

COMP2310/COMP6310

Systems, Networks, & Concurrency

Convener: Prof John Taylor

Course Update

- **Assignment 1 – Marking now**
- **Checkpoint 2 (7.5%) – This week**
 - Attend the lab as per Checkpoint 1
- **Quiz 2 (5%) – Next week**
 - Cover all material in lectures and labs weeks 6-10
 - Bring one double-sided A4 sheet of notes
- **Final Exam – Closed Book**
 - Wednesday 12/11/2025 2-5:15pm
 - Melville Hall

Linking

Acknowledgement of material: With changes suited to ANU needs, the slides are obtained from Carnegie Mellon University: <https://www.cs.cmu.edu/~213/>

Today

- **Linking**
- Case study: Library interpositioning

Example C Program

```
int sum(int *a, int n);

int array[2] = {1, 2};

int main()
{
    int val = sum(array, 2);
    return val;
}
```

main.c

```
int sum(int *a, int n)
{
    int i, s = 0;

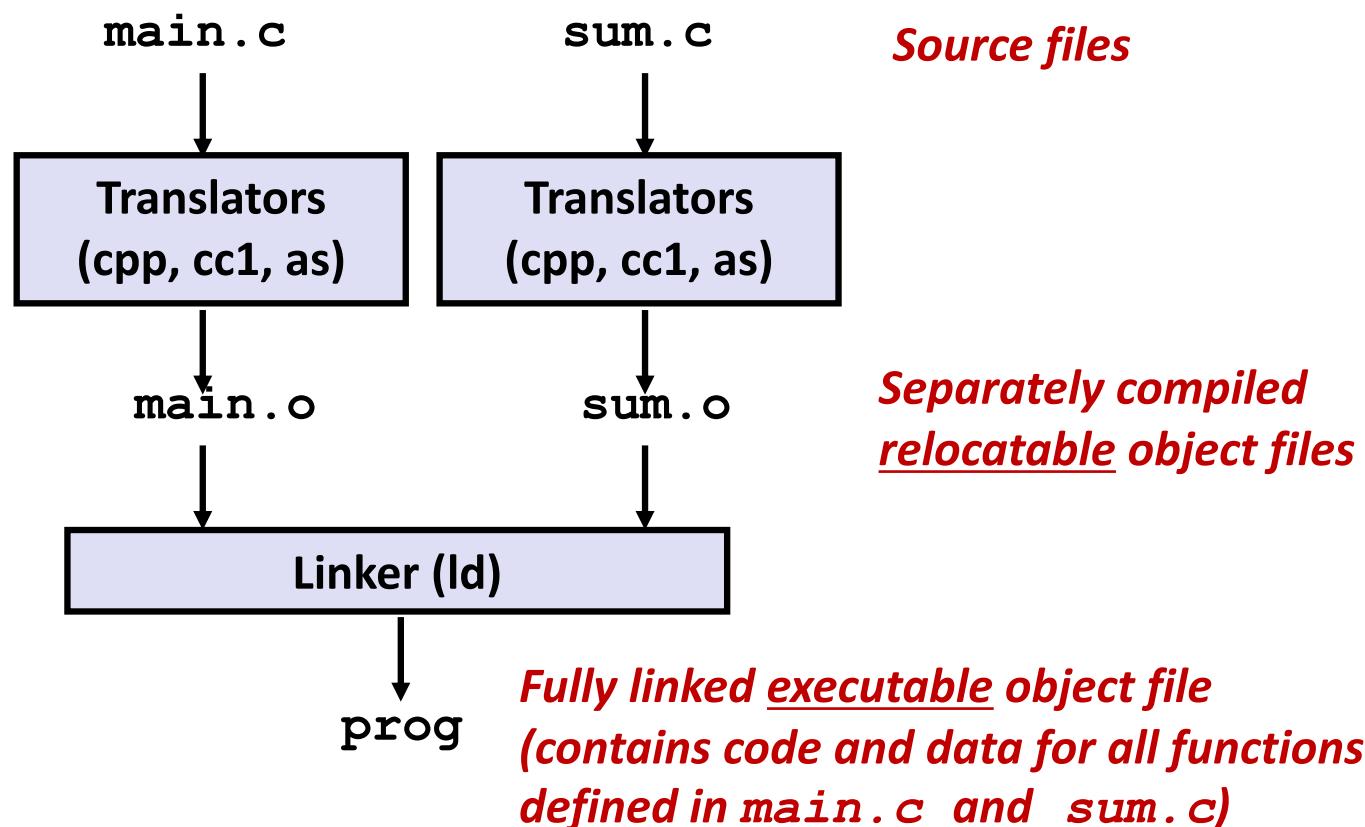
    for (i = 0; i < n; i++) {
        s += a[i];
    }
    return s;
}
```

sum.c

Static Linking

- Programs are translated and linked using a *compiler driver*:

- linux> *gcc -Og -o prog main.c sum.c*
- linux> *./prog*



Why Linkers?

■ Reason 1: Modularity

- Program can be written as a collection of smaller source files, rather than one monolithic mass.
- Can build libraries of common functions (more on this later)
 - e.g., Math library, standard C library

Why Linkers? (cont)

■ Reason 2: Efficiency

- Time: Separate compilation
 - Change one source file, compile, and then relink.
 - No need to recompile other source files.
- Space: Libraries
 - Common functions can be aggregated into a single file...
 - Yet executable files and running memory images contain only code for the functions they actually use.

What Do Linkers Do?

■ Step 1: Symbol resolution

- Programs define and reference *symbols* (global variables and functions):
 - `void swap() { ... } /* define symbol swap */`
 - `swap(); /* reference symbol swap */`
 - `int *xp = &x; /* define symbol xp, reference x */`
- Symbol definitions are stored in object file (by assembler) in *symbol table*.
 - Symbol table is an array of structs
 - Each entry includes name, size, and location of symbol.
- **During symbol resolution step, the linker associates each symbol reference with exactly one symbol definition.**

What Do Linkers Do? (cont)

■ Step 2: Relocation

- Merges separate code and data sections into single sections
- Relocates symbols from their relative locations in the .o files to their final absolute memory locations in the executable.
- Updates all references to these symbols to reflect their new positions.

Let's look at these two steps in more detail....

Three Kinds of Object Files (Modules)

■ Relocatable object file (. o file)

- Contains code and data in a form that can be combined with other relocatable object files to form executable object file.
 - Each .o file is produced from exactly one source (.c) file

■ Executable object file (a .out file)

- Contains code and data in a form that can be copied directly into memory and then executed.

