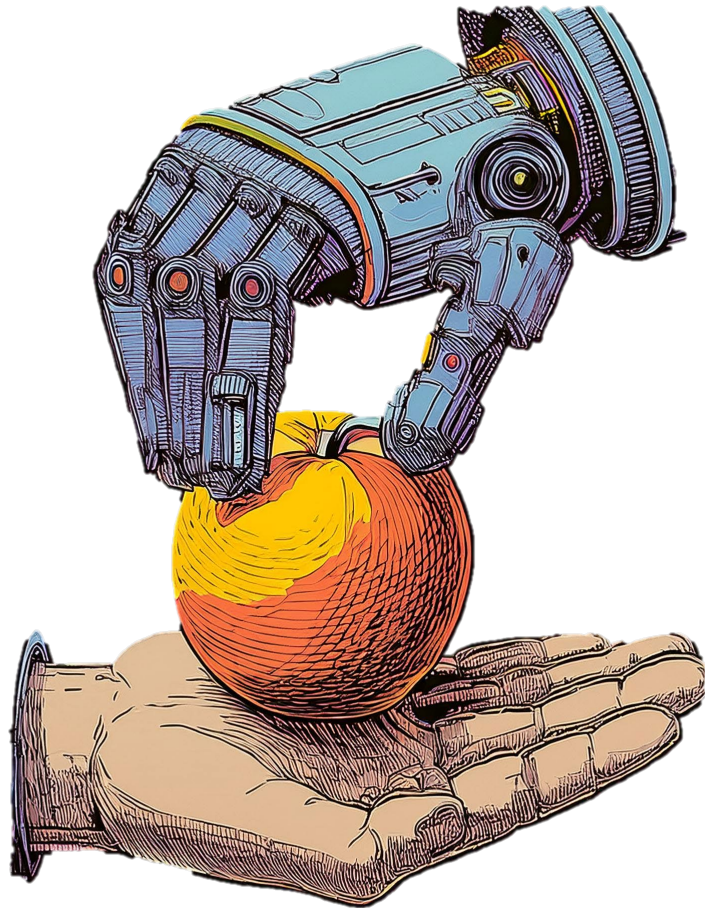


Brain-computer interfaces: methods and applications

Arnau Dillen



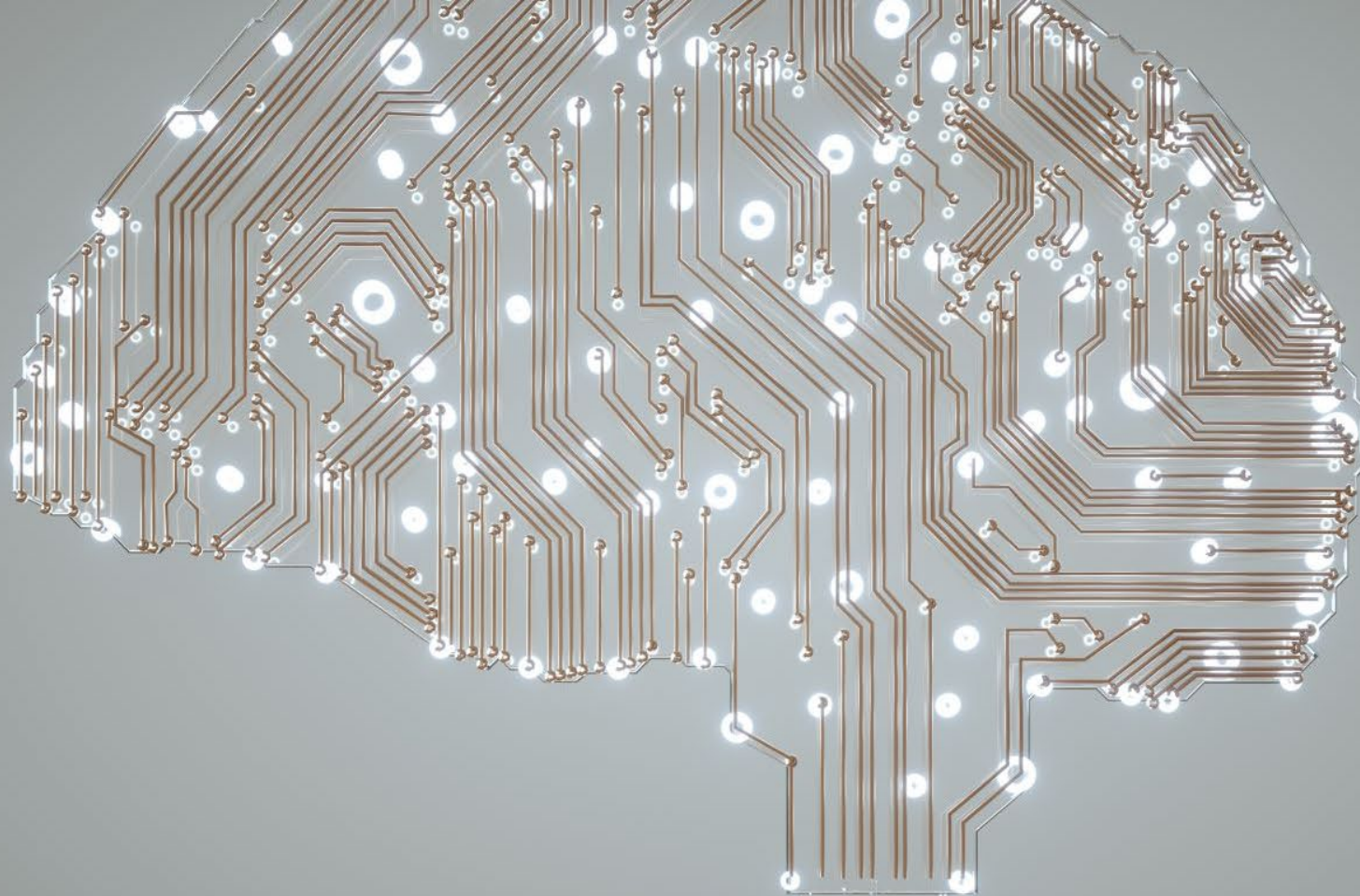
Introduction

"Unless in communicating with it one says exactly what one means, trouble is bound to result." (Alan Turing, 1945)

Mouse + keyboard and touchscreens are the standard interaction modalities today

- **But excludes people with physical disabilities!**
- **Inefficient for certain applications and use cases!**
- Alternatives are necessary.

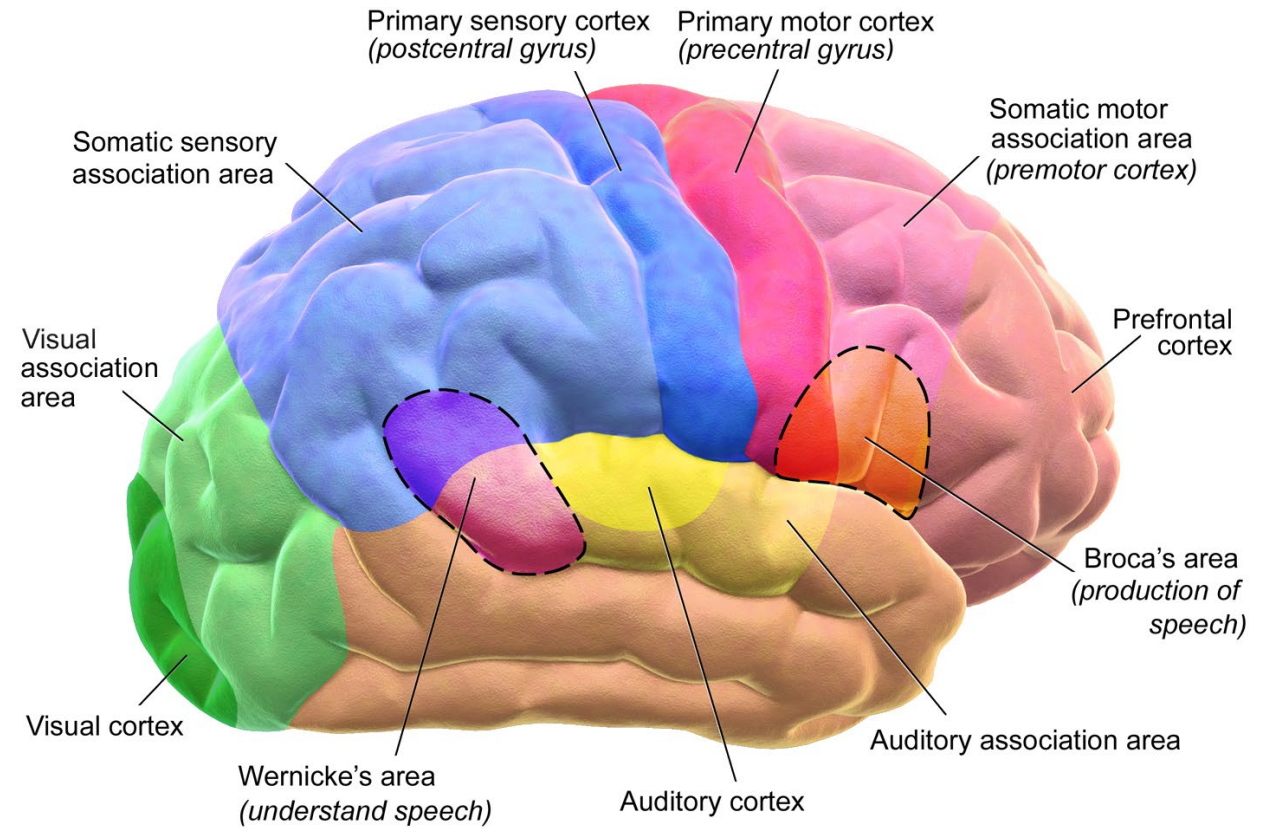
Possible alternative: Brain-computer interface



BACKGROUND

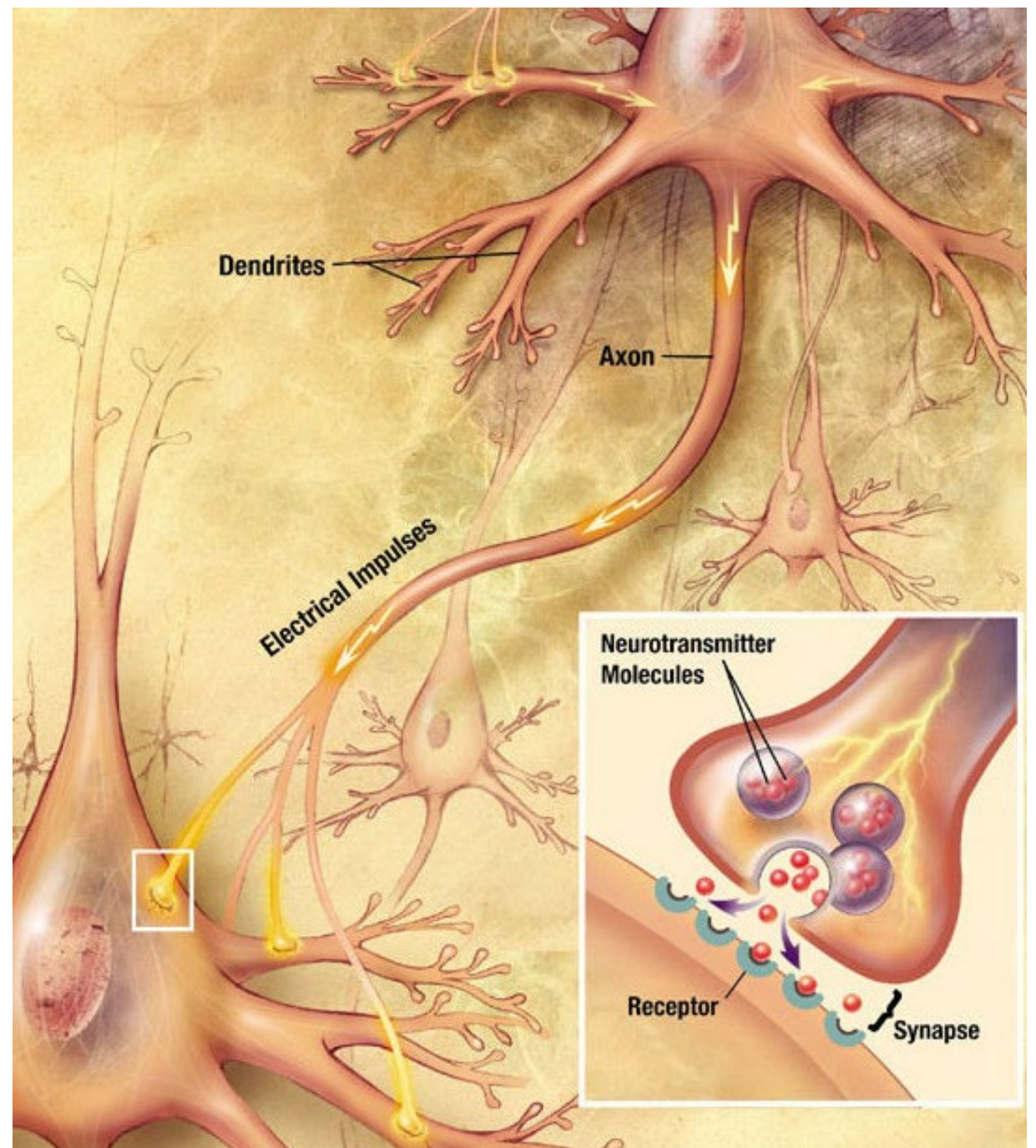
AI for brain data

THE BRAIN

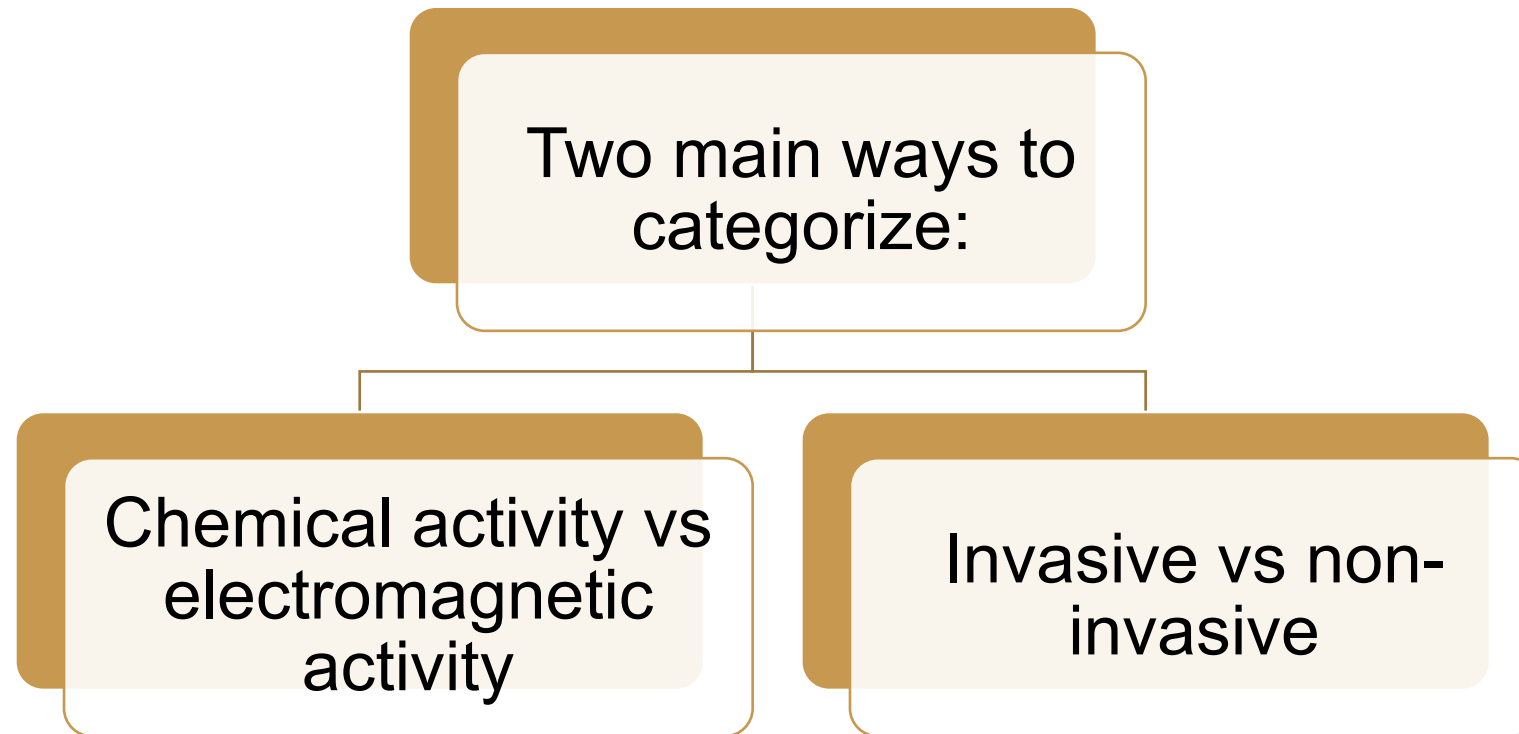


Blausen.com staff (2014). "Medical gallery of Blausen Medical 2014". WikiJournal of Medicine 1 (2). DOI:10.15347/wjm/2014.010. ISSN 2002-4436. - Own work, CC BY 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=60100749>

NEURONS



Measuring neural activity



Electromagnetic brain activity: non-invasive

Electroencephalogram (EEG)



By mBrainTrain. <https://mbraintrain.com/smarter-pro-line/>

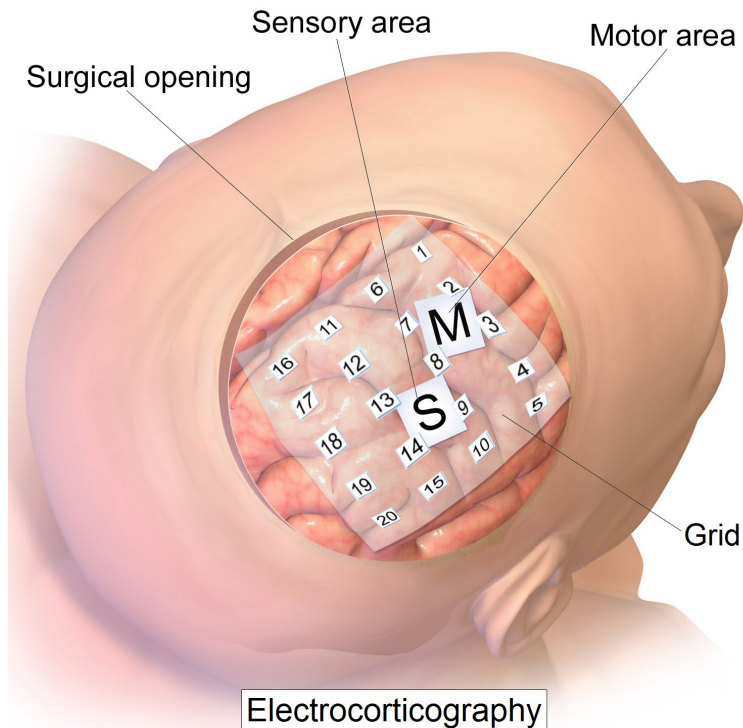
Magnetoencephalogram (MEG)



By Unknown NIMH author - NIMH Image library,
http://infocenter.nimh.nih.gov/il/public_il/image_details.cfm?id=80, Public Domain,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11909237>

Electromagnetic brain activity: invasive

Electrocorticogram (ECoG)



Local field potentials (LFP)

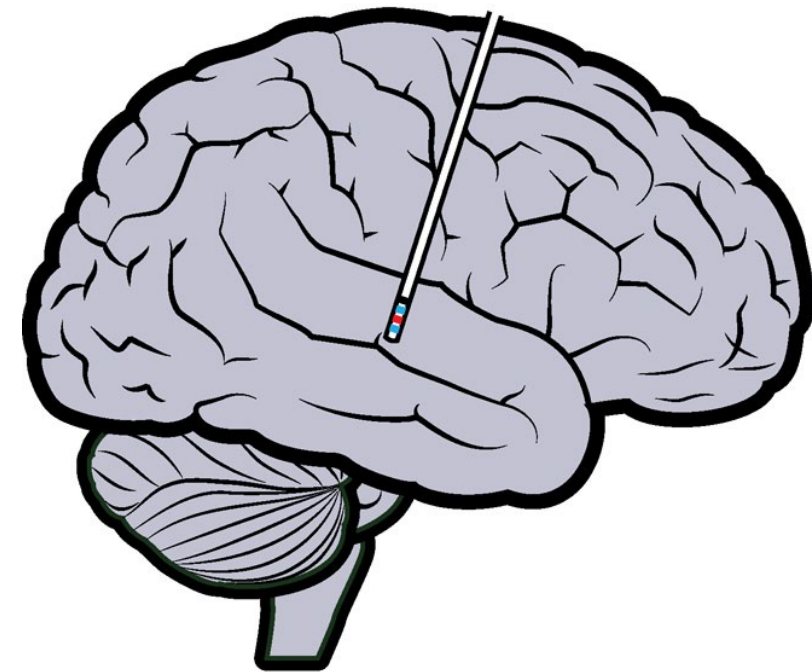


Image from: MRC Brain Network Dynamics Unit.
<https://www.mrcbndu.ox.ac.uk/groups/tan-group>

Blausen.com staff (2014). "Medical gallery of Blausen Medical 2014". WikiJournal of Medicine 1 (2). DOI:10.15347/wjm/2014.010. ISSN 2002-4436. - Own work, CC BY 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=31574255>

Chemical brain activity: invasive

Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI)



Functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS)



Image from: Salford PsyTech.
<https://hub.salford.ac.uk/psytech/psytechsalford/equipment-resources/functional-near-infrared-spectroscopy-fnirs/>

