CS412/413

Introduction to Compilers
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Lecture 2: Lexical Analysis
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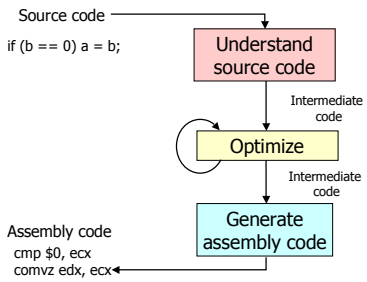
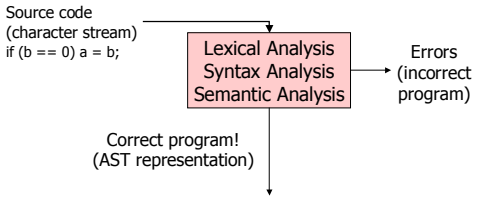
Outline

- Review compiler structure
- Compilation example
- What is lexical analysis?
- Writing a lexer
- Specifying tokens: regular expressions
- Writing a lexer generator

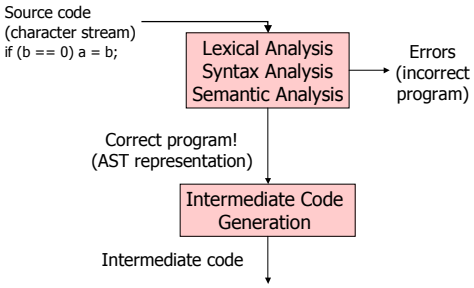
Simplified Compiler Structure



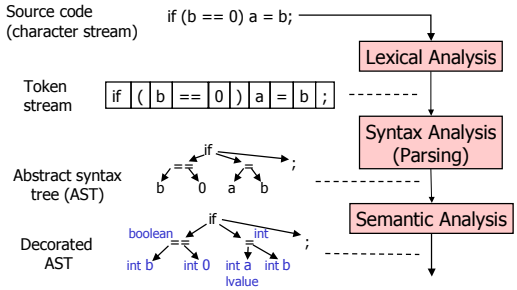
Simplified Front End Structure



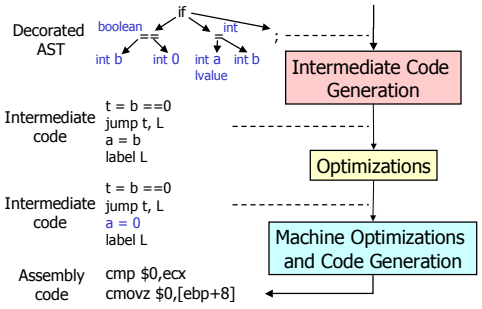
More Precise Front End Structure



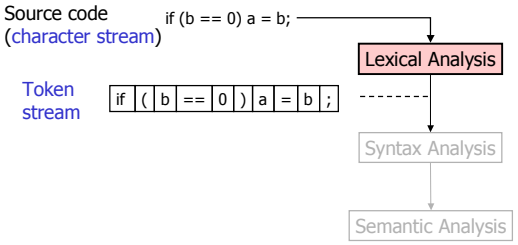
How It Works



How It Works



First Step: Lexical Analysis



Tokens

- Identifiers: x y11 elsen _i00
- Integers: 2 1000 -500 5L
- Floating point: 2.0 0.00020 .02 1. 1e5 0.e-10
- Strings: "x" "He said, \"Are you?\""
- Comments: /** don't change this **/
- Keywords: if else while break
- Symbols: + * { } ++ < << [ ] >=

Ad-hoc Lexer

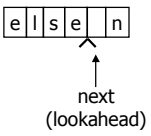
- Hand-write code to generate tokens
- How to read identifier tokens?

```
Token readIdentifier( ) {
  String id = "";
  while (true) {
    char c = input.read();
    if (!identifierChar(c))
          return new Token(ID, id, lineNumber);
    id = id + String(c);
  }
}
```


Look-ahead Character

- Scan text one character at a time
- Use look-ahead character (next) to determine what kind of token to read and when the current token ends

```
char next;
…
while (identifierChar(next)) {
  id = id + String(next);
  next = input.read ();
}
```



