TR-87-012

AN EXTENDED VISUAL PROGRAMMING SYNTHESIZER FOR COMPUTER AIDED INSTRUCTION APPLICATIONS



TR-87-012 An Extended Visual Programming Synthesizer for Computer Aided Instruction Applications

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ABSTRACT

An extension work to our previous visual programming synthesizer for computer-aided-instruction (CAI) application is presented. The extended visual programming synthesizer is to increase the representational power by including the Student-Problem curve analysis for the development of smart CAI programs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In our previous work[3], we have tried to design a form-oriented and visual-directed system for CAI courseware developing purpose, in which a visual programming synthesizer called VIPS was developed so that end users with little or no knowledge of computer programming can use it to develop their own applications(coursewares). It is known that all form-oriented approaches are application dependable, i.e., different applications require different form representations and structures. For instances, in office information systems application, QBE/OBE uses a two-dimensional one-level skeleton table[16,17] and FORMAL uses a two-dimensional representation of hierarchical data[10,11,12], and, in CAI courseware developing systems application, form-driven approaches were widely used, where forms are represented and structured in linear strings[4,6,8,9]. The purpose of proposing an extended VIPS is to include with more representational power to upgrade the level of its application.

The nature of the original VIPS was set to the application level of coursesware content creation and lesson definition. With this level of applications, the input, formatting, and modification of text, graphics, audio, or any other information can be created and displayed, also each lesson's control structure can be defined. The limitation of these applications is its deficiency in lack of courseware analysis and progress evaluation, because in this level of applications, there is no recording and analysis of data generated during student's learning process. In order to enhance the capabilities of VIPS in this respect, we adopt the so called Student-Problem (S-P) curve analysis[14].

The Student-Problem curve analysis requires to record a chart concerning

the attributes of problem and each student scores (right or wrong) to each problem as a (0, 1)-matrix, which contains the information of the characteristics of the courseware versus the student learning process. For example, the rearrangement of an obtained (0, 1)-matrix according to the descending order of student scores rowwise and the descending order of correctly answered problems columnwise forms two boundary curves, the S-curve and the P-curve, whose relative shapes and local properties contain a lot of information such as the distribution of problem being answered, a certain student reaction to certain kind of problems, and so forth. Therefore, in this paper, we propose an extended VIPS which is capable of recording and reordering each of the obtained (0, 1)-matrix, extracting information from them, and printing the final analysis results to inform the teacher the effectiveness of the courseware as well as student learning behavior as a reference for further improvement or consolation of the developed courseware.

2. THE SYSTEM ORGANIZATION

The extended VIPS consists of four major parts: a Visual Interface, a V-Form Interface Language, an Internal Structure, and a V-Form Interpreter. Fig.1 shows the system organization.

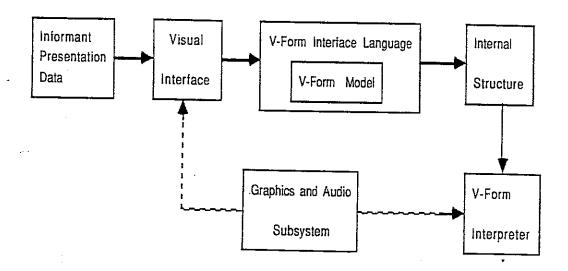


Fig. 1. The system organization of the extended VIPS.

The Visual Interface provides an environment for users to communicate with the system through a midium called the V-Forms. The Informant Presentation Data of V-Forms consists of text, static graphics (line drawing and bit-map), dynamic graphics (animation), and voices. The V-Form Interface Language is used to define and manipulate V-Forms under a V-Form model, in which each V-Form consists of a V-Form type to specify both the V-Form logical structure (scheme) and visual structure (template) and a V-Form instance to be filled with the presentation data[3], V-Forms thus constructed form the external structure of the V-Form model. V-Forms in the external structure are automatically converted into an internal structure to hold the information of the specified V-Forms and the control flow of the defined courseware (application program). The V-Form Interpreter interpretes the internal structure to achieve all functions of the application program.

