Regular Expressions

CSE 413, Autumn 2002

Programming Languages

http://www.cs.washington.edu/education/courses/413/02au/

Agenda for Today

- Basic concepts of formal grammars (review)
- Regular expressions
- Lexical specification of programming languages
- Using finite automata to recognize regular expressions

Programming Language Specifications

- Since the 1960s, the syntax of every significant programming language has been specified by a formal grammar
  - » First done in 1959 with BNF (Backus-Naur Form or Backus-Normal Form) used to specify the syntax of ALGOL 60
  - » Borrowed from the linguistics community (Chomsky?)

Grammar for a Tiny Language

- *program* ::= *statement* | *program statement*
- *statement* ::= *assignStmt* | *ifStmt*
- *assignStmt* ::= *id* = *expr* ;
- *ifStmt* ::= if (*expr*) *stmt*
- *expr* ::= *id* | *int* | *expr* + *expr*
- *Id* ::= a | b | c | i | j | k | n | x | y | z
- int ::= 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9

Productions

- The rules of a grammar are called *productions*
- Rules contain
  - » Nonterminal symbols: grammar variables (*program, statement, id,* etc.)
  - » Terminal symbols: concrete syntax that appears in programs (a, b, c, 0, 1, if, (, …)
- Meaning of

  nonterminal ::= <sequence of terminals and nonterminals>

  In a derivation, an instance of *nonterminal* can be replaced by the sequence of terminals and nonterminals on the right of the production
- Often, there are two or more productions for a single nonterminal – can use either at different times

Alternative Notations

- There are several syntax notations for productions in common use; all mean the same thing

  ifStmt ::= if (*expr*) *stmt*

  ifStmt → if (*expr*) *stmt*

  <ifStmt> ::= if (<expr>) <stmt>

Example Derivation

program ::= *statement* | *program statement*
statement ::= *assignStmt* | *ifStmt*
assignStmt ::= *id* = *expr* ;
ifStmt ::= if (*expr*) *stmt*
expr ::= *id* | *int* | *expr* + *expr*
Id ::= a | b | c | i | j | k | n | x | y | z
int ::= 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9

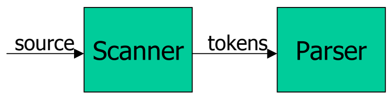
a = 1 ; if (a + 1) b = 2 ;

Parsing

- Parsing: reconstruct the derivation (syntactic structure) of a program
- In principle, a single recognizer could work directly from the concrete, character-by-character grammar
- In practice this is never done

Parsing & Scanning

- In real compilers the recognizer is split into two phases
  - » Scanner: translate input characters to tokens
    Also, report lexical errors like illegal characters and illegal symbols
  - » Parser: read token stream and reconstruct the derivation



Recall: Characters vs Tokens

- Input text

```
// this statement does very little
if (x >= y) y = 42;
```

- Token Stream

IF LPAREN ID(x) GEQ ID(y)
RPAREN ID(y) BECOMES INT(42) SCOLON

Why Separate the Scanner and Parser?

- Simplicity & Separation of Concerns
  - » Scanner hides details from parser (comments, whitespace, input files, etc.)
  - » Parser is easier to build; has simpler input stream
- Efficiency
  - » Scanner can use simpler, faster design
    (But still often consumes a surprising amount of the compiler's total execution time)

Tokens

- Idea: we want a distinct token kind (lexical class) for each distinct terminal symbol in the programming language
  - » Examine the grammar to find these
- Some tokens may have attributes
  - » Examples: integer constant token will have the actual integer value (17, 42) as an attribute; identifiers will have a string with the actual id as an attribute

Typical Programming Language Tokens

- Operators & Punctuation
  - » `+ - * / ( ) { } [ ] ; : < <= == = != ! …`
  - » Each of these is a distinct lexical class
- Keywords (reserved)
  - » `if while for goto return switch void …`
  - » Each of these is also a distinct lexical class (not a string)
- Identifiers
  - » A single ID lexical class, but parameterized by actual id
- Integer constants
  - » A single INT lexical class, but parameterized by int value
- Other constants, etc.

Principle of Longest Match

- In most languages, the scanner should pick the longest possible string to make up the next token if there is a choice
- Example

  return foobar != hohum;

  should be recognized as 5 tokens

  | RETURN | ID(foobar) | NEQ | ID(hohum) | SCOLON |

  not more (i.e., not parts of words or identifiers, or ! and = as separate tokens)

Languages & Automata Theory

- Alphabet: a finite set of symbols
- String: a finite, possibly empty sequence of symbols from an alphabet
- Language: a set, often infinite, of strings
- Finite specifications of (possibly infinite) languages
  - » Automaton – a recognizer; a machine that accepts all strings in a language (and rejects all other strings)
  - » Grammar – a generator; a system for producing all strings in the language (and no other strings)
- A language may be specified by many different grammars and automata
- A grammar or automaton specifies only one language

