

Research Statement

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My research interest lies in security and its intersection with software engineering and machine learning. Modern systems have grown immensely complex, utilizing diverse advanced programming languages with intricate language features. These language features introduce new attack surfaces while creating challenges for security analysis. Securing such complex software systems requires *scalability* to analyze large codebases, *rigor* to ensure precise reasoning about language semantics, and *adaptability* to keep pace with evolving threats. Prior approaches rely on excessive engineering efforts and expertise to model language-specific features and vulnerability patterns, failing to achieve these properties simultaneously. *My research vision is to unify scalability, rigor, and adaptability in security analysis.*

My research philosophy toward this vision is *principled abstraction and decomposition*. Abstraction eliminates irrelevant complexity to reveal essential security properties, while decomposition breaks intractable challenges into solvable sub-problems. By choosing appropriate abstraction layers and decomposition granularities, my research identifies critical bottlenecks in security practices and develops deployable defenses with real-world impact. Guided by this philosophy, I advanced foundational vulnerability analysis to achieve scalability and rigor through abstractions of programming language features. However, like most classic approaches, these techniques still require substantial manual effort from security experts to design detection logic and adapt to new threat models. Meanwhile, the emerging trend of LLM-based code analysis offers adaptability through natural language prompts, yet it lacks computational scalability and logical rigor. To bridge this gap, I have been developing *agentic program analysis*, where an intelligent agent coordinates LLM reasoning with classic program analysis to exploit their complementary strengths. By abstracting the interaction interfaces between LLMs and large codebases through structured analysis primitives, this approach enables LLMs to provide adaptability while ensuring scalability and rigor.

My work has made significant real-world impacts. I have applied my philosophy to securing web applications [2, 4, 6, 7, 12], desktop applications [1, 3, 5], cloud software [8], operating systems [11, 13], and database systems [14]. My research has been published at top-tier venues in security (S&P, Security, CCS, NDSS) and software engineering (ICSE, FSE, ASE), including seven papers as the first author. I have received a Distinguished Paper Award at CCS 2024 [7], a Best Paper Honorable Mention at CCS 2022 [12], and a Distinguished Artifact Award at CCS 2025 [10]. My work has uncovered 346 previously unknown vulnerabilities in widely deployed software, including the Linux kernel, the PHP interpreter, and GitHub, resulting in 47 assigned CVEs. These discoveries were acknowledged by vendors, rewarded through bug bounty programs, and patched to protect millions of users worldwide.

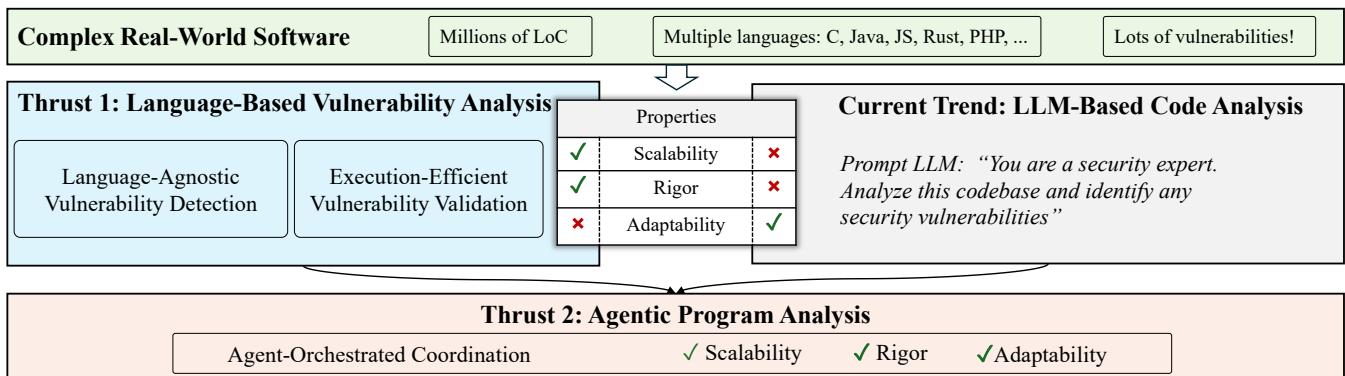


Figure 1: An overview of my past and current research.