■ Shared object file (. so file)

- Special type of relocatable object file that can be loaded into memory and linked dynamically, at either load time or run-time.
- Called *Dynamic Link Libraries* (DLLs) by Windows

Executable and Linkable Format (ELF)

- Standard binary format for object files
- One unified format for
 - Relocatable object files (.o),
 - Executable object files (a.out)
 - Shared object files (.so)
- Generic name: ELF binaries

ELF Object File Format

■ Elf header

- Word size, byte ordering, file type (.o, exec, .so), machine type, etc.

■ Segment header table

- Page size, virtual addresses memory segments (sections), segment sizes.

■ .text section

- Code

■ .rodata section

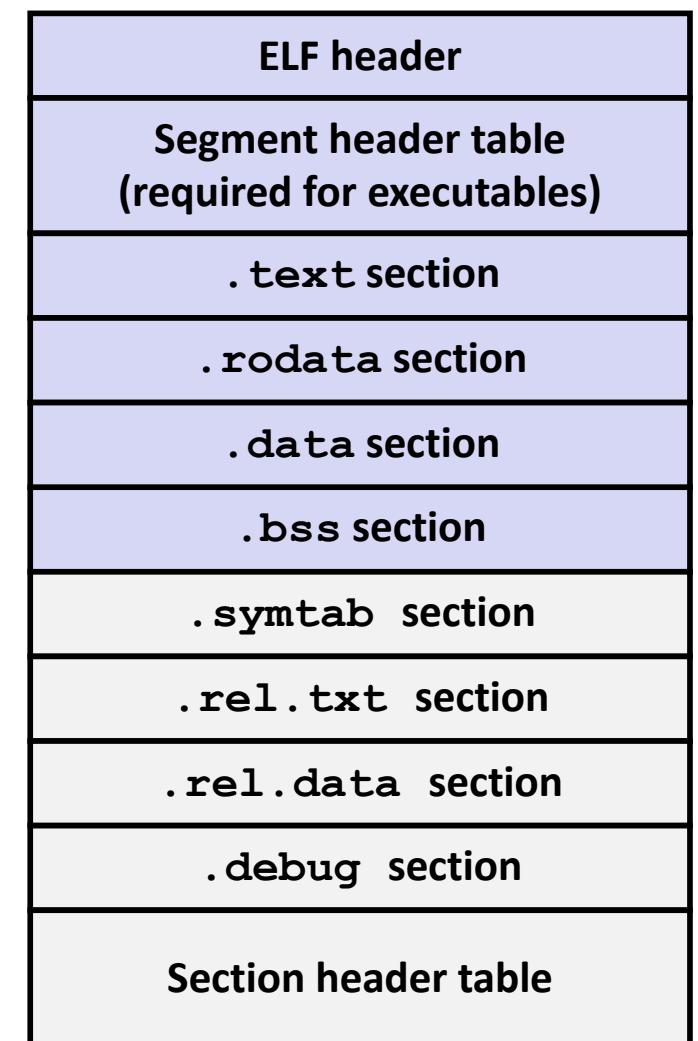
- Read only data: jump tables, ...

■ .data section

- Initialized global variables

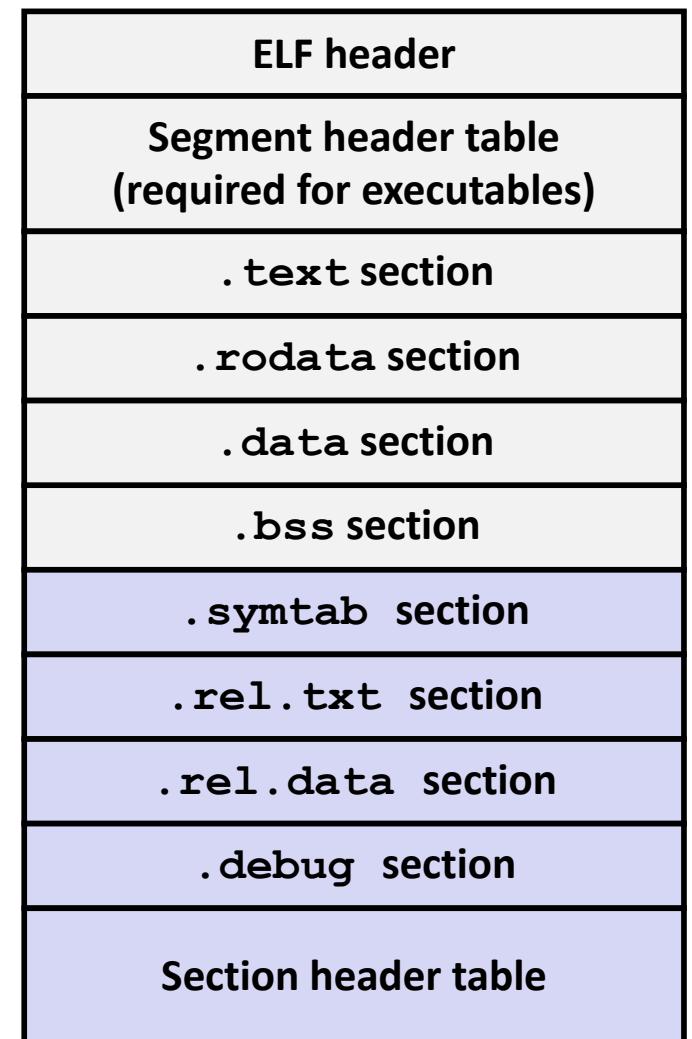
■ .bss section

- Uninitialized global variables
- “Block Started by Symbol”
- “Better Save Space”
- Has section header but occupies no space



ELF Object File Format (cont.)

- **.syntab section**
 - Symbol table
 - Procedure and static variable names
 - Section names and locations
- **.rel.text section**
 - Relocation info for **.text** section
 - Addresses of instructions that will need to be modified in the executable
 - Instructions for modifying.
- **.rel.data section**
 - Relocation info for **.data** section
 - Addresses of pointer data that will need to be modified in the merged executable
- **.debug section**
 - Info for symbolic debugging (`gcc -g`)
- **Section header table**
 - Offsets and sizes of each section



Linker Symbols

■ Global symbols

- Symbols defined by module m that can be referenced by other modules.
- E.g.: non-**static** C functions and non-**static** global variables.

