



Functional Abstraction and Polymorphism

Corky Cartwright
Department of Computer Science
Rice University



Abstracting Designs

- “The elimination of repetitions is the most important step in the (program) editing process” – Textbook
- The software engineering term for revising a program to make it better or accommodate an extension: *refactoring*.
- Repeated code should be avoided at almost all costs. Why? Revisions involved repeated code are almost impossible to get right.
- *Abstractions* help us avoid this problem.



The Need for Abstractions

```
;; contains-doll? : los -> boolean
;; (contains-doll? alos) determines whether alos
;; contains the symbol 'doll
(define (contains-doll? alos)
  (cond
    [(empty? alos) false]
    [else (or (symbol=? (first alos) 'doll)
              (contains-doll? (rest alos)))]))
```



The Need for Abstractions

```
;; contains-car? : los -> boolean
;; (contains-car? alos) determines whether
;;   alos contains the symbol 'car
(define (contains-car? alos)
  (cond
    [(empty? alos) false]
    [else (or (symbol=? (first alos) 'car)
              (contains-car? (rest alos)))]))
```



Creating Abstractions

How can we write one function that replaces

- `contains-doll?`
- `contains-car?`
- `contains-pizza?`
- `contains-comp210?`



Creating Abstractions

```
;; contains? : symbol los -> boolean
;; (contains? s alos) determines whether alos
;; contains the symbol s
(define (contains? s alos)
  (cond
    [(empty? alos) false]
    [else (or (symbol=? (first alos) s)
              (contains? s (rest alos)))]))
```



Can We Do Better?

```
;; contains? : any list-of-any -> boolean
;; (contains? v aloa) determines whether
;;   aloa contains the value v
(define (contains? v aloa)
  (cond
    [(empty? aloa) false]
    [else (or (equals? (first aloa) v)
              (contains? v (rest aloa)))]))
```



Using Abstractions

- How do we use `contains`?

```
(contains? 'doll (list ...))  
(contains? 'car (list ...))
```

- How can we better define `contains-doll?`,
`contains-car`?

```
(define (contains-doll? alos) (contains? 'doll alos))  
  (define (contains-car? alos) (contains? 'car alos))
```

- This idea is called **reuse**. Let's run with it!



A more complex example

```
;; below : lon number -> lon
;; (below alon n) returns the list containing the
;; numbers in alon that are less than or equal to n
(define (below alon t)
  (cond [(empty? alon) empty]
        [else
         (cond [(<= (first alon) t)
                (cons (first alon)
                      (below (rest alon) t))]
               [else (below (rest alon) t)]))]))
```



A more complex example

```
;; above : lon number -> lon
;; (above alon n) returns the list of the numbers
;; in alon that are greater than t
(define (above alon t)
  (cond [(empty? alon) empty]
        [else
         (cond [(> (first alon) t)
                  (cons (first alon)
                        (above (rest alon) t))]
               [else (above (rest alon) t)]))]))
```



Creating Abstractions

How can we write one function that replaces

- `below`
- `above`
- `equal`
- `same-sign-as`
- ... ?



Creating Abstractions cont.

```
;; filter1 : relOp lon number -> lon
;; (filter1 test alon n) returns the list of the numbers t
;;   in alon such that (test t n) is true
(define (filter1 test alon t)
  (cond [(empty? alon) empty]
        [else
         (cond [(test (first alon) t)
                  (cons (first alon)
                        (filter1 test (rest alon) t))]
                [else (filter1 test (rest alon) t)])])])
```

What did we do? Use a function as an argument!
relOp abbreviates *relational operator*. Requires the Intermediate language level.



Using Abstractions

- How do we denote (express) function values? In three different ways. We will use the simpler one for now: write the name of a defined function (primitive, library, or program-defined):

```
(filter1 <= (list ...) 17))  
(filter1 > (list ...) 17))
```

How can we define functions **below** and **above** without code duplication?

```
(define (below alon t) (filter1 <= alon t))  
(define (above alon t) (filter1 > alon t))
```

- Both functions will work just as before!



Repetition in Types

Repetition also happens in type definitions.

A `lon` is one of:

- `empty`
- `(cons n alon)`,

where `n` is a number and `alon` is a `lon`.

A `los` is one of:

- `empty`
- `(cons s alos)`,

where `s` is a symbol and `alos` is a `los`.



Abstracting Types

A `list-of x` is one of:

- `empty`
- `(cons x alox)`,
where `x` is an `X` and `alox` is a `listOf X`.

A variable at the type level.

In FP, called **parametric polymorphism**

In OOP, called **genericity (generic types)**



Abstracting Types

Type	Example(s)
<code>list-of number</code>	<code>(list 1 2 3)</code>
<code>list-of symbol</code>	<code>(list 'a 'b 'pizza)</code>
<code>any</code>	<code>(list 1 2 3)</code> <code>(list 'a 'b 'pizza)</code> <code>empty</code> <code>(list 1 'a +)</code>

Important! `list-of x` is NOT `list-of any`



Revisiting `filter1`

What is a more precise description of `test`'s type?

```
;; filter1 : relOp (list-of number) number →  
;;   (listOf number)  
;; where relOp is (number number -> boolean)  
;; (filter1 r alon n) returns the list of numbers  
;; t from alon such that (r t n) is true
```



Revisiting `filter1`

Can we generalize the type of `filter1`?

```
;; filter1 :  
;; (number number -> boolean) (list-of number) number ->  
;; (listOf number)
```

What is special about `number`? Does `filter1` rely on any of the properties of `number`?

No. It could be any type `x`.

```
;; filter1 : (x x -> boolean) (list-of x) x -> (list-of x)
```



A better form of filtering?

Claim: `filter1` is unnecessarily complex and specialized. Compare it with the following function (which is part of the Scheme library).

```
;; filter (X -> boolean) (listOf X) -> listOf X
;; (filter p alox) returns the list of elements e
;;   in alox that satisfy the predicate p.
```

Note that `p` is unary, which means that we must pass matching unary functions as arguments. This convention is inconvenient in the absence of a new linguistic mechanism called lambda-notation which is introduced in Lecture 9. This mechanism is available in the “Intermediate student with lambda” language.



Final thoughts

- Function abstraction adds **expressiveness** to the programming language
- Type abstraction (polymorphism) does the same for type annotations
- They work well together, *e.g.* OCAML, Haskell.
- Programming will continue to get “easier” as we add abstraction mechanisms to our languages.



For Next Class

- Slides for earlier lectures have been cleaned up. Check them out.
- Review hand evaluation rule for **local**
- Work on HW3 (which includes a *real* challenge problem).
- Reading:
 - Chs. 19-22: Linguistic Abstraction,
Functions as values
 - Chs. 21-22: Abstracting designs
and first class functions