Interactive Patterns in Humorous Messaging Interactions: a Contrastive Analysis of Spanish (WhatsApp) and Chinese (WeChat) Users

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Abstract

In Yus (2022a, 2022b), a corpus of humorous interactions on the messaging app WhatsApp was analysed, aiming to isolate their recurrent turn-taking variations. The analysis yielded several patterns depending on the quality of the first turn in the messaging conversation: (a) humorous text, (b) humorous text plus emoji, (c) non-humorous text, (d) non-humorous text plus emoji, (e) image, (f) image plus humorous text; (g) image plus non-humorous text; and (h) video. The objective of the present study is to compare these humorous interactions with those carried out in a different cultural environment (China), and a different messaging application (WeChat). The analysis will first focus on the (dis)similarities in the “interface affordances” of these two applications and then will address the ways in which the users from these cultures (Spain, China) carry out their humorous messaging interactions.

Keywords

instant messaging – WhatsApp – WeChat – interface affordances – humorous interactions – messaging humour – emoji
1 Introduction

In this paper, recurrent patterns will be isolated from collected dyadic humorous interactions from two highly popular messaging apps: WhatsApp among Spanish users and WeChat among Chinese users, by grouping these users’ humorous strategies and then analysing and cross-culturally comparing their attributes and frequency.

The paper begins with a brief analysis of the so-called interface affordances of these messaging apps (Section 2). After that, some general considerations about the corpus and methodology used for this research are provided (Section 3). The next section briefly compares messaging and conversational humorous interactions. Next, in Section 5 the main analysis of this paper is carried out, with an initial account of possible similarities and cross-cultural differences between WhatsApp and WeChat as regards the use of laugh particles (Section 5.1) and emoji (5.2), followed by the most important contribution of this paper: the analysis of parallelisms and asymmetries in the initiation, management and development of turns from humorous interactions on these apps, with an underlying aim to show possible cultural differences in these patterns (5.3). The chapter ends with some concluding remarks.

2 Interface Affordances: WhatsApp vs. WeChat

WhatsApp and WeChat share several interface affordances, what in previous research (e.g. Yus 2016, 2017, 2021a, 2022a, 2022b, 2023) was also called interface-related contextual constraints. Some of these are also limitations for appropriate contextualisation, since messaging apps were initially designed for (mainly) text-based interactions. Both apps exhibit similar characteristics, but also some differing attributes (see Table 1).

Detrimental qualities of both app interfaces include the fact that the system imposes a strict order for the display of messages, which often leads to disrupted turn adjacency, that is, the second turn is not posted in direct adjacency to the first turn but in a slot further down on the screen, separated from its actual point of reference by earlier postings. Consequently, multi-party interactions may appear chaotic due to the disruption of established face-to-face turn-taking conventions, especially in messaging groups (König, 2019: 158; Yus, 2021a: 62).

On the positive side, both apps have incorporated the possibility to exchange audio files, GIFs, emojis, stickers, images and free phone- or video-calls, which, together with text alteration and creative use of punctuation, increases the
options for conveying the intended interpretation and the options for contextualisation. In this sense, Tagg and Lyons (2022) propose the terms *polymedia repertoire* (which encompasses the full configuration of semiotic and technological resources accessed by networked individuals in the contemporary age) and *polymedia nest* (a resource into which other resources are embedded, including various communicative modes or channels). During an act of humorous messaging interaction, interlocutors are offered a wide polymedia repertoire of options to enrich their texts.

### Table 1 Differences between WhatsApp and WeChat interface affordances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WhatsApp</th>
<th>WeChat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is basically an app for text-, image-</td>
<td>It also offers all-in-one platform for communication, social media,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and video-based communication and file sharing</td>
<td>search engine, mobile wallet and e-commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different letter types (bold, italics ...)</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only emojis from the smartphone galleries. Stickers and G</td>
<td>Users may choose between the galleries of emojis provided by the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1s are taken from the app or from other sources</td>
<td>smartphone and the unique ones provided by the app itself, also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>applied to GIFs and stickers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Users may also create images, stickers and memes with their own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>photos or pictures stored on the smartphone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regarding users’ location, they may send their exact</td>
<td>Regarding users’ location, the app incorporates several</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>location to other users as a message</td>
<td>location-centred features: <em>Shake, Look Around</em> and <em>People Nearby</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Users’ names do not appear in the dialogue screen of</td>
<td>(see Yus, 2021b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dyadic conversations, but they do in messaging groups</td>
<td>Users are identified by their profile images in the dialogue screen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It has a notification feature, which allows users to</td>
<td>Not available, but users may “give someone a buzz,” a sort of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tell whether the message has been delivered and read (blue</td>
<td>notification that also appears on the smartphone screen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>double tick)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts can be deleted any time after being sent, as long</td>
<td>Texts can only be deleted a short period of time after being sent, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as the addressee user still has not read it</td>
<td>regardless of whether the addressee user has read it or not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In sum, the evolutions of the WhatsApp and WeChat interfaces provide users with a highly suitable environment for synchronous interaction, including those for humorous purposes. Not surprisingly, these apps fit what Wang et al. (2012) call strong phatic technologies, that is, technologies designed for users to establish frequent interactions in an environment of non-stop connectivity. Specifically, these apps constitute an environment where users often engage in conversations with the explicit intention of generating humorous effects in their interlocutors and groups of contacts. The tone of the interactions is very often phatic and playful, and many users communicate regularly with their contacts just to forward a joke or humorous meme, often imported from other platforms.

3 Corpus and Methodology

For this paper, 2269 humorous WhatsApp and 385 WeChat interactions have been collected. There is an obvious difference in the number of interactions from each app, which is mainly due to data-collecting constraints: while WhatsApp contains an option to export a whole archive of dyadic or group interactions into text (which includes emojis and, optionally, images and videos), for WeChat the only option to gather the data is to capture screenshots of previously identified humorous instances, a much more complicated task. In any case, we were confident that we could still draw interesting percentage-based conclusions regarding turn management in humorous interactions on these apps. In fact, we decided to test the validity of the percentages in the WhatsApp corpus by re-analysing it, this time with 80% reduction in size. As predicted, the analysis yielded similar percentages per category (see below).

These are main methodological steps taken in the research:

1. For the WhatsApp corpus, an archive of 5 years of dyadic interactions (2017–2022) between 8 users\(^1\) was exported (making up more than 500,000 words); the corpus also includes around a hundred screenshots kindly provided by friends and students. The WeChat corpus includes more user variation.\(^2\) There is also an age difference in the corpora: 40–60 age range on WhatsApp and 20–35 on WeChat.

\(^1\) Specifically, one “male user-male user” and three “male user-female user” archives of interactions.

\(^2\) Screenshots of multiple interactions, mostly female-female (305) and also male-male (15) and mixed male-female (80). 14 of these interactions had to be discarded since they had no humorous quality despite the initial presence of (apparently) humorous discourses.
2. Next, we engaged in a detailed analysis of the corpora, searching for humorous interactions and with special attention to typical discourses that signal the presence of a humorous intention, such as the use of certain emojis (e.g. the “laugh with tears of joy” emoji) and laugh particles (e.g. jajaja/hhh), among others (see 5.1 and 5.2 below).