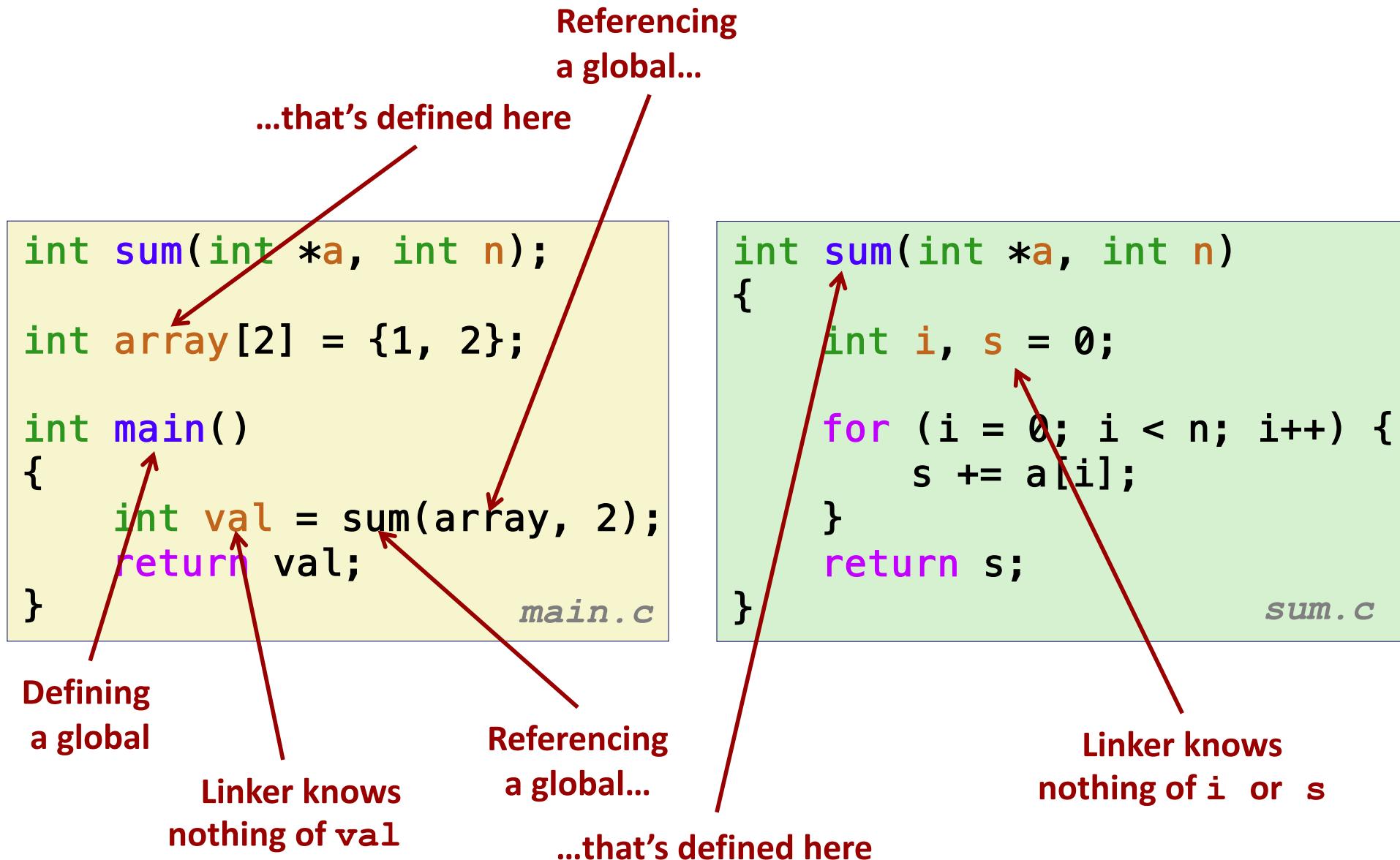
■ External symbols

- Global symbols that are referenced by module m but defined by some other module.

■ Local symbols

- Symbols that are defined and referenced exclusively by module m .
- E.g.: C functions and global variables defined with the **static** attribute.
- **Local linker symbols are *not* local program variables**

Step 1: Symbol Resolution



Local Symbols

■ Local non-static C variables vs. local static C variables

- local non-static C variables: stored on the stack
- local static C variables: stored in either .bss, or .data

```
int f()
{
    static int x = 0;
    return x;
}

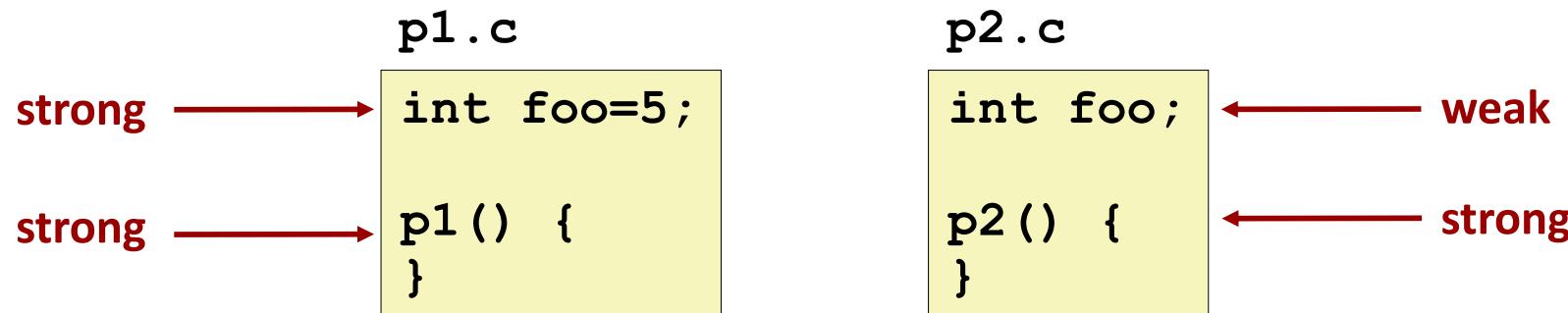
int g()
{
    static int x = 1;
    return x;
}
```

Compiler allocates space in .data for each definition of x

Creates local symbols in the symbol table with unique names, e.g., x . 1 and x . 2.

How Linker Resolves Duplicate Symbol Definitions

- Program symbols are either *strong* or *weak*
 - *Strong*: procedures and initialized globals
 - *Weak*: uninitialized globals



Linker's Symbol Rules

- **Rule 1: Multiple strong symbols are not allowed**
 - Each item can be defined only once
 - Otherwise: Linker error
- **Rule 2: Given a strong symbol and multiple weak symbols, choose the strong symbol**
 - References to the weak symbol resolve to the strong symbol
- **Rule 3: If there are multiple weak symbols, pick an arbitrary one**
 - Can override this with `gcc -fno-common`

Linker Puzzles

```
int x;  
p1() {}
```

```
p1() {}
```

Link time error: two strong symbols (**p1**)

```
int x;  
p1() {}
```

```
int x;  
p2() {}
```

References to **x** will refer to the same uninitialized int. Is this what you really want?

```
int x;  
int y;  
p1() {}
```

```
double x;  
p2() {}
```

Writes to **x** in **p2** might overwrite **y**!
Evil!

```
int x=7;  
int y=5;  
p1() {}
```

```
double x;  
p2() {}
```

Writes to **x** in **p2** will overwrite **y**!
Nasty!

```
int x=7;  
p1() {}
```

```
int x;  
p2() {}
```

References to **x** will refer to the same initialized variable.

