McSema: Static Translation of X86 Instructions to LLVM

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About Us

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What is McSema?

Translate existing programs into a representation that can be easily manipulated and reasoned about.

The representation we chose is LLVM IR.

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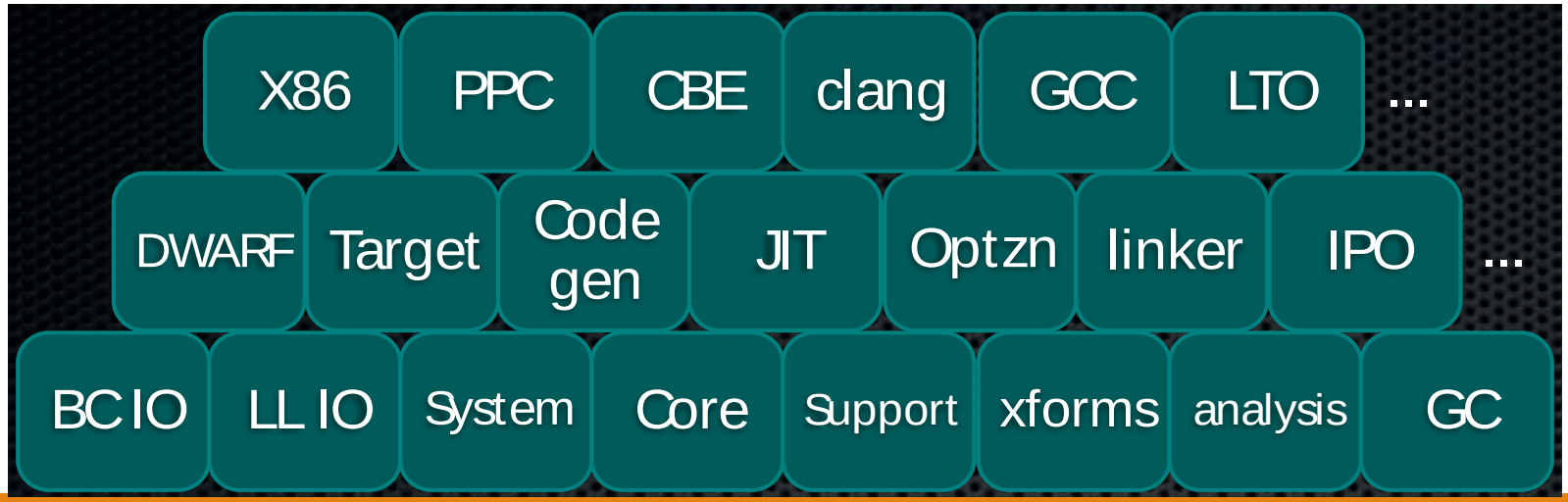
What is LLVM?

Modern Optimizing Compiler Infrastructure

- Infrastructure first, compiler second

Easy to learn and modify (for a compiler)

Very permissive licensing



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What is LLVM IR?

Like a higher level assembly language

Typed, Static Single Assignment

Simplifies program analysis and transformation

```
define i32 @main(i32 %argc, i8** %argv) {
  %1 = alloca i32, align 4
  %2 = alloca i32, align 4
  %3 = alloca i8**, align 8
  store i32 0, i32* %1
  store i32 %argc, i32* %2, align 4
  store i8** %argv, i8*** %3, align 8
  %4 = call i32 (i8*, ...)* @printf(… <omitted>)
  ret i32 0 }
```

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Why translate x86 to LLVM IR?

