MGAIA: EXTENDING THE GAIA METHODOLOGY TO MODEL MOBILE AGENT SYSTEMS

Weanna Sutandiyo, Mohan Baruwal Chhetri, Seng Wai Loke and Shonali Krishnaswamy

School of Computer Science and Software Engineering, Monash University, 900 Dandenong Rd, Caulfield East, VIC 3145, Australia

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Abstract: Mobile agents are a class of software agents that have the ability to move from host to host and are particularly relevant for mobile and distributed applications. The development of several mobile agent implementation environments has necessitated conceptual modelling techniques for mobile agent applications. In this paper, we present mGaia, our extension of the Gaia Agent Oriented Software Engineering (AOSE) methodology to model mobile agent systems.

1 INTRODUCTION

Mobile agents are a class of software agents that have the ability to move and are particularly useful in the area of distributed and mobile computing (Kotz, 2002). Even though a sizable number of mobile agent toolkits have been developed to support the implementation and deployment of mobile multiagent applications, the conceptual modelling of mobile agent applications is an area that has not been largely addressed (Krishnaswamy, 2003). The increasing focus on mobile agents as an important technology for developing mobile and distributed applications and the inherent disadvantages of confining the mobility of agents to implementation alone necessitates techniques for modelling such systems prior to embarking on the implementation. Agent Oriented Software Engineering (AOSE) is defined as software engineering for agent based computing (Weiβ, 2002). AOSE methodologies aim to provide tools and techniques for modelling, analysing and designing agent systems prior to implementation. Several methodologies have been proposed to model multiagent systems (MAS). However, the focus of these methodologies has been on multiagent systems at a generic level and they do not address the specific modelling issues that pertain to mobile agent systems. We have developed a conceptual modelling methodology for mobile agent systems, mGaia, which is an extension of the Gaia Agent Oriented Software Engineering (AOSE) methodology (Woolridge, 2000). The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 presents mGaia. Section 3 presents an application that was modelled with mGaia and then implemented using Grasshopper. Section 4 concludes the paper. We recommend that extending an existing methodology to model each required property in an agent system is preferred, instead of developing a methodology from scratch for each new property to be considered.

2 mGaia

We present mGaia as an enhancement of Gaia to facilitate conceptual modelling of mobile agent systems. In order to support conceptual modelling of mobile multiagent systems, mGaia incorporates the existing models of Gaia and adds a new model, namely, the mobility model. Figure 1 shows the structure of mGaia’s models. The basic ideas of mGaia are borrowed from the existing Gaia methodology. As such, mGaia still consists of the analysis and design phases. The objective of the analysis phase is to obtain an understanding of the system and its structure. It consists of the roles model, which identifies the roles in the system and the interaction model, which identifies the interactions between the roles found. There are four attributes of roles:

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Requirements Statement

Roles Model

Interaction Model

Agent Model

Services Model

Acquaintance Model

Analysis

Design

Figure 1: Structure of mGaia’s

- Responsibilities that consist of the liveness property, which defines the continual execution of the role within the system, and the safety property, which is a condition that must be maintained to avoid system behaviour that is contrary to its system requirements,
- Permissions, which define the access privileges or rights of roles,
- Activities, which are tasks that need to be performed by roles without interaction with other roles, and
- Protocols, which are activities that involve interactions with other roles.

The objectives of the design phase are to convert the system from an abstract level to a concrete level and to ease implementation. The design phase consists of the agent model, the services model, and the acquaintance model and the new mobility model.

- The agent model of mGaia is used to identify the agent types and how many agents are involved within the entire system. It includes constructs to distinguish between agents that possess the characteristic of mobility and those that do not.
- The services model of mGaia is the list of services that each role can provide and be associated with.
- The acquaintance model defines the communication links between each agent.

The mobility model of mGaia defines the mobility characteristics of agents further, such as identifying the movements and travel path of each mobile agent.

