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Public speaking anxiety in an EAP presentation-skills course

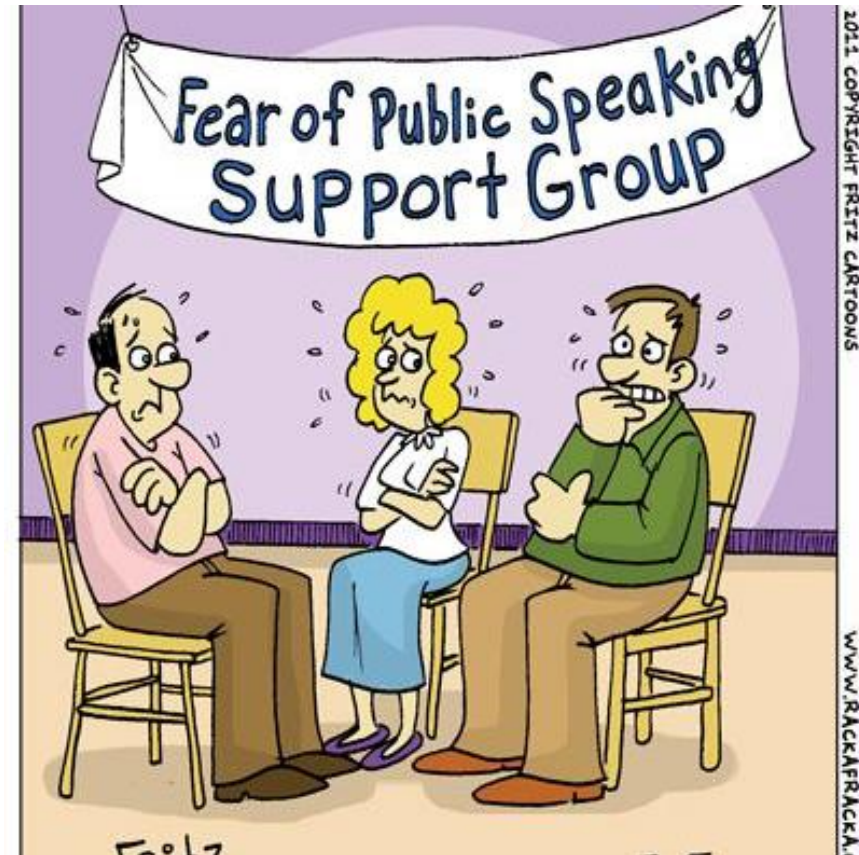
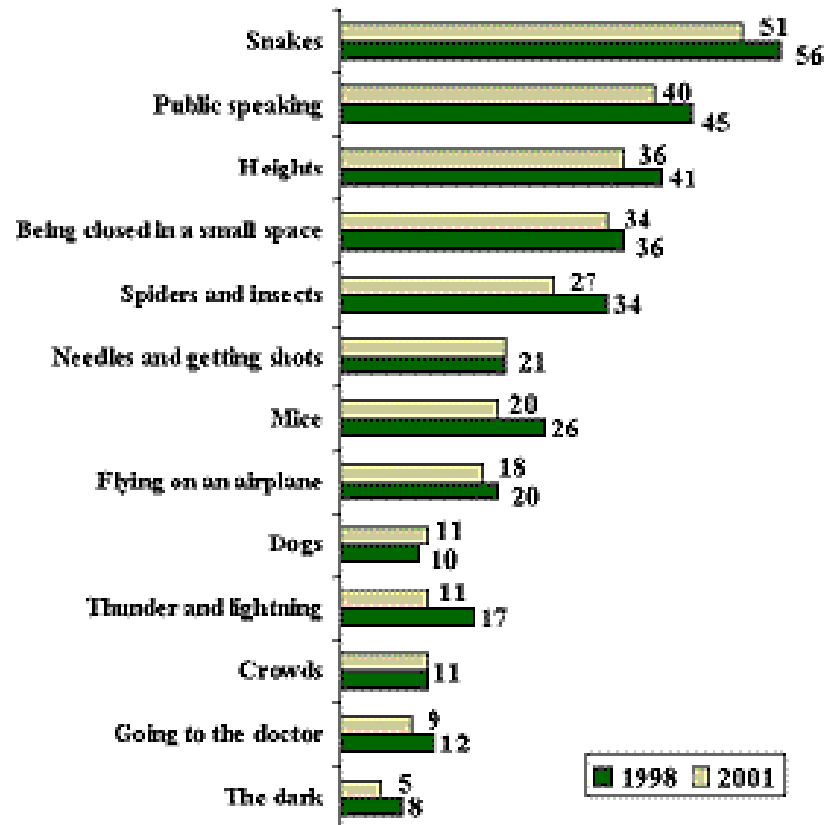
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To begin with, I must admit that I have never experienced such paralyzing nervousness in my life as I did today at improvisation. Sometimes, I used to get nervous before a big presentation or an exam (state exam, graduation). Still, it always disappeared at the beginning, and I was able to give a result that I was 100% satisfied with. This was not the case today. I was hoping it would be, but it wasn't. Both topics that came up were cool, and I had an idea of what I would say. But I couldn't even remember my name once the countdown started. Even during the following discussion, I had a total blackout and couldn't remember trivial words.

