Regression Test Selection Across JVM Boundaries

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ABSTRACT

Modern software development processes recommend that changes be integrated into the main development line of a project multiple times a day. Before a new revision may be integrated, developers practice regression testing to ensure that the latest changes do not break any previously established functionality. The cost of regression testing is high, due to an increase in the number of revisions that are introduced per day, as well as the number of tests developers write per revision. Regression test selection (RTS) optimizes regression testing by skipping tests that are not affected by recent project changes. Existing dynamic RTS techniques support only projects written in a single programming language, which is unfortunate knowing that an open-source project is on average written in several programming languages.

We present the first dynamic RTS technique that does not stop at predefined language boundaries. Our technique dynamically detects, at the operating system level, all file artifacts a test depends on. Our technique is, hence, oblivious to the specific means the test uses to actually access the files: be it through spawning a new process, invoking a system call, invoking a library written in a different language, invoking a library that spawns a process which makes a system call, etc. We also provide a set of extension points which allow for a smooth integration with testing frameworks and build systems. We implemented our technique in a tool called RTSLinux as a loadable Linux kernel module and evaluated it on 21 Java projects that escape the JVM by spawning new processes or invoking native code, totaling 2,050,791 lines of code. Our results show that RTSLinux, on average, skips 74.17% of tests and saves 52.83% of test execution time compared to executing all tests.

CSC CONCEPTS

• Software and its engineering ➔ Software testing and debugging; Software evolution;

KEYWORDS

Regression test selection, language-agnostic

ACM Reference format:


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1 INTRODUCTION

To check that recent project changes do not break any established functionality developers practice regression testing—running available tests against the new changes. Although immensely important, regression testing often comes at a high cost [17, 22, 27, 52, 64]. Google recently reported that the company runs more than 70 million tests daily and the testing cost increases quadratically: both the number of revisions per day and the number of tests per revision increase linearly [3, 79].

Background: Regression test selection (RTS) optimizes regression testing by skipping tests that are not affected by recent project changes (i.e., changes between two given revisions) [19, 27–29, 37, 66, 67, 69, 70, 77, 79, 84–86]. To determine which tests are affected, dependencies on various source artifacts must be established and maintained for each test throughout the life cycle of a program. Before tests are executed, only those tests whose dependencies are invalidated by the recent changes are selected.

An RTS technique typically has to make two big choices regarding tracking dependencies: (1) what kind of dependencies to track (e.g., at what granularity level), and (2) how to track them (e.g., statically or dynamically). This leads to a whole spectrum of techniques, which all greatly vary in safety and precision: a safe technique always selects all affected tests, while a precise technique does not select any unaffected test [71].

In this paper, we consider Java projects that are either multilingual (i.e., make native calls via JNI) or span across multiple JVMs (by spawning multiple Java processes). We argue that the existing RTS techniques are not well suited for this class of projects. To address their shortcomings, we propose a novel RTS technique based on dynamic (system-level) file and process monitoring.

Problem: Existing dynamic RTS techniques [14, 21, 37, 67, 69, 71, 77, 86] are all language-specific (i.e., unable to observe dependencies that span across languages), making them unsafe for multilingual projects. Recent studies found that an open-source project is written in five programming languages on average [57, 68].

Existing static RTS techniques, on the other hand, are imprecise. Due to common limitations of static analyses, such techniques must typically overapproximate the set of dependencies [51, 61, 81, 82]. Examples include Google’s continuous integration system TAP [3, 26, 79] and Microsoft’s CloudBuild [31], which only track dependencies between projects. Assume, for example, a new method is added to a commonly used collections library; in such a setting, all tests of all dependent projects must be rerun, even though none of them are effectively affected by that change.

Technique: We present the first dynamic language-agnostic RTS technique, dubbed RTSLinux. RTSLinux collects dependencies at the file level granularity. To do so, RTSLinux integrates with the OS kernel (via a loadable kernel module [6]), where it intercepts all relevant process- and file-related system calls. The benefits of such tight
integration with the operating system are twofold: (1) it enables RTSLinux to precisely observe all dynamic dependencies, no matter which part of the test’s process tree creates them, and (2) keeps the overhead to a minimum. Finally, RTSLinux provides primitives and extension points for easy integration with testing frameworks and build systems, as well as for further (domain-specific) improvements of the technique’s precision.

**Evaluation**: We evaluated RTSLinux on 420 revisions of 21 popular open-source projects. Our evaluation has the following main objectives: (1) evaluate RTSLinux’s effectiveness in its own right (in terms of the reduction in testing time), (2) evaluate the added benefits of the key novelty behind RTSLinux—dependency detection across JVM boundaries—comparing to an RTS tool for Java-only projects, and (3) provide initial assessment of the significance of kernel-level integration.

