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Mechanized semantics, seventh lecture

Of functions and types: the semantics of a functional language

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A change of paradigm

IMP, a toy imperative language

- Running a program = modifying the state
- Basic operation: assignment
- Control structures: conditional, loops
- Data types: first order (e.g. numbers).

FUN, a toy functional language

- Running a program = computing its value.
- Basic operations: function abstraction, function application.
- Control structures: conditional, recursion.
- Data types: higher order (functions as first-class values).

The FUN functional language

A recipe for a functional language

the lambda-calculus

+ a reduction strategy

+ primitive data types

+ a type system

= a functional language

The lambda-calculus

Terms: $M, N ::= x$ variables
| $\lambda x. M$ function abstraction ($x \mapsto M$)
| $M N$ function application

One structural rule: α -conversion (renaming of bound variables)

$$\lambda x. M =_{\alpha} \lambda y. M\{x \leftarrow y\} \quad \text{if } y \text{ not free in } M$$

One computation rule: β -reduction

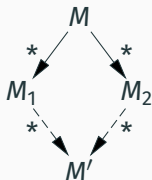
$$(\lambda x. M) N \rightarrow_{\beta} M\{x \leftarrow N\}$$

Good properties of reductions

Theorem (Church and Rosser, 1935)

The β -reduction is **confluent**:

if $M \xrightarrow{*} M_1$ and $M \xrightarrow{*} M_2$, there exists M' such that $M_1 \xrightarrow{*} M'$ and $M_2 \xrightarrow{*} M'$.



We say that N is a normal form of M if $M \xrightarrow{*} N \not\rightarrow$

Corollary

The normal form of a term, if it exists, is unique.

Expressiveness of lambda-calculus

Lambda-calculus is Turing-complete.

In particular, via functional encodings, it can express

- All the usual data types: integers, pairs, lists, ...

Example: Church's encoding of natural numbers

$$n \equiv \lambda f. \underbrace{f \circ \dots \circ f}_{n \text{ times}} \equiv \lambda f. \lambda x. \underbrace{f (f (\dots (f x)))}_{n \text{ times}}$$

- General recursion via fixed-point combinators.

Example: the combinator $Y = \lambda f. (\lambda x. f (x x)) (\lambda x. f (x x))$

is such that $Y F \xrightarrow{*} F (Y F)$.

Why lambda-calculus is not a good programming language

Little control over termination and complexity

Non-determinism caused by β -reductions that can apply in several places and in any order. Depending on the way β -reductions are performed,

- a computation can diverge or terminate;
- it can terminate quickly or slowly.

Functional encodings of data structures are limited

- Unnatural.
- Generally inefficient.
- Not typable in several standard type systems.

Reduction strategies

Make β -reduction deterministic by restricting where and when it can be performed. Two main choices:

- **Strong vs weak reduction:** can we reduce “under a λ ”?
Weak reduction: a function body is evaluated only after the function is applied.
Strong reduction: we can simplify the function body before application.
- **Call-by-name vs call-by-value:**
By value: the argument must be evaluated before being passed to the function.
By name: the argument is passed as is, not necessarily evaluated.

Specifying a strategy: the “SOS” style

(G. Plotkin, *A structural approach to operational semantics*, 1981, 2004.)

Axioms and inference rules for a relation $M \rightarrow M'$
(read: the whole term M reduces into the term M').

Weak call-by-name

$$(\lambda x. M) N \rightarrow M\{x \leftarrow N\}$$

$$\frac{M \rightarrow M'}{M N \rightarrow M' N}$$

Weak call-by-value
left to right

$$(\lambda x. M) v \rightarrow M\{x \leftarrow v\}$$

$$\frac{M \rightarrow M' \quad N \rightarrow N'}{M N \rightarrow M' N'}$$

(Here, values, written v , are just the lambdas: $v ::= \lambda x. M$)

Specifying a strategy: via a grammar of contexts

(A. Wright, M. Felleisen, *A Syntactic Approach to Type Soundness*, 1994).