Like Gaia, mGaia has abstract concepts and concrete concepts. The abstract concepts are used during the analysis process and they do not necessarily have direct correlations in the run-time system. The concrete concepts are considered during the design process. The concrete concepts have direct correlations in implementation of the run-time system. Table 1 summarises the abstract and concrete concepts of mGaia. It must be noted that in Table 1, the italicised concepts are unique to mGaia and mainly aim to support modelling agent mobility in multiagent system. In summary, the additional features of mGaia involve modifications to the following Gaia’s models: role model, agent model and the introduction of a new mobility model. We now present analysis and design phases of mGaia.

2.1 Analysis Phase of mGaia

In mGaia, modifications have been made to roles model so that each role identified is categorized into three different role types - system, interface, and user roles. The purpose of categorising roles is to clarify each role’s responsibilities within the system. A system role is defined as a role that interacts with other parts of the system and not the user. An interface role is a role that interacts with the user and the other parts of the system. A user role is a role that represents the human user itself. Despite the modification in the roles model, the remaining components are the same as in Gaia.
2.2 Design Phase of mGaia

In mGaia we have modified Gaia’s agent model to specify the mobility characteristic of agents. We have also introduced the new mobility model. The following section will discuss the modified agent model and the mobility model.

2.2.1 The Agent Model

The agent model identifies the number of agents, the agent types, and the relationship between the roles identified (in the role model) and the agent types in the system.

mGaia’s agent model classifies the agents into two different categories - mobile (by adding a notation of “m” sign) and stationary. The categorisation of agent types caters for mobility characteristic of agents. Furthermore, we modify the agent model to allow similar behaviour roles to be grouped into one category. This is notational illustrated by grouping the role names between parentheses as shown in Figure 2. This modification is for convenience of presentation.

2.2.2 Mobility Model

The mobility model enhances Gaia to incorporate support for modelling of mobile agents in multiagent systems. While the analysis phase of mGaia involves identifying the roles and the interactions of each role, the design phase of mGaia involves agents. Therefore, the mobility model is best fitted into the design phase rather than in the analysis phase, as mobility is a characteristic of agents and not roles. Furthermore, mobility is not an interaction, as an agent does not need to be mobile to communicate. These considerations motivated the inclusion of the mobility model in the design phase. The mobility model is derived from the agent model. In the agent model, the agent types are categorised into mobile and stationary. In order to model the mobility characteristics of mobile agents, the mobility model identifies place types. There are four steps in constructing the mobility model:

Step 1: Place Types
Identify the place types, which are locations that the mobile agent can visit or reside in. Table 2 shows the place types in the mobility model of mGaia. Table 3 identifies the instance operators of place types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place Types</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Instances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Instance operator: indicates how many place types exist in the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pn</td>
<td>description of place types</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 2: Agents and Places Specifications
Step 2 of the mobility model is derived from step 1 and the agent model. In this step, we identify the relationship between agent types and place types. It also defines the constraints of the relationship. The agents and places specifications are derived from the place types identified in step 1 of mobility model. Table 4 shows the agent and place specifications for the mobility model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agent Types</th>
<th>Mobile</th>
<th>Place Types</th>
<th>Constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>A tick sign to identify if the specific agent is mobile or not</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3</td>
<td>The constraints of agents and place types relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td></td>
<td>P2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
includes features such as disabled access, capacity, speakers, OH projectors and LAN connection, query lecture theatres on available times and book the specified lecture theatre at a particular campus and negotiate with another user when the other user has booked the lecture theatre for a particular time slot. The analysis and design of the Smart Lecture Theatre system was done using mGaia and the implementation was performed using the Grasshopper mobile agent toolkit.

4 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

We have presented a conceptual modelling methodology for mobile agent systems. We presented our experiences in mapping the mGaia models to Grasshopper mobile agent toolkit (http://www.grasshopper.de) in (Sutandiyo et al., 2004), which showed mGaia to be effective. These experiences have indicated that there are several open issues that need to be addressed which are the focus of our current work. The key issues include identification of additional constructs for mobile agent systems, formalization of the constructs, specification of mobility of agent contexts/places and addressing the mobility of roles – or mobility in the analysis phase of the modeling.

REFERENCES


