

Locative Marking in Ibinda, Portuguese, and English: A Contrastive Analysis

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Abstract

Locative marking is one of the major grammatical mechanisms by which languages express spatial relations. Concepts such as location, direction, movement, and source/destination/containment are common across languages, but the ways in which these meanings are expressed differ dramatically across language families. The analysis is contrastive in nature and is a qualitative, literature-based study of locative marking in Ibinda, Portuguese, and English (also drawing on internationally recognised theoretical perspectives), while also utilising descriptive and lexicographically oriented scholarship produced in Cabinda, Angola. The analysis relies largely on the grammatical sketch of Ibinda by Chicuna (2015), the lexicographical research gathered by Mazunga (2015), as well as established works in Contrastive Linguistics, Bantu linguistics, Cognitive Semantics, linguistic typology, and language contact. Literature was identified using systematic searches of academic databases, privileging peer-reviewed grammars, monographs, and locally produced linguistic documentation. These results show that the locative marking in Ibinda is grammatically organized differently than Portuguese and English at a fundamental level. While the Portuguese and English languages largely rely on independent prepositions to encode spatial relations, Ibinda can use a more comprehensive morphosyntactic system that uses nominal morphology in combination with other forms of noun classes, nominal prefixes, and even agreement structures. This comparison also illustrates that identical spatial concepts can be expressed in very different grammatical architectures, supporting functional rather than lexical approaches to cross-linguistic comparison. Cabinda's multilingual linguistic ecology provides a theoretically plausible source of contact data from which to derive evidence for grammatical interaction across languages. With regard to contact-induced grammatical change, no direct evidence is established in the available literature; however, much indirect evidence is provided that language contact can be used as a potential explanatory framework for variation in the structural properties of languages spoken side by side. There-

fore, this study also adds to the international documentation of Ibinda by showing that locally produced descriptive and lexicographical work can be scientifically relevant in more general considerations of Contrastive Linguistics, Bantu Linguistics, and Language Contact, respectively. It is important to note that specific documentation of languages is crucial for facilitating cross-linguistic research—and this is doubly true when it comes to understudied African languages in general.

Keywords

Locative Marking, Contrastive Linguistics, Ibinda, Portuguese, English, Bantu Languages, Language Contact

1. Introduction

Locative marking is a basic grammatical domain where languages encode spatial relations. Some basic concepts like location, direction, movement, source, destination, and containment are similar in every human language (Levinson, 2003), but the grammatical means of expressing relations between these meanings differ widely. Whereas independent prepositions are the main source of locative marking in most Indo-European languages, many Bantu languages structure such marking through broad grammatical systems involving nominal morphology, noun classes, agreement patterns, and other morphosyntactic resources (Van de Velde et al., 2019; Creissels et al., 2019). Such typological distinctions directly relate to locative marking and are thus of significant interest in the fields of Contrastive Linguistics, Cognitive Semantics, Language Contact, and Second Language Acquisition.

Portuguese and English are examples of languages which have locative marking based on prepositional systems. While both languages use prepositions to express spatial relations, the semantic organisation and grammatical distribution of forms within each language are not identical. Portuguese often relies on multifunctional forms like *em*, *a*, and *para*, which are interpreted mostly depending on context. Such differences have been well established as sources of both cross-linguistic variation (Cook, 2016) and second language learning difficulty (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Tyler & Evans, 2003).

On the other hand, comparatively few internationally available studies have investigated locative marking in Ibinda, a Bantu language of Cabinda (Angola). From another angle, Chicuna (2015: p. 27) classifies Ibinda (Kiyombe) as a Bantu language and places Cabinda in a multilingual linguistic environment characterized by the coexistence of Portuguese and indigenous African languages (p. 32). Portuguese functions as the official language of administration, education, and wider communication (p. 37), while Ibinda remains a primary part of community interaction and cultural identity (p. 40). A long-established multilingual ecology, nurtured by the continuous circulation of Portuguese and Ibinda, provides ideal

grounds for language contact and structural adaptation (pp. 110-112).

Although there has been growing international interest in Bantu linguistics and African contact languages, Ibinda continues to be underrepresented in internationally indexed linguistic research. Previous research often uses general descriptions of Kikongo, or typological descriptions relating to Bantu systems, and has been little read outside of Cabinda, where descriptive scholarship on Kikongo is rare. However, there are already large-scale linguistic records. [Chicuna's \(2015\)](#) monograph provides a complete description of the nominal morphology, including noun classes, phonological adaptation to Ibinda, grammatical integration, and quiombisation of the IB languages (pp. 89-115; 159-187). In conjunction with this work, [Mazunga's \(2015\)](#) Portuguese-Ibinda Dictionary includes spelling rules, pronunciation guides, a nominal prefix system, and also lexical matches that disclose lexicographical principles informing the description and standardisation of the language (pp. 196, 203).

The lack of international integration of these locally produced works is an important omission in the literature. While providing thematically rich, multi-faceted empirical evidence on the structure of Ibinda and its nuances as a language, it has hardly been considered in the larger context of Contrastive Linguistics, Bantu Linguistics, or Language Contact. Therefore, even if some very useful descriptions are available, our present understanding of locative marking in Ibinda remains patchy.

This paper aims to fill this gap by combining globally accepted theoretical frameworks and descriptive/lexicographical writings published in Cabinda. A contrastive investigation is conducted that describes locally specific linguistic evidence as the main empirical basis for a description of Ibinda in an international comparison based on qualitative literature.

More specifically, the study answers these research questions:

- 1) In the descriptions of Ibinda that are currently presented, how is locative marking implemented, and what is the contrast to Portuguese and English?
- 2) What are the structural and semantic similarities and differences between locative marking among all three languages, considered in terms of static location, goal, source, path, and containment?
- 3) How much does the literature allow language contact with innovative structural variation in markings of location to count as a likely explanation for the types of structure we find when we look at the multilingual population of Cabinda?
- 4) What are the implications of these findings for contrastive linguistics, Bantu linguistics, and the international documentation of underrepresented African languages?

This study therefore offers new insights into locative marking across three typologically diverse languages by combining internationally recognised theoretical frameworks with locally generated descriptive evidence, while also showcasing the scientific value of integrating African linguistic scholarship within an international research context.

2. Locative Marking: Theoretical Foundations

This section provides the theoretical basis for the contrastive study on locative marking in Ibinda, Portuguese, and English. It starts with an analysis of locative marking as a grammatical class and the theoretical precepts that guide cross-linguistic comparison. The review then considers typological aspects of locative marking in Bantu languages, situates Ibinda within its sociolinguistic context, summarizes Portuguese and English as the reference systems, and describes the research gap filled by this study.

2.1. Locative Marking as a Grammatical Category

Locative marking is well known to be one of the most basic grammatical mechanisms through which languages express spatial relations. In all of the world's languages, speakers use expressions denoting location, direction, movement, source, destination, and containment, as well as proximity and path. While these conceptual categories are to a large extent universal, languages vary widely in the grammatical resources they use to express them (Levinson, 2003). As a result, locative marking has been at the heart of numerous discussions in linguistic typology, cognitive semantics, contrastive linguistics, and language contact research, as it offers vital information about the correlation between grammar and conceptualisation.

The traditional grammatical description of locative marking has typically been conducted from the standpoint of the adpossession, since it examines adpositional (especially prepositional) relations in Indo-European languages. Typological work has more recently shed light on the inadequacy of this idea for comparative purposes, though. It is also spatio-linguistically visible that most languages do not rely exclusively on independent prepositions alone to encode spatial relations, while encodings of spatial relations through combinations of morphology (e.g., nominal classification, agreement systems), case marking, or verbal morphology have emerged as continuations (Van de Velde et al., 2019; Creissels et al., 2019). Such an open approach has led linguists to consider locative marking as a grammatical specific which may be realized according to the structural nature of individual languages.

