Lecture 5 – Formal grammars, regular and context-free grammars

NTIN071 Automata and Grammars

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^{*} Adapted from the Czech-lecture slides by Marta Vomlelová with gratitude. The translation, some modifications, and all errors are mine.

Recap of Lecture 4

- regular expressions
- Kleene's theorem (two variants)
- constructions: RE to ϵ -NFA, DFA to RE
- state elimination algorithm
- string substitution, homomorphism, inverse homomorphism
- decision properties

CHAPTER 2: GRAMMARS

2.1 Formal grammars

Palindromes are not regular

palindrome: $w = w^R$, e.g. racecar, step_on_no_pets

Example

The language $L_{\mathrm{pal}} = \{ w \in \{0,1\}^* \mid w = w^R \}$ is not regular.

(A standard Pumping lemma argument using $w = 0^n 10^n$.)

How to represent $L_{\rm pal}$? We can use a (context-free) grammar, $G = (\{S\}, \{0,1\}, \mathcal{P}, S)$ with the following set of production rules:

$$\mathcal{P} = \{S
ightarrow \epsilon, \ S
ightarrow 0, \ S
ightarrow 1, \ S
ightarrow 050, \ S
ightarrow 151\}$$

For brevity, we also write $\mathcal{P} = \{S \rightarrow \epsilon \mid 0 \mid 1 \mid 0S0 \mid 1S1\}$.

Formal grammar: the definition

A formal (generative) grammar: G = (V, T, P, S) where

- V is a finite nonempty set of nonterminals (variables)
- T is a finite set of terminal symbols (terminals), $V \cap T = \emptyset$
- $S \in V$ is the start symbol
- \mathcal{P} is a finite set of production rules of the form $\alpha \to \beta$ where
 - $\alpha \in (V \cup T)^+ \setminus T^+$, the head (must contain some variable!)
 - $\beta \in (V \cup T)^*$, the body

A grammar is context-free (a CFG) if the head is a single variable, i.e., the rules are of the form $A \to \beta$ for $A \in V$ and $\beta \in (V \cup T)^*$.

The production rules thus represent a recursive definition of the language, starting from the start symbol (see the example).

Derivation, the language of a grammar

Let G = (V, T, P, S) be a grammar.

- γ one-step derives δ (write $\gamma \Rightarrow_{\mathcal{G}} \delta$ or just $\gamma \Rightarrow \delta$) if $\gamma = \eta \alpha \nu$ and $\delta = \eta \beta \nu$ for some $\alpha \to \beta \in \mathcal{P}$ and $\eta, \nu \in (V \cup T)^*$
- γ derives δ (write $\gamma \Rightarrow_G^* \delta$ or just $\gamma \Rightarrow^* \delta$) if there are $\beta_1, \ldots, \beta_n \in (V \cup T)^*$ s.t. $\gamma = \beta_1 \Rightarrow \beta_2 \Rightarrow \cdots \Rightarrow \beta_n = \delta$ (Note that always $\gamma \Rightarrow^* \gamma$.)
- the sequence β_1, \ldots, β_n is a derivation of δ from γ , it is minimal if $\beta_i \neq \beta_j$ for $i \neq j$
- a sentential form is any $\delta \in (V \cup T)^*$ such that $S \Rightarrow_G^* \delta$

The language generated by G, L(G) consists of words over the terminals derivable from the start symbol:

$$L(G) = \{ \omega \in T^* \mid S \Rightarrow_G^* \omega \}$$

(Similarly, for any $A \in V$ define $L(A) = \{\omega \in T^* \mid A \Rightarrow_G^* \omega\}$.)

2.2 Chomsky hierarchy

Chomsky hierarchy (of grammars)

Restricting the form of production rules:

- Type 0: **general grammars**
 - $\alpha_1 A \alpha_2 \rightarrow \beta$ where $A \in V$, $\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \beta \in (V \cup T)^*$
 - recursively enumerable languages \mathcal{L}_0
- Type 1: context-sensitive grammars
 - $\alpha_1 A \alpha_2 \rightarrow \alpha_1 \gamma \alpha_2$, $A \in V$, $\gamma \in (V \cup T)^+$, $\alpha_1, \alpha_2 \in (V \cup T)^*$
 - note: the variable must be rewritten to at least one symbol
 - ullet sometimes we allow $S
 ightarrow \epsilon$, then S cannot appear in any body
 - ullet context-sensitive languages \mathcal{L}_1
- Type 2: context-free grammars
 - $A \rightarrow \beta$ where $A \in V$, $\beta \in (V \cup T)^*$
 - ullet context-free languages \mathcal{L}_2
- Type 3: right-linear grammars (aka regular grammars)
 - $A \rightarrow \omega B$ or $A \rightarrow \omega$ where $A, B \in V, \omega \in T^*$
 - regular languages \mathcal{L}_3

The classes are ordered by (strict) inclusion

$$\mathcal{L}_0 \supset \mathcal{L}_1 \supset \mathcal{L}_2 \supset \mathcal{L}_3$$

- context-sensitive languages are recursively enumerable: the head of a CSG contains a variable
- context-free languages are context-sensitive: the context α_1, α_2 is empty; we can eliminate ϵ -productions $A \to \epsilon$
- regular languages are context-free: body can have any form
- strict inclusion: we will give examples later

2.3 Regular grammars

Right-linear grammars

A grammar G is right-linear (regular, type 3), if its production rules are of the form $A \to \omega B$ or $A \to \omega$ where $A, B \in V, \omega \in T^*$.

(At most one variable in the body, it can only be at the end.)

Example

$$\textit{G} = (\{\textit{S},\textit{A},\textit{B}\},\{\textit{0},\textit{1}\},\mathcal{P},\textit{S})$$
 where

$$\mathcal{P} = \{ S \to 0S \mid 1A \mid \epsilon, A \to 0A \mid 1B, B \to 0B \mid 1S \}$$

A derivation of $01101 \in L(G)$:

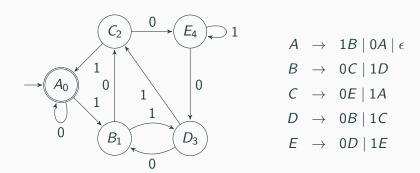
$$S \Rightarrow 0S \Rightarrow 01A \Rightarrow 011B \Rightarrow 0110B \Rightarrow 01101S \Rightarrow 01101$$

Corresponds to FA: nonterminals are states, generate means read.

Theorem

A language is regular, iff it is generated by a right-linear grammar.

Example: binary numbers divisible by 5



Derivation examples

$$A \Rightarrow 0A \Rightarrow 0$$
 $(n = 0)$
 $A \Rightarrow 1B \Rightarrow 10C \Rightarrow 101A \Rightarrow 101$ $(n = 5)$
 $A \Rightarrow 1B \Rightarrow 10C \Rightarrow 101A \Rightarrow 1010A \Rightarrow 1010$ $(n = 10)$
 $A \Rightarrow 1B \Rightarrow 11D \Rightarrow 111C \Rightarrow 1111A \Rightarrow 1111$ $(n = 15)$

Finite automaton to right-linear grammar

Given a DFA $A = (Q, \Sigma, \delta, q_0, F)$ define a right-linear grammar $G = (Q, \Sigma, \mathcal{P}, q_0)$, i.e. nonterminals are states, with productions:

- $p \rightarrow aq$ for all transitions $\delta(p, a) = q$
- $p \rightarrow \epsilon$ for every final state $p \in F$

To show that L(A) = L(G):

• For the empty word:

$$\epsilon \in L(A)$$
 iff $q_0 \in F$ iff $q_0 \to \epsilon \in \mathcal{P}$ iff $\epsilon \in L(G)$

• For a word $w = a_1 \dots a_n$: $a_1 \dots a_n \in L(A)$ iff there are $q_0, \dots, q_n \in Q$ s.t. $\delta(q_i, a_{i+1}) = q_{i+1}$ for i < n and $q_n \in F$. This means that $q_0 \Rightarrow a_1 q_1 \Rightarrow \dots \Rightarrow a_1 \dots a_n q_n \Rightarrow a_1 \dots a_n$ is derivation of $a_1 \dots a_n$, which shows that $a_1 \dots a_n \in L(G)$. \square

(Note: Same construction works for NFA or ϵ -NFA.)

Right linear grammar to finite automaton

Given a right-linear grammar we construct a ϵ -NFA.

