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Execution Framework of the GEMOC Studio (Tool Demo)

Erwan Bousse

TU Wien, Austria
bousse@big.tuwien.ac.at

Thomas Degueule

Inria, France
thomas.degueule@inria.fr

Didier Vojtisek

Inria, France
didier.vojtisek@inria.fr

Tanja Mayerhofer

TU Wien, Austria
mayerhofer@big.tuwien.ac.at

Julien Deantoni

Université Côte d'Azur, I3S, France
julien.deantoni@polytech.unice.fr

Benoit Combemale

Univ. Rennes 1 and Inria, France
benoit.combemale@inria.fr

Abstract

The development and evolution of an advanced modeling environment for a Domain-Specific Modeling Language (DSML) is a tedious task, which becomes recurrent with the increasing number of DSMLs involved in the development and management of complex software-intensive systems. Recent efforts in language workbenches result in advanced frameworks that automatically provide syntactic tooling such as advanced editors. However, defining the execution semantics of languages and their tooling remains mostly hand crafted. Similarly to editors that share code completion or syntax highlighting, the development of advanced debuggers, animators, and others execution analysis tools shares common facilities, which should be reused among various DSMLs. In this tool demonstration paper, we present the execution framework offered by the GEMOC studio, an Eclipse-based language and modeling workbench. The framework provides a generic interface to plug in different execution engines associated to their specific metalanguages used to define the discrete-event operational semantics of DSMLs. It also integrates generic runtime services that are shared among the approaches used to implement the execution semantics, such as graphical animation or omniscient debugging.

Categories and Subject Descriptors D.2.2 [Software Engineering]: Design Tools and Techniques; I.6 [Simulation and modeling]: Types of Simulation—Discrete event

Keywords domain-specific modeling language, language and modeling workbenches, model execution, debugging

1. Introduction

The integration of domain-specific concepts and best practices into Domain-Specific Modeling Languages (DSMLs) can significantly improve software and systems engineers productivity and system quality (Hutchinson et al. 2011b). Domain-specific models are used in the development processes to reason and assess specific properties over the system under development as early as possible. This usually leads to a better and cheaper design as more alternatives can be explored. While many models only represent structural aspects of systems, a large amount express behavioral aspects of the same systems. Behavioral models are used in various areas (e.g., enterprise architecture, software and systems engineering, scientific modeling, etc.), with very different underlying formalisms (e.g., business processes, orchestrations, functional chains, scenarios, protocols, activity diagram, etc.).

The development of DSMLs has only been recently recognized as a significant software engineering task in itself (Hutchinson et al. 2011a). To support the tedious task of implementing tool-supported DSMLs, specialized tools (aka. language workbenches) have been proposed during the last decade to provide generic or generated syntactic services for DSMLs. From a DSML specification, Eclipse-based tools, such as Sirius¹ and Xtext (Eysholdt and Behrens 2010), automatically provide advanced services for graphical and textual edition. This includes parsers, syntax highlighting, auto completion or “quick fix” suggestion systems.

For behavioral models, early dynamic validation and verification (V&V) techniques are required to ensure that they are correct with regard to their intended behavior, such as simulation, testing, debugging, or runtime verification. Dynamic V&V techniques may require to execute the models, in accordance with a given specification of the execution semantics of the DSML. Such a specification would eventually provide an execution engine, either in the form of an interpreter (i.e., operational semantics) or a compiler (i.e., translational

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¹<http://www.eclipse.org/sirius/>

semantics). However, the expected *runtime* services on top of the execution engine remain mostly hand crafted and dedicated to the execution engine developed for each new DSML. In particular, graphical animation and interactive debugging are common facilities to observe and control an execution to better understand a behavior or to identify the cause of a defect. Similarly to editors that share code completion or syntax highlighting, the development of advanced debuggers, animators, and others execution analysis tools shares common facilities, which should be reused among various DSMLs.

