Enhancing Automated Program Repair with Deductive Verification

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***Abstract*—Automated program repair (APR) is a challenging process of detecting bugs, localizing buggy code, generating fix candidates and validating the fixes. Effectiveness of program repair methods relies on the generated fix candidates, and the methods used to traverse the space of generated candidates to search for the best ones. Existing approaches generate fix candidates based on either syntactic searches over source code or semantic analysis of specification, e.g., test cases. In this paper, we propose to combine both syntactic and semantic fix candidates to enhance the search space of APR, and provide a function to effectively traverse the search space. We present an automated repair method based on structured specifications, deductive verification and genetic programming. Given a function with its specification, we utilize a modular verifier to detect bugs and localize both program statements and sub-formulas in the specification that relate to those bugs. While the former are identified as buggy code, the latter are transformed as *semantic* fix candidates. We additionally generate *syntactic* fix candidates via various mutation operators. Best candidates, which receives fewer warnings via a static verification, are selected for evolution though genetic programming until we find one satisfying the specification. Another interesting feature of our proposed approach is that we efficiently ensure the soundness of repaired code through modular (or compositional) verification. We implemented our proposal and tested it on C programs taken from the SIR benchmark that are seeded with bugs, achieving promising results.**

***Index Terms*—Automated Repair, Genetic Programming, Deductive Verification, Sound Repair**

I. Introduction

To automate the maintenance process, researchers have recently shown an increased interest in program repair tools [7], [15], [21], [29]. Automated program repair is a process of detecting bugs, localizing bugs, generating fix candidates and validating the fixes. We can broadly classify these tools into two categories. The first class of program repair tools generates fix candidates syntactically. These are tools (i.e. [6], [14], [24], [27], [29], [13], [19]) that repair the program based on a heuristic (and sometimes stochastic, such as guided via a genetic programming approach) traversal of the space of syntactic modifications.These heuristic-based tools have been shown to be as the most effective and scalable ones [14].

The second class of program repair tools generates fix candidates semantically. These are tools (i.e. [4], [7], [15], [21], [26], [20], [12]) that repair programs based on specifications and semantic analysis. Specifications can be a test suite [21], [26], [20], behavioral specification [4] or component specification [7]. Analyses used in these tools include specification inference [15], [21], [20], bounded verification with SAT [4], abstract interpretation [15], and model checking [7]. Bugs are detected when the semantic analysis cannot prove the correctness of a program against its specification. Based on the specification, those tools can synthesize fix candidates such that a repaired program patched with such a fix candidate complies to the specification semantically.

In this work, we propose to combine syntactic search-based and semantic-based techniques to enhance the expressiveness of fix candidates. We present a framework for automated program repair that integrates deductive verification into a genetic programming technique. We focus on programs whose *functional specifications* (pre-, post-condition, code contracts or assertions) are available and their correctness can be checked by an automated software verification tool. Given a program with its specification, our system detects bugs, identifies the root cause of the bugs by localizing them to relevant program statements and sub-formulas of the specification, generates semantic and syntactic fix candidates, and evolves candidates that receive fewer warnings from static verification until a candidate complying with the specification is found. Since the validation is based on sound deductive verification, our approach guarantees the soundness of repaired programs with respect to provided specifications. At the same time, we achieve scalability through modular (compositional) verification.

More concretely, our approach is a combination of three techniques:

- **Structured specification.** We use a *structured* specification mechanism [3] that is capable of capturing expressive program requirements. This structured specification allows verification to be done efficiently.
- **Deductive verification.** We use a Hoare-style verification system, which abstracts program code to logic formulas following symbolic execution paradigm. Function calls are compositionally analyzed through their pre- and post-specifications. The correctness of a program is reduced to the correctness of generated verification conditions (i.e. logical implications). Localization is performed at the proof level [9] with a mapping between transformed abstraction (formulas) and program source code.

- **Genetic programming.** Since automated program repair using genetic programming uses the test cases to compute the fitness of a candidate solution, we redesign the algorithm to work with deductive verification and logic specifications. Leveraging genetic programming, our repair technique is general and able to deal with not only *incorrect* but also *missing* source code implementation.

