



# AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

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Title: Theory and Implementation of a Variational Database Management System

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In this thesis I present the variational database management system, a formal framework and its implementation for representing variation in relational databases and managing variational information needs. A variational database is intended to support any kind of variation in a database. Specific kinds of variation in databases have already been studied and are well-supported, for example, schema evolution systems address the variation of a database's schema over time and data integration systems address variation caused by accessing data from multiple data sources simultaneously. However, many other kinds of variation in databases arise in practice, and different kinds of variation often interact, but these scenarios are not well-supported by the existing work. For example, neither the schema evolution systems nor the database integration systems can address variation that arises when data sources combined in one database evolve over time.

This thesis collects a large amount of work: It defines the variational database framework and the syntax and [specific kind of] semantics of the variational relational algebra, a query language for variational databases. It also defines the requirements of a generic variational database framework that makes the framework expressive enough to encode any kind of variation in databases. Additionally, it [shows/proves] that the introduced framework satisfies all these needs. It presents two use cases of the variational database framework that are based on existing data sets and scenarios that are partially supported by existing techniques. It presents the variational database management system which is the implementation of variational databases and variational relational algebra as an abstract layer written in Haskell on top of a traditional RDBMS. It also presents several

theoretical results related to the framework and query language, such as syntax-based equivalence rules that preserve the semantics of a query, a type system for ensuring that a variational query is well formed with respect to the underlying variational schema, and a confluence property of the variational relational algebra type system and semantics with respect to the relational algebra type system and semantics.

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# Theory and Implementation of a Variational Database Management System

by

Parisa Ataei

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degree of

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Parisa Ataei, Author

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[Eric. Committee. jeff. abu. parents. friends. ]

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## LIST OF ALGORITHMS

Algorithm

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Managing variation in databases is a perennial problem in database literature and appears in different forms and contexts [19, 3, 7, 10, 4] and it is inevitable [18]. Variation in databases mainly arises when multiple database instances conceptually represent the same database, but, differ in their schema, content, or constraints. Specific kinds of variation in databases have been addressed by context-specific solutions, such as schema evolution [13, 6, 2, 17, 14], data integration [9], and database versioning [5, 12]. However, there are no generic solution that addresses any kind of variation in databases. We motivate the need for a generic solution to variation in databases in Section 1.1.

The major contribution of this thesis is the *variational database* framework, a generic relational database framework that explicitly accounts for database changes (variation), and *variational relational algebra*, a data manipulation language for our framework that allows for information extraction from a variational database. The variational framework is generic because it can encode any kind of variation in databases. Additionally and more importantly, it is designed such that it satisfies any information need that a user may have in a variational database scenario. Based on information needs in a variational database scenario, we define requirements of a variational database framework in Section 1.1 and throughout the thesis, we show that our framework satisfies these requirements.

In addition to a formal description of the variational database framework and variational relational algebra and some theoretical results, this thesis distributes and presents two variational data sets (including both a variational database and a set of queries) as well as a *variational database management system* that implements the variational database framework as an abstraction layer on top of a traditional relational database management system in Haskell. Section 1.2 enumerates the specific contributions in the context of an outline of the structure of the rest of the thesis.

## 1.1 Motivation and Impact

Managing variation in databases is a perennial problem in database literature and appears in different forms and contexts [19, 3, 7, 10, 4]. Variation in databases mainly arises when multiple database instances conceptually represent the same database, but, differ in their schema or content. The variation in schema and/or content occurs in two *dimensions*: time and space. Variation in space refers to different variants of database that coexist in parallel while variation in time refers to the evolution of database, similar to variation observed in software [20]. Note that variation in a database can occur due to both dimensions at the same time.