One general reduction rule under a context E :

$$\frac{M \rightarrow_{\epsilon} M' \quad E \in \text{Ctx}}{E[M] \rightarrow E[M']}$$

For each strategy, axioms for head reductions \rightarrow_{ϵ} and a grammar defining the valid contexts E :

Weak call-by-name

$$(\lambda x. M) N \rightarrow_{\epsilon} M\{x \leftarrow N\}$$

$$E ::= [] \mid E N$$

Weak call-by-value

$$(\lambda x. M) v \rightarrow_{\epsilon} M\{x \leftarrow v\}$$

$$\text{Left to right: } E ::= [] \mid E N \mid v E$$

$$\text{Right to left: } E ::= [] \mid E v \mid M E$$

Specifying a strategy: via a natural semantics

Like we already did for IMP, we can summarize finite reduction sequences to a value $M \xrightarrow{*} v \not\rightarrow$ by a predicate $M \Downarrow v$, “term M evaluates to value v ”.

Weak call-by-name:

$$\lambda x. M \Downarrow \lambda x. M \qquad \frac{M \Downarrow \lambda x. P \quad P\{x \leftarrow N\} \Downarrow v}{M N \Downarrow v}$$

Weak call-by-value:

$$\lambda x. M \Downarrow \lambda x. M \qquad \frac{M \Downarrow \lambda x. P \quad N \Downarrow v' \quad P\{x \leftarrow v'\} \Downarrow v}{M N \Downarrow v}$$

Adding primitive data types

A systematic process: add

- new syntactic forms to the grammar of terms;
- new head reduction rules;
- new cases to the grammars of values and of contexts.

Starting point: weak call-by-value.

Terms: $M, N ::= x \mid \lambda x. M \mid M N$

Values: $v ::= \lambda x. M$

Contexts: $E ::= [] \mid E M \mid v E$

Head reduction: $(\lambda x. M) v \rightarrow_{\epsilon} M\{x \leftarrow v\}$

Booleans

Terms: $M ::= \dots \mid \text{true} \mid \text{false} \mid \text{if } M_1 M_2 M_3$

Values: $v ::= \dots \mid \text{true} \mid \text{false}$

Contexts: $E ::= \dots \mid \text{if } E M_2 M_3$

$\text{if true } M_2 M_3 \rightarrow_\epsilon M_2$

$\text{if false } M_2 M_3 \rightarrow_\epsilon M_3$

Peano natural numbers

Terms: $M ::= \dots \mid 0 \mid S M \mid \text{if0 } M_1 M_2 M_3$

Values: $v ::= \dots \mid 0 \mid S v$

Contexts: $E ::= \dots \mid S E \mid \text{if0 } E M_2 M_3$

$$\text{if0 } 0 M_2 M_3 \rightarrow_{\epsilon} M_2$$

$$\text{if0 } (S v) M_2 M_3 \rightarrow_{\epsilon} M_3 v$$

Products and sums

Terms: $M ::= \dots \mid (M_1, M_2) \mid \text{fst } M \mid \text{snd } M$
 $\mid \text{left } M \mid \text{right } M \mid \text{case } M M_1 M_2$

Values: $v ::= \dots \mid (v_1, v_2) \mid \text{left } v \mid \text{right } v$

Contexts: $E ::= \dots \mid (E, M) \mid (v, E) \mid \text{fst } E \mid \text{snd } E$
 $\mid \text{left } E \mid \text{right } E \mid \text{case } E M_2 M_3$

$\text{fst } (v_1, v_2) \rightarrow_\varepsilon v_1$ $\text{case } (\text{left } v) M_2 M_3 \rightarrow_\varepsilon M_2 v$

$\text{snd } (v_1, v_2) \rightarrow_\varepsilon v_2$ $\text{case } (\text{right } v) M_2 M_3 \rightarrow_\varepsilon M_3 v$

Fixed points (general recursion)

Terms: $M ::= \dots \mid \text{fix } M$

Values: $v ::= \dots \mid \text{fix } v$

Contexts: $E ::= \dots \mid \text{fix } E$

$$\text{fix } v_f v \rightarrow_{\epsilon} v_f (\text{fix } v_f) v$$

Mechanizing a functional language and its semantics

See the Coq development `FUN.v`.

