

Fixing Probe for Multi-Threaded MPI Applications (Revision 2)

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August 1, 2008

1 Introduction

MPI's message-probing operations, `MPI_Probe` and `MPI_Iprobe`, are useful in MPI applications that do not know *a priori* what messages they will receive or how much data those messages will contain. Such applications often have irregular, data-driven communication patterns or deal with data structures that require serialization for transmission.

Unfortunately, MPI's message-probing operations are unusable in multi-threaded applications where they could be most useful. The fundamental problem with `MPI_Probe` and `MPI_Iprobe` functions is that a message found by a probe can still be matched and received by a receive operation in a different thread. Thus, despite the fact that a probe operation returns a source and tag that can be used to receive a message, there is no guarantee that the message will still be available when that receive operation is invoked. For example, the following code can not be executed concurrently by two threads in an MPI process, because a message could be found by the `MPI_Probe` in both threads, while only one of the threads could successfully receive the message (the other will block):

```
MPI_Status status;  
int value;  
MPI_Probe(MPI_ANY_SOURCE, /*tag=*/0, MPI_COMM_WORLD, &status);  
MPI_Recv(&value, 1, MPI_INT, status.MPI_SOURCE, /*tag=*/0, MPI_COMM_WORLD,  
        MPI_STATUS_IGNORE);
```

The lack of a usable threaded `MPI_Probe` or `MPI_Iprobe` causes serious problems for the construction of language bindings for high-level object-oriented and generic languages, where users would like to be able to transmit objects that require serialization, including C++ [3,4], Java [1], Python [5], and C# [2]. MPI provides a mechanism to “pack” (serialize) an object into a buffer that can be transmitted via MPI, then “unpack” (de-serialize) that object at the receiver's end. However, while MPI provides good support for serialization and sending serialized data, it does not provide adequate support for receiving serialized data. The problem is that, in general, the receiver cannot know the length of the serialized data before it posts the receive. `MPI_Probe` and `MPI_Iprobe` provide this functionality, but they are

unusable in a multi-threaded environment. Thus, bindings for these languages must resort to elaborate and inefficient workarounds [2].

There is no known workaround that addresses all of the problems with `MPI_Probe` and `MPI_Iprobe` in multi-threaded MPI applications. Therefore, we propose extensions for MPI that introduce a new kind of probe—a “matched” probe—and a set of corresponding receive operations. The new probe matches a message and returns a handle to that specific message, which cannot be found by any other probe operation or matched by any other receive. The new receive operations allow the receipt of a message based on the message handle returned from this probe. These extensions allow the use of probe in a multi-threaded context, ensuring that the message found by probe is the message received.

In the following example, we illustrate how the new probe operation, `MPI_Mprobe`, can be used to receive a message of unknown length. Note that this code can be concurrently executed in several threads, each of which will receive different messages.

```
MPI_Message msg;
MPI_Status status;
/* Match a message */
MPI_Mprobe(MPI_ANY_SOURCE, MPI_ANY_TAG, MPI_COMM_WORLD, &msg, &status);

/* Allocate memory to receive the message */
int count;
MPI_get_count(&status, MPI_BYTE, &count);
char* buffer = malloc(count);

/* Receive this message. */
MPI_Mrecv(buffer, count, MPI_BYTE, &msg, MPI_STATUS_IGNORE);
```

2 Proposed Extensions

2.1 Message handles

A message handle returned by a matching probe (`MPI_Mprobe` or `MPI_Iprobe`) has type `MPI_Message`. A *null* handle is a handle with value `MPI_MESSAGE_NULL`.

```
int MPI_Message_cancel(MPI_Message *message)
```

```
MPI_MESSAGE_CANCEL(MESSAGE, IERROR)
INTEGER MESSAGE, IERROR
```

```
void Message::Cancel()
```

INOUT message the message to be cancelled (Message)

A call to `MPI_MESSAGE_CANCEL` cancels the receipt of a message matched by a matching probe. A cancelled message cannot be received.

Advice to implementers. Because no receive buffers have been posted for a receive, cancellation always succeeds even if the underlying interconnect does not permit the cancellation of transmissions after they have been matched. A valid implementation of `MPI_Message_cancel` that supports such interconnects is:

```
int count; /* set to the size of the message */
char* buffer = malloc(count);
MPI_Mrecv(buffer, count, MPI_BYTE, &msg, MPI_STATUS_IGNORE);
free(buffer); □
```

