

Functional vs OO programming

Case study



Functional vs OO programming

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# History

## Functional languages

Functional programming is a programming paradigm where a computation is treated as an evaluation of a mathematical function. Thus, building software becomes a process of composing pure functions, avoiding shared state, side-effects and mutable data, as opposed to OOP where the state is usually shared ( done so by methods which access mutable data ).

Code written in a functional matter tends to be more precise, expressive, predictable and shorted than the imperative or OO code – however, it’s a common pitfall, as it can become cryptic at times if the developer chooses not to pay attention to more self-explanatory options.

One common example in Scala would be the use of for comprehensions instead of multiple map/flatMap operations on data.





Despite being a simple example, the first example speaks for itself – one read and it should be clear what it does, while in the second example some deciphering and a more thorough read might be required – despite the same amount of rows. This boils down to the programmer’s desire of wanting to improve readability and scalability.

Talking about the history of functional languages, one of the most impressive aspects of the paradigm is that all of them are based on Lambda Calculus.

First introduced in the 1930s by the mathematician Alonzo Church, lambda calculus consists of constructing terms and performing operations on them. More than that, there are only 3 rules that are used to build terms:



Reductions consist of the following operations:



The history of the appearance of the first functional programming languages is as followed.

LISP

The first functional programming language ever that appeared in the late 1950’s and it was a smashing success as it is used almost 70 years later. It is seen by many as one of the simplest, yet most beautiful languages.

A few of the more notable characteristics of lisp include:

* garbage collection as a method of dealing with unused memory cells
* closures – for static scoping
* conditional expressions and use for writing recursive functions ( first ever language to do that )
* higher order operations on lists

FP (Function Programming)

It was introduced by John Backus in his 1977 lecture, "Can Programming Be Liberated from the von Neumann Style?" (!!!!), however the language wasn’t much successful outside of academia.

ML

In the mid 1970’s, researchers at the University of Edinburgh needed a language to describe proof search strategies while working on a system which would automate theorem proving. So, they came up with ML (meta language) and later figured out they could use it as a general purpose language.

Two of the most important features of the language include pattern matching and user-defined algebraic datatypes. Both features are strongly related and have played a fundamental role in defining modern programming languages.

Miranda

Designed by David turned and making its first apparition in 1985, the core feature is represented by lazy evaluation, which in turned later pretty much defined Haskell.

Later on, other functional programming languages emerged like:

* Haskell – 1987 – the de facto functional programming language
* Mathematica
* Scheme
* Erlang
* Elixir – runs on the Erlang Virtual Machine (BEAM)
* F#

Scala

Scala first appeared in 2004, being designed by Martin Odersky as part of a project of École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne.

It is developed on the JVM platform, so there are limitations caused by that.

Regarding the paradigms used, Scala sits in a bit of a weird spot - initially, it appeared as a desire to be a better Java, with a much cleaner syntax and less boilerplate code, all while adding some functional elements. As it evolved, it started introducing more FP elements - has all elements apart from laziness by default, while still being a pure OOP language. It's one of a kind language, and it does still have its quirks. As the developers' desire to go more functional increased, a number of libraries emerged to close the gap between the functional and OOP paradigms, creating an environment for Scala to be indeed fully Functional.

* Object Oriented languages
* Current state of the industry

Ever since Java has emerged as a programming language, the industry has been ruled by the OOP paradigm.

However, with the development of multi-core processors, there has been a shift to working more with threads and parallel processes - as OOP is largely based on mutating the state of the objects, OOP's domination declined a bit as it is increasingly difficult to keep track of changes while multiple threads work on the same data. And as this became a critical part of software development, a need for languages who work on immutable data emerged - and what better than FP, whose core is based on immutability?

As the need for immutability and threads increased, most OOP languages adopted some functional elements - .Net's Linq is a wonderful example of this, while Java’s Spring 5.0 introduced a whole bunch of functional elements.

## Object Oriented languages

## Current state of the industry

# Functional programming elements

## Immutability

An immutable object represents an object whose state cannot be modified by any means - one created, it remains the same throughout its life-span, without any possibility of changing it's internal state.

When it comes to representative traits of the FP paradigm,

immutability is what sits at the very core of all of them. Without immutability, the paradigm wouldn't exist. As opposed to the OOP paradigm, most relations are described by applying functions over data - thus, most of those functions usually have some laws associated to them to ensure correctness.

One of the most common laws associated with these functions is indeed immutability - the insurance that the object will not be tainted after the function has been applied.

For example, one of the laws associated with a functor is represented by

composition - mapping 2 functions f and g is the same as mapping f and then mapping g, which means that the following property MUST hold:

fa.map(g(f(\_))) == fa.map(f).map(g)

If fa (the object mapping over ) is not immutable, then the property simply wouldn't hold for at least some cases - thus, it makes the modelling of the data unpredictable, non-deterministic.

Also, one might argue that having immutable data eases the creation of recursive functions, as it's easier to not think about what happens to your data as the recursion goes deeper and deeper, worrying only about what is the goal.

It has also become a trend in the industry to opt over immutable entities and data over mutable ones even in OOP languages - numerous articles have emerged favoring the principle, and it has become increasingly popular in Java/C#, having Builders to actually create your immutable data.

## Functions

## Higher order functions

Any function which receives another function as a parameter or returns a function itself is called a higher order function. They are a defining factor when it comes to abstracting away all the logic and focusing more on what one is trying to achieve, instead of how will that happen.

Higher order functions is what defines the functional programming experience.

