

# Practical Unification for Dependent Type Checking

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# The type of a program

- Programs calculate outputs from inputs

## Example (Type of a program)

The program **inputs** a list of numbers  
and **outputs** a list of numbers

- Dependent types can specify how the output depends on the input.

## Example (Dependent type)

The program inputs a list of numbers and  
outputs a list with the numbers in the input, sorted from lowest to highest

- A type checker can verify that a program has a given type
- Dependent types can include calculations  
⇒ Dependent type checking is challenging

# Examples of dependent types

## Declarations

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Nat} & : \text{Set} \\ \text{Int} & : \text{Set} \\ \text{Vec} & : (n : \text{Nat}) \rightarrow (A : \text{Set}) \rightarrow \text{Set} \\ \text{append} & : \{m : \text{Nat}\} \rightarrow \{n : \text{Nat}\} \rightarrow \text{Vec } m \text{ Int} \rightarrow \\ & \quad \text{Vec } n \text{ Int} \rightarrow \text{Vec } (m + n) \text{ Int} \\ \text{repeat} & : \{n : \text{Nat}\} \rightarrow \text{Int} \rightarrow \text{Vec } n \text{ Int}\end{aligned}$$

## Examples

$$\begin{aligned}\vdash 2 & : \text{Nat} & \vdash \text{append } [-1, 1] [1] & : \text{Vec } (1 + 2) \text{ Int} \\ \vdash 1 + 1 & : \text{Nat} & \vdash \text{repeat } 1 & : \text{Vec } 2 \text{ Int} \\ \vdash [-1, 1] & : \text{Vec } 2 \text{ Int}\end{aligned}$$

- Terms and types share the same syntax
- Arguments surrounded by  $\{ \dots \}$  are implicit.
- For simplicity,  $\Sigma; \Gamma \vdash \text{Set} : \text{Set}$ .

# First design decision: Uniqueness

Implicit arguments introduce multiple ways of typechecking a term:

## Example (Typechecking with implicit arguments)

$$\begin{aligned} \text{append} &: \{m : \text{Nat}\} \rightarrow \{n : \text{Nat}\} \rightarrow \text{Vec } m \text{ Int} \rightarrow \\ &\quad \text{Vec } n \text{ Int} \rightarrow \text{Vec } (m + n) \text{ Int} \\ \text{repeat} &: \{n : \text{Nat}\} \rightarrow \text{Int} \rightarrow \text{Vec } n \text{ Int} \\ \vdash^? \text{append } (\text{repeat } 1) (\text{repeat } (-1)) &: \text{Vec } (2 + 1) \text{ Int} \end{aligned}$$



## Solutions

1.  $\text{append } \{2\} \{1\} (\text{repeat } \{2\} 1) (\text{repeat } \{1\} (-1)) : \text{Vec } (2 + 1) \text{ Int}$   
**Program result:**  $[1, 1, -1]$
2.  $\text{append } \{0\} \{3\} (\text{repeat } \{0\} 1) (\text{repeat } \{3\} (-1)) : \text{Vec } (2 + 1) \text{ Int}$   
**Program result:**  $[-1, -1, -1]$

## Question

Allow non-unique (and choose (1.)), or reject problem as ambiguous?

# Uniqueness on implementations of dependent type checkers

Key: : Fulfilled    -: Unfulfilled partly or by design    : Unfulfilled

	Coq	Agda		Ours
1. Uniqueness	-			
2. Reordering	-			
3. Well-typedness				

- **Not enforce uniqueness** (f.ex. Coq): Less frustration.
- **Enforce uniqueness** (f.ex. Agda): More predictable.
- We choose to enforce uniqueness of our solutions (1.).
- Uniqueness allows more flexibility (2.), but this flexibility introduces challenges (3.)
- We wish to reconcile both.

# Problem: Dependent type-checking with implicits

A possible type-checking problem.

(We use  $U \rightarrow V$ ,  $(x : U) \rightarrow V$  or  $\{x : U\} \rightarrow V$  for  $\Pi UV$ ).

