Formal Grammar

CSG, CFG, Parse Tree, Ambiguity, Non-Determinism

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Lecture #1 out of 10 90 minutes

All videos are in this YouTube playlist.

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Notation

Chomsky Hierarchy

Parse Tree

Ambiguity

Non-determinism

I promise, there will be no more formalism than it's necessary!

Chapter #1:
Notation

By the way, if a language is simple, it's possible to do it without a grammar, for example (we just split the text by a space):

```
PRINT 42
PRINT 256
PRINT 0
```

A practical example: I have a project **Xembly**, which is using ANTLR4 for parsing its own language:

```
XPATH "/car/price";
SET "$2000";
ATTR "time", "2023/02/01";
```

However, I have a task in the backlog: get rid of the grammar and use string manipulations instead, because it's faster.

A grammar is a finite set of formal rules for generating (!) syntactically correct sentences. Pay attention to the word "formal." A grammar may be informal, if the rules are informal. For example:

"Commands go one after another sometimes with arguments"

This is a rule, but it is not formal and may not be understood by a computer.

Assume, we want to create a new programming language (very similar to Basic), which will allow us to write programs that look like this:

```
10 PRINT "What is your name?"
20 INPUT X
30 PRINT "Hello,", X
```

It's impossible (or very hard) to parse this program by splitting strings, for example, because of the possible commas inside the "Hello," string.

A formal grammar G, according to Noam Chomsky (1956), is a tuple $\langle N, T, P, S \rangle$, where:

- $N = \{P_{\text{rogram}}, L_{\text{ine}}, N_{\text{umber}}, C_{\text{ommand}}, A_{\text{rgument}}, \dots \}$ (non-terminals or variables)
- $T = \{10, 20, PRINT, X, ,, "Hello", ...\}$ (terminals or alphabet)
- $P = \{...\}$ (production rules)
- $S \in N$ (start symbol)

By the way, $N \cap T = \emptyset$.

A <u>language</u> that can be built by G is denoted as L(G): set of all strings that can be generated by G.

A <u>production rule</u> specifies a replacement of its <u>left-hand side</u> with its right-hand side, for example:

1.
$$L_{\text{ine}} \rightarrow N_{\text{umber}} \text{ INPUT } A_{\text{rgument}}$$

$$2. N_{\text{umber}} \rightarrow 10$$

$$3. N_{\text{umber}} \rightarrow 20$$

Formally, a production rule is (using Kleene star, by Stephen Kleene):

$$(T \cup N)^* n (T \cup N)^* \rightarrow (T \cup N)^* \quad n \in N$$
$$V^* n V^* \rightarrow V^* \quad V = (T \cup N)$$

Each left-hand side must contain at least one non-terminal symbol.

Grammars are said to be equivalent if they produce the same language.

Chapter #2:

Chomsky Hierarchy

There are four types in Chomsky Hierarchy of grammars:

Type-0: Unrestricted grammars

Type-1: Context-sensitive grammars

Type-2: Context-free grammars

Type-3: Regular grammars

Type-0: Unrestricted Grammar

The only restriction is that α is not empty (not ϵ) in each rule:

$$\alpha \to \beta \quad \alpha, \beta \in N \cup T$$

For every unrestricted grammar G there exists some Turing machine capable of recognizing $\boldsymbol{L}(G)$ and vice versa.

The decision problem of whether a given string *s* can be generated by a given unrestricted grammar is equivalent to the problem of whether it can be accepted by the <u>Turing machine</u> equivalent to the grammar. The latter problem is called the Halting problem and is undecidable.

Type-1: Context-Sensitive Grammar

A context-sensitive grammar (CSG) are "non-erasing" grammars. A grammar is noncontracting (or monotonic) if all of its production rules are of the form $\alpha \to \beta$ where the length of α is less than or equal to that of β .

Some textbooks define CSGs as non-contracting, although this is not how Noam Chomsky defined them in 1959.

A canonical example is $\{a^nb^nc^n: n \geq 1\}$.