American Fears

% Saying "Yes, afraid"



Theoretical background

- glossophobia

- Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), xenoglossophobia

“the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including **speaking**, listening, and learning” (MacIntyre and Gardner 1994)

- spoken language production (e.g. Dewaele 2002)

- presentations- regular feature in academic contexts+ common method of assessment

- social aspect

Fears (Bippus and Daly 1999)

- Increased self-focusing
- Fear of not meeting the audience's expectations
- Speaker's feeling of inferiority
- Perceived skills deficiency
- Fear of evaluation
- Lack of experience

Academic Presentations Course



- Master's study programme at Faculty of Social Studies
- Students of social sciences
- Compulsory course
- Level: B2/C1 CEFR
- 1 (100 min.) seminar every week
- Group size
- Speaking as the main skill

Academic Presentations Course

Tasks:

- Tandem presentations
- Mini-presentations (recorded, Pecha Kucha, poster presentation)
- Story-telling, debating
- Improvisations

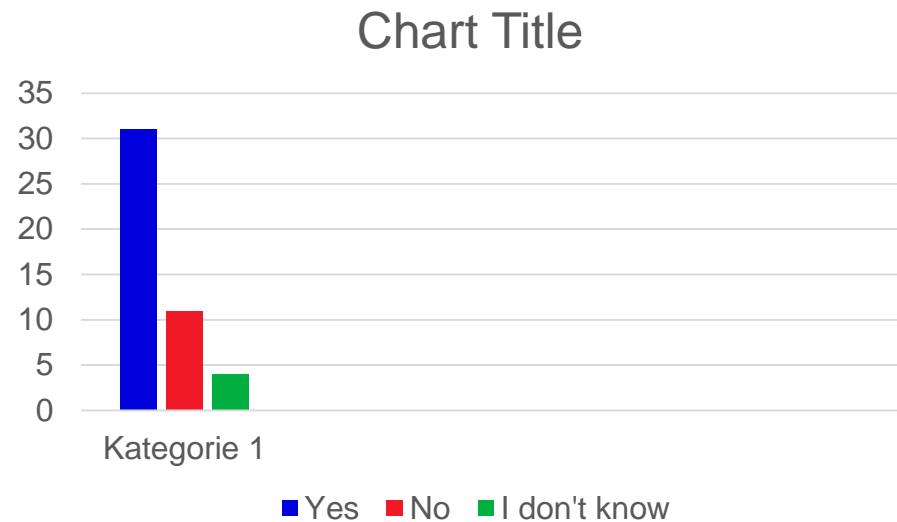
What are the greatest challenges you face in presenting?

