The Design of C: A Rational Reconstruction

Goals of this Lecture

• Help you learn about:
  • The decisions that were available to the designers of C
  • The decisions that were made by the designers of C
  … and thereby…
  • C

• Why?
  • Learning the design rationale of the C language provides a richer understanding of C itself
  • … and might be more interesting than simply learning the language itself !!!
  • A power programmer knows both the programming language and its design rationale

• But first a preliminary topic…
Why Bits (Binary Digits)?

• Computers are built using digital circuits
  • Inputs and outputs can have only two values
  • True (high voltage) or false (low voltage)
  • Represented as 1 and 0

• Can represent many kinds of information
  • Boolean (true or false)
  • Numbers (23, 79, …)
  • Characters (ʻaʼ, ʻzʼ, …)
  • Pixels, sounds
  • Internet addresses

• Can manipulate in many ways
  • Read and write
  • Logical operations
  • Arithmetic
Base 10 and Base 2

- **Decimal (base 10)**
  - Each digit represents a power of 10
  - $4173 = 4 \times 10^3 + 1 \times 10^2 + 7 \times 10^1 + 3 \times 10^0$

- **Binary (base 2)**
  - Each bit represents a power of 2
  - $10110 = 1 \times 2^4 + 0 \times 2^3 + 1 \times 2^2 + 1 \times 2^1 + 0 \times 2^0 = 22$

**Decimal to binary conversion:**
Divide repeatedly by 2 and keep remainders

```
12 / 2 = 6   R = 0
6 / 2 = 3    R = 0
3 / 2 = 1    R = 1
1 / 2 = 0    R = 1
```
Result = **1100**

Writing Bits is Tedious for People

- **Octal (base 8)**
  - Digits 0, 1, ..., 7
- **Hexadecimal (base 16)**
  - Digits 0, 1, ..., 9, A, B, C, D, E, F

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Octal</th>
<th>Hexadecimal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0000 = 0</td>
<td>0010 = A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0001 = 1</td>
<td>0011 = B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0010 = 2</td>
<td>0100 = C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0011 = 3</td>
<td>0101 = D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0100 = 4</td>
<td>0110 = E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0101 = 5</td>
<td>0111 = F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0110 = 6</td>
<td>1000 = 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0111 = 7</td>
<td>1001 = 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus the 16-bit binary number

```
1011 0010 1010 1001
```
converted to hex is **B2A9**
Representing Colors: RGB

- Three primary colors
  - Red
  - Green
  - Blue

- Strength
  - 8-bit number for each color (e.g., two hex digits)
  - So, 24 bits to specify a color

- In HTML, e.g. course “Schedule” Web page
  - Red: `<span style="color:#FF0000">De-Comment Assignment Due</span>`
  - Blue: `<span style="color:#0000FF">Reading Period</span>`

- Same thing in digital cameras
  - Each pixel is a mixture of red, green, and blue

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Finite Representation of Integers

- Fixed number of bits in memory
  - Usually 8, 16, or 32 bits
  - (1, 2, or 4 bytes)

- Unsigned integer
  - No sign bit
  - Always 0 or a positive number
  - All arithmetic is modulo $2^n$

- Examples of unsigned integers
  - 00000001 $\Rightarrow$ 1
  - 00001111 $\Rightarrow$ 15
  - 00010000 $\Rightarrow$ 16
  - 00100001 $\Rightarrow$ 33
  - 11111111 $\Rightarrow$ 255
Adding Two Integers

- From right to left, we add each pair of digits
- We write the sum, and add the carry to the next column

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base 10</th>
<th>Base 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 9 8</td>
<td>0 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ 2 6 4</td>
<td>+ 0 0 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum 4 6 2</td>
<td>Sum 1 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carry 0 1</td>
<td>Carry 0 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Binary Sums and Carries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Sum</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Carry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

XOR
("exclusive OR")

AND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0100 0101 + 0110 0111</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1010 1100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Modulo Arithmetic

• Consider only numbers in a range
  • E.g., five-digit car odometer: 0, 1, …, 99999
  • E.g., eight-bit numbers 0, 1, …, 255

• Roll-over when you run out of space
  • E.g., car odometer goes from 99999 to 0, 1, …
  • E.g., eight-bit number goes from 255 to 0, 1, …

• Adding $2^n$ doesn’t change the answer
  • For eight-bit number, n=8 and $2^n=256$
  • E.g., $(37 + 256) \mod 256$ is simply 37

• This can help us do subtraction…
  • Suppose you want to compute $a - b$
  • Note that this equals $a + (256 - 1 - b) + 1$

