Formal Specification of a Context-aware Whiteboard System in CCA

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Abstract—A context-aware whiteboard system provides a number of services in a smart classroom including registering students as they enter the classroom; logging students and lecturers in to the blackboard virtual learning environment at the beginning of each lecture and logging them out at the end of the lecture. This system also notifies students of their absence to a lecture and maintain a list of attendance automatically. Using information from the timetable, it is aware of the lectures that are scheduled to take place in the classroom and the students that are allowed to attend these lectures. Finally, it allows students and lecturers to interact with teaching materials such as lecture slides and videos stored in the blackboard virtual learning environment. This paper proposes a formal specification of the white board system in the Calculus of Context-aware Ambients (CCA in short). This enables the formal analysis of the white board system using the execution environment of CCA. Some important properties of a classroom white board system have been validated as a proof of concept.

Keywords—Calculus of Context-aware Ambients; pervasive system; CCA; formal specification; context-aware whiteboard

I. INTRODUCTION

The most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it. This was Mark Weiser’s vision for the computers of the 21st century [7]. This vision led to a new paradigm for distributed systems coined ubiquitous computing, sometimes known as pervasive computing. In order to make the user and his tasks the central focus rather than computing devices and technical issues, appliances should vanish into the background [1] and sense the user context so as to provide due assistance to the user any time and anywhere. Such systems are also known as context aware systems.

Pervasive systems can be utilised in any domain including education, and can save time, acting as a fast and easy way for producing services. Interruptions can happen in a university lecture due to organisational processes of the university such as registering attendance of students and customising classrooms.

A context-aware whiteboard system provides a number of services in a smart classroom including registering students as they enter the classroom; logging students and lecturers in to the blackboard virtual learning environment at the beginning of each lecture and logging them out at the end of the lecture. This system also notifies students of their absence to a lecture and maintain a list of attendance automatically. Using information from the timetable, it is aware of the lectures that are scheduled to take place in the classroom and the students that are allowed to attend these lectures. Finally, it allows students and lecturers to interact with teaching materials such as lecture slides and videos stored in the blackboard virtual learning environment. This paper proposes a formal specification of the white board system in the Calculus of Context-aware Ambients (see Sect. V). This enables the formal analysis of the white board system using the execution environment of CCA. Some important properties of a classroom white board system have been validated as a proof of concept (see Sect. V).

II. OVERVIEW OF CONTEXT-AWARE WHITEBOARD

A context-aware whiteboard (CaWB) system is able to register students attendance automatically as they enter the classroom; it is assumed that students carry ID cards with them and that CaWB can detect the presence of such ID cards once the students enter the classroom. The CaWB also detects the presence of a lecturer in the same way, by sensing the presence of the lecturer ID card in the classroom. When the CaWB detects the presence of a student, it checks with the blackboard (BB) system if that individual is enrolled on the module scheduled to take place in the classroom at that specific time. If the student is enrolled on that module, the CaWB logs in the student to the BB system and adds the student ID to the attendance list. If the student is not enrolled on that module, CaWB will send a notification to the student immediately to let her know she is probably in the wrong classroom.

When a lecturer enters the classroom, the CaWB checks if she is scheduled to teach in that classroom at that specific time. If so, the lecturer is automatically logged in to the BB system, otherwise the CaWB notifies her of being in the wrong classroom. Once logged in to the BB system, the lecturer can access the teaching materials such as lecture slides, tutorials, audio contents and videos. At the end of a class, the lecturer can check the attendance list and if necessary contact the students that did not turn up.

This general architecture shows the general components of the system. The ID card should be carried by the user ”lecturers and students”. Sensor hardware senses the data from a surrounding environment and communicates with middle ware to transfer the data wirelessly using for example Bluetooth or IR signal. The middle ware communicates with the context server using a network based on TCP/IP as an example. The middle ware in this system would be the white board. The context server updates and synchronises information across the system. Fig. 1 depicts the general architecture of CaBW system.
that name is limited to the process \( P \). The replication \( !P \) denotes a process which can always create a new copy of \( P \), i.e., \( !P \) is equivalent to \( P!P \). Replication, first introduced in the \(\pi\)-Calculus can be used to implement both iteration and recursion. The process \( n[P] \) denotes an ambient named \( n \) whose behaviours are described by the process \( P \). The pair of square brackets ‘[’ and ‘]’ outlines the boundary of that ambient. An ambient \( n[P] \) is represented graphically as follows:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Ambient} \\
\text{ambient}
\end{array}
\]

