Transforming BPEL into Intermediate Format Language
For Web Services Composition Testing

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Abstract

BPEL is a standard language for Web services composition. To test a composite Web service, the design of a formal model is very useful, because it facilitates the application and the automatization of test generation methods. In this paper, we propose a transformation procedure of the BPEL specification into an Intermediate Format (IF) model that is based on timed automata. This IF format is well adapted to model BPEL (timed) constructs and to handle faults, events, termination, message correlation and activities synchronization. The proposed transformation was implemented in the BPEL2IF tool, which is also presented in this paper.

1. Introduction

Web services provide standard means of interoperating between different software applications, running on a variety of platforms and/or frameworks [14]. Business Process Execution Language for Web Service (WS-BPEL) [10] is emerging as the standard composition language for specifying business process behavior based on Web services.

A BPEL business process implements a new composite Web service by specifying its interactions with existing Web services (called partners). It provides constructs to describe complex business processes that can interact synchronously or asynchronously with their partners. A basic process in BPEL is defined as one root element consisting of one or more child elements describing partners, a set of variables, correlation sets, fault and compensation handlers and activities. These latter define the interaction logic of a process and its partners. The BPEL activities that can be performed by a business process instance are categorized into basic (e.g., receive, exit) and structured activities (e.g., sequence, flow).

In our work, we focus on unit testing of Web services composition. The BPEL description of Web services composition is considered as the specification of what the system is expected to do. To facilitate the application and automatization of test generation algorithms, a formal model of BPEL is required. Inspired in our previous transformation of BPEL into Timed Extended Finite State Machine for Web Services (WS-TEFSM) [6] we propose a BPEL transformation into an Intermediate Format (IF) language. This language is based on communicating timed automata extended with variables and is associated to an efficient open-source simulator [13]. Using a TestGen-IF tool [2], which is based on this simulator, we can explore by an exhaustive simulation the state space of the model and generate test cases. In this paper, we present the IF timed automaton and we detail how to transform the BPEL process and its constructs into IF model. We define also how to handle faults, events, activities synchronization, termination and message correlation.

This paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we discuss related work. Section 3 introduces the IF model which is used to model BPEL composition. The transformation of BPEL into IF model is detailed in Section 4. Section 5 describes the tool BPEL2IF that implements the BPEL transformation procedure. Finally, Section 6 concludes this paper.

2. Related-work

In the last years, several formal models of BPEL description and Web services composition have been proposed
(e.g., process algebras, Petri nets and automata) [8, 12]. In our work, we do not consider process algebras nor Petri nets formalisms because we wanted to use our experience on formal methods (as in [3]) and tools in the area of testing. In addition, the IF timed automaton is powerful enough to specify the temporal behaviors of web services and are suitable to automate testing.

In [4], a BPEL process is transformed into PROMELA (the input language of SPIN) and used by the model checker SPIN to generate a test suite for BPEL specifications. The authors of [15] proposed a BPEL transformation into annotated deterministic finite state automaton for service discovery. All these works do not cover either compensation, fault, event nor termination handling.

In [16], the BPEL semantics were modeled by Web Service Automata (WSA) as an intermediate formal model and then the SPIN model checker and the NuSMV model checker were used to generate test cases. This WSA formalism does not allow to cover either message correlation handling nor capturing the timing aspects of some BPEL constructs (e.g., wait, onAlarm).

In [9], they propose another formalism that deals with data variables, the extended finite state automata, but no timing constraints are considered. In [5], a formalism taking into account timing constraints is proposed, the WSTTS. Nevertheless, this formalism uses only clocks but no data variables. Our work improves the state of art, because the obtained IF formal model includes all relevant aspects of BPEL constructs: time constraints, message correlation, fault and event handling, termination, fault propagation and activities synchronization.

3. IF Overview

A communicating system described using IF language [11] is composed of active processes instances running in parallel and interacting asynchronously through shared variables and signals via signalroutes or by direct addressing. A process instance can be created and destroyed dynamically during the system execution. It has local data and a private FIFO buffer. Each IF process is described as a timed automaton extended with discrete data variables, communication primitives and urgency attributes on transitions, i.e., IF-TA.

**Definition 1 (IF Timed Automaton)** The IF Timed Automaton is a tuple $TA = (Q, Act, X, T, q_0)$ where: $Q$ is a finite set of states, $q_0$ is the initial state, $Act$ is a finite set of actions, $X$ is a set of typed variables (including data variables and clocks) and $T \subseteq Q \times G(X) \times 2^{Act} \times U \times Q$ is a set of transitions such that $G(X)$ is a set of boolean guard conditions on data variables and clocks, and $U = \{ \text{eager, lazy, delayable} \}$ is the urgency set.

