

Timed Concurrent Constraint Programming with Instantaneous Computations⁴

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Abstract

The *timed concurrent constraint programming* language (`tccp` in short), was introduced for modeling reactive systems. This language allows one to model in a very intuitive way typical ingredients of these systems such as timeouts, preemptions, etc. However, there is no natural way for modeling other desirable features such as functional computations, for example for calculating arithmetic results. In fact, although it is certainly possible to implement such kind of operations, each single step takes time in `tccp`, and avoiding interferences with the intended overall behavior of the system is quite involved.

In this paper, we propose an extension of `tccp` for modeling *instantaneous* computations which improves the expressiveness of the language, in the sense that operations that are cumbersome to implement in pure `tccp`, are executed by calling an efficient, external functional engine, while the `tccp` programmer can focus in the pure, and usually more complex, reactive part of the system. We also describe a case study which motivates the work, and discuss how the new capability presented here can also be used as a new tool for developers from the verification point of view.

Key words: Timed Concurrent Constraint language, Functional features, Case study

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⁴ This work has been partially supported by the EU (FEDER) and the Spanish MEC under grant TIN2004-7943-C04, the "ICT for EU-India Cross-Cultural Dissemination Project under grant ALA/95/23/2003/077-054", and Valencian Government under grant GV06/285.

1 Introduction

The programming language *Timed Concurrent Constraint Programming* (**tccp** in short) was introduced by F. de Boer *et al.* in [2] for modeling reactive systems, i.e., concurrent systems which continuously interact with the user (and generally do not terminate). **tccp** was defined as an extension of the **ccp** model introduced by Saraswat in [11], which was ideally thought of as a simple but powerful model for concurrency. The **tccp** language introduced two main modifications to the original **ccp** model. On the one hand, an implicit notion of (discrete) time was included in the semantics of **tccp**. On the other hand, a new agent was introduced, which is able to handle negative information and can be used to model timeouts and preemptions.

In this paper, we propose an extension of **tccp** for modeling *instantaneous* functions which allows us to simplify and speed up arithmetic calculations. Although it is possible to implement arithmetic functions in **tccp**, the resulting implementation of such functions is quite far from being intuitive. Moreover, these computations consume unspecified time, thus making the synchronization of processes more difficult. For example, a given process might need a data that another process is committed to compute, and this computation might take some time depending on the data size. Thus, the calculation might slow down and eventually disorder the overall execution of the system.

The new capability presented here can be used as a new tool for developers from the verification point of view. It is well-known that verifying concurrent systems is highly complex. In the context of **tccp**, where the synchronization among processes is manually programmed, badly implemented calculations might cause synchronization errors and even mask other communication anomalies which then become more elusive to capture. In such cases, the possibility to perform independent verification for the reactive and the functional components of the system can be a very helpful facility. External functions written in a functional language can be seen as a specification of **tccp** function implementations and the programmer can check the implementation of the whole **tccp** system by using the version with the external functions. He can also introduce in the **tccp** program assertions which use the external functions and are automatically verified during the program execution.

In Section 2 we first introduce the **tccp** language, then in Section 3 we motivate the proposed extension of the language by means of an example. We also provide the semantics for the new construct. In Section 4 we illustrate the proposed extensions by means of a representative example (the model of a coffee machine). Finally, we discuss some lines of further work in Section 5.

2 The **tccp** language

The concurrent constraint programming framework was defined as a simple but powerful model for concurrent systems. Along the last decades, the model has been extended in different ways, **tccp** being one of these extensions. **tccp** is a concurrent constraint language with a notion of time and a mechanism to

capture negative information. Similarly to other languages of the **ccp** family, **tccp** is parametric w.r.t. an underlying constraint system. This implies that, at each time instant, there exists a global store which contains the information accumulated upto that specific time instant.

