

by Erich Rast

2022-8-26 18:30







for Z3S5 Lisp Version "2.3.11+be8daf8"

#### 1 Introduction

Z3S5 Lisp can be used as a standalone interpreter or as an extension language embedded into Go programs. It is a traditional Lisp-1 dialect, where the suffix 1 means that symbols hold one value and this value might either represent functions and closures or data. This is in contrast to Lisp-2 language like CommonLisp in which symbols may hold functions in a separate slot. Scheme dialects are also Lisp-1 and Z3S5 Lisp shares many similarities with Scheme while also having features of traditional Lisp systems.

## 1.1 Invoking Lisp

#### 1.1.1 The Standalone Interpreter

In the directory cmd/z3 there is an example standalone version z3.g0 that you can build on your system using g0 build z3.g0. The interpreter is started in a terminal using ./z3. The z3 interpreter is fairly limited. It starts a read-eval-reply loop until it is quit with the command (exit[n]) where the optional number n is an integer for the Unix return code of the program. It reads one line of input from the command line and returns the result of evaluating it. Better editing capabilities and parenthesis matching are planned for the future.

When an interpreter starts either in a standalone executable or when the interp.Boot() function is called in a Go program, then it first loads the standard prelude and help files in directory embed. These are embedded into the executable and so the directory is not needed to run the interpreter. After this start sequence, the interpreter checks whether there is a file named init.lisp in the executable directory – that is, the z3 directory for standalone or the directory of the program that includes Z3S5 Lisp as a package. If there is such a file, then it is loaded and executed.

The z3 interpreter also has a number of command-line options. If option -l <filename> is provided, then Z3S5 Lisp sets \*interactive-session\* to nil (which usually suppresses the start banner), loads and executes the specified file, and returns to the shell afterwards. The flag -e does the same but executes the expressions directly provided as string on the command-line. Special characters in the provided expressions have to be suitably escaped not to be interpreted by the shell, of course, and how to do this depends on the type of shell used to run the interpreter.

If in addition to the -e or -l flags the -i option is provided, then \*interactive-session\* is set to true right from the start, the file is loaded and executed, and then an interactive session is started

as if the interpreter had been started without any command-line options. By using the -s flag, \* interactive-session\* can be set to nil regardless of how the interpreter is started, and therefore printing a start banner is suppressed (and anything else that requires \*interactive-session\* to be non-nil.)

Example 1: ./z3 -e "(out 'hello-world)(nl)"-i -s starts the interpreter, does not print a start banner since -s is specified, prints *hello-world* and new line, and then enters an interactive session since -i is specified.

Example 2: ./z3 -l /home/user/tests/test.lisp -s starts the interpreter, loads and executes the file in directory /home/tests/test.lisp (an absolute Unix path) while suppressing the start-banner with the -s option, and returns to the shell.

Example 3: ./z3 -i -l my\_prelude.lisp launches the interpreter and loads the file my\_prelude.lisp in the same directory as the interpreter and then starts an interactive session

See ./z3 -h for a list of all command-line options.

#### 1.1.2 Using the Interpreter in Go

See cmd/z3/z3.go for an example of how to use Z3S5 Lisp in Go. It is best to include the package with z3 "github.com/rasteric/z3s5-lisp" so z3 can be used as the package shortcut, since this has to be called often when writing extensions. The following snippet from z3.go imports the Lisp interpreter, boots the standard prelude, and runs an interactive read-eval-reply loop:

```
import (
      "fmt"
2
       "os"
3
4
5
       z3 "github.com/rasteric/z3s5-lisp"
6)
7
8 func main() {
9
       interp, err := z3.NewInterp(z3.NewBasicRuntime(z3.FullPermissions))
       if err != nil {
           fmt.Fprintf(os.Stderr, "Z3S5 Lisp failed to start: %v\n", err)
11
           os.Exit(1)
13
       }
       err = interp.Boot()
14
       if err != nil {
15
           fmt.Fprintf(os.Stderr, "Z3S5 Lisp failed to boot the standard
16
               prelude: %v\n", err)
17
           os.Exit(2)
18
       }
       interp.SafeEval(&z3.Cell{Car: z3.NewSym("protect-toplevel-symbols")
19
          , Cdr: z3.Nil}, z3.Nil)
```

```
20 interp.Run(nil)
21 }
```