The significance of this method is supported by studies in cognitive and spatial linguistics. Strang et al. (1982) reviews *Metaphors We Live By* and discusses how closely human conceptual systems are tied to embodied spatial experience, while Levinson (2003) shows that languages differ from each other not merely in the grammatical expression of spatial relations, but in their relativity because speakers actually conceptualise and categorise spatial experience differently. In this respect, just as Tyler and Evans (2003) illustrate how locative expressions build general semantic networks originating from concrete, abstract, and metaphorical meaning, but extending beyond true spatial configurations. Newer research on the acquisition of African languages has also shown that spatial conceptualisation and its grammatical encoding are overlaid beginning in infancy, with children acquiring language-specific patterns of spatial expression through experience with their

linguistic environment (Hellwig, Kidd, & Sagna, 2026). In sum, these studies demonstrate that locative marking is neither purely grammatical nor entirely conceptual; rather, it may be seen in the context of sociocultural systems of conceptual organisation.

Similar conclusions have been reached in typological investigations. As Haspel-math (2010) has pointed out, meaningful cross-linguistic comparison requires looking not at formal equivalence but rather at similar grammatical functions, since the same meaning is often expressed using different structural means in different languages. In the same vein, Ameka and Levinson (2007) show that the surfaces of locative predicates and spatial constructions differ greatly across languages, so that one-to-one comparisons of grammatical forms are methodologically weak. This is particularly pertinent when making comparisons between languages from typologically distant language families.

The goal of comparative linguistic analysis is thus not to look for one-to-one correspondences between specific grammatical forms but rather to examine how different languages accomplish similar communicative purposes. Locative marking can be a perfect example; languages may express the same spatial relations using very different grammatical devices. As a result, contrastive studies grounded solely on lexical similarity run the risk of missing relevant structural differences in linguistic configuration that govern the structuring of grammatical meaning.

This theoretical perspective lays the conceptual groundwork for the current study. Instead of contrasting individual cases, I examine how locative marking is realised in three different grammatical systems: Ibinda, Portuguese, and English. Such an approach creates a basis for cross-language contrast and, because similarities and differences can be discussed in terms of grammatical organisation rather than lexical form (the concern of much contrastive analysis), it lends itself to cross-linguistic data.

2.2. Locative Marking in Bantu Languages

The Bantu languages are one of the largest and best-studied language families in Africa, comprising several hundred languages spread across Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa (Van de Velde et al., 2019). Bantu languages share several structural characteristics, which differentiate them from many Indo-European languages, although the family is quite diverse linguistically. These include noun class systems, elaborate nominal morphology, extensive methods of agreement, and complex relations between morphology and syntax (Creissels et al., 2019). The shared typological characteristics provide the general framework in which to gain a better understanding of the grammatical organisation of locative marking across individual Bantu languages.

Locatives are widely perceived, relative to the Bantu linguistic tradition, as grammatical phenomena outside of independent adpositions. The grammatical resources used can be noun class morphology, locative noun classes, nominal prefixes, agreement systems, and/or verbal morphology (Zeller & Ngoboka, 2018;

Van de Velde et al., 2019). Thus, the semantics of locative relations is ultimately determined by the coordination between two or more grammatical devices rather than any single lexical item.

Typological research has also shown that languages from the same family may instantiate similar spatial relations through different structural strategies. Rather than being universally formal, locative constructions are shown to permit extensive intersystemic diversity (Ameka & Levinson 2007), whereby target and source languages manifest drastically differing grammatical transpositions. In the same vein, Haspelmath (2010) suggests that meaningful comparisons must target grammatical functions and semantic relations rather than one-to-one matching of individual forms. These observations pertain to what is, in my experience at least, the most salient issue for comparative work on Bantu: the organisation of grammar often differs from that posited for their distant Indo-European cousins while still communicating equivalent content.

The centrality of nominal morphology is one of the key properties of Bantu grammatical systems. Noun classes are systematic grammatical categories that classify a subset of lexical items according to certain phonological, morphological, or semantic criteria, typically controlling agreement patterns and some aspects of the interpretation of grammatical relations (Creissels et al., 2019). Nominal prefixes likewise perform grammatical roles beyond those of lexical identification, being involved also in the organization of morpho-syntactic structure and grammatical cohesiveness. As a result, in many cases, spatial relations in Bantu languages are analyzed not by way of independent prepositional inventories but rather as elements of larger grammatical systems. A central role played by noun class systems and agreement patterns in the grammatical organisation of spatial relations across the Bantu family was recently reaffirmed by comprehensive scholarship on the topic (Marten, Hurst-Harosh, Kula, & Zeller, 2025). Moreover, recent studies have shown that the native status of animacy interacts with noun class membership in key aspects of the grammatical encoding of spatial relations in Bantu languages (Halpert & Hammerly, 2026).

Similarly, post-2000 work in Bantu linguistics shows the importance of not interpreting individual languages purely through family-wide generalisations. While similar in crucial structural features, Bantu languages remain individually diverse in their phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics (Van de Velde et al., 2019). More recent research has expanded the complexity of Bantu morpho-syntactic systems, including both subject-object asymmetries in focus marking that interact with spatial and grammatical relations (Bassong et al., 2026), and also marked topicalization of different types of topicalized noun phrases in relation to other participants under certain discourse grammars (Mereu et al.). As such, detailed descriptive evidence for each language under investigation is preferable to assumptions based on typological similarity when it comes to reliable contrastive analysis.

This is especially critical for underrepresented languages like Ibinda. Typolog-

ical descriptions are indispensable but cannot replace thorough language-specific documentation. Thus, the next section is devoted to analysing Ibinda grammatically in its own linguistic and sociolinguistic context before contrasting it with Portuguese and English.

2.3. Ibinda in the Linguistic Context of Cabinda

So, Ibinda is a Bantu language spoken in the province of Cabinda, Angola, and thus situated in a multilingual linguistic ecology, continuing sustained contact between Portuguese and indigenous African languages (Chicuna, 2015: pp. 27, 32). In this sociolinguistic context, the Portuguese language occupies the official sphere of administration and education, as well as the institutional domain of communications (Chicuna, 2015: vol. 1, p. 37), while Ibinda continues to have a fundamental role in family life and community interaction, oral tradition, and cultural identity (Chicuna, 2015: p. 40). Both of these languages have coexisted for many centuries, which provides good opportunities for continuous language contact and grammatical interaction over time (Chicuna, 2015: pp. 110-112).

Grammatical Description: A Brief Overview Being exposed to the various linguistic features that are typical for Bantu languages and at the same time much more specific structures which show us some of their own characteristics, Chicuna (2015) writes a grammatical description in which its main structural aspect is shown through Ibinda exhibiting most likely one of the most significant aspects that make them still belong to the Bantu language and are associated with FYI. At the core of the language's grammatical structure is a very sophisticated nominal morphology, whereby nouns are organised in classes and marked by nominal prefixes that play an important role in controlling agreement relations and shaping morphosyntactic organisation (Chicuna 2015: pp. 91, 106). These grammatical mechanisms span more than just classes of elements and form an integral part of the structural organisation, whereby grammatical meanings such as those encoding spatial relations manifest themselves.

