Storyboards for the elicitation of TAM contexts in Melanesia
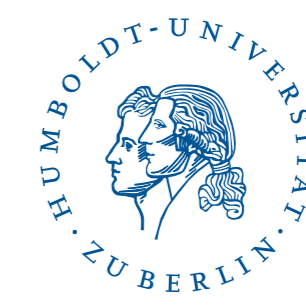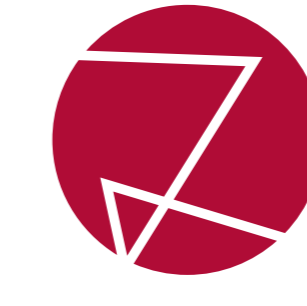
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Linguistic Evidence 2018

The MelaTAMP project

- We investigate **TAM systems** ...
- ...in **seven Oceanic languages** ...
- ...of **Melanesia** (Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea) ...
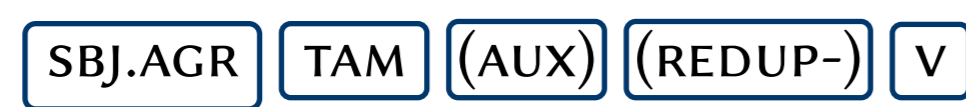- primarily based on **corpus data**.

| SBJ.AGR | TAM | (AUX) | (REDUP-) | V |

Figure: The typical, simplified anatomy of an Oceanic predicate

Storyboards:

- Elicitations are necessary to complement corpus data with infrequent but theoretically crucial contexts.
- Storyboards create contextualized, narrative-based examples.

Temporal vs. modal dominance: the theory

- Many Oceanic languages qualify as **mood-prominent** (cf. Dempwolff, 1939; Bhat, 1999).
- The interdependence between time and modality can be modeled by a branching-time structure (Thomason, 1984; Dowty, 1977; Krifka, 2016).
- In terms of a tripartite branching-times structure (von Prince, submitted), mood-prominence implies that the modal dimension matters more than the temporal dimension in the choice of a mood marker.

Figure: Modal domains of a branching-time structure; the actual, the possible and the counterfactual.

Figure: right: temporal domains, the past, the present and the future.

Definition of modal domains

actual: $\{i | i \leq i_0\}$
possible: $\{i | i_0 < i\}$
counterfactual: $\{i | i \not\leq i_0, i_0 \neq i\}$

Definition of temporal domains

present: $\{i | t(i) = t(i_0)\}$
future: $\{i | t(i_0) < t(i)\}$
past: $\{i | t(i) < t(i_0)\}$

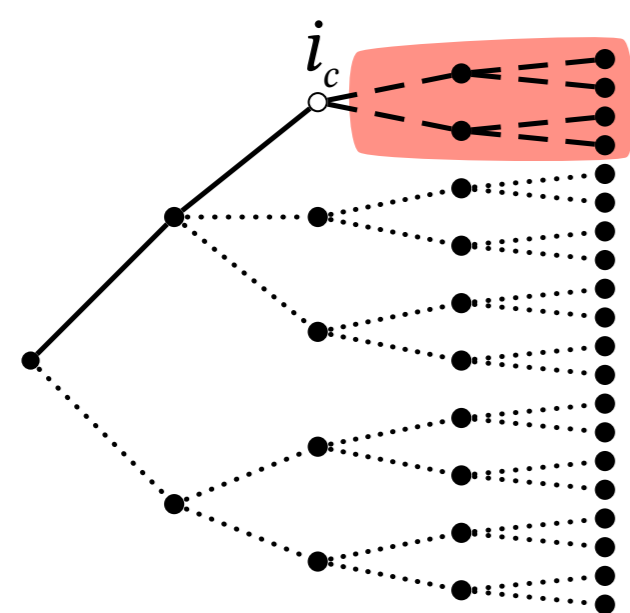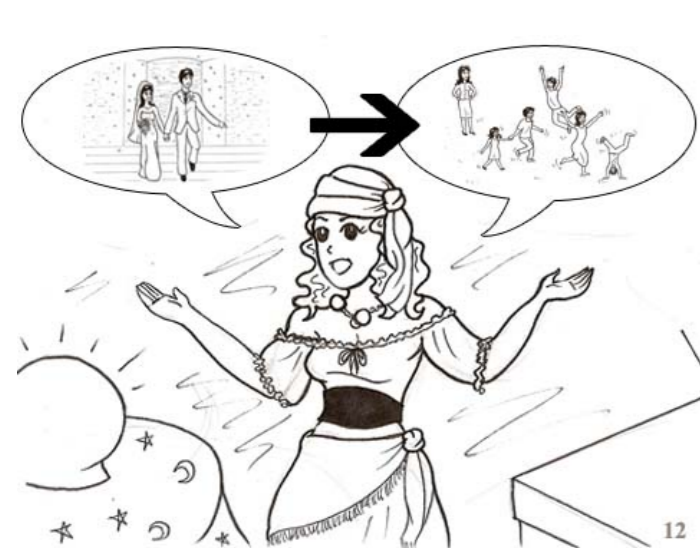## Question 1: Binary or tripartite distinctions

