

MODEL-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT OF GRAPHICAL TOOLS

Fujaba Meets GMF

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Abstract: In this paper we describe and evaluate our combination of the Fujaba CASE-Tool with the Graphical Modeling Framework (GMF) of the Eclipse IDE. We created an operational model with Fujaba and used it as input for a GMF editor generation process. This allows us to introduce a new approach for generating fully operational models including graphical editors for model representation and transformation. By making our development process explicit this paper acts as a guide for applying this approach to other projects as well.

1 MOTIVATION

Model-driven software development has gained increasing attention during the last years. Executable models promise to improve the productivity of software engineers significantly. In particular, in the context of object-oriented software engineering numerous approaches have been developed to generate executable code from higher-level models.

Model-driven software development may be applied to different parts of a software system. The application logic is concerned with the structure and behavior of the data on which the system operates. In an interactive system, the operations provided by the application logic are invoked through a user interface which presents the data of the application in various ways.

In this paper, we address the integration of the Graphical Modeling Framework (GMF) with the object-oriented CASE tool Fujaba. GMF allows the fast generation of graphical editors for any object-oriented data model based on the Eclipse Modeling Framework (EMF) and the Eclipse Graphical Editing Framework (GEF) (ecl, 2006d). Fujaba supports model-driven development by generating executable code from object-oriented models which are composed of class, state, and story diagrams (combinations of activity and communication diagrams).

With GMF, graphical editors may be generated

rapidly. However, their functionality is restricted to predefined elementary graph operations such as insertion and deletion of single nodes and edges. This restriction is due to the fact that EMF focuses on structure and lacks support for generating behavioral models, i.e., method bodies must still be implemented manually. Fujaba closes this gap since it generates fully operational models.

Thus, combining both approaches supports model-driven development of interactive systems, covering both user interface and application logic. Below, we demonstrate step by step the development process for the combined application of Fujaba and GMF, and show that the execution of this process significantly reduces the development time for interactive systems with a graphical user interface.

2 TECHNOLOGY OVERVIEW

Before introducing the main features of GMF it is necessary to get an overview of EMF and GEF first. Please note that due to the space limitations of this paper it is not possible to give a full overview of all three frameworks. Readers who are interested in a more detailed and complete introduction to EMF, GEF and GMF we propose a further reading of (ecl, 2006b), (ecl, 2005b) and (ecl, 2006c) as well

as (Zündorf, 2001) to learn more about Fujaba and SDM.

2.1 Eclipse Modeling Framework

EMF is a framework for Eclipse that allows the specification of models based on the **Ecore**¹ metamodel (ecl, 2005a).

Based on the Ecore model definition it is possible to generate a (non-operational) model implementation. The model implementation consists of interfaces only, so if we had not used Fujaba for generating our model we would still have to implement all complex methods or - in Ecore terminology - all instances of `EOperation`. But in either case we must still create a graphical editor both to view our model as a graph and to call our `EOperation` instances for model transformations.

2.2 Graphical Editing Framework

GEF is an Eclipse framework that provides support for the uniform implementation of graphical editors. GEF is based on the Model View Controller (MVC) pattern (Freeman et al., 2004) which is widely used for object oriented GUI implementations. But most GUIs implement MVC in a non-uniform way, which limits the extensibility and accessibility of complex GUIs. GMF provides the necessary data structures for designing and implementing complex graphical editors. As suggested by the MVC pattern GEF separates the data model from its graphical representation - the **view**. Data model and view are linked by the controller - called **editpart** in GEF - which both updates the view if the data model changes and passes change requests from the view to the data model (ecl, 2005b).

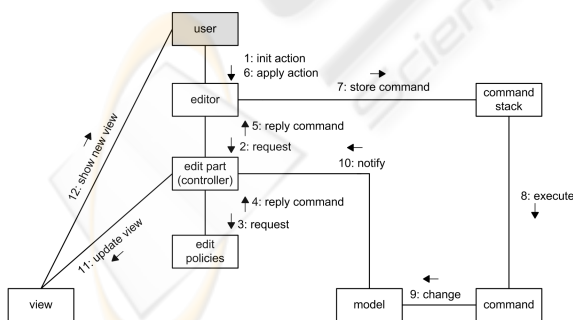


Figure 1: Communication diagram of a GEF editor interaction.

Figure 1 shows a communication diagram of a user-editor interaction: Once the user initiates an ac-

¹an UML-dialect and a variant of the OMG proposal for *Essential Meta Object Facility* (EMOF)

tion via the GUI (1) the editor sends a request to all edit parts (2). Each edit part forwards the request to its edit policies (3). If a policy is responsible for the request it returns a command (4) that is propagated to the editor (5). Once the user applies the command (6) it is stored on the command stack (7) for undo/redofunctionality and finally executed (8). During execution the command applies its changes to the model (9). Affected model elements notify their edit part about the changes (10), so each notified edit part can update its view element (11). Finally the updated view presented to the user (12).

