

The TTC 2017 Live Contest on Generating Code in the presence of Refinements

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Abstract

As model-driven engineering (MDE) gets increasingly applied to larger problems, the modularity of model transformations becomes more and more interesting. In particular, flexible reuse mechanisms are required to reuse existing transformation logic wherever possible. In this paper, we propose a benchmark for model transformation reuse in the application scenario of generating code for metamodels in the presence of refinements.

1 Introduction

Model transformations are a very important part of any model-driven software development process and have even been called the "heart-and-soul" of this engineering paradigm [1]. As model transformations become more and more complex, their modularity and reuse mechanisms become more important. However, these reuse mechanisms do not seem satisfactory [2], [3].

For a reuse scenario to provide actual advantages, it is further important that the reused artifact encapsulates a substantial share of logic because any kind of reuse always introduces a dependency to the reused artifact. For example, we do not think that reusing a rule that simply copies a name is an artifact worth reusing.

An application scenario where complex logic needs to be shared across multiple model transformations is the code generation for a given metamodel in the presence of refinements or redefinitions as they are called in the UML [4]. Such refinements are useful as they allow metamodelers to model relationships in multiple levels of abstraction simultaneously whereas the modeler only has to fill in the values for the least common reference.

However, in a platform that only supports single inheritance of classes such as Java or .NET, refinements step into the decision which existing class can be used as a base class. The logic of this decision making is independent of the way how the features of the class are represented. As outlined in [5], this yields a challenge for the modularity mechanisms of model transformation languages or code generators as such a logic should be made reusable for different purposes of the generated code.

In this paper, we therefore propose this problem as a challenge for authors of model transformation languages to exhibit the reuse mechanisms of their transformation languages. We hope that this challenge and solutions thereof can bring the discussion on reuse in model transformation languages a step forward.

Along with this paper, the contest contains online resources¹ that contain input models, expected outputs, a reference solution of this challenge in NTL [6] and a benchmark framework to run solutions, record execution times and generate diagrams.

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¹<http://github.com/georghinkel/ttc2017LiveContest>

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 gives more background on the case. Section 3 defines the tasks of this challenge. Section 4 briefly introduces the benchmark framework. Lastly, Section 5 lists the evaluation criteria for solutions of this challenge.

2 Case Description

We first explain the code generation in the presence of refinements and then present an algorithm to select a base class for a generated class.

2.1 Generating code in the presence of refinements

For any attribute or reference (feature in the remainder), a code generator typically generates a property and perhaps other members. If the feature is not refined, this property is usually backed by a field. In case a feature is refined, custom getter and setter implementation are generated that return the value of the refining feature instead.

At the same time, we face the problems that metamodels such as Ecore often allow multiple inheritance but technical platforms such as Java or .NET do not. As a consequence, a class of the metamodel is usually turned into an interface and an implementation class. To minimize the generated code, the code generator often tries to reuse existing implementation classes of base classes in the metamodel.

If a class inherits another class, it inherits all members of this base class. This may include generated members for features that are refined in the scope of the current class. Therefore, such an inheritance must be forbidden for the generated code.

Therefore, refinements impact the inheritance hierarchy of the implementation base class. In case a feature is refined, the code generator may no longer reuse any implementation class that contains a backing field for this feature.

For example, consider the situation in the left side of Figure 1. There, multiple inheritance is used with a common base class. Because the implementation DImpl for the metaclass D may only use one base class, the property PropC has to be replicated in the implementation class DImpl as well.²

