

A young man with light brown, slightly messy hair is shown from the chest up, looking off-camera with a wide-eyed, open-mouthed expression of surprise or fear. He is wearing a dark jacket. The background is a dense forest of tall, thin trees, with sunlight filtering through the leaves, creating a dappled light effect. The overall tone is cinematic and suspenseful.

A STORY BY JONATHAN CORTES

MOTHER TONGUE

Without words or time, only their instinct
can save them.

Fiction Short Film | 15 minutes | Drama/Suspense

Project Evolution

- 2024: Makila Incubator, Montreal, Canada
- 2024: Writing Grant from the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ)
- 2025: Cuban Hat Pitch, Montreal, Canada



Synopsis

Elena (31), a Colombian woman living illegally in the United States, crosses into Canada to reunite with her son Daniel (15), whom she abandoned shortly after his birth. Separated by language and deep resentment, they can only communicate through an automatic translator.

When the police surround them in the heart of the frozen forest, they must decide whether they can trust each other to prevent Elena's deportation to Colombia and, in doing so, redefine their broken bond.



Theme

Mother Tongue explores how communication and personal connections are possible in a world where, despite its progress, technology fails to create genuine emotional bonds, distancing us from each other and even ourselves. Through Elena and Daniel's encounter, the film highlights the linguistic and emotional barrier between a mother and son separated by time and distance.

It also addresses the realities of borders, immigration law, exile, and the complex identity of second-generation immigrants. Ultimately, it reminds us that some fractures can only be healed through physical presence.

Artistic Approach

Mother Tongue uses a visually contrasted style: in the first part, handheld camerawork captures the characters' separation, emphasizing their isolation and communication struggles. The lighting starts cold and harsh, symbolizing distance and detachment, while wide shots reinforce their disconnection. After the phone translator stops working, the camera becomes more stable, using close-ups to reflect their transition toward a more authentic connection. The lighting softens, marking the evolution of their relationship. Elements of dark comedy punctuate their misunderstandings, offering a subtle critique of technology's impact on human relationships.

Impact & Resonance

In a world increasingly dependent on communication technologies and marked by constant migration, Mother Tongue resonates with contemporary realities. The film sheds light on the loneliness of undocumented migrants, the fragmented identity of second-generation immigrant children, and the fact that, despite technology's promise to break down language barriers, it cannot bridge the emotional gaps that separate people.. Through an intimate yet universal story, Mother Tongue questions our fundamental need for human connection in a world where digital immediacy cannot replace physical presence or forgiveness.

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