With the help of GEF, graphical editors may be developed quite rapidly. However, this still requires a significant amount of manual implementation (see Section 6).

2.3 Graphical Modeling Framework

GMF² combines both EMF and GEF for a generative approach to create graphical editors. GMF is separated into two components: a **runtime component** and a **generator component**. The runtime component provides facilities for viewing and manipulating a graphical model. The generator component takes an Ecore-based model – any EMF-model – and maps it onto the runtime component. Therefore two models exist in GMF: the Ecore-based data model – called **semantic model** – and the GMF-internal runtime model – called **notational model**. The runtime component synchronizes both models (ecl, 2006d).

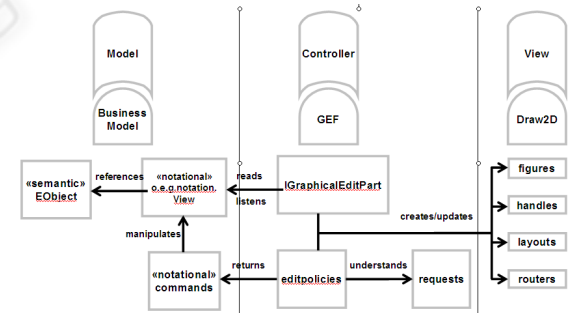


Figure 2: Components of the GMF and their relationships (ecl, 2006a).

Figure 2 (ecl, 2006a) gives a rough overview about the various components of GMF and its relationships. As depicted by the rounded boxes GMF is split according to the MVC pattern into *Business Model*, *GEF-Controller* and *Draw2D-View*. The Business Model is separated into an Ecore-based *semantic*

²GMF was released in June 2006 and counts as work in progress, so the only publications available are slides and website-articles (ecl, 2006c).

model and a *notational* model. Furthermore the notational model is GEF-compliant³ by separating *notational commands* from *notational data*. The GEF-Controller listens via *GraphicalEditPart* to *notational data model* changes and updates the *Draw2D-View* accordingly. Additionally every *GraphicalEditPart* reacts on *requests* and provides the corresponding *notational commands* if responsible.

We continue now with showing how to generate a simple editor with GMF for a sample model. The example provides more insight into the GMF but please note that due to its complexity an extensive description of GMF is out of the scope of this paper. Please refer to (ecl, 2006d) or (ecl, 2006c) for further reading.

2.4 Fujaba

Fujaba (Zündorf, 2001) is a powerful environment for developing executable models with the help of class, story, and state diagrams. Fujaba has been used in numerous research projects and is being developed jointly at multiple sites; work on Fujaba is presented in a workshop series (Giese and Westfechtel, 2006). The most distinctive feature of Fujaba are story diagrams, which combine activity and communication diagrams. Fujaba generates executable code from story diagrams. By default, the code generator produces plain Java code. While GEF does not constrain the model to be used, GMF requires an EMF model. To make the integration of Fujaba and GMF work, the Fujaba development team (located at Kassel, Germany) extended the code generator in order to produce EMF models.

3 CREATING A FUJABA MODEL: DYNAMIC TASK NETS

Before we can start the generative process of GMF we have to create a model first. Figure 3 depicts an UML class diagram of our sample model: a *Dynamic Task Net* (DTN) (Heimann et al., 1997). A DTN is a model used for keeping track of tasks and their relationships in development process management systems. Instances of class *DTNDynamicTaskNet* represent a complete DTN. Each DTN consists of tasks (class *DTNTask*) and relationships (class *DTNConnection*). Additionally we have three types of relationships:

³To provide undo/redo functions, GEF requires the separation of data and operations. Therefore each operation in the notational model has an associated notational command class (see: *Command Pattern* (Freeman et al., 2004))

1. a control flow relationship (class *DTNControlFlow*) to represent temporal dependencies, i.e. “Task A must finish before Task B begins”.
2. a subtask relationship (class *DTNSubtaskHierarchy*) to represent compositions, i.e. “Task A consists of two tasks: Task A1 and Task A2”.
3. a feedback relationship (class *DTNFeedbackFlow*) to represent backward dependencies, i.e. “Execution of Task B suggests a rework of Task A due to new insights into the problem”.

