

# Developing Mobile Applications on Top of a Self-destruction System with Data Recovery

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## **Abstract**

Conventional mobile applications are built based on a client-server modal and require central servers for storing shared data and processing confidential information. If the central servers are accessed by an attacker, a curious administrator or a government, private information will be revealed because data is often stored on the central servers in the form of cleartext. This paper presents Grouper, a framework for developing mobile applications without trusted central servers. Grouper provides object synchronization among mobile devices. It also uses a secret sharing scheme to create several shares from a marshalled object and uploads these shares to multiple untrusted servers. These untrusted servers construct a self-destruction system. Uploaded shares will be deleted after a certain period of time. Mobile devices exchange messages via untrusted servers based on the Grouper Message Protocol. Grouper consists of a client framework and a Web service. We have implemented client framework for iOS, macOS, tvOS and watchOS in Objective-C. The Web service is implemented in Java and runs on multiple untrusted servers. We have implemented two applications using Grouper: an iOS application named Account Book, and a benchmark application named Test. We have evaluated the development efforts of applications using Grouper as well as the performance. Developing these applications demonstrates that Grouper requires little development effort to convert a standalone application to a data sharing application. Experimental results prove that the performance of Grouper is satisfactory for mobile applications that are used among a small group of people.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

People use mobile applications every day. When users use conventional mobile applications based on a client-server mode, users fully trust the central servers. In fact, they are often unaware of their existence and simply rely on the functionality to be provided. If the central servers are accessed by an attacker, a curious administrator or a government, private information will be revealed because data is often stored on the central servers in the form of cleartext. In addition, users may lose their data when service providers shut their servers down.

To address the problem of using central servers, the proposals including Vanish[1], SafeVanish[2], SeDas[3] and CouldSky[4] constructed a data self-destruction system as their storage. In these approaches, servers store encrypted data temporarily and delete it after a certain period of time.

These existing approaches have several problems. First, they do not support data recovery when some nodes are unable to obtain data from shared storage. Often, application developers have to deal with such cases on their own. Second, these approaches do not provide support for developing mobile applications.

To address these problems, we are going to develop such mobile applications on top of a self-destruction system with data recovery. Concretely, we are developing Grouper, a framework for developing mobile applications using such a self-destruction system. Grouper provides object synchronization among mobile devices. In Grouper, a sender node translates an updated object into shares using a secret sharing scheme and uploads these shares to untrusted servers. A receiver node downloads some of these shares and reconstructs the object. The untrusted servers construct a self-destruction system, and delete these shares after a period of time. Unlike existing approaches, Grouper supports data recovery when some nodes are unable to obtain shares from untrusted servers. When a receiver node is unable to obtain shares, the Grouper framework automatically asks the sender to upload the missing shares again. This ensures reliable data sharing among the devices of a group. In addition, data can be recovered even if untrusted servers shut down because all devices of a group have the complete data set of this group.

Grouper consists of a client framework and a Web service. We have implemented the client framework for iOS, macOS, tvOS and watchOS in Objective-C. The Web service is

implemented in Java and runs on multiple untrusted servers. We used the Sync[5] framework in Grouper to synchronize objects among mobile nodes. We have implemented two applications using Grouper: an iOS application named Account Book, and a benchmark application named Test. These implementations demonstrate that Grouper makes it easy to develop mobile applications with data synchronization. Experimental results prove that the performance of Grouper is satisfactory for mobile applications that are used among a small group of people.

The contributions of this paper are as follows. First, we provide support for data recovery when some nodes are unable to obtain data from untrusted servers. Grouper provides reliable data synchronization among nodes using a reliable multicast technique. Second, we make it easier to develop mobile applications. In fact, a developer can add data synchronization functions to stand alone applications with a few lines of code.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. We present related works in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, we describe the threat model and some assumption in our framework Grouper. Then, we describe the design of Grouper by introducing its layers, and the way to send or receive among devices using our Grouper Message protocol in Chapter 4. Next, we describe the three parts of implementation of Grouper: client framework, Web service and application detailedly in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, we give the evaluation of Grouper from developer efforts and performance. Finally, we conclude the paper and introduce the future works in Chapter 7.

## Chapter 2

# Related Work

In this chapter, we introduce the following related works. Most of them use data encryption that requires private key generation and distribution to protect user data, and do not support data recovery.

### 2.1 Self-destruction Systems

We introduce the following self-destruction systems which keep data on servers temporarily in this section.

#### 2.1.1 Vanish

Vanish[1] is a self-destruction system that uses Distributed Hash Tables(DHTs) as the back-end storage. Vanish encrypts a message with a new random key, threads the key to shares using a secret sharing scheme, stores these shares in a public DHT, and eliminates the key from the local storage. The key in Vanish is removed after a certain period of time, and the encrypted message becomes permanently unreadable. Vanish is implemented with OpenDHT[6] or VuzeDHT[7] which is controlled by a single maintainer. Thus, it is not very secure against some Sybil attacks[8, 9]. In addition, the surviving time of the key in Vanish cannot be controlled by the applications for the user.

#### 2.1.2 SafeVanish and SeDas

To address these issues in Vanish system, Zeng et al. proposed SafeVanish[2] and SeDas[3].

SafeVanish prevents "hopping attacks"[9], which is one kind of the Sybil attacks[8, 9] by extending the length range of key shares to increase the attack cost substantially, and do some improvement on the Shamir's secret sharing algorithm implemented in the Vanish system. The proposal of SafeVainish can only increase the cost of hoping attack, but cannot stop it.

Based on active storage framework like oasis[10], SeDas proposes a distributed object-based storage system with self-destructing data function. Concretely, it exploits active storage networks instead of P2P nodes to maintain a divided secret key. In SeDas, user can



specify the key survival time of distribution key and use the settings of expanded interface to export the life cycle of a key, allowing the user to control the subjective life-cycle of private data. The measurement and experimental security of SeDas analysis sheds insight into the practicability of its approach.

### 2.1.3 CloudSky

Although, SeDas allows user to control the survival time of the key, it still cannot handle the cases that require the access control over the encrypted data including user grant and revocation. By extending SeDas, Zeng's group proposed CloudSky[4], a controllable data self-destruction system for untrusted cloud storage. CloudSky uses Attribute Bases Encryption (ABE) to implement the access control over the encrypted data, and allows the data owner to have user grant and revocation capabilities. CloudSky deals with the untrusted cloud storage network in two ways including the data self-destruction and the use of Hash-based Message Authentication Code (HMAC) [11], which ensures the data integrity.

However, these systems are not suitable for developing information sharing applications. They are suitable for exchanging immutable messages, whereas our target applications need to modify objects repeatedly after other devices receive the object. Although CloudSky solves the problems regarding user controllability that exist in Vanish, offline devices cannot download messages after they have been removed from untrusted servers. In Grouper, offline devices can download such messages by using confirm and resend messages. A trusted authority is necessary in CloudSky to manage user profiles, whereas Grouper does not rely on any trusted authority.

## 2.2 Data Encryption Systems

We introduce the following data encryption systems in this section. Both them encrypted user data and save the encrypted data in servers or clients.

### 2.2.1 Mylar

Mylar[12] stores encrypted data on an untrusted server and decrypts this data only in the browsers of users. Application developers of Mylar use its API to encrypt regular (non-encrypted) Web applications. Mylar uses its browser extension to decrypt data on the client-side. For the contributions, Mylar supports keyword searching in Web applications by computing over encrypted data and JavaScript code verification from untrusted servers.

Mylar is suitable for platforms that enable client-side computation on data received from server. In addition, Mylar still requires a trusted identity provider (IDP). Compared to Mylar, which uses a single untrusted server, Grouper takes advantages of the data redundancy provided by the secret sharing scheme by using multiple untrusted servers and does not require any trusted IDP.

### 2.2.2 Sweets

Sweets[13] is a decentralized social networking service (SNS) application on Android devices that uses data synchronization with P2P connections among mobile devices. Sweets performs data synchronization not only between two online nodes directly but also via common friend nodes indirectly for offline nodes. This indirect synchronization uses ABE to provide access control. Consequently, Sweets provides data confidentiality and availability without permanently available centralized storage servers. Sweets applies OpenID Connect to provide decentralized user authentication and implements a self-issued OpenID provider that runs on users devices. Sweets implements indirect replication via a hybrid cryptographic mechanism that combines ABE and AES encryption schemes. Taking the advantage of ABE, protected data can be hosted and relayed by users who have no permission to access it. In addition, by combining ABE and AES, Sweets can void expensive and repetitive ABE operations.

Both Grouper and Sweets provide a way to develop mobile application without central servers. However, direct synchronization in Sweets can only be done when two devices are online at the same time. On the other hand, in Grouper, users can synchronize data from multiple untrusted servers, anytime.

### 2.2.3 DepSky

DepSky[14] is a system that keeps encrypted data in commercial storage services and performs application logic in other individual servers. It implements the concept of *Cloud-of-Clouds*. *Cloud-of-Clouds* is the core concept in DepSky. It represents that DepSky is a virtual storage, and its users invoke operations in several individual servers. Figure 2.1 shows the architecture of DepSky. When a client want to share data with an other client, it generates several shares and uploads these shares to the application logic servers (the yellow servers on the left side). Application logic servers saves shares into commercial storage services (the blue cloud on the right side) via the APIs provided by the storage provider. By using commercial storage services, DepSky improves the availability and confidentiality of the untrusted cloud systems.

However, commercial storage services may not supports temporary data storage like the self-destruction systems. In Grouper, untrusted servers undertake the responsibility of temporary data storage and message delivery. Mobile devices perform application logic.

### 2.2.4 SPORC

SPORC[15] is designed for developing group collaboration applications using untrusted cloud resources. In SPORC, a server observers only encrypted data and cannot deviate from correct execution without being detect. To maintain synchronization among clients, SPORC uses operational transformation (OT), which allows each client to apply local updates optimistically.

In SPORC, synchronization should be done among online nodes, while Grouper allows synchronization among offline nodes.