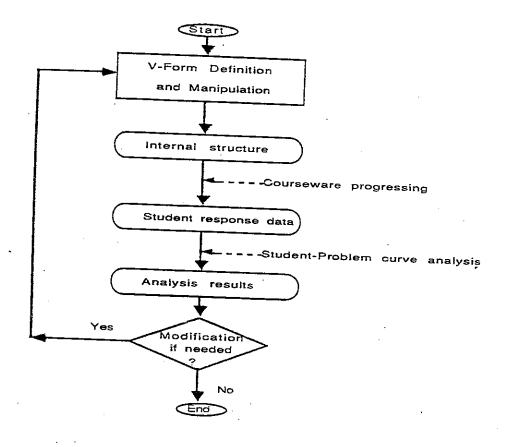


Fig. 2. The application program construction flow.

Fig. 2 shows the construction flow of an application program. A courseware designer first uses the system provided V-Form interface language to define and manipulate all V-Forms which are then self-synthesized as an internal structure to become executable by the V-Form interpreter. After progressing the courseware by students, the student response data are collected into a table (which contains a (0, 1)-matrix). The teacher then selects from a list of all possible analysis results those items of what he wants to know, for example, the distribution of types of problems being correctly answered. The analysis results are obtained from various interpretations of the formed Student-Problem curve, the print out may suggest the courseware designer to modify the material of the lesson if the students learning performance is unsatisfactory.

3. THE INTERACTIVE V-FORM PROGRAMMING

The interactive V-Form programming uses forms as media for programming and employs multiple windowing and interactive facilities used in most icon systems[1,2,5,7,13,15]. Fig. 3 shows a V-Form programming screen, where the top area shows a command type menu, each command type when selected can pop-up a new set of operation commands underneath it, the rest screen area is a region for programming in a manner of what-you-sketch-is-what-you-get.

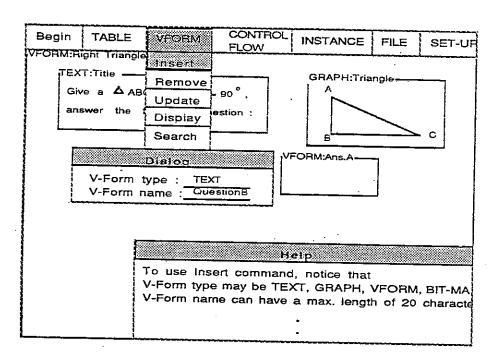


Fig. 3. The VFORM command type operations.

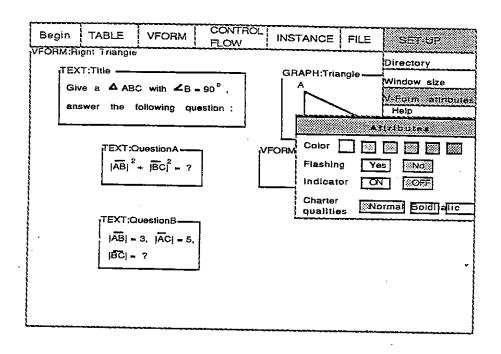


Fig. 4. The SET-UP command type operations and the V-Form attributes.

Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 illustrate some typical steps for the creation of a V-Form and its reaction in screen displaying. The selection of VFORM command type pops up five operation commands as shown in Fig. 3. Then the selection of "Insert" operation command displays a dialog window and possibly a help window (if it was specified in the set-up as an "on" status). The user then fills in a V-Form type and a V-Form name into the dialog window, the TEXT type and QuestionB name in this example. After that, both windows disappear to allow the user to locate a TEXT window and to fill in the content of the V-Form QuestionB in the working area. The selection of SET-UP command type pops up four operation commands as shown in Fig. 4. Then the selection of the "V-Form attributes" operation displays an attribute window to overlay the previous screen. The selection of the items listed in the attribute window sets up the display attributes of the TEXT:QuestionB. Notice that, all window handlings are under the

"Window size" operation of the SET-UP command type.

