Programming Languages

2nd edition

Tucker and Noonan

Chapter 1
Overview

A good programming language is a conceptual universe for thinking about programming.

A. Perlis

Contents

1.1 Principles

Programming languages have four properties:

- *Syntax*
- *Names*
- *Types*
- *Semantics*

For any language:

- *Its designers must define these properties*
- *Its programmers must master these properties*

Syntax

The *syntax* of a programming language is a precise description of all its grammatically correct programs.

When studying syntax, we ask questions like:

- *What is the grammar for the language?*
- *What is the basic vocabulary?*
- *How are syntax errors detected?*

Names

Various kinds of entities in a program have names:

variables, types, functions, parameters, classes, objects, …

Named entities are bound in a running program to:

- *Scope*
- *Visibility*
- *Type*
- *Lifetime*

Types

A *type* is a collection of values and a collection of operations on those values.

- Simple types
  - *numbers, characters, booleans, …*
- Structured types
  - *Strings, lists, trees, hash tables, …*
- A language's *type system* can help to:
  - *Determine legal operations*
  - *Detect type errors*

Semantics

The meaning of a program is called its *semantics*.

In studying semantics, we ask questions like:

- *When a program is running, what happens to the values of the variables?*
- *What does each statement mean?*
- *What underlying model governs run-time behavior, such as function call?*
- *How are objects allocated to memory at run-time?*

1.2 Paradigms

A programming *paradigm* is a pattern of problem-solving thought that underlies a particular genre of programs and languages.

There are four main programming paradigms:

- *Imperative*
- *Object-oriented*
- *Functional*
- *Logic (declarative)*

Imperative Paradigm

Follows the classic von Neumann-Eckert model:

- *Program and data are indistinguishable in memory*
- *Program = a sequence of commands*
- *State = values of all variables when program runs*
- *Large programs use procedural abstraction*

Example imperative languages:

- *Cobol, Fortran, C, Ada, Perl, …*

The von Neumann-Eckert Model

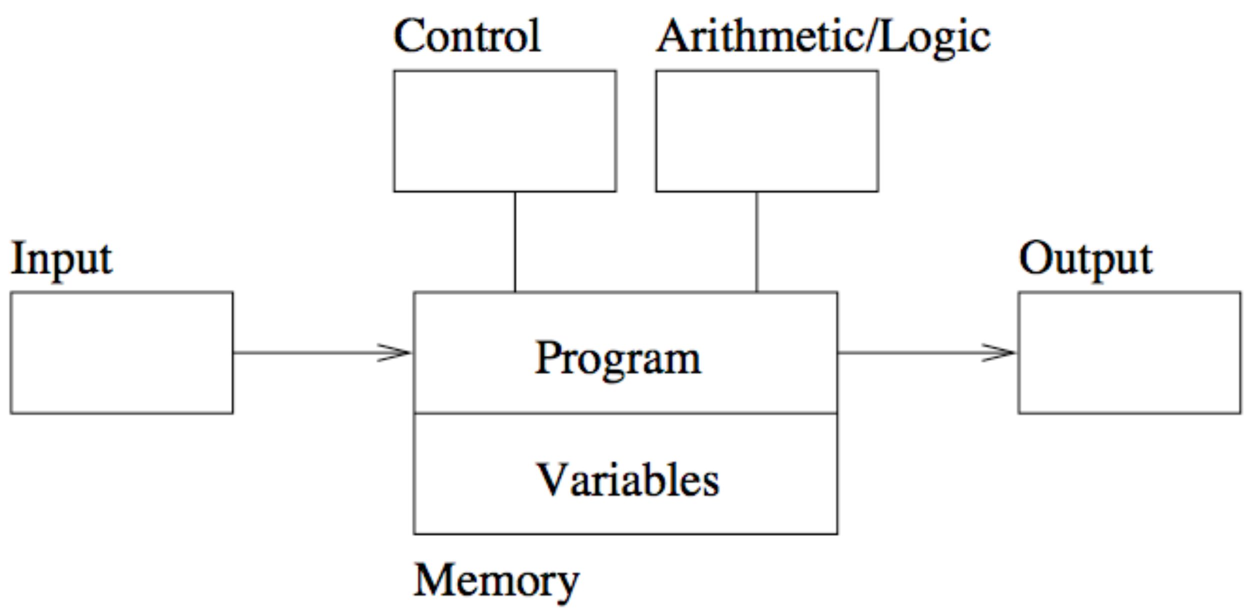

Figure 1.1: The von Neumann-Eckert Computer Model

Object-oriented (OO) Paradigm

An OO Program is a collection of objects that interact by passing messages that transform the state.