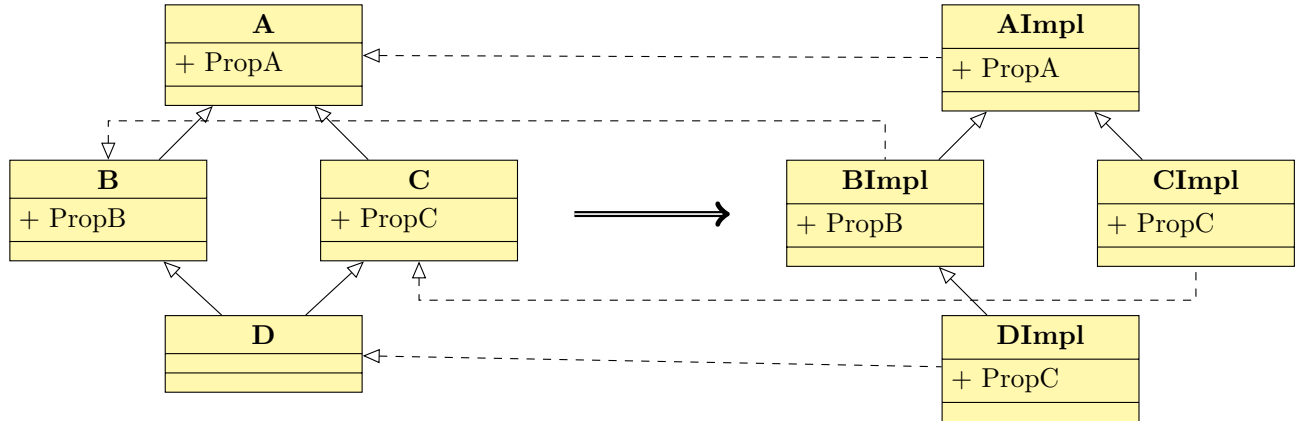


Figure 1: Example resolving multiple inheritance [5]

This situation changes if the property PropB is a refinement of property PropA, as depicted in Figure 2. Now, the implementation class DImpl must not use the implementation classes AImpl or CImpl, because they contain a direct implementation of PropA. However, it may use the implementation class BImpl.

As soon as an appropriate base class is found, we may simply copy the generated code for the features that cannot be inherited and copy them into the generated type, as long as they are not refined.

2.2 An algorithm to chose the implementation base class

To find such a base class, we propose the abstract algorithm depicted in Algorithm 1. It is essentially based on a reversed topological order of strongly connected components in a dedicated graph that is induced by inheritance relations and refinements.

²Note that in this situation, it is not clear whether DImpl should inherit from BImpl or CImpl and both options would be allowable.

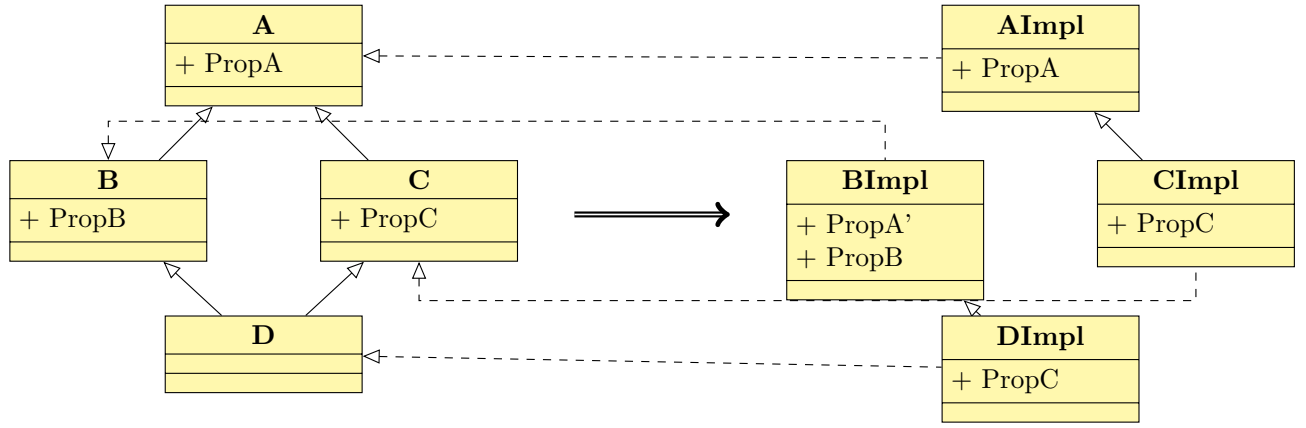


Figure 2: Example resolving multiple inheritance when property PropB refines PropB [5]

