Lexical Analysis

Compiler Design

CSE 504

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Structure of a Language

Grammars: Notation to succinctly represent the structure of a language.
Example:

$$
\begin{array}{lcl}
\mathit{Stmt} & \longrightarrow & \texttt{if}\ \mathit{Expr}\ \texttt{then}\ \mathit{Stmt}\ \texttt{else}\ \mathit{Stmt} \\
\mathit{Stmt} & \longrightarrow & \texttt{while}\ \mathit{Expr}\ \texttt{do}\ \mathit{Stmt} \\
\mathit{Stmt} & \longrightarrow & \texttt{do}\ \mathit{Stmt}\ \texttt{until}\ \mathit{Expr} \\
\vdots & & \\
\mathit{Expr} & \longrightarrow & \mathit{Expr}\ \texttt{+}\ \mathit{Expr} \\
\vdots & &
\end{array}
$$

Grammars

$$Stmt \longrightarrow \texttt{if}\ Expr\ \texttt{then}\ Stmt\ \texttt{else}\ Stmt$$

- Terminal symbols: `if`, `then`, `else`
  - Terminal symbols represent group of characters in input language: *Tokens*.
  - Analogous to *words*.
- Nonterminal symbols: *Stmt*, *Expr*
  - Nonterminal symbols represent a sequence of terminal symbols.
  - Analogous to *sentences*.

Phases of Syntax Analysis

1. Identify the words: **Lexical Analysis**.
   Converts a stream of characters (input program) into a stream of tokens.
   Also called *Scanning* or *Tokenizing*.
2. Identify the sentences: **Parsing**.
   Derive the structure of sentences: construct *parse trees* from a stream of tokens.

Lexical Analysis

Convert a stream of characters into a stream of *tokens*.

- Simplicity: Conventions about "words" are often different from conventions about "sentences".
- Efficiency: Word identification problem has a much more efficient solution than sentence identification problem.
- Portability: Character set, special characters, device features.

Terminology

- Token: Name given to a family of words.
  e.g., `integer_constant`
- Lexeme: Actual sequence of characters representing a word.
  e.g., 32894
- Pattern: Notation used to identify the set of lexemes represented by a token.
  e.g., $[0-9]+$

Terminology

A few more examples:

Token	Sample Lexemes	Pattern
`while`	`while`	`while`
`integer_constant`	32894, -1093, 0	[0-9]+
`identifier`	`buffer_size`	[a-zA-Z]+

Patterns

How do we *compactly* represent the set of all lexemes corresponding to a token?
For instance:

> *The token `integer_constant` represents the set of all integers: that is, all sequences of digits (0–9), preceded by an optional sign (+ or −).*

Obviously, we cannot simply enumerate all lexemes.

Use **Regular Expressions**.

Regular Expressions

Notation to represent (potentially) infinite sets of strings over alphabet Σ.

- a: stands for the set $\{\mathtt{a}\}$ that contains a single string a.
- $a \mid b$: stands for the set $\{\mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}\}$ that contains two strings a and b.
  - Analogous to *Union*.
- ab: stands for the set $\{\mathtt{ab}\}$ that contains a single string ab.
  - Analogous to *Product*.
  - $(a|b)(a|b)$: stands for the set $\{\mathtt{aa}, \mathtt{ab}, \mathtt{ba}, \mathtt{bb}\}$.
- a^*: stands for the set $\{\epsilon, \mathtt{a}, \mathtt{aa}, \mathtt{aaa}, \ldots\}$ that contains all strings of zero or more a's.
  - Analogous to *closure* of the product operation.

ϵ stands for the *empty string*.

Regular Expressions

Examples of Regular Expressions over $\{\mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}\}$:

- $(a|b)^*$: Set of strings with zero or more a's and zero or more b's:
  $\{\epsilon, a, b, aa, ab, ba, bb, aaa, aab, \ldots\}$
- (a^*b^*): Set of strings with zero or more a's and zero or more b's such that all a's occur before any b:
  $\{\epsilon, a, b, aa, ab, bb, aaa, aab, abb, \ldots\}$
- $(a^*b^*)^*$: Set of strings with zero or more a's and zero or more b's:
  $\{\epsilon, a, b, aa, ab, ba, bb, aaa, aab, \ldots\}$

