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Multimodal communication and online  
negotiation: An ethnomethodological study of  
leadership and decision-making strategies in  
video-mediated ensembles

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MASTER THESIS IN LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION COACHING

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## Abstract

Human interaction is complicated and no formulaic procedure can help determine the underlying message of an interlocutor during a social exchange. As soon as March 2020 hit, the vast majority of our social world went online which convinced individuals to shift to videoconferencing tools for their daily lives. Yet, in comparison to face-to-face interaction, video-mediated communication differs somewhat to more traditional face-to-face compositions which raises questions about how online situations affect things like decision-making and leadership which are consequential to businesses, education and other domains. To find answers, this study employs Multimodal Interaction Analysis (MIA) as a methodological framework as well as visual transcription conventions to show how individuals make decisions and reach consensus in real-time through multiple modes of communication. The results suggest that leadership is something that is enacted ‘in-the-moment’ through communicative strategies. More specifically, leadership is not an individual accomplishment but is enacted fluidly by accumulating information from teammates, reporting facts to implicitly ask for help, assigning tasks to accomplish a goal and disagreeing with interlocutors to prevent confusion. Thus, leadership and decision-making are highly dynamic and social actors exercise them democratically in their accomplishment of goal-oriented tasks.

**Keywords:** Ethnomethodology, Decision-making, Leadership, Multimodal Interaction Analysis, Videoconferencing

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# 1 Introduction

Due to the spread of COVID-19, the vast majority of the world's face-to-face interactions went online. Statistics show that before the pandemic, 17% of the employees in the US worked remotely while this number increased to 44% after the spread of the virus (Mlitz, 2021). The outbreak of the disease dramatically shifted activities such as meeting family and friends, teaching/participating in classes and even having recreation to the online world following the restrictions imposed on face-to-face meetups as well as enforcement of social distancing. Of course, telecommunication technologies were active before the pandemic. People employed them to chat with each other but they were used mostly because it was not feasible or inefficient to run the meeting in person.

One of the primary domains where online platforms were not utilized as predominately as today was business. Businesses might have used telecommunicating technologies for international meetings with their branches overseas, but usual day-to-day communication was mostly done at the offices in person. Yet, corona measures forced the majority of meetings to go online.

In general, social interaction is a complicated phenomenon given the fact that sentential meaning does not always equate with the true intentions of a speaker. As a result, individuals have to constantly make inferences about what their interlocutor means based on context. This suggests that interlocutors draw upon non-linguistic and paralinguistic information to determine speaker-meaning (Birner, 2012).

In face-to-face interactions, people can draw upon multiple modes of communication (gesture, posture, gaze, etc.) to help determining speaker-meaning. However, during interactions through video-conferencing software, some of the visual access to other modes of communication or the physical context of the interlocutors may be distorted or not in view. For example, they may not see hand gestures in full.

This poses a number of problems to the interaction between group members. During actual meetings, people have access to different audiovisual resources, can utilize their posture, proxemics and many other modes without worrying about whether or not they are seen in the computer screens (Den-

stadli & Gripsrud, 2010; Fulk & Collins-Jarvis, 2001), but online environment imposes restrictions on how people interact with each other. As stated by Kiesler and Sproull (1992), “Not just the physical aspects of meetings change with technology. The dynamics of group decision making differ from those of face-to-face meetings” (p. 97).

Given the fact that the communicative situation is dramatically altered when we introduce the medium of videoconferencing software, questions arise regarding precisely what impacts might be on the day-to-day task in people’s lives and their occupations. One of the most important tasks that people do daily, is making decisions. Usually, the corporate structure require people to make decisions collaboratively and the participation of the team can be influential. It is normal for the team to have ideas and share their insights with the group. To accomplish things effectively in team organizations, there needs to be some sort of protocol, process and workflow. Often times decision making occurs through interaction and the implementation of these decisions is consequential for the business. However, it is still not quite clear how decisions are made when interaction is mediated with videoconferencing technology.

In cultures with high power distance between employers and employees, the common conceptualization is that there is an officer known as the manager, CEO, or the boss, who manages the communication of the whole organization and employees have little influence in the decision-making processes. At many organizations, management is the power control over assets. Some scholars believe that the result of meetings with managers are mostly predictable because those with more organizational power and authority would be the most influential people to make decisions, i.e., “Managers speak more than subordinates; men speak more than women; the person at the head of the table speaks more than others...we can predict the decision just by knowing who dominates the discussion” (Kiesler & Sproull, 1992, p. 96).

In contrast, it is believed that in countries such as the Netherlands with minimum power distance between leaders and employees, leadership and decision-making are highly dependent on the interaction between all parties which is consequential for the entire organization. Individuals have equal chance to represent their thoughts and engage in an egalitarian sort of interaction (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009).



The new circumstances regarding online visitation, decision-making and leadership in groups, raise two fundamental questions:

1. How do people exercise leadership in non-hierarchical settings where interaction is mediated by videoconferencing tools?
2. What are the different strategies that individuals employ in video-mediated interactions that help them make decisions collectively?

Hence, the aim of this study is to look into the tactics and strategies that online users participate in a videoconference, particularly using Skype. It tries to figure out the implicit and explicit leadership strategies opted for in moments of collective online decision-making; in other words, it examines what exactly happens “in and through” (p. 6) video-mediated conversations (Harper et al., 2019).

In order to determine how leadership is enacted via collective decision-making, it is pivotal to first understand that communication in groups is highly complex and intertwined. To delve into how leadership work exactly occurs, it is necessary to focus on naturally occurring interactions using a deductive, qualitative and multimodal methodology which allows for teasing apart the intricacies of social interaction. Hence, the collected data from dyadic conferences will be analyzed using the insights of Multimodal Inter(action) Analysis (MIA) and visual transcription conventions. Furthermore, findings will be discussed with an eye on the theoretical and practical implications. Finally, suggestions will be provided for future research.

Understanding how leadership is enacted will help better understand how negotiation takes place and how roles are shaped and reshaped between individuals during interactions. It also helps us recognize what strategies facilitate a collective idea. Leadership and decision-making are central concepts with which many individuals and organizations deal on a daily basis. However, few studies have been dedicated to investigate how collective decision-making is managed in online gatherings. As the world is facing a change in communication and it is moving toward online interaction, it seems important to investigate how people interact in such an environment.

## 2 Literature Review

In the following, a background will be provided on interactional pragmatics and its importance for studies of human interaction. After that an overview of video-mediated interaction and the use of online platforms will be given. Then previous works on decision-making, leadership and disagreement as a leadership strategy will be discussed briefly.

### 2.1 Interactional Pragmatics

As stated by Goffman (1974), interaction involves multiple layers of psychological and societal aspects including utterances and the situation where the interaction develops. Conversation analysis (CA) as the study of the organization of natural social talk, developed out of the sociolinguistic principles of social interaction. It focuses on vocal and aural elements of an exchange as well as the structure of the interactions, such as turn-taking, sequential organization, repair organization, and action formation. Turn-taking can be defined as the procedure by which individuals manage conversation by allocating turns to each other. This is closely tied to sequential organization; steps by which interlocutors create an order using patterns and sequences of speech. Repair organization, or the act of modifying speech when communication breaks down, and action formation, as the meaning of words that cause individuals to perform action, are other key elements of structural elements that CA takes into account (Jefferson, 1984; Schegloff, 1968). CA made scientists aware of the values of “spoken discourse” (p. 3), however, online and face-to-face interactions include verbal and non-verbal aspects which necessitates looking at interactional pragmatics (D’hondt et al., 2009).

Interactional pragmatics complements the understanding of human interaction by looking at non-verbals as well, i.e., in addition to studying language at sentential level, it goes beyond vocal/aural features of exchanges and focuses on “non-denotational” (p. 3) parameters of language. It is necessary to go beyond sentential and conversational layers because the messages are delivered both verbally and non-verbally. One can argue that the study of human communication is best comprehended with an eye on a multitude of interactional contexts as well as communicative modes (D’hondt et al., 2009).

The importance of interactional pragmatics for this particular study goes even further; it lies in the fact that interaction is complicated when it is not done face-to-face and studying only the spoken aspects of video-mediated communication may not be sufficient to understand the pragmatic values of the conversation, as people's access to different visual fields in video-mediated environments may differ.

## 2.2 Video-mediated Interaction

Videoconferencing (also known as audioconferencing or teleconferencing) was initially used for business purposes when members of organizations opted for distance meeting instead of face-to-face conversations. It consists of a combination of telephone conversations coupled with webcams to optimize the efficiency of work-related matters (Heckscher, 1994). Shortly after its introduction, academic researchers became interested in how videoconferencing may affect communication (Denstadli et al., 2012).

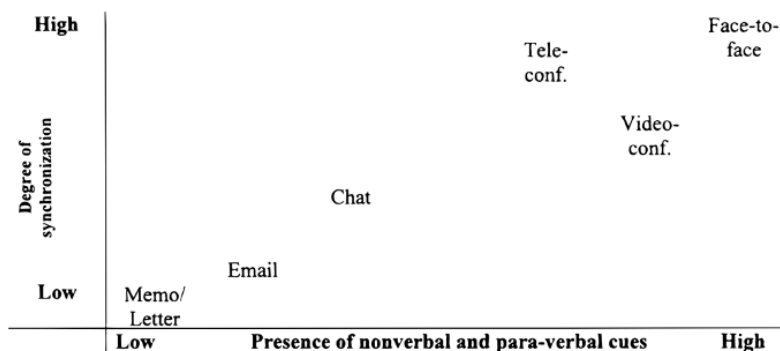
The studies on video-mediated communication and its comparison with face-to-face or audio-mediated interactions have been vast but there seems to be a lack of consistency in results. On the one hand, some scholars have articulated that for the purpose of completing organizational activities, face-to-face interactions end in less ambiguous outcomes and online group work does not provide as transparent and effective conversations as do offline platforms (Denstadli et al., 2012). Furthermore, videoconferencing does not permit individuals to observe marginal aspects of communication which may indicate that face-to-face channel is perhaps the least ambiguous medium (Baltes et al., 2002; Dubrovsky et al., 1991; O'Neill et al., 2016). On the other hand, others believe that there is no specific difference in the quality of delivered messages between the two formats. Computer-mediated meetings have proved to be a suitable match for offering solutions during problem-solving tasks (Arunachalam, 1991; Daly, 1993; Straus & McGrath, 1994).

The difference in views in regard to messages conveyed during video-mediated sessions is important because the past decades witnessed a tremendous revolution in human communication tools and methods; from pen and paper, letters, memos and in-person meetings to smartphones, emails, online chats and videoconferences.

Isaacs and Tang (1994) compared phone conversations with videoconferences as two separate fashions of two-way communication. They conducted a research on five individuals who had worked with each other face-to-face before and were seated in separate buildings for the purpose of videoconferencing. The participants engaged in telephone calls and video sessions to interact with each other. Following the analysis of six videotaped and audio recorded sessions, they found that when visual stimuli are present, interlocutors demonstrated a higher tendency to mutual understanding, showed higher response prediction, expanded their voiced descriptions, better handled turn-taking and moments of silence, and gave better non-verbal information. It seems that interactions that are mediated by video are more understandable than those accompanied with voice only. Since we are witnessing a universal inclination to videoconferences, especially for business purposes, and colleagues barely use landlines for a group discussion, studying interaction in video-mediated situation becomes important. This can show how individuals tackle issues such as decision-making, leadership and online negotiation.

**Figure 1**

*Placement of six communications media according to degree of synchronization (simultaneity) of communication and degree of nonverbal and paraverbal cues present.*



In another study, Baltes et al. (2002) offered a holistic paradigm on verbal and non-verbal styles of communication which showed the place of different methods of exchanging messages in computer-mediated and face-to-face environment on a descriptive diagram (Figure 1). Their pattern incorporated

“memos and letters, synchronous and asynchronous text-based communication (namely online chats and emails), teleconferencing, videoconferencing, and face-to-face interaction” (p. 158-159). They found that compared to face-to-face interaction, video-mediated interaction can decrease effectiveness and satisfaction rate between participants and increase the time needed to complete a task and make decisions. However, the expansion of technology, increase in speed of communication, spread of COVID-19, and many other factors have made organizations move to online meetings to carry out daily tasks. Even though the above study emphasizes the effectiveness of face-to-face interaction, we can see people shifting to online platforms such as Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and many others to engage in decision-making sessions. This makes it necessary to investigate how individuals behave in such meetings and manage the tasks therein.

The above two studies centered on conveyance of messages in spoken and written media without noticing other communicative modes. As stated earlier, our communication is not bound to talk or writing but is done multimodally. Therefore, recent academic attention has been centered on other communicative modes such as proxemics, gaze, posture, object handling, etc. as well as intercultural aspects of interactants to shed light upon how unspoken messages and cultural issues can influence interaction, especially in online environments.

Norris and Pirini (2017) investigated video-mediated conferences from a multimodal perspective with a focus on communicating knowledge, coordinating attention and conveying disagreement. They found that expression of these interactive behavior is not restricted to verbal language only, but are always performed multimodally. Using videoconferencing tools, they claimed that messages may be conveyed quicker via alterations in gaze, gesture, posture and how objects are handled compared to when participants rely on spoken language. Following their findings, it can be said that there may be other actions that are communicated non-verbally. Furthermore, they asserted that “disagreements may be discouraged or encouraged depending on the cultural setting” (p. 31) but they did not specify how this can be viewed differently, for example between eastern and western cultures, therefore, one part of the present study will be dedicated to discussing the differences in disagreement styles amongst Farsi and English speakers as a leadership strategy that facilitates decision-making in video-mediated interactions.

In a more recent study about online negotiation and construction of common ground therein, Norris and Geenen (2021) investigated a video call between a Serbian native speaker and a monolingual New Zealand English speaker. They investigated if culture determines how individuals negotiate their points to reach mutual agreement. They found that the cultural background of online parties may play a role in the formation of misunderstandings but its impact on seeing different practices is not significant compared to methods that individuals employ to complete a task. They mentioned that it is not the cultural differences that affect video-mediated communication but the fact that every person may take a separate route to solve a problem and they may become unaware of each other’s attention and awareness. However, the participants in the study had not met before but, in more realistic situations where online interlocutors should make decisions, they usually have been acquainted so as to be able to tackle subjects more realistically. Also, they did not explicate how the conflicts that arise between individuals were resolved and what strategies they adapted to complete the tasks.

Video-mediated interaction has been viewed with a focus on collaboration using online software. Geenen et al. (2021) investigated the communicative modes employed in videoconferences and analyzed lower-level and higher-level actions when participants were given a scenario to find a dining place together. Using visual transcription conventions, they probed into layout, posture, gesture, object handling, gaze, head movement, facial expression, and spoken language to determine the place of each higher-level action on the continuum of attention and awareness. They indicated that even though online participants may attempt to “do the same thing” together, they do not necessarily do the same thing together. In other words, the attention and awareness of individuals during online sessions fluctuate from person to person and non-verbals contain numerous messages that are unspoken in the mode of spoken language. They looked into how a group of people collaborate to make decisions in an online meeting which is one focus of the present study but the strategies that helped them come up with the decisions were not targeted.

The above review shows that today, we are being exposed to the inevitable role of video-mediated communication which is replete with multimodal interactions. In addition to home use, organizations are internalizing the transition from face-to-face meetups to online calls for a variety of reasons. A consider-

able point in this regard is that all the organizations and the people therein need to interact with teammates to discuss ideas and make decisions together which makes the importance of online decision-making more apparent.

## 2.3 Decision-making and Consensus

Herrera-Viedma et al. (2017) defined consensus as “an accessible resolution that a decision maker can support, even if it is not his/her favorite one” (p. 259). Game theory as one of the core theories in decision-making postulates that a game is “any interaction between multiple people in which each player’s payoff is affected by the decisions of others”. It means that almost any interaction made between participants can be analyzed using the principles of game theory in order to determine the roles and significance of players. Game theory has some tenets and fundamentals. First, each game requires more than one player to be played which indicates the relevance of team-work and collaboration. Second, each player should interact with other ones so that the game moves on and the communication takes place. Third, the game should have an outcome, purpose, and objective. Fourth, game players must have rationality at the outset of the game and remain rational throughout the game. Finally, each player plays based on her/his personal self-interest and there is no outside pressure imposed on any stakeholder (Nash et al., 1950). Following this description, a Skype videoconference comprised of dyads of participants can form a game. Each person has an interlocutor with whom s/he should interact, they are logical individuals with their personal idiosyncrasies, there is freedom in making calls and a purposeful conclusion is drawn after each interaction. During online interactions, participants gather together to make decisions and reach a consensus but it is crucial to pay attention to the similarities and differences between face-to-face and online decision-making to grasp a better understanding of how individuals act in each environment.

Kiesler and Sproull (1992) investigated the dynamism of decision-making in computer-mediated and face-to-face sessions and studied factors such as time and participation to determine the differences therein. They described the advantages and disadvantages of each medium and suggested that decisions made through videoconferencing technologies take four times more compared to person-to-person settings. In other words, online meetings prove more time-

consuming than offline meetings. They added that no matter the means and type of interaction (online vs. offline), decisions are always affected by those who first approach the problem and/or offer a solution. They asserted that in-person situations do not leave much room for other participants to share their voice because of social variables such as prestige and status. However, today we are facing a shift from one-sided decision-making favored by more powerful officials to the inclusion of multiple viewpoints in businesses and many other areas. There seems to be a place to investigate how decisions are made where there is no strict hierarchy and power distance between decision makers.

Good decisions can be the result of shared understanding and consensus between the group members. Pirini and Geenen (2018) indicated that a blend of posture and gaze is necessary for the establishment of “shared knowledge” even though there are no set patterns for the undertaking of either of these communicative modes in action. After analyzing interactions, they concluded that consensus can be reached when different modes are at the foreground of the attention and awareness spectrum of social actors; i.e., interactants “prioritize” their actions when they engage in collaborative decision-making tasks. They added that collaborative gaze distribution can signify agreement between participants before they speak it out. This may suggest that there is room for studying online interactions. One of the most influential modes through which decision-making is facilitated is spoken language.

