Defining Racket:
Pairs, Lists, and GC

Topics

- Compound values:
  - Cons cell: pair of values
  - List: ordered sequence of parts
- Programming with pairs and lists
- Implementation consideration:
  garbage collection (GC)

Pairs: cons cells

Construct a cons cell holding 2 values:
cons built-in function, takes 2 arguments

Access parts:
- car built-in function, takes 1 argument
  returns first (left) part if argument is a cons cell
- cdr built-in function, takes 1 argument
  returns second (right) part if argument is a cons cell

Mnemonic: car precedes cdr in alphabetic order

Names due to the IBM 704 computer assembler language
(used for first Lisp implementation, 1950s)
contents of the address/decrement part of register number

cons expressions build cons cells

Syntax: \((\text{cons} \ e_1 \ e_2)\)

E ⊢ e_1 ↓ v_1
E ⊢ e_2 ↓ v_2
E ⊢ (\text{cons} \ e_1 \ e_2) ↓ (\text{cons} \ v_1 \ v_2) \quad [\text{cons}]

c ons is a function, so why define evaluation rules?
**cons cells** are values

**Syntax:**  
\( (\text{cons } v_1 v_2) \)

- \((\text{cons } 17 42)\)
- \((\text{cons } 3.14159 \ #t)\)
- \((\text{cons } (\text{cons } 3 4.5) (\text{cons } \#f 5))\)

So is \((\text{cons } 17 42)\) a function application expression or a value?

\( e ::= v \mid ... \)

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**cons cell diagrams**

\( (\text{cons } v_1 v_2) \)

Convention: put “small” values (numbers, booleans, characters) inside a box, and draw a pointers to “large” values (functions, strings, pairs) outside a box.

\( (\text{cons } (\text{cons } 17 (\text{cons } "\text{cat}" 6)) (\text{cons } \#t (\lambda (x) (* 2 x)))) \)

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**car and cdr expressions**

**Syntax:**  
\( (\text{car } e) \)

**Evaluation:**

1. Evaluate \( e \) to a cons cell.
2. The result is the **left** value in the cons cell.

\[
\begin{align*}
E \vdash e \downarrow (\text{cons } v_1 v_2) & \quad \text{[car]} \\
E \vdash (\text{car } e) \downarrow v_1
\end{align*}
\]

**Syntax:**  
\( (\text{cdr } e) \)

**Evaluation:**

1. Evaluate \( e \) to a cons cell.
2. The result is the **right** value in the cons cell.

\[
\begin{align*}
E \vdash e \downarrow (\text{cons } v_1 v_2) & \quad \text{[cdr]} \\
E \vdash (\text{cdr } e) \downarrow v_2
\end{align*}
\]

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**Practice with car and cdr**

Write expressions using **car**, **cdr**, and \( tr \) that extract the five leaves of this tree:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(define } tr \text{ (cons } (\text{cons } 17 \ (\text{cons } "\text{cat}" 6)) \\
\quad (\text{cons } \#t \ (\lambda (x) (* 2 x)))) \text{), ...}
\end{align*}
\]
Rule check

What is the result of evaluating this expression?

(car (cons (+ 2 3) (cdr 4)))

Examples

(define (swap-pair pair)
  (cons (cdr pair) (car pair)))

(define (sort-pair pair)
  (if (< (car pair) (cdr pair))
      pair
      (swap pair)))

What are the values of these expressions?

(swap-pair (cons 1 2))
(sort-pair (cons 4 7))
(sort-pair (cons 8 5))

Lists

A list is one of:

– The empty list: null
– A pair of the first element, v_first, and a smaller list, v_rest, containing the rest of the elements:
  (cons v_first v_rest)

A list of the numbers 7, 2, and 4:
  (cons 7 (cons 2 (cons 4 null)))

List diagrams

These n cons cells form the “spine” of the list

The slash means this slot contains null
list as sugar*

• (list) desugars to null
• (list el ...) desugars to (cons el (list ...))

Example:

(list (+ 1 2) (* 3 4) (< 5 6))

desugars to

(cons (+ 1 2) (list (* 3 4) (< 5 6)))

desugars to

(cons (+ 1 2) (cons (* 3 4) (list (< 5 6))))

desugars to

(cons (+ 1 2) (cons (* 3 4) (cons (< 5 6) null)))

* Close enough for now, but actually a variable-argument function.

Quoted notation (only the basics)

Symbols are values: 'a
where a is any valid identifier or other primitive value
number and boolean symbols identical to values: '#f is #f

Atoms: symbols, numbers, booleans, null

Quoted notation of cons/list values:

• A cons cell (cons 1 2) is displayed '(1 . 2)
• null is displayed '()
• A cons cell (cons 1 null) is displayed '(1)
• A cons cell (cons 1 (cons 2 null)) is displayed '(1 2)
• (list 1 2 3) is displayed '(1 2 3)
• '(cons 1 2) is the same as (list 'cons '1 '2)
• (cons (cons 1 2) (cons 3 4)) is displayed '(((1 . 2) 3 . 4)

Pairs, Lists, and GC

List practice

(define LOL
 (list (list 17 19)
       (list 23 42 57)
       (list 115 (list 111 230 235 251 301) 240 342)))

1. Draw the diagram for the value bound to LOL.
2. Write the printed representation of the value bound to LOL.
3. Give expressions using LOL (and no number values) that evaluate to the following values: 19, 23, 57, 251, '(235 251 301)
4. Write the the result of evaluating:
   (+ (length LOL)
      (length (third LOL))
      (length (second (third LOL))))

append

(define L1 (list 8 3))
(define L2 (list 7 2 4))

The append function takes two lists as arguments and returns a list of all the elements of the first list followed by all the elements of the second list.
List practice

(define L1 '(7 2 4))
(define L2 '(8 3 5))

For each of the following three lists:
1. Draw the diagram for its value.
2. Indicate the number of cons cells created for its value.
   (Don't count pre-existing cons cells.)
3. Write the quoted notation for its value.
4. Determine the list length of its value.

(define L3 (cons L1 L2))
(define L4 (list L1 L2))
(define L5 (append L1 L2))

Implementation: memory management

Who cleans up all those cons cells when we're done with them?

(cdr (cons 1 (cons 2 (cons 3 null))))

Garbage: cells that will never be used again, but still occupy storage space.
Garbage Collection (GC)

- A cell or object is \textit{garbage} once the remainder of evaluation will never access it.

- **Garbage collection:** Reclaim space used by garbage.

- Required/invented to implement Lisp.
  - Immutability ⇒ fresh copies
  - Rapid allocation, rapid garbage creation

GC: Reachability

Who cleans up all those cons cells when we're done with them?

\[(\text{car } (\text{cons } 1 \ (\text{cons } 2 \ (\text{cons } 3 \ \text{null})))) \downarrow 1\]

Garbage: unreachable cells

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|}
\hline
1 \\
\hline
2 \\
\hline
3 \text{ null} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

You will read more about GC on the next assignment.