Local Bindings and Scope

These slides borrow heavily from Ben Wood’s Fall ‘15 slides, some of which are in turn based on Dan Grossman’s material from the University of Washington.

CS251 Programming Languages
Fall 2018, Lyn Turbak
Department of Computer Science
Wellesley College

Motivation for local bindings

We want local bindings = a way to name things locally in functions and other expressions.

Why?
– For style and convenience
– Avoiding duplicate computations
– A big but natural idea: nested function bindings
– Improving algorithmic efficiency (not “just a little faster”)

let expressions: Example

```lisp
> (let {([a (+ 1 2)] [b (* 3 4)])} (list a b))
'(3 12)
```

Pretty printed form

```lisp
> (let {([a (+ 1 2)]
            [b (* 3 4)])}
        (list a b))
'(3 12)
```

let in the quadratic formula

```
(x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a})
```

```lisp
(define (quadratic-roots a b c)
    (let {([-b (- b)]
            [sqrt-discriminant
                (sqrt (- (* b b) (* 4 a c)))]
            [2a (* 2 a)])}
        (list (/ (+ -b sqrt-discriminant) 2a)
              (/ (- -b sqrt-discriminant) 2a))))

> (quadratic-roots 1 -5 6)
'(3 2)
> (quadratic-roots 2 7 -15)
'(1 1/2 -5)
Formalizing let expressions

2 questions:

- Syntax: $\text{let } ([id1 e1] \ldots [idn en]) \ e_body$
  - Each $x_i$ is any variable, and $e_body$ and each $e_i$ are any expressions.

- Evaluation:
  - Evaluate each $e_i$ to $v_i$ in the current dynamic environment.
  - Evaluate $e_body[v1,\ldots vn/id1,\ldots idn]$ in the current dynamic environment.

Result of whole let expression is result of evaluating $e_body$.

let is an expression

A let-expression is just an expression, so we can use it anywhere an expression can go.

Silly example:

$$(+ (let \{[x 1]\} x)
  (let \{[y 2]
    \{[z 4]\}
  (- z y)))$$

let is just syntactic sugar!

(\text{let } ([id1 e1] \ldots [idn en]) \ e_body)

desugars to

$$((\text{lambda} \ (id1 \ldots idn) \ e_body) \ e1 \ldots en)$$

Example:

(\text{let } \{[a (+ 1 2)] [b (* 3 4)]\} \ (\text{list} \ a \ b))

desugars to

$$((\text{lambda} \ (a \ b) \ (\text{list} \ a \ b) \ (+ \ 1 \ 2) \ (* \ 3 \ 4))$$

Parenls vs. Braces vs. Brackets

As matched pairs, they are interchangeable. Differences can be used to enhance readability.

\begin{align*}
> & \ (\text{let} \ \{[a (+ 1 2)] [b (* 3 4)]\} \ (\text{list} \ a \ b)) \\
& \ '(3 \ 12) \\
> & \ (\text{let} \ \{[a (+ 1 2)] [b (* 3 4)]\} \ (\text{list} \ a \ b)) \\
& \ '(3 \ 12) \\
> & \ (\text{let} \ \{[a (+ 1 2)] [b (* 3 4)]\} \ (\text{list} \ a \ b)) \\
& \ '(3 \ 12) \\
> & \ (\text{let} \ \{[a (+ 1 2)] [b (* 3 4)]\} \ (\text{list} \ a \ b)) \\
& \ '(3 \ 12)
\end{align*}
Avoid repeated recursion

Consider this code and the recursive calls it makes
– Don’t worry about calls to first, rest, and null? because they do a small constant amount of work

(define (bad-maxlist xs)
  (if (null? xs)
      -inf.0
      (if (> (first xs) (bad-maxlist (rest xs)))
          (first xs)
          (bad-maxlist (rest xs)))))

The key is not to do repeated work!
– Saving recursive results in local bindings is essential…

Some calculations

Suppose one bad-maxlist call’s if logic and calls to null?, first?, rest take 10^-7 seconds total
– Then (bad-maxlist (list 50 49 ... 1)) takes 50 x 10^-7 sec
– And (bad-maxlist (list 1 2 ... 50))
  takes \((1 + 2 + 2^2 + 2^3 + \ldots + 2^{49})\) x 10^-7
  = \((2^{50} - 1)\) x 10^-7 = 1.12 x 10^8 sec = over 3.5 years
– And (bad-maxlist (list 1 2 ... 55))
  takes over 114 years
– And (bad-maxlist (list 1 2 ... 100))
  takes over 4 x 10^{15} years.
  (Our sun is predicted to die in about 5 x 10^9 years)
– Buying a faster computer won’t help much 😞

Efficient maxlist

(define (good-maxlist xs)
  (if (null? xs)
      -inf.0
      (let {{[rest-max (good-maxlist (rest xs))]}}
          (if (> (first xs) rest-max)
              (first xs)
              (rest-max)))))

The key is not to do repeated work!
– Saving recursive results in local bindings is essential…
Transforming good-maxlist

