CSc 372

Comparative Programming Languages

14 : Haskell — Lazy Evaluation

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Lazy evaluation

- Haskell evaluates expressions using a technique called lazy evaluation:
  1. No expression is evaluated until its value is needed.
  2. No shared expression is evaluated more than once; if the expression is ever evaluated then the result is shared between all those places in which it is used.
- Lazy functions are also called non-strict and evaluate their arguments lazily or by need.
- C functions and Java methods are strict and evaluate their arguments eagerly.

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Don’t Evaluate Until Necessary

- The first of these ideas is illustrated by the following function:

```
ignoreArgument x = "I didn’t evaluate x"
```

- Since the result of the function `ignoreArgument` doesn’t depend on the value of its argument `x`, that argument will not be evaluated:

```
$ hugs +s
> ignoreArgument (1/0)
I didn’t evaluate x
(246 reductions, 351 cells)
```

Don't Evaluate Until Necessary...

- The function seq forces strict evaluation when that is necessary:

```
> seq ignoreArgument (1/0)
Inf
(32 reductions, 78 cells)
```

Evaluate Shared Expressions Once

- The second basic idea behind lazy evaluation is that no shared expression should be evaluated more than once.
- For example, the following two expressions can be used to calculate $3 * 3 * 3 * 3$:

```
$ hugs +s
> square*square where square = 3*3
81
(30 reductions, 67 cells)
> (3*3)*(3*3)
81
(34 reductions, 45 cells)
```

Evaluate Shared Expressions Once. . .

- Notice that the first expression requires fewer reduction than the second.
- A reduction is the basic step of evaluating a Haskell expression, by applying a function to its argument.

Saving Reductions

- Consider these sequences of reductions:

```
square * square where square = 3 * 3
   -- calculate the value of square by
   -- reducing 3*3==>9 and replace each
   -- occurrence of square with this result
   ==> 9 * 9
   ==> 81

(3 * 3) * (3 * 3)    -- evaluate first (3*3)
   ==> 9 * (3 * 3)   -- evaluate second (3*3)
   ==> 9 * 9
   ==> 81
```

- Lazy evaluation means that only the minimum amount of calculation is used to determine the result of an expression.

Taking the Minimum

- Consider the task of finding the smallest element of a list of integers.

```
> minimum [100,99..1]
1
(2355 reductions, 3211 cells)
```

- `[100,99..1]` denotes the list of integers from 1 to 100 arranged in decreasing order.
- Instead, we could first sort and then take the head of the result:

```
> :load List
> sort [100,99..1]
[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, ..., 99, 100]
(3430 reductions, 8234 cells)
```

Taking the Minimum. . .

- However, thanks to lazy evaluation, calculating just the first element of the sorted list actually requires less work in this particular case than the first solution using `minimum`:

```
> head (sort [100,99..1])
1
(1877 reductions, 3993 cells)

> minimum [100,99..1]
1
(2355 reductions, 3211 cells)
```

Infinite data structures

- Lazy evaluation makes it possible for functions in Haskell to manipulate ‘infinite’ data structures.
- The advantage of lazy evaluation is that it allows us to construct infinite objects piece by piece as necessary
- The function `ones` below generates an infinite list of 1s:

```
ones = 1 :  ones

> take 10 ones
[1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1]
(277 reductions, 389 cells)
```

Infinite data structures. . .

- Consider the following function which can be used to produce infinite lists of integer values:

```
countFrom n = n :  countFrom (n+1)

> countFrom 1
[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,^CInterrupted!]
```

Infinite data structures. . .

- For practical applications, we are usually only interested in using a finite portion of an infinite data structure.
- We can find the sum of the integers 1 to 10:

```
> sum (take 10 (countFrom 1))
55
(278 reductions, 440 cells)
```

- `take n xs` evaluates to a list containing the first `n` elements of the list `xs`.

Infinite data structures. . .

- Infinite data structures enable us to describe an object without being tied to one particular application of that object.
- The following definitions for infinite list of powers of two [1, 2, 4, 8, . . .]:

```
powersOfTwo = 1 :  map double powersOfTwo
         where double n = 2*n
```

```
> take 10 powersOfTwo
[1,2,4,8,16,32,64,128,256,512]
```

Infinite data structures. . .

- `xs!!n` evaluates to the n:th element of the list `xs`.
- We can define a function to find the nth power of 2 for any given integer n:

```
powersOfTwo = 1 :  map (*2) powersOfTwo

twoToThe n = powersOfTwo !!  n

> twoToThe 5
32
```

Fibonacci

- Here's a definition of a function that generates an infinite list of all the fibonacci numbers:

```
fib = 1:1:[a+b| a,b <-zip fib (tail fib)]

> take 10 fib
[1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34,55]
```

Acknowledgements

- These slides were derived mostly from the Gofer manual.

  Functional programming environment, Version 2.20

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