

# XPath and XQuery

Introduction to Databases

CompSci 316 Fall 2017



**DUKE**  
COMPUTER SCIENCE

# Announcements (Tue. Oct. 24)

- Homework #3 due in two weeks
- Project milestone #1 feedback emailed
  - Milestone #2 due in 2½ weeks

# Query languages for XML

- XPath
  - Path expressions with conditions
  - ☞ Building block of other standards (XQuery, XSLT, XLink, XPointer, etc.)
- XQuery
  - XPath + full-fledged SQL-like query language
- XSLT
  - XPath + transformation templates

# Example DTD and XML

```

<?xml version="1.0"?>
<!DOCTYPE bibliography [
  <!ELEMENT bibliography (book+)>
  <!ELEMENT book (title, author*, publisher?, year?, section*)>
  <!ATTLIST book ISBN CDATA #REQUIRED>
  <!ATTLIST book price CDATA #IMPLIED>
  <!ELEMENT title (#PCDATA)>
  <!ELEMENT author (#PCDATA)>
  <!ELEMENT publisher (#PCDATA)>
  <!ELEMENT year (#PCDATA)>
  <!ELEMENT i (#PCDATA)>
  <!ELEMENT content (#PCDATA|i)*>
  <!ELEMENT section (title, content?, section*)>
]>
<bibliography>
  <book ISBN="ISBN-10" price="80.00">
    <title>Foundations of Databases</title>
    <author>Abiteboul</author>
    <author>Hull</author>
    <author>Vianu</author>
    <publisher>Addison Wesley</publisher>
    <year>1995</year>
    <section>...</section>...
  </book>
</bibliography>

```

# XPath

- XPath specifies path expressions that match XML data by navigating down (and occasionally up and across) the tree
- Example
  - Query: `/bibliography/book/author`
    - Like a file system path, except there can be multiple “subdirectories” with the same name
  - Result: all author elements reachable from root via the path `/bibliography/book/author`

# Basic XPath constructs

- / separator between steps in a path
- name* matches any child element with this tag name
- \* matches any child element
- @*name* matches the attribute with this name
- @\* matches any attribute
- // matches any descendent element or the current element itself
- matches the current element
- matches the parent element

# Simple XPath examples

- All book titles

`/bibliography/book/title`

- All book ISBN numbers

`/bibliography/book/@ISBN`

- All title elements, anywhere in the document

`//title`

- All section titles, anywhere in the document

`//section/title`

- Authors of bibliographical entries (suppose there are articles, reports, etc. in addition to books)

`/bibliography/*/author`

# Predicates in path expressions

[ *condition* ] matches the “current” element if *condition* evaluates to true on the current element

- Books with price lower than \$50  
`/bibliography/book[@price<50]`
  - XPath will automatically convert the price string to a numeric value for comparison
- Books with author “Abiteboul”  
`/bibliography/book[author='Abiteboul']`
- Books with a publisher child element  
`/bibliography/book[publisher]`
- Prices of books authored by “Abiteboul”  
`/bibliography/book[author='Abiteboul']/@price`



# More complex predicates

Predicates can use **and**, **or**, and **not**

- Books with price between \$40 and \$50

```
/bibliography/book[40<=@price and @price<=50]
```

- Books authored by “Abiteboul” or those with price no lower than \$50

```
/bibliography/book[author='Abiteboul' or  
@price>=50]
```

```
/bibliography/book[author='Abiteboul' or  
not(@price<50)]
```

- Any difference between these two queries?

# Predicates involving node-sets

```
/bibliography/book[author='Abiteboul']
```

- There may be multiple authors, so `author` in general returns a **node-set** (in XPath terminology)
- The predicate evaluates to true as long as it evaluates **true for at least one node** in the node-set, i.e., at least one author is “Abiteboul”
- Tricky query

```
/bibliography/book[author='Abiteboul' and author!='Abiteboul']
```

  - Will it return any books?

