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Published in:
SCOPES '15 - 18th International Workshop on Software and Compilers for Embedded Systems, 1-3 June 2015, St. Goar, Germany

DOI:
10.1145/2764967.2771935

Published: 01/01/2015

Document Version
Accepted manuscript including changes made at the peer-review stage

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Download date: 17. Oct. 2018
High-level software-pipelining in LLVM

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ABSTRACT
Software-pipelining is an important technique for increasing the instruction level parallelism of loops during compilation. Currently, the LLVM compiler infrastructure does not offer this optimization although some target specific implementations do exist. We have implemented a high-level method for software-pipelining within the LLVM framework. By implementing this within LLVM’s optimization layer we have taken the first steps towards a target independent software-pipelining method.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
C.0 [Computer Systems Organization]: General—modeling of computer architecture; D.3.4 [Programming Languages]: Processors—compilers, optimization

General Terms
Performance

Keywords
LLVM, software-pipelining

1. INTRODUCTION
Embedded systems are nowadays often used in situations where both high-performance processing and low energy consumption are critical. This has led to the design of highly specialized processor hardware which often obtains a large part of its efficiency from high instruction-level parallelism. Very-long instruction-word (VLIW) processors are a prime example of such processors and many DSP-like processors [1] incorporate VLIW characteristics internally. It is the task of the compiler to find and utilize this ILP as part of the application compilation process. One key optimization in the compilation process is software-pipelining [6]. Software-pipelining is a scheduling technique which schedules loop code in such a way that independent operations from different loop iterations can be scheduled in parallel.

The design of such an optimizing compiler is commonly separated into three layers of increasing architectural detail as is shown in figure 1. The frontend translates the input language into an intermediate representation (IR). This IR is then optimized by the target independent optimizer, and finally translated into actual assembly or binary code by the backend. Traditionally, implementing a software-pipelining algorithm into a compiler is within the target specific backend code [3, 4, 5]. All details of the program’s instructions, together with a detailed view of the processor architecture are known at this stage. This allows for highly detailed scheduling decisions and produces good optimized code in general. However, such a backend implementation is usually highly target specific which makes it difficult to re-use the software-pipelining implementation across different architectures.

An alternative implementation was proposed by Ben-Asher and Meisler [2]. They demonstrated the effects of implementing source-level modulo-scheduling. Doing so places the software-pipelining algorithm just before the frontend stage of the compiler. No information about the hardware resources of the processor is available yet at this level which frequently makes the obtained schedules inefficient, as could be observed in their experimental results. Their source-level approach was able to find several significant improvements but also presented equally large regressions in several cases.

In this paper we consider finding the middle ground between both options. By placing the software-pipelining algorithm at the end of the optimizer stage we are able to use the generic IR instructions, and combine them with some basic information on the available resources from the target backend, in order to achieve a more accurate but still target independent solution.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows, first we introduce the basic concepts of software-pipelining in section 2. Then we present our implementation considerations in section 3 and finalize with a discussion on our initial experiences with this approach in section 4.
2. SOFTWARE-PIPELINING

Software-pipelining is a loop scheduling technique aimed at increasing the instruction level parallelism by scheduling operations from different loop iterations in an overlapping fashion. Most commonly, software-pipelining is implemented through a technique called modulo scheduling [2, 4, 6, 9].

In a modulo-scheduled loop kernel, the operations of the original loop body are overlapped such that there is a fixed initiation interval between the start of consecutive loop iterations which is smaller than the total length of the original loop body. This initiation interval (II) is constrained by two factors: the available resources in the processor, and loop carried dependencies in the code.

Listing 1 and figure 2 illustrate the effect of a resource constraint on the II, in this case the number of parallel load-store operations that can be executed. Operations from different loop iterations are distinguished by their background color and texture. Only the kernel operations are shown in these example schedules, address calculation and control-flow operations are hidden for brevity and it is assumed that arrays A and B do not overlap. Figure 2b shows that the minimal II is three cycles if only one load-store operation is allowed in parallel, while figure 2c demonstrates an II of two cycles if two load-store operations are allowed in parallel.

Figure 2: Simplified schedules of the loop shown in listing 1 showing the original sequential schedule and two software-pipelined versions demonstrating the influence of a resource constraint.

After determining the minimal II, a modulo scheduling algorithm will usually attempt to schedule the loop kernel with that II as an input. If it fails it will increment the II and try again until either a schedule is found or the II grows beyond the schedule length of the original non-pipelined loop and no pipelined schedule exists.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

Although several implementations of software-pipelining have been published before, none of these is available in the most recent version of the LLVM framework. Either they have been lost in previous restructuring of the schedulers [7], or they are very target specific implementations [3, 5, 9].

In our implementation we have chosen to use the swing modulo scheduling algorithm [8]. This algorithm is very efficient at finding good software-pipelined schedules, and was previously also used in e.g. LLVM [7] and GCC [4].

The swing modulo scheduling algorithm operates in five steps; a) find cyclic (loop carried) dependencies and their length; b) find resource pressure; c) compute minimal initiation interval (II); d) order nodes according to ‘critical-
ity"; and e) schedule nodes in this order, either as-soon-as-
possible or as-late-as-possible based on the status of their
dependencies. For full details on the swing modulo schedul-
ing algorithm please refer to [8] which has an excellent set
of examples to illustrate the approach.