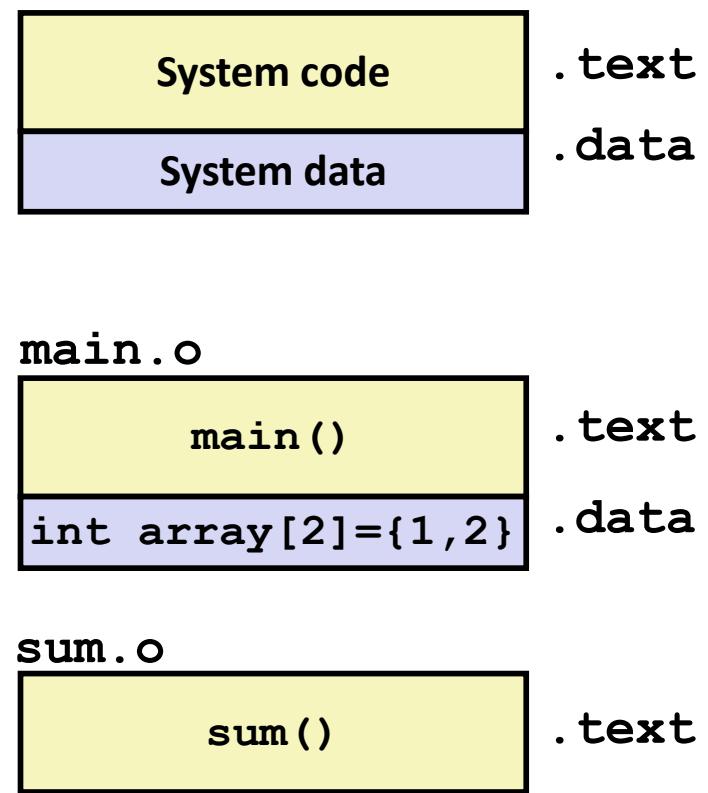
Nightmare scenario: two identical weak structs, compiled by different compilers with different alignment rules.

Global Variables

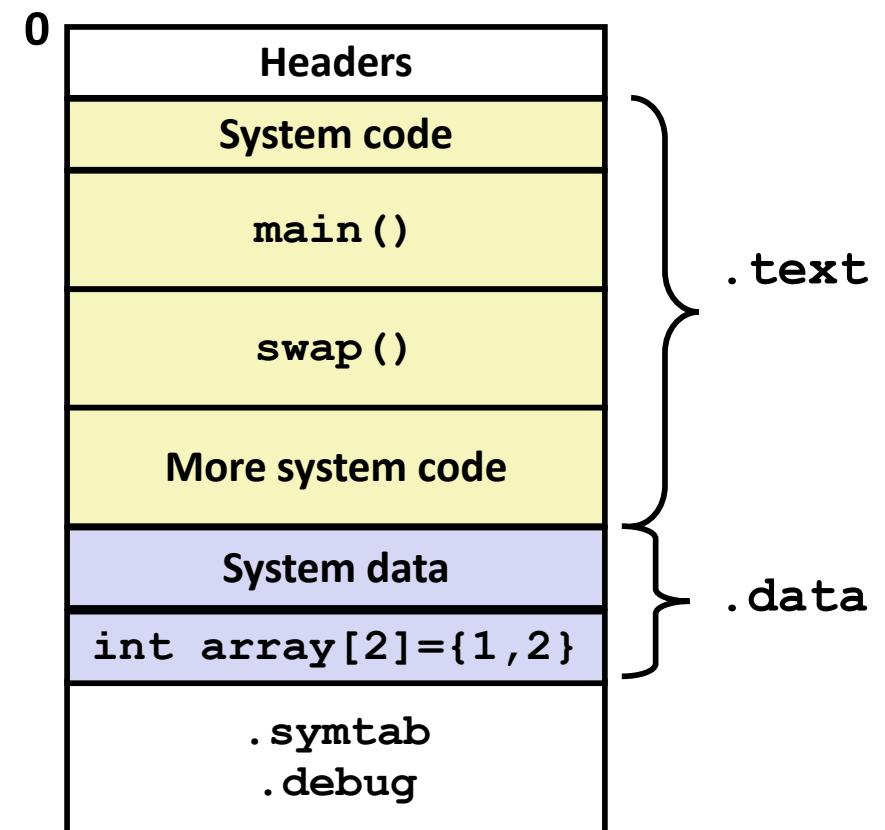
- **Avoid if you can**
- **Otherwise**
 - Use **static** if you can
 - Initialize if you define a global variable
 - Use **extern** if you reference an external global variable

Step 2: Relocation

Relocatable Object Files



Executable Object File



Relocation Entries

```
int array[2] = {1, 2};

int main()
{
    int val = sum(array, 2);
    return val;
}
```

main.c

```
0000000000000000 <main>:
 0: 48 83 ec 08          sub    $0x8,%rsp
 4: be 02 00 00 00        mov    $0x2,%esi
 9: bf 00 00 00 00        mov    $0x0,%edi      # %edi = &array
                                         a: R_X86_64_32 array      # Relocation entry

 e:  e8 00 00 00 00        callq   13 <main+0x13> # sum()
                                         f: R_X86_64_PC32 sum-0x4  # Relocation entry
13: 48 83 c4 08          add    $0x8,%rsp
17:  c3                  retq
```

