

What you always wanted
(or maybe not) to know about

Speech Act Theory

NOT hearsay:
Statements offered to show:

1. Speaker's verbal act
2. Hearer's reaction or state of mind
3. Speaker's indirect state of mind
4. Utterance for its own sake

Exceptions to the Hearsay Rule

- Records of vital statistics
- Public records or reports
- Documents of business activities
- Medical diagnoses and treatment
- Learned treatises and reference works
- Excited utterances (“Oh, my God!”)
- Dying declaration
- ‘State of mind’ exceptions [controversial]

Searle's Speech Act Theory

How Speakers and Hearers use
Language

How Speakers & Hearers Use Language



Speaker



Message



Hearer

Components of a speech act

State of mind



Message



Illocution

What speaker means
to convey

Locution

Actual words of
the message

Perlocution

Hearer's reaction to
speaker's message

Components of a speech act



Illocution

What speaker means
to convey

Illocution – Speaker's purpose or intent

- Convey information: [Assertive]
“Jones is a disreputable businessman.”
- Make a request: [Directive]
“Will you pay for my tuition?”
- Make a commitment: [Commissive]
“I will take you to Disneyland for your birthday.”
- Create a new state of affairs: [Declaration]
“We the jury find the defendant to be guilty.”
- Express an emotion: [Expressive]
“I'm thrilled that you will be going to law school.”

Explicit vs. Implicit Illocutions

Assertives

- **Explicit:** “I {claim, assert} that it is raining outside.”
- **Implicit:** “It is raining outside.”

Commissives

- **Explicit:** “I {promise, vow} that I will repay the money I borrowed.”
- **Implicit:** “I **will** repay the money I borrowed.”

Directives

- **Explicit:** “I {demand, order} you to leave town immediately.”
- **Implicit:** “Leave town immediately!”

Declarations

- **Explicit:** “We find the defendant is not guilty.”
- **Implicit:** “Not guilty!”

Structure of Explicit illocutions

- “I maintain that it is raining outside.”
- ↑
1st person subject
- “I maintain that it is raining outside.”
- ↑
simple present tense verb

Structure of Explicit illocutions

“[I insist] (that) {you leave immediately}.”



illocutionary
clause



propositional
clause

Structure of Explicit illocutions

“[We find] (that) {the defendant is not guilty}.”



illocutionary
clause



propositional
clause

Components of a speech act



Perlocution

Hearer's reaction to speaker's message

Perlocution

Effect on the hearer

“Jones is a disreputable businessman.”

Hearer now knows something about Jones.

Hearer avoids Jones.

“I will take you to Disneyland for your birthday.”

The hearer jumps up and down with joy.

“Will you pay for my tuition?”

The hearer angrily answers ‘no way!’.

“We the jury find the defendant to be guilty.”

The mother of the defendant begins to sob.

“I’m thrilled that you will be going to law school.”

The hearer is aware that the speaker shares his/her good fortune.

Components of a speech act



Message



Locution

Actual words of
the message

Locution

The linguistic properties

“Jones is a disreputable businessman.”

The word ‘disreputable’ is defamatory.

“We the jury find the defendant to be guilty.”

This utterance contains 9 words.

“Will you pay for my tuition?”

This is an interrogative utterance.

“I will take you to Disneyland for your birthday.”

