USIXML: A Language Supporting Multi-path Development of User Interfaces

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Abstract. USer Interface eXtensible Markup Language (USIXML) consists in a User Interface Description Language (UIDL) allowing designers to apply a multi-path development of user interfaces. In this development paradigm, a user interface can be specified and produced at and from different, and possibly multiple, levels of abstraction while maintaining the mappings between these levels if required. Thus, the development process can be initiated from any level of abstraction and proceed towards obtaining one or many final user interfaces for various contexts of use at other levels of abstraction. In this way, the model-to-model transformation, which is the cornerstone of Model-Driven Architecture (MDA), can be supported in multiple configurations, based on composition of three basic transformation types: abstraction, reification, and translation.

Keywords: context-sensitive user interface, development processes, modality independence, model-driven architecture, model-to-model transformation, multi-path development, rendering independence, user interface description language.

1 Introduction

Due to the rapid changes of today's organisations and their business, many information systems departments face the problem of quickly adapting the user interface (UI) of their interactive applications to these changes. These changes include, but are not limited to: task redefinition [4], task reallocation among workers [4], support of new computing platforms [10], migration from stationary platforms to mobile computing [17], evolution of users with more demands, increasing need for more usable UIs, transfer of tasks from one user to another one [7], redefinition of the organisation structure, adaptation to dynamic environments [16], changes in the language, redesign due to obsolescence [3], evolution of the domain model [1]. All these changes change to some extent the context of use, which is hereby referred to as

the complete environment where final users have to carry out their interactive tasks to fulfil the roles they are playing in their organisations.

To address the challenges posed by these changes, the development processes used in these organisations are not always considered appropriate, as they do not reflect the implication of any change throughout the complete development life cycle. As a matter of fact, organisations react to changes in very different ways in their UI development processes. For instance, one organisation starts by recovering existing input/output screens, by redrawing them and by completing the functional core when the new UI is validated by the customer (*bottom-up approach*). Another organisation prefers modifying the domain model (e.g., a UML class diagram [12]) and the task model [20] to be mapped further to screen design (*top-down approach*). A third one tends to apply in parallel all the required adaptations where they occur (*wide spreading approach*). A fourth one relies on an intermediate model and proceeds simultaneously to the task and domain models, and the final UI (*middle-out approach*) [15]. The UI development process has also been empirically observed as an ill-defined, incomplete, and incremental process [24] that is not well supported by rigid development methods and tools. Such methods and tools usually force developers to act in a way that remains peculiar to the method. The tool does not allow for more flexibility. For instance, SEGUIA [25] only supports a single fixed UI development path [11].

The variety of the approaches adopted in organisations and the rigidity of existing solutions provide ample motivations for a UI development paradigm that is flexible enough to accommodate multiple development paths and design situations while staying precise enough to manipulate information required for UI development. To overcome these shortcomings, the development paradigm of **multi-path UI development** is introduced that is characterised by the following principles:

- *Expressiveness of UI*: any UI is expressed depending on the context of use thanks to a suite of models [20] analysable, editable, and manipulable by a software [21].
- *Central storage of models*: each model is stored in a model repository where all UI models are expressed according to the same UI Description Language (UIDL).
- *Transformational approach*: each model stored in the model repository may be subject to one or many transformations supporting various development steps.
- *Multiple development path*: development steps can be combined together to form developments path that are compatible with the organisation's constraints, conventions, and context of use. For example, a series of transformations should be applied to progressively move from a task model to a dialog model, to recover a domain model from a presentation model, to derive a presentation model from both the task and domain models.
- *Flexible development approaches*: development approaches (e.g., top-down, bottom-up, wide spreading, and middle-out) are supported by flexibly following alternate development path and enabling designers to freely shift between these paths depending on the changes imposed by the organization [15].

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reports on some significant pieces of work that are partially related to multi-path UI development. Section 3 introduces the reference representations used throughout this paper to address the principles of expressiveness and central storage of models based on USer Interface eXtensible Markup Language (USIXML). Section 4 shows how a transformational approach is represented and implemented thanks to graph grammars and graph transformations applied on models expressed in USIXML and stored in a model repository. Three basic transformation types (i.e., abstraction, reification, and translation) are exemplified. Section 6 exposes the tool support proposed around USIXML. Section 7 concludes by reporting on the main benefits and difficulties encountered so far with multi-path UI development.

2   Related Work

The multi-path UI development, as defined in Section 1, is at the intersection of two mainstreams of research and development: on the one hand, UI modelling and design of multi-platform UIs represent significant advances in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and on the other hand, program transformation that is considered promising in Software Engineering (SE) as a mean to bridge the gap between abstract description of software artefacts and their implementation [4,23].

Teallach tool and method [11] exploit three models: a task model, a domain model as a class diagram, and a presentation model both at logical and physical levels. Teallach enables designers to start building a UI from any model and maps concepts from different models one to each other (e.g., map a widget to a domain concept, or map a task onto a domain concept). Teallach also provides rules to derive model elements using information contained in another model.

XWEB [25] produces UIs for several devices starting from a multi-modal description of the abstract UI. This system operates on specific XWEB servers and browsers tuned to the interactive capacities of particular platforms, which communicate thanks to an appropriate XTP protocol. MORE [10] produces applications that are platform independent by relying on Platform Independent Application (PIA). A PIA can be created either by a design tool or by abstracting a concrete UI by a generalization process done by reverse engineering [17] the UI code.

UIML consists of a UIDL supporting the development of UIs for multiple computing platforms by introducing a description that is platform-independent to be further expanded with peers once a target platform has been chosen [2]. The TIDE tool [2] transforms a basic task model into a final UI. XIML [21] is a more general UIDL than UIML as it can specify any type of model, any model element, and relationships between them. Although some predefined models and relationships exist, one can expand the existing set to fit a particular context of use. XIML has been used in MANNA for platform adaptation [9], and in VAQUITA and Envir3D [5] to support re-engineering [7] of web sites by applying a series of model transformations. SeescoaXML [21] is the base UIDL exploited in the SEESCOA project to support the production of UIs for multiple platforms and the run-time migration of the full UI across these platforms.

TERESA (Transformation Environment for inteRactivE Systems representAtions) [17] produces different UIs for multiple computing platforms by refining a general task model for the different platforms. Then, various presentation and dialogue techniques are used to map the refinenements into XHTML code adapted for each platform, such as Web, PocketPC, and mobile phones. TERESA exploits TERESAXML, a UIDL that supports several types of transformations such as: task model into presentation task sets, task model into abstract UI, abstract UI to concrete UI, and generation of the final UI. In [26], a very interesting example of a platform modulator [9] is provided that maps a hierarchical task model to a presentation model explicitly taking into account platform characteristics such as screen resolution.

The above pieces of work all represent an instance with some degree of coverage and restrictions of the multi-path UI development. Regarding the *UI expressiveness* for multiple contexts of use, XTP of XWeb, UIML, XIML, TERESAXML and SeescoaXML are UIDLs that address the basic requirements of UI modelling and expressivity. XIML is probably the most expressive one as a new model, element or relationship can be defined internally. Yet, there is no systematic support of these relationships until they are covered by specific software. Regarding the *transformational approach*, Seescoa, Teallach, TERESA and TIDE include some transformation mechanism to map a model onto another one, but the logics and the definition of transformation rules are completely hard coded with little or no control by designers. In addition, the definition of these representations is not independent of the transformation engine. Regarding multiple development path, only Teallach explicitly addresses the problem, as models can be mapped one onto another according to different ways. Other typically apply top-down (e.g., TIDE), bottom-up (e.g., VAQUITA), middle-out (e.g., MIDAS [15]), but none of them support all development approaches.

To satisfy the requirements subsumed by the four principles, *Graph Transformation* (GT) [22] will be applied because substantive experience shows applicability in numerous fields of science (e.g., biology, operational research) and, notably, to computer science (e.g., model checking, parallel computing, software engineering). GTs are operated in two steps: expressing abstract concepts in the form of a graph structure and defining operations producing relevant transformations on the graph structure. Sucrow [23] used GT techniques to formally describe UI dialog with dialog states (the appearance of a UI at a particular moment in time) and dialog transitions (transformations of dialog states). An interesting edge typology is proposed to describe dialog states, emphasises, widget hierarchy, semantic feedback, and relationships with the functional core of the application. To support "a continuous specification process of graphical UIs", two models are defined in the development process: abstract and concrete. GTs map one model into another, and vice versa, thus leading to reversibility. Furthermore, elements such as dialog patterns, style guides, and metaphors are used to automate abstract to concrete transition. However, conceptual coverage and fundamental aspects of this work remains silent: presented concepts remain at the model level without going to any final UI and there is no description of the meta-level or of the instance level. To structure the models involved in the UI development process and to characterise the model transformations to be expressed through GT techniques, a reference framework is now introduced.

3   The Reference Framework Used for Multi-path UI Development

Multi-path UI development is based on the Cameleon Reference Framework [6], which defines UI development steps for multi-context interactive applications. Its simplified version, reproduced in Fig. 1, structures development processes for two contexts of use into four development steps (each development step being able to manipulate any specific artefact of interest as a model or a UI representation) [5,6]:

1. *Final UI* (FUI): is the operational UI i.e. any UI running on a particular computing platform either by interpretation (e.g., through a Web browser) or by execution (e.g., after compilation of code in an interactive development environment).
2. *Concrete UI* (CUI): concretises an abstract UI for a given context of use into Concrete Interaction Objects (CIOs) [25] so as to define widgets layout and interface navigation. It abstracts a FUI into a UI definition that is independent of any computing platform. Although a CUI makes explicit the final Look & Feel of a FUI, it is still a mock-up that runs only within a particular environment. A CUI can also be considered as a reification of an AUI at the upper level and an abstraction of the FUI with respect to the platform.
3. *Abstract UI* (AUI): defines interaction spaces (or presentation units) by grouping subtasks according to various criteria (e.g., task model structural patterns, cognitive load analysis, semantic relationships identification), a navigation scheme between the interaction spaces and selects Abstract Interaction Objects (AIOs) [25] for each concept so that they are independent of any modality. An AUI abstracts a CUI into a UI definition that is independent of any modality of interaction (e.g., graphical interaction, vocal interaction, speech synthesis and recognition, video-based interaction, virtual, augmented or mixed reality). An AUI can also be considered as a canonical expression of the rendering of the domain concepts and tasks in a way that is independent from any modality of interaction. For example, in ARTStudio [5], an AUI is a collection of related workspaces. The relations between the workspaces are inferred from the task relationships expressed at the upper level (task and concepts). An AUI is considered as an abstraction of a CUI with respect to modality.
4. *Task & Concepts* (T&C): describe the various tasks to be carried out and the domain-oriented concepts as they are required by these tasks to be performed. These objects are considered as instances of classes representing the concepts manipulated.

This framework exhibits three types of *basic transformation types*: (1,2) *Abstraction* (respectively, *Reification*) is a process of elicitation of artefacts that are more abstract (respectively, concrete) than the artefacts that serve as input to this process. Abstraction is the opposite of reification. (3) *Translation* is a process that elicits artefacts intended for a particular context of use from artefacts of a similar development step but aimed at a different context of use. With respect to this framework, *multi-path UI development* refers to a UI engineering method and tool that enables a designer to (1) start a development activity from any entry point of the reference framework (Fig. 1), (2) get substantial support in the performance of
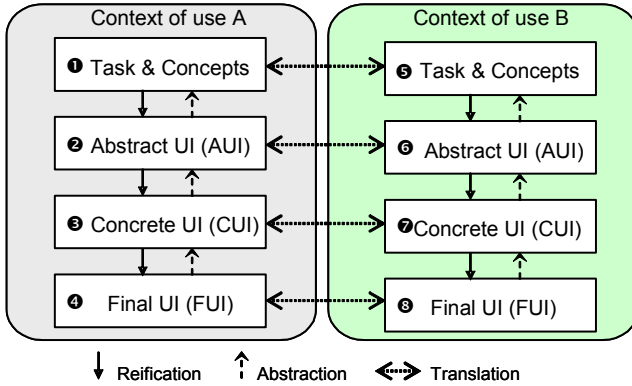
Fig. 1. The Cameleon Reference Framework.

