Programming Languages

ML Modules

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Sections in Textbook

- Section 8 in Elements of ML Programming
- Chapter 9 in pdf (Programming in Standard ML ’97: A Tutorial Introduction)

Modules

For larger programs, one “top-level” sequence of bindings is poor

- Especially because a binding can use *all* earlier (non-shadowed) bindings

So ML has *structures* to define *modules*

```
structure MyModule = struct bindings end
```

Inside a module, can use earlier bindings as usual

- Can have any kind of binding (val, datatype, exception, ...)

Outside a module, refer to earlier modules’ bindings via **`ModuleName.bindingName`**

- Just like **`List.foldl`** and **`String.toUpper`**; now you can define your own modules

Example

```
structure MyMathLib =
struct

fun fact x =
    if x=0
    then 1
    else x * fact(x-1)

val half_pi = Math.pi / 2

fun doubler x = x * 2

end
```

Namespace management

- *So far*, this is just *namespace management*
  - Giving a hierarchy to names to avoid shadowing
  - Allows different modules to reuse names, e.g., **`map`**
  - Very important, but not very interesting

Signatures

- A *signature* is a type for a module
  - What bindings does it have and what are their types
- Can define a signature and ascribe it to modules – example:

```
signature MATHLIB =
sig
val fact : int -> int
val half_pi : real
val doubler : int -> int
end

structure MyMathLib :> MATHLIB =
struct
fun fact x = …
val half_pi = Math.pi / 2.0
fun doubler x = x * 2
end
```

In general

- Signatures

```
signature SIGNAME =
sig types-for-bindings end
```

  – Can include variables, types, datatypes, and exceptions defined in module

- Ascribing a signature to a module

```
structure MyModule :> SIGNAME =
struct bindings end
```

  – Module will not type-check unless it matches the signature, meaning it has all the bindings at the right types

Hiding things

Real value of signatures is to to *hide* bindings and type definitions

– So far, just documenting and checking the types

Hiding implementation details is the most important strategy for writing correct, robust, reusable software

So first remind ourselves that functions already do well for some forms of hiding…

Hiding with functions

These three functions are totally equivalent: no client can tell which we are using (so we can change our choice later):

```
fun double x = x*2
fun double x = x+x
val y = 2
fun double x = x*y
```

Defining helper functions locally is also powerful

– Can change/remove functions later and know it affects no other code

Would be convenient to have "private" top-level functions too

– So two functions could easily share a helper function
– ML does this via signatures that omit bindings…

Example

Outside the module, **`MyMathLib.doubler`** is simply unbound

- So cannot be used [directly]
- Fairly powerful, very simple idea

```
signature MATHLIB =
sig
val fact : int -> int
val half_pi : real
end

structure MyMathLib :> MATHLIB =
struct
fun fact x = …
val half_pi = Math.pi / 2.0
fun doubler x = x * 2
end
```

A larger example [mostly see the code]

Now consider a module that defines an Abstract Data Type (ADT)

- A type of data and operations on it

Our example: rational numbers supporting **`add`** and **`toString`**

```
structure Rational1 =
struct
datatype rational = Whole of int | Frac of int*int
exception BadFrac

(*internal functions gcd and reduce not on slide*)

fun make_frac (x,y) = …
fun add (r1,r2) = …
fun toString r = …
end
```

Library spec and invariants

Properties [externally visible guarantees, up to library writer]

- Disallow denominators of 0
- Return strings in reduced form (“4” not “4/1”, “3/2” not “9/6”)
- No infinite loops or exceptions

Invariants [part of the implementation, not the module’s spec]

- All denominators are greater than 0
- All **`rational`** values returned from functions are reduced

More on invariants

Our code maintains the invariants and relies on them

Maintain:

- **`make_frac`** disallows 0 denominator, removes negative denominator (divisor), and reduces result
- **`add`** assumes invariants on inputs, calls **`reduce`** if needed

Rely:

- **`gcd`** does not work with negative arguments, but no denominator can be negative
- **`add`** uses math properties to avoid calling **`reduce`**
- **`toString`** assumes its argument is already reduced

A first signature

With what we know so far, this signature makes sense:

- **`gcd`** and **`reduce`** not visible outside the module

```
signature RATIONAL_A =
sig
datatype rational = Whole of int | Frac of int*int
exception BadFrac
val make_frac : int * int -> rational
val add : rational * rational -> rational
val toString : rational -> string
end

structure Rational1 :> RATIONAL_A = …
```

The problem

By revealing the datatype definition, we let clients violate our invariants by directly creating values of type **`Rational1.rational`**

- At best a comment saying "must use **`Rational1.make_frac`**"

```
signature RATIONAL_A =
sig
datatype rational = Whole of int | Frac of int*int
…
```

Any of these would lead to exceptions, infinite loops, or wrong results, which is why the module's code would never return them

- **`Rational1.Frac(1,0)`**
- **`Rational1.Frac(3,~2)`**
- **`Rational1.Frac(9,6)`**

So hide more

Key idea: An ADT must hide the concrete type definition so clients cannot create invariant-violating values of the type directly

Alas, this attempt doesn't work because the signature now uses a type **`rational`** that is not known to exist:

```
signature RATIONAL_WRONG =
sig
exception BadFrac
val make_frac : int * int -> rational
val add : rational * rational -> rational
val toString : rational -> string
end

structure Rational1 :> RATIONAL_WRONG = …
```

