

The Design and Implementation of the Synchronous Language Céu

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Céu is a reactive language inspired by Esterel that targets constrained embedded platforms and ensures safe concurrency by handling threats at compile time. Based on the synchronous programming model, our design allows for a simple reasoning about concurrency that enables compile-time analysis and results in deterministic and memory-safe programs. We discuss the design of Céu and propose a formal semantics for its particular control mechanisms, such as parallel compositions, finalization, and internal events. We also present two implementation back ends: one aiming for resource efficiency and interoperability with *C*, and another based on a virtual machine that allows remote reprogramming.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Concurrency, Determinism, Embedded Systems, Esterel, Synchronous, Reactivity

1. INTRODUCTION

An established alternative to *C* in the field of embedded systems is the family of reactive synchronous languages [?]. Two major styles of synchronous languages have evolved: in the *control-imperative* style, programs are structured with control flow primitives, such as parallelism, repetition, and preemption; in the *dataflow-declarative* style, programs can be seen as graphs of values, in which a change to a value is propagated through its dependencies without explicit programming. Considering the control-based languages, Esterel [?] was the first to appear and succeed, influencing a number of embedded languages, such as *Reactive-C* [?], *OSM* [?], *Sync-C* [?], and *PRET-C* [?].

Despite its success and influence, Esterel has an overly complex semantics that requires careful static analysis to detect and refuse programs with *causality* and *schizophrenia* problems. Both problems have an extensive coverage and debate in the literature [?; ?; ?; ?; ?; ?; ?; ?]. The complex semantics not only challenges the analysis and compilation of programs, but also results in incompatible and non-compliant implementations. Above all, it also affects the programmer's understanding about the code, which, ultimately, has to solve the errors when facing corner cases. Another drawback of the Esterel semantics consists of the loose and non-deterministic execution for intra-reaction statements, which prevents threads to share memory and interact with stateful system calls safely.

In this work, we present Céu, a new programming language that inherits the synchronous and imperative mindset of Esterel but diverges in fundamental semantic aspects. Overall, Céu has a simple semantics with fine-grained execution control, and a straightforward single-threaded implementation targeting resource-constrained systems. The list that follows summarizes the contributions behind the design of Céu:

- Unique and queue-based external events, which define the notion of time in Céu (Section 2.1).
- Stack-based internal events for intra-reaction communication, which also provides a limited form of coroutines (Section 2.2).
- Static temporal analysis to detect suspicious concurrent statements (Section 2.3).
- Safe integration with *C* via function annotations and enforced finalization for external resources (Section 2.4).

— First-class synchronized timers with a dedicated syntax (Section 2.5).

We also present a lightweight implementation of CÉU with two back ends: one aiming for resource efficiency and interoperability with *C*, and another based on a virtual machine that allows remote reprogramming. Our implementations target resource-constrained devices, such as *Arduino* and *MICAz* sensor nodes based on 8-bit microcontrollers¹, showing the practical aspect of our clean semantics.

In previous work [?, ?], we employed CÉU in the context of wireless sensor networks, developing a number of applications, protocols, and device drivers. We evaluated the expressiveness of CÉU in comparison to event-driven code in *C* and attested a reduction in source code size (around 25%) with a small increase in memory usage (around 5–10% for *text* and *data*) [?]. For the *VM* back end, applications have a bytecode footprint in the order of hundreds of bytes which can be transmitted over the air in a few packets [?].

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 discusses the design of CÉU, focusing on the fundamental differences to Esterel. Section ?? presents the *C* and *VM* implementation back ends. Section ?? discusses other synchronous languages targeting embedded systems. Section ?? concludes the paper.

2. THE DESIGN OF CÉU

CÉU is a synchronous reactive language inspired by Esterel with support for multiple concurrent lines of execution known as *trails*. By reactive, we mean that programs are stimulated by the environment through input events, which are broadcast to all awaiting trails. By synchronous, we mean that trails at any given moment are either reacting to the current event or are awaiting another event; in other words, trails never react to different events simultaneously.

In the sections that follow, we discuss the main differences between CÉU and Esterel: unique and queue-based external events (Section 2.1), stack-based internal events (Section 2.2), static temporal analysis for concurrent statements (Section 2.3), safe integration with *C* (Section 2.4), and first-class synchronized timers (Section 2.5).

Regarding the similarities, Figure 1 shows side-by-side the implementations in Esterel (a) and CÉU (b) for the following control specification: “*Emit an output O as soon as two inputs A and B have occurred. Reset this behavior each time the input R occurs*” [?]. The first phrase of the specification, awaiting and emitting the events, is translated almost identically in the two languages (ln. 3–8, in both implementations), given that Esterel’s ‘||’ and CÉU’s *par/and* constructs are equivalent. For the second phrase, the reset behavior, the Esterel version uses a *abort-when* (ln. 2–9), which, in this case, serves the same purpose of CÉU’s *par/or* (ln. 2–11): the occurrence of event *R* aborts the awaiting statements in parallel and restarts the enclosing *loop*.

CÉU employs the synchronous model, in which programs advance in a sequence of discrete reactions to external events. It also has a strong imperative flavor, with explicit control flow through sequences, loops, and parallels, and also assignments. Being designed for control-intensive applications, CÉU provides support for concurrent lines of execution and broadcast communication through events. Internal computations within a reaction (e.g. expressions, assignments, and system calls) are considered to take no time in accordance with the synchronous hypothesis [?]. An *await* is the only statement that halts a running reaction and allows a program to advance in this notion of time. To ensure that reactions run in bounded time and programs always progress, loops are statically required to contain at least one *await* statement in all possible paths [?, ?]. CÉU shares the same limitations with Esterel and synchronous

¹Both *Arduino* and *MICAz* use the 8-bit *ATmega328* microcontroller with 32K of FLASH and 2K of SRAM.

<pre> 1 loop 2 abort 3 [4 await A 5 6 await B 7]; 8 emit O 9 when R 10 end 11 12 . </pre>	<pre> 1 loop do 2 par/or do 3 par/and do 4 await A; 5 with 6 await B; 7 end 8 emit O; 9 with 10 await R; 11 end 12 end </pre>
(a) Esterel	(b) CÉU

Fig. 1. A control specification implemented in Esterel and CÉU: “Emit *O* after *A* and *B*, resetting each *R*”

languages in general: computations that run in unbounded time (e.g., cryptography, image processing) do not fit the zero-delay hypothesis, and cannot be directly implemented.

2.1. Unique and Queue-Based External Events

Esterel defines a logical unit of time as a discrete sequence of instants or “ticks”. At each tick, depending on external stimuli the environment provides, an arbitrary number of input events can be active simultaneously (including zero). The set of input events awakes the program, which must react within the current tick, in bounded time.

In CÉU, each unique external stimulus itself defines a unit of time. The execution model for CÉU programs is as follows [?]:

- (1) The program initiates the “boot reaction” in a single trail (but parallel constructs may create new trails).
- (2) Active trails execute until they await or terminate. This step is named a *reaction chain*, and always runs in bounded time.
- (3) The program goes idle and the environment takes control.
- (4) On the occurrence of a new external input event, the environment awakes *all* trails awaiting that event. It then goes to step 2.

A program must react completely to an occurring event completely before handling the next. Based on the synchronous hypothesis, a program takes no time on step 2 and is always idle on step 3. In practice, if a new external input event occurs while a reaction chain is running (step 2), it is enqueued to run in the next reaction.

