

# Chapter 1

## Semantic Analysis

The lexer detects illegal tokens inside the input, while the parser detects ill-formed parse trees inside the input. Semantic analysis is the last “front end” phase of the compiler to catch errors. It is necessary because there are errors that cannot be caught by the parser and lexer, and some language constructs are not context free.

As a typical statically type checked object oriented language, Cool language requires its semantic analyser doing the following checks:

- All identifiers are declared
- Type checking (major function)
- Inheritance relationships
- Classes are defined only once
- Methods in a class are defined only once
- Reserved identifiers are not misused

This is not an exhaustive list.

### 1.1 Scope

There can be more than one definition of an identifier before it is used. In order to match the correct declaration of an identifier with its uses, we need to understand the conception of scope.

The **scope** of an identifier is the portion of a program in which that identifier is accessible. The same identifier may refer to different things in different parts of the same program. In such case, different scopes of the same identifier should not overlap. Programming languages can have either **static scope** or **dynamic scope**. Today most languages, including Cool, have static scope, which means

scopes of identifiers depend only on the program text, not the runtime behaviors. There are languages that are dynamically scoped, like SNOBOL and ancient Lisp, for which scopes depend on the execution process of the program. Generally speaking, static scoped language follows **the most closely nested rule**, meaning that the variable binds to the definition that is the most closely enclosing it. Dynamically scoped language follows **the most recent binding rule**, meaning that the variable binds to the most recent definition during the execution.

In Cool, identifier bindings are introduced by a lot of mechanisms:

- class definitions (class names)
- method definitions (method names)
- let expressions (object ids)
- formal parameters (object ids)
- attribute definitions (object ids)
- case expressions(object ids)

Not all identifiers in Cool follow the most closely nested rule. For example, class definitions in Cool cannot be nested, and they are globally visible throughout the program, which means that a class can be used before it is defined. Also, attribute names are globally visible within the class in which they are defined. What's more, method names have some complex rules, such as they can be defined in a parent class, and they can be overridden.

## 1.2 Symbol tables

Much of semantic analysis can be expressed as a recursive descent of an AST. In each step we do the following 3 things:

- Before: Begin processing an AST node  $n$  (preprocessing)
- Recurse: Process the children of  $n$
- After: Finish processing node  $n$  (postprocessing)

When performing semantic analysis on a portion of the AST, we need to know which identifiers are defined. If we divide the processing of the expression  $\text{let } x:T \leftarrow e_0 \text{ in } e_1$  into the 3 phases listed above, the preprocessing phase will add definition of  $x$  to the current definitions and override any previous definition of  $x$ , while the postprocessing phase will remove definition of  $x$  and restore the old definition of  $x$ . A **symbol table** is the data structure used to track the current bindings of identifiers.

To implement a simple symbol table, we can use just a stack. It contains three operations:

- `add_symbol(x)`: push symbol `x` and its associated info on the stack.
- `find_symbol(x)`: search the stack from the top. Returns the first `x` found or `NULL`.
- `remove_symbol()`: pop the stack.

This simple implementation works for `let` expression because in `let` expressions, declarations are perfectly nested, and symbols are added to the symbol table one at a time. In other cases, the functionality of this implementation is not sufficient, e.g. in the definition of a method in which more than one symbols can be introduced each time. We need an implementation that covers the following operations:

- `enter_scope()`: start a new nested scope
- `find_symbol(x)`: find current `x` (or `NULL`)
- `add_symbol(x)`: add a symbol `x` to the table
- `check_scope(x)`: true if `x` is defined in the current scope
- `exit_scope()`: exit current scope

Class names should be specially considered here because classes can be used before they are defined. Thus they cannot be checked using a symbol table, neither in one single pass. The solution is to complete two passes: gather all class names in the first one, and do the checking in the second one. In general, semantic analysis requires multiple passes. In the implementation of semantic analysis, a few simple passes is superior to one complex pass.