The integration of genetic programming and deductive verification to automated program repair is the primary novelty of our approach. To the best of our knowledge, we are the first one to propose such an integration for automated program repair. Additionally, we propose *path-sensitive* bug localization by pairing states at each program location with control-flow variables, i.e., the variables of test conditions of `if` and `loop` statements, to enable our system to generate semantic fix candidates for buggy `if` and `loop` conditions.

We have implemented a prototype of our proposed approach on top of GenProg [29] (as the genetic programming component) and HIP/SLEEK [1], [9] (as the deductive verification component). We have performed a preliminary evaluation of our prototype on a set of ten C programs from the SIR benchmark that are seeded with bugs. Our experiment results show that our approach can automatically produce sound repairs for incorrect and missing implementation errors (including security defects, i.e., buffer overflow) in less than seven minutes for all bugs, and outperforms recent state-of-the-art semantics-based repair tool named Angelix [20], in terms of the number of bugs correctly fixed.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. We describe a motivating example to illustrate our proposed approach in Section II, followed by background in Section III. Section IV describes the details of our proposed approach. Section V presents the results of a preliminary evaluation of our approach. Section VI discusses related work, followed by conclusion and future work in Section VII.

II. A Motivating Example

In Listing 1, we show a code snippet from a function `addstr` in the `replace` program taken from the SIR benchmark [2].

In the code snippet, we use `requires` and `ensures` keywords to express the pre-condition and post-condition of the function. In the `requires` and `ensures` clauses, the semantic of $int *j$, is specified as $j \mapsto int\_ref\langle j\_val \rangle$ where j is a pointer pointing to an object with value j_val. Primed variables denote the value of function parameters at the return point(s) of the function. For example, j_val' denotes the value of j_val after the execution of function $addstr$.

The requirement of the `else` branch of `addstr` is specified in line 5. The specification in line 5 indicates two important constraints. First, the value of j after exiting the function `addstr`, denoted by j_val', is increased by one. Second, the value of $outset[*j]$ after exiting the function `addstr`, denoted by $outset'[j\_val'-1]$, is equal to c. However, the `else` branch has been *incorrectly implemented*. As the value of `j` is increased (line 14) before the array update (line 15), the array `outset` may be overflowed. For this example, our

```
1 bool addstr(int c, int [] outset, int *j, int maxset)
2 /*
3  requires j|->int_ref<j_val> & maxset>=0 & j_val<= maxset case {
4   j_val=maxset -> ensures j|->int_ref<j_val> & j_val'=j_val & res=
       false;
5   j_val<maxset -> requires j_val>=0 ensures j|->int_ref<j_val> &
       j_val'=j_val+1 & outset'[j_val'-1]=c & j_val'<=maxset & res=
       true;
6   j_val>maxset -> ensures true;
7 }
8 */
9 {
10     bool result;
11     if (*j >= maxset)
12       result = false;
13     else {
14       *j = *j + 1;
15       outset[*j] = c; //Bug: outset may be overflowed
16       result = true;
17     }
18     return result;
19 }
```

Listing 1. Code snippet from `replace` program of SIR benchmark with a seeded bug

verification component detects a bug, and localizes the root cause of the bug as statements in lines 11, 14 and 15 since they violate the constraint $outset'[j\_val'-1]=c$ (at line 5) of the specification. Based on the violated specification, our system generates a *semantic* fix candidate which replaces $outset[*j]=c$ with $outset[*j-1]=c$. Our genetic programming component proposes another *syntactic* fix candidate for this bug by just swapping the statements at line 14 and line 15. These two fix candidates are then soundly validated by the verifier. This example demonstrates that combining both syntactic and semantic candidates condenses the correct repairs within a huge space of possible candidates.

III. Background

A. Program Repair with GenProg

GenProg uses genetic programming to guide the search for a valid repair of a buggy program [28]. GenProg takes as input a buggy program along with a set of test cases. The repair process goes through two main phases: bug localization and valid patch finding. At the first phase, *suspicious areas* containing statements that are likely buggy are identified by running the program against the test cases. These *suspicious areas* are then the targets for the second phase which will generate fix candidates.

