GDIT

Tool for the Design, Specification and Generation of Goals Driven User Interfaces

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Abstract: In previous works, we have made the proposal of, firstly, a new style of interaction called Goals Driven Interaction (GDI), specially appropriate for those software applications in which a zero learning time is necessary, and secondly, a methodology and a notation for the specification of these Goals Driven user Interfaces. Now, we introduce a software tool which brings support and facilitate the design and the specification of this type of user interfaces, using that specialized methodology and notation. In addition, the tool generates the corresponding prototype, from a model or specification made previously.

1 INTRODUCTION

Although direct manipulation with WIMP (Windows, Icons, Menus and Pointer) elements is currently the most extended user interface paradigm in use (Dix et al., 1998), there are still many users that need a training and learning period, manuals and/or expert support to become efficient users, and, in several cases, in order to be able to make the basic tasks. For this reason, in previous works (Carrillo et al., 2002; Carrillo, Falgueras, Guevara, 2005) we have proposed a new and alternative style of interaction, called Goal Driven Interaction (or GDI), specially appropriate for those software applications that are to be used seldom, and whose main priority is the ease of use and a minimal learning time.

GDI’s main philosophy is to guide the user, in a hierarchical and progressive way through the whole interaction process, not only with regard to the tasks and goals that the user can have, but also about the steps sequence of the method to follow, or, if it is the case, the choices that can be made, to accomplish those goals at any given moment. To this end, the user interfaces based in this kind of interaction will be structured in three areas, as seen in Figure 1.

Goals Driver Window (GDW) will be the main mechanism for interaction in these interfaces, because it is the area where users will be guided gradually through the goals hierarchy (defined in the analysis and specification phase of the GDI interface), while allowing the user to access the different functionalities in the system, becoming a substitute (or alternative) to the typical menus, icons, toolbars and those elements in WIMP interfaces, that are not necessary in GDI (as seen in Figure 1).

GDW will show the Method or the Selection that will allow the user to accomplish each concrete Goal at every moment. If that Goal requires the user to make a Selection, GDW will show the different excluding Alternatives that compose that Selection, so that the user could choose one of them. In other case, if the Goal must be accomplished following a specific Method, GDW will offer the sequence of Steps that compose this Method (as in Figure 1). The interface will always underline the current Step. And the system will only allow the user to carry out that Step. This could imply the initiation of a new sub-Goal, that will have associated another Method or Selection (whose description will be shown now). Or
the Step could imply the performance of an elementary Action or activity. There is another special type of Step, in which the user decides if he wants to jump to a concrete Step of the actual Method, or to continue with the next Step. Finally, all Methods should end in a last Step that indicates that the Goal has already been reached or accomplished, and after which we will return to the ‘father’ Goal in the hierarchy.

On the other hand, two aspects are considered fundamental for the success of GDI and the interfaces that support them. The first of them is the fact that their specification and design process can be carried out based on main interface engineering techniques and methodologies, as those based on tasks hierarchical analysis (John and Kieras, 1996; Kieras, 1997b; Morì, Paterno and Santoro, 2002). Anyone of those techniques can be taken like reference. Nevertheless, even NGOMSL (Kieras, 1997a), the methodology (and the notation) more adequate for GDI, has needed to be adapted and extended, being converted in the GDI methodology already presented and described in (Carrillo, Falgueras, Guevara, 2005), whose basic elements we summarized now.

The generic format of a Method specification is:

```
Method for: <goal> [cancelable]
  [disable if <condition_for_system>] [effect <effect_on_the_system>]]
1) ... i) <step i>
  [disable if <condition_for_system>] [effect <effect_on_the_system>]...
  ... n) Return with goal accomplished [effect <effect_on_the_system>]
and each <step_i> (from 1 to n-1) could be one of:

accomplish <goal>
make <action>
dismiss <option_a>
disable if <condition_for_system> 
then accomplish <goal>
go_to <step_n>
```

Selection has the following format:

```
[For the system]
Selection for: <goal> [cancelable]
  [disable if <condition_for_system>] [effect <effect_on_the_system>]]
a) <option_a>
  ... n) <option_n>
and any <option_i>:
  [for <condition_for_user>] [then accomplish <goal>] [effect <effect_on_the_system>]
```

The disable if clause let to define conditional Steps or Options that will have to be disabled in case that the state of the system is the specified in the <condition_for_the_system>. Also, it will be possible to express Steps or Options that will have a concrete effect on the system, modifying their state.

A second fundamental aspect would be the possibility of using a software tool that would automate the process of generating a prototype. With this purpose we have developed the GDIT tool.

## 2 THE GDIT TOOL

The main aim of the tool that we present, is supporting and to facilitating the design and specification of new Goals Driven user Interfaces, using the specialized GDI methodology, and based on a model, generating the corresponding GDI prototype. Nevertheless, GDIT has a second aim. There are a few tools specifically designed to support building GOMS models, but they have not yet seen wide acceptance in any modeling or development community (Baumeister, John and Byrne, 2000). For this reason, and given the similarity between GDI and NGOMSL notations we have developed GDIT so that it is a good alternative tool for building GOMS models, using NGOMS methodology. Along next paragraphs we describe the structure (Figure 2) and the main elements of GDIT.

