

Dealing with missing participants in the opening phases of a videoconference¹

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The paper explores the social interaction that takes place during the initial phases of videoconferences. The focus is on the problem of absent participants, which is often considered a reason for delaying the official beginning of the meeting. One of the resources that the participants have is to reach the absent participant by cellphone. We observed a recurrent pattern of action whereby one of the participants disengages from the video meeting to reach the missing person by phone. This negotiation process moves through four steps: 1) the detection of the problem, 2) the offer to call the missing person by one participant, 3) the acceptance of this offer by the moderator, and 4) the temporary absence of the participant from the video meeting to make the phone call. Our data concern videoconferencing in the context of international teachertraining in German as a foreign language (LEELU project, <https://www.leelu.eu/english/>).

Keywords: video-mediated communication, openings, use of smartphone during videoconferencing, entering in and exiting from a video meeting

1. Introduction

This article explores the ways in which participants organize their activities in order to set up the beginning of a meeting. We focus on video meetings, and in particular on the problem of absent participants, which is often considered a reason for delaying the official beginning of the encounter (Steven et al. 2014; Caspi 2020; Lehmann-Willenbrock and Allen 2020). We investigate one of the resources that the participants have to deal with this problem: that is, reaching the absent participant by phone. We analyze how recourse to the phone is prompted by the moderator and offered by the participants. The recourse to the phone by one of the participants implies that s/he has been authorized to leave the meeting in order to make the phone call. Moreover, we observe how the participant who has left the meeting then returns

¹ The paper is the result of a joint effort by the authors. However, in accordance with the Italian academic custom, we state that Parts 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 are attributable to SH, and Parts 4, 5 are attributable to GF.

to it after the call. We study the ways in which departures from, and returns to, the meeting are accomplished.

Over the past twenty years, the use of video conferencing has increased enormously in both professional and private life. Besides Skype (Harper et al. 2017; Licoppe 2017a, b; Licoppe and Morel 2012), other applications for video communication, such as FaceTime, Google Hangout (Rosenbaum et al. 2016) or WhatsApp, are being used for interpersonal communication, while specialized software programs such as Adobe Connect, Zoom, or platforms such as Microsoft Teams, are increasingly being used for professional meetings. Recently, the Covid-19 crisis has significantly accelerated this trend. The possibility of video-, audio- or text-based chatting, as well as the easy and safe storage of documents or materials in different formats, and the possibility to share them with others before and during meetings, significantly increases the potential of video-based communication in meetings, so that it becomes a multi-channel, and thus a highly complex, form of digital interaction.

As a normal practice and communicative habitus, together with the possibility to chat, there is the simultaneous or consecutive use of other devices such as smartphones during videoconferences. These devices are employed primarily in order to support the accomplishment of the common task (Beers Fägersten et al. 2010; Licoppe 2017b, 367), while in private conversations they are also used for other activities carried out at the same time (Licoppe 2017b, 372). As Mlynář et al. pointed out (2018, 7), their use creates and connects different spaces, overcoming boundaries between public/private and offline/online domains. Cellphones are particularly useful in the initial phases of videoconferences as means to connect the participants when the problems and delays often caused by technical constraints arise (Mondada 2010; Liddicoat 2011, 53, mentioned in Muñoz 2016, 13).

Our data concern videoconferencing in the context of international teacher-training in German as a foreign language (LEELU project).² We explore the use of a cellphone in the initial phases of a meeting, and in particular how the participants use a smartphone to manage problems due to the absence of a participant. We examine situations where the moderator takes the absence of a participant as a reason to delay the beginning of the meeting. We observe a recurrent pattern of action whereby one of the participants disengages from the meeting (Szymanski 1999) in order to reach the missing person by phone. We focus on the ways in which leaving and returning to the meeting are accomplished by participants in the

² For the research design and the outcomes of the research, see the project website www.leelu.eu. The interaction analysis presented in this paper is to be understood as an extension of these findings; it is based on data collected in the course of the project but which were not the concern or part of the LEELU project design.

initial phases of a video-meeting. We argue that the leaving is accomplished by authorizing one of the members to disengage from the meeting, while the return is accomplished by favoring the re-engagement of this participant in the videoconference.

We first describe some of the features of the initial phases of videoconferences. We focus on how problems caused by missing participants are handled by the moderator and how a participant engages in a secondary action. The subsequent section contains the empirical part of the paper. After presenting the research design (3.), it analyzes and discusses three sequences of international videoconferencing (4. and 5.). These sequences show how a participant leaves the meeting in order to use a smartphone to reach the missing person (4.). We then analyze how this participant re-enters the video-meeting (5.). The discussion (6.) and the conclusion (7.) sections highlight the participation in different ‘media spaces’ (Aoki et al. 2006) established during the meeting (being a participant in the meeting or talking on the cellphone), in order to show how problems at the beginning of a video-conference can be dealt with by the participants, and to give suggestions for further research on communication mediated by more than one connective device.

2. Literature review

Since the seminal work of Boden (1994), there has been a growth of research on video-based formal or professional meetings which mainly relies on microanalytical analysis based on the CA approach (for an overview, see Asmuß and Svennevig 2009; Svennevig 2012; Raclaw and Ford 2015; Mlynář et al. 2018; Due and Licoppe 2021). An increasing number of studies adopt a multimodal perspective (see Mondada and Schmitt 2010; Asmuß 2015; Veyrier 2015; Due et al. 2020). This literature refers to the large body of studies on interaction during face-to-face meetings in professional contexts, and it focuses on the organization of meetings at the micro-level through the mobilization of various verbal, embodied, material, and technological resources. Different aspects of the organization of meetings have been studied: the recommencement of a meeting (Atkinson et al. 1978); alignment or misalignment and agreement or disagreement (Asmuß 2002; Oittinen 2018); leadership in various sorts of meetings (Asmuß 2007; Svennevig, 2008); ‘management styles’ in work meetings (Schmitt 2006); the management of the transitions between different phases of activities in meetings (Bruxelles et al., 2009; Mehus, 2005; Mondada, 2006); introducing the topic to be discussed

(González-Martínez and Giglio 2020); and other aspects, as summarized by Depperman et al. (2010, 1702) and by Nielsen (2013, 35).