Regular Expressions and Finite Automata

- The lexical grammar (structure) of most programming languages can be specified with regular expressions
  - » (Sometimes a little cheating is needed)
- Tokens can be recognized by a deterministic finite automaton
  - » Can be either table-driven or built by hand based on lexical grammar

Regular Expressions

- Defined over some alphabet Σ
  - » For programming languages, commonly ASCII or Unicode
- If *re* is a regular expression, *L*(*re*) is the language (set of strings) generated by *re*

Fundamental Regular Expressions

re	*L*(*re*)	Notes
a	{ a }	Singleton set, for each a in Σ
ε	{ ε }	Empty string
∅	{ }	Empty language

Operations on REs

re	*L*(*re*)	Notes
rs	L(r)L(s)	Concatenation
r|s	L(r)∪L(s)	Combination (union)
r*	L(r)*	0 or more occurrences (Kleene closure)

- Precedence: * (highest), concatenation, | (lowest)
- Parentheses can be used to group REs as needed

Abbreviations

- The basic operations generate all possible regular expressions, but there are common abbreviations used for convenience. Typical examples:

Abbr.	Meaning	Notes
r+	(rr*)	1 or more occurrences
r?	(r | ε)	0 or 1 occurrence
[a-z]	(a|b|…|z)	1 character in given range
[abxyz]	(a|b|x|y|z)	1 of the given characters

Examples

re	L(*re*)
+	single + character
!	single ! character
=	single = character
!=	2 character sequence
<=	2 character sequence
hogwash	7 character sequence

More Examples

re	L(*re*)
[abc]+	
[abc]*	
[0-9]+	
[1-9][0-9]*	
[a-zA-Z][a-zA-Z0-9_]*	

Abbreviations

- Many systems allow abbreviations to make writing and reading definitions easier

  name ::= *re*

  » Restriction: abbreviations may not be circular (recursive) either directly or indirectly

Example

- Possible syntax for numeric constants

digit ::= [0-9]

digits ::= *digit*+

number ::= *digits* (. *digits*)?

([eE] (+ | -)? digits) ?

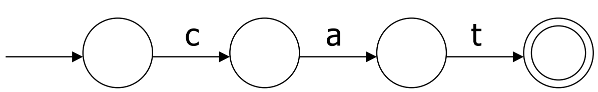
Recognizing Regular Expressions

- Finite automata can be used to recognize strings generated by regular expressions
- Can build by hand or automatically
  - » Not totally straightforward, but can be done systematically
  - » Tools like Lex, Flex, and JLex do this automatically, given a set of REs

Finite State Automaton

- A finite set of states
  - » One marked as initial state
  - » One or more marked as final states
- A set of transitions from state to state
  - » Each labeled with symbol from Σ, or ε
- Operate by reading input symbols (usually characters)
  - » Transition can be taken if labeled with current symbol
  - » ε-transition can be taken at any time
- Accept when final state reached & no more input
  - » Scanner slightly different – accept longest match even if more input
- Reject if no transition possible or no more input and not in final state (DFA)

Example: FSA for “cat”



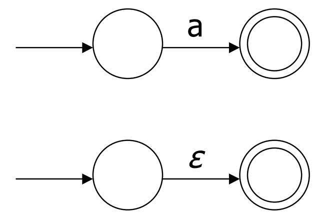
DFA vs NFA

- Deterministic Finite Automata (DFA)
  - » No choice of which transition to take under any condition
- Non-deterministic Finite Automata (NFA)
  - » Choice of transition in at least one case
  - » Accept if some way to reach final state on given input
  - » Reject if no possible way to final state

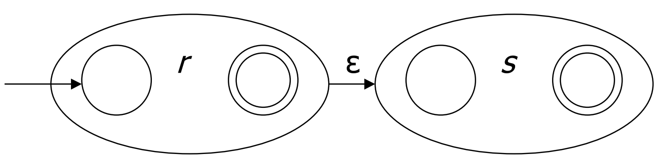
Finite Automata in Scanners

- Want DFA for speed (no backtracking)
- Conversion from regular expressions to NFA is easy
- There is a well-defined procedure for converting a NFA to an equivalent DFA