all basic transformation types and their combinations of Fig. 1. To enable such a development, the two most important requirements gathered from observations are:

1. A language that enables the expression and the manipulation (e.g., creation, modification, deletion) of the model at each development steps and for each context of use. For this purpose, USIXML is introduced and defined (http://www.usixml.org). It is out of the scope of this paper to provide an extensive discussion on the content of USIXML. USIXML is composed of approximately 150 concepts enabling the expression of different levels of abstraction as introduced in Fig. 1.
2. A mechanism to express design knowledge that would provide a substantial support to the designer in the realisation of transformations. For this purpose, a GT technique is introduced and defined based on USIXML.

4   Graph Transformation Specification with USIXML

Graph transformation techniques were chosen to formalize USIXML, the language designed to support multi-path UI development, because it is (1) **Visual**: every element within a GT based language has a graphical syntax; (2) **Formal**: GT is based on a sound mathematical formalism (algebraic definition of graphs and category theory) and enables verifying formal properties on represented artefacts; (3) **Seamless**: it allows representing manipulated artefacts and rules within a single formalism. Furthermore, the formalism applies equally to all levels of abstraction of USIXML (Fig. 2). USIXML model collection is structured according to the four basic levels of abstraction defined in the Cameleon Reference Framework that is intended to express the UI development life cycle for context-sensitive interactive applications. Fig. 2 illustrates more concretely the type of concepts populating each level of Cameleon reference framework:

- At the FUI level, the rendering materialises how a particular UI coded in one language (markup, programming or declarative) is rendered depending on the UI toolkit, the window manager and the presentation manager. For example, a push

button programmed in HTML at the code sub-level can be rendered differently, here on MacOS X and Java Swing. Therefore, the code sub-level is materialised onto the rendering sub-level.

- The CUI level is assumed to abstract the FUI independently of any computing platform, this level can be further decomposed into two sub-levels: platform-independent CIO and CIO type. For example, a HTML push-button belongs to the type "Graphical 2D push button". Other members of this category include a Windows push button and XmButton, the OSF/Motif counterpart.

-
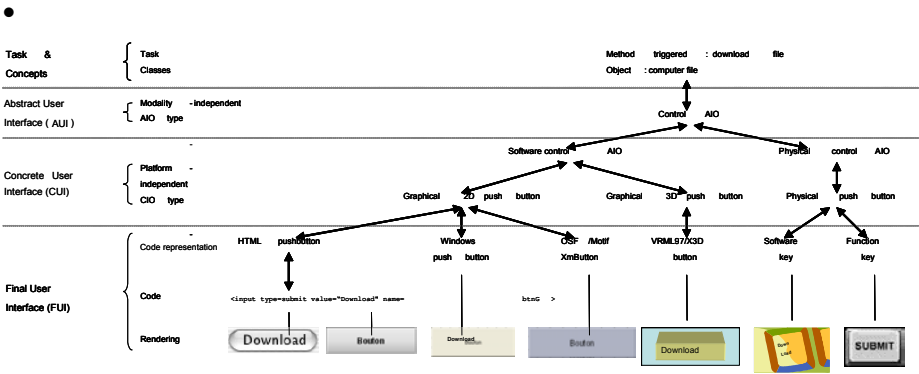
Fig. 2. Example of transformations in USIXML.

- Since the AUI level is assumed to abstract the CUI independently of any modality of interaction, this level can be further decomposed into two sub-levels: modality-independent AIO and AIO type. For example, a software control (whether in 2D or in 3D) and a physical control (e.g., a physical button on a control panel or a function key) both belong to the category of control AIO.
- At the T&C level, a task of a certain type (here, download a file) is specified that naturally leads to AIO for controlling the downloading.

Thanks to the four abstraction levels, it is possible to establish mappings between instances and objects found at the different levels and to develop transformations that find abstractions or reifications or combinations. For example, if a Graphical User Interface (GUI) needs to be virtualised, a series of abstractions is applied until the sub-level "Software control AIO" sub-level is reached. Then, a series of reifications can be applied to come back to the FUI level to find out another object satisfying the same constraints, but in 3D. If the GUI needs to be transformed for a UI for augmented reality for instance, the next sub-level can be reached with an additional abstraction and so forth. The combinations of the transformations allow establishing development path. Here, some first examples are given of multi-path UI development. To face multi-path development of UIs in general, USIXML is equipped with a collection of basic UI models (i.e., domain model, task model, AUI model, CUI model, context model and mapping model) (Fig. 4) and a so-called transformation model *(Fig. 3) [13]. Beyond the AUI and CUI models that reflect the AUI and CUI levels, the other UI models are defined as follows:*
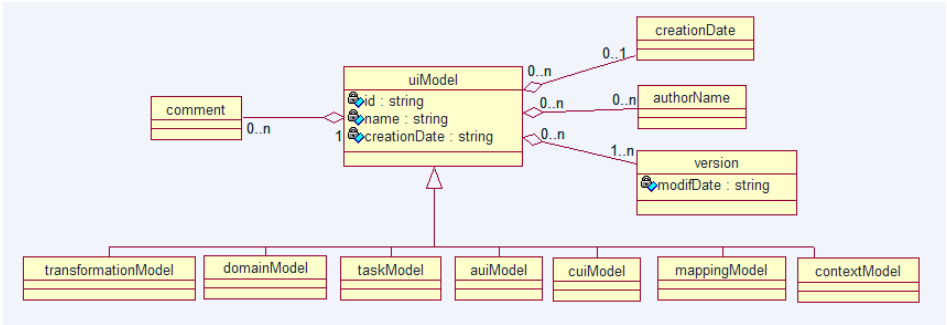
Fig. 3. USIXML Model Collection.

