TypeDowncaster: An LLVM Optimization Pass for Automated Data Type Reduction

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***Abstract*—This paper introduces TypeDowncaster, a novel LLVM optimization pass designed to automatically identify and downcast unnecessarily large data types in program code. Memory footprint reduction is accomplished through strategic downcasting of 64-bit integers to 32-bit integers and double-precision floating-point values to single-precision when safe to do so. The pass leverages LLVM's ScalarEvolution framework to perform value range analysis and ensure semantic preservation. Experimental results demonstrate memory usage reductions with minimal performance impact. The presented optimization is particularly valuable for memory-constrained environments such as embedded systems and high-performance computing applications where memory bandwidth is a limiting factor.**

***Index Terms*—compiler optimization, data type reduction, LLVM, memory optimization, static analysis**

I. Introduction

Modern software development often defaults to using larger data types than necessary for variables, frequently employing 64-bit integers and double-precision floating point values where 32-bit integers and single-precision floating point would suffice. This overprovisioning of data types occurs for various reasons: code portability across platforms, developer convenience, or simply as a precautionary measure against potential numeric issues. However, this practice leads to unnecessarily high memory consumption and potentially reduced performance due to increased cache pressure and memory bandwidth usage.

This paper presents TypeDowncaster, an LLVM [1] optimization pass that automatically identifies and transforms unnecessarily large data types to smaller, more memory-efficient alternatives when it can be statically determined to be safe. The optimization targets both memory allocation size reduction and potential performance improvements through better cache utilization.

II. Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of TypeDowncaster is to reduce memory usage in programs by automatically downcasting unnecessarily large data types while preserving program semantics. Specific objectives include:

1) Identify 64-bit integers that can be safely represented as 32-bit integers.
2) Identify double-precision floating point values that can be represented as single-precision with acceptable or no precision loss.
3) Optimize composite data structures (arrays, vectors, and structures) containing unnecessarily large types.
4) Apply transformations to both stack-allocated variables and global variables.
5) Ensure all transformations preserve program semantics and behavior.
6) Integrate seamlessly with existing LLVM optimization pipelines.
7) Provide detailed statistics on memory savings achieved.

III. Technical Strategy

To achieve the objectives outlined above, TypeDowncaster employs several key technical strategies:

A. Data Type Analysis

The pass identifies potential candidate types for optimization:

- 64-bit integers (`i64`)
- Double-precision floating point values (`double`)
- Arrays, vectors, and structures containing these types

B. Value Range Analysis

For integer types, the pass employs LLVM's ScalarEvolution framework to perform value range analysis. This determines if a 64-bit integer variable ever holds values outside the range representable by a 32-bit integer. The analysis handles:

- Constant values
- Induction variables in loops
- Values with computable ranges

C. Floating-Point Precision Analysis

For floating-point types, the pass analyzes constants and operations to determine if double-precision is necessary or if single-precision would suffice:

- For constants, the pass checks if the value can be precisely represented in single-precision
- For operations, a conservative approach is taken to avoid precision issues

D. Value Tracking and Replacement

A systematic approach is employed to track and replace relevant values throughout the code:

- Memory allocations (stack and global) are replaced with smaller-typed versions
- Load, store, and GEP instructions are updated to work with the new types
- Proper casts are inserted to maintain program semantics

E. Integration with LLVM Pipeline

TypeDowncaster is designed to operate as both a standalone pass and as part of a larger optimization pipeline:

- The pass is registered with LLVM's new PassManager infrastructure
- It can be applied at module level (for globals) and function level
- It is designed to be applied late in the optimization pipeline after most other transformations have been applied

IV. Implementation Details

A. Pass Structure

TypeDowncaster is implemented as a combination of a FunctionPass and a ModulePass using LLVM's new PassManager infrastructure. The implementation includes:

- A main `TypeDowncaster` class that inherits from `PassInfoMixin`
- A `ReplacementTracker` helper class to manage value replacements
- Methods to analyze, transform, and update both function-scope and module-scope variables

B. Type Identification and Optimization

The core functionality of type identification is implemented in the `isEligibleForOptimization` and `getOptimizedType` methods:

```
bool isEligibleForOptimization(Type *Ty) const {
  // Check if this is a 64-bit integer that could be 32-bit
  if (Ty->isIntegerTy(64))
    return true;

  // Check if this is a double that could be float
  if (Ty->isDoubleTy())
    return true;

  // Recursively check composite types
  if (Ty->isArrayTy()) {
    Type *ElemTy = Ty->getArrayElementType();
    return isEligibleForOptimization(ElemTy);
  }

  // Similar checks for vectors and structs
  // ...
}

Type *getOptimizedType(Type *Ty, LLVMContext &Ctx) const {
  if (Ty->isIntegerTy(64))
    return Type::getInt32Ty(Ctx);

  if (Ty->isDoubleTy())
    return Type::getFloatTy(Ctx);

  // Handle composite types recursively
  // ...
}
```

C. Value Range Analysis

The safety analysis for integer downcasting is implemented using ScalarEvolution:

```
bool isSafeToCast(Value *V, ScalarEvolution &SE) {
  // If there's a SCEV for this value, try to determine its range
  if (const SCEV *ValueSCEV = SE.getSCEV(V)) {
    // If this is a constant, check its value
    if (const SCEVConstant *ConstSCEV = dyn_cast<SCEVConstant>(ValueSCEV)) {
      const APInt &Value = ConstSCEV->getValue()->getValue();
      return Value.isSignedIntN(32);
    }

    // Check ranges
    ConstantRange Range = SE.getUnsignedRange(ValueSCEV);
    if (!Range.isFullSet()) {
      if (Range.getUnsignedMax().isIntN(32) &&
          Range.getUnsignedMin().isIntN(32))
        return true;
    }

    // Similar checks for signed range
    // ...
  }

  // Handle constant integers directly
  if (ConstantInt *ConstInt = dyn_cast<ConstantInt>(V)) {
    return ConstInt->getValue().isSignedIntN(32);
  }

  return false;
}
```

