



Programming Languages and Compilers (CS 421)

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<https://courses.grainger.illinois.edu/cs421/fa2023/>

Based heavily on slides by Elsa Gunter, which were based in part on slides by Mattox Beckman, as updated by Vikram Adve and Gul Agha



Lambda Calculus - Motivation

- A **beautiful, simple, Turing-complete** programming language
- Captures the essence of **functions**, function **application**, and **evaluation**
- Serves as a **theory of computation**
- Extremely **elegant** and useful for reasoning
- Two kinds: **untyped** and **typed**



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Questions before we start?



Untyped Lambda Calculus



Untyped λ -Calculus is All You Need

- **All you need:**

- **Variables:** x, y, z, w, \dots

- **Abstraction:** $\lambda x . e$

(Function creation, think `fun x -> e`)

- **Application:** $e_1 e_2$

- **Grouping:** (e)

- With some environment, and some canonical values, this is **Turing-Complete!**



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Untyped λ -Calculus Grammar

Formal BNF Grammar:

<expression> ::=
| <variable>
| <abstraction>
| <application>
| (<expression>)

<abstraction> ::= λ <variable>.<expression>

<application> ::= <expression> <expression>

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| $\langle \text{variable} \rangle$
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| $\langle \text{application} \rangle$
| $(\langle \text{expression} \rangle)$

$\langle \text{abstraction} \rangle ::= \lambda \langle \text{variable} \rangle . \langle \text{expression} \rangle$

$\langle \text{application} \rangle ::= \langle \text{expression} \rangle \langle \text{expression} \rangle$

Untyped Lambda Calculus



Untyped λ -Calculus Terminology

- **Variable binding:** $\lambda x . e$ is a binding of x in e
- **Occurrence:** a location of a subterm in a term
 - **Bound occurrence:** occurrences of x in $\lambda x . e$
 - **Free occurrence:** one that is not bound
- **Scope of binding:** in $\lambda x . e$, all occurrences in e not in a subterm of the form $\lambda x . e'$ (same x)
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Example

- **Label occurrences and scope:**

$(\lambda x. y \lambda y. y (\lambda x. x y) x) x$



Example

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9



Example

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Example

- **Label occurrences and scope:**

free
↓
 $(\lambda \mathbf{x}. y \lambda y. y (\lambda x. x y) \mathbf{x}) x$
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Example

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(λ **x**. y λ **y**. **y** (λ x . x **y**) **x**) x
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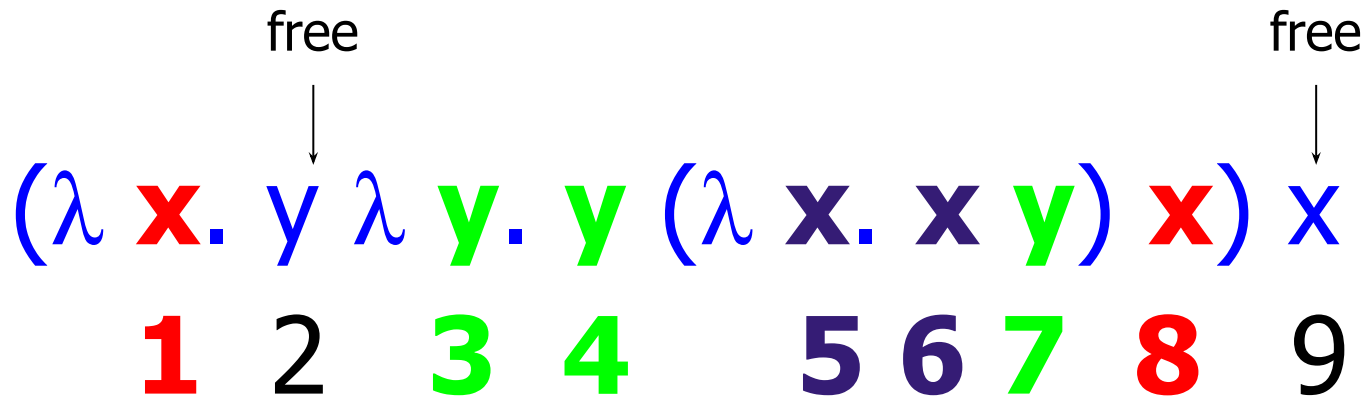
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Example

- Label occurrences and scope:





Questions so far?



