

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
ENGINEERING TRIPOS PART IIA

GF2: Software
Final Report

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1 Introduction

This report is an overall summary of the GF2 Software project. In this project, our task is to design, implement and test a logic simulator using the Python language, as a team of three members. This report first introduces the overall functions and the software structure of the simulator, and then explains the basic approaches we used to achieve efficient teamwork. There is also a brief introduction of my contribution to the project, which includes the source files I have written and the intuitions and basic logic behind the code implementation. Finally, an explanation of the testing procedures we have adopted and a statement of possible improvement on the software and teamwork are presented at the end.

2 Functions of the Logic Simulator

As its name suggests, the logic simulator simply just simulates the real-world logic circuits on computers. It can read logic circuit configurations into the software from text definition files, construct and simulate the circuits, and display the simulation results on the screen. The following sub-sections contain detailed description of the functions of the logic simulator, from different perspectives.

2.1 Basic functions achievable through definition file statements

A valid definition file consists of statements which specify all the initial configurations of the user's logic circuit. Each statement represents one of the three basic functions: define a list of devices of a certain device type (DEVICE), connect two device ports together (CONNECT), and monitor a list of device outputs (MONITOR). Each statement should be enclosed by a single pair of parentheses.

2.1.1 Device definition

A list of devices of a certain device type can be defined through a statement of the following format:

`(DEVICE device1 device2 ... is/are device_type [qualifier])`

where the available device types are briefly described as follows:

Device type(s)	Inputs	Outputs	Has qualifier?	Qualifier description
CLOCK	0	1	Yes	Change state every n cycles
SWITCH	0	1	Yes	Initial state (set/clear)
AND NAND OR NOR	1-16	1	Yes	Number of inputs
DTYPE	4	2	No	
XOR	2	1	No	
RC	0	1	Yes	Output falls low after n cycles
NOT	1	1	No	

The device definition statement starts with the keyword **DEVICE**, followed by a list of device names (cannot be empty), the keyword **is** or **are**, and the device type (and possibly a qualifier) at the end. User must provide a valid qualifier for a device type that needs a qualifier (e.g. **CLOCK**, **RC**) and should not give a qualifier if the device type does not need one (e.g. **DTYPE**, **NOT**).

If the device definition statement is valid, logic simulator will add the devices to the device list, and the ports of these devices can be further connected or monitored. In addition, for the **SWITCH** devices, their states (set/clear) can be changed after the simulation starts.

2.1.2 Connecting device ports

Two device ports can be connected together by a statement of the following format:

(CONNECT device_port1 to device_port2)

The connection statement starts with the keyword **CONNECT**, followed by two device ports with the keyword **to** in between. In general, the format of the device port name should be **device_name.port_name**. There is only one special case, where the user should directly use the **device_name** as the device port name when that device has only one output port.

The connection statement would be valid only if one port is an input and the other is an output. Also, an output can be connected to multiple inputs, but an input can only be connected to one output.

2.1.3 Monitoring device ports

A list of device ports can be monitored by a statement of the following format:

(MONITOR device_port1 device_port2 ...)

The monitor definition statement begins with the keyword **MONITOR**, followed by a list of device ports to be monitored. Each device port name conforms to the format specified in Section 2.1.2. In the logic simulator, only device outputs are allowed to be monitored. The waveforms of the monitored outputs will finally be displayed on the screen.

2.2 Definition file read-in and error report

When the user has a definition file ready, he/she can open that file in the logic simulator by clicking **File->Open** and use the system's default file browser (a pop-up window) to select the file. The logic simulator will try to read and interpret the statements one by one, and gradually build the circuit on the fly. If the definition file is error-free, nothing will happen and the user can proceed by clicking the **Run** button (this conforms to the Unix philosophy - 'no news is good news').

