Formal Methods for Software Development

Modeling Distributed Systems

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This Lecture

You know you have a distributed system when the crash of a computer you've never heard of stops you from getting any work done.–Leslie Lamport

Using PROMELA channels for modeling distributed systems

Modeling Distributed Systems

Distributed systems consist of

- nodes,
- interacting via communication channels,
- protocols dictate how nodes communicate with each other.

Distributed systems are very complex.

Models of distributed systems abstract away from details of networks/protocols/nodes.

In PROMELA:

- nodes modeled by PROMELA processes,
- communication channels modeled by PROMELA channels,
- protocols modeled by algorithm distributed over processes.

Channels in PROMELA

In PROMELA, channels are first class citizens.

Data type **chan** with two operations for sending and receiving

A variable of channel type is declared by initializer:

chan *name* = [*capacity*] **of** {$type_1, \ldots, type_n$}

name	name of channel variable
capacity	non-negative integer constant
$type_i$	PROMELA data types

Example:

```
chan ch = [2] of { mtype, byte, bool }
```

Meaning of Channels

chan *name* = [*capacity*] **of** {$type_1, ..., type_n$}

Creates channel, stored in variable *name*

Messages communicated via channel are *n*-tuples $\in type_1 \times \ldots \times type_n$

Can buffer up to *capacity* messages, if $capacity \geq 1$
$\Rightarrow$ *"buffered channel"*

The channel has *no* buffer if $capacity = 0$
$\Rightarrow$ *"rendezvous channel"*

Meaning of Channels

Example:

chan `ch = [2]` **of** `{` **mtype**, **byte**, **bool** `}`

Creates channel, stored in variable `ch`

Messages communicated via `ch` are 3-tuples $\in$ **mtype** $\times$ **byte** $\times$ **bool**

Given, e.g., **mtype** `= {red, yellow, green}`,
an example message on `ch` can be: `green, 20,` **false**

`ch` is a *buffered channel*, buffering up to 2 messages

Sending and Receiving

send statement has the form:

name ! $expr_1$, ... , $expr_n$

- *name*: channel variable
- $expr_1$, ... , $expr_n$: sequence of expressions, where number and types match *name*'s type
- sends *values* of $expr_1$, ... , $expr_n$ as *one* message
- example: `ch ! green, i+20,` **false**

receive statement has the form:

name ? var_1, ... , var_n

- *name*: channel variable
- var_1, ... , var_n: sequence of variables, where number and types match *name*'s type
- *assigns* values of message to var_1, ... , var_n
- example: `ch ? color, time, flash`

Client-Server

```
chan request = [0] of { byte };

active proctype Client0() {
  request ! 0
}

active proctype Client1() {
  request ! 1
}

...
```

`Client0` and `Client1` send messages 0 resp. 1 to channel `request`

Order of sending is nondeterministic

Client-Server

```
chan request = [0] of { byte };

...

active proctype Server() {
  byte num;
  do
    :: request ? num;
       printf("serving␣client␣%d\n", num)
  od
}
```

Server loops on

- receiving first message from `request`, storing value in `num`
- printing

Executability of receive Statement (non-buffered)

`request ? num`

executable only when another process offers send on channel `request`

⇒ receive statement frequently used as guard in **if**/**do**-statements

```
do
  :: request ? num ->
     printf("serving␣client␣%d\n", num)
od
```

("->" equivalent to ";")

Rendezvous Channels

```
chan ch = [0] of { byte, byte };

/* global only to make visible in SpinSpider */
byte hour, minute;

active proctype Sender() {
  printf("ready\n");
  ch ! 11, 45;
  printf("Sent\n")
}

active proctype Receiver() {
  printf("steady\n");
  ch ? hour, minute;
  printf("Received\n")
}
```

Which interleavings can occur? ⇒ ask SpinSpider

Rendezvous are Synchronous

On a rendezvous channel:

> Transfer of message from sender to receiver is synchronous,
> i.e., one single operation.

