

Mechanizing Synthetic Tait Computability in Istari

CPP 2026

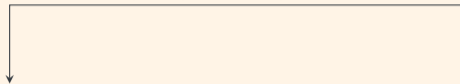
Jan 13th, 2026

Runming Li

j.w.w. Yue Yao, Robert Harper

Mechanizing *Synthetic Tait Computability* in *Istari*

An abstract **categorical gluing** approach to
metatheory of type theory



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Mechanizing *Synthetic Tait Computability* in *Istari*

A NuPRL-style proof assistant based on **extensional** type theory

Theorem (Canonicity)

Every closed term of type *bool* is equal to either *true* or *false*.

Proof Idea:

- equip every type A with a **computability structure**
- equip every element of type A with an evidence of the corresponding **computability structure**

$$\text{true} \quad \cdot \quad e : \text{bool}$$

$$\text{inl}(\checkmark : \text{true} = \text{true}) \quad \cdot \quad (e = \text{true}) \vee (e = \text{false})$$

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TRUE : BOOL

<p>true</p>	•	<p>e : bool</p>
<p>$\text{inl}(\checkmark : \text{true} = \text{true})$</p>	•	<p>$(e = \text{true}) \vee (e = \text{false})$</p>

IF : **BOOL** \rightarrow $A \rightarrow A \rightarrow A$

$\lambda \begin{pmatrix} b \\ b \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} t \\ t \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} f \\ f \end{pmatrix} \cdot \text{case } b \{ \text{inl}_- \hookrightarrow t \mid \text{inr}_- \hookrightarrow f \}$ *if b t f*

The **blue** terms work *exactly* like the **red** terms.

$$\text{IF TRUE } t f = t$$

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{if true } t f \\ \text{case (inl(✓)) \{inl_} \leftrightarrow t \mid \text{inr_} \leftrightarrow f\} \end{array} = \begin{array}{l} t \\ t \end{array}$$

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IF TRUE $t f = t$

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Suppose I have $e : \text{bool}$.

$$e : \text{bool} \xRightarrow{\text{bluify}} \text{proof } e : \begin{matrix} \text{bool} \\ (e=\text{true}) \vee (e=\text{false}) \end{matrix} \xRightarrow{\text{top}} e : \text{bool}$$

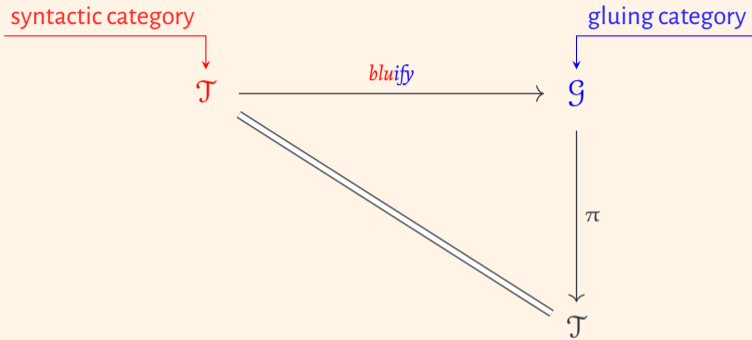
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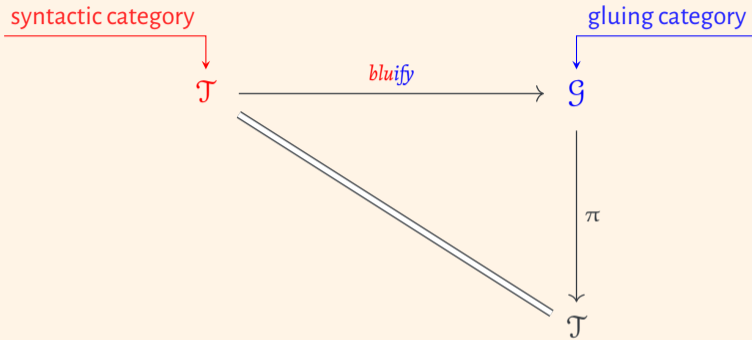
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$$\pi \circ \text{bluify} = \text{id}_{\mathcal{T}}$$

“fundamental theorem of logical relations”



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Artin Gluing

need to **mechanize** them!



