

CSE341: Programming Languages

Lecture 6 Nested Patterns Exceptions Tail Recursion

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Nested patterns

- We can nest patterns as deep as we want
 - Just like we can nest expressions as deep as we want
 - Often avoids hard-to-read, wordy nested case expressions
- So the full meaning of pattern-matching is to compare a pattern against a value for the “same shape” and bind variables to the “right parts”
 - More precise recursive definition coming after examples

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2

Useful example: zip/unzip 3 lists

```
fun zip3 lists =  
  case lists of  
    ([],[],[]) => []  
  | (hd1::t11,hd2::t12,hd3::t13) =>  
    (hd1,hd2,hd3)::zip3(t11,t12,t13)  
  | _ => raise ListLengthMismatch  
  
fun unzip3 triples =  
  case triples of  
    [] => ([],[],[])  
  | (a,b,c)::tl =>  
    let val (l1, l2, l3) = unzip3 tl  
    in  
      (a::l1,b::l2,c::l3)  
    end  
  end
```

More examples in `.sml` files

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3

Style

- Nested patterns can lead to very elegant, concise code
 - Avoid nested case expressions if nested patterns are simpler and avoid unnecessary branches or let-expressions
 - Example: `unzip3` and `nondecreasing`
 - A common idiom is matching against a tuple of datatypes to compare them
 - Examples: `zip3` and `multisign`
- Wildcards are good style: use them instead of variables when you do not need the data
 - Examples: `len` and `multisign`

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4

(Most of) the full definition

The [semantics](#) for pattern-matching takes a pattern p and a value v and decides (1) does it match and (2) if so, what variable bindings are introduced.

Since patterns can nest, the [definition is elegantly recursive](#), with a separate rule for each kind of pattern. Some of the rules:

- If p is a variable x , the match succeeds and x is bound to v
- If p is $_$, the match succeeds and no bindings are introduced
- If p is $(p1, \dots, pn)$ and v is $(v1, \dots, vn)$, the match succeeds if and only if $p1$ matches $v1$, ..., pn matches vn . The bindings are the union of all bindings from the submatches
- If p is $C p1$, the match succeeds if v is $C v1$ (i.e., the same constructor) and $p1$ matches $v1$. The bindings are the bindings from the submatch.
- ... (there are several other similar forms of patterns)

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5

Examples

- Pattern `a::b::c::d` matches all lists with ≥ 3 elements
- Pattern `a::b::c::[]` matches all lists with 3 elements
- Pattern `((a,b),(c,d))::e` matches all non-empty lists of pairs of pairs

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6

Exceptions

An exception binding introduces a new kind of exception

```
exception MyUndesirableCondition
exception MyOtherException of int * int
```

The `raise` primitive raises (a.k.a. throws) an exception

```
raise MyUndesirableException
raise (MyOtherException (7,9))
```

A `handle` expression can handle (a.k.a. catch) an exception

– If doesn't match, exception continues to propagate

```
e1 handle MyUndesirableException => e2
e1 handle MyOtherException(x,y) => e2
```

Actually...

Exceptions are a lot like datatype constructors...

- Declaring an exception adds a constructor for type `exn`
- Can pass values of `exn` anywhere (e.g., function arguments)
 - Not too common to do this but can be useful
- `handle` can have multiple branches with patterns for type `exn`

Recursion

Should now be comfortable with recursion:

- No harder than using a loop (whatever that is ☺)
- Often much easier than a loop
 - When processing a tree (e.g., evaluate an arithmetic expression)
 - Examples like appending lists
 - Avoids mutation even for local variables
- Now:
 - How to reason about *efficiency* of recursion
 - The importance of *tail recursion*
 - Using an *accumulator* to achieve tail recursion
 - [No new language features here]

Call-stacks

While a program runs, there is a *call stack* of function calls that have started but not yet returned

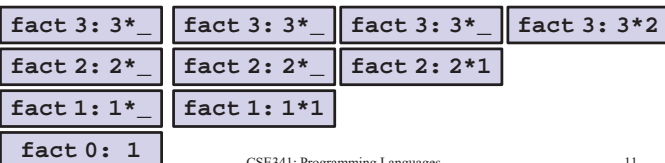
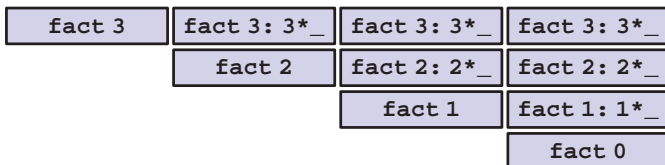
- Calling a function `f` pushes an instance of `f` on the stack
- When a call to `f` finishes, it is popped from the stack

These stack-frames store information like the value of local variables and “what is left to do” in the function

