



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## Differential case-marking in Ecuadorian Siona

Case, J.T.

### Citation

Case, J. T. (2026, June 30). *Differential case-marking in Ecuadorian Siona*. LOT dissertation series. LOT publishers, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4307357>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4307357>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Differential case-marking in Ecuadorian  
Siona

Published by

LOT  
Binnengasthuisstraat 9  
1012 ZA Amsterdam  
The Netherlands

phone: +31 20 525 2461

e-mail: [lot@uva.nl](mailto:lot@uva.nl)  
<https://www.lotschool.nl>

Cover illustration: Trees at twilight, taken on personal phone at Sototsiaya, Ecuador.

ISBN: 978-94-6093-504-6  
DOI: <https://dx.medra.org/10.48273/LOT0719>  
NUR: 616

Copyright © 2026 Justin Thomas Case. All rights reserved.

Differential case-marking in Ecuadorian  
Siona

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van  
de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,  
op gezag van rector magnificus prof. dr. S. de Rijcke,  
volgens besluit van het college voor promoties  
te verdedigen op dinsdag 30 juni 2026  
klokke 16.00 uur

door

Justin Thomas Case

geboren 21 maart 1990  
te Tampere, Finland

Promotores:    prof. dr. A.P. Salanova    University of Ottawa (Canada)  
                  prof. dr. J.S. Doetjes

Co-promotor:    dr. M. Bruil

Overige leden:  prof. dr. É. Mathieu    University of Ottawa (Canada)  
                  prof. dr. H. de Hoop    Radboud University  
                  dr. G.J. van der Wal  
                  dr. N.D. Siddiqi        Carleton University (Canada)

The research carried out to form this dissertation is partially self-funded and partially funded by the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (awarded twice: 2020-2022) under the project title “Animacy strewn across the grammar in Ecuadorian Siona”.

This dissertation is dedicated to my *airobai* friends in Sototsiaya  
and to the *baicoca* language. *Ai deoji si'ahua'i !*



---

## Contents

---

Acknowledgments . . . . .	xi
Abbreviations . . . . .	xiii
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 DCM patterns attested in Siona . . . . .	2
1.2 Research questions and dissertation outline . . . . .	5
1.3 The Siona people and their language . . . . .	7
1.3.1 Siona in its genealogical context . . . . .	8
1.3.2 Siona in its areal context . . . . .	11
1.4 The representation of Siona data . . . . .	12
1.4.1 A taxonomy of Siona example types . . . . .	12
1.4.2 Glossing conventions: Reporting parsed Siona data . . .	14
1.4.3 Orthography matters: Presenting Siona data . . . . .	15
<b>2 Differential case-marking in the typological record</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1 DCM: A working definition . . . . .	19
2.2 Ingredients for a holistic description of DCM . . . . .	20
2.2.1 The formal dimension: A typology of DCM patterns . . .	21
2.2.2 The functional dimension: DCM across grammatical re-	
lations . . . . .	23
2.2.3 The semantico-pragmatics of DCM . . . . .	26
2.2.3.1 Multi-dimensionality: Ranking DCM triggers .	30
2.2.3.2 Ambiguity avoidance in the broader DCM picture	32
<b>3 Siona case grammar: A preliminary description</b>	<b>35</b>
3.1 Subject-oriented DCM patterns . . . . .	39
3.2 Non-Subject-oriented DCM patterns . . . . .	42
3.2.1 Direct object-oriented DCM patterns . . . . .	43
3.2.2 Promotion and noun class mobility patterns . . . . .	47
3.2.3 Indirect object-oriented DCM patterns . . . . .	51

