CSE 401 – Compilers

LL and Recursive-Descent Parsing

Hal Perkins

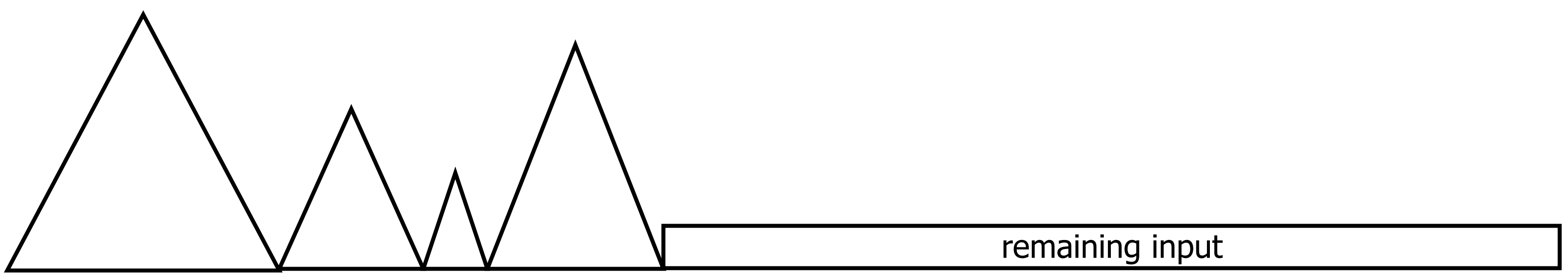
Winter 2017

Agenda

- Top-Down Parsing
- Predictive Parsers
- LL(k) Grammars
- Recursive Descent
- Grammar Hacking
  - Left recursion removal
  - Left factoring

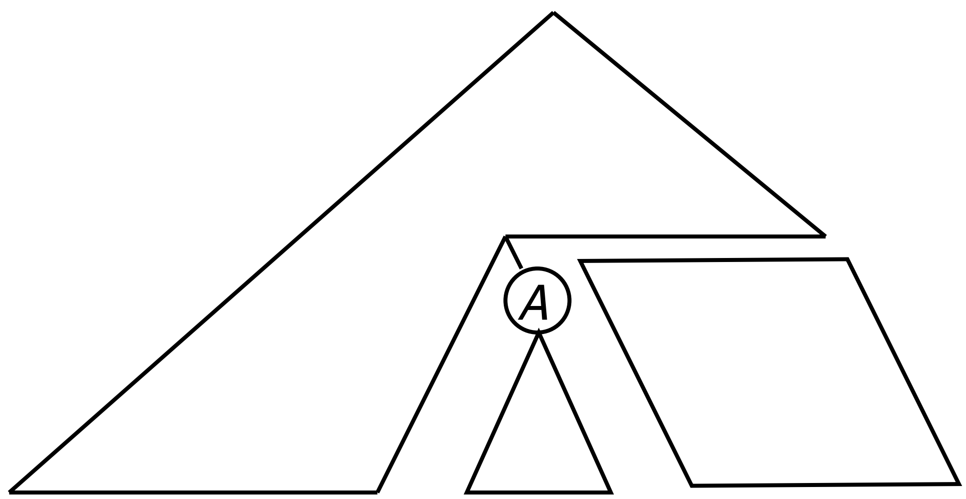
Basic Parsing Strategies (1)

- Bottom-up
  - Build up tree from leaves
    - Shift next input or reduce a handle
    - Accept when all input read and reduced to start symbol of the grammar
  - LR(k) and subsets (SLR(k), LALR(k), …)



Basic Parsing Strategies (2)

- Top-Down
  - Begin at root with start symbol of grammar
  - Repeatedly pick a non-terminal and expand
  - Success when expanded tree matches input
  - LL(k)