Reaching consensus in human interaction is an activity practiced on a daily basis. Geenen and Pirini (2020), defined “intersubjectivity” (p. 495), as the point where interactants reach a collective understanding regarding a topic of interest using the embodied mode of spoken language. Considering the action in question which is mediated through cultural tools such as a computer screen, it can be said that the act of online collective decision-making is a multimodal interaction which embeds intersubjectivity. In order for interactants to hear what other participants say, see their hand and body movements, gaze distribution, etc. it is necessary to rely on a stable material alignment.

The first tier of intersubjectivity involves proxemics between social actors and cultural tools, mainly furniture and layout. This usage makes the establishment of the relationship between participants more durable and consistent, therefore, making decisions in virtuality requires participants to rely on long-



lasting modes. Most of the times, online interactants hold conversations seated with a stable layout. The second tier involves actions which are consistent during interaction but are constantly redirected, redistributed and/or altered by individuals such as posture. One can notice moments when participants want to deal with tasks and their postural orientations fluctuate regularly. The third tier embeds the most ephemeral modes such as verbal language, gaze and gesture (Pirini, 2016). It appears that all of the communicative modes work hand-in-hand to assist individuals to have collective interactions but cultural and social norms may not allow stakeholders to contribute to the organizational processes equally.

Research has shown that in cultures where hierarchy is an indispensable part of the organization, decision-making is carried out following the ideas of high-ranked agents while employees with lower hierarchical positions would tend to have minimum voice. In cultures such as Iran, it is common that during business sessions, many stakeholders participate in organizational discussions but the final decision may not represent the synthesis of what everyone discussed. As stated by Karami and Dubinsky (2019): “Strategy formation and decision making in Iranian firms instantiate a political system in which strategies reflect the interests of the most powerful groups in the organization—mainly the founder and his/her family” (p. 13). In contrast, in egalitarian cultures such as the Netherlands, the output of a social activity is usually in line with thoughts and ideas of the whole group (Glazer & Karpati, 2014). Based on these two distinct decision-making methods from two distinct cultures, one might wonder how different decision-making and collaboration in video-mediated sessions would be from face-to-face interaction and how leadership can influence the activities of the interlocutors.

## 2.4 Leadership

Rauch and Behling (1984) defined leadership as “the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement”. Through leadership, achievement of group members is eased and they can work toward a unified goal (Summerfield, 2014). Another definition which seems to be slightly different is offered by Silva (2016) who believed that there is a leader-follower binary in the interaction. Giving an example from the leadership situation in World War II when a leader was appointed following

the consent of people and context of the time, he proposed that leadership is “the process of interactive influence that occurs when, in a given context, some people accept someone as their leader to achieve common goals” (p. 4). But he based this definition on an example about the time of war and peace when a leader leads a group of people. However, his definition implies that people appoint leaders explicitly while there seems to be a place to investigate how leadership is exercised in non-hierarchical situations in current time.

A study by Zhu et al. (2012) on online collaboration showed that leadership is exercised collectively and is not limited to people with specific positions and/or privileges. They proposed the term “shared leadership” (p. 407) to refer to the establishment of leader role with the help of all the contributors. They studied various leadership types such as transactional, aversive, directive and person-focused and discussed how leadership influences the participation of individuals in Wikipedia editing suggestions. Zhu et al. (2012) concluded that individuals do not have to have an official leader role to be regarded as leader or influence the decisions of the group, rather, they contribute to the completion of tasks equally regardless of corporate positions. This viewpoint seems to be in contrast with the leader-follower perspective that Silva (2016) envisioned. The controversy in results, calls for a thorough investigation of the interactions between people to see how close today’s leadership is with these two definitions.

Lord and Dinh (2014) proposed four principles of leadership in industrial, organizational and economical domains that contain elements from Zhu et al. (2012) and Silva (2016). These principles allow us to understand how dynamic decision-making is and how the stakeholders collaborate with each other. So, they cast a selective glance on the evaluation of leadership studies done in 40 years and pointed out the following:

First, leadership is a concept co-constructed with reciprocal orientations between all the individuals in a group who collectively influence a process. This principle highlights the importance of teamwork, interactivity and the fact that leadership is not a one-sided process; in contrast, it incorporates what all the included social parties bring to the table of social act. Leadership is rather a collaborative management task that incorporates all the microlevel interactions between stakeholders, includes role shift of all parties and not the job of a boss who bosses around.

Second, the way individuals process information in an environment has effects on how the influence of leaders and members is comprehended and the concept of leadership is constructed in a society. Understanding information processing helps us expand our vision on the indirect effects of leadership and the performance of individuals. One benefit of information processing perspectives is that we can gather data from different sources to provide insights regarding behavior and performance of the team. The information can be analyzed and the performance of all members would be regarded. This can highlight positive and negative points of a collective resolution and help the team resolve the necessary points.

Third, leader's role is indirectly tied to the objective and performance of the group. It means that the effect that a leader has is often the result of what team members perform together but not what a leader commands. According to this principle, we do not exactly know what true leaders do that help the performance of the group. Also, the details in performance of the performers are not clear either. This calls for an attempt to explore what strategies individuals utilize that help them exercise leadership in a group.

Finally, Lord and Dinh (2014) proposed that leadership in actuality is carried out by looking at the past and synthesize the experiences from before in order to predict the future. However, this may not give accurate results because studying the incidents that have happened before may not clearly indicate what will happen in the future. Looking at the past helps people see what others have done when facing similar problems and helps them reduce their anxiety but it may reduce creativity and looking at available options.

Understanding how these principles can be applied to online ensembles gives us a framework to discuss decision-making and leadership from another angle. We can see how leadership is exercised or how the exchanged information affect the activities and direction of the group in total. Reaching a consensus and making a decision is not always accompanied by agreement of all members. There are many occasions where stakeholders do not share similar ideas and therefore, reach a state of conflict which makes it important to investigate how these moments are dealt with in online meetings, where certain cues may be lost.

## 2.5 Disagreement and Leadership

In a study on group decision-making, Torrance (1957) investigated disagreement and its effect on the performance of individuals. He proposed two central arguments regarding disagreement in task-oriented situations. First, disagreement decreases misunderstanding between group members and communication is hindered when an individual does not express her/his disapproval to teammates appropriately. He reported an example about a group of equipment technicians who failed to communicate disagreement in a life-threatening situation which resulted in serious damage of 7 to 8 members. Second, he bluntly articulated that “decision makers need to accept the fact that task-oriented disagreement is almost always good” (p. 317). Following this assertion, one can say that disagreement as a leadership strategy can heavily influence the decision-making process of a goal-directed group. As videoconferences are replete with interaction and individuals do not always share similar thoughts when they try to make decisions, one issue to investigate is how teammates negate each other’s viewpoints in non-hierarchical settings.

Disagreement, as the subtle art of disapproving a perspective, can take three forms; *mitigated* which is soft, indirect, reluctant and with hedging, *unmitigated* which is direct instant and to the point, and *aggravated* which as the term implies, is accompanied by a higher level of seriousness and aggravation (Ishihara, 2016, p. 287). In essence, disagreement has been identified as a face-threatening act and at times as an impolite behavior (Goffman, 1967) since it can tarnish one’s face or be regarded disrespectful (Brown et al., 1987). However, the expression of disagreement and the degree of its threatening nature is interpreted differently based on the interpersonal relations of interactants and the context of interaction.

In a study on disagreement in start-up companies where participants had no power and authority over one another, Schmitt and Reiter (2019) analyzed the Skype video calls, emails and text messages of a group of colleagues to see how participants handle disagreement and manage conflicts in regard to making decisions on the company name. They identified that disagreement is a dynamic behavior which can be expressed by participants based on the context, interpersonal relations and medium of interaction. They mentioned that participants tend to use mitigated disagreement in asynchronous forms of communication such as emails while they rely on unmitigated or aggregated

disagreement when interacting in video-mediated situations. Schmitt and Reiter (2019) added that in leaderless groups where there is no difference in authority between members, decision-making is influenced by the style of disagreement (Evans et al., 2019). However, their study focused on the analysis of talk using transcription of verbiage but the visual aspects of conversations were not considered when participants expressed their disagreement. So, they did not show materially how other modes are influential in conveying disagreement. In the present study, spoken language as well as other communicative modes will be analyzed to show how participants work through task achievement in online non-hierarchical sessions.

## 2.6 Conclusion

Human communication is complicated when it is done face-to-face since it is not limited to speech and it involves non-verbals as well. Interactional pragmatics facilitates the understanding of this complicated system by looking at meanings beyond talk. Therefore, unspoken messages and non-denotational side of interaction can be covered by interactional pragmatics (D'hondt et al., 2009). However, the introduction of videoconferencing technology and its prevalence in today's business has made communication even more complicated as the dynamics of online and offline conversation are different. Still, technology has made the majority of people move to online platforms which makes it necessary to study video-mediated interactions (Baltes et al., 2002; Denstadli et al., 2012; Isaacs & Tang, 1994).

As there are different accesses to different visual fields in video-mediated settings and as interaction involves both verbals and non-verbals, researchers have recently focused on multimodality of interaction in videoconferences. For example, Isaacs and Tang (1994) pointed to the advantages of video-mediated meetings over audio-only talks and mentioned that individuals have more comprehensible interactions when they can see in addition to hear. However, Baltes et al. (2002) suggested that face-to-face compositions provide the most clear interactions in multi-party organizational tasks but we are witnessing a speedy shift from offline encounters to online conferences.

Furthermore, Norris and Pirini (2017) emphasized that online media are prevalent, but it is possible that participants neglect some of the commu-

nicative modes therein. They studied the unspoken aspects of interaction and discussed that communication of knowledge, coordination of attention and conveyance of disagreement can take place quicker through non-verbal modes. They pointed to the paucity of research in disagreement between cultures but did not focus on how disagreement is treated in online settings between people with different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, Geenen and Pirini (2020) discussed intersubjectivity and pointed to the communicative modes such as proxemics, posture, gaze, spoken language and gesture which help individuals reach a collective understanding. Online decision-making was further discussed by Geenen et al. (2021) who showed that the attention and awareness of participants in videoconferences do not always converge when they collaborate and solve problems.

Collaboration and problems-solving are key elements in group decision-making tasks and leadership, especially in organizational settings. Authors such as Kiesler and Sproull (1992) believed that decisions are always affected by agents with higher official ranks while other company stakeholders may not equally be included. However, this viewpoint is being challenged today and it is worth to study who makes decisions in online settings and how they do it since scientists such as Zhu et al. (2012) have proposed terms such as “shared leadership” which incorporates visions from all stakeholders of a gathering. As leadership is the process of influencing the activities of parties to reach a goal (Summerfield, 2014), it is worth seeing if strategies that online users adopt to make decisions, have similarities with the leadership principles that Lord and Dinh (2014) proposed and see if they influence the behavior of the team and facilitate collaboration.

An important study regarding decision-making and collaboration was done by Pirini and Geenen (2018). They showed how gaze convergence in a multiparty interaction signals agreement around a decision before articulating words. However, the data set involved face-to-face multiparty interactions involving a building task with very specific rules. First, their findings may not apply to online, video-mediated interactions as participants are not in the same time-place and thus, cannot all look in the same direction about a spatial problem because they can only look at each other. Additionally, the seating of participants and strict organization of the task may have had influence on the behavior of participants. Roles were also explicitly distributed amongst members. It is important to look at this consensus reaching behavior

multimodally but in non-hierarchical groups in a more naturalistic setting and also with the added complication of a video-mediated interaction.

## **3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Participants**

The data was collected from a corpus comprising four dyads. The participants in these dyads were selected in a way to form a bilingual dataset, i.e., people who speak two distinct languages; English and Farsi (also known as Persian). They either lived in the Netherlands or Iran. This was done purposefully to investigate the differences in communication style of individuals with two different cultural and linguistic background. They were all recruited from the personal network of the researcher and participants of each dyad knew each other as friends. English speakers were approximately at C1-C2 level of CEFR with a variety of native languages including German, Spanish, Romanian and Armenian. Nine people participated in the study and their age ranged between 22 to 36. One dyad comprised of three participants as a sample for online meetings with more than two people, the other dyads comprised of two individuals. Fictitious names were used to represent participants throughout the study.

### **3.2 Procedure**

First, potential participants were contacted to make sure they were willing and accessible to contribute to the study. Before starting the task, each participant was informed of the aim and procedure of the study using a participant information sheet, see Appendix A. After that, each participant was given verbal explanation, description and demonstration of how to record their screen. This was followed by pilot testing for a short clip to ensure the participants had learned how to proceed. However, not all participants needed the same amount of explanation because some already knew how to work with screen-recording software. Mainly, Open Broadcaster Software (OBS) was used as the main screen-recording application to save the sessions as well as Skype in-built recorder.

Second, a general scenario with a daily topic was distributed to participants. The scenario was about a two-week trip to Europe and the participants were asked to choose between four countries (Norway, Sweden, Belgium, France) to travel to with a defined budget. The budget was more for participants who did the task from Iran to make it more realistic and feasible for them. The ultimate goal of the scenario was to discuss the country or countries they wished to travel to with their teammate and decide on the itinerary including time of travel, accommodation type, leisure, and/or relevant activities that they could manage to do with the budget. The scenario was sent thirty minutes before the meeting to let participants know what they were going to talk about together. Each meeting took approximately between 35-50 minutes depending on the depth and length of the discussion between peers.

Finally, Skype video calls were made in each dyad. The researcher recorded the entire meeting and asked each participant to send the recorded files at the end of each meeting for further analysis. Dyad 1 and Dyad 2 constituted Persian participants and Dyad 3 and Dyad 4 were formed by English-speaking participants.

After data collection, prominent moments of decision-making and leadership strategies were highlighted and the related moments were trimmed to focus on excerpts in more detail. Then, significant moments were verbally and visually transcribed to look into the interactions. For dyads with Farsi speakers, the researcher translated the conversations to English. For the transcription of verbiage, see Appendix B.

### **3.3 Method**

In the present study, Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA) was applied as the fundamental methodological framework which provides the unit of analysis as well as lower and higher level actions as methodological tools (Norris, 2004). MIA takes mediated action as the unit of analysis to look at discourse. It provides the analyst with an explicit framework and helps figure how interactants engage in social interaction. In other words, the data were studied following MIA insights to scrutinize communicative modes that occur between social actors in real-time (Geenen, 2017).



The methodology was accompanied by the employment of visual transcription conventions. Spoken words easily evaporate moments after being uttered. This transience makes it necessary to record data from videoconferences to increase the readability and accessibility of information and further analyze bits and pieces transferred between social agents. This is known as the “practice of transcription” (Geenen et al., 2021) which provides analysts with a chance to delve into the topic of interest. It is important to note that during transcription of videoconferences, the analyst transcribes lower-level actions, not modes in isolation. That is, taking the smallest pragmatic meaning unit as a scale to transcribe the interaction.

Visual transcription conventions include several steps, as specified by Geenen (2020). First is the collection of data. This can be done by devices such as camera, webcam, or the like which capture physical aspects of participants and microphones which record audio. Second, it is necessary to describe the data and focus on the higher-level actions of interest. Third, certain pieces of data which provide answers to research questions should be selected for detailed analysis. Finally, the selected data need to be transcribed using MIA framework.

To employ the visual transcription conventions in this study, all frames were numbered, and moments of interaction were indicated at the top left corner of frames. The spoken words were brought in the middle in a way to show how they were uttered.

### **3.4 Mediated Action**

The notion of mediated action originally comes from Vygotskian Multimodal Mediated Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), later on reformulated in Wertsch’s Mediated Action Theory (Wertsch, 1994, 1998) and Scollon’s Mediated Discourse Theory (Scollon, 1999, 2002) where mediation, particularly language and the mediation of cognition, was the core focus of the attention. The primary argument was that the acquisition of language qualitatively alters human cognition because a cultural tool (language) mediates human thought. The alteration occurs because the thought is not the same prelinguistic and postlinguistic. The mediated action happens when a social actor acts with

or through mediational means or cultural tools (Norris, 2004; Wertsch, 1994, 1998). The mediated action was claimed to be a unit of analysis in mediated discourse analysis, while it is more of a theoretical concept because applying the mediated action as a methodological tool is not as straightforward as it may seem to explicate the relationships regarding agency since they come together in undertaking a mediated action and that is where the notions of mode, higher-level and lower-level actions make a difference. Therefore, as mediated action is a theoretical concept it necessitates a definition for a single unit of analysis to better analyze the interaction (Norris, 2009).

### 3.5 Mode

Mode is a concept that is used to study interaction. Communicative mode, as Norris (2004) argues, is a theoretical notion and it is always and only heuristic. The theoretical notion of mode allows the researcher to break up the interaction into manageable pieces (the modes in the abstract) which facilitates the analysis of social interaction and communication. A fundamental point about the notion of mode is that it is useful theoretically and analytically, however, it does not have any existential reality. In other words, as long as the analyst does not look into the interaction in question, it can be said that pursuing mode in isolation is a pointless struggle. Hence, defining mode outside of actual phenomena would not provide any value to the understanding of interactions (Norris, 2013).

The concept of mode becomes valuable when the goal is to understand the meaning potential behind what is being carried out by a social agent, i.e., the pragmatic values inherent in an action. Mode is, thus, an analytical tool used to piece apart certain components embedded in different activities to grasp a deeper understanding of the interaction. The theorization of mode as a system of mediated action postulates that regularities in a mode reside on a continuum somewhere between the social actor and the mediational means acknowledging that mediational means are always multiple. The regularities existent in a communicative mode are closer towards the mediational means rather than to the individual who carries out the action (Norris, 2009).

### 3.6 Lower-level and Higher-level Action

Norris (2004) defines lower-level action as the smallest interactional meaning unit of any communicative mode. It is a methodological tool which allows the researcher to maintain a single unit of analysis and inspect communicative modes simultaneously. The application of lower-level action is palpable for each and every communicative mode since it defines the smallest pragmatic unit of analysis. Considering the mode of videoconferencing, for instance, a number of lower-level actions cooperate to form a mode. For example, postural reorientations shape the mode of posture the way a person holds a pen or any other object forms the strings of the mode of object handling gaze redistributions for any purpose, let's say looking for a piece of information in the internet browser form the mode of gaze and so forth.

