

Exploring Cultural Connections: Communication in Sense8

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Abstract: This paper explores how culturally diverse characters in the television series *Sense8* express their social identities and facilitate cross-cultural emotional connections through verbal communication. Drawing upon social identity theory and sociolinguistics, the study examines the linguistic interactions among the empathic cluster members in *Sense8*, focusing on two representative scenes from the first season. Through qualitative analysis, the paper demonstrates how characters from different cultural backgrounds establish a shared sense of identity and solidarity through language, despite their diverse origins and social statuses. The findings highlight the importance of verbal communication in fostering emotional connections and cross-cultural understanding within the cluster. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of human social diversity and cross-cultural communication, with implications for promoting harmony and cooperation in multicultural contexts.

Keywords: social identity, cross-cultural communication, shared sense

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Straczynski co-created the science fiction television series *Sense8*. The show's distinctive narrative approach, character development, and examination of issues like gender, identity, and connection won it a lot of praise and conversation when it debuted on Netflix in 2015 [1]. The first season focuses on eight strangers with different abilities from all over the world. Suddenly, they are united spiritually by an unbreakable relationship. These eight people had never met before, but they all unexpectedly witness a lady named Angelica committing suicide in a bloody hallucination [2]. By designating them as "Sensates," this occurrence creates a mental and emotional bond between them. Through this special link, people are able to communicate and exchange sensations, knowledge, languages, and talents despite having quite different cultures, backgrounds, and lifestyles. My interest stems from the creators' depiction of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds being linked together to form a new collective entity, and how these clusters evolve from initial confusion to mutual assistance through their psychic connections, eventually reaching consensus and identifying themselves as members of the cluster. In sociolinguistics, the theory of social identity can be used to explain how individuals identify with the social groups to which they belong and seek self-identification within them [3]. This theory posits that an individual's social identity is shaped and expressed through their interactions and communication with specific social groups.

1.2. Research Objective

The goal of this study is to explore how characters from different cultural backgrounds in *Sense8* express and create their social identities and facilitate cross-cultural emotional connections through verbal communication. I will focus on the verbal communication between members of the empathy cluster in the show and explore how this communication reflects their social identities and facilitates emotional connections between them. Within the framework of social identity theory, I will examine the role of verbal communication in cross-cultural contexts and how it facilitates emotional connection and solidarity among empathizers in the context of shared consciousness. By exploring *Sense8* in depth, I can understand how characters from different cultures express their social identities and promote emotional connections through verbal communication. This will not only help us better understand the complexity of human social diversity and cross-cultural communication, but also better understand and apply social identity theory. In addition, this study can provide useful insights for promoting cross-cultural understanding and enhancing cross-cultural harmony and cooperation, which has certain theoretical and practical significance. Consequently, this essay aims to address the following question:

1) In *Sense8*, how do culturally diverse characters express and establish their social identities and facilitate cross-cultural emotional connections through verbal communication?

2. Social Identity Theory

2.1. Basic concepts

"The knowledge of an individual of his/her affiliation with a social group and of what is of significant affection and value to him/her as a member of that group" is how Tajfel defines "social identity" [4]. People associate with and dedicate themselves to the specific social group to which they belong through this process. The basic tenet of social identity theory is that people seek out and preserve a positive social identity in order to boost their self-esteem, and that this positive identity is primarily derived from favourable comparisons between the relevant out-group and the in-group. Social identity is primarily derived from group membership or qualification. People attempt to break away from their current group or look for other ways to make a positive differentiation if they are unable to develop a social identity that meets their needs.

2.2. The process of social identification

2.2.1. Categorisation

Individuals organise and classify a vast array of external cues in order to simplify perception to fit social reality. People are significantly impacted by it. According to reinforcement effects, once stimuli are classified, people tend to perceive similarities between members of the same category to be larger than they actually are, and vice versa for members of different groups. Stated differently, there is reinforcement of both similarities and differences within and between categories [5].

2.2.2. Identification

Social identity theory is based on identification. In this sense, the term "identity" has two meanings: first, it refers to the ability to distinguish oneself or something from a vast array of similar objects or individuals. According to social identity theory, identity is defined as the personal and social traits that set one person apart from another. As a result, identities that are created based on personal traits are referred to as personal identities, whereas identities that are created based on social characteristics—that is, membership in a social group—are referred to as social identities.

Equivalency is the second meaning of identity. According to social identity theory, people attribute to themselves the traits that make them fit the in-group when they choose to join a social group in order to develop their social identity. Identity can therefore be defined as one's own self-concept or self-imagery. It is a mindset that views the self as an object or an assessment of one's own self-worth [6].

