Direct Reflection for Free!

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Basic terminology

When we write an interpreter or a compiler, we are dealing with two languages:

- **Metalanguage**: the language in which the interpreter/compiler is implemented.
- **Object language**: the input language of the generated interpreter/compiler.
Metaprogramming

Homogeneous
(same language)

Heterogeneous
(different languages)
  e.g. C preprocessor

Generative
(putting together)
  Strings (JavaScript’s `eval`)
  ADTs (Template Haskell)
  Quasiquotation (Lisp, Haskell, Idris)

Intensional
(taking apart data types and functions)
Problem statement

• Implementing metaprogramming systems, when writing a compiler/interpreter, is difficult. Especially with languages in development, any change in the language will require a lot of work to keep the metaprogramming parts up to date.

• Until recently, we did not have a convincing way to automatically add homogeneous generative metaprogramming to an existing language definition, now we do thanks to "Modelling Homogeneous Generative Meta-Programming" by Berger, Tratt and Urban (ECOOP'17)

However, their one-size-fits-all method requires the addition of a new constructor to the AST to represent ASTs. And the addition of "tags" as well.

• We still do not have a convincing way to automatically add homogeneous generative metaprogramming to an existing language implementation.
My solution

• To find an appropriate representation of ASTs of an object language inside that language. We can pick a different representation for each language.

• To use Haskell and take advantage of the generic programming techniques to automatically add metaprogramming to an existing language implementation.

• In other words, I want to use the intensional metaprogramming of the meta language to automatically create a generative metaprogramming system for the object language.
Peirce's triangle of signs

Symbol
(the physical sign itself, representamen)

Object
(the referred object, referent)

Sense
(the thought/sense made out of it, interpretant)

STOP
stop rule

"I should stop here."
Peirce's triangle of signs, with a twist

Symbol | Object | A value | Metalanguage term that represents it

Sense | (in a language implementation)

inspired from James Noble and Kumiko Tanaka-Ishii
The language implementation triangle

A value
the mathematical value
red

Meta language term
that represents it
Red
(in meta language)

Object language term
that represents it

Red
(if our object language
has algebraic data types)

\(\lambda r.\lambda g.\lambda b. r\)
(if our object language
is untyped \(\lambda\)-calculus)

\(\text{inl}()\)
(if our object language
is typed \(\lambda\)-calculus
with sums and products)
The language implementation triangle

A value
the string hello

Meta language term
that represents it
"hello"
(in meta language)

Object language term
that represents it
"hello"
(if our object language
has strings)

any other representation
our object language supports
Peirce's triangle of signs, with another twist

Symbol | Sense | Object
--- | --- | ---
| | | 

Term in the object language

AST representing that term in the meta language

Reflection of that term in the object language

(in a language implementation)
The metaprogramming implementation triangle

**Term in the object language**
"hello"
(in object language)

**AST representing that term in the meta language**
StrLit "hello"
(in meta language)

**Reflection of that term in the object language**
StrLit "hello"
(in object language)
A value
the string hello

Meta language term
that represents it
"hello"
(in meta language)

Reflection of the reflected term
in the meta language

AST representing that term
in the object language
StrLit "hello"
(in object language)

Reflection of that term
in the object language
StrLit "hello"
(in object language)

AST representing the reflected term
in the meta language
App (Var "StrLit") (StrLit "hello")
(in meta language)

Reflection of the reflection of the term
in the object language
App (Var "StrLit") (StrLit "hello")
(in object language)

...
class Bridge a where
  reflect :: a → Exp
  reify :: Exp → Maybe a
class Bridge a where
  reflect :: a → Exp
  reify :: Exp → Maybe a

instance Bridge String where
  reflect s = StrLit s
  reify (StrLit s) = Just s
  reify _ = Nothing

instance Bridge Int where
  reflect n = IntLit n
  reify (IntLit n) = Just n
  reify _ = Nothing
Haskell’s generic programming techniques

There are a few alternatives such as GHC.Generics, but I chose Data and Typeable for their expressive power.

```
class Typeable a where
    typeOf :: a -> TypeRep

class Typeable a => Data a where
    ...
    toConstr :: a -> Constr
    dataTypeOf :: a -> DataType
```

```
gmapQ :: (forall d. Data d => d -> u) -> a -> [u]  (can collect arguments of a value)

fromConstrM :: forall m a. (Monad m, Data a) => (forall d. Data d => m d) -> Constr -> m a
            (monadic helper to construct new value from constructor)
```

Both Data and Typeable are automatically derivable! (for simple Haskell ADTs)
1. Pick your object language.

2. Define an AST data type for your object language, in the metalanguage.

3. Pick your reflection representation.
   (There are many options!)

4. Define the `Data a => Bridge a` instance for the AST data type.

Let's try with the λ-calculus!
Scott encoding for untyped λ-calculus

A value
the natural number 0

Object language term
that represents it
\( \lambda f. \lambda x. x \)

Meta language term
that represents it
\( Z \)
(in meta language)
Scott encoding for untyped $\lambda$-calculus

A value
the natural number 1

Object language term that represents it
$\lambda f. \lambda x. f \ (\lambda f. \lambda x. x)$

Meta language term that represents it
$S \ Z$
(in meta language)
Generalizing Scott encoding

\[
\begin{align*}
\lambda c_1. \lambda c_2. \ldots \lambda c_m. c_i & \ [e_1] \ldots \ [e_n] \\
\text{where } Ctor \text{ is the } i^{th} \text{ constructor} \\
& \text{out of } m \text{ constructors}
\end{align*}
\]