Language of Regular Expressions

Let R be the set of all regular expressions over Σ. Then,

- Empty String: $\epsilon \in R$
- Unit Strings: $\alpha \in \Sigma \Rightarrow \alpha \in R$
- Concatenation: $r_1, r_2 \in R \Rightarrow r_1 r_2 \in R$
- Alternative: $r_1, r_2 \in R \Rightarrow (r_1 \mid r_2) \in R$
- Kleene Closure: $r \in R \Rightarrow r^* \in R$

Regular Expressions

Example: $(a \mid b)^*$

$$\begin{array}{rcl}
L_0 & = & \{\epsilon\} \\
L_1 & = & L_0 \cdot \{\mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}\} \\
 & = & \{\epsilon\} \cdot \{\mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}\} \\
 & = & \{\mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}\} \\
L_2 & = & L_1 \cdot \{\mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}\} \\
 & = & \{\mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}\} \cdot \{\mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}\} \\
 & = & \{\mathtt{aa}, \mathtt{ab}, \mathtt{ba}, \mathtt{bb}\} \\
L_3 & = & L_2 \cdot \{\mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}\} \\
 & \vdots &
\end{array}$$

$$L = \bigcup_{i=0}^{\infty} L_i \qquad = \{\epsilon, \mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}, \mathtt{aa}, \mathtt{ab}, \mathtt{ba}, \mathtt{bb}, \ldots\}$$

Semantics of Regular Expressions

Semantic Function $\mathcal{L}$: Maps regular expressions to sets of strings.

$$
\begin{aligned}
\mathcal{L}(\epsilon) &= \{\epsilon\} \\
\mathcal{L}(\alpha) &= \{\alpha\} \qquad (\alpha \in \Sigma) \\
\mathcal{L}(r_1 \mid r_2) &= \mathcal{L}(r_1) \cup \mathcal{L}(r_2) \\
\mathcal{L}(r_1\ r_2) &= \mathcal{L}(r_1) \cdot \mathcal{L}(r_2) \\
\mathcal{L}(r^*) &= \{\epsilon\} \cup (\mathcal{L}(r) \cdot \mathcal{L}(r^*))
\end{aligned}
$$

Computing the Semantics

$$
\begin{aligned}
\mathcal{L}(a) &= \{\mathtt{a}\} \\
\mathcal{L}(a \mid b) &= \mathcal{L}(a) \cup \mathcal{L}(b) \\
&= \{\mathtt{a}\} \cup \{\mathtt{b}\} \\
&= \{\mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}\} \\
\mathcal{L}(ab) &= \mathcal{L}(a) \cdot \mathcal{L}(b) \\
&= \{\mathtt{a}\} \cdot \{\mathtt{b}\} \\
&= \{\mathtt{ab}\} \\
\mathcal{L}((a \mid b)(a \mid b)) &= \mathcal{L}(a \mid b) \cdot \mathcal{L}(a \mid b) \\
&= \{\mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}\} \cdot \{\mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}\} \\
&= \{\mathtt{aa}, \mathtt{ab}, \mathtt{ba}, \mathtt{bb}\}
\end{aligned}
$$

Computing the Semantics of Closure

Example: $\mathcal{L}((a \mid b)^*)$
$= \{\epsilon\} \cup (\mathcal{L}(a \mid b) \cdot \mathcal{L}((a \mid b)^*))$

$$
\begin{array}{lcll}
L_0 & = & \{\epsilon\} & \textit{Base case} \\
L_1 & = & \{\epsilon\} \cup (\{\mathrm{a}, \mathrm{b}\} \cdot L_0) & \\
 & = & \{\epsilon\} \cup (\{\mathrm{a}, \mathrm{b}\} \cdot \{\epsilon\}) & \\
 & = & \{\epsilon, \mathrm{a}, \mathrm{b}\} & \\
L_2 & = & \{\epsilon\} \cup (\{\mathrm{a}, \mathrm{b}\} \cdot L_1) & \\
 & = & \{\epsilon\} \cup (\{\mathrm{a}, \mathrm{b}\} \cdot \{\epsilon, \mathrm{a}, \mathrm{b}\}) & \\
 & = & \{\epsilon, \mathrm{a}, \mathrm{b}, \mathrm{aa}, \mathrm{ab}, \mathrm{ba}, \mathrm{bb}\} & \\
\vdots & & &
\end{array}
$$

$$\mathcal{L}((a \mid b)^*) = L_\infty = \{\epsilon, \mathrm{a}, \mathrm{b}, \mathrm{aa}, \mathrm{ab}, \mathrm{ba}, \mathrm{bb}, \ldots\}$$