2.2.3. Comparison

Any form of self-evaluation necessitates a covert social comparison with others. A covert comparison with other social categories is much more necessary for the appraisal of oneself. A specific social category's qualities can only be revealed through positive social identity comparison with comparable out-groups and in-groups. The categorising process gains greater significance through social comparisons [5].

3. Methodology

A detailed methodology was developed to explore how culturally diverse characters in the television series *Sense8* express and build social identities and foster cross-cultural emotional connections through verbal communication. I began by selecting and collecting data on episodes from the first season of *Sense8* based on explicit criteria, choosing two of the most representative examples, the first a scene in which eight unrelated people first fully establish a connection and trust each other's existence. The second is at the end of the episode when member Riley is being hunted by the whispers, to protect each other the clusters come from all over the world and use their unique skills to help Riley escape the situation. Through verbal communication, they trust and identify with each other. Research has been moving more and more in the direction of qualitative, linguistic, narrative, and reflexive studies during the last few decades [7]. For this reason, I am also using qualitative research in this study. *Sense8* involve multiple characters, multiple plot lines, and are often characterized by depth and complexity. Qualitative analysis can better capture the nuances and resumptions between plots and characters. The focus of the study is to explore how characters express social identity and facilitate cross-cultural emotional connections through linguistic communication. This involves a deeper understanding of the emotional relationships between language, cultural symbols, and characters, and qualitative analysis can provide more detail and depth. miscellaneous relationships, as well as the cultural and social meanings behind them. At the same time, qualitative analysis can help researchers gain a deeper understanding of what characters say and do in different social contexts and situations, as well as the motivations and meanings behind these behaviors. This is crucial for understanding how characters build social identities and promote cross-cultural emotional connections.

3.1. Data Selection and Collection

The characters in *Sense8* have different social statuses and backgrounds. Will is a police officer in Chicago, Capps is a horse-drawn carriage driver living in Nairobi, Kenya, Sun is a businessman and underground boxer in Seoul, South Korea, Noemi is a transgender hacker living in San Francisco, Ra is a pharmacist in Mumbai, India, Wolfgang is a locksmith and safe thief in Berlin, Germany, Lito is a popular actor living in Mexico City and Riley is an Icelandic DJ living in London. Wolfgang is a locksmith and safecracker in Berlin, Germany, Lito is a popular actor living in Mexico City and Riley is an Icelandic DJ living in London. Since the characters come from different countries and cultures, realistically there may be a language barrier between them which may affect their communication and mutual understanding. However, these eight people are all part of the empathic cluster, so they can communicate with each other without any barriers, even though they use their first language when

communicating. Because of their different upbringing, they expressed their opinions with an obvious social nature. But when they observe whether there is any difference in the use of language in conversations between characters of different social status, and how they demonstrate their social status and identity through language. Hence, *Sense 8* is a perfect material for this topic.

3.2. Analysis Procedure

Collection of linguistic samples: In collecting linguistic samples of these characters in the episodes, I mainly chose the ones in which they self-identified themselves as a member of the Empaths 6 and recognized their telepathic ability to communicate with the other members of the group, and to be able to respond to a member's danger in the event of a crisis, including dialogues, word choices, grammatical structures, etc., and especially those linguistic features that could reflect their social identity. These include dialogic fragments, word choice, grammatical structures, etc., especially those linguistic features that reflect their social identity.

Extraction of Social Identity Elements: Extract elements of social identity, such as cultural background, gender identity, social status, etc., from the language samples. These elements can be reflected through vocabulary, accent, grammar and so on.

Language and social identity association analysis: analyze the association between the extracted elements of social identity and language use. Observe how the characters express their social identity through language, such as which language or dialect they use in conversation, which specific words or catchphrases they use.

Contextual analysis: analyze the context of language use, including the background of the conversation, character relationships, and social environment. These situational elements will influence which language the character chooses to express his/her social identity.

Ultimately, these elements will be combined with the identity process of social identity theory to analogize, identify as well as compare and draw final conclusions.

4. Analysis

Example 1:

First one is from the 4th episode, "What's Going On?" Each person sings from their own location. In the scene where they sing the same song in different places, the cluster members establish shared consciousness for the first time. Due to their ability to share consciousness, they are stimulated by the song to trigger emotions, memories, and physical responses, leading to their recognition of their identity as sensates.

