

Case Studies in Robotics Toolchains

Alli Nilles

HOW STANDARDS PROLIFERATE:
(SEE: A/C CHARGERS, CHARACTER ENCODINGS, INSTANT MESSAGING, ETC.)



Roadmap

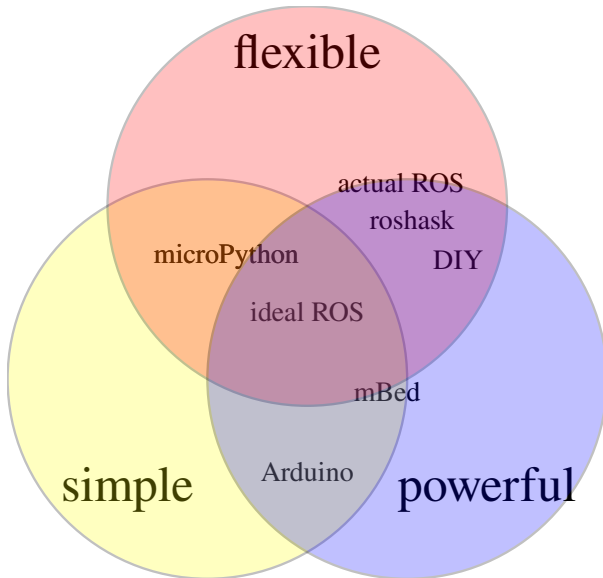
① Case Studies

- ① Low level: Arduino / embedded programming
- ② High level: ROS

② Lessons?

- ① power vs. simplicity vs. flexibility (vs. verifiability?)
- ② Ideas from functional programming
- ③ Good tools need good communities
- ④ Good communities form around good tools. . .

How to Evaluate Tools?



Embedded Programming

Case Study: Arduino Hacking

- Measure rotation of rolling ball robot, reconstruct motion
- Need small footprint, onboard data logging
- Easy to get rough estimate, hard to get exact



Takeaways

- Simplicity: where we tell beginners to start matters
 - Is traditional C++ style programming the best place to start?
- Powerful: large community
- Lose flexibility when tied to Arduino platforms/libraries/IDE

Alternatives:

- mBed: about as simple and powerful, more flexible through online IDE
- possible fork into high-level and low-level languages
 - microPython
 - llvm for devices?

Takeaways

- Networking:
 - Example: Need to network a home-grown OS on embedded device
 - ♥ roserial ♥: all you need is `init`, `read`, `write`, and `time`
 - ♥ ESP8266 ♥
 - Better to use networked chip than add a new component to your design

ROS

Case Study: ROS

My use cases:

- Data logging
- Playing with Spheros
- Bluetooth and ROS



Takeaways

- flexible: large community, integrated with many platforms
- powerful: scalable framework, solid protocols
- simple?
 - networking issues
 - Ex: Optitrack Mocap
 - versioning issues
 - Ex: gazebo7 for Kinetic, gazebo2 for Indigo
 - catkin
 - XML

The Angle Bracket Tax¹

```
<launch>
  <arg name="world" default="simple_world"/>
  <arg name="init_pos_x" default="0.0"/>
  <arg name="init_pos_y" default="0.0"/>
  <node pkg="gazebo_ros" type="spawn_model"
    name="spawn_robot"
    respawn="false" output="screen"
    args="-param robot_description
    -urdf
    -x $(arg init_pos_x)
    -y $(arg init_pos_y)
    -z $(arg init_pos_z)
    -model youbot">
  </node>
</launch>
```

¹<https://blog.codinghorror.com/xml-the-angle-bracket-tax/>

Alternative: yaml

```
- world: simple_world
- init_pos_x: &init_pos_x 0.0
- init_pos_y: &init_pos_x 0.0
- node:
  - pkg: gazebo_ros
  - type: spawn_model
  - name: spawn_robot
  - respawn: false
  - output: screen
  - args:
    - param robot_description
    - urdf
    - x *arg init_pos_x
    - y *init_pos_y
    - z *arg init_pos_z
    - model youbot
```

More Takeaways

- Lack of simplicity leads to wasted time
- Low level timing issues left to user
 - callbacks, “spinOnce”
 - hard to enforce logic on Topics: what if I want to do something only when I have a pair of new values from two topics that publish at different rates?

Possible Solution: Haskell Client

Credit to Anthony Cowley,² UPenn GRASP lab

```
sayHello =  
    Topic $ do threadDelay 1000000  
               t <- getCurrentTime  
               let msg = S.String ("Hello world " ++ show t)  
               return (msg, sayHello)
```

Problems:

- time delay is brittle and hardcoded
- delay is orthogonal to task of operating on value
- verbose

²<https://github.com/acowley/roshask>

roshask

```
sayHello :: Topic IO S.String
sayHello = repeatM (fmap mkMsg getCurrentTime)
  where mkMsg = S.String . ("Hello world " ++) . show

main = runNode "talker"
      $ advertise "chatter" (topicRate 1 sayHello)
```

Advantages:

- Can optimize topicRate and reuse
- Operation on data is independent of rate plumbing

Other nice things about roshask:

- everyNew, bothNew functions
- composable nodes: data on one machine is shared, not streamed, while preserving modularity

But why invest in learning Haskell?

- High-level robotic control is functional in style
- Built around infinite lists: natural for robotics
- Type safety (already in ROS message types)
- Lack of side-effects means robots that act more consistently and are easier to verify
- Large community, Foreign Function Interface (FFI) is hardware-friendly
 - Learn you a Haskell for Great Good!

Conclusions

How to Move Towards the Middle?