Ibinda phonological organisation is very different from that of Portuguese and English (Chicuna, 2015: p. 89). Such structural differences become even more prominent in the context of language contact. Lexical items from Portuguese that enter into Ibinda experience systematic phonological adaptation (p. 97), morphological restructuring (pp. 91, 164), and grammatical integration in the linguistic system of Ibinda (pp. 112, 171). According to Chicuna (2015: p. 115), this process is called *quiombisation*, and he emphasizes that it is structural rather than just an additive lexical borrowing, meaning a feature of the language system itself in which foreign lexemes are adapted structurally according to regular patterns in the receiving linguistic environment. The study of relevant Portuguese, but also non-Portuguese, loanwords illustrates that the processes behind this kind of lexical integration are governed by identifiable phonological, morphological, and grammatical parameters (pp. 159, 165, 179, 187).

Alongside this grammatical description, Mazunga's (2015) Portuguese-Ibinda

dictionary contains one of the few published lexicographic descriptions of the language. Besides lexical equivalences between Portuguese and Ibinda, the dictionary records spelling conventions, pronunciation instructions, nominal prefixes, and rules for standardisation of written Ibinda (Mazunga 2015: pp. 196, 203). Thus, the dictionary is not only a usable bilingual tool but also an objective source of descriptive evidence that can contribute to (and provide examples for) grammatical attempts such as those in Chicuna (2015).

Collectively, these two works represent the most extensive linguistic documentation of Ibinda to date. You are rooted in the data until October 2023: Chicuna (2015) lays out the grammatical and descriptive basis needed to understand the language's structural organisation, while Mazunga (2015) provides detailed lexicographical evidence about its written manner and lexical system. Used together, they allow the present study to explore locative marking in terms of attested linguistic evidence rather than general typological properties, yielding a stronger empirical basis for comparisons between Portuguese and English.

2.4. Portuguese and English as Reference Systems for Contrastive Analysis

The present study chose Portuguese and English as comparative languages because they are additionally the best-documented examples of Indo-European systems with locative marking mainly realized by independent prepositions. The broad grammatical descriptions found in the literature form an excellent springboard for comparison with the language-specific characteristics of Ibinda, so that what is uncommon to all languages can be viewed from a wider cross-linguistic perspective.

Despite the close theoretical relationship between Portuguese and English as Afro-Asiatic languages, their systems of locative marking differ analogously on certain crucial parameters. Portuguese depends on a small nucleus of efficient prepositional tools, especially *em*, *a*, *para*, *de*, and *por* (Cunha & Cintra, 2014), whose interpretation is strongly context-sensitive, depending mainly on the grammatical and communicative situation. As a result, single prepositions are capable of expressing many meanings related to place, time, or abstract structures, forcing speakers to use the surrounding context in determining how they should be understood.

Similarly, English uses prepositions as the primary means of coding spatial relations. As opposed to Portuguese, though, I think English encodes many more spatial configurations linguistically by means of specific forms: *in*, *on*, *at*, *into*, *onto*, *from*, *through*, and *across* (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Tyler & Evans, 2003). Linguists characterize the distinctions as semantic contrasts of containment, surface contact, point location, movement, direction, and path, made explicit by grammar in the English system.

Notwithstanding these cross-linguistic differences, both Portuguese and English possess a key typological characteristic: locative marking is realized mainly by means of independent prepositions (as opposed to the morphosyntactic systems

available in many Bantu languages; Van de Velde et al., 2019; Creissels et al., 2019). This shared characteristic renders them fitting reference systems for comparison purposes with Ibinda, as the grammatical organization of Ibinda is consistently typological to these languages.

The goal of the current study is thus not to make direct lexical equivalence between Portuguese, English, and Ibinda. Rather, it aims at a comparison of each language: how it encodes analogous spatial relations through its own grammatical resources. Such a functional view coheres with contrastive linguistic perspectives based around grammatical organisation rather than formal similarity (Haspel-math, 2010). The analysis thus inspires a richer picture of the cross-linguistic variation in locative marking by studying it as an aspect of grammatical systems rather than isolated items in the lexicon.

Similarly, this comparison serves as a theoretical foundation for investigating the potential role of language contact in grammatical variation in Cabinda. Such potential for structural adaptation and grammatical innovation may reinforce similar spatial relations as achieved through different grammatical means across the three languages during prolonged multilingual interaction. The following section investigates the relative strength of this interpretation in the existing literature.

2.5. Language Contact, Underrepresented Language, and the Research Gap

Before describing this theory and research on it, the first sentence will outline how language contact has been an observable source of structural change since the 1970s. For instance, in multilingual societies, the extent and duration of contact between linguistic communities may induce phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and discourse grammatical innovations that result from processes of lexical borrowing or structural adaptation (Thomason, 2001). These changes have particular salience in the multilingual contexts of Africa, where the two language systems (so-called Bantu languages and European-inspired Romance languages) have been cohabiting for centuries.

Cabinda is one example of these multilingual contexts. While Portuguese serves as the official language for administration, education, and the broader institutional domain, Ibinda is still used actively in family and community discussions and cultural expressions (Chicuna, 2015: pp. 37-40). Over the years, these two languages have coexisted sustainably through a long-term evolutionary process of multidirectional interaction, resulting in an apparently stable multilingual linguistic ecology with permanent contact between Portuguese and Ibinda (Chicuna, 2015). This sociolinguistic context offers an ideal framework to study locative marking from both typological and contact-linguistic perspectives.

Long-term contact between languages in African multilingual contexts is known to have causal contributions to the emergence of new grammatical patterns

and semantic extensions (Corum, 2015; Mous, 2019). The evidence from these studies confirms that contact situations offer more favourable conditions for structural accommodation and grammatical innovation, especially where languages belonging to different families are in prolonged proximity. Recent literature has also extended insular studies of substrate influence in multilingual settings to a wider variety of language contact phenomena, including particular lexical semantics examples, such as those involving spatial expressions (Bahri, 2025). An added dimension to studies of small-scale multilingualism is the need to examine how languages in contact shape, and are shaped by, their social, communicative environments (Lüpke, 2025)—using data comparable between disparate linguistic contexts. Almost as recently, this debate has been reopened by Gülde-mann (2025), who has looked at certain language contact phenomena from a historical and comparative perspective that bear directly on the theoretical frameworks available for analysing contact-induced change. Yet, there have not been many studies on these issues based on the linguistic data from Cabinda, despite the relevant local descriptive and lexicographical scholarship.

This demonstrates a crucial shortcoming of existing research. The limitation is not the lack of transcriptural data on Ibinda but rather the limited integration of that documentation into internationally indexed studies. While Chicuna (2015) offers an extensive grammatical description of the language and Mazunga (2015) provides documentation of its orthographic and lexical organisation, little has been done to incorporate these works into the breadth of research on Contrastive Linguistics, Bantu Linguistics, Language Contact, or African multilingualism. Overall, there is a wealth of primary descriptive evidence collected on Ibinda, but it continues to be underrepresented in international comparative research.

This paper fills this void by centering the analysis around locally produced linguistic scholarship. Instead of relying solely on general typological accounts of Bantu languages, it integrates the grammatical evidence given in Chicuna (2015) with the lexicographical documentation presented by Mazunga (2015), and routes all this into internationally recognised theoretical constructs from Contrastive Linguistics, Cognitive Semantics, Bantu Linguistics and Language Contact. The benefit of this is that it allows for the analysis of these forms as Ibinda-specific linguistic features, but can also situate such features within broader morphological discussions of locative marking across typologically distant languages.

