

Language Design

COMS W4115



Katsushika Hokusai, *In the Hollow of a Wave off the Coast at Kanagawa*, 1827

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Language Design Issues

Syntax: how programs look

- Names and reserved words
- Instruction formats
- Grouping

Semantics: what programs mean

- Model of computation: sequential, concurrent
- Control and data flow
- Types and data representation

C History

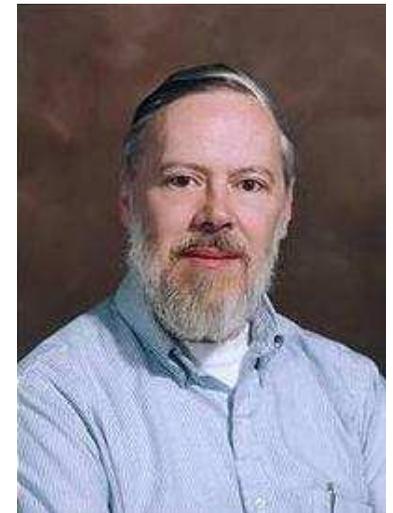
Developed between 1969 and 1973 along with Unix

Due mostly to Dennis Ritchie

Designed for systems programming

- Operating systems
- Utility programs
- Compilers
- Filters

Evolved from B, which evolved from BCPL



BCPL

Martin Richards, Cambridge, 1967



Typeless

- Everything a machine word (n-bit integer)
- Pointers (addresses) and integers identical

Memory: undifferentiated array of words

Natural model for word-addressed machines

Local variables depend on frame-pointer-relative addressing: no dynamically-sized automatic objects

Strings awkward: Routines expand and pack bytes to/from word arrays

C History

Original machine (DEC PDP-11) was very small:

24K bytes of memory, 12K used for operating system

Written when computers were big, capital equipment

Group would get one, develop new language, OS



C History

Many language features designed to reduce memory

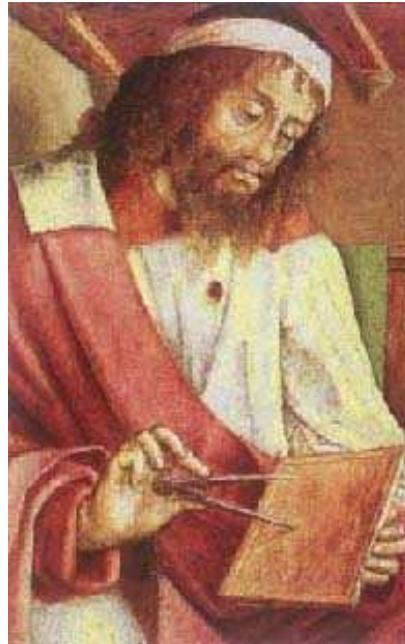
- Forward declarations required for everything
- Designed to work in one pass: must know everything
- No function nesting

PDP-11 was byte-addressed

- Now standard
- Meant BCPL's word-based model was insufficient

Euclid's Algorithm in C

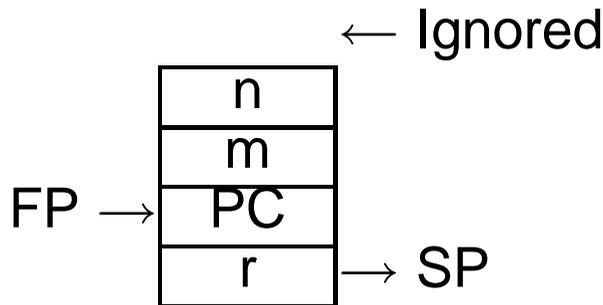
```
int gcd(int m, int n ) ←  
{  
    int r;  
    while ((r = m % n) != 0) {  
        m = n;  
        n = r;  
    }  
    return n;  
}
```



“New style” function declaration lists number and type of arguments. Originally only listed return type. Generated code did not care how many arguments were actually passed, and everything was a word. Arguments are call-by-value

Euclid's Algorithm in C

```
int gcd(int m, int n )
{
    int r;
    while ((r = m % n) != 0) {
        m = n;
        n = r;
    }
    return n;
}
```



Automatic variable
Allocated on stack
when function
entered, released
on return
Parameters &
automatic variables
accessed via frame
pointer
Other temporaries
also stacked

