Legitimacy and Legality in National Identity Construction

— A Study of Southern Cameroons' Secessionist Discourse

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Abstract

This article studies the use of discourses of legality and legitimacy in order to justify separation amongst Anglophone secessionists in Cameroon. It was motivated by the belief that the study of self-determination can be analyzed from legal, historical as well as linguistic perspectives. Building on previous works dealing with national identity construction, this article focuses on the linguistic strategies used by independence activists from the former British Trust-territory of Southern Cameroons to justify their fight for independence. The analysis of thirteen speeches given by prominent Southern Cameroonian nationalists was guided by Wodak et al.'s Discourse-Historical Approach and led to the identification of three semantic macrostructures. The latter were found to be enforced in discourse by strategies such as nomination and predication, as well as common place arguments, which in turn are achieved through word choice, intertextuality, storytelling and comparison.

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