

TUTORIAL: EXTENDING THYMELEAF

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$1\,$ Some reasons to extend Thymeleaf

Thymeleaf is an extremely extensible library. The key to it is that most of its user-oriented features are not directly built into its core, but rather just packaged and componentized into feature sets called *dialects*.

The library offers you two dialects out-of-the-box: the Standard and SpringStandard dialect, but you can easily create your own. Let's explore some of the reasons for doing this:

Scenario 1: adding features to the Standard dialects

Say your application uses the *SpringStandard* dialect and that it needs to show an alert text box in blue or red background depending on the user's role (admin or non-admin) from Monday to Saturday, but always in green on Sundays. You can compute this with conditional expressions on your template, but too many conditions could render your code a little bit hard to read...

Solution: create a new attribute called alertclass and an attribute processor for it (Java code that will compute the right CSS class), and package it into your own MyOwnDialect dialect. Add this dialect to your template engine with the th prefix (same as the *SpringStandard* one) and you'll now be able to use th:alertclass="\${user.role}"!

Scenario 2: view-layer components

Let's say your company uses Thymeleaf extensively, and you want to create a repository of common functionalities (tags and/or attributes) that you can use in several applications without having to copy-paste them from one application to the next. This is, you want to create view-layer components in a similar way to JSPs taglibs.

Solution: create a Thymeleaf dialect for each set of related functionalities, and add these dialects to your applications as needed. Note that if the tags or attributes in these dialects make use of externalized (internationalized) messages, you will be able to package these messages along with your dialects (in the shape of *processor messages*) instead of requiring that all of your applications include them in their messages .properties files as you would with JSP.

Scenario 3: creating your own template system

Now imagine your are creating a public website that allows users to create their own design templates for showing their content. Of course, you don't want your users to be able to do absolutely anything in their templates, not even all that the Standard Dialect allows (for example, execute OGNL expressions). So you need to offer your users the ability to add to their templates only a very specific set of features that are under your control (like showing a profile photo, a blog entry text, etc).

Solution: create a Thymeleaf dialect with the tags or attributes you want your users to be able to use, like <mysite:profilePhoto /> or <mysite:blogentries fromDate="23/4/2011" />. Then allow your users to create their own templates using these features and just let Thymeleaf execute them, being sure nobody will be doing what they're not allowed to.

2 Dialects and Processors

2.1 DIALECTS

If you've read the *Using Thymeleaf* tutorial before getting here –which you should have done–, you should know that what you've been learning all this time was not exactly *Thymeleaf*, but rather its *Standard Dialect* (or the *SpringStandard Dialect*, if you've also read the *Thymeleaf* + *Spring 3* tutorial).

What does that mean? It means that all those th:x attributes you learned to use are only a standard, out-of-the-box set of features, but you can define your own set of attributes (or tags) with the names you wish and use them in Thymeleaf to process your templates. **You can define your own dialects**.

Dialects are objects implementing the org.thymeleaf.dialect.IDialect interface, which looks like this:

```
public interface IDialect {
    public String getPrefix();
    public boolean isLenient();

    public Set<IAttrProcessor> getAttrProcessors();
    public Set<ITagProcessor> getTagProcessors();
    public Map<String,Object> getExecutionAttributes();

    public Set<IDocTypeTranslation> getDocTypeTranslations();
    public Set<IDocTypeResolutionEntry> getDocTypeResolutionEntries();
}
```

Let's see these methods step by step:

First, the *prefix*:

```
public String getPrefix();
```

This is the prefix that the tags and attributes of your dialect will have, a kind of namespace (although it can be changed when adding dialects to the Template Engine). If you create an attribute named earth and your dialect prefix is planets, you will write this attribute in your templates as planets:earth.

The prefix for both the Standard and SpringStandard Dialects is, obviously, th. Prefix can be null so that you can define attribute/tag processors for non-namespaced tags (for example, standard , <div> or tags in XHTML).

