Updates

- Oct 26 - Clarified that `iter` should return 0 (though we won’t test the return value).
- Oct 22 - Clarified in `iter(t,f)` that f takes two arguments. Clarified meaning of `next_inst`.
- Oct 14 - Clarified no spaces in `to_s` when applied to `id`.

1 Introduction

In this project, you will implement RubeVM, a virtual machine for a simple bytecode language. Later in the semester, you will compile Rube (a simplified Ruby) source code into RubeVM bytecode.

2 RubeVM Fundamentals

Figure 1 defines what the RubeVM instructions are, what values they manipulate, and provides some definitions that will be useful for the operational semantics. We’ll discuss the figure from top to bottom.

RubeVM is a register-based machine, where registers r are simply numbered starting from 0. We assume there is an unbounded number of registers. Registers contain values v. The first two kinds of values are integers n (e.g., 0, 1, 10, -42, etc) and strings s. Values also include identifiers id. When an identifier is stored in a register, we treat it as a pointer to the function of that name (more on functions later). We also use identifiers to refer to global variables (but an identifier in a register is always a function pointer). Lastly, values include locations ℓ, which are pointers to tables, which are stored in the heap. A table t is a mapping from values to values.

There are many different kinds of RubeVM instructions i. We’ll discuss the semantics of each instruction in detail below. For now, just observe there are several groups of instructions: Basics (loading constants, moving values); arithmetic and comparisons; branching; global variable access; table manipulation; and function calls.

A RubeVM program P is a mapping from function names (id) to function bodies F, which themselves are mappings from program counters (pc) to instructions. For example, If P is a program with some function f, then P(f)(0) is the first instruction in function f. Note that program counters are just natural numbers, but we write them as pc as a reminder of what they’re used for.

When a program runs, it may update the heap H. The heap stores two kinds of mappings in it: locations ℓ are mapped to tables t, and global variable names id are mapped to values v. In other words, if H is a heap and ℓ ∈ dom(H) (ℓ is in the domain of H, i.e., there is a mapping for ℓ in H), then H(ℓ) will be a table. Similarly, if H is a heap and id ∈ dom(H), then H(id) will be a value. Tables are not values because they are mutable in RubeVM.

As RubeVM executes a function, that function may access a register file R, which is just a mapping from register numbers to values. In RubeVM, each function invocation has its own local registers that are disjoint with any other function invocation, i.e., the registers are local variables.

Finally, as RubeVM executes, there will be function calls and returns. To handle these, RubeVM maintains a stack S. Each stack frame has the form (id,pc,R), where id is the name of the function, pc is the program counter, and R is the register file. The stack is a sequence of stack frames, separated with ::, with the top-most frame on the left.
We’ll describe the operational semantics as a small-step semantics over machine states \( \langle H, S \rangle \), where \( H \) is the heap and \( S \) is the stack. Figure 2 gives the operational semantics rules. The column “Reduction” defines judgments of the form \( P \vdash \langle H, S \rangle \rightarrow \langle H', S' \rangle \), meaning that one step of execution of program \( P \) with heap \( H \) and stack \( S \) yields a new heap \( H' \) and new stack \( S' \). Recall the current function is always on the left of the stack. Hence in the rules we almost always write the configuration pattern as \( \langle H, (id, pc, R) :: S \rangle \), to indicate a state with heap \( H \), current function \( id \), current program counter \( pc \), current registers \( R \), and remainder of the stack \( S \).

The column “\( P(id)(pc) \)” indicates what the instruction in the current function \( id \) at the current program counter \( pc \) must be for this rule to apply. Finally, the “Side conditions” column indicates other conditions that must be true for this rule to apply. If we wrote these rules correctly, at most one reduction rule should be possible in any state. It’s also possible no rule may apply, in which case the machine gets stuck.

Next we step through the semantics, from top to bottom.

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Figure 1: RubeVM syntax and runtime model.

3 RubeVM Operational Semantics

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Next we step through the semantics, from top to bottom.
const \( r, v \) Yields a new state that is the same as the old state, except the program counter in the current stack frame has been incremented by one, and the register file has been updated so that \( r \) now maps to \( v \).

Note that this may either mean \( r \) is newly added to \( R_t \) or it may be updated. Notice that in addition to lettings registers be initialized with integers and strings, this also lets registers be initialized with function pointers. To actually call a function, it is a two-step process: The name is loaded into a register with \( \text{const} \), and then that register is used as an operand to the \( \text{call} \) instruction (discussed below).

