Lazy Dynamic Input/Output in the lazy functional language Clean

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Abstract. The new release of Clean offers a hybrid type system with both static and dynamic typing. Any common static Clean expression can in principle be converted into a dynamic expression (called a "dynamic"), and backwards. The type of the dynamic (an encoding of the original static type) can be checked at run-time via a special pattern match after which the dynamic expression can be evaluated as efficiently as usual. Clean furthermore offers "dynamic I/O": any application can read in a dynamic that is stored by some other application. Such a dynamic can contain unevaluated functions (closures) that are unknown in the receiving application. The receiving application therefore has to be extended with these function definitions. This is not trivial because Clean uses compiled code and is not an interpreted language that uses some byte code. A running Clean application therefore communicates with a dynamic linker that is able to add the missing binary code to the running application. So, dynamics can be used to realize plug-ins and mobile code in a type safe way without loss of efficiency in the resulting code. In this paper we explain the implementation of dynamic I/O. Dynamics are written in such a way that internal sharing is preserved when a dynamic is read. Dynamics are read in very lazily in phases: first its type is checked, and only if the evaluation is demanded, the dynamic expression is reconstructed and the new code is linked in. Dynamics can become quite complicated: they can contain sharing, they can be cyclic, they can even refer to other dynamics, and they may be distributed over a computer network. We have managed to completely hide the internal storage structure for the user by separating the storage of dynamics in system space and user space. For the user a dynamic on disc is just a Clean expression of some type that can be used in any application.

1 Programming with dynamics

This paper describes how dynamic I/O is realized in Clean. Before we go into more detail, we give two small examples of Clean applications that use dynamics. We explain what these applications do and sketch what is required to store and read dynamics from disc.

1.1 A dynamic producer and its consumer

The producer application shown below creates a dynamic which contains an infinite list of integers. The `writeDynamic`-function takes this dynamic as its argument and stores it into a file.

```
Start world     // Producer application
   # dyn        = dynamic [1..] :: [Int]
   # (ok,world) = writeDynamic "infinite_list" dyn world
   = world
```

When a dynamic is built, its static type is the type `Dynamic` regardless of its contents. The type `Dynamic` can be regarded as an existential type defined as:

```
:: Dynamic = E.a: {
   value :: a
,  type  :: T_ypeObjectType
   }
```

It is important to known that the `dynamic` constructor is a lazy constructor: it stores the unevaluated infinite list in the record. The infinite list contains closures i.e. unevaluated function applications. These compiled function definitions have to be stored as well.

A representation of the static type of the infinite list is stored in the `type`-field of the dynamic. It needs to be stored to check the type consistency between the producer and consumer who are compiled independently of eachother.

The `writeDynamic`-function *encodes* the dynamic `dyn` into a string. Using a standard I/O write-operation, the string is stored in a file named `infinite_list`. The consumer application shown below, uses the `readDynamic`-function to read the stored dynamic from that file, checks that the type matches and then prints the sum of the first 100 elements of the integer list.

```
Start world     // Consumer application
   # (_,x,world) = readDynamic "infinite_list" world
   = (sum (take 100 (extract_or_die x)),world)
where
   extract_or_die :: Dynamic -> [Int]
   extract_or_die (l :: [Int]) = l
   extract_or_die _            = abort "type mismatch"
```

The `readDynamic`-function uses a standard I/O read operation to read the encoded dynamic from file. This string representation is then *decoded* into a dynamic. The decoding is done lazily. The compiled function definitions required for evaluation are also retrieved from disk and added to the consumer application. This is also part of decoding phase.

The consumer first tries to unify the dynamic type stored in the `type`-field of the dynamic with the type specified in the dynamic pattern match of the extract_or_die-function. If it fails, the consumer is aborted. Otherwise the now statically typed producer list l is decoded and returned.

The consumer can now apply its own take and sum to the still lazy producer list which has been extracted from the dynamic. The result is printed. Note that the encoding and decoding of a dynamic preserves laziness.

More detailled information about the creation of dynamics and dynamic pattern matches can be found in [3] and [4]. The standard I/O operations can be any string I/O operation as provided by interfaces to operating systems. In Clean values, and therefore also dynamics, are represented as graphs at run-time. This paper focusses on the *encode* and *decode*-operations to be performed on graphs e.g. dynamics.

1.2 Dynamic version of the well-known apply function

The next example is a dynamic version of the well-known apply function. The apply function shown below serves to illustrate dynamic pattern variables and laziness in the decoding of a dynamic.

```
Start world
   # (_,f,world) = readDynamic "function" world
   # (_,a,world) = readDynamic "argument" world
   # (ok2,world)
      = writeDynamic "result" (apply f a) world
   = world;
where
   apply :: Dynamic Dynamic -> Dynamic
   apply (func :: a -> b) (arg :: a)    = dynamic (func arg) :: b
   apply _ _                            = abort "type mismatch"
```

The dynamic apply application reads two dynamics: function and argument. The apply-function then performs a type safety check: if the former contains a function which can take the value of the latter as its argument, then the function can be applied to the argument. This function application is stored into a dynamic of type b which is stored into a file. Due to the laziness of the dynamic constructor, the actual application of the function to the argument is postponed until some (other) application reads the dynamic in again and forces its evaluation. The second alternative of apply causes the application to abort.

As the producer/consumer example of section 1.1 showed: dynamics are read and *lazily* decoded from file. Therefore the readDynamic-functions postpone decoding until it is really required.

In contrast to the previous example, the dynamic patterns now contain the dynamic pattern variables a and b. Both dynamic patterns succeed iff τ_1 is unifyable with $\mathtt{a} \rightarrow \mathtt{b}$ and τ_2 is unifyable with a, where τ_1 and τ_2 are the dynamic types of the dynamics stored in respectively function and argument.

The occurrence of a in both patterns, forces unification between the types of the two different dynamics. In case of a successful dynamic pattern match, it guarantees the type-safe application of function func to its argument arg.

If both dynamic patterns of the first `apply`–alternative succeed, only the required types τ_1 and τ_2 will be decoded. There is no need to read and decode the complete graphs because their evaluation is not demanded. It is sufficient to store references to the encoded `func` and `arg` on disc. So, reading of dynamics is done very lazy.

The `writeDynamic`-function encodes the dynamic and stores its string representation in the file named `result`. In this case the encoded dynamic will depend on the encoded dynamics stored in the files `function` and `argument`.

The encoded `result` dynamic would have no decode references, if the value components `func` and `arg` would have been evaluated before the encoding of the resulting dynamic took place. So, the degree of evaluation of an application determines the dependencies of a dynamic on parts of other dynamics.

2 The full paper

The full paper will address the following issues:

– the design and implementation of the encode and lazy decode operations.
– user support for dynamics.
– related work.
– conclusion and future work.

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