Neural signal comparison

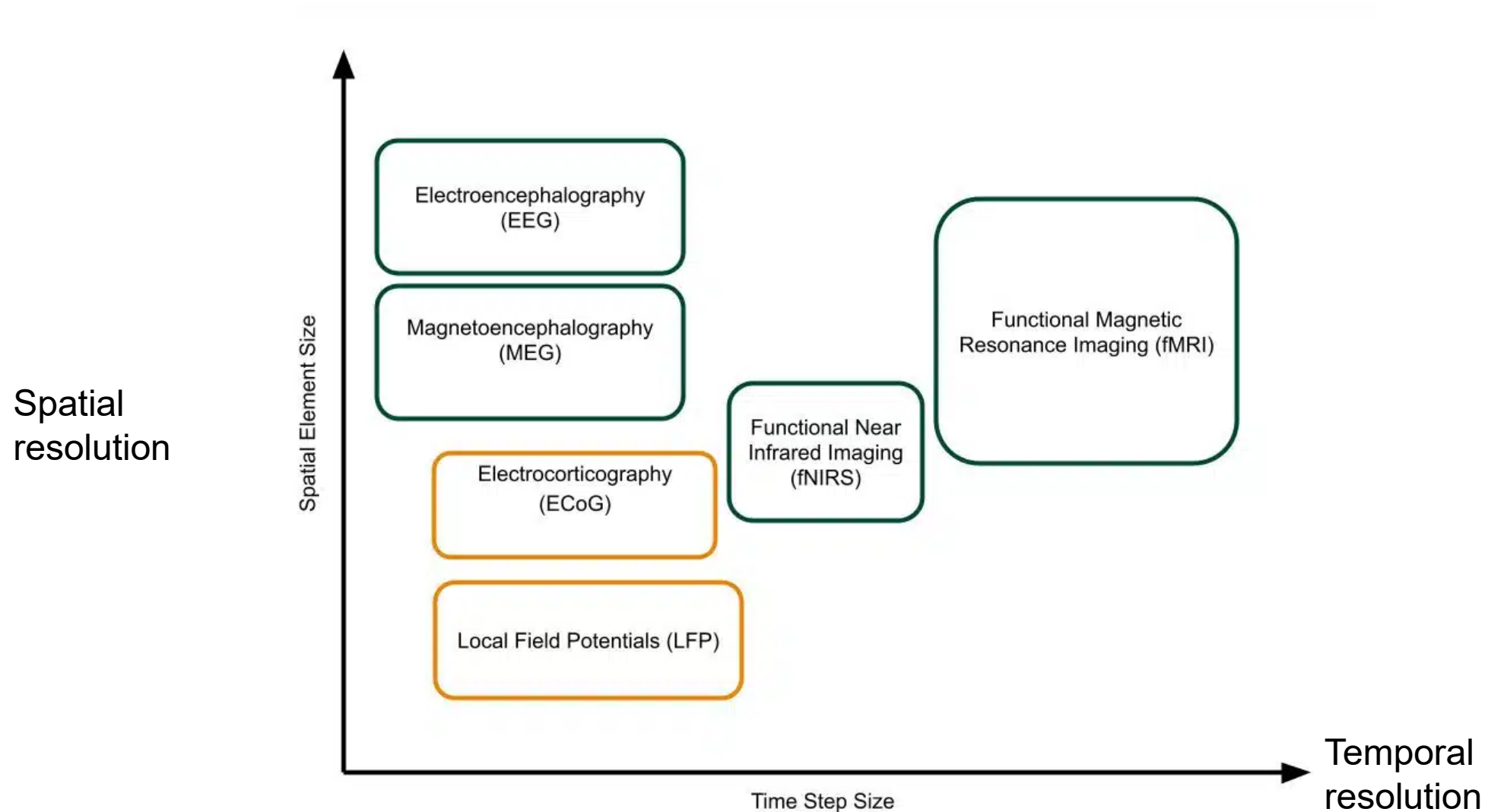


Image from: Brainaccess. <https://www.brainaccess.ai/methods-of-brain-activity-measurements/>

Our choice: EEG

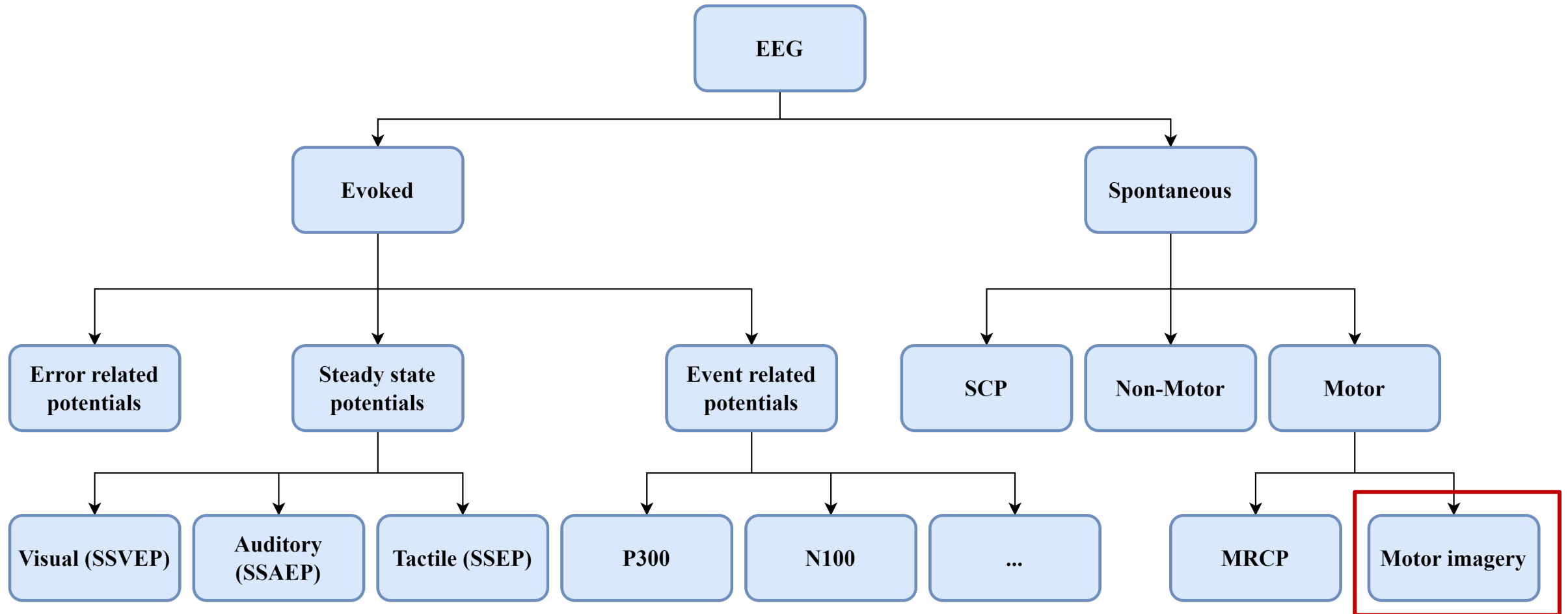
Pros

- Non-invasive
- Portable
- High temporal resolution
- Well-known

Cons

- Noisy
- Low spatial resolution

EEG modalities



AI applications using neural activity

Brain-computer interfaces (BCI)

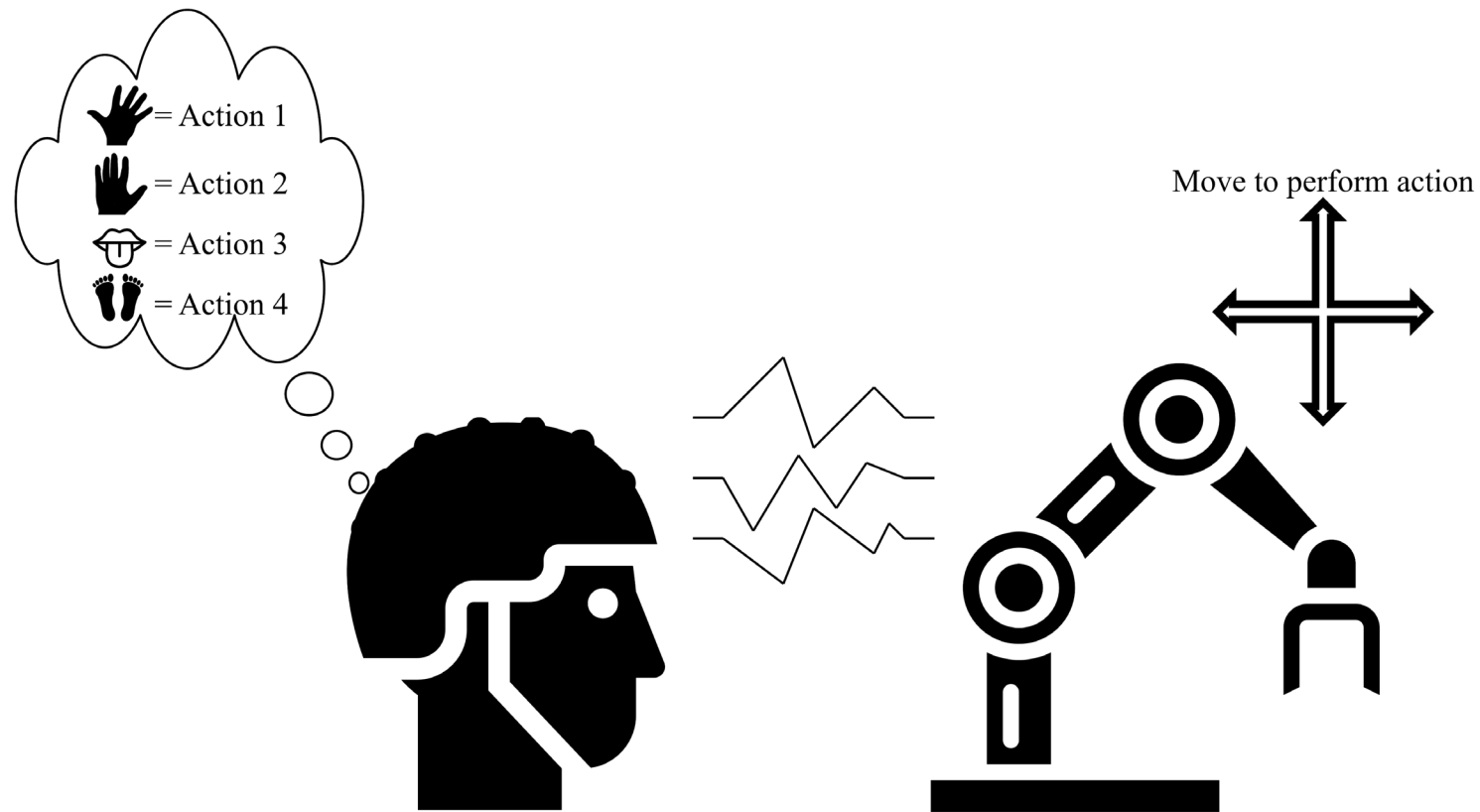
- Control
- Monitoring
- Human-in-the-loop

Neuroscience

- Epileptic seizure prediction
- Early onset Alzheimer detection
- Brain activity modelling

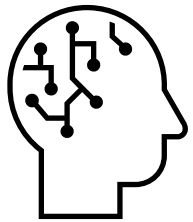
Brain-computer interfaces for control

Motor imagery (MI) BCI: Mapping imagined movement to device action



Robotic Arm by Smalllike from NounProject.com

BCI decoding pipeline



Signal Acquisition
(EEG)



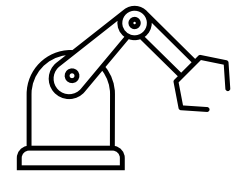
Pre-
processing



Feature
Extraction



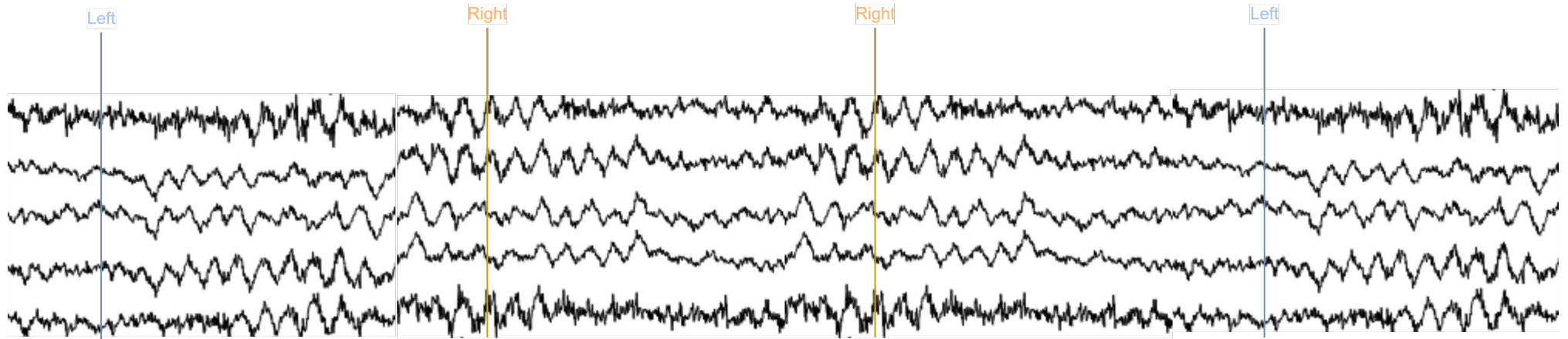
Classification
(Machine
learning)



Perform
requested
action

Getting training data from EEG

Continuous recording of EEG with event markers

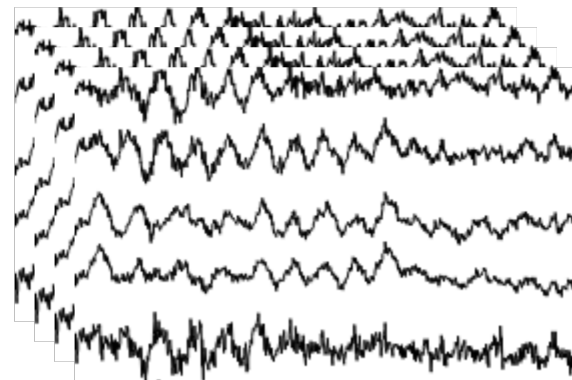
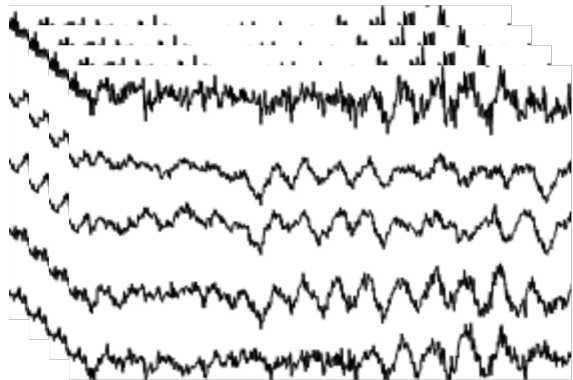


Extract windows

Left hand

Right hand

Labelled dataset of EEG windows



Issues

Noisy EEG
(artifacts, inter- and
intraindividual
variability, ...)

More MI classes
harder to classify

User training
necessary

Hard to gather
machine learning
training data

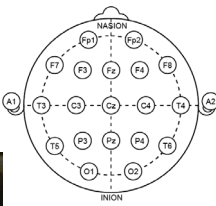
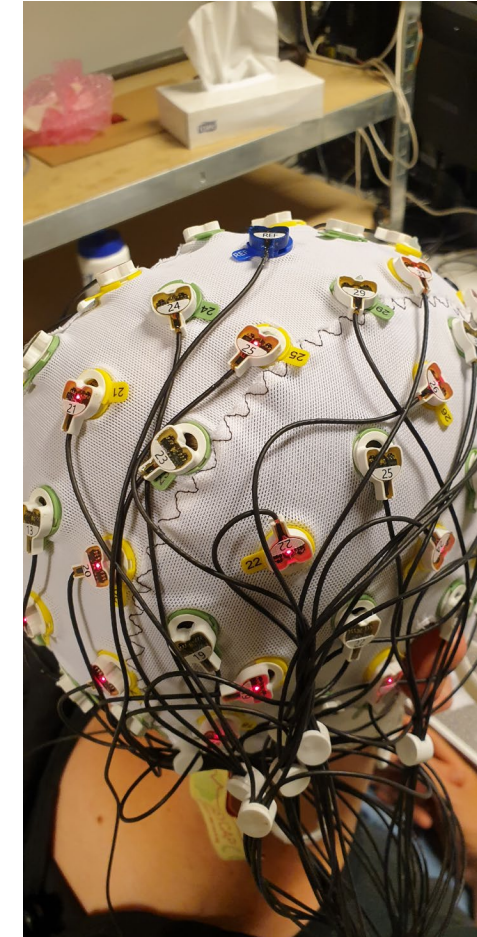
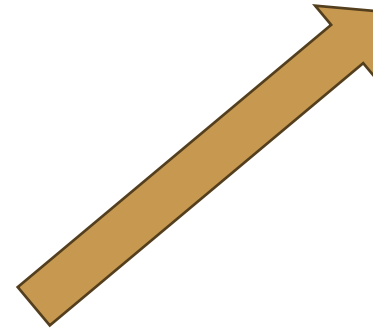
Lack of
standardised
evaluation for BCI
prototypes

Data acquisition

Acquiring MI data

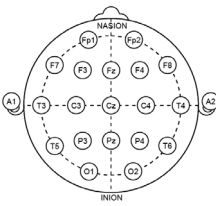
15 participants

- 14 male, 1 female
- Aged between 18 and 50 years (mean 28 ± 7).
- No prior BCI experience
- 5 sessions each



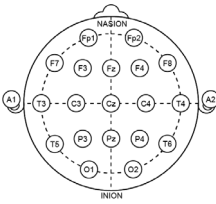
64 channel LiveAmp (Brain Products) with active wet electrodes for EEG recording

Preparing the EEG cap



1. Connect all the cables
2. Initiate the connection to the PC
3. Start impedance check
4. Add gel to every single electrode
5. Start streaming the data





MI acquisition procedure

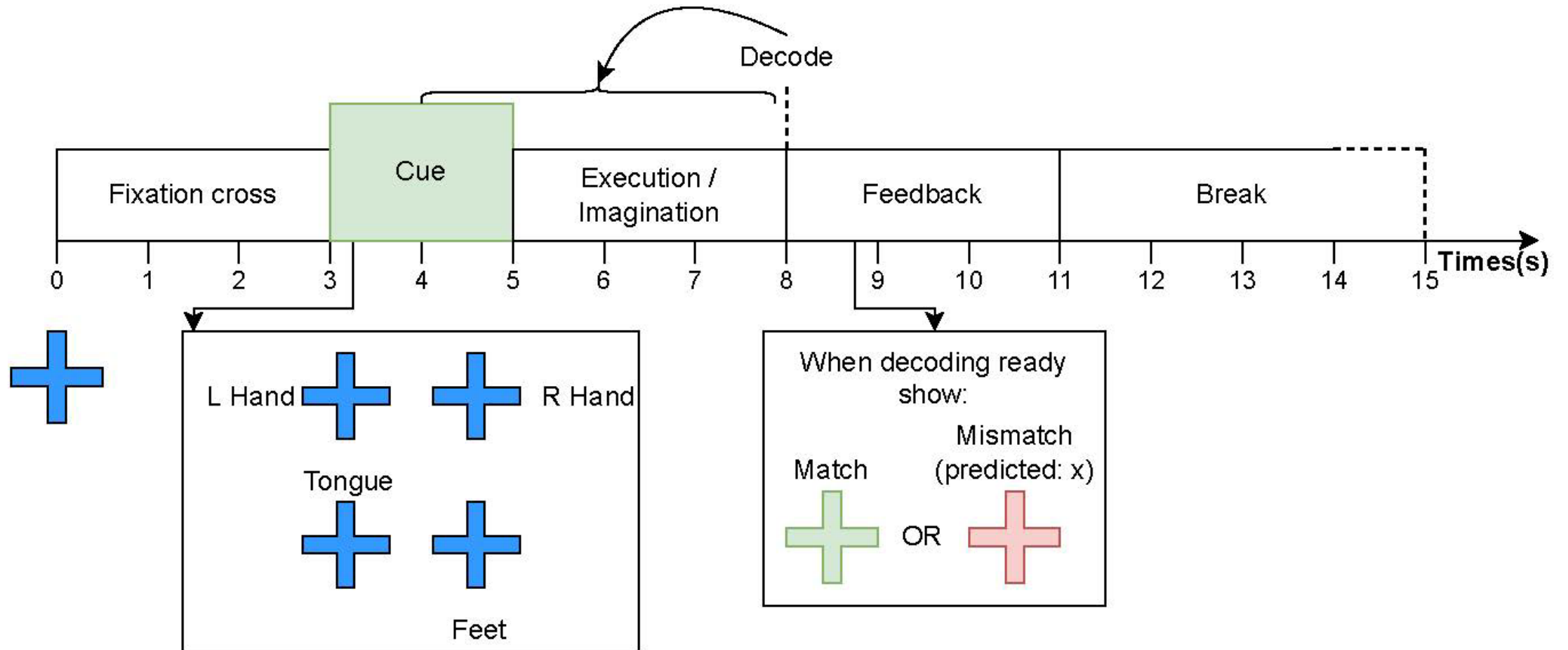
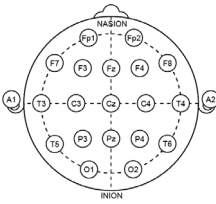
First 2 sessions: Familiarization

- Alternating executed and imagined movement
- No feedback

Sessions 3-5: Data acquisition

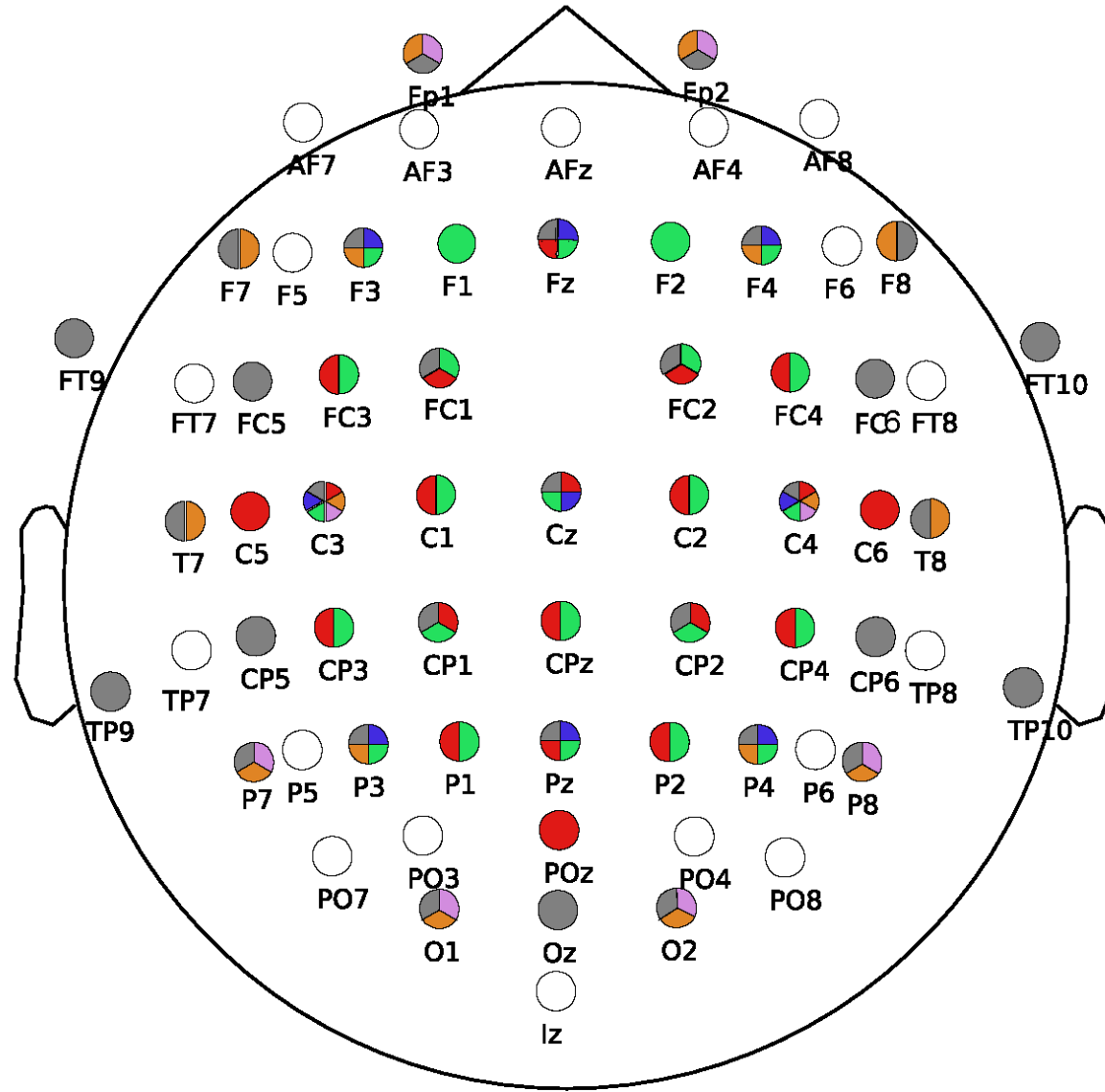
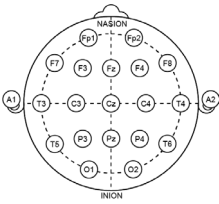
- First MI run without feedback (calibration)
- 3+ feedback runs