A context expression specifies a property upon the state of the environment. A context-guarded prefix \( \kappa \! M.P \) is a process that waits until the environment satisfies the context expression \( \kappa \), then performs the capability \( M \) and continues like the process \( P \). The dot symbol ‘.’ denotes the sequential composition of processes. We let \( M.P \) denote the process \( \text{true}?M.P \), where \( \text{true} \) is a context expression satisfied by all context. A process abstraction \( x \triangleright (y_1, \ldots, y_t) \) denotes the linking of the name \( x \) to the process \( P \) where \( y_1, \ldots, y_t \) are the formal parameters. This linking is local to the ambient where the process abstraction is defined. So a name \( x \) can be linked to a specific process in one ambient and to a different process in another ambient. This locality property is interesting for context-awareness, especially when combined with ambient mobility. Hence an ambient calling a process abstraction may behave differently depending on its current location. A selection process \( \text{if} \ k_i?M_1.P_1 \ldots k_\ell?M_\ell.P_\ell \text{fi} \) waits until at least one of the context-expressions \( (k_i)_{1 \leq i \leq \ell} \) holds; then proceeds non-deterministically like one of the processes \( k_i?M_i.P_i \) for which \( k_i \) holds.

Capabilities: A call to a process abstraction named \( x \) is done by a capability of the form \( \alpha \ x(z_1, \ldots, z_\ell) \) where \( \alpha \) specifies the location where the process abstraction is defined and \( z_1, \ldots, z_\ell \) are actual parameters. The location \( \alpha \) can be ‘↑’ for any parent, ‘n ↑’ for a specific parent \( n \), ‘↓’ for any child, ‘n ↓’ for a specific child \( n \), ‘ ’ for any sibling, ‘n ’ for a specific sibling \( n \), or ‘’ (empty string) for the calling ambient itself. A process call \( \alpha \ x(z_1, \ldots, z_\ell) \) behaves like the process linked to \( x \) at location \( \alpha \), in which each actual parameter \( z_i \), \( i = 1, \ldots, \ell \) is substituted for each occurrence of the corresponding formal parameter. A process call can only take place if the corresponding process abstraction is defined at the specified location.

Ambients exchange messages using the output capability \( \alpha \ send(z_1, \ldots, z_\ell) \) to send a list of names \( z_1, \ldots, z_\ell \) to a location \( \alpha \), and the input capability \( \alpha \ recv(y_1, \ldots, y_t) \) to receive a list of names from a location \( \alpha \). The mobility capabilities in and out are defined as follows. An ambient that performs the capability \( \text{in} \) moves into the sibling ambient \( n \). The capability \( \text{out} \) moves the ambient that performs it out of that ambient’s parent. The capability \( \text{del} n \) deletes an ambient of the form \( n[0] \) situated at the same level as that capability, i.e., the process \( \text{del} n.P \mid n[0] \) reduces to \( P \). The capability \( \text{del} \) acts as a garbage collector that deletes ambients which have completed their computations.
Example 3.1:

- The process \( n[\text{in } m.\text{out.0}] | m[\text{in } n.\text{out.0}] \) describes the behaviours of two sibling ambients \( n \) and \( m \) concurrently willing to move in and out of one another.

- The ambient \( n[(\#\text{at}(m))? :: \text{send}(\text{msg}).0] \) releases the message ‘\( \text{msg} \)’ only when at location \( m \); where the context expression ‘\( \text{at}(m) \)’ holds if \( n \) is a child ambient of the ambient \( m \). The formal definition of the predicate ‘at’ is given in Example 3.2.

Context model: In CCA, a context is modelled as a process with a hole in it. The hole (denoted by \( \odot \)) in a context represents the position of the process that context is the context of. For example, suppose a system is modelled by the process \( P | n[Q | m[R | S]] \). So, the context of the process \( R \) in that system is \( P | n[Q | m[\odot | S]] \), and that of the ambient named \( m \) is \( P | n[Q | \odot] \) as depicted graphically in Fig. 2. Thus the contexts of CCA processes are described by the grammar in Table II. A property of a context can be described by a formula called a context expression (CE in short).

