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| **MASTER THESIS** |
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| **Frege IDE with JetBrains MPS** |
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I would like to thank … = **TODO**

Title: Frege IDE with JetBrains MPS

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Abstract: Frege is an open-source project which tries to bring the popular functional language, Haskell, to Java ecosystem. JetBrains MPS is an open-source language workbench, which allows users to built an integrated development environment with a projectional (structured) editor for a language. The focus of the thesis is to analyze Frege grammar and build an environment to assist developers with writing code in the language. The environment should include a set of intuitive editors for editing Frege syntax, provide a simple type checking and implement code generators for the Frege language. Aim of the environment is its usability. Additionally, the thesis tries to compare projectional editors with plain-text ones and evaluate, whether they offer any advantage for editing purely functional languages.

Keywords: Frege, Haskell, IDE, projectional editor

Contents

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Introduction

Integrated development environments (commonly abbreviated as IDE) are a set of software applications that provide tools and facilities to software developers. They greatly ease the process of development, providing features like intelligent code completion, syntax highlighting, build automation tools, debugger, and many others. [1]

Most IDEs are built like text editors that provide additional features when editing a source code. The editors usually parse the code; generate a parse tree, which allows static code analysis and generic error checking of the written program. [3]

A different approach to designing an IDE can be done via a projectional editing. A projectional editor (also known as structured editor) is a document editor that is cognizant of the document’s underlying structure. It is usually used to edit hierarchical or marked-up text, computer programs, diagrams, and any other type of content with a clear and well-defined structure. While for the most computer programs, due to their complexity, a conventional text-based IDE may be more suitable, for specific programming languages, especially DSL (domain specific language) a projectional editor might prove to be a more effective tool.

In this work, we intended to create a projectional IDE for a functional language, Frege, to evaluate, whether such approach makes sense and whether projectional editors offer more convenience than regular text-based IDEs when it comes to working with functional languages in general. The application we implemented is in this text often referred to as Frege-IDE.

Frege, named after the German mathematician, [Gottlob Frege](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gottlob_Frege), is a functional language, heavily based on Haskell, trying to bring the language to Java ecosystem. It is considered a Haskell dialect, sometimes called ‘a Haskell for the JVM’ (Java Virtual Machine). [2]

There are several IDEs for Haskell. (Examples can be found at [*https://wiki.haskell.org/IDEs*](https://wiki.haskell.org/IDEs).) Most of the known IDEs provide mainly syntax highlighting, macros and project management features, while some also support more advanced functionalities, such as code completion and type checking. Frege, being a relatively new project, does not have as extensive support in IDEs as Haskell, which is one of the reasons why we decided to create an environment specifically for that language.

As an underlying tool for designing our environment, we have chosen an open-source language workbench JetBrains MPS. MPS (standing for ‘Meta-Programming System’) is a software solution allowing developers and language designers to create a projectional editor, together with advanced features found in many IDEs, such as code completion, syntax highlighting and others. It is primarily used for designing editors for DSLs, for developing new languages and also extending existing ones, when the languages available do not meet the needs of a developer. MPS has a large set of features, allowing for designing editors which closely resemble those from conventional, text-based, IDEs. It allows a language designer to define a structure of AST (abstract syntax tree) to represent the code, editor for manipulating the AST and a text generator to transform the AST into pure text. More about the platform is described in chapter 1.

Frege, based on Haskell language, has also rather many syntactic and semantic constructs for this work to be able to include them all. We have therefore focused our attention only on the most important features worth examining, such as function declaration and definition, operators and custom data types. Our ideal IDE would have to have a user-friendly editor, which closely emulates writing Frege code in such a way most developers in that language are used to. This should be accompanied by a contextual code completion feature, which would allow referencing already defined functions, operators, variables, and other elements in the correct spots in the code. Last, but not least, we have strived for a type checker that would be able to find small mistakes in the code, such as calling a function with illegal arguments, or evaluate type of an expression. Chapter 3 describes the supported features of the language in a greater detail.

Organization

The thesis is organized in the following way:

* Chapter 1 is devoted to MPS tool. It describes what MPS is, what it can do and what its limitations are. The chapter introduces a project structure in MPS, how to define an editor for a simple language and how to tackle certain common problems.
* Chapter 2 describes Frege language. It takes a look into the features of the language and shows their applications on concrete examples.
* Chapter 3 is dedicated to the concrete work implementation. It delves into Frege grammar and shows, how it was transformed into MPS concepts. It explores editor aspect, how it was designed with usability in mind and its concrete implementation. Then, code completion feature is explained. The chapter is concluded with type system, where some of the more interesting algorithms, used in the work, are described.
* Chapter 4 evaluates our decisions and explores the advantages and disadvantages of the projectional editor over a standard, text-based, IDE.
* In the conclusion, a brief summary of the whole work may be found, where we also strived to answer the final question, whether projectional IDEs are actually good for functional languages.

1. JetBrains MPS

JetBrains MPS is an open-source language workbench that focuses on DSLs. It is a tool that helps its users to create a new language and then write other programs in that language. [6]

MPS has a wide range of users. The areas MPS is currently applied in include electrical engineering, data mining, insurance industry and others. The tool can be used to create new languages as well as extending existing ones. Programs written in the defined languages may then be conveniently transformed into pure text in a specific, usually generic-purpose language. [4]

This chapter provides an informal introduction to the tool and describes the usage details later.

MPS is a complex tool built around projectional editing, which means it does not treat the document as a text, but rather as structured concepts. This allows its users to create languages which involve non-parsable notations, such as decision tables, diagrams, and other controls. [5] Additionally, several editors may be specified for a single language, thus allowing users to switch between different visual representations of a document. Figure 1.1 shows an exemplar editor for an extension of Java language with matrices and other non-parsable controls.



Figure 1.1: Editor for an extension of Java language with non-parsable controls

Traditional IDEs, on the other hand, involve a similar processing of a code, usually expressed as plain text files, as compilers do. Traditional process of compiling written code involves lexers and parsers to read programs, which are then transformed into tree-like data structures, called ASTs. (See figure 1.2 for an example of an AST for a simple arithmetic expression (7 + 1) \* 2 + 3.) After that, in the process of semantic analysis and code generation, an executable program is created. During these processes a text-based IDE may report and underline any found errors for the user.

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Figure 1.2: AST for a simple arithmetic expression

In contrast, in MPS, the user works with AST directly, therefore completely omitting the process of lexical analysis and subsequent parsing. This brings certain advantages:

* It may be easier to extend an existing language.
* MPS can check for type errors and other mistakes in the code at almost any time.

Extending lexers and parsers to accommodate for the changes in a language requires a certain set of skills and a deeper knowledge of the language’s grammar. The process is complicated, since it requires a programmer to keep track of the possible ambiguities that may arise when defining new grammar rules for a parser. (A well-known example is the ‘dangling else’ problem.) However, in MPS the process usually only requires defining new concepts that can act as AST nodes and specifying places in the corresponding AST where the new nodes can be created. This also means that in MPS we can combine syntax of several different languages and introduce no syntax ambiguities whatsoever. (This, however, may still look ambiguous to the user, if there are several different concepts with the same visual representation.)

On the other hand, to check for errors in the code in a traditional IDE, one has to define a specific set of rules to deal with the incorrect syntax. Code being currently typed means, it almost certainly cannot be correctly evaluated by the standard parser for the corresponding language. Therefore, in an example below, we might not be able to tell a user that the integer and string types are incomparable between themselves, until the ‘if’ expression is properly finished with the required body:

if (1 == "")

// a statement is required here

Understandably, there are ways to deal with the illustrated problem, but it requires extra effort. In MPS, this is not an issue, since the code is already ‘parsed’. Even though the body of the ‘if’ expression is not set yet, there is already a node in the corresponding AST associated with the conditional expression inside the ‘if’ brackets. The node then may be further checked and underlined with red color. (This is a well-known technique of many popular IDEs, such as Visual Studio or Eclipse, to report errors.) This quality is also useful when designing a smart code completion feature, which requires certain knowledge of the context surrounding the target piece of code.

Working with AST directly also carries some downsides. They mainly include worse code editing. In en example from the figure 1.2, a user would need to define the AST from root to leaves, which, at least in case of arithmetic expressions, is not very user-friendly. Fortunately, MPS provides several functionalities to allow a language designer to define custom automatic transformations of the AST. A designer can define a transformation for a case, when, for instance, a certain node (or a whole subtree) is deleted, a specific text is written at the end (or a beginning) of a node, and so on. The MPS actions are described further in this chapter.

We will now describe the MPS platform in a more detail.

1.1 Project structure

A project in MPS is divided into two main categories: solutions and languages.

A ‘language’ is the user defined programming language. It may represent a completely new language or an extension of an existing one. Several different languages may be defined in a single MPS project. They can act as an extension of each other, or be completely independent languages.

A ‘solution’, on the other hand, is a part of the project that represents documents (a code) written in one or more of the defined languages. Sometimes, a solution acts only as a runtime support for one or more of the defined languages, to be used, for example, in a code generation process.

Figure 1.3 shows a logical view of a typical project in MPS.

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Figure 1.3: Logical view of a project in MPS

Solution is a set of models. They act as packaging units that make it possible to reference the corresponding set of models from other solutions or languages. A model is simply a set of ASTs. We can imagine a single AST as a representation of a single document (an analogy to a source file in a traditional programming paradigm). The model then consists of one or more such documents.

Language describes what types of ASTs can be created with it. It also includes a visual representation of each node, AST transformation actions, syntax and semantic rules together with many other ‘settings’. It is divided into several categories, called aspects.

The following is the description of the most important MPS aspects which we have also used in this work.

1.2 Structure

Before we delve into the structure aspect, we have to explain the notion of MPS concepts. A concept represents a sort of a class of AST nodes. It closely resembles working with classes and instances in many popular object-oriented programming languages, such as Java. In this analogy, a concept is a class, whereas an AST node is an instance of that class. Concepts, in a similar manner as classes, can have defined methods, properties, can extend (inherit from) other concepts or implement interfaces. They can contain fields, which are either valued types or instances of (possibly) different concepts. This way, we can specify a structure of possible ASTs that can be created. A concept may also be declared abstract, in which case no AST nodes may be created directly for such a concept.

There are several different ‘points of view’ to a concept. We can define methods for them, fields and properties, visual appearance of the AST nodes, and other. These are called aspects. Structure aspect allows to define structure of possible ASTs that can be expressed with the corresponding language. It defines what kind of AST nodes may be used in a program, what properties, children and references they may have. [7] An example of the structure aspect for a concept is shown on figure 1.4.

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Figure 1.4: Structure aspect for a concept in MPS

We start by naming a concept. This is similar to naming a class in languages like Java and must follow a similar set of naming rules. On an example depicted by figure 1.4, the corresponding concept is named MoneyCreator.

The extends clause provides a reference to the super-concept. By default, all concepts are created with BaseConcept as their super-concept, but this can be changed to a more specific one. Similarly to Java, the clause encodes inheritance (or ‘is-a’ relationship in UML) and each concept, except the BaseConcept itself, directly or indirectly has to extend BaseConcept in the formed hierarchy. In terms of MPS, this means that if a concept A extends a concept B, it indicates that the concept A has all of properties, children, references, methods, and definitions from all other aspects, as B.

Concepts can also implement interfaces by using implements clause. An interface in this case is a special ‘interface concept’. It is a mechanism to declare characteristics that can be used across several concept types. Unlike concepts, we cannot define an alias for them (see below) nor can they extend concepts, only other interfaces. They are mostly used for grouping properties that are commonly used together and passing them onto necessary concepts.

An alias acts as a string that triggers a built-in auto-completion menu. An example of such a menu is depicted on figure 1.5. If the name is unambiguous (i.e. it is not a prefix of another item in the menu), an instance of the concept is immediately created. More about the menu is discussed in the editor chapter.



Figure 1.5: An example of auto-completion menu in MPS

A concept may be set to act as a root. What this means is that its instances, together with their children, may represent a single unit of a program, a single document or a source code. (See above the project structure in MPS and solutions.) There should be at least one such a concept for the corresponding language to make sense. A concept may be set to act as a root by using the instance can be root clause and setting the value to true.

An analogy to Java fields is represented by concept properties and children. Properties define concept’s custom values (values that are owned by the concept). These are set under the properties section. They can be one of the following:

* **Primitive type:** integer, boolean, or string.
* **Enumeration type:** a custom enumeration data type may be created in MPS structure aspect to be used within a concept.
* **Constrained data type:** a custom constrained data type may be created in MPS structure aspect, which is a simple string type validated by a user-defined regular expression.

It may be interesting to note that primitive types can be derived from usage of the other two options.

Children (found under children section), on the other hand, resemble aggregation relationship. These are the instances that belong to the instance of the current concept. While there may be references set to these AST nodes from other instances as well, in terms of their lifetime, they strictly depend on the life of the current instance. In case the current instance is removed from the AST, all of its children (and therefore children of their children, recursively) are removed as well.

Children are defined by setting a name, a concept and a cardinality. The cardinality may be one of the following options:

* **[1]**: exactly one instance of the specified concept is required.
* **[0..1]**: there may or may not be one instance of the specified concept.
* **[1..\*]**: at least one instance of the specified concept is required. These then form an ordered array.
* **[0..\*]**: there may be zero or more instances of the specified concept.

Expressing a relationship between nodes can be also done via references. It is only possible to create a reference to a node if this node already exists in the corresponding AST. Contrary to children, cardinality can take here only two forms:

* **[0..1]**: the reference is optional.
* **[1]**: the reference to an instance of the specified concept is required.

Where would we use a reference? Consider a following piece of code in Frege:

f = 7

g = 1 + f

The code represents a definition of two constant functions returning an integer number. An (almost) equivalent piece of code could be written in Java in the following way:

int f() { return 7; }

int g() { return 1 + f(); }

We could express the corresponding AST in many different ways, but let us imagine for the sake of simplicity a root node, representing the source file, consisting of statement nodes. Both f = 7 and g = 1 + f are statements. It is easy to imagine an expression, such as 1 + 2, as a tree with a node + on top having two children, representing the literals: 1 and 2. But in the case of 1 + f, it is less clear what f is. Using a reference here might be helpful. We already have a statement declaring, what f is, in the corresponding AST. In 1 + f we are only applying an existing function f. Therefore, we are referencing the existing function f in the node representing the f operand. An example of such AST is depicted on figure 1.6.



Figure 1.6: AST for statements using a reference

1.3 Editor

Editor aspect is responsible for rendering and editing ASTs by the user of the language being created. This includes textual and graphical representation of each AST node and certain AST transformation actions. This aspect is what makes MPS a projectional editor, rather than using lexers and parsers to process the user-written code.

The easiest way to define an editor for a language is to define an editor for each concept (called concept editor). There may be several different editors defined for a single concept, which offers different views of the same concept for different needs. If a concept has no editor defined, a default one will be provided by MPS.

Another way of creating an editor for a language is to create an editor component. It is an editor responsible for rendering and editing only a part of an AST node. It does not focus on any single concept and as such may be reused across several concept editors to render certain parts similarly.

Figure 1.7 shows a concept editor for the MoneyCreator concept from the previous chapter.

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Figure 1.7: Concept editor in MPS

A usual representation of an AST node consists of, so called, editor cells. An editor cell is the smallest unit which can be used to render (and possibly edit) a certain portion of an AST node over a rectangular region in MPS editor window. For instance, MoneyCreator concept has a string property called name. To show and edit the property value of any instance of the concept MoneyCreator, we specify a property editor cell for the corresponding property name.

The main types of editor cells include:

* **Constant cells**: constant cells are used to render keywords and other constant text in editor. Figure 1.8 shows an editor from the user perspective of a demo language, which is an extension of Java. On the example, we use a while-loop, which is an instance of WhileStatement concept. The string While (blue) is a constant editor cell. On figure 1.7, the rectangle with the string Money also denotes a constant editor cell, but from the perspective of a language designer, who is creating the concept editor for MoneyCreator concept.



Figure 1.8: Editor for an extension of Java language

* **Property cells**: they render content of a specific property of a concept for which the editor is being defined. Editing such a cell in the editor window for a concrete AST is immediately reflected in the given property of the corresponding AST node. The cell provides automatic binding to the concept’s property. On the example above depicted on figure 1.8, a declaration of the integer variable i is an instance of a concept with a string property name. The identifier is rendered by a property cell. By invoking a node explorer window (alt + x), we can see that the property of the AST node is indeed set to the name we entered. The node explorer is shown on figure 1.9.



Figure 1.9: Node explorer for the declaration of the integer variable i

* **Child cells**: these cells delegate the rendering of a specific concept’s child (or a set of children) to their corresponding concept editors. The concrete behavior of such a cell depends on the child’s cardinality:
  + **[1]**: the editor cell is always present
  + **[0..1], [0..\*] or [1..n]**: child nodes are bound to their corresponding editors and removing a child in MPS editor window results in removing it from the parent node of the corresponding AST as well
  + **[0..\*] or [1..\*]**: the children’s corresponding concept editors are separated by a specified textual delimiter

On figure 1.8 we can see a method invocation represented by statement handle(i, "default"). The provided two arguments are children of cardinality [0..n] of a concept Expression and are represented by child cells delimited by a comma.

* **Referent cells**: referent cells are used to display an attribute of a referenced node from the given concept (see references in the structure chapter above). As in the case of property cells, they are mapped to a certain property of the referenced node in the AST. However, they can only reflect the property of the original node, but not affect it. Figure 1.9 shows an editor with Money variable declaration. It has a form of a subtree with an AST node representing the variable’s name (originally m2). The variable is then referenced in an expression, which prints a subtraction of the variable by another variable into the standard output. The change in the variable’s name (m2\_2) is immediately reflected into the reference. This way MPS support renaming refactoring feature out of the box.

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Figure 1.9: Editor for an extension of Java language depicting the usage of referent editor cells

* **Collection cells**: wrapper-like cells to contain other editor cells are called collection cells. They affect visual arrangement of the cells being rendered. There are three main types of collection cells:
  + **Horizontal cells**: cells enwrapped are placed horizontally in row.
  + **Vertical cells**: cells enwrapped are placed vertically.
  + **Indent cells**: cells enwrapped are placed in a text-like manner.

There are several other types of editor cells. Here we only described the most-used ones from the perspective of this work.

The editor cells may also be rendered in different ways. We can change that by using editor styles. Applying editor style could be described as analogous to applying CSS (Cascading Style Sheets)styles to DOM nodes in HTML and XML documents. This allows us to change visual properties, such as color of a text, background color, spacing, padding as well as functional aspects, such as editor cell being editable or read-only and many others. Figure 1.10 shows a usage of editor styles for a selected editor cell.

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Figure 1.10: Editor style for a selected editor cell

1.3.1 Editor actions

So far we have described how we can customize appearance of each AST node. Now we will discuss editor actions, how we can allow automatic transformations of the corresponding AST and how to easily add new AST nodes to the code tree.

A lot of developers are used to write programs in text-based IDEs or just in a plain-text editor. To simulate such a behavior, MPS comes with a notion of editor actions. We have to remind the reader that MPS keeps the code at tree-like data structures at all times. This means that what seems in a text-based editor as a trivial operation (such as adding a new operator and an operand to an arithmetic expression) is a non-trivial AST transformation in MPS.

Let us consider a simple arithmetic expression: 7 – 1 \* 2 + 3. In a plain-text editor, a normal user would write the expression from left to right. In MPS, however, the expression has to be encoded within an AST, and as such has to be entered from root node to the leaves. In this particular example, a user would need to create an instance of a concept representing the + operator. This creates a binary tree. The right operand is an AST node representing the literal 3. The left operand is a new subtree representing the expression 7 – 1 \* 2, which has to be, again, entered from root node to the leaves, starting with the concept representing the – operator.

Understandably, the mentioned approach is not very user-friendly. However, we can use MPS editor actions to create an editor where such an arithmetic expression may be entered from left to right. We will show the approach for the concrete expression from the high-level point of view.

