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Problems and Enhancements of the Embedding of OCL into  
QVT ImperativeOCL

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# Problems and Enhancements of the Embedding of OCL into QVT ImperativeOCL

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**Abstract:** MOF QVT introduces ImperativeOCL as an imperative language for operational descriptions of model transformations (QVT operational mappings). ImperativeOCL extends conventional OCL by expressions with side-effects. A couple of semantical problems arise from the way OCL is embedded into ImperativeOCL – imperative expressions are modelled as a subtype of OCL expressions. This paper points out these semantical problems and proposes a change to the operational mappings language of QVT that resolves these problems, following an approach that reuses OCL by composition rather than by inheritance in the abstract syntax of ImperativeOCL. The proposed change reduces the complexity of the imperative language, removes undefinedness, and leaves OCL conformant to its original definition.

**Keywords:** MOF, QVT, ImperativeOCL, OCL

## 1 Introduction

OCL [OMG06] has proven to be a valuable ingredient in modeling, model validation, and model transformation. It can be used to precisely describe model constraints such as invariants, guards, and pre- and post-conditions, and to formulate queries to system states in general. In model transformation, it can be used to express queries to models, e.g., to specify source objects for transformations.

By now, several OCL tools exist, including ATL [ABJK06], the Dresden OCL toolkit [DOT08], Eclipse MDT OCL [MOT08], KMF [AP05], OCLE [COT08], Octopus [Kla05], RocLET [RT08], and USE [GBR07].

In MOF QVT [OMG08] OCL is extended to so-called ImperativeOCL as part of QVT’s “operational mappings”. Within ImperativeOCL, statements with side-effects can be formulated. It adds facilities to manipulate system states (e.g. to create and modify objects, links, and variables) and certain constructs from imperative programming languages (e.g., loops, conditional execution). ImperativeOCL is used in QVT to specify transformations operationally (complementary to the relational language of QVT).

While the usefulness of a combination of OCL with imperative language elements is unquestioned, we criticise the way OCL is extended to ImperativeOCL. The chosen abstract syntax leads to a couple of semantical problems which we point out in this paper. In our opinion, the



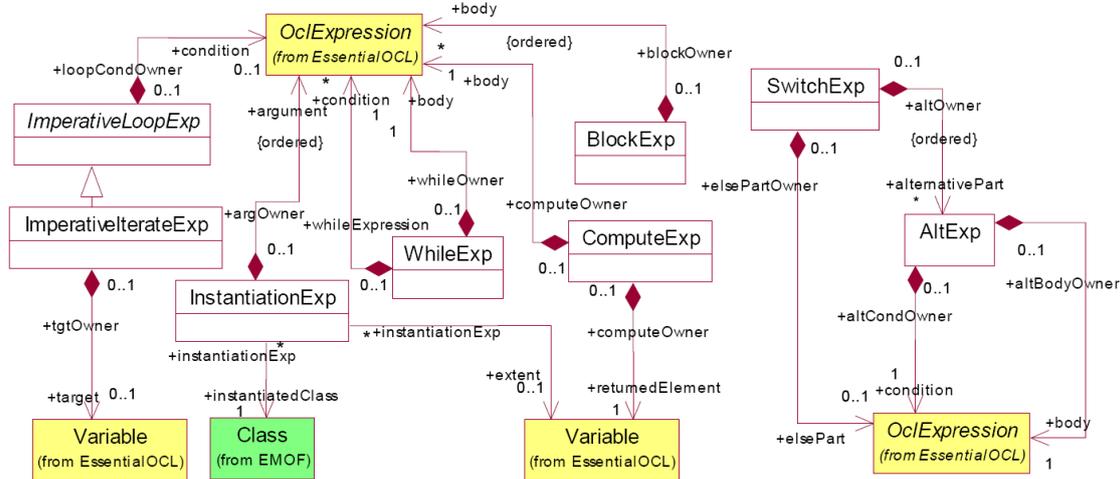


Figure 2: ImperativeOCL - control and instantiation constructs

The compute expression (meta-class ComputeExp in Fig. 2)

```
compute( v:T=initExpr ) { e1; ... ; en }
```

returns the value of the variable  $v$  after ending the sequential execution of the body ( $e1; \dots ; en$ ). Within the body, variables defined in outer scopes can be freely accessed and changed.

