CSE 341: Programming Languages

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Lecture 25— Static Overloading; Subtype vs. Parametric Polymorphism; Bounded Quantification

Static Overloading

Many OO languages allow methods in the same class to have the same "name" but different argument types. E.g.:

```
void show(Window w)  ...
void show(DancingBear db) ...
float distTo(Point p) ...
float distTo(3DPoint p) ...
```

This complicates slightly the semantics of message send. As before, we:

- Use the class ("run-time type") of the receiver to pick a method.
- Call the method with the receiver bound to `self`.

But now there are multiple methods with the same name, so we:

- Use the *(compile-time) types* of the arguments to pick the "best match".

A lower-level view

Here's an equivalent way to think about it:

- A method's *name* includes the types of its "formal" arguments (e.g., `show$Window`)
- A message send is rewritten with the types of its "actual" arguments after typechecking (e.g., `show(e)` becaomes `show$Window(e)` if `e` has type `Window`.

This seems like an "ugly" view, but:

- It's exactly how static overloading is implemented.
- It suggests static overloading is not very "interesting", just convenient.

But... It interacts poorly with contravariant subtyping on method argument-types, which (I believe) is why Java and C++ use invariant subtyping there.

Static Overloading vs. Multimethods

A very simple difference: Multimethods choose the method at run-time using the class of the actuals.

Example: `e.distTo((Point)(new 3DPoint(3.0,4.0,2.0)))`

The same "no best match" errors arise, but with overloading they arise at compile-time (and can be resolved with explicit subsumption).

Static Typing and Code Reuse

Key idea: Scheme and Smalltalk are different but not *that* different:

- Scheme has arbitrarily nested lexical scope (so does Smalltalk, but only within a method)
- Smalltalk has subclassing and dynamic dispatch (but easy to code up what you need in Scheme)

Java and ML are a bit more different:

- ML has datatypes; Java has classes
- The ML default is immutable
- Java does not have first-class functions (but does have anonymous inner classes)

But the key difference is the *type system*: Java has subtyping; ML has parametric polymorphism (e.g., `('a * ('a -> 'b)) -> 'b`).

What are "forall" types good for?

Some good uses for forall types:

- Combining functions:

```
(* (('a->'b)*('b->'c)) -> ('a->'c) *)
let compose (f,g) x = g (f x)
```

- Operating on generic container types:

```
isempty : ('a list) -> bool
map : (('a list) * ('a -> 'b)) -> 'b list
```

- Passing private data (unnecessary with closures):

```
(* ('a * (('a * string) -> int)) -> int *)
let f (env, g) =
   let val s1 = getString(37)
       val s2 = getString(49)
   in g(env,s1) + g(env,s2) end
```

More on private data

```
(* ('a * (('a * string) -> int)) -> int *)
let f (env, g) =
   let val s1 = getString(37)
       val s2 = getString(49)
   in g(env,s1) + g(env,s2) end
```

The last point is important in safe, lower-level languages (related to my research), but is unnecessary in ML or Java:

- In ML, just use `(string->int) -> int` and have the caller "pass the `'a`" via a closure (a free variable in the function passed in.
  - This works because the types of free variables do not appear in a function type
- In Java, just "pass the `'a`" as a field in the object that implements the interface.
  - This works because subtyping lets us "forget" we have fields.

What is subtyping good for?

- Passing in values with "extra" or "more useful" stuff

```
bool isXPos(Pt p) { p.x > 0; } // works fine for a Pt3D
```

But in ML, we end up *encoding coercive subtyping* using regular ML functions that build new values:

```
type pt = { x : real, y : real}
type pt3D = { x : real, y : real, z : real }
fun isXPos (p:pt) = (#x p) > 0.0
val p3:pt3D = { x=4.0, y=3.0, z=5.0}
fun pt (p:pt3D) = { x=(#x p), y=(#y p)}
val _ = isXPos ((pt) p3)
```

What else is subtyping good for?

In addition to adding "public" fields, we can use it for private state:

```
interface I { int f(int); }
class MaxEver implements I {
   int m = 0;
   int f(int i) {
      if(i > m)
        i = m;
      return m;
   }
}
```

In ML, we *encode* private state using closures.

Wanting both

Could one language support subtype polymorphism and parametric polymorphism?

- Sure; and the next generation of OO languages will
- C++ templates are sort of like parametric polymorphism, but they duplicate code, so they're a bit like macros

More interestingly, you may want *both at once*!

```
Pt withXZero(Pt p) { return new P(0,p.y); }
```

How could we make a version that worked for subtypes too?

Bounded Quantification

Here's an excellent start:

```
interface I { Pt copy(Pt p); }
Pt withXZero(Pt p, I i) {
  Pt ans = i.copy(p); ans.x = 0; return ans;
}
```

But consider using it for a `Pt3D`:

- copy method will have to downcast argument.
- user of `withXZero` will have to downcast result.

Enter *bounded quantification*:

```
interface I<'a> { 'a copy('a p); }
'a withXZero('a p, I<'a> i) where 'a <: Pt {
  'a ans = i.copy(p); ans.x = 0; return ans;
}
```

How did that work?

- No downcasts.
- Without the bound, `ans.x` would not typecheck.
- At call-sites of `withXZero`, just check the instantiation for `'a` is a subtype of `Pt`

In general, in a language with subtyping (`t1<:t2`) and parametric polymorphism, a useful generalization of `forall 'a. t` is `forall 'a<:t1 . t2`. This allows fewer instantiations for `'a`.

Advanced point: When is `forall 'a<:t1. t2` a subtype of `forall 'a<:t3. t4`.

- Sound answer: contravariant bounds; covariant body.
- But that answer makes the subtyping question (for any two types, is one a subtype of the other) undecidable! (1992 result)
- A common restriction in practice is invariant bounds.