# (How to Write a (Lisp) Interpreter (in Python))

This page has two purposes: to describe how to implement computer language interpreters in general, and in particular to build an interpreter for most of the *Scheme* dialect of Lisp using Python 3 as the implementation language. I call my language and interpreter *Lispy* (**lis.py**). Years ago, I showed how to write a semi-practical Scheme interpreter Java and in in Common Lisp). This time around the goal is to demonstrate, as concisely and simply as possible, what Alan Kay called "*Maxwell's Equations of Software*."

Why does this matter? As Steve Yegge said, *"If you don't know how compilers work, then you don't know how computers work."* Yegge describes 8 problems that can be solved with compilers (or equally well with interpreters, or with Yegge's typical heavy dosage of cynicism).

## Syntax and Semantics of Scheme Programs

The *syntax* of a language is the arrangement of characters to form correct statements or expressions; the *semantics* is the meaning of those statements or expressions. For example, in the language of mathematical expressions (and in many programming languages), the syntax for adding one plus two is "1 + 2" and the semantics is the application of the addition operation to the two numbers, yielding the value 3. We say we are *evaluating* an expression when we determine its value; we would say that "1 + 2" evaluates to 3, and write that as "1 + 2" ⇒ 3.

Scheme syntax is different from most other programming languages. Consider:

**Java**

```
if (x.val() > 0) {
  return fn(A[i] + 3 * i,
            new String[] {"one", "two"});
}
```

**Scheme**

```
(if (> (val x) 0)
    (fn (+ (aref A i) (* 3 i))
        (quote (one two)))
```

Java has a wide variety of syntactic conventions (keywords, infix operators, three kinds of brackets, operator precedence, dot notation, quotes, commas, semicolons), but Scheme syntax is much simpler:

- Scheme programs consist solely of *expressions*. There is no statement/expression distinction.
- Numbers (e.g. `1`) and symbols (e.g. `A`) are called *atomic expressions*; they cannot be broken into pieces. These are similar to their Java counterparts, except that in Scheme, operators such as `+` and `>` are symbols too, and are treated the same way as `A` and `fn`.
- Everything else is a *list expression*: a "(", followed by zero or more expressions, followed by a ")". The first element of the list determines what it means:
  - A list starting with a keyword, e.g. `(if ...)`, is a *special form*; the meaning depends on the keyword.
  - A list starting with a non-keyword, e.g. `(fn ...)`, is a function call.

The beauty of Scheme is that the full language only needs 5 keywords and 8 syntactic forms. In comparison, Python has 33 keywords and 110 syntactic forms, and Java has 50 keywords and 133 syntactic forms. All those parentheses may seem intimidating, but Scheme syntax has the virtues of simplicity and consistency. (Some have joked that "Lisp" stands for "*Lots of Irritating Silly Parentheses*"; I think it stand for "*Lisp Is Syntactically Pure*".)

In this page we will cover all the important points of the Scheme language and its interpretation (omitting some minor details), but we will take two steps to get there, defining a simplified language first, before defining the near-full Scheme language.

# Language 1: Lispy Calculator

*Lispy Calculator* is a subset of Scheme using only five syntactic forms (two atomic, two special forms, and the procedure call). Lispy Calculator lets you do any computation you could do on a typical calculator—as long as you are comfortable with prefix notation. And you can do two things that are not offered in typical calculator languages: "if" expressions, and the definition of new variables. Here's an example program, that computes the area of a circle of radius 10, using the formula $\pi\ r^2$:

```
(define r 10)
(* pi (* r r))
```

Here is a table of all the allowable expressions:

| Expression | Syntax | Semantics and Example |
|---|---|---|
| variable reference | *symbol* | A symbol is interpreted as a variable name; its value is the variable's value.<br>Example: `r` ⇒ `10` (assuming `r` was previously defined to be 10) |
| constant literal | *number* | A number evaluates to itself.<br>Examples: `12` ⇒ `12` *or* `-3.45e+6` ⇒ `-3.45e+6` |
| conditional | (`if` *test conseq alt*) | Evaluate *test*; if true, evaluate and return *conseq*; otherwise *alt*.<br>Example: `(if (> 10 20) (+ 1 1) (+ 3 3))` ⇒ `6` |
| definition | (`define` *symbol exp*) | Define a new variable and give it the value of evaluating the expression *exp*.<br>Examples: `(define r 10)` |
| procedure call | (*proc arg...*) | If *proc* is anything other than one of the symbols `if`, `define`, or `quote` then it is treated as a procedure. Evaluate *proc* and all the *args*, and then the procedure is applied to the list of *arg* values.<br>Example: `(sqrt (* 2 8))` ⇒ `4.0` |

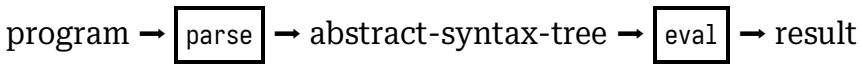
In the Syntax column of this table, *symbol* must be a symbol, *number* must be an integer or floating point number, and the other italicized words can be any expression. The notation *arg...* means zero or more repetitions of *arg*.

# What A Language Interpreter Does

A language interpreter has two parts:

1. **Parsing:** The parsing component takes an input program in the form of a sequence of characters, verifies it according to the *syntactic rules* of the language, and translates the program into an internal representation. In a simple interpreter the internal representation is a tree structure (often called an *abstract syntax tree*) that closely mirrors the nested structure of statements or expressions in the program. In a language translator called a *compiler* there is often a series of internal representations, starting with an abstract syntax tree, and progressing to a sequence of instructions that can be directly executed by the computer. The Lispy parser is implemented with the function `parse`.
2. **Execution:** The internal representation is then processed according to the *semantic rules* of the language, thereby carrying out the computation. Lispy's execution function is called `eval` (note this shadows Python's built-in function of the same name).

Here is a picture of the interpretation process:




And here is a short example of what we want `parse` and `eval` to be able to do (`begin` evaluates each expression in order and returns the final one):

```
>> program = "(begin (define r 10) (* pi (* r r)))"

>>> parse(program)
['begin', ['define', 'r', 10], ['*', 'pi', ['*', 'r', 'r']]]

>>> eval(parse(program))
314.1592653589793
```

# Type Definitions

Let's be explicit about our representations for Scheme objects:

```
Symbol = str              # A Scheme Symbol is implemented as a Python str
Number = (int, float)     # A Scheme Number is implemented as a Python int or float
Atom   = (Symbol, Number) # A Scheme Atom is a Symbol or Number
List   = list             # A Scheme List is implemented as a Python list
Exp    = (Atom, List)     # A Scheme expression is an Atom or List
Env    = dict             # A Scheme environment (defined below)
                          # is a mapping of {variable: value}
```

# Parsing: `parse`, `tokenize` and `read_from_tokens`

Parsing is traditionally separated into two parts: *lexical analysis*, in which the input character string is broken up into a sequence of *tokens*, and *syntactic analysis*, in which the tokens are assembled into an abstract syntax tree. The Lispy tokens are parentheses, symbols, and numbers. There are many tools for lexical analysis (such as Mike Lesk and Eric Schmidt's lex), but for now we'll use a very simple tool: Python's `str.split`. The function `tokenize` takes as input a string of characters; it adds spaces around each paren, and then calls `str.split` to get a list of tokens:

```
def tokenize(chars: str) -> list:
    "Convert a string of characters into a list of tokens."
    return chars.replace('(', ' ( ').replace(')', ' ) ').split()
```

Here we apply tokenize to our sample program:

```
>>> program = "(begin (define r 10) (* pi (* r r)))"
>>> tokenize(program)
['(', 'begin', '(', 'define', 'r', '10', ')', '(', '*', 'pi', '(', '*', 'r', 'r', ')', ')', ')']
```

Our function `parse` will take a string representation of a program as input, call `tokenize` to get a list of tokens, and then call `read_from_tokens` to assemble an abstract syntax tree. `read_from_tokens` looks at the first token; if it is a `')'` that's a syntax error. If it is a `'('`, then we start building up a list of sub-expressions until we hit a matching `')'`. Any non-parenthesis token must be a symbol or number. We'll let Python make the distinction between them: for each non-paren token, first try to interpret it as an int, then as a float, and if it is neither of those, it must be a symbol.

