G54FOP: Lecture 15

Denotational Semantics and Domain Theory I

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This Lecture

- Introduction to Denotational Semantics
- The relation between Operational and Denotational Semantics

Denotational Semantics (1)

Operational Semantics (review):

- The meaning of a term is the term it (ultimately) reduces to, if any:
  - Stuck terms
  - Infinite reduction sequences
- No ***inherent*** meaning (structure) beyond syntax of terms.
- Focus on behaviour; important aspects of semantics (such as non-termination) ***emerges*** from the behaviour.

Denotational Semantics (2)

Denotational Semantics:

- Idea: ***Semantic function*** maps (abstract) syntax directly to meaning in a ***semantic domain***.
- Domains consist of appropriate semantic objects (Booleans, numbers, functions, . . .) and have structure; in particular, an ***information ordering***.
- The semantic functions are ***total***; in particular, even a ***diverging*** computation is mapped to an element in the semantic domain.

Denotational Semantics (3)

Example:

$$[\![(\mathbf{1+2})\ \mathbf{*}\ \mathbf{3}]\!] = 9$$

abstract syntax

meaning/denotation
(here, semantic domain is $\mathbb{Z}$)

$[\![\cdot]\!]$, or variations like $\mathrm{E}[\![\cdot]\!]$, $\mathrm{C}[\![\cdot]\!]$: ***semantic functions***

$[\![$ and $]\!]$: ***Scott brackets*** or ***semantic brackets***.

Compositionality (1)

- It is usually required that a denotational semantics is ***compositional***: that the meaning of a program fragment is given in terms of the meaning of its ***parts***.
- Compositionality ensures that
  - the semantics is well-defined
  - important meta-theoretical properties hold

Compositionality (2)

Example:

$$[\![(\mathbf{1+2})\ \mathbf{*}\ \mathbf{3}]\!] = [\![\mathbf{1+2}]\!] \times [\![\mathbf{3}]\!]$$

abstract syntax

subterms (abstract syntax)

semantic multiplication
$(\times : \mathbb{Z} \times \mathbb{Z} \to \mathbb{Z})$

The meaning of the whole is given by composing the meaning of the parts.

Definition

Formally, a ***denotational semantics*** for a language L is given by a pair

$$\langle D, [\![\cdot]\!] \rangle$$

where

- D is the ***semantic domain***
- $[\![\cdot]\!] : L \to D$ is the ***valuation function*** or ***semantic function***.

In simple cases D may be a set, but usually more structure is required leading to ***domains*** as defined in ***domain theory***.

Example: Simple Expr. Language (1)

e	$\rightarrow$		*expressions:*
	|	**true**	*constant true*
	|	**false**	*constant false*
	|	**if** e **then** e **else** e	*conditional*
	|	**0**	*constant zero*
	|	**succ** e	*successor*
	|	**pred** e	*predecessor*
	|	**iszero** e	*zero test*

Example: Simple Expr. Language (2)

Develop a denotational semantics $\langle D, [\![\cdot]\!]\rangle$ for E, picking $\mathbb{N}$ as the semantic domain for simplicity:

$$D = \mathbb{N}$$
$$[\![\cdot]\!] : e \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$$

However, as there are both Booleans and natural numbers in the ***object*** language, a more refined choice for the semantics at the ***meta*** level would have been $\mathbb{N} \uplus \mathbb{B}$, the ***disjoint union*** of natural numbers and Booleans.

(On whiteboard)

Exercises (1)

1. Find the denotation of

   if (**iszero** (**succ 0**)) **then true else false**

Exercises (2)

2. Consider the following language extension:

e	$\rightarrow$		*expressions:*
	...		
	|	**not** e	*logical negation*
	|	e **&&** e	*logical conjunction*
	|	e **+** e	*addition*
	|	e **-** e	*subtraction*
	|	e ***** e	*multiplication*

Extend the denotational semantics accordingly.

Operational and Denotational Sem. (1)

Given a language L, suppose we have:

- a big-step operational semantics

$$\Downarrow \subseteq L \times V$$

  where $V \subseteq L$ is the set of values
- a denotational semantics

$$\langle D, [\![\cdot]\!] \rangle$$

  where $[\![\cdot]\!] : L \to D$

How should these be related?

Operational and Denotational Sem. (2)

Closed terms $t_1, t_2 \in L$ are ***semantically*** or ***denotationally equivalent*** iff

$$[\![t_1]\!] = [\![t_2]\!]$$

Assume D is ***ground*** (no functions; i.e., our closed terms are ***programs*** that output something "printable"). We adopt a function

$$\underline{\cdot} : D \to V$$

that maps a semantic value $d \in D$ to its ***term representation*** $v \in V$.

Operational and Denotational Sem. (3)

Assuming termination:

- ***Correctness*** of operational semantics w.r.t. denotational semantics:

$$t \Downarrow v \;\Rightarrow\; [\![t]\!] = [\![v]\!]$$

- ***Completeness*** of operational semantics w.r.t. denotational semantics:

$$[\![t]\!] = d \;\Rightarrow\; t \Downarrow \underline{d}$$

Operational and Denotational Sem. (4)

Assuming termination:

- ***Computational adequacy*** of operational semantics w.r.t. denotational semantics (or vice versa, depending on point of view):

$$t \Downarrow v \;\Leftrightarrow\; [\![t]\!] = [\![v]\!]$$