Use all existing LLVM tools

- Optimization
- Test Generation
- Model Checking

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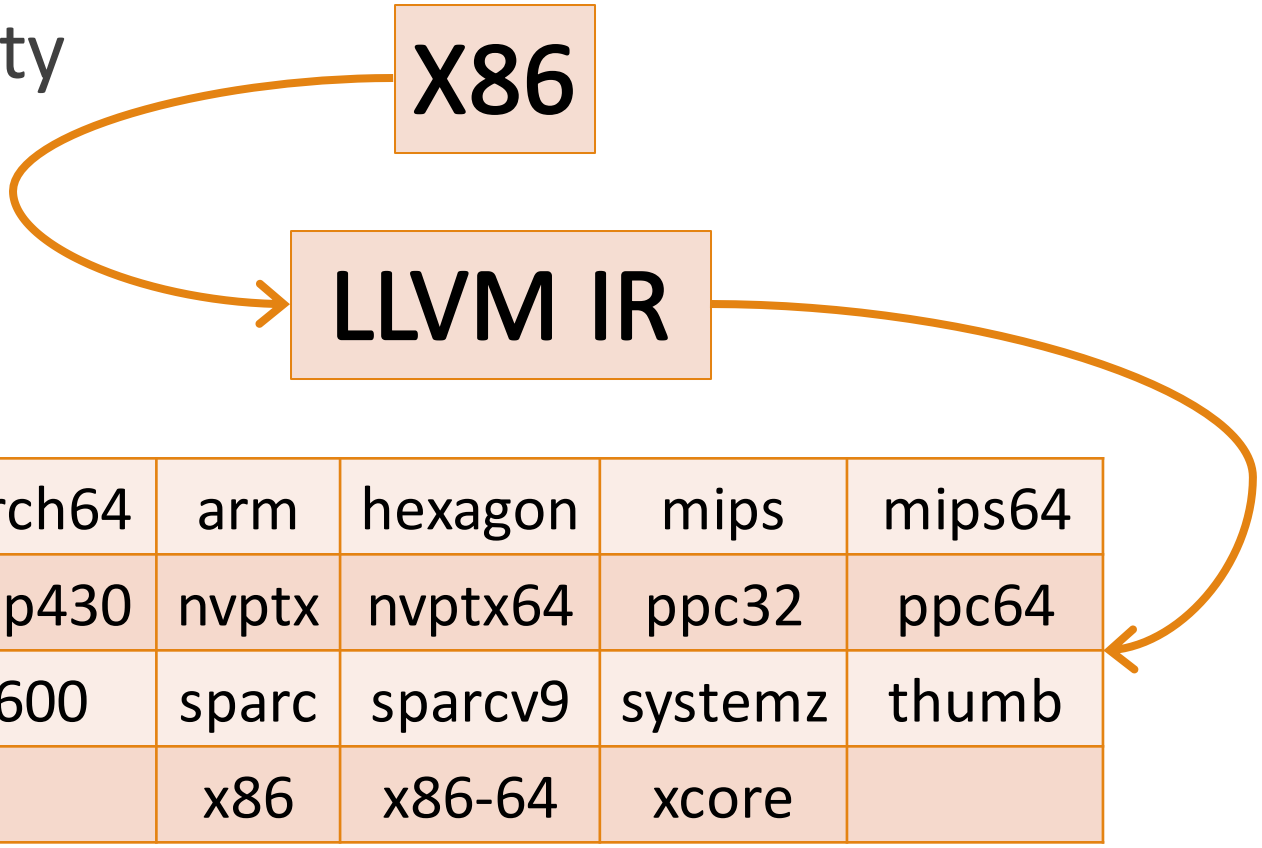
Why translate x86 to LLVM IR?

