

COMENIUS UNIVERSITY IN BRATISLAVA

FACULTY OF MATHEMATICS, PHYSICS AND INFORMATICS

TWO-WAY DATABINDING OF MODELS AND
VIEWS IN DART

Diploma thesis

2014

Bc. Jakub Uhrík

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Diploma thesis

Study programme: Computer Science

Field of Study: 9.2.1. Computer Science, Informatics

Department: FMFL.KI - Department of Computer Science

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Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave
Fakulta matematiky, fyziky a informatiky

ZADANIE ZÁVEREČNEJ PRÁCE

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Študijný odbor: 9.2.1. informatika
Typ záverečnej práce: diplomová
Jazyk záverečnej práce: anglický
Sekundárny jazyk: slovenský

Názov: Obojsmerné previazanie dát s pohľadmi v jazyku Dart / *Two-way databinding of models and views in Dart*

Cieľ: Porovnajte rôzne spôsoby obojsmerného previazania modelov s pohľadmi vo webových aplikáciách. Vyberte si prístup navrhnutý Angular-om resp. Model Driven Views, alebo prístup, ktorý používa Facebook React, implementujte tento prístup v jazyku Dart. Zdôvodnite svoje rozhodnutie a odôvodnite, prečo je zvolený prístup pre Dart vhodnejší.

Vedúci: RNDr. Tomáš Kulich, PhD.
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Dátum zadania: 28.10.2013

Dátum schválenia: 29.10.2013

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I would like to thank my supervisor RNDr. Tomáš Kulich, PhD. for his guidance, support, and encouragement throughout writing this thesis.
Special thanks belong to my family for all their support.

Bc. Jakub Uhrík

Abstract

Abstract in english.

Key words: Databinding, Dart, Facebook React, AngularJS, ...

Abstrakt

Abstrakt v slovincine.

Kľúčové slová: Databinding, Dart, Facebook React, AngularJS, ...

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Introduction

As one of the results of this magister thesis is our new databinding library in dart, which is called **tiles**. In next text, we will use only **tiles** to mention *our new databinding library in dart*.

Chapter 1

Motivation - why databinding

The first question, as always should be, is the motivation of this work. What is the motivation to create another library, that will handle databinding in dart?

We will start with small introduction to history of how websites and later web-applications was created. Then we define a set of features required for **tiles**.

1.1 History

1.1.1 Plain documents

1.1.2 Simple PHP

1.1.3 Server side frameworks

1.1.4 Simple JavaScript/jQuery

1.1.5 JavaScript MVC frameworks

1.2 Objectives

From previous overview of "history" we can produce set of features, which should be contained in **tiles**.

1.2.1 Server-side rendering

1.2.2 Programmer friendly API

1.2.3 Easy concept

1.2.4 Two way databinding

Chapter 2

Databinding

In this chapter we will introduce problematics of databinding more deeply then in introduction.

2.1 One way databinding

Discuss one way databinding.

2.2 Two way databinding

Discuss two way databinding.

Chapter 3

Existing solutions

3.1 Template driven

Discuss databinding based on filling some type of template with model. This approach is used in standard MVC frameworks like AngularJS, Ember or UI libraries like Polymer.dart.

3.2 Component driven

Discuss databinding based on component approach used for example in React from facebook or our library.

Chapter 4

Our solution

In this chapter we will introduce and deeply describe our Dart library **Tiles**.

4.1 Requirements

In this section we write down a list of requirements on our library.

4.2 Architecture

In this section we describe our architecture from couple points of view like [High level idea](#), [Structure](#), [Core](#), [Life-cycle](#), [Events](#), [Rendering](#) and [Injecting](#).

We will focus on good understanding of how library works. We will not discuss API a lot, this is the focus of next section.

But, of cause we add some examples, so wee will show some parts of api in this section too, but they don't will be so much described as in next section.

4.2.1 High level idea

Our high level idea inherit from facebook react library. We created api, whose main class is **Component**, which represents construct very similar to react's **Component**. This component is mounted to some element, where it renders itself. This relationship is shown on figure [Idea](#).

