CSE 505: Concepts of Programming Languages

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Lecture 16

Advanced Concepts in Object-Oriented Programming

So far...

The difference between OOP and “records of functions with shared private state” is *dynamic-dispatch* (a.k.a. *late-binding*) of `self`.

We (informally) defined *method-lookup* to implement dynamic-dispatch correctly (using run-time tags or code-pointers).

We hurriedly investigated the difference between subclassing and subtyping.

Then fancy stuff: multiple-inheritance, interfaces, overloading, multiple dispatch.

Next lecture: Bounded polymorphism and classless OOP

Type-Safety in OOP

I forgot to emphasize what type-safety means. . .

- “Not getting stuck” has meant “don’t apply numbers”, “don’t add functions”, “don’t read non-existent record fields”, etc.
- In pure OO, we have only method calls (and maybe field access)
  - Stuck if method-lookup fails (no method matches)
  - Stuck if method-lookup is ambiguous (no best match)

  So far, we have only failure because no method of the right name.

Subclassing vs. Subtyping

Recall:

- Many languages have subclassing *equals* subtyping: $C \leq D$ iff C (reflexively/transitively) extends D
- More powerful subtyping is sound, e.g., $C \leq D$ if C has every field/method D does at an appropriate type.
  - With our restrictions on subclassing, we have subclassing *implies* subtyping.
- We can also allow subclasses that are *not* subtypes, exposing a key issue in OOP...

Subclass not a subtype

```
class P1 {
  Int x;
  Int get_x() { x }
  Bool compare(P1 p) { self.get_x() == p.get_x() }
}
class P2 extends P1 {
  Int y;
  Int get_y() { y }
  Bool compare(P2 p) { self.get_x() == p.get_x() &&
                       self.get_y() == p.get_y() }
}
```

- Allowing P2$\leq$P1 is *unsound*!

Subclass not a subtype

- But we can still inherit implementation (need not reimplement `get_x`).
- We cannot always do this (what if `get_x` called `self.compare`)? Possible solutions:
  - Re-typecheck `get_x` in subclass
  - Use a RFTS (Really Fancy Type System)
  - Don't override `compare`

Personally, I see little use in allowing subclassing that is not subtyping. But I see much use in understanding that typing is about interfaces and inheritance is about code-sharing. Confusing them restricts both.

Multiple Inheritance

Why not allow `class C extends C1,C2,...{...}`
(and C$\leq$C1 and C$\leq$C2)?

What everyone agrees on: C++ has it and Java doesn't.

All we'll do: Understand a couple basic problems it introduces and how interfaces get most of the good and little of the bad.

Problem sources:

- Class hierarchy is a dag, not a tree (not true with interfaces).
- Subtype hierarchy is a dag, not a tree (true with interfaces).

Multiple Inheritance, Method-Name Clash

If C extends $C1$ and $C2$ which both define a method m, what does C mean? Possibilities:

1. Reject declaration of C. (Too restrictive with diamonds – see next slide)
2. Require C to override m. (No help if types are incompatible.)
3. "Left-side" ($C1$) wins. (Must decide if upcast to "right-side" ($C2$) coerces to use $C2$'s m or not.)
4. C gets both methods. (Now upcasts definitely coercive and with diamonds we lose coherence.)
5. Other (I'm just brainstorming based on sound principles)?

Diamond Issues

If C extends $C1$ and $C2$ and $C1$,$C2$ have a common superclass D (perhaps transitively), our class hierarchy has a diamond.

- If D has a field f, should C have one field f or two?
- If D has a method m, $C1$ and $C2$ will have a clash.
- If subsumption is coercive (changing method-lookup), how we subsume from C to D affects run-time behavior (incoherent).

Diamonds are common, largely because of types like `Object` with methods like `equals`.

Implementation Issues

This isn't an implementation course, but many semantic issues regarding multiple inheritance have been heavily influenced by clever implementations. In particular, accessing members of `self` via compile-time offsets.

Won't work with multiple inheritance unless upcasts "adjust" the `self` pointer.

That's one reason C++ has different kinds of casts.

Better to think semantically first (how should subsumption affect the behavior of method-lookup) and implementation-wise second (what can I optimize based on the class/type hierarchy)

Digression: Casts

A "cast" can mean many things (cf. C++).

At the language level:

- upcast (no run-time effect)
- downcast (run-time failure is defined or undefined?)
- conversion (key question is round-tripping)
- "reinterpret bits" (not well-defined)

At the implementation level:

- upcast (usually no run-time effect but see last slide)
- downcast (usually only run-time effect is failure, but...)
- conversion (same as at language level)
- "reinterpret bits" (no effect by definition)

Least Supertypes

Consider `if` e_1 `then` e_2 `else` e_3 (or in C++/Java, e_1 ? e_2 : e_3). We know e_2 and e_3 must have the same type.

With subtyping, they just need a common supertype. And we should pick the least (most-specific) type. With single inheritance, it's the closest common ancestor in the class-hierarchy tree.

With multiple inheritance, there may be no least common supertype. (Example: $C1$ extends $D1, D2$ and $C2$ extends $D1, D2$)

Solutions: Reject or require explicit casts.

Multiple Inheritance Summary

- Method clashes (what does inheriting m mean)
- Diamond issues (coherence issues, shared (?) fields)
- Implementation issues (slower method-lookup)
- Least supertypes (may be ambiguous)

Complicated constructs lead to difficult language design.

Now we will develop interfaces and see how (and how not) multiple interfaces are simpler than multiple inheritance.

Interfaces

An interface is *just a (named) (object) type*. Example:

```
interface I { Int get_x(); Bool compare(I); }
```

A class can *implement* an interface. Example:

```
class C implements I {
  Int x;
  Int get_x() {x}
  Bool compare(I i) {...} // note argument type!
}
```

If C implements I, then $C \leq I$.

Requiring *explicit* "implements" hinders extensibility, but simplifies type-checking (a little).

Basically, C implements I if C could extend a class with all *abstract* methods from I.

Interfaces, continued

Subinterfaces (`interface J extends I { ...}`) work exactly as subtyping suggests they should.

An unnecessary (?) addition to a language with abstract classes and multiple inheritance, but what about single inheritance and multiple interfaces:

```
class C extends D implements I1,I2,...,In
```

- Method clashes (no problem, inherit from D)
- Diamond issues (no problem, no implementation diamond — interfaces have no run-time effect)
- Implementation issues (still a "problem", different object of type I will have different layouts)
- Least supertypes (still a problem, this *is* a typing issue)

Using Interfaces

Although it requires more keystrokes, it may make sense (be more extensible) to:

- Use interface types for all fields and variables.
- Don't use constructors directly
  (for class C implementing I, write:
  `I makeI(...)  { new C(...)  }`.

This is related to "factory patterns"; constructors are behind a level of indirection.

It is using named object-types instead of class-based types. Next lecture we'll consider OO with no classes and only unnamed object-types.

Static Overloading

So far, we have assumed every method had a different name (same name implied overriding and required a subtype).

Many OO languages allow the same name for methods with *different argument types*:

```
A f(B x) { ... }
C f(D x, E y) { ... }
F f(G x, H z) { ... }
```

Complicates definition of method-lookup for `e1.m(e2,...,en)`

Previously, we had dynamic-dispatch on `e1`: method-lookup a function of the *run-time type* of the object `e1` evaluates to.

We now have *static overloading*: Method-lookup is *also* a function of the *compile-time types* of `e2,...,en`.

Static Overloading Continued

Because of subtyping, multiple methods can match!

"Best-match" can be roughly "subsume fewest arguments. For a tie, allow subsumption to *immediate* supertypes and recur"

Ambiguities remain (no best match):

- `A f(B)` vs. `C f(B)` (usually rejected)
- `A f(I)` vs. `A f(J)` for `f(e)` where `e` has type T, $T \leq I$, $T \leq J$ and I,J are incomparable (We saw this before)
- `A f(B,C)` vs. `A f(C,B)` for `f(e1,e2)` where $B \leq C$, and `e1` and `e2` have type B

Type systems often reject ambiguous calls or use *ad hoc* rules to give a best match (e.g., "left-argument precedence")

Multiple Dispatch

Static overloading saves keystrokes from shorter method-names, but we know the compile-time types of arguments at call-sites, so we could call methods with different names.

Multiple (dynamic) dispatch (a.k.a. multimethods) is much more interesting: Method-lookup a function of the run-time types of arguments.

It's a natural generalization: the "receiver" argument is no longer treated differently!

So `e1.m(e2,...,en)` is just sugar for `m(e1,e2,...,en)`. (It wasn't before, e.g., when `e1` is `self` and may be a subtype!)

Example

```
class A { int f; }
class B extends A { int g; }
Bool compare(A x, A y) { x.f == y.f }
Bool compare(B x, B y) { x.f == y.f && x.g == y.g }
Bool f(A x, A y, A z) { compare(x,y) && compare(y,z) }
```

Neat: late-binding for both arguments to `compare` (choose second method if both arguments are subtypes of B, else first method).

With power comes danger. Tricky question: Can we add "`&& compare(x,z)`" to body of `f` and have an equivalent function?

- With static overloading?
- With multiple dispatch?

Pragmatics

Not clear where multimethods should be defined — no longer "everything in a class"

So multimethods are "more OO" because "more late-binding" but "less OO" because less "receiver-oriented".

Multimethods can be added to Java (UWCSE PhD 2003), but work well (better?) in a classless OO language.

Several languages have multimethods and several are from UW.

Revenge of Ambiguity

The "no best match" issues with static overloading exist with multimethods and ambiguities arise at run-time. It's undecidable if "no best match" will happen:

```
A f(B,C) {...} // B <= C
A f(C,B) {...}
unit g(C a, C b) { f(a,b); /* may be ambiguous */ }
```

Possible solutions:

- Raise exception when no best match
- Define "best match" such that it always exists (Dylan?)
- Reject at compile-time methods that do not have a "best match" for all possible argument types

Summary so far

Quickly sketched many advanced issues in class-based OOP:

- multiple inheritance (thorny semantics)
- interfaces (less thorny, but no least supertypes)
- static overloading (reuse method names, get ambiguities)
- multimethods (generalizes late-binding, ambiguities remain)

But there's still no good way to define a container type (e.g., homogeneous lists).