3. In the next phase, we analysed how humour is managed and generated in the unfolding of several turns within the selected interactions. In this paper, a turn may or not coincide with a user’s message, since for us “a turn” is made up of all the messages that a user sends before another user intervenes (or replies) with their own message, which immediately constitutes a different turn. Therefore, a turn may be shaped as a single message, but users often send a text and then, in a subsequent message, type another message (e.g. an emoji). These are two different messages from the same user, but in a row, which for the purposes of analysis in this research is considered a single conversational turn.

4. The subsequent phase was to look for recurrent patterns that can yield a typology of interactions on WhatsApp/WeChat. To avoid an excessive multiplicity of pattern variations, our analysis was restricted to the first four turns in the selected humorous interactions. In our opinion, these turns are sufficient to isolate recurrent patterns and, at the same time, avoid an undesired multiplicity of conversational turn developments.

   Furthermore, following Yus (2022a, 2022b), we established a typology of interactions depending on the quality of the first turn. For each of these, we determined whether that turn initiates the humorous interaction or it constitutes a change into a humorous mode (play frame) during a non-humorous interaction that is already in progress.

5. During the analysis, for each type of interaction a table was set up in which the interactions fitting the initial turn were grouped according to the quality of the subsequent turns, that is, we put together conversations with the same second turn, and the same procedure for the subsequent third and fourth turns. For example, Table 2 shows part of one of these tables, specifically the one collecting humorous interactions in which the first turn is a humorous text. The first column is, obviously, the same across the examples. This part of the table shows how we grouped together all the interactions whose second turn was “humorous text plus emoji” (and below them “emoji” as a second turn) and then we continued grouping third and fourth turn discourses. The numbers below each line refer to the instances in the corpus fitting this turn pattern, arranged by user.
6. Finally, the tables resulting from the analysis of WhatsApp and WeChat were compared and/or contrasted and we drew several conclusions regarding the cultural similarities and specificities of Spain (WhatsApp) and China (WeChat) in the use of these messaging apps for humorous purposes, which constitutes the main objective of this paper.

4 Analysis of Humorous Interactions

The foundations of this paper are cyberpragmatics and conversation analysis. From the former, it takes the idea that discourses such as emojis, GIFs, stickers and other text-based strategies such as letter repetition are not gratuitous but very relevant in directing the user in the right inferential direction. From the latter, it takes a more analytical approach aimed at elucidating turn structure and turn management.

To our knowledge, there is no previous turn-based analysis of humorous messaging interactions apart from Yus (2022a) and no research comparing cultural attributes in these interactions. However, there is a substantial amount of interesting research focused on face-to-face humorous interactions, which exhibit similar qualities to the ones carried out in messaging apps (see Koivisto et al., 2023). In this sense, Chovanec and Tsakona (2018) proposed five elements...
that are important in humorous interactions. These are also at work in humorous messaging counterparts:

a. **Framing devices** signal the presence of humour, for example laughter, smile, prosodic and intonational features or gestures. They indicate the humorous frame within which the accompanying discourse should be inferred, and indicate what is usually referred to as “mode adoption” (Attardo et al., 2013: 410; Dynel, 2011: 225). These framing devices are also found in messaging interactions via emoji and laugh particle use, for example.

b. **Reactions** provide a glimpse to whether the addressee has understood the humorous intention correctly. Reactions are frequently humorous too, often encouraging a continuation in the play frame, which is likewise frequent in humorous messaging interactions. This alignment takes place when the interlocutor engages in what Holmes (2006) called “supportive contributions” (see also Hay, 2001).

c. **Sociocultural parameters** relate to the specific cultural and social variables qualifying both addressee and addressee, additionally including the specificities of the community within which humorous discourses are produced and circulate, which is an essential element in the context of this paper.

d. **Reasons** refer to possible goals meant to be achieved through the use of humour in an interaction, for example to emphasise the expected mutuality of information during the interaction. Failed/successful inferential outcomes bring to the surface the differences with people, for instance revealing who belongs or not to a culture or social group, which is also interesting for the research in this paper.

e. Finally, **genres** tend to be relatively stable, but in reality they constantly undergo re-shaping online and often mash up into new genres, some of which become long-lasting while others have a more ephemeral nature (Yus, 2021a). The genre of the humorous messaging interaction has remained relatively stable, but the gradual improvement of apps with new affordances, some of them crucial for proper contextualisation of typed utterances, results in this genre exhibiting certain variations and developments which may eventually influence how humorous discourses are devised, typed and inferred on these apps (Yus, 2023).

5 Patterns of Humorous Interactions: WhatsApp vs. WeChat

In this paper, we compare humorous messaging interactions taking place on WhatsApp and WeChat. Our preliminary research hypotheses on these
interactions appear to be contradictory, but we view them as complementary. On the one hand, we predict that many humorous interactions on both apps will exhibit similar patterns regarding how they are structured. For example, we predict that a humorous attempt by a user will be reacted upon in similar ways on both apps: mainly by showing appreciation through text, laugh particles or text plus emoji (and/or stickers), among other possibilities.

However, on the other hand we also predict that cultural constraints may “leak” to how these humorous interactions are initiated, replied to and developed. Specifically, we predict that certain qualities of these interactions will somehow resemble or resonate with the ones that have already been ascribed in the bibliography to individualist and collectivist cultures, even if both cultures have evolved substantially beyond these rigid labels.

There is certainly a substantial amount of research on individualist vs. collectivist cultures (see Hofstede, 2001), for instance in the expression and management of emotions. This is, obviously, not a clear-cut dichotomy of mutually exclusive attributes, since cultures often exhibit mixed qualities. Therefore, it should be underlined that we do not support (and neither does this journal) the idea that cultures necessarily have to be ascribed to black-or-white, mutually exclusive labels such as individualist or collectivist, because cultures evolve and acquire different traits that do not neatly fit these labels. This is the case of Spain, for instance, which would roughly be placed in-between both ends of the individualist-collectivist continuum (Cheng, 2017: 211). However, in the corpus of humorous interactions collected for this paper, we did find interactive qualities that resonate with those that have traditionally been assigned to collectivist, high-context cultures (which emphasise indirectness and lays more emphasis on paralanguage and other nonverbal cues to convey meaning) and individualist, low-context cultures (qualified as more direct, language-dependent communication, in which the language carries most of the meaning, see Togans et al., 2021: 278).

Besides, people from individualistic cultures tend to express their feelings through explicit cues, whereas those from collectivistic cultures are more prone to conveying them indirectly through subtler cues, including non-verbal ones (Park et al., 2014: 334). This cultural duality has been applied to virtual interactions and specifically to the use of emoji, for example in the use of vertical vs. horizontal emojis (Sun et al., 2023).