1. First, the user types in 7. That is a very simple unary expression and no further work is to be done here.
2. Then, user hits -. MPS immediately creates a binary expression subtree, where root is the operator -. 7 is put as its left operand and the focus is set on the right operand, so the user may edit that.
3. User types in 1, which only concludes the editing of the right operand. Figure 1.11 illustrates the AST in its current state.



Figure 1.11: Illustration of an AST for the arithmetic expression 7 – 1

1. Then, however, follows the operator \*. User is now editing the right child of the AST corresponding to the expression 7 – 1. MPS, therefore, takes a look at the parent’s operator’s precedence. It is clear that - is less precedent, than \*. Thus, a subtree for binary operator \* is created, 1 is put as its left child and a focus on the right child is set. The subtree is placed in the original stead of the node representing operand 1. Figure 1.12 illustrates an AST after finishing the current step.



Figure 1.12: Illustration of an AST representing an arithmetic expression 7 – 1 \* unset-operand

1. User types in 2, which concludes the editing of the right operand for the operator \*.
2. Finally, user types in operator +. MPS again takes a look on the parent’s operator, which is \* and has a higher precedence. The new subtree, therefore, has to be created elsewhere. The parent of the node representing operator \* is, however, –. While – has the same precedence as + all of the operators are left associative, which means the new subtree has to be created even on the higher level. MPS creates the subtree, puts the current AST corresponding to the expression 7 – 1 \* 2 as its left child and sets the focus on its right child. The current AST is depicted on figure 1.13.



Figure 1.13: Illustration of an AST representing an arithmetic expression 7 – 1 \* 2 + unset-operand

1. Typing 3 only finishes editing of the right child and the expression is concluded.

In the description above, we were always editing a specific editor cell corresponding to a single node in the AST. We always handled an event of writing a specific textual pattern to the right of a certain editor cell. This is just what MPS allows us to do. These type of actions are usually referred to as transformation menu actions and we will describe them in a more detail in the following chapter.

Another important type of actions are substitute menu actions, which allow to substitute a certain AST node (or a whole subtree) for a different AST node. These actions are usually invoked when a certain text is written in place of an AST node, which we want to automatically substitute for something else. The substitute menu actions are described in the chapter of the same name.

1.3.2 Transformation menu actions

Transformations menu actions provide a way to manipulate an AST when a certain textual pattern is entered, usually either left or right of a certain editor cell. They allow us to replace a certain AST node for a different one, change a whole code subtree, or otherwise manipulate the corresponding data structures.

From a certain perspective we could say that the transformation menu actions are specific set of event handlers. The handlers are specified in a general-purpose programming language, which is based on Java (so called BaseLanguage). This allows for almost any type of AST manipulation and offers a lot of flexibility.

An example of a usage scenario can be a concept, which represents a certain type of expression enclosed within brackets, for example, (x1). However, the corresponding AST node may be changed to represent either:

* A tuple, which has a form of several expressions within round brackets separated by commas, e.g. (x1, x2, x3)
* A list, which has a form of several expressions within round brackets separated by colons, e.g. (x1 : x2 : x3)

We want to change the AST node based on the user-entered text. If the expression x1 is followed by a comma, we will replace the node for an instance of a tuple concept. In case the user enters a colon, an instance of a list concept is created. Figure 1.14 shows the concrete implementation of the corresponding transformation action, which is also described in a greater detail below.

The actions have to be always associated with a certain editor cell and the corresponding concept. However, the editor actions in general apply only to the following types of cells:

* Constant cells
* Property cells
* Referent cells

In the example above, the editor for the concept representing an expression enclosed within round brackets consists of three parts:

1. A constant cell representing the left round bracket
2. A child cell representing the expression
3. A constant cell representing the right round bracket

This means the transformation action described in the example above has to be created for the concept representing the expression, rather than the whole bracketed expression. (We are assuming the concept representing the expression consists only of the three mentioned types of editor cells, for example, the property cell denoting the identifier x1.)

Transformation menu action can be created as either:

* A default transformation menu for a concept
* A named transformation menu

A default transformation menu is associated with a specific concept. The action is triggered by entering a specific textual pattern either left or right (we can choose either of the two options) of all three types of the mentioned editor cells the corresponding concept editor consists of. For instance, if we created a default right-side transformation menu for the bracketed expression concept, the action would be triggered by entering the specified textual pattern right of both of the bracket symbols, but would not be triggered by entering the pattern right of the expression.

Additionally, every concept is implicitly associated with a default transformation menu. If the language designer does not provide one explicitly, a transformation menu defined for the closest super-concept is assumed. [9] If none are defined, a one implicitly defined for BaseConcept is used.

A named transformation menu is an additional action associated with a specific concept. Unlike the default menu, it is not associated with all of the three types of the mentioned editor cells in the corresponding concept editor implicitly. Instead, a language designer has to attach the action explicitly to the concrete editor cells he or she likes. However, the same restriction for the editor cell types applies here as well, i.e. we cannot attach the named action to child editor cells, only to the constant, property and referent cells.

Let us now describe the implementation process of a transformation menu action on the example for the bracketed expression. We will create a default transformation menu for the concept representing the expression. Then we specify the section, i.e. where the transformation should take place. There are several options, but for the purpose of this work, either the action is triggered upon typing a text right of an editor cell, or left of an editor cell. (We chose right. See figure 1.14 with the clause section({ side transformation: right }).)

Then, we define the action from three main categories:

* **Text:** represents a string that triggers the current action. This is the string a user can type either right or left of the associated editor cells. It can be either a constant, or a piece of code which returns the string that triggers the action.
* **Can execute:** a piece of code that is executed once the action is triggered. If the code returns false, the current action is prevented from execution. However, due to how MPS works, it is mostly best to leave the section empty, as returning true indicates the possibility to execute the action even if not triggered by the current Text.
* **Execute:** the specific handler of the current action, written in a higher-level Java-like language. It specifies the concrete transformation of the AST.

On figure 1.14 we can see the concrete implementation consisting of two separate actions. Each action performs its own transformation of the bracketed expression node (either to a tuple or a list). The former expression x1 is copied and placed as their first item. The bracketed expression node is a parent of the current expression, which is why we have to use the statement node.**parent**.replace with(newNode). The last line of the both handlers denotes setting a focus on the newly created AST node - on its last editable editor cell.



Figure 1.14: A default transformation menu for a concept representing an expression, which is also a child of the bracketed expression concept

There is also a way to reuse transformation menu actions. Instead of specifying an action, a language designer may use include statement. It includes a specific default or named transformation menu. Furthermore, a transformation menu aimed for a different concept, than the one being currently dealt with, may also be included. Consider the example above and a scenario, where we want to execute the actions defined for expression concept also when a user types the coma or colon symbol right of the bracket symbols. We may simply create a default transformation menu for the concept representing the bracketed expression and include the default transformation for expression concept.

1.3.3 Substitute menu actions

Substitute menu actions define transformations to some parts of the AST, where one node (or a whole subtree) is substituted by another node (or a whole subtree).

Typically substitute actions are triggered by user when pressing ctrl + space in the editor. This invokes a completion menu that contains options that, when selected by the user, will replace the current AST node under caret. Substitute menu actions allow a language designer to add specific items into the completion menu as well as overriding the behavior of the ones included in the menu by default. The default substitute menu is provided by MPS for all concepts, when the caret’s position is in front of a node, or the whole node is selected. Figure 1.15 depicts such a scenario in Frege-IDE.



Figure 1.15: A default substitute menu provided by MPS for a selected node

To trigger a substitute action, a user may also simply enter the text in place of an AST node from the completion menu for one of its items. This, understandably, does not work in every case, as not every AST node is completely editable (consider, for instance, an AST node with non-editable constant editor cells). However, instances of abstract concepts, which are created by default for the concepts with children of such abstract concepts, are editable. They are highlighted by reddish rectangle to denote an error and that MPS expects an instance of a concrete concept instead. Figure 1.16 captures the usage scenario. First we have an AST node, which is an instance of an abstract concept. Then we enter a text from the substitute menu, Just. Upon hitting the last character, the substitute action is triggered in the same way, as if the user selected the item manually from the menu and pressed enter key.



Figure 1.16: Using substitute menu actions by entering text directly

The completion menu follows the following scheme:

* All concepts applicable in the given context are displayed in the menu. (This follows the structure aspect of the language project. For example, if a concept A contains a child of an abstract concept B and there are two concrete concepts, which extend B – B1 and B2, then B1 and B2 are added to the menu. If B11 extends B1, it is also added to the menu.)
* Abstract concepts are not included in the menu.
* Concepts, for which their constraints do not allow their presence in the current place in the code, are not included either. (More about the constraints is discussed in the chapter of the same name.)
* Smart references are not added to the completion menu, but rather all of the referenceable items are included instead.

Smart reference is a term we use for concepts that contain only a single reference and nothing else. For instance, it may be a concept representing a variable in an expression. In most programming languages, a variable has to be declared first, before it can be used:

int i;

boolean b = i > 10; // i is a reference here

Such a concept would consist only of a reference to a concept representing the corresponding variable declaration. MPS then, instead of adding the concept itself to the substitution menu, adds to the menu all of the referenceable variable declarations. Thus, in the example above, the menu would be populated with the presentation of the AST node i (among other visible variables in the given context).

The completion menu may be altered by creating a substitute menu for a concept. If we create a default, empty, substitute menu for a concrete concept, it will not be populated by that concept, regardless of the context where the menu is invoked. This feature may be used to treat concepts, such as an EmptyStatement. A typical program is usually a series of statements. For the sake of simplicity, let us consider that each statement goes onto a new line. To allow empty lines in the editor, we would create an EmptyStatement concept. However, it does not make much sense to allow creating the EmptyStatement instances from the completion menu. Instead, each line should be an instance of EmptyStatement by default and easily rewritten to a different statement. To prevent EmptyStatement populating the completion menu, we would do just that - that is, creating an empty default substitute menu for the concept.

A language designer may also specify substitute actions and wrap substitute menus inside a substitute menu for a concept. We will describe them in a more detail, as they are important and heavily used in Frege-IDE.

Substitute actions populate the completion menu by a new entry at all places, where the current concept (for which we are defining the substitute menu) would be applicable. A language designer then specifies a custom handler, which has to return a new AST node for the current concept, or a concept which extends, directly or indirectly, the current concept. (In the analogy with OOP languages, the new AST node has to have a type of the current concept.)

We will demonstrate substitute menu actions on an example. Let us assume an abstract concept Literal. We have two concepts which extend Literal: IntegerValue and BooleanValue. What we want is to automatically create a concrete AST node, where a node for Literal concept is expected. If the user types an integer number, an instance of IntegerValue should be created, whereas if user types true or false, an instance of BooleanValue should be created.

From the point of view of completion menu, in places where an instance of Literal concept is expected, there should be three items in the menu available: two for BooleanValue (true and false) and one representing a generic IntegerValue. We will handle BooleanValue in the following way:

1. Set BooleanValue as an abstract concept.
2. Create two concrete concepts, which extend BooleanValue, i.e. TrueValue and FalseValue, representing the corresponding values.
3. Set aliases to true and false for the corresponding concepts representing the boolean values. This populates the completion menu with the defined aliases instead of the names of the corresponding concepts.

The IntegerValue is trickier, because there is no single value to represent the concept with. To solve the problem, we will create a default substitute menu for the Literal concept and add a single substitute menu action. Figure 1.17 shows an implementation of such a menu. We describe the details below.



Figure 1.17: Implementation of a default substitute menu for Literal concept

The substitute menu action consists of defining the following sections:

* **Create node**: this is a custom handler of the current substitute action and has to return a new node for the current concept.
* **Matching text:** a string that triggers the current substitute action, when typed. This is also the string that will be displayed on the left side of the invoked completion menu.
* **Can substitute:** a boolean telling the MPS whether the current substitute action may be executed when triggered.

In the case of our example, the IntegerValue is a concept with a single property representing the user-entered integer value. Therefore, in create node section, we simply create a new node and set its value property to be equal to the user-entered text. The matching text section is set to return whatever value the user types. This may make not much sense, but it is important to understand that we cannot represent all integer numbers with a single string. Finally, can substitute checks whether the user-entered string actually represents an integer value. It tries to match the string against a regular expression capturing integer values, and if successful, returns true.

Wrap substitute menu populates the completion menu by a different concept as a ‘replacement’ for the current concept. The corresponding handler still has to return an instance of the current concept, however, to conform to the defined structure.

Let us consider the following scenario. We have Literal concept from the example above, which, according to the structure, extends an abstract Expression concept. Then we have another abstract concept, Pattern, completely independent from Expression. However, we want to be able to use Literal also in places, where Pattern is expected. Since Literal may only extend one of the two concepts, we would need to create a new Literal concept, which would extend Pattern. Copying the Literal together with its sub-concepts would create a lot of code duplicity and the language would quickly become unmaintainable.

A different solution is to create a ‘wrapping’ concept, let us call it PLiteral. The concept extends Pattern and has a single child of cardinality [1] of type Literal. However, we want to preserve everything about the Literal concept from the example above, i.e. automatic substitution to IntegerValue and BooleanValue. In the current state, a user of the language would first need to create an instance of PLiteral and only then would he or she be able to use the defined substitute menu for Literal. (This is the ‘top-down’ approach of creating the AST.)

A language designer may use, however, the option of defining the wrap substitute menu. He or she would specify that in places where concept PLiteral is expected, the completion menu may be populated by the entries from completion menu for Literal concept instead. Selecting any of the corresponding entries from the completion menu would create an instance of Literal, and then the handler, defined by the language designer, would take the AST node and enwrap it by an instance of PLiteral.



Figure 1.18: Default substitute menu for PLiteral concept with the wrap substitute menu

Figure 1.18 depicts an implementation details of wrap substitute menu for PLiteral concept. A language designer selects a concept of which the completion menu should be copied (menu to wrap default substitute menu for), then specifies the handler, which wraps the original AST node by a new instance of the current concept.

1.3.4 Cell action map

Cell action map is a custom defined event handler associated with an editor cell. Unlike the previously mentioned types of actions, these allow a language designer to define a handler for events, such as editor cell selection, cell removal, pressing a concrete keyboard key when the editor cell is focused, and so on.

Consider the example from the transformation menu actions chapter. We have these types of concepts:

* A concept representing a bracketed expression, e.g. (x1)
* A concept representing a tuple, e.g. (x1, x2, x3)
* A concept representing a list, e.g. (x1 : x2 : x3)

However, this time, we are faced with the opposite problem – how to change an AST node, representing either a tuple or a list, back to the simple bracketed expression, upon removal of the last item?

We will demonstrate the usage of the action map on the tuple concept. Tuple is a concept containing at least two children of type Expression. Figure 1.19 provides an exemplar implementation of its structure aspect in MPS.



Figure 1.19: Implementation of structure aspect of Tuple concept

In the corresponding concept editor we associate the child editor cells for rest children from figure 1.19 with a new cell action map, we will name Tuple\_RemoveRestItems. In the cell action map, we define a new handler for DELETE action. The handler itself is relatively simple – we only create a new AST node for the bracketed expression, set the expression between the brackets to be equal to the last remaining item in the Tuple AST node and replace the Tuple node with the newly created bracketed expression. Finally, we set a focus on the newly created AST node in the editor. Figure 1.20 depicts an implementation of the cell action map.



Figure 1.20: Implementation of the cell action map for Tuple concept

To conclude the editor chapter, editor actions provide a flexible way to build a user-friendly editor that can mimic many features of a traditional, text-based, editor. However, it is impossible to allow the completely same behavior, since a user is editing the AST data structure and not the text he or she sees. This means that almost every editing feature has to be implemented manually. The language designer should, however, optimize the editor for the most common cases, at least.

1.4 Behavior

Behavior aspect allows to, simply said, define methods on concepts. If we take the analogy with OOP further, then structure aspect allows a language designer to declare classes and their fields, while the behavior aspect allows to declare and implement their methods, including constructors.

In behavior aspect, constructor is a block of code which is executed when a new node of the corresponding concept is created. However, certain exceptions exist, when the constructor is not, in fact, executed. These mainly include creating an instance of the concept by using other means in the MPS BaseLanguage, than the statement new initialized node<MyConcept>().

Similar concept of methods as in OOP languages, such as Java, is present here as well. A concept may be associated with several methods with strictly defined visibility (public, protected, or private). Methods that can be overridden in sub-concepts, have to be marked virtual. Static methods exist here as well. They are methods not attached to an instance of the concept, but rather have to be called on the concept itself.

Important characteristic of the behavior aspect is that it allows to traverse the AST being created. We can easily inspect parent and children of any node as well as nodes’ references.

An example of a concept’s behavior aspect is depicted on figure 1.21. The corresponding Import concept, which represents ‘import’ statement in Frege, has defined a constructor setting its property to a default value. getPrefix method returns the import’s alias. More about the Frege language is discussed in chapter 2.



Figure 1.21: Example of a concept’s behavior aspect in MPS

1.5 Intentions

Intentions aspect allows to define special user interface elements (called intentions) that allow executing predefined actions in certain places in the code. They usually perform some modification of the current AST.

Let us assume a program which consists of a series of statements. Each statement is placed on a single line, but some lines may be empty. Statements consist of several items. In this case, when a caret is positioned at the end of a statement, pressing enter key is, from the user’s perspective, ambiguous. Either it should add a new item to the current statement, or a new line. The scenario is illustrated on figure 1.22.



Figure 1.22: A program in MPS consisting of a series of simple statements

We can approach the problem by letting the user decide. A user would invoke a menu that would let him or her decide whether an item should be added to the current statement, or a new line below the statement.

The intentions menu is generally invoked by pressing alt + enter keys. The menu may contain several items and the selection of a concrete intention is confirmed by pressing enter key. An example of the menu is shown on figure 1.23.

Standard type of intentions are defined for a concrete concept. There is also another type of intentions (surround-with type) we have not used in this work and will therefore not describe.



Figure 1.23: Intentions menu in MPS

When created, the corresponding intention will be added to all intentions menu invoked on that corresponding concept. (This means a caret has to be positioned on the editor cells associated with the given concept at the time of the menu invocation.) The intention may also be executed within the subtree defined by the corresponding concept, if available in child nodes is set to true.

An example of an intention implementation is show on figure 1.24. A language designer has to provide the intention’s description, which will be shown in the invoked menu, and the handler to specify the required action. Additionally, he or she can define the context in which the intention may be displayed in the menu, by returning a boolean value inside the isApplicable section.



Figure 1.24: New intention definition in MPS

1.6 Constraints

Constraints aspect lets a language designer declare constraints that help him or her control where nodes of a language are allowed. They also allow to specify and put a set of restrictions on valid values (properties) of AST nodes and to define scopes for referenced nodes.

Scope is an object which defines a list of potential targets that can be referenced. Nodes outside the list may not be set a reference to. Additionally, scope object also helps to locate a suitable target from the given list based on what the user has entered in the corresponding place in the editor. When no scope is defined in the concept’s constraint aspect, all nodes of the appropriate type are considered eligible. The auto-completion menu is filled with nodes based on this rule.

Concept constraints are divided into several sections:

* **Can be child:** the section allows specifying a boolean method which returns, whether a node of the current concept can be a child in a specific AST context. If the method returns false, then the node will not be suggested in the auto-completion menu. Sections Can be parent and Can be ancestor work in a similar way.
* **Property constraints:** property constraints allow restricting a set of values of a concept property. In a sub-section is valid a language designer may specify a boolean method for checking the corresponding property’s value. If the method returns false, the value is considered illegal and MPS marks the associated editor property cell with a reddish rectangle.
* **Referent constraints:** in this section a language designer controls how references are established to nodes of the concept. He or she may restrict what nodes will be referenceable from the given concept by specifying the scope object.

1.6.1 Scope

Scope is an object in MPS which defines a list of potential targets that can be referenced. It is an (indirect) instance of an abstract class Scope in the BaseLanguage in MPS.

A language designer may specify his or her own implementation of Scope. The new class must inherit from the Scope class provided by MPS implicitly and implement the necessary abstract methods. Notable methods from the class include:

* **public abstract sequence<node<>> getAvailableElements(string prefix);** returns all of the nodes from the scope that begin with a string **prefix**.
* **public abstract node<> resolve(node<> contextNode, string refText); r**eturns a node, if the entered string **refText** can unambiguously determine a referenceable node from the current scope.

