CSE P 501 – Compilers

Implementing ASTs
(in Java)
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Agenda

- Representing ASTs as Java objects
- Parser actions
- Operations on ASTs
  - Modularity and encapsulation
- Visitor pattern

- This is a general sketch of the ideas – more detailed treatment in the book and online for the MiniJava project

Review: ASTs

- An Abstract Syntax Tree captures the essential structure of the program, without the extra concrete grammar details needed to guide the parser
- Example:

```
while ( n > 0 ) {
   n = n – 1;
}
```

- AST

Representation in Java

- Basic idea is simple: use small classes as records (or structs) to represent nodes in the AST
  - Simple data structures, not too smart
- But also use a bit of inheritance so we can treat related nodes polymorphically

AST Nodes - Sketch

```
// Base class of AST node hierarchy
public abstract class ASTNode {
   // operations
   ...
   // string representation
   public abstract String toString() ;
   // etc.
}
```

- Note: In a real compiler, we would put the node classes into a separate Java package. Use your own judgment for your project.

Some Statement Nodes

```
// Base class for all statements
public abstract class StmtNode extends ASTNode { ... }
// while (exp) stmt
public class WhileNode extends StmtNode {
   public ExpNode exp;
   public StmtNode stmt;
   public WhileNode(ExpNode exp, StmtNode stmt) {
         this.exp = exp; this.stmt = stmt;
   }
   public String toString() {
         return "While(" + exp + ") " + stmt;
   }
}
```

(Note on toString: most of the time we'll want to print the tree in a separate traversal, so this is mostly useful for debugging)

More Statement Nodes

```
// if (exp) stmt [else stmt]
public class IfNode extends StmtNode {
    public ExpNode exp;
    public StmtNode thenStmt, elseStmt;
    public IfNode(ExpNode exp,StmtNode thenStmt,StmtNode elseStmt) {
        this.exp=exp; this.thenStmt=thenStmt;this.elseStmt=elseStmt;
    }
    public IfNode(ExpNode exp, StmtNode thenStmt) {
        this(exp, thenStmt, null);
    }
    public String toString() { ... }
}
```


Expressions

```
// Base class for all expressions
public abstract class ExpNode extends ASTNode { ... }
// exp1 op exp2
public class BinExp extends ExpNode {
    public ExpNode exp1, exp2;      // operands
    public int op;                  // operator (lexical token)
    public BinExp(Token op, ExpNode exp1, ExpNode exp2) {
        this.op = op; this.exp1 = exp1; this.exp2 = exp2;
    }
    public String toString() {
        ...
    }
}
```


More Expressions

```
// Method call: id(arguments)
public class MethodExp extends ExpNode {
    public ExpNode id;       // method
    public List args;        // list of argument expressions
    public BinExp(ExpNode id, List args) {
        this.id = id; this.args = args;
    }
    public String toString() {
        ...
    }
}
```


&c

- These examples are meant to give you some ideas, not necessarily to be used literally
  - E.g., you might find it much better to have a specific AST node for “argument list” that encapsulates the generic java.util.List of arguments
- You’ll also need nodes for class and method declarations, parameter lists, and so forth
  - Starter code in book and on web for MiniJava

Position Information in Nodes

- To produce useful error messages, it’s helpful to record the source program location corresponding to a node in that node
  - Most scanner/parser generators have a hook for this, usually storing source position information in tokens
  - Would be nice in our projects, but not required (i.e., get the parser/AST construction working first)

AST Generation

- Idea: each time the parser recognizes a complete production, it produces as its result an AST node (with, usually, one or more subtrees consisting of the components of the production)
- When we finish parsing, the result of the goal symbol is the complete AST for the program

Example: Recursive-Descent AST Generation

```
// parse while (exp) stmt
WhileNode whileStmt() {
    // skip "while ("
    getNextToken();
    getNextToken();

    // parse exp
    ExpNode condition = exp();
    ...
```

```
    // skip ")"
    getNextToken;

    // parse stmt
    StmtNode body = stmt();

    // return AST node for while
    return
          new WhileNode
             (condition, body);
}
```


AST Generation in YACC/CUP

- A result type can be specified for each item in the grammar specification
- Each parser rule can be annotated with a semantic action, which is just a piece of Java code that returns a value of the result type
  - The semantic action is executed when the rule is reduced

YACC/CUP Parser Specification

- Specification

```
non terminal StmtNode stmt, whileStmt;
non terminal ExpNode exp;
...
stmt ::= ...
     | WHILE LPAREN exp:e RPAREN stmt:s
          {: RESULT = new WhileNode(e,s); :}
     ;
```


SableCC/JavaCC

- Integrated tools like these provide tools to generate syntax trees automatically
  - Advantage: saves work, don't need to define AST classes and write semantic actions
  - Disadvantage: generated trees may not be as abstract as we might want

Operations on ASTs

- Once we have the AST, we may want to
  - Print a readable dump of the tree (pretty printing)
  - Do static semantic analysis
    - Type checking
    - Verify that things are declared and initialized properly
    - Etc. etc. etc. etc.
  - Perform optimizing transformations on the tree
  - Generate code from the tree, or
  - Generate another IR from the tree for further processing (maybe flatten to a linear IR)

Where do the Operations Go?