Also notice this rule technically lets locations be loaded into registers (like casting an integer to a pointer in C), but well-behaved programs will never use this behavior. In fact, the assembler we give you forbids this syntactically.

Almost all the remaining instructions increment the program counter by one, so we will leave that out of the subsequent discussion unless there is a special case.

\( \text{mov} \ r_1, r_2 \) Stores the value \( v \) associated with \( r_2 \) in the current register file in the register \( r_1 \).

\( \text{add} \ r_1, r_2, r_3 \) Updates \( r_1 \) to contain the sum of the integers in \( r_2 \) and \( r_3 \). Notice no behavior for this instruction is defined if \( r_2 \) or \( r_3 \) does not contain an integer.

\( \text{Figure 2: Operational Semantics} \)
sub, mul, div  Similar to add.

eq r_1, r_2, r_3  Stores 1 in r_1 if r_2 and r_3 both contain the same value, or 0 if they contain different values. This instruction is only defined if both r_2 and r_3 are integers, or if both are strings.

lt, leq  Similar to eq, but only allows integer comparisons.

jmp n  Unconditionally updates the program counter to the previous program counter plus n + 1. Since n is an integer, it may be negative to jump to an earlier instruction in the function. (The extra plus one here seems to be standard on VMs and CPUs.)

if_zero r, n  Adds n + 1 to the previous program counter if r contains zero, otherwise “falls through” to the next instruction by adding one to the program counter. Note that it is allowed for R(r) to not be an integer—that case will always fall through, however.

rd.glob r, id_2  Stores the value v mapped to id_2 in the heap into r.

wr.glob id_2, r  Stores the contents of r into the mapping for id_2 in the heap.

mk_tab r  Generates a fresh location ℓ that is not already mapped in the heap; updates the heap to map ℓ to an empty table; and updates r to contain ℓ.

rd.tab r_1, r_2, r_3  Looks up the value v stored in r_3 in the table whose location ℓ is stored in r_2, and stores the corresponding value v' into r_1. Note this rule is undefined if v is not a key in the table.

wr.tab r_1, r_2, r_3  Updates the table whose location ℓ is indicated by r_1 so that the value v stored in r_2 is mapped to the value v' stored in r_3. This may cause either a new mapping to be added if there was none previously, or the previous mapping to be replaced.

call r, n_1, n_2  The register r must contain an id_2 that names a function in the program. Note there is no check here that id_2 must be a valid function name, but if it is not, the semantics will get stuck in the next step. A new register file R_2 is created and initialized with the contents of the current stack frame’s registers n_1 through n_2, offset so R(n_1) is in register 0, R(n_1) + 1 is in register 1, etc. If n_2 < n_1, the new register file R_2 is empty by definition. Then a new stack frame is pushed onto the stack, with the callee function name id_2, the initial program counter 0, and the initial register file R_2. Thus, in the next step execution will continue inside of id_2.

ret r  Pops the current stack frame off the stack, incrementing the caller stack frame’s program counter by one. Also copies the value v in register r to the register n_1 in the caller’s stack frame, where n_1 is the initial register indicated in the call instruction that created the current stack frame.

Finally, to run a program from scratch, we start executing the main function of the program, with the program counter at 0, an empty register file, and an empty heap. Thus, the initial configuration for program P is

\( \langle \emptyset, (\text{main}, 0, \emptyset) : \emptyset \rangle \)

The program exits when main returns. That is, when a program reaches a configuration

\( \langle H, (\text{main}, pc, R) : \emptyset \rangle \)

and \( P(\text{main})(pc) = \text{ret} r \). The value returned from the program is \( R(r) \).

(Note it is an error if main, or any other function, runs out of instructions before returning.)
Your job is to implement the operational semantics in OCaml. Figure 3 shows a translation of (most of) Figure 1 into OCaml. Registers, values, and identifiers are given by types \texttt{reg}, \texttt{value}, and \texttt{id}. Notice there is overlap between \texttt{value} and \texttt{id}. Also notice we have arbitrary decided to represent locations as integers, and that we have not given you a representation of tables—that choice is up to you. When you do add tables to the set of values, do not modify the other constructors. For debugging purposes, you will probably want to add the capability of printing out table values; you’ll want to modify \texttt{Disassembler.value} to do that (just follow the pattern).

