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# Nulascript

## Introduction:

**Nulascript** is a dynamically typed programming language that allows memory access through pointers. Pointers represent a crucial concept in computer programming, particularly in low-level languages like C. They store memory addresses rather than actual values. This distinction becomes important in terms of efficiency because it allows you to work with data in memory directly without making unnecessary copies. For example, in high-level scripting languages running on virtual machines and in deployment pipelines, avoiding data duplication and having direct access to memory locations can lead to faster execution and more cost-effective infrastructure management.

The process of running **Nulascript** code involves several stages. At a high level, it starts with the user writing code in a text file. This code is then passed to a lexer, which breaks it down into tokens. These tokens are then used as input for a parser to construct an abstract syntax tree. Finally, the AST is interpreted to execute the code.

The lexer, also known as a lexical analyzer, is a core component of a compiler or interpreter. Its primary role is to examine the source code of a programming language and divide it into individual tokens. These tokens are the smallest meaningful units of code, like keywords, identifiers, operators, and literals. The lexer categorizes these tokens and sends them to subsequent stages in the compilation or interpretation process for further analysis, where the code's structure and meaning are further understood and processed. Essentially, a lexer serves as the initial step in the process of translating human-readable source code into a format that a computer can comprehend and work with.

The parser, also known as a syntactic analyzer, is another core component which primary task is to inspect the source code tokens generated by the lexer and arrange them into a hierarchical structure known as the syntax abstract tree. The tree servers as a representation of the source code which clearly defines the relationship between different tokens and their grammatical structure. The parser's role is to verify whether the code complies with the language's syntax rules and to generate a structured representation that can be further processed by the compiler or interpreter. Additionally, there exist various types of parsers. In the context of **Nulascript**, the tokens are processed by a Pratt parser, also referred to as a top-down operator precedence parser. Our parser primarily begins at the top of the parse tree, examining the initial symbol of the grammar, and proceeds linearly by inspecting the subsequent tokens to determine the appropriate path to take. This approach leads to efficient parsing. We'll delve into more detail about the parser's implementation as we continue.

An interpreter is, as the name implies, the underlying software which interprets the meaning of our code by walking the abstract tree we’ve just created. Interpreters provide a direct way to execute commands without building a machine code executable. Rather it executes the code on the fly which enables us to interactively run commands, if needed. At a high level, our **Nulascript** code will run from a C++ binary, which breaks down into machine code and contains instructions on how to execute each step from our tree.

## Lexer:

In the realm of programming languages, Nulascript's Lexer adheres to a well-established convention. Functioning as a fundamental component in the code interpretation process, it it’s primary job is to take a piece of code in the form of a string and break it down into smaller parts, which we call “tokens”. These tokens serve as the atomic units of code, encompassing everything from keywords and identifiers to operators and constants.

The Lexer's tokenization process serves as a crucial initial step in the broader process of code interpretation. It paves the way for subsequent stages in the software development lifecycle, such as parsing and interpretation. Through this systematic dissection, it plays a pivotal role in enabling the computer to comprehend and execute the programmer's instructions with precision and accuracy.

### Now, let’s dive into how Nulascript’s Lexer is implemented:

#### The Lexer class:

**public**:

// avoid copying large inputs

Lexer(**const** std::string& input);

Token getNextToken();

In the code snippet, we have two public methods. The first is a constructor named **Lexer**, which takes a single argument: a reference to a **std::string** containing **Nulascript** code. The purpose of this constructor is to initialize an instance of the **Lexer** class with the provided input. This design choice is made to prevent the unnecessary duplication of exceptionally lengthy code segments into memory. By using a reference to the input, the code remains memory-efficient, even when dealing with large code files.

The second public method is **getNextToken()**, which is used to retrieve the next token from the **Nulascript** code. This method plays a crucial role in the lexical analysis process, where the code is systematically broken down into individual tokens for further processing.

Before jumping to explaining what **getNextToken()** does, let’s first check what the Lexer holds as private variables.

**private**:

TokenLookup tokenLookup;

std::string input;

**int** pos;

**int** readPos;

**char** ch;

At a high level, the TokenLookup class is responsible for handling the lookup of reserved keywords. Here's a brief excerpt from the class's implementation:

TokenLookup::TokenLookup() {

keywords = {

{"fn", FUNC},

{"let", LET},

{"true", TRUE},

TokenType TokenLookup::lookupIdent(**const** std::string& ident) {

**auto** it = keywords.find(ident);

**if** (it != keywords.end()) {

**return** it->second;

}

**return** IDENT;

}

In the code, the default constructor TokenLookup is used to initialize an instance of the TokenLookup class. This constructor initializes an unordered map named keywords, which contains pairs of reserved keywords and their corresponding token types. This map serves as a lookup table for identifying and categorizing keywords in the code.