The underlying constraint system determines the atomic propositions and constraints of the language. In the following we recall the essential aspects of **tccp**. A **tccp** program $P ::= D.A$ consists of a set of declarations D and an agent A . A declaration D is defined as a set of declarations $D.D$ or a clause of the form $D ::= p(\bar{x}) :- A$ where \bar{x} is a (possibly empty) list of variables. Finally, agents are defined as:

$$A ::= \text{tell}(c) \mid \sum_{0 < i < j} \text{ask}(c_i) \rightarrow A_i \mid \text{now } c \text{ then } A \text{ else } A \mid A \parallel A \mid \exists x A \mid p(\bar{x})$$

The *tell* agent $\text{tell}(c)$ adds the (atomic) constraint c to the global store. c must be a constraint from the underlying constraint system. The semantics of the agent establishes that the constraint c is only available in the following time instant. In other words, the execution of the *tell* agent takes one instant of time. The *choice* agent $\sum_{0 < i < j} \text{ask}(c_i) \rightarrow A_i$ corresponds to non-deterministic choice. It executes one of the branches A_i among those whose guard c_i is satisfied by the store at that time. When a branch is taken, the execution of the corresponding A_i agent starts in the following time instant. This means that also the execution of the *choice* agent takes one instant of time. If no guard is entailed by the store, then the *choice* agent suspends. In such cases, it is executed again in the following time instant.

Both the *tell* and the *choice* agents exist in the **ccp** paradigm (i.e., the model without any notion of time). The only difference here is that execution consumes one time instant in **tccp**. The *conditional* agent $\text{now } c \text{ then } A_1 \text{ else } A_2$ is new in **tccp**. This agent introduces the capability to capture negative information and, thus, to model features such as *timeouts* or *preemptions*. The *conditional* agent checks if the constraint c is satisfied by the store. In that case, the agent A_1 , corresponding to the *then* branch, is executed. Otherwise, the agent corresponding to the *else* branch (A_2) is run. It is important to remark that, in contrast to the choice agent, the execution of the corresponding agent (A_1 or A_2) starts at the same time instant as the *conditional* agent, i.e., at the same time instant as the guard is checked. Note that another difference to the *choice* agent is the fact that this agent never suspends: The execution always continues either with the *then* branch, or with the *else* one.

The \parallel -agent is the *parallel* agent, which is also defined in the **ccp** model. The semantics of the parallel agent in **ccp** follows the interleaving approach whereas, in the **tccp** language, parallelism is maximal parallelism. This means that each time we have two or more parallel agents which can be executed, all of them are executed concurrently, i.e., their execution starts at the same time instant. The semantics for the *hiding* agent $\exists x A$ coincides with the **ccp** version. This agent can be seen as an existential quantification of variable x in agent A . In that way, we make variable x local to agent A . Finally, $p(\bar{v})$ is

the *procedure call* agent. If there exists a clause of the form $p(\bar{x}) : -A$ in the set of declarations, then the body A is executed in the following time instant. Similar to the *choice* and *tell* agents, also the *procedure call* consumes time.

As said before, **tccp** is parametric w.r.t. a *cylindric constraint system*. Let us briefly introduce the constraint system underlying the language. Intuitively, a simple constraint system is a set of atomic constraints and an entailment relation \vdash which satisfies some specific properties. Formally:

Definition 2.1 (Simple Constraint System [11]) A simple constraint system is a structure $\langle \mathcal{C}, \vdash \rangle$ where \mathcal{C} is the set of atomic constraints and relation $\vdash \subseteq \wp(\mathcal{C}) \times \mathcal{C}$ satisfies:

$$\mathbf{C1} \quad u \vdash C \text{ for all } C \in u \quad \mathbf{C2} \quad u \vdash C \text{ if } u \vdash C', \forall C' \in v, \text{ and } v \vdash C$$

The entailment relation can be extended to $\wp(\mathcal{C}) \times \wp(\mathcal{C})$ in the normal way. We can obtain a cylindric constraint system, by adding an existential quantification operator to a simple constraint system. Formally:

Definition 2.2 (Cylindric Constraint System [11]) A tuple $\langle \mathcal{C}, \vdash, \text{Var}, \exists \rangle$ is a cylindric constraint system iff $\langle \mathcal{C}, \vdash \rangle$ is a simple constraint system, Var is a denumerable set of variables and, for each $x \in \text{Var}$, there exists a function $\exists_x : \wp(\mathcal{C}) \rightarrow \wp(\mathcal{C})$ such that, for each $u, v \in \wp(\mathcal{C})$:

1. $u \vdash \exists_x u$,
2. $u \vdash v$ then $\exists_x u \vdash \exists_x v$,
3. $\exists_x(u \cup \exists_x v) = \exists_x u \cup \exists_x v$,
4. $\exists_x(\exists_y u) = \exists_y(\exists_x u)$.

3 Instantaneous functions in **tccp**

Let us motivate our proposal by means of a simple example: A **tccp** program which defines a deterministic arithmetic function. **tccp** was not specifically defined for specifying this kind of programs but rather reactive systems, and for this reason the code appears quite unnatural and clumsy.

We assume that the underlying constraint system supports Presburger Arithmetic (that is, the first-order theory of the natural numbers with addition). Assume also that no mechanism to ensure that a variable is non-free is provided in the constraint system. Also remind that in **tccp** there is no sequential composition agent.

In the following program, the clause **mult(N,M,Z,S)** returns in **Z** the product $N \cdot M$. We manually synchronize the procedure calls by using an auxiliary variable **S** which ensures that the arithmetic calculations (in the last line) are not attempted before the recursive call has been successfully executed.

```
mult(N,M,Z,S) :- now (M=1) then (tell(Z=N) || tell(S=1))
                else  $\exists M', Z', S'$  ( tell(M' is M - 1) || mult(N,M',Z',S') ||
                ask(S'=1)  $\rightarrow$  (tell(Z is N+Z') || tell(S=1)).
```

For example, the execution of the agent `(goal) mult(3,3,Result,Sync)` instantiates, after a certain amount of time, variable **Result** to 9, and **Sync** to 1, which signals the termination of the process. This particular execution takes 8 instants of time, and what is more important, the time needed to finish a computation directly depends on the input values of the call.

This is a very simple example, and we could have used an underlying constraint system where the product operator was defined, but it is not realistic to assume that we have a constraint system able to compute any function. In [13], the relation between constraint systems and first-order logic is established. In that context, a constraint system is defined as a pair (Σ, Δ) , where Σ is a signature specifying constants, functions and predicate symbols, and Δ is a consistent first-order theory over Σ . The authors then define that $c \vdash d$ iff the formula $c:d$ is true in all models of Δ and, for operational reasons, they require \vdash to be decidable. This restriction also indicates which kind of constraint systems underlying **tccp** we can reasonably assume and use.

Many complex arithmetical functions such as the factorial, square roots, etc. impose strong dependencies among the data that can be achieved in **tccp** only by contrived sequentialization of processes as shown in the example above.

In the following, we present a declarative mechanism for supporting numerical calculations in **tccp** (i.e., function calls have no side effects: Identical calls at different points of time yield identical results). We propose a simple though practical classical approach where the logic language is interfaced to an external functional language. This has the advantage that the semantics of **tccp** can be easily adapted. More sophisticated languages integrating functions and constraint exist which do not extend the ask-tell paradigm with time such as Mercury [12], Oz [14], Ciao [7], Curry [6], Toy [10], Gödel [9], Slam-sl [8].

3.1 The function call agent

Let us add a new *function call* agent in the syntax of the language. We write $Y \leftarrow e$ to denote a call e to an external function. External functions are not defined by explicit **tccp** rules, but their semantics is determined by an external implementation which simply requires e to be sufficiently instantiated. The interface to the external functional engine consists of a binary predicate $\text{eval}(e, V)$. The second argument must be a free variable which is instantiated to the result v of the function call e after successful execution. In that case, $\text{eval}(e, V)$ becomes true. Then, in the following time instant, the constraint $Y = V$ is added to the store. We assume that this process takes a constant amount of time: One time instant.

