What is the nature of the disorder in foreign accent syndrome?  

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Foreign accent syndrome (FAS) is a poorly understood speech disorder that has recently received increased theoretical and empirical attention. People with FAS manifest changes to their speech production that are perceived as features of another accent, but usually also show features associated with disorders such as apraxia of speech, aprosodia or dysarthria. The current paper reviews past cases of FAS and presents acoustic investigations of two new cases, testing the hypothesis that the disorder is due to an altered vocal tract tension setting (Ingram et al, 1992; Laver, 1980).

NC is a male monolingual speaker of Australian English, who acquired an accent that Australian listeners perceived as North American for 5 months following a motor vehicle accident at 13 years. Three characteristics contributed to NC's perceived accent: rhoticised vowels, a shift in vowel quality resembling that of general American English, and tapped productions of /t/ and /d/. Analysis of NC's F0 and acoustic vowel space in the F1/F2 plane suggested that increased laryngeal and supralaryngeal tension were features of NC's foreign-accented speech. NJ is a female monolingual English speaker from Cornwall, England, who acquired a "central European" accent following a motor vehicle accident at 52 years. Comparisons of NJ's vowel space, speech rate, consonant precision and F0 pre- and post-accident are currently in progress. While some of NJ's speech changes resemble those of NC, impressionistic analyses suggest that a number of features differ across cases and an identical account of the changes may not apply.