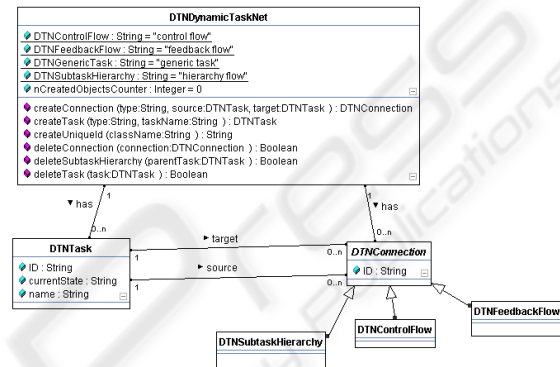


Figure 3: Class diagram of the Dynamic Task Net (DTN) model.

It is important to notice that the application studied here significantly goes beyond just a standard graphical editor. The process management system supports seamless interleaving of editing and execution of dynamic task nets. All operations have to maintain numerous consistency constraints, and in general they affect subgraphs of the DTN rather than just single nodes, edges, and attributes. The behavior of DTNs is specified with a comprehensive set of story diagrams, which, however, cannot be presented here due to the lack of space.

4 GENERATING A SIMPLE GMF EDITOR

Once we have created our model in Fujaba, we are able to generate both the Ecore-based model and the implementation of our complex methods. Now we can start generating our first prototype by executing the following seven steps (ecl, 2006d):

1. **Create/Generate model:** In this step the model is created with Fujaba first. Then its implementation is generated both by Fujaba and the EMF code generation. Instead of creating an Ecore-based model definition manually we generate the model definition and the method implementation

with Fujaba. Note that only the method implementation is generated by Fujaba – not the interfaces. We use the ability of the EMF code generation to merge already existing implementations into the EMF code generation process and generate the interfaces from the Ecore-based model definition. Now we have a fully operational EMF model.

2. **Create Graphical Definition:** In this step the elements of the notational model (i.e. node figure, labels, etc.) are defined.
3. **Create Tooling Definition:** In this step the palette entries of the editor are defined.
4. **Create Mapping Definition:** In this step information from the model, graphical and the tooling definition are combined. For each model element a graphical element (if any) is chosen as well as a tooling element. Examples are a class from the model which is depicted as circle or an attribute that is shown by a label.
5. **Create Generator Model:** In this step the mapping definition is translated into a generator model.
6. **Adjust Generation Parameters:** In this step various parameters for the plug-in generation can be manipulated, i.e. class names of selected plug-in classes.
7. **Generate Diagram Plug-in:** This is the final step of the generation process. It produces a fully operable graphical editor as Eclipse plug-in.

Figure 4 shows a sample DTN instance in a GMF editor

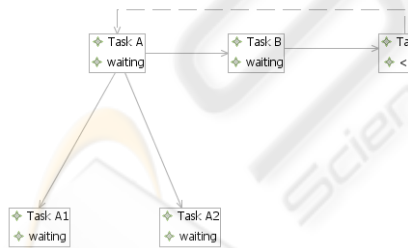


Figure 4: GMF diagram of a simple DTN instance.

5 EXTENDING THE EDITOR

Once the editor has been generated it turns out that it is missing typical functionality that is expected from any generated tool – like support for calling the generated complex model operations. In the following section the solution to several problems is presented first, discussing the open ones afterward.

5.1 Solved Problems

The editor generated so far does not yet provide the functionality we expect from the final graphical tool. Executable code has been generated from the Fujaba model, but the corresponding operations cannot be called via the generated editor. As mentioned, these operations have to preserve the consistency constraints of the DTN model and may affect large parts of the task net (e.g., suspension of all active tasks in some task hierarchy).

To support the call of EOperations of a semantic model element via the editor we want to have a context menu. This menu must only show up if the figure associated with the model element is selected. To support this behavior we have to customize the generated editor. Luckily GMF is designed for extensibility (ecl, 2006d) so we must create only another plug-in-project. First we have to design our menu structure and actions as described in (Clayberg, 2006). We want to relate specific menus to specific figures so we have to choose the right EditPart-class to attach the menu to. Note that the menus are related to the controller (an EditPart) and not the model (a semantic or notational model element).

Second we have to implement the actions for the menu entries. Each action must gather all necessary parameters from the user before it calls its corresponding method in the semantic model. So a dialog for every action has to be implemented. But simply calling the appropriate method in the semantic model fails: GMF uses the EMF Transaction framework to access the semantic model. So we have to implement subclasses of AbstractTransactionalCommand as wrapper for each method call. Additionally the operation has to be registered in the current TransactionalEditingDomain or it will be rejected by the EMF Transaction framework.

Last but not least we have replaced the generated default commands for basic model transformations (i.e. adding or deleting a node) with our own basic commands. We can reuse the TransactionalCommands we implemented for the menu actions above. GMF allows us to attach a so called EditHelper to any type of our semantic model. An EditHelper receives every request that is generated due to the users actions and is affecting the appropriate type. Our implementation of the EditHelper replaces the default command associated with the request with our appropriate TransactionalCommand. Whenever the default command would have been executed our command is executed instead.