The understanding of locative marking in Ibinda, Portuguese, and English that emerges from the present study is strengthened by combining theoretical aspects found in the literature about international linguistic sub-disciplines with detailed descriptive evidence generated in Cabinda. More generally, it shows that locally developed linguistic research represents a critical empirical foundation for enabling international work on many understudied languages of Africa, as well as comparative studies of grammatical systems across diverse language families.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study provides a qualitative, literature-based contrastive research design to analyze locative marking in three languages: Ibinda, Portuguese, and English. Instead of gathering raw linguistic data via fieldwork, corpus compilation, or experimental methods, the research examines and compares published linguistic descriptions, theoretical studies, and lexicographically oriented resources in a systematic fashion. In this sense, it is precisely here that the methodology is correct: we cannot state more primal than valid and evidence-based close examination of how three divergent typological languages encode comparable space relation through differing grammatical systems.

The framework of the study lies in Contrastive Linguistics, which aims to find the similarities and dissimilarities between languages through a systematic comparison of their grammatical structures. Furthermore, I turn to perspectives from Bantu Linguistics, Cognitive Semantics, Linguistic Typology, and Language Contact to contextualize the linguistic evidence theoretically.

In contrast to previous contrastive approaches, which are typically much narrower in scope and concentrate on lexical equivalence or possibly a single grammatical form(s), the current study investigates locative marking as a wider grammatical domain. Therefore, there is a special focus on the interplay of nominal morphology, noun classes, nominal prefixes, morphosyntactic organization, and prepositional systems where these are involved in encoding spatial relations. This perspective allows comparison at the level of grammatical organization rather than simple formal correspondence.

It is a descriptive and comparative study. It does not attempt to make causal claims between the languages being studied. Rather, it reviews and synthesizes the existing linguistic literature to determine patterns of recurrence, structural parallels, grammatical divergences, and whether contact linguistics can provide a viable explanatory model for variation involving locative marking within the multilingual setting of Cabinda.

As Ibinda remains comparatively underrepresented in international linguistic research, this makes the current study especially suitable for this research design. Nature of study: The research systematically compares locally generated descriptive and lexicological scholarship with internationally acknowledged theoretical literature and thus contributes both to Contrastive Linguistics and the international documentation of an underrepresented African language.

3.2. Data Sources

The analysis was only based on secondary sources that were chosen to establish the theoretical and empirical grounds for a contrastive approach between locative marking in Ibinda, Portuguese, and English. The literature review was structured using two mutually reinforcing categories: internationally published theoretical works and locally produced descriptive and lexicographical literature.

Literature Search Procedure:

Method A systematic search of the literature was performed in Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and the Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA) database from January to March 2026. The search used combinations of the following keywords and their variations: “locative marking,” “spatial relations,” “Bantu languages;” Ibinda, Kiyombe, Portuguese locatives, English prepositions; language contact; contrastive linguistics; multilingualism in Angola; and Cabinda linguistics. English, Portuguese, and French keywords were used in order to maximize coverage of both internationally indexed and locally produced scholarship. We also manually checked the reference lists of important publications to identify additional literature. This included peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly monographs, edited volumes, and reference grammars that offered in-depth grammatical descriptions for the targeted locative marking across the three languages. Ibinda-related scholarship produced in-country was included based on descriptive relevance, regardless of its international indexing rates because of the relative lack of the language in globally indexed databases.

Internationally Recognized Theoretical Publications:

The first class of books includes theoretical and descriptive works in Contrastive Linguistics, Cognitive Semantics, Linguistic Typology, Bantu linguistics, Language Contact, and the grammatical description of Portuguese and English. The overall domain that summarises the key theoretical elements of locative marking has been dealt with in these publications, comprising a grammatical category (localisation), typological hierarchy of spatial relations, and cross-linguistic comparability. Important references are [Strang et al. \(1982\)](#), [Levinson \(2003\)](#), [Tyler and Evans \(2003\)](#), [Haspelmath \(2010\)](#), [Ameka and Levinson \(2007\)](#), [Corum \(2015\)](#), [Mous \(2019\)](#), [Thomason \(2001\)](#), [Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman \(1999\)](#), [Cunha & Cintra \(2014\)](#), [Van de Velde et al. \(2019\)](#), [Creissels et al. \(2019\)](#), [Zeller and Ngoboka \(2018\)](#).

Descriptive and Lexicographical Scholarship Performed Locally:

The second group is the local linguistic scholarship originating in Cabinda, and it provides some core empirical data concerning Ibinda. The [\(2015\)](#) monograph by Chicuna represents the primary descriptive source for the language and describes its sociolinguistic context (pp. 27, 32, 37, 40), grammatical organisation (pp. 89-106), examples of language contact phenomena (pp. 110-115), and phonological, morphological, and syntactic integration of Portuguese loanwords into Kiyombe. These data form the empirical ground for analysing locative marking by building on the accounts of locational predicates in Ibinda.

Alongside this descriptive evidence, [Mazunga’s \(2015\)](#) Portuguese-Ibinda Dictionary documents lexicographic information to do with writing guidelines, pronunciation, nominal prefixes, lexical correspondences, and methodologies for the standardisation of written Ibinda (pp. 196, 203). Despite its primary purpose as a bilingual dictionary, this work is also an essential linguistic resource as it indeed records lexical forms and written conventions that enable the grammatical interpretation of the language.

Integration of Sources:

This fact illustrates the central methodological principle of the current study: an integrative approach combining theoretically recognised international literature with locally produced descriptive and lexicographical sources. The analysis does not depend solely on generalized typological descriptions of Bantu languages, but rather is based on language-specific evidence from Cabinda, which, in turn, is interpreted within internationally established theoretical frameworks. This integration offers a strong and solid empirical and conceptual basis for the contrastive analysis performed in the present study.

3.3. Data Selection Criteria

Four key criteria were used in the selection of literature to ensure that the sources selected for analysis are relevant, reliable, and comparable.

First, publications had to engage in at least one of three aspects central to the theoretical agenda of this study: locative marking, Contrastive Linguistics, Bantu Linguistics, Cognitive Semantics, Linguistic Typology, and Language Contact. This criterion guaranteed that the theoretical framework was developed through internationally recognised academia directly linked to the objectives of this study.

Second, preference was given to publications containing detailed grammatical descriptions rather than purely theoretical explorations. Given that the aim of the investigation was to compare the grammatical domain of locative marking across these three languages, works that described phonology, morphology, syntax, nominal systems, and spatial constructions were regarded as most germane.

Third, we felt it best to give priority to peer-reviewed books/monographs/edited volumes and important reference grammars that have established themselves in their area. We chose foundational works based on their ongoing influence in research areas dealing with spatial language, cognitive semantics, contrastive linguistics, Bantu grammar, and language contact.

Lastly, all published linguistic documentation of Ibinda was intended to be as accessible as possible. Domestic scholarship was perceived to be important to provide reliable empirical data because, outside the research on the language that is indexed internationally, there is only a limited range of existing research that deals with the international literature. This led to the decision to choose [Chicuna \(2015\)](#) and [Mazunga \(2015\)](#) as the main sources which describe the grammar and lexicon of Ibinda. It is indicative of the fact that the current study aims to place its language-specific evidence for Cabinda into a cross-linguistic typological framework rather than relying on generalised typological descriptions of Bantu languages.

These selection criteria helped ensure that the analysis was based on sources theoretically pertinent to locative marking across Ibinda and both contact languages, Portuguese and English.

3.4. Analysis Framework and Comparative Dimensions

This analysis is carried out within the Contrastive Linguistics framework, from a

functional-typological standpoint, and contrasts locative marking in Ibinda with Portuguese and English. Instead of considering movement verbs in isolation, the paper explores the grammatical architecture through which similar spatial relations are expressed across the three languages.

This analytical framework draws on some methodological perspectives of Contrastive Linguistics, Cognitive Semantics, Bantu Linguistics, and general literature on linguistic typology and language contact. By combining both methodologies, we provide a thorough basis for the analysis of locative marking from the ground and in the context of multilingualism. The grammatical form, semantic function, and typological organisation are hence analysed as three interdependent facets of a comparativist analysis.

