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HEADLINE: American universities help foreign scholars work toward **accent**-free English

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BODY:

Myongchee Choi, a Korean visiting scholar at the **University of Missouri**, is looking to shed her foreign **accent**.

The 36-year-old urban planner and government official from Ansan, South Korea, studied and practiced English for more than two decades before arriving in the United States last fall. But even with a knowledge of textbook English, communication did not come easily.

"They just taught us grammar and how to read," said Choi. "They never taught us how to speak, and how to listen."

In an effort to lose her heavy Korean lilt, Choi enrolled in the university's semester-long "**accent** modification" program, where she worked with speech therapists who usually deal with stroke victims and stutterers.

Such programs have long been offered by U.S. universities to nonnative speakers. At many American universities, an increase in the number of foreign-born graduate students teaching undergraduates has led to minimum language proficiency requirements.

Sang Kim, the director of the university's Asian Affairs Center, which hosts visiting scholars, said Friday the **accent** modification program was key to the academic success of those scholars, who are often officials sent by provincial governments in Korea and China.

"In order for them to go out and do research effectively, they need to have good working English," Kim said.

Choi and the other participants work on consonant formation, vowel articulation, stress patterns, proper pauses, intonation and pitch. In essence, participants have to unlearn the techniques by which they originally learned to speak English, said Dana Fritz, a clinical instructor at the university's Speech and Hearing Clinic.

"So much of that is inside you, it's hard to take out," Choi said.

Visiting Korean scholar Ji-Wook Kim, a government procurement officer in the Chungnam

province who like Choi does not teach classes at the university, quickly realized that the English spoken on campus bears faint resemblance to what he learned back home.

"We think we speak English," he said. "But Americans don't know what we're saying."

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