Supplementary Material on "Translating C to Safer Rust"

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This document gives more detail into the translation method in our paper "Translating C to Safer Rust" to appear in PACMPL, OOPSLA issue on October 2021. We give an introduction to Rust's ownership system, followed by a precise list of the rewrite rules used by the lifetime resolution algorithm. Finally, we give two code snippets to (1) complete the example used in the paper, and (2) to show an example of borrow conflicts mentioned in the paper.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Rust, C, Automatic Translation, Memory-Safety, Empirical Study

This document supplements "Translating C to Safer Rust" [Emre et al. 2021]. The following sections contain (1) a description of Rust's ownership system, (2) detailed rewrite rules used in ResolveLifetimes (see Section 3 of [Emre et al. 2021]), (3) a snippet from the bzip2 corpus program showing a borrow conflict that is resolved by promoting the related references to raw pointers, and (4) the full version of the running example from the paper after all steps of our method are applied.

1 RUST'S OWNERSHIP SYSTEM

This section serves a short primer to how Rust handles *ownership* and *borrowing*. Both of these features are central to Rust's memory model, and enable it to statically ensure memory safety in safe code without resorting to garbage collection at runtime. Given that our work must work with Rust's memory model closely, it is necessary to have some understanding of Rust's memory model in order to understand the significance of our own work. That said, this section is intended only as a quick introduction; readers curious for more details are directed to the online Rust book for basics [Klabnik and Nichols 2018], as well as as a more formal alias-based formulation at [Matsakis 2018].

1.1 Motivation

Rust's memory model ensures memory safety statically, without resorting to potentially expensive runtime memory management techniques like garbage collection. In Rust, well-typed programs are memory-safe by construction. As with a garbage collected language, users explicitly perform memory allocation, but do not explicitly perform deallocation. Unlike with garbage collection, the Rust compiler statically inserts routines to deallocate heap-allocated memory when it is no longer needed. The type system of Rust is designed in such a manner that the compiler statically

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https://doi.org/10.1145/nnnnnnnnnnnnn

knows exactly where these memory deallocations need to be performed. This knowledge of when to perform deallocation is based around *ownership*.

1.2 Ownership

By default, data is said to be *owned* in Rust. For example, consider the following function definition f, which uses type Vec from the Rust standard library (representing a vector):

```
1 fn f(v: Vec<i32>) {}
```

f is said to take ownership of v. This is indicated by the fact that v is directly of type $\text{Vec}<\text{i}\,32>$. Whoever owns the data is ultimately responsible for deallocating any heap-allocated data held. Deallocation implicitly occurs whenever the variable bound to the data falls out of scope. With this in mind, any heap-allocated data held in v is deallocated immediately after the call to f, as v will no longer be accessible.

Within a scope, ownership can be transferred from one variable to another. For example, consider the following code snippet:

```
1 fn example() {
2  let v1 = vec![1, 2, 3]; // creates a vector holding 1, 2, 3
3  let v2 = v1;
4 }
```

In this case, v1 initially holds the underlying vector. Ownership is then transferred to variable v2. Because ownership is never transferred away from v2, v2 will have all heap-allocated memory deallocated at example's termination. Because ownership was transferred away from v1, there is no similar deallocation performed for v1, beyond typical stack deallocation of v1.

Ownership can also be transferred between scopes. For example, consider the following:

```
1 fn identity(v: Vec<i32>) -> Vec<i32> { return v; }
```

In this case, like the prior f example, identity takes ownership over v. However, because identity later returns v, it transfers ownership to identity's caller. Any heap-allocated memory bound to v then becomes the concern of identity's caller.

1.3 Borrowing and Lifetimes

While the ownership model unambiguously allows the compiler to safely statically deallocate all heap-allocated memory, it is nonetheless very restrictive. For example, if you wanted to define a function that merely printed the contents of a vector, it would need to transfer ownership back to the caller. This would mean having an unintuitive type signature like:

```
1 fn print_all(v: Vec<i32>) -> Vec<i32> { ... }
```

With this in mind, the more data a function needs to do its job, the more data the very same function needs to return. There are also negative performance implications of ownership transfer, since barring compiler optimizations, it entails copying any stack-allocated memory behind a variable.