In this tool demonstration paper, we introduce the *execution framework* of the GEMOC Studio, an Eclipse-based language and modeling workbench. This framework provides a generic interface to integrate different execution engines, themselves associated to their specific metalanguages to define the discrete-event operational semantics of DSMLs. The framework also integrates runtime services that can be shared among the various approaches used to implement the execution semantics. These services include graphical animation, omniscient debugging or trace management. We illustrate the framework with the integration of different engines that are applied on the development of modeling environments for various DSMLs. We demonstrate our approach through the definition of different xDSMLs with different approaches, and the presentation of the resulting environments provided by the modeling workbench to animate and debug models.

2. On Model Execution

Debugging, and dynamic V&V techniques in general, require models to be executable, which is achieved by defining the execution semantics of the executable DSMLs (xDSMLs) used to define them. The execution semantics of an xDSML is mainly implemented either as a compiler (aka. translational semantics) or as an interpreter (aka. operational semantics).

A compiler consists in generating executable code, usually targeting an execution environment that provides the tools of interest for the modeling language under development (*e.g.*, virtual machine, debugger, checkers). While this approach allows language designers to reuse existing, possibly efficient, tools for new modeling languages, it comes with two difficulties. First, the definition of the semantics is given in terms of the targeted execution environment. This makes difficult the definition and understanding of the resulting execution semantics. Second, to be useful to the user of the xDSML there is a need for a back-annotation mechanism to trace back the execution results in terms of the initial model.

An interpreter is a virtual machine for a modeling language in charge of executing any conforming models. The interpreter defines the data structure representing the execution state of a model, and the execution rules in terms of endogenous, possibly in-place, transformations of such an execution state. The execution state can be either an extension of the syntax of the modeling language (*e.g.*, the execution state of a statechart could be specified by an additional collection

containing the current states) or a separate data structure defined by its own metamodel (*e.g.*, the execution state of a Petri net may be represented as a matrix). While the main benefit of this approach is to define the execution semantics directly in terms of the concepts of the modeling language, the main drawback is the necessity for any new xDSML to implement all the tooling based on the execution semantics, *e.g.*, a debugger. Developing such a complex tool for a xDSML remains a difficult and error-prone task.

Various approaches have been investigated in the last decade to implement operational semantics (*e.g.*, (Mayerhofer et al. 2013; Engels et al. 2000; Tatibouët et al. 2014; Combemale et al. 2013)), with their own pros and cons (formality, underlying paradigm, abstraction level, or specific concern such as concurrency). Moreover, despite the specificity of each xDSML and the differences between their semantics, there is a common set of runtime facilities which can be expected for all languages. For instance, one may expect the following debugging facilities: control of the execution (pause, resume, stop), representation of the current state (*i.e.*, model animation), breakpoint definition, step into/over/out and step forward/backward. To support the various approaches to implement the discrete-event operational semantics of xDSMLs, and to drastically reduce the development cost of runtime tools, we present in the next section the generic execution framework provided in the GEMOC studio. This execution framework is used to integrate different approaches to define the operational semantics of xDSMLs (incl., the meta-language and the associated execution engine), and provides various generic facilities for model simulation, graphical animation and debugging.

3. GEMOC Execution Framework

3.1 Overview of the GEMOC Studio

The GEMOC Studio² is an Eclipse package atop the Eclipse Modeling Framework (EMF), which includes:

- The *GEMOC Language Workbench*: to be used by language designers to build and compose new xDSMLs,
- The *GEMOC Modeling Workbench*: to be used by domain designers to create, execute and coordinate models conforming to xDSMLs.

The different concerns of a DSML, as defined with the tools of the language workbench, are automatically deployed into the modeling workbench. They parametrize a generic execution framework that provides various generic services, such as graphical animation, debugging tools, trace and event managers, timeline visualizations, etc.

3.2 Overview of the Execution Framework

Figure 1 shows an overview of the execution framework offered by the GEMOC studio. At the middle, the xDSML de-

²<http://gemoc.org/studio>

operations that are synchronously called by the engine during the execution of a model: *engineStarted* when the execution starts, *engineStopped* when the execution ends, *aboutToExecuteStep* when the engine is about to start an execution step, *stepExecuted* when an execution step finished. Within the implementation of one of these operations, an addon can access the engine and its status, the executed model, or even the graphical interface of the studio. Therewith, an addon can accomplish a large diversity of tasks, such as changing the executed model, pausing or stopping the execution, displaying information, or sending some input data to the engine.

