

# Context-Free Grammars

Formalism

Derivations

Backus-Naur Form

Left- and Rightmost Derivations

# Informal Comments

- A *context-free grammar* is a notation for describing languages.
- It is more powerful than finite automata or RE's, but still cannot define all possible languages.
- Useful for nested structures, e.g., parentheses in programming languages.

# Informal Comments – (2)

→ Non-Terminal

- Basic idea is to use “variables” to stand for sets of strings (i.e., languages).
- These variables are defined recursively, in terms of one another.
- Recursive rules (“productions”) involve only concatenation.
- Alternative rules for a variable allow union.

# Example: CFG for $\{ 0^n 1^n \mid n \geq 1 \}$

- Productions:  $A \rightarrow 0$   
 $B \rightarrow A 1$
- $S \rightarrow 01$   
 $S \rightarrow 0S1$
- Terminal (terminals) =  $\{0, 1\}$   
Non-Terminal =  $S$   
(non-terminals)  
Start Symbol =  $S$
- Basis:  $01$  is in the language.
- Induction: if  $w$  is in the language, then so is  $0w1$ .

# CFG Formalism

- *Terminals* = symbols of the alphabet of the language being defined.
- *Variables* = *nonterminals* = a finite set of other symbols, each of which represents a language.
- *Start symbol* = the variable whose language is the one being defined.

# Productions

- A *production* has the form  $\text{variable} \rightarrow \text{string of variables and terminals}$ .
- Convention:
  - $A, B, C, \dots$  are variables.  $NT$
  - $a, b, c, \dots$  are terminals.  $T$
  - $\dots, X, Y, Z$  are either terminals or variables.
  - $\dots, w, x, y, z$  are strings of terminals only.
  - $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \dots$  are strings of terminals and/or variables.

# Example: Formal CFG

000111

□ Here is a formal CFG for  $\{ 0^n 1^n \mid n \geq 1 \}$ .

□ Terminals =  $\{0, 1\}$ .

□ Variables =  $\{S\}$ .

□ Start symbol =  $S$ .

□ Productions =

$S \rightarrow 01$

$S \rightarrow 0S1$

$S \rightarrow 0S1$

$\Rightarrow 00S11$

$\Rightarrow 000111$

msn n n n n<sup>g</sup>

# Derivations – Intuition

- We *derive* strings in the language of a CFG by starting with the start symbol, and repeatedly replacing some variable  $A$  by the right side of one of its productions.
- That is, the “productions for  $A$ ” are those that have  $A$  on the left side of the  $\rightarrow$ .



# Derivations – Formalism

□ We say  $\alpha A \beta \Rightarrow \alpha \gamma \beta$  if  $A \rightarrow \gamma$  is a production.

□ **Example:**  $S \rightarrow 01$ ;  $S \rightarrow 0S1$ .

□  $S \Rightarrow 0S1 \Rightarrow 00S11 \Rightarrow 000111$ .

The diagram illustrates the derivation  $S \Rightarrow 0S1 \Rightarrow 00S11 \Rightarrow 000111$ . It uses colored circles and arrows to show how the production rule  $S \rightarrow 0S1$  is applied at each step:

- A green circle highlights the initial  $S$ , with a green arrow pointing to the  $S$  in  $0S1$ .
- A red circle highlights the  $S$  in  $0S1$ , with a red arrow pointing to the  $S$  in  $00S11$ .
- A purple circle highlights the  $S$  in  $00S11$ , with a purple arrow pointing to the  $S$  in  $000111$ .