To address these issues around ownership transfer, Rust also has a concept known as *borrowing*. As the name suggests, data can be temporarily borrowed without changing ownership. Data is borrowed through a reference, which bear similarity to references in other languages. Borrowed data can be used like owned data, with some restrictions. One important restriction is that borrowed data cannot outlive the actual data being borrowed. Using C/C++ terminology, Rust must ensure that there are no dangling pointers to any allocated data.

To ensure that the underlying data being borrowed is always valid, Rust introduces the concept of a *lifetime*. Lifetimes are type-level variables which abstractly define how long the underlying data being borrowed will be in memory. For example, consider the following code:

```
1 fn has_lifetime<'a>(v: &'a Vec<i32>) { ... }
```

Instead of having ownership of v transferred to has_lifetime, this instead borrows the underlying Vec<i32> for lifetime 'a. Rust will ensure that the underlying Vec<i32> is in memory for the duration of the call to has_lifetime. Because has_lifetime merely borrows the Vec<i32>, there is no memory deallocation of v performed; has_lifetime does not own the vector, and so it is not has_lifetime's responsibility to deallocate the vector.

Like regular type variables, data structure definitions themselves can take lifetimes, as with:

```
1 struct SomeData<'a, 'b> {
2  first: &'a i32,
3  second: &'b i32
4 }
```

With the above code in mind, Rust will make sure that no allocated instance of SomeData will outlive anything it borrows. That is, the data referred to by first and second will always be in memory at least as long as the SomeData data structure itself.

To show this in practice, consider the following example, which is rejected by the Rust compiler:

```
1 fn rejected() {
2  let the_data;
3  let first_int = 1;
4  {
5   let second_int = 2;
6   the_data = SomeData { first: &first_int, second: &second_int };
7  }
8  print!("{}'', *the_data.second);
9 }
```

The above code is rejected by the Rust compiler, with an error message stating that second_int does not live long enough. To understand why, first understand that each block in Rust corresponds to a separate lifetime variable. That is, an enclosing scope maps directly to object lifetimes. For speaking purposes, the outer scope of rejected will be called 'a, and the inner scope (where second_int is declared) will be called 'b. With this in mind, the_data has type SomeData<'a, 'b>, and it itself has lifetime 'a. However, 'b does not live as long as 'a. As such, we have attempted to create a data structure with a lifetime longer than its constituents, which is not permitted. As such, Rust rejects the program. Thinking in terms of C/C++, this rejection makes sense - second_int is allocated on the stack and subsequently deallocated after the_data is initialized, so the_data.second would be a dangling pointer.

1.3.1 Restrictions. All borrows seen so far are immutable borrows, meaning that the underlying object cannot be changed through these borrows. Furthermore, the underlying object may not be changed at all while any immutable borrows are active. Similarly, Rust disallows ownership transfers while any borrows are active. This can be statically checked at compile time, as shown in the code below:

```
1 struct MyStruct {
2    first: i32
3 }
4
5 fn involves_borrows<'a>(datum: &'a MyStruct) -> &'a MyStruct {
6    return datum;
7 }
8 fn performs_transfer(x: MyStruct) {}
```

```
9
10 fn main() {
11    let x = MyStruct { first: 42 };
12    let r = involves_borrows(&x);
13    performs_transfer(x);
14    print!("{}", r.first)
15 }
```

The above compile, code fails the the transfer performed to as performs_transfer is disallowed because reference r still refers to the same data structure. Specifically, Rust tracks that x has an active borrow at the call to performs_transfer, disallowing the call. As an aside, the subsequent use of r.first is required to get this code to compile, as this forces the compiler to internally keep the borrow of x around after the call to performs_transfer; effectively, Rust will permit the existence of a dangling pointer, but not the access of a dangling pointer.

1.3.2 Immutable and Mutable Borrows. All prior borrow examples are based on immutable borrows, meaning the underlying object cannot be changed through the borrow. Rust also supports mutable borrows, which use the mut reserved word, like so:

```
&'a mut Vec<i32>
```

The above snippet refers to a mutable borrow of a Vec<i32>, where the underlying vector is in memory for at least 'a lifetime.

Mutable borrows work similarly to mutable borrows, with the following twists. With immutable borrows, the same data may be borrowed multiple times in the same context, as none of the borrows can change the underlying object. However, with mutable borrows, only one such mutable borrow may be active at any time. Furthermore, if a mutable borrow is active, all mutation must be done through the mutable borrow, and no immutable borrows or ownership transfers are permitted. While restrictive, these requirements prevent data races from occurring - all mutation is very carefully tracked and made explicit in the types; it is not possible for data to be modified "out from under you", as it is in most languages.

