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Executable Formal Semantics of C

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1 Introduction

We present an executable formal semantics of the C programming language which will serve as the specification of the input language for the CerCo verified compiler. Our semantics is based on Leroy et. al.'s C semantics for the CompCert project [2, 3], which divides the treatment of C into two pieces. The first is an OCaml stage which parses and elaborates C into an abstract syntax tree for the simpler Clight language, based on the CIL C parser. The second part is a small step semantics for Clight formalised in the proof tool, which we have ported from Coq to the matita theorem prover. This semantics is given in the form of inductive definitions, and so we have added a third part giving an equivalent functional presentation in matita.

The CerCo compiler needs to deal with the constrained memory model of the target microcontroller (in our case, the 8051). Thus each part of the semantics has been extended to allow explicit handling of the microcontroller's memory spaces. *Cost labels* have also been added to the Clight semantics to support the labelling approach to cost annotations presented in [1].

The following section discusses the C language extensions for memory spaces. Then the port of the two stages of the CompCert Clight semantics is described in Section 3, followed by the new executable semantics in Section 4. Finally we discuss how the semantics can be tested in Section 5.

2 Language extensions for the 8051 memory model

The choice of an extended 8051 target for the CerCo compiler imposes an irregular memory model with tight resource constraints. The different memory spaces and access modes are summarised in Figure 1 — essentially the evolution of the 8051 family has fragmented memory into four regions: one half of the 'internal' memory is fully accessible but also contains the register banks, the second half cannot be accessed by direct addressing because it is shadowed by the 'Special Function Registers' (SFRs) for I/O; 'external memory' provides the bulk of memory in a separate address space; and the code is in its own read-only space.

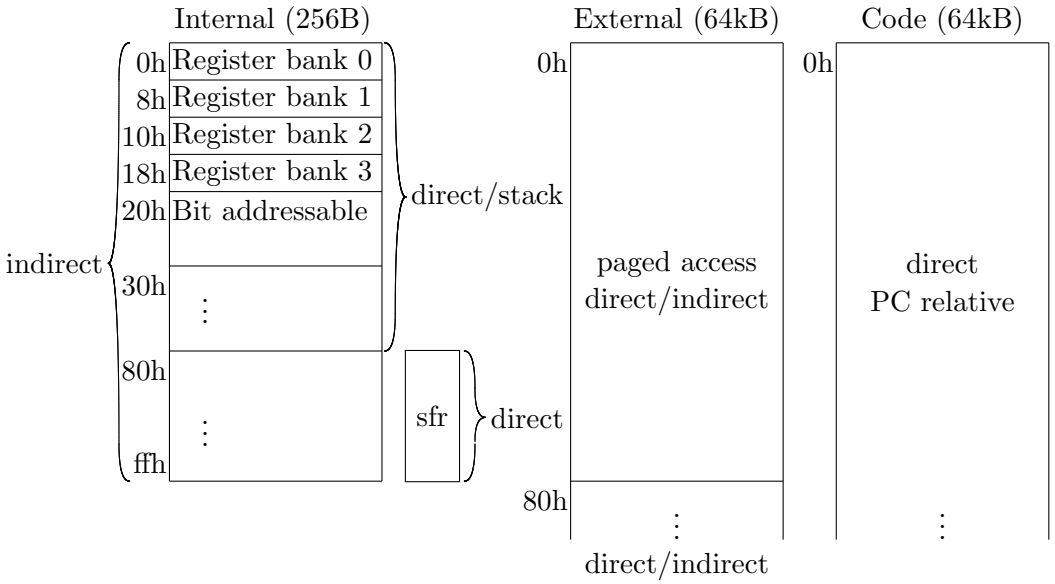

Figure 1: The extended 8051 memory model

To make efficient use of the limited amount of memory, compilers for 8051 microcontrollers provide extra keywords to allocate global variables to particular memory spaces, and to limit pointers to address a particular space. The freely available `sdcc` compiler provides the following extensions for the 8051 memory spaces: The generic pointers are a tagged union of the

Attribute	Pointer size (bytes)	Memory space
`__data`	1	Internal, first half (0h – 7fh)
`__idata`	1	Internal, indirect only (80h – ffh)
`__pdata`	1	External, page access (usually 0h – 7fh)
`__xdata`	2	External, any (0h – ffffh)
`__code`	2	Code, any (0h – ffffh)
none	3	Any / Generic pointer

other kinds of pointers.