We measured the effectiveness in terms of the reduction in the end-to-end testing time and in terms of the number of skipped tests. Our results show that RTSLinux, on average, reduces testing time by 52.83% and skips 74.17% of tests (compared to RetestAll, i.e., executing all tests at each project revision).

To measure the added benefit, we compared RTSLinux to Ekstazi [35–37], a recent RTS technique that collects dynamic file dependencies for Java projects, but fails to collect dependencies created from child processes or from JNI calls to code that does not compile to Java bytecode. We compared the two techniques in terms of safety, i.e., the percent of dependencies that are missed by Ekstazi, and in terms of reduction in number of tests and testing time. Our findings show Ekstazi is less safe, as it collects only (on average) 16.99% of accessed files collected by RTSLinux. Despite being safer than Ekstazi, RTSLinux achieves comparable savings, both in the number of tests skipped and the overall testing time.

## 2 MOTIVATING EXAMPLES

We motivate our work with two sample unit tests taken from popular open-source projects: Hadoop [2] and Ant [1]. The first sample test illustrates the case when code written in multiple languages is executed in the same process. The second sample test illustrates the case when code written in a single language is executed in multiple processes. In neither of these two cases (or combinations thereof) the existing RTS techniques provide safety. We discuss the issues faced by the existing techniques and briefly describe our proposed technique to overcome the challenges.

### 2.1 Multiple Languages and a Single Process

Figure 1 shows a test that invokes C code from Java code; the test is from the Apache Hadoop project [2] (Git SHA: fe6c1bd7), a popular map-reduce framework. The testSnappyNullPointerException test method (which is declared in TestSnappyCompressorDecompressor.java) invokes (line 7) compress method (declared in SnappyCompressor.java), which in turn invokes (line 13) compressBytesDirect (a native method also declared in SnappyCompressor.java). The implementation of the native method is in Java_compressBytesDirect function (written in C and implemented in SnappyCompressor.c). Java uses the Java Native Interface (JNI) to invoke the native code [47, 53]. Note that JNI does not spawn a new process but executes the native code in the same process as the Java Virtual Machine (JVM).

```java
1 // TestSnappyCompressorDecompressor.java
2 void testSnappyNullPointerException() {
3     SnappyCompressor compressor =
4         new SnappyCompressor();
5     byte[] bytes = BytesGenerator.get(1024 * 6);
6     compressor.setInput(bytes, 0, bytes.length);
7     compressor.compress(null, 0, 0);
8     ... }
9
10 // SnappyCompressor.java
11 int compress(byte[] b, int off, int len) {...
12 // Compress data
13 n = compressBytesDirect();
14 compressedDirectBuf.limit(n);
15 uncompressedDirectBuf.clear();
16 ...
17 native int compressBytesDirect();
18 ...
19 // SnappyCompressor.c
20 JNIEXPORT jint JNICALL Java_compressBytesDirect (JNIEnv
21     env, jobject thisj) {...
...
21 ... }
```

Figure 1: An example test from the Hadoop project that invokes C code from Java (without spawning a new process)

The existing dynamic RTS techniques are unsafe in this scenario. For example, Ekstazi would collect dependencies only on classes that are loaded in the JVM (i.e., TestSnappyCompressorDecompressor.class and SnappyCompressor.class) but it would not collect the dependency on libhadoop.so that contains the compiled code for SnappyCompressor.c. Similarly, techniques that collect dependencies on executed methods, e.g., TestTube [21], would detect methods written in Java (i.e., testSnappyNullPointerException, compress, and compressBytesDirect) and would miss functions written in C (i.e., function Java_compressBytesDirect).

Our proposed technique, RTSLinux, is, by design, oblivious to the specificities of JNI. As such, it collects all dependencies introduced by the JVM loading whatever files it needs to execute JNI calls. RTSLinux only needs to be informed (by a build system or a testing framework) when each test starts and finishes; no changes to the project under test are needed.

### 2.2 A Single Language and Multiple Processes

Figure 2 shows a test that spawns a new Java process; the test is taken from the Ant project [1] (Git SHA: c50b683c), a popular build system for Java.

The testForkedCapture test method (declared in JUnitTaskTest class) checks the correctness of the JUnit task [4] with “fork” set to true (meaning that Ant should execute the test in a newly spawned JVM rather than the same one that Ant is already running in).

In the setup of the test, a build script to be executed by Ant is specified (line 3); the build script contains a target with a JUnit task in it. The test first sets the “fork” option to true (line 6) and then executes said target (line 7). The execution continues through the implementation of the build system (line 10) until it eventually spawns a new JVM where the requested JUnit task executes the tests found in the Printer class (line 16).