Algorithm 1 Find implementation base class

```

function ALLFEATURES( $c$ ) return  $\bigcup_{c \preceq c_b} c_b.eStructuralFeatures$ 
function REFINEMENTS( $c$ ) return  $\{g | f \in c.eStructuralFeatures, f \llrefines\gg g\}$ 
function EDGE( $c_s, c_t$ ) return  $c_s \preceq c_t \vee (\text{REFINEMENTS}(c_s) \cap \text{ALLFEATURES}(c_t) \neq \emptyset \wedge c_t \not\preceq c_s)$ 
function FINDBASECLASS( $c$ )
   $shadows \leftarrow \text{REFINEMENTS}(c)$ 
   $ancestors \leftarrow \text{TRANSITIVEHULL}(c, cl \mapsto cl.eSuperTypes)$ 
  for all  $layer$  in REVERSETOPOLOGICALORDER( $ancestors, \text{EDGE}$ ) do
    if  $|layer| = 1 \wedge layer \neq \{c\} \wedge shadows \cap \text{ALLFEATURES}(layer[0]) = \emptyset$  then return  $layer[0]$ 
    for all  $l$  in  $layer$  do
       $shadows \leftarrow shadows \cup \text{REFINEMENTS}(l)$ 
  return  $\perp$ 

```

In Algorithm 1, the function ALLFEATURES simply computes the set of all attributes and references available in a given class, including inherited and transitively inherited. The function REFINEMENTS returns those attributes and references that are refined by attributes or references of the given class. More interesting is the function EDGE that defines the edges in the graph the topological order is created for. This graph shall contain edge from a class c_s to a class c_t , if the generated code for class c_s obsoletes the generated code for c_t . This may either be because $c_s \preceq c_t$ or because c_s refines a property of c_t . The latter case is not problematic for the case that $c_t \preceq c_s$, because in that case, the generated code for c_t is aware of this refinement.

The reversed topological order guarantees us that there is no incoming edge from ancestor classes not yet considered for the given class. It can be easily implemented by reversing the output of Tarjan's algorithm [7]. An implementation of the latter in Java is available in the benchmark resources. In Algorithm 1, we assume the latter to return a list of strongly connected components, each represented as set of classes.

2.3 Goals

Because the implementation of Algorithm 1 can be quite elaborate, the goal of this challenge is twofold:

- Compare the mechanisms of state-of-the-art model transformation languages to integrate more complex logic such as in Algorithm 1 and
- Compare the ability of state-of-the-art model transformation languages to reuse a skeleton transformation

3 Tasks

3.1 Overview

The task of this challenge is to create two code generators from a version of Ecore that supports refinements to a simplistic object-oriented programming language inspired by C# and Python. To make writing the solutions

easier, we created a simple code model for which we provide a printer to a human-readable notation. Therefore, solutions may simply implement the code generators as model-to-model transformations that target the meta-model for this language. Both code generators will have to deal with metamodels that contain refinements and multiple inheritance.

