CS 4110

Programming Languages & Logics

Lecture 26
Recursive Types

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Many languages support data types that refer to themselves:

Java

```
class Tree {
    Tree leftChild, rightChild;
    int data;
}
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OCaml

```
type tree = Leaf | Node of tree * tree * int
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class Tree {
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OCaml

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type tree = Leaf | Node of tree * tree * int
```

λ-calculus?

$$\mathit{tree} = \mathbf{unit} + \mathbf{int} \times \mathit{tree} \times \mathit{tree}$$

Recursive Type Equations

We would like **tree** to be a solution of the equation:

$$\alpha = \textbf{unit} + \textbf{int} \times \alpha \times \alpha$$

However, no such solution exists with the types we have so far...

Unwinding Equations

We could *unwind* the equation:

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\end{aligned}
$$

If we take the limit of this process, we have an infinite tree.

Infinite Types

Think of this as an infinite labeled graph whose nodes are labeled with the type constructors $\times$, $+$, **int**, and **unit**.

This infinite tree is a solution of our equation, and this is what we take as the type **tree**.

μ Types

We’ll specify potentially-infinite solutions to type equations using a finite syntax based on the *fixed-point type constructor* μ.

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Here's a **tree** type satisfying our original equation:

$$\textbf{tree} \triangleq \mu\alpha.\,\textbf{unit} + \textbf{int} \times \alpha \times \alpha.$$

Static Semantics (Equirecursive)

We'll define two treatments of recursive types. With *equirecursive types*, a recursive type is equal to its unfolding:

$\mu\alpha.\,\tau$ is a solution to $\alpha = \tau$, so:

$$\mu\alpha.\,\tau = \tau\{\mu\alpha.\,\tau/\alpha\}$$

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Two typing rules let us switch between folded and unfolded:

$$\frac{\Gamma \vdash e : \tau\{\mu\alpha.\,\tau/\alpha\}}{\Gamma \vdash e : \mu\alpha.\,\tau}\ \mu\text{-INTRO}$$

$$\frac{\Gamma \vdash e : \mu\alpha.\,\tau}{\Gamma \vdash e : \tau\{\mu\alpha.\,\tau/\alpha\}}\ \mu\text{-ELIM}$$

Isorecursive Types

Alternatively, *isorecursive types* avoid infinite type trees.

The type $\mu\alpha.\,\tau$ is distinct but transformable to and from $\tau\{\mu\alpha.\,\tau/\alpha\}$.

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Converting between the two uses explicit **fold** and **unfold** operations:

$$\begin{array}{rcl} \textbf{unfold}_{\mu\alpha.\,\tau} & : & \mu\alpha.\,\tau \;\to\; \tau\{\mu\alpha.\,\tau/\alpha\} \\ \textbf{fold}_{\mu\alpha.\,\tau} & : & \tau\{\mu\alpha.\,\tau/\alpha\} \;\to\; \mu\alpha.\,\tau \end{array}$$

Static Semantics (Isorecursive)

The typing rules introduce and eliminate μ-types:

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Dynamic Semantics

We also need to augment the operational semantics:

$$\frac{}{\textbf{unfold}\ (\textbf{fold}\ e) \to e}$$

Intuitively, to access data in a recursive type $\mu\alpha.\,\tau$, we need to **unfold** it first. And the only way that values of type $\mu\alpha.\,\tau$ could have been created is via **fold**.

Example

Here's a recursive type for lists of numbers:

$$\textbf{intlist} \triangleq \mu\alpha.\, \textbf{unit} + \textbf{int} \times \alpha.$$

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Here's how to add up the elements of an **intlist**:

$$\begin{array}{l}
\text{let sum} = \\
\quad \text{fix}\,(\lambda f{:}\,\textbf{intlist} \to \textbf{intlist} \\
\qquad\quad \lambda l{:}\,\textbf{intlist}.\ \text{case } \textbf{unfold}\ \ell \text{ of} \\
\qquad\qquad\qquad\quad (\lambda u : \textbf{unit}.\ 0) \\
\qquad\qquad\qquad\ \mid (\lambda p : \textbf{int} \times \textbf{intlist}.\ (\#1\,p) + f\,(\#2\,p)))
\end{array}$$

Encoding Numbers

Recursive types let us encode the natural numbers!

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A natural number is either 0 or the successor of a natural number:

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\textbf{nat} &\triangleq \mu\alpha.\, \textbf{unit} + \alpha \\
0 &\triangleq \textbf{fold}\,(\mathsf{inl}_{\textbf{unit}+\textbf{nat}}\,())\\
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2 &\triangleq \textbf{fold}\,(\mathsf{inr}_{\textbf{unit}+\textbf{nat}}\,1),\\
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&\vdots
\end{aligned}$$

The successor function has type $\textbf{nat} \to \textbf{nat}$:

$$(\lambda x : \textbf{nat}.\, \textbf{fold}\,(\mathsf{inr}_{\textbf{unit}+\textbf{nat}}\,x))$$

Self-Application and Ω

Recall Ω defined as:

$$\omega \triangleq \lambda x.\, x\, x \qquad\qquad \Omega \triangleq \omega\, \omega.$$

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So let's write a type equation:

$$\sigma = \sigma \to \tau$$

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Putting these pieces together, the fully typed ω term is:

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The type of ω is $(\mu\alpha.\,(\alpha \to \tau)) \to \tau$.

So the type of **fold** ω is $\mu\alpha.\,(\alpha \to \tau)$.

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So the type of **fold** ω is $\mu\alpha.\, (\alpha \to \tau)$.

Now we can define $\Omega = \omega$ (**fold** ω). It has type τ.

Self-Application and Ω

We can even write ω in OCaml:

```
# type u = Fold of (u -> u);;
type u = Fold of (u -> u)
# let omega = fun x -> match x with Fold f -> f x;;
val omega : u -> u = <fun>
# omega (Fold omega);;
...runs forever until you hit control-c
```

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Every λ-term can be applied as a function to any other λ-term. So let's define an "untyped" type:

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The full translation is:

$$\begin{aligned} [\![x]\!] &\triangleq x \\ [\![e_0\, e_1]\!] &\triangleq (\textbf{unfold}\ [\![e_0]\!])\ [\![e_1]\!] \\ [\![\lambda x.\, e]\!] &\triangleq \textbf{fold}\ \lambda x : U.\ [\![e]\!] \end{aligned}$$

Every untyped term maps to a term of type U.