1.7 Typesystem

Typesystem aspect makes it possible to report semantic errors to the user of the language. On its highest level, it could be said it contains mechanisms to check for both non-type related and type related rules.

Non-type related rules are called checking rules. These serve a language designer to implement custom semantic error checks. For instance, consider a type declaration statement in Frege language:

type MyType a b = [Int] -> a -> b

The statement declares a new type MyType with a and b being type variables. Type variables have to have different names to be distinguishable and thus the following statement is invalid in Frege:

type MyType a a = [Int] -> a -> a

To check and report the error, a language designer can create a checking rule for the concept representing the type declaration statement. A checking rule is a simple method, associated with a specific concept, which is executed by MPS automatically for each AST node of the concept in the current document. The method is executed mainly when the AST node is changed in any way, or when the document is opened. The error is reported to the user by using error statement in MPS BaseLanguage. A language designer specifies a string message and the AST node which caused the error. If the statement gets executed, the MPS underlines the corresponding node with red color in the editor to denote the error.

Figure 1.25 provides an implementation of the checking rule in Frege-IDE for the concept representing the type declaration statement. We compare each two type variables between themselves and report an error in case two have the same name.



Figure 1.25: The checking rule in Frege-IDE for the concept representing type declaration statement

Type related (typesystem) rules offer a declarative way to express rules which support type calculations. A language designer can let MPS calculate types of expressions in the runtime and upon finding inconsistencies, MPS will report errors to the user automatically.

MPS supports several types of declarative rules. We will describe the ones we used in this work, which include inference and subtyping rules.

Inference rules are created to calculate a type of a node for a given concept. These can also be used to enforce a type, i.e. to perform a type check. The rule consists of these sections:

* **Name:** determines name of the typesystem rule.
* **Applicable for:** used to specify a concept which the rule applies for.
* **Do:** defines the rule for the given concept. The rule is written in a variant of MPS BaseLanguage, which is extended with statements regarding the typesystem aspect.

Figure 1.26 shows an example of an inference rule for a concept representing an integer literal. The section Do contains a single statement, which tells MPS the type associated with the concept. We will describe the statement typeof(integerLiteral) :==: <int> in a more detail.



Figure 1.26: The inference rule for a concept representing an integer literal

The statement is a special form of an assignment. There are several different operators in MPS we can use:

* :==: The operator tells MPS that the type on the left hand side must be the same, as the type on the right hand side. This performs both a check and an assignment.
* :<=: This tells MPS that the type on the left hand side is a sub-type of the type on the right hand side.
* :~: Usage of the operator tells MPS that the type of operands on either side of it are weakly comparable.

typeof(integerLiteral) denotes a type of an instance of the IntegerValue concept. The inference rule is executed for each AST node of the current concept.

The <int> part denotes a quotation. It is used when a language designer needs to create nodes of the concepts of a language (even the language he or she may be now creating) in MPS BaseLanguage. The equivalent piece of code without the quotation would be as follows:

node<IntTypeNode> intTypeNode = new initialized node<IntTypeNode>();

typeof(integerLiteral) :==: intTypeNode;

Anything displayed inside the quotations symbols <…> is what a node would look like as if an actual editor of the corresponding language was used to edit the AST. int in this case is the textual representation of the concept IntTypeNode in its concept editor.

The concept IntTypeNode is not a part of MPS BaseLanguage. It is, however, a concept which extends Type concept from the BaseLanguage. The concept may be created in a new language, which is then added to the dependencies of MPS typesystem aspect. It represents a new type.

To represent a more complex type, such as an array of items of a certain type, a similar approach would have to be used. In Frege, the equivalent language construct is called a list. The concept representing its type is a new concept extending the Type concept from the BaseLanguage. It should contain a single child determining the type of its items. The child is, again, an instance of the Type concept. The structure aspect of such concept is depicted on figure 1.27.



Figure 1.27: Structure aspect of the concept representing the list type in Frege-IDE

When the operator :==: is used to compare a type of an AST node, MPS checks the whole tree for equivalence. In the example above, a list of integer items is, according to the operator :==:, different from a list of double items.

To check whether a list of integer items is assignable to a variable denoting a list of double items, we have to use the sub-typing operator :<=:. There is no concrete assignment statement in Frege language, but certain semantic checks of function definition statements against their type annotations behave similarly. For the sake of simplicity, let us consider a concept representing the assignment statement as in languages, like Java, which consists of left and right hand side. For the right hand side to be assignable to the variable on the left, it must be of the same or a ‘more concrete’ type, than the variable. The following statement illustrates an inference rule of such a concept:

typeof(assignment.rightExpression) :<=: typeof(assignment.leftVariable);

Let us consider a new concept representing the numeric type double, DoubleTypeNode. So far, there is no defined type relation between DoubleTypeNode and IntTypeNode and an attempt to assign an integer list to a double list variable would MPS underline with red color denoting the error. To specify that integer is a sub-type of double, we create a sub-typing rule.

Sub-typing rule is a simple method which returns a list of instances of Type concept that are ‘more abstract’ than the current type. In the case of IntTypeNode, we return a DoubleTypeNode instance. Figure 1.28 shows the concrete implementation for the example.



Figure 1.28: The subtyping rule for IntTypeNode concept

By implementing the rule, we have also allowed for sub-typing comparison of the list type. Now, MPS would have no objections against assigning an expression of an integer list to a variable of double list type.

In certain cases, however, the provided mechanisms are not enough to perform type checks. Sometimes a language designer needs to inspect the inferred type of an expression in a more detail. For this, MPS has a notion of when concrete block.

Since MPS offers only a strictly declarative way of defining types of AST nodes, it is not certain when a node will have its type inferred. However, a language designer may use when concrete statement to surround a block of code which will be executed only when the type of the given node is already known. The surrounded code is executed in a separate thread, which means the rest of the code in the typesystem rule will continue with its execution independently.

1.8 Textgen

The optional aspect component of a language, textgen, allows to define a mapping from AST nodes to text. The feature allows a translation of a code written in MPS to a plain text. A user can then compile the code using a standard compiler to an executable program.

Textgen can be triggered for a specific document by using a right mouse button in the editor space and selecting Preview generated text.

A language designer has to define the textgen aspect for each concept independently. He or she has to specify a string which is put into a buffer for each AST node encountered. If the corresponding concept contains children, their textgen should be invoke manually as well, in a recursive manner, down to the leaf concepts.

Definition of the textgen consists of a single method written in the MPS BaseLanguage. It specifies, what should be outputted to the buffer, by using append statement. The indentation of certain portions of the code may be manually increased by using with indent block. Last, but not least, it should call the textgen of child concepts, again, by using append statement.



Figure 1.29: Example of the textgen aspect for a concept in Frege-IDE

Figure 1.29 depicts an example of a usage of textgen aspect for a concept in Frege-IDE. The corresponding concept FDGuards, representing a function definition with guards, does not output anything on its own, but rather calls the textgen of its children. Its pattern child is outputted on a single line, then the guards are printed starting from the following line, indented. where is printed out only it is actually defined, since the cardinality of the child is set to [0..1].

Note that when using the textgen, an error arises when MPS tries to call a textgen for a concept which does not have the aspect specified. This can be useful when a given AST is currently incomplete or in an erroneous state. That is why abstract concepts usually should not implement it.

2. Frege

Frege is a variant of Haskell language, targeted for JVM platform. It is a purely functional language, has a strong static type system with global type inference and non-strict evaluation. The language compiles to Java and runs naturally on the JVM. This way it can be used inside any Java project. [10]

In this chapter, we describe the Frege syntax and what the most common patterns of writing programs in Frege are. We describe differences between Frege and Haskell and mention certain approaches when programming in functional languages in general. It is important to note that Frege is a robust and complex language, which is why we could not include the full set of language constructs in the implemented IDE. Certain features not mentioned in this chapter were omitted.

Frege was designed by Ingo Wechsung, who named it after the German mathematician, logician and philosopher, Gottlob Frege. Its syntax is very close to that of Haskell, with only small differences. The following is a brief description of the main differences.

In general, Frege could be considered a subset of Haskell language. Certain features are missing, such as the foreign function interface, which allows Haskell to interact with code written in another language. Instead, there are language constructs to make Java types and methods usable. (All primitive types are simply Java types.)

The Frege-Prelude library, an equivalent of Haskell-Prelude library which defines many standard types (for instance, Maybe), functions and operators (<=, !=, &&, …), has many functions, type classes and types known from Haskell. However, Frege uses the Java APIs whenever possible, so certain aspects of the language may feel different. For example, implementation of type classes is incomplete and multi parameter type classes are not supported by Frege at all. Additionally, the support for newtype declaration (an algebraic data type with exactly one constructor) is missing as well as deriving clause for data type declarations, and a few other keywords. A string value in Frege, unlike in Haskell, is not a list of characters, but an instance of the Java class java.lang.String. Furthermore, Frege does not have any operator data constructor other, than colon :, to separate a head and a tail of a list. This, however, allows a user to define in Frege even such custom operators that begin with the colon character, which is not valid in Haskell. (For instance, :-: is a valid custom operator function in Frege.)

There are several other minor differences between Haskell and Frege. However, they mostly do not affect this work in any way, which is why we do not include them in this paper. More about the differences can be found on Frege wiki [10].

The following subchapters describe Frege syntax on several small examples as well as overview of certain principles used when programming in a functional language. For the most part, the described syntax is also supported in Frege-IDE. Though recommended to read, people familiar with Haskell or Frege may skip this part.

2.1 Hello, world!

The following piece of code is an example of a ‘Hello, world!’ program in Frege:

module Hello where

greeting friend = "Hello, " ++ friend ++ "!"

main args = do

println (greeting "world")

This code would compile to Hello.class and Hello.java with a regular Java entry point method main. Moreover, the Hello.class would have a method public static String greeting(String ...) {...} that one can call from Java, or any other JVM language.

Just like in Haskell, the function greeting is **pure**, which means it is stateless and does not have any side effects. For the same given input parameters it always returns the same result. This is a great advantage of functional languages that basically allow the results of such functions to be cached. Function main, however, is not pure. Since it corresponds to the main function in Java language, it may produce side effects, like printing to the standard output, which it actually happens to do so in this concrete example.

2.2 Pattern matching

An important aspect of programming in both Frege and Haskell is pattern matching. When we define a new function, we may define different variants of its implementation for different input arguments. To elaborate, consider the following definition of the function charToName:

charToName :: Char -> String

charToName 'a' = "Albert"

charToName 'b' = "Broseph"

charToName 'c' = "Cecil"

charToName \_ = "No Name"

The main idea behind the function above is to provide the caller with a human name, beginning with the given character. (Here we only provide definition for the first three characters of English alphabet, albeit it should suffice for the demonstration.)

The first line of the program tells us that charToName is a function accepting a single character argument and outputting a string. (We discuss Frege types and function annotations in the following chapter.)

Then, we provide for each character a specific definition. The wildcard underscore character \_ matches any input. This way, if we were to call the function charToName with an input 'a', it would return "Albert", but for 'z' character we would get "No Name".

The ordering of the definitions is important here. Moving the definition for the pattern with wildcard \_ above the definition for input character 'a' would result in all calls to charToName returning "No Name" string.

Regarding the pattern matching in Frege, it is also important to mention variables. These ‘formal parameters’ are also patterns; it’s just that they never fail to match a value. This is in a certain way similar to the wildcard pattern \_. However, as a ‘side effect’ of the successful match, the formal parameter is bound to the value it is being matched against. [11] For this reason, patterns may not contain multiple variables with the same identifier.

Based on this, we can create a function returning a second element of any three-item-tuple. A tuple is simply an ordered sequence of items of (possibly) different types, separated by comma. The following are examples of constant functions returning a tuple:

tupleExample1 = (1, 'a')

tupleExample2 = (1 + 1, 2.7, true && false, 'a')

tupleExample3 = (1, 2.7, true, ("hello", 'a'), 'z')

To explain the third function tupleExample3, (1, 2.7, true, ("hello", 'a'), 'z') is a tuple of five items, fourth of which is another tuple of two items.

Our function, returning the second element of a three-item-tuple, would then look like this:

second (\_, x, \_) = x

When calling the second function with a three-item-tuple argument, the second value is automatically bound to the variable x. This is what we then return on the right hand side of the definition. We call this mechanism data deconstruction.

2.3 Types

Frege is a strongly and statically typed language. If the types are not specified by a programmer, they are automatically inferred. To provide types for the function greeting from the chapter 2.1, a user can write:

greeting :: String -> String

We call this signature a type annotation of the function. Here, we denote that function greeting accepts a single argument of a type String and returns a result of type String, too.

Additional types, which are also supported by Frege-IDE, include:

* **Bool**: represents boolean values (true, false).
* **Char**: represents a single utf-8 character.
* **Int**: represents integer numbers.
* **Double**: represents floating point numbers. It is an equivalent to Java double type.
* **Tuple**
* **List**
* Custom algebraic data types
* Function type

2.3.1 Tuples

A tuple, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is a sequence of items of (possibly) different types, separated by comma. Here we show examples of constant functions returning a tuple together with their type annotations:

tupleExample1 :: (Int, Char)

tupleExample1 = (1, 'a')

tupleExample2 :: (Int, Double, Bool, Char)

tupleExample2 = (1 + 1, 2.7, true && false, 'a')

tupleExample3 :: (Int, Double, Bool, (String, Char), Char)

tupleExample3 = (1, 2.7, true, ("hello", 'a'), 'z')

2.3.2 Lists

Besides tuples, there is also another fundamental data structure to hold multiple values in Frege - a list. A list is a homogenous data structure (i.e. all of its elements need to be of the same type). An example of a function returning a list is as follows:

listExample :: [Int]

listExample = [4, 8, 15, 16, 23, 42]

In this specific example we return a list of integer numbers, which is defined by enumeration. For ordinal data types, however, we can also specify a range of values:

rangeListExample :: [Int]

rangeListExample = ['a' .. 'z']

rangeListExample is a function which defines a list of 26 characters from ‘a’ to ‘z’.

Generally, each list can be separated into two parts: a head and a tail. A head is a single element at the beginning of the list. Tail is the remaining part. If the list contains only one element, the tail is an empty list. A completely empty list has to be represented by [] symbols.

This picture of lists is important, because it allows us to pattern-match it against the data constructor operator :. For instance, consider the following example:

getTop :: [String] -> String

getTop [] = "No elements"

getTop (x:xs) = x

The function above returns the first element from a given list of strings. If the corresponding list is empty, the function returns "No elements". The pattern (x : xs) matches a list in the following way:

* Head of the list is bound to the variable x.
* Tail of the given list is bound to the variable xs.
* The matching is successful only if the given list is not empty.

The function may be invoked in the following way:

frege> getTop ["hey", "hi", "hello"]

hey

This principle allows us to work with lists in an actually useful way, otherwise we would need to match them against an exact pre-defined pattern.

The following example shows a definition for a function which joins two lists into a single one:

listJoin [] ys = ys

listJoin (x:xs) ys = x : (listJoin xs ys)

The implementation follows a recursive approach, which is a common practice in most of the functional languages. The first line of the definition is a trivial join of two lists, first of which is empty. The result in this case is simply the second list. In the second line, however, we say that the result of the join is a new list, which first item is the same as the first item of the given first list. The tail of the new list is a result of recursive application of the function on the remaining part of the first list and the whole second list.

A usage example is as follows:

frege> listJoin [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6] [7, 8, 9]

[1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9]

There is also another way of declaring list, using so called list comprehension. We can think of this as an analogy to declarative programming, where we define what data we want, input sets, which specify where to get the data from, and condition to filter out the unwanted records.

For example, a function returning a list of Pythagorean triplets can be defined as follows:

pt = [(x, y, z) | x <- [1..15], y <- [1..15], z <- [1..15], x < y, y < z, x\*x + y\*y == z\*z]

The part before the vertical line symbol, (x, y, z), denotes the single item of the resulting list. Expression x <- [1..15] specifies that the input set for variable x is [1..15]. Lastly, x\*x + y\*y == z\*z denotes a condition so that only the relevant items are included in the resulting list.

A usage example is as follows:

frege> pt

[(3, 4, 5),(5, 12, 13),(6, 8, 10),(9, 12, 15)]

2.3.3 Custom algebraic data types

Custom algebraic data types allow to create a completely new type in a Frege program. Consider the following example:

data Days = Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |

Sunday

The statement above introduces a new type, called Days, to be used inside the corresponding Frege program. Monday, Tuesday, and the other parts of the declaration are called constructors. They denote the value of the declared data type.

The following function definition shows an example usage of the new type:

getNextDay :: Days -> Days

getNextDay (Monday) = Tuesday

getNextDay (Tuesday) = Wednesday

…

In this particular example, we have defined only a simple enumeration type. However, we can also wrap additional data as demonstrated by the following example:

data Point = Point Double Double

…

movePointX :: Point -> Double -> Point

movePointX (Point x y) \_x = Point (x + \_x) y

We have defined a simple type representing a point in a 2D space and a function moving that point by the given value in x-axis. In this case, our custom data type has only a single constructor. Notice that the name of the data type and the constructor are treated completely independently by the compiler and therefore may be named equally.

However, the constructor arguments do not necessarily have to be of primitive types. Consider the following, more advanced, example:

data Shape = Circle Point Double | Rectangle Point Point

…

surface :: Shape -> Double

surface (Circle \_ r) = pi \* sqr r

surface (Rectangle (Point x1 y1) (Point x2 y2)) = abs (x2 - x1) \* abs (y2 - y1)

The data type Shape contains additional data of type Point, which we have defined earlier in this chapter. It is used to denote a centre of a circle, or an upper-left and a bottom-right point of a rectangle.

Furthermore, we can also construct recursive data structures, as illustrated by the following piece of code in Frege:

data Tree = Nil | Node Int (Tree) (Tree)

The data type Tree represents a binary-tree-like data structure, where each node contains a single integer value and up to two child nodes. Nil constructor represents an empty node (a leaf), which does not contain any values.

To provide more flexibility for custom data types, we can also use the notion of type variables. In the example below, a represents a type variable. We can use any type in its place. Instead of then having to define several data types for several different functions, we can reuse the type while specifying, what a is, for each one:

data Maybe a = Just a | Nothing

…

getTopIntList :: [Int] -> Maybe Int

getTopIntList [] = Nothing

getTopIntList (x:xs) = Just x

getTopCharList :: [Char] -> Maybe Char

getTopCharList [] = Nothing

getTopCharList (x:xs) = Just x

2.3.4 Type synonyms

Type synonyms are similar declarations to algebraic data types. Unlike the data types, however, they do not introduce any new types into the program, but only wrap a complex type by a single type name. Additionally, the similar mechanism of type variables as in the data type declarations is supported. The example below demonstrates a usage of a type synonym to declare a new type Stack, which is represented by a simple list of items:

type Stack a = [a]

…

pop :: Stack Int -> Stack Int

pop [] = []

pop (x:xs) = xs

2.3.5 Function types

In functions, functions can also be used as arguments. Consider, for instance, a list of integer numbers. We may want to apply a certain function to each item of the list and return a new list of integers created this way. The function applied is unknown to us beforehand, but we can still implement the ‘mapping’ function. We can do it in the following way:

map :: (Int -> Int) -> [Int] -> [Int]

map \_ [] = []

map ff (x:xs) = (ff x) : (map ff xs)

(Int -> Int) denotes the function argument. This represents a function accepting a single integer argument and returning a new integer. We then apply this function, bound to the variable ff upon a successful match, to each item of the input list and return the new list.

2.3.6 Generic type

An important aspect of type annotation is providing an interpreter with a ‘generic type’. Consider the example from chapter 2.3.4. We may want to implement the mapping function more generally, for all list types, not just the list of integer numbers. Understandably, the implementation of the function is completely equivalent to the map function from the mentioned chapter. What has to be changed, is its type annotation:

map :: (a -> b) -> [a] -> [b]

What this says is that the function map accepts a function that takes an argument of a certain type a, and returns an element of a possibly different type b. Then map accepts as for its second argument the list of items of the type a and returns a list of items of the type b.

