

# CMSC 330: Organization of Programming Languages

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## Ownership, References, and Lifetimes in Rust

# Rust: GC-less Memory Management, Safely

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- Rust's heap memory **managed without GC**
- Type checking ensures **no dangling pointers** or **buffer overflows**
  - **unsafe** idioms are **disallowed**
- Key features that ensure safety: **ownership** and **lifetimes**
  - Data has a single **owner**. **Immutable** aliases OK, but mutation only via owner or **single mutable reference**
  - How long data is alive is determined by a **lifetime**

# Rules of Ownership

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1. Each value in Rust has a variable that's its **owner**
2. There can only be **one owner at a time**
3. When the **owner goes out of scope**, the value will be **dropped** (freed)

```
{ let mut s = String::from("hello"); //s is the owner
  s.push_str(", world!");
  println!("{}", s);
} //s's data is freed by calling s.drop()
```

**string:** Dynamically sized, mutable data

# Assignment Transfers Ownership

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- By default, an assignment *moves* data

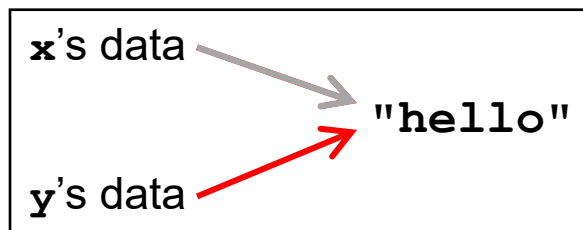
```
let x = String::from("hello");  
let y = x; //x moved to y
```

- A move leaves only **one owner**: **y**

```
println!("{}", world!", y); //ok  
println!("{}", world!", x); //fails
```

- Why? Both **x** and **y** may point to the same underlying data

*Move prevents double  
free, or use-after-free*



# Copy Trait

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- Primitives do not transfer ownership on assignment
  - `i32`, `char`, `bool`, `f32`, tuples of these types, etc.

```
let x = 5;  
let y = x;  
println!("{}", y); //ok  
println!("{}", x); //ok
```

- Why? These derive the `Copy` trait
  - Doing so says that an assignment copies the entire object

# Traits

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- A **Trait** is a way of saying that a type has a particular property
  - **Copy**: objects with this trait do *not* transfer ownership on assignment
    - instead, assignment copies all of the object data
  - **Move**: objects with this trait *do* transfer ownership on assignment
    - usually, so that not all of the data need be copied
- Another way of using traits: to indicate functions that a type is must implement (more later)
  - Like Java interfaces
  - Example: **Deref** built-in trait indicates that an object can be dereferenced via `*` op; compiler calls object's **deref()** method

# Use clone() to make explicit copies

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- Objects with the **Move** trait may be explicitly cloned
  - Avoids loss of ownership, but at the cost of a copy

```
let x = String::from("hello");  
let y = x.clone(); //x ownership not moved  
println!("{}", world!", y); //ok  
println!("{}", world!", x); //ok
```

# Ownership Transfer in Function Calls

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```
fn main() {
    let s1 = String::from("hello");
    let s2 = id(s1);    //s1 moved to arg
    println!("{}",s2); //id's result moved to s2
    println!("{}",s1); //fails
}

fn id(s:String) -> String {
    s // s moved to caller, on return
}
```

- On a call, ownership passes from:
  - argument to called function's parameter
  - returned value to caller's receiver



# References and Borrowing

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- Create an alias by making a **reference**
  - An explicit, non-owning pointer to the original value
  - Called **borrowing**. Done with **&** operator
- References are immutable by default (can override)

```
fn main() {
    let s1 = String::from("hello");
    let len = calc_len(&s1); //lends reference
    println!("the length of '{}' is {}",s1,len);
}

fn calc_len(s: &String) -> usize {
    s.push_str("hi"); //fails! refs are immutable
    s.len()          // s dropped; but not its referent
}
```

# Quiz 1: Owner of str's data at *HERE* ?

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```
fn foo(str:String) -> usize {  
    let x = str;  
    let y = &x;  
    let z = x;  
    let w = &y;  
    // HERE  
}
```

- A. x
- B. y
- C. z
- D. w

# Quiz 1: Owner of str's data at *HERE* ?

---

```
fn foo(str:String) -> usize {  
  let x = str;  
  let y = &x;  
  let z = x;  
  let w = &y;  
  // HERE  
}
```

A. x

B. y

**C. z**

D. w

# Rules of References

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1. At any given time, you can have *either but not both* of
  - One mutable reference
  - Any number of immutable references
2. References must always be valid (pointed-to value not dropped)