These components are somehow placed into tree structure, which represents **Virtual DOM**, which is then translated to real DOM of client's browser or to markup rendered by server application.

There can be event listeners attached to these components. **Events** ¹ are then

¹We work at Dart, which create browser compatibility for us, so we don't have to create synthetic

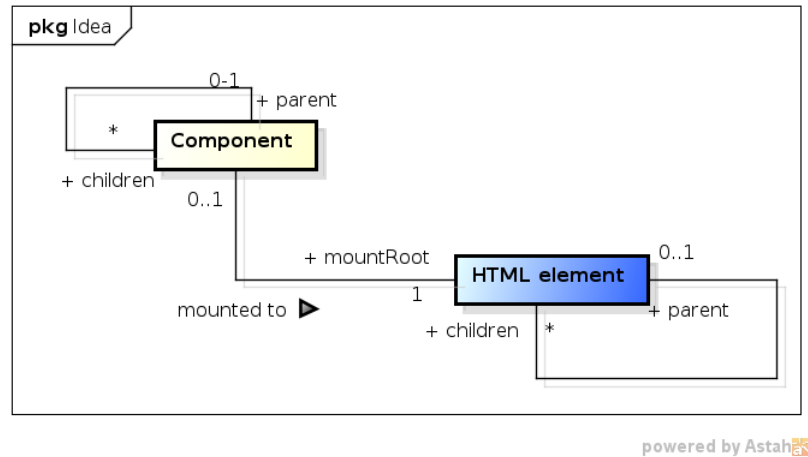


Figure 4.1: Idea

bubbled through virtual DOM, instead real one. By this there can be listener attached to custom component, which don't have element representing it in real DOM.

As we work in Dart language, it is natural to try to reuse most of code on both, client and server. So other important part of idea is **server-side rendering**, which is meant to easy rendering the same content on server as on client's browser. It is very important for SEO purposes and smooth user experience.

4.2.2 Structure

We split our library to 3 partially dependent packages.

Tiles

Tiles creates the core component's of library, focused to create and maintain virtual DOM and offer API for programmer. This package should be included by programmer in files, where he define custom components. These components then can be used both, on server and in browser application.

Tiles Browser

These package is used for mounting components to real HTML elements. It maintain relationships between elements and components, simulate events bubbling and keep real DOM in sync with virtual one.

Tiles Server

Tiles Server maintain server-side rendering. It offers api to render component structure to string with markup based on DOM components.

events like react.

