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► **To cite this version:**

Ra'Fat Ahmad Al-Msie'Deen, Abdelhak-Djamel Seriai, Marianne Huchard, Christelle Urtado, Sylvain Vauttier, et al.. Feature location in a collection of software product variants using formal concept analysis. ICSR: International Conference on Software Reuse, Jun 2013, Pisa, Italy. Springer, 13th International Conference on Software Reuse, LNCS (7925), pp.302-307, 2013, Safe and Secure Reuse. <10.1007/978-3-642-38977-1\_22>. <lirmm-00824190>

**HAL Id: lirmm-00824190**

**<https://hal-lirmm.ccsd.cnrs.fr/lirmm-00824190>**

Submitted on 19 Jan 2017

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# Feature Location in a Collection of Software Product Variants Using Formal Concept Analysis

Ra'fat AL-msie'deen<sup>1,\*</sup>, Abdelhak Seriai<sup>1</sup>, Marianne Huchard<sup>1</sup>,  
Christelle Urtado<sup>2</sup>, Sylvain Vauttier<sup>2</sup>, and Hamzeh Eyal Salman<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LIRMM / CNRS & Montpellier 2 University, France  
{Al-msiedee,Seriai,huchard,eyalsalman}@lirmm.fr

<sup>2</sup> LGI2P / Ecole des Mines d'Alès, Nîmes, France  
{Christelle.Urtado,Sylvain.Vauttier}@mines-ales.fr

**Abstract.** Formal Concept Analysis (FCA) is a theoretical framework which structures a set of objects described by properties. In order to migrate software product variants which are considered similar into a product line, it is essential to identify the common and the optional features between the software product variants. In this paper, we present an approach for feature location in a collection of software product variants based on FCA. In order to validate our approach we applied it on a case study based on ArgoUML. The results of this evaluation showed that all of the features were identified.

**Keywords:** Software Product Variants, Feature Location, FCA.

## 1 Introduction

Software product variants often evolve from an initial product developed for and successfully used by the first customer. These product variants usually share some common features but they are also different from one another due to subsequent customization to meet specific requirements of different customers [1]. As the number of features and the number of product variants grows, it is worth reengineering product variants into a Software Product Line (SPL) for systematic reuse. To switch to Software Product Line Engineering (SPLE) starting from a collection of existing variants, the first step is to mine a feature model that describes the SPL. This further implies to identify the software family's common and variable features. Manual reverse engineering of the feature model for the existing software variants is time-consuming, error-prone, and requires substantial effort [2]. Thus, we propose in this paper a new approach for feature location in a collection of software product variants. Our approach is based on the identification of the implementation of these features among object-oriented (OO) elements of the source code. These OO elements constitute the initial search space. We rely on Formal Concept Analysis (FCA) to reduce this search

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\* This work has been funded by grant ANR 2010 BLAN 021902.

space by identifying maximal subsets of features shared by maximal subsets of product variants and organizing these subsets by inclusion.

Our approach is detailed in the remainder of this paper as follows. Section 2 presents FCA, and Section 3 outlines our approach. Section 4 discusses our implementation and evaluation. Section 5 presents the related work. We conclude and draw perspectives for this work in Section 6.

