XPath and XQuery

Introduction to Databases

CompSci 316 Fall 2014

DUKE
COMPUTER SCIENCE

Announcements (Thu. Oct. 23)

- Graded midterm exams outside my office
- Homework #3 assigned today; due in two weeks
- Project milestone #1 feedback to be returned this weekend

Announcements (Tue., Oct. 28)

- Homework #3 due next Thursday
- Project milestone #1 feedback returned
- Project milestone #2 due a week after Homework #3
- Help session on Web development to be conducted by Ben tomorrow (Wed.) 6-8pm in Link

Query languages for XML

- XPath
  - Path expressions with conditions
  - ☞Building block of other standards (XQuery, XSLT, XLink, XPointer, etc.)
- XQuery
  - XPath + full-fledged SQL-like query language
- XSLT
  - XPath + transformation templates

Example DTD and XML

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>

<!DOCTYPE bibliography [
    <!ELEMENT bibliography (book+)>
    <!ELEMENT book (title, author*, publisher?, year?, section*)>
    <!ATTLIST book ISBN CDATA #REQUIRED>
    <!ATTLIST book price CDATA #IMPLIED>
    <!ELEMENT title (#PCDATA)>
    <!ELEMENT author (#PCDATA)>
    <!ELEMENT publisher (#PCDATA)>
    <!ELEMENT year (#PCDATA)>
    <!ELEMENT i (#PCDATA)>
    <!ELEMENT content (#PCDATA|i)*>
    <!ELEMENT section (title, content?, section*)>
  ]>

<bibliography>
    <book ISBN="ISBN-10" price="80.00">
      <title>Foundations of Databases</title>
      <author>Abiteboul</author>
      <author>Hull</author>
      <author>Vianu</author>
      <publisher>Addison Wesley</publisher>
      <year>1995</year>
      <section>…</section>…
    </book>
    …
  </bibliography>
```

XPath

- XPath specifies path expressions that match XML data by navigating down (and occasionally up and across) the tree
- Example
  - Query: `/bibliography/book/author`
    - Like a file system path, except there can be multiple "subdirectories" with the same name
  - Result: all author elements reachable from root via the path `/bibliography/book/author`

Basic XPath constructs

/ separator between steps in a path

name matches any child element with this tag name

* matches any child element

@*name* matches the attribute with this name

@* matches any attribute

// matches any descendent element or the current element itself

. matches the current element

.. matches the parent element

Simple XPath examples

- All book titles
  `/bibliography/book/title`
- All book ISBN numbers
  `/bibliography/book/@ISBN`
- All title elements, anywhere in the document
  `//title`
- All section titles, anywhere in the document
  `//section/title`
- Authors of bibliographical entries (suppose there are articles, reports, etc. in addition to books)
  `/bibliography/*/author`

Predicates in path expressions

[*condition*] matches the "current" element if *condition* evaluates to true on the current element

- Books with price lower than $50

  `/bibliography/book[@price<50]`

  - XPath will automatically convert the price string to a numeric value for comparison

- Books with author "Abiteboul"

  `/bibliography/book[author='Abiteboul']`

- Books with a publisher child element

  `/bibliography/book[publisher]`

- Prices of books authored by "Abiteboul"

  `/bibliography/book[author='Abiteboul']/@price`

More complex predicates

Predicates can use `and`, `or`, and `not`

- Books with price between $40 and $50

```
/bibliography/book[40<=@price and @price<=50]
```

- Books authored by "Abiteboul" or those with price no lower than $50

```
/bibliography/book[author='Abiteboul' or
  @price>=50]
/bibliography/book[author='Abiteboul' or
  not(@price<50)]
```

Predicates involving node-sets

```
/bibliography/book[author='Abiteboul']
```

- There may be multiple authors, so `author` in general returns a node-set (in XPath terminology)
- The predicate evaluates to true as long as it evaluates true for at least one node in the node-set, i.e., at least one author is "Abiteboul"
- Tricky query

```
/bibliography/book[author='Abiteboul' and
  author!='Abiteboul']
```

  - Will it return any books?

XPath operators and functions

Frequently used in conditions:

`x + y`, `x – y`, `x * y`, `x div y`, `x mod y`

`contains(x, y)` true if string *x* contains string *y*

`count(node-set)` counts the number nodes in *node-set*

`position()` returns the "context position" (roughly, the position of the current node in the node-set containing it)

`last()` returns the "context size" (roughly, the size of the node-set containing the current node)

`name()` returns the tag name of the current element

More XPath examples

- All elements whose tag names contain "section" (e.g., "subsection")

```
//*[contains(name(), 'section')]
```

- Title of the first section in each book

```
/bibliography/book/section[position()=1]/title
```

  - A shorthand: `/bibliography/book/section[1]/title`

- Title of the last section in each book

```
/bibliography/book/section[position()=last()]/title
```

- Books with fewer than 10 sections

```
/bibliography/book[count(section)<10]
```

- All elements whose parent's tag name is not "book"

