

COMPILERS

Activation Records

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Subprogram Invocation Mechanics

- ❑ Save status of caller.
- ❑ Process parameters.
- ❑ Save return address.
- ❑ Jump to called subprogram.
- ❑ ... do stuff ...
- ❑ Process value-result/result parameters and function return value(s).
- ❑ Restore status of caller.
- ❑ Jump back to caller's saved position.

Frames / Activation Records

- An activation record is the layout of data needed to support a call to a subprogram.
- For languages that do not allow recursion, each subprogram has a single fixed activation record instance stored in memory (and no links).

Function return value
Local variables
Parameters
Dynamic link
Static link
Return address

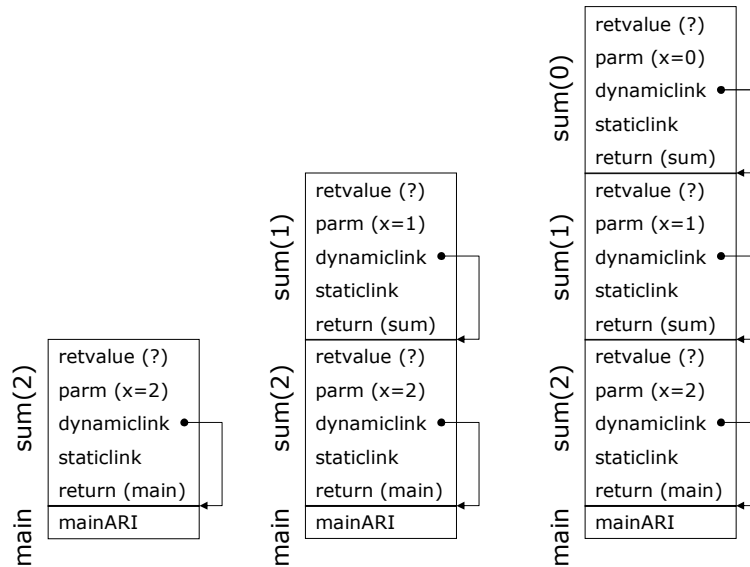
Stack-based Recursion

- When recursion is implemented using a stack, activation records are pushed onto the stack at invocation and popped upon return.

- **Example:**

```
int sum ( int x )
{
    if (x==0) return 0;
    else return (x + sum (x-1));
}
void main ()
{ sum (2); }
```

Recursion Activation Records



Non-local References

- ❑ To access non-local names in statically-scoped languages, a program must keep track of the current referencing environment.
- ❑ Static chains
 - Link a subprogram's activation record to its static parent.
- ❑ Displays
 - Keep a list of active activation records.

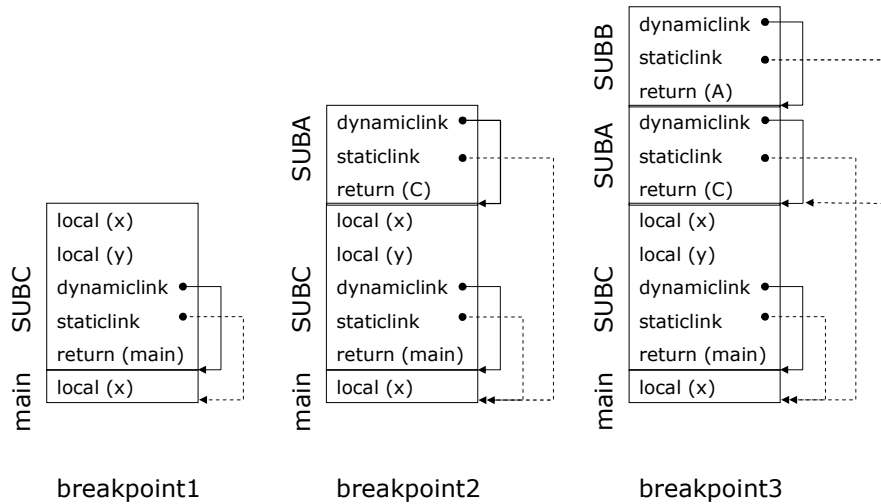
Non-local Reference Example

Example:

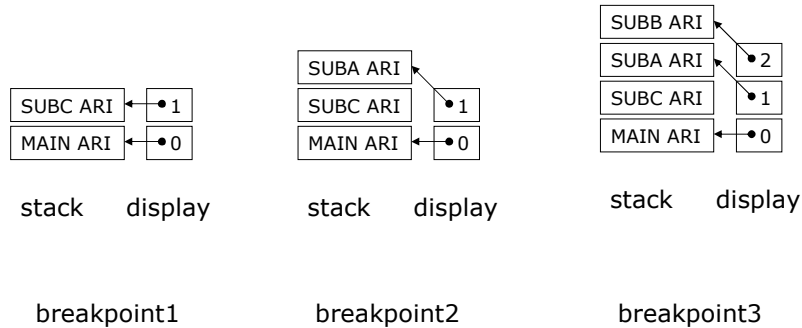
```

main {
  int x;
  sub SUBA {
    sub SUBB {
      x = 1; ← breakpoint3
    }
    SUBB; ← breakpoint2
  }
  sub SUBC {
    int x;
    int y;
    SUBA; ← breakpoint1
  }
  SUBC; ← breakpoint0
}
    
```

Static Chains



Displays

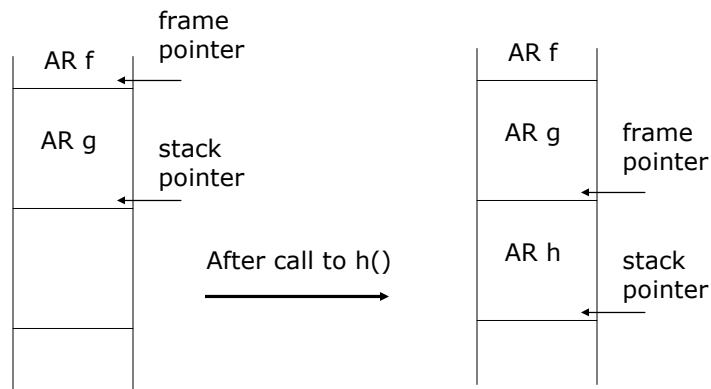


Static Chains vs. Displays

- ❑ Static chains require more indirect addressing – displays require a fixed amount of work.
- ❑ Displays require pointer maintenance on return – static chains do not.
- ❑ Displays require “backing up” of display pointer – static chains require static links in each activation record.

Frame Pointers

- Stack frames are usually supported by:
 - stack pointer - points to top of stack
 - frame pointer - points to top of previous frame



View Shifts

- On a Pentium machine,
 - $M[SP + 0] \leftarrow FP$
 - save old frame pointer
 - $FP \leftarrow SP$
 - move frame pointer to top of stack
 - $SP \leftarrow SP - K$
 - move stack pointer to end of new frame
- On machines which use registers for frame optimisation, remember to save registers in temporary variables.

Register Handling

- ❑ One set of registers are typically used by many subprograms, so a value expected by one may be overwritten by another.
- ❑ Solution:
 - Make it the responsibility of the caller to save registers first (caller-save)
 - Make it the responsibility of the callee to save registers first (callee-save)
- ❑ Optimise which registers need to be saved as some values can be thrown away.

Parameter Passing

- ❑ Registers are more efficient than copying every parameter to the stack frame.
 - Registers are limited so pass first k parameters in registers and rest in frame.
- ❑ Nested subprogram calls require saving and restoring so there is dubious cost savings!
 - leaf procedures, different registers, done with variables, register windows
- ❑ How does C support varargs ?

Return Addresses

- ❑ Traditionally a stack frame entry.
- ❑ More efficient to simply use a register.
 - Same saving procedure necessary as before for non-leaf subprograms.

Temporaries and Labels

- ❑ Each time a local variable is encountered, a unique *temporary* name is generated – this temporary will eventually map to either a register or a memory location (usually on the stack).
- ❑ Each time a subprogram is encountered, a unique *label* is generated.
- ❑ These must be unique to prevent naming conflicts - the optimiser will deal with efficiency.

Stack vs. Registers

- Why use registers?
 - Faster and smaller code
- If registers are so great, why use stack?
 - variables used/passed by reference
 - nested subprograms
 - variable is not simple or just too big
 - arrays
 - registers are needed for other purposes
 - too many variables