Versatile postpositions in Doromu-Koki: 

The case of rofu

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Abstract: In Bradshaw (2012:126-7) the Doromu-Koki rofu was classified as a non-local postposition, glossed as ‘to, for, from, in order that’. A couple of variations were noted at that time, but some areas were not clear. This is an attempt to further refine understanding about this nominal postposition; firstly, to expand on its typical postpositional uses, and secondly to explain its other uses as a clause chaining device. In addition, I will discuss how some other Doromu-Koki postpositions behave in the same manner.

Doromu-Koki is a Southeast, Manubaran, putative Trans New Guinea language1 of the Central Province of Papua New Guinea, spoken by about 2,000 people, approximately half of whom are living in the Inland Rigo District to the east-southeast of Port Moresby and the other half in Port Moresby itself. As with other Trans New Guinea languages, it has a robust postposition inventory of 13 location, five directional and ten non-local varieties as well as three postpositional clitics. In some texts, the postposition rofu occurs quite infrequently. For example, in an 11-minute narrative audio recording, there were no occurrences. This has required, in some cases, looking at isolated sentences produced during a dictionary development workshop and in Bible translation activities to find further examples.2

The most common gloss for rofu is ‘to’, in which it points to an addressee or goal. Addressees are tied in with the verb ni- ‘say’ (1) and goals, or as a directional, with verbs of motion such as bo- ‘go (over/up)’ for direction away (2) or bae- ‘come’ for direction toward (3).

(1) \(\text{[ina \ rofu] makai ni-yo}\)
\(3S \text{ to likewise say-3S.PST}\)
‘he spoke likewise to him’


2 Sources for texts are indicated in subscripted brackets. Where not indicated, the text is most likely a common utterance.
As a postposition it follows an NP (2) or pronoun (1) and (3).

(3)  *iddu ya bi [na rofu] baiyo*
    but 2 TOP 1S to come.2S.PST
    ‘but you came to me’

    And in some cases they follow a VP or clause, expressing purpose, yet still as a goal.

(4)  *mina mida maina rei mona re-gedi rofu*
    this child looking for do well do-2P.FUT in.order.to
    ‘in order to look properly for this child’

The second most common gloss is ‘for’, also as a nominal case, in which it has a benefactive role in (5) and (6) or again to indicate purpose in (7).

(5)  *[ini vene rofu] moi rama ae-yo*
    3.POSS people for get right put-3S.PST
    ‘he fulfilled (lit. ‘put right’) it for his people’

    [Sei di Uka Ago Ruaka ‘God’s New Covenant’, 2017:1]

(6)  *Kamini [ini baba rofu] moi de-si mar-o.*
    enough 3.POSS father for/to get come.down-SQSS give-3S.PST
    ‘Then he brought it down and gave it to his father.’

    this medicine TOP malaria for TOP good
    ‘This medicine that is for malaria, is good.’

    [From Bradshaw, In progress]

As well, *rofu* can have a source directional connotation glossed as ‘from, on’ in (8):

(8)  *[Sei di gubuyo bae-go mina rofu] ori di-yaganedi*
    God GEN anger come-3S.FUT REL from fear go-3P.JUS
    ‘you should flee from/be afraid of God’s coming anger’


*Rofu* can also have a meaning of ‘in’ or ‘with’, again indicating source direction:

(9)  *kaere bi [ina rofu] ada tora gade rei-da.*
    who TOP 3S in happiness big much do-1S.PRS
    ‘in whom I am well pleased/with whom I am very happy’[^ibid]

It can also be realised as ‘on’ in (10) and (11).

(10)  *[meda dadi-do eta rofu] ve-si*
    sun come.up-3S.PRS side on see-SQSS
    ‘they saw it on the east (lit. ‘sun coming up’) side and...’[^ibid:3]

[^3]: From Hiri Motu *muramura* ‘medicine’ (Dutton & Voorhoeve 1974:200)
The clitic =ri ‘at’ can be bound to the end of an NP constituent, including another postposition, so that in (11) it is bound to rofu.

