Using Source-to-Source Transformations to Add Debug Observability to HLS-Synthesized Circuits

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Using Source-to-Source Transformations to Add Debug Observability
to HLS-Synthesized Circuits

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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This dissertation introduces a novel approach for exposing the internal, source-level expressions of circuits generated by high-level synthesis (HLS) for in-circuit debug. The approach uses source-to-source transformations to instrument specific source-level expressions with debug ports. These debug ports allow a user to connect a debugging instrument (e.g. an embedded logic analyzer) to record the activity of the expression corresponding to the debug port. This dissertation demonstrates that a debugging solution based on these source-to-source transformations is feasible and that individual debug ports can be added for a cost of a 1-2% increase in circuit area on average. It also introduces another transformation that permits pointer-valued expressions to be instrumented for debug. It is demonstrated that all pointers in the CHStone benchmarks can be instrumented for an average 4% increase in circuit area.

The debug port transformations are demonstrated on two HLS tools – Vivado HLS and Legup. The architecture of the source-to-source compiler allowed the necessary adaptations for the second tool (Legup) to be implemented using a minimal amount of additional code. Due to limitations in the Legup compiler an additional optimization was added to reduce the latency overhead incurred by the debug ports. User manuals and other documentation from 10 additional C-based HLS tools is examined to determine whether they are amenable to debug instrumentation using the source-to-source transformations. Of the 10 additional HLS tools examined, 6 were amenable to the transformations, 3 were likely to be amenable, and 1 was not. This dissertation estimates the cost of a complete debugging solution (i.e. one with debug ports and a debugging instrument) and identifies a possible worst case bound for adding debug ports. Finally, this dissertation analyzes two different debugging instruments and determines which instrument would be best for most HLS circuit mapped to FPGAs. It then estimates the overhead of this debugging solution.

Keywords: FPGA, high-level synthesis, debugging, source-to-source transformations, embedded logic analyzer
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PREFACE

Many of the research contributions presented in this thesis were previously published in conference paper format. Specifically, the work of three published conference papers [1] [2] [3] are included in this format. However, the discussions of methods, results, and research contributions have been significantly expanded beyond that which was possible when the research was presented in conference paper format. In general, the research contributions from each of these conference papers are included and expanded upon in various chapters of this dissertation. For example, Chapter 3 expands upon the research contributions in the FPGA [1] and FPT [2] papers. Both of these papers discussed and tested the initial feasibility of the debug port transformation presented in this dissertation. Chapter 4 presents the work shadow pointers that was presented in [3]. Chapter 5 discusses how the source-to-source compiler presented in this dissertation was modified to support the LegUp high-level synthesis tool.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation

Field programmable gate arrays (FPGA) are a common alternative to ASICs for implementing circuits with high-performance and/or low-power requirements. In general, FPGAs are often used instead of ASICs, because they provide lower non-recurring engineering (NRE) costs and shorter time-to-market. These qualities make FPGAs ideal for use in low or medium volume products such as satellites [4], unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) [5], logic emulators, Internet routers, and (most recently) data centers [6]. FPGAs are also commonly chosen over other general computing platforms (e.g. GPUs, multi-core CPUs) because they often deliver higher performance while consuming less power.

Despite their performance and power benefits, FPGAs are not always chosen to implement high-performance applications. In general, FPGAs are passed by for two reasons. First, relative to other general purpose computing platforms, FPGAs are difficult to program and have long compilation and simulation times. These factors become deterrents to FPGA use in projects with short deadlines and/or when easier-to-program computing platforms provide sufficient performance and sufficiently low power consumption. Second, the use of an FPGA may not even be considered because a developer with the required hardware expertise is not available.

To address the challenges of FPGA development, increasing numbers of developers are turning to High-Level Synthesis tools (HLS). In general, an HLS tool is any compiler that is able to generate RTL code (which can be mapped to an FPGA) from a specification written in a standard programming language (e.g. C, C++, Java, Matlab). The use of high-level languages allows HLS users to develop, debug, and verify applications on a desktop PC while leveraging mature, industry-standard software development tools and environments before passing their code to an HLS tool for synthesis. Because the application is first developed and debugged in software, HLS users are often able to avoid the long simulation times associated with developing and debugging an
application written in an RTL language. In fact, the use of HLS tools has been shown, in certain
instances, to reduce development time by 5X while producing circuits comparable to hand-written
RTL [7].

Even though most of the validation and debugging of an HLS-generated circuit is per-
formed quickly in software, there is still a potential for difficult-to-find bugs to appear after the
design has been placed in an FPGA and exposed to real-world data. These types of bugs can
arise from system-level interactions with the surrounding environment (e.g. I/O devices) or other
modules in the system [8]. Further, the complexity of some system environments can make it
impossible to thoroughly test the HLS IP in software or in RTL simulation [8]. There is also the
possibility of errors in the HLS tool although these may be better handled by automated discrep-
ancy detection approaches [9] [10] [11]. Finding the root cause of these bugs is especially difficult
because real-world environments do not make it easy for the user to observe the execution of the
circuit.

The behavior of a circuit executing on an FPGA can be observed by instrumenting the
circuit with a debugging instrument known as an embedded logic analyzer (ELA). In order to use
an ELA, the user is required to identify a set of signals-of-interest that will help him isolate the bug.
These signals are connected to a memory bank (via intermediate signals or probes) in the ELA that
keeps a history of the values of the signal-of-interest. When the buggy behavior is encountered the
history leading up to that bug is locked into the memory bank and uploaded to the users workstation
for analysis.

The process of instrumenting an HLS design with an ELA is complicated by the fact that
it is difficult for the user to identify useful signals (i.e. those that correspond to source-level ex-
pressions that the user understands) to record with the ELA. This problem is compounded by the
fact that current commercial HLS tools do not automate the process in any way. Therefore, when
a bug manifests during in-circuit operation, the user must perform the whole task of setting up the
debugging instrument on his own. This can be a daunting and time-consuming task for at least
two reasons. First, in the best case, the general HLS-user is a hardware engineer who is merely
unfamiliar with newly generated HLS RTL and will need to invest time into understanding how it
is structured. In the worst case, the HLS-user is a software programmer who will not understand
the structure of the generated RTL. Second, in order to “connect” specific source-level variables
or expressions to the debugging instrument the HLS-user must identify all RTL signals that correspond to the variable or expression (may be duplicated in hardware). For these RTL signals to be useful, the HLS-user must also be able to identify when they are valid and when they correspond to the source-level variable of interest (i.e. due to resource sharing the RTL signals may correspond to different source-level variables or expressions at different points in execution; further there may be points where an RTL signals has no correspondence at all). This means that the user is also required to identify and connect to the debugging instrument all RTL expressions and signals that validate the data and correspondence (state machines signals, process if-statement conditionals, etc.). It is true that at least one commercial HLS tool (i.e. Vivado HLS [12]) provides some information about the correspondence between the original source code and the generated RTL code; however, it is the author’s experience that the provided information is not sufficient for a general debugging solution.

1.2 Summary of Research

The primary focus of this dissertation is to introduce source-to-source transformations that simplify the process of instrumenting an HLS-generated IP core for debug (i.e. connecting it to a debugging instrument) and demonstrate that these transformations are feasible for use in real-world debugging scenarios. This is accomplished by first introducing a source-to-source transformations (hereafter known as the debug port transformation) that can be automatically applied to direct the HLS tool to add debug ports into the RTL code of HLS-generated IP cores. Each of these debug ports corresponds to and is wired directly to the result of a specific source-level expression and can be easily connected to a debugging instrument via a simple data-valid interface. In this way, the debug port transformation relieves the HLS-user of the error-prone process involved in properly identifying the signals that correspond to the source-level expressions that he/she would like to observe with the debugging instrument.

Despite the many benefits of the debug port transformation, it also has the potential to increase the size and reduce the performance of the circuit to which it is applied. In most cases, the only extra circuitry added by the HLS tool to implement the debug port is a wire and a small amount of logic to implement a data valid signal. However, it has been observed that instrumenting a single expression with a debug port can alter the way in which a circuit is optimized as well as
change its structure. Both of these changes can increase the size and reduce the performance of the debug-port instrumented circuit potentially to the point where the debug port instrumentation approach is no longer feasible.

To demonstrate that the debug port transformation is indeed a feasible means to expose the internal expressions of an HLS-generated IP core to a debugging instrument this dissertation examines the results of two large sets of experiments. These experiments reveal that the debug port transformation can have a wide range of effects on a circuit whether it is used to instrument one expression or a large group of expressions. For example, these experiments revealed that when a single expression is instrumented it can actually improve both the area and performance of the circuit or it can significantly degrade both. In another example, the first 33 expressions instrumented with debug ports (in a special order) reduced the area of the circuit; however, instrumenting the remaining 50 expressions increased the area by almost 30%. These experiments were run in the Vivado HLS tool.

Once feasibility is established for Vivado HLS, the debug port transformation is migrated to a second HLS tool – LegUp [13]. Migrating the debug port transformation to LegUp merely required the creation of a small component that applied the LegUp-specific syntax for creating a port. However, the initial approach in LegUp – a direct mapping of the Vivado HLS approach – resulted in an unacceptable amount of latency overhead when hundreds of signals were instrumented. An alternative binding strategy that groups multiple expressions to a single debug port is proposed and used to mitigate the excessive latency overhead. A subset of more realistic scenarios that instrument a single debug port are examined and shown to result in much lower overhead. A comparison is then made between the LegUp and Vivado HLS results.

This dissertation also identifies that pointer values (addresses) in both Vivado HLS and LegUp cannot be written to debug ports. A transformation is proposed that inserts integer variables, called shadow pointers, to convey an equivalent form of the addresses held by pointers to the debug ports. This transformation is shown to work in both Vivado HLS and LegUp and results in a relatively small amount of overhead and required no changes to the source code that implemented the transformation.

This dissertation then examines the potential best and worst case bounds associated with using the debug port and shadow pointer transformations. It also uses data from the dissertation as
well as data from previously published papers to estimate the cost of a complete debugging solution based on the transformations presented in this dissertation. This dissertation also identifies other HLS tools that may be amenable to the proposed transformation and identifies potential future work.

The key results of this dissertation are:

1. The debug port transformation is a feasible means for exposing source-level expressions to a debugging instrument. This is demonstrated by the fact our experiments revealed that 90-99% of expressions (in the CHStone benchmarks) can be instrumented with debug ports for an individual cost of a 1-6% increase in LUT count and on average all assignment operations can be instrumented for an average 27% increase in LUT count.

2. The shadow pointer transformation can be used to expose the results of all pointer-valued expressions to the debugging instrument for an average cost of 2.5% (over the CHStone benchmarks). This result held even when all assignment operations were also instrumented with debug ports.

3. The debug port transformation was demonstrated in a second HLS tool – LegUp. After instrumentation the latency of the circuit increased by an average of 3.7X; however, the delayed binding strategy proposed in this dissertation reduced the latency overhead to an average of 1.95X.

4. Other than Vivado HLS and LegUp, documentation from 10 additional HLS tools were examined to determine how amenable they were to the debug port transformation. Of the 10 HLS tools examined, 6 were found to be amenable, 3 were likely to be amenable, and one was not.

1.3 Research Contributions

The following is a list of the research contributions of this dissertation:

- A comprehensive review of HLS debugging approaches.
- A source-to-source transformation that instruments arbitrary expressions with debug ports. The transformation ensures that the expression will exist in the final circuit.
• A transformation that allows pointer-valued expressions to be instrumented by the debug port transformation.

• A large-scale experiment (utilizing over 50,000 individual place and route runs) that demonstrates the feasibility of the source-to-source instrumentation approach.

• A demonstration that the source-to-source compiler can be extended to work with multiple HLS tools.

• A novel debug-port binding approach that significantly decreases the latency overhead of debug ports in HLS tools that have fixed latency overhead for I/O operations (such as LegUp).

• A survey of existing HLS tool documentation to determine other existing HLS tools that are amenable to the debug port transformations.

• The determination of a reasonable upper bound for the overhead inflicted by the debug port transformation.

• A comparison between a debug port transformation-based debugging solution and the built-in debugging support for LegUp.

1.4 Potential Applications

The transformations presented in this dissertation could potentially be used as the foundation of an automated debugging solution for an academic or commercial HLS tool. The benefit of the source-to-source approach is that the HLS tool developers do not have to modify their tools much – if at all – to support the transformations. Rather, they simply have to ensure that their tools meet the criteria set forth in Section 6.2 of this dissertation.

Another potential application of this work would be to open-source the source-to-source compiler presented in this dissertation. This would allow the users of Vivado HLS to more easily instrument their HLS-generated IP for in-system debug using both the transformations and a commercial debugging instrument (e.g. SignalTap Chipscope). As discussed in Section 5.2, the compiler is designed in a modular fashion and could easily be extended to support additional tools and could be the basis of many interesting research projects.
1.5 Dissertation Organization

Chapter 2 discusses previous work and provides background information on various related topics.

Chapter 3 introduces the debug port transformation and reports on a feasibility study.

Chapter 4 introduces the shadow pointer transformation which allows pointer-valued expressions to be instrumented using the debug port transformation.

Chapter 5 demonstrates that the debug port transformations can be migrated to another HLS tool (LegUp) and discusses a new binding approach that reduces latency overhead for LegUp designs.

Chapter 6 determines that not all HLS tools are amenable to the source-to-source transformation approach and identifies the features required to make them amenable. Several HLS tools are then examined to determine whether or not they are amenable to the source-to-source transformations.

Chapter 7 examines the best and worst case bounds of the debug port transformation. It also examines two debugging instruments and determines which debugging instrument would be the best fit for use in HLS circuits and then estimates the cost of this debugging instrument.

Chapter 8 provides a summary of the completed research and results. It also examines several potential items for future work. It also provides some concluding remarks.
CHAPTER 2. BACKGROUND AND RELATED WORK

To motivate our discussion of current and past debugging practices on FPGAs, this chapter describes FPGA architecture and standard RTL and C-based development flows. FPGA application development using HLS is also described. This chapter also examines the various approaches for performing on-chip debugging of FPGA-based applications. Previous research efforts applying these debugging approaches to HLS are then described. This chapter also describes some foundational concepts related to source-to-source transformations which are an important topic in this dissertation.

2.1 FPGA Architecture and Development

Throughout their history, the key feature of FPGAs has always been its ability to be re-configured to implement any simple or complex digital logic circuit which the FPGA has enough resources to implement. When they were first introduced by Xilinx in 1989 [14], FPGAs were primarily used to implement so-called “glue logic” between discrete components on printed circuit boards (PCB) [15]. Examples of glue logic consist of simple logic functions (e.g. AND, OR, NOT) and larger functions such as address decoders and state machines. The use of FPGAs to implement glue logic allowed engineers to consolidate functions implemented by multiple discrete components into a single device thereby decreasing the number of discrete components on the PCB. However, as the capacity and performance of FPGAs has increased with Moore’s law, the role of FPGAs has increased from simple glue logic to larger applications such as complex parallel computing algorithms and systems-on-chip. As a example of the expanding role of FPGAs, Microsoft recently announced its Catapult project [6] in which FPGAs were used to accelerate a portion of the Bing ranking algorithm by almost 2X while only increasing power consumption by 10%. The recent increases in the size and complexity of the applications mapped to FPGAs as well as the desire of FPGA vendors to increase the FPGA user-base has forced FPGA vendors to improve
the design productivity of their tools [16] [17] [18]. These improvements include the adoption of HLS tools (e.g. Vivado HLS, SDAccel) and graphical RTL design tools such as IP Integrator. The remainder of this section discusses basic FPGA architecture and application development using FPGA CAD tools in detail.

2.1.1 FPGA Architecture

As shown in Figure 2.1, an FPGA consists of a regular array of programmable logic blocks and interconnect. This is known as an island-style architecture. The general idea is that the logic blocks are ‘floating’ in a sea of interconnect. The logic blocks are used to implement digital functions while interconnect (switch-boxes) are used to create physical connections (wires) between the inputs and outputs of the logic blocks. For example, Figure 2.2 shows a portion of the FPGA being used to implement the AND gate. As shown in the figure, inputs A and B enter the FPGA through the I/O logic blocks and are routed to the logic block that is programmed to implement the AND gate. The result of the AND gate is then routed through several switch-boxes and finally off-chip through another I/O block.

Generally speaking, FPGAs consist of two types of logic blocks: fine-grained and coarse-grained. As shown in Figure 2.1, fine-grained logic blocks generally consist of several pairs of look-up tables (LUT) and flip-flops (FF) as well as dedicated carry chain logic (not shown) to aid in the efficient implementation of arithmetic units (e.g. adders, multipliers). LUTs are function generators that can be used to implement arbitrary logic functions of n-inputs and (generally) one output (where n is the number of inputs to the LUT). If a logic function is too large for a single LUT (i.e. the function has more inputs or outputs than available on the LUT), the FPGA architecture is flexible enough to allow multiple LUTs to be used together to implement the function. As shown in Figure 2.1, FFs are placed adjacent to LUT outputs to allow the FF to register LUT outputs with the least possible effect on the performance of the circuit.

As shown in Figure 2.1, FPGAs also contain coarse-grained logic blocks. Coarse-grained logic blocks are fixed implementations of commonly-used digital functions that have been integrated into the FPGA fabric. Since they implement fixed-functions, the underlying semi-conductor layout of coarse-grained logic blocks is smaller and achieves higher performance and lower power than an equivalent function implemented using fine-grained logic blocks. The most common ex-
Figure 2.1: An example of an island-style FPGA architecture.

