CSE 341 : Programming Languages

Lecture 6

Fancy 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

Useful example: zip/unzip 3 lists

```
fun zip3 lists =
   case lists of
        ([],[],[]) => []
      | (hd1::tl1,hd2::tl2,hd3::tl3) =>
             (hd1,hd2,hd3)::zip3(tl1,tl2,tl3)
      | _ => 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
```

More examples to come (see code files)

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 **`multsign`**
- Wildcards are good style: use them instead of variables when you do not need the data
  - Examples: **`len`** and **`multsign`**

(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,…,pn)* and *v* is *(v1,…,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)

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

Exceptions

An exception binding introduces a new kind of exception

```
exception MyFirstException
exception MySecondException of int * int
```

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

```
raise MyFirstException
raise (MySecondException(7,9))
```

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

- If doesn't match, exception continues to propagate

```
e1 handle MyFirstException => e2
e1 handle MySecondException(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

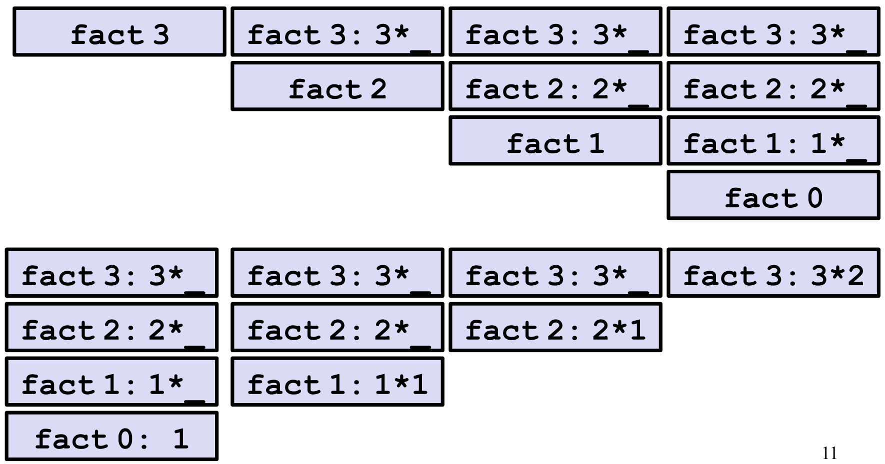
- Calling a function **f** pushes an instance of **f** on the stack
- When a call to **f** finishes, it is popped from the stack

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
```



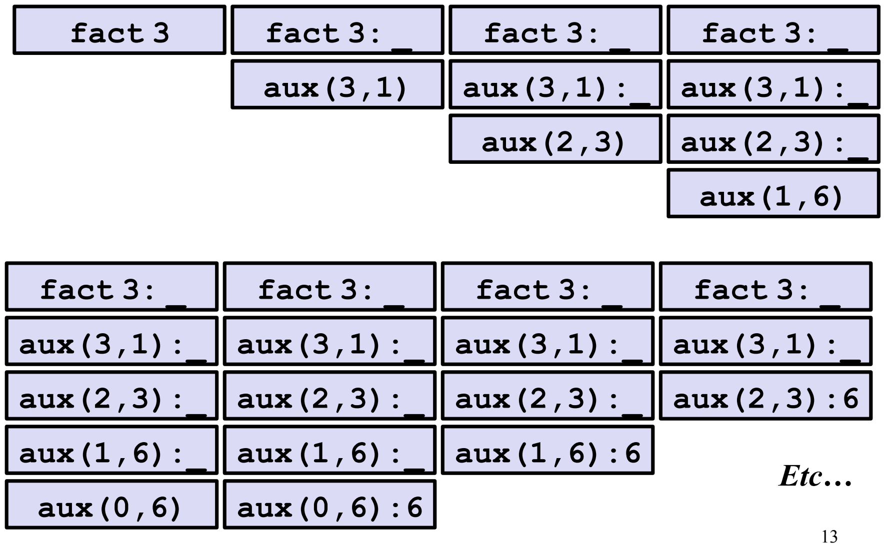
Example Revised

```
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



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

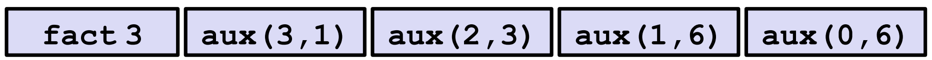
– (Along with other optimizations,) as efficient as a loop

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

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
```



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

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
```

fact 3	aux(3,1)	aux(2,3)	aux(1,6)	aux(0,6)

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
```


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+…+(length-1) is almost length*length/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 **`f x`** is the "immediate result" for the enclosing function body, then **`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
- …