What deserves explanation is the line starting with interp.SafeEval. This creates a list with the symbol protect-toplevel-symbols as car and an empty cdr and executes it within an empty environment. So it runs the equivalent of (protect-toplevel-symbols), which is interpreted as a function call that applies protect to all toplevel symbols defined thus far. It is not put in the standard prelude because a common way to extend Z3S5 Lisp is to simply redefine some of its primitives. Once a symbol is protected, attempts of redefining or mutating it result in a security violation error. As long as the Permissions given to NewBasicRuntime have AllowUnprotect set to true, you may use unprotect to remove this safeguard again and redefine existing functions. Symbols are protected in the z3 interpreter because it is easy to mess up the system with dynamic redefinitions. For example, you could redefine (setq + -) and + is suddenly interpreted as subtraction! However, redefining toplevel symbols is a very important feature. By using unbind on certain functions or setting them to something else like (setq func (lambda ()(error "not allowed to use func!"))) it is possible to create fine-grained access control to functions even when they are intrinsic or defined in the standard prelude. It is not possible to access an intrinsic function after it has been defined away in this manner. After you added all your toplevel symbols and removed or redefined the ones you do not like, you may thus protect all symbols and use set-permissions to revoke the privilege AllowUnprotect. This fixes the base vocabulary and any attempt to redefine it in the future will result in a security violation, since permissions can only be changed from less secure to more secure and never vice versa.

See the Chapter Extending Z3S5 Lisp for information about how to define your own functions in Z3S5 Lisp.

## 1.2 Data Types

Basic data types of Z3S5 Lisp are:

- Bools: t and nil. The empty list nil is interpreted as false and any non-nil value is true; the symbol t is predefined as non-nil and usually used for true.
- Symbols: abracadabra, foo, bar, ...hel%lo\*\_. These have few restrictions, as the last example illustrates.
- Integers: 3, 1, -28. These are bignums with functions such as +, -, sub, div,...
- Floats: 3.14, 1.92829 with a large range of functions with prefix fl.. Get a list with (dump 'fl.)
- UTF-8 Strings: "This is a test." with functions such as str+, str-empty?, str-forall?, str-join,... Get an overview with (dump 'str).

- Lists: '(a b c d e f) with functions such as car, cdr, mapcar, 1st, 2nd, member, filter ,...
- Arrays: #(a b c d e f) with functions such as array-ref, array-set, array-len, ...
- Dictionaries: (dict) with functions such as get, set, dict->alist, dict->array, dict-> values, dict-map,...
- Blobs: These contain binary data with functions like peek, poke, blob->base64,...
- Boxed values with functions like valid?. Boxed values are used to embed foreign types like Go structures into the runtime system which cannot be automatically garbage collected. They typically require manual destruction to free memory. See the source code for lisp\_decimal.go for an example of such an embedding.
- Futures: Futures encapsulate the result of a future computation and are returned by the special form (future ...) whose body evaluates to a future. The result of a future computation may be obtained with (force <future>).
- Tasks: Tasks are heavyweight concurrency constructs similar to threads in other programming languages. See (dump 'task) for a list of functions.

Strings, lists, and arrays are also sequences testable with the seq? predicate. These support convenience successor functions like map and foreach. Check the init.lisp preamble in directory embed/ for how these work.

Numbers are generally one bignum type for which num? is true and they will extend and shrink in their representation as necessary. However, numbers larger than 64 bit only support basic arithmetics and floating point arithmetics is limited to values that fit into a Float64. There is also a built-in decimal arithmetics extension with prefix dec for correct accounting and banking arithmetics and rounding – see (dump 'dec.) for a list of available decimal arithmetics functions and lisp\_decimal.go for implementation details.