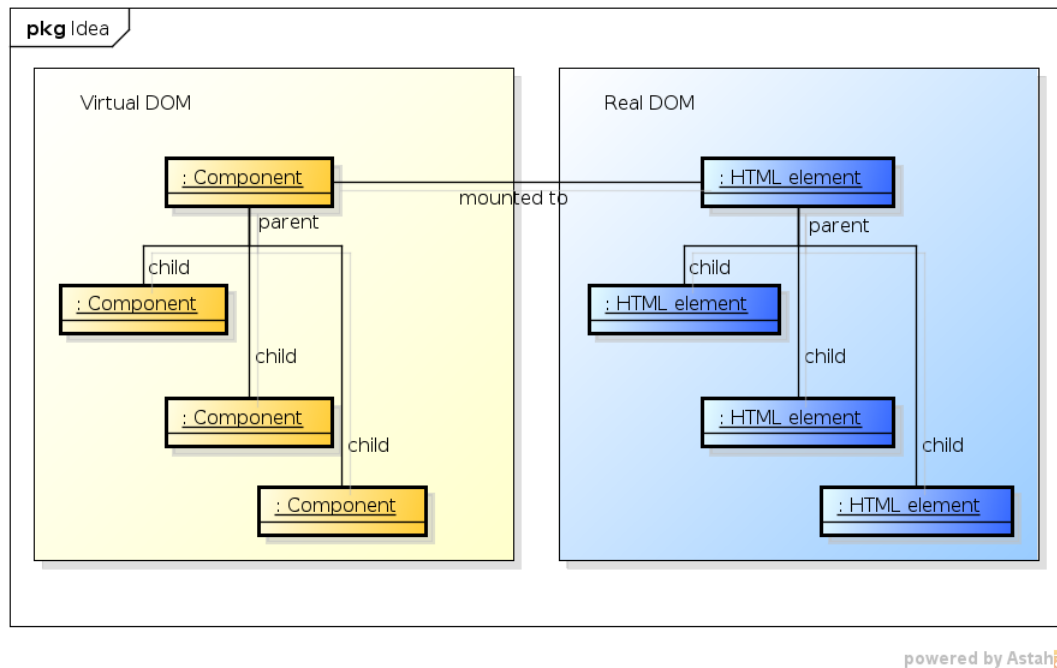


Figure 4.2: Virtual DOM

From this it is quiet obvious what are dependences between these packages. **Tiles** is independent, and both of **Tiles Browser** and **Tiles Server** are dependent on **Tiles**. These dependences are shown on figure [Packages](#).

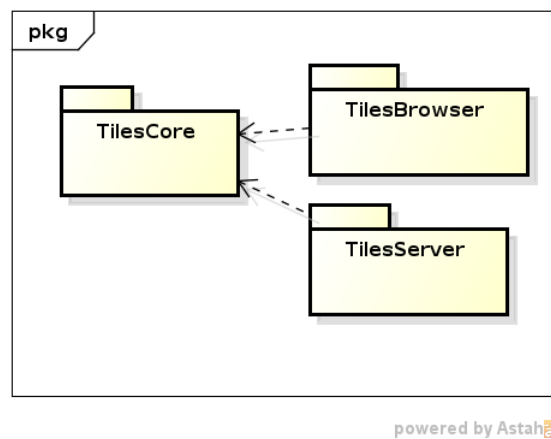


Figure 4.3: Packages

4.2.3 Core

We have 4 main classes in core of the library.

Component represents closed block of user interface, which should be rendered in application.

ComponentDescription is, as it sound like, description of a component. It is returned from component to describe it's children. We discuss this principle later.

In contrast with facebook react `Component`, our component do nothing else than api offered to programmer. This class is the main class for programmer which use our library, he don't need to use any other class created by our library. Just some methods.

Every node contain instance of `Component`. For this `Component` instance this node is something like *representer of me in virtual DOM*.

The whole image of relationships is shown on figure [Core of the library](#). Now we will focus on the main classes separately.

Figure 4.4: Core of the library

Component

Component, as in react, is the main building brick of application(library). It offers api to the programmer with life-cycles, props and so on.

Life-cycle methods will be discuss later, lets focus on the role of component in the whole library.

Component is a class, which represents functionality of certain part of UI² in an application. It is created with some props and children and it is upon it to do what ever it wants with it. But main purpose of it is to create some structure below³ it, add some event listeners and update itself sometimes, e.g. on some event occur.

The main method of the `Component` is `List<ComponentDescription> render()`. By this method component creates it's substructure. It will return list of children of this component, represented by instance of `ComponentDescription`. `Node`, which owns this component (and called it's render method) will take care of the rest. Basically, it will return something like *"This is how I should look like"*.

Second important method is `void redraw()`, which trigger redraw of the component. This redraw will be executed on the first next animation frame.

Redraw is powered by `needUpdate` stream offered by `Component`, which is automatically created in default constructor of class `Component`, so it is very important, to call superclass constructor in each custom component class.

`ComponentDescriptionFactory registerComponent(ComponentFactory factory)` is also very helpful method. By passing it it gets `ComponentFactory` as an argument and from it, create `ComponentDescriptionFactory`. This is mainly created for easy use of the library, we will show why these factories exists and how are they used in section [API](#)

DomComponent

`DomComponent` is a subclass of class `Component`. This is specialized class, which represents HTML elements in the component structure.

It has `props` saved as `Map`, because HTML element have attributes saved in `Map`, `render` method, which return `children` member variable and `svg` and `pair` flags.

Specific HTML elements are then created as with different `ComponentFactory` and also different `ComponentDescriptionFactory`, which is used to easily create `ComponentDescriptions` of `DomComponent` in custom component render method.