Top-Down Parsing

- Situation: have completed part of a left-most derivation

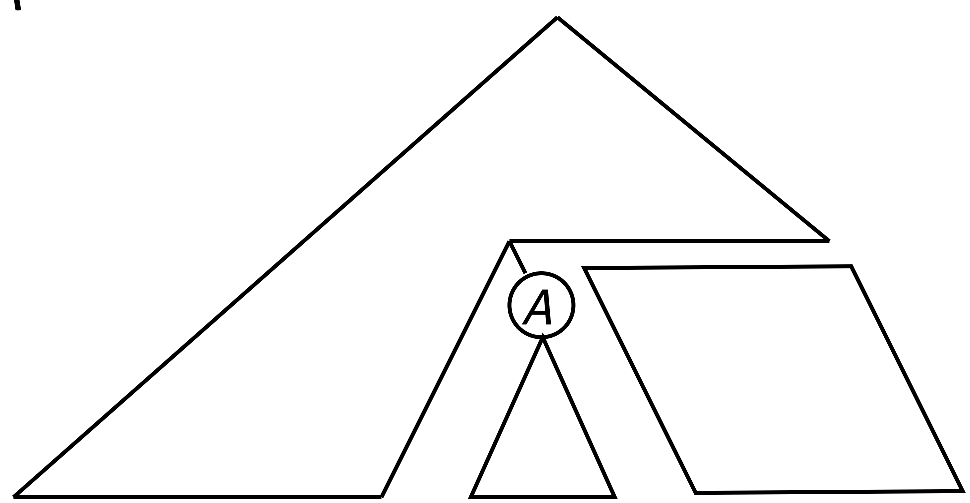
  S =>* w$A\alpha$ =>* wxy

- Basic Step: Pick some production

  $A ::= \beta_1\ \beta_2\ \ldots\ \beta_n$

  that will properly expand A to match the input

  – Want this to be deterministic



Predictive Parsing

- If we are located at some non-terminal *A*, and there are two or more possible productions

  $A ::= \alpha$

  $A ::= \beta$

  we want to make the correct choice by looking at just the next input symbol
- If we can do this, we can build a *predictive parser* that can perform a top-down parse without backtracking

Example

- Programming language grammars are often suitable for predictive parsing
- Typical example

  stmt ::= *id* = *exp* ; | return *exp* ;
  | if (*exp*) *stmt* | while (*exp*) *stmt*

If the next part of the input begins with the tokens

IF LPAREN ID(x) …

we should expand *stmt* to an if-statement

LL(1) Property

- A grammar has the LL(1) property if, for all non-terminals A, if productions $A ::= \alpha$ and $A ::= \beta$ both appear in the grammar, then it is true that
  FIRST(α) $\cap$ FIRST(β) = Ø
- If a grammar has the LL(1) property, we can build a predictive parser for it that uses 1 symbol lookahead

LL(k) Parsers

- An LL(k) parser
  - Scans the input Left to right
  - Constructs a Leftmost derivation
  - Looking ahead at most k symbols
- 1-symbol lookahead is enough for many practical programming language grammars
  - LL(k) for k>1 is rare in practice
    - and even if the grammar isn't quite LL(1), it may be close enough that we can pretend it is LL(1) and cheat a little when it isn't

Table-Driven LL(k) Parsers

- As with LR(k), a table-driven parser can be constructed from the grammar
- Example
    1. S ::= (S) S
    2. S ::= [S] S
    3. S ::= ε
- Table

	(	)	[	]	$
S	1	3	2	3	3

LL vs LR (1)

- Table-driven parsers for both LL and LR can be automatically generated by tools
- LL(1) has to make a decision based on a single non-terminal and the next input symbol
- LR(1) can base the decision on the entire left context (i.e., contents of the stack) as well as the next input symbol

LL vs LR (2)

∴ LR(1) is more powerful than LL(1)

– Includes a larger set of languages

∴ (editorial opinion) If you're going to use a tool-generated parser, might as well use LR

– But there are some very good LL parser tools out there (ANTLR, JavaCC, …) that might win for other reasons

Recursive-Descent Parsers

- One advantage of top-down parsing is that it is easy to implement by hand
  - And even if you use automatic tools, the code may be easier to follow and debug
- Key idea: write a function (method, procedure) corresponding to each non-terminal in the grammar
  - Each of these functions is responsible for matching its non-terminal with the next part of the input

Example: Statements

Grammar

stmt ::= *id* = *exp* ;
| return *exp* ;
| if (*exp*) *stmt*
| while (*exp*) *stmt*

Method for this grammar rule

```
// parse stmt ::= id=exp; | …
void stmt( ) {
  switch(nextToken) {
     RETURN: returnStmt(); break;
     IF:  ifStmt(); break;
     WHILE: whileStmt(); break;
     ID: assignStmt(); break;
  }
}
```

Example (more statements)

```
// parse while (exp) stmt
void whileStmt() {
    // skip “while” “(”
    getNextToken();
    getNextToken();

    // parse condition
    exp();

    // skip “)”
    getNextToken();

    // parse stmt
    stmt();
}
```

```
// parse return exp ;
void returnStmt() {
    // skip “return”
    getNextToken();

    // parse expression
    exp();

    // skip “;”
    getNextToken();
}
```

Invariant for Parser Functions

- The parser functions need to agree on where they are in the input
- Useful invariant: When a parser function is called, the current token (next unprocessed piece of the input) is the token that begins the expanded non-terminal being parsed
  - Corollary: when a parser function is done, it must have completely consumed input correspond to that non-terminal

Possible Problems

- Two common problems for recursive-descent (and LL(1)) parsers
  - Left recursion (e.g., $E ::= E + T \mid \ldots$)
  - Common prefixes on the right side of productions

Left Recursion Problem

Grammar rule

expr ::= *expr* + *term*
| *term*

And the bug is????

