JavaScript was invented by Brendan Eich in 1995 while he was an engineer at Netscape Communications Corporation. The objective was to create a scripting language for the Netscape Navigator web browser that would make the web more dynamic and interactive. Initially named Mocha, it was officially released as LiveScript in September 1995 before being renamed JavaScript in December 1995 as a marketing strategy to ride on the popularity of Sun Microsystem's Java language.

JavaScript's evolution has seen several versions, each aimed at enhancing functionality, improving performance, and increasing security. The first version, JavaScript 1.0, was released with Netscape Navigator 2.0 in March 1996. Subsequent versions (1.1 to 1.8.5) were released in parallel with various Netscape Navigator and Firefox browser versions between 1996 and 2011. JavaScript 1.8.5, released in July 2011, included significant performance improvements and new features such as strict mode and new Array methods.

However, a significant shift in JavaScript's evolution occurred in 1997 when the language was submitted to Ecma International, a standardization organization, for specification standardization. The outcome was the first edition of ECMAScript (ES1), JavaScript's official name. It was standardized to ensure that the language could be implemented in different web browsers and platforms, promoting its widespread adoption.

Since then, ECMAScript has seen several versions. The second and third editions were released in 1998 and 1999, respectively, featuring enhancements like error handling and stricter syntax rules. ES4 was abandoned due to disagreements over its feature set, leading to ES5's release in 2009 with a strict mode, better object properties manipulation, and JSON support.

A game-changing release was ECMAScript 6 (ES6), also known as ECMAScript 2015, which brought about significant changes like class declaration, arrow functions, promises, and modules. Subsequent versions (ES7 to ES12) were released annually from 2016 to 2021, with incremental updates and optimizations.

As of June 2023, the current version of ECMAScript is ES13. It continues the trend of incremental updates, emphasizing performance optimizations, new features, and syntax enhancements. The exact changes depend on the finalized specifications which are developed by the technical committee TC39 at Ecma International.

The prospects for JavaScript are highly optimistic. The language's flexibility, versatility, and widespread adoption guarantee its continued relevance in web development. JavaScript also enjoys substantial community support, a large ecosystem of libraries and frameworks (like React, Angular, and Vue.js), and is increasingly being used outside the browser environment (like Node.js for server-side scripting).

Future JavaScript evolution is likely to continue along the path of improving performance, security, and the development of more powerful abstractions for complex operations. The evolution of WebAssembly, a binary instruction format for a stack-based virtual machine, offers new opportunities for JavaScript to interact with other languages on the web, potentially opening even more use cases.

Sources:

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