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# Challenging Autistic "Humorlessness": Humor Production and Appreciation in Nonspeaking Autistic Interaction

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## Abstract

In most clinical and experimental autism research, autistic people, especially those who do not use speech, are portrayed as deficient in their ability to create and maintain social relationships. One frequent claim is that autistic people are unable to produce and appreciate humor, which is crucial to fostering social connectedness. By contrast, both critical autism studies and Crip Linguistics offer frameworks created by disabled communities that challenge such deficit-based notions regarding autistic languaging and interaction. These frameworks advocate understanding autistic social interaction on the terms defined by autistic individuals themselves.

In this article, I use ethnographically informed interactional analysis of video recordings to examine how a nonspeaking autistic young adult, "José," both appreciates others' humor and produces humor himself. I demonstrate not only that José is able to produce and appreciate humor, but also that he uses humor as a resource for stancetaking, enabling him to assert his agency without speech. Contrary to deficit-based assumptions, this study reveals that humor can play a pivotal role in the social lives of nonspeaking autistic individuals. The findings advance scholarly understanding of humor within the autism spectrum while demonstrating the need for inclusive, disabled-led approaches that understand nonspeaking autistic interaction on its own terms.

Nearly all clinical and experimental research on autism takes a deficit perspective. This situation becomes even more extreme when such research considers nonspeaking autistic people, who are often presented as less than fully human, their ability to engage meaningfully with others frequently questioned (Hinzen et al., 2020; Maljaars et al., 2011, 2012; Slušná et al., 2021). This perspective, which pathologizes nonspeaking autistic interaction, stands in contrast to approaches that seek to understand, appreciate, and destigmatize the intricacies of autistic languaging and interactional competence without speech, which involves the skillful use of embodied resources, vocalizations, and/or augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices. One such approach, critical autism studies, as part of the interdisciplinary field of critical disability studies, seeks to challenge conventional, deficit-driven perspectives on autism and emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting the experiences and perspectives of autistic people themselves (e.g., Davidson & Orsini, 2013; Milton & Ryan, 2021; O'Dell et al., 2016; Runswick-Cole et al., 2016; Woods et al., 2018. A second counterhegemonic approach to autism, Crip Linguistics, is a disability-centered theoretical framework that calls for a broader framing of language through the concept of languaging, or meaning-making. A central aspect of their argument, Henner and Robinson (2023) critique "modality chauvinism," or the privileging of one modality (such as spoken language) over others, such as AAC, gesture, or vocalizations. The founding principles of Crip Linguistics are as follows: "no way of languaging is bad; it is okay to change your own use of language but no way of using language should be described as atypical, disordered, or defective. We need a more expansive attitude about what involves language and what our attitudes about languaging communicates about a person's capacity" (Henner & Robinson, 2023). Henner and Robinson (2023) write:

> "*Crip Linguistics* means to *critique* language and language scholarship through the lens of disability, *include* disabled perspectives, *elevate* disabled scholars, *center* disabled voices in conversations about disabled languaging, *dismantle* the use of disorder and deficit rhetorics, and finally, *welcome* disabled

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> languaging as a celebration of the infinite potential of the bodymind" (p. 8).

One way I embrace Crip Linguistics is by citing and centering the voices and perspectives of autistic people, even if they are not institutionally recognized as academics. I also approach their communicative practices, whether through gesture, AAC, or other embodied forms, as meaningful acts of languaging. This orientation informs both the theoretical framing and analysis throughout the article.

For autism research, the "more expansive attitude…about languaging" that Henner and Robinson call for requires analysts to examine autistic interaction on its own terms. Interactional analysis provides a robust empirical basis for recognizing autistic languaging as skilled and competent (e.g., Chen, 2022; Maynard & Turowetz, 2022; Prado & Bucholtz, 2021; Solomon, 2008; Sterponi et al., 2015). The approach that I take in this article combines critical autism studies, Crip Linguistics, and ethnographically grounded interactional analysis in order to challenge the traditional deficit-based view of nonspeaking autistic interaction.

In this article, I focus on humor as an important yet underexamined aspect of autistic languaging. It is widely recognized that humor plays a crucial role in the development of interpersonal relationships (Glenn & Holt, 2017; Jensen, 2018; Treger et al., 2013); however, clinical research argues that autistic people are "humorless," unable to effectively produce and appreciate humor, and thus have difficulty meaningfully engaging with others (e.g., Lyons & Fitzgerald, 2004; Samson et al., 2013). Other research argues that autistic people do have the ability to appreciate humor but that this capacity is limited compared to that of non-autistic disabled people (e.g., St. James & Tager-Flusberg, 1994). Such research overlooks the interactional basis of humor and the many ways that humor can be appreciated and produced within interaction by speaking as well as nonspeaking autistic people. Using interactional analysis is therefore crucial to understanding how autistic people employ humor without speech, both to challenge misconceptions about their ability to engage socially with others and to highlight the role of humor as an interactional resource.

In the following section, I provide a brief overview of clinical research on humor in autism, with a critical focus on the prevalent notion that autistic people have difficulty engaging with humor. I then explore the conceptualization of humor in autism and discuss how the methods of conversation analysis have contributed to the understanding of humor in social interaction. Finally, I analyze how humor serves as a valuable resource for stancetaking for the nonspeaking autistic young man who is the focus of my longitudinal research. Based on my findings, I argue that nonspeaking autistic people can possess the ability to appreciate and produce humor in ways that are often underestimated, leveraging these capacities to engage in meaningful relationships and enact complex interactional stances.

