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Concise and Consistent Naming

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Outline

»The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.«
Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951)

- ▶ Relevance of identifiers
- ▶ Naming Troubles
- ▶ Our approach
- ▶ Experiences
- ▶ Tool support
- ▶ Conclusion & Future Work

Relevance of identifiers

- A program's *vocabulary* consists of its *identifiers*.
- Identifiers offer the most intuitive approach to program comprehension.
- About 70% of source code are identifiers.
- Obfuscators use *identifier scrambling* to make programs incomprehensible.

Example Eclipse 3.0M7

- # Identifiers: 94.829
- # Words: 7.233

Type	#	%	chars	%
Keywords	967.665	11%	4.650.273	13%
Delimiters	4.096.112	47%	4.096.112	11%
Operators	531.444	6%	669.932	2 %
Identifiers	2.873.232	32%	25.646.263	72%
Literals	301.081	3%	708.308	2%
Total	8.769.534	100%	35.770.888	100%

Token-Analysis

Naming troubles

- Identifiers in most programs are neither concise...
- ...nor consistent

```
function mr_mr_1(mr, mr_1)
  if Null(mr) or Null(mr_1) then
    exit function
  end if
  mr_mr_1 = (mr - mr_1)
end function
```

1

```
int counter = getCounter();
...
String counter = "first";
```

2

Causes

- Identifiers can be chosen arbitrarily by developers.
- Identifiers elude automated analysis.
- Developers have only limited knowledge of *all* identifiers of a program.
- Identifiers are subject to decay during system evolution.

Naming example

```
fct p = (seq m s) seq seq m :  
  p1 (<>, <>, s)
```

```
fct p1 = (seq m t, seq m l, seq m r) seq seq m:  
  if r == <> then <>  
  elif (rest(r) == <>) ^ (l == <>) then <t o <first(r)>>  
    else p1(t o <first(r)>, <>, l o rest(r)) o \  
      p1(t, l o <first(r)>, rest(r))  
  fi  
fi
```

- Identifiers provide information at the black-box level...
- ...and assist building mental models.
- Identifiers are the the most basic form of documentation.

A formal approach

Premise

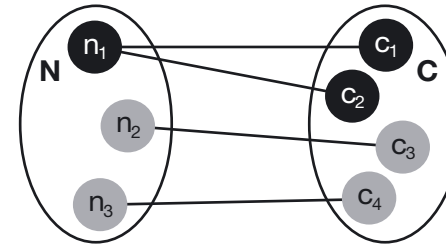
- A set of all relevant program concepts C .
- Concept C evolves over the program's lifetime.
- A set of names N .
- Assignment of names to concepts is modelled by relation R .
- Hyponymy and hypernymy relations are modelled by a partial order $<_A$.

permutation $<_A$ transformation

Consistency

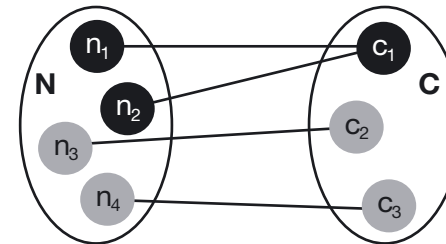
Homonyms

- A *homonym* is a name referring to more than one concept.



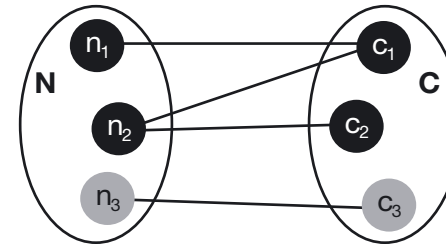
Synonym

- Two names are *synonym* if they refer to the same concept.



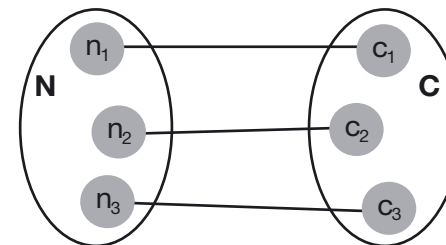
Combination

- The combination of homonyms and synonyms increases the comprehension effort.



Consistency

- A naming system is consistent if it contains neither homonyms nor synonyms.



