6

PHRASE-LEVEL SYNTAX

This chapter focuses on syntax at the level of the phrase, a set of one or more words functioning together as a syntactic unit (a unit which is taken to be the constituent of a clause, Chapter 7). Although phrases often consist of just a single word, the following sections focus on multi-word phrases, explaining how multiple words interact with one another within a single phrase. I begin with a discussion of noun phrases (§6.1) and verb phrases (§6.2), and then briefly discuss adpositional phrases (§6.3).

6.1 Noun phrases

A noun phrase (NP) consists minimally of a noun (common or proper) or a pronoun (personal or demonstrative). A phrase that has a noun (as opposed to a pronoun) as its head may also contain a determiner (subject marker, object marker, or demonstrative determiner, §5.3), which always comes last in the NP. An NP headed by a pronoun does not permit subject markers or object markers. Adjectives, if present, follow the head and precede determiners. Numerals, like nominal modifiers, follow the head noun and precede determiners such as subject markers or object markers. The only element in an NP that precedes the noun is the possessive pronoun, which indicates the possessor of the referent of the head noun (although it may be preferable to analyse this possessor as a separate NP within which the following NP is embedded). Thus, the canonical order of elements in a Pondi NP is as presented in (6.01).

(6.01) The Pondi NP
    [possessor][noun][adjective][numeral][determiner]
NPs may function as subjects (whether the sole argument of an intransitive clause or the more agentive argument of a transitive clause). They may also serve as direct objects of transitive clauses, and as the objects of postpositions. When serving functions other than subject, direct object, or object of a postposition, NPs may (depending on their structure) be marked with the oblique-marking enclitic \( =n \) (§7.3).

In the following sections I discuss nominal number (§6.1.1) and possession (§6.1.2).

### 6.1.1 Nominal number

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the number distinction found among Pondi nominals is two-way—between ‘one or two’ (or ‘non-plural’) and ‘more than two’ (or ‘plural’). This distinction differs from number distinctions found elsewhere in the grammar, indeed elsewhere within NPs, as determiners exhibit a three-way number distinction—‘one’ (i.e. singular) vs ‘two’ (i.e. dual) vs ‘more than two’ (i.e. plural). When there is an overt indication of nominal number greater than two (i.e. the presence of the quantifier \( \text{andeyal} \) ‘many’ or a numeral such as \( \text{nanìnge} \) ‘four’ following the noun), it is not necessary for the noun to be marked as ‘plural’ (§5.9). Thus, the contrast found among nouns may be considered one of ‘unmarked with respect to number’ vs ‘marked as referring to more than two referents’.

The different number marking schemes for nouns and determiners can interact within a single NP. Basically, there need not be agreement between the two: the presence or absence of, say, a subject marker, has no effect on the marking of the head noun of the determiner’s NP. Thus, the presence of, say, the 3\text{sg.sbj} marker \( mî \) indicates that a ‘non-plural’-marked (or ‘unmarked’) noun refers to exactly one referent (6.02); the presence of the 3\text{du} subject marker \( mîn \), on the other hand, indicates that the ‘non-plural’-marked noun refers to exactly two referents (6.03); when the 3\text{pl.sbj} marker \( nîdîn \) is used, however, then there is ‘agreement’ within the NP, since the noun will also be marked as ‘plural’ (6.04).

(6.02) kulam mî
\[
\begin{array}{cc}
\text{kulam} & mî \\
\text{boy} & \text{3sg.sbj}
\end{array}
\]
\‘the boy’
The ‘unmarked’ nature of the ‘non-plural’ noun form is illustrated by phrases such as the following (6.05), in which the presence of the numeral yawle ‘three’ obviates the need to mark the noun as plural.

(6.05) kulam yawle ndïn
kulam   yawle  ndïn
boy.3pl   three   3pl.subj
‘the three boys’

The same interaction of number categories can be seen in object NPs, even as the object-marker determiner cliticises to the verb. In (6.06), the object (‘pig’) is marked as non-plural (to refer to a dual referent), while the object marker is min= ‘3DU’, referring to the same dual referent. Example (6.07) is ungrammatical, because the object (‘pig’) is marked as plural despite referring to a dual referent. In (6.08), the object (‘pig’) is marked as plural (to refer to a referent of three or more) and the object marker is ndïn= ‘3pl.subj’, referring to the same plural referent. Example (6.09), on the other hand, is ungrammatical, because the non-plural form namal ‘pig’ is used despite referring to a referent of three or more (as indicated by the 3pl.obj marker ndi).