3.2.4	Other non-Subject DCM patterns . . . . .	53
3.3	Spatial DCM patterns . . . . .	55
3.3.1	Static location-oriented DCM patterns . . . . .	57
3.3.2	Goal-oriented DCM patterns . . . . .	60
3.3.3	Extended uses of the Goal-marker, -na . . . . .	63
3.4	Interim summary: Siona DCM as a paradigm . . . . .	66
<b>4</b>	<b>A comparativist study: Siona case-marking in typology</b>	<b>69</b>
4.1	Methodology: Case-marking questionnaire . . . . .	71
4.2	Typologizing Siona case-marking . . . . .	72
4.2.1	Typologizing Siona case: The Formal domain . . . . .	72
4.2.1.1	The case-marker inventory (size) . . . . .	72
4.2.1.2	The case-marker inventory (members) . . . . .	74
4.2.1.3	Single versus multiple case-marking patterns . . . . .	78
4.2.2	Typologizing Siona case: The Functional domain . . . . .	79
4.2.2.1	Situating Siona case-marker correspondences . . . . .	79
4.2.2.2	Functional gaps in Siona case-marking . . . . .	90
4.2.3	Typologizing Siona DCM properties . . . . .	93
4.2.3.1	Situating Siona Subject-oriented DCM . . . . .	93
4.2.3.2	Situating Siona Direct object-oriented DCM . . . . .	96
4.2.3.3	Situating Siona Indirect object-oriented DCM . . . . .	102
4.2.3.4	Situating Siona spatial DCM patterns . . . . .	105
4.3	Conclusion: Siona case-marking in typology . . . . .	109
<b>5</b>	<b>A variationist study: DCM in a narrative sample</b>	<b>113</b>
5.1	The Siona narrative dataset . . . . .	114
5.2	Methodology: The variationist program . . . . .	115
5.2.1	From tales to tokens: Coding the narrative sample . . . . .	116
5.2.2	The variable-rule technique: An overview . . . . .	120
5.3	Results: DCM in the narrative dataset . . . . .	122
5.3.1	Distribution of marking alternatives in the sample . . . . .	122
5.3.2	S-marking in the Siona narrative dataset . . . . .	126
5.3.2.1	Excluding invariable s-tokens . . . . .	126
5.3.2.2	Exploring the <i>varbrul</i> results for S-oriented DCM . . . . .	128
5.3.3	P-marking in the Siona narrative dataset . . . . .	131
5.3.3.1	Excluding invariable and outlier P-tokens . . . . .	132
5.3.3.2	Exploring the <i>varbrul</i> results for P-oriented DCM . . . . .	134
5.3.4	L-marking in the Siona narrative dataset . . . . .	139
5.3.4.1	Exploring the <i>varbrul</i> results for L-oriented DCM . . . . .	141
5.4	Discussion: Siona DCM in usage . . . . .	144
5.4.1	Discourse-related Triggers in the dataset . . . . .	146
5.4.2	Referentiality-related Triggers in the dataset . . . . .	147
5.4.3	Sentence-level Triggers in the Siona narrative dataset . . . . .	148

