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Differential case-marking in Ecuadorian Siona

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Summary in English

Ecuadorian Siona (henceforth Siona) is spoken in the most northwestern region of the Amazon basin. The language is currently spoken by approximately 300 people, spread across a half-dozen communities in the Napo-Putumayo region. The language belongs to the western branch of the Tukanoan language family and exhibits a number of typical traits of this family and other languages in the area. A particularly intriguing trait concerns the distribution of case-markers to indicate the role of core arguments (e.g., Subject, Direct object) and various spatial arguments in the sentence. The exact usage of case-markers is not random, rather it is conditioned by the interplay of several factors such as animacy status, information structure, and communicative efficiency or ambiguity avoidance. These are collectively referred to as *differential case marking* (DCM). Two DCM patterns are illustrated in the examples below — Subject-oriented DCM in (1), and animate Object-oriented DCM in (2):

- (1) a. *jaiye joro aide'oji iño*
hai-je **horo** ai + de'o-hi ihño
big-CL:GEN flower big + become-3S.M.PRS.ASS here
'Many flowers grow here.'
- b. *jaiye jorobi aide'oji iño*
hai-je **horo-bi** ai + de'o-hi ihño
big-CL:GEN flower-SBJ big + become-3S.M.PRS.ASS here
'Many FLOWers grow here (i.e., not something else).'
- [VOL: 20230622ejabi001.012a-c]
- (2) a. *bayē jaibai a'yēbairē*
baa-jì **hai-bāi** **a'j-i-bāi-re**
have-N3S.PRS.ASS many-PL.AN older_sibling-CL:M-PL.AN-N.SBJ
'(I/we/they) have many (older) siblings.'
- [VOL: 20230622ejabi001.011b]
- b. *mē'bi yē'ni ñaṇe bahuē*
mì'i-bi **jì'i-ni** ñaa-ñe bāā-wi
2SG-SBJ 1SG-N.SBJ2 see-CL:GEN NEG.AUX-N3S.PST.ASS
' "YOU didn't see ME (i.e., not vice versa)." '
- [NAT: 20140925salsu001.032]

Summary in English

The aim of this work is to refine the analysis of Siona DCM patterns based on the research questions in (3):

- (3) a. Which DCM patterns can be identified in Siona? What properties do these DCM patterns have in common, and how do they differ?
- b. Which factors determine the selection of case marking alternatives in a given context — such as animacy status, focus, specificity? A combination thereof? How do the active factors interact to determine the DCM patterns in usage?
- c. How does Siona DCM compare to other DCM systems described in the Tukanoan literature? In the northwestern Amazonia area? In the broader DCM typology?

To address the questions in (3), this dissertation assembles original data collected via diverse methodologies — including a comparative typological study in Chapter 4, a corpus study in Chapter 5, and an elicitation-based analysis of focus effects in Siona DCM in Chapter 6.

Chapter 2 reviews the DCM literature and lays the groundwork for the analysis of Siona DCM. Chapter 3, entitled ‘Siona case grammar: A preliminary description’, describes the diverse set of Siona DCM patterns, expanding considerably upon the generalizations outlined in Bruil (2014, §4.4). On the basis of diverse data points, this chapter provides new insights regarding the principles of several DCM patterns as pairs of PLAIN versus PROMINENT marking-alternatives, where the former is often zero-marking, as shown in (1a). A distinction between Subjects and non-Subjects is described, where only non-Subjects exhibit an obligatory case-marking requirement for animate nouns. This chapter also introduces a productive pattern where a class of inanimate nominalizations display the obligatory case-marking requirement in the singular. These are called *promoted noun phrases* in this dissertation. Patterns of DCM are described for both argumental and spatial noun phrases, where promoted spatial nouns also adhere to the non-Subject obligatory case-marking generalization. These observations form the foundation for the analysis of Siona via various methodologies.

Chapter 4 reports a comparative typological analysis of (differential) case-marking features in a sample of languages from the northwestern Amazon region, presented in full in Appendix A. This chapter is designed as a comparison of various case-marking properties based on a structural questionnaire. In particular, traits such as inventory size, case syncretisms, and the semantic-pragmatic factors underpinning DCM are scrutinized across the sample. The questionnaire is conceived with Siona as the standard of comparison so that the findings position the case-marking properties attested in the target language of this dissertation in its typological context. The sample comprises a balanced set of Tukanoan and non-Tukanoan languages spoken within the delimited area — i.e., the putative northwestern Amazonia area. The chapter provides insight into which features may have been inherited from an ancestral language, Proto-(Western-)Tukanoan, and/or where contact-induced grammatical shifts may have arisen. Ultimately Siona and its closest relatives display an admixture of typical Tukanoan traits — e.g., a significant overlap between argumentative and locative DCM, and traits shared with local non-Tukanoan languages — e.g., the presence of DCM in the case of the subject and the crucial role of information structure in DCM patterns.

