



**PSC 2024/25 (375AA, 9CFU)**

Principles for Software Composition

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[http://didawiki.di.unipi.it/doku.php/  
magistraleinformatica/psc/start](http://didawiki.di.unipi.it/doku.php/magistraleinformatica/psc/start)

16 - Erlang

# Erlang

## concurrency oriented programming



# Erlang: a concurrent programming language

<http://www.erlang.org/>



# Erlang: origins

named after Danish mathematician A. K. Erlang

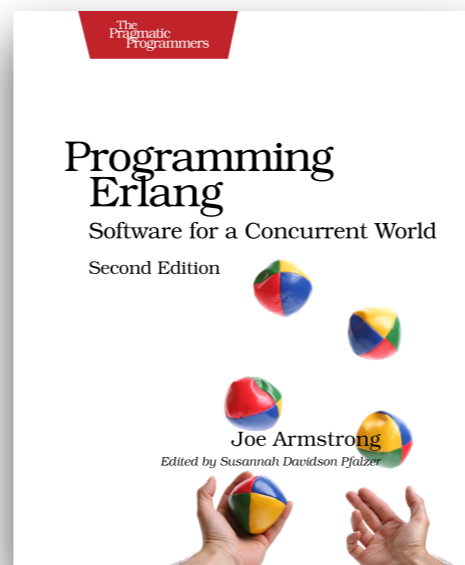
1986: first experimentation at Ericsson, Sweden

1989: internal use only

1990: sold as a product

1998: open source

Joe Armstrong, “Programming Erlang”, ch.1-5, 11-12



# Features

declarative (functional, Prolog) programming

arbitrary size integers, tuples, lists, functions, higher-order

atoms everywhere

dynamically typed

open source

unfamiliar syntax

variables are assigned only once

left-to-right evaluation, no pointers, no object-orientation

# Features: concurrency

concurrent and distributed programming

asynchronous message passing  
(no locks, no mutexes)

fault tolerance

hot swapping code

erlang processes are cheap

automatic memory allocation and garbage collection

can handle large telecom applications

Erl

# Erlang: erl

erl is the Erlang VM emulator

interactive shell or interpreter, executing read-eval-print loop

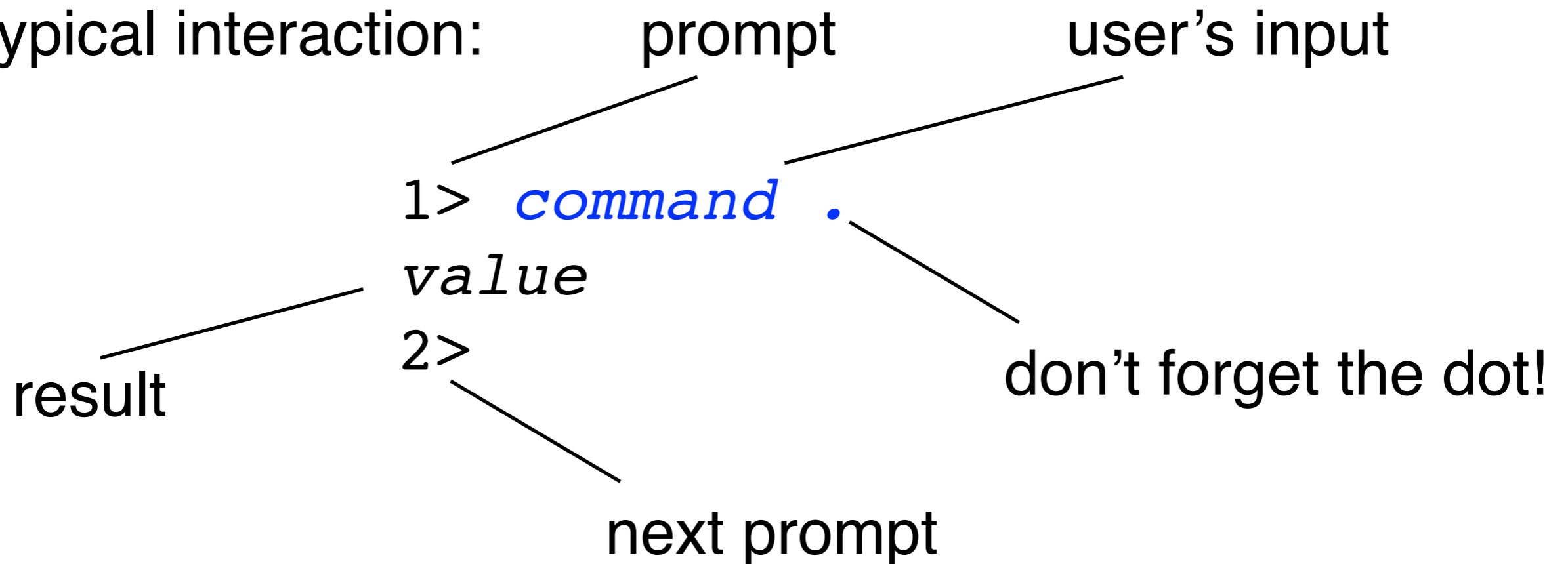
programmers enter expressions / declarations one at a time

they are compiled / executed



# erl expressions

typical interaction:



`halt() .` to exit the emulator

# Erlang modules

functions are organised in modules

one module for source file

filename is module name with suffix `.erl`

a comment

arity

declarations end with a dot

```
% filename hello.erl
-module(hello).
-export([hello/0]).

hello() -> io:format("Hello, world!~n").
```

function def

module name

separator

function name

argument

# erl: module loading

compile and load the module

1> *c(hello) .* invoke the function  
*{ok,hello}*

2> *hello:hello() .*  
*Hello, world!*

*ok*

3>

return value

next prompt

if you edit `hello.erl` and do `c(hello)` again  
the new version of the module replaces the old one

# Erlang basics

# Function definition

separates function clauses with ;  
last clause ends with .

variables start with upper-case letters X    Head    Tail  
variables are local to function clauses

function definitions cannot be nested  
non-exported functions are local to the module

pattern matching allowed

guards allowed (keyword when)

type-checking is done at runtime

# Atoms, tuples, lists

numbers: arbitrary size integers, floating point values  
(cannot start with .)

atoms: start with lower-case character  
(can be single-quoted if needed, don't use camelCase)

```
true ok hello_world. 'this is an atom'
```

tuples: main data constructor

tagged tuples: the first element of the tuple is an atom

we can use pattern matching

```
{ } {movie, "Matrix"} {movie, Title}
```

lists: can contain elements of any type

we can use pattern matching

```
[ ] [1, 2, ok] [H|T] [X, Y, Z] [X, Y, Z | Tail]
```

# Funs

funs: anonymous functions (lambda expressions)  
can have several arguments and clauses

```
fun () -> 42 end
```

```
fun (X) -> X+1 end
```

```
fun (X,Y) -> {X, fun (Z) -> Z+Y end} end
```

```
fun (F,X) -> F(X) end
```

# Type test & conversion

`is_integer(X)`

`is_float(X)`

`is_number(X)`

`is_atom(X)`

`is_tuple(X)`

`is_list(X)`

`is_function(X)`

`is_pid(X)`

...

`atom_to_list(A)`

`list_to_atom(L)`

`tuple_to_list(T)`

`list_to_tuple(L)`

...



# Erlang concurrency

# Processes

every Erlang code is executed by a process

processes are implemented by the VM (not by OS threads)

multitasking is preemptive (VM switching and scheduling)

processes need very little memory

switching between processes is very fast

the VM can handle a large number of processes

on multiprocessor/multicore machines, processes can be scheduled to run in parallel on separate CPUs/cores

using multiple schedulers

different processes may be reading the same program code at the same time (no variable updates!)

# Pids

each process has a process identifier

```
Pid = self()
```

new Erlang processes can be spawned to run functions

```
Pid = spawn(module, function, arguments)
```

```
Pid = spawn(fun () -> ... end)
```

```
Pid = spawn(fun f/0)
```

```
Pid = spawn(fun m:f/0)
```

the spawn operation returns immediately  
(the return value is the pid of the process)

children pids are available to parent process,  
not vice versa (unless passed)

# Communication

Messages can be sent to pids

*Pid* ! *message*



called bang

Processes can wait to receive (and select) some message

```
receive .. end
```

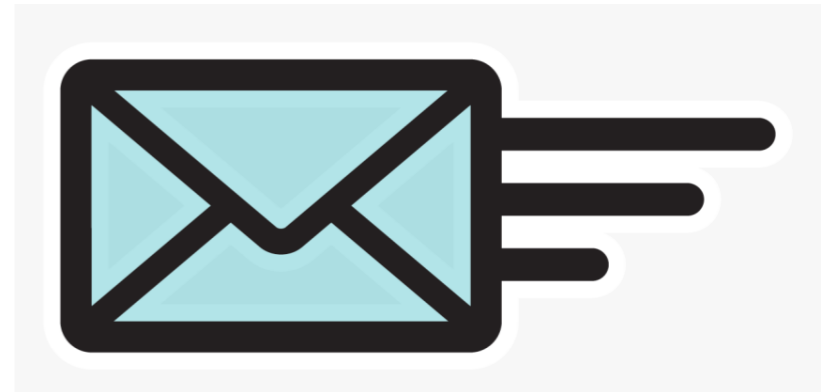
# Message passing

receive ... end



*Pid*

*Pid ! message*



# Message passing

messages are sent asynchronously  
(the sender continues immediately)

any value can be sent as a message

each process has a message queue (mailbox)  
no size limit, messages are kept until extracted

a message is received when it is extracted from the mailbox

messages are ordered from oldest to newest in the mailbox

the message that is extracted is not necessarily the oldest  
(pattern matching can be used, if there is no match  
the receiver suspends and keeps waiting)

# Reply

To reply a message, its sender must be known

its pid can be inserted in the message

syntax for tuples

*Pid* ! { *Mypid* , *message* }

now the receiver *Pid* can reply to *Mypid*

# erl session

```
bruni — beam.smp -- -root /usr/local/Cellar/erlang/21.2.2/lib/erlang -prognose erl -- -home ~ -- ▸ erl_child_setup — 106×24
Last login: Fri Apr 17 11:42:07 on ttys001
[host-131-114-219-127:~ bruni$ erl
Erlang/OTP 21 [erts-10.2.1] [source] [64-bit] [smp:12:12] [ds:12:12:10] [async-threads:1] [hipe] [dtrace]

Eshell V10.2.1 (abort with ^G)
1> █
```