# COM3064 Automata Theory

Week 6: Context Free Languages

Lecturer: Dr. Sevgi YİĞİT SERT Spring 2023

**Resources**: Introduction to The Theory of Computation, M. Sipser,
Introduction to Automata Theory, Languages, and Computation, J.E. Hopcroft, R. Motwani, and J.D. Ullman BBM401 Automata Theory and Formal Languages, İlyas Çiçekli

#### **Grammars**

- Grammars express languages
- Example: the English language

$$\langle sentence \rangle \rightarrow \langle noun \_phrase \rangle \langle predicate \rangle$$

$$\langle noun \_ phrase \rangle \rightarrow \langle article \rangle \langle noun \rangle$$

$$\langle predicate \rangle \rightarrow \langle verb \rangle$$

# A derivation of "the dog walks"

```
\langle sentence \rangle \rightarrow \langle noun \_ phrase \rangle \langle predicate \rangle
                                                                                                                \langle article \rangle \rightarrow a
\langle noun \ \_phrase \rangle \rightarrow \langle article \rangle \langle noun \rangle
                                                                                                                \langle article \rangle \rightarrow the
\langle predicate \rangle \rightarrow \langle verb \rangle
                                                                                                                \langle noun \rangle \rightarrow cat
 \langle sentence \rangle \Rightarrow \langle noun \_phrase \rangle \langle predicate \rangle
                         \Rightarrow \langle noun \_ phrase \rangle \langle verb \rangle
                                                                                                                 \langle noun \rangle \rightarrow dog
                         \Rightarrow \langle article \rangle \langle noun \rangle \langle verb \rangle
                         \Rightarrow the \langle noun \rangle \langle verb \rangle
                                                                                                                \langle verb \rangle \rightarrow runs
                         \Rightarrow the dog \langle verb \rangle
                                                                                                                \langle verb \rangle \rightarrow walks
                         \Rightarrow the dog walks
```

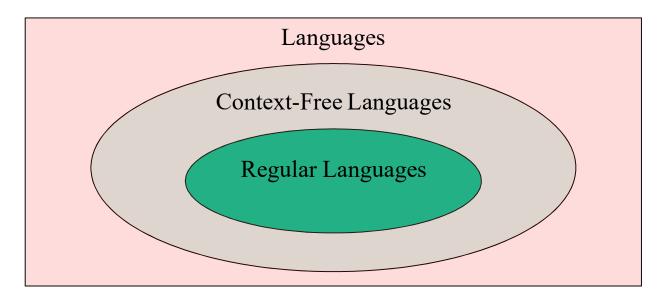
## Language of the grammar

### **Context-Free Grammars**

- We have seen that many languages cannot be regular.
  - We need to consider larger classes of languages.
  - Context-Free Languages (CFLs) is a larger class of regular languages.
  - Every regular language is a context-free language.
- Regular expressions are used to define regular languages.
- Context-Free Grammars (CFGs) are used to define Context-Free Languages (CFLs).
- Pushdown Automata recognize CFLs.
- Context-Free Grammars (CFGs) played a central role in natural language processing, and compilers.
  - The syntax of a programming language is described by a CFG.
  - A parser for a programming language is a **pushdown automata**.

# **Context-Free Grammars and Context-Free Languages**

- A context-free grammar is a notation for describing languages.
- CFGs are more powerful than REs, but they cannot still define all possible languages.
  - CFGs define Context-Free Languages (CFLs).
  - CFGs are useful to describe nested structures.
  - Since every regular language is a CFL, it can be defined by a CFG.
  - There are also languages that are not CFLs.



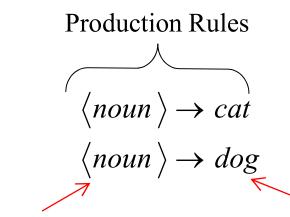
# CFG – Example

- The language  $\{0^n 1^n \mid n \ge 0\}$  is not a regular language, but it is a CFL.
  - It can be defined by a CFG.
- A CFG for  $\{0^n 1^n \mid n \ge 0\}$  is

$$S \rightarrow \epsilon$$

$$S \rightarrow 0S1$$

- 0 and 1 are terminals.
- S is a variable (or nonterminal).
- S is also the **start symbol** of this CFG.
- $S \rightarrow \epsilon$  and  $S \rightarrow 0S1$  are productions or rules



Variable

Terminal

#### Formal Definition of CFGs

• A **context-free grammar** *G* is a quadruple

$$G = (V, T, P, S)$$

- V is a finite set of variables (non-terminals).
- T is a finite set of terminals.
- **P** is a finite set of **production rules** of the form  $A \to \alpha$ , where **A** is a variable and  $\alpha \in (V \cup T)^*$

The left side of a production is a variable and its right side is a string of variables and terminals.

• S is a designated variable called the **start symbol**.

