CSE341: Programming Languages

Lecture 3
Local Bindings;
Options;
Benefits of No Mutation

Dan Grossman
Winter 2013
Review

Huge progress already on the core pieces of ML:

- **Types**: `int bool unit t1*...*tn t list t1*...*tn->t`
  - Types “nest” (each `t` above can be itself a compound type)
- **Variables, environments, and basic expressions**
- **Functions**
  - Build: `fun x0 (x1:t1, ..., xn:tn) = e`
  - Use: `e0 (e1, ..., en)`
- **Tuples**
  - Build: `(e1, ..., en)`
  - Use: `#1 e, #2 e, ...`
- **Lists**
  - Build: `[] e1::e2`
  - Use: `null e  hd e  tl e`
Today

- The big thing we need: **local bindings**
  - For style and convenience
  - A big but natural idea: nested function bindings
  - For efficiency (*not* “just a little faster”)

- One last feature for last problem of homework 1: **options**

- Why **not having mutation** (assignment statements) is a valuable language feature
  - No need for you to keep track of sharing/aliasing, which Java programmers must obsess about
Let-expressions

3 questions:

• Syntax: `let b1 b2 ... bn in e end`
  – Each `bi` is any binding and `e` is any expression

• Type-checking: Type-check each `bi` and `e` in a static environment that includes the previous bindings. Type of whole let-expression is the type of `e`.

• Evaluation: Evaluate each `bi` and `e` in a dynamic environment that includes the previous bindings. Result of whole let-expression is result of evaluating `e`. 
It is an expression

A let-expression is just an expression, so we can use it anywhere an expression can go
Silly examples

fun silly1 (z : int) = 
let val x = if z > 0 then z else 34
  val y = x+z+9
  in
    if x > y then x*2 else y*y
  end
fun silly2 () = 
let val x = 1
  in
    (let val x = 2 in x+1 end) +
    (let val y = x+2 in y+1 end)
  end

silly2 is poor style but shows let-expressions are expressions
  – Can also use them in function-call arguments, if branches, etc.
  – Also notice shadowing
What’s new

- What’s new is **scope**: where a binding is in the environment
  - *In* later bindings and body of the let-expression
    - (Unless a later or nested binding shadows it)
    - *Only in* later bindings and body of the let-expression

- *Nothing else is new:*
  - Can put any binding we want, even function bindings
  - Type-check and evaluate just like at “top-level”
Any binding

According to our rules for let-expressions, we can define functions inside any let-expression

```
let b1 b2 ... bn in e end
```

This is a natural idea, and often good style
(Inferior) Example

```haskell
fun countup_from1 (x : int) = 
  let fun count (from : int, to : int) = 
    if from = to 
    then to :: [] 
    else from :: count(from+1,to) 
  in 
    count (1,x) 
  end
```

- This shows how to use a local function binding, but:
  - Better version on next slide
  - `count` might be useful elsewhere
Better:

```
fun countup_from1_better (x : int) =
  let fun count (from : int) =
    if from = x
    then x :: []
    else from :: count(from+1)
  in
    count 1
  end
```

- Functions can use bindings in the environment where they are defined:
  - Bindings from “outer” environments
    - Such as parameters to the outer function
  - Earlier bindings in the let-expression

- Unnecessary parameters are usually bad style
  - Like `to` in previous example
Nested functions: style

• Good style to define helper functions inside the functions they help if they are:
  – Unlikely to be useful elsewhere
  – Likely to be misused if available elsewhere
  – Likely to be changed or removed later

• A fundamental trade-off in code design: reusing code saves effort and avoids bugs, but makes the reused code harder to change later
Avoid repeated recursion

Consider this code and the recursive calls it makes

- Don’t worry about calls to `null`, `hd`, and `tl` because they do a small constant amount of work

```haskell
fun bad_max (xs : int list) = 
  if null xs
  then 0 (* horrible style; fix later *)
  else if null (tl xs)
  then hd xs
  else if hd xs > bad_max (tl xs)
  then hd xs
  else bad_max (tl xs)

let x = bad_max [50,49,...,1]
let y = bad_max [1,2,...,50]
```
Fast vs. unusable

\[
\text{if } \text{hd } \text{xs} > \text{bad_max} \ (\text{tl } \text{xs}) \\
\text{then } \text{hd } \text{xs} \\
\text{else } \text{bad_max} \ (\text{tl } \text{xs})
\]
Math never lies

Suppose one `bad_max` call’s if-then-else logic and calls to `hd`, `null`, `tl` take $10^{-7}$ seconds

