CS450

Structure of Higher Level Languages

Lecture 15: Mutable environments

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Today we will...

- Why should we care about functional programming?
- Implement environments using heaps and frames
- Review some usage examples

Why learn the Structure of Higher Level Languages?

Structure of Higher Level Languages

> I postponed this discussion, because I felt that you are now better suited to understand and related to the points being made.

- Why learn the fundamental concepts in all programming languages?
- Why learn different languages?
- Why focus on functional programming?
- Why use Racket?

Disclaimer

- Most of these claims are opinions
- These will be mostly informal claims
- We are **not** trying to find the best language (or programming model)

Overview

- Languages are just tools, learn which language is amenable to what context
- The best programming language does not exist (theoretically most languages are equivalent)
- Different languages have different characteristics that favour different domains: for instance, functional languages being used in Programming Language research, C/Fortran in scientific/high-performance computing
- A programming language is a computing interface: it is crucial to understand its meaning
- The importance of first-class functions and avoiding mutation

Semantics and idioms

Why should we care about language semantics?

- **A language is a *computing user interface*.**
  We are learning reusable, cross-cutting patterns.
- **The semantics must be *unambiguous* and *precise*.**
  It is not a matter of personal opinion how a conditional expression works. Language features must be described unambiguously to users.
- **The semantics defines a software contract.**
  Is the bug in the client's bug, or is it in our code?
- **Language idioms (patterns) are transferrable knowledge.**
  Understanding idioms (patterns) teaches you something that can be applied across languages and technologies.

How are all languages similar?

How are all languages the same?

- **Theoretical:** Any input-output behavior implementable in language X is implementable in language Y (Church-Turing thesis), and *equivalent to the λ-calculus without numbers*
- **Practical:** Reoccurring fundamentals: variables, abstraction, recursive definitions

How are languages different?

Disclaimer

Languages are not slow/fast

- A language **implementation** is fast/slow, not the language itself
- Certain languages computational models are more amenable to implement efficiently
- Languages are user interfaces of computational models

How different languages behave in different contexts?

Why is C faster than all other languages?

> Is it because C is "close to the metal?" That is, is C fast because its semantics matches the processor's semantics?

Why is C faster than all other languages?

> Is it because C is "close to the metal?" That is, is C fast because its semantics matches the processor's semantics? **No!**

- First of all, which processor? How can it match the semantics of all processors?
- The key of C's success lays in having good compilers.
- C is fast because it is **old and its interface remains stable!**
- Compilers are just **really** good at optimizing C.
- There is a set of good practices to write optimizer-ready C code

Take away

> The facts above make C quite successful in High Performance Computing (large scale scientific codes).

Source: *C Is Not a Low-level Language: Your computer is not a fast PDP-11*. David Chisnall. ACM Queue vol. 16, no. 2. 2018

Why is Python slow multithreading?

- Pure Python programs are conditioned by the GIL (the Global Interpreter Lock) which effectively serializes parallel execution
- To parallelize code we must run multiple processes, where shared memory is especially slow, which, in turn, slows down compute-bound programs

Take away

> Avoid running compute-bound parallel codes in Python. Maybe choose C?

Source: Global Interpreter Lock. Python Wiki. Last edit in 2017, accessed in 2019.

Constraint language programming

> We solve the equation SEND+MORE=MONEY where each letter represents a digit in Prolog using a constraint language programming module:

```
sendmore(Digits) :-            % Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constraint_programming
   Digits = [S,E,N,D,M,O,R,E],      % Create variables
   Digits ins 0..9,                 % Associate domains to variables
   S #\= 0,                         % Constraint: S must be different from 0
   M #\= 0,
   all_different(Digits),           % all the elements must take different values
                1000*S + 100*E + 10*N + D      % Other constraints
              + 1000*M + 100*O + 10*R + E
   #= 10000*M + 1000*O + 100*N + 10*E + Y,
   label(Digits).                   % Start the search
```

Take away

> Some problems are more amenable to certain programming languages.

How are languages different?

1. **The implementation matters:** A language implementation may be conditioned (faster/slower) in certain contexts
2. **The model matters:** Certain problems are simpler/more efficient to write in specific languages
3. **The domain matters:** A technology your business needs may only be available in some language (say TensorFlow in Python)

Why learn different languages?