Openings in meetings have been the focus of several studies (see Nielsen 2013; Oittinen and Piirainen-Marsh 2015; Markman 2009). Mondada (2010) distinguishes among the pre-opening, opening, and beginning of a meeting, and the differences in co-presence, contact, and participation during these three phases (Mondada 2010, 277). The pre-opening is characterized by “a convergent attentional orientation” (Mondada, 2010, 285), in which the participants position themselves around the computer in various locations, check the image settings, switch the microphones on and off, or even talk, in their respective teams, in their own local language during international discussions (Mondada 2010, 285, see also Muñoz 2016, 6). Mondada (2010, 278) defines the opening sequence as

the moment in which the participants enter into a common interaction, indicating their willingness to interact, and recognizing and identifying each other, in short: adjust to each other, in order to begin jointly and in a coordinated manner the actual conversational activity. In professional settings the initial phases are managed by the moderator or chair, who welcomes the participants.³

Greetings or establishing contacts go hand in hand with checking the technical sound and image quality (Mondada 2010, 294; Licoppe 2017b, 363). These are the moments when the orientation to the meeting is established and shared by the participants. This orientation becomes visible, for example, through explicit references to the need to wait for other participants and/or through gesturally-conveyed impatience (Mondada 2010, 310). The moderator has the task of not only resolving the technical problems and, at best, eliminating them, but also of weighing up whether s/he should start the meeting despite the late arrival of some participants (Mondada 2010, 314-315). It is normally only the moderator who overtly notices if someone is still missing. The presence and/or the visibility of all the participants is what is taken to be a preliminary condition for the meeting to begin (Mondada 2010: 313).

The observation that someone is absent determines a kind of ‘hold on status’ of the meeting in which the moderator must decide whether to continue with the ongoing activity and begin the meeting without one of the participants or to wait for her/him a little longer. In the latter case, there may be attempts to overcome the problem. One such attempt may be the moderator’s open request to procure more information about the reason for the absence

³ Another distinction is drawn by Muñoz (2016). She differentiates among three different channels and their interplay in the pre-meeting phases: the technological opening, the interactional opening, and the audio-visual opening.

addressed to all participants or to one of them who is more likely to be familiar with the expected person.

In our research, we examined how smartphones are used to retrieve information regarding a person missing in a videoconference in order to deal with the problem of his/her absence. Unlike the cases studied by Ruhleder and Jordan 2001, where the use of cellphones is a hidden activity during videoconferences, we observed the authorized use of a cellphone (for a different case – the self-initiated mobile device used in face-to-face encounters – see Oloff 2019). The use of a smartphone to search for the missing participant creates a specific situation in a professional meeting where the (rare) concurrent use of smartphones is normally stigmatized (Asmuß and Svennevig 2009, 13) and requires some kind of authorization from the team leader (Egbert 1997, 44). We observed cases in which the main activity continued while one of the participants was allowed to leave to use his/her cellphone to search for the absent participant. At the same time, we observed how the main activity came to be resumed (Sutinen 2014) when the participant previously engaged in a parallel activity (i.e. talking on the phone with the missing participant) was then re-admitted to the meeting (see Relieu 2009 for the notion of disengaging and engaging mobile phone activities with concurrent activities).

Studies on meetings have yielded new insights into the notion of participation (Goffman 1963): that is, the way in which participants take part in the meeting not only by positioning themselves in space with their bodies, but also by actively orienting themselves toward the other participants. Multimodal analyses have shown the multiple resources that participants use in order to actively engage with others to maintain participation in a single ‘interactional space’ (Wasson 2008) or to orient themselves to different spaces (Mondada 2009, 2011). Through their movements, gaze, gestures, bodily position and orientation, the participants show involvement in (or detachment from) the situation. Online meetings (Svenning and Ruchinskis 1984; Oshima and Asmuß 2018) are cases particularly interesting for the study of participation, in that the interaction space of the meeting – the virtual meeting space – is different from the local place where the participants are (see Wasson 2008).

Through multimodal analysis it is possible to appreciate the delicate interactional work of disengaging from and re-entering a meeting. Disengaging is central to the analysis by Ilomäki and Ruusuvaara (2020), who examined openings and closings in video-mediated tele-homecare. If visual appearing is of key importance in the opening, disengaging is the way that closing is achieved, either by walking away from the screen or by shutting down the connection. We consider engaging and disengaging to be two specular methods to enter and

exit the meeting. Entering the meeting has to do not only with the visual appearing of one participant on the screen but also with how participants manage to become ratified members of the meeting by achieving entry into a common ‘interactional space’ (Mondada 2009). Exiting from the meeting means more than simply not being seen on the screen: the ‘exit’ requires a series of actions whereby a participant in the meeting visibly leaves it in a ratified fashion.

