



CRAFT DEVELOPMENT DIARY



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Introduction

This is a development diary of the “Craft” compiler also known previously by the name “Goblin”.

The “Craft” compiler is designed to compile “Craft” code a language which I have designed.

Unfortunately, I have only documented the project since 25th July 2016 so there is months of work undocumented. Anyhow it is titled day 1 and onwards even though it was not day 1 of the project it was day 1 of the diary.

Throughout this document you will see all the struggles and design choices I have made to get the Craft compiler completed.

Information

Before continuing it is important that you understand the names used in this diary, I will help explain the ones an experienced reader may have trouble with.

For anything else such as trouble understanding what a Lexer, Parser, virtual method, or virtual pure method is. Please research on them to understand this dairy.

Code generator

The code generator is the base class for all code generators, it parses the abstract syntax tree from the root and invokes methods in its inheritor/child depending on the branch it finds in the tree. For example, if it should find an assignment such as “x = 50” then it would invoke a method on its inheritor for handling assignments.

Goblin Bytecode generator

The Goblin bytecode generator extends the “CodeGenerator” class its methods get invoked by the code generator depending on the branch the code generator has found. Depending on the method that was invoked the goblin bytecode generator would write data to the stream or do further iteration of the AST (abstract syntax tree) until it finds what it is looking for.

Craft bytecode generator

The Goblin bytecode generator was renamed to Craft bytecode generator so throughout this diary know that they are the same.

Day 1 - 25th July 2016

This is the first day of documenting the Craft compiler. Unfortunately, I left it a bit late so I am actually writing this on the 26th July 2016 however I will write about the 25th as if it is the 25th.

Today I was working more on implementing arrays, at this point arrays were coming along well, I could only support 1 dimensional arrays although up to 3 dimensions can be parsed. I managed to make array access in expressions possible, although not perfect it worked, I was in the process of fixing a bug where array access would only work in expressions if it was on the left hand side, this was because the "A" register was used and if something else was on the left hand side of the expression, let's say a number it would occupy register "A" so the array access on the right hand side of the expression would generate byte code that would have overwritten the number at run time. I was in the process of fixing this or I did fix it I don't remember and then all of a sudden my computer crashed. When I booted back up I found my entire goblin bytecode generator NULLED. I searched my git repository for the most recent commit I could find and unfortunately the commit I found was on the 7th of July. The code that was present at that time would be completely obsolete a lot of development has been done since then so I chose to write the goblin code generator again. I rewrote a basic template for the goblin bytecode generator and I worked a little bit on the code generator improving the design.

Day 2 - 26th July 2016

Today early hours in the morning I was focusing on improving the design of the code generator, as well as implementing more code on the goblin bytecode generator since the file was NULLED yesterday due to a system crash.

The work early hours in the morning today was continued from yesterday I continued into the 26th I usually do work late.

I decided that I should modify the code generator to use a “Scope” class instead of all the functionality defined in the code generator. This made sense as it is certainly possible to have child scopes which would have caused problems in my current design. So I created a “Scope” class and this class contains variables as well as methods for working with these variables such as creating new variables or getting variables by name. A lot of the related content was moved from the code generator into the “Scope” class and modified. The “Scope” class has the ability to have one parent and one child although this will be changed later to allow for multiple children.

I also removed a lot of obsolete methods from the code generator, the old design approach was to have a virtual pure method for every possible scenario, for example I would have a method for handling a number, and let the code generator invoke a virtual pure method every time a number was found. The child class would then be able to write the machine/byte code to the stream.

This design was not appropriate and my new design approach is to have a method for only more structured elements such as functions, and assignments.

At the moment only the assignment method is implemented and was implemented a few days ago, the function method does not exist yet, in its place is the “scope_start” method. This however also needs to be removed as every scope can act differently. This will be replaced with a method such as “function_start” and this would be for function declarations including the function scope.

I also fixed the “cleanBranch” method in the Parser class. Originally it was not working or was not working as expected. I made it clean the tree of branches who only have one child starting at the branch passed as the first argument. This meant that branches with only one child are replaced with its only child, leading to a cleaner tree with information that is no longer needed removed.

I thought about the parser rules today and how I perhaps should change them, for example my expressions will have three branches the first one being the left operand, the second being the operator and the third being the right operand, this could be changed allowing the parent branch to be the operator and then its two children being the left operand and the right operand. This is how most designs look when I search for “Abstract syntax tree” on google images. There will be no definite change yet as I need to outline the pros of this change and cons if there is any.

Day 3 - 28th July 2016

Today I made the Exception class extend one of C++'s standard exceptions "logic_error". My reason for this is that should an exception be thrown and not caught I or others will be able to see the output in the console window.

I also fixed the design problems caused by the rule changes and the parser update where I fixed the "cleanBranch" method. I also made the ability to have multiple children in the Scope class which is required because scopes can have multiple scopes inside of them.