We already know from fieldwork on the West Ambrym languages that instead of a binary distinction between realis and irrealis, they have a tripartite distinction roughly corresponding to the three modal domains of the branching-time model.
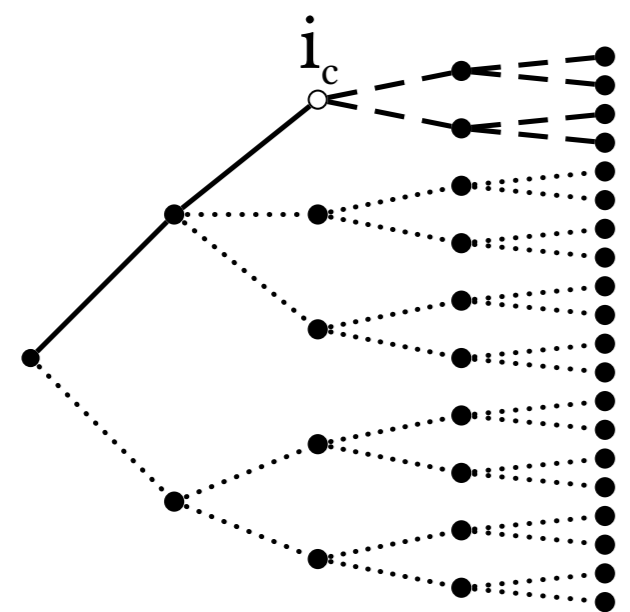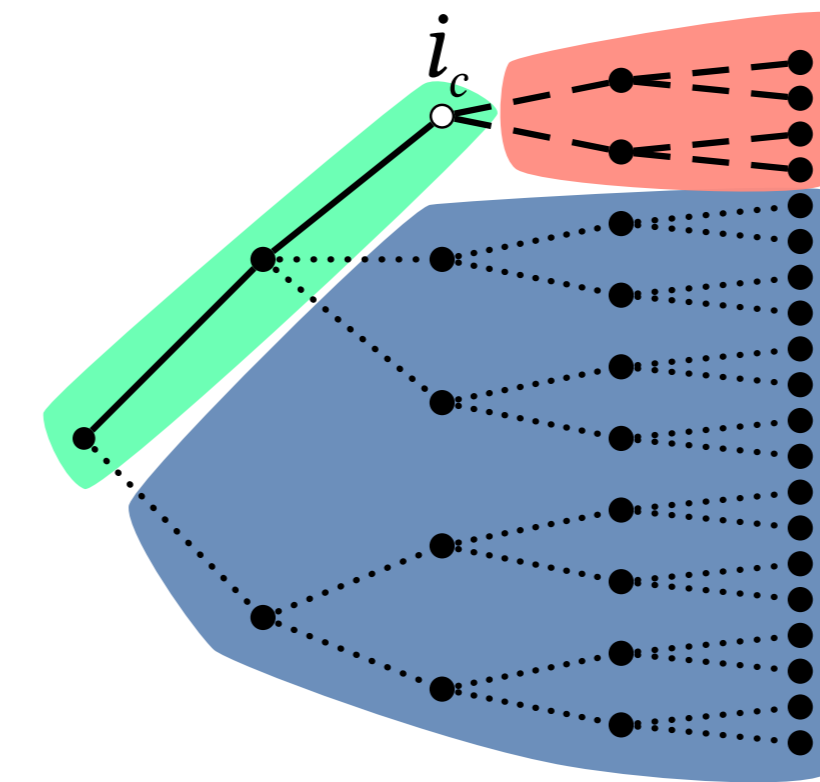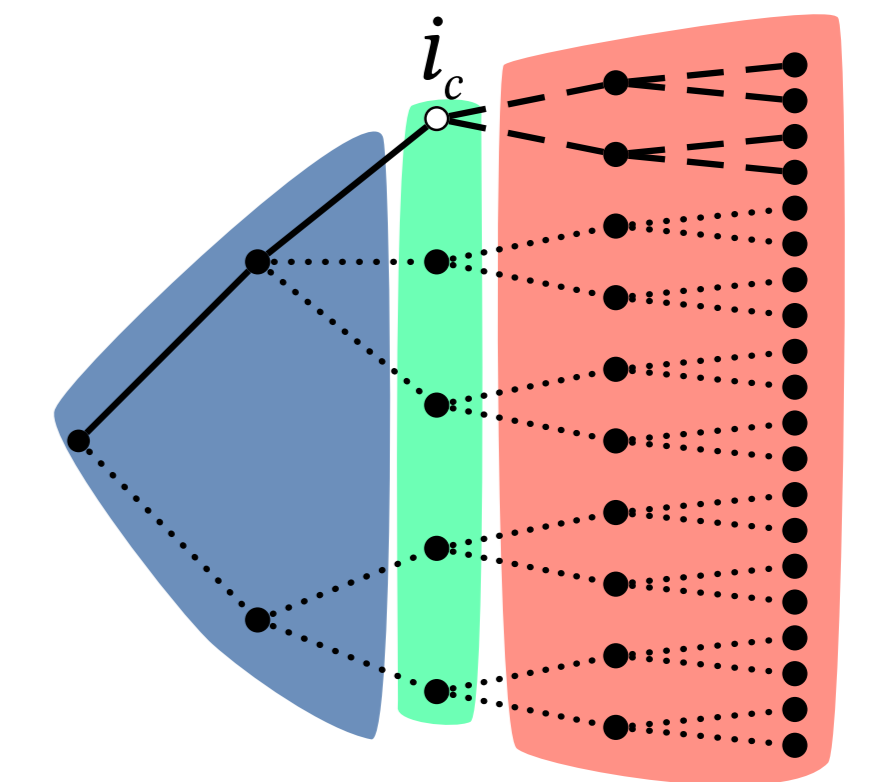