- Begin	TABLE	VFORM	CONTROL FLOW	INSTANCE	FILE	SET-UP
	Define UDT	Insert	Create	Group	Open	Directory
	Define RAT	Remove	Extend	Degroup	Close	Window size
	Edit ECT	Update	Link		New	V-Form attributes
		Display	Remove		Save	Help
		Search			Save As	•
					Print	
					Exit	
					Quit	

Fig. 5. Summary of operation commands.

Fig. 5 shows a summary of operation commands in each command type. The "Begin" operation command allows a user to define a system name and then performs initialization for courseware creation. The "Search" operation command of VFORM command type can be used as a page-turner which allows the user to search for and display out each of the turned V-Form pages (a page contains all V-Forms within a programming window). The construction of V-Forms into pages and their structures is through "CONTROL FLOW" command type, the operation command "Create" is used to create an independent new V-Form page, "Extend" is used to extend an existed V-Form (with VFORM type) and create a new V-Form page. "Link" builds a physical link between two existed V-Forms, and "Remove" is an inverse operation of "Link".

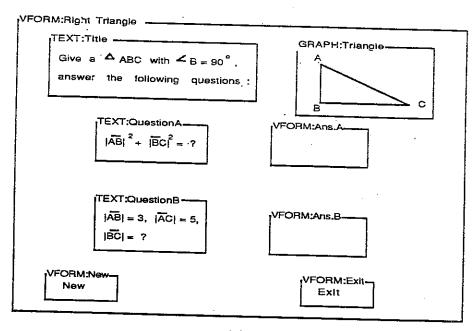
The importance of including the "TABLE" command type in the menu is to

record data generated during the execution of the developed application program. There are three operation commands in the "TABLE" command type, a User Data Table (UDT) to define user's information of the courseware (Fig. 6(a)), a Record Attribute Table (RAT) to specify each (problem) attribute name and its classification, for example, problem#4 belongs to an abstraction type problem (Fig. 6(b)), and an Embedded Control Table (ECT) to specify the embedded control section of a V-Form page (Fig. 6(c)).

File name of the user's records: user.dat			
User data specification			
< Prompt string >	< Input type >		
User name:	CHAR(20)		
ID number :	CHAR(7)		
•			
-	•		
•			

Attribute name	Category
P1	Definition
P2	Computation
P3 ⁻	Deduction
. P4	Abstraction
*	-
•	•
•	

(b)



(c)

	Auto	Ans.A	Ans.B	New	Exit
Input type		CHAR(6)	NUM(1)		
Matched conditions		EQ "AĈ ² "	EO 4		1
Execution order		1	2		
Match control actions	delay 3 display QuestionA display Ans.A	set v1=1 display Cuestion8 display Ans.B	set v2=1 display New display Exit		4
Eise actions		set v1±0 display CuestionB display Ans.B	set v2=0 display New display Exit		4
Records		P1 : v1	P2 : v 2		Á
1		4 P			
ppul bypa	Match condition	Execution		Eisa actions	Records

(d)

Fig. 6. The TABLE operation commands: (a) the User Data Table (UDT), (b) the Record Attribute Table (RAT),(c) an illustrated V-Form page VFORM:Right Triangle and (d) its Embedded Control Table (ECT).

After the construction of a V-Form page, and the selection of the "EDIT ECT" of the TABLE command type a skeleton table is automatically generated to allow the user (courseware designer) to fill in the appropriate data in the corresponding items. The menu in the bottom area of ECT window is used to choose the item to be filled in. The system then provides the capability of type checking on the execution order item and syntax checking on all other items during the editing of the embedded control table.

4. THE EXECUTION OF V-FORMS

As previously described, when an application program (in terms of V-Forms) has been completely constructed by a courseware developer, it is automatically converted into an internal structure to hold the courseware program control flow and the information of the specified V-Forms. The application program thus constructed can be executed by the interpretation of its internal structure. The internal structure is basically a graph which consists of five different kinds of nodes and their interconnections. These five kinds of nodes are System Node(SN), Form Control Table(FCT), Form Control Node(FCN), Action Node(AN), and Mode Node(MN), respectively.

