Context-Aware Task Handling in Resource-Constrained Robots with Virtualization

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Mobile Robots

Mobile robots are used in various scenarios:

- Interacting with a complex and non-deterministic world
- Executing numerous tasks like Sensing, planning, manipulating, and reasoning
The Challenge of Mobile Robots

In a complex world, all intelligent mobile robots are in a never-ending conflict among:

• Limited computational resources
• Energy storage, and
• Pending tasks requiring resources

Resource-constrained mobile robots have even more challenges to meet all the real-time deadlines
The Challenge of Mobile Robots

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Need for solutions that ensure real-time performance with concurrent task handling
Current Solutions and Their Limitations

**First** group involves adding *extra hardware* or utilizing cloud/fog computation

- Adding extra hardware is infeasible or uneconomical
  - The most common approach: Dedicate one processor per task! Not scalable
  - Adding extra hardware is often infeasible
    For instance, in a lightweight drone
- Cloud and fog computations are not always available and privacy concerns limit their use
Current Solutions and Their Limitations

**Second** group involves **Real-Time OS** schedulers or Robotic OS (ROS)

- Real-time OS schedulers are designed to minimize latency with preemptive schedulers
  - They cannot guarantee hard deadlines
  - They are not dynamic because fixed schedulers
- ROS does not offer real-time operations
- ROS2 does not support dynamically changing priorities in runtime and requires additional Linux kernel support

OS: Operating System
Solution – Example

Detecting contexts to improve real timeliness of critical tasks by dynamically reducing number of tasks in runtime
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Simple Example of a speech enabled vacuum robot
Solution – Example

Detecting contexts to improve real timeliness of critical tasks by dynamically reducing number of tasks in runtime

Simple Example of a speech enabled vacuum robot

| Timeline       | Task Priority |
|----------------|--------------|
| No movement    |              |
| Movement       |              |

Timeline | Task Priority | Time (Total 2 mins) |
|----------|--------------|----------------------|
| Visual SLAM | Speech Recognition | Event Driven | Context Aware |

0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 1
Solution – Example

Detecting contexts to improve real timeliness of critical tasks by dynamically reducing number of tasks in runtime

Simple Example of a speech enabled vacuum robot
Solution

Context-Aware Task Handling

OS-Level Dynamic Time Sharing
to dynamically simplify world for easier planning
to meet hard real-time deadlines
to mindfully use limited resources
to implement a lightweight and programmable reactive paradigm + no Linux kernel modifications
System Overview

Multiple components at play:

Task graphs | Docker/task | Context-Aware controller

Controller Context-Aware

User Config

Reactive (Dockers)

Dockers (modules)

Docker 1 (IMU)  Docker 2 (SLAM)  Docker 3 (Arm)  Docker n (Speech)

Priority ↓  Priority ↓  Priority ↓  Priority ↑

Inputs & Sensors

IMU  Camera  Mic

Linux Kernel

Scheduler

Reactive (inputs)

Publish & Subscribe Communication
Task Graphs

**Speech Recognition Task**
- **Sub-Task**: speech recognition (DNN-based)
  - **Capability Constraint**: 4-core, 700 MB mem, 250 ms slice
- **Sub-Task**: keyword spotting (simple computation)
  - **Capability Constraint**: 1-core, 100 MB mem, 30 ms slice
- **Sub-Task**: record microphone
  - **Capability Constraint**: 1-core, 20 MB, 10 ms slice

**Chatbot Task**
- **Sub-Task**: answer generation (database based)
- **Sub-Task**: text to speech
- **Sub-Task**: (removed for brevity)

**Sensors & Outputs**
- **Pre-Condition**: microphone
- **Pre-Condition**: speaker

**Pre-Condition**: microphone

**Capability Constraint**: 1-core, 20 MB, 10 ms slice
Task Graphs with Reactive Paradigm

An example with IMU sensor:

```
imu.pipe(filter(lambda value:
    value["accelerometer"]["x"] != 0 and
    value["accelerometer"]["y"] != 0 and
    value["accelerometer"]["z"] != 0))
```

Context-Aware
(not moving)

Sensors & Outputs

- Pre-Condition: microphone

Capability Constraint
- 1-core, 20 MB, 10 ms slice

Sub-Task
- record microphone

Speech Recognition Task

Capability Constraint
- 1-core, 100 MB mem, 30 ms slice

Sub-Task
- keyword spotting (simple computation)

Capability Constraint
- 4-core, 700 MB mem, 250 ms slice

Sub-Task
- speech recognition (DNN-based)
Results

Legend -- **CFS**: Linux Scheduler  
-- **CFS CA**: Linux Scheduler + Context Aware  
-- **RT CA**: Real-Time Scheduler + Context Aware

**Note** -- Non-Context-Aware settings miss deadlines!
Context-Aware Task Handling in Resource-Constrained Robots with Virtualized Execution
Context-Aware Task Handling in Resource-Constrained Robots with Virtualization

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Abstract—Intelligent mobile robots are critical in several scenarios. However, as their computational resources are limited, mobile robots struggle to handle several tasks concurrently while guaranteeing real-time deadlines. To address this challenge and improve the real-time completion of critical tasks under resource constraints, we propose a fast context-aware task handling technique. To effectively handle tasks in real-time, our proposed context-aware technique comprises three main ingredients: (i) a dynamic time-sharing mechanism, coupled with (ii) an event-driven task scheduling using reactive programming paradigm to mindfully use the limited resources; and, (iii) a lightweight virtualized execution to easily integrate functionalities and their dependencies. We showcase our technique on a Raspberry-Pi-based robot with a variety of tasks such as Simultaneous Localization and Mapping (SLAM), sign detection, and speech recognition with a 42% speedup in total execution time compared to the common Linux scheduler.

