Embedded Systems

6. Real-Time Operating Systems

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Software and Programming  Processing and Communication  Hardware
Embedded OS

Why an OS at all?

- Same reasons why we need one for a traditional computer.
- Not all services are needed for any device.

Large variety of requirements and environments:

- Critical applications with high functionality (medical applications, space shuttle, process automation, …).
- Critical applications with small functionality (ABS, pace maker, …)
- Not very critical applications with varying functionality (smart phone, smart card, microwave oven, …)
Embedded OS

Why is a desktop OS not suited?

- Monolithic kernel is too feature reach.
- Monolithic kernel is not modular, fault-tolerant, configurable, modifiable, … .
- Takes too much memory space.
- It is often too resource hungry in terms of computation time.
- Not designed for mission-critical applications.
- Timing uncertainty too large.
Embedded Operating Systems

Configurability

- No single RTOS will fit all needs, no overhead for unused functions/data tolerate: configurability is needed.
- For example, there are many embedded systems without external memory, a keyboard, a screen or a mouse.

Configurability examples:

- Simplest form: remove unused functions (by linker for example).
- Conditional compilation (using #if and #ifdef commands).
- Validation is a potential problem of systems with a large number of derived operating systems:
  - each derived operating system must be tested thoroughly;
  - for example, eCos (open source RTOS from Red Hat) includes 100 to 200 configuration points.
Example: Configuration of VxWorks

Automatic dependency analysis and size calculations allow users to quickly custom-tailor the VxWORKS operating system.

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**Embedded operating systems**

*Device drivers handled by tasks* instead of hidden integrated drivers:

- Improve predictability; everything goes through scheduler
- Effectively no device that needs to be supported by all versions of the OS, except maybe the system timer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RTOS</th>
<th>Standard OS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>application software</td>
<td>application software</td>
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<tr>
<td>middleware</td>
<td>middleware</td>
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<tr>
<td>device driver</td>
<td>device driver</td>
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<tr>
<td>real-time kernel</td>
<td>operating system</td>
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<td></td>
<td>device driver</td>
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Interrupts can be employed by any process

- For standard OS: this would be serious source of unreliability.
- But embedded programs can be considered to be tested … .
- It is possible to let interrupts directly start or stop tasks (by storing the tasks start address in the interrupt table). More efficient and predictable than going through OS interfaces and services.

- However, composability suffers: if a specific task is connected to some interrupt, it may be difficult to add another task which also needs to be started by the same event.
- If real-time processing is of concern, time to handle interrupts need to be considered. For example, interrupts may be handled by the scheduler.
Protection mechanisms are not always necessary:

- Embedded systems are typically designed for a single purpose, untested programs rarely loaded, software considered reliable.

- Privileged I/O instructions not necessary and tasks can do their own I/O.

  Example: Let `switch` be the address of some switch. Simply use `load register,switch` instead of a call to the underlying operating system.

- However, protection mechanisms may be needed for safety and security reasons.
Real-time Operating Systems

A real-time operating system is an operating system that supports the construction of real-time systems.

Three key requirements:

1. The timing behavior of the OS must be predictable. ∀ services of the OS: Upper bound on the execution time!

RTOSs must be deterministic (unlike standard Java for example):

- upper bounds on blocking times need to be available, i.e. times during which interrupts are disabled,
- almost all processor activities are controlled by a real-time scheduler.
Task Management Services

- External interrupt
  - Interrupt dispatch
  - Interrupt service
  - Time service & events
  - Services (create thread, sleep, notify, send,...)
  - Scheduling & dispatcher
  - Task execution

- Timer interrupt

- System calls (trap)

kernel
Real-time Operating Systems

2. OS must *manage the timing and scheduling*

   • OS possibly has to be aware of deadlines; (unless scheduling is done off-line).
   • OS must provide precise time services with high resolution.

3. The OS must be *fast*

   • Practically important.
Main Functionality of RTOS-Kernels

- **Task management:**
  - Execution of *quasi-parallel tasks* on a processor using processes or threads (lightweight process) by
    - maintaining process states, process queuing,
    - allowing for preemptive tasks (fast context switching) and quick interrupt handling
  - CPU *scheduling* (guaranteeing deadlines, minimizing process waiting times, fairness in granting resources such as computing power)
  - Process *synchronization* (critical sections, semaphores, monitors, mutual exclusion)
  - Inter-process *communication* (buffering)
  - Support of a *real-time clock* as an internal time reference
Task Management

- **Task synchronization:**
  - In classical operating systems, synchronization and mutual exclusion is performed via semaphores and monitors.
  - In real-time OS, special semaphores and a deep integration into scheduling is necessary (priority inheritance protocols, ...).

