Bachelor Thesis Draft

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1 Abstract

Automated Program Minimization With Preserving of Runtime Errors Debugging of large programs is a difficult and time consuming task. Given a runtime error, the developer must first reproduce it. He then has to find the cause of the error and create a bugfix. This process can be made significantly more efficient by reducing the amount of code the developer has to look into. This paper introduces three different methodologies of automatically reducing a given program P into its minimal runnable subset P'. The automatically generated program P' also has to result in the same runtime error as P. The main focus of the reduction is on correctness when operating in a concrete application domain set by this study.

Implementations of introduced methodologies written using the LLVM compiler infrastructure are then compared and classified. Performance is measured based on the statement count of the newly generated program and the speed at which the minimal variant was generated. Moreover, the limits of the three different approaches are investigated with respect to the general application domain. The paper concludes with an overview of the most general and efficient methodology.

2 Introduction

Automation of routine tasks tied with software development has resulted in a tremendous increase in the productivity of software engineers. However, the task of debugging a program remains mostly manual chore. This is due to the difficulty of reliably encountering logic-based runtime errors in the code, a task that, to this day, requires the developer's attention and supervision.

Let program P contain a runtime error E that consistently occurs when P is run with arguments A. Since the error E is present at runtime and not compile-time, it can be assumed that syntax wise the code is mostly correct. Therefore, any syntax-based error can be ruled out. This, in turn, leaves us with a set of logical errors $\mathbf{E_L}$. Those include wrongly indexed arrays and calculations that lead to either the incorrect result or an altered control flow of the program. Let $E \in \mathbf{E_L}$. As the generality of errors in $\mathbf{E_L}$ appears too complicated to be solved

for all programming languages at once, it is necessary to break the problem down for each programming language. This article is concerned with the logical errors of C and C++. Although C is not a subset of C++, the logical errors made in C can be approached similarly to those in C++. Both languages share mostly comparable constructs. Finding the cause of a logical error in a concrete language requires knowing these constructs, their behavior, and their general handling.

To make finding the cause of an error a systematic approach, one might try removing unnecessary statements in the code, thus minimizing the program. Let P' be a minimal variant of P such that P' results in the same error E as P when run with the same arguments A. If done carefully and correctly, P' represents the smallest subset of P regarding code size, while preserving the cause of the error in that subset. Upon manual inspection, the developer is required to make less of an effort to find the cause in P' as opposed to P.

The minimization of a program can be achieved in numerous ways. In further sections, the article describes and compares three different approaches. The first is based on naive statement removal and its consequences during runtime. The second removes major chunks of the code while periodically testing the generated program's correctness. The third deploys a sequence of code altering techniques, namely slicing and delta debugging.