Project Description

XPLite

In this section we describe XPLite, a path expression language you need to implement.

The syntax of XPLite is described using the following grammar:

\[
\text{PathExpression} ::= ([/'|\text{LocationStep})^* \\
\text{LocationStep} ::= \text{Axis}' ::' \text{NodeTest}(['\text{Predicate}'])^* \\
\text{Axis} ::= \text{self} |
\text{parent} |
\text{child} |
\text{attribute} |
\text{ancestor} |
\text{descendant} |
\text{following} |
\text{preceding} |
\text{following-sibling} |
\text{preceding-sibling} \\
\text{NodeTest} ::= \text{NodeName} |
\text{*} |
\text{node()} |
\text{attribute()} |
\text{text()} 
\]

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Informally, XPLite is a (n almost a) subset of XPath that contains all its major axes (self, child, parent, descendant, ancestor, following, preceding, following-sibling, preceding-sibling and attribute), five types of node tests, and a simplified version of predicates. It does not contain short syntax conventions (except for the "*" nodetest).

Each individual predicate is either an XPLite expression or a comparison between values of built-in functions and constants (you can compare a value of one function to a value of another function, as well as a value of a function to a constant; you can also compare constants, but this is less useful). Each location step can contain multiple predicates.

The semantics of XPLite is defined as follows.

- All expressions, except the expressions in the predicates are considered to be absolute, i.e., they start from the root of the XML repository specified in the command.

- As a special case, XPLite query of the form / returns the root of the repository, that is, the content of the entire XML repository\(^1\).

- The XML tree on which XPLite expressions are evaluated has the following types of nodes:
  - **root.** The root of the repository is the only node of this type.
  - **element.** A node that represents an XML element.
  - **text.** A node that contains text content only.

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\(^1\)XPLite queries will be directly preceded by the repository name: RETURN document("RepositoryName")/ is the command to retrieve the root of the given repository.
attribute. A node that contains information about an attribute.

- The semantics of each location step is the same as in XPath: it is treated as a transformation of the input node set into the output node set based on the semantics of the individual components of the location step.

- The semantics of the axes follows XPath. To simplify things, we explicitly assume that nodes whose content is #PCDATA have no children or descendants. (That is, XML documents used in conjunction with this project will have no mixed content).

- attribute nodes are not reachable via child or descendant axes. They are reachable only via the attribute axis. However, if the context node is an attribute node, the element node to which it belongs is reachable from it via parent axis, and only parent axis.

  \[
  \text{/descendant::foo/attribute::bar/parent::node()}
  \]

  returns all foo nodes that have an attribute bar.

- The semantics of the node tests follows XPath. The "*" nodetest is the abbreviation for the \( \text{node()} \) nodetest\(^2\). text () nodetest is satisfied by XML element nodes which have no descendants, but do have non-trivial content\(^3\).

  For example, in the following document,

  \[
  \text{<root>}
  \quad \text{<a>This is a</a>}
  \quad \text{<b>test</b>}
  \text{</root>}
  \]

  element <root> has two children: <a> and <b>. Both satisfy the text () nodetest.

- The semantics of the predicates is as follows.

  - If a location step contains more than one predicate then, a node is added to the output node set iff all predicates are true on it (i.e., we use conjunction).

  - Predicates consisting of a sequence of location steps (essentially a nested XPLite Expression) are considered to be relative and are evaluated for each of the nodes in the input nodeset (context). They are evaluated to true iff the XPLite expression yields a non-empty nodeset as the answer, otherwise, they evaluate to false.

  Consider, for example the following expression.

\(^2\text{This is the only abbreviation we allow in XPLite syntax}\)

\(^3\text{I.e., those XML element nodes that have a record in the ContentIndex structure.}\)
/child::b[child::c]

This expression returns all children of the root named b that have child nodes named c.

- Predicates of the form PredicateExpression are evaluated as follows. PredicateExpression is evaluated. If it evaluates to true, a non-zero number, a non-empty nodeset or a non-empty string, then the entire predicate expression evaluates to true. Otherwise, the predicate expression evaluates to false.

Note: This particular syntactic construct will mostly be used with the not() function to allow for expressions of the form:

/child::a[not(child::b)]

in addition to

/child::a[not(child::b) = true()]

However, for consistency sake, expressions of the form:

/child::a[position()]

are now also allowed.

- Predicates of the form PredicateExpression OP PredicateExpression are evaluated as follows. Both the lefthandside and the righthandside predicate expressions are evaluated. Their values are compared using the specified operator. If the comparison holds, the expression evaluates to true, otherwise, it evaluates to false.

The semantics of all operators is traditional. On boolean expressions, true > false, so a predicate [true()] > [false()] shall evaluate to true (see the semantics of true() and false() below). On strings, only equality, = and inequality, <> are defined. If two strings are compared using any other comparison, expression evaluates to false.

- function position() returns the position of the current node in its current context - i.e., in the current node set. For example,

/child::chapter[position()=4]

returns the fourth chapter child of the root. At the same time,

/descendant::f/parent::d[position()=2]

looks for the node <d> which has a child <f> and which is the second such node in the document order. In the following example:

<root>
   <d><f>1</f></d>
   <d><g>2</g></d>
   <f><d>3</d></f>
   <d><f>4</d></f>
</root>
the abovementioned query will retrieve in the last element <d> (<d><f>4</f></d>.

The context is always ordered in document order, i.e., the order of appearance of the starting tag of each node in the XML document.

- function `text()` has dual meaning. On nodes of type text (i.e., those that pass `text()` node test), this function returns the #PCDATA content of the node. On nodes of type attribute it returns the value of the current attribute. On all other nodes it returns empty string. The result of this function must be compared to a string value.

- function `last()` returns the size of the current context, i.e. the number of nodes in the context nodeset (nodelist). Using the XML document from above, in the following expression

  `/descendant::*[last()=3]`

`last()` will evaluate to 3 – there are three nodes `<f>` found in the document, they form the node set that `last()` gets as the input. At the same time,

`/descendant::*[position()=last()]`

returns only the last `<f>` node from the document (`<f>4</f>`).

- function `count(PathExpression)` evaluates the `PathExpression` first, and then returns the size of the context (i.e., the nodeset retrieved by the path expression). Note that `PathExpression` here can be both absolute and relative. Absolute path expressions are evaluated from the root, relative path expressions are evaluated from the context nodes.

- function `not(PathExpression)` evaluates `PathExpression` and then takes the logical NOT of it. If `PathExpression` evaluates to false, empty nodeset, empty string or 0, `not(PathExpression)` evaluates to true. Otherwise, it evaluates to false.

- functions `true()` and `false()` return `true` and `false` respectively. XPLite does not have specific constants for `true` and `false`, so, these functions can be used as surrogates for the truth values.

- XPLite constants are of two types: numeric and string. String constants are enclosed in double quotes. Numeric constants are proper integers, possibly negative.

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4Which, hopefully, coincides with `NodeId` in your StructureIndex.