Thus, they enable:

* Composability – focusing on what is the goal means the programmer can easily replace functions which have the same signature
* Reusability – basically, higher order functions can be seen as templating – the programmer is only focused on what should be done, and as a final step, the pieces are just put together
* Easier testing – when all the major pieces of a flow are abstract and based on generic definitions, it enables testing to be done much easier by providing functions which return a desired behavior. Thus, mocking is now a trivial task.

Some of the more popular higher order functions include:

* Map – the function received as a parameter - function: A => B - is used to transform the data structure by applying the function over that
* Filter – the function received as a parameter – function: A => Boolean - is used to keep the parts of the data structure whose properties are compliant to the function
* Reduce – the function received as a parameter – function: (A, B) => B – is used to apply the function over all of the elements from left to right and actually reduce the result to a single element. For example, the sum of all the elements in a list is a popular example which could be done using reduce().
* Fold – similar to reduce, except one can specify which end will be used as a starting point. Usually, there are 2 implementations of fold – foldLeft, foldRight – whose names are quite self-explanatory.

In the following section, the importance of higher order functions will be briefly explained.

A simple List implementation would be the following:



A map operation is defined and implemented in order to illustrate the usefulness of higher order functions.

Now, let’s say there is a list defined and that the programmer wants to add 10 to every single element.

Using higher order functions, this is easily done:



Without using higher order functions, this would’ve been increasingly difficult. The pure OOP way of doing this would be to define a method inside the definitions of the List – maybe named addToElements(amount: Int), or using Iterators and then using a “**for**” or “**while**” to transform it - but it is easy to see how this would’ve gone out of hand. Higher order functions enable the use of adhoc function application, which is both easier to understand for a future reader, and also reduces a lot of the boilerplate code.

By using the OOP approach, the following would happen:

1. A lot of boilerplate code expressed as methods for every single use of the List or “**for**” or “**while**” structures
2. When designing a library, it would be a major pain to try and extend the uses of the basic implementation. In OOP and imperative languages, this is done by offering Iterators and modifying a data structure using maybe a “**for”** or “**while**” structure.

Overall, higher order functions help a programmer write easy-to-read, well-structured, easy-to-test and boilerplate-free code, all of them being marks of clean coding.

## Recursion

A recursion function is any function which calls itself to yield a final result – usually, this is done over the conventional “**for**” found in imperative/OOP languages, which usually require a counter or have some mutable state – doing so would break the immutability that is desired in FP.

Apart from that, one of the main goals of functional programming is to be as close to mathematics as possible – this is usually expressed through laws that need to be met and other elements.

Recursion, as it is, if written properly, can become quite similar to a mathematical representation of a function.

A simple example is the Fibonacci sequence:



Simple and easy to understand, close to the mathematical representation of the function.

However, an imperative/OOP approach might look something similar to this:



As easily observed, the intent of the function, the real goal of its existence is hidden behind a lot of boilerplate code – it might not seem so complicated here, but again, Fibonacci is a simple example.

Generally, when it comes to larger tasks, it is much easier to split it into multiple, smaller recursive functions and compose them to obtain the result.

However, there is a problem when it comes to recursion – as functions call other functions, they build up the stack – with enough function calls, and the famous stack overflow will creep up in one’s algorithm. Fortunately, tail recursion is here for the rescue – what it does is eliminate the intermediate function calls and only keep track of the initial call and the last one.

Scala’s approach to tail recursion is slightly different – at compile time, scalac (the compiler) will write some optimization, basically rendering the recursion into a “**while**” loop.

## Purity and side effects

In functional programming, one of the most important aspects the programmer has to keep in mind is making sure functions stay as pure as possible.

## 

In order for a function to be categorized as pure, it has to produce no side effects.

A function is considered to have side effects if it modifies some data or variable, has some IO interaction (printing, connecting to a database, logging, etc.) or throws an exception.

In functional programming, it is extremely important for functions and also flow/behavior to be predictable – any side effects might actually affect the outcome of a function based on some external factors.

For example, if there is a function which also has some calls to a database for retrieval, the programmer can’t tell the outcome of that function given an input – is the connection to the database established, are the credentials correct, will there be a timeout, or everything will go fine and the function will output a result?

All these factors are considered evil because a function can become quite unpredictable depending on some factors that are outside of the programmer’s reach. When a function has no side effects, no matter how hard one tries to break it, it will always return the same output for the same input.

Avoidance of side effects has benefits like:

1. Less error-prone code – again, everything is input-output. Once this is true, the code is very unlikely to break.
2. Easier testing – since avoidance of side-effects is based around not having any contact with the “outside” world, this means a function will only work with its input. This, again, means testing is now a trivial task.
3. Atomic functions – making sure there are no side effects will more often than not force the programmer to break what was initially a function into smaller functions, each one dealing with a certain task, which together make up the same functionality the initial function had. This, of course, has big impact on the code – easier testing, and also, easier to modify.

## Referential transparency and first-class functions

## Benefits/disadvantages

# Object Oriented programming elements

## Classes

## Inheritance

## Encapsulation

## Polymorphism

## Dynamic binding

## Relations -> passing state and modifying it internally

## Benefits/disadvantages

# Functional Best Practices

## Function composition

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# Object Oriented Best Practices

## SOLID

## Single Responsibility Principle

## Open/Closed Principle

## Liskov Substitution Principle

## Interface segregation Principle

## Dependency Inversion Principle

## YAGNI

## High cohesion/low coupling

## Interfaces instead of implementation

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#### Scala with Play

#### Example – mail service or something similar

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