The basic tools are the same as for IMP:

- Inductive types for abstract syntax.
- Inductive predicates for reduction and evaluation relations.

A delicate issue: α -conversion

$$\lambda x. M =_{\alpha} \lambda y. M\{x \leftarrow y\} \quad \text{if } y \text{ not free in } M$$

It is not obvious how to consider terms modulo α -conversion, that is, equal up to a renaming of bound variables.

Making do without alpha-conversion

The development `FUN.v` represents terms without implicit renaming of bound variables:

$$\text{Abs}(\text{"x"}, \text{Var } \text{"x"}) \neq \text{Abs}(\text{"y"}, \text{Var } \text{"y"})$$

This is a problem to define substitution $M\{x \leftarrow N\}$:
the naive definition

$$(\lambda y. M)\{x \leftarrow N\} = \lambda y. (M\{x \leftarrow N\})$$

is vulnerable to **variable capture**.

For example $(\lambda y. x)\{x \leftarrow y\}$ is computed as $\lambda y. y$ ❌

Making do without alpha-conversion

The naive definition of substitution

$$(\lambda y. M)\{x \leftarrow N\} = \lambda y. (M\{x \leftarrow N\})$$

is correct if the term N is **closed**, i.e. without free variables.

(If N is closed, $\lambda y \dots N \dots$ cannot capture a y free in N .)

Fortunately, reducing a closed term (a complete program) produces only closed terms:

$$\underbrace{Prog}_{\text{closed}} \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow \underbrace{(\lambda x. M)}_{\text{closed}} \underbrace{N}_{\text{closed}} \rightarrow \underbrace{M\{x \leftarrow N\}}_{\text{closed}} \rightarrow \dots$$

Hence, the semantics we obtain is valid only for complete programs.

A type system with simple types

“Don’t compare apples with oranges.”

“On n’additionne pas des choux et des carottes.”

When we enrich lambda-calculus with data types such as Booleans, absurd terms appear:

`true` $(\lambda x. x)$ (a Boolean used as if it were a function)

`if` $(\lambda x. x) M M'$ (a function used as if it were a Boolean)

Dynamic typing, static typing

Dynamic typing:

detect and report these absurdities during execution

$$(\lambda b. \text{if } b \text{ } M \text{ } M') (\lambda x. x) \rightarrow \text{if } (\lambda x. x) \text{ } M \text{ } M' \rightarrow \text{ERROR}$$

Static typing:

analyze terms before execution to “statically” reject the terms that are not well typed.

- ✓ $\lambda b : \text{bool}. \text{if } b \text{ false true} : \text{bool} \rightarrow \text{bool}$
- ✗ $(\lambda b : \text{bool}. \text{if } b \text{ false true}) (\lambda x. x)$
- ✗ $\lambda b : \text{bool} \rightarrow \text{bool}. \text{if } b \text{ false true}$

A static type system

A **type algebra**, for example Church's simple types

Types: $\tau, \sigma ::= \text{bool}$ base type
 | $\sigma \rightarrow \tau$ type of functions from σ to τ

Typing rules that define a relation $\Gamma \vdash M : \tau$

read: “in context Γ term M is well typed and has type τ ”.

The context Γ is a list of assumptions $x_1 : \tau_1, \dots, x_n : \tau_n$
associating each free variable x_i with its type τ_i .