Each transition $t = q \xrightarrow{g \ a \ u \ \ } q'$ is an annotated with a set of guards $g$, a set of actions $a \in Act$ and an urgency attribute $u \in U$. The actions in $Act$ represent observable (i.e., signal input and output) or internal actions (e.g., assignment action, dynamic process creation and destruction). The clocks values are real numbers. They can be set and reset. Time progresses in states and transitions take zero time to be executed. The transition urgency [7] is used to control the time progress:

(i) **lazy transition**: is never urgent and never blocks time progress;

(ii) **delayable transition**: allows waiting as long as time progress does not disable it;

(iii) **eager transition**: is urgent as soon as it is enabled, and blocks time progress.

In the IF-TA semantics [7], we can distinguish discrete and timed transition. The timed transition indicates that the IF timed automaton does not execute any action (does not change state), but increments the current value of the clocks. A timed transition does not block any transition.

The discrete transition $q \xrightarrow{u} q'$ indicates that if the guard $g$ is true, then the automaton follows the transition by executing the action $a$, changing the current values of the data variables by executing all the assignments, changing the current values of the clocks by executing all the time setting/resetting, updating the buffers content of the system by consuming the first signals required by input actions and by appending all signals required by output actions and, finally, moving in the next state $q'$.

To obtain an IF system, IF timed automata can be composed by using an associative and commutative parallel operator [7].

4. Transforming BPEL into IF

In this BPEL transformation procedure, we consider data, predicates, messages and partner links handling, basic and structured activities, fault propagation, termination and synchronization of activities, scopes, message correlations, event and fault handling, BPEL process element, WSDL interface of BPEL process clients and partners. The compensation handler transformation is not considered in this work. Each BPEL activity is described as an IF process. In particular, a non-basic activity is transformed into an IF process which can dynamically create its sub-activities processes. Note that each IF process can be the parent of other IF processes or a child of another one. The BPEL process is described by an IF system which its IF processes are executed in parallel and interact asynchronously through signals (IF messages used to communicate between IF processes) via signalroutes (communication buffers) [13].
In this section, we present the transformation of the main constructs and functionalities of BPEL which are summarized in Table 1. Note that in this section, we use the Purchasing example given in [10].

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Table 1. BPEL Transformation into IF

4.1. Data, Message and Partner Links

A BPEL variable can be declared as a WSDL message type, XML schema element or XML schema type [10]. These types (defined in the WSDL interfaces) are transformed in simple or complex IF types by using the IF type constructors (e.g., enumeration and range). In the IF simulator, all the possible input parameters are given during simulation. As we cannot control those values, in general it is common to face the state explosion problem. In order to reduce the problem size, we limit the values of some input parameters. Note that choosing those parameters should be done carefully by an expert who has better knowledge on Web services.

Because the BPEL partner links are bidirectional, each WSDL partner link type is transformed in one or more IF enumeration types which contains the partner link name, and its associated portType and operation. For example, the Buyer partner link type is described by two IF types: toBuyer = enum Buyer.BuyerPT.PurchaseResponse and fromBuyer = enum Buyer.PurchasingPT.PurchaseRequest.

Each WSDL message type is described as an IF signal. For instance, the message <message name="POMessage"> <part name="PO" type="PurchaseOrder" /> </message> is described as signal POMessage(fromBuyer.POMessageType) where POMessageType is a complex type with PO as member, and fromBuyer is a partner link type. Each BPEL partner link can be associated to one or more IF signalroutes. However, the BPEL partner links are bidirectional when IF signalroutes are unidirectional. For this reason, we associate for each partner link PL at least two signalroutes: fromPL and toPL. The first one is used to transport the input messages while the second one is used to transport the output messages. Let POMessage and POResponse be two messages. For instance, the partner link Buyer used in receive and invoke activities (of the Purchasing service) is associated to the two following fromBuyer and toBuyer signalroutes where env is the IF environment [13] and intermediateEnv is an intermediate environment process (see Section 4.10):

4.2. Fault Propagation and Termination

An IF process describing a BPEL activity forwards a fault message to its parent process when it receives a fault message from its sub-process (describing its sub-activity). The fault message is propagated until the fault handler of one of the enclosed scope handles this fault. We model this propagation by allowing each IF process (describing an enclosing activity) to receive a fault message in each state and to send it to its parent.