(6.06) tatï alel namal minasiyï
  tatï        alel      namal        min=asi-ï
  papa        spear      pig          3DU=hit-IPFV
  ‘Papa killed two pigs with a spear.’

(6.07) *tatï alel name minasiyï
  tatï        alel      *name        min=asi-ï
  papa        spear      *pig.pl      3DU=hit-IPFV
  *‘Papa killed two pigs with a spear.’
(6.08)  \(\text{tati alel name ndasiy}\)  
\(\text{tati} \quad \text{alel} \quad \text{name} \quad \text{ndi}=\text{asi-i} \)  
\(\text{papa} \quad \text{spear} \quad \text{pig.pl} \quad \text{3pl.obj=hit-tpfv} \)  
‘Papa killed (more than two) pigs with a spear.’

(6.09)  \(\text{*tati alel namal ndasiy}\)  
\(\text{tati} \quad \text{alel} \quad \text{*namal} \quad \text{ndi}=\text{asi-i} \)  
\(\text{papa} \quad \text{spear} \quad \text{pig} \quad \text{3pl.obj=hit-tpfv} \)  
\(\text{*‘Papa killed (more than two) pigs with a spear.’} \)

### 6.1.2 Possession

To indicate possession, the possessor immediately precedes the possessum. When the possessor constitutes a single possessive pronoun (e.g. ninjin ‘my’ or ndinjin ‘their’), we may wish, simply, to treat this element as a determiner (or ‘possessive pronoun’, §5.2.3). If it is indeed a determiner, then it is the only dependent element in an NP permitted to precede the head noun. When the possessor is expressed not by a pronoun, but rather by a full NP (whether a common noun or a proper noun), then the possessor NP is marked by the free element njin ‘poss.npl’ or is ‘poss.pl’ (the number distinction reflects the number of referents encoded in the possessum NP, not in the possessor NP). The following examples illustrate the use of the free possessive marker njin ‘poss.npl’ with a common noun (6.10) and a proper noun (6.11).

(6.10)  \(\text{tati njin kap}\)  
\(\text{tati} \quad \text{njin} \quad \text{kap} \)  
\(\text{papa} \quad \text{poss.npl} \quad \text{house} \)  
‘papa’s house’

(6.11)  \(\text{David njin kap}\)  
\(\text{David} \quad \text{njin} \quad \text{kap} \)  
\([\text{name}] \quad \text{poss.npl} \quad \text{house} \)  
‘David’s house’

There is no verb in Pondi like the English verb ‘have’ to indicate possession or ownership. Rather, to express that someone ‘has’ something, a possessive NP is used, as in the following examples (note that this predicative structure does not differ in any way from the one used for attributive possessive constructions, as in 6.10 and 6.11).
6.2 Verb phrases

A verb phrase (VP) consists minimally of a verb (which itself contains a stem plus maximally one prefix and maximally one suffix). The verb is always the final element in the VP. If the verb is transitive (and contains an overt object), then the VP contains within it an NP (the direct object of the verb). This NP may be marked with (or indexed by) an object marker, which cliticises to the verb. I do not know whether it is better to analyse these object markers as argument-indexing prefixes (and thus belonging syntactically to the verb) or as belonging syntactically to the object NP—but in either case, they are constituents of VPs. Postpositional phrases (PPs) may also be considered constituents of VPs. When present, they always occur before the verb (and before the direct object, if the verb is transitive). If an auxiliary verb is present, it always immediately follows the main verb. Thus, the canonical order of elements in a Pondi VP is as presented in (6.14).

(6.14) The Pondi VP
[PP][NP][main verb][auxiliary verb]

In the following sections I discuss auxiliary verbs (§6.2.1), compound verbs (§6.2.2), and equational constructions (§6.2.3).