Another Example

$\boldsymbol{\mathcal{L}((\mathrm{a}^*\mathrm{b}^*)^*)}$:

$$
\begin{array}{rcl}
\mathcal{L}(a^*) & = & \{\epsilon, \mathrm{a}, \mathrm{aa}, \ldots\} \\
\mathcal{L}(b^*) & = & \{\epsilon, \mathrm{b}, \mathrm{bb}, \ldots\} \\
\mathcal{L}(a^*b^*) & = & \{\epsilon, \mathrm{a}, \mathrm{b}, \mathrm{aa}, \mathrm{ab}, \mathrm{bb}, \\
 & & \quad \mathrm{aaa}, \mathrm{aab}, \mathrm{abb}, \mathrm{bbb}, \ldots\} \\
\mathcal{L}((a^*b^*)^*) & = & \{\epsilon\} \\
 & & \cup\{\epsilon, \mathrm{a}, \mathrm{b}, \mathrm{aa}, \mathrm{ab}, \mathrm{bb}, \\
 & & \quad \mathrm{aaa}, \mathrm{aab}, \mathrm{abb}, \mathrm{bbb}, \ldots\} \\
 & & \cup\{\epsilon, \mathrm{a}, \mathrm{b}, \mathrm{aa}, \mathrm{ab}, \mathrm{ba}, \mathrm{bb}, \\
 & & \quad \mathrm{aaa}, \mathrm{aab}, \mathrm{aba}, \mathrm{abb}, \mathrm{baa}, \mathrm{bab}, \mathrm{bba}, \mathrm{bbb}, \ldots\} \\
 & & \vdots \\
 & = & \{\epsilon, \mathrm{a}, \mathrm{b}, \mathrm{aa}, \mathrm{ab}, \mathrm{ba}, \mathrm{bb}, \ldots\}
\end{array}
$$

Regular Definitions

Assign "names" to regular expressions.
For example,

$$\begin{aligned} \texttt{digit} &\longrightarrow 0 \mid 1 \mid \cdots \mid 9 \\ \texttt{natural} &\longrightarrow \texttt{digit}\ \texttt{digit}^* \end{aligned}$$

SHORTHANDS:

- a^+: Set of strings with one or more occurrences of a.
- $a^?$: Set of strings with zero or one occurrences of a.

Example:

$$\texttt{integer} \longrightarrow (+|-)^? \texttt{digit}^+$$

Regular Definitions: Examples

$$\begin{aligned} \texttt{float} &\longrightarrow \texttt{integer . fraction} \\ \texttt{integer} &\longrightarrow (+|-)^?\ \texttt{no\_leading\_zero} \\ \texttt{no\_leading\_zero} &\longrightarrow (\texttt{nonzero\_digit}\ \texttt{digit}^*) \mid 0 \\ \texttt{fraction} &\longrightarrow \texttt{no\_trailing\_zero}\ \texttt{exponent}^? \\ \texttt{no\_trailing\_zero} &\longrightarrow (\texttt{digit}^*\ \texttt{nonzero\_digit}) \mid 0 \\ \texttt{exponent} &\longrightarrow (\mathtt{E} \mid \mathtt{e})\ \texttt{integer} \\ \texttt{digit} &\longrightarrow 0 \mid 1 \mid \cdots \mid 9 \\ \texttt{nonzero\_digit} &\longrightarrow 1 \mid 2 \mid \cdots \mid 9 \end{aligned}$$

Regular Definitions and Lexical Analysis

Regular Expressions and Definitions *specify* sets of strings over an input alphabet.

- They can hence be used to specify the set of *lexemes* associated with a *token*.
- That is, regular expressions and definitions can be used as the *pattern* language

How do we decide whether an input string belongs to the set of strings specified by a regular expression?