In BPEL, the termination is activated by an exit activity (first case) or when a fault is thrown by an invoke activity or a throw activity (second case). We use terminate and done messages to handle the termination according to the following cases:

1. When an exit activity is reached, the exit process assigns true to the exit variable of the IF process describing the BPEL process element. This latter initiates the termination of its children by propagating the terminate message. Before terminating an IF process, all of its children must be terminated. For this end, the parent process propagates the terminate message to its children and waits to their termination, i.e., receiving done message from all its children. If a terminated IF process has no children or all its children have terminated (normally or abnormally), it stops immediately its execution and sends a done message to its parent.

2. Each IF process finishes its control flow when it receives a fault message and sends this message to its parent. If one of the enclosing scopes can handle this fault, the fault propagation is stopped.

The terminate and done messages must have a higher priority than a fault message which has a higher priority than a normal incoming message (generated from BPEL). The empty, throw and rethrow activities may be allowed to complete, and the started exit activity must not be terminated [10]. We detail the termination of each activity below when we describe the IF process of each activity.
4.3. Synchronization of Activities

Flow activity provides concurrency and synchronization dependencies between its sub-activities [10]. This synchronization is expressed by a link construct. Each BPEL activity has optional nested standard elements source and target [10] that define a link which connects two activities and can change the sequential order of activities. An activity may declare itself to be the target (respectively the source) of one or more links by including one or more target (respectively source) elements. An activity can be the source of multiple links, thus allowing multiple branches to be executed in parallel. Each link can have an associated transition condition attribute. The source sets the link guard to the logic value of transition condition or to true if this attribute is not specified. The target activity may have a join condition attribute specified. It is executed only if its attribute is evaluated to true. If the join condition is not specified, it is interpreted as an or logical operator between the incoming links.

In order to not complicate the task of the source, target and flow activities, we used a specific IF process, called linksManager, to handle the links and the synchronization of the flow sub-activities. This linksManager uses source (respectively target) messages to communicate with source (respectively target) activities. Each target or source activity declares itself to linksManager. For each link, when a source activity finishes, it evaluates the guard and sends a source message to linksManager with the guard value. LinksManager sends a target message with this guard value to the target activity which must wait until the source activities finish. When a target activity receives a target message of all incoming links, it evaluates its guard (i.e., join condition or logical formula on incoming links). When this guard is not satisfied, a target activity propagates the join failure fault to its parent.

4.4. Basic Activities

Basic activities [10] describe elemental steps of the BPEL process behavior. Basic activities are: invoke, receive, reply, assign, wait, empty, exit, throw and rethrow. Each basic activity is described by a simple IF process that executes one step and sometimes handles its forced termination. For instance, the IF process of the invoke, receive or reply activity uses the IF communicating actions (i.e., input and/or output). We note that all the input actions of this messaging process are not urgent and never block time progress. They have a lazy urgency (see Section 3). The IF process for the receive activity

```xml
<receive partnerLink="Buyer" portType="PurchasingPT" operation="PurchaseRequest" variable="PO"/>
```

is illustrated in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. The Receive Process](image)

4.5. Structured Activities

Structured activities describe the order in which its sub-activities are executed [10]. Sequence, if, while, repeat until and serial for each activities provide a sequential control. Flow activity provides concurrency and synchronization between activities. Pick activity provides a choice controlled by events. We have defined the transformation of all the structured activities as indicated in Table 1.

4.5.1. Sequence

A sequence activity is described as an IF process that performs sequentially its sub-activities [10]. This sequence process creates, in the appearing order, a sub-activity process and waits for its termination (a reception of done message) before creating the next sub-activity process. The sequence process terminates normally when the last sub-activity process terminates. It is interrupted when it receives a terminate or a fault message. In this case, it terminates its behavior and applies a forced termination to its active sub-activity process.

4.5.2. If

The if activity consists of an ordered list of conditional branches [10]. If no branch is taken, an optional else branch is taken, if present. The if activity is described as an IF process that selects, in the appearing order, one of the if branches. The if process creates a selected branch sub-activity process and waits for its termination, corresponding to the branch process termination. When the if activity process is interrupted by receiving a terminate or fault message, it terminates immediately when no branch is selected, or the forced termination is applied to the IF process of the selected branch sub-activity.

4.5.3. While and Repeat Until

The while and repeat until activities provide repeated execution of its sub-activities [10]. They are described as an IF process. The while process creates a sub-activity process as long as the while condition evaluates to true in each iteration. The repeat until process creates a sub-activity process
until the repeat condition becomes true. The while and repeat until processes wait for the sub-activity termination before each iteration. They terminate when their condition is evaluated to false. When they are interrupted, by receiving a terminate or fault message, their iteration is interrupted and the forced termination is applied to their sub-activity process.

