Too Much Milk

Don Porter

Portions courtesy Emmett Witchel
Critical Sections are Hard, Part 2

- The following example will demonstrate the difficulty of providing mutual exclusion with memory reads and writes
  - Hardware support is needed
- The code must work *all* of the time
  - Most concurrency bugs generate correct results for *some* interleavings
- Designing mutual exclusion in software shows you how to think about concurrent updates
  - Always look for what you are checking and what you are updating
  - A meddlesome thread can execute between the check and the update, the dreaded race condition
Thread Coordination

Too much milk!

Jack
• Look in the fridge; out of milk
• Go to store
• Buy milk
• Arrive home; put milk away

Jill

• Look in fridge; out of milk
• Go to store
• Buy milk
• Arrive home; put milk away
• Oh, no!

Fridge and Milk are Shared Data Structures
Formalizing “Too Much Milk”

• Shared variables
  – “Look in the fridge for milk” – check a variable
  – “Put milk away” – update a variable

• Safety property
  – At most one person buys milk

• Liveness
  – Someone buys milk when needed

• How can we solve this problem?
How to think about synchronization code

• Every thread has the same pattern
  – Entry section: code to attempt entry to critical section
  – Critical section: code that requires isolation (e.g., with mutual exclusion)
  – Exit section: cleanup code after execution of critical region
  – Non-critical section: everything else

• There can be multiple critical regions in a program
  – Only critical regions that access the same resource (e.g., data structure) need to synchronize with each other

```c
while(1) {
    Entry section
    Critical section
    Exit section
    Non-critical section
}
```
The Correctness Conditions

- **Safety**
  - Only one thread in the critical region

- **Liveness**
  - Some thread that enters the entry section eventually enters the critical region
  - Even if some thread takes forever in non-critical region

- **Bounded waiting**
  - A thread that enters the entry section enters the critical section within some bounded number of operations.

- **Failure atomicity**
  - It is OK for a thread to die in the critical region
  - Many techniques do not provide failure atomicity

```c
while(1) {
    Entry section
    Critical section
    Exit section
    Non-critical section
}
```
Solution #0

```c
while(1) {
    if (noMilk) { // check milk (Entry section)
        if (noNote) { // check if roommate is getting milk
            leave Note; //Critical section
            buy milk;
            remove Note; // Exit section
        }
    // Non-critical region
}
```

- Is this solution
  - 1. Correct
  - 2. Not safe
  - 3. Not live
  - 4. No bounded wait
  - 5. Not safe and not live

- It works sometime and doesn’t some other times
  - Threads can be context switched between checking and leaving note
  - Live, note left will be removed
  - Bounded wait (‘buy milk’ takes a finite number of steps)

What if we switch the order of checks?
Solution #1

while(1) {
    while(turn ≠ Jack) ; //spin
    while (Milk) ; //spin
    buy milk;       // Critical section
    turn := Jill   // Exit section
    // Non-critical section
}

while(1) {
    while(turn ≠ Jill) ; //spin
    while (Milk) ; //spin
    buy milk;
    turn := Jack
    // Non-critical section
}

◆ Is this solution
  ➢ 1. Correct
  ➢ 2. Not safe
  ➢ 3. Not live
  ➢ 4. No bounded wait
  ➢ 5. Not safe and not live

◆ At least it is safe
Solution #2: Peterson’s Algorithm

Variables:
- \( in_i \): thread \( T_i \) is executing, or attempting to execute, in CS
- \( turn \): id of thread allowed to enter CS if multiple want to

Claim: We can achieve mutual exclusion if the following invariant holds before thread \( i \) enters the critical section:

\[
\{(\neg in_j \lor (in_j \land turn = i)) \land in_i\}
\]

Intuitively: \( j \) doesn’t want to execute or it is \( i \)’s turn to execute
Peterson’s Algorithm

in₀ = in₁ = false;

Jack

while (1) {
    in₀ := true;
    turn := Jill;
    while (turn == Jill && in₁) ;//wait
    Critical section
    in₀ := false;
    Non-critical section
}

Jill

while (1) {
    in₁ := true;
    turn := Jack;
    while (turn == Jack && in₀);//wait
    Critical section
    in₁ := false;
    Non-critical section
}

Spin!

turn=Jack, in₀ = false, in₁:= true

Save, live, and bounded waiting; but only 2 threads
Too Much Milk: Lessons

• Peterson’s works, but it is really unsatisfactory
  – Limited to two threads
  – Solution is complicated; proving correctness is tricky even for the simple example
  – While thread is waiting, it is consuming CPU time

• How can we do better?
  – Use hardware to make synchronization faster
  – Define higher-level programming abstractions to simplify concurrent programming