

Process state and hot code swapping

Module 8 - Erlang tutorial 6

Operating systems and process oriented programming 2018

1DT096

Computation

What do we mean by computation?

How is computation performed in imperative programming languages?

How is computation performed in functional programming languages?

Computation

Imperative programming defines computation as statements that changes the **mutable** program **state**.

Functional programming treats computation as the **evaluation** of **mathematical functions** and avoids changing state and mutable data.

Erlang system initialisation

In Erlang systems it is common for a module to provide a start function that initialises the system, for example by spawning a new process.

The Erlang process loop

In Erlang, the recursive function used by a process to handle messages is called the process loop.

Erlang

process state

The state of an Erlang process is defined by the values of the arguments to the process receive loop.

**An example
of a **stateful**
Erlang
process**

In Erlang systems it is common for a module to provide a start function that initialises the system, for example by spawning a new process. The recursive function used by a process to handle messages is often named loop.

```
-module(state).  
-export([start/0]).  
  
start() ->  
    spawn(fun() -> loop(0) end).
```

The state of the process executing the **loop/1** function is defined by the value of the argument to the **loop/1** function. In this example the initial state is **0**.


```
loop(N) when is_integer(N) ->
    receive
        inc ->
            %% Update the process state by using a
            %% new value for the argument to the
            %% proces loop.
            loop(N+1);
        dec ->
            %% Update the process state by using a
            %% new value for the argument to the
            %% proces loop.
            loop(N-1);
        show ->
            io:format("N = ~w~n", [N]),
            %% Don't update the process state.
            loop(N)
    end.
```

```
-module(state).  
-export([start/0]).
```

A complete example module
implementing a stateful process

```
start() ->  
    spawn(fun() -> loop(0) end).  
  
loop(N) when is_integer(N) ->  
    receive  
        inc ->  
            loop(N+1);  
        dec ->  
            loop(N-1);  
        show ->  
            io:format("N = ~w~n", [N]),  
            loop(N)  
    end.
```

```
erlang> c(state).  
{ok,state}  
erlang> P = state:start().  
<0.156.0>  
erlang> P ! show.  
N = 0  
show  
erlang> P ! inc.  
inc  
erlang> P ! inc.  
inc  
erlang> P ! show.  
N = 2  
show  
erlang> P ! dec.  
dec  
erlang> P ! show.  
N = 1  
show  
erlang>
```

Compile the module.

Initially the process state **N = 0**.

The process state is changed by sending messages to the process.

- ▶ The **inc** message increases **N**.
- ▶ The **dec** message decreases **N**.
- ▶ The **show** message prints the value of **N**.

Hot swapping

Hot swapping is replacing or adding components without stopping or shutting down the system.

Hot code swapping in Erlang

Erlang supports change of code
in a running system.

Code replacement is done on the
module level.

Current and old module version

The code of a module can exist in two variants in a system: **current** and **old**.

- ▶ When a module is loaded into the system for the first time, the code becomes **current**.
- ▶ If then a new instance of the module is loaded, the code of the previous instance becomes **old** and the new instance becomes **current**.

Fully qualified function calls

When including the module name when calling a function, the function is said to be called using the fully qualified function name.

The following is an example of a fully qualified function call to the `bar/1` function in the `foo` module.

```
foo:bar(77).
```

Note that a function must be exported from a module in order to allow for fully qualified function calls.

?MODULE

The **?MODULE** macro returns the name of the current module.

To make a fully qualified function call to the **bar/1** function in the current module the **?MODULE** macro can be used as follows.

```
?MODULE:bar(77).
```

Using the **?MODULE** macro makes the code valid even if the name of the module is changed.

A fully qualified function call triggers hot code swapping

Both the old and the current version of a module code is valid, and can be evaluated concurrently.

- ▶ Fully qualified function calls always refer to current code.
- ▶ Old code can still be evaluated because of processes lingering in the old code.

An example of hot code swapping in Erlang

```
-module(swap).  
-export([start/0, loop/0]).
```

```
start() -> spawn(fun() -> loop() end).
```

```
result(X) -> 2*X.
```

```
loop() ->  
    receive
```

```
        swap ->
```

```
            io:format("Hot code swapping!~n"),
```

```
            ?MODULE:loop();
```

```
X when is_integer(X) ->
```

```
    io:format("Result = ~w~n", [result(X)]),
```

```
    loop();
```

```
X ->
```

```
    io:format("Unhandled message: ~p~n", [X]),
```

```
    loop()
```

```
end.
```

After receiving the atom **swap**, a fully qualified recursive function call **?MODULE:loop()** is made to the process loop.

```
erlang> c(swap).  
{ok, swap}  
erlang> P1 = swap:start().  
<0.189.0>  
erlang> P2 = swap:start().  
<0.191.0>  
erlang> P1 ! 7.  
Result = 14  
7  
erlang> P2 ! 33.  
Result = 66  
33  
erlang>
```

Compile the module.

Create two processes,
both running the
swap:loop/0 function.

When receiving an integer
X, both processes
calculates **2*X**.

```
-module(swap).  
-export([start/0, loop/0]).
```

```
start() -> spawn(fun() -> loop() end).
```

```
result(X) -> 10*X.
```

```
loop() ->  
    receive  
        swap ->  
            io:format("Hot code swapping!~n"),  
            ?MODULE:loop();  
        X when is_integer(X) ->  
            io:format("Result = ~w~n", [result(X)]),  
            loop();  
        X ->  
            io:format("Unhandled message: ~p~n", [X]),  
            loop()  
    end.
```

Now, change **result/1** from returning **2*X** to returning **10*X** and save the file.

```
erlang> c(swap).  
{ok, swap}  
erlang> P1 ! swap.  
Hot code swapping!  
swap  
erlang> P1 ! 7.  
Result = 70  
7  
erlang> P2 ! 33.  
Result = 66  
33
```

Compile the module.

Send the atom **swap** to the **P1** process.

- ▶ When receiving an integer **X**, **P1** now calculates **10*X**, i.e., **P1** runs the new version of the module.
- ▶ When receiving an integer **X**, **P2** continues to calculate **2*X**, i.e., **P2** runs the old version of the module.

The Erlang reference manual

You can read more about hot code swapping
in the Erlang Reference Manual.

[http://erlang.org/doc/
reference_manual/
code_loading.html](http://erlang.org/doc/reference_manual/code_loading.html)