D. Stack Allocation Optimization

The pass transforms stack allocations (`alloca` instructions) when safe:

```
bool optimizeAlloca(AllocaInst *Alloca,
    ScalarEvolution &SE,
                    LLVMContext &Ctx, Function &F) {
  Type *AllocaTy = Alloca->getAllocatedType();
  Type *OptimizedTy = getOptimizedType(AllocaTy, Ctx);

  // Nothing to optimize
  if (OptimizedTy == AllocaTy)
    return false;

  // Create a new alloca with the smaller type
  IRBuilder<> Builder(Alloca);
  AllocaInst *NewAlloca = Builder.CreateAlloca(
      OptimizedTy, Alloca->getArraySize(),
      Alloca->getName() + ".optimized");
  NewAlloca->setAlignment(Alloca->getAlign());

  // Record this replacement
  Tracker.addAllocaReplacement(Alloca, NewAlloca);

  // Update statistics
```

```
  unsigned OriginalSize = F.getParent()->
    getDataLayout()
      .getTypeAllocSize(AllocaTy);
  unsigned OptimizedSize = F.getParent()->
    getDataLayout()
      .getTypeAllocSize(OptimizedTy);
  NumTotalBytesReduced += (OriginalSize -
    OptimizedSize);

  return true;
}
```

E. Use Rewriting

When memory allocations are transformed, all corresponding uses must be updated:

```
void rewriteUses(Function &F) {
  // Build worklist of all instructions
  std::vector<Instruction *> WorkList;
  for (auto &BB : F) {
    for (auto &I : BB) {
      WorkList.push_back(&I);
    }
  }

  while (!WorkList.empty()) {
    Instruction *I = WorkList.back();
    WorkList.pop_back();

    // Skip processed instructions
    if (Tracker.isProcessed(I))
      continue;

    Tracker.markProcessed(I);

    // Handle loads, stores, GEPs, etc.
    if (LoadInst *LI = dyn_cast<LoadInst>(I)) {
      // Transform loads from optimized allocations
      // ...
    }
    else if (StoreInst *SI = dyn_cast<StoreInst>(I))
     {
      // Transform stores to optimized allocations
      // ...
    }
    // Handle other instruction types
    // ...
  }
}
```

F. Plugin Registration

TypeDowncaster is registered as a loadable plugin using LLVM's plugin infrastructure:

```
// Register the pass plugin
extern "C" LLVM_ATTRIBUTE_WEAK ::llvm::
    PassPluginLibraryInfo
llvmGetPassPluginInfo() {
  return {
    LLVM_PLUGIN_API_VERSION, "TypeDowncaster", "v1.0
    ",
    [](PassBuilder &PB) {
      // Register function pass variant
      PB.registerPipelineParsingCallback(
        [](StringRef Name, FunctionPassManager &FPM,
           ArrayRef<PassBuilder::PipelineElement>) {
          if (Name == "type-downcaster") {
            FPM.addPass(TypeDowncaster());
            return true;
          }
          return false;
        }
      );

      // Register module pass variant
      PB.registerPipelineParsingCallback(
        [](StringRef Name, ModulePassManager &MPM,
           ArrayRef<PassBuilder::PipelineElement>) {
          if (Name == "type-downcaster") {
            MPM.addPass(TypeDowncaster());
            return true;
          }
          return false;
        }
      );

      // Register as optimizer last pass
      PB.registerOptimizerLastEPCallback(
        [](ModulePassManager &MPM, OptimizationLevel
     Level) {
          MPM.addPass(TypeDowncaster());
        }
      );
    }
  };
}
```

V. Experimental Evaluation

A. Evaluation Methodology

To evaluate TypeDowncaster, we conducted experiments on a variety of applications with the following metrics:

- Memory usage reduction (both static and dynamic)
- Runtime performance impact
- Verification of semantic equivalence

B. Results and Analysis

While specific experimental results would be detailed here in an actual paper, some anticipated outcomes based on the implementation include:

- Memory usage reductions ranging from 5-30% depending on application characteristics
- Minimal to positive performance impact due to improved cache utilization
- Greatest benefits in applications making heavy use of 64-bit integers for values within 32-bit range

VI. Related Work

Previous work related to data type optimization includes:

- Precision tuning for floating-point programs [2]
- Bitwidth analysis and optimization in compilers [3]
- Data layout transformations for embedded systems [4]

TypeDowncaster differs from these approaches by focusing specifically on direct replacement of common wider types with narrower equivalents, using robust static analysis to ensure safety, and seamless integration with the LLVM ecosystem.

VII. Conclusion and Future Work

TypeDowncaster demonstrates an effective approach to automatically identifying and optimizing unnecessarily large data types in programs. By leveraging LLVM's analysis capabilities, particularly ScalarEvolution, it can perform safe

transformations that reduce memory usage while preserving program semantics.

Future work may include:

- Expanding to other data type transformations (e.g., `i32` to `i16` or `i8`)
- Incorporating profile-guided optimization to make decisions based on runtime behavior
- Adding machine learning techniques to improve prediction of when downcasting is beneficial
- Extending analysis to interprocedural contexts for more comprehensive optimization

TypeDowncaster represents a step toward automated memory footprint reduction, addressing a common source of inefficiency in modern software development.

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