Elements of Programming Languages

Lecture 10: Objects and Classes

James Cheney

University of Edinburgh

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Overview

- Last time: “programming in the large”
  - Programs, packages/namespaces, importing
  - Modules and interfaces
  - Mostly: using Scala for examples
- Today: the elephant in the room:
  - Objects and Classes
  - A taste of “advanced” OOP constructs: inner classes, anonymous objects and mixins
  - Illustrate using examples in Scala, and some comparisons with Java

Objects

- An *object* is a module with some additional properties:
    - **Encapsulation**: Access to an object's components can be limited to the object itself (or to a subset of objects)
    - **Self-reference**: An object is a value and its methods can refer to the object's fields and methods (via an implicit parameter, often called `this` or `self`)
    - **Inheritance**: An object can inherit behavior from another "parent" object
- Objects/inheritance are tied to *classes* in some (but not all) OO languages
- In Scala, the `object` keyword creates a *singleton object* ("class with only one instance")
- (in Java, objects can only be created as instances of *classes*)

Self-Reference

- Inside an object definition, the `this` keyword refers to the object being defined.
- This provides another form of recursion:

```
object Fact {
  def fact (n: Int): Int = {
    if (n == 0) {1} else {n * this.fact(n-1)}
  }
}
```

- Moreover, as we'll see, the recursion is *open*: the method that is called by `this.foo(x)` depends on what `this` is at run time.

Encapsulation and Scope

- An object can place restrictions on the *scope* of its members
- Typically used to prevent *external interference* with 'internal state' of object
- For example: Java, C++, C# all support
  - `private` keyword: "only visible to this object"
  - `public` keyword: "visible to all"
- Java: package scope (default): visible only to other components in the same package
- Scala: `private[X]` allows *qualified* scope: "private to (class/object/trait/package) `X`"
- Python, Javascript: don't have (enforced) `private` scope (relies on programmer goodwill)

Classes

- A *class* is an interface with some additional properties:
  - **Instantiation**: classes can describe how to construct associated objects (*instances* of the class)
  - **Inheritance**: classes may *inherit* from zero or more *parent* classes as well as *implement* zero or more interfaces
  - **Abstraction**: Classes may be *abstract*, that is, may name but not define some fields or methods
  - **Dynamic dispatch**: The choice of which method is called is determined by the run-time type of a class instance, not the static type available at the call
- Not all object-oriented languages have classes!
  - Smalltalk, JavaScript are well-known exceptions
  - Such languages nevertheless often use *prototypes*, or commonly-used objects that play a similar role to classes

Constructing instances

- Classes typically define special functions that create new instances, called *constructors*
    - In C++/Java, constructors are defined explicitly and separately from the initialized data
    - In Scala, there is usually one “default” constructor whose parameters are in scope in the whole class body
    - (additional constructors can be defined as needed)
- Constructors called with the `new` keyword

```
class C(x: Int, y: String) {
  val i = x
  val s = y
  def this(x: Int) = this(x,"default")
}
scala> val c1 = new C(1,"abc")
scala> val c2 = new C(1)
```

Inheritance

- An object can *inherit* from another.
- This means: the parent object, and its components, become “part of” the child object
  - accessible using `super` keyword
  - (though some components may not be directly accessible)
- In Java (and Scala), a class extends exactly one superclass (`Object`, if not otherwise specified)
- In C++, a class can have **multiple** superclasses
- Non-class-based languages, such as JavaScript and Smalltalk, support inheritance directly on objects via *extension*

Subtyping

- As (briefly) mentioned last week, an object `Obj` that extends a trait `Tr` is automatically a *subtype* (`Obj <: Tr`)
- Likewise, a class `Cl` that extends a trait `Tr` is a subtype of `Tr` (`Cl <: Tr`)
- A class (or object) `Sub` that extends another class `Super` is a subtype of `Super` (`Sub <: Super`)
- However, subtyping and inheritance are *distinct* features:
    - As we've already seen, subtyping can exist without inheritance
    - moreover, subtyping is about *types*, whereas inheritance is about *behavior* (code)

Inheritance and encapsulation

- Inheritance complicates the picture for encapsulation somewhat.
- `private` keyword prevents access from outside the class (including any subclasses).
- `protected` keyword means "visible to instances of this object and its subclasses"
- Scala: Both `private` and `protected` can be qualified with a scope `[X]` where `X` is a package, class or object.

```
class A { private[A] val a = 1
          protected[A] val b = 2 }
class B extends A {
  def foo() = a + b
} // "a" not found
```