New loop expressions such as *forEach* and *while* have been introduced to iteratively execute expressions (meta-classes ForExp and WhileExp):

```
company.employees->forEach(c) { c.salary := c.salary * 1.1 }
```

```
while(x<10) { x := x + 2 }
```

An imperative version of conditional evaluation is available (meta-class AltExp):

```
if ( x < 0 ) { x := 0 } else { x := 1 } endif
```

Variables can be declared in the current scope using the *var* statement (meta-class VariableInitExp):

```
var x : String
var y : Integer := 2
```

Instances of classes can be created using a *new* operator (meta-class InstantiationExp):

```
var p : Person
p := Person.new
```

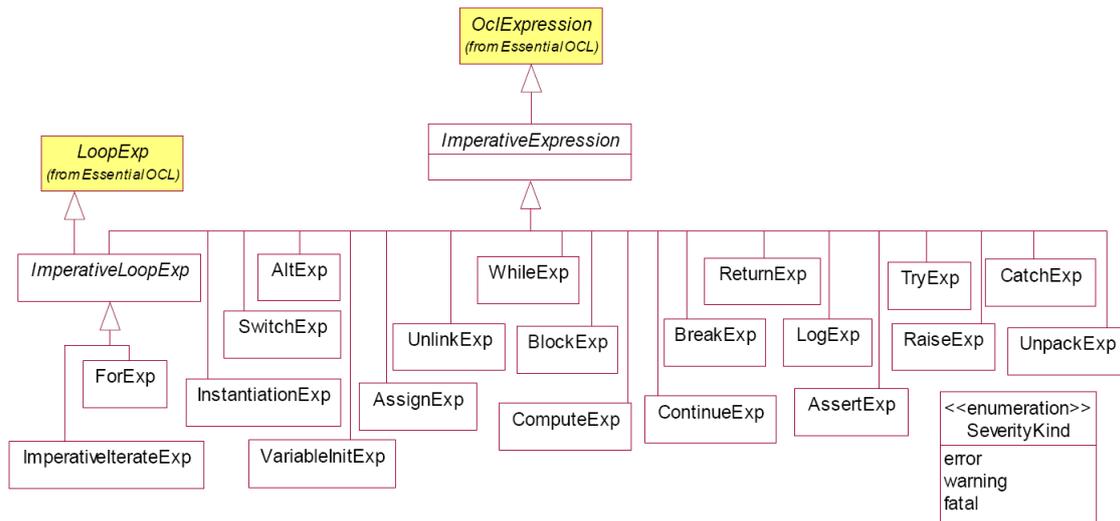


Figure 3: ImperativeOCL - side-effect expressions hierarchy

The most important aspect of the abstract syntax to that we refer in this paper is the fact that all imperative expression classes inherit from `OclExpression` (Fig. 3). `OclExpression` is the base class for all expressions in conventional OCL (cf. [OMG06]). Consequently, `ImperativeExpressions` can be used at all locations where `OclExpressions` occur. Thus, we can have imperative expressions consisting of OCL expressions that again consist of imperative expressions. For example,

```

var z : Set(Integer) := Set{1,2,3}->select(y |
  compute(x:Integer) { x := y * 2 } < 5
)
  
```

becomes a valid OCL expression under the QVT extension. The right-hand side of this imperative assignment expression is an OCL select expression. This OCL select expression requires a boolean body expression, which is given by a relational OCL expression whose left-hand side is an imperative compute expression. The body of this compute expression is an assignment expression whose right-hand side is again a conventional OCL expression ( $y * 2$ ). While this is a very simple example, trickier mixtures of imperative expressions and OCL expressions exist that comprise several semantical problems. In the following section we explain these problems that all follow from the design by inheritance of `ImperativeOCL`.

### 3 Problems

This section explains semantical problems that arise from the embedding of OCL into QVT ImperativeOCL. First (and most formally) we show that ImperativeOCL redefines the interpretation of OCL expressions and that this redefined interpretation leads to undefined semantics of several OCL expressions that had a perfectly well-defined semantics under conventional OCL. Second, we show that several equivalence rules for OCL no longer hold if ImperativeOCL is around. Third, we further show that (under the current design) some of the new imperative expressions are actually redundant to conventional OCL expressions. Finally, we generalise this critique and discuss that the abstract syntax of ImperativeOCL violates the subtype substitution principle in various other locations in UML, too. All of these problems arise from the fact that the abstract syntax of ImperativeOCL allows imperative expressions at all locations where OCL expressions are expected – ImperativeExpression is modeled as a subclass of OclExpression.

