An Approach Based On Model Driven Engineering For Big Data Visualization In Different Visual Modes

Allae Ererraissi, Abdessamad Belangour

Abstract: Data visualization consists of transforming complex data into simple visual representations to facilitate understanding and exploitation of data. The goal of this strategy is to make information accessible to everyone, or more specifically to people who can make decisions based on the data collected. During our research project, we have worked on the application of techniques related to model engineering to propose a universal meta-model for the different layers of a Big Data system. In continuous efforts, we present in this paper a model engineering approach that allows displaying the data in several visual modes, by using Atlas Transformation Language (ATL).

Index Terms: Meta-model, Model Driven Engineering, Big Data, Visualization layer, Data Viz.

1 INTRODUCTION

Beyond semantic considerations, it is clear that nowadays, and more than ever, it is important to be able to present key information in an intelligible and exploitable form. In the field of web analytics, the profusion of indicators of all kinds tends to drown the user under a flood of information that the human brain is struggling to deal with, when in fact only a few are useful. Indeed, the graphical representation makes it possible to better analyze trends, and no to get lost in the analysis of isolated figures. Several tools offer many features to create custom web dashboards to visualize in a single page the relevant indicators for a website, either in a graphical form, flow, or in a tabular one. In our continuous efforts to achieve the best results, we identify the key concepts of the visualization layer in Big Data thanks to our previous comparative studies [1]. In fact, this work is an improvement from the first study that we have already done [2] and which deals with the layer of visualization in Big Data. Thus this work is a progress report of our latest proposals from the different layers of Big Data: Data Sources, Ingestion [3], Hadoop Storage [4,5], Hadoop Management [6,7], Visualization [2,8], and Security [9]. The main purpose of this paper is to propose a universal meta-modeling for a Big Data system. This universal meta-modeling will be used in an independent cross-platform Domain Specific Language.

2 RELATED WORK

Several visualization frameworks have emerged for the purpose of interacting with Big Data. For example, Mural [10] and GraphLog [11] can be used to quickly prototype visualizations. In the work of Consens et al. [12], they used the GraphLog tool to generate interactive views, while Bloom [13] uses a graphical query language Mural.

To explain: A Bloom’s filter is a data structure, an implementation of the Abstract type Ensemble. However, it remains unclear whether graphical algebra is the most efficient way to specify views. GVL [14] uses a functional programming language to specify the output of a program. We think this approach is much more intuitive than other graph algebra approaches. Besides, Mackinlay proposed in these works to use graphical sentences to generate relational information presentations [15]. The technique proposed by Mackinlay is related to the field of interaction design. There is also the graphical modeling project of Eclipse [16] which has several features that allow modelers to define graphic editors dedicated to their data. The defined graphic editors can be used as viewers. Its principal problem is that they do not support graphic views such as graphics, zoomable interfaces, and 3D visualizations. The views they support are limited to simple graphics with containers. Note that software visualizations often contain thousands of visual entities. Nevertheless, it is clear that the GMF project does not allow us to specify the visualizations of the results of the query. This means that the diagram definition language is not as powerful as the relational algebra used by other tools. Another Eclipse visualization tool is BIRT [17], which is a tool for the integration of reports and integration. It can be integrated into existing data sets and produce 2D and 3D statistical graphs. It also produces maps, but they are relatively static and cannot be easily integrated with other tools such as EMF [18] and GMF. Yet, each of these technologies contributed to the realization of our work that deals with the visualization layer in Big Data. Our main goal is to propose a universal meta-modeling for this layer regardless of the platforms.

3 MODEL DRIVEN ARCHITECTURE (MDA)

Model Driven Architecture (MDA) [19] is a model-oriented approach defined by the Object Management Group (OMG) and made public at the end of 2000. This approach specifies three levels of abstraction (level business, platform-independent level, and platform-dependent level) for the description of the system architecture. It also proposes a development process based on these three levels and led by the models. The basic idea of MDA is to separate the functional specifications of a system from the specifications of its implementation on a given target platform. In an MDA-oriented development process, everything is considered as a
model. Thus, MDA identifies four types of models: CIM, PIM, PDM, and PSM.