In the second phase, GenProg leverages genetic programming to generate fix candidates and search for a valid repair among them. To create fix candidates (aka variants), GenProg primarily uses mutation operators to syntactically modify the original program in the suspicious areas. There are four mutation operators: add, replace, delete and swap. These mutations are applied to suspicious statements of the original program to generate various variants that are possible candidate repairs. The suitability of generated candidates is then computed by running the candidates against test cases, i.e., candidates passing more test cases have a higher suitability score. Better candidates with higher suitability scores, are selected and carried over to form a new generation of variants. This process is repeated many times until a valid repair which

passes all the test cases is found or when a limit is reached (i.e., a time limit, or a maximum number of generations).

B. Program Verification with HIP/SLEEK

Specification Language. We use structured specification (from [3]) which supports case analysis of the form below:

$$\mathsf{Y} \;::=\; \texttt{requires}\ \Phi\ \mathsf{Y} \;\mid\; \texttt{case}\{\pi_1 \Rightarrow \mathsf{Y}_1; \ldots; \pi_n \Rightarrow \mathsf{Y}_n\} \;\mid\; \texttt{ensures}\ \Phi$$

whereby Φ is a separation logic formula [22]. A separation logic formula is a conjunction of a heap formula and a pure (non-heap) formula. A heap formula is a *spatial* conjunction ($*$) of empty heap assertions (`emp`), points-to assertions ($\mapsto$), and user-defined predicates [1]. A pure formula is a first-order logic formula capturing an expressive constraints of numerical and bag/set domains. In HIP/SLEEK system, structured specification with separation logic can be used to efficiently and effectively verify functional correctness [3]. Furthermore, such a specification can be automatically inferred via second-order bi-abduction [8].

In the `case` block of the specification, π_1, ... ,π_n are guards corresponding to test conditions of `if` statements. Guards are pure formulas without quantifiers. For a sound and complete verification, these guards need to satisfy two conditions: disjointness (i.e. $\pi_i \wedge \pi_j \equiv \texttt{false}\ \forall\ i,j \in \{1...n\}$ and $i \neq j$), and universe (i.e. $\pi_1 \vee \pi_2 \vee ... \vee \pi_n \equiv \texttt{true}$). We exploit these requirements to efficiently perform verification when we validate fix candidates.

Modular Verification. HIP/SLEEK is a modular verification system. It verifies a set of dependent functions bottom-up and in isolation from other dependent functions. To verify a function, its source code is symbolically executed and abstracted into separation logic formulae. Functional correctness is reduced to the correctness of verification conditions which are generated during the symbolic execution. For example, verification conditions generated at function exits for postconditions proving have the following form:

$$\texttt{precondition} \wedge \texttt{code-abstract} \vdash \texttt{postcondition}$$

These verification conditions are discharged by SLEEK, a separation logic entailment procedure. In the case of a bug being found, i.e., a verification condition cannot be proven, HIP is able to identify the root cause of the bug by localizing sub-formulas in the specification and program statements that are relevant to the bug [9].

IV. Proposed Approach

The primary goal of our approach is to integrate deductive verification into genetic programming to generate both semantic and syntactic fix candidates as well as to produce sound repairs in a modular fashion. Fig. 1 depicts the workflow of our approach. There are three main phases: *bug detection/localization*, *fix candidate generation* and *fix candidate validation/selection*. These three phases are described in the following subsections.

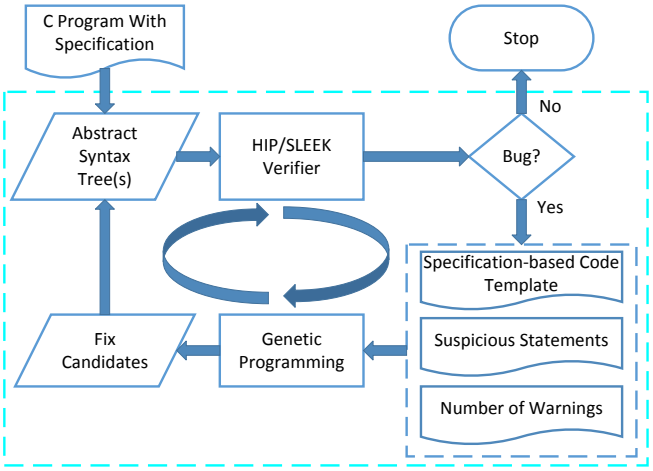

Fig. 1. The workflow of our repair approach using genetic programming and modular verification

A. Detecting and Localizing Bugs

The goals of this phase are to identify potential buggy statements and uncover parts of the specification that are violated.

