Exceptions

Motivation

Most programming languages provide some mechanism for interrupting the normal flow of control in a program to signal some exceptional condition.

Note that it is always *possible* to program without exceptions — instead of raising an exception, we return `None`; instead of returning result `x` normally, we return `Some(x)`. But now we need to wrap every function application in a `case` to find out whether it returned a result or an exception.

It is much more convenient to build this mechanism into the language.

Varieties of non-local control

There are *many* ways of adding "non-local control flow"

- `exit(1)`
- `goto`
- `setjmp/longjmp`
- `raise/try` (or `catch/throw`) in many variations
- `callcc` / continuations
- more esoteric variants (cf. many Scheme papers)

Let's begin with the simplest of these.

An "abort" primitive in $\lambda_{\rightarrow}$

First step: raising exceptions (but not catching them).

`t`	::=	...	*terms*
		`error`	*run-time error*

Evaluation

$$\texttt{error}\ \texttt{t}_2 \longrightarrow \texttt{error} \qquad \text{(E-AppErr1)}$$

$$\texttt{v}_1\ \texttt{error} \longrightarrow \texttt{error} \qquad \text{(E-AppErr2)}$$

- What if we had booleans and numbers in the language?

Typing

Typing

$$\Gamma \vdash \texttt{error} : \texttt{T} \qquad \text{(T-E}\textsc{rror})$$

Typing errors

Note that the typing rule for `error` allows us to give it *any* type `T`.

$$\Gamma \vdash \texttt{error} : \texttt{T} \qquad \text{(T-Error)}$$

This means that both

```
if x>0 then 5 else error
```

and

```
if x>0 then true else error
```

will typecheck.

Aside: Syntax-directedness

Note that this rule

$$\Gamma \vdash \texttt{error} : \texttt{T} \qquad \text{(T-Error)}$$

has a problem from the point of view of implementation: it is not *syntax directed*.

This will cause the Uniqueness of Types theorem to fail.

For purposes of defining the language and proving its type safety, this is not a problem — Uniqueness of Types is not critical.
Let's think a little, though, about how the rule might be fixed...

An alternative

Can't we just decorate the `error` keyword with its intended type, as we have done to fix related problems with other constructs?

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No, this doesn't work!

E.g. (assuming our language also has numbers and booleans):

$$\begin{array}{ll} & \texttt{succ (if (error as Bool) then 5 else 7)} \\ \longrightarrow & \texttt{succ (error as Bool)} \end{array}$$

Exercise: Come up with a similar example using just functions and `error`.

Another alternative

In a system with universal polymorphism (like OCaml), the variability of typing for `error` can be dealt with by assigning it a variable type!

$$\Gamma \vdash \texttt{error} : {}'\texttt{a} \qquad \text{(T-Error)}$$

In effect, we are replacing the *uniqueness of typing* property by a weaker (but still very useful) property called *most general typing*.

I.e., although a term may have many types, we always have a compact way of *representing* the set of all of its possible types.

Yet another alternative

Alternatively, in a system with subtyping (which we'll discuss in the next lecture) and a minimal `Bot` type, we *can* give `error` a unique type:

$$\Gamma \vdash \texttt{error} : \texttt{Bot} \qquad \text{(T-ERROR)}$$

(Of course, what we've really done is just pushed the complexity of the old `error` rule onto the `Bot` type! We'll return to this point later.)

For now...

Let's stick with the original rule

$$\Gamma \vdash \texttt{error} : \texttt{T} \qquad \text{(T-Error)}$$

and live with the resulting nondeterminism of the typing relation.

Type safety

The *preservation* theorem requires no changes when we add `error`: if a term of type `T` reduces to `error`, that's fine, since `error` has every type `T`.

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Progress, though, requires a litte more care.

Progress

First, note that we do *not* want to extend the set of values to include error, since this would make our new rule for propagating errors through applications.

$$\texttt{v}_1\ \texttt{error} \longrightarrow \texttt{error} \qquad \text{(E-AppErr2)}$$

overlap with our existing computation rule for applications:

$$(\lambda\texttt{x}{:}\texttt{T}_{11}.\texttt{t}_{12})\ \texttt{v}_2 \longrightarrow [\texttt{x} \mapsto \texttt{v}_2]\texttt{t}_{12} \qquad \text{(E-AppAbs)}$$

e.g., the term

$(\lambda$x:Nat.0) error

could evaluate to either 0 (which would be wrong) or error (which is what we intend).

