Introduction to Lexical Analysis

Outline

- Informal sketch of lexical analysis
  - Identifies tokens in input string
- Issues in lexical analysis
  - Lookahead
  - Ambiguities
- Specifying lexers
  - Regular expressions
  - Examples of regular expressions

Lexical Analysis

- What do we want to do? Example:

```
if (i == j)
then
    z = 0;
else
    z = 1;
```

- The input is just a string of characters:

```
if (i == j)\nthen\n\tz = 0;\n\telse\n\t\tz = 1;
```

- Goal: Partition input string into substrings
  - Where the substrings are tokens

What's a Token?

- A syntactic category
  - In English:
    noun, verb, adjective, …
  - In a programming language:
    Identifier, Integer, Keyword, Whitespace, …

Tokens

- Tokens correspond to sets of strings
  - these sets depend on the programming language
- Identifier: *strings of letters or digits, starting with a letter*
- Integer: *a non-empty string of digits*
- Keyword: *"else" or "if" or "begin" or …*
- Whitespace: *a non-empty sequence of blanks, newlines, and tabs*

What are Tokens used for?

- Classify program substrings according to role
- Output of lexical analysis is a stream of tokens . . .
- . . . which is input to the parser
- Parser relies on token distinctions
  - An identifier is treated differently than a keyword

Designing a Lexical Analyzer: Step 1

- Define a finite set of tokens
  - Tokens describe all items of interest
  - Choice of tokens depends on language, design of parser
- Recall

  if (i == j)\nthen\n\tz = 0;\n\telse\n\t\tz = 1;
- Useful tokens for this expression:

  Integer, Keyword, Relation, Identifier, Whitespace, (,), =, ;

Designing a Lexical Analyzer: Step 2

- Describe which strings belong to each token
- Recall:
  - Identifier: *strings of letters or digits, starting with a letter*
  - Integer: *a non-empty string of digits*
  - Keyword: *"else" or "if" or "begin" or …*
  - Whitespace: *a non-empty sequence of blanks, newlines, and tabs*

Lexical Analyzer: Implementation

An implementation must do two things:

1. Recognize substrings corresponding to tokens

2. Return the value or *lexeme* of the token
   - The lexeme is the substring

Example

- Recall:
  if (i == j)\nthen\n\tz = 0;\n\telse\n\t\tz = 1;

- Token-lexeme groupings:
  - Identifier: i, j, z
  - Keyword: if, then, else
  - Relation: ==
  - Integer: 0, 1
  - (,), =, ; single character of the same name

Why do Lexical Analysis?

- Dramatically simplify parsing
  - The lexer usually discards "uninteresting" tokens that don't contribute to parsing
    - E.g. Whitespace, Comments
  - Converts data early
- Separate out logic to read source files
  - Potentially an issue on multiple platforms
  - Can optimize reading code independently of parser

True Crimes of Lexical Analysis

- Is it as easy as it sounds?

- Not quite!

- Look at some programming language history . . .

Lexical Analysis in FORTRAN

- FORTRAN rule: Whitespace is insignificant
- E.g., VAR1 is the same as VA R1
- Footnote: FORTRAN whitespace rule was motivated by inaccuracy of punch card operators

A terrible design! Example

- Consider
  - DO 5 I = 1,25
  - DO 5 I = 1.25
- The first is DO 5 I = 1 , 25
- The second is DO5I = 1.25
- Reading left-to-right, cannot tell if DO5I is a variable or DO stmt. until after "," is reached

Lexical Analysis in FORTRAN. Lookahead.

Two important points:

1. The goal is to partition the string. This is implemented by reading left-to-write, recognizing one token at a time
2. "Lookahead" may be required to decide where one token ends and the next token begins

– Even our simple example has lookahead issues

i vs. if

= vs. ==

Another Great Moment in Scanning

- PL/1: Keywords can be used as identifiers:

IF THEN THEN THEN = ELSE; ELSE ELSE = IF

can be difficult to determine how to label lexemes

More Modern True Crimes in Scanning

- Nested template declarations in C++

vector<vector<int>> myVector

vector < vector < int >> myVector

(vector < (vector < (int >> myVector)))

Review

- The goal of lexical analysis is to
  - Partition the input string into *lexemes* (the smallest program units that are individually meaningful)
  - Identify the token of each lexeme

- Left-to-right scan ⇒ lookahead sometimes required

Next

- We still need
  - A way to describe the lexemes of each token

  - A way to resolve ambiguities
    - Is if two variables i and f?
    - Is == two equal signs = =?