### TABLE II. SYNTAX OF CONTEXTS

| \( C \) | ::= | 0 | \( \odot \) | \( n[C] \) | \( \langle C \rangle P \) | \( \nu n \langle C \rangle \) |

Context expressions: The CE \( \text{true} \) always holds. A CE \( n = m \) holds if the names \( n \) and \( m \) are lexically identical. The CE \( \bullet \) holds solely for the hole context, i.e. the position of the process evaluating that context expression. Propositional operators such as negation (\( \neg \)) and conjunction (\( \wedge \)) expand their usual semantics to context expressions. A CE \( \kappa_1 | \kappa_2 \) holds for a context if that context is a parallel composition of two contexts such that \( \kappa_1 \) holds for one and \( \kappa_2 \) holds for the other. A CE \( n[\kappa] \) holds for a context if that context is an ambient named \( n \) such that \( \kappa \) holds inside that ambient. A CE \( \ominus \kappa \) holds for a context if there exists somewhere in that context a sub-context for which \( \kappa \) holds. The operator \( \ominus \) is called somewhere modality, while \( \oplus \) is aka spatial next modality.

Example 3.2: We now give some examples of predicates that can be used to specify common context properties such as the location of the user and whom the user is with. In these sample predicates we take the view that a process is evaluated by the immediate ambient \( \lambda \) say that contains it.

- \( \text{has}(n) = \ominus (\bullet | n[\text{true}] | \text{true}) \)

IV. Formal Specification of CAWB System

In this section, the CAWB system is formally specified in CCA. It is assumed that the CAWB system is located in a classroom which acts as the active zone of the system, i.e. any ID card within the active zone can be detected by the CAWB, but ID cards outside the active zone cannot be detected by the CAWB system. Therefore, students outside the classroom are not detected by the CAWB, but are detected by the system once they enter the classroom; same for lecturers. The CAWB system is modelled in CCA using the following ambients:

- The classroom ambient \( cRoom \), which represents the active zone of the system
- The blackboard ambient \( BB \), which models the context server (see Fig. 1) and hosts the users login accounts
- The display system ambient \( Display \), for powerpoint presentations and tutorials
- The audio-vision system ambients \( AVS \), for playing audio contents and videos
- The attendance monitoring system \( aList \), that manages students attendance
- The context-aware whiteboard ambient \( CaWB \), that controls the whole system
- The lecturer ambient \( Lect1 \), representing a lecturer of ID number \( Lect1 \)
- The student ambient \( St1 \), representing a student of ID number \( St1 \).

The overall model of the system is given in Fig. 3, where \( P_i \) is a process specifying the behaviour of the corresponding ambient that contains it.

The textual representation of the model in Fig. 3 is given in Eq. (1).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{cRoom} & | \\
\text{CaWB} & | P_1 \\
& | \text{BB}[P_2] \\
& | \text{Display}[P_3] \\
& | \text{AVS}[P_4] \\
& | \text{aList}[P_5] \\
\end{align*}
\]

The classroom ambient \( cRoom \) is the active zone of the CAWB system; this means that any object inside the \( cRoom \)
can be detected by the CaWB system. Initially, the classroom is empty; students and lecturers are waiting outside as depicted in Fig. 3 (graphically) and Eq. 1 (in the textual form). The behaviours $P_i, 1 \leq i \leq 7$ of the ambients are specified below.

A. The context-aware whiteboard ambient CaWB

This ambient continuously scans its active zone (i.e. the classroom) to detect the presence of students and lecturers in the classroom. Once a user is detected, the system automatically attempts to log the user in to the Blackboard (BB). This behaviour is specified in Eq. (2).

$$P_1 = \text{Eq.}(2) | \text{Eq.}(3)$$

If the login is successful, a notification login allowed is sent to the user and that user’s ID is added to the attendance list. If the login is denied, the user is notified and the attendance list is not updated. In addition to the login request, the CaWB ambient enables users to display the lecture slides and tutorials; to play audio and video contents using the AVS system. This behaviour is specified in Eq. (3). Therefore the whole behaviour $P_1$ of the CaWB ambient is the parallel composition of the process in Eq. (2) and the process in Eq. (3), as depicted in Eq. (4).