Figure 2 compares the discrete notions of time in Esterel and CÉU. The box *Real World* shows event occurrences over a continuous timeline divided in units of 10 milliseconds. Since Esterel and CÉU define discrete logical units of time, we describe how the events (which are the same in all boxes) fit into their timelines.

Box-1 uses fixed-length ticks in Esterel, within which reactions to occurring inputs have to fit [?]. Here, we assume a $R(\text{boot})$ reaction which happens before any input at tick-0. The input *A* “physically” occurs during the boot reaction but, because time is logical and discrete, the event is delayed to the next tick. Note that the reaction $R(A)$ takes more time than tick-1, causing a *timing violation* in the program execution (after the end of tick-1 and before the end of $R(A)$). The events *B* and *C* occur during tick-1 and are delayed to happen *simultaneously* at tick-2 with $R(B+C)$. Since no new events occurred during tick-2, the CPU stays idle during the whole tick-3. Finally, one instance of event *D* and two instances of event *E* occur “simultaneously” during the idle tick-3. However, because the program cannot detect both occurrences of *E*, only one is considered in $R(D+E)$.

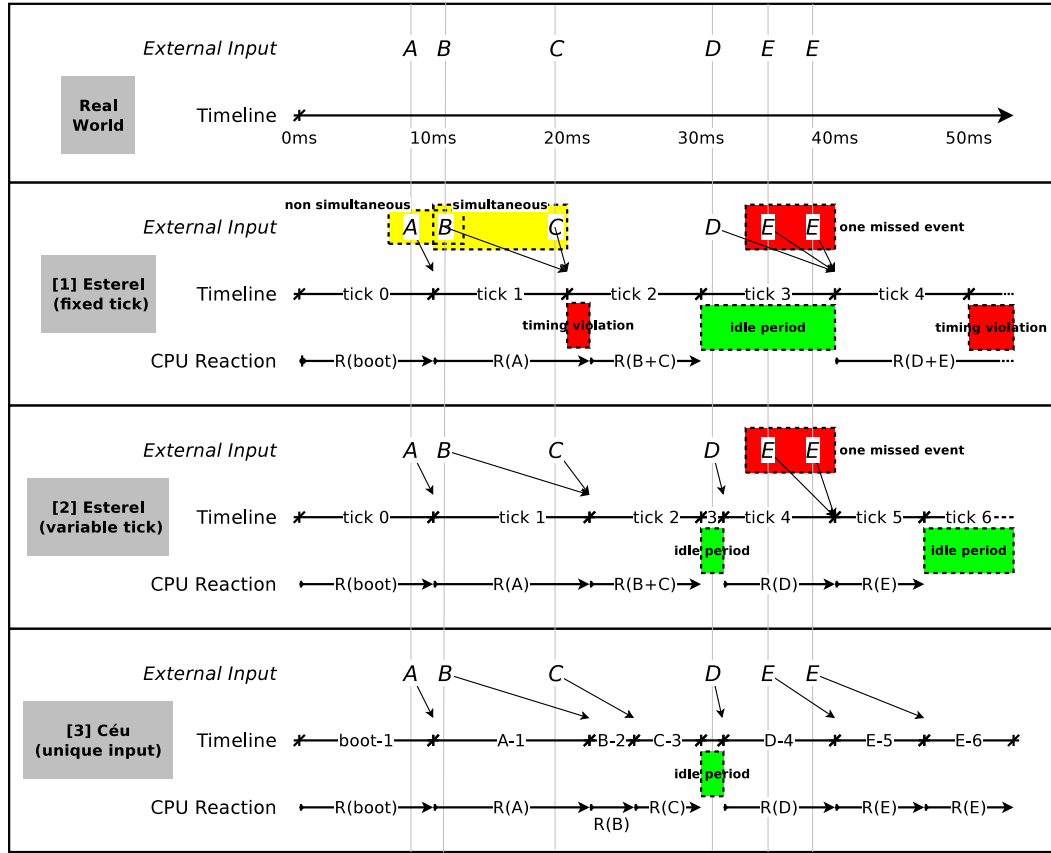


Fig. 2. The discrete notions of time in Esterel and CÉU.

Box-2 is an alternative that allows variable-length ticks in Esterel that adjust to the time the corresponding reaction takes to complete [?]. This approach avoids the time violation for $R(A)$ and also yields smaller idle periods. For instance, the occurrence of D interrupts the idle tick-3 to start reaction $R(D)$ on tick-4. Similarly to the fixed-tick approach, only one of the two simultaneous occurrences of E is considered on tick-5.

Box-3 illustrates the unique and queue-based policy for input events in CÉU. We also assume a $R(\text{boot})$ reaction before any input. Because the event A is unique during tick-0, the behavior in CÉU is similar to Box-2 for the first two units of time. However, the events B and C are not simultaneous in CÉU and are handled in subsequent reactions $R(B)$ and $R(C)$. We assume that the CPU time for $R(B+C)$ in Esterel is roughly the same as $R(B)+R(C)$ in CÉU. This way, the first idle period in Box-2 and Box-3 coincide. Finally, CÉU recognizes and reacts to the two instances of E independently, which are handled in sequence.

We decided for the unique and queue-based semantics for the reasons that follow:

- **A “tick” is too abstract and imprecise:** Outside the domain of hardware specification, a tick has no natural counterpart in the real world. Also, since ticks require no time regularity [?], the two approaches for Esterel in Figure 2 are legitimate, but lead to different behaviors for the same sequence of inputs.

```

1  input void LEFT_CLICK;
2  input void RIGHT_CLICK;
3  event void middle_click;
4  loop do
5    par/or do
6      AWAIT_AND(LEFT_CLICK, RIGHT_CLICK);
7      emit middle_click;
8    with
9      AWAIT_OR(LEFT_CLICK, RIGHT_CLICK);
10     await 200 ms;
11   end
12 end

13 #define AWAIT_AND(e1, e2) \
14   par/and do \
15     await e1; \
16   with \
17     await e2; \
18   end \
19 #define AWAIT_OR(e1, e2) \
20   par/or do \
21     await e1; \
22   with \
23     await e2; \
24   end

```

Fig. 3. Application defines that a `middle_click` event occurs whenever both `LEFT_CLICK` and `RIGHT_CLICK` occur within 200 milliseconds.

- **Events are never simultaneous:** From a rigorous point of view, event occurrences are infinitesimal, having zero probability of being simultaneous. This way, we believe that the notion of simultaneity should not be imposed by the language, but explicitly defined for each use case. In the end of the section, we present a specification to detect “simultaneous” button clicks. Note that in the case of Esterel, simultaneity depends on the imprecise definition of ticks. For instance, in Figure 2, the events B and C are simultaneous, even though A and B actually happen much closer to one another.
- **Unique input events imply mutual exclusion:** Because they are atomic, reactions to different events never overlap. The possibility to reason about each input individually is a prerequisite for the temporal analysis to be discussed in Section 2.3.