I have considered changing certain parser rules to output different types of branches than it does at the moment. Google image searches have given me many results with expressions that look like this:

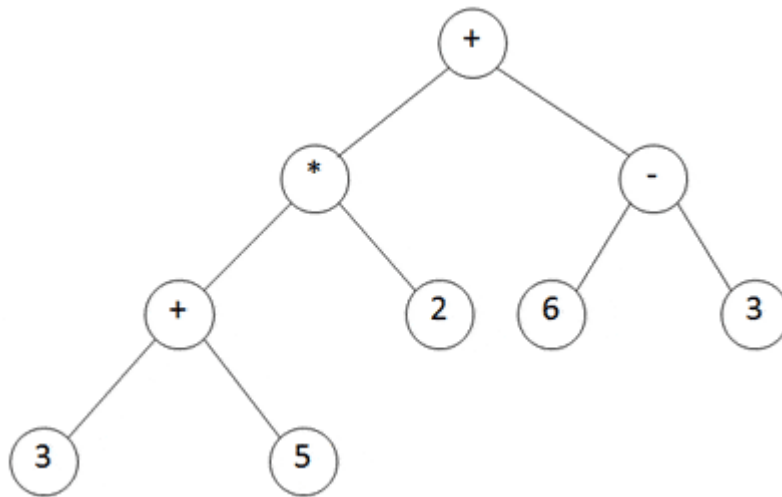


Fig 1.

My system does things a little differently and I need to consider whether or not the above image would be the best way to go about things. My tree is workable but I do believe the above image represents a better structure, the parser rules will need to be thought through carefully and not just the ones for expressions. I partially think that because I am not doing a similar structure as shown in Fig 1. May be partly the reason certain expressions cause parsing errors but I cannot be sure as of yet I am still in a bit of a grey area with this situation.

Another bug was discovered in function calls, a function call cannot have arguments that are also function calls, this is a parsing error.

In other news I attempted to update the parser to do a look ahead first before choosing a rule as the fact it does not do a look ahead has already caused me countless problems and requires rules to be placed in a pacific position to work correctly. Although today I have failed to implement the look ahead feature as the previous parser design would loop through all the rules and then apply it to every branch in the root, so in the first phase for example "3 + 3 + a" would become "E + E + E" and then as it goes to other rules would be broken down further. A look

ahead would not be possible with this design. I changed the design to apply the rules on a left to right basis without applying it to every branch at once, for example "3 + 3 + a" would become "E + 3 + a" now because there is no rule for "E + 3 + a" only "E + E" the parser will now fail to generate an abstract syntax tree, more thinking will need to be done but I plan to make the parser better before continuing the project as if I do not it may cause me even worse problems later on.

One possible solution that I would rather avoid because it might come across as a bad design perhaps, is the ability to state that a particular rule can be any of the following branches. E.g the "E" branch can be the "identifier" token or the "number" token.

Day 4 - 29th July 2016

Today I made the parser a look ahead parser which will help prevent rule conflixtions, for example two rules may exist, "E:operator:E" and "E:operator:E:operator", The second rule is a rule that you probably would never implement but I will use it as an example as it's the perfect scenario. Now take the expression "E+E+" you would expect this expression to match the second rule but in the first parser this did not happen it would pick the first rule that it matched to so it would be "E:operator:E". Now that the parser is changed it will now look ahead and find the most appropriate rule so it would pick "E:operator:E:operator" which is the correct rule.

Upon implementing the new Parser, I removed some code that should be their this caused an issue and prevented branches from being excluded from the tree, this was a simple bug to fix and I fixed it quickly.

Since the parser is now more efficient I no longer need the hash tag to represent functions and function calls I will be considering soon weather to remove them or keep them the same just to make the language a little different.

In other news I am considering rewriting the parser rules all together to try and do a better job, or at least rewrite some of them, also another problem was found and that is with the cleaning system for the parser. This system does exactly what it is supposed to do but in certain situations this would cause problems.

For example, the fourth branch in the "FUNC" branch holds a bunch of statement branches, now because of this cleaning system if only one statement in the function body exists then the cleaning system will replace that "STMT" branch with its child branch, I do not like this at all as obviously the function body should have some sort of root branch for its self. Anyway more thought will need to be given before any change is made.

If I do make this change, then I would set it up a bit similar to the way you exclude branches in the parser rules. In the parser rules you exclude branches from the tree by using the quote character: " '" in the current rule.

Day 5 - 30th July 2016

Today I was working on fixing a bug with input such as “c = (50 + 19) * 8” or “c = 50 + 19 * 8”. This bug is a parser bug where the parser cannot break down the branches correctly.

This issue occurred because of the parser rules and possibly the parser its self. Take these rules for example.

