

SUPERVISEE: There's another situation I would really welcome your help with. I have been seeing a couple with an interpreter. I was feeling quite confident as I have had training in working with an interpreter and I had made sure that we had a pre-meeting together to establish our working methods, to give some context about the clients and to establish our rules of communication. The interpreter seemed very experienced and actually the sessions had been going pretty well.

But during the last session, Marek, the husband, turned to me and started to talk to me directly in English. I let it go for a while and I was trying to think about what was happening relationally with this turn of the communication.

While I was thinking though, the interpreter turned to me and asked me what she should be translating. It was a really annoying question and interfered with my thinking. Anyway, I told her to translate the Polish. (I thought that would have been obvious).

So that was the first thing.

The husband continued to talk directly to me in English, and I thought I should address the shifting power dynamics with the wife. So I said: "I have noticed that sometimes your husband talks to me in English and you can't understand. I wonder what that feels like when he excludes you in that way? Does that happen a lot in your relationship?"

At this point, the wife got very cross with me and asked me if I saw him talking English to me as a bad thing. She said, I was wrong that she was very proud that Marek had learned English so quickly and that he could make himself understood with English people. He had made a big effort to learn English so that their family could benefit and could make progress here in this country.

At this point I was very confused and I think things just went from bad to worse. Can you help me think through what might have been happening and how I could have dealt with the rupture?