

Leaving and reclaiming the Mother Tongue

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*"...but I begin to trust English to speak my childhood self as well, to say what has long been hidden, to touch the tenderness spot...
in English, I wind my way back to my old, Polish melancholy" (E. Hoffman, 1989)*
Abstract

This paper discusses the gains and limitations of not using the mother tongue in the intimate analytic space. The psychoanalytic literature on the use of different languages in analysis is reviewed; i.e., situations where the patient, the analyst or both do not communicate in their mother tongue. The concepts of plurilingualism and polyglotism are also reviewed. Two clinical vignettes are presented; the case of Mr. M, a new immigrant, that needed to nourish and "repair" the language of his analyst as a way to repair himself; and the case of Mr. J, a patient with a traumatic past full of losses, who wanted to enter his analyst world by starting to study the mother tongue of his analyst as a way to depart from the mother that had abandoned him, and to reach out to a "new mother."