5.2 Open Problems

We encountered several problems with the default behavior of the synchronization of the semantic and the notational model. Whenever a semantic model element gets deleted or moved the view is not updated accordingly. This led to two manually implemented workarounds in the generated model, various bug reports and a discussion in the GMF-developer forum. For us it is obvious that a view has to be deleted by default if it is not existing in the semantic model anymore. Problems due to multi user access to a model do not have to be solved by the synchronization mechanism but must be addressed separately. Up to date there has been no decision if this should be default behavior in GMF or not.

6 EVALUATION

In (Buchmann and Dotor, 2006) we created a prototype of a graphical process management tool with GEF. In table 1 we compare the lines of manually implemented code of the GEF-based tool and the GMF-based tool of this paper. Additionally we compare the implementation effort as an indicator for ease of work and we count the number of class files – both implemented manually or generated – as an indicator for framework-induced complexity.

Table 1: Comparison of effort and complexity of GEF- and GMF-based editor creation.

	GEF editor	GMF-editor
LOC manually	4330	618
#classes manually	80	15
#classes overall	103	111
development time	$\approx 160h$	$\approx 12h$

The development time of our GMF-based tool is more than ten times smaller than the development time of our GEF-based tool: Seven times less code has to be implemented in six times fewer classes. Surprisingly the number of overall classes in the GMF-based tool is roughly the same as in the GEF-based tool. One might expect to have more classes in the more complex framework.

When it comes to default functionality and extensibility of the GMF editor it turned out that the editor is easily extensible if the developer is familiar with the GMF. The familiarization with GMF is a laborious task due to the lack of documentation and publications. Table 2 gives an overview of the expenditure of time in hours for the generation and the customiza-

tion step – both for a developer familiar and unfamiliar with GMF.

Table 2: Comparison of expenditure of time for developers familiar and unfamiliar with GMF.

	unfamiliar	familiar
Generation	$\approx 16h$	$\approx 8h$
Customization	$\approx 40h$	$\approx 4h$

Familiarity with GMF and its related technologies speeds up development time dramatically. Especially the customization of the graphical tool was approximately ten times faster once the first prototype has been created.

These results lead to the conclusion that the development of Fujaba and GMF-based prototypes decreases the development time dramatically. But like any large framework GMF requires some time to become familiar with it. Once the first tool has been developed and extended development time decreases. Even when the developer changes the project he can keep up the pace as GMF does not change.

7 RELATED WORK

The Fujaba environment includes *Dobs* (Geiger and Zündorf, 2002), a dynamic object browser for visualizing object structures at run time and for executing operations on these object structures. As part of Fujaba4Eclipse, Dobs may be run as an Eclipse plug-in (*eDobs*). Both Dobs and eDobs serve as debugging tools and have not been designed as graphical editors.

UPGRADE (Böhlen et al., 2002) is a universal platform for graph-based development which has originally been used PROGRES-based models (Schürr et al., 1999). Recently, it has been integrated with Fujaba, as well. With *UPGRADE*, graphical editors may be generated for arbitrary graph models which operate as stand-alone tools. In contrast, our work exploits technology developed in the context of Eclipse. Since our graphical editors may be run as Eclipse plug-ins, we may benefit from the functionality provided by the Eclipse infrastructure and integrate smoothly with other tools based on Eclipse.

The *TIGER* project (Ehrig et al., 2005) is based on AGG, an approach to graph transformations based on category theory. It is dedicated to the automatic generation of GEF editors using graph transformations, in contrast to our work, which uses GMF for editor generation. Therefore we may benefit from further developments for GMF, i.e. design tools for graphical elements and sophisticated wizards for the generation process. Furthermore our editors are extensible like

any other GMF-editor.

8 CONCLUSION

We have demonstrated model-driven development of graphical tools using Fujaba and GMF. While GMF lacks support for behavioral models, Fujaba closes this gap by generating executable code from story diagrams. The tables given in Section 6 indicate that the development effort following our process is fairly small, i.e., productivity is increased significantly. On the other hand, there are still several problems to be solved by ongoing and future work. The most important problem concerns the implementation of more complex commands than the basic add and delete commands: Even with the planned enhancement of the GMF tooling definition to support the generation of menus and actions is it necessary to implement dialogs, actions and TransactionalCommands to allow sophisticated transformations of the semantic model. We will evaluate whether it is possible to enhance Fujaba to generated dialogs and actions. Furthermore we plan to investigate whether it is worth the effort to override the proposed GMF generation process, developing some kind of Fujaba graphical editor generation plug-in.

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