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbb{A} &: \text{Set}, \\ \text{id} &: \{X : \text{Set}\} \rightarrow X \rightarrow X; \\ \cdot &\vdash^? \lambda x. (\text{id } x) : \mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A} \end{aligned}$$

↑

Goal: Find  $\Sigma^{\text{sol}}$  such that:

- $\Sigma^{\text{sol}}$  instantiates all meta-variables in  $\Sigma$
- $\Sigma^{\text{sol}}; \cdot \vdash \lambda x. \text{id } \{\alpha x\} x : \mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A}$

Solution:  $\Sigma^{\text{sol}} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathbb{A} : \text{Set}, \text{id} : X : \text{Set} \rightarrow X \rightarrow X, \alpha := \lambda. \mathbb{A} : \mathbb{A} \rightarrow \text{Set}$ .

- How to find a unique  $\Sigma^{\text{sol}}$  in general?

# Problem: Dependent type-checking with implicits

First, we replace each implicit argument with a metavariable:

$$\begin{aligned}\Sigma &\stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathbb{A} : \text{Set} \\ \text{id} &: \{X : \text{Set}\} \rightarrow X \rightarrow X \\ \alpha &: \mathbb{A} \rightarrow \text{Set} \\ \Sigma; \cdot &\vdash^? \lambda x. (\text{id } \{\alpha x\} x) : \mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A}\end{aligned}$$

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- How to find a unique  $\Sigma^{\text{sol}}$  in general?

# Type checking as unification

- Dependent type checking  $(\Sigma; \Gamma \vdash^? t : A)$  with implicit arguments is a higher-order unification problem.

## Example (Higher-order unification problem)

$$\Sigma \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathbb{A} : \text{Set}, \text{id} : \{X : \text{Set}\} \rightarrow X \rightarrow X, \alpha : \mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A} \\ \Sigma'; x : \mathbb{A} \vdash \alpha x : \text{Set} \approx \mathbb{A} : \text{Set} \quad (\Sigma' \text{ extends } \Sigma)$$

**Goal:** Find  $\Sigma^{\text{sol}}$  such that:

- $\Sigma^{\text{sol}}$  is an extension of  $\Sigma'$  and instantiates all meta-variables
- $\Sigma^{\text{sol}}; \cdot \vdash \text{Set} \equiv \text{Set}$  **type** and  $\Sigma^{\text{sol}}; x : \mathbb{A} \vdash \alpha x \equiv \mathbb{A} : \text{Set}$
- Whether  $\Sigma^{\text{sol}}$  exists is undecidable in general.

Definition (Pattern fragment, Miller 1991)

If  $\Sigma^{\text{sol}}; \Gamma \vdash \alpha \vec{x} \equiv t : A$  ( $\vec{x}$  distinct) then there is a unique solution for  $\alpha$ .

**Solution:**  $\Sigma^{\text{sol}} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathbb{A} : \text{Set}, \text{id} : X : \text{Set} \rightarrow X \rightarrow X, \alpha := \lambda y. \mathbb{A} : \mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A}$ .



# Pattern unification

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## 2. Reordering constraints vs. 3. Well-typedness

$$\Sigma \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \alpha : \text{Nat} \rightarrow \text{Set}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \Sigma; \cdot \vdash \lambda y. \alpha y & : \text{Nat} \rightarrow \text{Set} \approx \\ \lambda y. \text{Nat} : \alpha & 42 \rightarrow \text{Set} \end{aligned}$$

$\rightsquigarrow$

$$\Sigma; \cdot \vdash \text{Nat} \approx \alpha 42 : \text{Set} \quad \textcircled{1}$$

$$\Sigma; y : ? \vdash \alpha y \approx \text{Nat} : \text{Set} \quad \textcircled{2}$$

- $\textcircled{1}$  does not have a unique solution:  
 $\alpha := \lambda y. (\text{if } (y < 100) \text{ then Nat else Bool}) : \text{Nat} \rightarrow \text{Set}$   
 $\alpha := \lambda y. (\text{if } (y > 30) \text{ then Nat else Bool}) : \text{Nat} \rightarrow \text{Set}$   
...
- What should  $?$  be in  $\textcircled{2}$ ?