Mentimeter



questionnaire

Is it harder for you to present in a foreign language?



What makes it harder?

- Lack of words, fear of getting stuck (19)
- Lack of confidence (8)
- FLA (7):
 - not used to thinking in a foreign language,
 - more difficult to concentrate, need to focus on the language,
 - not used to speaking in English
 - Foreign accent and pronunciation
 - Thinking too much in their mother tongue
- Fear of making mistakes (6)
 - Being aware of poor language skills- **linguistic insecurity**

- *I am quite a perfectionist and if I cannot remember a specific word, I feel embarrassed and quite stupid.*
- *Despite I am not afraid of speaking in English, I still get subconsciously nervous and often forget some of the points I wanted to mention, some words and expressions that would help me describe things better.*

How often do you present in English?

- 72 percent give several talks a term
- 11 percent have never given a talk in English

How does your nervousness manifest?

1. Physical symptoms: shaking voice, red face/blushing, dry mouth, sweating, hard to breathe, fast heart beat, feeling sick
2. Problems with speaking/voice: stuttering, talking too fast, talking too quietly
3. Problems with presenting: forgetting what I want to say/getting stuck, not keeping eye contact, too many gestures
4. Others: looking stressed, playing with jewellery

Self-reflection journals

I think it was my worst performance. I have selected a great and interesting topic, and I wanted to present my research in the best possible way. My presentation was full of stats and numbers, which I obviously in a stressful situation did not remember, or I was not completely sure, so I was checking my notes too much. When I forget some number, I started to be more nervous than I have ever in this subject was and I was completely lost. I think it should just stop, took a break for a few secs and started the slide or the chapter once again – there was no time limit. I wanted to shine with my research, but even if I have presented it in the best way, after the presenting experience, I am sure it was not a good presentation. As I have said earlier, it was full of numbers and stats, which the audience had no chance to get. I should focus way more on the important facts and cases, not on the numbers. But it was a great experience, and I hope next time I will present my research way better.