Abstract types

So ML has a feature for exactly this situation:

In a signature:

```
type foo
```

means the type exists, but clients do not know its definition

```
signature RATIONAL_B =
sig
type rational
exception BadFrac
val make_frac : int * int -> rational
val add : rational * rational -> rational
val toString : rational -> string
end

structure Rational1 :> RATIONAL_B = …
```

This works! (And is a Really Big Deal)

```
signature RATIONAL_B =
sig
type rational
exception BadFrac
val make_frac : int * int -> rational
val add : rational * rational -> rational
val toString : rational -> string
end
```

Nothing a client can do to violate invariants and properties:

- Only way to make first rational is **`Rational1.make_frac`**
- After that can use only **`Rational1.make_frac`**, **`Rational1.add`**, and **`Rational1.toString`**
- Hides constructors and patterns – don't even know whether or not **`Rational1.rational`** is a datatype
- But clients can still pass around fractions in any way

Two key restrictions

So we have two powerful ways to use signatures for hiding:

1. Deny bindings exist (val-bindings, fun-bindings, constructors)

2. Make types abstract (so clients cannot create values of them or access their pieces directly)

(Later we will see a signature can also make a binding’s type more specific than it is within the module, but this is less important)

A cute twist

In our example, exposing the **`Whole`** constructor is no problem

In SML we can expose it as a function since the datatype binding in the module does create such a function

- Still hiding the rest of the datatype
- Still does not allow using **`Whole`** as a pattern

```
signature RATIONAL_C =
sig
type rational
exception BadFrac
val Whole : int -> rational
val make_frac : int * int -> rational
val add : rational * rational -> rational
val toString : rational -> string
end
```

Signature matching

Have so far relied on an informal notion of, "does a module type-check given a signature?" As usual, there are precise rules…

`structure Foo :> BAR` is allowed if:

- Every non-abstract type in **`BAR`** is provided in **`Foo`**, as specified
- Every abstract type in **`BAR`** is provided in **`Foo`** in some way
  - Can be a datatype or a type synonym
- Every val-binding in **`BAR`** is provided in **`Foo`**, possibly with a *more general* and/or *less abstract* internal type
  - Discussed "more general types" earlier in course
  - Will see example soon
- Every exception in **`BAR`** is provided in **`Foo`**

Of course **`Foo`** can have more bindings (implicit in above rules)

Equivalent implementations

A key purpose of abstraction is to allow *different implementations* to be *equivalent*

- *No* client can tell which you are using
- So can improve/replace/choose implementations later
- Easier to do if you *start* with more abstract signatures (reveal only what you must)

Now:

Another structure that can also have signature **`RATIONAL_A`**, **`RATIONAL_B`**, or **`RATIONAL_C`**

- But only *equivalent* under **`RATIONAL_B`** or **`RATIONAL_C`**

  (ignoring overflow)

Next:

A third equivalent structure implemented very differently

Equivalent implementations

Example (see code file):

- **`structure Rational2`** does not keep rationals in reduced form, instead reducing them "at last moment" in **`toString`**
  - Also make **`gcd`** and **`reduce`** local functions

- Not equivalent under **`RATIONAL_A`**
  - **`Rational1.toString(Rational1.Frac(9,6)) = "9/6"`**
  - **`Rational2.toString(Rational2.Frac(9,6)) = "3/2"`**

- Equivalent under **`RATIONAL_B`** or **`RATIONAL_C`**
  - Different invariants, but same properties
  - Essential that type **`rational`** is abstract

More interesting example

Given a signature with an abstract type, different structures can:

- Have that signature
- But implement the abstract type differently

Such structures might or might not be equivalent

Example (see code):

- **`type rational = int * int`**
- Does *not* have signature **`RATIONAL_A`**
- *Equivalent* to both previous examples under **`RATIONAL_B`** or **`RATIONAL_C`**

More interesting example

```
structure Rational3 =
struct
type rational = int * int
exception BadFrac

fun make_frac (x,y) = …
fun Whole i = (i,1) (* needed for RATIONAL_C *)
fun add ((a,b)(c,d)) = (a*d+b*c,b*d)
fun toString r = … (* reduce at last minute *)
end
```

Some interesting details

- Internally **`make_frac`** has type **`int * int -> int * int`**, but externally **`int * int -> rational`**
  - Client cannot tell if we return argument unchanged
  - Could give type **`rational -> rational`** in signature, but this is awful: makes entire module unusable – why?

- Internally **`Whole`** has type **`'a -> 'a * int`** but externally **`int -> rational`**
  - This matches because we can specialize **`'a`** to **`int`** and then abstract **`int * int`** to **`rational`**
  - **`Whole`** cannot have types **`'a -> int * int`** or **`'a -> rational`** (must specialize all **`'a`** uses)
  - Type-checker figures all this out for us

Can't mix-and-match module bindings

Modules with the *same signatures* still define *different types*

So things like this do not type-check:

- **`Rational1.toString(Rational2.make_frac(9,6))`**
- **`Rational3.toString(Rational2.make_frac(9,6))`**

This is a crucial feature for type system and module properties:

- Different modules have different internal invariants!
- In fact, they have different type definitions
  - **`Rational1.rational`** looks like **`Rational2.rational`**, but clients and the type-checker do not know that
  - **`Rational3.rational`** is **`int*int`** not a datatype!