

# **SOME HISTORY OF FUNCTIONAL PROGRAMMING LANGUAGES**

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# MILESTONES

$\lambda$  calculus (Church 1936, 1941)

LISP (McCarthy 1960), ALGOL 60

ISWIM (Landin 1966)

SASL (1973...) & KRC

Edinburgh - NPL, early ML, HOPE

Miranda

Haskell

The  $\lambda$ -calculus (Church 1936, 1941) is a typeless theory of pure functions with three rules

$$[\alpha] \quad \lambda x.A \Leftrightarrow \lambda y.[y/x]A$$

$$[\beta] \quad (\lambda x.B) A \Rightarrow [A/x]B$$

$$[\eta] \quad (\lambda x.A x) \Rightarrow A \quad \text{if } x \text{ not free in } A$$

There are functional representations of natural numbers and other data.

1) Church-Rosser theorem

$$A \Rightarrow B, A \Rightarrow B' \supset B \Rightarrow C, B' \Rightarrow C$$

implies normal forms unique (upto  $\alpha$ -conversion)

2) Second Church-Rosser theorem: repeatedly reducing leftmost redex is normalising

3) Böhm's theorem:

if  $A, B$  have distinct  $\beta, \eta$ -normal forms there is a context  $C[]$  with  $C[A] \Rightarrow \lambda xy.x, C[B] \Rightarrow \lambda xy.y$

Implies  $\alpha, \beta, \eta$ -conversion is the strongest possible equational theory on normalising terms

## Lazy Evaluation

2nd Church-Rosser theorem: to find normal form we must in general substitute actual parameters into function bodies *unreduced* (lazy evaluation).

Call-by-value is an *incorrect reduction strategy* for  $\lambda$ -calculus, but efficient because the actual parameter is reduced only once! Used from 1960.

Thesis of Wadsworth (1971) showed that the efficiency disadvantage of normal order reduction can be overcome by *graph reduction* on  $\lambda$ -terms.

Turner (1979) compiled a  $\lambda$ -calculus based language, SASL, to S,K combinators (Curry 1958) and did *graph reduction on combinators*.

Johnsson (1985) extracts program specific combinators from source ( $\lambda$ -lifting) to compile code for graph reduction on stock hardware.

Further developed by Simon Peyton Jones (1992) to Spineless Tagless G-machine which underlies the Glasgow Haskell compiler, GHC.

# LISP

McCarthy 1960 (developed from 1958)

Computation over symbolic data: formed from atoms by pairing; S-expressions can represent lists, trees and graphs.

S-expressions are of variable size and can outlive the procedure that creates them - requires a heap and a garbage collector.

The M-language manipulates S-expressions: has *cons*, *car*, *cdr*, tests, conditional expressions and recursion. This is computationally complete.

McCarthy showed an arbitrary flowchart can be coded as mutually recursive functions.

M-language is first order, cannot pass a function as argument or return as result. McCarthy's model was Kleene's theory of recursive functions.

M-language programs are coded as S-expressions and interpreted by *eval*. Allows meta-programming, by uses of *eval* and *quote*.

## Some myths about LISP

“Pure LISP” never existed - LISP had assignment and *goto* before it had conditional expressions and recursion. LISP programmers made frequent use of *replacar* and *replacd*.

LISP was not based on the  $\lambda$  calculus, despite using the word “lambda” to denote functions. Based on first order recursion equations.

The M-language was first order, but you could pass a function as a parameter by quotation, i.e. as the S-expression for its code. But this gives the wrong binding rules for free variables (dynamic instead of lexicographic).

If a function has a free variable, e.g.  $y$  in

$$f = \lambda x . x + y$$

$y$  should be bound to the value in scope for  $y$  where  $f$  is defined, not where  $f$  is called.

Not until SCHEME (Sussman 1975) did versions of LISP with static binding appear. Today all versions of LISP are  $\lambda$ -calculus based.

## Static binding and the invention of closures

Algol 60 allowed textually nested procedures and passing procedures as parameters (but not returning procedures as results). Algol 60 Report required static binding of free variables.

Randell and Russell (1964) implemented this by two sets of links between stack frames. The *dynamic chain* linked each stack frame, representing a function call, to the frame that called it. The *static chain* linked each stack frame to that of the textually containing function call, which might be much further down the stack. Free variables are accessed via the static chain.

If functions can be returned as results, a free variable might be held onto after the function call in which it was created has returned, and will no longer be present on the stack.

Landin (1964) solved this in his SECD machine. A function is represented by a ***closure***, consisting of code for the function plus an environment for its free variables. *Closures live in the heap.*

# ISWIM

In early 60's Peter Landin wrote a series of seminal papers on the relationship between programming languages and  $\lambda$  calculus.

"*The next 700 programming languages*"(1966) describes a language family (choose constants and basic operators). Key ideas:

syntactic sugar: ***let, rec, and, where***  
so we can say e.g.

