomatic expression '*ukuhamba ijuba likaNowa*' to humorously express the frustration of waiting for the person to return. This suggests that the second person had gone to the shops for a very long time, longer than the typical time it would take. That is why the first person is so frustrated with him or her.

In written discourse, writers can use this expression to emphasise the length of time people left. For instance, in the IsiZulu newspaper, *Ilanga*^[21], the reporter reports about the tendencies of politicians in this manner:

Unyaka ka-2024, unyaka lapho wonke amaqembu kumele abuyele kubantu, ayochaza ngakwenzile mayelana nezethembiso azenza kubantu. Kulesi sikhathi ngisho abahamba ijuba likaNowa bazobonakala begijima ngisho emaqeleni, bebhaka abavoti. Baphuma inqina kuhle kwabazingeli. Ngisho namakhansela angasaziwa emiphakathini, uzowabona ephithizela emiphakathini.

Amanye sengathi ungawabuza ukuthi afuna ukuzovuna nje, atshale nini?

(The year 2024 is the year when all parties must return to the people and explain what they have done regarding the promises they made to the people. At this time, even those who go away like Noah's dove will be seen running, looking for voters. They came out like hunters. Even the councillors who are no longer known in the communities, you will see them busy in the communities. Others, you can ask them if they just want to harvest, when did they plant?)

In this example, the expression '*ukuhamba ijuba likaNowa*' is used to illustrate the lengthy absence of politicians from their communities. It highlights how these figures often remain disengaged until election season when they suddenly reappear and are eager for votes. This expression criticises their inconsistent involvement, suggesting that their return is insincere and solely for political gain.

The use of this idiomatic expression highlights that the person referred to takes a long time to return from running errands. Its use serves to encourage the person of interest to be more time-conscious and complete tasks more promptly. Among the Zulu people, this reflects a cultural emphasis on efficiency and reliability in fulfilling responsibilities. It underscores the importance of valuing others' time and contributing to the smooth functioning of the community through promptness and dependability.

5.4. *Ukubuya kwendodana yolahleko*

The idiomatic expression '*ukubuya kwendodana yolahleko*' (the return of the prodigal son) is derived from the New Testament book of Luke 15. Here, the Pharisees and scribes were criticising Jesus for welcoming sinners. Jesus addressed them with three stories to emphasise God's love and willingness to forgive those who return to Him. He used the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the prodigal son. In the parable of the prodigal son, found in Luke 15:11-32, Jesus tells of a younger son who demands his inheritance from his father, squanders it in a distant land, and then eventually finds himself destitute. Realising his mistakes, he returns home, seeking forgiveness. Luke 15:17-24 records^[18]:

17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!

18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.'

20 So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

21 "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.

24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; 'he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

As indicated above, the prodigal son's father welcomed him back with open arms and celebrated his return. This symbolises God's joy when a sinner repents. Preachers use the parables mentioned above to teach about God's compassion, the importance of repentance, and the joy of reconciliation. They emphasise that no one is beyond redemption and that God eagerly awaits the return of those who have strayed.

The idiomatic expression '*ukubuya kwendodana yolahleko*' has a structure similar to other IsiZulu idiomatic patterns by using the '*uku-*' prefix when not used in a sentence. It is also adaptable by replacing the prefix '*uku-*' with relevant subject concord. The sentence '*UNtando uyindodana yolahleko emndenini wakhe*' (Ntando is a prodigal son in his family), for instance, is one of the examples to demonstrate this. Here, the subject concord '*u-*' complements the noun '*uNtando*'.

The expression '*ukubuya kwendodana yolahleko*' can also be understood according to different tenses as demonstrated below:

Present tense:

UNdaba uyindodana yolahleko kubo.

(Ndaba is the prodigal son in his family.)

Near past:

UNdaba ubuye njengendodana yolahleko kubo.

(Ndaba was a prodigal son in his family.)

Remote past:

UNdaba wabuya njengendodana yolahleko kubo.

(Ndaba had been the prodigal son in his family.)

Near future:

UNdaba uzobuya njengendodana yolahleko kubo.

(Ndaba will be the prodigal son in his family.)

Remote future:

UNdaba uyobuya njengendodana yolahleko kubo.

(Ndaba will one day be the prodigal son in his family.)

