ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a new programming language EventCJ. Its design stems from our observation that, in many context-aware applications, context changes are triggered by external events. Thus, in addition to the current COP language mechanisms, namely the one to activate/deactivate layers in accordance with a flow of control in programs, and the one to dispatch method calls to partial methods on active layers, we propose a mechanism to declaratively switch contexts of the receiver of events. EventCJ can declare events that trigger context transitions, and context transition rules that define how each instance’s context changes when it receives a specific event. After the transition, the instance acquires the context dependent behaviors provided by the activated context. Each event is declared in an AspectJ-like pointcut that specifies where the event is fired in the join points of the system. EventCJ separates the specification of when each context is activated and deactivated that may crosscut whole program in the existing COP languages. Furthermore, the declarative nature of the context transition rules help validation of some properties that the contexts should satisfy.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

D.1.5 [Programming Techniques]: Object-Oriented Programming; D.3.3 [Programming Languages]: Language Constructs and Features

General Terms

Languages

Keywords

ContextJ, Context translation rules, EventCJ

1. INTRODUCTION

Context awareness, which is a capability to behave with respect to its surrounding context, is becoming a major concern in many application areas such as ubiquitous computing, adaptive user interfaces, and business applications. In such applications, a behavior of the system may change with respect to its surrounding context. Thus, identification and a dynamic composition mechanism of contexts are the fundamental requirements to develop such applications. Moreover, such dynamic composition increases the complexity of software, thus it is desirable to implement the variation of behaviors in a modular way, and composition of such variations should be explicitly controlled to make it easy to reason about some required properties.

Context-oriented programming (COP) [6, 8, 9] has been proposed to modularly implement context-aware applications. In COP, context dependent behavioral variations can be modularized as layers of partial methods, and these variations can be dynamically activated and deactivated at runtime. Existing COP languages have two linguistic mechanisms, namely a mechanism to activate/deactivate layers, and a mechanism to dispatch method calls to partial methods on active layers. However, in many COP languages, it is still not easy to specify when a context should be activated or deactivated.

As Appeltauer et al. [3] pointed out, some context activations/deactivations occur upon external events. However, most current COP languages control context activation by using block statements. Although block statements are convenient to represent when a context in the problem domain is active during particular method calls in the implementation, they are not suitable to implement context activations that are triggered by events (such as entering a building from outside of doors, or moving a cursor from a GUI component to another), which can occur at any time during the execution of a program. Therefore, in such languages, programmers have to declare an event handler for each event and write context activation code that may crosscut whole the program. Furthermore, since a context activation is specified by a block statement, its effect cannot extend into the caller. Thus, after returning from the event handler, the activated context is deactivated and the programmers have to write a boilerplate code that remembers the current activated contexts and activates them again when they are required.

One of the possible solutions to address this problem is to exploit advice mechanism in aspect-oriented programming (AOP) [12] for localizing code that globally activates and deactivates contexts. For example, we can use the AspectJ-like pointcut and advice to specify where context activation
aspect Language

2. MOTIVATION

2.1 A Simple Example

This section describes our motivation of developing a new programming language that supports event-based context transitions by using a simple example. This example features a pedestrian navigation system that behaves differently with respect to its surrounding environment. If it is used out of doors, it provides a GPS-based navigation for the user. If it is used inside a building, it receives signals from active RFIDs to identify the location within the building. To save energy, the RFID reader is automatically switched off outside the building, and the GPS receiver is automatically switched off inside the building.

By using COP languages, we can modularize the context-dependent behavioral variations. Figure 1 shows a piece of pedestrian navigation system written in ContextJ [2], a COP language based on Java. We declare GPS navigation specific behaviors within a layer GPSNavi, and RF navigation specific behaviors within a layer RFAvi (throughout this paper, we use the words “layer” and “context” interchangeably). For example, in Figure 1, the DeviceController class declares three methods, namely powerOffDevices(), startDevices(), and currentStatus(), and the layers GPSNavi and RFAvi declare partial methods that provide behavioral variations for these methods. Examples of such behavioral variations are as follows: when the layer GPSNavi is activated, the startDevices() method starts the GPS receiver, or when the layer RFAvi is activated, the powerOffDevices() method turns the RFID reader off, and so on.