$$P_2 = \left\{ 
\begin{align*}
\neg \text{recv}(\text{src}, \text{req}) & \text{if} \\
\left(\left(\neg \text{recv}(\text{src}, \text{req}) \text{ or } \neg \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply})\right) \text{ and } \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply})\right) & \text{if} \\
\left(\neg \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply}) \text{ or } \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply})\right) & \text{if} \\
\left(\neg \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply}) \text{ or } \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply})\right) & \text{if} \\
\end{align*}
\right\}$$

Fig. 3. The model of CaWB system in CCA

B. The blackboard ambient BB

The BB ambient maintains the database of students enrolled on a module and the lecturers involved in the teaching of that module. This database is simply modelled as a process of the form $m_i(0)$, where $m_i, 1 \leq i \leq \ell$ are distinct user ID numbers. When The CaWB emits a login request for a user say $x$, the BB ambient checks if the user $x$ is enrolled on the module (using the context expression $\diamond \text{has}(x)$, as shown in Eq. (5)), in which case the login request is successful; otherwise the login request is denied. The BB ambient also handles requests to access the teaching materials such as lecture slides (.ppt), tutorials (.pdf), audio (.wav) and video contents (.wmv). Thus, the behaviour $P_2$ of the BB ambient is given in Eq. (5). Note that for illustration, of the four users waiting outside the classroom in Fig. 3 only Lect1 and St1 are enrolled on the module in the blackboard BB as shown in Eq. (5).

$$P_2 = \left\{ 
\begin{align*}
\left( \neg \text{recv}(\text{src}, \text{req}) \text{if} \\
\left(\neg \text{recv}(\text{src}, \text{req}) \text{ or } \neg \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply})\right) & \text{if} \\
\left(\neg \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply}) \text{ or } \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply})\right) & \text{if} \\
\left(\neg \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply}) \text{ or } \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply})\right) & \text{if} \\
\end{align*}
\right\}$$

C. The lecturer ambient Lect

It is assumed that a lecturer carries a smart badge (e.g. an RFID badge) that can interact wirelessly with the CaWB system. When a lecturer enters a classroom, the CaWB reads the ID number of the lecturer and automatically attempts to log the lecturer in to the blackboard system BB. If the login is successful, the lecturer is then allowed to request access to teaching materials such as slides, tutorials, audio and video contents. If in the contrary the login request is unsuccessful, the lecturer will be denied access to these resources and certainly will leave the classroom. The general behaviour $P_6$ of a lecturer is depicted in Eq. (6).

$$P_6 = \left\{ 
\begin{align*}
\text{in cRoom}. \text{CaWB} & \text{:: send}(\text{lecturer}, \text{login}). \\
\text{CaWB} & \text{:: recv}(\text{req}, \text{reply}). \text{if} \\
\left(\neg \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply}) \text{ or } \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply})\right) & \text{if} \\
\left(\neg \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply}) \text{ or } \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply})\right) & \text{if} \\
\left(\neg \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply}) \text{ or } \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply})\right) & \text{if} \\
\end{align*}
\right\}$$

D. The student ambient St

Similarly to a lecturer, it is assumed that a student carries a smart badge (e.g. an RFID badge) that can interact wirelessly with the CaWB system. When a student enters a classroom, the CaWB reads the ID number of the student and automatically attempts to log the student in to the blackboard system BB. If the login is successful, the student’s ID is added to the attendance list; otherwise the student is notified accordingly and eventually leaves the classroom. The general behaviour of a student is given in Eq. (7).

$$P_7 = \left\{ 
\begin{align*}
\text{in cRoom}. \text{CaWB} & \text{:: send}(\text{lecturer}, \text{login}). \\
\text{CaWB} & \text{:: recv}(\text{req}, \text{reply}). \text{if} \\
\left(\neg \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply}) \text{ or } \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply})\right) & \text{if} \\
\left(\neg \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply}) \text{ or } \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply})\right) & \text{if} \\
\left(\neg \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply}) \text{ or } \text{recv}(\text{dest}, \text{reply})\right) & \text{if} \\
\end{align*}
\right\}$$
E. Other ambients

The Display ambient models the screen of the whiteboard. It receives documents such as lecture slides and tutorials and allows to visualise their contents on the screen. Its behaviour is specified in Eq. (8).