As demonstrated by the examples above, this idiom adapts well to fit in across different tenses and subjects. It does this without altering its figurative meaning. This structural flexibility allows IsiZulu speakers to use it with ease in any relevant scenario.

In isiZulu, this idiom is used to describe someone who has gone astray or left home but eventually returns, often after realising their mistakes or experiencing hardship. This expression captures the essence of forgiveness and reconciliation, reflecting the theme of repentance and warm reception found in the biblical story of the prodigal son. It can be employed in both oral and written discourse to convey the idea of returning to a place of acceptance and belonging after a period of separation or wrongdoing. For instance, one might say in everyday conversation:

Ngiyabona indodana yolahleko isibuyile, futhi ibuye nomzukululu

(I see the prodigal son has returned, with a grandchild too.)

In this sentence, the expression conveys that someone who had distanced themselves from family has now returned unexpectedly, and with a new family member, a grandchild. A similar idea is highlighted through the example below:

Nakuba kwakunzima ukuthethelela indodana yakhe yolahleko, wayeyithanda. Ngakho, wamamukela ngezandla zombili.

(Even though it was hard to forgive his prodigal son, he loved him. So, he welcomed him with open arms.)

In this sentence, the father forgives his son who has come back after abandoning his father. In written texts, this idiomatic expression can be found in literature, media, and formal statements, where it conveys the idea of returning to a place of acceptance and belonging after a period of separation or absence. For instance, in the newspaper, *Isolezwe*^[22], the reporter uses this idiom when reporting about the cricket player, Rilee Rossouw, in this manner:

KUGQAME ‘indodana yolahleko’, uRilee Rossouw, ngesikhathi amaProteas edla iBangladesh ngama-run angu-104 emdlahweni wawo wesibili kaGroup 2 kwiNdebe yoMhlaba yeT20 eSydney Cricket Ground namuhla ekuseni. URossouw walaxaza iqembu lesizwe ekuqaleni kuka-2017 ukuze ayodlalele iqembu lase-England, iHampshire. Inkontileka ayisayina yayingamvumeli ukuthi aphinde adlalele namaProteas. Nokho lezi zinkontileka zachithwa zonke ngesikhathi kuqala umthetho weBrexit, nokwenze wakwazi ukubuyela eqenjini lesizwe ngoJulayi nonyaka. Akakhulumanga kakhulu ngosekudlulile kodwa uthe uyaziqhenya ngokuphinde amele izwe nangokwenza kahle emqhudelhwaneni omkhulu kangaka. “Uma ulahla ilungelo lokudlalela izwe lakho usuke ungalindele ukuthi uyophinde ulithole futhi. Kumele kube yigugu ukudlalela izwe lakho. Luselude uhambo kodwa ngethemba ukuthi kuzoqhubeka kuhambe kahle,” kusho Rossouw. “Ukubuyela eqenjini lesizwe bekungelula kodwa kube yisimangaliso ukuthi kugcine kwenzekile. Kwesinye isikhathi izinto zikuhambela kahle, yilokho engingakusho ngalo nyaka.”

(The ‘prodigal son’, Rilee Rossouw, stood out when the Proteas beat Bangladesh by 104 runs in their second Group 2 match of the T20 World Cup at the Sydney Cricket Ground this morning. Rossouw left the national team in early 2017 to play for England’s Hampshire. The contract he signed did not allow him to play with the Proteas. However, these contracts were all cancelled when the Brexit law began, which enabled him to return to the national team in July this year. He didn’t talk much about the past, but he said he was proud to represent the country again and to do well in such a big competition. “If you give up the right to play for your country, you don’t expect to get it again. It must be valuable to play for your country. There is still a long way to go but I hope it will continue to go well,” said Rossouw. “Returning to the national team was not easy but it was a miracle that it finally happened. Sometimes things go your way, that’s what I can say this year.”)

The expression ‘indodana yolahleko’ describes someone who returns after a period of wrongdoing, often with a sense of humility, remorse, and a desire for forgiveness. This expression embodies themes of repentance, forgiveness, and the joy of reconciliation. These themes are central to a variety of biblical narratives, particularly the parable of the prodigal son, which highlights the profound impact of repentance and

the grace of forgiveness. These themes are also significant in the Zulu culture and spiritual beliefs, where various practices are undertaken to achieve repentance and make amends. These practices often involve restoring broken relationships between individuals, families, and ancestors. This expression serves as a reminder of the importance of reconciliation and the enduring hope for redemption, reinforcing the values of forgiveness and the restoration of harmony within the community.