The lookupIdent() function within the TokenLookup class is responsible for examining a provided string to determine its token type. It does this by searching for the string in the keywords map. If a match is found, the function returns the associated TokenType. If no match is found, it returns IDENT, which represents an identifier - the name of a variable or function. This function is essential for identifying and categorizing tokens within the code based on the reserved keywords provided in the keywords map.

Now, back to this part:  
  
 **int** pos;

**int** readPos;

**char** ch;

Let’s use the following example code let a = 5; and walk through how these variables would be set initially when initializing the Lexer:

**pos would start at 0:** The Lexer begins processing at the first character of the input string, which is 'l' in the keyword 'let'.

**readPos would start at 1:** This indicates that the lexer is ready to read the next character after the current character pointed to by pos, which is 'e' in 'let'.

**ch would be assigned 'l':** This variable stores the character currently pointed to by pos, which is 'l' in 'let'.

Before we explore the additional features of the Lexer, let's first examine where the tokens are defined. These tokens are encapsulated in a struct called "Token," which is defined as follows:

**struct** Token {

TokenType type;

std::string literal;

};

The "literal" field in the Token struct, as the name suggests, stores the literal value of the token. For instance, if the token is '=' (an assignment operator), the "literal" field would contain the string '='. The "TokenType" of the token is determined by an enum declared in the same file:

**enum** TokenType {

ASSIGN,

// Other token types...

};

Consequently, in the case of a token with the literal value '=', the Token struct would hold the TokenType ASSIGN to represent this specific token.

All the tokens Nulascript’s Lexer supports:

**EOF\_TYPE**: This token represents the end of the file or input stream and is often used to indicate the end of parsing.

**ILLEGAL**: This token is typically used to represent an illegal or unrecognized input.

**IDENT**: Stands for "identifier" and is used to represent variable or function names in the source code.

**INT**: Represents integer values in the source code.

**ASSIGN**: Represents the assignment operator, typically used to assign a value to a variable.

**PLUS**: Represents the addition operator.

**MINUS**: Represents the subtraction operator.

**COMMA**: Represents a comma used to separate elements in a list or function arguments.

**SEMICOLON**: Represents a semicolon used to terminate statements.

**LPAR**: Stands for "left parenthesis" and is used to open a grouping, such as for function calls or mathematical expressions.

**RPAR**: Stands for "right parenthesis" and is used to close a grouping opened by LPAR.

**LBRACE**: Represents the left curly brace, used to open a block of code or a dictionary.

**RBRACE**: Represents the right curly brace, used to close a block of code or a dictionary opened by LBRACE.

**ASTERISK**: Represents the multiplication operator or pointers.

**DEREF**: Stands for "dereference" and is used to access the value pointed to by a reference or pointer.

**PIPE**: Similarly to how ‘|’ is used in shell scripting, the idea for this token is to directly pipe passed input to stdout.

**FUNC**: Indicates a function keyword, often used to define functions in the source code.

**BANG\_OR\_NOT**: Used for logical negation (‘!’ and “not” are interchangeable in Nulascript)

**SLASH**: Represents the division operator.

**LT**: Represents the less-than comparison operator.

**LOE**: Represents "less than or equal to" comparison operator.

**GT**: Represents the greater-than comparison operator.

**GOE**: Represents "greater than or equal to" comparison operator.

**LET**: Represents "let" keyword for defining functions and variables.

**IF**: Represents the if keyword, used to begin conditional statements.

**ELSE**: Represents the else keyword, used in conjunction with IF for conditional branching.

**TRUE**: Represents the boolean true value.

**FALSE**: Represents the boolean false value.

**RETURN**: Represents the return keyword, often used to exit a function and return a value.

**IS**: Is used for identity or equality checks.

Back to the Lexer’s implementation, now we’re going to go over all the function which handle appropriate token type assigning.  
  
**void** Lexer::readChar() {

**if** (readPos >= input.size()) {

ch = 0; // EOF

} **else** {

ch = input[readPos];

}

pos = readPos;

readPos = readPos + 1;

}

This function is responsible for updating both the current position and the reading position, as mentioned earlier. The noteworthy aspect here is how we signify the end of the input for the lexer, which is essentially our source code. We achieve this by assigning the value 0 to the EOF\_TYPE token type. You might wonder where this assignment is made. The truth is, we don't explicitly set a value for the token itself. Instead, in our getNextToken() function, we have a substantial switch-case construct that deals with all the possible characters in the code and assigns their corresponding token types.

