CSCI-GA.2130-001

Compiler Construction

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Who Am I?

• Mohamed Zahran (aka Z)
• Computer architecture/OS/Compilers Interaction
• http://www.mzahran.com
• Office hours: Wednesdays 5:00-7:00pm
• Room: WWH 328
• Course web page: http://cs.nyu.edu/courses/spring12/CSCI-GA.2130-001/index.html/
Formal Goals of This Course

• What exactly is this thing called compiler?
• How does the compiler interact with the hardware and programming languages?
• Different phases of a compiler
• Develop a simple compiler
Informal Goals of This Course

• To get more than an A
• To learn compilers and enjoy it
• To use what you have learned in MANY different contexts
Grading

• The project (labs): 60%
  – Due several lectures later
  – Several parts
  – Mostly programming and dealing with tools
  – Can do on your own machine or NYU machines
  – Must be sure that they work on NYU machines
  – Getting help: office hours and mailing list

• Final exam: 40%
The Course Web Page

• Lecture slides
• Info about mailing list, labs, ...
• Useful links (manuals, tools, book errata, ...).
• Interesting links (geeky stuff!)
The Book

- The classic definitive compiler technology text
- It is known as the Dragon Book
- A knight and a dragon in battle, a metaphor for conquering complexity
- We will cover mostly chapters 1 - 8
What Is A Compiler?

• Programming languages are notations for describing computations to people and to machines
• Machines do not understand programming languages
• So a software system is needed to do the translation
• This is the compiler
Compiler writers have to track new language features.

Compiler writers must take advantage of new hardware features.

Optimizing compilers are hard to build.

Excellent software engineering case study.

Theory meets practice.
Why Compilers Are So Important?

• Compiler writers have influence over all programs that their compilers compile
• Compiler study trains good developers
• We learn not only how to build compilers but the general methodology of solving complex and open-ended problems
• Compilation technology can be applied in many different areas
  – Binary translation
  – Hardware synthesis
  – DB query interpreters
  – Compiled simulation
So What Is An Interpreter?

+ Better error diagnostics than compiler
-Slower than machine language code directly executed on the machine
source program

Translator

Compilation

intermediate program

Virtual Machine

Interpretation

input

output
Compiler Is Not A One-Man-Show!

Why not letting the compiler generate machine code directly?
Let's Have A Closer Look: Phases of A Compiler

Front-end (Analysis Phase)

Back-End (Synthesis Phase)
Lexical Analysis

• Reads stream of characters: your program
• Groups the characters into meaningful sequences: lexemes
• For each lexeme, it produces a token 
  <token-name, attribute value>
• Blanks are just separators and are discarded
• Filters comments
• Recognizes: keywords, identifier, numbers, …
Entry into the symbol table
Syntax Analysis (Parsing)

• Uses tokens to build a tree
• The tree shows the grammatical structure of the token stream
• A node is usually an operation
• Node’s children are arguments
This is usually called a syntax tree
Semantic Analysis

• Uses the syntax tree and symbol tables
• Gathers type information
• Checks for semantic consistency errors
Intermediate Code Generation

- Code for an abstract machine
- Must have two properties
  - Easy to produce
  - Easy to translate to target language
• Called three address code
• One operation per instruction at most
• Compiler must generate temporary names to hold values
Intermediate Code Optimization (Optional)

• **Machine independent**
• **optimization so that better target code will result**

Instead of `inttofloat(60)`

```plaintext
t1 = inttofloat(60)
t2 = id3 * t1
t3 = id2 + t2
id1 = t3
```

Instead of `inttofloat` we can use `60.0` directly

```plaintext
t1 = id3 * 60.0
t2 = id2 + t1
id1 = t2
```

Do we really need `t2`?

```plaintext
t1 = id3 * 60.0
t2 = id2 + t1
id1 = id2 + t1
```
Code Generation

- **Input**: the intermediate representation
- **Output**: target language
- **This is the backend, or synthesis phase**
- **Machine dependent**
Qualities of a Good Compiler

• **Correct**: the meaning of sentences must be preserved

• **Robust**: wrong input is the common case
  – compilers and interpreters can’t just crash on wrong input
  – they need to diagnose all kinds of errors safely and reliably

• **Efficient**: resource usage should be minimal in two ways
  – the process of compilation or interpretation itself is efficient
  – the generated code is efficient when interpreted

• **Usable**: integrate with environment, accurate feedback
  – work well with other tools (editors, linkers, debuggers, . . .)
  – descriptive error messages, relating accurately to source
Compilers Optimize Code For:

- Performance/Speed
- Code Size
- Power Consumption
- Fast/Efficient Compilation
- Security/Reliability
- Debugging
Compiler Construction Tools

- Scanner generators: produce lexical analyzer
- Parser generators: automatically produce syntax analyzer
- Syntax-directed translation engines: collection of routines for walking a parse tree and generate intermediate code
- and many more ...
A Little Bit of History

Eckert and Mauchly

- 1\textsuperscript{st} working electronic computer (1946)
- 18,000 Vacuum tubes
- 1,800 instructions/sec
- 3,000 ft\textsuperscript{3}
A Little Bit of History

- Maurice Wilkes

EDSAC 1 (1949)

http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/UoCCL/misc/EDSAC99/

1st stored program computer
650 instructions/sec
1,400 ft³
A Little Bit of History

- 1954 IBM developed 704
- All programming done in assembly
- Software costs exceed hardware costs!
A Little Bit of History

- Fortran I (project 1954-57)
- The main idea is to translate high level language to assembly
- Many thought this was impossible!
- In 1958 more than 50% of software in assembly!
- Development time halved!

John Backus
(December 3, 1924 – March 17, 2007)
A Glimpse At Programming
Language Basics

• Static/Dynamic distinction
• Environments and states
  – Environment: mapping names to locations
  – States: mapping from locations to values

• Procedures vs Functions
• Scope
main() {
    int a = 1;
    int b = 1;
    {
        int b = 2;
        {
            int a = 3;
            cout << a << b;
        }
    }
    {
        int b = 4;
        cout << a << b;
    }
    cout << a << b;
}
cout << a << b;
Roadmap

• Today we have mostly discussed chap 1
• Chapter 2 gives an overview of the different phases of a compiler by building the front-end of a simple compiler
• Chapters 3-8 fill the gaps