

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

C!

A System Oriented Programming Language

Marwan Burelle

marwan.burelle@lse.epita.fr
<http://www.lse.epita.fr/>

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Global Language Overview
- 3 Syntax and Sugar
- 4 Objects in C!
- 5 The Macro Class Concept
- 6 State of The Prototype
- 7 Future Directions

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

Introduction

What do we use in kernel programming?

- Low-level code:
 - Direct memory access (reading/writing to in-memory registers and other address-based data access);
 - Architecture-specific code (ASM inlining);
 - Low-level execution flow manipulation.
- More classical code:
 - Data structures;
 - Algorithms.
- Control over binary building.

Programming in kernel space requires some features in the language and its toolchain.

- Address manipulation (pointers...);
- Function pointers;
- Transparent memory mapping of data structures;
- Interface with lower-level code (ASM inlining...);
- Bitwise operations;
- Control over the linking and how the output binary is produced;
- Very small or inexistant runtime dependencies.

- Why not a *High Level Language*:
 - Most of the modern languages are oriented towards userland applications;
 - *High level languages* (such as Java) often rely on specific runtime or worse (Java programs runs on a Virtual Machine);
 - *High level languages* often forbid low level manipulations;
 - Even languages such as C++ or Google's Go requires a specific runtime (Go uses a garbage collector, has specific calling conventions and various userland only native features) incompatible with kernel programming, or at least difficult to adapt.
- And C?
 - C was meant to code kernel!
 - Produced code is almost a direct translation of the original source code;
 - Most of the current C compilers offer ASM inlining.

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

Why would we need another language?

- The official C (ISO) is complex and full of “*things that used to be that way and won’t change*”;
- The language has some odd or ambiguous syntax;
- The type system of the language is too permissive on some subjects while being too restrictive on others;
- The language lacks modern programming idioms (like objects) that can be useful;
- Some features of the language are outdated and do not fit well in today’s context (*what is the size of an int? what really does the keyword register? ...*).

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

- C! (pronounced *c-bang*) is our attempt to have a new programming language for kernel and low-level programming;
- Our main goals were:
 - Rationalization of the C language syntax;
 - Minor but useful extensions (mainly syntactic sugar);
 - Attempting for a better type system (with possibly some extensions such as *Generics*);
 - Simple but usable objects;
 - Language idioms dedicated to kernel/low-level programming
 - Introducing a module formalism (redundant header files, namespaces, ...);
 - Keeping what makes C a good language for kernel.
- Currently C! is more a proof of concept rather than a production language, but the compiler prototype can already be used;
- Most of our goals are (at least partially) achieved.

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

Global Language Overview

- We chose to use a Compiler to Compiler model;
- The C! compiler produces C code that can be compiled using an almost standard C compiler (we use C99 and GNU C features);
- Why Compiler to Compiler?
 - Hard work on native code producing is obtained for *free*;
 - Most C! specific features are syntactic sugar over pure C;
 - Advanced features like object can directly be expressed in C;
 - The C programming language can be seen as high level portable ASM;
 - It enforces our idea of a new native general purpose system programming language: a strong low level base and non-intrusive higher level extensions.

- The basic idea of C! is to globally preserve C syntax with rational modifications;
- The first important point was to design the general syntax in a way that can be expressed using a standard parser generator (like yacc);
- Modifications to the original syntax should be globally coherent;
- The main difference is unambiguous *typename*s: type identifiers must be identified syntactically: we do not want lexing tricks!
- Modifications on the syntactic localization of type identifiers completely modify variable and function declarations (and thus structures' fields are also modified);
- Other syntax differences are syntactic sugar and pure C! extensions (objects, macro-class, ...);

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

- In C integer types are loosely defined, the `int` type obeys two contradictory definitions:
 - `int` type should be of the size of the machine word;
 - `int` type should be 2 or 4 bytes (16 or 32 bits) long.
- Some others types have a fixed size (`char`, `short`, ...) and other are machine dependant (`size_t` ...);
- C99 introduces sized types but these definitions are *fixed* (*i.e.* the standard defines a fixed set of types not a way to define integer type by its size);
- We directly introduce size (and signedness) in type declaration: a 32 bits signed integer will decalared as `int<32>` and the unsigned version as `int<+32>`;
- For homogeneity we use a similar scheme for floating point numbers;
- Integer with unusal size (less than 64 bits) can also be expressed, they will be stored in usual integer and we introduce management code to handle overflow.