Another line of research relevant to our paper is the analysis of the methods by which assistance is sought and offered in social interaction (Kendrick and Drew 2016; Drew and Kendrick 2018; Kendrick 2021). Recruitment of assistance has been studied as the product of the following sequence: the recognition of the trouble; the generation of a possible solution; and the implementation of this solution (Kendrick 2021). It has been shown how the resources with which trouble is put in public view by one person can create the opportunity for another participant in the event to provide assistance. Even if Kendrick and Drew (2014) have demonstrated that there is no preference for offers with respect to requests, we will describe in this article ways in which assistance is offered rather than requested once a problem is brought into public view. Craven and Potter (2010, 420, referring to Ervin-Tripp’s 1976 study on requests and directives) distinguish six different ways in which a speaker is entitled to request action from a recipient in social interaction. Lindstrøm (2005) claims that requests can be made by means of imperatives, questions, and statements; the various forms display the speaker’s degree of entitlement. In the cases that we examined, no explicit request was made by the moderator to some participant after statement of the trouble; the moderator only set out the problem – made a statement, described the situation, reported the trouble – thereby providing the opportunity for some of the participants to voluntarily offer help.

In this paper we underline how the management of problems in the preliminary phases of videoconferencing is an interactional achievement. We address the ways in which the absence of a person from a video meeting is considered a problem by the participants and consequently delays the start of the meeting. Unlike when technical features and functionalities are generally checked, especially in the pre-opening phase (Arminen et al. 2015, 10), it is usually the moderator who overtly notices that someone is missing. Observing that someone is missing determines a kind of ‘hold on status’ in which the moderator must decide whether to begin the meeting without the person or to wait for her/him a little longer. In the latter case, this reporting can generate attempts to remedy the problem. We observed that the remark that someone is absent often triggers an offer by someone in the team to call the absentee (the offer is made by the team member most familiar with the expected person).

We will see how the problem of a missing participant (whose absence causes the delay of the official beginning of the video meeting) is brought to the attention of the participant by the moderator, providing an opportunity for one of the participants to offer help (by calling the missing participant).

3. Data Collection and Design⁴

The corpus contained 8 video meetings of about one hour each, for a total amount of 9 hours and 4 minutes, recorded from November 2017 to March 2018, and involving 8 persons aged from 25 to 64. The international team consisted of 3 pre-service and 3 in-service German teachers at upper secondary schools in Budapest, Palermo, and Utrecht; 1 moderator (scientific expert for the project) at the University of Vienna; and 1 assistant (technical collaborator and researcher), who managed the content to be seen on the shared screen: i.e. the agenda, other documents, and the videos regarding what the 6 teachers had decided to discuss. The topics, selected by the teachers themselves beforehand, on the basis of video sequences recorded during extensive reading as a classroom activity, concerned problems arising during that activity. The meetings took place at prearranged times and had pre-set discussion points. The participants already knew each other. They were either non-native speakers (with different levels of German language competence) or native speakers of German. Thus, the meetings exhibited features of a formal setting, but at the same time, there was a friendly and collaborative atmosphere among colleagues during all the meetings. In general, this hybridity of meetings is the basis for exchanges between teachers and trainers in the context of teacher training, whereas the decision to adopt a non-directive moderation style is theoretically based on the training concept of the project (Dawidowicz et al. 2019). The meetings took place on the edubreak® platform and were recorded by the assistant, with the consent of the participants.

The computer screens of the participants were occupied by a shared view of documents, while the faces and upper bodies of the participants appeared in different sizes in a bar at the top of the screen. The participants were usually seated at a desk in a room at home, or more rarely, at school; the moderator and the assistant were frequently in their offices at the university.

⁴ Permission has been granted to publish the material for research purposes. All the names have been changed.

In these 8 international meetings, the initial phases lasted, on average, for about 10-15 minutes. The video meetings were opened by the host. From that moment on, participants could enter the room individually, and occasionally pre-service and in-service teachers were present together. After entering the room, the moderator initiated the interaction with the newly-arrived persons, greeting them and engaging in small talk before officially starting the meeting.

We have selected three sequences from the initial phase of the second round of the video meetings. These three sequences are used to analyze, first, how one of the participants offered to call the absent person when the delay in starting the meeting was attributed to her or his absence. Our focus is on how one of the participants, after the statement of the problem, came to offer to call the missing participant, and how s/he managed to leave the meeting to make the call. Then the analysis focuses on how one participant leaves the meeting to call the missing person, accomplishing “coordinated exits from the enclosed boundary of the meeting” (Boden, 1994, p. 102). Second, we analyze the ways in which the participant who has called the absentee returns to the meeting.

We have opted for a three-line transcript: the first line is in the original German, the second line is the literal translation word by word (modal particles are specified in italics), the third one – in bold – is the idiomatic English translation. Embodied actions are described with glosses.

4. How to disengage from the meeting to call a missing participant

In the two excerpts that follow, we can see how the absence of one of the participants is made manifest, and what kinds of resources are utilized to deal with the problem. In particular, we are interested in analyzing a particular sequence: the *formulation* (by the moderator) that one person is absent, followed by the *offer* by one of the participants to call the absentee, and the *acceptance* of the offer. We then describe how the participant disengages from the ongoing meeting in order to make the call.

4.1. Offering to call the missing participant

In the upper part of the screen, all in a line, are the faces and upper bodies of six participants (Fig. 1): we focus on Kerstin (KER, the first on the right), the moderator (MOD, the second from the left), and Mareike (MAR, the second from the right).



Fig. 1

The moderator has welcomed the teachers, briefly described the videos that will be discussed, and asked if the foreseen procedure is satisfactory. Amid this conversation, small talk is also going on. Just before the start of excerpt 1, the moderator has greeted Kerstin, who has joined the meeting.

