

IN MEMORIAM OF LYNELL MARCHESE ZOGBO (1948–2026)

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A Life Dedicated to African Linguistics, Kru languages and Bible Translation. Indeed, it is with profound sorrow that the international African linguistics community, and especially the West African Linguistic Society (WALS), mourns the passing of Lynell Marchese Zogbo, who departed this life on March 7, 2026, in California, at the age of seventy-eight (78).

With her passing, African linguistics loses one of its most distinguished voices, Bible translation loses a devoted servant, and countless colleagues, friends and students will miss a mentor whose wisdom, generosity, and unwavering commitment touched lives across continents.

For more than five decades, Lynell Marchese Zogbo dedicated her remarkable gifts to the study, preservation, and promotion of African languages, especially of the Kru languages of Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. Lynell Marchese Zogbo has been WALS Election Officer since the earliest days of the Society and was one of its living memories. She even recently accepted to continue to serve as a member of the Council of WALS and gave up only when she became ill. Her advice and encouragement to the WALS Council cannot be given enough tribute in this short memorial.

Born in the United States in 1948, Lynell Marchese Zogbo devoted most of her career to the study of West African languages. From our personal exchanges, she used to credit her former PhD mentors at UCLA, especially Vicky Fromkin and Peter Ladefoged, from whom she said she inherited a love for and insights into African Linguistics.

Though she partly started her academic career in Nigeria (Ilorin and Ibadan) she developed a deep connection with Côte d'Ivoire, where she then lived and worked for the rest of her life and met her husband, Georges (Nahounou G.) Zogbo, whose brother was a linguistic researcher in the Institute of Applied Linguistics (ILA), an expert and a native speaker of a Kru language who completed the only available dictionary of Bete, a Kru dialect.

In general, Lynell Marchese Zogbo's intellectual journey reflects an exceptional commitment to linguistic research, the description of African languages, and the transmission of knowledge. She leaves behind a remarkable body of scholarship whose influence will continue to shape African studies for years to come. Her scholarly legacy, immense and enduring, will continue to illuminate the path of future generations in African linguistics.

Her earliest research focused on Godié, a Kru language spoken in west-central Côte d'Ivoire. Beginning in the 1970s, she produced pioneering studies and was still leading studies on the syntax, subordination, and verbal system of the language before her passing. Her works *The Verbal System in Godié* (1977), *Subordinate Clauses as Topics in Godie* (1977), and *La subordination en godié* (1978) remain essential references for specialists of Godié, Kru in general, and African descriptive linguistics.

Lynell Marchese's most significant scholarly contribution, however, lies in her comparative research on the Kru language family as a whole. Her *Atlas linguistique des langues kru: essai de typologie* (1979; second edition 1983) was the first systematic synthesis of the Kru languages and remains a foundational work for their classification and comparative study. This contribution profoundly advanced our understanding of Kru linguistic diversity and provided a framework for generations of researchers.

Her landmark volume, *Tense/Aspect and the Development of Auxiliaries in Kru Languages* (1986), is widely recognized as one of the most important works ever published on the Kru languages. Through a rigorous comparative analysis of verbal systems, she proposed a historical reconstruction of tense, aspect, and modality

categories within the language family. This study continues to be an indispensable reference in African historical and typological linguistics.

Beyond language description, Lynell Marchese Zgboo made decisive contributions to theoretical discussions on Proto-Kru reconstruction, the evolution of tense systems, noun classes, historical phonology, and ideophones. Her later works, particularly those on *central vowels* in the Kru languages and on ideophones, demonstrate sustained scholarly productivity throughout the final decades of her career. Her paper *Kru Revisited, Kru Revealed (2012)* offers a remarkable synthesis of more than forty years of research on the Kru language family.

Her influence was also expressed through her institutional engagement in Côte d'Ivoire. Associated with the Institute of Applied Linguistics (ILA) at the University of Abidjan, she contributed significantly to the development of Ivorian linguistic studies and to the training of numerous scholars. Ivorian linguists owe much of the scientific foundation upon which contemporary research on the Kru languages is built to her pioneering work.

Alongside her academic career, Lynell Marchese Zogbo played a major role in the field of Bible translation. From 1985 to 2013, she served as a consultant with the United Bible Societies, supporting numerous translation projects throughout Francophone Africa. Her exceptional expertise enabled her to contribute to the production of high-quality translations in many African languages and to train several generations of Bible translators. I remember with happiness our discussion about the complexities of translating Hebrew grammatical tenses into African languages.

Her work on biblical literature and Hebrew poetry reflects the breadth of her scholarly interests. She contributed to the writing of several important reference works on Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, and Judges, as well as methodological studies widely used in Bible translation training programs. Her teaching at the Alliance Christian Evangelical Theological Faculty left a lasting mark on theological education institutions throughout Francophone Africa.

Beyond her scholarly accomplishments, those who knew Lynell Marchese Zogbo remember a generous and rigorous scholar, deeply committed to the transmission of knowledge. Her constant dedication to students, junior researchers, and translators reflected a vision of scholarship grounded in sharing, attentive mentorship, and service. Personally, I still remember that she always questioned her own results and was ready to show where there were still open questions and prospects.

The passing of Lynell Marchese Zogbo represents a tremendous loss for African linguistics, Kru studies, and Bible translation. Yet, her legacy lives on through her publications, the scholars she trained, and the many research and translation projects she inspired.

For specialists of the Kru languages, her name will forever be associated with the scientific description of these languages, their historical comparison, and their recognition as an important part of Africa's linguistic heritage. For Christian communities and Bible translators throughout Francophone Africa, she will remain a respected figure whose influence continues to extend far beyond her professional career.

May her work continue to inspire future generations of linguists and translators, as expressed in a poem dedicated to her memory that modestly summarizes her life path:

Across the forests where the Kru tongues sing,
She listened deeply and gave their voices wings.
In Godié words and ancient songs, she found light,
Bridging peoples, scriptures, and scholarship with insight.
Though her voice is silent, her wisdom still shall flow,
Through every language she cherished and helped the world to know.