Lecture 3: Mutual Recursion & Tail Recursion

CS 4301/6371: Advanced Programming Languages
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#let rec length = function [] -> 0 | _::t -> (length t)+1;;

“function ... -> ...” is an abbreviation for “fun x -> (match x with ... -> ...)”

#type staff = Programmer | Manager of dept
and dept = Outsourced | Staffed of staff;;

Mutually recursive types are separated by the word “and”. Notice that there is no “;;” before the “and” and there is no second “type” keyword. You can string as many mutually recursive types together as you wish with “and”.

#let rec staff2str s =
  (match s with
   Programmer -> "Peon"
   | Manager d -> "Dictator[^(dept2str d)^]"
   and dept2str d =
     (match d with Outsourced -> "Exiled"
      | Staffed s -> staff2str s));;

Mutually recursive functions are also defined with “and”. The first function in the group begins with “let rec”. Each subsequent function begins with “and” (and no “let rec”). The only “;;” appears at the end of the whole group.

#type 'a btree = BNull
| BNode of ('a * 'a btree * 'a btree);;

Polymorphic variants define a type constructor that is parameterized by a type variable.

#let rec tree2list t =
  (match t with
   BNull -> []
   | BNode (x,t1,t2) ->
     (tree2list t1) @ (x::(tree2list t2)));;

Here’s an example of a function that converts a polymorphic binary tree to a polymorphic list (with list elements given in prefix order). The “@” operator concatenates two lists. This differs from the “::” operator, which inserts an element onto the head of a list.

#let rec fold_left f b l =
  (match l with
   [] -> b
   | h::t -> fold_left f (f b h) t);;

“Fold” is an extremely important list operation in functional programming. (fold_left f b [w;x;y;z]) computes the formula f(f(f(f(b,w),x),y),z).

Parameter ‘b’ is called the “base case”.

#fold_left (fun b x y z -> (x>z)) false [1;2;3];;
- : bool = true

From “fold” one can derive many useful list functions, such as existence and forall functions that check if a given condition holds for any or all
fold_left (fun b x -> b || (f x))
false l;;
exists:('a->bool)->'a list->bool = <fun>
#let for_all f l =
    fold_left (fun b x -> b && (f x))
true l;;
for_all:('a->bool)->'a list->bool = <fun>
#for_all (fun x -> x>2) [1;2;3];;
- : bool = false

There is another operation called “fold_right”
that applies function f starting with the rightmost
element. That is, (fold_right f [w;x;y;z] b)
computes f(w,f(x,f(y,f(z,b)))).

#let rec fold_right f l b =
    (match l with
      [] -> b
    | h:t -> f h (fold_right f t b));;
fold_right : ('a -> 'b -> 'b) -> 'a list ->
'b -> 'b = <fun>
#fold_right (fun x y -> x-y) [1;2;3] 0;;
- : int = 2
#fold_left (fun x y -> x-y) 0 [1;2;3];;
- : int = -6

A function is “tail recursive” if the value that it
returns is the value returned by a direct recursive
call to itself. Note that fold_left is tail-recursive
but fold_right is not. Try to write tail-recursive
functions whenever possible, since these can be
optimized much better by functional compilers.

List.length, List.map, List.fold_left,
List.fold_right, List.exists, List.for_all

#fst ("foo",3);;
- : string = "foo"
#snd ("foo",3);
- : int = 3

Exceptions are defined like types, except that you
use the keyword “exception” in place of “type”.
Use the “raise” command to throw an exception.

#exception ImplErr of string;;
Exception ImplErr defined.
#raise (ImplErr "Help!");;
Uncaught exception: ImplErr "Help!"

An expression’s type declares its return type IF
the function or expression returns normally.
When you raise an exception, you don’t need to
satisfy the return type of the enclosing expression
because the expression is not returning normally.
Warning: If you program using exceptions, you
lose many of the benefits of functional
programming! I recommend avoiding them.

#let head l =
    (match l with x:::_ -> x | [] -> raise
      (ImplErr "head of empty list"));;
head : 'a list -> 'a = <fun>
#head [1;2;3];;
- : int = 1
#head [];;
Uncaught exception: ImplErr "head of empty
list"

Catch exceptions with “try ... with ...”. The “with”
part is a pattern-match on the exception type.
Each value returned by the right side of an arrow
must be of the same type that would be returned
if no exception was thrown.

#let foo l =
    (try (head l) with ImplErr _ -> 0);;
foo : int list -> int = <fun>