Excerpt 1. “I can try to call”

- 1 MOD Kerstin, wir warten noch auf zwei leute,
 Kerstin we wait still for two persons
 Kerstin, we are still waiting for two persons,
- 2 und dann geht s gleich los. ja?
 and then start it immediately yes
 and then we'll start (the meeting) immediately. Ok?
- 3 KER okay.
 okay.
- 4 (1.0)
- 5 MAR #ich kann ja kurz mal ähm
 I can modal quickly modal ehm
 I can quickly ehm
 # fig. 2, 3
 ((approaches the screen))



Fig. 2

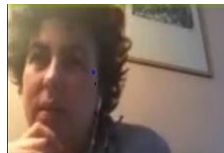


Fig. 3

- 6 (1.2)
- 7 MAR probieren Antje #anzurufen,
 try Antje to call
 try to call Antje,
 ((she takes headphones off))
 # fig. 4



Fig. 4

8 MOD [(ja, mach mal)]
 (yes do modal)
ok, please do it

9 MAR [weil] ich jetzt nicht weiß,
 [because] I now not know
because, I don't know,

10 ob sie es vielleicht zufällig vergessen hat.
 if she it perhaps accidentally forgot has
she could have forgotten (the meeting).

11 nicht? ich gehe mal ganz kurz=
 no I go modal pretty quickly
no? I will be away for a short time=

12 MOD =ja, ja, mach doch mal. das ist super.
 yes yes do modal modal that is great
=yes, yes, please go ahead, great.

At the beginning of the sequence, the moderator, as a way to welcome the person who has just arrived at the meeting (Kerstin), informs her that they are waiting for two people (line 1) and that the beginning of the meeting is delayed until the two missing persons arrive (line 2). In this way, the moderator updates the current state of the meeting. Her description of the situation suggests that there is a problem: in order for the meeting to begin, the two persons should be present. What is interesting to note here is the response to this first action. One participant, Kerstin, simply acknowledges the previous statement (line 3). But after a short pause, Mareike responds differently. She approaches the screen, with an embodiment display of attention and availability (Kendrick 2021, 70), and suggests that she might call the missing person by cellphone (lines 4-6). She would call the absent person but only after the authorization of the moderator (for a different case, the self-initiated use of a mobile device, see Oloff 2019). Her offer is carefully formulated with the modal particles “*ja*” and “*mal*”, which – as House and Kasper (1981) pointed out – have the function of softening the impact of the utterance. Furthermore, after a short pause (line 5) this utterance is minimized by “quickly” (*kurz*) and marked as an attempt by “try” (*versuchen*). Interestingly, Mareike takes the moderator’s statement as a request to do something, addressed to whoever might provide help in order to deal with the problem. In the literature, there are various examples of the ways in which statements can be understood as requests (see for example Asmuß 2007, 74; Kendrick 2021, 74; Kendrick and Drew 2016). By offering to call the missing person, Mareike shows that she has taken the moderator’s previous turn to be a formulation of a problem and a request for help to cope with the issue (Kendrick 2021, 76-77). At the same time, the way in which Mareike formulates her turn shows that she offers her help with some

caution, not straightforwardly (“I can try”): her interpretation of the moderator’s turn represents a *possible* interpretation. The fact that it was a correct interpretation is demonstrated by the moderator’s acceptance of Mareike’s proposal (line 8). In this way, a full sequence composed of three turns has been established: (1) the moderator’s suggestion of a problem, mobilizing an offer for help (lines 1-2); (2) Mareike’s actual offer to help (lines 5-7); (3) the moderator’s acceptance of Mareike’s offer (line 8).

Mareike continues her turn by presenting her offer, giving an explanation for the absence of her colleague (her colleague may have possibly forgotten to connect: lines 9-10). She is offering only *possible* explanations for the colleague’s absence: “I don’t know” (line 8), “perhaps” (line 10), and the final question “no?” (*nicht*, line 11), which makes the explanations for the colleague’s absence possible, but not certain. Again, Mareike presents herself as responsible for taking the initiative in offering help.

By removing her earpieces (fig. 4), Mareike signals that she is going to carry out what she has proposed. The modal particles (*mal*) and “quickly” (*kurz*) stress and anticipate the fact that her departure will be brief (line 11). With the repeated “yes” (*ja*) the moderator gives permission and authorizes Mareike’s action (line 12), assessing her offer with an appreciation (“that is great”). Mareike is seen taking off her headset, and she leaves the meeting, standing up and disappearing from the screen. She disengages herself from the ongoing meeting in order to deal with the search for the missing colleague in a parallel action, i.e. using her cellphone to call her colleague. After a short pause (the moderator is seen sipping coffee from a cup), the preliminary phase of the meeting continues with informal talk among the participants while they wait for news from Mareike (no longer visible in her screen). Mareike has left the meeting but at the same time she has left her screen on: the participants can see that she is connected but the screen is showing only the image of the place where Mareike was: an empty place.

4.2. *Offering to call the missing participant, 2*

The same pattern (statement of the problem, offer to help, acceptance of help, disengagement) seems to emerge in another meeting. Again, the problem being addressed by the moderator is that a person is absent and that the meeting will only start when the person can connect. In order to address this problem, one of the persons participating in the meeting again volunteers to help by ringing the missing person. How this disengagement from the meeting is accomplished is again the focus of our analysis.

At the top of the screen of the participants, in a line, there are the faces and the upper bodies of six participants (Fig. 5). In this meeting, we have to consider the moderator (MOD, the second from the left), and Birgit (BIR, the second from the right):

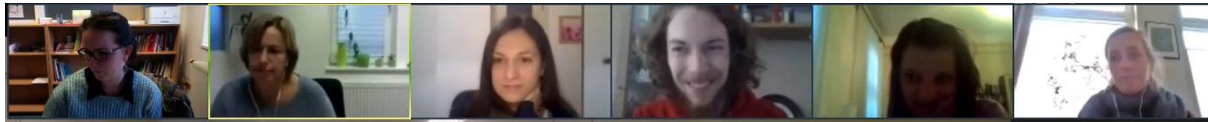


Fig. 5

The moderator has greeted the participants and, together with the assistant, has tested several technical devices. She has also gone ahead with some items on the agenda, explained her moderation style and asked if the procedure is clear. It seems that the meeting is about to begin. The following sequence starts after a short pause.

