René Coppieters, born in Belgium near Bruges (Brugge) on the 23rd of August, 1947, arrived in Pomona College in the autumn of 1976, after completing his Ph.D. degree in Linguistics at Harvard University and his undergraduate degrees in Classics and in East Asian Studies at the Université de Louvain (Belgium).

His upbringing and education were singular in the post-World-War-II world, even for a Belgian aristocratic family. As in many British aristocratic families of the late 19th and earlier centuries, René and his siblings were educated at home until they left for university. His father Charles, trained in Law at the Université de Louvain, managed the family estates and pursued his intellectual and artistic interests. During René’s second year studying Classics at Louvain, in the academic year 1965-66, he took a course in General Linguistics, in the European Structuralist tradition, but it contained a discussion of the new work in Linguistics being done in the United States by Noam Chomsky at MIT. (Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* was published in 1957, his equally ground-breaking *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* in 1965.) The discussion of this new work in syntax aroused René’s curiosity.
After receiving his undergraduate degrees, being asked but deciding not to continue at Université de Louvain as an Assistant in Classics, and completing his one year of compulsory military service, he applied for and was awarded, in a nation-wide competition in all academic subjects, one of twelve prestigious Belgian-American Foundation Fellowships for graduate study in the United States. After one year at the University of California, San Diego, where he studied syntax with Edward Klima, one of Chomsky's first graduate students, and with Ronald Langacker, he moved to Harvard University, where he completed a dissertation in French Syntax under the supervision of Susumu Kuno and also studied Indo-European and Tocharian under Jay Jasanoff.

As I had taught in 1972 the first course on Chomsky's philosophy and linguistics offered at Pomona College, a far-sighted idea of Stephen Erickson, Morton Beckner, Charles King, and Frederick Sontag, my colleagues in the Philosophy Department that I had just joined, I had encouraged the Chairman of the then Modern Languages Department, Professor of German Language and Literature Hans-Dieter Brueckner, to strengthen the language curriculum by adding a trained linguist to the faculty. In 1974 Karen Kossuth arrived from the University of California, Berkeley, to teach German and Linguistics at Pomona. Karen had written a Case Grammar of Icelandic. She was to teach four German courses and two linguistics courses. The next year she and Ronald Macaulay, the only full-time Linguist in Claremont and a Professor at Pitzer College, established the Pomona-Pitzer inter-collegiate major in linguistics. The year after that René arrived and began teaching two linguistics courses and four French courses per year.

Another remarkable Pomona professor, an alumna of the College and a witty, acerbic, chain-smoking Medievalist Phyllis Johnson, who had become, like Brueckner, a friend of mine while I was a still very young and inexperienced member of the Pomona Faculty, had followed the example of Hans-Dieter Brueckner and argued for the hiring of a Chomskyan syntactician in French, just so long as her more conservative colleagues could be appeased by his teaching Romance Philology. A year later René, Bill Banks in Psychology, and I in Philosophy proposed to the National Endowment for the Humanities an experimental Program in Language at Pomona College. NEH funded the proposal, and, in consequence, the first Cognitive Science course at Pomona College was offered, taught jointly by Atlas, Banks, and Coppeters. Known to the sixty students who enrolled in it as the "ABCs" course, it demonstrated that even in the 1970's there was excitement among Pomona and other Claremont undergraduates about an integrated approach to the study of language and mind. One upper-classman from Swarthmore College, an exchange-student who took the course during his semester visiting Pomona College, told me that it was the most intellectually exciting course he had ever taken in college. (I had dubbed the program "Prolan," which caused much mirth for my then senior colleague Professor Larry Cohen in the Department of Biology, as the term was an obsolete, scientific term for what is technically described as a "human, chorionic gonadotropic hormone.")

The original promise of this National Endowment for the Humanities program was strangled in the crib by the failure of the two most senior academic administrators at
the College in the late 1970's to understand its intellectual potential and hence to nurture it, despite the documented enthusiasm, amazingly enough, of Washington D.C. bureaucrats at NEH and NEH’s explicit invitation to Pomona College that it re-apply to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a more substantial grant to continue the development of the program. The inchoate program in cognitive science was killed by Administrative neglect. William Banks tried again and again to re-establish a program in cognitive science. Karen Kossuth and Rene Coppieters tried to interest the Administration of that time in introducing into the College a department of linguistics. Their efforts would only achieve success some fifteen years later, in 1999, when a Harvard University historian and new President of Pomona College would see the program's intellectual merits, take the advice of the distinguished academics who wrote a Ten-Year External Review of the program, and appreciate its value to the College as a way to make Pomona College a distinctive college as well as a good one. When Peter W. Stanley left the Presidency of Pomona College, US News and World Report ranked the College as the 4th best undergraduate college in the United States. The department that Stanley and the Board of Trustees created will graduate eleven students this year, among whom are five who will enter Ph.D. programs at MIT, Chicago, Rochester, and the University of California.

More than any other member of the faculty, René Coppieters is responsible for the creation and organization of the new Department of Linguistics and Cognitive Science. As a successful Chair of the large Modern Languages Department of the period, a Chair of the Curriculum Committee, a Member of the Executive Committee of the Faculty, and the first Chair of the new department, René brought administrative and political skills to the institutionalization of a deeply considered, intellectual conviction that the scientific study of language, begun by the Chomksy and Cognitive Revolutions of the late 1950's at Harvard and MIT, would progress by the embedding of linguistic theory in a larger theory of the mind. It is this intellectual conviction that structures the organization and curricula of the current department, which asks that all its faculty bring to bear an understanding of the relevant theories of linguistics, psychology, philosophy, and computer science in their teaching and, where possible, take dual if not multiple perspectives in their research.

This conviction was born from his understanding the implications for linguistic theory of ground-breaking linguistic research that Coppieters published on the subtle differences between native speakers of a language and highly fluent but non-native, second-language speakers. This classic study remains deeply influential in linguistics; it shifted our conception of what "fluency" in a language means.

In his thirty years at Pomona College, René has not just thought about linguistics; he has acted on his intellectual convictions. He has been granted the good fortune to see his ideas take institutional life and shape. His independence of mind, his intellectual originality, and his tact were surely shaped by his extraordinary family traditions and its supple, vigorous intellectuality. In August 1990, when I was lecturing in the University of Louvain, I had the pleasure and privilege of meeting René’s father Charles Coppieters. He made me a gift, a recently published volume of his poetry. A particular one of these
lyrics has remained with me, and as I say "au revoir" to my friend, sympathetic intellectual critic, and comrade-in-arms, I salute him with his father's art (Charles Coppieters, Thèmes et Variations, (Bruges: Walleyndruk NV, April 1990), p. 49):

\[
\begin{align*}
J'\text{ai subi} \\
\text{bien des automnes} \\
\text{et les feuilles} \\
\text{de la jeunesse} \\
\text{de plus en plus} \\
\text{furent emportées}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mais mon coeur} \\
\text{a mesure} \\
\text{retrouve l'innocence}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{et la neige y recouvre} \\
\text{le tapis mort} \\
\text{des illusions}
\end{align*}
\]

Bon Voyage, et Bonnes Chances, René! Merci!

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