

MPAnalyzer: A Tool for Finding Unintended Inconsistencies in Program Source Code

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ABSTRACT

Unintended inconsistencies are caused by missing a modification task that requires code changes on multiple locations in program source code. In order to identify such inconsistencies efficiently, we proposed a new technique. It firstly learns how code fragments were changed in the past modification tasks, and then, it identifies where inconsistencies exist at the latest version. In this paper, we focus on an aspect of the tool that we developed and shows a case study that we conducted with the tool. A video of the tool is available at http://youtu.be/a7_PVVZ4-vo.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

D.2.2 [Design Tools and Techniques]: Computer-aided software engineering; D.2.7 [Distribution, Maintenance, and Enhancement]: Version control

Keywords

Inconsistency detection; Modification patterns; Static analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

A modification task such as a bug fix occasionally requires source code changes on multiple locations. If a developer overlooks a location to be changed in a given task, an unintended inconsistency occurs there. Such an inconsistency may cause faults in the future, and such a task inherently involves the risk of overlooking locations [5].

Figure 1 shows two source files of Apache Subversion project. The 721th line of `update_editor.c`, the 1,340th and 1,502th lines of `status.c` include the same expression. Two of them were changed in the same way in 2004/01/10. Then, in 2004/03/11, the remaining one was modified and the 3 expressions got consistent again. The commit log of 2004/03/11 described that the modification was for following up to the modifications in 2004/01/10. The commit log is an evidence

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2642937.2648616>.

```
trunk/subversion/libsvn_wc/update_editor.c
718 eb->root_opened = TRUE;
719
720 *dir_baton = d = make_dir_baton (NULL, eb, NULL, FALSE, pool);
721 if (! eb->target) -----> *eb->target
722 {                               2004/01/10
723     /* For an update with a NULL target, this is equivalent to open_dir():*/
724     svn_wc_adm_access_t *adm_access;
```

```
trunk/subversion/libsvn_wc/status.c
1337 /* If this is the top-most directory, and the operation had a
1339 target, we should only report the target. */
1340 if (eb->target) -----> *eb->target
1341 {                               2004/01/10
1342     svn_wc_status_t *tgt_status;
1343     const char *path = svn_path_join (eb->anchor, eb->target, pool);
1344     ...
1499 /* If we have a target, that's the thing we're sending, otherwise
1500 we're sending the anchor. */
1501
1502 if (eb->target) -----> *eb->target
1503 {                               2004/03/11
1504     svn_node_kind_t kind;
1505     const char *full_path = svn_path_join (eb->anchor, eb->target, pool);
```

Follow-up to r8842. I forgot that eb->target is never NULL (but that *eb->target might be. *subversion/libsvn_wc/status.c (close_edit): Check *eb->target, not eb->target.

Figure 1: Modifications in Subversion

that: the 3 expressions must have been modified simultaneously; however the developer overlooked one of them.

Keyword-based search tools such as `grep` are useful to avoid inconsistencies. Developers can get a list of locations that may require changes in a given task by using `grep`. However, using `grep` still remains the following issues.

- Once an inconsistency has occurred, it is difficult to detect it with `grep`. Although developers need keywords included in the code fragment before the change, they have no way to get such keywords after the change because they do not know where the inconsistency exists.
- `grep` often returns a long list of locations, but most of the locations are not ones that actually require changes. Checking the locations one by one to eliminate false positives is a costly and burdensome task.

Another choice should be clone detection techniques (in short, CDTs). Using CDTs enables developers to identify where inconsistencies exist. However, using them still remains the following issues.

- Token-level inconsistencies can be detected by CDTs [2, 4]. However, at present, it still has not been revealed whether they have a sufficient capability to detect statement-level ones. We already have many type-

3¹ CDTs, but they have not been applied to detecting statement-level ones yet.

- Token-level inconsistencies can be detected by CDTs only if they are included in detected clones. If code surrounding inconsistencies is not duplicated to its correspondents, they will not be detected by CDTs. We are able to detect such clones like the 3 expressions in Figure 1 if we decrease the minimum size of clones to be detected. However, we will get a long list of clones even if the system is not large. Extracting necessary clones from it is a complicated and burdensome task.

As an alternative way to detect inconsistencies, we have proposed a new technique [1]. It firstly finds modification patterns, each of which means how a code fragment was changed to another one, by analyzing a code repository of target software. Then, it detects inconsistencies in the latest source code by using the patterns. In literature [1], we have reported the following experimental results.