Portability



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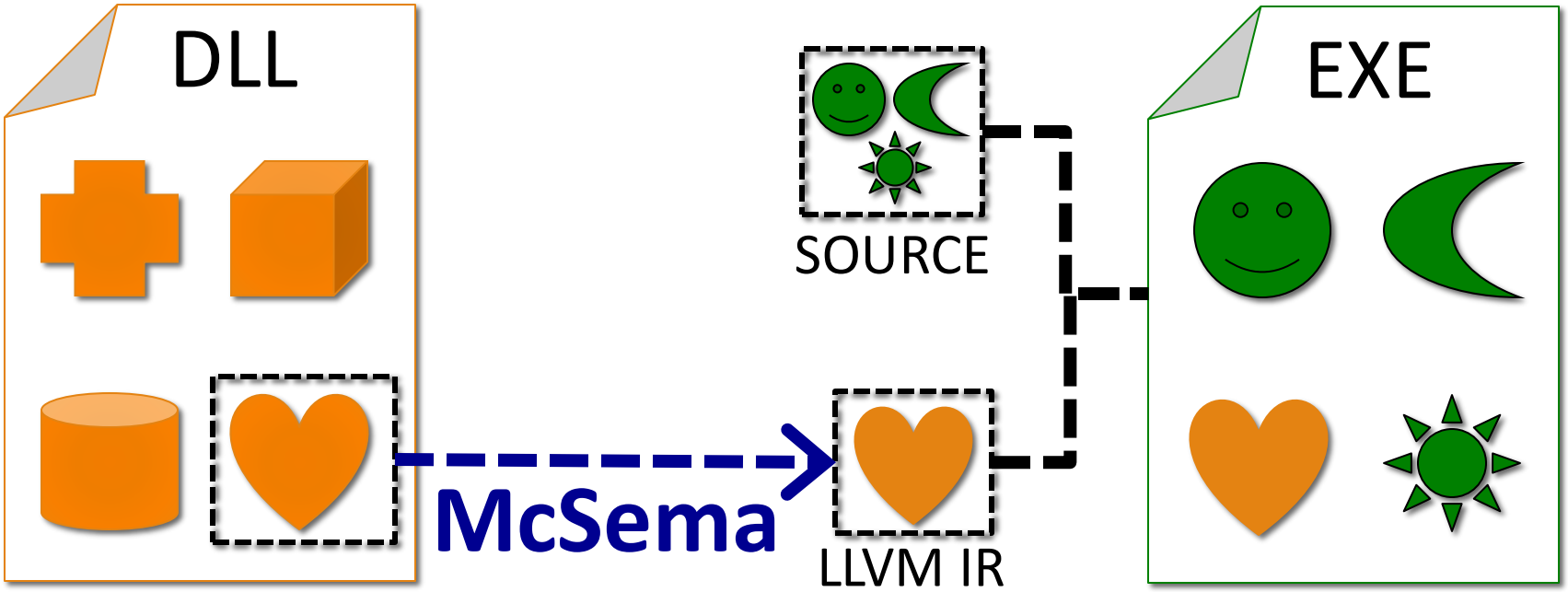
Why translate x86 to LLVM IR?

Foreign Code Integration and Re-Use



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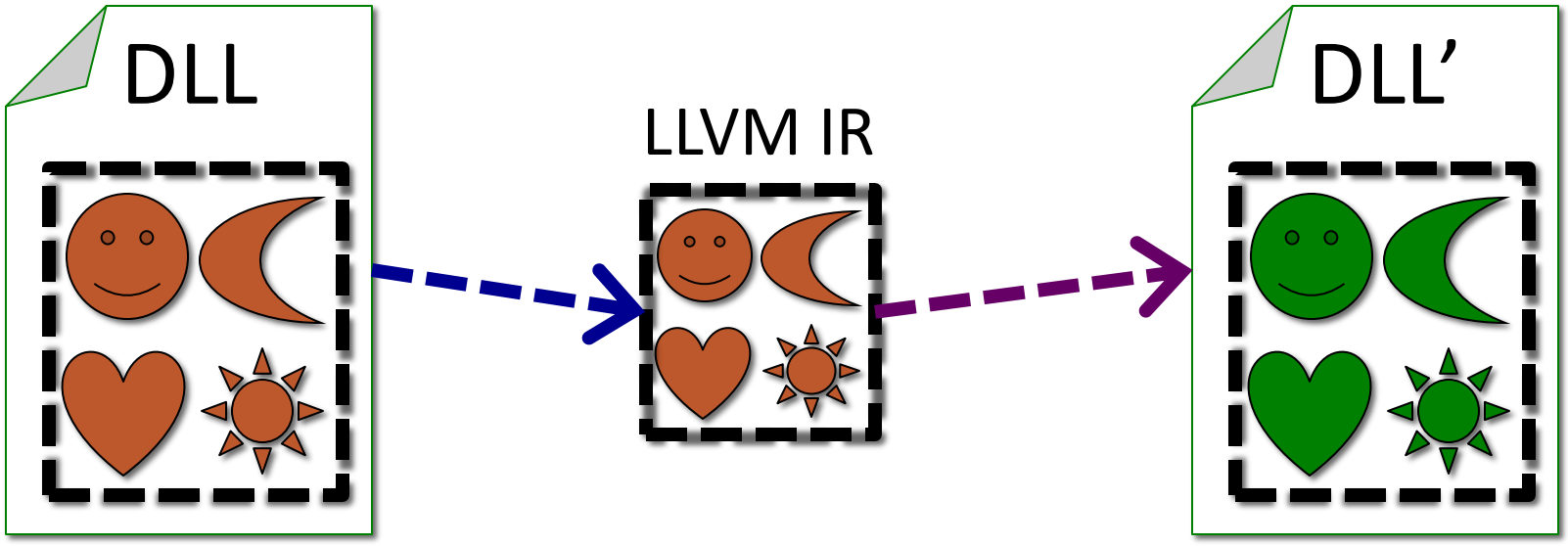
Why translate x86 to LLVM IR?