# XPath operators and functions

Frequently used in conditions:

$x + y$ ,  $x - y$ ,  $x * y$ ,  $x \text{ div } y$ ,  $x \text{ mod } y$

`contains(x, y)` true if string  $x$  contains string  $y$

`count(node-set)` counts the number nodes in *node-set*

`position()` returns the “context position”  
(roughly, the position of the current node in the node-set containing it)

`last()` returns the “context size” (roughly, the size of the node-set containing the current node)

`name()` returns the tag name of the current element

# More XPath examples

- All elements whose tag names contain “section” (e.g., “subsection”)

```
//*[contains(name(), 'section')]
```

- Title of the first section in each book

```
/bibliography/book/section[position()=1]/title
```

- A shorthand: `/bibliography/book/section[1]/title`

- Title of the last section in each book

```
/bibliography/book/section[position()=last()]/title
```

- Books with fewer than 10 sections

```
/bibliography/book[count(section)<10]
```

- All elements whose parent’s tag name is not “book”

```
//*[name()!='book']/*
```

# A tricky example

- Suppose for a moment that `price` is a child element of `book`, and there may be multiple prices per book
- Books with some price in range `[20, 50]`
  - Wrong answer:  
`/bibliography/book`  
`[price >= 20 and price <= 50]`
  - Correct answer:  
`/bibliography/book`  
`[price[. >= 20 and . <= 50]]`

# De-referencing IDREF's

`id ( identifier )` returns the element with *identifier*

- Suppose that books can reference other books

```
<section><title>Introduction</title>
  XML is a hot topic these days; see <bookref
  ISBN="ISBN-10"/> for more details...
</section>
```

- Find all references to books written by “Abiteboul” in the book with “ISBN-10”

```
/bibliography/book[@ISBN='ISBN-10']
  //bookref[id(@ISBN)/author='Abiteboul']
```

Or simply:

```
id('ISBN-10')//bookref[id(@ISBN)/author='Abiteboul']
```

# General XPath location steps

- Technically, each XPath query consists of a series of **location steps** separated by /
- Each location step consists of
  - An **axis**: one of self, attribute, parent, child, ancestor,<sup>†</sup> ancestor-or-self,<sup>†</sup> descendant, descendant-or-self, following, following-sibling, preceding,<sup>†</sup> preceding-sibling,<sup>†</sup> and namespace
  - A **node-test**: either a name test (e.g., book, section, \*) or a type test (e.g., text(), node(), comment()), separated from the axis by ::
  - Zero or more **predicates** (or conditions) enclosed in square brackets

<sup>†</sup>These **reverse axes** produce result node-sets in reverse document order; others (**forward axes**) produce node-sets in document order

# Example of verbose syntax

Verbose (**axis**, **node test**, **predicate**):

```
/child::bibliography  
  /child::book[attribute::ISBN='ISBN-10']  
  /descendant-or-self::node()  
  /child::title
```

Abbreviated:

```
/bibliography/book[@ISBN='ISBN-10']//title
```

- child is the default axis
- // stands for /descendant-or-self::node() /



# Some technical details on evaluation

Given a context node, evaluate a location path as follows:

1. Start with node-set  $N = \{\text{context node}\}$

2. For each location step, from left to right:

- $U \leftarrow \emptyset$
- For each node  $n$  in  $N$ :
  - Using  $n$  as the context node, compute a node-set  $N'$  from the axis and the node-test
  - Each predicate in turn filters  $N'$ , in order
    - For each node  $n'$  in  $N'$ , evaluate predicate with the following context:
      - Context node is  $n'$
      - Context size is the number of nodes in  $N'$
      - Context position is the position of  $n'$  within  $N'$
  - $U \leftarrow U \cup N'$
- $N \leftarrow U$