Similarly, we predict that the way in which humorous interactions are managed on WhatsApp/WeChat may be associated with certain cultural communicative patterns, while others will follow a similar humorous structure. As will be shown in the analysis of the corpus below, traces of these individualist vs. collectivist qualities, now applied to messaging interactions, are most prominent in the specific situation of sending a single image for humorous
purposes and replying to it. A very high percentage of WhatsApp users simply send the image with no accompanying discourse and on most occasions the addressee user simply reacts to it with an emoji or a laugh particle, finishing the interaction at this point. This kind of interaction is scarce on WeChat. Rather, this pattern mainly happens in group conversations, much more than in dyadic conversations. In these one-to-one WeChat dialogues, the user rarely sends a single image/video to the addressee, but tends to add supplementary explanatory discourse or their own comments, both to increase the potential humorous effects and to provoke the desire to reply to the message (what in Yus, 2014 was labelled *interactivity trigger*). Indeed, if the user simply sends a single image or video, the recipient is likely not to reply. By contrast, an image with additional discourses can attract more attention and trigger more reactions from other users.

This emphasis in complementing images with supplementary discourses is also clearly related to politeness. For Chinese users, sending an image or video with explanations or other supportive discourses expresses a higher level of respect towards their addressee than an image or video on its own, taking into account that these messages threaten the addressee’s *face* and force them to open the app and look at the sender’s discourse. The same applies to discourses such as emojis and stickers. Since cultures vary in their concern with face management and politeness, people from predominantly collectivist cultures tend to use more emoticons and emoji in text messages, particularly in negative, face-threatening situations (Togans et al., 2021: 285).

In the same way, when receiving a picture/video on WeChat, the addressee user will normally reply with an approving verbal-visual-multimodal discourse to acknowledge the humorous effect, strengthen ties and convey solidarity. A mere response with an emoji, so pervasive in the WhatsApp corpus (see below), would be interpreted as impolite or as exhibiting certain lack of interest in continuing the conversation. From a cultural point of view, the Chinese are more prone to trying to maintain good social relations with others by displaying a collaborative attitude in conversations, a quality that can also be identified in the image-based pattern of humorous messaging interactions, as will be shown in the analysis of the corpus. As Zhang, Wang and Lee (2021: 264) contend, “playfulness is encoded through emojis in order to discursively resolve the tension between the openness and freedom afforded by the emerging social media culture and the inherited real-life social norms of conservativeness and restraint. That is, emojis support Chinese social media users’ pursuit of preserving face and maintaining social harmony.”

Needless to say, this phenomenon is also mediated by the relationship existing between the interlocutors (an example of what in Yus 2021a was labelled *user-related contextual constraints*). If both parties have an intimate and
loving relationship, they can start a conversation simply by sending a single image/video with a higher frequency, and the addressee may respond with just an emoji, and this type of succinct reply will not be interpreted as a lack of interest or respect. On other occasions, though, as reflected upon in the corpus, sending an image alone is not sufficient and certainly much more unlikely than in the WhatsApp corpus, where this pattern is clearly pervasive.

5.1 **Laugh Particles**

The term *laugh particle* refers to different ways to transcribe laughter in humorous messaging interactions. There are different culture-specific conventions (e.g. “jajaja” in Spanish vs. “hahaha” in English), but they serve similar purposes in messaging interactions. Both in Chinese and Spanish, variations can be found beyond the most prototypical transcription convention for laughter. Table 3 reproduces conventions for laugh particles in Chinese with their overall frequency, together with approximate equivalents in Spanish and English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Frequency of use (Chinese)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>jajajaja</td>
<td>哈哈哈哈哈</td>
<td>hahahaha</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jejejeje</td>
<td>哼哼哼哼</td>
<td>hohohoho</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jajajaja</td>
<td>啊哈哈哈哈</td>
<td>ahahahaha</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jejejeje</td>
<td>嘿嘿嘿嘿</td>
<td>heyheyheyhey</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pufjajajaja</td>
<td>噗哈哈哈哈</td>
<td>puffhahahaha</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jojojojo</td>
<td>吼吼吼吼</td>
<td>hohohoho</td>
<td>4 (mainly among the Chinese youth)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In both corpora of Spanish and Chinese humorous messaging conversations, laugh particles play similar roles to the ones found in face-to-face interactions.

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3 See Yus (2023) for an account of Spanish users’ opinions about the meanings from the types of laugh particle (e.g. jajaja/jejeje, etc.) and the role of letter repetition in these particles (e.g. jaja vs. jajaja).
Sampietro, 2021a), mainly intended to acknowledge the humorous quality of a previous turn or to “tinge” an attached utterance with a clear humorous intention. Uses of laugh particles will be commented upon in more detail in Section 5.3 below.

5.2 Emoji

As mentioned above, one of the specific attributes of WeChat compared to WhatsApp is that the former provides users with a specific gallery of emojis (an interface-related contextual constraint). As can be seen in Figure 1, there are more emojis available on WhatsApp for humorous interactions than on WeChat, but users of WeChat can type emojis from both galleries, and the emojis available on both apps do not differ substantially. Therefore, we do not predict major misunderstandings in their use during humorous interactions. However, it should be noted that there are app-specific emojis such as the “facepalming with tears of joy” emoji on WeChat (fourth from the left in Figure 1), which can cause miscommunication: Spanish users tend to infer the laughing connotation (e.g., “That was really funny”) whereas WeChat users tend to emphasise the facepalming part (e.g., “I can’t believe you typed this”).

In any case, emojis are pervasive in humorous interactions on both apps. As Hsieh and Tseng (2017: 412) remark regarding emoticons, these “represent appealing characters and humorous gestures, thus complementing text messaging

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4 The “face with tears of joy emoji” is probably one of the most frequently used emojis for humorous purposes on both apps (Zhang et al., 2021; Sampietro, 2021b). However, the WeChat “facepalming with tears of joy” emoji is open to misunderstandings. For example, Sun et al. (2023) point out that this emoji is generally used when someone says or does something funny or embarrassing. However, it may be interpreted differently by some users because it includes both negative (tears) and positive (laugh) sentiments (see also Chui, 2020: 109).
in mobile instant messaging to foster perceived playfulness and fun in the interactive communication process.” Besides, other qualities such as the position of the emoji in the overall interaction introduce further roles (Sampietro, 2021a, 2021b).

5.3 **Turn-Taking Patterns**

For the analysis for this paper, a corpus of WhatsApp and WeChat humorous interactions was collected, which yielded the following preliminary patterns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WhatsApp</th>
<th></th>
<th>WeChat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HT</td>
<td>136</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HT + E*</td>
<td>109</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NhT</td>
<td>239</td>
<td></td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NhT + E</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMA</td>
<td>1530</td>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMA + HT</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMA + NhT</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VID</td>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>2269</td>
<td></td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Key: (1) HT = humorous text; (2) E = emoji; (3) NhT = non-humorous text; (4) IMA = image; (5) VID = video]

* In this paper, combinations of different discursive elements have been identified irrespective of the order in which they appear in the message. For example, AT + E (approbation text plus emoji) would fit both of these messages: “Sara: I love it! 😂😂😂” / Sara: 😂😂😂 I love it!.