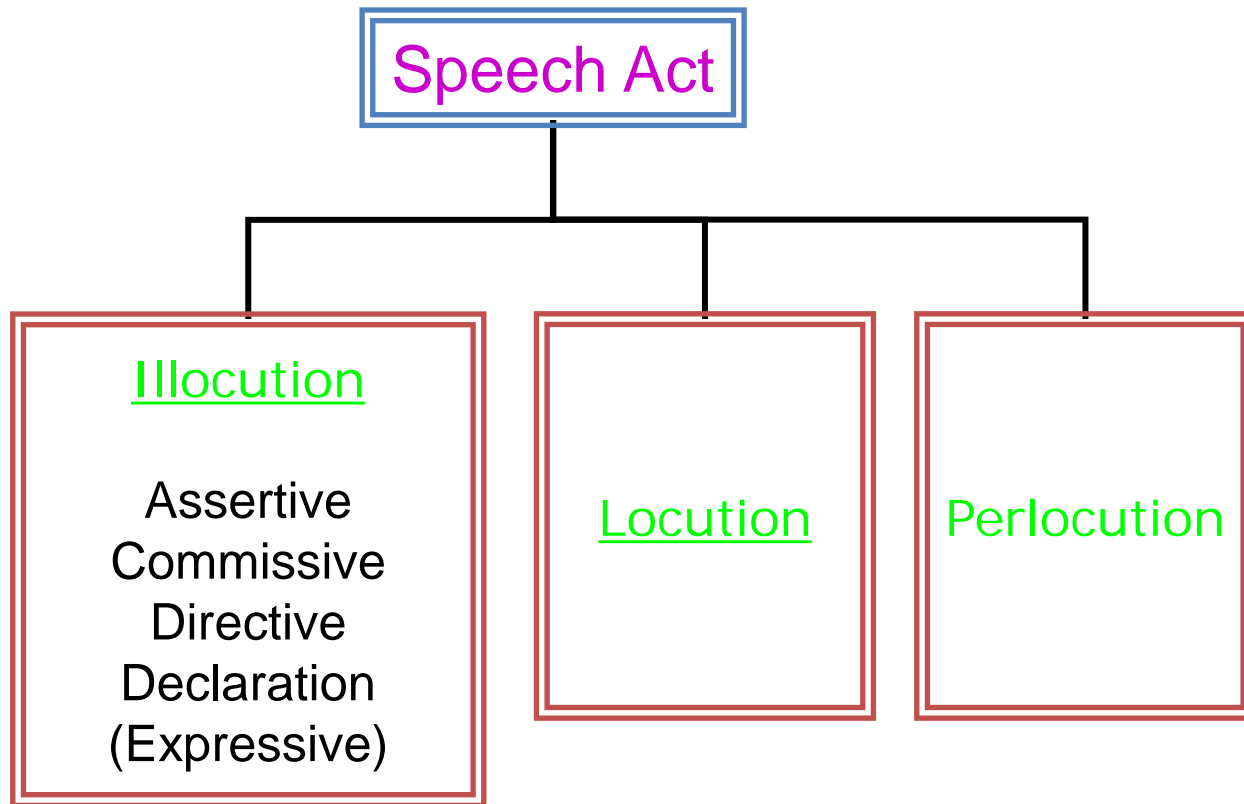
This utterance mentions a proper name that is a place.

“I’m thrilled that you will be going to law school.”

This is an utterance in the English language; it contains more than one verb and has 2 words beginning with ‘th’.

Speech Act Theory

John Searle



Components of a speech act

Speaker's State of Mind



Illocution

What speaker means
to convey

State of Mind

The **mental state** that accompanies an illocution

Assertive : **Belief**

“It is raining outside right now”

(I believe) it is raining outside right now.

“There will be a major earthquake on April 15, 2020.”

(I believe) there will be a major earthquake on April 15, 2020.

State of Mind

Commissive : Intent

“I will repay the money I borrowed.”

“I promise to repay the money I borrowed.”

(I intend) to repay the money I borrowed.

“I swear to tell the truth,....”

(I intend) to tell the truth.

State of Mind

Directive : Want

“In which room is our final exam?”

(I want) you to tell me the room where our final exam is.

“I order you to leave town immediately.”

