Social Roles in *Green Book* Dialogue: An Ethnography of Communication Analysis Using SPEAKING Framework

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how ethnography of communication in the movie *Green Book* (2018) reflects social roles through the characters' dialogue. Using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, it examines how the characters' communication reveals cultural values and navigates social dynamics between Dr. Don Shirley, an African-American pianist, and Tony Lip, his Italian-American driver, during their road trip through racially segregated America in the 1960s. A content analysis method is employed to analyze key dialogues, focusing on elements like Setting, Participants, Ends, Act Sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre. The findings show that differences in social roles based on race, class, and power are constructed and negotiated through language use in the conversation. Dr. Shirley used formal and polite language to assert his authority while dealing with being treated unfairly in society. On the other hand, Tony's casual and resistant way of speaking reflected his working-class background. These differences in how they communicate highlight the power struggles and cultural tensions in their social roles. These insights reveal how the film uses language to portray the complexities of communication across cultures, allowing viewers to better understand the interplay of social roles, race, and class in interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: Ethnography of Communication, SPEAKING Framework, Social Roles, *Green Book*, Dialogue

INTRODUCTION

Communication plays a vital role in building relationships and reflecting social structures, particularly in intercultural contexts. According to Wang, Lin, and Chu (2011), communication, which allows people to exchange ideas and emotions, is fundamental to human interaction and the preservation of culture. Culture is acquired, practiced, shared, and transmitted through communication, making it essential for societal living and cultural continuity. The relationship between communication and culture is both complex and interdependent, as cultures are formed and shaped through the interactions facilitated by communication. Rather than being deliberately constructed, cultures naturally emerge as a by-product of social interactions within relationships, groups, organizations, and societies.

One important aspect of communication in this context is the concept of social roles, which refers to the patterns of behavior and expectations tied to an individual's position in a social or cultural system. Newman B. and Newman P. (2020) explain that social roles link individuals to their social environments, shaping how they interact and communicate with others. These roles not only influence personal identity but also help establish social order by guiding interactions and relationships. Understanding social

roles is essential when analyzing communication, especially in intercultural settings, where role expectations often differ.

Films, as a powerful medium of mass communication, offer a unique way to explore how different cultures interact and how social roles are constructed and communicated. Puspasari, Masriadi, and Yani (2019) argue that films can reflect social and cultural processes, helping audiences grasp complex cultural dynamics. One notable example is Green Book (2018), which portrays the relationship between Dr. Don Shirley, an African-American pianist, and Tony Lip, his Italian-American driver, as they navigate the deeply segregated America of the 1960s. The film's dialogue does more than advance the plot—it mirrors the values and norms of each character's cultural background, illustrating how cultural differences and social roles shape communication, relationships, and approaches to conflict resolution. Given this context, the following research question is proposed: "How are social roles communicated and constructed in the dialogues of Green Book through the lens of Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework?"

To address this question, the study employs the ethnography of communication approach developed by Dell Hymes (1962). This method focuses on understanding the social and cultural contexts that shape communication. The SPEAKING Framework (Setting, Participants, Ends, Act Sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre, developed by Hymes and expanded by his students Sherzer and Darnell (1972), has become widely accepted in the ethnography of communication (Farah, 1998, as cited in Johnstone & Marcellino, 2018). This framework provide a comprehensive tool for analyzing how communication operates in daily life. By applying it, we can analyze how social roles are expressed and negotiated in the film's key dialogues.

While Green Book has been widely discussed for its exploration of race and friendship, for example research by Amalo et al. (2023) found that *Green Book* depicts the gradual development of a close relationship between individuals from different racial backgrounds while presenting a simplified portrayal of racism. Furthermore research by Wardana et al. (2023) revealed that the movie *Green Book* effectively portrays acts of racism as reflective of the discrimination faced by Black Americans in the United States, particularly during the Jim Crow era. There is limited research on how its dialogue reflects social roles in intercultural communication. This study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing key dialogues from the film to uncover how communication reflects cultural values and social roles. By doing so, this research contributes to a broader discussion about how films represent cultural diversity and foster a deeper understanding of intercultural communication

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "Ethnography of Communication" was first introduced as "Ethnography of Speaking" by Dell Hymes in 1962. In this groundbreaking work, Hymes highlighted the importance of studying language within its cultural context. He emphasized that communication isn't just about words and grammar, it's deeply tied to the social and cultural practices of a community. To truly understand how people communicate, we need to look at the specific situations they're in, including the norms, values, and expectations of their speech communities.

