

Linguistic Hybridity and Workplace Power in Chinese–Angolan Construction Sites: A Small-Scale Exploratory Study of Pidgin Play in Benguela

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ABSTRACT

This study examines an emergent workplace contact variety used in Chinese–Angolan construction sites in Benguela Province, Angola. The research focuses on interactions between Chinese supervisors and technical staff and Angolan construction workers at Catumbela, Baía-Farta, and Lobito project sites. These multilingual workplaces bring Portuguese, Mandarin, Angolan Portuguese, and local Angolan languages such as Umbundu, Kikongo, and Kimbundu into contact. The study investigates how workers maintain communication, how linguistic hybridity is deployed strategically, which language functions as the principal lexifier or superstrate, and how superstrate influence is manifested in the lexical, morphosyntactic, phonological, and pragmatic organization of the variety.

Adopting an exploratory case-study design, the research combines descriptive quantitative analysis with qualitative examination of workplace dialogues. The corpus comprises ten dialogues and 136 conversational turns from each of the three construction sites. The analysis considers word order, pronoun use, verbal morphology, negation, reduplication, tense–aspect marking, code-switching, lexical borrowing, discourse markers, and interactional functions. The findings indicate that Portuguese functions as the dominant lexical and morphosyntactic source, although Chinese and local Angolan languages contribute lexical items, phonological adaptations, discourse particles, and structural patterns. The variety is characterized by predominantly subject–verb–object word order, invariant or reduced verb forms, generalized use of *você*, preverbal negation, analytic tense–aspect marking through forms such as *tá/ta*, reduplication for emphasis or aspect, paratactic clause structure, and frequent code alternation.

The study further demonstrates that linguistic hybridity is not merely a consequence of limited proficiency or a neutral strategy for overcoming communication barriers. It functions as a resource for facilitating task performance, clarifying instructions, expressing solidarity, negotiating identity, managing face, and asserting or contesting authority. Chinese supervisors frequently control the choice and sequencing of linguistic resources, using Portuguese for workplace instructions and Chinese expressions to index cultural identity and institutional authority. Angolan workers, in turn, use hybrid forms to report problems, negotiate meaning, and express their own workplace identities. The study contributes to contact linguistics and workplace sociolinguistics by documenting an understudied Portuguese-based contact variety and showing how language structure and social power are mutually shaped in Chinese–Angolan labour interactions.

Keywords: language contact; workplace pidgin; linguistic hybridity; Angolan Portuguese; Mandarin; Portuguese; Bantu languages; Chinese–Angolan communication; language and power; Benguela.

INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

Human beings are so acculturated to communicating through language with ones who cross them around all over the world. In Angola, a Portuguese speaking country, many investments have been taken into account through the speedy expansion of Chinese economic assets in Africa. These investments have created new

multilingual constructions sites interactions where Angolan and Chinese need to share the same communication even though, not having the common native language which has given rise to emergent contact varieties that blend Portuguese and Mandarin with influences of local Angolan languages (e.g., Umbundu). As matter of facts, Wardhaugh, R., & Fuller, J. M. (2015) argue that multilingualism is common in societies across the world, despite the perception by many monolinguals that speaking only one language is the norm when they have contact and must communicate.

The current research examines communication at construction sites in Benguela – Angola, operated by CITIC Construction Co., Ltd (CITIC/RED-BENGUELA/2012/001) in Catumbela, as part of the RED 2000 housing Luhongo project, Baía-Farta as part of RED 1000 - infrastructures Project, and Lobito as part of RED 3000 housing and infrastructures project. The sites employ Chinese workers and technical staff alongside Angolan construction workers, creating a multilingual environment where a possible workplace pidgin has emerged to accommodate daily communication.

The emergence of this variety raises important theoretical and practical questions concerning the nature of language contact, the relationship between linguistic and social power, and the strategies through which speakers negotiate identity and authority in multilingual workplaces.

Why does Portuguese appear to dominate as the principal lexical source despite China's economic power? How do speakers vary their language use across different contexts? What role does linguistic hybridity play in asserting, negotiating, or resisting authority? These questions form the basis of the present investigation.

Research Problem

The early twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented study expansion of contact languages during colonial and postcolonial contexts in Africa. Nevertheless, Contemporary Chinese–Angolan construction sites constitute important multilingual environments in which Portuguese, Mandarin, Angolan Portuguese, and local Angolan languages come into contact. Despite the growing presence of Chinese companies in Angola, little empirical research has examined the everyday linguistic practices through which Chinese and Angolan employees coordinate work, communicate instructions, report problems, and negotiate authority. Although existing research has documented the existence of contact varieties in some African workplaces, limited attention has been paid to their structural features, communicative functions, and social dynamics in Portuguese-speaking contexts.

In particular, insufficient research has examined how linguistic hybridity is used strategically by different workplace participants to facilitate communication, exercise authority, express solidarity, or resist control. The relationship between Portuguese, Mandarin, Angolan Portuguese, and local Angolan languages in these interactions also requires further empirical investigation.

This study addresses these gaps through a case study of a workplace contact variety used in Chinese–Angolan construction sites in Benguela Province. It examines both the variety's structural characteristics and its social functions in workplace communication.

Research Questions

This study addresses four principal research questions:

1. How do Chinese and Angolan workers maintain communicative interaction at construction sites?
2. Why and how is linguistic hybridity deployed strategically by different workplace participants?
3. Which language does the function of superstrate/lexifier in this workplace contact variety?
4. How does superstrate dominance manifest itself in the lexical, morphosyntactic, phonological, and pragmatic features of the variety?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To describe the structural features of Benguela's construction-site contact variety across different speaker roles.
2. To examine how Chinese and Angolan workers maintain communicative interaction functions by using linguistic hybridity in the construction site.
3. To explore the relationship between linguistic practices in Chinese–Angolan labour relations.
4. To analyse how language choice and linguistic variation contribute to the negotiation of authority, responsibility, solidarity, and workplace identity.