Distinction between Attested Description and Typological Inference:

The data analyzed is systematically kept separate into direct attestations in the Ibinda sources and claims which come from Bantu typology. Any claims labeled “attested in [Chicuna \(2015\)](#)” or “documented by [Mazunga \(2015\)](#)” derive directly from descriptive details seen among the Ibinda material. While typological generalizations ([Van de Velde et al., 2019](#); [Creissels et al., 2019](#)) support claims of being consistent with broader Bantu patterns, they do not constitute evidence for Ibinda per se. This distinction allows the analysis to remain anchored to evidence within any given language but to take advantage of the interpretive framework provided by comparative Bantu scholarship.

Comparative Categories:

We structured the analysis around five major analytical dimensions that are closely related to the source of visions focused on typology ([Levinson, 2003](#); [Haspelmath, 2010](#)), while also positioning these dimensions so as to allow for systematic comparison across the three languages.

- a) Static Location:** An encoding that indicates the location of an entity.
- b) Target:** a representation of movement toward position.
- c) Sink:** encoding moving ahead of location.
- d) Path/trajectory:** encoding movement along or through a location.
- e) Containment/surface contact:** encoding internal vs. external relations.

These categories offer you a stable terrain for analyzing how identical spatial relations are encoded in one language with the grammatical resources of that language.

Analytical Dimensions:

The analysis was structured around four complementary analytical dimensions that correspond to the research questions presented in the introduction.

The first dimension explored what was known about locative marking in Ibinda from a grammatical standpoint, focusing specifically on the nominal morphology (noun classes, nominal prefixes) and morphosyntactic structures described in the linguistic literature available.

In the second dimension, Portuguese and English independently use prepositions as major devices to lexicalise spatial relations,¹ which made it possible to identify similarities and differences between two Indo-European languages.

In the third dimension, the three languages have compared their equivalent spatial relations with different mechanisms of grammar. We grouped the comparison into these five spatial categories: static location, goal, source, path, and containment/surface contact. Rather, the goal was to find correspondences in grammatical organisation and semantic interpretation (and typological structure), not one-to-one cognates of lexemes.

The fourth dimension examined whether existing literature supports language contact as a plausible explanatory framework for understanding the structural variation in relation to locative marking within the multilingual profile of Cabinda. We paid special attention to evidence of phonological, morphological, grammatical, and lexical adaptation reported in the descriptive literature on Ibinda.

So these four analytical dimensions mirror the research questions introduced in the Introduction and form the structure of the Findings & Discussion section. Thus, this alignment maintains methodological consistency through the link between the goals of the study, analytical methods, and interpretation of results.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

This analysis followed a four-stage systematic qualitative procedure. In this way, both theoretical consistency and language-specific descriptive evidence informed the comparisons of locative marking across Ibinda, Portuguese, and English at each stage.

Stage one comprised an extensive survey of the theoretical literature with regard to locative marking, as well as Contrastive Linguistics, Cognitive Semantics, Linguistic Typology, Bantu Linguistics, and Language Contact. This stage established the conceptual framework pursuant to which this study would be executed and identified both of the leading analytical concepts shaping its comparison.

The second phase involved a systematic review of the available descriptive and lexicographical data on Ibinda. Chicuna (2015) treated graphically, among other aspects, the sociolinguistic context of Cabinda and the description of nominal morphology, the noun-class system or paradigm, nominal prefixes, phonological configuration, and the structure-integration of Portuguese loanwords in Cabinda. In addition, lexicographical information recorded by Mazunga (2015), including orthographic conventions, pronunciation, lexical correspondences, and principles for the standardisation of written Ibinda, was also explored and incorporated into the grammatical description of the language.

In the third phase, a comparison of the linguistic evidence sourced from Ibinda with established grammatical descriptions of Portuguese and English was made. Instead of comparing individual isolated lexical items or, even less sensibly, individual prepositions, the approach had each language compared with its own grammatical system for organizing locative marking. This involved unprecedented attention to the search for similarities and differences in grammatical organisation, semantic interpretation, and typological structure. The comparison

was systematically structured in the order of the five categories we identified earlier in § 3.4: static location, goal, source, path, and containment/surface contact.

Stage four was where the results were interpreted within the integrated theoretical framework that this study utilized. The comparative evidence was examined from the perspectives of Contrastive Linguistics, Bantu Linguistics, Cognitive Semantics, Linguistic Typology, and Language Contact in determining how far the literature can answer the research questions and shed light on more universal concepts of locative marking across these three languages.

The functional comparison rather than formal equivalence was emphasized during the analytical process. As a result, it aimed to analyze the realization of equivalent spatial relations by different grammatical systems rather than matching Ibinda lexically with Portuguese and English. This process safeguarded that the interpretation was compatible with the aims related to typology and contrast in this study.

3.6. Methodological Limitations

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged in the analysis of findings in the present study.

The analysis is grounded entirely on published literature (and thus excludes primary or linguistic data gathered through fieldwork, corpus compilation, elicitation tasks, interviews, or other experimental procedures). As a result, the research should be interpreted as a literature-based contrastive component and not as an empirical analysis of use by actual speakers of Ibinda or by modern sources in Portuguese and English.

Second, the descriptive evidence related to Ibinda is relatively scant compared to the wealth of grammatical documentation available on Portuguese and English. While the descriptions by [Chicuna \(2015\)](#) and [Mazunga \(2015\)](#) remain among the most complete to date, future studies aimed at further descriptive work, larger corpora, or field-based research on this language will greatly complement the analysis presented here.

Third, due to the reliance on secondary sources, this study does not aim to show evidential links between the Ibinda grammatical structures and innovative locative marking patterns in Portuguese spoken by Cabindense speakers. The existing literature is, instead, reviewed to assess whether language contact represents a theoretically plausible explanatory framework. Proving direct contact-induced influence would require converging evidence from different domains: corpus studies, comparative grammatical studies, and field study of native speakers.

Fourth, the analysis investigates Portuguese as a linguistic system overall, following standard grammatical descriptions ([Cunha & Cintra, 2014](#)). The analysis of the variety spoken in Cabinda is not available either, given that there are no published linguistic descriptions of Cabindan Portuguese locative marking. Thus, it is this very foundational claim about language contact that could only be assessed as to whether the given descriptive evidence allows for a theoretically plau-

sible account without demonstrating any actual contact-induced change within a Portuguese variety.

Nevertheless, the methodological approach undertaken in this study has significant advantages. This paper presents the rationale, organization, and contents of a comparative study that brings together internationally accepted theoretical literature with empirical descriptive and lexicographical work carried out in Cabinda to arrive at a linguistically based, systematic comparison of marking locative relations in Ibinda, Portuguese, and English. It also shows that locally produced language documentation serves as an important empirical source of evidence for internationally relevant research on under-resourced African languages.

Consequently, the above-discussed limitations should be considered as openings for follow-up research instead of weaknesses of the actual investigation. They point to the necessity of further descriptive, corpus-based, and fieldwork-oriented research that can widen the empirical foundation established by the current literature while also contributing to a broader view of locative marking at the nexus of language contact and grammatical variation in Cabinda.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Locative Marking in Ibinda: A Distinct Grammatical System

This literature analysis shows us that the locative marking of Ibinda is structured according to a grammar system that can be fundamentally different from Portuguese and English. Ibinda is not reliant on the use of independent prepositions for expressing spatial relations, as stated in Chicuna (2015: pp. 89-106), and thus I find this aspect closer to nominal morphology, noun classes, nominal prefixes, and agreement that steers the morphosyntactic organisation within these languages.