Typing rules for simple types

The simply-typed lambda-calculus:

$$\frac{\Gamma = \dots, x : \tau, \dots}{\Gamma \vdash x : \tau} \text{ (Var)} \qquad \frac{x \notin \text{Dom}(\Gamma) \quad \Gamma, x : \sigma \vdash M : \tau}{\Gamma \vdash \lambda x. M : \sigma \rightarrow \tau} \text{ (Abs)}$$
$$\frac{\Gamma \vdash M : \sigma \rightarrow \tau \quad \Gamma \vdash N : \sigma}{\Gamma \vdash M N : \tau} \text{ (App)}$$

Extension with Booleans:

$$\Gamma \vdash \text{true} : \text{bool} \text{ (Cst)} \qquad \Gamma \vdash \text{false} : \text{bool} \text{ (Cst)}$$
$$\frac{\Gamma \vdash M : \text{bool} \quad \Gamma \vdash N : \tau \quad \Gamma \vdash P : \tau}{\Gamma \vdash \text{if } M N P : \tau} \text{ (If)}$$

Type soundness

Well-typed programs do not go wrong. (R. Milner)

A type system is **sound** if no program that is well typed in the empty context can “go wrong”, i.e. produce a run-time error such as `true (λx.x)`.

Formulated in terms of reduction sequences:

Normal termination: $M \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow v \in \text{Val}$

Abnormal termination (going wrong): $M \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow N \not\rightarrow, N \notin \text{Val}$

Divergence: $M \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow M' \rightarrow \dots$

Type soundness = if $\emptyset \vdash M : \tau$, the “going wrong” case is impossible.

(Normalization = if $\emptyset \vdash M : \tau$, the “divergence” case is impossible.)

Various ways to prove type soundness

Using a denotational semantics: (1975–1985)

(D. MacQueen, G. Plotkin, R. Sethi, *An ideal model for recursive polymorphic types*, 1986)

- Write a denotational semantics $\llbracket M \rrbracket$ where the domain of denotations contains a special element `err`.
For example: $D \simeq \text{Bool}_\perp + [D \rightarrow D] + \{\text{err}\}_\perp$.
- Interpret types τ as sets $\llbracket \tau \rrbracket$ not containing `err`.
- Show that if $\emptyset \vdash M : \tau$, then $\llbracket M \rrbracket \in \llbracket \tau \rrbracket$

Various ways to prove type soundness

Using a denotational semantics: (1975–1985)

Using a natural semantics: (1980–1995)

(M. Tofte, *Operational semantics and polymorphic type inference*, PhD Edinburgh, 1988)

- Write two natural semantics: $M \Downarrow v$ for normal termination, $M \Downarrow \text{err}$ for abnormal termination (going wrong).
- Show that if $\emptyset \vdash M : \tau$, then $M \not\Downarrow \text{err}$, and $M \Downarrow v \Rightarrow v \in \tau$.

Various ways to prove type soundness

Using a denotational semantics: (1975–1985)

Using a natural semantics: (1980–1995)

Using a reduction semantics: (since 1995)

(A. Wright et M. Felleisen, *A syntactic approach to type soundness*, 1994)

- Show two properties of reductions:
 progress and **preservation**.

The progress property

Show that a well-typed program does not go wrong immediately.

Theorem (Progress)

*If $\emptyset \vdash M : \tau$, either M is a value or M can reduce
($M \rightarrow N$ for some N).*

Uses a lemma that determines the shapes of values according to their types.

Lemma (Canonical forms)

Let v be a value.

If $\emptyset \vdash v : \sigma \rightarrow \tau$ then v is of the shape $\lambda x. M$.

If $\emptyset \vdash v : \text{bool}$ then v is true or false.

The preservation property (*subject reduction*)

Well-typedness is preserved by reduction steps.

Theorem (Preservation)

If $\Gamma \vdash M : \tau$ and $M \rightarrow N$ then $\Gamma \vdash N : \tau$.

Uses a substitution lemma and a weakening lemma.

Lemma (Typing is stable by substitution)

If $\Gamma, x : \sigma, \Gamma' \vdash M : \tau$ and $\Gamma \vdash N : \sigma$ then $\Gamma, \Gamma' \vdash M\{x \leftarrow N\} : \tau$.

Lemma (Weakening)

If $\Gamma \vdash M : \tau$ then $\Gamma, \Gamma' \vdash M : \tau$.

Well-typed programs do not go wrong.