Thrust 1: Language-Based Vulnerability Analysis

Modern software systems are polyglot, implemented in multiple programming languages. The use of diverse language features introduces significant challenges for security analysis. Meanwhile, even subtle misuse of language features leads to security vulnerabilities. For example, the type system in dynamic languages is difficult to analyze

and can lead to type juggling attacks [2]. I develop new vulnerability detection and validation techniques to achieve scalability and rigor through language-based analysis.

Language-Agnostic Vulnerability Detection. My key insight is to formulate vulnerability detection as a *code search problem* that retrieves program elements satisfying specific criteria. By separating the representation of programs from the search criteria, this abstraction enables language-agnostic analysis. Specifically, I abstract language-specific complexities into a unified code database and develop a domain-specific language (DSL) framework for expressing vulnerability specifications as simple, declarative queries. Unlike prior approaches that require complex graph query languages [16], my DSL distills vulnerability detection into four code search primitives: name lookup, abstract-syntax-tree lookup, flow tracking, and call graph traversal. Each primitive corresponds to a fundamental program analysis task, and these four primitives cover over 90% of common analysis tasks. Complex vulnerability patterns can thus be systematically specified by composing these elementary primitives. This general framework enables scalable static detection across heterogeneous codebases while alleviating the need for security experts to develop language-specific detection logic from scratch. The approach uncovered *over 60* previously unknown vulnerabilities, including 25 *CVEs*, across widely-deployed systems [2, 12]. Notably, it revealed a fundamental design flaw in PHP’s type system that influenced the design of PHP 8.0 [2] and led to a patch in the core PHP interpreter.

Execution-Efficient Vulnerability Validation. Dynamic testing validates vulnerabilities by executing programs with concrete inputs to confirm exploitability. However, this process is prohibitively slow for real-world applications due to the overhead of executing complex language features. My key insight is that not all language feature executions are necessary for validation. By abstracting away irrelevant execution overhead, I can dramatically improve efficiency without sacrificing correctness. My systematic profiling of real-world web applications revealed that accessing external resources through language-specific APIs, such as database queries and network calls, dominates execution time. Each test iteration independently re-fetches the same external resources, and even small slowdowns compound exponentially across thousands of repeated executions. Based on this insight, I developed a novel software-based data caching mechanism that transparently intercepts and stores frequently accessed external data in shared memory, combined with a just-in-time code compilation technique that optimizes interpreted language execution [7]. This approach dramatically improves validation throughput by *up to 4×* and exposes vulnerabilities 2× faster. It enabled the discovery of critical zero-day vulnerabilities in WordPress that threatened nearly half of the global web and would have remained undetected with prior approaches [7].

Thrust 2: Agentic Program Analysis

While classic language-based analysis achieves scalability and rigor, it can still take expert weeks or months to design detection logic for each vulnerability pattern. LLM-based code analysis offers adaptability through natural language prompts but lacks the computational scalability and logical rigor. For instance, prior LLM-based code agents directly feed entire codebases into LLMs for security assessment [15], which is constrained by context window limits and prone to hallucinations. To achieve adaptability while maintaining both scalability and rigor, I develop agentic program analysis that effectively coordinates LLM reasoning with program analysis.

Agent-Orchestrated Coordination. My approach applies principled decomposition to bridge LLMs and program analysis as complementary reasoning systems. LLMs excel at interpreting implicit security requirements from natural language cues (*e.g.*, comments) and formulating high-level analysis strategies, while program analysis provides systematic code search and rigorous validation. Specifically, I decompose security analysis into elementary components that are handled by either LLMs for semantic reasoning or program analysis through DSL primitives for code examination. LLMs act as orchestrators that compose these components into analysis plans, determining when to apply respective components [8, 9]. For example, an LLM might identify sinks for taint-style vulnerabilities through semantic reasoning, then compose DSL primitives to trace data flows through the code, and finally interpret the trace results to validate security. These DSL primitives enable on-demand context retrieval, selectively fetching relevant code snippets rather than processing entire codebases, and provide concrete execution evidence to validate LLM-generated hypotheses. This division of labor achieves *adaptability* through LLM-driven strategy formulation, *scalability* through efficient on-demand retrieval, and *rigor* through program analysis validation.