Excerpt 2. “Dear Barbara”

- 1 MOD JA, Barbara fehlt uns noch.
 yes Barbara miss us still
 yes, Barbara is still missing.
- 2 jetzt überlege ich, ob wir starten, (0.4)
 now think I if we start
 I'm wondering if we start now,
- 3 aber das wäre ja schade
 but this would yes pity
 but that would be a pity
- 4 ohne die liebe Barbara.
 without the dear Barbara
 without dear Barbara.
- 5 #(0.2)
 bir looks down to her left---->
 # fig 6a 6b

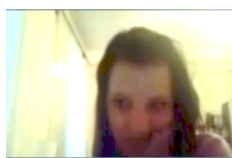


Fig. 6a

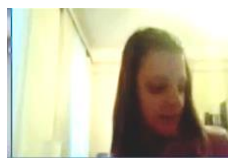


Fig. 6b

- 6 MOD ähm:. ein (.) paar minuten
 ehm a few minutes
 shall we wait for a few minutes
 bir -----
- 7 MOD warten wir noch ab, oder?=

wait we still or
**or?=
 bir -----|
 8 BIR =#ja, ich rufe sie an.
 yes I call her
 =**yes, I'm going to call her.**
 # fig. 6c**

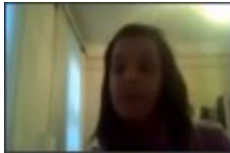


Fig. 6c

9 MOD das wär gut, Birgit. danke.
 that would be great Birgit thanks
that would be great, Birgit. thank you

The excerpt begins with the moderator (MOD) observing that one person, Barbara, is still absent (line 1). She shares with the group her doubts as to whether to start or wait before beginning the meeting (lines 2-6). That the meeting should not begin without the missing person is underlined by the moderator when she says that starting without her “would be a pity”, and that she is “dear Barbara”. Shortly thereafter, we can see Birgit (line 5) turning her gaze away from the screen and looking down to her left (figure 6 a, b). We cannot see what Birgit is looking at, because the video frame only shows the faces of the participants. However, we do know, from what follows, that she is probably looking at her cellphone. Is Birgit detaching herself for a moment from the meeting, in order to check for possible messages from the missing person on her cellphone? We do not know, but it is interesting that just after shifting her gaze, she starts an action outside the participation framework established by being in the meeting. She demonstrates pre-engagement with what will follow. In line 7, the moderator presents two possibilities: start the meeting without “dear Barbara” or wait a little longer (this second alternative is tacitly implied). At this point, Birgit offers to call Barbara (line 8, fig. 6b). As in the first excerpt, the moderator’s announcement is taken by Birgit to be a prompt for an offer of help. The moderator (line 9) endorses Birgit’s offer, expressing her appreciation (“that would be great”), and thanking Birgit for the offer (“thank you”). In this way, the three-step sequence is brought to a close: (1) announcement of a problem, taken as a request for help; (2) offer of help; (3) response with signs of appreciation and gratitude. At this point, Birgit can turn to her parallel line of action: she detaches herself from the meeting to attend to the other task, i.e. calling the missing person. She takes her phone to her left and looks downwards, probably dialing the number. Then she gets up from

her seat and leaves her position in front of the screen. Also in this case, the connection remains open; her screen shows the place where Birgit was. The meeting continues with casual remarks while waiting for news about the absentee.

4.3. Dealing with an incoming call during the meeting

The third case is rather different from the previous two. In this case, a call is received by one of the participants in the meeting, and it is heard by the other participants. The call comes from the missing person. What is interesting is how the call is treated by the persons at the meeting, and how it affects the participatory status of the participant receiving the call (for similar questions, see Licoppe and Tuncer 2014).

At the top of the participants' screen, in a line, are the faces and parts of the upper bodies of six participants (Fig. 7). Two of the participants are in the same room and sharing the same screen (second screen box from the right). The moderator is in the screen box in the middle (MOD, the third from the left). Let us focus on Anna (ANN, the first on the right).



Fig. 7

As in the two previous excerpts, we are in the initial phases of the meeting. The moderator has already mentioned that there is a missing person. When the excerpt begins, she is addressing the two participants sharing the same screen (the second screen from the right in fig. 7), and she is commenting on their unstable connection. Anna enters the sequence later.

Excerpt 3. “Here I am, and you?”

- 1 MOD ah okay. (-) es ist immer noch ein bisschen
 ah okay it is always still a bit
ah okay, it is still a bit
- 2 *#schwer euch zu ver#stehen. (0.8)
 difficult you to understand
difficult to understand you.
 *((loud phone ring tone))
 #fig. 8a #fig. 8b



Fig. 8a

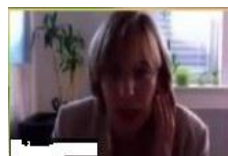


Fig. 8b

ann #looks briefly down to her left
then turns back to her screen
fig. 9a fig. 9b

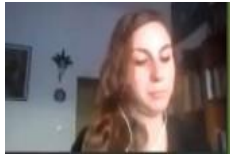


Fig. 9a

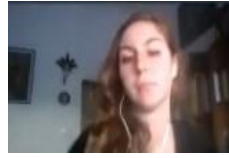


Fig. 9b

3 MOD also es geht schon,
so it goes already
but,

4 aber es #hallt es fällt# immer so
but it echoes it interrupts always so
but the echoes and interruptions continue

ann ((takes her right and left earphone out))
#fig. 10 #fig.11

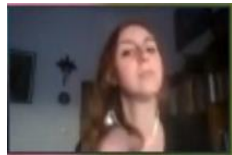


Fig. 10

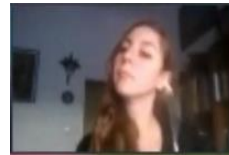


Fig. 11

5 ein ganz klein bisschen aus.
an almost little bit
a little bit.

