If social intimacy is collaboratively produced in interaction, then how do individuals with atypical interactional behaviors achieve it? This paper addresses a sociolinguistic practice noted for individuals on the autism spectrum but rarely analyzed: the sustained adoption of non-local dialect features. For sociolinguists who view second dialect acquisition as a social achievement importantly related to identity, this practice presents a paradox: How do individuals with such a purportedly “asocial” syndrome accomplish an activity that is intensely social? The talk draws from interviews conducted at CU Boulder for a multi-year project on accent imitation in autism.

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Image: A still from Episode 30, “Accent You Hate,” of Dexter’s Laboratory, a cartoon much beloved by the participants in Dr. Hall’s study.