

## Finding a Unified Identity Within Two Languages

Eva's bilingual inner dialogue reflects the two cultural identities struggling for dominance within her as she attempts to construct a unified personal identity for herself. Each culture and value system is defended and represented by its respective language. Her inner Polish voice represents the values and perspectives of her culture, while her American voice represents her newly discovered “American way.” Near the end of the novel, her American self and Polish self engage in conversation as if they are two separate individuals. When Eva's two languages collide the reader can see that Eva's identity changes depending on which language is constructing her at the moment. Her North American self believes she desires one thing while her Polish self wants the opposite. When Eva contemplates marrying her Texan boyfriend, she asks herself in both languages if this is the correct choice:

Should you marry him? the questions comes in  
English.  
Yes.  
Should you marry him? The question echoes in  
Polish  
No. (Hoffman 199)

Eva's two identities are distinguished by their language and each has its own perspective on how she should behave. She struggles internally to maintain a consistent version of herself. In most situations, Eva does what her American voice advises her to do, such as giving up piano (199). However, Eva is wary of the truth her Polish voice speaks. She fights with her Polish self to discern which language is the one that defines her true inner identity; she argues “why should I listen to you? You don't necessarily know the truth about me just because you speak in *that* language. Just because you seem to come from deeper within” (199, emphasis added). Eva's American voice attempts to suppress the validity of her inner Polish language but this identity retorts that “this is not the moment to lie to yourself” (199). When she is contemplating marriage, her American inner voice speaks first. The reader

can see that she keeps her American voice at the forefront and it is often her American self that she externalizes, however she cannot separate herself from her inner Polish voice.

Though Eva seems to externally portray her American self to those around her, the reader can see that she is an amalgamation of her two voices. She cannot exist without her Polish language, as her inner voice points out “if you don't satisfy me, you'll always be dissatisfied” (199). The Polish language inside her informs part of her complete self and she will never be able to drown it out completely, she is reminded by her inner Polish voice that “I'll never leave you quite alone...” (231). Eva's Polish language is the gateway to understanding herself as a whole and she must mediate between her two voices in order to find a unified personal identity.

## Works cited

Hoffman, Eva. Lost in Translation: A life in a New Language. New York: Penguin Group, 1990.