- **Further responsibilities:**
  - Initializations of internal data structures (tables, queues, task description blocks, semaphores, ...)
Task States

**Minimal Set of Task States:**

- run
- idle
- ready
- wait
- signal
- dispatched
- preemption
- activate
- resume
- terminate
- end_cycle
- timer
Task states

- **Run:**
  - A task enters this state as it starts executing on the processor

- **Ready:**
  - State of those tasks that are ready to execute but cannot be executed because the processor is assigned to another task.

- **Wait:**
  - A task enters this state when it executes a synchronization primitive to wait for an event, e.g. a wait primitive on a semaphore. In this case, the task is inserted in a queue associated with the semaphore. The task at the head is resumed when the semaphore is unlocked by a signal primitive.

- **Idle:**
  - A periodic job enters this state when it completes its execution and has to wait for the beginning of the next period.
Threads

A **thread** is the smallest sequence of programmed instructions that can be managed independently by a scheduler; e.g., a thread is a basic unit of CPU utilization.

Multiple threads can exist within the same process and share resources such as memory, while different processes do not share these resources:

- Typically **shared by threads**: memory.
- Typically **owned by threads**: registers, stack.

**Thread** advantages and characteristics:

- Faster to switch between threads; switching between user-level threads requires no major intervention by the operating system.
- Typically, an application will have a separate thread for each distinct activity.
- Thread Control Block (TCB) stores information needed to manage and schedule a thread.
Context Switching

process control block
Multiple Threads within a Process

![Diagram showing multiple threads within a process with segments labeled as 'text segment' and 'data segment'.]
Communication Mechanisms

**Problem**: the use of shared resources for implementing message passing schemes may cause priority inversion and blocking.
Communication mechanisms

- **Synchronous communication:**
  - Whenever two tasks want to communicate they must be synchronized for a message transfer to take place (*rendez-vous*).
  - They have to wait for each other.
  - **Problem** in case of dynamic real-time systems: Estimating the maximum blocking time for a process rendez-vous.
  - In a **static** real-time environment, the problem can be solved off-line by transforming all synchronous interactions into precedence constraints.
Communication mechanisms

- **Asynchronous communication:**
  - Tasks do not have to wait for each other
  - The sender just deposits its message into a channel and continues its execution; similarly the receiver can directly access the message if at least a message has been deposited into the channel.
  - More suited for real-time systems than synchronous comm.
  - **Mailbox:** Shared memory buffer, FIFO-queue, basic operations are send and receive, usually has fixed capacity.
  - **Problem:** Blocking behavior if channel is full or empty; alternative approach is provided by cyclical asynchronous buffers.
Class 1: Fast Proprietary Kernels

Fast proprietary kernels

For hard real-time systems, these kernels are questionable, because they are designed to be fast, rather than to be predictable in every respect.

Examples include:

- FreeRTOS
- QNX
- eCOS
- RT-LINUX
- VxWORKS
- LynxOS.
Class 2: Extensions to Standard OSs

Real-time extensions to standard OS:
Attempt to exploit comfortable main stream OS.
RT-kernel running all RT-tasks.
Standard-OS executed as one task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RT–task 1</th>
<th>RT–task 2</th>
<th>non–RT task 1</th>
<th>non–RT task 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>device driver</td>
<td>device driver</td>
<td>Standard–OS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>real–time kernel</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

+ Crash of standard-OS does not affect RT-tasks;
- RT-tasks cannot use Standard-OS services;
less comfortable than expected

revival of the concept: hypervisor
Example: Posix 1.b RT-extensions to Linux

Standard scheduler can be replaced by POSIX scheduler implementing priorities for RT tasks

RT-Task → RT-Task → Init → Bash → Mozilla

POSIX 1.b scheduler

Linux-Kernel

driver

I/O, interrupts

Hardware

Special RT-calls and standard OS calls available. Easy programming, no guarantee for meeting deadline
Example: RT Linux

RT-tasks cannot use standard OS calls. Commercially available from fsmlabs (www.fsmlabs.com)
Research systems trying to avoid limitations:

- Include L4, seL4, NICTA, ERIKA, SHARK

Research issues:

- low overhead memory protection,
- temporal protection of computing resources
- RTOSes for on-chip multiprocessors
- quality of service (QoS) control (besides real-time constraints)
- formally verified kernel properties

List of current real-time operating systems: