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# CPS Transformation of Beta-Redexes

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# CPS Transformation of Beta-Redexes [*]

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### Abstract

The extra compaction of Sabry and Felleisen's transformation is due to making continuations occur first in CPS terms and classifying more redexes as administrative. We show that the extra compaction is actually independent of the relative positions of values and continuations and furthermore that it is solely due to a context-sensitive transformation of beta-redexes. We stage the more compact CPS transformation into a first-order uncurrying phase and a context-insensitive CPS transformation. We also define a context-insensitive CPS transformation that is just as compact. This CPS transformation operates in one pass and is dependently typed.

**Keywords:** Continuation-passing style (CPS), Plotkin, Fischer, one-pass CPS transformation, two-level $\lambda$-calculus, generalized reduction.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Continuation-passing style (CPS)

The meaning of a $\lambda$-term, in general, depends on its evaluation order. Evaluation-order independence was one of the motivations for continuations [14, 21], and continuation-passing style was developed as an evaluation-order independent $\lambda$-encoding of $\lambda$-terms [4, 13]. In this $\lambda$-encoding, each evaluation context is represented by a $\lambda$-abstraction, called a *continuation*, and each $\lambda$-abstraction is passed a continuation in addition to its usual argument. All intermediate results are sent to a continuation and thus all calls are tail-calls. This $\lambda$-encoding gives rise to a variety of continuation-passing styles, whose structure is a subject of study in itself [8, 15, 20].

## 1.2 The CPS transformation

The format of CPS $\lambda$-terms was soon noticed to be of interest for the compiler writer [18], which in turn fostered interest in automating the transformation of $\lambda$-terms into CPS. Over the last twenty years, a wide body of CPS transformations has thus been developed for various purposes, e.g., to compile and to analyze programs, and to generate compilers [1, 6, 10, 17, 18, 22].

The naïve $\lambda$-encoding into CPS, however, generates a quite impressive inflation of lambdas, most of which form *administrative redexes* that can be safely reduced. Administrative reductions yield CPS terms corresponding to what one could write by hand. It has therefore become a challenge to eliminate as many administrative redexes as possible, at CPS-transformation time.

## 1.3 Sabry and Felleisen's optimization

In their article "Reasoning about Programs in Continuation-Passing Style" [16], Sabry and Felleisen present a CPS transformation that yields more compact terms than existing CPS transformations. For example [16, Footnote 6], CPS-transforming

$$((\lambda x.\lambda y.x)\, a)\, b$$

where $a$ and $b$ are variables, yields the term

$$\lambda k.((\lambda x.((\lambda y.k\, x)\, b))\, a)$$

whereas earlier transformations, such as Steele's [18] or Danvy and Filinski's [3], yield the more voluminous term

$$\lambda k.((\lambda x.\lambda k_1.(k_1\, (\lambda y.\lambda k_2.k_2\, x)))\, a\, (\lambda m.m\, b\, k)).$$

Sabry and Felleisen's optimization relies on using Fischer's CPS (where continuations occur first, as in $\lambda k.\lambda x.e$), whereas earlier transformations use Plotkin's CPS (where values occur first, as in $\lambda x.\lambda k.e$).

## 1.4 This article

Section 2 reviews administrative reductions in the CPS transformation and characterizes Sabry and Felleisen's optimization, independent of the relative positions of values and continuations in CPS terms (i.e., both for Fischer's and Plotkin's CPS). Section 3 constructs a similarly compact CPS transformation by composing an uncurrying phase and an ordinary CPS transformation. Section 4 integrates the optimization in a context-insensitive, one-pass CPS transformation. Section 5 concludes.

# 2 Administrative reductions in the CPS transformation

## 2.1 Context-insensitive administrative reductions

Appel, Danvy and Filinski, and Wand each independently developed a "one-pass" CPS transformation for call by value [1, 3, 22]. This CPS transformation relies on a context-free characterization of administrative reductions, i.e., a characterization that is independent of any source term. This one-pass transformation, shown below for Plotkin's CPS, is formulated with a static, context-free distinction between (translation-time) administrative reductions and (run-time) reductions, using a two-level $\lambda$-calculus [3, 12].