## Literature Review

### Humor and Autism

#### *Clinical Approaches*

It has been argued that humor is a distinctively human trait (Gordon, 2014; Polimeni & Reiss, 2006). However, clinical researchers often assert that autistic people are deficient in their ability to engage with humor, implying that they are not fully human. Asperger (1944), one of the first researchers to define autism, identified a lack of ability to appreciate and produce humor as one of the criteria of the diagnosis:

> An essential characteristic of these children is their humorlessness. They do not understand jokes, especially when they are targeted at themselves. . . They are unable to be cheerful in a relaxed manner and do not understand the world in a peaceful way which is the basis of genuine humor. If they are occasionally in a cheerful mood, this often appears awkward to others: overreaching, distorted, excessive: they jump and rampage about the room, lose their sense of distance, annoying, aggressive. Only in one sense they are often very competent, inventive even: in wordplay, beginning with verbicide, effects resulting from similarities in sound, and going to very sharply formulated, really clever and witty sentences. (p. 127)

An intriguing aspect here is the implicit distinction between the reception of humor and its production. The claim suggests that autistic children struggle with humor comprehension (i.e., are perceived as deficient in its reception) yet are still capable of generating humor—though at times in ways that others deem "annoying" rather than humorous. This reaction is then framed as a shortcoming of the autistic person rather than the annoyed recipient. Stating that autistic people are deficient in humor therefore implies deficits in their ability to navigate social interactions and relationships. In fact, one experimental study claims that autistic people can benefit from training to better comprehend and appreciate humor (Wu et al., 2016). It is a common belief among clinical and psychological researchers that autistic people, due to their presumed tendency to ignore contextual information and instead focus "excessively" on details, have great difficulty understanding jokes (Lyons & Fitzgerald, 2004; Samson, 2013). This research claims that autistic people tend to better grasp "simple" humor, such as jokes involving rhyme, slapstick, and funny sounds (Samson, 2013). The comprehension of verbal jokes is said to present a greater challenge than visual jokes for autistic people because the former involves processing more verbal information, which is often believed to be more difficult for autistic people (Emerich et al., 2003). Research has also argued that the topics of autistic humor are predominantly drawn from personal interests (Wu et al., 2014). Additionally, autistic people are said to lack proficiency in using affiliative humor, which is instrumental in fostering interpersonal relationships (Samson, 2013). Paulos (1980) goes so far as to imply that autis-

tic people are like computers, stating that humor "essentially depends on so many emotional, social, and intellectual facets of human beings, and is particularly immune to computer simulation and therefore difficult for persons with autism" (p. 51). However, this widespread deficit framing overlooks autistic people's humor because this perspective is based on controlled experimental studies that remove autistic people from their everyday contexts. Given that humor takes place in social interaction in the context of daily life (Norrick & Chiaro, 2009), it is important to examine autistic humor in this interactional ecology to better understand the interactional competence of autistic people (see also Maynard & Turowetz, 2022; Prado & Bucholtz, 2021, in preparation a).

### *Interactional Approaches*

As interactional researchers have shown, humor plays a vital role in fostering interpersonal connections and strengthening social connectedness (Glenn & Holt, 2017). In addition, humor is important in stancetaking (Bucholtz et al., 2011; Jaffe, 2016), an inherently dialogic and intersubjective process that is essential to social interaction (Du Bois & Kärkkäinen, 2012; Kiesling, 2022). According to Du Bois, "Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 163). However, compared to clinical and experimental research, very few studies of autism examine stance or use interactional methods, and humor rarely receives attention within this research. A handful of studies of autistic interaction briefly address humor in passing as a small part of a larger interactional analysis. For example, one study of autistic storytelling practices mentions in the analysis that an autistic narrator's cheerful tone and subsequent laughter while recounting a story prompts non-autistic recipients to assess the narrative as humorous (Emborg, 2023). Another study focusing on politeness among autistic children includes an interaction in which an autistic child makes a pun while engaging in a joint attentional activity with his mother; the transcript shows that the mother initially fails to grasp the pun and is only able to appreciate her son's humor after persistent attempts (Sirota, 2004). A third study, which centers on "atypical" pragmatic practices, presents an interaction in which an autistic person spontaneously shifts the topic in a therapy session and notes that this unexpected turn leads both the therapist and the patient to respond with laughter (Vössing & Kern, 2023). While these studies do not explicitly focus on humor in autistic interaction, they demonstrate instances where autistic people engage in humor with familiar interlocutors. Furthermore, they illustrate that mismatches can occur between autistic and nonautistic expectations regarding humor, often requiring autistic people to make multiple attempts and perform additional interactional labor in order for their nonautistic interlocutors to grasp the humor.

It is important to emphasize that all of the studies discussed above were conducted with speaking autistic people. To my knowledge, only one study has focused on nonspeaking autistic interaction and humor—or, more specifically, laughter, which is closely associated with humor. Auburn and Pollock (2013) examine interactions involving a nonspeaking autistic child they call "Alfie." Using video-recordings of Alfie's interactions with familiar interlocutors such as his parents and teacher, their analysis reveals Alfie's use of "laughing invitations" as a means of establishing affiliation and connection. The study thus challenges the misconception that nonspeaking autistic people do not use humor as an interactional resource in a similar fashion to their nonautistic, speaking counterparts. Auburn and Pollock's study yields three findings that are relevant to the present study: First, Alfie fosters and seeks affiliation by initiating humor through his unconventional use of an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) system called Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) (Bondy & Frost, 1994). Second, Alfie skillfully engages in interactional practices that present prior actions as laughable, occasionally persisting despite others' opposition to his efforts. Third, Alfie is able to facilitate humor by systematically blending laughter and eye gaze in order to resist structured therapy activities. The researchers' findings also align with recent research on humor in interaction that highlights the important role of multimodality (Priego-Valverde, 2023). The current study expands upon this research by focusing on humor as a resource for stancetaking in nonspeaking autistic interaction. In addition, the following analysis demonstrates the importance of an ethnographic perspective in understanding nonspeaking autistic humor, which often requires local insights that involve building long-term relationships with participants. Before presenting my analysis, I provide some additional background about nonspeaking autistic communicative practices as necessary context for interpreting the data.

## Nonspeaking Autistic Communicative Resources

Nonspeaking autistic people use a diverse range of resources to communicate, including gestures, facial expressions, vocalizations, and touch. In addition to these embodied forms of communication, they may also rely on external supports, such as assistive technology and communication partners. Another crucial yet often overlooked communicative resource is stimming (short for self-stimulatory behavior). Research has shown that stimming is not merely a repetitive or meaningless action but can serve important communicative, emotional, and self-regulatory purposes (e.g., Kapp et al., 2019; I. F. Morris et al., 2025), from expressing excitement, distress, or a desire to socially engage to helping people process their surroundings. As Bascom (2014) writes, "If you work on eliminating 'autistic symptoms' and 'self-stimulatory behaviors,' … you take away our voice." Thus, stimming is

a vital sensory and semiotic resource in autism (Nolan & McBride, 2015).

