

In this lecture, we'll explore a kind of generalization of the polymorphic λ -calculus that makes the type system even more powerful. While that type system seemed to *roughly* add λ -calculus-like features at the type level, this extension will complete the job: we'll have a complete “copy” of the term-level language in the type system, including arbitrary functions, variables, and applications.

1 Functions on Types

On a homework problem recently, you showed how to encode sums and products using polymorphism. The nifty conclusion is that, while we originally added these data types to our language as one-off extensions, that wasn't really necessary. You can write terms for the constructors and destructors that work for *any* underlying type. For example, you saw a constructor `pair` and destructors `pi1` and `pi2` that each worked for any two types you might want to pack together into a pair. The expression `pair int bool`, for example, produces a function that can take a number and a Boolean and construct a pair from them, as in `pair int bool 4 true`.

One way of seeing this is that you used polymorphism to write your own *functions from types to terms*. The “function” `pair`, when applied to two *types*, produced a *term* (i.e., a program) that worked as a specialized pair constructor. This is nice because we get to think of `pair` itself, before giving it specific types, as a self-contained, first-class entity.

However, we did not get the same level of parameterization for the *type* of pairs. The pair of an `int` and a `bool` in our encoding was written $\forall\gamma.(\text{int} \rightarrow \text{bool} \rightarrow \gamma) \rightarrow \gamma$, but there's no succinct way to summarize the *generic* type for any pair. What would it take to write self-contained, first-class entity called, say, capital `Pair` such that invoking it as `Pair int bool` expanded out to the type above? If we had something like this, we could stop relying on human intuition to see something like $\text{int} \times \text{bool}$ and replace it with our encoding for that type; the rules for producing complex types out of simpler ones would be formalized as *part of the language*.

That's the motivation for augmenting our language with *functions from types to types*. We'll be able define `Pair` as a self-contained type operator. This way, you will be able to write the complete of the `pair` constructor as

$$\forall\alpha.\forall\beta.\alpha \rightarrow \beta \rightarrow (\text{Pair } \alpha \beta)$$

which you have to admit is nicer to read than

$$\forall\alpha.\forall\beta.\alpha \rightarrow \beta \rightarrow \forall\gamma.(\alpha \rightarrow \beta \rightarrow \gamma) \rightarrow \gamma$$

We'll introduce a language where we can write the type operator `Pair` as a type-level function using familiar λ -calculus constructs:

$$\text{Pair} \triangleq \lambda\alpha : \text{type}. \lambda\beta : \text{type}. \forall\gamma.(\alpha \rightarrow \beta \rightarrow \gamma) \rightarrow \gamma$$

where we have a new λ construct for binding type variables.

2 Adding Kinds in λ_ω

We'll define an extension to the simply-typed λ -calculus, λ^\rightarrow , that adds the ability to write type operators. The language will be called λ_ω . (If you combine type operators and polymorphism, you get a language called System F_ω .)

In λ_ω , the grammar for expressions is the same as in the basic λ^\rightarrow . We'll make the language of types more complicated. Instead of just base types and abstractions, we'll add type variables, type abstractions, and

type applications:

$$\tau ::= b \mid \tau_1 \rightarrow \tau_2 \mid \alpha \mid \lambda\alpha : \kappa. \tau \mid \tau_1 \tau_2$$

Notice that our type abstractions, just like ordinary term-level abstractions, need annotations. These indicate the “type of the type” for the argument to the type operator. The usual word for “types of types” is *kind*, which we’ll denote with a new metavariable κ :

$$\kappa ::= \text{type} \mid \kappa_1 \Rightarrow \kappa_2$$

The \Rightarrow symbol denotes the kind of a type-level function.

Now is a good time to pause and think deeply about the fact that this grammar for kinds looks like our *old* grammar for types in λ^\rightarrow : there is a base kind, **type**, and functions on those kinds. We have essentially described our language of types using a copy of λ^\rightarrow . It’s healthy to wonder, then, why this shouldn’t continue on forever: why not write types for types of types, and then types for those, and so on into infinity? It’s possible to do that, and it leads to a realm of research called *pure type systems*, but going beyond two levels of types does not seem to be very useful for actual programming.

For what it’s worth, higher-order type operators, which are type-level functions take other type-level functions as arguments, are also not nearly as useful as more basic type operators. So while it is easy to imagine types of the kind **type** \Rightarrow **type** and even **type** \Rightarrow **type** \Rightarrow **type**, it’s harder to imagine useful examples with the kind (**type** \Rightarrow **type**) \Rightarrow **type**.