Significance of the Study

This research makes several significant contributions. Primarily, looking forward on theoretical contributions by advancing contact linguistics, documenting and describing an understudied contact variety in a Chinese – Angolan language contacts at Benguela's workplace contexts. It also describes how variation is systematic form by social role and communicative function in multilingual Chinese – Portuguese environments. Moreover, in methodological field contributions, it demonstrates the value of mixed-methods approaches combining quantitative coding and qualitative micro-analysis. The study further proposes an analytical framework for examining lexical sources and contact-induced features involving Portuguese, Mandarin, Angolan Portuguese, and local Angolan languages. Hence, It offers practical contributions by providing insights for improving intercultural communication in Chinese–Angolan workplaces at RED Benguela projects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations of Pidgin and Creole Linguistics

Pidgins and creoles have occupied a central place in linguistic theory since the Angolan colonial era, challenging traditional notions of language genesis, change, and universals. In accordance to the idea above (Thomason, 2001; Winford, 2003) argues that a pidgin is a simplified contact language that emerges in multilingual settings where speakers of different languages need to communicate but lack a common tongue. Pidgins are characterized by reduced morphological complexity (e.g., no subject–verb agreement, invariant pronouns), analytic tense/aspect marking (e.g., particles instead of inflection), lexical dominance from one language (the superstrate or lexifier), and substrate influence on phonology, grammar, and some vocabulary (Mufwene, 2001; Siegel, 2008).

When pidgins become nativized—that is, acquired as a first language by children—they may develop into creoles with expanded grammatical complexity and lexical resources (Bickerton, 1981; McWhorter, 2005). However, many workplace pidgins remain stable as second-language varieties without creolizing, serving specific communicative functions in limited domains (Ferguson, 1982; Romaine, 1988).

Theoretical debates in pidgin/creole studies have centered on questions of origins (monogenesis vs. polygenesis), the role of universal grammar (the bioprogram hypothesis), and the relative contributions of superstrate and substrate languages (the superstratist vs. substratist debate) (Arends, 1995; Lefebvre, 2004). More recent work has emphasized the role of social factors, speaker agency, and gradual processes of koineization and stabilization (Mufwene, 2001; Siegel, 2008).

Superstrate versus Substrate Dynamics in Contact Languages

The concepts of superstrate and substrate are fundamental to the analysis of pidgin and creole formation. The superstrate (or lexifier) is the socially, economically, and politically dominant language in the multilingual

context in which the pidgin or creole develops, providing the bulk of the vocabulary (Fuller, 2015: 116; Winford, 2003). Moreover, the substrate comprises the native languages of the speakers who contribute to the development of the pidgin or creole, providing some vocabulary but also phonological systems and grammatical structures; speakers of these languages are usually socially subordinate to superstrate language speakers (Fuller, 2015: 117; Mufwene, 2001).

Superstrate dominance is not merely a linguistic phenomenon. It is also connected to social and political relations. The superstrate language may be associated with administration, employment, education, trade, documentation, or institutional authority. It may therefore provide many of the lexical labels used in the contact situation because it has high functional value.

Substrate languages, by contrast, may contribute phonological patterns, grammatical structures, discourse conventions, and vocabulary. However, the distinction between superstrate and substrate should not be treated as rigid. Recent research has shown that the relative contributions of languages vary according to the social context, the histories of the speakers, and the functions performed by the contact variety (Mufwene, 2001; Aboh, 2015).

The possibility of multiple substrates further complicates traditional models. In multilingual settings, several local languages may contribute to a contact variety, making it difficult to identify a single substrate language. This issue is particularly relevant in Angola, where Portuguese coexists with Umbundu, Kimbundu, Kikongo, and other languages.

Language Contact in Multilingual Workplaces

In Benguela, multilingual workplaces are sites of intense language contact, where Chinese and Angolan employees may use Mandarin, Portuguese, Angolan Portuguese, English, and local Angolan languages (e.g: Umbundu) to accomplish shared tasks. These interactions require speakers to negotiate meaning despite differences in linguistic knowledge and communicative expectations. Research on workplace multilingualism has documented several communicative strategies, including the use of lingua francas, code-switching, lexical borrowing, gestures, repetition, translation, accommodation, and the emergence of contact varieties (Holmes, 2006; Angouri & Theodorou, 2016).

In multinational corporations, English often functions as a corporate lingua franca, but this creates its own challenges, including power asymmetries between native and non-native speakers, accent discrimination, and the marginalization of non-English speakers (Piller & Takahashi, 2006; Hübscher & Kohn, 2021). Hence, Recent research has emphasized the importance of "linguistic justice" and the need to value multilingual repertoires rather than imposing monolingual norms (Flores & Schissel, 2014). From this perspective, multilingual workers do not simply select one complete language at a time. They draw on their entire communicative repertoire to perform tasks, solve problems, build relationships, and negotiate authority.

In addition, Workplace contact varieties represent a particularly important form of multilingual communication. They are often domain-specific, restricted to task-related activities, and dependent on shared physical contexts. Although they may not develop into full creoles, they provide valuable evidence of language contact, simplification, accommodation, and structural adaptation.

Chinese Economic Expansion in Africa: Linguistic Implications

The rapid expansion of Chinese investment in Africa over the past two decades has created new multilingual workplaces where Chinese managers and African workers must communicate despite sharing no common native language. Recent research on Chinese-run construction sites in Africa has documented emergent pidgins blending Chinese, local languages, and colonial languages (e.g., English, French, Portuguese) (Driessen, 2020; Haugen, 2021; Naidu, 2022).

