

Minicaml, a purely functional, didactical programming language with an interactive REPL.

Alessandro Cheli
Course taught by Prof. Gianluigi Ferrari
and Prof. Francesca Levi

December 23, 2019

Abstract

minicaml is a small, purely functional interpreted programming language with a didactical purpose. It is based on the Prof. Gianluigi Ferrari and Prof. Francesca Levi's minicaml, an evaluation example to show students attending the Programming 2 course at the University of Pisa how interpreters work. It is an interpreted language with a Caml-like syntax, featuring interchangeable eager and lazy evaluation and a didactical REPL that shows each AST expression and each evaluation step.

1 REPL and command line interface

1.1 Installation

minicaml is available in the opam 2.0 repository. (<https://opam.ocaml.org/>). The easiest way to install minicaml is with the OCaml package manager **opam**. To do so, please check that you have a version of opam $\geq 2.0.0$ and run:

```
opam install minicaml
```

Alternatively, **minicaml** can be installed from source by downloading the source code git repository and building it manually. **minicaml** has been tested only on Linux and macOS systems. It has not been tested yet on Windows and BSD derived systems.

```
# download the source code
git clone https://github.com/0x0f0f0f/minicaml
# cd into the source code directory
cd minicaml
# install dependencies
opam install ANSITerminal dune ppx_deriving menhir cmdliner
# compile
make
# execute
make run
# install
make install
```

2 Lexer

3 Parser

4 AST Optimization

Before being evaluated, AST expressions are analyzed and optimized by an optimizer function that is recursively called over the tree that is representing the expression. The optimizer simplifies expressions which result is known

and therefore does not need to be evaluated. For example, it is known that $5 + 3 \equiv 8$ and `true && (true || (false && false)) \equiv true`. When a programmer writes a program, she or he may not want to do all the simple calculations before writing the program in which they appear in, we rely on machines to simplify those processes. Reducing constants before evaluation may seem unnecessary when writing a small program, but they do take away computation time, and if they appear inside of loops, it is a wise choice to simplify those constant expressions whose result is already known before it is calculated in all the loop iterations. To achieve minimization to an unreducible form, optimizer calls are iterated on each previous call's result; this way, we get a tree representing an expression that cannot be optimized again. This process is fairly easy:

```
let rec iterate_optimizer e =  
    let oe = optimize e in  
    if oe = e then e (* Bottoms out *)  
    else iterate_optimizer oe
```

5 Evaluation

6 Tests

Unit testing is extensively performed using the alcotest testing framework.

7 Thanks

Thanks to Antonio DeLucreziis for helping me implement lazy evaluation.