As noted above, many nonspeaking autistic people communicate utilizing augmentative and alternative communication technologies, also known as AAC. The category of AAC encompasses a wide variety of tools and technologies, such as alphabet letter boards, laminated pictures, phone and tablet apps, and speech-generating devices. Communicating through AAC can be challenging, as various factors such as sensory overload, motor difficulties, and stress can impede consistent communication with an AAC device (Cafiero & Delsack, 2018). In addition, AAC communication is often slow, prompting people to utilize their bodies for faster communication, in order to match the pace of speech in interaction (Higginbotham & Caves, 2002). While nonspeaking people often use gestures or other embodied modalities to communicate more efficiently, their interlocutors may ask them to reiterate their message through the device, whether as part of socialization into speaking-centered communication or for clarity. This redundancy is often more for the benefit of others rather than the communicator.

Family members are particularly likely to have specific expectations regarding a nonspeaking child's utilization of an AAC device, especially within Latinx households like the one that is the focus of this study, where there is a collective commitment to ensuring that AAC effectively serves everyone's needs (Huer et al., 2001; McCord & Soto, 2004). However, Latinx families often receive less training in the use of AAC devices compared to their white counterparts (Angell & Solomon, 2017). Furthermore, as I have discussed elsewhere, AAC devices may not be tailored to the needs of multilingual Latinx families, leading families to "tinker" with their devices to get them to work more effectively in their communicative environment (Prado, 2021). In their interview study of AAC users and humor, Weinberg et al. (2025) identify humor as an important interactional resource, helping participants feel more relatable and better integrated into social interactions. However, their interviewees also stated that humor is difficult to achieve in a timely way using AAC.

In my analysis below of how a nonspeaking autistic young Latino man both appreciates others' humor and produces humor himself, I show that autistic humor is a sophisticated interactional resource for stancetaking, enabling him to take a critical stance on his family members' ideologies surrounding his preference for using forms of communication other than his AAC app. I further demonstrate that such humor may be difficult for non-autistic outsiders (specifically, me as the researcher) to recognize due to their lack of attunement to the nuances of nonspeaking autistic interaction. Contrary to the commonly held clinical belief that autistic people are "humorless" and that nonspeaking autistic people cannot express themselves effectively, I show that nonspeaking autistic people are indeed able to joke and laugh – while simultaneously taking a stance in interactionally complex ways.

## Method

This paper draws on ethnographically grounded interactional analysis, a method that involves long-term engagement with participants and fine-grained analysis of naturally-occurring interaction. My analysis draws from a longitudinal, collaborative research project involving a nonspeaking autistic young man, "José," and his Latinx family. As someone who has known José and his family for over a decade and who shares cultural and linguistic ties with them, I bring a unique perspective to the research that informs both data collection and analysis. I began by reviewing over five hours of video data recorded by the family and during my own visits. I then transcribed these videos using transcription conventions (see appendix), attending closely to embodiment and AAC-mediated actions. I identified recurrent moments involving laughter and humor, ultimately narrowing my focus to one especially rich interaction in which José's stance toward his AAC app is negotiated through playful action. This approach allowed me to examine how humor is co-constructed in context, while centering José's interactional practices and lived experiences.

### Ethnographic Context

During the summer of 2021, I embarked on the second phase of my longitudinal project to collect a series of videos documenting the daily interactions of José with his family in Southern California. The first phase of the research was conducted in 2017. The purpose of this second phase of research was to capture additional footage of daily family interactions to observe changes and continuities in José's social interactions over the years. José was eighteen years old when the interactions analyzed in this article were recorded. I met him through his older sister, "Valentina," sometime in 2014. Valentina and I have been close friends since elementary school, having grown up in the same neighborhood where our families both still live. However, it wasn't until high school that I began to interact more frequently with José through a city-funded enrichment program for disabled youth, where I volunteered on the weekends for two years. Initially, I was drawn to the opportunity by my commitment to supporting youth in my community. I am not autistic, but like José and Valentina, I am Latinx and bilingual and I have spent an extensive period of time with them and their family.

Since his diagnosis at the age of three, José has used different communication systems with his family. The first was a picture-based system, similar to PECS, created by his family, involving using printed images of common or relevant items for communication. At the age of seven, José began to use PECS, as recommended by a therapist. When he was twelve years old, he began to use the symbol-based tablet AAC app Proloquo2Go, which uses a grid display with buttons, each of which is associated with an image and its corresponding word in English or Spanish (Figure 1). However, the app's bilingual functionality has several limitations that make it challenging for

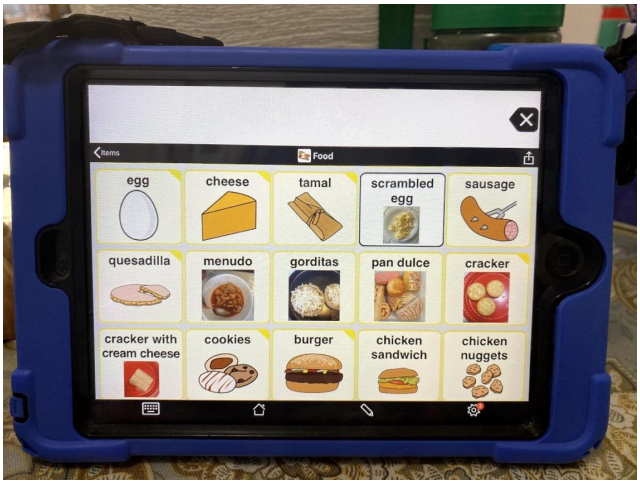


**Figure 1. José's tablet screen displaying his AAC app, Proloquo2Go.**

*Note.* Photo credit: Valentina.

José to use seamlessly (Prado and Bucholtz, in preparation b). For example, his family puts in significant time and effort to customize the Spanish buttons, which often lack images for the foods he commonly eats, such as tamales and pan dulce. Additionally, the app's bilingual feature is challenging to learn due to its complex interface, making it hard for users to navigate and effectively engage in culturally relevant translanguaging practices (Prado, 2021). José is often prompted to use the app by family members, even though they admit that they know what he wants based on his embodied practices, because they want him to become more communicatively independent. Moreover, family members often insist that José produce full sentences through the app rather than more communicatively efficient and interactionally appropriate single words or phrases (e.g., "I want chicken" instead of "chicken"). Each family member has different expectations regarding the use of the app. Valentina in particular has told me that she wants José to use the tablet more frequently. During this phase of the research, she worked as a therapist at a clinic for young children with developmental disabilities and often brought insights from her training into the home. José and Valentina's mother, on the other hand, is often willing to comply with José's requests that do not involve the AAC app, such as those made through physical touch.

