A Graphical User Interface (GUI) Testing Methodology

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ABSTRACT

Software testing in general and graphical user interface (GUI) testing in particular is one of the major challenges in the lifecycle of any software system. GUI testing is inherently more difficult than the traditional and command-line interface testing. Some of the factors that make GUI testing different from the traditional software testing and significantly more difficult are: a large number of objects, different look and feel of objects, many parameters associated with each object, progressive disclosure, complex inputs from multiple sources, and graphical outputs. The existing testing techniques for the creation and management of test suites need to be adapted/enhanced for GUIs, and new testing techniques are desired to make the creation and management of test suites more efficient and effective. In this article, a methodology is proposed to create test suites for a GUI. The proposed methodology organizes the testing activity into various levels. The tests created at a particular level can be reused at higher levels. This methodology extends the notion of modularity and reusability to the testing phase. The organization and management of the created test suites resembles closely to the structure of the GUI under test.

Keywords: methodology; script generation; testing GUI

INTRODUCTION

Graphical user interfaces (GUI) are an important part of any end-user software application today and can consume significant design, development, and testing activities. As much as half of the source code of a typical user-interaction intensive application can be related to user interfaces (Harold, Gupta, & Soffa, 1993; Horowitz & Singhera, 1993). GUIs provide an easier way of using various functions of the application by organizing them in a hierarchy of options and presenting only the options which make sense in the current working context. GUIs help users concentrate on the problem instead of putting efforts in remembering all the options provided by the software application that is being used to solve the problem, or searching for the right option from a huge list of options provided by the application. Graphical user interfaces organize the standard user actions and working paradigms into various components that are presented graphically to the user during various usage and application contexts. GUIs enhance the usability of an application significantly. However it also makes application development, testing and
maintenance significantly more difficult (Myers, 1993; Wittel & Lewis, 1991). The nature of GUI applications, their asynchronous mode of operation, nontraditional input and output, and hierarchical structure for user interaction make their testing significantly different and difficult from the traditional software testing.

Functional and regression testing of graphical user interfaces is significantly more complex than testing of traditional non-GUI applications because of the additional complexities mentioned in the previous paragraph. A number of commercial tools, like Mercury Interactive’s WinRunner, XRanner and Segue Software’s SilkPerformer, are used in the industry to test graphical user interfaces. These tools provide capture/replay capabilities to test a graphical user interface. Although functionality provided by these tools is sufficient for typical record/replay scenarios but they lack an underlying model that can provide more information about the test coverage or to determine the quality of the user interface from a particular functional or implementation perspective. These tools also do not provide a framework that assists in organized and modular testing. The methodology presented in this article uses user interface graphs (UIG) as a framework for organization of test scripts, generation of modular test suites, and coverage analysis of a test execution.

In this article, we propose a methodology for regression testing of graphical user interfaces, with and without a formal specification of the application under test. The remainder of this article is organized as follows: Section 2 highlights some of the best practices and recommendations for planning a testing activity for a graphical user interface. In this section, we highlight some of the sought features, well-known best practices and recommendations for planning a testing activity for a graphical user interface.

• Every element of the GUI should be considered as an object uniquely identifiable by a name. The objects should have a well-defined set of parameters and their response to the outside events should also be well defined.
• The testing activity should be planned carefully around a formal model of the application under test. This model should be powerful enough to provide automatic test generation and coverage analysis.
• Testing of a GUI should be performed in a layered fashion. The list of objects to be tested at a particular level, is either built dynamically while testing at lower levels or from the specifications of the application under test. The list of objects for the lowest level is the basic widget, supported by the underlying toolkit. While testing the highest level, it considers the entire application as a single object. The decision about the number of testing levels and the qualifying criteria for a particular testing level must be made before creating any tests.
• The tests should be organized as a hierarchy of scripts, that is, files containing commands to simulate user actions and
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