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

- Structure definitions are type definitions (no need to use the *struct* keywords);
- Unsigned integers can be used as bit arrays;
- Bitfields are natural extension of sized integer definitions;
- Packing of structures is a language feature;
- Smarter attempt to handle enumeration's identifier conflict (a local variable can't hide an enum value);
- Several *work in progress* for eliminating unused (or badly named) variable qualifiers;

- C! has a simple object oriented syntax extension;
- The object extensions is provided for convenience, it is not a major paradigm in C!;
- One should use objects to simplify data structuring, not code structuring;
- This extension is build as a syntactic sugar over *hand-made* objects in C;
- We have simple inheritance, only virtual methods and method overriding (but not overloading);
- For unambiguous manipulations, objects are always pointers (no implicit copy mechanism);
- Construction is classical but memory allocation is up to the programmer (the constructor take a pointer as first parameter);
- Object obey to a single syntax (only `obj.method()` and no horrible `obj->method()`);

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

We introduce a simple *modules model* to avoid naming ambiguity in multiple files compilation:

- Symbols and type names are isolated between modules using (simplified) namespaces;
- Symbols and type names are exported specifying a namespace:
 - `global_variable : int<32>;` won't be exported;
 - `my_module::global_variable : int<32>;` will be exported.
- A module can use another module's exported resources the `import` statement: `import my_module;;`
- The backend to C uses mangling to avoid name conflicts between modules during the linking;
- Unlike in C, a module M2 cannot use a module M3's resources without importing it even if both are used by a module M1 (this error is detected with splitted compilation).

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

- C! offers a concept of *macro class*: object oriented like syntax for operations call on non-object types;
- Various attempts for *external code* inlining (asm or pure C) are (*still work in progress*);
- Genrated C code is (or we hope it is) supposed to be human-readable and directly usable by a C programmer (simpler integration in existing code base);
- Some newer syntax (still in design phase) will try to solve classical low level issue such as automation of register like (adress based) data structures.
- We also try to have a better type system (there's still some issues);

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

Syntax and Sugar

- The main C's grammar issue is about type position:
`struct my_struct *my_var[5];` → `my_var : (my_struct[5]) *;`
- The former style forces to hack the lexer in order to memorize typedefs. The last one introduces no ambiguity.
- This syntax is used everytime one associates a type with a name:

- Parameters and return type in function declarations:

```
double my_function(long prm1, float prm2);
```



```
my_function(prm1 : int<32>, prm2: float<32>) : float<64>;
```

- Field declaration for boxed types (structures, classes, ...):

```
struct my_struct { long field; ... };
```



```
struct my_struct { field : int<32>; ... }
```

- Pointer to function types are made more readable:

```
int (*my_func)(int, char *)
```



```
my_func : <(int<32>, int<8> *)> : int
```

- Once more, the trick is to isolate the type and the identifier.

- In C, can you determine if $(x)(y)$ is:
 - a cast of y to the x type, or...
 - a call of the function x with y as an argument?
- Casts in C! obey the unambiguous type identifier rules!

```
string = (char *) my_ptr;  
          ↓  
string = (my_ptr : int<8> *);
```

- This syntax is coherent with previous changes.

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

- Trailing ' ; ' at the end of structure and class declarations is no longer needed;
- Function calls have a single syntax: a functional expression (direct identifier, function pointer, array or structure element) is applied to a vector of arguments;

- System code often deals with bit fields;
- One can handle it playing with bitwise operations (masks, shifts, ...);
- Or using bit fields in packed C's structures;
- C! brings another possibility: use unsigned integer as a bit array:

```
switch_feature(flags : int<+32> *) : int<+32>
{
    (*flags)[3] = !(*flags)[3];
    return (*flags)[3];
}
```

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

Objects in C!

- Object in C! is a class-based OOP model
- Intuitively, we design objects in C and then provide a syntactic sugar for C!
- We choose to keep the object model as simple as we can
- Basically we have:
 - Usual class definitions
 - All object's code is in class definition
 - Methods are *virtual* (in C++ terminology)
 - There's no visibility control (everything is *public*)
 - Methods can be overridden but not overloaded
 - Objects creation is divided in two parts: allocation (delegated to the programmer) and object initialization
- We try to avoid most C++ annoying aspects: no implicit copy, no syntax hell (object, reference, pointer ...), no syntax noise.

