



PAUL G. ALLEN SCHOOL  
OF COMPUTER SCIENCE & ENGINEERING

CSE341: Programming Languages

Lecture 22

OOP vs. Functional Decomposition;  
Adding Operators & Variants;  
Double-Dispatch

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# *Breaking things down*

- In functional (and procedural) programming, break programs down into *functions that perform some operation*
- In object-oriented programming, break programs down into *classes that give behavior to some kind of data*

This lecture:

- These two forms of *decomposition* are *so exactly opposite* that they are two ways of looking at the same “matrix”
- Which form is “better” is somewhat personal taste, but also depends on *how you expect to change/extend software*
- For some operations over two (multiple) arguments, functions and pattern-matching are straightforward, but with OOP we can do it with *double dispatch* (multiple dispatch)

# The expression example

Well-known and compelling example of a common *pattern*:

- Expressions for a small language
- Different variants of expressions: ints, additions, negations, ...
- Different operations to perform: `eval`, `toString`, `hasZero`, ...

Leads to a matrix (2D-grid) of variants and operations

- Implementation will involve deciding what “should happen” for each entry in the grid *regardless of the PL*

	<code>eval</code>	<code>toString</code>	<code>hasZero</code>	...
<code>Int</code>				
<code>Add</code>				
<code>Negate</code>				
...				

# Standard approach in ML

	<code>eval</code>	<code>toString</code>	<code>hasZero</code>	...
<code>Int</code>				
<code>Add</code>				
<code>Negate</code>				
...				

- Define a *datatype*, with one *constructor* for each variant
  - (No need to indicate datatypes if dynamically typed)
- “Fill out the grid” via **one function per column**
  - Each function has one branch for each column entry
  - Can combine cases (e.g., with wildcard patterns) if multiple entries in column are the same

[See the ML code]

# Standard approach in OOP

	<code>eval</code>	<code>toString</code>	<code>hasZero</code>	...
<code>Int</code>				
<code>Add</code>				
<code>Negate</code>				
...				

- Define a *class*, with one *abstract method* for each operation
  - (No need to indicate abstract methods if dynamically typed)
- Define a *subclass* for each variant
- So “fill out the grid” via **one class per row** with one method implementation for each grid position
  - Can use a method in the superclass if there is a default for multiple entries in a column

[See the Ruby and Java code]

# *A big course punchline*

	<code>eval</code>	<code>toString</code>	<code>hasZero</code>	...
<code>Int</code>				
<code>Add</code>				
<code>Negate</code>				
...				

- FP and OOP often doing the same thing in *exact* opposite way
  - Organize the program “by rows” or “by columns”
- Which is “most natural” may depend on what you are doing (e.g., an interpreter vs. a GUI) or personal taste
- Code layout is important, but there is no perfect way since software has many dimensions of structure
  - Tools, IDEs can help with multiple “views” (e.g., rows / columns)

# Extensibility

	<code>eval</code>	<code>toString</code>	<code>hasZero</code>	<code>noNegConstants</code>
<code>Int</code>				
<code>Add</code>				
<code>Negate</code>				
<code>Mult</code>				

- For implementing our grid so far, SML / Racket style usually by column and Ruby / Java style usually by row
- But beyond just style, this decision affects what (unexpected?) software *extensions* need not change old code
- **Functions** [see ML code]:
  - Easy to add a new operation, e.g., `noNegConstants`
  - Adding a new variant, e.g., `Mult` requires modifying old functions, but ML type-checker gives a to-do list if original code avoided wildcard patterns

# Extensibility

	<code>eval</code>	<code>toString</code>	<code>hasZero</code>	<code>noNegConstants</code>
<code>Int</code>				
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- For implementing our grid so far, SML / Racket style usually by column and Ruby / Java style usually by row
- But beyond just style, this decision affects what (unexpected?) software *extensions* are easy and/or do not change old code
- **Objects** [see Ruby code]:
  - Easy to add a new variant, e.g., `Mult`
  - Adding a new operation, e.g., `noNegConstants` requires modifying old classes, but Java type-checker gives a to-do list if original code avoided default methods



# *The other way is possible*

- Functions allow new operations and objects allow new variants without modifying existing code *even if they didn't plan for it*
  - Natural result of the decomposition

## *Optional:*

- Functions can support new variants somewhat awkwardly “if they plan ahead”
  - *Not explained here: Can use type constructors to make datatypes extensible and have operations take function arguments to give results for the extensions*
- Objects can support new operations somewhat awkwardly “if they plan ahead”
  - *Not explained here: The popular Visitor Pattern uses the double-dispatch pattern to allow new operations “on the side”*

# *Thoughts on Extensibility*

- Making software extensible is valuable and hard
  - If you know you want new operations, use FP
  - If you know you want new variants, use OOP
  - If both? Languages like Scala try; it's a hard problem
  - Reality: The future is often hard to predict!
- Extensibility is a double-edged sword
  - Code more reusable without being changed later
  - But makes original code more difficult to reason about locally or change later (could break extensions)
  - Often language mechanisms to make code *less* extensible (ML modules hide datatypes; Java's `final` prevents subclassing/overriding)

# Binary operations

	<code>eval</code>	<code>toString</code>	<code>hasZero</code>	...
<code>Int</code>				
<code>Add</code>				
<code>Negate</code>				
...				

- Situation is more complicated if an operation is defined over multiple arguments that can have different variants
  - Can arise in original program or after extension
- Function decomposition deals with this much more simply...