- It's a large proof with *a lot of* proof obligations
- Some proof obligations are *trivial* but *tedious*

e.g. **naturality** conditions:

all operations are stable under substitutions



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```
graph TD; A[need to mechanize them!] --> B[• It's a large proof with a lot of proof obligations]; A --> C[• Some proof obligations are trivial but tedious]; D["e.g. naturality conditions:  
all operations are stable under substitutions"] --> C;
```

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e.g. **naturality** conditions:
all operations are stable under substitutions

This is the *analytic* story of Tait's computability!

The *synthetic* story: describe the functor *bluify* in a (modal) type theory!

The type theory of synthetic Tait computability

Axiom (synthetic phase distinction)

There is an intuitionistic proposition $\text{syn} : \text{Prop}$ that controls *syntactic* v.s. *semantic* aspects.

Definition

- open modality isolates *syntax*
- closed modality isolates *semantics*

$$\text{○●}A \cong \mathbf{1}$$

↑
have the ability to isolate *syntax* from *semantics*, but not vice versa!

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Synthetic Tait Computability

Parametricity for an ML module calculus

Sterling & Harper

Normalization for Cartesian Cubical Type Theory

Sterling & Angiuli

Normalization for a multimodal type theory

Gratzer

⋮

If $e : F(\text{nat})$, then $e = \text{step}^c(\text{ret}(\text{suc}^n(\text{zero})))$.

Canonicity for Cost-Aware Logical Framework

Li & Harper

A modal dependent type theory with a phase distinction between **cost** and behavior based on **call-by-push-value**.

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TRUE : TM (BOOL)

$[\text{syn} \hookrightarrow \text{true}, \eta_{\bullet}(\text{inl}(\checkmark))]$: $(b : \text{tm}(\text{bool})) \times \bullet((b = \text{true}) + (b = \text{false}))$

Modality framework guarantees that $\circ(\text{TRUE} = \text{true})$ by $\circ\bullet A \cong \mathbf{1}$!

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Want $\text{TRUE} : \text{TM}(\text{BOOL})$ and $\circ(\text{TRUE} = \text{true})$. Write this as
 $\text{TRUE} : \{\text{TM}(\text{BOOL}) \mid \text{syn} \leftrightarrow \text{true}\}$.

To prove FTLR, it suffices to construct

$\text{BOOL} : \{\text{TP} \mid \text{syn} \leftrightarrow \text{bool}\}$

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$$\text{TP} : \{\mathcal{U} \mid \text{syn} \leftrightarrow \text{tp}\}$$
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$$\text{TM} : \{\text{TP} \rightarrow \mathcal{U} \mid \text{syn} \leftrightarrow \text{tm}\}$$
$$\text{TM } A = \pi_2 A$$
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$$\text{PI } A B = [\text{syn} \hookrightarrow \text{pi } A B, (e : \text{tm}(\text{pi } A B)) \times \{(a : \text{TM } A) \rightarrow \text{TM}(B a) \mid \text{syn} \hookrightarrow \text{app } e\}]$$
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$$\text{LAM } f = [\text{syn} \hookrightarrow \text{lam } f, f]$$
$$\text{APP} : \{\text{TM}(\text{PI } A B) \rightarrow (a : \text{TM } A) \rightarrow \text{TM}(B a) \mid \text{syn} \hookrightarrow \text{app}\}$$
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Proof is short, but can be deceiving!

The proof is short because ...

Hidden transport and equality reasoning

$$\text{LAM} : \{((a : \text{TM } A) \rightarrow \text{TM}(B a)) \rightarrow \text{TM}(\text{PI } A B) \mid \text{syn} \leftrightarrow \text{lam}\}$$

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need to cite $\text{pi}_\beta : \text{app}(\text{lam } f) x = f x$ to make it type-check

need to “transport” along

$$\circ((a : \text{TM } A) \rightarrow \text{TM}(B a) = (a : \text{tm } A) \rightarrow \text{tm}(B a))$$

which itself needs to “transport” along $\circ((A : \text{TP}) = (A : \text{tp}))$

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In many proof assistant, this leads to “transport hell”

The proof is short because ...

- **Subtypes**: if $a : \{A \mid \text{syn} \hookrightarrow a_o\}$ then $a : A$
- **Function extensionality**
- **Cumulative** universes
- ...

None of your favorite proof assistants support all of these features!
Except for one . . .

Istari

<https://istarilogic.org>

A NuPRL-style **extensional** proof assistant based on **computational semantics** developed by Karl Crary.

↑
PER model over operational semantics, à la logical relations.

Allows: “ill-typed” terms, terms with multiple types, untyped reduction, etc¹.

