# Advanced Notes on ML v1.2 

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## 1 Introduction

This document includes advanced notes for the course of Functional Languages, MD in Computer Science, University of Padova. Here you will find the formalization of an ML-like functional language, with details of the syntax, the type system and the semantics.

Table 1 shows the syntax of terms. Our calculus resembles the core ML language [1] with conditional, tuples and a sample binary operator added on top of it. Let-rec is syntactically restricted to lambda abstractions for enabling the definition of strict semantics in Section 3.

Table 1: Syntax of terms.


## 2 Type System

Type systems are used for verifying the correctness of programs. Type checking and other advanced forms of typing such as type inference happen at compile-time in strongly-typed programming languages. Table 2 shows the syntax of types, type schemes, typing environments and substitutions. Mind that $c$ represent type names, a.k.a. type constructors, such as int, float etc [5]. Parametric types are not supported. Type variables have form of greek letters $\alpha, \beta, \gamma$ etc.

Table 2: Syntax of types and related..

| $\tau$ | ::= |  | types |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  |  | c | type constructor |
|  | \| | $\tau \rightarrow \tau$ | arrow type |
|  | \| | $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, .$. | type variables |
|  |  | $\tau * . . * \tau$ | tuple type |
| $\sigma$ | ::= | $\forall \bar{\alpha} . \tau$ | type schemes |
| $\Gamma$ | ::= |  | typing environment |
|  |  | $\begin{aligned} & \varnothing \\ & \Gamma,(x: \sigma) \end{aligned}$ |  |
| $\theta$ | :: $=$ |  | substitutions |
|  | $1$ | $\begin{aligned} & \varnothing \\ & \theta,[\alpha \mapsto \tau] \end{aligned}$ |  |
|  |  | where $c$ are | identifiers |

### 2.1 Preliminaries

Before delving into the details of the typing rules, a number of utility functions must be defined. The following function $\mathrm{ftv}^{1}$ calculates the free type variables occurring in a type $\tau$, a type scheme $\sigma$ or an environment $\Gamma$.

$$
\begin{array}{ll}
\operatorname{ftv} & :(\tau \cup \sigma \cup \Gamma) \rightarrow \mathscr{P}(\alpha) \\
& =\varnothing \\
\operatorname{ftv}(c) & =\alpha \\
\operatorname{ftv}(\alpha) & =\mathrm{ftv}\left(\tau_{1}\right) \cup \mathrm{ftv}\left(\tau_{2}\right) \\
\operatorname{ftv}\left(\tau_{1} \rightarrow \tau_{2}\right) & =\bigcup_{i=1}^{n} \mathrm{ftv}\left(\tau_{i}\right) \\
\operatorname{ftv}\left(\tau_{1} * \ldots * \tau_{n}\right) & =\operatorname{ftv}(\tau) \backslash\{\bar{\alpha}\} \\
\operatorname{ftv}(\forall \bar{\alpha} \cdot \tau) & =\varnothing \\
\operatorname{ftv}(\varnothing) & =\operatorname{ftv}(\sigma) \cup \mathrm{ftv}(\Gamma)
\end{array}
$$

Generalization promotes a type $\tau$ into a type scheme $\sigma$ by quantifying type variables that represent polymorphic types through the forall universal quantifier $(\forall)$ :

$$
\begin{aligned}
& \operatorname{gen} \quad: \Gamma \times \tau \rightarrow \sigma \\
& \operatorname{gen}^{\Gamma}(\tau)=\forall \bar{\alpha} \cdot \tau \quad \text { where } \bar{\alpha}=\mathrm{ftv}(\tau) \backslash \operatorname{ftv}(\Gamma)
\end{aligned}
$$

Only type variables not occurring free in the environment can be quantified, hence the extra parameter $\Gamma$. Generalization takes place at let-binding time, as revealed by rules (LET) and (LETREC) in Tables 3 and 4. Instantiation is the opposite operation, converting a type scheme into a type by refreshing its polymorphic type variables, i.e. those quantified by the forall. Instantiation takes place in rule (VAR) at lookup time, i.e. when a variable identifier is encountered. As a matter of fact, function inst basically relies on another function, namely re, that refreshes type variables occurring