2.4 Operators

Both Haskell and Frege provide a lot of flexibility, when it comes to infix operators. There are several standard built-in operators, such as arithmetic addition +, subtraction -, comparison operators ==, >=, and so on. It is, however, possible to define almost any custom operators consisting of allowed symbols. These include: # $ % & \* + . / < = > ? @ \ \ ^ | ~ : -

For example, we can create a custom operator +++ for adding two integer numbers, while also incrementing the result by 1. The implementation is as follows:

(+++) :: Int -> Int -> Int

a +++ b = a + b + 1

The newly defined operator is simple to use in expressions. For instance, the following is a definition of a constant function returning integer 6:

ff = 2 +++ 3

Since operators are basically binary functions, there are no major differences between the two. The annotation differs only in obligation to wrap the operator inside brackets.

A user may also specify the custom operator’s precedence and associativity. By default, the custom operator is non-associative and has a precedence of 16. [14] There are 16 levels of precedence in Frege (numbered 1 to 16), the higher number denoting the more prioritized operator inside an expression.

The precedence and associativity may be changed by writing the following statement:

infixl 5 +++

The first part specifies the associativity. Three modes of associativity exist:

* **Left associativity:** the statement begins with keyword infixl.
* **Right-associativity:** the statement begins with keyword infixr.
* **Non-associative operator:** the statement begins with keyword infix. There must not be several non-associative operators used in a single expression in sequence, with exception of using brackets or changing precedence of a sub-expression in another way.

It is important to note that a combination of several operators with both types of associativity (left and right) with the same precedence in a single expression is not possible and results in a compilation error.

Function application, constructors, and bracketed expressions have all higher precedence, than any operator. For an operator to be used as a function argument, it has to be enwrapped inside brackets. Compare the following statements:

ff = 1 +++ foo 2 3 +++ 7

ff = 1 +++ foo 2 3 (+++) 7

In the first statement, we apply the function foo with arguments 2 and 3. In the second statement, we apply the function foo with arguments 2, 3, operator +++ and 7.

2.5 Currying

Currying is the technique of translating the evaluation of a function that takes multiple arguments, into evaluating a sequence of functions, each with a single argument. In Frege, a function may use for its implementation another function, while providing only some of its arguments. The technique may be demonstrated by the following example:

multiplyThree :: Int -> Int -> Int -> Int

multiplyThree x y z = x \* y \* z

multiplyByEighteen = multiplyThree 2 9

In the example above, the function multiplyThree takes three arguments and returns their product. multiplyByEighteen is then implemented by applying the function multiplyThree on two out of three possible arguments.

It is interesting to note that we do not have to provide in the implementation of multiplyByEighteen any arguments. This is the main idea behind the technique, otherwise we would need to write the following piece of code:

multiplyByEighteen x = multiplyThree 2 9 x

Currying may be also used with operators, and also applies in cases of a partial function application, as demonstrated by the following example:

max :: Int -> Int -> Int

…

six = (max 4) 6

Expression (max 4) applies the function max only partially, resulting in a function with annotation Int -> Int. This is then applied again for argument 6, resulting in a constant integer.

2.6 Where

In Frege, it is possible to create local definitions with local scope inside a function definition. Such definitions may be placed inside where code block. The scoping rules prevent the functions created this way to pollute the working namespace, which is useful for creating reusable modules.

The following piece of code shows an implementation of a function which describes length of a given list using words:

describeListWhere xs = "The list is " ++ what xs

where

what [] = "empty."

what [x] = "a singleton list."

what ys = "a longer list."

…

frege> describeListWhere [1]

The list is a singleton list.

In the example above, in where block, we define a new function called what, which accepts a single list argument. It cannot be used outside the function describeListWhere, where it is defined.

When working with where block, keeping a correct indentation is important. In the block, each definition should be aligned with where keyword, or have a greater indentation.

2.7 Guards

Guards are a mechanism in Frege which allow a user to return an expression based on boolean conditions.

Let us consider a signum function, which is used to describe a sign of a real number by an integer number. The function takes a single argument, which is a real number, and then performs a check of its sign:

* If the given number is greater, than 0, the function returns 1.
* If the given number is smaller, than 0, the function returns -1.
* If the given number is equal to 0, the function returns 0.

The following example is an implementation of the function in Frege:

sign x

| x < 0 = (- 1)

| x > 0 = 1

| otherwise = 0

The lines starting with vertical line symbol | are called guards. They consist of a boolean expression and the resulting expression to return, if the condition is evaluated to true. The special otherwise keyword denotes a condition that always evaluates to true. Ordering of the guards is, therefore, important and the conditions are evaluated in the top-down manner.

2.8 Constant definitions

In Frege, there is a special kind of a function definition where a user can define several constant functions in a single statement. The following example demonstrates definition of the three new constant functions a, b and c:

(a, b, c) = (1, 2, 3)

The values of the corresponding constants a, b and c are 1, 2 and 3 in their respective order.

Frege is a relatively flexible language in this manner and the following expression is a valid one as well:

[2, f] = [2, 3]

In this case, the value of f is 3. Furthermore, from the grammatical point of view, even the following statement is valid:

[1, f] = [2, 3]

A program with the example above would pass its compilation, however, an exception would be thrown upon an attempt to evaluate the constant f in any way. It still allows a user to specify constant functions in a flexible manner. The compiler only checks that the expression on the right hand side of the definition is of the same type as is the pattern on the left. For example, the following is the alternative definition of the constants a, b and c:

(a, b, c) = (1, 1 + a, 1 + b)

2.9 Import and export

To use functions, operators and data types from other modules, we must first import them. An import declaration has the following form:

import frege.prelude.Math (\*\*, log)

The fully qualified name of the module being imported has to be used. (In this case the statement imports the module frege.prelude.Math.) After that, a user may specify which items will be imported into the current namespace of the current module. For all other items a user has to use a qualified name of the item. The full details of the import declaration are described further in this chapter.

Import declarations are processed in the order they occur in the program text. However, their placement relative to other declarations is irrelevant. Nevertheless, it is considered a good practice to write all import declarations somewhere near the top of the program.

A user may or may not enumerate the items to import into the current namespace. If he or she chooses not to do so, everything from the given module is imported into the current namespace. The declaration in this case has the following form:

import frege.prelude.Math

The imported module Math contains several functions and constants for performing standard calculations. The constant pi may be referenced in this use-case directly in the following way:

circumference r = 2 \* **pi** \* r

In the example at the beginning of this chapter, there are two explicitly enumerated items: operator \*\* and function log. Everything else has to be referenced using a qualified name. The constant pi in this scenario has to be prepended by Math namespace:

circumference r = 2 \* **Math.pi** \* r

A user also has an option to enumerate none of the items, but to use the brackets symbols () anyway in the import declaration. This forces a programmer to use a qualified name for every item from the imported module.

When using the qualified name of the items, the imported module’s name may be aliased by using as clause. The following example demonstrates the usage scenario:

import frege.prelude.Math as MM ()

…

circumference r = 2 \* **MM.pi** \* r

Last, but not least, there is an option to use a reverse manner of importing items into the namespace. Instead of enumerating items which we do not have to use a qualified name for, we may specify the only items, we will need to use the qualified names for. This is done by using hiding clause, as demonstrated by the following example:

import frege.prelude.Math hiding (pi)

…

circumference r = 2 \* **Math.pi** \* r

rightTriangleC a b = **sqrt** (a **\*\*** 2 + b **\*\*** 2)

Among the items that can be imported into the module, constructors are imported into the current namespace independently from the data types where they are defined. Frege additionally supports a special syntax to treat the import of data type constructors and ease their enumeration. Consider, for example, the following data type declaration from chapter 2.3.3:

data Days = Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |

Sunday

The data type Days can be imported together with its constructors Monday and Tuesday into the current namespace using the following syntax:

import frege.example.DaysExample as DE (Days(Monday, Tuesday))

However, all of the remaining constructors belonging to the Days data type need to be referenced using qualified names (e.g.DE.Thursday). To import all of data type’s Days constructors, a syntax with two dot symbols .. can be used, as described below:

import frege.example.DaysExample as DE (Days(..))

Regarding the importing mechanism, all modules by default import the built-in module frege.Prelude. It contains standard arithmetic operators, such as +, -, \* and /, comparison operators, many data types, such as Maybe and a lot of other definitions. A complete list may be found on Frege official documentation. [15]

A similar approach to importing modules is also used to export items of the current module. Not exported definitions may not be referenced at all.

To export all of the definitions of the current module, we can use:

module Hello where

Hello denotes the name of the current module. The declaration has to be put at the beginning of the module.

To export only the functions greeting and getTop, we can write the following piece of code:

module Hello (greeting, getTop) where

A reader should be aware that based on how the platform MPS works, it is, unfortunately, not possible to work with the Frege modules and libraries written in a plain text. These have to be rewritten in a specific MPS project to make them usable. In this work we offer only a limited support of the standard module frege.Prelude.

2.10 Further reading

Frege and Haskell include many other aspects that are not mentioned in this work. While the current version of Frege-IDE supports all of the features of the language used in our examples throughout the chapter 2 (and much more), due to the scale and complexity, a lot was still not implemented. However, for an interested reader we recommend visiting Frege language specification [16], Frege wiki [17] and Frege Goodness book [18].

3. Frege in MPS

Frege has rather too many syntactic and semantic constructs for us to cover them all within the scope of this work. We have therefore focused our attention only on the most important features worth implementing, such as function definition and annotation, operators and custom data types. Our goal is to create an IDE that has a user-friendly editor that emulates normal text editing and writing code in the way that most Frege and Haskell developers are used to. This should be accompanied by a context help, sometimes referred to as a code completion, which would allow for referencing already defined functions, operators, variables, etc. Last, but not least, we will strive for a type checker, which would be able to find small mistakes in the code, such as calling a function with invalid arguments, or check types of expressions.

This chapter assumes knowledge of the reader at least on the level covered in chapter 2, which describes Frege syntax and features of the language we focused on.

3.1 Supported subset of Frege

In this work, we focused our attention only on the most important parts of the Frege language, which gained its popularity (or, rather, popularity of Haskell). For the most part, so called ‘syntactic sugars’ are omitted, as well as monads, which make Frege appear less of a functional and more of an imperative programming language. To also include more advanced features, such as context help and type checking, we had to keep the complexity of the work within reasonable limits, and thus concepts, like type classes and type instances, were omitted as well.

In this chapter, we review the features of Frege language that we have implemented from the high-level point of view.

3.1.1 Program structure

A program in Frege has to be properly structured. We expect a Frege module to have a header, depicting its name. We have also tried to emulate recommended practices of writing programs in Frege by, for instance, forcing import declarations to be written at the top of the program. Since a program is then just a series of definitions, we have left the rest up to the user of the IDE.

3.1.2 Import and export

To demonstrate the capabilities of the MPS platform regarding the scoping and code completion area, we decided to implement importing and exporting features of Frege, as they are depicted in chapter 2, i.e. allowing users to reference functions, operators, custom algebraic data types and their constructors. The imported module may or may not be aliased and the corresponding statements will occupy the top of the program’s code layout.

3.1.3 Comments

Comments should be easily applicable where all of the normal definitions are expected. There are two types of supported comments:

* A single-line comment beginning with two dashes symbols --
* A multi-line comment that can be nested, which is surrounded with braces with dashes {- … -}

3.1.4 Function definition

The user must be able to define new functions. A function may accept any number of arguments, it consists of the patterns (see chapter 2.2 - pattern matching), and the right-hand side, which provides an implementation for each of the patterns.

3.1.5 Type annotation

We allow the user to specify a type of a function. This also plays a role during the type checking and evaluation, where we have an easier job to infer the type of a function and its arguments.

3.1.6 Operator definition

Infix operators are functions that strictly accept (at least) two arguments. (A result of an operator application may be, again, a function accepting additional arguments.) An operator definition should be able to populate the namespace with new operators, allow these new operators to be used in new expressions and allow the operators to be annotated in the same way a regular function can be.

3.1.7 Operator precedence and associativity

The statements beginning with the infix keyword (infixl, infixr, infix) specify and alter an operator’s precedence together with its associativity. These have a significant impact on the type checking of expressions consisting of the infix operators.

3.1.8 Custom algebraic data types

The user should be able to declare new algebraic data types, which can be later used in functions. The name of a new data type becomes a new type, whereas the constructors become new values of that type.

3.1.9 Type synonyms

Similar to the data types, these statements introduce a new type inside the module, where they are defined. Unlike the data types, type synonyms only wrap a more complex type and do not introduce any new values.

3.1.10 Standard types and literals

Bool, Char, Int, and Double are types that are all part of the standard Frege library. Even though the standard library defines several additional types, such as Float, Decimal, and others, these were selected due to their prevalence and representative status and are therefore included in Frege-IDE. Additionally, type String is also supported with the standard syntax of using quotation marks ("Hello, world!").

3.1.11 Tuples

Standard tuples are fully supported in Frege-IDE, including their syntax and type checking.

3.1.12 Lists

In Frege there are three main ways of defining a list in an expression:

* **Enumeration:** e.g. ['a', 'b', 'c']
* **Range:** e.g. ['a' .. 'z']
* **List comprehension:** e.g. [x | x <- ['a' .. 'z']]

We offer only a limited support in Frege-IDE for list comprehension due to its complexity.

Additionally we have to account for the usage of the constructor operator for deconstructing lists denoted by colon symbol :. The operator can be also used for attaching a single list element at the beginning of another list. The following example demonstrates the usage of the operator in an expression:

ff = [1] : [[2, 2], [3, 3, 3], [4, 4, 4, 4]]

3.1.13 Function type

The function type is another standard type which covers the type of a function. For instance, a function accepting two integer arguments and outputting a string has the following type:

Int -> Int -> String

The type must be declarable inside function and operator annotations.

3.1.14 Where

where clause allows to provide additional local definitions with local scope inside a function definition. These are then visible only to the closest outer definition, as demonstrated by the following example:

five = 1 + four

where

four = 1 + three

where

three = 3

(In the example above, the constant function three is not visible in the right-hand side of the function five)

Similarly to the export and import feature of Frege, we aim to demonstrate the scoping capabilities of our IDE.

3.1.15 Guards

Guards provide an alternative way of a function definition with respect to the standard ‘assignment definition’ (f = "value"), where each guard contains a boolean condition for whether its branch should execute. This is an analogy to a series of if-else statements.

3.1.16 Additional concepts

From the Frege language we should also include the if statement, case expression, let statement and definition of lambda functions (anonymous functions defined within another definition). These together with the above should cover most of the standard usage of the Frege language (not accounting for classes and instances).

3.1.17 Type checking and evaluation

A separate aspect of the IDE is a type checker. We have implemented a simple type checking capability into our IDE, which is able to infer types of certain expressions and compare types of function definitions to their annotations.

Providing a user with a complete type-checking capabilities is not feasible within the scope of this work, and thus we only intended to implement a rather restricted type evaluation, capable of handling only certain scenarios. However, the system should be easily extensible and robust enough to demonstrate the potential of the MPS platform.

3.2 Structure aspect

Defining the structure aspect in MPS for each language concept is one of the most important part of this work. The concepts are ‘building bricks’ when it comes to working with AST. Every other aspect of Frege-IDE depends on this part, therefore a careful analysis is required to be done here.

Working with structure aspect in MPS to a certain extent resembles defining a grammar of a language for a compiler parser. To implement it correctly, we should understand the Frege grammar and how its different parts relate to the actual features of the language.

In this chapter, we are going to describe certain parts of the Frege grammar, show what actual features they correspond to and how we transformed them into the MPS concepts. A complete analysis would far exceed the scope of this text, so we will focus only on the most important or otherwise interesting parts we had to deal with.

The chapter focuses mainly on Frege grammar rules and how they are reflected on structure aspect of the IDE. Nonterminal symbols usually correlate to individual concepts in MPS, but it is not the one-to-one relationship. On the other hand, terminal symbols only rarely need to be represented by individual MPS concepts and are mostly only a part of the editor. This chapter takes a look at certain Frege grammar rules, describes their high-level meaning and shows implementation of the related concepts from their structure aspect in MPS.

During the analysis, we used materials from Frege official website, namely Frege grammar used in the official Frege compiler [19] and the language reference [20]. (The resources are also provided in the appendix.)

The grammar uses mainly the EBNF (extended Backus-Naur form) notation, which we often refer to in this work. Explanation of the notation is provided below.

3.2.1 Notation description

Throughout the chapter 3.2, we often use EBNF notation to describe the grammar of certain features of Frege. In this chapter, we briefly describe the notation and explain certain parts.

Grammar of most languages is described with rules by which can one replace a nonterminal symbol for a sequence of terminal and nonterminal symbols. For instance, a program in many languages consists of series of statements separated by a semicolon. A rule describing this is provided below:

statements ::= statement ';' statements | statement

The example above states, that the nonterminal symbol statements may be replaced for any number of nonterminal symbols statement separated by a terminal symbol semicolon ;, but at least one statement has to be present.

We use a convention that terminal symbols are surrounded with apostrophes, such as semicolon symbol ';' in the example above. If there are several options on how to replace a nonterminal symbol, the options are separated with a vertical line symbol |. Additionally, we use these regular expression symbols to express certain rules:

* **token\***: symbol token repeats in a sequence any number of times
* **token+**: symbol token repeats in a sequence at least once
* **token?**: symbol token may or may not be present
* **( … )**: symbols inside within the brackets are treated as one

It should be noted that in many cases we try to simplify the grammar and omit the irrelevant parts not included in the final project. This is done for clarity and better readability of the specified grammar rules. If a major part is omitted, it is mentioned explicitly.

3.2.2 Program structure

We start defining MPS concepts from the root level. A root concept represents a single document in MPS - a module in Frege.

A high level view of the module definition is described by the following rule:

module ::= moduleclause (';' definitions | 'where' '{' definitions '}')

In Frege code, the places where a proper indentation is required may be replaced by usage of curly brackets { and } and a semicolon ;. Consider the following example:

describeListWhere xs = "The list is " ++ what xs

where

what [] = "empty."

what [x] = "a singleton list."

what ys = "a longer list."

The example may be rewritten in the following way:

describeListWhere xs = "The list is " ++ what xs where { what [] = "empty."; what [x] = "a singleton list."; what ys = "a longer list." }

In most of the compiler implementations, the parser works with the second variant, while most of the Haskell and Frege programmers use the style with indentation, which we have actually stuck to in this work. The process of converting the first variant to the second is normally done during the lexical analysis.

Knowing this, the rule for module can be now better understood from the example in the chapter 2.1. After we define the module and its qualified name, we may or may not use the keyword where, which only visually denotes the separation from the rest of the program. After that the module is just a series of definitions. The rule is demonstrated as follows on the example from the chapter 2.1:

1. Part: moduleclause 'where'

(We decided to use the variant with where keyword in Frege-IDE. moduleclause symbol is usually translated to string module followed by the user-entered qualified name, and so on.)

module Hello where

1. Part: '{' definitions '}'

definitions ::= definition (';' definition)\* ';'?

(The rule above states that definitions are a series of definition symbols separated by a colon, which is translated from separation of the definitions by creating new lines during the lexical analysis. There has to be at least one definition in a module.)

greeting friend = "Hello, " ++ friend ++ "!"

main args = do

println (greeting "World")

The implementation of the concept representing a single module in Frege is described in the chapter below, as it is important to look on the symbol definition first.

3.2.3 Definitions

A definition in the Frege grammar is a substitute for one of the following language concepts:

* **Import declaration:** states, what is to be imported into the current module.
* **Fixity:** specifies associativity and precedence of an infix operator.
* **Type declaration:** declares a new type synonym.
* **Data declaration:** allows to create a new custom data type.
* **Class declaration:** (omitted in this work)
* **Instance declaration:** (omitted in this work)
* **Local definition:** covers function definitions and annotations.

