

# Lecture 8 – Lambda Calculus

## COSE212: Programming Languages

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2025 Fall

- FVAE – VAE with First-Class Functions
  - First-Class Functions
  - Concrete and Abstract Syntax
  - Interpreter and Natural Semantics with Closures
  - Static and Dynamic Scoping
- In this lecture, we will learn **syntactic sugar** and **lambda calculus**

## 1. Syntactic Sugar

- No More `val`

- F<sub>FAE</sub> – Removing `val` from FVAE

- Syntactic Sugar and Desugaring

## 2. Lambda Calculus

- Definition

- Church Encodings

- Church-Turing Thesis

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```
/* FVAE */  
val x = 1; x + 2
```

It assigns a **value** 1 to the **variable**  $x$ , and then evaluates the **body expression**  $x + 2$  with the environment  $[x \mapsto 1]$ .

It is same as:

```
/* FVAE */  
(x => x + 2)(1)
```

It assigns a **value** (argument) 1 to the **parameter**  $x$ , and then evaluates the **body expression**  $x + 2$  with the environment  $[x \mapsto 1]$ .

In general, the following two expressions are equivalent:

$\text{val } x = e_1; e_2$  is equivalent to  $(\lambda x. e_2)(e_1)$

Why?

The following inference rule for the semantics of  $\text{val } x = e_1; e_2$ :

$$\text{VAL} \frac{\sigma \vdash e_1 \Rightarrow v_1 \quad \sigma[x \mapsto v_1] \vdash e_2 \Rightarrow v_2}{\sigma \vdash \text{val } x = e_1; e_2 \Rightarrow v_2}$$

is equivalent to the following inference rule for the semantics of the combination  $(\lambda x. e_2)(e_1)$  of an anonymous function and an application:

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Fun} \\ \text{App} \end{array} \frac{\frac{}{\sigma \vdash \lambda x. e_2 \Rightarrow \langle \lambda x. e_2, \sigma \rangle} \quad \sigma \vdash e_1 \Rightarrow v_1 \quad \sigma[x \mapsto v_1] \vdash e_2 \Rightarrow v_2}{\sigma \vdash (\lambda x. e_2)(e_1) \Rightarrow v_2}$$

Then, we can define a smaller language FAE

Expressions	$e ::= n$	(Num)
	$  e + e$	(Add)
	$  e * e$	(Mul)
	$  x$	(Id)
	$  \lambda x. e$	(Fun)
	$  e(e)$	(App)

by removing val from FVAE using the following equivalence:

$\text{val } x = e_1; e_2$  is equivalent to  $(\lambda x. e_2)(e_1)$

## Definition (Syntactic Sugar)

Syntactic elements that can be expressed in terms of other syntactic elements are called **syntactic sugar**.

## Definition (Desugaring)

**Desugaring** is a translation for removing syntactic sugar.

$$\mathcal{D}[-] : \mathbb{E} \rightarrow \mathbb{E}$$

For example, we can define the desugaring of `val` as follows:

$$\mathcal{D}[\text{val } x = e_1; e_2] = (\lambda x. e_2)(e_1)$$

Is it correct? **No!** Why?



$$\mathcal{D}[\text{val } x = e_1; e_2] = (\lambda x. e_2)(e_1)$$

For example,

$$\mathcal{D}[\text{val } x = 1; 2 + (\text{val } y = 3; x * y)] = \lambda x. (2 + (\text{val } y = 3; x * y))(1)$$

Without desugaring rule for addition, the expression  $(\text{val } y = 3; x * y)$  in the right-hand side of the addition cannot be desugared.

So, we need to **recursively desugar** sub-expressions of the given expression even if they are not syntactic sugars.

$$\mathcal{D}[\text{val } x = e_1; e_2] = (\lambda x. \mathcal{D}[e_2])(\mathcal{D}[e_1])$$

$$\begin{array}{ll} \mathcal{D}[n] &= n \\ \mathcal{D}[e_1 + e_2] &= \mathcal{D}[e_1] + \mathcal{D}[e_2] \\ \mathcal{D}[e_1 * e_2] &= \mathcal{D}[e_1] * \mathcal{D}[e_2] \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{ll} \mathcal{D}[x] &= x \\ \mathcal{D}[\lambda x. e] &= \lambda x. \mathcal{D}[e] \\ \mathcal{D}[e_1(e_2)] &= \mathcal{D}[e_1](\mathcal{D}[e_2]) \end{array}$$

Then, it can be desugared as follows:

$$\mathcal{D}[\text{val } x = 1; 2 + (\text{val } y = 3; x * y)] = \lambda x. (2 + (\lambda y. x * y)(3))(1)$$

$$\mathcal{D}[\text{val } x = e_1; e_2] = (\lambda x. \mathcal{D}[e_2])(\mathcal{D}[e_1])$$

$$\begin{array}{ll} \mathcal{D}[n] &= n & \mathcal{D}[x] &= x \\ \mathcal{D}[e_1 + e_2] &= \mathcal{D}[e_1] + \mathcal{D}[e_2] & \mathcal{D}[\lambda x. e] &= \lambda x. \mathcal{D}[e] \\ \mathcal{D}[e_1 * e_2] &= \mathcal{D}[e_1] * \mathcal{D}[e_2] & \mathcal{D}[e_1(e_2)] &= \mathcal{D}[e_1](\mathcal{D}[e_2]) \end{array}$$

We can also implement **desugaring** in Scala:

```
def desugar(expr: Expr): Expr = expr match
  case Val(x, i, b) => App(Fun(x, desugar(b)), desugar(i))
  case Num(n)      => Num(n)
  case Add(l, r)    => Add(desugar(l), desugar(r))
  case Mul(l, r)    => Mul(desugar(l), desugar(r))
  case Id(x)        => Id(x)
  case Fun(p, b)     => Fun(p, desugar(b))
  case App(f, e)     => App(desugar(f), desugar(e))
```

Then, we can desugar the example FVAE expression as follows:

```
val expr: Expr = Expr("val x = 1; 2 + (val y = 3; x * y)")
desugar(expr) == Expr("(x => 2 + (y => x * y)(3))(1)")
```

Most programming languages have **syntactic sugar**:

- Scala

<code>for (x &lt;- list) yield x * 2</code>	$\equiv$	<code>list.map(x =&gt; x * 2)</code>
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- C++

<code>arr[i] + obj-&gt;field</code>	$\equiv$	<code>*(arr + i) + (*obj).field</code>
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- JavaScript<sup>1</sup>

<code>x   = y; x &amp;&amp;= y;</code>	$\equiv$	<code>x    (x = y); x &amp;&amp; (x = y);</code>
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- Haskell

<code>do x &lt;- f; g x</code>	$\equiv$	<code>f &gt;&gt;= (\x -&gt; g x)</code>
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- ...

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<sup>1</sup><https://babeljs.io/repl>

## 1. Syntactic Sugar

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F<sub>AE</sub> – Removing `val` from F<sub>VAE</sub>

Syntactic Sugar and Desugaring

## 2. Lambda Calculus

Definition

Church Encodings

Church-Turing Thesis

What is the minimal language that can express all the syntactic elements of FVAE? **Lambda calculus (LC)**!

The **lambda calculus (LC)** is a language only consisting of 1) **variables**, 2) **functions**, and 3) **applications**:

$$\begin{array}{lcl} \text{Expressions} & e ::= & x \\ & & | \lambda x. e \\ & & | e(e) \end{array}$$

We already showed that the **variable definition** can be desugared to a combination of a **function definition** and an **application**:

$$\mathcal{D}[\text{val } x = e_1; e_2] = (\lambda x. \mathcal{D}[e_2])(\mathcal{D}[e_1])$$

Then, how can we desugar other syntactic elements of FVAE?

Let's learn the **Church encodings**!

**Church encodings** are ways to encode **data** and **operations** in the **lambda calculus (LC)**.

For example, **Church numerals** are a way to encode **natural numbers** in the **lambda calculus (LC)**.

The key idea is to encode a **natural number**  $n$  as a **function** that takes another function  $f$  and an argument  $x$  and applies  $f$  to  $x$   $n$  times:

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{D}[0] &= \lambda f. \lambda x. x \\ \mathcal{D}[1] &= \lambda f. \lambda x. f(x) \\ \mathcal{D}[2] &= \lambda f. \lambda x. f(f(x)) \\ \mathcal{D}[3] &= \lambda f. \lambda x. f(f(f(x))) \\ &\vdots\end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{D}[e_1 + e_2] &= \lambda f. \lambda x. \mathcal{D}[e_1](f)(\mathcal{D}[e_2](f)(x)) \\ \mathcal{D}[e_1 * e_2] &= \lambda f. \lambda x. \mathcal{D}[e_1](\mathcal{D}[e_2](f))(x)\end{aligned}$$

