

Lecture 8: Interpreter runtime structures

David Hovemeyer

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601.428/628 Compilers and Interpreters



Today

- ▶ Scopes, environments, function calls
- ▶ Implementing functions and function calls
- ▶ Closures
- ▶ Memory management, garbage collection

Scopes, environments, and function calls

Scope, lifetime

- ▶ Scope: in what region(s) of the program is a particular variable visible?
- ▶ Lifetime: *when* in the execution of the program does a variable exist?
- ▶ These are related but distinct concepts

Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {  
    var b;  
    b = 1;  
    c = 4;  
    a + b;  
}
```

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1;
```

```
b = 2;
```

```
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
    var b;
```

```
    b = 1;
```

```
    c = 4;
```

```
    a + b;
```

```
}
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

scope of global variable a

Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1;
```

```
b = 2;
```

```
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
    var b;
```

```
    b = 1;
```

```
    c = 4;
```

```
    a + b;
```

```
}
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

scope of global variable a

global variable a not visible
here: shadowed by parameter a

Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1;
```

```
b = 2;
```

```
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
    var b;
```

```
    b = 1;
```

```
    c = 4;
```

```
    a + b;
```

```
}
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

scope of global variable b

Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1;
```

```
b = 2;
```

```
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
  var b;
```

```
  b = 1;
```

```
  c = 4;
```

```
  a + b;
```

```
}
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

scope of global variable b

} global variable b not visible
here: shadowed by local variable

Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1;
```

```
b = 2;
```

```
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
  var b;
```

```
  b = 1;
```

```
  c = 4;
```

```
  a + b;
```

```
}
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

global variable c's scope is
the entire program

– not shadowed by any
identically-named parameters
or local variables

Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1;
```

```
b = 2;
```

```
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
  var b;
```

```
  b = 1;
```

```
  c = 4;
```

```
  a + b;
```

```
}
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

global variable c's scope is
the entire program

– not shadowed by any
identically-named parameters
or local variables

Assignment to
global variable!

Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

scope of parameter a :
body of function

Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {  
  var b  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

scope of local variable b:
from point of definition to
end of function body

Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {  
    var b;  
    b = 1;  
    c = 4;  
    a + b;  
}
```

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);  
  
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

scope of global variable d:
point of definition to end of module

Variable lifetime

- ▶ Global variables exist for the duration of the execution of the program
- ▶ Parameters and local variables exist for the duration of a function call
 - ▶ Call stack: each call pushes an *activation record*
 - ▶ A calls B, B calls C, C calls D, etc. — arbitrarily many calls can be in progress at any point
 - ▶ In practice, the call stack is usually limited in size
 - ▶ Recursion: A calls itself
 - ▶ Caller and callee always have distinct activation records

Environment

- ▶ We'll use the term *environment* for a data structure containing a collection of variables that have a common lifetime
- ▶ Global environment: has definitions of global variables
 - ▶ Global variables are visible throughout the program unless shadowed by a variable in an “inner” scope
- ▶ Function call environment: created dynamically (on the call stack) to represent parameters and local variables of a called function

Nesting of environments

- ▶ Nesting: an “inner” environment can reference variables in an “outer” environment
 - ▶ But not vice versa!
- ▶ In our interpreter, there are only two levels of nesting, the global environment and function call environments
- ▶ In a *block-structured* language, every “block” defines a new environment
 - ▶ C and C++ are block-structured languages

Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1;
```

```
b = 2;
```

```
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
  var b;
```

```
  b = 1;
```

```
  c = 4;
```

```
  a + b;
```

```
}
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

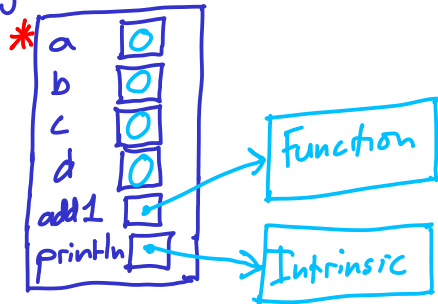
```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

* denotes current environment

global environment



Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

⇒ a = 1;