Here is the parser:

```
def parse(program: str) -> Exp:
    "Read a Scheme expression from a string."
    return read_from_tokens(tokenize(program))

def read_from_tokens(tokens: list) -> Exp:
    "Read an expression from a sequence of tokens."
    if len(tokens) == 0:
        raise SyntaxError('unexpected EOF')
    token = tokens.pop(0)
    if token == '(':
        L = []
        while tokens[0] != ')':
            L.append(read_from_tokens(tokens))
        tokens.pop(0) # pop off ')'
        return L
    elif token == ')':
        raise SyntaxError('unexpected )')
    else:
        return atom(token)

def atom(token: str) -> Atom:
    "Numbers become numbers; every other token is a symbol."
    try: return int(token)
    except ValueError:
        try: return float(token)
        except ValueError:
            return Symbol(token)
```

`parse` works like this:

```
>>> program = "(begin (define r 10) (* pi (* r r)))"

>>> parse(program)
['begin', ['define', 'r', 10], ['*', 'pi', ['*', 'r', 'r']]]
```

We're almost ready to define `eval`. But we need one more concept first.

# Environments

An environment is a mapping from variable names to their values. By default, `eval` will use a global environment that includes the names for a bunch of standard functions (like `sqrt` and `max`, and also operators like `*`). This environment can be augmented with user-defined variables, using the expression `(define` *`symbol value`*`)`.

```
import math
import operator as op

def standard_env() -> Env:
    "An environment with some Scheme standard procedures."
    env = Env()
    env.update(vars(math)) # sin, cos, sqrt, pi, ...
    env.update({
        '+':op.add, '-':op.sub, '*':op.mul, '/':op.truediv,
```

```
        '>':op.gt, '<':op.lt, '>=':op.ge, '<=':op.le, '=':op.eq,
        'abs':     abs,
        'append':  op.add,
        'apply':   lambda proc, args: proc(*args),
        'begin':   lambda *x: x[-1],
        'car':     lambda x: x[0],
        'cdr':     lambda x: x[1:],
        'cons':    lambda x,y: [x] + y,
        'eq?':     op.is_,
        'expt':    pow,
        'equal?':  op.eq,
        'length':  len,
        'list':    lambda *x: List(x),
        'list?':   lambda x: isinstance(x, List),
        'map':     map,
        'max':     max,
        'min':     min,
        'not':     op.not_,
        'null?':   lambda x: x == [],
        'number?': lambda x: isinstance(x, Number),
             'print':   print,
        'procedure?': callable,
        'round':   round,
        'symbol?': lambda x: isinstance(x, Symbol),
    })
    return env

global_env = standard_env()
```

# Evaluation: `eval`

We are now ready for the implementation of `eval`. As a refresher, we repeat the table of Lispy Calculator forms:

| Expression | Syntax | Semantics and Example |
|---|---|---|
| variable reference | *symbol* | A symbol is interpreted as a variable name; its value is the variable's value.<br>Example: `r` ⇒ `10` (assuming `r` was previously defined to be 10) |
| constant literal | *number* | A number evaluates to itself.<br>Examples: `12` ⇒ `12` *or* `-3.45e+6` ⇒ `-3.45e+6` |
| conditional | (`if` *test conseq alt*) | Evaluate *test*; if true, evaluate and return *conseq*; otherwise *alt*.<br>Example: `(if (> 10 20) (+ 1 1) (+ 3 3))` ⇒ `6` |
| definition | (`define` *symbol exp*) | Define a new variable and give it the value of evaluating the expression *exp*.<br>Examples: `(define r 10)` |
| procedure call | (*proc arg...*) | If *proc* is anything other than one of the symbols `if`, `define`, or `quote` then it is treated as a procedure. Evaluate *proc* and all the *args*, and then the procedure is applied to the list of *arg* values.<br>Example: `(sqrt (* 2 8))` ⇒ `4.0` |

Here is the code for `eval`, which closely follows the table:

```
def eval(x: Exp, env=global_env) -> Exp:
    "Evaluate an expression in an environment."
    if isinstance(x, Symbol):        # variable reference
        return env[x]
    elif isinstance(x, Number):      # constant number
        return x
    elif x[0] == 'if':               # conditional
        (_, test, conseq, alt) = x
        exp = (conseq if eval(test, env) else alt)
        return eval(exp, env)
    elif x[0] == 'define':           # definition
        (_, symbol, exp) = x
        env[symbol] = eval(exp, env)
    else:                            # procedure call
        proc = eval(x[0], env)
        args = [eval(arg, env) for arg in x[1:]]
        return proc(*args)
```

*We're done!* You can see it all in action:

```
>>> eval(parse("(begin (define r 10) (* pi (* r r)))"))
314.1592653589793
```

# Interaction: A REPL

It is tedious to have to enter `eval(parse("..."))` all the time. One of Lisp's great legacies is the notion of an interactive read-eval-print loop: a way for a programmer to enter an expression, and see it immediately read, evaluated, and printed, without having to go through a lengthy build/compile/run cycle. So let's define the function `repl` (which stands for read-eval-print-loop), and the function `schemestr` which returns a string representing a Scheme object.

```
def repl(prompt='lis.py> '):
    "A prompt-read-eval-print loop."
    while True:
        val = eval(parse(raw_input(prompt)))
        if val is not None:
            print(schemestr(val))

def schemestr(exp):
    "Convert a Python object back into a Scheme-readable string."
    if isinstance(exp, List):
        return '(' + ' '.join(map(schemestr, exp)) + ')'
    else:
        return str(exp)
```

Here is `repl` in action:

```
>>> repl()
lis.py> (define r 10)
lis.py> (* pi (* r r))
314.159265359
lis.py> (if (> (* 11 11) 120) (* 7 6) oops)
42
lis.py> (list (+ 1 1) (+ 2 2) (* 2 3) (expt 2 3))
lis.py>
```

# Language 2: Full Lispy

We will now extend our language with three new special forms, giving us a much more nearly-complete Scheme subset:

| Expression | Syntax | Semantics and Example |
|---|---|---|
| quotation | `(quote` *exp*`)` | Return the *exp* literally; do not evaluate it.<br>Example: `(quote (+ 1 2))` ⇒ `(+ 1 2)` |
| assignment | `(set!` *symbol exp*`)` | Evaluate *exp* and assign that value to *symbol*, which must have been previously defined (with a `define` or as a parameter to an enclosing procedure).<br>Example: `(set! r2 (* r r))` |
| procedure | `(lambda (`*symbol...*`)` *exp*`)` | Create a procedure with parameter(s) named *symbol...* and *exp* as the body.<br>Example: `(lambda (r) (* pi (* r r)))` |

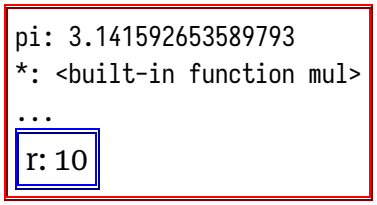
The `lambda` special form (an obscure nomenclature choice that refers to Alonzo Church's lambda calculus) creates a procedure. We want procedures to work like this:

```
lis.py> (define circle-area (lambda (r) (* pi (* r r))))
lis.py> (circle-area (+ 5 5))
314.159265359
```

There are two steps here. In the first step, the `lambda` expression is evaluated to create a procedure, one which refers to the global variables `pi` and `*`, takes a single parameter, which it calls `r`. This procedure is used as the value of the new variable `circle-area`. In the second step, the procedure we just defined is the value of `circle-area`, so it is called, with the value 10 as the argument. We want `r` to take on the value 10, but it wouldn't do to just set `r` to 10 in the global environment. What if we were using `r` for some other purpose? We wouldn't want a call to `circle-area` to alter that value. Instead, we want to arrange for there to be a *local* variable named `r` that we can set to 10 without worrying about interfering with any global variable that happens to have the same name. The process for calling a procedure introduces these new local variable(s), binding each symbol in the parameter list of. the function to the corresponding value in the argument list of the function call.