Now the *leniency* flag:

```
public boolean isLenient();
```

A dialect is considered lenient when it allows the existence of attributes or tags in a template

which name starts with the specified prefix (e.g.: <input planets:saturn="..." />) but no attribute/tag processor is defined in the template for it (there would be no defined behaviour for planets:saturn). If this happens, a lenient dialect would simply ignore the attribute/tag.

Both the Standard and the SpringStandard dialects are **not** lenient.

Now, let's have a look at the most important part of the IDialect interface, the processors:

```
public Set<IAttrProcessor> getAttrProcessors();
public Set<ITagProcessor> getTagProcessors();
```

There are two kinds of processors:

- Attribute processors are in charge of processing the dialect's attributes (e.g. th:text).
- *Tag processors* are in charge of processing the dialect's tags (the Standard Dialect defines no tags).

We will cover processors in more detail in next sections.

Execution attributes are objects that are contributed by the dialect to the execution arguments during the execution of templates. These are objects –usually utility objects– that will be made available to attribute and tag processors during their execution.

```
public Map<String,Object> getExecutionAttributes();
```

More interface methods:

```
public Set<IDocTypeTranslation> getDocTypeTranslations();
```

This returns the set of *DOCTYPE translations* to be applied. If you remember from the *Using Thymeleaf* tutorial, Thymeleaf can perform a series of DOCTYPE translations that allow you to establish a specific DOCTYPE for your templates and expect this DOCTYPE to be translated into another one in your output.

Last method:

```
public Set<IDocTypeResolutionEntry> getDocTypeResolutionEntries();
```

This method returns the *DOCTYPE resolution entries* available for the dialect. DOCTYPE resolution entries allow Thymeleaf's XML Parser to locally resolve DTDs linked from your templates (thus avoiding remote HTTP requests for retrieving these DTDs).

Thymeleaf makes most standard XHTML DTDs already available to your dialects by implementing the abstract class org.thymeleaf.dialect.AbstractXHTMLEnabledDialect, but you can always add your own ones for your own template DTDs.

2.2 ATTRIBUTE PROCESSORS

Attribute processors implement the org.thymeleaf.processor.attr.IAttrProcessor interface which looks like this:

This interface allows the attribute processor to specify the following data:

- The applicability of this attribute processor, specified by a set of AttrApplicability objects. By means of these objects, an attribute processor can define the name of the attribute/s that it will be applied to, and even select if it is going to be applied only when certain attributes exist or have a specific value in the same tag.
- The *precedence* of this processor. When several attributes are present in the same tag, precedence establishes the order In which processors are executed (smallest goes first).

The configuration, context, local variables, the resolved (and parsed) template and the DOM attribute object being processed are received as arguments by the process(...) method. This is the method that is called every time the engine finds an attribute corresponding to this processor's applicability.

Note that Thymeleaf includes a hierarchy of abstract convenience implementations of IAttrProcessor (all of them extending from AbstractAttrProcessor) that allow you to create custom attribute processors easily and writing less code than what you'd need if directly implementing the IAttrProcessor interface.

2.3 TAG PROCESSORS

Tag processors are the tag equivalents to attribute processors, implementing the org.thymeteleaf.processor.tag.ITagProcessor interface:

This interface includes the *applicability* of this tag processor, specified by a set of TagApplicability objects. By means of these objects, a tag processor can define the name of the tag/s that it will be applied to, and even select if it is going to be applied only when certain attributes exist or have a specific value in the tag.

Also, equivalently to attribute processors, the process(...) method receives data such as configuration, context, resolved template data, and the DOM element, and is the method that is called every time the engine finds a tag corresponding to this processor's applicability.

Note that Thymeleaf includes a hierarchy of abstract convenience implementations of ITagProcessor (all of them extending from AbstractTagProcessor) that allow you to create custom attribute processors easily and writing less code than what you'd need if directly implementing the ITagProcessor interface.

