UML Dialect for Designing Object-Relational Databases

Leszek A. Maciaszek
Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, leszek@mpce.mq.edu.au

Kin-Shing Wong
Tower Technology Pty Ltd, Sydney, Australia, ksw@towertechnology.com.au

ABSTRACT
The market trends indicate that the next generation database technology will be dominated by object-relational systems. This shift to the new technology calls for visual modeling techniques to facilitate the design of object-relational database systems. Even though Unified Modeling Language (UML) is not currently equipped to manage this task, it can be extended for it. The paper defines design constructs needed for the development of an object-relational database system. The constructs include those that assist in the migration process from a relational to an object-relational database. Both data and procedural constructs are considered. Many UML extensions in the proposed UML dialect are derived by stereotyping existing UML elements. New classes are created to model object-relational constructs, and they are assigned their own distinct icons. Any special constraints on relationships between concepts in the extended UML are explained through practical examples. The mappings from design models to an object-relational implementation are exemplified.

INTRODUCTION
The design is a low-level model of system’s architecture and its internal workings. As opposed to systems analysis, the design is constrained by software/hardware platform on which the system is to be implemented. This means that to claim support for design phase of software lifecycle, a visual modeling language must understand the underlying implementation model.

“The Unified Modeling Language (UML) is a general-purpose visual modeling language that is used to specify, visualize, construct, and document the artifacts of a software system” (Rumbaugh et al., 1999). As such, UML provides rather generic concepts that do not support well the design of systems. This includes “pure” object-oriented systems such as those that use C++, Java or Smalltalk as a programming language and an object database system to manage persistent objects. Each of these programming languages and databases has its own peculiarities that a generic UML does not accommodate.

The generic UML is also not expressive enough for designing relational and object-relational databases. As far as relational database design is concerned, UML is often not even supported by lower-engineering visual modeling tools and code generators. If UML is to be a player in the design of object-relational databases it will need to be extended to support the forthcoming SQL3 standard (Melton, 1996; Melton, 1998) and to capture the peculiarities of various object-relational database implementations (Oracle8, Informix Dynamic Server, DB2 UDB (Universal Data Base)).

UML has static, dynamic and architectural parts (Booch et al., 1999; Rumbaugh et al., 1999). The architectural constructs are used to arrange models into modules that partition a large system into workable components. These constructs are used for architectural design, which determines solution strategies for the client and server aspects of a database system. UML contains generic constructs for representing such architectural decisions, in particular for organizing modules into packages and run-time elements into components.

The description of internal workings of each architectural module is called detailed design. The detailed design is responsible for specification of algorithms and data structures for each module. These algorithms and data structures must be tailored to reinforcing and obstructive constraints of the underlying implementation platform.

UML captures information about the static (data) and dynamic (procedural) aspects of a system. A static view of the system is mostly captured in class diagrams. Dynamic aspects are expressed in use cases, state diagrams, activity diagrams and interaction diagrams. UML constructs and views support high-level modeling of object-oriented systems.

When it comes to capturing low-level design issues, UML offers special extensibility mechanisms - stereotypes, constraints and tagged values. A visual modeling tool can additionally allow for easy introduction of new graphical icons to represent stereotyped, constrained and tagged constructs. If such extensions target a particular implementation platform, such as an object-relational database, a new UML dialect is created. The ultimate aim of a UML dialect for designing object-relational databases (hereafter called the UML/ORDBS dialect) is to be sufficiently expressive to support lower-engineering activities, including data and code generation, and reverse-engineering from existing databases.

BACKGROUND
Stonebraker and Brown (1998) predict that by the year 2005 the object-relational database market will be 50% larger than the relational database market. The major market forces in favor of object-relational databases are software requirements of new multimedia applications and the growing need of business systems to support querying of complex data for decision-making functions.

The object-relational database (ORDB) model extends the relational database (RDB) model by providing a richer object-oriented type system and by adding constructs to SQL for complex queries. A forthcoming SQL standard (SQL3) provides the direction for object-relational database implementations. Apart from vendors specifically targeting this market (eg. UnivSQL and Omnisience), major relational database vendors - like Oracle, IBM and Informix - already ship their ORDB products to the market.

A practical implication for any ORDB vendor is to be compatible with relational technology, even though this may conflict with some SQL3 guidelines. As a result, ORDB products are significantly more complex than SQL-3 standard may stipulate. For example, Oracle8 (Koch and Loney, 1997) supports three different (yet compatible) database solution strategies:

• a typical relational solution based on Oracle’s built-in datatypes,
• a “pure” object-relational solution based on object tables,
• an “evolutionary” object-relational solution based on abstract datatypes and object views defined on an existing relational schema.