Examples of digital functions implemented within coarse-grained logic blocks are on-chip memories (BRAM) and multiply-accumulate units (DSP). The use of coarse-grained logic blocks also provides a means for FPGA architects to integrate functionality (into the FPGA) that cannot be implemented using fined-grained logic blocks. Examples of these circuits include high-speed serial I/O (SERDES), analog-to-digital converters, and temperature and power monitoring circuits.
2.1.2 Register Transfer Level Design

Designers currently specify most FPGA applications using Register Transfer Level (RTL) languages. RTL design provides a relatively high abstraction level to perform detailed low-level hardware design. Essentially, RTL languages allow hardware engineers to easily define how registers and other memory elements are updated on each clock cycle. Further, RTL languages like Verilog and VHDL also allow hardware engineers to seamlessly switch between different design abstraction levels (i.e. structural and behavioral). Thus RTL provides the engineer with a great deal of control over the architecture of the design.

2.1.3 Application Development on FPGAs

As shown in Figure 2.3, the development of a working FPGA circuit from a set of application requirements can be broken down into three phases: RTL development, running the vendor tool flow, and on-chip execution. During RTL development, the developer codifies the application requirements into an RTL specification (written in Verilog or VHDL). The developer then simulates the RTL specification to determine whether the RTL specification meets the requirements. If the RTL does not meet the requirements, the developer reviews the simulation to identify any errors.
Figure 2.3: This is the standard approach for RTL-based development on FPGAs.

in the specification (bugs) and makes appropriate adjustments to the RTL. This process, known as debugging, is repeated until the RTL meets all of the application’s requirements. RTL simulation is generally the best point in the development process to debug the functional specification of an application because compilation times are relatively short and circuit visibility is high.

Once the developer has determined that the RTL specification is correct, the RTL is passed to the FPGA vendor’s tool flow. In general, a vendor tool flow consists of three phases: logic synthesis and technology mapping; placement and routing; and bitstream generation. These phases translate the RTL specification into a gate-level netlist, efficiently map it to the FPGA, and generate a configuration file (i.e. a bitstream). Rather than attempting to find the optimal mapping of an RTL specification to the FPGA (which is a computationally infeasible problem) the vendor’s CAD tools search the circuit design space for a mapping that will meet the application developer’s requirements. Even though the vendor’s tools do not attempt to achieve the optimal circuit tool
run-times can still be lengthy. For example, in commercial environments run-times of hours and days are not uncommon [19].

The final step in the RTL development process is to download and execute the application on the FPGA. This step is necessary to ensure that the design actually works on the device as specified. Errors found during in-circuit execution are difficult to fix due to the speed of execution and low observability of circuit signal values. This underscores the importance of catching as many errors in simulation as possible.

2.2 HLS Tool Flow and Development

This section describes the fundamental concepts of HLS that form the foundation of much of the discussion in this dissertation. The primary function of an HLS tool is to transform a circuit specification described using a high-level language (HLL), such as C++ or Java, and output an RTL design that can be mapped to an FPGA or ASIC circuit. Canonically speaking, this HLL-to-RTL transformation is accomplished in three separate phases: 1) Scheduling, 2) Binding, and 3) RTL generation. In addition, HLS tools also leverage a compiler front end that provides a parser and common compiler optimizations. Figure 2.4 is a block diagram that shows the most common ordering of the HLS phases. Note, however, that the ordering shown in Figure 2.4 is not strict and can be altered by the tool developer. For example, an HLS tool developer may find that circuit quality increases if binding is performed prior to scheduling. The remainder of this section discusses each of these phases in detail and ends with a discussion on FPGA application development using HLS.
2.2.1 Parsing/Compiler Optimizations

Just like a standard compiler, an HLS tool has a front end that parses the HLL into an intermediate representation (IR) upon which compiler passes can operate. The HLS tool will generally run several compiler passes on the IR. Each of these compiler passes applies a single optimization to the IR. In general, HLS tools leverage standard compiler optimization passes (e.g. constant propagation, function inlining, loop unrolling, etc.) that have been specifically tuned for HLS [20] [21]. In addition, HLS-specific optimization passes are also used (e.g. memory partitioning). In some cases, these optimizations are applied automatically, in others, the user must include a pragma within the source code that instructs the HLS tool apply the optimization. Either way, the powerful optimizations within HLS tools often result in high-performing and efficient circuits.

2.2.2 Scheduling

The next step is scheduling. Scheduling is the process of deciding when each operation will execute in time. The job of the scheduler is to assign each operation to a clock cycle in such a way that the dependencies of all operations are met (i.e. the inputs of an operation are computed prior to executing the operation). In most cases, the goal of the scheduler is to maximize the performance of the resulting circuit by scheduling operations in parallel and minimizing loop initiation intervals (i.e. the number of cycles between the start of successive loop iterations). However, the user may also choose to guide the scheduler towards other goals such as minimizing area at a specific performance point. The scheduler must also ensure that it is possible for subsequent passes to successfully meet user constraints. For example, if the user imposed a resource constraint that limited the number of multipliers to three then the scheduler would have to ensure that no more than 3 multiply operations were scheduled in the same clock cycle. If the scheduler were to exceed this limit, the binder would be unable to find a successful operation-resource binding (see next section).
2.2.3 Binding

Binding is the process of assigning each operation in the program to a functional unit (e.g. an ALU) that will execute the operation. Essentially, the binder’s job is to search the design space and find a set of operation-resource assignments that will meet the user’s area and performance constraints. Resource sharing is the binder’s primary mechanism for accomplishing this task. The binder uses area and performance estimates to determine whether the benefit of sharing a resource is greater than its cost. For example, sharing an add resource on an FPGA might not be a good idea because the multiplexers required to implement the sharing may be larger than the resource itself. However, it is certainly a good idea to share large functional units (e.g. integer divide, floating point add, etc.) because the overhead from sharing is much less than creating a new resource.

2.2.4 RTL Generation

The final step in the process is RTL generation. During RTL generation, the HLS tool uses the results of all prior steps and generates an RTL file that implements the specification contained in the original source code. The most common approach is to generate an RTL module for each function that still exists in the IR after all compiler optimizations have been applied. Each module will also contain a state machine (generated from the schedule) that orchestrates the operation of the design. In addition, the RTL generation process generates and instances any IP cores (e.g. floating point cores, type conversion cores) required by the HLS design. Further, it also generates the external interfaces (e.g. AXI, AVALON) specified by the user.

2.2.5 HLS Application Development

Developing an application with HLS is very similar to developing a software application. The developer begins by coding the application using the HLL required by the HLS tool. The developer then compiles, executes, and debugs the code on a standard workstation using standard software development tools. Once the code is functionally correct, the developer can then run the HLS tool. The HLS tool will then read in the code and generate an RTL design as well as a report on the estimated area and performance of the design (the actual results are not available until after place and route). If the developer is not satisfied with the area and performance estimates he
should begin the design exploration process. During design exploration the developer experiments with HLS tool directives until the HLS tool produces a circuit that meets the developer’s desired performance and/or area constraints.

Once a satisfactory circuit has been produced the developer then tests the generated RTL in simulation. Many HLS tools have a feature, known as co-simulation, that automatically transforms the user’s software test harness into an RTL test bench that verifies the generated RTL using the same test vectors that were used to verify the software [12] [22]. Once the RTL has been verified the developer then places the generated RTL within a larger RTL design. This RTL should also be simulated as much as possible to ensure that the HLS-generated circuit interacts appropriately with its surrounding environment. Finally, the whole design is passed to the FPGA vendor’s tool flow (as discussed in Section 2.1.3) and executed on the FPGA to ensure proper function.

2.3 Debugging Approaches on FPGAs

Even after an FPGA application has been thoroughly verified using simulation, it is not uncommon to discover new bugs after the application is running on the FPGA. Given an infinite amount of simulation time and a perfect test-bench guaranteed to properly exercise all parts of the circuit all bugs could be found during simulation thereby eliminating the need for in-circuit debug. However, test-benches are rarely perfect and it is generally not possible completely exercise the circuit. Goeders concurs with this analysis and adds that these types of bugs can arise from system-level interactions with the surrounding environment (e.g. I/O devices) or other modules in the system (e.g. other modules in the system) [8].

To find the cause of these bugs, developers are required to augment their applications with debugging circuitry that assists them in isolating and observing buggy circuit behavior. As shown in Figure 2.5, this additional circuitry, also known as a debugging instrument, is added into the FPGA along side the developer’s circuit. The debugging instrument is connected to the developer’s circuit via signal probes that allow the debugging instrument to capture signal values. A communications link between the developer’s workstation and the debugging instrument allows the developer to control and configure the debugging instrument as well as upload circuit state values captured by the debugging instrument. The remainder of this section provides a brief description of in-circuit debugging approaches and the circuitry used to implement them. The interested
reader is referred to Paul Graham’s dissertation [23] for a more detailed examination of in-circuit debugging approaches for FPGAs.

2.3.1 Trace-Based Debugging Approaches

Using trace-based debugging approaches developers are able to observe signal values without interfering with the operation of the circuit (i.e. without stopping the clock). This is accomplished using a debugging instrument known as an embedded logic analyzer (ELA). Instead of using configuration or scan-chain read-back, ELAs provide in-circuit observability by passively recording a history of signal values during run-time. This is accomplished by connecting signals to on-chip memories that implement trace buffers (usually BRAMs). During each clock-cycle the values of observed signals are recorded into the trace buffers. Trace buffers are implemented in a circular fashion in which the oldest values are overwritten by the newest values. In this way an n-length history of the most recent signal values can be found in the trace buffers at any point during execution. To inspect the content of the trace buffers the developer can manually signal the trace buffers (from the workstation) to ‘lock-in’ the current history. Alternatively, a trigger unit can be included in the debugging instrument that allows the developer to define an event (i.e. a
trigger) based on observed signal values that will automatically signal the trace buffers to lock-in their histories once the trigger has fired. Once the contents of the trace buffers have been locked-in they can be uploaded to the workstation for inspection by the developer.

The size of an ELA varies depending on the number of signals, length of history recorded, and the number of signals connected to the trigger unit. As one might expect, large ELAs can adversely affect circuit area and performance. Inserting a large ELA can also impact the circuit compilation times. However, Hung [24] and Keeley [25] have demonstrated that an ELA inserted into a design after place-and-route has lower impact on circuit performance than standard insertion techniques. Further, this technique allowed the debugging instrument to be built from unused FPGA resources and resulted in faster overall compilation times. Their techniques also allowed the subset of observed signals to be changed without having to recompile the entire design.

2.4 Current Approaches for Debugging High-Level Synthesis

Generally speaking, debugging functionality can be added to HLS-generated circuits before, during, or after HLS. The first approach, adding debugging functionality before HLS is the approach taken in this dissertation. In this approach, the circuit description (i.e. the C source code) that serves as input to the HLS tool is modified such that the HLS tool automatically integrates the debugging functionality into the source code. In the second approach, adding debugging functionality during HLS, the owners of the HLS tool modify the HLS tool itself to automatically integrate debugging instruments (e.g. trace buffers) into the RTL generated by the HLS tool. Additionally, the HLS tool is also modified to emit a debugging database that contains mappings between RTL signals and source-level variables/expressions that were not optimized away during synthesis. This approach has also been applied by third parties on open-source HLS tools such as LegUp [13] [9] [26] [27]. Finally, the third approach is to add debugging functionality after HLS. This approach can take several forms. For example, new RTL analysis and modification tools (e.g. Invio™ [28]) could be used to automatically modify the HLS-generated RTL. Alternatively, in-system debugging solutions could be added to the circuit at a later point to the post-synthesis or post-place and route netlist. Either way, this approach depends on the HLS tool to provide a debugging database that provides the mappings between the source-code and the RTL or requires
the user to develop an intimate understanding of the RTL code generated by the HLS tool. For the most part, HLS tools do not provide this information in a way that is accessible to an outside user.

2.4.1 Previous Work: Adding Debug Prior To High-Level Synthesis

Several previous efforts have investigated adding or specifying the addition of debugging functionality at the source level. Most of these previous efforts have been authored by the author of this dissertation and his graduate adviser and are the focus of this dissertation (see Preface for further discussion) [1] [2] [3]. Recently, Xilinx’s SDAccel became the first commercial HLS tool to support a limited form of in-system debug [17]. According to the user guide, SDAccel supports OpenCL’s printf function during software operation, simulation, and in-FPGA operation [17]. Printf debugging was likely adopted by Xilinx (in SDAccel) because it is a common approach for debugging software applications and familiar to the software engineers who are the target of the SDAccel platform. The Leap FPGA operating system also supports printf debugging [29]. The challenge with printf debugging is that the user is required to manually add the printf statements. In general, manually modifying code during debugging is a poor practice as it effectively creates new versions of the code (which have to be managed) as well as introducing the potential that the developer may inadvertently insert errors into the code.

Other efforts have also specified the inclusion of debugging functionality in the source code [30] [31] [32]. These efforts have focused on assertion-based debugging where ANSI C assertions, inserted manually by the user, are synthesized directly into hardware so they can be used to verify in-system correctness. Assertions are typically non-synthesizable constructs that monitor specific, designer-specified circuit properties during simulation. For example, an assertion can be specified to print a warning message if a bus transaction does not terminate in a specified number of clock cycles during simulation. Assertions are usually added to the source of a hardware description by the designer as a non-synthesizable construct (similar to a comment or pragma). By extending assertions so that they are synthesized along with the user circuit, they can be used in-system to verify circuit behavior.

The approach presented by Curreri et. al. [30] [31] used an automatic source-to-source transformation to convert the ANSI C assertions to a form supported by the HLS tool (Impulse C [33]). In-hardware assertion failure notification was sent through a top-level port added by the
transformation. Because it used a source-level transformation to create a top-level port, the work of Curreri et. al. [30] [31] is similar to the work presented in this dissertation. However, Curreri’s work focused solely on converting assertions to synthesizable code while this work allows any expression in the source code to be connected to a debug port. For example, in Curreri’s debug ports were only created for the Boolean result of the assertion and an assertion identifier. This dissertation, on the other hand, examines the impacts of adding top-level debug ports on almost all expressions in a wider variety of circumstances (i.e., not just for assertions).

2.4.2 Previous Work: Adding Debug Support into The HLS tool

The thrust of several academic research efforts has been to augment existing academic HLS tools with both simulation-based and in-system debugging capabilities. In the first of these efforts, Hemmert et. al. augmented the JHDL-based [34] Sea-Cucumber synthesizing compiler [35] to allow debugging during both simulation and in-circuit operation [36] [37]. Hemmert’s debugger was also the first to highlight the source lines of multiple instructions that were executing during the same clock cycles. This is a feature that has been duplicated by other HLS debugging solutions [26]. A truly unique feature developed by Hemmert was virtual sequentialization. In virtual sequentialization, instructions that were reordered during simulation were dynamically placed back in their original, source-level order. The goal of this feature was to improve the debugging experience for users who were debugging the optimized HLS circuits.

In another effort [38] [39] an HLS tool called RedPill was created for the Smalltalk programming language and included a source-level debugger. The debugging functionality presented in these works was nearly identical to techniques presented by Hemmert [36] [37].

Both Calagar [9] and Goeders [26] [27] introduced source-level debugging solutions for the LegUp HLS tool. Although the core of their debugging solutions closely mirrored Hemmert’s work, they did introduce some interesting new features of their own. For example, Calagar’s Inspect debugger [9] introduced a technique called dynamic discrepancy detection which automatically compared the internal state of the software with the internal state of an RTL simulation or FPGA hardware execution as they operated in lock-step. Any differences found were immediately reported to the user. This is a useful tool for identifying C-to-hardware translation bugs in the HLS tool. The recent works of Fezzardi et. al. [10] and Yang et. al [11] have also examined auto-
mated discrepancy detection. Goeder’s HLS-Scope Debugger [26] [27] featured a highly efficient trace-based debugging approach. In this approach, HLS-Scope analyzed the schedule of the HLS design and effectively scheduled when source-level variable values would be written to on-chip trace buffers. Using this approach, Goeders was able to significantly improve the amount of useful debugging information captured by on-chip trace buffers. Recently, Goeders has extended his work to include the ability to instrument multi-threaded HLS applications for debug [40].

Most commercial tools that have been augmented to support source-level debugging generally support only source-level debugging in software and/or simulation. For example, Vivado HLS currently only supports source-level debug during the software development phase. Other commercial HLS tools, on the other hand, such as Impulse-C, CyberWorkBench, and SDAccel all support source-level debugging during both software development and RTL simulation [41] [33] [17]. In other words, the user is presented with a GDB or Eclipse-like debugging environment even as the RTL design is executing in simulation. As previously mentioned, SDAccel does support printf-like debugging on the FPGA; however, printf debugging does not provide the same degree of visibility provided by GDB or Eclipse debugging sessions.

2.4.3 Previous Work: Adding Debug After High-Level Synthesis

Up to this point, no research has looked at instrumenting HLS circuits for debug after RTL generation. That being said, inserting a debugging instrument directly into the RTL source code or resulting netlist is currently standard practice during RTL development. For example, commercial tools such as Chipscope [42] and SignalTap [43] have been specifically developed for this purpose. While it is possible to use these tools to debug HLS-generated circuits, the instrumentation process can be difficult because the user must understand the structure of the generated RTL and the mappings between RTL signals and the original source code (which are not always provided by the HLS tool). Further, it has been shown that an HLS-generated-circuit can be traced more efficiently if the schedule of the HLS circuit is taken into account when generating the debugging instrument [27].

