

CFFI-SYS Interface Specification

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Built-In Foreign Types.....	2
3	Operations on Built-in Foreign Types.....	3
4	Basic Pointer Operations.....	4
5	Foreign Memory Allocation.....	5
6	Memory Access.....	6
7	Foreign Function Calling.....	7
8	Loading Foreign Libraries.....	8
9	Foreign Globals.....	9
	Symbol Index.....	10

1 Introduction

CFFI, the Common Foreign Function Interface, purports to be a portable foreign function interface for Common Lisp.

This specification defines a set of low-level primitives that must be defined for each Lisp implementation supported by CFFI. These operators are defined in the `CFFI-SYS` package.

The `CFFI` package uses the `CFFI-SYS` interface to implement an extensible foreign type system with support for typedefs, structures, and unions, a declarative interface for defining foreign function calls, and automatic conversion of foreign function arguments to/from Lisp types.

Please note the following conventions that apply to everything in `CFFI-SYS`:

- Functions in `CFFI-SYS` that are low-level versions of functions exported from the `CFFI` package begin with a leading percent-sign (eg. `%mem-ref`).
- Where “foreign type” is mentioned as the kind of an argument, the meaning is restricted to that subset of all foreign types defined in [Chapter 2 \[Built-In Foreign Types\], page 2](#). Support for higher-level types is always defined in terms of those lower-level types in `CFFI` proper.

2 Built-In Foreign Types

```

:char [Foreign Type]
:unsigned-char [Foreign Type]
:short [Foreign Type]
:unsigned-short [Foreign Type]
:int [Foreign Type]
:unsigned-int [Foreign Type]
:long [Foreign Type]
:unsigned-long [Foreign Type]
:long-long [Foreign Type]
:unsigned-long-long [Foreign Type]

```

These types correspond to the native C integer types according to the ABI of the system the Lisp implementation is compiled against.

```

:int8 [Foreign Type]
:uint8 [Foreign Type]
:int16 [Foreign Type]
:uint16 [Foreign Type]
:int32 [Foreign Type]
:uint32 [Foreign Type]
:int64 [Foreign Type]
:uint64 [Foreign Type]

```

Foreign integer types of specific sizes, corresponding to the C types defined in `stdint.h`.

```

:size [Foreign Type]
:ssize [Foreign Type]
:ptrdiff [Foreign Type]
:time [Foreign Type]

```

Foreign integer types corresponding to the standard C types (without the `_t` suffix).

Implementor's note: I'm sure there are more of these that could be useful, let's add any types that can't be defined portably to this list as necessary.

```

:float [Foreign Type]
:double [Foreign Type]

```

The `:float` type represents a C `float` and a Lisp `single-float`. `:double` represents a C `double` and a Lisp `double-float`.

```

:pointer [Foreign Type]

```

A foreign pointer to an object of any type, corresponding to `void *`.

```

:void [Foreign Type]

```

No type at all. Only valid as the return type of a function.

3 Operations on Built-in Foreign Types

`%foreign-type-size` *type* \Rightarrow *size* [Function]

Return the *size*, in bytes, of objects having foreign type *type*. An error is signalled if *type* is not a known built-in foreign type.

`%foreign-type-alignment` *type* \Rightarrow *alignment* [Function]

Return the default alignment in bytes for structure members of foreign type *type*. An error is signalled if *type* is not a known built-in foreign type.

Implementor's note: Maybe this should take an optional keyword argument specifying an alternate alignment system, eg. :mac68k for 68000-compatible alignment on Darwin.

4 Basic Pointer Operations

pointerp *ptr* \Rightarrow *boolean* [Function]

Return true if *ptr* is a foreign pointer.

null-pointer \Rightarrow *pointer* [Function]

Return a null foreign pointer.

null-pointer-p *ptr* \Rightarrow *boolean* [Function]

Return true if *ptr* is a null foreign pointer.

make-pointer *address* \Rightarrow *pointer* [Function]

Return a pointer corresponding to the numeric integer *address*.

inc-pointer *ptr* *offset* \Rightarrow *pointer* [Function]

Return the result of numerically incrementing *ptr* by *offset*.