As in the first phase of the project, in this second phase I gave José's family a video camera and asked them to record daily interactions involving José, telling them that they had full autonomy over how much and what they wanted to record; this participant-driven approach to data collection was central to my informed consent protocol in both phases of the project. (Their father chose not to participate in the research and is not included in any of the data I collected.) For this phase of the project, however, I also implemented a new approach in several ways. First, to avoid making assumptions about family members' technological proficiency, in addition to demonstrating how to use the camera in person, I created video tutorials to instruct family members on various aspects of how to set up and operate the camera. As noted above, it is often the case that Latinx families receive an AAC device without the necessary training to maximize its potential, and I did not want to subject José's family to a similar experience by introducing them to new technologies without providing necessary support. Since in this research phase I provided them with a different camera with new functions, I wanted them to have resources they could access at any time, rather than waiting for me to return in person for further assistance. I visited the family's home four times during the approximately two weeks of data collection, and I always asked family members if they had questions about the camera and how I could assist them with feeling more comfortable using it. José's mother and sister told me that they felt confident using the camera, although they expressed concerns about potential audio issues and raised the possible need for an additional camera to capture interactions at multiple angles. Fortunately, the majority of the videos do not have audio problems, and despite my lack of resources to provide a second camera, the video data that was collected was of high enough quality to allow for analysis. This collaborative approach helped me to break down the traditional boundary between researcher and research participants.

Another departure from the first phase of research was my active participation in front of the camera during video-recordings in the family home. In many interactional studies, the researcher is absent during recording periods, a method that is often framed as producing better data because the presence of the researcher can potentially influence the interaction, rendering it less natural (e.g., Mondada, 2013). However, in these cases, the researcher is limited to what can be seen and heard on the video, and important contextual information is lost. For this reason, some researchers opt to remain present during the video-recordings but behind the camera, not interacting with participants but capturing ethnographic details through observation (e.g., Goodwin, 2006). However, in the present study, it was important for me as the researcher both to be present and to interact with the family on camera in order to make visible my role as researcher and to acknowledge my influence on the interaction as well as to experience the interaction firsthand and thus better inform the analysis (Hofstetter, 2021). Co-producing video data with José and his family both provided opportunities to show how José interacted with me and provided me with greater real-time insight into the interaction (see also Chen, 2021). As noted above, the video recording process lasted about two weeks; I received a little over five hours of video, about one and a half hours of which were made with me present in the home. The family was financially compensated with modest gift cards for their involvement in the research; they also play an ongoing role in my analysis of the data.

As I analyzed the videos, my interest in humor and laughter was piqued due to my awareness of clinical presumptions about the "humorlessness" of autism. I ini-

tially became interested in laughter because I noticed its frequent presence in the videos, often but not always intertwined with humor. I examined all the interactional contexts in which José laughed, whether surrounded by others or alone. One video from the collection, recorded during one of my visits to the family home in August 2021, stood out for its extensive use of humor and laughter.

On that summer weekend morning, I visited José and his family to check on the progress of the video recordings. During my visit, Valentina and I decided to set up the camera outside because of the nice weather. We placed a white plastic folding table in the family's backyard, and Valentina positioned the camera on the tripod at an angle she deemed most suitable to capture our activities. I let José know that the camera was recording us, and he continued to smile, close his eyes, cover and uncover his ears, and move his head. I interpret the latter three actions as stimming; because they co-occur with smiling, these actions suggest that the presence of the camera did not bother him or disrupt his focus on his own sensory or emotional needs at that moment. Throughout the recording, Valentina, José, and I played with Legos and enjoyed food prepared by their mother.

During my visit, I often engaged José in conversation by asking him questions about how to arrange the Lego tower we were jointly constructing. Each time, rather than communicating with me using the tablet he had available to him on the table, José used embodied action, using his hands to show me how to place the Lego pieces on the tower. At one point during our interaction, José lifted his water bottle from the table. In the larger data set over the two-week period, I noticed that José often requests more water by raising his water bottle and is then directed by either his mother or Valentina to use the tablet to make his request. Valentina had previously mentioned to me earlier on the day of my visit that although she typically encourages him to use the app to make such requests, he doesn't always do so in the way she expects. In fact, earlier that day, she had told me that José is quite skilled at using the app in ways that deliberately do not align with her expectations. I do not recall whether José was within earshot of this comment or if he reacted to it in any noticeable way. She mentioned that it particularly bothers her when he presses a button within the app and then slides his finger down the screen, causing the app not to register the action and therefore not to produce any synthesized speech output. This creative use of the AAC app arises in the analysis below, which examines how José uses humor to take a stance regarding the app.

## Analysis

The following analysis examines three ways in which José engages in humorous interaction: by producing humor himself, by displaying appreciation for others' humor, and by taking a stance through humor. In each of the following examples, José orients to and takes a stance toward his family's expectation that he should use the AAC device more often for communication. The first example focuses on José's own production of humor by teasing Valentina using the device. While Valentina recognizes his teasing, I fail to provide uptake to his tease, missing the duality of his humor, which is both playful and pointed. The second example demonstrates José displaying appreciation for others' humor, in this case in response to a joke I make about his use of the AAC device. The third example is a replay of José's first tease in which I finally catch on to his humor. The three examples collectively reveal José's ability to engage in humor as both an agentive producer and an active recipient; in addition, the analysis shows that José is able to use humor to take a stance on a topic that is a source of mild conflict in his family: his reluctance to use the AAC app. José demonstrates just how sophisticated his uses of humor are, given their grounding in what he knows about the "pet peeves" of those he is joking with and how he can mobilize this knowledge to do joking. The analysis thus demonstrates that nonspeaking autistic people like José are not "humorless," but are in fact skilled and interactionally competent social actors.

### Producing Humor through Teasing

In the following example, José attempts to play a joke using his AAC app, but I fail to recognize his humorous intent. Extract 1 takes place while José and I are building with Legos in the family's backyard. Valentina sits across from us, just out of the camera's frame. (See appendix for transcription conventions.)

**Extract 1**

**"I'm always the bad one"**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 |  | J: Lifts water bottle with right hand and looks at Valentina with head tilted slightly downward |
| 2 |  | V: "¿Qué pasa?"<br>*('What's happened?')* |
| 3 |  | E: Looks at José<br><br>J: [ "Hm:!" ]<br>V: [ "¿Qué es eso?" ]<br>*('What's that?')* |
| 4 |  | E: Looks at Valentina with head still turned toward José |
| 5 |  | E: Turns head towards Valentina<br><br>E: "¿Salud?"<br>*('Cheers?')*<br><br>J: Begins to lower water bottle |
| 6 |  | E: [ Smiles, looking at Valentina<br>V: [ "I know, I've done that bef-<br><br>V: "I did that with him [ yesterday." ]<br>J: [ Tugs at shirt ] |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 7 |  | V: [ Extends her water bottle toward José with right hand<br>E: [ “°Salud°.” ]<br>(‘Cheers’.)<br><br>J: Smiles and begins to lift left arm |
| 8 |  | J: [ (sharply inhales) ]<br>J: [ Closes eyes and swats Valentina’s water bottle with hand ] |
| 9 |  | E: [ @ ]<br>J: [ (short, sharp inhale) ]<br>J: [ Covers left ear with left hand ]<br><br>E: @@! [ @: @@h@@@h@@h<br>J: [ @@ (.) @@^@ [ @@ ] @^!@<br>V: [ “Oh, no:.” ] |
| 10 |  | J: Keeps eyes closed and lowers water bottle |
| 11 |  | J: [ Continues to smile<br>E: [ Continues to smile<br><br>J: Opens eyes<br><br>V: “You’re silly.”<br><br>J: [ “Hm:” ]<br>J: [ Tugs at shirt with left hand ] |
| 12 |  | J: [ Continues to smile<br>E: [ Continues to smile<br><br>J: [ “Hm:” ]<br>V: [ “You’re silly:.” ] @@@ |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 13 |  | J: [ Continues to smile and closes eyes<br>E: [ Continues to smile |
| 14 |  | J: [ Moves head in figure-8 motion<br>E: [ “Ay, José:.” ]<br>*(‘Oh, José’.)* |
| 15 |  | J: Continues to move head in figure-8 motion<br><br>E: [ @@ ] @@@h<br>V: [ “Ay, no.” ]<br>*(‘Oh, no’.)*<br><br>J: Stops moving head |
| 16 |  | V: [ Stands up from chair ]<br>V: [ “Aquí ], mira.”<br>*(‘Here, look’.)*<br>E: [ Yeah. ]<br><br>J: Opens eyes and looks toward headphones<br>V: Touches tablet with left hand and grabs headphones |
| 17 |  | J: Lifts left hand |
| 18 |  | J: Closes eyes<br><br>J: [ Pushes headphones toward Valentina with left hand ]<br>V: [ “No, está aquí.” ]<br>*(‘No, it’s here’.)*<br><br>V: Begins to move tablet toward José |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 19 |  | J: Tilts head back and raises left hand to left ear<br><br>E: @@@[ @ ]<br>V: [ “I need you ]<br><br>V: “To [ te:ll me:.” ]<br>J : [ Opens eyes, smiles, and places left hand near tablet ] |
| 20 |  | V: Touches tablet screen with left hand |
| 21 |  | V:[ Withdraws hand and looks at tablet ]<br>J: [ Raises left hand to left ear, then lowers it ]<br>J: [ @@!:@@ ]<br><br>J: (inhales deeply) |
| 22 |  | V: Takes a step back<br>J: (inhales)<br>V: @@ |
| 23 |  | J: Covers ears, closes eyes, and throws head back<br>J: [ (inhales) ]<br><br>V: [ Takes a step forward ]<br>E: [ @@ ] |
| 24 |  | V: Touches tablet screen with left hand<br>V: [ “Yeah I’m always the bad one. The bad one.” ] |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 25 |  | J: Opens eyes<br>J: [ Smiles and slides left index finger down tablet screen ]<br>J: [ “Hm:.” ] |
| 26 |  | V: Sits back down in her chair as she makes a palm-up gesture<br>V: [ “You see he ^knows.” ]<br>J: [ Covers ears and closes eyes<br><br>V: (tongue click) |
| 27 |  | J: Uncovers ears and opens eyes<br><br>J: [ Reaches for tablet with left hand and then retracts hand ]<br>E: [ “Yeah.” ]<br><br>J: [ Closes eyes and covers ears ]<br>E: [ °@@° ] |
| 28 |  | J: [ Leans forward slightly ]<br>J: [ (inhales) ]<br>E: [ Looks at José ] |
| 29 |  | E: Looks at Valentina<br>V: [ “It’s the simple fact that he knows that ^I know ] |
| 30 |  | V:[ “So ] he doesn’t want to do it”<br>J: [ “Hm:.” ]<br>J: [ Smiles and reaches toward tablet ] |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 31 |  | J: Retracts hand<br><br>J: [ "Hm:. ] Hm:."<br>E: [ (tongue click) "Yeah." ] |
| 32 |  | E: Looks at José<br><br>J: Taps head with right hand |

*Note:* Images in table are filtered stills of videos taken by the author. Relevant aspects of each images are also described in the corresponding transcript.

At the beginning of the extract, José holds up his water bottle and looks at Valentina with his head tilted slightly downward (line 1). Valentina asks him, "¿Qué pasa? ¿Qué es eso?" ('What's happened? What's that?') (lines 2-3). I interpret José's gesture along with his vocalization (line 3) to mean that he wanted to clink his and Valentina's bottles together in a toast (line 5). Valentina smiles as she recounts that she used the same gesture with José on camera the previous day, a video I have not yet viewed at the time of this interaction (line 6). She moves closer, holding her own water bottle poised for a toast, offering it to him to clink against, but he playfully swats it away with his hand, prompting laughter from all three of us (lines 9 and 12). In response, Valentina teasingly calls José "silly" (lines 11-12) and directs him to the tablet on the table ("Aquí, mira" 'Here, look'; line 16), implying that he should use it to communicate. These directive actions make clear that her previous questions were not due to her lack of understanding of José's request but rather to prompt him to use the AAC app.

Next, Valentina stands up from her chair, moves the headphones on the table out of the way, and brings the tablet closer to her brother. But as soon as José sees her pick up the headphones, he quickly pushes them back toward her, his eyes closed (line 18), signaling his focus on the headphones and his resistance to the idea that she might want him to wear them, while Valentina remains focused on his use of the tablet. She places the headphones further down the table, and at this point, José throws his head back and covers his ear with his left hand (line 19). I laugh in response (line 19), interpreting his reaction not as a sign of trouble or distress (as his use of these embodied stimming actions can sometimes indicate) but as playful and humorous resistance. Valentina sets the tablet near him and begins touching the screen (line 20), presumably looking for the app screen that includes the button for "water" or "water bottle." José opens his eyes and smiles and reciprocates with his own laughter as Valentina becomes more explicitly directive, telling José that he needs to tell her (i.e., via the app rather than through gesture) what he wants, treating his behavior as resistant (e.g., line 19). José moves his hand toward the tablet but quickly pulls it back, laughing (line 21). He then covers his ears, shuts his eyes, and inhales deeply (line 23). Once again, his stimming actions seem more interactionally oriented than self-oriented by visually displaying rejection of her request. His playful resistance prompts laughter from both Valentina and me (lines 22-23). Finally, Valentina, in a playfully defeated tone, says, "I'm always the bad one. The bad one" (line 24). By calling herself "the bad one," Valentina acknowledges the conflict between her expectation that José should use the AAC app and her brother's own preferred communicative practices.