The existing RTS techniques would only collect dependencies within the JVM of JUnitTaskTest and would miss dependencies introduced from the spawned processes. For example, Ekstazi would
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3 TECHNIQUE

This section describes the details of RTSLinux. We describe the common phases performed by traditional RTS techniques, present the way RTSLinux performs those phases, discuss a mechanism that a user can utilize to alter the behavior of the technique, and present the integration of RTSLinux with the existing testing frameworks and build systems.

RTS techniques typically include three phases: analysis, execution, and collection [37]. The analysis phase checks, for each test, if any of the previously collected dependencies have been affected by the recent changes. If a test is not invalidated by the changes, the test is not executed. (Tests for which dependencies have not previously been collected are always selected.) The execution phase runs selected tests. The collection phase collects dependencies for each test; these dependencies are used in the analysis phase of the subsequent project revision. The execution and collection phases are frequently interleaved, i.e., collection is done during test execution rather than in a separate run.

Figure 3 shows the three phases as performed by RTSLinux. Function Run (line 1) takes as input a command to execute and functions defined by the user that can alter RTSLinux’s behavior (as discussed later in this section). The given command can be an arbitrary Unix command; in the context of this paper, that command will always execute a test. If any dependency of the given command is affected (line 2), then RTSLinux executes the command and stores (in the current working directory) new dependencies for the given process id (line 5). We next describe the details of the three phases.
3.1 Analysis Phase

Analysis phase (Figure 3, lines 8 - 24) checks if the given command/test is affected or not; the utility function HasDependencies checks if there are dependencies associated with the given command and the current working directory. As stated earlier, if there are no dependencies associated with the command (e.g., command has not been executed before or its meta-data was removed), the command is always affected (line 23). If dependencies are present, then RTSLinux checks if any dependency of the given command is affected since the latest run (lines 10 - 20). The set of dependencies for a given command includes all dependencies collected (in the previous run) by any process that was spawned by the command.

To check if a dependency file is modified or not (line 16), RTSLinux compares the checksum of the current version of the file and the checksum that was computed at the end of the prior execution of the same command. By default, RTSLinux computes the checksum of the entire file or (file names in a) directory.

RTSLinux provides an extension mechanism, which allows the user to specify a customized function for computing the checksums (line 12). The custom function accepts two arguments: the type of the process that accesses the dependency and the path to the dependency. Based on the type of the process and the type of the file, the user can adjust the computation of the checksum. For example, if a process parses an XML file, the user may exclude comments from all XML files. In such cases, the command would not be selected if the changes are only in the comments of XML files. Note that computing the checksum is application dependent; RTSLinux provides a function that ignores debug info in .class files if these files are accesses from a JVM. The extension mechanism for the checksum can also be used to implement hierarchical checksum, i.e., a user can first check the size of the file and then check the content only if the size is the same.

3.2 Execution Phase

In RTSLinux, collection happens for every executed process. Unlike most existing dynamic RTS techniques, RTSLinux does not require changes to either sources or binaries of the project under test to enable collection of dependencies.

Figure 4 shows the integration of RTSLinux in the Linux OS. Specifically, RTSLinux implements wrappers [33] for each system call available in Linux that manages the set of running processes (e.g., fork) or accesses the file system (e.g., open). After starting the execution of the command (line 4 in Figure 3), system calls go through RTSLinux wrappers. Specifically our SystemExecute function (line 25 in Figure 3) is invoked from the wrappers. The function checks if the system call is spawning a new process or if it accesses any file or directory on the file system. If the call spawns a new process, RTSLinux updates the mapping of processes to include that the current process is spawning a new process; the map is used later to reconstruct the process tree, which is used to find all transitively spawned processes from the given process id. On the other hand, if the system call accesses a file or a directory, RTSLinux updates the set of dependencies of the current process. Note that this phase only creates the mapping among processes and collects dependencies, but does not compute the checksum of dependencies or associate dependencies with the command being executed. We separated the two phases to enable the user to collect dependencies for any part of the process tree and to entirely ignore dependencies for some commands if necessary.

3.3 Collection Phase

Collection phase (Figure 3, lines 34 - 50) computes the set of processes transitively spawned from the given command and computes the checksum of each dependency accessed by at least one process. Initially, RTSLinux finds transitive closure of processes from the process that started the given command (line 37). To compute the transitive closure, RTSLinux uses process map, which was created during the execution. Note that it is necessary to find only processes that are spawned (transitively) from the given command, because there can be many other processes running in parallel, which are not related to the user command. Even more, there could be other processes running other tests in parallel. We discuss several aspects of parallel test execution in Section 6. Computing the checksum of each dependency of each process is similar to the checksum computation that was described in Section 3.1. As before, RTSLinux uses the user defined function (if provided) for computing the checksum. Additionally, in collection phase, RTSLinux provides an extension point where the user can provide a filter to exclude some dependencies, e.g., temp files and directories.