6.2.1 Auxiliary verbs

There is a small, closed set of auxiliary verbs in Pondi. These are the only words permitted to follow finite verb forms within a given clause. The immediately preceding main verb is always inflected for irrealis mood. The auxiliary verb is thus always the absolute last element in any clause
where it is found. At least one auxiliary verb (w- ‘want, will’) is capable of inflecting for (two) TAM distinctions. I have identified the following auxiliary verbs in Pondi (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1. Auxiliary verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>w- (wapî, wï)</td>
<td>volitive/conative</td>
<td>‘want, will, try’ (‘vol’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>te</td>
<td>immediate future</td>
<td>‘be about to’ (‘fut’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ola</td>
<td>prohibitive</td>
<td>‘don’t!’ (‘proh’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of these, only w- ‘want, will, try’ inflects for TAM—either perfective wapî or imperfective wï (the latter, due to rounding caused by the preceding labial-velar glide, may be rendered [wo]; I have no evidence of an irrealis form of this auxiliary verb). I take as the basic meaning of w- the expression of want, desire, or attempt. Although volition can be encoded by an irrealis verb alone, it can also be encoded by a combination of an irrealis verb with the auxiliary verb w-, as in the following examples.

(6.15) meyamba nyï kiïm mïla wapi

yesterday 1sg jungle go-IRR want-PFV

‘I wanted to go the jungle yesterday.’

(6.16) nyï meyamba kapï us-la wapi nyï ambo ma=us=api

1sg yesterday house build-IRR want-PFV 1sg NEG 3sg.OBJ=build-IRR

‘Yesterday I wanted to build the house, [but] I didn’t build it.’

(6.17) Peter anto minjamo nda wi

[1pl=from] name banana take-IRR want-IPFV

‘Peter wants to take a banana from us.’

(6.18) John kapï us-la wi

[1name] house build-IRR want-IPFV

‘John wants to build a house.’

Although we could posit an irrealis form */wla/ ([wîla]), it seems that no such form is used; rather, simply an irrealis verb form (without any auxiliary verb) is used to express such notions as ‘would want’ or ‘will desire’.
This same verb is used to encode conative modality—that is, attempts (usually failed)—and may, as such, be translated as ‘try’, as in the following examples.

(6.19) kanam an kapî usîla wî

kanam  an  kapî  us-la  w-î
now  PL  house  build-IRR  want-IPFV

‘Now we are trying to build a house.’

(6.20) tatî alel ningasi-la wapî

tatî  alel  ningasi-la  w-apî
papa  spear  throw-IRR  want-PFV

‘Papa tried to throw the spear.’

(6.21) meyamba nyî namal asinda wapî mwa

meyamba  nyî  namal  asi-nda  w-apî  mwa
yesterday  1SG  pig  hit-IRR  want-PFV  nothing

‘Yesterday I tried to kill a pig, but I was unsuccessful.’

This final example (6.21) illustrates the frustrative use of mwa ‘no, nothing’, whereby the single word is used to encode the entire clausal meaning of ‘but this was to no avail’ or ‘but this did not work’. (The Tok Pisin word nogat ‘no’ may be used in a similar way.)

The volitional notion of w- ‘want’ seems to have been extended to encode futurity (which, also, can be encoded simply with a single irrealis-marked verb). This may be the result of a well-attested grammaticalisation process (cf. English will ‘want’ > ‘future marker’). Alternatively, it may be the result of calquing from Tok Pisin (which has experienced this very grammaticalisation process, such that the verb laik ‘want’ has come to be used also as a future marker). Examples of this immediate future usage of w- ‘want’ include the following.

(6.22) katîl mî kilîya wî

katîl  mî  kilî-ya  w-î
old.man  3SG.SUBJ  die-IRR  want-IPFV

‘The old man is about to die.’

(6.23) kinyî kît oliya wî

kinyî  kît  oli-ya  w-î
coconut  bottom  cut-IRR  want-IPFV

‘The coconut is about to fall down.’ (literally ‘cut bottom’)

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Another function of the auxiliary verb \textit{w-} ‘want’ is to encode progressive (imperfective) aspect. Although there exists in Pondi an imperfective suffix \textit{-ï} to achieve this same purpose, there are a number of verbs that do not make any morphological distinction between perfective and imperfective aspect. Thus, the addition of the verb \textit{w-} ‘want’ may help clarify that a progressive or continuous event is being described, as in the following examples.