## 1.3 Type checking

### 1.3.1 Types

“What is a type” is a question worthy of asking because type is a notion varying from language to language. The consensus is that a type is a set of values and a set of operations on these values. In OO languages, classes are one instantiation of the modern notion of type, but types do not need to be associated with classes.

**The goal of type checking is to ensure that operations are used only with the correct types.** It is nonsensical to add a function pointer to an integer in C, but at assembly language level they share the same implementation. Type checking is intended to avoid such errors.

There are 3 kinds of languages:

**Statically typed** Almost or all type checking is done as part of compilation.  
e.g. C, java, cool.

**Dynamically typed** Almost all type checking is done at run time. e.g. Python, Lisp, Perl.

**Untyped** No type checking. e.g. machine code.

There have always been debates on the merits of static typing v.s. dynamic typing. Static typing proponents assert that static checking catches many errors at compile time, and it avoids overhead of runtime type checks. Dynamic typing proponents argue that static type systems are too restrictive, and it causes difficulty when it comes to rapid prototyping. In the end, we end up with compromises on both sides: static typed languages often provide an “escape” mechanism, e.g. casting in C-like languages; dynamic typed languages are often retrofitted for optimisation and debugging with static typing.

Types in Cool include class names and `SELF.TYPE`. User is supposed to declare types for identifiers, and the compiler will do the rest of the job: a type will be inferred for every expression.

### 1.3.2 Logical inference rules

We have seen two formal notations as the specification of parts of a compiler: regular expressions and context free grammars. Logical inference rules are the appropriate formalism for type checking.

Inference rules have the form

If Hypothesis is true, the Conclusion is true.

In the specific case of type checking rules, they often have the form

If  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  have certain types, then  $E_3$  has a certain type.

In order to simplify the notation, we use  $\wedge$  to denote “and”,  $\Rightarrow$  to denote “if-then”, and  $x:T$  to denote “ $x$  has type  $T$ ”. Thus, the rule “if  $e_1$  has type `Int`,  $e_2$  has type `Int`, then  $e_1 + e_2$  has type `Int`” is denoted as

$$(e_1 : \text{Int} \wedge e_2 : \text{Int}) \Rightarrow e_1 + e_2 : \text{Int}$$

By convention, inference rules are written in the form

$$\frac{\vdash \text{Hypothesis}_1 \cdots \vdash \text{Hypothesis}_n}{\vdash \text{Conclusion}}$$

in which  $\vdash$  is read “it is provable that”. Here we give some rules as examples.

$$\begin{array}{c}
\frac{}{\vdash i \text{ is an integer literal}} \\
\vdash i : \text{Int} \\
\frac{}{\vdash e_1 : \text{Int} \vdash e_2 : \text{Int}} \\
\vdash e_1 + e_2 : \text{Int} \\
\frac{\frac{}{\vdash 1 : \text{Int}} \quad \frac{}{\vdash 2 : \text{Int}}}{\vdash 1 + 2 : \text{Int}} \\
\vdash \text{false} : \text{Bool} \\
\frac{}{\vdash \text{new } T : T} \\
\vdash e : \text{Bool} \\
\vdash !e : \text{Bool} \\
\vdash e_1 : \text{Bool} \vdash e_2 : T \\
\hline
\vdash \text{while } e_1 \text{ loop } e_2 \text{ pool} : \text{Object}
\end{array}$$

A type system is sound if whenever  $\vdash e : T$ ,  $e$  evaluates to a value of type  $T$ . We only want sound rules, but some sound rules are better than others. For example,  $\frac{\vdash i : \text{Int}}{\vdash i : \text{Object}}$  is sound but not helpful at all.

Type check proves facts in the form of  $e : T$ . The proof is on the structure of the AST. It actually has the shape of the AST, because one type rule is used for each AST node. In the rule used for an AST node  $e$ , Hypotheses are the proofs of the types of  $e$ 's subexpressions, while the conclusion is the type of  $e$ . Types are computed in a bottom-up pass over the AST.