Cross-instance sharing

- Classes in Java can have *static* fields/members that are shared across all instances
- Static methods can access `private` fields and methods
- `static` is also allowed in interfaces (but only as of Java 8)
- Class with only static members $\sim$ module
- C++: `friend` keyword allows sharing between classes on a case-by-case basis

Companion Objects

- Scala has no `static` keyword
- Scala instead uses *companion objects*
  - Companion = object with the same name as the class and defined in the same scope
  - Companions can access each others' `private` components

```
object Count { private var x = 1 }
class Count { def incr() = {Count.x = Count.x+1} }
```

- Note: This can only be done in compiled code, not interactively
- (More precisely, in interactive code the object and class need to be defined at the same time)

Multiple inheritance and the *diamond problem*

- As noted, C++ allows *multiple inheritance*
- Suppose we did this (in Scala terms):

```
class Win(val x: Int, val y: Int)
class TextWin(...) extends Win
class GraphicsWin(...) extends Win
class TextGraphicsWin(...)
  extends TextWin and GraphicsWin
```

- In C++, this means there are two copies of `Win` inside `TextGraphicsWin`
- They can easily become out of sync, causing problems
- Multiple inheritance is also difficult to implement (efficiently); many languages now avoid it

Abstraction

- A class may leave some components undefined
  - Such classes must be marked `abstract` in Java, C++ and Scala
  - To instantiate an abstract class, must provide definitions for the methods (e.g. in a subclass)
- Abstract classes can define common behavior to be inherited by subclasses
- In Scala, abstract classes can also have unknown *type* components
  - (optionally with subtype constraints)

```
abstract class ConstantVal {
  type T <: AnyVal
  val c: T
} // a constant of any value type
```

Dynamic dispatch

- An abstract method can be implemented in different ways by different subclasses
- When an abstract method is called on an instance, the corresponding implementation is determined by the *run-time type* of the instance.
- (necessarily in this case, since the abstract class provides no implementation)

```
abstract class A { def foo(): String}
class B extends A { def foo() = "B"}
class C extends A { def foo() = "C" }
scala> val b:A = new B
scala> val c:A = new C
scala> (b.foo(), c.foo())
```

Overriding

- An inherited method that is already defined by a superclass can be *overridden* in a subclass
- This means that the subclass's version is called on that subclass's instances using dynamic dispatch
- In Java, `@Override` annotation is optional, checked documentation that a method overrides an inherited method
- In Scala, must use `override` keyword to clarify intention to override a method

```
class A { def foo() = "A"}
class B extends A { override def foo() = "B" }
scala> val b: A = new B
scala> b.foo()
class C extends A { def foo() = "C" } // error
```

Type tests and coercions

- Given `x: A`, Java/Scala allow us to *test* whether its run-time type is actually subclass `B`

```
scala> b.isInstanceOf[B]
```

- and to *coerce* such a reference to `y: B`

```
scala> val b2: B = b.asInstanceOf[B]
```

- Warning: these features can be used to violate type abstraction!

```
def weird[A](x: A) = if (x.isInstanceOf[Int]) {
  (x.asInstanceOf[Int]+1).asInstanceOf[A]
  } else {x}
```

Advanced constructs

- So far, we've covered the "basic" OOP model (circa Java 1.0)
- Modern languages extend this in several ways
- We can define a class/object inside another class:
  - As a member of the enclosing class (tied to a specific instance)
  - or as a static member (shared across all instances)
  - As a local definition inside a method
  - As an anonymous local definition
- Some languages also support *mixins* (e.g. Scala traits)
- Scala supports similar, somewhat more uniform composition of classes, objects, and traits

Classes/objects as members

- In Scala, classes and objects (and traits) can be nested arbitrarily

```
class A { object B { val x = 1 } }
scala> val a = new A

object C {class D { val x = 1 } }
scala> val d = new C.D

class E { class F { val x = 1 } }
scala> val e = new E
scala> val f = new e.F
```

Summary

- Today
  - Objects, encapsulation, self-reference
  - Classes, inheritance, abstraction, dynamic dispatch
- This is only the tip of a very large iceberg...
  - there are almost as many "object-oriented" programming models as languages
  - the design space, and "right" formalisms, are still active areas of research
- Next time:
  - Inner classes, anonymous objects, mixins, parameterized types
  - Combining object-oriented and functional programming