

In Memory of Professor Emerita Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu, 1938-2016

Tribute by the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana

The Institute of African Studies is honoured to share our reflections on Professor Emerita Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu, a dedicated scholar and mentor, and friend to many of us, who passed away in November 2016.

During her long career as a scholar, Professor Kropp Dakubu made outstanding contributions to teaching, research and community service both within the University of Ghana, her professional home, and outside. She was member of faculty of the University of Ghana for forty-four years counting 10 years of post-retirement contract and five years of non-stipendiary service as a professor emerita of the University. Commencing her career as a Research Fellow in language and linguistics at the Institute of African Studies in 1964, she was promoted to the rank of Senior Research Fellow in 1972, Associate Professor in 1982, and Full Professor in 1987.

Professor Kropp Dakubu took up the position of Deputy Director of the Institute of African Studies in 1988 and later moved to the Language Centre as its Director, a position she held until she attained age 60, the retiring age in Ghana. She returned to the Institute of African Studies soon after where she continued on post-retirement contract to supervise graduate work and teach graduate classes. She also led and managed the Institute's Publications Unit, serving as the Editor-in-Chief of our publications. She continued to supervise and teach gratis graduate and undergraduate courses at the Linguistics Department of the University of Ghana as well as at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW). The credit for introducing the study of the Gurene language at the UEW is rightfully hers; she not only researched that language, but taught it and mentored the first tutors of Gurene at the Gur-Gonja Department of the UEW.

Professor Kropp Dakubu had a very fruitful scholarly career, especially in the area of language studies (linguistics and literature). She was keenly interested in issues and questions around historical linguistics, and language use and policy in Ghana. While Kropp Dakubu's research and writing have covered an impressive range of languages including English, Akan, Dagbani, and Dagaare, and some of endangered northern Guang languages, she is especially recognized internationally for her ground-breaking research into Ga and Dangme, and later on Gurene. It would be recalled that in appreciation of her work on the latter, the Frafra District assemblies bestowed a special award on her for the development of Gurene.

Altogether, Professor Kropp Dakubu wrote numerous books and monographs, countless journal articles and book chapters. She edited or co-edited more than forty scholarly journals and reports. When in 2012 the Vice-Chancellor of the University of

Ghana set up a programme for units of the University to produce readers it was to Professor Kropp Dakubu that he turned; he placed her in charge of the entire University readers' programme. The project was by all indicators a resounding success.

Professor Kropp Dakubu made rich contributions to the University and global Africanist scholarship. She served the academic community in Ghana and West Africa through her active membership of the West African Linguistics Society, the Linguistics Association of Ghana, and the Ghana English Studies Association. Her work was recognized variously, including her appointment as Visiting Professor at a number of respected institutions in the United States, Germany, and Norway, among others. In recognition of her outstanding scholarship she was elected to the Fellowship of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Professor Kropp Dakubu has been a mentor to numerous students, and generously continued to share her time, extensive knowledge and considerable skill and priceless insight with both faculty and staff long after her retirement. While receiving treatment in Boston she continued to receive email messages from her doctoral students requesting for assistance. Below are reflections from some of her colleagues.

Professor Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu was deeply committed to the work of the Institute. She was a stickler for proper writing: grammar, syntax, construction and so forth, and long after she had retired she assisted in the teaching of Academic writing to our graduate students. These quickly learned that they could not string together sentences in a cavalier manner and submit them as academic essays. She attended Fellows meetings and often brought her keen institutional memory to bear in guiding our decision making, something I particularly appreciated during my tenure as Director. In an environment when some do not speak out when something is wrong, for fear of incurring displeasure, Professor Kropp Dakubu was forthright, honest and firm. I recollect an occasion when pressure had been brought to bear on one Director by a past Director to hire someone to a position he was unqualified for, and indeed showed no competence for either; Professor Kropp Dakubu calmly spoke up to insist that he could not and should not be hired to that position. And he was not.

Professor Kropp Dakubu was down to earth and did not stand by ceremony, thus she did not demand any of the privileges that are sometimes associated with people of her status and distinction. This made her very approachable, and someone in whose presence one could be very comfortable.

I worked with her on one special issue of the then *Research Review* (now *Contemporary Journal of African Studies*) and found this to be one of the most smooth-sailing collaborative projects I have ever engaged in — Akosua Adomako Ampofo, and Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu (Eds.). 2009. *Knowledge Transmission in Ghana: Research Review Supplement 19*. Legon, Institute of African Studies. She was readily available, consistent, thorough, as well as

generous with the authors, spending much time and effort working with them to shape their papers. I myself learned a lot in the process, not only on the technical skills of editing a journal, but also on being both firm and kind with authors. As the Akans say, *ɔ ye nipa*, Professor Emerita Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu was truly a human being!

- Professor Akosua Adomako Ampofo (Director, IAS: 2010-2015)

For us, as a research institute, we could not have had a better role model than Professor Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu. She loved fieldwork and whether she ventured into communities in rural areas in northern Ghana or into small migrant groups in the city of Accra, she applied the same rigour and dedication. This resulted in prolific analyses and publications. The range of her interests has ensured that studies in a number of dying languages as well as languages like Ga and Gurune have been deepened considerably. She also studied and wrote about broad themes such as the national language and multi-lingualism. Professor Kropp Dakubu is associated with the revival and survival of our publications unit and publication programmes and was a long-term editor of the Institute of African Studies *Research Review*. She also served on numerous statutory and *ad hoc* committees thus assisting actively in the running of the Institute.

- Professor Esi Sutherland-Addy

The news of Professor Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu's demise was hard to believe and for days I still hoped that it was a mistake. The last time I received a message from her (about a month or two before she left us), she sounded upbeat and said she was living with her sister and receiving treatment.

The news of her passing has been hard to take for those of us who knew her for a long time — nearly 40 years: since the 1970s. In my own case: she was responsible for teaching me the Structure of African Languages, a course on offer at the Institute in my graduate student days. Professor Mary Esther Dakubu also supervised my MA (now the equivalent of the MPhil) thesis on 'Kasem Nominal Classes and Nominal Concord'. It was not a bad job, to put it euphemistically. The examiners had no difficulty with the thesis (even in those days when only a few Legon graduate theses made the mark). I recall that the external examiner's comments were flattering. She remained my mentor thereafter — ever willing to spare time to comment on my draft articles and publications. She was always frank and sympathetic: if she said a paper was not good, I did not doubt it.

As a former publications officer and Editor-in-chief at the Institute, she continued to be on standby long after she had stepped down from the position.

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As editors, Dr Stephen Acheampong and myself sought her advice whenever we were confronted by editorial challenges.

Mary Esther's departure is a great loss not only for the Institute; Ghanaian linguistics has lost a true champion. She was an authority not only on the Ga and Dangme languages, but also on Gurene (Frafra). She was interested also in Dagbanli (Dagbani) and Dagaare.

We will continue to mourn her for a long time.

May she find a peaceful repose in the arms of Our Lord.

Condolences to her daughter, Memuna.

- Professor Albert Kanlisi Awedoba