Acquiring motor imagery data



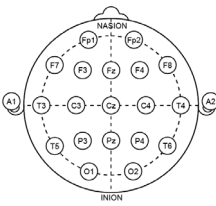
Study: optimal set of sensors for MI decoding

Evaluate accuracy of fixed decoding pipeline



- Legend
- Half
 - BCI Comp
 - OpenBCI 16
 - OpenBCI 8
 - Motor Cortex
 - MC Reduced

The ML pipeline



Signal Acquisition (EEG)



Pre-processing



Feature Extraction

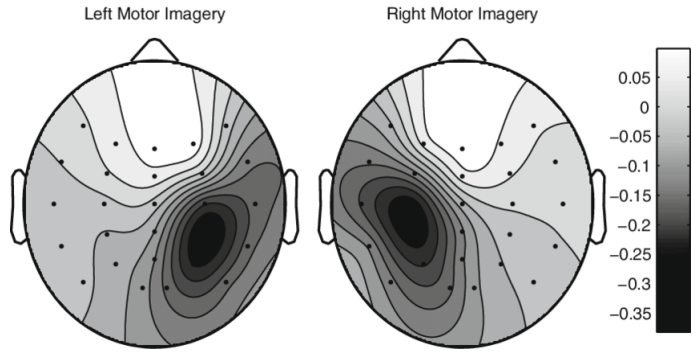


Classification (Machine learning)

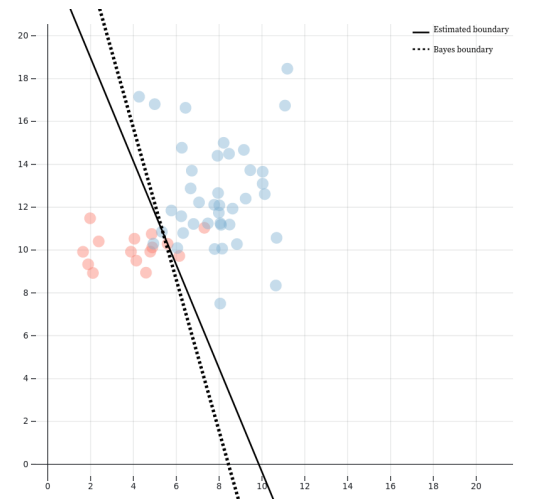
- 4-class MI data:
- Stored in XDF format
 - Read in Python with the MNE library

- Filtering between 8-35 Hz
- Cleaning using PREP pipeline
 - Drop bad data
 - Sensor interpolation
 - ...

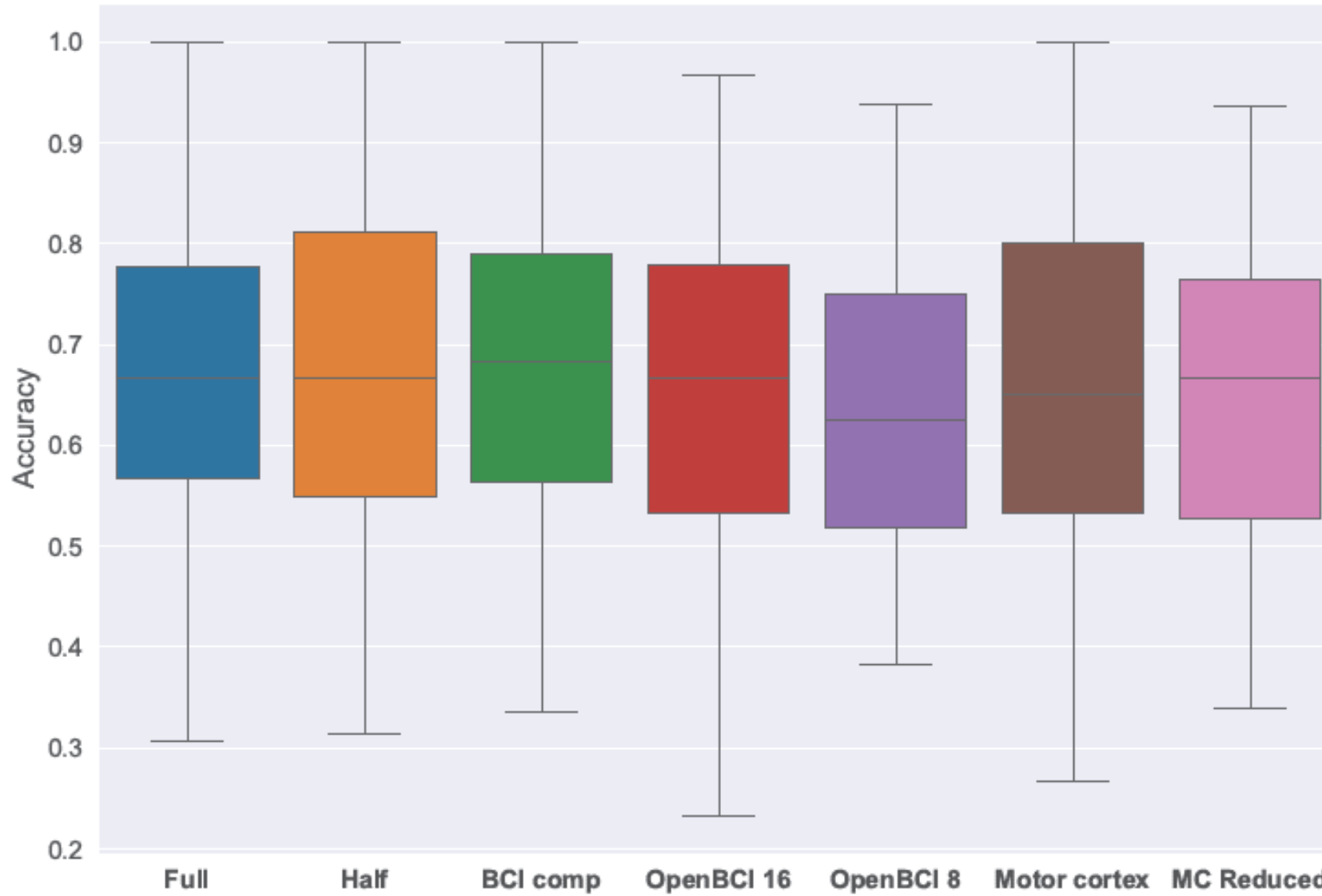
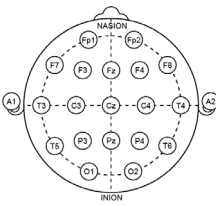
Common spatial patterns



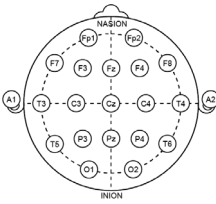
Linear discriminant analysis



Optimal sensor set for MI decoding Results



Optimal subset conclusions



Eight sensors sufficient to achieve adequate decoding performance

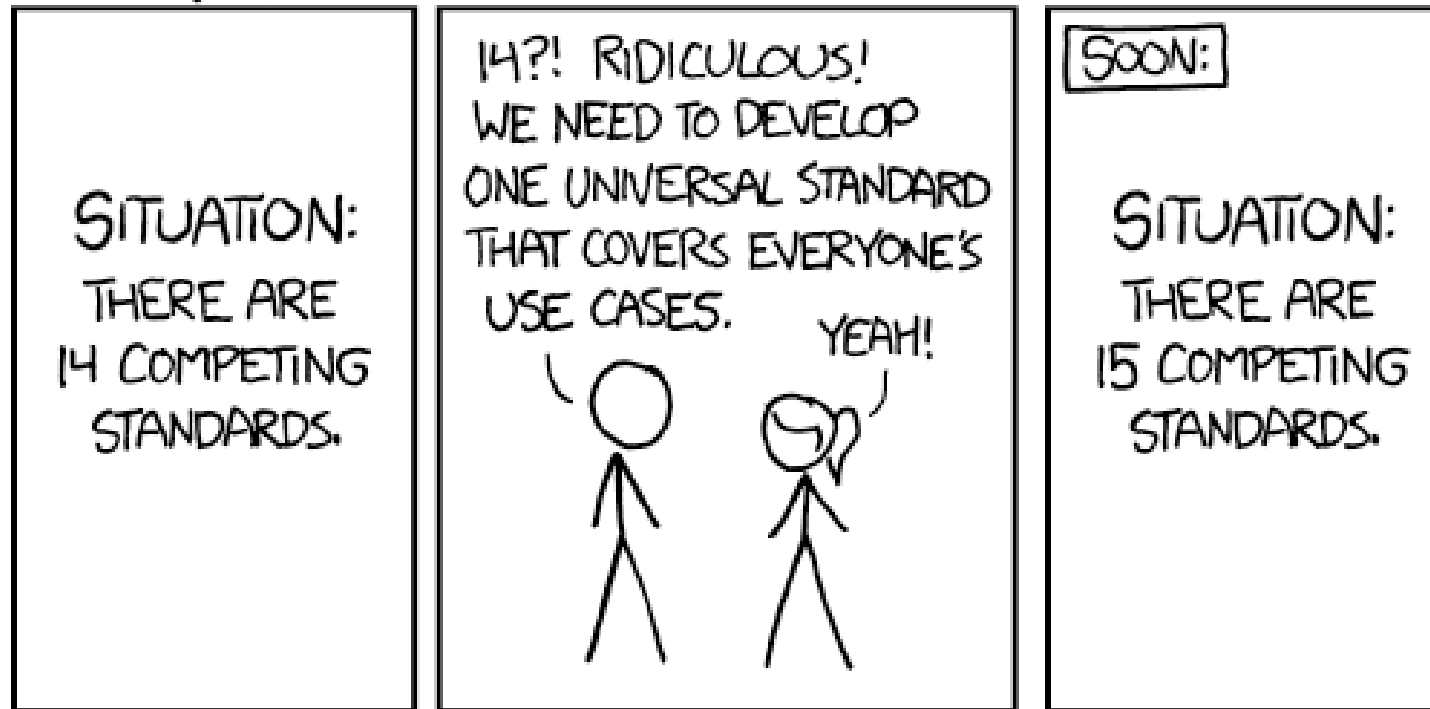
Often “classic” methods are sufficient and easier to use

-> We will use standard methods for now

A standardized user evaluation procedure for BCI prototypes

Avoid just making another standard

HOW STANDARDS PROLIFERATE:
(SEE: A/C CHARGERS, CHARACTER ENCODINGS, INSTANT MESSAGING, ETC)



Avoid just making another standard

- Reuse existing knowledge and formalize it
- Modular procedure
- Share with a stand-alone publication: *Dillen, A. et al. Evaluating the real-world usability of BCI control systems with augmented reality: A user study protocol. Front. Hum. Neurosci. 18, (2024).*

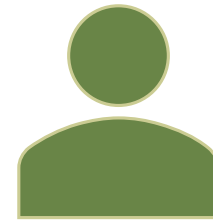
Usability



Efficiency



Effectiveness



User experience



Performance measures



Completion time:

Time it took to complete a single run of the evaluation task



Success rate:

Successful completion of a task within a given time



Fatigue:

Visual analogue scale before and after evaluation task



User experience:

User experience questionnaire and interview

Evaluation tasks

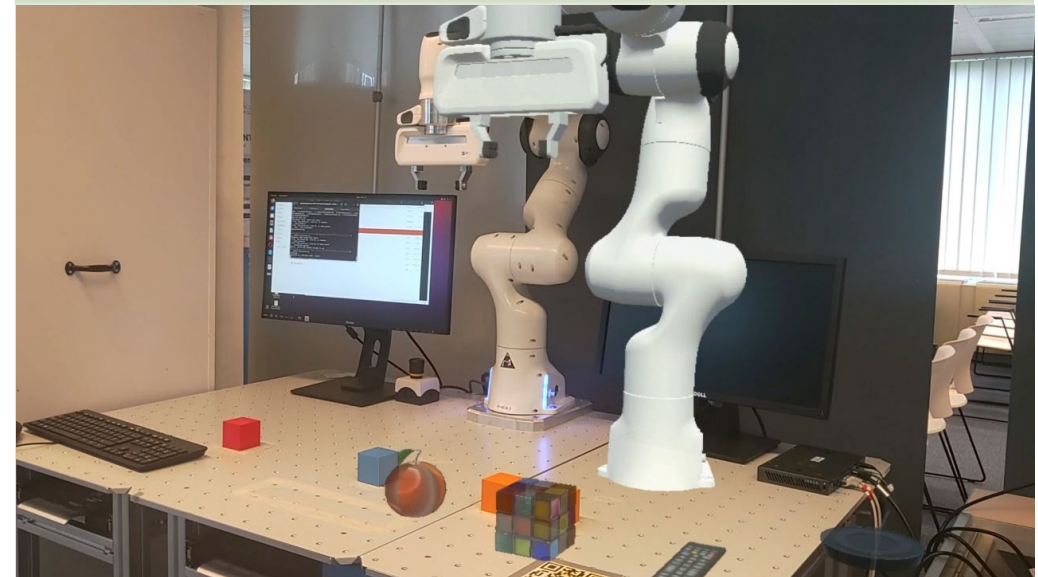


Sorting task



- 10 repetitions to complete
- 15 minutes cutoff

Pick-and-place task



- Complete predetermined sequence of object actions
- 15 minutes cutoff

User study design



Phase 1

- 3 participants (2 sessions each)
- Perform sorting task
- OpenBCI used for EEG

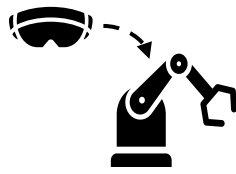
Phase 2

- 5 participants (3 sessions each)
- Simulated robot and environment in augmented reality
- Final session:
 - Performance assessment on sorting task
 - Comparison with eye tracking

Phase 3

- 12 participants (3 sessions each)
- Real robot reproduces virtual movement
- Final session
 - Performance assessment on pick-and-place task
 - Comparison with eye tracking

Design of our MI-BCI control system



A shared control approach to MI BCI

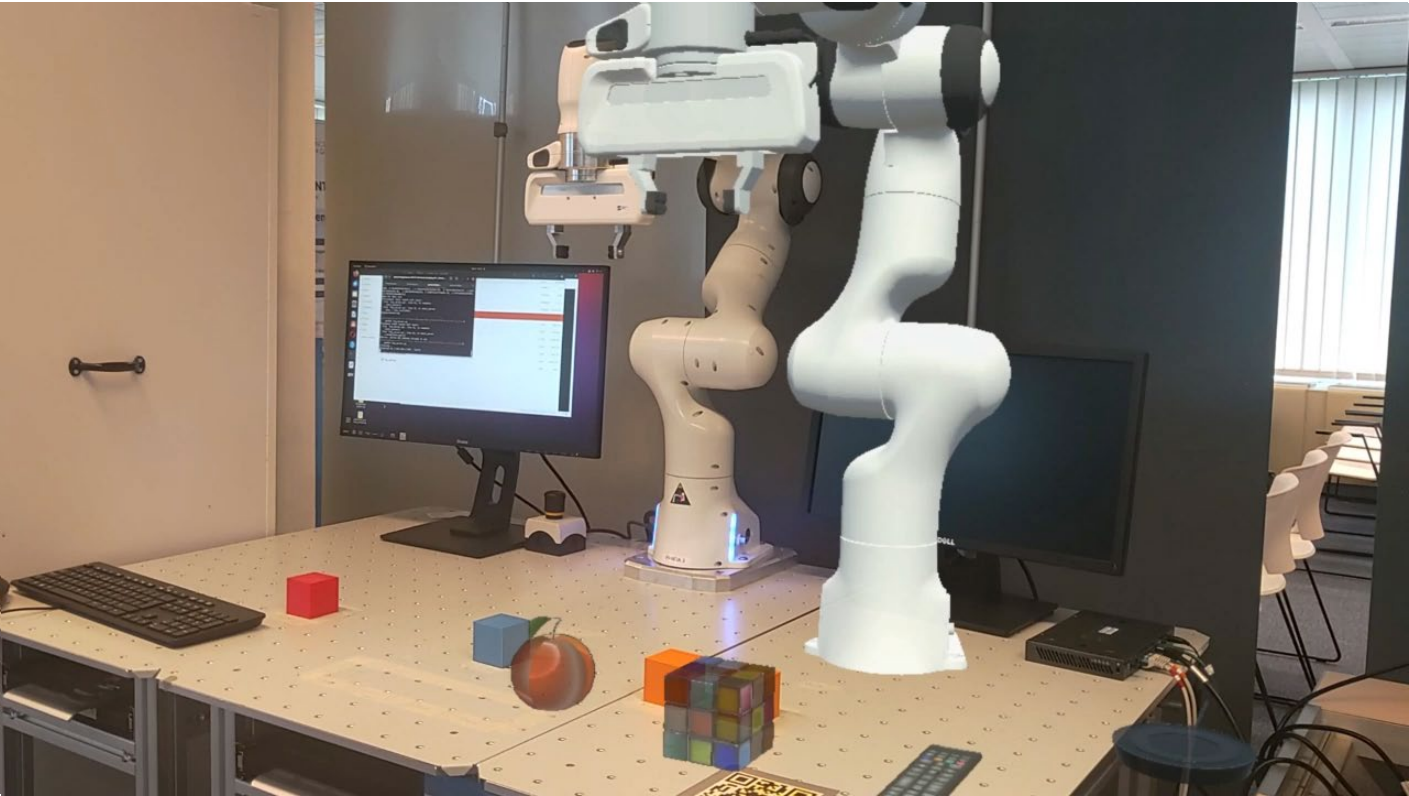
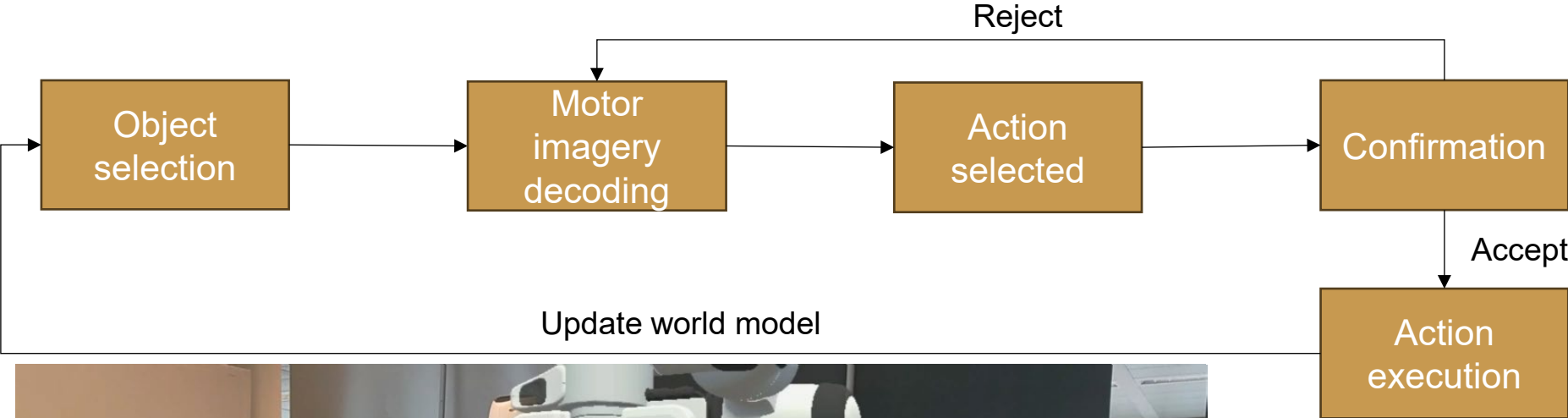
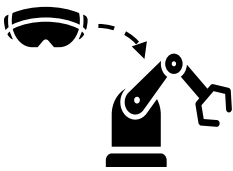
Shared control: Semi-autonomous robot with environment awareness. User gives high-level commands to robot.

