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”.

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

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”; maybe you’d prefer XML?!

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 — evaluate params, then call function)
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” (integer, rational, real, complex, number) 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.

Paren Matter

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

(\texttt{define (fact n) (if (= n 0) 1 (+ n (fact (- n 1))))) \ OK}
(\texttt{define (fact n) (if (= n 0) (1) (* n (fact (- n 1)))))}
(\texttt{define (fact n) (if = n 0 (1) (* n (fact (- n 1))))})
(\texttt{define fact (n) (if (= n 0) 1 (* n (fact (- n 1)))))}
(\texttt{define (fact n) (if (= n 0) 1 (* n fact (- n 1)))))
(\texttt{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, at front of 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.