Figure 3 emulates a `middle_click` event (ln. 3) in terms of `LEFT_CLICK` and `RIGHT_CLICK` (ln. 1–2). If both events occur, we emit the internal event `middle_click` (ln. 6–7). However, if one of them occurs and the *200ms* timer expires (ln. 9–10), we abort the whole behavior with the `par/or` (ln. 5–11) and try again with the enclosing `loop` (ln. 4). We discuss internal events in Section 2.2 and timers in Section 2.5. The macros `AWAIT_AND` (ln. 13–18) and `AWAIT_OR` (ln. 19–24) are simple expansions to a `par/and` and `par/or` for better readability. In this specification, “simultaneous” means “within 200 milliseconds”, which is a huge amount of time for a language-defined tick, and which would break the synchronous hypothesis. Note that a similar implementation for Esterel would not rely on the tick notion of simultaneity either. Note also that the application in CÉU could define an external input `TICK` and change the expiring event from *200ms* to `TICK` (ln. 10) to recover the abstract notion of simultaneity.

The synchronous hypothesis for CÉU holds if the reactions run faster than the rate of incoming input events. Otherwise, the system will accumulate delays between the real occurrence and actual reaction to events. This is also the case for the variable-length-tick approach of Esterel, since the more inputs to handle, the longer the reaction takes, and the more inputs will accumulate for subsequent ticks. For the fixed-length-tick approach of Esterel, a breach in the synchronous hypothesis causes timing violations, which can be avoided with *worst case reaction time* analysis to infer an appropriate value for the tick length [?].

2.2. Stack-Based Internal Events

Esterel makes no semantic distinctions between internal and external signals. In particular, programs can emit different external input signals simultaneously, with all coexisting during a reaction. In CÉU, a reaction starts from an external input event and programs cannot emit inputs at all. Therefore, the occurring input event is unique during the entire reaction, resulting in intrinsic queue-based handling. In contrast, programs can emit internal events but these follow a stack-based execution policy,

<pre> 1 input A; // external 2 signal B; // internal 3 [[4 await A; 5 emit B; 6 call f(); 7 8 await B; 9 call g(); 10]]</pre>	<pre> 1 input void A; // external (in uppercase) 2 event void b; // internal (in lowercase) 3 par/and do 4 await A; 5 emit b; 6 _f(); 7 with 8 await b; 9 _g(); 10 end</pre>
(a) Esterel	(b) CÉU

Fig. 4. Internal signals (events) in Esterel and CÉU: similar syntax, but different semantics.

```

1 event int* inc; // subroutine 'inc'
2 par/or do
3   loop do      // definitions are loops
4     var int* p = await inc;
5     *p = *p + 1;
6   end
7 with
8   var int v = 1;
9   await A;
10  emit inc => &v; // call 'inc'
11  _assert(v==2); // after return
12 end
```

Fig. 5. Subroutine `inc` is defined in a loop (ln. 3–6), in parallel with the caller (ln. 8–11).

similar to subroutine calls in typical programming languages. Figure 4 illustrates the use of internal signals (events) in Esterel (a) and CÉU (b). In Esterel, when `A` occurs, `B` is emitted (ln. 4–5) and both events become active, resulting in the invocation of `f()` and `g()` in no particular order. In CÉU, the occurrence of `A` makes the program behave as follows:

- (1) 1st trail awakes (ln. 4), emits `b`, and pauses.
- (2) 2nd trail awakes (ln. 8), calls `_g()`, and terminates.
- (3) 1st trail (on top of the stack) resumes, calls `_f()`, and terminates.
- (4) Both trails have terminated, so the `par/and` rejoins, and the program also terminates.

Internal events provide a fine-grained intra-reaction control mechanism. For instance, it brings a limited form of subroutines, as depicted in Figure 5. The subroutine `inc` is defined as a loop (ln. 3–6) that continuously awaits its identifying event (ln. 4), incrementing the value passed as reference (ln. 5). A trail in parallel (ln. 8–11) invokes the subroutine in reaction to event `A` through an `emit` (ln. 10). Given the stacked execution for internal events, the calling trail pauses, the subroutine awakes (ln. 4), runs its body (yielding `v=2`), loops, and awaits the next “call” (ln. 4, again). Only after this sequence the calling trail resumes and passes the assertion test (ln. 11).

On the one hand, this form of subroutines has a significant limitation that it cannot express recursive calls: an `emit` to itself is always ignored, given that a running body cannot be awaiting itself. On the other hand, this very same limitation brings some important safety properties to subroutines: first, they are guaranteed to react in bounded time; second, memory for locals is also bounded, not requiring data stacks. Also, this form of subroutines can use the other primitives of CÉU, such as parallel compositions and the `await` statement. In particular, they await keeping context information such as locals and the program counter, similarly to coroutines [?].

Another distinction regarding event handling in comparison to CÉU is that Esterel supports same-cycle bi-directional communication [?], i.e., two threads can react to

```

1 event void e,f;
2 loop do
3   par/or do
4     await e;
5   with
6     emit e;    // w/o delayed awaits, the emit awakes 1st trail
7     await f;   // and restarts the loop instantaneously
8   end
9 end

```

Fig. 6. Delayed awaits prevents re-execution of statements by design.

```

1 event void e;
2 par do
3   loop do
4     <...>    // code that awaits some period
5     emit e;  // periodic request
6   end
7 with
8   loop do
9     <...>    // code to execute immediately and then periodically
10    await e;  // await after
11  end
12 end

```

Fig. 7. An example that circumvents the *delayed await* by post-fixing the await inside the loop.

one another during the same cycle due to mutual signal dependency. CÉU has a different take, posing a tradeoff that an await is only valid for the next reaction, i.e., if an await and emit occur simultaneously in parallel trails, the await does not awake. These *delayed awaits* avoid corner cases of instantaneous termination and re-execution of statements in the same reaction (known as *schizophrenic statements* [?]).

The example in Figure 6 illustrates delayed awaits, which prevents infinite execution by design. Both sides of the par/or have an await statement to avoid instantaneous termination (ln. 4,7). However, if the emit (ln. 6) could awake the await (ln. 4) in the same reaction that reaches them, the par/or would terminate and restart the loop instantaneously, resulting in infinite execution.

In atypical scenarios requiring immediate awake, delayed awaits can be circumvented by manually copying or transforming the code to execute on awake. For instance, sometimes we need to execute a block of code immediately, and then, periodically from internal event requests, as illustrated in Figure 7. In this case, the await moved to the end of the loop (ln. 10) makes the periodic code to also execute immediately (ln. 9), and then in reactions to each emit request (ln. 5). If the periodic emit depends on a condition, then the code transformation becomes more intricate, requiring an extra condition test around the periodic code to prevent its immediate execution. On the one hand, we transfer the burden of dealing with these specific corner cases to the programmer. On the other hand, we simplify the semantics of the language and eliminate the need for complex analysis to deal with schizophrenic statements.

2.3. Static Temporal Analysis for Concurrent Statements

Embedded applications make extensive use of global memory and shared resources, such as through memory-mapped registers and system calls to device drivers. Hence, an important goal of CÉU is to ensure a reliable behavior for programs with concurrent lines of execution sharing memory and interacting with the environment.