Driessen's (2020) seminal study of Ethiopian construction sites introduces the concept of "pidgin play." The study shows how workers may appropriate words, manipulate meanings, and creatively reshape workplace

expressions in ways that challenge sociopolitical asymmetries. This perspective demonstrates that pidgins and other contact varieties are not merely instruments of cooperation. They may also become sites where power is negotiated, performed, and contested.

Studies of Chinese expatriates in Africa show that they often adopt minimal functional proficiency in host country languages, prioritizing task efficiency over linguistic integration (Wang, 2019; Li, 2021). This creates segregated relationships with host country employees, leading to distant or transactional interactions rather than collaborative ones (Shen, 2020). However, some research documents successful intercultural adaptation and hybrid communication practices (Gao, 2022).

Despite this growing body of research, relatively little attention has been devoted to Portuguese-based contact varieties in Chinese–Angolan workplaces. The present study contributes to this under-examined area.

Angolan Portuguese: Historical and Sociolinguistic Context

Angolan Portuguese (AP) is a nativized variety of Portuguese influenced by Bantu languages, particularly Umbundu, Kimbundu, and Kikongo (Castro, 2010; Gonçalves, 2016). It emerged during the colonial period through contact between European Portuguese and local African languages, and has continued to evolve since Angola's independence in 1975.

Reported features of Angolan Portuguese include

1. Phonological variation including vowel reduction, consonant cluster simplification.
2. Lexical borrowing from Bantu languages (e.g., mamba 'snake', kixima 'cornmeal dish').
3. Grammatical innovations involving prepositions, agreement, aspectual marking, and word order.
4. Variation by region, social class, and education level (Castro, 2010; Gonçalves, 2016). And above all, communicative context.

Angolan Portuguese is undergoing a shift from an exonormative orientation, based primarily on European Portuguese norms, toward a more endonormative orientation involving internally developed norms (Gonçalves, 2016; Bugel, 2009). This development has implications for language attitudes and ideologies.

Older or formally educated speakers may continue to associate European Portuguese with correctness and prestige. Younger speakers and speakers with less formal education may be more likely to accept Angolan Portuguese features as natural and legitimate. Consequently, tensions may arise between prescriptive norms based on European Portuguese and the descriptive realities of Portuguese as it is spoken in Angola.

In workplace contexts, Angolan Portuguese functions alongside local languages and, increasingly, Chinese, creating complex multilingual repertoires that speakers draw on strategically (Oliveira, 2018).

Language Ideologies and Power in Postcolonial Contexts

Language ideologies—beliefs and attitudes about language, its users, and its functions—play a crucial role in shaping linguistic practices and power relations (Kroskrity, 2004; Woolard, 2016). In postcolonial contexts, language ideologies are often tied to colonial histories, national identity projects, and social stratification (Errington, 2008; Mufwene, 2008).

In Angola, Portuguese is associated with: Colonial power and oppression (historically), national unity and modernity (post-independence), education, social mobility, and formal employment (contemporary), Elite status and cosmopolitanism (for some speakers).

However, local languages (Umbundu, Kimbundu, Kikongo, etc.) are associated with: Ethnic identity and cultural heritage, rural origins and traditional ways of life, informal domains and peer solidarity, for some, marginalization and lack of opportunity.

These associations are not uniform or universally shared. They may vary according to region, generation, education, class, and personal experience. Nevertheless, they influence how speakers use and evaluate linguistic varieties and how they position themselves and others during interaction (Oliveira, 2018; Gonçalves, 2016).

Linguistic Hybridity and Code-Switching Theory

Linguistic hybridity —refers to the use of linguistic means from different languages within the same interaction, utterance, or communicative event. Hence, (García & Wei, 2014; Canagarajah, 2013) announces that the mixing of linguistic resources from different languages—is a ubiquitous feature of multilingual communication. Therefore, in multilingual workplaces, speakers do not necessarily select one complete language at a time. Instead, they combine lexical items, grammatical patterns, pronunciation strategies, gestures, repetitions, translations, and locally meaningful expressions to achieve practical and social goals.

Moreover, code-switching may occur between clauses, within clauses, or through the insertion of isolated lexical items. In the present study, it is important to distinguish three related phenomena: First, *code-switching* – involving alternation between identifiable languages. Second, *borrowing* – involving lexical items that have become relatively conventionalized in the workplace variety. The last, *hybridization* – involving the creation of utterances whose structure cannot be assigned completely to one language.

Example: We may evaluate the conversation between a Chinese employer and an Angolan employee.

Dialogue 1: Interaction between Angolan worker and Chinese worker
1-Angolan worker: Nǐ hǎo! he hola? 2-Chinese worker: Nǐ hǎo! puluquê você passa no milâ? ola passa você méiyǒu lá? Você colega Hossi aqui no tê, onde elê passa? Voce liga ele fala ela aqui cule lá. 1-Angolan worker: Huo fala Hossi cufala, cabeça no ta bom, barriga cufala, ele basa hospitali tê, aqui passa tê. 2-Chinese worker: Voce aqui casa cahô lixa lixa palede mamandi. Lixa lixa tá bom, cahô pinta pinta, sabê? Mila Mila aqui palede tudo, mila mila tudo cufala cahô méiyǒu lá , sabê? Aqui voce mila palede ta bom, cahô yo. Voce fala Malia aqui tudo casa limpa limpa. 1-Angolan worker: Aqui block A cahô ta bom, block B tá poco poco tá bom puluquê cimento méiyǒu -lá Malia no limpa. lixo yo.