```
b = 2;
```

```
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
  var b;
```

```
  b = 1;
```

```
  c = 4;
```

```
  a + b;
```

```
}
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

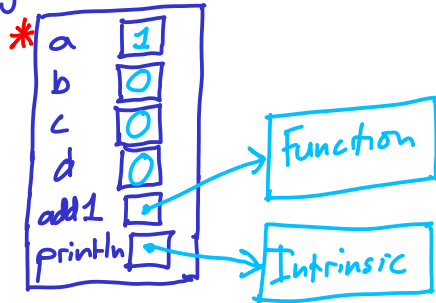
```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

* denotes current environment

global environment



Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1;
```

```
⇒ b = 2;
```

```
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
  var b;
```

```
  b = 1;
```

```
  c = 4;
```

```
  a + b;
```

```
}
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

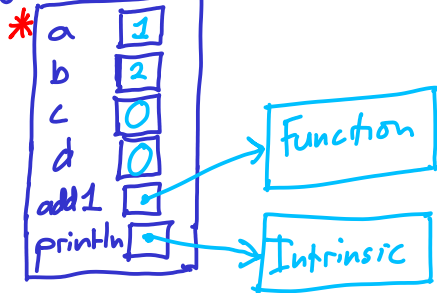
```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

* denotes current environment

global environment



Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1;
```

```
b = 2;
```

```
⇒ c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
  var b;
```

```
  b = 1;
```

```
  c = 4;
```

```
  a + b;
```

```
}
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

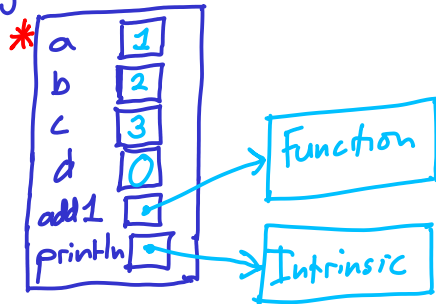
```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

* denotes current environment

global environment



Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

* denotes current environment

```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

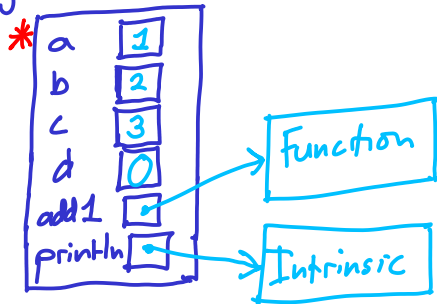
```
var d;
```

```
⇒ d = add1(c);
```

function call:
create environment

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

global environment



Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

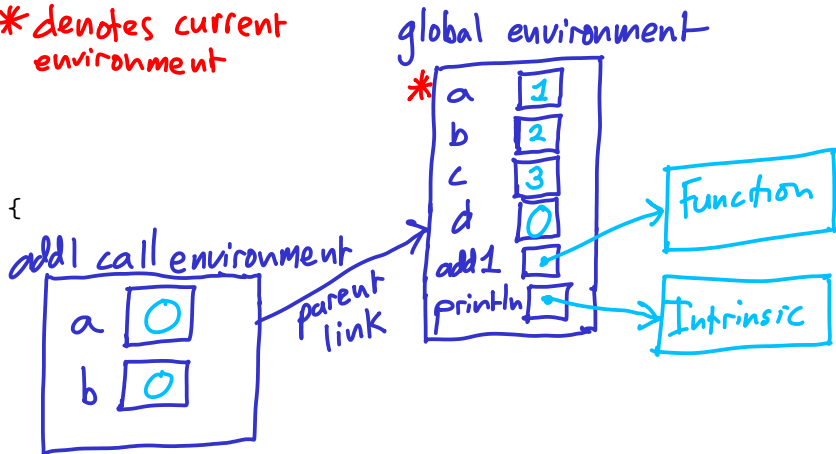
```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

⇒

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

* denotes current environment



Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

```
var d;  
⇒ d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

* denotes current environment

global environment

*

a	1
b	2
c	3
d	0
add1	Function
println	Intrinsic

add1 call environment

a	3
b	0

parent link

bind parameter(s)
to argument value(s)

Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

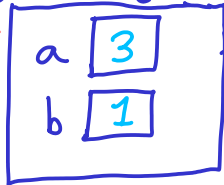
```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

* denotes current environment

function call begins!

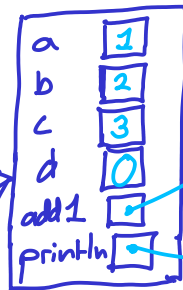
add1 call environment

*



parent link

global environment




Function

Intrinsic

Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

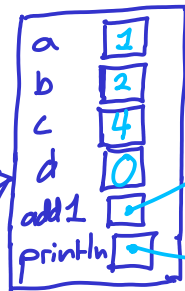
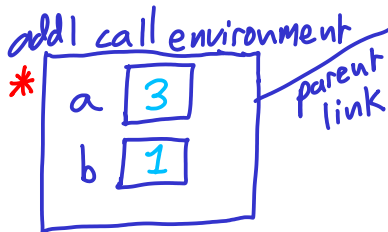
```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
   c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

** denotes current environment*

global environment



Function

Intrinsic

Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

* denotes current environment

```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

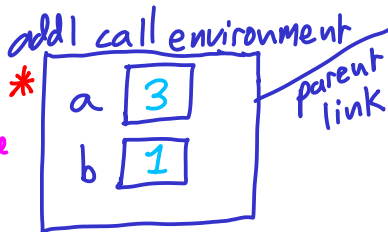
⇒ result value is 4

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

global environment

a	1
b	2
c	4
d	0
add1	Function
println	Intrinsic



Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

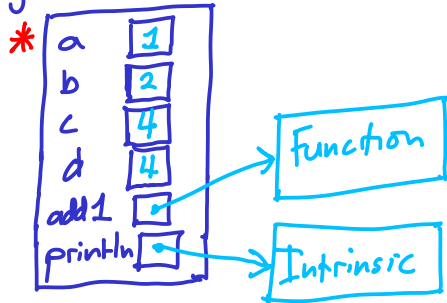
⇒ `d = add1(c);`

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

* denotes current environment

value of function call is 4

global environment



Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

* denotes current environment

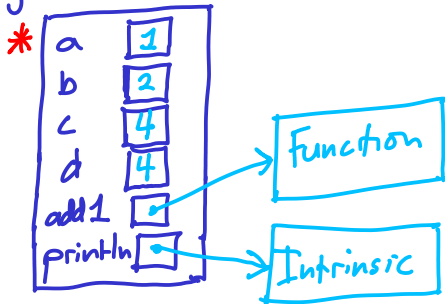
```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

```
⇒ println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

prints 1

global environment



Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

* denotes current environment

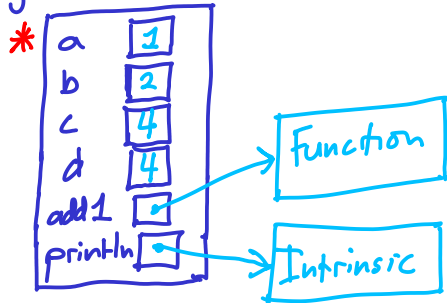
```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);  
⇒ println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

prints 2

global environment



Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

* denotes current environment

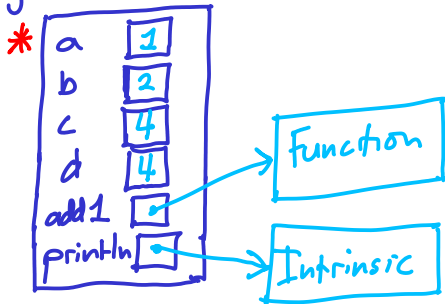
```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
⇒ println(c);  
d;
```

prints 4

global environment



Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

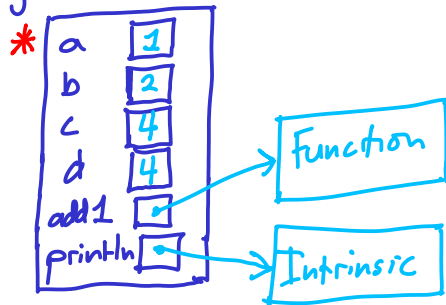
```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
⇒ d;
```

* denotes current environment

global environment



Program result: 4

Lexical addresses

In a language where every variable's scope is known statically, we can use *lexical addresses* to associate variable references with their definitions

Each variable has an integer position

Lexical address is pair (*depth*, *position*)

- ▶ *depth*: 0 if referenced variable is in current environment, 1 if in parent, 2 if in grandparent, etc.

Determining lexical addresses

Analyze source:

- ▶ Keep track of current (static) environment, initially the global environment
- ▶ Enter a nested scope → enter a nested environment (with previous environment as its parent)
- ▶ Leave a nested scope → return to parent environment
- ▶ Keep track of names defined (variables, functions)
- ▶ As long as definitions precede uses, we can associate each reference to a name with an entry in a static environment
- ▶ Static (pre-execution) environments are also called *symbol tables*
 - ▶ Much more about these when we move on to compilers!

Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1;  
b = 2;  
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

Initially: global env.
w/ intrinsics defined

global env.

name	position
println	0

Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1;
```

```
b = 2;
```

```
c = 3;
```

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
  var b;
```

```
  b = 1;
```

```
  c = 4;
```

```
  a + b;
```

```
}
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

definitions of a, b, c

global env.

name	position
println	0
a	1
b	2
c	3

Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1; (0,1)
```

```
b = 2; (0,2)
```

```
c = 3; (0,3)
```

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
  var b;
```

```
  b = 1;
```

```
  c = 4;
```

```
  a + b;
```

```
}
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

assign lexical
addresses

global env.

name	position
println	0
a	1
b	2
c	3

Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1; (0,1)
```

```
b = 2; (0,2)
```

```
c = 3; (0,3)
```

```
{ function add1(a) {
```

```
  var b;
```

```
  b = 1;
```

```
  c = 4;
```

```
  a + b;
```

```
}
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

create nested
env. for function,
define add1 in
global env

parent
link

add1 env.

name	position

global env.

name	position
println	0
a	1
b	2
c	3
add1	4

Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1; (0,1)  
b = 2; (0,2)  
c = 3; (0,3)
```

```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1;  
  c = 4;  
  a + b;  
}
```

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

define param a,
local var b

add1 env.

name	position
a	0
b	1

parent
link

global env.

name	position
println	0
a	1
b	2
c	3
add1	4

Example program

```
var a, b, c;  
a = 1; (0,1)  
b = 2; (0,2)  
c = 3; (0,3)
```

```
function add1(a) {  
  var b;  
  b = 1; (0,1)  
  c = 4; (1,3)  
  a + b;  
}  
(0,0) (0,1)
```

```
var d;  
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);  
println(b);  
println(c);  
d;
```

assign lexical addrs
for var refs

global env.

name	position
println	0
a	1
b	2
c	3
add1	4

parent
link

add1 env.

name	position
a	0
b	1

Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1; (0,1)
```

```
b = 2; (0,2)
```

```
c = 3; (0,3)
```

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
  var b;
```

```
  b = 1; (0,1)
```

```
  c = 4; (1,3)
```

```
  a + b;
```

```
}  
(0,0) (0,1)
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

assign lexical addrs
for var refs

reference to
global variable,
depth is 1
(parent env.)

parent
link

add1 env.

name	position
a	0
b	1

global env.

name	position
println	0
a	1
b	2
c	3
add1	4

Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1; (0,1)
```

```
b = 2; (0,2)
```

```
c = 3; (0,3)
```

define global var d

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
  var b;
```

```
  b = 1; (0,1)
```

```
  c = 4; (1,3)
```

```
  a + b;
```

```
  }  
(0,0) (0,1)
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
println(a);
```

```
println(b);
```

```
println(c);
```

```
d;
```

global env.

name	position
println	0
a	1
b	2
c	3
add1	4
d	5

Example program

```
var a, b, c;
```

```
a = 1; (0,1)
```

```
b = 2; (0,2)
```

```
c = 3; (0,3)
```

assign remaining
lexical addresses

```
function add1(a) {
```

```
  var b;
```

```
  b = 1; (0,1)
```

```
  c = 4; (1,3)
```

```
  a + b;
```

```
}  
(0,0) (0,1)
```

```
var d;
```

```
d = add1(c);
```

```
(0,5) (0,4) (0,3)
```

```
(0,0) println(a); (0,1)
```

```
(0,0) println(b); (0,2)
```

```
(0,0) println(c); (0,3)
```

```
d; (0,5)
```

global env.

name	position
println	0
a	1
b	2
c	3
add1	4
d	5

Function calls

Executing a function call

- ▶ As we've seen, executing a function call means:
 - ▶ Creating a new environment for it (with global environment as parent)
 - ▶ Evaluating argument expressions
 - ▶ Binding function parameters to argument values in the new function call environment
 - ▶ Evaluating the body of the function in the new function call environment
 - ▶ Result of evaluating body is result of function
 - ▶ Becomes value of function call expression at call site