```scheme
(define (good-maxlist xs)
  (if (null? xs)
      -inf.0
      (let {([rest-max (good-maxlist (rest xs))])
          (if (> (first xs) rest-max)
              (first xs)
              rest-max)))))
```

Your turn: sumProdList

Given a list of numbers, sumProdList returns a pair of
(1) the sum of the numbers in the list and
(2) The product of the numbers in the list

- `(sumProdList '(5 2 4 3))` → (14 . 120)
- `(sumProdList '())` → (0 . 1)

Define sumProdList. Why is it a good idea to use let
in your definition?

and and or sugar

- `(and)` desugars to `#t`
- `(and e1)` desugars to `e1`
- `(and e1 ...)` desugars to `(if e1 (and ...) #f)`

- `(or)` desugars to `#f`
- `(or e1)` desugars to `e1`
- `(or e1 ...)` desugars to
  - `(let ((id1 e1))
    (if id1 id1 (or ...)))`
  where `id1` must be fresh – i.e., not used elsewhere in the program.
- Why is `let` needed in or desugaring but not `and`?
- Why must `id1` be fresh?

Scope and Lexical Contours

`scope` = area of program where declared name can be used.

Show scope in Racket via `lexical contours` in `scope diagrams`.
Declarations vs. References

A declaration introduces an identifier (variable) into a scope.

A reference is a use of an identifier (variable) within a scope.

We can box declarations, circle references, and draw a line from each reference to its declaration. Dr. Racket does this for us (except it puts ovals around both declarations and references).

An identifier (variable) reference is unbound if there is no declaration to which it refers.

Scope and Define Sugar

(begin
(define (add-n x) (+ n x))
(define (add-2n y) (add-n (add-n y)))
(define n 17)
(define (f z)
  (let {
    [c (add-2n z)]
    [d (- z 3)]
  }
    (+ z (* c d)))))

Shadowing

An inner declaration of a name shadows uses of outer declarations of the same name.

Alpha-renaming

Can consistently rename identifiers as long as it doesn’t change the connections between uses and declarations.
Scope, Free Variables, and Higher-order Functions

In a lexical contour, an identifier is a **free variable** if it is not defined by a declaration within that contour. Scope diagrams are especially helpful for understanding the meaning of free variables in higher order functions.

```
(define (make-sub n)
  (λ (x) (- x n)))
```

```
(define (map-scale factor ns)
  (map (λ (num) (* factor num)) ns)
)
```

In a lexical contour, an identifier is a free variable if it is not defined by a declaration within that contour. Scope diagrams are especially helpful for understanding the meaning of free variables in higher order functions.

```
(let {
  [a (+ 2 3)]
  [b (* 3 4)]
}(list a
  (let {
    [a (- b a)]
    [b (* a a)]
  } (list a b)))
)
```

```
(let {
  [a (+ 2 3)]
  [b (* 3 4)]
}(list a
  (let {
    [a (- b a)]
    [b (* a a)]
  } (list a b))))
```

More sugar: **let**

```
(let* {} e_body) desugars to e_body
```

```
(let* {[id1 e1] …} e_body)
desugars to (let {[id1 e1]}
  (let* {…} e_body))
```

Example:

```
(let {
  [a (+ 2 3)]
  [b (* 3 4)]
}(list a
  (let* {
    [a (- b a)]
    [b (* a a)]
  } (list a b)))
)
```

Local function bindings with **let**

- Silly example:
  ```
  (define (quad x)
    (let ([square (lambda (x) (* x x))])
      (square (square x))))
  ```

- Private helper functions bound locally = good style.
- But can’t use let for local recursion. Why not?

