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ABSTRACT

This project is the design and implementation of a mini-language interpreter which is implemented with a windows type interface. The mini language is Core. The interpreter will be used to teach students at Texas A&M - Corpus Christi the concepts of programming without limiting the students to a particular language.
1.0 Mini-languages

A mini-language is a programming language with limited functionality, syntax, and semantics. It may be a subset of a general language or a small language in its own right. Mini-languages are useful in teaching students to develop skills involving the design of programming languages. Mini-languages contain basic control structures found in all procedural programming languages. A mini-language allows students to study the workings of control structures without having to deal with the nuances of a fully functional language. Mini-languages allow the programmer to study programming languages with severe constraints on language flexibility.

Creating an interpreter for the mini-language Core will allow programmers to fully implement and test the limits of this language. The interpreted mini-language allows teaching students how to recognize syntax vs semantic errors when programming. The X-Windows System interface will provide ease of use, allowing the programmer to concentrate on the mechanisms of the language rather than the intricacies of the interpreter. The implementation of this interpreter will also allow programmers to study the utilization of Unix tools to create an interpreter and possibly find better ways of writing interpreters.

1.1 Description of Core Mini-language

Core is a Pascal-like mini-language with limited functionality developed by Marcotty and Ledgard. Variables can be only positive integers. Variable names must be capital letters with an optional underscore anywhere after the first letter. There are two control structures - an "if then else" selector and a "while" loop. Core uses a "not equals" symbol (≠) for comparison that is not implemented on an ASCII keyboard, therefore the C convention of "not equals" (!=) is used.
Core has an assignment operator (:=) and a compare operator (=) that are be handled in the interpreter. Comparison operations for the language also include greater/less than (>/<). Core contains the mathematical operations multiplication (*), addition (+), and subtraction (-).

Core has six semantic and syntax error conditions that can lead to an early termination of the program. The undefined value error occurs when the variable has not been declared but is assigned an integer value in the program. The overflow error occurs when values applied to a math operator exceed the capacity of the machine to handle the result. The negative value error occurs during subtraction when the result of the operation is not positive, as Core can only handle positive values. A negative value entry will be a syntax error. Insufficient data error occurs when the variable has been declared but never assigned a value. The size error occurs when the size of the integer being used exceeds the capacity of the machine on which it is running. The illegal character error occurs when the syntax rules are violated such as a digit within a variable name or a lower case letter. The context free syntax in Backus-Naur Form (BNF) is illustrated in Figure 1.1.
Figure 1.1: Context Free Syntax of Mini-Language Core in BNF
1.2 Tools for Building Interpreter

The project also involves the use of the lex and yacc Unix tools to create the interpreter. Lex is used solely to perform lexical analysis and pass tokens to yacc. Yacc has the grammar rules for the language to be interpreted and repeatedly calls lex so that the syntax can be checked. The main program is included in yacc to allow for error checking. The X-Windows System is integrated into the main program in yacc to produce the windows interface.
2.0 Steps to Complete the Project

1. Syntax expressions.
2. Variable checking with hash table.
3. Assignment statements and math operations.
4. If statements and compares.
5. While loop.
6. Input and output statements.
7. Test.

2.1 Writing the Syntax expressions for Core

Syntax expressions for a mini-language enforce the checking for basic errors which can be anything from a keyboard error to a wording error as simple as not ending the program with the word end. The yacc generated parser takes the tokens from lex and fits them into the expression. If there is a token that is not found in the expression, a syntax error is given by yacc and the program is halted. Syntax rules for Core also require that reserved words be in lowercase while all variables are in uppercase.

Passing reserved words and math and comparison operators from lex to yacc was the first task. The simplest lex specification is shown in Figure 2.1.

```plaintext
%%
program       return PROGRAM;
begin          return BEGINS;
end            return END;
";"            return SEMICOLON;
%%
```

Figure 2.1. Simplest Lex Program.

To run the file in Figure 2.1, save the file with a " .l" extension. The filename used to save the lex is spec1.l Then use the unix command lex spec1.l. This creates the file lex.yy.c. This file is then included in the yacc program.

For the Core program the lex file returns upper case versions of the reserved words to distinguish between tokens and variables in the yacc program, shown in Figure 2.2.