- Then `bad_max [50, 49, ..., 1]` takes $50 \times 10^{-7}$ seconds
- And `bad_max [1, 2, ..., 50]` takes $1.12 \times 10^8$ seconds
  - (over 3.5 years)
  - `bad_max [1, 2, ..., 55]` takes over 1 century
  - Buying a faster computer won’t help much 😊

The key is not to do repeated work that might do repeated work that might do…

- Saving recursive results in local bindings is essential…
fun good_max (xs : int list) =
  if null xs
  then 0 (* horrible style; fix later *)
  else if null (tl xs)
  then hd xs
  else
    let val tl_ans = good_max(tl xs)
    in
    if hd xs > tl_ans
    then hd xs
    else tl_ans
    end
Fast vs. fast

```
let val tl_ans = good_max(tl xs)
in
  if hd xs > tl_ans
  then hd xs
  else tl_ans
end
```
Options

• \texttt{t option} is a type for any type \texttt{t}
  – (much like \texttt{t list}, but a different type, not a list)

Building:
• \texttt{NONE} has type \texttt{'a option} (much like [] has type \texttt{'a list})
• \texttt{SOME e} has type \texttt{t option} if \texttt{e} has type \texttt{t} (much like \texttt{e::[]})

Accessing:
• \texttt{isSome} has type \texttt{'a option -> bool}
• \texttt{valOf} has type \texttt{'a option -> 'a} (exception if given \texttt{NONE})
Example

```haskell
fun better_max (xs : int list) =
  if null xs
  then NONE
  else
    let val tl_ans = better_max(tl xs)
    in
    if isSome tl_ans
       andalso valOf tl_ans > hd xs
    then tl_ans
    else SOME (hd xs)
    end

val better_max = fn : int list -> int option
```

- Nothing wrong with this, but as a matter of style might prefer not to do so much useless “valOf” in the recursion
fun better_max2 (xs : int list) = 
  if null xs 
  then NONE 
  else let (* ok to assume xs nonempty b/c local *)
    fun max_nonempty (xs : int list) = 
      if null (tl xs) 
      then hd xs 
      else 
        let val tl_ans = max_nonempty(tl xs) 
        in 
          if hd xs > tl_ans 
          then hd xs 
          else tl_ans 
        end 
    end 
  in 
    SOME (max_nonempty xs) 
  end
Cannot tell if you copy

In ML, these two implementations of `sort_pair` are indistinguishable
– But only because tuples are immutable
– The first is better style: simpler and avoids making a new pair in the then-branch
– In languages with mutable compound data, these are different!

```ml
fun sort_pair (pr : int * int) = 
  if #1 pr < #2 pr
  then pr
  else (#2 pr, #1 pr)

fun sort_pair (pr : int * int) = 
  if #1 pr < #2 pr
  then (#1 pr, #2 pr)
  else (#2 pr, #1 pr)
```
Suppose we had mutation…

```scala
val x = (3, 4)
val y = sort_pair x

somehow mutate #1 x to hold 5

val z = #1 y
```

- What is \( z \)?
  - Would depend on how we implemented `sort_pair`
    - Would have to decide carefully and document `sort_pair`
  - But without mutation, we can implement “either way”
    - No code can ever distinguish aliasing vs. identical copies
    - No need to think about aliasing: focus on other things
    - Can use aliasing, which saves space, without danger
An even better example

```plaintext
fun append (xs : int list, ys : int list) = 
  if null xs 
  then ys 
  else hd (xs) :: append (tl(xs), ys)
```

val x = [2,4]
val y = [5,3,0]
val z = append(x,y)

or

(\text{can’t tell, but it’s the first one})
ML vs. Imperative Languages

• In ML, we create aliases all the time without thinking about it because it is impossible to tell where there is aliasing
  – Example: \texttt{tl} is constant time; does not copy rest of the list
  – So don’t worry and focus on your algorithm

• In languages with mutable data (e.g., Java), programmers are obsessed with aliasing and object identity
  – They have to be (!) so that subsequent assignments affect the right parts of the program
  – Often crucial to make copies in just the right places
    • Consider a Java example…
Java security nightmare (bad code)

class ProtectedResource {
    private Resource theResource = ...;
    private String[] allowedUsers = ...;
    public String[] getAllowedUsers() {
        return allowedUsers;
    }
    public String currentUser() { ... }
    public void useTheResource() {
        for(int i=0; i < allowedUsers.length; i++) {
            if(currentUser().equals(allowedUsers[i])) {
                ... // access allowed: use it
                return;
            }
        }
        throw new IllegalAccessException();
    }
}
Have to make copies

The problem:

```java
public String[] getAllowedUsers() {
    ... return a copy of allowedUsers ... 
}
```

The fix:

```java
p.getAllowedUsers()[0] = p.currentUser();
p.useTheResource();
```

Reference (alias) vs. copy doesn’t matter if code is immutable!