2.2 Matching Probe

The `MPI_MPROBE` and `MPI_IMPROBE` operations allow incoming messages to be queried without actually receiving them. The user can then decide how to receive them, based on the information returned by the probe. In particular, the user may allocate memory for the receive buffer, according to the length of the probed message.

```
int MPI_Improbe(int source, int tag, MPI_Comm comm, int *flag, MPI_Message *message,
                MPI_Status *status)
```

```
MPI_IMPROBE(SOURCE, TAG, COMM, FLAG, MESSAGE, STATUS, IERROR)
```

```
LOGICAL FLAG
```

```
INTEGER SOURCE, TAG, COMM, MESSAGE, STATUS(MPI_STATUS_SIZE), IERROR
```

```
bool Comm::Improbe(int source, int tag, Message& message) const
```

```
bool Comm::Improbe(int source, int tag, Message& message, Status& status) const
```

```
IN source source rank or MPI_ANY_SOURCE (integer)
```

```
IN tag tag value or MPI_ANY_TAG (integer)
```

```
IN comm communicator (handle)
```

```
OUT flag (logical)
```

```
OUT message message handle (Message)
```

```
OUT status status object (Status)
```

`MPI_IMPROBE(source, tag, comm, flag, message, status)` returns `flag = true` if there is a message that can be received and that matches the pattern specified by the arguments `source`, `tag`, and `comm`. The call matches the same message that would have been received by a call to `MPI_RECV(..., source, tag, comm, status)` executed at the same point in the program, and returns in `message` a handle to that message and in `status` the same value that would have been returned by `MPI_RECV()`. Otherwise, the call returns `flag = false`, and leaves `message` undefined.

A matched receive executed with the message handle will receive the message that was matched by the probe. Unlike `MPI_IPROBE`, no other probe or receive operation may match the message returned by `MPI_IMPROBE`. Each message returned by `MPI_IMPROBE` must either be completed with a matched receive or cancelled with `MPI_MESSAGE_CANCEL`.

The source argument of `MPI_IMPROBE` can be `MPI_ANY_SOURCE`, and the tag argument can be `MPI_ANY_TAG`, so that one can probe for messages from an arbitrary source and/or with an arbitrary tag. However, a specific communication context must be provided with the `comm` argument.

```
int MPI_Mprobe(int source, int tag, MPI_Comm comm, MPI_Message *message
              MPI_Status *status)
```

```
MPI_MPROBE(SOURCE, TAG, COMM, MESSAGE, STATUS, IERROR)
INTEGER SOURCE, TAG, COMM, MESSAGE, STATUS(MPI_STATUS_SIZE), IERROR
```

```
void Comm::Mprobe(int source, int tag, Message& message) const
void Comm::Mprobe(int source, int tag, Message& message, Status& status) const
```

```
IN source source rank or MPI_ANY_SOURCE (integer)
IN tag tag value or MPI_ANY_TAG (integer)
IN comm communicator (handle)
OUT message message handle (Message)
OUT status status object (Status)
```

`MPI_MPROBE` behaves like `MPI_IMPROBE` except that it is a blocking call that returns only after a matching message has been found.

Advice to users. Unlike the (deprecated) `MPI_PROBE` and `MPI_Iprobe`, `MPI_MPROBE` and `MPI_IMPROBE` can be safely used in a multi-threaded MPI program. A message returned by `MPI_MPROBE` or `MPI_IMPROBE` has already been matched, and can only be received with a matched receive (section 2.3) executed with the corresponding message handle. □

The MPI implementation of `MPI_MPROBE` and `MPI_IMPROBE` needs to guarantee progress: if a call to `MPI_MPROBE` has been issued by a process, and a send that matches the probe has been initiated by some process, then the call to `MPI_MPROBE` will return, unless the message is matched by a concurrent matching probe operation or received by another concurrent receive operation (that is executed by another thread at the probing process). Similarly, if a process busy waits with `MPI_IMPROBE` and a matching message has been issued, then the call to `MPI_IMPROBE` will eventually return `flag = true` unless the message is matched by a concurrent matching probe operation or received by another concurrent receive operation.

Editorial note: the definitions of `MPI_Iprobe` and `MPI_Probe` should remain the same as they are now, but we deprecate them by adding the following text:

`MPI_PROBE` and `MPI_Iprobe` are deprecated.

Rationale. `MPI_PROBE` and `MPI_Iprobe` find messages, but do not match them, which makes `MPI_PROBE` and `MPI_Iprobe` unusable in multi-threaded MPI programs. `MPI_MPROBE` and `MPI_IMPROBE` provide better semantics than `MPI_PROBE` and `MPI_Iprobe` for multi-threaded MPI programs. □

2.3 Matched receives

Messages that have been matched by a matching probe (section 2.2) can be received by a matched receive.

```
int MPI_Mrecv(void* buf, int count, MPI_Datatype datatype, MPI_Message* message,
             MPI_Status *status)
```

```
MPI_MRECV(BUF, COUNT, DATATYPE, MESSAGE, STATUS, IERROR)
<type> BUF(*)
INTEGER COUNT, DATATYPE, MESSAGE, STATUS(MPI_STATUS_SIZE), IERROR
```

```
void Message::Mrecv(void* buf, int count, const Datatype& datatype, Status& status)
void Message::Mrecv(void* buf, int count, const Datatype& datatype)
```

OUT buf initial address of receive buffer (choice)
IN count number of elements in receive buffer (integer)
IN datatype datatype of each receive buffer element (handle)
INOUT message message to be received (Message)
OUT status status object (Status)

This call receives a message found by a matching probe operation (section 2.2).