(11) [Koru seri gagani tau rofu]=ri di-gasa ago
water shore place all on=at go-SIMSS word
nirausi.re-gam-o.
proclaim-HAB-3S.PST
‘Whilst he was going along all the river’s shore places he was proclaiming.’ [ibid:128]

Rofu can be glossed ‘at, from’ (here not a physical location), expressing an extension or interval of time.

(12) ini lagani remanu ma egona rofu
3S.POSS year two and below at
‘from two years old and under’ [ibid:4]

This is different from the clitic =ri ‘at’, which does refer to location only here in (13), and (11) above.

(13) [Mida keika.keika faisara koru]=ri rafe-gam-adi.
child little-RED naked water=in wash-HAB-3P.PST
‘Little children were swimming naked in the river.’ [From Bradshaw, In progress]

There are other instances of rofu which behave quite differently. They can be the head of an NP followed by di ‘GEN’, in which case di is governed by the whole NP as seen in (14) – (16), as a type of “double case”.

(14) Mina oteima-na vene yaku ni-yadi, bi [[moi vegu re-na rofu] di buni yokoi de
this tell-NOM people DM say-3P.PST TOP get life do-NOM
in GEN good one not
‘These teachers (lit. ‘teaching people’) said that there is no benefit in salvation (lit. ‘getting life’).’ [Sei di Uka Ago Ruaka ‘God’s New Covenant’, 2017:196]

(15) [[meda yokoi dadi-yaka] rofu] di nai mida Adam
day one get.up-1S.PST on GEN 1S.POSS child (name)
ni-yaka…
say-1S.PST
‘On one day’s getting up I said to my son Adam…’ [Luke Bomena, 27 April 2006]

Here rofu is governing the transitive object Sei ‘God’, yet the whole NP is governed by di.

(16) yi [[moke-na vari gira ae-na] Sei rofu] di sina
2.POSS think-NOM plant strong put-NOM God in GEN word
‘the news of your faith (lit. ‘strongly implanting thinking’) in God’

In other cases, rofu appears without di, seemingly as another strategy for connecting clauses aside from using the traditional switch-reference system. A typical switch-reference construction can be seen below:
(17) Ma [di-si] mina gagani=ri ame-gam-adi.
and go-SQSS this place=at stay-HAB-3P.PST
‘And they went and were living in that place.’
[Sei di Uka Ago Ruaka di buka bedakai ‘Some books of God’s New Covenant’, 2011]

As well, rofu functions as a clause-chaining device, connecting clauses which share the
same subject, and here in (18) indicating consequence.

(18) [Uriyaku yokoi dadi-yaka] rofu nai mida e-dadi-yaka.
morning one get.up-1S.PST so.that my son CAUS-get.up-1S.PST
‘One morning I got up so that I woke up my son.’

This clause chaining use is quite regular, replacing the expected switch-reference markers,
which instead indicate sequentiality.

(19) Uriyaku yokoi dadi-si nai mida e-dadi-yaka.
morning one get.up-SQSS my son CAUS-get.up-1S.PST
‘One morning I got up and (then) I woke up my son.’

This use of rofu as a clause linker was previously analysed as indicating purpose (Bradshaw
2012:127). However, a more extended investigation shows that its use along with other
postpositions in clause chaining is quite extensive and fully acceptable in a variety of meanings.
The use of the same morpheme within NPs and as a clause chaining device can be described as
an instance of heterosemy, whereby “…two or more meanings or functions…deriving from the
same ultimate source, are borne by reflexes of the common source element that belong in
different morphosyntactic categories.” (Lichtenberk 1991:476).

This heterosemy of rofu allows for it to behave as a cause-effect clause chaining device.
This phenomenon is not uncommon in Papuan languages of New Guinea (e.g. Pennington
2018:246, 337-8 on Ma Manda, Aikhenvald 2011:28-38 on Manambu and p.c. on Yalaku, and
Merlan & Rumsey 1991:340-2 on Ku Waru). Below, the Ma Manda benefactive is used to
combine clauses (Pennington 2018:246):

(20) Kunum flong tata kaalin attak wala nündū wadûgût
heaven ALL custom good be-PRS-3SG that=BEN 1NSG also
kame flong tawangka aatûkugû...
earth ALL follow-SS remain-DUR
‘In heaven there are good customs, so we also must keep following him on earth
until…’

