Preface

The 19th International Symposium on Implementation and Application of Functional Languages (IFL 2007) is held at Freiburg, Germany, on the 27th to the 29th September 2007. Local organiser is the Programming Languages Group of the Department of Computer Science of the University of Freiburg.

IFL brings together researchers active in the area of functional programming, with an emphasis on the implementation and application of the same. IFL provides an annual open forum for researchers who wish to present and discuss new ideas and concepts, work in progress, preliminary results, etc. IFL has been held throughout Europe in the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Ireland and Hungary. This year for the first time IFL is co-located with the International Conference on Functional Programming (ICFP). A record number of 44 papers have been submitted for these draft proceedings. By the time of printing 73 researchers had registered for attendance at the symposium.

Following tradition, two proceedings are to be published: the draft proceedings used at the symposium (this document), released as a technical report of the Computing Laboratory of the University of Kent, and the post-symposium proceedings based on revised papers. The draft proceedings are un-refereed and provide a useful reference to the delegates at the symposium. All participants who give talks at the symposium are invited to submit revised papers for review after the symposium, to normal conference standards. The post-symposium proceedings of selected revised papers will be published by Springer-Verlag in its Lecture Notes in Computer Science (LNCS) series.

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September 2007

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# Table of Contents

Termination and Complexity Bounds for SAFE programs ........................................... 8  
*Salvador Lucas, Ricardo Peña*

Graph Parser Combinators ........................................................................... 24  
*Steffen Mazanek, Mark Minas*

Encoding Iterators in Interaction Nets ...................................................... 40  
*José Almeida, Ian Mackie, Jorge Sousa Pinto, Miguel Vilaça*

Testing Erlang Refactorings with QuickCheck ........................................... 55  
*Huqing Li, Simon Thompson*

Call Graphs, Dominator Trees, and Lambda Lifting ........................................ 71  
*Marco T. Morazan, Ulrik Schultz*

To Be or Not to Be . . . Lazy............................................................................ 89  
*Mercedes Hidalgo-Herrero, Yolanda Ortega-Mallén*

The Structure of the Essential Haskell Compiler, or Coping with Compiler Complexity .................................................. 107  
*Atze Dijkstra, Jeroen Fokker, Doaitse Swierstra*

XHaskell — Adding Regular Expression Types to Haskell .......................... 123  
*Martin Sulzmann, Kenny Zhuo Ming Lu*

Evaluating and Using a Grid-Enabled Parallel Haskell .................................... 139  
*Phil Trinder, Abyd Al Zain, Kevin Hammond*

Partial Parsing: Combining Choice with Commitment .................................. 140  
*Malcolm Wallace*

Functional Master-Worker Skeletons ............................................................ 152  
*Jost Berthold, Mischa Dieterle, Rita Loogen, Steffen Priebe*

Towards an Implementation of a Computer Algebra System in a Functional Programming Language .............................................................. 168  
*Oleg Lobachev*

Lazy Contract Checking for Immutable Data Structures ............................ 179  
*Robert Bruce Findler, Shu-yu Guo, Anne Rogers*

Haskell – Join – Rules .................................................................................. 195  
*Martin Sulzmann, Edmund Lam*

Splitting and Merging Program Refactorings ............................................. 211  
*Christopher Brown, Simon Thompson*

An Interpretation of Temporal Properties in Functional Programs ............. 224  
*Máté Tejfel, Tamás Kozsik, Zoltán Horváth*
Approaches to Subtyping in Functional Languages

Glenn Strong

On the Validation of Specifications used in Model-Based Testing

Pieter Koopman, Peter Achten, Rinus Plasmeijer

Car Damage Subrogation Workflow — an iTask exercise

Erik Zuurbier, Rinus Plasmeijer

Towards Open Type Functions for Haskell

Tom Schrijvers, Martin Sulzmann, Simon Peyton Jones, Manuel Chakravarty

Transparent Ajax and Client-Site Evaluation of iTasks

Rinus Plasmeijer, Jan Martin Jansen, Pieter Koopman, Peter Achten

Static Inference of Non-Monotonic Polynomial Sized Types

Marko van Eekelen, Olha Shkaravska

Efficient, Modular Tries

Frank Huch, Sebastian Fischer

FunSETL — Functional Reporting for ERP Systems

Michael Nissen, Ken Friis Larsen

The Reduceron: Widening the von Neumann Bottleneck for Graph Reduction using an FPGA