Non-HLS related research has also examined inserting debugging instruments after technology mapping and place and route. For example, Hung et. al analyzed the benefits of inserting debugging instruments at different points in the RTL design flow [24] [44] and found that
debug-instrumented designs achieved greater performance when the debugging instrumentation was added after place and route. The work of Keeley and Hutchings confirmed Hung’s result and demonstrated that trigger logic could also be quickly inserted after place and route (which was not demonstrated by Hung) [25].

2.4.4 Previous Work: Source-To-Source Compilation and High-Level Synthesis

Many previous efforts have reported on the use of source-to-source compilation techniques. In general, source-to-source compilation approaches can be applied to many tools and languages. The Rose compiler framework, that is used in this work, for example, supports C, C++, Fortran, and OpenMP [45]. These include projects both related-to and not-related to HLS. A complete list of source-to-source compilation projects not related to HLS is beyond the scope of this dissertation, however, the following citations are a sampling of some of the papers listed on the Rose compiler framework website [46] [47] [48] [49] [50]. Source-to-source compilers have also been developed for GPGPUs that can accept code written in ’C’ and that emit CUDA [51]. FPGA-related efforts also include CUDA-to-FPGA efforts [52], transforming assertions for debug [30], and allowing HLS to efficiently compile code with dynamic memory allocation [53]. In addition, the Hercules HLS tool employed source-to-source transformations to transform input source constructs so that they were more amenable to the HLS tool [54].

2.5 Source-to-Source Transformations

This dissertation examines the use of source-to-source compilation techniques as a means for instrumenting HLS circuits for debug. Therefore, it is important that the reader have a basic understanding of the source-to-source compilation process. This section provides an introduction to source-to-source compilation and describes important concepts in source-to-source compilation relevant to the topics covered in this dissertation. Readers that have prior experience with source-to-source compilation conceptions should skip this section and proceed to Chapter 3.
2.5.1 Source-to-Source Compilation

Source-to-source compilation is the process of analyzing a piece of source code (written in any programming language), modifying it, and producing a source file as output. The resulting source code can then be passed to a standard compiler which produces the executable version of the program. Source-to-source compilation has several important applications. For example, source-to-source compilation can be used to translate code written in one language to another [55]. This allows an application written in one language to be reused in a different context that requires another language. Other examples of uses of source-to-source compilation is restructuring for improving parallel computing [51], source code refactoring [56], and improving program security [57].

A source-to-source compiler works by parsing the input source code into an intermediate representation (IR), modifying the IR, and ’unparsing’ or translating the modified IR into source code format and writing it out into a new file. Assume, for example, that a source-to-source compiler translates programs written in C++ to Java. In this case, the source-to-source compiler would first parse the C++ file into an IR. Then, the compiler would scan the IR and replace all C++ specific elements with Java elements. For example, the compiler would need to replace calls to printf with calls to system.out.println, replace pointers with references, and add main() to a java class as a static method. Once this process is complete, the IR would be written out as pure Java code which could then be passed to the Java compiler.

2.5.2 Intermediate Representation

A common form of IR used by source-to-source compilers are Abstract Syntax Trees (AST). ASTs are commonly used because they represent programs in a form that closely mirrors the structure of the original source code. In other words, the individual nodes of the AST which represent program elements (expressions, loops, statements, functions, etc.), readily map to specific lines and columns of source code. Therefore, when the AST is unparsed the unmodified portions of the transformed source code retain the same variable and function names and are often formatted in the same way as the original source code. This simplifies the debugging of transformations as it results in more readable and familiar code. Further, the use of the AST allows
transformations to be written in terms of source code elements that will be added, inserted, or removed from the program rather than in assembly code-like instructions.

2.5.3 Modifying the AST

The source-to-source compiler generates the output source code based on the structure of the AST. Therefore to modify the code or in other words, apply a transformation, the structure of the AST must be modified. This is done by adding, removing, replacing, or inserting nodes into the AST. Another important part of a source-to-source transformation is finding the appropriate places within the AST at which to apply the transformation. This can be accomplished by analyzing the AST using a standard tree traversal method (e.g. pre-order, post-order) and running an analysis function on specific node types to determine whether a transformation should be applied. For example, consider a strength reduction transformation that converts all power-of-two multiplies and divides to left and right shift operations. A source-to-source compiler would carry out this transformation by traversing the AST to determine which multiply and divide are candidates for the transformation. The strength reduction transformation is then performed on all suitable candidates once the AST traversal is complete.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter was included to familiarize the reader with fundamental concepts and prior research related to this dissertation. Specifically, this chapter introduced the reader to FPGA architecture and explained RTL and HLS development flows in detail. It also described trace-based in-circuit debugging approaches for FPGAs. Then this chapter explored existing approaches for instrumenting HLS designs for on-chip debug. These approaches were examined according to the point in the tool flow which they instrumented the circuit, that is, before, during or after HLS. It was found that most prior approaches were implemented by modifying the HLS tool to instrument the design during HLS. Source-to-source transformations were identified as a method for instrumenting a design for debug prior to running the HLS tool. Foundational concepts related to source-to-source transformations were also described.
CHAPTER 3. DEBUG PORT TRANSFORMATION AND FEASIBILITY

In general, debugging instruments are inserted at the RTL or post-synthesis netlist level and require the developer to select a subset of design signals to connect to the debugging instrument for monitoring and recording. In most cases, the developer is very familiar with the structure of the RTL, so selecting the appropriate signals to connect to the debugging instrument is fairly straight-forward. Even after logic synthesis, which often alters signal names, a developer is usually still able to identify the signals he desires to observe. Instrumenting HLS circuits for debug, however, presents a challenge because the developer is usually not familiar with the HLS-generated RTL code. In fact, the basic premise of HLS is that the developer should not even see the RTL and certainly should not be familiar with it. Therefore, when in-circuit debugging on an HLS circuit is required, a developer must first undertake the time-consuming and error-prone task of understanding the generated RTL code before he can undertake the task of instrumenting it for debug.

This chapter introduces a source-to-source transformation that simplifies the instrumentation process inserting debug ports into the source code (which the HLS tool then translates into the RTL) that expose the results of internal source-level expressions to the developer. This removes the need for developers to become familiar with the generated hardware. As shown in Figure 3.1, this allows the developer to select familiar expressions in the source-code and easily connect them to a debugging instrument (such as an ELA) for in-circuit observation. The transformation accomplishes this by modifying the source-code (prior to HLS) to add top-level debug ports through which the results of selected expressions are written.

Once the debug port transformation has been described, the remainder of the chapter presents the results of a large series of experiments designed to test the feasibility of the transformation. The feasibility of the transformation is in question because the transformation essentially preserves the selected expressions from being “optimized out” of the circuit. This action may lead
3.1 Instrumenting Expressions for Debug In Vivado HLS

This section describes how the source code of a Vivado HLS design is transformed to instrument expressions with debug ports that allow the results of the instrumented expressions to be observed during simulation and in-circuit operation. The transformation itself is applied by modifying the AST of the source code from within an automated source-to-source compiler. After the transformation is applied, the transformed source code is passed to Vivado HLS which
generates RTL instrumented with the debug ports. The source-to-source compiler also generates a debug database that identifies the correspondence between the debug ports and the source code. Therefore, once the design has been instrumented by the source-to-source compiler a software tool could automate the process of connecting the debugging instrument using the debug database (this software tool was not created by this dissertation); alternatively, the developer could utilize the database and easily perform these tasks himself.

3.1.1 Instrumenting an Expression

In order to instrument a given expression with a debug port, the transformation needs to modify the developer’s source code to 1) add a debug port and 2) cause the result of the expression to be written to the debug port. Listing 3.1 presents an example of how these tasks are accomplished in Vivado HLS. In Listing 3.1, the original code is shown in lines 1-4 and the transformed code is shown in lines 5-10. The debug port is added to the design by defining a global variable (line 6) and inserting an interface pragma (line 8) that directs Vivado HLS to implement the global variable as a top-level port. The value of the target expression, a * b (line 3), is then written to the debug port by inserting an assignment to the global variable as shown on line 9. It should be noted that the syntax required for adding a port often differs between HLS tools but the two-step process (adding a port and writing to the port) is portable between HLS tools.

LISTINGS 3.1: Instrumentation Example

```c
1  // original
2  int mult(int a, int b){
3      return (a * b);
4  }
5  // eop from global
6  volatile int dbgPort;
7  int mult(int a, int b){
8    #pragma HLS interface port=dbgPort
9      return dbgPort = (a * b);
10  }
```
It is important to ensure that the transformation is applied in a way in which it does not modify the original behavior of the program. In general, adding variable declarations and pragmas to source code will not affect the behavior of the resulting circuit. However, it takes some care to ensure that instrumenting the source to write out expression results does not affect program behavior. This can be shown by examining the transformation as it is applied to the AST representation of the program. In an AST an expression can be represented as a single node or a subtree of nodes. For example, in Figure 3.2, the nodes labeled A and B represent variable reference expressions. An expression subtree is formed by the multiply node (labeled X) and its children (labeled A and B). Whether an expression is represented by a subtree or by a single node in the AST, the result of an expression is always passed from the node representing the expression to its parent. Thus, a debug port write can be created by inserting an assignment node between the target expression and its parent (e.g., connecting a top-level port to an assignment from an expression) without changing the original behavior of the program. This works because, in C, the result of an assignment is always the assigned value or right-hand-side node.

One of the benefits of this transformation is that it can be used to ensure (in most cases) that an expression is preserved through the HLS optimization process. In some cases, however, simply instrumenting an expression with a debug port is not enough to ensure that all instances of the target expression are preserved into the final circuit. For example, target expressions within an unrolled loop may be optimized to create a tree structure that results in efficient hardware. In these
cases, only the final instance of the debug port write is preserved. This can be problematic if the developer needs to observe the result of the target expression on each iteration of the loop. If such optimization is undesirable, it can be prevented by adding the volatile modifier to the declaration of the debug port as shown in Listing 3.1 on line 6.

3.1.2 Implementation in a Source-to-Source Compiler

In order to demonstrate feasibility, the debug port transformation was automated within a source-to-source compiler built on top of the Rose compiler infrastructure [45]. The Rose compiler infrastructure is a C++ library that encapsulates much of the functionality needed for source-to-source transformations. Rose was developed by researchers at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories (LLNL) and has been used to support in a variety of research projects [47] [46] [48]. Similar to other widely-used open-source compiler frameworks, such as LLVM, Rose supports several input languages including C, C++, Python, Java, Fortran, and OpenMP [45]. However, the transformations described in this dissertation only support C code. Additionally, Rose provides an extensive API as well as implementations of many commonly used analyses’ and transformations.

Under the Rose framework, source-to-source transformations are made on an Abstract Syntax Tree (AST) representation of the program not the actual source text. A typical source-to-source compiler built on top of Rose operates in three phases as shown in Figure 3.3. First, the input source code is parsed into an AST (see Section 2.5.2). Second, analyses and transformations are applied to the AST. Finally, the modified AST undergoes an unparsing process that creates the transformed source file.

Figure 3.3: The structure of a Rose-based source-to-source compiler.
3.1.3 Using the Source-to-Source Compiler

In order to use the source-to-source compiler the developer must select a subset of design expressions to instrument for debug. The source-to-source compiler has a limited set of built-in compiler passes that automatically select different groups of expressions (e.g. all expressions, assignment expressions only) to instrument. Alternatively, the developer can specify expressions in an XML file. The source-to-source compiler has been architected in a modular fashion (as will be discussed in Section 5.2) which makes integrating new expression selection passes a relatively easy task. In most cases, the developer is likely to instrument a small subset of expressions with debug ports. This use case would be best served by integrating the selection of expressions into the development IDE and have the IDE orchestrate the operation of the source-to-source compiler transparently to the developer.

After adding the debug ports using the source-to-source compiler and passing the transformed source through the HLS tool, the developer is then presented with an RTL module instrumented with debug ports. At this point, a debugging instrument can be instanced in the RTL and connected to the debug ports via intermediate RTL signals. However, it should be noted that each debug port is also equipped with a data valid signal that indicates that the corresponding expression has been executed and the latest result is valid and presented on the debug port. The data valid signal along with the HLS-generated schedule can be used to generate a memory efficient debugging instrument via the techniques presented by Monson [58] and Goeders [27]. In some cases, a designer may desire to connect a debugging instrument to the design at the netlist level. In these cases, the debugging ports are left unconnected during logic synthesis and may be optimized away. In order to ensure that the debug ports are still available in the netlist the developer should apply the synthesis “keep constraint” in the design constraint file [59]. This ensures that the synthesis process does not accidentally remove the debug ports before they can be connected to the debugging instrument in the netlist.

3.2 Feasibility of the Debug Port Transformation

The primary challenge of using the debug port transformation is the potential for the transformation to interfere with optimizations performed by the HLS tool. Expression balancing, for
example, is a common optimization performed by HLS. In this optimization, the HLS tool uses mathematical properties to restructure expressions to exploit more parallelism and reduce the number of operations required to compute the result. However, inserting a debug port on an expression forces the HLS tool to compute the result of the expression as it appears in the source code and may prevent the HLS tool from performing the optimization. As might be expected, interfering with HLS optimizations often results in observable increases in circuit size, minimum clock period, and latency. However, interfering with circuit optimization is not limited to debugging solutions for HLS designs only. Similar effects are also observed when instrumenting standard RTL designs for debug. However, instrumenting HLS designs at the source level interferes with both HLS optimization and RTL optimization.

Ideally, FPGA debugging solutions will incur as little overhead as possible. In general, low-overhead debugging solutions require the least amount of effort from developers since they require the developer to make few, if any, changes to the FPGA circuit or its environment. When the increases in circuit properties (area, clock period, latency, etc.) introduced by a debugging solution are too large developers are often forced to exert extra effort into activities such as moving the circuit to a larger device, adjusting the clock rate, and/or modifying the circuit to allow it to meet timing (when the clock rate cannot be adjusted). These efforts can be time-consuming and may even prevent the symptoms of the bug from manifesting. Therefore, developers prefer debugging solutions that modify the circuit as little as possible.

In most cases, the only extra circuitry added by the HLS tool to implement the debug port is a wire and (maybe) a little extra logic to implement a data valid signal. However, the debug port transformation modifies the source code prior to it being processed by the HLS tool. This has been observed to alter the way in which some HLS optimizations are applied, which, in some cases, results in a larger and/or slower HLS circuit. In some cases, the inserted debug ports can also affect the schedule of the circuit. For example, when a control flow optimization is affected (e.g. if-conversion) the control flow structure of the intermediate representation from which the RTL is generated may be altered thereby changing the schedule. In addition, the debug port transformation guarantees that an expression will not be optimized out of the final circuit. This may result in a greater number of operations in the resulting circuit which may make the circuit larger and/or add additional clock cycles to the schedule. The HLS tool may also create more than one instance of
an instrumented expression in hardware. This forces the HLS tool to add multiplexers in order to allow each copy of the instrumented expression to be connected to the debug port.

This section examines the results of two large groups of experiments that attempt to determine whether the proposed source-to-source approach for inserting debug ports is feasible. In other words, these experiments attempt to determine if the overhead incurred by the source-to-source approach is low enough to allow it to be used in real-world debugging scenarios. These experiments emulate two types of real world debugging scenarios. The first scenario examined by our experiments is one in which a developer selects one or a very few numbers of signals (expressions) to connect to a debugging instrument. This is accomplished by instrumenting a single expression in each test article and measuring changes in the area (LUTs and FFs), simulation latency, and clock period overhead. For purposes of clarity, the simulation latency is the number of clock cycles required to run the benchmark in co-simulation using the built-in test-vectors. The test vectors are used in software and simulation only and are not compiled into the hardware. The second debugging scenario is one in which large numbers of expressions are instrumented to provide maximum observability. A developer may wish to apply such an approach if for no other reason than to avoid rebuilding the design each time he desires to change the expressions he is observing.

3.2.1 Feasibility Experiments

The experiments described in this section are grouped into two types: single-port and multi-port. The single-port experiment examines the debugging scenario in which small numbers of expressions are instrumented for debug. This scenario is emulated in the single-port experiments by instrumenting individual expressions in isolation. For example, if a benchmark contained 10 expressions, the first experiment would consist of the benchmark instrumented with only the first expression, the next experiment would consist of the benchmark instrumented with only the second expression, and so forth. Each C-file is instrumented to contain a single debug port that is connected to a single expression. Therefore, each instrumented C-file contains a single debug port and there are as many instrumented C-files as there are expressions that can be instrumented. For example, if a CHStone benchmark C-file contains 10 expressions, 10 different instrumented C-files are generated. Each of these files is synthesized, placed, and routed and analyzed with regard to increases in area, clock-period, and latency.
The second group of experiments, multi-port, seeks to determine the impact of simultaneously instrumenting multiple assignment expressions in each benchmark. The multi-port experiment for each benchmark starts out with the original uninstrumented C file and then incrementally instruments assignment expressions, one at a time, until the final instrumented file contains instrumentations that connect all assignment expressions to debug ports. For example, if a CHStone benchmark file contains 10 assignment expressions, 10 different instrumented C-files are generated. The first instrumented C-file will contain a single debug port wired to a single expression. The next instrumented C-file will contain two debug ports, each wired to a different expression. The final instrumented file in the series will contain 10 debug ports, each wired to 1 of the 10 expressions.

As will be shown in the experimental data, the results from the single-port experiments are used to determine the order of instrumentation for the multi-port experiments. This is done by sorting the expressions found in the single port benchmarks in increasing order according to LUT overhead. This sorting determines the order of instrumentation for the multi-port experiments: low-impact expressions are instrumented first; higher-impact expressions are instrumented later. This approach makes it possible to verify the correctness of the multi-port experiments by comparing the relative increases/decreases in area, clock-rate, and latency shown by the single-port experiments to those increases/decreases that occur in the multi-port experiments.

