Today: Java support for generic programming

Readings for today: Head First Java chapter 16, Assorted Readings on Java chapter 5.

Next topic: Data Structures into Java §6.2, §6.4, §6.5.

The Old Days

- Java library types such as List didn’t used to be parameterized. All Lists were lists of Objects.
- So you’d write things like this:
  ```java
  for (int i = 0; i < L.size(); i += 1) {
    String s = (String) L.get(i); ...
  }
  ```
  That is, must explicitly cast result of L.get(i) to let the compiler know what it is.
- Also, when calling L.add(x), was no check that you put only Strings into it.
- So, newest release attempts to alleviate these perceived problems by introducing parameterized types, like List<String>.
- Unfortunately, it is not as simple as one might think.

Basic Parameterization

- From the definition of ArrayList in java.util:
  ```java
  public class ArrayList<Item> implements List<Item> {
    public Item get (int i) { ... }
    public boolean add (Item x) { ... }
    ...
  }
  ```
- First occurrence of Item introduces a formal type parameter, whose "value" (a reference type) in effect gets substituted for all the other occurrences of Item when ArrayList is "called" (when a programmer writes, e.g., ArrayList<String> or ArrayList<int[]>).
- Not limited to one parameter:
  ```java
  Map<String,Table> database = new HashMap<String,Table>();
  ```
- Can also say that you don’t care what a type parameter is (wildcards):
  ```java
  /** Number of items in C that are .equal to X. */
  static int frequency (Collection<?> c, Object x) {...}
  ```

Parameters on Methods

- Functions (methods) may also be parameterized by type. Example of use from java.util.Collections:
  ```java
  /** A read-only list containing just ITEM. */
  static <T> List<T> singleton (T item) { ... }
  ```
  In this case, compiler figures out T without help when you call singleton(x) by looking at the type of x.
- Another example (from java.util.Collections):
  ```java
  /** An unmodifiable empty list. */
  static <T> List<T> emptyList () { ... }
  ```
  Here, a call to emptyList() would not contain enough information, so instead we write, e.g., Collections.<Particle>emptySet (), to tell the compiler that T is Particle.
Type Bounds

- Sometimes, your program needs to ensure that a particular type parameter is replaced only by a subtype (or supertype) of a particular type (sort of like specifying the "type of a type.").

- For example,

```java
class NumericSet<T extends Number> extends HashSet<T> {
    /** My minimal element */
    T min () { ... }
    ...
}
```

Requires that all type parameters to NumericSet must be subtypes of Number (the "type bound"). T can either extend or implement the bound, as appropriate.

- Another example:

```java
/** Set all elements of L to X. */
static <T> void fill (List<? super T> L, T x) { ... }
```

means that L can be a List<Q> as long as T is a subtype of (extends or implements) Q.

Dirty Secrets Behind the Scenes

- Java's design for parameterized types was constrained by a desire for backward compatibility.

- Actually, when you write

```java
class Foo<T> {
    T x;
    T mogrify (T y) { ... }
}
```

Java gives really gives you

```java
class Foo {
    Object x;
    Object mogrify (Object y) { ... }
}
```

That is, it supplies the casts automatically, and also throws in some additional checks. If it can't guarantee that all those casts will work, gives you a warning about "unsafe" constructs.

Type Bounds (II)

And one more:

```java
/** Search sorted list L for KEY, returning either its position (if
 * present), or k-1, where k is where KEY should be inserted. */
static <T> int binarySearch(List<? extends Comparable<? super T>> L, T key)
```

Here, the items of L have to have a type that is comparable to T's or some supertype of T. Does L have to be able to contain the value key? Why does this make sense?

Limitations

Because of Java's design choices, are some limitations to generic programming:

- Since all kinds of Foo or List are really the same,
  - L instanceof List<String> will be true when L is a List<Integer>.
  - Inside, e.g., class Foo, you cannot write new T (), new T[], or x instanceof T.

- Primitive types are not allowed as type parameters.
  - Can't have ArrayList<int>, just ArrayList<Integer>.
  - Fortunately, automatic boxing and unboxing makes this substitution easy:

```java
int sum (ArrayList<Integer> L) {
    int N; N = 0;
    for (int x : L) { N += x; }
    return N;
}
```

- Unfortunately, boxing/unboxing have significant costs.