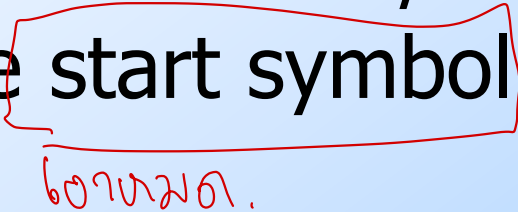
# Iterated Derivation

- $\Rightarrow^*$  means "zero or more derivation steps."
- **Basis:**  $\alpha \Rightarrow^* \alpha$  for any string  $\alpha$ .
- **Induction:** if  $\alpha \Rightarrow^* \beta$  and  $\beta \Rightarrow \gamma$ , then  $\alpha \Rightarrow^* \gamma$ .

# Example: Iterated Derivation

- $S \rightarrow 01; S \rightarrow 0S1.$
- $S \Rightarrow 0S1 \Rightarrow 00S11 \Rightarrow 000111.$
- So  $S \Rightarrow^* S; S \Rightarrow^* 0S1; S \Rightarrow^* 00S11;$   
 $S \Rightarrow^* 000111.$

# Sentential Forms

- Any string of variables and/or terminals derived from the start symbol is called a *sentential form*. 
- Formally,  $\alpha$  is a sentential form iff  $S \Rightarrow^* \alpha$ .

# Language of a Grammar

□ If  $G$  is a CFG, then  $L(G)$ , the *language of  $G$* , is  $\{w \mid S \Rightarrow^* w\}$ .

□ **Note:**  $w$  must be a terminal string,  $S$  is the start symbol.

□ **Example:**  $G$  has productions  $S \rightarrow \epsilon$  and  $S \rightarrow 0S1$ .

□  $L(G) = \{0^n 1^n \mid n \geq 0\}$ .

**Note:**  $\epsilon$  is a legitimate right side.

# Context-Free Languages

- A language that is defined by some CFG is called a *context-free language*.
- There are CFL's that are not regular languages, such as the example just given.
- But not all languages are CFL's.
- **Intuitively**: CFL's can count two things, not three.

# BNF Notation

- Grammars for programming languages are often written in BNF (*Backus-Naur Form*).
- Variables are words in <...>; **Example:** <statement>.
- Terminals are often multicharacter strings indicated by boldface or underline; **Example:** **while** or WHILE.

# BNF Notation – (2)

- Symbol  $::=$  is often used for  $\rightarrow$ .
- Symbol  $|$  is used for “or.”
  - A shorthand for a list of productions with the same left side.
- **Example:**  $S \rightarrow 0S1 \mid 01$  is shorthand for  $S \rightarrow 0S1$  and  $S \rightarrow 01$ .



# BNF Notation – Kleene Closure

- Symbol ... is used for “one or more.”
- **Example:**  $\langle \text{digit} \rangle ::= 0|1|2|3|4|5|6|7|8|9$

$\langle \text{unsigned integer} \rangle ::= \langle \text{digit} \rangle \dots$

*< > = Loop*

- Note: that's not exactly the \* of RE's.

- **Translation:** Replace  $\alpha \dots$  with a new variable A and productions  $A \rightarrow A\alpha \mid \alpha$ .

*Recursive  
definition of*

# Example: Kleene Closure

- Grammar for unsigned integers can be replaced by:

$$U \rightarrow UD \mid D$$
$$D \rightarrow 0 \mid 1 \mid 2 \mid 3 \mid 4 \mid 5 \mid 6 \mid 7 \mid 8 \mid 9$$