3.4 System Integration

We implemented RTSLinux as a loadable kernel module [6] and made only a few modifications to the Linux kernel [48]. We have tested our changes with several versions of the Linux kernel: from version 3.13.11-ckt39 (Apr 2016) to version 4.4.40 (Jan 2017). We had to change only five lines of code in our module to enable it to work across all Linux versions in the tested range. (Specifically, an argument to do_execve function was moved to a struct, so we had to adjust one of our wrapper functions.) We note, however, that other changes (e.g., addition of a new system call) could lead to a much higher maintenance cost.

RTSLinux implementation includes all the functions shown in Figure 3 and a number of wrapper functions for the existing system...
We assess the usability of RTSLinux: An alternative implementation. In addition to user space
RQ3: it provides a good starting point for seeking an implementation efficient possible implementation running in user space, we believe
of the importance of implementing our technique in kernel space comparing
is as effective as the state-of-the-art, and (2) detecting file-
RTSLinux when executing tests with Maven [56], instead of running mvn test the user should run rtslinux mvn test. The
the command and collects dependencies only if the set of dependencies (collected in the previous run) has been affected. However, collecting dependencies for a test command that executes all tests, is likely to be imprecise because any change to any dependency of any test would trigger the execution of all tests in the future.
To improve precision, the user can run one test per process; most popular build systems (e.g., [1, 39, 56]) provide options to spawn a new process for each test.
IsTestAffected and StoreDeps can be used by developers of build systems to check if a test should be executed before starting a test and saving dependencies for the test after it was executed. We integrated RTSLinux with Maven.
An alternative implementation: In addition to RTSLinux, we implemented our technique in another tool, called RTSFAB, which works in user space (i.e., runs outside the operating system’s kernel). Our motivation was to explore and compare the overheads of various approaches for collecting test dependencies. RTSFAB is implemented on top of Fabricate [32], a build system with dynamic dependencies that uses strace to collect accessed files [10].

4 EVALUATION
We assess the usability of RTSLinux by answering the following research questions:
RQ1: How effective is RTSLinux, i.e., what is the reduction in testing time and the number of executed tests?
RQ2: What are the benefits/drawbacks of dependency detection across JVM boundaries (as implemented in RTSLinux) compared to a single-JVM RTS (as implemented in Ekstazi, a recently developed RTS tool for Java). Specifically:
RQ2.1 (Efficiency): Does RTSLinux achieve as much reduction in total testing time and number of executed tests?
RQ2.2 (Safety): How many more dependencies are discovered by RTSLinux?
RQ3: What is the overhead of RTSFAB (a naive implementation of our technique running in user space) compared to RTSLinux?
The main objective of our evaluation is to show that (1) RTSLinux is as effective as the state-of-the-art, and (2) detecting file-based dependencies at the system level is beneficial. Additionally, by comparing RTSLinux to RTSFAB, we provide an initial assessment of the importance of implementing our technique in kernel space instead of in user space. Although RTSFAB may not be the most efficient possible implementation running in user space, we believe it provides a good starting point for seeking an implementation running in user space that is as efficient and as easy to integrate with the existing build systems as RTSLinux is.
We first describe the setup of our study (Section 4.1) and then answer the research questions (Section 4.2). Section 4.3 includes additional case studies, including an experiment in using RTSLinux with a Python project.

4.1 Study Setup
4.1.1 Projects. Table 1 lists the projects used in this evaluation, sorted by test execution time. This list includes projects from recent studies on regression testing [18, 20, 37, 41], as well as a number of new projects containing tests that escape the JVM by spawning processes and/or making native calls. Although not all of the projects used in previous studies require RTSLinux’s cross-JVM capabilities, they still serve as fair benchmarks for evaluating RTSLinux on its own merit (RQ1) and comparing it to Ekstazi in terms of efficiency (RQ2.1). We required that each project is available on GitHub and builds with Maven, which simplified our experiment infrastructure.

Columns in Table 1 designate project name, GitHub repository URL, latest revision (SHA) used in the study, number of lines of code (LOC) (as measured with sloc), number of Maven modules, total number of files, total number of test classes, test execution time for all test classes for a single project revision, and the way in which (at least some) tests escape the JVM they run in (Processes - spawns sub-processes, Native Calls - has native calls, Files - accesses external files, e.g., txt files); for projects that escape the JVM via both sub-processes and JNI, we mark them only as “Processes” in the table, because that is the more interesting case from RTSLinux’s perspective. For each project, we evaluated our selection technique over 20 revisions (such that the latest of these revisions is the one reported in the SHA column); we report the averages in the second and third to last columns in Table 1.
The last two rows show the total (Σ) and average (Avg.) values for each column (if appropriate). In summary, our evaluation spans across 420 revisions of 21 projects, totaling 2,050,791 lines of code.

