

15-213

“The Class That Gives CMU Its Zip!”

Introduction to Computer Systems

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August 27, 2002**

Topics:

- **Theme**
- **Five great realities of computer systems**
- **How this fits within CS curriculum**

Course Theme

- Abstraction is good, but don't forget reality!

Courses to date emphasize abstraction

- Abstract data types
- Asymptotic analysis

These abstractions have limits

- Especially in the presence of bugs
- Need to understand underlying implementations

Useful outcomes

- Become more effective programmers
 - Able to find and eliminate bugs efficiently
 - Able to tune program performance
- Prepare for later “systems” classes in CS & ECE
 - Compilers, Operating Systems, Networks, Computer Architecture, Embedded Systems

Great Reality #1

Int's are not Integers, Float's are not Reals

Examples

■ Is $x^2 \geq 0$?

- Float's: Yes!

- Int's:

 - » $40000 * 40000 \rightarrow 1600000000$

 - » $50000 * 50000 \rightarrow ??$

■ Is $(x + y) + z = x + (y + z)$?

- Unsigned & Signed Int's: Yes!

- Float's:

 - » $(1e20 + -1e20) + 3.14 \rightarrow 3.14$

 - » $1e20 + (-1e20 + 3.14) \rightarrow ??$

Computer Arithmetic

Does not generate random values

- Arithmetic operations have important mathematical properties

Cannot assume “usual” properties

- Due to finiteness of representations
- Integer operations satisfy “ring” properties
 - Commutativity, associativity, distributivity
- Floating point operations satisfy “ordering” properties
 - Monotonicity, values of signs

Observation

- Need to understand which abstractions apply in which contexts
- Important issues for compiler writers and serious application programmers

Great Reality #2

You've got to know assembly

Chances are, you'll never write program in assembly

- **Compilers are much better & more patient than you are**

Understanding assembly key to machine-level execution model

- **Behavior of programs in presence of bugs**
 - High-level language model breaks down
- **Tuning program performance**
 - Understanding sources of program inefficiency
- **Implementing system software**
 - Compiler has machine code as target
 - Operating systems must manage process state

Assembly Code Example

Time Stamp Counter

- Special 64-bit register in Intel-compatible machines
- Incremented every clock cycle
- Read with rdtsc instruction

Application

- Measure time required by procedure
 - In units of clock cycles

```
double t;  
start_counter();  
P();  
t = get_counter();  
printf("P required %f clock cycles\n", t);
```

Code to Read Counter

- Write small amount of assembly code using GCC's asm facility
- Inserts assembly code into machine code generated by compiler

```
static unsigned cyc_hi = 0;
static unsigned cyc_lo = 0;

/* Set *hi and *lo to the high and low order bits
   of the cycle counter.
*/
void access_counter(unsigned *hi, unsigned *lo)
{
    asm("rdtsc; movl %%edx,%0; movl %%eax,%1"
        : "=r" (*hi), "=r" (*lo)
        :
        : "%edx", "%eax");
}
```

Code to Read Counter

```
/* Record the current value of the cycle counter. */
void start_counter()
{
    access_counter(&cyc_hi, &cyc_lo);
}

/* Number of cycles since the last call to start_counter. */
double get_counter()
{
    unsigned ncyc_hi, ncyc_lo;
    unsigned hi, lo, borrow;
    /* Get cycle counter */
    access_counter(&ncyc_hi, &ncyc_lo);
    /* Do double precision subtraction */
    lo = ncyc_lo - cyc_lo;
    borrow = lo > ncyc_lo;
    hi = ncyc_hi - cyc_hi - borrow;
    return (double) hi * (1 << 30) * 4 + lo;
}
```


Measuring Time

Trickier than it Might Look

- Many sources of variation

Example

- Sum integers from 1 to n

n	Cycles	Cycles/n
100	961	9.61
1,000	8,407	8.41
1,000	8,426	8.43
10,000	82,861	8.29
10,000	82,876	8.29
1,000,000	8,419,907	8.42
1,000,000	8,425,181	8.43
1,000,000,000	8,371,2305,591	8.37