When studying OO, we learn about:

- *Sending Messages*
- *Inheritance*
- *Polymorphism*

Example OO languages:

Smalltalk, Java, C++, C#, and Python

Functional Paradigm

Functional programming models a computation as a collection of mathematical functions.

- *Input = domain*
- *Output = range*

Functional languages are characterized by:

- *Functional composition*
- *Recursion*

Example functional languages:

- *Lisp, Scheme, ML, Haskell, …*

Logic Paradigm

Logic programming declares what outcome the program should accomplish, rather than how it should be accomplished.

When studying logic programming we see:

- *Programs as sets of constraints on a problem*
- *Programs that achieve all possible solutions*
- *Programs that are nondeterministic*

Example logic programming languages:

- *Prolog*

1.3 Special Topics

- Event handling
  - *E.g., GUIs, home security systems*
- Concurrency
  - *E.g., Client-server programs*
- Correctness
  - *How can we prove that a program does what it is supposed to do under all circumstances?*
  - *Why is this important???*

1.4 A Brief History

How and when did programming languages evolve?

What communities have developed and used them?

- *Artificial Intelligence*
- *Computer Science Education*
- *Science and Engineering*
- *Information Systems*
- *Systems and Networks*
- *World Wide Web*

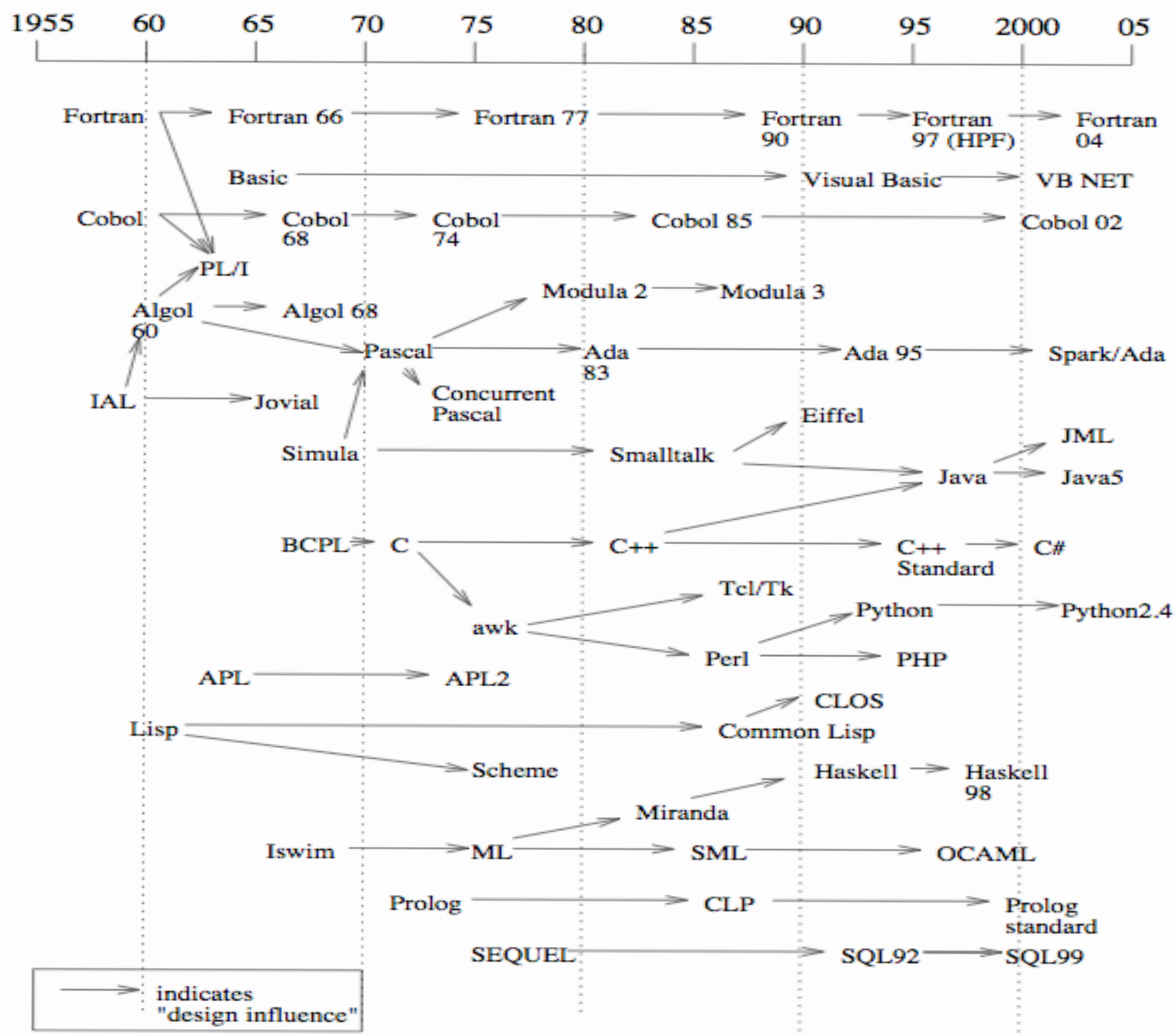

Figure 1.2: A Snapshot of Programming Language History

1.5 On Language Design

Design Constraints

- *Computer architecture*
- *Technical setting*
- *Standards*
- *Legacy systems*

Design Outcomes and Goals

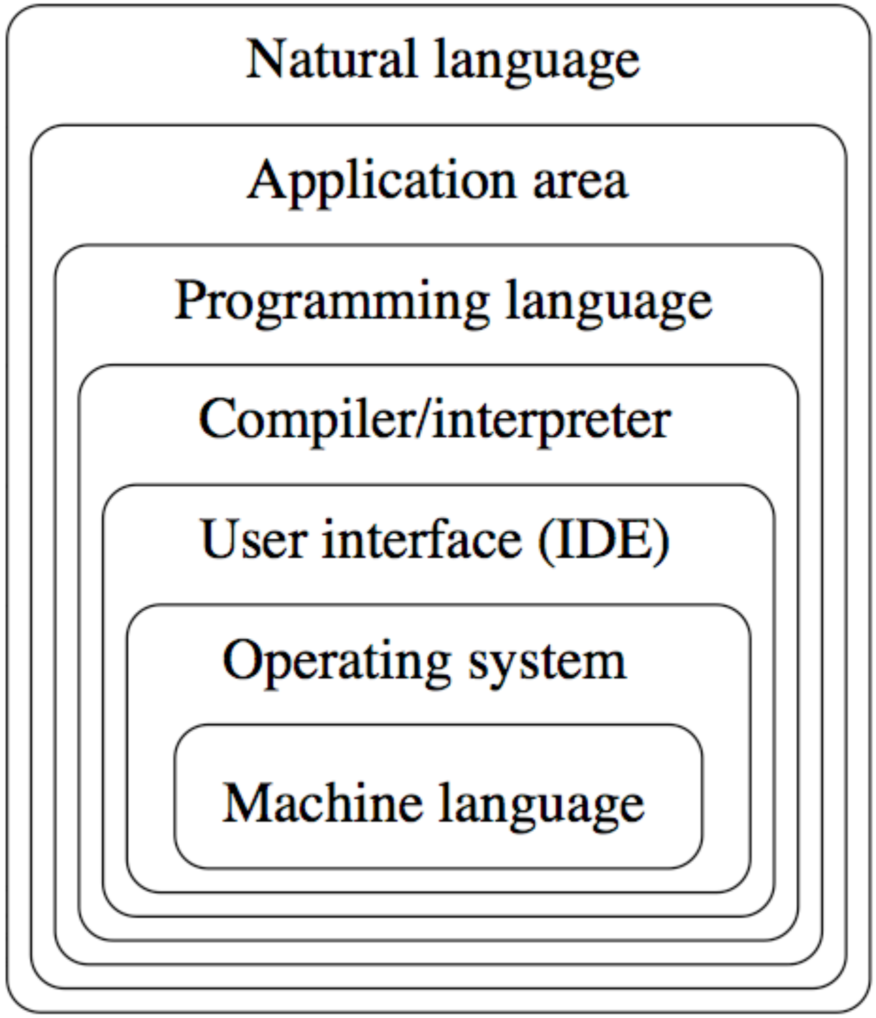

Figure 1.3: Levels of Abstraction in Computing

What makes a successful language?