4.1.2 Experiment Procedure. Figure 5 provides the procedure that we used to collect data for the analysis for a single project.
Table 1: Projects Used in the Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>URL [<a href="https://github.com/">https://github.com/</a>]</th>
<th>SHA</th>
<th>LOC</th>
<th>#Maven modules</th>
<th>#Files</th>
<th>#Test classes</th>
<th>Test time [s]</th>
<th>Escape method</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>la4j</td>
<td>vkostyukov/la4j.git</td>
<td>358be77e</td>
<td>13390</td>
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<td>147</td>
<td>22.85</td>
<td>14.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>ScribbleJava</td>
<td>fernandezpablo85/scribble-java.git</td>
<td>5175a416</td>
<td>7613</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>14.85</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bukkit</td>
<td>Bukkit/Bukkit</td>
<td>f210234e</td>
<td>32555</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>38.00</td>
<td>21.66</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZT-Exec</td>
<td>zeroturnaround/zt-exec</td>
<td>36654400</td>
<td>2938</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>18.45</td>
<td>25.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crypto</td>
<td>apache/commons-crypto.git</td>
<td>dc1769ed</td>
<td>5079</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>27.94</td>
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<tr>
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<td>square/retrofit</td>
<td>ec0635c6</td>
<td>12331</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>28.74</td>
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<td>17625</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>48.00</td>
<td>31.72</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vectorz</td>
<td>mikera/vectorz.git</td>
<td>425109e2</td>
<td>52096</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>78.50</td>
<td>38.98</td>
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<td>Lang</td>
<td>apache/commons-lang.git</td>
<td>17af6d163</td>
<td>69014</td>
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<td>133.50</td>
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<td>4540ad67</td>
<td>26928</td>
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<td>315</td>
<td>42.00</td>
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<td>Config</td>
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<td>6dddebfd1</td>
<td>64341</td>
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<td>642</td>
<td>162.30</td>
<td>66.05</td>
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<td>e8c10f57</td>
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<td>284131</td>
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<td>1548</td>
<td>309.30</td>
<td>190.41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dropwizard</td>
<td>dropwizard/dropwizard.git</td>
<td>1e40ef4f</td>
<td>37914</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>232.00</td>
<td>328.84</td>
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<td>7585</td>
<td>292.00</td>
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<td>962200</td>
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<td>370.08</td>
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<td>174832</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1501</td>
<td>431.00</td>
<td>376.46</td>
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<td>google/guava.git</td>
<td>061da3b3</td>
<td>244083</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>401.00</td>
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<td>57720</td>
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<td>145.00</td>
<td>462.28</td>
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<td>b2e9a94b</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>5523</td>
<td>312.35</td>
<td>879.99</td>
<td>Processes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Σ                      | N/A          | N/A     | 2050791| 250  | 26577      | 3111.05     | 3934.96     | N/A          |
Avg.                    | N/A          | N/A     | 97656.71| 11.90| 1265.57    | 148.14      | 187.37      | N/A          |

In the first step (line 2), we clone the project and then (line 3) checkout the latest revision used in the study (SHA column in Table 1). Next, we iterate over the last 20 project revisions (lines 4 - 16), starting from the oldest revision and moving towards newer revisions. We consider only project revisions that are on the master branch, because many projects run regression tests only against those revisions. In each iteration of the loop, we build the project and skip the revision if the build fails. If the build is successful, we execute the available tests and save the results. To force each test to run in a separate JVM (which is a common practice [18]), we run `mvn test -DforkCount=1 -DreuseForks=false`.

In the next step, the procedure (line 12) integrates RTSLinux by enabling our module in the Linux kernel and including the RTSLinux Maven plugin into the project under study. The tests are then selected based on the dependencies collected in the previous run and those tests are executed (line 14). Finally, the procedure stores the results and newly collected dependencies for the executed tests (line 15). We will use $E^\text{sel}$ to denote end-to-end test execution time and $N^\text{available}$ to denote the number of available tests.

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Using the collected data, we compute test selection ratio as $S = N^\text{sel} / N^\text{available} \times 100$, and savings in terms of end-to-end time as $T = E^\text{sel} / E^\text{available} \times 100$. Savings in terms of end-to-end time (compared to RetestAll) is the key metric for measuring the benefits of an RTS technique [37]. To be consistent with prior studies, we also report test selection ratio; the saving in terms of the number of tests is a metric independent of the machine used for running the experiments.

4.1.3 Execution Platform. We run all experiments on a 4-core Intel(R) Core(TM) i7-6700 CPU @ 3.40GHz with 16GB of RAM, running (our version of) Ubuntu 14.04 LTS. Similar to several recent studies [37, 41, 72], we used multiple versions of Java (Oracle JDK 7u72 and 8u60), which was necessary because several projects (e.g., Lang) do not work with newer Java versions.