5 Foreign Memory Allocation

foreign-alloc *size* \Rightarrow *pointer* [Function]

Allocate *size* bytes of foreign-addressable memory and return a *pointer* to the allocated block. An implementation-specific error is signalled if the memory cannot be allocated.

foreign-free *ptr* \Rightarrow *unspecified* [Function]

Free a pointer *ptr* allocated by **foreign-alloc**. The results are undefined if *ptr* is used after being freed.

with-foreign-pointer (*var* *size* **&optional** *size-var*) **&body** *body* [Macro]

Bind *var* to a pointer to *size* bytes of foreign-accessible memory during *body*. Both *ptr* and the memory block it points to have dynamic extent and may be stack allocated if supported by the implementation. If *size-var* is supplied, it will be bound to *size* during *body*.

6 Memory Access

`%mem-ref` *ptr* *type* **&optional** *offset* [Accessor]
Dereference a pointer *offset* bytes from *ptr* to an object for reading (or writing when used with `setf`) of built-in type *type*.

Example

```
;; An impractical example, since time returns the time as well,  
;; but it demonstrates %MEM-REF. Better (simple) examples wanted!  
(with-foreign-pointer (p (foreign-type-size :time))  
  (foreign-funcall "time" :pointer p :time)  
  (%mem-ref p :time))
```

7 Foreign Function Calling

`%foreign-funcall` *name* {*arg-type arg*}* **&optional** *result-type* \Rightarrow *object* [Macro]

`%foreign-funcall-pointer` *ptr* {*arg-type arg*}* **&optional** *result-type* \Rightarrow [Macro]
object

Invoke a foreign function called *name* in the foreign source code.

Each *arg-type* is a foreign type specifier, followed by *arg*, Lisp data to be converted to foreign data of type *arg-type*. *result-type* is the foreign type of the function's return value, and is assumed to be `:void` if not supplied.

`%foreign-funcall-pointer` takes a pointer *ptr* to the function, as returned by `foreign-symbol-pointer`, rather than a string *name*.

Examples

```
;; Calling a standard C library function:
(%foreign-funcall "sqrtf" :float 16.0 :float)  $\Rightarrow$  4.0
;; Dynamic allocation of a buffer and passing to a function:
(with-foreign-ptr (buf 255 buf-size)
  (%foreign-funcall "gethostname" :pointer buf :size buf-size :int)
  ;; Convert buf to a Lisp string using MAKE-STRING and %MEM-REF or
  ;; a portable CFFI function such as CFFI:FOREIGN-STRING-TO-LISP.
  )
```

8 Loading Foreign Libraries

`%load-foreign-library` *name* \Rightarrow *unspecified* [Function]

Load the foreign shared library *name*.

Implementor's note: There is a lot of behavior to decide here. Currently I lean toward not requiring NAME to be a full path to the library so we can search the system library directories (maybe even get LD_LIBRARY_PATH from the environment) as necessary.

9 Foreign Globals

`foreign-symbol-pointer` *name* \Rightarrow *pointer*

[Function]

Return a pointer to a foreign symbol *name*.

Symbol Index

%

%foreign-funcall	7
%foreign-funcall-pointer	7
%foreign-type-alignment	3
%foreign-type-size	3
%load-foreign-library	8
%mem-ref	6

:

:char	2
:double	2
:float	2
:int	2
:int16	2
:int32	2
:int64	2
:int8	2
:long	2
:long-long	2
:pointer	2
:ptrdiff	2
:short	2
:size	2
:ssize	2
:time	2
:uint16	2
:uint32	2
:uint64	2
:uint8	2
:unsigned-char	2
:unsigned-int	2

:unsigned-long	2
:unsigned-long-long	2
:unsigned-short	2
:void	2

F

foreign-alloc	5
foreign-free	5
foreign-symbol-pointer	9

I

inc-pointer	4
-------------------	---

M

make-pointer	4
--------------------	---

N

null-pointer	4
null-pointer-p	4

P

pointerp	4
----------------	---

W

with-foreign-pointer	5
----------------------------	---