The need to accommodate relational and object-relational constructs in a single model leads not only to some peculiar solutions, but it forces (at least initially) an abandonment of some important object-oriented features (eg. inheritance). There are significant differences between ORDB products (such as Oracle8, Informix Dynamic Server and UDB), and between ORDB products and the forthcoming SQL3 standard ( Muller, 1999).

Needless to say that design of object-relational databases is a challenging task, even for an experienced database designer familiar with object-oriented modeling. The initial difficulty lies in structuring of complex objects. A multi-level structure of abstract datatypes needs to be established before the stored objects (object tables) can be defined. But the ORDB vendors are incompatible on even such fundamental issues.

Even though SQL3 includes generalization of types into an inheritance structure, Oracle8 and UDB do not support inheritance as yet. Most ORDB vendors support multimedia data types (cartridges in Oracle, data-blades in Informix, extenders in DB2 UDB), but they have their own unique
ways of integrating these extensions into the SQL typing systems. The approaches to the relaxation of the first normal form also vary in ORDB products. SQL3 allows arrays as column values but it does not allow nested tables. Oracle8 has nested table and varying arrays. Collection data types supported by Informix include sets, multisets, and lists. The solutions to linking tables through pointers or references are not “standardized” either.

The incompatibilities, as defined above, make it difficult to propose a single set of UML extensions to cater for ORDB design. This paper takes an approach of relying on a specific technology rather than on vague and contradictory principles. An advantage is that we can offer a UML/ORDBS dialect that is coherent and has sufficient technical depth. We believe that this is a better strategy and the same UML extensibility mechanism can be readily used to provide variations to our UML/ORDBS dialect so that other products can be accommodated. The UML/ORDBS dialect presented in this paper targets Oracle8.

As mentioned, UML offers few extensibility mechanisms that give ability to tailor the modeling language to a database software platform, yet still share the concepts that are generic and common to other components of an application (such as the client application programming interface). The major extensibility mechanism in UML is stereotype. “A stereotype represents a variation of an existing model element with the same form (such as attributes and relationships) but with a different intent... A stereotyped element may have additional constraints, beyond those of the base element, as well as a distinct visual image.” (Rumbaugh et al., 1999).

Figure 1 is an example of a simple class diagram where classes are stereotyped as relational tables (the stereotyped labels are placed within matched guillemets, which are the quotation marks used in French and some other languages). The constraint placed on the relationship is also stereotyped as FK (foreign key).

Figure 1. Stereotypes as UML extensibility mechanism

An intent of stereotypes and other lesser extensibility mechanisms of UML is that a generic modeling element is still an ordinary element but with some differences in semantics. This is a correct approach if a new UML dialect is to retain its genericity and commonality to all domains, while at same time enabling the definition of specific constructs. Vendors of visual modeling (CASE) already offer some add-ins that utilize stereotypes to target specialized domains. In particular, Rational Corporation provides an add-in for Oracle8 in its Rational Rose visual modeling tool (Rational, 1998). The UML/ORDBS dialect, that we propose in this paper, uses Rational Rose / Oracle8 add-in as a starting point.

UML EXTENSIONS FOR DESIGNING OBJECT-RELATIONAL DATABASES

A built-in knowledge of the ORDBS constructs is a prerequisite for our UML/ORDBS dialect. Static, dynamic and architectural constructs have to be identified. The most important among these constructs is the abstract data type, which is known as the user-defined type (UDT) in SQL3, the distinct type in DB2 UDB and Informix Dynamic Server, and the object type in Oracle8.

Object types are the basis for defining object tables. It gives meaning to data, it defines operations on these data, it tells you how to compare and convert its own objects, it can be used for defining nested tables and for referencing objects in other tables. However, inheritance and encapsulation are not supported in Oracle8 and, therefore, not considered in our UML/ORDBS dialect (this limitation of the dialect is not consequential because the generic UML defines inheritance and encapsulation constructs).

The constructs supported by our UML/ORDBS dialect are classified in six groups and discussed in the remainder of this section. The examples that illustrate the usage of these constructs are drawn from the Oracle8 Purchase Order tutorial (Oracle, 1998). When needed, the tutorial is appropriately extended. The groups of constructs are:

- conventional relational constructs (tables, views, triggers, etc.)
- packages, stored procedures and functions
- object types and object tables
- collections (varying arrays and nested tables)
- object views and INSTEAD OF triggers
- clients and transactions

Conventional relational constructs

The UML/ORDBS support for conventional relational constructs is based on the stereotypes available in the Rational Rose / Oracle8 tool. The major difference is the introduction in UML/ORDBS of new graphical icons. Figure 2 illustrates two relational tables: PURCHASE_ORDER and LINE_ITEMS. The referential integrity is based on the purchase order number (PONO) columns, and it is enforced by a number of triggers (such as po_delete_tr). Other aspects of the example should be self-explanatory.