## 2. Reordering constraints vs. 3. Well-typedness

$$\Sigma \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \alpha : \text{Nat} \rightarrow \text{Set}$$

$$\Sigma; \cdot \vdash \text{Nat} \approx \alpha \text{ 42} : \text{Set} \quad \textcircled{1}$$

$$\Sigma; y : ? \vdash \alpha y \approx \text{Nat} : \text{Set} \quad \textcircled{2}$$

- $\textcircled{1}$  does not have a unique solution:

$\alpha := \lambda y. (\text{if } (y < 100) \text{ then Nat else Bool}) : \text{Nat} \rightarrow \text{Set}$

$\alpha := \lambda y. (\text{if } (y > 30) \text{ then Nat else Bool}) : \text{Nat} \rightarrow \text{Set}$

...

- What should  $?$  be in  $\textcircled{2}$ ?

### Results (on a more complex variant of this example)

Coq: Stuck

$\text{Nat} \neq \alpha \text{ 42}$

Agda: Solve  $\textcircled{2}$  (ignore  $?$ )

$[\alpha := \lambda y. \text{Nat} : \text{Nat} \rightarrow \text{Set}]$

- Ignoring types can result in bugs.

# Twin variables

- Variables usually have one type:  $\Sigma; \Gamma, x : A, \Delta \vdash x : A$
- Gundry and McBride (2013) propose giving each variable two types:

$$\Sigma; \Gamma, \hat{x} : A \dagger B, \Delta \vdash \acute{x} : A$$

$$\Sigma; \Gamma, \hat{x} : A \dagger B, \Delta \vdash \grave{x} : B$$

## Example

$\Sigma := \alpha : \text{Nat} \rightarrow \text{Set}$

$\Sigma; \cdot \vdash \text{Nat} \approx \alpha \ 42 : \text{Set}$

$\Sigma; \hat{y} : \text{Nat} \dagger (\alpha \ 42) \vdash \alpha \ \acute{y} \approx \text{Nat} : \text{Set}$

	Coq	Agda	Twin variables	Ours
1. Uniqueness	—	✓	✓	✓
2. Reordering	—	✓	✓	✓
3. Well-typedness	✓	✗	✓	✓
4. Minimal changes	✓	✓	—	—
5. Evaluation	✓	✓	—	—

## Goal #4: Minimal changes (1/2)

- We observe that type variable annotations ( $\acute{x}$ ,  $\grave{x}$ ) are not critical.

### Definition (Well-typed constraint)

$\Sigma; \Gamma \dagger \Gamma' \vdash t \approx u : A \dagger B$  is well-typed iff  $\Sigma; \Gamma \vdash t : A$  and  $\Sigma; \Gamma' \vdash u : B$

### Example

$$\begin{aligned} \Sigma &:= \alpha : \text{Nat} \rightarrow \text{Set} \\ \Sigma; \cdot \vdash \text{Nat} &\approx \alpha \ 42 : \text{Set} \dagger \text{Set} \\ \Sigma; y : \text{Nat} \dagger (\alpha \ 42) &\vdash \alpha \ y \approx \text{Nat} : \text{Set} \dagger \text{Set} \end{aligned}$$

We support many common rules. For example:

### Rule ( $\lambda$ -type)

$$\begin{aligned} \Sigma; \Gamma \dagger \Gamma' \vdash \lambda.t &\approx \lambda.u : \Pi A B \dagger \Pi A' B' \\ \rightsquigarrow \Sigma; \Gamma \dagger \Gamma', A \dagger A' &\vdash t \approx u : B \dagger B' \end{aligned}$$

## Goal #4: Minimal changes (2/2)

### Rule (Syntactic equality, homogeneous version)

$$\Sigma; \Gamma \vdash t \approx t : A \rightsquigarrow \Sigma; \square$$

- This is sound: For any  $\Sigma; \Gamma \vdash t : A$  we have  $\Sigma; \Gamma \vdash t \equiv t : A$ .