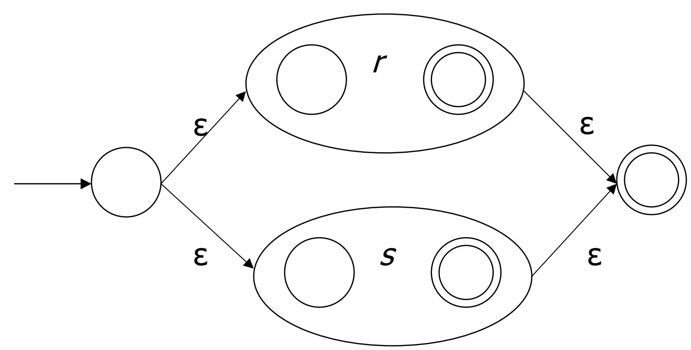
From RE to NFA: base cases



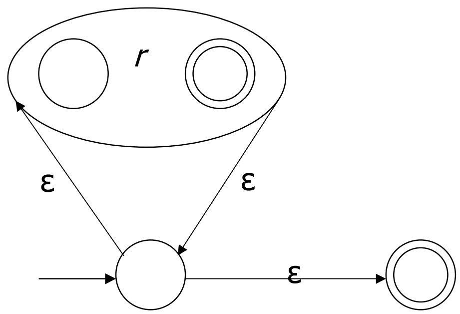
rs



r | *s*



r *



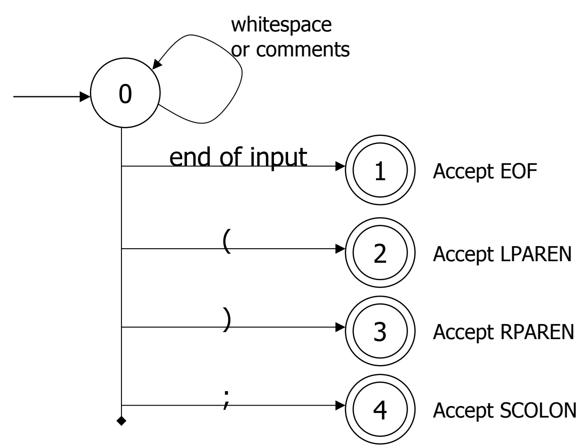
From NFA to DFA

- Subset construction
  » Construct a DFA from the NFA, where each DFA state represents a *set* of NFA states
- Key idea
  » The state of the DFA after reading some input is the set of *all* states the NFA could have reached after reading the same input
- If NFA has n states, DFA has at most 2^n states
  » => DFA is finite, can construct in finite # steps
- Resulting DFA may have more states than needed
  » See the books for construction and minimization details

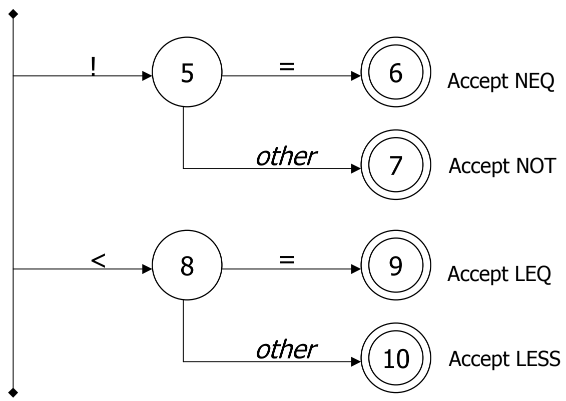
Simple DFA example

- Idea: show a hand-written DFA for some typical programming language constructs
  » Can use to construct hand-written scanner
- Setting: Scanner is called whenever the parser needs a new token
  » Scanner stores current position in input
  » Starting there, use a DFA to recognize the longest possible input sequence that makes up a token and return that token

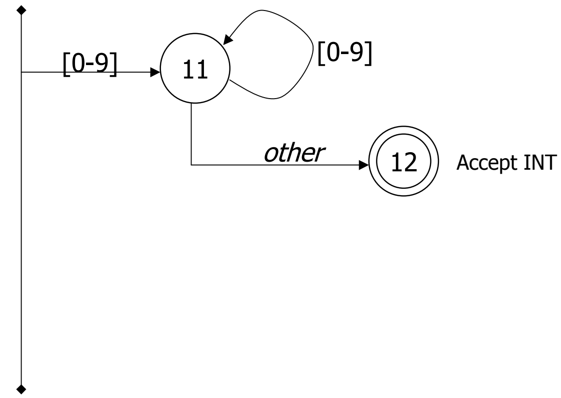
Scanner DFA Example (1)



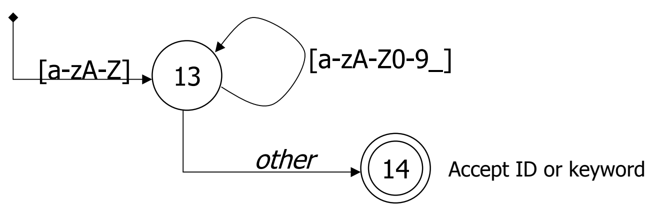
Scanner DFA Example (2)



Scanner DFA Example (3)



Scanner DFA Example (4)



- Strategies for handling identifiers vs keywords
  - » Hand-written scanner: look up identifier-like things in table of keywords to classify (good application of perfect hashing)
  - » Machine-generated scanner: generate DFA will appropriate transitions to recognize keywords
    - Lots 'o states, but efficient (no extra lookup step)