CSE 374
Programming Concepts & Tools

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Lecture 12 – C: structs, linked lists, and casts
Where we are

• We’ve seen most of the basic stuff about C, but we still need to look at structs (aka records or objects without methods) and linked data structures
  – Understand the code posted with today’s lecture; we won’t have time to walk through all the details
• Next: Rest of the C preprocessor (# stuff, macros), building multi-file programs
• Then: more programming tools (make)
• That will set us up for the next programming project
  – Which will start right after Wednesday’s midterm
structs

- A struct is a record (i.e., a collection of data fields)
- A pointer to a struct is like a Java object with no methods
- \( x.f \) is for field access. (if is \( x \) not a pointer – new!)
- \((*x).f\) in C is like \( x.f \) in Java. (if \( x \) is a pointer)
- \( x->f \) is an abbreviation for \((*x).f\)
- There is a huge difference between a struct (value) parameter and a pointer to a struct
- There is a huge difference between local variables that are structs and those that are pointers to structs
- Again, left-expressions evaluate to locations (which can be whole struct locations or just a field’s location)
- Again, right-expressions evaluate to values (which can be whole structs or just a field’s contents)
structure tags

• A typical structure definition looks like:

```c
struct person_info {
    char * name;
    int age;
}
```

• The identifier `person_info` after “struct” is not a type name, it is a structure tag. The “type” of this structure is `struct person_info`.
  – So type names (`int`, `char`) and struct tags are not the same kind of names
C parameters - revisited

• C has a uniform rule for parameters (almost): When a function is called, each parameter is *initialized* with a *copy* of the corresponding argument (int, char, ptr, …)
  – This holds even for structs! – a copy is created
  – There is no further connection between the argument and the parameter value in the function
• But they can point to the same thing, of course
• *But*: if the argument is an array name, the function parameter is initialized with a *pointer* to the array argument instead of a copy of the entire array
  – Implicit array promotion (we already knew this)
struct parameters

- A struct argument is copied (call-by-value)
- It is far more common to use a pointer to a struct as an argument instead of copying an entire struct
  - Gives same semantics as Java object references
  - Usually what you want – pointer to data that lives outside the function
    - Also avoids cost of copying a possibly large object
      - But occasionally you want call-by value (small things like complex numbers, geometric points, …)
- Puzzle: if an argument is an array containing a single struct, is it copied or is it promoted to a pointer?
  - What if it’s a struct containing only a single array?
Linked lists, trees, and friends

• Very, very common data structures
• Building them in C
  – Use `malloc` to create nodes
  – Need to use casts for “generic” types
  – Memory management issues if shared nodes
  – Usually need to explicitly free entire thing when done
  – Shows tradeoffs between lists and arrays

• Look at the sample code and understand what it does/how it does it
C types

• There are an infinite number of types in C, but only a few ways to make them:
  – char, int, double, etc. (many variations like unsigned int, long, short, …; mostly “implementation-defined”)
  – void (placeholder; a “type” no expression can have)
  – struct T where there is already a declaration for that struct type
  – Array types (basically only for stack arrays and struct fields, every use is automatically converted to a pointer type)
  – T* where T is a type
  – union T, enum E (later, maybe)
  – function-pointer types (later)
  – typedefs (just expand to their definition; type synonym)
**Typedef**

- Defines a *synonym* for a type – does **not** declare a new type
- Syntax
  ```
  typedef  type  name;
  ```
  After this declaration, writing `name` is the same as writing `type`
  Caution: array typedef syntax is weirder
- Examples:
  ```
  typedef int int32;       // use int32 for portability
  typedef struct point {
      int32 x, y;
  } Point2d;                // Point2d is synonym for struct
  typedef Point2d * ptptr;  // pointer to Point2D
  Point2d p;                // var declaration
  ptptr ptlist;             // declares pointer
  ```
Casts, part 1

- Syntax: \((t)e\) where \(t\) is a type and \(e\) is an expression (same as Java)
- Semantics: It depends
  - If \(e\) is a numeric type and \(t\) is a numeric type, this is a conversion
    - To wider type, get same value
    - To narrower type, may not (will get mod)
    - From floating-point to integral, will round (may overflow)
    - From integral to floating-point, may round (but int to double is exact on most machines)

Note: Java is the same without the “most machines” part
Note: Lots of implicit conversions such as in function calls
Bottom Line: Conversions involve actual operations; \((\text{double})3\) is a very different bit pattern than \((\text{int})3\)
Casts, part 2

- If \( e \) has type \( t_1^* \), then \((t_2^*)e\) is a (pointer) cast.
  - You still have the \textit{same} pointer (index into the address space).
  - Nothing “happens” at run-time.
  - You are just “getting around” the type system, making it easy to write any bits anywhere you want.
  - Old example: \texttt{malloc} has return type \texttt{void*}

```c
void evil(int **p, int x) {
    int * q = (int*)p;
    *q = x;
}
void f(int **p) {
    evil(p,345);
    **p = 17;  // writes 17 to address 345 (HYCSBWK)
    }
```

Note: The C standard is more picky than we suggest, but few people know that and little code obeys the official rules.
Questions worth answering:
• How does this compare to Java’s casts?
  – Unsafe, unchecked (no “type fields” in objects)
  – Otherwise more similar than it seems
• When should you use pointer casts in C?
  – For “generic” libraries (malloc, linked lists, operations on arbitrary (generic) pointers, etc.)
  – For “subtyping” (later)
• What about other casts?
  – Casts to/from struct types (not struct pointer casts) are compile-time errors.