main.o

Relocated .text section

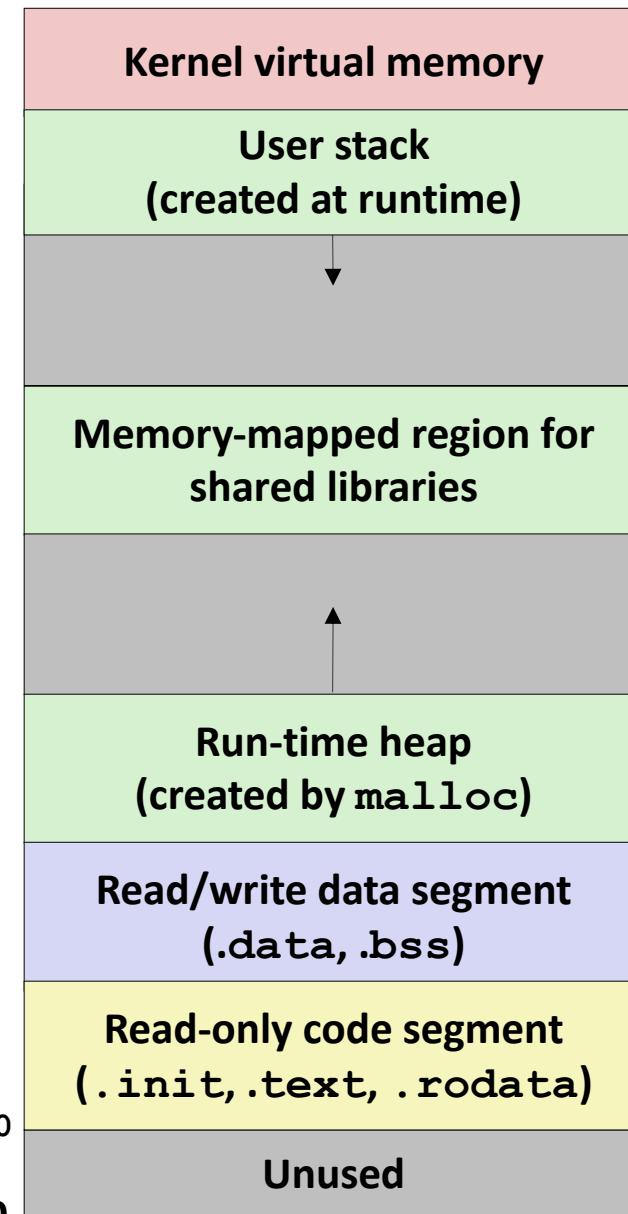
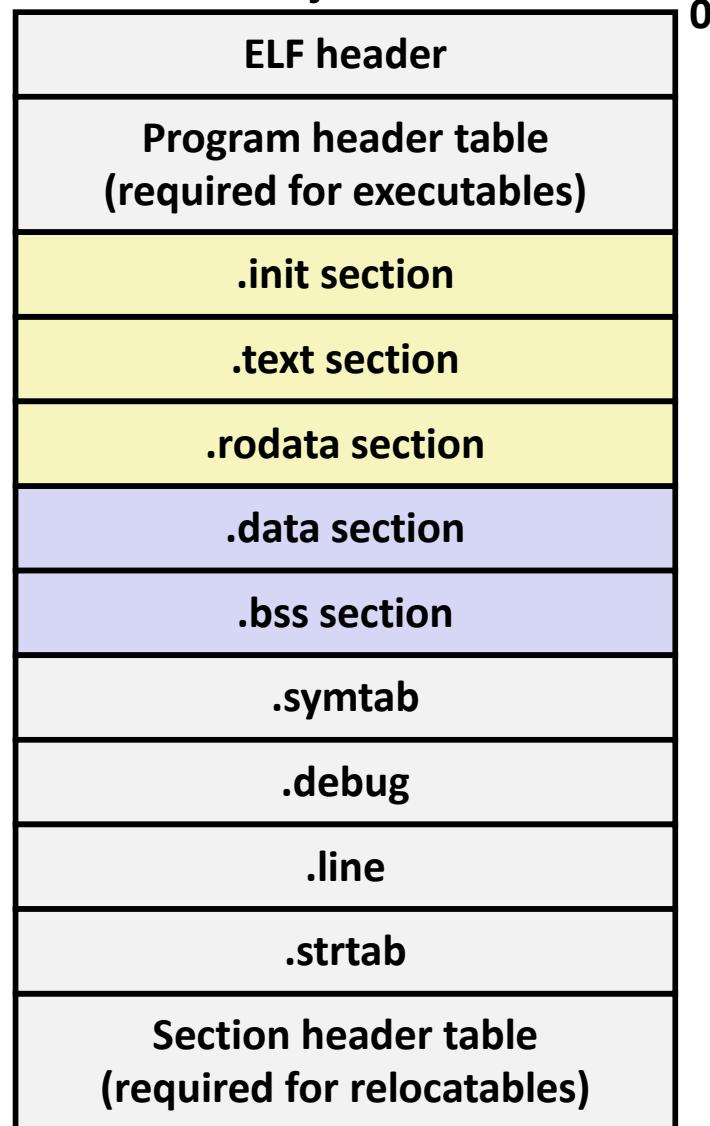
```
0000000004004d0 <main>:  
4004d0: 48 83 ec 08      sub    $0x8,%rsp  
4004d4: be 02 00 00 00    mov    $0x2,%esi  
4004d9: bf 18 10 60 00    mov    $0x601018,%edi # %edi = &array  
4004de: e8 05 00 00 00    callq  4004e8 <sum>   # sum()  
4004e3: 48 83 c4 08      add    $0x8,%rsp  
4004e7: c3                retq  
  
0000000004004e8 <sum>:  
4004e8: b8 00 00 00 00    mov    $0x0,%eax  
4004ed: ba 00 00 00 00    mov    $0x0,%edx  
4004f2: eb 09              jmp   4004fd <sum+0x15>  
4004f4: 48 63 ca          movslq %edx,%rcx  
4004f7: 03 04 8f          add    (%rdi,%rcx,4),%eax  
4004fa: 83 c2 01          add    $0x1,%edx  
4004fd: 39 f2              cmp    %esi,%edx  
4004ff: 7c f3              jl    4004f4 <sum+0xc>  
400501: f3 c3              repz  retq
```



