Prolog II

1

The Notion of Unification

- Unification is when two things “become one”
- Unification is kind of like assignment
- Unification is kind of like equality in algebra
- Unification is mostly like pattern matching
- Example:
  - `loves(john, X)` can unify with `loves(john, mary)`
  - and in the process, `X` gets unified with `mary`

2

Unification I

- Any value can be unified with itself.
  - `weather(sunny) = weather(sunny)`
- A variable can be unified with another variable.
  - `X = Y`
- A variable can be unified with (“instantiated to”) any Prolog value.
  - `Topic = weather(sunny)`

3

Unification II

- Two different structures can be unified if their constituents can be unified.
  - `mother(mary, X) = mother(Y, father(Z))`
- A variable can be unified with a structure containing that same variable. This is usually a Bad Idea.
  - `X = f(X)`

4

Unification III

- The explicit unification operator is `=`
- Unification is symmetric:

    `Steve = father(isaac)`

  means the same as

    `father(isaac) = Steve`
- Most unification happens implicitly, as a result of parameter transmission.

Scope of Names

- The scope of a variable is the single clause in which it appears.
- The scope of the "anonymous" ("don't care") variable, `_`, is itself.
  - `loves(_, _) = loves(john, mary)`
- A variable that only occurs once in a clause is a useless *singleton;* you should replace it with the anonymous variable

Writing Prolog Programs

- Suppose the database contains

```
loves(chuck, X) :- female(X), rich(X).
female(jane).
```

  and we ask who Chuck loves,

```
?- loves(chuck, Woman).
```

- `female(X)` *finds* a value for `X` , say, `jane`
- `rich(X)` then *tests* whether Jane is rich

Clauses as Cases

- A predicate consists of multiple clauses, each of which represents a "case"

```
grandson(X,Y) :- son(X,Z), son(Z,Y).
grandson(X,Y) :- son(X,Z), daughter(Z,Y).

abs(X, Y) :- X < 0, Y is -X.
abs(X, X) :- X >= 0.
```

Ordering

- Clauses are always tried in order
- buy(X) :- good(X).

```
buy(X) :- good(X).
buy(X) :- cheap(X).

cheap('Java 2 Complete').
good('Thinking in Java').
```

- What will `buy(X)` choose first?

Ordering II

- Try to handle more specific cases (those having more variables instantiated) first.

```
dislikes(john, bill).
dislikes(john, X) :- rich(X).
dislikes(X, Y) :- loves(X, Z), loves(Z, Y).
```


Ordering III

- Some "actions" cannot be undone by backtracking over them:
  - write, nl, assert, retract, consult
- Do tests before you do undoable actions:

```
– take(A) :-
      at(A, in_hand),
      write('You\'re already holding it!'),
      nl.
```


Recursion

- Handle the base cases first

`ancestor(X, Y) :- child(Y, X).`

(X is an ancestor of Y if Y is a child of X.)

- Recur only with a simpler case

```
ancestor(X, Y) :-
    child(Z, X), ancestor(Z, Y).
```

(X is an ancestor of Y if Z is a child of X and Z is an ancestor of Y).

Case Level

- You can often choose the "level" at which you want cases to be defined.

```
son(isaac, steven).
child(X, Y) :- son(X, Y).

male(isaac).
child(isaac, steven).
son(X, Y) :- male(X), child(X, Y).
```


Recursive Loops

- Prolog proofs must be tree structured, that is, they may not contain recursive loops.
  - child(X,Y) :- son(X,Y).
  - son(X,Y) :- child(X,Y), male(X).
  - ?- son(isaac, steven). ??? *May loop!*
- Why? Neither child/2 nor son/2 is atomic

Cut and Cut-fail

- The cut, !, is a commit point. It commits to:
  - the clause in which it occurs (can't try another)
  - everything up to that point in the clause
- Example:
  - loves(chuck, X) :- female(X), !, rich(X).
  - Chuck loves the *first* female in the database, but only if she is rich.
- Cut-fail, (!, fail), means give up *now* and don't even try for another solution.

What you can't do

- There are no functions, only predicates
- Prolog is programming in logic, therefore there are few control structures
- There are no assignment statements; the *state* of the program is what's in the database

Workarounds I

- There are few control structures in Prolog, BUT…
- You don't need IF because you can use multiple clauses with "tests" in them
- You seldom need loops because you have recursion
- You can, if necessary, construct a "fail loop"

Fail Loops

```
notice_objects_at(Place) :-
    at(X, Place),
    write('There is a '), write(X),
    write(' here.'), nl,
    fail.
notice_objects_at(_).
```

- Use fail loops sparingly, if at all.

Workarounds II

- There are no functions, only predicates, BUT…
- A call to a predicate can instantiate variables: `female(X)` can either
  - look for a value for `X` that satisfies `female(X)`, or
  - if `X` already has a value, test whether `female(X)` can be proved true
- By convention, output variables are put last

Workarounds III

- There are no assignment statements, BUT…
- the Prolog database keeps track of program state
  - `assert(at(fly, bedroom))`
  - ```
    bump_count :-
        retract(count(X)),
        Y is X + 1,
        assert(count(Y)).
    ```
- Don't get carried away and misuse this!
    ```

The End