Encoding productions based on their form:

- $A \rightarrow aB$ are encoded directly as transitions
- $A \rightarrow \epsilon$ (ϵ -productions) define accepting states
- $A \rightarrow B$ (unit productions) correspond to ϵ -transitions

Productions with more terminals, $A \rightarrow a_1 \dots a_n B$ or $A \rightarrow a_1 \dots a_n$:

- introduce new variables Y_1, Y_2, \dots, Y_{n+1}
- replace with $A \to a_1 Y_2$, $Y_2 \to a_2 Y_3$, ..., $Y_{n-1} \to a_{n-1} Y_n$, and finally either $Y_n \to a_n B$ or $Y_n \to a_n Y_{n+1}$, $Y_{n+1} \to \epsilon$

Similarly, $A \rightarrow a$ can be rewritten to $A \rightarrow aY$, $Y \rightarrow \epsilon$.

(Think of a state diagram but edges labelled with words, subdivide them. For edges pointing nowhere, add a new final state.)

Standardization of a right-linear grammar

Sometimes we want to get rid of unit productions too, this can be done by taking transitive closure (same as removing ϵ -transitions).

We call grammars G and G' equivalent if L(G) = L(G').

Lemma

For any right-linear grammar G there exist an equivalent G' which only has productions of the form $A \to aB$ or $A \to \epsilon$.

Formalizing the previous slide, define $G' = (V', T, \mathcal{P}', S)$ where V' contains the original variables V plus all new variables used for encoding. Productions \mathcal{P}' are as described.

To remove unit productions $(A \to B)$, take the transitive closure $U(A) = \{B \in V \mid A \Rightarrow^* B\}$. For every production $B \to \gamma \in \mathcal{P}$ with $B \in U(A)$ add the production $A \to \gamma$ to \mathcal{P}' .

Formalizing the construction of an automaton

Given a right-linear grammar, first standardize it: $G = (V, T, \mathcal{P}, S)$ with productions only of the form $A \to aB$ or $A \to \epsilon$.

Define an NFA $A=(Q,\Sigma,\delta,S_0,F)$, where Q=V, $\Sigma=T$, $S_0=\{S\}$, $F=\{A\mid A\to\epsilon\in\mathcal{P}\}$, and the transitions are:

$$\delta(A,a) = \{B \mid A \to aB \in \mathcal{P}\} \text{ for } A \in V, a \in T$$

To show that L(G) = L(A): For the empty word, $\epsilon \in L(G)$ iff $S \to \epsilon \in \mathcal{P}$ iff $S \in F$ iff $\epsilon \in L(A)$. Otherwise, $w = a_1 \dots a_n \in L(G)$ iff there is a derivation $S \Rightarrow a_1 X_1 \Rightarrow \dots \Rightarrow a_1 \dots a_n X_n \Rightarrow a_1 \dots a_n$.

Equivalently, in A there are states $X_0, X_1, \ldots, X_n \in Q$ such that $X_0 = S \in S_0, X_n \in F$ and $X_{i+1} \in \delta(X_i, a_i)$. But this means that $a_1 \ldots a_n \in L(A)$.

(Note: Easier to leave unit productions in, construct an ϵ -NFA: $\delta(A, \epsilon) = \{B \mid A \rightarrow B \in \mathcal{P}\}.$)

Linear grammars an linear languages

A context-free grammar is

- left-linear if productions are of the form $A \to B\omega$ or $A \to \omega$,
- linear if productions are of the form $A \to \omega B \omega'$ or $A \to \omega$

where $A, B \in V$ and $\omega, \omega' \in T^*$. A language is linear if it is generated by some linear grammar.

- Left-linear grammars generate regular languages. (L is regular iff L^R is, reversing bodies gives a right-linear grammar.)
- But not every linear language is regular! Example: $L = \{0^n1^n \mid n \ge 1\}$, linear rules $S \to 0S1 \mid 01$
- Observe: productions can be split to left-linear and right-linear
- Not every context-free language is linear, for example $L = \{w \in \{0,1\}^* \mid |w|_0 = |w|_1\}$. Context-free grammar later, to prove non-linearity use a version of PL for linear languages.

2.4 Context-free grammars

Example: simple expressions

Recall that in a CFG, the head always consists of a single variable.

