

# Μεταγλωττιστές (Εαρινό 2026)

Εισαγωγή στο Σχεδιασμό και στην Υλοποίηση  
των Γλωσσών Προγραμματισμού

# How are Languages Implemented?

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- Two major strategies:
  - Interpreters (older, less studied)
  - Compilers (newer, much more studied)
- Interpreters run programs “as is”
  - Little or no preprocessing
- Compilers do extensive preprocessing

# Language Implementations

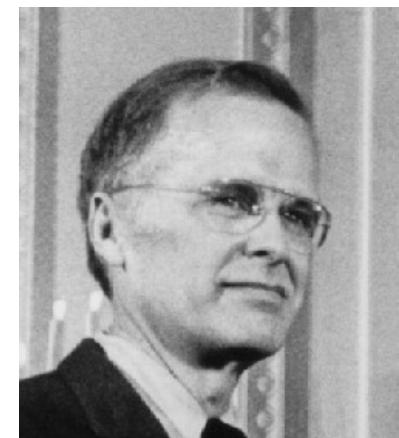
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- Today, batch compilation systems dominate
  - gcc, clang, ...
- Some languages are primarily interpreted
  - Java bytecode compiler (javac)
  - Scripting languages (perl, python, javascript, ...)
- Some languages (e.g. Lisp) provide both
  - Interpreter for development
  - Compiler for production

# (Short) History of High-Level Languages

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- 1953 IBM develops the 701
- Till then, all programming is done in assembly
- Problem: Software costs exceeded hardware costs!
- John Backus: “Speedcoding”
  - An interpreter
  - Ran 10-20 times slower than hand-written assembly



# FORTRAN I

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- 1954 IBM develops the 704
- John Backus
  - Idea: translate high-level code to assembly
  - Many thought this impossible
    - Had already failed in other projects
- 1954-7 FORTRAN I project
- By 1958, >50% of all software is in FORTRAN
- Cut development time dramatically
  - (2 weeks → 2 hours)

# FORTRAN I

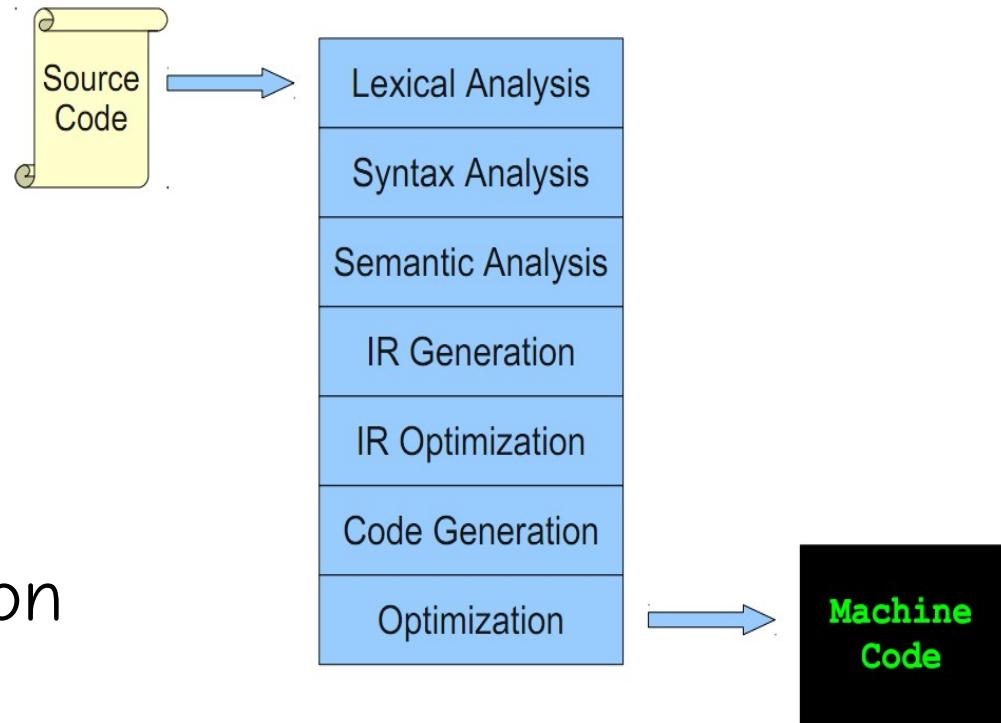
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- The first compiler
  - Produced code almost as good as hand-written
  - Huge impact on computer science
- Led to an enormous body of theoretical work
- Modern compilers preserve the outlines of the FORTRAN I compiler

# The Structure of a Compiler

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1. Lexical Analysis
2. Syntax Analysis
3. Semantic Analysis
4. IR Optimization
5. Code Generation
6. Low-level Optimization



The first 3 phases can be understood by analogy to how humans comprehend natural languages (e.g., English, Greek, etc.).