2.1 Typing Rules

Let’s define the typing rules for λ_ω . The rules are going to look similar to our type system for System F, where we added a second context Δ to keep track of type variables. In that language, however, all defined type variables in Δ mapped to a single kind, **type**. Now, Δ will be a partial function from type variables to kinds κ . The basic rules for variables, abstractions, and application are:

$$\frac{\Delta \vdash \tau : \text{type}}{\Delta; \Gamma, x : \tau \vdash x : \tau} \quad \frac{\Delta \vdash \tau_1 : \text{type} \quad \Delta; \Gamma, x : \tau_1 \vdash e : \tau_2}{\Delta; \Gamma \vdash \lambda x : \tau_1. e : \tau_1 \rightarrow \tau_2} \quad \frac{\Delta; \Gamma \vdash e_1 : \tau_1 \rightarrow \tau_2 \quad \Delta; \Gamma \vdash e_2 : \tau_1}{\Delta; \Gamma \vdash e_1 e_2 : \tau_2}$$

Aside from adding Δ to the judgment, these rules look mostly the same as the rules for the simply-typed λ -calculus. As in System F, the variable and function rules need an extra premise that ensures that the types are well-formed—and, here, we make it explicit that they must have the kind **type**. Term-level variables are not allowed to have types whose kind is **type** \Rightarrow **type**, for example.

We will also add one more rule to capture *type equivalence*. The idea is that we want to let type expressions “evaluate” to produce concrete types: for example, the type expression `Pair int bool` should be able to “expand out” to its full polymorphic type so we can use it in computations. We will define a new relation, $\tau_1 \equiv \tau_2$, to determine equivalent types. Then, we add a typing rule that lets expressions take on any equivalent type:

$$\frac{\Delta; \Gamma \vdash e : \tau \quad \tau \equiv \tau' \quad \Delta \vdash \tau' : \text{type}}{\Delta; \Gamma \vdash e : \tau'}$$

This rule says that if you have already derived a type τ for an expression, and you know τ is equivalent to another type τ' , you can also say that the expression has type τ' .

2.2 Kinding Rules

Leaving aside type equivalence for a moment, we need a way to determine whether a type τ has kind κ . That is, we need inference rules to define the judgment $\Delta \vdash \tau : \kappa$ that we used in the typing rules above. In System

F, we defined a similar judgment that just checked that all the type variables used in a type expression were bound by \forall s. In λ_ω , the kinding rules define the meaning of type abstraction and type application:

$$\frac{}{\Delta, \alpha : \kappa \vdash \alpha : \kappa} \quad \frac{\Delta, \alpha : \kappa_1 \vdash \tau : \kappa_2}{\Delta \vdash \lambda \alpha : \kappa_1. \tau : \kappa_1 \Rightarrow \kappa_2} \quad \frac{\Delta \vdash \tau_1 : \kappa_1 \Rightarrow \kappa_2 \quad \Delta \vdash \tau_2 : \kappa_1}{\Delta \vdash \tau_1 \tau_2 : \kappa_2}$$

These kinding rules for type variables, type abstraction, and type application are identical to the typing rules for terms in λ^\rightarrow . We also need two more kinding rule for dealing with our only “base kind,” i.e., **type**. We will have one axiom that says that the base types have kind **type**, and another rule that functions on types are also types:

$$\frac{}{\Delta \vdash b : \text{type}} \quad \frac{\Delta \vdash \tau_1 : \text{type} \quad \Delta \vdash \tau_2 : \text{type}}{\Delta \vdash \tau_1 \rightarrow \tau_2 : \text{type}}$$

2.3 Type Equivalence

Finally, we need to define that \equiv relation we alluded to above. First, we will make the operator reflexive, symmetric, and transitive:

$$\frac{}{\tau \equiv \tau} \quad \frac{\tau_1 \equiv \tau_2}{\tau_2 \equiv \tau_1} \quad \frac{\tau_1 \equiv \tau_2 \quad \tau_2 \equiv \tau_3}{\tau_1 \equiv \tau_3}$$

Next, we define equivalences for function types, type abstractions, and type applications that just “recurse through” these structures:

$$\frac{\tau_1 \equiv \tau'_1 \quad \tau_2 \equiv \tau'_2}{\tau_1 \rightarrow \tau_2 \equiv \tau'_1 \rightarrow \tau'_2} \quad \frac{\tau \equiv \tau'}{\lambda x : \kappa. \tau \equiv \lambda x : \kappa. \tau'} \quad \frac{\tau_1 \equiv \tau'_1 \quad \tau_2 \equiv \tau'_2}{\tau_1 \tau_2 \equiv \tau'_1 \tau'_2}$$

Finally, we need one more rule that is the equivalent of β -reduction on types:

$$\overline{(\lambda \alpha : \kappa. \tau_1) \tau_2 \equiv \tau_1 \{\tau_2 / \alpha\}}$$

With these rules, we have, for example, that $(\lambda \alpha : \text{type}. \text{int}) \text{bool} \equiv \text{int}$.