We have mentioned that it is a good practice to include the import statements in the top of a module definition before any other statements. We can enforce this by not following the exact Frege grammar, but rather implement our own version of the module grammar rule. It will have to be a root concept responsible for the overall program structure with the following children:

* **module**: corresponds to the moduleclause symbol from the previous chapter. Represents a name of the module together with additional specifications that usually go onto the first line of a Frege program.
* **import**: corresponds to the import statements, which are part of the definition rule. They have to be separated from the rest of the definitions to enforce their placement at the top of the program. Import statements are described in more detail in the following chapter.
* **definitions**: represents the rest of the statements that are part of the definition rule.

A possible implementation of the concept from the structure aspect view is depicted on figure 3.1. The corresponding root concept is named Skeleton.



Figure 3.1: Structure aspect for the Skeleton concept in Frege-IDE

3.2.4 Import statements

According to the Frege reference, the following rules are associated with import statements:

import ::= 'import' packagename ('as'? namespace)? 'public'? importlist?

importlist ::= 'hiding'? '(' (importitem *(*', ' importitem)\*)? ')'

The import rule represents the import statement as it was described in chapter 2.9. For instance, the relations between the different parts of the rule are described on the following example:

import mps.frege.ExampleTree as ET (Tree(Nil), ->>, traverse)

…

import ~ 'import'

mps.frege.ExampleTree ~ packagename

as ET ~ ('as'? namespace)?

(Tree(Nil), ->>, traverse) ~ importlist?

Unlike in the official Frege compiler implementation, we did not include the visibility (public keyword)and aliasing of imported items in the final work. (However, aliasing of the imported module was included.)

The importitem symbol represents a function, operator, type or a data type, which is to be imported into the current namespace. The rule from the official reference is as follows:

importitem ::= VARID

| OPERATOR

| CONID ('(' (member (',' member)\*)? ')')?

The nonterminal symbols from the rule above are referenced in this work several times. The distinction is as follows:

* **VARID**: represents identifiers beginning with a lowercase symbol (a-z) or with an underscore symbol. It is used to describe names of functions, variables, type variables, etc.
* **CONID**: represents identifiers beginning with an uppercase symbol (A-Z). Describes names of types, data types, constructors, etc.
* **OPERATOR**: it is used to describe a sequence of symbols an infix operator can consist of. The available symbols are mentioned in chapter 2.4.

A member enumeration described by the third variant in the importitem rule above also allows to enumerate constructors associated with a specific data type. Only the constructors enumerated are to be imported into the current namespace.

To implement the import statements in Frege-IDE, we can mostly follow the official grammar. We create a concept Import with three main parts:

* Name, which references an existing module’s name.
* Optional aliasing part of the import statement (clause as).
* Optional list of imported items into the current namespace.

An example of such implementation is captured in figure 3.2. Note that terminal symbol import is not a part of the structure aspect of the corresponding Import concept, but rather of its editor. The terminal symbols usually do not affect the structure of the AST in any way and only affect its visual representation.

Additionally, we set the concept’s alias to import. This tells MPS to create an instance of the concept whenever a user types in the string import(the set alias) in the correct places of the code.



Figure 3.2: Import concept implementation

In figure 4.2., the implementation of the Import concept consists of children concepts ImportAs and ImportItems. The concept ImportAs wraps ('as'? namespace)? part of the import rule, whereas ImportItems relates to the importlist symbol.

The reference to Module concept correlates to the packagename symbol of the import rule. This tells MPS that we will allow only importing of such modules that exist and are visible to the current module in Frege-IDE. (However, this means we will not be able to import modules and libraries from external sources made outside the Frege-IDE.)

As we have mentioned, concept ImportItems correlates to the importlist nonterminal symbol. In the Frege-IDE implementation, the concept simply contains an optional child of concept ImportHiding, which represents the optional hiding keyword, and [0..n] children of concept ImportItem.

ImportItem represents one of the three main types of identifiers. In MPS, however, we want to take advantage of the references to allow the import only of the existing items from the corresponding module that is being imported. From the high-level point of view, we may import only one of the following types of items:

* Functions
* Operators
* Type synonyms
* Data types
* Data type constructors

The idea is to represent an import item with an abstract concept and then to create concrete concepts for each type of the import items. The corresponding abstract concept in Frege-IDE is the already mentioned ImportItem. The concrete concepts are as follows:

* IIFunction for importing functions
* IIOperator for importing operators
* IIType for importing type synonyms and data types
* IIConstructor for importing constructors

Why is it enough to create only one concept as a substitute for importing both type synonyms and data types? The reason is the grammar - there is basically no syntactical difference between the two since they both define a type. Thus, where there is the former, there can also be the latter.

Each of the four concepts needs to contain a reference to the language construct it represents. Since the language constructs are referred from multiple places in the Frege grammar, the implementation is best solved by using smart references. As a reminder, a smart reference is a concept that contains only a single reference. In the case of Frege language, the four mentioned language constructs have to be separated - for each one we need to create a new smart reference.

Let us take for example the import item IIType. It may represents a data type and for this reason, it must contain an optional member enumeration list we named IITConstructorList. The type name it references is enwrapped inside a new smart reference concept called TypeReference. The implementation of the IIType concept in the structure aspect is depicted on figure 3.3.



Figure 3.3: Structure aspect of the concept IIType in Frege-IDE

The implementation of IITConstructorList concept is to a greater extent similar to the implementation of the ImportItems concept, since they both represent a sequence of members enclosed within brackets, hence we will not describe it.

TypeReference concept is a smart reference to a type name. Both type synonym and data type declaration are named by the CONID variant of the identifier in Frege, which means their names need to begin with an uppercase letter. The two concepts representing the declarations then need to contain a same type of child to represent their name to be referenceable from the TypeReference concept. Figure 3.4 shows a structure aspect of the smart reference concept TypeReference.



Figure 3.4: Structure aspect of the concept TypeReference in Frege-IDE

Concepts Data representing a data type declaration and concept Type representing a type synonym declaration are depicted from their structure aspect in Frege-IDE on figures 3.5 and 3.6. Their name is represented by a child of the same concept TypeName, which is used in the smart reference TypeReference.



Figure 3.5: Structure aspect of the concept Data representing a data type declaration in Frege-IDE



Figure 3.6: Structure aspect of the concept Type representing a type synonym declaration in Frege-IDE

We have not yet explained how to allow referencing only the import items actually corresponding to the Frege module being imported. The feature is more advanced and cannot be solved simply by defining a structure of possible ASTs. It is related to scopes in constraints aspect in MPS and we describe it in chapter 3.4.

3.2.5 Function definition

Function definition covers the area of defining new functions, operators and certain special expressions for defining constants.

On its highest level, we could divide a function definition into two parts: left and right hand side. When a user is providing a definition, he or she always specifies a pattern and an expression corresponding to that pattern. To demonstrate, let us consider the following example:

getTop (x:xs) = x

Here, the single statement defines a new function getTop, which returns a first item of a non-empty list. In this case, the left hand side consists of the string getTop (x:xs), which describes the name of the function and its arguments. The part (x:xs) is usually referred to as pattern. On the right hand side, we have a simple expression x referencing an argument from the pattern.

A slightly different example is the definition of the signum function as provided below:

sign x

| x < 0 = (- 1)

| x > 0 = 1

| otherwise = 0

Similarly to the previous case, the string sign x is considered to be the left hand side of the function sign, whereas the rest of the definition is the right hand side. This corresponds to the actual Frege grammar, where the high-level function pattern binding is defined as follows:

binding ::= lhs rhs

rhs ::= '=' expression ('where' declarations)?

| guardedExpressions ('where' declarations)?

(Symbol lhs stands for the ‘left hand side’ and rhs for the ‘right hand side’.)

#### 3.2.5.1 Left hand side

There are three main ways of defining a function:

* Standard definition, e.g. multiply x y = x \* y
* Operator definition, e.g. x :-: y = x + y + 1
* Any pattern definition, e.g.: (a, b, c) = (1, 2, 3)

The grammar for the left hand side is associated with the following grammar rules:

lhs ::= VARID patternTerm\*

| patternTerm OPERATOR patternTerm

| pattern

pattern ::= listPattern

| patternTerm

listPattern ::= patternTerm ':' listPattern

| patternTerm

patternTerm ::= VARID (1)

| '\_' (2)

| literal (3)

| '[' (pattern (',' pattern)\*)? ']' (4)

| '(' (pattern (',' pattern)\*)? ')' (5)

| CONID (pattern (', ' pattern)\*)? (6)

The grammar rules above are simplified due to Frege-IDE not supporting certain features, such as word-like operators (e.g. x `plus` y = x + y) or argument capture, while other changes were made for clarity.

From the rules above it is clear that the lhs symbol corresponds to the three ways of function definition mentioned earlier. patternTerm symbol allows us to do one of the following:

1. Define a new variable: factorial n = n \* factorial (n - 1)
2. **Use the wildcard symbol \_:** charToName \_ = "No Name"
3. **Use a literal:** factorial 0 = 1
4. **Use a list:** getTop [] = "No elements"
5. **Use a tuple or surround a single pattern inside the brackets:** second (\_, x, \_) = x
6. **Apply a data type constructor:** surface (Circle \_ r) = pi \* sqr r

Additionally, a list may be matched also by creating a pattern by using the grammar rule for listPattern symbol. The example is as follows:

getTop (x:xs) = x

The part representing the list (x:xs) can be created by using the corresponding rule. Additionally, any number of items at the beginning of a list may be specified. The following example demonstrates the usage on a function, which returns a first item of a given list. The given list, however, must contain at least three items, otherwise it will not be matched:

getTop (item1 : item2 : item3 : tail) = item1

In the final work we made several simplifications to ease us the implementation of typesystem and editor aspect. First, we require each AST node corresponding to the listPattern symbol to be enclosed within brackets. This bears no semantic restrictions and is an actually recommended practice, because it makes the code easier to read. Second, pattern consisting of empty brackets makes no sense in the restricted set of features we provide, therefore it was not included either.

It is interesting to note that in the official Frege compiler implementation, lhs symbol is syntactically no different from expressions, since it can be considered as a restricted subset of the latter. The compiler only implements additional checks during parsing. However, in Frege-IDE we used the customized grammar mentioned here, as it greatly eased our work in other MPS aspects.

#### 3.2.5.2 Right hand side

The right hand side of the function definition can be either a single expression optionally followed by the where block, or a series of guards optionally followed by the where block. This can be seen on the grammar rule for the symbol rhs.

where block consists of function definitions and annotations. These are described later in this chapter.

Guards, in contrast to the single expression variant of function definition, consist of at least two expressions and in their most simple form a grammar for them looks like this:

guardedExpressions ::= ('{' guard '}')+

guard ::= '|' expression '=' expression

#### 3.2.5.3 Expressions

The expression symbol consists of a series of binary expressions (infix operators with operands) and an optional type, or the forall construct. The rule defining the expression is as follows:

expression ::= binex ('::' (forall | type))?

Even though the forall construct is linked to type declaration, it is a part of a more advanced feature in Frege and we have not included it. The type symbol, on the other hand, will be described later in the third chapter.

binex symbol represents a series of operands separated by operators. In Frege-IDE, the concept representing the operands is named TopExpression, which corresponds to the symbol topex of the official Frege grammar. A single operand may take one of the following forms:

* **Case expression**
* **Let expression**
* **Conditional expression** (if)
* **Lambda**
* **A series of primary expressions separated by a whitespace**

Primary expressions are a subset of expressions that include terms, monads (omitted in this work) and a usage of (qualified) names, for instance application of imported functions or operators. In Frege grammar, terms are literals, lists and tuples, or in other words, values. Additionally, bracketed expression is also a part of primary expressions.

The last point of the topex grammar rule also includes a usage only of a single primary expression. A single primary expression can act as an operand:

six = 3 + 3

However, for a series of primary expressions separated by a whitespace to be meaningful, it must be some kind of an application - an application of a function, operator, or a data type constructor. Let us consider the following function:

six = max 4 (3 + 3)

In the example above, max is part of primary expressions. It is a name of a function that is visible in the current namespace. The number 4 is a literal, which is part of terms. (3 + 3)is a bracketed expression. Together they form an application of the function max with the arguments 4 and (3 + 3).

A special case of application is application of a bracketed expression. In the following example, we enclose the expression max 4 with brackets, which is a currying technique from the chapter 2.5. What remains is a function accepting a single argument, to which we provide the literal 6:

six = (max 4) 6

Not every sequence of primary expressions is an application. For instance, a sequence of literals makes no sense when standing alone:

invalid = 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

We have modified the grammar in Frege-IDE to better distinguish between the different forms of applications and to allow only the valid applications to occur in the program. As such, the expression from the example above is impossible to type in Frege-IDE. This additionally helped us in the typesystem aspect, where the corresponding type-checking algorithms were easier to implement.

Figure 3.7 shows a hierarchy of concepts in Frege-IDE, starting from the TopExpression concept in the corresponding ‘inheritance tree’. As we have already described, the TopExpressionmay take several different forms, such as the case expression (conceptCase) or a conditional expression (concept IfThenElse). There is no direct variant corresponding to the series of primary expressions part of the topex grammar rule. Instead, we introduce two custom concepts, ApplicationEntityand GenericApplication.

GenericApplication represents any kind of application, for instance of a function, operator, data type constructors and so on. From a certain point of view, the concept does correspond to the series of primary expressions, but only partially. For cases when we have a single literal in an expression, an instance of the Literal concept is used in the corresponding AST instead.

ApplicationEntityrepresents the entity we are applying in the GenericApplication concept. It may be a function, operator, but also a bracketed expression.



Figure 3.7: Hierarchy of concepts starting from the TopExpression concept in Frege-IDE

In the chapter 2.4, we have already mentioned that the applications have higher precedence, than any operator. Now, as we have described the grammar of expressions in Frege, it is clear they are syntactically bound to act that way.

#### 3.2.5.4 Grouped representation

A problem with the pattern matching in Frege is that it may seem like we are providing several definitions for the same function. Consider the example:

getTop [] = "No elements"

getTop (x:xs) = x

In the example above, for different versions of input arguments we are specifying different bodies of the same function. However, in Frege-IDE, we need to reference an existing function name from multiple places, such as import declarations, or a function application. We need to reference an existing node in the corresponding AST representing the current program. If we were to reference the getTop function, for instance, from a different function, which one of the two AST nodes would we have to point to? Understandably, the answer should be ‘all of them’, as they all define the same function. This can be achieved in MPS by creating a new concept, which wraps all of the function definitions that define the same entity.

The ‘grouping’ concept should contain a single child, which represents the function’s name, and [1..n] children representing different variants of the function’s implementation for its different patterns. The patterns also need to be adjusted so they do not introduce their custom function names, but rather reference the single child of the ‘grouping’ concept representing the function name. In Frege-IDE, the concept representing the grouped definition is called FDGrouped.

Additionally, the grouped representation has to be created also for the operator definitions. However, in the third case of the grammar rule for the lhs symbol, there is no grouping necessary – only constant functions can be defined this way and providing different pattern matchers for a constant function makes little to no sense.

There was also a different way of dealing with the problem, which involved a function annotation to be the AST node which is referenced, instead of the grouped function definition. While this is definitely also an option, in Frege we can have a function without an annotation whereas the other way around we would get an error during the compilation. We believe the approach we took and described in this chapter is more appropriate and actually conforms to the Frege specification, which would not be the case in the latter way.

3.2.6 Types

Types are a vital part of the Frege grammar. They play a role in the definition of a function annotation, or when declaring custom data types.

There are several ‘native’ types, which translate directly to the types from JVM. These include:

* **Bool**
* **Char**
* **String**
* **Numeric types** (In this work, only Int and Double are supported.)

These types are part of the Frege-Prelude library and are implicitly imported to all Frege modules.

Additional types we included are:

* **Tuple**
* **List**
* Custom algebraic data types
* Function types

Types connected to monads, exceptions, and the data types that are part of the Frege-Prelude library were not included in this work.

Before we describe the Frege types and how we implemented them in Frege-IDE, it is important to note that by omitting classes and instances, we lose an important aspect of the Frege language, which is called parametric polymorphism. This feature allows to apply certain functions and operators on a selected class of types, but not all of them. Consider, for instance, a built-in operator +. It allows to add any numeric values together. Its annotation would look like this:

(+) :: a -> a -> a

The problem is to specify that the type variable a represents a numeric type. This is, unfortunately, not possible without Frege classes and instances. We omitted the feature due to the size and scope of the work and leave it as a possible future extension of Frege-IDE.

Without the type classes, the grammar describing the Frege types is as follows:

type ::= (typeApplication '->')\* typeApplication

typeApplication ::= simpleType+

simpleType ::= VARID (1)

| CONID (2)

| '(' type ')' (3)

| '(' type (',' type)+ ')' (4)

| '[' type ']' (5)

On the highest level, we specify a function type, which corresponds to the symbol type. Each part of the function type, representing either an argument or a return type, consists of one or more simpleType symbols, which is denoted by typeApplication grammar rule. As the name suggests, this rule is responsible for application of a type on a type variable. Consider, for example, the data type Maybe, which consists of a single type variable. A type of the function getTopIntList from the chapter 2.3.3 looks as follows:

data Maybe a = Just a | Nothing

…

getTopIntList :: [Int] -> Maybe Int

In the example above, the part Maybe Int is made possible by the application of typeApplication grammar rule.

The simpleType symbol denotes one of the following options:

1. Usage of a type variable: (+) :: a -> a -> a
2. Usage of a type name: data type names, together with the built-in types, such as Int, or String, are part of the grammar rule. getTopIntList :: [Int] -> Maybe Int
3. Type inside brackets: semantically the type of the expression is the same, as the type inside the brackets. This allows, for instance, to specify a function type argument of a function, as depicted in the chapter 2.3.5: map :: (Int -> Int) -> [Int] -> [Int]
4. Tuple type: second :: (a, b, c) -> b
5. List type: getTop :: [a] -> a

Types are used in several places throughout the Frege grammar, but we will mention just two main representatives: function annotation and declaration of new data types.

In function annotation, we provide a name of the function or an operator, we want to specify the type for. It is even possible to specify the type for several items at once, as demonstrated by the following example:

(+), (-), (\*) :: Double -> Double -> Double

The right hand side of the annotation Double -> Double -> Double corresponds to the grammar described in this chapter. It is important here to note the possibility to declare new type variables:

map :: (a -> b) -> [a] -> [b]

This is an important distinction from the data type declaration, where on the right hand side, only the type variables declared on the left hand side can be used. Consider the following example:

data Tree a = Nil | Node a (Tree a) (Tree a)

The left hand side of the data type declaration declares a new type variable a. This variable then can be used on the right hand side, where constructors Nil and Node are defined.

We want to incorporate the behavior by using references. On the right hand side of data type declarations, an instance of a concept containing a reference to an existing type variable has to be used. In the function annotation’s right hand side, an instance of a concept containing a property has to be used instead. The property, in this case, represents the new type variable’s name.

To implement the types for data type declarations and function annotations, we can take one of these two main approaches:

* We can create two sets of concepts for types, each with a different implementation of type variable usage. In the first set, only a declaration of new type variables would be possible. In the second, type variables could be only referenced.
* We can implement two different concepts that inherit from the concept corresponding to the simpleType symbol: one for creating type variables and one for referencing them. Using the constraints aspect in MPS, we are able to allow or restrict the concepts instances in specific places of the AST.

We have chosen the second approach, because it is less time-consuming to implement and poses fewer problems. First, it is syntactically more appropriate as two different sets of concepts would mean there is a different grammar for the types in data type declaration and in function annotation. This is not true as the type variables are simply checked during semantic analysis. Additionally, this solution is easier to maintain if certain changes are to be incorporated.

The remaining part of the types are the built-in native types. In this case, there are also two main ways of implementation approaches:

* We can ‘hard-code’ the native types into the Frege-IDE, creating a concept inheriting from simpleType for each of the native types mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.
* We can define the types using the data type declaration statements inside a new module. This module will be implicitly imported to all of the other modules a user will create, as in the case of Frege-Prelude library.