> Learn at least one new language every year.

Source: *The Pragmatic Programmer*. Andrew Hunt and David Thomas. 1999.

Why should you care

- Deeper understanding of the differences and the similarities between languages
- Learn different approaches to the same problems
- More job opportunities
- Better technology choices (some technologies are only available in specific languages)

Why functional programming?

What is functional programming?

- Mutation is discouraged
- Higher-order functions serve as a generalization device

Why should we care?

- These features help designing correct, elegant, and efficient software
- Functional programming languages are heavily favoured by PL researchers, which means they serve as **a test bed for PL design**. Functional programming is close(r) to math formalism, thus implementation is usually simpler in functional programming languages.
- **Functional programming is trendy!** C++/Java/C#/Python/Javascript are all incorporating functional programming idioms.

Why should we discourage mutation?

- Simpler to reason about: no surprises passing a data-structure to functions/objects
- Concurrency-ready: read-only means no race conditions (and no locks), which leads to simpler, faster code

Who is using it?

- `immutable.js` for JavaScript by Facebook
- `vavr`, `PCollections`, the Scala runtime, and the Closure runtime for Java
- `immer` for C++
- immutable collections for .NET

Why should we use higher-order functions?

- Simpler interface than objects (which method? which order?)
- Can be combined effectively (frameworks on combining functions)

A researcher's Petri Dish

> Most programming languages features started out in functional programming languages.

- Garbage collection (LISP, 1959)
- Generics (Hindley-Milner-Damas type system 1969/1978, implemented in ML in ~1977)
- Higher-order functions (`lambda` expressions in C++, C#, Java, Python) introduced in LISP (1959) and in ISWIM (1966)
- Type inference, *e.g.*, `auto` in C++, `var` in C# (Hindley-Milner-Damas)
- Algebraic-data types and pattern matching (1970s in Hope)
- Recursion

A new wave of languages

Many new interesting programming languages

- Swift: next-generation programming language for Apple systems
- Rust: functional programming meets system programming
- F#: an ML derivate for the .NET ecosystem
- Elixir: highly-available distributed system
- Clojure: a LISP-influenced language for the JVM and the web

How are we using functional programming ?

- **OCaml:** web development (Facebook), distributed systems (Docker), finance (Bloomberg, Aesthetic Integration), hardware virtualization (Citrix)
- **Haskell:** verification (Facebook), distributed systems (Google), compilers (Intel), distributed systems (Microsoft)
- **Erlang:** communication (WhatsApp), ads (AddRoll), web backend (Bet365), finance (Goldman Sachs)
- **Elixir:** spam prevention (Pinterest), micro services (Lonely Planet)
- **F#:** data analysis (Kaggle), trading (Credit Suisse), gaming backend (GameSys)
- **Racket** game scripting (Naughty Dog), image processing (YouPatch)
- **Scala** middleware (Twitter), database (Netflix), microservices (Tumblr), web (The Guardian)

Honorable mentions

- ReasonML, Elm, PureScript, ClojureScript

Mutable environments

Summary

> Today we implement a mutable environment.

Constructors

- **Empty**: The empty, root environment.
- **Put**: $E \leftarrow [x := v]$ updates an existing environment E upon defining a variable. Returns the same frame, and updates the heap.
- **Push**: $E_2 \leftarrow E_1 + [x := v]$ creates a new environment E_2 by extending environment E_1 with one binding $x = v$. Returns the new environment.

Selectors

- **Variable Lookup**: $E(x)$ Looks up variable x in the bindings of the current frame, otherwise recursively looks up the parent frame.