- **uiModel**: is the topmost superclass containing common features shared by all component models of a UI. A uiModel may consist of a list of component model in any order and any number, such as task model, a domain model, an abstract UI model, a concrete UI model, mapping model, and context model. A user interface model needs not include one of each model component. Moreover, there may be more than one of a particular kind of model component.

- **taskModel** (Inherits from: uiModel): is a model describing the interactive task as viewed by the end user interacting with the system. A task model represents a decomposition of tasks into sub-tasks linked with task relationships. Therefore, the decomposition relationship is the privileged relationship to express this hierarchy, while temporal relationships express the temporal constraints between sub-tasks of a same parent task. A task model is here expressed according to the ConcurTaskTree notation [20].

- **domainModel** (Inherits from: uiModel): is a description of the classes of objects manipulated by a user while interacting with a system [12].

- **mappingModel** (Inherits from: uiModel): is a model containing a series of related mappings (i.e, a declaration of an inter-model relationship) between models or elements of models. A mapping model serves to gather a set of inter-model relationships that are semantically related.

- **contextModel** (Inherits from: uiModel): is a model describing the three aspects of a context of use in which a end user is carrying out an interactive task with a specific computing platform in a given surrounding environment. Consequently, a context model consists of a user model, a platform model, and an environment model.

Transformations are specified using transformation systems. Transformation systems rely on the theory of graph grammars [22]. We first explain what a transformation system is and then illustrate how they may be used to specify UI model transformations. The proposed formalism to represent model-to-model transformation in USIXML is graph transformations. This formalism has been discussed in [13,14]. USIXML has been designed with an underlying graph structure. Consequently any graph transformation rule can be applied to a USIXML specification. Graph transformations have been shown convenient and efficient for our present purpose in [19].
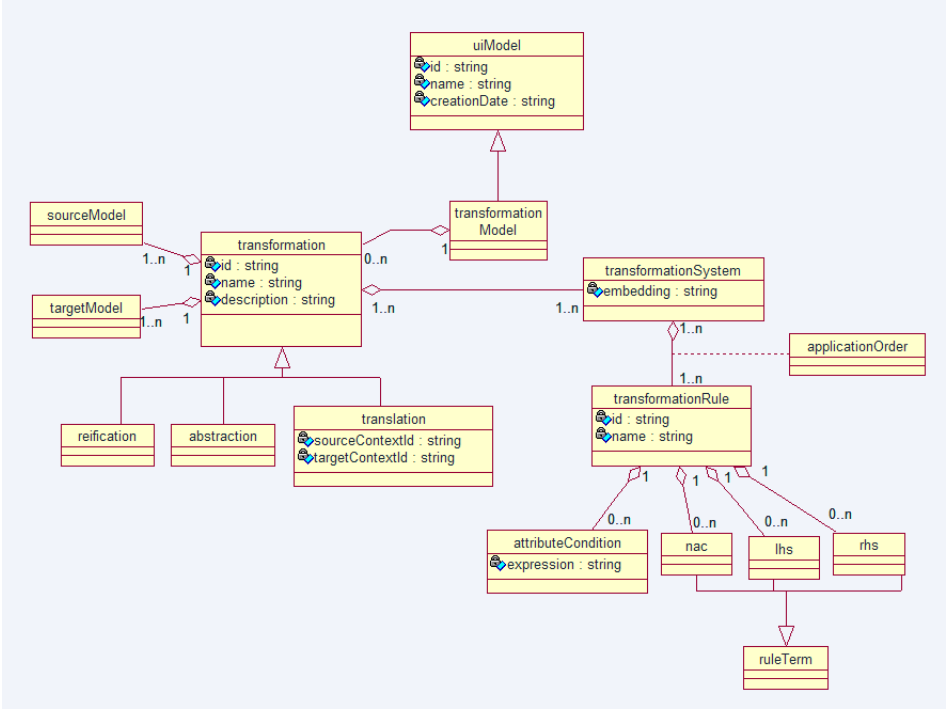
Fig. 4. Transformation model as defined in USIXML.

A transformation system is composed of several transformation rules. Technically, a rule is a graph rewriting rule equipped with negative application conditions and attribute conditions [19].

Fig. 5 illustrates how a transformation system applies to a USIXML specification: let G be a USIXML specification (represented as a graph), when 1) a Left Hand Side (LHS) matches into G and 2) a Negative Application Condition (NAC) does not matches into G (note that several NAC may be associated with a single rule) 3) the LHS is replaced by a Right Hand Side (RHS). G is resultantly transformed into G, a resultant USIXML specification. All elements of G not covered by the match are considered as unchanged. All elements contained in the LHS and not contained in the RHS are considered as deleted (i.e., rules have destructive power). To add more expressive power to transformation rules, variables may be associated to attributes within a LHS. Theses variables are initialized in the LHS and their value can be used to assign an attribute in the expression of the RHS (e.g., LHS : button.name:=x, RHS : task.name:=x). An expression may also be defined to compare a variable declared in the LHS with a constant or with another variable. This mechanism is called 'attribute condition'.
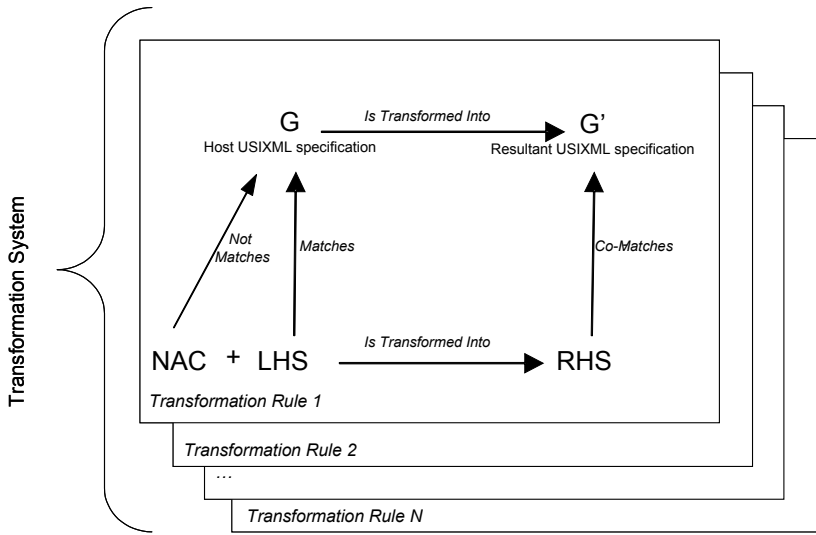
Fig. 5. Transformation system in USIXML.