# Example

To show the issue:

- Include variants **String** and **Rational**
- (Re)define **Add** to work on any pair of **Int**, **String**, **Rational**
  - Concatenation if either argument a **String**, else math

Now just defining the addition operation is a *different* 2D grid:

	<b>Int</b>	<b>String</b>	<b>Rational</b>
<b>Int</b>			
<b>String</b>			
<b>Rational</b>			

# ML Approach

Addition is different for most `Int`, `String`, `Rational` combinations

- Run-time error for non-value expressions

Natural approach: pattern-match on the pair of values

- For *commutative* possibilities, can re-call with `(v2, v1)`

```
fun add_values (v1,v2) =
  case (v1,v2) of
    (Int i, Int j) => Int (i+j)
  | (Int i, String s) => String (Int.toString i ^ s)
  | (Int i, Rational(j,k)) => Rational (i*k+j,k)
  | (Rational _, Int _) => add_values (v2,v1)
  | ... (* 5 more cases (3*3 total): see the code *)

fun eval e =
  case e of
    ...
  | Add(e1,e2) => add_values (eval e1, eval e2)
```

# Example

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Now just defining the addition operation is a *different* 2D grid:

	<b>Int</b>	<b>String</b>	<b>Rational</b>
<b>Int</b>			
<b>String</b>			
<b>Rational</b>			

Worked just fine with functional decomposition — what about OOP...

# What about OOP?

Starts promising:

- Use OOP to call method `add_values` to one value with other value as result

```
class Add
  ...
  def eval
    e1.eval.add_values e2.eval
  end
end
```

Classes `Int`, `MyString`, `MyRational` then all implement

- Each handling 3 of the 9 cases: “add `self` to argument”

```
class Int
  ...
  def add_values v
    ... # what goes here?
  end
end
```

# First try

- This approach is common, but is “not as OOP”
  - *So do not do it on your homework*

```
class Int
  def add_values v
    if v.is_a? Int
      Int.new(v.i + i)
    elsif v.is_a? MyRational
      MyRational.new(v.i+v.j*i,v.j)
    else
      MyString.new(v.s + i.to_s)
    end
  end
end
```

- A “hybrid” style where we used dynamic dispatch on 1 argument and then switched to Racket-style type tests for other argument
  - Definitely not “full OOP”



## *Another way...*

- `add_values` method in `Int` needs “what kind of thing” `v` has
  - Same problem in `MyRational` and `MyString`
- In OOP, “always” solve this by calling a method on `v` instead!
- But now we need to “tell” `v` “what kind of thing” `self` is
  - We know that!
  - “Tell” `v` by calling different methods on `v`, passing `self`
- Use a “programming trick” (?) called *double-dispatch*...

# Double-dispatch “trick”

- `Int`, `MyString`, and `MyRational` each define all of `addInt`, `addString`, and `addRational`
  - For example, `String`'s `addInt` is for concatenating an integer argument to the string in `self`
  - 9 total methods, one for each case of addition
- `Add`'s `eval` method calls `e1.eval.add_values e2.eval`, which dispatches to `add_values` in `Int`, `String`, or `Rational`
  - `Int`'s `add_values: v.addInt self`
  - `MyString`'s `add_values: v.addString self`
  - `MyRational`'s `add_values: v.addRational self`So `add_values` performs “2nd dispatch” to the correct case of 9!

[Definitely see the code]

# *Why showing you this*

- Honestly, partly to belittle full commitment to OOP
- To understand dynamic dispatch via a sophisticated idiom
- Because required for the homework
- To contrast with *multimethods* (optional)

## *Works in Java too*

- In a statically typed language, double-dispatch works fine
  - Just need all the dispatch methods in the type

```
abstract class Value extends Exp {
    abstract Value add_values(Value other);
    abstract Value addInt(Int other);
    abstract Value addString(Strng other);
    abstract Value addRational(Rational other);
}
class Int extends Value { ... }
class Strng extends Value { ... }
class Rational extends Value { ... }
```

[See Java code]

# *Being Fair*

Belittling OOP style for requiring the manual trick of double dispatch is somewhat unfair...

What would work better:

- **Int**, **MyString**, and **MyRational** each define three methods all named **add\_values**
  - One **add\_values** takes an **Int**, one a **MyString**, one a **MyRational**
  - So 9 total methods named **add\_values**
  - **e1.eval.add\_values e2.eval** picks the right one of the 9 at run-time using the classes of the two arguments
- Such a semantics is called *multimethods* or *multiple dispatch*

# *Multimethods*

General idea:

- Allow multiple methods with same name
- Indicate which ones take instances of which classes
- Use dynamic dispatch on arguments in addition to receiver to pick which method is called

If dynamic dispatch is essence of OOP, this is more OOP

- No need for awkward manual multiple-dispatch

Downside: Interaction with subclassing can produce situations where there is “no clear winner” for which method to call

# *Ruby: Why not?*

Multimethods a bad fit (?) for Ruby because:

- Ruby places no restrictions on what is passed to a method
- Ruby never allows methods with the same name
  - Same name means overriding/replacing

# Java/C#/C++: Why not?

- Yes, Java/C#/C++ allow multiple methods with the same name
- No, these language do *not* have multimethods
  - They have *static overloading*
  - Uses static types of arguments to choose the method
    - But of course run-time class of receiver [odd hybrid?]
  - No help in our example, so still code up double-dispatch manually
- Actually, C# 4.0 has a way to get effect of multimethods
- Many other language have multimethods (e.g., Clojure)
  - They are not a new idea