As already mentioned above, we were confident that, despite the asymmetry of both corpora, we could nevertheless draw relevant percentage-based conclusions from the analysis of the data. One way to check the validity of this percentage-based account is to reduce drastically the size of the WhatsApp corpus and check the extent to which the initial percentages remain roughly similar despite this reduction. We therefore reduced the corpus by 80% and checked the humorous patterns in the new 20% sub-corpus, which eventually amounted to 703 humorous interactions compared to the 2269 found in the initial corpus:

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5 The majority of the collected WhatsApp sample for this paper (excluding screenshots) amounted to 1845 pages (from exported chats). The corpus reduced by 80% amounted to 370 pages.
As can be deduced from the comparison of the two WhatsApp corpora, although percentages obviously vary, both exhibit a similar distribution of humorous interactions per category. Predictably, in the reduced corpus images remains as the preferred discourse to initiate a humorous interaction on WhatsApp (see below) and the other categories maintain their frequency in comparison to the other categories, with the exception of the last three, which were not found in the 20% sub-corpus.

From the general WhatsApp/WeChat corpus, we can draw several preliminary conclusions. Against our expectations, a first humorous text (with or without emoji) is not the preferred option for WhatsApp (6% + 4.8%) and WeChat (13% + 6%) users. It is more frequent to change the on-going non-humorous conversation into a humorous one by means of a humorous text with/without emoji on WhatsApp (10.53% + 3.41%) and WeChat (26.6% + 6.3%). In Yus (2022a), the example in (1) was provided, in which a serious conversation about Ramón’s fall is turned into a humorous one by Olga. Notice how Ramón’s initial reaction to the humorous attempt is negative and conveys it with the appropriate emoji of anger (😡), but he finally aligns with and further develops the new humorous frame just initiated by Olga:

1. Ramón:6 Šabes?
   [You know what?].

6 In this paper, WhatsApp users’ names have been changed to preserve their anonymity.
Hoy me he caído en MediaMarkt
[Today I fell down at MediaMarkt].

Olga: Comorr????
[Whatttttt?].

Olga: 😖

Olga: Con tu hijo delante?
[With your son beside you?].

Ramón: He tropezado con un borde de ladrillo y he caído\(^7\) de cara sobre la carretera.
[I tripped over a brick curb and fell face first onto the road].

Ramón: Pero no me he hecho nada.
[But I wasn’t hurt].

Olga: Dios mío de mi vida.
[Oh my God].

Ramón: Y mi hijo venga a reírse.
[And my son couldn’t stop laughing].

Olga: Habrá temblado la tierra...
[The earth must have trembled].

Ramón: 😡😡😡

Olga: 😂😂😂😂

Olga: 😖DataFrame

Olga: Lo siento.
[I am sorry].

Olga: Pero... es muy divertido! Jajaja.
[But... it’s so funny! hahaha].

Olga: 😏ppo

Ramón: Se ha caído un coche dentro del agujero que he hecho en el suelo
[A car fell into the hole I made on the ground].

Ramón: 😄

Olga: Jajaja.

Olga: Me meoooo.
[I laugh my socks off].

Secondly, the use of single images to initiate a humorous interaction is pervasive in the WhatsApp data (67.4%) but not in the WeChat sample, whose users show a tendency to accompany the image with a humorous text (14.8%) or

\(^7\) In this paper, orthographic mistakes in Spanish WhatsApp conversations have been preserved.
with a non-humorous text plus emoji (13%). Possible reasons for this asymmetry have already been mentioned above in terms of cultural variability.

Finally, and also against our expectations, videos are not the preferred option for initiating a humorous interaction (only 4.58% on WhatsApp and 6.25% on WeChat). A possible explanation is that users are aware of the “weight” of videos (in terms of megabytes), which demands high smartphone data connection and thus users tend to avoid them or send a link to the video instead.

5.3.1 Pattern 1: Humorous Text

In this pattern, the first turn is made up of a humorous text, followed by the following possible second-turn continuations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WhatsApp (136 / 6%)</th>
<th>WeChat (50 / 13%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(3.73%) 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NhT</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>(13.2%) 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>(39%) (X)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(8.8%) 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT + E</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(6.6%) 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HT + E</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(5.9%) (X)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(5.1%) 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE + NhE</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(4.4%) (X)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[key: HT = humorous text; E = emoji; NhT = non-humorous text; LP = laugh particle; AT = approbation text (e.g. I love it!); HE = humorous emoji; NhE = non-humorous emoji]

In the WhatsApp corpus, it is very common to reply with just a single emoji and end the conversation there (39%). This pattern is very scarce in the WeChat data, whose users prefer to reply with approbation texts\(^8\) (24%), probably because these are considered more polite and exhibit higher acknowledgement, appreciation and solidarity. This is further corroborated by the fact that 58% of these approbation texts include laugh particles that convey and further reinforce the user’s willingness to show their enjoyment of the initiated humorous turn. In our opinion, this would constitute another example of how

\(^8\) There are various ways to convey approbation textually. Examples in the corpus include (1) buenísimo! (very good!), (2) cierto! (true!), (3) Me encanta! (I love it), and even (4) Siiiiii (yessssss).


cultural attributes of the Chinese culture “leak” to the way humorous interactions unfold on WeChat, as already mentioned.

Another difference between the datasets is the continuation with a non-humorous second turn, almost double in the WeChat corpus compared to the WhatsApp corpus. In this case, users normally add laugh particles or humorous emojis to turn that potential non-humorous quality of the text into a humorous one. WeChat examples can be found in Figure 2, translated in (2–4), where humorous texts are replied to with the addition of laugh particles to strengthen or emphasise the humorous quality of a potentially non-humorous text.

(2) User 1: Today’s activity is about ...
   User 1: Nailing on the board I have spent almost two hours nailing.
   User 2: Hahahahahaahahaaha.
   User 2: Go for it!
   User 1: [“regret” emoji] I should have let my mom buy a Starbucks and put it there, then just let him go.
   User 2: I’m laughing my socks off.
   User 2: Working all day.
   User 2: Only drink half a cup of Starbucks.

(3) User 1: What is Foreign Language Week.
   User 1: Can’t speak Chinese for a week.
   User 1: Whoever speaks Chinese will be fired.
   User 1: Is it?
User 2: hhhhhhhhh.
User 2: Why do you understand it in such a way?
User 1: hhhhhhh.
User 1: So what is it?

(4) User 1: How to tell people politely: you have your fly open?
User 2: To a boy?
User 2: You can tell him directly, what are you afraid of?
User 2: Hahaha.
User 1: [facepalming with tears of joy emoji].
User 1: What if it’s a girl?

Certainly, what often appears to be a continuation with a non-humorous text is, in reality, part of a staged or faked seriousness and the use of emojis (and also stickers) guarantees that these instances are properly understood. An example is (5), which is clearly initiated by a humorous text, and the subsequent turns maintain this humorous frame with the aid of emojis and laugh particles that tinge the accompanying texts with a humorous quality:

(5) Saúl: Solo para que lo sepáis, he sido voluntario para probar una vacuna rusa del Covid-19. He recibido la primera dosis y quería comentaros que es totalmente segura y sin efectos secundarios. Me siento χορόσο я чувствую себя немного странно и я думаю, что вытащил ослиные уши.

[Just for you to know, I have volunteered to test the Russian Covid-19 vaccine. I got the first jab and I wanted to tell you that it is completely safe and with no side effects. I am feeling χορόσο я чувствую себя немного странно и я думаю, что вытащил ослиные уши].