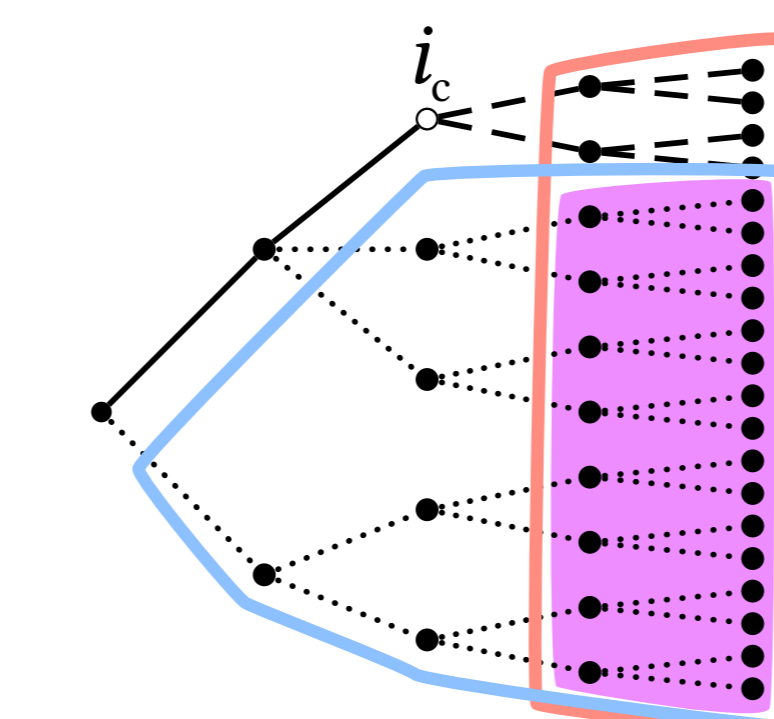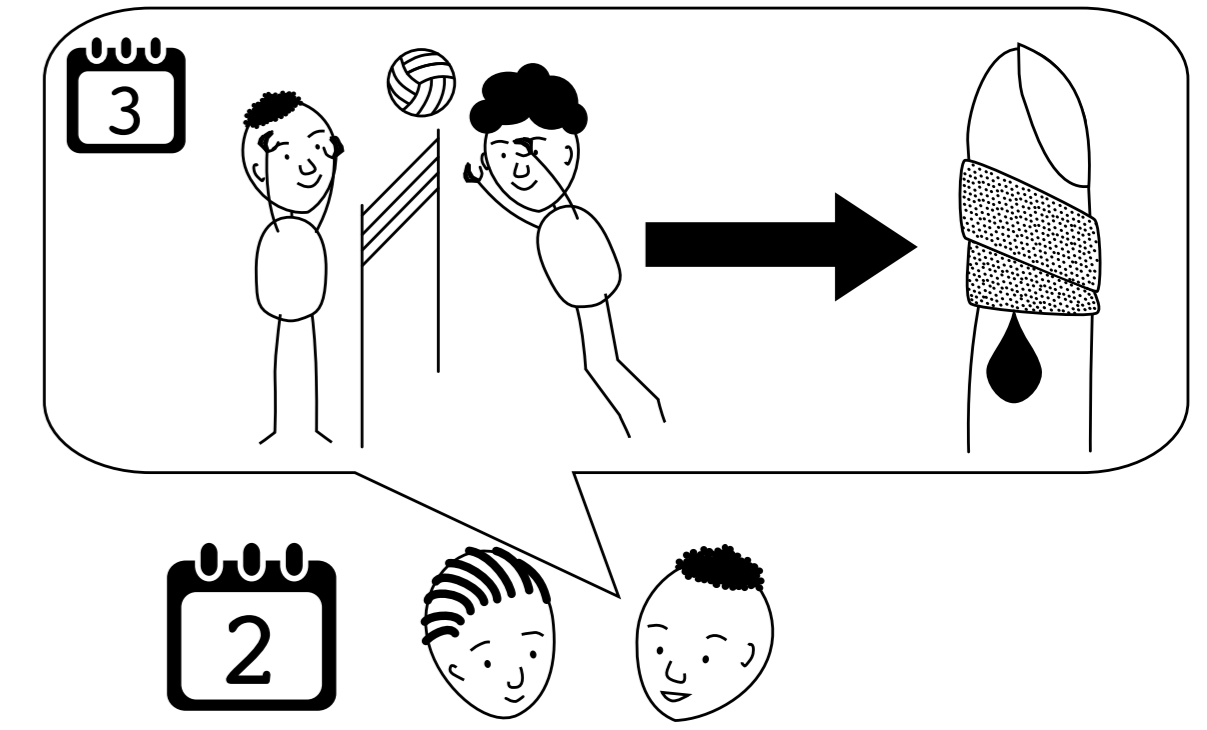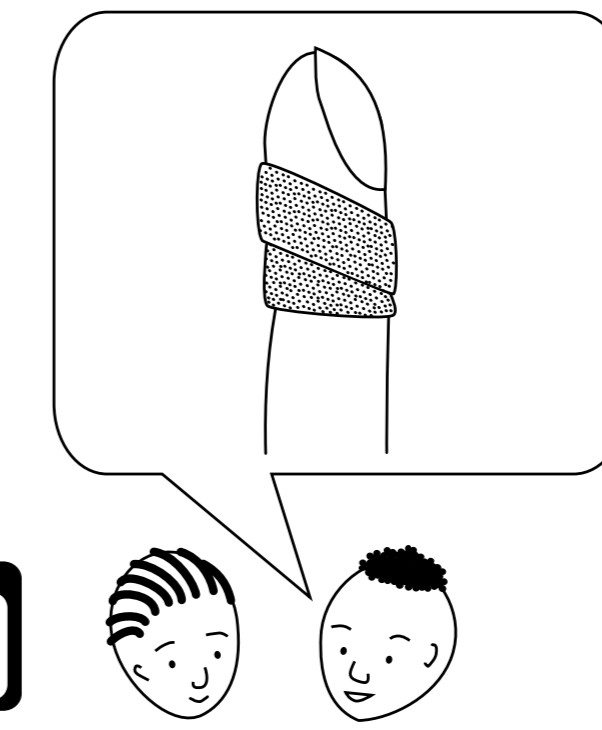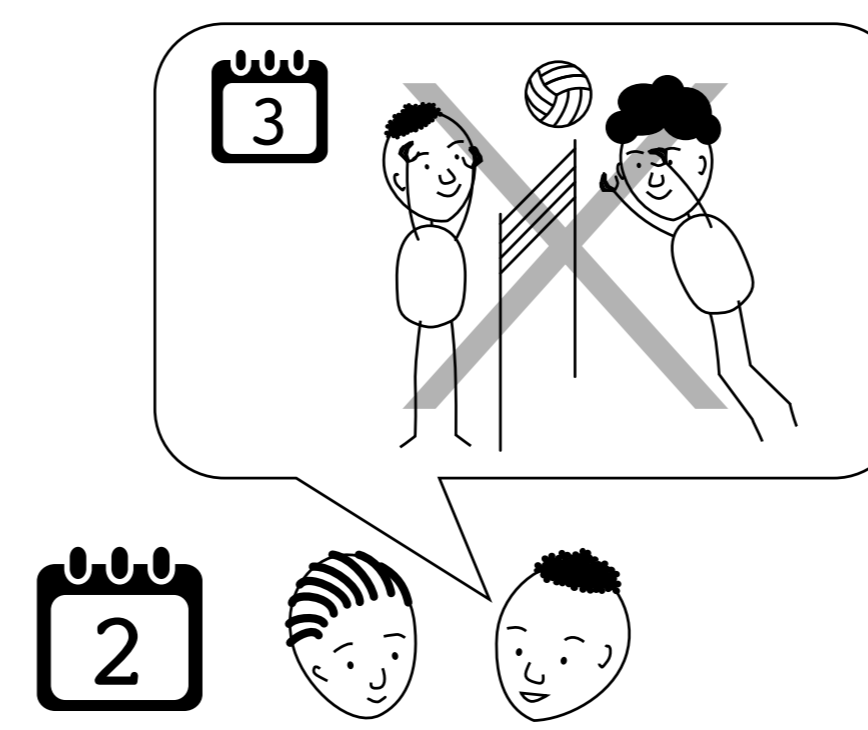
Question 1