5.5. *Ukudla izinkamba zikaFaro*

The idiom ‘*ukudla izinkamba zikaFaro*’ (to drink from Pharaoh’s cup) originates from the Old Testament, specifically Genesis 40:20-23^[18], which recounts the story of the Egyptian chief cupbearer and chief baker. The cupbearer’s role involved drinking Pharaoh’s wine to ensure it was safe. In this passage, both the cupbearer and the baker are imprisoned with Joseph, known for his gift of dream interpretation. Joseph interprets each man’s dream, predicting their fates, and as the passage unfolds, his interpretations are fulfilled precisely. This is recorded in the Bible in the following way:

20 Now the third day was Pharaoh’s birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials:

21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand—22 but he impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.

Preachers often use this passage to encourage believers to be faithful in the face of adversity. They highlight Joseph’s unwavering faith and integrity, even when he is forgotten in prison. While in prison, he continued using his gifts to help others, including interpreting the dreams of his fellow prisoners. Preachers also encourage believers to trust that God will fulfil His promises at the right time. They point out that God’s timing is often different from people’s. While Joseph helps the cupbearer by interpreting his dream, his own release from prison is delayed because of the cupbearer’s forgetfulness. Joseph had to wait for the right moment to be remembered and ultimately elevated.

The idiomatic expression ‘*ukudla izinkamba zikaFaro*’ follows the general structure of IsiZulu idioms. It has the ‘*uku-*’ prefix when not used within a sentence. Similar to

other idiomatic expressions, it can be adapted morphologically to fit different sentence structures. It does this by replacing the prefix ‘*uku-*’ with the appropriate subject concords, thereby aligning it with the sentence’s grammatical context. For instance, in the sentence ‘*ubaba udla izinkambi zikaFaro*’ (my father drinks alcohol), the subject concord ‘*u-*’, in ‘*udla*’, aligns with the subject ‘*ubaba*’. This is similar to the sentence ‘*abantu badla izinkambi zikaFaro uma bebuka ibhola lezinyawo*’. Here, the subject concord ‘*ba-*’ is used with the subject ‘*abantu*’.

The idiom ‘*ukudla izinkamba zikaFaro*’ can also appear in different tense variation. The following example demonstrates how this idiom adapts to different tenses:

Present tense:

UBafana udla izinkambi zikaFaro.

(Bafana is drinking alcohol.)

Near past:

UBafana udle izinkambi zikaFaro.

(Bafana drank alcohol.)

Remote past:

UBafana wadla izinkambi zikaFaro.

(Bafana drank alcohol a long time ago.)

Near future:

UBafana uzodla izinkambi zikaFaro.

(Bafana will soon drink alcohol.)

Remote future:

UBafana uyodla izinkambi zikaFaro.

(Bafana will drink alcohol in the distant future.)

The flexibility of this idiom across tenses and subjects illustrates the adaptability of IsiZulu idiomatic structures, which allows the idiom to maintain meaning while fitting seamlessly into various grammatical contexts. In isiZulu, ‘*ukudla izinkambi zikaFaro*’ is used to describe excessive or harmful alcohol consumption, drawing from biblical imagery related to Pharaoh’s wine-filled cups. This idiom has expanded beyond its religious roots and is now commonly used in both spoken and written contexts. It serves as an indirect or symbolic way to discuss alcohol abuse, often helping to soften the discomfort or stigma associated with addressing addiction directly by referring instead to Pharaoh’s cups. For example, in general everyday conversation, a speaker might address alcohol consumption by saying:

Kodwa baba ayingipharhi kahle lendaba yakho yokudla izinkambi zikaFaro njalo ngempelasonto

But father, I do not like your habit of always getting drunk on weekends

In newspapers and media, this idiom can appear to describe people who consume alcohol excessively. For instance, an article from *News24* uses the idiom in the following way^[23]:

Omunye wabalingisi abahamba phambili emdlalweni othandwa kakhulu kuleli, iSibaya, kubikwa ukuthi ulwisana nokuthanda izinkamba zikaFaro ngokweqile, ngokusho kombiko.