Sender		Receiver
⋮		⋮
(11,45)	$\longrightarrow$	(hour,minute)
⋮		⋮

Rendezvous are Synchronous

Either:

1. Location counter of sender process at send ("!"):
   "offer to engage in rendezvous"
2. Location counter of receiver process at receive ("?"):
   "rendezvous can be accepted"

or in the reverse order:

1. Location counter of receiver process at receive ("?"):
   "offer to engage in rendezvous"
2. Location counter of sender process at send ("!"):
   "rendezvous can be accepted"

In both case, the next step is:

Location counter of both processes is incremented in one step.

Only place where 2 PROMELA processes execute at once

Reconsider Client Server

```
chan request = [0] of { byte };

active proctype Server() {
  byte num;
  do :: request ? num ->
          printf("serving␣client␣%d\n", num)
  od
}
active proctype Client0() {
  request ! 0
}
active proctype Client1() {
  request ! 1
}
```

So far no reply to clients

Reply Channels

```
chan request = [0] of { byte };
chan ack = [0] of { bool };

active proctype Server() {
  byte num;
  do :: request ? num ->
        printf("serving␣client␣%d\n", num);
        ack ! true
  od
}
active proctype Client0() {
  request ! 0; ack ? _; printf("acknowledged\n")
}
active proctype Client1() {
  request ! 1; ack ? _; printf("acknowledged\n")
}
```

(Anonymous variable "_": data from message not stored anywhere)

Reply Channels - Single Server

```
mtype = { nice, rude };
chan request = [0] of { mtype };
chan reply = [0] of { mtype };

active proctype Server() {
  mtype msg;
  do :: request ? msg; reply ! msg
  od
}
active proctype NiceClient() {
  mtype msg;
  request ! nice; reply ? msg;
  assert(msg == nice)
}
active proctype RudeClient() {
  mtype msg;
  request ! rude; reply ? msg
}
```

Is the assertion valid? Ask SPIN.

Several Servers

More realistic with several servers:

```
active [2] proctype Server() {
  mtype msg;
  do :: request ? msg; reply ! msg
  od
}
active proctype NiceClient() {
  mtype msg;
  request ! nice; reply ? msg;
  assert(msg == nice)
}
active proctype RudeClient() {
  mtype msg;
  request ! rude; reply ? msg
}
```

And here? Analyse with SPIN.

Sending Channels via Channels

To fix the protocol:

clients declare local reply channel + send it to server

Sending Channels via Channels

```
mtype = { nice, rude };
chan request = [0] of { mtype, chan };

active [2] proctype Server() {
  mtype msg; chan ch;
  do :: request ? msg, ch;
        ch ! msg
  od
}
active proctype NiceClient() {
  chan reply = [0] of { mtype };  mtype msg;
  request ! nice, reply;   reply ? msg;
  assert( msg == nice )
}
active proctype RudeClient() {
  chan reply = [0] of { mtype };  mtype msg;
  request ! rude, reply;   reply ? msg
}
```

verify with SPIN

Scope of Channels

Global channel

- All processes can send and/or receive messages

Local channel

- Can model 'private' communication & security issues
- Example:
  Local channel can be passed through a global channel

Sending Process IDs

Used *fixed constants* used for identification (here `nice`, `rude`)

- inflexible
- doesn't scale

Alternative:
Processes send their own, unique process ID, `_pid`, as part of message

Experiment with `rendezvous3.pml`

Example, clients code:

```
chan reply = [0] of { byte, byte };
request ! _pid, reply;
reply ? serverID, serversClient;

assert( serversClient == _pid )
```

Limitations of Rendezvous Channels

- Rendezvous too restrictive for many applications
- Servers and clients block each other too much
- Difficult to manage uneven workload
  (online shop: dozens of webservers serve thousands of clients)

Buffered Channel

Buffered channels queue messages.
Requests/services block clients/servers less often.