*expr where f x = stuff and g y = other stuff*  
instead of writing  $\lambda$ -terms and an  
offside rule for nested block structure

- + Assignment
- + J operator - allows a program to capture its own continuation (see also Landin 1965).

ISWIM = sugared  $\lambda$  + assignment + control

PAL (Evans 1968) used for teaching at MIT was inspired by ISWIM (had first class labels) runtime typing

## SASL - St Andrews Static Language

I left Oxford in 1972 for a lectureship at St Andrews and gave a course on programming language theory in the Autumn term.

During that course I invented a simple notation based on the applicative subset of PAL. Tony Davie implemented it in LISP then I implemented it BCPL by an SECD machine (Easter 1973).

Two changes from applicative PAL

- multi-level pattern matching
- string as list of char

SASL was and remained purely applicative

call by value, runtime typing, **let** and **rec** (no  $\lambda$ )  
curried functions with left associative appln

data types: int, truthvalue, char, list, function  
all data types had same rights

Used for teaching functional programming,  
instead of LISP.

## Advantages of SASL over LISP for teaching fp

- 1) pure sugaring of  $\lambda$  calculus, with no imperative features and no eval/quote distractions
- 2) has correct scope rules for free variables (static binding)
- 3) multi-level pattern matching makes for huge improvement in readability

### LISP

```
cons(cons(car(car(x))),cons(car(car(cdr(x))),nil)),  
      cons(cons(car(cdr(car(x)))),cons(car(cdr(car(cdr(  
x))))),nil)),nil))
```

becomes

***let ((a,b),(c,d)) = x in ((a,c),(b,d))***

in 1973 SASL was probably unique in these properties

## Why dynamic typing?

LISP and other languages for computation over symbolic data worked on lists, trees and graphs.

This requires structural polymorphism - a function which reverses a list, or traverses a tree, doesn't need to know the type of the elements.

Before Milner (1978) the only way to handle this was to delay type checking until run time.

### SASL example

let  $f$  be a curried function of unknown number of Boolean arguments, we want to test if it is a tautology.

$\text{taut } f = \text{boolean } f \rightarrow f ;$   
 $\quad \quad \quad \text{taut } (f \text{ True}) \& \text{taut } (f \text{ False})$

runtime typing still has followers - Erlang, LISP

## evolution of SASL 1973-83

dropped **rec** allowing recursion as default,  
switched from **let** to **where**

in 1976 SASL became lazy and added multi-equation pattern matching for case analysis

$$\text{ack } 0 \ n = n+1$$

$$\text{ack } m \ 0 = \text{ack } (m-1) \ 1$$

$$\text{ack } m \ n = \text{ack } (m-1) \ (\text{ack } m \ (n-1))$$

I got this idea from John Darlington

implemented at St Andrews in 1976 by lazy version of SECD machine (Burge 1975)

at Kent in 1977 reimplemented by translation to SK combinators and combinator graph reduction

added floats and ***list comprehensions*** - with lazy lists these become very powerful

# SASL sites, circa 1986

California Institute of Technology, Pasadena  
City University, London  
Clemson University, South Carolina  
Iowa State U. of Science and Technology  
St Andrews University  
Texas A & M University  
Universite de Montreal  
University College London  
University of Adelaide  
University of British Columbia  
University of Colorado at Denver  
University of Edinburgh  
University of Essex  
University of Groningen, Netherlands  
University of Kent  
University of Nijmegen, Netherlands  
University of Oregon, Eugene  
University of Puerto Rico  
University of Texas at Austin  
University of Ulster, Coleraine  
University of Warwick  
University of Western Ontario  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
University of Wollongong

MCC Corporation, Austin Texas  
Systems Development Corporation, Pennsylvania  
**Burroughs Corporation**

(24 educational + 3 commercial)

## Advantages of laziness

Consistent with Church 1941 - second Church Rosser theorem

supports equational reasoning

allows programming with  $\infty$  data structures and interactive I/O using lazy lists

renders exotic control structures unnecessary

- lazy lists replace coroutines
- list of successes method replaces backtracking

the list of successes method is in my 1976 SASL manual, but didn't have a name until Wadler 1985

## KRC

KRC was a miniaturised version of SASL developed for teaching in 1979-1980, very simple, it had only top level equations (no **where**) and a built in line editor

An important change - replaced conditional expressions by equations with guards

$$\begin{aligned} \text{sign } x &= 1, & x > 0 \\ &= -1, & x < 0 \\ &= 0, & x == 0 \end{aligned}$$

Combining pattern matching with guards gives significant gain in expressiveness

KRC also introduced list comprehensions

Described in Turner (1982) See **krc-lang.org** for papers and resurrected software

## Edinburgh (1970's)

Burstall (1969) extends ISWIM with syntax for algebraic data types and *case* expressions