3 PUTTING IT ALL TO WORK

3.1 Extrathyme: a website for Thymeland's football league

Football is a popular sport in Thymeland¹. There is a 10-team league going on there each season, and its organizers have just asked us to create a website for it called "Extrathyme".

This website would be very simple: just a table with:

- · The team names.
- How many matches they won, drew or lost, as well as the total points earned.
- A remark explaining whether their position in the table qualifies them for higher-level competitions next year or else mean their relegation to regional leagues.

Also, above the league table, a banner will be displaying headlines with the results of recent matches.



Sweet Paprika Savages 1 - 3 Cinnamon Sailors

League table for July 12, 2011

| Team name | Won | Drawn | Lost | Points | Remarks |
|------------------------------|-----|-------|------|--------|---|
| Spearmint Caterpillars (SPC) | 21 | 10 | 5 | 73 | Classified for the World Champions League |
| Basil Dragons (BAD) | 21 | 9 | 6 | 72 | Classified for the continental play-offs |
| Sweet Paprika Savages (SPS) | 15 | 12 | 9 | 57 | Classified for the continental play-offs |
| Parsley Warriors (PAW) | 15 | 9 | 12 | 54 | |
| Polar Corianders (PCO) | 11 | 16 | 9 | 49 | |
| Cinnamon Sailors (CSA) | 13 | 9 | 14 | 48 | |
| Laurel Troglodytes (LTR) | 10 | 11 | 15 | 41 | |
| Angry Red Peppers (ARP) | 8 | 8 | 20 | 32 | |
| Rosemary 75ers (ROS) | 7 | 11 | 18 | 32 | |
| Saffron Hunters (SHU) | 8 | 7 | 21 | 31 | Relegated to Regional League |

¹ European football, of course ;-)

We will use HTML5, Spring MVC and the SpringStandard dialect for our application, and we will be extending Thymeleaf by creating a score dialect that includes:

- A score: remarkforposition attribute that outputs an internationalized text for the Remarks column in the table. This text should explain whether the team's position in the table qualifies it for the World Champions League, the Continental Play-Offs, or relegates it to the Regional League.
- A score:classforposition attribute that establishes a CSS class for the table rows depending on the team's remarks: blue background for the World Champions League, green for the Continental Play-Offs, and red for relegation.
- A score:headlines tag for drawing the yellow box at the top with the results of recent matches. This tag should support an order attribute with values random (for showing a randomly selected match) and latest (default, for showing only the last match).

Our markup will therefore look like this, making use of both th and score attributes:

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html xmlns:th="http://www.thymeleaf.org" xmlns:score="http://thymeleafexamples">
    <title>extraThyme: Thymeland's football website</title>
    <meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=UTF-8" />
<link rel="stylesheet" type="text/css" media="all"
    href="../../css/extrathyme.css" th:href="@{/css/extrathyme.css}"/>
  <body>
    <div>
      <img src="../../images/extrathymelogo.png" alt="extraThyme logo" title="extraThyme logo"
th:src="@{/images/extrathymelogo.png}" th:alt-title="#{title.application}"/>
    <score:headlines order="random" />
    <div class="leaguetable">
      <h2 th:text="#{title.leaguetable(${execInfo.now.time})}">League table for 07 July 2011</h2>
      <thead>
           >
            tr>
<ht th:text="#{team.name}">Team
Won
Drawn
Lost
Points
Points

           </thead>
         tbody>

The Winners (TWN)

