CSE 341:
Programming Languages

Winter 2005
Lecture 13— Scheme Intro, Several Binding Forms
Scheme

• Like ML, functional focus with imperative features
  – anonymous functions, function closures, etc.
  – but every binding is mutable

• A really minimalist syntax/semantics
  – In the LISP tradition
  – Current standard is 50 pages

• Dynamically typed
  – Less “compile-time” checking
  – Accepts more perfectly reasonable programs

• Some “advanced” features for decades
  – Programs as data, hygienic macros, continuations
Which Scheme?

Scheme has a few dialects and many extensions.

We will use “PLT → Pretty Big” for the language and DrScheme as a convenient environment.

Most of what we do will be “pure Scheme”.

Exceptions are multiline comments, define-struct, and a brief foray into the MzScheme module system.
Scheme syntax

Syntactically, a Scheme term is either an atom (identifier, number, symbol, string, ...) or a sequence of terms \((t_1 \ldots t_n)\).

Note: Scheme used to get (still gets?) “paren bashed”, which is hilarious in an XML world.

Semantically, identifiers are resolved in an environment and other atoms are values.

The semantics of a sequence depends on \(t_1\):

- certain character sequences are “special forms”
- otherwise a sequence is a function application (semantics same as ML)
Some special forms

- define
- lambda
- if, cond, and, or
- let, let*, letrec
Some predefined values

- #t, #f
- (), cons, car, cdr, null?, list
- a “numeric tower” with math operations (e.g., +) defined on all of them
- tons more (strings vs. symbols discussed later)

Note: Prefix and variable-arity help make lots of things functions.
Parens Matter

Every parenthesis you write has meaning – get used to that fast!

(define (fact n) (if (= n 0) 1 (* n (fact (- n 1))))) ; correct
(define (fact n) (if (= n 0) (1) (* n (fact (- n 1))))))
(define (fact n) (if = n 0 (1) (* n (fact (- n 1))))))
(define fact (n) (if (= n 0) 1 (* n (fact (- n 1))))))
(define (fact n) (if (= n 0) 1 (* n fact (- n 1))))
(define (fact n) (if (= n 0) 1 (* n ((fact) (- n 1))))))

Local bindings

There are 3 forms of local bindings with different semantics:

• let

• let*

• letrec

Also, in function bodies, a sequence of definitions is equivalent to letrec.

But at top-level redefinition is assignment!

This makes it ghastly hard to encapsulate code, but in practice:

• people assume non-malicious clients

• implementations provide access to “real primitives”

For your homework, assume top-level definitions are immutable.