# Borrowing and Mutation

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- Make **immutable references** to **mutable** values
  - Shares **read-only access** through owner and borrowed references
    - Same for immutable values
  - **Mutation disallowed** on original value until **borrowed reference(s)** dropped

```
{ let mut s1 = String::from("hello");
  { let s2 = &s1;
    println!("String is {} and {}",s1,s2); //ok
    s1.push_str(" world!"); //disallowed
  } //drops s2
  s1.push_str(" world!"); //ok
  println!("String is {}",s1);} //prints updated s1
```

# Mutable references

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- To permit mutation via a reference, use `&mut`
  - Instead of just `&`
  - But **only OK for mutable variables**

```
let mut s1 = String::from("hello");
{ let s2 = &s1;
  s2.push_str(" there"); //disallowed; s2 immut
} //s2 dropped
let s3 = &mut s1; //ok since s1 mutable
s3.push_str(" there"); //ok since s3 mutable
println!("String is {}",s3); //ok
```

## Quiz 2: What does this evaluate to?

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```
{ let mut s1 = String::from("Hello!");  
  {  
    let s2 = &s1;  
    s2.push_str("World!");  
    println!("{}", s2)  
  }  
}
```

- A. "Hello!"
- B. "Hello! World!"
- C. Error
- D. "Hello!World!"

## Quiz 2: What does this evaluate to?

---

```
{ let mut s1 = String::from("Hello!");  
  {  
    let s2 = &s1;  
    s2.push_str("World!");  
    println!("{}", s2)  
  }  
}
```

- A. "Hello!"
- B. "Hello! World!"
- C. Error; s2 is not mut**
- D. "Hello!World!"



## Quiz 3: What is printed?

---

```
fn foo(s: &mut String) -> usize{
    s.push_str("Bob");
    s.len()
}
fn main() {
    let mut s1 = String::from("Alice");
    println!("{}",foo(&mut s1))
}
```

- A. 0
- B. 8
- C. Error
- D. 5

## Quiz 3: What is printed?

---

```
fn foo(s: &mut String) -> usize{
    s.push_str("Bob");
    s.len()
}
fn main() {
    let mut s1 = String::from("Alice");
    println!("{}",foo(&mut s1))
}
```

A. 0

**B. 8**

C. Error

D. 5

# Ownership and Mutable References

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- Can make **only one** mutable reference
- Doing so **blocks use** of the original
  - Restored when reference is dropped

```
let mut s1 = String::from("hello");
{ let s2 = &mut s1; //ok
  let s3 = &mut s1; //fails: second borrow
  s1.push_str(" there"); //fails: second borrow
} //s2 dropped; s1 is first-class owner again
s1.push_str(" there"); //ok
println!("String is {}",s1); //ok
```

implicit borrow  
(`self` is a reference)

But: see  
next slide

# Update: Non Lexical Lifetimes (NLL)

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- Rust has been updated to support lifetimes that end before the surrounding scope:
  - <http://blog.pnkfx.org/blog/2019/06/26/breaking-news-non-lexical-lifetimes-arrives-for-everyone/>

```
let mut s1 = String::from("hello");
{ let s2 = &mut s1; //ignored - never used
  let s3 = &mut s1; //ignored - never used
  s1.push_str(" there"); //OK!
  s2.push_str(" there"); //fails - 2 mutable refs
} //s2 dropped; s1 is first-class owner again
s1.push_str(" there"); //ok
println!("String is {}",s1); //ok
```

# The \* Operator

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- Given a value of type *T&* (or *T&mut*) use the \* operator to read or write its underlying contents

```
let mut x = 2;  
let mut y = 3;  
let mut r = &mut x;  
*r = 4;  
r = &mut y;  
*r = 5;
```

– Note two uses of `mut` for `r`, with different meanings!

# Immutable and Mutable References

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- **Cannot make a mutable reference if immutable references exist**
  - Holders of an immutable reference assume the object will not change!

```
let mut s1 = String::from("hello");
{ let s2 = &s1; //ok: s2 is immutable
  let s3 = &s1; //ok: multiple imm. refs allowed
  let s4 = &mut s1; //fails: imm ref already
} //s2-s4 dropped; s1 is owner again
s1.push_str(" there"); //ok
println!("String is {}",s1); //ok
```

# Aside: Generics and Polymorphism

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- Rust has support like that of Java and OCaml
  - Example: The `std` library defines `Vec<T>` where `T` can be **instantiated** with a variety of types
    - `Vec<char>` is a vector of characters
    - `Vec<&str>` is a vector of string slices
- You can define polymorphic functions, too
  - Rust:

```
fn id<T>(x:T) -> T { x }
```
  - Java:

```
static <T> T id(T x) { return x; }
```
  - OCaml:

```
let id x = x
```
- More later...

# Lifetimes: Avoiding Dangling References

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- References must always be to **valid memory**
  - Not to memory that **has been dropped**