And in Manambu (Aikhenvald 2011:32) the objective-locative case indicates completive
aspect:

(21) wun [dɔ-kə-m] wukəmər-ə-m
I he-LK-OBJ/LOC forget-LK-OBJ/LOC
‘I completely forgot him’
In Ku Waru, ergative/instrumental is used to indicate cause-effect (Merlan & Rumsey 1991:340):

(22) koi-n tim-n gai-yl okum  
(name)-ERG do-PRF-3sg-ERG sweet.potatoes-DEF come-PPR-3SG  
‘because of what Koi did, the sweet potatoes are growing (lit. ‘coming’)’

Likewise, in Doromu-Koki rofu is behaving as a cause-effect clause chaining device (23) – (26), which replaces switch reference.

(23) Ma di-yadi rofu, mina gagani=ri ame-gam-adi.  
and go-3P.PST so.that this place=at stay-HAB-3P.PST  
‘And they went so that they were living in that place.’

(24) Doketa ya iriuneduka re-go rofu ya imi-go.  
doctor 2 sorrow do-3S.FUT so.that 2 pierce-3S.PST  
‘The doctor will feel sorry for you so that he will give you a shot.’

[From Bradshaw, In progress]

(25) Giro, baiya re-yadi rofu, sufa urana di-yadi.  
axe bush.knife do-3P.PST so.that bush toward go-3P.PST  
‘They got their axes and bush knives, so that they went out to the bush.’

[Raphael Totome, Uba dubuisa ‘Two brothers together’, 1999]

In (26) rofu expresses a goal/directional (in order to) meaning.

(26) Ye ya kaya mida afe-si de-giya rofu Siau di  
so 2 REFL child return-SQSS come-2S.FUT so.that (name) GEN  
yava=ri moi-gedi.  
house=at get-3P.FUT  
‘So you yourself will bring the child in order that they will get him at Siau’s house.’

[Sebu, 26 April 2006]

In the following sentence one would not normally encounter use of the development marker yaku in a second clause, and the postpositional phrase at the end of the sentence. I believe the author was emphasising the weapon and its target; the postposition dudu ‘instrument’ is not indicated on the noun sosogi ‘spear’, such that it is almost being promoted to subject, while the locative has been moved to after the verb, from its usual position before. This might also further account for the other use of rofu as a marker of consequence in (28).

(27) Meki re-yo rofu sosogi yaku imi-yo ini getona=ri.  
chase do-3S.PST so.that spear DM shoot-3S.PST 3S.POSS back=in  
‘He chased it so that he shot it in the back with a spear.’

[Peter Paul, Sumari some diyo ‘He hunted in the bush’, 24 May 2002]

As Dixon (2002:238) says about Australian languages “…one recurrent feature is that nominal affixes are generally used to mark types of subordinate clause”, such is the case with Doromu-Koki. In (28) =ri is seen bound to a noun and in (29) to a verb with a conditional reading.
As can now be seen, often rofu is a non-location postposition, but in other cases it is a clause chaining device (cf. Aikhenvald 2011:25, Blake 1999). And it is not alone – others that behave likewise are listed below. Six out of 31 postpositions have two functions, displaying heterosemous patterns, dependent on the grammatical context. They function as exponents of grammatical roles of nouns with the NP and as clause linking devices, following the pattern described as “versatile cases” in Aikhenvald (2011:8): “If a case morpheme occurs on an inflected verb, it is most likely to be used as a clause-linking device.”