In case that the definition file contains errors, a detailed error report will be shown in a pop-up window, with description and location (line number and position in the line) of each error occurred, in order to provide useful information to the user so that he/she can locate and correct the errors more easily. There are two main categories of errors, namely *syntactic error* and *semantic error*. Syntactic errors occur when parts of the definition file don't obey the grammar as specified in the EBNF file (e.g. mistyping keywords), while semantic errors occur when parts of the file are grammatically correct but don't make any sense (e.g. connecting two inputs). After correcting all the errors, the user can open the file again and proceed with the simulation.

2.3 Display of waveforms of the monitored device outputs

If the definition file read-in stage has been successful, the user can enter a number in the textbox at the top of the main control panel to specify the initial simulation cycles, and then click the **Run** button below the textbox to start the simulation. The waveforms of the monitored device outputs will then be displayed on the main canvas.

The waveforms of the monitored signals are drawn in the main canvas from bottom to top, with a red ruler right below the waveforms which indicates the number of simulation cycles. If the user moves cursor into the canvas, a vertical cursor line will be shown to point the current cycle number on the ruler, and a yellow hoverbox will appear with information of current cycle number, port name and the output value (high/low).

By our settings, the maximum number of simulation cycles per page is fixed at 60. If more than 60 cycles are simulated, the user can use the **Prev Page** / **Next Page** buttons or enter a page number and click the **Goto** button to navigate among the pages. The waveforms can also be zoomed in/out horizontally by using the two icons at the bottom of the control panel, or place the cursor inside the canvas and use the scroll wheel. In addition, each monitored signal can be moved up/down by pressing and holding the left button and drag the signal upward/downward.

2.4 Modifications of circuit and simulator settings

The user can modify some of the states of the simulator after successfully parsing a definition file. For instance, the outputs of the switches can be changed by selecting the switches in the switch list at the middle of the control panel and clicking 1 or 0 below the switch list. The altered switch states will affect subsequent simulation cycles. Also, the monitors can be added or deleted by clicking the Add/Delete Monitors button. After adding/deleting monitors, the canvas will be redrawn immediately, showing the new waveforms of the active monitors.

The simulator also has the Simplified Chinese version, in order to satisfy the customer's new requirements. The simulator automatically detects the operating system's language (through the environment variable `LANG`) and run the Chinese version if the system language is Chinese. The user can switch the language by selecting `File->Language` in the menu bar.

3 Software Structure

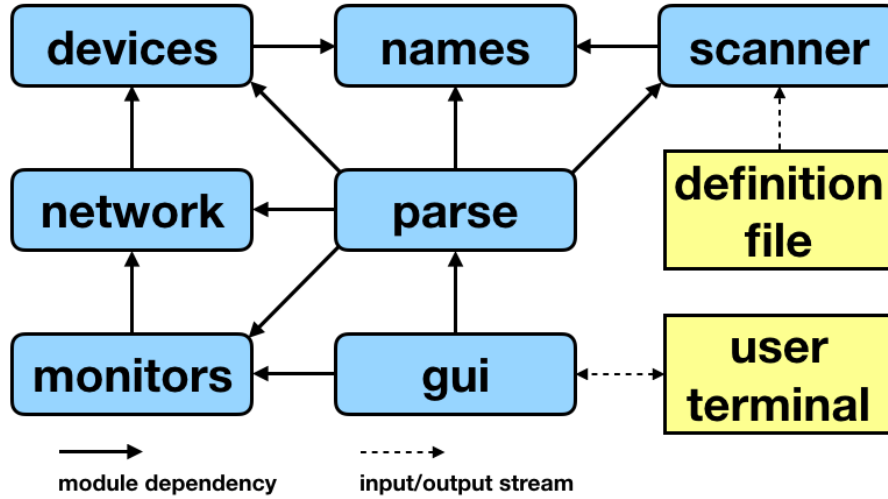


Figure 1: Software Structure of the Logic Simulator

Figure 1 illustrates the software structure of the logic simulator, which shows the module names and their dependencies. The dependency profile shown in figure 1 is not the whole story: it only shows *major* dependencies in order to make the diagram more clean and intuitive (actually in the source code `gui.py` depends on all other modules, but it's tedious and unnecessary to draw them all). The following subsections will explain the modules in turn.