## First Step: Lexical Analysis

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- Recognize words
  - Smallest unit above letters

This is a sentence.

- Note the
  - Capital "T" (start of sentence symbol)
  - Blank " " (word separator)
  - Period ":" (end of sentence symbol)

## More Lexical Analysis

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- Lexical analysis is not trivial. Consider:  
*ist his ase nte nce*
- Plus, programming languages are typically more cryptic than English:

**\*p->f ++ = - .12345e-5**

## And More Lexical Analysis

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- Lexical analyzer divides program text into “words” or “tokens”

**if (x == y) then z = 1; else z = 2;**

- Units:

**if, (, x, ==, y, ), then, z, =, 1, ;, else, z, =, 2, ;**

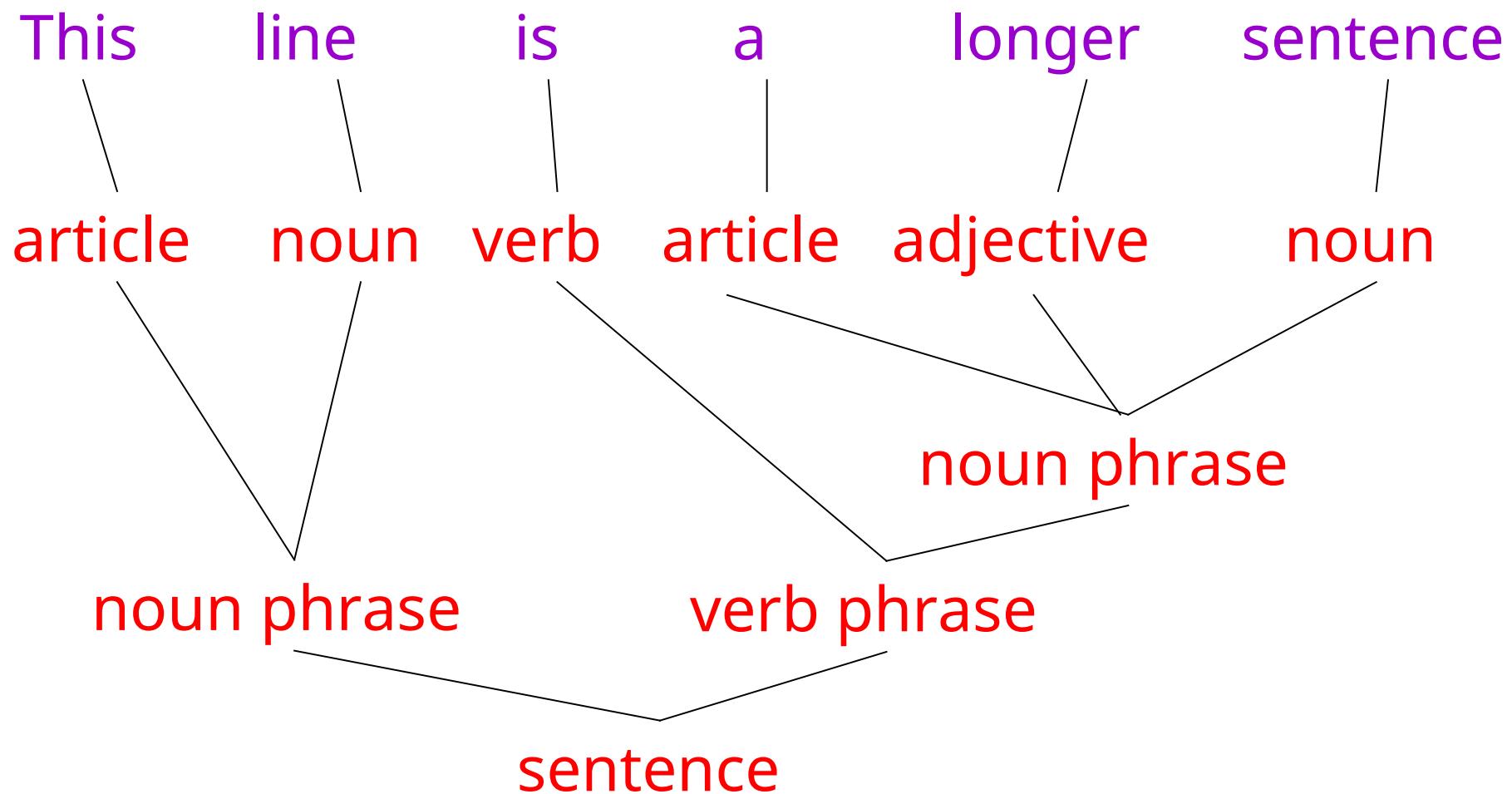
## Second Step: Syntax Analysis (Parsing)