Add obfuscation and/or security to existing code.



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Demo 1

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Prior Work

- Dagger
- Second Write
- Fracture
  - Draper Lab
- BAP
  - CMU

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Why McSema

Open Source

Documentation and Unit Tests

FPU and SSE Support (incomplete)

Modular architecture

- Separate control flow recovery from translation
- Designed to translate code from arbitrary sources
- Control flow graphs specified as Google protocol buffers

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Open Source

McSema is DARPA funded.

It is in the process of being open sourced. These things take time.

Permissively licensed.

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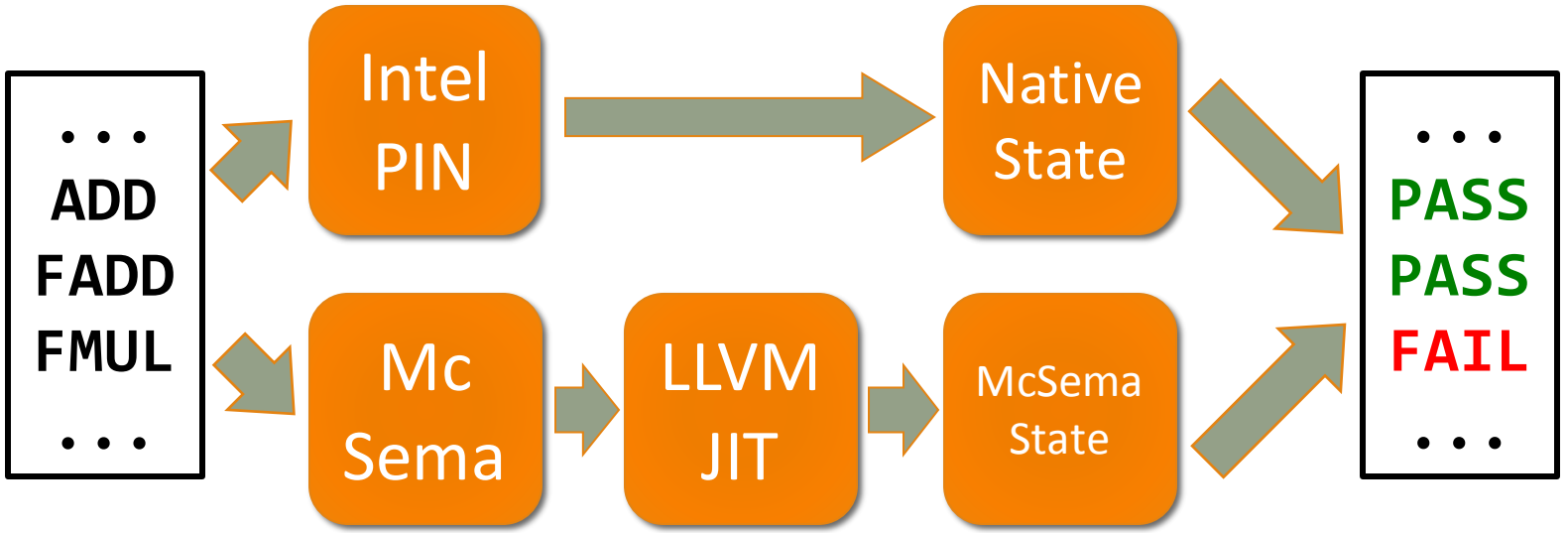
Unit Tests

Google test powered unit test for instruction semantics

Compares McSema CPU context to native CPU state



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FPU And SSE Support

Nearly Complete FPU Support

- Many instructions
- Some core issues remain:
  - Precision Control
  - Rounding Control