We intend the CerCo compiler to support extensions that are broadly compatible with `sdcc` to enable the compilation of programs with either tool. In particular, this would allow the comparison of the behaviour of test cases compiled with each compiler. Thus the C syntax and semantics have been extended with the memory space attributes listed above. The syntax follows `sdcc` and in the semantics we track the memory space that each block was allocated in and only permit access via the appropriate kinds of pointers. The details on these changes are given in the following sections.

The `sdcc` compiler also supports special variable types for accessing the SFRs, which provide the standard I/O mechanism for the 8051 family. (Note that pointers to these types are not permitted because only direct addressing of the SFRs is allowed.) We intend to use CompCert-style 'external functions' instead of special types. These are functions which are

declared, but no C implementation of them is provided. Instead they are provided by the runtime or compiled directly to the corresponding machine code. This has the advantage that no changes from the CompCert semantics are required, and a compatibility library can be provided for `sdcc` if necessary. The 8051 and the `sdcc` compiler also provide bit-level access to a small region of internal memory. We do not intend to expose this feature to C programs in the CerCo compiler, and so no extension is provided for it.

Finally, we adopt the `sdcc` extension to allocate a variable at a particular address to provide a way to deal with memory mapped I/O in the external memory space.

- Are we really going to do this?

3 Port of CompCert Clight semantics to matita

3.1 Parsing and elaboration

- Could do with some text here

The first stage taken from the CompCert semantics is the parsing and elaboration of C programs into the simpler Clight language. This is based upon the CIL library for parsing, analysing and transforming C programs by Necula et. al. [5]. The elaboration performed provides explicit type information throughout the program, including extra casts for promotion, and performs simplifications such as breaking up expressions with side effects into effect-free expressions and statements to perform the effects. The transformed Clight programs are much more manageable and lack the ambiguities of C, but also remain easily understood by C programmers.

The parser has been extended with the 8051 memory spaces attributes given above. The resulting abstract syntax tree records them on global variable declarations and pointer types. However, we also need to deal with them during the elaboration process to produce all of the required type information. For example, when the address-of operator `&` is used it must decide which kind of pointer should be used. Thus the extended elaboration process keeps track of the memory space (if any) that the value of each expression resides in. Where the memory space is not known, a generic pointer will be used instead. Moreover, we also include the pointer kind when determining whether a cast must be inserted so that conversions between pointer representations can be performed.

Thus the elaboration turns the following C code

```
int g(int *x) { return 5; }

int f(__data int *x, int *y) {
  return x==y ? g(x) : *x;
}

__data int i = 1;

int main(void) {
  return f(&i, &i);
}
```

into the Clight program below:

```
int g(int *x) { return 5; }

int f(__data int * x, int * y)
```

```
{
  int t;
  if (x == (__data int * )y) {
    t = g((int * )x);
  } else {
    t = *x;
  }
  return t;
}

int main(void)
{
  int t;
  t = f(&i, (int * )(&i));
  return t;
}
```

The expressions in `f` and `main` had to be broken up due to side-effects, and casts have been added to change between generic pointers and pointers specific to the `__data` section of memory. The underlying data structure also has types attached to every expression, but these are impractical to show in source form.

Note that the translation from C to Clight is not proven correct — instead it effectively forms a semi-formal part of the whole C semantics. We can have some confidence in the code, however, because it has received testing in the CerCo prototype, and it is very close to the version used in CompCert. We can also perform testing of the semantics without involving the rest of the compiler because we have an executable semantics. Moreover, the cautious programmer could choose to inspect the generated Clight code, or even work entirely in the Clight language.

3.2 Small-step inductive semantics

The semantics for Clight itself has been ported from the Coq development used in CompCert to matita for use in CerCo. Details about the original big-step formalisation of Clight can be found in Leroy and Blazy [3] (including a discussion of the translation from C in §4.1), although we started from a later version with a small-step semantics and hence support for `goto` statements. Several parts of the semantics were shared with other parts of the CompCert development, notably:

- the representation of primitive values (integers, pointers and undefined values, but not structures or unions) and operations on them,
- traces of I/O events,
- a memory model that keeps conceptually distinct sections of memory strictly separate (assigning 'undefined behaviour' to a buffer overflow, for instance),
- results about composing execution steps of arbitrary small-step semantics,
- data structures for local and global environments, and
- common error handling constructs, in particular an error monad.

