

*The Languages of Limited Diffusion Work Group, part of the Home for Trainers project of the STC has been working on finding resources and ways to share those resources. To view the database go to <http://www.ncihc.org/languages-of-limited-diffusion>. The LLD Work Group will also present a review of one resource through the ListServ about once every three months. We know that not all of the ListServ readers will be interested in every resource, so please don't respond; just, delete the information that doesn't interest you.*

*If you have resources you would like to add to the database, and/or if you would like review a resource, please contact us at [lld@ncihc.org](mailto:lld@ncihc.org).*

<b><u>Title:</u></b>	The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down
<b><u>Type of Resource:</u></b>	book
<b><u>Last accessed:</u></b>	September 2014
<b><u>Reviewer:</u></b>	Catherine Anderson
<b><u>Language:</u></b>	English

Anne Fadiman's work of literary journalism, first published in 1997, remains a classic resource for interpreters, interpreter trainers, health care providers, as well as immigrant/refugee organizations that serve as ports of entry to newcomers from around the world. This ensemble narrative involves a Hmong child who has epileptic seizures, her refugee parents who try to parent her, love her, and assist her, and the Western medical practitioners who, while well-intentioned, seem to be blind to obvious linguistic and cultural barriers. The book's power lies in Fadiman's understated voice that searches to understand how the consequences of cultural and linguistic miscommunication led to the tragedy, in the end, of the young girl's permanent vegetative state. It is an incisive ethnography that goes beyond pure description to ask necessary and penetrating questions about health care from the point of view of those for whom English is not a first language.

Case studies are often very instructive for those studying interpreting. In this long narrative, through the recounting of the experience of the young girl and her family, certain realities emerge as the "truths" of interpreting: The use of interpretation/translation, in any cross-cultural interaction is essential to communication. In a serious health care situation this is even more so. A health care provider cannot communicate part of a diagnosis, or provide vaguely understood treatment options. The communication has to be clear, accurate, and as precise in the target language as it is in the source language. Other truths illustrated throughout the book are: those communicating medical information in the source language (English, in this case), need to be aware that not all terms and phrases have equivalencies in the target language. A good interpreter will be able to ask for clarification, then describe a word in the patient's language. A good interpreter will also be able to explain aspects of the culture the physician may not know. Fadiman reveals how communication between the Lee family and the providers failed because these essential elements of cross cultural communication were either not known or ignored. At the critical time when Lia was first diagnosed and the family needed accurate interpreting, the clinic did not strive to provide an interpreter, assuming the family was acting purposefully

obstinate or non-compliant. The doctors could not see what was obvious: Foua and Nao Kao loved their daughter and feared medication because it seemed to make her worse.

Fadiman tells Lia's story through the eyes of both her Hmong family and the western practitioners who tried to help but were not successful. For those of us working with limited-English proficient individuals, the details are bracing and familiar. An interpreter straddles two worlds at the same time: the disorientation and confusion of the limited-English proficient speaker and the perspective of Western-based protocols designed to help the patient. Those of us who identify with the LEP patient know how disempowering and desperate it feels not to be able to communicate with a health care provider. When we identify with Western providers, we know how crushing it is to realize that our best intentions may be misguided, damaging, or plain wrong. Fadiman illuminates both worlds, and helps us try to see through all of them at the same time.