### Rule (Syntactic equality, heterogeneous version)

$$\Sigma; \Gamma \ddagger \Gamma' \vdash t \approx t : A \ddagger A' \rightsquigarrow \Sigma; \square$$

### Definition (Heterogeneous equality)

We have  $\Sigma; \Gamma_1 \ddagger \Gamma_2 \vdash t \equiv \{v\} \equiv u : A \ddagger B$  if and only if:

- $\Sigma; \Gamma_1 \vdash t \equiv v : A$ ,
- $\Sigma; \Gamma_2 \vdash u \equiv v : B$ ,
- and  $\text{FV}(v) \subseteq \text{FV}(t) \cap \text{FV}(u)$

- For  $\Sigma; \Gamma \vdash t : A$  and  $\Sigma; \Gamma' \vdash t : A'$  we have  $\Sigma; \Gamma \ddagger \Gamma' \vdash t \equiv \{t\} \equiv t : A \ddagger A'$

## Goal #5: Evaluation

	Coq	Agda	Twin variables	Ours
1. Uniqueness	—	✓	✓	✓
2. Reordering	—	✓	✓	✓
3. Well-typedness	✓	✗	✓	✓
4. Minimal changes	✓	✓	—	✓
5. Evaluation	✓	✓	—	

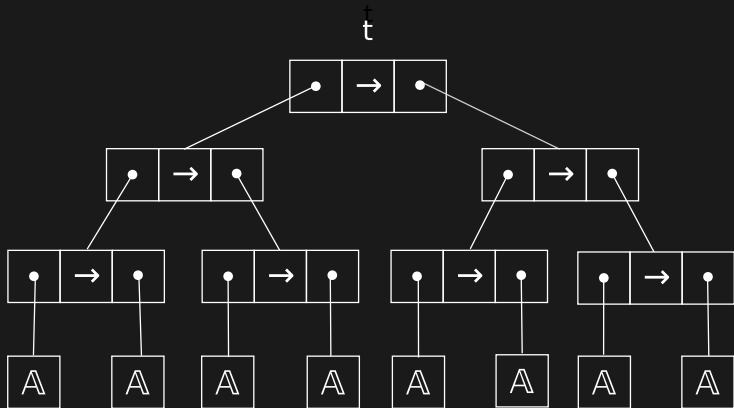
- We implement the approach into Tog (Mazzoli et al.).
- The internal syntax of terms is respected.
- For acceptable performance, we improve the following:
  - ▶ Elaboration
  - ▶ Term representation: **Hash consing**
  - ▶ Blockers for constraint scheduling

# Hash consing

$\text{id} : \{X : \text{Set}\} \rightarrow X \rightarrow X$

$\text{id} \{\alpha\} \text{id} \text{id} : \mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A}$

$\alpha := ((\mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A}) \rightarrow (\mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A})) \rightarrow ((\mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A}) \rightarrow (\mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A})) : \text{Set}$





# Hash consing

$$\text{id} : \{X : \text{Set}\} \rightarrow X \rightarrow X$$
$$\text{id } \{\alpha\} \text{ id id} : \mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A}$$
$$\alpha := ((\mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A}) \rightarrow (\mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A})) \rightarrow ((\mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A}) \rightarrow (\mathbb{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{A})) : \text{Set}$$

