

Chapter 1, “Building Abstractions with Procedures”

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1. Building Abstractions with Procedures (pp. 1-106)

- Target of study: **computational processes** (1)
 - intuition: “Computational processes are abstract beings that inhabit computers” (1)
- Processes manipulate **data** (1)
- Evolution of a process is directed by a pattern of rules called a **program** (2)
- An upshot: “**People create programs to direct processes**” (2)
- Programs are composed from **programming languages** (2)
- A framing thought, among others (2-3)

Well-designed computational systems, like well-designed automobiles or nuclear reactors, are designed in a modular manner, so that parts can be constructed, replaced, and debugged separately.

Programming in Lisp

- “[...] our **procedural** thoughts will be expressed in Lisp” (3)
- Lisp **interpreter**: “a machine that carries out the processes described in the Lisp language” (3)
- Interesting historical note, about one of Lisp’s original use cases (4)

Lisp [...] was designed to provide symbol-manipulating capabilities for attacking programming problems such as the symbolic differentiation and integration of algebraic expressions.
- A note about dialects of Lisp (4)

Lisp is by now a family of dialects, which, while sharing most of the original features, may differ from one another in significant ways

 - This book makes use of the Scheme dialect of Lisp
- A main reason why Lisp is being used as the framework for the book’s discussion of programming (5)

If Lisp is not a mainstream language, why are we using it as the framework for our discussion of programming? Because the language possesses unique features that make it an excellent medium for studying important programming constructs and data structures for relating them to the linguistic features that support them. **The most significant of these features is the fact that Lisp descriptions of processes, called *procedures*, can themselves be represented and manipulated as Lisp data.** The importance of this is that there are powerful program-design techniques that rely on the ability to **blur the traditional distinction between “passive” data and “active” processes.**

- The above facts make Lisp good at writing programs that **manipulate other programs as data** (like interpreters and compilers)

1.1 The Elements of Programming (pp. 6-39)

- A powerful programming language can be used as: (6)
 - a means for instructing a computer to perform tasks
 - a framework within which we organize our ideas about processes
- Combining simple ideas into complex ideas (6)

[...] when we describe a language, we should **pay particular attention to the means that the language provides for combining simple ideas to form more complex ideas.**

 - Three mechanisms for doing this
 1. **Primitive expressions**, which represent the simplest entities the language is concerned with
 2. **Means of combination**, by which compound elements are built from simpler ones
 3. **Means of abstraction**, by which compound elements can be named and manipulated as units
- Two kinds of elements in programming: **procedures** and **data** (6)
 - Data is the “stuff” that we manipulate; procedures are the rules for manipulating the data
- An upshot: (6)

[...] any powerful programming language should be able to describe primitive data and primitive procedures and should have methods for combining and abstracting procedures and data.

1.1.1 Expressions (pp. 7-10)

- An initial framing (7)

Imagine that you are sitting at a computer terminal. You type an *expression*, and the interpreter responds by displaying the result of its *evaluating* that expression.

- Some vocab (8)
 - **combinations**: expressions formed by delimiting a list of expressions within parentheses, in order to denote procedure application
 - **operator**: leftmost element in the list
 - **operand**: other elements in the list than the operator
 - **argument**: “The value of a combination is obtained by applying the procedure specified by the operator to the *arguments* that are the values of the operands”
- Scheme uses **prefix notation**: operator to the left of the operands (8)
 - Advantages of prefix notation (8-9)

- * can accommodate procedures that may take an arbitrary number of arguments

· e.g., (+ 21 35 12 7 5 6), which evaluates to 86

- * extends in a straightforward way to allow combinations to be *nested*, i.e., combinations themselves can have combinations as elements

· e.g., (+ (* 3 5) (- 10 6)), which evaluates to 19

- might think to use a *pretty-printing* convention—where each long combination is written so that the operands are aligned vertically—if you have lots of nested things, like

```
(+ (* 3
    (+ (* 2 4)
        (+ 3 5)))
  (+ (- 10 7)
      6))
```

instead of

```
(+ (* 3 (+ (* 2 4) (+ 3 5))) (+ (- 10 7) 6))
```

- Scheme interpreter runs in a **REPL** (*read-eval-print loop*)
 - Interesting note here (10)

Observe in particular that it is not necessary to explicitly instruct the interpreter to print the value of the expression.

