

Something More about μ Kernels

Advanced Operating Systems

Luca Abeni

luca.abeni@santannapisa.it

μ Kernels - The Idea

- Basic idea: simplify the kernel
 - Reduce to the number of abstractions implemented by the kernel
 - Address Spaces
 - Threads
 - IPC mechanisms (channels, ports, etc...)
 - Most of the “traditional” kernel functionalities implemented in user space
 - Even device drivers can be in user space!

μ Kernels and Servers

- Interactions via IPC (IRQs to drivers as messages, ...)
- Servers: US processes implementing OS functionalities
 - OS kernel as a single user-space process:
Single-server OSs
 - Multiple user-space processes (a server per driver, FS server, network server, ...):
Multi-server OSs

μ -Kernels as Resource Managers

- A μ -kernel handles some “software resources”
 - Sometimes referred as “objects”
 - Debatable name: an object is generally (encapsulated) data + methods
 - Must be protected
- Example: address spaces, tasks, ...
 - The number / kind of abstractions / resource types depends on the μ -kernel details
- Tasks can “operate” on these resources
 - How to control the accesses / implement protection?

Message Passing Interactions

- Most of the interactions happen through message passing
 - Operation on a resource: send a message (and eventually wait for a reply)
 - Send message... To who?
 - The μ -kernel / kernel?
 - The resource / its manager?
 - Something else?
- Different IPC mechanisms depending on the μ -kernel
 - Synchronous / Asynchronous
 - Different security mechanisms
 - ...

Capabilities

- μ -kernels are often capability-based systems
 - Why? Because this is the most natural solution for an IPC-based system
- What is a “capability”? Informally speaking: reference to a software resource, associated with access rights
 - The exact definition might vary from system to system
- Intuition: to operate on something I must “own” the right capability
 - More advanced than a simple access control list

Capabilities as (Protected) References

- To access resource \mathcal{R} , task τ needs a reference to it
 - Example: you cannot open a file if you do not know its name
- Protected reference: tasks cannot forge capabilities
 - Capabilities are created and manipulated by the capability system
 - So, a file name is not a good example!
- Capabilities are opaque
 - You do not really know what a capability is: you just use it to access a resource
- Think about pointers

Capabilities and Access Rights

- A capability is not a simple protected reference
- It is associated to access rights
 - A capability can be used to perform an action on a resource, but not other actions
 - Example: read/receive capability, write/send capability, ...
- Using the read capability for a file, I can read it, but I cannot write on it!
- Each task owns capabilities for accessing some resources
- The μ -kernel / capability system is responsible for enforcing the respect of capabilities

Capabilities Management

- Tasks cannot create capabilities → a task “receives” a capability from someone else
 - Can be the μ -kernel / capability system
 - ... Someone else? ...
- Capabilities can be transferred
 - A task owning a capability can send it to another task
 - What happens when a capability is transferred?
- The capability system defines the exact behaviour of capability transfer

Capabilities and Messages

- Capabilities can be used for IPC access control
 - Used to send / receive messages
 - Used to check if a task has the rights to send / receive a message
 - ...
- Object Oriented vision: resource → Object
 - Invocation of a method → send a message to the object

Example: Mach

- Mach μ -kernel: capability-based, tries to implement some OO concepts
 - Tasks can operate on “objects” by sending messages to them
 - IPC mechanism provided by the (μ)kernel
- Mach IPC: indirect addressing
 - The destination of a message is indicated by specifying a “communication channel”
 - Tasks send messages to ports \rightarrow queues of messages
- Capabilities implemented through ports
 - Capability \leftrightarrow read or write reference to a port)

Mach Ports and Capabilities

- Port rights: secure, location-independent way of naming ports
- The receive right for a port can be owned only by one single task
 - A task can send a message to a port by using a “send capability” (send right) for the port
 - A task can receive a message from a port by using a “receive capability” (receive right) for the port
- Each task is created with some ports for communicating with the kernel (and owns the “send rights” - capabilities for such ports)

Sending Capabilities

- A task can send one of its “port right” in a message
- The task receiving the message will be able to access the port
- When a receive right is contained in the message, the right is revoked from the sender
 - The sender “donates” its capability to the receiver
 - Remember: the receive right for a port cannot be owned by multiple tasks!

Example: Scheduling Capabilities

- Capabilities can be used for scheduling too!
 - Temporal capabilities
- Distinction between scheduling context and execution context
 - In traditional systems, a “task context” contains both scheduling information and the task state used for dispatching
 - Scheduling context: data structure used by the scheduler
 - Execution context: rest of the task state
- Scheduling capability: reference to the scheduling context

Scheduling and Dispatching

- A task can execute only if it owns a scheduling capability
 - Will be dispatched when the scheduler selects the corresponding scheduling context
- Generally, a scheduling context is associated to a core / CPU
 - Migration: the scheduling capability of a task is replaced with a different one (referencing a scheduling context associated to a different core / CPU)

Flexibility

- Inheritance is simple: donate the scheduling capability to a different task!
 - Easy form of proxy execution... Useful for client/server interactions!
- User space scheduling is possible: a user-space server manages the scheduling capabilities of the tasks!