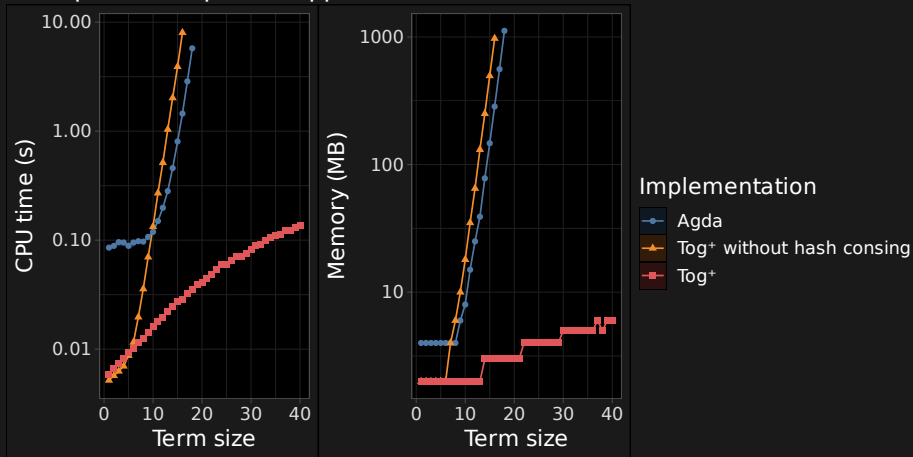
- Each unique term is given a numeric identifier:

Identifier	Term
$t : \#0$	$\#1 \rightarrow \#1$
$\#1$	$\#2 \rightarrow \#2$
$\#2$	$\#3 \rightarrow \#3$
$\#3$	$\mathbb{A}$

- Reduces memory usage.
- Accelerates equality checks, caching.

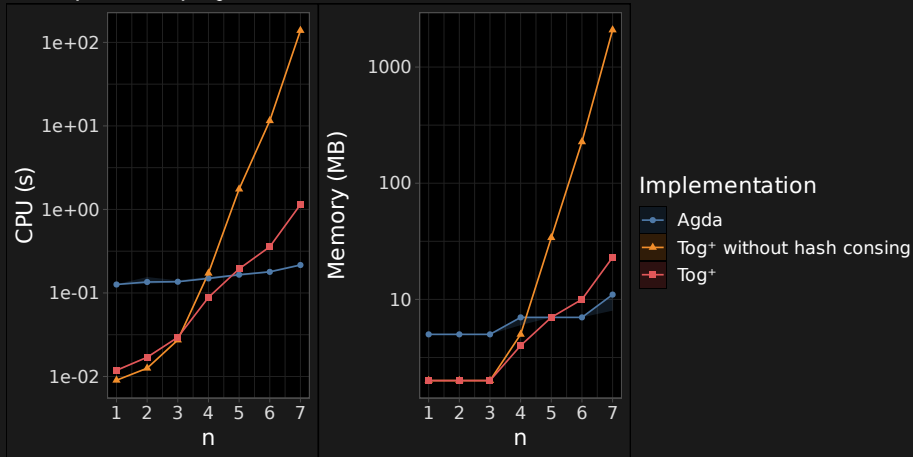
# Hash consing: Evaluation

Hash-consing gives a straightforward performance boost.  
Example with repeated application of id:



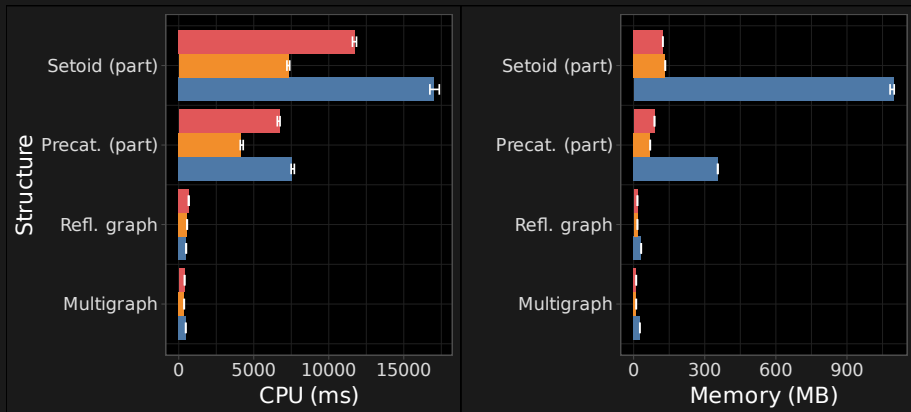
# Hash consing: Evaluation

In other cases special case optimizations are better.  
Example with *projection-like functions*:



# Evaluation: Case study

- Embedded type theory inspired by McBride
- Many constraints, term-before-type unification.