**Experimental Procedure**

All experiments in both groups followed the same general procedure shown in Figure 3.4. Each experiment is configured with an input C file and a set of expressions to instrument. Scripts were created to generate the sets of expressions for individual experiments. However, in the future,
expression selection could be made more user-friendly by integrating it into the user’s IDE and allowing for more intuitive selection criteria: type of expression, area of interest, etc. The input C file for each experiment is instrumented and the resulting C code is then executed in software to ensure the instrumentation does not modify the original program behavior (the benchmarks are self-checking). Next, the C code is synthesized into RTL using Vivado HLS. The resulting RTL is then run through the Vivado HLS co-simulation flow. This is done to ensure correctness and measure the execution latency of the generated RTL. Finally, the Vivado out-of-context implementation flow is invoked by exporting the RTL from Vivado HLS with the evaluate VHDL option checked. In out-of-context mode, Vivado synthesizes, places, and routes the design in isolation (not connected to other modules or I/O) while preserving all of the module’s ports to ensure that essential logic is not optimized out. The Vivado and Vivado HLS 2014.1 tools were used for all experiments and configured to use a Xilinx Zynq XC7Z020-CLG484-1 device, chosen because it was large enough that all experiments fit into less than 50% of the chip.

**Benchmarks**

The experiments presented in this paper employed 9 of the 12 CHStone benchmarks [60]. The CHStone benchmarks were introduced by Hara et. al. in 2008 [60] and are widely used in the HLS research community. The benchmarks in CHStone implement common encryption, compression, and floating point algorithms. The CHStone benchmarks are self-checking and contain built-in test vectors defined as global variables. To prevent large portions of the CHStone benchmarks from being optimized away, the source code for each benchmark had to be modified to so that Vivado HLS interpreted the global variables corresponding to the test vectors as top-level ports. This was accomplished by adding Vivado HLS pragmas and new function parameters into the HLS circuit descriptions. These changes were carefully made and the benchmarks were compiled and executed to ensure that they still executed properly. Three of the CHStone benchmarks (mips, motion, and gsm) could not be synthesized by Vivado HLS because they contained double pointers (motion, gsm) or the computation was contained in `main` (mips, Vivado HLS does not compile code contained in `main`) [12]).

To provide context for the results of the feasibility experiments, Table 3.1 presents the area (LUTs and FFs) and LUT utilization of the uninstrumented (i.e., no debug ports added) CHStone
benchmarks as compiled on the Xilinx Zynq XC7Z020-CLG484-1 (has 53,200 LUTs available). As shown by Table 3.1, all but one of the benchmarks was set to an easily achievable (and Vivado HLS default) clock constraint of 10 ns (see Easy Clk. Constraint column in Table 3.1). The clock constraint of the jpeg benchmark was increased to 12 ns after the initial run of the Single Ports experiments (discussed in Section 3.2.2) failed to achieve the timing constraint. After increasing the clock constraint to 12 ns all but one of the jpeg test articles achieved the specified timing constraint. The one test article that did fail only missed the timing constraint by .2 ns.

To support the discussion in Section 3.2.2, a harder-to-achieve clock constraint (Hard Clk. Constraint) is presented in Table 3.1. This clock constraint was determined by successively tightening the clock constraint (in Vivado only, not Vivado HLS) of each benchmark (in increments of .25 ns) until the FPGA place-and-route tools (Vivado) were no longer able to achieve timing closure.

**Restricted and Un-Instrumented Expressions**

These experiments attempted to instrument as many expressions as possible. However, some expressions were not instrumented because they provide no debugging value or because they caused the HLS tool to fail: constant-valued literals; calls to void functions; aggregate array initializers; pointers; non-synthesizable functions (e.g. printf); expressions that return a storage location (e.g. dereferenced-pointer on left-hand-side of assignment); and intermediate expressions gener-
ated by the compiler (e.g. implicit cast). Vivado HLS generates an error if it detects an assignment from many of the above mentioned items. Also, printf statements were not instrumented because all other expressions in a program are instrumented; any expression printed by the printf statement could be recreated from the other instrumented expressions. However, the printed results from printf statements may still have utility. Such statements may be instrumented using the approach described here by locating all of the expressions in the printf and instrumenting them so that they attach to top-level debug ports. At a later point in this dissertation a transformation is presented that allows pointer values (addresses) to be indirectly written to debug ports.

3.2.2 Single-Port Experiments

For the single-port experiments, all possible expressions are instrumented, one expression at a time. Each instrumented file contains a single instrumented expression and a single debug port. Over the course of the single-port experiments, 7,228 different experiments (C-files) were created as there were 7,228 expressions found across the 9 CHStone benchmarks used in this study. Each of these experiments successfully completed the experimental procedure described in Section 3.2.1. All instrumented ports survived synthesis, place and route, with the exception of some expressions that were deemed as “dead-code” by the synthesis process. Dead code refers to regions of code that are eliminated because the compiler can statically determine that they will not be executed at run-time or because these sections of code become empty due to the optimization process. Ports eliminated due to dead code are discussed in more detail later in this dissertation. In addition, with only one exception (missed by 0.2ns), each instrumented file also met its specified timing constraint.

Summary of Results

This section presents the results of the single port experiments in terms of increases in area and decreases in performance. The results show that, in most cases, the impact of instrumenting a single debug port is small – 2-3% increases in area were observed (on average). For the average-sized circuit, this amounts to LUT increases of 149-224 LUTs and FF increases of 99-148. For the largest circuit (jpeg), these numbers increased to 454-682 for LUTs and 209-313 for FFs. The
absolute worst case impact of a single debug port was 1086 LUTs (dfsin) and 970 FFs (blowfish). Performance metrics were largely unaffected. Further, high percentages of the experimental results were close to the 2-3% average previously reported. This indicates that when a small subset of expressions is instrumented with debug ports the overhead resulting from instrumentation is likely to be small. Results, however, can vary widely from experiment-to-experiment with some experiments resulting in circuit improvements and others resulting in significant increases in area and decreases in performance.

Analytical Method

The analysis presented in this section attempts to characterize the distribution of the experimental results using statistical measures such as minimum (MIN), maximum (MAX), mean, and standard deviation. In general, these measures are used to show that even though the extremes (i.e. MIN and MAX) of the experimental results can be large; the average or mean impact is often very small. The standard deviation, which is a measure used to characterize the spread of a distribution, is then used to show that high percentages of the experimental results reside close to the mean. This, in turn, indicates that the impact of high percentages of the experiments was very small (within 1 standard deviation).

To illustrate the analytical method, Figure 3.5 shows the distribution of LUT increases and decreases resulting from instrumenting all 324 valid expressions in the dfmul benchmark one-at-a-time. All data presented in Figure 3.5 (and in this chapter) is presented relative to the uninstrumented version of the benchmark circuit (i.e. the original benchmark without applying source-to-source transformations). For example, the bin at 0% on the x-axis tallies experiments that resulted in no change (or a very small change) from the uninstrumented benchmark circuit. Bins to the right of zero tally experiments that resulted in decreases while bins to left tally experiments that resulted in increases. The mean, denoted by the dashed red line, shows an average increase of .4% among all experiments. The dashed green lines mark the locations of standard deviations relative to the mean. In the distribution shown in Figure 3.5, 80.5% of experiments fell within one standard deviation of the mean. This means that 80.5% of the time a randomly instrumented expression will result in a change in LUT usage (an increase or decrease) between -1.4% and 2.2% (the mean +/- the standard deviation). The second standard deviation enclosed an additional 12.5% of the
experiments (92.5% of all experiments were within two standard deviations of the mean). These experiments (that is the 12.5% between the first and second standard deviations) will have LUT usage impacts between -3.2% and -1.4% and 2.2% and 4.0%. The other 7.5% of all experiments fall outside the second standard deviation and result in higher impacts but represent a small percentage of the overall experiments.

Results

Table 3.2 summarizes circuit impacts, relative to the uninstrumented benchmarks, that are caused by adding debug ports, one at a time, and reports these results according to minimum and maximum impact, mean, and standard deviation. Resource impacts are categorized according to resource-type, e.g., LUT or FF. Performance impacts are listed as either clock-period or simulation latency. Negative values indicate that the addition of a debug port resulted in an improvement (reduction in LUT/FF count, clock period, latency) while positive values indicate the opposite. In Table 3.2, the results are grouped by benchmark and expression type.
Table 3.2: Single Port Experiment Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expr. Group</th>
<th>LUT min</th>
<th>LUT max</th>
<th>LUT mean</th>
<th>LUT std.</th>
<th>FF min</th>
<th>FF max</th>
<th>FF mean</th>
<th>FF std.</th>
<th>Min. Clock Period min</th>
<th>Min. Clock Period max</th>
<th>Min. Clock Period mean</th>
<th>Min. Clock Period std.</th>
<th>Simulation Latency min</th>
<th>Simulation Latency max</th>
<th>Simulation Latency mean</th>
<th>Simulation Latency std.</th>
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<td>1.1%</td>
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<td>-2.5%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>-0.2%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>-1.8%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>-7.0%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>-2.4%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>-1.2%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jpeg</td>
<td>-5.0%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>-0.7%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>-3.2%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>-5.3%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>-0.0%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>-0.4%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sha</td>
<td>-3.3%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>-0.4%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>-7.9%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>-3.6%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>-4.7%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>-3.3%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>-6.1%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>-0.6%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>-3.5%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Result Analysis by Expression Type

To track potential impact by type of expression, expressions are categorized according to these groups:

- State Modification(=,+-,++,+=, etc.)
- Relational/Logical(<,=,||, etc.)
- Control Flow(functions,?:, comma operator)
- Reference([],->, variable reference, cast)
- Arithmetic (+,-,*,/, %, etc.)
- Bit-Wise (&, |, ^, etc.)

In this series of experiments no clear trends, relative to expression-type are discernible. Expressions of type State Mod., Ref., and Bit-Wise, appear to impact LUT and FF usage more than the other types of expressions when the min and max columns are observed. However, these trends do not appear to translate to Min. Clock Period or Simulation Latency nor does there seem to be discernible trends for the mean or standard deviation for the LUT column. These same expression types appear to show some differentiation in the standard deviation column for FF (2.4, 2.3, 3.1 versus 2.0, 0.5, 1.1) but the differentiation is not strong. State modification and variable reference expressions had similar impacts across both area and performance. This demonstrates that instrumenting a reference to a variable has a similar impact as instrumenting the last assignment that changed its value. Thus, when instrumenting source code it likely does not matter whether the assignment or a later reference is instrumented.

Result Analysis by Benchmark

With the exception of blowfish, the relative increase or decrease in resource usage and circuit performance was relatively small, usually with extremes (i.e. MIN and MAX) no more than about 15% in either direction. Further, the means associated with the experimental results were also small – generally less than 1% on average. As shown in Table 3.2, the average impact of one
debug port on each metric (LUTs, FFs, Min. Clock Period, and Simulation Latency) was also small – less than 1% in most cases. Experimental results also show that 60-90% of experimental results fell within one standard deviation of their respective means. The average standard deviations were always less than 2%. Most individual standard deviations were less than 3%. Thus, with low means and low standard deviations we can conclude that between 60 to 90% of debug ports (depending on the benchmark) can be instrumented at a cost of 1-4% percent (avg. 77-307 LUTs, 49-198 FFs) or 2-3% on average.

Considering blowfish specifically, nearly all of the area increase for blowfish occurred in the main encryption data path that consists of interleaved XOR, AND, and ADD operations. LUT and FF overhead increased from 1% to 14% (45 to 617 LUTs) and 1% to 25% (39 to 970 FFs) as instrumentation progressed through this region in blowfish. One potential explanation for the excessive increases in this region is that the debug ports are interfering with the CAD tool’s efficient packing of logic operations (i.e. AND, XOR, ADDs) into LUTs. Another factor that is certainly contributing to the increases is that Vivado HLS instances two copies of this particular region. Since each instance of the instrumented expression writes to the same debug port additional multiplexing logic must be added. This multiplexing logic will be described in more detail in Section 3.2.2.

Impacts on latency were nearly nonexistent for these single-port experiments: only 3.7% of experiments impacted latency (including the general outlier, blowfish). Even fewer experiments experienced increases (or decreases) in BRAM or DSP usage. However, note that dfadd experienced a substantial impact with regards to latency. In particular, this latency overhead appears large primarily because the original latency is very short (12 cycles); thus even a one cycle increase in latency results in an 8% increase.

**Clock Period and CAD Tool Variation**

During the single-port experiments all benchmarks were compiled using a clock-constraint that was easily attained during place and route. However, the experimental data exhibit a nearly normal distribution for clock period that indicates that an increase in clock period was just as likely as a decrease in clock period when instrumenting a single expression. This result initially seemed strange and suggested a hypothesis that CAD-tool variation is occurring in the presence
of an easy timing constraint, and that CAD-tool variation was impacting the clock-period as much as the instrumentation process. To test this hypothesis, 10% of the previously synthesized circuits were selected and placed and routed with a more difficult to achieve timing constraint. As shown in Figure 3.6, for all experiments employing the original easier timing constraint, the maximum reduction in clock period was 8.4% and the maximum increase in clock period was 7.6%. For the more difficult timing constraint, the maximum reduction in clock period was 6.5% and the maximum increase in clock period was 12%. The standard deviation was 2.8% in both cases. The experimental data for the easier timing constraint at one standard deviation (68.2% of all experiments) ranged from a 3.0% decrease in clock period (-0.2% mean) and a 2.6% increase in clock period. Contrast this with the harder timing constraint where the mean shifts toward an increase in clock period. In this case, the maximum reduction in clock period is 1.1% while the maximum increase in clock period is 4.5%. Thus it seems clear that the CAD tool variation was impacting clock period nearly as much as the instrumentation process. The experimental data for the harder clock constraint reduced the role of CAD tool variation so that the impact due to instrumentation is more pronounced, i.e., an increase of clock period is more likely when instrumenting an expression. Even so, there is still a small possibility that instrumenting an expression may reduce the clock period by a small amount. The distributions from these experiments are shown in Figure 3.6.

Figure 3.6: Hard Clock Constraint Shifts Mean
Table 3.3: Effect of Single Port Experiments on Performance and Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Easy Clk.</th>
<th>Hard Clk.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imp. Area, Imp. Perf.</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imp. Area, Deg. Perf.</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deg. Area, Imp. Perf.</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deg. Area, Deg. Perf.</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Improvement in Quality of Results from Instrumentation**

One of the oddities of the results in Table 3.2 is the frequency with which debug port instrumentation improves individual area and performance metrics. Generally speaking, a developer does not expect to see a reduction in circuit size after adding circuitry. One possible explanation of such behavior is that the HLS and FPGA CAD tools are exchanging area for performance or vice-versa. This has the potential to cause the area and performance metrics to trend in different directions. For example, instrumentation may cause the FPGA CAD tool to perform less register duplication, which lowers the FF count but may increase the minimum clock period of the circuit. By itself, the lower FF count could be seen as an improvement to the quality of the circuit. However, when viewed along with the increase in minimum clock period the reduction in FF usage may not be viewed as an improvement.

To determine the overall impact of the debug port transformation the single port experiments were re-examined and classified as to whether they improved or degraded the area and performance of the circuit. The results of this examination are found in Table 3.3. For the purposes of Table 3.3, area is calculated as the sum of LUTs and FFs. An experiment is considered to have “improved” area if the sum of LUTs and FFs in the experiment is less than the sum of LUTs and FFs in the uninstrumented benchmark. Again, for the purposes of Table 3.3, performance is calculated according to execution time (the product of latency and minimum clock period). Performance is considered to have improved if the execution time of the experiment is less than the execution time of the uninstrumented benchmark.

The first column of Table 3.3 considers all of the single port experiments. As shown in Table 3.3, nearly 25% of all experiments have the effect of improving both area and performance compared to 44% that improved one or the other and 31% that degraded both. In other words the developer has a one-in-four chance of improving performance by inserting a debug port. This
makes sense considering that latency is largely unaffected and CAD tool variation appears to ensure that 50% (or more) of experiments see an improvement in clock rate. Therefore, the experiments that improve both area and performance could simply be the intersection of experiments in which area improved and clock period randomly improved by CAD tool variation.

To control the effect of CAD tool variation, the Easy and Hard Clk. experiments from Section 3.2.2 are also included as the second and third columns of Table 3.3. Recall that the “Easy Clk.” experiments are simply a randomly selected 10% subset of the single port experiments. Accordingly, the Easy Clk. data closely mirrors the data in the first column. The Hard Clk. data consists of the results of the same subset of experiments from the Easy Clk experiment except they were constrained with a much tighter clock constraint (as described in Section 3.2.2). The effect of CAD tool variation on the experiments can be clearly seen in the 14% drop in experiments that improve both area and performance almost all of which appears to have shifted to the improve area, degrade performance category. A similar shift was seen in the other categories suggesting that the CAD tool variation hypothesis was responsible for a certain portion of experiments that improve both area and performance.