$$P_3 = !CaWB \uparrow \text{recv}(\text{req}, \text{reply}).0$$ (8)

The AVS ambient can be modelled in a similar way. It is assumed that this ambient is able to play audio and video contents received from the CaWB ambient; its behaviour is formalised in Eq. (9).

$$P_4 = !CaWB \uparrow \text{recv}(\text{req}, \text{reply}).0$$ (9)

The aList ambient maintains the list of attendance. It receives a user ID from the CaWB ambient and creates a new child ambient of name that user ID. This behaviour is modelled in Eq. (10).

$$P_5 = !CaWB \uparrow \text{recv}(n).n[0]$$ (10)

Therefore the list of students attending a lecture is simply modelled inside the ambient aList as a process of the form $m_1[0] \mid \ldots \mid m_t[0]$, where $m_i$, $1 \leq i \leq t$ are distinct student ID numbers.

V. Validation

The CCA model of the context-aware whiteboard system (see Sect. IV) can now be executed using the CCA simulator ccaPL. A typical simulation output is depicted in Fig. 4, where the symbol “--->” represents an execution step; and the explanation of each execution step is given between a pair of curly brackets. For example the execution step in line 1 lets the ambient St1 move in to the ambient cRoom; while the execution step in line 4 says that a child ambient BB sends the message (St1, login, allowed) to its parent ambient CaWB. The remaining execution steps can be explained in a similar manner. A series of scenarios will be used to validate the proposed model.

Scenario 1: this scenario is designed to check if any enrolled student is automatically logged in and added to the attendance list when the student enters the classroom. Equation (5) shows that only the lecturer Lect1 and the student St1 are initially enrolled on the module. Figure 4 depicts the execution output when the student St1 enters the classroom.

The simulator ccaPL also displays the execution output graphically in the form of a diagram, which enables the user to visualise the concurrent behaviours of the system. Two types of diagrams can be produced: (i) a communication diagram depicting message passing between ambients; and (ii) a behaviour diagram showing both the movements of ambients and the communications between them.

The diagrams corresponding to the execution output in Fig. 4 are depicted in Fig. 5 for the communication diagram and Fig. 6 for the behaviour diagram. The top row in both diagrams lists the names of the ambients involved in the system being executed. The vertical dashed line represents the timeline for each ambient (time increases from top to bottom); and a solid directed line from the timeline of an ambient A say to that of an ambient B indicates a message passing from the ambient A to the ambient B at a specific time point, with the content of the message carried as a label to that line. Moreover, a behaviour diagram provides additional information about the mobility of ambients. A box labelled as “X --> Y” on the timeline of an ambient A says to that of an ambient B indicates a message passing from the ambient A to the ambient B at a specific time point, with the content of the message carried as a label to that line. Moreover, a behaviour diagram provides additional information about the mobility of ambients. A box labelled as “X --> Y” on the timeline of an ambient A says to that of an ambient B indicates a message passing from the ambient A to the ambient B at a specific time point, with the content of the message carried as a label to that line. Moreover, a behaviour diagram provides additional information about the mobility of ambients.

Scenario 2: This scenario shows that a lecturer teaching on a module can access the teaching materials on blackboard. The lecturer Lect1 who is enrolled to teach on the module (see Eq. (5)) enters the classroom and requests access to teaching materials as per Eq. (6). The execution output is depicted in Fig. 7.
Scenario 1: This scenario shows the movement of users within the classroom. The behavior graph illustrates the interactions between different users and their actions within the system.

Scenario 2: This scenario demonstrates the interaction of the system with different users and their roles within the classroom. The execution output shows the system's response to various interactions and transitions.

Scenario 3: This scenario is designed to show that the model cannot allow students or lecturers who are not enrolled on the module to access the teaching resources of the module on the blackboard system. The lecturer Lect2 and the student St2 are not enrolled on the module. Figure 8 shows the execution output when they enter the classroom.

VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In this paper, we have presented the formalisation of a context-aware white board system in CCA. The system’s specification was simulated using the execution environment of CCA called ccaPL on various scenarios. Some important properties of a classroom white board system were validated as a proof of concept.

In terms of future works, we will add more advanced functions to the system including listing absent students, recording lectures, and uploading files on Black Board.

REFERENCES