Token Lexer::getNextToken() {

Token currentToken;

skipOverWhitespace();

**switch** (ch) {

**case** '=':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::ASSIGN, ch);

**break**;

**case** '+':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::PLUS, ch);

**break**;

**case** '-':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::MINUS, ch);

**break**;

**case** ',':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::COMMA, ch);

**break**;

**case** ';':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::SEMICOLON, ch);

**break**;

**case** '(':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::LPAR, ch);

**break**;

**case** ')':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::RPAR, ch);

**break**;

**case** '{':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::LBRACE, ch);

**break**;

**case** '}':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::RBRACE, ch);

**break**;

**case** '\*':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::ASTERISK, ch);

**break**;

**case** '&':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::DEREF, ch);

**break**;

**case** '|':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::PIPE, ch);

**break**;

**case** '!':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::BANG\_OR\_NOT, ch);

**break**;

**case** '/':

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::SLASH, ch);

**break**;

**case** '<':

currentToken =

handleComparisonOperators(ch, TokenType::LT, TokenType::LOE);

**break**;

**case** '>':

currentToken =

handleComparisonOperators(ch, TokenType::GT, TokenType::GOE);

**break**;

**case** 0:

currentToken.literal = "";

currentToken.type = TokenType::EOF\_TYPE;

**break**;

**default**:

**if** (isLetter(ch)) {

currentToken.literal = readExtendedToken(TokenType::IDENT);

currentToken.type = tokenLookup.lookupIdent(currentToken.literal);

**return** currentToken;

} **else** **if** (isDigit(ch)) {

currentToken.type = TokenType::INT;

currentToken.literal = readExtendedToken(currentToken.type);

**return** currentToken;

} **else** {

currentToken = newToken(TokenType::ILLEGAL, ch);

}

}

readChar();

**return** currentToken;

}

This is pretty much the heart of the Lexer.

First, it calls skipOverWhitespace() to skip any whitespace characters.

Then, it enters a switch-case statement based on the current character, ch, to identify and assign the appropriate token type.

For example, if ch is '=', it creates a new token with a TokenType of ASSIGN.

If ch is '+', it creates a token with PLUS, and so on for various other characters.

The code handles various punctuation and operator characters commonly found in other programming languages.

If ch is 0, indicating the end of the file, it sets the token type to EOF\_TYPE.

If ch is not one of the recognized characters, it checks if it's a letter (part of an identifier) or a digit (part of an integer literal). If it's a letter, it reads an extended token (possibly a longer identifier) and determines the correct TokenType using a lookup. If it's a digit, it treats it as an integer and reads an extended token accordingly.

If none of the above conditions are met, it marks the token as ILLEGAL.

After determining the token type and possibly the token's literal value, the readChar() function is called to advance to the next character in the input.

Finally, it returns the extracted token.

In this code segment, we encounter a few tokens that require some special handling, particularly the comparison operator tokens.  
  
Token Lexer::handleComparisonOperators(**char** opChar, TokenType shortType,

TokenType extendedType) {

// reduce branching by not conditionally checking and inferring the extended

// type

**if** (peekNextChar() == '=') {

**char** savedCh = ch;

readChar();

**char** tokenLiteral[3] = {savedCh, ch, '\0'};

**return** newToken(extendedType, tokenLiteral);

}

**return** newToken(shortType, ch);

}

The Token Lexer::handleComparisonOperators(char opChar, TokenType shortType,

TokenType extendedType) function comes into play here. It serves to differentiate between

two possibilities: whether the character is a simple '<' or '>', indicating less than or greater

than, or whether it's part of an extended equality comparison (e.g., '<=' or '>=').

To optimize the code and minimize branching, it first checks if the next character, obtained

using peekNextChar(), is an '=' sign. If it is, the function treats the current character as part

of an extended comparison. It temporarily stores the current character, advances to the next

character using readChar(), and constructs a token literal that combines the two characters

(e.g., "<=" or ">="). Finally, it creates a new token with the extendedType and this combined

literal.

If the next character is not '=', indicating a simple comparison, the function creates a new

token with the shortType and the current character, which represents 'less than' or

'greater than'.

So, in essence, this function helps distinguish between basic comparison operators and their

extended counterparts whenever '<' or '>' characters are encountered in the input.