#### 3.1 Undefined Semantics for OCL Expressions

In conventional OCL, the semantics of an OCL expression  $e$  can be formally expressed by an interpretation function

$$I[[e]] : ENV \rightarrow VALUE$$

where  $ENV = (\sigma, \beta)$  is the environment in which the expression is evaluated ( $\sigma$  is a system state – objects, links, and attribute values –, and  $\beta$  maps bound variables to their values). Cf. [OMG06, Annex A] and [Ric02] for the formal semantics of OCL.

However for ImperativeOCL expressions, the interpretation function described above is not sufficient. The evaluation (or execution) of an ImperativeOCL expression does not only return a value, it also results in a (possibly) modified state and a (possibly) modified variable binding. To take this into account, the interpretation of an ImperativeOCL expression must be defined like follows:

$$I_{IMP}[[e]] : ENV \rightarrow VALUE \times ENV$$

While this is not done formally in [OMG08], the effect of all imperative expressions are described in natural language, and one could define  $I_{IMP}[[e]]$  for all imperative expressions from this descriptions.

But, since ImperativeExpression is modeled as a subclass of OclExpression, the imperative semantics MUST be defined for all “ordinary” OCL expression, too, as ImperativeOCL expression can occur everywhere a OCL expression is expected. Figure 4 depicts this structural problem using the OCL metamodel – the redefinition of eval() in ImperativeExpression is invalid.

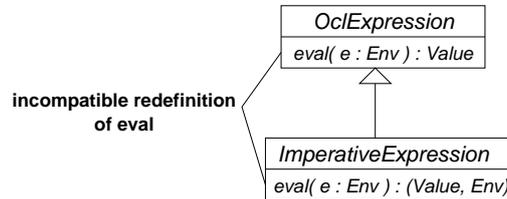


Figure 4: Problem illustrated using the OCL meta-model

The following imperative OCL expressions illustrates this problem:

```

compute(z:Boolean) {
  var x : Boolean := true
  var y : Boolean := true
  if ((x:=false) and (y:=false)) { ... }
  z := x
}
  
```

The value of this compute expression is false: the block is executed and the value of the block variable  $z$  at the end of the block becomes the value of the compute expression. Since false is assigned to  $x$  in the condition of the if statement,  $z$  becomes false at the end (the assignment expression has the value of its right-hand side, like in C or Java, therefore the expression  $x:=false$  is false).

But what happens if we change the last line as follows:

```

compute(z:Boolean) {
  var x : Boolean := true
  var y : Boolean := true
  if ((x:=false) and (y:=false)) { ... }
  z := y
}
  
```

Is the value of this expression true or false? It depends on how we define the imperative semantics of the logical connectives. Given boolean expressions  $e_1$  and  $e_2$ , we have at least two choices to define  $I_{IMP}[[e_1 \text{ and } e_2]](env)$ :

1. Lazy evaluation semantics like in Java or C (returns true for the above example):

$$I_{IMP}[[e_1 \text{ and } e_2]](env) = \begin{cases} I_{IMP}[[e_2]](env_1) & \text{if } v_1 = \text{true} \\ (v_1, env_1) & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

where  $(v_1, env_1) = I_{IMP}[[e_1]](env)$ . Under this semantics (also called short-circuit evaluation) the right-hand side of the *and* operator is not evaluated if the left-hand side already evaluates to *false*. Therefore,  $y$  stays *true*.

2. Strict evaluation semantics (returns false for the above example):

$$I_{\text{IMP}}[[e_1 \text{ and } e_2]](\text{env}) = \begin{cases} (\text{true}, \text{env}_2) & \text{if } v_1 = \text{true} \wedge v_2 = \text{true} \\ (\text{false}, \text{env}_2) & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

where  $(v_1, \text{env}_1) = I_{\text{IMP}}[[e_1]](\text{env})$  and  $(v_2, \text{env}_2) = I_{\text{IMP}}[[e_2]](\text{env}_1)$ . Under this semantics, both sides of the *and* operator are always evaluated. Therefore, *false* is assigned to  $y$ .

The QVT specification does not say which semantics should hold. But since ImperativeOCL expressions can occur everywhere OCL expressions can occur, this semantics has to be defined.

One can find further similar locations where the imperative semantics of OCL expression is not obvious, e.g. for the collection operation *iterate* (what happens if the body of the expressions modifies the range variable?) or the treatment of undefined values in arithmetic expressions (similar to the logical connectives – lazy or not?).