In 1964, Hymes expanded on this idea in his essay *"Introduction: Toward Ethnographies of Communication."* He broadened the focus to include not just spoken language but also non-verbal communication. This shift recognized that communication involves many behaviors and practices that reflect culture and social interaction.

According to Muriel Saville-Troike (2003), the main goal of this approach is to understand how communication happens within specific cultural settings.

Hymes (1972) also introduced the SPEAKING model, a useful framework for analyzing communication. This model breaks down communication into these key elements:

1. Setting: The time and place.
2. Participants: The people involve.
3. Ends: The purpose or goals of the interaction.
4. Act Sequence: The structure and content of the communication.
5. Key: The tone, mood, or manner of the conversation.
6. Instrumentalities: The forms or channels of communication, such as speech, gestures, or writing.
7. Norms: The social rules and expectations around communication.
8. Genre: The type or style of communication, like a speech, interview, a casual chat, or a formal meeting.

As this field grew, researchers began exploring the deep connections between language, culture, and society. Ethnography of Communication became a unique field of study that treats communication as a cultural system. By drawing from anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, it offers a rich perspective on how communication works in different cultural contexts.

Several studies have used this approach effectively. For example, Herman, Sinurat, and Sitio (2019) analyzed *Romeo and Juliet* using Hymes' model. They identified various elements like settings, participants, purposes, and tones in the story. Situmorang et al. (2024) used the same model to study the comedy video *Main Hakim Sendiri* and found it helped break down the humorous elements. Setyawati (2022) applied Hymes' framework to study communication between an infertile couple, showing how cultural norms shaped their interactions. Umar et al. (2024) used the model to study workplace communication, showing that respectful interactions help bridge cultural and hierarchical differences. This focus on communication within specific contexts aligns closely with Social Role Theory, which examines how individuals' behaviors and interactions are shaped by the roles they occupy within their social environments.

Social Role Theory, as explained by Newman B. and Newman P. (2020), describes how people's personalities and behaviors are shaped by their participation in social roles. These roles act as a bridge between individuals and their social environments. Masolo et al. (2004) describe social roles as concepts that are "played" by individuals in specific relationships, while Smyth (2021) sees them as a framework for understanding power and agency in society. For example, a reseacrh Adila, Yusuf, and Nahdhiyah (2020) studied social roles and religious norms in Leo Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina*. They found that social roles often create tension and conflict for individuals, while religious expectations can limit personal freedom, leading to moral and existential dilemmas.

In *Green Book*, the social roles of Dr. Shirley (an African American pianist) and Tony Lip (an Italian American bouncer) are central to the story. Their interactions reflect cultural values and societal expectations, showing both tension and growth. Using Hymes' framework, we can analyze how their conversations are shaped by cultural norms, social rules, and their unique experiences. Ultimately, the movie is not just a story

of friendship, it's also a powerful exploration of how communication can help overcome cultural divides and build empathy.

METHOD

This study analyzes the dialogue in *Green Book* using content analysis to uncover the deeper meanings behind the characters' interactions. It focuses on how the dialogue shapes the characters, advances the plot, and reinforces the film's key themes. The primary data for this research consists of the dialogue between Dr. Shirley and Tony Lip in the film *Green Book* (2018), with the film's transcript serving as text data to ensure the accuracy. The transcript of the selected dialogue is the main material for analysis and was obtained from a verified online source, ensuring accuracy and can be used in educational purposes.

To achieve this, the study combines content analysis with an ethnographic approach, using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework. Content analysis, as defined by Krippendorff (2004), is a method for drawing meaningful and reliable insights from texts or other media, such as audio and video. This approach helps researchers understand how messages are communicated in various forms.

In film, content analysis provides a way to examine the structure and language of dialogue, as well as the social roles and cultural dynamics revealed through character interactions. Aacharya (2022) notes that this method can uncover patterns in communication, offering valuable insights into human behavior and relationships.