Existing work on variation in databases addresses specific kinds of variation in a context and proposes solutions specific to the context of the variation, such as schema evolution [13, 6, 2, 17, 14], data integration [9], and database versioning [5, 12]. Unfortunately, some of these tools do not address all their user’s needs. Furthermore, they are all *variation-unaware*, i.e., they dismiss that they are addressing a specific kind of a bigger problem. Thus, not only they cannot address a new kind of database variation but they also cannot address the interaction of different kinds of database variation since they assume that each kind of variation is *isolated* from another kinds. This costs database researchers to develop a new system for every individual kind of data variation and forces developers and DBAs to use manually unsafe workaround.

For example, schema evolution is a kind of schematic variation in databases over time that is well-supported [13, 6, 2, 17, 14]. Changes applied to the schema over time are *variation* in the database and every time the database evolves, a new *variant* is generated. Current solutions addressing schema evolution dismiss that it is a kind of variation, thus, they *simulate* the effect of variation by relying on temporal nature of schema evolution and using timestamps [13, 6, 2, 17] or keeping an external file of timeline history of changes applied to the database [14].

Unlike schema evolution, some kinds of database variation are partially supported. For example, while developing software for multiple clients simultaneously, an approach called software product line (SPL) [8], a different database schema is required for each client due to client’s different business requirements and environments [16]. SPL researchers have developed encodings of data models that allow for arbitrary variation by annotating different elements of the model with features from the SPL [16, 15, 1]. Thus,

they can generate a database schema *variant* for each software *variant* requested by a client and generated by the SPL. However, these solutions address *only* variation in the data model but do not extend it to the level of the data or queries. The lack of variation support in queries leads to unsafe techniques such as encoding different variants of query through string munging, while the lack of variation support in data precludes testing with multiple variants of a database at once.

The situation exacerbates even more when two kinds of variation interact and create a new kind of database variation: the evolution of the database used in development of software by an SPL. This is due to the evolution of software and its artifacts; an inevitable phenomena [11]. This is where even previous context-specific solutions like schema evolution tools fail because the context-specific approaches assume that the kind of variation that they address is completely isolated from other kinds of variation. We motivate this case through an example in Section 1.1. Note that new kinds of variation may arise that are not necessarily the interaction of already-addressed variation in database. We discuss such a scenario in Section 1.1.2.

As we have shown, variation in databases is abundant and inexorable [18]; impacts DBAs, data analysts, and developers significantly [11]; and appears in different contexts. Current methods are all extremely tailored to a specific context. Consequently, they fail to address the interaction of their specific kind of database variation with other kinds. Hence, the challenge becomes defining a variation-aware database that can model different kinds of variation in different contexts such that it satisfies different specialists' needs at different stages, e.g., development, information extraction, deployment, and testing.

### 1.1.1 Motivating Example

In this section, we motivate the interaction of two kinds of variation in databases resulting in a new kind: database-backed software produced by an SPL and schema evolution. An SPL uses a set of boolean variables called *features* to indicate the functionalities that each software variant requires. Consider an SPL that generates management software for companies. It has a feature *edu* that indicates whether a company provides educational means such as courses for its employees. Software variants in which *edu* is disabled (i.e., *edu* = `false`) only provide basic functionalities while ones in which *edu* is enabled

Table 1.1: Schema variants of the employee database developed for multiple software variants by an SPL. Note that an educational database variant must contain a basic database variant too.

(a) Database schema variants for basic software variants.