4. Integration of Different Execution Engines

Using the API for execution engines that we described, different metaprogramming approaches have been integrated to describe discrete-event operational semantics. In particular, we implemented four main execution engines:

Java Engine. The Java engine is dedicated to operational semantics that are entirely defined using any Java-based language, such as Java, Xtend (Efftinge et al. 2012) or Kermeta (Jézéquel et al. 2015). The assembling of the various DSML concerns (incl., abstract and concrete syntaxes, and operational semantics) is made consistent thanks to Melange (Degueule et al. 2015). The *initialize* operation consists in loading the model, and searching for the entry point specified by the xDSML (i.e., the *main* method of the semantics). The *execute* operation simply consists in starting this entry point. However, to interweave notifications to addons in between execution steps, it is required that the Java semantics themselves notify the engine both before and after the performed steps (e.g., by calling *beforeStep* and *afterStep* provided by the abstract engine), otherwise the engine has no way to be informed of the execution. These calls can be either introduced manually at the beginning and at the end of chosen execution rules (i.e., Java methods), or can be introduced externally using aspect-oriented programming (e.g., AspectJ), or can even be realized using a feature provided by the metalanguage (e.g., the *@Step* annotation provided by Kermeta).

Java+MoCCML Engine. The Java+MoCCML engine is dedicated to operational semantics where the (possibly concurrent and timed) control is described in the MoCCML formal language (Deantoni et al. 2015), while the execution rules are written in any Java based language (e.g., Kermeta) (Combemale et al. 2013). In this case, the *initialize* operation creates a so called concurrency model according to the operational semantics, where some relevant events are defined, constrained together and linked to execution rules defined in Java (or any Java-based language). Then the *execute* operation consists in a loop that asks for the next possible steps to the Timesquare solver (Deantoni and Mallet 2012). There are potentially several possible steps since it considers all acceptable interleavings of the events. Once a step is selected, it calls the corresponding Java methods as required. Notifi-

cations to and from addons are received and sent directly by the engine during this execution loop.

xMOF Engine. The xMOF engine supports the execution of operational semantics defined with xMOF (Mayerhofer et al. 2013). With xMOF the data structure for representing the execution state of a model is defined with a metamodel and the rules of the semantics are defined with UML activities conforming to the fUML standard (Object Management Group 2015). For the execution of models, the xMOF engine relies on the virtual machine of fUML. In particular, the *initialize* operation of the xMOF engine loads the model to be executed as well as an optional input model defining input values to the executed model (e.g., the initial token distribution of a Petri net). These models are then handed over to the fUML virtual machine for execution in the *execute* operation of the xMOF engine. The fUML virtual machine provides sophisticated mechanisms for controlling and observing the execution of a model. These mechanisms are utilized by the xMOF engine to call the operations *beforeStep* and *afterStep* at the appropriate instants.

BCOoL Engine. The engine supports the behavioral coordination of heterogeneous models, based on coordination patterns defined using BCOoL (Vara Larsen et al. 2015). The *execute* operation consists in asking a set of coordinated engines what are the next possible steps and to merge and filter these steps to provide the next possible coordinated steps according to the coordination patterns.

5. Runtime Services

Using the API for addons that we described, we implemented a set of generic runtime services that can be shared among the different execution engines of the GEMOC Studio.

Graphical Animator. The graphical animator is an addon that updates different views in order to display the current execution state of the executed model, hence helping to understand models under execution. Since the GEMOC Studio is based on Eclipse, the animator is connected to the Eclipse debug UI to display the stack of currently executed steps in the *Debug* view, and the values of the execution state in the *Variables* view. In addition, if a graphical concrete syntax was defined for the xDSML using Sirius, the animator updates a graphical representation of the execution state of the model during the execution.

Execution Trace Addons. The execution framework provides two complementary ways to manage execution traces: a generic multibranch trace addon, or a generator of domain-specific multidimensional trace addons. Each trace addon reacts to engine notifications to capture steps and states. The *generic multibranch trace addon* captures generic traces that contain different branches, each linked to a choice made during a non-deterministic situation of the execution. The *generator of domain-specific and multidimensional trace addon* can

automatically produce an addon specific to a given xDSML to create and manage multidimensional traces (Bousse et al. 2015b).