Ad-hoc Lexer: Top-level Loop

```
class Lexer {
  InputStream s;
  char next;
  Lexer(InputStream _s) { s = _s; next = s.read(); }
  Token nextToken( ) {
      if (identifierChar(next))
            return readIdentifier();
      if (numericChar(next))
            return readNumber();
      if (next == '\"') return readStringConst();
      …
  }
}
```

Problems

- Don't know what kind of token we are going to read from seeing first character
  - if token begins with "i" is it an identifier?
  - if token begins with "2" is it an integer constant?
  - interleaved tokenizer code is hard to write correctly, harder to maintain
- Need a more principled approach: lexer generator that generates efficient tokenizer automatically (e.g., lex, flex, JLex)

Issues

- How to describe tokens unambiguously
  2.e0 20.e-01 2.0000
  "" "x" "\\" "\"\'"
- How to break text up into tokens
  if (x == 0) a = x<<1;
  if (x == 0) a = x<1;
- How to tokenize efficiently
  - tokens may have similar prefixes
  - want to look at each character ~1 time

How to Describe Tokens?

- We can describe programming language tokens using regular expressions!
- A regular expression (RE) is defined inductively:

a	ordinary character stands for itself
ε	the empty string
R|S	either R or S (alternation), where R, S = RE
RS	R followed by S (concatenation), where R, S = RE
R*	concatenation of a RE R zero or more times (R* = ε|R|RR|RRR|RRRR…)

Simple Examples

- A regular expression R describes a set of strings of characters denoted L(R)
- L(R) = the "language" defined by R
  - L(**abc**) = { **abc** }
  - L(**hello**|**goodbye**) = {**hello**, **goodbye**}
  - L(**1**(**0**|**1**)*) = all non-zero binary numbers
- We can define each kind of token using a regular expression

Convienent RE Shorthand

R^+	one or more strings from L(R): R(R*)
R?	optional R: (R|ε)
[abce]	one of the listed characters: (a|b|c|e)
[a-z]	one character from this range: (a|b|c|d|e|…|y|z)
[^ab]	anything but one of the listed chars
[^a-z]	one character not from this range

Examples

Regular Expression	Strings in L(R)
a	"a"
ab	"ab"
a | **b**	"a" "b"
ε	""
(**ab**)*	"" "ab" "abab" …
(**a** | ε) **b**	"ab" "b"

More Examples

Regular Expression	Strings in L(R)
digit = [**0**-**9**]	"0" "1" "2" "3" …
posint = digit+	"8" "412" …
int = -? posint	"-42" "1024" …
real = int (ε | (. posint))	"-1.56" "12" "1.0"
= -?[0-9]+(ε | (. [0-9]+))	
[**a**-**zA**-**Z**_][**a**-**zA**-**Z0**-**9**_]*	C identifiers

- Lexer generators support abbreviations – cannot be recursive

How To Break Up Text

elsen = 0;

1 | else | n | = | 0 |

2 | elsen | = | 0 |

- REs alone not enough: need rule for choosing
- Most languages: longest matching token wins
- Ties in length resolved by prioritizing tokens
- RE's + priorities + longest-matching token rule = lexer definition

Lexer Generator Spec

- Input to lexer generator:
  - list of regular expressions in priority order
  - associated action for each RE (generates appropriate kind of token, other bookkeeping)
- Output:
  - program that reads an input stream and breaks it up into tokens according to the REs. (Or reports lexical error -- 'Unexpected character")

Example: JLex

```
%%
digits = 0|[1-9][0-9]*
letter = [A-Za-z]
identifier = {letter}({letter}|[0-9_])*
whitespace = [\ \t\n\r]+
%%
{whitespace} {/* discard */}
{digits}      { return new IntegerConstant(Integer.parseInt(yytext()); }
"if"          { return new IfToken(); }
"while"       { return new WhileToken(); }
…
{identifier}  { return new IdentifierToken(yytext()); }
```


Summary

- Lexical analyzer converts a text stream to tokens
- Ad-hoc lexers hard to get right, maintain
- For most languages, legal tokens conveniently, precisely defined using regular expressions
- Lexer generators generate lexer code automatically from token RE's, precedence
- Next lecture: how lexer generators work

Groups

- If you haven't got a full group lined up, hang around and talk to prospective group members
- Submit questionnaire!