- It detected 16 and 69 unintended inconsistencies from the two open source systems, respectively.
- Most of the detected unintended inconsistencies were not detected by two CDTs, CCFinder[3] and Nicad[6]. CCFinder detected 2 and 39 out of the 16 and 69 inconsistencies, and Nicad detected 2 and 2 out of them.

In this paper, we focus on an aspect of the tool we developed. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 explains our solution for the issues of inconsistency detection. Section 3 introduces our tool that we developed; Section 4 shows a case study we have conducted with the tool; Section 6 concludes this paper.

2. OUR SOLUTION

In order to detect where inconsistencies exist, we have proposed a new technique that utilizes the past changes [1]. The followings are its characteristics, and it is free from the issues of `grep` and CDTs.

- It can detect not only token-level inconsistencies but also statement-level ones.
- It can detect inconsistencies even if they are not in duplicated code chunk.
- It does not require deep analysis of source code, and so it is easy to apply it to many programming languages.
- It has high scalability, less than an hour is required for analyzing million lines of code and its history.

The technique analyzes how source code was modified in the past to find modification patterns. A **modification pattern** (in short, **MP**) means a pattern that a code fragment was changed to another one. For example, by analyzing modifications performed in 2004/01/10 in Figure 1, the technique finds that the following MP occurred twice.

```
eb->target → *eb->target
```

Found MPs are used for detecting inconsistencies. In the case of Figure 1, by using the above MP, we can automatically suggest that the 1,502th line must be changed to “`*eb->target`” just after the 2004/01/10 modifications.

¹A type-3 clone is a duplicate code region including some instructions that are not duplicated to its correspondents.

3. TOOL: MPANALYZER

We have implemented the proposed technique as a tool, **MPAnalyzer**². Currently, the tool handles C/C++ and Java software systems managed with **Subversion**.

MPAnalyzer has two functions called *mining function* and *detection function*: *mining function* is a batch processing that analyzes past modifications to find MPs; *detection function* is an interactive processing for detecting inconsistencies to be modified with the found MPs.

3.1 Mining Function

The input and output of *mining function* are as follows.

Input: a code repository of a target system,

Output: a set of MPs with *confidence* and *support* values.

Minning function consists of three steps.

STEP1: identifies revisions where the source code was changed.

STEP2: extracts MPs from the revisions.

STEP3: calculates *confidence* and *support* metrics for MPs.

In STEP1, *mining function* identifies revisions where one or more source files were modified. Code repositories contain not only source files but also other kinds of files such as manual or copyright files. There are revisions that no source files were modified. Consequently, the purpose of STEP1 is eliminating revisions to be ignored.

In STEP2, *mining function* extracts MPs from every of two consecutive revisions. MPs are extracted at the level of program statements and conditional predicates. Interface E in Figure 2(a) shows an extracted MP. The detailed operations in STEP2 is described in literature [1].

In STEP3, *mining function* calculates **confidence** and **support** metrics for each of the extracted MPs.

Definition 1 (Confidence) *This is a probability that a given code fragment (cf_1) is changed to another one (cf_2). Confidence is represented by a fraction, $\frac{m}{n}$. Herein, “ m ” is the number of modifications whose pre-changed code fragments are cf_1 and post-changed ones are cf_2 ($cf_1 \rightarrow cf_2$)³. “ n ” is the number of modifications whose pre-changed code fragments are cf_1 ($cf_1 \rightarrow *$). $m \leq n$ is always satisfied.*

Definition 2 (Support) *This is a numerical metric to present the number of equivalent modifications classified into a given MP. Two modifications, $cf_3 \rightarrow cf_4$ and $cf_5 \rightarrow cf_6$ are equivalent if the two conditions are satisfied.*

- The token sequence of cf_3 is identical to the one of cf_5 .
- The token sequence of cf_4 is identical to the one of cf_6 .