Esterel is only deterministic with respect to reactive control: “the same sequence of inputs always produces the same sequence of outputs” [?]. However, the execution

```

1 input void A, B;
2 var int x = 1;
3 par/and do
4   await A;
5   x = x + 1;
6 with
7   await B;
8   x = x * 2;
9 end

```

(a)

```

1 input void A;
2 var int y = 1;
3 par/and do
4   await A;
5   y = y + 1;
6 with
7   await A;
8   y = y * 2;
9 end

```

(b)

Fig. 8. Shared-memory concurrency in CÉU: Example (a) is safe because the trails access x atomically in different reactions; Example (b) is unsafe because both trails access y in the same reaction.

order for operations within a reaction is non-deterministic: “if there is no control dependency, as in $\ll \text{call } f1() \parallel \text{call } f2() \gg$, the order is unspecified and it would be an error to rely on it” [?]. A number of Esterel-based synchronous languages, such as *SOL* [?], *SC* [?], and *PRET-C* [?], enforce intra-reaction determinism with an arbitrary execution order for statements in multiple lines of execution. CÉU also takes the deterministic approach and when multiple trails are active during the same reaction, they are scheduled in the order they appear in the program source code.

Even so, we consider that enforcing an arbitrary execution order can be misleading in some cases. For instance, consider the two examples in Figure 8, both of which define a shared variable (ln. 2), and assign to it parallel trails (ln. 5, 8). In the example (a), the two assignments to x execute from reactions to different events A and B which, by definition, cannot occur simultaneously (Section 2.1). Hence, for the sequence $A \rightarrow B$, x becomes $(1+1)*2 \rightarrow 4$, while for $B \rightarrow A$, x becomes $(1*2)+1 \rightarrow 3$. In the example (b), the two assignments to y execute from a reaction to the same event A , and are simultaneous from an external point of view. Since CÉU employs lexical order for intra-reaction statements, the execution is still deterministic, and y always becomes $(1+1)*2 \rightarrow 4$. However, any (apparently innocuous) change in the order of trails can change the semantics of a program, which we consider unsafe.

To mitigate this threat, CÉU performs a temporal analysis at compile time and detects concurrent accesses to shared variables, as follows: if a variable is written in a trail segment, then a concurrent trail segment cannot read or write to that variable, nor dereference a pointer of that variable type. A trail segment is a sequence of statements followed by an *await* (or termination). Concurrency in CÉU is characterized when two or more trail segments in parallel react to the same input event. Considering the examples in Figure 8:

- The assignments to x in lines 2 and 5 in (a) **cannot** be concurrent because they are not in parallel trails.
- The assignments to x in lines 5 and 8 in (a) **cannot** be concurrent because they **cannot** execute during the same reaction.
- The assignments to y in lines 5 and 8 in (b) **can** be concurrent because they are in parallel trails and **can** execute during the same reaction.

The algorithm for the analysis, which is depicted in Section ??, inspects all possible *await* statements that precede a variable access and hold the associated awaking events. Then, it checks all accesses in parallel trails to see if they share an awaking event. If it is the case, the compiler warns about the suspicious accesses.

Note that this analysis is only possible due to the uniqueness of input events within reactions. Otherwise, any two trail segments in parallel could be concurrent, even if they react to different input events.

2.4. Safe Integration with C

In CÉU, any identifier prefixed with an underscore is repassed *as is* to the C compiler that generates the final binary. Therefore, access to C is seamless and, more importantly, easily trackable. Similarly to Esterel, which supports the `call` primitive for external code, calls are assumed to be instantaneous [?]. Evidently, programs should only resort to C for asynchronous functionality, such as non-blocking I/O, or simple struct accessors, but never for control purposes.

In addition, CÉU also employs the temporal analysis for calls and accesses to external symbols in C. As an example, the program in Figure 9.a defines four external symbols inside a `native` block for standard declarations in C (ln. 1–6). The `par/and` (ln. 7–11) creates two trails that react concurrently during the boot reaction (ln. 8,10): the first trail calls the symbol `_f`, while the second calls `_g` and `_id`, and also accesses `_NUM`. Since CÉU does not inspect any code defined in C, it has no idea about the meaning of the symbols and complains about suspicious concurrent accesses between `_f` against all symbols in the second trail.

The code in Figure 9.b uses annotations to provide hints to the compiler about the semantics of the C symbols in use in (a):

- `_NUM` is a constant symbol, meaning that it is safe to use it concurrently with any other symbol in the program.
- `_id` is a pure function, also meaning that it is safe to call it concurrently with any other symbol in the program.
- Both `_f` and `_g` are impure, but their effects do not conflict and they can be safely called concurrently.

Esterel’s `abort` and CÉU’s `par/or` statements illustrate how synchronous languages can abort awaiting lines of execution without tweaking them with synchronization primitives. In contrast, traditional (asynchronous) multi-threaded languages cannot express thread termination safely [?; ?]. Still, aborting lines of execution that deal with external resources is challenging because they may end up in an inconsistent state. For this reason, Esterel and CÉU provide a `finalize` construct with a clause that executes even if the enclosing block aborts and does not terminate normally.

Figure 10 uses `lock` and `unlock` calls to represent an external resource. The normal behavior is to `lock` the resource, perform some operations in subsequent reactions to input A, and then `unlock` the resource. However, if the aborting input B occurs after the `lock` but before the reactions to A, we still want to call `unlock` to safely release the resource. In Esterel and CÉU, the `finalize` clauses (ln. a:10 and b:5) are automatically called if the enclosing blocks (ln. a:3–1 and b:3–10) are externally aborted (ln. a:12 and b:12).

<pre> 1 native do 2 #define NUM 10 3 void f (void) { <...> } 4 void g (int v) { <...> } 5 int id (int v) { <...> } 6 end 7 par/and do 8 _f (); 9 with 10 _g (_id (_NUM)); 11 end </pre>	<pre> native @const _NUM; native @pure _id; native @safe _f with _g; </pre>
(a)	(b)

Fig. 9. TODO

```

1 input A, B;
2 abort
3   finalize
4     call lock();
5     await A;
6     <...>;      // do something
7     await A;
8     <...>;      // do something
9   with
10    call unlock();
11  end
12 when B
13 .

```

(a) Esterel

```

1 input void A, B;
2 par/or do
3   _lock();
4   finalize with
5     _unlock();
6   end
7   await A;
8   <...>;      // do something
9   await A;
10  <...>;      // do something
11 with
12   await B;
13 end

```

(b) CÉU

Fig. 10. Finalization in Esterel and CÉU: after the call to lock, both languages guarantee to call unlock if the enclosing block aborts when B occurs.

```

1 par/or do
2   var _buffer_t msg;
3   <...> // prepare msg
4   finalize
5     _send_request(&msg);
6   with
7     _send_cancel(&msg);
8   end
9   await SEND_ACK;
10 with
11  <...>
12 end
13 .

```

(a) Local resource finalization

```

1 par/or do
2   var _FILE* f;
3   finalize
4     f = _fopen(...);
5   with
6     _fclose(f);
7   end
8   _fwrite(..., f);
9   await A;
10  _fwrite(..., f);
11 with
12  <...>
13 end

```

(b) External resource finalization

Fig. 11. CÉU enforces the use of finalization to prevent *dangling pointers* for local resources and *memory leaks* for external resources.

CÉU goes one step further and enforces the use of `finalize` for system calls that deal with pointers representing resources:

- If a system call **receives** a pointer from CÉU, the pointer represents a **local** resource that requires finalization.
- If a system call **returns** a pointer to CÉU, the pointer represents an **external** resource that requires finalization.