# **2 Writing Programs**

The z3 interpreter loads and executes any file init.lisp in the same directory as the executable at startup. It is also possible to use the command-line option -l <filename> to load and execute it. This sets \*interactive-session\* to nil, executes the contents of the file and returns to the shell. This behavior can be overridden by specifying the -i flag on the command-line, which sets 'interactive-session to true and ensures that an interactive session is started after the initial files are loaded.

#### 2.1 Finding Functions and Online Help

Built-in help on functions can be obtained with (help func) where the function name is not quoted. For example, (help help) returns the help entry for the help function. A list of bound toplevel symbols can be obtained with (dump [sym]) where the optional symbol sym must be a quoted prefix. For example, (dump) returns all toplevel bindings and (dump 'str) returns a list of all bound symbols starting with "str". By convention, internal helper functions without help entry are prefixed with an underscore and omitted by dump. To get a list of all bindings, including those starting with an underscore, use (dump-bindings).

#### 2.2 Peculiarities of Z3S5 Lisp

- Iterators over sequences use the order (iterator sequence function), not sometimes one and sometimes the other. Exception: memq and member ask whether an element is a member of a list and have order (member element list).
- There is no meaningful eq, equality is generally tested with equal?.
- Predicate names usually end in a question mark like in Scheme dialects, with a few exceptions like = for numeric equality. Example: equal?. There is no p-suffix like in other Lisps.
- dict data structures are multi-threading safe.
- There is support for futures and concurrent tasks.

#### 2.3 Basic Control Flow and Examples

When Z3S5 Lisp encounters an unquoted list, it attempts to interpret the first element of the list as a function call. Thus, if the symbol is bound to a function or macro, it calls the function with the remainder of the list as argument:

```
1 > (+ 10 20 30 40 50)
2 150
```

Symbols evaluate to their values and need to be quoted otherwise. They can be defined with setq:

```
1 > hello
2 EvalError: void variable: hello
3    hello
4 > (setq hello 'world)
5 world
6 > hello
7 world
```

To define a function, the macro defun can be used as in other Lisp dialects. The syntax is the traditional one, not in Scheme dialects:

(defun foo (bar)...) is really just a macro shortcut for (setq foo (lambda (bar)...)) like in most other Lisp dialects. Macros are expanded before a program is executed, which unfortunately makes error reporting in Z3S5 Lisp sometimes a bit obtuse. The system neither keeps track of source locations nor of original definitions and will present the expanded macros when an error occurs. This will not change in the future, so better get used to it! Changing this and turning Z3S5 Lisp into a real, full-fledged Lisp would be a gigantic task and not worth the effort, as there are already far more capable Lisp systems like CommonLisp and Racket out there.

The above function demonstrates recursion, a feature that is often used in Lisp. Z3S5 Lisp eliminates tail recursion. The example also illustrates the use of = for numeric equality, + and - functions on (potential) bignums and the macro (if <condition> <then-clause> <else-clause>). The more general cond construct is also available and in fact the primitive operation:

```
1 > (defun day (n))
2
      (cond
          ((= n 0) 'sunday)
3
         ((= n 1) 'monday)
5
          ((= n 2) 'tuesday)
6
          (t 'late-in-the-week)))
7 day
8 > (day 1)
9 monday
10 > (day 0)
11 sunday
12 > (day -1)
13 late-in-the-week
14 > (day 5)
15 late-in-the-week
```

Looks like some programmer was lazy there.

In Lisp languages it is common to iterate over lists and other data structures either using recursive functions or by using some of the standard iteration constructs such as map, foreach, mapcar, and

so on. Nesting calls of macros or functions like map and filter to achieve the desired data transformation is very common functional programming style and often desirable for performance. Here is an example:

```
1 > (map '(1 2 3 4 5 6) add1)
2 (2 3 4 5 6 7)
```

Local variables are bound with let or with letrec in Z3S5 Lisp. The latter needs to be used whenever a variable in the form depends on the other variable, which is not possible with let since it makes the bindings only available in the body. Here is the definition of apropos from the preamble:

The variable info is bound to the result of (get \*help\* arg nil), which evaluates to default nil if there is no help entry for arg in the global dictionary \*help\*. That avoids calling (get \*help\* arg nil) twice, once for the check to nil and once in the first **if** branch. But it can often be better to avoid uses of let and re-use accessors; it depends a bit on clarity and intent, and whether the initial computation is costly or not. Here is an example where let would not do and instead letrec has to be used:

The reason this doesn't work with let is that is-even? is not bound in the definition of is-odd? and vice versa when let is used, whereas letrec makes sure that these bindings are mutually available. Although the current implementation always uses letrec under the hood, it is best to use let whenever it is possible since at least in theory it could be implemented more efficiently. Notice that setq can be used to mutate local bindings, of course, and is not just intended for toplevel symbols. Although beginners should avoid it, sometimes mutating variables with setq can make definitions simpler at the cost of some elegance.

## **3 Advanced Topics**

#### 3.1 Error Handling

There are no continuations and there is no fancy stuff like dynamic wind. Instead, there are primitives like push-error-handler and pop-error-handler and macros such as with-**final** and with-error-handler.

## 3.2 Debugging

Not only are error messages fairly rudimentary, they also use the expanded macro definitions and are therefore hard to read. Local bindings are implemented with lambda-terms and displayed as such. This makes debugging a challenge, as it should be. Z3S5 programmers have the habit of writing bug-free code from the start and thereby avoid debugging entirely. But you could write your own trace or stepper functions for enhanced debugging features by redefining all toplevel symbols appropriately. Then again, you could also just write your own Lisp with better debugging capabilities. The choice is up to you!

## 3.3 Concurrency

Dicts use Go's sync.Map under the hood and are therefore concurrency-safe. The global symbol table is also cuncurrency-safe. This means that dicts can be accessed safely from futures and tasks and can even be used for synchronization purposes, as the (admittedly horrible) current implementation of tasks in embed/init.lisp illustrates. Generally, futures should be used and can be spawned in large quantities without much of a performance penalty. Tasks need some work to become efficient and there are plans to include a more direct interface to Go's goroutines with cancelable contexts in the future.

#### 3.4 File Access

For obvious reasons, not all embedded interpreters should provide full file access. Therefore, this option needs to be enabled with build tag fileio, or otherwise none of the filesystem-related functions will be available. The z3 Makefile in cmd/z3 enables this option by default for the standalone executable.

#### 3.5 Images

Z3S5 Lisp supports the writing and reading of Lisp images called "zimages". To save a zimage, use (save-zimage <version> <info> <entry-point> <file>), where the <version> must be a semver string and <info> a list. The entry point is a procedure that is executed after the image has been loaded and can be nil for not executing anything. The filename <file> by convention ends in . zimage. To load such an image, overwriting the current lisp system, use (load-zimage <file>).

Important limitations need to be kept in mind when working with zimages. Symbols will get unprotected when loading a zimage and therefore the interpreter must have the permission to unprotect symbols. See declare-unprotected, protect, unprotect, and protected? for more information. Symbols may also be declared volatile with declare-volatile and some of the predefined global variables such as \*tasks\* are already declared volatile. A volatile toplevel symbol is neither written to a zimage nor is a symbol marked volatile in the running system overwritten when it is present in a zimage and the image is loaded. This can be a rare source of incompatibility; there is currently no way to force the loading of a symbol in the image when it is declared volatile in the running system and providing such a mechanism would introduce new problems. You should declare as volatile any symbol that cannot be overwritten because it contains data essential to the running system, and at the same time be aware of the possibility that a global symbol might be declared volatile in the future and therefore not be loaded. Use prefixes and sanity checks where necessary to avoid problems.

Finally, not all values can be externalized. For example, ports, tasks, futures, and mutexes cannot be externalized. If a symbol bound to such a value is declared volatile, then it is neither written nor loaded. If it is *not* volatile, however, then the value nil is written and loaded for it. For most applications this is desirable. The procedure in your entry point can check for nil and make sure to re-introduce the desired state of such values after loading an image if this is necessary for the proper functioning of the system. In general, it is desirable to use initialization functions and not rely on global variables when dealing with images.