4.2 Answers to Research Questions

4.2.1 RQ1: How Effective is RTSLinux. Table 2 shows the main results for RTSLinux. Columns 2-5 are explained in Section 4.1.2; Column 6 denotes the total number of dependencies used by tests (we counted dependencies that are in the project under study, the local Maven cache, or executable files used by tests). The last two rows show the summary values (where appropriate) and average values computed over all projects. We discuss the right-hand part (Ekstazi) of the table in the next section.

Our results show that RTSLinux reduces test execution time for all projects. In the best case (for the Net project) time to execute tests is decreased to only 13.52% (of RetestAll time). In the worst case (for the Closure project) time to execute tests is decreased to 85.12%. On average, across all projects, test execution time is decreased to 47.17%. Similarly, RTSLinux leads to substantial reduction in terms of the number of executed tests. In the best case (for the Config project), RTSLinux reduces test execution time by 74.94% of available tests. In the worst case (for the Vectorz project), RTSLinux selects 64.32% of available tests. We can observe that there are significant
we can observe differences in several cases, e.g., (as discussed in the next section), which may lead to more tests the project, but they do not remove the directory upon completion.

IO

tween revisions. We illustrate these two cases using the
and (2) Ekstazi misses to collect some files that are modified be-
tories and/or files that are not removed when test execution finishes, Such a difference can happen for two reasons: (1) tests create direc-
torieties (Column 11), and number of dependencies normal-
selected tests (Column 9), test selection ratio (Column 10), number
of Efficiency.

Table 2 (right) shows the results for Ekstazi, including
Recall (Section 4.1) that we measure end-to-end time for the entire
RTSLinux that creates the test directory. When the test
finishes, RTSLinux computes the checksum of the test directory (which is non-empty at this point). At the next project revision (under the assumption that we are running tests on a continuous integration service (CIS) [11, 46], e.g., Travis CI, which always does a clean build), RTSLinux will compute the checksum for the test directory and find that the checksum is different from before, thus RTSLinux will select t every time for the execution. (Note that the same problem can happen even if developers do not use CIS, but multiple tests use the same test directory that is not cleaned [18].)

This problem happens for several other projects including Config and ClosureC; observe that the test selection ratio in the table is the same for these two projects because we automatically insert code to cleanup project repository prior to computing the checksum. As mentioned before, another reason for the difference in test selection ratio is the difference in the set of dependencies. We observed that several tests in 10 (e.g., DirectoryFileComparatorTest) traverse all files from the root of the project; whenever any of these files change RTSLinux selects tests for the execution, while Ekstazi misses to select these tests.

4.2.3 RQ2.3: How Does RTSLinux Compare to Ekstazi in Terms of Safety. We find that Ekstazi collects only 16.99% of dependencies collected by RTSLinux (see the last row in the last column in Table 2). Therefore, Ekstazi is less safe than RTSLinux. Despite these differences in the set of dependencies, the reduction in test execution time by RTSLinux and Ekstazi is similar, which demonstrates that RTSLinux is efficient. We observed, for RTSLinux, that projects with many Maven modules have high number of dependencies; the
We performed several case studies to further evaluate RTSLinux. We can see that for the first project revision (when computation of dependencies happens for the first revision). Table 3 includes only single languages. Recall that the test is executed in a single process that runs Python code (and depends on .py files) and PySonar2 spawns a process that runs Python code (and depends on .py files).

4.3.2 A Single Language and Multiple Processes. Section 2.2 introduced a test from the Ant project that spawns subprocesses. (We did not include Ant in our benchmark projects in Section 4.2 because it does not build with Maven.) For Hadoop, we executed only the test method of interest (testForkedCapture); as expected, RTSLinux collected Printer.class (among 617 dependencies) while Ekstazi didn’t (among 218 dependencies).

4.3.3 Additional Cases. We have also checked correctness of RTSLinux on a few hand-picked interesting tests that either use JNI or spawn subprocesses. Table 4 shows these tests and compares number of dependencies collected by RTSLinux (#Deps) and percent of those dependencies collected by Ekstazi (Deps [%]).

5. THREATS TO VALIDITY

External: The projects used in our study may not be representative. To mitigate this threat, we used popular open-source projects that vary in size, number of authors, number of revisions, number of tests, application domain, and ways their tests escape from JVM. Furthermore, several projects used in our study were used in recent work on regression testing [57].
We performed experiments with projects mostly written in Java (although RTSLinux is in theory, more broadly applicable). Our main motivation for this work was projects that escape from JVM. In the future, we plan to evaluate RTSLinux and develop necessary extensions for projects written in other languages.