Temporal Features	basic Database Schema Variants
$V_1$	<i>engineerpersonnel</i> ( <i>empno</i> , <i>name</i> , <i>hiredate</i> , <i>title</i> , <i>deptname</i> ) <i>otherpersonnel</i> ( <i>empno</i> , <i>name</i> , <i>hiredate</i> , <i>title</i> , <i>deptname</i> ) <i>job</i> ( <i>title</i> , <i>salary</i> )
$V_2$	<i>empacct</i> ( <i>empno</i> , <i>name</i> , <i>hiredate</i> , <i>title</i> , <i>deptname</i> ) <i>job</i> ( <i>title</i> , <i>salary</i> )
$V_3$	<i>empacct</i> ( <i>empno</i> , <i>name</i> , <i>hiredate</i> , <i>title</i> , <i>deptno</i> ) <i>job</i> ( <i>title</i> , <i>salary</i> ) <i>dept</i> ( <i>deptname</i> , <i>deptno</i> , <i>managerno</i> ) <i>empbio</i> ( <i>empno</i> , <i>sex</i> , <i>birthdate</i> )
$V_4$	<i>empacct</i> ( <i>empno</i> , <i>hiredate</i> , <i>title</i> , <i>deptno</i> , <i>std</i> , <i>instr</i> ) <i>job</i> ( <i>title</i> , <i>salary</i> ) <i>dept</i> ( <i>deptname</i> , <i>deptno</i> , <i>managerno</i> ) <i>empbio</i> ( <i>empno</i> , <i>sex</i> , <i>birthdate</i> , <i>name</i> )
$V_5$	<i>empacct</i> ( <i>empno</i> , <i>hiredate</i> , <i>title</i> , <i>deptno</i> , <i>std</i> , <i>instr</i> , <i>salary</i> ) <i>dept</i> ( <i>deptname</i> , <i>deptno</i> , <i>managerno</i> , <i>stdnum</i> , <i>instrnum</i> ) <i>empbio</i> ( <i>empno</i> , <i>sex</i> , <i>birthdate</i> , <i>firstname</i> , <i>lastname</i> )

(b) Database schema variants for educational software variants.

Temporal Feature	educational Database Schema Variants
$T_1$	<i>course</i> ( <i>coursename</i> , <i>teacherno</i> ) <i>student</i> ( <i>studentno</i> , <i>coursename</i> )
$T_2$	<i>course</i> ( <i>courseno</i> , <i>coursename</i> , <i>teacherno</i> ) <i>student</i> ( <i>studentno</i> , <i>courseno</i> )
$T_3$	<i>course</i> ( <i>courseno</i> , <i>coursename</i> ) <i>teach</i> ( <i>teacherno</i> , <i>courseno</i> ) <i>student</i> ( <i>studentno</i> , <i>courseno</i> , <i>grade</i> )
$T_4$	<i>ecourse</i> ( <i>courseno</i> , <i>coursename</i> ) <i>course</i> ( <i>courseno</i> , <i>coursename</i> , <i>time</i> , <i>class</i> ) <i>teach</i> ( <i>teacherno</i> , <i>courseno</i> ) <i>student</i> ( <i>studentno</i> , <i>courseno</i> , <i>grade</i> )
$T_5$	<i>ecourse</i> ( <i>courseno</i> , <i>coursename</i> , <i>deptno</i> ) <i>course</i> ( <i>courseno</i> , <i>coursename</i> , <i>time</i> , <i>class</i> , <i>deptno</i> ) <i>teach</i> ( <i>teacherno</i> , <i>courseno</i> ) <i>take</i> ( <i>studentno</i> , <i>courseno</i> , <i>grade</i> )

provide educational functionalities in addition to the basic ones. Thus, this SPL yields two types of variants: **basic** and **educational**.

Each variant of this SPL needs a database to store information about employees, but SPL features impact the database: While **basic** variants do not need to store any education-related records **educational** variants do. We visualize the impact of features on the schema variants in Table 1.1: It has two schema types: **basic**, shown in Table 1.1a, and **educational**, shown in Table 1.1b. A **basic** schema variant contains only the schema in one of the cells in Table 1.1a while an **educational** schema variant consists of two sub-schemas: one from the **basic** and another from Table 1.1b. For example, the yellow highlighted cells include relation schemas for an **educational** schema variant.

Rows of Table 1.1 indicate the evolution of schema variants in time. To capture the evolution of the software and its database we add two disjoint sets of features which again are boolean variables. The temporal feature sets are disjoint to allow individual paces for the evolution of each type of schema. For example, yellow cells of Table 1.1 show a valid schema variant even though the **basic** and **educational** sub-schemas are not in the same row.