6 aber: gut,
but well,

7 [wir werden das schon hinkriegen].
we will it already manage
we will manage it.

8 ANN #[(Lea)]
(Lea)
fig 12

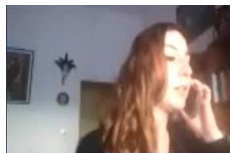


Fig. 12

9 (1.0)
((Anna is answering the phone speaking to Lea))

10 ANN #hai-, sì, io ci sono,
have yes I here am

have-, yes, here I am.

fig 13((Lea gazes at the screen))



Fig. 13

11

e tu?

and you?

While the moderator is commenting on the unstable connection of the two participants (in the second screen from the right in fig. 7) and the difficulty of hearing them (line 1-2), a phone rings loudly (01, 02). The moderator raises her head (fig. 8a, fig. 8b) while continuing to talk, and Anna directs her gaze briefly down to her left, where her phone is ringing (fig. 9a, fig. 9b). The ringing cuts in on the meeting, reconfiguring the positions of the participants. The moderator raises her head in order to understand what is happening: during an online meeting, it is to be expected that cellphones are silenced and personal calls are disregarded. There is a single, relatively long ringtone (Anna should have silenced the ringing of her cellphone before joining the meeting, but she did not). The moderator, after a brief pause (line 2), continues to talk about the hearing problem with the connection, whilst continuing to look at the screen in front of her as if monitoring the possible reasons for why a cellphone is ringing. What happens in the meantime is that Anna takes her earphones off (the earphones are probably connected to her pc) while at the same time looking at her camera: we see that she is looking at the other participants, not attending to her cellphone (fig. 10, fig. 11). She is preparing to answer the call. By removing her earphones, she is disengaging herself from the meeting in order to answer the call. Anna starts to talk on her cellphone while the moderator is completing her assessment of the communication problem with the two persons having technical trouble (“we will manage it”, lines 6-7). Anna answers the call by saying the name of the caller loudly enough for it to be heard by the persons in the meeting (“Lea”, line 8, fig. 12). Lea is the person absent from the meeting.

Amongst the many devices enabling the receiver to identify the name of the caller, the most common is probably the caller’s name displayed on the cellphone screen. This accounts for the first turn of the responder (Arminen and Leinonen 2006). However, this is also a good way to convey to all the participants in the meeting that Anna is not answering a personal call; in this way, Anna is letting the other participants know that the caller is the missing person. Even if not fully audible, due to the overlap with the moderator’s turn, Anna’s turn

(line 8) allows the participants at the meeting to listen in on the phone call, or at least to hear Anna's part. The meeting seems to be suspended (Leisanen and Rauniomaa 2014): the moderator does not continue to talk, and the other participants do not say anything; they look at their screens, monitoring what Anna may say on the phone. In this way, the participants show that they are not regarding the call as an inappropriate intrusion into the meeting, but as a way to find out about the missing person. At the same time, it is interesting to observe the consequences of the call regarding Anna's participation status in the meeting. In this case, the detachment of the person speaking on the phone from the meeting does not go through a three-step sequence enabling one of the participants to legitimately leave the meeting to attend to another task. Here the phone call has broken into the meeting. What Anna does is maintain what we might call "a double engagement" or "double orientation" (cf. Deppermann et al. 2010, 1701): in one sense, she is busy answering the phone; in another, she is still participating in the meeting. Anna shows this "double engagement" with her bodily posture and her gaze: on the one hand, she is detached from the meeting, only attending to the call (fig. 12); on the other, she is at the meeting, looking at the screen, and engaged with the other participants (fig. 13).

At some point, the meeting is resumed and the moderator addresses other topics, while Anna continues to be busy with the call.

5. How to re-engage in the meeting

Thus far, we have seen how the problem of the missing participant may be addressed in video meetings, where one of the participants (usually, the one who is closest, for whatever reason, to the missing participant, usually belonging to the same national team – see Rasmussen Hougaard 2008; Mondada 2004) can call the missing participant. Calling someone may pose an interactional, practical problem: how to leave the meeting in order to engage in the parallel task of calling the missing person? We have seen two examples where, after the offer of help and its acceptance, one of the participants is authorized to leave the meeting. The third excerpt shows instead the double orientation – to the meeting and to the call – of the person answering the call that breaks into the meeting. We return to the same data in order to deal with a specular, practical, interactional problem: how can the return to the online meeting be accomplished by a participant who has previously been busy talking on the phone?

5.1. Re-entering the meeting

We left excerpt no.1 at the point when Mareike stood up and walked away from the screen in order to make the telephone call. The rest of the participants engaged in small talk, and another participant joined the group and greeted everybody (the first on the right in fig. 14). After welcoming him, the moderator (MOD, the first on the left) then explained once again that the group was still waiting for the last participant and went through part of the agenda for the day. In the meantime, Mareike (MAR, the second from the right) appeared on the screen. She sat down in her chair, still talking on the phone, orienting her body to the call and not making herself available for the meeting.



Fig. 14

The moderator is presenting the day's agenda, reading it on a sheet of paper in front of her and not looking at the video screen (fig. 15).

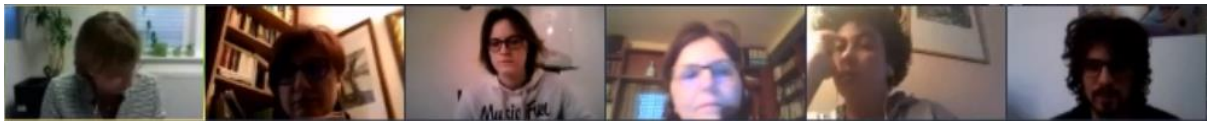


Fig. 15

In the meantime, Mareike leaves the phone, takes the earpieces out (left and then right), and then positions herself in front of her screen (fig. 16a, b, c, d).