Using PC-relative addressing for sum(): **0x4004e8 = 0x4004e3 + 0x5**

Loading Executable Object Files

Executable Object File



Packaging Commonly Used Functions

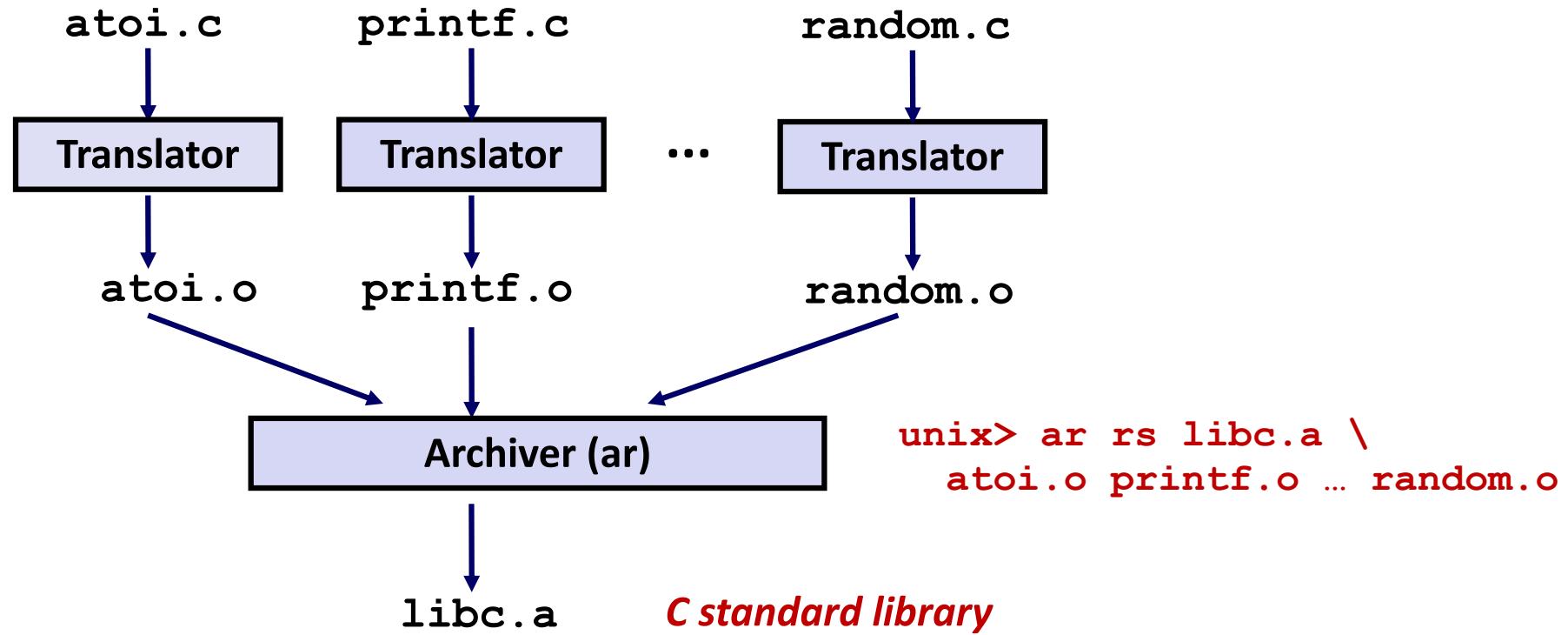
- How to package functions commonly used by programmers?
 - Math, I/O, memory management, string manipulation, etc.
- Awkward, given the linker framework so far:
 - Option 1: Put all functions into a single source file
 - Programmers link big object file into their programs
 - *Space and time inefficient*
 - Option 2: Put each function in a separate source file
 - Programmers explicitly link appropriate binaries into their programs
 - *More efficient, but burdensome on the programmer*

Old-fashioned Solution: Static Libraries

■ **Static libraries (.a archive files)**

- Concatenate related relocatable object files into a single file with an index (called an *archive*).
- Enhance linker so that it tries to resolve unresolved external references by looking for the symbols in one or more archives.
- If an archive member file resolves reference, link it into the executable.

Creating Static Libraries



- Archiver allows incremental updates
- Recompile function that changes and replace .o file in archive.

Commonly Used Libraries

libc.a (the C standard library)

- 4.6 MB archive of 1496 object files.
- I/O, memory allocation, signal handling, string handling, data and time, random numbers, integer math

libm.a (the C math library)

- 2 MB archive of 444 object files.
- floating point math (sin, cos, tan, log, exp, sqrt, ...)

```
% ar -t libc.a | sort
...
fork.o
...
fprintf.o
fpu_control.o
fputc.o
freopen.o
fscanf.o
fseek.o
fstab.o
...
```

```
% ar -t libm.a | sort
...
e_acos.o
e_acosf.o
e_acosh.o
e_acoshf.o
e_acoshl.o
e_acosl.o
e_asin.o
e_asinf.o
e_asinl.o
...
```

Linking with Static Libraries

```
#include <stdio.h>
#include "vector.h"

int x[2] = {1, 2};
int y[2] = {3, 4};
int z[2];

int main()
{
    addvec(x, y, z, 2);
    printf("z = [%d %d]\n",
           z[0], z[1]);
    return 0;
}                                main2.c
```

libvector.a

```
void addvec(int *x, int *y,
            int *z, int n) {
    int i;

    for (i = 0; i < n; i++)
        z[i] = x[i] + y[i];
}
```

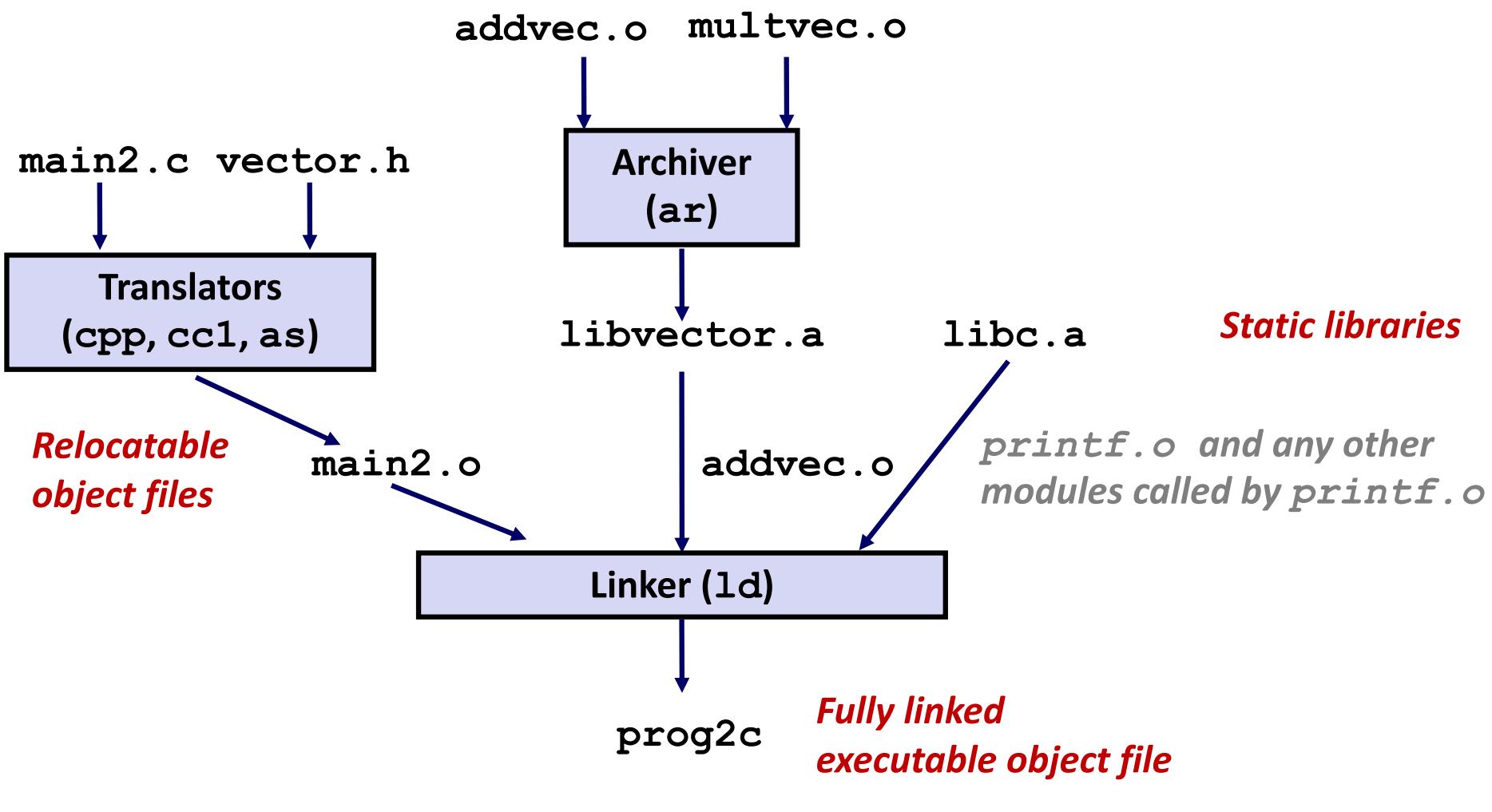
addvec.c

```
void multvec(int *x, int *y,
              int *z, int n)
{
    int i;

    for (i = 0; i < n; i++)
        z[i] = x[i] * y[i];
}
```

multvec.c

Linking with Static Libraries



"c" for "compile-time"