- The CIM (Computation Independent Model), also called a domain model or business model, models the requirements of the system. Its purpose is not only to help the understanding of the problem but also to fix a common vocabulary for a particular field. MDA makes no recommendation concerning the language to be used to describe the MICs. For example, in UML the requirements models are described using use case diagrams or with the use of UML profiles such as SysML [20].
- The Platform Independent Model (PIM) also called a model of analysis and abstract design of the application. This model describes the system without showing the details of its use on a particular platform. In MDA, it is possible to develop several PIM models independent of the target platform. PIM models do not contain information about runtime platforms. A PIM must be refined with the details of one or more particular architecture(s) to produce a PSM.
- The Platform Description Model (PDM) describes the platform on which the system will be run, for example, component models with different levels of abstraction such as CCM or EJB.
- The Platform Specific Model (PSM) or a specific model of the execution platforms. PSM is the model produced by the transformation of a PIM to take into account the technical information related to the chosen platform. The PSM can be refined by successive transformations until an executable system is obtained.

![Fig. 1. MDA Model Levels [19].](image)

Figure 1 gives an overview of an MDA process commonly referred to as the Y development cycle by showing the different levels of abstraction associated with the models.

**4 MODEL TRANSFORMATION**

The two main artifacts of model engineering are modeling and model transformations. From a general point of view, we call a model transformation any process whose inputs and outputs are models. The purpose of defining and automating transformations is to make models more operational and to increase the productivity of development in an IDM approach. This section presents the general principle of a transformation, the types of model transformation as well as the main transformation languages.

### 4.1 General principle of a transformation

A transformation is the automatic generation of a target model(s) from a source model(s), following a transformation definition. A transformation definition is a set of transformation rules that describe how a model described with a source language can be transformed into a model described with the target language [21]. A transformation rule describes how one or more source language constructs can be transformed into one or more constructs of the target language [22]. Moreover, one can model the transformation itself by applying the principles of the IDM to it, and thus considering it as an application defined by a transformation model (Mt) itself conforming to a meta-model (MMt). This last represents the abstract definition of the transformation language [23]. As illustrated in figure 2, a model transformation defined by a model Mt is the operation which makes it possible to transform a model Ma (conforming to its meta-model MMa) into a model Mb (conforming to its meta-model MMb). In a more formal way, we can define this operation by the following function:

\[ Mb : MMb = Trans (Ma : MMa , Mt : MMt) \]

![Fig. 2. Model transformation process [23].](image)

### 4.2 Typology of transformations

The source and target models are described by meta-models that may be the same or different. In [24], we distinguish the so-called endogenous and exogenous transformations combined with so-called vertical and horizontal transformations. A transformation is:

- Endogenous: if the source and target models conform to the same meta-model;
- Exogenous: if the source and target models conform to different meta-models;
- Horizontal: if the meta-models reside at the same level of abstraction;
- Vertical: if the meta-models reside at different levels of abstraction.

In the literature, we find [24], [25] and also [26]. There is also another typology of transformations characterized as follows:

- A simple transformation (1 to 1) transforms an element of a source model into an element of a target model. A typical example is the transformation of a UML class into an XML document, or into a relational database...
Multiple transformations (M to N) transform one or more elements of a source model into one or more elements of a target model. Example of multiple transformations are model decomposition transformations (1 to N) and model fusion (N to 1);
- An update transformation sometimes called on-site transformation makes it possible to modify a model by adding, modifying or deleting one of its elements. In this type of transformation, the source model is updated without the explicit creation of the target model. As an example, we have Model Refactoring, which is used to rearrange elements of a model to improve its structure or readability.

At the same time, we refer to the classification proposed in [25] and presented in [27], and which is based on the nature of the software artifact produced by the transformation and the technique used to implement it. In fact, two major families of approaches are listed here: the "model-to-model" transformation approaches, and the "model-to-text" transformation approaches.