Using Regular Definitions for Lexical Analysis

Q: Is ababbaabbb in $\mathcal{L}(((a^*b^*)^*)$?
A: Hm. Well. Let's see.

$$
\begin{aligned}
\mathcal{L}((a^*b^*)^*) &= \{\epsilon\} \\
&\quad \cup\{\epsilon, \mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}, \mathtt{aa}, \mathtt{ab}, \mathtt{bb}, \\
&\quad\quad \mathtt{aaa}, \mathtt{aab}, \mathtt{abb}, \mathtt{bbb}, \ldots\} \\
&\quad \cup\{\epsilon, \mathtt{a}, \mathtt{b}, \mathtt{aa}, \mathtt{ab}, \mathtt{ba}, \mathtt{bb}, \\
&\quad\quad \mathtt{aaa}, \mathtt{aab}, \mathtt{aba}, \mathtt{abb}, \mathtt{baa}, \mathtt{bab}, \mathtt{bba}, \mathtt{bbb}, \ldots\} \\
&\quad \vdots \\
&= ???
\end{aligned}
$$

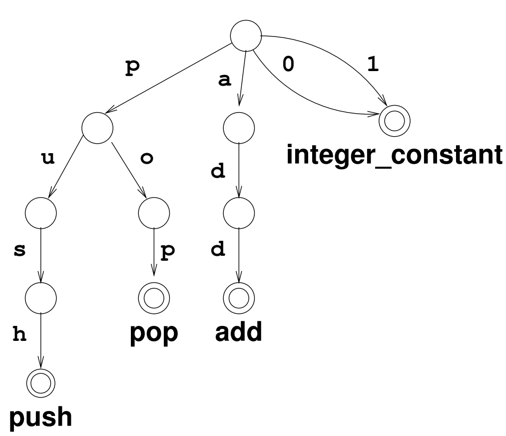
Recognizers

Construct *automata* that recognize strings belonging to a language.

- Finite State Automata ⇒ Regular Languages
  - Finite State → cannot maintain arbitrary counts.
- Push Down Automata ⇒ Context-free Languages
  - Stack is used to maintain counter, but only one counter can go arbitrarily high.

Recognizing Finite Sets of Strings

- Identifying words from a small, finite, fixed vocabulary is straightforward.
- For instance, consider a stack machine with `push`, `pop`, and `add` operations with two constants: `0` and `1`.
- We can use the *automaton*:



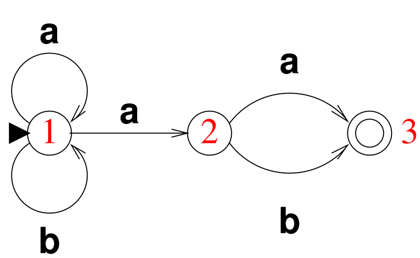
Finite State Automata

Represented by a labeled directed graph.

- A finite set of *states* (vertices).
- *Transitions* between states (edges).
- *Labels* on transitions are drawn from $\Sigma \cup \{\epsilon\}$.
- One distinguished *start* state.
- One or more distinguished *final* states.

Finite State Automata: An Example

Consider the Regular Expression **(a | b)*a(a | b)**.
$\mathcal{L}((a \mid b)^*a(a \mid b)) = \{\mathtt{aa}, \mathtt{ab}, \mathtt{aaa}, \mathtt{aab}, \mathtt{baa}, \mathtt{bab},$
$\mathtt{aaaa}, \mathtt{aaab}, \mathtt{abaa}, \mathtt{abab}, \mathtt{baaa}, \ldots\}$.
The following automaton determines whether an input string belongs to $\mathcal{L}((a \mid b)^*a(a \mid b)$:



Acceptance Criterion

A finite state automaton (NFA or DFA) *accepts* an input string x

... if beginning from the start state

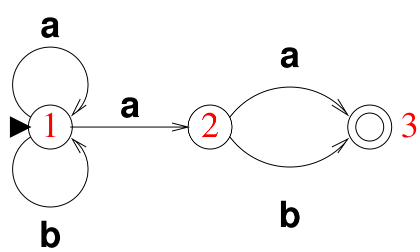
... we can trace some path through the automaton

... such that the sequence of edge labels spells x

... and end in a final state.

Recognition with an NFA

Is abab $\in \mathcal{L}((\mathbf{a} \mid \mathbf{b})^*\mathbf{a}(\mathbf{a} \mid \mathbf{b}))$?

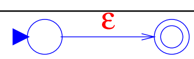


Input:		a	b	a	b	Accept?
Path 1:	1	1	1	1	1	no
Path 2:	1	1	1	2	3	yes
Path 3:	1	2	3	$\perp$	$\perp$	no
						YES

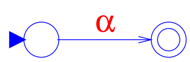
Regular Expressions to NFA

Thompson's Construction: For every regular expression r, derive an NFA $N(r)$ with unique start and final states.