¹A great tutorial on computational semantics is Angiuli’s thesis.

Istari

- **Typing judgment** is internal to the language.

$M : A$ is a proposition to be proved by users.

- If $M : A(N)$ and $N = N'$, then $M : A(N')$.

Propositional equality! Equality reflection in action.

- Type-checking is **undecidable!**

If typechecker is stuck, user can manually take over!

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```
define /id_vec {m n}/  
/  
  fn v . v  
//  
  forall (m n : nat). vec(m + n) → vec(n + m)  
/;  
  unfold /id_vec/.  
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  apply /Nat.plus_commute/.  
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a proof that $m + n = n + m!$

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A library of phase distinction in Istari

- Phase
- Modalities
- Strict glue types
- Extension types

Thanks to Istari's subset type $\{x : A \mid P(x)\}$,
which handles the coercion implicitly: if $a : \{x : A \mid P(x)\}$, then $a : A$.

$LAM : \{((a : TM A) \rightarrow TM(B a)) \rightarrow TM(\Pi A B) \mid \text{syn} \leftrightarrow \text{lam}\}$
 $LAM f = [\text{syn} \leftrightarrow \text{lam} f, f]$

Istari

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Our mechanized proof is almost verbatim from the on-paper one!

We mechanized . . .

- Dependent type theory: booleans with large eliminations and Π -types, *etc.*
- Cost-Aware Logical Framework: call-by-push-value adjunction $F \dashv U$, cost-behavior phase distinction, cost effects, *etc.*

	Intensional	Extensional
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Typechecking	Automatic	Mostly automatic but sometimes manual
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Lines of tactics	Definitions
0–100	TM, TP, TRUE, FALSE
100–200	PI, LAM, PI_{β} , BOOL
400–500	APP, PI_{η}
1200–1500	IF, IF_{β_1} , IF_{β_2}

Accordingly, these proofs [gluing] have a very *extensional* flavor, and as such are less amenable to implementation in a proof assistant based on intensional type theory. Moreover, the more sophisticated iterations [STC] rely on *(multi)modal type theories* as internal languages for feature-rich categories, for which mechanization is still in its infancy.

— Adjedj et al. Martin-Löf à la Coq. CPP 24

Bonus slides

*[W]hereas in the past the **synthetic** and **analytic** viewpoints were opposed to each other, today they must be viewed as two parts of a whole whose interplay leads to new and useful developments in mathematics.*

— Jon Sterling, Naïve logical relations in synthetic Tait computability


$tp : \mathcal{U}$ $tm : tp \rightarrow \mathcal{U}$ $bool : tp$ $true\ false : tm(bool)$ $if : (b : tm(bool)) \rightarrow tm(C(true)) \rightarrow tm(C(false)) \rightarrow tm(C(b))$ $if_{\beta_1} : if\ true\ t\ f = t$ $if_{\beta_2} : if\ false\ t\ f = f$ $pi : (A : tp) \rightarrow (tm(A) \rightarrow tp) \rightarrow tp$ $lam : ((x : tm(A)) \rightarrow tm(B(x))) \rightarrow tm(pi\ A\ B)$ $app : tm(pi\ A\ B) \rightarrow (x : tm(A)) \rightarrow tm(B(x))$ $pi_{\beta} : app\ (lam\ f)\ a = f\ a$ $pi_{\eta} : lam\ (app\ e) = e$

Axiom

Syntactically, there exists syntax $tp, tm, bool, true, false, if, pi, lam, app, \dots$

Second-order syntax remove the burden of *substitution* and *naturality*!

In fact, our mechanization does not
have any substitution proofs at all!




Of course, this limits the models that can be written down internally, but synthetically it gives rise to the correct category that represents the syntax.

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Artin Gluing \mathcal{G}

$$\mathcal{G} = \mathbf{Set} \downarrow \Gamma$$

$\Gamma = \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{T}}(\mathbf{1}_{\mathcal{T}}, -)$
the global section functor

Objects:

$$\left(\begin{array}{c} S \in \mathbf{Set} \\ \downarrow f \\ \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{T}}(\mathbf{1}_{\mathcal{T}}, A) \end{array} \right)$$

Think as: **proof-relevant** predicates on closed terms of type A !

Artin Gluing \mathcal{G}

$$\mathcal{G} = \mathbf{Set} \downarrow \Gamma$$

$\Gamma = \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{T}}(\mathbf{1}_{\mathcal{T}}, -)$
 the global section functor

Objects:

$$\left(\begin{array}{c} S \in \mathbf{Set} \\ \downarrow f \\ \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{T}}(\mathbf{1}_{\mathcal{T}}, A) \end{array} \right)$$

Think as: **proof-relevant** predicates on closed terms of type A !

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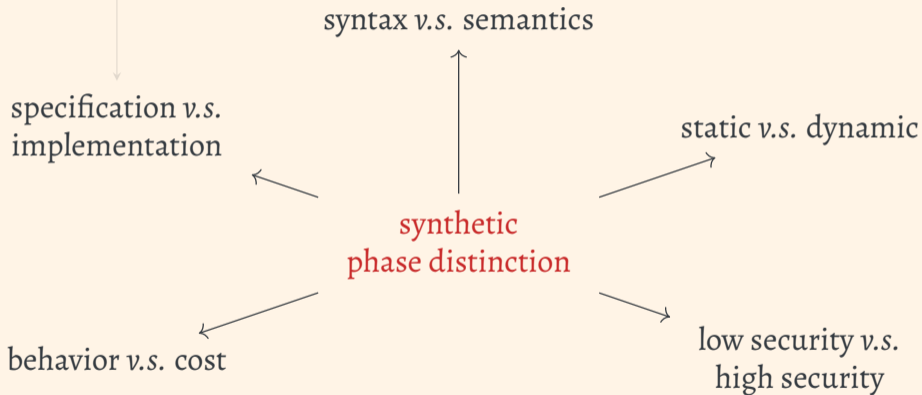
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