$$
\begin{aligned}
\llbracket \cdot \rrbracket_{\mathrm{p}} \;&:\; \Lambda \to (\Lambda \to \Lambda) \to \Lambda \\
\llbracket x \rrbracket_{\mathrm{p}} \;&=\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, x \\
\llbracket \lambda x.e \rrbracket_{\mathrm{p}} \;&=\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, (\underline{\lambda}x.\underline{\lambda}k.\llbracket e \rrbracket_{\mathrm{p}} \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t.k \,\underline{@}\, t)) \\
\llbracket e_0\, e_1 \rrbracket_{\mathrm{p}} \;&=\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.\llbracket e_0 \rrbracket_{\mathrm{p}} \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t_0.\llbracket e_1 \rrbracket_{\mathrm{p}} \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t_1.(t_0 \,\underline{@}\, t_1) \,\underline{@}\, (\underline{\lambda}v.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, v)))
\end{aligned}
$$

"$\underline{\lambda}$" and "$\underline{@}$" denote hygienic abstract-syntax constructors and "$\overline{\lambda}$" and "$\overline{@}$" denote translation-time abstractions and (infix) applications, respectively. A $\lambda$-term $e : \Lambda$ is CPS-transformed with

$$\underline{\lambda}k.\llbracket e \rrbracket_{\mathrm{p}} \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t.k \,\underline{@}\, t).$$

The corresponding one-pass transformation for Fischer's CPS is as follows.

$$
\begin{aligned}
\llbracket \cdot \rrbracket_{\mathrm{f}} \;&:\; \Lambda \to (\Lambda \to \Lambda) \to \Lambda \\
\llbracket x \rrbracket_{\mathrm{f}} \;&=\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, x \\
\llbracket \lambda x.e \rrbracket_{\mathrm{f}} \;&=\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, (\underline{\lambda}k.\underline{\lambda}x.\llbracket e \rrbracket_{\mathrm{f}} \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t.k \,\underline{@}\, t)) \\
\llbracket e_0\, e_1 \rrbracket_{\mathrm{f}} \;&=\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.\llbracket e_0 \rrbracket_{\mathrm{f}} \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t_0.\llbracket e_1 \rrbracket_{\mathrm{f}} \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t_1.(t_0 \,\underline{@}\, (\underline{\lambda}v.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, v)) \,\underline{@}\, t_1))
\end{aligned}
$$

A $\lambda$-term $e : \Lambda$ is CPS-transformed with

$$\underline{\lambda}k.\llbracket e \rrbracket_{\mathrm{f}} \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t.k \,\underline{@}\, t).$$

## 2.2 Context-sensitive administrative reductions

Sabry and Felleisen (1) tag all the "new" lambdas introduced by the CPS transformation, (2) reduce systematically the $\beta$-redexes with a tagged lambda, and (3) untag the remaining tagged lambdas:

$$
\begin{aligned}
[\![x]\!] &= \overline{\lambda}k.k\,x \\
[\![\lambda x.e]\!] &= \overline{\lambda}k.k\,(\overline{\lambda}k.\lambda x.[\![e]\!]\,k) \\
[\![e_0\,e_1]\!] &= \overline{\lambda}k.[\![e_0]\!]\,(\overline{\lambda}t_0.[\![e_1]\!]\,(\overline{\lambda}t_1.t_0\,k\,t_1))
\end{aligned}
$$

A $\lambda$-term $e$ is CPS-transformed with

$$[\![e]\!].$$

An administrative reduction amounts to reducing a $\beta$-redex where the $\lambda$-abstraction is tagged.

This three-pass CPS transformation resembles much the Fischer-style one-pass CPS transformation of Section 2.1, with three exceptions:

Form: it does not use @ for applications, is more implicit by not underlining abstract-syntax constructors, and $\eta$-reduces continuations.

Content: it is a first-order rewriting system whereas the one-pass transformation is a higher-order one.

Plus: it contains one more overlined $\lambda$-abstraction, namely the one declaring the continuation of a $\lambda$-abstraction.

The extra overline makes administrative reductions context-sensitive, as illustrated below:

$[\![\lambda x.((\lambda y.y)\,x)]\!] =$
$\overline{\lambda}k.k\,(\overline{\lambda}k.\lambda x.(\overline{\lambda}k.k\,(\overline{\lambda}k.\lambda y.(\overline{\lambda}k.k\,y)\,k))\,\overline{\lambda}t_0.(\overline{\lambda}k.k\,x)\,\overline{\lambda}t_1.t_0\,k\,t_1)$
$\longrightarrow_{\overline{\beta}^+}\,\overline{\lambda}k.k\,(\overline{\lambda}k.\lambda x.(\overline{\lambda}k.\lambda y.k\,y)\,k\,x)$
$\longrightarrow_{\overline{\beta}}\,\overline{\lambda}k.k\,(\overline{\lambda}k.\lambda x.(\lambda y.k\,y)\,x)$

The term $\overline{\lambda}k.\lambda x....$ arises from the transformation of $\lambda x....$ and cannot be administratively reduced. The term $\overline{\lambda}k.\lambda y....$ arises from the transformation of $\lambda y....$ and can be administratively reduced.