Now, consider the following scenario: In the initial design of the **basic** database, SPL DBAs settle on three tables *engineerpersonnel*, *otherpersonnel*, and *job*; shown in Table 1.1a and associated with feature  $V_1$ . After some time, they decide to refactor the schema to remove redundant tables, thus, they combine the two relations *engineerpersonnel* and *otherpersonnel* into one, *empacct*; associated with feature  $V_2$ . Since some clients' software relies on a previous design the two schemas have to coexist in parallel. Therefore, the existence (presence) of *engineerpersonnel* and *otherpersonnel* relations is *variational*, i.e., they only exist in the **basic** schema when  $V_1 = \text{true}$ . This scenario describes *component evolution*: developers update, refactor, and improve components including the database [11].

Now, consider the case where a client that previously requested a **basic** variant of the management software has recently added courses to educate its employees in specific subjects. Hence, an SPL developer needs to enable the *edu* feature for this client, forcing the adjustment of the schema variant to **educational**. This case describes *product evolution*: database evolution in SPL resulted from clients adding/removing features/-components [11].

The situation is further complicated since the **basic** and **educational** schemas are in-



terdependent: Consider the **basic** schema variant for feature  $V_4$ . Attributes *std* and *instr* only exists in the *empacct* relation when *edu* = **true**, represented by a dash-underline, otherwise the *empacct* relation has only four attributes: *empno*, *hiredate*, *title*, and *deptno*. Hence, the presence of attributes *std* and *instr* in *empacct* relation is *variational*, i.e., they only exist in *empacct* relation when *edu* = **true**.

Our example demonstrates how different kinds of variation interact with each other, an indispensable consequence of modern software development. The described interaction is similar to a recent scenario we discussed with an industry contact in Section 1.1.2.

### 1.1.2 New Instance of Data Variation in Industry

New variational scenarios could appear, either from combination of other scenarios or even a new scenario could reveal itself. For example, the following is a scenario we recently discussed with an industry contact: A software company develops software for different networking companies and analyzes data from its clients to advise them accordingly. The company records information from each of its clients' networks in databases customized to the particular hardware, operating systems, etc. that each client uses. The company analysts need to query information from all clients who agreed to share their information, but the same information need will be represented differently for each client. This problem is essentially a combination of the SPL variation problem (the company develops and maintains many databases that vary in structure and content) and the data integration problem (querying over many databases that vary in structure and content). However, neither the existing solutions from the SPL community nor database integration address both sides of the problem. Currently the company manually maintains variant schemas and queries, but this does not take advantage of sharing and is a major maintenance challenge. With a database encoding that supports explicit variation in schemas, content, and queries, the company could maintain a single variational database that can be configured for each client, import shared data into a variational database, and write variational queries over the variational database to analyze the data, significantly reducing redundancy across clients.

### 1.1.3 Requirements of a Variation-Aware Database Framework

For a variation-aware framework to be expressive enough to encode any kind of variation in databases, it must satisfy some requirements. Thus, we define the requirements that make a database framework variational through studying different kinds of variation in databases. A variational artifact, including databases, encompasses multiple *variants* of the artifact and provides a way to distinguish between different variants that are all encoded in one place, the variational artifact. It also provides a way to get the variants from the variational artifact, we call this *configuration function*. These requirements that help distinguish a database framework that simulates the effect of variation compared to one that is variational are listed below:

- (R0) *All database variants must be accessible at a given time.* For example, in our motivating example, a company that started with  $V_1$  of the **basic** schema evolves over time but its different branches adopt the new schema at different paces, thus, it requires access to all variants of the **basic** schema.
- (R1) *The query language must allow for querying multiple database variants simultaneously. Additionally, it must allow for filtering tuples to specific variants.* That is, the framework must provide a query language that allows users to query multiple database variants at the same time in addition to giving them the freedom to choose the variants that they want to query. For example, an SPL tester that is testing a piece of code for the not highlighted variants of the software in Table 1.1 needs to write queries that exclude the variants associated with yellow cells of Table 1.1.
- (R2) *Every piece of data must clearly state the variant it belongs to and this information must be kept throughout the entire framework.* Continuing the example of the SPL tester, they need to know the variant that some results belong to in order to be able to debug the software correctly and accordingly.
- (R3) *The variational database must provide a way for generating database and query variants.* For example, the SPL developers need to deploy the management software for each client, thus, they need to configure the database schema and its queries in the code for each software variant.

Throughout the thesis, we show how the proposed variational database framework satisfies these requirements via examples, proofs, and tests.

## 1.2 Contributions and Outline of this Thesis

[to be filled out when I have the chapters.]

The high level goal of this thesis is to emphasize the need for a variation-aware database framework and to present one such framework. Therefore, in addition to the formal definition of the framework and query language, it also provides variational data sets (including both the variational database and a set of queries) to illustrate the feasibility of the proposed framework. Furthermore, it illustrates various approaches to implement such a framework and compares their performance.

The rest of this section describes the structure of this thesis, enumerating the specific contribution that each chapter makes.

Chapter 2 (*Background*) introduces several concepts and terms that are the basis of this thesis. It describes types and how to interpret them. It explains relational databases with assumptions that are held throughout the thesis and relational algebra. It also describes various ways of incorporating variation into elements of a database.

[Chapter 3]

[Chapter 4]

[Chapter 5]

[Chapter 6]

Chapter 7 (*Related Work*) collects research related to different kinds of variation in databases and other related variational research.

Finally, Chapter 8 (*Conclusion*) briefly presents ...

## Chapter 2: Background

[background]

### 2.1 Types

[types]

### 2.2 Relational Databases

[relational database]

### 2.3 Relational Algebra

[relational algebra]

### 2.4 Variational Set

[vset]

#### 2.4.1 Variational Set Configuration

[vset configuration.]

### 2.5 The Formula Choice Calculus

[formula choice calculus]

## Chapter 3: The Variational Database Framework

[needs. must have configuration. ]

### 3.1 Variational Needs in a Relational Database

[needs and examples of them.]

### 3.2 Variation Space in a Variational Database Framework

[fexp. evaluation.]

### 3.3 Variational Schema

[vsch]

#### 3.3.1 Variational Schema Configuration

[vsch configuration.]

### 3.4 Variational Table

[vtab]

#### 3.4.1 Variational Table Configuration

[vtab configuration]

### 3.5 Variational Database

[vdb]

### 3.5.1 Variational Database Configuration

[vdb configuration]

## 3.6 Properties of a Variational Database Framework

[well-formed vdb properties.context-specific properties.]

[show that they hold for vdb.]

## Chapter 4: The Variational Query Language

[vql]

### 4.1 Variational Relational Algebra

[vra]

#### 4.1.1 VRA Configuration

[vra configuration]

#### 4.1.2 VRA Semantics

[vra semantics]

#### 4.1.3 VRA Type System

[type sys]

#### 4.1.4 VRA Variation-Minimization Rules

[rules]

### 4.2 Variational Query Language Properties

[prop. show for vra.]

## Chapter 5: Variational Database Usecases

### 5.1 Variation in Space

[enron email usecase]

### 5.2 Variation in Time

[employee evolution usecase]



## Chapter 6: Variational Database Management System (VDBMS)

[vdbms]

### 6.1 Implemented Approaches

[apps]

### 6.2 Experiments

[exp.]

## Chapter 7: Related Work

[related work! have to work on this!]

### 7.1 Instances of Variation in Databases

[schema evolution. database versioning. data integration. data provenance.]

### 7.2 Instances of Database Variation Resulted from Software Development

[SPL. data model. query.]

### 7.3 Variational Research

[blah]

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

[conclusion]

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## APPENDICES