1

th:text="${t.drawn}" class="matches">0

th:text="${t.lost}" class="matches">0

th:text="${t.lost}" class="points">3

             Great winner!
           <td>The Losers (TLS)</td>
             0
             Big loooooser
         </div>
  </body>
</html>
```

(Note that we've added a second row to our table with th: remove="all" so that our template shows nicely as a prototype when directly opened in a browser.)

3.2 CHANGING THE CSS CLASS BY TEAM POSITION

The first attribute processor we will develop will be ClassForPositionAttrProcessor, which we will implement as a subclass of a convenience abstract class provided by Thymeleaf called AbstractAttributeModifierAttrProcessor.

This abstract class is already oriented to creating attribute processors that set or modify the value of attributes in their host tags, which is exactly what we need (we will set a value to the

tr

Let's have a look at our code:

```
public class ClassForPositionAttrProcessor
         extends AbstractAttributeModifierAttrProcessor {
    public ClassForPositionAttrProcessor() {
        super();
    public Set<AttrApplicability> getAttributeApplicabilities() {
         return AttrApplicability.createSetForAttrName("classforposition");
    public Integer getPrecedence() {
         return Integer.valueOf(12000);
    @Override
    protected Map<String, String> getNewAttributeValues(final Arguments arguments,
             final TemplateResolution templateResolution, final Document document,
final Element element, final Attr attribute, final String attributeName,
             final String attributeValue) {
         * Process (parse and execute) the attribute value, specified as a * Thymeleaf Standard Expression.
         final Integer position =
   (Integer) StandardExpressionProcessor.processExpression(
                      arguments, templateResolution, attributeValue);
         * Obtain the remark corresponding to this position in the league table.
         final Remark remark = RemarkUtil.getRemarkForPosition(position);
         st Apply the corresponding CSS class to the element.
         final Map<String,String> values = new HashMap<String, String>();
         if (remark != null) {
    switch (remark) {
                 case WORLD_CHAMPIONS_LEAGUE:
                      values.put("class", "wcl");
                      break;
                  case CONTINENTAL_PLAYOFFS:
                      values.put("class", "cpo");
                      hreak.
                  case RELEGATION:
                      values.put("class", "rel");
                      break;
         return values;
    }
    @Override
```

As you can see, in this case the convenience abstract class we are using abstracts from us any direct modification on the DOM object tree, and instead we just have to create and return a Map with all the new attribute values to be set in the tag.

It is important to note that we are creating this attribute with the ability of executing expressions written in the Standard Syntax (used by both the *Standard* and the *SpringStandard* dialects). This is, the ability to be set values like \${var}, #{messageKey}, conditionals, etc. See how we use this in our template:

In order to evaluate these expressions (also called Thymeleaf Standard Expressions) we make use of the StandardExpressionProcessor class methods:

```
final Integer position =
   (Integer) StandardExpressionProcessor.processExpression(arguments, templateResolution, attributeValue);
```

3.3 DISPLAYING AN INTERNATIONALIZED REMARK

The next thing to do is an attribute processor able to display the remark text. This will be very similar to the ClassForPositionAttrProcessor, but with a couple of important differences:

- We will not be setting a value for an attribute in the host tag, but rather the text body (content) of the tag, in the same way a th:text attribute does.
- We need to access the message externalization (internationalization) system from our code so that we can display the text corresponding to the selected locale.

This time we will be using a different convenience abstract class -one especially designed for setting the tag's text content-, AbstractTextChildModifierAttrProcessor. And this will be our code:

```
public class RemarkForPositionAttrProcessor
    extends AbstractTextChildModifierAttrProcessor {