In contrast, in a context-insensitive one-pass CPS transformation, all overlined $\lambda$-abstractions are guaranteed to occur in an overlined application (and thus there is no need for post-erasure). A context-sensitive CPS transformation thus can perform more administrative reductions than a context-insensitive one.

Furthermore, we can precisely locate the extra gain: for source $\beta$-redexes. Given a source $\beta$-redex, one can actually substitute the continuation of the application for the continuation of the abstraction:

$$(\lambda x.e[c/k])\,t_1$$

thereby enabling further administrative reductions inside $e$.

This reduction is not accounted for in a (say, Plotkin-style) one-pass CPS transformation, since in the particular case where $t_0$ denotes $\underline{\lambda}x.\underline{\lambda}k.e$, one does not simplify

$$(t_0 \underline{@} \, t_1) \underline{@} \, c$$

into

$$(\underline{\lambda}x.e[c/k]) \underline{@} \, t_1.$$

The reduction thus yields more compact CPS counterparts of source $\beta$-redexes, in that the translated $\lambda$-abstractions are not explicitly passed any continuation when they occur in a $\beta$-redex.[1]

On the other hand, a similar phenomenon occurs for let expressions, as reviewed next.

## 2.3 CPS transformation of let expressions

The CPS transformation of let expressions reads as follows:

$$[\![\text{let } x = e' \text{ in } e]\!] \quad = \quad \overline{\lambda}\kappa.[\![e']\!]\overline{\lambda}t'.\underline{\text{let}} \, x = t' \, \underline{\text{in}} \, [\![e]\!]\kappa$$

In words, $e$ is in tail-position in the let expression, and is CPS-transformed with respect to the same $\kappa$ as the let expression. This technique is instrumental in continuation-based partial evaluation [11].

Seeing let expressions as syntactic sugar for $\beta$-redexes, it appears clearly that the context-sensitive administrative reduction includes the standard let optimization, independently of whether continuations are put first or last. This administrative reduction, however, yields more.

## 2.4 CPS transformation of embedded $\beta$-redexes

Extra mileage is obtained for fully applied (curried) $\lambda$-abstractions. CPS-transforming the curried application of a "$n$-ary" $\lambda$-abstraction to $n$ arguments relocates the continuation of the application to the body of the $\lambda$-abstraction.

$$[\![(\lambda x_1....\lambda x_n.e) \, e_1... \, e_n]\!] =$$
$$\overline{\lambda}\kappa.[\![e_1]\!] \, \overline{@} \, (\overline{\lambda}t_1....[\![e_n]\!] \, \overline{@} \, (\overline{\lambda}t_n.(\underline{\lambda}x_n....(\underline{\lambda}x_1.[\![e]\!] \, \overline{@} \, \kappa) \underline{@} \, t_1...) \underline{@} \, t_n)...)$$

This extra mileage is independent of whether continuations are put first or last.

As a net effect, a term such as

$$(\lambda f.\lambda g.\lambda x.f \, x \, (g \, x)) \, (a \, b) \, c \, (d \, e)$$

---

[1] As Shivers puts it [17] and can be read off their type, the translated $\lambda$-abstractions are promoted to continuations.

where $a$, $b$, $c$, $d$, and $e$ are variables, is CPS transformed into (letting continuations occur last)

$$\lambda k.a\, b\, (\lambda f.(\lambda g.d\, e\, (\lambda x.f\, x\, (\lambda v_1.g\, x\, (\lambda v_2.v_1\, v_2\, k))))\, c).$$

Observe how the $\lambda$-abstractions $\lambda f....$ and $\lambda x....$ end up as the continuations of the applications $(a\, b)$ and $(d\, e)$, and how the application of $\lambda g....$ to $c$ survives in the CPS term.

Letting continuations occur first would yield a similar term:

$$\lambda k.a\, (\lambda f.(\lambda g.d\, (\lambda x.f\, (\lambda v_1.g\, (\lambda v_2.v_1\, k\, v_2)\, x)\, x)\, e)\, c)\, b.$$

## 2.5   Summary and conclusion

A CPS transformation with context-sensitive administrative reductions yields more compact CPS terms because it exposes more administrative redexes. The extra administrative reductions affect nested $\beta$-redexes corresponding to fully applied curried $\lambda$-abstractions, and reduce continuation-passing by promoting the inner $\lambda$-abstractions to continuations. These extra administrative reductions can be carried out independently of whether continuations occur first or last in CPS terms.