Consider
$$G=(\{E,I\},\{+,*,(,),a,b,0,1\},\mathcal{P},E)$$
 where
$$\mathcal{P}=\{E\to I,$$

$$E\to E+E,$$

$$E\to E+E,$$

$$E\to (E).$$

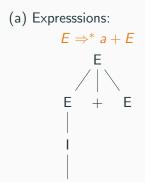
$$I \rightarrow a \mid b \mid Ia \mid Ib \mid I0 \mid I1 \}$$

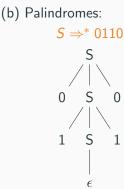
- Rules 1-4 describe expressions *E*.
- Rules 5-10 describe identifiers I, correspond to the regular expression (a + b)(a + b + 0 + 1)*.

Parse trees

The tree is the data structure of choice to represent the source program in a compiler, facilitating translation into executable code.

Derivations from CFG naturally correspond to trees. Apply a production → append symbols from body as children of head.





The definition

A parse tree for a CFG is a labeled ordered tree such that:

- \bullet inner nodes are labeled by variables from V
- the root is labeled by the start symbol S
- leaves have labels from $V \cup T \cup \{\epsilon\}$
- ullet if a leaf is labeled ϵ , it must be the only child of its parent
- if an inner node is labeled A and its children X_1, \ldots, X_k (ordered left-to-right), then $A \to X_1, \ldots, X_k \in P$

The yield of a parse tree is the string $\gamma \in (V \cup T)^*$ obtained by reading the labels on all leaves left-to-right.

Note: yields containing only terminals \leftrightsquigarrow words from the language

Leftmost and rightmost derivations

Leftmost derivation \Rightarrow_{lm} , \Rightarrow_{lm}^* : in each step rewrite the leftmost (first) variable; rightmost \Rightarrow_{rm} , \Rightarrow_{rm}^* : rewrite the rightmost (last)

Example: Same productions for each variable but different order

- leftmost: $E \Rightarrow_{lm} E * E \Rightarrow_{lm} I * E \Rightarrow_{lm} a * E \Rightarrow_{lm} a * (E)$ $\Rightarrow_{lm} a * (E + E) \Rightarrow_{lm} a * (I + E) \Rightarrow_{lm} a * (a + E) \Rightarrow_{lm} \Rightarrow_{lm}$ $a * (a + I) \Rightarrow_{lm} a * (a + I0) \Rightarrow_{lm} a * (a + I00) \Rightarrow_{lm} a * (a + b00)$
- rightmost: $E \Rightarrow_{rm} E * E \Rightarrow_{rm} E * (E) \Rightarrow_{rm} E * (E + E) \Rightarrow_{rm} E * (E + I) \Rightarrow_{rm} E * (E + I0) \Rightarrow_{rm} E * (E + I00) \Rightarrow_{rm} E * (E + b00) \Rightarrow_{rm} E * (I + b00) \Rightarrow_{rm} E * (a + b00) \Rightarrow_{rm} I * (a + b00) \Rightarrow_{rm} a * (a + b00)$

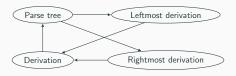
Derivations and parse trees

Theorem

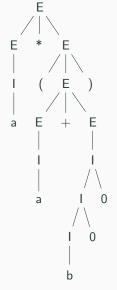
Given a context-free grammar G = (V, T, P, S) and $\gamma \in (V \cup T)^*$, the following are equivalent:

- (i) $A \Rightarrow^* \gamma$
- (ii) $A \Rightarrow_{lm}^* \gamma$
- (iii) $A \Rightarrow_{rm}^* \gamma$
- (iv) There is a parse tree with root A and yield γ .

Proof (ii) \Rightarrow (i) and (iii) \Rightarrow (i) are trivial. We will show (i) \Rightarrow (iv) and (iv) \Rightarrow (ii) [analogously (iv) \Rightarrow (iii)].