```
fn main() {  
    let ref_invalid = dangle();  
    println!("what will happen ... {}", ref_invalid);  
}  
  
fn dangle() -> &String {  
    let s1 = String::from("hello");  
    &s1  
} // bad! s1's value has been dropped
```

- Rust will disallow this using a concept called **lifetimes**
  - A **lifetime** is a type-level parameter that **names the scope in which the data is valid**

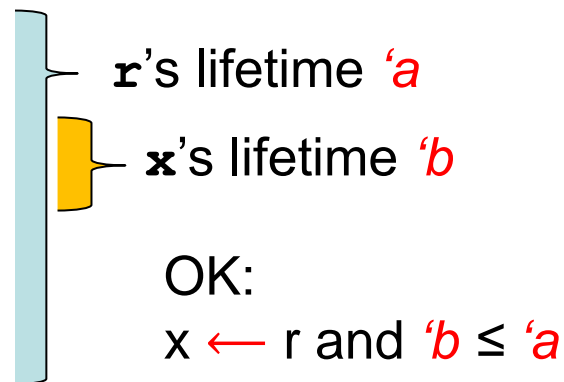


# Lifetimes: OK Usage

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- Lifetime corresponds with scope

```
{
  let r = 5;
  {
    let x = &r;
    println!("r: {}", r); //ok
  }
}
```



- Variable **x** in scope while **r** is
  - A **lifetime** is a *type variable* that identifies a scope
  - **r's lifetime 'a exceeds x's lifetime 'b**

# Lifetimes: Preventing Dangling Refs

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- Slightly changing the example

```
{
  let r; // deferred init
  {
    let x = 5;
    r = &x;
  }
  println!("r: {}", r); //fails
}
```



r's lifetime 'a

x's lifetime 'b

**Not OK:**

r ← x but 'a' ≠ 'b'

- Variable **x** goes out of scope while **r** still exists
  - r's lifetime 'a' exceeds x's lifetime 'b' so not safe to assign **x** to **r**

## Quiz 4: What is printed?

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```
{ let mut s = &String::from("dog");
  {
    let y = String::from("hi");
    s = &y;
  }
  println!("s: {}",s);
}
```

- A. dog
- B. hi
- C. Error – y is immutable
- D. Error – y dropped while still borrowed

## Quiz 4: What is printed?

---

```
{ let mut s = &String::from("dog");
  {
    let y = String::from("hi");
    s = &y;
  }
  println!("s: {}",s);
}
```

A. dog

B. hi

C. Error – y is immutable

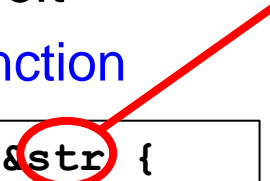
**D. Error – y dropped while still borrowed**

# Lifetimes and Functions

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- Lifetime of a reference not always explicit
  - E.g., when passed as an **argument to a function**

String slice  
(more later)



```
fn longest(x:&str, y:&str) -> &str {  
    if x.len() > y.len() { x } else { y }  
}
```

- What could **go wrong** here?

```
{ let x = String::from("hi");  
  let z;  
  { let y = String::from("there");  
    z = longest(&x, &y); //will be &y  
  } //drop y, and thereby z  
  println!("z = {}", z); //yikes!  
}
```

# Lifetime Parameters

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- Each reference to a value of type  $t$  has a **lifetime parameter**
  - $\&t$  (and  $\&\text{mut } t$ ) – lifetime is implicit
  - $\&'a t$  (and  $\&'a \text{mut } t$ ) – lifetime  $'a$  is explicit
- Where do the lifetime names come from?
  - When left implicit, they are generated by the compiler
  - Global variables have lifetime  $\text{'static}$
- Lifetimes can also be **generic**

```
fn longest<'a>(x:&'a str, y:&'a str) -> &'a str {  
    if x.len() > y.len() { x } else { y }  
}
```

- Thus:  $x$  and  $y$  must have the same lifetime, and the returned reference shares it

# Lifetimes FAQ

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- When do we use **explicit lifetimes**?
  - When more than one var/type needs the same lifetime (like the `longest` function)
- How do I tell the compiler exactly **which lines of code lifetime 'a covers**?
  - You can't. The compiler will (always) figure it out

# Lifetimes FAQ

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- How does **lifetime subsumption** work?
  - If lifetime 'a is longer than 'b, we can use 'a where 'b is expected; can require this with 'b: 'a.
    - Permits us to call `longest (&x, &y)` when `x` and `y` have different lifetimes, but one outlives the other
  - Just like subtyping/subsumption in OO programming
- Can we use **lifetimes in data definitions**?
  - Yes; we will see this later when we define **structs**, **enums**, etc.



# Recap: Rules of References

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1. At any given time, you can have *either* but not both of
  - One mutable reference
  - Any number of immutable references
2. References must always be valid
  - A reference must never outlive its referent