(6.25) mï sinangala \textit{wï}
\begin{verbatim}
mï  sinanga-la  w-ï  \\
3sg.subj  stand-IRR  want-IPFV
\end{verbatim}
‘He is (in the process of) standing up.’

(6.26) ndïn nïm asïliya \textit{wï}
\begin{verbatim}
ndïn  nïm  asïli-ya  w-ï  \\
3pl.subj  canoe  push-IRR  want-IPFV
\end{verbatim}
‘They are (in the process of) pushing the canoe.’

(6.27) kanam iye kinyï kulam anda \textit{wï}
\begin{verbatim}
kanam  iye  kinyï  kulam  an-nda  w-ï  \\
now  girl  coconut  boy  give-IRR  want-IPFV
\end{verbatim}
‘The girl is now (in the process of) giving the coconut to the boy.’

It may be pointed out here, that—as an alternative to using the auxiliary verb \textit{w-} ‘want’—wishes and desires can be expressed with an irrealis verb form alone (§4.4), as in the following examples.

(6.28) nyï ke \textit{amnda}
\begin{verbatim}
nyï  ke  am-nda  \\
1sg  sago  eat-IRR
\end{verbatim}
‘I want to eat.’ (literally ‘eat sago’)

(6.29) kïman nyï=un \textit{i-la}
\begin{verbatim}
kïman  nyï=un  i-la  \\
who  1sg=with  come-IRR
\end{verbatim}
‘Who wants to come with me?’
Unlike the auxiliary verb *w-*, the auxiliary verb *te* ‘be about to’ does not seem to inflect for any TAM distinctions. Although it is likely cognate with the Ulwa speculative suffix *-t* (which encodes epistemic possibility in that language), it seems rather in Pondi to encode immediate futurity, as in the following examples.

\[(6.30)\] ndindi nja wamnda *te*
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
ndindi & nja \\
\text{dog} & \text{this} \\
\end{array}
\begin{array}{ll}
u=am-nda & \text{be.about.to} \\
\text{2SG.OBJ=eat-IRR} & \text{be.about.to} \\
\end{array}
\]
‘This dog is about to bite you!’

\[(6.31)\] nyï sila *te*
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
nyï & si-la \\
1SG & \text{be.about.to} \\
\end{array}
\]
‘I’m about to sit down.’

\[(6.32)\] kapatupa ndïn alasïla *te*
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
kapatupa & ndïn \\
\text{hawk} & \text{3PL.SUBJ} \\
\end{array}
\begin{array}{ll}
alas-la & \text{fly-IRR} \\
\text{fly-IRR} & \text{be.about.to} \\
\end{array}
\]
‘The hawks are about to fly.’

Although this verb generally encodes ‘immediate’ future time, it may also be used to refer to future time more broadly—or, at least, it is capable of referring to events of the following day, as in example (6.33).

\[(6.33)\] tatï kïmbïlo kisïm mïla *te*
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
tatï & kïmbïlo \\
\text{papa} & \text{tomorrow} \\
\end{array}
\begin{array}{ll}
kisïm & \text{go-IRR} \\
\text{jungle} & \text{be.about.to} \\
\end{array}
\]
‘Papa will go to the jungle tomorrow.’ (perhaps with the sense ‘Papa is ready to go to the jungle tomorrow.’)

Also, the immediate future auxiliary verb *te* ‘be about to’ can be used in exhortations (cf. §8.3), as in the following example.

\[(6.34)\] an mïla *te*
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
an & mal-la \\
1PL & \text{be.about.to} \\
\end{array}
\]
‘Let’s go (now)!’

The last auxiliary verb to be considered, *ola* ‘don’t!’, is used in negative commands (i.e. prohibitions). It, too, must follow irrealis-marked verbs, as seen in the following examples.
(6.35) o nyinjin minjamo amnda ola
    o  nyi-njin  minjamo  am-nda  ola
   2SG.SUBJ 1SG-poss.NPL  banana  at-IRR  don't
   'Don't eat my banana!'