# **CFG - Example**

Consider the language of palindromes

$$L_{pal} = \{ w \in \Sigma^* : w = w^R \}$$

- Some members of L<sub>pal</sub>: abba bob ses tat
- $L_{pal}$  is NOT regular, but  $L_{pal}$  is a context-free language.
- Let  $\Sigma = \{0,1\}$  be the alphabet for  $L_{pal}$ .
- In this case,  $\varepsilon$ , 0, 1, 00, 11, 000, 010, 101, 111, 0110,... will be in L<sub>pal</sub>.
- A CFG  $G_{pal}$  for  $L_{pal}$  is:

$$G_{\text{pal}} = (\{S\}, \{0,1\}, \{S \to \varepsilon, S \to 0, S \to 1, S \to 0S0, S \to 1S1\}, S)$$

• Sometimes, we use a shorthand for a list of production rules with the same left side.

$$S \rightarrow \epsilon \mid 0 \mid 1 \mid 0S0 \mid 1S1$$

#### **Derivation**

- Initially, we have a string that only contains the **start symbol**.
- We expand the **start symbol** using a production rule whose left side is the start symbol.
  - i.e. we replace the start symbol with a string which appears on the right side of a production rule belongs to the start symbol.
- If the resulting string contains at least one variable, we further expand the resulting string by replacing one of its variables with the right side (body) of one of its production rules.
  - We can continue these replacements until we derive a string consisting entirely of terminals.
- The language of the grammar is the set of all strings of terminals that we can be obtained in this way.
- Replacement of a variable (in a string) with the right side of one of its productions is called as derivation.

#### **Derivation** $\Rightarrow$

- Suppose G = (V, T, P, S) is a CFG.
- Let  $\alpha A\beta$  be a string of terminals and variables where **A** is a variable.
  - i.e.  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are strings in  $(V \cup T)^*$ , and A is V.
- Let  $A \rightarrow \gamma$  be a production rule of G.
- Then, we say that

$$\alpha A\beta \Rightarrow \alpha \gamma \beta$$
 is a derivation

• One derivation step can replace any variable in the string with the right side (body) of one of its productions.

#### **Derivation** $\Rightarrow$

• Grammar G:  $S \rightarrow Ab$ 

$$A \rightarrow aAb$$

$$A \rightarrow \lambda$$

• Derivations :

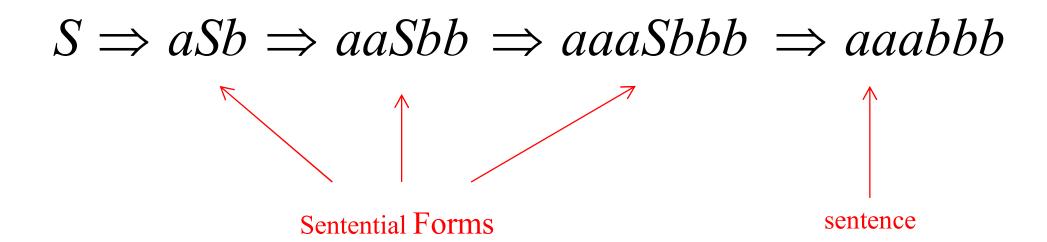
$$S \Rightarrow Ab \Rightarrow b$$

$$S \Rightarrow Ab \Rightarrow aAbb \Rightarrow abb$$

$$S \Rightarrow Ab \Rightarrow aAbb \Rightarrow aaAbbb \Rightarrow aabbb$$

#### **Derivation** $\Rightarrow$

• Sentential Form: A sentence that contains variables and terminals



# **Derivation Sequence**

- We can extend the derivation (⇒) relationship to represent zero or more derivation steps.
- We use symbol  $\stackrel{*}{\Rightarrow}$  to denote zero or more steps of a derivation sequence.

- In other words,  $\alpha \stackrel{*}{\Rightarrow} \beta$ ,  $\beta$  means that there is a sequence of strings  $\gamma_1, \gamma_2, ..., \gamma_n$  for some  $n \geq 1$  such that
  - 1.  $\alpha = \gamma_1$ ,
  - 2.  $\beta = \gamma_n$ , and
  - 3. for i = 1, 2, ..., n 1, we have  $\gamma_i \Rightarrow \gamma_{i+1}$

## **Derivation Sequence – Example**

- Let CFG  $G = (\{S\}, \{0,1\}, \{S \rightarrow \varepsilon, S \rightarrow 0S1\}, S)$
- $S \Rightarrow 0S1 \Rightarrow 00S11 \Rightarrow 000S111 \Rightarrow 000111$  is a derivation sequence.
  - S derives 000111; or 000111 is derived from S.
- That is,  $S \stackrel{*}{\Rightarrow} 00011$  and also
- $S \stackrel{*}{\Rightarrow} 000S111$
- $S \stackrel{*}{\Rightarrow} 00S11$
- 0S1 <sup>\*</sup>⇒ 000S111
- 00S11 <sup>\*</sup>⇒000111
- $S \Rightarrow 0S1 \Rightarrow 00S11 \Rightarrow 0011$  is a derivation sequence.