Euclid on the PDP-11

<pre>.globl _gcd .text _gcd: jsr r5, rsave L2: mov 4(r5), r1 sxt r0 div 6(r5), r0 mov r1, -10(r5) jeq L3 mov 6(r5), 4(r5) mov -10(r5), 6(r5) jbr L2 L3: mov 6(r5), r0 jbr L1 L1: jmp rretrn</pre>	<p>GPRs: r0–r7 r7=PC, r6=SP, r5=FP</p> <p>Save SP in FP r1 = n sign extend r0, r1 = m ÷ n r = r1 (m % n) if r == 0 goto L3 m = n n = r</p> <p>r0 = n non-optimizing compiler return r0 (n)</p>
--	--

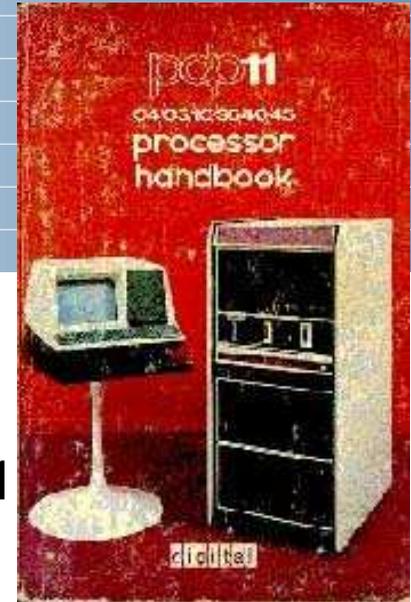
Euclid on the PDP-11

```
        .globl _gcd
        .text
_gcd:
        jsr r5, rsave
L2:     mov 4(r5), r1
        sxt r0
        div 6(r5), r0
        mov r1, -10(r5)
        jeq L3
        mov 6(r5), 4(r5)
        mov -10(r5), 6(r5)
        jbr L2
L3:     mov 6(r5), r0
        jbr L1
L1:     jmp rretrn
```

Very natural mapping from C into PDP-11 instructions.

Complex addressing modes make frame-pointer-relative accesses easy.

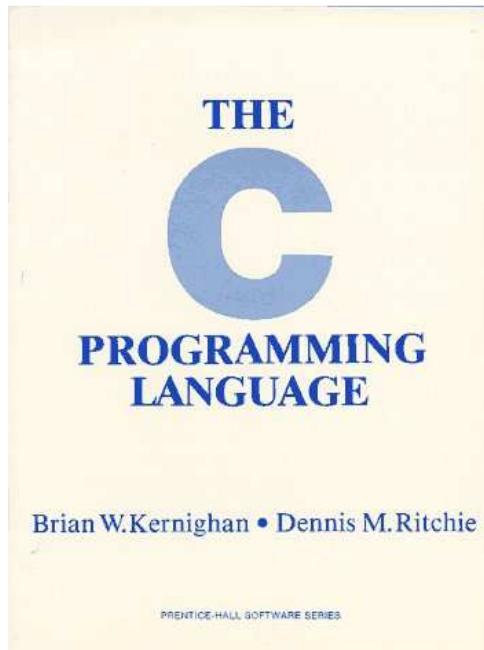
Another idiosyncrasy: registers were memory-mapped, so taking address of a variable in a register is straightforward.



The Design of C

Taken from Dennis Ritchie's *C Reference Manual*

(Appendix A of Kernighan & Ritchie)



Lexical Conventions

Identifiers (words, e.g., `foo`, `printf`)

Sequence of letters, digits, and underscores, starting with a letter or underscore

Keywords (special words, e.g., `if`, `return`)

C has fairly few: only 23 keywords. Deliberate: leaves more room for users' names

Comments (between `/*` and `*/`)

Most fall into two basic styles: start/end sequences as in C, or until end-of-line as in Java's `//`

Lexical Conventions

C is a *free-form* language where whitespace mostly serves to separate tokens. Which of these are the same?

`1+2`

`1 + 2`

`foo bar`

`foobar`

`return this`

`returnthis`

Space is significant in some language. Python uses indentation for grouping, thus these are different:

```
if x < 3:
```

```
    y = 2
```

```
    z = 3
```

```
if x < 3:
```

```
    y = 2
```

```
z = 3
```

Constants/Literals

Integers (e.g., 10)

Should a leading - be part of an integer or not?

Characters (e.g., 'a')

How do you represent non-printable or ' characters?

Floating-point numbers (e.g., 3.5e-10)

Usually fairly complex syntax, easy to get wrong.

Strings (e.g., "Hello")

How do you include a " in a string?

What's in a Name?

In C, each name has a **storage class** (where it is) and a **type** (what it is).