Environment example

Environment visualization

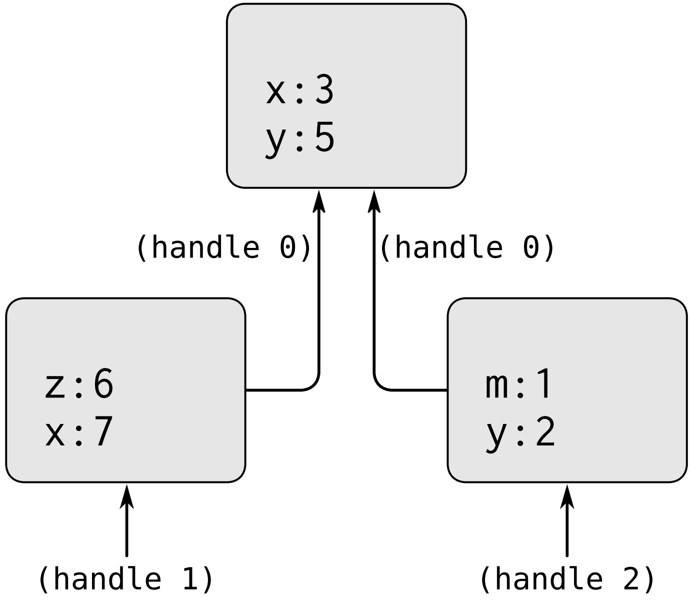

Figure 3.1: A simple environment structure.

Source: SICP book Section 3.2

Environment operations

Environment example

Environment visualization

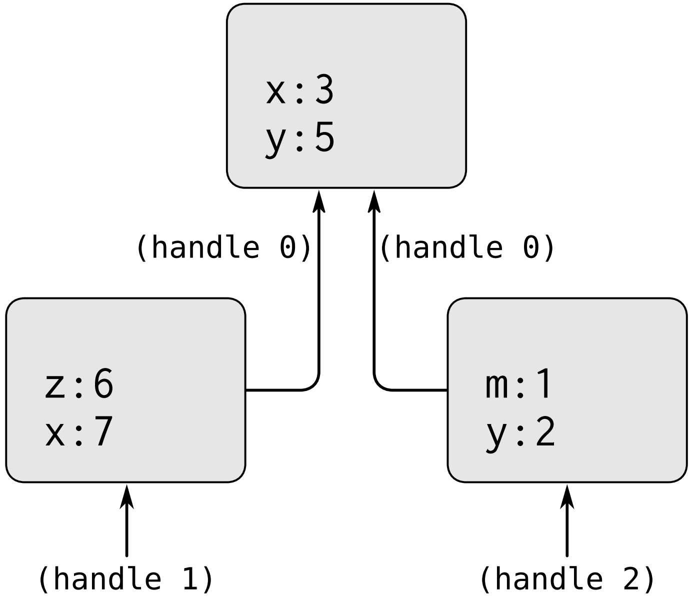

Figure 3.1: A simple environment structure.

Source: SICP book Section 3.2

Environment operations

```
E0 ← [x := 3]
E0 ← [y := 5]
E1 ← E0 + [z := 6]
E1 ← [x := 7]
E2 ← E0 + [m := 1]
E2 ← [y := 2]
```

Constructors: Root

The root environment

```
(define root-alloc (heap-alloc empty-heap root-frame))
(define root-environ (eff-result root-alloc))
(define root-mem (eff-state root-alloc))
```

Constructors: Put

$$E \leftarrow [x := v]$$

```
(define (environ-put mem env var val)
  (define new-frm (frame-put (heap-get mem env) var val))
  (heap-put mem env new-frm))
```

Example

```
E0 ← [x := 3]
E0 ← [y := 5]
```

In Racket

Constructors: Put

$$E \leftarrow [x := v]$$

```
(define (environ-put mem env var val)
  (define new-frm (frame-put (heap-get mem env) var val))
  (heap-put mem env new-frm))
```

Example

```
E0 ← [x := 3]
E0 ← [y := 5]
```

In Racket

```
(define E0 root-environ)
(define m1
  (environ-put
    (environ-put root-heap E0 (s:variable 'x) (s:number 3))
    E0 (s:variable 'y) (s:number 5)))
```

Constructors: Push

$$E_2 \leftarrow E_1 + [x := v]$$

```
(define (environ-push mem env var val)
  (define new-frame (frame env (hash var val)))
  (heap-alloc mem new-frame))
```