# **Derivation Sequence – Example**

#### A CFG:

$$S \rightarrow ASB \mid c$$

$$A \rightarrow \epsilon \mid aA$$

$$B \rightarrow \epsilon \mid bB$$

Derivation Sequences of acb from S.

$$S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow aASB \Rightarrow aSB \Rightarrow acB \Rightarrow acbB \Rightarrow acb$$
  
 $S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow ASbB \Rightarrow Asb \Rightarrow Acb \Rightarrow aAcb \Rightarrow acb$   
 $S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow AcB \Rightarrow aAcB \Rightarrow aAcbB \Rightarrow acbB \Rightarrow acb$ 

• We may select any non-terminal (variable) of the string for the replacement in each derivation step.

## **Leftmost and Rightmost Derivations**

• Leftmost Derivation  $\Rightarrow$  always replaces the leftmost variable (in the string) with one of its rule-bodies

$$S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow aASB \Rightarrow aSB \Rightarrow acB \Rightarrow acbB \Rightarrow acb$$

• Rightmost Derivation  $\Rightarrow_{rm}$  always replaces the righmost variable (in the string) by one of its rule-bodies.

$$S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow ASbB \Rightarrow ASb \Rightarrow Acb \Rightarrow aAcb \Rightarrow acb$$

# **Leftmost and Rightmost Derivations**

$$S \rightarrow ASB \mid c$$
 $A \rightarrow \epsilon \mid aA$ 
 $B \rightarrow \epsilon \mid bB$ 

Derivation Sequences of acb from S.

$$S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow aASB \Rightarrow aSB \Rightarrow acB \Rightarrow acbB \Rightarrow acb$$

 $S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow aASB \Rightarrow aSB \Rightarrow AcB \Rightarrow aAcB \Rightarrow acb$ 

 $S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow AcB \Rightarrow aAcB \Rightarrow aAcbB \Rightarrow acbB \Rightarrow acb$  is **NOT** a leftmost or rightmost derivation.

is a **leftmost derivation** 

is a rightmost derivation

# The Language of a CFG

• If G = (V, T, P, S) is a CFG, then **the language of** G is

$$L(G) = \{ w \in T^* : S \stackrel{*}{\Rightarrow} w \}$$

- i.e. the set of strings of terminals (strings over  $T^*$ ) that are derivable from S
- If we call L(G) as a **context-free language**.
  - Ex:  $L(G_{pal})$  is a context-free language.
- For each CFL, there is a CFG, and each CFG generates a CFL.
- Every regular language is a CFL.
  - That is, regular languages are a proper subset of context-free languages

# The Language of a CFG - Example

A context-free grammar  $G: S \rightarrow aSa$ 

$$S \rightarrow bSb$$

$$S \to \lambda$$

A derivation:

$$S \Rightarrow aSa \Rightarrow abSba \Rightarrow abba$$

# The Language of a CFG - Example

A context-free grammar  $G: S \rightarrow aSa$ 

$$S \rightarrow bSb$$

$$S \to \lambda$$

A derivation:

$$S \Rightarrow aSa \Rightarrow abSba \Rightarrow abba$$

Another derivation:

$$S \Rightarrow aSa \Rightarrow abSba \Rightarrow abaSaba \Rightarrow abaaba$$

# The Language of a CFG - Example

A context-free grammar  $G: S \rightarrow aSa$ 

$$S \rightarrow bSb$$

$$S \to \lambda$$

A derivation:

$$S \Rightarrow aSa \Rightarrow abSba \Rightarrow abba$$

Another derivation:

$$S \Rightarrow aSa \Rightarrow abSba \Rightarrow abaSaba \Rightarrow abaaba$$

$$L(G) = \{ww^R : w \in \{a,b\}^*\}$$

#### **Parse Trees**

- **Parse trees** are an alternative representation to derivations.
- If  $v \in L(G)$ , for some CFG, then v has a parse tree, which tells us the (syntactic) structure of w.
  - If G is unambiguous, v can have only one parse tree.
  - If G is ambiguous, v may have more than one parse tree.
  - Ideally there should be only one parse tree for each string in the language. This means that the grammar should be unambiguous.
    - We may remove the ambiguity from some of ambiguous grammars in order to obtain unambiguous grammars by making certain assumptions.
    - Unfortunately, some CFLs are inherently ambiguous and they can be only defined by ambiguous grammars.