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

- In C! objects are structures with special inner structure containing function pointers:

```
struct my_object {  
    // vtable  
    struct my_object_methods *_methods;  
    // attributes  
    int x,y;  
};  
  
struct my_object_methods {  
    int (*getX)(void);  
    int (*getY)(void);  
};
```

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

```
class A {  
  x : int<32>;  
  get() : int<32> { return x; }  
  set(_x : int<32>) : void { x = _x; }  
  double() : void  
  {  
    this.set(2 * this.get());  
  }  
}
```

```
class B {  
  x : A;  
  get() : A { return x; }  
}
```

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

- The syntax embeds all the cooking for objects manipulation in C:

- Method call such as `a.get()` will be rewritten as `a->_methods->get(a)`
- Cascading methods call is managed using compound expressions and temporary local variables: the call `b.get().set(42)` will be translated as:

```
({  
    A _cbtmp1 = b->_methods->get(b);  
    _cbtmp1->_methods->set(_cbtmp1, 42) ;  
})
```

- Actual constructors are build using class variables (class definition can take parameters) visible only at creation time.
- The constructor always take as first a pointer to a suitable memory location to store the object (of type `void*` to avoid typing issues.)

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

The Macro Class Concept

- The idea is to provide an object like syntax to manipulate non-object data.
- When defining a macro-class we give a base type (the storage type) and a set of *operations*.
- A fake *this* is available in operations code, it represents the inner value
- operations can be *const* (no modifications to the inner value) or not.
- Normally methods calls on macro-class are replace by C macro.
- Macro-class are a simple syntax extensions to handle typed macro over specific data.

- Macro class can be used where object-oriented syntax are convenient but full-object implementation is useless.
- A classical example is evolved integer flags such as status return of a `wait syscall`. One can define setting and testing of various properties of the status as method call that in fact will implement the usual macro.
- The purpose is to provide convenient syntax for low level behaviour code (for example, it will possible to include assembly code in a macro operations) without any overhead or runtime code.

```
macro class MC : int<+32>
{
  get() const : int<+32>
  {
    return (this * 2);
  }

  set(x : int<+32>) : void
  {
    this = x/2;
  }
}

f() : void
{
  x : MC;
  // x is really an int<+32>
  x = 0;
  // but it can be used like an object
  x.set(42);
}
```

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

State of The Prototype

- Lexing/Parsing : check;
- Type checking : check, even if a few improvements are scheduled;
- Module support: very partial... but coming soon! (the identifiers mangling is still to be decided)
- Object support: check;
- Macro class support: partial;
- Stay tuned!

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

- **Lexing/Parsing : check;**
- Type checking : check, even if a few improvements are scheduled;
- Module support: very partial... but coming soon! (the identifiers mangling is still to be decided)
- Object support: check;
- Macro class support: partial;
- Stay tuned!

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

- Lexing/Parsing : check;
- Type checking : check, even if a few improvements are scheduled;
- Module support: very partial... but coming soon! (the identifiers mangling is still to be decided)
- Object support: check;
- Macro class support: partial;
- Stay tuned!

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

- Lexing/Parsing : check;
- Type checking : check, even if a few improvements are scheduled;
- Module support: very partial... but coming soon! (the identifiers mangling is still to be decided)
- Object support: check;
- Macro class support: partial;
- Stay tuned!

- Lexing/Parsing : check;
- Type checking : check, even if a few improvements are scheduled;
- Module support: very partial... but coming soon! (the identifiers mangling is still to be decided)
- Object support: check;
- Macro class support: partial;
- Stay tuned!

- Lexing/Parsing : check;
- Type checking : check, even if a few improvements are scheduled;
- Module support: very partial... but coming soon! (the identifiers mangling is still to be decided)
- Object support: check;
- Macro class support: partial;
- Stay tuned!

- Lexing/Parsing : check;
- Type checking : check, even if a few improvements are scheduled;
- Module support: very partial... but coming soon! (the identifiers mangling is still to be decided)
- Object support: check;
- Macro class support: partial;
- Stay tuned!

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

Future Directions

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

- Finish and fix work in the compiler
- Fix syntax for inlining
- Fix the object constructor troll
- Solve various typing issues
- Find a better way to implement class macro ops (inlined functions ?)
- Have a tool chain ...

C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions

- Data mapping: automatic access to register like data
- Method Overloading
- Plugin and annotation (external processing of code)
- Generics and/or Template
- Global static constructions
- Native compiler (does-it make sense ?)
- Self-host (C! in C!)
- Front-end integration in gcc/clang
- Code validation and static checking



C!

Marwan Burelle

Introduction

Global Language
Overview

Syntax and Sugar

Objects in C!

The Macro Class
Concept

State of The
Prototype

Future Directions