Omniscient Debuggers. Two omniscient debugging addons are provided, each relying on a different sort of trace addon. They can provide services expected by any debugger (e.g., step into/over/out, breakpoints) thanks to an integration with the Eclipse Debug UI. In addition, they provide services to explore the execution *backward* in time (back into/over/out), by relying on execution traces constructed by trace addons. They each provide a view called a *timeline*, which is an interactive graphical representation of the trace. The *multibranch debugger* relies on a multibranch trace to explore non-deterministic and concurrent executions. It allows the creation of new branches by going back in time and making different choices. The *multidimensional omniscient debugger* (Bousse et al. 2015a) relies on a multidimensional trace to explore the different dimensions of the execution, using additional stepwise operations to explore the dimensions.

VCD. The VCD addon provides a representation of the execution in the form of a timing diagram represented in the Value Change Dump format (VCD) defined by the IEEE Standard 1364-1995 and extended in the IEEE Standard 1364-2001. It represents the potentially parallel evolution of the calls of the execution steps. This illustrates the possibility to adapt the GEMOC studio addons to specific domains. In this case it is adapted to the Electronic Design Automation (EDA) domain, which is used to this kind of format.

Stimuli Manager. The stimuli manager is an addon provided to send *stimuli* to an ongoing execution. This addon provides a view showing all the possible stimuli that can be sent to the execution, which depends on the technique used to define the operational semantics, and on the content of the semantics. This addon is interesting for non-deterministic executions that depends on external stimuli, e.g., to simulate stimuli from the external environment.

Step Decider. Lastly, the step decider is an addon provided to make choices in non-deterministic situations during an ongoing execution. It provides a view that shows all the steps possible at a given point in time, and gives the possibility to rely either on an existing decider (e.g., the random decider to make a choice at random), or to manually choose the next step from the displayed possibilities. Like the stimuli manager, this addon is only interesting for non-deterministic semantics with different possible steps at some points in the execution.

6. Related Work

In the last decade, various language workbenches have been proposed with generic or generative approaches to automate the development of *syntactic* services. To name just a few, Xtext and Sirius have been developed on top of EMF to provide textual and graphical advanced editors respectively.

These tools have been developed with a strong connection between the metamodeling environment and the associated services. More recently, a *Language Server Protocol*⁴ has been developed to decouple the IDE and the language syntactic services. This paves the way for using the same services from various IDE that implements this protocol.

In this paper, we propose an execution framework that supports generic and generative approaches for *runtime* services (e.g., graphical animator and omniscient debugging), and a generic API to connect different metaprogramming approaches and associated execution engines. Among many other projects, model execution has been previously investigated within Ptolemy (Eker et al. 2003), a framework where different Model of Computations (MoC) can be integrated based on a unique Java API. While the API can be used to implement different ways of specifying an operational semantics, the framework does not provide any way to communicate from and to user defined addons. Other interesting frameworks for model execution include, ModHel'X (Hardebolle and Boulanger 2008) and ATOM3 (Lara and Vangheluwe 2002), which support multi-formalism modeling and the concurrent execution of heterogeneous models. However, both are bound to their specific metaprogramming approach.

7. Conclusion

Languages workbenches facilitate the development of DSMLs, especially for providing syntactic services. However *runtime* services are mostly handcrafted for each different xDSML and each different metaprogramming approach. Based on a common API, we proposed a framework to integrate any kind of metaprogramming approach used to define discrete-event operational semantics into an execution engine. Notably, implementing this API allows to use and reuse of generic or user-defined runtime services as *addons* that send and receive generic messages to and from the execution engines. Using this framework, we implemented four different engines, each for a specific metaprogramming approach, and a set of runtime services, such as generic debuggers that can be used for any xDSML and engine. As our project is open-source and available online, we are very open to any contributors for implementing additional execution engines (e.g., to support operational semantics defined with other metaprogramming approaches) and additional runtime services.

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⁴<https://github.com/Microsoft/language-server-protocol>

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