Table 1: Example number 1.

Dialogue 2: Interaction between Chinese Boss and Angolan worker
2-Chinese Boss: Nǐ hao! He ola, Nǐ aqui casa talabalio palede mamandi pinta. Lixa lixa tá bom, cahô pinta pinta, sabê? Mila Mila aqui palede tudo, mila mila tudo cufala cahô meho lá, sabê? Aqui Nǐ mila mila palede tá bom, cahô yo. Nǐ fala Malia aqui tudo casa passa. 1-Angolan worker: Aqui block B cahô ta bom, block C tá poco poco tá bom puluquê cimento yǒu Malia no limpa, no passa. lixo yo.

Table 2: Example number2.

The analysis therefore adopts a flexible approach combining the Matrix Language Frame model with a broader translanguaging perspective. The Matrix Language Frame model is useful for identifying the language that supplies the principal morphosyntactic frame, whereas translanguaging emphasizes the speaker's deployment of an integrated multilingual repertoire rather than the selection of strictly separated languages.

In Benguela construction-site workplaces, linguistic hybridity is not merely a combination of two linguistic codes or a consequence of limited proficiency. It may also perform several social and communicative functions, including: Facilitating communication in pursuit of a shared construction goal, simplifying directives and explanations, indexing urgency or importance, maintaining cooperation and solidarity, concealing or softening disagreement, displaying or challenging supervisory power, providing a shared *lingua franca* for workplace interaction.

Language, authority, and workplace power

Language is a central resource through which workplace authority is produced and recognized and negotiated. Orders, warnings, evaluations, corrections, jokes, and reprimands are not merely linguistic acts; they also position speakers institutionally and socially.

A manager may possess authority because of organizational hierarchy, contractual status, and control over resources. However, the interactional realization of that authority depends partly on the manager's ability to communicate effectively. A manager who lacks sufficient proficiency in the workers' language may need to rely on repetition, gestures, interpreters, visual demonstrations, or a restricted contact variety.

This distinction makes it useful to differentiate between:

1. **Institutional power**, derived from organizational position, contracts, supervision, and control of resources.
2. **Interactional power**, which is negotiated moment by moment through communication.

The two forms of power do not always coincide. A Chinese supervisor may control employment decisions but lose interactional control when Angolan workers reinterpret, parody, or deliberately misunderstand an instruction. Conversely, workers may display linguistic creativity without possessing the institutional power to alter working conditions.

The study therefore treats workplace discourse as a site of **unequal but negotiated power**. Portuguese can operate simultaneously as: the official language of the Angolan state; the language of formal employment and documentation; a bridge language between Chinese and Angolan participants; a resource for workers' harmony; a language of discipline and supervisory instruction.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a **small-scale exploratory case-study design** with descriptive quantitative and qualitative components. The dataset consists of ten workplace dialogues containing 136 conversational turns for each construction sites (Benguela, Catumbela and Baía-Farta). The quantitative component is limited to descriptive counts of recurring forms and interactional practices. It does not attempt to establish statistical significance or population-level generalizations.

The qualitative component examines selected turns in their immediate interactional context. It focuses on lexical choice, code alternation, repetition, possible grammatical reduction, repair, contextual inference, and the relationship between language use and workplace roles.

The term *mixed methods* is used in a restricted sense. The study combines numerical description with qualitative interpretation, but the quantitative component should not be understood as a statistically powered

corpus study. *The primary value of the dataset lies in its contextual detail and its ability to generate hypotheses for further research.*

Small corpora can be methodologically useful when they preserve authentic interactional context and permit detailed manual analysis. However, their findings should be treated as local (Benguela construction sites) and exploratory rather than representative of a wider speech community (all over Angola country).

Corpus and Sampling

The corpus contains ten dialogues and 136 conversational turns collected from each of the three construction sites in Benguela Province.

Site	Project association	Principal interactional setting
Catumbela	RED 2000 Luhongo housing project	Chinese technical staff and Angolan workers
Baía-Farta	RED 1000 infrastructure project	Chinese supervisors and Angolan workers
Lobito	RED 3000 housing and infrastructure project	Supervisory, technical, and labour interactions

Table 3: Sampling representation.

The participants included Chinese supervisors or technical staff and Angolan construction workers. The principal interactional configuration examined in this study was the Chinese boss–Angolan workers exchange. As the study is focused on naturally occurring workplace interaction, the participants are identified using codes as it follows:

Participant code	Role	Linguistic background	Site
CH-B01	Chinese supervisor (Boss)	Mandarin; functional Portuguese	Baía-Farta
AO-W01	Angolan worker	Portuguese; possible Umbundu /Kikongo/Kimbundu background	Baía-Farta / Lobito
CH-T01	Chinese technical worker	Mandarin; functional Portuguese	Catumbela

Table 4: Sampling identification.

The sample was selected purposively because the dialogues involved direct communication between Chinese and Angolan employees during construction-related activities.

The unit of analysis is the conversational turn. Additional units include lexical items, clauses, repetitions, discourse particles, and interactional episodes.

The study makes no claim that the ten dialogues represent: All Chinese–Angolan workplaces in Angola. All varieties of Angolan Portuguese. All Chinese or Angolan employees. All Lusophone African contact situations. Instead, the findings describe the linguistic practices observed in the three work places specific corpus at Benguela construction sites.

RESULTS

Morphosyntactic data presentation and analysis

Example 1: Boss instruction turn

Original turn:

“Voce aqui casa cahô lixa lixa palede mamandi. Lixa lixa tá bom, cahô pinta pinta, sabê? Mila Mila aqui palede tudo, mila mila tudo cufala cahô meho lá, sabê? Aqui você mila palede ta bom, cahô yo. Voce fala Malia aqui tudo casa limpa limpa.”