[^0]in a type:
\[

$$
\begin{array}{lll}
\text { inst } & : \sigma \rightarrow \tau & \\
\text { inst }(\forall \bar{\alpha} \cdot \tau) & =\mathrm{re}^{\bar{\alpha}}(\tau) & \\
& : \mathscr{P}(\alpha) \times \tau \rightarrow \tau & \\
\mathrm{re} & =c & \text { if } \alpha \notin \bar{\alpha} \\
\mathrm{re}^{\bar{\alpha}}(c) & =\alpha & \text { if } \alpha \in \bar{\alpha} \text { and with } \beta \text { fresh } \\
\mathrm{re}^{\bar{\alpha}}(\alpha) & =\beta & \\
\mathrm{re}^{\bar{\alpha}}(\alpha) & =\mathrm{re}^{\bar{\alpha}}\left(\tau_{1}\right) \rightarrow \mathrm{re}^{\bar{\alpha}}\left(\tau_{2}\right) & \\
\mathrm{re}^{\bar{\alpha}}\left(\tau_{1} \rightarrow \tau_{2}\right) & =\mathrm{re}^{\bar{\alpha}}\left(\tau_{1}\right) * . . * \mathrm{re}^{\bar{\alpha}}\left(\tau_{n}\right) & \text { with } n \geq 2 \\
\mathrm{re}^{\bar{\alpha}}\left(\tau_{1} * . . * \tau_{n}\right) & =2
\end{array}
$$
\]

### 2.1.1 More on Type Variables

To refresh type variables means to replace, for instance, a type variable whose name is $\alpha$ with a new type variable $\beta$, where the name $\beta$ has never been used before. For example, let $\tau=\alpha \rightarrow \beta \rightarrow \beta \rightarrow$ int $* \alpha * \gamma$, then refreshing its type variables means to replace type variables occurring in $\tau$ with new ones having unused names, thus yielding to $\delta \rightarrow \epsilon \rightarrow \epsilon \rightarrow$ int $* \delta * \zeta$. All occurrences of $\alpha$ has been replaced with $\delta$; occurrences of $\beta$ with $\epsilon$; and occurrences of $\gamma$ with $\zeta$. This is equivalent to applying the substitution $[\alpha \mapsto \delta ; \beta \mapsto \epsilon ; \gamma \mapsto \zeta]$ to the type $\tau$. More on substitutions in Section 2.3.1.

An implementation must produce new fresh names when refreshing, granting they haven't been used before in the typing context. Type variables must therefore be unique identifiers. A type $\alpha \rightarrow$ int $* \alpha \rightarrow \beta$ would then be encoded as $1 \rightarrow$ int $* 1 \rightarrow 2$, where $\alpha$ is actually encoded by the number 1 and $\beta$ by the number 2 . Refreshing such type is extremely simple: for each type variable a new fresh number must be produced, leading to $2 \rightarrow$ int $* 2 \rightarrow 3$.

Mind that this is not a plain increment: this is a full replacement with new numbers not occurring before. For example, consider the following scenario with multiple types in the typing context including a variety of type variables:

| original type | implementation | refreshed |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
| $\alpha \rightarrow \alpha$ | $1 \rightarrow 1$ | $7 \rightarrow 7$ |
| $\beta * \beta \rightarrow \gamma$ | $2 * 2 \rightarrow 3$ | $8 * 8 \rightarrow 9$ |
| $\delta \rightarrow \zeta \rightarrow \eta \rightarrow \eta$ | $4 \rightarrow 6 \rightarrow 5 \rightarrow 5$ | $10 \rightarrow 12 \rightarrow 11 \rightarrow 11$ |

A common encoding is through integer numbers produced by a global counter that is incremented each time a new fresh type variable is required. Obviously, such a counter would always provide numbers never used before.

### 2.2 Type rules

Type rules for expressions are shown in Table 3. Type judgements are logical formulas of form $\Gamma \vdash$ $e: \tau$. It is interesting to point out that unannotated lambdas cannot be typed, hence the rule (ABSAnnotated) adding a type annotation $\tau_{1}$ to the lambda parameter $x$. Notably, such type annotation is promoted to a dummy type scheme $\forall \varnothing . \tau_{1}$ when bound to the environment, which is basically a monomorphic type.

The same goes for let-rec bindings, which require an explicit type scheme annotation $\sigma$ as shown by rule (Let-Rec-Annotated). The reason why let-rec bindings require an annotation, whereas plain let bindings in rule (LET) do not, is due to the need to extend the environment with some type scheme $\sigma$ bound to the recursive identifier $x$ when typing $e_{1}$ : this is necessary because $x$ would occur in it. Also, the form of bindable recursive expressions is restricted to lambdas.

Rules for literals are trivial and only a sample rule (Lit-Int) for integers is shown. Rule (Plus) shows how to deal with binary operators.