2 THE REWRITE RULES

This section gives a simplified fragment of Rust HIR that we perform rewrite operations on (Figure 1), and the specific rewrite rules we use to rewrite the initial program according to a given configuration and taint analysis results. We consider a core language (Figure 1), and we rewrite other constructs like unary/binary operations and method calls to function calls. We similarly rewrite fused assignment operators (e.g., +=) to equivalent unfused code. The notation \overrightarrow{a} denotes a sequence of as. For example, a function call contains a sequence of expressions representing arguments. e_{guard} denotes the guard expression in pattern matches. Similar to Oxide, we maintain a context denoting whether an expression is used in a place where it is borrowed mutably or immutably, or owned; these contexts are defined in Figure 2. The context assignee denotes that the expression is on the left-hand side of an assignment-like expression or being borrowed mutably. move denotes that the expression's value should be moved, as it is used in a context that should own its value. The notation $c[d \mapsto e]$ is used for conditionally updating the context: if c = d then $c[d \mapsto e]$ produces e, otherwise it produces e. Adjusted Type is a function provided by the Rust compiler that gives the type of the expression in the context it is used (after coercions, and converting &mut to & if necessary).

REWRITEPROGRAM adds lifetimes to each struct according to the method described in Section 3.3 of the original paper [Emre et al. 2021], and assigns unique lifetimes to each lifetime variable needed

in a function signature. It adds the lifetime constraints to each function signature directly from the configuration. The function bodies are rewritten using the rewrite rules given in Figures 3 to 5. The helper PKIND returns the kind (owned, borrowed, raw) of an expression as computed by the taint analyses from the current configuration. Other helper functions are defined in Figure 6. The rewrite rule $c \vdash e_1 \rightarrow e_2$ denotes that e_1 is rewritten into e_2 under mutability context c. Similarly, $c \vdash s_1 \rightarrow s_2$ denotes that the statement s_1 is rewritten into the statement s_2 under the context c as described in Figure 5. After rewriting an expression according to the rules given in Figures 3 and 4, we check the context of the expression and the pointer kind to decide whether to re-borrow the expression according to Section 3.3 of the original paper. Let c be the current context, p = PKIND(e), and $c \vdash e \rightarrow e'$. Then, if e has a pointer type, we choose whether to re-borrow e' according to the following conditionally-applied rules (attempted from first to last):

- $p = \text{owned and } c \neq \text{move.}$ We borrow the box by rewriting e' to e'.as_ref().map(|x| x.as_ref ()) (we use as_mut instead of as_ref if the current context is mut).
- p = owned and c = move. We do not re-borrow the expression's value, as it should be moved.
- p = raw. We do not perform any re-borrowing, as p is a raw pointer.
- p = borrowed and c = mut. We rewrite e' into borrow_mut(&mut e').
- p = borrowed, c = not, and e has a mutable pointer type. We rewrite e' into borrow(& e').
- p = borrowed, c = not, and e = has an immutable pointer type. We rewrite $e' = \text{into } e' \cdot \text{clone}()$.
- Otherwise, we do not re-borrow the value of the expression.

3 SIMPLIFIED VERSION OF THE BORROW CHECKER VIOLATION IN BZIP2

In the snippet below, the object pointed to by strm is borrowed into (*s).strm, and it is later mutated while s and the first borrow is still alive. This is a simplified version of BZ2_bzCompressInit function from bzip2 where all the code unrelated to the borrow conflict is removed.

Because of the conflict above, we promote the borrowed expression (strm) to be a raw pointer. In this specific case, a higher level rewriting approach might have reorganized the statements to resolve the borrow conflict.

4 THE FULL PROGRAM AFTER APPLYING ALL STEPS OF OUR TECHNIQUE

Figure 7 shows the full BST program after applying all steps of our technique.