Gloss (word-by-word):

"You here house (work) sand sand wall slowly. Sand sand is good, (work) paint paint, know? check check here wall all, check check all [if] bad [then] (work) no have, know? Here you ckeck [if] wall is good, [then] work have. You tell woman (cleaner) here all houses clean clean."

Gloss (approximate):

"In this house your work is sanding (sanding paper) the walls (wall plaster) slowly, when you finish with it, (work) have to paint the walls, you know? Here, (Rows of houses) you have to check all the walls, after checking, if you find serious cracks (damage) on the walls do not work it, you know? Just work on the walls which is ok. Then tell the cleaners (women) to make the cleaning in all the houses."

As through interaction on the language contact, people can create a new way of communicating and can increase their language variety store as they listen to the outputs of their workmates, market fellows in the place they get in touch, as we may see at the previous example between the Chinese employer and the Angolan's employee by which they needed to communicate at construction project, but as they were using different codes they had to through both different languages which are Chinese and Angolan Portuguese, creating a new communicative variety of the languages in order to prosper communication and understanding.

Generally, this kind of interaction contains types of verbal and non-verbal patterns. While the speaker interacts by face-to-face conversation, talking through telephone, or by writing, or posting comments on discussion board or teamwork forum, he has to perform facial expression following by body gestures, in order to reinforce the best decoding of the message. Sometimes, head nodding is also integrated when demands non-verbal interaction to positive or negative situation or statement.

Moreover, in this kind of interaction, speakers communicate combining words from different languages Portuguese and Chinese expressed with some influences of their local languages or dialects. Hence, all languages involved in the current interaction, contributed to the sounds, vocabulary and the grammatical features. However, to different extents, and some additional features may emerge which are unique to the new variety, because new variety on the languages contact develops to serve fundamental communicative function in a very restricted set of domains, they tend to have a simplified structure, no grammar rule conformation and a small vocabulary compared with entirely standard languages.

Word/Phrase	Lexical source	Part of speech	Grammatical function	Notes
Voce	PT	Pronoun	3rd person singular subject	Generalized pronoun (<i>você</i>)
aqui	PT	Adverb	Locative	'here'
casa	PT	Noun	Direct object / location	'house' (metaphorically 'work site')
cahô	CHINESE	Noun	subject	Chinese-influenced or local form
lixa lixa	PT + REDUP	Verb + REDUP	Imperative / aspectual emphasis	'sand thoroughly'; reduplication for intensity
palede	PT	Noun	Direct object	'parede' (wall) – phonological

				adaptation from Umbundu influence.
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Table 5: Morphosyntax representation1.

Word/Phrase	Lexical source	Part of speech	Grammatical function	Notes
mamandi	slowly	Adverb	Temporal / aspectual marker	Chinese-influenced or local form
.	–	–	Clause boundary	–
tá	PT	Verb/Aux	Progressive / stative marker	'está' reduced to <i>tá</i>
bom	PT	Adjective	Predicative adjective	'good'
,	–	–	Clause boundary	–
pinta pinta	PT + REDUP	Verb + REDUP	Imperative / aspectual emphasis	'paint thoroughly'
sabê	PT	Verb	Discourse marker (imperative)	'sabe?' ('you know?') – seeks confirmation
?	–	–	Sentence boundary	–
Mila Mila	CHINESE	Verb + REDUP	Imperative / aspectual emphasis	'measure thoroughly' (Chinese calque)
tudo	PT	Quantifier	Universal quantifier	'all'
cufala	CHINESE	Adjective	Predicative adjective	'broken/damaged' (Chinese calque)
méiyǒu	CHINESE	Negative particle	Negative auxiliary verb	(do not have/there is not) – Chinese expression
sabê	PT	Verb	Discourse marker	'you know?'

Table 6: Morphosyntax representation1

Word/Phrase	Lexical source	Part of speech	Grammatical function	Notes
yo	Unclear/Mixed	Particle	Affirmative particle	'yes' / 'okay'
fala	PT	Verb	Imperative verb	'tell' / 'speak to'
Malia	PT (name)	Proper noun	Object of <i>fala</i>	Chinese expressed way to address Woman. (PT/Worker's name)
casa	PT	Noun	Direct object	'house' workplace in Red project

limpa limpa	PT + REDUP	Verb + REDUP	Imperative / aspectual emphasis	'clean thoroughly'
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Table 7: Morphosyntax representation³.

Actually, the word order used by the variety is predominantly subject–verb–object (SVO), as in *Voce lixa lixa palede* ('You sand wall'). This aligns with Portuguese basic word order and is the most frequent pattern in the corpus (65.4% of turns).

However, it uses generalized pronoun system *você* (3rd perso singula) for 2nd person singular, with no morphological distinction between subject and object forms. This reflects typical simplification of contact varieties. According to the verb morphology, it does not include inflectional marking for person or number (e.g., *voce lixa*, *voce fala* – no *-s* or *-mos* endings). The Reduplication (*lixa lixa*, *pinta pinta*, *mila mila*, *limpa limpa*) functions as an aspectual or emphatic device, signaling thoroughness or iterative action. This is a common variety strategy and appears in 27.2% of turns in the corpus.

Analysis kept some tense and aspect marking like the use of *tá/ta* (from Portuguese *está*) as an invariant progressive/stative marker (e.g., *tá bom*, *ta bom*). This analytic strategy replaces inflected forms and is attested in 47.8% of turns. Anyway, no past or future tense markers are visible in this turn; temporal reference is inferred from context or adverbs (*aqui*, *lá*). The negation is not observed in this turn, but elsewhere in the corpus negation appears as a preverbal particle (e.g., *no ta bom*), consistent with analytic negation patterns language contact variety.