<b>6</b>	<b>Information structure and Siona DCM</b>	<b>151</b>
6.1	Methodology: Controlled elicitation . . . . .	153
6.2	Case-marking as a focus strategy . . . . .	155
6.3	Focal case-marking: The size question . . . . .	159
6.3.1	Broad and narrow interpretations for focal case-marking	159
6.3.2	Focal case-marking within complex nominals . . . . .	162
6.4	Distribution check: Siona DCM and focus . . . . .	169
6.4.1	Siona DCM patterns across focal construction types . . .	170
6.4.1.1	Case-marking and information-seeking questions	174
6.4.1.2	DCM and opposition constructions . . . . .	177
6.4.2	Compatibility of focal case- and discourse-marking . . .	179
6.4.3	In summary: Focus-sensitive Siona DCM . . . . .	185
6.5	Towards a theory of discourse-driven DCM . . . . .	186
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>189</b>
7.1	Summary of findings . . . . .	192
7.1.1	A typological investigation of Siona case-marking . . . .	192
7.1.2	A corpus-based investigation of Siona DCM . . . . .	193
7.1.3	An elicitation-driven investigation: Focus-sensitive case- marking . . . . .	195
7.2	Future research directions . . . . .	198
7.3	Towards a formal analysis of Siona DCM . . . . .	199
	<b>Appendix A Northwest Amazonia case-marking dataset</b>	<b>203</b>
A.1	Methodology matters . . . . .	203
A.1.1	Presenting the NWA sample . . . . .	203
A.1.2	Formulating and administering the questionnaire . . . .	206
A.1.2.1	Coding the Formal domain of the questionnaire	207
A.1.2.2	Coding the Functional domain of the question- naire . . . . .	209
A.1.2.3	Coding the DCM domain of the questionnaire .	212
A.2	Presenting the NWA dataset . . . . .	214
A.2.1	The dataset: The Formal domain . . . . .	216
A.2.2	The dataset: The Functional domain . . . . .	219
A.2.3	The dataset: The DCM domain . . . . .	234
	<b>Appendix B Siona DCM narrative dataset (supplement)</b>	<b>255</b>
B.1	Token-by-token annotation protocols . . . . .	256
B.1.1	Annotating sentence-level factors . . . . .	256
B.1.2	Annotating referential token-level factors . . . . .	258
B.1.3	Annotating information structural properties . . . . .	262
B.2	Results: Statistics and illustrative data . . . . .	265
B.2.1	The results for s-oriented DCM . . . . .	266
B.2.2	The results for p-oriented DCM . . . . .	270
B.2.3	The results for l-oriented DCM . . . . .	282
B.2.4	Miscellaneous examples for discussion . . . . .	285

<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>293</b>
Samenvatting in het Nederlands . . . . .	315
Summary in English . . . . .	319
Curriculum Vitae . . . . .	323

---

## Acknowledgments

---

This dissertation is the culmination of years of work, which would not have been possible without the support of my family, my friends, and my colleagues. I count myself incredibly lucky to have worked with so many talented individuals, and these words are a small token of my appreciation for the time and effort you have all invested in this project and in me.

First and foremost, my deepest gratitude goes to the Siona speakers, the *airobai* of Sototsiaya. I will never forget my first visit in 2018. The warmth of the community, children jumping into the stream, and the patience of those who took the time to teach me about their language. Since then, through multiple returns in 2019, 2022, 2023, and 2025, the warm reception has never wavered. To the families who hosted me, shared their meals, and opened their culture to me: my life has been enriched by your generosity and your friendship. I dedicate this work to my Siona friends. I truly hope that this work contributes, in some small way, to the maintenance and to the celebration of the *bajicoca* language for the generations to come.

I would also like to recognize my linguist friends who shared the field with me through the years: Alex Nastevski, Teresa Rabideau, Olivia Griffin, Jurriaan Wiegertjes, Jasmine Desjardins, Jelle Christiaans, Isaac Eaton, Veronika Voevodina, and Rochelle Valenzuela. (Those of you who are not mentioned here, are not forgotten.) A special mention goes to my dear friend and colleague, Paloma Jeretič. I have fond memories of our long chats on hammocks in Sototsiaya, working out the puzzles of Siona grammar as a syntax-semantics team. You have made me a better linguist, and I look forward to our future collaborations.

My doctoral training was shaped by exceptional minds at both the University of Ottawa and Leiden University. At Ottawa, I am grateful for the guidance and support of Ana Arregui, Dennis Ott, and Éric Mathieu, to name a few, particularly in the earlier stages of my doctoral training. I also learned greatly from Laura Sabourin and Tania Zamuner who taught me the foundations of quantitative analysis. In Leiden, I benefited immensely from the insights and collaborations of Jenneke van der Wal and Rik van Gijn. I have learned a great

deal from our discussions over the past few years, and I am a better linguist for it.

