ISW Colloquium – Spring Semester 2024

WED 27.03.2024 | 16:00-17:00 | UniTobler F -111 (U1)

Jeff Good (SUNY Buffalo):

Linguistic diversification across scales: Developing baseline assumptions for modeling language change in Bantu societies

One of the most significant recent trends in modeling the historical development of large language families, such as the Bantu subgroup of Benue-Congo, has been the application of phylogenetic techniques to linguistic data—in some cases augmented with geographic information—to understand their diversification at great scale and time depth. However, the sociolinguistic assumptions that are used to interpret the resulting models are rarely made fully explicit or carefully justified, which weakens their usefulness as a basis for concrete historical inference. This talk will present results of ongoing quantitative and qualitative research to model the dynamics of linguistic diversification at small scale among a group of languages spoken in the area that is believed to be in or near the Bantu homeland. This work is intended to offer lessons for understanding the diversification of the family as a whole, and its results will be used to develop initial proposals for more sociolinguistically informed approaches for the use of phylogenetic methods in the large-scale analysis of language change in the Bantu area.