The song is a key part of the scene as the main characters sing together and become friends for the first time. Riley smokes while perched atop her preferred overlook. She sings along as she plays the same song on her MP3. Capheus drives and sings. Will likes to sing while working at his desk. On a rooftop in the dark, Kala sings. Lying in bed, Lito sings. Nomi takes drugs and lies on a bed while singing. Sun in her bathroom, dancing and singing. All eight of them are singing the same song at the same time, while being deeply involved in their individual pursuits. The song's emotions, music, and lyrics all work together to create a point of resonance with the other senses. When everyone sings the song together, it creates a moment of emotional bonding. At this point, individuals begin to explore this experience more thoroughly and begin to perceive the relationship between themselves and other sensates more vividly. Even while they may have had felt this connection in earlier episodes, this scene highlights their acceptance of it. Thus, it represents a turning point in their progressive awareness and comprehension of their common consciousness [2]

This scene can be explained through the social identity theory by examining the processes of categorization, identification, and comparison. Categorization: In this scene, each character

represents different cultural backgrounds and social statuses. They categorize themselves as members of the same group, the cluster of sensates, by engaging in the common behavior of singing the same song. Despite being in different locations and environments, they categorize themselves into the same category and establish a common social identity through sharing the same behavior and experiences. Identification: In this scene, the characters express their social identity by singing the same song. Although they come from different cultural backgrounds and social statuses, they establish a common sense of identification through the shared choice and expression of the song. This sense of identification is manifested not only in their identification as members of the cluster but also in their respect and understanding of each other. Comparison: In this scene, the characters recognize more clearly the connections and similarities between themselves and other members through comparison of their behaviors and experiences. Despite coming from different cultural backgrounds and social statuses, they discover many similarities between each other through the shared choice and expression of the song. This comparison facilitates emotional connections and understanding between them, contributing to the establishment of cross-cultural emotional connections.

This scene can be understood as the characters establishing their social identity with each other through the shared experience of shared consciousness. In this scenario, each character represents different cultural backgrounds, gender identities, and social statuses. Despite being in different locations, they engage in a form of cross-cultural emotional communication and connection by singing the same song.

Example 2: Riley goes back to Iceland after the conclusion of the first season in order to face her painful history. She specifically goes back to the location of the vehicle crash when she lost her spouse and child. Her psychological and emotional state affects her and makes her more susceptible. She is apprehended and brought to the hospital, her link with the Whispers overwhelming her with painful memories. Following her capture, the Whispers discover that it is simpler to communicate with her and, by extension, with other people in her cluster. Riley is captured by BPO, but everyone uses their special abilities to save her, saving Riley as well as themselves. When confronted with the common foe, BPO, the sensates collaborate as a single unit instead than acting independently, with each move intended to safeguard the entire cluster [2].

In this scenario, each character utilizes their language skills to execute specific tasks, demonstrating their particular roles within the cluster. Will needs to avoid being tracked by the Whispers, so he must appear in different locations. Lito, as an actor, successfully impersonates a doctor and utilizes his charm to find Riley's room. Sun overcomes security personnel using her boxing skills. This combination of language communication and action allows each character to play a specific role within the cluster, expressing their social identity. The language communication among the characters reflects their identification and sense of responsibility towards the cluster. They collaborate towards a common goal, demonstrating loyalty to the cluster.

Nomi utilizes her hacking skills to plan an escape route, while Kala uses her pharmaceutical knowledge to revive Riley. Each person contributes to the cluster's efforts. This collaborative language communication strengthens their emotional connection and identification with one another. In the plot to rescue Riley, the characters face the common enemy, BPO, and must closely collaborate to complete the mission. In this situation, the language choices of the characters are influenced by the circumstances. They tend to use familiar languages and accents for better communication and cooperation in dangerous situations. Through their language communication with this common enemy, they become more acutely aware of their identity and value as cluster members. This comparison promotes emotional connection and solidarity among them, reinforcing their identification with the cluster.

5. Conclusion

Overall, *Sense8* is a compelling narrative that delves into the connections between people in different cultures, how people identify with their selves as well as their group identities in a new environment. Through the lens of social identity theory and sociolinguistics, it reveals how the characters navigate their individual identities within the context of a larger collective consciousness. The verbal communication and non-verbal interaction between the eight sensates witnesses the cluster members' transition from initially feeling confused to eventually accepting themselves as well as accepting the group and uniting as members of the cluster. It also demonstrates that language is an important tool for connecting and expressing social identity, as cluster members justify their existence by articulating their experiences when sensing each other [3]. Through the choice and use of language, the characters are able to establish their social identity within the cluster and create emotional connections with other members. As the characters communicate and collaborate across linguistic and cultural barriers, they develop deep emotional bonds that transcend traditional notions of identity and belonging. Understanding how characters from different cultures express their social identities through linguistic communication can provide useful insights for a better understanding of human social diversity and cross-cultural communication. In addition, the application of social identity theory helps us to explore in depth the role and influence of language in the construction of social identity.

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