Implementation ■ Tog+ w/o syn. eq. rule ■ Tog+ (with syn. eq. rule) ■ Agda-

# Conclusions




	Coq	Agda	Twin variables	Ours
1. Uniqueness	–	✓	✓	✓
2. Reordering	–	✓	✓	✓
3. Well-typedness	✓	✗	✓	✓
4. Minimal changes	✓	✓	–	✓
5. Evaluation	✓	✓	–	✓

- We demonstrate that a simplified version of twin types in practice.
- We introduce a heterogeneous notion of equality, and a syntactic equality rule which can sometimes improve performance.
- Future work:
  1. Implement in Agda
  2. Test more examples

# References I

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# Our setting

$t, u, v, A, B, T, U, \dots ::=$		$h ::= x, y, z, \dots$	variable
Set	universe	$\alpha, \beta, \dots$	metavariable
Bool	boolean type	$\mathfrak{a}, \mathfrak{b}, \dots$	atom
$\Pi AB$	function type	if	boolean recursor
$\Sigma AB$	product type	$x ::= 0, 1, 2, \dots$	deBruijn indices
true   false	booleans	$e ::=$	<i>eliminator</i>
$\lambda.t$	abstraction	$t$	term application
$\langle t, u \rangle$	pair	$\cdot\pi_1$   $\cdot\pi_2$	projections
$h \vec{e}$	neutral term		

- **Hereditary substitution:**  $t[u] \Downarrow v$ . For example,  $0[u] \Downarrow u$
- **Signatures:**  $\Sigma ::= \cdot \mid \Sigma, \alpha : A \mid \Sigma, \alpha := t : A \mid \Sigma, \mathfrak{a} : A$   
( $\text{FV}(A) = \text{FV}(t) = \emptyset$ ) and **Contexts:**  $\Gamma ::= \cdot \mid \Gamma, A$
- **Judgments:**  $\Sigma$  **sig**,  $\Sigma \vdash \Gamma$  **ctx**,  $\Sigma; \Gamma \vdash A$  **type**,  $\Sigma; \Gamma \vdash t : A$ ,  
 $\Sigma; \Gamma \vdash A \equiv B$  **type**,  $\Sigma; \Gamma \vdash t \equiv u : A$ .
- For simplicity,  $\Sigma; \Gamma \vdash \text{Set} : \text{Set}$ .



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## Some examples

(We use variable names for clarity instead of deBruijn indices.)

Let  $\Sigma_1 \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathbb{A} : \text{Set}, a : \mathbb{A}, b : \mathbb{A}$ .

- $\Sigma_1$  **sig**
- $\Sigma_1; \cdot \vdash \mathbb{A} : \text{Set}$
- $\Sigma_1; \cdot \vdash \mathbb{A}$  **type**
- $\Sigma_1; \cdot \vdash a : \mathbb{A}$
- 
- $\Sigma_1; \cdot \vdash \text{if } (\lambda.\mathbb{A}) \text{ true } a \ b \equiv a : \mathbb{A}$

Let  $\Sigma_2 \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathbb{A} : \text{Set}, b : \mathbb{A}, \alpha := \lambda.b : \text{Bool} \rightarrow \mathbb{A}$ .

- $\Sigma_2$  **sig**
- $\Sigma_2; \cdot \vdash \alpha : \text{Bool} \rightarrow \mathbb{A}$
- $\Sigma_2; x : \text{Bool} \vdash \alpha \ x \equiv b : \mathbb{A}$

Pointed set:

- $\cdot; \Sigma(\text{Set})(0) \vdash 0.\pi_2 : 0.\pi_1$
- $\cdot; x : \Sigma(g : \text{Set})(g) \vdash x.\pi_2 : x.\pi_1$

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