UBongani Gumede kubikwa ukuthi wayiswa eHoughton House Addiction Recovery Centre ngasekupheleni konyaka odlule ngenxa yale nkinga.

Iphephabhuku iDrum, libika ukuthi uGumede wangeniswa kulesi sikhungo sokuhlunyeleliswa, kepha waghahla isikhathi eside

(One of the leading actors in the most popular game in the country, iSibaya, is reported to be struggling with liking Pharaoh's cups [alcohol] too much, according to the report.

Bongani Gumede was reportedly taken to Houghton House Addiction Recovery Centre late last year because of this problem.

The Drum magazine reports that Gumede was admitted to this rehabilitation centre, but did not stay for long.)

In this context, the idiom is used to highlight Bongani Gumede's struggle with alcohol addiction, portraying his excessive drinking as akin to "drinking from Pharaoh's cups." The use of this idiom serves as a means of addressing a sensitive issue in a way that mitigates the potential embarrassment often associated with the unpleasantness of addiction. By employing this metaphor, the speaker frames the issue in a more socially acceptable manner, which allows for a discussion of the problem without directly confronting the stigma attached to addiction.

While Christianity does not prohibit alcohol consumption, it emphasises moderation. For example, Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding (John 2:1-11)^[18], and the bread and wine of Holy Communion symbolise Jesus' body and blood. However, the Bible advises against excessive drinking, with verses such as Ephesians 5:18 warning^[18], "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery." This balanced view on alcohol aligns with teachings on dignity and moderation. Similarly, Zulu culture has customs that involve brewing and responsibly consuming alcohol during

ancestral ceremonies. The idiom 'ukudla izinkambi zikaFaro' (to drink from Pharaoh's cup) reflects shared values of self-control, respect, and maintaining one's dignity. Both Christian and Zulu traditions, therefore, emphasise moderation and integrity in their teachings on alcohol consumption.

6. Findings and Conclusions

The article explored idiomatic expressions derived from biblical sources and demonstrated their structure the modern usage patterns of these idiomatic expressions and their continued relevance in daily conversation, literature, media and community. The findings revealed that idiomatic expressions originating from the Bible mirror the structure and adaptability of regular IsiZulu idioms. Similar to other idioms, they follow a similar grammatical pattern, incorporating the prefix "uku-" when they are not used within a sentence. Their structure is flexible, allowing them to adjust and fit various sentence forms by adopting the relevant subject concords. This adaptability enables these expressions to be used across multiple tenses (present, near past, remote past, near future, and remote future) without altering the idiom's meaning. As Mbathu confirms, when idioms are integrated into a sentence or narrative, they employ subject or object concords to align more effectively with the context^[1].

The idiomatic expressions discussed demonstrate the significant influence of the Bible and Christianity on the IsiZulu language. These biblical narratives have become deeply embedded within the language, reflecting the broader acceptance of the Bible within the community—a result largely attributed to effective Bible translations. Dickie contends that for Bible translations to resonate, they must be rendered in ways that are both accessible and culturally relevant to the target community^[24]. Similarly, Masubelele notes that translators employed techniques such as cultural substitution and semantic shift to adapt existing words, expanding their meanings to encompass biblical concepts^[7]. Consequently, these expressions, rooted in Christian scripture, have evolved to carry meanings that resonate with the Zulu people.

The article discovered that idiomatic expressions derived from the Bible are frequently used beyond church settings, appearing in a variety of contexts. This finding aligns with Khachaturyan's observation that language changes of-

ten stabilise within ecclesiastical genres before spreading to standard and colloquial usage^[5]. Similarly, Choi affirms that biblical references are prominent in literary works and daily newspapers, showing the broad reach of these expressions^[25]. This study found that journalistic use of idioms enriches language, making articles more engaging and compelling.

Author Contribution

Conceptualization, S.P.K. and S.Z.D.; methodology, S.P.K.; validation, S.Z.D.; formal analysis, S.P.K. and S.Z.D.; investigation, S.P.K.; resources, S.Z.D.; data curation, S.P.K.; writing—original draft preparation, S.P.K.; writing—review and editing, S.Z.D.; supervision, S.Z.D.; project administration, S.Z.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Note:

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Conflict of interest

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