Key characteristics:

- *Simplicity and readability*
- *Clarity about binding*
- *Reliability*
- *Support*
- *Abstraction*
- *Orthogonality*
- *Efficient implementation*

Simplicity and Readability

- Small instruction set
  - *E.g., Java vs Scheme*
- Simple syntax
  - *E.g., C/C++/Java vs Python*
- Benefits:
  - *Ease of learning*
  - *Ease of programming*

Clarity about Binding

A language element is bound to a property at the time that property is defined for it.

So a *binding* is the association between an object and a property of that object

- *Examples:*
  - a variable and its type
  - a variable and its value
- *Early binding* takes place at compile-time
- *Late binding* takes place at run time

Reliability

A language is *reliable* if:

- *Program behavior is the same on different platforms*
  - E.g., early versions of Fortran
- *Type errors are detected*
  - E.g., C vs Haskell
- *Semantic errors are properly trapped*
  - E.g., C vs C++
- *Memory leaks are prevented*
  - E.g., C vs Java

Language Support

- Accessible (public domain) compilers/interpreters
- Good texts and tutorials
- Wide community of users
- Integrated with development environments (IDEs)

Abstraction in Programming

- Data
  - *Programmer-defined types/classes*
  - *Class libraries*
- Procedural
  - *Programmer-defined functions*
  - *Standard function libraries*

Orthogonality

A language is *orthogonal* if its features are built upon a small, mutually independent set of primitive operations.

- Fewer exceptional rules = conceptual simplicity
  - *E.g., restricting types of arguments to a function*
- Tradeoffs with efficiency

Efficient implementation

- Embedded systems
  - *Real-time responsiveness (e.g., navigation)*
  - *Failures of early Ada implementations*
- Web applications
  - *Responsiveness to users (e.g., Google search)*
- Corporate database applications
  - *Efficient search and updating*
- AI applications
  - *Modeling human behaviors*

1.6 Compilers and Virtual Machines

Compiler – produces machine code

Interpreter – executes instructions on a virtual machine

- Example compiled languages:
  - *Fortran, Cobol, C, C++*
- Example interpreted languages:
  - *Scheme, Haskell, Python*
- Hybrid compilation/interpretation
  - *The Java Virtual Machine (JVM)*