Do we systematically find a tripartite modal distinction into the actual, the possible and the counterfactual? Or do some of the project languages only have a binary distinction into irrealis and realis?

Test

The Fortune Teller Storyboard: Mary asks a fortune teller who she should marry, a (specific) tall guy or a short one. Following the fortune teller's advice, she decides to marry the tall, skinny man. Many years later, Mary is curious to learn how things would have turned out had she married the short fat man instead.

(1) *[ba ko lene yaafu berep enti], [ba s-amro* POT 2SG marry.to man long this POT CL3-2D *tejimre nye ba ra ngor en ba ra ngor].* child 3PL POT 3PL big COMP POT 3PL big
"If you marry this tall man, you'll have very many children." (Dalkalaen)

(2) *[a ko do kirine yaafu mwermwer enti]* COMP 2SG IMPF follow man short this *lo [bala s-amro ver ti fwe en* then COUNT CL3-2D stone DIST much COMP *ti fwe]* DIST much
"If you had followed this man, then you'd be very rich." (Dalkalaen)

Results

- All our languages allow for distinctions between counterfactuals and future possibilities.
- Within the four languages from Ambrym (Daakie, Daakaka, Dalkalaen and North Ambrym), this difference is marked obligatorily as part of their core TAM systems.
- In Nafsan and Mavea, by contrast, this difference is marked by optional markers.

