CS321 Languages and Compiler Design I

Fall 2010

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

Choosing a programming language

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 (still widely used)

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

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, but 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

Many, many lines of code are probably still in wide use.

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, Modula-3 **ca. 1990**

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**

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.

OBJECT-ORIENTED LANGUAGES

Simula-67 **1967** **Kristen Nygaard and Ole-Johan Dahl**

- Discrete event simulations

Smalltalk **1972-** **Alan Kay (Xerox PARC)**

- Graphical user interfaces
- Everything is an object
- Unusual message-sending syntax

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

- Extended version of C.
- Vehicle for main-stream adoption of OOP.
- Direct support for abstract data types
- Large and very complex language
- Used very widely.

SAFER OBJECT-ORIENTED PROGRAMMING

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

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

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

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

LISP AND FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGES

LISP **1959-60** **John McCarthy (MIT)**

Domain: Artificial intelligence; symbolic computing

- List processing
- "First-class" functions
- Extremely simple program syntax; programs manipulate programs
- Dynamic typing

Many variants, including **Common Lisp**, **Scheme**; also related to

Standard ML, Caml **1981-** **Robin Milner, et al.**

- Static but flexible typing
- Rich, orthogonal type system
- Module support

Haskell **1987-** **Academic Committee**

- Lazy (demand-driven) evaluation
- No side effects

SCRIPTING LANGUAGES

Domain: Glueing components, system admin, HTML generation, etc.

Perl **1987- Larry Wall**

- C-like syntax
- Static typing
- Dynamically-sized and associative arrays

JavaScript **1995- Netscape,Sun**

- Brower-side HTML generation, input validation
- Dynamically-typed, limited OOP support

PHP **1994- Rasmus Lersdorf**

- Server-side HTML generation, DBMS integration

Python **1990- Guido von Rossum**

- Rich built-in support for lists, tuples, dictionaries
- OOP support
- Interpreter can be extended with compiled libraries

Ruby **1993- Yukihiro Matsumoto**

- Pure OOP