CFFI-SYS Interface Specification

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1 Introduction

CFFI, the Common Foreign Function Interface, purports to be a portable foreign function interface for Common Lisp.

This specification defines a set of low-level primitives that must be defined for each Lisp implementation supported by CFFI. These operators are defined in the `CFFI-SYS` package.

The `CFFI` package uses the `CFFI-SYS` interface to implement an extensible foreign type system with support for typedefs, structures, and unions, a declarative interface for defining foreign function calls, and automatic conversion of foreign function arguments to/from Lisp types.

Please note the following conventions that apply to everything in `CFFI-SYS`:

- Functions in `CFFI-SYS` that are low-level versions of functions exported from the `CFFI` package begin with a leading percent-sign (eg. `%mem-ref`).
- Where "foreign type" is mentioned as the kind of an argument, the meaning is restricted to that subset of all foreign types defined in Chapter 2 [Built-In Foreign Types], page 2. Support for higher-level types is always defined in terms of those lower-level types in `CFFI` proper.

2 Built-In Foreign Types

`:char` [Foreign Type]
`:unsigned-char` [Foreign Type]
`:short` [Foreign Type]
`:unsigned-short` [Foreign Type]
`:int` [Foreign Type]
`:unsigned-int` [Foreign Type]
`:long` [Foreign Type]
`:unsigned-long` [Foreign Type]
`:long-long` [Foreign Type]
`:unsigned-long-long` [Foreign Type]

These types correspond to the native C integer types according to the ABI of the system the Lisp implementation is compiled against.

`:int8` [Foreign Type]
`:uint8` [Foreign Type]
`:int16` [Foreign Type]
`:uint16` [Foreign Type]
`:int32` [Foreign Type]
`:uint32` [Foreign Type]
`:int64` [Foreign Type]
`:uint64` [Foreign Type]

Foreign integer types of specific sizes, corresponding to the C types defined in `stdint.h`.

`:size` [Foreign Type]
`:ssize` [Foreign Type]
`:ptrdiff` [Foreign Type]
`:time` [Foreign Type]

Foreign integer types corresponding to the standard C types (without the `_t` suffix).

Implementor's note: I'm sure there are more of these that could be useful, let's add any types that can't be defined portably to this list as necessary.

`:float` [Foreign Type]
`:double` [Foreign Type]

The `:float` type represents a C `float` and a Lisp `single-float`. `:double` represents a C `double` and a Lisp `double-float`.

`:pointer` [Foreign Type]

A foreign pointer to an object of any type, corresponding to `void *`.

`:void` [Foreign Type]

No type at all. Only valid as the return type of a function.

3 Operations on Built-in Foreign Types

`%foreign-type-size` *type* ⇒ *size* [Function]

Return the *size*, in bytes, of objects having foreign type *type*. An error is signalled if *type* is not a known built-in foreign type.

`%foreign-type-alignment` *type* ⇒ *alignment* [Function]

Return the default alignment in bytes for structure members of foreign type *type*. An error is signalled if *type* is not a known built-in foreign type.

Implementor's note: Maybe this should take an optional keyword argument specifying an alternate alignment system, eg. :mac68k for 68000-compatible alignment on Darwin.

4 Basic Pointer Operations

`pointerp` *ptr* ⇒ *boolean* [Function]
: Return true if *ptr* is a foreign pointer.

`null-pointer` ⇒ *pointer* [Function]
: Return a null foreign pointer.

`null-pointer-p` *ptr* ⇒ *boolean* [Function]
: Return true if *ptr* is a null foreign pointer.

`make-pointer` *address* ⇒ *pointer* [Function]
: Return a pointer corresponding to the numeric integer *address*.

`inc-pointer` *ptr offset* ⇒ *pointer* [Function]
: Return the result of numerically incrementing *ptr* by *offset*.

5 Foreign Memory Allocation

`foreign-alloc` *size* ⇒ *pointer* [Function]

Allocate *size* bytes of foreign-addressable memory and return a *pointer* to the allocated block. An implementation-specific error is signalled if the memory cannot be allocated.

`foreign-free` *ptr* ⇒ *unspecified* [Function]

Free a pointer *ptr* allocated by `foreign-alloc`. The results are undefined if *ptr* is used after being freed.

`with-foreign-pointer` (*var size* **&optional** *size-var*) **&body** *body* [Macro]

Bind *var* to a pointer to *size* bytes of foreign-accessible memory during *body*. Both *ptr* and the memory block it points to have dynamic extent and may be stack allocated if supported by the implementation. If *size-var* is supplied, it will be bound to *size* during *body*.

6 Memory Access

`%mem-ref` *ptr type* **&optional** *offset* [Accessor]

Dereference a pointer *offset* bytes from *ptr* to an object for reading (or writing when used with `setf`) of built-in type *type*.

Example

```
;; An impractical example, since time returns the time as well,
;; but it demonstrates %MEM-REF. Better (simple) examples wanted!
(with-foreign-pointer (p (foreign-type-size :time))
  (foreign-funcall "time" :pointer p :time)
  (%mem-ref p :time))
```

7 Foreign Function Calling

`%foreign-funcall` *name* {*arg-type arg*}* **&optional** *result-type* ⇒ *object* [Macro]

`%foreign-funcall-pointer` *ptr* {*arg-type arg*}* **&optional** *result-type* ⇒ *object* [Macro]

Invoke a foreign function called *name* in the foreign source code.

Each *arg-type* is a foreign type specifier, followed by *arg*, Lisp data to be converted to foreign data of type *arg-type*. *result-type* is the foreign type of the function's return value, and is assumed to be `:void` if not supplied.

`%foreign-funcall-pointer` takes a pointer *ptr* to the function, as returned by `foreign-symbol-pointer`, rather than a string *name*.

Examples

```
;; Calling a standard C library function:
(%foreign-funcall "sqrtf" :float 16.0 :float) ⇒ 4.0

;; Dynamic allocation of a buffer and passing to a function:
(with-foreign-ptr (buf 255 buf-size)
  (%foreign-funcall "gethostname" :pointer buf :size buf-size :int)
  ;; Convert buf to a Lisp string using MAKE-STRING and %MEM-REF or
  ;; a portable CFFI function such as CFFI:FOREIGN-STRING-TO-LISP.
  )
```

8 Loading Foreign Libraries

`%load-foreign-library` *name* ⇒ *unspecified* [Function]

Load the foreign shared library *name*.

Implementor's note: There is a lot of behavior to decide here. Currently I lean toward not requiring NAME to be a full path to the library so we can search the system library directories (maybe even get LD_LIBRARY_PATH from the environment) as necessary.

9 Foreign Globals

`foreign-symbol-pointer` *name* ⇒ *pointer* [Function]

Return a pointer to a foreign symbol *name*.

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