Let M be a closed, well-typed program: $\emptyset \vdash M : \tau$.

Assume that M goes wrong:

$$M \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow N \not\rightarrow, N \notin \text{Val}$$

By (iterated) preservation, $\emptyset \vdash N : \tau$.

By progress, either N is a value or N reduces.

Contradiction!

Intrinsically-typed terms

Two views of typing

The “extrinsic” view, in the style of Curry:

- Abstract syntax and semantics are defined independently of the type system.
- The type system is a “filter” (a static analysis) that eliminates problematic terms.

Then “intrinsic” view, in the style of Church:

- The type system participates in the definition of the terms of the language. E.g. Church’s simply-typed lambda-calculus:

$$M_{\tau} ::= x_{\tau} \mid (\lambda x_{\sigma}. M_{\tau})_{\sigma \rightarrow \tau} \mid (M_{\sigma \rightarrow \tau} N_{\sigma})_{\tau}$$

- Semantics is defined on well-typed terms only.

Dependent types and intrinsic typing

Church's intrinsic view can be expressed using **dependent types** (Coq, Agda, ...) or **generalized algebraic data types** (GADTs) (Haskell, OCaml).

The type of terms $\text{term } \Gamma \tau$ is parameterized by a typing context Γ and a type expression τ .

$\text{Const} : \text{bool} \rightarrow \text{term } \Gamma \text{ Bool}$

$\text{Cond} : \text{term } \Gamma \text{ Bool} \rightarrow \text{term } \Gamma \tau \rightarrow \text{term } \Gamma \tau \rightarrow \text{term } \Gamma \tau$

$\text{App} : \text{term } \Gamma (\text{Fun } \sigma \tau) \rightarrow \text{term } \Gamma \sigma \rightarrow \text{term } \Gamma \tau$

$\text{Abs} : \text{term } (\sigma :: \Gamma) \tau \rightarrow \text{term } \Gamma (\text{Fun } \sigma \tau) \quad (?)$

$\text{Var} : \text{var } \Gamma \tau \rightarrow \text{term } \Gamma \tau \quad (?)$

Representing variables

In the intrinsic approach, a variable designates one of the typing assumptions in the context. This assumption determines the type of the variable. There should be no way to mention a variable that is not described in the context!

Designating variables by names:

feasible, but can raise problems with renaming.

Designating variables by positions:

quite natural: context \approx list, assumption \approx position in the list.

It is de Bruijn's notation (1972)!

de Bruijn's notation

(N. de Bruijn, *Lambda calculus notation with nameless dummies, a tool for automatic formula manipulation*, 1972.)

Instead of identifying variables by names, de Bruijn's notation identifies them by their **positions** relative to the λ -abstractions that bind them.

$$\begin{array}{l} \lambda x. (\lambda y. y x) x \\ \quad \quad \quad | \quad | \quad | \\ \lambda. (\lambda. \underline{1} \underline{2}) \underline{1} \end{array}$$

\underline{n} is the variable bound by the n -th enclosing λ .

Two α -convertible terms are equal in de Bruijn's notation:
 $\lambda x. x$ and $\lambda y. y$ are both represented as $\lambda. \underline{1}$

Intrinsically-typed de Bruijn's notation

A context Γ is a list of types $\tau_1 :: \dots :: \tau_n :: \text{nil}$ where τ_i is the type of the variable having de Bruijn index i .

The type $\text{var } \Gamma \tau$ of variables of type τ in context Γ is isomorphic to the integers between 1 and the size n of Γ .