Great Reality #3

Memory Matters

Memory is not unbounded

- It must be allocated and managed
- Many applications are memory dominated

Memory referencing bugs especially pernicious

- Effects are distant in both time and space

Memory performance is not uniform

- Cache and virtual memory effects can greatly affect program performance
- Adapting program to characteristics of memory system can lead to major speed improvements

Memory Referencing Bug Example

```
main ()
{
    long int a[2];
    double d = 3.14;
    a[2] = 1073741824; /* Out of bounds reference */
    printf("d = %.15g\n", d);
    exit(0);
}
```

	Alpha	MIPS	Linux
-g	5.30498947741318e-315	3.1399998664856	3.14
-O	3.14	3.14	3.14

(Linux version gives correct result, but implementing as separate function gives segmentation fault.)

Memory Referencing Errors

C and C++ do not provide any memory protection

- Out of bounds array references
- Invalid pointer values
- Abuses of malloc/free

Can lead to nasty bugs

- Whether or not bug has any effect depends on system and compiler
- Action at a distance
 - Corrupted object logically unrelated to one being accessed
 - Effect of bug may be first observed long after it is generated

How can I deal with this?

- Program in Java, Lisp, or ML
- Understand what possible interactions may occur
- Use or develop tools to detect referencing errors

Memory Performance Example

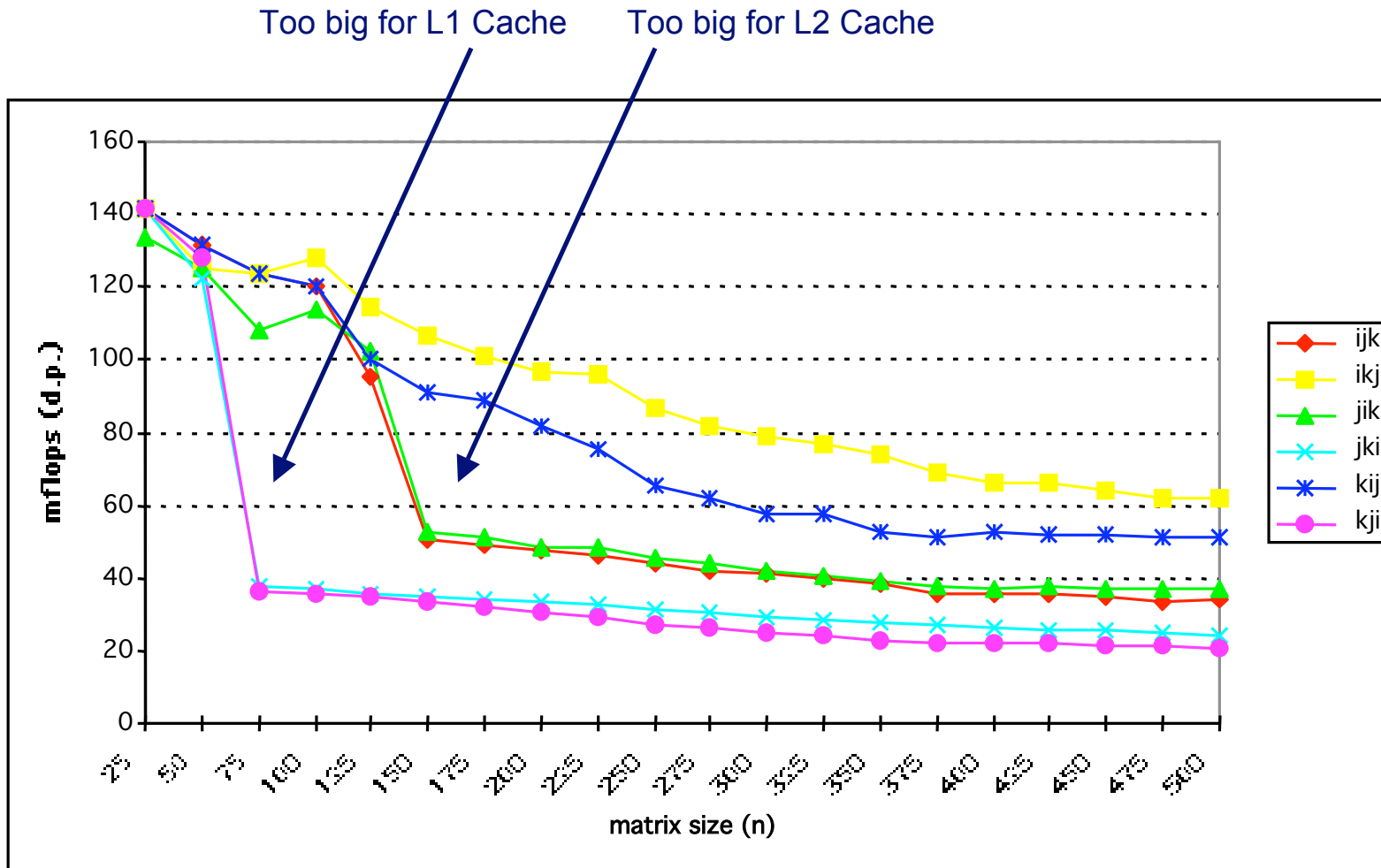
Implementations of Matrix Multiplication

- Multiple ways to nest loops

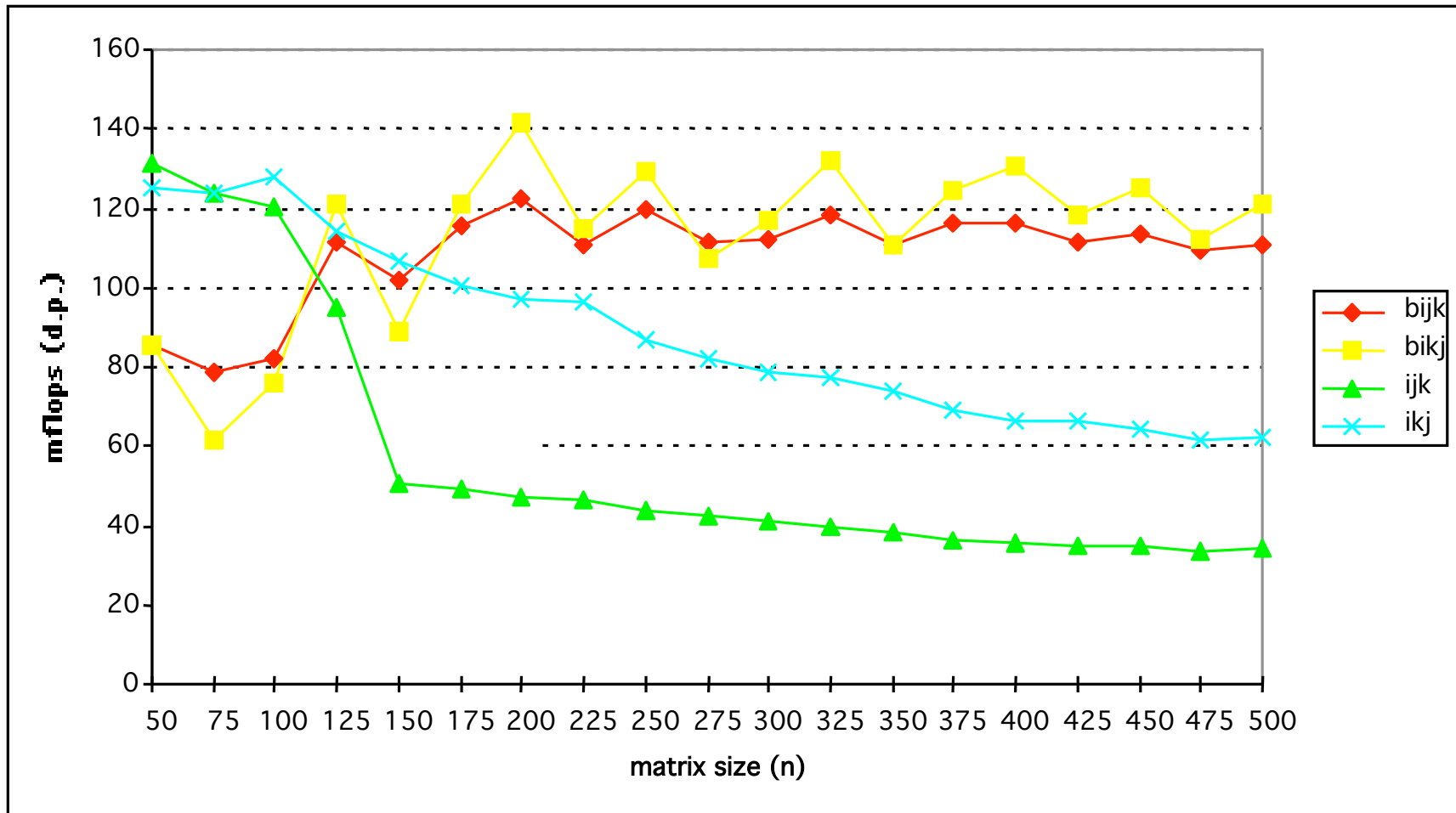
```
/* ijk */  
for (i=0; i<n; i++) {  
    for (j=0; j<n; j++) {  
        sum = 0.0;  
        for (k=0; k<n; k++)  
            sum += a[i][k] * b[k][j];  
        c[i][j] = sum;  
    }  
}
```

```
/* jik */  
for (j=0; j<n; j++) {  
    for (i=0; i<n; i++) {  
        sum = 0.0;  
        for (k=0; k<n; k++)  
            sum += a[i][k] * b[k][j];  
        c[i][j] = sum;  
    }  
}
```

