This presentation, drawing from Heller and McElhinny 2017, considers the problem of the ontological status of language. I argue that the idea of language as an object of enquiry, separable from “cognition”, “society” and “culture”, is best understood as the product of a specific set of political economic conditions in which colonialism and capitalism are intertwined. One result is to render language available as a technique of regimentation and means for discursively legitimizing relations of social difference and social inequality. Within this framework, I will develop one particular case study, the rise of U.S. sociolinguistics/linguistic anthropology in the context of the Cold War.