public RemarkForPositionAttrProcessor() {
    super();
```

```
}
    public Set<AttrApplicability> getAttributeApplicabilities() {
         return AttrApplicability.createSetForAttrName("remarkforposition");
    public Integer getPrecedence() {
         return Integer.valueOf(12000);
    @Override
    protected String getText(final Arguments arguments,
             final TemplateResolution templateResolution, final Document document,
final Element element, final Attr attribute, final String attributeName,
final String attributeValue) {
          * Process (parse and execute) the attribute value, specified as a * Thymeleaf Standard Expression.
         final Integer position =
             (Integer) StandardExpressionProcessor.processExpression(
                      arguments, templateResolution, attributeValue);
          * Obtain the remark corresponding to this position in the leaguh table.
         final Remark remark = RemarkUtil.getRemarkForPosition(position);
          * If no remark is to be applied, just return an empty message
        if (remark == null) {
    return "";
          * Message should be internationalized, so we ask the engine to resolve the message
            'remarks.{REMARK}' (e.g. 'remarks.RELEGATION'). No parameters are needed for this
         return getMessage(arguments, templateResolution, "remarks." + remark.toString(), new Object[0]);
    }
}
```

Note that we are accessing the message externalization system with:

```
return getMessage(arguments, templateResolution, "remarks." + remark.toString(), new Object[0]);
```

But this in fact is not the only way. The AbstractAttrProcessor class offers three methods for obtaining externalized messages from attribute processors. The first two make a difference between *template messages* and *processor messages*:

```
protected String getMessageForTemplate(
    final Arguments arguments, final TemplateResolution templateResolution,
    final String messageKey, final Object[] messageParameters);

protected String getMessageForProcessor(
    final Arguments arguments, final String messageKey, final Object[] messageParameters);
```

getMessageForTemplate(...) uses the Template Engine's currently registered externalization mechanisms to look for the desired message. For example:

- In a Spring application, we will probably be using specific Message Resolvers that query the Spring MessageSource objects registered for the application.
- When not in a Spring application, we will probably be using Thymeleaf's Standard Message Resolver that looks for .properties files with the same name as the template being processed.

getMessageForProcessor(...) uses a message resolution mechanism created for allowing the componentization -or, if you prefer, encapsulation- of dialects. This mechanism consists in allowing tag and attribute processors to specify their own messages, whichever the application their dialects are used on. These are read from .properties files with the same name and living in the same package as the processor class (or any of its superclasses). For example, the thymeleafexamples.extrathyme.dialects.score package in our example could contain:

- RemarkForPositionAttrProcessor.java: the attribute processor.
- RemarkForPositionAttrProcessor_en_GB.properties: externalized messages for English (UK) language.
- RemarkForPositionAttrProcessor_en.properties: externalized messages for English (rest of countries) language.
- RemarkForPositionAttrProcessor.properties: default externalized messages.

Finally, there is a third method, the one we used in our code:

```
protected String getMessage(
    final Arguments arguments, final TemplateResolution templateResolution,
    final String messageKey, final Object[] messageParameters);
```

This getMessage(...) acts as a combination of the other two: first it tries to resolve the required message as a template message (defined in the application messages files) and if it doesn't exist tries to resolve it as a processor message. This way, applications can override –if needed– any messages established by its dialects.

3.4 A TAG PROCESSOR FOR OUR HEADLINES

The third and last processor we will have to write is a tag processor. As their name implies, tag processors are executed for tags instead of attributes, and they have one advantage and also one disadvantage with respect to attributes:

- Advantage: tags can contain multiple attributes, and so your tag processors can receive a richer and more complex set of configuration parameters.
- Disadvantage: custom tags are unknown to browsers, and so if you are developing a
 web application you will have to sacrifice one of the most interesting features of
 Thymeleaf: the ability to statically display templates as prototypes (something called
 natural templating)

Our tag processor will implement the org.thymeleaf.processor.tag.ITagProcessor, but as we did with our attribute processors, instead of implementing it directly, we will use an abstract convenience implementation as a base: AbstractMarkupSubstitutionTagProcessor. This is a base tag processor that simply expects you to generate the DOM nodes that will substitute it (the host tag) when the template is processed.

And this is our code:

```
public class HeadlinesTagProcessor extends AbstractMarkupSubstitutionTagProcessor {
    private final Random rand = new Random(System.currentTimeMillis());
    public HeadlinesTagProcessor() {
        super();
    }
```