Samples from the Ss' journals

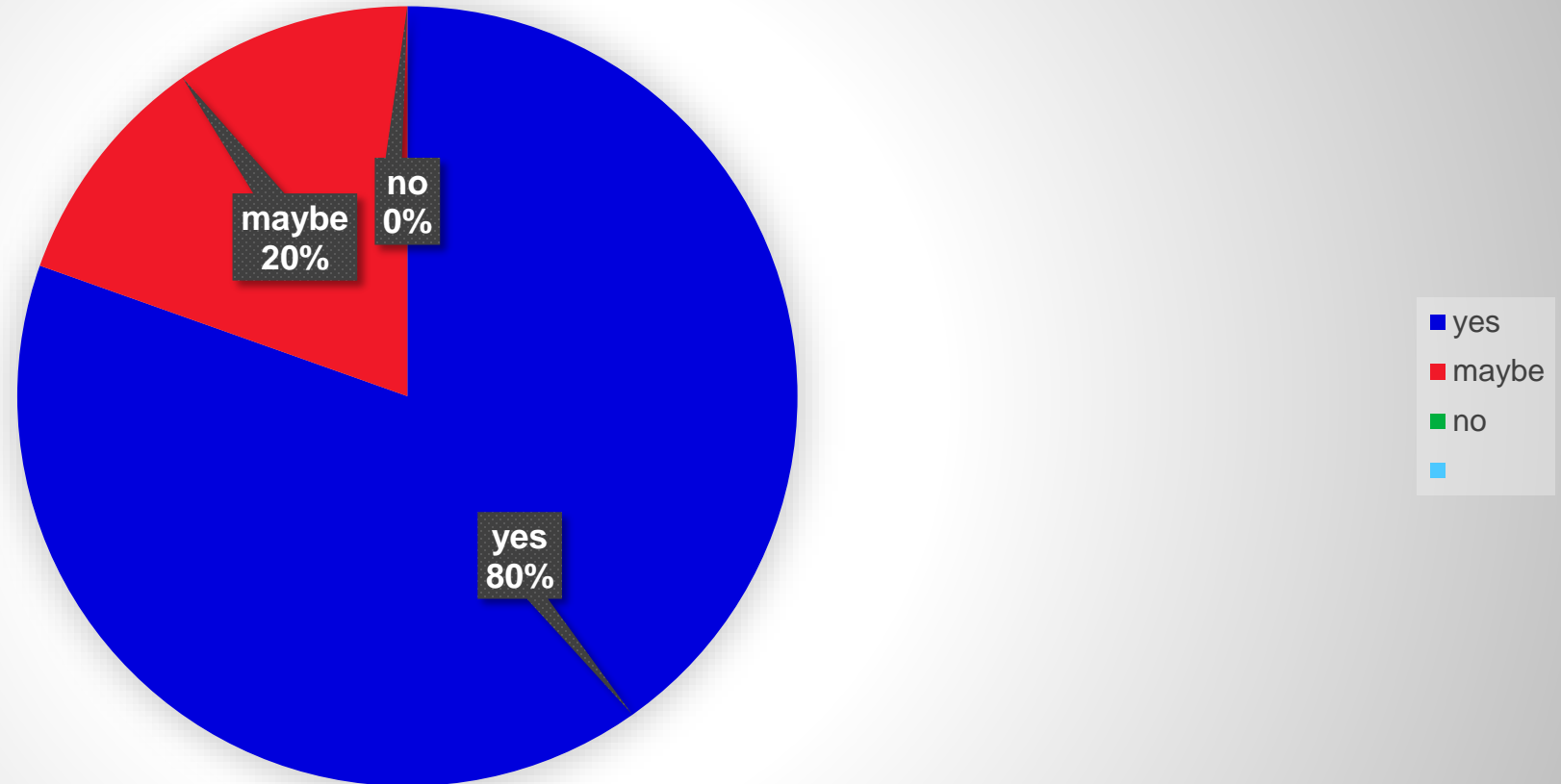
Evaluating this final presentation, I think I was my worst presentation of the whole course, I panicked because of my topic after hearing others and despite my preparation and practice I forgot number of parts I wanted to talk about, I just wanted to finally get it all over with, so no my original expectations and aim didn't match the reality at all. I felt terrible during presentation, and all was thinking about was how stupid this is, how is it even relevant and what's my point with this presentation.

I really feel that I have a big advantage in that I'm not the naturally nervous type, I would say I'm quite extroverted and speaking in front of people generally doesn't bother me. I used to be quite shy and insecure about speaking English, but by having to speak English a lot at work (we have foreign colleagues), I'm not so insecure about my English anymore. I've got used to speaking it.

What helped?

- Working on self-confidence
- Working with the audience (e.g. focusing on a friendly person in the audience, building rapport with them, getting used to the group)
- Saying to myself it is OK to make mistakes
- Practice and rehearsal, being well prepared
- Clear presentation structure
- Breathing techniques
- Water, bit of alcohol
- Looking good (dress up)

Do you think a presentation skills class will be useful for your future career?



Conclusions

- **Perceived skills deficiency**
 - Increased self-focusing
 - Lack of experience
 - Fear of not meeting the audience's expectations
 - Speaker's feeling of inferiority- language learning Histories
 - discussion part
- Fear of evaluation



"TO HELP YOU OVERCOME YOUR FEAR OF SNAKES, I'VE ARRANGED FOR YOU TO GIVE A PUBLIC SPEECH ON THE SUBJECT."

Conclusions

- ✓ **Confidence** boosting step by step with every other presentation
(teacher's and peer feedback helps)
- ✓ Stepping out of the comfort zone
- ✓ Non-native speaker inferiority syndrome
- ✓ Self-praise (discrepancy between their feelings and their actual performance)-
positive self-talk
- ✓ Eye-opening and liberating:
 - ✓ fighting against perfectionism
 - ✓ getting rid of the fear of making mistakes