### 3.2 Breaking Equivalence Rules

In conventional OCL, several equivalence rules hold, most of them well-known from predicate logic. If we include imperative expressions into the set of OCL expressions, they all do not longer hold. This is not necessarily a problem but at least contrary to the logical character of conventional OCL.

1. Substituting variables by let expressions. In conventional OCL, the following equivalence holds:

$$\text{let } x : T = e_1 \text{ in } e_2 \Leftrightarrow e_2\{x/e_1\}$$

In ImperativeOCL, this equivalence does not hold. The left-hand and right-hand term are only equivalent if  $x$  occurs exactly once in  $e_2$ .

2. Commutativity laws.

$$e_1 \text{ and } e_2 \Leftrightarrow e_2 \text{ and } e_1$$

In ImperativeOCL, the commutativity laws for conjunction (and also disjunction) do not longer hold. Notice that this is a different problem than the one discussed in subsection 3.1. The following example illustrates it (returning false and true):

```
compute(z:Boolean) { y := (z:=true) and (z:=false) }
```

```
compute(z:Boolean) { y := (z:=false) and (z:=true) }
```



### 3.3 Redundancy of Existing OCL Language Features

Some of the new language features in ImperativeOCL such as `forEach` and the imperative conditional are not really necessary (as long as `ImperativeExpression` is a subclass of `OclExpression`). Their effect can be achieved using conventional OCL expressions:

```
company.employees->forEach(c) { c.salary := c.salary * 1.1 }
```

has the same effect as

```
company.employees->iterate(c; r:OclAny=Undefined |
  c.salary := c.salary * 1.1
)
```

and

```
if ( x < 0 ) { x := 0 } else { x := 1 } endif
```

is the same as

```
if x < 0 then x := 0 else x := 1 endif
```

### 3.4 Further Problems

Apart from the problems illustrated above, we can find several other locations where allowing imperative expressions does not make sense. For example, ImperativeOCL would allow us to modify the system state in an invariant or a post-condition. The evaluation of the invariant could evaluate to true and invalidate the state at the same time.

Apart from the structural problems discussed above, we have the opinion that the subtype relation between `ImperativeExpression` and `OclExpression` violates the substitutability of subtypes for supertypes (e.g., [LW94]) very clearly. An imperative expression cannot be used everywhere a OCL expression is expected. On the contrary, there are only very few locations where imperative expressions can be safely used where an OCL expression is expected. Therefore, we propose a change to the QVT specification that leaves the semantics of conventional OCL unchanged and reuses OCL (as is) as a *part* of QVT's imperative language instead.

## 4 Suggested Change to the QVT specification

We think that ImperativeOCL expressions have not been intended to be used at all locations where OCL expressions occur. Therefore, imperative languages such as the one defined in QVT (called ImperativeOCL at the moment) should use OCL by composition rather than by inheritance, as depicted in Fig. 5.

Several concrete changes in the abstract syntax of ImperativeOCL follow from this modification. Most important, two versions of assignment expressions will be required: one whose right-hand side is of type `OclExpression` (as current) and one whose right-hand side is an `ImperativeExpression` (to capture the result of a compute or instantiation expression). Figure 6 shows the modifications to the abstract syntax class diagram.

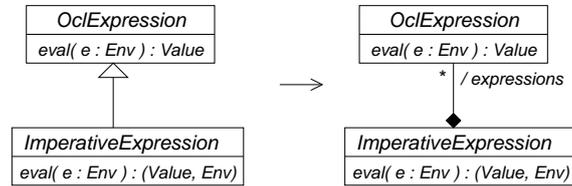


Figure 5: Suggested change to the abstract syntax of QVT

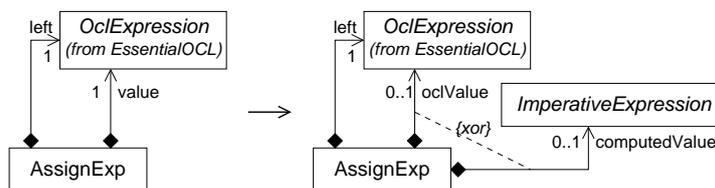


Figure 6: Suggested change to meta-class AssignExp

The body of imperative loops will not longer be inherited from the OCL meta-class LoopExp. Iterators and the (imperative) body expression are modeled explicitly now (Fig. 7).