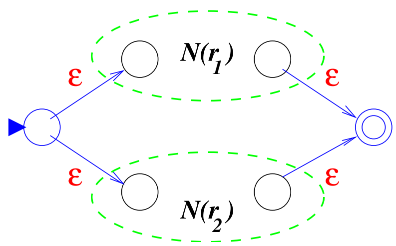
ϵ



$\alpha \in \Sigma$

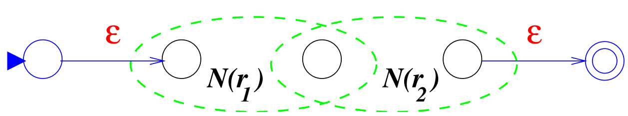


$(r_1 \mid r_2)$

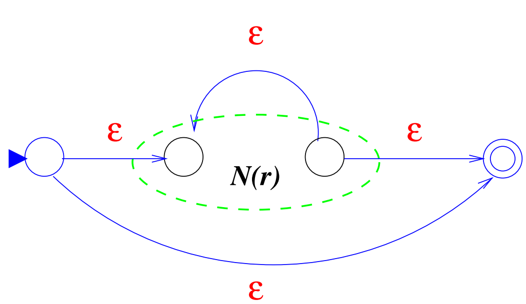


Regular Expressions to NFA (contd.)

$r_1 r_2$

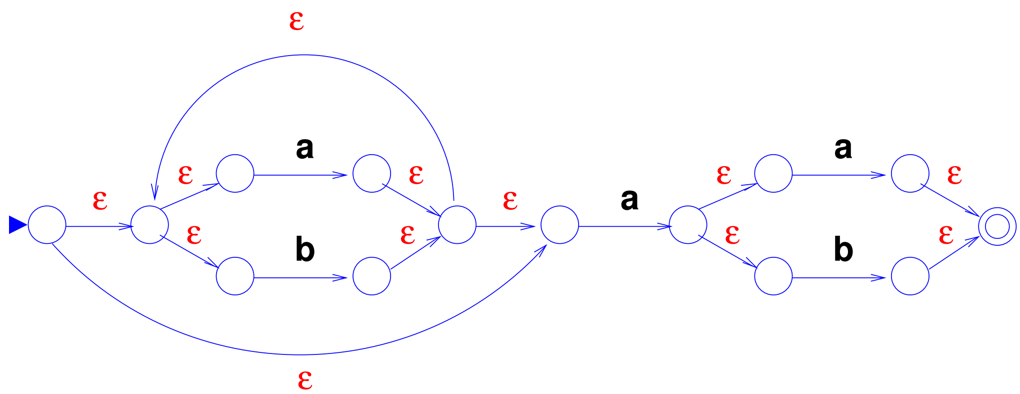


r^*



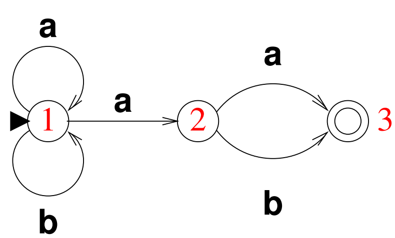
Example

(a | b)*a(a | b):



Recognition with an NFA

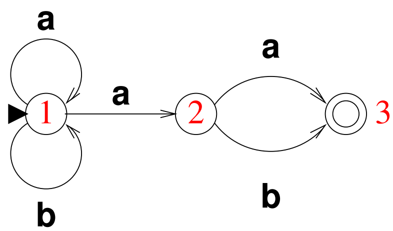
Is abab $\in \mathcal{L}((a \mid b)^*a(a \mid b))$?



Input:		a	b	a	b	Accept?
Path 1:	1	1	1	1	1	
Path 2:	1	1	1	2	3	Accept
Path 3:	1	2	3	$\perp$	$\perp$	
All Paths	$\{1\}$	$\{1,2\}$	$\{1,3\}$	$\{1,2\}$	$\{1,3\}$	Accept

Recognition with an NFA (contd.)

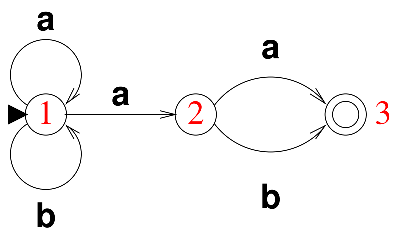
Is aaab $\in \mathcal{L}((\mathbf{a} \mid \mathbf{b})^*\mathbf{a}(\mathbf{a} \mid \mathbf{b}))$?



