

# The Challenges of Public Speaking in "The Wings of Culture"

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**Abstract**---As a content producer and presenter of the radio show program, "The Wings of Culture", broadcasted live every Friday on Radio Ribat Fm, Monastir, I have faced different challenges. This paper draws on my personal experience to examine the various challenges I have so far met while presenting the program. My presentation tackles in its first part how the radio host should inform, instruct, and entertain simultaneously the audience especially that the program targets British and American literature and civilisation. The second important challenge to address is how to use voice, word choice, and pitch to enact an effective public performance, and accordingly help the audience create the required mental picture specifically in the condition of the absence of a visual image. The third part, however, is devoted to talking about how to manage time, work under pressure, and have quick thinking, particularly when engaging in conversation with a guest.

**Keywords**---culture, public speaking, voice pitch, voice tone, wings.

## Introduction

The first challenge met is how the radio host should inform and amuse simultaneously the audience especially that the program targets British and American literature and civilisation (Gonzalez-Bono *et al.*, 2002; Sumter *et al.*, 2010; England *et al.*, 2012). The goal of the "Wings of Culture" is "not limited by informing the audience or expressing my thoughts publicly, but to entertain them and particularly affect them through changing their emotions, actions, and attitudes" (Nikitina, 2011). It would be important "to leave my listeners moved by the new concepts and words broadcasted to them and touched by their meaning" (Nikitina, 2011). So, the main questions raised here are: How can I broadcast a live talk show on British and American literature and culture and make it easily and smoothly accessible to the broad community especially that the program does not target only specialised in English but also the common listener? How can I present the different literary genres dealt with, whether poetry, fiction, or drama to the broad community? What ideas do I want to share with my audience? What topics my audience needs to listen to? How can I use terms that are often foreign to the experience of the audience? How do I make my presentation memorable?

Let me start with the first question: How can I broadcast a talk show on English literature and civilisation and make it easily and smoothly accessible to the broad community? Before I begin to craft every episode, it would be important to consider who the message is intended for. It is intended for the common listener, including those who have never spoken or written English language or those whose English is average or poor. It would be significant then to take into consideration the different levels of the listeners' English and

accordingly determine my choice of words, concepts, themes, level of information, organization pattern, and motivational statement. To grab attention at the beginning of the episode a set of motivational questions, that will be answered subsequently and that relate to the listeners' interests and motivations in life, are asked.

Also, when I think of a topic, I always think back to my listeners and whether this will benefit or be of interest to them. That is why I always try to foster critical and analytical debates on cultural issues related to the impact of British and American art and culture on the Tunisian society. For instance, the episode on "American Pop Music of the 1980's", which introduces the genre of pop music of the 1980s, discusses the effects of Michael Jackson's art including his music, dancing style, and fashion on Tunisian people and goes back to Jackson's popular concert in Tunisia in 1996. Also, the episode on "English Renaissance", which studies Shakespeare's drama, discusses the influence of this literary genre on different Tunisian playwrights and consequently its effects on the Tunisian drama. So far, I have found that discussing the impact of the British or American culture on the Tunisian one interests listeners and draws their attention.

Another way to entertain the audience and particularly affect them by changing their emotions, actions, and attitudes is storytelling. So far, I have found that storytelling in radio shows is important not only because "everyone loves to listen to stories" but mainly because "a well-told story has an almost hypnotic effect on the listeners" (Nikitina, 2011). Nikitina proclaims that "the best stories to use in your public speech may involve true facts of your life; self-effacing humorous facts about your past mistakes, and challenges; success stories from famous people's biographies; and stories that explore the history of your business" (19). Examples of the stories used in "The Wings of Culture" include autobiographical accounts and humorous facts of the author's life, as well as success stories of prominent inspiring figures. Among the success stories dealt within the program are those of Oprah Winfrey and Martin Luther King, those eminent public speakers who believed in the national ethos of the USA, which is "the American Dream". It is effective that "the plot of the story involves a lesson or a transformation outcome that the listeners can relate to and benefit from" (Nikitina, 2011). Handling concepts such as "The American Dream" by telling short stories of successful people usually works like a charm on listeners. Yet, it is important to keep the story "simple and short" (Nikitina, 2011) and to translate those key concepts from English into Arabic. It is indeed crucial to bear in mind that the program uses terms that are often foreign to the experience of the audience.