3.1 The names module

The **names** module is the simplest one among all the modules, but it's a crucial part of the simulator since all the other modules depend on it, either directly or indirectly. The main function of the **names** module is to assign each name string (can be device name, keywords, etc.) a unique id (a non-negative integer), so that other modules can communicate with each other through the ids instead of using the actual name strings. The **names** module can also assign unique error codes to the error-name lists of the other modules, which is very useful in the error-handling stage.

3.2 The devices, network and monitors modules

The three modules **devices**, **network** and **monitors** together store almost all the information of the circuit configurations.

The **devices** module stores all the individual devices used in the logic circuit. This module depends on the **names** module and use the allocated ids from **names** to identify the devices. Each stored device has a unique device id, a device type, input port connections, output port values and additional device settings. In general, the **devices** module is mainly used to create new devices and return relevant information of the stored devices on request.

The **network** module depends on the **devices** module. It stores all the connections among the devices and updates the input/output signals for new simulation cycles. For each device type, the module has a method to update the outputs of devices of that type based on the inputs. The main function of the **network** module is to establish new connections among the devices and execute the whole network to update the signals and move on to the next simulation cycle.

The **monitors** module depends on both the **devices** module and the **network** module. This module manages the creation and deletion of the monitors, and it also records the output values of the monitored signals against time (simulation cycles). Every time after executing the whole network, the **monitors** module records the updated output values for the existing monitors for the new simulation cycle. The main function of this module is to manage monitors and provide data for drawing waveforms on the canvas.

3.3 The scanner and parse modules

The two modules **scanner** and **parse** are at the heart of definition file read-in and error reporting. In our design, **scanner** just converts the definition file to symbols (or tokens), and **parse** receive the symbols from **scanner** and construct the circuit network. The **parse** module also does all the error handling.

The **scanner** module reads the definition file directly and converts the file to a series of symbols. A symbol is a low-level abstraction of the input file stream, which can be a **KEYWORD**, a **NAME**, a **NUMBER**, a **PUNCTUATION** or the **EOF** (end of file) token. In our design, the scanner does not do any error handling, but there are circumstances where the current symbol cannot be categorised to any of the types stated above. Examples are number with leading zeros (007) and unrecognised characters (?!@#\$). Therefore, apart from the normal types stated above, we have included a new type **SYNTAX_ERROR** to deal with this case.

The **parse** module takes as input the symbols from **scanner** and builds the circuit network on the fly. The **parse** module tries to interpret the symbol stream as statements explained in Section 2.1, and then call methods in **devices**, **network** and **monitors** to create new devices, connect device ports and add new monitors. If it detects an error, it will generate an error code, display the description and location of the error and seek the next left parenthesis '(' to resume parsing. User cannot proceed to the simulation stage if **parse** generates errors.

3.4 The gui module

The **gui** module implements the graphical user interface for the logic simulator to interact with the user directly. Technically the **gui** module has dependencies on all other modules, but only two major ones are drawn in figure 1 to make the diagram clean and intuitive. When the user launches the simulator, **gui** first calls the **parse** module to read the selected definition file, and then use the data in the **monitors** module to add/delete monitors and draw the signal waveforms on the canvas. **gui** also calls the **network** module to move to next simulation cycle, and calls **devices** to alter the states of the switches.

4 Teamwork

Since this software project is a group project for three people, teamwork is very important to keep the development progress smooth and efficient. We have taken several simple but useful approaches

to let ourselves always work as a team. Our team is a great team with enthusiasm all the time, and the progress and outcomes are quite as expected.

4.1 Task allocation among team members

There are four main modules that need to be implemented by us: **names**, **scanner**, **parse** and **gui**. Initially we have split the work into three parts: **names** & **scanner** (Paul), **parse** (me) and **gui** (Brian). Apart from the dependency relationships among these modules, they are actually quite independent so that we can start implementing our modules at the same time. Also, by this arrangement, we can avoid merge conflicts in Git as much as possible since each individual module is assigned to one team member only.