Matmult Performance (Alpha 21164)



Blocked matmult perf (Alpha 21164)



Great Reality #4

There's more to performance than asymptotic complexity

Constant factors matter too!

- Easily see 10:1 performance range depending on how code written
- Must optimize at multiple levels: algorithm, data representations, procedures, and loops

Must understand system to optimize performance

- How programs compiled and executed
- How to measure program performance and identify bottlenecks
- How to improve performance without destroying code modularity and generality

Great Reality #5

Computers do more than execute programs

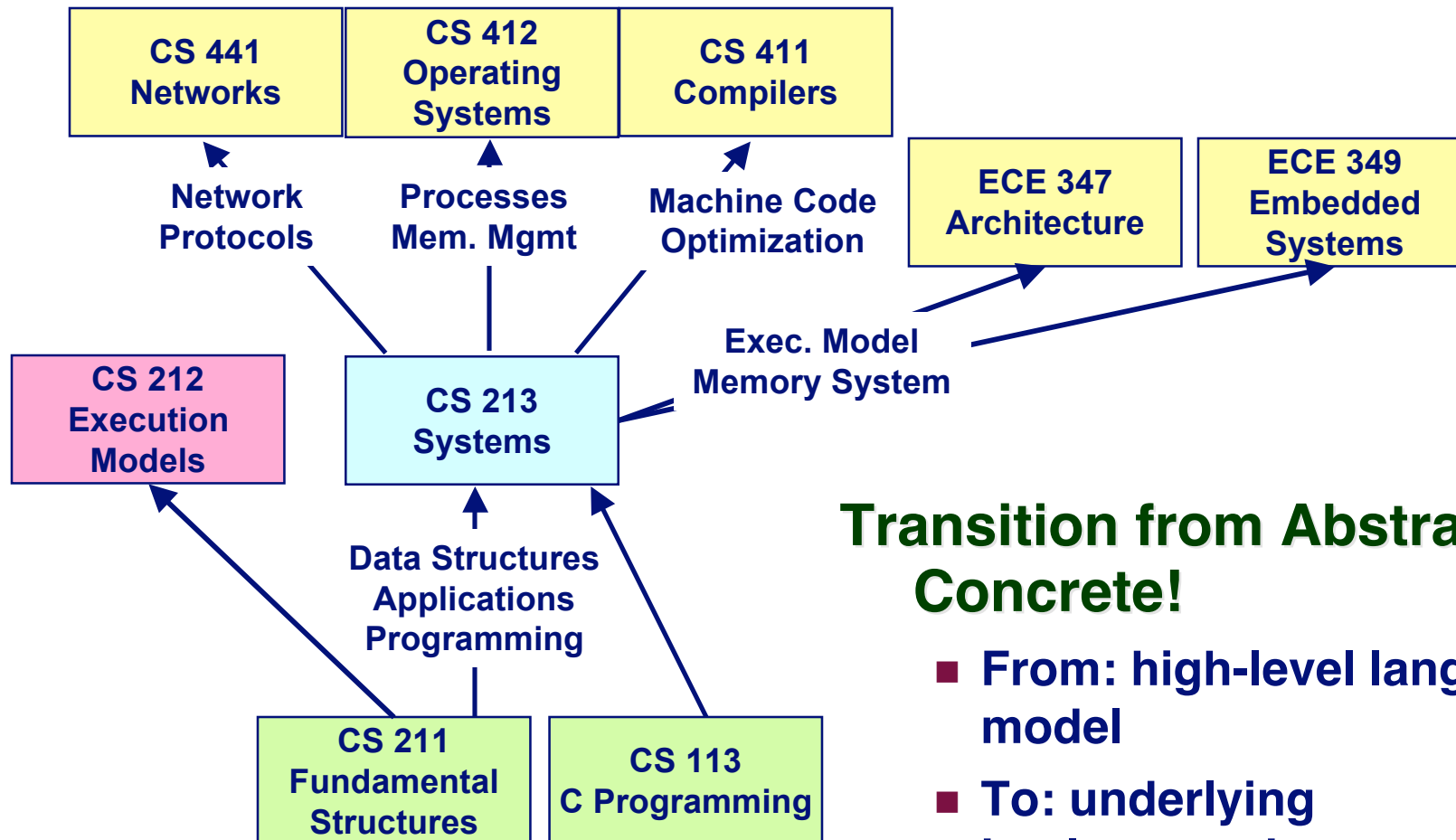
They need to get data in and out

- I/O system critical to program reliability and performance

They communicate with each other over networks

- Many system-level issues arise in presence of network
 - Concurrent operations by autonomous processes
 - Coping with unreliable media
 - Cross platform compatibility
 - Complex performance issues

Role within Curriculum



Transition from Abstract to Concrete!

- From: high-level language model
- To: underlying implementation

Course Perspective

Most Systems Courses are Builder-Centric

- **Computer Architecture**
 - Design pipelined processor in Verilog
- **Operating Systems**
 - Implement large portions of operating system
- **Compilers**
 - Write compiler for simple language
- **Networking**
 - Implement and simulate network protocols

Course Perspective (Cont.)

Our Course is Programmer-Centric

- Purpose is to show how by knowing more about the underlying system, one can be more effective as a programmer
- Enable you to
 - Write programs that are more reliable and efficient
 - Incorporate features that require hooks into OS
 - » E.g., concurrency, signal handlers
- Not just a course for dedicated hackers
 - We bring out the hidden hacker in everyone
- Cover material in this course that you won't see elsewhere