The main language of the program is Arabic but English is highly encouraged (Carrillo *et al.*, 2001; Blöte *et al.*, 2009; Westenberg *et al.*, 2009). I keep alternating between speaking English language and Arabic. Key concepts are uttered in English and then translated into Arabic. When analysing and discussing with the guest the main themes of songs and literary works, it would be valuable and outstanding to read those quotes, poems, or lyrics of songs in English and then translate them into Arabic to facilitate listeners' comprehension and to help them learn new words in the English language. In addition to that, in most of the episodes, the last part is devoted to translating the most famous inspirational quotes of fiction writers, playwrights, political activists, musicians, etc. So far, I have found that translating quotes about hard work, courage, life, success, etc are not only entertaining but most influential and motivating.

The major source of entertainment in radio programs is undeniably music. This program does not only consist of delivering the content for radio audience while making discussion with the guest on a specific topic but also of playing music and songs. Still, music is not only played to transition between different parts of the show and entertain the audience but also to convey and highlight specific themes discussed during the show, which helps the listener grasp some new concepts and ideas. For example, in the episode on "English Renaissance," a major part is devoted to study Renaissance music and to represent and differentiate between its various types prevailing at that time, yet Renaissance music has

been in parallel transmitted to the public. Hence, music in "The Wings of Culture" almost often informs and diverts listeners.

The second important challenge to address is how to use voice, word choice, and pitch to enact an effective public performance, and accordingly help the audience create the required mental picture specifically in the condition of the absence of a visual image (Cornwell *et al.*, 2006; Fichera & Andreassi, 2000; Schwerdtfeger, 2004). Undoubtedly, body language captures the audience's attention and helps them follow what you are trying to convey. It helps to enhance and clarify the content. Still, what does it support the speech and keep people focused on the speaker when there is no visual image provided? It has been argued that in the context of radio show broadcasting it is the tone of voice that would be given major importance. In the area of public speaking, and particularly radio broadcasting, "your voice becomes a powerful instrument that allows you to engage, charm and encourage your audience to listen" (Nikitina, 2011). Indeed, it has been asserted that "people are more influenced by the sound and quality of an individual's voice than by its content" (Nikitina, 2011). That is why, it would be crucial to take attention to "paralanguage", which refers to the non-verbal elements of communication as pace (speed), pitch (highness or lowness of voice), and volume (loudness) (Nikitina, 2011). These elements affect public speaking.

It has been claimed that the tone of voice, like body language, is one of "the means of communication available to speaker beside the power of the spoken word" (Nikitina, 2011). Words are powerful but they acquire more power with a clear and distinguished tone. Indeed, "a speaker's voice, emotional state, and attitude are often revealed in the tone of voice" (Nikitina, 2011). When delivering the content in public it is essential to avoid a monotone voice: a tone with no vibrations, as it quickly loses the audience's attention and even puts some of them to sleep. "Speaking in a monotone voice makes the message sound bland, unemotional and even boring. Varying [the] voice in pitch is necessary to avoid monotony and hold the audience's interest, add color and excitement to the speech, and also make certain words and ideas stand out" (Nikitina, 2011). Still, it would be necessary to practise the speech in full before live delivery. "Saying the words helps speakers hear: where they are rushing words; were to improve word flow and voice intonation; and how to project enthusiasm" (Brown, 2017).

In addition to tone pitch, tone pace should be given attention. My speech should be delivered at a rate that allows listeners to fully and smoothly understand my message. I should bring my speech to an appropriate pace and win my audience's attention. Words and concepts in English, in particular, should be delivered and then translated into Arabic at a slow rate to enable the audience to grasp these new notions and their meaning.

So far, I have noticed that my tone is more vibrant when being with a guest than being a solo broadcaster. When engaging the self in a discussion with a guest on a specific topic, the rhythm of the episode is felt energetic and vivid. Yet, in some episodes as a solo broadcaster, the voice tone loses some of its excitement. Therefore, episodes with the content-relevant guest, which means the guest specialised in the topic tackled, are more encouraged and preferred. Also, it is highly recommended to listen to the show after the end of each episode and try to criticise the self in order to enhance the voice tone.