An application program has only one SN node to keep the system information, such as its system name, pointers that connect the system to an User Data Table, a Record Attribute Table, and to the rest of the system. The tail terminal of the pointer from SN node to the rest of the system is a FCT node which keeps the information of a V-Form page such as page margin, pointers that connect to the control actions in its ECT table (the "Auto" field in Fig. 6(d)) and to a linked list of a sequence of FCN nodes. A FCN node keeps the information of a V-Form, such as the V-Form name, its window size and location, input type, input length, execution order, a control pointer that connects to ar. AN node, a content pointer to a linked list of a sequence of MN nodes and a pointer to another FCT node. An AN node holds three pointers, a condition pointer, an action pointer, and an else pointer, respectively, each points to a linked list of a sequence of MN nodes with the information of condition, action, and else as shown in Fig. 6(d). A MN node records the information in two parts, the first part is the displaying attributes of a specified fragmented content (a content may need several MN nodes to keep within it), the second part is the content portion which may be

part of the content of a V-Form or the condition, action, else, and record specified in ECT table.

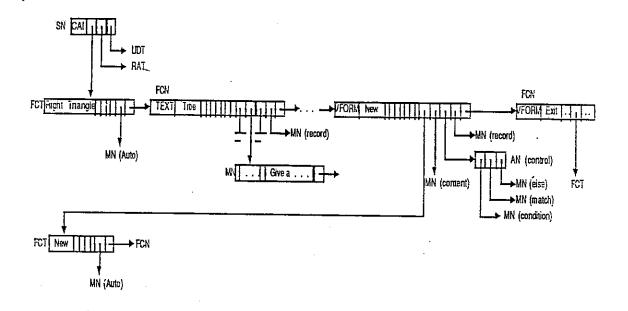


Fig. 7. The internal structure of VFORM:Right Triangle.

The execution of V-Forms is through the interpretation of the internal structure by an interpreter. Fig. 8 shows the internal structure synthesized by the external structure of the application shown in Fig. 6(c). We use it as an example to explain the interpretation process. The interpreter starts from the SN node of an application program specified by the system name (CAI in this example) and then allows each user (student) to fill in the information specified in the User Data Table (for example, student name and ID number). After that, the system goes to the first FCT node to start the interpretation of the internal structure of the first V-Form page (VFORM:Right triangle in Fig. 6(c)) which is chained as shown in Fig. 7. The window margin of FCT defines the window of VFORM:Right Triangle and the Auto actions defined in Fig. 6(d) will be executed after all V-Forms in the first page have been displayed. In each FCN node, the window size

and location define a V-Form window, the content pointer incurs the content of the V-Form to be displayed. Now, the V-Form TEXT: Title and GRAPH: Triangle are displayed while the rest V-Forms are not displayed because they were set at "OFF" status (Fig. 4), and after delay 3 time units (as specified in Auto) the TEXT:QuestionA and the VFORM:Ans.A are displayed. At this time, the system finds a FCN node with VFORM type to allow an user giving his answers according to the execution order, if the question is correctly answered (i.e, satisfy the matched condition, |AC|² in this example) then the system performs the match control actions else performs the else actions according to the information of the AN node pointed by the control pointer of the FCN node. The match control actions set a value v1=1 while the else actions set v1=0 for Ans.A and record v1 value in Record field of the ECT table as P1:v1 through the record pointer of the FCN, then both actions display the TEXT:QuestionB and the VFORM:Ans.B and repeat the process (for the student to continue his answer on QuestionB). Notice that the input type of "CHAR(m)" and "NUM(n)" is for students to fill in the blanks while that of "*" is for students to perform the selection as specified by the courseware developer (New and Exit in this example). The matched conditions of New and Exit are both empty, when either one is selected the matched condition is automatically satisfied and the system goes to the specified FCT. However, if there is a non-null FCT pointer in a FCN node and when the match conditions are satisfied during the interpretation of the FCN node then system branches to the pointed FCT. Finally, a (0, 1)-matrix can be constructed from the Record field of ECT table after giving a test to a group of students.