An important distinguishing feature of Ibinda is the centrality of nominal morphology in grammatical organisation. As mentioned in Chicuna (2015: p. 91), nominal morphology is a sub-stratum of the grammatical structure of a language, and noun classes arrange lexical items into systematic grammatical categories which govern agreement relations and participate in sentence structure (p. 106). So do nominal prefixes, which go beyond lexical designation as points of incompatibility but act as grammatical manifestations active in the organisation of morphosyntactic structure. The observations we present here thus suggest that locative marking should also be interpreted within the overall architectural framework of the grammar of a language, rather than through analysis of isolated vocabulary items.

Concrete Ibinda Locative Constructions:

While there is no discrete chapter on locative marking in Chicuna (2015), the broader grammatical description does contain a number of examples concerning how spatial relations are encoded through nominal morphology. Locative interpretation, for example, is often related to particular noun class prefixes. The prefix *ku-* (class 17) is often used in terms of general location and direction, for example

ku-mbanza (in/to the village), while the prefix mu- (class 18) is related to internal location, e.g. mu-ntima (in the heart/inside). In the case of mbazi yandi yi-ku-mbanza (his house is in the village), these nominal prefixes interact with agreement markers on verbs and modifiers, so that the locative interpretation of ku-mbanza is established not by an independent preposition but through such agreement patterns. In the same vein, Mazunga (2015) describes how certain lexical items with locative nominal prefixes encode spatial meaning via a morphologically integrated noun as opposed to relying on independent adpositional components. The pattern of matrix spatial meaning encoded in nominal morphology rather than independent adpositions is similar to other African languages. By way of illustration, Sani and Siuto (2026) present comparable locative verbal extensions in Fulfude, whereby spatio-diverse relations such as location, direction, and source are encoded by means of verbal morphology (not independent prepositions), with some involvement of noun class agreement. Such cross-linguistic parallels confirm the typological specificity of Bantu and closely related African languages with respect to their grammatical treatment of spatial relations. These examples show that locative expression in Ibinda is tightly interconnected with nominal classification and agreement systems, a stark contrast to the preposition-based strategies used by Portuguese and Enga (and many languages of the world).

This is further supported by the fact that the phonological structure of Ibinda displays significant differences from Portuguese and English (Chicuna, 2015: p. 89). These structural differences impede their full potential when Portuguese lexical items find themselves in a contact situation with Ibinda and are thus the object of systematic phonological adaptation (p. 97), morphological restructuring (pp. 91, 164), and grammatical integration (pp. Regular structural accommodation is linked with this process, which Chicuna (2015: [15] p. 115) refers to as quiom-bisation, a consistent feature of lexical borrowing rather than the mere transfer of vocabulary. Portuguese loanwords are similarly classifiable in terms of known patterns of phonological, morphological, and grammatical integration (p. 159; p. 165; p. 179; pp. 187).

The data reinforce the view that the locative in Ibinda cannot be sufficiently interpreted by direct comparison with the free prepositions in Portuguese or English. Rather, the metaphorical accounts suggest that spatial relations manifest through grammatical mechanisms functioning within wider morphosyntactic systems. Therefore, while lexical equivalence might lend comparisons in the language a certain degree of comprehensibility, comparing between languages along strictly lexical lines is likely to obscure some important partial mitigations.

Distinction between Attested Description and Typological Inference:

Such behaviours are in line with wider typological sketches of Bantu addressing the notion that they typically have grammatical functions dispersed through morphology and syntax, rather than concentrated within separate adpositional systems (Van de Velde et al., 2019; Creissels et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it must be stressed that such typological consistency does not supersede the requirement of

language-specific evidence. The descriptions of King [Chicuna \(2015\)](#) show us that Ibinda must not be read simply as a representation of the Bantu language family. Instead, it has language-specific grammatical features that need to be analysed on the basis of direct descriptive data and not abstract typological generalisations.

The first research question aimed to find out how locative marking shows up in the descriptions of Ibinda that I have at hand and their differences with Portuguese and English. The data reviewed in this paper suggest that locative marking in Ibinda should be interpreted as part of a systemic grammatical system distinct from those principally predicated on the use of prepositions found in the two Indo-European languages. This observation bolsters the basis of the cross-linguistic comparison presented in the following section.

4.2. Cross-Linguistic Comparison of Locative Marking

The contrastive analysis unmitigatedly shows that Ibinda, Portuguese, and English express similar spatial relations with radically different grammatical systems. The three languages allow speakers to convey meaning related to location, direction, movement, source, destination, containment, and path, but they differ significantly in the grammatical means through which these meanings are realised. Thus, the comparison shows that only semantic similarity between languages is observed, while grammatical realisation varies depending on the structural organisation of every language.

Both Portuguese and English are preposition-based systems for locative marking. In Portuguese, spatial relations are predominantly expressed using a relatively small set of very productive prepositions (such as *em*, *a*, *para*, *de*, and *por*), interpreted largely through grammatical and communicative context ([Cunha & Cintra 2014](#)). Consequently, individual prepositions are often polysemous or may serve several locative, directional, temporal, and abstract functions. English, on the other hand, mainly uses free prepositions; but its locative system normally distinguishes far more spatial configurations with such special forms as *in*, *on*, *at*, *into*, *onto*, *through*, *across*, and *from* ([Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999](#); [Tyler & Evans, 2003](#)). These forms are coded with increasingly particular differences regarding containment, surface contact, point location, movement, and trajectory.

On the other hand, there is considerable descriptive evidence that Ibinda relates locative marking to a larger morphosyntactic system. Instead of relying primarily on independent prepositions, the language incorporates expressions of spatial relationships more with nominal morphology (e.g., noun classes and nominal prefixes) and grammatical agreement ([Chicuna, 2015](#): pp. 91-106). This results in the grammatical encoding of spatial meaning being spread out over interacting components of the language, not residing solely in a distinct class of lexical items.

Each of the following subsections examines how each language encodes specific spatial categories.

4.2.1. Static Location

For English, static location is represented with the prepositions *in/location*,

on/surface, and at/point, where containment (in) versus contact with a surface occurs (on), or point location (at). For example, in other locations, Portuguese uses *em* for across-the-board static location, but the interpretation can be containment or floor touch according to nominal semantics. For example, in Ibinda (as described in [Chicuna \(2015\)](#)), static location is indicated by locative noun classes and nominal prefixes, where the prefix for general location is *ku-* and *mu-* for internal location. In the absence of an independent system of prepositions, static location is encoded by nominal morphology (as opposed to a separate grammatical category).

4.2.2. Goal and Source

In English, there are many ways that goal and source relations can be encoded: directional prepositions (into, onto, to, and from). Portuguese uses *a* or *para* to distinguish goal, while focusing on source through *de*. In Ibinda, the descriptive evidence indicates location- and movement-related meanings are related to locative noun classes in combination with verbal morphology and agreement patterns, where the prefix *ku-* has been identified as both a locator of space ([Chicuna 2015: p. 107](#)).

4.2.3. Containment and Surface Contact

Grammatically, the difference between containment and contact with a surface is well-encoded in English (in/on), but less clearly so in Portuguese (*em* encompasses both). This distinction is likely encoded in Ibinda using locative noun class prefixes (*mu-* indicating internal location vs *ku-* indicating general location), as exemplified by [Chicuna \(2015\)](#). This implies that containment is actually coded in nominal morphology rather than within a distinct system of prepositions.

The key difference between semantic equivalence and grammatical realisation that this comparison reinforces => This means that equivalent spatial concepts do not have to equate with the same grammatical structures. Different languages may encode identical communicative meanings using completely different grammatical resources. The goal of meaningful cross-linguistic comparison, therefore, should be at the level of grammatical functions rather than mere formal equivalence ([Haspelmath 2010](#)). In like manner, [Ameka & Levinson \(2007\)](#) show that the same spatial relations can receive very diverse locative constructions across languages.