The third challenge is about how to manage time, work under pressure, and have "quick thinking", particularly when engaging in conversation with a guest. Concerning the challenge of time management, the main question raised here is "how much information to include in the talk in order to communicate the message and fit it in the time frame allowed for the speaker" (Nikitina, 2011). Every week, it would be indispensable to plan the program and send the finalised show clock, which outlines the order and content of the show and highlights the time given to each section, to the Radio station before at least 24 hours. In order to prevent problems of time management I usually first prepare the show

clock and second run through the speech to ensure it meets time requirements. Yet, despite following these daily common means to prevent problems of time management, falling into such problems is common.

The episode's duration is two hours. Yet, it happens with me that the episode closes a few minutes after the expected finishing time. Why does the public speaker risk running overtime? Is it because the delivery of the material is not adequately rehearsed and timed? 'If you are speaking for 10 minutes, rehearse for about eight,' advise Ronald Adler and Jeanne Elmhurst in their book *Communication at Work: Principles and Practices for Business and Professions*" (Brown, 2017). Yet, in the context of live radio shows presentation "over-preparing can be as bad as under-preparing; remember that radio is an art form, not a science" (Ryan, 2017). Spontaneity is required. Giving the impression of being relaxed and confident to the listener is important but appearing spontaneous is also of paramount importance in radio broadcasting (Hancock et al., 2010).

Accordingly, wandering during the discussion with the guest is probable even though I am not that kind of public speaker who likes to divert from the central topic and surrender to unhampered imagination. I always try to manage myself and to comply with the public speaking requirements, particularly those advocated by the public speaking coach and speechwriter Jezra Kaye. In "How to Manage Yourself in Public Speaking and Life", Kaye explains that often speakers digress or improvise because of unexpected happenings that occur in the moment during the live talk show, or simply because they sometimes prefer to express themselves spontaneously without any prior premeditation. Yet, she recommends noticing where they were before they headed off in a new direction so that they can get back to the main point, and she advises to discipline the self to stay within one degree of separation from the topic and within the expected time (2017).

Problems of time management make me work under pressure, which is one of the challenges faced in "The Wings of Culture". Yet, the main other reasons for working under pressure include also how to handle unexpected questions from the part of the guest and how to have quick thinking, particularly when engaging in conversation with him. Such situations are sources of stress especially that they require clear and effective communication with the guest and to have a strong memory to recall some facts, data, etc.... So, I should manage myself when uncomfortable feelings strike particularly self-doubt about my performance. Jezra Kaye believes that "very few of us get through a public speaking situation without being assaulted by self-doubt" (2017).

Therefore, following Kaye's advice, when these sorts of thoughts and feelings hit, it would be urgent to draw on one's skills of self-management to *get through the moment*. It is crucial to try not to feed the thoughts by focusing on them; instead, to stay connected with the guest and the audience. The public speaker should stay focused on what is decided to say, and in a minute or two or even three the negative thoughts that seemed so compelling just seconds ago will begin to dissipate of their ridiculous weight (2017). Yet, if the speaker fails to control his /her mood and works under pressure, he /she would risk alienating the audience.

Being nervous is especially problematic because in the context of radio broadcasting "when we are nervous, listeners are more likely to focus on negative vocal cues," says author Cheryl Hamilton in 'Essentials of Public Speaking'" (Brown, 2017). Allowing time to research, prepare and practice beforehand helps me gain the sense of control necessary for the audience to trust and believe the message. Yet, once again the speaker should keep in mind that over-preparing can be as bad as under-preparing because radio is an art form, not a science. That is why it would be important to manage the self at moments of tension and stress.

## Conclusion

To conclude, as a radio personality I have found public speaking challenging yet exciting. Conducting research about the topic and the benefits of the material for listeners are crucial preliminary steps. Arranging the speech into a well organised structure with an attention-getting introduction and motivating entertaining content and rehearsing it before the broadcast ensures a confident speaking tone that keeps the audience on track. Still, "in public speaking, as in life, learning to manage [the] self is the secret to everything" (Kaye, 2017; Tillfors *et al.*, 2002; Davidson *et al.*, 2000; Bassett *et al.*, 1987). How to manage the self in public speaking is something I learned and acquired progressively. Common self-management skills such as resisting stress, communicating, managing time, strengthening memory, and exercising are central to feel relaxed, confident, and more productive during the broadcast. After a short period of practice, I have started to enjoy radio live broadcasts and have considered public speaking as one of my core skills.

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on the earlier version of this paper.

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