The middle part of the figure shows the instructions. Finally, the bottom part of the figure defines types for a function body (an array of instructions), the program (an associative list mapping function names to their bodies), the heap (a mapping from values to values), registers (a mapping from register numbers to values), the stack (a list of stack frames containing the function name, program counter, and registers), and the configuration (a pair of heap and stack).

You must implement the following functions in the file \texttt{rubevm.ml} (the first couple are just warmups, and you may or may not use them in the last two functions):

- \texttt{max_regs} \( p \ f : \text{prog} \rightarrow \text{string} \rightarrow \text{int} \) takes a program and the name of a function in the program, and returns the highest numbered register accessed within the body of the function.
- \texttt{next_inst} \( p \ (h, s) : \text{prog} \rightarrow \text{config} \rightarrow \text{instr} \) takes a program and a configuration, and returns the next instruction to be executed (i.e., the instruction that \texttt{run_inst} would execute if it were called).
• \(\text{run} \, \text{inst} \, p \,(h, s) : \text{prog} \rightarrow \text{config} \rightarrow \text{config}\) takes a program and a current configuration, and executes the next instruction, yielding a new configuration. This function should raise an exception (of your choice) if the program attempts to do anything that is erroneous in the semantics, i.e., if there is no reduction rule for that case. Some example erroneous cases are adding two strings, “calling” an integer as a function, reading a non-existent key in a table, etc.

• \(\text{run prog} \, p : \text{prog} \rightarrow \text{value}\) runs a program, starting in the initial configuration (as defined above), until \(\text{main}\) returns, and the function returns the value returned from \(\text{main}\).

To help make it a bit easier to write RubeVM programs, we’ve provided you with an assembler. Once you have a working prototype, you can run a program from scratch as \(./\text{rubevm} \, \text{file}\), where \(\text{file}\) is the name of a file containing rubevm assembly code. For an example of a program in this format, see \(\text{r1.rubevm}\), which doesn’t do anything interesting but does include every possible instruction. After a program is executed, \(\text{rubevm}\) prints the value returned from running the program.

5 Foreign Functions

The interpreter above is theoretically useful, but programs are still limited in practical terms. For example, there’s no way to do I/O within the language. To solve this problem, you must extend your interpreter to perform special handling of certain foreign function calls. In RubeVM, foreign function calls look just like normal calls (they are invoked with the \text{call} instruction as usual), but the interpreter intercepts them and performs special operations that are written in OCaml rather than in RubeVM code. You must implement the following foreign functions:

• \(\text{print string}(s)\). Prints string \(s\) to standard output. This function should print \(s\) as-is, e.g., it does not print a newline after the string. Returns the string that was printed.

• \(\text{print int}(n)\). Prints integer \(n\) to standard output (again without anything else, e.g., without adding a newline). Returns the integer (not its string representation) that was printed.

• \(\text{to s}(v)\). If \(v\) is a string, the string is returned as-is. If \(v\) is an integer, converts the integer to a string and returns that string. If \(v\) is an identifier, returns the string \(\text{Function}<\text{id}>\), where \(\text{id}\) is the name of the function. Note there should be no extra spaces added, e.g., if \(\text{foo}\) is the \(\text{id}\), then \(\text{to s}\) would return \(\text{Function}<\text{foo}>\) and not \(\text{Function}<\text{foo}>\) or \(\text{Function}<\text{foo}>\) etc.

• \(\text{to i}(v)\). If \(v\) is an integer, returns the integer as-is. If \(v\) is a string, converts the string to an integer and returns that. Your implementation may do whatever you choose if \(v\) is a string that contains characters other than digits and a possible initial minus sign.

• \(\text{concat}(s1, s2)\). Returns the concatenation of strings \(s1\) and \(s2\).

• \(\text{length}(s)\). Returns the length of string \(s\).

• \(\text{size}(t)\). Returns the number of key-value pairs in table \(t\). (Note \(t\) is really a “pointer to a table” in the internal RubeVM representation.)

• \(\text{iter}(t, f)\). Calls function \(f\) (which in the semantics will be an \(\text{id}\)) once on each key–value pair in table \(t\). E.g., if \(k\) maps to \(v\) in the table, the function \(f\) will be called as \(f(k,v)\). The iteration order is unspecified (any order is fine). The \(\text{iter}\) function always returns \(0\).

In all cases, your implementation must abort with an exception (whichever exception you prefer) if a foreign function is called with the wrong types of arguments. Since there are quite a few foreign functions to implement, it would probably be a good idea to design your interpreter to make it easy to add new foreign functions.
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