We detail hereafter a simplified scenario illustrating the three basic types of transformation (thus inducing different path) mentioned in Section 3.

Step 1 (Abstraction): a designer reverse engineers an HTML page with Rutabaga [3] in order to obtain a CUI model. Transformation 1 (Fig. 6) is an abstraction that takes a button at the concrete level and abstracts it away into an abstract interaction object. The LHS selects every button and the method they activate and create a corresponding abstract interaction object equipped with a control facet mapped onto the method triggered by its corresponding concrete interaction object. Some behavioural specification is preserved at the abstract level. Note that behaviour specification in USIXML is also done with graph transformations rules. It is out of the scope of this paper to explicit this mechanism. This is why rule 1 in transformation 1, in its LHS, embeds a fragment of a transformation system specification. This may seem confusing at first sight but is very powerful at the end i.e., we dispose of a mechanism transforming a UI behavioural specification into another one! In the RHS, one also see that a relationship *isAbstractedInto* has been created. This relationship ensures traceability of rule application and helps in maintaining coherence among different levels of abstraction.

Step 2 (Reification): the designer decides to add, by hand, to the abstract level a navigation facet to every abstract interaction object that has a control facet. From this new abstract specification, Transformation 2 (Fig. 7) reifies every abstract interaction object into image components (i.e., a type of concrete interaction object). By default, the control facet is activated when an event "*onMouseOver*" is triggered, and the navigation facet is activated when the *imageComponent* is double-clicked. This rule may of course be customized by the designer to reflect his own preferences or needs.

Transformation 1: abstraction	Transformation 2: reification

```
...
<abstraction        id="AB1"        name        =
"AbstractButtonWithControl"    description  =  "this
translation abstracts buttons into an AIO with an
activation facet"

<transformationSystem id = "TR2" name="Transfo2"...>
<transformationRule id = "rule1" name "abstractsBut">

<lhs>
    <button ruleSpecificID="1" mapID="2">
        <behavior>
        <action>
        <transformationSystem>
        <transformationRule>
        <rhs>
        <method ruleSpecificID="3"
                    mapID="4" name="X" />
        <isTriggeredBy isFired="true">
        <source sourceId="1">
        <target targetId="3">
        </isTriggeredBy>
        </rhs>
        </transformationRule>
        </transformationSystem>
        </action>
        </behaviour>
    </button>
</lhs>

<rhs>
    <abstractIndividualComponent ruleSpecificId="5">
        <control activatedMethod="X">
    </abstractIndividualComponent>

    <isAbstractedInto>
        <source sourceId="2"/>
        <target targetId="5"/>
    <isAbstractedInto>

    <button ruleSpecificId="1" mapID="2">
        <behavior>
        <transformationSystem>
        <transformationRule>
        <rhs>
        <method ruleSpecificID="3" mapID ="4"/>
        <isTriggeredBy isFired="true">
        <source sourceId="1">
        <target targetId="3">
        </isTriggeredBy>
        </rhs>
        </transformationRule>
        </transformationSystem>
        </behaviour>
    </button>
</rhs>
...
<nac.../>

</transformationRule>
</transformationSystem>
</abstraction>
...
```

```
...
<reification id="Reif1" name = "ReifiesAioImgCtlrNav"
 description = " reifies a control AIO into an image
Component with corresponding behavior template"

    <transformationSystem id = "TRE1" name="TR2"...>
    <transformationRule    id    =    "rule44"    name
"ReiFControl44">

<lhs>
    <abstractIndividualComponent mapID="1">
    <control activatedMethod="X"/>
    <navigation target="Y"/>
    </abstractIndividualComponent>
<lhs>
<rhs>
    <imageComponent ruleSpecificID="2">
        <behavior>
        <event type="doubleClick"/>
        <action>
        <transformationSystem>
        <transformationRule>
        <lhs>
        <rhs>
        <method ruleSpecificID="3" name="X"/>
        <isTriggeredBy isFired="true">
        <source sourceId="2">
        <target targetId="3">
        </isTriggeredBy>
        </rhs>
        </transformationRule>
        </transformationSystem>
        </behaviour>
        <behavior>
        <event type="onMouseOver(self)"/>
        <action>
        <transformationSystem>
        <transformationRule>
        <lhs/>
        <rhs>
        <graphicalContainer id="Y" visible="true"/>
        </rhs>
        </transformationRule>
        </transformationSystem>
        </behaviour>
    </imageComponent>

    <isReifiedInto>
        <source sourceId="1"/>
        <target targetId="2"/>
    </isReifiedInto>

    <abstractIndividualComponent mapID="1">
        <control activatedMethod="X">
    </abstractIndividualComponent>
</rhs>
<nac.../>
    <transformationRule>
    </transformationSystem>
    </reification>
    ...
```

Fig. 6. Transformation 1.   **Fig. 7.** Transformation 2.