While the second option may seem easier to maintain, there are actual benefits to the first approach, which have to do with typesystem aspect of MPS. Specifically, it would be especially difficult to link the type names to the types of the corresponding literals in case of the latter option. Hence, we opted for the first approach.

3.3 Editor Aspect

The process of creating the editor for Frege-IDE involves defining visual appearance for each AST node and providing a user with a way to manipulate the AST in a user-friendly manner.

As mentioned before, MPS is a projectional editor and thus it is not possible for a user to work with the code in the text form directly. Every function, name, variable, type etc. is in some way associated with a specific AST node, which has to be presented to the user in some way.

In this chapter, we show how the editor aspect in MPS allows us to tackle many different challenges we came across when implementing the user interface part of our IDE. We also present a couple of non-trivial problems we had to deal with, and what approach we took to solve them.

3.3.1 Visual Appearance of AST Nodes

Appearance of the most of the concepts is rather straightforward to implement. We have already analyzed and implemented the structure aspect in the previous chapter, so it is clearly visible which concept is connected to what language feature. Frege is a text-based programming language, thus creating concept editors involves only specifying a correct set of strings for constant editor cells and the right set of other types of cells mentioned in the chapter 1.3.

We will demonstrate the implementation of concept editors on an example for the concept associated with the data type declarations. The corresponding concept Data inherits from the Definition concept, which was introduced in chapter 3.2.3. The structure aspect of the Data concept is depicted on figures 3.5 and 3.8. The concept editor is depicted on figure 3.9.



Figure 3.8: Structure aspect of the concept Data in Frege-IDE



Figure 3.9: Visual representation of an AST for data type declaration (top) together with the Data concept editor (bottom)

In Frege, the data type declaration has to begin with the keyword data. In our editor, it is a constant editor cell with a string data. We have additionally applied editor styles to denote the keyword by changing its color and making the text bold. The keyword is then followed by the data type’s name. As mentioned in the previous section, the name must not be a property, but rather a child node due to the implementation of the reference concept TypeReference. In the editor, we simply use a child editor cell pointing to the concept editor of the TypeName concept. Type variable declarations and a set of constructors are both lists of child nodes. For these we have to use a (horizontal) child collection editor cell. They again, as in the case of the data type’s name, refer to their corresponding concept editors, which are used when editing their values. The delimiter for the set of constructors is set to the vertical bar symbol |, which is added between the child editor cells automatically.

The editor implementation for the concept representing a data type constructor is depicted on figure 3.10. The data type constructor concept DataConstructor consists of a name and an arbitrary amount of type nodes to depict the type of values a constructor accepts. On the example for the Tree data type, the constructor Node accepts the first argument of type a set by the corresponding type variable a from the left hand side of the data type declaration. The subsequent two arguments are of types Tree a, therefore recursively pointing to the type Tree with the same type variable a. The editor therefore consists of child editor cells for the constructor’s name and for the collection of type nodes.



Figure 3.10: Visual representation of an AST for data type constructor (top) together with the DataConstructor concept editor (bottom)

3.3.2 Side Transformation Menus

Side transformations allow a language designer to change a concrete AST in a specific manner when a user of that language writes a certain text either right or left of a given editor cell.

Let us take for example a list expression in right hand side of the function definition. We have mentioned there are three main ways to define a list:

* **By enumerating elements:** ['a', 'b', 'c']
* **By specifying a range of elements:** ['a', 'c' .. 'z']
* **Using the list comprehension:** [x \* y | x <- [1..5], y <- [3..7]]

For each of the three methods there is a specific concept associated with the list definition. Now we want to enable a seamless transformation from the first to the second method when the user enters .. right of the last element in the list. To do that, we need to know how both of the concepts are implemented.

Enumeration list concept is a simple term that contains arbitrary amount of children of Expression concept. Its editor consists of two constant editor cells representing square brackets [ and ], and a horizontal collection cell representing the children items of the list.

The range list concept is based on the enumeration list, but it has to have at least one child left of the ..symbol. Additionally it may or may not contain a child of Expression concept for specifying the upper bound of the range. Figure 3.11 represents the editor implementation for the range list concept. The upper bound child cell upTo is preceded by a question mark symbol to denote that the editor cell is to be displayed only if the upper bound is actually specified.



Figure 3.11: Editor for the concept representing the range list expression

The implementation of the transformation is rather straightforward and follows a similar pattern as in the example described in Chapter 1.3.2. We set a default transformation menu for the concept associated with the list item (Expression concept), as the only editor cells that can trigger an action are constant, property and referent cells (list item is a child editor cell). We set the action’s properties as follows:

* Text triggering the transformation should be set to ..
* Can execute part should be left to <always> to prevent the other text patterns from triggering the current transformation menu.
* In Execute part we specify that the new instance of the range list concept should copy all of the items from the former instance of the enumeration list concept. Then it should replace it completely. The items that are copied are the ones that will go before the ..symbol. In most cases the user actually wants to specify the upper bound of the range list as well, which is why we then create a new instance of the concept Expression and set the focus on the new node.

The problem with the current approach is that the concept that triggers the transformation is Expression, which is a child of several different concepts, not all of which are list enumeration concepts. We need to include an additional condition where we check that the current Expression node is indeed a child of the list enumeration concept and only then allow the action to be executed. Figure 3.11 shows the implementation of the default transformation menu for the Expression concept. The described action is enwrapped inside the action group which checks whether the parent of the current Expression node is an instance of the list enumeration concept. In Execute part, we replace the parent AST node, which is the actual list enumeration, instead of the Expression node, which only triggers the action.



Figure 3.11: Default transformation menu for the Expression concept

3.3.3 Transformation Menu Inclusion Pattern

As described in the previous chapter, the child editor cells cannot trigger editor actions and therefore the actions are defined on the corresponding child concepts instead. However, certain concepts, such as Expression, are children of several different concepts. The individual actions have to be restricted so that they are applicable only for the relevant parents.

There is, however, another problem with the editor related to the parent-child relationship. In the previous chapter we described how to transform a list enumeration to the list range upon entering the .. symbol right of the Expression concept. For the sake of simplicity, let us assume the transformation menu was actually defined for the TopExpression concept. We want the transformation to also work for the concept GenericApplication which is associated with the function application and inherits from the TopExpression concept. Consider the following example:

ff = [1, 2, getTop [3 .. 100]]

The expression getTop [3 .. 100] is a text representation of an instance of the GenericApplication concept. Upon entering the .. symbol right of the [1 .. 100] expression, a user might expect the list would be transformed to the list range, as demonstrated by the following example:

ff = [1, 2, getTop [3 .. 100] .. 7]

Unfortunately, this is not the implicit behavior. First, the GenericApplication has to have its own default transformation menu defined where it includes the transformation menu for the TopExpression concept. The implementation is illustrated on Figure 3.12.



Figure 3.12: Default transformation menu for the GenericApplication concept

GenericApplication concept contains the following children:

* A single child of ApplicationEntity concept, which specifies what is to be applied (e.g. a function, operator or a bracketed expression).
* Arbitrary amount of children of PrimaryExpression concept, which represent the arguments passed to the application entity.

The GenericApplication editor consists solely of the child editor cells, as depicted in Figure 3.13. As explained in the Chapter 1.3.2, the transformation therefore cannot be triggered by the GenericApplication, since its editor does not contain the necessary type of editor cells. Instead, the transformation menu has to be defined also for all of its children ApplicationEntity and PrimaryExpression concepts.



Figure 3.13: Concept editor for the GenericApplication concept

The default transformation menu for the GenericApplication concept should be triggered only if the specific text pattern is written right of the whole node. An instance of the GenericApplication concept may contain none, single, or several children AST nodes of the PrimaryExpression concept, which means either the transformation menu should be triggered by the last PrimaryExpression child node, or by the single ApplicationEntity child node if the application happens not to contain any arguments at all (i.e. there are no PrimaryExpression children nodes inside the corresponding GenericApplication node).

We therefore create a default transformation menu for both of the concepts ApplicationEntity and PrimaryExpression. We enwrap the editor action inside the group, where we check for the following conditions:

* The parent of the current AST node has to be an instance of the GenericApplication concept.
* For the ApplicationEntity default transformation menu, the parent AST node must not contain any children of the PrimaryExpression concept.
* For the PrimaryExpression default transformation menu, the parent AST node’s last child of the PrimaryExpression concept must be the current AST node.

The editor action is a simple include action, where we specify that the transformation menu to be included is the default transformation menu from the GenericApplication concept and that it applies to the parent AST node.

The implementation for the PrimaryExpression concept is depicted in Figure 3.14 (a similar approach would be used also for the ApplicationEntity concept). Since the PrimaryExpression concept also inherits from the TopExpression concept, it should include its default menu as well.



Figure 3.14: Default transformation menu for the PrimaryExpression concept

Understandably, there are also several concepts that inherit from the PrimaryExpression, hence they need to include the default transformation menu for the PrimaryExpression concept. The concepts which editors additionally contain the child editor cells also need to follow the similar approach we described in this chapter.

The main idea behind the pattern is therefore not to define the transformation menus on the concepts which can actually trigger the action (such as IntegerValue representing an integer literal which has the necessary type of editor cell), but rather on the higher-level (possibly abstract) concepts (such as TopExpression) and to include whatever transformation menus they might have in their child concepts and descendants (descendant in terms of concept inheritance). We used this pattern throughout most of the implementation of transformation menus, since a direct implementation would be very difficult to maintain and prone to many mistakes.

Substitute actions

We use substitute actions whenever we need to allow a user to substitute certain AST nodes for another nodes. Mostly we need to allow a seamless substitution of an abstract concept to a concrete one. We will now take a look on how literals should work in our IDE and demonstrate the usage of substitute actions on them.

A literal is an abstract concept which inherits from ‘term’. It basically carries a simple value in expressions. It has these subconcepts:

* StringValue: Contains a single property of a string type. The value is enclosed with quotes “ in regards to how the editor looks like.
* CharValue: Represents a single character. The property is of a custom constrained type which allows only a single character to be typed, otherwise the node will not be validated correctly. Similarly to StringValue, in concept editor, the value is enclosed with apostrophes ‘.
* BooleanValue: Is an abstract concept. The editor has a single cell pointing to the content of the concept’s alias. This allows us to simply inherit from the concept, create two concrete concepts TrueValue and FalseValue with aliases ‘true’ and ‘false’ that will represent the actual value.
* IntegerValue: A concept with a single property. Its editor contains only a single property cell pointing to the mentioned property.
* DoubleValue: Same as IntegerValue, but the property is of a different type to allow floating-point numeric values instead of only the integer ones.

Now we may imagine a situation where there is a focus on an abstract expression AST node, i.e. the node is not set yet to anything at the moment. How will we enter any of the possible values?

In case of string and character, the situation is easy. We know that before entering a string value in an expression, a normal user would probably enter a quotation mark first, then enter the string value and finally finished with typing the right quotation mark. This means that quotation mark can serve as a trigger for entering string values. This is done by declaring alias of the StringValue concept to “. We will use the similar approach for CharValue concept. Additionally, it is clear that Boolean values will work the same way due to the aliasing mechanism. For these concepts, defining special substitute actions is actually not necessary.

IntegerValue and DoubleValue cannot be triggered by a concrete string as in the previous example. For these, we need to define a default substitute action, which will be associated with the Literal concept.

Since we are defining a substitute menu for the Literal concept, we have to include its subconcepts menus first, otherwise we would lose string, char and Boolean value triggers. Then, we define two substitute actions, one for integers and the second for floating-point numbers.

* In ‘create node’ part, we specify what node is to be created and that its property should be equal to the text entered by the user.
* ‘Matching text’ should return the text entered by the user, since there is no single string that could be associated with an integer or a floating-point number.
* ‘Can substitue’ will test the entered text for not being empty and whether it matches the regular expression pattern for entering integer or double values. To prevent the ambiguity between integers and doubles, we will also make sure, regarding the floating-point numbers, that the entered text does not match the regular expression for integer numbers and thus has to be, indeed, a double value.

The corresponding implementation is depicted on Figure 4.13. This approach not only handles the case of a seamless substitution of an abstract expression node to ‘IntegerValue’, but also a substitution of ‘IntegerValue’ to ‘DoubleValue’. For example, upon examination of the node ‘27’ in the following definition by pressing ‘alt + x’ we can see that the node is an instance of the ‘IntegerValue’ concept: myvalue = 27

Upon adding .1 to the expression, we can see that the node was substituted for an instance of ‘DoubleValue’ concept: myvalue = 27.1



Figure 4.13: A default substitute menu for the ‘Literal’ concept

To additionally prevent the DoubleValue and IntegerValue from populating the substitute menu when editing an expression AST node, we may define empty default substitute menus for them. This is, however, optional and bears no significant change on the usage of our IDE.

Wrap substitute menu

Wrap substitute menu is a special type of substitution menu, where we need to populate the menu (defaultly invoked by pressing ‘ctrl + space’) by instances of a different concept, than we will actually substitute the current AST node for.

To demonstrate, we will take a look at the left hand side of the function definition. We know from the previous chapter that it consists of patterns. According to the Frege grammar, we may replace NTS ‘patternTerm’ for a literal. Now, literals are part of the ‘Literal’ abstract concept which is part of the expressions. This means we have literals already implemented for the right hand side of the function definition (together with their corresponding concept editors and associated editor actions) and implementing the same concepts for the left hand side would be meaningless and difficult to maintain. To avoid the code duplication, we will create a new concept representing literals for the patterns: ‘PLiteral’. The concept inherits from ‘Pattern’ and contains a single child, which is the actual ‘Literal’ concept instance. When typing a value (e.g. an integer), we could expect the similar behavior as in the case of the actual literals in expressions, i.e. that the abstract ‘Pattern’ will get immediately substituted for the corresponding concept carrying the value (e.g. ‘IntegerValue’). That is, however, not possible without some work, since ‘Pattern’ may be substituted only for ‘PLiteral’ concept, and only then its child of an abstract ‘Literal’ type can be substituted for a concrete literal value. MPS, however, allow us to define a wrapper around the ‘Literal’ concept, to include all of the substitutions for ‘Literal’ concept into ‘Pattern’ as well, while automatically encapsulating such an AST node inside a new instance of ‘PLiteral’.

An implementation is depicted on Figure 2.18. As it can be seen, most of the work is automatically done by MPS platform itself, we only specify the handler, i.e. how to wrap the given node.

On a side note, regarding the ‘Literal’ concept, since now it can also be a child of ‘PLiteral’, according to our inclusion pattern, it should, among other things, also include the default transformation menu intended for ‘PLiteral’ (when it happens to be its child). If we do not include the menu, certain transformations would not be applicable, such as transformation of a pattern inside brackets to a tuple pattern upon typing a comma ,: ff (1) => ff (1**, 2**)

Another example of a wrap substitute menu usage is the ‘PConstructor’ concept (todo: ref to prev chpt). Since the concept contains the smart reference to the constructor as a child, we cannot use its referencing capabilities directly. Instead, we would need to create an instance of the ‘PConstructor’ concept first and only then we would be able to pick an available constructor. To create an instance of the ‘PConstructor’ automatically, we have to define a wrap substitute menu for ‘PConstructor’ concept in a similar manner.

Cell action map

Side transformation menus allow us to transform a certain AST node to another when a specific text is written right or left of an editor cell. We may want to, however, put an event handler on a specific editor cell in cases when it is selected, removed, or otherwise manipulated with. For these cases we use the cell action maps.

In Frege-IDE, most of the scenarios, in which we have to use cell action maps, are simply connected to an editor cell deletion. In the previous subchapter, where we described side transformation menus in our IDE, we demonstrated, how we could allow a user to easily transform a list defined by enumeration to a ranged list. Now we could also allow a backwards transformation from the ranged list to enumeration upon a deletion of the ..symbol. Since the given symbol is a constant editor cell, we can create an action map for the cell right away. We select the ‘DELETE’ action as the trigger and implement the transformation in a similar manner, as for side transformation menus. The final implementation is depicted on Figure 4.14.



Figure 4.14: Cell action map for the ranged list constant editor cell depicting the range (..) symbol

Seamless definitions

In the previous chapter we have seen that a definition may be one of the following:

* Import declaration
* Fixity
* Type synonym and datatype declaration
* Annotation and function definition

Except annotation and function definition, all of the above definitions begin with a certain keyword that makes them easily distinguishable (infix, type, data). That is why a simple alias inside the concepts implementation is enough to provide us with a relatively user-friendly interface – for instance, upon typing ‚data‘, it is clear that the definition must be a datatype declaration, so the MPS may create an instance of the corresponding concept.

Annotation and function definition are more complicated and require a careful analysis. There are several observations, which will help us:

* When we type a new identifier, it is not yet clear whether the definition will be an annotation, or a function definition. There must be an ambiguous step (concept) in the process.
* When we begin our definition with symbol [, or a constructor’s name, or a literal, then it is clear we are providing a function or operator definition. **1** +-+ 1 = 2
* When we begin our definition with symbol (, then it is ambiguous, but has only two outcomes:
  + We may be trying to annotate an operator. By typing any operator symbol, we can immediately transform the corresponding node to annotation instance, since a function definition will never contain such an element. **(+**-+) :: Int -> Int -> Int
  + When typing anything else (from what is allowed to be inside patterns), we know it has to be a function definition.
    - Examples:
    - **(a**, b) = (1, 2)
    - **(1**, c) = (1, 2)
    - **([**a, b], c) = ([1, 2], 3)

Let us now examine the possible outcomes when an identifier is specified first:

* If an identifier is followed by a comma, it has to be an annotation, since we are clearly adding new items to collectively annotate. **identifier1,** identifier2 :: Int
* If an identifier is followed by symbol ::**,** it is again, an annotation. identifier :: Int
* If any other operator symbol is types, it is an operator definition. **identifier :-**: b = 0 (Colon symbol : on its own may not serve as a custom operator, so when typed **:** we have to wait for what comes after.)
* When typing symbol =, we are defining a constant function definition, or an operator definition (for an operator that begins with symbol =). This is ambiguous and we will let the user decide.
* When typing anything else (from the set of symbols allowed in patterns), we are providing arguments to a function definition. **identifier (**a, b) = a \* b

This is a rather complex decision tree we have to implement if we want to account for each case, so we will only describe the implementation briefly. All definitions are concepts that inherit from the abstract ‘Definition’ concept. We can create a concept ‘FunctionDefinition’, which will represent what we get when trying to type either a symbol [, or a constructor’s name, or a literal. It is not a ‘real’ function definition, which also has to consist of the right hand side. Instead, it is rather an ‘incomplete definition’ (we can underline the node with red color to denote an error using the typesystem MPS aspect). The ‘FunctionDefinition’ is composed of a single child representing a pattern, which has its own editor actions that allow the node to be transformed to the final definition form.

To allow a seamless substitution of the ‘Definition’ node to ‘FunctionDefinition’, we define a wrapper for the ‘FunctionDefinition’ for all of the three mentioned cases:

* List pattern (handles the input symbol [)
* Constructor reference in a pattern (‘PConstructor’ concept)
* Literal in a pattern (‘PLiteral’ concept)

This works, because whenever an instance of the ‘Definition’ concept is expected (therefore ‘FunctionDefinition’ is also applicable), we may instead use one of the three options mentioned above and the handler will automatically wrap the node into an instance of the ‘FunctionDefinition’.

We will handle the case for ( symbol in a similar manner. We create a concept representing the brackets, which are empty at first (this is, again, an ‘incomplete definition’). The right transformation menu associated with the left bracket then handles both of the possible outcomes:

* We create two transformation actions.
* The first one is triggered by any character that is from the allowed operators. If the entered character does not conform to this condition, we return any operator character. (See Figure 4.15 for implementation details.) This action transforms the node to annotation.
* If anything else is typed (the text part has to return an empty string “”), the node is to be transformed to ‘FunctionDefinition’.



Figure 4.15: Text part of the transformation action associated with the concept representing empty brackets

The last case is handled by creating another new concept and defining an appropriate substitution of the ‘Definition’ to the new concept. The substitute action has to check the user-typed text for whether it actually can act as an identifier and that it does not equate to one of the reserved words (e.g. true, false, data, type, infix, etc). After that we have to implement all of the cases from the observations above as a right transformation menu for the new concept. The approach is no different from the one described in this section, so we will not go through it.

An interesting problem is to transform the identifier to a reference in case the identifier is followed by symbol ::. While this problem is related to scoping (this is described in the following chapter), if we have a list of available nodes representing the function names, it is sufficient to find the one that is a best match for the user-entered identifier. We pick one and simply create a new node referencing the picked node.

This whole approach is just one of many, since there is no exact set of rules for how the IDE should behave. We took this path as an experiment which we will refer to later in the evaluation chapter. On the one hand we allow a user to type the Frege code as he or she may be used to (from left to righ), but now we offer only a limited assist in referencing existing functions and operators when defining annotations. There are advantage and disadvantages to both.

Adding operators inside expressions

Frege language allows users to define custom infix operators with an almost arbitrary precedence. The precedence, however, may be changed at any time and handling such an event properly would be complicated to implement. Instead, we opted for keeping expressions in linear structures in contrast to a tree that would need to be recomputed and reshaped each time a precedence of an operator is changed. Evaluating type of an expression is therefore left to the typesystem aspect, where a special algorithm must be used to handle various scenarios.

To allow adding operators, we need to obtain a set of available operators first. This topic is described in the chapter that deals with scopes. Once we have it, we need to define right transformation menu for the operands. What we want to achieve is to add a new operator and then set focus to a new operand node upon typing an operator a user wants to use. However, there may be a case when we have two operators where one is a prefix of another. Consider the operators + and ++. When a user types an expression “x+”, it is not clear, whether he or she will continue by adding another + symbol, or the typed operator is finished. Fortunately, MPS simplifies the scenario by automatically handling ambiguous transformation menu actions once the user-entered text does not conform to any of the triggering ‘text’ parts anymore. This means that once a user types “x+y”, it is clear that the text that should trigger one of the two actions, was “+” (the last one possible). Thus, the corresponding action is activated.

Somewhat unpleasant feature of MPS is that we cannot specify in ‘text’ part of a transformation menu action a list of strings, but rather only a single string that can trigger the action. We have to, therefore, return a closest operator that begins with the user-entered operator string. In the example above, it would, however, immediately trigger the action for a single “+” operator once the user writes “x+”, since there is no ambiguity MPS would know of. To force the ambiguity, we will create a second action with the same handler, but the text triggering the action is now the second closest operator that begins with the user-entered string. If such an operator does not exist, we may return an arbitrary string which does not begin with the currently user-typed text.

To implement the feature, we have used a custom trie-like data structure. We give the trie the user-entered text and find out if there is a leaf node with the same prefix as the given input. If yes, we return the operator, if not, we return ‘Illegal pattern’. Figure 4.16 represents such a trie with the blue nodes denoting ‘leaves’. The available operators are ‘+’, ‘++’ and ‘+-+’ and the input string is ‘+--’ in the first case, ‘+-’ in the second and ‘+-+’ in the third. In the first case the trie does not contain the string, so it returns ‘Illegal pattern’. In both the second and third case, the trie returns ‘+-+’, however, the action is executed only in the third case where there is an exact match of the user-entered text and the string returned from the trie. The ambiguity may be forced only in the case the entered text is equal to ‘+’. In that case, for the second action, we may return either ‘++’ or ‘+-+’.



Figure 4.16: A visualization of the trie used to implement the feature for adding operators in expressions

Final remarks

While the editor aspect of MPS provides powerful options to allow the creation of a user-friendly IDE, it takes a considerable amount of time and resources. Rather than analyzing different usage scenarios of the language, it may be sometimes easier to define a set of executable actions (intentions) which a user may choose from to create the required AST nodes. As it has been mentioned, since the MPS does not rely on lexers and parsers to process the code, we have to take a reverse approach and that is costly.

**Code completion**

An important feature of many great IDEs is a context-aware code completion. This feature speeds up development process mainly by putting less pressure on a programmer’s memorization of the identifiers, members and so on. It usually has a form of a list (Figure 2.5). A lot of simplified implementations only include a list of members or all possible words that were written in the corresponding code. Context-aware code completion differs from such implementations by providing a list of only those constructs that are actually ‘visible’ in the given context. Consider the following example of functions in Frege:

length (y:ys) = 1 + length ys

getTop (x:xs) = x

On the right hand side of the getTop function definition a user would not be able to pick e.g. a variable ‘y’ from the code completion menu, since ‘y’ is a local variable of the function ‘length’. The only identifiers, in this context, the menu would be populated with, would be ‘getTop’, ‘x’, ‘xs’ and ‘length’ (if we ignore the possibility of other functions being defined in the module, the imported definitions and implicitly imported definitions from Frege-Prelude library).

To implement context-aware code completion in MPS platform, several mechanisms are available: concept references, constraints and scopes. In this chapter, we will analyze the overall problem with code completion, discuss possible solutions and provide several examples.

Scopes

The high-level approach to restricting set of available nodes in a certain context is relatively simple.

Let us look at datatype and type synonym declarations. We have already explained in the chapter 4.1 (Structure) why their names are connected to a specific node and not a simple property. The node is an instance of ‘TypeName’ concept and a type reference is a simple concept containing only a reference to ‘TypeName’. (Thus, it is a ‘smart reference’.) What we want to do is to restrict certain type names that are referenced from the smart reference based on the context. We will therefore define constraints for the concept, specify its presentation (it should simply return the referenced type name) and the scope, which is basically a list of all ‘TypeName’ instances that are referenceable in the given situation.

Providing a scope for the concept, however, requires a proper analysis. It would be tedious and unmanageable to specify a list of referenceable nodes for each smart reference concept individually. Instead, we can take a different approach and proclaim certain concepts to be ‘scope providers’. What we mean by this is that they contain certain children which can be referenced. In our example, both datatype and type synonym declarations are scope providers, because they contain a child, instance of the ‘TypeName’ concept, which can be further referenced by other concepts. These concepts, upon invocation, will provide a list of nodes that are available to them.

With this approach of scope providers, we can actually form a hierarchy. Both described concepts inherit from ‘Definition’ and are therefore children of the ‘Skeleton’ concept. ‘Skeleton’ could be considered a single whole Frege module. It only makes sense upon requesting a list of available ‘TypeName’ instances from ‘Skeleton’ concept, for ‘Skeleton’ to delegate the call to each its datatype and type synonym declaration and return the merged lists.

This hierarchy is, however, not completely correct, since certain concepts must not provide their children to the ‘outside’ world. A good example is a function definition, which specifies several arguments in the form of variables, but the variables are referenceable only from its own right hand side. (refer to example at the beginning of this chapter) The name of the function still needs to be propagated to the parent scope provider, however.

Based on this, we can implement the constraints aspect of each smart reference by delegating the work of an actual scope creation to their closest ancestor, which can do so. An exemplar implementation is provided on Figure 4.17. Since a scope provider may provide several different list of nodes (e.g. ‘Skeleton’ may provide a list of all type names, but also function names, list of operators, and so on), we should be able to tell, which concept we are actually interested in. In case of type reference, we simply want to obtain a list of all referenceable instances of ‘TypeName’ concept, so that is what we specify. In our work, the concepts, which can create a scope, implement interface ‘ScopeProvider’.

Figure 4.17: An exemplar implementation of the type reference link constraints

Scope hierarchy pattern

In the most cases a scope provider concepts needs to know who is requesting a scope and what the relation between the two is. For instance, the function definition may provide its name and a list of its argument identifiers to its right hand side, but to the outside, only its name may be returned. A similar mechanism may be used for concepts enwrapping ‘where’ and ‘let’ language constructs.

However, since the function definition is the first scope provider in the hierarchy for a requester from its right hand side, now it also has to provide its parent scope. If we go back to the example at the beginning of this chapter, we can see that the right hand side of the function ‘getTop’ can use the identifier of the function ‘length’ and vice versa. In this case the nodes are siblings in the corresponding AST (both are children of the ‘Skeleton’ concept), but generally speaking, all of the pattern scopes, up to the root concept, have to be merged together to provide the correct set of referenceable nodes. (An example could be an imported function from another module, which would be provided by a concept higher in the ‘scope-providing’ hierarchy, than is the sibling.)

We can illustrate the pattern on the Figure 4.18. The figure depicts an AST of a simple Frege module with two functions:

f x y = x + y

g = 0

Function definition is a scope provider. It can create a scope, where it enwraps its arguments and its name. Thus, for the right hand side of the function ‘f’, it provides the arguments ‘x’ and ‘y’, which are then referenced. This is because the function definition knows, where the request came from, and can properly react. If the request for scope came from the ‘outside’ (e.g. ‘Skeleton’), it would only return its own name.

‘Skeleton’ concept is also a scope provider. It provides nodes that were either implicitly or explicitly imported to the module (‘+’ operator is part of the implicitly imported Frege.Prelude library), while also delegating scope creation to its children. This means that based on the illustration below, we know, that ‘Skeleton’ provides the following nodes:

* Everything implicitly imported from Frege.Prelude library, such as ‘+’ operator definition.
* Function names ‘f’ and ‘g’, which are actually provided by the corresponding function definitions themselves, to which ‘Skeleton’ concept only delegates its request. The function definitions, based on the request coming from a parent, know that they may only return their own names, but not the arguments.

Now we can derive, what referenceable nodes the code completion menu for the right hand side of the function ‘f’ is populated with:

* Request for scope to the function definition of ‘f’ comes from its right hand side, which means the definition will return a list of its arguments.
* Subsequently, the definition will delegate the scope creation to its parent.
* The closest parent of the function definition of ‘f’, which is also a scope provider, is the root node and instance of ‘Skeleton’ concept.
* The root node will create the scope as described above.
* The two scopes are merged and returned to the right hand side of the function ‘f’.



Figure 4.18: A visualization of the AST for a single Frege module with two function definitions

To help us implement the pattern, we have created an interface ’DCScopeProvider’ (extends the built-in ‘ScopeProvider’). It contains two main methods, one called by children and one called by parent scope providers. The default implementation, which may be overridden using behavior MPS aspect, is to always include for children only the parent scope, which is delegated up to the root node, and then subsequently called down (i.e. called by parent scope providers), usually back to the original scope provider. In the latter method, the concept returns a concrete scope it provides.

In special cases, such as the function definition concept, we may override the method called by children to also include additional nodes (such as function arguments). The method invoker may be also further inspected, which gives us a lot of flexibility and allows us to react appropriately in almost any scenario.

Import and export

The concept that provides a scope of imported function identifiers, operators, datatypes and other definition names, is the root concept ‘Skeleton’. Upon a request, it constructs two scopes:

* Scope of everything that was imported from other modules.
* Scope of the current module, i.e. function identifiers, operators, etc.

The merged scopes are then returned.

In the both cases, the scope creation is actually delegated to the children concepts. However, the creation of the imported scope significantly differs from the latter, which we have described in the previous section.

The ‘Import’ concept contains a reference to a ‘Module’ concept. From that, it can get to the other module’s root node (instance of ‘Skeleton’ concept) and subsequently request the whole module’s scope. While the main idea works, there are two main obstacles:

* A module may restrict what it is actually willing to export.
* Not all entities are to be imported into the main namespace.

The first point is solved by iterating the enumerated items in the ‘module’ statement. If no items are provided, we create the scope for the whole module. If exported items are specified, a scope is created for each one and then merged into a single list.

The second point poses some challenges, since all of the items are actually imported, but some of them can be accessed only by using a qualified name. This means that the ‘Import’ concept has to be able to provide two different scopes, one for all of the items from the referenced module (for a usage with qualified names), and one for the items that are enumerated, or in case of using ‘hidden’ clause, not enumerated (items that are imported into the current namespace).

Additionally, the ‘Import’ concept has to provide a very specific scope for its children as well. First, it should allow to import only the other modules and not the one currently being defined. Thus, a scope containing the sibling module names has to be created. Then, we have to provide the scope for the items enumeration, which will describe, what items will be actually imported into the current namespace. This, understandably, depends on the selection of the module to be imported. In each case, the scope is created by the ‘Import’ concept itself and cannot include its parent scope for obvious reasons. Therefore, the hierarchical scope pattern described in the previous section does not fully apply here. (In a similar manner, the concept ‘IIType’ has to create its own scope for the ‘IITConstructorList’ depending on the datatype it references.)

It remains to explain, how the two scopes, that ‘Import’ concept provides, are used.

The second scope containing only the items imported into the current namespace is the default scope that the ‘Import’ provides. This is then used by ‘Skeleton’, merged with the rest and returned to the requester. The first scope for a usage with qualified names, has to be used explicitly.

In scenarios, where it made sense, special concepts were created to incorporate the usage of qualified names. For instance, in an expression where a certain kind of application is expected (function application, operator application, etc.), we may use ‘ImportedEntityApplication’. The concept consists of two parts, which include the alias of an imported module and the application entity, which is referenced from that module. In a similar manner as the ‘Import’ concept, ‘ImportedEntityApplication’ creates a custom scope for the application entity child, based on the scope provided by the corresponding ‘Import’ node. From the editor perspective, a wrapper substitute menu is defined to create an instance of the concept whenever an import alias is typed by a user. Figure 4.19 shows a usage of the concept on a concrete example. The code completion menu is populated only by the identifiers from the corresponding imported module ‘mps.frege.examples.Lists’.



Figure 4.19: Code completion menu when using a qualified name

Implicitly imported library Frege.Prelude

A library with several standard functions and operators has been created to simulate the behavior of an implicit library Frege.Prelude. The module is simply labeled as ‘Default’ in Frege-IDE (mps.frege.Default).

Every new module imports the library implicitly upon its construction by searching the visible modules and finding the one with the corresponding name. The module is then imported with a ‘hidden’ flag, which makes it invisible in the editor.

**Typesystem**

To implement a simple type checking capability for our IDE, we used the typesystem aspect in MPS. The current feature has some limitations and supports only type evaluation of the functions, where an annotation is provided. In this chapter, we will go through several examples, describe the problems we encountered during the implementation and evaluate the final result.

Types

Several concepts have to be created to be used in the MPS typesystem aspect to denote the types of expressions. As analyzed in previous chapters, we need to implement at least the following types:

* Numeric types (to demonstrate the capabilities, we will restrict ourselves only to Integer and Double types)
* Bool
* Char
* String (in Frege, it is not a list of Char, thus a new separate type is required for the feature)
* List
* Tuple
* Function type

Additionally, we will create a special concept called ‘Undecidable’ to denote the types of expressions we could not or did not want to infer the types of.

An example of an implementation for the concept representing type of a tuple is captured on Figure 4.20. The concept has to inherit from Type concept in j.mps.baseLanguage. The type of a tuple is given by types of its items, therefore we also need to provide the children for the concept.

To specify the relations between the new types we have to create sub- or super-typing rules, and replacement rules. The relationship between Double and Int is rather straightforward, and regarding the implementation, we only create the sub-typing rule for the concept representing the Int type. There, we specify that the super-types of Int are composed only of our new type Double.

Tuples, functions and lists are more complicated. For the two tuples to be comparable, they need to have the same size and, subsequently, their items need to be comparable as well (recursively, e.g. in case the item of a tuple is a tuple again). The replacement rule is implemented in a Java-like language, by iterating the children items of the two tuples to be compared. If the corresponding pair of items does not satisfy the sub-typing relationship, we will manually report an error to the user.



Figure 4.20: Implementation of the concept representing type of a tuple

Infix expressions

In Frege, a user may define custom operators with different associativity and precedence. An operator is just a function accepting two arguments and returning a result. A result of such function may, again, be a function accepting additional arguments.

Frege differs from most programming languages such as C# or C++ in the sense the languages allow mostly only operator overloading, that is, adjust the behavior of the operators for different input types. The syntax tree generated by the parser in the corresponding language compiler, however, stays the same. That is not the case in Frege. Here, a user may create a completely new operator of an arbitrary length, altering the syntax tree that is generated for the expressions using the new operator.

We have already mentioned the problems associated with the custom operators and editors, and why we opted for keeping the expressions linearized instead of using a tree. Now we have to parse the expressions using the information a user gives us by typing the ‘infix’ statement, where he or she specifies the new operator’s associativity and precedence.

The plan to implement the expression type evaluation is as follows:

* Evaluate the types of the sub-expressions recursively, such as expression enclosed within brackets, or expressions inside terms (tuples, lists).
* The remaining is a linearized series of operands, for which we know the type of, and operators.
* Gather the data for the operators used inside the expression, namely precedence and associativity.
* Construct a temporary binary expression tree for the current expression.
* Get the type for each node representing an operator, in the corresponding binary tree
* Evaluate the type of the tree.

The MPS offers a declarative way to implement the type evaluation of AST nodes and thus we do not have to be excessively concerned about recursive approach. Furthermore, to ease the implementation of the last point, we can actually create the temporary expression tree based on new MPS concepts, implement the type evaluation of those (again, declaratively) in the typesystem aspect and let the platform perform the computation itself.

The concept representing usage of infix operators inside the expressions is ‘OperatorReference’. We can implement in the behavior aspect of the concept methods for returning the used operator’s associativity and precedence, simply by searching the corresponding AST and selecting the first ‘fixity’ declaration, which is associated with the current operator. If no ‘fixity’ declaration is available, we return a default value.

In a similar manner, we can implement the type retrieval of the operators. ‘OperatorReference’ points to the operators’ actual function definition. We can inspect the right hand side of the definition (it is an expression), evaluate its type and return it.

What remains, is constructing the binary expression tree for the given expression based on the used operators’ precedence and associativity. For this, we used a derivation of a standard algorithm for translating infix expressions to postfix, which uses a single stack. Our algorithm uses two stacks and iterates through the elements of the expression three times in total.

Before we delve into the algorithm, let us analyze the conditions given by Frege language regarding the operators’ associativity.

* There are three types of associativity: left, right and non-associative operators.
* There must not be operators with different associativity and the same precedence in sequence in a single expression.
* Non-associative operator (or non-associative operators with the same precedence) must not be used in sequence in an expression. (Note that when separated by another left or right-associative operators, the expression is usually legal.)

The corresponding algorithm works like this:

1. Iterate the elements of the expression from left to right and put them on the first stack. Keep the track of the precedence of the last operator and if an operator with a lower precedence is encountered, evaluate the items on the first stack.
2. We evaluate only the items on the first track, where the operators have a strictly higher precedence, than the newly encountered operator. These operators are basically surrounded from both the left and the right side of the expression by the operators with lower precedence, which means they will definitely get evaluated first, therefore we can form a sub-tree for them.
3. Keep track of the last operator’s precedence and associativity. If you encounter two consequent operators with the same precedence, but different or no associativity, report an error to the user.
4. Since we are now iterating the elements in the first stack, we are encountering items in the reversed order. Therefore if we run into the operator with the right associativity, we can form a binary sub-tree right away and put its root node on the second stack. (We need to be careful with the reversed order of the operands.) If we hit a left-associative operator, we only put the item on the second stack, because the sub-tree will need to be formed from the other side. We do this until we hit an operator with a different precedence.
5. Once we hit in the first stack an operator with a different precedence, then the last one, we know, the new operator will have a smaller precedence. This is because of the first point, where we take new operators only in the increasing order. That means the items popped from the first stack can be evaluated in the final phase, since they have a higher precedence and need to get evaluated first.
6. In the final evaluation phase, we iterate the items in the second stack, therefore the order of the items is the same as in the original expression. Here, the operators are left-associative, so we simply take operands and an operator, form a sub-tree, and move onto next items. Then, we take the formed sub-tree, the new operand and the new operator, and form a sub-tree again. This way we get a tree representing evaluation of items from left to right.
7. We return back to the first point and continue with the items in the former expression. Once the items are depleted, we move onto the second point again.