(3) *Pa=mer lak skot Adam, rak=fo pitlak mane laap.* 2SG.IRR=COUNT marry with Adam 2DU.IRR=PSP.IRR have money:BI a.lot
If you had married Adam, you two would have had a lot of money. (Nafsan)

Question 2: Future counterfactuals

Question 2

Do *future-less-vivid* conditionals (or future counterfactuals) pattern with past counterfactuals or with future indicatives?

Test

The Totem Field Storyboards do not include contexts for *future-less-vivid* conditionals. We created a narrative about a celebration that lasts three days, with a different activity on each day. Two boys talk about whether they would participate in next day's events.
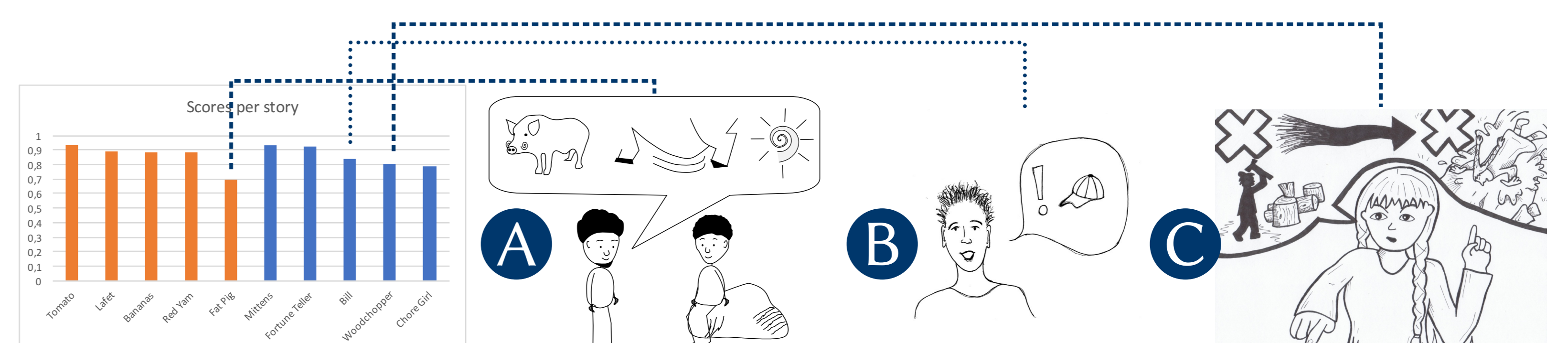

(4) *al-uk mwe nek en ngae nga na ti bele lo ba* skin-1SG.POSS REAL be.afraid COMP COMP FOC 1SG DIST play DISC POT *s-ak men-ok be en kebu.* 3SG-1SG.POSS wound.of-1SG.POSS POT eat return
"I'm afraid that if I played, my wound would bleed again." (Dalkalaen)

Results

- Some languages use the structures associated with past counterfactual conditionals (Nafsan).
- Some languages use the structures associated with potential future conditionals (Daakaka, Mavea).
- Some languages use a specific structure (Dalkalaen, see above).
- In addition, we found that future-oriented possibilities with apprehended content trigger the use of specific timitive structures, regardless of the counterfactual/ potential distinction – see example (5).

(5) *to vu ne ka na=n ple volibol te na=n tu yen s-ok myanok,* NEG;REAL be.good TRANS COMP 1SG=NEG;POT play volleyball DISC 1SG=NEG;POT hit in CL3-1SG.POSS wound *te bura ne kuo.* DISC blood NEG;POT run
"It would not be good for me to play volleyball and get hit on my wound so the blood would run again." (Daakaka)

Efficiency and Conventions

- 79% of the 28 target contexts were produced with the target structure by 14 speakers.
- The MelaTAMP storyboards were slightly more efficient than the TFS storyboards (80% vs 78%).
- Most graphical conventions ("?", "→", speech bubbles, thought bubbles, crosses for negation) were easily adapted by speakers.
- In some contexts, however, conventions were apparently not clear enough (relative clause in context A, negative counterfactual conditional in context C, calender symbols for reference to dates).
- Certain aspects of Western culture were sufficiently unfamiliar to speakers to interfere with the task (as the effect of wind on white people's hair in context B).

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