Step3 (Translation): to adapt a UI to a new type of display/browser that has the characteristic to be tall and narrow. The designer decides then to apply Transformation 3 (Fig. 8) to her CUI model. This transformation is made of a rule that selects all boxes (basic layout structure at the CUI level) and sets these boxes type to "*vertical*". All widgets contained in this box are then glued to the left of the box (again in the idea of minimizing the width of the resulting UI). Note the presence of a

negative application condition (too long to show in previous examples) that ensures that rule 1 in transformation 3 is not applied to an already formatted box.

Fig. 8 shows a simple example of translation specified with USIXML. This rule of the rule selects all boxes (basic layout structure at the CUI level), sets these boxes to "vertical". All widgets contained in this box are then glued to the left of the box (again in the idea of minimizing the width of the resulting UI). A negative application condition ensures that a rule is not applied to an already formatted box.

```
Transformation 3: translation

...

<translation id="TL1" name="squeezeDisplay"

description= "this translations vertically aligns all widgets of a

container">

<sourceModel type="cui"/>

<targetModel type="cui"/>

<transformationSystem id="TR1" name="Transfo1"...>

<transformationRule id="rule1" name="squeeze1">


<lhs>

<box mapID="1">

<graphicalIndividualComponent mapId="2" />

</box>

</lhs>


<rhs>

<box mapID="1" type="vertical">

<graphicalIndividualComponent mapId="2" glueHorizontal="left"/>

</box>

</rhs>


<nac>
```

```
<box mapID="1" type="vertical">

<graphicalIndividualComponent mapId="2" glueHorizontal="left"/>

</nac>

</transformationRule>

</transformationSystem>

</translation>

...
```

Fig. 8. Transformation 3.

Alternatively to textual representation, transformation rules are easily expressed in a graphical syntax. Fig. 9 shows a graphical equivalent for the rule contained in Fig. 8. A general purpose tool for graph transformation called AGG (Attributed Graph Grammars) was used to specify this example. There is no proof that states the superiority of graphical formalism over textual ones, but at least USIXML designer can choose between both.
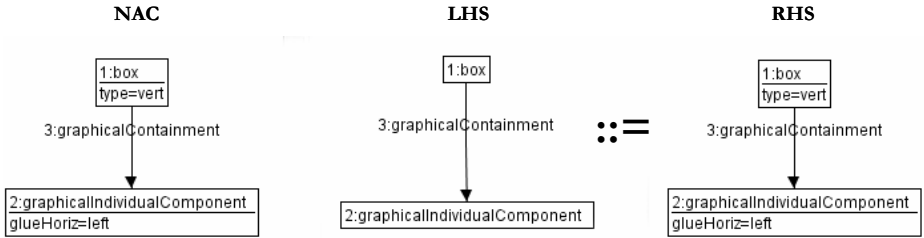
Fig. 9. Graphical representation of the transformation.

Traceability (and as a side-effect reversibility) of model transformation is enabled thanks to a set of 'so-called' *interModelMappings* (e.g., *isAbstractedInto*, *IsReifiedInto*, *isTranslatedInto*) allowing a relation between model elements belonging to different models. Thus, it is possible to keep a trace of the application of rules i.e., when a new element is created a mapping indicates of what element it is an abstraction, a reification, a translation, etc. Another advantage of using these mappings is to support multi-path development is that they explicitly connect the various levels of our framework and realizes an seamless integration of the different models used to describe the system. Knowing the mappings of a model increases dramatically the understanding of the underlying structure of a UI. It enables to answer, at no cost, to question like: what task an interaction object enables?, what domain object attributes are updated by what interaction object? Which interaction object triggers what method?

5   Tool Support

Tool support is provided for several of the levels shown in Fig. 2.

- **Reverse engineering of UI code**: a specific tool, called *Rutabaga* [3], automatically reverse engineers the presentation model of an existing HTML Web page at both the CUI and AUI levels, with or without intra-model, inter-model mappings. This tool allows developers to recuperate an existing UI so as to incorporate it again in the development process. In this case, a re-engineering can be obtained by combining two abstractions, one translation, and two reifications. This is particularly useful for evolution of legacy systems.
- **Model edition**: as editing a new UI in USIXML directly can be considered as a tedious task, a specific editor called *GrafiXML* has been developed to face the development of USIXML models. Being at first hand a textual language, an *ad hoc* USIXML editor was created. In this editor, the designer can draw in direct manipulation any graphical UI by directly placing CIOs and editing their properties in the Composer, which are instantly reflected in the UI design (Fig. 10). At any time, the designer may want to see the corresponding USIXML specifications (Fig. 11) and edit it. Selecting a USIXML tag automatically displays possible values for this tag in a contextual menu. When the tag or the elements are modified, those changes are propagated to the graphical representation. In this way, a bidirectional mapping is maintained between a UI and its USIXML specification: each time a part is modified, the other one is updated accordingly.
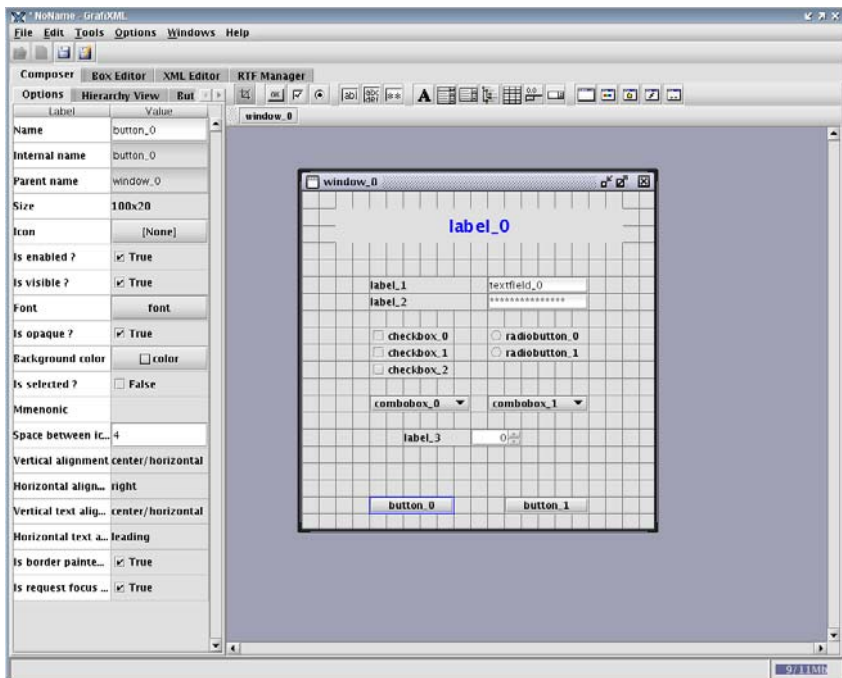

