Assemblers, Linkers, and Loaders

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See: P&H Appendix B.3-4

```
#include <stdio.h>
int n = 100;
int main (int argc, char* argv[]) {
    int i, m = n, count = 0;
    for (i = 1; i <= m; i++) { count += i; }
    printf (“Sum 1 to %d is %d\n", n, count);
}
```

```
[csug01] mipsel-linux-gcc –S add1To100.c
```

Global variables in data segment

- Exist for all time, accessible to all functions

Dynamic variables in heap segment

- Exist between malloc() and free()

Function-Local variables in stack frame

- Exist solely for the duration of the stack frame

```
int n = 100;
int main (int argc, char* argv[]) {
        int i, m = n, count = 0, *A = malloc(m*4);
        for (i = 1; i <= m; i++) { count += A[i-1] = i; }
        printf ("Sum 1 to %d is %d\n", n, count);
}
```

```
        .data
        .globl  n
        .align  2
n:      .word   100
        .rdata
        .align  2
$str0:  .asciiz
           "Sum 1 to %d is %d\n"
        .text
        .align  2
        .globl  main
main:   addiu   $sp,$sp,-48
        sw      $31,44($sp)
        sw      $fp,40($sp)
        move    $fp,$sp
        sw      $4,48($fp)
        sw      $5,52($fp)
        la      $2,n
        lw      $2,0($2)
        sw      $2,28($fp)
        sw      $0,32($fp)
        li      $2,1
        sw      $2,24($fp)
$L2:    lw      $2,24($fp)
        lw      $3,28($fp)
        slt     $2,$3,$2
        bne     $2,$0,$L3
        lw      $3,32($fp)
        lw      $2,24($fp)
        addu    $2,$3,$2
        sw      $2,32($fp)
        lw      $2,24($fp)
        addiu   $2,$2,1
        sw      $2,24($fp)
        b       $L2
$L3:    la      $4,$str0
        lw      $5,28($fp)
        lw      $6,32($fp)
        jal     printf
        move    $sp,$fp
        lw      $31,44($sp)
        lw      $fp,40($sp)
        addiu   $sp,$sp,48
        j       $31
```

