

Towards a Transformation Language for Component Structures*

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Abstract

To cope with the high complexity of software in advanced technical systems, the software of these systems is often built in a component-based fashion. The growing usage of self-adaptive techniques leads to sophisticated reconfigurations of the software component structures during runtime. Current modeling approaches for component-based software systems do not include a powerful transformation language for the specification of component structure reconfigurations. We therefore give in this paper an outlook on an extension of a component-based modeling approach. This extension enables (1) the specification of hierarchical component structures and (2) the specification of structural transformations based on the specified hierarchical component structures.

1. Introduction

Software has become the driving force in the evolution of many technical systems and grows in some areas at an exponential rate and results in a dramatically increasing complexity due to the cooperation of before hand isolated functions (e.g., automotive software [8, 9]). Therefore, these systems are often built in a component-based fashion to counter the effect of growing

complexity. The system is then a specific structure of those reusable components.

Self-adaptiveness is a second general trend for technical systems. Self-adaptive systems are robust to changes in their environment by self-monitoring and adaptation. Adaptations can be as simple as changing one parameter of a single component and as complex as a structural transformation on a hierarchical component structure.

Component structures as proposed in current architecture description languages like UML [13] and its variant SysML [14] as well as in older ones like Darwin [11] can be employed to model such flexible component-based software. However, those approaches do not support the specification of complex structural transformations.

Matlab and its toolboxes Simulink and StateFlow are extensively used in embedded control systems. Simulink supports the notion of enabled subsystems. Enabled subsystems are only executed if a positive value is available at a specific input. It is in principle possible to model complex transformations of the component structures solely with embedded subsystems by enumerating all resulting component structures as distinct configurations. The resulting model becomes very complex for non-trivial transformations. Furthermore, it is only possible to specify a fixed set of distinct component structures. It is not possible to describe transformations which create new configurations.

Other approaches for building adaptive component based systems have been published in [10, 12]. Kacem et al. specify single transformations for component structures using a graphical language based on component diagrams [10].

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The approach by Métyayer [12] allows the specification of single transformations as well as sequences but is not based on component diagrams. We refer to [2] for a recent survey which discusses other approaches.

We postulate the following requirements for a transformation language on component structures based on these related approaches: (1) The language should align with well-known specification languages for component structures, (2) it should support specification of single transformations, and (3) it should support transformation sequences including the specification of loops, decisions, etc.

We give in this paper an outlook on an extension of our previous approach [3, 4] which overcomes the outlined limitations of current approaches and fulfills the above stated requirements.

1.1. Application Example

A small excerpt from the Railcab project¹ and its safety-critical software is used in the following as our application example. The overall project aims at using a passive track system with intelligent railcabs that operate autonomously and make independent and decentralized operational decisions. Railcabs either transport goods or up to approx. 10 passengers.

Railcabs can build convoys in order to reduce energy consumption due to utilization of the slipstream. The safe coordination between different railcabs to build and break a convoy has been presented in [7]. The resulting changes on the component structure of the first railcab in the convoy with respect to the following railcabs has been sketched in [3]. We extend these sketches by a more thorough structural definition of the component structures and the structural transformations. Note that the presented component structures are kept very simple to serve as an example in this short paper.

We first present the specification language for the component structures in Section 2. In Section 3, we present the graphical transformation language. Thereafter, we sketch the application of the transformations on component structures in Section 4. We conclude the paper in Section 5 and provide an outlook on planned future work.

2. Component Models

We employ the MECHATRONIC UML for modeling the system. The MECHATRONIC UML approach enables the development of complex mechatronic systems [4]. It supports the specification of software structure and its changes [1] as well as complex real-time coordination behavior and formal verification of safety properties [7]. In addition, the MECHATRONIC UML integrates the modeling of control behavior by embedding controllers in the states of the real-time behavior without forfeiting the verification results [6].

Thus, the MECHATRONIC UML supports in principle the required modeling notions. In the following, we present the extensions of the specification of hierarchical component structures which are required for the specification of transformations.

Similar to the UML [13], we distinguish component types and their instances. We start by presenting non-hierarchical component types. Thereafter, we present how hierarchical component types are specified.

2.1. Simple Component Types

Simple component types are the building blocks of component structures. They do not contain any sub components but are used as sub components in hierarchical component types. A simple component type has ports for connections with other components. A multiplicity is associated with ports. It defines the allowed number of port instances of a certain port when the associated component type is instantiated.

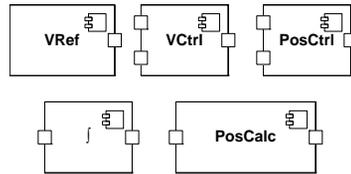


Figure 1. Simple component types used in the railcab software

Figure 1 shows the component types which are used in our convoy example. The VCtrl and VRef components are used to control the velocity of a railcab which is driving alone or as the first railcab in a convoy. The PosCtrl is in contrast used for controlling the railcab’s position in a convoy.

¹www.railcab.de/en/

The \int and PosCalc components are used by the convoy-leader railcab to compute the position of the following railcabs in the convoy. For each following railcab, one PosCalc component instance is employed. This component computes the required position of a railcab in a convoy based on the position of the railcab directly ahead.