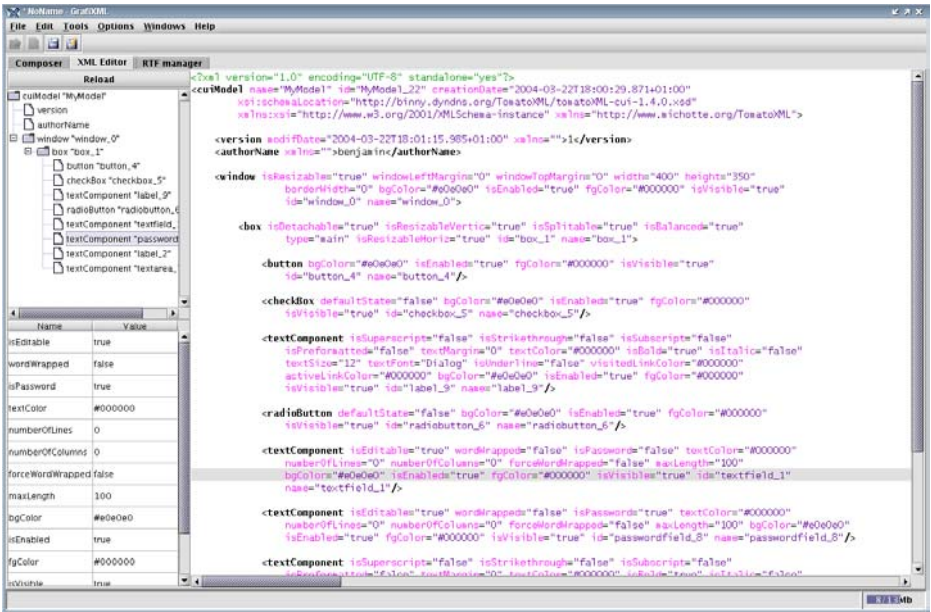**Fig. 10.** Graphical Editing of a UI in GrafiXML.

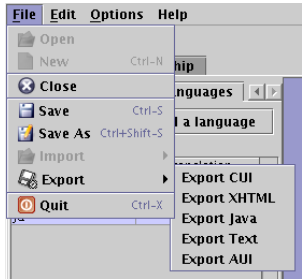**Fig. 11.** USIXML equivalent of a UI edited in GrafiXML.

Fig. 12. Capabilities to generate a UI at different levels of abstraction.

What distinguishes GrafiXML from other UI graphical editors are its capabilities to directly generate USIXML specifications at the different levels of abstractions represented in Fig. 2: FUI (here in plain text, in XHTML and Java AWT), CUI (with or without relationships), and AUI (with or without relationships). In addition, a UI can be saved simultaneously with CUI and AUI specifications, while establishing and maintaining the inter-model relationships between.

- **Transformation specification and application:** an environment called AGG (Attributed Graph Grammars tool) is used for this experiment. AGG can be considered as a genuine programming environment based on graph transformations [12]. It provides 1) a programming language enabling the specification of graph grammars 2) a customizable interpreter enabling graph transformations. AGG was chosen because it allows the graphical expression of directed, typed and attributed graphs (for expressing specifications and rules). It

has a powerful library containing notably algorithms for graph transformation [14], critical pair analysis, consistency checking, positive and negative application condition enforcement. AGG user interface is described in Fig. 13. Frame 1 is the grammar explorer. Fig. 13 Frames 2, 3 and 4 enable to specify sub-graphs composing a production: a negative application (frame 2), a left hand side (frame 3) and a right hand side (frame 4). The host graph on which a production will be applied is represented in Frame 5.