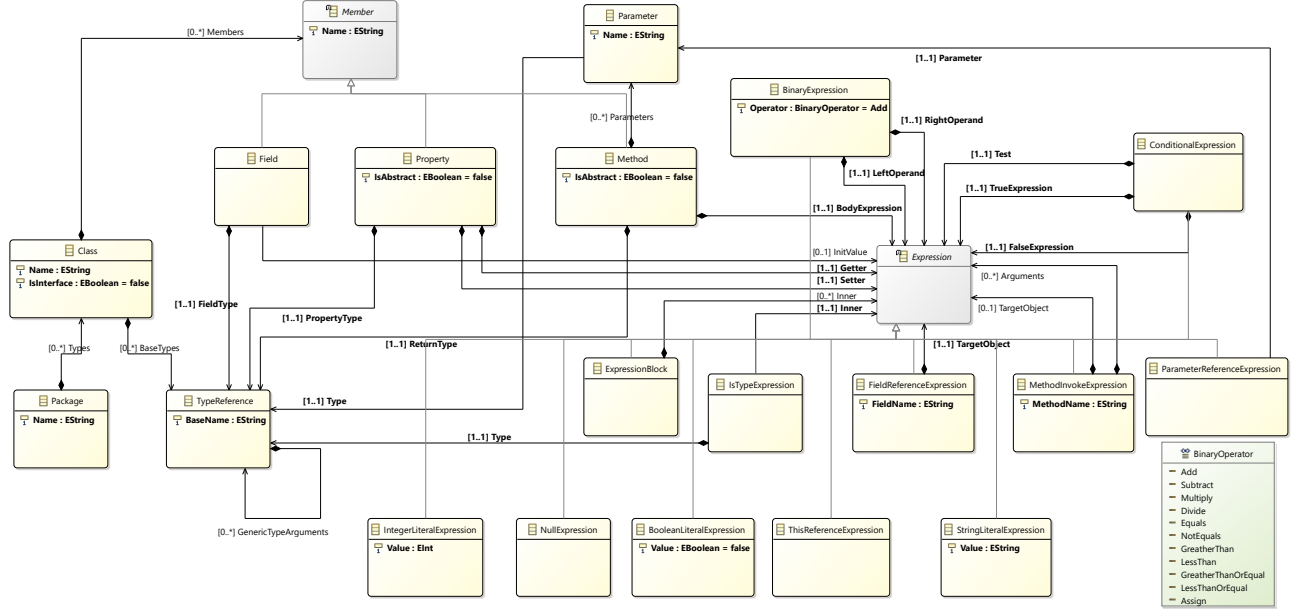


Figure 3: An excerpt of the metamodel for SimpleCodeDOM

An excerpt of the code model is depicted in Figure 3. An instance of this metamodel is a package. A package may contain classes (that could be interfaces). A class consists of multiple members that can be fields, methods or properties where the latter are simply pairs of a getter and a setter. A class may also define base types (equivalent to super types in Java). Furthermore, there are several expression types.

3.2 Limitations

In the scope of this challenge, we only deal with refinement of single-valued references that are refined by exactly one other reference. The example models are guaranteed to be correct in the sense that references only refine references of a base class and that the types of these references fit together.

In particular, the metamodels used for testing only contain instances of the following types:

- **EPackage**: There is exactly one instance per test model.
- **EClass**: There may be multiple classes. Each class may have one or multiple super types.
- **EReference**: Each class may define multiple references to other classes. All references have an upper bound 1. In the scope of this challenge, the information whether a reference is a containment is ignored.

3.3 Code Generator A: Backing references with properties

In the first version of the code generator, a reference should be transformed to a property with a backing field. The property should be named exactly as the original reference. The field should have a prefix "_". The getter and setter of the generated property should simply return or store the backing field. The property for a refined reference should not be backed by a field but should return or store the refining reference.

```

1 interface A
2   abstract property PropA : E
3
4 class AImpl : A
5   field _PropA : E
6   property PropA : E
7     get: this._PropA
8     set: (this._PropA = value)
9
10 interface B : A
11   abstract property PropB : E
12
13 class BImpl : B
14   field _PropB : E
15   property PropA : E
16     get: this.PropB
17     set: (this.PropB = value)
18
19   property PropB : E
20     get: this._PropB
21     set: (this._PropB = value)

```

Listing 1: The generated code for classes A and B from Listing 2

As an example, we depicted the generated code for the classes A and B from Figure 2 in Listing 1.

Note that we adapted the syntax of *C#* with respect to inheritance and implementation of interfaces: Both concepts use the same syntax and are not distinguished in the code model where they are both specified as base types. However, by convention, the

3.4 Code Generator B: Lazy Loading from a database

In a second code generator, we want to implement lazy loading, for example from a database. For this, each reference should be generated as a method that simply invokes an assumed method **resolve** that takes as input an object reference and the name of the reference as a string. The method should have the name of the original reference prepended with "get_". Furthermore, all of the generated classes have to inherit (directly or indirectly) from a common class **DBObject**.

```

1 interface A
2   abstract method get_PropA()
3
4 class AImpl : DBObject, A
5   method get_PropA()
6     resolve(this, 'PropA')
7
8 interface B : A
9   abstract method get_PropB()
10
11 class BImpl : B
12   method get_PropA()
13     this.get_PropB()
14
15   method get_PropB()
16     resolve(this, 'PropB')

```

Listing 2: The generated code for classes A and B from Listing 1

As an example, we have depicted the expected outcome of this code generator for the model from Figure 2 in Listing 2.

4 Benchmark Framework

The benchmark framework is based on the benchmark framework of the TTC 2015 Train Benchmark case [8] and supports a generator of change sequences, automated build and execution of solutions as well the visualization of the results using R. The source code and documentation of the benchmark as well as metamodels, a reference solution in NTL [6], example models, intended outputs for them and a Java implementation of Tarjan's algorithm are publicly available online at <http://github.com/georghinkel/ttc2017LiveContest>.

4.1 Solution requirements

Solutions should report on the runtime of the respective phase in integer nanoseconds (**Time**) and the working set in bytes (**Memory**) by writing the metrics in a CSV format to the standard output. As an example, reporting

that the transformation of model `model1` using code generator `A` of the NMF solution for the run index 0 took 83ms and required a working set of 21.7MB, the following lines should be emitted to standard output:

```
1 NMF;model1;A;0;Time;83761000
2 NMF;model1;A;0;Memory;22822912
```

Listing 3: Example output

The memory measurement is optional. If it is done, it should report on the used memory after the transformation is completed.