#### 3.6 Database Access

The build tags db and fts5 enable a database module with Sqlite3 support. See (dump 'db.) for available functions and consult the reference and help system for more information on them. The tag fts5 is required if db is used, since the key-value module kvdb makes use of the fts5 text indexing features of Sqlite. So the tags always have to be combined.

Take a look at (dump 'kvdb) for more information about the key-value database and look up (help remember) for information on the remember system. Basically, you can use (remember key value) to remember a value, (recall key) => value to recall it, and (forget key) to forget it. However, this requires (init-remember) to be executed first once. In the z3 executable this is loaded in the

local init.lisp file that also prints the start banner, but you might want to disable it if you don't use remember because it slows down startup.

## 3.7 Object-oriented Programming

The extension for object-oriented programming is embedded into the init file and adds the symbol oop in \*reflect\*. It provides a simple object system with multiple inheritance and more lightweight structure. Both of them are based on arrays whose first element is a symbol starting with %, so it is best not to use arrays starting with such symbols for other purposes.

## 3.7.1 Classes, Objects, Methods

Classes should be created with the defclass macro; there are other ways of creating them but this is most convenient. When a class is created, it's name, a possibly empty list of superclasses, and if necessary some properties can be declared:

```
1 (defclass named nil (name "<unknown>"))
```

This defines a class called named with no superclasses and a name property with default value "<unknown>". Methods that subclasses shall inherit must be defined *before* the respective subclass is defined. So let's add a convenience method to retrieve the name:

```
1 (defmethod named-name (this) (prop this 'name))
```

This method takes the instance of the class as first argument ("this") and retrieves the instance's property name. The name in the first unquoted argument must be composed out of a valid class name and the method name. The following definitions illustrate inheritance:

```
1 (defclass point (named) (x 0) (y 0))
2 (defmethod point-move (this delta-x delta-y)
3  (setprop this 'x (+ (prop this 'x) delta-x))
4  (setprop this 'y (+ (prop this 'y) delta-y)))
```

This defines a named point with methods point-name and point-move, where the former is inherited from the superclass named. To make instances, use **new** as follows:

```
1 (setq a (new point (x 10) (y 20) (name "A")))
2 (point-name a)
3 ==> "A"
4 (prop a 'x)
5 (setprop a 'x 99)
6 (prop a 'x)
7 ==> 99
```

```
8 (point-move a 1 20)
9 (prop a 'x)
10 ==> 100
11 (prop a 'y)
12 ==> 40
```

As you can see in the example, the "this" argument must be named in the definition of point-move but when calling the method does not need to be taken into account; when the method is called, the first argument is always the object it is called upon. If no property value is specified in a **new** call, then a property gets its default value. If no default value has been specified during class definition, then the value is nil. Aside from the direct names bound by defmethod, it is also possible to use the method function to call methods, and properties can be get and set with prop and setprop respectively. There are a few more helper functions such as object? and **classs**? to test for objects and classes, as well as isa? for checking whether an object is a subclass of a given class. Check out the "Object-oriented Programming" section of the Reference Manual for a complete list.

One thing to bear in mind when using this very simple OOP extension is that everything is defined dynamically at runtime and order matters. If you instantiate a class before all of its methods are defined, the resulting object will not take into account any future changes or definitions of the class, it will just be derived from the current state of the class. Likewise, when a subclass is defined, the methods of the superclass need to be defined already or else they will not become part of the subclass. If you look at the implementation, you can see why: It simply copies symbols and their closure from dictionaries.

### 3.7.2 Structures

Structures are more lightweight array-based representations of named fields without inheritance. They are similar to association lists and the corresponding macros allow the getting and setting of values based on a name in the struct (which is just an assessor to the array):

```
1 (defstruct point (x 0) (y 0))
```

This is similar to the previous example but no inheritance is possible. Instances of a struct are arays called "records" and created with make and make\*:

```
1 (setq a (make point '((x 20)(y 100))))
2 (setq b (make* point (x 10) (y 10)))
3 (point-x a)
4 ==> 20
5 (point-x! a 30)
6 (point-x a)
7 ==> 30
```

That's about it. These macros basically just provide conveniently named getter and setter functions for

arrays. Consult the Reference Manual for a complete list of all structure-related functions.