We anticipate a similar arrangement for the CerCo verified compiler, although this means that there may be further changes to the common parts of the semantics later in the project to harmonise the stages of the compiler. In particular, some of data structures for environments are just preliminary definitions for developing the semantics.

The main body of the small-step semantics is a number of inductive definitions giving details of the defined behaviour for casts, expressions and statements. Expressions are side-effect free in Clight and only produce a value as output. In our case we also need a trace of any cost labels that are 'evaluated' so that we will be able to give fine-grained costs for the execution of compiled conditional expressions.

As an example of one of the expression rules, consider an expression which evaluates a variable, `Expr (Evar id) ty`. A variable is an example of a class of expressions called *lvalues*, which are roughly those expressions which can be assigned to. Thus we use a general rule for lvalues,

```
ninductive eval_expr (ge:genv) (e:env) (m:mem) : expr → val → trace → Prop :=
...
  | eval_Elvalue: ∀a,ty,psp,loc,ofs,v,tr.
      eval_lvalue ge e m (Expr a ty) psp loc ofs tr →
      load_value_of_type ty m psp loc ofs = Some ? v →
      eval_expr ge e m (Expr a ty) v tr
```

where the auxiliary relation `eval_lvalue` yields the location of the value, `psp,loc,ofs`, consisting of memory space, memory block, and offset into the block, respectively. The expression can thus evaluate to the value `v` if `v` can be loaded from that location. One corresponding part of the `eval_lvalue` definition is

```
...
with eval_lvalue (*(ge:genv) (e:env) (m:mem)*) :
       expr → memory_space → block → int → trace → Prop :=
  | eval_Evar_local: ∀id,l,ty.
      get ??? id e = Some ? l →
      eval_lvalue ge e m (Expr (Evar id) ty) Any l zero E0
...
```

simply looks up the variable in the local environment. The offset is zero because all variables are given their own memory block to prevent the use of stray pointers. A similar rule handles global variables, with an extra check to ensure that no local variable has the same name. Note that the two relations are defined using mutual recursion because `eval_lvalue` uses `eval_expr` for the evaluation of the pointer expression in the dereferencing rule.

Casts also have an auxiliary relation to specify the allowed changes, and operations on values (including the changes in representation performed by casting) are given as functions.

The only new expression in our semantics is the cost label which wraps around another expression. It does not change the result, but merely prefixes the trace with the given label to identify the branches taken in conditional expressions so that accurate cost information can be attached to the program:

```
  | eval_Ecost: ∀a,ty,v,l,tr.
      eval_expr ge e m a v tr →
      eval_expr ge e m (Expr (Ecost l a) ty) v (tr++Echarge l)
```

- make the semantics of the cost labels clearer

As the expressions are side-effect free, all of the changes to the state are performed by statements. The state itself is represented by records of the form

```
ninductive state: Type :=
  | State:
      ∀f: function.
      ∀s: statement.
      ∀k: cont.
      ∀e: env.
      ∀m: mem. state
  | Callstate:
      ∀fd: fundef.
      ∀args: list val.
      ∀k: cont.
      ∀m: mem. state
  | Returnstate:
      ∀res: val.
      ∀k: cont.
      ∀m: mem. state.
```

During normal execution the state contains the currently executing function's definition (used to find `goto` labels and also to check whether the function is expected to return a value), the statement to be executed next, a continuation value to be executed afterwards (where successor statements and details of function calls and loops are stored), the local environment mapping variables to memory locations[1] and the current memory state. The function call and return states appear to store less information because the details of the caller are contained in the continuation.

- need to note that all variables 'appear' to be memory allocated, even if they're subsequently optimised away.