By blending content analysis with ethnographic techniques, this study digs deeper into how the film's dialogue reflects social roles and cultural norms, offering a richer understanding of the connection between language, culture, and storytelling.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data for this study consist of the dialogue and script of the film *Green Book*, with a specific focus on selected words and sentences analyzed through the SPEAKING framework. To provide context, the discussion begins with background information on the broader issues addressed in the film. It is then narrowed to specific aspects to maintain a focused and precise scope. The analysis emphasizes the SPEAKING factors in the film, exploring how these elements illustrate communication dynamics, cultural norms, and social roles. The study outlines its primary objectives and concludes with a clear overview of the research structure, ensuring a cohesive and systematic approach.

Dialogue 1

Dr. Shirley: *"Do you foresee any issues working for a black man?"*

Tony Lip: *"No, no... 'fact just yesterday me and the wife had a couple colored guys over the house. For drinks."*

Dr. Shirley: (beat) *"Oh, I see. You're married."*

Tony Lip: *"Yup. Two kids."*

Dr. Shirley: *"I don't know if this is the proper job for a married man."*

Tony Lip: *"Why, we bringing broads?"*

Table 1. Conversation Analysis of Dialogue 1

Dell Hymes speaking framework	Content Analysis
Setting (S)	Dr. Shirley's apartment, an extravagant space filled with cultural artifacts and art, signifying sophistication and status.
Participants (P)	Dr. Shirley: A successful, educated Black man, asking about potential issues Tony may have working for a Black employer. His question about Tony's suitability is rooted in social hierarchies and race dynamics, given the time and context of the story. Tony Lip: A working-class white man, applying for a job as Dr. Shirley's driver. Tony's casual, sometimes provocative language reflects his role in this interaction as someone accustomed to a more relaxed, informal environment, potentially unaware of the sensitivities regarding race and social roles.
Ends (E)	Dr. Shirley's goal: To assess whether Tony can handle working for a Black man, especially given the societal context of racism in the 1960s. He also wants to know if Tony will be able to navigate the social and professional demands of such a job. Tony Lip's goal: To express his suitability for the job and assure Dr. Shirley that his personal life will not affect his work. He does so through a somewhat blunt, informal response, revealing both his working-class background and his lack of awareness or concern about race issues.
(Act Sequence - A)	Dr. Shirley: Asks a direct and significant question about race and professional boundaries, which is both personal and professional. His question reflects the time period's racial tensions and the social hierarchy that Tony may not fully understand. Tony Lip: Responds casually, using informsl language ("me and the wife had a couplecolored guys over the house"), suggesting that he doesn't view Dr. Shirley's race as a barrier. His informal tone could be interpreted as naive or dismissive of the racial dynamics at play, revealing a lack of awareness or sensitivity. Dr. Shirley: Reacts thoughtfully, acknowledging Tony's family life, but questions whether this is a suitable role for a married man, likely referencing the isolation and emotional toll of traveling for work, or the potential complications of the job. Tony Lip: Responds with humor and an informal attitude ("Why, we bringing broads?"), which again highlights his casual attitude but also reinforces his role as a working-class man who doesn't necessarily grasp the social sensitivities that Dr. Shirley is concerned about.
Key (K)	The tone begins with seriousness as Dr. Shirley addresses potential issues Tony might have working for him, but it quickly shifts to a more relaxed, humorous mood as Tony responds. This contrast in tone reveals the different attitudes the two characters hold toward the social role they play in their relationship—Dr. Shirley as a professional navigating the complexities of race and class, and Tony Lip as a working-class man who sees the job in a more practical, less formal light.
Instrumentalities (I)	Language: Dr. Shirley uses formal language ("I don't know if this is the proper job for a married man"), which signals his social position and expectations for professionalism. Tony, on the other hand, uses informal, colloquial language ("Why, we bringing broads?"), reflecting his lower-class background and lack of formality in such conversations. Delivery: Dr. Shirley's delivery is measured, calm, and reflective, indicating his social awareness and consideration of the complex racial dynamics at play. Tony's delivery is more casual, humorous, and brash, revealing his comfort with informal settings and perhaps a lack of awareness about the racial and social implications of their roles.