# **Constructing Parse Trees**

- Let G = (V, T, P, S) be a CFG.
- A tree is a parse tree for G if:
  - 1. Each interior node is labeled by a variable in V.
    - The root must be labeled by the start symbol S.
  - 2. Each leaf is labeled by a symbol in  $T \cup \{\varepsilon\}$ .
    - Any  $\varepsilon$  -labeled leaf is the only child of its parent.
  - 3. If an interior node is labeled by the variable A, and its children (from left to right) labeled  $X_1, X_2, ..., X_k$  then  $A \to X_1 X_2 ... X_k \in P$ .

# **Parse Tree - Example**

Grammar:

$$S \rightarrow ASB \mid c$$

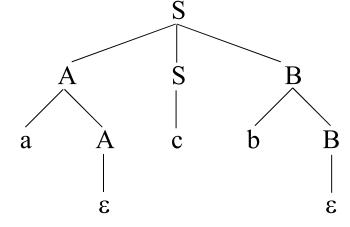
$$A \rightarrow \epsilon \mid aA$$

$$B \rightarrow \epsilon \mid bB$$

A Derivation Sequence of **acb** 

$$S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow aASB \Rightarrow aCB \Rightarrow$$

Parse tree of acb



#### Grammar:

$$S \rightarrow ASB \mid c$$

$$A \rightarrow \epsilon \mid aA$$

$$B \rightarrow \epsilon \mid bB$$

• Each derivation step corresponds to the creation of an inner node (by creating its children).

S

S

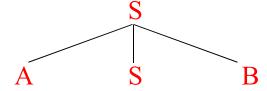
#### Grammar:

$$S \rightarrow ASB \mid c$$

$$A \rightarrow \epsilon \mid aA$$

$$B \rightarrow \epsilon \mid bB$$

$$S \Rightarrow ASB$$



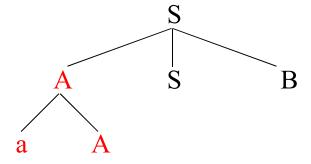
#### Grammar:

$$S \rightarrow ASB \mid c$$

$$A \rightarrow \epsilon \mid aA$$

$$B \rightarrow \epsilon \mid bB$$

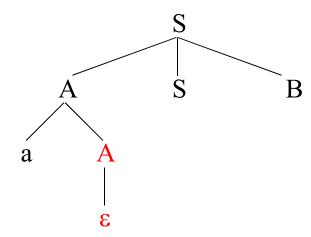
$$S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow aASB$$



#### Grammar:

$$S \rightarrow ASB \mid c$$
 $A \rightarrow \epsilon \mid aA$ 
 $B \rightarrow \epsilon \mid bB$ 

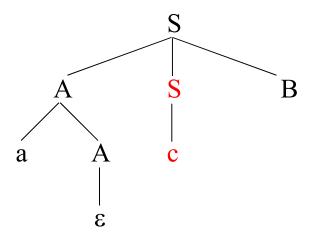
$$S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow aASB \Rightarrow aSB$$



#### Grammar:

$$S \rightarrow ASB \mid c$$
 $A \rightarrow \epsilon \mid aA$ 
 $B \rightarrow \epsilon \mid bB$ 

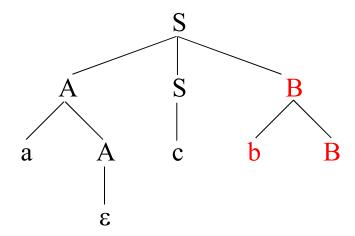
$$S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow aASB \Rightarrow aSB \Rightarrow aCB$$



#### Grammar:

$$S \rightarrow ASB \mid c$$
 $A \rightarrow \epsilon \mid aA$ 
 $B \rightarrow \epsilon \mid bB$ 

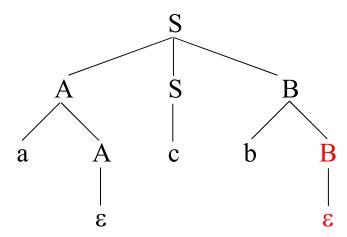
$$S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow aASB \Rightarrow acB \Rightarrow acB \Rightarrow acbB$$



#### Grammar:

$$S \rightarrow ASB \mid c$$
 $A \rightarrow \epsilon \mid aA$ 
 $B \rightarrow \epsilon \mid bB$ 

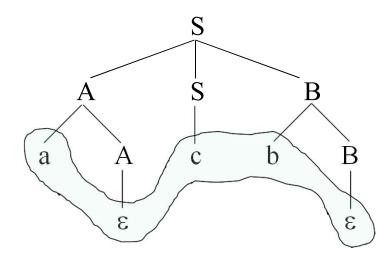
$$S \Rightarrow ASB \Rightarrow aASB \Rightarrow aCB \Rightarrow$$



#### The Yield of a Parse Tree

- The concatenation of the labels of the leaves in left-to-right order is called the yield of the parse tree.
- The yield of the parse tree is a string of terminals.
  - The set of all yields of all parse trees of a CFG G is the language of G.
- Yield Example:

$$\mathbf{a} \, \varepsilon \, \mathbf{c} \, \mathbf{b} \, \varepsilon = \mathbf{acb}$$



For every parse tree, there is a unique leftmost, and a unique rightmost derivation.