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- Once words are identified, the next step is to understand the sentence structure
- Parsing = Diagramming Sentences
  - The diagram is a tree

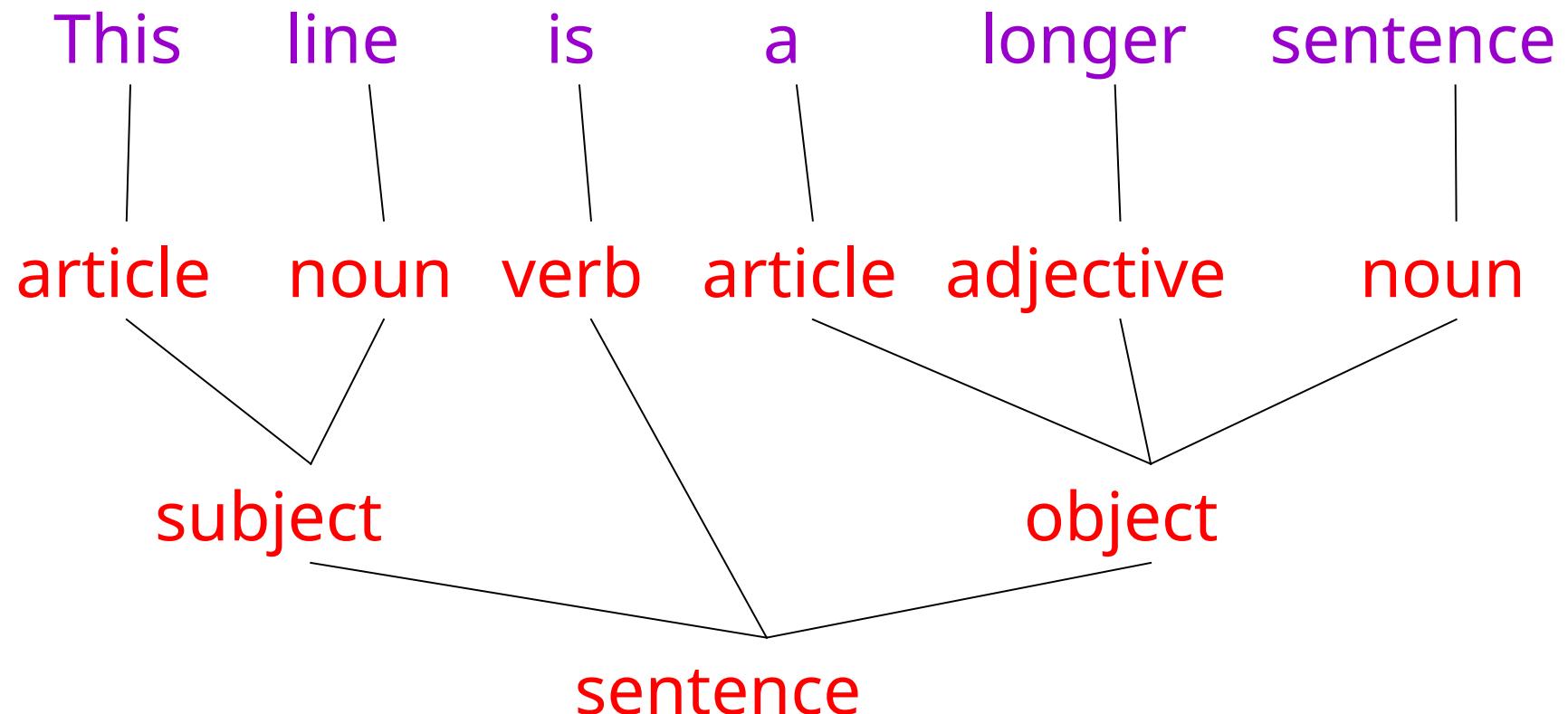
## Diagramming a Sentence (1)