Norms (N)	In a professional setting, especially one where the employer is Black and the potential employee is white, there is an expectation that the conversation would be more formal, with deference shown by the employee toward the employer. Dr. Shirley's careful questioning aligns with the norm of professionalism and sensitivity to race in the workplace, particularly given the historical context.
	Tony's response, however, reflects a more informal norm. His comment about having "a couple colored guys over" and asking if "we're bringing broads" shows a lack of understanding of the seriousness of Dr. Shirley's question about race and professional boundaries. This also reflects Tony's working-class norm of addressing things bluntly and without the kind of diplomacy Dr. Shirley is likely accustomed to in his circle.
Genre (G)	This is an interview, with both parties subtly negotiating their terms and testing boundaries.

Dialogue 2

Tony Lip: ""*Doc, I noticed on the itinerary that the last show's on December 23rd.*"

Dr. Shirley: *"Birmingham, yes. It's a Christmas show."*

Tony Lip: *"Any way we could hit the road early the next morning so I can be back home in time for Christmas Eve?"*

Dr. Shirley: *"We'll see. Could you please put the cigarette out?"*

Tony Lip: *"Why?"*

Dr. Shirley: *"Because I can't breathe back here."*

Tony Lip: *"What are you talking about? The smoke's going into my lungs. I'm doing all the work here."*

Dr. Shirley: *"Thank you."*

Table 2. Conversation Analysis of Dialogue 2

Setting (S)	The conversation takes place inside a car during a long road trip. This setting is significant because it reflects the personal and professional boundaries being negotiated between Tony, the driver, and Dr. Shirley, the employer.
Participants (P)	Dr. Shirley: A Black, highly educated, and accomplished concert pianist. His role as an employer comes with certain expectations of respect and comfort, particularly in his personal space. His role is one of authority, but also vulnerability, given his status as a Black man traveling in the segregated South.
	Tony Lip: A working-class, white man who is used to a more informal, unregulated environment. As a potential employee, Tony sees his role as a driver, but his casual approach and defensiveness about his actions suggest that he feels entitled to more comfort in the situation.
Ends (E)	Dr. Shirley's goal: To maintain control over his environment and ensure his comfort during the long trip. His request for Tony to put out the cigarette is a demand for a basic right to clean air and health in his own space.

	Tony Lip's goal: To ensure that he can get home in time for Christmas Eve, as well as express his frustration with the work he's doing (driving) and the discomfort of being asked to accommodate Dr. Shirley's needs, especially when he himself feels burdened by the work.
(Act Sequence - A)	Tony: Brings up his personal need to be home for Christmas, introducing a potential conflict in their professional relationship—he wants to leave early to be with his family.
	Dr. Shirley: Responds to Tony's request indirectly, focusing on his own immediate comfort by asking Tony to put out the cigarette. This highlights his awareness of his own needs in the professional environment.
	Tony: Responds defensively, feeling like his efforts are being undervalued (as he's doing all the work, driving the car) and justifies his right to smoke.
	Dr. Shirley: Maintains control over the conversation by giving a polite but firm "Thank you," implying that the issue is settled. He has asserted his comfort over Tony's perceived discomfort.
Key (K)	The mood begins as somewhat neutral but grows tense. Dr. Shirley's request is polite but firm, while Tony's tone becomes defensive, as he doesn't see why he should comply. The humor Tony attempts to insert into the situation is a coping mechanism, highlighting his frustration.
	Dr. Shirley maintains a calm, authoritative tone, while Tony's tone shifts toward resentment and defensiveness. The contrast in their responses highlights the unequal power dynamic.
Instrumentalities (I)	Language: Tony uses colloquial, informal language ("What are you talking about?"), which reflects his working-class, unpolished background. Dr. Shirley, on the other hand, maintains formal, polite language ("Could you please put the cigarette out?"), reinforcing his role as a professional.
	Delivery: Dr. Shirley's tone is calm but assertive, signaling his authority and expectations. Tony's responses reflect frustration and defiance, showing that he doesn't see his role as subordinate to Dr. Shirley's comfort.
Norms (N)	In professional settings, there is an expectation that employees respect the comfort of their employers. Dr. Shirley, in his role as a Black professional, also deals with racial dynamics in the South, where comfort and space are not always guaranteed. His request for Tony to stop smoking is not just about air quality, but about his right to dictate the conditions of his work environment.
	Tony, however, is used to a less formal norm, where his comfort and rights as the one doing the "hard work" (driving) are prioritized. His defiance of Dr. Shirley's request suggests that he sees the role of a driver as one that should not be encumbered by requests to make the employer comfortable, especially when he feels his own needs are being overlooked.
Genre (G)	The genre here is informal dialogue, typical of the interaction between two people in a work context, but complicated by personal desires and professional expectations. The interaction is not formal enough to feel like a business negotiation but is still marked by an unequal power dynamic rooted in race and class.