Using Static Libraries

■ Linker's algorithm for resolving external references:

- Scan `.o` files and `.a` files in the command line order.
- During the scan, keep a list of the current unresolved references.
- As each new `.o` or `.a` file, *obj*, is encountered, try to resolve each unresolved reference in the list against the symbols defined in *obj*.
- If any entries in the unresolved list at end of scan, then error.

■ Problem:

- Command line order matters!
- Moral: put libraries at the end of the command line.

```
unix> gcc -L. libtest.o -lmine
unix> gcc -L. -lmine libtest.o
libtest.o: In function `main':
libtest.o(.text+0x4): undefined reference to `libfun'
```

Modern Solution: Shared Libraries

■ Static libraries have the following disadvantages:

- Duplication in the stored executables (every function needs libc)
- Duplication in the running executables
- Minor bug fixes of system libraries require each application to explicitly relink

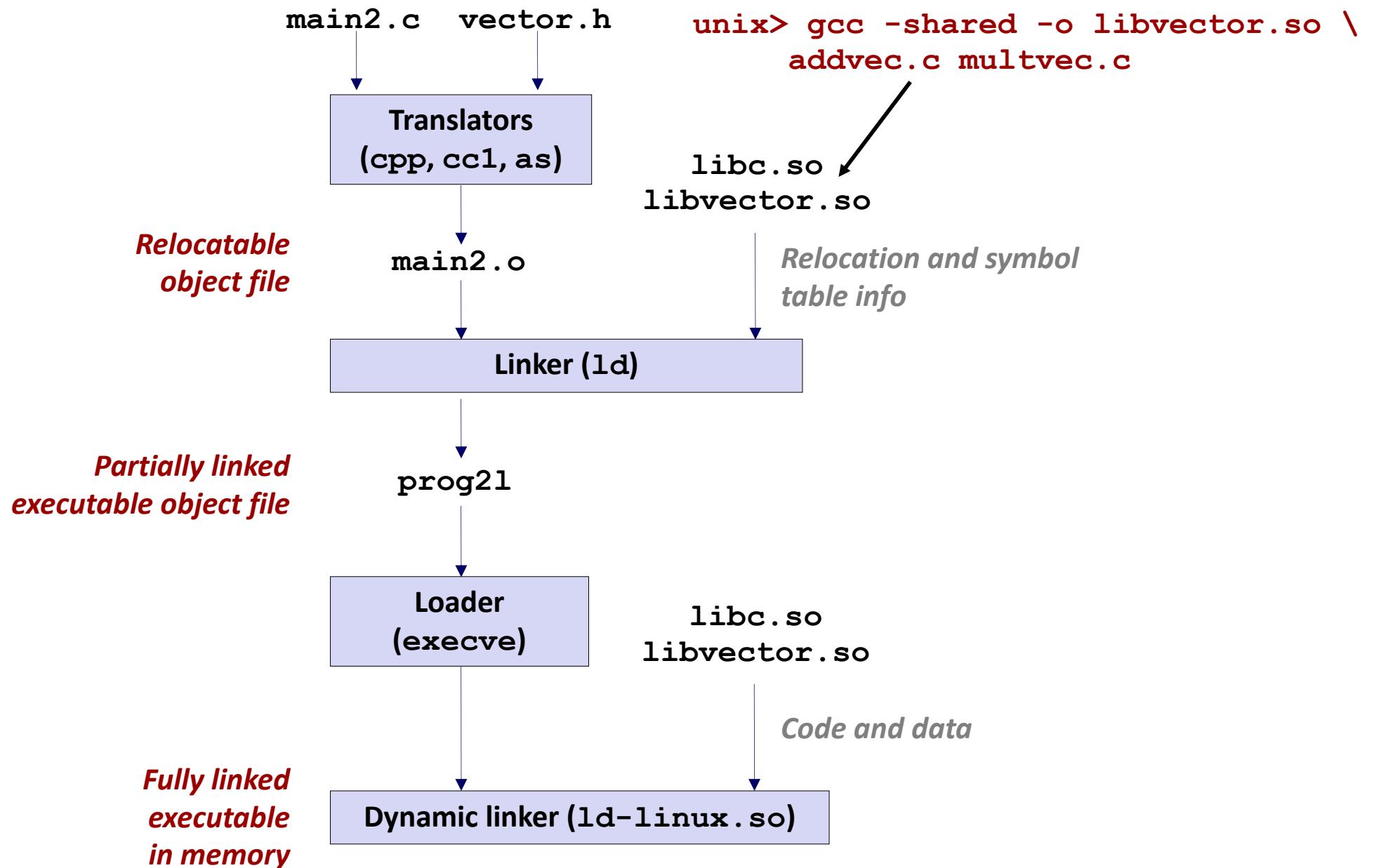
■ Modern solution: Shared Libraries

- Object files that contain code and data that are loaded and linked into an application *dynamically*, at either *load-time* or *run-time*
- Also called: dynamic link libraries, DLLs, .so files

Shared Libraries (cont.)