Parse tree to leftmost derivation: an example



- Root: $E \Rightarrow_{lm} E * E$
- Leftmost child of the root: $E \Rightarrow_{lm} l \Rightarrow_{lm} a$
- Rightmost child of the root: $E \Rightarrow_{lm} (E) \Rightarrow_{lm} (E+E) \Rightarrow_{lm} (I+E) \Rightarrow_{lm} (a+E)$ $\Rightarrow_{lm} (a+I) \Rightarrow_{lm} (a+I0) \Rightarrow_{lm} (a+I00) \Rightarrow_{lm} (a+b00)$
- Leftmost integrated to root: $E \Rightarrow_{lm} E * E \Rightarrow_{lm} I * E \Rightarrow_{lm} a * E$
- Full derivation: $E \Rightarrow_{lm} E * E \Rightarrow_{lm} I * E \Rightarrow_{lm} a * E \Rightarrow_{lm}$ $\Rightarrow_{lm} a * (E) \Rightarrow_{lm} a * (E + E) \Rightarrow_{lm} a * (I + E) \Rightarrow_{lm}$ $\Rightarrow_{lm} a * (a + E) \Rightarrow_{lm} a * (a + I) \Rightarrow_{lm} a * (a + I) \Rightarrow_{lm}$ $\Rightarrow_{lm} a * (a + I) \Rightarrow_{lm} a * (a + I)$

Parse tree to leftmost derivation: the proof

Observe: If $\beta_1 \Rightarrow \beta_2 \Rightarrow \cdots \Rightarrow \beta_n$ is a derivation, then for any $\alpha, \alpha' \in (V \cup T)^*$, $\alpha\beta_1\alpha' \Rightarrow \alpha\beta_2\alpha' \Rightarrow \cdots \Rightarrow \alpha\beta_n\alpha'$ is a derivation.

Suppose we have a parse tree with root A and yield γ . Induction on the depth of the tree.

Base: depth 1, root A with children that read γ

 $A \rightarrow \gamma$ is a production, thus $A \Rightarrow_{\mathit{Im}} \gamma$ is a one-step derivation

Induction step: depth n > 1, root A with children X_1, X_2, \dots, X_k

- If X_i is a terminal, define $\gamma_i = X_i$
- If X_i is a variable, then by induction $X_i \Rightarrow_{lm}^* \gamma_i$.

To construct the leftmost derivation, show by induction on $i=1,\ldots,k$ that $A\Rightarrow_{lm}^*\gamma_1\gamma_2\ldots\gamma_iX_{i+1}X_{i+2}\ldots X_k$

Finally, when i = k, the result is a leftmost derivation of γ from A.

The induction within the induction

Assuming that $A \Rightarrow_{lm}^* \gamma_1 \gamma_2 \dots \gamma_{i-1} X_i X_{i+1} X_{i+2} \dots X_k$, show

$$A \Rightarrow_{lm}^* \gamma_1 \gamma_2 \dots \gamma_i X_{i+1} X_{i+2} \dots X_k$$

- If X_i is a terminal, do nothing, just increment i.
- If X_i is a variable, rewrite the derivation

$$X_i \Rightarrow_{lm} \alpha_1 \Rightarrow_{lm} \alpha_2 \cdots \Rightarrow_{lm} \gamma_i$$

to the following:

$$\gamma_{1}\gamma_{2}\dots\gamma_{i-1}X_{i}X_{i+1}X_{i+2}\dots X_{k} \Rightarrow_{lm}$$

$$\gamma_{1}\gamma_{2}\dots\gamma_{i-1}\alpha_{1}X_{i+1}X_{i+2}\dots X_{k} \Rightarrow_{lm}$$

$$\vdots$$

$$\Rightarrow_{lm}\gamma_{1}\gamma_{2}\dots\gamma_{i-1}\gamma_{i}X_{i+1}X_{i+2}\dots X_{k}$$

(To construct a rightmost derivation, go from i = k down to 1.)

Derivation to parse tree

Suppose we have a derivation $A = \beta_1 \Rightarrow \beta_2 \Rightarrow \cdots \Rightarrow \beta_n = \gamma$.

We construct a parse tree with root A and yield γ by induction on the number of steps n in the derivation.

Base (n = 1): A is a single-vertex parse tree

Induction step (n > 1): We have $A \Rightarrow^* \beta_{n-1} \Rightarrow \beta_n$.

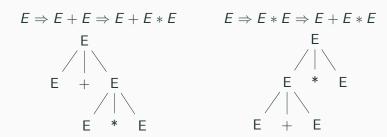
Suppose $\beta_{n-1} = \alpha C \alpha'$ and $\beta_n = \alpha \delta \alpha'$ for a production $C \to \delta$.

