

CSC 347 - Concepts of Programming Languages

L-Values

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Learning Objectives

- ❓ When do we read and when write to a memory location?
 - Distinguish l-values from r-values



Variables

- Given declaration:

```
1 var x: Int = 0
```

- What does `x` mean below?

```
1 x = x + 1
```

- Right-hand `x` denotes
 - value *read* from storage location
- Left-hand `x` denotes
 - the storage location (address)
- Goes back to Strachey in the 1960s
 - [Fundamental Concepts in Programming Languages](#),
Christopher Strachey (1967)



L-Values

- Expression for which l-mode evaluation succeeds
- Effectively, *has an address*
- In C, l-value has address:

```
1 int x = 5;  
2 int y = 6;  
3 int *p = &x;  
4 int *q = &y;  
5 int **r = &p;  
6 r = &q;  
7 q = p;  
8 **r = 7;
```

- In Scala, we can assign to l-values

```
1 val x = 5  
2 val l = List(1, 2)  
3 val (a, b) = (1, 2)  
4 val y :: z :: Nil = l
```

- In formal semantics: content of mutable stores

$$\frac{\langle e, \xi_0 \rangle \Downarrow \langle v, \xi_1 \rangle}{\langle x := e, \xi_0 \rangle \Downarrow \langle v, \xi_1 \{x \mapsto v\} \rangle} (:=)$$



Not L-Values

- L-mode evaluation sometimes disallowed
- In C, cannot take address of temporary expressions

```
1 int x = 5;  
2 int y = 6;  
3 int *p = &(x + y); /* not allowed */  
4 (x + y) = 7;      /* not allowed */
```

- `(x + y)` not an l-value
 - although it might be stored temporarily



Further L-Values

- L-values may require r-mode evaluation
- Array access in C, Java, etc.

```
1 arr[n + 2] = 7;
```

- Field access in Java, Scala, etc.

```
1 obj.f1 = 7
```



Summary

L-values

- Write to a memory location
- C: take address `&x`
- Scala, Java: assignable

```
1 val x = 5
2 val y :: tail = List(1, 2, 3)
```

- May need r-value `arr[1+2]`

R-values

- Read value at a memory location
- C, Scala, Java: expressions `x`, `1`, `x+y`, ...

- Specialized uses of *l-value* / *r-value*