José then touches the tablet and slides his finger down the screen, but no sound is produced (line 25), an action which, as mentioned above, Valentina finds irritating. A brief smile spreads across his face. Valentina sits back in her chair, a gesture of resignation, and turns her palm up as she says, "You see, he knows" (line 26). José closes his eyes and covers his ears (line 26), then briefly opens his eyes and reaches for the tablet but withdraws his hand just before I give a soft chuckle in response to Valentina's comment (line 27). He bends over, his head facing down toward the table (line 28). This repeated reaching for the tablet and retracting of his hand seems to highlight or extend the teasing, as if to say, "I know you want me to use it, but I don't want to." This interpretation is supported by his second smile later in line 30, which demonstrates the additional interactional labor he puts into calling attention to his joke. This moment further underscores how José's humor operates through multimodal means that are too often overlooked when only AAC "output" is prioritized, highlighting his resistance to the ideology of modality chauvinism. Despite his earlier smile in line 25, however, as well as Valentina's "po-faced" response to his teasing (Drew, 1987), I fail to take up his action as a joke. When Valentina continues to playfully express her frustration to me (lines 29-30), I respond sympathetically (line 31). In this extract, José creatively uses the AAC device not for the transactional purpose of making a request but rather to engage with us socially and interactionally by teasing his sister. While Valentina recognizes his humorous intention, I fail to perceive his invitation to appreciate his humor, cued by his smile. José continues to smile and vocalizes after Valentina's complaint. In the next two examples, José continues to engage in humor related to his resistance to using the AAC app.

## Appreciating Others' Humor

In this example, which follows immediately after Extract 1, José demonstrates his appreciation for others' humor while again taking a stance. In response to Valentina's complaint in lines 29 and 30, I ask her which family member usually prompts José to use the tablet:

## Extract 2

### “I don’t need the iPad”

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 |  | E: “Are y- uh-<br><br>E: [ “Who’s usually the one who de que dice ‘ah José: el iPad’ o algo así?” ]<br>*(‘Who’s usually the one who says, “ah José the iPad” or something like that?’)*<br>J: [ Tugs at shirt with left hand and taps head with right hand ] |
| 2 |  | V: “What do you mean?” |
| 3 |  | E: “Like, oh: like ‘say it with the [ iPad’ ]<br>J: [ Touches lip with left hand ]<br>J: [ Closes eyes<br><br>E:[ “Or something” ]<br>V: [ “↓Oh:. Me.” ] |
| 4 |  | J: Briefly rests right hand on table, palm open and angled toward water bottle |
| 5 |  | E: [ “You?” ]<br>V: [For sure. ]<br><br>E: [ @@@ ] @@<br>V: [ Yeah yeah yeah. ] |
| 6 |  | J: [ Moves his head in a figure-8 motion<br>V: [ “I’m usually the one.” ]<br><br>E: Looks at José |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 7 |  | E: [ Turns head toward José<br>J: [ Continues to move head in figure-8 motion<br><br>E: “And [ what do you think about [ that, José:?” ]<br>J: [ Smiles<br><br>V: [ “°So (.) oh he’s happy°.” ] |
| 8 |  | J: Continues to move head in figure-8 motion |
| 9 |  | J: [ Stops moving head and tugs at shirt with left hand ]<br>J: [ “^ Hm:!” ] |
| 10 |  | V: “°Yeah°.” |
| 11 |  | E : “You’re like, ‘Ah: [ no:. ]<br>J: [ Touches head with right hand ]<br><br>E: [ “They know what ] I wa:nt.<br>J: [ “^Hm::!” ] |
| 12 |  | E: Briefly looks toward Valentina<br>E: [ @@ ] |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 13 |  | E: [ “I don’t need the [ i:Pa:d.’” ]<br>E: [ Looks back at José<br><br>J: [ Smiles more widely<br>J: [ Touches his head with left hand ] |
| 14 |  | E: @ [ @ ]<br>J: [ @@^::! ] |
| 15 |  | J: [ Smiles more widely<br>E: [ Looks at Valentina |
| 16 |  | E: [ h@@ ]@h!@@<br>E: [ Points toward José while looking at Valentina ]<br>J: [ Tugs at shirt with left hand. ] |
| 17 |  | J: [ Moves head in figure-8 motion<br>V: [ “Yeah.” ]<br><br>E: [ Looks at José<br>V: [ “He’s like ‘you know it girlfrie:::nd.’” ] |
| 18 |  | J: Continues to move head in figure-8 motion |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 19 |  | J: Continues to move head in figure-8 motion<br><br>E: “You kno:w [ i:t.” ]<br>V: [ @@@ ]<br><br>J: [ Stops smiling |
| 20 |  | J: Continues to move head in a figure-8 motion<br>E: [ @@@ ] |
| 21 |  | J: Continues to move head in figure-8 motion<br>J: [ Scrunches nose and shows teeth ] |
| 22 |  | J: Stops moving head<br><br>E: “¿Verdad que [ sí, José?” ]<br>*(‘¿Right, José?’)*<br>J: [ Tugs at shirt with left hand ] |
| 23 |  | V: “That’s [ his happy dance.” ]<br>E: [ Looks at José<br><br>J: Taps head with right hand |

*Note:* Images in table are filtered stills of videos taken by the author. Relevant aspects of each images are also described in the corresponding transcript.