One’s and Two’s Complement

• One’s complement: flip every bit
  • E.g., b is 01000101 (i.e., 69 in decimal)
  • One’s complement is 10111010
  • That’s simply 255-69

• Subtracting from 11111111 is easy (no carry needed!)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
1111 \ 1111 \\
- \ 0100 \ 0101 \\
\hline
1011 \ 1010
\end{array}
\]

• Two’s complement
  • Add 1 to the one’s complement
  • E.g., $(255 - 69) + 1 \Rightarrow 1011 \ 1011$
Putting it All Together

• Computing “a – b”
  • Same as “a + 256 – b”
  • Same as “a + (255 – b) + 1”
  • Same as “a + onesComplement(b) + 1”
  • Same as “a + twosComplement(b)”

• Example: 172 – 69
  • The original number 69: 0100 0101
  • One’s complement of 69: 1011 1010
  • Two’s complement of 69: 1011 1011
  • Add to the number 172: 1010 1100
  • The sum comes to: 0110 0111
  • Equals: 103 in decimal

Signed Integers

• Sign-magnitude representation
  • Use one bit to store the sign
    • Zero for positive number
    • One for negative number
  • Examples
    • E.g., 0010 1100 \( \rightarrow \) 44
    • E.g., 1010 1100 \( \rightarrow \) -44
  • Hard to do arithmetic this way, so it is rarely used

• Complement representation
  • One’s complement
    • Flip every bit
    • E.g., 1101 0011 \( \rightarrow \) -44
  • Two’s complement
    • Flip every bit, then add 1
    • E.g., 1101 0100 \( \rightarrow \) -44
Overflow: Running Out of Room

- Adding two large integers together
  - Sum might be too large to store in the number of bits available
  - What happens?

- Unsigned integers
  - All arithmetic is “modulo” arithmetic
  - Sum would just wrap around

- Signed integers
  - Can get nonsense values
  - Example with 16-bit integers
    - Sum: 10000+20000+30000
    - Result: -5536

Bitwise Operators: AND and OR

- Bitwise AND (&)
  - Mod on the cheap!
    - E.g., 53 % 16
    - … is same as 53 & 15;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>53</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&amp; 15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bitwise Operators: Not and XOR

• One’s complement (~)
  • Turns 0 to 1, and 1 to 0
  • E.g., set last three bits to 0
    • \( x = x \& \sim 7; \)

• XOR (^)
  • 0 if both bits are the same
  • 1 if the two bits are different

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>^</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bitwise Operators: Shift Left/Right

• Shift left (<<): Multiply by powers of 2
  • Shift some # of bits to the left, filling the blanks with 0

\[
53\begin{array}{cccccccc}
0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 \\
\end{array}
\]
\[
53<<2\begin{array}{cccccccc}
1 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
\end{array}
\]

• Shift right (>>): Divide by powers of 2
  • Shift some # of bits to the right
  • For unsigned integer, fill in blanks with 0
  • What about signed negative integers?
    • Can vary from one machine to another!

\[
53\begin{array}{cccccccc}
0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 \\
\end{array}
\]
\[
53>>2\begin{array}{cccccccc}
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 \\
\end{array}
\]
Example: Counting the 1’s

• How many 1 bits in a number?
  • E.g., how many 1 bits in the binary representation of 53?
    \[
    \begin{array}{cccccccc}
    0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 \\
    \end{array}
    \]
  • Four 1 bits

• How to count them?
  • Look at one bit at a time
  • Check if that bit is a 1
  • Increment counter

• How to look at one bit at a time?
  • Look at the last bit: \( n \& 1 \)
  • Check if it is a 1: \( (n \& 1) == 1 \), or simply \( n \& 1 \)

Counting the Number of ‘1’ Bits

```c
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdlib.h>

int main(void) {
    unsigned int n;
    unsigned int count;
    printf("Number: ");
    if (scanf("%u", &n) != 1) {
        fprintf(stderr, "Error: Expect unsigned int.\n");
        exit(EXIT_FAILURE);
    }
    for (count = 0; n > 0; n >>= 1)
        count += (n & 1);
    printf("Number of 1 bits: %u\n", count);
    return 0;
}
```
Summary

• Computer represents everything in binary
  • Integers, floating-point numbers, characters, addresses, …
  • Pixels, sounds, colors, etc.

• Binary arithmetic through logic operations
  • Sum (XOR) and Carry (AND)
  • Two’s complement for subtraction

• Bitwise operators
  • AND, OR, NOT, and XOR
  • Shift left and shift right
  • Useful for efficient and concise code, though sometimes cryptic

The Main Event

The Design of C
Goals of C

Designers wanted C to support:
- **Systems programming**
  - Development of Unix OS
  - Development of Unix programming tools

But also:
- **Applications programming**
  - Development of financial, scientific, etc. applications

*Systems* programming was the primary intended use

The Goals of C (cont.)

