Robert Cooper, who died on 19 October 2012 of the cancer that had first appeared 20 years earlier, was the first ‘distinguished language scholar’ to be interviewed for this journal. The interview, under the title “Questions for Robert Cooper”, was published in 2009 in Volume 8.

Born in Salem Massachusetts on December 1, 1931, Robert Cooper attended Newton High school and went on to study for a degree in English at Cornell University. After two happy years, he returned home on the death of his mother and continued to an honors degree at Harvard, followed by 2 years at Harvard Law School. During his army service, he became a skilled teletypist. Thinking of entering his grandfather’s business, he earned an MBA at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.

For 2 years, he worked at Abraham and Strauss, but giving up on a business career, he went on to study for a doctorate at Teachers College under Walter H. MacGinitie, a reading assessment expert who was an author of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test and Professor of Psychology and Education. Cooper’s dissertation dealt with the acquisition of morphological rules in English by deaf children. This led to his first published article, and at the same time he published an article on the English proficiency of foreign students. The year before, he had carried out a study showing the correlation of the new Test of English as Foreign Language with the Columbia Test of English proficiency, constituting what was an early contribution to the field of English language testing.

For his first job after the doctorate, he joined Joshua Fishman, having been recommended as a qualified psychometrician by the leading testing expert, Robert Thorndike, who had been on his dissertation committee. There, he joined John Gumperz and Roxana Ma as members of the team working on Fishman’s pioneering...
study of bilingualism in the Jersey City barrio. It was in this environment that he was first introduced to the field of the sociology of language to which he was to make major contributions. He is listed as the second author of the *Bilingualism in the Barrio* report, and as the author of two chapters and co-author of another. His resulting 1968 paper in *Language Learning* was the first to argue for the need to include sociolinguistic contextual data in reporting language proficiency.

The research project in Nigeria that he hoped to work on next fell through, but Fishman recommended him to the second founding father of sociolinguistics, Charles Ferguson. In 1968, Cooper joined Ferguson, Marvin Bender, and J. Donald Bowen working on the Ford Foundation-sponsored survey of languages in Ethiopia. The results of his research appear in nine chapters of the published volume dealing with language in Ethiopia. Cooper’s role in the project was to study language in use. For the pioneering study of the marketplace, the team went to twenty markets in different parts of the country in each of which they hired six local high school students to collect data. The students would go to each stall in the market and record the produce being sold and the number of transactions they overheard in each language. As the reports were highly correlated, the average was very reliable. His groundbreaking study in that project, co-authored with Susan Carpenter, established the important principle that in a multilingual area where there is no *lingua franca*, it is generally the seller who learns the buyers’ languages. Another study looked at languages used in the courts. A study of the mutual intelligibility of six related languages required travelling in the bush on two ten-day field trips; this adventure which needed the team to cross rivers in a Land Rover and sleep in mission stations was probably the most exciting part of the trip.

After the Ethiopian project finished, in 1970 Cooper was awarded a postdoctoral fellowship in linguistics at Stanford University from the Social Science Research Council. There, he helped Ferguson edit the Ethiopian report and was mentored in linguistics by Ferguson. His close relationship to Fishman and Ferguson, two of the founders of the field of sociolinguistics, established his basic understanding of the rapidly growing field.

But his days of full-time research were not to continue. At the end of the fellowship, in 1971, he accepted an appointment at San Diego State University, moving from the academic luxury of the Stanford Center for Advanced Studies to the hard grind of teaching four courses a semester, none related to the sociology of language and two of them freshman composition. He at once started looking for another research position, and having found one, he took a leave of absence from San Diego.

For his next project, Cooper joined Joshua Fishman in Jerusalem to carry out research for a Ford Foundation-supported study of the spread of English. In the book that reported on the project, Cooper is listed as the second editor, after Fishman, and as a co-author of half the 14 chapters. His innovative studies of English in two Jerusalem neighborhoods opened up the field of urban sociolinguistic study, and the data he reported on the language of signs in downtown Jerusalem formed one of the first studies in the field that is nowadays called linguistic landscaping.

Joshua Fishman had been in Jerusalem not just for his studies of language spread and of language planning, but also with the hope of building a program in the field at