

## Re: Please explain the meaning of 'stealing' a ref

**Source:** <http://coding.derkeiler.com/Archive/Python/comp.lang.python/2003-11/1174.html>

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**From:** Christos (*tzot\_at\_sil-tec.gr*)

**Date:** 11/06/03

Date: Thu, 06 Nov 2003 18:28:28 +0200

My last post in this thread, since it --like Alex noticed too-- tends to move into 'off-topic' territory.

On Thu, 06 Nov 2003 14:30:30 GMT, rumours say that Alex Martelli <aleax@aleax.it> might have written:

[snip: Alex ponders on whether the thread remains on topic (it merely does), then states that, as an author himself, has strong opinions on style, nuances, fine point of connotation etc]

Point taken, and be sure that all my respect goes to acknowledged authors like yourself; after all, we don't discuss one of your books or your style here, but rather the python documentation and how it could be improved for newcomers --not that \*I\* \*know\* how to improve it. I only pointed parts that might be as unclear to others as to me.

[snip: I suggesting a defining "owning a reference", Alex counter-proposing a variation to the current doc sentence about what a function that owns a reference has to do, I accidentally ignoring the counter proposal, summarising instead where in the docs the answers to my questions can be collected from]

>So what about my proposed transliteration of "when X, Y" into "X  
>means Y"? This is similar to (e.g.) changing "when somebody owns  
>a property outright, they can sell it" to "owning a property  
>outright means you can sell it" -- essentially equivalent in normal  
>English usage, but perhaps more specific or clear to non-natives?

I really have no preference between the two. I believe they carry the same amount of information. Sorry for not commenting upon your proposal.

>>>> *This text is obviously clear*

[snip: I acknowledge a fault on my part in keeping in mind the difference between owning an object and owning a reference, Alex re-states the fact that the documentation is clearest on this, I mistake at a point Alex's use of second person in his sentence as referring to me, and Alex explains that he used 'you' as a generic person (my

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comment: à la 'on' in French) instead of me specifically.]

Explanation and not justification: In English I have met more often the idiom 'one can only hope' than 'you can only hope' when speaking in general, so I perceived you meant me. After your clarification, I understand it's a null issue.

[snip: discussion about the phrase 'Few functions steal references; the two notable exceptions are...']

Sorry for snipping all of your reply, but this should be kept short. Do you believe that the following:

'Few functions steal references; of these exceptions, the two notable are...'

is more to the point of passing the message that the word 'exceptions' after the semicolon means a subset of the exceptions referenced before the semicolon?

If you really believe this is a moot point, please, let's drop the subject without further discussion on this. I insist on my point for clarity, but I am not an expert, cause I am a self-taught English speaker (by listening to songs, watching cinema and TV, and practicing whenever I could with native speakers (mostly British, apart from two trips to the States)).

I say to drop the subject if you disagree because, pragmatically speaking, your opinion counts more than mine, so let's keep our energies for more grave matters.

[snip some more discussion about the 'exceptions' subject]

>> *If the python documentation had a terminology dictionary, how would  
>> 'stealing', 'borrowing' and 'owning' a reference be defined in a concise  
>> and absolutely clear way? I seem to not be able to write these  
>> definitions, although I would like to.*

>  
>*The concept of "owning a reference" is the crucial one. "Stealing"  
>is just one way to permanently transfer ownership, "borrowing" means  
>no transfer of ownership takes place, and these meanings are so close  
>to those in everyday language that the "terminology dictionary" would  
>have few problems, I believe.*

>  
>*So, focusing on ownership, and foregoing the concision that would  
>probably be required in a dictionary, we might say:*

>  
>""  
>*Ownership pertains to references, never to objects (objects are not  
>owned: they are always shared). "Owning a reference" means being  
>responsible for calling Py\_DECREF on it when the reference is no  
>longer needed. Ownership can also be transferred, meaning that the*

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>code that receives ownership of the reference then becomes
>responsible for eventually decrefing it when it's no longer needed.
>""""
>
>plus, perhaps, pointers to the various appropriate sections in
>the "extending and embedding" tutorial and API reference that deal
>with this concept. Really, the true meaning of "reference
>ownership" is _operational_ -- the "responsibility of eventually
>decrefing (unless the ownership is transferred)" _together_ with
>the rules for how and when ownership (i.e. responsibility to
>eventually decref) is transferred.
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There you go, back to your excellent ability to reply to answers in a way that seems definite. That's the Alex before the tiresome python-syntax-in-lisp thread :)

The above text in triple-quotes, believe me, is what I sought since the start. Our discussion really helped me answer my questions before I read it clearly in your post; and I firmly believe that your triple-quoted text should be added to the documentation.

I just submitted patch 837322 merging your words above into the documentation text --please revise.

Thanks for your time.

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--
TZOTZIOY, I speak England very best,
Ils sont fous ces Redmontains! --Harddix
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