# British woman’s stroke triggers rare foreign accent and social isolation



A British woman from Plymouth, Sarah Colwill, has shared her harrowing experience following a stroke in 2010, which resulted in a dramatic change in her speech, leading her to develop a foreign accent. Now 50 years old, Ms Colwill woke up one morning to find that her distinctive Devon drawl had vanished, replaced by what has been described as a Chinese accent, despite her having never visited Asia. Her case is one of approximately 100 known instances of Foreign Accent Syndrome (FAS) globally.

In an exclusive interview with MailOnline, Ms Colwill recounted the significant challenges she has faced in the 15 years since the stroke. She described enduring discrimination and harassment, including being the target of racial abuse. "I can't describe how it feels when your society, your country turns against you and doesn't recognise you as a resident anymore," she said, reflecting on the distress caused by strangers telling her to "go back to your own country."

The stroke left her with various neurological impairments, severely impacting her ability to walk and communicate. As a result, Ms Colwill had to leave her job as an IT coordinator and move back in with her mother, alongside her husband Patrick, where they have since lived in a makeshift extension that they refer to as a "glorified shed."

Despite the hardships, Ms Colwill noted that she has not entirely lost her sense of community. She mentioned that some of her Asian friends, including the owners of a local Chinese restaurant, have supported her. "She accepted how I spoke... to her I didn't sound Chinese," she noted, highlighting the disparity between personal relationships and public perceptions of her accent.

In addition to her ongoing struggle with the accent, Ms Colwill has faced emotional turmoil, particularly from Christian groups that have claimed her condition is evidence of demonic possession, suggesting that she required an exorcism. "It was just an awful, awful time," she recalled, explaining how the abuse online was frequent enough for her sister to intervene on her behalf.

The impact on her personal relationships has also been profound; she revealed that some family members have distanced themselves due to misconceptions about her condition, attributing her speech change to a lack of effort rather than a legitimate medical issue.

Ms Colwill expressed frustration over how people perceive her situation, stating, "I'm not choosing to speak this way... I can't change it." She acknowledged that the accent varies and has even been mistaken for other accents, including Australian and Spanish.

Reflecting on her journey, she indicated the limited support available for individuals with such rare conditions and the ongoing battle to maintain her mental health and regain confidence. "It's been a hard journey and a long journey to get here, but it's taught me many things about what's important if the people around you," she concluded, emphasising her gratitude for the unwavering support from her husband and sister.

As Ms Colwill continues to navigate the complexities brought on by her FAS, she remains hopeful for a return to her former accent while focusing on improving her quality of life and mental well-being.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2010/apr/19/migraine-changes-womans-accent> - This piece reports on Sarah Colwill's case, highlighting how a severe migraine attack caused her to develop a Chinese-sounding accent, despite her never having been to China, and the subsequent medical diagnosis of FAS.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/7606587/Migraine-sufferer-starts-speaking-with-Chinese-accent.html> - This article covers Sarah Colwill's condition, noting that she woke up with a Chinese accent after a severe migraine, and includes her personal account of the frustration and confusion caused by this sudden change.
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