**Model to model transformation**

![Fig. 3. Model to model transformation [27].](image)

Figure 3 shows model-to-model transformation methods. Each model is expressed as an instance of its meta-model using an appropriate data structure. The transformation rules are expressed according to the entities and structures defined by them. They are interpreted for each source model by the model transformation tool. This approach is characterized by the fact that the source model and the product model are expressed in a structured way according to their respective meta-model. The transition from a PIM model to a PSM is the most classic example of this type of transformation.

**Model to text transformation**

![Fig. 4. Model to text transformation [27].](image)

Figure 4 illustrates the use of model-to-text transformations. The source model is described according to its meta-model, but the resulting model is unstructured in text form (source code, XML file, etc.). The transformation rules are written according to the meta-model of the source model, and the syntax of the produced files. The target meta-model no longer exists directly in the transformation process. Code generation can be considered as a special case of model-to-text transformation. Regarding this, several open-source and commercial MDA tools based on "templates" for transforming models into code have emerged. In this category, we can mention Acceleo [28] which is integrated into the Eclipse platform and the EMF framework or AndroMDA [29].

### 4.3 Transformation languages

Model transformation is a central operation of Model Driven Engineering. For this reason, several transformation languages have been defined. Typically, transformation languages apply IDM techniques to transform themselves. The principle is to offer a meta-model to build transformation models. In what follows, we present the QVT languages of the OMG [30] and ATL of the ATLAS group of INRIA-LINA [31] which are widely used in the IDM community and which we consider it representative of this category of languages.

#### 4.3.1 QVT

As part of the MDA approach, OMG introduced the QVT language (Query, View, Transformation). Query is a query that takes a model input and selects specific elements of that model. View is a model that derives from other models. Transformation takes an input model to modify it or create another one. QVT is a specification that is coupled to that of the MOF and as the name implies it is no longer dedicated to the specification of models, but their manipulation. This language has a hybrid declarative/imperative nature and implements the model transformation in different ways. As part of MDA, this language is associated with its tools such as MOF / QVT. Therefore, this language is a new paradigm that offers new possibilities in software engineering. The QVT standard has a hybrid character by supporting three transformation languages (Figure 5). The declarative part of QVT is defined by two languages of different levels of abstraction: QVT-Relations and QVT-Core. QVT-Relations is a user-oriented language for defining transformations at a high level of abstraction. It has a textual and graphical syntax. QVT-Core is a low-level technical language, defined by textual syntax. This language is used to specify the semantics of the QVT-Relations language, which is given as a RelationsToCore transformation (Figure 5). The imperative component of QVT is supported by the language Operational Mappings. This language extends the two declarative languages of QVT by adding imperative constructions (sequence, selection, repetition, etc.) as well as OCL constructs. Finally, QVT proposes a second extension mechanism called Black Box to specify transformations. It’s about invoking features of transformations implemented in an external language. The advantage of QVT is that it is based on existing standards namely the MOF and OCL. This allows for the development of simple tools intended for a large number of users and compatibility with a large number of existing modeling tools.
4.3.2 ATL
In order to propose tools that claim the MDA architecture published in 2002 by the OMG, the INRIA laboratory in Nantes has developed the ATL model transformation language [32] (ATLAS Transformation Language) that we use in the rest of this thesis. An ATL program is composed of rules that define how elements of the source model are identified and traversed to create the elements of the target model (model-to-model transformation called Module). Beyond the transformations of classical models, ATL defines an additional model of request which makes it possible to specify queries on the models (transformations of type model towards text (called Query)). One of the particularities of the ATL language is its hybrid character (declarative and imperative). The declarative gives the possibility to directly correspond an element of the source metamodel of the transformation with an element of the target metamodel of the transformation. Indeed, the example of a completely declarative transformation in ATL is presented below. We describe a rule named Sample, for each InputM element of type InputElement that it identifies in the source model, creates an OutputM element of type OutputElement in a target model, and initializes the value of the attributeA attribute of OutputM with the value of the attributeB attribute of InputM.