### 2.1 “Graph Window”: The Visual Representation of a Specification

Since GDI and NGOMSL are essentially methodologies for hierarchical tasks analysis and specification, in our environment, models are structured in a hierarchical way.

Each project or model will be represented in the Graph Window by means of a (cyclic or acyclic) graph. Each node or component will map to, either a Goal, or to an elementary Action. Each Action is a leaf of the graph. There are another three kinds of nodes: the node that corresponds to a Goal that is accomplished following a Method, the node that corresponds to a Goal that implies a Selection and, finally, the node that doesn't follow any of the previous characteristics, the indefinite node. Indefinite node represents a Goal that, although it can be specified at an higher level of detail, the analyst considers that it is not necessary to be done in that moment. Each kind of node will be distinguished by a colour. In addition, for each node, further information can be given (clicking the node with the right button of the mouse), such as its type, the category, its specification, etc (see section 2.2).
The tool supports different views of the model: complete view, summary view, view by levels, view by types of nodes, enlarged or reduced view (zoom in and out)... GDIT supports the possibility of automatically expanding task patterns. This means that, if the designer defines the structure of a high-level goal in a point of the model, and if the same goal has occur somewhere else, then they do not have to again provide all the specification, but it is sufficient to indicate the name of the high-level goal.

The tool allows an easy copying and pasting of entire subtrees. It is possible to construct a library of patterns associated with subtrees for common tasks which the analyst can reuse in future models.

2.2 “Components Edition Window”: Nodes in Detail

1. Node details can be edited in a pop-up window (the Components Edition Window) that is divided in three panels corresponding to three categories: The first panel collects the general data of the node (Figure 3): name, type (Action, Method, Selection and indefinite, as we explained before), a detailed description, and the GDI clauses (cancelable, cancelable disable if, and/or cancelable effect).

2. The second one, called Component Specification, only will exist if the node represents a Method or a Selection. If the node is a Method, it gathers the list of Steps necessary to accomplish that Goal (as seen in Figure 2). If the node represents a Selection it groups the several Options that compose it.

3. The third panel allows to view the list of ‘fathers’ of the current node. Nodes that use it or come exactly before it.

2.3 “Goals Driven Window”: Edition and Simulation

There is another way for building the specification of a model, different from that of the Graph Window. Instead of that you can use the Goals Driven Window (GDW).

You can watch every Step/Option for each active Method/Selection in the GDW. Analyst can easily add, modify or delete Steps/Options in the active Method/Selection interacting with the mouse directly over those items. A contextual menu will help to do this edition.

On the other hand, GDW also can be used like an interactive simulator, to support the analysis, design and checking of the dynamic behavior of GDI model. This process is easy: you can click over the active Step/Option of the current Method/Selection, and then you will “navigate” over the hierarchy of Goals and Actions, as if a real process of interaction would be taken place. This will also allow you to check the process of interaction, and even to modify it, if necessary, in an interactive way. Designer can check whether the specified behavior is really what they intended to describe. This is important because,
especially in the case of large specifications, it is difficult to immediately understand the overall behavior deriving from the combination of the hierarchical structure and the temporal relationships.

2.4 The “System States Window”

GDI notation allows you to specify conditional Steps/Options, and also, Steps/Options with effect (by means of the disable if and effect clauses). These clauses need to examine or modify the current system state, which is represented by variables.

GDI also includes a small status window in which, for the current project, those relevant states (variables and its values) are listed. We can see an example in the upper right corner of Figure 2.

2.5 Additional Features

At any time, it is possible to save partially or completely the specifications of the model, or to insert into the current model partial specifications previously saved. It is also possible to save or print all or parts of the specification as ASCII text and, also, all or parts of the Graph Windows as images. This is particularly useful when inserting them in documents, manuals, or reports related to the application that is being considered.

The tool also offers the possibility of changing the keywords of the GDI and NGOMSL notations. This makes it easy to localize the tool, making it more natural for people in any country.

The “System States Window”

2.6 Automatic Generation of GDI Prototypes

Just after completing the specification of a GDI user interface, it is possible to ask for the automatic generation of Java code that corresponds to a real prototype of the application. GDI generates the code of these prototypes in such a way that an external programmer could easily understand how the code is structured. For example, he could find quickly where to insert instructions to convert that prototype into a full-fledged application (Figure 4).

3 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

GDI is a new platform that supports a new interaction style (GDI) and the corresponding methodology of development. It helps to carry out the specification and design of the user interface efficient and comfortable. In addition, the development of both, a specifications language, and an automatic prototyping tool, has confirmed the viability of this GDI methodology.

One of the necessary further steps is the extension of our GDI specification language (and of our tool), building in it a higher semantic content. To this end a great deal of work is currently being carried out to incorporate the widgets characteristics as additional annotations in the specification of the models. The possibilities in this field are immense.

REFERENCES