However, it is clear that in a small percentage of experiments the circuit was improved because the insertion of the debug port allowed the HLS tool to more efficiently optimize the circuit. For example, in one experiment the adpcm benchmark was improved when the insertion of a debug port cause the tool to make a different decision on the inlining of a function which resulted in improvements in area and a significant reduction in latency. It may seem strange that adding debug ports may actually improve circuits in some cases as seen in Table 3.2. However, compiler passes are heuristics that are usually chosen and ordered based upon how well they perform across some benchmark suite of circuits/programs and they will fail to optimize some circuits. In those single-port experiments where improvements can be observed, it is likely that the inclusion of some debug port interfered with some earlier optimization in such a way to allow a later optimization to be more effective (this effect is similar to changing the order of the optimization passes). (See Huang et al. [61] for a discussion of optimization passes for the LegUp Compiler.) The clock-constraint experiment also showed that the improvement likelihood was reduced when the clock constraint was more difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, even when the timing constraint was difficult to achieve, circuit improvements still may occur when debug ports are added.
Multiplexing and Port-Write Duplication

Although only a single assignment is instrumented for each debug port, the assignment may be duplicated by Vivado HLS when inlining functions, instantiating functions multiple times, or unrolling loops. This may lead to a duplication of the debug port assignment that can create resource conflicts at the debug port and can result in excessively large multiplexers. In other words, the debug port is located at the output of the multiplexer while all of the duplicated expressions are connected to the inputs of the multiplexer. Figure 3.7 illustrates this concept with a block diagram of an HLS-generated IP core that has one hardware implementation of expression C and two hardware implementations of expression F. These two copies of expression F were created because the HLS tool decided to create two copies of the enclosing function (Funct1). However, only one debug port for each of the expressions was specified by the source-to-source compiler (because it did not know the expression would be duplicated). Therefore, the HLS tool was required to add MUX0 to ensure that both hardware copies of expression F could write to the debug port.

Port-write duplications were found in 827 experiments. Of these 827 experiments, only 111 of them increased simulation latency. Manual inspection verified that, for 30 of the 111 cases,
debug-port resource conflicts were the cause of the increase (this may also be the case for some of the remaining 81 of 111 cases but the inspection process is laborious). In at least one case, manual inspection of the RTL discovered a large multiplexer that was generated for a test-case that duplicated the port-write 32 times.

The solution to this problem is conceptually simple enough though it can be somewhat difficult to implement: eliminate the multiplexer by creating a new debug port for each duplicated port-write. For example, this approach was used in a limited number of preliminary experiments to eliminate the additional latency caused by the port-resource conflicts. The function call hierarchy is another cause of port-write duplication. This is because HLS tools create an RTL module for each function defined in the program. This means that each function call in the program has the potential to become an RTL instance (depending on how the HLS tool allocates and binds resources). Therefore, a function called at multiple points in the program could (and often does) become multiple instances of the associated RTL module. This means that the HLS tool must multiplex writes to top-level ports (e.g. debug ports) made by duplicated function. These multiplexers could be eliminated by ensuring that each instance of a function had its own set of top-level ports. This could be accomplished by creating a unique set of top-level ports for each function call and then passing references to those ports through the function call hierarchy as pointers. Then instead of writing a global variable the debug values would simply be written to a debug port passed as a parameter to the function.

Other Observed Effects

1) Dead Code Ports: In 610 cases, Vivado HLS removed instrumented ports when it detected that they were attached to regions of dead code. Vivado automatically identifies dead code as part of the optimization process; the designer cannot disable this functionality. In all but eight of these cases, the dead code port had absolutely no impact on the final circuit. The maximum impact of the eight cases was negligible (63 LUTs, 64 FFs, and +.16ns minimum clock period). In some cases, regions containing only non-synthesizeable expressions (e.g., printf(), exit()) were treated as dead code.

2) Constant Bits and Ports: As a general rule, it is helpful to know how many bits at the debug ports have been optimized to constants by HLS and logic synthesis optimizations (e.g.
value range analysis [20] and constant propagation) because there is no need to record them with a debugging instrument (since they do not change). This will generally reduce the amount of memory required to capture these values at run-time, for example. Constant bits can be found by analyzing the post-synthesis or post-place/route netlists to identify debug ports that are driven by constant values. In the Single-Port experiments, 35% of debug port bits are tied to constant values. When only assignment expressions are considered this number rises to 41%. In the Multi-port experiments (see next section), which only examine assignment expressions, 40% of debug port bits are constant. This suggests that having multiple ports does not interfere (much) with constant propagation.

3.2.3 Multi-Port Experiments

The single-port experiment demonstrated the effects of instrumenting expressions one-at-a-time and helped to confirm the individual impacts caused by instrumenting various types of expressions. The multi-port experiments cumulatively add debug ports to the developer’s design to model the situation where the user is debugging a circuit and needs to observe the output from multiple expressions. In order to create a realistic debugging scenario, only state modification expressions (assignments, increment/decrement, etc.) were instrumented. Specific expressions were instrumented in ascending order according to the observed increase in LUT usage seen in the single-port experiment to make it easier to correlate results between the single-port and multi-port experiments. This made the results more predictable and made the experiments easier to debug. Note that with this ordering of ports, early port additions tend to improve the circuit while later port additions do the opposite (the sorted order guarantees that later port additions will have bigger impacts).

Summary of Results

Unlike the single-port experiments where data were presented in tabular format, the multi-port data are presented in graph form. The graphs allow the reader to see trends that result from incrementally/cumulatively adding debug ports to the benchmarks. Figure 3.8 shows the progressive area and performance impacts as debug ports are incrementally added to each of the bench-
marks. Each row of sub-figures presents the data for a single benchmark with the area data (LUT, FF) on the left and the performance data (clock period, latency) on the right. The number of debug ports is shown on the x-axis; the change relative to the uninstrumented circuit (dotted blue line) is shown on the y-axis. In general, the progressive LUT impact for each benchmark (blue line) initially dropped below the dotted-line as the first debug ports were added (this is somewhat expected, see earlier discussion) and then increased to an average of 24% after all debug ports were added. LUT increases for most benchmarks after all expressions are instrumented varied between 5% and 25% though one benchmark (blowfish) saw an increase of 50%. In several of the benchmarks, the first several added debug ports result in a decrease in LUT usage; for example, for the dfiadd benchmark, LUT usage did not exceed the uninstrumented circuit LUT-count until 62 debug ports were added (see Fig. 3.8g). This suggests that a high percentage of debug ports can be added at low/no-cost. The benchmarks generally exhibited lower percentage increases in FF count, latency and clock-period as shown in Figure 3.8, relative to LUT increases. In five of the nine benchmarks, FF impact never increased more than 5% with 7 of the benchmarks never exceeding a 10% impact. Progressive latency impact is shown by the solid red line in the performance sub-figures. The number of flat regions in the progressive simulation latency impact line reinforces the fact that very few of the instrumentations impacted latency. It is also interesting to note that for six of the nine benchmarks latency actually stayed the same or improved (blowfish was included in this category). The unique latency towards the end of the adpcm latency data (Figure 3.8b) occurred because a debug port caused a function to be inlined and a later debug port prevented the function from being inlined. In this case, inlining prevented the function from being scheduled in parallel with other function calls thereby increasing the overall latency. The latency returned to its former spot once the function was no longer inlined. Progressive clock period impact is shown by the solid blue lines in the performance sub-figures. In general, very few experiments resulted in clock period overhead of more than 5%. As discussed in Section VI-B the random jumps in achieved minimum clock period are likely due to CAD tool variation in the face of small changes to the design. The flat regions in the aes and blowfish data (figures 3.8d and 3.8f respectively) stand out. These flat regions are due to debug ports that were instrumented in dead code.
Figure 3.8: Multi-Port Experiment Results
Figure 3.8: (continued) Multi-Port Experiment Results
Figure 3.8: (continued) Multi-Port Experiment Results
3.3 Conclusion

The objectives of this chapter were to introduce the debug port transformation and answer the question: does the debug port transformation result in circuits with tolerable increases in area and clock period, relative to uninstrumented circuits? The answer offered by the data from this feasibility study is in the affirmative. When added one-at-a-time, most debug ports cause small increases/decreases in area and performance that centered around small means (+1/-1%) and small standard deviations (most less than 3%). In actual debugging scenarios, the impact caused by adding a few debug ports is usually negligible and is sometimes surprisingly positive. As you cumulatively add more ports, the impacts from adding additional ports overlap such that the total cost is much less than simply multiplying the port count by the overhead discovered in the single-port experiments.

When all ports were added, the worst-case results were related to LUT overhead and exhibited LUT-count increases between 5% and 55% with most around 20-25%. Note that this overhead occurs when all assignment expressions are instrumented; significantly lower overhead is possible when fewer expressions are instrumented. In summary, to the extent that the CHStone benchmarks are representative of actual user circuits, on average, users can instrument all assignment expressions contained in a program for an area overhead of approximately 25% with an increase in clock-period of about 5%. One outlier in this study, blowfish, would require 50% overhead in order to instrument these expressions in the circuit description. In the end, the data suggest that for the majority of circuits, instrumenting source code is a feasible way to implement debug functionality. If the engineer has a device with an additional 25-50% area available and can tolerate small slowdowns due to small increases in clock-period, debugging this way is quite feasible. It is common, especially during the prototyping phase, for engineers to use devices that are larger than actually required so that they can insert other debugging circuitry such as ChipScope, for example.

This work reports only the explicit costs imposed by adding debug ports to user circuits, e.g., wiring the output from expressions to the top-level of the circuit. These costs (or, in some cases, improvements) are the result of instrumented debug ports interfering with the normal HLS optimization process. This work does not examine the actual combined costs of connecting these debug ports to trace-buffers, for example. However, Keeley [25] and Hung [24] demonstrate that, for many cases, there are sufficient unused block-RAMs in many user designs that can be exploited.
as trace-buffers. Moreover, Keeley [25] notes that converting a block-RAM into a circular trace-buffer only requires the addition of a single local wire. Thus, for many HLS-generated circuits, the insertion of the debug port and its subsequent interference with the HLS optimization process represents the majority of the cost to instrument a user circuit with debug ports and trace buffers.
CHAPTER 4. INSTRUMENTING POINTERS IN VIVADO HLS

The debug port transformation presented in Chapter 3 provides an effective means for exposing the internal signals of HLS-generated circuits to external instruments for debugging. As discussed in Chapter 3, restrictions imposed by Vivado HLS prevent pointer values (addresses) from being wired to top-level ports. For example, attempting to connect the result of any pointer-valued expression to a top-level port causes Vivado HLS to throw an error during synthesis. While the reason Xilinx has chosen to throw an error rather than provide an actual address value is unclear, however, one might speculate that it is due to the fact that variables are stored in individual memory elements (e.g. Registers, RAMs, and FIFOs) rather than a monolithic memory making it difficult to provide a meaningful address value to the debug port. LegUp, another HLS tool, imposes a similar restriction; however, rather than issuing an error the top-level port to which the pointer-valued expression is connected is set to zero. Due to the fundamental reasons for these restrictions, it is likely that other HLS tools also enforce similar restrictions. Although appropriate and well-intentioned, these restrictions significantly reduce the in-circuit observability that can be achieved by the debug port transformation.

This chapter presents a source-to-source transformation that overcomes these restrictions by inserting an additional variable for each pointer (declared in the original source code) that represents the value held by the pointer using a non-pointer type. The use of a non-pointer type allows these variables, referred to as shadow pointers, to be instrumented and connected to top-level ports using the debug port transformation. The transformation also inserts the necessary source code to ensure that pointer/shadow pointer pairs are equivalent throughout the program. For example, each time an operation is performed on a pointer, the transformation inserts C statements that perform an equivalent operation on the shadow pointer. This allows shadow pointers to be reliably instrumented for debug at any point in the program. This chapter presents and evaluates the shadow pointer transformation and finds that when all pointers in a design are instrumented,
Shadow pointers result in an average 4% increase in circuit area and have almost no impact on circuit performance.

### 4.1 Shadow Pointer Transformation

In this section, the shadow pointer transformations are described using the examples in Listing 4.1. In Listing 4.1, the text of the original code is black and the statements added by the shadow pointer transformation are blue. The purpose of adding shadow pointers is to provide statements that reflect pointer values and that can be instrumented with debug ports using the approach described in Chapter 3. The green-colored code shows how shadow pointers are instrumented with debug ports. This code consists of debug port declarations (lines 7-10) and port-writes (lines 14, 35, 40, 45, 51, and 56).\(^1\) The port-writes cause the current values of the shadow pointer fields to be written to the top-level ports.

#### 4.1.1 Shadow Pointers

The purpose of a shadow pointer is to shadow a pointer from the original source code (hereafter referred to as the target pointer). A shadow pointer always holds a data-representation that refers to the same storage location (address) as its target pointer. This is accomplished by inserting statements into the source code that update the shadow pointer each time the target pointer is modified. These statements are added prior to synthesis; therefore, when the transformed code is passed to the HLS tool the shadow pointer statements are synthesized into RTL along with the rest of the code.

The data-type used to represent the shadow pointers in the transformation is a struct with two members: variable_id and a byte_address. A two-part address representation was chosen because HLS tools often implement variables in individual memories (i.e. block RAMs or registers). The two-part address representation allows a shadow pointer to more closely mirror the structure of the state in the final design. A similar address representation is used by LegUp 3.0 to internally support pointers [62]. Each of these fields (variable_id and byte address) is represented by a 32-bit unsigned integer (see Listing 4.1, lines 2-5). Prior to the transformation each variable

---

\(^1\)As discussed in Chapter 3, Vivado HLS also requires an interface pragma to designate a global variable as a top-level port. Due to space constraints the pragmas have been omitted from listing 4.1.
(including arrays) are assigned a variable_id. The shadow pointer’s variable_id member is used to identify the variable to which the target pointer is pointing. The byte_address member specifies the specific byte (within the variable) pointed to by the target pointer.

LISTINGS 4.1: Shadow Pointer Examples

```c
typedef struct {
    int id;
    int addr;
} shadow_ptr;

shadow_ptr
dbg_prt0, dbg_prt1,
dbg_prt2, dbg_prt3,
dbg_prt4, dbg_prt5;

void foo( int * ptr_d,
    shadow_ptr shadow_d ) {
    dbg_prt0 = shadow_d;
    ...
}

int main() {
    /* Program State */
    /* variable ID of a is 59 */
    /* variable ID of arr is 60 */
    int a, arr[5];

    /* Pointers to be Shadowed */
    int * ptr_a, * ptr_b, * ptr_c;

    /* Shadow Pointer Declarations */
    shadow_ptr shadow_a,
        shadow_b,
        shadow_c;

    /*Constant Address Assignment Ex.1*/
    ptr_a = &a;
    shadow_a.id = 59;
    shadow_a.addr = 0;
    dbg_prt1 = shadow_a;

    /*Constant Address Assignment Ex.2*/
    ptr_b = arr;
    shadow_b.id = 60;
    shadow_b.addr = 0;
    dbg_prt2 = shadow_b;

    /*Pointer-to-Pointer Assignment*/
```
Using a 32-bit unsigned integer allows shadow pointers to support a program with approximately 4-billion variables of 4-billion bytes each. Clearly, this is more bits of representation than is needed by any realistic HLS design in the foreseeable future. However, as will be shown, shadow pointers are highly amenable to common HLS optimizations such as \textit{range analysis} [20] and \textit{constant propagation}. Therefore, rather than attempting to specify the required bit width in the source code the HLS tool is allowed to optimize the shadow pointer data path. Previously, Goeders and Wilton relied on similar bit-width optimizations to reduce overhead in their HLS debugging framework [26].

The address representation used by shadow pointers is also capable of representing uninitialized and NULL pointers by reserving \textit{variable.id} for each. Further, out-of-bounds pointers appear in the shadow pointer representation as \textit{byte-addresses} that are larger than the address space. Out-of-bounds memory accesses are a common cause of discrepancies between desktop, simulation, and FPGA execution. This is because an out-of-bounds access in normal C execution will read or overwrite the value at the current address which may or may not contain a used value. In an HLS design, however, out-of-bounds accesses are likely to wrap around and overwrite actual state. With additional circuitry this transformation could be used to detect out-of-bounds memory accesses.
4.1.2 Shadow Pointer Insertion

The shadow pointer data path is constructed using a three-step process. First, a shadow pointer declaration is added for each pointer in the source code. In the example code (Listing 4.1), pointers ptr_a, ptr_b, and ptr_c (line 25) are shadowed by shadow pointers shadow_a, shadow_b, shadow_c respectively (lines 28-30). This also includes pointers declared as parameters to functions such as ptr_d (line 12) which is shadowed by shadow_d (line 13). Second, a shadow pointer assignment is created and inserted each time a target pointer is assigned (lines 32, 37, 42, 47, and 53). In this step, the target pointer assignment statement is copied (twice) and sub-expressions (of the copies) are replaced to form assignments to the corresponding shadow pointer’s variable_id and byte_address. Finally, a stand-alone reference to the assigned shadow pointer is inserted after the shadow pointer assignment (see lines 35, 40, 45, 51, and 56). These references will be instrumented with debug ports (green text) after the shadow pointer transformations are complete.

The second step is perhaps the most complex and requires a more detailed explanation. In this step, two copies of the original target pointer statement are created. The first copy is converted to shadow pointer variable_id form and the second copy is converted to shadow pointer byte_address form. Once the conversion is complete the converted copies are inserted after the target pointer assignment statement. To correctly convert expressions to their shadow pointer forms three different cases must be handled: Pointer Variable References, Constant Address Expressions, and Pointer Arithmetic Expressions.

**Pointer Variable References**

A pointer variable reference is simply the use of a pointer’s name in an expression. For example, the occurrences of ptr_a on line 32 and ptr_b on line 37 are references to pointer variables ptr_a and ptr_b respectively. The variable_id form of a pointer reference is simply a reference to the corresponding shadow pointer using the dot operator to reference the variable_id member. Similarly, the byte_address form of a pointer reference is simply a reference to the shadow pointer’s byte_address member addr. Lines 33 and 34 shadow the variable_id and byte_address forms of the
ptr_a. Pointer variable references may be found on both the left- and right-hand sides of the target pointer assignment statement. Lines 42-44 demonstrate a pointer-to-pointer assignment.