Computation



Some Intuition

Identity Function:

$(\lambda \mathbf{x}. \mathbf{x})$

Applying Identity Function:

$(\lambda \mathbf{x}. \mathbf{x}) y \Rightarrow^* y$



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Identity Function:

$(\lambda x. x)$

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Untyped λ -Calculus

- How do you **compute** with the λ -calculus?
- Roughly speaking, by **substitution**:

$$(\lambda x. e_1) e_2 \Rightarrow^* e_1 [e_2 / x]$$

(modulo subtleties to deal with variables)

Transition Semantics for λ -Calculus

**Lazy
Evaluation**

$$\frac{E \rightarrow E'' \quad \text{App}}{E E' \rightarrow E'' E'}$$

$$\frac{}{(\lambda x . E) E' \rightarrow E[E'/x]} \quad \text{L-App}$$

Transition Semantics for λ -Calculus

**Eager
Evaluation**

$$\frac{E \rightarrow E'' \quad \text{App}}{E E' \rightarrow E'' E'}$$

$$\frac{E' \rightarrow E'' \quad \text{E-App}}{(\lambda x . E) E' \rightarrow (\lambda x . E) E''}$$

$$\frac{\text{V-App}}{(\lambda x . E) V \rightarrow E[V/x]}$$

Where V is a variable or abstraction (value)

Computation



How Powerful is the Untyped λ -Calculus?

- The untyped λ -calculus is **Turing Complete**
 - Can express any sequential computation
 - Yes, in that few computation rules
- But it'd suck to use as-is:
 - How to express basic **data**: booleans, integers, etc?
 - How to express **recursion**?
 - What about **constants**? **If-then-else**?
 - “Just” a convenience—can be added as syntactic sugar



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Clever encodings
do exist



How Powerful is the **Typed** λ -Calculus?

- **Sometimes Not Turing Complete**
- Depends on the type system!
 - Types rule out invalid programs
 - What is the type of $(f f)$?
 - Types are *not* syntactic sugar! They disallow some terms
- e.g., simply typed λ -calculus is less powerful than the untyped λ -Calculus: **not Turing Complete** (no recursion)



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Questions so far?



Normalization:

Another way to think about meaning



Equality

- A problem that shows up *everywhere*: How do you tell if two terms in this language are “the same” as each other?
 - **Compute** them all the way, then see if the **result** is the same
 - Want some way of **normalizing** the terms—choose some **normal form**
 - “Same” means **same normal form**
- Typically a simple, syntactic notion of equality



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Equality

- Programming languages researchers really like Greek letters for some reason
- So when we define computation rules to get terms into their normal forms, we name them after Greek letters:
 - **α -conversion**: renaming variables
 - **β -reduction**: reducing function application
- **Equality** of lambda terms in untyped lambda calculus is **$\alpha\beta$ -equivalence**



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α -Conversion

$\lambda x. e \xrightarrow{\alpha} \lambda y. (e [y/x])$ provided that:

1. y is not free in e
2. No free occurrence of x in e becomes bound in e when replaced by y



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$\lambda x. x y \xrightarrow{\alpha} \lambda y. y y$

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**y is free in body on LHS,
but not in body on RHS**

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**Can't just rename x to y ;
get something different**

Normalization



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Good:

**Renaming first y on LHS to x on RHS
doesn't change the meaning!**

$\lambda \mathbf{y}. (\lambda y. y) \mathbf{y} \xrightarrow{\alpha} \lambda \mathbf{x}. (\lambda y. y) \mathbf{x}$



Questions so far?