E:identifier

E:number

E:E:operator:E

E:'symbol@(:E:'symbol@)

ASSIGN:E:'symbol@=:E

The following happens:

*C = 50 + 19 * 8*

*E = 50 + 19 * 8*

*E = E + 19 * 8*

*ASSIGN + 19 * 8*

As you can see the parser is left with “+ 19 * 8” unparsed, this is because the ASSIGN rule matched correctly while the other rules did not. A look ahead exists but it will not work with branches who have not yet become a child because of this the parser is not working correctly.

Possible solutions

1. Change the parser rules
2. Make the parser branch look what is ahead and then see if it matches a different rule

I would rather implement solution 2. Although I am not sure if it is the best solution yet.

Priority is now changing the parser to do just this.

Day 6 - 31th July 2016

Today I decided to start rewriting the majority of the parser, I will not rewrite the rule system but the actual AST(Abstract Syntax Tree) generator. The problem with the old design was that it did not follow standard procedures to generating AST's and because of this the code was a bit ugly. I will now be using stacks instead of vectors, this did cross my mind in the past but I chose to go with the vector.

I hope to implement a shift reduce parser, properly this time.

Day 7 - 9th August 2016

Today I worked more on rewriting the parser, the development was coming along well but unfortunately I have some segmentation faults that I need to fix. The parser code is not quite right but I feel that I am nearly there. Once complete this will be the 3rd time I have wrote the parser.

Day 8 - 11th August 2016

Today not much was accomplished, I fixed a bug where I was creating a new instance of an array with a size of zero, this was because I did not check that functions existed before creating the array, e.g “new function[total_functions]” if the “total_functions” variable is zero then it will attempt to create a new function array of 0 elements, this causes issues. I believe that similar issues still exist in the system which I plan to clean out once the parser is complete.

As for the parser its self it is not coming along well at all and I am considering going back to the old working design, although not the best design it did work rather well.

I appear to be having many segmentation faults while implementing the new parser design and it is holding me back.

Day 9 - 16th August 2016

Today I successfully created a shift reduce parser that uses a stack, at the moment it does not do a look ahead and is incomplete as it also is not recursive when it comes to reductions.

I hope to soon make the parser do a look ahead and do recursions on reductions until no more reductions can be done for the current stack state.

Day 10 - 17th August 2016

Today I made the shift reduce parser recursive when it comes to reductions, this was simple to do, I simply just recall the same method when a reduction has been successful, this in turn will attempt to reduce the stack further.

I also attempted to implement the look ahead but was unsuccessful.

Day 11 - 18^h August 2016

Today I was attempting to implement a shift reduce parser and during my attempts I realised that I was popping from the back of the stack and not the front, I was curious to why the branches were getting created in order and it is because of that reason.

This setup worked fine for a stack that did not need a look ahead but in a real situation a look ahead is required.

I decided to have a cigarette and thought through the best approach I could do to get this working and the solution I came up with is to make the rule requirements also a stack, and make the start of the input get popped and then pushed to the parser stack so it's a left to right parser rather than a right to left. Then finally during checking for reductions I would pop from the back of the parser stack so its right to left.

Take the following example

Rule requirements: identifier:operator:number

Now take the following input

A + 9

Now what would happen is during every reduction attempt we pop from the right most symbol, and then we pop from the right most rule requirement. So as you can see the rule requirement is "number" and the right most input is also a "number".

This is why this sort of setup seems to work.

Now as for the look ahead symbol since we are now pushing data onto the parse stack left to right instead of the previous right to left, the look ahead will always be the next symbol to the right.

I started writing code that would check if there was a rule match with the parser stack plus the look ahead symbol and if it was it would shift the look ahead symbol to the parser stack and then reduce with the rule it matched with. However, if there was no match it would then try to match a rule with the parse stack alone.

There was a serious problem with this design. I fixed this problem by making it only choose the parser stack plus the look ahead symbol reduction should there be a match for the parser stack alone and also the parser stack plus the look ahead symbol. This solved the problem and my parser could work well with a look ahead symbol, however I then set the following rules:

E:identifier

E:number

E:E:operator:E

T:E:operator:E:E

and even tried

T:E:operator:E:identifier

I may have also tried

T:identifier:operator:identifier:identifier

Once I tried those rules everything went terribly wrong, it appears the reduction of “identifier” into branch “E” and “number” into branch “E” causes issues with the current parser logic.

I am also concerned about the cleanliness of the parser and the approaches I am taking.

It appears I am back to the drawing board.

Day 12 - 6th September 2016

Today I worked on the parser and made the parser work with a look ahead properly I also made the parser reduce the correct way around rather than the previous opposite. Due to the way a stack works previously the branches were being written backwards this is fixed now. I also fixed a few bugs in the parser and partially implemented the ability of custom branches being set based on rules. E.g the newly reduced branch based on rule "V_DEF" becomes the "V_DEF" branch in memory.

I also changed the ParserRule class and made a method that returns the total requirements of its self.

