Bypassing Space Explosion in Regular Expression Matching for Network Intrusion Detection and Prevention Systems

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Problem Statement

- Core operation in IDS/IPS is Deep Packet Inspection
  - Past DPI: string matching
  - Current DPI: regular expression (RE) matching
    • Example: SNORT, Bro

- Problem: given a set of REs, how to quickly scan packet payload to determine which REs are matched?
Solution using Automata

- Common solution is to build an equivalent Finite State Automata based on DFA.

- DFA size grows exponentially with number of REs.

- Several alternate automata have been proposed $D^2FA$, XFA, $\delta$FA etc.
Limitations of Prior Work

- **Prior solution:** *Union then Minimize* framework.
  - First combined DFA for the whole RE set is built.
  - Compression technique is applied to the combined DFA to get the alternate automata.

- **Problems:**
  - The minimization/compression is applied on large combined automata, hence requires too much time and memory.
  - The intermediate DFA might be too large to fit in memory.
  - Whole automata needs to be rebuilt if new RE is added to set.


Our Approach

- **Our approach:** Minimize then Union framework.
  - Build individual DFAs for each RE in the RE set.
  - Compress each DFA to get individual alternate automata.
  - Merge the all compressed alternate automata together.

- **Advantages**
  - The compression algorithm is applied to small DFAs.
  - Large intermediate DFA does not need to be built.
  - Easy to add new RE to the set with one merge.

- **In this work we focus on the D^2FA.**
D$^2$FA Overview

- D$^2$FA [Kumar et al., 2006] uses common transitions between states to reduce the number of transitions.

- To build a D$^2$FA:
  1. We choose a deferred state for each state in the DFA.
  2. For each state, remove transitions that are common with its deferred state.
D$^2$FA Construction

- Build Space Reduction Graph (SRG)
- Find maximum spanning tree (MST) in SRG.
- Use the MST to set deferred states.

D$^2$FA for RE set \{ab, bc.*d\}  2648 Transitions

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DFA for RE Matching in DPI

- Traditional DFA defined as
  \[(Q, \Sigma, \delta, q_0, A),\]
  where \(A \subseteq Q\) is the set of accepting states.

- For RE matching in DPI, we redefine DFA as
  \[(Q, \Sigma, \delta, q_0, M),\]
  where \(M: Q \rightarrow 2^R\) gives, for each state, the subset of REs matched from RE set \(R\).

DFA for RE set \{ab, bc.*d\}
Merging DFAs (1)

- **Input:** Min. state DFAs $D_1$ and $D_2$ equivalent to RE sets $R_1$ and $R_2$.
- **Output:** Min. state DFA $D_3$ equivalent to RE set $R_1 \cup R_2$.

- **Solution:** Use the standard Union Cross Product (UCP) construction, $D_3 = UCP(D_1, D_2)$
- Each state in $D_3$ corresponds to a pair of states in $D_1$ and $D_2$. $Q3 = Q1 \times Q2$. 

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Merging DFAs (2)

- For traditional DFA, $D_3 = UCP(D_1, D_2)$ is not guaranteed to be minimum state.
- We prove that for redefined DFA for DPI, $D_3$ is guaranteed to be minimum state if:
  - Only reachable state pairs are generated, and
  - $R_1 \cap R_2 = \emptyset$.

- To create the DFA for the entire RE set:
  - First create DFA for each RE
  - Merge DFAs together in a binary fashion to get the final DFA.
- Merge method much faster than direct method
  - Time to build largest DFA in our experiments:
    - Direct method: 386 seconds
    - Merge method: 0.66 seconds.
Merging $D^2FA$

- We extend the UCP construction for merging DFAs to merge $D^2FAs$.
- To generate $D^2FA$, we need to set deferred state for each state.
- Set the deferred state as soon as new state is created.
- Since deferred state is set when a state is created, we only need to store the non-deferred transitions for the state.
- The whole DFA is never built since we always store the $D^2FA$. 
Setting Deferred State

- Idea: Use deferment relation from the input $D^2$FAs to set the deferment in the merged $D^2$FA.

- To choose deferred state for new state, $u = \langle v, w \rangle$, in $D_3$, we use deferment of $v$ in $D_1$ and $w$ in $D_2$.

- Among all the $(i+1) \times (j+1)-1$ possible state pairs, choose the one which has most common transitions with $\langle v, w \rangle$. 
Merging D^2FA Example

- For most states, one of the first pair is the best pair.

- In our experiments, average number of comparisons needed < 1.5
Experimental Results: Main

- We used real world 8 RE sets that were used in prior work for our experiments.
- We group the 8 RE sets into three groups according to type of REs in the sets: STRING, WILDCARD, SNORT
- We compare $D^2$FA Merge algorithm with the Original $D^2$FA algorithm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE set group</th>
<th># States / ASCII len.</th>
<th>Trans increase</th>
<th>Def. depth ratio</th>
<th>Space ratio</th>
<th>Speedup factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>20.10%</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRING</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>44.00%</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2672.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILDCARD</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNORT</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>21.30%</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1882.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experimental Results: Scale

- To test scalability we use a synthetic RE set with REs of the form \( /c_1c_2c_3c_4\cdot c_5c_6c_7c_8/ \)
- We add one RE at a time until memory estimate goes over 1GB.

- Original \(D^2FA\) algorithm:
  - # REs added: 12
  - # states in final \(D^2FA\): 397,312
  - Time to build \(D^2FA\): 71 hours

- \(D^2FA\) Merge algorithm:
  - # REs added: 19
  - # states in final \(D^2FA\): 80,216,064
  - Time to build \(D^2FA\): 1.2 hours

- For 12 REs, \(D^2FA\) Merge only needs 10 seconds to build.
- \(D^2FA\) Merge results in same \(D^2FA\) size as the original algorithm.
Questions?

- Thank you for listening!