(6.36) mïla ola
    mal-la  ola
   go-IRR  don't
   'Don't go!'

The form ola 'don't!' is homophonous with the base form (and imperative) of the verb ola- 'perceive, hear'. Indeed, it is most likely a grammaticalisation of this verb. Several languages of the region seem to have derived prohibitive markers from verbs of perception or cognition, for example Ulwa wana- 'feel' and wana 'PROH', and Ambakich kanak- 'hear' and anak 'PROH'. We can imagine the grammaticalisation process underlying this: at some point there must have been a biclausal construction, the first clause containing an irrealis-marked verb indicating the (hoped) counterfactual event to be prohibited, and the second clause containing an imperative form of a verb of perception (and, by extension, reasoning). Thus, sentences like the one seen in example (6.35) could have originated from biclausal sentences of the form 'before you eat my banana, think!' or 'lest you eat my banana, hark!'. In Ulwa, the grammaticalisation process has gone one step further: the prohibitive marker wana has moved from the clause-final verbal position to the canonical negator position (following the subject and preceding the object). More examples of prohibitive constructions are provided in §8.3.

There is no evidence of multiple auxiliary verbs co-occurring in the same VP.

6.2.2 Compound verbs

Compared to some Papuan languages, Pondi does not make frequent use of serial verb constructions (SVCs)—especially not if we take a stricter definition of SVCs that demands that the multiple verbs in a given clause all match in terms of TAM marking. There are, however, a number of compound verb constructions, in which a nominal element is used idiomatically to give a particular meaning to the verb.
In such constructions, a non-referential nominal expression (sometimes referred to as an ‘adjunct nominal’, Foley 1986:117–128) combines with a verb of rather general meaning to make the meaning of the verb more specific. For example, the verb *ola- ‘perceive’* can combine with a number of nouns to refer to different types of sensory perception, such as ‘smell’, ‘taste’, or ‘feel’ (unmodified, the verb *ola-* often has the basic meaning ‘hear’). Thus, there are compounds like those in (6.37).

(6.37) *nambisola- ‘smell’ (literally ‘odour-perceive’)*  
*imbïnola- ‘feel, taste’ (literally ‘feeling/flavour-perceive’)*

The following examples illustrate how these compound verbs function in sentences. If an object-marker proclitic is present, it immediately precedes the nominal element (6.40).

(6.38) *meyanga nyï ke alwe nambisole*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{meyanga} & \quad \text{nyï} & \quad \text{ke} & \quad \text{alwe} & \quad \text{nambis-ola-ï} \\
\text{yesterday} & \quad \text{1sg} & \quad \text{sago} & \quad \text{good.pl} & \quad \text{odour-perceive-IPFV}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Yesterday I smelled some good food.’

(6.39) *nyï ipï imbïnole*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{nyï} & \quad \text{ipï} & \quad \text{imbïn-ola-ï} \\
\text{1sg} & \quad \text{arm} & \quad \text{feeling-perceive-IPFV}
\end{align*}
\]

‘I’m feeling (my) arm.’

(6.40) *meyanga nyï ke ateyamate ndimbïnole*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{meyanga} & \quad \text{nyï} & \quad \text{ke} & \quad \text{ateyamate} & \quad \text{ndï=} & \quad \text{imbïn-ola-ï} \\
\text{yesterday} & \quad \text{1sg} & \quad \text{sago} & \quad \text{bad.pl} & \quad 3\text{pl.obj}= & \quad \text{feeling-perceive-IPFV}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Yesterday I tasted some bad food.’

Another verb commonly used in forming compounds is *numla- ‘throw’*. In (6.41), this verb is functioning without any adjunct nominal.

(6.41) *alkï alel ndïnumle*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{alkï} & \quad \text{alel} & \quad \text{ndï=} & \quad \text{numla-ï} \\
\text{person} & \quad \text{spear} & \quad 3\text{pl.obj}= & \quad \text{throw-IPFV}
\end{align*}
\]

‘The person is throwing spears.’