Due to the nature of the modules, the **gui** module needs much more work than other modules. With efforts, the implementation, integration and testing of the **names**, **scanner** and **parse** modules were finished much faster than expected, before the completion of the **gui** module. Therefore, me and Paul joined the **gui** implementation afterwards, based on the framework set up by Brian. This has led to more merge conflicts, but with the coordination of **gui** designer Brian and frequent group meetings they have been easily resolved.

4.2 Teamwork on code review

Code review is an important measure to keep the whole team coordinated. It involves detecting hidden bugs, revising the code style (check PEP8 compliance) and all other methods that can improve the overall software quality. When we write our own modules, we also take a look at modules implemented by other team members and give them short feedbacks as soon as possible. The code review process not only makes our software more robust, but also helps each team member better understand other teammates' work.

4.3 Group meetings

Group meeting is an efficient way to share ideas and make important decisions within the group. During this project, we have held a lot of group meetings very frequently, roughly once every 2-3 days (other than the scheduled DPO sessions). By having frequent group meetings, we can summarise the finished work and make new short-term plans and decisions very rapidly.

Many key decisions have been made during the group meetings. For example, the EBNF syntax definition was made in our first two group meetings, even before the first scheduled DPO session of the project. Other decisions include the basic framework of each module, and the desired functions and features in the **gui** module.

Another important aspect in the group meetings is to specify the interfaces among modules. The tight dependencies among modules implies that we have to design the module interfaces very carefully before we actually implement the methods in each module. For instance, we spent a whole group meeting designing the interface between **scanner** and **parse**, since we need various features in error handling such as displaying the line and position of each error occurred. The effort on the interface specification has led to very successful integration of the **scanner** and **parse** module.

4.4 Compromise within the team

In this project, there are occasions where we have different ideas on particular aspects of design. This happens a lot in the design and implementation in the **gui** module. For example, I once suggested Brian to enlarge the main control panel and display both the active monitor list and the switch list on the panel, but Brian wanted to keep the panel as simple as possible. Finally we

figured out a ‘compromised version’ in which the switch list is embedded in the panel while the monitor list is achieved by a pop-up window.

Sometimes we also need to compromise on our ambitions since we always have endless improvement plans but there are also limitations on available time and resources. For instance, in the internationalisation stage of the software, the translation of the hoverbox has been a big headache since its rendering is handled by GLUT rather than the operating system, and the GLUT has no internal support for rendering Unicode characters. In the end, we used a ‘hand-crafted’ solution: draw the Chinese hoverbox manually, make a screenshot of it and then render the image on the canvas.

5 My Contribution to the Project

As stated in the previous section, I am in charge of the design, implementation and testing of the `parse` module, while actually I have also contributed to some parts of the `gui` module. The following subsections will explain the details of my contribution.

5.1 `parse.py`

This module is used to parse the definition file and build the logic circuit network. It analyses the syntactic and semantic correctness of the symbol stream from `scanner` and displays a collection of error messages if errors occur.

5.1.1 Basic elements

The variables `self.symbol_type` and `self.symbol_id` are used to store the information of the current symbol, received from the `scanner`. `self.symbol_type` can be one of the following: `self.scanner.KEYWORD`, `self.scanner.NAME`, `self.scanner.NUMBER`, `self.scanner.PUNCTUATION`, `self.scanner.SYNTAX_ERROR` and `self.scanner.EOF`. `self.symbol_id` stores the id of the symbol content which can be used in the `names` module to find the actual name string (for the `NUMBER` type, the id is the number itself). The method `self.move_to_next_symbol()` is used to get next symbol from scanner and update the `self.symbol_type` and `self.symbol_id`.