### 2.3 Type Inference

Type inference, a.k.a. type reconstruction, is an advanced typing mechanism through which types are deduced from the code rather than being annotated by the programmer in the program text. Type inference rules are shown in Table 4. The original ML type inference algorithm [1][3] is here formulated

Table 3: Type rules for expressions.

in terms of syntax-directed rules [8]. Type judgements are logical formulas of form $\Gamma \vdash e: \tau \triangleright \theta$, i.e. yielding two outputs, a type and a substitution, for which $\theta(\tau) \equiv \tau$ holds. This means that the output type $\tau$ is granted to be less general as possible, hence the output substitution $\theta$ does not need to be applied to it.

### 2.3.1 Substitutions

Table 2 defines substitutions $\theta$ syntactically as a map from type variables $\alpha$ to types $\tau$. For the sake of brevity, we often use the compact notation $\left[\alpha_{1} \mapsto \tau_{1} ; . . ; \alpha_{n} \mapsto \tau_{n}\right.$ ] with $n \geq 1$ in place of $\varnothing,\left[\alpha_{1} \mapsto \tau_{1}\right], . .,\left[\alpha_{n} \mapsto \tau_{n}\right]$.

Substitutions can also be seen as functions from types to types [6]: a substitution application $\theta(\tau)$ consists in producing a new type $\tau^{\prime}$ where all occurrences of each type variable $\alpha_{i} \in \operatorname{dom}(\theta)$ are replaced with the mapped type $\tau_{i} \in \operatorname{codom}(\theta)$, such that $\alpha_{i} \notin \tau^{\prime}$. Substitutions can also be applied to environments and type schemes, leading to the following overall definition of application:

$$
\begin{array}{lll}
\theta & : \quad(\tau \rightarrow \tau) \cup(\sigma \rightarrow \sigma) \cup(\Gamma \rightarrow \Gamma) & \\
& =c & \\
\theta(c) & & \\
\theta(\alpha) & & \text { if }[\alpha \mapsto \tau] \in \theta \\
\theta(\alpha) & & \text { if } \alpha \notin \operatorname{dom}(\theta) \\
\theta\left(\tau_{1} \rightarrow \tau_{2}\right) & =\theta & \\
\theta\left(\tau_{1} * . . * \tau_{n}\right) & =\theta\left(\tau_{1}\right) \rightarrow \theta\left(\tau_{2}\right) * \ldots \theta\left(\tau_{n}\right) & \\
& & \text { with } n \geq 2 \\
\theta(\forall \bar{\alpha} . \tau) & =\forall \bar{\alpha} \cdot \theta^{\prime}(\tau) & \\
& & \\
\theta(\varnothing) & =\varnothing & \\
\theta(\Gamma,(x: \sigma)) & =\theta(\Gamma),(x: \theta(\sigma)) &
\end{array}
$$

When applying a substitution $\theta$ to a type scheme $\sigma \equiv \forall \bar{\alpha} . \tau$, only the type component $\tau$ must be affected. This is necessary because type variables quantified by the $\forall$ must not be touched, as they are meant to represent polymorphic types. Substitution $\theta$ must thefore be restricted to a smaller substitution $\theta^{\prime}$ whose domain does not include the quantified type variables $\bar{\alpha}$.

Substitution composition [7] is defined like function composition: let $\theta_{1}$ and $\theta_{2}$ be two substitutions, then the composition $\theta_{2} \circ \theta_{1}$ yields a new substitution $\theta^{\prime}$ such that $\theta^{\prime}(\tau)=\theta_{2}\left(\theta_{1}(\tau)\right)$. Composition can also be defined constructively: let $\theta_{1}=\left[\alpha_{1} \mapsto \tau_{1} . . \alpha_{n} \mapsto \tau_{n}\right]$ and $\theta_{2}=\left[\beta_{1} \mapsto \tau_{1}^{\prime} . . \beta_{m} \mapsto \tau_{m}^{\prime}\right]$ for $n \geq 1$ and $m \geq 1$, then $\theta_{2} \circ \theta_{1}=\left[\beta_{1} \mapsto \theta_{1}\left(\tau_{1}^{\prime}\right) . . \beta_{m} \mapsto \theta_{1}\left(\tau_{m}^{\prime}\right) ; \alpha_{1} \mapsto \tau_{1} . . \alpha_{n} \mapsto \tau_{n}\right]$ where if $\alpha_{i}=\beta_{j}$ for some $i \in[1, n]$ and $j \in[1, m]$ then $\tau_{i} \equiv \tau_{j}^{\prime}$. The last constraint means that the domains of the

Table 4: Type inference algorithm as syntax-directed rules.

two substitutions must be disjoint, unless if the same type variable appears in both domains then they must map into the same type, otherwise composition leads to an error state ${ }^{2}$.