Luca: El pobre ...
[Po]r[g]uy].

Luca: Al menos, ha aprendido una lengua sin esfuerzo ni clases.
[At least, he has learned a language with no effort or classes].

Luca: 😂😂😂😂

Saúl: Jajaja.

Luca: A mí el finlandés me atrae.
[I am interested in Finnish].

Saúl: Pero esa lengua es complicada ... necesitas 5 dosis.
[But that language is complicated ... you need 5 doses].

Saúl: 😊😊
5.3.2 Pattern 2: Humorous Text with Emoji

In this pattern, the humorous text of the first turn is accompanied with an emoji or laugh particle. These are not the preferred option on WhatsApp (4.8%) or WeChat (6%), the latter also resorting to sticker use. “Humorous text plus emoji” is common in the WhatsApp corpus, while laugh particles are significant in the WeChat corpus. Even more significant is sticker use on WeChat, much more frequent in conversations of users in the age range of the WeChat corpus (20–35) compared to the WhatsApp one (40–60), and also because of cultural constraints. As Tagg and Lyons (2022: 100) remark, “stickers are more popular and more widely used in Asia than in Europe and used extensively in Chinese social media including WeChat. Larger and more elaborate than emoji, stickers may be perceived by users as more expressive, especially when they evoke offline contexts.” Several possibilities for the second turn are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WhatsApp (109 / 4.8%)</th>
<th>WeChat (23 / 6%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HT + E</td>
<td>(20.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>(16.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E + AT</td>
<td>(7.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HT</td>
<td>(5.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HT + LP</td>
<td>(X)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NhT</td>
<td>(X)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NhT + E</td>
<td>(X)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NhT + LP</td>
<td>(X)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Humorous text plus sticker (WeChat)

Humorous text plus laugh particle (WeChat)

[Key: HT = humorous text; E = emoji; NhT = non-humorous text; LP = laugh particle; AT = approbation text]

For WhatsApp users, replying with a similar discourse (HT + E) is the preferred option (20.1%) followed by typing a single emoji (16.5%). An example of the former is found in (6), where a humorous text plus emoji is replied to with the same pattern:

(6) [Luis has jokingly asked Sara to give him a present back]9

9 The reader is reminded that these three messages by Luis would constitute a single turn.
Luis: Tecnicamente es mio, sabsessss o sea
[Technically it is mine, you know].
Luis: Yo puse la pasta
[I provided the money].
Luis: 😂
Sara: No es cool hablar de pasta ...
[It's not cool to talk about money ...].
Sara: 😂😂😂

WeChat users show a preference of attaching laugh particles to their replies (52% of second turns). We interpret this conversational strategy as arising from a desire to be polite, and a willingness to acknowledge that the humorous intention was successful, as happens in the conversations reproduced in Figure 3 and translated in (7–9) below. The interaction on the right is most illustrative, since the user not only acknowledges the humorous intention, but also adds a sticker to the laugh particles.

Figure 3  WeChat conversations with text plus laugh particles
Key: HT = humorous text; E = emoji; LP = laugh particle; AT = approbation text; S = sticker

(7) User 1: It’s chocolate, I feel that your gift is more like a Valentine’s Day gift than a gift from my boyfriend [+ emoji].
User 2: Hahahahaha! It was bought before New Year, but it really seems to be a Valentine’s Day gift.
User 1: This is a gift of Valentine’s Day!
User 2: Hey, you and I have too much tacit agreement!!!
User 2: Your gift is also TF, thank you so much hee hee hee.

(8) User 1: I also want to take a picture.
User 1: 😂😂😂
User 2: Our [dog A’s name] is wearing the wrong socks.
User 1: hhhhh.
User 1: Then [dog B’s name] is wearing the wrong scarf.

(9) User 1: Damn.
User 1: It cost 426 yuan for gasoline, I wanna buy an electric car.
User 1: 🤣🤣🤣
User 2: Our [dog’s name] is wearing the wrong socks.
User 1: hahaha.
User 2: Sticker (hahahaha).
User 2: I’ll buy you an electric car.
User 2: Then I drive the gasoline car hahaha.

5.3.3 Pattern 3: Non-humorous Text
In this pattern, the on-going non-humorous interaction is turned into a humorous one by one of the interlocutors. An example has already been provided in (1) above. Frequent continuations in the second turn (and some for third turn) are provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WhatsApp (239 / 10.53%)</th>
<th>WeChat (192 / 26.5%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HT + E</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3rd) HT + E:</td>
<td>31 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3rd) NhT:</td>
<td>19 (7.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3rd) NhT + E:</td>
<td>9 (3.76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3rd) E:</td>
<td>19 (7.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3rd) HT + LP:</td>
<td>16 (6.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3rd) NhE:</td>
<td>15 (6.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3rd) HT:</td>
<td>9 (3.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NhT</td>
<td>15 (6.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NhT</td>
<td>20 (19.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Key: HT = humorous text; E = humorous emoji; NhT = non-humorous text; LP = laugh particle; AT = approbation text; NhE = non-humorous emoji; IM = image]

This pattern is found in 10.53% of WhatsApp and 26.5% of WeChat interactions. In the WhatsApp corpus, the preferred option when deciding to turn the interaction into a humorous one is to resort to a humorous text plus humorous emoji (63.2%), as in (10) below, in which the initial turn by Luis is...
non-humorous but Sara humorously replies to it. Then Luis decides to continue the conversation in the new humorous frame, and again with a similar pattern (HT + E). In fact, mirroring the same turn strategy (HT + E followed by HT + E) is found in 13% of the interactions fitting this pattern.  

(10) Luis: Ahora me echo una crema nueva por las noches
[Now I apply a new cream at night].
Luis: Se llama ... [It's called ...].
Sara: Uauuuuu
Sara: Escandalo [Scandal].
Sara: 😂
Luis: Crema tersa-piel-jurásica 😂
[Smooth-Jurassic-skin cream].
Sara: Jaja ...
[haha].
Sara: Anda yaaaaa [Come off it!].

However, sometimes interactional failure occurs: 7.8% of the interlocutors reject the other user's attempted shift into a humorous interaction, replying with an explicit non-humorous text, as in the pandemic-related conversation in (11) below, which forces an immediate re-shifting of the conversation into the initial non-humorous frame:

(11) Juan: 10 millones de infectados ya
[10 million infected already].
Luis: Y subiendo
[And rising].
Juan: Al parecer los de [ciudad natal de Luis] son el grupo de más riesgo de contagio
[Apparently, those in [Luis's hometown] are the ones with the highest infection risk].
Juan: 😂😂😂

---

10 These chained “image replied to with emoji” messages by users suit what Georgakopoulou (2017) called ritual appreciation: positive assessments of the post and/or poster, expressed in highly conventionalised language coupled with emoji.
Luis: Calla, calla, que en [mi ciudad] han estado bastante mal en una residencia y ha habido varios fallecimientos [Don't mention this! in [my hometown] people at a residence have been through a rough time and there have been several deaths].

Juan: Por diosssss 😓😓😓 [My God].

Luis: Pues sí [Yeah].