Environment representation

How to represent an environment? One possibility:

```
struct Environment {  
    std::map<std::string, struct Value> vars;  
    struct Environment *parent;  
};
```

Assumes that variables will be looked up by name

Another possibility

If lexical addresses are computed for variable/function references, then the *position* of the variable in the environment is the key to accessing it

- ▶ Names are only needed when assigning lexical addresses prior to execution

So:

```
struct Environment {  
    // In both of these vectors, index=position  
    std::vector<std::string> names; // not needed at runtime!  
    std::vector<struct Value> vals; // only needed at runtime!  
    struct Environment *parent;  
}
```

Assumes that variables will be looked up (at runtime) by position

Function representation

Key information in function representation:

- ▶ Identifying information about all parameters and local variables
 - ▶ Enough information to create and initialize a function call environment at runtime
 - ▶ Maybe use `Environment` for this? Only needs info for local parameters and variables, can leave parent field null
- ▶ AST of function body

Possibility:

```
struct Function {  
    struct Environment env_template;  
    struct Node *body_ast;  
};
```


Closures

Closures

Many languages support *closures*, a.k.a. anonymous functions, lambdas

Basic idea: the closure retains a pointer to its parent environment, i.e., the environment in which it was created at runtime

- ▶ This may imply that the lifetime of the parent environment is extended to be at least as long as the lifetime of the closure

Closure example

```
function make_addn(n) {  
    return function(x) { x + n; };  
}
```

```
var add1, add2;  
add1 = make_addn(1);  
add2 = make_addn(2);
```

```
println(add1(1)); // prints 2  
println(add2(1)); // prints 3
```

Implementing closures

A few possible implementation techniques:

- ▶ Dynamically-allocate function call environments
 - ▶ Closure values retain a pointer to parent environment
 - ▶ Could use reference counting to know when to delete dynamically-created environments
 - ▶ Environment is destroyed when there are no remaining references to it
- ▶ Closure retains a *copy* of its parent environment (and grandparent, etc.)
 - ▶ Or, copies of just the variables that are actually referenced by the body of the closure function

Memory management, garbage collection

Dynamically allocated values

- ▶ We noted last time that runtime values may require dynamically-allocated storage
 - ▶ Strings, vectors, list nodes, objects, etc.
- ▶ How to ensure that dynamically allocated memory gets reclaimed when no longer used?
- ▶ A couple standard approaches:
 - ▶ Reference counting
 - ▶ Garbage collection

Reference counting

- ▶ All dynamically allocated objects have a *reference count* field
 - ▶ Is just an integer indicating how many pointers are pointing to the object
- ▶ Language runtime must take care to increment and decrement references counts
 - ▶ C++ smart pointers can help a lot with this
- ▶ When reference count reaches 0, deallocate
- ▶ Problem: object graphs with cycles can't be reclaimed

Garbage collection

- ▶ Language runtime keeps track of references to dynamic objects
- ▶ Periodically, it determines which objects are reachable
 - ▶ Unreachable objects are reclaimed
- ▶ There are *many* ways to do this! (Tons of research, we could do an entire course on this topic)
 - ▶ We'll briefly discuss two

Root set

- ▶ The *root set* of references are the starting point for determining which objects are reachable
- ▶ It consists of:
 - ▶ Objects referenced by global variables
 - ▶ Objects referenced by the activation records (i.e., function call environments) of currently-executing functions (on the call stack)
- ▶ Objects not directly or indirectly reachable from the root set can be assumed to be garbage

Assumptions

- ▶ The garbage collector can find all of the dynamically allocated objects
- ▶ Given a pointer to an object, the garbage collector knows what pointers to other objects are stored in it

Mark and sweep

- ▶ Starting from the root set, do a graph traversal to find all reachable objects, and mark them as “live”
- ▶ Traverse all dynamically allocated objects, and reclaim the memory of those not marked as alive
 - ▶ Also, clear the “live” mark on objects that are still alive

Copying

- ▶ Heap is divided into *semispaces*
- ▶ New objects are allocated in the current semispace
- ▶ To collect garbage:
 - ▶ Starting from the root set, do a graph traversal of reachable objects
 - ▶ For each live object, copy it into the other semispace (keeping track of mapping from old location to new location)
 - ▶ Once all objects are copied, update all pointers in root set and live objects to reflect the updated object locations
 - ▶ Switch semispaces