We performed our experiments on 20 revisions per project. The results could differ if we chose different number of revisions or another time frame. For projects used in a previous evaluation of Ekstazi [37], we used the same revisions as reported in that study. For other projects, added in this study, we used the latest revisions available at the time of our experiments.

The overhead introduced by the collection phase may differ for other Linux kernel versions. Although we tested RTSLinux with several Linux versions, we have not measured the time for each version. Considering that the version 4 was introduced only to avoid high version numbers [5], we do not expect that our results would differ on a few latest releases of the kernel.

**Internal**: Implementation of RTSLinux may contain bugs that may impact our conclusions. To mitigate this threat, we wrote a number of tests, manually inspected the output of several examples, and compared the outputs of Ekstazi and RTSLinux. We also compared RTSLinux and RTSFAB, which should always have the same test selection ratio.

**Construct**: We compared RTSLinux only with Ekstazi, although many other RTS techniques have been proposed in the past (Section 7). We justify our decision with two reasons. First, other existing RTS techniques collect fine-grained dependencies (e.g., methods, statements, basic blocks, elements of the extended control flow graphs, etc.) and they are less safe than Ekstazi. Ekstazi also compares favorably with the existing RTS techniques in terms of end-to-end regression testing time [37]. Second, to the best of our knowledge, Ekstazi is the only publicly available RTS tool (for Java) at the moment.

## 6 DISCUSSION

**Dependent tests**: Some test suites may have order dependencies among tests, e.g., if test t1 executes before test t2, then t2 passes, otherwise it fails. Therefore, if RTSLinux selects only test t2 for the execution, the test would fail if the test t1 is not selected. RTSLinux, as other RTS tools, does not reason about order dependencies among tests. However, because RTSLinux requires that each test (or group of tests specified by a developer) executes in a separate process, there cannot be a problem due to order dependencies on values in the main memory. Still, there could be a problem if tests share state on the disk. We believe that RTSLinux can be a base for a framework for detecting such dependencies. Using RTSLinux we were able to detect bugs (when a test does not clean the state on disk) in 10, Config, and ClosureC; our patches were recently accepted by 10 and Config developers [24, 25].

**Flaky tests**: Flaky tests are tests that non-deterministically pass and fail for the same project revision [30, 54, 60, 62, 80, 87]. There are a number of sources of non-determinism, including GUI events, networking, concurrency, etc. Similar to the existing RTS techniques, RTSLinux collects dependencies only for one possible execution; if a test is not selected, then the previous execution trace is still feasible. Note that this is consistent with existing static RTS techniques that are used in practice [31, 79].

**Parallel execution**: RTSLinux supports parallel test execution by tracking dependencies for each user’s command separate and monitoring the accessed files/directories by (transitively) spawned processes. Note however that RTSLinux does not support distributed tests (i.e., tests that communicate over network), but only tests that are executed on a single machine.

**One test per JVM**: Although running one test (or groups of dependent tests) per JVM can introduce overhead, it is still a common approach practiced in industry [18]. As a result, RTSLinux fits well in the common development practices and reduces the testing cost by skipping many tests after code changes.

**Detecting files loaded by JVM in Ekstazi**: Ekstazi has a hidden option to collect files loaded by JVM, which is untested and disabled by default. In our experiments, hence, we used the default (stable) Ekstazi configuration. In principle, even when collecting all files loaded by JVM, Ekstazi still cannot detect file accesses made from spawned processes and from native code, making it strictly less safe than RTSLinux.

## 7 RELATED WORK

**Regression test selection**: There has been a lot of work, in the last three decades, on regression testing [27, 44, 85] and on regression test selection [19, 28]. Prior work on dynamic RTS techniques mostly explored fine-grained dependencies, including dependencies on functions/methods (e.g., [21]), statements (e.g., [71]), basic blocks (e.g., [77]), and elements of (extended) control flow graphs [69, 86]. Recent work introduced Ekstazi [37] that collects dynamic file dependencies, which we discussed throughout this paper. Unlike the existing techniques, RTSLinux supports tests that are written in multiple languages and spawn multiple processes.

Kung et al. [49] introduced the class firewall, a technique that (statically) identifies modified set of classes for two project revisions. Skoglund and Runeson proposed an RTS technique based on the class firewall [73] and later improved the precision of their technique [74]. Orso et al. [67] combined the class firewall (static...
with a database state. Nanda et al. [64] recently proposed an RTS tracing tools that are supported by many existing build systems. and finishes; these notification can be easily added via plugins long as the build system notifies systems and can be integrated with any build system to enable RTS, as

similar to functions even if functions access files. Similar to existing RTS Fabricate [32] collect dynamic dependencies on executed files by us-

ers [38] and are rather imprecise [20, 61, 81]. Memoize [59] and

of fine-grained dependencies, but require substantial effort by the

applications. Willmor and Embury [84] presented a new definition of safety that takes into account the interaction of the program with a database state. Nanda et al. [64] recently proposed an RTS technique that collects dependencies on non-code elements, such as configuration files and databases. RTSLINUX, collects not only dependencies on configuration files and databases but on any file accessed by any process (transitively) spawned by the test.