The imperative part of ATL completes these direct correspondences between elements. It contains conditional statements (if, then, else ... endif), variable declarations (let VarName: varType = initialValue), loop declarations (while (condition)? Do), and so on. Besides, this part allows to manipulate the elements generated by the declarative rules (modification of attributes, etc.). At the implementation level, an execution engine for the ATL language has been developed and it is available through the Eclipse M2M project. This execution engine is based on a virtual transformation machine [28].

5 VISUALIZATION
In this section, we detail a general methodology applicable to massive data visualization. This method leads us to modify the visualization pipeline that we have already proposed in our previous works [2,8] for the purpose of splitting it into two parts. The first includes the recalculation steps on the cloud and the second groups the steps performed on the visualization client.

5.1 Constraints and specific needs of a massive data visualization system
The amount of information that can be represented on a computer screen is intrinsically limited by its resolution (its number of pixels). When several pieces of information occupy the same pixel, it is called occlusion or “overplot”. There are several solutions to overcome this problem. The first is to increase the number of pixels of the screen along with its size. This solution has the advantage of allowing a great immersion in the visualization but it actually prevents from taking knowledge of a single shot of the entirety of the information especially as the screen exceeds the visual field of the user. Thus, it is complicated to obtain an overview of the data. Also, it requires specific hardware, which cannot usually be moved. As Munzner points out in “Visualization Analysis & Design” [33], such an installation requires a suitable room, which prevents it from being integrated into a daily working method and requires a change of mental context. The other solution is to present the user with an abstraction of the data so as to reduce the amount of information to be represented. To allow interactive exploration of data, it is then necessary to provide several levels of abstraction or levels of detail. Each additional level gives more information but has to be more strongly filtered to be presented to the user. Therefore, we speak of multi-scale visualization, as presented previously. This concept is fundamental to allow us to visualize massive data beyond what allows a conventional resolution. We have seen in the introduction that the needs related to the collection, storage,
and processing of massive data have led to the emergence of new distributed infrastructures. The data to be visualized cannot easily leave these infrastructures. On the one hand, they are too large to be copied: even with the increase in network transfer speeds, the copying time of such a large amount of data remains prohibitive without providing a decisive advantage in the subsequent processing. On the other hand, raw data has become a valuable resource. Consequently, Holders of this new resource prefer to keep it within a controlled and secure infrastructure. The other problem with massive data visualization is computational performance. No calculation on the raw data can be done in real-time. Therefore, it is imperative to pre-calculate and index the data to speed up the subsequent steps. Taking into account the previous remarks, it is necessary to calculate a multiscale abstraction, which implies several calculation steps on all the data. Under these conditions, the use of computing and distributed storage capabilities offered by the Big Data infrastructure is essential, regardless of the initial location of the data. Visualization within a Big Data infrastructure implies an asymmetry of means. Indeed, the data are stored within a cluster of machines whose resources in computing power and RAM are limited only by the investment that is made. On the contrary, the visualization is done on a machine that is comparatively very limited in resources. We must find a way to reduce the amount of information to be transferred and represented. Here again, the use of a multiscale abstraction makes it possible to transfer only a part of the data. Ideally, the amount of data to be transferred must be very limited or even limited. This constraint joins the problem of occlusion. However, it is less strong since it is possible to start by transferring very little data and add detail later without blocking the visualization process. All these conditions for the implementation of a massive data visualization system may seem compelling as they go beyond the traditional framework of data visualization on a single client. It is also not direct to adapt known methods to integrate them in this context. Nevertheless, such a system based on remote viewing also represents a chance and offers many opportunities. For example, we can retain those described by Holliman & Watson [34]: the sharing of computing resources, the simplification of the client code, which facilitates its porting on new platforms and of course the scalability offered by the cloud. To these advantages, we will add the sharing of precalculations and results. All calculations done on the cloud can be kept and shared among users. Thus, even if the precalculation of a multi-scale abstraction of a large dataset requires several hours of computation, once this has been done, several users can benefit from it in a transparent manner, which makes it possible to amortize the cost in computing time per user.