C Pointers can be trouble

Pointer to global variables are fine

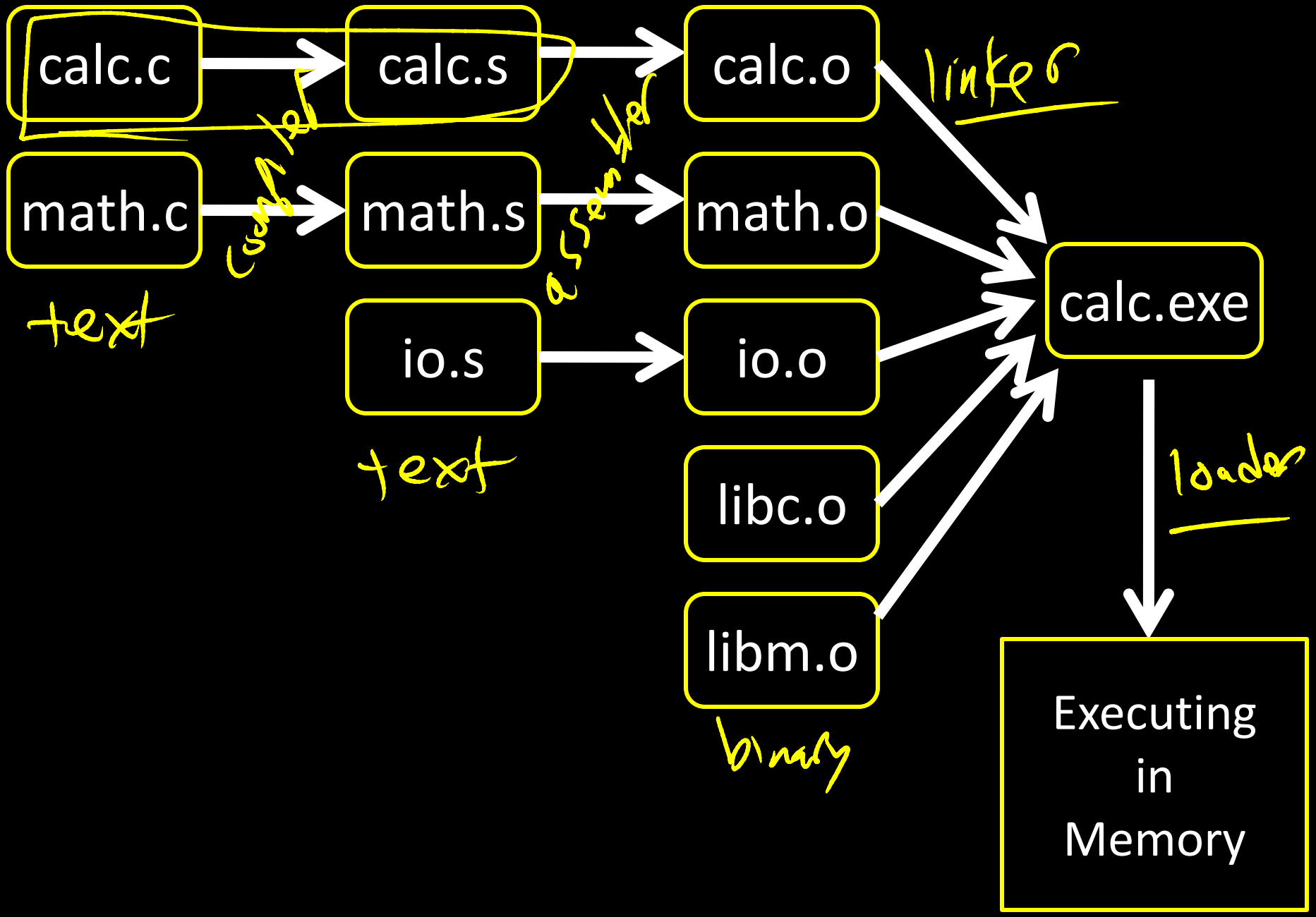
Pointer to dynamic variables in heap segment

```
int *bad()
{ s = malloc(20); … free(s); … return s; }
```

Pointer to function-local variables in stack frame

```
int *trouble()
{ int a; …; return &a; }
char *evil()
{ char s[20]; gets(s); return s; }
```

(Can't do this in Java, C#, ...)


calc.c
calc.s
calc.o
linker
math.c
compiler
math.s
assembler
math.o
text
calc.exe
io.s
io.o
text
loader
libc.o
libm.o
binary
Executing
in
Memory

Assembler output is obj files

- Not executable
- May refer to external symbols
- Each object file has illusion of its own address space

Linker joins object files into one executable

Loader brings it into memory and starts execution

Assemblers and Compilers

Object File

Header

- Size and position of pieces of file

Text Segment

- instructions

Data Segment

- static data (local/global vars, strings, constants)

Symbol Table

- External (exported) references
- Unresolved (imported) references

Debugging Information

- line number → code address map, etc.

Global labels: External (exported) symbols

- Can be referenced from other object files
- Exported functions, global variables

Local labels: Internal (non-exported) symbols

- Only used within this object file
- static functions, static variables, loop labels, …

