Animation with the gridSVG package

Paul Murrell

May 4, 2017

Introduction

The grid.animate() function in the gridSVG package allows various features of a grid grob to be animated. Calls to this function can be quite straightforward. For example, the following code animates a circle so that it travels from left to right across the screen (the result of this code is the file "animCircle.svg", which can be viewed in a web browser).

```r
> library(grid)
> library(gridSVG)

> grid.circle(.1, .5, r=.1, gp=gpar(fill="black"),
+ name="circle")
> grid.animate("circle", x=c(.1, .9))
> grid.export("animCircle.svg")
```

Things can get more complicated though. For example, in order to animate a polyline grob, it is necessary to specify a vector of x and/or y locations for each time point and it may even be necessary to specify multiple vectors at each time point if the polyline grob specifies more than one polyline (via its id argument).

To give a concrete example, consider the result of the following grid code, which draws two polylines from a single call to grid.polyline() (see Figure 1).

```r
> grid.rect()
> grid.polyline(c(.2, .3, .4, .6, .7, .8),
+ c(.7, .5, .7, .3, .5, .3),
+ id=rep(1:2, each=3),
+ gp=gpar(lwd=5),
+ name="polyline")
```

The task is to animate the two polylines so that they appear to “flap” (the left will transition to look like the right one and the right one will transition to look like the left one, and repeat).
Figure 1: Two polylines drawn from a single call to \texttt{grid.polyline}.
The y-values for the animation look something like this (the x-values are not animated):

```r
$id1
$id1$t1
[1] 0.7npc 0.5npc 0.7npc
$id1$t2
[1] 0.3npc 0.5npc 0.3npc
$id1$t3
[1] 0.7npc 0.5npc 0.7npc
$id2
$id2$t1
[1] 0.3npc 0.5npc 0.3npc
$id2$t2
[1] 0.7npc 0.5npc 0.7npc
$id2$t3
[1] 0.3npc 0.5npc 0.3npc
```

For the first polyline (`id1`), at the first time point (`t1`), the y-values are just the original y-values, `c(.7, .5, .7)`. At the second time point, the y-values for the first polyline are `c(.3, .5, .3)`, and at the third time point the y-values are back to the original `c(.7, .5, .7)`. The y-values for the second polyline are the reverse of the y-values for the first polyline.

Specifying this set of animation values is more complex and can get pretty confusing, but at the same time, we still want to be able to specify the simple animation values (like in the first example) in a simple manner. The `gridSVG` package provides a consistent, but flexible system for specifying animation values that is based on a single, coherent data structure, but which allows the user to use simpler specifications where possible.

### The `animUnit` class

An `animUnit` object has three components: a vector of `values` (as a `unit` object), a `timeid` vector (default `NULL`), and an `id` vector (default `NULL`).

The `animUnit()` function is used to create an `animUnit`, with only the `values` as a required argument. The following code generates a single value at four different time points.

```r
> animUnit(unit(1:4, "cm"))
```
As this example shows, the default interpretation of a NULL timeid is that each value belongs to a separate time period (and the default interpretation of a NULL id is that there is only one shape to be animated). This example also demonstrates the print method for animUnit objects, which is useful for seeing which animation values belong to different time periods.

This simple sort of animUnit is sufficient for specifying something like the x-location of a single data symbol (where there is exactly one x-value required per time point).

For the slightly more difficult situation of animating multiple data symbols (where we need several x-values per time period, one for each different data symbol), the id argument can be explicitly specified. The following code generates values for two shapes (id1 and id2) with values at two time points (t1 and t2) for each shape.

```r
> animUnit(unit(1:4, "cm"), id=rep(1:2, 2))

$id1
$id1$t1
[1] 1cm
$id1$t2
[1] 3cm

$id2
$id2$t1
[1] 2cm
$id2$t2
[1] 4cm
```

In the case where we have a single shape, but that shape is described by multiple x-values (e.g., a single polygon), we need multiple x-values per time point for each shape, the timeid argument can be used to associate multiple x-values with a single time point. The following code generates six values at each of two time points (t1 and t2) for a single shape.
And in the worst case, we have multiple shapes, each requiring multiple x-values per time period (e.g., multiple polygons from a single polygon grob), so we need to specify both id and timeid. The following code generates three values at two different time points for two different shapes.

```r
> animUnit(unit(1:12, "cm"), timeid=rep(1:2, 6), id=rep(1:2, each=6))

$id1
$id1$t1
[1] 1cm 3cm 5cm
$id1$t2
[1] 2cm 4cm 6cm
$id2
$id2$t1
[1] 7cm 9cm 11cm
$id2$t2
[1] 8cm 10cm 12cm
```