It also shows that the typological differences need not be thought of as communicative weaknesses. Rather, each language offers a whole, internally coherent grammatical system for representing space. While Portuguese and English are predominantly prepositional languages, Ibinda relies on grammatical mechanisms typical of Bantu languages but also language-specific structural properties as documented in [Chicuna \(2015\)](#). As a result, comparisons based solely on single prepositions would miss the wider grammatical organization within which spatial meaning is interpreted.

The second research question aimed at examining the structural/semantic sim-

ilarities and differences that characterize locative marking in Ibinda, Portuguese, and English. The results show that the three languages are largely similar with respect to semantic domains but differ greatly in grammatical organisation. This result is in line with the claim that contrastive linguistic analysis should focus on grammatical architecture and communicative function rather than one-to-one lexical correspondence. It provides the conceptual ground from which to investigate if extensive multilingual contact in Cabinda can plausibly account for layered variation with respect to locative marking, a question we pursue in the next section.

4.3. Language Contact as a Plausible Explanatory Framework

The other research question tested whether the type of structural variation triggered by locative marking in a multilingual context like Cabinda can be confirmed by occurrence in existing literature that supports language contact as a possible explanation. To clarify, as there are no descriptions of locative marking in Cabindan Portuguese situated in the published literature, it is not our aim to examine Cabindan Portuguese as a linguistic variety separate from other varieties of Portuguese. Instead, the study investigates whether this attested bilingualism between Portuguese and Ibinda, combined with evidence of grammatical interaction, presents a plausible theoretical environment for contact-induced influence.

The results show that, while the evidence does not establish direct causal relationships between Ibinda and Portuguese, they strongly argue in favor of interpreting language contact as an adequate conceptual model for grammatical interaction in the area.

Cabinda is a traditionally multilingual setting where Portuguese and Ibinda have been spoken alongside each other for generations. Officially, Portuguese serves as the language of administration, education, and institutional communication, while Ibinda remains relevant for family interaction within the home, community life, and cultural identity (Chicuna 2015: pp. 37, 40). It offers a long-term bilingual context that promotes ongoing language contact; thus, linguistic structural influence across languages may theoretically take place (Chicuna, 2015: pp. 110-112).

Studies of language contact in multilingual African contexts have shown that extensive media(ted) bilingual exposure to genetically unrelated languages can increase grammatical restructuring, semantic expansion, and the introduction of new linguistic types (Corum, 2015; Mous, 2019). Related works have further documented similar patterns of structural accommodation and grammatical integration (cf. Bustamante 2021, categorising these as structural borrowings across a variety of African settings). Bahri (2025) shows how very specific lexical substrate influence can maintain itself in contact situations, even in semantic domains like spatial expressions. Towards this end, Lüpke (2025) also points out that small-scale multilingualism provides environmental conditions for structural approximation and grammatical innovation, which may balance invisibly fine169 but

continuously in large, one maximum high standardized language context. [Güldemann \(2025\)](#) also addresses this by embracing a historical-comparative approach to language contact, and she provides comparison evidence across various African language families as to how contact-induced change operates. This underscores that multilingualism is associated with conducive environments for structural accommodation, while noting that language-specific empirical investigation of individual cases is needed.

The descriptive evidence discussed in this study supports analyzing variables from the perspective of language contact. Refer to [Chicuna \(2015: p. 97\)](#) for the systematic phonological adjustment of Portuguese lexical items incorporated into Ibinda; morphologically restructuring them (pp. 91, 164); grammaticalizing them (pp. Additionally, rather than sporadic one-off examples of lexical borrowing (pp. 159, 165, 179, 187), Portuguese loanwords illustrate systematic structural patterns of integration. These observations suggest that Portuguese and Ibinda interfacing cannot be limited to the lexicon but must also encompass deeper processes of grammatical accommodation.

However, the literature does not offer any clear empirical support for a claim that certain locative constructions in Cabindan Portuguese are directly rooted in Ibinda grammatical structure. That would necessitate corpus-based studies, comparisons of authentic discourse ecology, and fieldwork with bilinguals. Thus, the current study does not make a causal claim. Instead, it comes to the conclusion that Cabinda's multilingual linguistic ecology offers a theoretically plausible setting in which contact-induced structural variation involving locative marking is likely to have developed.

Such an interpretation accords with [Thomason's \(2001\)](#) point of view that explanations accounting for the observed similarities due to language contact must be based on converging linguistic evidence rather than structural similarity per se. This study thus places language contact as a reasonable interpretive framework but acknowledges the need for further empirical work that can test the hypotheses arising from this literature.

The third research question asks how much the existing literature supports language contact as a possible account of structural variation involving locative marking in Cabinda. The collected evidence indicates that both the multilingual background of the region and, even more importantly, the observed grammatical interaction between Portuguese and Ibinda contribute to a strong theoretical foundation for such an interpretation. Simultaneously, the study acknowledges that any definitive conclusions concerning contact-induced grammatical change must come from more empirical evidence based on primary data.

4.4. Contributions to Contrastive Linguistics and Documentation of Underrepresented Languages

The fourth research question, which forms the basis for relating the present study to other fields of inquiry, is about the implications of this study for Contrastive

Linguistics, Bantu Linguistics, and international under-represented African languages documentation overall. The results imply that the study not only adds to our understanding of locative marking both cross-linguistically and within the previously unexplored area of three genetically diverse languages sensitive to inclusive/exclusive contexts, but also serves as a methodological model for incorporating local perspectives into international fieldwork in light of widespread oral institutions producing self-identifying linguistic practices.

To begin with, here is the first contribution that addresses Contrastive Linguistics. The analysis shows that cross-linguistic comparison, if it aims to elicit fundamental linguistic types, must be based on considerable differences in instances of grammatical organization rather than individual lexical equivalents. While Ibinda, Portuguese, and English express comparable spatial relations in their respective grammatical systems to encode similar information about the same state of affairs, this finding supports functional contrastive analyses which focus more on grammatical function and structural organisation than one-to-one formal equivalence (Haspelmath, 2010). This perspective offers a broader framework for comparing typologically disparate languages.

The second contribution relates to Bantu Linguistics. Thus, in contrast to how generalized descriptions of the Bantu family have interpreted Ibinda, this study illustrates the necessity of documenting grammar at a more local level. Chicuna's (2015) detailed descriptions lay out structural facets that are much too hidden for ËÑ's broad typological generalisations. For this reason, the research supports the conclusion that comprehensive descriptive grammars should be included in comparative linguistic studies of Bantu languages with limited descriptions (Van de Velde et al., 2019; Creissels et al., 2019). This is an approach in line with recent broad-ranging work on Bantu languages that highlights the need to reconcile typological generalisations with language-particular description (Marten et al., 2025). Recent work has also shown that fine-grained lexico-grammatical description at the level of individual Bantu languages is crucial for a complete picture of both family-wide patterns and language-internal change in the Bantu linguistic landscape (e.g., Halpert & Hammerly 2026; Bassong, Ossoko, & Rizzi 2026).

This work also adds to the scholarship on Language Contact. The multilingual linguistic ecology of Cabinda provides a theoretical dimension for modelling grammatical interaction between Portuguese and Ibinda, and this synthesis of descriptive evidence supports that position. At the same time, it also clearly separates descriptive evidence from explanation in terms of cause, thus acknowledging that hypotheses about contact-induced grammatical change have to be established as valid based on evidence provided by corpus and field work. This prudent parsing makes the study methodologically robust while also being in step with modern takes on language contact (Thomason, 2001; Mous, 2019).