The `parse` module has defined 32 error types whose error codes are assigned by the `names` module’s method `self.names.unique_error_codes(32)`. The dictionary `self.errormsg` maps an error code to its corresponding error message, which forms the basis of error message display. An important variable, `self.error_code`, is used to store the current error code. When error occurs during parsing, `self.error_code` will be modified and the parser will call `self.error_display()` to display the error message based on the error code in `self.error_code`.

5.1.2 Mechanism of parsing and error handling

The logic of parsing definition files is simple: each non-terminal variable is represented by a method in `parse.py`, and the method returns `True` or `False` to indicate whether the symbols can be interpreted as that non-terminal variable in the EBNF syntax.

The parsing process is initiated by calling `self.parse_network()`, which tries to read the entire definition file and build the circuit network. `self.parse_network()` calls `self.statement()` repeatedly to read the statements in the file, and `self.statement()` calls lower-level methods like `self.device()`, `self.connect()` and `self.network()` and the recursive process continues according to the EBNF syntax.

If error occurs in a parser method, it stores the corresponding error code into `self.error_code` and return `False`. Then, the parsing process will eventually get back to the root method `self.parse_network()` and the method `self.error_display()` will be called to produce the relevant error message. In

addition, it's interesting to notice that if a method detects an error it will definitely return **False**, but if a method returns **False** it does not necessarily mean an error has occurred - it might just mean the current symbol cannot be interpreted as the non-terminal variable represented by that method, and it's harmless.

5.1.3 Main features of error display

The `self.error_display()` has many useful features which help the user locate and correct the errors more easily. This subsection lists these features and briefly introduces the mechanisms behind the scene.

1. Display of the error location

For each error, the error message shows the content of the line in which the error occurs, together with its line number and the position of error in that line. This is achieved with the help of `scanner`'s method `self.scanner.complete_current_line()`, which returns the current line content and the position of the current symbol. The line number can be obtained by `self.scanner.line_number`.

2. Additional information in error description

The error description for the error `self.DEVICE_REDEFINED` is:

```
***Semantic Error: Device '{symbol_name}' is already defined"
```

Notice the curly brace pattern `{symbol_name}` - it's a placeholder for the actual name of the current symbol. For example, if the current symbol name is `'D1'` (which represents a device name), the placeholder `{symbol_name}` will be replaced by `D1`. Internally, this is done by using `str.format(**format_dict)`, where `format_dict` is `self.errormsg.format_dict` in my implementation. The `format_dict` is a dictionary which maps keyword such as `symbol_name` to its actual name string.

The curly brace placeholders also exists in error descriptions of other error types. This feature provides additional information to the user which helps the user better understand his/her error.

3. Display of the line of previous definition

If the user redefines a device or monitor, the line of previous definition will also be shown, together with the error message of current line. This is achieved by recording the line number and position of each device/monitor definition in two dictionaries (one for device and one for monitor). The `scanner` module has a list called `self.scanner.previous_lines` where content of previous lines can be obtained. With this list and the two dictionaries, the line of previous definition of a device/monitor can be easily displayed.

4. Device name suggestion system

In the `CONNECT` and `MONITOR` statements, if a device name cannot be recognised (not defined), a suggestion list of possible existing device names will be displayed together with the error message. The suggestion algorithm is based on the maximum length of the common prefix of two strings. For example, if the existing device list is `[A1 B11 B12 B2 C3]` and a user types `B1`, the suggestions would be `[B11 B12]`.

5.2 test_parse.py

The `test_parse.py` contains the formal testing functions for `parse.py`, which includes unit tests and integration tests. Unit tests are used to test the individual methods, while integration tests are used to test the functionality of the whole module. Brian wrote the unit tests to test each method and I wrote the integration tests to test whether the parser is able to generate correct error codes when given a test definition file.

To simplify the testing process and avoid creating loads of test files in the project folder, I have implemented a class called `ParserTestCase` to help me do the integration tests. An instance of the `ParserTestCase` class reads the definition file input as Python strings, execute the parser and check if the produced error codes are the same as expected.