# Redefining `Env` as a Class

To handle local variables, we will redefine `Env` to be a subclass of `dict`. When we evaluate `(circle-area (+ 5 5))`, we will fetch the procedure body, `(* pi (* r r))`, and evaluate it in an environment that has `r` as the sole local variable (with value 10), but also has the global environment as the "outer" environment; it is there that we will find the values of `*` and `pi`. In other words, we want an environment that looks like this, with the local (blue) environment nested inside the outer (red) global environment:




When we look up a variable in such a nested environment, we look first at the innermost level, but if we don't find the variable name there, we move to the next outer level.

Procedures and environments are intertwined, so let's define them together:

```
class Env(dict):
    "An environment: a dict of {'var': val} pairs, with an outer Env."
    def __init__(self, parms=(), args=(), outer=None):
        self.update(zip(parms, args))
        self.outer = outer
    def find(self, var):
        "Find the innermost Env where var appears."
        return self if (var in self) else self.outer.find(var)

class Procedure(object):
    "A user-defined Scheme procedure."
    def __init__(self, parms, body, env):
        self.parms, self.body, self.env = parms, body, env
    def __call__(self, *args):
        return eval(self.body, Env(self.parms, args, self.env))

global_env = standard_env()
```

We see that every procedure has three components: a list of parameter names, a body expression, and an environment that tells us what other variables are accessible from the body. For a procedure defined at the top level this will be the global environment, but it is also possible for a procedure to refer to the local variables of the environment in which it was *defined* (and not the environment in which it is *called*).

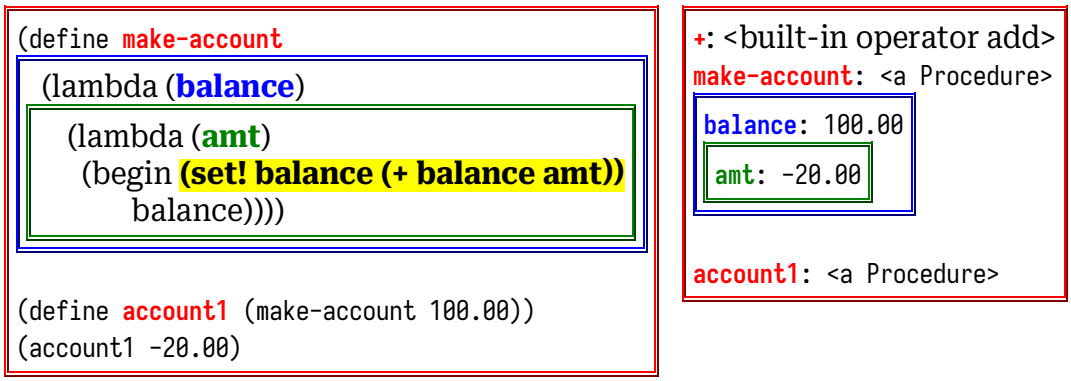
An environment is a subclass of `dict`, so it has all the methods that `dict` has. In addition there are two methods: the constructor `__init__` builds a new environment by taking a list of parameter names and a corresponding list of argument values, and creating a new environment that has those {variable: value} pairs as the inner part, and also refers to the given `outer` environment. The method `find` is used to find the right environment for a variable: either the inner one or an outer one.

To see how these all go together, here is the new definition of `eval`. Note that the clause for variable reference has changed: we now have to call `env.find(x)` to find at what level the variable `x` exists; then we can fetch the value of `x` from that level. (The clause for `define` has not changed, because a `define` always adds a new variable to the innermost environment.) There are two new clauses: for `set!`, we find the environment level where the variable exists and set it to a new value. With `lambda`, we create a new procedure object with the given parameter list, body, and environment.

```
def eval(x, env=global_env):
    "Evaluate an expression in an environment."
    if isinstance(x, Symbol):    # variable reference
        return env.find(x)[x]
    elif not isinstance(x, List):# constant
        return x
    op, *args = x
    if op == 'quote':            # quotation
        return args[0]
    elif op == 'if':             # conditional
        (test, conseq, alt) = args
        exp = (conseq if eval(test, env) else alt)
        return eval(exp, env)
    elif op == 'define':         # definition
        (symbol, exp) = args
```

```
        env[symbol] = eval(exp, env)
    elif op == 'set!':           # assignment
        (symbol, exp) = args
        env.find(symbol)[symbol] = eval(exp, env)
    elif op == 'lambda':         # procedure
        (parms, body) = args
        return Procedure(parms, body, env)
    else:                        # procedure call
        proc = eval(op, env)
        vals = [eval(arg, env) for arg in args]
        return proc(*vals)
```

To appreciate how procedures and environments work together, consider this program and the environment that gets formed when we evaluate `(account1 -20.00)`:




Each rectangular box represents an environment, and the color of the box matches the color of the variables that are newly defined in the environment. In the last two lines of the program we define `account1` and call `(account1 -20.00)`; this represents the creation of a bank account with a 100 dollar opening balance, followed by a 20 dollar withdrawal. In the process of evaluating `(account1 -20.00)`, we will eval the expression highlighted in yellow. There are three variables in that expression. `amt` can be found immediately in the innermost (green) environment. But `balance` is not defined there: we have to look at the green environment's outer `env`, the blue one. And finally, the variable `+` is not found in either of those; we need to do one more outer step, to the global (red) environment. This process of looking first in inner environments and then in outer ones is called *lexical scoping*. `Env.find(var)` finds the right environment according to lexical scoping rules.

Let's see what we can do now:

```
>>> repl()
lis.py> (define circle-area (lambda (r) (* pi (* r r))))
lis.py> (circle-area 3)
28.274333877
lis.py> (define fact (lambda (n) (if (<= n 1) 1 (* n (fact (- n 1))))))
lis.py> (fact 10)
3628800
lis.py> (fact 100)
933262154439441526816992388562667004907159682643816214685929638952175999932299
156089414639761565182862536979208272237582511852109168640000000000000000000000
lis.py> (circle-area (fact 10))
4.1369087198e+13
lis.py> (define first car)
lis.py> (define rest cdr)
lis.py> (define count (lambda (item L) (if L (+ (equal? item (first L)) (count item (rest L))) 0)))
lis.py> (count 0 (list 0 1 2 3 0 0))
```

```
3
lis.py> (count (quote the) (quote (the more the merrier the bigger the better)))
4
lis.py> (define twice (lambda (x) (* 2 x)))
lis.py> (twice 5)
10
lis.py> (define repeat (lambda (f) (lambda (x) (f (f x)))))
lis.py> ((repeat twice) 10)
40
lis.py> ((repeat (repeat twice)) 10)
160
lis.py> ((repeat (repeat (repeat twice))) 10)
2560
lis.py> ((repeat (repeat (repeat (repeat twice)))) 10)
655360
lis.py> (pow 2 16)
65536.0
lis.py> (define fib (lambda (n) (if (< n 2) 1 (+ (fib (- n 1)) (fib (- n 2))))))
lis.py> (define range (lambda (a b) (if (= a b) (quote ()) (cons a (range (+ a 1) b)))))
lis.py> (range 0 10)
(0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9)
lis.py> (map fib (range 0 10))
(1 1 2 3 5 8 13 21 34 55)
lis.py> (map fib (range 0 20))
(1 1 2 3 5 8 13 21 34 55 89 144 233 377 610 987 1597 2584 4181 6765)
```

We now have a language with procedures, variables, conditionals (`if`), and sequential execution (the `begin` procedure). If you are familiar with other languages, you might think that a `while` or `for` loop would be needed, but Scheme manages to do without these just fine. The Scheme report says "Scheme demonstrates that a very small number of rules for forming expressions, with no restrictions on how they are composed, suffice to form a practical and efficient programming language." In Scheme you iterate by defining recursive functions.