A higher-level action can be conceptualized as an activity which has a socially constituted and recognizable beginning and ending (Norris, 2004, 2009). It is a methodological tool employed to define the focus of analysis to a particular activity type. It is formed by various lower-level actions and it is the job of the analyst to analyze what lower-level actions have constructed a higher-level action (Norris, 2004, 2011). As an example, if we consider an online meeting a higher-level action, the commencement of the virtual call being its start and pushing the red button as the endpoint of this higher-level action, gaze, posture, object handling, spoken language and gesture are perhaps the most noticeable modes in forming the higher-level action of videoconferencing. Here, it is the job of the analyst to specify the smallest pragmatic meaning unit the communicative modes.

### 3.7 Modal Density, Continuum of Attention/Awareness

Modal density is composed of modal intensity and modal complexity. The former refers to the degree of intensity that a single mode is being used to carry out a higher-level action; that is using a specific mode intensely, while the latter refers to the number of modes that are being utilized to accomplish a particular higher-level action (Norris, 2009). As can be imagined videoconferencing is dense through complexity since several modes such as spoken (and perhaps written) language, posture, object handling, gaze, gesture, etc. are simultaneously being utilized by social actors.

Human beings are habitual multitaskers in the sense that they are continuously engaged in doing multiple actions at a time. The point to consider here is that the degree of “attention/awareness” (Geenen & Pirini, 2020) fluctuates based on the higher-level action being undertaken by social actors. There exists a continuum where the focus of action may be placed on foreground, midground or background of attention/awareness. Whether an action would be put on either side of this continuum depends on modal density; that is the denser the higher-level action, the closer it would be to the foreground continuum of attention/awareness. For example, talking on the phone is a modally dense action because the mode of spoken language is extremely used and the action of speaking on the phone is at the foreground of attention/awareness. However, if during the conversation you realize you need to write something down, the act of looking for a tool to do the writing goes to the foreground of attention/awareness and speaking on the phone goes to the midground of this continuum. This shift does not indicate that the participants have terminated the initial mediated action, but it manifests the changes on the continuum of attention/awareness.

## 4 Analysis

This section features the analysis of representative samples from the data set with a focus on ethnographic insights and showcases individual instances of each sample in analytical subsections. Additionally, visual transcription conventions are applied to materially show what the interactions constitute and substantiate the arguments that are made in this thesis.

The analysis focuses on four main strategies which facilitate group decision-making and allow individuals to progress through a task. The strategies are *accumulating information*, *reporting to the interlocutor*, *assigning task*, and *disagreeing with the interlocutor*. Social actors accumulate information to narrow down the available options and help the group to make decisions with a particular focus. Interlocutors may bestow the leadership role on other members by reporting facts to them and ask for assistance implicitly or explicitly. Social actors assign tasks to interactants equally to provide a balance between all members and be fair throughout the process of decision-making

and disagree with each other to stick to a consistent direction and stay focused to the goals. These strategies facilitate group decision-making by limiting alternatives, specifying options, providing help, dividing the workload, and giving redirection.

The following section shows how interlocutors obtain information in order to proceed with the task. The excerpts show that individuals ask a number of questions from their peer to make sure what they think about a process which they have to complete together. It shows that neither of the participants make decisions on her/his own, in contrast, the group move toward a certain point by limiting options and narrowing down a big chunk of information.

## 4.1 Accumulating Information

In non-hierarchical online visitation, leaders tend to obtain information from other parties in order to make better decisions and narrow choices down. This appears to be done to minimize options and be as specific as possible which allows the social actors to move on with the task and finalize a decision. Collecting information can be a two-way process and there is no predefined leader who holds the position throughout interactions.

In the representative data samples analyzed herein, one can notice that some of the patterns recur. The samples indicate how each party can exercise the leadership role by accumulating information. This behavior can be a two-way process; i.e., all members can obtain information from each other during the interaction to make better decisions. Leadership role is thus exercised when accumulating information ends in a specific focus instead of many options. Therefore, after a communicative period, the participants pay attention only to specific options and ignore other ones. This way the process of decision-making is facilitated.

**Dyad 3-Accumulating Information 1** Figure 2 features the activities in Timestamp 02:05-04:40. In this interactive segment group members obtain information from each other and share opinions regarding their trip. Here, both interlocutors know that they should make decisions about four probable countries but they do not know exactly where they should go, how they

should approach the issue and how to minimize their options so as to manage time and complete the task. Thus, P2 asks “Then what do we, what do you” but the sentence is neither clear nor finished (Frame 1). P1 knows that they need to plan an itinerary and this requires detailed planning and meticulous surveying of options. Therefore, she provides her opinion about the options by saying “Ok, I would like to go to Norway or Sweden” and does so before P2 finishes his sentence (Frame 2). It is understandable that P1 is giving her opinion following P2’s question even though that was not a complete question. After the answer, P2 continues narrowing down the topic and asks a follow-up question.

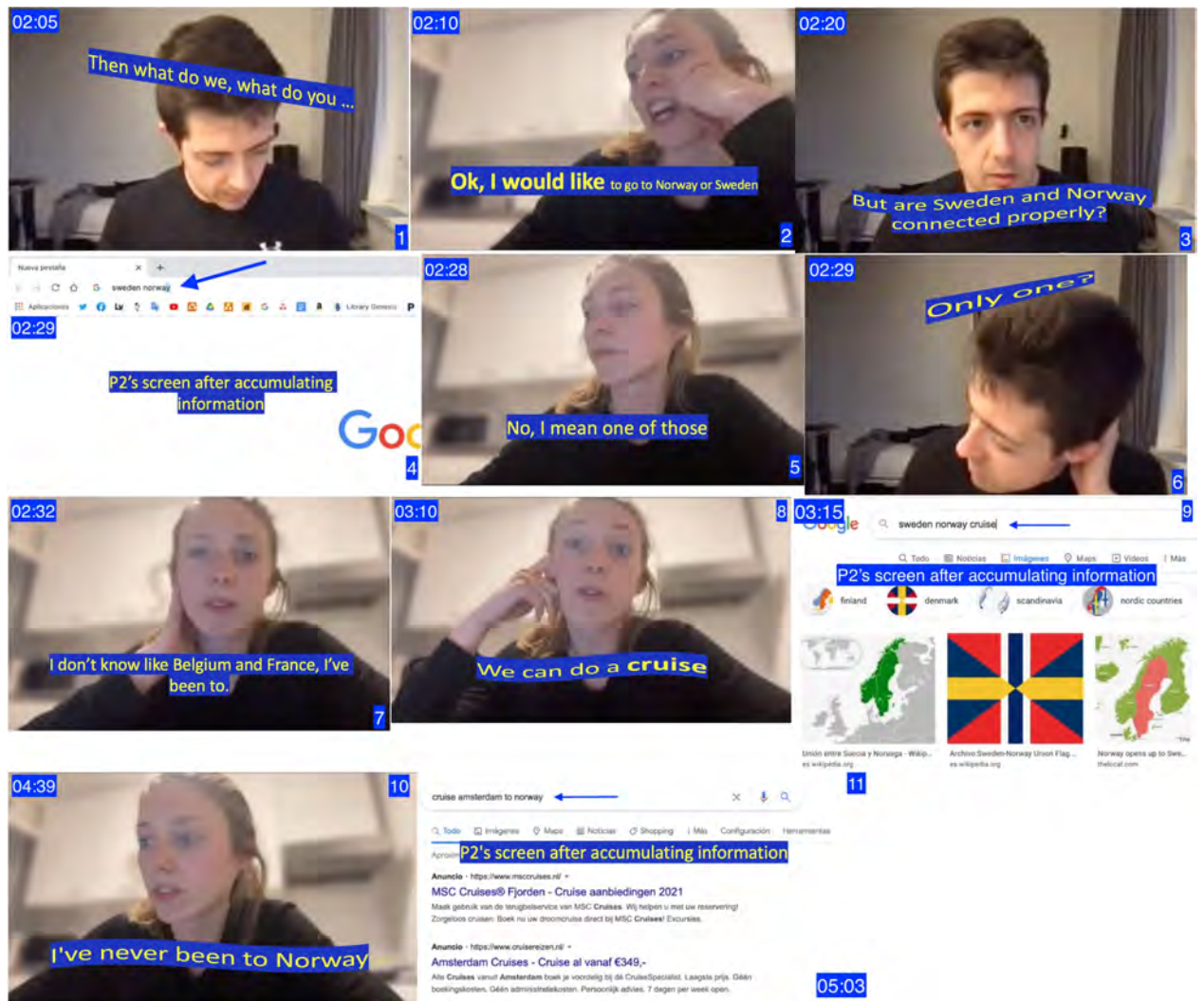
At this point (02:10), they have collectively minimized their options to two countries and ignored the other two. P2 says “But are Sweden and Norway connected properly?” and types the countries “sweden norway” in his browser to see if they are adjacent (Frame 3 & 4). P1 answers the question by making her proposition clearer and says “No, I mean one of those” (Frame 5). It can be imagined that P2 inquires about the opinions and thoughts of the interlocutor and narrows down the topic. P1 answers the questions and helps to keep the fluidity of the interaction.

So far, it can be seen that P2 has asked for P1’s opinion and preferences twice and poses the third question which is a follow-up. At 02:29, he asks “Only one?” with a rising intonation. He undertakes a lower-level action of head touch and shifts the direction of his head while doing so (Frame 6). P1 implicitly leaves some room for P2 to share his idea. She starts her answer with “I don’t know like Belgium and France, I’ve been to. I would like to do something different” (Frame 7).

The conversation goes on and P2 focuses on Norway and Sweden. At 03:10, P1 suggests that they can “do a cruise” (Frame 8). The social actor changes her posture and touches her face while articulating the words. This proposition convinces P2 to type “sweden norway cruise” in his browser (Frame 9). Based on this, it can be understood that the teammates have collectively minimized their options and have selected two countries out of four and focused on one specific accommodation/means of transportation which is a cruise.

The social actors continue working on the task for some time and check

Figure 2  
Excerpt 2



the prices and possible days of the cruises in Norway and Sweden. Further, they discuss the best time to travel to Scandinavia. At 04:39, P1 adds “I’ve never been to Norway. So, I would like to go to Oslo” (Frame 10). Following this sentence, P2 types “cruise amsterdam to norway” at 05:03 (Frame 11).

The communicative segment above shows that the participants moved from four possible options with a variety of available means of transportation to a specific focus; cruises in Norway. They achieved this point collectively with the help of each other. Accumulating information as a leadership strategy, allowed them to focus on a specific target and narrow their choices down. So, at the end of the conversation they made a decision to take a cruise to Norway.

**Dyad 4-Accumulating Information 1** The analysis of Figure 3 shows that collecting information in online meetings can be a two-way process and no certain person is explicitly nominated to exercise the leadership role. In this excerpt the social actors accumulate information, act based on it and determine their date of departure collectively.

At 06:16-06:54, it can be seen that the participants are discussing their most suitable time to travel and P1 tries to narrow down the choices by asking P2 several questions. P1 has a targeted way to approach the problem, i.e., she asks questions and provides reasons for so doing to better investigate the situation. She asks “Which time is convenient for you? Because this depends on time” (Frame 1). P2 provides her opinion and asks for that of P1 who initially posed the question (Frame 2). This indicates that gathering information can be a two-way process and neither of the social actors is formerly nominated as the leader. So, the leadership role can be exercised by any participant and they contribute to focusing on a goal and making a sound decision.

P1 instantly agrees with what P2 proposes and poses another question to make sure her peer has a voice and her contribution is equally valuable. After this, P1 provides reasons for why she agrees and supports her agreement by referring to her personal plans. To obtain more information, she asks another question (Frame 3).

P2 answers the question and cooperates with her interlocutor (Frame 4).



Figure 3  
Excerpt 3

06:16 Which time is convenient for you? 1

06:23 Let's do it in the summer, right? 2

06:36 Yeah, exactly. I'm going to Armenia in August, but other months are fine. What about you? 3

06:38 Let's do it in July then 4

06:39 July. Which day? 5

06:41 It should be the beginning of July 6

06:54 Let's start with 4<sup>th</sup> 7

06:54 P1's screen after gathering information 8

https://www.booking.com/searchresults.html?label=be-g\_F

Stays Flights Car rentals Attractions Airport taxis

Home > Belgium > Search results

**Search**

Destination/property name: Belgium

Check-in date: Sunday, July 4, 2021

Check-out date: Sunday, July 11, 2021

1-week stay

2 adults

No children 1 room

☐ I'm traveling for work

Search

71% of places to stay are unavailable. If you're flexible, try changing your dates.

**Belgium: 3,143 properties found**

Top picks for long stays Entire home

Commission paid and other benefits may affect your results. Your results include some shared accommodations.

**Class' Charles' HOTEL CLANDESTINE**  
Double Room 2 beds (11)

She specifies a month but the group needs to set a date for a trip. Therefore, P1 asks the last question to minimize the options as much as possible (Frame 5). She asks for P2’s idea regarding the date of departure as she has taken control of the search by looking up on her computer. P2’s answer does not specify a definite date but only a period of possible days. She gives her answer while she undertakes a demonstrable lower-level action of postural reorientation (Frame 6) which may be a sign of thinking about the question; i.e. she holds her chin with her right hand. Finally, P1 chooses a specific day on her screen as she has the calendar in front of her. As can be seen, interactants make decisions based on the information they obtain from each other and they have an equal share in exercising the leadership role.

The analyzed representative samples show that in online settings, where there is no institutional hierarchy between the participants, doing leadership is realized through the interactive practice of information gathering. As illustrated, social actors ask questions from each other to make decisions. This supports the idea of “intersubjectivity” (Pirini, 2016) where interactants reach consensus collectively through employment of verbal language (p. 495). It was shown that neither of the participants is explicitly nominated as the leader and others have equal share in the process.

## 4.2 Reporting to the Interlocutor

Collective decision-making requires cooperation of all group members. Sometimes, group members cannot complete a task individually and require clarification and direction; thus, they may seek assistance from other members. Interlocutors seek assistance because they are sometimes uncertain about a topic, so reporting to a social actor at a site of engagement can be followed by requests for demystification. Leadership role is not formerly set but when interlocutors report facts and declare uncertainty, they may bestow this role on the other individual. It is important to note that the word ‘leader’ does not imply that others nominate a person and her/his decisions determine the ultimate trajectory of the group. In contrast, a leader is a social actor who cooperates with other members and facilitates the endeavors of the whole group while the person may not consciously be aware that s/he is doing so. In what follows, there are moments when interactants report to an interlocutor. The interlocutor guides and helps the teammates and provides clarification.

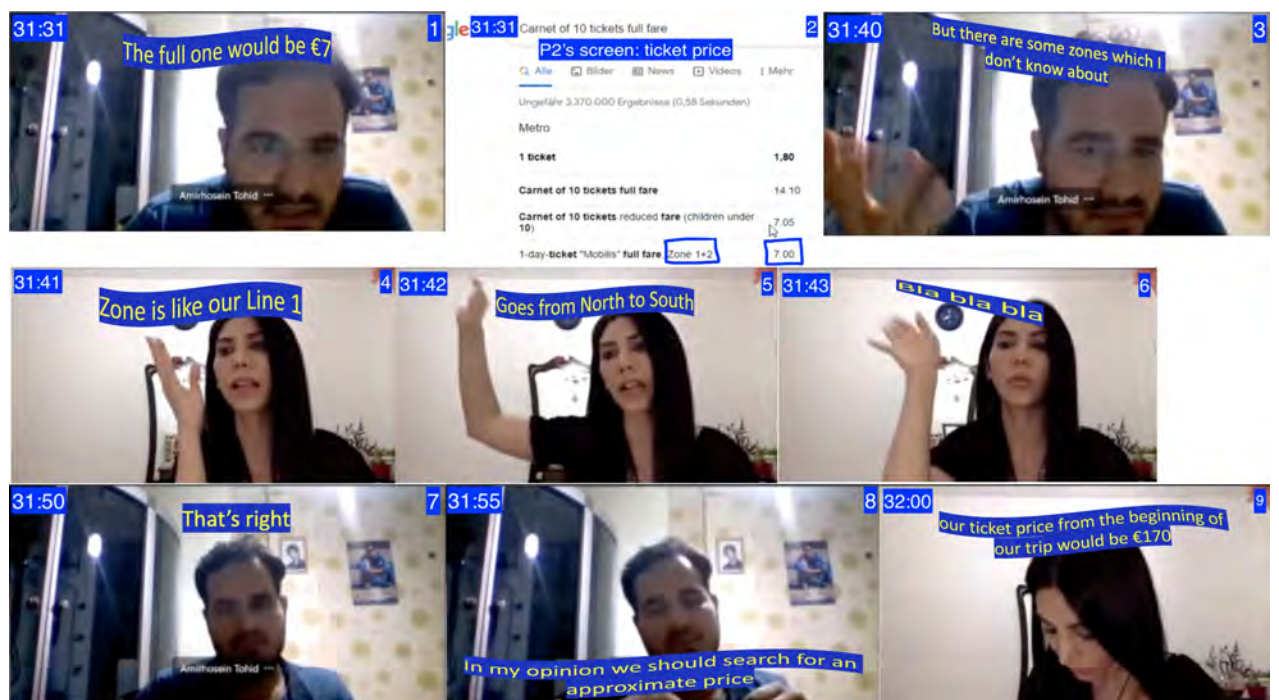
**Dyad 1-Reporting to the Interlocutor 1** In Figure 4, the participants are discussing train tickets in Paris following the assignment that was distributed by P1. To respond to the assignment, P2 reports the prices of the train ticket. At 31:31, he says “The full one would be €7. The ticket which takes you everywhere you want. If I’m not mistaken”. When articulating this sentence, P2’s gaze is directed to the computer screen which is his only point of reference and he is leaning forward to attend to the screen as much as interactively possible (Frame 1).

As illustrated using blue squares (Frame 2), P2 reads and reports the information to P1 based on what he sees on the screen until an unfamiliar concept catches his eyes and confuses him. At 31:40, the social actor notices that the price of train tickets in Paris are based on certain zones and he does not know what that means. Therefore, he expresses his confusion in a multitude of modes. He utters the sentence “But there are some zones which I don’t know about” in a falling intonation and with a note of desperation in his voice which may indicate lack of knowledge. His utterance is simultaneously coupled with a hand gesture and changes in facial expression.