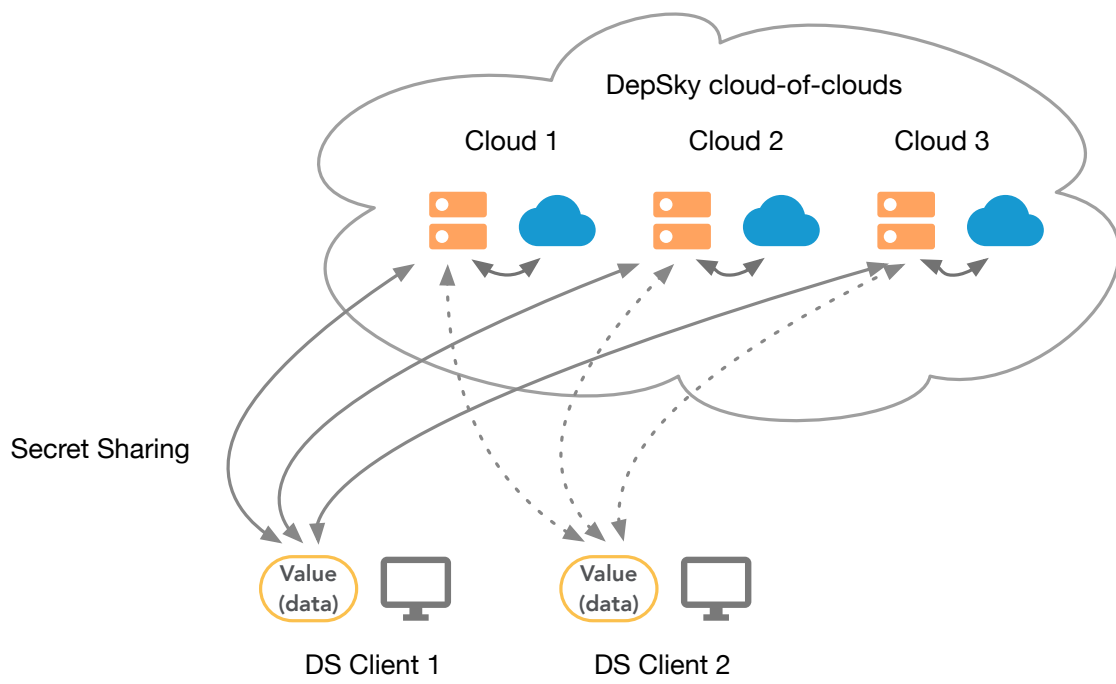


Figure 2.1: Architecture of DepSky.

## Chapter 3

# Threat Model

In this chapter, we introduce the assumptions and the threat model underlying the Grouper framework.

### 3.1 Target Application

We target mobile applications that are used among a small group of people. A group consists of a special member called the owner and other members. Each member has a mobile device. Only the group owner can invite other members in a face-to-face manner. In this group, each user create a new object and share it with other grouper members. If an other user synchronized the new object, he / she can edit the content of the object or delete the object. The modification or deletion by this user is able to synchronized to the devices of other group members.

Our target applications are suitable for those groups which are sensitive for their shared data. Those groups requires their shared data cannot be accessed by the server manager.

### 3.2 Assumptions

To implement our target mobile applications, there are following assumptions which is necessary in Grouper.

First, because we use servers, they are passive adversaries and can read all of the data but they do not actively attack. Servers host Web services and perform device authentication. Servers generate access keys for group members. When a device wants to get/put data from/to servers, the device sends a request with an access key. In this paper, we do not address other types of attacks such as user tracking and metadata collection by servers. For example, servers can track users with IP addresses, and Grouper cannot hide social graphs against such tracking.

Second, data transportation between a device and an untrusted server is secure. We can protect it using Transport Layer Security (TLS) or other encryption techniques. Grouper focuses on the privacy of the data storage on servers rather than on data transportation.

Third, in an application, all group members are not malicious and their devices connect

to each other securely at a face-to-face distance at the time of user invitation. For example, group members working in an office know one another and are not malicious. When the group owner invites new members, the owner authenticates group members in a face-to-face manner. Note that after user invitation, devices communicate through servers and no secure, direct communication path is required.

Last, servers are isolated from one another and managed by independent providers. We assume that providers of untrusted servers do not expose user data to other providers. For example, a group owner can leverage the servers of Amazon, Google, and Microsoft, which are not supposed to expose user data to other cloud providers.

# Chapter 4

## Design

This chapter describes the design of the Grouper framework.

### 4.1 Overview

Our goal is to support the development of mobile applications that do not rely on trusted central servers.

To achieve this goal, we are developing the Grouper framework. This framework provides the following functions:

- **Data Synchronization.** If an user updates or deletes an object in his device, the mirrors of this object in other devices are updated or deleted.
- **Group management.** A group owner can create a group and invite other members to his group.

For example, *Account Book* is an iOS application developed using Grouper. In this application, a leader of a small company can create a group and invite employees to join the group. Then, the employees can record the income and expenditure of their company. These income and expenditure records are represented as objects and shared among devices. Anyone can edit and delete existing records in his/her device.

Grouper uses untrusted servers to exchange messages among mobile devices. Untrusted servers construct a self-destruction system, and delete messages after a certain period of time. We refer to this as the Time to Live (TTL).

Grouper uses Shamir's secret sharing scheme to protect messages from the providers of untrusted servers. In this scheme, a member securely shares a secret with other members by generating  $n$  shares using a cryptographic function[16]. At least  $k$  or more shares can reconstruct the secret, but  $k - 1$  or fewer shares output nothing about the secret[17]. We describe this scheme as a function  $f(k, n)$ , where  $n$  is the number of shares, and  $k$  is the threshold to combine shares.

Grouper has the following advantages over conventional approaches using a self-destruction system. First, it is easy for a developer to recover from message losses in untrusted servers,

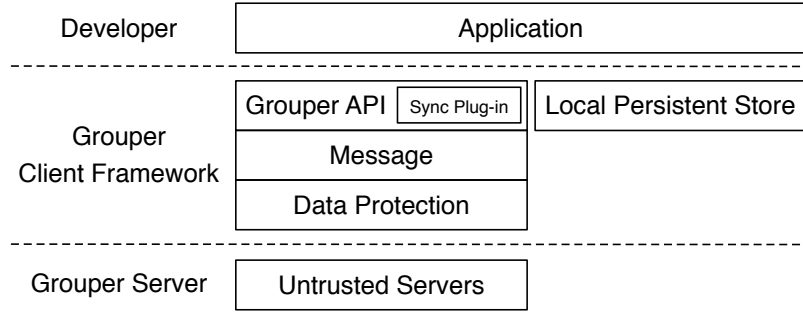


Figure 4.1: Architecture of Grouper.

as demonstrated in Section 4.4. Grouper performs retransmission when some mobile devices miss getting messages from untrusted servers. Developers of mobile applications do not have to specify the lifetimes of messages. Second, it is easy for a group owner to invite other members using a safe communication channel at a face-to-face distance, as discussed in Section 4.7.

## 4.2 Architecture

Figure 4.1 describes the architecture of the Grouper framework. Grouper consists of the following four layers and a plugin:

- **Grouper API.** A developer develops an application without data synchronization at first. He/she adds the synchronization function to his/her application by using the API.
- **Synchronization Plugin.** Grouper uses a third-party framework for data synchronization. This plugin marshalls an updated object in a local persistent store and the Grouper API layer passes the marshalled message to the lower message layer. When the Grouper API layer receives a message, this layer unmarshalls the message using the plugin, reconstructs the message, and puts the object included in the message into the persistent store.
- **Message.** This layer provides a messaging transportation service with multicasting capability among devices. The destination of a message is not only the node identifier (ID) of a single device, but also "\*", which means it is delivered to all the other nodes. This layer does not ensure message delivery to other devices.
- **Data Protection.** Grouper protects user data by a secret sharing scheme in this layer. This layer divides a message into several shares, and uploads these shares to untrusted servers. When this layer downloads shares from untrusted servers, it recovers the original message using the secret sharing scheme.
- **Untrusted servers.** When a mobile device uploads a share to an untrusted server, this server receives it and stores it to a database. When a mobile device downloads a share from an untrusted server, this server retrieves it from the database and sends it into the device. An untrusted server performs device authentication using device keys.

Method	Description
<b>setup</b> ( <i>appId</i> , <i>entities</i> , <i>dataStack</i> )	An application invokes this method to initialize Grouper with <i>appId</i> , <i>entities</i> and <i>dataStack</i> . The parameter <i>appId</i> is the unique ID of an application. The parameter <i>entities</i> is an array which contains the names of all entities used in this application. The developer should pay attention to the order of entity name in the array. If entity A is reference by an The parameter <i>datastack</i> is used by the synchronization plugin.
<i>sender.update</i> ( <i>object</i> )	An application invokes this method after creating a new object or modifying an existing object. Grouper performs updates asynchronously and sends an update message to other devices.
<i>sender.delete</i> ( <i>object</i> )	An application invokes this method when it wants to delete an existing object. Grouper deletes the object and removes it from the persistent store of a device automatically, after sending a delete message to other devices.
<i>receiver.receive</i> ( <i>callback</i> )	An application invokes this method to register the callback function that is called after Grouper processes the received messages and updates objects according to the messages. The application can use this callback function to update the user screen.
<i>sender.confirm</i> ()	An application needs to invoke this method periodically or occasionally to send a confirm message to other devices.

Table 4.1: Client API of Grouper.

The following sections describe the details of these layers from the top layer to the bottom layer.

### 4.3 Grouper API

The Grouper framework provides object synchronization among mobile devices through a simple client API. Table 4.1 shows the client API of Grouper that is used to develop mobile applications. An application initializes the framework by invoking the method *setup*(). When the application needs to update an object in all devices, it invokes the method *sender.update*(). When the application needs to delete an object in all devices, it invokes the method *sender.delete*(). When the application needs to receive update notifications, it



Method	Description
<i>marshall(o)</i>	Marshalls the object <i>o</i> and returns the marshalled byte array.
<i>updateRemote(b)</i>	Unmarshalls the byte array <i>b</i> to the object and puts the object into the persistent store.
<i>deleteRemote(b)</i>	Deletes the object of the object ID in the byte array <i>b</i> .

Table 4.2: API of the synchronization plugin.

invokes the method *receiver.receive()* with a callback function. This callback function is called when another node updates an object and its local mirror has been updated. The application can use this callback function to change the values that are shown on the user interface screen. The method *sender.confirm()* is used for realizing reliable messaging. We will describe reliable messaging in Section 3.4.

The Grouper API layer relies on the synchronization plugin. As described in Table 4.2, the synchronization plugin should provide the functions *marshall(o)*, *updateRemote(b)* and *deleteRemote(b)*. Grouper invokes these functions to obtain marshalled data from the persistent store, save unmarshalled data in the persistent store, and delete objects in the persistent store.

We have not implemented the synchronization plugin on our own, but we provide it as a pluggable module. This is because there are many such synchronization modules that provide various features. Additionally, application requirements may also vary. Each application developer should choose a suitable module based on a consistency model and other requirements.

Because we implement our client framework in Objective-C, we currently use the Sync framework[5] to implement the data synchronization plugin. The Sync framework marshalls objects into JavaScript Object Notation (JSON) strings and provides a consistency model where the newest version wins.

## 4.4 Reliable Message Delivery

Grouper implements reliable message delivery in the Grouper API layer over the self-destruction system. In this section, we introduce an existing technique to solve the reliable message delivery problem called reliable multicasting at first. Then we reference the reliable multicasting technique to design our own solution which is more suitable for Grouper.