Below we provide the operational semantics for the function call agent⁵:

$$\frac{}{\langle Y \leftarrow e, st \rangle \longrightarrow \langle \text{stop}, st \sqcup \{Y = V\} \rangle} \quad \text{if } \exists V. \text{eval}(e, V)$$

Note that the computed value v is only available in the store in the following time instant. This is similar to what happens with the **tell** agent, that is, the execution of this agent takes exactly one time unit.

We have reimplemented in Curry ([6]) our previous **tccp** interpreter which we had written in Prolog. The new prototype includes the above construct for function calls. We use Curry itself as the functional engine, external to the **tccp** interpreter. This allows us to program functions in a natural way

⁵ See [2] to recall the original semantics of **tccp**.

while enjoying advanced features such as type inference, higher-order features, partial application, equational constraint solving, etc. However, we do not exploit the power of logical variables in function calls which are available in Curry because we are only interested in deterministic computations. We circumscribe all non-determinism within `tccp`. This is compatible with the basic ask-tell principle and very similar to the classical connection of external functions to logic programs [4].

4 A Case Study

In this section we present a case study where the use of instantaneous functions arises very naturally. The program models a coffee machine with the following facilities:

- coins of 2€, 1€, 0.5€, 0.2€, 0.1€, 0.05€, 0.02€ and 0.01€ are accepted;
- the user can have some coffee (`coffee`), some milk coffee (`mcoffee`), only milk (`milk`), some tea (`tea`), only a cup (`cup`) and he can also choose to cancel the process (`cancel`);
- if the user makes a choice, but has not previously introduced enough money, the machine requests more money; moreover, no drink is produced;
- if the user introduces more money than necessary, the machine returns the change to the user;
- if the machine has not enough coins for returning the extra money to the user (the difference between the price of the product and the total amount introduced), then it does not supply the product, but it returns the whole amount of money introduced by the user;
- the machine has different boxes for each kind of coin, thus it is able to concurrently return a coin of each kind.

Next we explain the most important points in the specification of the coffee machine. First of all, let us recall that streams are used in `tccp` to record the change of state. Each single variable is associated to a stream (implemented as a logical list); that is, each element of the list represents the value of the variable at a given time instant. This allows us to handle imperative variables in the same way as logical lists are used in concurrent logic languages. We write $X = [Y|Z]$ for denoting a stream X recording the current value Y of the considered variable and the stream Z of future values of the same variable. Streams are also used in `tccp` as explicit communication channels between `tccp` agents as illustrated in this section.

Now, we are ready to explain the clause which models the user behavior. In the figure we only show a fragment and we write [...] to indicate that some code has been omitted:

```
user(Free,Free',Order,Cash,Cash') :-
  ∃Free'',Order',Cash''(
    (ask(Free=[idle|Free'])) → ∃C (tell(Cash = [C|Cash']) ||
                                insertCoin1(C,Cash')) +
    [...]
```

```

ask(Free=[idle|Free']) → tell(Order=[coffee|Order']) +
ask(Free=[idle|Free']) → tell(Order=[mcoffee|Order']) +
[...]
ask(Free=[idle|Free']) → tell(Order=[cancel|Order']) +
ask(Free=[idle|Free']) → tell(true)) ||
user(Free',Free'',Order',Cash',Cash'')).

```

The `user` clause has five parameters:

- `Free` is a stream whose values can be either `idle` (when the machine is idle) or `busy` (when the machine is processing an order).
- `Free'` is an output stream parameter and corresponds to the tail of `Free`.
- `Order` is an output stream, whose head contains the selected order.
- `Cash` is a stream containing tuples with the money introduced by the user, classified by kinds of coins.
- `Cash'` is the tail of `Cash` and corresponds to the updated money after the user has introduced some more money.