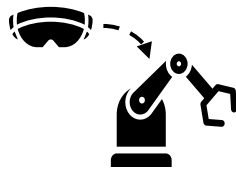
Goal: enable complex interactions while keeping MI decoding simple

Key components:

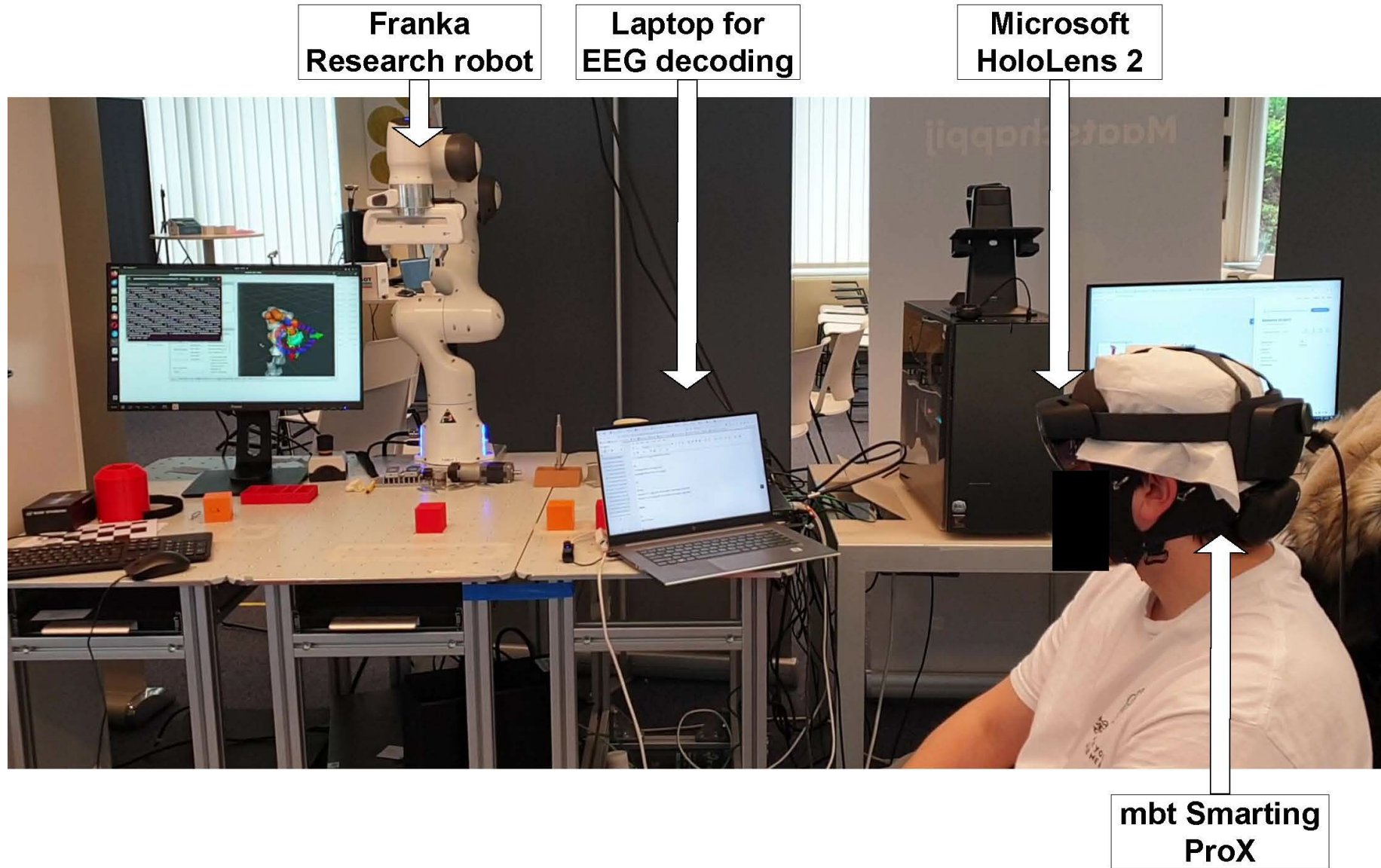
- Augmented reality user interface
- Spatial awareness and object detection
- Object selection with eye tracking
- Action selection with MI BCI (2 classes for this concept)

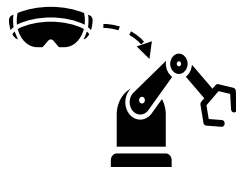
The shared control strategy





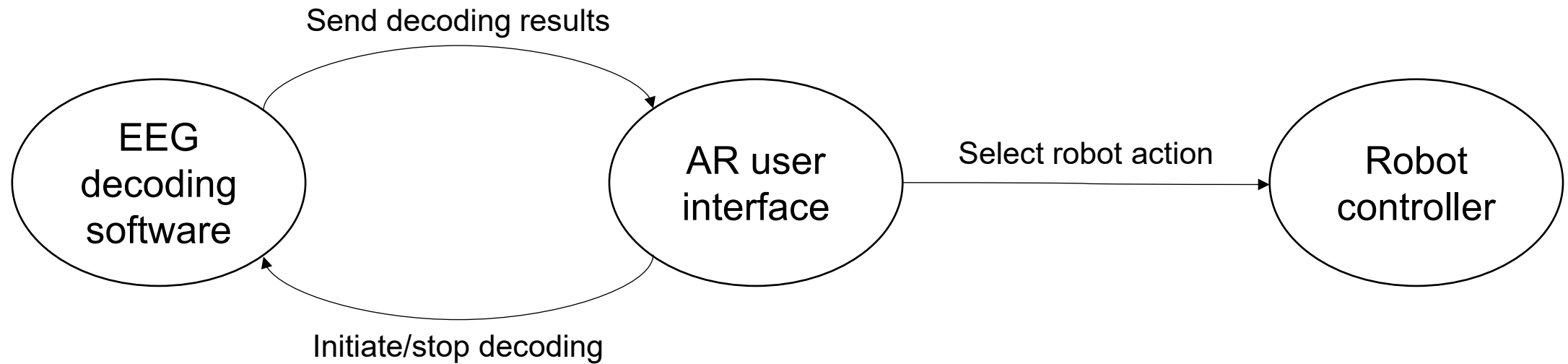
Hardware setup

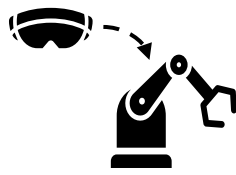




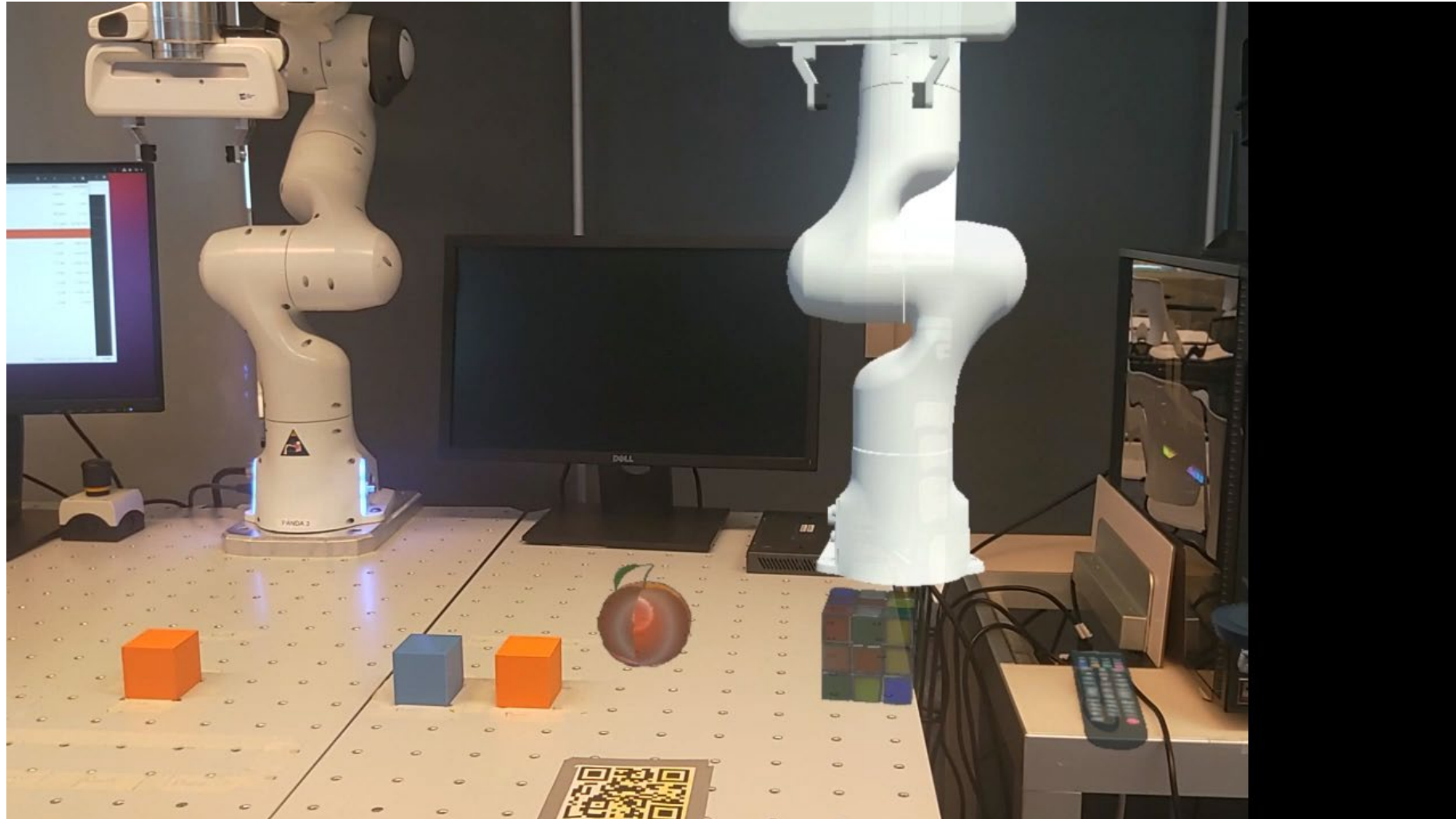
Software overview

3 independent software components:



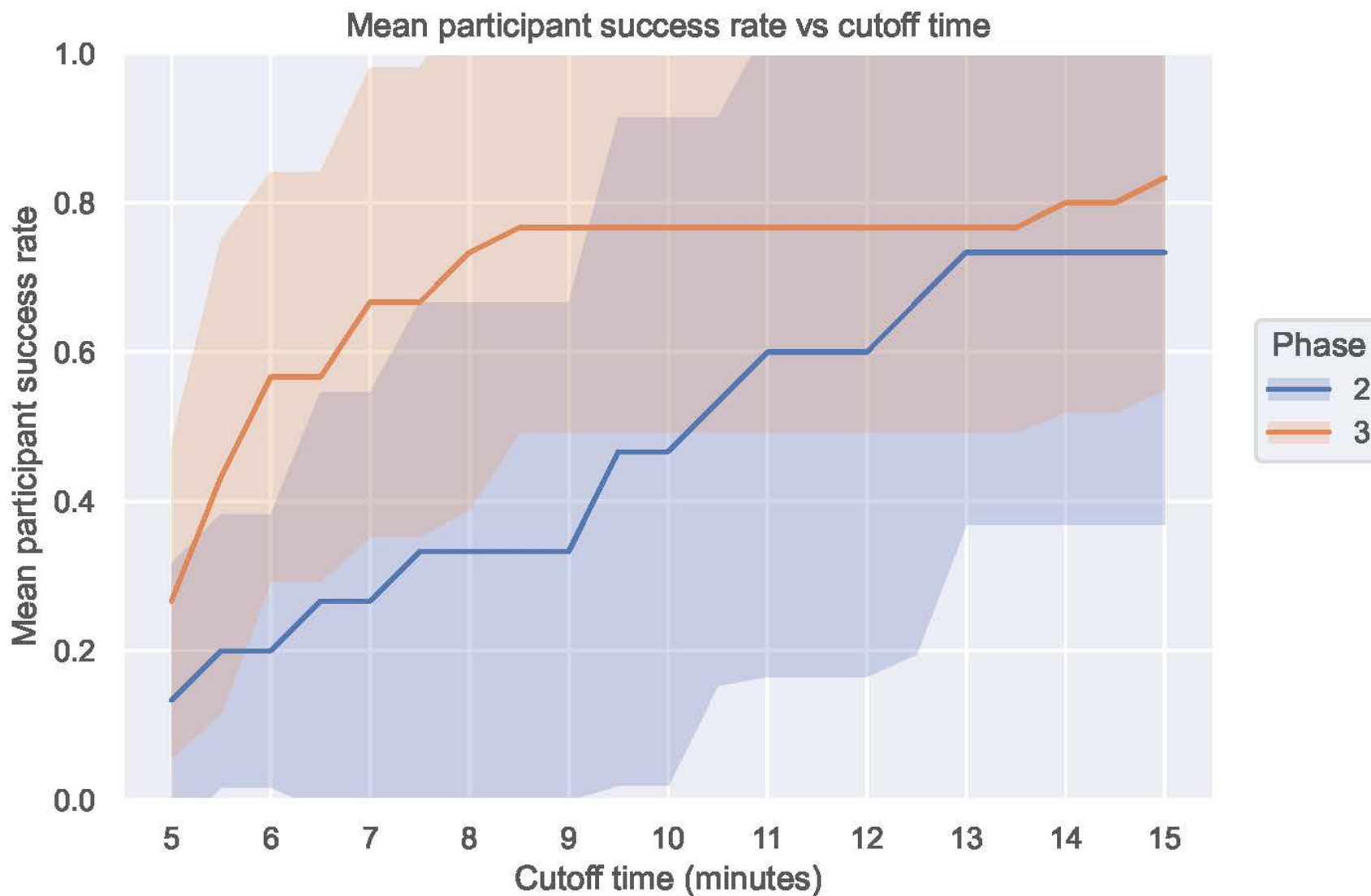


Comparison with eye tracking control

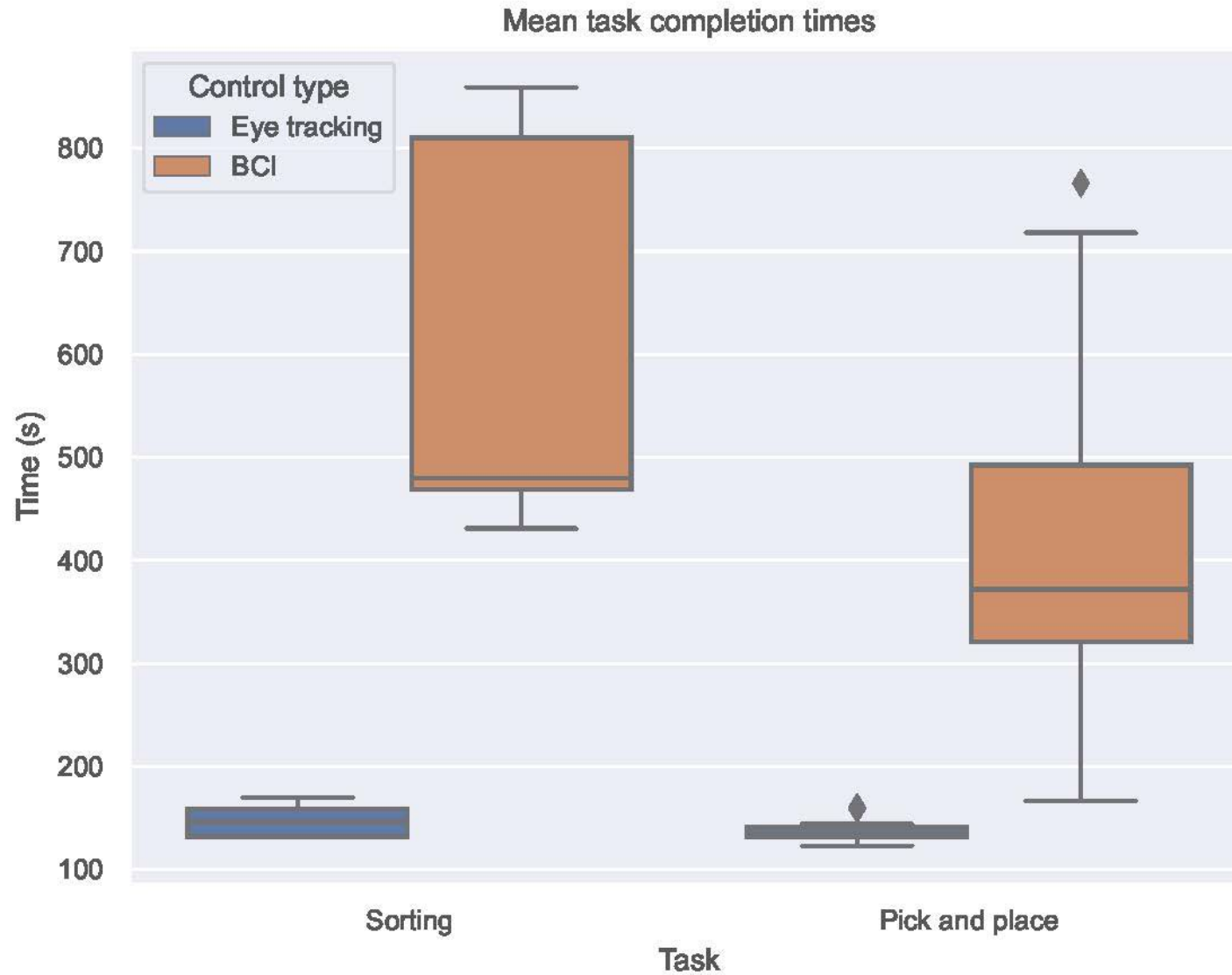


The user evaluation results

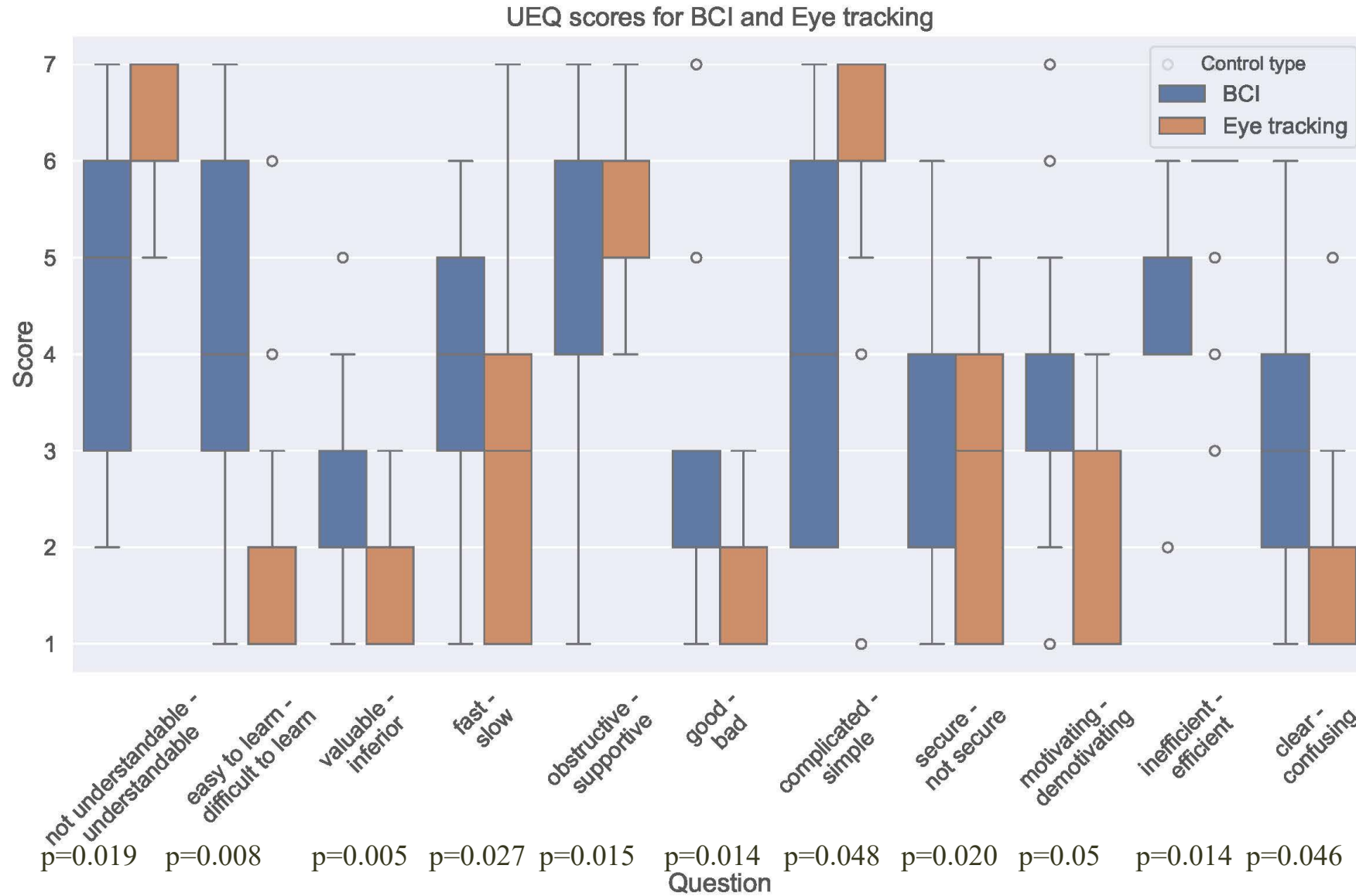
Results: success rate



Results: completion time



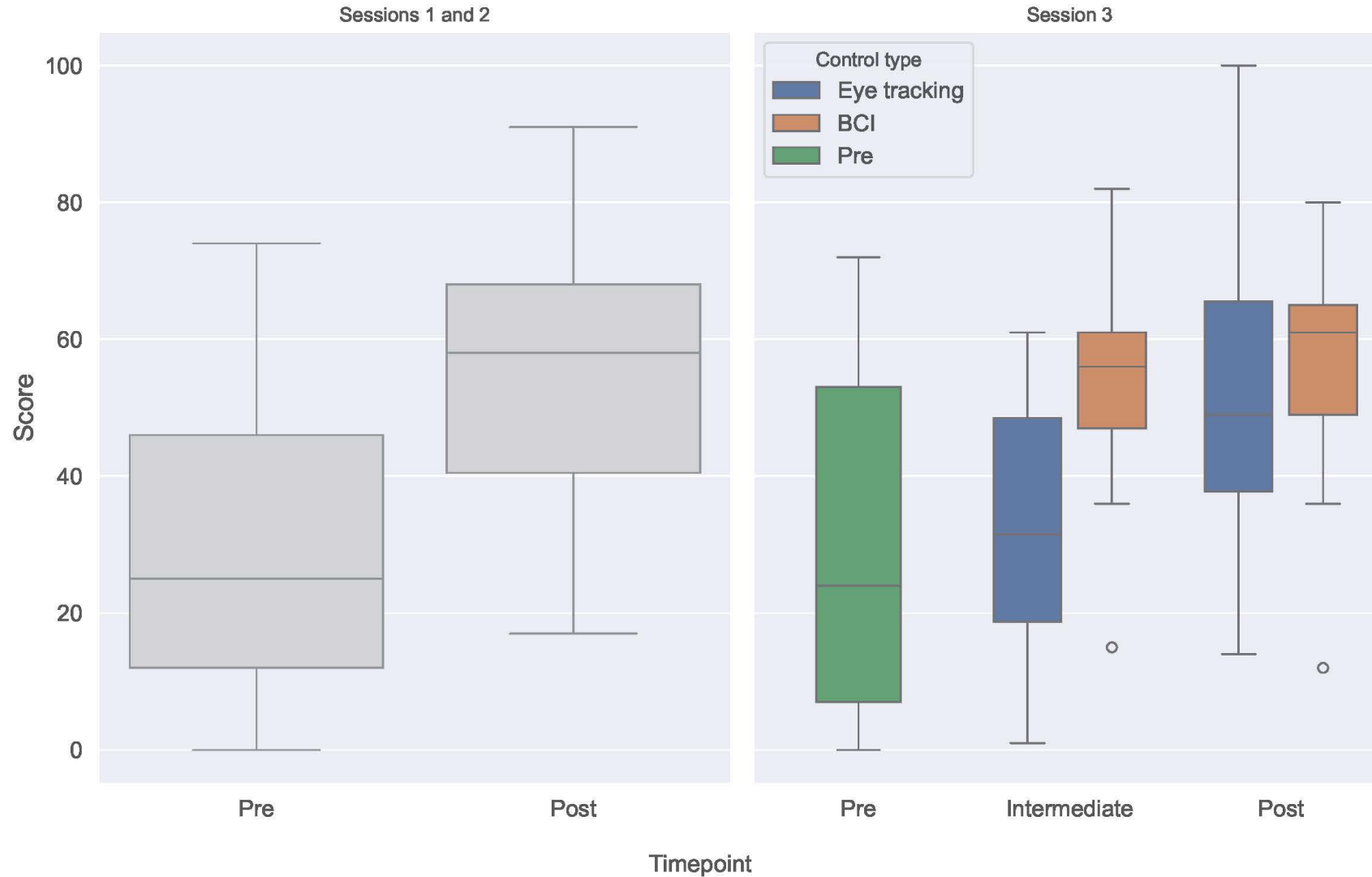
Results: user experience



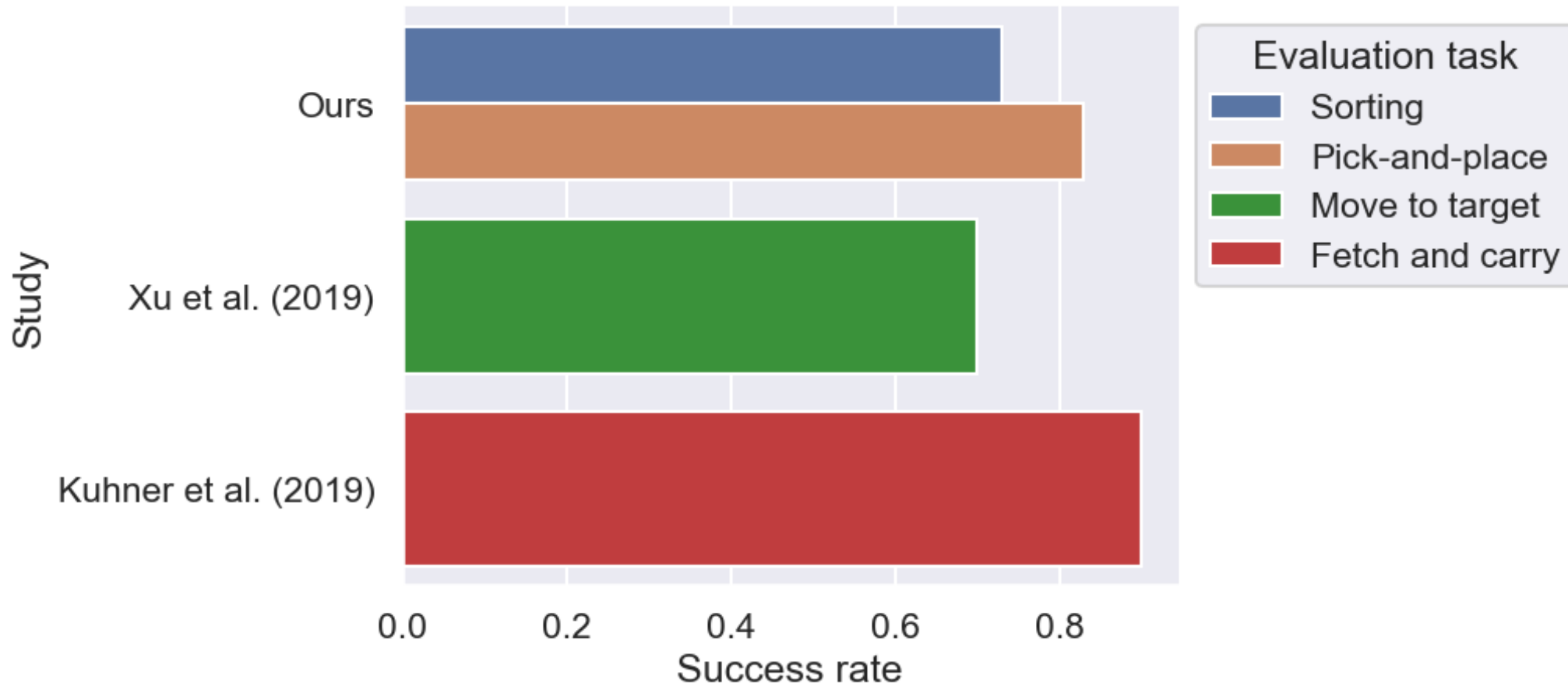
Results: fatigue



Mental fatigue scores before and after using BCI or Eye tracking



Comparison with state-of-the-art



GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Research question: How to design a BCI control system that enables users to operate a robot arm without the need to move their limbs or speak?

RO1: Develop a real-time MI decoding pipeline

RO2: Design a robot arm control strategy using MI

RO3: Construct and validate an evaluation framework for BCI prototypes

Key findings

RO 1:

- Best choice of decoding method highly dependent on application requirements
- Eight sensors sufficient to obtain good decoding accuracy
- Customization decoding pipeline to user brings limited improvement

RO 2:

- Shared control simplifies MI decoding
- Multimodal interaction with eye tracking and augmented reality user interface enhances usability

RO 3:

- Our user evaluation framework is a good first step towards real-world deployment
- Eye tracking is currently better, but BCI can be used for certain niche use cases

Strengths

Portable system

Off-the-shelf hardware

Extending and replacing components is trivial

Realistic evaluation

Weaknesses

Basic EEG decoding methods

Unsure if fatigue from calibration or BCI usage

Low user study sample size

No evaluation in target population

Future work

Research questions to investigate:

- How can advanced EEG decoding methods benefit usability?
- What benefit will gamification of calibration procedure bring?
- What are the requirements for embedded decoding?
- How will the results translate to in-field user evaluation with target users?

Ultimate goal: all-in-one plug-and-play hardware and software system

Conclusion

Currently, ubiquitous BCI adoption as the standard interaction modality with electronic devices is unlikely.

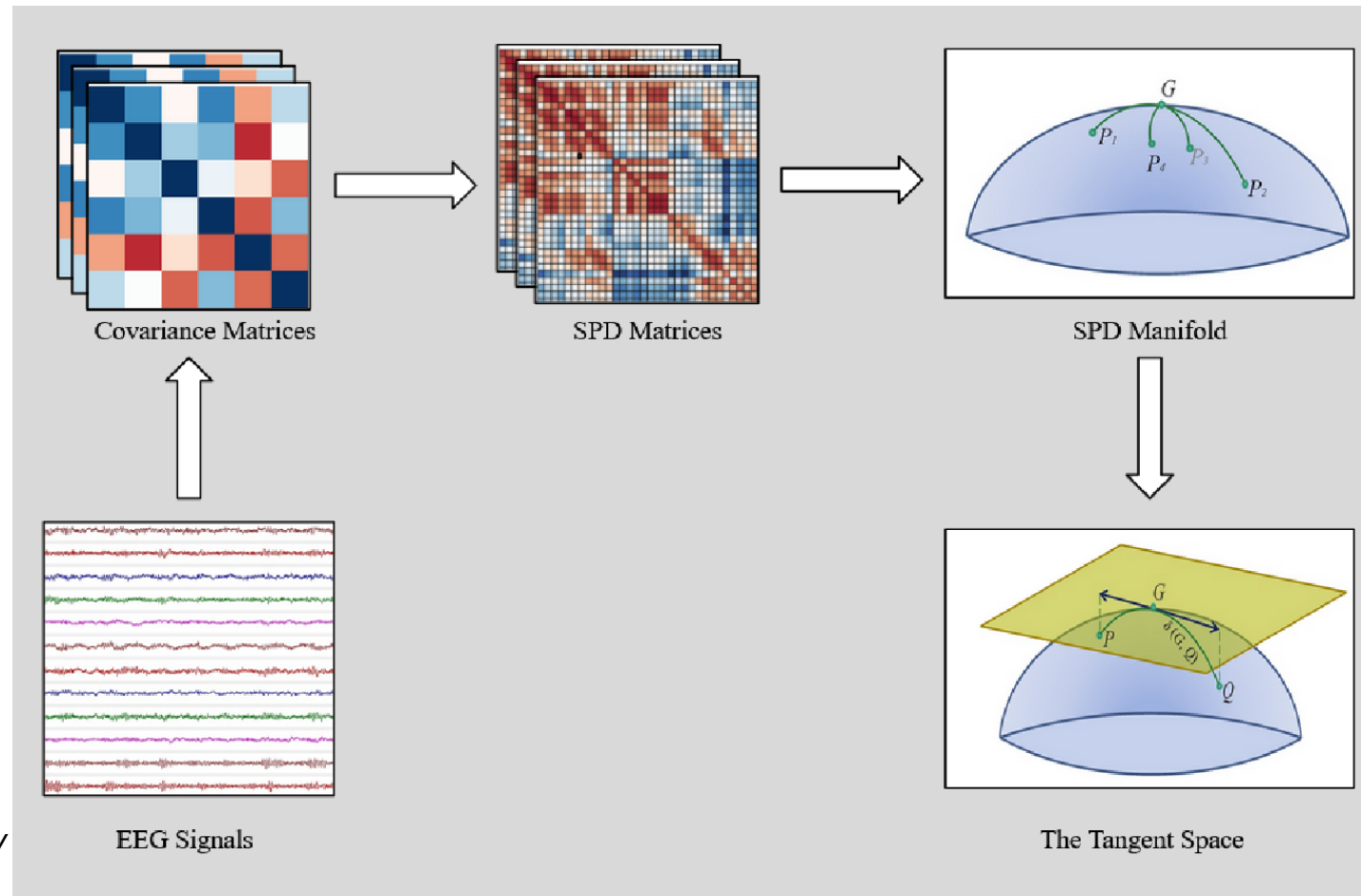
But! targeted and purpose-driven BCI applications hold immense potential.

Current trends in BCI

State-of-the-art decoding methods

Rieman geometry features

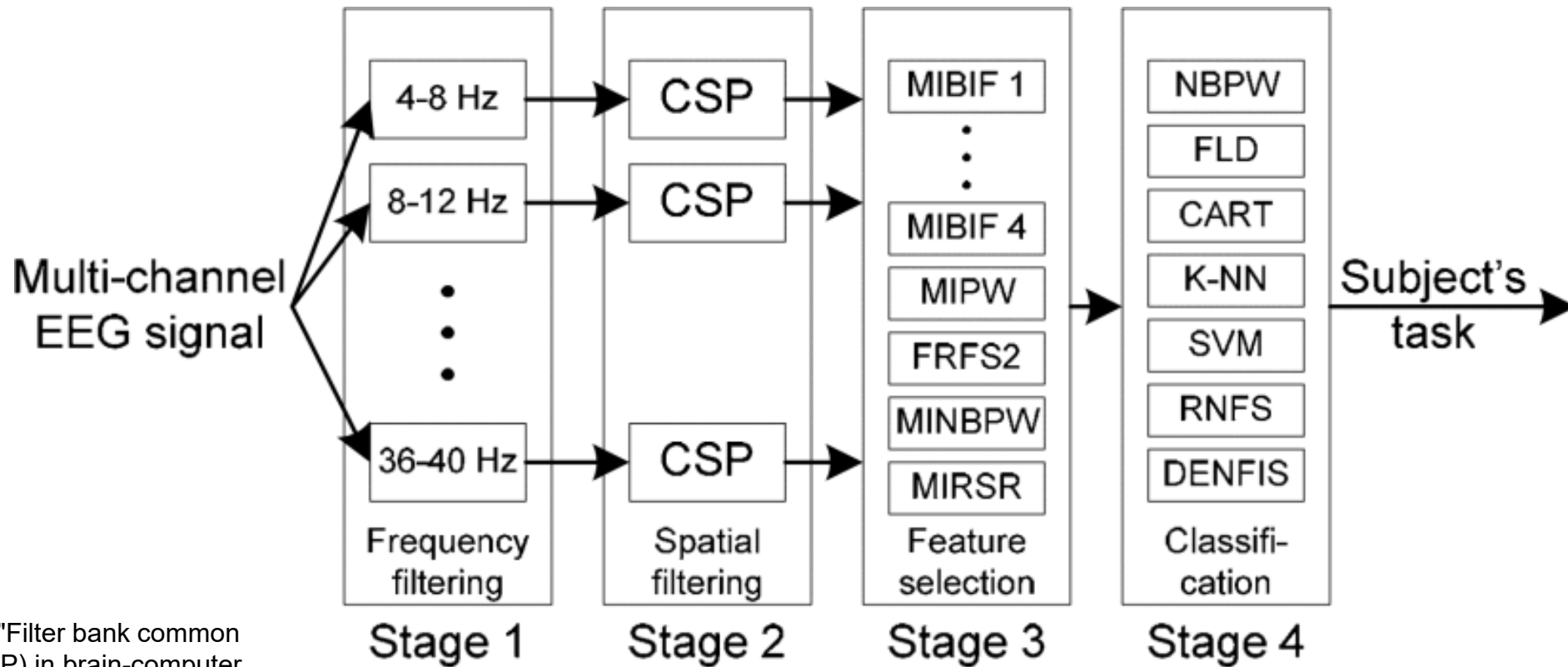
Mapping 2D representation to 3D space (and back)



From:
Tibermacine, Imad Eddine, et al.
"Riemannian geometry-based eeg
approaches: A literature review." *arXiv
preprint arXiv:2407.20250* (2024).

Filter bank common spatial pattern features

Apply multiple filters and learn which frequencies are most informative for an individual

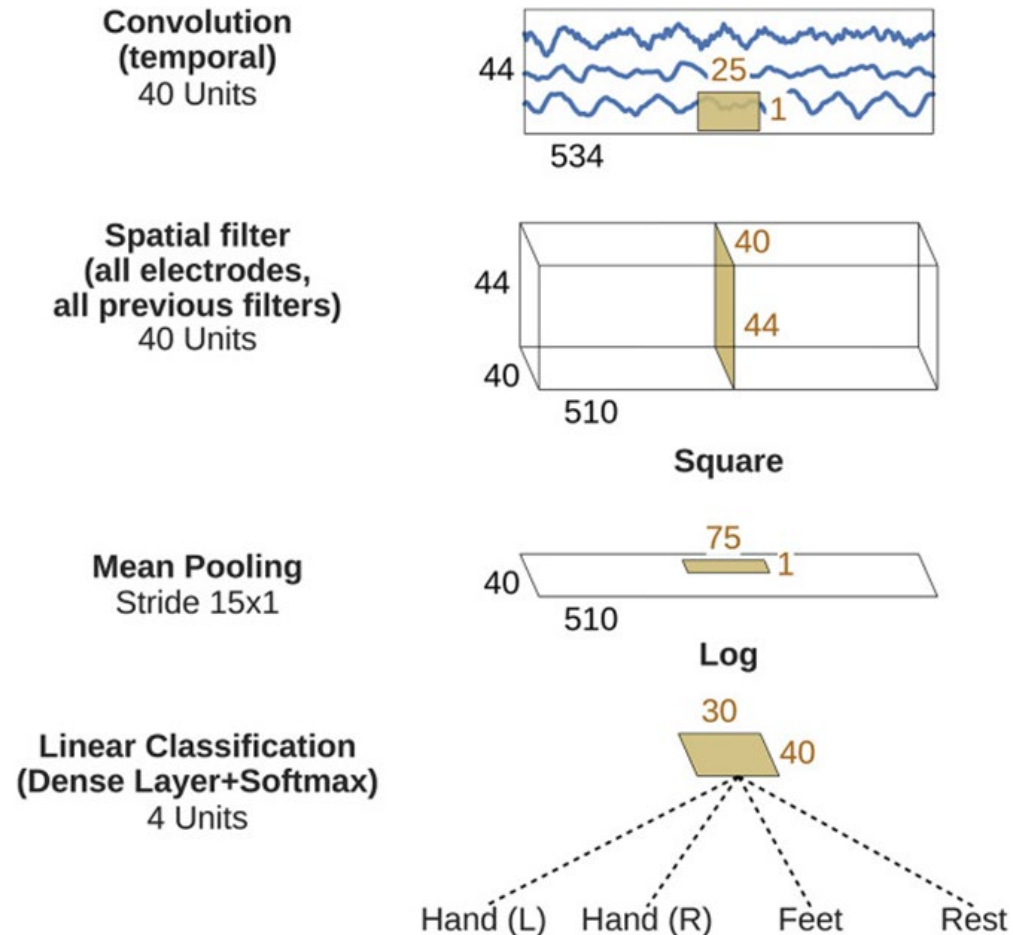


From:

Ang, Kai Keng, et al. "Filter bank common spatial pattern (FBCSP) in brain-computer interface." *2008 IEEE international joint conference on neural networks (IEEE world congress on computational intelligence)*. IEEE, 2008.

Deep learning

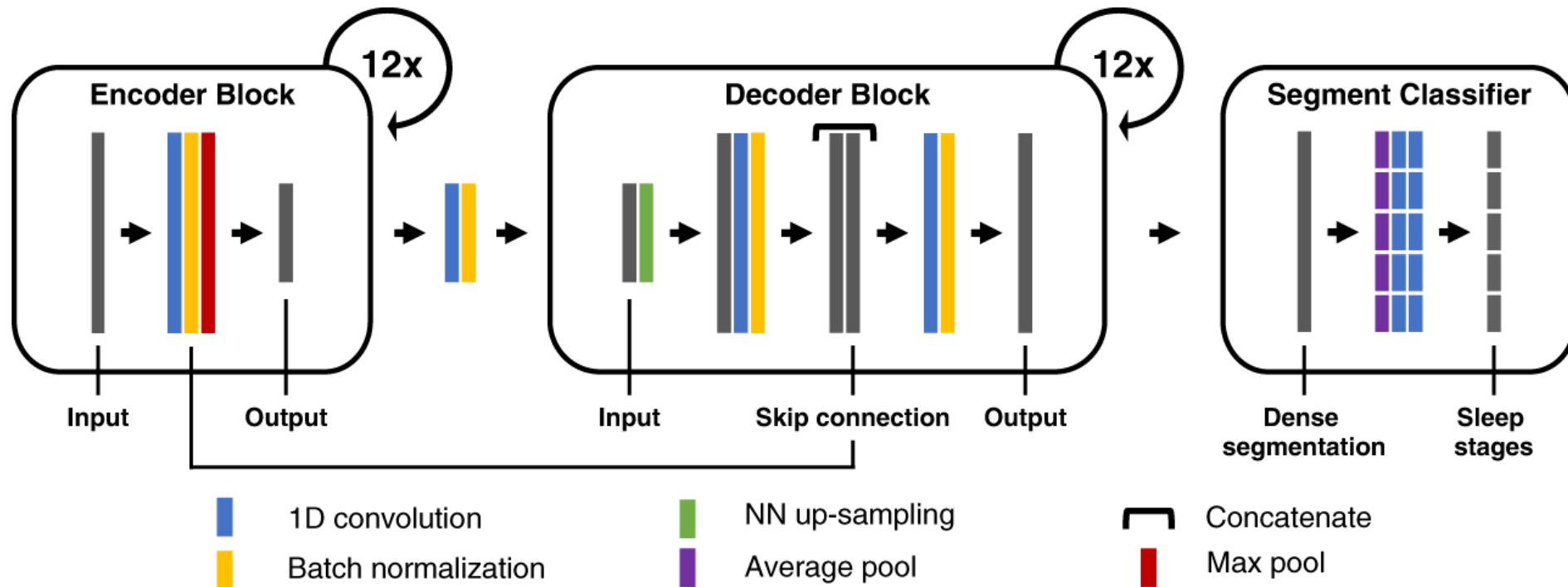
CNNs: encode time and spatial features in the convolutions



From:
Schirrneister, Robin Tibor, et al. "Deep learning with convolutional neural networks for EEG decoding and visualization." *Human brain mapping* 38.11 (2017): 5391-5420.

Deep learning

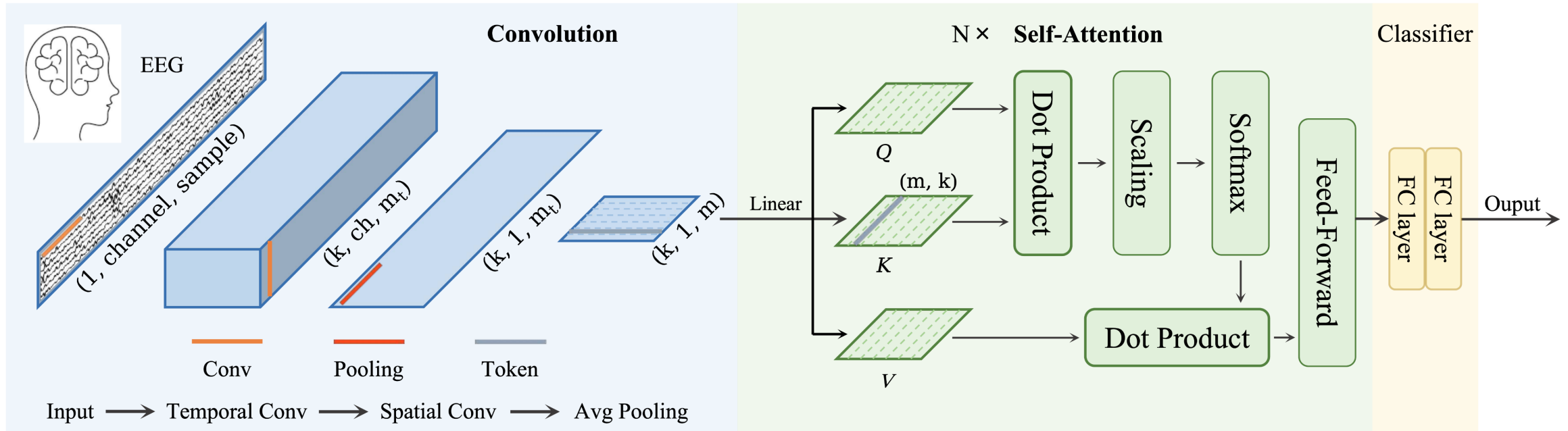
U-net: encoder-decoder architectures



From:
Perslev, Mathias, et al. "U-Sleep: resilient high-frequency sleep staging." *NPJ digital medicine* 4.1 (2021): 72.

Deep learning

Transformer networks: use attention to capture long-range dependencies



From:
Song, Yonghao, et al. "EEG conformer:
Convolutional transformer for EEG decoding
and visualization." *IEEE Transactions on
Neural Systems and Rehabilitation
Engineering* 31 (2022): 710-719.

Deep learning

Want to know more?

Check out braindecode!