math.c

```
int pi = 3;
int e = 2;
static int randomval = 7;

extern char *username;
extern int printf(char *str, …);

int square(int x) { … }
static int is_prime(int x) { … }
int pick_prime() { … }
int pick_random() {
    return randomval;
}
```

```
gcc -S … math.c
gcc -c … math.s
objdump --disassemble math.o
objdump --syms math.o
```

```
csug01 ~$ mipsel-linux-objdump --disassemble math.o

math.o:     file format elf32-tradlittlemips

Disassembly of section .text:

00000000 <pick_random>:
   0:   27bdfff8        addiu   sp,sp,-8
   4:   afbe0000        sw      s8,0(sp)
   8:   03a0f021        move    s8,sp
   c:   3c020000        lui     v0,0x0
  10:   8c420008        lw      v0,8(v0)
  14:   03c0e821        move    sp,s8
  18:   8fbe0000        lw      s8,0(sp)
  1c:   27bd0008        addiu   sp,sp,8
  20:   03e00008        jr      ra
  24:   00000000        nop

00000028 <square>:
  28:   27bdfff8        addiu   sp,sp,-8
  2c:   afbe0000        sw      s8,0(sp)
  30:   03a0f021        move    s8,sp
  34:   afc40008        sw      a0,8(s8)
  ...
```

prolog

random val 0x8030 0008

epilog

```
csug01 ~$ mipsel-linux-objdump --syms math.o
math.o:     file format elf32-tradlittlemips

SYMBOL TABLE:
00000000 l    df *ABS*          00000000 math.c
00000000 l    d  .text          00000000 .text
00000000 l    d  .data          00000000 .data
00000000 l    d  .bss           00000000 .bss
00000000 l    d  .mdebug.abi32  00000000 .mdebug.abi32
00000008 l     O .data          00000004 randomval
00000060 l     F .text          00000028 is_prime
00000000 l    d  .rodata        00000000 .rodata
00000000 l    d  .comment       00000000 .comment
00000000 g     O .data          00000004 pi
00000004 g     O .data          00000004 e
00000000 g     F .text          00000028 pick_random
00000028 g     F .text          00000038 square
00000088 g     F .text          0000004c pick_prime
00000000         *UND*          00000000 username
00000000         *UND*          00000000 printf
```

Q: Why separate compile/assemble and linking steps?

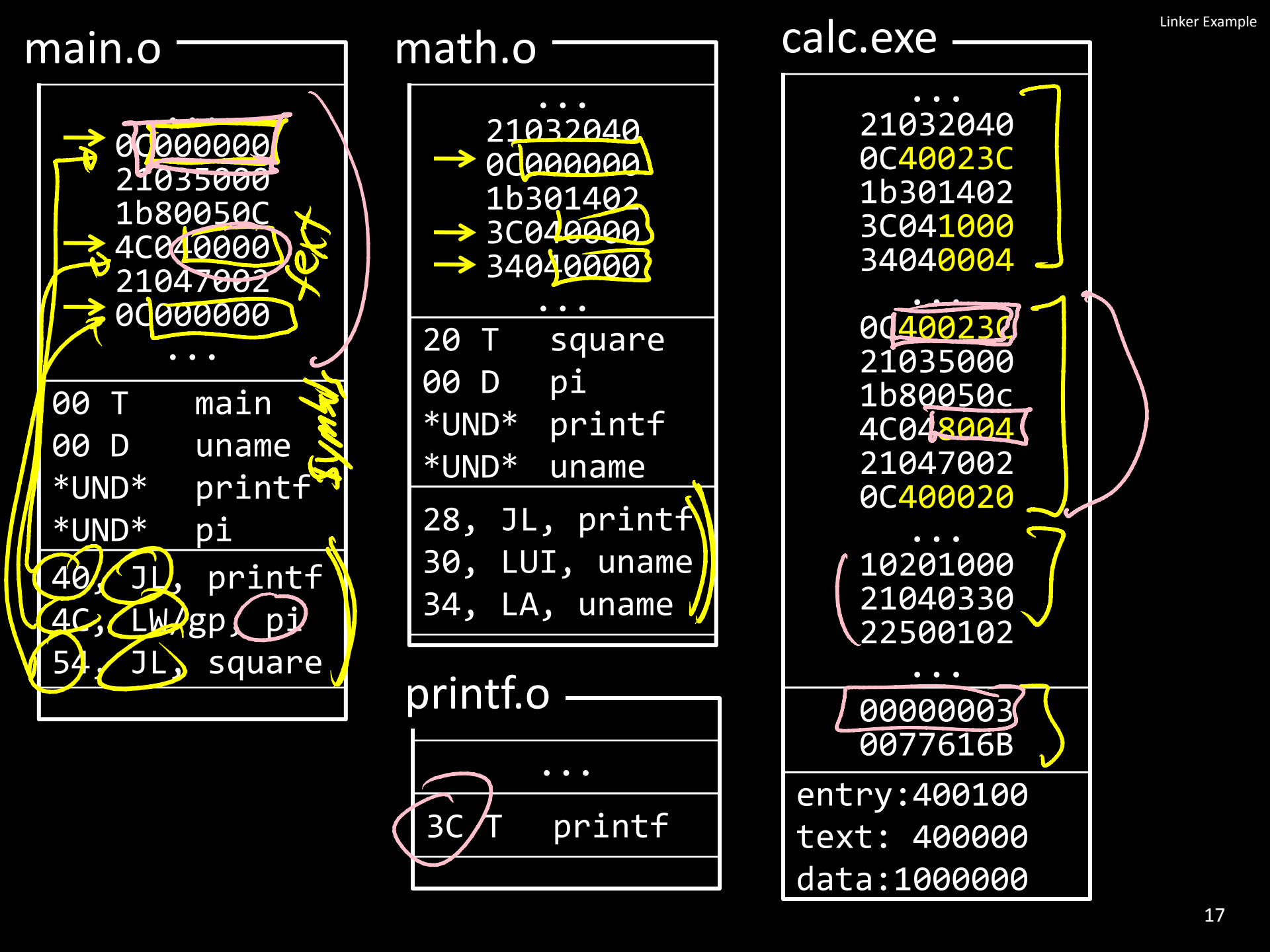
A: Can recompile one object, then just relink.

