Computational Logic

Efficiency Issues in Prolog
Efficiency

• In general, efficiency \(\equiv\) savings:
  ◇ Not only time
    (number of unifications, reduction steps, LIPS, etc.)
  ◇ Also memory

• General advice:
  ◇ Use the best algorithms
  ◇ Use the appropriate data structures

• Each programming paradigm has its specific techniques, try not to adopt them blindly.

Note: The timings in the following examples were taken a long time ago, so computers and Prolog are much faster now, but the comparisons are still valid!
Data structures

- D.H.D. Warren: “Prolog means easy pointers”

- Do not make excessive use of lists:
  - In general, only when the number of elements is unknown
  - It is convenient to keep them ordered sometimes (e.g., set equality)
  - Otherwise, use structures (functors):
    * Less memory
    * Direct access to each argument ([arg/3]) (like arrays!)

```
[a, b, c]  
LST  a  
LST  b  
LST  c  
[]

f(a, b, c)  
STR  f/3  
a  
b  
c
```
Data structures (Contd.)

- Use advanced data structures:
  - Sorted trees
  - Incomplete structures
  - Nested structures
  - ...
Let Unification Do the Work

- Unification is very powerful. Use it!
- Example: Swapping two elements of a structure:
  \[ f(X, Y) \sim f(Y, X) \]
  - Slow, difficult to understand, long version (exaggerated):

  ```prolog
  swap(S1, S2):-
      functor(S1, f, 2), functor(S2, f, 2),
      arg(1, S1, X1), arg(2, S1, Y1),
      arg(1, S2, X2), arg(2, S2, Y2),
      X1 = Y2, X2 = Y1.
  ```

  - Fast, intuitive, shorter version:

  ```prolog
  swap(f(X, Y), f(Y, X)).
  ```
• Example: check that a list has exactly three elements.

  ◇ Weak answer:

  three_elements(L):- length(L, N), N = 3.

  (always traverses the list and computes its length)

  ◇ Better:

  three_elements([_,_,_]).
Avoid using it for simulating global variables

Example (real executions):

```prolog
bad_count(N):-
    assert(counting(N)),
    even_worse.

even_worse:-
    retract(counting(0)).

even_worse:-
    retract(counting(N)),
    N > 0, N1 is N - 1,
    assert(counting(N1)),
    even_worse.
```

```prolog
good_count(0).
good_count(N):-
    N > 0, N1 is N - 1,
    good_count(N1).
```

bad_count(10000): 165,000 bytes, 7.2 sec.
good_count(10000): 1,500 bytes, 0.01 sec.
Database (Contd.)

- Asserting results which have been found true (lemmas).

Example (real executions):

```prolog
fib(0, 0).
fib(1, 1).
fib(N, F):-
    N > 1,
    N1 is N - 1,
    N2 is N1 - 1,
    fib(N1, F1),
    fib(N2, F2),
    F is F1 + F2.
```

```prolog
:- dynamic lemma_fib/2.
lemma_fib(0, 0).
lemma_fib(1, 1).
lfib(N, F):-
    !.
lfib(N, F):-
    N > 1,
    N1 is N - 1,
    N2 is N1 - 1,
    lfib(N1, F1),
    lfib(N2, F2),
    F is F1 + F2,
    assert(lemma_fib(N, F)).
```

- fib(24, F): 4,800,000 bytes, 0.72 sec.
- lfib(24, F): 3,900 bytes, 0.02 sec. (and zero if called again)

Warning: only useful when intermediate results are reused.
Determinism (I)

- Many problems are deterministic.
- Non-determinism is
  - Useful (automatic search).
  - But expensive.
- Suggestions:
  - Do not keep alternatives if they are not needed.
    ```prolog
    member_check([X|_],X) :- !.
    member_check([_|Xs],X) :- member_check(Xs,X).
    ```
  - Program deterministic problems in a deterministic way:
    Simplistic:
    ```prolog
    decomp(N, S1, S2) :-
        between(0, N, S1),
        between(0, N, S2),
        N =:= S1 + S2.
    ```
    Better:
    ```prolog
    decomp(N, S1, S2) :-
        between(0, N, S1),
        S2 is N - S1.
    ```
Determinism (II)

- Checking that two (ground) lists contain the same elements

- Naive:

  ```prolog
  same_elements(L1, L2):-
      (member(X, L1), \+ member(X, L2)),
      (member(X, L2), \+ member(X, L1)).
  ```

  1000 elements: 7.1 secs.

