Foreword

The sociology of language has, of late, been subject to the micro-sociolinguistic pressures of variational linguistics, on the one hand, and of ethnomethodology, on the other. Both of these pressures have contributed mightily to the growing empirical, methodological, and theoretical rigor of the sociology of language, but they have both exacted a great price in so doing. The price has not only been that of learning 'more and more about less and less' but of doing so under 'self-destruct' instructions which foresee and encourage the demise of the field itself.

Sociology per se, basically a many-splendored discipline with a strong macroscopic wing, has, nevertheless, sorely needed an ally in order to withstand the onslaught of microsociolinguistic astigmatism. Certainly the 'sociology of language' cannot long remain restricted by a notion of society as something no greater than 'conversations' or 'face-to-face interactions' or, indeed, the 'routines of everyday life'. This is not to say that all of the foregoing do not exist within a greater social context, but only to stress that it is that very context that needs to be seen.

The volume which the O'Barrs have put together is refreshingly and unabashedly macro-interested, although it is as microtechnical as any rigorist might desire. As an anthropologist and a political scientist working together, they have provided a prospective map of a field that sorely needs to be formulated: the political sociology of language. It is high time that we all returned to social reality in our concern for language in society, and there is nothing more real than the allocation of power in social relationships. This allocation so frequently either follows language lines or invites language demarca-

tions corresponding to it that the many examples attested to in this volume cannot but direct our attention to the larger scene that has so often escaped the attention of sociolinguistic specialists.

Our innocence of nations and other political units and of their impact on language behavior has not merely been tantamount to overlooking the elephants at the zoo. In addition, due to individual biases, it has been 'justified' theoretically, thus finally presenting as a virtue the necessary astigmatism to which all young and volatile disciplines are prone. The O'Barrs have put the 'nation' back into the agenda of serious sociolinguistic researchers and, as a result, it will now be more difficult to forget it or any other societal structure for the control and organization of scarce resources.

It may be, of course, that nations are prominent influences in societally patterned language behavior only when the nations are as young, as raw, as formative as are Tanzania, India, and Papua New Guinea today. Older, more secure, more successfully routinized nations may be far less prominent configurations in the social behavior of their citizens. However, only volumes with the temerity to raise big issues and to view them unflinchingly will bring us closer to understanding such or other macrosociological factors in the lives of men. It is precisely because the O'Barrs did not fear to take a big step into the unknown that they and their associates deserve to be congratulated and that we must acknowledge our vast indebtedness to them.

With the appearance of this volume we may hope that conferences, courses, and careers devoted to an explication of 'language and politics' will begin to multiply. The world of scholarship at large, and sociolinguistic scholarship in particular, would both benefit thereby.

Yeshiva University
New York

Joshua A. Fishman
General Editor