The following code uses the `animUnit()` function to produce the flapping poly-lines example from the previous section. It produces a file called "animPolyline.svg" that can be viewed in a browser.

```r
> grid.newpage()
> grid.rect()
> grid.polyline(c(.2, .3, .4, .6, .7, .8),
+ c(.7, .5, .7, .3, .5, .3),
+ id=rep(1:2, each=3),
+ gp=gpar(lwd=5),
+ name="polyline")
> polylineY <- animUnit(unit(c(.7, .5, .7, .3, .5, .3,
+ .7, .5, .7, .3, .5, .3),
+ unit="npc"),
+ timeid=rep(1:3, each=6),
+ id=rep(rep(1:2, each=3), 3))
```
The as.animUnit() function

The `animUnit` class gives us the range of possible specifications that we require, but it is overkill for simple cases, and may be less convenient even for more complex cases.

There is an `as.animUnit()` function that can convert vectors, matrices, and lists to `animUnit`s so that we can use those simpler data structures to provide animation values. For example, a single value per time period can be specified with just a vector, as follows.

```r
> as.animUnit(1:4, unit="cm")

$\text{t1}$
[1] 1 cm

$\text{t2}$
[1] 2 cm

$\text{t3}$
[1] 3 cm

$\text{t4}$
[1] 4 cm
```

Even better, the `grid.animate()` function makes use of this coercion function and fills in the `unit` based on the units of the feature that is being animated. This means that the call to `grid.animate()` can just specify a vector, like the following (taken from the first example at the beginning of this document).

```r
> grid.animate("circle", x=c(.1, .9))
```

When we need to specify values for multiple shapes it can be convenient to use a matrix, where each column provides the values for a different shape. The following code shows an example (again, in a call to `grid.animate()` we can leave out the `unit`).

```r
> m <- matrix(1:6, ncol=2)

[,1] [,2]
[1,] 1 4
[2,] 2 5
[3,] 3 6
```
If we have multiple values per time point (e.g., a polygon), we can get `as.animUnit()` to treat columns as different time points rather than as different shapes by specifying the `multVal` argument, as shown below.

```r
> as.animUnit(m, unit="cm", multVal=TRUE)
```

If we have multiple values per time point (e.g., a polygon), we can get `as.animUnit()` to treat columns as different time points rather than as different shapes by specifying the `multVal` argument, as shown below.

```r
> as.animUnit(m, unit="cm", multVal=TRUE)
```

The `grid.animate()` function guesses how it should use the columns of a matrix, depending on the shape that is being animated, so for relatively straightforward cases we should be able to simply pass a matrix to `grid.animate()`.

Finally, we can specify animation values as a list of units (if that is more convenient than calling `animUnit()`). The following code shows an example, which shows that the default behaviour is to treat each component of the list as animation values for a separate shape.

```r
> l <- list(unit(1:3, "cm"), unit(4:6, "cm"))
> l

[[1]]
[1] 1cm 2cm 3cm
```

```r
> l <- list(unit(1:3, "cm"), unit(4:6, "cm"))
> l

[[1]]
[1] 1cm 2cm 3cm
```
Again, we can specify that the components of the list correspond to separate
time points rather than separate shapes (by calling as.animUnit() directly and
supplying the multVal argument).

> as.animUnit(l, multVal=TRUE)

$t1
[1] 1cm 2cm 3cm

$t2
[1] 4cm 5cm 6cm

The animValue class

Some features of a shape, such as visibility, are not numeric locations or
dimensions, so they do not need to be specified as unit values. For these cases,
there is an animValue() function to create the various specifications that we
might need, plus an as.animValue() function, which grid.animate() makes
use of to allow convenient variations.
Summary

For relatively simple animations, all we need to do is specify a numeric vector, or possibly a matrix, in the call to `grid.animate()`. For more complex animations, how we specify the animation values depends on what we find most convenient. Specifying a matrix or a list of units may suffice, although this may rely on `grid.animate()` correctly guessing our intention. It may be necessary to directly call `as.animUnit()` on a matrix or a list of units to get the behaviour that we want. Alternatively, a direct call to `animUnit()` should allow us to specify any set of animation values that we need and the `print()` method for the `animUnit` objects that are created by that function should help us to check that we are generating values in the right format.