Input:		a	a	a	b	Accept?
Path 1:	1	1	1	1	1	
Path 2:	1	1	1	2	3	Accept
Path 3:	1	1	2	3	$\perp$	
Path 4:	1	2	3	$\perp$	$\perp$	
All Paths	$\{1\}$	$\{1,2\}$	$\{1,2,3\}$	$\{1,2,3\}$	$\{1,3\}$	Accept

Recognition with an NFA (contd.)

Is aabb $\in \mathcal{L}((\mathbf{a} \mid \mathbf{b})^*\mathbf{a}(\mathbf{a} \mid \mathbf{b}))$?

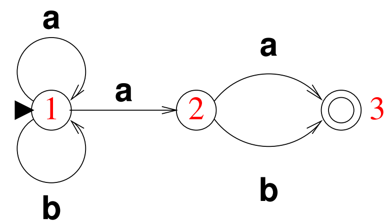


Input:		a	a	b	b	Accept?
Path 1:	1	1	1	1	1	
Path 2:	1	1	2	3	$\perp$	
Path 3:	1	2	3	$\perp$	$\perp$	
All Paths	$\{1\}$	$\{1,2\}$	$\{1,2,3\}$	$\{1,3\}$	$\{1\}$	REJECT

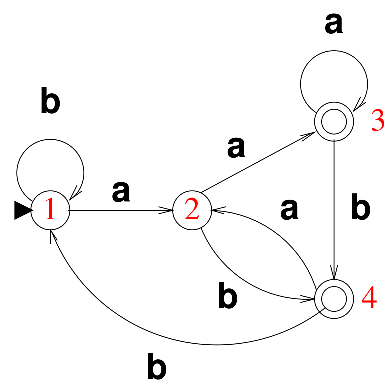
Determinism

(a | b)*a(a | b):

Nondeterministic:
(NFA)

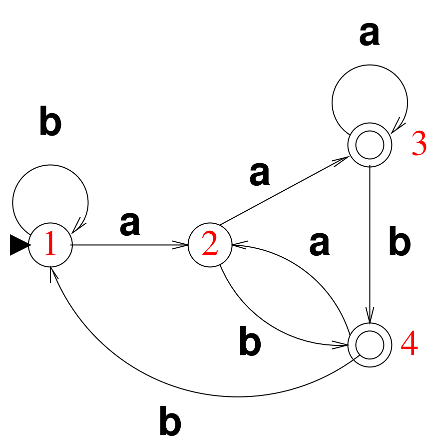


Deterministic:
(DFA)



Recognition with a DFA

Is abab $\in \mathcal{L}((a \mid b)^*a(a \mid b))$?



Input:		a	b	a	b	Accept?
Path:	1	2	4	2	4	YES

NFA vs. DFA

For every NFA, there is a DFA that accepts the same set of strings.

- NFA may have transitions labeled by ϵ.
  (Spontaneous transitions)
- All transition labels in a DFA belong to Σ.
- For some string x, there may be *many* accepting paths in an NFA.
- For all strings x, there is *one unique* accepting path in a DFA.
- Usually, an input string can be recognized *faster* with a DFA.
- NFAs are typically *smaller* than the corresponding DFAs.

NFA vs. DFA (contd.)

R = Size of Regular Expression
N = Length of Input String

	NFA	**DFA**
Size of Automaton	$O(R)$	$O(2^R)$
Recognition time per input string	$O(N \times R)$	$O(N)$

Converting NFA to DFA

Subset construction

Given a set S of NFA states,

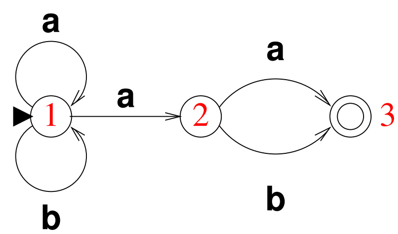
- compute $S_\epsilon = \epsilon$-closure(S): S_ϵ is the set of all NFA states reachable by zero or more ϵ-transitions from S.
- compute $S_\alpha = \text{goto}(S, \alpha)$:
  - S' is the set of all NFA states reachable from S by taking a transition labeled α.
  - $S_\alpha = \epsilon$-closure(S').

Converting NFA to DFA (contd).