Code

```
// parse expr ::= …
void expr() {
    expr();
    if (current token is
                        PLUS) {
      getNextToken();
      term();
    }
}
```

Left Recursion Problem

- If we code up a left-recursive rule as-is, we get an infinite recursion
- Non-solution: replace with a right-recursive rule

  expr ::= *term* + *expr* | *term*

  – Why isn't this the right thing to do?

Formal Left Recursion Solution

- Rewrite using right recursion and a new non-terminal
- Original: *expr* ::= *expr* + *term* | *term*
- New:

  expr ::= *term exprtail*

  exprtail ::= + *term exprtail* | ε

- Properties
  - No infinite recursion if coded up directly
  - Maintains required left associatively (*if* you handle things correctly in the semantic actions)

Another Way to Look at This

- Observe that

  expr ::= *expr* + *term* | *term*

  generates the sequence

  (…((*term* + *term*) + *term*) + …) + *term*
- We can sugar the original rule to reflect this

  expr ::= *term* { + *term* }*
- This leads directly to recursive-descent parser code
  - Just be sure to do the correct thing to handle associativity as the terms are parsed

Code for Expressions (1)

```
// parse
//    expr ::=  term { + term }*
void expr() {
     term();
     while (next symbol is PLUS) {
      getNextToken();
      term();
     }
}
```

```
// parse
//     term ::= factor { * factor }*
void term() {
     factor();
     while (next symbol is  TIMES) {
      getNextToken();
      factor();
     }
}
```

Code for Expressions (2)

```
// parse
//   factor ::= int | id | ( expr )
void factor() {

 switch(nextToken) {

   case INT:
    process int constant;
    getNextToken();
    break;
   …
   case ID:
    process identifier;
    getNextToken();
    break;
   case LPAREN:
    getNextToken();
    expr();
    getNextToken();
   }
}
```

What About Indirect Left Recursion?

- A grammar might have a derivation that leads to a left recursion

  $A \Rightarrow \beta_1 \Rightarrow^* \beta_n \Rightarrow A\ \gamma$

- Solution: transform the grammar to one where all productions are either

  A ::= aα – i.e., starts with a terminal symbol, or

  A ::= Aα – i.e., direct left recursion

  then use formal left-recursion removal to eliminate all direct left recursions

Eliminating Indirect Left Recursion

- Basic idea: Rewrite all productions A ::= B… where A and B are different non-terminals by using all B ::= … productions to replace the initial rhs B
- Example: Suppose we have A ::= Bδ, B ::= α, and B ::= β. Replace A ::= Bδ with A ::= αδ and A ::= βδ.
- Need to pick an order to process the non-terminals to avoid re-introducing indirect left recursions. Not complicated, just be systematic.
  – Details in any compiler or formal-language textbook

Second Problem: Left Factoring

- If two rules for a non-terminal have right hand sides that begin with the same symbol, we can’t predict which one to use
- Solution: Factor the common prefix into a separate production

Left Factoring Example

- Original grammar

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

  | if (*expr*) *stmt* else *stmt*

- Factored grammar

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

  ifTail ::= else *stmt* | ε

Parsing if Statements

- But it's easiest to just code up the "else matches closest if" rule directly
- (If you squint properly this is really just left factoring with the two productions handled by a single routine)

```
// parse
//    if (expr) stmt [ else stmt ]
void ifStmt() {
    getNextToken();
    getNextToken();
    expr();
    getNextToken();
    stmt();
    if (next symbol is ELSE) {
      getNextToken();
      stmt();
    }
}
```

Another Lookahead Problem

- In languages like FORTRAN, parentheses are used for array subscripts
- A FORTRAN grammar includes something like

    factor ::= *id* (*subscripts*) | *id* (*arguments*) | …

- When the parser sees "*id* (", how can it decide whether this begins an array element reference or a function call?

Two Ways to Handle *id* (?)

- Use the type of *id* to decide
  - Requires declare-before-use restriction if we want to parse in 1 pass; also means parser needs semantic information, not just grammar
- Use a covering grammar

  factor ::= *id* (*commaSeparatedList*) | …

  and fix/check later when more information is available (e.g., types)

Top-Down Parsing Concluded

- Works with a smaller set of grammars than bottom-up, but can be done for most sensible programming language constructs
  – Possibly with some grammar refactoring
- If you need to write a quick-n-dirty parser, recursive descent is often the method of choice
  – And some sophisticated hand-written parsers for real languages (e.g., C++) are "based on" LL parsing, but with lots of customizations

Parsing Concluded

- That's it!
- On to the rest of the compiler
- Coming attractions
  - Intermediate representations (ASTs etc.)
  - Semantic analysis (including type checking)
  - Symbol tables
  - & more…