Key idea: if \( Ctor \) constructs a value of a type that has a \texttt{Data} instance, then we can get the Scott encoding automatically
Implementation of Scott encoding from \textit{Data}

\begin{verbatim}
instance Data a ⇒ Bridge a where
    reflect v
    | getTypeRep a = getTypeRep Int = reflect Int (unsafeCoerce v)
    | getTypeRep a = getTypeRep String = reflect String (unsafeCoerce v)
    | otherwise =
        lams args (apps (Var c : gmapQ reflectArg v))
        where
            (args, c) = constrToScott a (toConstr v)
            reflectArg :: forall d. Data d ⇒ d ⇒ Exp
            reflectArg x = reflect @d x

    reify e
    ...
\end{verbatim}

1. get all the constructors
2. pick which one you use
3. recurse on the arguments
4. construct the nested lambdas and applications
Implementation of Scott encoding from `Data`

instance `Data a` ⇒ `Bridge a` where
  reflect `v`

...  

reify `e`  
  `getTypeRep` `@a` = `getDefType` `@Int` = `unsafeCoerce` (reify `@Int` `e`)  
  `getDefType` `@a` = `getDefType` `@String` = `unsafeCoerce` `$()` (reify `@String` `e`)  
  otherwise =

1. case `collectAbs` `e` of
   ([], _) → `Nothing`
   (args, body) →

2. case `spineView` `body` of
   (Var `c`, rest) → do
     `ctors` ← `getConstrs` `@a`
     `ctor` ← `lookup` `c` (zip `args` `ctors`)
     `evalStateT` (fromConstrM `reifyArg` `ctor`) `rest`
     _ → `Nothing`

where

3. `reifyArg` :: `forall` `d`. `Data d` ⇒ `StateT` `[Exp]` `Maybe` `d`

   `reifyArg` = do `e` ← `getConstrs` `head`
                  `modify` `tail`
                  `lift` (reify `@d` `e`)  

1. get the nested lambda bindings
2. get the head of the nested application
3. recurse on the arguments
4. construct the Haskell term
Now we have a way to take (pretty much) any Haskell value to its representation in \( \text{Exp} \).

This can be either a natural number, a color, or ... \( \text{Exp} \) itself.

data \( \text{Exp} \) =
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Var} & \cdot \text{String} & x \\
\text{App} & \cdot \text{Exp} \times \text{Exp} & e_1 \ e_2 \\
\text{Abs} & \cdot \text{String} \times \text{Exp} & \lambda \ x \cdot e \\
\text{StrLit} & \cdot \text{String} & "hello" \\
\text{IntLit} & \cdot \text{Int} & 3 \\
\text{MkUnit} & & ()
\end{align*}
\]
deriving (Show, Eq, Data, Typeable)
Tying the knot

\[ \text{reflect} \ \text{Red} \]
\[ \lambda \Rightarrow (\text{Abs} \ "c0" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c1" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c2" \ (\text{Var} \ "c0")))) \]

\[ \text{reflect} \ (S \ Z) \]
\[ \lambda \Rightarrow (\text{Abs} \ "c0" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c1" \ (\text{App} \ (\text{Var} \ "c0") \ (\text{Abs} \ "c0" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c1" \ (\text{Var} \ "c1"))))) \]

\[ \text{reflect} \ \text{MkUnit} \]
\[ \lambda \Rightarrow (\text{Abs} \ "c0" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c1" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c2" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c3" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c4" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c5" \ (\text{Var} \ "c5"))))) \]

\[ \text{reflect} \ (\text{reflect} \ Z) \]
\[ \lambda \Rightarrow (\text{Abs} \ "c0" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c1" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c2" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c3" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c4" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c5" \ (\text{App} \ (\text{Var} \ "c2" \ (\text{StrLit} \ "c0"))) \ (\text{Abs} \ "c0" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c1" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c2" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c3" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c4" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c5" \ (\text{App} \ (\text{Var} \ "c2" \ (\text{StrLit} \ "c1")) \ (\text{Abs} \ "c0" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c1" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c2" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c3" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c4" \ (\text{Abs} \ "c5" \ (\text{App} \ (\text{Var} \ "c0" \ (\text{StrLit} \ "c1"))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))}} \]
Tying the knot

data Exp =
    Var String x
  |
    App Exp Exp e1 e2
  |
    Abs String Exp \ x. e
  |
    StrLit String "hello"
  |
    IntLit Int 3
  |
    MkUnit ()
  |
    Quasiquote Exp `(e)
  |
    Antiquote Exp ~(e)

deriving (Show, Eq, Data, Typeable)
eval' :: M.Map String Exp → Exp → Exp

... eval' env (Quasiquote e) = reflect e
eval' env (Antiquote e) = let Just x = reify (eval e) in x

(no error handling here)

"In programming languages, there is a simple yet elegant strategy for implementing reflection: instead of making a system that describes itself, the system is made available to itself. We name this direct reflection, where the representation of language features via its semantics is actually part of the semantics itself."

Eli Barzilay, dissertation, 2006
Tying the knot

\[ \lambda > \text{eval} \ <$> \ \text{parseExp} \ \text{Right MkUnit} \]

"~( (λ x.x) `( () ) )"
What we can do using this

- **Parser reflection**: a way to pass a string containing code in the object language, to the object language, and getting the reflected term.

- **Type checker / elaborator reflection**: a way to expose the type checker in the object language and make it available for the reflected terms, usable in metaprograms.

- **Reuse of efficient host language code**
Future work

- More experiments with typed object languages, especially dependent types
- Boehm–Berarducci encoding
- Object languages with algebraic data types
- Typed metaprogramming à la Typed Template Haskell or Idris
- Another metalanguage: Coq, JavaScript?