The process of code-switching and mixed forms (Chinese greeting – *Ni hao*) does not appear in this specific turn, but forms like *cahô*, *cufala*, *mamandi*, *meho*, *yo* are of Chinese etymology, possibly reflecting Chinese phonological influence, local Chinese varieties, or its phonetic adaptation. Furthermore, these mixed forms contribute to the "Mixed" classification of some turns and illustrate substrate influence on phonology and lexicon. In addition, discourse markers such as: *sabê* ('you know?') functions as a confirmation-seeking particle, common in instructional talk, *yo* ('yes') serves as an affirmative particle, possibly from local usage.

Example 2: Worker problem-solving turn

Original turn:

Aqui block A cahô ta bom, block B tá poco poco tá bom puluquê cimento meho-lá Malia no limpa. lixo yo.

Gloss (word-by-word):

"Here block A [work] is good, block B is little little is good because cement no have-there Malia not clean. Rubbish have."

Gloss (approximate):

" Here in block-A the work is done and ok, in block B is not concluded due to the lack of Portland cement, the cleaner (woman) did not clean and there is so much rubbish.

Word/Phrase	Lexical source	Part of speech	Grammatical function	Notes
Block A/ Block B	PT (loanword)	Noun	Subject / topic	'Block A' (construction terminology) from English Language
poco poco	PT + REDUP	Adj + REDUP	Adverbial phrase	'little by little' – reduplication for gradual

puluquê	PT	Pronoun/ Conjunction	Question word/ Causal subordinator	'porquê' (why) – phonological adaptation (because) of Portuguese influenced by silent local language sounds.
cimento	PT	Noun	Subject of subordinate clause	'cement'
méiyǒu -lá	CHINESE	Negative part+ Auxiliary verb+ Preposition	Negative verb form + locative	'Não tem' ('do not have/there is not') Chinese expressing absence or negative statement.
Malia	PT (name)	Proper noun	Subject of subordinate clause	Worker's name Mária (Mary) – Portuguese expression used by Chinese workers when addressing to any Angolan woman.
lixo	PT	Noun	Standalone noun (topic)	'trash'
yo	CHINESE	Verb	Affirmative verb	'Tem/Há' 'have' / 'there is' - Chinese expression denoting the existence of something.

Table 8: Word-by-word morphosyntactic annotation of example 2.

The analysis indicates that the word order again, is predominantly subject+verb+object, with topics introduced by locatives (*Aqui block A...*). The structure is paratactic (clauses linked without subordination), just like typical of pidgin-style discourse. The Reduplication *poco poco* ('little by little') functions as an adverbial phrase indicating gradual progress. This is a common pattern in Portuguese-based creoles and pidgins, and exemplifies how reduplication encodes aspectual meaning. Therefore, tense and aspect marking is vivid by double use of *tá/ta* in the same clause (*block B tá poco poco tá bom*) may signal a complex aspectual structure (e.g., 'is gradually becoming good'). This reflects the flexible, analytic use of *tá* as a multifunctional marker. Hence, negation was made by preverbal *no* (from *não*) precedes the verb (*no limpa*), consistent with the preverbal negation pattern being as typical of pidgins and creoles. This is an example of the NO_AGREE feature in the coding scheme.

In addition, Causal subordination “*puluquê*” ('why') introduces an interrogative clause, showing that speakers can question for authority and demand for results. Moreover, *méiyǒu -lá* shows phonological adaptation of Chinese expressing absence or negative statement, with hyphenation suggesting a fused form. Ellipsis and fragmentary structure “*lixo yo*” ('trash have') is a fragmentary turn, typical of workplace talk where full sentences are not required. This reflects the pragmatic efficiency of the contact variety.

Comparative summary of morphosyntactic features

Feature	Example 1 (Boss)	Example 2 (Worker)	Corpusfrequency
Word order	SVO	SVO (topic-prominent)	65.4% (SVO)
Pronoun system	Generalized <i>você</i>	Not present in this turn	–
Verb inflection	None (invariant forms)	None (invariant forms)	47.1% (NO_AGREE)

Reduplication	<i>lixa lixa, pinta pinta, mila mila, limpa limpa</i>	<i>poco poco</i>	27.2% (REDUP)
Tense/aspect marker	<i>tá/ta</i> (progressive/stative)	<i>tá/ta</i> (progressive/stative)	47.8% (TÁ ^a PROG)
Negation	Not present	Preverbal <i>no</i>	–
Subordination	None (paratactic)	<i>puluquê</i> ('because')	–
Code-switching	Mixed forms (<i>cahô, cufala, mamandi</i>)	Mixed forms (<i>cahô, meho-lá, yo</i>)	15.4% (CS)
Discourse markers	<i>sabê, yo</i>	<i>yo</i>	–

Table 9: Comparative summary of morphosyntactic features.

Linguistic hybridity as a power resource

1. Control over the linguistic repertoire – Chinese bosses exercise authority by controlling which linguistic resources are used and when Bosses initiate code-switching. They decide when to use Portuguese, when to insert Chinese expressions, and when to employ mixed forms. In turn, workers follow the boss's lead, they typically adapt to the boss's linguistic choices rather than introducing their own. Thus, with asymmetric flexibility, Bosses can switch between Chinese (with other Chinese staff) and Portuguese/new variety (with workers), while workers cannot access Chinese-only spaces.

Example: (Boss greeting): Ni hao! Bom dia! Você chi le ma? Ta hao ma? Aqui trabalho tudo hao ma?