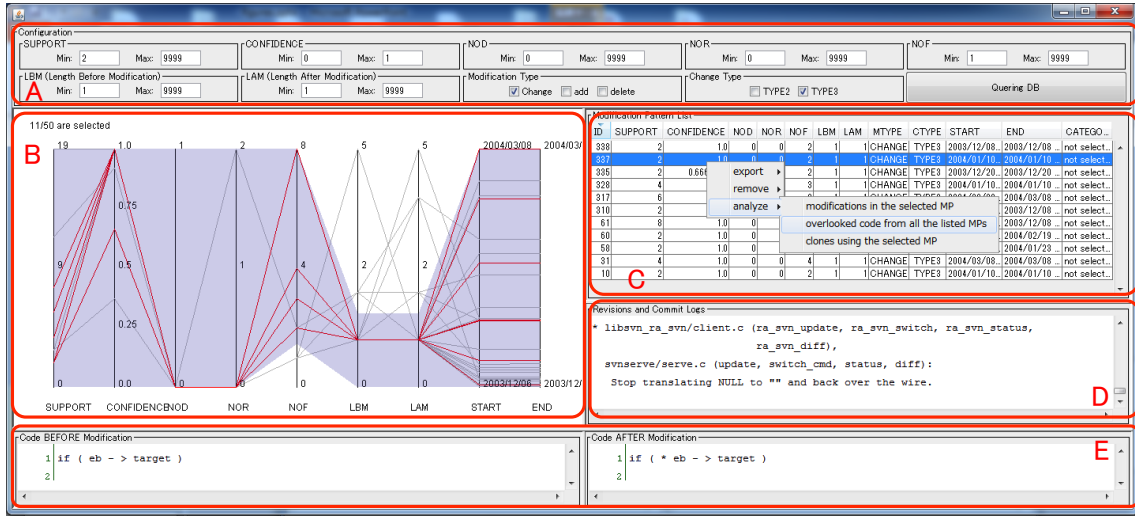
3.2 Detection Function

The inputs of *detection function* are the followings, (1) source files where inconsistencies are to be detected, (2) a list of MPs with their *confidence* and *support* values, and (3) thresholds of *confidence*, *support*, and *place*. The output is a list of detected inconsistencies.

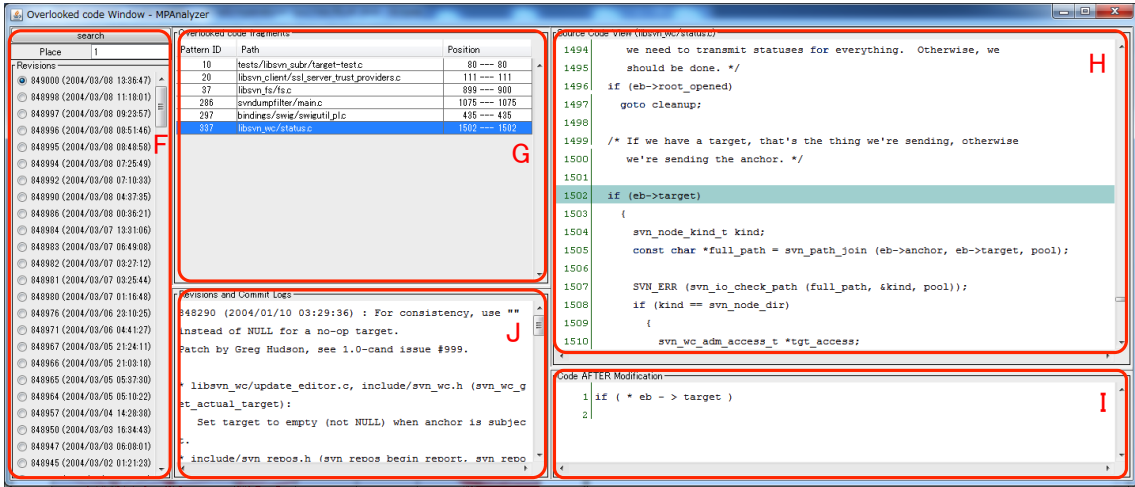
Detection function consists of the following steps.

²<https://github.com/YoshikiHigo/MPAnalyzer>

³“ \rightarrow ” means “was changed to”.



(a) Window for selecting MPs (STEP1)



(b) Window for detecting overlooked code fragments (STEP2)

Figure 2: Snapshots of Windows for each of the steps in *detection function*

STEP1: selects MPs.

STEP2: detects inconsistencies.

In STEP1, *detection function* selects MPs used for detecting inconsistencies. Selections are conducted by specifying the thresholds of *confidence* and *support*. If both the *confidence* and *support* values of a given MP are within the threshold range, it is used for detecting inconsistencies.

Figure 2(a) shows the window for selecting MPs. In the window, developers select MPs with interfaces A and B. The right-hand list (C) shows a selection result. Developers can see the commit logs where the MPs occurred and their code with interfaces D and E.

In STEP2, every of the source files is checked to find out if it contains any of the selected MPs. Assuming that there are a source file f in a revision r_1 and a selected MP $mp = cf_1 \rightarrow cf_2$. If the token sequence of f contains the token sequence of cf_1 , MPA analyzer regards that f has an inconsistency, and it shows the following information:

- location of the matched code fragments (file path, start line, and end line), and

- cf_2 , which is a suggestion of how the code fragments should be modified.