²UI = User Interface

³From the virtual DOM tree point of view

ComponentDescription

`ComponentDescription` is description of a component. It describes what component should be rendered.

For this purpose, it's need 4 types of information:

- **Type of the component**

To create instance of some component, we need to know, what type (class) of the component it should be. This information is represented by `ComponentFactory`, which is function with 2 parameters, `props` and `children`, which returns instance of a subclass of a `Component`.

- **Properties**

Data which should be passed to the factory, to be new component created with them.

- **Children**

Children of described component. This is useful mainly when programmer want to render more complex structure of `DOMComponents`.

- **Key**

Key is an identifier of a child. If component's function `render` returns list of children with keys, and after update it returns the same children but in different positions, it only reorder this children and not remove, add them or change their properties.

It has all these information as final. Description is once created, with all informations and then these information can't be changed. All these information is set up by constructor.

`ComponentDescription` have one important method, which is `isComponent createComponent()`, which creates `Component` instance with `props` and `children` from the description.

Node

`Node` is the most important and complex class in the library. It creates virtual DOM tree, maintain creating and updating of it based on results of component's `render` method, listen to component's `needUpdate` stream and mark self as *"dirty"* when it's component need update and handle process of updating which rearrange children of the `Node`.

Children are stored through class `NodeChild`, which represents all information about child (node, component's factory and key). By this encapsulation, when update is triggered, we can compare factory of a component description and factory of a child and decide, if we need to replace this child or it is enough to update it.

As the key is also stored in `NodeChild`, we also compare old children with next one when doing update, and if there exists child in old children with the same key as in the next one, this child "step out of the line" and only move around without replacing.

Node have two important flags: `isDirty` and `hasDirtyDescendant`. These flags represents information, if some node need to be redrawn. If `isDirty` is true, this node need to be updated, because component of this node called `redraw`. If `hasDirtyDescendant` is true, that means, that there exist a descendant of this node, which want to be updated. When `hasDirtyDescendant` is true and `isDirty` is false, component don't have to update itself, it is enough to call update on child nodes.

Method `List<NodeChange> update()` is doing this update process. It returns list of changes, which was needed to put node in new state. This update is mainly called by browser part of a library and this list is used to translate changes in virtual DOM to real one. Method consists of several main steps.

1. check, if update is needed by flags `isDirty` and `hasDirtyDescendant`, if no, return,
2. if component of this node need update (`isDirty == true`), update this node with rearrangement of children,
3. add results of update calls on children to result,
4. set this node as not dirty and not have dirty descendant and return.

Rearrangement of children by calling `render` method of this component and adapting node's children to returned descriptions has not so difficult as complex algorithm, which we will not describe here. It is fully documented in the source code related to this work, extracted to specific method private to the library which is in own file: https://github.com/cleandart/tiles/blob/master/lib/src/core/node_update_children.dart

NodeChange

`NodeChange` take place as a record of a change in the virtual DOM. It is used to mirror changes in the virtual DOM with real DOM.

When some node in the virtual DOM is updated by method `update`, list of changes is returned. This list is then processed by browser part of a library, which mirror these changes to real DOM.

`NodeChange` class has no methods (except constructor) and act just as a data chunk specialized for it's purpose. It contains node, type of change, old and next properties.

Type is stored as instance of `NodeChangeType` enum and can be one of `CREATED`, `UPDATED`, `MOVED` and `DELETED`, whom meaning is obvious. When type is `UPDATED`, old props and new pros take effect.

4.2.4 Life-cycle

Every instance of `Component` have own life-cycle. As every object, first it is created. Then, when component is mounting or rendering into text, it is rendered, and then it is mounted. Then it lives it's own life.

When something "higher" want to update it, it will first receive props, then it is asked, if it should be updated, and if yes, then it is rendered. After that, it was updated, of course.

At the end of component's life, component should be notified about that it will be unmounted(e.g. from DOM), to be able, to do some modifications to it's refs, destroy timers and so on.