Due to recursion, multiple stack-frames may be calls to the same function

Example

```
fun fact n = if n=0 then 1 else n*fact(n-1)
val x = fact 3
```

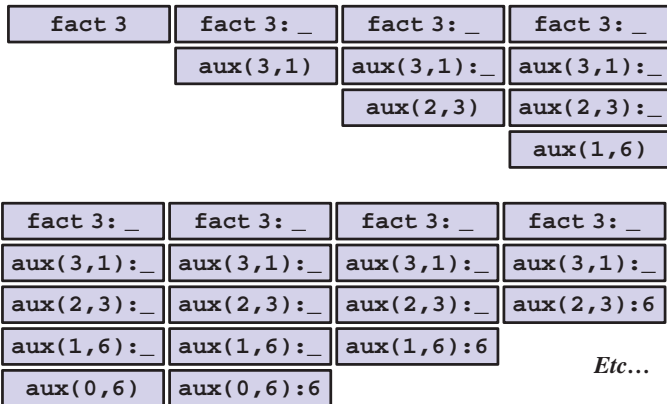


Example Revised

```
fun fact n =
  let fun aux(n,acc) =
        if n=0
        then acc
        else aux(n-1,acc*n)
      in
        aux(n,1)
      end
  val x = fact 3
```

Still recursive, more complicated, but the result of recursive calls *is* the result for the caller (no remaining multiplication)

The call-stacks



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13

An optimization

It is unnecessary to keep around a stack-frame just so it can get a callee's result and return it without any further evaluation

ML recognizes these *tail calls* in the compiler and treats them differently:

- Pop the caller *before* the call, allowing callee to *reuse* the same stack space
- (Along with other optimizations,) as efficient as a loop

Reasonable to assume all functional-language implementations do tail-call optimization

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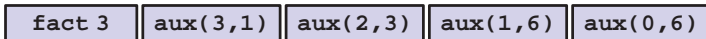
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14

What really happens

```

fun fact n =
  let fun aux(n,acc) =
        if n=0
        then acc
        else aux(n-1,acc*n)
      in
        aux(n,1)
      end
  val x = fact 3
  
```



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15

Moral of tail recursion

- Where reasonably elegant, feasible, and important, rewriting functions to be *tail-recursive* can be much more efficient
 - Tail-recursive: recursive calls are tail-calls
- There is a *methodology* that can often guide this transformation:
 - Create a helper function that takes an *accumulator*
 - Old base case becomes initial accumulator
 - New base case becomes final accumulator

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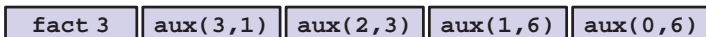
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16

Methodology already seen

```

fun fact n =
  let fun aux(n,acc) =
        if n=0
        then acc
        else aux(n-1,acc*n)
      in
        aux(n,1)
      end
  val x = fact 3
  
```



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17

Another example

```

fun sum xs =
  case xs of
    [] => 0
  | x::xs' => x + sum xs'
  
```

```

fun sum xs =
  let fun aux(xs,acc) =
        case xs of
          [] => acc
        | x::xs' => aux(xs',x+acc)
      in
        aux(xs,0)
      end
  
```

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18

And another

```
fun rev xs =
  case xs of
    [] => []
  | x::xs' => (rev xs') @ [x]
```

```
fun rev xs =
  let fun aux(xs,acc) =
        case xs of
          [] => acc
        | x::xs' => aux(xs',x::acc)
      in
        aux(xs,[])
      end
```

Actually much better

```
fun rev xs =
  case xs of
    [] => []
  | x::xs' => (rev xs') @ [x]
```

- For `fact` and `sum`, tail-recursion is faster but both ways linear time
- Non-tail recursive `rev` is quadratic because each recursive call uses `append`, which must traverse the first list
 - And $1+2+\dots+(\text{length}-1)$ is almost $\text{length}^2/2$
 - Moral: beware list-append, especially within outer recursion
- Cons constant-time (and fast), so accumulator version much better

Always tail-recursive?

There are certainly cases where recursive functions cannot be evaluated in a constant amount of space

Most obvious examples are functions that process trees

In these cases, the natural recursive approach is the way to go

- You could get one recursive call to be a tail call, but rarely worth the complication

Also beware the wrath of premature optimization

- Favor clear, concise code
- But do use less space if inputs may be large

What is a tail-call?

The “nothing left for caller to do” intuition usually suffices

- If the result of $\text{f } x$ is the “immediate result” for the enclosing function body, then $\text{f } x$ is a tail call

But we can define “tail position” recursively

- Then a “tail call” is a function call in “tail position”

...

Precise definition

A *tail call* is a function call in *tail position*

- If an expression is not in tail position, then no subexpressions are
- In `fun f p = e`, the body `e` is in tail position
- If `if e1 then e2 else e3` is in tail position, then `e2` and `e3` are in tail position (but `e1` is not). (Similar for case-expressions)
- If `let b1 ... bn in e end` is in tail position, then `e` is in tail position (but no binding expressions are)
- Function-call *arguments* `e1 e2` are not in tail position
- ...