Example

In Racket

```
E1 ← E0 + [z := 6]
E1 ← [x := 7]
```

Constructors: Push

$$E_2 \leftarrow E_1 + [x := v]$$

```
(define (environ-push mem env var val)
  (define new-frame (frame env (hash var val)))
  (heap-alloc mem new-frame))
```

Example

```
E1 ← E0 + [z := 6]
E1 ← [x := 7]
```

In Racket

```
(define e1-m2 (environ-push m1 E0 (s:variable 'z) (s:number 6)))
(define E1 (eff-result e1-m2))
(define m2 (eff-state e1-m2))
(define m3 (environ-put m2 E1 (s:variable 'x) (s:number 7)))
```

Continuing the example

Example

```
E0 ← [x := 3]
E0 ← [y := 5]
E1 ← E0 + [z := 6]
E1 ← [x := 7]
E2 ← E0 + [m := 1]
E2 ← [y := 2]
```

In Racket

Continuing the example

Example

```
E0 ← [x := 3]
E0 ← [y := 5]
E1 ← E0 + [z := 6]
E1 ← [x := 7]
E2 ← E0 + [m := 1]
E2 ← [y := 2]
```

In Racket

```
(define E0 root-environ)
(define m1
  (environ-put
    (environ-put root-heap E0 (s:variable 'x) (s:number 3))
    E0 (s:variable 'y) (s:number 5)))
(define e1-m2 (environ-push m1 E0 (s:variable 'z) (s:number 6)))
(define E1 (eff-result e1-m2))
(define m2 (eff-state e1-m2))
(define m3 (environ-put m2 E1 (s:variable 'x) (s:number 7)))
(define e2-m4 (environ-push m3 E0 (s:variable 'm) (s:number 1)))
(define E2 (eff-result e2-m4))
(define m4 (eff-state e2-m4))
(define m5 (environ-put m4 E2 (s:variable 'y) (s:number 2)))
```

Selector: Variable lookup

$E(x)$

```
(define (environ-get mem env var)
  (define frm (heap-get mem env))    ;; Load the current frame
  (define parent (frame-parent frm))  ;; Load the parent
  (define result (frame-get frm var)) ;; Lookup locally
  (cond
    [result result] ;; Result is defined, then return it
    [parent (environ-get mem parent var)] ; If parent exists, recurse
    [else (error (format "Variable ~a is not defined" var))]))
```

Example

```
(check-equal? (environ-get m5 E2 (s:variable 'y)) (s:number 2))
(check-equal? (environ-get m5 E2 (s:variable 'm)) (s:number 1))
(check-equal? (environ-get m5 E2 (s:variable 'x)) (s:number 3)))
```

A language of environments

Environment visualization

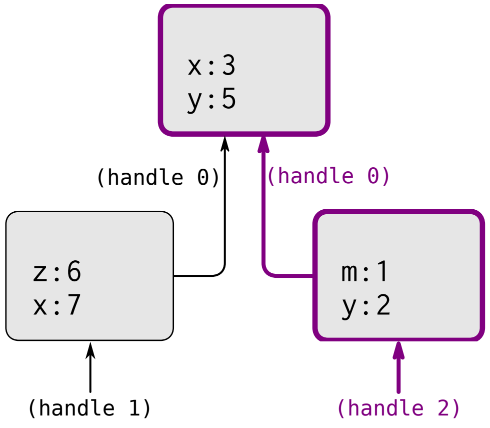

Figure 3.1: A simple environment structure.

Source: SICP book Section 3.2

```
(define parsed-m5
  (parse-mem
    '([E0 . ([x . 3] [y . 5])]
      [E1 . (E0 [x . 7] [z . 6])]
      [E2 . (E0 [m . 1] [y . 2])])))
; Which is the same as creating the following data-structure
(heap
  (hash
    (handle 0)
    (frame #f
      (hash (s:variable 'y) (s:number 5) (s:variable 'x) (s:number 3)))
    (handle 2)
    (frame (handle 0)
      (hash (s:variable 'y) (s:number 2) (s:variable 'm) (s:number 1)))
    (handle 1)
    (frame (handle 0)
      (hash (s:variable 'z) (s:number 6) (s:variable 'x) (s:number 7)))))

(check-equal? parsed-m5 m5)
```