*type tree*

*niltree : tree*

*node : atom x tree x tree → tree*

*case exp of pat<sub>1</sub> : exp<sub>1</sub>; ... pat<sub>n</sub> : exp<sub>n</sub>;*

Darlington's **NPL** (1973-5) introduced multi-equation function defs over algebraic types

$$fib(0) \Leftarrow 1$$

$$fib(1) \Leftarrow 1$$

$$fib(n+2) \Leftarrow fib(n+1) + fib(n)$$

NPL also had “set expressions”

*setofeven(X) ≜ <: n : n in X & even(n) :>*

NPL was used for work on program transformation (Burstall & Darlington 1977)  
first order, static typing, pure, call-by-value

NPL evolved into **HOPE** (1980) higher order, strongly typed with explicit types, polymorphic type variables, purely functional - kept multi-equation p/m but dropped set expressions

also in Edinburgh (1973-78) **ML** developed as meta-language of Edinburgh LCF (Gordon et al 1979) this had

$\lambda$  **let letrec** + references

types built using + x and type recursion  
also type abstraction

call-by-value, no pattern matching, structures analysed by conditionals and e.g. *isl*, *isr*

polymorphic typing with ***type inference***

**Standard ML** (1984-8) is confluence of HOPE and ML streams, but not pure — has references and exceptions, ref Milner et al. (1990)

# Miranda

Developed in 1983-86 Miranda is SASL/KRC plus algebraic data types and static polymorphic type discipline of Milner (1978)

*tree* \* ::= *Leaf* \* | *Node* (*tree* \*) (*tree* \*)

*maptree* :: (\* → \*\*) → *tree* \* → *tree* \*\*

*zip3* :: [\*] → [\*\*] → [\*\*\*] → [(\*, \*\*, \*\*\*)]

Miranda introduced a lexical distinction between variables and constructors, to distinguish pattern matching from function definition

*Node* *x* *y* = *stuff*

is pattern match, binds *x*, *y* to parts of *stuff* but

*foo* *x* *y* = *stuff*

defines a function *foo* of two arguments

Combining guards with *where* requires a change to scope rules

```
foo a b c = exp1, if test1  
           = exp2, if test2  
           = exp3, if test3  
           where  
           definitions
```

The scope of *definitions* is the whole rhs

Miranda is lazy, purely functional, has list comprehensions, polymorphism with type inference and optional type specifications - see “An Overview of Miranda” (Turner, 1986)

Miranda was first released in 1985 (compiler to SK combinators) with subsequent releases in 1987, 1989. Quite widely used until mid-90’s

Papers and source code at ***miranda.org.uk***

## Haskell

Has many similarities to Miranda, the two most immediately noticeable changes are

Switched guards to left hand side of equations

$$\begin{aligned} \text{sign } x \mid x > 0 &= 1 \\ \mid x < 0 &= -1 \\ \mid x == 0 &= 0 \end{aligned}$$

Extended the variable/constructor distinction to types, with lower case tvars, upper case tcons

*data Tree a = Leaf a | Node (Tree a) (Tree a)*

*maptree :: (a → b) → (Tree a) → (Tree b)*

*zip4 :: [a] → [b] → [c] → [d] → [(a,b,c,d)]*

Almost everything in Miranda is present in Haskell but Haskell has a richer syntax - guards and conditional expressions, **let** and **where**, pattern matching by equations and **case** exprs

and major new features

***type classes, monadic I/O, nested modules***

## Tautology in Haskell

```
class Taut a where  
  taut :: a -> Bool
```

```
instance Taut Bool where  
  taut b = b
```

```
instance Taut a => Taut (Bool -> a) where --problem here  
  taut f = taut (f True) && taut (f False)
```

### To compile needs

```
ghc -XFlexibleInstances
```

## Tautology in SASL

```
taut f = boolean f → f ;  
        taut (f True) & taut (f False)
```

An early meeting of what became the Haskell committee drew up a set of principles including

*...It should be based on ideas that enjoy a wide consensus*

Type classes based on Wadler & Blott (1989) are an evident exception – powerful but add a great deal of complexity to the language

A language is **coherent** if the computational behaviour of a term is independent of its type

Example:-      $[] ++ [] = > []$

Haskell is not coherent, by design

```
> n = 1  
> p = length (show n)
```

by default,  $p == 1$

if we add specification  $n :: \text{Float}$ , we get  $p == 3$   
with  $n :: \text{Rational}$ , we get  $p == 5$

The issue is overloaded constants,  $1$  is overloaded to mean  $1.0$  at  $\text{Float}$ ,  $1\%1$  at  $\text{Rational}$  ...

See Odersky, Wadler & Wehr “*A second look at overloading*” FPCA 1995 for an alternative.

# A Haskell oddity

```
> take 7 "cakes"  
"cakes"  
  
> take (10^100) "cakes"  
> []
```

Haskell has two types *Int* and *Integer*

*take* :: *Int* → [*a*] → [*a*]

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