Language-Oriented Programming

Principles of Programming Languages
Colorado School of Mines

https://lambda.mines.edu
Learning Group Activity

Share with your group the macro you made for class today. Explain how it works, and when you might use it.

Why couldn’t you use a function instead of a macro for the scenario you selected?
Language-Oriented Programming is a programming paradigm where you either:

- Extend an existing programming language to create the syntax needed to solve your problem elegantly (extensible programming language)
- Or, create a new domain specific language for solving your problem

Programming languages with homoiconic syntax and macros have historically been very good at LOP.
Extensible Syntax

The domain of extensible languages is well dominated by Lisp, with the others sharing in common homoiconic syntax and macros.

The exception to the above is concatenative languages, like Forth.
Domain Specific Languages are languages tailored to solve a specific kind of problem. For example, the object property definition language is created for defining properties about types of data:

```
(type house
 :bases (building living-space)
 :nouns ("house" "home")
```

- More examples: HTML, CSS, Glade (GUI), Sieve (mail filtering), Regular Expressions ...
- DSLs can be either intended to stand-alone in their own files, or to be used inline in other languages. In the latter case, we often call them domain specific mini-languages.
A Domain Specific Mini-Language you already know

match is a DSL built into Racket... in fact, it just translates into a bunch of cons and lets:

```scheme
> (syntax->datum (expand-once '(match a [(list-rest b c) b] [_ a])))
'(let ((a1 a))
  (let ((fail2
         (λ ()
           (match:error a1 (syntax-srclocs (quote-syntax srcloc)) 'match)))
    (let* ((f3
            (lambda ()
              (syntax-parameterize
               ((fail (make-rename-transformer (quote-syntax fail2))))
                (let () a))))))
     (cond
      ((pair? a1)
       (let ((unsafe-car6 (unsafe-car a1)) (unsafe-cdr7 (unsafe-cdr a1)))
        (syntax-parameterize
         ((fail (make-rename-transformer (quote-syntax f3))))
          (let ((c unsafe-cdr7)) (let ((b unsafe-car6)) (let () b))))))
      (else f3))))))
```
Why DSLs?

- Domain-specific syntax can eliminate repetitive code
- Domain-specific syntax can make it easier to express certain concepts
- Can be restricted, which allows us to prove certain things while compiling:
  - **Example:** regular expressions are a DSL which can be translated to finite state machines, which we can prove certain properties about
There’s two things that go into a #lang in Racket:

- A **reader module**, which parses a custom syntax to (Racket) s-expression syntax
- A **expander module**, which provides the macros and functions in the language.

**Custom Reader Optional**

Many DSLs just use s-expression syntax, as it’s easy and usually expressive enough for most applications. Racket comes with the s-exp reader which provides you with exactly this functionality.
Let’s make a DSL!

- For the second part of lecture, I will be covering an example implementation of a DSL in detail.
- The DSL shown in class today is derived from one published in Volume 55, Issue 1 of the CACM by Matthew Flatt:
  doi: 10.1145/2063176.2063195
Text-based adventures are some of the earliest computer games. They gained quite a lot of popularity in the 1970s and 1980s:

You're standing in a meadow.
There is a house to the north.
> north
You are standing in front of a house.
There is a door here.
> open door
The door is locked.
>

Anyone who has written a text-based adventure in a general purpose language can tell you they often result in a load of spaghetti code. Let’s clean that up.
In order to define a DSL for text-based adventures, we must define a model which text-based adventures follow. This is a critical part of designing any DSL:

**Items:** Items have a state and the user can store them in their inventory.

**Verbs:** Verbs conduct an action on an item or the place. Verbs can have multiple names (e.g., north and n)

**Places:** Places have a description, items, and verbs which can move to other places.
Using structs makes for an easy way to store objects in our model:

\[
\text{(struct verb (aliases \(\text{name}\)) desc thing?))} \\
\text{(struct item (name \(\text{symbol}\)) [state #:mutable \(\text{state of item}\) actions])} \\
\text{(struct place (desc \(\text{string}\) [items #:mutable \(\text{list of items}\) actions])} \\
\text{; list of names} \\
\text{; string} \\
\text{; does it take an item?} \\
\text{; symbol} \\
\text{; list of verb -> function conses} \\
\text{; state of item} \\
\text{; list of verb -> function conses} \\
\text{; list of items} \\
\text{; list of verb -> function conses}
\]
We can’t expect our users of our DSL to be using our structs directly, let’s make easy syntaxes to define them:

- **define-verbs**: Define a list of verb aliases to their corresponding verb structs, additionally providing a name to refer to a list of all of the verbs.
- **define-item**: Define an item, specifying the verbs associated and what they do.
- **define-place**: Define a place, specifying the verbs associated and what they do.
(define-verbs all-verbs
  [(north n) "go north"]
  [(south s) "go south"]
  [(east e) "go east"]
  [(west w) "go west"]
  [(up) "go up"]
  [(down) "go down"]
  [(in enter) "enter"]
  [(out leave) "leave"]
  [(get grab take) thing "take"]
  [(put drop) thing "drop"]
  [(open unlock) thing "open"]
  [(close lock) thing "close"]
  [(knock) thing "knock"]]
Implementing define-verbs

(define-syntax-rule (define-verbs all-id
  [(id aliases ...) spec ...] ...)

(define-syntax (define-one-verb (id aliases ...) spec ...) ...
  (define all-id (list id ...))))

(define-syntax define-one-verb
  (syntax-rules (thing)
    [(_ (id ...) desc)
      (begin
        (define id (verb (list 'id ...) desc #f))
        ...)]
    [(_ (id ...) thing desc)
      (begin
        (define id (verb (list 'id ...) desc #t))
        ...)])
(define-item door 'closed
    [open (if (have-item? key)
            (begin
                (set-item-state! door 'open)
                "You use the key to unlock and open the door."
                "The door is locked."
            )
        )
    ]
    [close (set-item-state! door 'closed)
            "The door is now closed."
        ]
    [knock "No one is home."
    ]
)
(define-syntax-rule (define-item id start-state [vrb expr exprs ...] ...) 
(define id (item 'id start-state (list (cons vrb (λ () expr exprs ...)) ...))))
(define-place house-front
  "You are standing in front of a house."
  (door)
  ([in (if (eq? (item-state door) 'open)
          room
          "The door is not open.")]
   [south meadow]))

Implementation is very similar to define-item.
Game logic omitted from slides, as not super relevant to the DSL (available on course site)

Demo game!
Announcements

- Today is last lecture
- Thursday (11/15) is optional lab day held in ALAMODE
- No class or office hours Tuesday (11/20) due to Thanksgiving Break
- Tuesday (11/27) is optional lab/work day (ALAMODE)
- Presentations 11/29, 12/4, 12/6