An example of the statement execution rules is the assignment rule (corresponding to the C syntax `a1 = a2`),

```
ninductive step (ge:genv) : state → trace → state → Prop :=
  | step_assign: ∀f,a1,a2,k,e,m,psp,loc,ofs,v2,m',tr1,tr2.
      eval_lvalue ge e m a1 psp loc ofs tr1 →
      eval_expr ge e m a2 v2 tr2 →
      store_value_of_type (typeof a1) m psp loc ofs v2 = Some ? m' →
      step ge (State f (Sassign a1 a2) k e m)
           (tr1++tr2) (State f Sskip k e m')
...
```

which can be read as:

- if `a1` can evaluate to the location `psp,loc,ofs`,
- `a2` can evaluate to a value `v2`, and
- storing `v2` at location `psp,loc,ofs` succeeds, yielding the new memory state `m'`, then
- the program can step from the state about to execute `Sassign a1 a2` to a state with the updated memory `m'` about to execute the no-op `Sskip`.

[1] In the semantics all variables are allocated, although the compiler may subsequently allocate them to registers where possible.

This rule would be followed by one of the rules to which replaces the `Sskip` statement with the 'real' next statement constructed from the continuation `k`. Note that the only true side-effect here is the change in memory — the local environment is initialised once and for all on function entry, and the only events appearing in the trace are cost labels used purely for accounting. At present this imposes an ordering due to the cost labels. Should this prove too restrictive we may change it to produce a set of labels encountered.

The Clight language provides input and output effects through 'external' functions and the step rule

```
| step_external_function: ∀id,targs,tres,vargs,k,m,vres,t.
    event_match (external_function id targs tres) vargs t vres →
    step ge (Callstate (External id targs tres) vargs k m)
         t (Returnstate vres k m)
```

which allows the function to be invoked with and return any values subject to the enforcement of the typing rules in `event_match`, which also provides the trace.

Cost label statements add the given label to the trace analogously to the cost label expressions above.

4 Executable semantics

We have added an equivalent functional version of the Clight semantics that can be used to animate programs. The definitions roughly follow the inductive semantics, but are necessarily rearranged around pattern matching of the relevant parts of the state rather than presenting each case separately.

4.1 Expressions

The code corresponding to the variable lookup definitions on page 6 is

```
nlet rec exec_expr (ge:genv) (en:env) (m:mem) (e:expr) on e :
             res (Σr:val×trace. eval_expr ge en m e (\fst r) (\snd r)) :=
match e with
[ Expr e' ty ⇒
  match e' with
  [ ...
  | Evar _ ⇒ Some ? (
      do ⟨l,tr⟩ ← exec_lvalue' ge en m e' ty;
      do v ← opt_to_res ? (load_value_of_type' ty m l);
      OK ? ⟨v,tr⟩)
...
  ]
]
and exec_lvalue' (ge:genv) (en:env) (m:mem) (e':expr_descr) (ty:type) on e' :
    res (Σr:memory_space × block × int × trace. eval_lvalue ge en m (Expr e' ty) (\fst (\fst (\
  match e' with
  [ Evar id ⇒
      match (get ...id en) with
      [ None ⇒ Some ? (do ⟨sp,l⟩ ← opt_to_res ? (find_symbol ? ? ge id); OK ? ⟨⟨⟨sp,l⟩,zero⟩,E0⟩)
      | Some loc ⇒ Some ? (OK ? ⟨⟨⟨Any,loc⟩,zero⟩,E0⟩) (* local *)
```

```
      ]
...
```

where the result is placed in an error monad (the `res` type constructor) so that *undefined behaviour* such as dereferencing an invalid pointer can be rejected. We use `do` notation similar to Haskell and CompCert, where

```
do x ← e; e'
```

means evaluate `e` and if it yields a value then bind that to `x` and evaluate `e'`, and otherwise propogate the error.

4.2 Statements

Evaluating a step of a statement is complicated by the presence of the 'external' functions for I/O, which can return arbitrary values. These are handled by a resumption monad, which on encountering some I/O returns a suspension. When the suspension is applied to a value the evaluation of the semantics is resumed. Resumption monads are a standard tool for providing denotational semantics for input [4] and interleaved concurrency [6, Chapter 12]. The definition also incorporates errors, and uses a coercion to automatically transform values from the plain error monad.

- should perhaps give more details of the resumption monad?

