A Novelty Search-based Test Data Generator for Object-oriented Programs
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ABSTRACT
In search-based structural testing, meta-heuristic search techniques have been frequently used to automate test data generation. In this paper, we introduce the use of novelty search algorithm to the test data generation problem based on statement-covered criterion. In this approach, we seek to explore the search space by considering diversity as the unique objective function to be optimized. In fact, instead of having a fitness-based selection, we select test cases based on a novelty score showing how different they are compared to all other solutions evaluated so far.

Keywords
Search-based Software Testing, Structural Coverage, Automated Test Data Generation, Novelty Search, Genetic Algorithm

1. INTRODUCTION
In general, manually creating test cases for testing software systems is time consuming and error-prone. Thus, the automation of this process becomes necessary. In fact, meta-heuristic search techniques such as Genetic Algorithms (GAs) are frequently used to automate the test data generation process and gather relevant test cases through the wide search space [3, 1]. These techniques are especially applied for structural white-box testing. For coverage-oriented approaches, applying Evolutionary Algorithms (EAs) to test data generation [4] has been focused on finding input data for a specific path of the program in accordance with a coverage criterion (e.g., longest path executed). The problem with coverage-oriented approaches is that search-based techniques cannot exploit the huge space of possible test data. In fact, some structures of the system may not be reached since they are executed only by a small portion of the input domain. The use of a fitness function as a coverage criterion to guide the search to detect relevant test data usually create one or more local optima to which the search may converge.

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This process is known as diversity loss. Therefore, diversity maintenance in the population level is key for avoiding premature convergence. This issue is a common problem in GAs and many techniques are proposed to escape from local optima in multi-modal search space [2, 6]. However, all these alternatives use a fitness-based selection to guide the search.

In this paper, we propose the use of Novelty Search (NS) algorithm [5] to the test data generation problem. In this approach, we seek to explore the search space of possible test input values by considering diversity as the unique objective function to be optimized. In fact, instead of having a fitness-based selection, we rather select test cases based on a novelty score showing how different they are compared to all other test data evaluated so far.

The paper is organized as follows: section 2 describes the approach overview and our novelty search adaptation. Concluding remarks and future work are provided in section 3.

2. NOVELTY SEARCH FOR TEST DATA GENERATION

2.1 Approach Overview
Our test data generation framework aims to fully automate the test data generation process without requiring user intervention. In fact, we have considered our System Under Test (SUT) as a gray or semi transparent box in where the internal structure is partially known. Thus, we can design test cases through the exposed interfaces and conduct a code coverage analysis from the general structure of our target SUT. For example, within apache.commons.math library, Methods Under Test (MUTs) are accessed through some specific Java interfaces. Each interface belongs to a sub-package of the whole library and exhibits a set of methods. Our test data generation framework will rely on this concept to generate automatically test cases. In fact, as shown in Figure 1, starting from an input interface and a code source package, the testing framework is able to: (1) generate automatically sequences of method invocation through the input interface, (2) generate relative test data using NS, (3) execute test cases on target Classes Under Test (CUTs) and then (4) analyze code coverage within the source package. The process is iterated until a termination criterion is met (e.g., number of iterations).

In our proposal, we use the same logic as GAs to implement the NS algorithm. However, we make some changes and we add new settings to optimize the test data generation. In fact, instead of using a fitness function to evaluate
We define the novelty metric of a particular solution as follows:

$$NM(S) = \frac{1}{k} \sum_{i=1}^{k} \text{distance}(S, \mu_i)$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

where $\mu_i$ is the $i$th nearest neighbor of the solution $S$ within the population and the archive of novel individuals. Finally, we have normalized the resulted novelty distance in the range [0-100].

3. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In this paper, we proposed a new adaptation of the NS algorithm to test data generation problem. Using the NS approach is clearly a divergent evolutionary technique, inspired by natural evolution’s drive to novelty that directly rewards novel behaviors instead of progress towards a fixed objective.

As a future work, we aim to conduct an empirical evaluation of our NS approach by comparing it to fitness-based and random approaches. In addition, we can optimize our approach by adding diversity as an addition goal to a traditional objective driven approach to form a multi-objective optimization problem. Finally, since we are testing gray-box systems, we can apply this approach, as well, for black-box testing. In this case, we will be able to measure some non-functional properties such as memory usage and CPU consumption.

4. REFERENCES


\[^{1}\]http://www.levenshtein.net/