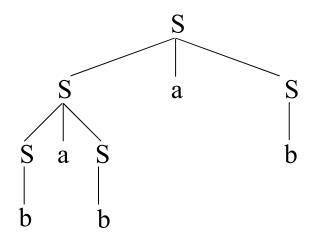
# **Ambiguous Grammars**

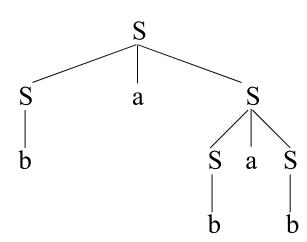
- A CFG is ambiguous if it produces more than one parse tree for a string in the language.
  - i.e. there is a string in the language that is the yield of two or more parse trees.

#### Example:

 $S \rightarrow SaS \mid b$  is an ambiguous grammar.

There are two parse trees for the string **babab** 





# **Ambiguity, Leftmost and Rightmost Derivations**

- If there are two different parse trees for a string in the language, they must produce two different **leftmost derivations** for that string.
  - Conversely, two different leftmost derivations of a string produce two different parse trees for that string.
- Likewise for rightmost derivations.
- Thus, equivalent definitions of **ambiguous grammar** are:
- 1. A CFG is ambiguous if there is a string in the language that has two different leftmost derivations.
- 2. A CFG is ambiguous if there is a string in the language that has two different rightmost derivations.

# **Ambiguity, Leftmost and Rightmost Derivations**

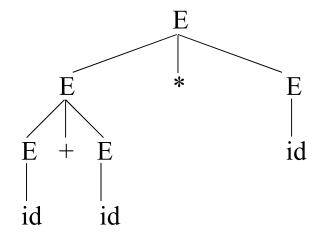
$$S \rightarrow SaS \mid b$$

- There are two **leftmost** derivation sequences for the string **babab**
- 1.  $S \Rightarrow_{lm} SaS \Rightarrow_{lm} SaSaS \Rightarrow_{lm} babaS \Rightarrow_{lm} babab$
- 2.  $S \Rightarrow_{lm} SaS \Rightarrow_{lm} baSaS \Rightarrow_{lm} babaS \Rightarrow_{lm} babab$

- There are two **rightmost** derivation sequences for the string **babab**
- 1.  $S \Rightarrow SaS \Rightarrow Sab \Rightarrow SaSab \Rightarrow Sabab \Rightarrow babab$
- 2.  $S \Rightarrow_{rm} SaS \Rightarrow_{rm} SaSaS \Rightarrow_{rm} SaSab \Rightarrow_{rm} Sabab \Rightarrow_{rm} babab$

# **Ambiguity**

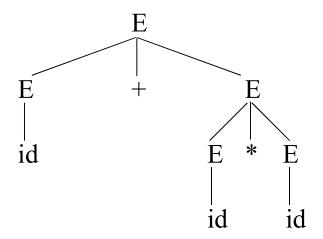
- An ambiguous grammar for expressions:  $E \rightarrow E+E \mid E*E \mid E^E \mid id \mid (E)$
- 2 parse trees, 2 leftmost and 2 rightmost derivations for the expression id+id\*id



$$E \underset{lm}{\Longrightarrow} E^*E \underset{lm}{\Longrightarrow} E+E^*E \underset{lm}{\Longrightarrow} id+E^*E$$
  
 $\underset{lm}{\Longrightarrow} id+id^*E \underset{lm}{\Longrightarrow} id+id^*id$ 