Index Terms—Edge AI, Software, Mobile Robots, Middleware

1. INTRODUCTION & MOTIVATION

Unlike conventional industrial or commercialized robots that perform a set of pre-programmed and routine tasks, intelligent mobile robots manipulate their environment using their perception and physical resources to achieve a myriad of goals. Such robots must be capable of dynamically switching between navigation, planning, reasoning, recognition, and sensing their environment. Intelligent robots need to interact with a dynamic, complex, and non-deterministic world. These robots must execute numerous tasks such as controlling their physical resources (e.g., arms), understanding data derived from sensors, or executing perception and planning.

Intelligent robots are always in a near-never-ending conflict between available computation resources, their energy storage, and the tasks at hand. This conflict is particularly emphasized in resource-constrained robots because even the concurrent execution of a few rudimentary tasks is extremely demanding with only a few processing cores. For example, a Raspberry Pi with only four cores could be fully utilized by the operation system (OS), processing the data from a single sensor, and simple navigation and control algorithms. Adding more sensors and tasks only causes the robot to miss real-time deadlines. Thus, ensuring efficient handling of critical tasks and meeting critical deadlines is the key challenge for resource-constrained robots.

To extend the capabilities of resource-constrained robots and meet real-time demands, the common practices are adding extra hardware or utilizing cloud/fog computation [1]-[7]. However, in several scenarios, adding new hardware is either inflexible or uneconomical. For example, adding extra processing units to a lightweight drone requires heavier batteries, which in turn demands stronger motors. Further, cloud and fog are not always available. Additionally, privacy concerns limit the suitability of cloud-based computation.

To enable intelligent mobile robots to efficiently utilize limited resources, we propose a context-aware task handling technique that simplifies the world and planning tasks by dynamically reducing the number of tasks in a certain context to only the critical ones. For example, limited human-robot interaction is expected while the robot is performing an already assigned task. This technique enables resource-constrained robots to efficiently perform manifold functionalities while meeting their real-time constraints.

To be effective in handling tasks using our context-aware technique, we propose using a virtualized execution that (i) integrates several tasks while providing dynamic, low-cost, and kernel-level control over the scheduling policy; (ii) enables easier context-aware implementation by providing manageable control over tasks; and (iii) provides a uniform and practical environment for building new robots in the community.

For experiments, we use a custom-built Raspberry-Pi-based robot using an iRobot Roomba \(8 \) equipped with one Raspberry Pi 4 (RPi4) \(9 \) as the only processing unit. Our iRobot, shown in Figure 1, has several sensors (i.e., LIDAR, inertial measurement unit (IMU), cameras, and microphone), and control devices (i.e., motors for navigation, robotic arm, and speakers). For software, we use Docker \(10 \), a popular virtualization tool, and implement our context-aware technique to collect and process sensor data, simultaneous localization and mapping (SLAM), voice recognition, and sign recognition.

Our contributions are as follows:

- Context-aware task planning to effectively use the limited resources and hence extend the number of tasks that a robot can handle.
- OS-level dynamic time-sharing to implement the context-aware scheduling in real-time.

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Timeline

Almost no movement – event driven

Movement – context aware

Event Driven

Context Aware

(a)

CFS

CA

(b)

RT

CA

(c)

0

0.2

0.4

0.6

0.8

1

Weights

Time (Total 2 mins)

Visual Slam

Speech Recognition

Event Driven

Context Aware

Scheduling Weights
**Procedure 1:** Context-Aware Task Planning.

**Input:** ConfigFile: Configuration File with Context-Aware Setting and Relative Priorities of Tasks.

Input : InputList: Input & Sensor List

1. **Initial**
   2. **for** input ∈ InputList **do**
      3. // Create observable stream.
         stream ← CreateStream(input);
      4. // Instantiate scheduling score function.
         InstantiateRX(stream);
      5. AddToList(stream, StreamList);
   6. **for** context ∈ ConfigFile **do**
      7. // Create context task graph.
         graph ← CreateTaskGraph(context);
      8. // Create combinator observable stream
         contextStream ← CreateStream(graph);
         AddToList(contextStream, TaskGraphList)
   9. // Initialize an initial scheduling policy.
      InitializeScheduling;
   10. **return** StreamList TaskGraphList

// On receiving an event on any stream after its bound reactive function.

**Event-Based Procedure**

13. **OnObservableStreamEvent** stream
   14. // Calculate scheduling score for the stream.
      CalculateScore(stream);
   15. // Calculate new real-time time-slices values.
      DictTimeSlices ← CalculateTimeSlices();
   16. // Update the scheduler.
      UpdateScheduler(DictTimeSlices);