Excursion to a World Without Types: Scripting Languages
Scripting Languages

- Lightweight programming languages evolved from command languages
- Lightweight data structures hashmap (object), strings
- Lightweight syntax familiar, no semicolon, (often not well specified), ...
- Lightweight typing dynamic, weak, duck typing
- Lightweight metaprogramming
- Lightweight implementation interpreted, few tools
JavaScript, a Typical Scripting Language

- Initially developed by Brendan Eich of Netscape Corp.
- Standardized as ECMAScript (ECMA-262 Edition 5.1)
- Application areas (scripting targets)
  - client-side web scripting (dynamic HTML, SVG, XUL)
  - server-side scripting (Whitebeam, Helma, Cocoon, iPlanet)
  - animation scripting (diablo, dim3, k3d)
  - and many more
JavaScript, Technically

- Java-style syntax
- Object-based imperative language
  - no classes, but prototype concept
  - objects are hashtables
- First-class functions
  - a functional language
- Weak, dynamic type system

**Slogan:** Any type can be converted to any other reasonable type

```javascript
node.onmouseout = function (ev) {
  init();
  state++;
  node.className = "highlight-" + state;
  ev.stopPropagation();
}
```
Problems with JavaScript

Symptomatic for other scripting languages

► No module system
  ► No namespace management
  ► No interface descriptions

► No static type system

► No application specific datatypes
  primitive datatypes, strings, hashtables

► Type conversions are sometimes surprising
  “A scripting language should never throw an exception [the script should just continue]” (Rob Pike, Google)

⇒ Limited to small applications
Specific Problems with JavaScript

- Most popular applications
  - client-side scripting
  - AJAX
- Dynamic modification of page content via DOM interface
  - DOM = document object model
  - W3C standard interface for accessing and modifying XML
  - Mainly used in web browsers

⇒ Incompatible DOM implementations in Web browsers
⇒ Programming recipes instead of techniques
⇒ Platform independent libraries like JQuery
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- Incompatible DOM implementations in Web browsers
  ⇒ programming recipes instead of techniques
  ⇒ platform independent libraries like JQuery
Can You Write Reliable Programs in JavaScript?

- Struggle with the lack of e.g. a module system
  - Ad-hoc structuring of large programs
  - Naming conventions
  - Working in a team
- Work around DOM incompatibilities
  - Use existing JavaScript frameworks (widgets, networking)
  - Frameworks are also incompatible
- Wonder about unexpected results
An Ultra-Brief JavaScript Tutorial

Rule 1: JavaScript is object-based. An object is a hash table that maps named properties to values.
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Rule 2:
Every value has a type. For most reasonable combinations, values can be converted from one type to another type.
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Rule 3:
Types include null, boolean, number, string, object, and function.

Rule 4:
‘Undefined’ is a value (and a type).
Some Quick Questions

Let’s define an object `obj`:

```javascript
js> var obj = { x: 1 }
```

What are the values/outputs of

- `obj.x`
- `obj.y`
- `print(obj.y)`
- `obj.y.z`
Answers

```javascript
js> var obj = {x:1}
js> obj.x
1
js> obj.y
js> print(obj.y)
undefined
js> obj.y.z
js: "<stdin>", line 12: uncaught JavaScript exception:  
ConversionError: The undefined value has no properties.  
(<stdin>; line 12)
```
Weak, Dynamic Types in JavaScript II

Rule 5:
An object is really a dynamic mapping from strings to values.

```
js> var x = "x"
x
1
js> obj[x]
gotcha
js> obj.undefined = "gotcha"

What is the effect/result of the last expression?
```
Weak, Dynamic Types in JavaScript II

Rule 5:
An object is really a dynamic mapping from strings to values.

```javascript
js> var x = "x"
js> obj[x]
1
js> obj.undefined = "gotcha"
gotcha
js> obj[obj.y]
    == obj[undefined]
    == obj["undefined"]
    == obj.undefined
    == "gotcha"
```
Weak, Dynamic Types in JavaScript III

Recall Rule 2:
Every value has a type. For most reasonable combinations, values can be converted from one type to another type.

```javascript
> var a = 17
> a.x = 42
42
> a.x
```

What is the effect/result of the last expression?
Weak, Dynamic Types in JavaScript III

Wrapper objects for numbers

```javascript
m = new Number(17); n = new Number(4)
m+n
21
```
Weak, Dynamic Types in JavaScript III

Wrapper objects for numbers

```javascript
m = new Number(17); n = new Number(4)
m+n
```

21

Wrapper objects for booleans

```javascript
flag = new Bool(false);
result = flag ? true : false;
```

What is the value of `result`?
Weak, Dynamic Types in JavaScript IV

Rule 6:
Functions are first-class, but behave differently when used as methods or as constructors.

```javascript
function f () { return this.x; }
```

```javascript
obj.f = f
```

```javascript
function f () { return this.x; }
```

```javascript
obj.f()
```

1

```javascript
new f()
```

[object Object]
Distinguishing Absence and Undefinedness I

```javascript
js> obju = { u : {} }.xx
[object Object]
j
js> objv = { v : {} }.xx
[object Object]
j
js> print(obju.u)
undefined
js> print(objv.u)
undefined
```
Distinguishing Absence and Undefinedness II

Rule 7:
The `with` construct puts its argument object on top of the current environment stack.

```javascript
js> u = "defined"
defined

js> with (obju) print(u)
undefined

js> with (objv) print(u)
defined
```
Distinguishing Absence and Undefinedness III

Rule 8:
The for construct has an in operator to range over all defined indexes.

```javascript
js> for (i in obju) print(i)
u
js> for (i in objv) print(i)
v
js> delete objv.v
true
js> for (i in objv) print(i)
js> delete objv.v
true
```
Thesis

- Common errors such as
  - using non-objects as objects
    e.g. using numbers as functions
  - invoking non-existing methods
  - accessing non-existing fields
  - surprising conversions

  can all be caught by a

  Static Type System

- and much more.