# BNF Notation: Optional Elements

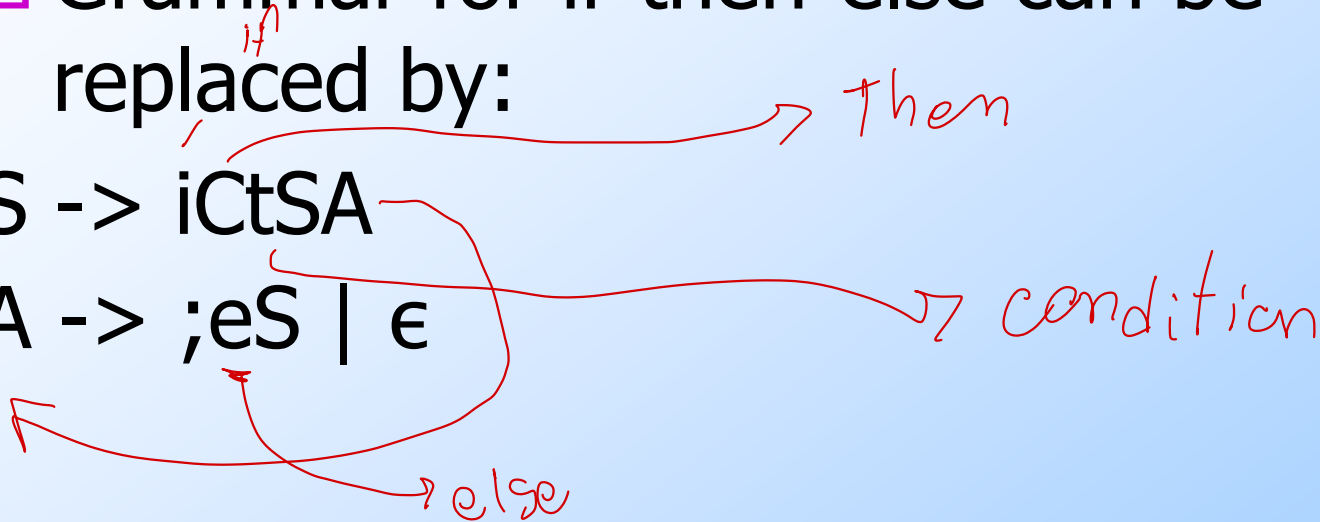
- Surround one or more symbols by [...] to make them optional.
- **Example:**  $\langle \text{statement} \rangle ::= \text{if } \langle \text{condition} \rangle \text{ then } \langle \text{statement} \rangle [; \text{else } \langle \text{statement} \rangle]$
- **Translation:** replace  $[\alpha]$  by a new variable  $A$  with productions  $A \rightarrow \alpha \mid \epsilon$ .

# Example: Optional Elements

- Grammar for if-then-else can be replaced by:

$S \rightarrow \text{if } C \text{ then } S \text{ else } S$

$A \rightarrow ;eS \mid \epsilon$



# BNF Notation – Grouping

- Use {...} to surround a sequence of symbols that need to be treated as a unit.
  - Typically, they are followed by a ... for “one or more.”
- **Example:** `<statement list> ::=`  
`<statement> [{;<statement>}...]`

# Translation: Grouping

- You may, if you wish, create a new variable  $A$  for  $\{\alpha\}$ .
- One production for  $A$ :  $A \rightarrow \alpha$ .
- Use  $A$  in place of  $\{\alpha\}$ .

# Example: Grouping

$L \rightarrow S [\{;S\} \dots]$

□ Replace by  $L \rightarrow S [A \dots]$

$A \rightarrow ;S$  *ଅଣେଇ*

□ A stands for  $\{;S\}$ .

□ Then by  $L \rightarrow SB$

$B \rightarrow A \dots \mid \epsilon$  *ଫାଲ୍ସ*

$A \rightarrow ;S$

□ B stands for  $[A \dots]$  (zero or more A's).

□ Finally by  $L \rightarrow SB$

$B \rightarrow C \mid \epsilon$

$C \rightarrow AC \mid A$   $A \rightarrow ;S$

□ C stands for  $A \dots$ .

*A ଅଣେଇ*  
*A ଅନନ୍ତ ଲେଖ,*

# Leftmost and Rightmost Derivations

- Derivations allow us to replace any of the variables in a string.
- Leads to many different derivations of the same string.
- By forcing the leftmost variable (or alternatively, the rightmost variable) to be replaced, we avoid these “distinctions without a difference.”