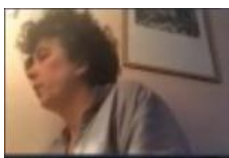


Fig. 16a

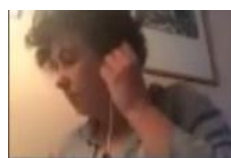


Fig. 16b



Fig. 16c

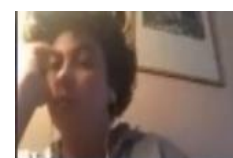


Fig. 16d

With the orientation of her body, Mareike makes herself again available to join the meeting. When she is back in front of her screen, the moderator (MOD, the first to the left) is still reading a sheet of paper, not looking at the screen (fig. 15).

The moderator keeps talking about the agenda. She raises and lowers her head four times, alternating reading with monitoring the screen. The moderator then arrives at the end of the list of issues to cover in the meeting, and at this point she addresses Mareike (fig. 17):



Fig. 17

Excerpt 4: “I left a message on the voicemail”

12 MOD Mareike, #hast du noch
 Mareike have you still
Mareike, have you been able
 mar ((approaches the screen))
 # fig 18 a, b



Fig. 18a



Fig. 18b

13 Antje erreichen können?
 Antje reach can
to reach Antje?

14 MAR äh war leider nur ihre voicemail.
 eh was unfortunately only her voicemail
eh, unfortunately, there was only her voicemail.

15 also ich habe jetzt,
 so I have now
so, I have just,

16 ich hab da was draufgesprochen.
 I have there something recorded
I have recorded something.

17 MOD ja, gut, dann würde ich sagen starten wir
 yes good then would I say start we
yes, good, then I would suggest we start

What is interesting to analyse here is how the return to the video meeting is accomplished by the participant. In this fourth excerpt, Mareike returns to her position in front of her screen, and is visible to all the parties. But this is not exactly the solution to the practical problem of being a ratified participant. It is only when the moderator explicitly addresses Mareike that this process of being re-admitted to the meeting is fully accomplished. The moderator asks Mareike about the outcome of the phone call. Mareike positions herself closer to the screen (fig. 18a, b) and explains that she was unable to talk to Antje because she did not answer. She

was therefore only able to leave a message (lines 14, 15, 16). The moderator gives a token of appreciation (“good”), and only at this point can the meeting begin (line 17).

5.2. Re-entering the meeting, 2

We left Birgit (BIR) standing up and only barely visible on the screen (fig.19, the second screen from the right). In the meantime, the assistant (ASS, first screen on the left) is spending her time checking her emails in order to find other useful information about the missing person, while the moderator (MOD, second screen from the right) explains something about the organization of the day’s agenda, adding that they will start immediately after the return of Birgit.

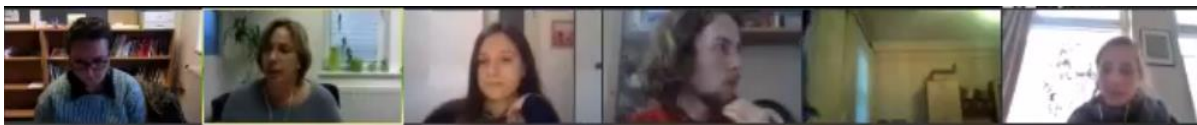


Fig. 19

At this point Birgit returns to her chair and sits down in front of her screen (fig. 20).

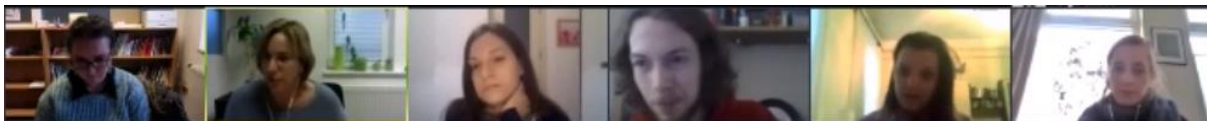


Fig. 20

Excerpt 5: “I couldn’t reach her”

- 9 MOD +ah, Birgit, + da bist du wieder.
 ah Birgit there are you again
ah, Birgit, here you are again.
 +raises the eyebrows+ ((fig 21 a, b))
- 10 BIR ja, ich bin hier.
yes, I am here.
- 11 MOD und?
and?
- 12 RW ja, ich konnte sie nicht erreichen.
 yes I could she not reach
yes, I wasn’t able to reach her.
- 13 MOD okay. dann fang wir an. (...)
 okay then begin we
okay. then let’s start.

Contrary to what we saw happening in the previous case, here Birgit’s arrival in front of her screen – thus making herself again available as a participant in the meeting – is almost

immediately acknowledged by the moderator, who notes Birgit's return with a "change of state token" (Heritage 1984) ("ah", line 9) that she is aware of her presence. The moderator displays her awareness with a sudden change of facial expression (see fig. 21 a, b):



Fig. 21a



Fig. 21b

Having been called by her name and with the announcement that she has returned, Birgit is turned into a ratified participant in the meeting. She is asked to report on the result of her call. With the noting and the verbalization of Birgit's presence, the moderator is doing another action: she is implicitly asking for information about the missing person (line 9). Instead, the answer "yes, I'm here" (*ja, ich bin hier*) (line 10) indicates that Birgit has understood the moderator's previous turn literally. At this point, the moderator asks Birgit what information she has regarding the missing person with a simple turn ("and?", line 11) designed to elicit further information. Birgit's answer – that she could not reach the missing colleague (line 12) – is the signal for the moderator to start the video meeting (13).