# 3   Staging the more compact CPS transformation

Sabry and Felleisen [16, Definition 7, page 306] identify a reduction $\beta_{lift}$ moving the context of a $\beta$-redex into the body of the corresponding $\lambda$-abstraction:[2]

$$E[(\lambda x.M)N] \longrightarrow (\lambda x.E[M])N \qquad\qquad (\beta_{lift})$$
$$\text{where } E \neq [\,] \text{ and } x \notin FV(E)$$

They also pointed out that CPS-transforming a term $e$ and mapping the result back to direct style yields a term in $\beta_{lift}$-normal form.

But a term in $\beta_{lift}$-normal form does not give rise to the extra context-sensitive administrative reduction of Section 2. Therefore, the extra power of the context-sensitive CPS transformation is solely due to $\beta_{lift}$.

The more compact CPS transformation can thus be staged as follows:

1. a phase uncurrying (and appropriately renaming, if need be) all $\beta$-redexes
   $(\lambda x_1....\lambda x_n.e)\, e_1... e_n$
   into embedded let expressions   let $x_1 = e_1$
                         in   let $x_2 = e_2$
                               in ...  let $x_n = e_n$
                                     in $e$

---

[2]The transitive closure of $\beta_{lift}$ is a generalized reduction in the sense of Bloo, Kamareddine, and Nederpelt [2].

2. an ordinary, context-insensitive CPS transformation (either à la Plotkin or à la Fischer) handling let expressions.

The benefit of this staging, we believe, is three-fold: (1) it clarifies the extra compaction; (2) it extends a context-insensitive, one-pass CPS transformation; and (3) it suggests how to obtain even more compact terms. Indeed, in the same fashion as control-flow analysis can be used to locate the application sites of curried $\lambda$-abstractions in order to uncurry them [1, 7], the CPS transformation can benefit from control-flow information to promote more functions to continuations.

# 4   More compact CPS transformations in one pass

Promoting functions into continuations compromises context independence in the CPS transformation, since how to CPS-transform a $\lambda$-abstraction depends on whether it occurs in a $\beta$-redex or not. Fortunately, it does so in a very regular way, which makes it possible to derive a *family* of one-pass CPS transformations indexed by positions in the current context.
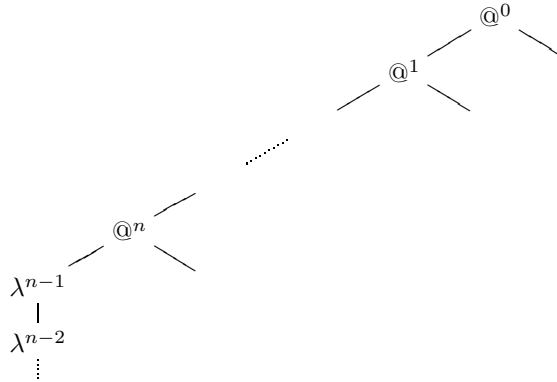


Indexing the transformation functions with the lexical position of their argument yields the one-pass CPS transformation à la Plotkin of Figure 1. A $\lambda$-term $e : \Lambda$ is CPS-transformed with

$$\underline{\lambda}k.[\![e]\!]^0 \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t.k \,\underline{@}\, t).$$

Similarly, a one-pass CPS transformation à la Fischer is displayed in Figure 2.

$$
\begin{aligned}
\Psi^0 \, v \;\; &= \;\; v \;\; : \;\; \tau_0 \\
& \qquad\qquad \text{where } \tau_0 = \Lambda. \\
\Psi^{n+1} \, v \;\; &= \;\; \overline{\lambda} t.\overline{\lambda}\kappa.(t \,\underline{@}\, v) \,\underline{@}\, (\underline{\lambda}v'.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, (\Psi^n \, v')) \\
& \;\; : \;\; \tau_{n+1} \\
& \qquad\qquad \text{where } \tau_{n+1} = \Lambda \to (\tau_n \to \Lambda) \to \Lambda. \\[6pt]
[\![\cdot]\!]^n \;\; &: \;\; \Lambda \to (\tau_n \to \Lambda) \to \Lambda \\
[\![x]\!]^n \;\; &= \;\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, (\Psi^n \, x) \\
[\![\lambda x.e]\!]^0 \;\; &= \;\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, (\underline{\lambda}x.\underline{\lambda}k.[\![e]\!]^0 \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t.k \,\underline{@}\, t)) \\
[\![\lambda x.e]\!]^{n+1} \;\; &= \;\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t.\overline{\lambda}\kappa'.(\underline{\lambda}x.[\![e]\!]^n \,\overline{@}\, \kappa') \,\underline{@}\, t) \\
[\![e_0 \, e_1]\!]^n \;\; &= \;\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.[\![e_0]\!]^{n+1} \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t_0.[\![e_1]\!]^0 \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t_1.(t_0 \,\overline{@}\, t_1) \,\underline{@}\, \kappa))
\end{aligned}
$$

