

**CS321 F'04 Lecture Notes**  
**Lecture 3**

# Evaluating Programming Languages

How can we judge or compare languages?

## Expressiveness

- Technically not interesting; nearly all languages are “Turing-complete.”

## Appropriateness to domain

- Scientific (numerical) computing
- Business applications
- Artificial intelligence
- Systems programming
- etc.

## High-level goals for code

- Easily readable
- Easily writable
- Maintainable
- Efficient

## Goals for languages

- Simplicity
- Uniformity (orthogonality)
- Modularity
- Clean syntax
- Maximizes explicit structure
- Clear execution model
- Efficient implementation model

## **Costs affected by programming language choice**

Execution speed (& space)

Development time

- Program writing
- Compilation, testing, debugging
- (Training)

Maintenance time

- Program reading

## **Factors affecting programming language choice**

Costs (as above)

Availability of implementations

Availability of trained programmers (should this matter?)

Politics

Inertia

# **FORTRAN** **1954-58** **John Backus (IBM)**

Domain: Numerical computation

Features:

- Arithmetic expressions (evaluated using stack)
- Statements
- Bounded arrays
- Iterative control structures
- Subroutines (no recursion; call-by-reference; separate compilation (in FORTRAN II))
- Common blocks (and EQUIVALENCE declarations)
- I/O using FORMAT directives

Implementation model:

- Fixed run-time storage requirements
- Optimization of numerical computations

Still used very widely: FORTRAN IV, FORTRAN 77, FORTRAN 90, HPF

## **ALGOL 60**

**1957-60 Committee**  
(incl. Backus, McCarthy, Naur)

Domain: Numerical computation

Features:

- Carefully defined by “report”

Syntax defined with BNF

- Block structure (stack-based implementation)
- Recursive subroutines
- Explicit type declarations
- Scope rules and dynamic lifetimes
- Relational & boolean expressions
- Call-by-value & call-by-name
- Dynamic Array Bounds

Never widely used in US; somewhat used in Europe.

Very influential on later languages.

“An improvement on nearly all its successors.” – Hoare

**Cobol** **1959-61** **DOD-led committee**

Domain: Business data processing

Features:

- Separate data description
- Record data structures
- File description/ manipulation
- English-language-like syntax (“Syntactic sugar”)
- Early standardization

Still used very widely.

**Ada** **1977-83** **DOD-sponsored committee**  
(Ichbiah)

Domain: Everything, but especially embedded systems.

Features:

- Focus on reliability, safety.
- Real-time control and multiprocessing.
- Programming support environments.
- Very large and verbose language.

Was mandated for much DOD work, but no more. Ada95 added object-oriented features.

**Pascal Family****1971- Niklaus Wirth**

Pascal 1971

Domain: General-purpose programming, education.

- Simplicity of language and implementation
- Rich type definition facility
- Structured programming methodology
- Suitable for proving programs correct

**Modula-2****1979-81**

- Modules for abstraction
- Systems programming facilities
- Procedure types

**Oberon, Oberon-2****1988-90, 1992**

- Further simplification!
- Addition of object-oriented features.

**Modula-3****1988-89**

- Separate development by DEC SRC.

## **C** **1972-74** **Dennis Ritchie (Bell Labs)**

Domain: Systems Programming; hacking of all kinds.

Implementation language for UNIX kernel and utilities

- Rich set of operators
- Terse syntax
- Easy machine access

Very successful; widely used in engineering and education

Standardized as **ANSI C**

## **C++** **1980-** **Bjarne Stroustrup**

Domain: As C.

- Extended version of C.
- Direct support for abstract data types
- Object-oriented programming
- Large and very complex language

Used very widely.

## **Java** **1995- Arnold & Gosling (Sun)**

Domain: Internet applet programming; as C++.

- Cut-down, cleaned-up version of C++.
- Automatic heap storage management (garbage collection).
- Type-safety and runtime memory security.
- Portable runtime environment (Java Virtual Machine).

Wildly hyped for network applications; may or may not take over C++ territory.

## **C#** **2001- Microsoft**

- Very similar to Java (though supposedly independent).
- Common Language Runtime environment intended to support multiple source languages.



## Visual Basic

1990's Microsoft

Domain: Customizing and extending MS Windows-based office and COM applications.

- Very loosely based on BASIC language developed in early '60's.
- Programs (especially user-interfaces) usually built using interactive **visual** program development environment.
- Often used to “glue” together existing code components.
- Supports rapid, “one-off” prototyping and large-scale system development.
- Conventional procedural language.
- Dynamic typing.
- Supports COM objects.

Used very widely in Microsoft environments.