Types

12 lectures for CST Part II by Andrew Pitts

⟨www.cl.cam.ac.uk/teaching/1617/Types/⟩

"One of the most helpful concepts in the whole of programming is the notion of type, used to classify the kinds of object which are manipulated. A significant proportion of programming mistakes are detected by an implementation which does type-checking before it runs any program. Types provide a taxonomy which helps people to think and to communicate about programs."

R. Milner, *Computing Tomorrow* (CUP, 1996), p264

"The fact that companies such as Microsoft, Google and Mozilla are investing heavily in systems programming languages with stronger type systems is not accidental – it is the result of decades of experience building and deploying complex systems written in languages with weak type systems."

T. Ball and B. Zorn, *Teach Foundational Language Principles*, Viewpoints, Comm. ACM (2014) 58(5) 30–31

Type systems channel TCS into PLs & Verification

Uses of type systems

- Detecting errors via *type-checking*, either statically (decidable errors detected before programs are executed) or dynamically (typing errors detected during program execution).

static = compile-time = decidable

dynamic = run-time = possibly undecidable

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e.g. types in { module interfaces / object classes

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type systems as checkable documentation of programmer intentions

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- Efficiency.

goes back to FORTRAN!

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- Abstraction and support for structuring large systems.
- Documentation.
- Efficiency.
- Whole-language safety.

PL "meta-theory" – properties of all legal progs
E.g. §4 of this course
Requires formal math / logic methods

Formal type systems

part of PL semantics

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Formal type systems

- Constitute the precise, mathematical characterisation of informal type systems (such as occur in the manuals of most typed languages.)
- Basis for *type soundness* theorems: "any well-typed program cannot produce run-time errors (of some specified kind)."
- Can decouple specification of typing aspects of a language from algorithmic concerns: the formal type system can define typing independently of particular implementations of type-checking algorithms.

Typical type system judgement

is a relation between typing environments (Γ), program phrases (e) and type expressions (τ) that we write as

$$\Gamma \vdash e : \tau$$

and read as: *given the assignment of types to free identifiers of* e *specified by type environment* Γ, *then* e *has type* τ.

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E.g.

$$f : int\ list \to int, b : bool \vdash (\texttt{if}\ b\ \texttt{then}\ f\ \texttt{nil}\ \texttt{else}\ 3) : int$$

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We consider *structural* type systems, in which there is a language of type expressions built up using type constructs (e.g. $int\, list \to int$ in ML).
(By contrast, in *nominal* type systems, type expressions are just unstructured names.)

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C/Java-style:

`bar foo`

Type checking, typeability, and type inference

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- *Type-checking* problem: given Γ, e, and τ, is $\Gamma \vdash e : \tau$ derivable in the type system?

- *Typeability* problem: given Γ and e, is there any τ for which $\Gamma \vdash e : \tau$ is derivable in the type system?

Solving the second problem usually involves devising a *type inference algorithm* computing a τ for each Γ and e (or failing, if there is none).

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Hence well-typed programs don't get stuck:

Safety. If $\Gamma \vdash e : \tau$, $dom(\Gamma) \subseteq dom(s)$ and $\langle e, s \rangle \to^* \langle e', s' \rangle$, then either e' is a value, or there exist e'', s'' such that $\langle e', s' \rangle \to \langle e'', s'' \rangle$.

Outline of the rest of the course

- **ML polymorphism.** Principal type schemes and type inference. [2]
- **Polymorphic reference types.** The pitfalls of combining ML polymorphism with reference types. [1]
- **Polymorphic lambda calculus (PLC).** Explicit versus implicitly typed languages. PLC syntax and reduction semantics. Examples of datatypes definable in the polymorphic lambda calculus. [3]
- **Dependent types.** Dependent function types. Pure type systems. System F-omega. [2]
- **Propositions as types.** Example of a non-constructive proof. The Curry-Howard correspondence between intuitionistic second-order propositional calculus and PLC. The calculus of Constructions. Inductive types. [3]

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- *Parametric polymorphism* (*generics*): same expression belongs to a family of structurally related types.
  E.g. in Standard ML, length function

$$\begin{array}{lllll} \texttt{fun} & \mathit{length}\,\texttt{nil} & = & 0 \\ \;\;| & \mathit{length}\,(x :: xs) & = & 1 + (\mathit{length}\,xs) \end{array}$$

  has type $\tau\ \mathit{list} \to \mathit{int}$ for all types τ.

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we introduce *type variables* α (i.e. variables for which types may be substituted) and write

$$\textit{length} : \forall\alpha\ (\alpha\ \textit{list} \to \textit{int}).$$

$\forall\alpha\ (\alpha\ \textit{list} \to \textit{int})$ is an example of a *type scheme*.

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For example in

$$\texttt{let}\ f = \lambda x\,(x)\ \texttt{in}\ (f\ \texttt{true}) :: (f\ \texttt{nil})$$

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in $(f\ \texttt{true})$, f has type $bool \to bool$

in $(f\ \texttt{nil})$, f has type $bool\ list \to bool\ list$

Overall, the expression has type $bool\ list$.

Forms of hypothesis in typing judgements

- *Ad hoc* (overloading):

  if $f : \mathit{bool} \to \mathit{bool}$
  and $f : \mathit{bool}\,\mathit{list} \to \mathit{bool}\,\mathit{list}$,
  then $(f\;\mathtt{true}) :: (f\;\mathtt{nil}) : \mathit{bool}\,\mathit{list}$.

  Appropriate for expressions that have different behaviour at different types.

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- *Parametric*:

  if $f : \forall\alpha\,(\alpha \rightarrow \alpha)$,
  then $(f\ \mathtt{true}) :: (f\ \mathtt{nil}) : bool\,list$.

  Appropriate if expression behaviour is uniform for different type instantiations.

ML uses parametric hypotheses (type schemes) in its typing judgements.

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- M is a Mini-ML expression
- τ is a Mini-ML type.