# How Small/Fast/Complete/Good is Lispy?

In which we judge Lispy on several criteria:

- ***Small:*** Lispy is *very* small: 117 non-comment non-blank lines; 4K of source code. (An earlier version was just 90 lines, but had fewer standard procedures and was perhaps a bit too terse.) The smallest version of my Scheme in Java, Jscheme, was 1664 lines and 57K of source. Jscheme was originally called SILK (Scheme in Fifty Kilobytes), but I only kept under that limit by counting bytecode rather than source code. Lispy does much better; I think it meets Alan Kay's 1972 claim that *you could define the "most powerful language in the world" in "a page of code."* (However, I think Alan would disagree, because he would count the Python compiler as part of the code, putting me *well* over a page.)

```
bash$ grep "^\s*[^#\s]" lis.py | wc
     117     497    4276
```

- ***Fast:*** Lispy computes `(fact 100)` exactly in 0.003 seconds. That's fast enough for me (although far slower than most other ways of computing it).
- ***Complete:*** Lispy is not very complete compared to the Scheme standard. Some major shortcomings:

    - ***Syntax***: Missing comments, quote and quasiquote notation, # literals, the derived expression types (such as `cond`, derived from `if`, or `let`, derived from `lambda`), and dotted list notation.
    - ***Semantics***: Missing call/cc and tail recursion.
    - ***Data Types***: Missing strings, characters, booleans, ports, vectors, exact/inexact numbers. Python lists are actually closer to Scheme vectors than to the Scheme pairs and lists that we implement with them.
    - ***Procedures***: Missing over 100 primitive procedures.
    - ***Error recovery***: Lispy does not attempt to detect, reasonably report, or recover from errors. Lispy expects the programmer to be perfect.
- ***Good:*** That's up to the readers to decide. I found it was good for my purpose of explaining Lisp interpreters.

# True Story

To back up the idea that it can be very helpful to know how interpreters work, here's a story. Way back in 1984 I was writing a Ph.D. thesis. This was before LaTeX, before Microsoft Word for Windows—we used troff. Unfortunately, troff had no facility for forward references to symbolic labels: I wanted to be able to write "As we will see on page @theorem-x" and then write something like "@(set theorem-x \n%)" in the appropriate place (the troff register \n% holds the page number). My fellow grad student Tony DeRose felt the same need, and together we sketched out a simple Lisp program that would handle this as a preprocessor. However, it turned out that the Lisp we had at the time was good at reading Lisp expressions, but so slow at reading character-at-a-time non-Lisp expressions that our program was annoying to use.

From there Tony and I split paths. He reasoned that the hard part was the interpreter for expressions; he needed Lisp for that, but he knew how to write a tiny C routine for reading and echoing the non-Lisp characters and link it in to the Lisp program. I didn't know how to do that linking, but I reasoned that writing an interpreter for this trivial language (all it had was set variable, fetch variable, and string concatenate) was easy, so I wrote an interpreter in C. So, ironically, Tony wrote a Lisp program (with one small routine in C) because he was a C programmer, and I wrote a C program because I was a Lisp programmer.

In the end, we both got our theses done (Tony, Peter).

# The Whole Thing

The whole program is here: lis.py.

# Further Reading

To learn more about Scheme consult some of the fine books (by Friedman and Fellesein, Dybvig, Queinnec, Harvey and Wright or Sussman and Abelson), videos (by Abelson and Sussman), tutorials (by Dorai, PLT, or Neller), or the reference manual.

> I also have another page describing a more advanced version of Lispy.
> *Peter Norvig*

# (An ((Even Better) Lisp) Interpreter (in Python))

In a previous essay I showed how to write a simple Lisp interpreter in 90 lines of Python: **lis.py**. In this essay I make the implementation, **lispy.py**, three times more complicated, but more complete. Each section handles an addition.

## (1) New data types: `string, boolean, complex, port`

Adding a new data type to Lispy has three parts: the internal representation of the data, the procedures that operate on it, and the syntax for reading and writing it. Here we add four types (using Python's native representation for all but input ports):

- **strings**: string literals are enclosed in double-quotes. Within a string, a \n means a newline and a \" means a double-quote.
- **booleans**: The syntax is `#t` and `#f` for True and False, and the predicate is `boolean?`.
- **complex numbers**: we use the functions in the `cmath` module rather than the `math` module to support complex numbers. The syntax allows constants like `3+4i`.
- **ports**: No syntax to add, but procedures `port?`, `load`, `open-input-file`, `close-input-port`, `open-output-file`, `close-output-port`, `read`, `read-char`, `write` and `display`. Output ports are represented as Python file objects, and input ports are represented by a class, `InputPort` which wraps a file object and also keeps track of the last line of text read. This is convenient because Scheme input ports need to be able to read expressions as well as raw characters and our tokenizer works on a whole line, not individual characters.

Now, an old data type that becomes new:

- **symbol**: In the previous version of Lispy, symbols were implemented as strings. Now that we have strings, symbols will be implemented as a separate class (which derives from `str`). That means we no longer can write `if x[0] == 'if'`, because `'if'` is now a string, not a symbol. Instead we write `if x[0] is _if` and define `_if` as `Sym('if')`, where `Sym` manages a symbol table of unique symbols.

Here is the implementation of the new `Symbol` class:

```
class Symbol(str): pass

def Sym(s, symbol_table={}):
    "Find or create unique Symbol entry for str s in symbol table."
    if s not in symbol_table: symbol_table[s] = Symbol(s)
    return symbol_table[s]

_quote, _if, _set, _define, _lambda, _begin, _definemacro, = map(Sym,
"quote   if   set!  define   lambda   begin   define-macro".split())

_quasiquote, _unquote, _unquotesplicing = map(Sym,
"quasiquote   unquote   unquote-splicing".split())
```

We'll show the rest soon.

## (2) New syntax: strings, comments, quotes, # literals

The addition of strings complicates tokenization. No longer can spaces delimit tokens, because spaces can appear inside strings. Instead we use a complex regular expression to break the input into tokens. In Scheme a comment consists of a semicolon to the end of line; we gather

this up as a token and then ignore the token. We also add support for six new tokens: `#t #f ' ` , ,@`

The tokens `#t` and `#f` are the True and False literals, respectively. The single quote mark serves to quote the following expression. The syntax `'`*exp* is completely equivalent to `(quote` *exp*`)`. The backquote character `` ` `` is called *quasiquote* in Scheme; it is similar to `'` except that within a quasiquoted expression, the notation `,`*exp* means to insert the value of *exp* (rather than the literal *exp*), and `,@`*exp* means that *exp* should evaluate to a list, and all the items of the list are inserted.