### 1.3.3 Type environment

For a variable, the local structural rule does not carry enough information to give it a type.

$$\frac{x \text{ is a variable}}{\vdash x : ?}$$

More information should be put into the rules in such case. A **type environment** gives types to **free** variables. A variable is free if it is not defined within the expression. A type environment is a function from object identifiers to types. It is implemented by the symbol table.

Let  $O$  be a function from ObjectIdentifiers to Types, the sentence  $O \vdash e : T$  is read: under the assumption that free variables in expression  $e$  have the type given by  $O$ , it is provable that  $e$  has type  $T$ . The type environment should be added to the earlier rules. For example now we have

$$\begin{array}{c}
\frac{}{\vdash i \text{ is an integer literal}} \\
O \vdash i : \text{Int} \\
O \vdash e_1 : \text{Int} \quad O \vdash e_2 : \text{Int} \\
\hline
O \vdash e_1 + e_2 : \text{Int}
\end{array}$$

And we can now write some new rules:

$$\frac{O(x) = T}{O \vdash x : T}$$

We use  $O[T/x]$  to denote the function that returns  $T$  for  $x$ , and  $O(y)$  for whatever  $y \neq x$ . We can now define the rule for let expression:

$$\frac{O \vdash e_0 : T \quad O[T/x] \vdash e_1 : T_1}{O \vdash \text{let } x : T \leftarrow e_0 \text{ in } e_1 : T_1} \quad (1.1)$$

The type environment is passed down the AST from the root to the leaves, while types are computed up the AST from the leaves to the root.

### 1.3.4 Subtyping

The rule (1.1) is not satisfactory in practice because It is not necessary that  $x:T$ .  $x$  can actually be of any subtype of  $T$ . In order to allow the use of subtypes, we introduce the  $\leq$  relationship between classes. Its formal definition is

- $X \leq X$
- $X \leq Y$  if  $X$  inherits from  $Y$
- $X \leq Z$  if  $X \leq Y$  and  $Y \leq Z$

With  $\leq$  relationship added, rule (1.1) can be written as

$$\frac{O \vdash e_0 : T_0 \quad O[T/x] \vdash e_1 : T_1 \quad T_0 \leq T}{O \vdash \text{let } x : T \leftarrow e_0 \text{ in } e_1 : T_1}$$

Similarly, the rule of assignment can be written as

$$\frac{O(x) = T_0 \quad O \vdash e_1 : T_1 \quad T_1 \leq T_0}{O \vdash x \leftarrow e_1 : T_1}$$

Attribute initialization inside a class also uses subtyping.  $O_C(x) = T$  means for all attributes  $x$  of class  $C$  we have  $x : T$ .

$$\frac{O_C(x) = T_0 \quad O_C \vdash e_1 : T_1 \quad T_1 \leq T_0}{O_C \vdash x : T_0 \leftarrow e_1 : T_0}$$

Consider the case of the if expression. The type of `if  $e_0$  then  $e_1$  else  $e_2$  fi` can be either the type of  $e_1$  or that of  $e_2$ , depending on whether the else clause or the then clause is executed at runtime. In this case, the best we can do is to use the smallest super type larger than both the types of  $e_1$  and  $e_2$ , i.e. **their least upper bound**, which is denoted by  $Z = \text{lub}(X, Y)$ . Its formal definition is

- $X \leq Z \wedge Y \leq Z$
- if  $X \leq Z' \wedge Y \leq Z', Z \leq Z'$

In Cool, the least upper bound of two types is their least common ancestor in the inheritance tree. Equipped with the definition of  $\text{lub}(X, Y)$ , we can write the rule of the if expression:

$$\frac{\begin{array}{c} O \vdash e_0 : \text{Bool} \\ O \vdash e_1 : T_1 \\ O \vdash e_2 : T_2 \end{array}}{O \vdash \text{if } e_0 \text{ then } e_1 \text{ else } e_2 \text{ fi} : \text{lub}(T_1, T_2)}$$