Finally, circularity is not allowed: given a substitution $\theta=\left[\alpha_{1} \mapsto \tau_{1} . . \alpha_{n} \mapsto \tau_{n}\right]$ for $n \geq 1$, then $\alpha_{i} \notin \tau_{i}$ forall $i \in[1, n]$.

### 2.3.2 Unification

Unification is crucial for type inference and appears every time a type of some form is required, e.g. in rules (I-APP) and (I-IF) in Table 4 . Given two types $\tau_{1}$ and $\tau_{2}$, unification calculates a substitution that makes the two types equal. More formally, $\mathbf{U}\left(\tau_{1} ; \tau_{2}\right)$ calculates a substitution $\theta$ such that $\theta\left(\tau_{1}\right) \equiv \theta\left(\tau_{2}\right)$. Such substituion $\theta$ is called the most greater unifier (MGU) [9]. The Martelli-Montanari unification algorithm [4] efficiently calculated the MGU:

[^1]\[

$$
\begin{array}{lll}
\mathbf{U} & : \tau \times \tau \rightarrow \theta & \\
\mathbf{U}\left(c_{1} ; c_{2}\right) & =\varnothing & \text { if } c_{1} \equiv c_{2} \\
\mathbf{U}(\alpha ; \tau)=\mathbf{U}(\tau ; \alpha) & =[\alpha \mapsto \tau] & \\
\mathbf{U}\left(\tau_{1} \rightarrow \tau_{2} ; \tau_{3} \rightarrow \tau_{4}\right) & =\mathbf{U}\left(\tau_{1} ; \tau_{3}\right) \circ \mathbf{U}\left(\tau_{2} ; \tau_{4}\right) & \\
\mathbf{U}\left(\tau_{1} * . . * \tau_{n} ; \tau_{1}^{\prime} * . . * \tau_{n}^{\prime}\right) & =\mathbf{U}\left(\tau_{1} ; \tau_{1}^{\prime}\right) \circ . . \circ \mathbf{U}\left(\tau_{n} ; \tau_{n}^{\prime}\right) & \text { with } n \geq 2
\end{array}
$$
\]

Notably, not all combinations of cases are defined: undefined cases would lead to an error state in an implementation.

## 3 Operational Semantics

Semantics represent the behaviour of programs. Program evaluation happens at run-time, either by running the machine code produced by a compiler or by evaluating the code in case the language is interpreted.

Table 5 shows the syntax of values and evaluation environments. Closures and rec-closures are basically pairs and triples, respectively.

Table 5: Syntax of values and related. Definitions for literals $L$ and expressions $e$ come from Table 1.


Table 6 shows the evaluation rules for expressions. Semantics can be expressed in a number of ways: the kind of semantics defined in this document are called operational semantics [2].

Rule (E-App) deals with closures, whereas rule (E-APP-REC) is triggered when the left expression of the application evaluates to a rec-closure. Rule (E-PLUS) shows how to deal with binary arithmetic operators for intergers: evaluation of operands produces an integer literal of form $n$, with $n \in \mathbb{Z}$, as of Table 1. Special operator $\oplus$ stands for the actual addition between two integer numbers. An implementation would invoke the plus operator in the host language in this case, truly producing the sum between the two values.

## References

[1] Luis Damas and Robin Milner. Principal type-schemes for functional programs. In Proceedings of the 9th ACM SIGPLAN-SIGACT symposium on Principles of programming languages, pages 207-212, 1982.
[2] Matthew Hennessy. The semantics of programming languages: an elementary introduction using structural operational semantics. John Wiley \& Sons, Inc., 1990.
[3] Daniel Leivant. Polymorphic type inference. In Proceedings of the 10th ACM SIGACT-SIGPLAN symposium on Principles of programming languages, pages 88-98, 1983.
[4] Alberto Martelli and Ugo Montanari. An efficient unification algorithm. ACM Transactions on Programming Languages and Systems (TOPLAS), 4(2):258-282, 1982.