SSE Support is architecturally implemented

- Register state is complete
- Needs more instructions

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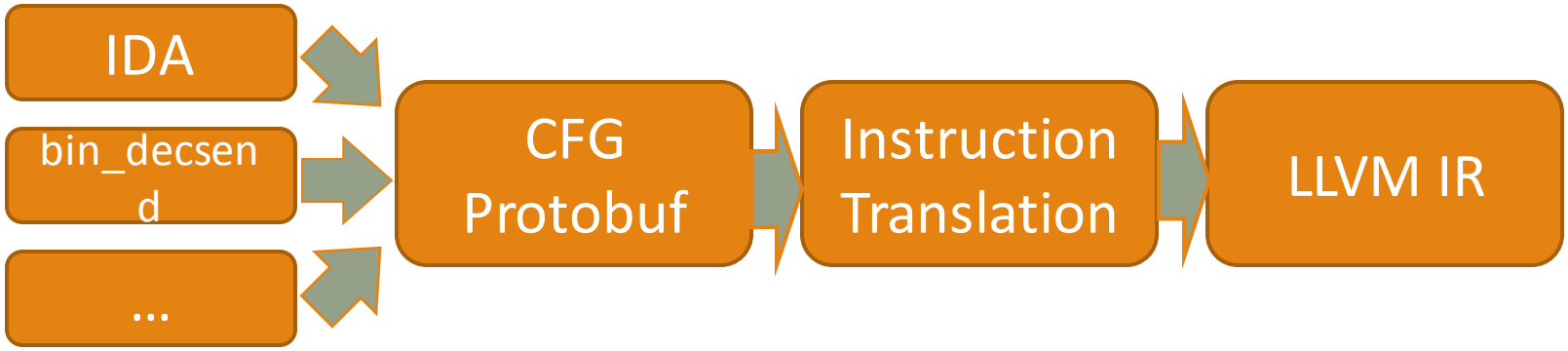
McSema Architecture

Separate control flow recovery from translation

Designed to translate code from arbitrary sources

Control flow graphs specified as Google protocol buffers



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Control Flow Recovery

1) Start at the entry point

2) BFS through all discovered basic blocks

3) ???

4) Recover CFG

What could go wrong???

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CFG Recovery Challenges

Indirect Calls

- `JMP EAX`

Jump Tables

- `JMP [EAX*4+OFFSET]`

Mixed Code and Data

- `0x40040: RET`
- `0x40041: db ‘H’,’e’,’l’,’l’,’o’,’ ‘,’W’,’o’,’r’,’l’,’d’,’\0’`
- `0x40056: PUSH EBP`

Constant, Data, or Code?

- `0x40000: MOV EAX, 0x40040`

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CFG Recovery Solutions

Relocation Entries

- Reliably identify pointers
- Required for ASLR on Windows

API Domain Knowledge

- Argument types to help solve code/data question
- Need to know about APIs later anyway

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CFG Recovery Solutions

Let IDA do it!

- McSema comes with an IDAPython script to dump the CFG from IDA

Why IDA

- Countless man-hours spent on CFG recovery
- The CFG will be at least as good as what you see in IDA

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CFG Recovery Solutions

In the future

- CFG recovery via symbolic execution
- Static call resolution drastically improves binary size
- Even external code vs. translated code would be a big improvement