**Constant Address Expressions**

These expressions generally arise from the use of the address-of operator on a variable or array name on the right-hand-side of the target pointer assignment statement. The shadow-pointer variable_id form of these expressions is the referenced variable’s variable_id (each variable and array is assigned a variable_id by the transformation). By definition, the shadow-pointer byte_address form of a constant address expression is zero. Listing 4.1 contains several examples of a constant address conversion. Lines 33 and 34 illustrate the conversion of the expression &a to the constant literals 59 and 0. As noted by the comment on line 20, 59 is the variable_id assigned to the variable a by the transformation. A similar conversion can be observed for the array name arr on lines 37-39.

**Pointer Arithmetic Expressions**

In C, expressions involving pointer arithmetic are generally in the following form:

$$pointer \pm integer.$$  

(4.1)

The integer in Equation 4.1 is interpreted as the number of elements of the pointed-to type to add or subtract from the address stored in the pointer reference. This means that there is an implied multiply by the sizeof the pointed-to type in front of integer in Equation 4.1. Therefore, the pointer arithmetic expression must be converted to the form

$$pointer \pm sizeof(pointed\_to\_type) \times integer,$$  

(4.2)

before individual sub-expressions are converted into shadow pointer form. An example of this conversion is found on lines 47-51. There are other common forms of pointer arithmetic such as pre- and post-fix increment and decrement operators (++, --) and address-of array indexing.
(see lines 53-55). These are handled by expanding the expressions into the form of Equation 4.2 and, as before, converting the sub-expression to shadow pointer form.

4.1.3 Current Limitations of Shadow Pointers

In their current form, the transformations cannot update a shadow pointer when its target pointer has been modified indirectly (i.e. the target pointer is modified through a dereferenced pointer). Indirection could be supported by adding a pointer to the shadow pointer data structure. Thus, when a target pointer is indirectly modified the shadow pointer of the corresponding target pointer could be indirectly modified as well. The current version of the transformation supports pointers-to-pointer as long as the pointer value is not modified via indirection.

Another limitation of the approach is that external addresses are not directly represented by shadow pointers. External addresses can be passed into a design when an array or pointer is used as a parameter of the top level function (which become top-level ports in the RTL). Instead of directly representing external addresses, the transformation assigns a variable_id to top-level arrays (top-level pointers not currently supported). The byte_address then represents an offset which can be added to the initial value (address) of a pointer (or array) parameter to calculate the exact external address. This offset may also be negative. In summary, to add support for external addresses the byte_address should be represented as a signed integer and the initial value (address) of a top-level pointer needs to be recorded during run-time. This can be accomplished by (automatically or manually) connecting the corresponding nets to the ELA.

4.2 Experiments

To determine the costs associated with shadow pointers, the transformation was implemented and added to the source-to-source compiler and applied to the CHStone benchmarks as described in Chapter 3. (The impact of instrumenting pointers was not measured in the experiments in Chapter 3.) The potential sources of overhead of the shadow pointer transformation are the same as the debug port transformation – increases in area (LUTs and FFs) and decreases in performance (increased latency and minimum clock period). However, the effects of the shadow pointer transformation on area and performance may be greater than the debug port transformation

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since additional logic is inserted into the data path. In some cases, however, there may be no increases in logic if the HLS tool can identify identical expressions that can be merged (i.e. common sub-expressions that can be eliminated).

In each of the several experiments conducted, the shadow pointer transformation was applied to all pointers in the benchmark. Then, as discussed in Section 4.1.2, the shadow pointer references were instrumented with debug ports. Adding the debug ports was absolutely necessary to ensure the shadow pointer logic was not optimized away. Once the transformations were complete, the code was compiled and executed to ensure it still operated correctly. The transformed source was then passed to Vivado HLS which synthesized, simulated, and implemented the instrumented design.

4.2.1 Results

As will be shown, the primary effect of the shadow pointer transformation on the benchmark circuits was increased area. In this section, area results are presented in terms of LEs (rather than LUTs and FFs individually) to simplify the presentation of the data. An LE is a LUT-FF pair where the output of the LUT drives the input of FF. This is a measurement generally for applications mapped to Altera devices; however, Xilinx devices have a similar measurement, “LUT-FF” pairs which can be found in the Xilinx device utilization report. Increases in LEs are expected since shadow pointers may require additional functional units (for computing the byte-address) and additional registers (for storing shadow pointers across clock cycles). As shown in Table 4.1, the average increase was 223 LEs (2.58%). To provide context for the results, the number of pointer-valued expressions in each of the CHStone benchmarks is shown in the second column of Table 4.1 (i.e. # of Shadow Pointer Ports). Since all pointer-valued expressions were instrumented with shadow pointers and debug ports this is also the number of debug ports instrumented in these experiments. Therefore, by dividing the average area increase (223 LEs) by the number average number of debug ports (34.1) in each benchmark we determine that on average each pointer-valued expression is instrumented with a shadow pointer and a debug port for a cost of 6 or 7 logic ele-
Table 4.1: Experimental Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmark</th>
<th>Base Area (LEs)</th>
<th># of Shadow Pointer Ports</th>
<th>Nets</th>
<th>Area Change (LEs)</th>
<th>pct (+/-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adpcm</td>
<td>9290</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>-258</td>
<td>-2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aes</td>
<td>5800</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-86</td>
<td>-1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blowfish</td>
<td>5042</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>+10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfadd</td>
<td>5820</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>+1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfdiv</td>
<td>5378</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>+3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfmul</td>
<td>2840</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfsin</td>
<td>14692</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>+0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jpeg</td>
<td>24437</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>1115</td>
<td>+4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sha</td>
<td>4806</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>+7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean</td>
<td>8678.3</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>163.6</td>
<td>223.2</td>
<td>+2.58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ments. Other important area and performance metrics such as DSP and BRAM usage, minimum clock period, and execution latency were either unaffected or improved slightly.

### 4.2.2 Optimization Effects

As discussed in Section 4.1.2, the transformation does not optimize the bit-width of the shadow pointer data path. However, many opportunities exist for common HLS optimizations such as constant propagation and range analysis. For example, pointers are often initially assigned to constant addresses via an array-name or a variable address. Often, these constants can be propagated through much of the shadow pointer data path. Further, programmers generally avoid writing programs that result in pointers that access out-of-bounds memory locations. Thus, the addresses stored in pointers (and by association the addresses stored in shadow pointers) will often have statically identifiable bounds which can often be represented in fewer than 32-bits.

To understand the effects of the constant propagation and range analysis optimizations the debug ports in the post-synthesis netlist are examined. As shown in Figure 4.1, a debug port-bit may be driven by a constant logic value (i.e. 1 or 0), by a net that drives a single debug port-bit, or by a net that drives multiple debug port-bits. Each shadow pointer debug port has 66-bits (2 data-valid bits, 32 variable_id bits, and 32 byte_address bits). It was found that an average of 86.4% of
the shadow pointer debug port bits were driven by constant values. After accounting for nets that drive multiple port bits, it was found that an average of 92.8% of the bit-width of the data path had been optimized away. This means that, on average, 4 or 5 nets drive the non-constant bits of each shadow pointer debug port.

As shown in Table 4.1, the designs with the highest area overhead (blowfish, jpeg, sha), also had the highest numbers of nets driving the corresponding debug ports. However, in adpcm, which had the fourth highest number of nets, a 2% improvement in circuit area was observed. It may seem strange that adding logic for shadow pointers could result in an improvement in area. This can occur because the HLS tool may choose to optimize the transformed source differently (for better or for worse) than the non-transformed source. For example, in adpcm, Vivado HLS decided not to inline a function from the transformed source that was inlined in the non-transformed source. Since inlining a function results in an increase in area (it duplicates resources) a decrease in area should be observed when a function call is not inlined (resources are no longer duplicated).
4.2.3 Any Room For Improvement?

While examining the three benchmarks with the highest area overhead (\textit{blowfish}, \textit{jpeg}, and \textit{sha}) it was found that each of the circuits had several shadow pointer byte-address ports with 32 unique, non-constant, port-bits. This was an indicator of potential shadow pointers that could not be optimized by the range analysis or constant propagation. Upon close examination, however, it was found that in each case the range of values the shadow pointer byte address could take was statically determinable. However, the constant values that allowed the range to be determined statically were outside of the given function. This indicates that the range analysis performed by Vivado HLS was not context-sensitive (i.e. the analysis did not consider the calculated ranges of function arguments). It was hypothesized that a context-sensitive range analysis would provide additional area savings.

To test the hypothesis, the potential ranges of the five unoptimized byte-address ports in the \textit{blowfish} benchmark were calculated. Next, the design was modified to ensure that these shadow pointers were only represented by the number of bits that had been determined. Once the modifications were complete the design was re-implemented. The modifications caused the design overhead to drop by about 2.8%. Closer examination revealed that much of the remaining area overhead was not part of the shadow pointer data path. A comparison of the IR of the transformed and un-transformed benchmarks found that the insertion of debug ports was interfering with the optimization of an if-statement (i.e. if-conversion). The source-code was manually modified to insert the if-conversion (using a conditional expression, the \texttt{?:} operator) and re-implemented in Vivado HLS. The overhead of the resulting circuit dropped by another 6.1% (from 9.1% to 3.0%). Based upon these manually-produced results, future work could investigate the modification of the source-to-source compiler to automatically apply these transformations.

4.3 Conclusion

The shadow pointer transformation presented in this chapter filled in an important observability gap in the debug port transformation. In particular, it allows changes in source-level variable values to be tracked even when that variable is modified indirectly (through a pointer). Prior to this transformation there was no means of identifying which variables were modified indirectly through
pointers. This chapter also demonstrated that very often much of the additional logic added by the
debug port transformation was optimized to constant values. This occurred because many of the
pointers in the source only pointed to limited numbers of source-level variables. The HLS and logic
synthesis tools were able to take advantage of these facts and optimize the circuits to constants.
CHAPTER 5. MIGRATING TRANSFORMATIONS TO LEGUP

The transformations presented thus far in this dissertation have all been implemented and tested on a single HLS tool, Vivado HLS. In this chapter the source-to-source compiler is updated to support both Vivado HLS and another HLS tool – LegUp [13]. This requires making any necessary modifications to ensure that both the compiler and transformations (debug port and shadow pointer) are compatible with both tools. From a research perspective, migrating the transformations to LegUp provides the opportunity to examine the portability of the transformations and catalog any modifications that need to be made when porting transformations between HLS tools. As far as the author of this dissertation is aware, no other works have reported on the results of migrating a source-to-source transformation from one HLS tool to another. This is considered one of the contributions of this dissertation. As will be shown, very few changes were required to achieve a working version of the debug port transformation in LegUp. However, in the current version of LegUp each write to a debug port comes at a cost of two additional cycles. When a large number of expressions are instrumented the execution time of the instrumented circuit is significantly extended. To mitigate the additional latency a new approach for binding expressions to debug ports is presented and shown to significantly reduce the excessive latency.

5.1 Primary Differences between Vivado HLS and LegUp

To motivate the discussion on porting transformations between Vivado HLS and LegUp this section examines the primary differences between these tools. The following discussion will describe both HLS tools and contrast their relevant differences.

5.1.1 LegUp

LegUp is an academic research tool out of the University of Toronto with the stated goal to “broaden the FPGA user base to include software engineers” [13]. As such, LegUp generates
complete hardware systems from ANSI C programs. This allows software engineers to use LegUp without any hardware design knowledge. LegUp supports two primary flows: pure hardware and hybrid. The pure hardware flow compiles the entire C program (including main) to a hardware accelerator. Test vectors are hard-coded into the program as global variables; these are synthesized in block rams contained in a centralized memory controller at the top level of the design. Descendant functions that access the global variables must send requests up the function hierarchy to the memory controller. In the hybrid flow the user specifies functions for LegUp to implement as hardware accelerators. The remaining functions are executed on a MIPS or ARM processor. Communication between the processor and accelerator occurs primarily through either the processor’s local cache or main memory (when a cache miss is encountered). In both flows the only I/O in LegUp accelerators is through a centralized memory controller.

The latest version of LegUp, version 4.0, was released recently [22]. LegUp 4.0 contains the source-level debugging frameworks of both Goeders and Wilton [26] [27] [8] and Calagar et. al [9]. To be clear, the goal of this chapter is not to propose a replacement for the source-level debugging framework already provided with LegUp; rather it merely demonstrates that the source-to-source debugging transformations proposed in this dissertation can be used in multiple HLS tools. With the release of LegUp 4.0, the LegUp team has added several features that relax the constraints on the system environment. First, LegUp now allows the user to specify a custom top-level module. This allows users to include hardware components other than the processor, bus, and LegUp-generated accelerators. Second, LegUp now supports user-defined I/O through the use of custom Verilog module function implementations. These custom Verilog implementations allow a user to replace a LegUp-generated function with a user-supplied Verilog module. Further, LegUp will propagate any I/O ports from the custom Verilog module to the top level of the hardware accelerator. With these two additional features a LegUp design could receive (send) data from (to) other hardware components or even receive data from off-chip sources without having to request it through the memory controller. In particular, these two new LegUp features provided a mechanism through which the debug port transformation could be supported in LegUp.
5.1.2 Xilinx Vivado HLS

In contrast, Vivado HLS has always been focused on generating high-performance IP cores for arbitrary system environments. As such, it does not assume a system model and does not generate a complete system. This provides a lot of flexibility for hardware engineers but makes it a difficult tool for software engineers to use without the support of a constrained environment or an experienced hardware engineer. Thus the tool has historically been used to increase the productivity of hardware engineers. Much of the flexibility comes from the wide variety of I/O standards supported by Vivado HLS that allow the generated module to be easily integrated into any arbitrary hardware system. However, in an effort to expand its user-base, Xilinx has been working on higher-level tools that use Vivado HLS as a back-end to compile C programs to specific board environments [?] [17]. The recent transitions made by both LegUp and Vivado HLS demonstrate the importance of HLS tools supporting both arbitrary and constrained system environments.

5.2 Source-to-Source Compiler Architecture

The source-to-source compiler is designed in modular fashion that facilitates the testing and evaluation of different strategies of implementing the primary components of the compiler. As shown in Figure 5.1, the compiler consists of three swappable components. The functionality of these components is described as follows:

1. **Expression Selector**: Analyzes the AST and creates a list of expressions that will be instrumented with debug ports.

2. **Debug Port Binder**: Analyzes the list of expressions chosen by the selector, allocates debug ports, and assigns each expression to a debug port. Assigning an expression to a debug port communicates to the instrumentor that it should instrument the code so that the result of the expression is written to the assigned debug port.

3. **Instrumentor**: Modifies the AST of the program to insert debug ports and instrument expressions according to the debug port-expression bindings generated by the debug port binder.
The modular structure of the source code of the source-to-source compiler allows users to develop new strategies by creating a new C++ class that implements that strategy. The strategy can then be loaded (in place of the default strategy) using command line arguments. For example, to support the debug port transformation in LegUp a new *Instrumentor* class was created that used LegUp specific syntax to insert debug ports and instrument expressions. This new functionality was added without modifying the debug port binder or expression selection components.

### 5.3 Migrating Transformations to LegUp

Several changes were required to migrate the debug port transformations to LegUp (no changes were required for the shadow pointer transformation). The primary reason for these changes is that top-level I/O ports are defined and used very differently in LegUp than they are in Vivado HLS. To illustrate the syntactical differences of creating a debug port, Listing 5.1 provides a juxtaposition of how a debug port is created in Vivado HLS versus how the same debug port is created in LegUp. Lines 1 - 4 in Listing 5.1 show the uninstrumented function. Lines 6 - 11 show how this function is instrumented in Vivado HLS and lines 13 - 21 show how the same function is instrumented in LegUp. In terms of inserting a debug port, the primary difference between LegUp and Vivado HLS is the syntax used to declare a debug port and connect it to an expression. As discussed in Section 3.1.1, the syntax used to insert a debug port in Vivado HLS was to declare a global variable and add a pragma that instructs Vivado HLS to interpret the declared global as a top-level port (as shown in lines 7, 10). The instrumented expression is then

---

**Figure 5.1: Architecture of the source-to-source compiler.**
“connected” to the debug port by inserting an assignment from the instrumented expression to the
global variable (representing the debug port).

LISTINGS 5.1: Examples of Vivado HLS and LegUp Transformations

```c
// original code
int mult(int a, int b){
    return (a * b);
}

// Vivado HLS Approach
int dbgport0;
int mult(int a, int b){
    #pragma HLS interface port=dbgport0
    return (dbgport0 = (a * b));
}

// LegUp Approach
void __attribute__((noinline)) dbgport0(int arg0){
    printf("DebugPort0:%d", arg0);
}
int mult(int a, int b){
    int tmp0; //, tmp1;
    return (tmp0 =(a*b), dbgport0(tmp0), tmp0);
    //return (tmp0 =(a*tmp1=b), dbgport0(tmp1), tmp0);
}
```

In LegUp top-level ports are represented as functions as opposed to global variables (see
Listing 5.1 lines 14 - 17, 20). A debug port itself is specified by defining a new function in the
source code (lines 14-17) and adding a command in the configuration file associated with the
LegUp project. As shown on line 20, the connection between an expression and a debug port is
created by passing the result of the expression as an argument to the function. Special care must be taken to ensure that LegUp properly instances the custom Verilog module within its generated RTL. First, as shown on line 14, the \texttt{noinline} attribute must be added to the function definition to ensure that calls to the function are not inlined (i.e. optimized away). Second, each function parameter must be used as an argument to a \texttt{print} statement to ensure that the parameter is not optimized away (see line 16).