Figure 1: A family of one-pass, call-by-value CPS transformations à la Plotkin

$$
\begin{aligned}
\Phi^0 \, v \;\; &= \;\; v \;\; : \;\; \tau_0 \\
& \qquad\qquad \text{where } \tau_0 = \Lambda. \\
\Phi^{n+1} \, v \;\; &= \;\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.v \,\underline{@}\, (\underline{\lambda}v'.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, (\Phi^n \, v')) \\
& \;\; : \;\; \tau_{n+1} \\
& \qquad\qquad \text{where } \tau_{n+1} = (\tau_n \to \Lambda) \to \Lambda. \\[6pt]
[\![\cdot]\!]^n \;\; &: \;\; \Lambda \to (\tau_n \to \Lambda) \to \Lambda \\
[\![x]\!]^n \;\; &= \;\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, (\Phi^n \, x) \\
[\![\lambda x.e]\!]^0 \;\; &= \;\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, (\underline{\lambda}k.\underline{\lambda}x.[\![e]\!]^0 \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t.k \,\underline{@}\, t)) \\
[\![\lambda x.e]\!]^{n+1} \;\; &= \;\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.\kappa \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}\kappa'.\underline{\lambda}x.[\![e]\!]^n \,\overline{@}\, \kappa') \\
[\![e_0 \, e_1]\!]^n \;\; &= \;\; \overline{\lambda}\kappa.[\![e_0]\!]^{n+1} \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t_0.[\![e_1]\!]^0 \,\overline{@}\, (\overline{\lambda}t_1.(t_0 \,\overline{@}\, \kappa) \,\underline{@}\, t_1))
\end{aligned}
$$

Figure 2: A family of one-pass, call-by-value CPS transformations à la Fischer

$[\![\cdot]\!]^0$ is applied to the root of a term (i.e., to the body of a $\lambda$-abstraction or to the expression in position of argument in an application). For $n > 0$, $[\![\cdot]\!]^n$ is applied to an expression in position of function in an application. $n$ is the depth of the expression since the closest root, as in the picture above. $\Psi$ (resp. $\Phi$) coerces a syntactic object into a translation-time one.

The transformation based on these families of functions can be proven correct by a simulation theorem similar to Plotkin's [13]. The correctness criterion is a relation between the transformation of the result of an expression and the result of the transformation of it, i.e., (noting contextual equivalence with $\sim$)

$$ e \longrightarrow^* v \quad \text{implies} \quad [\![e]\!]^0 \, \lambda a.a \longrightarrow^* v' \quad \text{and} \quad v' \sim [\![v]\!]^0 \, \lambda a.a $$

as well as preservation of non-termination and of getting stuck.

Reflecting the context dependence of both CPS transformations, the two-level specifications in Figures 1 and 2 are not themselves simply typed. Instead, they are dependently typed and define two families of simply typed two-level specifications. Each of these families produces simply-typed two-level $\lambda$-terms, that can be statically (i.e., administratively) reduced in one pass.

Figures 1 and 2 can be programmed in a dependently typed language and also in Scheme, if one treats the indices as arguments.

## 5    Conclusion and issues

In their study of CPS programs [16], Sabry and Felleisen needed a CPS transformation that would perform more administrative reductions than the ones already available [1, 3, 6, 22]. We have identified the extra power of this CPS transformation: a context-sensitive administrative reduction enabling a more effective treatment of $\beta$-redexes which corresponds to Bloo, Kamareddine, and Nederpelt's notion of generalized reduction. This treatment turns out to be independent of the relative positions of values and continuations. The resulting CPS transformation can be factored into (1) a first-order uncurrying phase and (2) a CPS transformation with context-insensitive administrative reductions. We have also presented two one-pass CPS transformations embodying the extra compaction and generalizing the corresponding one-pass CPS transformations à la Plotkin and à la Fischer. They can be adapted *mutatis mutandis* for encoding $\lambda$-terms into monadic normal form [9], A-normal form [5, Figure 9], nqCPS, etc., including $\beta_{lift}$.

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