In the previous version of Lispy, all input was read from strings. In this version we have introduced ports (also known as file objects or streams) and will read from them. This makes the read-eval-print-loop (repl) much more convenient: instead of insisting that an input expression must fit on one line, we can now read tokens until we get a complete expression, even if it spans several lines. Also, errors are caught and printed, much as the Python interactive loop does. Here is the `InPort` (input port) class:

```
class InPort(object):
    "An input port. Retains a line of chars."
    tokenizer = r'''\s*(,@|[('`,)]|"(?:[\\].|[^\\"])*"|;.*|[^\s('"`,;)]*)(.*)'''
    def __init__(self, file):
        self.file = file; self.line = ''
    def next_token(self):
        "Return the next token, reading new text into line buffer if needed."
        while True:
            if self.line == '': self.line = self.file.readline()
            if self.line == '': return eof_object
            token, self.line = re.match(InPort.tokenizer, self.line).groups()
            if token != '' and not token.startswith(';'):
                return token
```

The basic design for the `read` function follows a suggestion (with working code) from Darius Bacon (who contributed several other improvements as well).

```
eof_object = Symbol('#<eof-object>') # Note: uninterned; can't be read

def readchar(inport):
    "Read the next character from an input port."
    if inport.line != '':
        ch, inport.line = inport.line[0], inport.line[1:]
        return ch
    else:
        return inport.file.read(1) or eof_object

def read(inport):
    "Read a Scheme expression from an input port."
    def read_ahead(token):
        if '(' == token:
            L = []
            while True:
                token = inport.next_token()
                if token == ')': return L
                else: L.append(read_ahead(token))
        elif ')' == token: raise SyntaxError('unexpected )')
        elif token in quotes: return [quotes[token], read(inport)]
```

```
        elif token is eof_object: raise SyntaxError('unexpected EOF in list')
        else: return atom(token)
    # body of read:
    token1 = inport.next_token()
    return eof_object if token1 is eof_object else read_ahead(token1)

quotes = {"'":_quote, "`":_quasiquote, ",":_unquote, ",@":_unquotesplicing}

def atom(token):
    'Numbers become numbers; #t and #f are booleans; "..." string; otherwise Symbol.'
    if token == '#t': return True
    elif token == '#f': return False
    elif token[0] == '"': return token[1:-1].decode('string_escape')
    try: return int(token)
    except ValueError:
        try: return float(token)
        except ValueError:
            try: return complex(token.replace('i', 'j', 1))
            except ValueError:
                return Sym(token)

def to_string(x):
    "Convert a Python object back into a Lisp-readable string."
    if x is True: return "#t"
    elif x is False: return "#f"
    elif isa(x, Symbol): return x
    elif isa(x, str): return '"%s"' % x.encode('string_escape').replace('"',r'\"')
    elif isa(x, list): return '('+' '.join(map(to_string, x))+')'
    elif isa(x, complex): return str(x).replace('j', 'i')
    else: return str(x)

def load(filename):
    "Eval every expression from a file."
    repl(None, InPort(open(filename)), None)

def repl(prompt='lispy> ', inport=InPort(sys.stdin), out=sys.stdout):
    "A prompt-read-eval-print loop."
    sys.stderr.write("Lispy version 2.0\n")
    while True:
        try:
            if prompt: sys.stderr.write(prompt)
            x = parse(inport)
            if x is eof_object: return
            val = eval(x)
            if val is not None and out: print >> out, to_string(val)
        except Exception as e:
            print '%s: %s' % (type(e).__name__, e)
```

Here we see how the read-eval-print loop is improved:

```
>>> repl()
Lispy version 2.0
lispy> (define (cube x)
          (* x (* x x))) ; input spans multiple lines
lispy> (cube 10)
```

```
1000
lispy> (cube 1) (cube 2) (cube 3) ; multiple inputs per line
1
lispy> 8
lispy> 27
lispy> (/ 3 0) ; error recovery
ZeroDivisionError: integer division or modulo by zero
lispy> (if 1 2 3 4 5) ; syntax error recovery
SyntaxError: (if 1 2 3 4 5): wrong length
lispy> (defun (f x)
          (set! 3 x)) ;; early syntax error detection
SyntaxError: (set! 3 x): can set! only a symbol
lispy>
```

# (3) Macros: user-defined and builtin derived syntax

We also add a facility for defining macros. This is available to the user, through the `define-macro` special form (which is slightly different than standard Scheme), and is also used internally to define so-called *derived expressions*, such as the `and` form. Macros definitions are only allowed at the top level of a file or interactive session, or within a `begin` form that is at the top level.

Here are definitions of the macros `let` and `and`, showing the backquote, unquote, and unquote-splicing syntax:

```
def let(*args):
    args = list(args)
    x = cons(_let, args)
    require(x, len(args)>1)
    bindings, body = args[0], args[1:]
    require(x, all(isa(b, list) and len(b)==2 and isa(b[0], Symbol)
                   for b in bindings), "illegal binding list")
    vars, vals = zip(*bindings)
    return [[_lambda, list(vars)]+map(expand, body)] + map(expand, vals)

_append, _cons, _let = map(Sym("append cons let".split))

macro_table = {_let:let} ## More macros can go here

eval(parse("""(begin

(define-macro and (lambda args
   (if (null? args) #t
       (if (= (length args) 1) (car args)
           `(if ,(car args) (and ,@(cdr args)) #f)))))

;; More macros can go here

)"""))
```

# (4) Better `eval` with tail recursion optimization

Scheme has no `while` or `for` loops, relying on recursion for iteration. That makes the language simple, but there is a potential problem: if every recursive call grows the runtime stack, then the depth of recursion, and hence the ability to loop, will be limited. In some implementations

the limit will be as small as a few hundred iterations. This limitation can be lifted by altering `eval` so that it does not grow the stack on all recursive calls--only when necessary.

Consider the evaluation of `(if (> v 0) (begin 1 (begin 2 (twice (- v 1)))))` when `v` is `1` and `twice` is the procedure `(lambda (y) (* 2 y))`. With the version of `eval` in lis.py, we would get the following trace of execution, where each arrow indicates a recursive call to `eval`:

```
⇒ eval(x=(if (> v 0) (begin 1 (begin 2 (twice (- v 1))))),      env={'v':1})
    ⇒ eval(x=(begin 1 (begin 2 (twice (- v 1)))),               env={'v':1})
        ⇒ eval(x=(begin 2 (twice (- v 1)))),                    env={'v':1})
            ⇒ eval(x=(twice (- v 1))),                          env={'v':1})
                ⇒ eval(x=(* 2 y),                               env={'y':0})
                ⇐ 0
```

But note that the recursive calls are not necessary. Instead of making a recursive call that returns a value that is then immediately returned again by the caller, we can instead alter the value of `x` (and sometimes `env`) in the original invocation of `eval(x, env)`. We are free to do that whenever the old value of `x` is no longer needed. The call sequence now looks like this:

```
⇒ eval(x=(if (> v 0) (begin 1 (begin 2 (twice (- v 1))))),      env={'v':1})
   x = (begin 1 (begin 2 (twice (- v 1))))
   x = (begin 2 (twice (- v 1))))
   x = (twice (- v 1))))
   x = (* 2 y);                                                 env = {'y':0}
⇐ 0
```