The shift in the representation of a debug port from a global variable to a function required that expressions no longer be implemented in place (i.e. within the original expression). Instead, as shown on line 20 (Listing 5.1), the target expression (a * b), is instrumented by storing the result of the expression into a temporary variable ($tmp0$, declared on line 19). The temporary variable is then passed to the debug port function ($dbgport0$) which is appended to the statement using the comma operator. Finally, the temporary variable is appended to the statement to ensure that the return statement returns its intended value. In this case, the target expression (a * b) and the return value of the statement were the same. The commented code on lines 19 and 21 shows how the same statement would need to be instrumented if the target expression were b instead of (a * b). As shown in the commented code on line 19, a second temporary variable ($tmp1$) would need to be created. In this case, as shown in the commented code on line 21, $tmp0$ is used to store the value passed to the return statement while $tmp1$ is used to store the result of the target expression. $tmp1$ is then passed to the debug port function while $tmp0$ is appended to the end of the statement to be used as the operand for the return statement. The same approaches for ensuring the correctness of the debug port transformation in LegUp are applied in other similar situations (e.g. conditionals of if-statements and loops).

\subsection{Using Custom Verilog Modules to Implement Debug Ports in LegUp}

This subsection describes how LegUp’s “Custom Verilog Module” functionality is used to implement debug ports in LegUp. As shown in Figure 5.2, data is generally moved into and out of an accelerator through the memory controller at the top-level of a LegUp accelerator. However, as shown, other top-level ports can be added as long as those ports are propagated from so-called “custom Verilog modules”. This subsection will first discuss the architecture of a LegUp accel-
In LegUp (and most other HLS tools), an RTL module is generated for each function not inlined during high-level synthesis. As shown in Figure 5.2, the top-level module of a LegUp accelerator contains the RTL implementation of the `main()` function and the memory controller. As shown in the figure, the RTL module implementing `main()` includes a data path and state machine (described using Verilog statements) and instances of the RTL modules that implement functions called by `main()` (i.e. `foo()`, `bar()`, and `goo()`). With the possible exception of the custom Verilog module (i.e. `goo()`), each of the RTL modules instanced in `main()` has the same structure as `main()`, that is, a data path, state machine, and a set of RTL module instances. As might be expected, this causes the RTL module instance hierarchy to closely resemble the function call hierarchy of the source code.
LegUp does not generate RTL modules for functions specified as custom Verilog modules (in the LegUp project configuration file); rather, it simply generates a module instance within the RTL implementation of the calling function and relies on the user to supply the RTL implementation of the custom Verilog module. LegUp also provides a mechanism that allows the user to add user-defined ports (i.e. those not automatically generated by LegUp) to the module instance of a custom Verilog module. LegUp will then connect the user-defined ports on the custom Verilog module instance to top-level ports of the LegUp accelerator. For example, in Figure 5.2, function goo() is specified as a custom Verilog module. As shown in the figure, apart from its connection to the memory controller through main()'s data path, goo() is also directly connected to I/O ports at the top level of the LegUp accelerator. Note that even though only one level of module hierarchy is shown in Figure 5.2, LegUp will propagate user-defined I/O ports through as many levels of hierarchy as necessary.

LISTINGS 5.2: Custom Verilog Module for Debug Port Function in Listing 5.1

```verilog
// Legup Configuration File Entry
set_custom_verilog_function "dbgport0" noMemory \
    output 0:0 arg0_valid_out \  
    output 31:0 arg0_out \ 

// Custom Verilog Module RTL for Debug Port
module dbgport0 ( 
    /* Required Signals */
    start, finish, 
    clk, clk2x, clk1x_follower, reset, 
    /* Function Parameter */
    arg0_arg, 
    /* Propagated to Top-Level Ports */
    arg0_valid_out, 
    arg0_out 
); 
```
As an example, Listing 5.2 shows the required configuration file command (lines 1 - 4) and the RTL (lines 6 - 28) for a custom Verilog module that implements the debug port function (dbgport0()) from Listing 5.1. As shown, the set_custom_verilog_function command (on line 2) instructs LegUp to use a user-supplied RTL module (custom Verilog module) for function dbgport0() instead of generating an RTL module. Further, the command specifies that the custom RTL does not need access to the memory controller (noMemory) and specifies that ports arg0_out (line 3) and arg0_valid_out (line 4) (the user-defined ports) on the custom Verilog module (lines 14, 15, 21, 22) be propagated through the Verilog module hierarchy and connected to similarly-named ports at the top level of the accelerator. The start, reset, clk, clk1x_follower, clk2x and finish (lines 9, 10, 18, 19) are signals required to properly integrate the custom Verilog module with the LegUp accelerator. As one might expect, the clock and reset ports expose the accelerator’s clock and reset signals to the custom Verilog module. The start and finish signals provide a means for the LegUp accelerator to pass execution control to the custom RTL (start) and for the custom RTL to return execution control to the accelerator (finish). The start signal also serves to validate the data input (function parameter) of the custom Verilog module. LegUp requires that signals corresponding to function parameters have the same name as the function parameter with the post-fix _arg. For example, arg0_arg (Listing 5.2, lines 12, 20) corresponds to arg0, the only parameter of dbgport0() (Listing 5.1, line 15).
The primary functionality of the RTL implementation of dbgport0() is to connect the input signal corresponding to the function parameter (ultimately the target expression) to the user-defined port that is routed to the top-level of the design (arg0_out). This occurs on line 24 of Listing 5.2 where arg0_arg the function parameter (target expression) is assigned to arg0_out (which LegUp routes to the top-level of the accelerator). A valid signal for the target expression is provided by connecting the start signal to arg_valid_out which is also routed to the top-level. Finally, the finish signal is set to a logical ’1’ to ensure that the modules passes execution control back to the accelerator as quickly as possible (two clock cycles) [22].

5.3.2 Compiler Modifications to Support LegUp

To provide LegUp support for the debug port transformation a new instrumentor component (see Section 5.2) was created for the source-to-source compiler. The new component applies the necessary transformations to define debug port functions and call them in the data paths of the source code. It also generates the required configuration file and a Verilog file that contains the RTL implementations of all debug port functions. The Verilog file is then automatically included into the LegUp accelerator via an ‘include’ statement inserted by LegUp.

5.4 Improvements to Port-Binding Strategy

The primary challenge of supporting the debug port transformation for LegUp is the two clock cycles of latency overhead incurred each time the result of an expression is written to a debug port (i.e. the debug port function is called). In some cases, this latency overhead can significantly affect the performance of an accelerator. This is especially true when large numbers of expressions are instrumented or when expressions are instrumented within loop bodies. In some debugging scenarios, large amounts of latency overhead may be tolerable; however, in others the accelerator may not be able to operate fast enough to keep up with incoming data. While this latency overhead cannot be eliminated, it can be reduced by lowering the number of expressions instrumented or only instrumenting expressions outside of loops. Unfortunately, these approaches also tend to reduce the number of expressions that can be observed by a debugging instrument (e.g. an ELA). In this section, a new approach for creating debug ports and assigning them to target expressions (i.e.
debug port binding, see Section 5.2) is presented. This approach attempts to reduce the number of calls to debug ports without reducing the number of visible expressions.

5.4.1 Naive/Default Binding Approach

Up to this point, the debug port binding strategy employed by the source-to-source compiler has been to assign each target expression to its own debug port. Listing 5.3 provides an example of code from the \textit{adpcm} benchmark that was instrumented for LegUp using the default binding strategy. Note that the \texttt{printf()} statements in the debug port function definitions have been omitted. In the listing, the original (uninstrumented) code is black, the code added by the source-to-source compiler is blue, and comments are green. In this example, the target expressions are the four (4) variable assignment operations found on lines 12 - 16. The default binder created a debug port for each of the 4 target expressions. Then, the LegUp instrumentor appended the debug port calls to the end of the statement enclosing the corresponding target expression. The latency overhead resulting from the debug port function calls is 8 clock cycles. This latency occurs regardless of where the debug port function calls are placed within the source code.

This strategy worked well for instrumenting circuits in Vivado HLS, because, unlike LegUp, Vivado HLS has no automatic latency penalty associated with writing a value to a debug port (as LegUp does). Further, in the vast majority of cases (above 90%), expressions in Vivado HLS can be instrumented without increasing the latency of the schedule at all. Since latency is not increased, the results of target expressions are often connected to a debug port without being stored in a register thereby reducing the area requirements of the debugging solution. However, due to the automatic two-cycle latency penalty, the default strategy did not work as well when the transformations were ported to LegUp. For example, as will be shown, execution latency increased an average of 3.70 times when the default binding strategy was applied. This occurs primarily because the default binding strategy does not take the latency penalty into account.

5.4.2 Delayed Port-Binding Strategy

The \textit{delayed port-binding strategy} was devised to reduce the latency overhead of the debug port transformation in LegUp. This strategy assumes that \textit{all} target expressions will first be stored
LISTINGS 5.3: Example of Code Instrumented Using Default Binding Strategy

```c
/* Default Binding */

void __attribute__((noinline)) DbgPort0(int arg0) { ... }
void __attribute__((noinline)) DbgPort1(int arg0) { ... }
void __attribute__((noinline)) DbgPort2(int arg0) { ... }
void __attribute__((noinline)) DbgPort3(int arg0) { ... }

int filterp(int rlt1, int al1,
            int rlt2, int al2)
{
    int t0, t1, t2, t3;
    long pl;
    long pl2;
    (t0 = pl = 2*rlt1, DbgPort0(t0), t0);
    (t1 = pl = ((long)al1)*pl,
     DbgPort1(t1), t1);
    (t2 = pl2 =2*rlt2, DbgPort2(t2), t2);
    (t3 = pl +=((long)al2)*pl2,
     DbgPort3(t3), t3);
    return (int)(pl >> 15);
}
```

into a unique temporary variable (i.e., one that won’t be assigned in any other statements). Making this assumption allows the port-binder to delay writing the result of the target expression to a debug port (i.e. passing it as an argument to a debug port function call). The ability to delay debug port writes allows the debug port binder to assign multiple target expressions to each debug port. Multiple target expressions can be simultaneously written to a debug port by adding arguments to the function definition. To support the parallel writing of debug port arguments to top-level ports the bit width of the debug port is increased. Thus the debug port itself can support an arbitrary number of expressions without increasing the latency penalty. Sharing debug ports in this way has the effect of reducing the number of debug port function calls while allowing the user to observe the same number of target expressions. For example, if five (5) target expressions are each bound to their own port, 10 cycles of latency will be added to the circuit. However, if these five target expressions are bound to one debug port, only 2 cycles of latency will be added to the circuit.

There are limits on the debug ports to which a target expression can be assigned. This limitation is based on the assumption that the result of an expression needs to be written to a debug
port each time it is executed. Two conditions must be met to guarantee that this is true. First, a target expression must be assigned to a debug port that is called after the result of the expression has been computed. Second, a target expression must be assigned to a debug port that is called within the same code block as the target expression (i.e. within the same set of curly braces). For example, if an expression exists within the body of a loop it must be assigned to a debug port that is called after the expression is executed but before the end of the loop body. If, the same target expression was followed by a conditional break statement (i.e. a break statement within an if-statement) the expression should be assigned to a debug port called prior to the conditional break statement. However, with special handling, an expression within an if-statement block can be assigned to a debug port that is called after the if-statement block. The only requirement is that along with the result of the if-enclosed target expression the debug port also presents enough information to determine whether the if-enclosed target expression was executed. This is done by storing the results of any if-statement conditionals related to the execution of the target expression and writing them to the debug port as well. This is important because a value will be written to the debug port whether or not the if-enclosed target expression was executed. Together, the results of related if-statement conditionals create a de facto valid signal for the if-enclosed target expression at the debug port.

5.4.3 Delayed Binding Algorithm

As previously discussed the goal of the delayed binding approach is to reduce latency overhead as much as possible. This can be accomplished by maximizing debug port sharing while still obeying the two binding constraints discussed in the previous section. The delayed binding strategy accomplishes these goals using the following process. The binder searches for the latest point in the program where the result of each target expression can be written. This search begins with the statement that encloses the target expression and continues through each subsequent statement until a (closing) curly brace, loop statement, terminating statement (i.e. return, break, continue, or exit()), or if-statement containing a terminating statement is encountered. If the end of an if-statement body is encountered, the if-statement conditional is added to the list of target expressions and eventually bound to the same debug port as the original target expression. Once the latest point has been found, the binder checks whether it has already created a debug port that is
called at this point in the program. If a debug port has been created, the target expression is bound to that debug port. Otherwise, the binder creates a new debug port and binds the target expression to it. The result of this process is that most target expressions are collected into a single debug port at the end of the enclosing loop or function body.

Listing 5.4 shows a simple example of the delayed binding approach. This listing follows the same text-color scheme found in Listing 5.3, that is, the original uninstrumented code is black, code added by the source-to-source compiler is blue, and comments are high-lighted in green. In order to contrast the default and delayed binding approaches, both Listing 5.3 and the example in Listing 5.4 show instrumented versions of the same function (`filt ep()`) from the `adpcm` benchmark. However, the example in Listing 5.3 used the default binding approach to instrument the code while the example in Listing 5.4 used the delayed binding approach.

The primary difference between the two examples is the number of debug ports that were created and the amount of latency overhead that was incurred. In Listing 5.3, 4 target expressions were instrumented and 4 debug ports were created resulting in 8 cycles of latency overhead. On the other hand, as shown in Listing 5.4, the delayed binding approach bound the 4 target expressions to a single debug port called just prior to the return statement (line 14). By calling only 1 debug
port, the latency overhead was only 2 clock cycles. This is a significant improvement over the 8 cycles that resulted from the default binding approach. Further, the delayed binding approach accomplished this while instrumenting the same target expressions as the default binding approach. However, the 1 debug port added by the delayed binding approach is roughly 4 times wider (in terms of bit width) than any single port created by the default binding approach. This being said, in total, the delayed binding approach actually creates 3 less debug port bits than the default approach because it only requires a valid signal for 1 debug port instead of 4.
To illustrate some of the more complex details of the delayed binding approach another example has been included as Listing 5.5. Recall that part of the delayed binding approach is to search for the latest point in the source code that a call to a debug port function can be inserted while still ensuring that all instances of a target expression are written to the debug port. This principal is illustrated by DbgPort0 and DbgPort1 which are debug port functions called on lines 11 and 15 respectively. DbgPort0 was called on line 11 because of the for loop statement on line 12. Technically, the call to DbgPort0 could have been delayed and merged with DbgPort2 while still ensuring that the value was written. However, this may not be good practice as delaying the call to DbgPort0 would cause the expressions in the body of the loop (DbgPort1) to be written before the expressions in DbgPort0. Further, deadlock is a common problem with HLS designs and delaying the write of the expressions associated with DbgPort0 until after a loop (especially a long loop) increases the probability of encountering a deadlock condition before the expression can be written to the debug port. This is a challenge because the result of the expression may contain critical information for debugging the deadlock. The challenges and possible solutions to the deadlock problem for the delayed binding approach will be discussed in more detail in Section 5.4.4.

The insertion point of the call to DbgPort1 (line 15) illustrates why the debug port write must be inserted prior to conditional break statements (i.e. a break statement inside of an if statement, see lines 16 - 18). First, consider the situation if DbgPort1 had been placed after the conditional break statement (as illustrated by the commented code on line 19) and not before. Using this insertion point the expressions captured by temporary variables t1 and t2 (assigned on lines 13 and 14) would be written to the debug ports on all iterations except for iterations where the conditional break point is taken. This situation is avoided by inserting the call to DbgPort1 prior to the conditional break point.

Finally, DbgPort2 (called on line 28) illustrates the how target expressions enclosed by if-statement bodies (e.g. lines 22 and 25) are instrumented outside of those same function bodies. As previously discussed, this is accomplished by storing the result of the if-statement conditional into a temporary variable (line 21) and writing it to the same debug port as the if-enclosed target expressions (i.e. DbgPort2, line 28). The alternative to writing the results of if-enclosed expressions outside of if statements is to write them within the if-statements as shown by the commented code
on lines 23 and 26. In many cases, (but not this one), this alternative leads to more latency overhead than is necessary. In this case, using the alternative instrumentation approach would result in only one debug port being called in this section of code each time the function is executed. This is because the alternative removes the need for DbgPort2 and the if-statement ensures that only DbgPort3 or DbgPort4 would be called. However, in the general case, other target expressions either before or after the if-statement would require DbgPort2 to be inserted.

5.4.4 Debugging Deadlock using the Delayed Binding Approach

As previously discussed, deadlock is a common problem when debugging in HLS generated circuits. Deadlock errors can often be difficult to debug since the only symptom is that the circuit stops working. Deadlock generally occurs within an HLS design when the HLS-generated circuit attempts a read from an external circuit and that read is not or cannot be fulfilled. For example, poorly-sized streaming FIFOs are a common source of deadlock within Vivado HLS generated circuit. Another example occurs when the HLS-generated circuit makes an erroneous read-request that cannot be fulfilled by the surrounding system (e.g. attempting to read a non-existent memory address). Deadlock errors are often encountered while integrating an HLS circuit into an existing system.

The deadlock issue poses a particular problem for the delayed binding approach. This is because the delayed binding approach may separate the execution of a target expression from the operation that writes its result to the debug port. If they are separated by one or more clock cycles, it is possible that an intervening operation may deadlock; thus, preventing the result of the target expression from ever being written to the debug port. This complicates the debugging process especially if the target expression would have provided useful debugging information.