2.2. Hierarchical Component Types

The power of component-based software development stems from the independent reuse of components by third parties [16], i.e. larger components are built from smaller ones by connecting them via contractually specified interfaces.

The UML supports this approach by their concept of composite structures [13]. Composite structures contain instances of other components which are called *Parts*. These parts as well as the connectors which connect these parts have multiplicity attributes. Thus, a part can express multiple component instances (of the same type). The same applies for the connector respectively the connector ends which bind the connector to the ports. For the specification of hierarchical component types in the MECHATRONIC UML, we simply reuse these UML concepts.

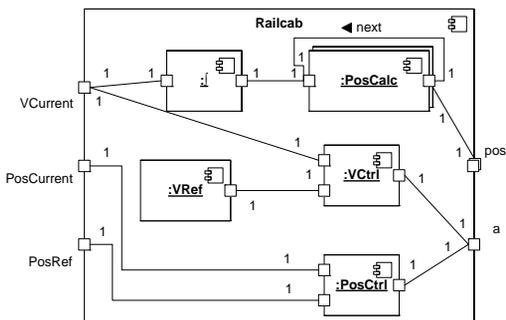


Figure 2. Specification of a railcab's software structure

Figure 2 shows the hierarchical Railcab component type. This component type contains different parts of the aforementioned component types. All those parts have the default multiplicity of 0..1 except the `:PosCalc` part which can be instantiated multiple times. This is denoted by the second frame.

The `pos` port is a multiport. Each instance of this multiport is used to connect to a different following railcab. The `a` port is used to send

acceleration values to other parts of the software to control the engine.

2.3. Component Instances

After presenting the component type specification, Figure 3 shows the component instance structure for three railcabs in convoy mode. The component instance structure for the leading railcab is shown on the left hand side whereas the component instances of the following railcabs is shown on the right side. In the next section, we present the transformation specifications for the reconfiguration of the leading railcab when a new railcab enters such a convoy.

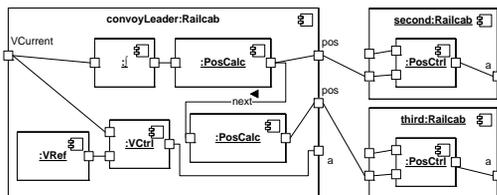


Figure 3. Component instance structure for a convoy of three railcabs.

3. Structural Transformations

Our approach for the specification of structural transformations is twofold. Single transformations are specified by a graphical language which is based on graph transformations [15]. These single transformations are embedded into the activities of UML like activity diagrams. Activity diagrams allow to combine single transformations for a sequential execution including if-expressions and loops.

Graph transformations [15] are a powerful formalism for the specification of structural changes to graph like structures. Graph transformation rules consist of structural specifications for a precondition and a postcondition. A graph transformation rule is applicable if each element of the precondition structure can be mapped onto one element of the host graph. No two elements of the precondition structure may be mapped onto the same element of the host graph (isomorphism check). Then, the host graph is changed in such a way that each element of the postcondition can be mapped onto an element of the host graph while retaining the

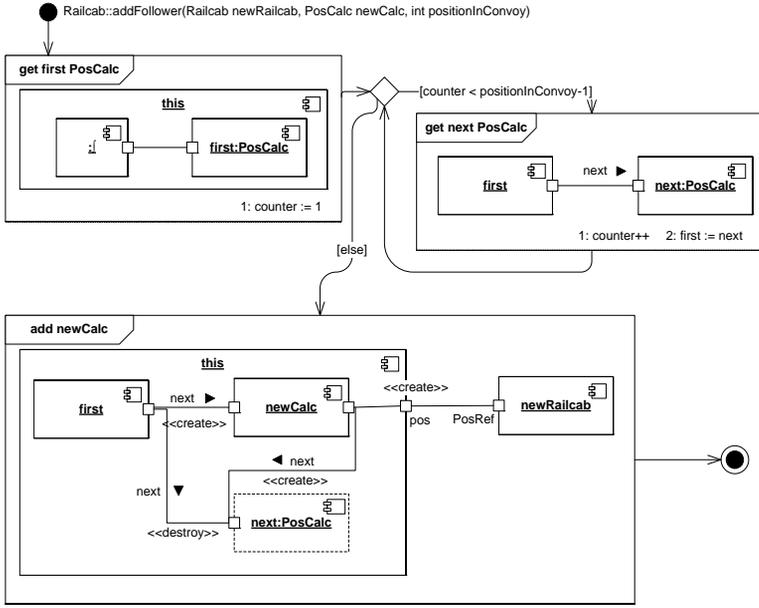


Figure 4. Adding a new railcab to a convoy of at least two railcabs.

element mappings created during the precondition mapping and removing elements which are part of the pre- but not part of the postcondition structure.

Story patterns [5] are employed as concrete formalism. Story patterns combine pre- and postcondition structures into a single diagram based on UML [13] collaboration diagrams. The difference between pre- and postcondition structures is denoted by annotating elements by `<<create>>` and `<<destroy>>` stereotypes. An element annotated by `<<create>>` will be created during application of the story pattern, whereas an element annotated by `<<destroy>>` will be destroyed. In contrast to [5], we employ graph transformations on component instance structures instead of object structures.