In *detection function*, we introduce one more metric, **place**. *place* represents the number of code fragments matched with cf_1 . If cf_1 is matched in many locations, the matched locations are unlikely to be unintended inconsistencies. The authors think that the number of unintended ones is a small number because they were overlooked. Consequently, we use *place* to specify an upper limit of matched locations. If a code fragment is matched more often than the *place* threshold, the matched locations are not suggested to developers.

Figure 2(b) shows the window for detecting inconsistencies. In the window, developers firstly select a revision where inconsistencies are to be detected and they specify a *place* threshold in interface F. Then, they start a detection with the specified conditions by pushing the search button. Detecting inconsistencies usually finishes in less than 10 seconds, but of course it depends on the size of search targets. The detected inconsistencies are listed in interface G. Developers see their source code and suggestions of how to modify by using interfaces H and I. The commit logs of the matched MPs are available interface J.

Table 1: An overview of the target branches

branch	# of commits	# of .c files	LOC	# of total MPs	# of used MPs	# of inconsistencies	# of UIs
1.3.x	3,434	161	104,672	5,232	973	58	42
2.0.x	217	195	154,894	258	20	0	0
2.2.x	831	225	193,011	1,240	122	8	5
2.4.x	510	259	210,217	1,090	69	5	5

4. CASE STUDY

We have applied MPAnalyzer to Apache HTTP Server⁴. In this case study, we used 4 branches, 1.3.x, 2.0.x, 2.2.x, and 2.4.x in the repository. Those branches are intended for providing stable versions of the software, and source code modifications in the branches are for bug fixes and refactorings rather than adding new functionalities.

The target period is from each start of the branches to the end of October, 2013. Table 1 shows the number of commits⁵ in the branches and size of the latest versions.

Table 1 also shows the quantitative result. The column names mean the followings.

Total MPs: the number of all the found MPs.

Used MPs: the number of the MPs used for detecting inconsistencies. In this case study, we selected MPs satisfying two conditions: (1) its *support* was 2 or more; and, (2) its *confidence* was 1.

Inconsistencies: the number of inconsistencies detected by using the selected MPs. In this case study, we configured the threshold of *place* as 1.

UIs: the number of unintended inconsistencies included in the detected inconsistencies. Herein, an unintended inconsistency means that it is a code fragment that was overlooked in a past modification task. The authors carefully browsed each of the detected inconsistencies to judge whether it was unintended or not.

We found 52 unintended inconsistencies in total. In our investigation, 19 out of them were classified into bug fixes, 17 were refactorings, 14 were functional enhancements, and the remaining 2 were for removing warnings in its compilation time. We spent about 5 hours to judge the 71 detected inconsistencies. But, if developers of the software had judged them, they would have spent much less time because they have deep knowledge on the software.

5. EXPERIENCES WITH MPANALYZER

Through this case study, we learned that the commit logs play an important role in identifying whether detected inconsistencies are unintended or not. It would be much more difficult to do it if we could not have seen the commit logs. Interface J of Figure 2(b) was very useful in the case study.

We found some trivial inconsistencies in addition to severe ones that may cause faults in the future. For example, the trivial ones include (1) missing modifiers such as `const` and (2) recommending renaming variables. If developers use MPAnalyzer within strictly limited time frame, such trivial inconsistencies will be obstacles to identify severe inconsistencies efficiently. Consequently, we need to invent a technique that ranks detected inconsistencies based on their severities.

⁴<http://httpd.apache.org/>

⁵Herein, this number means the number of commits where at least one .c file was modified in the branch.

MPAnalyzer is intended not for avoiding inconsistency occurrences but for detecting inconsistencies that have already occurred. In order to avoid occurrences, we need another tool. A plugin for IDEs seems to be a reasonable choice as an implementation of such a tool. By integrating the tool to IDEs, it can check whether developers have overlooked some locations to be changed in a given task before committing their changes. This case study showed that the MP-based approach is useful to detect inconsistencies, which means the approach is also promising to avoid inconsistencies.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we introduced our tool, MPAnalyzer, which was developed for detecting unintended inconsistencies in program source code. MPAnalyzer takes a repository of target software to find patterns that code fragments were changed to other ones in the past modification tasks. After finding patterns, MPAnalyzer detects inconsistencies by using them. The pre-changed code fragments in the patterns are keys for searching inconsistencies. The post-changed code fragments in the matched patterns are showing how the detected inconsistencies should be modified.

We applied MPAnalyzer to four branches in the repository of Apache HTTP Server. As a result, we found 52 unintended inconsistencies. The application result shows that the pattern-based approach[1] is promising and the tool is useful for efficient analysis of unintended inconsistencies.

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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