Similar changes have to be made for conditional execution (meta-classes AltExp and SwitchExp), while loops (meta-class WhileExp), and general block expression (meta-class BlockExp).

The sketched modification makes a clear distinction between imperative and logical language elements (i.e., conventional OCL). This solves all of the aforementioned problems: For the OCL part (then unchanged from [OMG06]), no under-definedness is introduced and the expected equivalence rules hold again. Also, it is made clear that no expressions with side-effects can occur at unexpected locations such as invariants and post-conditions. Imperative loops and conditional execution are clearly separated from the logical versions.

However, constellations such as the one provided in the introduction of this paper are not longer possible if the abstract syntax of ImperativeOCL is changed this way. While imperative expressions can still contain OCL expressions, OCL expressions can no longer contain imperative parts to calculate sub-results:

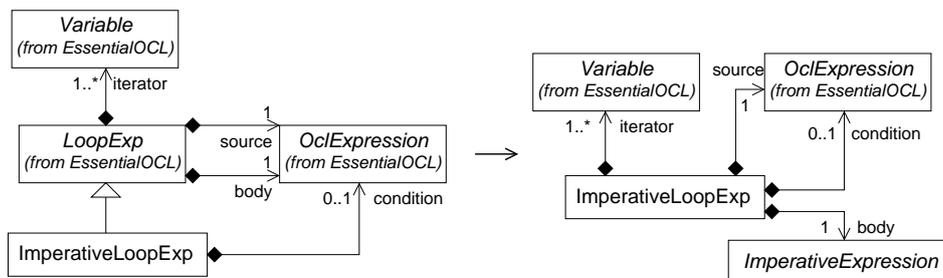


Figure 7: Suggested change to meta-class ImperativeLoopExp

```
z := Set{1,2,3}->select(y |  
  compute(x:Integer) { x := y * 2 } < 5  
)
```

will be no valid expression. The example would have to be reworked either as pure OCL for the right-hand side of the assignment

```
z := Set{1,2,3}->select(y | y * 2 < 5)
```

or into a fully imperative version (except the arithmetic and relation expressions that are OCL):

```
z := Set{ }  
Set{1,2,3}->forEach(y) {  
  if (compute(x:Integer) { x := y * 2 } < 5) { z += y }  
}
```

Of course, this is a very simplified example. Imperative expressions in real QVT applications may be more complicated to rewrite. Especially, if imperative operations are invoked as part of an expression. For example the following imperative expression, using an operation with side-effects (`calcAgeImperatively`)

```
if (calcAgeImperatively(p1) > calcAgeImperatively(p2)) { ... }
```

would have to be rewritten as

```
var ageOfP1 : Integer = calcAgeImperatively(p1);  
var ageOfP2 : Integer = calcAgeImperatively(p2);  
if (ageOfP1 > ageOfP2) { ... }
```

because the arguments of the relational OCL expression cannot be imperative expressions.

#### 4.1 Alternative (cheaper) Solution

The solution we have sketched so far implies a major rework of the QVT specification. In an alternative, pragmatic approach the QVT specification could also be improved by making a textual addendum that at least clarifies the scope of ImperativeOCL:

Conventional OCL expressions as described in [OMG06] are not allowed to have side effects unless used as part of a top level ImperativeOCL expression.

Therefore, even in a system supporting ImperativeOCL, class invariants and pre- and postconditions will not be allowed to contain ImperativeOCL sub-expressions. And to distinguish the purpose of the new flow control constructs:

ImperativeOCL's flow control statements have been introduced solely to write concise imperative programs. The side-effect free forms of conditional evaluation (*if-then-else-endif*) and *iterate* should not be used to program side-effects. Instead, the ImperativeOCL forms should be used.

## 5 Conclusion

In this paper, we have pointed out a couple of semantical problems that all arise from the way OCL is embedded into QVT's ImperativeOCL. The design which subclasses `OclExpression` in the abstract syntax does not allow to replace subtype instances for supertype instances. It also requires an extended semantics of all conventional OCL expressions which is not defined at the moment.

We outlined a change to ImperativeOCL that resolves these problems by reusing OCL (as it is) in a non-intrusive way, making OCL a part of the imperative language. While this change requires certain (intermixed) expressions to be rewritten, it essentially reduces the complexity of the imperative language, removes undefinedness, and leaves OCL conformant to its original definition.

We have informed the OMG about the problems depicted in this paper by means of an OMG issue regarding [OMG08], also including the cheaper solution.

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