```
//*[name()!='book']/*
```

A tricky example

- Suppose for a moment that `price` is a child element of `book`, and there may be multiple prices per book
- Books with some price in range [20, 50]
  - Wrong answer:
    ```
    /bibliography/book
    [price >= 20 and price <= 50]
    ```
  - Correct answer:
    ```
    /bibliography/book
    [price[. >= 20 and . <= 50]]
    ```

De-referencing IDREF's

`id(`*identifier*`)` returns the element with *identifier*

- Suppose that books can reference other books

```
<section><title>Introduction</title>
  XML is a hot topic these days; see <bookref
ISBN="ISBN-10"/> for more details…
</section>
```

- Find all references to books written by "Abiteboul" in the book with "ISBN-10"

```
/bibliography/book[@ISBN='ISBN-10']
  //bookref[id(@ISBN)/author='Abiteboul']
```

Or simply:

```
id('ISBN-10')//bookref[id(@ISBN)/author='Abiteboul']
```

General XPath location steps

- Technically, each XPath query consists of a series of location steps separated by /
- Each location step consists of
  - An axis: one of `self`, `attribute`, `parent`, `child`, `ancestor`,† `ancestor-or-self`,† `descendant`, `descendant-or-self`, `following`, `following-sibling`, `preceding`,† `preceding-sibling`,† and `namespace`
  - A node-test: either a name test (e.g., `book`, `section`, `*`) or a type test (e.g., `text()`, `node()`, `comment()`), separated from the axis by `::`
  - Zero of more predicates (or conditions) enclosed in square brackets

†These reverse axes produce result node-sets in reverse document order; others (forward axes) produce node-sets in document order

Example of verbose syntax

Verbose (axis, node test, predicate):

```
/child::bibliography
  /child::book[attribute::ISBN='ISBN-10']
  /descendant-or-self::node()
  /child::title
```

Abbreviated:

```
/bibliography/book[@ISBN='ISBN-10']//title
```

- `child` is the default axis
- `//` stands for `/descendant-or-self::node()/`

Some technical details on evaluation

Given a context node, evaluate a location path as follows:

1. Start with node-set N = {context node}
2. For each location step, from left to right:
   - $U \leftarrow \emptyset$
   - For each node n in N:
     - Using n as the context node, compute a node-set N' from the axis and the node-test
     - Each predicate in turn filters N', in order
       - For each node n' in N', evaluate predicate with the following context:
         - Context node is n'
         - Context size is the number of nodes in N'
         - Context position is the position of n' within N'
     - $U \leftarrow U \cup N'$
   - $N \leftarrow U$
3. Return N

One more example

- Which of the following queries correctly find the third `author` in the entire input document?
  - `//author[position()=3]`
    - Same as `/descendant-or-self::node()/author[position()=3]`
    - Finds all third authors (for each publication)
  - `/descendant-or-self::node()`
    `[name()='author' and position()=3]`
    - Returns the third element in the document if it is an `author`
  - `/descendant-or-self::node()`
    `[name()='author']`
    `[position()=3]`
    - Correct!
    - After the first condition is passed, the evaluation context changes:
      - Context size: # of nodes that passed the first condition
      - Context position: position of the context node within the list of nodes

XQuery

- XPath + full-fledged SQL-like query language
- XQuery expressions can be
  - XPath expressions
  - FLWOR expressions
  - Quantified expressions
  - Aggregation, sorting, and more…
- An XQuery expression in general can return a new result XML document
  - Compare with an XPath expression, which always returns a sequence of nodes from the input document or atomic values (boolean, number, string, etc.)

A simple XQuery based on XPath

Find all books with price lower than $50

```
<result>{
  doc("bib.xml")/bibliography/book[@price<50]
}</result>
```

- Things outside `{}`'s are copied to output verbatim
- Things inside `{}`'s are evaluated and replaced by the results
  - `doc("bib.xml")` specifies the document to query
    - Can be omitted if there is a default context document
  - The XPath expression returns a sequence of book elements
  - These elements (including all their descendants) are copied to output

FLWR expressions

- Retrieve the titles of books published before 2000, together with their publisher

```
<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")/bibliography/book
  let $p := $b/publisher
  where $b/year < 2000
  return
    <book>
      { $b/title }
      { $p }
    </book>
}</result>
```

- `for`: loop
  - `$b` ranges over the result sequence, getting one item at a time
- `let`: assignment
  - `$p` gets the entire result of `$b/publisher` (possibly many nodes)
- `where`: filtering by condition
- `return`: result structuring
  - Invoked in the "innermost loop," i.e., once for each successful binding of all query variables that satisfies `where`

An equivalent formulation

- Retrieve the titles of books published before 2000, together with their publisher

```
<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")/bibliography/book[year<2000]
  return
    <book>
      { $b/title }
      { $b/publisher }
    </book>
}</result>
```

Another formulation

- Retrieve the titles of books published before 2000, together with their publisher

```
<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")/bibliography/book,
      $p in $b/publisher
  where $b/year < 2000
  return
    <book>
      { $b/title }
      { $p }
    </book>
}</result>
```

Nested loop

- Is this query equivalent to the previous two?
- Yes, if there is one publisher per book
- No, in general
  - Two result book elements will be created for a book with two publishers
  - No result book element will be created for a book with no publishers

Yet another formulation

- Retrieve the titles of books published before 2000, together with their publisher