- **Dynamic linking can occur when executable is first loaded and run (load-time linking).**
 - Common case for Linux, handled automatically by the dynamic linker (`ld-linux.so`) .
 - Standard C library (`libc.so`) usually dynamically linked.
- **Dynamic linking can also occur after program has begun (run-time linking).**
 - In Linux, this is done by calls to the `dlopen()` interface .
 - Distributing software.
 - High-performance web servers.
 - Runtime library interpositioning.
- **Shared library routines can be shared by multiple processes.**
 - Take advantage of virtual memory

Dynamic Linking at Load-time



Dynamic Linking at Run-time

```
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdlib.h>
#include <dlfcn.h>

int x[2] = {1, 2};
int y[2] = {3, 4};
int z[2];

int main()
{
    void *handle;
    void (*addvec)(int *, int *, int *, int);
    char *error;

    /* Dynamically load the shared library that contains addvec() */
    handle = dlopen("./libvector.so", RTLD_LAZY);
    if (!handle) {
        fprintf(stderr, "%s\n", dlerror());
        exit(1);
    }
}
```

dll.c

Dynamic Linking at Run-time

```
...
/* Get a pointer to the addvec() function we just loaded */
addvec = dlsym(handle, "addvec");
if ((error = dlerror()) != NULL) {
    fprintf(stderr, "%s\n", error);
    exit(1);
}

/* Now we can call addvec() just like any other function */
addvec(x, y, z, 2);
printf("z = [%d %d]\n", z[0], z[1]);

/* Unload the shared library */
if (dlclose(handle) < 0) {
    fprintf(stderr, "%s\n", dlerror());
    exit(1);
}
return 0;
}
```

dll.c

Linking Summary

- **Linking is a technique that allows programs to be constructed from multiple object files.**
- **Linking can happen at different times in a program's lifetime:**
 - Compile time (when a program is compiled)
 - Load time (when a program is loaded into memory)
 - Run time (while a program is executing)
- **Understanding linking can help you avoid nasty errors and make you a better programmer.**

Today

- Linking
- Case study: Library interpositioning

Case Study: Library Interpositioning

- **Library interpositioning : powerful linking technique that allows programmers to intercept calls to arbitrary functions**
- **Interpositioning can occur at:**
 - *Compile time*: When the source code is compiled
 - *Link time*: When the relocatable object files are statically linked to form an executable object file
 - *Load/run time*: When an executable object file is loaded into memory, dynamically linked, and then executed.

Some Interpositioning Applications

■ Security

- Confinement (sandboxing)
- Behind the scenes encryption

■ Debugging

- In 2014, two Facebook engineers debugged a treacherous 1-year old bug in their iPhone app using interpositioning
- Code in the SPDY networking stack was writing to the wrong location
- Solved by intercepting calls to Posix write functions (`write`, `writev`, `pwrite`)

Source: Facebook engineering blog post at

<https://code.facebook.com/posts/313033472212144/debugging-file-corruption-on-ios/>

Some Interpositioning Applications

■ Monitoring and Profiling

- Count number of calls to functions
- Characterize call sites and arguments to functions
- Malloc tracing
 - Detecting memory leaks
 - **Generating address traces**

Example program

```
#include <stdio.h>
#include <malloc.h>

int main()
{
    int *p = malloc(32);
    free(p);
    return(0);
}                                int.c
```

- Goal: trace the addresses and sizes of the allocated and freed blocks, without breaking the program, and without modifying the source code.
- Three solutions: interpose on the `lib malloc` and `free` functions at compile time, link time, and load/run time.

Compile-time Interpositioning

```
#ifdef COMPILETIME
#include <stdio.h>
#include <malloc.h>

/* malloc wrapper function */
void *mymalloc(size_t size)
{
    void *ptr = malloc(size);
    printf("malloc(%d)=%p\n",
        (int)size, ptr);
    return ptr;
}

/* free wrapper function */
void myfree(void *ptr)
{
    free(ptr);
    printf("free(%p)\n", ptr);
}
#endif
```

mymalloc.c

Compile-time Interpositioning

```
#define malloc(size) mymalloc(size)
#define free(ptr) myfree(ptr)

void *mymalloc(size_t size);
void myfree(void *ptr);
```

malloc.h

```
linux> make intc
gcc -Wall -DCOMPILETIME -c mymalloc.c
gcc -Wall -I. -o intc int.c mymalloc.o
linux> make runc
./intc
malloc(32)=0x1edc010
free(0x1edc010)
linux>
```

Link-time Interpositioning

```
#ifdef LINKTIME
#include <stdio.h>

void *__real_malloc(size_t size);
void __real_free(void *ptr);

/* malloc wrapper function */
void *__wrap_malloc(size_t size)
{
    void *ptr = __real_malloc(size); /* Call libc malloc */
    printf("malloc(%d) = %p\n", (int)size, ptr);
    return ptr;
}

/* free wrapper function */
void __wrap_free(void *ptr)
{
    __real_free(ptr); /* Call libc free */
    printf("free(%p)\n", ptr);
}
#endif
```

mymalloc.c

Link-time Interpositioning

```
linux> make intl
gcc -Wall -DLINKTIME -c mymalloc.c
gcc -Wall -c int.c
gcc -Wall -Wl,--wrap,malloc -Wl,--wrap,free -o intl
int.o mymalloc.o
linux> make runl
./intl
malloc(32) = 0x1aa0010
free(0x1aa0010)
linux>
```

- The “**-Wl**” flag passes argument to linker, replacing each comma with a space.
- The “**--wrap,malloc**” arg instructs linker to resolve references in a special way:
 - Refs to malloc should be resolved as __wrap_malloc
 - Refs to __real_malloc should be resolved as malloc

Load/Run-time Interpositioning

```
#ifdef RUNTIME
#define _GNU_SOURCE
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdlib.h>
#include <dlfcn.h>

/* malloc wrapper function */
void *malloc(size_t size)
{
    void *(*mallocp)(size_t size);
    char *error;

    mallocp = dlsym(RTLD_NEXT, "malloc"); /* Get addr of libc malloc
*/
    if ((error = dlerror()) != NULL) {
        fputs(error, stderr);
        exit(1);
    }
    char *ptr = mallocp(size); /* Call libc malloc */
    printf("malloc(%d) = %p\n", (int)size, ptr);
    return ptr;
}
```

mymalloc.c

Load/Run-time Interpositioning

```
/* free wrapper function */
void free(void *ptr)
{
    void (*freep)(void *) = NULL;
    char *error;

    if (!ptr)
        return;

    freep = dlsym(RTLD_NEXT, "free"); /* Get address of libc free */
    if ((error = dlerror()) != NULL) {
        fputs(error, stderr);
        exit(1);
    }
    freep(ptr); /* Call libc free */
    printf("free(%p)\n", ptr);
}
#endif
```

mymalloc.c

Load/Run-time Interpositioning

```
linux> make intr
gcc -Wall -fPIC -shared -o mymalloc.so mymalloc.c -ldl
gcc -Wall -o intr int.c
linux> make runr
(LD_PRELOAD="./mymalloc.so" ./intr)
malloc(32) = 0xe60010
free(0xe60010)
linux>
```

- The `LD_PRELOAD` environment variable tells the dynamic linker to resolve unresolved refs (e.g., to `malloc`) by looking in `mymalloc.so` first.

Interpositioning Recap

■ Compile Time

- Apparent calls to malloc/free get macro-expanded into calls to mymalloc/myfree

■ Link Time

- Use linker trick to have special name resolutions
 - malloc → __wrap_malloc
 - __real_malloc → malloc

■ Load/Run Time

- Implement custom version of malloc/free that use dynamic linking to load library malloc/free under different names