It is possible, however, for this verb stem to combine with various nouns to create a variety of meanings, such as seen in the following compound constructions (6.42).
suwate numla- ‘spit’ (literally ‘saliva-throw’)
walwal numla- ‘breathe, blow’ (literally ‘lung-throw’)
pis numla- ‘dance’ (literally ‘leg-throw’)

These forms can be seen in the following sentences.

(6.43) kulam suwate numle
kulam suwate numla-ī
boy saliva throw-IPFV
‘The boy spits.’

(6.44) katīl walwal numle
katīl walwal numla-ī
old.man lung throw-IPFV
‘The old man was breathing.’

(6.45) kīmbilo angwalise pis numlala
kīmbilo angwalise pis numla-la
tomorrow woman.pl leg throw-IRR
‘The women will dance tomorrow.’

In fact, this putative verb stem, numla- ‘throw’, may itself contain an
adjunct nominal, in this case num ‘(a) throw’, combining with the generic
verb la- ‘put’. Examples of compound verbs formed with la- ‘put’, include
the following.

(6.46) kulal la- ‘vomit’ (literally ‘vomitus-put’)
katal la- ‘laugh’ (literally ‘laughter-put’)
kis la- ‘mash’ (this one is uncertain, since the element kis
is otherwise unknown)

One particularly interesting compound construction involves the
(otherwise unknown) element pu- ‘bathe’. Although glossed alone
as ‘bathe’, it always occurs with nambi ‘water’. Simply juxtaposed,
the adjunct and verb stem have an intransitive (or reflexive) sense
(‘bathe [oneself]’), as in (6.47).

(6.47) meyamba kulam nambi pwapī
meyamba kulam nambi pu-apī
yesterday boy water bathe-PFV
‘The boy bathed (himself) yesterday.’
When employed for encoding a transitive meaning, however, the verb behaves rather more like verbs of ‘putting’ in Pondi, which take a goal argument as (obligatory) direct object argument and a theme argument as (optional) oblique. The following sentence (6.48) illustrates this use for *pu* - ‘bathe’.

(6.48) tatî komblam man nambi mapwapi
      tatî komblam ma=n nambi ma=pu-apî
      papa child 3sg.obj=obl water 3sg.obj=bathe-pfv
      ‘Papa bathed the child.’ (perhaps literally ‘Papa put the child in water.’)

If in fact the verb *pu*- has the meaning ‘put’ (along with the typical Pondi argument structure associated with verbs of such meaning), then the intransitive sentence (6.48) would literally mean something like ‘the boy put (himself) in water yesterday’, with the (reflexive) theme argument being simply implied.

### 6.2.3 Equational constructions

Pondi has no discrete copular verb. Equative sentences (i.e. sentences containing a predicate complement) are formed without any overt verb. That is, the subject (always first in the clause) may be juxtaposed with whatever is predicated of it (always last in the clause). In each of the following equative sentences (6.49–50), the two NPs have the same referent. Two NPs are simply juxtaposed; there is no indication of tense, aspect, or mood (aside from any lexical clues provided in the form of, say, adverbs). The second NP is taken to be the complement.

(6.49) John mî nîman
      John mî nîman
      [name] 3sg.subj man
      ‘John is a man.’

(6.50) mî ambo angwaliyi
      mî ambo angwaliyi
      3sg.subj neg woman
      ‘He is not a woman.’

The predicates in such equational constructions can be adjectives, as in examples (6.51) and (6.52).
6.3 Adpositional phrases

The only adpositional phrases in Pondi are postpositional phrases (PP)—that is, the adposition always immediately follows its object. A PP consists of an NP and a postposition. The NP may consist entirely of a pronoun, in which case the pronoun is of the non-subject variety (if, say, it is a personal pronoun, §5.2.1) and it cliticises to the postposition. When the object is a full NP, it may but need not end with an object marker; when it does, this object marker cliticises to the following postposition.

The following sentences provide examples of a postposition with just a pronoun (6.53), a postposition with a full NP and an object marker (6.54), and a postposition with a full NP but no object marker (6.55).