3. Return  $N$

# One more example

- Which of the following queries correctly find the third author in the entire input document?
  - `//author[position()=3]`
    - Same as `/descendant-or-self::node()/author[position()=3]`
    - Finds all third authors (for each publication)
  - `/descendant-or-self::node()  
[name()='author' and position()=3]`
    - Returns the third element or text node in the document if it is an author
  - `/descendant-or-self::node()  
[name()='author']  
[position()=3]`
    - Correct!
    - After the first condition is passed, the evaluation context changes:
      - Context size: # of nodes that passed the first condition
      - Context position: position of the context node within the list of nodes

# XQuery

- XPath + full-fledged SQL-like query language
- XQuery expressions can be
  - XPath expressions
  - FLWOR expressions
  - Quantified expressions
  - Aggregation, sorting, and more...
- An XQuery expression in general can return a new result XML document
  - Compare with an XPath expression, which always returns a sequence of nodes from the input document or atomic values (boolean, number, string, etc.)

# A simple XQuery based on XPath

Find all books with price lower than \$50

```
<result>{  
  doc("bib.xml")/bibliography/book[@price<50]  
}</result>
```

- Things outside `{ }`'s are copied to output verbatim
- Things inside `{ }`'s are evaluated and replaced by the results
  - `doc("bib.xml")` specifies the document to query
    - Can be omitted if there is a default context document
  - The XPath expression returns a sequence of book elements
  - These elements (including all their descendants) are copied to output

# FLWR expressions

- Retrieve the titles of books published before 2000, together with their publisher

```
<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")/bibliography/book
  let $p := $b/publisher
  where $b/year < 2000
  return
    <book>
      { $b/title }
      { $p }
    </book>
}</result>
```

- **for:** loop
  - \$b ranges over the result sequence, getting one item at a time
- **let:** “assignment”
  - \$p gets the entire result of \$b/publisher (possibly many nodes)
- **where:** filtering by condition
- **return:** result structuring
  - Invoked in the “innermost loop,” i.e., once for each successful binding of all query variables that satisfies where

# An equivalent formulation

- Retrieve the titles of books published before 2000, together with their publisher

```
<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")/bibliography/book[year<2000]
  return
    <book>
      { $b/title }
      { $b/publisher }
    </book>
}</result>
```

# Another formulation

- Retrieve the titles of books published before 2000, together with their publisher

```
<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")/bibliography/book,
    $p in $b/publisher } Nested loop
  where $b/year < 2000
  return
    <book>
      { $b/title }
      { $p }
    </book>
}</result>
```

- Is this query equivalent to the previous two?
- Yes, if there is one publisher per book
- No, in general
  - Two result book elements will be created for a book with two publishers
  - No result book element will be created for a book with no publishers

# Yet another formulation

- Retrieve the titles of books published before 2000, together with their publisher

```
<result>{  
  let $b := doc("bib.xml")/bibliography/book  
  where $b/year < 2000  
  return  
    <book>  
      { $b/title }  
      { $b/publisher }  
    </book>  
}</result>
```

- Is this query correct?
- No!
- It will produce only one output book element, with all titles clumped together and all publishers clumped together
- All books will be processed (as long as one is published before 2000)



# Subqueries in `return`

- Extract book titles and their authors; make title an attribute and rename author to writer

```
<bibliography>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")/bibliography/book
  return
    <book title="{normalize-space($b/title)}">{
      for $a in $b/author
      return <writer>{string($a)}</writer>
    }</book>
}</bibliography>
```

What happens if we replace it with `$a`?

- `normalize-space(string)` removes leading and trailing spaces from string, and replaces all internal sequences of white spaces with one white space

# An explicit join

- Find pairs of books that have common author(s)

```
<result>{  
  for $b1 in doc("bib.xml")//book  
  for $b2 in doc("bib.xml")//book  
  where $b1/author = $b2/author  
    and $b1/title > $b2/title  
  return  
    <pair>  
      {$b1/title}  
      {$b2/title}  
    </pair>  
}</result>
```

← These are string comparisons,  
not identity comparisons!