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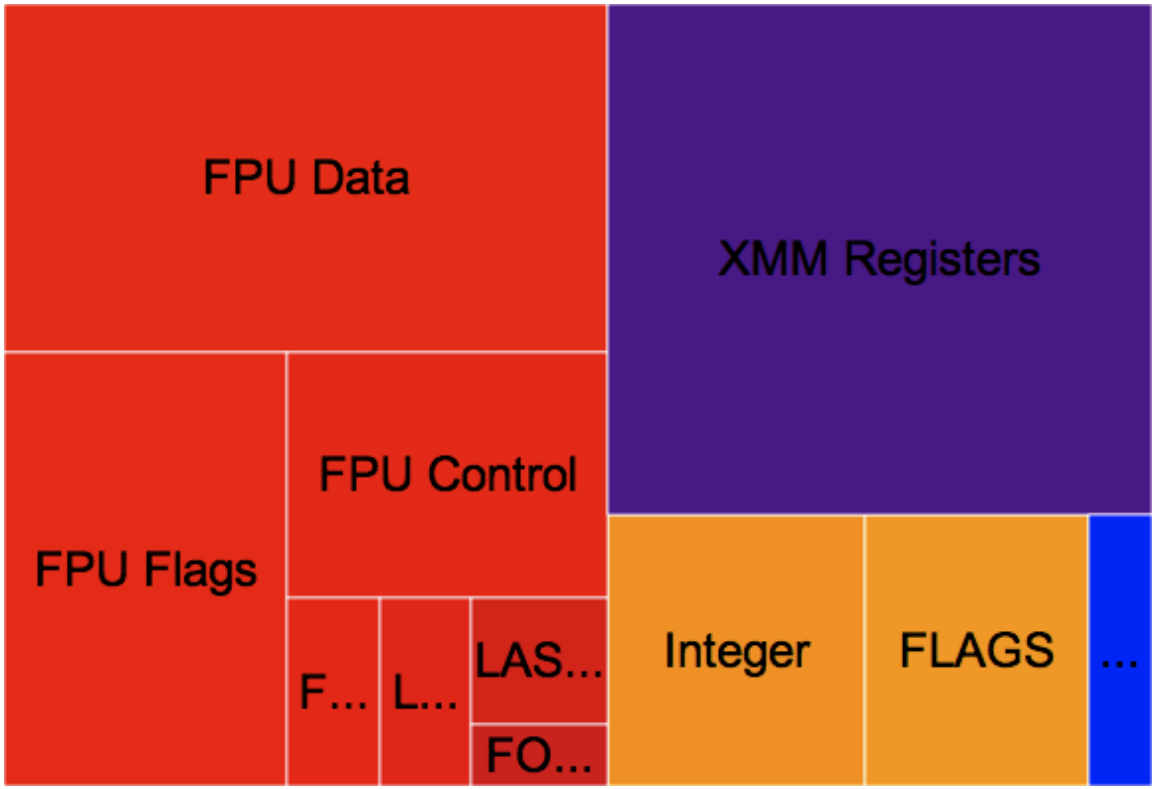
Instruction Translation: CPU

Model as operations on CPU context



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Demo 2

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Instruction Translation: Memory Model

Manipulates actual memory

Stack pointer is set to a translator stack

Stack variable recovery would be ideal

- Create LLVM IR `alloca` values for function stack locals
- Not always possible for sound variable recovery

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Instruction Translation: Functions

Spill Context, Translate, Store Context

```
F(A,B):
   EAX = ESP[-4]
   EBX = ESP[-8]
   EAX += EBX
END
```

```
TRANSLATED_F(RegContext):
   VAR_EAX = RegContext.EAX
   VAR_EBX = RegContext.EBX
   VAR_ESP = RegContext.ESP
   VAR_EAX = VAR_ESP[-4]
   VAR_EBX = VAR_ESP[-8]
   VAR_EAX += VAR_EBX
   RegContext.EAX = VAR_EAX
   RegContent.EBX = VAR_EBX
   RegContent.ESP = VAR_ESP
END
```

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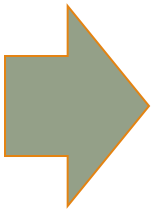
Instruction Translation: Lazy Translation

Let the optimizer make it better!

```
TRANSLATED_F(RegContext):
   VAR_EAX = RegContext.EAX
   VAR_EBX = RegContext.EBX
   VAR_ESP = RegContext.ESP
   VAR_EAX = VAR_ESP[-4]
   VAR_EBX = VAR_ESP[-8]
   VAR_EAX += VAR_EBX
   RegContext.EAX = VAR_EAX
   RegContent.EBX = VAR_EBX
   RegContent.ESP = VAR_ESP
END
```



```
OPTIMIZED_F(RegContext):
   VAR_ESP = RegContext.ESP
   VAR_EAX = VAR_ESP[-4]
   VAR_EBX = VAR_ESP[-8]
   RegContext.EAX =
      VAR_EAX + VAR_EBX
   RegContent.EBX = VAR_EBX
END
```

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Instruction Translation: Externals