- Pure "object-oriented" style
  - Really smart AST nodes
  - Each node knows how to perform every operation on itself

```
public class WhileNode extends StmtNode {
   public WhileNode(...);
   public typeCheck(...);
   public StrengthReductionOptimize(...);
   public generateCode(...);
   public prettyPrint(...);
   ...
}
```

Critique

- This is nicely encapsulated – all details about a WhileNode are hidden in that class
- But it is poor modularity
- What happens if we want to add a new Optimize operation?
  - Have to open up every node class
- Furthermore, it means that the details of any particular operation are scattered across the node classes

Modularity Issues

- Smart nodes make sense if the set of operations is relatively fixed, but we expect to need flexibility to add new kinds of nodes
- Example: graphics system
  - Operations: draw, move, iconify, highlight
  - Objects: textbox, scrollbar, canvas, menu, dialog box, plus new objects defined as the system evolves

Modularity in a Compiler

- Abstract syntax does not change frequently over time
  - ∴ Kinds of nodes are relatively fixed
- As a compiler evolves, it is common to modify or add operations on the AST nodes
  - Want to modularize each operation (type check, optimize, code gen) so its components are together
  - Want to avoid having to change node classes to modify or add an operation on the tree

Two Views of Modularity

	Type check	Optimize	Generate x86	Flatten	Print
IDENT	X	X	X	X	X
exp	X	X	X	X	X
while	X	X	X	X	X
if	X	X	X	X	X
Binop	X	X	X	X	X
...					

	draw	move	iconify	highlight	transmogrify
circle	X	X	X	X	X
text	X	X	X	X	X
canvas	X	X	X	X	X
scroll	X	X	X	X	X
dialog	X	X	X	X	X
...					

Visitor Pattern

- Idea: Package each operation in a separate class
  - One method for each AST node kind
- Create one instance of this visitor class
  - Sometimes called a "function object"
- Include a generic "accept visitor" method in every node class
- To perform the operation, pass the visitor object around the AST during a traversal

Avoiding instanceof

- Next issue: we'd like to avoid huge if-elseif nests to check the node type in the visitor

```
void checkTypes(ASTNode p) {
  if (p instanceof WhileNode) { ... }
  else if (p instanceof IfNode) { ... }
  else if (p instanceof BinExp) { ... } ...
```

- Solution: Include an overloaded "visit" method for each node type and get the node to call back to the correct operation for that node(!)
  - "Double dispatch"

One More Issue

- We want to be able to add new operations easily, so the nodes shouldn't know anything specific about the actual visitor class
- Solution: an abstract Visitor interface
  - AST nodes include "accept visitor" method for the interface
  - Specific operations (type check, code gen) are implementations of this interface

Visitor Interface

```
interface Visitor {
    // overload visit for each node type
    public void visit(WhileNode s);
    public void visit(IfNode s);
    public void visit(BinExp e);
    ...
}
```

- Aside: The result type can be whatever is convenient, not necessarily void

Specific class TypeCheckVisitor

```
// Perform type checks on the AST
public class TypeCheckVisitor implements Visitor {
    // override operations for each node type
    public void visit(WhileNode s) { ... }
    public void visit(IfNode s) { ... }
    public void visit(BinExp e) {
        e.exp1.accept(this); e.exp2.accept(this);
    }
    ...
}
```


Add New Visitor Method to AST Nodes

- Add a new method to class ASTNode (base class or interface describing all AST nodes)

```
public abstract class ASTNode {
    ...
    // accept a visit from a Visitor object v
    public abstract void accept(Visitor v);
    ...
}
```


Override Accept Method in Each Specific AST Node Class

- Example

```
public class WhileNode extends StmtNode {
    ...
    // accept a visit from a Visitor object v
    public void accept(Visitor v) {
        v.visit(this);
    }
    ...
}
```

- Key points
  - Visitor object passed as a parameter to WhileNode
  - WhileNode calls visit, which dispatches to visit(WhileNode) automatically – i.e., the correct method for this kind of node

Encapsulation

- A visitor object often needs to be able to access state in the AST nodes
  - ∴ May need to expose more state than we might do to otherwise
  - Overall a good tradeoff – better modularity
    - (plus, the nodes are relatively simple data objects anyway)

Composite Objects

- If the node contains references to subnodes, we often visit them first (i.e., pass the visitor along in a depth-first traversal of the AST)

```
public class WhileNode extends StmtNode
{
    …
    // accept a visit from Visitor object v
    public void accept(Visitor v) {
```


Visitor Actions

- A visitor function has a reference to the node it is visiting (the parameter)
- It's also possible for the visitor class to contain local instance data, used to accumulate information during the traversal
  - Effectively "global data" shared by visit methods

```
public class TypeCheckVisitor extends NodeVisitor {
   public void visit(WhileNode s) { … }
   public void visit(IfNode s) { … }
   …
   private <local state>;
}
```


Responsibility for the Traversal

- Possible choices
  - The node objects (as done above)
  - The visitor object (the visitor has access to the node, so it can traverse any substructure it wishes)
  - Some sort of iterator object
- In a compiler, the first choice will handle many common cases

References

- For Visitor pattern (and many others)

  Design Patterns: Elements of Reusable Object-Oriented Software
  Gamma, Helm, Johnson, and Vlissides
  Addison-Wesley, 1995
- Specific information for MiniJava AST and visitors in the textbook

Coming Attractions

- Static Analysis
  - Type checking & representation of types
  - Non-context-free rules (variables and types must be declared, etc.)
- Symbol Tables
- & more