To illustrate, let us consider an example with three operators:

* + left-associative, precedence 1
* \* left-associative, precedence 3
* . right-associative, precedence 2

The type which the operators work on is not important at the moment. Consider the following expression:

"1" + "2" + "3" + "4" \* "5" \* "6" . "7" . "8" . "9"

We know that the operator \* has the highest precedence, so the expression "4" \* "5" \* "6" gets evaluated first. The operator is left-associative, which means we can place brackets in the following way and not alter the expression’s syntax tree:

"1" + "2" + "3" + (("4" \* "5") \* "6") . "7" . "8" . "9"

Then, the operator . is the one with the highest precedence. It is right-associative, so we get the following equivalent expression:

"1" + "2" + "3" + ((("4" \* "5") \* "6") . ("7" . ("8" . "9")))

Finally, the result would look like this:

((("1" + "2") + "3") + ((("4" \* "5") \* "6") . ("7" . ("8" . "9"))))

Now if we take a look on how the algorithm works, we iterate through the items until the operator . is encountered. That is because . has a lower precedence than \*, but \* has a higher precedence, than +.

**Expression:** . "7" . "8" . "9"

**First stack:** "6" \* "5" \* "4" + "3" + "2" + "1"

**Second stack:** (empty)

Then we evaluate the items in the second stack. Since operator \* is left associative, we put everything onto the second stack until operator + is reached, which has a lower precedence.

**Expression:** . "7" . "8" . "9"

**First stack:** + "3" + "2" + "1"

**Second stack:** "4" \* "5" \* "6"

From the second stack, a binary tree is formed by taking elements in order as they come. Figure 4.21 represents such a tree formed in this stage.



Figure 4.21

The algorithm then continues with the first point, taking rest of the elements until all of them are depleted and moves onto second stage.

**Expression:** (empty)

**First stack:** "9" . "8" . "7" .*tree*(("4" \* "5") \* "6")+ "3" + "2" + "1"

**Second stack:** (empty)

In the second stage, we move through the . operators. Being right-associative, the tree is formed immediately, until the operator + is encountered.

**Expression:** (empty)

**First stack:** *tree*((("4" \* "5") \* "6") . ("7" . ("8" . "9")))+ "3" + "2" + "1"

**Second stack:** (empty)

Finally, the rest of the elements are pushed onto the second stack, the tree is formed in the final stage and returned. Figure 4.22 depicts the resulting tree.



Figure 4.22

Function application

The function type is similar to that of the tuple, but it contains 1..n children, which represent the function’s arguments. The last child could be thought of as the function’s return type, but due to currying, this is not necessarily true (several last children could represent together the function’s return type).

In the concept ‘GenericApplication’, the application entity is a node that should carry an associated type. In this work, we completely omitted the user defined types (type synonyms and datatypes), which means we will not be dealing with the constructor application. Application entity for operators and functions is fairly simple – since it references a concrete function or operator definition, we only have to take a look at the type of its right hand side. As for the application entity representing an expression enclosed within brackets, we have to evaluate the contained expression and get its type.

For the type inspection, we have to use ‘when concrete’ block. The application entity may be of a function type, but also does not have to be (consider for example a literal enclosed within brackets). If it is not, we have to make sure no arguments were specified for the application, otherwise that is an error. The resulting type of the application is then the type of the application entity itself.

In case the application entity has a function type, it needs to be properly handled. First, we check the types of the provided arguments against the types of the expected arguments. We also need to check the amount of provided arguments does not exceed the amount of expected arguments for the application entity. It is possible to specify fewer arguments, however, since that is the currying mechanic.

The returned type of the whole application is based on whether all of the arguments of the function have been depleted. If so, we will return the type of the last child of the corresponding function type. If that is not the case, we construct a new function type, insert all of the remaining arguments’ types into it and return the new type.

We can visualize this on an example with the following function definition:

ff :: Char -> Bool -> Int

ff x y = 0

In this case, we are not really interested what the function does and why it does not actually use the variables ‘x’ and ‘y’ in any way. We only care about the type of its arguments as described by the corresponding annotation, and its return type.

Let us consider the usage of the function in the expression ff ‘a’ true. Since all of the arguments were depleted, the type of the expression is obviously Int, as that is what the function returns. However, the expression ff ‘a’ has a type of a function, which could be described by the following annotation:

ff ‘a’ :: Bool -> Int

Note that the similar approach works in the case with infix expressions, where we apply an operator with left and right operands as its arguments.

Function definition type inference

There are two main, relatively independent, parts when it comes to type inference of a function or an operator. The resulting type of either is given by their respective right hand sides. On the other hand, types of the arguments is not always unambiguously inferable. We can take for example a function, which provides a result independently of the given arguments:

ff x y = 0

Though in some cases it is possible to deduce the type of the arguments based on their usage, as demonstrated by the following example:

getTop :: [String] -> String

…

ff x y = getTop [x, y]

(It is clear that the arguments ‘x’ and ‘y’ need to be of the type String based on their usage as arguments to the function getTop.)

This kind of type inference is relatively complex to implement and we did not include it in the final work. Instead, we opted for a reasonable compromise:

* If an annotation is provided for a function or an operator, it is considered to be the actual type of that definition. The resulting type is only checked against the very type of the corresponding right hand side of the definition.
* If the annotation is not provided, the type of the function arguments is ambiguous and is never checked (the inferred type is set to ‘undecidable’). The resulting type of the function is then based on the type of its right hand side.

In the example above, the inferred type of the function ‘ff’ without an annotation would be:

ff :: undecidable -> undecidable -> String

If we were to specify the annotation for ‘ff’ with arguments being of a different type, than String, we would only report an error that the arguments of an illegal type were provided. Figure 4.23 captures such example in Frege-IDE.



Figure 4.23: Example of an illegal arguments usage

Arguments type decomposition

In the previous section, we described that we want the types of function arguments be inferred from the corresponding annotation, if it is provided. Retrieving the type of an annotation is relatively straightforward and a similar problem has been already described in the current chapter (we simply search the current AST for the required annotation, and if available, get its type).

A certain challenge is posed by the fact that a variable, which we intend to infer the type for, may be included deep within a sub-tree representing a certain argument. Let us consider the following function ‘gg’:

gg :: [[Char]] -> [Char]

gg [[1], ['a', 'b', x]] = [x, x, x]

We have to account for several things. First and foremost, we need to know the type of the variable ‘x’, because it is also used in the expression in the right hand side. We need to check that the expression [x, x, x] conforms to the type [Char]. Secondly, we want to make sure that the whole argument is correct, which in this case, it is not: [1] inside the first argument is definitely not of the type [Char].

To do this, we will need to take the type of the corresponding argument from the annotation, and decompose it, as we will delve into the sub-tree associated with the argument. We can illustrate our reasoning on the example above. We know that the argument [[1], ['a', 'b', x]] corresponds to the type [[Char]]. This means that each item of the list has to correspond to the type [Char], i.e. [1] has to have the type [Char] together with the ['a', 'b', x]. Going further down, we check that the type of the literal 1 corresponds to Char as well as the types of items 'a', 'b' and x. Since literals already carry types on their own, the attempt to declare the type Char for the literal 1 will MPS evaluate as an error, whilst the variable ‘x’ will be simply assigned the given type.

To implement the feature, each pattern concept has to inspect the type its parent assigned it. If the type corresponds to the pattern, the type is decomposed and its children types distributed between the children of the corresponding pattern. The root pattern concept takes its type from the annotation, and in case there is none, the ‘undecidable’ type is taken.

We can show how the algorithm works on the mentioned example. The list pattern ['a', 'b', x] is a child of the list pattern [[1], ['a', 'b', x]]. With the help of ‘when concrete’ block the pattern waits until its type, provided by its parent, is resolved. The corresponding type is [Char]. Upon inspection, the type is, indeed, a list, which correctly corresponds to the given pattern. We decompose the type, select Char, and infer the type of the children 'a', 'b' and x to be Char. In case the type given by the parent list was ‘undecidable’, ‘undecidable’ type would be also assigned to the children items.

* *Chapter 5: Evaluation*
  + *What we strived to achieve, again? Recapitulation?*
  + *User-friendliness of the “Frege-IDE”, against classical text-based IDEs, advantages and disadvantages*
    - *(Should be probably mentioned user's time investment into learning to use the IDE)*
  + *Limitations*
    - *Something couldn't be done easily, e.g. Enter key-press does not always create a new line, ambiguity*
    - *Not all transformations are possible, e.g. rewriting f x y = x + y to f , x, y :: Int -> Int -> Int (by removing = and adding , , ::) is basically impossible to cover – it is not a text editor*
    - *Intentions – for the example above intention is an option to cover such transformation*
    - *(Mention built-in JAVA-like language, that also has these limitations)*

In this work, we have focused on creating a projectional IDE to assist developers with development of programs in Frege language. We have included support for code completion, simple error and type checking and refactoring. This chapter looks into the convenience of usage of such an IDE, how it compares to classic plain-text IDEs and whether it offers any advantages.

Editor

Frege-IDE being built on top of a platform for creating projectional editors puts several restrictions on how a typical program may be written. We cannot edit the whole text directly, since only certain editor cells are modifiable. Additionally due to way how editor actions work, we cannot even add new textual constructs anywhere we would like, as opposed to a plain-text IDE.

The editor is only as good as it is designed. Every feature has to be implemented, and even a seemingly trivial functionality, such as adding a new operator with operand right of an existing expression, has to be created manually. This puts a considerable amount of work on a language designer, who has to think of a different usage scenarios of the IDE he or she is developing.

Even though this means that an IDE built on top of the MPS platform will never be as flexible as the editing of a plain text, there are advantages to this approach. Mainly they include the possibility to force the users of such an IDE to adhere to a specific coding style. We can limit the usage of unwanted features of a language, or to prevent the programmers from writing an ‘unaesthetic’ code.

When developing an editor, a language designer has several options to choose from. He or she can put editor actions in some places to handle events related to writing particular text phrases. Then, there may also be defined handlers for deletion, selection, and other manipulation of concrete editor cells. Last but not least, there is the notion of intentions, which are manually-invoked actions (by alt + enter) designed to be usable in specific places in the code to handle certain scenarios.

Side transformation menus are actions, which are triggered when a certain text pattern is written right of an editor cell. In this work, we used the action for adding an operator right of expressions. Figure 5.1 shows the usage of the Frege-IDE for this particular case.



Figure 5.1: Using side transformation menu for adding operator right of an expression

We can define special handlers for manipulation of certain editor cells, especially deletion. For these cases we may use cell action maps. A scenario in which the cell action maps can be useful, is a conversion of a range list expression to basic enumeration, upon deletion of the range symbol .. . The demonstration is depicted on Figure 5.2.



Figure 5.2: Using cell action map for handling deletion (by pressing backspace key) of the range symbol inside a list term

Sometimes, intentions are used to deal with non-trivial scenarios, such as handling multiple options for the same input. Consider a function definition with guards. At the end of the last guard, we have several options:

* We can add a new, empty line, where we will put new a definition.
* We can add a new pattern for the function. The function definitions being grouped together, means we have to tell the editor somehow that we want to create a new pattern definition inside that group.
* We can add a new guard.

There are many different approaches to a problem like this, and it is on consideration of a language designer. A certain experience with user experience design can be helpful in this regard. Overall, we have at least these options:

* Hitting the enter key always add a new line. If the character ‘|’ is typed on the new line, we can check the definition above and react by creating the new guard for the definition. A similar approach would be taken for the case of creating a new pattern definition for the same function (i.e. upon typing a name of a function, we would check, whether the function above has the same name and if so, a new pattern definition would be created instead).
* Typing ‘|’ at the end of the last guard would be understood as adding a new guard.
* A specific key press would be associated with the corresponding action.
* We can let the user choose from a menu of available actions by using intentions.

The first option is probably the closest we can get with emulation of a classic, plain-text, IDE. While it may seem as an attractive choice, it is relatively difficult to implement and the positive gains are questionable. We would need to think of many different scenarios, some of which a user could expect a different behavior from the system than what would be actually implemented. For instance, what should happen, if a user types in the same name of a new function more than one line below? Should that be understood as adding a new pattern for the same function? What if there was a different definition in between? What if the user planned on renaming the first function later, but for the time being, wanted to create a new function definition with the same name? All of these questions would need to be answered.

The second option of typing ‘|’ symbol might seem like a reasonable choice. However, we have to take into account that there may be a custom operator defined, which begins with the same mentioned character. In this case, the action is ambiguous.

We dismissed the third option immediately. It is almost the same as creating intentions menu, with an additional disadvantage of forcing a user to remember which key corresponds to which action.

The intentions menu, however, suits here well. Not only is it easy for a user to do precisely what he or she intended, the selected action also takes away a few unnecessary keystrokes. By choosing a concrete action, the IDE can perform additional operations a user would need to do him or herself otherwise. An example of a usage of intentions menu in Frege-IDE is depicted on Figure 5.3.



Figure 5.3: Using intentions menu to add a new guard to a function definition

Seamless definitions

In chapter 4.2.x (todo: ref) we have proposed and implemented a way of a seamless definition creation in Frege-IDE. The most difficult part was to understand from the user input, whether an annotation or a function definition is currently being typed. There were several possibilities on how to approach the matter. The one we took was mainly to demonstrate the capabilities of the MPS platform and to show how similar scenarios can be generally handled.

From the user-experience perspective, let us propose additional solutions to the problem:

* Intentions aspect can be used to allow the user to choose, what kind of definition he or she plans to create. (We have actually implemented this option as well.)
* Create a wrap substitute menu over all defined functions and operators. If a name of an existing function or an operator is typed, immediately create an annotation, otherwise it will be understood as a new function definition.

Ability to invoke intentions menu on an empty line may improve the overall experience with the IDE, since now a user has several options on how to create a new definition, but should not make matters any worse. It is questionable whether leaving only this approach (as opposed to what was implemented) would be a better design than the current version. We believe different users would have a different opinion on the matter.

The second point is not insignificant, since it is quite convenient to have the code-completion menu populated with the defined functions and operators. During the evaluation, we have tried several times creating an annotation of a function where we were unsuccessful. The reason for this is that a small typographical error meant the Frege-IDE was not able to find the definition with the provided name and resulted in an unset function reference. Figure 5.4 portrays such a scenario.



Figure 5.4: An annotation with an unset function reference

The problem with this approach would be that typing a new name for a new function definition would not be resolvable until the name was not a prefix of any other, already defined, function. Why? Because the Frege-IDE would not be able to tell whether we are not trying to type in a name of an existing function instead (to provide an annotation for the corresponding function) and thus would be waiting until the name was completely unambiguous. This means that if we had a function named, for example, ‘foo’, we would not be able to create a definition for a function named ‘fo’ (unless selecting an action from the intentions menu, or use a different workaround).

Overall, we leave the answer to what is the best approach here, rather unanswered and only speculate over several options, none of which is perfect.

References

Notion of references greatly eased the implementation of a context aware code completion, which we described in chapter 4.3 (todo: ref). To utilize the feature, however, one has to create an instance of a concept, which is to be referenced, first. This means in cases like ‘where’ clause in function definition, we have to provide a definition inside the ‘where’ part first.

Consider the following example:

five = 1 + four

where

four = 1 + three

where

three = 3

In Frege-IDE, we would first need to write a code in a following manner:

five = 1

where

four = 1

where

three = 3

And only then would we be able to finish the expressions five = 1 and four = 1. This is due to how MPS works – it allows only an existing instance of a concept to be referenced. Since in time of specifying a definition for the function five = 1 function four does not exist, it is not referenceable.

Comparison

fregIDE is a plugin for Eclipse platform which adds a support, among other things, for syntax highlighting, code completion and type checking of Frege programs. It can be found on <https://github.com/Frege/eclipse-plugin/wiki/fregIDE-Tutorial> together with a user manual and installation tutorial.

We have tried the plugin to compare it to Frege-IDE and see, what advantages and disadvantages there are to a projectional IDE over a plain-text based one. We have chosen this specific plugin due to its popularity and extensive support.

fregIDE is rather a robust system and offers many features we could not afford to implement in Frege-IDE. The type checking and evaluation covers almost all of the cases and does not pose the limitations on existence of a function’s annotation, as we had to make. (Figure 5.5 captures a type evaluation by fregIDE plugin.)



Figure 5.5: An example of a type evaluation in fregIDE

However, we experienced some performance issues with the plugin and difficulties with the code completion menu during testing. But these may be connected to the Eclipse platform, rather than the plugin itself.

All in all, at first glance, Frege-IDE does not offer any significant advantage over fregIDE plugin. The set of supported features is limited, the type system is less robust and the editor puts a lot of restrictions on how a code can be actually written. Performance issues are much less severe in Frege-IDE, but these may be related to external sources. However, being restrictive in how a code may be written may, in certain cases, be actually a good thing. We have already mentioned the limiting of unwanted features of a language or enforcing a certain coding guideline. In fact, in Frege-IDE, we have done so, for example, in regards to the import statement, which we forced to be at the top of a module. Additionally, in certain cases we can ‘predict’ what a user is about to write and save him, or her, a few keystrokes. As an example, consider the import statement again. We can use aliasing of the imported module, by typing ‘as’, or hide certain constructs from the namespace, by using ‘hiding’ clause. In both cases, the first character (‘a’ or ‘h’) is enough for us to resolve what comes next. Features like these are easily implementable in MPS and were to a smaller extent also included in this work.

* + *Experience*
    - *What I found MPS lacking about, flexibility, not much detailed documentation*
* *Conclusion*
  + *Are projectional IDEs good for functional languages?*
  + *Is “Frege-IDE” usable? Future work, possible extensions.*

In this work, we have analyzed and implemented an IDE infrastructure on top of JetBrains MPS platform for a subset of Frege language. The final application, called ‘Frege-IDE’, can assist developers with writing, editing, and testing programs in Frege. The IDE includes support for refactoring, code completion and a type checking.

Frege-IDE differs from most IDEs in regards it is a projectional editor, rather than being centered on a code written in a plain text. This brings many restrictions on how a user may use Frege-IDE for writing Frege programs. The editor is not that flexible, certain symbols may not be easily rewritten to other language constructs. A certain time investment is necessary for a user to learn to work with the IDE in an efficient way. On the other hand, such environments can be quite predictive, able to save time and unnecessary keystrokes, which makes them very convenient to use. Furthermore, restrictions imposed on the editor may, in certain cases, be a good thing, where we can enforce a certain coding style and limit the usage of unwanted features of a language.

By implementing Frege-IDE, we wanted to demonstrate the capabilities of JetBrains MPS platform, to see, whether it can be used to develop IDEs for functional languages, such as Haskell and Frege and to find out whether projectional editors are good for functional languages in general. In our experience, we found that the MPS platform is really robust and offers many different ways how to solve typical problems a language designer may come across in his or her work. However, we also lacked some features we needed when developing Frege-IDE, especially the ones related to the editor aspect and had to use a few workarounds. Additionally, the documentation found on JetBrains official website is rather short and could use more examples. That being said, we were still able to create an IDE we wanted and which, in our opinion, works well for Frege language. It is, however, difficult to speculate whether projectional editors offer more convenience for editing purely functional languages compared to plain-text editors in general. We believe there are advantages to both approaches. There are many restrictions a projectional editor puts on a user used to work with a certain language in a plain-text editor, who may then feel the environment to be very limiting. We feel like the fewer features a language has, a better projectional IDE for the language may be designed, since in complex languages, such as Java, or C++, a user has many options how to structure his or her code. This inherently goes against the philosophy of projectional editors, where each language construct should have its own visual appearance and editor, usually not very customizable. All in all, in our opinion, the convenience of a projectional editor is not related to a language being functional or imperative, but rather to the cardinality of the set of the features the language has and, possibly, to the coding style most users of the language are used to.

**Future work**

Frege-IDE project is open to future extensions. These can include extending the set of supported features of Frege language, improving the type system and user experience with the environment’s editor. Additionally, built-in Frege libraries were not implemented in this project and could be included in the future work as well.

* *References, used literature, bibliography*

TODO – check, ci som pouzil vsetky a precislovat podla poradia

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* *Appendix*
  + *Frege formal grammar*
  + *What can be found on the attached CD (source code, examples, MPS setup, …)*
  + *Examples*

TODO

- examples – mention only the examples in Frege-IDE, what each folder contains.

Future work: zmienit automatizaciu resp. kniznice Frege prepisat do MPS

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