

FRANKIE (Voiceover): “The heart needs words too” Why can’t I think of anything like that to say when I am with my clients. What don’t I understand about them? Why don’t they understand me? I’m getting all the same types of clients right now, when all I want to do is finish my course and qualify. I was doing so well. Haven’t I learned enough already? What is it I need to learn now?

Fade out and then back up on Consultation Room 1. Two chairs.

MALIK: Well I feel violent. I feel stupid. Violent and stupid.

FRANKIE: I don’t think you are stupid. You speak how many other languages besides English? Is it two others?

MALIK: And what good do they do me? I am ashamed to speak those languages. I would erase every trace, every memory, every utterance of those two languages if I could only speak English like an English person, like you.

FRANKIE: You can’t really mean that. Why would you feel ashamed of being multilingual?

MALIK: When words come out of your mouth, words that you have thought about so carefully, does anyone make strange faces and ask you to repeat yourself again and again, louder and louder?

FRANKIE: Well ...

MALIK: You see?

Fade down. Fade up on Frankie in the chair with his inner thoughts.

FRANKIE: Come on - what would Christine say to that? I can’t even think straight. I feel really ashamed. I never thought that just speaking English like a native was such an advantage. Maybe he’s catastrophising. I’ll help him to see this is not so awful. People aren’t so bad. This is an irrational fear.

Fade back into the scene with Malik.

FRANKIE: Look, I think your English is really good. I have experience of lots of people with strong accents – and not just foreign accents either. But Scottish accents and Geordie accents. I can understand you as well as them.

MALIK: OK. You don’t see. Ironically, I’m not a native – not a native speaker. Having an accent, and I mean a foreign accent, is like your invisible skin colour. Just like, when you walk into a room and you are brown or black, you have shown everyone your ethnic passport.

FRANKIE: (Quietly) Is it really that bad?

MALIK: Except this marker isn’t visible. But when you open your mouth to speak, it marks you out. You could call it audio-racism.

FRANKIE: I didn’t mean that when I said ...

MALIK: If you have a standard British accent like you – or better still a posh one – you can pass as someone civilised, knowledgeable, credible. It makes your skin colour more palatable.

FRANKIE: (Quietly) I really am impressed that you can speak so many languages. I mean it.