4.5.4. Flow

Flow activity allows to specify one or more activities to be performed concurrently [10]. The links defined in the flow activity permit to enforce precedence between sub-activities, i.e., synchronization. The flow activity is described as an IF process that creates simultaneously the IF processes of all the enclosed sub-activities. The synchronization of the flow sub-activities is handled by the links-Manager process described in section 4.3. The flow process completes when all sub-activities are completed. It is interrupted when it receives a terminate or a fault message. In this case, it terminates its behavior and applies forced termination to its active sub-activities processes.

4.5.5. Pick

The pick activity waits for one event occurrence, then executes the associated activity [10]. It is described as an IF process that waits the occurrence of one event, creates the IF process of the associated activity of each event and waits for its termination. The event of the pick activity has two forms: OnMessage considered as an IF input action and onAlarm considered as an IF waiting action. The pick process termination is similar to the if process termination. All the input actions (modeling the onMessage elements) of the pick process are not urgent and do not block time progress. These input actions have a lazy urgency. In the contrary, the timeout action (modeling the onAlarm) is always urgent and it has an eager urgency.

4.6. Scope

A scope provides the context that influences the execution of its enclosed activities [10]. The scope context includes variables, partner links, correlation sets, event handlers, fault handlers, a compensation handler and a termination handler. Each scope has a primary activity which defines the normal behavior of the scope. It is described as an IF process which creates two sub-processes, respectively, one of its primary activity and another of its event handlers. The scope process can have defined variables considered as private variables. When the scope process is interrupted, by receiving a terminate or fault message, it applies a forced termination to the IF processes of its primary activity and event handlers by propagating a terminate message, and waits for their termination. Finally, in the case of fault message reception, the scope process creates the IF process of its fault handlers to handle the fault and waits for its termination. If the scope fault handler do not handle the occurred fault, the scope process propagates (to its parent) the fault message. The transformation of correlation sets, fault and event handlers are presented in the next sections.

4.7. Message Correlation

A correlation set is a set of properties shared by all messages in the correlated group [10]. Correlation can be declared in a BPEL process or a scope. Correlation set names are used in the BPEL messaging constructs (e.g, invoke, receive and onMessage). We limit each messaging activity to one correlation set (except the synchronous invoke which is limited to two correlation sets). We handle the message correlation as follows:

- The IF process of a BPEL process or scope is extended with a complex type declaration of the correlation set construct: {name; status; properties}. The Status variable indicates if the correlation set is being initiated;
- The IF process of each messaging activity that carries the correlation set cs_name is extended by two variable declarations: initiate and cs_name;
- When the initiate variable is set to yes, the IF process of the messaging activity initiates the correlation set (by setting the status variable to true) and defines the correlation set properties according to the correlation values of the exchanged message;
- If a correlation set cs_name is already initialized, i.e., status variable is set to no, then the correlation values of the IF process of each messaging activity that carries the correlation set cs_name must be identical to the values of the properties of this correlation set;
- A fault (i.e., correlation violation) message is propagated (by the IF process of the messaging activity) when a correlation set is already initiated (respectively has not been initiated) and the initiate attribute is set to yes (respectively to no). This fault message is also propagated if the values of the correlation are different from the values of the correlation set in the message;
- The propertyAlias elements (that permit to retrieve correlation values from a message [10]) are transformed into IF procedures which have a property name and a WSDL message type as parameters, and return a WSDL message part.
Figure 2 illustrates the IF process for the following receive activity with correlation: `<receive partnerLink="Buyer" portType="PurchasingPT" operation="PurchaseRequest" variables="PO"> <correlations> <correlation set="PurchaseOrder" initialize="yes"/> </correlations> </receive>`.

This activity initiates the correlation set PurchaseOrder. In Figure 2, the transition 1 checks if the correlation is already initiated (status = false). In this case, the receive process sets the status variable to true, defines the properties of the PurchaseOrder correlation and sends to the parent process a done message. Else (status = true), the receive process propagates (by the transition 2) the correlation violation fault. If the receive process receives a terminate message, the transition 3 and the transition 4 terminate immediately this process and send a done message to its parent.