5.3. Coming back to the meeting with a report (of the call)

In the sixth episode we return to our third meeting (see paragraph 4.3).



Fig. 22

Anna (ANN, the first on the right) has explained to Lea (on the phone, not in the meeting) how to join the meeting. Anna continues to talk to Lea on her phone while, at the same time, remaining on air at the meeting; the other participants can still overhear what Anna is saying to Lea (although she is speaking in Italian, a language that the other participants cannot understand). But at the same time, the other participants talk among themselves. There is a short sequence related to the bad connection that the two participants sharing the same screen had. Then the moderator (MOD, the screen at the center – she will be addressed in the following excerpt by her name Sarah) answers a question regarding the locations of the moderator's and the assistant's offices in the building. In the meantime, Anna is about to end her call with Lea: first, she plugs the earpiece into her right ear (fig. 23a), says the last word

to Lea on the cellphone (fig. 23b), puts the cellphone away (fig. 23c), plugs the earpiece into her left ear, looking at the camera (fig. 23d).

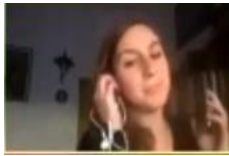


Fig. 23a

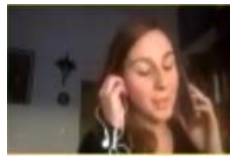


Fig. 23b

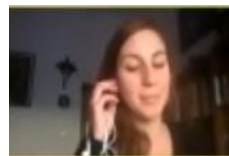


Fig. 23c

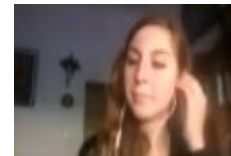


Fig. 23d

A sequence has just ended in which the moderator has answered an inquiry about whether her office and the assistant's office are close to each other. There is a short pause, which is taken by Anna as an opportunity to start talking. At the same time, the assistant self-selects to speak, and again talks about the position of the moderator's office as compared to her office. Anna's and the assistant's turns overlap:

Excerpt 6: "Lea is coming"

- 12 ANN [Lea kommt.]
 Lea comes
Lea is coming.
- 13 ASS [Sarah ist in diese richtung.]
Sarah is in this direction.
- 14 MOD ja bei mir ist +die: +
yes for me is this
 +laughing and pointing to her left+
- 15 aber jetzt seh ich euch gut Klara.=
 but now see I you good Klara
but now I see you clearly Klara.=
- 16 =danke, Anna, dass du das gelöst hast.
 thank Anna that you it resolved have
=thank you Anna that you have solved it.
- 17 das ist super.
this is great.
- 18 ANN danke.
thank you.
 ((softly laughs))
- 19 MOD dann sind wir gleich komplett. sehr schön.
 then are we soon complete very nice
then we will be complete. very nice.
- 20 ANN sie kommt.
 she comes
she is going to come.

21 MOD sehr schön. ja perfekt. perfekt.
very nice. yes perfect. perfect.

22 (2.0)

23 ANN vielleicht.
maybe.

24 MOD bestimmt. +bestimmt. +
sure. sure.
+softly laughing+

25 ich fang jetzt einfach mal an,
I begin now simply *modal*
now I'm going to start,

26 mit der vorrede.
with the preamble.

Considering that moment as a possible point for turn transition, and assuming that the topic of the location of the offices in the building is concluded, Anna takes her turn to talk (line 12). She announces the result of the phone call by saying that the missing person (Lea) is about to join the meeting. At the same time, the assistant takes her turn, continuing with the previous topic (“Sarah is in that direction”, line 13, pointing to her left the position of Sarah’s, the moderator’s, office, as viewed from her – the assistant’s – actual office). An overlap with Anna’s announcement occurs.

The moderator does not reply to Anna’s announcement, but responds to the assistant’s turn, briefly indicating where for her the assistant’s office is (line 14: “yes, for me it is in this (direction)”, also pointing to her left). After a comment on the state of the actual connection with the participants sharing the same room (the addressed person, Klara, is one of them - line 15), the moderator finally acknowledges Anna’s announcement. Although Anna’s announcement overlapped with the assistant’s turn (lines 12 and 13), she has been heard by the moderator. She is acknowledged only after some preliminary interactional work has been done (positions of the offices; bad connection turned good).

The moderator thanks Anna for having resolved the problem (line 16), followed by a sign of appreciation (“that’s great”, line 17). Anna thanks the moderator for the appreciation (line 18). Now the problem seems to be near to a solution: the missing person is supposed to be arriving soon, and the meeting will be able to start with the presence of all the necessary participants. The moderator signals her appreciation that the meeting may start soon (line 19), and Anna repeats her announcement that the missing person is about to arrive (line 20).

Again the moderator shows signs of appreciation (line 21), to which Anna replies with a joke (line 23), introducing an element of uncertainty regarding the fact that maybe the missing person said that she would appear but in the end will not. After acknowledging the joke (line 24), the moderator begins the meeting with some introductory remarks (lines 25-26).

6. Conclusion

The article has shown the sequences emerging in a video meeting when the participants collaborated in order to deal with the problem of a missing person. We have seen how an announcement issued by the moderator could recruit assistance and elicit an offer of help from a participant, who offered to call the missing participant; ringing someone is at odds with participating in the meeting. The participant left the meeting in order to take parallel action. We have focused on how disengagement from the meeting and re-entry to the meeting are accomplished by the participants, and the role of the chairperson on these occasions. In the three cases we have examined, two parallel courses of action proceeded: the participants had to tackle the challenges presented by being and participating in a virtual space, and they had to coordinate with others their leaving and entry into different interactional spaces (Mondada 2009).

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