

The term "underlying force" is not a standard, precise term in the field of linguistics, but it's often used informally to describe the illocutionary force of an utterance. In simple terms, it's the hidden, intended meaning or action behind what a speaker says.

This concept is a core part of Speech Act Theory, which argues that language is used not just to describe things, but to perform actions.

Illocutionary Force

The illocutionary force is the speaker's intention when they make an utterance. It's the "underlying force" or purpose of their words. It's what the speaker is doing by saying something.

Requesting: "Can you pass the salt?" (The underlying force is a request.)

Promising: "I'll be there at 8." (The underlying force is a promise.)

Commanding: "I want you to leave." (The underlying force is a command.)

Apologizing: "I'm sorry for being late." (The underlying force is an apology.)

The illocutionary force is distinct from the literal meaning of the words themselves. For example, "It's cold in here" literally describes the temperature. However, the underlying force could be an indirect request for someone to close the window.

In essence, the "underlying force" is the action that the speaker intends to perform with their words.