WeChat users exhibit certain variability in the interactional unfolding of this pattern. Again, a typical strategy is to type an apparently non-humorous text and attach laugh particles and emojis, and even a humorous text next to it, so as to guarantee proper interpretation of the text. Figure 4, for instance, reproduces interactions in which an initial non-humorous turn is replied to with a non-humorous text associated with humour-revealing discourses such as sticker and laugh particle (left/right interactions), and emoji (middle). They are translated in (12–14) below. In all of these cases, the new humorous frame is taken up and developed in the subsequent turns.

**Figure 4** WeChat conversations with second turn with non-humorous text plus humour-revealing items

Key: HT = humorous text; NhT = non-humorous text; E = emoji; LP = laugh particle; ST = sticker

(12) User 1: hahaha.
User 1: I'm going to get an iced coffee.
User 2: Sure (sticker).
User 2: hahaha. Do you still want to sleep at night?
User 1: I won't sleep.
User 1: hahaha.
User 2: Let’s get high.

User 1: Because he said.
User 1: One bag.
User 1: With accent.
User 1: It’s obviously Japanese.
User 1: Then he spoke Japanese.
User 1: Yes, yes, yes, similar.
User 1: One bag (with Japanese accent).
User 1: It’s obviously Japanese.
User 2: hahahaha + emoji.

User 1: Your boyfriend at least arrived early, I was all done and my friend told me there were still 13 stops to go.
User 1: ...
User 2: 。。
User 2: I’m laughing my ass off hahahahahahahaha.
User 2: He’s funny.
User 2: And very euphemistic.
User 2: He couldn’t say.
User 2: I just went out.
User 2: Sticker (well, how could it not be?).

Pattern 4: Non-humorous Text Plus Emoji/Sticker/Laugh Particle

This pattern, not very frequent in both corpora, is similar to the previous one, but in this case the non-humorous text in the first turn is accompanied by emoji (WhatsApp corpus) and by emoji or laugh particle (WeChat corpus). Major percentages of the second/third turns are provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>WhatsApp (77 / 3.41%)</th>
<th>WeChat (24 / 6.3%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HT + E</td>
<td>29 (37.7%)</td>
<td>HT + LP 2 (8.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3rd) NhT + NhE:</td>
<td>10 (13%)</td>
<td>HT + LP/S 4 (16.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3rd) HT + E:</td>
<td>8 (10.4%)</td>
<td>AT 4 (16.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3rd) NhT:</td>
<td>6 (7.8%)</td>
<td>Non-humorous text + laugh particle 9 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Key: HT = humorous text; E = emoji; NhT = non-humorous text; LP = laugh particle; AT = approbation text; NhE = non-humorous emoji; S = sticker]
As in the previous pattern, the most typical continuation in the WhatsApp corpus is a humorous text plus emoji (37.7%), whereas in the WeChat corpus continuations are more varied. It is significant that “non-humorous text plus laugh particle” is found in 37.5% of the WeChat interactions but is almost non-existent in the WhatsApp corpus. We interpret these laugh particles as another attempt to guarantee an effective interpretation and also, as part of the qualities of the Chinese culture, a strategy to reinforce social ties and show solidarity towards the attempted humour. Some examples are provided in Figure 5, translated as (15–16) below.

(15) User 1: Next week I am attending another wedding ceremony hahahaha.
User 1: Many weddings lately.
User 2: [“facepalming with tears of joy” emoji].
User 2: Exactly.
User 2: Many colleagues give us wedding sweets here in my company.
User 2: Image.
User 1: They take marriage as part of the end-of-year performance haha.

(16) User 1: hahahahahahahahaha.
User 1: hahahahahahahahaha.
User 1: My teacher has praised me, hahahaha.
User 2: hahahahaha.
User 2: What did you do?
User 2: Bravo bravo bravo bravo bravo.
User 1: The teacher said I was the only one that followed the rhythm of the music.
User 1: We danced one by one on the stage hahahaha.
User 1: I am very happy.

In (15), the initial non-humorous text plus laugh particles strengthens the ties of solidarity between the interlocutors. User 2 replies with an approbation text plus an emoji and an image that convey the user’s willingness to cooperate and develop the interaction just initiated. User 1’s reply acknowledges that User 2’s text has achieved the humorous intention. This is an example of this culturally connoted conversational strategy of WeChat users: to resort to combinations of emojis, images and/or stickers not only to strengthen the prospects of proper understanding and humorous effects, but also to emphasise exiting social ties between the interlocutors. Similarly, User 1 initiates the interaction in (16) with
a series of laugh particles accompanying a non-humorous text. User 2 replies immediately with similar laugh particles supporting User 1’s humorous strategy, followed by a non-humorous text.

Several WhatsApp interactions also fit this fourth pattern, where “non-humorous texts plus non-humorous emojis” are sometimes followed by a humorous text plus humorous emoji, as a way to convey the user’s intention to abandon the non-humorous course of the conversation. Two examples are reproduced in (17–18).

(17) Sara: Te voy a hacer el ingreso 🤑🤩🤩
            [I am going to make your transfer].
Luis: Thx amor.
        [Thanks love].
Luis: 115€ con los intereses de demora. Lo siento pero los negocios son los negocios 😝
        [It’s 115€ with interest for late payment. Sorry but business is business].
Sara: Diosssss.
[God].
Sara: Ya me avisaron q no mezclara dinero con amistad 😂😂😂
[I was warned not to mix money and friendship].

(18) Sara: Podemos ir con la perra 😊
[We could go with the dog].
Hace tanto q no la veo.
[It's so long since I last saw her].
Luis: Ya.
[Yes].
Luis: De hecho me pregunta por ti 😊
[Actually, she asks me about you].
Sara: Se acordara de mi?
[Will she remember me?].
Sara: 😂😂😂

5.3.5 Pattern 5: Single Image
In this pattern it is where we find the most striking differences between the WhatsApp and the WeChat corpora, as already mentioned above. In this case, the user sends a single image, which is replied to with different kinds of discourse. It should be noted that what we mean by “image” in this pattern is what the smartphone treats as an image, that is, a discourse that is either forwarded from another messaging conversation or retrieved from the smartphone’s storage of images. As such, these images can contain several discursive modes: plain text, image or multimodal combinations. Possible continuations of this first single image turn are provided below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WhatsApp (1530 / 67.4%)</th>
<th>WeChat (54 / 14.05%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E: 736 (48.1%)</td>
<td>HT + LP 9 (16.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT 136 (8.9%)</td>
<td>LP 8 (14.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT + E 128 (8.4%)</td>
<td>AT 11 (20.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE + NhE 127 (8.3%)</td>
<td>NhT 8 (14.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP 113 (7.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HT + E 53 (3.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NhE 40 (2.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Key: HT = humorous text; E = humorous emoji; NhT = non-humorous text; LP = laugh particle; AT = approbation text; NhE = non-humorous emoji]
There is certainly a striking difference between the percentage of interactions that start with a single image on WhatsApp (67.4%) and WeChat (14.05%). Half of the WhatsApp interactions are simply followed by an emoji (48.1%), approbation text (8.9%), laugh particle (7.4%), and so on, and the humorous interaction finishes at this point, after just two turns. As already remarked, a possible explanation for the low percentage on WeChat conversations is that both sending a single image and replying with a single type of discourse do not suit collectivist qualities, traces of which have been significantly found in the corpus. These users will normally prefer to add other discourses to the initial image and to reply to them with richer discursive modes, thus favouring an adequate effort-relieving understanding of the initial turn and to show acknowledgement, solidarity and collective enjoyment of the initiated humorous interaction.