Parse Windows DLLs to extract API signatures

- Simple text-based format
- Easy to add custom mappings

Match import names

Emit as an `extern` function in LLVM IR

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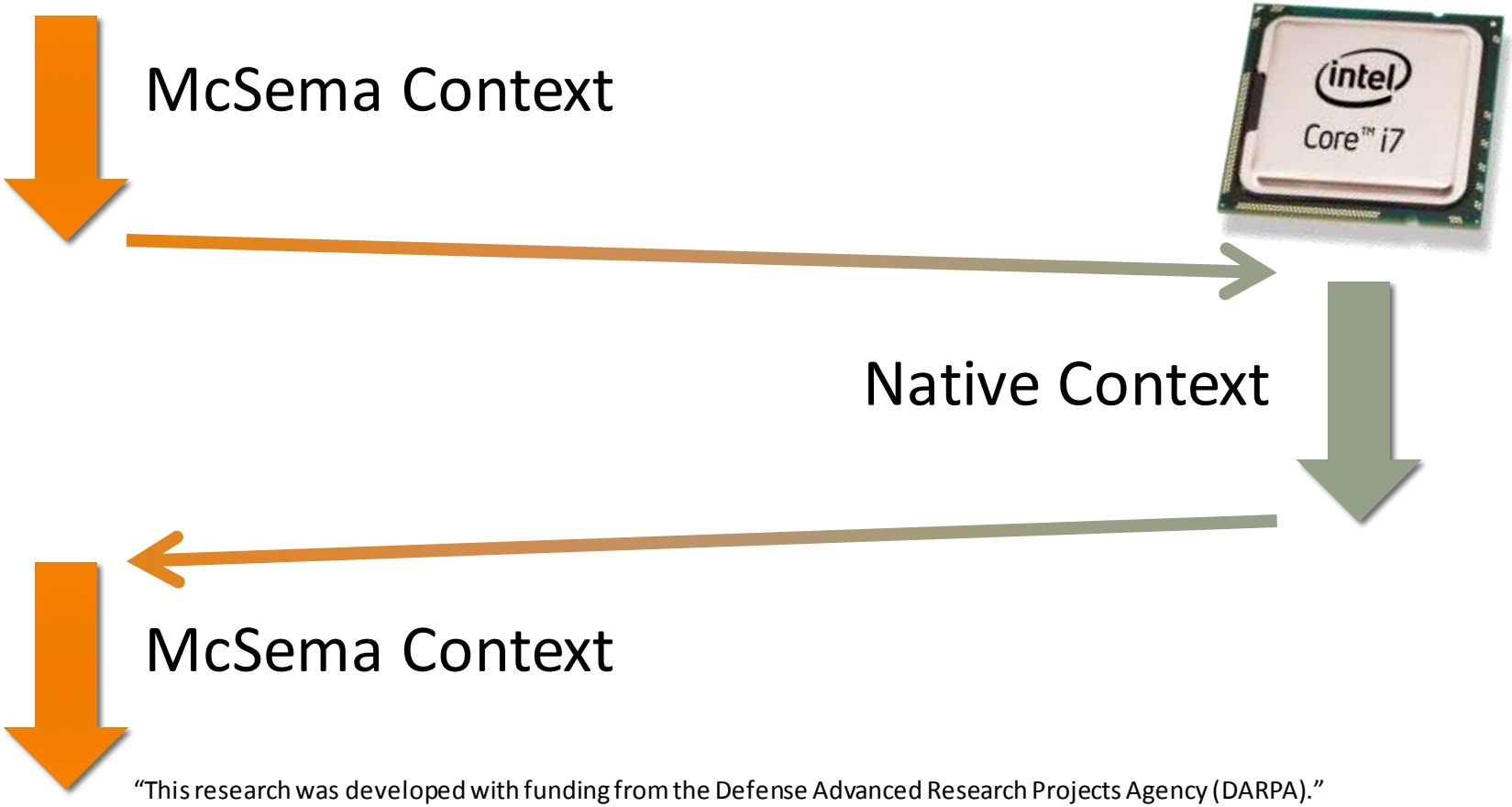
Instruction Translation: CALL REG/MEM