5. THE S-P CURVE ANALYSIS

After giving a test to m students with n problems a record of Pi:vj for each student is formed (according to the Record fields of ECT tables specified by the courseware developer), where Pi denotes the i-th problem category and vj is a value to denote the correctness of his answer to j-th problem, 1 for right answer and 0 for wrong answer, and so a m x n (0, 1)-matrix is obtained. Fig. 8 shows a chart for 31 problems by 38 students. This chart can be rearranged according to the descending order of the student with high score in rows and the descending order of the problem with high correctly answered in columns, then a S-P chart is obtained in which two boundary curves, the S-curve and the P-curve, are formed as shown in Fig. 9. This S-P chart is useful for identifying unusual response patterns on the tests (in addition to the test score). For example, when both curves sharply tend to upper-left corner may indicate that the problems are very difficult for most students (Fig. 10(a)), on the other hand, when both curves sharply tend to lower-right corner may indicate that the problems are too easy (Fig. 10(b)), and so normally both curves should alternate between the diagonal line drawn from upper-right to lower-left corners (Fig. 10(c)). Also, new information may be gained by adding some measures to categorize the S-P chart to help for further diagnosis on each student's understanding of speccific skills. For example, a large caution index as shown in Fig. 9 indicates a student's unusual response in the phenomena that he can answer a few difficult problems but can't answer considerably many easy problems (#10 student with two dots in caution signal). Similarly, a categorized S-P chart may be formed if n problems are further divided into k categories, i.e, Pi, i = 1, ..., k.

The results of S-P curve analysis can be expressed as a set of analysis

service items for a teacher to select what he wants to know about the diagnosis of the courseware and the evaluation of the learning process. The analysis service items provided in the extended VIPS are: S-P chart, S-Test score, S-Caution signal, S-Caution index, Number of students getting correct answer for each problem, Passing rate of each problem, P-Caution signal, P-Caution index, Average passing rate, and Disparity coefficient (see in Fig. 9). The selection of each of such items incurs a procedure to perform the computation of the related data and print the results in natural language output forms (deduced from the logical expression in Horn clause). For example, the natural language output may be of the form: "The lesson is too easy (or too difficult). The reason is because the disparity coefficient is greater than 0.6 (or less than -0.6)".

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, an extended VIPS from our previous work is proposed with the purpose to show that smart CAI coursewares can be developed under a form-oriented and visual-directed programming environment. This is achieved by recording and analyzing data generated during the execution of the courseware. The extended VIPS provides a table that can record the generated data into as a Student-Problem chart. And, based on the Student-Problem chart, a Student-Problem curve is obtained such that from it useful information can be extracted and analyzed to behave a smart courseware.

HHH ORIGINAL DATA HHH

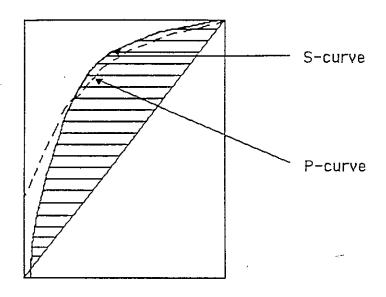
PROBLEM NUMBER

STUDENT NUMBER	11111111 <u>122222222222</u> 1234567898123456789812345678981
C.A	111111111111111111111111111111111111111
. 1 2	8 1 1 1 1 1 8 1 1 1 9 1 1 1 1 8 1 9 8 1 1 8 9 8 2 9 8 1 1 9 9 9 9 9 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1
3	18 118 11111111111111111111000011000
5	8 1 1 1 1 1 0 1 0 0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 0 1 1 1 1 1 0
. 6	11991111111119911981911998811199
16	111111100001111111011000000000000000000
- 11 - 12	111111111111111111111100100011100
13	111110110061898888 1121008888AAA
lá	1118181111111111111100011810000008
19	111111111111111111111111111111111111111
28	118411111111111111111111111111111111111
21 22	112111111111111111111111111111111111111
24 23	
27	111111111111111111111111111111111111111
28 · 29	11111111111811111111111111111188888818
38 32	1111111111111111111111111111111
34	111111111111111111111111111111111111111
36 35	11111111111111111111111111111
37	111111111111111111111111111111111111111
33	111111111111111111111111111111111111111