Figure 2. Conventional relational constructs in UML/ORDBS

Packages, stored procedure and functions

Relational and object-relational databases allow storing programs in the database. These programs are called stored procedures or functions. Stored procedures cannot return values to the calling program, but functions can. Packages are larger program units that can contain procedures, functions, variables, and SQL statements (Koch and Loney, 1997). The dot notation is used to execute a procedure or a function within a package (package_name.procedure_name).

Below is an example of package specification with one function and one procedure. The function find_cust allows to find a customer object given customer number (custno_in) as input parameter. The procedure update_cust enables to update customer information in the database. It expects customer object (cust_in) as input parameter.

CREATE OR REPLACE PACKAGE manage_cust AS
FUNCTION find_cust(custno_in IN NUMBER) RETURN customer_info_t;
PROCEDURE update_cust(cust_in IN customer_info_t);
END manage_cust;
/

Figure 3 shows a design of package manage_cust. There are three graphical icons to represent a package, procedure and function. The package contains procedure update_cust and function find_cust. The containment is expressed with UML aggregation by value relationship.

Figure 3. Packages, stored procedures and functions in UML/ORDBS
Object types and object tables

As explained earlier, the object type in Oracle8 corresponds (loosely speaking) to the concept of class and abstract data type. It defines a data structure (attributes) and operations (methods) that act on these attributes. Object type is just a template for object creation; it itself does not hold any data. Objects can be stored persistently in object tables (each row is an object). Transient objects are stored in programming language variables (Feuerstein, 1997).

The code below defines an object type (purchase_order_t) and an object table (purchase_tab). The object type contains three scalar attributes (pono, orderdate and shipdate). The attribute custref is a reference to an object of type customer_info_t. The types of line_item_list and shiptoaddr are other user-defined object types.

The purchase_order_t houses three functions and one procedure. The function get_item finds an order_item. The procedure add_item adds a new order item to the purchase order, and the function total_value returns the total amount of a purchase order. The PRAGMA RESTRICT_REFERENCES clauses control the ability of methods (functions or procedures) to modify the database.

The next statement defines the object table purchase_tab. The statement places the scope on the custref reference column. The scope says that the references can refer only to the customer_tab objects. The object table also has a nested column line_item_list. The line_item_list objects are stored in a separate table po_line_tab.

![Graphical icons for a V ARRAY and a nested table in the UML/ORDBS](image)

Figure 5. Collections (varying arrays and nested tables) in UML/ORDBS

Graphical icons for a VARRAY and a nested table in the UML/ORDBS dialect are shown in Figure 5. Aggregation by reference is used to link the scalar datatype (note the icon) - the same scalar datatype can be a component of many different collections. The line_item_list objects, on the other hand, are aggregated by value with the line_item_list_t nested table because each component object can belong only to one collection.

Object views and INSTEAD OF triggers

An object view is a virtual object table. Object views facilitate transition of applications from a relational database to an object-relational database. An object view is an updatable (INSTEAD OF triggers) named query on relational and/or object tables.

The code below presents a simple example of an object view (stock_view) that contains relational table stock_info. An INSTEAD OF trigger instructs the ORDBS that any inserts on object view need to be executed as programmed in insert statement in the trigger body.

CREATE OR REPLACE VIEW stock_view OF stock_info_t WITH OBJECT OID(stockno) AS
SELECT *
FROM stock_info;

CREATE OR REPLACE TRIGGER
stockview_insert_tr INSTEAD OF INSERT ON stock_view
BEGIN
INSERT INTO stock_info VALUES (
CASE STUDY - PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

In the previous section, we defined the primitive constructs in our UML/ORDBS dialect. In this section, we put it all together and show how these constructs can be used on a small case study. The case study extends the examples in the tutorial provided in Oracle8 documentation (Oracle8, 1998).

The application domain refers to a purchase order (PO) application handling customers, stock of products for sale and purchase orders. Customers place orders on stock items. A stock item can appear on many purchase orders. A purchase order can have any number of line items, but each line item refers to a single stock item.

Designing ORDB schema with UML dialect

Figure 8 shows a static model for the PO application. It shows object types, object tables, a nested table and a VARRAY. These graphical objects are linked by aggregation, generalization and reference relationships. Aggregation relationships are used to capture the containment of object types. For example, purchase_order_t contains an attribute which type is defined as address_t. Reference relationships (supported by Oracle8 REF operator) are shown as arrowed lines pointing to the referenced row objects. Object tables are derived as subclasses of object types and are therefore linked by generalization relationships. For example, each row of customer_tab is a customer_info_t object.

