Michael Bozhilov

Senior Project I

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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.