DISCUSSION

The two dialogues analyzed in this study reflect the complexity of communication between individuals with different social, cultural, and racial backgrounds. Using the SPEAKING framework, the study explores not only the dynamics of the conversation but also how social roles interact in the interpersonal relationship between Dr. Shirley and Tony.

In the first dialogue, the social and cultural backgrounds of both characters play a central role in shaping how they speak and understand each other. Dr. Shirley, a highly educated Black man in 1960s America, brings a perspective shaped by experiences of

marginalization and struggles against stereotypes. His measured, formal communication style reflects his effort to maintain a professional image while maintaining the necessary boundaries in his interactions with Tony.

On the other hand, Tony, a working-class white man, communicates more casually, without being bound by formalities. His everyday language, sometimes even provocative, shows a lack of awareness about the social complexities Dr. Shirley faces. Tony views the conversation as a practical exchange without considering power dynamics or racial sensitivities. This creates implicit tension, especially when Tony tries to present himself as "not racist," without fully understanding the depth of the issues Dr. Shirley addresses.

The second dialogue intensifies this difference, set in the more personal and emotional context of the car ride they share. The confined space makes their interactions more intense as physical limits and professional boundaries are constantly tested. Dr. Shirley's request for Tony to put out his cigarette reflects his attempt to assert his authority as the employer while also asserting his right to comfort and health. However, Tony's response suggests he sees himself as a hard-working individual who believes he is entitled to the same level of comfort. This difference in perspective highlights how social hierarchies can cause conflict in work relationships, especially when differences in status are combined with racial tension.

Both dialogues also reflect the dynamics of social roles in the relationship between the characters. Dr. Shirley, despite being formally the employer, faces the complex social reality of being a Black man in a society dominated by white supremacy. In the conversation, he must navigate power carefully, ensuring his authority is both accepted and respected. This is evident in the way Dr. Shirley uses polite, formal, and considerate language to maintain control of the conversation.

In contrast, Tony shows resistance to Dr. Shirley's authority by using humor, informality, and occasionally defensive remarks. Even though Tony is in a subordinate position as an employee, his body language and choice of words often convey confidence based on his status as a white man in a society that systematically benefits him. This highlights the tension between their opposing social identities, where their work relationship becomes a subtle battlefield for negotiating social role power.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, from the perspective of the ethnography of communication, which examines how language and communication practices reflect and influence social roles, Green Book illustrates that communication is not just about words, but also about cultural and social contexts. The way Tony and Dr. Shirley communicate is deeply shaped by their differing cultural backgrounds. Dr. Shirley's language reflects the expectations of a highly educated Black professional navigating a racially segregated society, while Tony's language reflects his roots in a working-class Italian-American community. Their communication styles express and reinforce their social roles, with Tony often challenging the social norms imposed upon him.

In this film, the social roles of Tony Lip and Dr. Shirley are conveyed through their dialogues, revealing the differences in their social positions, particularly in terms of race and class. By applying Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, we can see how their roles are influenced by factors such as the setting, their speech styles, and their goals. Tony, a working-class white man, speaks casually and informally, while Dr. Shirley, a highly educated Black man, uses more polite and formal language. This contrast in speech

underscores the power imbalance between them. Dr. Shirley, as the employer, expects respect and comfort, while Tony, as the employee, feels frustrated and often resists Dr. Shirley's requests, such as when asked to stop smoking. This tension highlights the social roles each man assumes—Dr. Shirley as the authority figure and Tony as the worker—and how those roles are shaped by their class and race.

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