### 4.4.1 Basic Reliable Multicasting

Figure 4.2 shows the basic reliable multicasting technique introduced in Distributed Systems[18]. In this reliable multicasting technique, each message has a sequence number for each sender. Each member keeps the newest sequence numbers for senders and detects missing messages. If a member notices a missing message from a sender, the member asks the sender to resend the update message. For example, consider that a sender sends update message No.3 to all other members using a multicast address. When a member receives update message

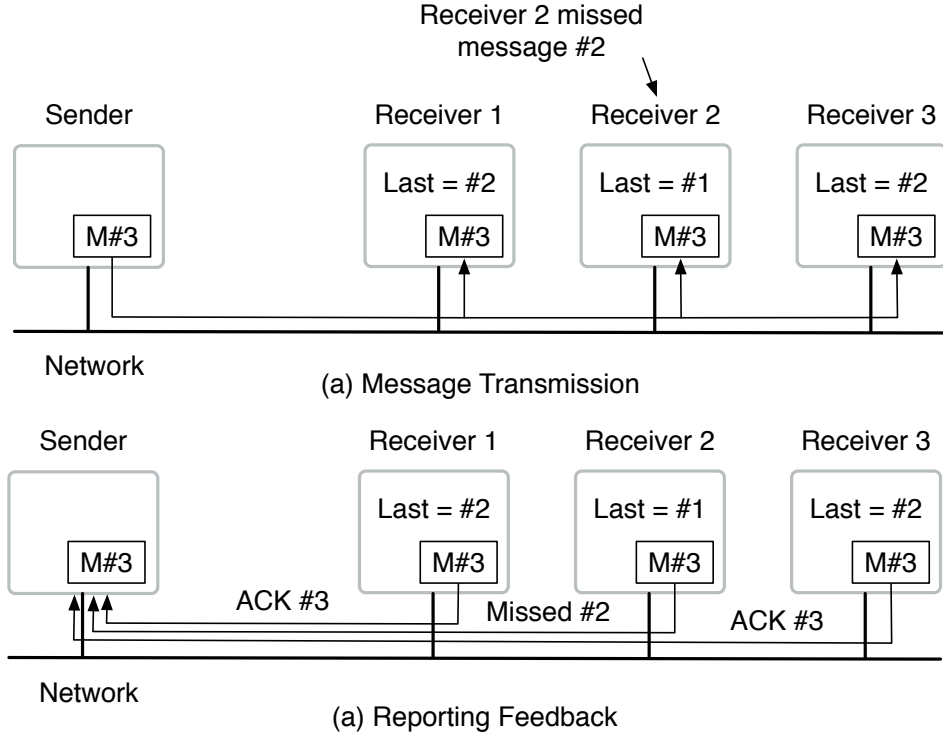


Figure 4.2: Basic reliable multicasting.

No.3, the member compares the sequence number 3 with the newest sequence number of the sender. If the newest sequence number of the sender is 1, this means the member missed update message No.2. The member asks the sender to resend update message No.2 using a control message. The sender will send update message No.2 to the member who request it using a unicast address.

#### 4.4.2 Data Recovery on Self-destruction System

This basic reliable multicasting technique works well for continuous media, such as video streaming in Internet communication. However, it does not work well if receivers go offline often or for a long time, as servers delete messages within a short time. In a word, the basic reliable multicasting technique is not suitable for data recovery on our self-destruction system.

To address this problem, we extend the basic reliable multicasting technique. We use a special type of message that includes active sequence numbers. Using these messages, a receiver can easily identify missing messages. We call these type of messages confirm messages.

Figure 4.3 shows that the sender is sending five update messages, from No.1 to No.5, to the receiver. The sender uploads two messages, No.1 and No.2, using a multicast address. The receiver downloads these two messages and goes offline. The servers delete these two

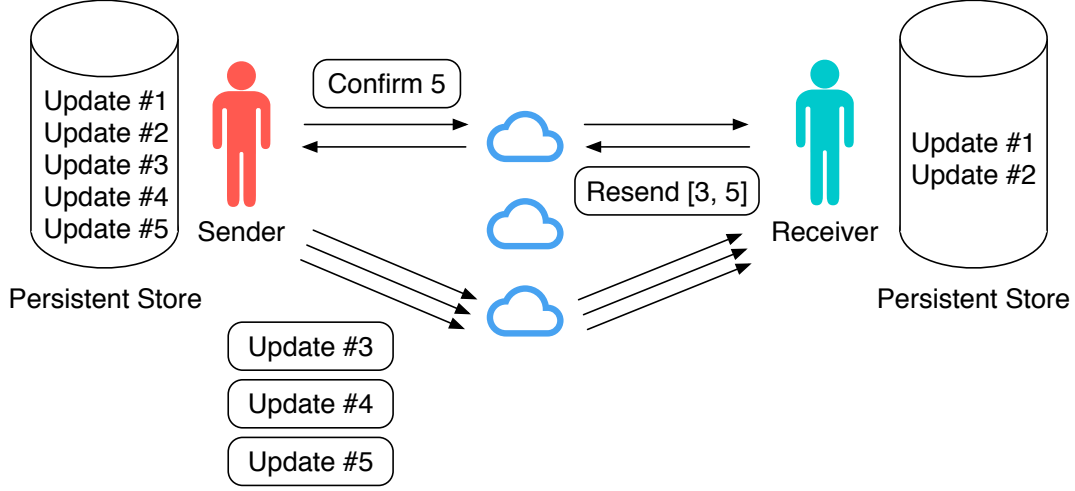


Figure 4.3: Implementing reliable messaging with continuous sequence numbers.

messages. The sender uploads the next three update messages, from No.3 to No.5, using a multicast address. Then, the servers delete these three messages again. The receiver comes online, but the receiver does not notice that these three messages are missing.

At this time, the sender sends a confirm message that includes the newest active sequence number, 5, as shown in Figure 4.3. The receiver receives this sequence number and compares it with the newest sequence number in the persistent store. In Figure 4.3, the receiver notices that update messages No.3, No.4, and No.5 are missing. The receiver asks the sender to resend update messages No.3, No.4, and No.5 using a resend message. The sender will again send update messages No.3, No. 4, and No.5 to the receiver using a unicast address.

This idea is inspired by the checkgroups message of Usenet[19]. In Usenet, the list of active newsgroups is maintained with two basic messages: newgroup and rmgroup. When a node receives a newgroup message, the node adds the newsgroup to the list. When a node receives a rmgroup message, the node removes the newsgroup from the list. However, these basic messages can be lost and the list can become obsolete. Checkgroups messages supplement these basic messages. A checkgroups message includes the list of all newsgroups in a newsgroup hierarchy. A checkgroups message is distributed periodically or after some time after the basic messages are distributed.

## 4.5 Data Protection

The data protection layer uses Shamir's secret sharing scheme  $f(k, n)$  as introduced in Section 4.1. In Grouper, we extend this scheme and design a new scheme  $f(k, n, s)$ . In our scheme, the parameters  $k$  and  $n$  are same as those in the scheme  $f(k, n)$ . The parameter  $s$  represents the minimum number of untrusted servers when a sender uploads shares, where  $k \leq s \leq n$ . Although a receiver is able to recover the original message from at least  $k$  shares, we should also consider the scenario in which the server crashes. When a sender

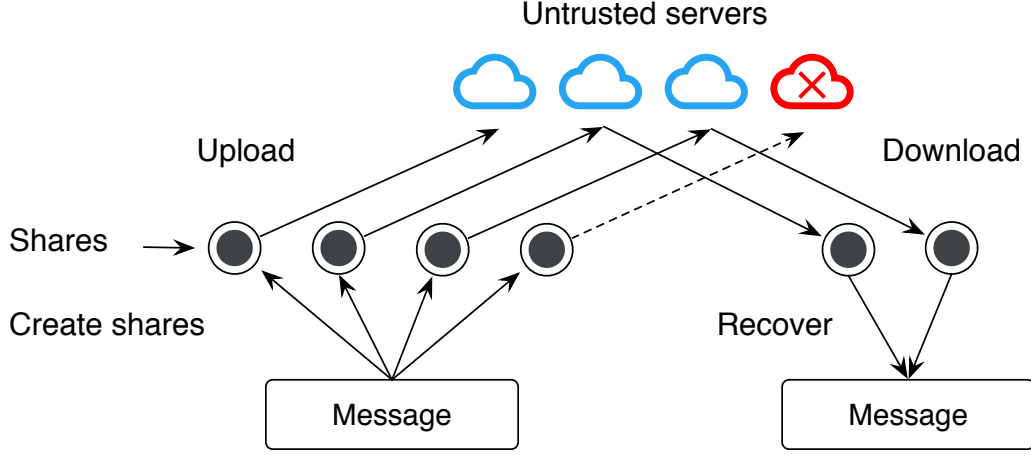


Figure 4.4: Message transportation using the extended secret sharing scheme  $f(2, 4, 3)$ .

has  $n$  shares, Grouper tries to upload these  $n$  shares to all  $n$  untrusted servers, at first. If the shares are uploaded to  $s$  or more untrusted servers, we consider that this upload to be successful. Otherwise, Grouper continues trying to upload these shares.

Figure 4.4 shows the message transportation from a device to another device using the extended secret sharing scheme  $f(2, 4, 3)$ . In this figure, the message layer in a sender device is sending a message to the message layer in a receiver device. At first, this layer calls the data protection layer and creates four shares, according to the secret sharing scheme. Next, this layer uploads those shares to four untrusted servers. In Figure 4.4, although only the three untrusted servers on the left receives shares successfully, we regard this upload as successful. Finally, the message layer in the receiver device downloads two shares from the four untrusted servers and recovers the message by calling the data protection layer.

We can choose the parameter  $s$  based on the following policies.

- **Sender first.** An application sets  $s$  close to  $k$ . A sender receives a successful result earlier. When some servers are not available, it is more likely that a receiver will lose a message.
- **Receiver first.** An application sets  $s$  close to  $n$ . A sender must continue attempting to obtain a successful result. When some servers are not available, a receiver will be more likely to receive a message.

Compared with data encryption methods, the secret sharing scheme has the following advantages. First, using a secret sharing scheme does not require key management, including generation and distribution. Second, the secret sharing scheme ensures the data availability when a number of untrusted servers are not accessible. For the  $f(k, n, s)$  scheme in Grouper, a sender can complete uploading when at least  $s$  untrusted servers are available, and a receiver can recover the object when at least  $k$  untrusted servers are available. Third, the secret sharing scheme reduces the risk of an attack because an attacker who can only access only  $k - 1$  or less untrusted servers cannot obtain any information.

Attribute	Explanation
type	Type of this message.
content	A marshalled object or sequence numbers.
sequence	Sequence number of the message.
class	Class name of an object.
objectId	ID of an object.
receiverId	Node identifier of the receiver.
senderId	Node identifier of the sender.
email	Email address of the sender.
name	Name of the sender.
sentTime	Time the message is sent.

