

# JavaScript

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(adopted from my & Edward Yang's CSE242 slides)



# Why JavaScript?

- Lingua franca of the Internet
  - Used in the browsers, used server-side, used for IoT
  - Still evolving to address growing needs (EcmaScript)
- Interesting goals and design trade-offs
- Illustrates many core concepts of CSE 130

# The great ideas [JavaScript]

## Expressive power (say more with less)

First-class functions

Pattern matching

Type inference

Exception handling

Monads

Continuations

## Reliability and reuse

Type polymorphism

Type classes

Modules

Objects & inheritance

## Cross-cutting concerns

Memory management

Concurrency

# The great ideas [Haskell]

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# Today

- A little bit of history
- Concepts from JavaScript
  - First-class functions
  - Objects
  - Language flexibility

May 1995

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We need a scripting language  
for the browser!



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Can I use Scheme?



# May 1995



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Can I use Scheme?

Ha? No! Make it look like Java!



One week later...

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Here is a hacked up prototype!



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Great! Let's ship it!

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Great! Let's ship it!

(It really took another year to embed it in the browser)

# JavaScript's design goals [Eich, ICFP 2005]

- Make it easy to copy/paste snippets of code
  - Tolerate “minor” errors — e.g., missing semicolons
- Simplify event handling (inspired by HyperCard)
- Pick a few hard-working, powerful primitives
  - First-class functions (based off Scheme/Lisp)
  - Objects everywhere (based off Self/Smalltalk)
- Leave all else out!

# JavaScript has evolved

- EcmaScript 5 and 6 introduced many new features
  - block scoping
  - new types (Map, Set, Symbols, Uint8Array, etc.)
  - strict mode
  - module system
  - classes
- How could JavaScript have been useful without these?



First-class functions!

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  - can be passed as arguments to a function
  - can be returned as result of function call

# Function as scoping primitive

- Today: JavaScript has block scoping
- But, until recently, JavaScript only had function-level scoping
  - What does this mean?
  - How did people survive?

scope-\*.js

# Function as scoping primitive

- Whenever you want a new scope:
  - declare a new function
  - immediately call it
- Key requirement from language design:
  - being able to declare function in any scope



# Okay! But...

- Why do we want to pass functions as arguments?
- Or return functions as results?

# Functions as args

- Original reason: simple way to do event handling
  - E.g., `onclick(function() { alert("button clicked!"); })`
- Still true today. But many other reasons, including:
  - performance: asynchronous callbacks
  - expressiveness: filter, map-reduce, etc.

# Performance?

- Don't need to block when reading file
- Can tell runtime system to call your "callback" function once it's read the file
  - This allows runtime to schedule other IO concurrently

perf-\*.js

# Expressive power

- Say more with less!
  - E.g., filter all positive elements from array
  - E.g., add 42 to every element of the array
- In both cases: we are expressing the computation we care about without telling the computer what to do
  - Don't need to clutter code with low-level mechanisms!
  - Opens up room for performance optimizations! How?

expressive.js

# Why return functions?

- With the other 2 properties: let's you compose functions from other functions
  - Functions that do this are called “high-order”
- E.g., function composition:  $(f \circ g)(x) = f(g(x))$ 
  - Here  $\circ$  is a function that takes 2 functions:  $f$  and  $g$
  - E.g., instead of `map(map(list, f), g)` we can do `map(list, g  $\circ$  f)`: way faster!

hof.js



Aren't these just function pointers?

# No! JavaScript functions are closures!

- Closure = function code + environment
  - Function pointers don't keep track of environment
  - We'll see this in more detail in a few lectures

closure.js

# What else can functions be used for?

- EcmaScript now has notion of modules
  - But most implementations still use functions
- How can we use functions to implement modules?
  - Closures are good for information hiding
  - Locally declared variables are scoped to the function ("module")
  - Function called with exports object which is used to expose public variables/functions

module\*.js

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- Concepts from JavaScript ✓
  - First-class functions ✓
  - Objects
  - Language flexibility

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  - Methods are function-valued properties
    - e.g., `obj.f = function (y) { return this.x + y; }`

# What is “this”?

- this is called the receiver
  - Comes from Self (Smalltalk dialect)
  - Will see more of this in objects lecture
- Intuitively: this points to the object which has the function as a method
  - Really: this is bound when the function is called

receiver.js



# I thought JavaScript had classes

- Now it does! But it didn't always
- How did people program before?
  - Used to use functions as constructors!

# What is a function constructor?

- Just a function!
  - When you call function with new the runtime binds the `this` keyword to newly created object
  - You can set properties on the receiver to populate object
  - One property is special: `prototype`

class.js

# Today

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# Language flexibility

- Does not require lines end in ';'
  - Automatic ';' insertion not always what you expect
- Casts implicitly to avoid "failures"
  - Useful in some case, usually source of errors
- Hoisting
  - Sometimes useful, but, variable declarations (though not definitions) are also hoisted

# Language flexibility

- Evaluate string as code with eval
  - Need access to full scope at point of call
  - Scope depends on whether call is direct or not
- Can alter almost every object (“monkey patch”)
  - Even built-in objects like window and fs
  - What’s the problem with this?

# Takeaways

- First-class functions are extremely powerful
  - We'll see this over and over
- Language “flexibility” is not free
  - Think about features before shipping them