In ContextJ, the context-dependent behaviors can dynamically be composed with the base program by using the with statement. For example, when we receive an RF event that indicates that we enter the building, the following event handler may be invoked:

```java
class DeviceController{
    void powerOffDevices(){...}
    void startDevices(){...}
    void currentStatus(){...}

    layer GPSNavi{
        after void powerOffDevices(){...}
        after void startDevices(){...}
        after void currentStatus(){...}
    }

    layer RFNavi{
        after void powerOffDevices(){...}
        after void startDevices(){...}
        after void currentStatus(){...}
    }
}
```

Figure 1: Example of context dependent behaviors in ContextJ

```java
void onBuildingEntered(RFEvent e){
    with(GPSNavi){ powerOffDevices(); }
    with(RFNav}{ startDevices(); }
}
```

This event handler firstly turns the GPS receiver off (because the powerOffDevices() method is called within the GPSNavi layer), then starts the RF reader (because the startDevices() method is called within the layer RFNavi).

2.2 A Problem

The with statement of ContextJ is convenient to explicitly activate each layer within a specific control flow. However, it is not suitable to implement context transitions that are triggered by external events, which may occur at any time. Therefore, in the above example, the with statement has to always be used within event handlers that capture the relevant events. When the event handler returns, the activated layer is also deactivated, because the execution proceeds outside the with statement. Therefore, there are no ways to get the layer specific currentStatus() after returning from the event handler, unless we provide a wrapper method that is used to inspect the current machine's status:

```java
void wrapCurrentStatus() {
    with(lastLayer()){ currentStatus(); }
}
```

This method firstly retrieves the layer that was active last time, then activates it by using the with statement and calls the layer specific currentStatus() method. In this case, we have to provide another boilerplate code; we have to remember the layer that was active last time and retrieve it by using the auxiliary lastLayer() method.

The source of this problem is, in ContextJ, layer activation triggered by events cannot directly be captured by using the with statement and thus we have to use it within the event handlers on a case-by-case basis, and there are no ways to represent the layer activation that extends into executions after returning the method where the layer is activated.

2.3 An AOP-based Solution and Its Problem

A possible solution to switch context is to use an AspectJ-like pointcut and low-level context activation/deactivation
primitives (such as ContextJ reflection API) to declare an advice that makes context transitions. We consider that, after the transition, the context activation lasts until the next event that deactivate the activated context is fired, which can also be captured by using a pointcut.

Figure 2 shows the pedestrian navigation example written in AspectJ. The RFEvent() pointcut captures the execution of onBuildingEntered() method declared in DeviceController. The advise is executed before the onBuildingEntered() method is executed. It initially checks whether the GPSNavi layer is active or not by using the isActive() method provided by the ContextJ reflection API; if so, then it turns the GPS receiver off, deactivate GPSNavi, activate RFNavi, and starts the RFID reader.

However, these imperative primitives for context activation/deactivation make it difficult to reason about some required properties imposed by some context transition specifications. For example, someone would like to statically ensure that the RFID reader always inactive in the out of doors (e.g., by using some tools); however, ensuring it is quite difficult in this AOP-based approach.

3. OUR PROPOSAL

This section proposes a new programming language EventCJ to address the aforementioned problems. To represent event-based context transitions, EventCJ provides a new language construct named context transition specification that denotes context transition rules and before- and after-procedures that are performed before and after the transition occurs, respectively. As in ContextJ, each context is declared by using the layer declaration statement placed within a class declaration. Thus, currently we take the layer-in-class style\(^1\). To explain the constructs of EventCJ, we use the same example of section 2. The structure of layer declaration is identical to that of ContextJ (shown in Figure 1), thus in this section, we omit this part.

In EventCJ, a context transition is triggered by an event. An event is declared by using the declare event statement with a name of event and a specification that specifies when this event will be fired by using the AspectJ-like pointcut. For example, in Figure 3, RFEvent is declared to be fired at an execution of method onBuildingEntered() declared in DeviceController. The receiver of RFEvent is specified by the receiver clause; in this case, the receiver of RFEvent is the instance itself that executes the onBuildingEntered() method. In the receiver clause, we may specify a set of

\(^1\)This “current” decision may be reviewed in the future, which is not in the scope of this paper.