Even if less frequently than in the WeChat corpus, WhatsApp users do sometimes add other discourses when replying to a single image. Figure 6 shows some examples of laugh particles with added discourses as explanations, translated as (19) (top left), (20) (top middle), (21) (bottom left) and (22) (right). The last one is interesting in the way both users decide to extend the humorous conversation and co-construct the humorous effects by means of chained playful turns regarding the initial image.
Image: Photo of President of Spain. Breaking news: Pedro Sánchez leaves the government to enter Temptation Island contest.

hahahaha Judging by how we are now, I can expect anything.

(20) Image: A remote with a clear Netflix button on it. My father: “How on earth can I get Netflix on TV?”

Hahahahaha. In my house there is also one of those.

(21) hahahaha I love Mafalda.

(22) Image by User 1: A jab with Russian vodka and the text: “first photos of the Russian vaccine.”

User 2: hahahaha
User 1: Covid sorted out.
User 2: I am more into gin and rum hahahaha.
User 1: I think it kills in the same way 😂😂😂
User 2: Sure 😂😂😂

In line with the desire to cooperate and facilitate correct interpretation of image-based humorous interactions, WeChat users shy away from this “single image plus single discursive reaction” pattern so pervasive on WhatsApp. For example, in 16.6% of the conversations the second turn includes a humorous text and 14.8% contain a potentially non-humorous text. In these cases, WeChat users add laugh particles to show acceptance of the humorous intention and to ensure that they convey their willingness to accept and continue the humorous frame initiated by User 1, or to make sure that they save mental effort in User 1 by emphasising, via laugh particles, that the text should not be interpreted as non-humorous after all.

Similarly, approbation texts are also accompanied by laugh particles, so that the interlocutor is directed in the right humour-centred inferential direction. Some examples are provided in Figure 7 and translated in (23–25). In the one on the left, the user adds laugh particles to the text. In the one in the middle, laugh particles and sticker. Finally in the one on the right, the text is accompanied by laugh particles and another image related to the initial message.

(23) User 1: Image.

What can convince people is never the reason, but the “Southern wall” / We cannot learn from others, but from what we have experienced.11

11 There is a Chinese proverb: “If you don’t hit the Southern wall, you won’t look back.” It means if a person does not try the lessons of failure, they will not change their stubborn way of thinking.
The interactions in (24–25) also show a pattern which is scarce in the WhatsApp corpus but significant in WeChat, which may be labelled as *chained images*, that is, to use images or stickers as replies to preceding image- and sticker-based turns and showing willingness to reciprocate in the same discursive mode. Higher frequency may be due to the age range of the WeChat users (20–35), compared to the WhatsApp ones (40–60), as already suggested. Two further examples can be found in Figure 8, translated in (26–27).

(24) User 1: Image: “I am planning a trip with my friends in 2020 / I am still planning a trip with my friends in 2022.”

User 2: Image.

User 1: “Southern wall” is really a good comrade.

User 2: It makes sense.

User 2: “It’s really like us hahahahaha.

User 1: “Southern wall” is really a good comrade.

User 1: “Image: “You are farting again.”

User 2: “Image: “I want to talk with my own biological clock that here is China.”

User 2: It makes sense.

User 2: “I am planning a trip with my friends in 2020 / I am still planning a trip with my friends in 2022.”

User 2: hahahahaha.

User 2: “I am planning a trip with my friends in 2020 / I am still planning a trip with my friends in 2022.”

User 2: “I want to talk with my own biological clock that here is China.”

User 2: “You are farting again.”

User 2: It makes sense.

User 2: “I am planning a trip with my friends in 2020 / I am still planning a trip with my friends in 2022.”

User 2: “I want to talk with my own biological clock that here is China.”

User 2: It makes sense.

User 2: “I am planning a trip with my friends in 2020 / I am still planning a trip with my friends in 2022.”

User 2: “I want to talk with my own biological clock that here is China.”

User 2: It makes sense.

User 2: “I am planning a trip with my friends in 2020 / I am still planning a trip with my friends in 2022.”

User 2: “I want to talk with my own biological clock that here is China.”

User 2: It makes sense.


User 2: “I want to talk with my own biological clock that here is China.”

User 2: It makes sense.

User 2: “I am planning a trip with my friends in 2020 / I am still planning a trip with my friends in 2022.”

User 2: “I want to talk with my own biological clock that here is China.”

User 2: It makes sense.

User 2: “I am planning a trip with my friends in 2020 / I am still planning a trip with my friends in 2022.”

User 2: “I want to talk with my own biological clock that here is China.”

User 2: It makes sense.

(26) User 1: Image.

User 2: Image.
User 1: hahahaha the face of this dog is soft to caress.
User 2: Image + image.

(27) User 1: Image.
User 2: hahahahahaha.
User 1: Image.
User 2: hahahahahaha.
User 1: Image.
User 2: It's super funny, this bear.
User 2: sticker.
User 1: That's so funny.

5.3.6 Pattern 6: Single Image with Humorous Text (Plus Emoji/Laugh Particle)

In this pattern, the first user produces an image with attached humorous text. It is not the most popular humorous strategy in the WhatsApp corpus (1.73%), but more popular for WeChat users (14.8%). The most typical second-turn continuations are listed below each first-turn sub-type.

In this pattern, we also identify the WeChat users' willingness to cooperate and show solidarity towards the first user's turn by aligning themselves with the humorous frame of the conversation in subsequent turns. Not surprisingly, only 12.8% of the humorous WhatsApp interactions reach the third turn. Most
of them finish when the second user acknowledges the humorous intention and stops the interaction at this point, mostly with a simple emoji (20.5%), as in the examples collected in Figure 9 and translated in (28) show.

(28)  [A] The Last Supper, pandemic version.
[B] In Lepe, they claim that they have discovered a pharaoh sphinx.
[C] The World Cup starts.
[D] When you are in 2018 but your son is already in 2028.