5.2 Changing the Viewing Pipeline for Massive Data
The imbalance of resources between the Big Data infrastructure and the visualization client has repercussions on the visualization pipeline. The most expensive steps in time and / or in memory must be done in the cloud, while the others can be run on the client. Thus, the pipeline is separated into two: first the cloud part and then the client part. Depending on where the separation occurs, several types of pipeline for big data emerge. Firstly, the pixel and geometry oriented approaches proposed by Holliman and Watson [34]. We also propose our approach based on the use of a multiscale abstraction, which solves some of the problems related to previous approaches. This figure shows the pipeline that we already detailed in our previous work [2]:

**Fig. 7.** The pipeline of visualization, adapted from [35]. In an interactive system, it can be executed many times per second.

5.2.1 Pixel-oriented pipeline
The pixel-oriented approach is as simple as possible. In this split, the entire pipeline runs in the cloud. The final image is then sent to the client for display. With this approach, rendering is done in the cloud, so there is no performance constraint for the client. However, this also implies that all interactions must be transmitted to the server to be processed and generate a new image that will be transmitted to the client. Therefore, all interactions require a round trip through the network, which increases their latency. Similarly, the bandwidth used is proportional to the resolution of the visualization. Sent images can be compressed, but this further increases latency. The simplicity of this approach makes it compatible with any visualization. Nonetheless, it ultimately provides nothing more than remote desktop sharing software as the role of the client is reduced to a screen on which display the final image transmitted to it.

5.2.2 Geometry oriented pipeline
The geometry-oriented approach operates to separate the pipeline further upstream. The cloud part is responsible for generating geometry, but more rendering. This step is provided by the customer who must have sufficient power to draw the geometry which is transmitted to him. This division of roles makes the client a little less dependent on the cloud part. Some interactions can be done without help from the server, which improves latency compared to the previous approach. However, the most complex interactions, which require data manipulation, still need to use the server. The bandwidth used by this approach is difficult to estimate since the amount of geometric data to be sent depends entirely on the application. This approach can be compared to client-server oriented rendering libraries, such as X11 and OpenGL [36].

5.2.3 Pipeline oriented data abstraction
The two previous approaches adapt the existing model to move some expensive tasks into the cloud, but they do not take into account one of the fundamental problems related to massive data visualization: occlusion. Our approach, visible in Figure 8, separates the pipeline at the level of the visual encoding, thus it has more upstream than the geometry-oriented approach. The data sent to the client is represented in the form of multiscale abstraction, which allows both to solve the problem of occlusion and to better predict or even limit the bandwidth used. With this approach, the client becomes much more independent of the server. Most interactions can be implemented without network transfer. Since the client has
data abstraction, it is possible to apply traditional visualization algorithms to the client. Thanks to the use of multi-scale abstraction, the client does not need to have a large computing capacity. To accommodate the less powerful devices, the level of abstraction to be used can be increased, that is, fewer data will be transferred. This approach is the most complete and the most flexible. This is the one we will use in our work.

Fig. 8. The visualization pipeline is modified to take into account the constraints to visualize massive data. The steps of the pipeline are now separated into two phases: the precalculation phase is done in the cloud while the visualization phase is done on a local machine and requires the transfer of some of the precomputed data.