```
<result>{
  let $b := doc("bib.xml")/bibliography/book
  where $b/year < 2000
  return
    <book>
      { $b/title }
      { $b/publisher }
    </book>
}</result>
```

- Is this query correct?
- No!
- It will produce only one output book element, with all titles clumped together and all publishers clumped together
- All books will be processed (as long as one is published before 2000)

Subqueries in `return`

- Extract book titles and their authors; make title an attribute and rename author to writer

```
<bibliography>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")/bibliography/book
  return
    <book title="{normalize-space($b/title)}">{
      for $a in $b/author
      return <writer>{string($a)}</writer>
    }</book>
}</bibliography>
```

What happens if we replace it with $a?

- `normalize-space(`*string*`)` removes leading and trailing spaces from string, and replaces all internal sequences of white spaces with one white space

An explicit join

- Find pairs of books that have common author(s)

```
<result>{
 for $b1 in doc("bib.xml")//book
 for $b2 in doc("bib.xml")//book
 where $b1/author = $b2/author
   and $b1/title > $b2/title
 return
  <pair>
   {$b1/title}
   {$b2/title}
  </pair>
}</result>
```

← These are string comparisons, not identity comparisons!

Existentially quantified expressions

```
(some $var in collection satisfies
 condition)
```

- Can be used in `where` as a condition

- Find titles of books in which XML is mentioned in some section

```
<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")//book
  where (some $section in $b//section satisfies
         contains(string($section), "XML"))
  return $b/title
}</result>
```

Universally quantified expressions

```
(every $var in collection satisfies
 condition)
```

- Can be used in `where` as a condition

- Find titles of books in which XML is mentioned in every section

```
<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")//book
  where (every $section in $b//section satisfies
         contains(string($section), "XML"))
  return $b/title
}</result>
```

Aggregation

- List each publisher and the average prices of all its books

```
<result>{
  for $pub in distinct-values(doc("bib.xml")//publisher)
  let $price := avg(doc("bib.xml")//book[publisher=$pub]/@price)
  return
    <publisherpricing>
      <publisher>{$pub}</publisher>
      <avgprice>{$price}</avgprice>
    </publisherpricing>
}</result>
```

  - `distinct-values(`*collection*`)` removes duplicates by value
    - If the collection consists of elements (with no explicitly declared types), they are first converted to strings representing their "normalized contents"
  - `avg(`*collection*`)` computes the average of *collection* (assuming each item in *collection* can be converted to a numeric value)

Conditional expression

- List each publisher and, only if applicable, the average prices of all its books

```
<result>{
  for $pub in distinct-values(doc("bib.xml")//publisher)
  let $price := avg(doc("bib.xml")//book[publisher=$pub]/@price)
  return
    <publisherpricing>
      <publisher>{$pub}</publisher>
      { if ($price)
        then <avgprice>{$price}</avgprice>
        else () }
    </publisherpricing>
}</result>
```

Empty list ≈ nothing

- Use anywhere you'd expect a value, e.g.:
  - `let $foo := if (…) then … else …`
  - `return <bar blah="{ if (…) then … else … }"/>`

Sorting (a brief history)

- A path expression in XPath returns a sequence of nodes according to original document order
- `for` loop will respect the ordering in the sequence
- August 2002 (http://www.w3.org/TR/2002/WD-xquery-20020816/)
  - Introduce an operator `sort by (`*sort-by-expression-list*`)` to output results in a user-specified order
  - Example: list all books with price higher than $100, in order by first author; for books with the same first author, order by title

```
<result>{
  doc("bib.xml")//book[@price>100]
  sort by (author[1], title)
}</result>
```

Tricky semantics

- List titles of all books, sorted by their ISBN

```
<result>{
  (doc("bib.xml")//book sort by (@ISBN))/title
}</result>
```

WRONG!

  - What is wrong?
    - The last step in the path expression will return nodes in document order!
  - Correct versions

```
<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")//book sort by (@ISBN)
  return $b/title
}</result>
```

```
<result>{
  doc("bib.xml")//book/title sort by (../@ISBN)
}</result>
```

Current version of sorting

Since June 2006

- `sort by` has been ditched
- A new `order by` clause is added to FLWR
  - Which now becomes FLWOR
- Example: list all books in order by price from high to low; for books with the same price, sort by first author and then title

```
<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")//book[@price>100]
  stable order by
    number($b/price) descending,
    $b/author[1],
    $b/title empty least
  return $b
}</result>
```

Preserve input order
Order as number, not string
Override default (ascending)
Empty value considered smallest

Summary

- Many, many more features not covered in class
- XPath is very mature, stable, and widely used
  - Has good implementations in many systems
  - Is used in many other standards
- XQuery is also fairly popular
  - Has become the SQL for XML
  - Has good implementations in some systems

XQuery vs. SQL

- Where did the join go?
- Is navigational query going to destroy physical data independence?
- Strong ordering constraint
  - Can be overridden by `unordered { for… }`
  - Why does that matter?