- Each state in DFA corresponds to a *set of states* in NFA.
- Start state of DFA = ϵ-closure(start state of NFA).
- From a state s in DFA that corresponds to a set of states S in NFA:
  - let $S' = \text{goto}(S, \alpha)$ such that S' is non-empty.
  - add an α-transition to state s' that corresponds S' in NFA,
- S contains a final NFA state, and s is the corresponding DFA state

$$\Rightarrow s \text{ is a final state of DFA}$$

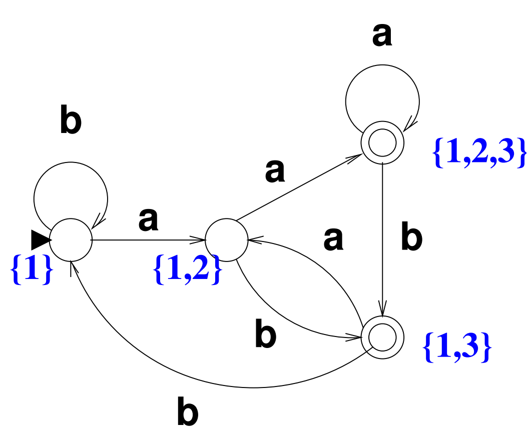
NFA → DFA: An Example



ϵ-closure($\{1\}$)	=	$\mathbf{\{1\}}$			
goto($\{1\}$, a)	=	$\mathbf{\{1,2\}}$	goto($\{1,2,3\}$, a)	=	$\mathbf{\{1,2,3\}}$
goto($\{1\}$, b)	=	$\{1\}$	goto($\{1,2,3\}$, b)	=	$\{1,3\}$
goto($\{1,2\}$, a)	=	$\mathbf{\{1,2,3\}}$	goto($\{1,3\}$, a)	=	$\{1,2\}$
goto($\{1,2\}$, b)	=	$\mathbf{\{1,3\}}$	goto($\{1,3\}$, b)	=	$\{1\}$

NFA → DFA: An Example (contd.)

ϵ-closure($\{1\}$)	=	$\{1\}$			
goto($\{1\}$, a)	=	$\{1,2\}$	goto($\{1,2,3\}$, a)	=	$\{1,2,3\}$
goto($\{1\}$, b)	=	$\{1\}$	goto($\{1,2,3\}$, b)	=	$\{1,3\}$
goto($\{1,2\}$, a)	=	$\{1,2,3\}$	goto($\{1,3\}$, a)	=	$\{1,2\}$
goto($\{1,2\}$, b)	=	$\{1,3\}$	goto($\{1,3\}$, b)	=	$\{1\}$



Construction of a Lexical Analyzer

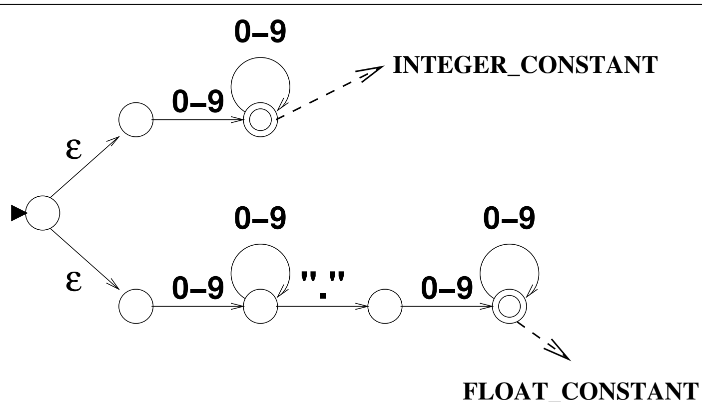
- Regular Expressions and Definitions are used to specify the set of strings (lexemes) corresponding to a *token*.
- An automaton (DFA/NFA) is built from the above specifications.
- Each final state is associated with an *action*: emit the corresponding token.

Specifying Lexical Analysis

Consider a recognizer for integers (sequence of digits) and floats (sequence of digits separated by a decimal point).

```
[0-9]+                { emit(INTEGER_CONSTANT); }

[0-9]+"."[0-9]+       { emit(FLOAT_CONSTANT); }
```



Lex

- Tool for building lexical analyzers.
- Input: lexical specifications (`.l` file)
- Output: C function (`yylex`) that returns a token on each invocation.
- Example:

```
%%
[0-9]+              { return(INTEGER_CONSTANT); }

[0-9]+"."[0-9]+     { return(FLOAT_CONSTANT); }
```

- Tokens are simply integers (`#define`'s).