Table 4.3: Attributes of the Grouper message.

## 4.6 Grouper Message Protocol

The Grouper API layer sends and receives messages using our own protocol, the Grouper Message Protocol. In this protocol, a message is a JSON string that contains a marshalled object and its attributes. Table 4.3 shows the attributes in a Grouper message. There are three important attributes:

- **Type.** This attribute refers to the message types. There are four types of messages: update messages, delete messages, confirm messages, and resend messages. An update message contains the marshalled objects of an application. A delete message contains the identifier of a deleted object. A confirm message contains the sequence numbers of all update and delete messages created in a device. A resend message contains the sequence numbers of missing messages. We call update messages and delete messages *normal messages*. Both confirm messages and resend messages contain control information about a reliable multicast. We call these messages *control messages*.
- **Content.** If the message is an update message, the content value contains the JSON string of a marshalled object. If the message is a delete message, the content value contains the objectId of an object. If the message is a confirm message, the content value contains the maximum sequence number of messages created in the device of the sender. If the message is a resend message, the content value contains the range of missing message sequence numbers.
- **Sequence.** This attribute refers to the sequence number of a message. When a sender sends a new normal message, the sender increments the sequence number and includes it in the new message. The sequence number of any control message is 0.

The receiverId attribute contains the addresses of destination devices. An address is either a list of device IDs or "\*", which signifies multicasting to all devices.

Applications send update, delete and confirm messages through the Grouper API, and send resend messages after receiving confirm messages automatically. When an application

invokes the method *grouper.sender.update()*, the Grouper API layer sends an update message that contains the marshalled object to all devices. When an application invokes the method *grouper.sender.delete()*, the Grouper API layer sends a delete message that contains the ID of the deleted object to all devices. When an application invokes the method *grouper.confirm()*, the Grouper API layer sends a confirm message to all devices. The confirm message includes the sequence numbers of objects that were recently created in the device.

The method, *grouper.confirm()*, is invoked in the following situations:

- **Periodically.** For example, an application sends a confirm message once during the TTL.
- **When the device becomes online.** Sometimes, a device is offline and cannot send a confirm message within the TTL. Grouper therefore sends a confirm message when the device becomes online.

Developers should send and receive Grouper messages in their applications by invoking the client API of Grouper. Algorithm 1 describes the handle process when the Grouper API layer receives a message. For an update or delete message, Grouper invokes the method *sync.updateRemote()* or *sync.deleteRemote()* of the synchronization plugin to update the persistent store. For a confirm message, the Grouper API layer copies the sequence numbers from the message content and removes the sequence numbers that exist in the device. Next, the Grouper API layer creates a resend message that contains the missing sequence numbers and sends it to the sender of the confirm message. For resend messages, the Grouper API layer retrieves the sequence numbers from the resend message, finds the corresponding normal messages, and sends them to the sender of the resend message.

## 4.7 Group Management

To manage a group, Grouper provides the following two functions: group creation and member invitation.

### 4.7.1 Group Creation

A user can create a group, and the creator becomes the owner of the group. Before creating a group, the owner prepares his/her own user information (including his email address and name), multiple untrusted servers, a group ID, and a group name. Next, the owner initializes the group on all untrusted servers by submitting his/her node identifier and the TTL to multiple untrusted servers. The node identifier, which represents his/her device, is generated by Grouper randomly when the application is launched for the first time. On each untrusted server, the Web service initializes this new group and returns a master key including the highest privilege to the owner. The owner can add other members to an untrusted server using the master key.

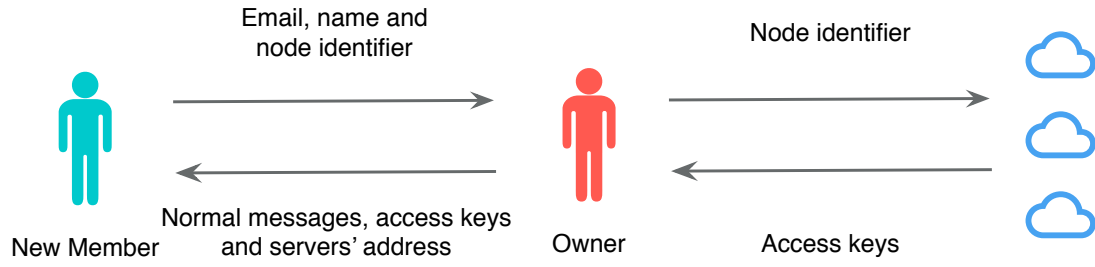


Figure 4.5: Member invitation.

#### 4.7.2 Member Invitation

After creating a group, the owner can invite new members to his/her group as shown in Figure 4.5. To join the group, a new member first prepares his/her user information at first. The owner invites the new member in a face-to-face manner, rather than using central servers. At this time, Grouper establishes a connection between the devices using a local safe communication channel like *Multipeer Connectivity*[20]. First, the new member sends his/her user information and a node identifier to the owner. The owner saves the user information and node identifier to his/her device. Second, the owner registers the new member to the multiple untrusted servers by submitting the node identifier of the new member. Third, the untrusted servers return access keys for the new member to the owner. Last, the owner sends the access keys, the addresses of the untrusted servers and the list of existing members to the new member. After receiving them, the new member can access the untrusted servers with the keys.

---

**Algorithm 1** Message handling algorithm

---

```
1: procedure ONMESSAGERECEIVED(msg, sender)
  ▷ Check duplicate message.
2:   historyMsgs  $\leftarrow$  getMsgsBySender(msg.sender)
3:   if msg  $\in$  historyMsgs then
4:     return
5:   end if
6:   lastMsg  $\leftarrow$  historyMsgs.last()
7:   historyMsgs.add(msg)
  ▷ Basic reliable multicast.
8:   if msg.seq  $\neq$  0 && lastMsg.seq + 1  $\neq$  msg.seq then
9:     resendMsg  $\leftarrow$  createResendMsg(lastMsg.seq +
10:      1, msg.seq)
      ▷ Create a resend message with the minimum and
11:      maximum sequence number.
12:     sendMsg(resendMsg, sender)
13:   end if
  ▷ Handle the message by its type.
14:   if msg.type = "update" then
15:     sync.updateRemote(msg)
16:   else if msg.type = "delete" then
17:     sync.deleteRemote(msg)
18:   else if msg.type = "confirm" then
19:     maxSeq = getMaxSeqFrom(msg.content)
20:     resendMsg  $\leftarrow$  createResendMsg(lastMsg.seq +
21:      1, maxSeq)
22:     if resendMsg  $\neq$  null then
23:       sendMsg(resendMsg, sender)
24:     end if
25:   else if msg.type = "resend" then
26:     seqs  $\leftarrow$  getSeqs(msg.content)
27:     for seq  $\in$  seqs do
28:       missingMsg  $\leftarrow$  getMsg(seq)
29:       sendMsg(missingMsg, sender)
30:     end for
31:   end if
32: end procedure
```

---



## Chapter 5

# Implementation

Grouper consists of a client framework for developing mobile applications and a Web service running on multiple untrusted servers. We describe the implementation of the implementation of the Web service in Section 5.1, the client framework in Section 5.2, and the demo applications in Section 5.3.

### 5.1 Web Service

We have chosen to implement our own Web service rather than using commercial general cloud storage services like Amazon Simple Storage Service (S3), Google Cloud Storage, or Microsoft Azure Storage for the following reasons:

- The Web service must support on the Grouper Message protocol.
- The Web service must delete shares after a prescribed time.

#### 5.1.1 Dependencies of Web Service

Our Web service provides a RESTful API to clients. It runs on a Tomcat server[21] that is an open-source implementation of the Java Servlet, JavaServer Pages, Java Expression Language, and Java WebSocket technologies. Our Web service use the MySQL[22] database as the backend storage. We use the following frameworks in Java Enterprise Edition (Java EE) to implement our Web Service.

- **Spring**[23] provides a comprehensive programming and configuration model for modern Java-based enterprise applications. Grouper uses it for dependency injection and manage the containers in the Web project.
- **Spring MVC**[23], an original web framework built on the Servlet API and included in the Spring Framework. Spring MVC framework relies on the Spring framework. Grouper uses it to create our RESTful API.
- **Hibernate**[24], an open-source Java ORM framework. Hibernate provides generalized and automated solutions to common tasks associated with object life cycles and object

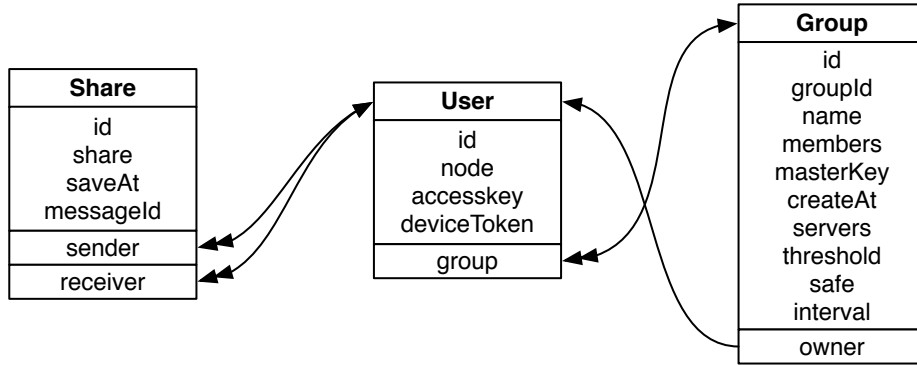


Figure 5.1: Entities' relationship in the Web service of Grouper.

graph management, including persistence. Grouper uses it to save and operate objects in the Web service.

By using these frameworks, we divide our Web service into the following four layers from the bottom to the top.

- **Domain Layer.** This layer is a collection of all entity objects. The major scope of this layer is to create a standardized and federated set of objects, that could be potentially reused within different projects.
- **Data Access Object (DAO) layer.** This layer is a collection of objects that provide abstract interface and implementation to access the MySQL database. Each entity object corresponds to a DAO object.
- **Service Layer.** This layer is a collection of objects that provide abstract interface and implementation of business logic. This layer invokes the methods provided in the DAO layer.
- **Controller Layer.** The objects in this layer build the RESTful API for client framework. This layer is responsible for user authentication by the access key and invokes the methods provide in the service layer.

### 5.1.2 Entity Design

Our Web service includes three kinds of entities: the *Group*, *User*, and *Share* entities. Figure 5.1 shows the relationship among these entities. Table 5.1 shows the attributes of these entities.