6 MODEL DRIVEN VISUALIZATION
A graphical representation of statistical data or visualization of statistical data is a visual summary of the encrypted statistical data. It allows at a glance to grasp the general trend. Graphical representations of statistical data are also found in information and communication to the general public where they can influence the effectiveness and credibility of the message. From this point of view, it should be borne in mind that a graphic representation remains, in essence, a simplification of reality. The multiple parameters of graphical representation (scale, choice of coordinates, false colors, etc.) are all factors that may intentionally or unintentionally distort reality, for example by masking, distorting or minimizing important information. NICTs have developed these representations under the names of DataVisualisation or DataViz. These technologies allow today to visualize "virtually" data in space (three-dimensional computer graphics, video projection or laser projection on a "neutral" model, or visualization with 3D glasses, etc.). Our proposal aims to make the transition from one visual mode to another by applying techniques related to model engineering. The following figure shows our approach:

For the purpose of doing this work, we rely on our first metamodeling [2]. By using the ATL transformation language, we will make transformations of our meta-model to the destination meta-models [37], which presents the final visualization mode. Indeed, there are several visualization modes (Bar Chart, Circle Diagram, Point Cloud, Line, Bubble, Heatmap, etc.). However, we limit ourselves in our choice to: graphs, tree, and bar chart. We determine the meta-models defined for the modes of visualization chosen in our work. In short, Figure 9 expresses the existence of a concrete viewer for each model. Eventually, we shall briefly present the major material used in this work. We used JFace from Eclipse for trees, lists, and tables. BIRT was used for reading graphics. We also used Zest [38] for the graph-based views, as well as a Google component for the geographic maps. After that, and in order to generate a view of a data model, we defined transformations thanks to the ATL transformation language [39]. These rules will be applied to the instance data (figure 9-D) by matching the elements of their corresponding data model (Figure 9-C). For the purpose of generating a view from a data model, the interaction designer selects the viewer and writes transformation rules to describe the view. The transformation rules are applied to the instance data (Figure 9-D) by matching the elements of their corresponding data model (Figure 9-C). After applying the transformation rules, the resulting dataset is introduced into the selected viewer. Then, the view can be automatically filled in with the results and displayed to the user.

The following fig shows the meta-model that we proposed for the visual mode of the trees:

Fig. 9. MDV Architecture proposed.

Fig. 10. Meta-model for a TreeView.
Then we presented the meta-model that we proposed for the visual mode of Map:

![Meta-model for Map](image)

**Fig. 11.** Map viewer meta-model.

Finally, we present in this figure the last visual mode that we used:

![Meta-model for GraphView](image)

**Fig. 12.** Meta-model for a GraphView.

### 7 TRANSMFORMATIONS

As we have mentioned in the previous paragraphs, we used the ATL transformation language to perform transformations to pass instance data and present them as three visual modes.

Here is an excerpt from the ATL code that we defined for this reason:

```java
Figure 13. ATL Transformation rules to Tree view.
```

### 8 EXPERIENCES AND EVALUATION

#### 8.1 Configuration

In this section, we list the techniques we used to implement the approach presented in Figure 9. We used version 4.12 of the Eclipse IDE with the addition of Eclipse Modeling Framework (EMF) to draw the proposed meta-models. Version 4.1 of the ATL transformation language was used to define the transformation rules [40]. We defined three transformation rules: J2TreeView, J2MapView, and J2GraphView.

#### 8.2 Experiences

To carry out our tests, we have created dozens of Ecore model instances on the Eclipse tool thanks to the EMF tool, which contains the generic Ecore instance editor. The purpose of using multiple instances of data is to better measure the execution time of transformations to the three visual modes chosen. The following table shows the execution time of ATL transformations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformation</th>
<th>J2TreeView</th>
<th>J2MapView</th>
<th>J2GraphView</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transformation time</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>1045</td>
<td>756</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results are shown in the following figure:

**Fig. 15.** Execution time for transformations.

### 9 CONCLUSION

Data is the pillar of business efficiency. Without the data, you cannot get the information needed to complete your tasks. In addition, reading and analyzing your data quickly allows you to understand the influence of certain factors on your overall success and proactive decision-making. That's why data visibility is paramount. Creating a chart or diagram helps you...
(and others) interpret the data and the underlying questions. In this paper, we apply model engineering techniques to provide an approach to display data in multiple visual modes.

10 REFERENCES