Storage classes:

1. automatic
2. static
3. external
4. register

Fundamental types:

1. **char**
2. **int**
3. **float**
4. **double**

Derived types:

1. arrays
2. functions
3. pointers
4. structures

Objects and lvalues

Object: area of memory

lvalue: refers to an object

An lvalue may appear on the left side of an assignment

```
a = 3; /* OK: a is an lvalue */
```

```
3 = a; /* 3 is not an lvalue */
```

Conversions

C defines certain automatic conversions:

- A `char` can be used as an `int`
- Floating-point arithmetic is always done with `doubles`; `floats` are automatically promoted
- `int` and `char` may be converted to `float` or `double` and back. Result is undefined if it could overflow.
- Adding an integer to a pointer gives a pointer
- Subtracting two pointers to objects of the same type produces an integer

Expressions

Expressions are built from identifiers (`foo`), constants (`3`), parenthesis, and unary and binary operators.

Each operator has a **precedence** and an **associativity**

Precedence tells us

$1 * 2 + 3 * 4$ means
 $(1 * 2) + (3 * 4)$

Associativity tells us

$1 + 2 + 3 + 4$ means
 $((1 + 2) + 3) + 4$

C's Operators in Precedence Order

<code>f(r,r,...)</code>	<code>a[i]</code>	<code>p->m</code>	<code>s.m</code>
<code>!b</code>	<code>~i</code>	<code>-i</code>	
<code>++l</code>	<code>--l</code>	<code>l++</code>	<code>l--</code>
<code>*p</code>	<code>&l</code>	<code>(type) r</code>	<code>sizeof(t)</code>
<code>n * o</code>	<code>n / o</code>	<code>i % j</code>	
<code>n + o</code>	<code>n - o</code>		
<code>i << j</code>	<code>i >> j</code>		
<code>n < o</code>	<code>n > o</code>	<code>n <= o</code>	<code>n >= o</code>
<code>r == r</code>	<code>r != r</code>		
<code>i & j</code>			
<code>i ^ j</code>			
<code>i j</code>			
<code>b && c</code>			
<code>b c</code>			
<code>b ? r : r</code>			
<code>l = r</code>	<code>l += n</code>	<code>l -= n</code>	<code>l *= n</code>
<code>l /= n</code>	<code>l %= i</code>	<code>l &= i</code>	<code>l ^= i</code>
<code>l = i</code>	<code>l <<= i</code>	<code>l >>= i</code>	
<code>r1 , r2</code>			

Declarators

Declaration: string of specifiers followed by a declarator

basic type

```
static unsigned int (*f[10])(int, char*)[10];
```

specifiers declarator

Declarator's notation matches that of an expression: use it to return the basic type.

Largely regarded as the worst syntactic aspect of C: both pre- (pointers) and post-fix operators (arrays, functions).

Storage-Class Specifiers

<code>auto</code>	Automatic (stacked), default
<code>static</code>	Statically allocated
<code>extern</code>	Look for a declaration elsewhere
<code>register</code>	Kept in a register, not memory

C trivia: Originally, a function could only have at most three `register` variables, may only be `int` or `char`, can't use address-of operator `&`.

Today, `register` simply ignored. Compilers try to put most automatic variables in registers.

Type Specifiers

`int`

`char`

`float`

`double`

`struct { declarations }`

`struct identifier { declarations }`

`struct identifier`



Declarators

identifier

(*declarator*)

Grouping

declarator ()

Function

declarator [*optional-constant*]

Array

* *declarator*

Pointer

C trivia: Originally, number and type of arguments to a function wasn't part of its type, thus declarator just contained ().

Today, ANSI C allows function and argument types, making an even bigger mess of declarators.

Declarator syntax

Is `int *f()` a pointer to a function returning an `int`, or a function that returns a pointer to an `int`?

Hint: precedence rules for declarators match those for expressions.

Parentheses resolve such ambiguities:

`int *(f())` Function returning pointer to `int`

`int (*f)()` Pointer to function returning `int`

Statements

expression ;

{ statement-list }

if (*expression*) *statement* **else** *statement*

while (*expression*) *statement*

do *statement* **while** (*expression*);

for (*expression ; expression ; expression*) *statement*

switch (*expression*) *statement*

case *constant-expression* :

default:

break;

continue;

return *expression* ;

goto *label* ;

label :

External Definitions

“A C program consists of a sequence of external definitions”

Functions, simple variables, and arrays may be defined.