- **A tool for transformation application:** several Application Programming Interfaces are available to perform model-to-model transformations (e.g., DMOF at http://www.dstc.edu.au/Products/CORBA/M-OF/ or Univers@lis at http://universalis. elibel.tm.fr/site/). We tested AGG API as this API proposes to transform models with as graph transformations. This scenario is described in Fig. 14. An initial model along with a set of rules are transmitted to a Application Programming Interface that performs appropriate model transformations and provide a resulting model that can be edited.
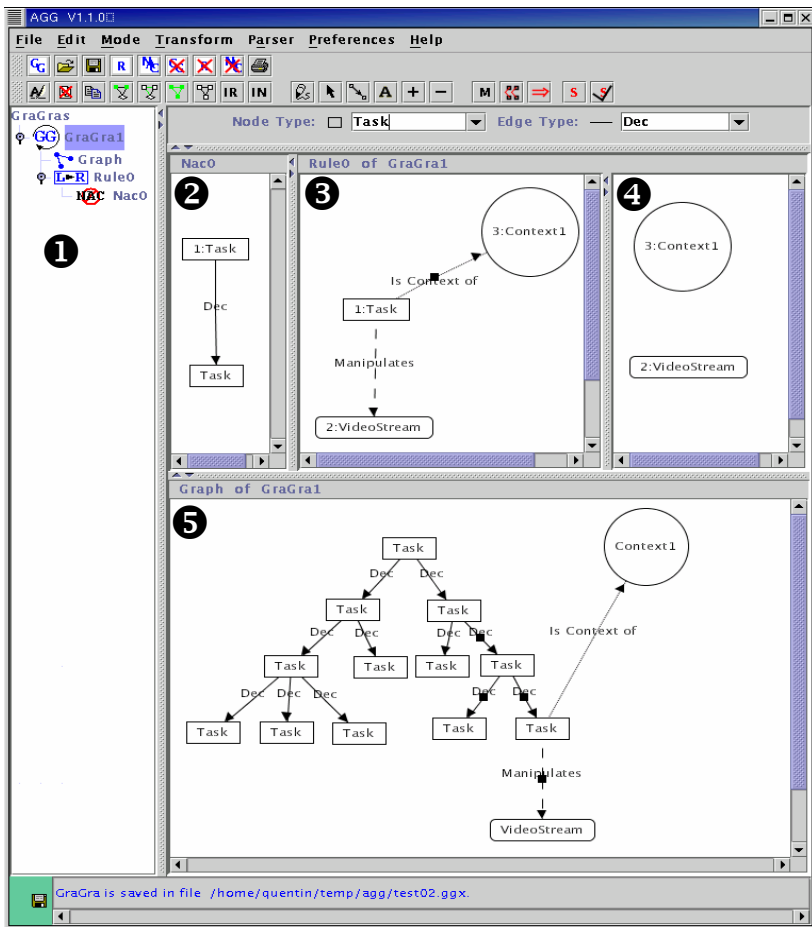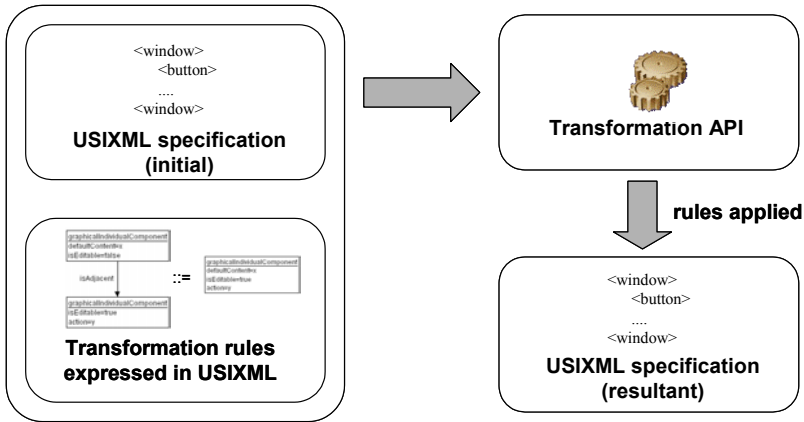

Fig. 13. AGG user interface.

Fig. 14. Development process based on transformation application.

6 Conclusion

Information systems are subject to a constant pressure toward change. UIs represent an important and expensive software component of information systems. Multi-path UI development has been proposed to cope with the problem of UI adaptation to an evolving context of use. Multi-path UI development has been defined as an engineering method and tool that allows a designer to start a UI development by several entry points in the development cycle, and from this entry point get a substantial support to build a high quality UI. Main features of multi-path UI development are:

1. A flexible development process based on transformations.
2. A unique formal language to specify UI related artefacts. So far, these concepts have been hard coded in software tools, thus preventing anyone from reusing, redefining or exchanging them. USIXML provides a mean to overcome these shortcomings. The core of this language is composed of a set of integrated models expressed in a formal and uniform format, governed by a common meta-model definition, graphically expressible and a modular, modifiable and extensible repository of executable design knowledge that is also represented with a graphical syntax. Furthermore, a definition of an XML notation supporting the exchange of models and executable design knowledge has been presented.
3. A transformational approach based on systematic rules that guarantee semantic equivalence when applied, some of them being reversible.
4. A tool supporting the expression and manipulation of models and design knowledge visually.

With increase of design experience, a copious catalogue of transformation rules can be assembled into meaningful grammars. The level of support provided to the accomplishment of design steps varies from one transition to another. Indeed, some

transitions are better known than others. For instance, the reification between physical and logical UI can be supported by hundreds of rules namely by widget selection rules. On the contrary, rules that enable the translation of a task model from a desktop PC to a handheld PC are, for now, understudied. Some transitions are intrinsically harder to support (e.g., abstraction transitions). For instance, retrieving a task model from the physical UI is not a trivial problem.

Acknowledgements

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Discussion

[Stephen Gilroy] USIXML is an instantiation of your particular graph. Do you think USIXML has sufficient expressiveness to represent all the aspects of your graph?

> [Victor Jaquero] Yes USIXML is a raw transcript from our graph structure to an XML-like syntax. USIXML has been designed to overcome the intrinsic tree-like structure of XML languages. Like other language (e.g., GXL), USIXML allows to define a real graph structure with nodes and edges. So, as soon as a concept is defined in our conceptual graphs it is transposable into USIXML.

[Stephen Gilroy] Is USIXML extensible?

> [Victor Jaquero] At the model level USIXML allows to define any kind of model. In this sense it is possible to instantiate new context models, new domain models,...At meta-model level USIXML offers a modular structure which clearly segregates the models it describes (these models being integrated with inter-model relationships). Consequently, integrating new models in USIXML is facilitated. The model and its concept is simply declared along with the relationships that integrates this newcomer with existing models. Rules exploiting this new model can be defined afterward. Another point of extensibility is inside existing models themselves. In the concrete user interface models for instance node types relevant to different modalities (e.g., 2-D graphic and vocal) are clearly differentiated in separated sub-trees. The introduction of a new modality, for instance, would consist in introducing a new sub-tree into the node classification.

[Peter Forbrig] Is the idea to transform the model interactively, or is there a set of pre-defined rules?

> [Victor Jaquero] There is an editor for rules (AGG) that allows them to be created for the particular application, as well as re-using existing rules (these rules have been defined for our case studies).

[Michael Harrison] So are the rules applied interactively, or does the system specify how to apply them?

[Victor Jaquero] The application of the rules may depend on different types of scenarios, they can be applied blindly (with no user control), or step by step with undo facilities. TransformiXML GUI enables also to define alternate transformation systems for a same development step, it is also possible modify the application order of rules populating a transformation system.