Example:

```
chan ch = [3] of { mtype, byte, bool }
```

Buffered Channels

Buffered channels, with capacity *cap*

- Can hold up to *cap* messages
- Are a FIFO (first-in-first-out) data structure:
  always the 'oldest' message in channel is retrieved by a receive
- (Normal) receive statement reads and removes message
- Sending and receiving to/from buffered channels is asynchronous,
  i.e. interleaved

Executability of Buffered Channel operations

Given channel `ch`, with capacity *cap*, currently containing *n* messages

receive statement `ch ? msg`
is executable iff `ch` is not empty, i.e., $n > 0$

send statement `ch ! msg`
is executable iff there is still 'space' in the message queue, i.e., $n < cap$

A non-executable receive or send statement will block until it is executable again

(With option `-m`, SPIN has a different send semantics:
Attempt to send to full channel doesn't block, but message gets lost.)

Checking Channel for Full/Empty

This can prevent unnecessary blocking:

Given channel `ch`:

full(`ch`) checks whether `ch` is full
nfull(`ch`) checks whether `ch` is not full
empty(`ch`) checks whether `ch` is empty
nempty(`ch`) checks whether `ch` is not empty

Illegal to negate those.
Avoid combining with **else**.

Copy Message without Removing

Assume `ch` to be a buffered channel.

```
ch ? color, time, flash
```

- Assigns values from the message to `color, time, flash`
- Removes message from `ch`

```
ch ? <color, time, flash>
```

- Assign values from the message to `color, time, flash`
- Leaves message in `ch`

Dispatching Messages

Recurring task: Dispatch action depending on message

```
mtype = {hi, bye};
chan ch = [0] of {mtype};

active proctype Server () {
   mtype msg;
read:
  ch ? msg;
  do
    :: msg == hi -> printf("Hello.\n"); goto read
    :: msg == bye -> printf("See␣you.\n"); break
  od
}
...
```

There is a better way!

Dispatching Messages

Recurring task: Dispatch action depending on message type.

```
mtype = {hi, bye};
chan ch = [0] of {mtype};

active proctype Server () {
  do
    :: ch ? hi -> printf("Hello.\n")
    :: ch ? bye -> printf("See␣you.\n"); break
  od
}
...
```

`hi` and `bye` are *values*, not variables!

Pattern Matching

Receive statement allows also non-variable expressions as arguments:

$$ch \; ? \; exp_1, \ldots, exp_n$$

- $exp_1, \ldots, exp_n$ any(!) expressions of correct type
- Receive statement is executable, iff
  - either of the following holds:
    - *ch* is buffered channel and not empty, or
    - *ch* is rendezvous channel and some process ready to send to *ch*
  - message $v_1, \ldots, v_n$ in channel *ch* matches $exp_1, \ldots, exp_n$
- v_i matches exp_i iff
  - exp_i is a variable and v_i a value (of correct type)
  - exp_i is not a variable and exp_i == v_i

Pattern Matching Examples

Assume

```
chan ch = [0] of {int, int};
int id = 5;
```

Does `ch ? 0, id` match message

- `[0, 5]` ? ✔ `[0, 7]` ? ✔ `[1, 7]` ? ✘
- Value of `id` afterwards?

To match the value stored in a variable *var* use **eval**(var)

Does `ch ? 0, eval(id)` match message

- `[0, 5]` ? ✔ `[0, 7]` ? ✘ `[1, 7]` ? ✘
- Value of `id` afterwards?

Dispatching Messages Revisited

Random receive ?? (for buffered channels)

- Executable if matching message exists in channel.
- If executed, first matching message removed from channel.

```
mtype = {hi, bye};
chan ch = [3] of {mtype};

active proctype Server () {
  do
    :: ch ?? bye -> printf("See␣you.\n"); break
    :: else      -> printf("Hello.\n")
  od
}
...
```

Nicer Message Formatting

PROMELA provides an alternative, but equivalent syntax for

```
ch ! exp1, exp2, exp3
```

namely

```
ch ! exp1(exp2, exp3)
```

Increases readability for certain applications, e.g. protocol modelling:

`ch!send(msg,id)`	vs.	`ch!send,msg,id`
`ch!ack(id)`	vs.	`ch!ack,id`

And finally

Buffered channels are part of the state!

State space gets much bigger using buffered channels

Use with care (and with small buffers).