<https://braindecode.org/stable/index.html>

Current trends in BCI

Novel applications

Image generation based on brain signals

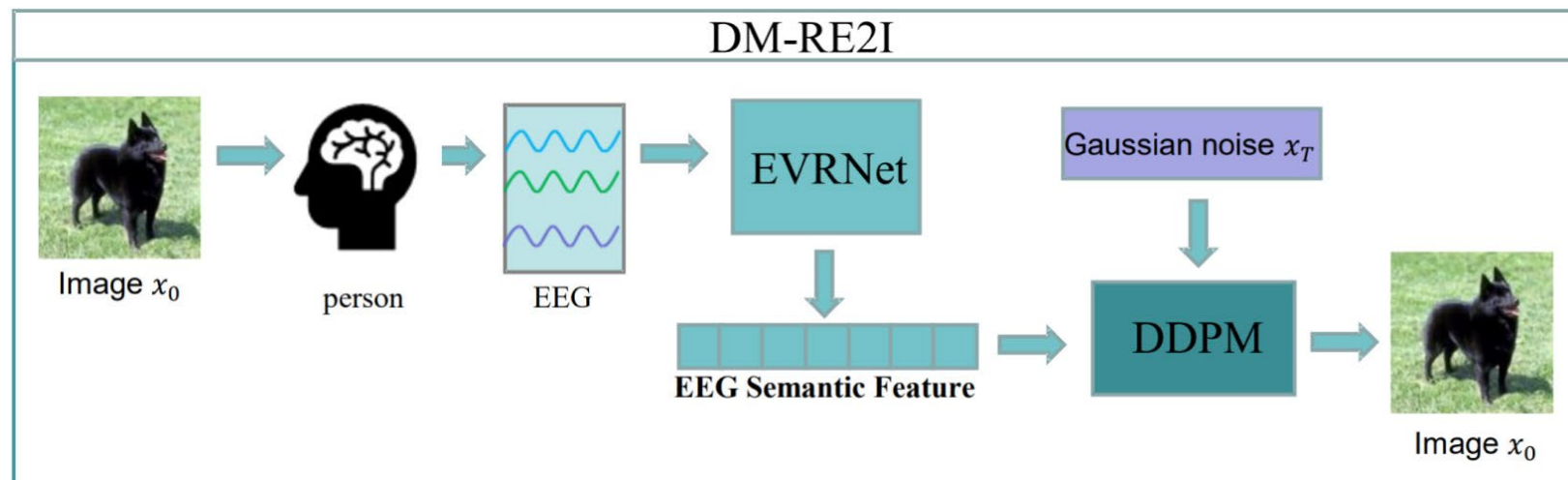
Generate the picture that a person is looking at based on EEG activity

Some recent references:

Singh, P., Pandey, P., Miyapuram, K. and Raman, S., 2023, June. EEG2IMAGE: image reconstruction from EEG brain signals. In *ICASSP 2023-2023 IEEE International Conference on Acoustics, Speech and Signal Processing (ICASSP)* (pp. 1-5). IEEE.

Khare, S., Choubey, R.N., Amar, L. and Udutalapalli, V., 2022. Neurovision: perceived image regeneration using cprogan. *Neural Computing and Applications*, 34(8), pp.5979-5991.

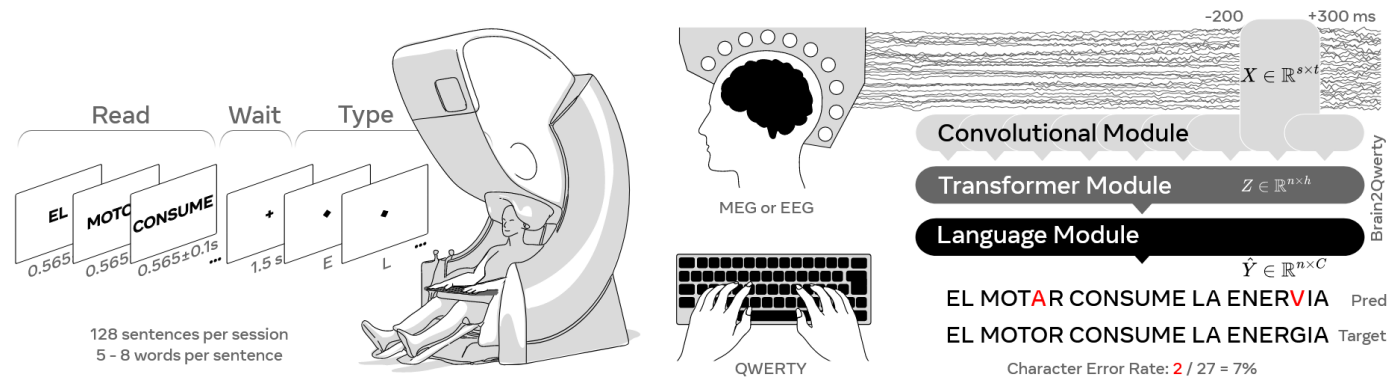
Zeng, H., Xia, N., Qian, D., Hattori, M., Wang, C. and Kong, W., 2023. DM-RE2I: A framework based on diffusion model for the reconstruction from EEG to image. *Biomedical Signal Processing and Control*, 86, p.105125.



Text generation from brain data

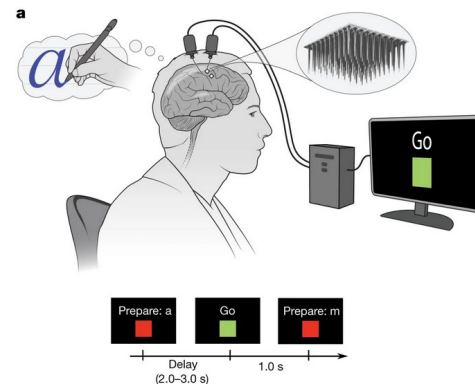
Text from EEG/MEG during typing :

Lévy, J., Zhang, M., Pinet, S., Rapin, J., Banville, H., d'Ascoli, S. and King, J.R., 2025. Brain-to-Text Decoding: A Non-invasive Approach via Typing. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2502.17480*.



From imagined handwriting with ECoG:

Willett, F.R., Avansino, D.T., Hochberg, L.R., Henderson, J.M. and Shenoy, K.V., 2021. High-performance brain-to-text communication via handwriting. *Nature*, 593(7858), pp.249-254.



Bi-directional BCI

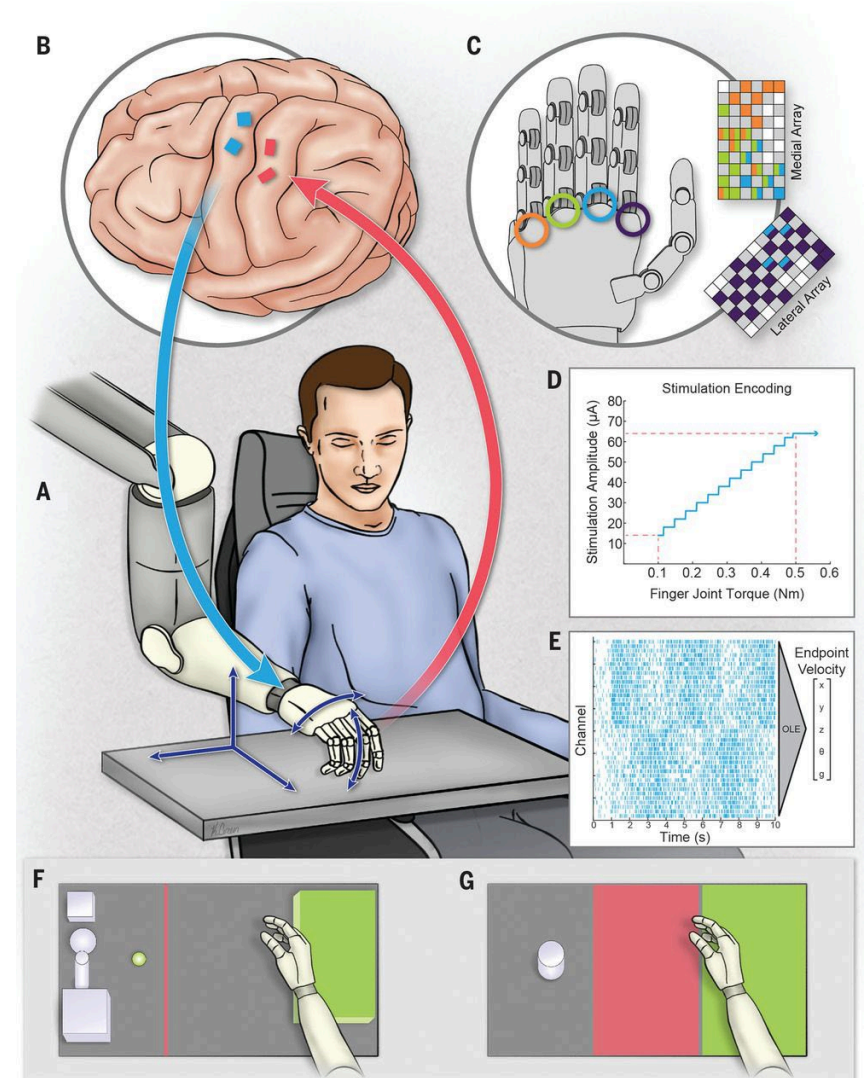
Decoding of movement intention + stimulation to reproduce sensory input

Some references:

Wood, H., 2021. Bidirectional brain–computer interface aids robotic arm control. *Nature Reviews Neurology*, 17(8), pp.462-462.

Weiss, J.M., Flesher, S.N., Franklin, R., Collinger, J.L. and Gaunt, R.A., 2018. Artifact-free recordings in human bidirectional brain–computer interfaces. *Journal of Neural Engineering*, 16(1), p.016002.

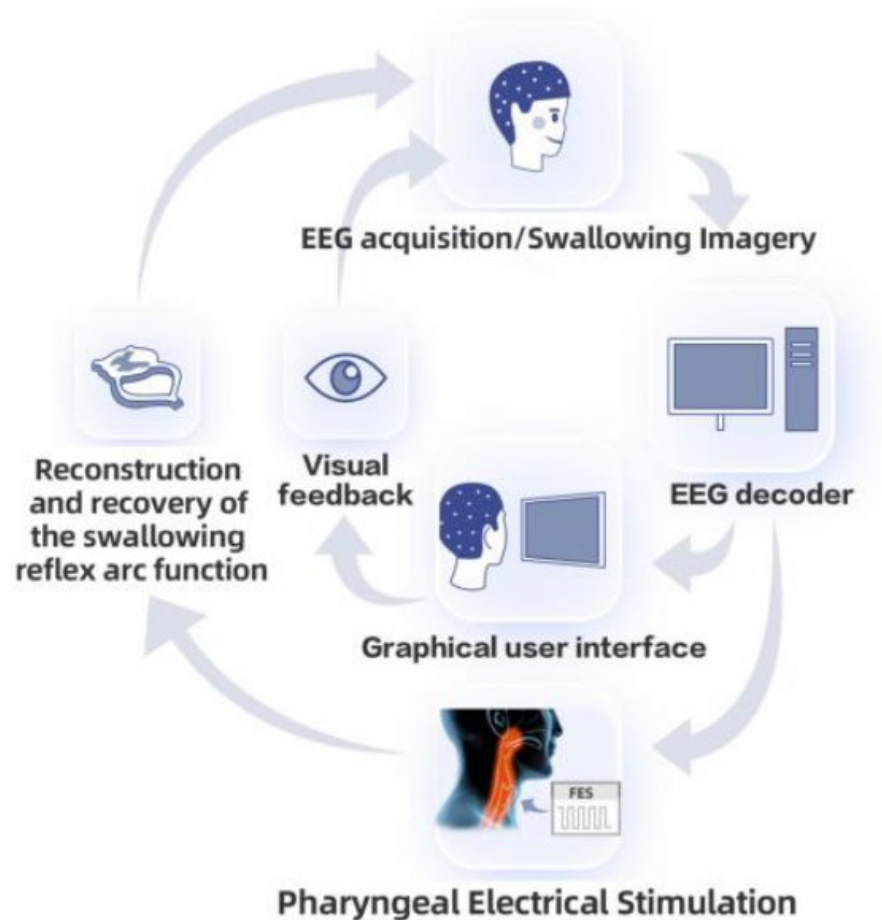
Flesher, S.N., Downey, J.E., Weiss, J.M., Hughes, C.L., Herrera, A.J., Tyler-Kabara, E.C., Boninger, M.L., Collinger, J.L. and Gaunt, R.A., 2021. A brain–computer interface that evokes tactile sensations improves robotic arm control. *Science*, 372(6544), pp.831-836.



Non-invasive bi-directional BCI

Decode EEG + stimulate with functional electrical stimulation for swallowing

From:
“Development and feasibility of a motor imagery-based closed-loop BCI-FES system for swallowing rehabilitation”, Submitted work to journal of neural engineering (2026)



BCI game control

Playing games with “mind control”



Valve invests in BCI



Next-gen hardware

Dry EEG sensors (e.g. CGX)



Galea: VR + BCI headset



Neuralink: low-risk ECoG implantation



Future perspectives

- Advanced prosthetic control with BCI
- Fatigue detection with biosignal
- Neuroscience research and medical diagnosis of neural diseases
- Cognitive modelling

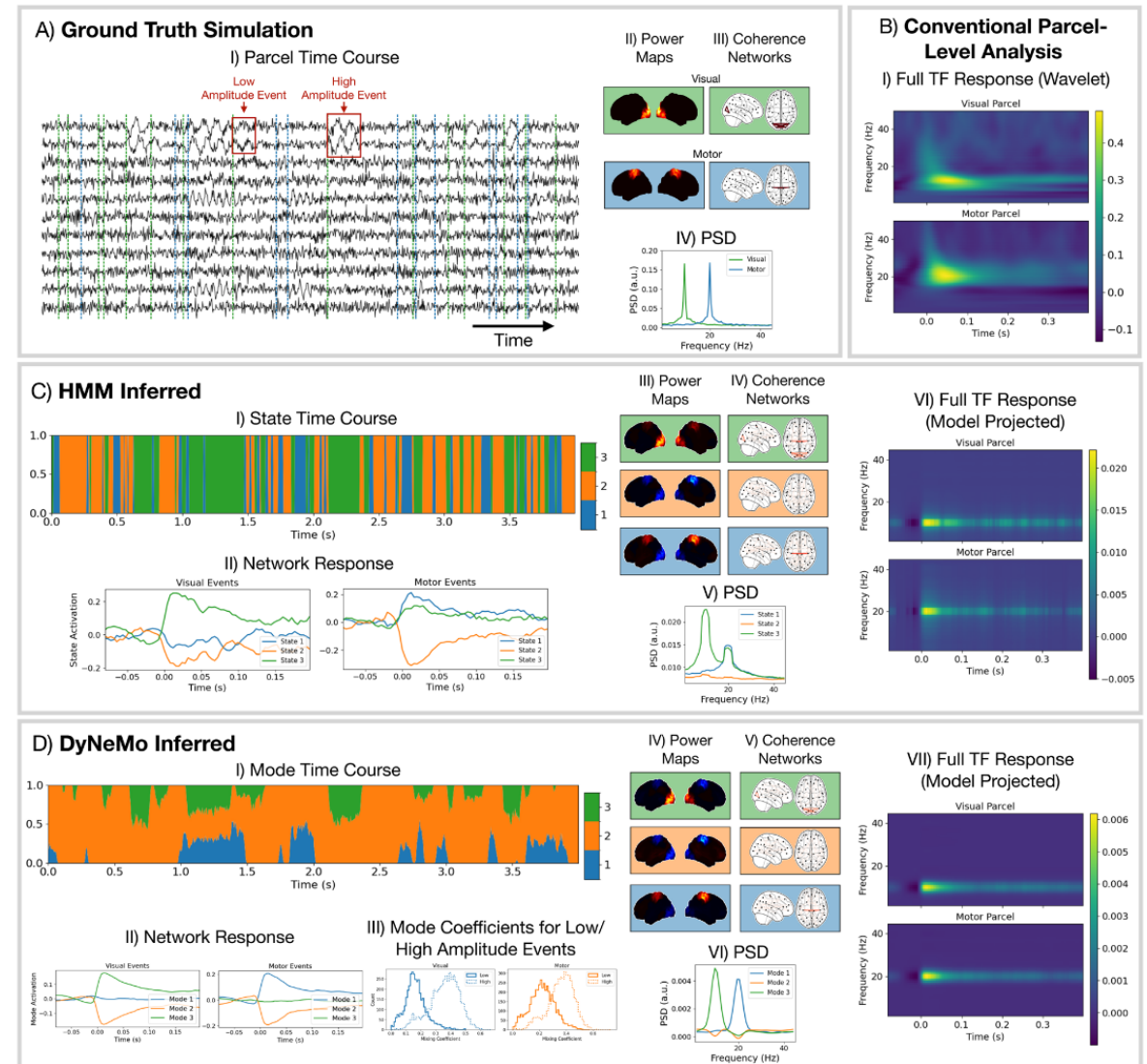
Our latest and future projects

Example: MEMOBRAIN

Goal: extract active brain states from MEG data using AI methods

Improve analysis of what happens where and when in the brain when processing a stimulus

Compare normal brain-state activation patterns with those of patients suffering from multiple sclerosis



Issues

Noisy EEG
(artifacts, inter- and
intraindividual
variability, ...)

More MI classes
harder to classify

User training
necessary

Hard to gather
machine learning
training data

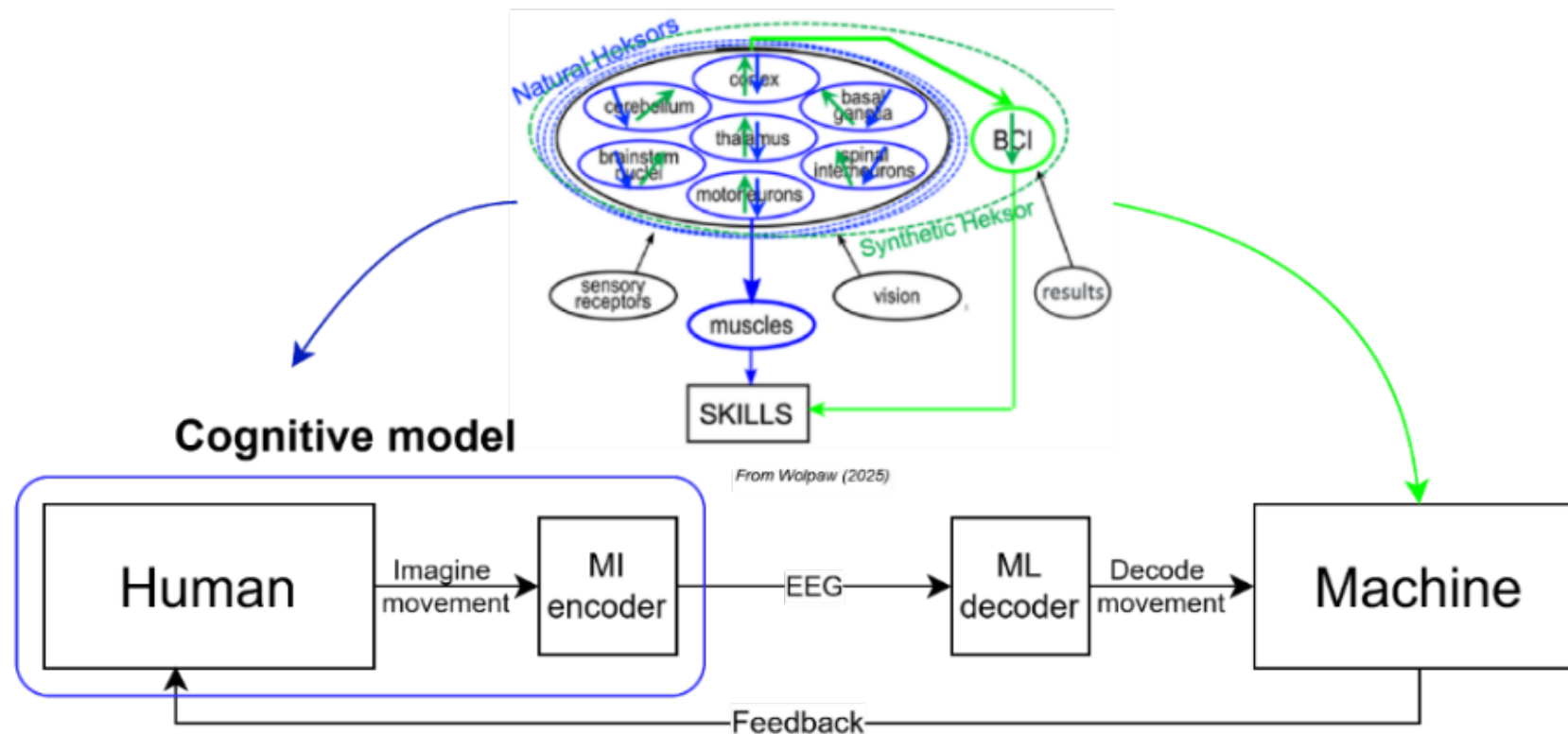
Lack of
standardised
evaluation for BCI
prototypes

Example: cognitive model of BCI skill acquisition

Modelling the adaptation of a human that learns to use a BCI control system

Simulation of a novel neural representation of neural networks related to a skill: heksors

Simulation of interaction between human (encoder) and BCI ML decoder



Thank you

Joint PhD between VUB and CY Cergy Paris University



+



Extra: Demo video



More info: my publications

- Dillen, A., Lathouwers, E., *et al.* (2022) ‘A data-driven machine learning approach for brain-computer interfaces targeting lower limb neuroprosthetics’, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2022.949224>.
- Dillen, A., Steckelmacher, D., *et al.* (2022) ‘Deep learning for biosignal control: Insights from basic to real-time methods with recommendations’, *Journal of Neural Engineering*, 19(1), p. 011003. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1088/1741-2552/ac4f9a>.
- Dillen, A. *et al.* (2023) ‘Optimal Sensor Set for Decoding Motor Imagery from EEG’, *Applied Sciences*, 13(7), p. 4438. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/app13074438>.
- Dillen, A., Omid, M., Ghaffari, F., Vanderborght, B., *et al.* (2024) ‘A shared robot control system combining augmented reality and motor imagery brain-computer interfaces with eye tracking’, *Journal of Neural Engineering*, 21(5), p. 056028. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1088/1741-2552/ad7f8d>.
- Dillen, A., Omid, M., Díaz, M.A., *et al.* (2024) ‘Evaluating the real-world usability of BCI control systems with augmented reality: a user study protocol’, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 18. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2024.1448584>.
- Dillen, A., Omid, M., Ghaffari, F., Romain, O., *et al.* (2024) ‘User Evaluation of a Shared Robot Control System Combining BCI and Eye Tracking in a Portable Augmented Reality User Interface’, *Sensors*, 24(16), p. 5253. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/s24165253>.