CÉU tracks the interaction of system calls with pointers and requires finalization clauses to accompany them. In the example in Figure ??a, the local variable `msg` (ln. 2) is an internal resource passed as a pointer to `_send_request` (ln. 5), which is an asynchronous call that transmits the buffer in the background. If the block aborts (ln. 11) before receiving an acknowledge from the environment (ln. 9), the local `msg` goes out of scope and the external transmission now holds a *dangling pointer*. The finalization ensures that the transmission also aborts (ln. 7). In the example in Figure ??b, the call to `_fopen` returns an external file resource as a pointer. If the block aborts (ln. 12) during the `await A` (ln. 9), the file remains open as a *memory leak*. The finalization ensures that the file closes properly (ln. 6). In both cases, the code does not compile if the programmer forgets to use the `finalize` construct.

Note that the illustrative example of Figure 10 does not manipulate pointers (i.e., the resource is a *singleton*). That case is an example of a bad and unsafe API to expose to CÉU because the compiler will not enforce the use of finalization.

```

var int v;
await 10ms;
v = 1;
await 1ms;
v = 2;

```

(a)

```

par/or do
  await 10ms;
  <...> // any non-awaiting sequence
  await 1ms;
  v = 1;
with
  await 12ms;
  v = 2;
end

```

(b)

Fig. 12. First-class timers in CÉU.

2.5. First-Class Timers

Activities that involve reactions to *wall-clock time*² appear in typical patterns of embedded development, such as timeout watchdogs and sensor samplings. However, support for wall-clock time is somewhat low-level in existing languages, usually through timer callbacks or “sleep” blocking calls. Furthermore, in any concrete timer implementation, a requested timeout does not expire precisely without delays, a fact that is usually ignored in the development process. We define the difference between the requested timeout and the actual expiring time as the *residual delta time* (*delta*). Without explicit manipulation, the recurrent use of timed activities in sequence (or in a loop) may accumulate a considerable amount of deltas that can lead to incorrect behavior in programs.

The `await` statement of CÉU supports wall-clock time and handles deltas automatically, resulting in more robust applications. For the example in Figure ??a, suppose that after the first `await` request, the underlying system gets busy and takes 15ms to check for expiring awaits. The CÉU scheduler will notice that the `await 10ms` has not only already expired, but is delayed with `delta=5ms`. Then, the awaiting trail awakes, sets `v=1`, and invokes `await 1ms`. As the current delta is higher than the requested timeout (i.e. $5ms > 1ms$), the trail is rescheduled for execution, now with `delta=4ms`.

CÉU also takes into account the fact that time is a physical quantity that can be added and compared. For instance, for the example in Figure ??b, although the scheduler cannot guarantee that the first trail terminates exactly in 11ms, it can at least ensure that the program always terminates with `v=1`. Given that any non-awaiting sequence is considered to take no time in the synchronous model, the first trail is guaranteed to terminate before the second trail, because $10 + 1 < 12$. A similar program in a language without first-class support for timers would depend on the execution timings for the code marked as `<...>`, making the reasoning about the execution behavior more difficult.

2.6. Discussion

lexical order pragmatism - again, familiar to programmers - register order - parallax, logging - simple, understandable, imperative - multiple calls to compose, `printf`, are not commutative - define with intimidating name - implementation aspects in Section XX

TODO: move POE to here, simpler more natural for software dev

- static analysis also simpler - highlight that is not only important to have a computationally-sound algorithm, but that something that programmers can understand - same with 1st-class timers, also, too much common to be ignored
- understandable semantics - implementable

TODO add a remark about tasks/async/thread in “Discussion”

²By wall-clock time we mean the passage of time from the real world, measured in hours, minutes, etc.

TODO Link the sections, connect the dots, draw conclusions, eliminate remaining xxx.

Timers allows for an internal, defined by the programmer in charge of the specification, definition of simultaneity.

On the one hand, enforcing an execution order for concurrent operations may seem arbitrary and also precludes true parallelism. On the other hand, it provides a priority scheme for trails, and makes shared-memory concurrency more tractable. - again, simple For constrained embedded development, we believe that deterministic shared-memory concurrency is beneficial, given the extensive use of memory mapped ports for I/O and the lack of hardware support for real parallelism.

TODO: we could detect that trails do not share memory and execute in multiple threads

3. IMPLEMENTATION

The compilation process of a program in CÉU for the original *C* back end is composed of three main phases: the *parsing phase* converts the source code in CÉU to an *abstract syntax tree (AST)*; the *temporal analysis phase* detects inconsistencies in programs, such as unbounded loops and suspicious accesses to shared memory; the *code generation phase* converts the *AST* to standard *C* code and packs it with platform-dependent functionality (e.g., system calls) and the runtime of CÉU, compiling everything with *gcc* to generate the final binary.

In the sections that follow, we discuss the implementation highlights related to the peculiarities of CÉU: the temporal analysis for determinism (Section ??), static memory allocation for data and trails (Sections ?? and ??), static scheduling and trail finalization (Section ??), interaction with the environment (Section ??), and the *VM* back end (Section ??),

3.1. Temporal Analysis for Concurrent Statements

TODO: internal events, emits are propagated from preceding awaits to input

The compile-time *temporal analysis* phase detects inconsistencies in CÉU programs. Here, we focus on the algorithm that detects suspicious access to shared variables, as discussed in Section 2.3.

For each node representing a statement in the program *AST*, we keep the set of events *I* (for *incoming*) that can lead to the execution of the node, and also the set of events *O* (for *outgoing*) that can terminate the node.

A node inherits the set *I* from its direct parent and calculates *O* according to its type:

- Nodes that represent expressions, assignments, *C* calls, and declarations simply reproduce $O = I$, as they do not await;
- An `await e` statement has $O = \{e\}$.
- A `break` statement has $O = \{\}$ as it escapes the innermost `loop` and never terminates, i.e., never proceeds to the statement immediately following it (see also `loop` below);
- A *sequence node* (;) modifies each of its children to have $I_n = O_{n-1}$. The first child inherits *I* from its parent node, and the set *O* for the sequence node is copied from its last child, i.e., $O = O_n$.
- A `loop` node includes its body's *O* on its own *I* ($I = I \cup O_{body}$), as the loop is also reached from its own body. The union of all `break` statements' *O* forms the set *O* for a `loop`.
- An `if` node has $O = O_{true} \cup O_{false}$.
- A parallel composition may terminate from any of its branches, hence $O = O_1 \cup \dots \cup O_n$.

<pre> 1 input void A, B; 2 var int y; 3 par/or do 4 await A; 5 y = 1; 6 with 7 await B; 8 y = 2; 9 end 10 await A; 11 y = 3; </pre>	<pre> 1 Stmts I={.} O={A} 2 Dcl_y I={.} O={.} 3 ParOr I={.} O={A,B} 4 Stmts I={.} O={A} 5 Await_A I={.} O={A} 6 Set_y I={A} O={A} 7 Stmts I={.} O={B} 8 Await_B I={.} O={B} 9 Set_y I={B} O={B} 10 Await_A I={A,B} O={A} 11 Set_y I={A} O={A} </pre>
(a)	(b)

Fig. 13. A program with a corresponding AST describing the sets I and O . The program is safe because accesses to y in parallel have no intersections for I .