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## Diagramming a Sentence (2)

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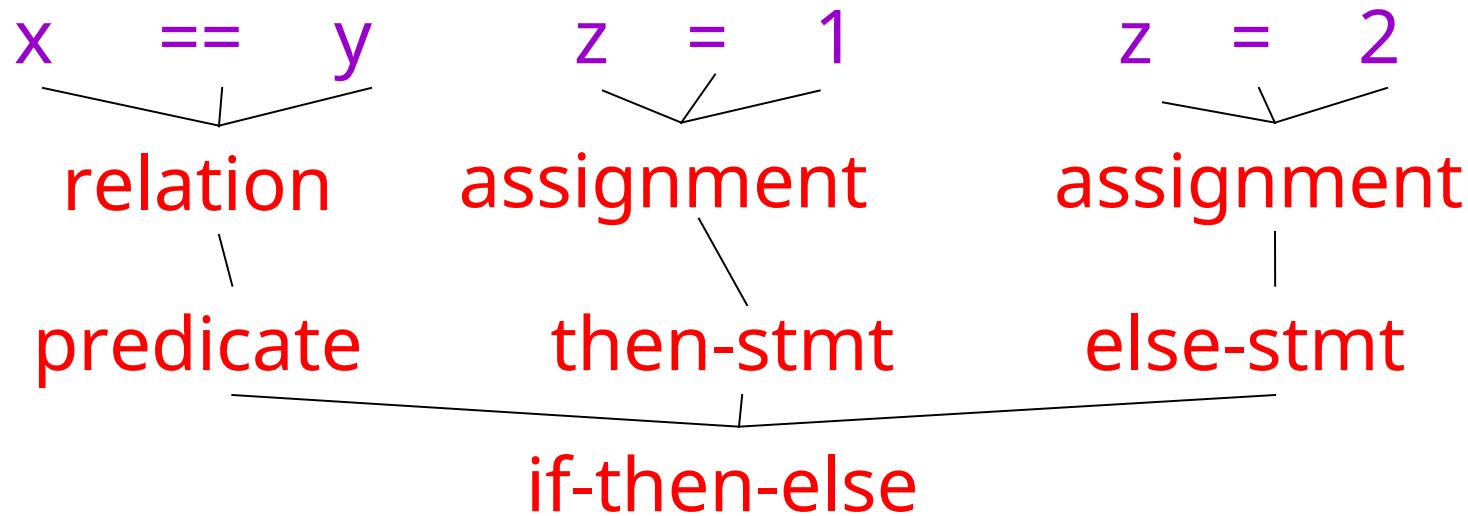
# Parsing Programs

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- Parsing program expressions is the same
- Consider:

**if (x == y) then z = 1; else z = 2;**

- Diagrammed:



## Third Step: Semantic Analysis

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- Once the sentence structure is understood, we can try to understand its “meaning”
  - But, sometimes, “meaning” is too hard for compilers
- Most compilers perform limited analysis to catch inconsistencies
- Some optimizing compilers do more analysis to improve the performance of the program

# Semantic Analysis in English

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- Example:

Jack said Jerry left his assignment at home.

What does “his” refer to? Jack or Jerry?

- Even worse:

Jack said Jack left his assignment at home.

How many Jacks are there?

Which one left the assignment?

# Semantic Analysis in Programming Languages

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- Programming languages define strict rules to avoid such ambiguities

- This C++ code prints 42; the inner definition is used

```
{  
    int Jack = 17;  
    {  
        int Jack = 42;  
        cout << Jack;  
    }  
}
```

## More Semantic Analysis

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- Compilers perform many semantic checks besides variable bindings
- Example:

Arnold left her homework at home.
- A “type mismatch” between *her* and Arnold; we know they are different people  
(Presumably Arnold is male...)

# Optimization

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- No strong counterpart in English, but akin to editing
- Automatically modify programs so that they
  - Run faster
    - avoid some source code redundancy
    - exploit the underlying hardware more effectively
  - Use less memory/cache/power
  - In general, conserve some resource more economically

## Optimization Example

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$X = Y * 0$  is the same as  $X = 0$

NO!