The receive buffer consists of the storage containing **count** consecutive elements of the type specified by **datatype**, starting at address **buf**. The length of the received message must be less than or equal to the length of the receive buffer. An overflow error occurs if all incoming data does not fit, without truncation, into the receive buffer.

If a message that is shorter than the receive buffer arrives, then only those locations corresponding to the (shorter) message are modified.

On return from this function, the message handle is set to `MPI_MESSAGE_NULL`. All errors that occur during the execution of this operation are handled according to the error handler set for the communicator used in the matching probe call that produced the message handle.

Example The following example uses a matching probe and a ready receive to receive any message of any size. This code can be executed in multiple threads concurrently.

```
MPI_Message message;
MPI_Status status;
/* Match a message */
MPI_Mprobe(MPI_ANY_SOURCE, MPI_ANY_TAG, MPI_COMM_WORLD, &message, &status);

/* Allocate memory to receive the message */
int count;
MPI_Get_count(&status, MPI_BYTE, &count);
char* buffer = malloc(count);

/* Receive this message. */
MPI_Mrecv(buffer, count, MPI_BYTE, &message, MPI_STATUS_IGNORE); □
```

Rationale. `MPI_MRECV` does not have a communicator parameter because the communicator was part of the matching probe operation. Requiring the communicator to also be passed into `MPI_MRECV` would involve additional user code and additional error checking in the MPI implementation, with no clear benefit. □

```
int MPI_Imrecv(void* buf, int count, MPI_Datatype datatype, MPI_Message* message,
              MPI_Request *request)
```

```
MPI_IMRECV(BUF, COUNT, DATATYPE, MESSAGE, REQUEST, IERROR)
```

```
<type> BUF(*)
```

```
INTEGER COUNT, DATATYPE, MESSAGE, REQUEST, IERROR
```

```
void Message::Imrecv(void* buf, int count, const Datatype& datatype, Request& request)
```

OUT buf initial address of receive buffer (choice)

IN count number of elements in receive buffer (integer)

IN datatype datatype of each receive buffer element (handle)

INOUT message message to be received (Message)

OUT request request object (Status)

Start a ready, non-blocking receive of a message found by a matching probe operation (section 2.2). The message handle is set to `MPI_MESSAGE_NULL`.

3 Revision History

Revision 2

- Added `MPI_MESSAGE_NULL`.
- Clarify that errors in the receive operations are handled according to the communicator with which the message handle is associated.

Revision 1

- Renamed `MPI_Rprobe`, `MPI_Irprobe`, `MPI_Rrecv` and `MPI_Irrecv` to `MPI_Mprobe`, `MPI_Improbe`, `MPI_Mrecv`, and `MPI_Irecv`, respectively.
- Made `MPI_Message` an opaque handle; `MPI_Mprobe` and `MPI_Improbe` now return an `MPI_Status` result to provide information about the message (source, tag, count). Removed `MPI_Message_get_count`.
- Corrected numerous small errors in the C++ bindings.

References

- [1] Bryan Carpenter, Geoffrey Fox, Sung Hoon Ko, and Sang Lim. Object serialization for marshalling data in a Java interface to MPI. In *JAVA '99: Proceedings of the ACM 1999 conference on Java Grande*, pages 66–71, New York, NY, USA, 1999. ACM Press.

- [2] Douglas Gregor and Andrew Lumsdaine. Design and implementation of a high-performance MPI for C# and the common language infrastructure. In *Proceedings ACM SIGPLAN Symposium on Principles and Practice of Parallel Programming*, February 2008. To appear.
- [3] Douglas Gregor and Matthias Troyer. Boost.MPI. <http://www.generic-programming.org/~dgregor/boost.mpi/doc/>, November 2006.
- [4] Prabhanjan Kambadur, Douglas Gregor, Andrew Lumsdaine, and Amey Dharurkar. Modernizing the C++ interface to mpi. In *Proceedings of the 13th European PVM/MPI Users' Group Meeting*, LNCS, pages 266–274, Bonn, Germany, September 2006. Springer.
- [5] Patrick Miller and Martin Casado. MPI Python. <http://sourceforge.net/projects/-pympi/>.