The rule of case expression takes a similar but more complex form:

$$\frac{\begin{array}{c} O \vdash e_0 : T_0 \\ O[T_1/x_1] \vdash e_1 : T'_1 \\ \dots \\ O[T_n/x_n] \vdash e_n : T'_n \end{array}}{O \vdash \text{case } e_0 \text{ of } x_1 : T_1 \rightarrow e_1; \dots; x_n : T_n \rightarrow e_n : \text{lub}(T'_1, \dots, T'_n)}$$

### 1.3.5 Typing methods

In order to check the type of a method call, we need a mechanism similar to type environment  $O$  for variables. In Cool, method type rules are put in namespace  $M$  different from  $O$ , which means that a method and an object can share the same name. A rule

$$M(C, f) = (T_1, \dots, T_n, T_{n+1})$$

means that in class  $C$ , there is a method  $f$  with signature  $f(x_1 : T_1, \dots, x_n : T_n) : T_{n+1}$ . Now we can write the rule of normal dispatch:

$$\frac{\begin{array}{c} O, M \vdash e_0 : T_0 \\ O, M \vdash e_1 : T_1 \\ \dots \\ O, M \vdash e_n : T_n \\ M(T_0, f) = (T'_1, \dots, T'_n, T_{n+1}) \\ T_i \leq T'_i \text{ for } 1 \leq i \leq n \end{array}}{O, M \vdash e_0.f(e_1, \dots, e_n) : T_{n+1}}$$

Similarly, the rule of static dispatch is

$$\begin{array}{c}
O, M \vdash e_0 : T_0 \\
O, M \vdash e_1 : T_1 \\
\vdots \\
O, M \vdash e_n : T_n \\
M(T, f) = (T'_1, \dots, T'_n, T_{n+1}) \\
T_0 \leq T \\
\frac{T_i \leq T'_i \quad \text{for } 1 \leq i \leq n}{O, M \vdash e_0 @ T.f(e_1, \dots, e_n) : T_{n+1}}
\end{array}$$

For some cases involving `SELF_TYPE`, we need to know the class in which an expression appears. Thus the full type environment of Cool contains 3 parts:

- A mapping `O` giving types to object identifiers.
- A mapping `M` giving types to methods.
- The current class `C`.

The whole environment must be added to all rules, although in most cases `M` and `C` are passed down but not actually used. For example, the rule for add of int is now

$$\frac{O, M, C \vdash e_1 : \text{Int} \quad O, M, C \vdash e_2 : \text{Int}}{O, M, C \vdash e_1 + e_2 : \text{Int}} \quad (1.2)$$

### 1.3.6 Implementation

Cool type checking can be implemented in a single traversal over the AST. The type environment is passed down the tree from parent to child, while types are passed up the tree from child to parent.

The implementation of a rule is somewhat self-explaining. The addition rule for int (1.2) could be implemented with the following pseudo-code.

```

1 TypeCheck(Environment, e1 + e2) {
2   T1 = TypeCheck(Environment, e1);
3   T2 = TypeCheck(Environment, e2);
4   Check T1 == T2 == Int; // report error if false
5   return Int;
6 }

```

The rule of let expression

$$\frac{
\begin{array}{c}
O, M, C \vdash e_0 : T_0 \\
O[T/x], M, C \vdash e_1 : T_1 \\
T_0 \leq T
\end{array}
}{O, M, C \vdash \text{let } x : T \leftarrow e_0 \text{ in } e_1 : T_1}$$

can be implemented as



```
1 TypeCheck(Environment, let x:T ← e0 in e1) {  
2   TypeCheck(Environment, e0) = T0;  
3   TypeCheck(Environment, e1) = T1;  
4   Check subtype(T0, T); // report error if false  
5   return T1;  
6 }
```