<pre> input int A, B, C; do var int a = await A; end do var int b = await B; end par/and do await B; with await C; end </pre>	<pre> union { int a_1; // do.1 int b_2; // do.2 struct { // par/and int _and_3: 1; int _and_4: 1; }; } MEM ; </pre>
---	---

Fig. 14. A program with blocks in sequence and in parallel, with corresponding memory layout generated by the compiler.

With all sets calculated, we take all pairs of nodes that perform side effects and are in parallel branches, comparing their sets I for intersections. For each pair, if the intersection is not the empty set, we mark both nodes as suspicious.

The example in Figure ??a has a corresponding *AST*, in Figure ??b, with the sets I and O for each node. The event $.$ (dot) represents the “boot” reaction. The assignments to y in parallel (ln. 5,8 in the code) have an empty intersection of I (ln. 6,9 in the AST), hence, they do not conflict. Note that although the accesses in ln. 5,11 in the code (ln. 6,11 in the AST) do have an intersection, they are not in parallel and are also safe.

3.2. Static Memory Layout

CÉU favors a fine-grained use of trails, being common to use trails that await a single event. For this reason, CÉU does not allocate per-trail stacks; instead, all data resides in fixed memory slots—this is true for the program variables as well as for temporary values and runtime flags. Memory for trails in parallel must coexist, while statements in sequence can reuse it. Translating this idea to *C* is straightforward [?; ?]: memory for blocks in sequence are packed in a *struct*, while blocks in parallel, in a *union*. CÉU reserves a single static block of memory to hold all memory slots, whose size is the maximum the program uses at a given time. A given position in the memory may hold different data (with variable sizes) during runtime. As an example, Figure ?? shows a program with corresponding memory layout. Each variable is assigned a unique *id* (e.g. *a_1*) so that variables with the same name can be distinguished. The *do-end* blocks in sequence are packed in a *union*, given that their variables cannot be in scope at the same time, e.g., *MEM.a_1* and *MEM.b_2* can safely share the same memory slot. The example also illustrates the presence of runtime flags related to the parallel composition, which also reside in reusable slots in the static memory.

3.3. Static and Lightweight Trail Allocation

Each line of execution in CÉU needs to carry associated data, such as which event it is awaiting and which code to execute when it awakes. The compiler statically infers the maximum number of trails a program can have at the same time and creates a static vector to hold the runtime information about them. Like normal variables, trails that cannot be active at the same time can share slots in the static memory vector.

At any given moment, a trail can be awaiting in one of the following states: `INACTIVE`, `STACKED`, `FINALIZE`, or in any of the events defined in the program:

```
enum {
    INACTIVE = 0,
    STACKED,
    FINALIZE,
    EVT_A,      // input void A;
    EVT_e,      // event int e;
    <...>       // other events
}
```

All terminated or not-yet-started trails stay in the `INACTIVE` state and are ignored by the scheduler. A `STACKED` trail holds an associated stack level and is delayed until the scheduler runtime reaches that level again. A `FINALIZE` trail represents a hanged finalization block which is only scheduled when its corresponding block goes out of scope. A trail waiting for an event stays in the state of the corresponding event, also holding the minimum sequence number (*seqno*) in which it can awake. In concrete terms, a trail is represented by the following struct:

```
struct trail_t {
    state_t evt;
    label_t lbl;
    union {
        unsigned char seqno;
        stack_t stk;
    };
};
```

The field `evt` holds the state of the trail (or the event it is awaiting); the field `lbl` holds the entry point in the code to execute when the trail segment is scheduled; the third field depends on the `evt` field and may hold the `seqno` for an event, or the stack level `stk` for a `STACKED` state.

The size of `state_t` depends on the number of events in the application; for an application with less than 253 events (plus the 3 states), one byte is enough. The size of `label_t` depends primarily on the number of `await` statements in the application—each `await` splits the code in two segments and requires a unique entry point in the code for its continuation. Additionally, `split` & `join` points for parallel compositions, `emit` continuations, and finalization blocks also require labels. The `seqno` could eventually overflow during execution (i.e., every 256 reactions). However, given that the scheduler traverses all trails on every reaction, it can adjust them to properly handle overflows (actually, 2 bits to hold the `seqno` is already enough). The size of `stack_t` depends on the maximum depth of nested emissions and is bounded to the maximum number of trails. In the worst case, a trail emits an event that awakes another trail, which emits an event that awakes another trail, and so on. The last trail cannot awake any trail, because they are all hanged in the `STACKED` state.

In the context of embedded systems, the size of `trail_t` is typically only 3 bytes (1 byte for each field), imposing a negligible memory overhead even for trails that only await a single event and terminate. For instance, the *CTP* collection protocol ported to CÉU reaches eight simultaneous lines of execution with an overhead of 2% in comparison to the original version in *C* [?].

<pre> 1 input void A; 2 event void e; 3 // TRAIL 0 - lbl Main 4 par/and do 5 // TRAIL 0 - lbl Main 6 await e; 7 // TRAIL 0 - lbl Awake.e 8 // TRAIL 0 - lbl And.chk 9 with 10 // TRAIL 1 - lbl And.sub.2 11 await A; 12 // TRAIL 1 - lbl Awake.A.1 13 emit e; 14 // TRAIL 1 - lbl Emit.cont 15 // TRAIL 1 - lbl And.chk 16 end 17 // TRAIL 0 - lbl And.out 18 await A; 19 // TRAIL 0 - lbl Awake.A.2 20 21 22 23 24 25 </pre>	<pre> 1 enum { 2 Main = 1, // ln 3 3 Awake.e, // ln 7 4 And.chk, // ln 8,15 5 And.sub.2, // ln 10 6 Awake.A.1, // ln 12 7 Emit.cont, // ln 14 8 And.out, // ln 17 9 Awake.A.2 // ln 19 10 }; 11 12 trail.t TRLS[2] = { 13 { STACKED, Main, 0 }; 14 { INACTIVE, 0, 0 }; 15 }; 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 </pre>	<pre> 1 void dispatch (trail.t* t) { 2 switch (t->lbl) { 3 case Main: 4 // activate TRAIL 1 5 TRLS[1].evt = STACKED; 6 TRLS[1].lbl = And.sub.2; 7 TRLS[1].stk = cur.stack; 8 9 // code in the 1st trail 10 // await e; 11 TRLS[0].evt = EVT.e; 12 TRLS[0].lbl = Awake.e; 13 TRLS[0].seq = cur.seqno; 14 break; 15 16 case And.sub.2: 17 // await A; 18 TRLS[1].evt = EVT.A; 19 TRLS[1].lbl = Awake.A.1; 20 TRLS[1].seq = cur.seqno; 21 break; 22 23 <...> // other labels 24 } 25 } </pre>
(a)	(b)	(c)

Fig. 15. (a) Static allocation of trails: the comments identify the trail indexes inferred by the compiler; (b) Entry-point labels: each trail segment has an associated numeric identifier generated by the compiler. (c) Dispatch function: uses a *switch* to associate each segment identifier with the corresponding code to execute.

3.4. Static Scheduling and Trail Finalization

In the final generated code in *C*, each trail segment label representing an entry point becomes a *switch case* with the associated code to execute. Figure ?? illustrates the generation process. For the program in (a), the compiler extracts the entry points and associated trails, e.g., the label *Awake.e* will execute on TRAIL-0 (ln. 7). For each statement that pauses (emit and await), resumes (par/and, par/or, and finalize), or aborts (par/or and break), the compiler splits the trail into segments with associated entry points. The entry points translate to an *enum* in the generated code (ln. 1–10, in (b)). The state of trails translates to a vector of type *trail.t* with the maximum number of simultaneous trails (ln. 12–15). On initialization, TRAIL-0 is set to execute the *Main* entry point (ln. 13), while all others are set to *INACTIVE* (in the example, only one, in ln. 14).