Matthew Naylor, Colin Runciman

Incremental Extension of a Domain Specific Language Interpreter

Olivier Michel, Jean-Louis Giavitto

Generic Programming Combinators

Sebastian Fischer, Frank Huch

Supero: Making Haskell Faster

Neil Mitchell, Colin Runciman

Checking Dependent Types Efficiently

Dirk Kleeblatt

HW-Hume in Isabelle

Chunxu Liu, Greg Michaelson

Static Contract Checking for Haskell

Dana Na Xu, Simon Peyton Jones, Koen Claessen

Debugging Lazy Functional Programs by Asking the Oracle

Bernd Braüel, Holger Siegel

Uniqueness Typing Simplified

Edsko de Vries, Rinus Plasmeijer, David Abrahamson

Tabular Expressions and Total Functional Programming

Baltasar Trancón y Widemann, David L. Parnas
Positive Supercompilation for a Higher Order Call-By-Value Language............ 441
   Peter Jonsson, Johan Nordlander

The Simple Category of Modules.................................................. 457
   Mikolaj Konarski

Polytopes & Polytypes: Generic Isosurfacing & Functional Programming ......... 474
   Colin Runciman, David Duke, Rita Borgo, Malcolm Wallace

Meta(Fun) — Towards a Functional-Style Interface for C++ Template Metaprograms
........................................................................................................ 489
   Ádám Sipos, Zoltán Porkoláb, Norbert Pataki, Viktória Zsók

Speculative Inlining of Predefined Procedures in an R5RS Scheme to C Compiler . 503
   Marc Feeley

Circuit Parallelism in Haskell Programs ........................................... 519
   Andreas Koltes, John O’Donnell

On Implementing S-Net ................................................................. 531
   Clemens Grelck, Frank Penczek

From Contracts Towards Dependent Types: Proofs by Partial Evaluation......... 534
   Stephan Herhut, Sven-Bodo Scholz, Robert Bernecky, Clemens Grelck, Kai Trojahner

A Rational Simplifier for GHC ....................................................... 551
   Laszlo Nemeth

Amortizing the Cost of Commuting Conversions when Beta-Reducing Monadic Normal Forms and A-Normal Forms........................................ 552
   Olivier Danvy
Index

Abrahamson, David, 416
Achten, Peter, 230, 252
Al Zain, Abyd, 139
Almeida, Jose, 40
Bernecky, Robert, 534
Berthold, Jost, 152
Borgo, Rita, 474
Brassel, Bernd, 400
Brown, Christopher, 211
Chakravarty, Manuel, 233
Claessen, Koen, 382
Danvy, Olivier, 552
de Vries, Edsko, 416
Dieterle, Mischa, 152
Dijkstra, Atze, 107
Duke, David, 474
Feeley, Marc, 503
Findler, Robert Bruce, 179
Fischer, Sebastian, 258, 318
Fokker, Jeroen, 107
Giavitto, Jean-Louis, 301
Grelck, Clemens, 531, 534
Guo, Shu-yu, 179
Hammond, Kevin, 139
Herhut, Stephan, 534
Hidalgo-Herrero, Mercedes, 89
Horvath, Zoltan, 224
Huch, Frank, 258, 318
Jansen, Jan Martin, 252
Jonsson, Peter, 441
Kleeblatt, Dirk, 350
Koltes, Andreas, 519
Konarski, Mikolaj, 457
Koopman, Pieter, 230, 252
Kozsik, Tamás, 224
Lam, Edmund, 195
Larsen, Ken Friis, 268
Li, Huiqing, 55
Liu, Chunxu, 366
Lobachev, Oleg, 168
Loogen, Rita, 152
Lu, Kenny Zhuo Ming, 123
Lucas, Salvador, 8
Mackie, Ian, 40
Mazamek, Steffen, 24
Michaelsen, Greg, 366
Michel, Olivier, 301
Minas, Mark, 24
Mitchell, Neil, 334
Morazan, Marco T., 71
Naylor, Matthew, 290
Nemeth, Lazlo, 551
Nissen, Michael, 268
Nordlander, Johan, 441
O’Donnell, John, 519
Ortega-Mallen, Yolanda, 89
Parnas, David L., 431
Pataki, Norbert, 489
Pena, Ricardo, 8
Penczek, Frank, 531
Peyton Jones, Simon, 233, 382
Pinto, Jorge Sousa, 40
Plasmeijer, Rinus, 230, 232, 252, 416
Porokolab, Zoltan, 489
Priebe, Steffen, 152
Rogers, Anne, 179
Runciman, Colin, 290, 334, 474
Scholz, Sven-Bodo, 534
Schrijvers, Tom, 233
Schultz, Ulrik, 71
Shkaravska, Olha, 254
Siegel, Holger, 400
Sipos, Adam, 489
Strong, Glenn, 229
Sulzmann, Martin, 123, 195, 233
Swierstra, Doaitse, 107
Tejfel, Máté, 224
Thompson, Simon, 55, 211
Trancón y Widemann, Baltasar, 431
Trinder, Phil, 139
Trojahner, Kai, 534
van Eekelen, Marko, 254
Vilaca, Miguel, 40
Wallace, Malcolm, 140, 474
Xu, Dana Na, 382
Zsok, Viktoria, 489
Zuurbier, Erik, 232
Abstract