![Figure 2. The Receive Process with Correlation Handling](image)

4.8. Fault and Event Handlers

The fault handler of a scope or a BPEL process is a set of catch clauses defining how the scope should respond to different types of faults [10]. The fault handlers are described as an IF process which combines an if activity applied to various sequences of catch or a catchAll activities (conditional branches) and the creation of its IF sub-activities processes. Each catch branch is considered as a comparison between the propagated fault and its handled fault. The catchAll branch is used to catch all the faults that are not handled by the defined catch branch.

The BPEL process element and each scope can be associated with a set of event handlers that are invoked concurrently when the corresponding event occurs [10]. There are two event types: input message (onEvent element) and alarm (onAlarm element). Event handlers are described, in the same way as a pick activity, as an IF process where each onEvent is considered as an IF input action and onAlarm considered as an IF waiting action. The event handlers process termination is similar to the if' process termination.

4.9. BPEL Process Element

A BPEL process always starts with the process element, i.e., the root of the BPEL document. It is composed of the following optional children: partner links, variables, correlation sets, fault handlers, compensation handlers and event handlers. Note that compensation handlers are not considered in this work.

The process element contains one main activity declaration representing the process workflow definition. This BPEL process element is described as an IF process (schematized in Figure 3) which creates two sub-processes, respectively, of its primary activity and its event handlers. The transformation of its optional children is detailed in the previous sections.

When the IF process of the BPEL process element receives a fault (the case of the transition 3') or when its exit variable is assigned to true by the exit process (the case of the transition 3''), it applies a forced termination to the IF processes of its primary activity and event handlers by propagating a terminate message and waits for their termination. Afterwards, in the case of fault message reception (the case of the transition 4), the IF process of the BPEL process element creates the IF process of its fault handlers to handle the fault and waits for its termination.

![Figure 3. The BPEL Process Machine](image)

4.10. BPEL Client and Partners

The client and the partners of a BPEL process are considered as the environment of the IF system. In IF, the communication between two IF processes and the communication between an IF process and the environment are handled in a different way. Each IF process has its own FIFO queue and the messages from other processes are stored in this queue. As the communication is asynchronous it may take time to consume the messages in the FIFO queue. The messages
from the environment are, however, consumed as soon as
the environment sends a message, i.e., the communication
between the IF environment and IF process is synchronous.

In the proposed transformation, the IF process of BPEL
message constructs can receive the messages (e.g., done
signal) from the environment as well as from other pro-
cesses. In this case the order of consumption of the mes-
sages cannot be guaranteed to be the same order of their
receipt. The messages in the queue, which is already re-
cieved from other IF processes, may need to wait for the
processing of newly incoming messages from the environ-
ment.

In order to solve this problem, we introduce an interme-
diate environment process, called IntermediateEnv. Every
message from the environment is sent to this Intermedia-
tEnv process and then it passes each message to the appro-
ate destination. As each signal is defined to have only one
destination in the proposed model, the Intermediate process
can distribute the incoming messages from the environment
to the proper destinations. By introducing this intermediate
process, we can guarantee the order of consumption of mes-
sages as all the messages coming from the environment
are passed to the FIFO queue of the IF process.

5. BPEL2IF Tool

We have developed BPEL2IF which is used to transform
BPEL (BPELWS 1.1 and WS-BPEL 2.0) into IF. It imple-
ments our BPEL transformation procedure defined in sec-
tion 4. The BPEL document is processed as a tree where
each node corresponds to a BPEL construct. A depth-first
walk of the BPEL tree is performed and associated XSL
transformation rules are applied to each node in order to
produce an IF specification document.

This tool was used to transform the Loan Web service
given in [11] which contains receive, invoke and pick ac-
activities. The obtained IF specification was obtained by the
transformation of the BPEL specification of the Loan ser-
vice and the WSDL description of its partner (i.e., the Credit
Rating service). This IF specification contains the declara-
tion of five signals describing the BPEL messages, three in-
ternal signals (i.e., done, fault and terminate), and four sig-
nalroutes associated to the BPEL partner links. The User
and the Credit Rating services are described by the IF envi-
ronment, i.e., env.

6. Conclusion

This paper proposes a transformation procedure of BPEL
specification into Intermediate Format (IF) model. This
later can model the BPEL constructs and can handle
faults, events, activities synchronization, message corre-
lation, fault propagation and termination of the BPEL process
and its sub-activities. The proposed procedure has been
implemented in the BPEL2IF tool. We actually use this
transformation procedure to test the BPEL specification of
Web services composition and to generate test cases from
IF specifications.

Our future work is to handle compensation and to inves-
tigate the extension of the proposed transformation proce-
dure to the choreography of Web services.

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