## 3.8 Language Stability

At this stage, built-in commands may still change. The good news is that any change introduced in Z3S5 Lisp needs to be tracked and checked in Z3S5 Machine, and so no larger changes are planned. However, no guarantees can be made and you should vendor the repository or even fork it if you want to make sure no breaking changes occur. Once the language is stable, it will be marked on the home page.

#### 3.9 Known Bugs

Since this language has been ported from a larger system, there may be known bugs not in the issue tracker at Github. A known issue of this version is a problem with the recursive externalization of Dict containing Dict.

#### 3.10 Roadmap

A library system, a robust key-value database with fulltext search, some basic OOP, and a simple persistence layer will likely be ported from Z3S5 Machine to this embedded Lisp in the future.

# 4 Extending Z3S5 Lisp

The system is extended by calling interp.Def. As an example, consider the following function from lisp\_base.go:

```
// (str->chars s) => array of int convert a UTF-8 string into an
array of runes

interp.Def("str->chars", 1, func(a []any) any {
    runes := []rune(norm.NFC.String(a[0].(string)))
    arr := make([]any, len(runes), len(runes))
    for i := range runes {
        arr[i] = goarith.AsNumber(runes[i])
    }

return arr
}
```

The Def function takes the function symbol as string, the number *n* of arguments, and a function that takes an array of any and returns a value any (aka **interface**{}). The function may explicitly check

the type of the arguments for correctness but doesn't need to. It is normal for functions to panic and even deliberately throw an error. These are caught by the intepreter and displayed to the user. So how much you check depends primarily on what errors you want to provide. By convenience, custom errors thrown in function definitions start with the name of the function such as panic(error.New ("foobar: the foobar function has failed")) for a function foobar. If a function returns no value, then the definition should return Void, a special Lisp value that is not printed in the read-eval-print loop.

Care must be taken with numbers. Pure Go numbers will not do and may lead to bizzare and unexpected runtime behavior. Every number needs to be converted using <code>goarith.AsNumber</code> and other conversion functions from <code>z3s5-lisp</code> and the package <code>github.com/nukata/goarith</code>. Check the source code of some of the implementation files for examples. Again, this is really important: Always convert Go numbers to bigint numbers with <code>goarith.AsNumber!</code>

There are a few helper functions such as ExpectInts that can be used for checking arguments. Other useful conversion functions are AsBool, ToLispBool, ArrayToList, ListToArray, etc.

Notice that lists are structures composed by &Cell{Car: a, Cdr: b}, where Cdr might be another Cell and the final Cdr is Nil, just like in any Lisp. If you construct these without the member names Car and Cdr Go will complain about this and refuse to compile, even though in this case it is perfectly fine to use anonymous access. If you want to create a lot of lists by hand in your function definitions without creating runtime performance penalties by using functions like ArrayToList, then it might make sense to switch off this behavior of the go vet command by running go vet -composites= false instead. Of course, this will also disable such checks for other parts of your application where they might be useful. The only other way is to make the list construction fully explicit, as in: &z3 .Cell{z3.NewSym("hello"), &z3.Cell{z3.NewSym("world"), z3.Nil}} which yields the list (hello world).

Custom data structures: Since there is currently no way to modify the printer for custom structures directly in the Lisp system, it is best to put them into a box using interp.DefBoxed, which takes a symbol for a boxed value and creates a number of auxiliary functions. See lisp\_decimal.go for an example of how to use boxed values.

#### 5 License

Z3S5 Lisp was written by RAST Erich and is based on Nukata Lisp by SUZUKI Hisao. It is licensed under the MIT License that allows free use and modification as long as the copyright notices remain. Please read the LICENSE file for more information.

This document is Copyright (c) 2022 by Erich Rast.