He undertakes a lower-level action of stroke and stroke hold from the mode of hand gesture. He raises his right hand, holds it approximately 20 cm from his face, twists the fist in the air while the palm is up and the fingers are slightly spread out. This may be regarded as a natural co-speech hand gesture that occurs to indicate ‘being puzzled, unsure’ and/or similar concepts. In addition to the gesticulation, the social actor undertakes the lower-level actions of gaze redistribution. Using skeletomuscular motions, he conveys the concept of “not knowing” and expresses that in verbal language as well (Frame 3). This can best be seen by comparing Frame 3 to Frame 1.

Frame 3 demonstrates P2’s proxemic orientation when he is reading the information and expressing his lack of knowledge regarding the point. It can be realized that he is maintaining a relatively close distance between himself and the device and the space in between is relatively small. Also, it can be seen that he is strictly attending to the screen to read the information. This posture may suggest that social actors hold their face, shoulders and torso

Figure 4  
Excerpt 4



close to the digital devices when they are required to give responses, provide details, and pay attention to an important point.

By this time, P2 has clearly reported his response about the prices and stated his uncertainty regarding train zones in Paris. At 31:41, when P1 realizes that her interactant has trouble understanding the concept of ‘zone’, she responds and attempts to demystify the issue by saying “Zone is like our Line 1, for example, which goes from North to South. I don’t know bla bla bla”. It is important to note that ‘I don’t know’ uttered by P1 when explaining zones is a casual idiomatic statement which is used in everyday conversation and does not indicate lack of knowledge in the sense that P2 conveyed by the same phrase because P2 actually didn’t know but P1 implies that she knows. In addition to the mode of verbal language, P1 communicates her message through a number of other modes, more noticeably the mode of hand gesture.

Her action is formed by forming a metaphoric gesticulation while explaining zone by comparing it to a similar concept that is comprehensible to P2. She holds her hand in front of the right side of her face (Frame 4). Further, she undertakes a lower-level action of stroke and stroke hold when she utters “North”. She holds her right arm up to form a 45 ° angle, twists her fist in a way that only the thumb can be seen from the camera and the other four fingers point to the North (Frame 5). She further waves her palm in the air repeatedly when saying “Bla bla bla” to avoid giving more examples of zones in Iran. Since, the expression is a pretentious chatter without specificity, the hand gesture represents an abstract idea and does not embody any picturable aspects of zone (Frame 6).

After P1’s explanations, P2’s space between himself and the device changes drastically; he leans back to a more relaxed position and nods his head in agreement. This alteration is coupled with the phrase “That’s right” in a soft neutral intonation which may indicate that P1’s clarification was sufficient and P2 is now clear about the meaning of zone. A comparison between Frame 3 and Frame 7 can clearly feature P2’s postural and proxemic alterations.

When P2 understands the meaning of the concept, he makes a suggestion and says “So, in my opinion we should search for an approximate price” (Frame 8) and the group agrees on looking for approximate prices for Paris

trains so as to calculate expenses of daily activities during the period they intend to stay. So, P1 calculates the numbers by looking at her notes. She agrees with P2 and announces the summation of ticket prices from the beginning of the trip based on the price that P2 reported (Frame 9).

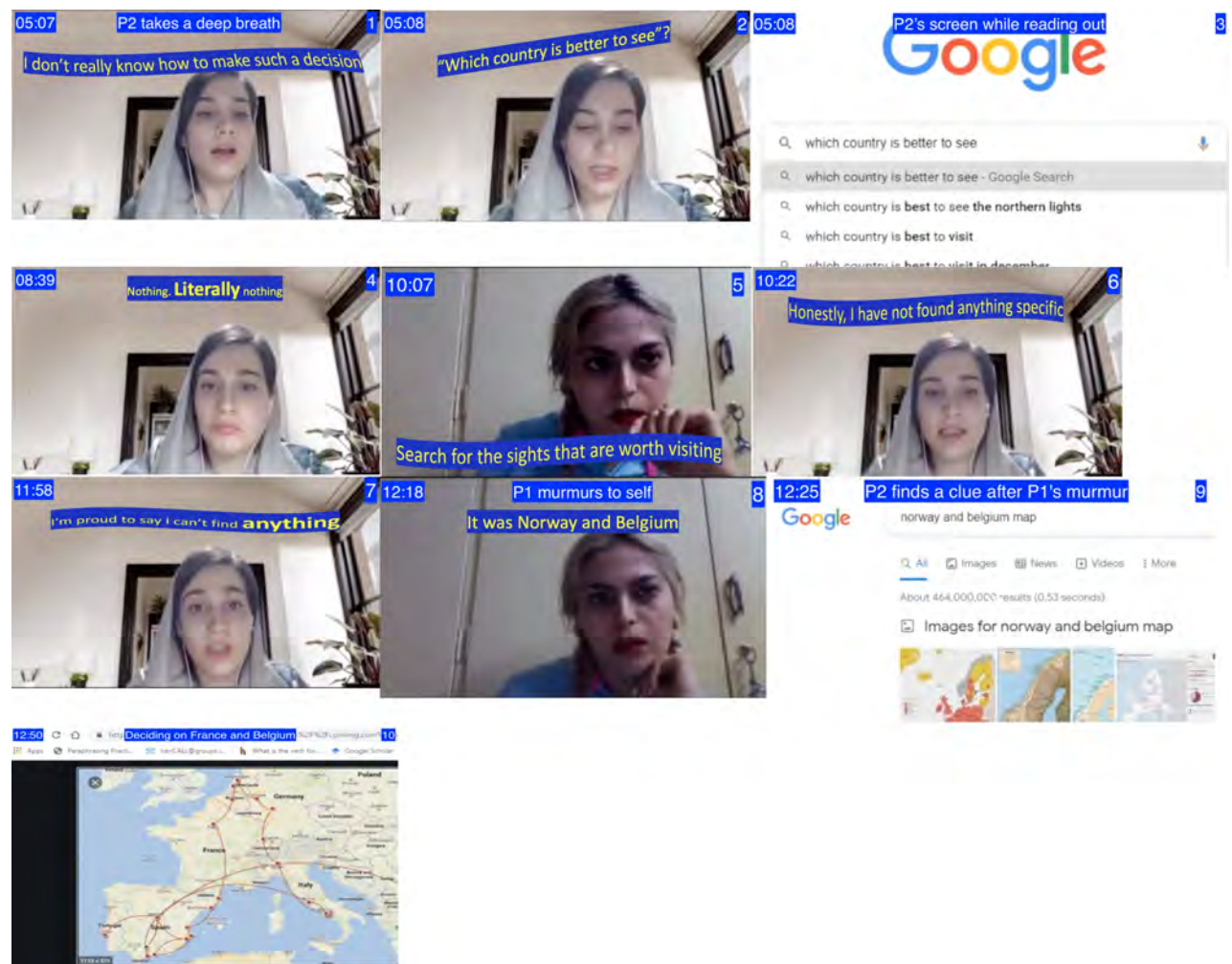
Looking at this excerpt, it can be said that in addition to giving responses, sharing facts and ideas, reporting may serve as a strategy to request for clarification and bestows the leadership role on a social actor based on which s/he can help a group member understand a topic better. Even though the social actor may not be aware of the role, s/he facilitates the process of decision making by helping members to have a clear understanding of a subject matter. When the concept became clear with the help of P1, they made a decision on choosing daily tickets in Paris.

**Dyad 2-Reporting to the Interlocutor 1** Figure 5, represents a segment in which participants are engaged in deciding on a country to travel to. P1 asks P2 if she has chosen France as her point of interest but P2 responds that she has started searching for the countries one by one and has no personal preferences for either of them. In fact, she says “I don’t really know. I don’t really know how to make such a decision”. She explicitly announces her lack of knowledge in regard to making a decision which may be interpreted as an implicit effort to request help. She takes a deep breath and explicitly declares that she doesn’t know how to make such a decision (Frame 1). The postural orientation of the social actor shifts demonstrably when she prepares herself to take the breath and work with the computer.

However, as she does not explicitly ask for help, her interlocutor does not respond to her statement. Thus, she tries to find out how she can do the task on her own by approaching the issue from a new angle; i.e., P2 starts typing a new phrase to see if she can find an answer to her problem. The phrase she reads and types is “Which country is better to see”? (Frame 2 & Frame 3). One probable assumption could be that she reads the phrase out to inform the interlocutor of what she is doing, what her new strategy embodies and in what language she does the searching since she does not read out all the sentence she types.



**Figure 5**  
*Excerpt 5*



The social actor reads out more sentences and talks to herself which may be due to the fact that she has not found a satisfactory answer to her attempt. At 08:39 and after 39 seconds of silence, she says “Nothing, literally nothing” in English, i.e., she switches to English to indicate unavailability of satisfactory information. This is the second time she has announced her failure in finding what she intends to. Her facial expressions can signify that she is clueless since she shakes her head and chin while articulating the sentence (Frame 4).

After around 2 minutes, at 10:07, P1 assigns a task to P2 and says “As you are searching for the most affordable countries, also search for the sights that are worth visiting” (Frame 5). This statement makes P2 say “Honestly, I have not found anything specific so far, Have you?” (Frame 6). P1 gives some explanation about what she has achieved so far and what she is focusing on. After her response, P2 chooses to change her searching phrase. She changes her first method and goes to a new website but the new website does not offer anything satisfactory either. After nearly two minutes, at 11:58, P2 explicitly announces “I’m proud to say I can’t find anything, and I don’t know why” (Frame 7). She utters the sentence whimsically and redirects her search to another topic. At the same time, P1 is totally occupied with a different subject, a cathedral in Belgium, and does not pay attention to P2’s statement. This is perhaps because P2 does not explicitly ask for help, rather, she reports on her status and as a result, P1 does not react to this behavior.

A moment of talking to self by P1 comes into rescue and gives some cues to P2. At 12:18, P1 murmurs to herself “It was Norway and Belgium” (Frame 8). As P2 hears this, she immediately types that in her own browser (Frame 9) to get some fresh ideas. From this point on, P2 finds the map of Europe and bases her conversation on that. She realizes that the countries are adjacent and they can travel to two of them. In fact, P1 reported what she was doing in her murmur which facilitated the process of decision-making for the whole group without consciously knowing it but her contribution opened a new door for P2 when she was clueless.

The above excerpt exemplified that reports may be unattended if they are not announced explicitly. P2 struggled to get her message across and P1 did not respond even though the statements implied a need for help. The excerpt showed how a social actor reports uncertainty and asks for cues which may bestow the leadership role on the other interactant but the interactant did



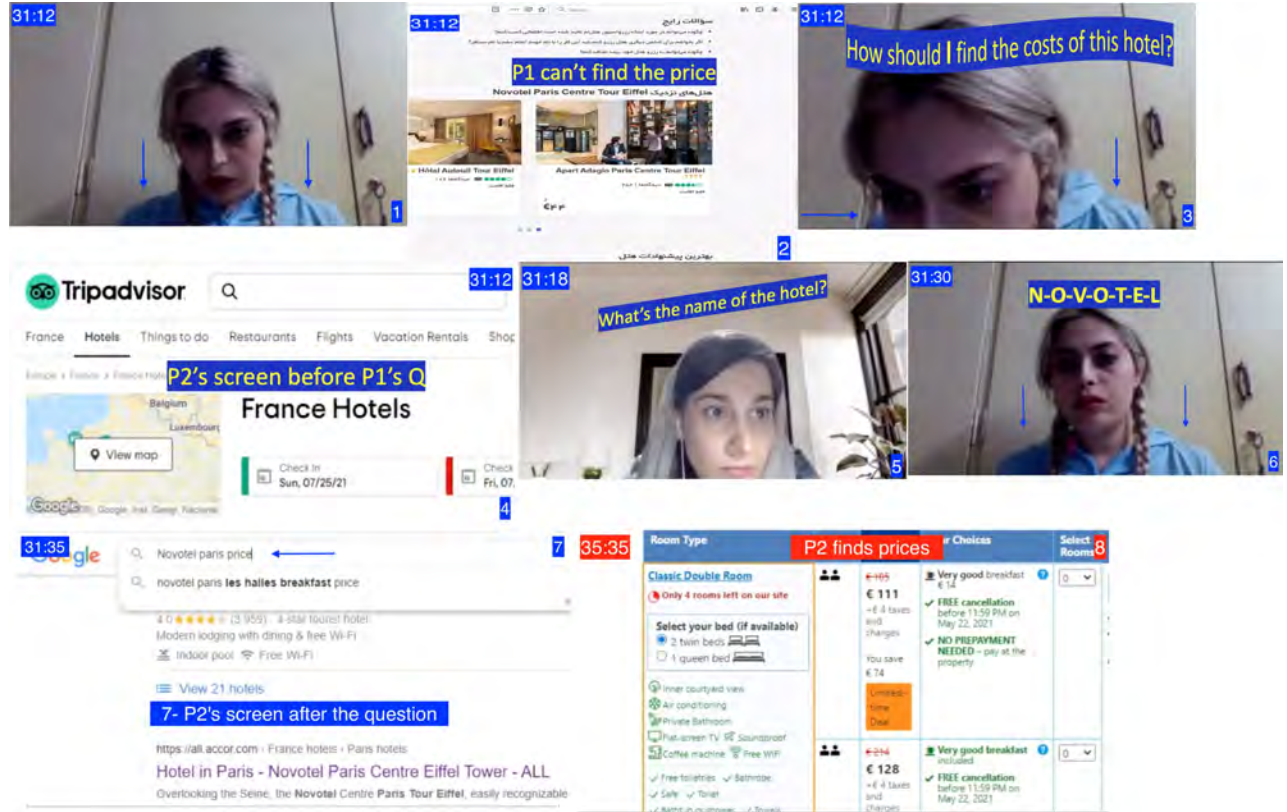
not comprehend the message since it was broadcast implicitly and she was occupied with other things; so she unwittingly ignored her peer. Finally, it was demonstrated that P1 facilitated decision-making by giving hints to P2 because from the state of ‘literally nothing’, the team reached an idea and chose France and Belgium. Note that P2 typed ‘norway and belgium map’, following P1’s murmur, but she suggested ‘Belgium and France’ following the flow of her search and the conversation.

A fundamental moment of reporting was shown in Frame 8. P1 reported what she was looking for and mentioned two countries while P2 was searching more broadly (Frame 3). A comparison between Frame 3 and Frame 9 shows how specific P2’s search turned out after P1’s report. It seems that P1’s murmur helped her teammate to choose the two countries together. It should be emphasized that neither of the participants spoke out what they were doing all the time, but they only did so when they wanted to let each other know what they were up to. So, P1’s murmur can be regarded as a report to the interlocutor that facilitated the decision-making process.

**Dyad 2-Reporting to the Interlocutor 2** In the interactive segment brought in Figure 6, the participants are discussing hotel prices in Paris. At 31:12, one can see that P1’s head is relatively far from the device, her shoulders are leaning back, and she is looking for hotel prices in her browser (Frame 1). As she talks to herself and announces her interest in a particular hotel, she realizes that the prices that are available on the page are for other hotels in which she has no interest while the price for the one she is looking for cannot be located (Frame 2). Thus, she reports her situation to P2 in the form of a question and implicitly asks for help. The moment when the social actor attempts to ask the question, she undertakes a prominent lower-level action in the mode of posture and totally leans forward to the device, to look for the information in more details (Frame 3). It is important to note that verbally, she wants to know how she can find the information “herself” (“How should I find the costs of this hotel?”), but P2 comes up with assistance and volunteers to help.

Pragmatically, when such an interaction occurs in such a context, i.e., one asks about the right way to do something, one of the most probable

**Figure 6**  
*Excerpt 6*



interpretations is to attempt to do the task instead of providing guidelines and instructions. It can be seen that before P1's question, P2 is occupied with entering check-in and check-out dates for a different hotel and is doing something other than P1's line of inquiry (Frame 4) but as soon as the question is posed, P2 offers help by asking a question (Frame 5). It is understandable that they both implicitly inform each other of their intention, i.e., P1 addresses herself to ask for help and P2 asks a relevant question to offer help.

As P2 offers assistance implicitly, P1 who was leaning forward, undertakes multiple lower-level actions through the mode of posture. Hence, she leans back, stops looking scrupulously at her screen, spells the name of the hotel and lets P2 do the search (Frame 6). The reorientations in body movement may be a sign that P1 understands that she has successfully conveyed her

true meaning and can now rest back. By the same token P2 is aware of the communication details because she stops what she was doing earlier and tries to look for what P1 had problems with. She opens a new tab and types the letters spelled by P1 without explicitly being asked for (Frame 7).

P2 continues looking for the price and searches different websites. After around four minutes, she finds the price and announces that. Therefore, P1 who could not find the price of the hotel, informed her interlocutor who completed the task (Frame 8). One can say that leadership is bestowed on the interlocutor because they helped each other carry out the task and make a decision about the price of a hotel.

It appears that participants of an online group align themselves with the cooperativeness of the conversation. As illustrated in Figure 6, a social actor can implicitly inform the interlocutor, ask for help and convey pragmatic meaning of a sentence. It was shown that social actors may not specify a rigid role to each other and the questions that are asked may allow interactants to help group members and facilitate the process of collective decision-making.

As explained, decision-making in virtual environment is actioned with the collaboration of all group members. One can notice the importance of leadership during online sessions as social actors may realize that they are sometimes not able to accomplish a task on their own. Therefore, they tend to report the situation to another person and implicitly request help. Leadership is not the job of one person; in contrast it is a collaborative action in which all participants switch roles.

### **4.3 Assigning Task**

Leadership can be actioned in-situ through the distribution and assignment of tasks during a multiparty interaction. Assigning tasks is mostly done in order to specify roles, make progress with the topic of the session, and provide a balance between responsibilities of all participants. One of the roles that social actors have is that of a facilitator who tries to make collective decisions by dividing work and delegating duties equally. It must be mentioned that task distributors are not fixed and can change roles throughout the interaction. The analysis of the following excerpts illustrates how social actors assign tasks

and distribute duties to each other through a variety of communicative modes.