Valid for integers, but not for floating point numbers

## Code Generation

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- Produces assembly code (usually)
- A translation into another language
  - Analogous to human translation

## Intermediate Languages

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- Many compilers perform translations between successive intermediate forms
  - All but first and last are *intermediate languages* internal to the compiler
  - Typically there is one IL
- Intermediate languages generally ordered in descending level of abstraction
  - Highest is source
  - Lowest is assembly

## Intermediate Languages (Cont.)

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- IL's are useful because lower levels expose features hidden by higher levels
  - registers
  - memory/frame layout
  - etc.
- But lower levels obscure high-level meaning

## Issues

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- Compiling is almost this simple, but there are many pitfalls
- Example: How are erroneous programs handled?
- Language design has big impact on compiler
  - Determines what is easy and hard to compile
  - Course theme: many trade-offs in language design

# Compilers Today

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- The overall structure of almost every compiler adheres to our outline
- The proportions have changed since FORTRAN
  - Early:
    - lexical analysis, parsing most complex, expensive
  - Today:
    - lexical analysis and parsing are well-understood and cheap
    - semantic analysis and optimization dominate
    - focus on concurrency/parallelism and interactions with the memory model of the underlying platform
    - optimization for code size and energy consumption

# Current Trends in Compilation

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- Compilation for speed is less interesting. However, there are exceptions:
  - scientific programs
  - advanced processors (Digital Signal Processors, advanced speculative architectures, GPUs)
- Ideas from compilation used for improving code reliability:
  - memory safety
  - detecting data races
  - security properties
  - ...

# Programming Language Economics

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- Programming languages are designed to fill a void
  - enable a previously difficult/impossible application
  - orthogonal to language design quality (almost)
- Programming training is the dominant cost
  - Languages with a big user base are replaced rarely
  - Popular languages become ossified
  - But it is easy to start in a new niche...

# Why So Many Programming Languages?

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- Application domains have distinctive (and sometimes conflicting) needs
- Examples:
  - *Scientific computing*: High performance
  - *Business*: report generation
  - *Artificial intelligence*: symbolic computation
  - *Systems programming*: efficient low-level access
  - *Web programming*: scripts that run everywhere
  - *Multicores*: concurrency and parallelism
  - Other special purpose languages...

## Topic: Language Design

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- No universally accepted metrics for design
- “A good language is one people use”
- NO !
  - Is COBOL the best language?
- Good language design is hard

# Language Evaluation Criteria

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Characteristic	Criteria		
	Readability	Writeability	Reliability
Simplicity	YES	YES	YES
Datatypes	YES	YES	YES
Syntax design	YES	YES	YES
Abstraction		YES	YES
Expressivity		YES	YES
Type checking			YES
Exceptions			YES

# History of Ideas: Abstraction

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- Abstraction = detached from concrete details
- Necessary for building software systems
- Modes of abstraction:
  - Via languages/compilers
    - higher-level code; few machine dependencies
  - Via subroutines
    - abstract interface to behavior
  - Via modules
    - export interfaces which hide implementation
  - Via abstract data types
    - bundle data with its operations

# History of Ideas: Types

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- Originally, languages had only few types
  - FORTRAN: scalars, arrays
  - LISP: no static type distinctions
- Realization: types help
  - provide code documentation
  - allow the programmer to express abstraction
  - allow the compiler to check among many frequent errors and sometimes guarantee various forms of safety
- More recently:
  - experiments with various forms of parameterization
  - best developed in functional languages

## History of Ideas: Reuse

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- Exploits common patterns in software development
- Goal: mass produced software components
- Reuse is difficult
- Two popular approaches (combined in C++)
  - Type parameterization (List(Int) & List(Double))
  - Class and inheritance: C++ derived classes
- Inheritance allows:
  - specialization of existing abstractions
  - extension, modification and information hiding

# Current Trends

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- **Language design**
  - Many new special-purpose languages
  - Popular languages to stay
- **Compilers**
  - More needed and more complex
  - Driven by increasing gap between
    - new languages
    - new architectures
  - Venerable and healthy area

# Why Study Compilers?

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- Increase your knowledge of common programming constructs and their properties
- Improve your understanding of program execution
- Increase your ability to learn new languages
- Learn how languages are implemented
- Learn new (programming) techniques
- See many basic CS concepts at work