Progress

Instead, we keep `error` as a non-value normal form, and refine the statement of progress to explicitly mention the possibility that terms may evaluate to `error` instead of to a value.

> THEOREM [PROGRESS]: *Suppose t is a closed, well-typed normal form. Then either t is a value or $t = \mathtt{error}$.*

Catching exceptions

$\texttt{t} \quad ::= \quad \ldots$ *terms*

$\qquad \texttt{try t with t}$ *trap errors*

Evaluation

$$\texttt{try } \texttt{v}_1 \texttt{ with } \texttt{t}_2 \longrightarrow \texttt{v}_1 \qquad \text{(E-TryV)}$$

$$\texttt{try error with } \texttt{t}_2 \longrightarrow \texttt{t}_2 \qquad \text{(E-TryError)}$$

$$\frac{\texttt{t}_1 \longrightarrow \texttt{t}_1'}{\texttt{try } \texttt{t}_1 \texttt{ with } \texttt{t}_2 \longrightarrow \texttt{try } \texttt{t}_1' \texttt{ with } \texttt{t}_2} \qquad \text{(E-Try)}$$

Typing

$$\frac{\Gamma \vdash \texttt{t}_1 : \texttt{T} \qquad \Gamma \vdash \texttt{t}_2 : \texttt{T}}{\Gamma \vdash \texttt{try } \texttt{t}_1 \texttt{ with } \texttt{t}_2 : \texttt{T}} \qquad \text{(T-Try)}$$

Exceptions carrying values

`t`	::=	...	*terms*
		`raise t`	*raise exception*

Evaluation

$$\texttt{(raise v}_{11}\texttt{) t}_2 \longrightarrow \texttt{raise v}_{11} \qquad \text{(E-AppRaise1)}$$

$$\texttt{v}_1\ \texttt{(raise v}_{21}\texttt{)} \longrightarrow \texttt{raise v}_{21} \qquad \text{(E-AppRaise2)}$$

$$\frac{\texttt{t}_1 \longrightarrow \texttt{t}_1'}{\texttt{raise t}_1 \longrightarrow \texttt{raise t}_1'} \qquad \text{(E-Raise)}$$

$$\texttt{raise (raise v}_{11}\texttt{)} \longrightarrow \texttt{raise v}_{11} \qquad \text{(E-RaiseRaise)}$$

$$\texttt{try v}_1\ \texttt{with t}_2 \longrightarrow \texttt{v}_1 \qquad \text{(E-TryV)}$$

$$\texttt{try raise v}_{11}\ \texttt{with t}_2 \longrightarrow \texttt{t}_2\ \texttt{v}_{11} \qquad \text{(E-TryRaise)}$$

$$\frac{\texttt{t}_1 \longrightarrow \texttt{t}_1'}{\texttt{try t}_1\ \texttt{with t}_2 \longrightarrow \texttt{try t}_1'\ \texttt{with t}_2} \qquad \text{(E-Try)}$$

Typing

To typecheck `raise` expressions, we need to choose a type — let's call it $\mathtt{T}_{exn}$ — for the values that are carried along with exceptions.

$$\frac{\Gamma \vdash \mathtt{t}_1 : \mathtt{T}_{exn}}{\Gamma \vdash \mathtt{raise}\ \mathtt{t}_1 : \mathtt{T}} \tag{T-Exn}$$

$$\frac{\Gamma \vdash \mathtt{t}_1 : \mathtt{T} \qquad \Gamma \vdash \mathtt{t}_2 : \mathtt{T}_{exn} \to \mathtt{T}}{\Gamma \vdash \mathtt{try}\ \mathtt{t}_1\ \mathtt{with}\ \mathtt{t}_2 : \mathtt{T}} \tag{T-Try}$$

What is $\mathtt{T}_{exn}$?

To complete the story, we need to decide what type to use as $\mathtt{T}_{exn}$. There are several possibilities.

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2. Error messages: $\mathtt{T}_{exn} = \mathtt{String}$
3. A predefined variant type:

$$
\begin{array}{lll}
\mathtt{T}_{exn} & = & \mathtt{<divideByZero:} \quad \mathtt{Unit}, \\
 & & \;\mathtt{overflow:} \quad \mathtt{Unit}, \\
 & & \;\mathtt{fileNotFound:} \quad \mathtt{String}, \\
 & & \;\mathtt{fileNotReadable:} \quad \mathtt{String}, \\
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5. A *class* of "throwable objects" (as in Java)