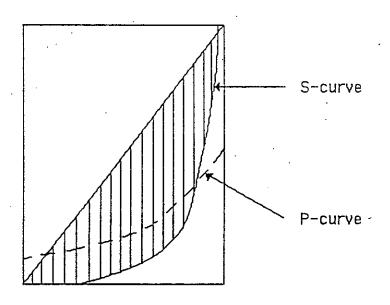
Fig. 8. An example of a matrix for 38 students on 31 problems. (Courtesy of Takahiro SATO of C&C Systems Research Laboratories NEC Corporation)

```
Test score
                  XXX S-P TABLE XXX
                                         (Correct answers)
                   PROBLEM
                                           Caution signal
             easy
                            ≔ difficult
                                            Caution index
                     1 111 2211211222223223
       STUDENT
              2712383455669490170281783490561
       NUMBER
                                          C.S
              8.88
           24
              8.84
           Зó
              8.41
              27
                                          8.38
      high
              30
                                          e :22
                                                  S-curve
                                          8.23
                                          u.73
           11
              77
                                          8.27
              77
                                          8.44
           33
              74
                                          0.02
                                                  P-curve
           19
              71
                                          A . N.A
           23
              0.25
                                       7 r
              1118111181111111111111111111000000
                                       71
                                          8.38
              1111161111166166166116111111111111111122
           10
                                       71
                                          1.13
           34
              48
                                          8.15
              39
                                          8.17
              1111181188111111181181111118881188 21
                                       88
                                         . 8.63
           చవ
                                          8.81
              ८٥
           28
              111111111111111110011<u>11</u>00000000 28
                                       45.
                                          8.05
              5۵
                                          82.38
              81116111111111111111<del>11</del>18988981818 - 28
                                       చక
              111111101101010110111110100010000 18
                                       5ê
                                         - B.28
              low
                                       58
                                         . 0.50
              1111111111 000 1 10 1 10 00 00 0 1 10 0 1 10 0 1
                                       38
                                         8.73
              1111111116111181111110810888088808 17
                                       55
                                          8.11
              52
                                          0.33
              1] 161106100<u>6(316</u>181186616011066 13
                                       42
                                         . 8.73
           13 -11111181194019919901999099999 11
                                       35
                                          0.10
                                       % AT C.S
  (Correct
   answers)
                -Number of students
              9883867775555344322108332109870
                                        getting correct
              999999998888888777766444333222
                                      -Passing rate
              7223230002223306733677336726730
                                         of each problem
                                      Caution signal
              #86#88#88#88#8
Caution index
              9445708381225558623623468<u>2</u>56344
              688°518735145888961465264993941
        TOTAL MEAN 62.8% --
                          -Average passing rate
               MEAN
                     SD ...
                        ATT . MEAN
        STUDENT
               21.3
                         6.49
        PROBLEM
               20.5
                 -Disparity coefficient
```

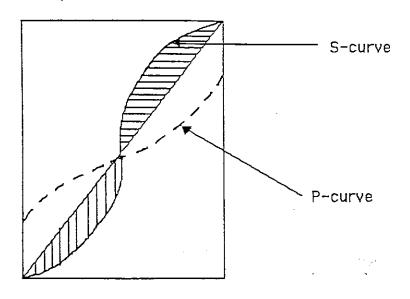
Fig.9. The S-P chart and the S-P curve analysis. (Courtesy of Takahiro SATO of C&C Systems Research Laboratories NEC Corporation)



(a) very difficult problems negative disparity coefficient



(b) very easy problems possitive disparity coefficient



(c) norm reference test
normal distribution
near zero disparity coefficient

Fig. 10. Examples of S-P Charts.

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