Another palliative is being able to give linguistic research produced in Cabinda international visibility. Instead of using these descriptions as auxiliary references, the current study takes the grammatical description by Chicuna (2015) and the

lexicographical documentation written by Mazunga (2015) as centrepieces for analysis. This showcases that locally attuned scholarship can provide first-order evidence for internationally relevant linguistic questions. More generally, it stresses the scientific merit of including regional linguistic documentation in international discourse on grammatical typology, linguistic contact, and contrastive analysis.

Lastly, it adds to the growing contribution of under-researched African languages by showing how richly descriptive and lexicographical studies can be anchored into larger theoretical discussions. Although there is considerable documentation written in Cabinda, Ibinda has attracted relatively less interest from the wider community of linguists publishing in internationally indexed journals. In bringing this documentation into conversation with theoretical models that are cross-culturally recognized, the study builds on a solid empirical base for research on locative marking while promoting wider recognition of African linguistics in the global scholarly exchange.

The fourth research question aimed to explore the implications of this study for linguistic research at a general level. Above all, the results clarify that the main contribution of this research is not only to compare locative marking among Ibinda, Portuguese, and English, but also to show how systematic descriptive work carried out from within can contribute substantively to international work in Contrastive Linguistics, Bantu Linguistics, Language Contact, and underdescribed languages.

5. Conclusion

This study is a qualitative literature-based contrastive analysis of locative marking in Ibinda, Portuguese, and English. Grounded as it was in the necessary expertise of theoretical perspectives that enjoy international recognition, but combining this with descriptive and lexicographical scholarship generated in Cabinda itself, a third objective was to examine how three typologically distinct languages express spatial relations and make clear the relevance for international work on Contrastive Linguistics, Bantu Linguistics, and Language Contact of locally documented linguistic evidence.

These results show that the same spatial relations are expressed in similar ways despite a diverse array of grammatical systems matched to these languages. While Portuguese and English mainly use independent prepositions to convey locative meaning, the descriptive evidence available suggests that Ibinda organizes locative marking in a wider grammatical context, featuring nominal morphology, noun classes, nominal prefixes, and morphosyntactic organization (Chicuna, 2015: pp. 89-106). These observations corroborate our claim that more far-reaching and informative cross-linguistic comparison should be conducted through the lens of grammatical organization as opposed to isolated lexical forms.

This shows that the multilingual linguistic ecology of Cabinda constitutes a theory-congruent environment for analyzing structural interaction between Portu-

guese and Ibinda. The observed processes of phonological adjustment, morphological restructuring, grammatical integration, and lexical borrowing (Chicuna, 2015: p. 97; p. 112; p. 115; pp. 159-187) suggest that language contact operates on a structurally wider range than vocabulary and denotes significant accommodation effects between two languages in the areas derived from their differing features of being agglutinative versus inflectional morphology. However, because the current study is fully based on published literature and does not focus on a well-defined language contact situation of Cabindan Portuguese, there is no direct evidence for contact-induced grammatical change. It does not point to language contact as an established causal explanation that needs more empirical proof (Thomason, 2001; Mous, 2019).

The main contribution of this paper is to show how local scholarship has scientific value that can be used for international purposes. Rather than considering the works used in Chicuna (2015) and Mazunga (2015) as useful pointers, this research has considered them as fundamental diagrams of how to describe the grammatical and lexical organization of Ibinda. Not only does this method buttress the empirical side of the contrastive analysis, but it also exemplifies how regional linguistic documentation can play an essential role in larger conversations of grammatical typology, language contact, and under-represented African language documentation.

The study also suffers from methodological limitations. However, its findings are drawn solely from published linguistic literature and so it contains no evidence-based contributions that would have come through corpus analysis, fieldwork, elicitation tasks, or experimental work. Therefore, they should be seen as reading-based interpretations instead of clear examples for the existence of grammatical influence. Descriptive studies produced by contemporary scholarship should be complemented with corpus-based research, comparative grammatical analyses, and fieldwork with speech communities of both native Ibinda speakers as well as civil society in the bilingual regions of Cabinda. Certain empirical approaches to data collection hold great promise for broadening our understanding of spatial language acquisition and use in naturalistic settings, as recently illustrated for African language acquisition and multilingualism (Hellwig, Kidd, & Sagna, 2026; Lüpke, 2025). They also offer a template for further research into locative marking in Ibinda and other understudied African languages.

To conclude, the present study shows that Ibinda is an under-researched but valuable contrastive linguistic case. Based on internationally recognized theories, with ample grammatical and lexicographical evidence produced in Cabinda itself, the study not only provides a clear map of deviance from locative marking in Ibinda but also contributes to fulfilling the purported need for greater international recognition of African linguistics. This work will hopefully inspire the future role of Ibinda in the near future to see locally produced linguistic theory—Ibinda puts discourse in a context of contributive proximity—integrated into global discourses on language structure, multilingualism, and contact linguistics.

Practical Implications

The summary of comparative findings provides various pedagogical implications for the applied linguistics of Cabinda and similar multilingual contexts.

The aims of the study are twofold: 1) to pinpoint systematic differences in locative marking between Portuguese and Ibinda and use this information to adapt practical teaching materials for improved instruction of the Portuguese language in Cabinda. Second-language learners of Portuguese from an Ibinda background will apply strategies to encode morphology gained in their first language, and this evidence can inform the design of instructional interventions targeting prepositional behaviour in Portuguese. Thus, a pedagogical material could explicitly contrast the system of Portuguese, which is based on prepositions, with the noun class-based system of Ibinda and highlight the consequences this has for comprehension: spatial relations that are encoded in nominal morphology in their L1 need to be expressed by means of prepositions in Portuguese; similarly, such trials can help learners become sensitive to syntactic strategies that complicated clauses may use.

Second, since translation practice can manipulate explicit formal relations explicitly or implicitly, it points out that the three languages do not have directly equivalent locative systems. Translators between Ibinda (3) and the two target languages, Portuguese and English, must be aware that spatial relations expressed via nominal morphology in Ibinda require prepositional phrase coding in Portuguese and English, and vice versa. This awareness underpins more differentiated and context-sensitive translation decisions, especially in legal, administrative, or educational translation, where spatial fidelity is sacrosanct.

Third, the research highlights a continued need for descriptive work on Ibinda. This study has depended on previously published descriptions by [Chicuna \(2015\)](#) and [Mazunga \(2015\)](#), but more descriptive research studies, particularly those based directly on spatial semantics + locative constructions, would further complement our empirical basis for contrastive analyses both at the word level and the sentence level; develop pedagogical materials; as well as contribute to lexicographical documentation. More descriptive work in the future might also investigate whether or not Ibinda has innovated any new locative constructions under Portuguese influence, or if Portuguese as spoken in Cabinda contains any patterns of spatial expression that were semantically influenced by Ibinda.

Fourth, the results are relevant to language policy and educational planning in Cabinda. This reinforces arguments in favour of including Ibinda within educational curricula, both as a focus for scholarship and also as a medium of instruction, supported by evidence that Ibinda has full systematic grammatical expression of spatial relations. By analysing features which distinguish the structure of Ibinda from that of Portuguese, it is possible to design bilingual education programmes that advance effective learning outcomes in both these languages while still respecting their linguistic integrity.

Overall, these implications indicate that research on underrepresented lan-

guages can generate theoretical contributions and help in practice in education, translation, or language documentation. Bridging the gap between grammatical description and applied contexts, this study is undertaken under the premise of highlighting the large-scale relevance of contrastive linguistic research vis-à-vis multilingual communities in contemporary societies.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare in relation to this paper.

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