Linkers

Linker combines object files into an executable file

- Relocate each object's text and data segments
- Resolve as-yet-unresolved symbols
- Record top-level entry point in executable file

End result: a program on disk, ready to execute


main.o
0C000000
21035000
1b80050C
4C040000
21047002
0C000000
...
00 T main
00 D uname
UND printf
UND pi
40, JL, printf
4C, LW/gp, pi
54, JL, square
xext
Symtbl
math.o
...
21032040
0C000000
1b301402
3C040000
34040000
...
20 T square
00 D pi
UND printf
UND uname
28, JL, printf
30, LUI, uname
34, LA, uname
printf.o
...
3C T printf
calc.exe
...
21032040
0C40023C
1b301402
3C041000
34040004
...
0C400230
21035000
1b80050c
4C048004
21047002
0C400020
...
10201000
21040330
22500102
...
00000003
0077616B
entry:400100
text: 400000
data:1000000

Object File

Header

- location of main entry point (if any)

Text Segment

- instructions

Data Segment

- static data (local/global vars, strings, constants)

Relocation Information

- Instructions and data that depend on actual addresses
- Linker patches these bits after relocating segments

Symbol Table

- Exported and imported references

Debugging Information

Unix

- a.out
- COFF: Common Object File Format
- ELF: Executable and Linking Format
- …

Windows

- PE: Portable Executable

.o

.obj

.exe

All support both executable and object files

Loaders and Libraries

Loader reads executable from disk into memory

- Initializes registers, stack, arguments to first function
- Jumps to entry-point

Part of the Operating System (OS)

Static Library: Collection of object files
(think: like a zip archive)

.a
.lib

Q: But every program contains entire library!

A: Linker picks only object files needed to resolve undefined references at link time

e.g. libc.a contains many objects:

- printf.o, fprintf.o, vprintf.o, sprintf.o, snprintf.o, …
- read.o, write.o, open.o, close.o, mkdir.o, readdir.o, …
- rand.o, exit.o, sleep.o, time.o, ….