“An external definition declares an identifier to have storage class **extern** and a specified type”

Function definitions

```
type-specifier declarator ( parameter-list )  
type-decl-list  
{  
  declaration-list  
  statement-list  
}
```

Example:

```
int max(a, b, c)  
int a, b, c;  
{  
  int m;  
  m = (a > b) ? a : b ;  
  return m > c ? m : c ;  
}
```

More C trivia

The first C compilers did not check the number and type of function arguments.

The biggest change made when C was standardized was to require the type of function arguments to be defined:

Old-style

```
int f();
```

```
int f(a, b, c)
```

```
int a, b;
```

```
double c;
```

```
{
```

```
}
```

New-style

```
int f(int, int, double);
```

```
int f(int a, int b, double c)
```

```
{
```

```
}
```

Data Definitions

type-specifier init-declarator-list ;

declarator optional-initializer

Initializers may be constants or brace-enclosed, comma-separated constant expressions. Examples:

```
int a;
```

```
struct { int x; int y; } b = { 1, 2 };
```

```
float a, *b, c;
```

Scope Rules

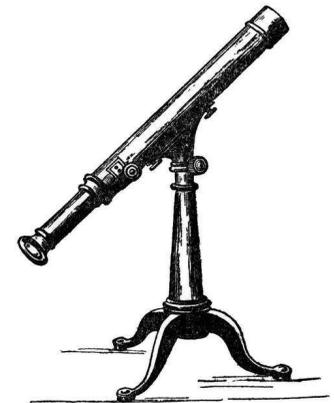
Two types of scope in C:

1. Lexical scope

Essentially, place where you don't get "undeclared identifier" errors

2. Scope of external identifiers

When two identifiers in different files refer to the same object. E.g., a function defined in one file called from another.



Lexical Scope

Extends from declaration to terminating } or end-of-file.

```
int a;
```

```
int foo()  
{  
    int b;  
    if (a == 0) {  
        printf("A was 0");  
        a = 1;  
    }  
    b = a; /* OK */  
}
```

```
int bar()  
{  
    a = 3; /* OK */  
    b = 2; /* Error: b out of scope */  
}
```

External Scope

file1.c:

```
int foo()  
{  
    return 0;  
}
```

```
int bar()  
{  
    foo(); /* OK */  
}
```

file2.c:

```
int baz()  
{  
    foo(); /* Error */  
}
```

```
extern int foo();  
  
int baff()  
{  
    foo(); /* OK */  
}
```

The Preprocessor

Violates the free-form nature of C: preprocessor lines *must* begin with #.

Program text is passed through the preprocessor before entering the compiler proper.

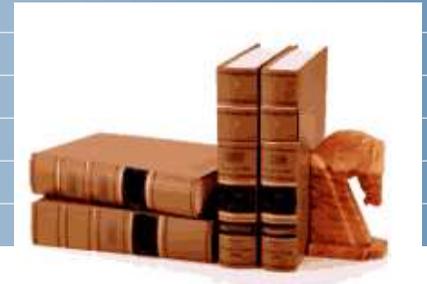
Define replacement text:

```
# define identifier token-string
```

Replace a line with the contents of a file:

```
# include " filename "
```

C's Standard Libraries



<code><assert.h></code>	Generate runtime errors	<code>assert(a > 0)</code>
<code><ctype.h></code>	Character classes	<code>isalpha(c)</code>
<code><errno.h></code>	System error numbers	<code>errno</code>
<code><float.h></code>	Floating-point constants	<code>FLT_MAX</code>
<code><limits.h></code>	Integer constants	<code>INT_MAX</code>
<code><locale.h></code>	Internationalization	<code>setlocale(...)</code>
<code><math.h></code>	Math functions	<code>sin(x)</code>
<code><setjmp.h></code>	Non-local goto	<code>setjmp(jb)</code>
<code><signal.h></code>	Signal handling	<code>signal(SIGINT, &f)</code>
<code><stdarg.h></code>	Variable-length arguments	<code>va_start(ap, st)</code>
<code><stddef.h></code>	Some standard types	<code>size_t</code>
<code><stdio.h></code>	File I/O, printing.	<code>printf("%d", i)</code>
<code><stdlib.h></code>	Miscellaneous functions	<code>malloc(1024)</code>
<code><string.h></code>	String manipulation	<code>strcmp(s1, s2)</code>
<code><time.h></code>	Time, date calculations	<code>localtime(tm)</code>

Language design

Language design is library design.

— Bjarne Stroustrup

Programs consist of pieces connected together.

Big challenge in language design: making it easy to put pieces together *correctly*. C examples:

- The function abstraction (local variables, etc.)
- Type checking of function arguments
- The `#include` directive