α -Equivalence

- **α -equivalence** is the **smallest congruence** containing **α -conversion**
- Let \sim be a relation on lambda terms. \sim is a **congruence** if
 - it is an equivalence relation, and
 - if $e_1 \sim e_2$ then
 - $(e e_1) \sim (e e_2)$ and $(e_1 e) \sim (e_2 e)$
 - $\lambda x. e_1 \sim \lambda x. e_2$
- One usually treats α -equivalent terms as equal, i.e., uses α -equivalence classes of terms

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Normalization



Example

Show: $\lambda x. (\lambda y. y x) x \sim_{\alpha} \lambda y. (\lambda x. x y) y$



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$(\lambda y. y z) \xrightarrow{-\alpha-} (\lambda x. x z)$ SO

$(\lambda y. y z) \sim_{\alpha} (\lambda x. x z)$ SO

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Normalization

Example

Show: $\lambda x. (\lambda y. y x) x \sim_{\alpha} \lambda y. (\lambda x. x y) y$

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Normalization



Questions so far?



Equality

- Programming languages researchers really like Greek letters for some reason
- So when we define computation rules to get terms into their normal forms, we name them after Greek letters:
 - **α -conversion**: renaming variables
 - **β -reduction**: reducing function application
- **Equality** of lambda terms in untyped lambda calculus is **$\alpha\beta$ -equivalence**



β -reduction

$$(\lambda x. e) r \xrightarrow{\beta} e [r / x]$$

- **Essence of computation** in the lambda calculus
- Usually defined on α -**equivalence classes** of terms



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Needed: Substitution

- Defined on **α -equivalence classes** of terms
- $e [r / x]$ means **replace every free occurrence** of x in e by r
 - e called **redex**; r called **residue**
- Provided that no variable free in e becomes bound in $e [r / x]$
 - **Rename** bound variables in e to **avoid capturing** free variables of r



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Needed: Substitution

We can define by cases:

■ Variable:

$$x [r / x] = r$$

$$y [r / x] = y \text{ if } y \neq x$$

■ Application:

$$(e_1 e_2) [r / x] = ((e_1 [r / x]) (e_2 [r / x]))$$

■ Function:

$$(\lambda x. e) [r / x] = (\lambda x. e)$$

$$(\lambda y. e) [r / x] = \lambda y. (e [r / x]) \text{ if } y \neq x \text{ and } y \text{ not free in } r$$



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**Rename y in redex if
needed to avoid capture**

Normalization



Needed: Substitution

$$(\lambda y. y z) [(\lambda x. x y) / z] = ?$$

- Problems?
 - z in redex in scope of y binding
 - y free in the residue
- $(\lambda y. y z) [(\lambda x. x y) / z] \rightarrow$
 $(\lambda w. w z) [(\lambda x. x y) / z] =$
 $\lambda w. w (\lambda x. x y)$



Needed: Substitution

$$(\lambda \mathbf{y}. y \mathbf{z}) [(\lambda x. x y) / z] = ?$$

■ Problems?

■ **z** in redex in scope of **y** binding

■ y free in the residue

■ $(\lambda y. y z) [(\lambda x. x y) / z] \xrightarrow{\alpha} (\lambda w. w z) [(\lambda x. x y) / z] = \lambda w. w (\lambda x. x y)$



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Then we can substitute



Needed: Substitution

- **Note:** only replace **free** occurrences

- e.g.,

$$(\lambda y. y z (\lambda z. z)) [(\lambda x. x) / z] = \\ \lambda y. y (\lambda x. x) (\lambda z. z)$$

not

$$\lambda y. y (\lambda x. x) (\lambda z. (\lambda x. x))$$



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$$(\lambda z. (\lambda x. x y) z) (\lambda y. y z) \rightarrow_{\beta} ??$$



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$$y z$$



Questions so far?



$\alpha\beta$ -Equivalence

- **$\alpha\beta$ -equivalence** is the smallest congruence containing **α -equivalence** and **β -reduction**
- A term is in **normal form** if no subterm is α -equivalent to a term that can be β -reduced
- Hard fact (**Church-Rosser**): if e_1 and e_2 are $\alpha\beta$ -equivalent and both are normal forms, then they are α -equivalent



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Teaser: Does every term have a normal form?



Teaser: Does every term have a normal form?

Try to normalize:

$(\lambda x. x x) (\lambda x. x x)$



Questions?



Next Class:

Evaluation in Lambda Calculus
(plus how to write actual programs)



Next Class

- **Please enjoy fall break!**
- **Last quiz** is the Tuesday when you are back.
- All deadlines can be found on **course website**
- Use **office hours** and **class forums** for help