# Leftmost Derivations

- Say  $wA\alpha \Rightarrow_{lm} w\beta\alpha$  if  $w$  is a string of terminals only and  $A \rightarrow \beta$  is a production.
- Also,  $\alpha \Rightarrow_{lm}^* \beta$  if  $\alpha$  becomes  $\beta$  by a sequence of 0 or more  $\Rightarrow_{lm}$  steps.

# Example: Leftmost Derivations

- Balanced-parentheses grammar:

$$S \rightarrow SS \mid (S) \mid ()$$

- $S \Rightarrow_{lm} SS \Rightarrow_{lm} (S)S \Rightarrow_{lm} (())S \Rightarrow_{lm} (())()$

- Thus,  $S \Rightarrow_{lm}^* (())()$

- $S \Rightarrow SS \Rightarrow S() \Rightarrow (S)() \Rightarrow (())()$  is a derivation, but not a leftmost derivation.

# Rightmost Derivations

- Say  $\alpha Aw \Rightarrow_{rm} \alpha \beta w$  if  $w$  is a string of terminals only and  $A \rightarrow \beta$  is a production.
- Also,  $\alpha \Rightarrow_{rm}^* \beta$  if  $\alpha$  becomes  $\beta$  by a sequence of 0 or more  $\Rightarrow_{rm}$  steps.

# Example: Rightmost Derivations

- Balanced-parentheses grammar:

$$S \rightarrow SS \mid (S) \mid ()$$

- $S \Rightarrow_{\text{rm}} SS \Rightarrow_{\text{rm}} S() \Rightarrow_{\text{rm}} (S)() \Rightarrow_{\text{rm}} ((()))()$

- Thus,  $S \Rightarrow_{\text{rm}}^* ((()))()$

- $S \Rightarrow SS \Rightarrow SSS \Rightarrow S()S \Rightarrow ()()S \Rightarrow ()()()$  is neither a rightmost nor a leftmost derivation.

# Parse Trees

Definitions

Relationship to Left- and  
Rightmost Derivations

Ambiguity in Grammars

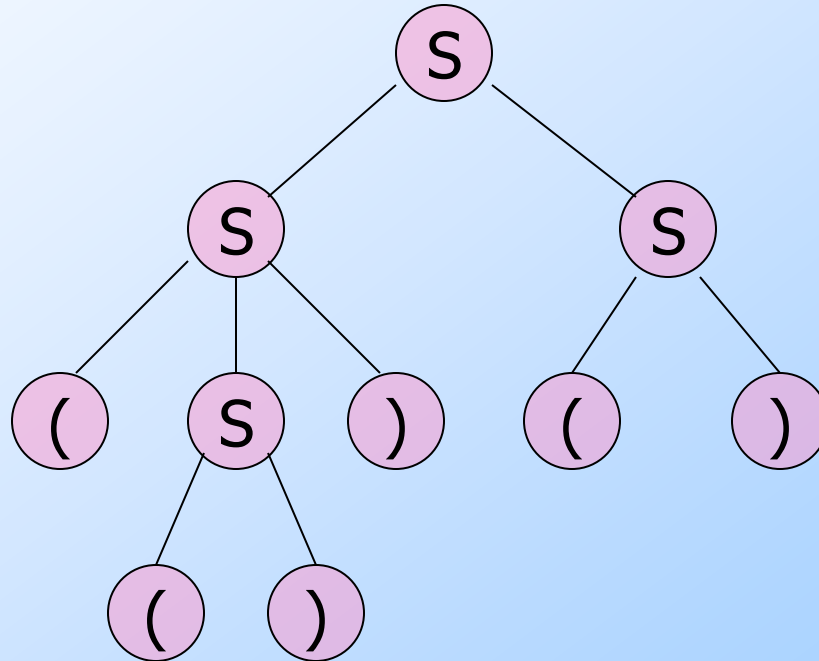
$NT = \{ A, B \}$   
 $T = \{ a, b, \epsilon \}$

# Parse Trees

- *Parse trees* are trees labeled by symbols of a particular CFG.
- **Leaves**: labeled by a terminal or  $\epsilon$ .
- **Interior nodes**: labeled by a variable.
  - Children are labeled by the right side of a production for the parent.
- **Root**: must be labeled by the start symbol.