The Share entity saves the share content generate by a secret sharing scheme uploaded from the devices of group members. To recover a message from multiple shares saved in multiple untrusted servers, the we should save the message ID in the Share entity. When a device downloads several shares from servers, Grouper tries to group these shares by the message ID and recover a message using the shares with the same message ID. The sender attributes references an User entity, and indicates the uploading device. The receiver attributes references an User entity, and indicates those devices with the privilege to download

Entity	Attribute	Description
Share	id	Physical ID of the Share entity.
	share	Share content uploaded from devices.
	saveAt	Time to save this share.
	messageId	Message ID of the message to generate this share.
	sender	User entity of the sender for this share.
	receiver	User entity of the receiver for this share.
User	id	Physical ID of the User entity.
	node	The device's unique node identifier of this user.
	accessKey	Access key to upload and download share of this user.
	deviceToken	Device token for sending a remote notification.
	group	Group of this user.
Group	id	Physical ID of Group entity.
	groupId	Unique group identifier created by the group owner.
	name	Group name created by the group owner.
	members	Number of group members.
	masterKey	Master key for the group owner.
	createAt	Time to create this group entity.
	servers	Number of servers, the parameter $n$ in the $f(k, n, s)$ scheme.
	threshold	Threshold, the parameter $k$ in the $f(k, n, s)$ scheme.
	safe	The parameter $s$ in the $f(k, n, s)$ scheme.
	TTL	Time to Live for the shares of this group.
	owner	User entity of the group owner.

Table 5.1: Attributes of entities in the Web service of Grouper

the share. If the sender hopes all devices in the group can receive the share, Grouper sets the receiver to *null*.

The User entity saves the information of an user's device. The unique node identifier generated in the device by the UUID scheme can distinguish the users' devices. Our un-trusted server generates an access key for the user when the group owner register him / her in this server. To send a remote notification to the user, he / she should provide a device token from the notification pushing server. The group attribute references a Group entity, and indicates which group the user belongs to.

The Group entity save the information of a group. The group owner creates a unique group identifier which is not existed in the server, and a group name to create a group. The number of group members is one when the owner creates the group. When the grouper invites a new member to the group, the number of group members plus one. When the group is created, the server generates a master key and returns to the group owner. The group owner can edit the attributes of the Group entity using this master key. In addition, all parameters in the extended secret sharing scheme and the TTL should be submitted by the group owner. The owner attribute references an User entity, and indicates the group owner.

### 5.1.3 RESTful API

The Web service of Grouper provides the following RESTful API for the client framework.

- **group/register** (POST)
  - ◊ Register a new group in an untrusted server.
  - ◊ Parameters: group ID and group name.
  - ◊ Return: master key for the group owner.
- **group/info** (GET)
  - ◊ Get information of a group.
  - ◊ Header: master key of this group or access key of the group member.
  - ◊ Return: all attributes of a Group entity.
- **group/init** (POST)
  - ◊ Initialize a group by submitting the parameters in the extended secret sharing scheme  $f(k, n, s)$  and the TTL.
  - ◊ Header: master key of this group.
  - ◊ Parameters:  $k$ ,  $n$ ,  $s$  and TTL.
  - ◊ Return: success flag.
- **user/add** (POST)
  - ◊ Add a new user in the untrusted server by the group owner.
  - ◊ Header: master key of this group.
  - ◊ Parameters: node identifier and the flag to indicate that this user is the owner or the common member.
  - ◊ Return: access key for this new user.
- **user/state** (GET)
  - ◊ Check server state.
  - ◊ Header: access key of the group member.
  - ◊ Return: server state.
- **user/deviceToken** (POST)
  - ◊ Update the device token of the device by a group member.
  - ◊ Header: access key of the group member.
  - ◊ Parameters: access token from the remote notification pushing server.
  - ◊ Return: success flag.
- **user/notify** (POST)
  - ◊ Send a remote notification to a group member.
  - ◊ Header: access key of the sender.

- ◇ Parameters: content of the remote notification, the node identifier of the notification receiver and the notification category.
  - ◇ Return: success flag.
- **transfer/put** (POST)
  - ◇ Upload a share to an untrusted server.
  - ◇ Header: access key of the group member.
  - ◇ Parameters: JSON array of which contains the shares, receivers and the message IDs.
  - ◇ Return: the number of shares which are saved in the server successfully.
- **transfer/list** (GET)
  - ◇ Get the list of share IDs for a group member.
  - ◇ Header: access key of the group member.
  - ◇ Return: share IDs that this group member has privilege to download.
- **transfer/get** (GET)
  - ◇ Get the content of shares by the list of share IDs.
  - ◇ Header: access key of the group member..
  - ◇ Parameters: array of share IDs.
  - ◇ Return: content of shares.
- **transfer/confirm** (POST)
  - ◇ Confirm whether the shares are existed in an untrusted server.
  - ◇ Header: access key of the notification sender.
  - ◇ Parameters: array of message IDs.
  - ◇ Return: array of message IDs which are not existed in this untrusted server.

All of these RESTful APIs authenticate the common group member or the group owner by submitting an access key or a master key in the request header.

## 5.2 Client Framework

This section describes how we implement the client framework. Grouper’s client framework is written in Objective-C, and its core layer supports developing applications on iOS, macOS, watchOS and tvOS. Grouper supports the iOS GUI for group management, so that developers need not to implement it on the iOS platform.

In this section, we introduce the dependences of client framework in Subsection 5.2.1. We use singleton pattern to implement the manager classes in the client framework, to avoid multiple instances of a manager class. These manager classes are listed from Subsection

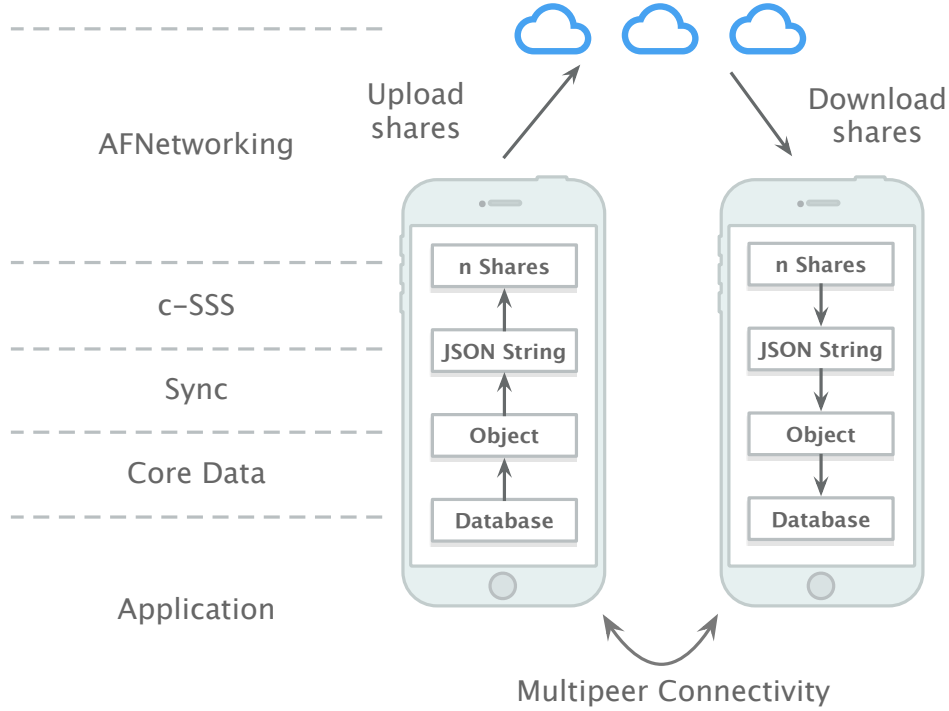


Figure 5.2: Frameworks in client framework of Grouper.

### 5.2.1 Dependencies of Client Framework

It makes use of the following frameworks in Figure 5.2. The main functions of this frameworks are shown as following.

- **Multipeer Connectivity**[20], an official Peer-to-Peer communication framework provided by Apple. Grouper uses it to transfer data between two devices in a face-to-face manner using a wireless LAN or Bluetooth network. With Multipeer Connectivity, a private connection can be established between two devices without Internet.
- **Core Data**[25], an official Object-Relational Mapping (ORM) framework provided by Apple. Core Data provides generalized and automated solutions to common tasks associated with object life cycles and object graph management, including persistence. Grouper uses it to manage model layer objects.
- **Sync**[5], a lightweight Swift framework for data synchronization using Core Data. Sync uses the JSON string to synchronize managed objects of Core Data among devices. Sync provides a instance method *export()* for the managed object to convert the it into a JSON string and an asynchronous method *sync(json, objectName, callback)* for data stack to synchronize the JSON string into Core Data. Grouper currently uses it in the synchronization plugin.
- **c-SSS**[26], an implementation in the original C code of the secret sharing scheme. It provide two main functions for generate shares and reconstructing them. The function

```

1 // Send an update message for a sync entity.
2 - (void)update:(NSManagedObject *)entity;
3
4 // Delete a sync entity and send a delete message.
5 - (void)delete:(NSManagedObject *)entity;
6
7 // Send confirm message;
8 - (void)confirm;
9
10 // Send resend message with a range to receiver.
11 - (void)resendWith:(int)min and:(int)max to:(NSString *)receiver;
12
13 // Send unsent messages.
14 - (void)unsent;
15
16 // Send existed messages.
17 - (void)sendExistedMessages:(NSArray *)messages;

```

Figure 5.3: Instance methods of *SenderManager*.

*generate\_share\_strings(char\*secret, int n, int k)* can generate  $n$  shares from the string *secret* with the threshold  $k$ . The function *extract\_secret\_from\_share\_strings(constchar \* shares)* can recover the string after accessing to more than  $k$  shares.

- **AFNetworking**[27], a networking library in the Objective-C language. Grouper uses it to invoke the RESTful API provided by our several Web services running on multiple untrusted servers.

### 5.2.2 Sender Manager

The class *SenderManager* provides the methods to create and send the Grouper message as shown in Figure 5.3.

In our persistent store, Core Data[25], the entities created by the application developers should synchronized to other devices. We call an entity in Core Data which is needed to synchronize to other devices *sync entity*.

The method *-(void)update* : creates an update messages with a JSON string generates from a sync entity. Then, invokes an instance method *-(void)sendMessages* : to generate several shares from the normal messages and send the shares to multiple untrusted servers.

The method *-(void)delete* : deletes a sync entity, creates a delete message with a JSON string which contains the object ID of this entity, and invokes the method *-(void)sendMessages* :, as same as the method *-(void)update* : .

The method *-(void)confirm* finds the maximum sequence number of normal messages in the local persistent store, creates a confirm message with a JSON string which contains the maximum sequence number, and invokes the method *-(void)sendMessages* :.

The method *-(void)resendWith : and : to :* is used for sending a resend messages after receiving a confirm message. It creates a resend message with a JSON string which contains the range of sequence number ( the minimum and maximum sequence number), and invokes the method *-(void)sendMessages* :.