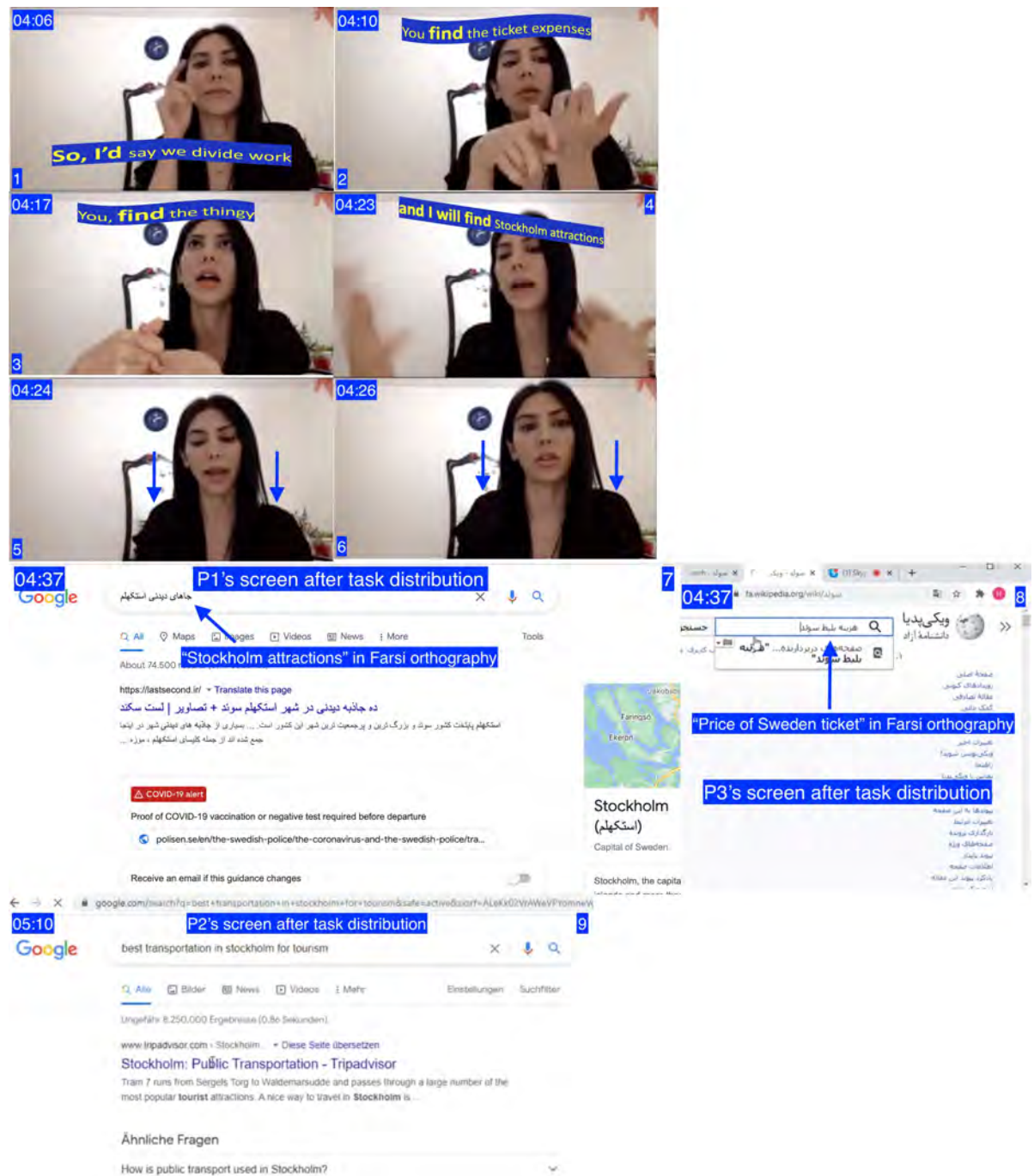
**Dyad 1-Assigning Task 1** The interactive segment 04:06-04:26, shown in Figure 7, features an example where a social actor distributes tasks between herself and the members fairly to help the group come up with a targeted way of online search. She does so relying on a multitude of modes such as spoken language, hand gesture, posture and gaze.

P1 starts to distribute tasks by asking each member to do a particular job including herself. On the one hand, she addresses the whole group using plural form of the verb “divide” (“we divide”) which may show that even though the concept of dividing task implies separation, she collaborates with her group members. On the other hand, her statement is articulated using first person pronoun “I” (“I’d say”). This way she includes herself in the interaction when she exercises the leadership role. She conveys her message through the mode of spoken language and performs hand gestures. The first noticeable gesture in this segment is a deictic one which is carried out when the social actor announces the plan (Frame 1).

Further, she undertakes other lower-level actions of stroke and stoke hold to split responsibilities. As can be seen, the social actor begins dividing tasks and she does so by enumerating them using her fingers. As she assigns a task to each member, she holds both her hands in front of her torso and shoulders and holds down her left-hand little finger with her right index finger. Three of her fingers are held up and packed together and the thumb is away from the little finger (Frame 2).

Later, the higher-level action of assigning task is shaped by chains of other lower-level actions such as stroke hold and gaze redistribution. At 04:17, the social actor is splitting a task to another interlocutor and simultaneously performs the finger count as she did for the previous interlocutor but this time with variation. As she is distributing the second task, she holds her left-hand ring finger perhaps because it is the one after the little finger. Therefore, she holds her second finger to assign the second task. A lower-level action of gaze shift is noticeable when she is trying to find a suitable word to describe the task. She rolls her eyes which may be a sign of looking for a word (Frame 3).

Figure 7  
Excerpt 7



Additionally, the social actor assigns a task to herself which may signify collaboration and membership. She does so to imply that what the members are engaged in, is a group work that requires effort from all parties. So, to appoint herself to another task, she performs a metaphoric gesture by waving both of her hands while her fingers are pointed to herself (Frame 4). Her falling intonation indicates that the higher-level action of task distribution is finished and members can start working.

Preparing to do the task and doing it are two different actions followed by two different postural shifts. The end point of the higher-level action of assigning the task is followed by a postural reorientation and gaze shift when the social actor leans back and looks down at the keyboard (Frame 5). The act of doing the assignment starts when the social actor undertakes another lower-level action in her posture. She leans forward and attends to the computer screen (Frame 6). This may signify that preparing for a task and doing it encompass a compilation of communicative modes such as posture, gaze, and object handling.

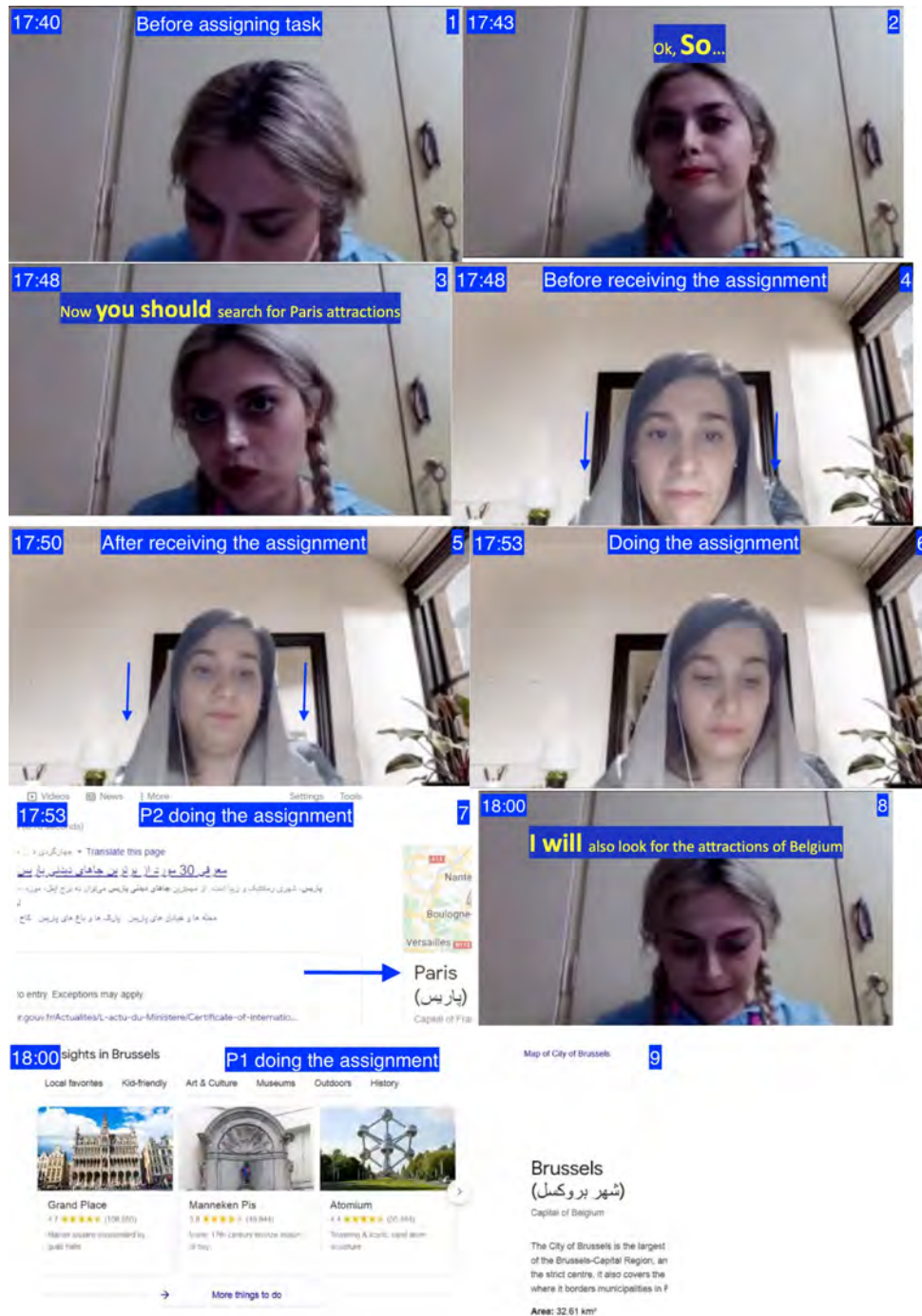
After distributing the tasks, each participant starts working on what they are assigned to. P1 looks for Stockholm attractions (Frame 7), P3 looks for ticket prices to Sweden (Frame 8), and P2 looks for the best means of transportation in Stockholm (Frame 9). This way each person contributes to the task equally and makes the whole process of decision-making easier.

The selected segment above shows that in a video-mediated interaction, the leadership role can be exercised through assigning tasks and distributing roles to fellow teammates. The task distributor divides the work equally between all members using a variety of communicative modes and each member does one part of the job that ultimately results in completion of the whole picture.

**Dyad 2-Assigning Task 1** In order to describe and show how democratically social actors distribute tasks in a group, Timestamp 17:40-18:00 will be analyzed in Figure 8. Before reaching this point, the group was discussing the distance between Iran to France and Iran to Belgium to see which of



Figure 8  
Excerpt 8



these two could be a more suitable destination. After finding the distance and choosing France as the first target country, they started to plan how they can go from Paris to Brussels. P2 was updating P1 about the fact that they could travel both by train and by bus which persuaded P1 to choose the bus and finalize her list by writing down some points (Frame 1).

To assign the task, P1 undertakes several lower-level actions such as movement in head, shoulders and gaze shift from the notes to the screen. She makes some distance from the desk and takes a deep breath which can signify the beginning of the task. Then she says “Ok, so” (Frame 2). This action may be indicative of starting a new higher-level action; assigning the task.

At 17:48, P1 asks P2 to search for the attractions of Paris by saying “Now you should do a favor and search for Paris attractions. Tell me the results so that I write them down. I will also look for the attractions of Belgium” (Frame 3). The sentence is formed using some hedging to make it friendly while still keeping it effective. As they have collectively decided to travel to both France and Belgium, the task distributor assigns a task to herself to imply that she is fair and the workload is not on the shoulders of one person only. For a reminder of this decision, see ‘Dyad 2-Reporting to the Interlocutor 1’ above.

At the moment of task assignment, P2 is looking at her screen and is simultaneously listening to P1 (Frame 4). Comparing that to Frame 5, when she has received the assignment fully, one can notice a demonstrable postural and proxemic reorientation as the social actor prepares herself to start doing the assignment. Further, the communicative modes that are noticeable when she is preparing herself are different from when she starts searching. She undertakes lower-level actions such as head movement and gaze redistribution to start the task (Frame 6) and looks down to type the phrase “attractions of Paris” in the browser following what her interlocutor assigned (Frame 7). It can be imagined that she is occupied with the mode of object handling to work with the keyboard and the mouse.

Finally, since P1 has assigned a task to herself, she looks online for attractions of Brussels (Frame 8 & Frame 9). In other words, both social actors commit themselves to make progress with the topic. This indicates how leadership is actioned through equal distribution of tasks and providing balance in a group. Assigning a task may be regarded as a leadership strategy



because it influences the activities of the members. In the continuation of this selected segment, the participants carried out the tasks and informed each other of what they accomplished; i.e., P1 found attractions such as St Michael and St Gudula Cathedral, Mont des Arts, and shops at Avenue Louise in Brussels and P2, chose Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe, Louvre Museum, Palais Garnier, and several other attractions in Paris.

**Dyad 4-Assigning Task 1** The interactive segment shown in Figure 9, features two separate instances of task distribution in this dyad. It exemplifies how leadership can be exercised in situ between social actors assigning tasks to each other and shifting roles following the flexible nature of an interaction.

The participants are deciding the country of destination and means of transportation to travel there. After choosing Sweden, P1 asks if her interlocutor prefers to fly or take the train which raises P2's doubts because the destination to Sweden is so long that in her mind it may not be feasible to take the train. P1 rephrases her sentence by emphasizing that more than one train may be needed and taking the train is one of the ways to Sweden. Following that, she suggests to go to Ryan Air and look up the flights there.

At the same time, P2 assigns a task to P1 and herself by saying "look there, and I will also see if we can go to Sweden by train or not" (Frame 1). As the conversation goes on, both the interlocutors commit themselves to doing the assignment suggested by the task distributor; i.e., P1 looks for trains from Amsterdam to Sweden and P2 searches for cheap flights on Ryan Air (Frame 2 & Frame 3).

P1 reports that it is not possible to go to Sweden by train. Approximately after 2 minutes, the interactants switch roles and this time, P1 assigns a task to P2. As shown in Frame 3, P1 is searching on Ryan Air. So, she asks P2 to look for flights on EasyJet perhaps to have more varied results from different sources. At 06:05, P1 undertakes lower-level actions of head movement and gaze shift and asks P2 if she knows the other airline through the mode of verbal language (Frame 4). Using some hedging, she asks P2 to look for the other airline. She says "Maybe you could look EasyJet?". To utter this sentence, she undertakes other lower-level actions of head movement and

**Figure 9**  
*Excerpt 9*

04:25 1  
Look there, and I will also see if we can go to Sweden by train or not

04:45 2  
P2's screen after the assignment  
Amsterdam  
Sweden  
Leave now  
OPTIONS  
Wearing a mask on public transport is required due to COVID-19  
Avoid public transport if possible due to COVID-19  
Sorry, we could not calculate travel directions from Amsterdam to Sweden

04:50 3  
P1's screen after the assignment  
RYANAIR  
Plan | My bookings  
FLIGHTS CAR HIRE HOTELS EVENTS & ACTIVITIES  
Return trip One way Apply promo code  
Verified by Ryanair  
From Eindhoven To Destination  
Pick a destination country  
Austria France Germany Hungary Italy  
Bulgaria Croatia Cyprus  
Ireland  
Morocco  
Poland  
Pick an airport Clear selection  
Alicante  
Barcelona (All Airports)  
Barcelona  
Barcelona Reus  
Bologna  
Bratislava

06:05 4  
Do you also know EasyJet?

06:07 5  
Maybe you could look EasyJet?

06:08 6  
P2 receives the assignment

06:09 7  
P2 doing the assignment

06:09 8  
P2's screen after the assignment  
easy jet flights  
About 131,000,000 results (0.71 seconds)  
Ad - <https://www.vliegtickets.nl/easyjet>  
Easy Tickets - Altijd de Goedkoopste Tickets  
Dankzij goede afspraken met airlines, kunnen wij jou altijd de beste ticket-deals bieden  
Alle Airlines en Alle Bestemmingen bij Vliegtickets.nl en boek nu snel Online! Boeken met iDeal. Services: Alle Airlines Vergelijken, Hotel en Autohuur.  
Last minute opties - Stedentrips zoeken - Allerlei aanbiedingen - Open vakantie landen  
Stedentrips - from €33.00 - Bijv. Barcelona - More  
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Flights 2021 / 2022 | 1000's of low priced seats! | easyjet.com

gaze shift coupled with a rising intonation to form the question (Frame 5). She assigns this task to P2 because she herself had already started searching for flights on Ryan Air. Thus, the social actor in this site of engagement distributes tasks fairly, as did P2 in the previous task.

When P2 receives the assignment, she forms a noticeable distance between herself and the device (Frame 6). It seems that the interactant first prepares herself for the action by taking a short distance and then coming back to a normal posture with a normal distance (Frame 7). To continue the conversation, the social actor cooperates with her peer and tries to contribute to the interaction by typing the phrase suggested by P1 (Frame 8). The continuation of this excerpt would be what was analyzed under ‘Dyad 4-Accumulating Information 1’ above. Following that, the group decided to travel to Belgium on July 4th.

To conclude, the representative samples show that leadership can be exercised through the communicative act of task assignment which is often exercised democratically; i.e., there is no structurally determined leader in either of the groups. It seems that social actors switch the role of task distributor during interactions to facilitate collective decision-making. This way, each interactant does one part of the job and helps the group to reach a consensus.

#### **4.4 Disagreeing with the Interlocutor**

In online multiparty goal-directed tasks, participants express their disagreement in a variety of ways. Based on cultural background of individuals and the interactional properties of a conversation, disagreement may be communicated directly and/or indirectly. Disagreement can be regarded as a leadership strategy because it determines the trajectory of collective decision-making and leads the group to a more clear and efficient route. It helps the group reach a shared understanding because it does not let individuals deviate from their direction and allows them to stick to a consistent line.