The scheduler executes in two passes: in the *broadcast* pass, it sets all trails that are waiting for the current event to *STACKED* in the current stack level; in the *dispatch* pass, it executes each trail that is *STACKED* to run in the current level, setting it immediately to *INACTIVE* (the trail segment may reset it in sequence if it doesn't terminate).

During the dispatch pass, if a trail executes and emits an internal event, the scheduler increments the stack level and re-executes the two passes. After all trails are properly dispatched, the scheduler decrements the stack level and resumes the previous execution. For the first reaction, the scheduler starts from the *dispatch* pass, given that the *Main* label is the only one that can be active at the stack level 0 (ln. 13, in Figure ??b).

The code in Figure ??c dispatches a trail segment according to the current label to execute. For the first reaction, it executes the *Main* label in TRAIL-0. When the *Main* label reaches the *par/and*, it stacks TRAIL-1 (ln. 4–7) and proceeds to the code in TRAIL-0 (ln. 9–14), respecting the deterministic execution order. The code sets the running TRAIL-0 to await *EVT.e* on label *Awake.e*, and then halts with a *break*. The next iteration of *dispatch*

takes `TRAIL-1` and executes its registered label `And_sub_2` (ln. 16–21), which sets `TRAIL-1` to await `EVT_A` and also halts.

Regarding abortion and finalization, when a `par/or` terminates, the scheduler makes a *broadcast* pass for the `FINALIZE` event, but limited to the range of trails covered by the terminating `par/or`. Trails that do not match the `FINALIZE` are set to `INACTIVE`, as they have to be aborted. Given that trails in parallel are allocated in subsequent slots in the static vector `TRLS`, this pass only aborts the desirable trails. The subsequent *dispatch* pass executes the finalization code. Escaping a `loop` that contains parallel compositions also triggers the same abortion process.

3.5. Single-Threaded Dispatching

The implementation of C  U dispatches active trails sequentially in a single thread, taking no advantage of multi-core CPUs. This decision comes not only from the fact that C  U targets constrained embedded systems with a single CPU, but also because C  U imposes deterministic execution for intra-reaction statements.

Nonetheless, as discussed in Section 2.3, the temporal analysis of C  U infers precisely trails that are concurrent yet do not share resources. Hence, these non-conflicting trails could potentially execute with real parallelism in multiple cores. However, our experiments with a multi-threaded implementation in multi-core CPUs execute slower than the single-threaded implementation in the same CPUs. Considering that we use C  U primarily in control-dominated applications, this result is not surprising [?; ?]. We believe that the continuous fork-and-rejoin overhead due to small reactions as well as the excessive locality of data due to stackless threads sharing contiguous static memory seem to prevent any speed-up gains.

If we consider data-dominated applications, multi-core implementations can offer considerable speed-up gains. However, data-intensive computations do not typically require a disciplined step-wise execution and can actually execute in asynchronous calls. Esterel provides a `task` primitive for this purpose [?], and C  U provides an equivalent `async/thread` primitive (which are out of the scope of this paper).

Since loops in C  U must contain `await` statements, reactions run in bounded time, which guarantees that successive calls to `dispatch` never block the scheduler for long. However, the code generation phase does not inspect C calls and also has no extra analysis such as for worst-case reaction times [?; ?].

Single-thread dispatching may not be suitable for hard real-time activities. In a previous work [?], we measure how synchronous lengthy computations in C (e.g., hashing and compression) can block the scheduler and affect higher-priority activities such as a radio driver. In such cases, the system requires careful testing to avoid undersized hardware deployment.

3.6. Interaction with the Environment

As a reactive language, the execution of programs in C  U is guided entirely by the occurrence of external input events. The binding for a specific platform (environment) is responsible for calling hook functions in the API of the runtime of C  U whenever an external event occurs. However, the binding must never interleave or run multiple API calls in parallel. This would break the C  U sequential/discrete semantics of time.

As an example, Figure ?? shows our binding for *TinyOS* [?], which maps system callbacks to input events in C  U. The file `ceu_app.h` (ln. 3) contains all definitions for the compiled C  U program, which are further queried through `#ifdef`'s. The file `ceu_app.c` (ln. 4) contains the runtime of C  U with the scheduler and dispatcher pointing to the labels defined in the program. The callback `Boot.booted` (ln. 6–11) is called by *TinyOS* on startup, so we initialize C  U inside it (ln. 7). If the C  U program uses timers, we also start a periodic timer (ln. 8–10) that triggers callback `Timer.fired` (ln. 13–17) every


```

1 implementation
2 {
3     #include "ceu_app.h"
4     #include "ceu_app.c"
5
6     event void Boot.booted () {
7         ceu_init();
8 #ifdef CEU_WCLOCKS
9         call Timer.startPeriodic(10);
10    #endif
11    }
12
13 #ifdef CEU_WCLOCKS
14    event void Timer.fired () {
15        ceu_wclock(10000);
16    }
17 #endif
18
19 #ifdef EVT_PHOTO_READDONE
20    event void Photo.readDone (int val) {
21        ceu_go(EVT_PHOTO_READDONE, &val);
22    }
23 #endif
24
25 #ifdef EVT_RADIO_SENDDONE
26    event void RadioSend.sendDone (message_t* msg) {
27        ceu_go(EVT_RADIO_SENDDONE, &msg);
28    }
29 #endif
30
31 #ifdef EVT_RADIO_RECEIVE
32    event message_t* RadioReceive.receive (message_t* msg) {
33        ceu_go(EVT_RADIO_RECEIVE, &msg);
34        return msg;
35    }
36 #endif
37
38    <...>    // other events
39 }

```

Fig. 16. The *TinyOS* binding for CÉU. This platform-dependent template includes the *C* files generated from the original application in CÉU (*ceu_app.h* and *ceu_app.c*) for the *code generation phase*.

10 milliseconds and advances the wall-clock time of CÉU (ln. 15)³. The remaining lines map pre-defined *TinyOS* events that can be used in CÉU programs, such as the light sensor (ln. 19–23) and the radio transceiver (ln. 25–36). The scheduler of the *TinyOS* is already synchronous by default and always execute event handlers atomically, hence, the API calls to CÉU are properly serialized.

3.7. The Terra Virtual Machine

Terra is a system for programming wireless sensor network applications which uses CÉU as its scripting language [?]. Figure ?? shows the three basic elements of Terra: CÉU as the scripting language, a set of customized pre-built components, and the embedded virtual-machine engine which can disseminate and install bytecode images dynamically. This approach aims to combine the flexibility of remotely uploading code with the expressiveness and safety guarantees of CÉU.

The main difference between the standard *C* back end and the Terra *VM* is the *code generation phase*, which here outputs assembly instructions for the *VM*, instead of statements in *C*. To reduce the memory footprint of applications, the *VM* includes

³We also offer a mechanism to start the underlying timer on demand to avoid the “battery unfriendly” 10ms polling.