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Chapter 5 presents a corpus analysis of case-marking patterns in a sample of Siona narrative texts (8078 words, 1914 nominal tokens). All eligible Subject, Object, and Location tokens are manually coded as marked or unmarked — as shown on the Subject noun phrases in (1). This forms the dependent variable for a statistical analysis of the narrative corpus via the implementation of the variable-rule technique, i.e., *variable-rule* analysis (Labov 1966, 1970, *et seq.*; Sankoff and Labov 1979; Sankoff 1988). This chapter tests the statistical effects of a handful of plausible factors mentioned in the typological literature, including some already mentioned in Chapter 3: word order, affectedness, animacy, specificity, topicality, and contrastivity. Besides an anticipated degree of variability in usage, statistical support is yielded for Siona DCM as being primarily driven by information structure. Contrastivity shows the largest effect across all three tested grammatical relations (Subjects, Direct objects, and Locations). In other words, a noun phrase is far more likely to receive overt (i.e., PROMINENT) case-marking when its referent is contrasted with salient alternative referents at that moment in the narrative. Topicality shows the second largest effect, although this effect is not observed for Subject-oriented DCM in the sample. A handful of smaller statistical effects regarding word order and specificity status are found, but these effects differ in nature from the effects of information structure. This study also demonstrates that spatial noun phrases receive overt case-marking significantly more often than do argumental noun phrases, despite a clear overlap regarding the statistically significant factors favouring case-marking.

Chapter 6 characterizes the distribution of case-marking in contexts traditionally associated with focus, reporting data collected via controlled elicitations. The results indicate that the relevant overt (PROMINENT) case-marking arises strictly in a subset of these focus contexts — i.e., in certain question-answer pairs such as in (4), an in opposition constructions as in (5). This same case-marking is generally associated with the *emphatic contrast* reading in out-of-the-blue contexts, as was shown above in (1b):

- (4) a. QUESTION: *quebi iño aide'okuē ?*
ke-e-bi ihño ai + de'o-ki
 WH-CL:GEN-SBJ here big + become-2/3S.M.PRS.N.ASS
 'What grows here?'
- b. ANSWER: *jaiye jorobi aide'oji iño*
hai-je **horo #(-bi)** ai + de'o-hi ihño
 big-CL:GEN flower-SBJ big + become-3S.M.PRS.ASS here
 'Many FLOWERS grow here.' [VOL/SUG: 20230622ejabi002.003a-b]
- (5) [*bahuē yohuē hueroye* _{NEG}] [*te'e guēnarore huerohuē* _{AFF}]
 bāā-wi **jo-wi** wero-je **te'-e**
 NEG.AUX-N3S.PST.ASS canoe-CL:CONT buy-CL:GEN one-CL:GEN
gĩna-ro #(-re) wero-wi
 metal-CL:RECIP-N.SBJ buy-N3S.PST.ASS
 'I didn't buy a BOAT _{NEG}, [(I) bought a COOKING POT _{AFF}].'
 [VOL: 20230623ejepa001.013]

Besides the (often predictable) distribution of overt case-marking in (4) and (5), judged as odd where the case-marking is absent, it is shown that case-marking is not used in certain focus contexts where it might be expected. For example, speakers avoid

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case-marking in contexts of correction, with focus-sensitive morphemes such as *-hē* (also) and *-se'e* (only), and in certain interrogative constructions such as alternative questions (X or Y), or complex WH questions (which student did you see?). Ultimately, this chapter refines the description of the distribution of Siona DCM alternatives on the basis of focus and/or contrastivity, distinguishing rigid from more subtle effects.

Considered together, the various forms of evidence assembled in this dissertation paint a picture of Siona as primarily conditioned by the interplay of an animacy class system and information structure. The former determines whether case-marking is obligatory in certain contexts, and which case-markers are available to a particular noun phrase, whereas the latter conditions the use of overt PROMINENT case-marking. Various insights are presented regarding the subtler role of other, less important factors (e.g., word order, specificity) contributing to the variable nature of Siona DCM. Part of this variation is due to ambiguity avoidance and communicative efficiency, which merits greater attention in future research. These factors differ fundamentally from the animacy and discourse factors scrutinized extensively here.