# Existentially quantified expressions

*(some \$var in collection satisfies condition)*

- Can be used in `where` as a condition
- Find titles of books in which XML is mentioned in some section

```
<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")//book
  where (some $section in $b//section satisfies
        contains(string($section), "XML"))
  return $b/title
}</result>
```

# Universally quantified expressions

*(every \$var in collection satisfies condition)*

- Can be used in `where` as a condition
- Find titles of books in which XML is mentioned in every section

```
<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")//book
  where (every $section in $b//section satisfies
         contains(string($section), "XML"))
  return $b/title
}</result>
```

# Aggregation

- List each publisher and the average prices of all its books

```
<result>{
  for $pub in distinct-values(doc("bib.xml")//publisher)
  let $price := avg(doc("bib.xml")//book[publisher=$pub]//@price)
  return
    <publisherpricing>
      <publisher>{$pub}</publisher>
      <avgprice>{$price}</avgprice>
    </publisherpricing>
}</result>
```

- `distinct-values(collection)` removes duplicates by value
  - If the collection consists of elements (with no explicitly declared types), they are first converted to strings representing their “normalized contents”
- `avg(collection)` computes the average of *collection* (assuming each item in *collection* can be converted to a numeric value)

# Conditional expression

- List each publisher and, only if applicable, the average prices of all its books

```

<result>{
  for $pub in distinct-values(doc("bib.xml")//publisher)
  let $price := avg(doc("bib.xml")//book[publisher=$pub]//@price)
  return
    <publisherpricing>
      <publisher>{$pub}</publisher>
      { if ($price)
        then <avgprice>{$price}</avgprice>
        else () }
    </publisherpricing>
}</result>

```

Empty list  $\approx$  nothing

- Use anywhere you'd expect a value, e.g.:
  - let \$foo := if (...) then ... else ...
  - return <bar blah="{ if (...) then ... else ... }"/>

# Sorting (a brief history)

- A path expression in XPath returns a sequence of nodes according to **original document order**
- `for` loop will respect the ordering in the sequence
- August 2002 (<http://www.w3.org/TR/2002/WD-xquery-20020816/>)
  - Introduce an operator **sort by (sort-by-expression-list)** to output results in a user-specified order
  - Example: list all books with price higher than \$100, in order by first author; for books with the same first author, order by title

```
<result>{  
  doc("bib.xml")//book[@price>100]  
  sort by (author[1], title)  
}</result>
```

# Tricky semantics

- List titles of all books, sorted by their ISBN

```
<result>{
  (doc("bib.xml")//book sort by (@ISBN))/title
}</result>
```

**WRONG!**

- What is wrong?
  - The last step in the path expression will return nodes in document order!
- Correct versions

```
<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")//book sort by (@ISBN)
  return $b/title
}</result>
```

```
<result>{
  doc("bib.xml")//book/title sort by (../@ISBN)
}</result>
```



# Current version of sorting

Since June 2006

- **sort by** has been ditched
- A new **order by** clause is added to FLWR
  - Which now becomes FLWOR
- Example: list all books in order by price from high to low; for books with the same price, sort by first author and then title

```

<result>{
  for $b in doc("bib.xml")//book[@price>100]
  stable order by
    number($b/price) descending,
    $b/author[1],
    $b/title empty least
  return $b
}</result>

```

Preserve input order  
 Order as number, not string  
 Override default (ascending)  
 Empty value considered smallest

# Summary

- Many, many more features not covered in class
- XPath is very mature, stable, and widely used
  - Has good implementations in many systems
  - Is used in many other standards
- XQuery is also fairly popular
  - Has become the SQL for XML
  - Has good implementations in some systems

# XQuery vs. SQL

- Where did the join go?
- Is navigational query going to destroy physical data independence?
- Strong ordering constraint
  - Can be overridden by `unordered { for... }`
  - Why does that matter?