To enable automatic execution by the benchmark framework, solutions should add a subdirectory to the `solutions` folder of the benchmark with a `solution.ini` file stating how the solution should be built and how it should be run. In addition, the solution has to be selected in the benchmark configuration file in `config/configuration.json`.

```
1 [build]
2 default=MSBuild NMFCodeGenerator.csproj /p:Configuration=Release
3 skipTests=MSBuild NMFCodeGenerator.csproj /p:Configuration=Release
4
5 [run]
6 A=bin\NMFCodeGenerator.exe transformA
7 B=bin\NMFCodeGenerator.exe transformB
```

Listing 4: An example `solution.ini` file

As an example, Listing 4 contains `solution.ini` file for the NMF reference solution. It simply states the executable that should be run and the transformation that should be called. All other parameters such as the model input and output path are passed through environment variables `Input`, `Output`, `Model` and `RunIndex`.

4.2 Running the benchmark

The benchmark framework only requires Python 2.7 or above and R to be installed. R is required to create diagrams for the benchmark results. Furthermore, the solutions may imply additional frameworks. We would ask solution authors to explicitly note dependencies to additional frameworks necessary to run their solutions.

If all prerequisites are fulfilled, the benchmark can be run using Python with the command `python scripts/run.py`. Additional command-line options can be queried using the option `-help`.

```
1 {
2   "Tools": ["NMF"],
3   "Models": [
4     "model1",
5     "model2",
6     "model3",
7     "model4"
8   ],
9   "Transformations": ["A", "B"],
10  "Runs": 5
11 }
```

Listing 5: The default benchmark configuration

The benchmark framework can be configured using JSON configuration files. The default configuration is depicted in Listing 5. In this configuration, code for all example models is computed using only the reference solution in NMF 5 times each.

To execute the chosen configuration, the benchmark can be run using the command line depicted in Listing 6.

```
1 &> python scripts/run.py
```

Listing 6: Running the benchmark

Additional commandline parameters are available to only update the measurements or create visualizations.

5 Evaluation

Solutions of the proposed benchmark should be evaluated by their completeness, correctness, conciseness, understandability, percentage of shared code and performance.

For each evaluation category, a solution can earn 5 points.

5.1 Completeness & Correctness

Assessing the completeness and correctness of model transformations is a difficult task. In the scope of this benchmark, completeness and correctness are checked in terms of the example models: For each model, we make a string comparison of the printed code.

Points are awarded according to the following rules:

- **0 points** The task is not solved.
- **1-4 points** The task is solved, but the number of elements in the result is either too high or too low.
- **5 points** The task is completely and correctly solved.

5.2 Conciseness

As for any model transformation tasks, conciseness is important to make sure the implementation is in a reasonable size.

- **0 points** The task is not solved.
- **1 point** The solution is the least concise.
- **5 points** The solution is the most concise.
- **1-5 points** All solutions in between are classified relative to the most and least concise solution.

To evaluate the conciseness, we ask every solution to note on the lines of code of their solution. For any graphical part of the specification, we ask to count the lines of code in a HUTN³ notation of the underlying model.

5.3 Understandability

Similarly to conciseness, it is important for maintenance tasks that the solution is understandable. However, as there is no appropriate metric for understandability available, the assessment of the understandability is done manually. For solutions participating in the contest, this score is collected using questionnaires at the workshop.

5.4 Share of reused code

In this category, we evaluate the percentage of model transformation code that is shared. This means, for both code generators, we compute the fraction

$$\frac{\text{Lines of code shared}}{\text{Total Lines of code for code generator A}} + \frac{\text{Lines of code shared}}{\text{Total Lines of code for code generator B}}.$$

Points are awarded in relation to the percentages achieved by the solutions.

5.5 Performance

For the performance measurements, we measure the execution time for some example models. Points are awarded according to the following rules:

- **0 points** The task is not solved.
- **1 point** The solution is the slowest.
- **5 points** The solution is the fastest.
- **1-5 points** All solutions in between are classified according to their speed.

³<http://www.omg.org/spec/HUTN/>

5.6 Overall Evaluation

Due to their importance, the points awarded in completeness & correctness and understandability are doubled in the overall evaluation.

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