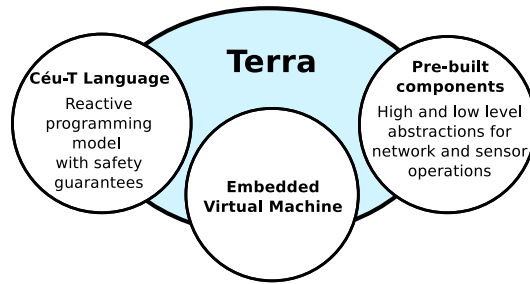


Fig. 17. Terra programming system basic elements.

special instructions for complex and recurrent operations from the runtime of CÉU, such as handling events and trails.

In Terra, CÉU scripts cannot execute arbitrary *C* code, instead, they rely on pre-built components that can be customized for different application domains. Considering the domain of sensor networks, Terra already provides components organized in four areas: radio communication, group management, data aggregation, and local operations (e.g., access to sensors and actuators). When creating an instance of the *VM*, the programmer can choose whether or not to include each component, setting different abstraction boundaries for scripts. The generated *VM* has to be preloaded into the embedded devices before they are physically distributed.

The communication between scripts in CÉU and the components in the *VM* is mostly through events: scripts emit requests through output events and await answers through input events. Terra also provides system calls for initialization and configuration of components (e.g., *getters* and *setters*). Figure ??a shows a CÉU interface with the available functionality for a customized *VM* (with temperature and radio components). Figure ??b shows the associated bindings for output events (ln. 1–8), input events (ln. 10–14), and system calls (ln. 16–22). Note that all applications for the customized *VM* must comply with the same interface. In contrast, the template-based *C* back end (illustrated in Figure ??) allows applications to choose all possible combinations of functionalities from the underlying platform at compile time.

4. RELATED WORK

CÉU has a strong influence from Esterel, embracing its disciplined synchronous-reactive model with support for lexical composition of lines of execution. However, there are fundamental semantic differences that prevents the design of CÉU as pure extensions to Esterel. In particular, Esterel has a notion of time similar to digital circuits in which multiple signals can be active at a clock tick. In CÉU, instead of clock ticks, the occurrence of a single external event that defines a time unit. CÉU also distinguishes external events from stack-based internal events, which provide a limited form of coroutines supporting reactive statements.

The event-driven approach of CÉU is widespread [?] and popular in many software communities, such as web frameworks (e.g., *jQuery* [?] and *Node.js* [?]), GUI toolkits (e.g., *Tcl/Tk* [?] and *Java Swing* [?]), and Games [?]. Like CÉU, event-driven programming is essentially synchronous, i.e., events go through a queue and are dispatched sequentially and atomically to prevent race conditions. We believe that for software design, this approach is more familiar to programmers and simplifies the reasoning about concurrency. For instance, the uniqueness of external events in CÉU is a prerequisite for the temporal analysis that enables safe shared-memory concurrency.

<pre> // Output events output void REQUEST_TEMPERATURE; output int REQUEST_SEND; // sends int value // Input events input int TEMPERATURE_DONE; // recvs int value input void SEND_DONE; // System calls function int getRadioID (void); </pre>	<pre> 1 // Output events 2 void VM.out(int evt_id, void* args) { 3 switch (id){ 4 case O_REQUEST_TEMPERATURE: 5 call TINYOS_TEMP.read(); 6 <...>; // O_REQUEST_SEND 7 } 8 } 9 10 // Input events 11 event TINYOS_TEMP.done (int val) { 12 VM.enqueue(I_TEMPERATURE_DONE, &val); 13 } 14 <...> // TINYOS_SEND.done 15 16 // System calls 17 void VM.function(int id, void* params) { 18 switch (id) { 19 case F_GET_RADIO_ID: 20 VM.push(TINYOS_NODE_ID); 21 } 22 } </pre>
(a)	(b)

Fig. 18. (a) CÉU interface with customized VM. (b) The routine VM.out redirects all output events to the corresponding OS calls (ln. 1–8). Each *TinyOS* event callback calls VM.enqueue for the corresponding input event (ln 10–14). System calls use VM.push for immediate return values (ln. 16–22).

Many synchronous languages have been designed to interoperate with *C*, such as *Reactive C* [?], *Protothreads* [?], *PRET-C* [?] and *SC* [?]. They offer Esterel-like parallel compositions with communication via shared variables, relying on deterministic scheduling to preserve determinism. However, it is the responsibility of the programmer to specify the execution order for threads, based on either explicit priorities, or source code lexical order (similar to CÉU). These languages have a tick-based notion of time similar to Esterel, which prevents the event-based temporal analysis of CÉU.

URBI [?] is a reactive scripting language with a rich set of control constructs for time management, event-driven communication, and concurrency. Concurrency is based on stackful coroutines, diverging from our goals regarding resource efficiency and static bounds for memory and execution time.

Esterel has different compilation back ends that synthesizes to software and also to hardware circuits [?; ?]. Among the software-based approaches, *SAXO-RT* [?] is the closest to our implementation with respect to trail allocation and scheduling: the compiler slices programs into “control points” (analogous to our “entry points”) and rearranges them into a directed acyclic graph respecting the constructive semantics of Esterel. Then, it flattens the graph into sequential code in *C* suitable for static scheduling.

A number of virtual machines have been proposed for embedded systems. *Darjeeling* [?] and *TakaTuka* [?] are complete *Java* VMs targeting constrained embedded systems with support for multithreading and garbage collection. Java has antagonistic design choices in comparison to CÉU: it does not impose static bounds on memory usage and execution time, and provides preemptive multithreading which requires synchronization primitives for accessing shared memory. Plummer et al. [?] propose a Esterel-based VM with similar design choices to our work. To reduce code size, the VM has a specialized instruction set to deal with events and concurrency constructs that are particular to Esterel. However, the proposed VM is only a proof of concept, with no support for arithmetic operations, external system calls, or remote reprogramming.

5. CONCLUSION

We presented the design and implementation of CÉU, a synchronous reactive language inspired by Esterel targeting constrained embedded systems.

CÉU is a concurrency-safe language, employing a static analysis that encompass all control constructs and ensures that the high degree of concurrency in embedded systems does not pose safety threats to applications. As a summary, the following safety properties hold for all programs that successfully compile in CÉU: time and memory-bounded reactions to the environment (except for external system calls), no race conditions in shared memory, reliable abortion for activities handling resources, and automatic synchronization for timers. These properties are usually desirable in embedded applications and are guaranteed as preconditions in CÉU by design.

CÉU is a resource-efficient language suitable for constrained embedded systems. The reference implementation compiles to portable event-driven code in *C*, with no special requirements for OS threads or per-trail data stacks. The VM implementation uses the same front end and imposes no extra restrictions, being equally suitable for constrained systems.

CÉU is a practical language with expressive control constructs, such as lexically scoped parallel compositions, convenient first-class timers, and a unique stack-based signaling mechanism. Programs interoperate seamlessly with *C*, and can take advantage of existing libraries, lowering the entry barrier for adoption. CÉU has an open source implementation and bindings for *TinyOS*, *Arduino*, and the *SDL* graphical library.⁴

For the past three years, we have been teaching CÉU for undergraduate and graduate students in research projects and two hands-on courses on *distributed systems* and *reactive programming*. Our experience shows that students take advantage of the sequential-imperative style of CÉU and can implement non-trivial concurrent applications in a few weeks.

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