This project would have been impossible without my extraordinary supervisory team. At Ottawa, my deepest gratitude goes out to Andrés Salanova, who has played a pivotal role in my development throughout this entire process. You pushed me to be a well-rounded linguist, encouraged me to embrace the descriptive dimensions of our field, and are a role model of how to foster meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities. Your mentorship is foundational to my professional development.

To Jenny Doetjes: thank you for your unrelenting kindness and for all of the advice in developing the final version of this doctoral project. Your guidance on precise and concise writing and scientific reporting, and your infectious curiosity, even for phenomena outside your immediate research, have had a considerable impact on me and have elevated this dissertation.

And to Martine Bruil: working with you on Siona changed my life. Thank you for your patience as I “learned the ropes” and for showing me the vital importance of working with naturalistic, textual data. You have inspired me to aspire to high descriptive standards and to look at the puzzles from various angles. I feel privileged to count you not just as a supervisor and colleague, but as a close friend. Thank you for making me feel so at home in Leiden.

Finally, I must thank my wonderful family. To my brother Brian and his wife Gabrielle, my dad Terry, my father Tom and his wife Alicia, and to my in-laws in California, Jon, Donna, Joni and Josh: thank you for your support and encouragement through the years. To my mom, Carlene: I cannot properly put into words how much your tireless support has meant. Whether it was a phone call to calm my anxieties or acting as a sounding board for my ideas, you have been a constant throughout this doctorate.

Last, but certainly not least, to my wife, Julia. You have been my pillar through every stress-filled night and every moment of doubt. I am so grateful for your encouragement and for the work you do that allows me to pursue what I love. Having you join me in Sototsiaya to teach English was a highlight for me, and I look forward to many more journeys together.

Thank you all for being part of this chapter in my academic life.

---

## Abbreviations

---

1	first-person	FOC	focus
2	second-person	FUT	future
3	third-person	GEN	generic (classifier)
ACC	accusative	GOAL	goal
ABL	ablative	INAN	inanimate
ACC	accusative	INCL	inclusive
ADD	additive	INTENS	intensive
ANIM	animate	LOC	locative
APPL	applicative	M	masculine
ASS	assertive	MED	medial
AUX	auxiliary	N.ASS	non-assertive
BEN	benefactive	N.SBJ	non-subject
CL	classifier	N3S	non-third-person singular
CNT.EXP	counter-expectative	NEG	negative
COM	comitative	NMLZ	nominalizer
COMP	companion	OPP	opposition
CONT	container (classifier)	PL	plural
COP	copula	POL	polar
DAT	dative	POSS	possessor
DCM	differential case-marking	PRO	pronoun
DEF	definite	PROG	progressive
DEM	demonstrative	PROX	proximate
DEP	dependent	PRP	prospective
DERIV	derivation	PRS	present
DES	desiderative	PST	past
DIST	distal	Q	question (interrogative)
DS	different-subject	RCT.PST	recent past
EXCL	exclusive	REDUP	reduplication
F	feminine	REP	reportative

RND	round (classifier)	SS	same subject
SEL	selection/selective	TOP	topic/topical
SG	singular	TEMP	temporal
SOURCE	source	TRS	transitive
SPEC	specific	WH	<i>wh</i> question item

The following symbols are utilized to represent complex items in glosses throughout this dissertation. Further discussion of the glossing conventions is found in Section 1.4.2.

- < - > indicates affixation; e.g., *jǐ'ǐ-bi* (1SG-SBJ)
- < = > indicates cliticization; e.g., *jǐ'ǐ=kato* (1SG=TOP)
- < + > indicates compounding; e.g., *je'ja + wi'e* (school, lit. teaching + house)
- < . > extends the grammatical gloss of a morpheme; e.g., *wi'e-mahka* (house-DIM.SG)
- < \_ > extends a lexical gloss where multiple English elements correspond to a single Siona element in the translation; e.g., *ko'e-nũ'u* (look\_for-HORT)