By induction, we have a parse tree with root A and yield $\alpha C \alpha'$. Find the leaf corresponding to C and append to it new leaves labelled by the symbols from δ .

This shows that (i) \Rightarrow (iv), and thus the theorem is proved.

2.5 Ambiguity in grammars

Ambiguity: an example

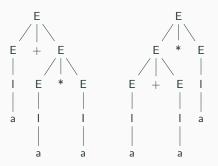


- Two different parse trees for the same expression.
- Important difference: 1 + (2 * 3) = 7 but (1 + 2) * 3 = 9
- Imagine source file interpretable as two different programs.
- This grammar can be modified to remove ambiguity.
- Different derivations with the same parse tree are not an issue (e.g. left-most and right-most).

Amiguous context-free grammars

A context-free grammar G is ambiguous if for some $\omega \in L(G)$ there exist two different parse trees with root S and yield ω . Otherwise the grammar is unambiguous.

Example: our grammar for simple expressions is ambiguous, $\omega = a + a * a \in L(G)$ is yielded by both of the following parse trees:



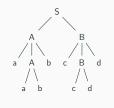
Inherent ambiguity of context-free languages

A context-free language L is unambiguous if there exists an unambiguous grammar generating it, and L is inherently ambiguous otherwise (i.e., if every CFG for L is ambiguous).

Example: $L = \{a^n b^n c^k d^k \mid n, k \ge 1\} \cup \{a^n b^k c^k d^n \mid n, k \ge 1\}$ is inherently ambiguous. Here is an ambiguous grammar with two parse trees for $\omega = aabbccdd$.

$$S \rightarrow AB \mid C$$

 $A \rightarrow aAb \mid ab$
 $B \rightarrow cBd \mid cd$
 $C \rightarrow aCd \mid aDd$
 $D \rightarrow bDc \mid bc$



Why inherently? Idea: any grammar will generate at least some $a^nb^nc^nd^n$ in the two different ways.



Removing ambiguity

- There is no algorithm deciding if a given CFG is ambiguous.
- There exist inherently ambiguous context-free languages (see the example above).
- There are certain techniques for removing ambiguity.

Different causes for ambiguity:

- The precedence of operators is not respected.
- A sequence of identical operators associates from left or right.
- E.g. for rules $S \to \text{if then } S \text{ else } S \mid \text{if then } S \mid \epsilon$, the word if then if then else has two meanings: if then (if then else) or if then (if then) else

Possible solutions:

- syntax error (Algol 60)
- else belongs to the closer if (rules ordered by preference)
- parentheses, begin—end, or indentation (Python)

Enforcing precedence

Introduce a new variable for each level of 'binding strength': '

- a factor is an expression that cannot be broken by any operator: identifiers, parenthesized expressions
- a term is an expression not broken by +
- an expression can be broken by either * or +.

An unambiguous grammar:

$$I \rightarrow a \mid b \mid Ia \mid Ib \mid I0 \mid I1$$

 $F \rightarrow I \mid (E)$
 $T \rightarrow F \mid T * F$
 $E \rightarrow T \mid E + T$

right: the only parse tree for a + a * a



Unambiguity and compilers

Compiling an expression (a stack for intermediate results + two registers):

- (1) $E \rightarrow E + T$... pop r1; pop r2; add r1,r2; push r2
- (2) $E \rightarrow T$
- (3) $T \rightarrow T * F$... pop r1; pop r2; mul r1,r2; push r2
- (4) $T \rightarrow F$
- (5) $F \rightarrow (E)$
- (6) $F \rightarrow a$... push a
 - 'a+a*a' is obtained by applying rules 1,2,4,6,3,4,6,6
 - reverse the sequence and choose only code-generating rules: 6,6,3,6,1
 - now replace the rules with the corresponding code:
 push a; push a; pop r1; pop r2; mul r1,r2; push
 r2; push a; pop r1; pop r2; add r1,r2; push r2

Summary of Lecture 5

- Grammars: general, context-sensitive, context-free, right-linear (regular) – Chomsky hierarchy
- The language of a grammar, derivation
- Right-linear grammars correspond to FA (and so do left/linear)
- Linear grammars are stronger
- Context-free grammars: parse tree and its yield
- (un)ambiguous grammars, inherently ambiguous languages