$$E \Rightarrow E^*E \Rightarrow E^*id \Rightarrow E+E^*id \Rightarrow rm$$

$$E+id^*id \Rightarrow id+id^*id$$

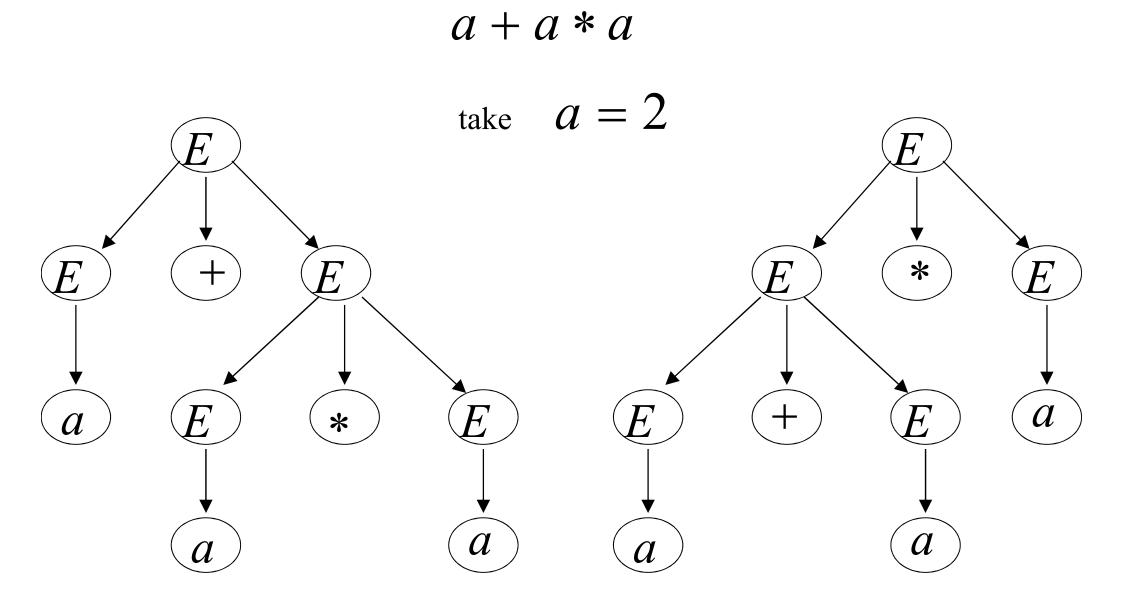


$$E \underset{lm}{\Longrightarrow} E+E \underset{lm}{\Longrightarrow} id+E \underset{lm}{\Longrightarrow} id+E*E$$

$$\underset{lm}{\Longrightarrow} id+id*E \underset{lm}{\Longrightarrow} id+id*id$$

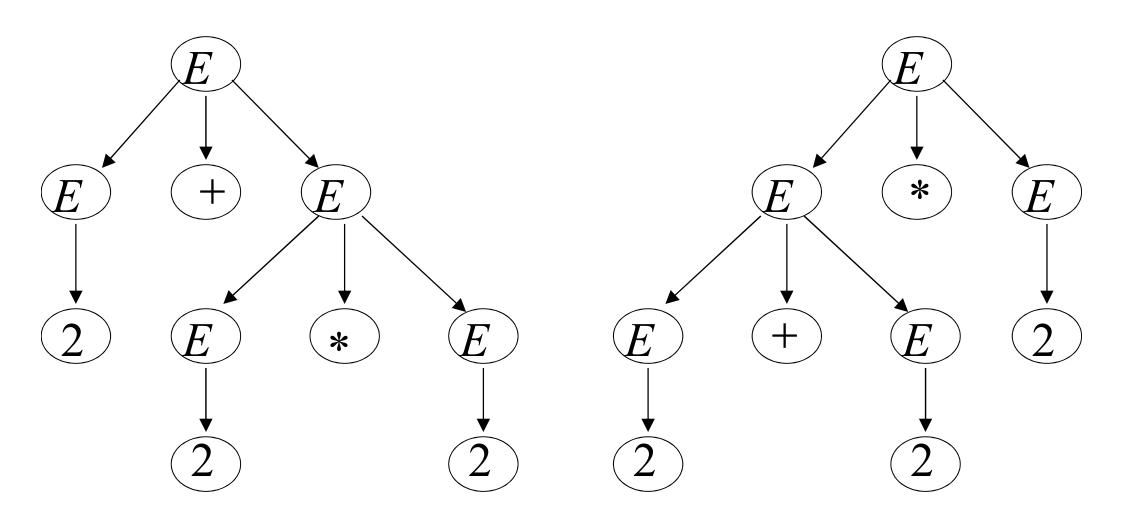
$$E \underset{rm}{\Longrightarrow} E + E \underset{rm}{\Longrightarrow} E + E^*E \underset{rm}{\Longrightarrow} E + E^*id \underset{rm}{\Longrightarrow} E + id^*id \underset{rm}{\Longrightarrow} id + id^*id$$

