CSE341: Programming Languages

Lecture 24
Subtyping

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Last major topic: Subtyping

Build up key ideas from first principles
  – In pseudocode because:
    • No time for another language
    • Simple to first show subtyping without objects

Then:

• How does subtyping relate to types for OOP?
  – Brief sketch only

• What are the relative strengths of subtyping and generics?

• How can subtyping and generics combine synergistically?
A tiny language

- Can cover most core subtyping ideas by just considering
  \textit{records with mutable fields}

- Will make up our own syntax
  - ML has records, but no subtyping or field-mutation
  - Racket and Ruby have no type system
  - Java uses class/interface names and rarely fits on a slide
Records (half like ML, half like Java)

Record creation (field names and contents):

{f1=e1, f2=e2, ..., fn=en}   Evaluate e_i, make a record

Record field access:

e.f                     Evaluate e to record v with an f field, get contents of f field

Record field update

e1.f = e2                Evaluate e1 to a record v1 and e2 to a value v2;
                         Change v1's f field (which must exist) to v2;
                         Return v2
A Basic Type System

Record types: What fields a record has and type for each field

\[ \{f_1:t_1, f_2:t_2, \ldots, fn:tn\} \]

Type-checking expressions:

- If \( e_1 \) has type \( t_1, \ldots, en \) has type \( tn \),
  then \( \{f_1=e_1, \ldots, fn=en\} \) has type \( \{f_1:t_1, \ldots, fn:tn\} \)

- If \( e \) has a record type containing \( f : t \),
  then \( e.f \) has type \( t \)

- If \( e_1 \) has a record type containing \( f : t \) and \( e_2 \) has type \( t \),
  then \( e_1.f = e_2 \) has type \( t \)
This is safe

These evaluation rules and typing rules prevent ever trying to access a field of a record that does not exist

Example program that type-checks (in a made-up language):

```plaintext
fun distToOrigin (p:{x:real,y:real}) =
  Math.sqrt(p.x*p.x + p.y*p.y)
val pythag : {x:real,y:real} = {x=3.0, y=4.0}
val five : real = distToOrigin(pythag)
```
Motivating subtyping

But according to our typing rules, this program does not type-check
– It does nothing wrong and seems worth supporting

```scala
fun distToOrigin (p:{x:real,y:real}) = 
    Math.sqrt(p.x*p.x + p.y*p.y)

val c : {x:real,y:real,color:string} = 
    {x=3.0, y=4.0, color="green"}

val five : real = distToOrigin(c)
```
A good idea: allow extra fields

Natural idea: If an expression has type

\{f1:t1, f2:t2, \ldots, fn:tn\}

Then it can also have a type with some fields removed

This is what we need to type-check these function calls:

```scala
fun distToOrigin (p:{x:real,y:real}) = ...
fun makePurple (p:{color:string}) =
    p.color = "purple"

val c :{x:real,y:real,color:string} =
    {x=3.0, y=4.0, color="green"}

val _ = distToOrigin(c)
val _ = makePurple(c)
```
Keeping subtyping separate

A programming language already has a lot of typing rules and we do not want to change them

– Example: The type of an actual function argument must equal the type of the function parameter

We can do this by adding “just two things to our language”

– Subtyping: Write $t_1 <: t_2$ for $t_1$ is a subtype of $t_2$

– One new typing rule that uses subtyping:
  
  If $e$ has type $t_1$ and $t_1 <: t_2$,
  
  then $e$ (also) has type $t_2$

Now all we need to do is define $t_1 <: t_2$
Subtyping is not a matter of opinion

• Misconception: If we are making a new language, we can have whatever typing and subtyping rules we want

• Not if you want to prevent what you claim to prevent [soundness]
  – Here: No accessing record fields that do not exist

• Our typing rules were sound before we added subtyping
  – We should keep it that way

• Principle of substitutability: If \( \tau_1 <: \tau_2 \), then any value of type \( \tau_1 \) must be usable in every way a \( \tau_2 \) is
  – Here: Any value of subtype needs all fields any value of supertype has
Four good rules

For our record types, these rules all meet the substitutability test:

1. “Width” subtyping: A supertype can have a subset of fields with the same types

2. “Permutation” subtyping: A supertype can have the same set of fields with the same types in a different order

3. Transitivity: If \( t_1 <: t_2 \) and \( t_2 <: t_3 \), then \( t_1 <: t_3 \)

4. Reflexivity: Every type is a subtype of itself

(4) may seem unnecessary, but it composes well with other rules in a full language and “does no harm”
More record subtyping?