## 2 Formal Concept Analysis (FCA)

Galois lattices and concept lattices [3] are core structures of a data analysis framework (FCA) for extracting an ordered set of concepts from a dataset, called a formal context, composed of objects described by attributes. A formal context is a triple  $K = (O, A, R)$  where  $O$  and  $A$  are sets (objects and attributes, respectively) and  $R$  is a binary relation, i.e.,  $R \subseteq O \times A$ . An example of formal context is provided in Figure 1 (left). A formal concept is a pair  $(E, I)$  composed of an object set  $E \subseteq O$  and its shared attribute set  $I \subseteq A$ .  $E = \{o \in O \mid \forall a \in I, (o, a) \in R\}$  is the extent of the concept, while  $I = \{a \in A \mid \forall o \in E, (o, a) \in R\}$  is the intent of the concept. Given a formal context  $K = (O, A, R)$ , and two formal concepts  $C_1 = (E_1, I_1)$  and  $C_2 = (E_2, I_2)$  of  $K$ , the concept specialization order  $\leq_s$  is defined by  $C_1 \leq_s C_2$  if and only if  $E_1 \subseteq E_2$  (and equivalently  $I_2 \subseteq I_1$ ).  $C_1$  is called a sub-concept of  $C_2$ .  $C_2$  is called a super-concept of  $C_1$ . Let  $\mathcal{C}_K$  be the set of all concepts of a formal context  $K$ . This set of concepts provided with the specialization order  $(\mathcal{C}_K, \leq_s)$  has a lattice structure, and is called the concept lattice associated with  $K$ . In our approach, we will consider the AOC-poset (for Attribute-Object-Concept poset), which is the sub-order of  $(\mathcal{C}_K, \leq_s)$  restricted to object-concepts and attribute-concepts. An object-concept (resp. attribute-concept) is the lowest concept (resp. a greatest concept) where an object (resp. an attribute) appears. In AOC-poset representations, objects are represented only in their introducer concept (and inherited by superconcepts), while attributes are represented only in their introducer concept (and inherited by their subconcepts), meaning that no concept should have empty object part and empty attribute part.

## 3 Our Approach to Feature Location

This section provides main concepts and hypotheses used in our approach.

### 3.1 Goal and Core Assumptions

The general objective of our work is to identify a feature model for a collection of software product variants based on the static analysis of their source code. We consider that "a feature is a prominent or distinctive and user visible aspect, quality, or characteristic of a software system or systems" [4]. We adhere to the classification given by [4] which distinguishes three categories of

features: functional, operational and presentation features. Our work focuses on the identifying of functional features. In our approach we deal with software systems where the functional features are implemented at the programming language level (*i.e.*, source code). The functional features are implemented by object oriented building elements (OBEs) such as *packages*, *classes*, *attributes*, *methods* or *method body elements* (*local variable*, *attribute access*, *method invocation*). We consider that a feature corresponds to exactly one set of OBEs. This means that a feature always has the same implementation in all products where it is present. We also consider that feature implementations may overlap: a given OBE can be shared between several features' implementations. In this paper, we name such shared OBE as a *junction*.

### 3.2 Features versus Object-Oriented Building Elements

Feature location in a collection of software variants consists in identifying a group of OBEs that constitutes its implementation. This group of OBEs must either be present in all variants (case of a common feature) or in some but not all variants (case of an optional feature). Thus, the initial search space for the feature location process is composed of all the subsets of OBEs of existing product variants. As the number of OBEs is big, a strategy must be designed to reduce the search space.

Our proposal consists in dividing the OBE set in specific subsets: the *common feature set* – also called *common block* (CB) – and several *optional feature sets* (Block of Variations, denoted as BVs). Optional (*resp.* common) features appear in some but not all (*resp.* all) variants, they are implemented by OBEs that appear in some but not in all (*resp.* all) variants.

This is realized by building a formal context, which is composed of software variants (objects of the formal context) described by their OBEs (attributes of the formal context). The relation associates a software variant with the OBEs that appear in its source code. The corresponding AOC-poset is then calculated. A concept intent (containing the concept attributes) represents OBEs common to two or more variants (the objects included in the concept extent). As the concepts of the AOC-posets are ordered, the intent of the most general (*i.e.*, top) concept gathers the OBEs that are common to all products. They constitute the CB. The intents of the remaining concepts are BVs. A concept intent corresponds to the implementation of one or more features. As an illustrative example, we consider four text editor software variants. *Editor\_1* supports core text editing features: *open*, *close*, and *print* a file. *Editor\_2* has the core text editing features and a new *select\_all* feature. *Editor\_3* supports *copy* and *paste* features, together with the core ones. *Editor\_4* supports *select\_all*, *copy* and *paste* features, together with the core ones. Figure 1 shows the formal context for the text editor variants and the AOC-poset for this formal context which shows the CB and BVs.

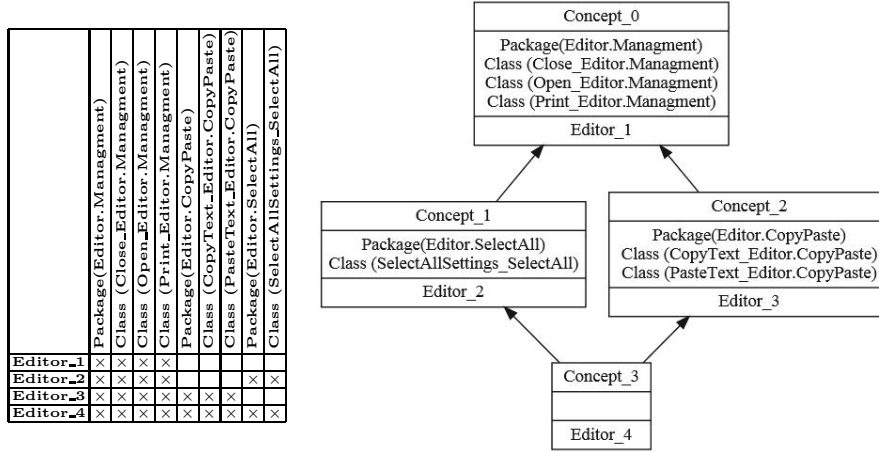


Fig. 1. The Formal Context and AOC-poset for Text Editor Variants

### 4 Experimentation

To validate our approach, we ran experiments on the Java open-source software ArgoUML [5]. We used 10 variants for ArgoUML. The advantage of ArgoUML variants is that they are well documented and their feature model is available for comparison with our results and validation of our proposal. ArgoUML variants are presented in Table 1: LOC (Lines of Code), NOP (Number of Packages), NOC (Number of Classes) and NOOBE (Number Of Object-oriented Building Elements).

Table 1. ArgoUML software product variants

| Product # | Product Description                 | LOC     | NOP | NOC   | NOOBE   |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|---------|-----|-------|---------|
| P1        | All features disabled               | 82,924  | 55  | 1,243 | 74,444  |
| P2        | All features enabled                | 120,348 | 81  | 1,666 | 100,420 |
| P3        | Only Logging disabled               | 118,189 | 81  | 1,666 | 98,988  |
| P4        | Only Cognitive disabled             | 104,029 | 73  | 1,451 | 89,273  |
| P5        | Only Sequence diagram disabled      | 114,969 | 77  | 1,608 | 96,492  |
| P6        | Only Use case diagram disabled      | 117,636 | 78  | 1,625 | 98,468  |
| P7        | Only Deployment diagram disabled    | 117,201 | 79  | 1,633 | 98,323  |
| P8        | Only Collaboration diagram disabled | 118,769 | 79  | 1,647 | 99,358  |
| P9        | Only State diagram disabled         | 116,431 | 81  | 1,631 | 97,760  |
| P10       | Only Activity diagram disabled      | 118,066 | 79  | 1,648 | 98,777  |

Table 2 summarizes the obtained results. For readability’s sake, we manually associated feature names to CB and BVs, based on the study of the content of each block and on our knowledge of the software. Of course, this does not impact the quality of our results. In Table 2, CB represents a single common feature. For the given set of BVs [2 -10], each BV represents a single optional feature. For given set of BVs [11 - 22], each BV represents a junction between two or more features. The column (# OBEs) in Table 2 represents the number of OBEs that implement this feature.

