CSE341: Programming Languages

Lecture 11
Closures-ish Java & C

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Higher-order programming

- Higher-order programming, e.g., with **`map`** and **`filter`**, is great
- Language support for closures makes it very pleasant
- Without closures, we can still do it more manually / clumsily
  - In OOP (e.g., Java) with one-method interfaces
  - In procedural (e.g., C) with explicit environment arguments
- Working through this:
  - Shows connections between languages and features
  - Can help you understand closures and objects

Example in ML

```
datatype 'a mylist = Cons of 'a * ('a mylist) | Empty

(* ('a -> 'b) -> 'a mylist -> 'b mylist *)
fun map f xs = case xs of …
(* ('a -> bool) -> 'a mylist -> 'a mylist *)
fun filter f xs = case xs of …
(* 'a mylist -> int *)
fun length xs = case xs of …


val doubleAll = map (fn x => x*2)
val countNs xs = length (filter (fn x => x=n) xs)
```


Java

- Java 8 likely to have closures (like C#, Scala, Ruby, …)
  - Write like
```
lst.map((x) => x.age)
   .filter((x) => x > 21)
   .length()
```
  - Make parallelism and collections much easier
  - Encourage less mutation
  - Hard parts for language designers:
    - Implementation with other features and VM
    - Evolving current standard library (else not worth it?)
- But how could we program in an ML style in Java today…
  - Won't look like pseudocode above
  - Was even more painful before Java had generics

One-method interfaces

```
interface Func<B,A> {  B m(A x); }

interface Pred<A> { boolean m(A x); }

interface Foo { String m(int x, int y); }
```

- An interface is a named type [constructor]
- An object with one method can serve as a closure
  - Different instances can have different fields [possibly different types] like different closures can have different environments [possibly different types]
- So an interface with one method can serve as a function type

List types

Creating a generic list class works fine

- Assuming **`null`** for empty list here, a choice we may regret
- **`null`** makes every type an option type with implicit **`valOf`**

```
class List<T> {
  T head;
  List<T> tail;
  List(T x, List<T> xs){
     head = x;
     tail = xs;
  }
  …
}
```

Higher-order functions

- Let's use static methods for `map`, `filter`, `length`
- Use our earlier generic interfaces for "function arguments"
- These methods are recursive
  - Less efficient in Java ☹
  - Much simpler than common previous-pointer acrobatics

```
static <A,B> List<B> map(Func<B,A> f, List<A> xs){
  if(xs==null) return null;
  return new List<B>(f.m(xs.head),map(f,xs.tail));
}
static <A> List<A> filter(Pred<A> f, List<A> xs){
  if(xs==null) return null;
  if(f.m(xs.head))
    return new List<A>(xs.head),filter(f,xs.tail);
  return filter(f,xs.tail);
}
static <A> length(List<A> xs){ … }
```


Why not instance methods?

A more OO approach would be instance methods:

```
class List<T> {
  <B> List<B> map(Func<B,T> f){…}
  List<T> filter(Pred<T> f){…}
  int length(){…}
}
```

Can work, but interacts poorly with `null` for empty list

- Cannot call a method on `null`
- So leads to extra cases in all *clients* of these methods if a list might be empty

An even more OO alternative uses a subclass of List for empty-lists rather than `null`

- Then instance methods work fine!

Clients

- To use `map` method to make a `List<Bar>` from a `List<Foo>`:
  - Define a class `C` that implements `Func<Bar,Foo>`
    - Use fields to hold any "private data"
  - Make an object of class `C`, passing private data to constructor
  - Pass the object to `map`
- As a convenience, can combine all 3 steps with *anonymous inner classes*
  - Mostly just syntactic sugar
  - But can directly access enclosing fields and `final` variables
  - Added to language to better support callbacks
  - Syntax an acquired taste? See lec11.java

Now C [for C experts]

- In Java, objects, like closures, can have "parts" that do not show up in their types (interfaces)
- In C, a *function pointer* is just a code pointer, period
  - So without extra thought, functions taking function pointer arguments won't be as useful as functions taking closures
- A common technique:
  - Always define function pointers and higher-order functions to take an extra, explicit environment argument
  - But without generics, no good choice for type of list elements or the environment
    - Use `void*` and various type casts…

The C trick

[ignore if not (yet) a C wizard; full implementation in lec11.c]

Don't do this:

```
list_t* map(void* (*f)(void*), list_t xs){
   … f(xs->head) …
}
```

Do this to support clients that need private data:

```
list_t* map(void* (*f)(void*,void*)
            void* env, list_t xs)   {
   …  f(env,xs->head) …
}
```

List libraries like this aren't common in C, *but callbacks are!*

- Lack of generics means lots of type casts in clients ☹