- Sort and unify:

  ```prolog
  same_elements(L1, L2):-
      sort(L1, Sorted),
      sort(L2, Sorted).
  ```

  (sorting can be done in $O(N \log N)$)

  1000 elements: 0 secs.
Search order

• Golden rule: fail as early as possible (prunes branches)
• How: reorder goals in the body (perhaps even dynamically)
• Example: generate and test

\[
\text{generate}_z(Z) :- \\
\quad \text{generate}_x(X), \\
\quad \text{generate}_y(X, Y), \\
\quad \text{test}_x(X), \\
\quad \text{test}_y(Y), \\
\quad \text{combine}(X, Y, Z).
\]

• Perform tests as soon as possible:

\[
\text{generate}_z(Z) :- \\
\quad \text{generate}_x(X), \\
\quad \text{test}_x(X), \\
\quad \text{generate}_y(X, Y), \\
\quad \text{test}_y(Y), \\
\quad \text{combine}(X, Y, Z).
\]

• Even better: test as deeply as possible within the generator

\[
\text{generate}_z(Z) :- \\
\quad \text{generate}_x\text{-test}(X), \\
\quad \text{generate}_y\text{-test}(X, Y), \\
\quad \text{combine}(X, Y, Z).
\]

→ c.f. Constraint Logic Programming!
Indexing

- Indexing on the first argument:
  - At compile time an indexing table is built for each predicate based on the principal functor of the first argument of the clause heads
  - At run-time only the clauses with a compatible functor in the first argument are considered

- Result: appropriate clauses are reached faster and choice-points are not created if there are no “eligible” clauses left

- Improves the ability to detect determinacy, important for preserving working storage
Indexing (Contd.)

- Example: value greater than all elements in list

```prolog
bad_greater(_X,[]).
bad_greater(X,[Y|Ys]):- X > Y, bad_greater(X,Ys).
```

600,000 elements: 2.3 sec.

```prolog
good_greater([],_X).
good_greater([Y|Ys],X):- X > Y, good_greater(Ys,X).
```

600,000 elements: 0.67 sec

- Can be used with structures other than lists

- Available in most Prolog systems
Iteration vs. Recursion

- When the recursive call is the last subgoal in the clause and there are no alternatives left in the execution of the predicate, we have an *iteration*

- Much more efficient

- Example:

  ```prolog
  sum([], 0).
  sum([N|Ns], Sum):-
      sum(Ns, Inter),
      Sum is Inter + N.
  ```

  ```prolog
  sum_iter(L, Res):-
      sum(L, 0, Res).

  sum([N|Ns], In, Out):-
      Inter is In + N,
      sum(Ns, Inter, Out).
  ```

  **sum/2** 100000 elements: 0.45 sec.

  **sum_iter/2** 100000 elements: 0.12 sec.
Iteration vs. Recursion (Contd.)

- The basic skeleton is:
  
  ```
  <head>:-
    <deterministic computation>
    <recursive_call>.
  ```

- Known as *tail recursion*

- Particular case of *last call optimization*

- It also consumes less memory
Cuts

- Cuts eliminate choice-points, so they “create” determinism
- Example:

```
a :-
    test_1, !, ...

a :-
    test_2, !, ...

...

a :-
    test_n, !, ...
```

- If $test_1 \ldots test_n$ mutually exclusive, declarative meaning of program not affected.
- Otherwise, be careful: Declarativeness, Readability.
Delaying Work

- Do not perform useless operations
- In general:
  - Do not do anything until necessary
  - Put the tests as soon as possible

- Example:

```prolog
x2x3([], []).
x2x3([X|Xs], [NX|NXs]):-
    NX is -X * 2,
    X < 0,
    x2x3(Xs, NXs).
x2x3([X|Xs], [NX|NXs]):-
    NX is X * 3,
    X >= 0,
    x2x3(Xs, NXs).
```

100,000 elements: 1.05 sec.

- Delaying the arithmetic operations

```prolog
x2x3_1([], []).
x2x3_1([X|Xs], [NX|NXs]):-
    X < 0,
    NX is -X * 2,
    x2x3_1(Xs, NXs).
x2x3_1([X|Xs], [NX|NXs]):-
    X >= 0,
    NX is X * 3,
    x2x3_1(Xs, NXs).
```

100,000 elements: 0.9 sec.
Delaying Work

- Delaying head unification + determinism:

```prolog
x2x3_2([], []).
x2x3_2([X|Xs], Out):- X < 0, !,
    NX is -X * 2,
    Out = [NX|NXs],
    x2x3_2(Xs, NXs).
x2x3_2([X|Xs], Out):- X >= 0, !,
    NX is X * 3,
    Out = [NX|NXs],
    x2x3_2(Xs, NXs).
```

100000 elements: 0.68 sec. (and half the memory consumption)

- Some (personal) advice: use these techniques only when performance is essential. They might make programs:
  - Harder to understand
  - Harder to debug
  - Harder to maintain
Conclusions

- Avoid inheriting programming styles from other languages
- Program in a declarative way:
  ◦ Improves readability
  ◦ Allows compiler optimizations
- Avoid using the dynamic database when possible
- Look for deterministic computations when programming deterministic problems
- Put tests as soon as possible in the program (early pruning of the tree)
- Delay computations until needed

- Final thought: learning Prolog implementation techniques (e.g., the Warren Abstract Machine) is very instructive and useful. See the available slides and book on the topic.