



JANUARY 28, 2011

COURT REPORTERS – WHAT TO DO WITH STRONG ACCENTS?

As court reporters, we get to produce transcripts about everything imaginable and meet people from all over the world. One of the most difficult parts of our job is to write people who come from different countries, ethnicities, and with strong regional accents. The question was recently debated on the NCRA manager’s forum: “Does the reporter write a verbatim transcript or transcribe testimony adding plurals when a person does not have the ability to pronounce an ‘s’ and yet it is obvious the plural is what the person is saying? Or, “Does the reporter write a verbatim transcript or transcribe testimony inserting ‘him’ for ‘them’ when it is obvious the person is talking about a single person?”

As a court reporter in the line of battle listening to strong accents I will find myself thinking: “Did I mishear? Did the witness say ‘him’ but I couldn’t tell because of the accent, or did the witness say ‘them’? The thing is ‘them’ wouldn’t make any sense in the context of what he is talking about? Hmm. But I think I heard ‘them’.”

Mind you, this is going through my mind as I am writing 200+ words a minute.

Another problem is witnesses who invent things often come from foreign countries, and court reporters have the added stress of not knowing the intricacies of the science they are talking about, for example, the sequencing of the human genome.

In reading the advice that different court reporters were giving on the NCRA forum, there were two schools of thought, but one of the wisest comments was to the effect, “It can be dangerous to help the person with the strong accent, because where do you stop? Everyone in the room can hear the accent, and the record with the broken English, incorrect syntax will make sense to the reader in the long run.”

One thing that I have done when reporting scientists with very strong accents, scientists who are talking about highly technical subject matter, testimony that is difficult to understand and report, is put a realtime screen in front of the scientist. I ask all counsel (and put my statement/request on the record as THE REPORTER), “Does everyone agree that I will put a realtime screen in front of the witness so the witness can read what I am transcribing his/her testimony to be, and if I am incorrect, the witness can stop, let me know, and make sure I am accurately recording what he/she is saying in realtime?” I have found that 99.9% of the time all counsel agree to my solution and are grateful. Everyone wants an accurate record.



**DISCOVERY**  
CONFERENCE CENTRE

Realtime makes a lot of court reporters very nervous, and they feel uncomfortable having someone read what they are writing – particularly when the testimony is highly technical. I say, “Get over it.” I know I am a really good court reporter, and I know the attorneys know I am a really good court reporter. For IP, patent litigation, having an accurate record of the science is essential to everyone. I want to “get it right” and not assume I know what the scientist is saying or guess. I have used this tool in extremely difficult situations (maybe 25 depositions in my career).

Reporting a deposition with strong accents will never be easy. Strong accents are one of the many reasons that machines cannot do our job. I have strong empathy for all reporters everywhere, young and old, who are reporting the tough depositions with speakers almost impossible to understand. I have a high degree of respect and admiration for all of you out there. Writing accents is incredibly hard work and takes a tremendous amount of concentration. Court reporters rock!



**DISCOVERY**

CONFERENCE CENTRE

ROSALIE A. KRAMM, CRR \*PRESIDENT CSR #5469 [MAILTO:ROSALIE@KRAMM.COM](mailto:ROSALIE@KRAMM.COM) 2224 THIRD AVENUE, SAN DIEGO,  
CA 92101 T.800-939-0080 F.619-239-0206 [WWW.KRAMM.COM](http://WWW.KRAMM.COM)  
[HTTP://WWW.DISCOVERYCONFERENCECENTRE.COM](http://WWW.DISCOVERYCONFERENCECENTRE.COM)