# Why do we care about ambiguity?



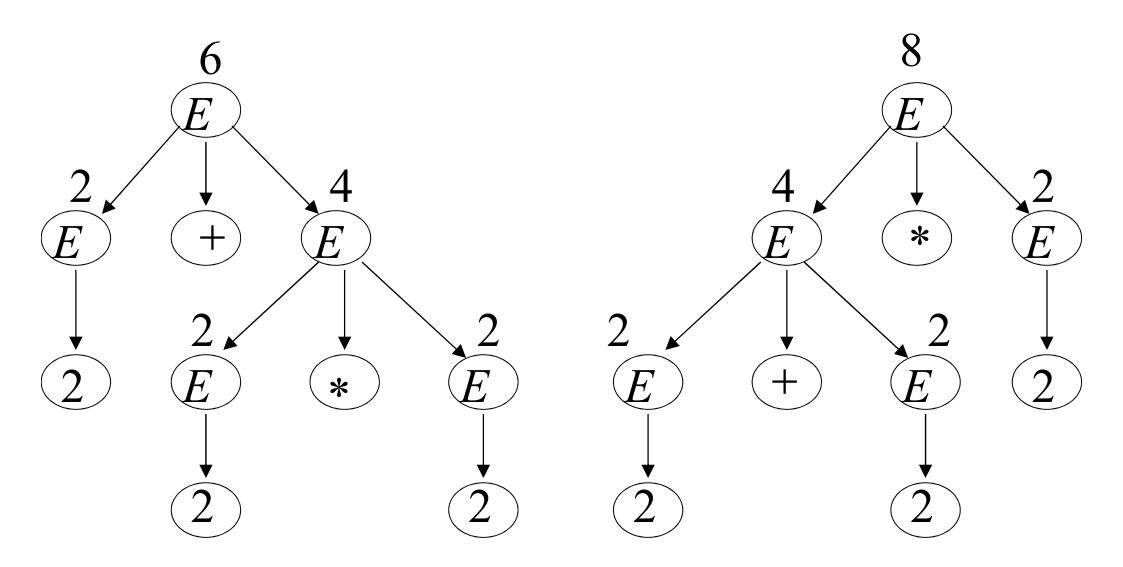
# Why do we care about ambiguity?

$$2 + 2 * 2$$



$$2 + 2 * 2 = 6$$

$$2 + 2 * 2 = 8$$

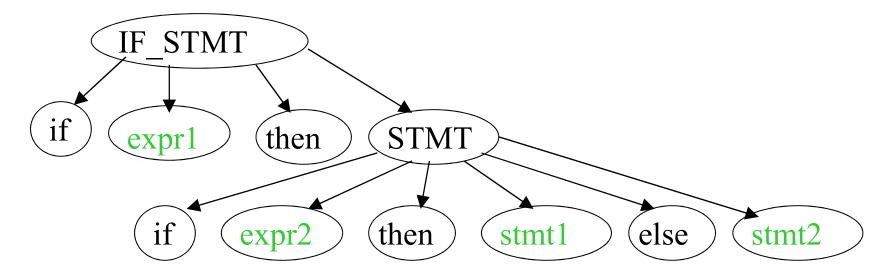


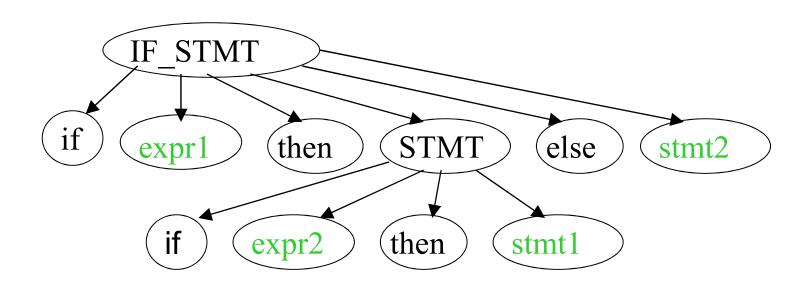
# Another ambigious grammar

 $IF\_STMT \longrightarrow if EXPR then STMT$ 

if EXPR then STMT else STMT

#### If expr1 then if expr2 then stmt1 else stmt2





### **Ambiguity**

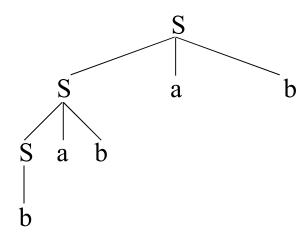
• We can create an equivalent CFG (which produces the same language) by eliminating the ambiguity from the following ambiguous CFG.

$$S \rightarrow SaS \mid b$$

• In the following unambiguous CFG, we prefer left groupings.

$$S \rightarrow Sab \mid b$$

• Now, there is only one parse tree for the string **babab** 



# **Ambiguity – Operator Precedence**

• Ambiguous grammars (because of ambiguous operators) can be disambiguated according to the precedence and associativity rules.

$$E \rightarrow E+E \mid E*E \mid E^E \mid id \mid (E)$$

Disambiguated grammar:

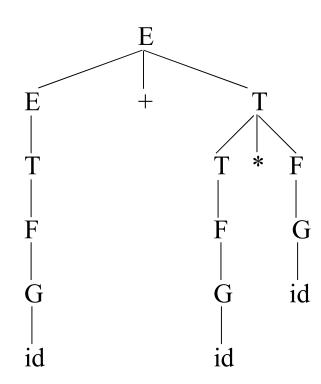
$$E \rightarrow E+T \mid T$$

$$T \rightarrow T*F \mid F$$

$$F \rightarrow G^{F} \mid G$$

$$G \rightarrow id \mid (E)$$

parse tree for id+id\*id



### **Inherent Ambiguity**

- Some CFLs may have both ambiguous grammars and unambiguous grammar.
  - In this case, we may disambiguate their ambiguous grammars.
- Unfortunately, there are some CFLs that do not have any unambiguous grammar.
- A context free language L is said to be inherently ambiguous if all its grammars are ambiguous.