The following interactive segments explicate the differences in expressing disagreement between English and Farsi speakers and show that the former mostly rely on direct and instant expression of disagreement while the latter

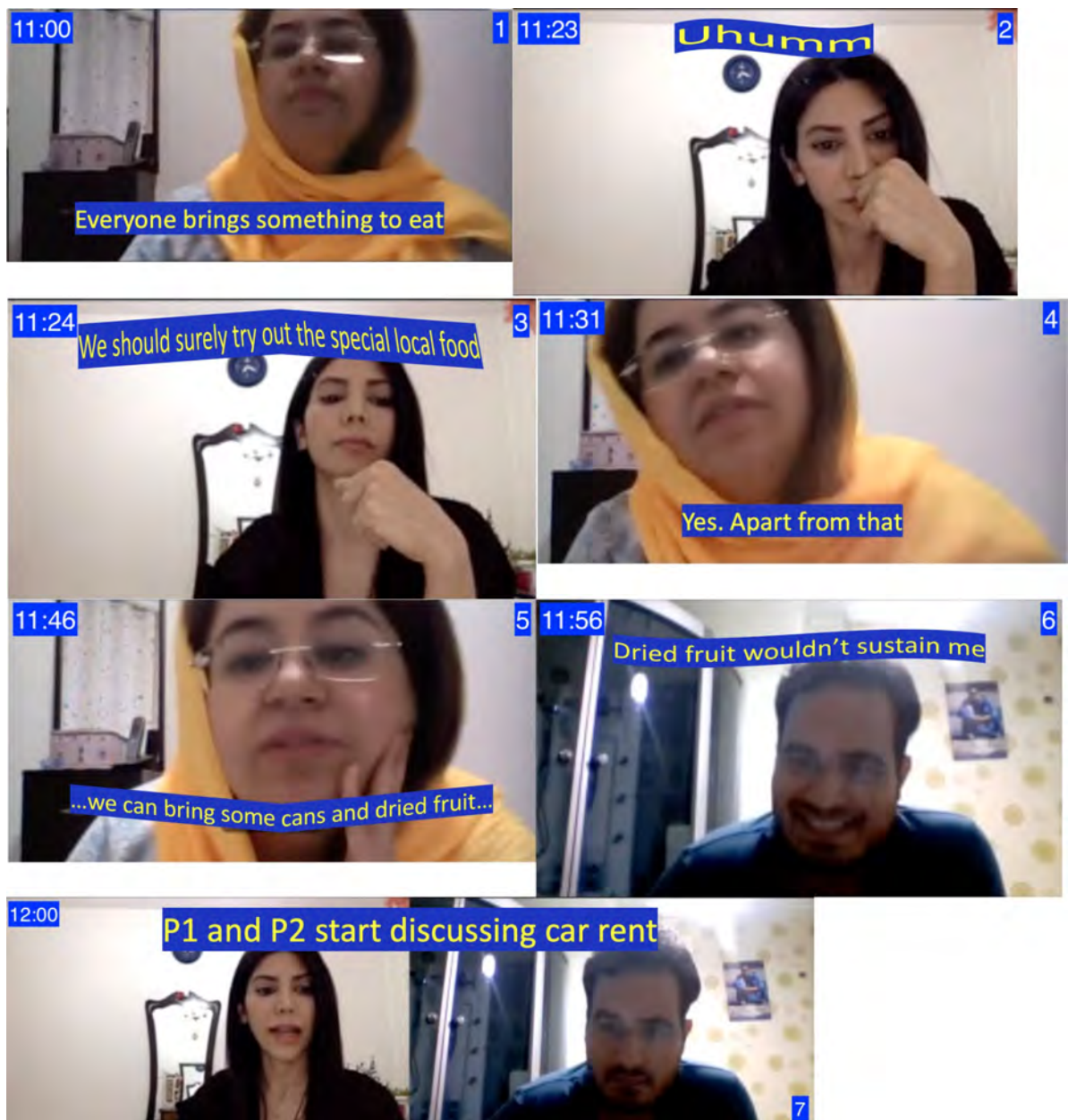
tend to do so using indirect methods such as hesitating to agree, extending moments of pause, telling jokes, and using elongated speech. It should be mentioned that both groups show exceptions and they may shift in style of disagreement occasionally but most of the times the pattern is stable.

**Dyad 1-Disagreeing with the Interlocutor 1** In the interactive segment shown in Figure 10, participants are engaged in making decisions about food options during their trip to Sweden. At 11:00, P3 undertakes a postural shift and makes some distance with the device to start her sentence. She gives her suggestion about a potential method to save money by taking some food from home so that they consume for a couple of days and not buy. The idea is that each person should bring some light food and they inform each other of what they bring so that they get a variety of food at the end and as a result reduce their expenses to a certain extent. So, P3 utters a lengthy sentence coupled with explanations and examples and says “...everyone brings something to eat...” (Frame 1).

P1 listens to P3’s suggestion and confirms her understanding by saying “Uhuum” while she leans forward and maintains an approximate distance of 20 cm with the device (Frame 2). As P3 speaks, P1 interrupts and says “We should surely try out the special local food” which is uttered assertively (Frame 3). When P1 attempts to announce her opinion, she undertakes a lower-level action of torso and shoulder movement and leans back for a moment. Then, she utters the sentence and again leans forward. This can be seen by comparing Frame 2 to Frame 3. What P1, therefore, is doing is to first interrupt P3 and give an opinion confidently about something which is in contrast to what P3 suggested. However, P1 does not explicitly negate P3’s idea.

When P1 shares her personal interest in testing local food, P3 agrees with that and continues giving more and more explanations to make sure her idea is heard. So, she explains that what she means is apart from testing local food. It seems that she tries to first offer a positive and caring face by agreeing with P1’s idea perhaps to make P1 agree with her, i.e., P3 agrees with P1 to be agreed by her as well (Frame 4). P3’s examples of food are cans, nuts, dates, and dried fruit which are stated when she changes her posture as she

**Figure 10**  
*Excerpt 10*



speaks. So, she touches the left side of her face with her left hand (Frame 5) and express her idea in the mode of verbal language.

At 11:56, P2 disagrees with the idea. As he hears the examples, he shows his disagreement by making a joke out of the situation and further laughs at his own statement in a non-sarcastic manner. His intention is not to mock the interlocutor but to convey his disagreement in a soft and indirect way. P2, thus, says “Dried fruit wouldn’t sustain me” which results in the laughter of the whole group (Frame 6) and telling more jokes. The disagreements cause the group to ignore the idea of bringing light snacks from home and they move to another topic; the price for renting a car which seems to be more important for the participants of this specific dyad. From this point, P3 stops talking for some time and the conversation goes on about renting a car in Stockholm between P1 and P2.

As can be seen, each of the social actors has a strategy to disagree with P3; one shares her idea by interrupting, being assertive and yet considerate and the other by being facetious. Based on the definition of leadership stated in Summerfield (2014), the activities of P3 are influenced by the disagreements of the interlocutors because she stays silent when P1 and P2 start talking about renting a car. It seems that she allows the other two participants to decide on the new topic.

In the above excerpt, it was shown that any social actor can express disagreement indirectly as a decision-making strategy to redirect the route that an interlocutor may take in regard to a problem. Disagreement can take different ways in an interactive conversation with Farsi speakers. An individual may try to explain her/his point and be rejected by others. During the interaction, the individual senses the implicit hints of disagreement (someone interrupts and/or gives an opinion in contrast to the original statement). As the individual senses this, s/he may continue elaborating on the point and agree with others with the hope to be approved. Other participants may take different strategies to express disagreement such as making a joke.

**Dyad 1-Disagreeing with the Interlocutor 2** Timestamp 17:30-18:03 features the time when P1 and P2 are discussing gas prices in Sweden and

informing each other regarding the matter. P3 interrupts the other members by reading out a word. She says “Guys, we can go by metro as well. By metro” and raises her voice when emphasizing “metro” to make sure the other two members hear her out (Frame 1). See Figure 11.

She proposes the idea which is a general fact since the proposition indicates possibility of doing something, i.e., they “can” take the metro. The idea is adopted from an online encyclopedia which is edited by a number of individuals and is used to inform people of general facts and events. The word “metro”, shown by a blue arrow, catches the eyes of the participant, and she uses it to propose the idea (Frame 2). Yet, she does not offer any details about it, nor does she consciously attend to what the other two members are discussing.

Following P3’s suggestion, P1 replies hesitantly and doubtfully. She believes that taking the metro is not a good option for the group and provides reasons for that. But to answer P3’s statement, she uses a strategy which shows her disagreement with the proposition implicitly. She says “By metro, uum, it’s ...kinda... I feel that since..., for example, if we were on our own, public transportation would have been a good option. However, as far as we are three and we must pay for tickets, I feel car ...”. P1 leaves her statement unfinished and drags it because completing it may threaten P3’s face (Goffman, 1967). Hence, she lets P3 who originally proposed the idea, complete the sentence. As can be imagined, P1 hesitates and pauses for a long time to say what she believes and the whole statement takes around 21 seconds.

At the moment of disagreeing with the interactant, the social actor expresses her idea through the mode of verbal language while she simultaneously changes her posture (Frame 3). She holds up her right hand and covers half of her face when she drags the sentences. Moreover, she enunciates the word “however” in a way that shows a considerable contrast between using public transport and renting a car; i.e., she emphasizes the word in an exaggerated manner to ensure P3 understands that her idea does not match her preferences (Frame 4). To support her argument, she explains that as there are three people in the group, it would be better to rent a car and performs a gesticulation showing number three with her fingers (Figure 5).

Basically, P1 disagrees with P3 without explicitly indicating it. She shows doubt, expresses hesitation, drags her sentence and provides insights on what



Figure 11  
Excerpt 11

1 17:30 Metro in Farsi orthography

2 17:30 مترو

3 17:46 Hmm, it's ...kinda...

4 17:56 However...

5 18:00 ...as we are three and we must pay for tickets...

6 18:03 Car would be more comfortable

7 18:03 کارخانه

8 18:40

P3 ignores "metro" and scrolls down

P2 announces gas price: group decide rent car

gasoline price in sweden per litre

Google

Alle Bilder News Mehr

Ungefähr 5.260.000 Ergebnisse (0,64 Sekunden)

Ergebnisse für gasoline price in **sweden** per litre

Stattdessen suchen nach: gasoline price in sweden per

For comparison, the average price of gasoline in the Krona.

Sweden Gasoline prices, 29-Mar-2021.

| Sweden Gasoline prices | Liter  |
|------------------------|--------|
| SEK                    | 15.703 |
| USD                    | 1.808  |
| EUR                    | 1.536  |



her interlocutor thinks would be a suitable means of transport. P3 understands that P1 does not entertain her idea and resultantly, refrains from insisting. P3's mind is changed as she completes the unfinished sentence by saying "Car would be more comfortable" (Frame 6). This may indicate that she accepts P1's lead and now believes that her original idea was not viable. After realizing that taking the metro may not be a good decision in this very trip, P3 scrolls down and ignores the part of the web which explained metro in Sweden (Frame 7) and moves to the gallery section.

The sentence structure in farsi necessitates the verb to be at the end of the sentence but P1 does not use any verbs. Instead, P3 completes it. Based on this, it can be interpreted that P1 implied her disagreement and P3 understood it. This can be regarded as a leadership strategy because P3's initial focus was redirected to another topic and the group ignored counting on the metro as a means of transport in Stockholm. The analysis of the previous excerpt "Dyad 1-Disagreeing with the Interlocutor 1" shows that the members focused on renting a car and looked for gas prices instead of metro tickets in Stockholm. Therefore, P1's strategy allowed the group to zoom on a specific type of transportation.

In conclusion, disagreement in Persian dyadic video-mediated interactions may be exercised in several shapes or forms. Mostly, interactants disagree with each other by stating their idea in hesitation, employing pauses, using lengthy sentences, cracking jokes, and similar methods. They rely on the cultural understanding and background of interlocutors so they tend to leave sentences unfinished in certain situations. At such moments, the rejected person understands the situation and modifies her/his own statement. Individuals can sense the hints when a social actor wants to disagree. One strategy to gain approval may be to agree with the person who shows signs of disagreement. Finally, it can be argued that in interactions with Farsi speakers, the act of disagreeing is mostly exercised implicitly and is replete with a considerable degree of hedging and indirect statements. It should be emphasized that this style is effective and the interactants understand the underlying messages as one would disagree on spot.

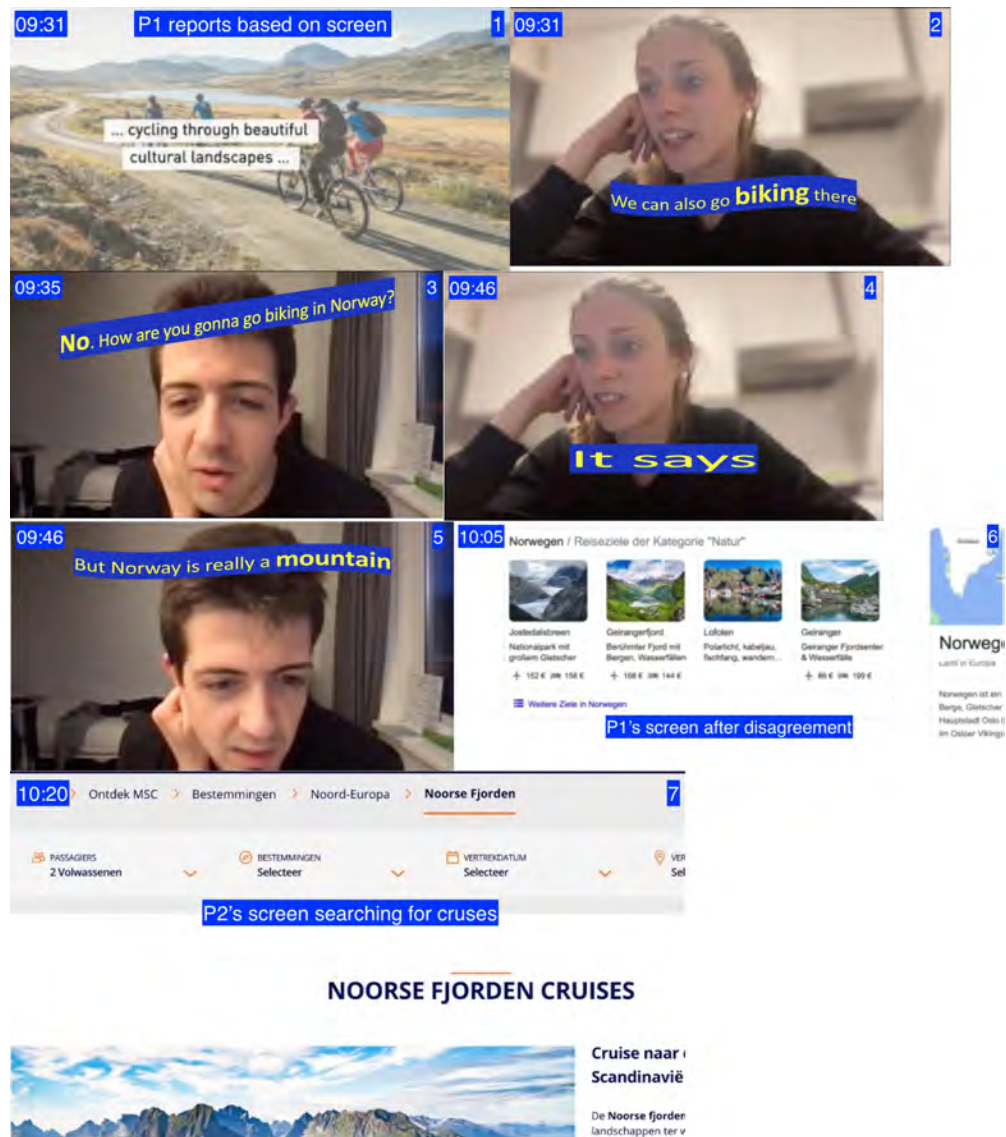
**Dyad 3-Disagreeing with the Interlocutor 1** The following excerpt features an example where P2 disagrees with P1 regarding a suggested means of transport in Norway (Figure 12). Before reaching this moment P1 announced a considerable number of various transportation types with diverse utility with little explanation of how they should exactly be used. She proposed hiking, kayaking, glamping and it seems that she informs P2 of the possible alternatives so that he chooses from them. Then she suggests bicycles as a mode of transportation in Norway during their trip which is not approved by P2.

Looking at P1's browser, it is apparent that at the moment of interaction she is scanning a page (Frame 1) and reports the vehicle as a possibility because she sees its picture and continues scrolling down. At 09:31 she says "We can also go biking there" with an emphasis on "biking" (Frame 2). She announces the possibility of using the bike in Norway but P2 instantly disagrees by first calling P1's first name followed by a loud "No". P2 then tries to evaluate the proposition by questioning its feasibility. So, he asks "how are you gonna go biking in Norway?" (Frame 3).

P1's response to this question is "It says" (Frame 4) by which she means according to the website and the picture on it, one can bike in Norway. One might say that the social actor relies on the information available online but P2 appears to be against this suggestion, and in order to counter it, he provides a critical point regarding the fact that Norway is a mountainous country and it would be quite a chore to bike there, especially for the whole duration of the trip (Frame 5).

One argument regarding this excerpt is that if an interactant proposes something against the standards of a social actor for whatsoever reasons, the person disagrees instantly without prevarication. The moment of disagreement is very short and effective and is in line with the objective of the topic of discussion because just as the individual disagreed with the interlocutor, P1 shifted to another page and ignored biking in Norway (Frame 6) and P2 continued with the task he was formerly dealing with; i.e., finding cruises in Norway which turned out to be the focus of their trip (Frame 7). The disagreement moment facilitated decision-making as it helped the group to concentrate on one subject instead of different alternatives.