Figure 2: Example of context transition in AspectJ

Figure 3: event declaration in our proposal

instances by listing multiple instances, or by using the connotative representation as follows:

```java
received(DeviceController dc | dc.id > 0)
```

If the receiver clause is not provided, the effect of context transition is global.

Figure 3 also describes an example of a context transition specification that specifies how the receiver of events switches its active contexts. The specification starts from the keyword event, followed by a sequence of event names. In Figure 3, this sequence of events is specified as a single event RFEvent, but we can also specify a pattern of events. This sequence of event names is followed by a context transition rule that specifies how the context of the receiver of events changes with respect to the received events. For example, the context transition rule GPSNavi -> RFNavi described in Figure 3 specifies that if GPSNavi exists in the set of activated contexts, then the GPSNavi context is deactivated and the RFNavi context is activated. The left-hand side of -> is a condition that restricts when the context transition can occur. In the above example, the context transition to RFNavi will not occur unless GPSNavi is activated.

Besides the operator ->, we can also use a context transition operator += that indicates the context of the left-hand side will not be deactivated and the context of the right-hand side will be activated. We can use a notation * to represent a (possibly empty) set of currently activated contexts. Furthermore, we can use a notation . to represent “nothing.” For example, we can encode the execution that all the activated contexts are deactivated when the navigation system is turned into manual mode:

```java
event SetManual: * -> ..
```

We can create a composite context transition rule by concatenating each context transition rule by using || (the first matched context transition rule is selected) and && (all the context transition rules are selected iff all the rules satisfy the conditions). For example, the following context transition rule specifies that if GPSNavi is active in the receiver of RFEvent, it is deactivated and RFNavi becomes active; otherwise, if RFNavi is active, it is deactivated and GPSNavi becomes active:

```java
|| RFEvent: GPSNavi -> RFNavi
|| RFNavi -> GPSNavi ..
```

We can also restrict the condition that specifies when the context transition occurs. For example, in Figure 3, RFNavi
Figure 4: Example of context transitions in the pedestrian navigation system

Figure 5: Client of the money transfer system

Figure 6: The class TransferSystem in the money transfer system

4. CASE STUDY

This section shows that EventCJ is expressive enough to implement applications straightforwardly with respect to the specifications by using a simple money transfer system [2] that handles the transfer of an amount of money from one bank account to another.

Figure 5 shows the GUI part of the system. Here the user AOTANI logs in and transfers 10,000 yens from his account to KAMINA’s account. When the start button is pressed, it starts the money transfer.

The two check boxes “Encryption” and “Logging” control the encryption and logging functions, respectively. If the check box “Encryption” is checked, the system encrypts the information about the amount of transferred money. If the check box “Logging” is checked, the system logs a sequence of operations executed during the money transfer: i.e., debiting 10,000 yens from AOTANI and crediting 10,000 yens to KAMINA.

The implementation of the money transfer system in EventCJ is straightforward. Figures 6 and 7 show the Transfersystem and Account classes that implement the core parts of the system. The behaviours of encryption and logging functions are implemented modularly as layers, namely Encryption and Logging.

Each layer is activated and deactivated when the state of the corresponding check box is changed. This can be achieved straightforwardly by (1) declaring an execution of the methods invoked when the check boxes change their
of context dependent features in event-based applications such as GUI applications. However, it does not support EventCJ-like declarative statements for context transition rules and procedures associated with context transitions. Thus, validation of some properties that the context should be satisfy would be rather difficult in JCop. There are some programming languages designed for event-based programming. EventJava [7] is an extension of Java that seamlessly integrates events with methods and broadcasting with unicast of events. In EventJava, each event is declared and invoked as a method, but broadcasting of events (syntactically like a static method call) and event correlations (specifying the pattern of events to react) are supported. Each event conveys attributes that forms a context, and this context is customizable [10], but this context is global and only one context is supported per application. ECaesarJ [14], an extension of CaesarJ [5], provides a mechanism to declare events and their handlers. By using them, we can encode context transitions like that explained in this paper and their associated procedures. However, in ECaesarJ, the context activation does not cause the change to the context dependent behaviors that is supported in EventCJ. Furthermore, ECaesarJ can capture only external events that are explicitly fired by the source of events, whereas in EventCJ, implicit internal events can also be captured by using pointcuts.