# Example: Parse Tree

$S \rightarrow SS \mid (S) \mid ()$

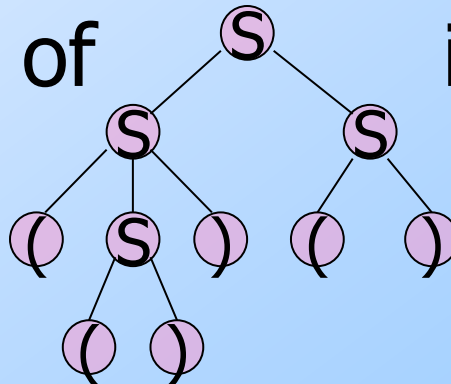


# Yield of a Parse Tree

- The concatenation of the labels of the leaves in left-to-right order
  - That is, in the order of a preorder traversal.

is called the *yield* of the parse tree.

- Example: yield of  is  $((\ ))(\ ))$





# Parse Trees, Left- and Rightmost Derivations

- For every parse tree, there is a unique leftmost, and a unique rightmost derivation.
- We'll prove:
  1. If there is a parse tree with root labeled  $A$  and yield  $w$ , then  $A \Rightarrow_{lm}^* w$ .
  2. If  $A \Rightarrow_{lm}^* w$ , then there is a parse tree with root  $A$  and yield  $w$ .

Code  
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meaning  
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# Ambiguous Grammars

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เพราะมันมีหลายวิธีในการแปล

- A CFG is *ambiguous* if there is a string in the language that is the yield of two or more parse trees.

ถ้ามันมีหลาย Meaning

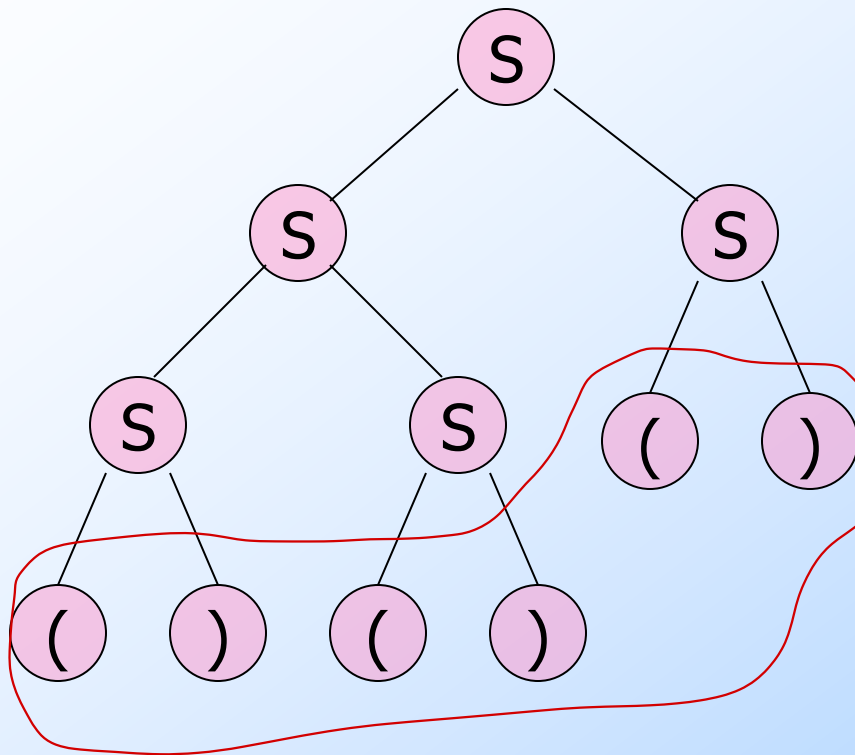
- Example:  $S \rightarrow SS \mid (S) \mid ()$

- Two parse trees for  $()()()$  on next slide.