1.1.2 Naming and the Environment (pp. 10-12)

- **names** to refer to computation objects (10)

We say that the name identifies a *variable* whose *value* is the object.

- The Scheme dialect of Lisp uses `define` to name things (10)

– e.g.,

```
(define size 2)
```

- `define` is Scheme's **simplest means of abstraction**, since it lets us to use simple names to refer to the results of compound operations (11)

- An upshot (11)

[...] complex programs are constructed by building, step by step, computational objects of increasing complexity.

- In order to associate values with symbols, need to have some sort of memory that keeps track of the name object pairs (11)

– This memory is called the **environment** (more precisely, the **global environment** in this specific case)

1.1.3 Evaluating Combinations (pp. 12-15)

- The interpreter itself is following a **procedure** when it evaluates combinations (12)

To evaluate a combination, do the following:

1. Evaluate the subexpression of the combination.
2. Apply the procedure that is the value of the leftmost subexpression (the operator) to the arguments that are the values of the other subexpressions (the operands).

- Important points about processes in general, that are illustrated by the above example (12-14)

– The evaluation rule is **recursive**: the first step above tells us to *recursively* evaluate the evaluation process on each element of a given combination (12)

* Can think of this recursive evaluation process as a process of **tree accumulation** (where the tree structure is implied by the nested structure of the combinations)—the **values of the operands** “**percolate upward**”

– repeated application of the first step in the evaluation rule brings us to the point where we need to evaluate **primitive expressions** (14)

- * examples of primitive expressions are numerals, built-in operators, and other names

- * Rules for handling primitive cases (14)

We take care of the primitive cases by stipulating that

- the values of numerals are the numbers that they name,
- the values of built-in operators are the machine instruction sequences that carry out the corresponding operations, and
- the values of other names are the objects associated with those names in the environment.

- * A note about the relationship between meaning of symbols in expressions and the *environment* (14)

We may regard the second rule [from the rules for handling primitive cases, above] as a special case of the third one by stipulating that symbols such as + and * are also included in the global environment, and are associated with the sequences of machine instructions that are their “values.” **The key point to notice is the role of the environment in determining the meaning of the symbols in expressions.** In an interactive programming language such as Lisp, it is meaningless to speak of the value of an expression such as (+ x 1) without specifying any information about the environment that would provide a meaning for the symbol x (or even for the symbol +).

- The evaluation rule does not handle definitions (14)

- * Corollary: (define x 3), for example, is not a combination

- Exceptions to the general evaluation rule are called **special forms** (14)

- Each special form has its own evaluation rule

- Note about **syntax** of the programming language (14-5)

The various kinds of expressions (each with its associated evaluation rule) constitute the syntax of the programming language.

- Lisp’s syntax is simple relative to other programming languages’ syntaxes (15)

[In Lisp], the evaluation rule for expressions can be described by as simple general rule together with specialized rules for a small number of special forms.

- A note here also about **syntactic sugar** (15n11)

Special syntactic forms that are simply convenient alternative surface structures for things that can be written in more uniform ways are

sometimes called *syntactic sugar*, to use a phrase coined by Peter Landin.

1.1.4 Compound Procedures (pp. 15-18)

- [TODO]

1.1.5 The Substitution Model for Procedure Application (pp. 18-22)

- [TODO]

1.1.6 Conditional Expressions and Predicates (pp. 22-27)

- [TODO]

1.1.7 Example: Square Roots by Newton's Method (pp. 27-33)

- [TODO]

1.1.8 Procedures as Black-Box Abstractions (pp. 33-39)

- [TODO]

1.2 Procedures and the Processes They Generate (pp. 40-74)

1.3 Formulating Abstractions with Higher-Order Procedures (pp. 74-106)