[Warning: I am misleading you 😊]

Subtyping rules so far let us drop fields but not change their types

Example: A circle has a center field holding another record

```kotlin
fun circleY (c:{center:{x:real,y:real}, r:real}) =
    c.center.y

val sphere:{center:{x:real,y:real,z:real}, r:real} =
    {center={x=3.0,y=4.0,z=0.0}, r=1.0}

val _ = circleY(sphere)
```

For this to type-check, we need:

```kotlin
{center:{x:real,y:real,z:real}, r:real}
<:
    {center:{x:real,y:real}, r:real}
```
Do not have this subtyping – could we?

\[
\{\text{center:\{x:real,y:real,z:real\}}, \ r:\text{real}\} \\
\quad <: \\
\{\text{center:\{x:real,y:real\}}, \ r:\text{real}\}
\]

- No way to get this yet: we can drop \text{center}, drop \text{r}, or permute order, but cannot “reach into a field type” to do subtyping

- So why not add another subtyping rule... “Depth” subtyping:
  \[
  \text{If } \text{ta} <: \text{tb}, \text{ then } \{f1: t1, \ldots, f: \text{ta}, \ldots, fn: tn\} <: \\
  \quad \{f1: t1, \ldots, f: \text{tb}, \ldots, fn: tn\}
  \]

- Depth subtyping (along with width on the field's type) lets our example type-check
Stop!

- It is nice and all that our new subtyping rule lets our example type-check

- But it is not worth it if it breaks soundness
  - Also allows programs that can access missing record fields

- Unfortunately, it breaks soundness 😞
**Mutation strikes again**

If $ta \ll tb$, then $\{f1:t1, \ldots, f:ta, \ldots, fn:tn\} \ll \{f1:t1, \ldots, f:tb, \ldots, fn:tn\}$

```scala
fun setToOrigin (c:{center:{x:real,y:real}, r:real})=
  c.center = {x=0.0, y=0.0}
val sphere:{center:{x:real,y:real,z:real}, r:real} =
  {center={x=3.0, y=4.0, z=0.0}, r=1.0}
val _ = setToOrigin(sphere)
val _ = sphere.center.z (* kaboom! (no z field) *)
```
Moral of the story

• In a language with records/objects with getters and setters, depth subtyping is unsound
  – Subtyping cannot change the type of fields

• If fields are immutable, then depth subtyping is sound!
  – Yet another benefit of outlawing mutation!
  – Choose two of three: setters, depth subtyping, soundness

• Remember: subtyping is not a matter of opinion
**Picking on Java (and C#)**

Arrays should work just like records in terms of depth subtyping

- But in Java, if \( t_1 <: t_2 \), then \( t_1[] <: t_2[] \)
- So this code type-checks, surprisingly

```java
class Point { ... }
class ColorPoint extends Point { ... }
...
void m1(Point[] pt_arr) {
    pt_arr[0] = new Point(3,4);
}
String m2(int x) {
    ColorPoint[] cpt_arr = new ColorPoint[x];
    for(int i=0; i < x; i++)
        cpt_arr[i] = new ColorPoint(0,0,"green");
    m1(cpt_arr); // !
    return cpt_arr[0].color; // !
}
```
Why did they do this?

• More flexible type system allows more programs but prevents fewer errors
  – Seemed especially important before Java/C# had generics

• Good news: despite this “inappropriate” depth subtyping
  – `e.color` will never fail due to there being no `color` field
  – Array reads `e1[e2]` always return a (subtype of) `t` if `e1` is a `t[]`

• Bad news: to get the good news
  – `e1[e2]=e3` can fail even if `e1` has type `t[]` and `e3` has type `t`
  – Array stores check the run-time class of `e1`'s elements and do not allow storing a supertype
  – No type-system help to avoid such bugs / performance cost
So what happens

void m1(Point[] pt_arr) {
    pt_arr[0] = new Point(3, 4); // can throw
}

String m2(int x) {
    ColorPoint[] cpt_arr = new ColorPoint[x];
    ...
    m1(cpt_arr); // "inappropriate" depth subtyping
    ColorPoint c = cpt_arr[0]; // fine, cpt_arr
    // will always hold (subtypes of) ColorPoints
    return c.color; // fine, a ColorPoint has a color
}

• Causes code in m1 to throw an ArrayStoreException
  – Even though logical error is in m2
  – At least run-time checks occur only on array stores, not on field accesses like c.color
null

- Array stores probably the most surprising choice for flexibility over static checking

- But null is the most common one in practice
  - null is not an object; it has no fields or methods
  - But Java and C# let it have any object type (backwards, huh?!)  
  - So, in fact, we do not have the static guarantee that evaluating e in e.f or e.m(...) produces an object that has an f or m
  - The “or null” caveat leads to run-time checks and errors, as you have surely noticed

- Sometimes null is convenient (like ML's option types)
  - But also having “cannot be null” types would be nice
Now functions

- Already know a caller can use subtyping for arguments passed
  - Or on the result