The LLVM IR is a low-level abstract representation of the
program. It uses a basic set of operations that often trans-
late directly into processor operations, however, some more
complex operations also exist. One example of such a more
complex operation is the getelementpointer operation, or
GEP in short. These operations can perform complex ad-
dress calculations although they also frequently reduce to
only a single operation or even a constant value. LLVM of-
fers a TargetTransformInfo interface which provides infor-
mation about the cost of specific operations on the proces-
sor architecture, as well as, information about the available
features of the processor architecture. Using this cost infor-
mation through LLVM’s CostModelAnalysis allows us to
estimate scheduling information such as the length of loop
carried dependencies.

As shown in figure 3, loop carried dependencies can exist
in two forms. Memory carried dependencies can be recog-
nized in IR code by using LLVM’s DependenceAnalysis to
check if a pair of a store and load operation may address the
same memory location across subsequent loop iterations. If
this is the case, then a memory carried dependency exists.
Currently our implementation will not accept such loops and
these need to be transformed to the second form before ap-
plying software-pipelining. We assume that such dependen-
cies are translated into register carried dependencies by an
earlier optimization pass. Luckily, most of LLVM’s transfor-
mations, including loop vectorization, already produce loops
in the second form. The second form uses a register to ex-
plicitly represent loop carried dependencies.

Listing 4: Memory carried dependencies

```c
define void @foo(i8* nocapture %in, i32 %width) #0 {
  entry:
    %cmp = icmp ugt i32 %width, 1
    br i1 %cmp, label %for.body, label %for.end
for.body: ; preds = %entry, %for.body
  %i.0 = phi i32 [1, %entry], [i, %entry]
  %sub = add i32 %i.0, -1
  %idx = getelementptr inbounds i8* %in, i32 %sub
  %add = add i8 %idx, align 1, !tbaa !0
  %store = store i8 %add, i8* %idx, align 1, !tbaa !0
  %cmp = icmp ugt i32 %width, 1
  br i1 %cmp, label %for.body, label %for.end
for.end: ; preds = %for.body, %entry
  ret void
}
```

The LLVM IR is a static single assignment (SSA) repre-
sentation of the program. Each operation in the IR creates
a new value in a unique virtual register which may only be
assigned once. Phi-nodes are used in order to cope with
merge-points in the control-flow graph (such as introduced
by if-statements and the back-edges of loops). Listing 4
shows an example loop with a memory carried dependency.

In this example we can observe that the address computa-
tion of both GEP operations addresses subsequent locations
which are then used by a store-load pair to create a mem-
ory dependency. To analyze this, we need to consider the
loop induction variable %i.0, its increment direction, and
the address computation of both %idx and %idx1, which is
all achieved using the existing DependenceAnalysis.

Once we have excluded loops with memory carried depen-
dencies we are only left with those loops that have either no
dependencies or only register carried ones. For these loops
we compute the length of the cyclic dependency using the
cost model. Listing 5 shows the same loop implemented
using a register carried dependency. Here we observe that
there is one less load operation in the loop, which has been
replaced by a new phi operation. The minimal recurrence
II is now computed by finding the cycle %i.0-%add-%i.0,
and computing its weight. All cycles in the operation graph
are enumerated and the longest cycle represents the minimal
recurrence II.

Listing 5: After promoting the memory dependency
to a register carried dependency

```c
define void @foo(i8* nocapture %in, i32 %width) #0 {
  entry:
    %idx = getelementptr inbounds i8* %in, i32 0
    %pre = load i8* %idx, align 1, !tbaa !0
    %cmp = icmp ugt i32 %width, 1
    br i1 %cmp, label %for.body, label %for.end
for.body: ; preds = %entry, %for.body
  %i.0 = phi i32 [%inc, %for.body], [1, %entry]
  %0 = phi i32 [%add, %for.body], [%pre, %entry]
  %idx1 = getelementptr inbounds i8* %in, i32 0
  %1 = load i8* %idx1, align 1, !tbaa !0
  %add = add i8 %idx1, align 1, !tbaa !0
  %store = store i8 %add, i8* %idx1, align 1, !tbaa !0
  %inc = add i32 %i.0, 1
  %exitcond = icmp eq i32 %inc, %width
  br i1 %exitcond, label %for.end, label %for.body
for.end: ; preds = %for.body, %entry
  ret void
}
```

From this point, we compute the minimal resource II using
two new hooks in the TargetTransformInfo. These hooks
represent the number of available execution resources for
scalar and vector operations respectively. At this point we
assume that the processor architecture is capable of ex-
ecuting either scalar or vector operations on each issue-slot,
as this was the case for our initial target architecture. This
model may be extended in the future when support for other
architectures is considered.

With both the minimal recurrence and resource based
II values, we can now start the actual node ordering and
scheduling steps. These steps again use the cost model and
the new TargetTransformInfo hooks to determine a
software-pipelined schedule.

From this schedule, we then generate a loop prologue,
kernel, and epilogue, in IR form and connect them to the
original code together with a conditional block that checks
if there are sufficient loop iterations to satisfy the require-
ments for the prologue. This results in the loop structure
shown in figure 4a. However, in many cases the loop bypass
from the (top) entry block checks the same, or a very similar,
Further improvements of the approach may be found in tuning or extending the set of TargetTransformInfo hooks and possibly by adding heuristics that estimate register file pressure. As such, these will be considered as part of our future work.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the HiPEAC network for supporting this research through a collaboration grant, as well as, Martin O’Riordan and David Moloney of Movidius Ltd, for providing the opportunity for, and their support while working on, this project.

6. REFERENCES


