Diachrony in Grammar Writing: The Case of Tangut

Writing the grammar of Tangut (Western Xia empire, 1038-1227) leads to providing the synchronic account of a language that spans over two centuries, relying on text collections (corpus) and philology (document study). This is at least the way Tangut Studies have been working since the emergence of the field, facing the challenge of subjectivity due to the absence of feedback or elicitation from informants, until the documentation of closely related languages provided a paradigm shift (Honkasalo 2019, Gates 2021; Beaudouin 2023).

The introduction of data from Tangut's sister languages, while addressing the shortcomings, introduces a paradox. It mitigates the subjectivity in Tangut documentation, but involves substituting *another language*, requiring an awareness of both diachronic and geographic distances to explain unique language developments. Tangut synchronic description, akin to languages described through the lens of sister languages like Classical Maya, demands an analysis that mandatorily encompasses diachrony and synchrony. Simultaneously, the description of Tangut shares common concerns with any living language description. While a bottom-up approach in parts of speech definition appears ideal (de Haan 2010, 2012), top-down considerations are often unavoidable; when crafting a grammar, self-awareness of the underlying framework is crucial, as is introducing the selected features governing one's categorisation for the reader.

This presentation aims to provide a methodological account of the sources available for the sake of grammar writing in Tangut, emphasizing the diachrony-based methodology drawn from the documentation of sister languages. Examples will be provided, illustrating instances where the distinction between diachrony and synchrony blurs. Additionally, the concept of a hierarchy of features will be introduced, highlighting instances where subtle shifts in hierarchy yield structural impacts, such as relocating a morpheme within the grammar.