Here is an implementation of `eval` that works this way. We wrap the body in a `while True` loop, and then for most clauses, the implementation is unchanged. However, for three clauses we update the variable `x` (the expression being evaluated): for `if`, for `begin`, and for procedure calls to a user-defined procedure (in that case, we not ony update `x` to be the body of the procedure, we also update `env` to be a new environment that has the bindings of the procedure parameters). Here it is:

```
def eval(x, env=global_env):
    "Evaluate an expression in an environment."
    while True:
        if isa(x, Symbol):       # variable reference
            return env.find(x)[x]
        elif not isa(x, list):   # constant literal
            return x
        elif x[0] is _quote:     # (quote exp)
            (_, exp) = x
            return exp
        elif x[0] is _if:        # (if test conseq alt)
            (_, test, conseq, alt) = x
            x = (conseq if eval(test, env) else alt)
        elif x[0] is _set:       # (set! var exp)
            (_, var, exp) = x
            env.find(var)[var] = eval(exp, env)
            return None
        elif x[0] is _define:    # (define var exp)
            (_, var, exp) = x
            env[var] = eval(exp, env)
            return None
        elif x[0] is _lambda:    # (lambda (var*) exp)
```

```
            (_, vars, exp) = x
            return Procedure(vars, exp, env)
        elif x[0] is _begin:     # (begin exp+)
            for exp in x[1:-1]:
                eval(exp, env)
            x = x[-1]
        else:                    # (proc exp*)
            exps = [eval(exp, env) for exp in x]
            proc = exps.pop(0)
            if isa(proc, Procedure):
                x = proc.exp
                env = Env(proc.parms, exps, proc.env)
            else:
                return proc(*exps)

class Procedure(object):
    "A user-defined Scheme procedure."
    def __init__(self, parms, exp, env):
        self.parms, self.exp, self.env = parms, exp, env
    def __call__(self, *args):
        return eval(self.exp, Env(self.parms, args, self.env))
```

This implementation makes it possible to write procedures that recurse arbitrarily deeply without running out of storage. However, it may require some restructring of procedures to make this work. Consider these two implementations of a function to sum the integers from 0 to *n*:

```
(define (sum-to n)
  (if (= n 0)
      0
      (+ n (sum-to (- n 1)))))

(define (sum2 n acc)
  (if (= n 0)
      acc
      (sum2 (- n 1) (+ n acc))))
```

The first is more straightforward, but it yields a "RuntimeError: maximum recursion depth exceeded" on `(sum-to 1000)`. The second version has the recursive call to `sum2` in the last position of the body, and thus you can safely sum the first million integers with `(sum2 1000000 0)` and get 500000500000. Note that the second argument, `acc`, accumulates the results computed so far. If you can learn to use this style of accumulators, you can recurse arbitrarily deeply.

# (5) Call-with-current-continuation (`call/cc`)

We have seen that Scheme handles iteration using recursion, with no need for special syntax for `for` or `while` loops. But what about non-local control flow, as is done with `try/except` in Python or `setjmp/longjmp` in C? Scheme offers a primitive procedure, called `call/cc` for "call with current continuation". Let's start with some examples:

```
lispy> (call/cc (lambda (throw)
         (+ 5 (* 10 (call/cc (lambda (escape) (* 100 (escape 3))))))))
35
lispy> (call/cc (lambda (throw)
         (+ 5 (* 10 (call/cc (lambda (escape) (* 100 (throw 3))))))))
3
```

In the first example, evaluating `(escape 3)` causes Scheme to abort the current calculation and return 3 as the value of the enclosing call to `call/cc`. The result is the same as `(+ 5 (* 10 3))` or 35.

In the second example, `(throw 3)` aborts up two levels, throwing the value of 3 back to the top level. In general, `call/cc` takes a single argument, *proc*, which must be a procedure of one argument. *proc* is called, passing it a manufactured procedure which we will call *throw*. If *throw* is called with a single argument, then that argument is the value of the whole call to `call/cc`. If *throw* is not called, the value computed by *proc* is returned. Here is the implementation:

```
def callcc(proc):
    "Call proc with current continuation; escape only"
    ball = RuntimeWarning("Sorry, can't continue this continuation any longer.")
    def throw(retval): ball.retval = retval; raise ball
    try:
        return proc(throw)
    except RuntimeWarning as w:
        if w is ball: return ball.retval
        else: raise w
```

This implementation allows for non-local escape from procedures. It does not, however, implement the full power of a real Scheme `call/cc`, with which we can not only call the continuation to return a value, we can also store the continuation away and call it multiple times, each time returning to the same place.

# (6) Procedures with arbitrary number of arguments

The standard Scheme procedure `list` can be called with any number of arguments: `(list 1 2)`, `(list 1 2 3)`, etc. In Scheme a user can define a procedure like this using the syntax `(lambda` *args body*`)` where *args* is a single symbol representing the parameter that is bound to the list of arguments supplied in a procedure call, and *body* is the body of the procedure. The implementation takes just one small change in `Env.__init__` to check if `parms` is a Symbol rather than a list:

```
class Env(dict):
    "An environment: a dict of {'var':val} pairs, with an outer Env."
    def __init__(self, parms=(), args=(), outer=None):
        # Bind parm list to corresponding args, or single parm to list of args
        self.outer = outer
        if isa(parms, Symbol):
            self.update({parms:list(args)})
        else:
            if len(args) != len(parms):
                raise TypeError('expected %s, given %s, '
                                % (to_string(parms), to_string(args)))
            self.update(zip(parms,args))
    def find(self, var):
        "Find the innermost Env where var appears."
        if var in self: return self
        elif self.outer is None: raise LookupError(var)
        else: return self.outer.find(var)
```

If `parms` is a Symbol, we bind it to the list or arguments. Otherwise we bind each parm to the corresponding arg. Real Scheme also has the syntax `(lambda (arg1 arg2 . rest) ...)`. We can't do that because we're using Python lists, and don't have dotted pairs.

# (7) Earlier error detection and extended syntax

Consider the following erroneous code:

```
(define f (lambda (x) (set! 3 x)))
(define g (lambda (3) (if (x = 0))))
(define h (lambda (x) (if (x = 0) 1 2 3)))
```

In the first version of Lispy, evaluating these definitions would not yield any complaints. But as soon as any of the functions were called, a runtime error would occur. In general, errors should be reported as early as possible, so the new version of Lispy would give appropriate error messages as these functions are defined, not waiting for them to be called.

We do this by improving the procedure `parse`. In the first version of Lispy, `parse` was implemented as `read`; in other words, any expression at all was accepted as a program. The new version checks each expression for validity when it is defined. It checks that each special form has the right number of arguments and that `set!` and `define` operate on symbols. It also expands the macros and quasiquote forms defined in section (2) above. It accepts a slightly more generous version of Scheme, as described in the table below. Each of the expressions on the left would be illegal in the first version of Lispy, but are accepted as equivalent to the corresponding expressions on the right in the new version:

| Extended Expression | Expansion |
|---|---|
| (begin) | None |
| (if *test conseq*) | (if *test conseq* None) |
| (define (*f arg...*) *body...*) | (define *f* (lambda (*arg...*) *body...*) |
| (lambda (*arg...*) *e1 e2...*) | (lambda (*arg...*) (begin *e1 e2...*)) |
| `*exp*<br>(quasiquote *exp*) | expand , and ,@ within *exp* |
| (*macro-name arg...*) | expansion of (*macro-name arg...*) |

Here is the definiiton of `parse`:

```
def parse(inport):
    "Parse a program: read and expand/error-check it."
    # Backwards compatibility: given a str, convert it to an InPort
    if isinstance(inport, str): inport = InPort(StringIO.StringIO(inport))
    return expand(read(inport), toplevel=True)
```