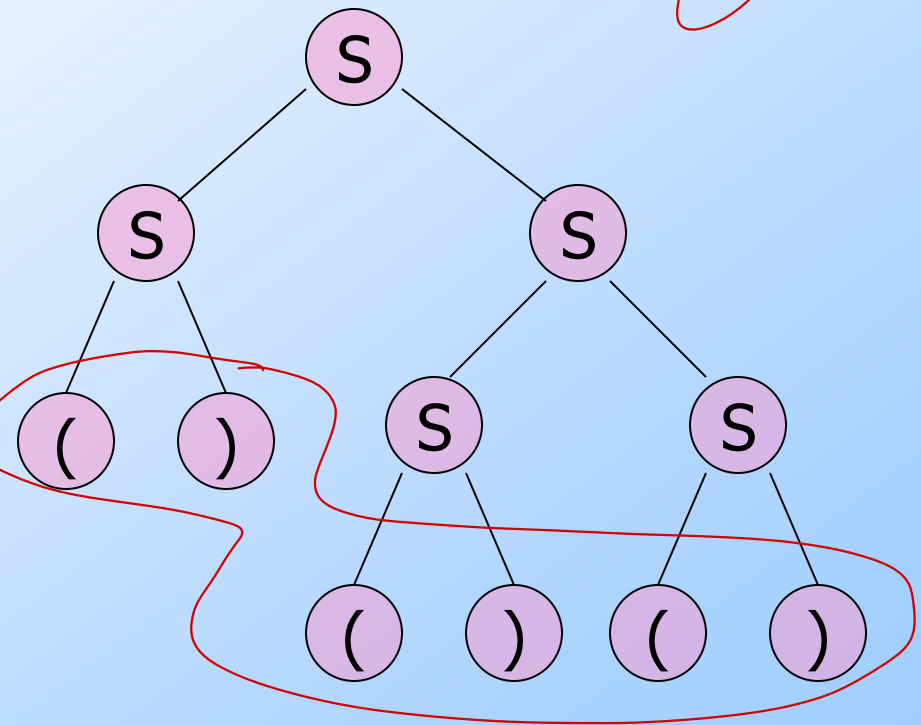
$S \rightarrow SS \mid (S) \mid ()$

Parse tree of  $(())()()$  +  $11000$   
հանգան,

## Example – Continued



$()()()$



$()()()$

# Ambiguity, Left- and Rightmost Derivations

- If there are two different parse trees, they must produce two different leftmost derivations by the construction given in the proof.
- Conversely, two different leftmost derivations produce different parse trees by the other part of the proof.
- Likewise for rightmost derivations.

# Ambiguity, etc. – (2)

- Thus, equivalent definitions of “ambiguous grammar” are:
  1. There is a string in the language that has two different leftmost derivations.
  2. There is a string in the language that has two different rightmost derivations.

# Ambiguity is a Property of Grammars, not Languages

- For the balanced-parentheses language, here is another CFG, which is unambiguous.

$B \rightarrow (RB \mid \epsilon$

$R \rightarrow ) \mid (RR$

B, the start symbol, derives balanced strings.

R generates strings that have one more right paren than left.

$NT: \{B, R\}$

$T: \{ (, ), \epsilon \}$

# Example: Unambiguous Grammar

$B \rightarrow (RB \mid \epsilon$        $R \rightarrow ) \mid (RR$

- Construct a unique leftmost derivation for a given balanced string of parentheses by scanning the string from left to right.
  - If we need to expand B, then use  $B \rightarrow (RB$  if the next symbol is "(" and  $\epsilon$  if at the end.
  - If we need to expand R, use  $R \rightarrow )$  if the next symbol is ")" and  $(RR$  if it is "(".