The designers of wanted C to be:
- Low-level
  - Close to assembly/machine language
  - Close to hardware

But also:
- Portable
  - Yield systems software that is easy to port to differing hardware
The Goals of C (cont.)

The designers wanted C to be:
• Easy for people to handle
  • Easy to understand
• Expressive
  • High (functionality/sourceCodeSize) ratio

But also:
• Easy for computers to handle
  • Easy/fast to compile
  • Yield efficient machine language code

Commonality:
• Small/simple

Design Decisions

In light of those goals...
• What design decisions did the designers of C have?
• What design decisions did they make?

Consider programming language features, from simple to complex…
Feature 1: Data Types

• Previously in this lecture:
  • Bits can be combined into bytes
  • Our interpretation of a collection of bytes gives it meaning
    • A signed integer, an unsigned integer, a RGB color, etc.

• A data type is a well-defined interpretation of a collection of bytes

• A high-level programming language should provide primitive data types
  • Facilitates abstraction
  • Facilitates manipulation via associated well-defined operators
  • Enables compiler to check for mixed types, inappropriate use of types, etc.

Primitive Data Types

• Issue: What primitive data types should C provide?

• Thought process
  • C should handle:
    • Integers
    • Characters
    • Character strings
    • Logical (alias Boolean) data
    • Floating-point numbers
  • C should be small/simple

• Decisions
  • Provide integer, character, and floating-point data types
  • Do not provide a character string data type (More on that later)
  • Do not provide a logical data type (More on that later)
Integer Data Types

- **Issue:** What integer data types should C provide?
  - **Thought process**
    - For flexibility, should provide integer data types of various sizes
    - For portability at *application* level, should specify size of each data type
    - For portability at *systems* level, should define integral data types in terms of *natural word size* of computer
    - Primary use will be *systems* programming

Integer Data Types (cont.)

- **Decisions**
  - Provide three integer data types: `short`, `int`, and `long`
  - Do not specify sizes; instead:
    - `int` is natural word size
    - $2 \leq \text{bytes in short} \leq \text{bytes in int} \leq \text{bytes in long}$
  - Incidentally, on hats using gcc217
    - Natural word size: 4 bytes
    - `short`: 2 bytes
    - `int`: 4 bytes
    - `long`: 4 bytes
Integer Constants

• Issue: How should C represent integer constants?

• Thought process
  • People naturally use decimal
  • Systems programmers often use binary, octal, hexadecimal

• Decisions
  • Use decimal notation as default
  • Use "0" prefix to indicate octal notation
  • Use "0x" prefix to indicate hexadecimal notation
  • Do not allow binary notation; too verbose, error prone
  • Use "L" suffix to indicate long constant
  • Do not use a suffix to indicate short constant; instead must use cast

• Examples
  • int: 123, -123, 0173, 0x7B
  • long: 123L, -123L, 0173L, 0x7BL
  • short: (short)123, (short)-123, (short)0173, (short)0x7B

Was that a good decision?

Unsigned Integer Data Types

• Issue: Should C have both signed and unsigned integer data types?

• Thought process
  • Must represent positive and negative integers
    • Signed types are essential
  • Unsigned data can be twice as large as signed data
    • Unsigned data could be useful
  • Unsigned data are good for bit-level operations
    • Bit-level operations are common in systems programming
  • Implementing both signed and unsigned data types is complex
    • Must define behavior when an expression involves both

Why?
Unsigned Integer Data Types (cont.)

• Decisions
  • Provide unsigned integer types: unsigned short, unsigned int, and unsigned long
  • Conversion rules in mixed-type expressions are complex
    • Generally, mixing signed and unsigned converts signed to unsigned
    • See King book Section 7.4 for details

Do you see any potential problems?

Was providing unsigned types a good decision?

What decision did the designers of Java make?

Unsigned Integer Constants

• Issue: How should C represent unsigned integer constants?

• Thought process
  • "L" suffix distinguishes long from int; also could use a suffix to distinguish signed from unsigned
  • Octal or hexadecimal probably are used with bit-level operators

• Decisions
  • Default is signed
  • Use "U" suffix to indicate unsigned
  • Integers expressed in octal or hexadecimal automatically are unsigned

• Examples
  • unsigned int: 123U, 0173, 0x7B
  • unsigned long: 123UL, 0173L, 0x7BL
  • unsigned short: (short)123U, (short)0173, (short)0x7B
There’s More!

To be continued next lecture!