COS320: Compiling Techniques

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April 13, 2022

Compiling functional languages

Functional languages

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  - can be passed as parameters (e.g., `map`)
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- Functions that take functions as parameters or return functions are called *higher-order*
- A higher-order functional language is one with *nested functions* with *lexical scope*

Scoping

- $(\textbf{fun}\ x\ \texttt{->}\ e)$ is an expression that evaluates to a function
  - x is the function's parameter
  - e is the function's body
- Occurrences of x within e are said to be *bound* in $(\textbf{fun}\ x\ \texttt{->}\ e)$
  - Variables are resolved to most closely containing **fun**.
- Occurrences of variables that are not bound are called *free*

$$(\textbf{fun}\ x\ \texttt{->}\ (\textbf{fun}\ y\ \texttt{->}\ (x\ z)\ (\textbf{fun}\ x\ \texttt{->}\ x)\ y))$$

Closures

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  1. Apply the function $(\textbf{fun}\ x\ \texttt{->}\ \textbf{fun}\ y\ \texttt{->}\ x)$ to the argument 0 $\rightsquigarrow$ $(\textbf{fun}\ y\ \texttt{->}\ x)$

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- In higher-order functional languages, a function value is a *closure*, which consists of a function pointer *and* an environment
  - Environment is used to interpret variables from enclosing scope

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let compose =
  fun (f : int -> int) ->
    (fun (g : int -> int) ->
      (fun (x : int) ->
        f (g x)))
let add10 = fun (x : int) -> x + 10
let mul2 = fun (x : int) -> 2 * x
let result = compose add10 mul2 100
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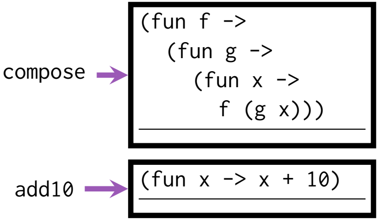

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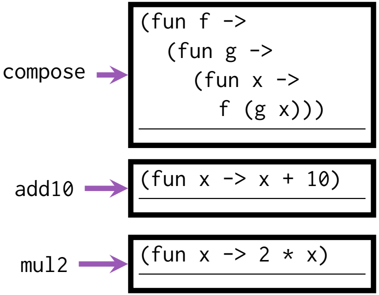

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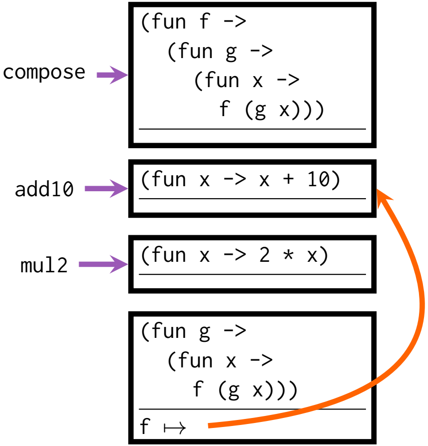

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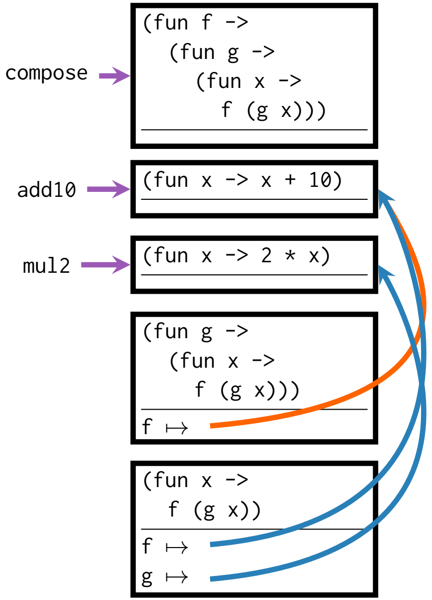

Compiling closures

- Strategy: translate a language with closures to one with (just) function pointers
- *Closure conversion* transforms a program so that no function accesses free variables
- *Hoisting* transforms a closure-converted program so that all function expressions appear at the top-level
  - Function expressions can be implemented as functions

Nameless representation

- Idea (de Bruijn): use a representation of expressions without named bound variables
  - Each variable is replaced by a number: # of enclosing scopes between occurrence & the scope it is resolved to
  - $($**fun** x `->` $x) \rightsquigarrow ($**fn** $0)$
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- Environments can be implemented as lists
  - Each environment has a pointer to parent environment

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  - p represents an *environment* (as a list)
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Evaluation environment: index $0 \mapsto a$, other indices shifted

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    - Greater space requirement (no sharing with parent environment)
    - Can reduce space by storing only variables that are actually free

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- *Hoisting*:
  - Gives globally unique identifiers each function expression
  - Replaces function expressions with their identifiers
  - Places definitions for the identifiers as top-level scope

Functional optimizations

- Tail call elimination: functional languages favor recursion over loops, but loops are more efficient (need to allocate stack frame, push return address, save registers, ...)
  - Tail call elimination searches for the pattern

    ```
    %x = call foo ...; ret %x
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  - *Inlining* replaces function calls with their definitions to alleviate some of this burden
- Uncurrying: in some functional languages (e.g., OCaml), functions always take a single argument at a time
  - E.g., in `let f x y = ...`, `f` takes one argument `x`, and returns a closure which takes a second argument `y` and produces the result
  - A single OCaml-level function call may result in *several* function calls and closure allocations
  - *Uncurrying* is an optimization that determines when a function is always called with more that one parameter `(f 3 4)`, and compiles it as a multi-parameter function.