The execution of assignments is straightforward,

```
nlet rec exec_step (ge:genv) (st:state) on st : (IO eventval io_out (Σr:trace × state. step ge
match st with
[ State f s k e m ⇒
  match s with
  [ Sassign a1 a2 ⇒ Some ? (
    ! ⟨l,tr1⟩ ← exec_lvalue ge e m a1;:
    ! ⟨v2,tr2⟩ ← exec_expr ge e m a2;:
    ! m' ← store_value_of_type' (typeof a1) m l v2;:
    ret ? ⟨tr1++tr2, State f Sskip k e m'⟩)
...
```

where `!` is used in place of `do` due to the change in monad. The content is essentially the same as the inductive rule given on page 7.

The handling of external calls uses the

```
do_io : ident → list eventval → IO eventval io_out eventval
```

function to suspend execution:

```
...
  ]
| Callstate f0 vargs k m ⇒
  match f0 with
  [ ...
  | External f argtys retty ⇒ Some ? (
      ! evargs ← check_eventval_list vargs (typlist_of_typelist argtys);:
      ! evres ← do_io f evargs;:
      ! vres ← check_eventval evres (proj_sig_res (signature_of_type argtys rett
      ret ? ⟨(Eextcall f evargs evres), Returnstate vres k m⟩)
...
```

Together with functions to provide the initial state for a program and to detect a final state we can write a function to run the program up to a given number of steps. Similarly, a corecursive function can return the entire execution as a stream of trace and state pairs.

- say something more about the rest?

5 Validation

We have used two methods to validate our executable semantics: we have proven them equivalent to the inductive semantics of Section 3.2, and we have animated small examples of key areas.

5.1 Equivalence to inductive semantics

To show that the executable semantics are sound with respect to the inductive semantics we need to prove that any value produced by each function satisfies the corresponding relation, modulo errors and resumption. To deal with these monads we lift the properties required. In particular, for the resumption monad we ignore error values, require the property when a value is produced, and quantify over any interaction with the outside world:

```
nlet rec P_io O I (A:Type) (P:A → Prop) (v:IO O I A) on v : Prop :=
match v return λ_.Prop with
[ Wrong ⇒ True
| Value z ⇒ P z
| Interact out k ⇒ ∀v'.P_io O I A P (k v')
].
```

We can use this lifting with the relations from the inductive semantics to state soundness properties:

```
ntheorem exec_step_sound: ∀ge,st.
  P_io ??? (λr. step ge st (\fst r) (\snd r)) (exec_step ge st).
```

The proofs of these theorems use case analysis over the state, a few lemmas to break up the expressions in the monad and the other soundness results to form the corresponding derivation in the inductive semantics.

We experimented with a different way of specifying soundness using dependent types:

```
nlet rec exec_step (ge:genv) (st:state) on st : (IO eventval io_out (Σr:trace × state. step ge
```

Note the Σ type for the result of the function, which shows that successful executions are sound with respect to the inductive semantics. Matita automatically generates proof obligations for each case due to a coercion between the types

`option (res T)` and `res (Σx:T. P x)`

(where a branch marked `None` would generate a proof obligation to show that it is impossible, although the semantics do not use this feature). This is intended to mimic Sozeau's Russell language and elaboration into Coq [7]. The coercion also triggers an automatic mechanism in matita to add equalities for each pattern matched. Each case of the soundness proof consists of

extracting an equality for each computation in the monad, making any further case distinctions necessary and applying the corresponding rule from the inductive semantics.

However, the soundness proofs then pervade the executable semantics, making the correctness proofs more difficult. We decided to keep the soundness results separate, partly because of the increased difficulty of using the resulting terms in proofs, and partly because they are of little consequence once equivalence has been shown.

The completeness results requiring a dual lifting which requires the term to reduce to a particular value, allowing for resumptions with existential quantification:

```
nlet rec yieldsIObare (A:Type) (a:IO io_out io_in A) (v':A) on a : Prop :=
match a with
[ Value v ⇒ v' = v
| Interact _ k ⇒ ∃r.yieldsIObare A (k r) v'
| _ ⇒ False
].
```

We then show the completeness theorems, such as

```
ntheorem step_complete: ∀ge,s,tr,s'.
  step ge s tr s' → yieldsIObare ? (exec_step ge s) ⟨tr,s'⟩.
```

by case analysis on the inductive derivation and a mixture of reduction and rewriting.

- Whole execution equivalence

5.2 Animation of simple C programs

```
MORE:
  library stuff: choice of integers, maps
  check for any axioms
```

References

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