PAUL G. ALLEN SCHOOL
OF COMPUTER SCIENCE & ENGINEERING

CSE341: Programming Languages

Lecture 12
Equivalence

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Last Topic of Unit

More careful look at what "two pieces of code are equivalent" means

- Fundamental software-engineering idea

- Made easier with
  - Abstraction (hiding things)
  - Fewer side effects

Not about any "new ways to code something up"

Equivalence

Must reason about "are these equivalent" *all the time*

– The more precisely you think about it the better

- *Code maintenance:* Can I simplify this code?
- *Backward compatibility:* Can I add new features without changing how any old features work?
- *Optimization:* Can I make this code faster?
- *Abstraction:* Can an external client tell I made this change?

To focus discussion: When can we say two functions are equivalent, even without looking at all calls to them?

– May not know all the calls (e.g., we are editing a library)

A definition

Two functions are equivalent if they have the same “observable behavior” no matter how they are used anywhere in any program

Given equivalent arguments, they:

- Produce equivalent results
- Have the same (non-)termination behavior
- Mutate (non-local) memory in the same way
- Do the same input/output
- Raise the same exceptions

Notice it is much easier to be equivalent if:

- There are fewer possible arguments, e.g., with a type system and abstraction
- We avoid *side-effects*: mutation, input/output, and exceptions

Example

Since looking up variables in ML has no side effects, these two functions are equivalent:

```
fun f x = x + x
```

$=$

```
val y = 2
fun f x = y * x
```

But these next two are not equivalent in general: it depends on what is passed for `f`

- Are equivalent *if* argument for `f` has no side-effects

```
fun g (f,x) =
    (f x) + (f x)
```

$\neq$

```
val y = 2
fun g (f,x) =
    y * (f x)
```

- Example: `g ((fn i => print "hi" ; i), 7)`
- Great reason for "pure" functional programming

Another example

These are equivalent *only if* functions bound to **`g`** and **`h`** do not raise exceptions or have side effects (printing, updating state, etc.)

– Again: pure functions make more things equivalent

```
fun f x =
    let
      val y = g x
      val z = h x
    in
      (y,z)
    end
```

$\neq$

```
fun f x =
    let
      val z = h x
      val y = g x
    in
      (y,z)
    end
```

– Example: **`g`** divides by **`0`** and **`h`** mutates a top-level reference
– Example: **`g`** writes to a reference that **`h`** reads from

Syntactic sugar

Using or not using syntactic sugar is always equivalent

– By definition, else not syntactic sugar

Example:

```
fun f x =
    x andalso g x
```

$=$

```
fun f x =
    if x
    then g x
    else false
```

But be careful about evaluation order

```
fun f x =
    x andalso g x
```

$\neq$

```
fun f x =
    if g x
    then x
    else false
```

Standard equivalences

Three general equivalences that always work for functions

- In any (?) decent language

1. Consistently rename bound variables and uses

```
val y = 14
fun f x = x+y+x
```

=

```
val y = 14
fun f z = z+y+z
```

But notice you can't use a variable name already used in the function body to refer to something else

```
val y = 14
fun f x = x+y+x
```

≠

```
val y = 14
fun f y = y+y+y
```

```
fun f x =
  let val y = 3
  in x+y end
```

≠

```
fun f y =
  let val y = 3
  in y+y end
```

Standard equivalences

Three general equivalences that always work for functions

- In (any?) decent language

2. Use a helper function or do not

```
val y = 14
fun g z = (z+y+z)+z
```

$=$

```
val y = 14
fun f x = x+y+x
fun g z = (f z)+z
```

But notice you need to be careful about environments

```
val y = 14
val y = 7
fun g z = (z+y+z)+z
```

$\neq$

```
val y = 14
fun f x = x+y+x
val y = 7
fun g z = (f z)+z
```

Standard equivalences

Three general equivalences that always work for functions

- In (any?) decent language

3. Unnecessary function wrapping

```
fun f x = x+x
fun g y = f y
```

$=$

```
fun f x = x+x
val g = f
```

But notice that if you compute the function to call and *that computation* has side-effects, you have to be careful

```
fun f x = x+x
fun h () = (print "hi";
            f)
fun g y = (h()) y
```

$\neq$

```
fun f x = x+x
fun h () = (print "hi";
            f)
val g = (h())
```

One more

If we ignore types, then ML let-bindings can be syntactic sugar for calling an anonymous function:

```
let val x = e1
in e2 end
```

```
(fn x => e2) e1
```

- These both evaluate **`e1`** to **`v1`**, then evaluate **`e2`** in an environment extended to map **`x`** to **`v1`**
- So *exactly* the same evaluation of expressions and result

But in ML, there is a type-system difference:

- **`x`** on the left can have a polymorphic type, but not on the right
- Can always go from right to left
- If **`x`** need not be polymorphic, can go from left to right

What about performance?

According to our definition of equivalence, these two functions are equivalent, but we learned one is awful

– (Actually we studied this before pattern-matching)

```
fun max xs =
  case xs of
    [] => raise Empty
  | x::[] => x
  | x::xs' =>
      if x > max xs'
      then x
      else max xs'
```

```
fun max xs =
  case xs of
    [] => raise Empty
  | x::[] => x
  | x::xs' =>
     let
       val y = max xs'
     in
       if x > y
       then x
       else y
     end
```

Different definitions for different jobs

- PL Equivalence (341): given same inputs, same outputs and effects
  - Good: Lets us replace bad **`max`** with good **`max`**
  - Bad: Ignores performance in the extreme
- Asymptotic equivalence (332): Ignore constant factors
  - Good: Focus on the algorithm and efficiency for large inputs
  - Bad: Ignores "four times faster"
- Systems equivalence (333): Account for constant overheads, performance tune
  - Good: Faster means different and better
  - Bad: Beware overtuning on "wrong" (e.g., small) inputs; definition does not let you "swap in a different algorithm"

Claim: Computer scientists implicitly (?) use all three every (?) day