CSLogicAJ [16] is a programming language features the adaptation of service behavior by context-sensitive service aspects. It is based on LogicAJ [15] that is an aspect-oriented extension of Java supporting metavariables in pointcuts. As in EventCJ, context change is modeled in terms of join points of the system. CSLogicAJ is based on the OSGi-based middleware, thus only services available in the local OSGi registry can be intercepted.

Context activation per instance was also proposed in NextEJ [11], which extends the with block statement to specify the instances that are affected by the context activation within a specific control flow. Unlike EventCJ, the context activation semantics of NextEJ is rather similar with that of ContextJ (the scope of context activation is controlled by the with block statement), but NextEJ also provides the morphing of instance types (the type of instance can be refined within the block statement so that it acquires new behaviors). Realizing such morphing is very hard in EventCJ. Since context activation of NextEJ is based on the with block statements, it is not suitable to represent event-based context transitions.

Languages for trace/event-based AOP [1, 17] use pointcuts similar to EventCJ. Although current EventCJ does not observe sequences of events but only one event, it might be one option in future versions to use such a language to handle sequences of events if that is necessary and useful to represent context transitions.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The event-based context transition in EventCJ makes it possible to declaratively specify how the set of active contexts associated with an instance changes with respect to its receiving events. Events are declared with pointcuts that specify where each event is fired in the join points of the system, thus we can flexibly specify the execution points where context transition occurs responding external events. By the layer construct taken from ContextJ, we can im-

Figure 7: The class Account in the money transfer system

states as an event and (2) changing the states (active or inactive) of the layers when the event occur:

/* activating/deactivating the encryption layer*/
declare event SwitchEncryption: before execution(
    /*handler for changes of the encryption check box*/);

event SwitchEncryption:
    //activating Encryption
    Encryption -> Encryption
    ;
    //context transitions
    no procedures is executed

Lines 2–7 declare an event and context transition rules regarding the Encryption layer. Lines 2–3 declare the event SwitchEncryption and specify that it is fired before the execution of the handler for the state change events of the encryption check box. When SwitchEncryption occurs, the layer Encryption is activated if it is not active and is deactivated otherwise. Neither before nor after procedures are specified. Lines 10–15 declare an event and context transition rules of the Logging layer in the same way.

5. RELATED WORK

JCop [4] is a successor of ContextJ that supports declarative statements specifying where each layer to be active with respect to control flows by using an AspectJ-like pointcut syntax. Although JCop is developed independently of EventCJ, both share the same motivation. JCop can separate the specification of event specific context activation from the program, thus it enables modular implementation

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```
class Account{
    void credit(int am){...}
    void debit(int am){...}
    layer Encryption{
        void credit(int am){
            proceed(decrypt(amount));
        }
        void debit(int am){
            proceed(decrypt(amount));
        }
    }
    layer Logging{
        after void credit(int am){
            Logger.logCredit(this, am);
        }
        after void debit(int am){
            Logger.logDebit(this, am);
        }
    }
    /* other methods and constructors */
}
```

---

To handle the states as an event and (2) changing the states (active or inactive) of the layers when the event occurs:

/* activating/deactivating the encryption layer*/
declare event SwitchEncryption: before execution(
    /*handler for changes of the encryption check box*/);

event SwitchEncryption:
    //activating Encryption
    Encryption -> Encryption
    ;
    //context transitions
    no procedures is executed

Lines 2–7 declare an event and context transition rules regarding the Encryption layer. Lines 2–3 declare the event SwitchEncryption and specify that it is fired before the execution of the handler for the state change events of the encryption check box. When SwitchEncryption occurs, the layer Encryption is activated if it is not active and is deactivated otherwise. Neither before nor after procedures are specified. Lines 10–15 declare an event and context transition rules of the Logging layer in the same way.

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implement context dependent behaviors, but the activation of these behaviors now can extend over multiple methods. The state machine like notation makes it easier to ensure some required properties are satisfied in the program. The case study of banking account application expects its applicability to business applications.

However, this work is still in its early stage. One of the planned future work is to implement a compiler and re-implement the existing real applications to evaluate the effectiveness of EventCJ. As mentioned above, context transition rules help validation of some properties that the contexts should satisfy. Thus, applying automated checking methods (such as model checking) to the program written in EventCJ will also be an important direction of our research.

7. REFERENCES