Type-2: Context Free Grammar

A <u>context-free grammar</u> (CFG) is a grammar in which the left-hand side of each production rule consists of only a single non-terminal symbol, for example:

$$p_1: P_{\texttt{rogram}} \to P_{\texttt{rogram}} L_{\texttt{ine}}$$

$$p_2: P_{\mathtt{rogram}} \to \epsilon$$

$$p_3: L_{\text{ine}} \to I_{\text{nteger}} \ C_{\text{ommand}} \ T_{\text{ail}}$$

$$p_4: T_{\text{ail}} \to T_{\text{ail}} A_{\text{rgument}}$$

$$p_5: T_{\mathtt{ail}} \to \epsilon$$

$$p_6:I_{\text{nteger}} \rightarrow 10$$

$$p_7:I_{\text{nteger}} \rightarrow 20$$

Derivation process may be described using \Rightarrow_{p_i} notation:

$$P \underset{p_1}{\Longrightarrow} \mathbf{P} \mathbf{L}$$

$$\underset{p_3}{\Longrightarrow} P \mathbf{I} \mathbf{C} \mathbf{T}$$

$$\underset{p_8}{\Longrightarrow} P 30 C T$$

$$\underset{p_7}{\Longrightarrow} P 30 PRINT T$$

$$\underset{p_7}{\Longrightarrow} \mathbf{P} \mathbf{L} 30 PRINT T$$

$$\underset{p_7}{\Longrightarrow} \dots$$

$$\underset{p_7}{\Longrightarrow} \dots$$

We can say that "G derives in zero or more steps": $\stackrel{*}{\Longrightarrow}$ (it is <u>reflexive</u> transitive closure of \Longrightarrow). For example:

$$P \stackrel{*}{\Longrightarrow} P L$$
 30 PRINT T

Languages generated by context-free grammars are known as <u>context-free</u> languages (CFL).

Not all languages can be generated by CFGs.

The <u>language equality</u> question (do two given context-free grammars generate the same language?) is undecidable.

The <u>language</u> inclusion question is also undecidable: Given two CFGs, can the first one generate all strings that the second one can generate?

The <u>emptiness problem</u> (whether the grammar generates any terminal strings at all), is undecidable for context-sensitive grammars, but decidable for CFGs.

Leftmost derivation: always expands leftmost non-terminal.

There are <u>left recursive</u> CFGs: when non-terminals stay always on the left side of the right-side hand of the rule. Similarly, there are <u>right recursive</u> CFGs.

Type-3: Regular Grammar

In a <u>regular grammar</u> all production rules have at most one non-terminal symbol in the rightmost or leftmost position in the rule (A and B are non-terminals and a is a string of terminals):

$$A \rightarrow a$$
 $A \rightarrow a \ B$ (right-linear grammar)
 $A \rightarrow B \ a$ (left-linear grammar)
 $A \rightarrow \epsilon$

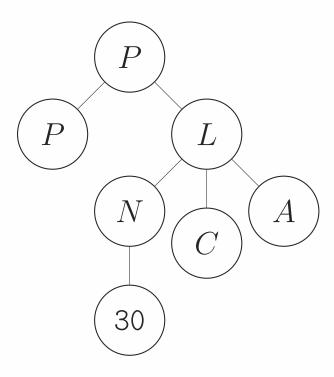
Left-linear grammar is just another name for left-regular grammar (the same for right-).

Some textbooks and articles disallow empty rules (with ϵ).

A regular grammar generates exactly the language a nondeterministic finite automaton accepts.

Chapter #3:
Parse Tree

A <u>parse tree</u> (parsing tree, derivation tree, concrete syntax tree) is an ordered, rooted tree that represents the syntactic structure of a string according to some CFG.

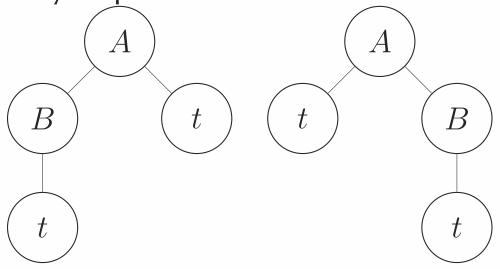


Chapter #4:
Ambiguity

An <u>ambiguous grammar</u> is a CFG for which there exists a string that can have more than one leftmost derivation or parse tree. For example, this grammar:

$$A \to B \ t \mid t B$$
$$B \to t$$

May be parsed as two different trees:



Chapter #5:

Non-determinism

Non-deterministic CFG:

$$A \to B x$$

$$A \to B y$$

$$A \to B z$$

Backtracking in a parser is required in order to parse this grammar.

By using <u>left factoring</u> it is possible to remove non-determinism:

$$A \to B C$$

$$C \to x \mid y \mid z$$