Due to some network reasons, a device may send messages to untrusted servers using the

method  $-(void)sendMessage$  : unsuccessfully. In these situations, the Grouper framework invokes the method  $-(void)unsent$  to send the messages which are sent unsuccessfully. The method  $-(void)unsent$  finds those messages and sends them to untrusted servers again by invoking the method  $-(void)sendMessage$  :.

The method  $-(void)sendExistedMessages$  : is used for resending normal messages after receiving a resend message. It puts the normal message to a mutable array at first. Before sending the normal messages, it confirms with the multiple untrusted servers at first. If some of them have not been deleted in servers, those messages will be deleted from the mutable array. At last, it sends the messages in the mutable array to servers by invoking the method  $-(void)sendMessage$  :.

The methods introduced above use a same important method  $-(void)sendMessage$  :, to generate shares and send to servers. This method transfers the Grouper messages to a JSON strings at first. Then, it invokes the function  $generate\_share\_strings(char * secret, int n, int k)$  in c-SSS[26] to generate shares for each JSON string. The shares are grouped by the address of the multiple untrusted server. Next, it tries to upload these shares to the servers using the RESTful API **transfer/put**. If the number of servers which are accessed successfully is more than  $s$  in the extended secret sharing scheme  $f(k, n, s)$ , the Grouper framework regard this uploading successful. Otherwise, the object IDs of these Grouper messages will be put into a queue called *unsentMessageIds*. Grouper tries to send the Grouper messages recorded in *unsentMessageIds*, in the setup method, so that these messages can be sent with application launching. At last, if the share uploading is successful, this method send a remote notification the messages' receiver.

Note that there may be too many messages to be sent at the same. To improve the stability of the share uploading, the method  $-(void)sendMessage$  : divide the messages to several parts. For example, if there are 550 messages to be sent at the same, this method tries to send 100 messages everytime.

### 5.2.3 Receiver Manager

The class *ReceiverManager* provides a instance method  $-(void)receiveWithCompletion$  : to receive shares, recover messages and synchronize the content in the messages into the local persistent store.

This method does not download all shares from the multiple untrusted servers directly. When the application invokes this method, it gets the array of share IDs from the servers using the RESTful API **transfer/list** at first. Because Grouper saved the old share IDs in the local persistent store before, this method compares the new share IDs from the servers with the old share IDs. Then, this method removes those share IDs existed, and get the content of shares by submitting the share IDs which are not existed using the RESTful API **transfer/get**. If the content of shares are received successfully, the share IDs will be saved into the local persistent store. Next, this method tries to group the shares by message ID and recover the shares with a same message ID to a Grouper message. At last, this method uses the Algorithm 1 to handle the Grouper messages. A callback block should be invoked after handling all messages successfully.



```

1 // Save global user email and name.
2 - (void)saveCurrentUserWithEmail:(NSString *)email name:(NSString *)name;
3
4 // Add a new untrusted server.
5 - (void)addNewServer:(NSString *)address
6     withGroupName:(NSString *)groupName
7     andGroupId:(NSString *)groupId
8     completion:(SucessMessageCompletion)completion;
9
10 // Initialize group.
11 - (void)initializeGroup:(int)threshold
12     safeServersCount:(int)safeCount
13     interval:(int)interval
14     withCompletion:(SucessMessageCompletion)completion;
15
16 // Setup mutipeer connectivity so that the device can be discovered by others.
17 - (void)setupMutipeerConnectivity;
18
19 // Open device browser.
20 - (void)openDeviceBroswerIn:(UIViewController *)controller;
21
22 // Send invite message to a peer.
23 - (void)sendInviteMessageTo:(MCPeerID *)peer;
24
25 // Send device token to untrusted servers
26 - (void)sendDeviceToken:(NSString *)token;

```

Figure 5.4: Instance methods of *GroupManager*.

## 5.2.4 GroupManager

The class *GroupManager* provides methods to create a new group, invite members to an existing group and send device token for remote notification to the untrusted servers. Figure 5.4 shows the main instance methods.

An application invokes the method `-(void)saveCurrentUserWithEmail : name :` when an user uses the application without creating or joining a group at first. It saves the name and email of a user into the local persistent store of a his / her device.

An application invokes the method `-(void)addNewServer : withGroupName : andGroupId : completion` when an user adds untrusted servers before creating a new group. It submits the group name and group ID to an new untrusted server. Then, this server generates a master key and returns to the device. At last, this method saves the group name, group ID, server address and master key in the local persistent store.

## 5.2.5 UI for Group Management

We provide UI for group management including group creation and member invitation for the iOS platform in *Grouper*.

## 5.2.6 Release and Installation

We use CocoaPods[28], a dependency manager for Swift and Objective-C Cocoa projects, to release the client framework of *Grouper*. With CocoaPods, the developer can add the

```

1 | grouper = [Grouper sharedInstance];
2 | UIStoryboard *storyboard = [UINavigationController storyboardWithName:@"Main" bundle:nil];
3 | [grouper setupWithAppId:@"accountbook"
4 | entities:[NSArray arrayWithObjects:@"Classification", @"Account", @"Shop", @"Photo",
   |         @"Template", @"Record", nil]
5 | dataStack:[self dataStack]
6 | mainStoryboard:storyboard];

```

Figure 5.5: Initialize Grouper in the Account Book application.

dependency of Grouper to his / her applications easily.

## 5.3 Application

Using the Grouper framework, we have developed the following applications.

- **Account Book.** An iOS application in Objective-C, that records the income and expenditure of a group.
- **Test.** A benchmark iOS application in Swift, that tests the performance of Grouper.

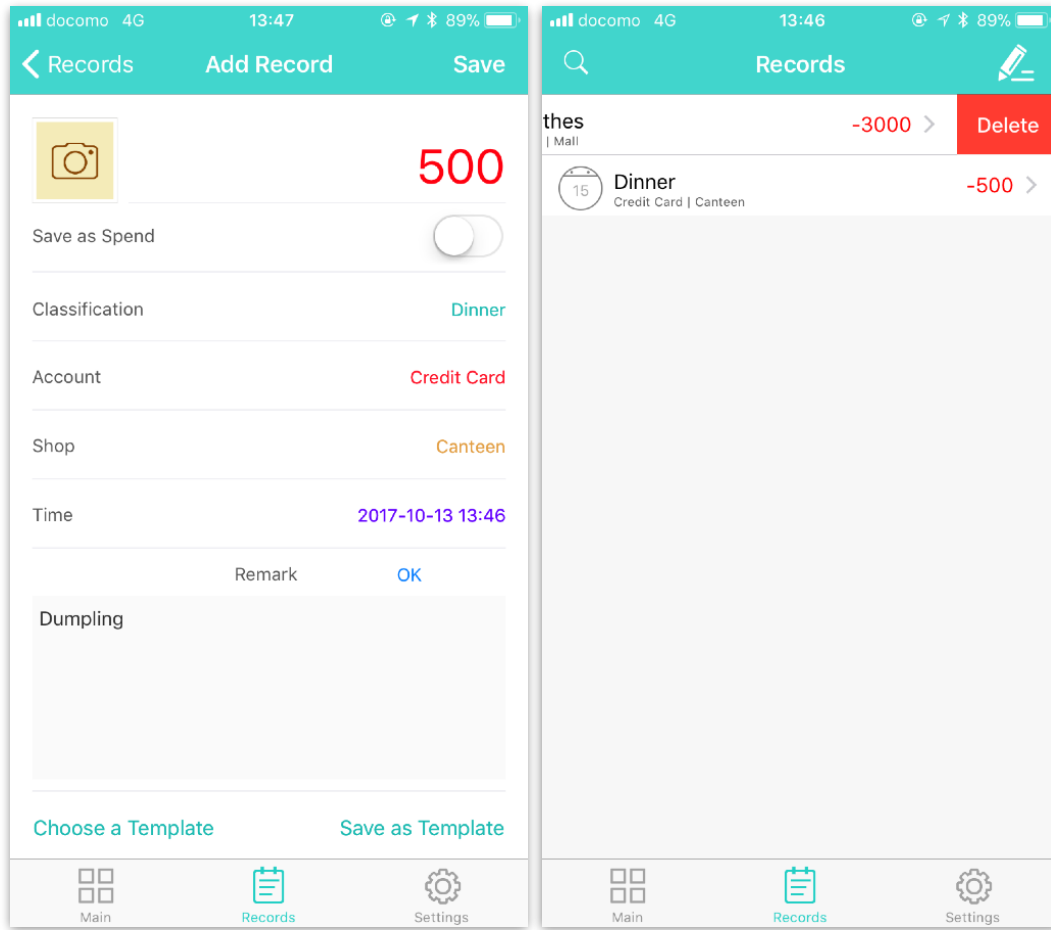
We will introduce how to extend a standalone application into a data sharing application using Grouper. In this section, we will show how we use Grouper to develop the demo application Account Book. We have introduced the basic functions of Account Book in Section 4.1. The standalone application of Account Book can record the income and expenditure of a small group by group members. Without data sharing, records by a group member cannot be shared with other members. To extend the stand alone application, we need follow the five steps as the following.

### 5.3.1 Initialization of Grouper

At first, we invoke the *grouper.setup()* method introduced in Table 4.1 to initialize Grouper in the method *-(BOOL)application : didFinishLaunchingWithOptions :* of the AppDelegate at first. Figure 5.5 shows how we initialize our Grouper framework in the Account Book application. We invoke the class method *Grouper.sharedInstance* to get the singleton of the Grouper framework in line 1. Because our framework supports the GUI if iOS, we can provide the storyboard instance to Grouper to use the GUI for creating a new group or joining an existing group provided by Grouper. For this reason, we get the storyboard instance in line 2. In line 3, we invoke the initialization method to initialize Grouper.

We have emphasized the order of the parameter entities in Table 4.1. The reference relationships among entities Classification, Account, Shop, Photo, Template and Record are as following.

- **Record:** *Classification*  $\leftarrow$  *Record*, *Account*  $\leftarrow$  *Record*, *Shop*  $\leftarrow$  *Record*, *Photo*  $\leftarrow$  *Record*
- **Template:** *Classification*  $\leftarrow$  *Template*, *Account*  $\leftarrow$  *Template*, *Shop*  $\leftarrow$  *Template*



(a) Add a record.

(b) Delete a record.

Figure 5.6: Add and delete a record in the Account Book demo application.

We can see the array in the code above following the principle introduced in Table 4.1. For each entity, if it is referenced by an other entity, it is in front of the entity. After initializing the Grouper framework in the Account Book application, we can invoke other methods in Table 4.1.