At the beginning of the extract, I pose a question to Valentina about which member of their family tends to tell José to use the tablet as an AAC device. Once Valentina confirms that she plays this role (lines 3, 5, and 6), I orient my body to José and directly select him as recipient, asking, "And what do you think about that, José:?" (line 7). Research on nonspeakers has shown that they are rarely directly addressed with questions other than requests, with more complicated, open-ended questions directed to their family members instead (M. A. Morris et al., 2013). In my interaction with José just prior to Extract 1, I had also been asking him direct questions, but they were rather simplistic, similar to what a therapist might ask, such as "Where should we put this Lego?" Here, I ask this open-ended question despite being aware that the communicative resources José has available to him do not equip him to respond in conventional ways. In response, José makes a figure-8 motion with his head, a stim that his family interprets as an expression of happiness. In fact, Valentina, in a surprised and pleased tone of voice, quickly remarks that José is "happy" (line 7). This action signals his delight toward my acknowledgement of him as a stance-taking subject.

Moreover, immediately after I jokingly voice José answering my question, he takes a stance toward my joke. In lines 11 and 13, I say to José, "You're like, 'ah: no: they know what I want. I don't need the i:Pa:d.'" His response to my joke is a loud, high-pitched laugh (line 14), joining my own laughter (line 14). Despite clinical claims that autistic laughter is typically not social (Hudenko et al., 2009) or even that it is "inexplicable" (Reddy et al., 2002, p. 236), it is clear that here we are sharing laughter (Jefferson, 1979): José's laughter is closely timed to the "laughable," in this case, my joke, and is also produced in partial overlap with my own laughter (line 14). The sequential positioning of his laughter at this expected and relevant point in the interaction demonstrates both his appreciation for my joke and his engagement with me and Valentina in the ongoing interaction. José's action in this example challenges claims that autistic laughter is untimely (Lyons & Fitzgerald, 2004) and that autistic people lack empathy for others' emotions or are humorless. In fact, it demonstrates the opposite.

Additionally, José's laughter allows him to overcome the limitations of the AAC app while simultaneously taking a stance toward his sister's expectation that he should use it for communication. José is aware that his family expects him to use the app and displays an appreciation of my humor as someone outside of his family who recognizes that he can accomplish a lot without it. In line 16, I interpret José's laughter as a sign of his alignment with my joke, as shown by my deictic gesture towards him and my eye gaze toward Valentina, seeking her reaction as well. Interestingly, Valentina responds by also voicing José, saying, "He's like 'you know it girlfrie:::nd'" (line 17), followed by laughter (lines 19-20). Valentina's response both aligns with my voicing and indicates that she interprets José's laughter as also aligning with it. However, the recipient of the voicing is different in each case: I use the deictics *you* and *I*, positioning José as the primary recipient of my joke, while Valentina uses *he*, positioning me as her primary recipient. Notably, José laughs when I voice him but not when Valentina does, indicating his orientation to his role as recipient. When I ask for affirmation from José (line 22), Valentina responds with the statement that José's embodied motions are his "happy dance" (line 23), indicating to me that he is enjoying himself and our conversation. Despite not having the communicative resources for engaging in open-ended conversation in conventional ways, in this example José skillfully finds a way to actively participate in the interaction and take a stance that both his sister and I acknowledge as relevant. Thus, in this complex interaction, José's displayed appreciation of my humor also functions as a resource for him to take a stance on his family's expectation that he should communicate via the AAC app, a social action that would be extremely difficult to accomplish merely by "correctly" pressing the buttons of the device.

## Replaying the Tease

In the final example, José replays his early tease of his sister but this time I recognize and appreciate his humor. About five minutes after Extract 2 and just before Extract 3 begins, José reaches out and lightly touches my water bottle, then smiles and laughs, possibly referring back to the humor he produced in the previous exchange involving a water bottle. The fact that he is touching my water bottle may indicate that he is pursuing further laughter from me. Valentina tells him that it's my water bottle and asks him if he wants one for himself. Touch is framed as a recognizable but non-ideal mode of communication, as Valentina goes on to emphasize to José, "You have to ask," and directs him to the tablet, standing up from her seat and pointing at the device. José responds by laughing, closing his eyes, and covering his ears, playfully indicating that he's not listening to her. His exaggerated gestures suggest he's joking around, trying to lighten the mood and deflect the seriousness of the conversation. He then moves her finger away from the tablet. Valentina continues to prompt José to use the app, saying that the button is "right here" and prompting him by saying "Wa:::ter." In the following extract, José, possibly in an attempt to elicit further laughter, replays his earlier tease from Extract 1, but with a very different outcome:

## Extract 3

### José Replays His Tease

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 |  | J: "Hm:!"<br>J: Slides left index finger down the tablet screen<br><br>J: [ Smiles<br>E: [ Watches José's action |
| 2 |  | J: Lifts and holds water bottle with right hand<br><br>J: [ Looks up at Valentina, head tilted slightly downward ]<br>J: [ *Hm: m!* ] |
| 3 |  | E: "Lu: [ Le hace así." ]<br>*('He does it like this.')*<br>E: [ Makes sliding motion in the air with right index finger ]<br>J: [ Looks at me, smiling ] |
| 4 |  | E:[ Smiles at José<br>J: [ @!^@! ]<br><br>J: [ (sharply inhales) ]<br>J: [ Closes eyes and covers ears ] |
| 5 |  | J: [ Looks down and smiles ]<br>J: [ @@ ]<br>E:[ Smiles toward Valentina ]<br><br>J: [ Closes eyes and covers ears ]<br>J: [ @^ (long, deep inhales) ] @@!: @!^::<br>V: [ "Ay, José." ]<br>*('Oh, José'.)* |
| 6 |  | J: [ Slides finger down tablet screen ]<br>J: [ (deep inhales) ]<br>E: [ "Atrapa:do:" ]<br>*('Caught you'.)*<br><br>J: [ @!@!: ]<br>J: [ Closes eyes and covers ears ]<br>E: [ "@@" ] |
| 7 |  | J: [ Smiles<br>V: [ "Mhm:." ] |
| 8 |  | J: [ Moves head in figure-8 motion, eyes remain closed<br>J: [ @ ] |
| 9 |  | J: [ Continues to move head in figure-8 motion, eyes closed<br><br>E:[ "Caught you in the act, José:." ]<br>J: [ Raises right hand toward face and tugs shirt with left hand ] |

*Note:* Images in table are filtered stills of videos taken by the author. Relevant aspects of each images are also described in the corresponding transcript.

In line 1, José vocalizes, presses a button on the AAC app and slides his finger down the screen, so that no synthesized speech is produced from the device. He then vocalizes again ("Hm: m!") and lifts his water bottle slightly from the table while looking at Valentina with his head tilted slightly downward (line 2). I notice his finger movement on the tablet and recall Valentina's previous mention of this practice, which she explained as indicating his resistance to using the tablet in ways she expects of him. In this sequence, he first slides his finger down the tablet screen, appearing to comply with the requirement to use the AAC app without actually doing so. He then lifts his water bottle from the table, using his preferred, embodied mode of communication to make his request.

