CS 420 Exam Question

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Q: *Assume that in order to add floating-point values to L_3, we decided to increase the size of basic values to 64 bits, and switch to NaN-tagging. Describe how L_3 values (both the existing ones as well as 64-bits floating-point values) would be represented in such a scheme. For simplicity, assume that primitives working on floating-point values are distinct from those working on integers (e.g. integer addition would be* `@+` *like now, but floating-point addition would be* `@float-+`*).*

I will be following the specification of the IEEE 754-2019 standard [1]. As seen in figure 1, the contents of a single double precision floating-point number has a 1-bit sign (S), an 11-bit biased exponent (E), and a 52-bit trailing significand (T) [1, §3.4]. A NaN value is indicated by setting all bits of E to one and can represent a *quiet NaN* or *signaling NaN*. For the purposes of NaN tagging in L_3 we will always assume quiet NaNs and thus the first (most significant) bit of T needs to be set to 1.

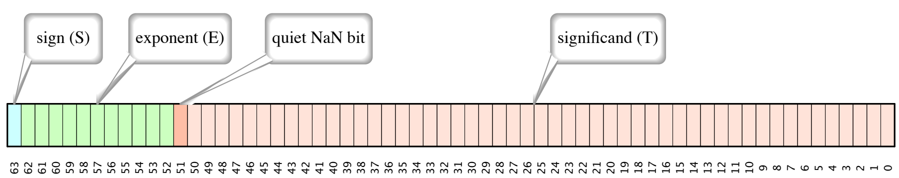

Figure 1: An example of the layout of a 64-bit floating-point.

In L_3 we need to represent 6 values: double precision floating-point numbers, integers, pointers, characters, booleans, and the unit value. We know that floats will take up the full 64 bit word and everything else needs to fit in the tagged NaN payload. For a tagged NaN we have 51 bits, which is more than enough to represent all other L_3 values.

Following the example of x86-64, we will use only the lower 48 bits of our 64 bit address leaving 3 bits for us to encode the type stored in the actual payload. With these 3 bits we could encode our types as demonstrated in figure 2. Observe that a type tag for NaN is explicetly encoded because we also need to allow NaNs, as well as the other two *special values*: [+/-]∞. However, no explicit handling is needed for the infinities

Value	Type Encoding
NaN	000
Integer	001
Pointer	010
Character	011
Boolean True	100
Boolean False	101
Unit	110

Figure 2: Possible encoding of 3-bit type tags.

as they are represented by having all bits of T set to 0. This differentiates them from tagged NaNs because the quiet bit will not be set.

For the sake of normality, I will assume that integers become 32 bits (instead of 31) even though, theoretically, they could be 48 bits. As before, checking for a word's type can be done with a simple bitmask and comparison and all other functionality should remain the same, especially because all floating-point operations will have their own primitives. As a final example, if you wanted to check if a given word is an integer, you would mask the most significant 16 bits with the mask `#b0111111111111001`, and if the result is the same then the word is in fact an integer.

Bibliography

[1] IEEE Standard for Floating-Point Arithmetic. 2019. https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/servlet/opac?punumber=8766227