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```
e \in \text{Expression} ::= \overrightarrow{e}
                                                                                                               array literals
e \in \text{Expression} := T\{\overrightarrow{fld} : \overrightarrow{e}\}\ |
                                                                                                      struct construction
                         f(\overrightarrow{e})
                                                                                                               function call
                          (\overrightarrow{e})
                                                                                                                         tuples
                          &μ e |
                                                                                                     address-of operator
                                                                                                                dereference
                           *e
                          l \in \text{Literal} \mid
                          e as \tau
                          x \in Variable
                          loop e
                          match e_{scrutinee} \overrightarrow{pe_{quard}} \Rightarrow \overrightarrow{e} \mid
                                                                                                        pattern matching
                          e_1 = e_2
                                                                                                                 assignment
                          e.fld|
                                                                                                                 field access
                          e_1[e_2]
                                                                                                                array access
                          \overrightarrow{s}e
                                                                                                                        blocks
                          break | continue | return e
                                                                            early return, control flow redirection
 s \in \text{Statement} ::= \mathbf{let} \ \mu x = e_1; e_2 \mid e;
\mu \in Mutability := mut \mid not
        \tau \in \text{Type} ::= * \mu \tau \mid
                                                                                                               raw pointers
                          \&\mu\tau
                                                                                                  borrowing references
                          Option < Box < \tau >> \mid
                                                                                                        owned references
                          T \in StructName
                                                                                                                       structs
                                                                                                                 other types
         p \in Pattern
```

Fig. 1. Abstract syntax for the fragment of Rust HIR that is relevant to our rewrite rules for expressions. Because we rely on the compiler for lifetime inference, the lifetimes inside types are elided.

 $c \in UseCtx ::= mut \mid not \mid move \mid assignee$

Fig. 2. The contexts for determining how a variable is used.

Fig. 3. Rules for rewriting expressions, part I.

$$\frac{c \vdash e \to e'}{c \vdash e.fld \to e'.fld} \text{ Field} \qquad \frac{c \vdash e_1 \to e'_1 \quad \text{not} \vdash e_2 \to e'_2}{c \vdash e_1[e_2] \to e'_1[e'_2]} \text{ Index}$$

$$\frac{c \vdash e \to e' \quad \text{not} \vdash s \to s'}{c \vdash s \vdash e \to s'} \text{ Block}$$

$$\frac{assignee \vdash e_1 \to e'_1 \quad PKIND(x) = owned \quad \mathbf{move} \vdash e_2 \to e'_2}{c \vdash e_1 = e_2 \to e'_1 = e'_2} \quad Assign-Move$$

$$assignee \vdash e_1 \to e'_1 \quad PKIND(x) \neq owned \quad Adjusted Type(e_1) \neq *mut \tau \\ \mathbf{not} \vdash e_2 \to e'_2 \\ c \vdash e_1 = e_2 \to e'_1 = e'_2$$

$$assignee \vdash e_1 \to e'_1 \quad PKIND(x) \neq owned \quad Adjusted Type(e_1) = *mut \tau \\ \mathbf{mut} \vdash e_2 \to e'_2 \\ c \vdash e_1 = e_2 \to e'_1 = e'_2$$

$$Assign-Mut \\ c \vdash e_1 = e_2 \to e'_1 = e'_2$$

$$Assign-Mut \\ \mathbf{mut} \vdash e_2 \to e'_2 = e'_2$$

Fig. 4. Rules for rewriting expressions, part II.

$$\frac{c \vdash e_2 \to e_2' \quad \text{PKIND}(x) = \text{owned} \quad \mathbf{move} \vdash e_1 \to e_1'}{c \vdash \mathbf{let} \ \mu x = e_1; e_2 \to \mathbf{let} \ x = e_1'; e_2'} \quad \text{S-Let-Move}$$

$$\frac{c \vdash e_2 \to e_2' \quad \text{PKIND}(x) \neq \text{owned} \quad \mathbf{mut} \vdash e_1 \to e_1'}{c \vdash \mathbf{let} \ \mathbf{mut} x = e_1; e_2 \to \mathbf{let} \ x = e_1'; e_2'} \quad \text{S-Let-Mut}$$

$$\frac{c \vdash e_2 \to e_2' \quad \text{PKIND}(x) \neq \text{owned} \quad \mathbf{not} \vdash e_1 \to e_1'}{c \vdash \mathbf{let} \ \mathbf{not} x = e_1; e_2 \to \mathbf{let} \ x = e_1'; e_2'} \quad \text{S-Let-Not}$$

$$\frac{\mathbf{not} \vdash e \to e_1'}{c \vdash e_1 \to e_1'} \quad \text{S-Semicolon}$$

Fig. 5. Rules for rewriting statements.

$$\begin{aligned} \mathsf{CTx}(e) &= \mathsf{Mutability}(\mathsf{AdjustedType}(e)) \\ \mathsf{Mutability}(\tau) &= \left\{ \begin{array}{ll} \mathsf{mut} & \tau = *\mathbf{mut}\tau' \\ \mathsf{not} & \mathsf{otherwise} \end{array} \right. \\ & \frac{\tau \neq *\mu\tau''}{\tau \mapsto_{loc} \tau'} \; \mathsf{T-NonPtr} \\ & \frac{\tau \mapsto_{\mathsf{PTsTo}(loc)} \tau' \; \; \mathsf{PKind}(loc) = raw}{*\mu\tau \mapsto_{loc} *\mu\tau'} \; \mathsf{T-RawPtr} \\ & \frac{\tau \mapsto_{\mathsf{PTsTo}(loc)} \tau' \; \; \; \mathsf{PKind}(loc) = owned}{*\mu\tau \mapsto_{loc} \mathsf{Option} < \mathsf{Box} < \tau' >>} \; \mathsf{T-OwnedPtr} \\ & \frac{\tau \mapsto_{\mathsf{PTsTo}(loc)} \tau' \; \; \; \mathsf{PKind}(loc) = borrowed}{*\mu\tau \mapsto_{loc} \mathsf{Option} < \&\mu\tau' >} \; \mathsf{T-RawPtr} \end{aligned}$$

Fig. 6. Helper functions for rewriting expressions and nested types. $\tau \mapsto_{loc} \tau'$ rewrites a type that is associated with the set of locations loc. PTsTo returns the points-to set of given set of locations.