The boss opens with Chinese (Ni hao), then Portuguese (Bom dia), then mixed questions. This displays multilingual competence and sets the terms of interaction: the boss controls the linguistic frame, and workers must respond within it. The implication is by controlling the repertoire, bosses position themselves as linguistic gatekeepers who determine what counts as appropriate communication.

Selective use of Chinese to index authority – Bosses strategically insert Chinese expressions at key moments to:

Signal cultural superiority: Using Chinese greetings (Ni hao), welfare questions (chi le ma 'Have you eaten?'), or affirmations (hao 'good') reminds workers of the boss's cultural background and the company's national identity.

Create distance: Switching to Chinese when frustrated or giving serious instructions can create psychological distance and signal that the boss is operating from a different cultural framework.

Exclude workers from full participation: When bosses use Chinese terms that workers do not understand, it reinforces the hierarchy of knowledge and reminds workers of their outsider status.

Example (hypothetical but realistic): Boss (to worker): Você trabalha devagar. Tai man le! (Portuguese + Chinese: 'You work slowly. Too slow!')

The Chinese phrase *tai man le* ('too slow') may not be fully understood by the worker, but its tone and context convey criticism. The boss uses Chinese to intensify the message while maintaining plausible deniability ("I was just expressing myself"). Implication in this Chinese variety phrase, denotes that Chinese becomes a marker of authority that workers cannot fully access or challenge.

2. Portuguese as a tool of accommodation and control - While Chinese indexes cultural authority, Portuguese is used strategically to demonstrate accommodation by speaking Portuguese (even non-standard), bosses signal

that they are making an effort to communicate, which can reduce resistance and foster cooperation. Consequently, for maintaining control, Bosses use simplified, directive Portuguese (*você cahô aqui, tá bom?*) that workers must comply with, reinforcing the task hierarchy. For avoiding full integration interaction is performed by using a simplified, non-native variety rather than investing in full proficiency, bosses maintain a degree of separation from workers and local culture.

Example (Boss instruction): Voce aqui casa cahô lixa lixa palede mamandi. Lixa lixa tá bom, cahô pinta pinta, sabê?

The boss uses Portuguese for the core instruction but simplifies grammar (invariant *você, tá* marker) and adds confirmation-seeking (*sabê*). This shows accommodation (making speech understandable) while maintaining directive authority (telling the worker what to do). In its turn, implication, Portuguese is not a neutral bridge but a managed resource that bosses deploy to balance accommodation and control.

Hybridity as a mechanism of authority assertion

Creating a "boss variety" of the languages contact is somehow priority in the interaction. Chinese bosses may develop a distinctive way of speaking the workplace pidgin that signals their authority, more Chinese insertions than workers use. More directive structures (imperatives, confirmation-seeking *sabê, tá bom?*), more reduplication and substrate influence than workers use (bosses may use *lixa lixa* and *poco poco* or *cahô* as frequently).

This creates a register distinction: *Boss register*: More Chinese, more directive, more standard-Portuguese-like. *Worker register*: More mixed forms, more reduplication, more substrate influence. Implication illustrates that linguistic hybridity becomes stratified, with bosses and workers using different versions of the "same" variety, reinforcing social hierarchy.

The use of hybridity to manage face and authority - Bosses use hybrid language to navigate face-threatening situations like softening criticism: A boss might mix Portuguese with Chinese to soften a reprimand. While, for strengthening authority conversely, bosses may switch to Chinese to intensify authority. The Implication that may be seen is tha hybridity allows bosses to modulate authority depending on the situation, using different languages for different pragmatic effects.

Up to now, the analysis dictates that the Boss by displaying competence in multiple linguistic codes, bosses accumulate cultural capital that reinforces their authority: Multilingual display: Bosses who can switch between Chinese, Portuguese, and even a few local language words (*obrigado, sim, tá bom*) appear more culturally sophisticated and adaptably authoritative. By contrast workers typically have less access to Chinese and may not speak standard Portuguese fluently, creating a linguistic asymmetry that mirrors the power hierarchy.

In attempt to Legitimizing presence, Bosses' ability to use local Portuguese (even non-standard) signals that they are legitimate actors in the Angolan context, not just temporary outsiders.

Example:(Boss greeting):

Ni hao! Bom dia! Você chi le ma? Ta hao ma? Aqui cahô tudo hao ma? você bu hao, gaosu yo. Wo men yi qi jie jue. Hao bu hao?

This turn displays Chinese greetings and questions (*Ni hao, chi le ma, ta hao ma, bu hao, gaosu wo, wo men, hao bu hao*). The Portuguese structure and vocabulary (*você, aqui, trabalho, tudo, se*), hybrid question formation (*Você chi le ma?*).

The boss is performing multilingual competence, which reinforces his position as aculturally adaptable leader rather than a monolingual outsider.

Hybridity in task-critical vs. relational contexts

In Instruction and Safety turns (84.0% and 66.7% Portuguese-majority, respectively), bosses use hybridity to Ensure comprehension, as simplified Portuguese + reduplication (*lixa lixa, pinta pinta*) makes instructions clearer. Maintain authority like directive structures (*você faz, tá bom?*) reinforce the task hierarchy. Limit negotiation by using a simplified, boss-controlled variety, bosses reduce opportunities for workers to challenge or reinterpret instructions.

Example (Boss instruction): *Voce aqui casa cahô lixa lixa palede mamandi. Lixa lixa tá bom, cahô pinta pinta, sabê?*

The boss uses Portuguese for core vocabulary (*você, casa, palede, tá bom, pinta*). Reduplication for emphasis (*lixa lixa, pinta pinta*), and confirmation-seeking (*sabê*) to ensure compliance.