This type is generated by two constructors:

$$\begin{aligned} V1 & : \text{var } (\tau :: \Gamma) \tau && \text{(one)} \\ VS & : \text{var } \Gamma \tau \rightarrow \text{var } (\sigma :: \Gamma) \tau && \text{(successor)} \end{aligned}$$

Derived definitions:

$$\begin{aligned} V2 & = VS V1 : \text{var } (\tau_1 :: \tau_2 :: \Gamma) \tau_2 \\ V3 & = VS V2 : \text{var } (\tau_1 :: \tau_2 :: \tau_3 :: \Gamma) \tau_3 \end{aligned}$$

A denotational semantics for intrinsically-typed terms

We can define an interpretation of FUN type expressions as Coq types:

$$\llbracket \text{Bool} \rrbracket = \text{bool} \qquad \llbracket \text{Fun } \sigma \ \tau \rrbracket = \llbracket \sigma \rrbracket \rightarrow \llbracket \tau \rrbracket$$

Typing contexts become the Coq types for **evaluation environments** that associate a value to each variable of the context:

$$\llbracket \text{nil} \rrbracket = \text{unit} \qquad \llbracket \tau :: \Gamma \rrbracket = \llbracket \tau \rrbracket * \llbracket \Gamma \rrbracket$$

We can, then, interpret a term $a : \text{term } \Gamma \ \tau$ as a Coq function environment \mapsto value:

$$\llbracket a \rrbracket : \llbracket \Gamma \rrbracket \rightarrow \llbracket \tau \rrbracket$$

A denotational semantics for intrinsically-typed terms

$$\llbracket \text{Var } V1 \rrbracket e = \text{fst}(e)$$

$$\llbracket \text{Var } (VS\ v) \rrbracket e = \llbracket \text{Var } v \rrbracket (\text{snd } e)$$

$$\llbracket \text{Abs } a \rrbracket e = \text{fun } x \Rightarrow \llbracket a \rrbracket (x, e)$$

$$\llbracket \text{App } a_1\ a_2 \rrbracket e = (\llbracket a_1 \rrbracket e) (\llbracket a_2 \rrbracket e)$$

$$\llbracket \text{Const } b \rrbracket e = b$$

$$\llbracket \text{Cond } a_1\ a_2\ a_3 \rrbracket e = \text{if } \llbracket a_1 \rrbracket e \text{ then } \llbracket a_2 \rrbracket e \text{ else } \llbracket a_3 \rrbracket e$$

This defines a Coq function that is well-typed and total
 \Rightarrow type soundness and normalization hold “by construction”.

The equations of denotational semantics are satisfied.

Compatible with reductions: if $a \rightarrow a'$ then $\llbracket a \rrbracket = \llbracket a' \rrbracket$.

Limitations of the intrinsic approach

The features of the object language (FUN) must be available or encodable in the host language (Coq).

- Effects (including divergence) \Rightarrow monadic encoding.
- Subtyping \Rightarrow coercions $\llbracket subtype \rrbracket \rightarrow \llbracket supertype \rrbracket$.
- Impredicative polymorphism (system F) \Rightarrow Coq's option `-impredicative-set`.

The host language must have inductive families (GADTs) and preferably full dependent types \Rightarrow excludes HOL, PVS, ...

We explain simple languages (such as FUN) in terms of a more complex language (OCaml, Haskell, Agda, Coq).

Summary

Summary

Functional languages (syntax, semantics, typing) mechanize very well, generally speaking...

... modulo a few difficulties to account for bound variables and alpha-conversion (equivalence up to renaming of bound variables).

Many type systems have been mechanized, including advanced features such as

- **Subtype polymorphism** (e.g. `bool <: int`)
- **Parametric polymorphism** (e.g. $\forall \alpha. \alpha \rightarrow \alpha$)
- **Dependent types** (e.g. `term Γ τ`)

The next lecture reconsiders the latter two from a logical perspective (that of type theory).

References

References

Two textbooks on typed functional languages:

- Benjamin Pierce. *Types and Programming Languages*. MIT Press, 2002.
- Robert Harper. *Practical Foundations for Programming Languages*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Mechanizations of typed functional languages:

- Extrinsic approach, in Coq: Benjamin Pierce et al, *Software Foundations, volume 2: Programming Languages Foundations*, <https://softwarefoundations.cis.upenn.edu/>.
- Intrinsic approach, in Agda: Philip Wadler, *Programming Language Foundations in Agda*, <https://plfa.github.io/>