- If even one grammar for L is unambiguous, then L is an unambiguous language.
  - Our expression language is an unambiguous language.
  - Even though the first grammar for expressions is ambiguous, there is another language for the expressions language is unambiguous.

#### **Inherent Ambiguity**

• A context free language L is said to be inherently ambiguous if all its grammars are ambiguous.

```
Example: Consider L = \{a^nb^nc^md^m : n \ge 1, m \ge 1\} \cup \{a^nb^mc^md^n : n \ge 1, m \ge 1\}
```

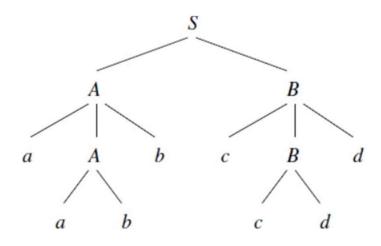
A grammar for L is

$$S \rightarrow AB \mid C$$
 $A \rightarrow aAb \mid ab$ 
 $B \rightarrow cBd \mid cd$ 
 $C \rightarrow aCd \mid aDd$ 

 $D \rightarrow bDc \mid bc$ 

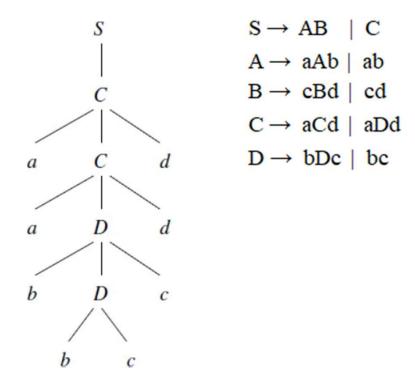
### **Inherent Ambiguity**

• The parse trees for the string **aabbccdd**.



$$S \underset{lm}{\Rightarrow} AB \underset{lm}{\Rightarrow} aAbB \underset{lm}{\Rightarrow} aabbB$$

$$\underset{lm}{\Rightarrow} aabbcBd \underset{lm}{\Rightarrow} aabbccdd$$



$$S \underset{lm}{\Rightarrow} C \underset{lm}{\Rightarrow} aCd \underset{lm}{\Rightarrow} aaDdd \underset{lm}{\Rightarrow}$$

$$aabDcdd \underset{lm}{\Rightarrow} aabbccdd$$

• It can be shown that every grammar for L behaves like the one above. The language L is inherently ambiguous.

#### Is Every Regular Language a CFL?

• Every regular language is a CFL.

#### Create a CFG for a given regular language whose DFA is given:

• A DFA  $M = (Q, \Sigma, \delta, q_0, F)$  is given, define the CFG G = (V, T, P, S) as follows:

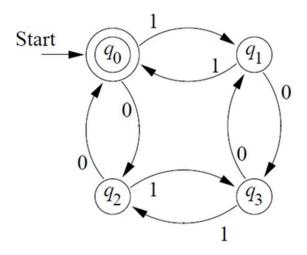
$$V = \{ S_i \mid q_i \text{ is in } Q \}$$
 $T = \Sigma$ 

$$P = \{ S_i \rightarrow aS_j \mid \delta(q_i, a) = q_j \} \cup \{ S_i \rightarrow \varepsilon \mid q_i \text{ is in } F \}$$

$$S = S_0$$

# Is Every Regular Language a CFL?

• Create a CFG for the following DFA:



### **CFG – Questions**

• Design context-free grammars for the following languages:

• 
$$\{0^n1^m : n>m \ge 0\}$$
  
 $S \to 0S1 \mid 0A$   
 $A \to \varepsilon \mid 0A$ 

• The strings of 0's and 1's that contain equal number of 0's and 1's.

$$S \rightarrow 0S1S \mid 1S0S \mid \epsilon$$

#### **CFG – Questions**

- Design context-free grammars for the following language:
- Is this grammar ambiguous?

YES: Two leftmost derivations for ε

$$S \underset{lm}{\Rightarrow} A \underset{lm}{\Rightarrow} \varepsilon$$

$$S \underset{lm}{\Rightarrow} B \underset{lm}{\Rightarrow} \varepsilon$$

• Disambiguate this grammar.

$$S \rightarrow A \mid B \mid \epsilon$$

$$A \rightarrow 0A1 \mid 01$$

$$B \rightarrow 1B0 \mid 10$$