```
public Set<TagApplicability> getTagApplicabilities() {
          return TagApplicability.createSetForTagName("headlines");
    @Override
    protected List<Node> getMarkupSubstitutes(final Arguments arguments,
               final TemplateResolution templateResolution, final Document document,
               final Element element) {
         /*
   * Obtain the Spring application context. Being a SpringMVC-based
   * application, we know that the IContext implementation being
   * used is SpringWebContext, and so we can directly cast and ask it
          final ApplicationContext appCtx =
               ((SpringWebContext)arguments.getContext()).getApplicationContext();
           * Obtain the HeadlineRepository bean from the application context, and ask
           * it for the current list of headlines
          final HeadlineRepository headlineRepository = appCtx.getBean(HeadlineRepository.class);
final List<Headline> headlines = headlineRepository.findAllHeadlines();
           * Read the 'order' attribute from the tag. This optional attribute in our tag
           * will allow us to determine whether we want to show a random headline or
           * only the latest one ('latest' is default).
          final String order = element.getAttribute("order");
          String headlineText = null;
          if (order != null && order.trim().toLowerCase().equals("random")) {
               final int r = this.rand.nextInt(headlines.size());
               headlineText = headlines.get(r).getText();
                                            only the latest headline will be shown
               Collections.sort(headlines);
               headlineText = headlines.get(headlines.size() - 1).getText();
          }
           * Create the DOM structure that will be substituting our custom tag. 
* The headline will be shown inside a '<div>' tag, and so this must 
* be created first and then a Text node must be added to it.
          final Element container = document.createElement("div");
          container.setAttribute("class", "headlines");
          final Text text = document.createTextNode(headlineText);
container.appendChild(text);
           * The abstract IAttrProcessor implementation we are using defines
* that a list of nodes will be returned, and that these nodes
* will substitute the tag we are processing.
          final List<Node> nodes = new ArrayList<Node>();
          nodes.add(container);
          return nodes;
    }
}
```

Not much new to see here, except for the fact that we are accessing Spring's ApplicationContext in order to obtain one of our beans from it (the HeadlineRepository).

Note also how we can access the custom tag's order attribute as we would with any other DOM element:

```
final String order = element.getAttribute("order");
```

3.5 DECLARING IT ALL: THE DIALECT

The last step we need to take in order to complete our dialect is, of course, the dialect class itself.

Dialect classes must implement the org.thymeleaf.dialect.IDialect interface, but again we will here use an abstract convenience implementation that allows us to only implement the methods we need, returning a default (empty) value for the rest of them.

Here's the code, quite easy to follow by now:

```
public class ScoreDialect extends AbstractDialect {
      * Default prefix: this is the prefix that will be used for this dialect * unless a different one is specified when adding the dialect to
        the Template Engine.
    public String getPrefix() {
        return "score";
     \ast Non-lenient: if a tag or attribute with its prefix ('score') appears on \ast the template and there is no valuetag/attribute processor
      * associated with it, an exception is thrown.
    public boolean isLenient() {
         return false;
      * Two attribute processors are declared: 'classforposition' and
        'remarkforposition'.
    @Override
    public Set<IAttrProcessor> getAttrProcessors() {
        final Set<IAttrProcessor> attrProcessors = new HashSet<IAttrProcessor>();
         attrProcessors.add(new ClassForPositionAttrProcessor());
attrProcessors.add(new RemarkForPositionAttrProcessor());
         return attrProcessors;
     * Only one tag processor: the 'headlines' tag.
    @Override
    public Set<ITagProcessor> getTagProcessors() {
        final Set<ITagProcessor> tagProcessors = new HashSet<ITagProcessor>();
         tagProcessors.add(new HeadlinesTagProcessor());
         return tagProcessors;
}
```

Once our dialect is created, we will need to declare it for use from our Template Engine. Let's see how we'd configure this in our Spring bean configuration files:

And that's it! Our dialect is ready to run now, and our league table will display in exactly the way we wanted.