This phase takes as input a program and its specification. The HIP/SLEEK deductive program verifier checks the program against the specification. If an error is detected, the verifier identifies the root cause of the error which includes suspicious statements and the corresponding violated parts of the specification. For generating more expressive fix candidates, we enhance the HIP/SLEEK error calculus presented in [9] with path-sensitive localization. We implement the new feature by adding variables `v` in test conditions of each `if` statement to every downstream statements of the corresponding `then` and `else` branches. We also add variables `v` in test conditions of each `loop` statement to every downstream statements to body of the `loop`. When a downstream statement is a potential root cause of the error, so is `v`. This allows us to potentially identify buggy *if*- and *loop*-conditions.

The potential buggy statements and parts of the specification that are violated are passed to the next phase for generating fix candidates.

B. Generating Fix Candidates

In this phase, we first generate *semantic* fix candidates from the violated sub-formulas of the specification. We generate two kinds of semantic fix candidates. If the violated sub-formulas belong to either preconditions or guards or case blocks, we generate fix candidates corresponding to *expressions* of `if` statements. Otherwise, we generate fix candidates corresponding to *assignment* statements. We additionally generate syntactic candidates by employing various mutations operators borrowed from GenProg, e.g., append, delete and swap. These fix candidates are then evolved through genetic programming to create populations of variants that may contain a valid repair.

The reason for incorporating syntactic and semantic candidates is that these candidates could help one another in tandem to condense the search space into more valuable candidates overall. For example, the search space with syntactic repair candidates alone is sometimes very sparse [16], and real fixes could lie beyond the syntactic candidates. Semantic candidates, however, could cultivate the search space with more useful candidates. The intuition is that a specification already captures the primary functionality of a program, and thus the concrete code extracted from the specification would help in patching the current buggy implementation of the program.

C. Validating and Selecting Fix Candidates

In this phase, we validate the variants generated by the previous phase. We use the HIP/SLEEK system to verify each of the variants in a modular fashion. We exploit the modularity of deductive verification to compositionally verify the variants. Particularly, we only verify the functions that contain suspicious statements discovered by the bug localization phase.

After each candidate has been verified, a fitness score, which defines how good a repair candidate is, is computed. We define the fitness score as the number of warnings produced by the verifier. Better candidates, whose fitness scores are lower, are selected and carried over to form a new population of mutants (aka. a new generation). This process is repeated many times until a valid repair which passes the verification process is found or when some limits are reached (i.e., the time limit is reached, or the maximum number of populations is reached).

V. Preliminary Evaluation

Experimental Setup. We experiment on programs from the SIR benchmark [2], which has been extensively used in research in software engineering, particularly by studies that propose new testing and fault localization approaches, e.g., [5], [18]. We reused SIR program specifications constructed by Le et al. [9] and manually injected seeded bugs to the original programs.

TABLE I
Evaluation of our proposed approach on programs from the SIR benchmark with manually seeded bugs.

Program	Mutated Location	LOC	Time	Bug Category
uniq	gline_loop	74	0.5	Incorrect
replace	addstr	855	2.8	Missing
replace	stclose	855	2.15	Missing
replace	stclose	855	2.2	Incorrect
replace	locate	855	2.5	Incorrect
replace	patsize	855	0.5	Incorrect
replace	esc	855	2.14	Incorrect
schedule3	dupp	693	0.43	Incorrect
print_tokens	ncl	1002	6.25	Missing
tcas2	IBC	302	0.15	Incorrect

Experiment Results. Table I shows experimental results. In the table, "LOC" column indicates the number of lines in each program (including specification lines). The "Mutated Location" column shows the function in which the bug is seeded. In this column, "dupp" is a short form of `do_upgrade_process_prio`, "ncl" is a short form of `numeric_case_loop` and "IBC" is a short form of `Inhibit_Biased_Climb`. The "Time" column captures the time (in minutes) taken to fix the bug using our approach. The "Bug Category" column shows the type of the error, either missing implementation or incorrect implementation. Missing implementation refers to errors in which necessary statements are absent from the source code, while incorrect implementation refers to errors wherein the current source code is incorrectly implemented with respect to the desired specifications. The example in listing 1 can be considered as incorrect implementation error; an example of missing implementation error is a missing null check when dereferencing pointers. From the results, we can note that, for all bugs except one, our approach can successfully fix the bugs in less than 3 minutes. The bug that took the most time to fix was the print_tokens bug which requires 6.25 minutes.