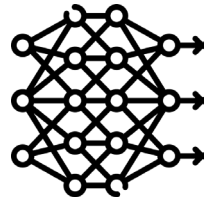
Attributions

- Neural network icon made by Freepik on Flaticon: <https://www.flaticon.com/free-icons/neural-network>

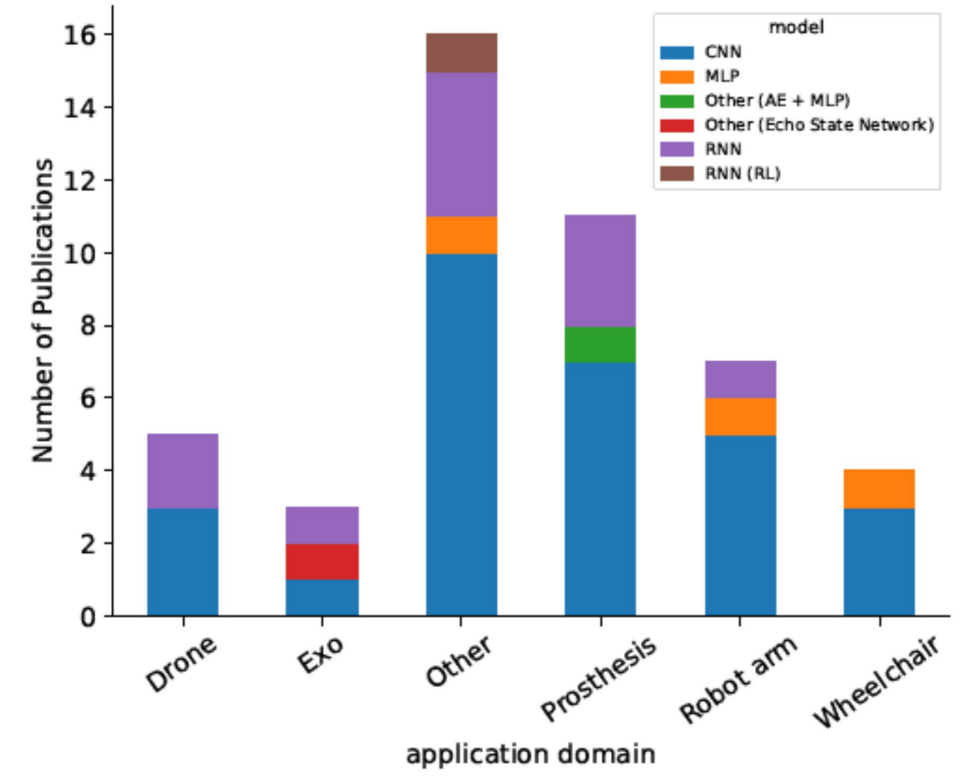
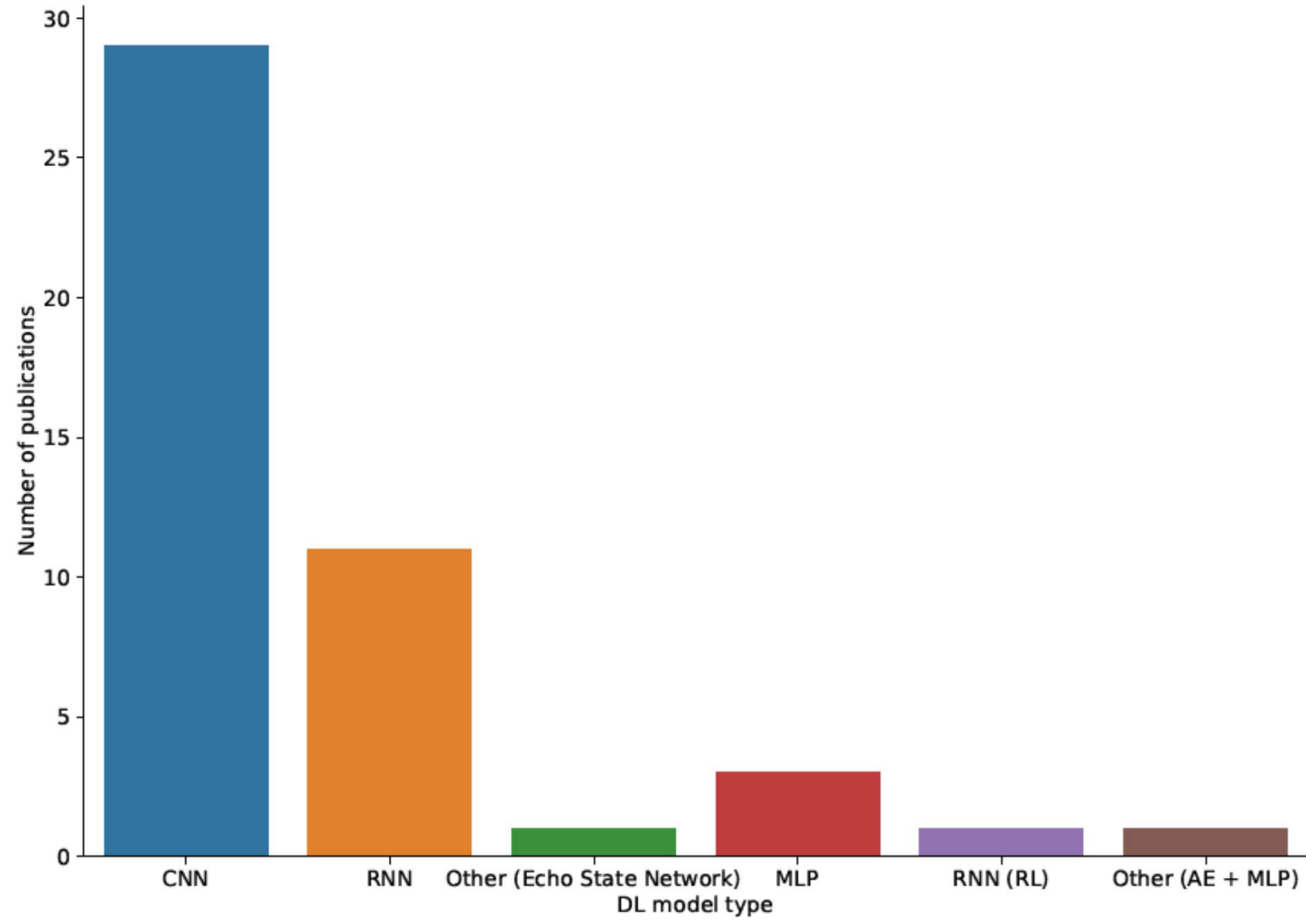
References

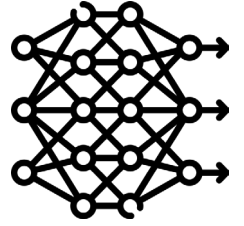
Xu, Y., Ding, C., Shu, X., Gui, K., Bezudnova, Y., Sheng, X., & Zhang, D. (2019). Shared control of a robotic arm using non-invasive brain–computer interface and computer vision guidance. *Robotics and Autonomous Systems*, 115, 121–129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.robot.2019.02.014>

Kuhner, D., Fiederer, L. D. J., Aldinger, J., Burget, F., Völker, M., Schirrmeister, R. T., Do, C., Boedecker, J., Nebel, B., Ball, T., & Burgard, W. (2019). A service assistant combining autonomous robotics, flexible goal formulation, and deep-learning-based brain–computer interfacing. *Robotics and Autonomous Systems*, 116, 98–113. <https://doi.org/10/gjs8gp>



Number of publications





Systematic literature Search

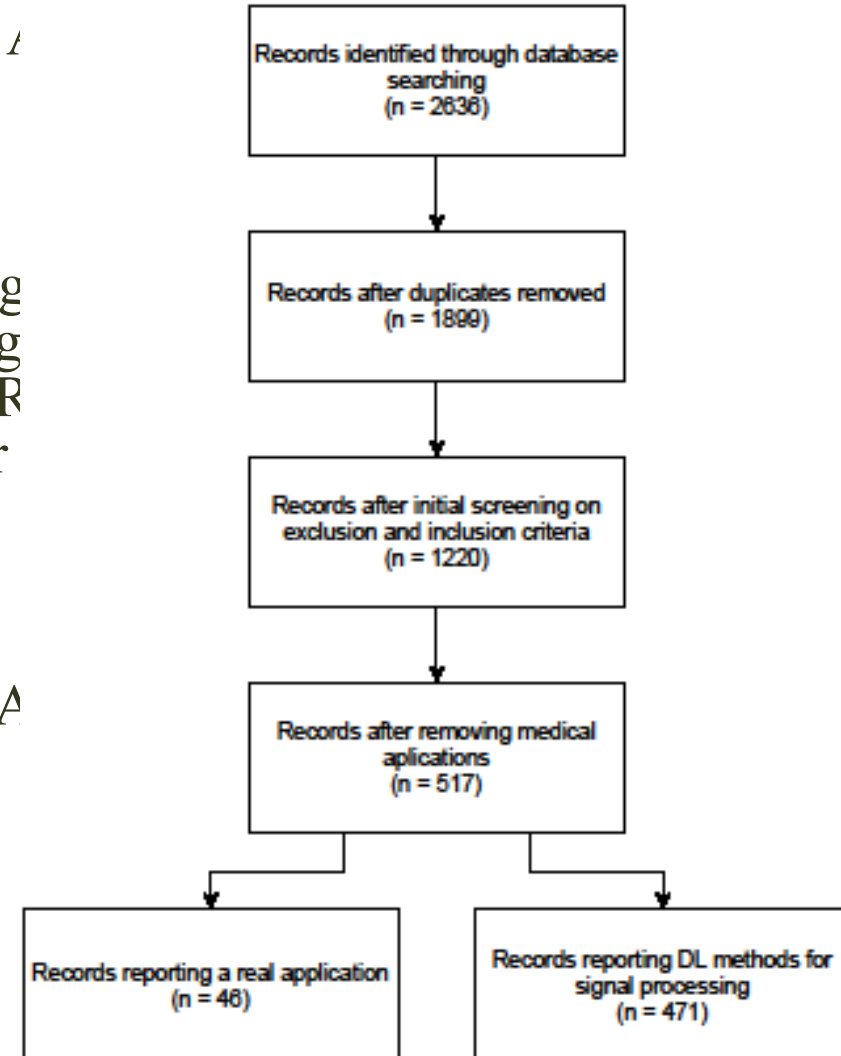
Databases: PubMed, Scopus, IEEE Explore, and A

Search string:

(Brain Computer Interface OR Electroencephalog OR EEG OR Brain Machine Interface OR Biolog Signal* OR Magnetoencephalogra* OR MEG OR Electromyogra* OR EMG OR Human Computer Interaction* OR HCI)

AND (Deep Learning OR Convolutional Neural Network* OR Recurrent Neural Network OR Generative Adversarial Network* OR GAN OR A Encoder OR Transformer Network)

AND (Motor Image* OR Control* OR Applied)



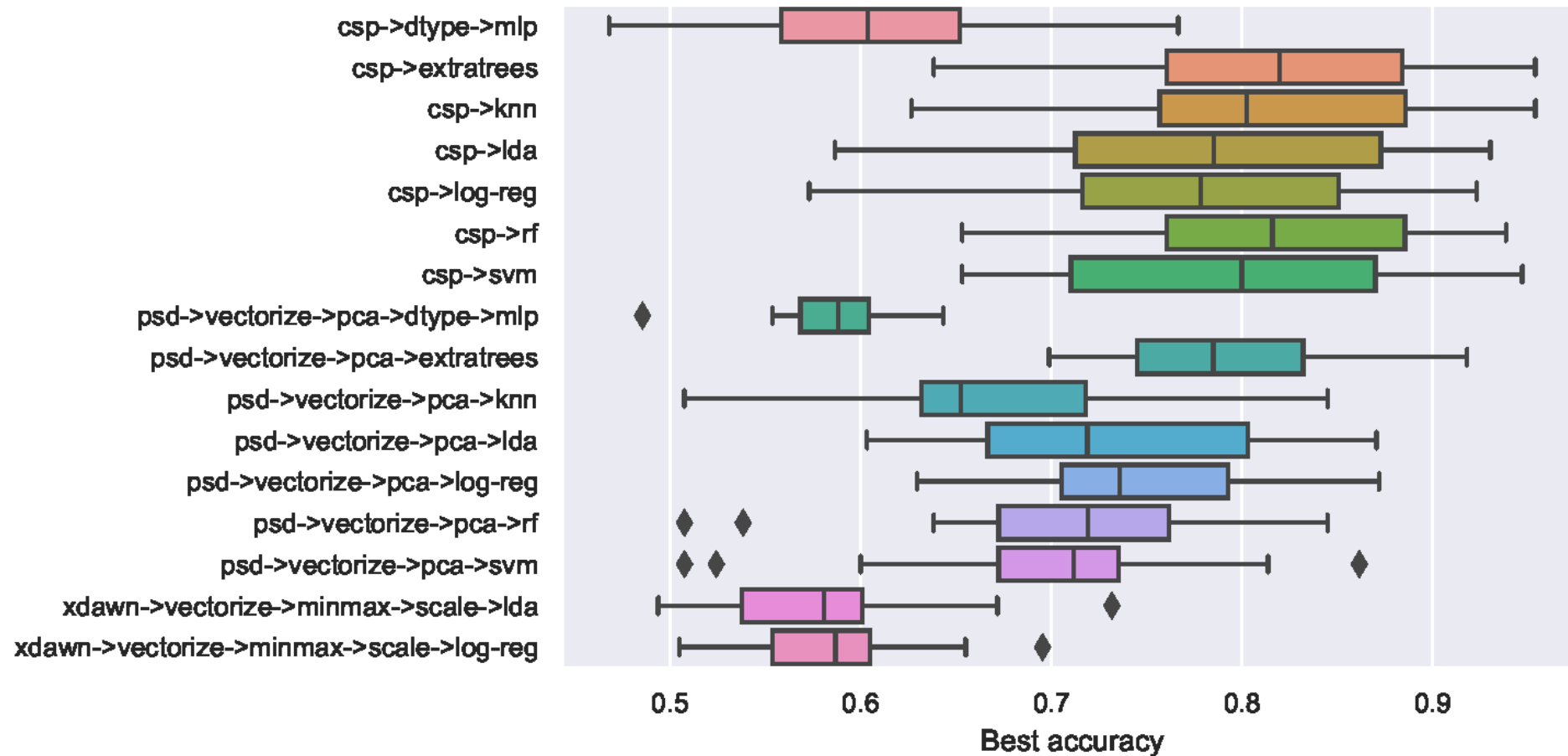


Benchmarking pipelines

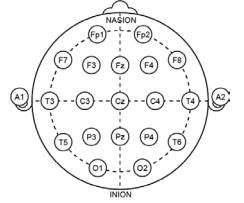
Table 3.1: Evaluated EEG decoding pipelines. Abbreviations: PSD = Power spectral density, CSP = Common spatial patterns, RF = Random forest, KNN = K-nearest neighbours, LDA = Linear discriminant analysis, ExtraTrees = Extremely randomised trees, SVM = Support vector machine, MLP = Multi-layer perceptron, PCA = Principal component analysis

Feature extraction	Classifier	Other steps
PSD	RF	Vectorize and PCA between PSD and RF
PSD	KNN	Vectorize and PCA between PSD and KNN
PSD	LDA	Vectorize and PCA between PSD and LDA
PSD	Logistic regression	Vectorize and PCA between PSD and logistics regression
PSD	ExtraTrees	Vectorize and PCA between PSD and ExtraTrees
PSD	SVM	Vectorize and PCA between PSD and SVM
PSD	MLP	Vectorize, PCA and Datatype cast between PSD and MLP
CSP	RF	
CSP	KNN	
CSP	LDA	
CSP	Logistic regression	
CSP	ExtraTrees	
CSP	SVM	
CSP	MLP	Datatype cast before MLP
XDawn	LDA	Vectorize and MinMax Scale between XDawn and LDA
XDawn	Logistic regression	Vectorize and MinMax Scale between XDawn and LDA

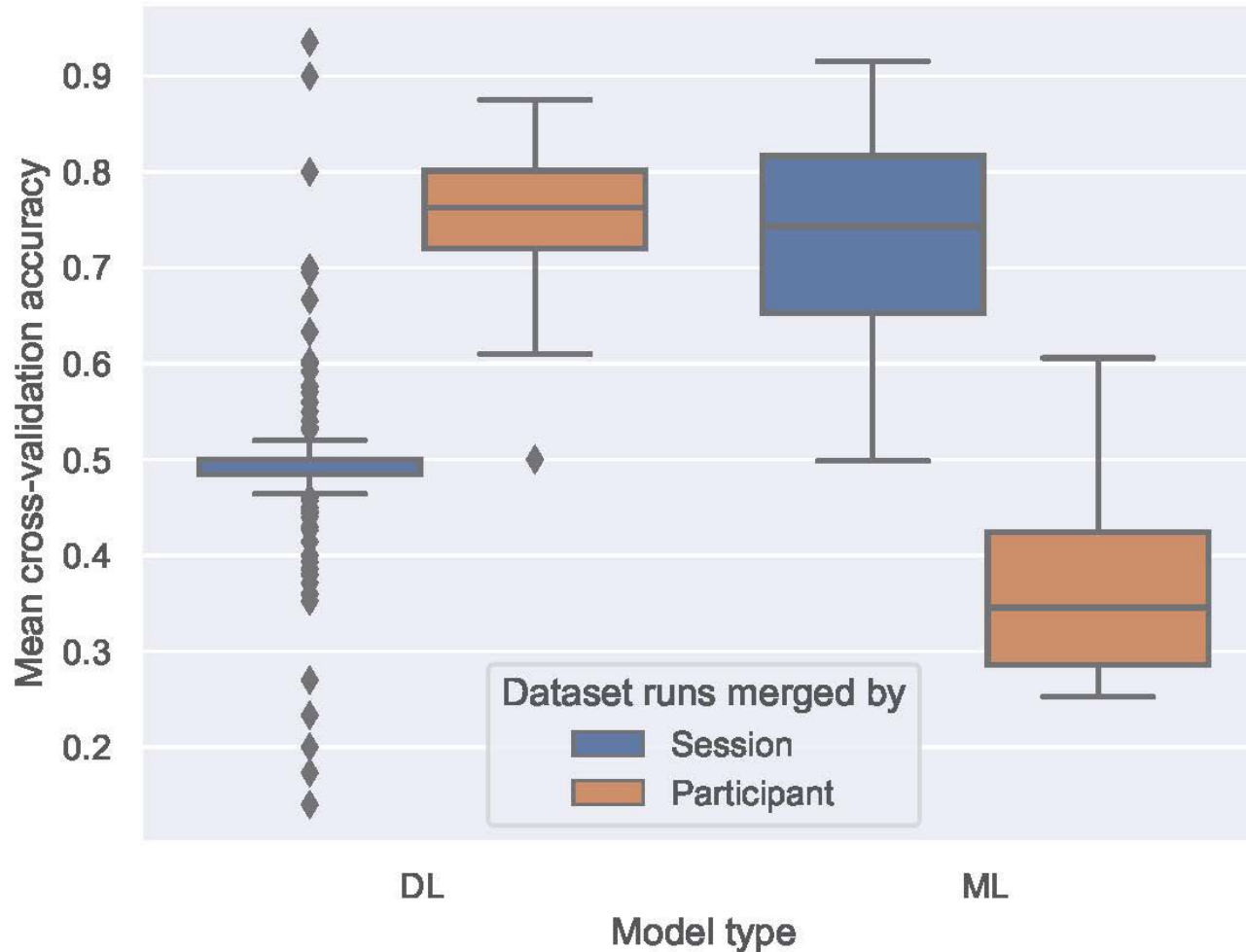
Best accuracy for each optimized pipeline



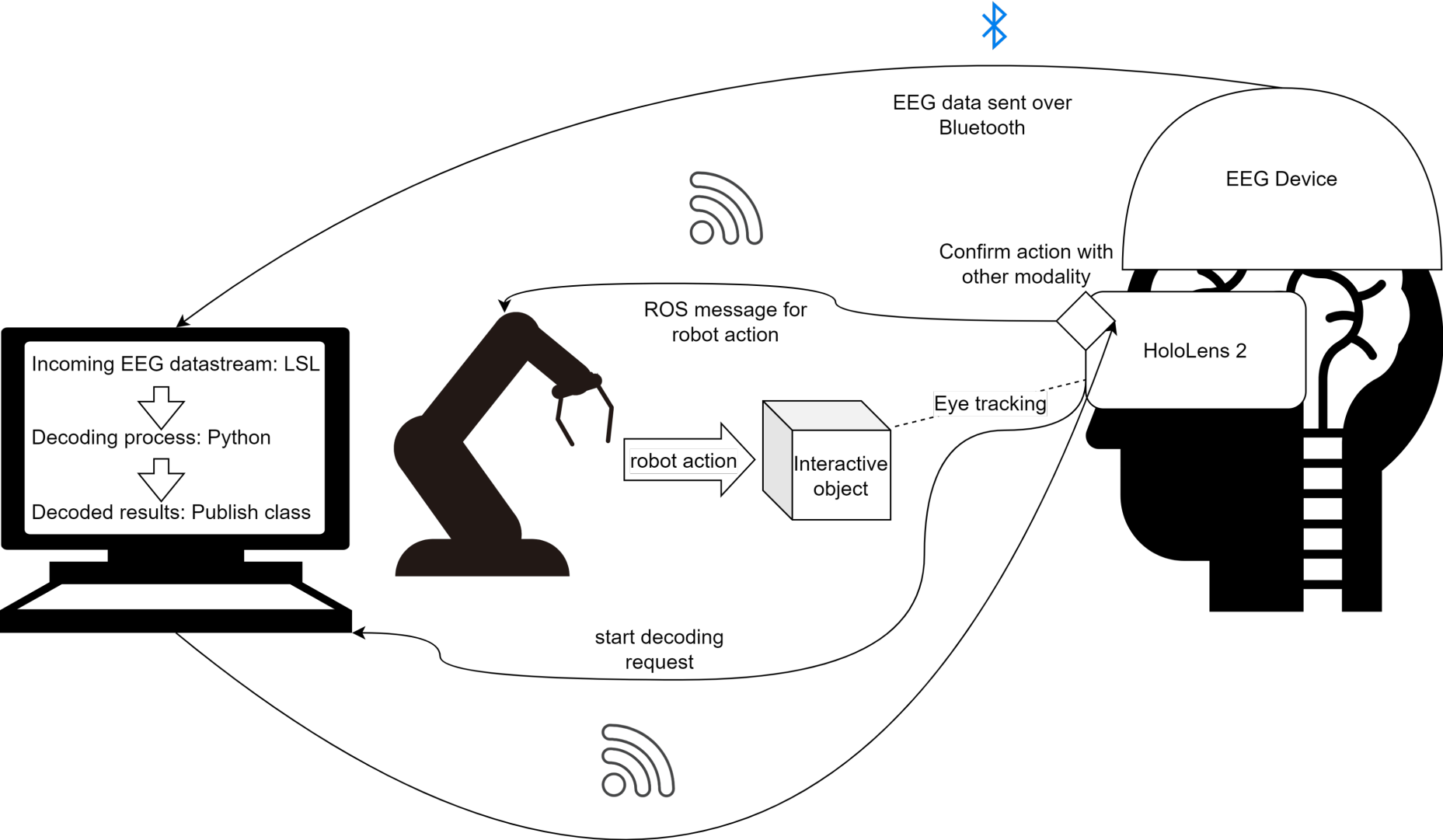
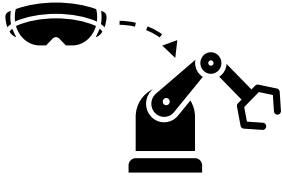
DL vs ML on MI data



Poster at BCI meeting: Arnau Dillen. Calibration methods during EEG signal acquisition and their impact on motor imagery. (2023) doi:[10.3217/978-3-85125-962-9-124](https://doi.org/10.3217/978-3-85125-962-9-124).