```
(define (up-to-broken x)
  (let {
    [between (lambda (from to)
      (if (> from to)
        null
        (cons from
          (between (+ from 1) to)))]
  } (between 1 x)))
```

Local Bindings & Scope 21

Local Bindings & Scope 22

Local Bindings & Scope 23

Local Bindings & Scope 24
letrec to the rescue!

(defun (up-to x)
  (letrec ([between (lambda (from to)
                        (if (> from to)
                          null
                          (cons from
                          (between (+ from 1) to))))]
          (between 1 x)))

In (letrec [[id1 e1] ... [idn en]] e_body),
id1 ... idn are in the scope of e1 ... en.

Even Better

(defun (up-to-better x)
  (letrec ([up-to-x (lambda (from)
                      (if (> from x)
                        null
                        (cons from
                        (up-to-x (+ from 1))))]
            (up-to-x 1)))

- Functions can use bindings in the environment where they are
  defined:
  - Bindings from "outer" environments
    - Such as parameters to the outer function
  - Earlier bindings in the let-expression
- Unnecessary parameters are usually bad style
  - Like to in previous example

Mutual Recursion with letrec

(defun (test-even-odd num)
  (letrec [{even? (lambda (x)
                      (if (= x 0)
                        #t
                        (odd? (- x 1)))}
           {odd? (lambda (y)
                      (if (= y 0)
                        #f
                        (even? (- y 1)))}
           (list (even? num) (odd? num))]
  > (test-even-odd 17)
  '(#t #f)

Exercise: let vs. let* vs. letrec

(let ([f (lambda (x) (/ x 2))]
      [g (lambda (y) (+ y 1))]
      [h (lambda (a b) (+ a b)])]
  (let ([f (lambda (y) (- y 1))]
        [g (lambda (n)
            (if (<= n 0)
              1
              (h n (g (f n)))))]
        [h (lambda (a b) (* a b))]
        (list (f 10) (g 4) (h 2 3)))))

- What is the value of the above expression?
- What is its value if the inner let is replaced by let*
- What is its value if the inner let is replace by letrec?
Local definitions are sugar for \texttt{letrec}

\begin{verbatim}
(define (up-to-alt2 x)
  (define (up-to-x from)
    (if (> from x)
      null
      (cons from
        (up-to-x (+ from 1))))
  (up-to-x 1))

(define (test-even-odd-alt num)
  (define (even? x)
    (if (= x 0) #t (not (odd? (- x 1)))))
  (define (odd? y)
    (if (= y 0) #f (not (even? (- y 1)))))
  (list (even? num) (odd? num)))
\end{verbatim}

\textbf{Nested functions: style}

- Good style to define helper functions inside the functions they help if they are:
  - Unlikely to be useful elsewhere
  - Likely to be misused if available elsewhere
  - Likely to be changed or removed later

- A fundamental trade-off in code design: reusing code saves effort and avoids bugs, but makes the reused code harder to change later

\textbf{Local Scope in other languages}

What support is there for local scope in Python? JavaScript? Java?

\textbf{Racket Language Summary So Far}

\textbf{Racket kernel declarations:}

- definitions: \texttt{(define \textit{id} \textit{E})}

\textbf{Racket kernel expressions}

- literal values (numbers, boolean, strings): e.g. 251, 3.141, #t, "Lyn"
- variable references: e.g., \texttt{x, fact, positive?, fib_n-1}
- conditionals: \texttt{(if \textit{Etest} \textit{Ethen} \textit{Eelse})}
- function values: \texttt{(lambda \{\textit{Id1} \ldots \textit{Idn}\} \textit{Ebody})}
- function calls: \texttt{(E\textit{Erator} \{\textit{Erand1} \ldots \textit{Erandn}\})}
  \textit{Note}: arithmetic and relational operations are really just function calls!
- (new) local recursion: \texttt{(letrec \{[[\textit{Id1} \textit{E1}] \ldots [\textit{Idn} \textit{En}]] \textit{Ebody})}

\textbf{Racket Syntactic Sugar}