Lex Specifications

```
%{
    C header statements for inclusion
%}
  Regular Definitions    e.g.:
    digit    [0-9]
%%

  Token Specifications    e.g.:
    {digit}+             { return(INTEGER_CONSTANT); }

%%
  Support functions in C
```

Lex/Flex Regular Expressions

Adds "syntactic sugar" to regular expressions:

- Range: `[0-7]`: Integers from 0 through 7 (inclusive)
  `[a-nx-zA-Q]`: Letters `a` thru `n`, `x` thru `z` and `A` thru `Q`.
- Exception: `[^/]`: Any character other than `/`.
- Definition: `{digit}`: Use the previously specified regular definition `digit`.
- Special characters: Connectives of regular expression, convenience features.
  e.g.: `| * ^`

Special Characters in Lex/Flex

`| * + ? ( )`	Same as in regular expressions
`[ ]`	Enclose ranges and exceptions
`{ }`	Enclose "names" of regular definitions
`^`	Used to negate a specified range (in Exception)
`.`	Match any single character except newline
`\`	Escape the next character
`\n`, `\t`	Newline and Tab

For literal matching, enclose special characters in double quotes (`"`) *e.g.:* `"*"`
Or use "\" to escape. *e.g.:* `\*`

Examples

`for`	Sequence of `f`, `o`, `r`
`"||"`	C-style OR operator (two vert. bars)
`.*`	Sequence of non-newline characters
`[^*/]+`	Sequence of characters except * and /
`\"[^"]*\"`	Sequence of non-quote characters beginning and ending with a quote
`({letter}|"_")({letter}|{digit}|"_")*`	C-style identifiers

Actions

Actions are attached to final states.
Actions:

- Distinguish the different final states.
- Are used to return *tokens*.
- Can be used to set *attribute values*.
- In Lex/Flex: action is a fragment of C code (blocks enclosed by '{' and '}').

PLY

PLY is a Yacc/Lex-like parser/lexer framework in Python.
(See `http://www.dabeaz.com/ply/`)

- List of tokens is declared *a priori*.
- Each token T with an action is specified by a Python function t_T:
  - Regular expression patterns, specified as Python docstrings, describe sets of lexemes.
  - Function body describes the action to be performed when input matches the pattern.
- Action-less token T is specified by defining variable t_T with the regular expression pattern as its value.

Example:

```
import ply.lex as lex

# List of token names.
tokens = ('NUMBER', 'PLUS',
   'MINUS')

# Tokens without actions.
t_PLUS = r'\+'
t_MINUS = r'-'

# A token with action.
def t_NUMBER(t):
    r'\d+'
    t.value = int(t.value)
    return t
```


Mechanics

- The returned tokens are instances of class `LexToken`, with attributes `type`, `value`, `lineno` and `lexpos`.
- Line numbers have to be maintained explicitly by setting the `lineno` attribute of the lexer.
- To ignore a lexeme (i.e. not return a token),
  - end its action with a `pass` instead of `return`, or
  - name the rule as `t_ignore`
- Error handling (for characters not matching any pattern) can be specified as function `t_error`.
- PLY's lexer can handle regular definitions, as well as conditional analysis (*a la* lex) where matching can be controlled by explicitly maintained conditions. See PLY documentation for details.

Priority of matching

- Patterns for tokens with actions are matched in the order they are specified.
- Regular expressions for action-less tokens are sorted, and matched longest-expression first.

Constructing Lexers using PLY

- Easy way:
  - `lex.lex()` to create the lexer;
  - `lex.input()` to specify the input string to be scanned;
  - repeated invocation of `lex.token()` to generate tokens.
- Alternative (better) way:
  - Put lexer specifications in a separate module, say `proto2lex.py`.
  - `lexer = lex.lex(module=proto2lex)` to create a lexer (referenced from variable `lexer`).
  - `lexer.input(...)` to specify its input
  - `lexer.token()` to generate tokens, one at a time.
- The alternative way works even when there are multiple instances of the same lexer in an application.

Lexical Analysis: Summary

Convert a stream of characters into a stream of tokens.

- Make rest of compiler independent of character set
- Strip off comments
- Recognize line numbers
- Ignore white space characters
- Process macros (definitions and uses)
- Interface with **symbol table** (also called "name table").