**Tracing tools:** There are several tools for tracing system calls in the Linux kernel. The most popular tool for tracing system calls is the strace tool [10]. Internally, strace uses ptrace system call that stops the traced process(es) for each call and introduces observable overhead when many system calls are made by the traced process(es) [88]. For example, the execution of `du -sh` is hundreds of times faster than the execution of `strace du -sh`. Another popular tool available in Linux is perf trace. Although this tool has much lower overhead than the strace tool, perf trace does not provide a way to extract the file names in human readable for-

mat [8]. Other third-party tools are available, including systemtap, LTtng, and ktap. These tools are more generic than RTSLINUX and require the use of domain specific languages to specify calls to be traced. Additionally, our attempt to use systemtap was unsuccessful due to incompatibility with recent versions of the Linux kernel.

**Build systems and memoization:** Many build systems (including Ant [1], Make [75], Maven [56], and Gradle [39]) support incremental execution of a build target, but the incremental computation is commonly based on statically computed dependencies, which makes them unsafe. Modern cloud-based build systems [16, 23] improve safety of incremental builds by keeping the explicit list of fine-grained dependencies, but require substantial effort by the users [38] and are rather imprecise [20, 61, 81]. Memoize [59] and Fabricate [32] collect dynamic dependencies on executed files by using the strace command; these systems do not collect dependencies on accessed files that do not exist. SCons [9] and Vesta [45] capture accesses to files even if the files do not exist; however SCons does not support an arbitrary language by default and Vesta requires that used files are under revision control. Tup [12] collects dynamic file dependencies via FUSE; therefore, Tup currently cannot collect separate set of dependencies for tests that are running in parallel processes. Pluto is a build system for Java that dynamically collects file dependencies and uses semantic hashing. Regarding memo-

ization, Guo and Engler proposed IncPy [40] that memoizes calls to functions even if functions access files. Similar to existing RTS techniques, IncPy is language-specific.

RTSLINUX was inspired by both the existing build systems and memoization. However, RTSLINUX is complementary to build sys-

tems and can be integrated with any build system to enable RTS, as long as the build system notifies RTSLINUX when each test starts and finishes; these notification can be easily added via plugins that are supported by many existing build systems. RTSLINUX also may reduce the need for build system migration that can be non-

trivial [38, 58, 65, 78].

**Provenance-aware systems:** Provenance-aware systems provide meta-data that describe the history of various objects in a system. Initial work on provenance-aware systems was language-specific (e.g., [13]). Recent work explored support for multilingual projects via libraries [55] (that require manual annotations) and OS logging [63, 76]. Muniswamy-Reddy et al. [63] proposed a technique that collects meta-data on various abstraction levels. Bates et al. [15] presented a whole-system provenance-aware technique that collects meta-data for the entire system with negligible overhead, and Gehani and Tariq introduced support for provenance auditing in distributed environments [34]. Lee et al. [50] presented an approach that avoids dependency explosion. RTSLINUX (and any other RTS technique) and the provenance-aware systems have different goals, which is reflected in the type of collected meta-data and the way the meta-data is used. For example, an RTS technique needs to know when each test starts and finishes.

**Continuous integration services:** Recent work by Vasilescu et al. [83] and Hilton et al. [46] showed that continuous integration services (CISs), such as Travis CI [11], are widely used and improve the productivity of project teams. Currently, more than 300k projects use Travis CI [46], which is only one out of more than 25 publicly available CISs. CISs are used by projects written in different (combination of) programming languages and build languages. RTSLINUX could easily be integrated with a number of CISs that run Linux based VMs, which would lead to reduction in regression testing cost for a number of projects.

8 CONCLUSION

We presented a novel regression test selection technique, dubbed RTSLINUX. The key novelty is that RTSLINUX supports tests that escape JVM (e.g., spawn multiple subprocesses). For each test, RTSLINUX collects all accessed files by the process running the test and all spawned subprocesses; the overhead of collection is reduced by implementing RTSLINUX at the system level (as a loadable kernel module). RTSLINUX provides extension mechanism for smooth integration with build systems and testing frameworks. Our results show that RTSLINUX substantially reduces testing time compared to ReTestAll. Additionally, our experiments showed that RTSLINUX achieves similar savings for Java projects as Ekstazi (a regression test selection tool for JVM languages) while improving the safety. Although more research is needed to evaluate RTSLINUX for various languages and improve its precision by combining it with language-specific techniques, we believe that current savings achieved by RTSLINUX can make a significant difference for a large number of multilingual projects and any continuous integration service.

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