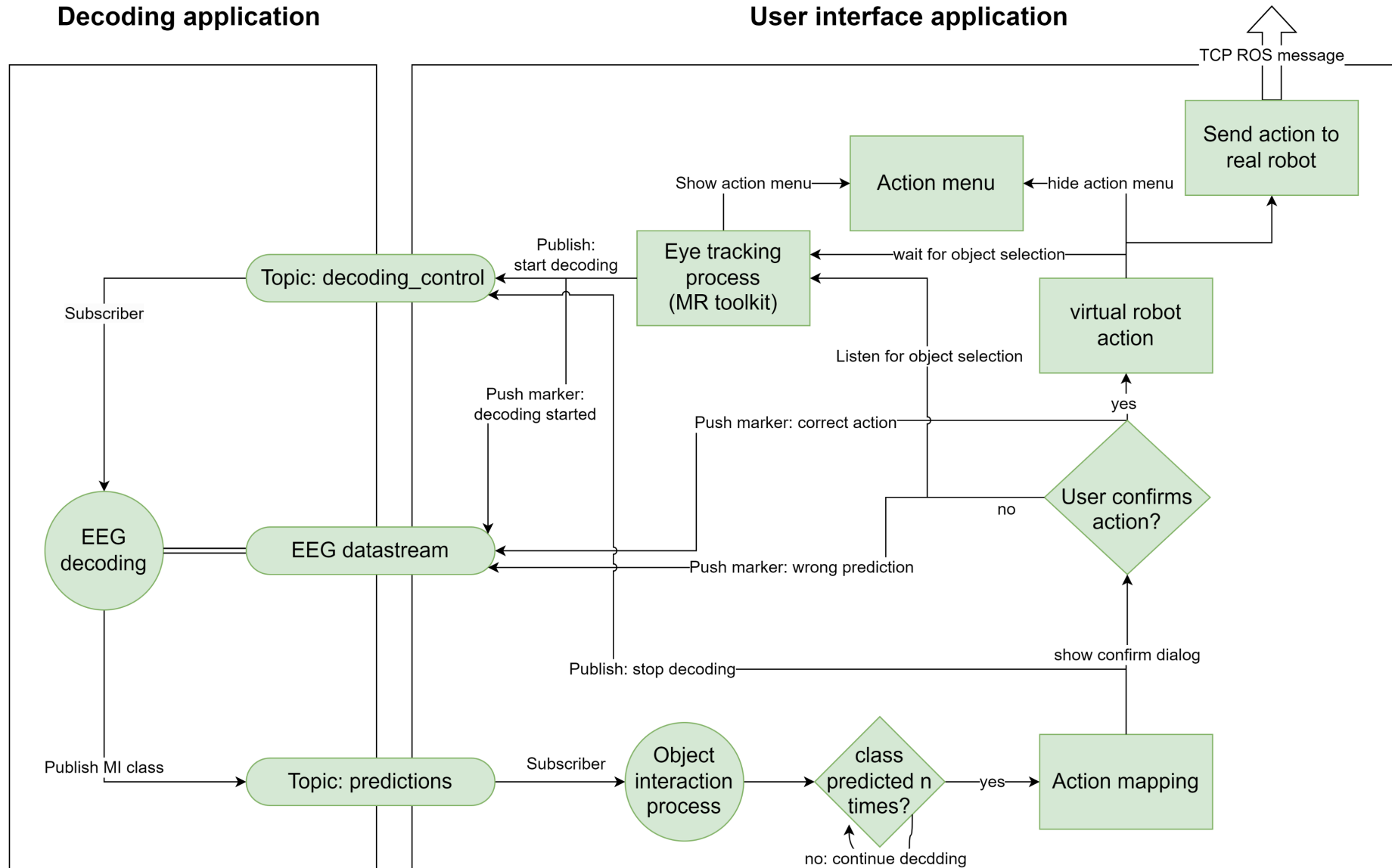
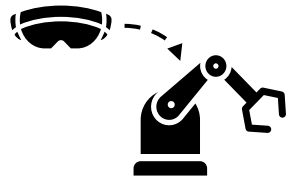


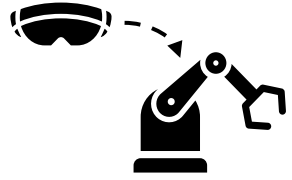
Hardware setup details



decoding results

BCI software details





Software implementation details



EEG decoding: Custom Python software



AR user interface: Unity 3D + mixed reality toolkit



EEG acquisition: lab streaming layer



Communication between software components: ZeroMQ

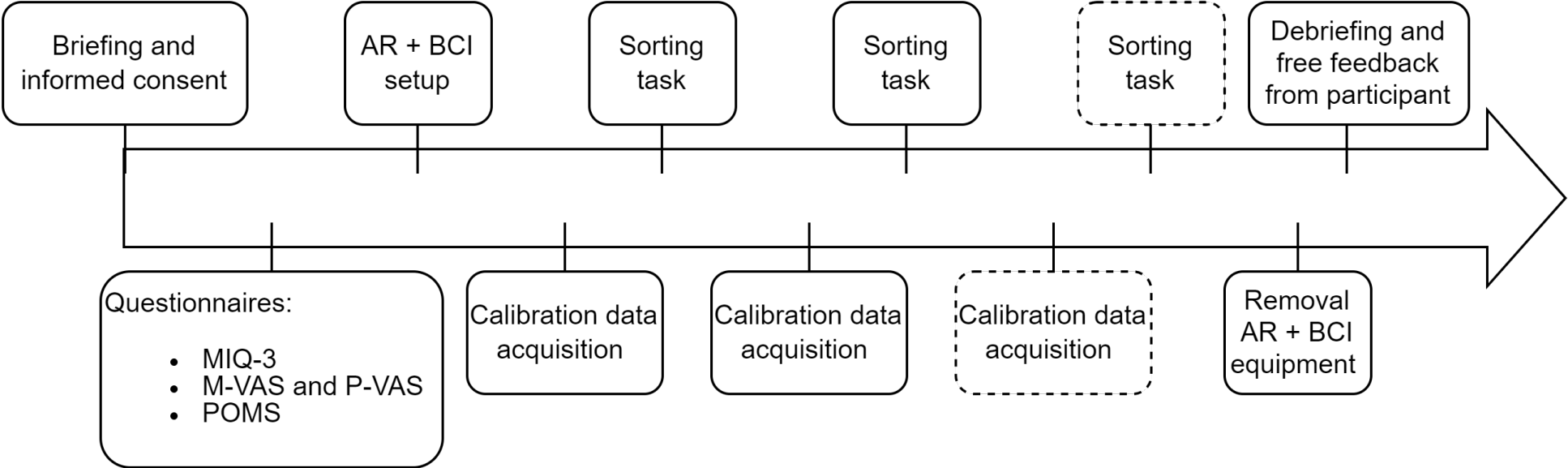


Sample size calculations

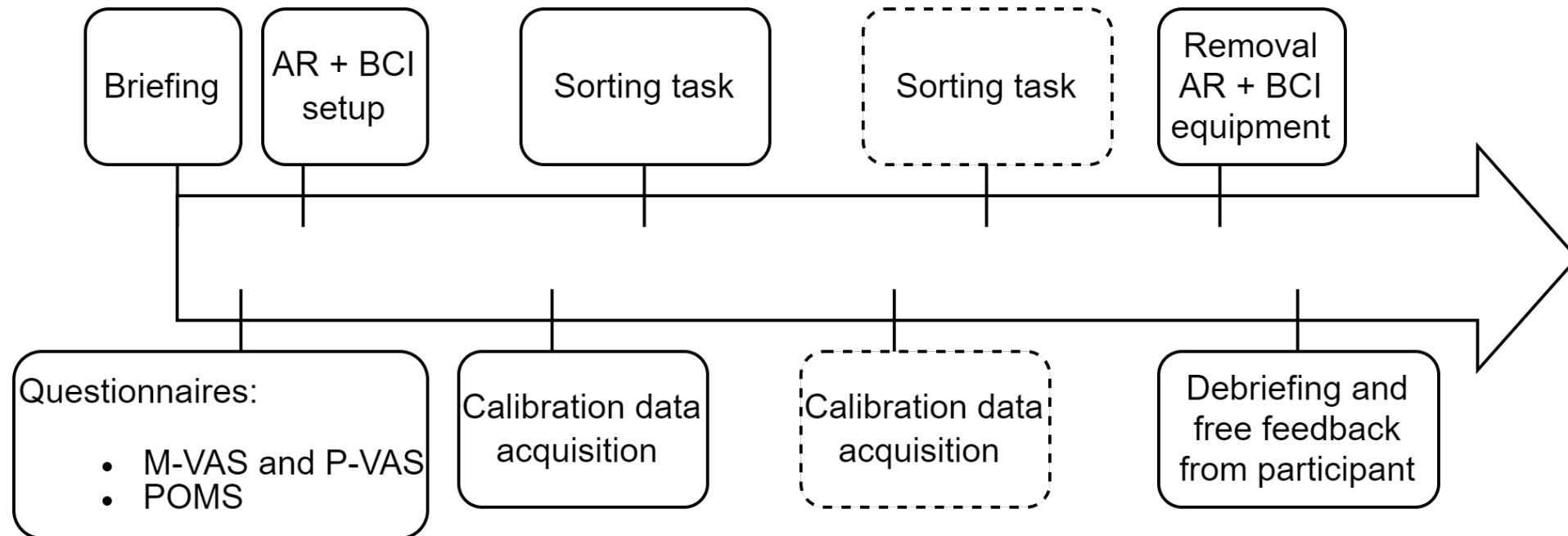
Study Power

- Phase 1: Not relevant. Validation in more than one individual
- Phase 2: Pilot study with no statistical validation.
5 was chosen to balance time efficiency and assessment thoroughness
- Phase 3: Power for 20 participants (original goal)
 - 90 % confidence interval
 - 20 % margin of error
 - medium risk and fair precision
 - Formula: $N = K^2 \frac{s^2}{m^2}$, where $K = 1.645$ (constant for 90% CI), s = standard deviation as a proportion of the mean (estimated as 0.52) and $m = 0.20$ (desired margin of error)

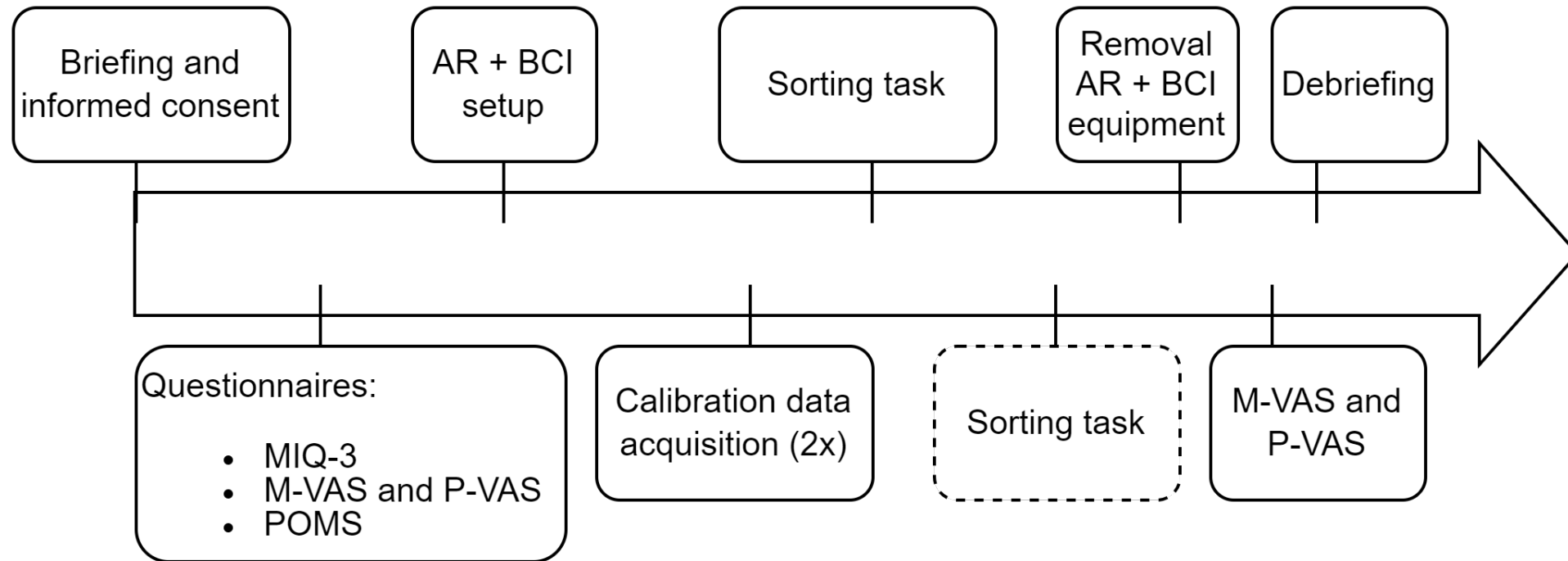
User study Phase 1 procedure: Session 1



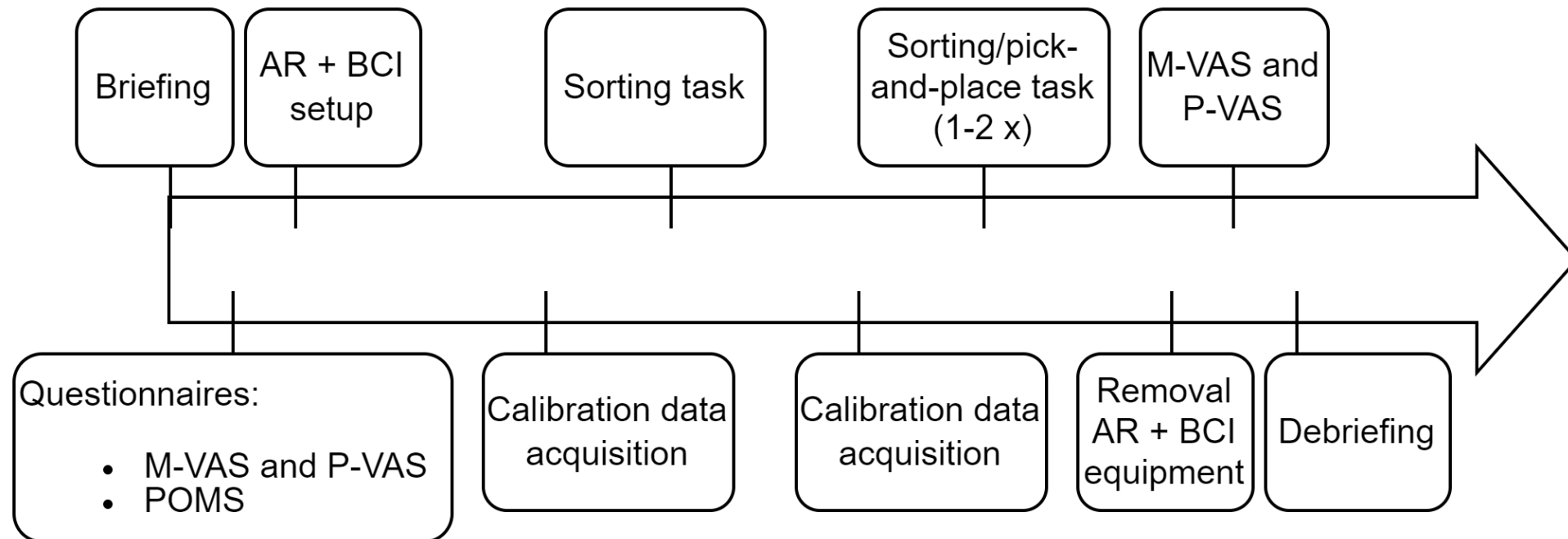
User study Phase 1 procedure: Session 2



User study Phase 2 and 3 procedure: Session 1



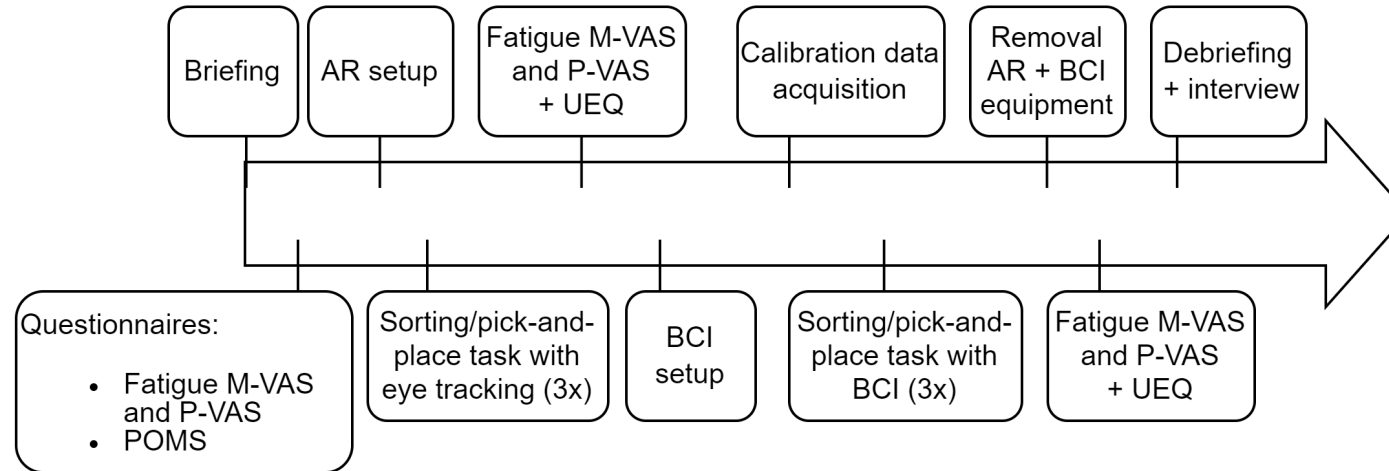
User study Phase 2 and 3 procedure: Session 2



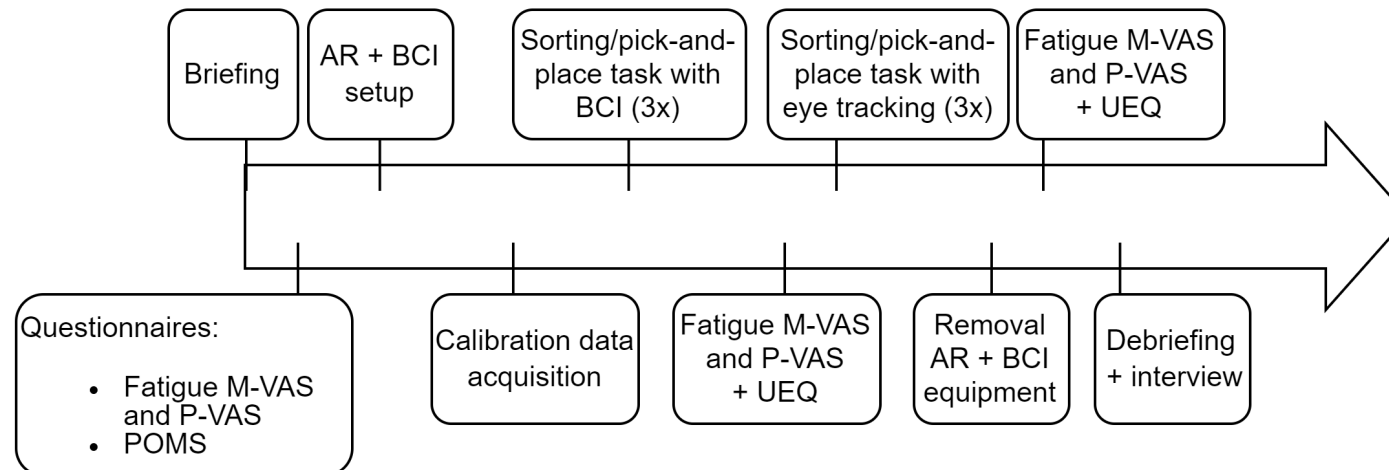
User study Phase 2 and 3 procedure: Session 3



A



B





User experience details

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of UEQ scores for BCI and Eye tracking control types with *p*-values for statistical tests.

Question	BCI	Eye Tracking	<i>p</i> -Value
annoying—enjoyable	5.00(±1.78)	6.08(±0.86)	0.052
not understandable—understandable	4.92(±1.75)	6.38(±0.77)	0.019
creative—dull	2.31(±1.25)	2.54(±1.66)	0.570
easy to learn—difficult to learn	4.00(±1.96)	1.85(±1.57)	0.008
valuable—inferior	2.85(±1.28)	1.77(±0.73)	0.005
boring—exciting	4.54(±1.66)	4.85(±1.52)	0.677
not interesting—interesting	5.85(±1.28)	6.31(±0.75)	0.139
unpredictable—predictable	4.00(±1.68)	5.38(±1.94)	0.050
fast—slow	3.69(±1.55)	2.85(±1.77)	0.027
inventive—conventional	2.08(±1.12)	2.00(±0.91)	1.000
obstructive—supportive	4.23(±2.01)	5.62(±0.96)	0.015
good—bad	2.92(±1.75)	1.69(±0.75)	0.014
complicated—simple	4.15(±1.77)	5.69(±1.65)	0.048
unlikable—pleasing	5.38(±1.04)	5.46(±0.97)	0.837
usual—leading edge	4.69(±1.84)	5.00(±1.73)	0.751
unpleasant—pleasant	4.31(±1.60)	5.23(±1.24)	0.165
secure—not secure	3.54(±1.66)	2.69(±1.44)	0.020
motivating—demotivating	3.62(±1.76)	2.46(±1.13)	0.050
meets expectations—does not meet expectations	3.62(±2.02)	2.00(±1.35)	0.060
inefficient—efficient	4.31(±1.60)	5.77(±1.17)	0.014
clear—confusing	3.15(±1.68)	2.00(±1.15)	0.046
impractical—practical	4.77(±1.48)	5.54(±1.13)	0.165
organized—cluttered	2.38(±1.26)	2.23(±1.01)	0.549
attractive—unattractive	2.77(±1.09)	2.46(±1.45)	0.596
friendly—unfriendly	2.85(±1.34)	2.15(±1.07)	0.069
conservative—innovative	6.00(±0.82)	5.77(±0.93)	0.337

Comparison with state-of-the-art

Study	Evaluation tasks	Results
Ours	Sorting and pick-and-place	Success rate: 0.73 and 0.83 Avg. completion time: 490 s and 380 s
Xu et al. (2019)	Move to target area	Success rate: 0.7 Avg. completion time: 16.99 s – 25.83s
Kuhner et al. (2019)	Fetch and carry task	Success rate 0.9 Avg. completion time: 258.7 s