Regular Languages

- There are several formalisms for specifying tokens

- *Regular languages* are the most popular
  - Simple and useful theory
  - Easy to understand
  - Efficient implementations

Languages

Def. Let Σ be a set of characters. A *language* Λ *over* Σ is a set of strings of characters drawn from Σ

(Σ is called the *alphabet* of Λ)

Examples of Languages

- Alphabet = English characters
- Language = English sentences
- Not every string on English characters is an English sentence

- Alphabet = ASCII
- Language = C programs
- Note: ASCII character set is different from English character set

Notation

- Languages are sets of strings
- Need some notation for specifying which sets of strings we want our language to contain
- The standard notation for regular languages is *regular expressions*

Atomic Regular Expressions

- Single character

$$'c' = \{"c"\}$$

- Epsilon

$$\varepsilon = \{""\}$$

Compound Regular Expressions

- Union

$$A+B=\{s \mid s\in A \text{ or } s\in B\}$$

- Concatenation

$$AB=\{ab \mid a\in A \text{ and } b\in B\}$$

- Iteration

$$A^*=\bigcup_{i\geq 0} A^i \quad \text{where } A^i = A \ldots i \text{ times} \ldots A$$

Regular Expressions

- **Def**. The *regular expressions over* Σ are the smallest set of expressions including

ε	
$'c'$	where $c\in\Sigma$
$A+B$	where A, B are rexp over Σ
AB	" " "
A^*	where A is a rexp over Σ

Syntax vs. Semantics

- To be careful, we should distinguish syntax and semantics (meaning) of regular expressions

$$
\begin{aligned}
L(\varepsilon) &= \{""\} \\
L('c') &= \{"c"\} \\
L(A+B) &= L(A)\cup L(B) \\
L(AB) &= \{ab \mid a\in L(A) \text{ and } b\in L(B)\} \\
L(A^*) &= \bigcup_{i\geq 0} L(A^i)
\end{aligned}
$$

Example: Keyword

Keyword: *"else" or "if" or "begin" or …*

$$\text{'else'} + \text{'if'} + \text{'begin'} + \cdots$$

Note: 'else' abbreviates 'e''l''s''e'

Example: Integers

Integer: *a non-empty string of digits*

digit = '0'+'1'+'2'+'3'+'4'+'5'+'6'+'7'+'8'+'9'
integer = digit digit*

Abbreviation: $A^+ = AA^*$

Example: Identifier

Identifier: *strings of letters or digits, starting with a letter*

letter = 'A' +...+ 'Z' + 'a' +...+ 'z'
identifier = letter (letter + digit)*

Is (letter* + digit*) the same?

Example: Whitespace

Whitespace: *a non-empty sequence of blanks, newlines, and tabs*

(' ' + '\n' + '\t')$^+$

Example 1: Phone Numbers

- Regular expressions are all around you!
- Consider +46(0)18-471-1056

Σ = digits ∪ {+,–,(,)}
country = digit digit
city = digit digit
univ = digit digit digit
extension = digit digit digit digit
phone_num = '+'country'('0')'city'–'univ'–'extension

Example 2: Email Addresses

- Consider *kostis@it.uu.se*

$$\Sigma = \text{letters} \cup \{.,@\}$$

$$\text{name} = \text{letter}^{+}$$

$$\text{address} = \text{name '@' name '.' name '.' name}$$

Summary

- Regular expressions describe many useful languages
- Regular languages are a language specification
  - We still need an implementation
- Next time: Given a string *s* and a regular expression *R*, is

$$s \in L(R)?$$