**Table 2.** Feature Location in ArgoUML Software Variants

| #  | Feature Name            | # OBEs | #  | Feature Name                       | # OBEs |
|----|-------------------------|--------|----|------------------------------------|--------|
| 1  | Class Diagram           | 74431  | 12 | Junction cognitive/deployment      | 745    |
| 2  | Diagram                 | 1309   | 13 | Junction cognitive/sequence        | 55     |
| 3  | Use case Diagram        | 1928   | 14 | Junction sequence/collaboration    | 111    |
| 4  | Collaboration Diagram   | 935    | 15 | Junction state/logging             | 6      |
| 5  | Cognitive Diagram       | 10193  | 16 | Junction deployment/logging        | 18     |
| 6  | Activity Diagram        | 1583   | 17 | Junction collaboration/logging     | 13     |
| 7  | Deployment Diagram      | 1334   | 18 | Junction use case/logging          | 22     |
| 8  | Sequence Diagram        | 3708   | 19 | Junction sequence/logging          | 51     |
| 9  | State Diagram           | 2597   | 20 | Junction activity/logging          | 3      |
| 10 | Logging                 | 1149   | 21 | Junction cognitive/logging         | 169    |
| 11 | Junction activity/state | 57     | 22 | Junction between features 14/17/19 | 18     |

In fact 22 features have been identified from ArgoUML software product variants. The 12 extra features (features 11-22) represent junctions between the other features [5]. The top concept (feature 1 called "Class Diagram" in Table 2) contains 74431 OBEs that are shared by all software product variants (*i.e.*, CB). In particular, it contains the *class diagram* feature, which is indeed a common feature, and is therefore present in every product. We compared the obtained CB with the common features of the original feature model [5]. CB corresponds exactly to one common feature (*i.e.*, class diagram). Concerning the obtained BVs, each BV from 2-10 corresponds exactly to one original optional feature. For BVs from 11-22, each block represents a junction.

## 5 Related Work

Loesch et al. [6] applied FCA to analyze the variability in a software product line based on product configurations (described by features), and construct a lattice that provides a classification of the usage of variable features in real products derived from the product line. An inclusive survey about approaches linking features and source code in a single software is proposed in [7]. Rubin *et al.* [8] present an approach to locate optional features from two product variants' source code. They do not consider common features and limit their proposal to two variants. Xue *et al.* [1] propose an automatic approach to identify the traceability links between a given collection of features and a given collection of source code variants. They thus consider feature descriptions as an input. Acher *et al.* [2] present automated techniques to extract variability descriptions in a software architecture and consider the architect's knowledge for reverse engineering architectural feature models. She *et al.* [9] propose an approach to define a feature model based on a set of already identified features. The main problem tackled is to identify the structure of the feature model. In particular, they present procedures to identify alternatives from an existing set of features. Their work is complementary to our work as it can take as input a feature set deduced from our approach and synthesize the feature model. Acher et al. [10] present an approach to synthesize a feature model based on the product descriptions. Their approach takes as input product description for a collection of product variants to build the FM. Products are described by characteristics (language, license, etc.) with different patterns on values (many-valued, one-valued, etc.).

Ryssel et al. [11] applied FCA to extract feature diagrams from an incidence matrix that contains matching relations as input. The matrix shows the parts of a set of function-block oriented models that describe different controllers of a DC motor. The approach proposed by Ziadi *et al.* [12] is the closest one. Authors propose a solution for feature identification from the source code of a set of product variants. They identify all common features as a single mandatory feature. However, they do not distinguish between optional features that appear together in a set of variants. Their approach doesn't consider the method body and do not use any classification technique to classify object oriented elements.

## 6 Conclusion and Perspectives

We present in this paper an approach for feature location in a collection of software product variants based on FCA. It has been applied on a collection of ArgoUML software products. The results of this evaluation showed that all of the features were identified. As future work, we will apply a clustering algorithm on the CB and BVs to determine more precisely each feature implementation based on both lexical similarity (*i.e.*, textual similarity between OBEs) and semantic similarity/dependency structure (*i.e.*, inheritance, attribute access, method invocation). We also plan to use the identified common and optional features to automate the building of the studied software family's feature model.

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