**Figure 12**  
*Excerpt 12*



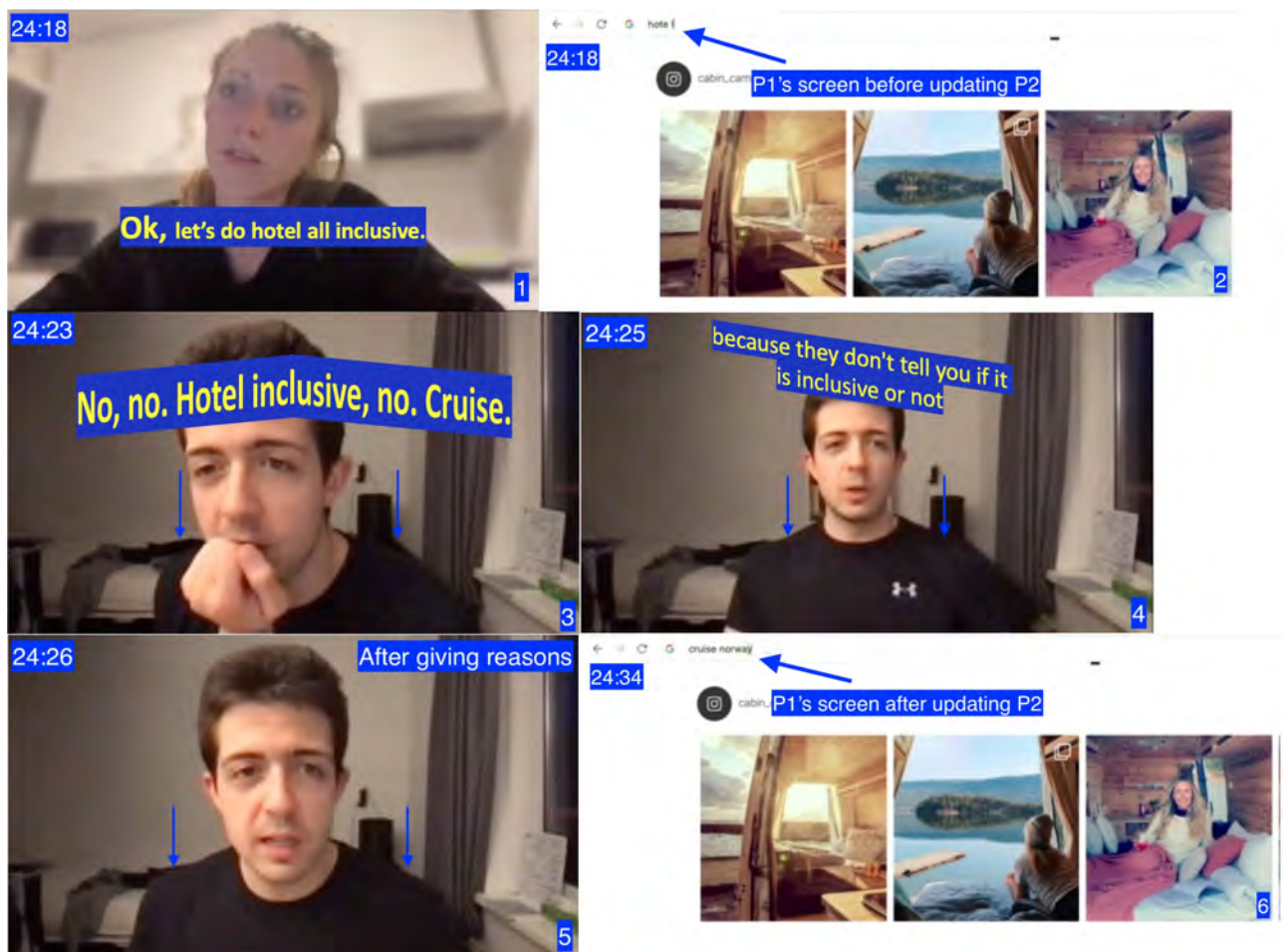
**Dyad 3-Disagreeing with the Interlocutor 2** This interactive segment includes another collaborative interaction between participants where one updates the interlocutor regarding what is being done and receives feedback and redirection. The social actors are discussing accommodation options in Norway and are weighting their alternatives to find the most suitable place to stay at. See Figure 13.

Leadership role in this segment seems to be bestowed on P2 as P1 reports what she is typing and receives feedback. At 24:18, in an attempt to specify the place of stay, P1 says “Ok, let’s do hotel all inclusive” and starts typing it in her browser (Frame 1 & Frame 2); however, it should be mentioned that this is not a regular practice for her. She does not read out all the phrases that she types in the browser and she only does so for similar moments when she needs feedback. The act of reading out may indicate that she tries to make P2 understand what she is searching for. This may be a way to bestow the leadership role on the other social actor.

After hearing the proposition, P2 disagrees and attempts to reorient P1’s trajectory by telling her the right accommodation type and offering a more practical alternative. In other words, when he understands what P1 is prepared to do and realizes that it is in contrast to the focus of the group, he redirects P1 to another line of search and provides reasons for his idea.

The moment when the social actor disagrees with P1, one can notice assertiveness and authority at play (Frame 3) perhaps because if the message is not delivered with enough force, it is possible that a poor decision would be made for their trip. After expressing the disagreement assertively, he lowers his voice and provides reasons for the disagreement in a soft tone. At this time, he undertakes demonstrable postural reorientation. He prepares himself for reasoning by first taking distance from the desk (Frame 4) and then leaning forward when the utterance is finished (Frame 5). His feedback is acknowledged and P1 changes her phrase to exactly what he suggested (Frame 6). This shows that the participants help each other during the process of collective decision-making and lead each other to other areas if necessary. However, it should be emphasized that there is no predefined leader or follower in the interaction and the actions are dedicated to making decisions collectively.

**Figure 13**  
*Excerpt 13*



It seems that by disagreeing with the interlocutor, the social actor changes the searching direction of the teammate and helps the group to stick to a central idea. Based on the interaction and the flow of conversation, disagreement can allow participants to focus on a united direction. One can argue that the leadership role is exercised because the group was redirected to cruises instead of hotels. This choice was made by both of the interlocutors and as one of them was deviating from the focus, the other one redirected her by disagreeing on spot. The disagreement took five seconds and was carried out without hesitation.

Comparing the dyads, it can be argued that even though disagreement in both groups was targeted to focused decision-making and helped all participants to stick to their central choices, there is variation in style between English and Farsi speakers. English speakers tend to express disagreement explicitly. It means that they directly say what they disagree with and why. They use the least possible number of words to do so which can be an offshoot for having shorter conversations. Farsi speakers, however, tend to use hedging, pauses, examples and explanations in lengthy chunks and crack jokes. This is perhaps done following cultural understanding and shared knowledge of interactants which makes the act of disagreeing implicit and lengthy. Therefore, styles of disagreement as a leadership strategy vary from culture to culture during online conferences.

This chapter presented the analysis of four of the most regularly manifested strategies through which leadership is exercised and decision-making is facilitated between English and Farsi speakers in online sessions (Harper et al., 2019). By analyzing individual instances in each of the representative samples, it was shown how social actors engage in an interaction by accumulating information, reporting to each other, assigning tasks, and disagreeing with one another. These strategies were identified and ruminated with a focus on MIA as the theoretical framework of the study and visual transcription conventions.

## 5 Discussion

In an unstructured goal-directed multiparty online task, interlocutors tend to do leadership work in a fluid manner rather than establishing a concrete

and consistent leader-follower binary. Leadership is exercised following the participation of all the social actors who change roles flexibly. Interactants do not specify any sort of power or distance between each other. In fact, they may not know whether or not they are doing leadership by facilitating task achievement (Summerfield, 2014). Leadership strategies ease the progress of decision-making by helping individuals to zoom in on relevant ideas. The strategies identified in this study are *accumulating information*, *reporting to the interlocutor*, *assigning task*, and *disagreeing with the interlocutor*.

## 5.1 Accumulating Information: A Leadership Strategy

Following the analysis of the representative samples, this study showed that accumulating information as a leadership strategy, effectively influences the behavior and result of the whole group because it eases the process of decision-making. Employing this strategy, social actors ask for ideas, preferences, thoughts and opinions of interlocutors to narrow down a topic and make it more doable. Collecting information facilitates decision-making by letting the members set and adjust their target throughout the process. When teammates are given several options, they can narrow them down by collecting information from each other and work toward a specific point. Information can be accumulated by applying changes in prosodic contours and using a multitude of communicative modes.

According to the tenets of game theory (Nash et al., 1950), participants affect each other's choices and as the interaction goes on, they reach a certain point based on the behavior and idiosyncrasies they demonstrate. The present study underpins this idea by showing that the members supported their decisions by zooming on certain alternatives instead of many and gradually showing changes regarding their understanding of the task. Furthermore, the strategies they adopted influenced the interaction. For example, when social actors accumulated information from members, they limited options with the help of each other and moved toward a united goal which affected the whole decision-making process.

As detailed in the analysis, participants in Dyad 3 and Dyad 4 collectively engaged in accumulating information and managed to make specific decisions by limiting their options; i.e., they chose to go to Norway by cruise and fly to

France on July 4th, respectively. Note that in both excerpts, the individuals asked neither too many questions nor too few. Rather, they kept a balance between perhaps 3-4 questions so that the brain gets enough information. At the beginning of each excerpt the participants were faced with a big fuzzy picture with many options but accumulating enough information allowed them to make specific choices and take a clear route. It seems that the more knowledge the participants collected from peers, the more confident they felt to make decisions. It is possible that too much information can break the balance.

The analysis showed that participants helped each other to come up with more clear thoughts when they asked for opinions of teammates and acted based on it. One area where this finding can be applied to is business. Glazer and Karpati (2014) indicated that in cultures with high power distance, decisions are mostly made by a limited number of people even though they discuss issues with all members. Karami and Dubinsky (2019) supported this viewpoint by emphasizing that decision-making in Iranian organizations is done by a few powerful managers. It seems that asking for ideas of other members can help the group come up with better decisions in organizational settings.

The present study specified that teammates pay attention to the ideas of the members and the puzzle is completed by the collection of all thoughts. While this study was conducted in a non-institutional setting with no strict hierarchy between participants, it is likely that this phenomenon can be found in other situations. For example, during university online meetings, there is no explicit hierarchy between participants but they collaborate with each other to complete tasks. Also, colleagues at work may gather in online meetings where they need to make decisions and engage in problem-solving situations. At such moments, they usually discuss the issues together and find a solution to the problems.

## **5.2 Reporting to the Interlocutor: A Leadership Strategy**

Leadership can occur through other social actors' communicative practices and is not just something that is enacted, but also bestowed by other inter-



locutors. Asking for clarification may be regarded as a practice which bestows leadership on individuals as they help the person who is confused. Collective decision-making requires the whole team to be in a unified direction, not just one person knowing what s/he does. For example, the excerpt from Dyad 1, showed that after reporting to the task distributor, one participant got confused but the task distributor helped him understand the meaning of the concept. After the concept became clear, the person who was confused made his suggestion about considering an approximate price which was approved by the task distributor. So, they collectively made a decision on selecting ticket prices in Paris and acted on it.

Reporting facts during videoconferences can occur implicitly. In such occasions, the intention of an individual may be to implicitly ask for assistance. This may be followed by the intervention of an interlocutor to take initiative and help the group make a collective decision. In other words, participants report on what they have (not) achieved and seek some cues to carry on with the task. Instead of asking explicitly, they may address themselves and talk about a momentary problem but the interlocutor comprehends the intention as s/he understands the pragmatic functions of the conversation and is aware of the shared background knowledge of teammates. This finding may be a sign that pragmatic values of an interaction are realized by people with shared background and having similar or semi-similar background in a videoconference could help members interact more fruitfully.

For example, in the first excerpt of Dyad 2, one of the participants wanted to know how she could find the price of a hotel herself but her intention was to ask her interlocutor to do that. The message was conveyed, the interlocutor took charge by searching for the price of the hotel and they collectively made a decision to spend a certain amount of money on the hotel. However, this style of reporting can lead to missing the messages if recipients of information are not fully aligned with the cultural background or are negligent of each other's attempts.

As put by Norris and Geenen (2021) it is possible that an interlocutor misses the reports of teammates and does not consciously attend to them. Depending on the way an individual reports a fact or idea (implicitly/explicitly), social agents can help each other demystify concepts and affect the communication. For example, the second excerpt of Dyad 2 showed that a participant

reported her lack of idea on how to make “such a decision” three times but her interlocutor did not attend to either of them because the message was not clearly broadcast. However, a moment of talking to self solved the puzzle and helped the group choose Belgium and France based on the map. It appears that individuals do not always pay attention to each other because an action can be in the background of the continuum of attention/awareness (Geenen & Pirini, 2020).

Reporting facts can determine how the whole interaction takes place. It can influence the management of time, which is important in everyday life. Following what Kiesler and Sproull (1992) mentioned, decision-making between three people “takes approximately 4 times as long in a real-time computer conference as face-to-face” (p.108). The reasons for this delay may be ample, however, it seems that clear messages can help individuals convey ideas quicker and save time. The way participants in business meetings, classroom groups, governmental positions and many other organizations report information, can impact their work. People need to constantly make decisions which at points can be a difficult task but when it is done collectively, it can be more efficient since more details will be considered from a variety of perspectives.

Such a phenomenon can be found between employees and supervisors, for example. The cultural specificities of individuals as well as contextual elements of an interaction influence how information is distributed between colleagues, partners, friends, etc. The flexible nature of human communication causes us to change leadership role but it is necessary to consider how the information should be reported.

### **5.3 Assigning Task: A Leadership Strategy**

According to the first principle stated by Lord and Dinh (2014), leadership is not a unidirectional phenomenon in which one person or certain people with privileges would be included, rather it incorporates a wider range of parties who have equal share and must cooperate with each other to create a sound interaction. In such a multiparty exchange, interactants shift roles and each person can assign tasks to other members.

The analysis of Dyad 1, Dyad 2, and Dyad 4 showed that social actors formulate duties to all parties democratically. The task distributors not only assigned tasks to other members, but they set a duty for themselves and announced that elaborately to make sure everyone understood they were not doing the job alone. When interactants received the task, they started looking for answers by first making postural shifts and/or redistributing their gaze before attempting it. This applies to task distributors as well, i.e., their postural and proxemic properties before and after task assignment, shifted demonstrably and their prosodic contour changed to signal the beginning and end point of higher-level actions.

Fair task distribution is a crucial leadership strategy because it encapsulates equity and inclusion. There are many people in different sectors who struggle to have their perspectives included in decisions that are made by organizations. Logical and fair task distribution encourages individuals to speak their truth more clearly and share thoughts which can be valuable to the group. One of the central aspects of inclusive leadership is to consider the sense of belonging in all members. Equitable task distribution can be a leadership strategy through which all members would feel included, engaged, and motivated by virtue of having a part to play.

A noteworthy point about assigning tasks is that social actors must try to distribute tasks as clearly and equitably as possible. A clear task could, for example, be accompanied by guidance about workable solutions, an image of the expected results, plus tools to achieve them. An equitable task would consider the potentials, knowledge, background and principles of the members and must not be mistaken with equal tasks. Employing these tactics or similar ones can help interactants experience less ambiguity and perform more efficiently when they try to accomplish an objective in daily interactions.

## **5.4 Disagreeing with the Interlocutor: A Leadership Strategy**

The analysis of the samples showed that disagreeing with an interlocutor can be another leadership strategy that facilitates group decision-making by preventing members from getting involved in dilemma and confusion.

Disagreement in task-oriented online groups can be regarded a leadership strategy as it seems to redirect the route of participants, help them save time, let them stick to a goal and be consistent throughout the process. As Torrance (1957) emphasized, disagreement is helpful to team-players as it helps them avoid probable misunderstanding.

As described and illustrated in the first excerpt of Dyad 1, an interlocutor was trying to convince members to bring light food for their trip but others disagreed and focused on renting a car which was perhaps more important to them. This way they did not waste time on discussing what to bring and saved it on finding gas prices instead. In the second excerpt, a similar situation arose where a participant suggested the members use the metro as the means of transport in Stockholm while an interlocutor disagreed since she believed that would be more costly than hiring a car; so the individual was convinced that metro was not a good option and the group focused on finding gas prices. This is in line with the ideas of Torrance (1957) as he believed that failing to disagree in task-oriented groups may jeopardize the decision-making and objectives of the team.

The first excerpt of Dyad 3 showed that when a participant proposed bicycles as a mode of transportation to be used in Norway, the interlocutor disagreed and convinced her to ignore it. The person who disagreed, continued focusing on cruises to stick to what they had decided on collectively from the beginning of their interaction. The second excerpt featured the time when a participant suggested hotels as an accommodation type for the trip while her interlocutor disagreed and redirected her to search for the cruise. This helped the group to stick to their plan and save time.

A comparison between the dyads revealed that there is variation in disagreement patterns between English and Farsi speakers where the former rely on unmitigated and the latter on mitigated forms (Ishihara, 2016). On the one hand, English speakers expressed their thoughts on spot, without hesitation and without wasting time. On the other hand, Farsi speakers expressed their disagreement by prevaricating, explaining, exemplifying, hesitating, pausing and making jokes and relied on the background and cultural understanding of their interlocutors. A reason for this phenomenon could be disagreement is traditionally a face-threatening act (Goffman, 1967) and people may feel offended when others do not approve of their ideas (Brown

et al., 1987). Disagreement nuances, thus, need to be heeded in online and offline environments as they influence the direction of the path toward goal achievement. Individuals and businesses need to realize how people in cultures with high and low power distance react to rejection so as to adopt correct strategies in daily activities.

To answer the first research question, it is worth noting that to make decisions in non-hierarchical and non-institutional online settings where social distance and power are minimal, leadership is exercised collectively, dynamically and democratically. This is in contrast to common conceptualization where there is a predefined leader, a number of followers and the team is directed by the leader, the task distributor or the boss who is a perfect decision maker on her/his own (Kiesler & Sproull, 1992). This finding applies to cultures with high and low power distance. Social actors switch roles from one context to the other based on the flow of the interaction.

To answer the second research question, strategies that interactants adopt which facilitate leadership include accumulating information from teammates, reporting facts to implicitly ask for help, assigning tasks to accomplish a goal, and disagreeing to (re)orient the direction of the talk. These strategies may be formulated implicitly and/or explicitly and can bestow the leadership role on interlocutors. Based on the dynamism and flexibility of interaction in videoconferences, participants exercise the role of leader at different times but with similar patterns.