Although Valentina's initial reaction to José's action is not visible in the video, he looks at me and smiles as I mimic the movement of his finger while sharing my observation with both Valentina and José (line 3). José responds with loud, long laughter and covers his ears while closing his eyes (lines 4-6). Here, José strategically produces his tablet action as a joke. This is evidenced both by its timing and by his delighted reaction to my recognition of his playful orientation, as displayed through his laughter and stimming. In Extract 1, the same action with the tablet was produced in a way that I failed to recognize as humorous. In that example, José produced the finger-sliding action in the middle of his sister's playful complaint about him, and Valentina called attention to his action only to complain about it. In Extract 3, however, José overtly produces the finger-sliding action, which his sister dislikes, immediately after Valentina has prompted him repeatedly to use the tablet; this time, I catch the humor and call attention to it. Thanks to José's skillful use of the sequential organization of the interaction, the joke "lands" with me and becomes a source of shared humor. José's animated response to my observation also shows that he is clearly attuned to the interaction at hand despite engaging in actions that might be perceived as "being in his own world" (e.g., stimming, closing his eyes, covering his ears) throughout the video. Rather, José is soliciting me as the primary audience for his joke, while again taking a playful yet pointed stance regarding Valentina's insistence on him using the tablet.

The evidence that José's joke is recognized as such can be seen not only in the fact that it captures my attention and elicits a gesture, comment, and a wide smile from me as a result (lines 3 and 4), but also in the fact that Valentina responds with a playful expression of disappointment or disagreement, saying "Ay, José" ('Oh, José'; line 5), which displays the difference in expectations of José's communication held by her as his sister and me as a family friend. Although Valentina response isn't produced in a stern tone, she again offers a po-faced response and doesn't join in with José's laughter. Meanwhile, José's laughter followed by Valentina's response cues me to teasingly admonish José, as it becomes evident that he is not in trouble (line 6). In fact, it is understandable that he doesn't appear to take seriously her insistence on using the AAC app, and even teases her for her stance toward it, considering he has other resources available to him that are just as effective—and often more effective.

It appears that my appreciation of José's joke with the app is important enough that he replays it several minutes later. Repetition in autism, such as echolalia or stimming, is often clinically framed in a deficit-based perspective; however, interactional and semiotic research has found that repetition in autism serves interactional purposes and builds social connection (Nolan & McBride, 2015; Sterponi & Shankey, 2014). Likewise, José's repeti-

tion of the joke—with important variations that make this replay successful—signals his purposeful engagement in the interaction both to take a stance and to build sociality.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that nonspeaking autistic people have rich social lives in which humor plays a crucial part. The autistic-centered approach taken in the preceding analysis contributes to Crip Linguistics and critical autism studies by showing the importance of ethnographic and interactional methods for helping researchers to better understand the role of humor in the social worlds of nonspeaking autistic people. In particular, I have argued that a Crip Linguistics perspective is crucial in rejecting modality chauvinism and recognizing the multimodal, embodied nature of José's nonspeaking autistic languaging. At the same, I want to emphasize that it is not José's family members but the clinicians who advise them who are responsible for promoting the ideology of modality chauvinism. As shown throughout the analysis and in my previous research with this family (Prado & Bucholtz, 2021), José's sister regularly and supportively engages with him in his embodied languaging practices, including his skilled use of embodied humor.

Contrary to research that labels autistic people as "humorless," a claim that is often amplified for nonspeaking autistic people, José produces and appreciates humor in ways that highlight his interactional competence. José is neither deficient in humor nor a passive recipient of others' humor; rather, humor is an important component of José's languaging, enabling him to take a stance that is both interactionally skilled and highly consequential for his day-to-day life. In other words, José engages with others through humor not merely for its own sake or even to create social connection but also to take stances in interaction that may diverge from the stances of other participants. Understanding how nonspeaking autistic people like José navigate others' stances and take stances of their own both allows for a better appreciation of how these social actors use their communicative repertoires for stancetaking and can guide us in more effectively recognizing, appreciating, and supporting their preferred modes of communication. I have also shown that repetition, a key resource of autistic interaction that is often pathologized and dismissed as "meaningless," can be useful in the production of humor. José's persistence in repeating his joke until it was recognized as such emphasizes its significance for him. The analysis underscores that repeated attempts at humor may be necessary in autistic–non-autistic interaction due to deficiencies in non-autistic people's recognition and uptake of the humor rather than in autistic people's production of humorous social actions.

This situation also raises fundamental questions about the ethics of interaction between people who language in very different ways (cf. Green, 2022). The analysis demonstrates that nonspeaking autistic languaging must be defined by nonspeaking autistic people like José rather than by the expectations of clinicians or researchers. Authors working within critical autism studies often highlight the importance of centering autistic voices in the construction of knowledge about autism. However, much of this work is grounded in the perspectives of autistic people who express themselves through conventional spoken and/or written language, which may exclude the unique communicative strategies of nonspeaking people like José. By broadening the scope of autism studies to include these diverse forms of expression, we gain a more inclusive and autistic-centered understanding of the autistic experience. José's use of humor, for example, challenges deficit-based views by showcasing his interactional capacity to engage, respond, and assert his own stance. Recognizing José's contributions as valuable and meaningful requires an openness to understanding autistic languaging on its own terms, beyond conventional norms. This approach fosters an ethically grounded framework for autism research, ensuring that nonspeaking autistic people are included, respected, and valued as essential contributors to the broader discourse on autism. Those who seek justice for autistic people must "ethically listen" to nonspeaking autistic voices in all the diverse ways they express themselves (Lebenhagen, 2020). This ethical listening includes recognizing the important yet often overlooked role of humor and laughter in nonspeaking autistic languaging.

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**Appendix**

## Transcription conventions

. indicates sentence final falling intonation
, indicates clause-final intonation (“more to come”)
? rising intonation
: colon indicates elongated sound
:: extra colon indicates longer elongation
^ raised pitch
↓ downward shift in pitch
[ ] overlap
Underline indicates emphasis
° ° spoken softly or whispered
h inspiration (in-breaths)
@ laughter pulse
" " vocalization or speech
’ ’ constructed dialogue (Tannen, 1989) or translation