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Mitigating misunderstanding in nonverbal communication in Canada

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Effective communication is crucial for individuals to navigate social interactions and build successful relationships. Nonverbal communication plays a significant role in conveying emotions, intentions, and attitudes. However, nonverbal cues can sometimes be misinterpreted, leading to misunderstandings and potentially disrupting interpersonal connections. This article explores the phenomenon of nonverbal misunderstanding in communication within the context of Canada, considering cultural, regional, and individual factors that contribute to these instances. By understanding the challenges associated with nonverbal communication, individuals can develop strategies to enhance their intercultural competence and improve their communication skills.

Communication is a complex process that involves both verbal and nonverbal elements. Nonverbal signs encompass facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, and other subtle signals that complement spoken language. While these cues can enhance communication, they can also lead to confusion and misinterpretation, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. Canada, known for its cultural diversity, provides a unique setting to explore nonverbal misunderstanding due to its multicultural population. The Canadian communication style (Seryakova, 2009) is generally positive and nice. For instance, in greeting, Canadians expect a smile, a direct eye contact, and a handshake.

Canada's cultural landscape is rich and varied, with Indigenous peoples and a large number of immigrants from around the world. Different cultural backgrounds bring distinct nonverbal communication norms, which can lead to

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misunderstandings. For example, the concept of personal space varies widely across cultures; what may be considered a comfortable distance for conversation in one culture might be perceived as intrusive in another. Additionally, gestures that are harmless in one culture can carry offensive connotations in another. Recognizing and respecting these differences is essential to prevent nonverbal miscommunication.

We can easily observe regional variations in nonverbal communication in Canada. Canada's vast geographical expanse results in regional differences that can influence nonverbal communication. Residents of urban centers like Toronto and Vancouver may have more exposure to cultural diversity, potentially making them more attuned to interpreting various nonverbal cues. On the other hand, people in smaller towns or rural areas might not encounter as many diverse communication styles, making them more susceptible to misinterpreting unfamiliar gestures or expressions.

We also cannot ignore individual factors of Canadians, which can cause communication misunderstandings. Even within a single culture or region, individual differences in nonverbal communication can contribute to misunderstandings. Personality traits, past experiences, and personal preferences shape how individuals express and interpret nonverbal cues. For instance, someone with introverted tendencies might not display as many outward signs of emotion, which could lead to misperceptions of their feelings by more expressive individuals.

In the age of technology, nonverbal misunderstandings have extended to digital platforms. Text messages, emails, and video calls lack many of the nonverbal cues present in face-to-face interactions. Emojis and GIFs attempt to bridge this gap but can sometimes lead to misinterpretations due to their subjective nature. Additionally, cultural nuances might not translate effectively across digital communication channels.

How can we avoid misinterpreting and misunderstanding in nonverbal behavior in multicultural Canada? The following communicative strategies to mitigate nonverbal misunderstanding can be recommended: *cultural sensitivity in conversations, active listening, clarifications of meanings, context consideration, and general communicative adaptability*. Cultural sensitivity means educating oneself about different cultural norms and practices, which can

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enhance cross-cultural communication. This includes understanding acceptable body language, gestures, and personal space boundaries. Active listening is a skill to paying attention to both verbal and nonverbal cues during conversations, which can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the speaker's message. If there is uncertainty about the meaning of a nonverbal cue, it's beneficial to politely ask for clarification. This prevents assumptions and helps clear up potential misunderstandings. The next strategy is context consideration. It means the interpreting of nonverbal signs within the definite context of the conversation and relationship. A gesture that might seem negative could be a result of stress or unrelated factors. Finally, all mentioned above mitigating strategies can lead to general communicative adaptability, which is about being open to adjusting one's own nonverbal communication style when interacting with individuals from different backgrounds can enhance mutual understanding.

In conclusion, nonverbal communication is an intricate and essential aspect of human interaction in Canada's diverse society. By recognizing and addressing potential nonverbal misunderstandings, individuals can foster effective communication, build stronger relationships, and promote intercultural harmony in a multicultural environment.

References:

- [1] Seryakova, I. (2009) *Magic of Nonverbal Communication*. Kyiv: Освіта України.