Conciseness

Correctness

- A program element p implements concept c .
- The identifier of p is *correct* if it is the name of concept c or of a concept more general than c .
- »transformation« is a correct identifier for concept *permutation*.
- »storage« is no correct identifier for concept *permutation*.

Conciseness

- A program element p implements concept c .
- The identifier of p is *concise* if it is the name of concept c .
- »permutation« is the only concise identifier for concept *permutation*.
- »transformation« is no concise identifier for concept *permutation*.

Identifier Dictionary

- *Identifier Dictionary (IDD)* stores all identifiers with a description.
- IDD is implemented as **Eclipse** plugin.
- Dictionary is stored in **database** or **XML** file.
- Dictionary is **built incrementally** by analyzing the AST.
- **Warnings** for typical naming problems.
- **Hovers** offer context-sensitive access to the dictionary.
- **Auto-completion** features help to avoid inconsistency.
- **Global rename refactoring** allows project-wide modification of identifiers.

IDD in action

Name	Type	Description	# D	# R
UnicodeEsca...	<n.a.>	<none>	1	2
UNION	int	<none>	1	1
unit	String	Another unit	6	14
unit	StructureUnit	A structure unit	1	4
unit	IUnit	A program unit	19	36
unit	IPositionListA...	<none>	1	0
unit1	IUnit	Unit in comparison	1	2
unit2	IUnit	Unit in comparison	1	2
unitIndex	int	<none>	1	3
UnitIterator	<n.a.>	<none>	1	1
unitIterator	IUnitIterator	<none>	1	2

Resource	in Folder	Location
FastSearchAlgorithm.java	D:/cvsbroy/cloned/clon...	line 105
FastSearchAlgorithm.java	D:/cvsbroy/cloned/clon...	line 133
FastSearchAlgorithm.java	D:/cvsbroy/cloned/clon...	line 174
ISearchAlgorithm.java	D:/cvsbroy/cloned/clon...	line 43
ISearchAlqorithm.java	D:/cvsbroy/cloned/clon...	line 56

Resource	in Folder	Location
FastSearchAlgorithm.java	D:/cvsbroy/cloned/clon...	line 111
FastSearchAlgorithm.java	D:/cvsbroy/cloned/clon...	line 115
FastSearchAlgorithm.java	D:/cvsbroy/cloned/clon...	line 118
FastSearchAlgorithm.java	D:/cvsbroy/cloned/clon...	line 118
FastSearchAlgorithm.java	D:/cvsbroy/cloned/clon...	line 121

```
public Enumeration<RatedPackage> getChildPackages () {  
    int le  
    return  
}
```

Iversion	<n.a.>	SCM Version
key	K	Generic key
level	int	Tree level
list	Arra...	<none>
Logger	<n.a.>	Doclet logger

Changes to be performed

- Rename field 'destinationDirectory' to 'destinationFolder'
- HTMLOutput.java - Rating/src/edu/tum/cs/rating/output
- Rename field 'destinationDirectory' to 'destinationFolder'
- RatedPackage.java - Rating/src/edu/tum/cs/rating/model

```
if (names.length == level) {  
    // add Class  
    assert !childClasses.containsKey(c.getClassName())  
        + c.getClassName() + " entered twice."  
    childClasses.put(c.getClassName(), c);  
    return;  
}
```

- 1 main view
- 2 auto-completion
- 3 refactoring preview
- 4 hover

Experiences

- Tool usage fostered **awareness** for naming issues.
 - Students developed **identifier-guided strategies** for reverse engineering tasks.
 - **Global rename refactoring** was perceived as powerful feature to cure naming problems.
 - **Change tracking** of the identifier dictionary helped to find potential problems.
 - Current implementation doesn't regard names of **non-source-code** entities.
- ▶ Too early to draw a final conclusion but results are very encouraging.

Conclusion & Future Work

Conclusions

- Formal model allows thorough analysis of naming problems and...
- ...increases awareness of naming issues.
- Identifier dictionary allows to apply the model.
- Application must be supported by an appropriate process.

Future work

- Compound identifiers
 - Extension of the model to describe compound identifiers.
 - Definition of rules for identifier composition.
 - Improve IDD for better compound handling.
- Leverage ontologies for more sophisticated automatic analysis.