Figure 4 shows the transformation which specifies the component reconfiguration of the leader railcab when another railcab enters a convoy of at least two railcabs. This transformation takes three arguments: (1) the new railcab’s software component, (2) the position calculation component for the new railcab, and (3) the position in the convoy.

The transformation is basically divided into two parts. In the upper half of the transformation, the component structure of the leading railcab is searched for the correct place for adding the position calculation component of the new

railcab. This is specified as a loop in the control flow. This search starts with the first position calculation component in the first activity. Then the list of position calculation components is traversed until the appropriate place between the `positionInConvoy-1`-th component and the next one is found.

There, the new position calculation component is inserted into the component structure as shown in the lower half of Figure 4. This includes reconnecting the different components denoted by the various deleted and created connectors. Note that the `next` component is optional (denoted by dashed lines), i.e. only if there is such a `next` component, the creation and deletion of the connectors associated with this component are executed. This allows adding a railcab at the rear-end of the convoy. Additionally, a new `pos` part is created and connected to the new railcab’s software component.² This activity completes the reconfiguration. We omit appropriate error handling activities due to space restrictions.

This transformation is used whenever a single railcab enters a convoy of n railcabs resulting in a convoy of length $n + 1$. Therefore, this example transformation shows that our approach is not

²We assume here that the underlying communication framework transparently handles the necessary inter node communication.

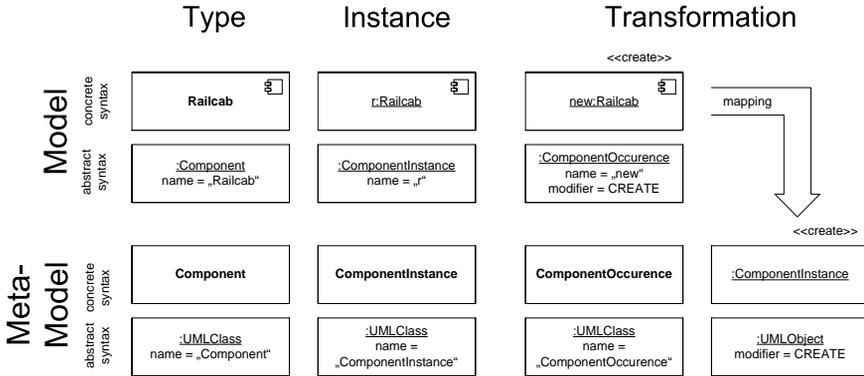


Figure 5. Mapping from Transformation Language to Transformations on Meta-Model.

restricted to the specification of a predefined set of component configurations but can in principle be used to specify an infinite amount of configurations. This clearly does not hold in real life. The relevant restrictions for the application in the embedded real-time domain have been presented for a similar transformation language in [17].

4. Applying Graph Transformations on Components

In Section 3, we have described how we apply graph transformations on component structures. The presented approach enables the consistent usage of graph transformations on component instance structures by applying the graph transformations directly on the concrete syntax of component instance structures instead of object structures. Internally, we map the transformations on component structures to graph transformations on object structures of the component meta-model (cf. Figure 5).

First, we distinguish between the *model* and the *meta-model* level. On both levels, we differ between concrete syntax and abstract syntax. The developer of a component based system is working on the model level and uses the concrete syntax. The concrete syntax of a component type is represented by a rectangle, a name (e.g. Railcab) and a component icon at the top right corner. The abstract syntax of the Railcab component is presented by an instance of the Component meta-class with Railcab as value for the name attribute. The same (meta-) modeling approach applies for the component in-

stance model and the graph transformations on the component structure.

Based on the meta-model of the component models, we can then map the graph transformations on the component structure to graph transformations on the meta-model. For example, new:Railcab with modifier CREATE is mapped to :UMLObject with modifier CREATE and appropriate other objects e.g. concerning the Railcab component type which are not shown due to space reasons. This mapping allows the execution of the component structure transformations on component instance structures by simply reusing the concepts of [5].

5. Conclusions and Future Work

We presented an approach which facilitates the component-based modeling of reconfigurable systems. The approach supports the definition of hierarchical component types as well as a transformation language to specify the reconfiguration of component structures. In contrast to related work, the approach supports a powerful specification language for transformations on component structures combined with a control flow specification to express if- and loop-constructs.

The sketched mapping of component structure transformations based on the meta-model for the execution of the transformations is rather simple. Specifically, it does not take the special characteristics of advanced technical systems like hard deadlines and real-time scheduling into account. Therefore, further research is required for an execution of the transformations during runtime.

Tool support for the presented concepts and graphical specification languages is under way. It is currently integrated into our case tool Fujaba Real-Time Tool Suite³ which is currently ported to the eclipse version of core Fujaba⁴.

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³<http://wwwcs.uni-paderborn.de/cs/fujaba/projects/realtime/>

⁴<http://wwwcs.uni-paderborn.de/cs/fujaba/projects/eclipse/>