(6.53)  nyï ambo un mïla
nyï ambo u-un mal-la
1sg NEG 2sg.obj=with go-IRR
‘I won’t go with you.’

(6.54)  John alkï ndun malï
John alki ndi=un mal-i
[name] person 3pl.obj=with go-ipfv
‘John is going with the people.’

(6.55)  nyï ambinjin tati un name lak sangoyï
nyï ambi-njin tati un name lak sango-i
1sg npl.refl-poss.npl papa with pig.pl for walk-ipfv
‘I used to go hunting for pig with my papa.’ (literally ‘I used to walk with my papa for the sake of pigs.’)
This last example (6.55) additionally illustrates how two PPs can function within the same clause: here, we see the comitative postposition un ‘with’, indicating the person with whom the subject acted, as well as the purpose postposition lak ‘for the sake of’, indicating the reason for the action.

It is also possible for two postpositions to combine within a single PP. In all instances, the second postposition is the rather generic word kï ‘at, in, on’, which can follow certain other postpositions, such as imbam ‘under, below’, at ‘atop, above’, or un ‘in, within, inside’ (§5.4). This may reflect the fact that these postpositions have derived from nouns (e.g. in forms such as at-kï, the initial at—originally ‘top’—would have been the object of the postposition kï ‘at, in, on’ (i.e. ‘at the top [of]’). Indeed, the form imbam ‘under, below’ seems to retain its nominal nature in exhibiting an alternation between non-plural and plural forms (§5.4). In the synchronic grammar, however, forms like at ‘atop, above’ and un ‘in, within, inside’ may be used as postpositions on their own. The following sentences illustrate how, for example, at ‘atop, above’ can function alone as the head of a PP (6.56); that it is not itself a noun is indicated by the fact that the object marker cliticises to it and not to the following verb (6.57) (i.e. it is not part of compound noun meaning ‘the top of the house’).

(6.56) kolwal kapî at pi
  kolwal  kapî at p-i
  rat.sp  house  atop  be-1PFV
  ‘The rat is on the house.’

(6.57) kolwal kapî mat pi
  kolwal  kapî ma=at p-i
  rat.sp  house  3SG.OBJ=atop  be-1PFV
  ‘The rat is on the house.’

Alternatively, a postposition like at ‘atop, above’ can be part of a larger PP headed by kï ‘at, in, on’, as in (6.58) and (6.59).

(6.58) nyî mel atkî sisuki akalala
  nyî  mel at-kî sisuki akalala
  1SG  palm.sp atop-at rubbish  wipe-IRR
  ‘I will clean up the rubbish on the floor.’
Finally, sentence (6.60) illustrates how ki‘at, in, on’ can function alone—without a word like at ‘atop, above’—as the head of a PP.

(6.60) kanam ndīn kapī kī ke amī
    kanam    ndīn    kapī    kī    ke    am-ī
    now      3PL.SBJ   house   at    sago   eat-IPFV
‘Now they are eating at home.’ (literally ‘eating sago’)

The verb glossed here (and in the similar sentence in example 5.37) as ‘flock’ may actually be indicative of a very limited system of verbal number in Pondi. That is, Pondi distinguishes between alas- ‘fly [NPL]’ and alawa- ‘fly [PL]’. The exact semantic distinction between the two is unclear—the difference could lie simply in the number of participants, but could, alternatively, depend on whether the event itself is plural, in other words, distributive or iterative (in which case ‘flock’ is not a great translation, although it still captures something of the plurality of the verb). Pondi’s sister language Mwakai has the forms wura- ‘fly [SG]’ and wurura- ‘fly [PL]’. Indeed, verbal number seems to be a common, though lexically very restricted, feature of Keram languages: Ambakich has klip- ‘fall [SG]’ vs kanop- ‘fall [PL]’; and Ulwa has ni- ‘die [SG]’ vs nipunpu- ‘die [PL]’. In all of these pairs, there is a distinct phonological similarity, but no clear derivational process (although some—and especially the Mwakai forms—seem to involve reduplication). With so few attested instances of verbal number in Keram languages, it is difficult to say whether verbal number involves derivation or is merely a lexical distinction (as in fly and flock in English).