This is hybridity in service of control: the boss adapts speech for intelligibility but maintains directive authority. In relational contexts, hybridity acts for rapport and distance, like in small_talk turns (50.0% Mixed), bosses use hybridity to build rapport using Chinese greetings (*Ni hao*) and welfare questions (*chi le ma*) alongside Portuguese (*Bom dia, você tá bom?*) shows cultural openness and personal interest. In order to maintain distance it is Inserted Chinese phrases that workers do not fully understand (*hao bu hao?, tai hao le*) reminds workers of cultural difference and boss authority. In contrast, to negotiate identity, Bosses can signal both belonging (using local Portuguese) and distinctiveness (using Chinese) simultaneously.

Example (Boss greeting): *Ni hao! Bom dia! Você chi le ma? Ta hao ma? Aqui trabalho tudo hao ma?*

This turn opens with Chinese (*Ni hao*) to index cultural identity, adds Portuguese (*Bom dia*) to show accommodation, and uses mixed questions (*Você chi le ma?*) to display multilingual competence. This is hybridity in service of identity work: the boss is both accommodating and culturally distinct.

So far, Chinese bosses in this study deploy linguistic hybridity not merely as a pragmatic solution to communication challenges but as a strategic resource for asserting and maintaining authority. By controlling the linguistic repertoire—initiating code-switching, selectively inserting Chinese expressions, and using simplified but directive Portuguese—bosses position themselves as linguistic gatekeepers who set the terms of interaction. This is evident in greeting sequences where bosses display multilingual competence (*Ni hao! Bom dia! Você chi le ma?*), and in instruction turns where they balance accommodation with control (*lixa lixa tá bom, sabê?*). Unlike workers, who use hybridity to index identity and solidarity, bosses use it to accumulate cultural capital, modulate face-threatening acts, and maintain psychological distance. These findings align with research on Chinese-run construction sites in Ethiopia, where pidgins function as sites of contestation and collaboration, reflecting and reproducing power asymmetries rather than dissolving them.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the linguistic practices that enable communication between Chinese and Angolan workers at construction sites in Catumbela, Baía-Farta, and Lobito, Benguela Province. It shows that their workplace speech is not a random mixture of Portuguese, Mandarin, and Angolan languages, but a structured, functional multilingual contact variety adapted to daily work.

Portuguese is the variety's principal lexifier. It provides much of the vocabulary, sentence organization, construction terminology, and grammatical framework. This reflects Portuguese's institutional role in Angola as the official language of administration, employment, documentation, and interethnic communication. Mandarin also contributes important lexical, phonological, and pragmatic elements, including forms such as *cahô, cufala, meiyu, mila mila*, and *yo*. Local Angolan languages further influence phonological adaptation, discourse practices, meanings, and speakers' communicative repertoires. The variety is therefore best described as Portuguese-based, shaped by Mandarin influence and Angola's multilingual ecology.

Its recurrent structural features include subject–verb–object order, reduced verbal inflection, generalized use of *você*, invariant *tá/ta* for progressive or stative meanings, preverbal *no* for negation, and contextual expression of tense and aspect. Reduplication, such as *lixa lixa*, *pinta pinta*, and *poco poco*, conveys emphasis, repetition, or aspectual meaning. These features support efficient, transparent, task-oriented interaction.

Hybridity also has pragmatic and social functions. Workers and supervisors use mixed resources to give instructions, report problems, request confirmation, express urgency, and coordinate activities. Gestures, repetition, shared context, and cooperative interpretation frequently compensate for limited linguistic knowledge.

Language simultaneously reflects power relations. Chinese supervisors often control code-switching, using simplified Portuguese for comprehensible directives while Mandarin may reinforce identity, distance, or authority. Angolan workers nevertheless exercise agency by questioning instructions, reporting difficulties, and introducing locally meaningful forms. The repertoire thus reproduces inequalities but also enables negotiation, solidarity, and subtle resistance. As an exploratory study based on a small corpus from selected sites, its findings require broader future investigation.

The study makes three principal contributions. First, it documents an understudied Portuguese-based contact variety in a Chinese–Angolan workplace. Second, it demonstrates that structural simplification and multilingual hybridity are connected to specific communicative and social functions. Third, it shows that workplace language is a site where institutional power, cultural identity, accommodation, solidarity, and resistance are continuously negotiated.

However, the conclusions must be interpreted within the limits of the research design. The corpus is small, exploratory, and restricted to selected construction sites in Benguela Province. The findings cannot be generalized to all Chinese–Angolan workplaces, all varieties of Angolan Portuguese, or all multilingual communities in Angola. In addition, the etymological classification of some forms remains uncertain and requires verification through additional recordings, speaker interviews, comparison with Mandarin varieties, and investigation of possible Bantu-language influences.

Future research should therefore expand the corpus, include more construction sites and participant roles, and examine naturally occurring recordings across different communicative situations. Comparative research involving other Chinese projects in Angola and other Portuguese-speaking African countries would also help determine whether similar contact varieties are developing elsewhere. Further investigation should combine acoustic analysis, detailed morphosyntactic annotation, speaker-attitude studies, and ethnographic observation. Such research would provide a more comprehensive account of how multilingual workers construct shared meanings and negotiate power in contemporary African workplaces.

Overall, the Benguela construction-site contact variety illustrates the dynamic nature of language contact in present-day Angola. It is a flexible communicative system shaped by Portuguese institutional dominance, Mandarin economic and cultural presence, and the multilingual resources of Angolan workers. Its emergence confirms that contact varieties are not deficient forms of language but adaptive systems that respond to concrete social needs while simultaneously reflecting the unequal power relations in which they develop.

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