

CS 4110

Programming Languages & Logics

Lecture 16 Fixed-Point Combinators



Recursive Functions

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We'd like to write it like this...

$$\text{FACT} \triangleq \lambda n. \text{IF } (\text{ISZERO } n) \text{ 1 } (\text{TIMES } n \text{ (FACT (PRED } n)))$$

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In slightly more readable notation this is...

$$\text{FACT} \triangleq \lambda n. \text{if } n = 0 \text{ then } 1 \text{ else } n \times \text{FACT } (n - 1)$$

...but this is an equation, not a definition!

Recursion removal trick

We can perform a “trick” to define a function FACT that satisfies the recursive equation on the previous slide.

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Define a new function FACT' that takes a function f as an argument. Then, for “recursive” calls, it uses $f f$:

$$\text{FACT}' \triangleq \lambda f. \lambda n. \text{if } n = 0 \text{ then } 1 \text{ else } n \times ((f f) (n - 1))$$

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Then define FACT as FACT' applied to itself:

$$\text{FACT} \triangleq \text{FACT}' \text{ FACT}'$$

Example

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Fixed point combinators

Our “trick” requires following human-readable instructions.
Write a different function f' that takes itself as an argument and uses self-application for recursive calls, and then define f as $f' f'$.

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Fixed point combinators

How can we generate the fixed point of G ?

In denotational semantics, finding fixed points took a lot of math. In the λ -calculus, we just need a suitable combinator...

Y Combinator

The (infamous) Y combinator is defined as

$$Y \triangleq \lambda f. (\lambda x. f (x x)) (\lambda x. f (x x))$$

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What happens when we evaluate Y G under CBV?

Z Combinator

To avoid this issue, we'll use a slight variant of the Y combinator, called Z, which is easier to use under CBV.

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Example

Let's see Z in action, on our function G .

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$$\begin{aligned} & \text{FACT} \\ = & Z\ G \\ = & (\lambda f. (\lambda x. f(\lambda y. x\ x\ y)) (\lambda x. f(\lambda y. x\ x\ y)))\ G \\ \rightarrow & (\lambda x. G(\lambda y. x\ x\ y)) (\lambda x. G(\lambda y. x\ x\ y)) \end{aligned}$$

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$$\begin{aligned} & \text{FACT} \\ = & Z\ G \\ = & (\lambda f. (\lambda x. f (\lambda y. x\ x\ y))) (\lambda x. f (\lambda y. x\ x\ y))\ G \\ \rightarrow & (\lambda x. G (\lambda y. x\ x\ y)) (\lambda x. G (\lambda y. x\ x\ y)) \\ \rightarrow & G (\lambda y. (\lambda x. G (\lambda y. x\ x\ y)) (\lambda x. G (\lambda y. x\ x\ y)))\ y \end{aligned}$$

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Let's see Z in action, on our function G.

```
FACT
= Z G
= (λf. (λx. f (λy. x x y)) (λx. f (λy. x x y))) G
→ (λx. G (λy. x x y)) (λx. G (λy. x x y))
→ G (λy. (λx. G (λy. x x y)) (λx. G (λy. x x y)) y)
= (λf. λn. if n = 0 then 1 else n × (f (n - 1)))
    (λy. (λx. G (λy. x x y)) (λx. G (λy. x x y)) y)
```

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```
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= Z G
= (λf. (λx. f (λy. x x y)) (λx. f (λy. x x y))) G
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→ G (λy. (λx. G (λy. x x y)) (λx. G (λy. x x y)) y)
= (λf. λn. if n = 0 then 1 else n × (f (n - 1)))
    (λy. (λx. G (λy. x x y)) (λx. G (λy. x x y)) y)
→ λn. if n = 0 then 1
    else n × ((λy. (λx. G (λy. x x y)) (λx. G (λy. x x y)) y) (n - 1))
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$$\begin{aligned} & \text{FACT} \\ = & Z\ G \\ = & (\lambda f. (\lambda x. f(\lambda y. x\ x\ y)) (\lambda x. f(\lambda y. x\ x\ y)))\ G \\ \rightarrow & (\lambda x. G(\lambda y. x\ x\ y)) (\lambda x. G(\lambda y. x\ x\ y)) \\ \rightarrow & G(\lambda y. (\lambda x. G(\lambda y. x\ x\ y)) (\lambda x. G(\lambda y. x\ x\ y))\ y) \\ = & (\lambda f. \lambda n. \text{if } n = 0 \text{ then } 1 \text{ else } n \times (f(n - 1))) \\ & (\lambda y. (\lambda x. G(\lambda y. x\ x\ y)) (\lambda x. G(\lambda y. x\ x\ y))\ y) \\ \rightarrow & \lambda n. \text{if } n = 0 \text{ then } 1 \\ & \text{else } n \times ((\lambda y. (\lambda x. G(\lambda y. x\ x\ y)) (\lambda x. G(\lambda y. x\ x\ y))\ y) (n - 1)) \\ =_{\beta} & \lambda n. \text{if } n = 0 \text{ then } 1 \text{ else } n \times (\lambda y. (Z\ G)\ y) (n - 1) \end{aligned}$$

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Other fixed point combinators

There are many (indeed infinitely many) fixed-point combinators. Here's a cute one:

$$Y_k \triangleq (\text{L L})$$

where

$$L \triangleq \lambda abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzr. \\ (r(thisisafixedpointcombinator))$$

Turing's Fixed Point Combinator

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Now use the recursion removal trick:

$$\begin{aligned}\Theta' &\triangleq \lambda t. \lambda f. f(t t f) \\ \Theta &\triangleq \Theta' \Theta'\end{aligned}$$

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