The body of this clause is simply a non-deterministic choice between the different actions that the user can perform, including the choice *do nothing* (the last one). In case the user had introduced some money, the corresponding branch (depending on the kind of coin) calls a devoted procedure `insertCoin` which records this amount.

```

insertCoin1(C,Cash) :- ∃ X1,X2,X3,X4,X5,X6,X7,X8 (
  tell(C=c(X1,X2,X3,X4,X5,X6,X7,X8)) || ask(true) → ∃ X'(tell(X' is X1+1) ||
    tell(Cash=[c(X',X2,X3,X4,X5,X6,X7,X8)|_]))

```

In the `insertCoin1` clause, the first `tell` agent stores in each X_i the number of coins of each kind introduced up to that time instant. After that, first the variable corresponding to the kind of coin introduced is updated, and then the tuple storing the total number of coins is modified. In order to ensure that variable X_i is instantiated before the update is done, a delay is forced by calling agent `ask(true)`.

The `coffeeMachine` procedure models the behavior of the coffee machine. The `Case` argument is similar to the `Cash` one discussed above, and stores the total number of coins in the machine case, that can be returned to the user.

The following program excerpt corresponds to the actions that the coffee machine performs when the user presses the `coffee` button:

```

coffeeMachine(Free,Free',Order,Order',Cash,Case,Case',Output, Change) :-
  ∃ C(tell(Case=[C|Case']) || tell(Order=[_|Order']) || tell(Cash=[Input|_]) ||
    ask(Order=[coffee|_]) → ∃ N(N ← paid(Input) ||
      ask(true) → now N ≥ 0.3 then
        ∃ Chng (Chng ← change(0.3,C,Input) ||
          tell(Free=[working|_]) || tell(Output=[coffee|_]) ||
          tell(Change'=[Chng|_]) || giveChange(Order',Chng,Case,Case'))
        else tell(Output=[moreMoney|_])) +
  [...])
  ask(Order=[cancel|_]) → giveChange(Order',Free,C,Case,Case') ||
coffeeMachine(Free',Free'',Order',Order'',Cash',Case',Case'',Change',Output')

```

The structure of the declaration is as follows: Depending on the product chosen by the user (which is recorded in the `Order` stream), the machine checks stream `Cash` to determine if enough money has been introduced. Here we use a function `paid` to calculate the total amount of money introduced. This function is externally implemented (in `Curry`) by simply adding the values of the different kinds of coins recorded in stream `Cash`.

```
data Case = C Int Int Int Int Int Int Int Int
paid :: Case -> Int
paid C x1 x2 x3 x4 x5 x6 x7 x8 =
  x1*2 + x2*1 + x3*0.5 + x4*0.2 + x5*0.1 + x6*0.05 + x7*0.02 + x8*0.01
```

Whenever the total amount is greater than the price of the product, we start the process of supplying the product and (if necessary) returning the change, which depends on the number of coins of each kind the machine has. Note that `change` is again an external function, which represents the number of coins that the machine must return to the user. .

Procedure `giveChange` returns the coins to the user and also updates the machine case. The coins are eventually returned in parallel whenever possible.

```
giveChange(Order,Change,Case,Case') :-
  ∃D1,D2,D3,D4,D5,D6,D7,D8,X1,X2,X3,X4,X5,X6,X7,X8,C1,C2,C3,C4,C5,C6,C7,C8 (
    tell(Change = c(D1,D2,D3,D4,D5,D6,D7,D8)) ||
    tell(Case=[c(X1,X2,X3,X4,X5,X6,X7,X8)|Case']) ||
    ask(true) → (tell(C1 is X1-D1) || tell(C2 is X2-D2) ||
      [...]
      tell(C8 is X8-D8) ||
      tell(Order=[no|_]) || tell(Free=[idle|_]))).
```