Create

Create part of life-cycle is implemented by constructor of `Component`. It will receive props and optionally children as arguments and it should do whatever it needs to prepare whole state of object to live.

An trivial example of constructor of `Component` is

```
class MyComponent extends Component {
  MyComponent(props, [children]): super(props, children) {}
}
```

which only call's constructor of super class `Component`

Example of more complex constructor should be e.g. component which maintain example `Todo` instance.

```
class MyTodoComponent extends Component {
  Todo todo;
  MySearchComponent(props, [children]): super(props, children) {
    if (props != null && props.todo is Todo) {
```

```

        this.todo = props.todo
    } else {
        this.todo = new Todo();
    }
}

// ...

}

```

Did mount

Component life-cycle **Did mount** is implemented by method `didMount`. It is called after component is mounted to DOM.

This is the correct place to initialize for example timers, stream listeners and so on.

For example, in our `MyTodoComponent` we should listen for change of todo on server, and if it was changed, we can redraw component.

```

class MyTodoComponent extends Component {
  Todo todo;
  StreamSubscription subscription;

  // ...

  didMount() {
    this.subscription = this.todo.changedOnServer.listen((change) {
      this.redraw();
    });
  }

  // ...

}

```

Will receive props

Will receive props life-cycle method is `willReceiveProps`. It is called every time, when component will receive new **props**, except first time, when these **props** are passed to constructor.

This is place, where old props and new props can be compared, so this is right place to make changes based on difference in old and new props.

Example of `willReceiveProps` in our `MyTodoComponent` should compare `todo` of old and new props and there are not equal, it can update change listener.

```
class MyTodoComponent extends Component {
  Todo todo;
  StreamSubscription subscription;

  // ...

  willReceiveProps(dynamic newProps) {
    if (this.todo != newProps.todo) {
      this.subscription.cancel();
      this.subscription = newProps.todo.changedOnServer.listen((change) {
        this.redraw();
      });
    }
  }

  // ...
}
```

Should update

Should update is partly lifecycle, partly not. It is a question, if component should update on this props-change.

This "life-cycle" is implemented by method `shouldUpdate`. This method is used mainly for speed up performance. By default it returns true, so if it is not implemented in custom component, it will update always.

In basic scenario this method recognize, if it will be rendered differently with new props. If not, it return false, else it return true.

Example in `MyTodoComponent` should look like this:

```
class MyTodoComponent extends Component {
  Todo todo;
  StreamSubscription subscription;

  // ...
}
```

```

    shouldUpdate (newProps, oldProps) {
      if (newProps.todo == oldProps.todo) {
        return false;
      }
      return true;
    }

    // ...

  }

```

Render

Render is the main part of the Component.

It is implemented by method `render`, which have no attributes. It should return array of component descriptions which should be considered as *"this is how this component should look like"*.

For example, in our `MyTodoComponent` render will return `<div>` which contains title and description of `todo`.

```

class MyTodoComponent extends Component {
  Todo todo;
  StreamSubscription subscription;

  // ...

  render () {
    return div ({ "class": "todo"}, [
      h2 ({}, todo.title),
      p ({}, todo.description)
    ]);
  }

  // ...

}

```

Did update

When life-cycle method `didUpdate`, by which is implemented this life-cycle event, is triggered, component, and programmer, can be sure, that component is mounted and there exist elements in DOM for each `DomComponent` descendant.

Will unmount

This event is implemented by method `willUnmount`, which contain no arguments.

It is called right before it is unmounted from dom.

This is the correct place to stop all timers and listeners.

```
class MyTodoComponent extends Component {
  Todo todo;
  StreamSubscription subscription;

  // ...

  willUnmount () {
    subscription.cancel();
  }

  // ...
}
```

4.2.5 Events

4.2.6 Rendering

Server side

In browser

4.2.7 Injecting

4.3 API

Documentation of offered API of our library.

4.3.1 Component

4.3.2 Browser specific API

4.3.3 Server specific API

Chapter 5

Performance

Chapter 6

Benchmarks

Conclusion

Here will be conclusion of wholw thesis

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