I applied this approach to detect privilege escalation vulnerabilities in complex microservice systems. An LLM infers from service documentation that certain operations require administrator privileges, then composes DSL primitives to trace how user inputs flow to these operations. Program analysis executes these traces across multiple services and validates whether proper authorization checks exist at each step. This coordinated analysis discovered 24 *critical privilege escalation vulnerabilities* in widely-used cloud applications that neither standalone program analysis tools nor LLMs could detect [8].

Future Directions

My past research has laid a solid foundation for analyzing today’s complex software systems. Future software is evolving with non-deterministic AI components, heterogeneous architectures, and increasingly sophisticated attacks, which all demand new analytical capabilities beyond what exists today. My future research will continue applying my research philosophy to develop new security foundations that analyze emerging software paradigms, unlock new security capabilities, and enable autonomous security evolution.

Securing Emerging Software Paradigms. Software is evolving beyond traditional deterministic paradigms to incorporate AI-driven decision-making, autonomous agents, and probabilistic reasoning. These systems make non-deterministic decisions, adapt at runtime, and exhibit emergent behaviors that traditional security analysis cannot adequately reason about. For example, agentic software systems where LLM-driven agents interact with traditional code create subtle cross-component security risks invisible to conventional analysis. My research will extend program analysis to these environments by developing *probabilistic abstract interpretation*. Instead of tracking concrete values, my abstractions will track probability distributions of program states. By treating LLM prompts as function calls with stochastic return values, I can map the infinite state space of an agent into manageable, abstract domains. This allows us to mathematically bound the behavior of an AI agent, verifying that even in the worst-case probabilistic path, it cannot violate safety invariants like data leakage.

Enabling New Security Capabilities. Beyond the mentioned properties, future security analysis must achieve new capabilities to be practically viable, specifically accessibility for broad adoption, resilience to software evolution, and provability for formal guarantees. My research philosophy of principled decomposition provides the foundation to unlock these properties simultaneously. By enabling independent reasoning about components, I aim to achieve accessibility where developers can verify local services without mastering the entire global system complexity. This independence also fosters resilience through incremental verification, allowing system updates to trigger re-analysis of only specific component summaries rather than the entire codebase. Furthermore, I will ensure provability by automatically composing these local properties to derive rigorous system-wide security guarantees. I will develop compositional abstractions that capture these local properties and incremental algorithms that preserve them, transforming security analysis from a brittle process into a resilient foundation for modern development.

Achieving Autonomous Security Evolution. The ultimate vision is security systems that evolve autonomously, discovering emerging vulnerability classes, synthesizing defenses, and continuously improving without human intervention. Current security practices still require excessive manual engineering for each of these steps. My research will establish a new paradigm where security systems evolve across the *entire security lifecycle*. To achieve this safely, I will close the loop between generative automation and formal correctness. I will develop foundations that enable autonomous evolution through neuro-symbolic reasoning, where generative models propose defenses and formal verifiers enforce safety constraints before deployment. Specifically, I will frame defense generation as a constrained synthesis problem, leveraging the generative capabilities of LLMs to explore novel mitigation strategies while using symbolic execution to strictly prune unsafe candidates. For example, systems might autonomously learn vulnerability principles from attack patterns and synthesize patched binaries that are mathematically proven to preserve system functionality. Crucially, this creates a continuous feedback loop where successful defenses are distilled into generalized policies, allowing the analysis engine to refine its own reasoning logic and adapt to future threats. This transforms security from a reactive, manual effort into a self-improving, autonomous ecosystem that scales with the threat landscape.

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