The Compiling Process

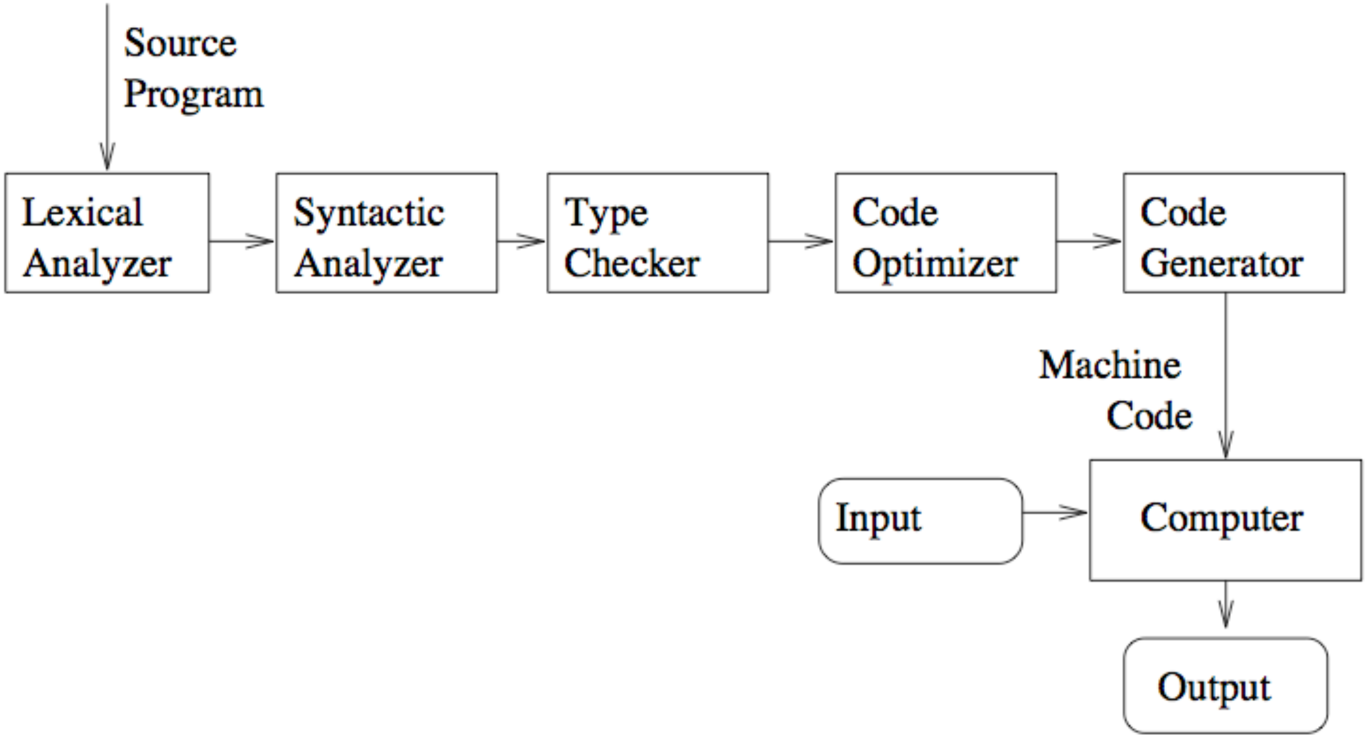

Figure 1.4: The Compile-and-Run Process

The Interpreting Process

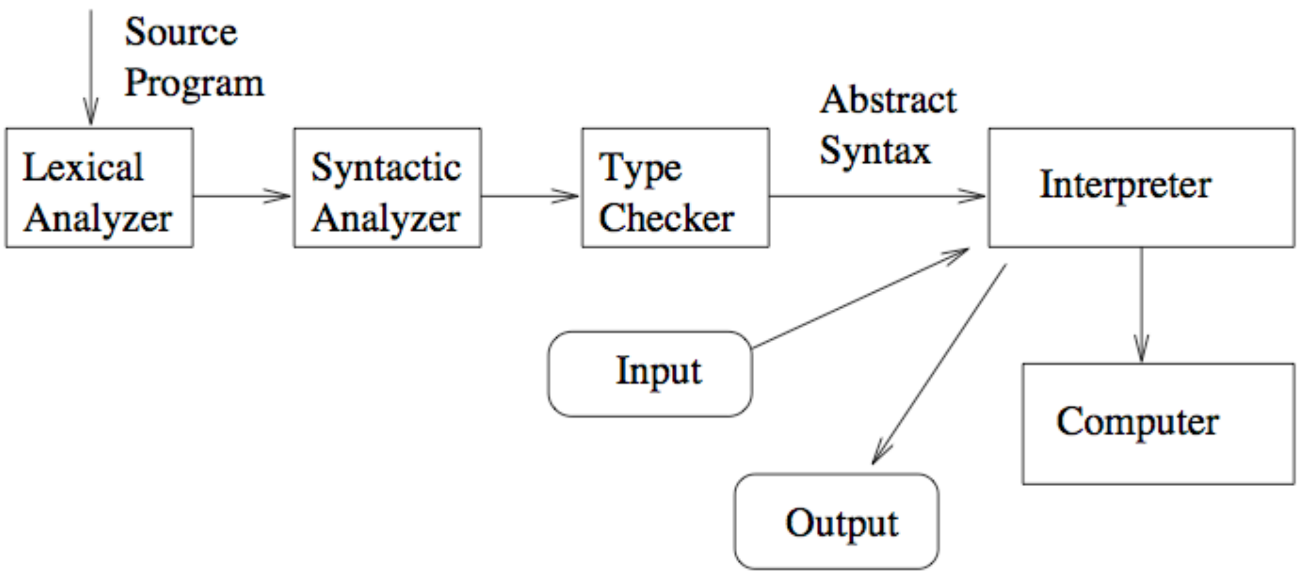

Figure 1.5: Virtual Machines and Interpreters

Discussion Questions

1. Comment on the following quotation:

   It is practically impossible to teach good programming to students that have had a prior exposure to BASIC; as potential programmers they are mentally mutilated beyond hope of regeneration. – E. Dijkstra

2. Give an example statement in your favorite language that is particularly unreadable. E.g., what does the C expression `while (*p++ = *q++)` mean?