```
1 // bst.rs
2 use std::os::raw::c_int;
3 // BST node
4 pub struct node_t<'a1, 'a2> {
      pub left: Option<&'a1 mut node_t<'a1, 'a2>>,
       pub right: Option<&'a1 mut node_t<'a1, 'a2>>,
       pub value: Option<&'a2 mut c_int>,
7
8 }
9 impl<'a1, 'a2> std::default::Default for node_t<'a1, 'a2> {
10
11 }
12 pub fn insert<'a1, 'a2, 'a3>(mut value: c_int,
                                mut node: Option<&'a1 mut node_t<'a2, 'a3>>) {
13
14
15 }
16 pub fn find<'a1, 'a2, 'a3, 'a4, 'a5, 'a6>(mut value: c_int, mut node: Option<&'a1 mut node_t<'a2, 'a3>>)
  -> Option<&'a4 mut node_t<'a5, 'a6>>
17
18 where 'a1: 'a4, 'a5: 'a2, 'a6: 'a3, 'a3: 'a6, 'a2: 'a5
19 {
       if value < **(**node.as_ref().unwrap()).value.as_ref().unwrap() && !(**node.as_ref().unwrap()).left.</pre>
20
        is_none() {
21
          return find(value, borrow_mut(&mut (*node.unwrap()).left))
22
       } else {
23
          if value > **(**node.as_ref().unwrap()).value.as_ref().unwrap() && !(**node.as_ref().unwrap()).
        right.is_none() {
24
              return find(value, borrow_mut(&mut (*node.unwrap()).right))
25
           } else { if value == **(**node.as_mut().unwrap()).value.as_mut().unwrap() { return node } }
26
27
       return None:
28 }
29
30 // main.rs
31 use std::os::raw::c_int;
32 use bst::{node_t, insert, find};
33
34 pub fn main_0() -> int {
35
       // Using Box to avoid malloc clutter
       let mut tree = Some(Box::new(crate::node_t::default()));
36
37
       **(**tree.as_mut().unwrap()).value.as_mut().unwrap() = 3;
38
       // insert 2 nodes
39
      insert(1, tree.as_mut().map(|b| b.as_mut()));
40
       insert(2, tree.as_mut().map(|b| b.as_mut()));
41
       // change the value of node containing 3 to 4
42
       **(**find(3, tree.as_mut().map(|b| b.as_mut())).as_mut().unwrap()).value.as_mut().unwrap() = 4;
43
       return 0;
44 }
```

Fig. 7. The safe Rust program with no raw pointers after applying all steps of our technique.