We also compared our approach against recent state-of-the-art semantics-based APR, namely Angelix. Experiment results showed that Angelix can only fix one of those 10 bugs (*tcas2*). Our observation on the results is that Angelix by default cannot fix bugs that require adding new statements. That is, its synthesis engine is geared towards synthesizing only guards, assignments, if-conditions, and loop-conditions, and is not able to produce new code out of thin air, e.g., inserting new statements. Also, some bugs involve nonlinear constraints, which are hard for Angelix's synthesis engine to solve. Our cultivated search space including both syntactic and semantic candidates, however, comes in handy here. That is, our approach can generate candidates that lie beyond the search space of Angelix, and thus is more likely to be able to find the correct fixes with the help of the optimization function which assesses patch suitability by the number of warnings issued by the underlying verifier. In the future, we expect a greater success of combining syntactic and semantic repair candidates, to potentially enhance repair capability of APR and ensure patch quality.

Threats to Validity. Threats to internal validity relate to errors in our implementation and experiment. We have put an effort to ensure that our implementation and experiment are correct, however, there could be errors that we did not notice. Threats to external validity relate to the generalizability of our findings. In our preliminary experiment, we have only evaluated our approach on 10 buggy programs from SIR benchmark with specifications constructed by Le et al [9] (a co-author of this paper). In the future, we plan to reduce this threat to external validity by evaluating our approach with more programs and different kinds of bugs. Also, our approach requires complete specifications in order to completely ensure the soundness of generated patches. We expect that employing advances in specification inference and mining could help reduce this burden [10]. Future work would be to use the history of bug fixes to mine specifications of past patches and inform the future patch generation process in a way that generated patches are likely to conform to desired behaviours.

VI. Related Work

Syntactic-based approaches. Le Goues et al. proposed GenProg, the first search-based automated patch generator [29], [14]. To improve GenProg, Weimer et al. proposed a cost model and used program equivalence to reduce fix search space [27]. Qi et al. replaced genetic programming with random search to reduce the number of test case executions [24]. Kim *et al.* manually constructed fix templates learned from many human-written patches [6], and applied these templates to fix bugs. Long *et al.* presented Prophet, a tool that automatically learn from human-written patches to fix new bugs [17]. Le *et al*, introduced HDRepair that uses bug fix history to assess suitability of patches [13].

While the above approaches use dynamic analysis (i.e., testing) for detecting/localizing bugs and validating repaired programs, we use static analysis (i.e., deductive verification). Furthermore, our approach integrates syntactic and semantic-based approaches, by combining semantic fix candidates constructed by analyzing a program and its specification with syntactic fix candidates generated by genetic programming.

Semantics-based approaches. AutoFix-E [26], AutoFix-E2 [23] and SemFix [21] rely on *testing* to localize bugs, inferring specifications, and generate fixes conforming to inferred specifications. Logozzo and Ball [15] presented a property-specific program repair based on abstract interpretation. Recently, Sergey *et al.* proposed Angelix – a semantics-based approach that can generate fixes for many bugs [20].

Like these approaches, we make use of specification and static analysis technique for automated program repair. Different from them, we employ Hoare-style verification combined with genetic programming to integrate syntactic and semantic-based approaches.

VII. Conclusion and Future Work

In this work, we propose a novel program repair technique, which marries the strengths of static verification and genetic programming, to produce sound repairs. Our approach uses the structured specification of a program together with genetic programming to evolve a buggy program until the bugs are gone. To enhance the efficiency of genetic programming, we generate high-quality fix candidates which are inferred using semantic analysis of the program and its specification. We employ modular deductive verification to generate fix candidates and validate the fixes. We have implemented a prototype and evaluated it on ten C programs from SIR benchmark with promising results.

We plan to extend the empirical evaluation of our approach with additional programs and more bugs of various types. We also plan to handle programs manipulating complex data structures, e.g., singly-linked list, binary tree, AVL tree, etc. We could also employ machine learning techniques to help traverse the search space of possible candidates, e.g., predict correct patches among the search space like prediction tasks proposed in [11], [25]. We also plan to systematically compare our proposed technique with more APR approaches.

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