- More interesting: When is one function type a subtype of another?
  - Important for higher-order functions: If a function expects an argument of type \( t_1 \rightarrow t_2 \), can you pass a \( t_3 \rightarrow t_4 \) instead?
  - Coming next: Important for understanding methods
    - (An object type is a lot like a record type where “method positions” are immutable and have function types)
Example

fun distMoved (f : {x:real,y:real}->{x:real,y:real},
   p : {x:real,y:real}) =
   let val p2 : {x:real,y:real} = f p
   val dx : real = p2.x - p.x
   val dy : real = p2.y - p.y
   in Math.sqrt(dx*dx + dy*dy) end

fun flip p = {x = ~p.x, y=~p.y}
val d = distMoved(flip, {x=3.0, y=4.0})

No subtyping here yet:
   - \texttt{flip} has exactly the type \texttt{distMoved} expects for \texttt{f}
   - Can pass \texttt{distMoved} a record with extra fields for \texttt{p},
     but that's old news
Return-type subtyping

fun distMoved (f : {x:real,y:real}->{x:real,y:real}, p : {x:real,y:real}) =
  let val p2 : {x:real,y:real} = f p
  val dx : real = p2.x - p.x
  val dy : real = p2.y - p.y
  in Math.sqrt(dx*dx + dy*dy) end

fun flipGreen p = {x = ~p.x, y=~p.y, color="green"}
val d = distMoved(flipGreen, {x=3.0, y=4.0})

• Return type of flipGreen is {x:real,y:real,color:string}, but distMoved expects a return type of {x:real,y:real}

• Nothing goes wrong: If ta <: tb, then t->ta <: t->tb
  – A function can return “more than it needs to”
  – Jargon: “Return types are covariant”
This is wrong

```
fun distMoved (f : {x:real,y:real}->{x:real,y:real},
    p : {x:real,y:real}) =
    let val p2 : {x:real,y:real} = f p
    val dx : real = p2.x - p.x
    val dy : real = p2.y - p.y
    in Math.sqrt(dx*dx + dy*dy) end

fun flipIfGreen p = if p.color = "green" (*kaboom!*)
    then {x = ~p.x, y=~p.y}
    else {x = p.x, y=p.y}
val d = distMoved(flipIfGreen, {x=3.0, y=4.0})
```

- Argument type of flipIfGreen is
  \{x:real,y:real,color:string\}, but it is called with a
  \{x:real,y:real\}

- Unsound! \(ta <: tb\) does NOT allow \(ta -> t <: tb -> t\)
The other way works!

fun distMoved (f : {x:real,y:real}->{x:real,y:real},
 p : {x:real,y:real}) =
 let val p2 : {x:real,y:real} = f p
 val dx : real = p2.x – p.x
 val dy : real = p2.y – p.y
 in Math.sqrt(dx*dx + dy*dy) end

fun flipX_Y0 p = {x = ~p.x, y=0.0}
val d = distMoved(flipX_Y0, {x=3.0, y=4.0})

• Argument type of flipX_Y0 is {x:real}, but it is called with a {x:real,y:real}, which is fine

• If \( \text{tb <: ta} \), then \( \text{ta -> t <: tb -> t} \)
  – A function can assume “less than it needs to” about arguments
  – Jargon: “Argument types are contravariant”
Can do both

fun distMoved (f : {x:real,y:real}->{x:real,y:real},
   p : {x:real,y:real}) =
   let val p2 : {x:real,y:real} = f p
     val dx : real = p2.x - p.x
     val dy : real = p2.y - p.y
   in Math.sqrt(dx*dx + dy*dy) end

fun flipXMakeGreen p = {x = ~p.x, y=0.0, color="green"}
val d = distMoved(flipXMakeGreen, {x=3.0, y=4.0})

- flipXMakeGreen has type
  
  \{x:real\} \rightarrow \{x:real,y:real,color:string\}

- Fine to pass a function of such a type as function of type
  
  \{x:real,y:real\} \rightarrow \{x:real,y:real\}

- If \texttt{t3 <: t1} and \texttt{t2 <: t4}, then \texttt{t1 \rightarrow t2 <: t3 \rightarrow t4}
Conclusion

• If \( t_3 <: t_1 \) and \( t_2 <: t_4 \), then \( t_1 \rightarrow t_2 <: t_3 \rightarrow t_4 \)
  – Function subtyping contravariant in argument(s) and covariant in results

• Also essential for understanding subtyping and methods in OOP

• Most unintuitive concept in the course
  – Smart people often forget and convince themselves covariant arguments are okay
  – These people are always mistaken
  – At times, you or your boss or your friend may do this
  – Remember: A guy with a PhD in PL jumped out and down insisting that function/method subtyping is always contravariant in its argument -- covariant is unsound