For example,

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{D}[\![1 + 1]\!] &= \lambda f.\lambda x.\mathcal{D}[\![1]\!](f)(\mathcal{D}[\![1]\!](f)(x)) \\ &= \lambda f.\lambda x.(\lambda f.\lambda x.f(x))(f)((\lambda f.\lambda x.f(x))(f)(x)) \\ &= \lambda f.\lambda x.f((\lambda f.\lambda x.f(x))(f)(x)) \\ &= \lambda f.\lambda x.f(f(x)) \\ &= \mathcal{D}[\![2]\!]\end{aligned}$$

We can represent other data or operations in the **LC** using **Church encodings**, such as **integers**, **booleans**, **pairs**, **lists**, and so on.<sup>2</sup>

Let's see one more example of **Church encoding** for **booleans** and **logical operations** (i.e., **Church booleans**).

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<sup>2</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church\\_encoding](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_encoding)

The key idea is to encode a **boolean**  $b$  as a **function** that takes two arguments  $t$  and  $f$  and applies  $t$  if  $b$  is true or  $f$  if  $b$  is false:

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{D}[\text{true}] &= \lambda t. \lambda f. t & \mathcal{D}[\text{if}(e_1) e_2 \text{ else } e_3] &= \mathcal{D}[e_1](\mathcal{D}[e_2])(\mathcal{D}[e_3]) \\ \mathcal{D}[\text{false}] &= \lambda t. \lambda f. f & \mathcal{D}[e_1 \ \&\& \ e_2] &= \mathcal{D}[e_1](\mathcal{D}[e_2])(\mathcal{D}[e_1]) \\ & & \mathcal{D}[e_1 \ || \ e_2] &= \mathcal{D}[e_1](\mathcal{D}[e_1])(\mathcal{D}[e_2]) \\ & & \mathcal{D}[\text{! } e] &= \lambda t. \lambda f. \mathcal{D}[e](f)(t)\end{aligned}$$

For example,

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{D}[\text{true} \ \&\& \ \text{false}] &= \mathcal{D}[\text{true}](\mathcal{D}[\text{false}])(\mathcal{D}[\text{true}]) \\ &= (\lambda t. \lambda f. t)(\mathcal{D}[\text{false}])(\mathcal{D}[\text{true}]) \\ &= \mathcal{D}[\text{false}]\end{aligned}$$

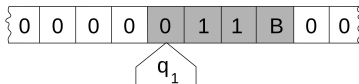




**Alonzo Church** invented **lambda calculus** in 1930s, and it became the foundation of **programming languages**:

$$e ::= x \mid \lambda x.e \mid e(e)$$

**Alan Turing** invented **Turing machines (TM)** in 1936, and it became the foundation of **computers**:



**Church-Turing Thesis: Lambda Calculus is Turing complete.**

*Any real-world computation can be translated into an equivalent computation involving a **Turing machine** or can be done using **lambda calculus**.*

The MiniFSharp language is a toy language inspired by the F# language.<sup>3</sup>

<https://github.com/ku-plrg-classroom/docs/tree/main/cose212/mini-fsharp>

- Please see above document on GitHub:
  - ① Implement `interp` function.
  - ② Implement `hanoiMovesBody` function.
- The due date is 23:59 on Oct. 13 (Mon.).
- Please only submit `Implementation.scala` file to [LMS](#).
- You can run interpreter on course website:

<https://plrg.korea.ac.kr/courses/cose212/>

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<sup>3</sup><https://fsharp.org/>

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- Recursive Functions

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