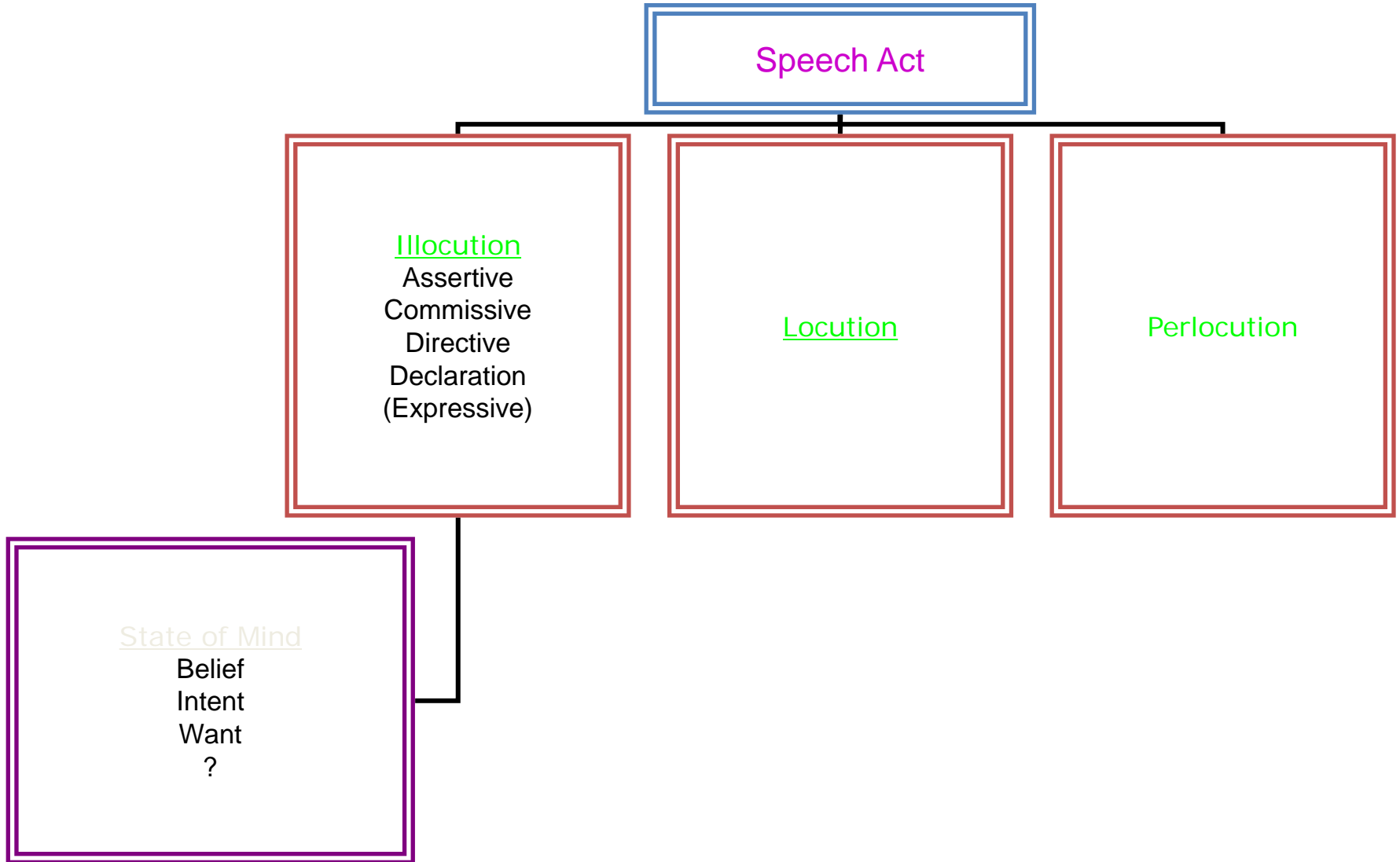
“Leave town immediately!”

(I want) you to leave town immediately.

State of Mind

Declaration : ?

Speech Act Theory



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**NOT hearsay:
Statements offered to show:**

Legal Reason	Speech Act Reason
Speaker's Verbal Act	Illocution > Commissive, Directive, Declaration
Hearer's reaction (or state of mind)	Perlocution
Speaker's indirect state of mind	Illocution > Assertive
Speaker's direct state of mind	State of mind < Illocution
Utterance for its own sake	Locution