The method `self.add_input_line(line)` adds a line to the test file where `line` is a Python string. The method `self.add_expected_error(name, linum, pos)` appends a 3-tuple (the name, line number and position of the expected error) to `self.expected_output` which is a list of expected errors. After constructing a test case using the two methods above, the parser is executed and the actual produced errors are stored in `self.actual_output`. Finally the actual output is compared to the expected output to decide whether the test case is passed.

I have written test functions for all possible error codes using the `ParserTestCase` class, and they all get passed.

5.3 `gui.py`

My main contribution to `gui.py` is the implementation of the yellow hoverbox which shows the current cycle number, output port name and its output value (high/low) when the cursor is placed inside the canvas. An example of the yellow hoverbox can be found in Appendix C (the one-page user guide). I have also added a ‘dragging function’ in `gui.py`, which allows user to drag the signals up and down to adjust the vertical order of the signal waveforms.

In the maintenance stage, I also implemented the Chinese version of the hoverbox. Since the GLUT have no internal support for Unicode rendering, I used a ‘hand-crafted’ approach instead: draw the hoverbox on computer, take its screenshot and use texture mapping to display it on the canvas. This is the best workaround we can find in the limited project time.

6 Testing Procedures

In this project, we have informal and formal tests for our software. The informal tests are mainly used in the `gui` module, while the formal tests (using `pytest` module) are used in all other modules.

The testing of the `gui` module is tricky since it’s very difficult to write unit tests for each method. Therefore, all the testings are done by experiment: run the simulator and then check the expected or unexpected behaviours. The simple iteration process is adopted: implementation -> experiment -> debugging. Usually, we test the functionalities immediately after a method or even several lines of code are implemented, in order to keep everything under control.

All the modules other than `gui` are tested using the `pytest` module. The testing procedure for these modules is looser than that of the `gui` module: we first implement the whole module and then do some informal tests to find the obvious bugs, and finally write a test module to thoroughly check the module’s functionalities. Unit tests are written for all the non-`gui` modules to test each individual method. Integration tests are prepared for the `parse` module since it involves error handling and we need to check the final error codes.

7 Possible Improvements

Our logic simulator is not a perfect software since this is just a 4-week project and we are not professional software engineers. The software itself has plenty room for further improvement, and our teamwork could also be more coordinated.

7.1 Potential improvement for the software

The coding style can be further improved. Although we have made our code PEP8 compliant eventually, some of the code is still not very readable and each team member has his own coding style and naming convention. This sometimes causes inefficiency since it becomes harder for each team member to understand other teammates' code. The coding style and naming convention for the team should have been specified at the very beginning of the project.

Possible improvements also exist for the GUI design. For example, the maximum simulation cycles per page is fixed at 60 and is not adjustable by the user. It's possible to provide a 'preference' function where the user can customise the system settings. Also, due to the time limitation, we only put the EBNF syntax definition in the help page, which is actually not very helpful for users. A better help page can be made by putting a table of content of the available functions and write the help information for each of them.

7.2 Potential improvement for the teamwork

Although everything has worked quite as expected, our teamwork can still be further improved. For example, we actually anticipated the circumstance where the implementation of the non-GUI modules is faster than the implementation of the GUI, but we did not have a suitable plan for this circumstance. Therefore, me and Paul had nothing to do after the integration of **scanner** and **parse**, until we finally joined the GUI implementation. To achieve better teamwork, we need to be very prepared for possible or unexpected circumstances which slow down the whole development process.

8 Conclusion

In the GF2 Software Project, we have implemented a logic simulator software as a team of 3. The logic simulator uses a graphical user interface to interact with the user, which can read a logic circuit definition file, build and simulate the circuit, and present the output waveforms of the monitored signals on the screen. In this project, I have got a feel of the formal software development process, which involves the design, implementation, testing and the maintenance phases. I have also got more used to writing Python code and using the version control software Git. Also, the teamwork skills I learned through this project will be extremely beneficial to my future career.