# The Parsing Process

Remaining Input:

(( ))( )



Next  
symbol

Steps of leftmost  
derivation:

B

$B \rightarrow (RB \mid \epsilon$

$R \rightarrow ) \mid (RR$



# The Parsing Process

Remaining Input:

$()())$



Next  
symbol

Steps of leftmost  
derivation:

B

$(RB$

$B \rightarrow (RB \mid \epsilon$

$R \rightarrow ) \mid (RR$

# The Parsing Process

Remaining Input:

))()



Next  
symbol

Steps of leftmost  
derivation:

B

(RB

((RRB

$B \rightarrow (RB \mid \epsilon$

$R \rightarrow ) \mid (RR$

# The Parsing Process

Remaining Input:

)()



Next  
symbol

Steps of leftmost  
derivation:

B

(RB

((RRB

((())RB

$B \rightarrow (RB \mid \epsilon$

$R \rightarrow ) \mid (RR$

# The Parsing Process

Remaining Input:

()



Next  
symbol

Steps of leftmost  
derivation:

B

(RB

((RRB

((())RB

((()))B

$B \rightarrow (RB \mid \epsilon$

$R \rightarrow ) \mid (RR$

# The Parsing Process

Remaining Input:

)



Next  
symbol

Steps of leftmost  
derivation:

B            (())(RB

(RB

((RRB

(()RB

(())B


$B \rightarrow (RB \mid \epsilon$

$R \rightarrow ) \mid (RR$

# The Parsing Process

Remaining Input:

Steps of leftmost derivation:

  
Next  
symbol

B          (())(RB

(RB          (()>()B

((RRB

(()RB

(())B


$B \rightarrow (RB \mid \epsilon$

$R \rightarrow ) \mid (RR$

# The Parsing Process

Remaining Input:

Steps of leftmost derivation:

  
Next  
symbol

B            (())(RB

(RB            (()>()B

((RRB            (()>()

(()RB

(())B

$B \rightarrow (RB \mid \epsilon$

$R \rightarrow ) \mid (RR$

# LL(1) Grammars

- As an aside, a grammar such  $B \rightarrow (RB \mid \epsilon$   
 $R \rightarrow ) \mid (RR$ , where you can always figure out the production to use in a leftmost derivation by scanning the given string left-to-right and looking only at the next one symbol is called LL(1).
- “Leftmost derivation, left-to-right scan, one symbol of lookahead.”



# LL(1) Grammars – (2)

- Most programming languages have LL(1) grammars.
- LL(1) grammars are never ambiguous.

# Inherent Ambiguity

- It would be nice if for every ambiguous grammar, there were some way to “fix” the ambiguity, as we did for the balanced-parentheses grammar.
- Unfortunately, certain CFL’s are *inherently ambiguous*, meaning that every grammar for the language is ambiguous.

# Example: Inherent Ambiguity

- The language  $\{0^i 1^j 2^k \mid i = j \text{ or } j = k\}$  is inherently ambiguous.
- **Intuitively**, at least some of the strings of the form  $0^n 1^n 2^n$  must be generated by two different parse trees, one based on checking the 0's and 1's, the other based on checking the 1's and 2's.

# One Possible Ambiguous Grammar

$S \rightarrow AB \mid CD$

$A \rightarrow 0A1 \mid 01$

A generates equal 0's and 1's

$B \rightarrow 2B \mid 2$

B generates any number of 2's

$C \rightarrow 0C \mid 0$

C generates any number of 0's

$D \rightarrow 1D2 \mid 12$

D generates equal 1's and 2's

And there are two derivations of every string with equal numbers of 0's, 1's, and 2's. E.g.:

$S \Rightarrow AB \Rightarrow 01B \Rightarrow 012$

$S \Rightarrow CD \Rightarrow 0D \Rightarrow 012$