CSE 307: Principles of Programming Languages

Exceptions

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Topics

Explicit Vs Implicit Control Transfer

- Control abstractions studied so far are explicit:
  - At the statement involving transfer of control, there is a syntactic indication of the point of transfer.
  - Even for procedure calls or goto statements, there is an explicit indication of the target of transfer.
- An implicit control abstraction involves:
  - Constructs that enable one to set up the transfer point in advance.
  - At the statement that transfers control, the target is not explicitly specified.

Explicit Vs Implicit Control Transfer

- Examples:
  - Function Pointers
  - Return Statements
  - Exceptions

Terminology

Exception: An error, or more generally, an unusual condition.

Raise, Throw, Signal: A statement is said to “raise” (or “throw” or “signal”) an exception if the execution of this statement leads to an exception. ("throw" is the term used in C++/Java language descriptions, “raise” is used in OCAML.)

Catch: A catch statement is used in C++/Java to declare a handler. OCAML uses the “try ... with” statement to handle exceptions.

Terminology (Continued)

Resumption model: After the execution of the handler, control returns back to the statement that raised the exception.

- Example: signal handling in UNIX/C.

Termination Model: Control does not return to that statement after the handler is executed.

- Example: Exception handling in most programming languages (C++, Java and OCAML).

Exception Handling in OCAML

- Exceptions are like datatypes in many ways.
  - exception BadN;;
- They may take arguments, such as:
  - exception BadM of string * int * int * int;;
- Once defined, they may be raised in functions as follows:

```
# let rec comb(n, m) = if n<0 then raise BadN
   else if m<0 then raise (BadM("M less than zero", 0, n, m))
   else if m>n then raise (BadM("M > N", 1, n, m))
   else if (m=0) || (m=n) then 1
   else comb(n-1,m) + comb(n-1,m-1);;
val comb : int * int -> int = <fun>
# comb(-1, 2);;
Exception: BadN.
# comb(9, -1);;
Exception: BadM ("M less than zero", 0, 9, -1).
```


Exception Handling in OCAML (Continued)

- Handlers can be setup using the “handle” keyword:

```
<exprWithHandler> ::= try <expr> with <match>
<match> ::= <handler> | .... | <handler>
<handler> ::= <exceptionValue> -> <handleexpr>
<handleexpr> ::= <expr>
```

- The meaning of expressions:
  - If the <expr> evaluates without raising an exception, then its value is returned as the value of <exprWithHandler>.
  - If the evaluation of some function f in <expr> returns an exception value EV, then the rest of <expr> is not evaluated.
  - Instead, EV is matched against the <exceptionValue> associated with each of the <handler>'s. If it matches an <exceptionValue>, then the corresponding <handleexpr> is executed.
  - If there is no match, EV is returned as the value of the expression <exprWithHandler>

Exception Handling in OCAML (Continued)

- Uncaught exceptions are propagated up the call stack.
- Example: `f` calls g, which in turn calls `h`
- if `h` raises an exception and there is no handler for this exception in `h`, then g gets that exception.
- If there is a handler for the exception in g, the handler is executed, and execution continues normally after that.
- otherwise, the exception is propagated to `f`.

Exception Handling in OCAML (Continued)

- The semantics of matching exception handlers is exactly as with function definitions. In particular, when there are multiple matches, the first match is taken.
- Example:

```
# let f n m =
      try comb(n, m) with
         BadN -> 1
         | BadM(s, 0, x, y) -> (print_string "BadM exception, "; print_string (s^", ");
                                print_string "raised, ignoring\n"; 1);;
val f : int -> int -> int = <fun>
# f 2 (-1);;
BadM exception, M less than zero, raised, ignoring
- : int = 1
# f (-2) 1;;
- : int = 1
# f 1 3;;
Exception: BadM ("M > N", 1, 1, 3).
```


Exception Handling in C++/Java

- The syntactic constructs for exceptions parallel those of OCAML, and semantics of exceptions remains essentially the same.
- Syntax:

```
<blockWithHandler> ::= try <block> <match>
<match> ::= <handler> ... <handler>
<handler> ::= catch (<parameter decl>) { <block> }
```


Exception Handling in C++/Java (Continued)

- Example:

```
int fac(int n) {
   if (n <= 0) throw (-1) ; else if (n > 15) throw ("n too large");
   else return n*fac(n-1); }
void g (int n) {
   int k;
   try { k = fac (n) ;}
   catch (int i) { cout << "negative value invalid" ; }
   catch (char *s) { cout << s; }
   catch (...) { cout << "unknown exception" ;}
```

- use of g(-1) will print “negative value invalid”, g(16) will print “n too large”
- If an unexpected error were to arise in evaluation of fac or g, such as running out of memory, then “unknown exception” will be printed

Exception Vs Return Codes

- Exceptions are often used to communucate error values from a callee to its caller. Return values provide alternate means of communicating errors.
- Example use of exception handler:

```
float g (int a, int b, int c) {
   float x = fac(a) + fac(b) + fac(c) ; return x ; }
main() {
   try { g(-1, 3, 25); }
   catch (char *s) { cout << "Exception `" << s << "'raised, exiting\n"; }
   catch (...) { cout << "Unknown exception, eixting\n";
}
```

- We do not need to concern ourselves with every point in the program where an error may arise.

Exception Vs Return Codes (Continued)

```
float g(int a, int b, int c) {
   int x1 = fac(a);
   if (x1 > 0) {
      int x2 = fac(b);
      if (x2 > 0) {
         int x3 = fac(c);
         if (x3 > 0)
            return x1 + x2 + x3;
         else return x3;
      }
      else return x2;
   }
   else return x1;
}
main() {
   int x = g(-1, 2, 25);
    if (x < 0) { /* identify where error occurred, print */ }
}
```

- Assume that `fac` returns 0 or a negative number to indicated errors
- If return codes were used to indicate errors, then we are forced to check return codes (and take appropriate action) at every point in code.

Use of Exceptions in C++ Vs Java

- In C++, exception handling was an after-thought.
  - Earlier versions of C++ did not support exception handling.
  - Exception handling not used in standard libraries
  - Net result: continued use of return codes for error-checking
- In Java, exceptions were included from the beginning.
  - All standard libraries communicate errors via exceptions.
  - Net result: all Java programs use exception handling model for error- checking, as opposed to using return codes.