Q: But every program still contains part of library!

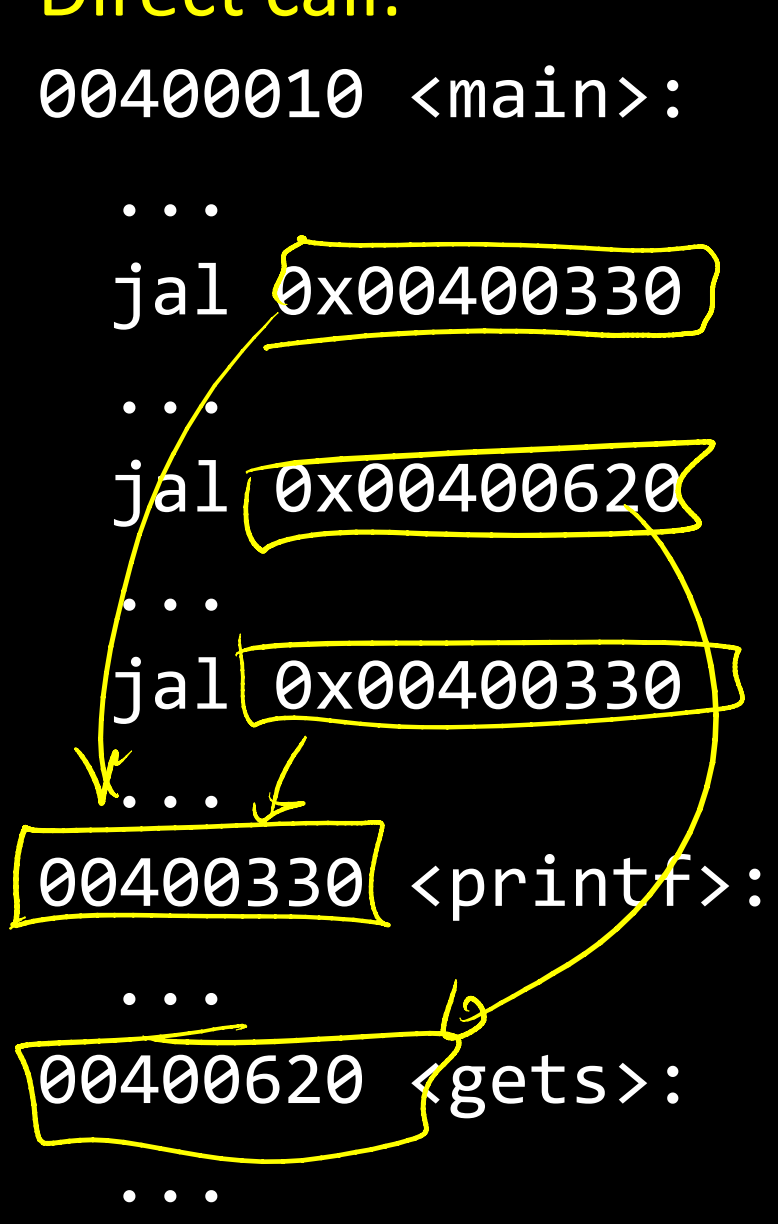
A: shared libraries

- executable files all point to single *shared library* on disk
- final linking (and relocations) done by the loader

Optimizations:

- Library compiled at fixed address
  (makes linking trivial: few relocations needed)
- Jump table in each program
- Can even patch jumps on-the-fly

Direct call:



Drawbacks:

Linker or loader must edit every use of a symbol (call site, global var use, …)

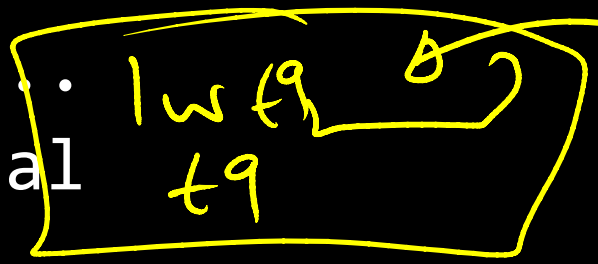
Idea:

Put all symbols in a single "global offset table"

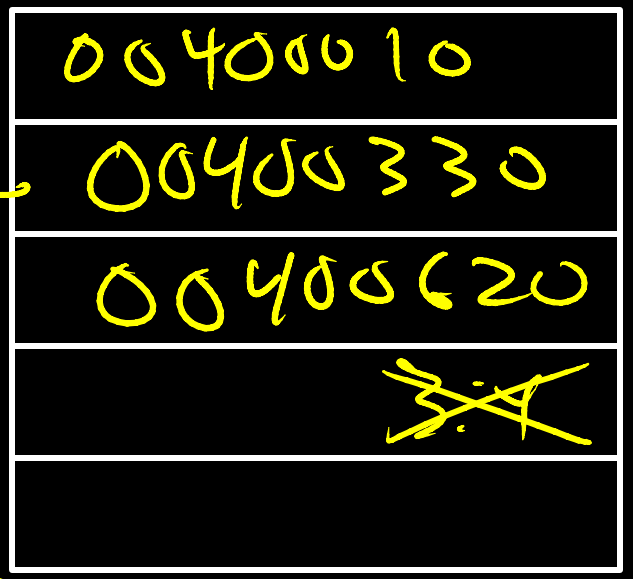
Code does lookup as needed

Direct call:

```
00400010 <main>:
   ...
   jal
   ...
   jal
   ...
   jal
   ...
00400330 <printf>:
   ...
00400620 <gets>:
   ...
```



GOT: global offset table



Indirect call:

```
00400010 <main>:
   ...
   lw t9, -32708(gp)
   jalr t9
   ...
   lw t9, -32704(gp)
   jalr t9
   ...
00400330 <printf>:
   ...
00400620 <gets>:
   ...
```

```
# data segment
   ...
   ...
# global offset table
# at -32712(gp)
.got
.word 00400010
.word 00400330
.word 00400620
...
```

sp = fp = 58

Indirect call with on-demand dynamic linking:

```
00400010 <main>:
   ...
   lw t9, -32708(gp)
   jalr t9
→  ...
.got
   .word 00400888
   .word 00400888
   .word 00400888
   .word 00400888
```

```
   ...
00400888 <dlresolve>:
```

t9 is entry
- xlate to name
- load (name)
fix got w/ new name.

Indirect call with on-demand dynamic linking:

```
00400010 <main>:
   ...
   # load address of prints
   # from .got[1]
   lw t9, -32708(gp)
   # also load the index 1
   li t8, 1
   # now call it
   jalr t9
   ...
.got
   .word 00400888 # open
   .word 00400888 # prints
   .word 00400888 # gets
   .word 00400888 # foo
```

```
   ...
00400888 <dlresolve>:
   # t9 = 0x400888
   # t8 = index of func that
   #    needs to be loaded

   # load that func
   ... # t7 = loadfromdisk(t8)

   # save func's address so
   # so next call goes direct
   ... # got[t8] = t7

   # also jump to func
   jr t7
   # it will return directly
   # to main, not here
```

Windows: dynamically loaded library (DLL)

- PE format

Unix: dynamic shared object (DSO)

- ELF format

Unix also supports Position Independent Code (PIC)

- Program determines its current address whenever needed (no absolute jumps!)
- Local data: access via offset from current PC, etc.
- External data: indirection through Global Offset Table (GOT)
- … which in turn is accessed via offset from current PC

Static linking

- Big executable files (all/most of needed libraries inside)
- Don’t benefit from updates to library
- No load-time linking

Dynamic linking

- Small executable files (just point to shared library)
- Library update benefits all programs that use it
- Load-time cost to do final linking
  - But dll code is probably already in memory
  - And can do the linking incrementally, on-demand