

Evidentiality and the Structure of Speech Acts

Abstract, Evidentials Fest at OSU

In Cheyenne (Algonquian: Montana), evidentials are part of the illocutionary mood paradigm. Based on this grammatical system and crosslinguistic data in the literature, I propose a new theory of evidentials. I argue that evidentials contribute *not-at-issue* content, which cannot be directly challenged or denied. This content is added directly to the common ground, without negotiation. In contrast, *at-issue* content, the main point of a sentence, is proposed to be added to the common ground, up for negotiation.

This analysis of evidentials implies a more articulated theory of assertion and other speech acts. In particular, I argue that all speech acts are structured into three components: the presentation of the at-issue proposition, a non-negotiable update that directly restricts the common ground, and a negotiable update that imposes structure on the common ground. I give an implementation of this proposal in an update semantics with individual, modal, and propositional discourse referents. The presentation of the at-issue proposition is modeled as the introduction of a propositional discourse referent. This predicts that only the at-issue proposition can be referred to in subsequent discourse, and the non-challengeability of the evidential falls out as a special case of propositional anaphora.