And here is the definition of `expand`. It may seem odd that `expand` is twice as long as `eval`. But `expand` actually has a harder job: it has to do almost everything eval does in terms of making sure that legal code has all the right pieces, but in addition it must deal with illegal code, producing a sensible error message, and extended code, converting it into the right basic form.

```
def expand(x, toplevel=False):
    "Walk tree of x, making optimizations/fixes, and signaling SyntaxError."
    require(x, x!=[])                    # () => Error
    if not isa(x, list):                 # constant => unchanged
        return x
    elif x[0] is _quote:                 # (quote exp)
        require(x, len(x)==2)
        return x
    elif x[0] is _if:
```

```
        if len(x)==3: x = x + [None]     # (if t c) => (if t c None)
        require(x, len(x)==4)
        return map(expand, x)
    elif x[0] is _set:
        require(x, len(x)==3);
        var = x[1]                       # (set! non-var exp) => Error
        require(x, isa(var, Symbol), "can set! only a symbol")
        return [_set, var, expand(x[2])]
    elif x[0] is _define or x[0] is _definemacro:
        require(x, len(x)>=3)
        _def, v, body = x[0], x[1], x[2:]
        if isa(v, list) and v:           # (define (f args) body)
            f, args = v[0], v[1:]        #  => (define f (lambda (args) body))
            return expand([_def, f, [_lambda, args]+body])
        else:
            require(x, len(x)==3)        # (define non-var/list exp) => Error
            require(x, isa(v, Symbol), "can define only a symbol")
            exp = expand(x[2])
            if _def is _definemacro:
                require(x, toplevel, "define-macro only allowed at top level")
                proc = eval(exp)
                require(x, callable(proc), "macro must be a procedure")
                macro_table[v] = proc    # (define-macro v proc)
                return None              #  => None; add v:proc to macro_table
            return [_define, v, exp]
    elif x[0] is _begin:
        if len(x)==1: return None        # (begin) => None
        else: return [expand(xi, toplevel) for xi in x]
    elif x[0] is _lambda:                # (lambda (x) e1 e2)
        require(x, len(x)>=3)            #  => (lambda (x) (begin e1 e2))
        vars, body = x[1], x[2:]
        require(x, (isa(vars, list) and all(isa(v, Symbol) for v in vars))
                or isa(vars, Symbol), "illegal lambda argument list")
        exp = body[0] if len(body) == 1 else [_begin] + body
        return [_lambda, vars, expand(exp)]
    elif x[0] is _quasiquote:            # `x => expand_quasiquote(x)
        require(x, len(x)==2)
        return expand_quasiquote(x[1])
    elif isa(x[0], Symbol) and x[0] in macro_table:
        return expand(macro_table[x[0]](*x[1:]), toplevel) # (m arg...)
    else:                                #        => macroexpand if m isa macro
        return map(expand, x)            # (f arg...) => expand each

def require(x, predicate, msg="wrong length"):
    "Signal a syntax error if predicate is false."
    if not predicate: raise SyntaxError(to_string(x)+': '+msg)

def expand_quasiquote(x):
    """Expand `x => 'x; `,x => x; `(,@x y) => (append x y) """
    if not is_pair(x):
        return [_quote, x]
    require(x, x[0] is not _unquotesplicing, "can't splice here")
    if x[0] is _unquote:
        require(x, len(x)==2)
        return x[1]
    elif is_pair(x[0]) and x[0][0] is _unquotesplicing:
```

```
        require(x[0], len(x[0])==2)
        return [_append, x[0][1], expand_quasiquote(x[1:])]
    else:
        return [_cons, expand_quasiquote(x[0]), expand_quasiquote(x[1:])]
```

# (8) More primitive procedures

Here we augment `add_globals` with some more primitive Scheme procedures, bringing the total to 75. There are still around 80 missing ones; they could also be added here if desired.

```
def is_pair(x): return x != [] and isa(x, list)

def add_globals(self):
    "Add some Scheme standard procedures."
    import math, cmath, operator as op
    self.update(vars(math))
    self.update(vars(cmath))
    self.update({
     '+':op.add, '-':op.sub, '*':op.mul, '/':op.div, 'not':op.not_,
     '>':op.gt, '<':op.lt, '>=':op.ge, '<=':op.le, '=':op.eq,
     'equal?':op.eq, 'eq?':op.is_, 'length':len, 'cons':lambda x,y:[x]+list(y),
     'car':lambda x:x[0], 'cdr':lambda x:x[1:], 'append':op.add,
     'list':lambda *x:list(x), 'list?': lambda x:isa(x,list),
     'null?':lambda x:x==[], 'symbol?':lambda x: isa(x, Symbol),
     'boolean?':lambda x: isa(x, bool), 'pair?':is_pair,
     'port?': lambda x:isa(x,file), 'apply':lambda proc,l: proc(*l),
     'eval':lambda x: eval(expand(x)), 'load':lambda fn: load(fn), 'call/cc':callcc,
     'open-input-file':open,'close-input-port':lambda p: p.file.close(),
     'open-output-file':lambda f:open(f,'w'), 'close-output-port':lambda p: p.close(),
     'eof-object?':lambda x:x is eof_object, 'read-char':readchar,
     'read':read, 'write':lambda x,port=sys.stdout:port.write(to_string(x)),
     'display':lambda x,port=sys.stdout:port.write(x if isa(x,str) else to_string(x))})
    return self

isa = isinstance

global_env = add_globals(Env())
```

# (9) Testing

Complicated programs should always be accompanied by a thorough test suite. We provide the program **lispytest.py**, which tests both versions of Lispy:

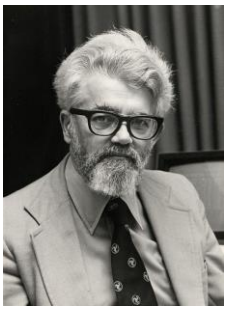
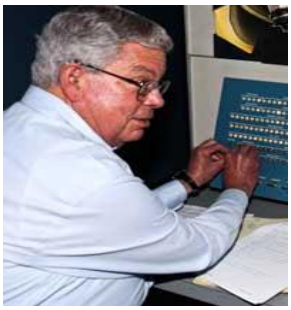
```
bash$ python lispytest.py
python lispytest.py
(quote (testing 1 (2.0) -3.14e159)) => (testing 1 (2.0) -3.14e+159)
(+ 2 2) => 4
(+ (* 2 100) (* 1 10)) => 210
(if (> 6 5) (+ 1 1) (+ 2 2)) => 2
(if (< 6 5) (+ 1 1) (+ 2 2)) => 4
(define x 3) => None
x => 3
(+ x x) => 6
(begin (define x 1) (set! x (+ x 1)) (+ x 1)) => 3
((lambda (x) (+ x x)) 5) => 10
```

```
(define twice (lambda (x) (* 2 x))) => None
(twice 5) => 10
(define compose (lambda (f g) (lambda (x) (f (g x))))) => None
((compose list twice) 5) => (10)
(define repeat (lambda (f) (compose f f))) => None
((repeat twice) 5) => 20
((repeat (repeat twice)) 5) => 80
(define fact (lambda (n) (if (<= n 1) 1 (* n (fact (- n 1)))))) => None
(fact 3) => 6
(fact 50) => 30414093201713378043612608166064768844377641568960512000000000000
(define abs (lambda (n) ((if (> n 0) + -) 0 n))) => None
(list (abs -3) (abs 0) (abs 3)) => (3 0 3)
(define combine (lambda (f)
    (lambda (x y)
      (if (null? x) (quote ())
          (f (list (car x) (car y))
             ((combine f) (cdr x) (cdr y)))))))) => None
(define zip (combine cons)) => None
(zip (list 1 2 3 4) (list 5 6 7 8)) => ((1 5) (2 6) (3 7) (4 8))
(define riff-shuffle (lambda (deck) (begin
    (define take (lambda (n seq) (if (<= n 0) (quote ()) (cons (car seq) (take (- n 1) (cdr seq))))))
    (define drop (lambda (n seq) (if (<= n 0) seq (drop (- n 1) (cdr seq)))))
    (define mid (lambda (seq) (/ (length seq) 2)))
    ((combine append) (take (mid deck) deck) (drop (mid deck) deck))))) => None
(riff-shuffle (list 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8)) => (1 5 2 6 3 7 4 8)
((repeat riff-shuffle) (list 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8)) => (1 3 5 7 2 4 6 8)
(riff-shuffle (riff-shuffle (riff-shuffle (list 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8)))) => (1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8)
******************************************** lis.py: 0 out of 29 tests fail.
(quote (testing 1 (2.0) -3.14e159)) => (testing 1 (2.0) -3.14e+159)
(+ 2 2) => 4
(+ (* 2 100) (* 1 10)) => 210
(if (> 6 5) (+ 1 1) (+ 2 2)) => 2
(if (< 6 5) (+ 1 1) (+ 2 2)) => 4
(define x 3) => None
x => 3
(+ x x) => 6
(begin (define x 1) (set! x (+ x 1)) (+ x 1)) => 3
((lambda (x) (+ x x)) 5) => 10
(define twice (lambda (x) (* 2 x))) => None
(twice 5) => 10
(define compose (lambda (f g) (lambda (x) (f (g x))))) => None
((compose list twice) 5) => (10)
(define repeat (lambda (f) (compose f f))) => None
((repeat twice) 5) => 20
((repeat (repeat twice)) 5) => 80
(define fact (lambda (n) (if (<= n 1) 1 (* n (fact (- n 1)))))) => None
(fact 3) => 6
(fact 50) => 30414093201713378043612608166064768844377641568960512000000000000
(define abs (lambda (n) ((if (> n 0) + -) 0 n))) => None
(list (abs -3) (abs 0) (abs 3)) => (3 0 3)
(define combine (lambda (f)
    (lambda (x y)
      (if (null? x) (quote ())
          (f (list (car x) (car y))
             ((combine f) (cdr x) (cdr y)))))))) => None
(define zip (combine cons)) => None
```

```
(zip (list 1 2 3 4) (list 5 6 7 8)) => ((1 5) (2 6) (3 7) (4 8))
(define riff-shuffle (lambda (deck) (begin
    (define take (lambda (n seq) (if (<= n 0) (quote ()) (cons (car seq) (take (- n 1) (cdr seq))))))
    (define drop (lambda (n seq) (if (<= n 0) seq (drop (- n 1) (cdr seq)))))
    (define mid (lambda (seq) (/ (length seq) 2)))
    ((combine append) (take (mid deck) deck) (drop (mid deck) deck))))) => None
(riff-shuffle (list 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8)) => (1 5 2 6 3 7 4 8)
((repeat riff-shuffle) (list 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8)) => (1 3 5 7 2 4 6 8)
(riff-shuffle (riff-shuffle (riff-shuffle (list 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8)))) => (1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8)
() =raises=> SyntaxError (): wrong length
(set! x) =raises=> SyntaxError (set! x): wrong length
(define 3 4) =raises=> SyntaxError (define 3 4): can define only a symbol
(quote 1 2) =raises=> SyntaxError (quote 1 2): wrong length
(if 1 2 3 4) =raises=> SyntaxError (if 1 2 3 4): wrong length
(lambda 3 3) =raises=> SyntaxError (lambda 3 3): illegal lambda argument list
(lambda (x)) =raises=> SyntaxError (lambda (x)): wrong length
(if (= 1 2) (define-macro a 'a)
    (define-macro a 'b)) =raises=> SyntaxError (define-macro a (quote a)): define-macro only allowed
at top level
(define (twice x) (* 2 x)) => None
(twice 2) => 4
(twice 2 2) =raises=> TypeError expected (x), given (2 2),
(define lyst (lambda items items)) => None
(lyst 1 2 3 (+ 2 2)) => (1 2 3 4)
(if 1 2) => 2
(if (= 3 4) 2) => None
(define ((account bal) amt) (set! bal (+ bal amt)) bal) => None
(define a1 (account 100)) => None
(a1 0) => 100
(a1 10) => 110
(a1 10) => 120
(define (newton guess function derivative epsilon)
    (define guess2 (- guess (/ (function guess) (derivative guess))))
    (if (< (abs (- guess guess2)) epsilon) guess2
        (newton guess2 function derivative epsilon))) => None
(define (square-root a)
    (newton 1 (lambda (x) (- (* x x) a)) (lambda (x) (* 2 x)) 1e-8)) => None
(> (square-root 200.) 14.14213) => #t
(< (square-root 200.) 14.14215) => #t
(= (square-root 200.) (sqrt 200.)) => #t
(define (sum-squares-range start end)
         (define (sumsq-acc start end acc)
            (if (> start end) acc (sumsq-acc (+ start 1) end (+ (* start start) acc))))
         (sumsq-acc start end 0)) => None
(sum-squares-range 1 3000) => 9004500500
(call/cc (lambda (throw) (+ 5 (* 10 (throw 1))))) ;; throw => 1
(call/cc (lambda (throw) (+ 5 (* 10 1)))) ;; do not throw => 15
(call/cc (lambda (throw)
         (+ 5 (* 10 (call/cc (lambda (escape) (* 100 (escape 3)))))))) ; 1 level => 35
(call/cc (lambda (throw)
         (+ 5 (* 10 (call/cc (lambda (escape) (* 100 (throw 3)))))))) ; 2 levels => 3
(call/cc (lambda (throw)
         (+ 5 (* 10 (call/cc (lambda (escape) (* 100 1))))))) ; 0 levels => 1005
(* 1i 1i) => (-1+0i)
(sqrt -1) => 1i
(let ((a 1) (b 2)) (+ a b)) => 3
```

```
(let ((a 1) (b 2 3)) (+ a b)) =raises=> SyntaxError (let ((a 1) (b 2 3)) (+ a b)): illegal binding
list
(and 1 2 3) => 3
(and (> 2 1) 2 3) => 3
(and) => #t
(and (> 2 1) (> 2 3)) => #f
(define-macro unless (lambda args `(if (not ,(car args)) (begin ,@(cdr args))))) ; test ` => None
(unless (= 2 (+ 1 1)) (display 2) 3 4) => None
2
(unless (= 4 (+ 1 1)) (display 2) (display "\n") 3 4) => 4
(quote x) => x
(quote (1 2 three)) => (1 2 three)
'x => x
'(one 2 3) => (one 2 3)
(define L (list 1 2 3)) => None
`(testing ,@L testing) => (testing 1 2 3 testing)
`(testing ,L testing) => (testing (1 2 3) testing)
`,@L =raises=> SyntaxError (unquote-splicing L): can't splice here
'(1 ;test comments '
     ;skip this line
     2 ; more ; comments ; ) )
     3) ; final comment => (1 2 3)
******************************************** lispy.py: 0 out of 81 tests fail.
```

# (Appendix) Brought to you by

[Guy Steele](#) [Gerald Jay Sussman](#)

[Alonzo Church](#) [John McCarthy](#) [Steve Russell](#)

Alonzo Church defined the lambda calculus in 1932. John McCarthy proposed that the calculus could be used as the basis of a programming language in late 1958; in 1959 Steve Russell had coded the first Lisp interpreter in assembler for the IBM 704. In 1975, Gerald Jay Sussman and Guy Steele invented the Scheme dialect of Lisp.

(Note: it may seem perverse to use `lambda` to introduce a procedure/function. The notation goes back to Alonzo Church, who in the 1930's started with a "hat" symbol; he wrote the square function as "ŷ . y × y". But frustrated typographers moved the hat to the left of the parameter and changed it to a capital lambda: "Λy . y × y"; from there the capital lambda was changed to lowercase, and now we see "λy . y × y" in math books and `(lambda (y) (* y y))` in Lisp. If it were up to me, I'd use `fun` or maybe `^`. )

*Peter Norvig*