

## *Culture As An Impediment To Effective Public Speaking*

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### **Abstract**

*The paper took an overview on culture being an impediment to effective public speaking. It attempted to consider the place of culture in public speaking and the emphasis was on verbal and non-verbal expressions and other cultural practices that seems to reflect in public speaking of speakers. The paper also considered ethnocentrism as playing a very crucial role in public speaking. The paper finalized by stating ways in which culture could blend with public speaking to enable listeners get the messages passed.*

### **Introduction**

Throughout history people have used public speaking as a vital means of communication. What the Greek leader Pericles said more than 2,500 years ago is still true today: “One who forms a judgment on any point but cannot explain” it clearly “might as well never have thought at all on the subject.” Public speaking, as its name implies, is a way of making your ideas public—of sharing them with other people and of influencing other people. Frank (2000)

During modern times many women and men around the globe have spread their ideas and influence through public speaking. In the United States, the list includes Franklin Roosevelt, Billy Graham, Cesar Chavez, Barbara Jordan, Ronald Reagan, Martin Luther King, Hillary Clinton, and Barack Obama.

In other countries, we see the power of public speaking employed by such people as former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, South African leader Nelson

Mandela, Burmese democracy champion Aung San SuuKyi, and Kenyan environmentalist and Nobel Prize winner Wangari Maathai.

Communication is one aspect of interpersonal relationship that cannot be swept under the carpet and in communicating, issues such as culture is a determinant on how one communicates.

When people listen to a speaker from a different cultural background, they tend to be on guard against the temptation to judge the speaker on the basis of his or her appearance or manner of delivery. Too often people form opinions about people by the way they look or speak rather than by what they say. No matter what the cultural background of the speaker, it is good we should listen to her or him as attentively as we would want our audience to listen to us.

Since thousands of people in the Nigeria earn their living as professional public speakers. This paper focuses on the way culture stands as an impediment to effective public speaking.

### Culture as an Impediment To Effective Public Speaking

Diversity and multiculturalism are such basic facts of life that they can play a role in almost any speech a speaker gives. Let's consider the following situations: A business manager briefing employees of a multinational corporation. A minister sermonizing to a culturally diverse congregation; an international student explaining the customs of his land to students at a U.S. university; a teacher addressing parents at multiethnic urban schools are only a few of the countless speaking situations affected by the cultural diversity of modern life.

According to Nuel (2007), speech making becomes more complex as cultural diversity increases; part of the complexity stems from the differences in language from culture to

culture. Nothing separates one culture from another more than language. Language and culture are so closely bound that “we communicate the way we do because we are raised in a particular culture and learn its language, rules, and norms.”

The meanings attached to gestures, facial expressions, and other nonverbal signals also vary from culture to culture. Even the gestures for such basic messages as “hello” and “goodbye” are culturally-based. For example, the North American “goodbye” wave is interpreted in many parts of Europe and South America as the motion for “no,” while the Italian and Greek gesture for “goodbye” is the same as the U.S. signal for “come here.”

Many stories have been told about the fate of public speakers who fail to take into account cultural differences between themselves and their audiences. (See Richardson, 2001)

Ethnocentrism is a common impediment in public speaking. According to Adiele (2009), ethnocentrism is the belief that our own group or culture (whatever it may be) is superior to all other groups or cultures. Because of ethnocentrism, we identify with our group or culture and see its values, beliefs, and customs as “right” or “natural”—in comparison to the values, beliefs, and customs of other groups or cultures, which we tend to think of as “wrong” or “unnatural.”

Avoiding ethnocentrism in public speaking does not mean you must agree with the values and practices of all groups and cultures. At times a speaker might try to convince people of different cultures to change their traditional ways of doing things—as speakers from the United Nations seek to persuade farmers in Africa to adopt more productive methods of agriculture, or as delegates from the U.S. and China attempt to influence the other country’s trade policies. Martins (2003)

If speakers are to be successful, however, they must show respect for the cultures of the people they address. They need to adapt their message to the cultural values and expectations of their listeners.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, culture can influence public speaking in various ways. However, it is imperative that that a speaker works on his speeches, he should be alert to how cultural factors might affect the way listeners respond. For classroom speeches a speaker can use audience-analysis questionnaires to learn about the backgrounds and opinions of the students. For speeches outside the classroom, the person who invites a speaker to speak can usually provide information about the audience.

## References

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