### 5.3.2 Object Creation and Updating

Figure 5.6(a) shows the screenshot of adding a record in Account Book. A user uses Account Book to add income and expenditure records that include the classifications, accounts, shops, times and remarks. When the user click the save button, Account Book saves the record into the local persistent store at first. The stand alone application contains the line 2 to line 8. To share this record with other group members, we invokes the *grouper.sender.update()* method of Grouper to share this record with other group members

```

1 // Save record to app local persistent store.
2 Record *record = [dao.recordDao saveWithMoney:money
3                      remark:_remarkTextView.text
4                      time:_selectedTime
5                      classification:_selectedClassification
6                      account:_selectedAccount
7                      shop:_selectedShop
8                      photo:photo];
9
10 // Invoke update method in sender to send an update message.
11 [grouper.sender update:record];

```

Figure 5.7: Create a new record and send an update message.

```

1 Record *record = [records objectAtIndex:indexPath.row];
2 if (editingStyle == UITableViewCellEditingStyleDelete) {
3     // Delete the record in the local persistent store and other devies.
4     [grouper.sender delete:record];
5     // Update user interface.
6     [records removeObjectAtIndex:indexPath.row];
7     [tableView deleteRowsAtIndexPaths:[NSArray arrayWithObject:indexPath]
8         withRowAnimation:YES];
9 }

```

Figure 5.8: Delete a record and send a delete message.

after saving in the local persistent store in line 11.

After invoking the method *grouper.sender.updated()*, this record will be divided to several shares and uploaded to multiple untrusted servers. This method is also suitable for record updating. Note that after invoking this method, data of the object has only been uploaded to multiple untrusted servers. Grouper does not ensure that other grouper members can synchronize this object successfully.

### 5.3.3 Object Deletion

Figure 5.6(b) shows the screenshot of deleting a record in Account Book. A user swipes a cell from right to left to delete a record from the record list. In the stand alone application, we only delete this record in the local persistent store when the user click the delete button. To delete this record on the devices of other group members, we invoke the *grouper.sender.delete(object)* method of Grouper in line 4.

By invoking the method *sender.delete()*, the record in the local persistent store will be deleted at first, so we need not to delete it on the local device before invoking this method like the method *sender.update()*.

### 5.3.4 Synchronization from Untrusted Servers

Grouper provide the method *grouper.receiver.receive()* to synchronize messages from untrusted servers. Developers can decide when and how to synchronize messages that contains the updated or deleted objects by themselves. For example, we provide the following two

```

1 [grouper.receiver receiveWithCompletion:^(int success, Processing *processing) {
2     long now = (long)[[NSDate date] timeIntervalSince1970];
3     if (now - grouper.group.defaults.controlMessageSendTime > grouper.group.defaults.
4         interval * 60) {
5         [grouper.sender confirm];
6         // Update the last time to send a confirm message.
7         grouper.group.defaults.controlMessageSendTime = now;
8     }
9 }];

```

Figure 5.9: Receive messages from untrusted server and send a confirm message.

ways in Account Book for users to synchronize messages.

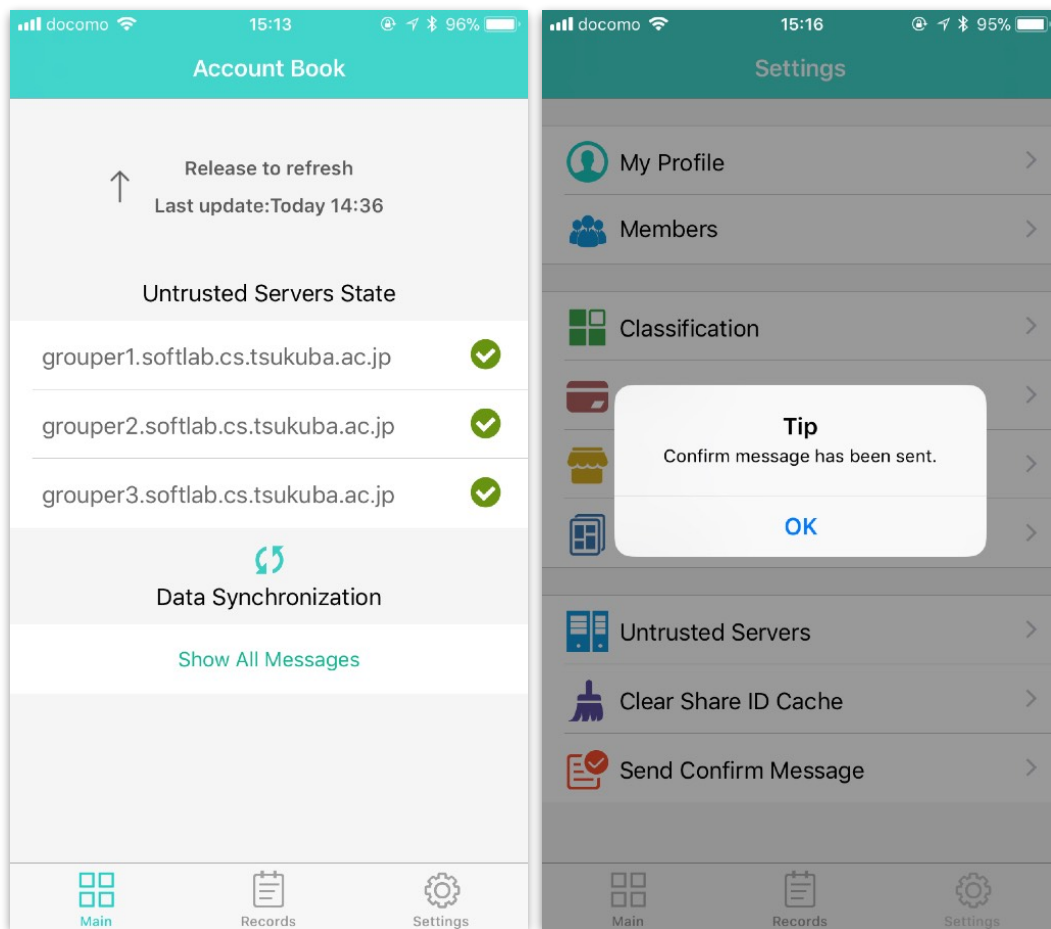
- **Manually.** User can pull down the view as shown in Figure 5.10(a) to synchronize messages.
- **Automatically when the application is launched.** Account Book tries to synchronize messages automatically when it is launched.

We invoke the method *grouper.receiver.receive()* to receive and synchronize messages, and update user interface or do other things in the callback block. The parameter *success* in the block indicates the state of synchronization. If the number of servers that a device can access is less than the threshold  $k$  in the extend secret sharing scheme  $f(k, n, s)$ , the synchronization will be failed and parameter *success* will be false.

### 5.3.5 Sending Confirm Message

We have introduced that method *grouper.confirm()* is invoked periodically or when the device becomes online in Section 4.6. In the Account Book application, we provide the following two ways to send a confirm message.

- **Manually.** User can send a confirm message manually in the Setting table view as shown in Figure 5.10(b).
- **After receiving messages.** As described from line 2 to line 7 in Figure ??, if Account Book receives messages from untrusted servers successfully, Account Book will check the last time to send the confirm message. If the time difference between now and the last time is longer than the TTL defined by user, Account Book will send a confirm message.



(a) Receive messages.

(b) Send a confirm message.

Figure 5.10: Receive messages and send a confirm message in the Account Book demo application.

## Chapter 6

# Evaluation

This chapter discusses the development efforts of applications using Grouper for developing mobile applications, as well as its performance.

### 6.1 Development Efforts

We view the development efforts through two factors: the usability of the client API and the code size, in terms of the lines of code (LoC) the developer has to add after using Grouper. As described in Table 4.1, Grouper provides a simple client APIs for developers. A developer can easily convert a standalone application to a data sharing application with our client APIs.

Section 5.3 demonstrates the implementation of two applications. Table 6.1 shows that developers can add data synchronization to these applications with Grouper by adding a small amount of code.

The Grouper framework provides the synchronization as a pluggable module. We use the Sync[5] framework. It provides a consistency model where currently, the newest object wins in the synchronization plugin. For example, if a record in the Account Book application has been modified by two users, the modification of one user will be lost. Account Book maintains the newest modification and put it into persistent store.

If an application requires another consistency model, the developer has to implement the related synchronization plugin. For example, if a developer wants to use eventual

Application	Account Book	Test
Platform	iOS	iOS
Lanaguage	Objective-C	Swift
Number of Entities	5	1
Standalone Application LoC	8076	621
Increased LoC	190	18

Table 6.1: Application lines of code.

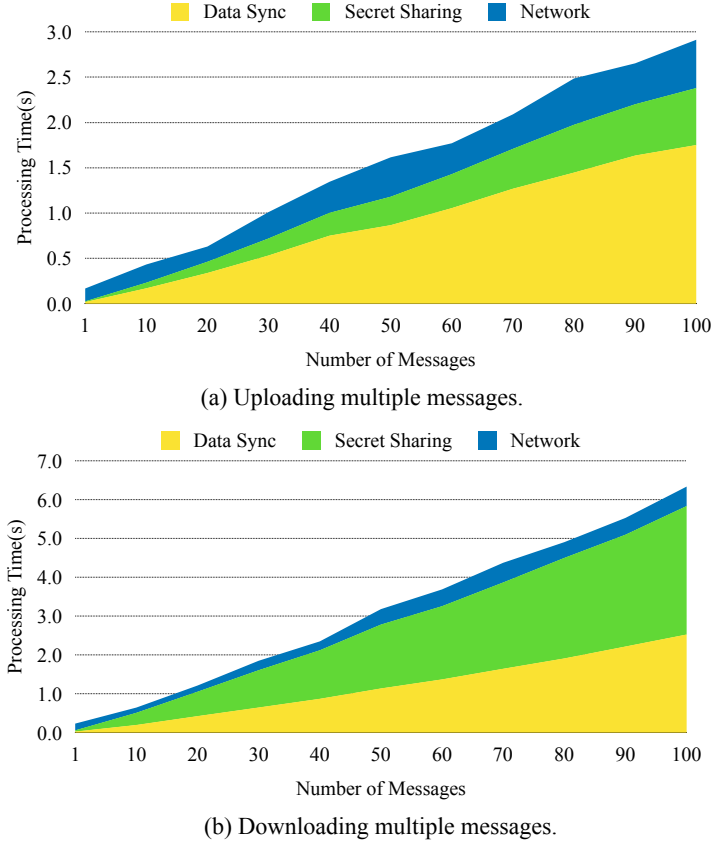


Figure 6.1: Processing time of uploading and downloading multiple messages.

consistency, he/she can choose Ensembles[29]. For this reason, if a developer wants to use another consistency model, he/she must add more lines of code to those in Table 6.1.