The findings of this study suggest a different view than what had been proposed in previous studies. Many researchers such as Kiesler and Sproull (1992) believed that leadership and decision-making are unidirectional in the sense that one person with certain privileges makes the final calls which are “predictable” (p. 96) but this study showed that doing leadership in online ensembles is a “shared” process (Zhu et al., 2012). It is highly flexible, cooperative, and fluid. There is no prearranged leader who is nominated to do the leadership work individually but the social actors change roles in the dynamism of interaction.

## 5.5 Further Research and Limitations

In the dataset, it was noticed that sometimes social actors independently shift from what they were initially doing and jump to unrelated subjects. For example, one was asked to find ticket prices, while ended up looking for food. It would be interesting to see what provokes individuals to parry tasks. Is this because they are not motivated or have minimum knowledge to tackle the topic? Or satisfaction with the task could be a factor that causes individuals to shift topics and as a result go look for things they are more interested in. Further investigation is suggested to find how group work can have successful results by tailoring tasks to needs, wants and/or expertise of members.

This study was not without limitations. In total, four dyads formed the core dataset of this thesis and as a result few participants were recruited for data collection. More inclusive results would have been ensured had more representative samples were targeted.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that all the contact with the participants was made online, including task explanation and setup, therefore, technical issues were handled by participants instead of the researcher. Screens of two participants were half-recorded and some parts were fractured at the end of the interaction because the researcher failed to explain in enough detail and resolve all the technical problems.

Also, more expanded results would have been ensured if more than one camera angle was employed to collect data. In this study, all participants were recorded through one webcam directed only to their face while more communicative modes could have been analyzed had more cameras were employed from different angles. Since a webcam is mostly directed to the face of participants, it is possible that other parts of the body do not get recorded properly. Having multiple cameras installed in different angles can help the researcher look into communicative modes such as gesture, proxemics, posture, etc. in more details.

## 6 Conclusion

The sudden shift to video-mediated interaction raised a number of issues regarding how individuals had to make decisions in their everyday jobs. Harper et al. (2019) called for a need to meticulously examine what happens “in and through” (p. 6) a virtual meeting and how participants interact with each other online. In order to answer this call, the present study explored the strategies that are applied by online users during authentic videoconferencing in detail, particularly using Skype as an audio/video software.

To find out these strategies, this study employed Multimodal Inter(action) Analysis (MIA) (Norris, 2011), as a theoretical and methodological framework which allows the analyst to scrutinize the interaction by looking at lower-level and higher-level actions. It provides a room to explore the miniature characteristics of interaction. It was found that leadership strategies employed during video-mediated sessions include, accumulating information, reporting to the interlocutor, assigning task and disagreeing with the interlocutor. Nobody was formerly assigned as the leader to do leadership individually and permanently, in contrast, social actors enacted leadership through communicative practices flexibly. They shifted roles and helped each other to accomplish objectives by making collective decisions.

In conclusion, it can be proposed that there are commonalities in core components of the findings in this research and other sectors. The ways in which people negotiate decisions and enact leadership in a social situation is comparable to how leadership is done in all social situations; whether they be institutional, educational, political, and any other social situation.

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# Appendices

## A Participant Information Sheet

I am inviting you to participate in this online study. The following information highlight key details so as to help you decide whether or not to accept this invitation. Before starting your participation, please ask any questions about any information relevant to this study or if you need more explanation. Thanks.

**Title:** Human multimodal communication and online negotiation: An ethnomethodological study of leadership and decision-making strategies in video-mediated ensembles

**Researcher contact details:**

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**Goal and methodology:**

This study looks at the way people communicate when making collaborative decisions in a Skype conversation. You will receive certain scenarios about daily activities which contain some problems that you need to solve in your group with your laptop cameras turned on. The scenarios are designed in a way that you'll need to search online. So, you should record your screen while you are searching the web and send the recorded video to the researcher.

The goal of this study is to find the effect of social elements during online problem-solving sessions. So, this is an entirely online study and what you do with your groupmate(s) will be an important part of the data for this work.

Finally, you will answer some questions about your preferences and details of your choices during interactions. This may happen at some later time after the group chat.

**Ethical considerations:**

During this study, your data will be treated in accordance with ethical guidelines of Radboud University. It means that the information you provide for this study is going to be treated confidentially and anonymously and only for academic purposes. Finally, your actual name will never be used in the publication of this work and only fictitious names will be used.

**Duration:**

It is expected that your participation will last between 30 to 40 minutes.

**Procedure and activity:**

Half an hour prior to your meeting with your groupmates, you will be given a scenario and you are going to make-decisions and reach a conclusion about that.

**Risks:**

No risk is predicted for participating in this study.

**What happens if I agree to participate?**

If you agree to participate, your data will be analyzed for a thesis in the field of applied linguistics. Your participation includes: solving a problem in a group and answering some questions about your experience.

**What happens to the information collected for this study?**

The information will be stored, studied and analyzed in order to be published in a master's thesis. Your voice, face, hand gestures, and movements will be analyzed to be put in the analysis part of the thesis. However, we will keep your actual name confidential.

**What if I want to stop participating in this study?**

Your participation is 100% voluntary and this is absolutely your decision to take part. However, you are always free to leave this study whenever you feel uncomfortable. So, you can stop at any time.

**Will it cost me money to take part in this research?**

There are no costs associated with participation in this research study.

**Will I be paid for participating in this research?**

You will not be paid for taking part in this research.

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

I have had the opportunity to read and consider the information in this form. I understand that I can ask additional questions throughout my participation. I understand that by signing below, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that my recorded video will be analyzed only for academic purposes. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I understand that if my ability to consent or assent for myself changes, either I or my legal representative may be asked to re-consent prior to my continued participation in this study.

## B Transcription of Verbiage

**Dyad 3-Accumulating Information 1** P2: Then what do we, what do you

P1: Ok, I would like to go to Norway or Sweden because it's farther away. And I think it's nice because it has more things that I haven't seen yet.

P2: But are Sweden and Norway connected properly?

P1: Humm?

P2: Are Sweden and Norway connected properly?

P1: No, I mean one of those

P2: Only one?

P1: I don't know. or two? I don't know like Belgium and France I've been to. I would like to do something different.

P2: Uhum.

P1: We can do Sweden and Norway. I think they are also close. P2: Yeah, yeah. They are next to each other actually.

P1: Yeah, so then we can do those. I would say. What do you prefer?

P2: Yeah, we can do that. We could also. I mean we have two weeks. So, we should go to France.

P1: Yeah, but four countries is a little bit stressful.

P2: Yeah.

P1: Or we can do a cruise.

P2: We do what?

P1: A cruise. Like. No, I think. Let's do Norway and Sweden.

P2: Norway and Sweden?

P1: Uhum.

P2: Ok.

P1: Let's see. Sweden. Country in Europe. Yeah, I think I would like to do like

P2: Norway 7-day trip for oh yeah but that's a bit out of the budget. But it is like a whole month. That's expensive.

P1: Let's do hiking. Let's do hiking. And see the... uuh. see the... how do you call... the polar lights. No, northern lights. Or only in winter?

P2: When do you have to go to see that?

P1: Northern lights when to see.

P2: When to see. Ok.

P1: From late August to early April.

P2: August to early April. So, we are kind of probably kind of late to that.

P1: We're probably exactly in the time we can't go. Sad! Ok. Then we don't have to worry about that at least. Even though looks cool. Yeah. Ok, anyways. That's so big. Ok, uum. Yeah, I've never been to Norway, so, I would like to go to Oslo. I've been to Stockholm. But ...

P2: But maybe...

L1: I think Bergen. I think Bergen is also pretty big to see and pretty. How do I?

L2: And the Fjords. Oha.

L1: How do you see that? Oh, wait. What to see in ...

L2: I'm checking Royal Caribbean cruises.

L1: Yeah, but cruise is not so good for the environment, though. I think yeah.

**Dyad 4-Accumulating Information 1** P1: Which time is convenient for you? Because this depends on time.

P2: Let's do it in the summer, right?

P1: Yeah, exactly. I'm going to Armenia in August, but other months are fine. What about you?

P2: Let's do it in July then.

P1: July. Which day? You see 2, 4, 9, 11, 16, 18.

P2: It should be the beginning of July.

P1: Beginning. Then 2nd or 4th. I think 2nd might be cheaper. Or Sunday. Actually, the other way around. Ok. Let's start with 4th.

P2: Choose 2nd first. And then ...

P1: I already proceeded with 4th. Sorry.

P2: Oh. Ok ok no problem.

**Dyad 1-Reporting to the Interlocutor 1** P2: The full one would be €7. The ticket which takes you everywhere you want. If I'm not mistaken.

P1: For the whole thing?

P2: But there are some zones which I don't know about.

P1: Zone is like our Line 1, for example, which goes from North to South. I don't know bla bla bla.

P2: That's right. So, in my opinion we should search for an approximate

price. for example, we would ask how much it would be during these many days.

P1: Very well. Ok then. Look, our ticket price from the beginning of our trip would be €170.

**Dyad 2-Reporting to the Interlocutor 1** P1: So, you set it on France?

P2: No, I've just started one by one. I have no thingy... (preference). Umm. I don't really know. I don't really know how to make such a decision. "Which country is better to see?" uum. "To travel?". I'm also going to do the real search. Was it in euros or dollars?

P1: Euro. €3000.

P2: Ok. I searched like this. Did he tell us the number of days?

P1: Maximum 2 weeks.

P2: Ok. 14 at most. Alright. An interesting point mentioned here is that it depends on where you begin your trip. i.e., it has counted the departure point as well.

(Discussing technical problem)

P2: Interestingly Vietnam and China are there but France is not. Oh, here it is. "This post has been so helpful I'll be studying abroad in France in the spring and I'll be blogging about it! ...". Nothing. Literally nothing. . Nothing about this one either...

P1: Ah, now they have started texting...

P2: Why is this (the chair) down this much ?

P1: I think this must be good...Norway... ...Wait a minute... Belgium. Wish Finland was also there.

P2: Alright.

P1: As you are searching for the most affordable countries, also search for the sights that are worth visiting.

P2: Honestly, I have not found anything specific so far. Have you?

P1: I'm searching for Belgium and Norway and the attractions in them. What beautiful nature!

P2: I'm proud to say I can't find anything. And I don't know why.

P1: It was Norway and Belgium. Belgium is sort of a historical country. Do you like historical places?

P2: I'm ok. I like it.

P1: What a flexible and good person!



P2: Travelling is nice.

P1: Yeah, travelling is nice. Wow, it is also pretty. It has everything.

P2: I also like a beautiful natural place. Why not? The main reason I want to travel to France is for the Louvre Museum.

P1: So, I guess Belgium would work well for us. Because it has natural and historical attractions such as churches and museums all together.

P2: Ok. Now that I look at the map, I see that France is here. France and Belgium are adjacent. Ok?

P1: Ok.

P2: Now that they are adjacent, one point is that we can have France and Belgium together. You like Belgium and I like France.

P1: Yes.

**Dyad 2-Reporting to the Interlocutor 2** P1: This is an interesting hotel, in general. How should I find the costs of this hotel?

P2: What's the name of the hotel?

P1: Novotel.

P2: Vatel?

P1: Novotel. It's close to Eiffel as well. N-O-V-O-T-E-L

P2: Aha

P1: Novotel Paris center tour. But the name is Novotel. What a cool place.

P2: Novotel Paris... Alright. Novotel Paris. Let's go for price. Oh now I remember, for hotel and such stuff, we should go to booking.com.

P1: How much does it say?

P2: Uum... Good is 7.5... Great location... Bookin.com doesn't show me prices. Ok. Show price. Classic twin.

P1: Go for the double. Yeah. Twin.

P2: See available rooms and prices. Should I curse now? Booking.com doesn't show me prices?

P1: Doesn't it?

P2: Nope. Doesn't care about me. It says you should sign in. Wait I sign in with one of my many accounts. 36 minutes passed so far.

P1: Ok, good.

P2: Again, reserve, show price. Doesn't give anything. Can you believe it? Oh yeah. No nothing.

P1: Let me go here.

P2: You know what's interesting? It gives me the prices in Rial.  
P1: Even better. No, it doesn't work. Nothing.  
P2: For example, 8 million or something.  
P1: How much would it be to convert to Euro? I don't know. Dollar price is not 25 Toman. That one would be around 30 or something.  
P2: Wait. It says set out your budget. Look if you can tell me our budge in Rial.  
P1: Wait a moment.  
P2: This IRR, what is this.  
P1: It's Iran.  
P2: No No it is not that. It says Internal Rate of Return.  
P1: The internet doesn't work. Dollar price.  
P2: Today's price, yes. Here it shows in Rial.  
P1: Wait. I'll tell you our budget in Rial.  
P2: Really, shouldn't we go for Couchsurfing? Our stay would be so expensive.  
P1: Let us search and see how much would that be. Aha, here. It shows digital currency.  
P2: I want to curse it. Aha, here it is.  
P1: May, 2021. Euro is 28.800 Toman.  
P2: No worries. We don't need it. Found it. Wait. I am changing the currency. It's too slow. After so many years. Congratulations. If we want a twin bed, it would be €111.

**Dyad 1-Assigning Task 1** P1: So, I'd say we divide work. You, (P3's name), find the uum, trip, the ticket expenses (P2's name), you find the thingy, uum the best transportation method and I will find Stockholm attractions. Sounds good?  
P2: I should find transportations? You mean what we should go by? Right?  
P1: Yeah, for example if we should take the tram, bus? See if the busses are good.  
P2: Alright. And then what about the rest of the items? Food, attractions, ...  
P3: We'll be at Mehdi's place.  
P1: Come on, we are not paying for accommodation to save for restaurants.  
P3: (inner jokes)

**Dyad 2-Assigning Task 1** P1: Ok, so. Now you should do a favor and search for Paris attractions...uum... Tell me the results so that I write them down. I will also look for the attractions of Belgium. That would actually be Brussels.

P2: I can't believe I'm searching in Farsi.

P1: Farsi is better. If you search in English, you'll get nowhere.

P2: Wow, how beautiful is that.

**Dyad 4-Assigning Task 1** P1: Yeah right. Yeah exactly. Right. Should we look at, should we go by flight? Or should we go by train?

P2: Is it possible to go to Sweden by train?

P1: Sweden, I mean not a single train, I think. Imagine maybe one of the ways to go there might be train. But I don't think the train would be everything. Even kijken, let's look. You know what? We could look what was Ryanair, I think. That was some secure European company. Cheap flights.

P2: Yeah. Look there. And I will also see if we can get to Sweden by train or not.

P1: Ok. So, we are going from Amsterdam maybe Eindhoven. Oh, it goes to only Ireland and Spain. Let me do English maybe it is easier for him to analyze it when we are doing this in English. Ok, maybe Eindhoven. Eindhoven is always much more... Yes, Eindhoven. Ok, so look. So, Eindhoven. We go from Eindhoven we can go to... let me see to which country... France. France is possible. That is easy.

P2: Uhum. Ok.

P1: And Sweden and which one was it as well? Norway. I don't think Norway and Sweden are possible, no. So, if we are going to use Ryanair, we have possibility to go to France, (Pause) Belgium is just like very easy from France, right?

P2: I think we could do that because we can't reach Sweden by train anyway.

P1: But we go to Marseille. Do you like Marseille? I think it's really nice place. That's two people. Let's go for approximate price. right? Do you also know EasyJet? Do you know EasyJet? It's also one, cheap one. Maybe you could look EasyJet.

P2: EasyJet. Ok I was already looking at pictures from Marseille but wait.

Ok.

P1: Which time is convenient for you? Because this depends on time.

P2: Let's do it in the summer, right?

P1: Yeah, exactly. I'm going to Armenia in August, but other months are fine. What about you?

P2: Let's do it in July then.

P1: July. Which day? You see 2, 4, 9, 11, 16, 18.

P2: It should be the beginning of July.

P1: Beginning. Then 2nd or 4th? I think 2nd might be cheaper. Or Sunday. Actually, the other way around. Ok. Let's start with 4th.

P2: Choose 2nd first. And then ...

P1: I already proceeded with 4th. Sorry.

P2: Oh. Ok ok no problem.

**Dyad 1-Disagreeing with the Interlocutor 1** P3: Now, I have another suggestion.

P2: What?

P3: I'd say, instead of bringing unnecessary stuff, alright, for example, everyone brings something to eat. In a way that we would not be charged for extra baggage weight. Clothes for normal use so that we can bring food instead. Because food would be expensive there.

P1: Uhum.

P3: As an example, I'd say...

P1: We should surely try out the special local food of that country and city.

P3: Yes. Apart from that. But for on the way, for example, when we were on a train or somewhere around the place, we have some food with us so that we wouldn't pay extra for food. For example, we can bring some cans with us, dried fruit, dates, things which have a volume and let us continue temporarily.

P1: Uhuum. Very well.

P2: Dried fruit wouldn't sustain me.

(Inside joke)

**Dyad 1-Disagreeing with the Interlocutor 2** P3: Guys, we can go by metro as well. By metro.

P2: \$ 5.8.

P1: 5.8. By metro, hmm, it's ...kinda... I feel that since..., for example, if we were on our own, public transportation would have been better for use. However, as far as we are three and we must pay for tickets, I feel...

P3: Car would be more comfortable.

P1: Yeah.

**Dyad 3-Disagreeing with the Interlocutor 1** P1: We can also go biking there.

P2: (P1's name) No. How are you gonna go biking in Norway?

P1: It says.

P2: Really?

P1: Yeah, I think you can do it. Yeah.

P2: But Norway is really a mountain. I mean, it really the glacier and fjords and everything, right?

P1: Hmm.

**Dyad 3-Disagreeing with the Interlocutor 2** P1: Ok, let's do hotel all inclusive.

P2: No, no. Hotel inclusive, no. Cruise.

P1: Cruise?

P2: Yeah, because the hotel inclusive, the thing is they don't tell you if it is inclusive or not.

P1: Ok, we do Norway that way. Norway cruise.