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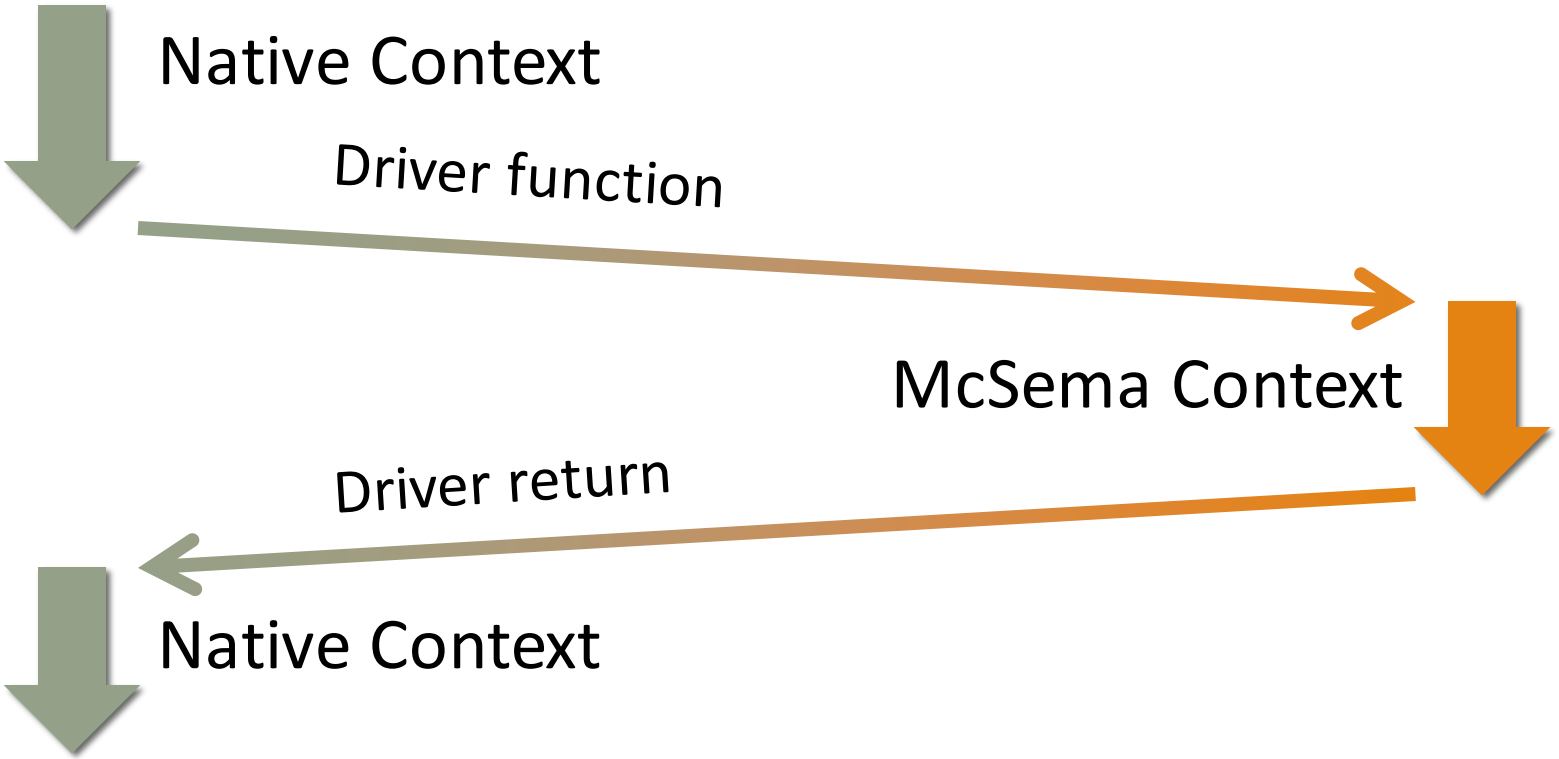
Instruction Translation: Callbacks

Create ‘drivers’ that translate context



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Development Progress: What Works

Integer instructions

Unit Tests

FPU registers

FPU instructions (some)

SSE registers

SSE instructions (very few)

Callbacks

External Calls

Jump Tables

Data References

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Demo 3

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Development Progress: What Needs to be Done

FPU Instructions (some)

SSE Instructions (most)

Exceptions

Privileged instructions

Need more unit tests!

Better optimization

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Future Plans

More instructions support

Memory modeling

Optimization

Rigorous Testing

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Questions?

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