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Oppositional Ideology Uses of Linguistic Devices in the Battle for Public Opinion

Using the principles of critical discourse analysis, I examine the similarities and differences in rhetorical techniques used by the publicity machine of both pro- and anti-evolutionist activists. Fairclough (*Critical Discourse Analysis*, 1995:76) tells us that ‘discoursal practice is a facet of struggle which contributes in varying degrees to the reproduction or transformation of the existing order of discourse, and through that of existing social and power relations’. Analyzing media reports, press releases and blog posts regarding the issue, I show how linguistic manipulation of public opinion is attempted in an effort to protect on one hand or attack on the other the status quo with respect to science education. The discoursal practice of these two groups, then, illuminates these battling ideologies. The pro-evolutionists, who count the majority of the world’s mainstream scientists among them, are attempting to preserve the status quo by using techniques to diminish the anti-evolutionist stance, including explicit use of factual detail, sometimes incomprehensible to the layperson. The anti-evolutionists, among whom are variously called creationists (both young- and old-earth creationists) and proponents of a principle called intelligent design, choose instead to use rhetorical techniques designed to threaten the status quo including forcing dichotomies and by excessive credentializing. Describing the linguistic devices underpinning these arguments can help us to understand how changes are effected or avoided in social, cultural and power relations and how public opinion can be manipulated through linguistic means.