Designing ORDB programs with UML dialect

A typical functionality of a program interacting with a database is best captured by the acronym CRUD - create, read, update, delete persistent objects. A question arises how to manipulate persistent objects in object-relational database. Feuerstein (1997) describes four approaches (in the context of Oracle8 database):

1. Handle persistent objects from client application by sending SQL statements (SELECT, INSERT, UPDATE, and DELETE) to server database for execution. This approach does not take advantage of object types (and no methods have to be defined).
2. Still handle persistent objects from client application but invoke constructor methods to insert data and various update methods to update data. Use SELECT and DELETE as in point 1.
3. Implement all data manipulations via object methods. This method limits reuse because (in Oracle8 context) it effectively ties each object type to a single object table.
4. Design object methods to avoid direct references to persistent object tables, instead acting only on its own object and on data exchanged via method arguments. Packages can be constructed to introduce a level of indirection between method invocation and persistent storage, thus allowing for type reuse.

The last approach seems to be the most attractive from object-oriented perspective. Below is a specification of a package (manage_po) that uses this approach to handle the CRUD operations on purchase order objects.

CREATE OR REPLACE PACKAGE manage_po AS
/* This package depends on the following */
* SEQUENCE po_seq
* OBJECT TYPE customer_info_t
* OBJECT TABLE purchase_order_t
* OBJECT TABLE purchase_tab
*/

Figure 8. UML/ORDBS schema design
/* return the next new purchase order number */
PROCEDURE next_pono(pono_out OUT NUMBER);

/* create a new purchase order */
* a new purchase order number will be assigned automatically
*
PROCEDURE create_po
( cust_ref_in IN REF customer_info_t,
  po_ref_out OUT REF purchase_order_t);

/* find purchase orders when provided with pono_in */
* return an object or a reference to the object
*
FUNCTION find_po_ref(pono_in IN NUMBER) RETURN REF
  purchase_order_t;

/* update the given purchase order */
PROCEDURE update_po(po_in IN purchase_order_t);

/* overloaded delete purchase order functions */
PROCEDURE delete_po(pono_in IN NUMBER);
PROCEDURE delete_po(po_ref_in IN REF purchase_order_t);
PROCEDURE delete_po(po_ref_in IN REF purchase_order_t);

END manage_po;
/

The above package can be designed using our UML/ORDBS dialect
as shown in Figure 9. Aggregation by value relationships are used to identify
all component procedures and functions within the package. The only

exception is the procedure next_pono, which is “indirectly” contained in
the package because it is invoked by the procedure create_po whenever a
new purchase order number needs to be generated. The arrowed line signifies
invocation relationship.

### Designing client/server flow-of-control with UML dialect

In the previous two sections, we showed how the static structure and the
architectural design of each program could be visualized in the UML/
ORDBS dialect. However, a flow-of-control between client and server
objects to accomplish a business transaction has not been shown yet.

Figure 10 shows an object collaboration diagram that represents such a
flow-of-control for the creation of a new purchase order. A client object
named Create Purchase Order window activates the process. The first task
is to retrieve a customer for whom the purchase order is to be created. This
is initiated by a message sent to package manage_cust, and more specifi-
cally to function find_cust that returns a customer object from object table
customer_tab.

Once the customer is displayed on client window, a transient object of
type purchase_order_t is instantiated and line items are added to it. After
purchase order is created (still in the program’s memory and visible in a
client window), a client object requests that the object be persistently stored
in object-relational database. The client passes Transient PO as an argu-
ment of procedure manage_po.create_po. This procedure requests that
another procedure (next_pono) generates next purchase order number un-
der which PO can be stored. The database transaction is only started now
and, if successful, it commits changes to object table purchase_tab.

### CONCLUSIONS

A new UML dialect for designing object-relational databases was
described in this paper. The dialect supports directly object-relational con-
structs of Oracle8, but it could be easily customized for other ORDBS-s.
The UML extensions, including the introduction of graphical images, were
implemented on top of Rational Rose. The UML/ORDBS dialect has been
integrated into Rational Rose add-in for Oracle8 and it can provide a lim-
ited capability for Oracle8 code generation.

As yet, the capabilities of more extensive forward and reverse engi-
neering with Oracle8 have not been built into our UML/ORDBS dialect.
This is because of inherent limitations in Rational Rose (and most other
visual modeling tools). For example, Rational Rose does not fully support
stereotyping outside of class models. Stereotyping UML elements in mod-
els that do not visualize classes is difficult and occasionally impossible
(e.g. in sequence diagrams, collaboration diagrams or state diagrams, where
classes are not the modeling elements).

More importantly, to create a sufficiently expressive UML dialect, a
tool has to allow for appropriate extensions of its own internal metamodel
(and a scripting language to program such extensions needs to be pro-
vided by a tool vendor). Rational Rose does not give this capability. As a
result, the stereotyped elements are relatively “mindless” and tasks such
as code generation are not completely obtainable. Unless vendors of vi-
sual modeling tools “open up” the metamodels to system developers, so
that they can fully customize the tools to their needs, the industry adoption
of UML dialects extended for system design (as opposed to system analy-
sis) will be sluggish.

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