The iTask system is a combinator library written in Clean which allows the specification of multi-user workflow systems for the web. The iTask system generates forms that have to be filled in and submitted by the user. Each user has a set of tasks that can be processed in any order. The submission of a form might terminate existing tasks or create new tasks for the user herself as well as for other users. As a consequence a single event can cause a very complex state change on the server and can effect the work of many other users.

The advantages of using a browser as interface to a workflow system created with the iTask library is that no software has to be installed at the client site and that the look and feel of the GUI is familiar to every user. A drawback of this architecture is that the response might become rather slow when there are many users and many tasks. For each and every event on the client a message is sent to the server over the world wide web. The server processes the event and generates a new web-page for the user containing all her new tasks. For the calculation of the set of new tasks, the state of all other tasks has to be examined. Due to the delay of the world wide web and the creation, transportation and rendering of the complete new page by the browser, the response of a workflow system can become relatively slow.

In this paper we present two solutions for dealing with this performance problem.

First we introduce a combinator ‘UseAjax’ that cause the workflow system to use Ajax technology for handling a (sub)task. This has as consequence that only a part of the web page is updated instead of the creation, sending and rendering of an entire new page. The advantage of this extension is not only a smoother reaction in the browser on changes being made. Also the efficiency for large workflow systems is commonly improved in this way because most of the time only a smaller, for this (sub)task relevant, part of the current state needs to be recalculated.
For the definition of the workflow system a single annotation ‘UseAjax’ is sufficient. The implementation of this feature in the iTask library requires a Java script that runs on the client as well as a call-back function that handles the event. For the implementation this requires the possibility to store Clean functions temporarily in a web page as well as the possibility to store them in a persistent store at the server site such as in a file or in a database.

The second extension is another annotation, ‘OnTheClient’, which allows client site evaluation of tasks.

Since no call at all has to be made to the server when such a task is evaluated, there is no web communication overhead anymore as is the case when Ajax technology is being used. For the implementation of this feature one needs to be able to execute the tasks specified in Clean in the browser at the client site. We realize this with an interpreter for Clean code running in the browser. Therefore Clean is compiled to Sapl and this code is loaded into the browser together with the compact and efficient Sapl interpreter. Of course, code interpreted by the Sapl interpreter running in the browser is not as efficient as the execution of compiled Clean code at the server. So, there is also an efficiency penalty when ‘OnTheClient’ is chosen instead of ‘UseAjax’.

By choosing one of the annotations, the programmer can define which evaluation method preferably should be used for a certain (set of) tasks.

Whenever evaluation ‘OnTheClient’ is not possible for some reason (e.g. when a database needs to be inspected on the server) the system can automatically decide to ‘UseAjax’ instead.