Programming Abstractions

Week 4-1: Combinators and combinatory logic

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An early 20th century crisis in mathematics

Russell's Paradox

Define *S* to be the set of all sets that are *not* elements of themselves

- $S = \{x \mid x \notin x\}$

Is *S* an element of *S*?

- Assume so: $S \in S \implies S \notin S$ by the definition of *S*, a contradiction
- Assume not: $S \notin S \implies S \in S$ by the definition of *S*, another contradiction!

This led to a hunt for a non-set-theoretic foundation for mathematics

- Combinatory logic (Moses Schönfinkel and rediscovered by Haskell Curry)
- Lambda calculous (Alonzo Church and others)
  - This forms the basis for functional programming!

Combinatory term

One of three things

A variable (from an infinite list of possible variables)

- I'll use lowercase, upright letters: e.g., f, g, h, x, y, z

A combinator (a function that operates on functions)

- One of the three primitive functions
  - Identity: (I x) = x
  - Constant: (K x y) = x
  - Substitution: (S f g x) = (f x (g x))
- A new combinator C = E where E is a combinatory term, e.g.,
  - J = (S K K)
  - B = (S (K S) K)

(E_1 E_2) An application of a combinatory term E_1 to term E_2

- Application is left-associative so (E_1 E_2 E_3 E_4) is (((E_1 E_2) E_3) E_4)

The primitive combinators

The identity combinator (I x) = x

- Given any combinatory term x, it returns x

The constant combinator (K x y) = x

- I.e., ((K x) y) = x which you can think of as (K x) returns a function that given any argument y returns x

The substitution combinator (S f g x) = (f x (g x))

- You can think of S as taking two functions f and g and some term x. f is applied to x which returns a function and that function is applied to the result of (g x)
- But really, f, g, and x are all just combinatory terms

What is the result of applying the constant combinator in the combinatory term (K z I)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))

A. The variable z

B. The combinator I

C. The combinatory term (z I)

D. It's an error because I takes an argument but none is provided

E. None of the above

What is the result of applying the substitution combinator in the combinatory term (S (f x) h y z)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))

A. The variable f

B. The combinator S

C. The combinatory term ((f x) y (h y) z)

D. The combinatory term (f x (h x) y z)

E. It's an error because S takes 3 arguments but is given four

Expressing S, K, and I in Racket

```
(define (I x)
  x)

(define (K x)
  (λ (y) x))

(define (S f)
  (λ (g)
    (λ (x)
      ((f x) (g x)))))
```

Using the combinators (in Racket)

```
((K 25) 37) ; returns 25

; ((curry-* x) y) is just (* x y)
(define (curry-* x)
  (λ (y)
    (* x y)))

(define (square x)
  (((S curry-*) I) x))
```

As combinators we get (S * I x) = (* x (I x)) = (* x x)

Equivalence between Scheme and combinatory logic

We can represent combinators in Scheme as procedures with no free variables (i.e., every variable used in the body of the procedure is a parameter)

There are no λs in combinatory logic so no way to make new functions

However, combinatory logic does have a way to get the same effect as λ expressions

- We won't cover this, but we can convert every expression in λ calculus into combinatory logic
- λ calculus is Turing-complete (it can perform any computation) so combinatory logic is as well!

Example of a new combinator

L = (S K)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))

Example of a new combinator

L = (S K)

Apply the rules to the left-most combinator in each step, starting with (L x y)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))

Example of a new combinator

L = (S K)

Apply the rules to the left-most combinator in each step, starting with (L x y)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))

(L x y) = ((S K) x y) [Definition of L]

Example of a new combinator

L = (S K)

Apply the rules to the left-most combinator in each step, starting with (L x y)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))

(L x y)	= ((S K) x y)	[Definition of L]
	= (S K x y)	[Constant]

Example of a new combinator

L = (S K)

Apply the rules to the left-most combinator in each step, starting with (L x y)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))

(L x y)	= ((S K) x y)	[Definition of L]
	= (S K x y)	[Constant]
	= (K y (x y))	[Substitution]

Example of a new combinator

L = (S K)

Apply the rules to the left-most combinator in each step, starting with (L x y)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))

(L x y)	= ((S K) x y)	[Definition of L]
	= (S K x y)	[Constant]
	= (K y (x y))	[Substitution]
	= y	[Constant]

Example: Diagonalizing combinator

W = (S S L)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))
- (L x y) = y

Example: Diagonalizing combinator

W = (S S L)

Apply the rules to the left-most combinator in each step, starting with (W f x)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))
- (L x y) = y

Example: Diagonalizing combinator

W = (S S L)

Apply the rules to the left-most combinator in each step, starting with (W f x)

(W f x) = ((S S L) f x) [Definition of W]

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))
- (L x y) = y

Example: Diagonalizing combinator

W = (S S L)

Apply the rules to the left-most combinator in each step, starting with (W f x)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))
- (L x y) = y

(W f x) = ((S S L) f x)   [Definition of W]
= (S S L f x)   [Associativity]

Example: Diagonalizing combinator

W = (S S L)

Apply the rules to the left-most combinator in each step, starting with (W f x)

(W f x) = ((S S L) f x)	[Definition of W]
= (S S L f x)	[Associativity]
= (S f (L f) x)	[Substitution]

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))
- (L x y) = y

Example: Diagonalizing combinator

W = (S S L)

Apply the rules to the left-most combinator in each step, starting with (W f x)

(W f x) = ((S S L) f x)	[Definition of W]
= (S S L f x)	[Associativity]
= (S f (L f) x)	[Substitution]
= (f x ((L f) x))	[Substitution]

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))
- (L x y) = y

Example: Diagonalizing combinator

W = (S S L)

Apply the rules to the left-most combinator in each step, starting with (W f x)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))
- (L x y) = y

(W f x) = ((S S L) f x)	[Definition of W]
= (S S L f x)	[Associativity]
= (S f (L f) x)	[Substitution]
= (f x ((L f) x))	[Substitution]
= (f x (L f x))	[Associativity]

Example: Diagonalizing combinator

W = (S S L)

Apply the rules to the left-most combinator in each step, starting with (W f x)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))
- (L x y) = y

(W f x)	= ((S S L) f x)	[Definition of W]
	= (S S L f x)	[Associativity]
	= (S f (L f) x)	[Substitution]
	= (f x ((L f) x))	[Substitution]
	= (f x (L f x))	[Associativity]
	= (f x x)	[Applying L]

Example: Composition combinator

B = (S (K S) K)

(B f g x) = ((S (K S) K) f g x)	[Definition of B]
= (S (K S) K f g x)	[Associativity]
= ((K S) f (K f) g x)	[Substitution]
= (K S f (K f) g x)	[Associativity]
= (S (K f) g x)	[Constant]
= ((K f) x (g x))	[Substitution]
= (K f x (g x))	[Associativity]
= (f (g x))	[Constant]

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))

Work out what J = (S K K) does in (J x)

Apply the rules of the left most combinator in each step, starting with (J x)

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))

I is unnecessary

- (I x) = x
- (K x y) = x
- (S f g x) = (f x (g x))

Since (S K K x) is always x, (S K K) and I are *functionally equivalent*

We can replace I in any combinatory term with (S K K)

Since we can model all computation using S, K, and I and I can be built from S and K, S and K are sufficient for any computation!

Unlambda is a programming language built out of S, K, function application, and functions for printing and reading a character

- Hello world! in Unlambda: `````````````.H.e.l.l.o.,. .w.o.r.l.d.!i
- Echo user input: ```sii```si`k`ci`@|