Table 6: Operational semantics as evaluation rules.

| E-Lit-Int |
| :--- |
| $\diamond$ |


$\Delta \vdash n \rightsquigarrow n$$\quad$| E-VAR |
| :--- |
| $x \in \operatorname{dom}(\Delta) \quad \Delta(x)=v$ |
| $\Delta \vdash x \rightsquigarrow v$ |$\quad$| E-Abs |
| :--- | :--- |
| $\Delta \vdash \lambda x . e \rightsquigarrow\langle\lambda x . e ; \Delta\rangle$ |

E-App E-App-Rec
$\Delta \vdash e_{1} \rightsquigarrow\left\langle\lambda x \cdot e_{0} ; \Delta_{0}\right\rangle \quad \Delta \vdash e_{2} \rightsquigarrow v_{2}$
$\frac{\Delta_{0},\left(x \rightsquigarrow v_{2}\right) \vdash e_{0} \rightsquigarrow v}{\Delta \vdash e_{1} e_{2} \rightsquigarrow v}$

$$
\Delta \vdash e_{1} \rightsquigarrow\left\langle\lambda x . e_{0} ; f ; \Delta_{0}\right\rangle \quad \Delta \vdash e_{2} \rightsquigarrow v_{2}
$$

$$
\frac{\Delta_{0},\left(f \rightsquigarrow\left\langle\lambda x \cdot e_{0} ; f ; \Delta_{0}\right\rangle\right),\left(x \rightsquigarrow v_{2}\right) \vdash e_{0} \rightsquigarrow v}{\Delta \vdash e_{1} e_{2} \rightsquigarrow v}
$$

E-If-True
$\frac{\Delta \vdash e_{1} \rightsquigarrow \text { true } \quad \Delta \vdash e_{2} \rightsquigarrow v_{2}}{\Delta \vdash \text { if } e_{1} \text { then } e_{2} \text { else } e_{3} \rightsquigarrow v_{2}}$
E-Plus

$$
\frac{\Delta \vdash e_{1} \rightsquigarrow n_{1} \quad \Delta \vdash e_{2} \rightsquigarrow n_{2} \quad n=n_{1} \oplus n_{2}}{\Delta \vdash e_{1}+e_{2} \rightsquigarrow n}
$$

$\frac{\begin{array}{l}\mathrm{E}-\mathrm{LET} \\ \Delta \vdash e_{1} \rightsquigarrow v_{1} \quad \Delta,\left(x \rightsquigarrow v_{1}\right) \vdash e_{2} \rightsquigarrow v_{2} \\ \Delta \vdash \text { let } x=e_{1} \text { in } e_{2} \rightsquigarrow v_{2}\end{array}}{l}$

$$
\Delta \vdash \text { let } x=e_{1} \text { in } e_{2} \rightsquigarrow v_{2}
$$

E-If-False
$\frac{\Delta \vdash e_{1} \rightsquigarrow \text { false } \quad \Delta \vdash e_{3} \rightsquigarrow v_{3}}{\Delta \vdash \text { if } e_{1} \text { then } e_{2} \text { else } e_{3} \rightsquigarrow v_{3}}$
E-Tup

$$
\frac{\Delta \vdash e_{i} \rightsquigarrow v_{i} \quad(\forall i \in[1, n])}{\Delta \vdash\left(e_{1}, . ., e_{n}\right) \rightsquigarrow\left(v_{1}, . ., v_{n}\right)}
$$

E-Let-Rec

$$
\frac{\Delta,\left(f \rightsquigarrow\left\langle\lambda x . e_{1} ; f ; \Delta\right\rangle\right) \vdash e_{2} \rightsquigarrow v_{2}}{\Delta \vdash \text { let rec } f=\lambda x . e_{1} \text { in } e_{2} \rightsquigarrow v_{2}}
$$

[5] Robin Milner. A proposal for standard ml. In Proceedings of the 1984 ACM Symposium on LISP and Functional Programming, pages 184-197, 1984.
[6] Wikipedia. Substitution (logic). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Substitution_(logic). [Online; accessed 19-January-2023].
[7] Wikipedia. Substitution (logic). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Substitution_(logic)\#: ~:text=Composition\%20is\%20an\%20associative\%20operation, neutral\%20element\%20of\% 20substitution\%20composition. [Online; accessed 19-January-2023].
[8] Wikipedia. Syntax-directed translation. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syntax-directed_ translation. [Online; accessed 19-January-2023].
[9] Wikipedia. Unification (logic). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unification_(computer_ science). [Online; accessed 19-January-2023].


[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ Mind that when the domain of a function includes a set-union, it means the function is defined on multiple domain sets. Also, in the codomain a powerset appears: if $A$ is a set, $\mathscr{P}(A)$ is the powerset of $A$, i.e. the set of sets of $A$.

[^1]:    ${ }^{2}$ Mind that an error state is something related to computer implementations, not to mathematics or logic. It means that if a certain state occurs in an implementation, then an error must be raised. A compiler, for example, would fail in that case.