Finally, the `system` procedure synchronizes the machine and the user declarations. Initially, the coffee machine has two coins of each class.

```
system(Case,Output) :- ∃ Free,Order,Cash,Cash',Case' (
  tell(Case) || tell(Free=[idle|_]) || tell(Order = [no|_]) ||
  tell(Cash = [c(0,0,0,0,0,0,0,0)|Cash']) ||
  user(Free,Order,Cash,Cash') || Case = [c(2,2,2,2,2,2,2,2)|Case']) ||
  coffeeMachine(Free,Order,Cash,Case,Case',Output)).
```

5 Analysis and Verification

In this section we illustrate how instantaneous functions can be used in `tccp` to verify some (static as well as dynamic) properties of the system.

Let us enumerate some properties that the user could be interested to check in the model of the coffee machine:

- (i) If an order is initiated and sufficient money has been introduced, then eventually the order is correctly completed (i.e., the product is supplied, the change is correctly returned, the `Case` is consistently updated and the status of the machine is reset); otherwise the machine returns the money.
- (ii) If the user does not introduce enough money for the selected product, then no action is performed unless the cancel button is pressed. In that

case, inserted coins are returned to the user.

Let us (partially) specify the former property above. Namely, that the `Case` is correctly updated after the completion of an order. We have to check that the new value of the machine case coincides with the amount `Case + Cash - Change`. In order to verify this property, we introduce a new external function `check` that performs the required computation.

```
check :: Coins -> Coins -> Coins -> Coins -> Bool
check (C x1 x2 x3 x4 x5 x6 x7 x8) (C y1 y2 y3 y4 y5 y6 y7 y8)
      (C z1 z2 z3 z4 z5 z6 z7 z8) (C w1 w2 w3 w4 w5 w6 w7 w8) =
      y1+w1-x1 == z1 && y2+w2-x2 == z2 && y3+w3-x3 == z3 &&
      y4+w4-x4 == z4 && y5+w5-x5 == z5 && y6+w6-x6 == z6 &&
      y7+w7-x7 == z7 && y8+w8-x8 == z8
```

Assume that the definition of the function call `check(Change, C, C', Cash)` is written in `Curry` and that the calls to that function are correctly sequentialized and synchronized with the rest of the `tccp` code:

```
[...]
  ask(Order=[cancel|_]) → giveChange(Order'Input,Case,Case') ||
  check2(Change',Case',Case'',Cash') ||
  coffeeMachine(Free',Free'',Order',Order'',Cash',Case',
                Case'',Change',Output')
[...]
```

```
check2(Change,Case,Case',Cash) :- ∃B(B ← check(Change,Case,Case',Cash) ||
  ask(true) → now (B=0) then stop else skip.
```

These function calls in the program can be seen as a means to introduce invariants or assertions along the code. Such invariants are checked during system execution, and the execution is interrupted in case one of the assertions is not satisfied. Obviously, the invariants should not corrupt the behavior of the original system, and is the programmer who must take care of the synchronization.

It is also possible to program such checks at the program goal level, by using shared variables to synchronize the main process with a dedicated monitor.

```
coffeeMachine(Free,Free',Order,Order',Cash,Case,Case',Change,Output) ||
check2(Change,Case,Case',Cash)
```

Regarding the dynamic properties, we can combine our methodology with the constraint temporal logic defined in [3,1]. In the following we illustrate how a dynamic property can be formalized in the `tccp` logic.

For instance, the property that checks that, whenever the `coffee` order is given to the machine, it eventually produces either the `coffee` output or the `moreMoney` output, can be written as follows.

$$\Box(\text{Order} = \text{coffee} \rightarrow \Diamond(\text{Output} = \text{coffee} \vee \text{Output} = \text{moreMoney}))$$

We are currently improving the implementation by interfacing it with more powerful external constraint solvers in `Curry`. As to further work, we also plan to develop a methodology to verify `tccp` code with external functions by adapting the model checkers developed in [5].

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