By contrast, in the WeChat corpus, users exhibit a greater tendency to develop the interaction and further acknowledge or strengthen the ties that bind the users together after the humorous image-plus-text-based interaction has been initiated, and show greater cooperation to lead the interaction to a co-constructed successful outcome. This is evidenced by 48.2% of the interactions that reach the third turn and 19% that reach the fourth turn. Figure 10, translated in (29–31) below, shows WeChat interactions in which the interlocutors engage in “conversational work” to develop the humorous interaction in subsequent turns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WhatsApp (59 / 1.73%)</th>
<th>WeChat (58 / 15.6%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(A) First turn: Image plus humorous text:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
<td>WeChat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(18 / 46.1%)</td>
<td>(38 / 65.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>8 (20.5%)</td>
<td>LP 10 (17.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AT + LP 7 (12.06%)</td>
<td>NhT + LP 5 (8.62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(B) First turn: Image plus humorous text plus emoji:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
<td>WeChat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(19 / 48.7%)</td>
<td>5 / 8.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>7 (17.94%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(C) First turn: Image plus laugh particle:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WhatsApp (X)</td>
<td>WeChat (7 / 12.06%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(D) First turn: Image plus emoji</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WhatsApp (10 / 20.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(E) First turn: Image plus humorous text plus laugh particle/sticker:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WhatsApp (X)</td>
<td>WeChat (10 / 17.24%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Key: HT = humorous text; E = emoji; NhT = non-humorous text; LP = laugh particle; AT = approbation text]
User 1: Image (text: body stocking).
User 1: Image (text: wearing the wrong socks).
User 1: I’m dying of laughter.
User 2: hahaha.
User 1: I also wanna take a picture 😄😄😄
User 1: [Dog 1]’s just wearing the wrong socks.
User 2: hhhhh.
User 2: [Dog 2] was wearing the wrong scarf. (30)

This cooperative attitude also applies to the sender’s initial turn. 17.24% of first WeChat turns include a sticker or laugh particle besides the image but no equivalent is found in the WhatsApp corpus. We interpret this as the user’s intention to strengthen the humorous intention and direct the addressee in the right inferential direction, thus saving mental effort while showing solidarity.

5.3.7 Pattern 7: Single Image with Non-humorous Text (Plus Emoji/Laugh Particle)

In this pattern, the first turn is made up of an image and a non-humorous text, which occasionally may be accompanied by an emoji or laugh particle. It is very rare in the WhatsApp corpus (1.53%) but more common in the WeChat corpus (13%). Some possible second-turn possibilities are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WhatsApp (25 / 1.53%)</th>
<th>WeChat (50 / 13%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Image + non-humorous text</td>
<td>Image + non-humorous text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 (31.4%)</td>
<td>44 (88%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP 4 (8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT 5 (10%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HT 10 (20%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NhT 6 (12%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NhT + LP 11 (22%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As in previous patterns with a non-humorous text in the first turn, at some stage this non-humorous quality shifts into a humorous frame. This shift does not necessarily occur in the second turn. For instance, in six WeChat interactions the second turn also contains a non-humorous text. Besides, most of the WhatsApp samples consist of just two turns. A typical case, found in 22.8% of the WhatsApp corpus, is to add an emoji to the first turn that contains a potentially non-humorous text, so that the interlocutor is directed in the right inferential direction, as happens in the short interactions reproduced in Figure 11, the first two translated in (32–33).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WhatsApp (25 / 1.53%)</th>
<th>WeChat (59 / 13%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Image + non-hum. text + emoji</td>
<td>Image + non-hum. text + laugh particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 (22.8%)</td>
<td>4 (8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Key: HT = humorous text; NhT = non-humorous text; LP = laugh particle; AT = approbation text]

**Figure 11** Short WhatsApp conversations starting with image + non-humorous text + emoji

(32) Juan: Image.
Juan: 😂😊😂😂
Juan: It’s real. You can buy it 😄
Sara: 😂😊😂😂

(33) Juan: Image (says “anti incest window” instead of “anti insect window”).
Juan: At a Chinese store this morning.
Juan: Sinners control 😂😊😂😂😂ɡ😂😊😂😂 😂😂
Sara: Really good!!!

A similar strategy is found in the WeChat corpus, but interactions tend to be longer (4–5 turns) and, as already remarked, the users show willingness to develop and sustain the interaction in the right direction and taking joint responsibility in co-constructing the humorous effects, as in Figure 12, translated in (34–36).

FIGURE 12 WeChat conversations starting with image + non-humorous text
Key: IM = image; HT = humorous text; NhT = non-humorous text; LP = laugh particle; E = emoji; AT = approbation text

(34) User 1: Hahahahahaha.
   User 1: Image.
   User 1: A friend helped me to paint my nails.
   User 2: Hahahahahaha.
   User 1: Image.
   User 2: But she also painted on your finger, hahahahaha.

(35) User 1: Image.
   User 1: Weight loss meal.
   User 2: Ay, it looks delicious.
   User 2: You don’t eat staple food.
   User 2: You’re pretty good + emoji.
   User 1: Corn.
   User 2: It’s good to eat this way.
   User 1: It’s also tasty hahaha.
User 2: Mmmmmmm it looks pretty tasty.

(36) User 1: Image.
User 1: He's begging me.
User 1: But I'm not available.
User 1: I'm going to take a shower.
User 2: His little claws are of the external eight type.
User 1: Hahahahaha is that a little claw.
User 1: That's really a big one.
User 1: Emoji.
User 1: I am going to take a shower now.
User 2: His claws are like flat feet walking on the ground hahahaha.

5.3.8 Pattern 8: Video
As already mentioned, video is not the preferred option for humorous interactions on WhatsApp (4.58%) or WeChat (6.25%). As was also the case in previous patterns, WhatsApp users mainly reply with a single emoji (35.6%) which terminates the conversation, an almost non-existent strategy in the WeChat corpus. As part of the collectivist attitude towards appreciation for the value of the initiated interaction and showing acknowledgement and solidarity among users, we unsurprisingly found that “approbation text plus laugh particle” was the preferred option on WeChat (29.1%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WhatsApp (104 / 4.58%)</th>
<th>WeChat (24 / 6.25%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>37 (35.6%)</td>
<td>E 1 (4.16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT + E</td>
<td>14 (13.5%)</td>
<td>LP 3 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HT + E</td>
<td>10 (9.6%)</td>
<td>AT 3 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AT + LP 7 (29.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NHT + LP 3 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HT + LP 3 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Key: HT = humorous text; E = emoji; NHT = non-humorous text; LP = laugh particle; AT = approbation text]

6 Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have analysed a corpus of dyadic humorous interactions on WhatsApp and WeChat. We have isolated several patterns depending on the quality of the first turn.
We hypothesised that on many occasions there would be clear parallelisms in the way these interactions unfold. For that purpose, we analysed up to four turns in dyadic messaging conversations. Certainly, some of the turns are similar on both apps, but we also found differences in the way humorous attempts are replied to and subsequent interactions managed. We suggest that these asymmetries may be explained by assuming that certain cultural attributes of Spanish and Chinese users get manifested in the way they sustain their messaging interactions. For example, simply replying with emoji, so pervasive in the WhatsApp sample, is not considered appropriate in most of the dyadic WeChat conversations analysed.

Prospects of future research include the analysis of these humorous messaging conversations depending on the sex of the interlocutors (e.g. female-female vs. male-male), a variable not analysed in the present paper (see Pérez-Sabater, 2019). This may be interesting, for example, in accounting for emoji frequency or sticker use, or even discursive patterns more frequently associated with same sex vs. mixed sex messaging conversations.

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**References**


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Ecosystem, Routledge, 2021). His research has also focused on irony and humorous discourses (Humour and Relevance, John Benjamins, 2016; Pragmatics of Internet Humour, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023). Francisco Yus is also editor (with Chaoqun Xie) of the journal Internet Pragmatics (John Benjamins, https://benjamins.com/catalog/ip).

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