Speech Act Theory
How Speakers and Hearers use Language

3 components of a communication
- Speaker
- Hearer
- Message

3 components of a speech act
- Illocution: What speaker means to convey
- Locution: Actual words of the message
- Perlocution: Hearer’s reaction to speaker’s message
Illocution – Speaker’s purpose or intent

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

Perlocution – Effect on the hearer

- "Jones is a disreputable businessman."
  - Hearer now **knows** something about Jones.
  - Hearer **avoids** Jones.
  "We the jury find the defendant to be guilty."
  - The mother of the defendant begins to **sob**.
  - Will you pay for my tuition?"
    - The hearer angrily **answers** ‘no way!’. 
  "I will take you to Disneyland for your birthday."
  - The hearer **jumps up and down** with joy.
  "I’m thrilled that you will be going to law school."
  - The hearer is **aware** that the speaker shares his/her good fortune.

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 Austin
Constative vs. Performatives

Assertives = Assertions = Constatives
Statements that (potentially) are ‘true’ or ‘false’.
• “It is raining outside right now.” [present]
• “Columbus discovered America in 1492.” [past]
• “There will be a major earthquake on April 15, 2012.” [future]

Performatives
• The speaker performs an action in uttering specific words.
• There are 3 main types:
  • Declarations
  • Directives
  • Commissives
### Declarations

**Declaring** it makes it happen

- "I pronounce you husband and wife." (said by a proper clergy person or justice of the peace during a wedding ceremony)
- "We find the defendant not guilty." (said by a proper impaneled jury during a trial)
- "I pass." (said by a bridge player whose turn it is to make a bid)

### Directives

The speaker **directs** a demand or a request to the listener

- "In which room is our final exam?" (The speaker requests the hearer to answer the question)
- "Leave town immediately!" (The speaker demands that the hearer carry out the action desired by the speaker)
- "I order you to leave town immediately."

### Commissives

The speaker **commits** him/herself to a future course of action

- "I will repay the money I borrowed." (the speaker is making a commitment)
- "I promise to repay the money I borrowed."
- "I swear to tell the truth,..." (the speaker is making a commitment to be truthful)
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, 2012.”
(I believe) there will be a major earthquake on April 15, 2012.

State of Mind

Commissive : Intent
“I will repay the money I borrowed.”
(I intend) to 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
John Searle

Speech Act

Illocution
Assertive
Commissive
Directive
Declaration (Expressive)

Locution

Perlocution

State of Mind
Belief
Intent
Want

Assertives

• Implicit: “It is raining outside.”
• Explicit: “I {claim, assert} that it is raining outside.”
• State of mind: I {believe, think} that it is raining outside.”
Commissives

- Implicit: “I will repay the money I borrowed.”
- Explicit: “I {promise, vow} that I will repay the money I borrowed.”
- State of mind: “I intend to repay the money I borrowed.”

Directives

- Implicit: “Leave town immediately.”
- Explicit: “I {demand, order} you to leave town immediately.”
- State of mind: “I want you to leave town immediately.”

Declarations

- Implicit: “We find the defendant not guilty.”
- Explicit: “We declare the defendant to be not guilty.”
- State of mind: [none]
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

• “We find that the defendant is not guilty.”
  ↑
  1st person subject
• “We find that the defendant is not guilty.”
  ↑
  simple present tense verb

Structure of Explicit illocutions

“[I maintain] (that) {it is raining outside}.”
↑
↓ illocutionary clause
↑ proposition clause
Structure of Explicit illocutions

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

↑

Illocutionary clause

↑

Propositional clause