Note that the synchronization frameworks must provide the interfaces as described in Table 4.2. For this reason, Grouper does not support iOS synchronization frameworks for iCloud or Dropbox. For example, Grouper does not support Core Data with iCloud[25] and TICoreDataSync[30] at this point. These frameworks provide APIs for files whereas Grouper requires APIs for sending multicast messages. If a developer want to use them, he/she has to add an additional layer that provides the methods in Table 4.2.

## 6.2 Performance

In this section, we show that mobile applications using the Grouper framework provide satisfactory performance for small groups of people. Table 6.2 lists the hardware and software configuration of our experiment environment. In our performance experiments, we used the benchmark application *Test* to transfer data between the iPhone 4s and iPod touch 5th generation on a wireless LAN network (802.11n). We installed 30 Web services on three



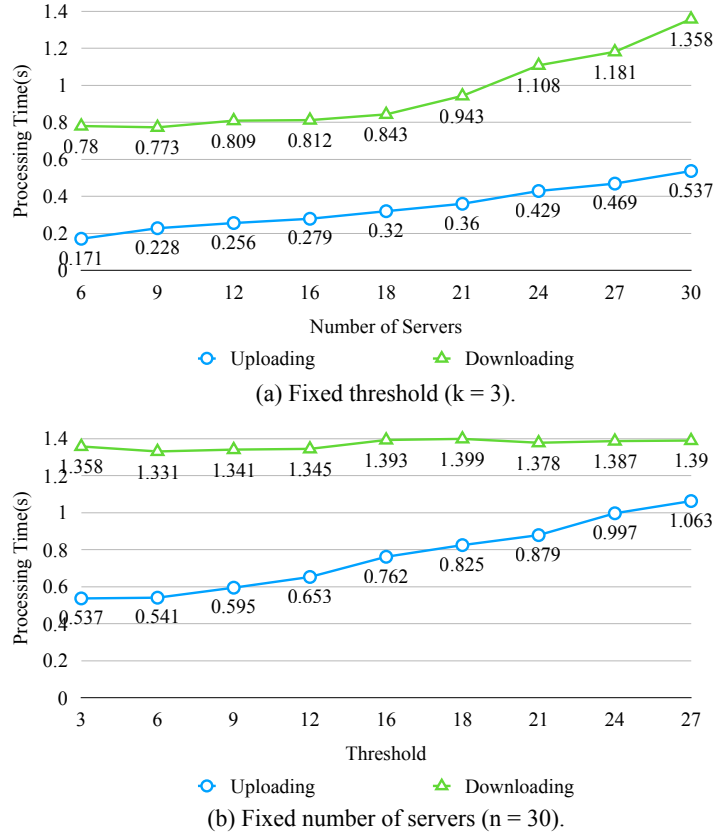


Figure 6.2: Processing time of uploading and downloading a single message with a constant  $k$  or  $n$ .

different servers. Each server ran a Tomcat server instance which hosted 10 Web services.

In our benchmark application, the size of an object was 323 bytes. The object corresponded to an income or expenditure record of the Account Book application. When the object was updated in a node, the Grouper API generated a normal message whose size was 656 bytes.

We performed an experiment to measure the processing time of object synchronization according to the number of updated objects. In this experiment, we set the secret sharing scheme to  $f(2, 3, 3)$ . We sent multiple messages from a device and received them in another device. Concretely, we sent multiple messages from the iPod to the iPhone for three times, and from the iPhone to the iPod for three times. Then, we obtained the average value of the measured processing times.

Figure 6.1 shows the processing time of uploading and downloading multiple messages. We divide the processing time into three parts: data synchronization, secret sharing, and networking. As the number of messages increased, the data synchronization and secret sharing time increased linearly. The networking time increased slowly and sometimes decreased.

Device	CPU	RAM	OS
iPod touch 5th	A5	512MB	iOS 9.3.5
iPhone 4s	A5	512MB	iOS 9.3.5
Server 1	Core i7-5820K	32GB	Ubuntu 14.04.5
Server 2	Core i7-5820K	32GB	Ubuntu 14.04.5
Server 3	Core i7-5820K	32GB	Ubuntu 14.04.5

Table 6.2: Devices in the performance experiment.

On the whole, the total processing time increased linearly. Compared with uploading messages, downloading messages required more processing time.

Note that object synchronization is done as a background task, asynchronously. When the Grouper framework is performing object synchronization, the user interface of a mobile application does not freeze. Therefore, a user is not aware of the activity of data synchronization.

We performed an experiment to measure the processing time of object synchronization according to the parameters of the secret sharing scheme. Specifically, we changed the parameter  $k$  and  $n$  of the secret sharing scheme and measured the processing time of uploading and downloading a single message.

Figure 6.2(a) shows the relationship between processing time and the number of servers  $n$ , where  $k = 3$ ,  $n = 6, 9, \dots, 30$  and  $s = n$ . As  $n$  increased, the processing time of uploading and downloading increased linearly. Figure 6.2(b) shows the relationship between processing time and the threshold  $k$ , where  $n = s = 30$  and  $k = 3, 6, 9, \dots, 27$ . As  $k$  increased, the processing time of uploading increased linearly and that of downloading did not change.

### 6.3 Discussion on the Number of Messages

In this section, we discuss the number of messages. We use the parameters in Table 6.3.

First, we consider the situation in which all devices are online ( $F = 0$ ). In this situation, the number of uploads for the device  $i$  are:

$$NU_i = U_i + C \quad (6.1)$$

Total number of uploads  $NU$  is the sum of  $NU_i$ .

$$NU = \sum_{i=1}^D NU_i = U + C \cdot D \quad (6.2)$$

A device does not download the messages that it has uploaded. To simplify these equations, we assume that the device downloads those messages as well. Thus, the number of downloads for device  $i$ ,  $ND_i$ , is equal to the total number of uploads  $NU$ .

$$ND_i = NU = U + C \cdot D \quad (6.3)$$

Parameter	Explanation
$D$	Number of devices.
$T$	Time to live (TTL).
$F$	Average number of offline devices during the TTL.
$L$	Average offline time.
$U_i$	Average number of updated/deleted messages in the device $i$ during the TTL.
$UR_i$	Average number of updated/deleted messages by resend messages in the device $i$ during the TTL.
$C$	Average number of confirm messages in the device $i$ during the TTL.
$U$	Total number of updated and deleted objects during the TTL.
$NU_i$	Number of uploads for device $i$ during the TTL.
$NU$	Total number of uploads during the TTL.
$ND_i$	Number of downloads for device $i$ during the TTL.
$ND$	Total number of downloads during the TTL.

Table 6.3: Parameters for discussing the number of messages.

The total number of downloads  $ND$  is the sum of  $ND_i$ .

$$ND = \sum_{i=1}^D ND_i = NU \cdot D = (U + C \cdot D) \cdot D \quad (6.4)$$

Since the current cloud servers scale well according to the number of devices and messages, we discuss  $NU_i$  and  $UD_i$  in this section. Equation 6.1 shows that for the device  $i$  during the TTL, the order of uploading is  $O(U)$ . Equation 6.3 shows that the order of downloading is  $O(U + D)$ . As the number of updated and deleted objects increases, the total numbers of uploads and downloads increases linearly. As the number of devices increases, the number of confirm messages increases linearly.

Next, we consider the situation in which there are offline devices in a group ( $F \neq 0$ ). In this situation, offline devices send resend messages when they become online and the devices that have the updated objects will resend the update messages to the offline devices. To simplify these equations, we assume that all offline devices receive the updated messages after they send resend messages. For the device  $i$ , the number of those update messages by the resend message,  $UR_i$ , is

$$UR_i = U_i \cdot \frac{L}{T} \cdot F \quad (6.5)$$

Compared to the situation that  $F = 0$ , in this situation, the number of uploads for the device  $i$  includes  $UR_i$ . Thus, we obtain  $NU_i$ ,  $NU$ ,  $ND_i$  and  $ND$  where  $F \neq 0$ .

$$NU_i = U_i + C + U_i \cdot \frac{L}{T} \cdot F = U_i \cdot (1 + \frac{L}{T} \cdot F) + C \quad (6.6)$$

$$NU = \sum_{i=1}^D NUi = U \cdot (1 + \frac{L}{T} \cdot F) + C \cdot D \quad (6.7)$$

$$NDi = NU = U \cdot (1 + \frac{L}{T} \cdot F) + C \cdot D \quad (6.8)$$

Equations 6.6 and 6.8 show that for the device  $i$  during the TTL, the order of uploading is  $O(U \cdot \frac{L}{T} \cdot F + C)$ , and the order of downloading is  $O(U \cdot \frac{L}{T} \cdot F + C \cdot D)$ . As the numbers of updated and deleted objects, the average number of offline devices during the TTL, and the average online time increase, the number of uploads and downloads for a single device increases linearly.

If we use a longer  $T$ , the numbers of messages,  $NUi$  and  $NDi$ , become smaller. However, this makes it easier for attackers to attack untrusted servers.

Finally, we consider the following two cases with concrete parameters. In the last two cases, there are ten users in a small group and everyone has a device. We set the TTL to one day and a hundred of normal messages are created by the ten users in the group during the TTL. In addition, a device send only one confirm message during the TTL.

- **Case 1:**  $D = 10$ ,  $T = 1$  day,  $Ui = 100$ ,  $C = 1$ ,  $F = 0$ .

In this case, there are no offline users in the group. Each device uploads 101 messages and downloads 1010 messages during the TTL.

- **Case 2:**  $D = 10$ ,  $T = 1$  day,  $L = 1$  day,  $Ui = 100$ ,  $C = 1$ ,  $F = 2$ .

In this case, there are two offline users in the group and the average offline time is one day. Each device uploads 301 messages and downloads 3010 messages during the TTL.

## 6.4 Scalability of Grouper

From section 6.1 to 6.3, we can conclude that Grouper is able to support a group with a hundred of members, and does not influence user experience of an application.

## Chapter 7

# Conclusion

This paper describes Grouper, a framework using a secret sharing scheme and multiple untrusted servers, to implement light-weight information sharing in mobile applications. In an application using Grouper, users can create a group and share objects safely via multiple untrusted servers. Grouper provides two main functions: reliable data synchronization and group management. Compared to conventional self-destruction systems, Grouper provides the reliable synchronization and allows mobile devices to synchronize data with other devices after untrusted servers remove the data. Compared to pure data encryption approaches, Grouper improves dependability by using multiple untrusted servers and an extended secret sharing scheme  $f(k, n, s)$ .

We have implemented Grouper's client framework in the Objective-C language and the Web service in the Java language. In addition, we have developed applications, *Account Book* and *Test*, using Grouper. The development of these applications demonstrate that Grouper requires little development effort to convert an standalone application into a data sharing application. We also evaluated the performance of Grouper using our benchmark application. The results shows that using Grouper in an application does not influence user experience.

In the future, we would like to support additional platforms, including Android. We also have a plan to use file-oriented APIs for exchanging messages among devices.

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