# Day 1.

## 1. Defining a Language

What is a programming language?

- well-defined
- representation of (originally: abstraction for)
- computation (originally: instructions to a thing that computes)

So, let's build one!

Two aspects of language definition:

- *Syntax*
  - from the Greek συνταξις("suntaxis") coordination
  - most *technical* questions about syntax—parsing and printing—well-studied
  - see compilers for mechanisms, theory of computation for theoretical aspects
  - not particularly the focus of this course: parsers and printers will generally be provided
- *Semantics*
  - from the Greek σημαντικος("sēmantikos") significant
  - many open questions—much of PL theory revolves around questions of *defining* and *approximating* program semantics
  - variety of techniques—from the very mathematical (interpreting programs as mathematical functions) to the very empirical (programs mean what the compiler/hardware do)
  - this class—theory of language semantics; compilers—practice of language semantics
  - can we ever really get away from translation?
- Most semantic concerns independent of syntactic concerns *in programming languages*

## 2. Arithmetic Expressions (Part 1)

*Model of computation:* grade school arithmetic.

Have to define syntax, even if it's not the point of the course. Levels of syntax:

- input stream/characters ( 1 8 + 5 ) × 2
- lexemes/words ( 18 + 5 ) × 2
- terms/sentences ( 18 + 5 ) × 2

Underlining convention: language being defined is *underlined*, meta-notation written normally. (Broken regularly from now on.)

Our approach: define the *terms* of a language; leave remaining syntactic concerns implicit.

Terms, intuitively: sums, products, constants. How to make formal?

*1.*

- Mathematical description: Let the set $\mathcal{E}$ be the *smallest* set such that
  1. For all integers $z \in \mathbb{Z}$, $z \in \mathcal{E}$;
  2. If $e_1, e_2 \in \mathcal{E}$, then $e_1 \mathbin{\underline{+}} e_2 \in \mathcal{E}$; and,
  3. If $e_1, e_2 \in \mathcal{E}$, then $e_1 \mathbin{\underline{\times}} e_2 \in \mathcal{E}$
- System of *inference rules*:

$$\frac{}{z \in \mathcal{E}}\,(z \in \mathbb{Z}) \qquad \frac{e_1 \in \mathcal{E} \quad e_2 \in \mathcal{E}}{e_1 \mathbin{\underline{+}} e_2 \in \mathcal{E}} \qquad \frac{e_1 \in \mathcal{E} \quad e_2 \in \mathcal{E}}{e_1 \mathbin{\underline{\times}} e_2 \in \mathcal{E}}$$

- *BNF* (Backus-Naur form) rules:

$$\mathcal{E} \ni e ::= z \mid e_1 \mathbin{\underline{+}} e_2 \mid e_1 \mathbin{\underline{\times}} e_2$$

Key ideas:

- Each defines the same notion
- Each is *compositional*: bigger terms are built out of smaller terms
  - Operations on terms will be defined the same way: recursive functions are the natural consequence of compositional definition
- Still have to disambiguate our *representation* of terms, but parentheses &c. are in our *meta*-notation, not in terms themselves

Happy surprise: (almost) direct correspondence between mathematical formalism and executable Haskell

```
data Expr = Const Int | Plus Expr Expr | Times Expr Expr
```

Some functions:

```
eval :: Expr → Int
eval (Const z)     = z
eval (Plus e1 e2)  = eval e1 + eval e2
eval (Times e1 e2) = eval e1 * eval e2

pp :: Expr → String
pp (Const z)     = show z
pp (Plus e1 e2)  = "(" ++ pp e1 ++ ") + (" ++ pp e2 ++ ")"
pp (Times e1 e2) = "(" ++ pp e1 ++ ") * (" ++ pp e2 ++ ")"
```

Key ideas:

- Pattern matching: always your friend
- Recursion: always your other friend
- Summary: structure of computation parallels structure of data