

# CSE-505: Programming Languages

## Lecture 26 — Classless OOP

Zach Tatlock  
2015

# Classless OOP

OOP gave us code-reuse via inheritance and extensibility via late-binding

Can we throw out classes and still get OOP? Yes

Can it have a type system that prevents “no match found” and “no best match” errors? Yes, but we won't get there

This is mind-opening stuff if you've never seen it

*Will make up syntax as we go...*

## Make objects directly

Everything is an object. You can make objects directly:

```
let p = [  
  field x = 7;  
  field y = 9;  
  right_quad(){ x.gt(0) && y.gt(0) } // cf. 0.lte(y)  
]
```

p now bound to an object

- ▶ Can invoke its methods and read/write its fields

No classes: Constructors are easy to encode

```
let make_pt = [  
  doit(x0,y0) { [ field x=x0; field y=y0;... ] }  
]
```

## Inheritance and Override

Building objects from scratch won't get us late-binding and code reuse. Here's the trick:

- ▶ `clone` method produces a (shallow) copy of an object
- ▶ method “slots” can be mutable

```
let o1 = [ // still have late-binding
  odd(x)  {if x.eq(0) then false else self.even(x-1)}
  even(x) {if x.eq(0) then true  else self.odd(x-1) }
]
let o2 = o1.clone()
o2.even(x) := {(x.mod(2)).eq(0)}
```

Language doesn't grow: just methods and mutable “slots”  
Can use for constructors too: `clone` and `assign` fields

## Extension

But that trick doesn't work to add slots to an object, a common use of subclassing

Having something like “extend e1 (x=e2)” that mutates e1 to have a new slot is problematic semantically (what if e1 has a slot named x) and for efficiency (may not be room where e1 is allocated)

Instead, we can build a new object with a *special parent slot*:  
[parent=e1; x=e2]

parent is very special because definition of method-lookup (*the* issue in OO) depends on it (else this isn't inheritance)

## Method Lookup

To find the *m* method of *o*:

- ▶ Look for a slot named *m*
- ▶ If not found, look in object held in parent slot

But we still have late-binding: for method in parent slot, we still have `self` refer to the original *o*.

Two *inequivalent* ways to define `parent=e1`:

- ▶ Delegation: `parent` refers to result of `e1`
- ▶ Embedding: `parent` refers to result of `e1.clone()`

Mutation of result of `e1` (or its parent or grandparent or ...) exposes the difference

- ▶ We'll assume delegation

## Oh so flexible

Delegation is way more flexible (and simple!) (and dangerous!) than class-based OO: The object being delegated to is usually used like a class, but its slots may be mutable

- ▶ Assigning to a slot in a delegated object changes every object that delegates to it (transitively)
  - ▶ Clever change-propagation but as dangerous as globals and arguably more subtle?
- ▶ Assigning to a parent slot is “dynamic inheritance” — changes where slots are inherited from

Classes restrict what you can do and how you think, e.g., never thinking of clever run-time modifications of inheritance

## Javascript: A Few Notes

- ▶ Javascript gives assignment “extension” semantics if field not already there. Implementations use indirection (hashtables).
- ▶ *parent* is called *prototype*
- ▶ `new F(...)` creates a new object *o*, calls *F* with `this` bound to *o*, and returns *o*
  - ▶ No special notion of constructor
  - ▶ Functions are objects too
  - ▶ This isn't quite prototype-based inheritance, but can code it up:

```
function inheritFrom(o) {  
    function F() {}  
    F.prototype = o;  
    return new F();  
}
```

- ▶ No `clone` (depending on version), but can copy fields explicitly



## Rarely what you want

We have the essence of OOP in a tiny language with more flexibility than we usually want

Avoid it via careful coding idioms:

- ▶ Create *trait/abstract* objects: Just immutable methods
  - ▶ Analogous role to virtual-method tables
- ▶ Extend with *prototype/template* objects: Add mutable fields but don't mutate them
  - ▶ Analogous role to classes
- ▶ Clone prototypes to create *concrete/normal* objects
  - ▶ Analogous role to objects (clone is constructor)

Traits can extend other traits and prototypes other prototypes

- ▶ Analogous to subclassing

## Coming full circle

This idiom is so important, it's worth having a type system that enforces it

For example, a template object cannot have its members accessed (except clone)

We end up getting close to classes, but from first principles and still allowing the full flexibility when you want it