Table: **Heterosemous forms**

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<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Postpositional meaning</th>
<th>Clause linking meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>adina</strong></td>
<td>‘beside, close/next to’</td>
<td>‘because, meaning of’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>dudu</strong></td>
<td>‘instrument, with’</td>
<td>‘according to, thus’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>fafau</strong></td>
<td>‘above, on (top of)’</td>
<td>‘concerning, basis of, about’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>=ri</strong></td>
<td>‘at, in, on’</td>
<td>‘simultaneous different subject (while)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>rofu</strong></td>
<td>‘for, at, to, with, from’</td>
<td>‘in order to, so that’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following are examples for these with both sets of meanings (excepting rofu, which has already been exemplified above):

**Postpositional:**

(30) *Nai* [eneka **adina**=ri] etu tora ni-yo.  
1S.POSS [pelvis near=at] boil big become-3S.PST  
‘I got a big boil close to my pelvis.’  
[From Bradshaw, In progress]

(31) *John* [bi **kodu** dudu] aruma u-yo.  
(name) TOP [stick] snake hit-3S.PST  
‘John hit the snake with the stick.’  
[bid]

(32) *Re-si* koro=ri vare-yo-ri aruma yaku ina **fafau**  
do-SQSS boundary=at sleep-3S.PST-SIMDS snake DM 3  on.top.of  
de-yo.  
come.down-3S.PST  
‘And then when he was sleeping on the boundary (of the garden) a snake came down upon him.’  
[Justin Gugunu, Baba bona mida di sina ‘Father and son story’, 10 April 2004]
(33) *Omuna tau tora gabire=ri amei-sa.*

mountain all big under=at stay-2S.PRS
‘You live under all the big mountains.’
[From Bradshaw, In progress]

Clause linking:

(34) *adina na rofu gedu mar-o*

because 1S to back.of.neck give-3S.PST
‘because he ignored (lit. ‘gave back of neck’) me’ [ibid]

(35) *Makai dudu beika yaku ni-yo bi rama ae-yo...*

like this thus what DM say-3S.PST TOP true put-3S.PST
‘Thus what he said was fulfilled (lit. ‘was put true’)…’

(36) *Ye beika re-yo *fafa* iriyeduka re-si...*

so what do-3S.PST concerning sorrow do-SQSS
‘And so he was sorry about what he had done and…’ [ibid:67]

It appears that the –*ri* ‘simultaneous different subject’ switch reference marking may actually be another case of heterosymy, such that =*ri* ‘at, in, on’4 is also being used as a clause linking device [cf. (30) above].

(37) *Rafe-bi-gida-ri* bai.si na eru.re-na ga re-fa.

wash-DUR-1S.FUT-SMDS come.SQSS 1S trick-NOM PRHB do-2P.IMP
‘While (or lit. ‘at/on’) I will be washing, don’t come and be tricking me.’
[From Bradshaw, In progress]

The other switch reference suffixes do not behave so, except interestingly the pair *ma* ‘and (coordinating conjunction)’5 (38) and –*ma* ‘subsequent different subject’ (39), though this is a different type of heterosemy as both are connectors, but connectors or “coordinands” are different.

(38) *Nono.baba ma mida-mida amei-nu re-yadi.*

parent and child-RED stay-STAT do-3P.PST
‘The parents (lit. ‘mother-father’) and children sat down.’
[Joe Warika, Oga ‘Planting’, 1999]

(39) *Ina yaku dona u-yo-ma na di-yaka.*

3 DM pig hit-3S.PST-SQDS 1S go-1S.PST
‘He killed the pig and then I went.’

As there is precedence for heterosemous morphemes in other Papuan languages, and even as NP case marking used as clause linking devices, it is quite reasonable to find the same phenomenon occurring in Doromu-Koki. Several have been observed, and may even include the switch reference markings. Historically these may indeed be cases of reinterpretation.

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4 This is being interpreted as a clitic because it is bound to the end of an NP, whereas the switch reference –*ri* only occurs as a verbal affix.

5 From Hiri Motu *ma* ‘and’ (Dutton & Voorhoeve 1974:199).
Abbreviations

1. first person  IMP  imperative  PRS  present
2. second person INST  imperative  PST  past
3. third person  JUS  jussive  RED  reduplication
ALL  linker  REFLEXIVE
BEN  locative  REL  relativiser
CAUS  negative  S  singular, subject
DEF  nominaliser  SG  singular
DM  noun phrase  SIM  simultaneous
DS  non-singular  SQ  sequential
DUR  object  SS  same subject
ERG  plural  STAT  stative
FUT  possessor  TOP  topical marker
GEN  present progressive  VP  verb phrase
HAB  possessive
HYP  perfective

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