In general, the programming constructs that can cause deadlock are usually easily identifiable. For example, reads from streaming FIFOs, external memory accesses, and synchronization commands can be easily identified in the source code. If deadlock is a concern, the delayed binding strategy could be updated to treat these constructs in the same way it treats curly braces, that is, program points at which writes to debug ports can no longer be delayed and must be written. Such an approach would likely ensure that all debug port values computed prior to the deadlock would be available for inspection by the developer should a deadlock occur.
5.5 Experiments and Results

5.5.1 Experiments

Several experiments were performed to evaluate the effectiveness of the debug port and shadow pointer transformations in LegUp. To facilitate comparisons with Vivado HLS the 9 CH-Stone benchmarks [60] that are synthesizable by Vivado HLS [1] [2] were used. In general, the experiments were carried out using the experimental flow detailed in Figure 5.3. First, the initial source-code for each benchmark was passed to the source-to-source compiler along with a configuration. The configuration specified which internal components the source-to-source compiler should use (i.e. selector, binder, instrumentor). After the source-to-source compilation process was complete, the transformed source code was passed to Vivado HLS or LegUp. The resulting RTL was then passed to the FPGA vendor tool flow corresponding to the HLS tool. For LegUp the RTL was passed to Quartus 13.0 and mapped to the Cyclone II. Vivado HLS designs were compiled for a Zynq 7000 and built in Vivado 2014.1 using Vivado HLS’s built in export functionality.

By default, the Quartus projects generated by LegUp use extremely tight clock constraints (e.g. 2 ns clock period). It is assumed that this is done to direct Quartus to try to hit the highest clock rate possible. For many of the benchmarks, this approach worked; while they did not meet the specified clock rate (i.e. 500 MHz) they compiled with clock periods comparable to those of the un-instrumented designs. However, for some of the benchmarks, (especially the larger benchmarks dfsin and jpeg), this approach led to long compile times and eventual failure. This occurred even
though the benchmarks were small enough to fit on the device. When necessary, the problem was mitigated by loosening the clock constraints to 20 or 40 ns. Even though the clock constraints were loosened, the benchmarks still achieved maximum clock frequencies similar to or better than those achieved by the uninstrumented baseline circuits. In one variant of the jpeg benchmark (delayed binding with pointers) loosening the clock constraints was not enough. However, the design compiled easily when the circuit was moved to a larger Cyclone III device.

5.5.2 Results

With the one noted exception, all source-level transformations were successfully compiled by LegUp and implemented in Quartus. The implemented designs were simulated to double-check that the transformations did not affect the functional correctness of the circuits. This section describes a variety of experimental results and details how the source-level transformations impacted circuit latency and area. The LegUp and Vivado HLS results are presented relative to uninstrumented baseline circuits compiled using the default settings of the respective HLS tool.

5.5.3 Effect of Delayed-Binding Strategy

The delayed-binding strategy is a technique that bundles debug ports together in a way that minimized their latency impacts (see Section 5.4). The first series of experiments measures the worst-case impact of this optimization by instrumenting all assignment expressions and building the benchmarks using two different binding schemes: (1) the default, unbundled approach, and (2) the bundled, delayed-binding approach. The results of these experiments are found in Table 5.1. The measured average increase in latency for the default approach, shown in the first column of Table 5.1, is 3.70X. In the three most extreme cases (adpcm, dfadd, dfmul) latency increases between 6-8 times. The default binder also resulted in a 72% average increase in area (Table 5.2). As shown in the next column of Table 5.1, the delayed-binding strategy reduced the latency overhead from 3.70X to 1.95X and decreased area overhead slightly, from 72% to 69%.
Table 5.1: Simulation Latency Overhead

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>benchmarks</th>
<th>Legup</th>
<th>Vivado HLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Default</td>
<td>Delayed Binding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adpcm</td>
<td>7.09</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aes</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blowfish</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfadd</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfdiv</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfmul</td>
<td>7.09</td>
<td>3.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfsin</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jpeg</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sha</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Area Overhead (LEs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>benchmarks</th>
<th>Legup</th>
<th>Vivado HLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Default</td>
<td>Delayed Binding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adpcm</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aes</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blowfish</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfadd</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfdiv</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfmul</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfsin</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jpeg</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sha</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5.4 Latency Overhead

The previous experiments measure the worst-case latency caused by inserting debug ports on all possible expressions. However, in actual practice, engineers will often want to focus their debugging activities on specific sections of the circuit and hence will only instrument smaller subsections of a circuit at a time. In other cases, vendors of FPGA-based products may desire to permanently install instrumentation in the final product so they can perform additional tuning and debugging in the field.
In general, inserting debug ports using using the previously-discussed source transformations results in two types of latency overhead. The first type, debug-port latency, is the two-cycle overhead that results from calling debug port functions in LegUp. The second type, scheduling latency, arises when the insertion of a debug port alters the optimization and scheduling of the design. By profiling the simulation results it was found that, on-average, 80% of the latency overhead in the previous experiment was a result of debug-port latency while 20% resulted from scheduling latency.

Figure 5.4 illustrates how total debug-port latency is likely to change as different numbers of debug ports are inserted into a design. The figure was created by profiling the debug-port activity during the simulation of each of the fully-instrumented benchmarks, based on the delayed-binding strategy. Profiling kept track of the total number of times each debug port was activated. The total debug-port latency (for each benchmark) was found by summing the port-latencies of all of the debug ports in the benchmark and placed as the first data-point in the top-left corner of Figure 5.4. Subsequent data points were created by iteratively removing the debug port with the highest port-latency until all debug ports are removed at the far right of the graph (100% of ports removed). The trendline is a best-fit polynomial interpolation of all of the data for all benchmarks. The data in Figure 5.4 represent the latency costs for debug-port latency (80% of all latency, on average) but do not include the latency that may be caused by scheduling latency (responsible for 20% of all latency, on average).

Three additional experiments were run to verify the accuracy of the results shown in Figure 5.4. In these experiments, the transformed source-code was modified to remove calls to a percentage of the debug port functions for all of the benchmark circuits. As before, the most active debug ports were removed first. Once the ports were removed, the source-code was synthesized with LegUp and the resulting RTL was simulated. The left-most red dot in Figure 5.4 shows the results of the first experiment which removed the top most-active 10% of the debug ports. As shown by the data point, removing the top 10% of the debug ports reduced the latency overhead from 100% to 60%. This number represents the average latency measured across all benchmarks. The next two red dots show the additional impact of removing 20% and 50% of the debug ports. As expected, the data represented by the red-dots indicate that latency costs are slightly higher than that predicted by the trend-line because the completely-synthesized results include both debug-port
and scheduling latency. These experiments validate the previous findings regarding debug-port and scheduling latency and indicate that the experimental approach shown in the figure is sufficient for estimating latency increases caused by the insertion of individual debug ports.

In summary, the results displayed in Figure 5.4 suggest that, on average, the majority of the latency overhead is caused by a relatively small number of ports, i.e., those with the highest activity rates. For example, it was found that the top 20% of debug ports were responsible for 60% of the total latency overhead while 80% of the ports were responsible for the remaining 40% of the overhead. The top 20% of debug ports are classified as *high-latency ports* since together they account for a majority of the latency, and each individual port will likely contribute significant latency. On the other hand, the lower 80% of debug ports are classified as *low-latency ports* because each port from this classification will account for only a small amount of latency. In general, high-activity ports are found in loop bodies.
5.5.5 Cost of Individual Debug Ports

To provide a better sense of the latency cost of inserting individual ports with differing activity rates, an additional series of experiments was conducted to confirm the total latency costs (scheduling latency + debug-port latency) caused by inserting a single port in each of the benchmarks. Three ports were selected for each benchmark, based upon the results from earlier experiments: (1) the highest-activity debug-port, (2) the least-active debug port, and (3) a debug port on the boundary between the high-latency ports (top 20%) and the low-latency ports (bottom 80%) as described previously. Each benchmark was synthesized/implemented three times; a single one of the three debug ports was inserted into the benchmark each time. The resulting circuits were built, simulated and the latency increases were measured.

Table 5.3 shows the results of each of these experiments. On average, latency overhead drops from an average of 20% to an average of 4% between the highest latency and boundary debug ports. This suggests that the other high-latency ports are likely to have a latency overhead somewhere between 4% and 20%. As one might expect the lowest latency port does not contribute much to the latency overhead. Therefore, on average, it is expected that the low-latency ports (80% of all ports) have a latency overhead of less than 4%. However, due to unpredictable scheduling latency some of the low latency debug ports may have latency overhead greater than 4%. For example, since debug ports are classified as low-latency or high-latency based on their port latency, it is possible that the instrumentation of a randomly-selected low-latency debug port may result in scheduling latency overhead that is somewhat higher than that predicted by the boundary overhead. This is because the scheduling latency of any given debug port is not predictable.

The area costs of the highest-latency, boundary-latency, and lowest-latency are shown in Table 5.4. The area impacts of these ports range from a small improvement to a 9% overhead. On average, the individual port impacts ranged from 1%-2%. These results are comparable to the results for Vivado HLS found during the feasibility study in Chapter 3. Recall that the feasibility study found that the area overhead of individual debug ports centered on a small means (.3%) with std. deviations of 1-3%; which appears to be similar to the results from LegUp.
Table 5.3: Latency Impact of Single Ports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>benchmarks</th>
<th>Highest Lat.</th>
<th>Boundary Lat.</th>
<th>Lowest Lat.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adpcm</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aes</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blowfish</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfadd</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfdiv</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfmul</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfsin</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jpeg</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sha</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.20</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.04</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4: Area Impact of Single Ports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>benchmarks</th>
<th>Highest Lat.</th>
<th>Boundary Lat.</th>
<th>Lowest Lat.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adpcm</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aes</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blowfish</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfadd</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfdiv</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dfmul</td>
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<td>.99</td>
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<td>dfsin</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
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<td>jpeg</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sha</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.01</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.02</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.01</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5.6 Comparison of LegUp and Vivado Results

Now that the transformations have been applied in both Vivado HLS and LegUp this section compares and contrasts the results from the transformations applied in each tool. For convenience, area and latency results from Vivado HLS have been appended to Tables 5.1 and 5.2 adjacent to the LegUp results. Before beginning the comparison, some differences between the circuits generated by Vivado HLS and LegUp need to be pointed out. First, the experiments performed in Chapter 3 used a different version of the CHStone benchmarks (v1.9) than the one available in LegUp; additionally the CHStone benchmarks were modified slightly (as discussed in Chapter 3) to ensure that I/O ports were added correctly. A programmatic comparison (diff) of the LegUp-native CHStone and CHStone v1.9 revealed the differences are small. The primary change between the
newer and older versions is the way the self-checking mechanism reports results. The older version (LegUp-native) reports the number of correct results while the newer version reports the number of incorrect results. The second difference in the circuits generated by LegUp and Vivado HLS is that LegUp synthesizes entire programs, including `main()`. This means that more functionality is included in the LegUp results than Vivado HLS which does not synthesize `main()`. Finally, the results were synthesized by different (logic) synthesis tools onto very different FPGA architectures. Generally speaking, an in depth, benchmark-by-benchmark comparison of these circuits requires a degree of experimental control which is far beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Some conclusions, however, can be drawn about the percentage change in area and latency caused by the transformations in each tool. As shown in Table 5.1, the latency overhead in Vivado HLS is almost non-existent. This is likely due to the Vivado HLS’s ability to schedule writes to ports during the same clock cycles as other operations. Even after implementing the delayed sharing technique the disparity between the latency overhead of LegUp and the latency overhead in Vivado is significant (1.95X vs. 2%). On average, the LegUp transformations caused almost three times more area increases than those caused by Vivado HLS. Increases in Vivado HLS ranged from 0-30%. On the other hand, increases in LegUp ranged from 2% to 2.55X.

5.5.7 Impact of Instrumenting Pointers

It is interesting to note that the pointer transformation was run in both Vivado HLS and LegUp without any modifications to the transformation. The latency and area results of running the shadow pointer transformation along with the debug port transformations is shown in Tables 5.1 and 5.2. With the exception of `adpcm` (in LegUp), the pointer transformation had very little impact on area and latency in either Vivado HLS or LegUp. Vivado HLS saw no increase in latency (on average) and a 2% increase in area. LegUp, on the other hand, saw an average 6% increase in latency and 4% increase in area. If the impact of `jpeg` is removed, which was unable to route on the Cyclone II (although it could fit), an average 2% decrease in area with the addition of the pointer transformation was observed. The small size of the impacts are likely due to the fact that the relative number of pointers compared to other instrumented expressions is small (especially in the floating point benchmarks, i.e. `dfadd`, `dfdiv`, `dfmul`, and `dfsin`). In addition, using the delayed binding approach allowed many pointer expressions to be bound to already existing debug ports.
This avoided much of the additional latency. The \textit{adpcm} benchmarks was an outlier in the fact that, with the addition of the pointer transformation, it saw a large increase in latency and a significant decrease in area. While the exact cause of this irregularity is unknown, it is likely that pointer transformation caused the HLS tool to make different decisions in how it optimized the \textit{adpcm} benchmark. Similar effects were seen in previous results.

\subsection*{5.5.8 Usability and Feasibility}

This chapter successfully demonstrates that a single tool can apply source-to-source compiler-based transformations across multiple HLS tools. As reported, a single tool was created and this tool successfully instrumented source code for two different HLS tools: LegUp and Xilinx’s Vivado HLS. However, the source-to-source compilation approach also demonstrates that significantly different impacts may occur when using different HLS tools. In particular, synthesizing instrumented code with LegUp results in far more latency than when similarly instrumented code is synthesized by Vivado. In the case where \textit{all} possible expressions are instrumented, the increase in latency may result in circuits that are too slow for effective debug in some situations. As was shown, latency was not a concern when using Vivado HLS and it is not clear at this point whether similar increases in latency will be seen when the tool is applied with other synthesis tools or if LegUp will prove to be the outlier in this regard.

Setting aside latency concerns, it is still not generally desirable to instrument all possible expressions in source code because of potential area impacts and because it will be difficult to capture a sufficient swath of data of sufficient depth when so many signals are being captured (many thousands of bits). Most debugging scenarios are better served by more targeted instrumentation and the tool disclosed in this paper makes it relatively easy for the user to control which expressions are to be instrumented. As mentioned, it is not at all uncommon for shipping products to contain some amount of instrumentation for later test and performance tuning. For these and other scenarios, the latency costs of instrumenting smaller numbers of ports as shown in Tables 5.3 and 5.4 are feasibly low enough to be used for effective debugging. In some cases designers may still desire to instrument all expressions if for no other reason than to eliminate the need to recompile every time the user decides to observe a different set of expressions. For many circuits, latency costs were about 1.5X those of the original, un-instrumented circuit (only for LegUp) and this may
not impede effective debugging in many cases; note that the current ELA-based debugging tools in use with Verilog/VHDL circuits often consume a significant amount of area and also increase the clock period a significant amount. Also, at least for the LegUp case, avoiding expressions that are in oft-executed loops can dramatically lower the latency increase. Unfortunately, adding observability to hardware still has real costs relative to general software. Much of this added cost is due to the fundamental difference between the computing models used by FPGAs and general-purpose processors.

5.6 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to show that source-to-source transformations could be effectively applied in two very different HLS tools: Vivado HLS and LegUp. These transformations had previously been demonstrated in Vivado HLS [1, 2] but they had never been successfully demonstrated in any other HLS tools. Migrating these transformations to LegUp required the development of new components for the source-to-source compiler. The modular structure of the source-to-source compiler allowed support for LegUp to be added using only 1502 new lines of C++ code. The additional code included the LegUp-specific instrumentor (301 lines), supporting code (680 lines), and the delayed binding component (521 lines).

Even though higher latency overhead (1.95X) was observed when debug ports were added to observe all assignment expressions in a design, source-to-source transformations are still a reasonable approach for real-world debugging scenarios in which small, targeted subsets of signals are instrumented. In general, it was found that 80% of all debug ports, when instrumented individually, were likely to result in latency overhead of less than 4%. On the other hand, the remaining 20% were likely to result in a latency overhead of 4%-20% on average.
CHAPTER 6. MIGRATING TRANSFORMATIONS TO OTHER HLS TOOLS

In Chapter 5, it was shown that the source-to-source transformations presented in this paper could be used in LegUp as well as Vivado HLS. Although, the transformations worked successfully, the instrumented hardware generated by LegUp exhibited significantly larger increases in area and decreases in performance than the instrumented circuits generated by Vivado HLS. For example, the average relative growth of LegUp circuit area (as a percentage) was 3 times that which resulted from instrumenting Vivado HLS circuits (See Table 5.2). Unfortunately, the degradation in performance – especially latency – and area may be significant enough to dissuade people from using the source-to-source transformations presented in this paper to instrument their LegUp-generated circuits for debug. The fact that the transformations worked well for Vivado HLS and not-so-well for LegUp broaches three important questions: 1) What are the primary causes of the disparities between the Vivado HLS and LegUp results? 2) What qualities or features does an HLS tool need to be amenable for debug instrumentation via source-to-source transformation as presented in this dissertation? 3) Are there any HLS tools (other than Vivado HLS) that could be amenable to the source-to-source transformations presented in this dissertation?

6.1 Disparities between Vivado HLS and LegUp Results

When comparing Vivado HLS and LegUp it is important to remember that LegUp is an open-source academic research tool primary written by graduate students. Due to limited time and resources, it is likely that the authors of LegUp made careful decisions that simplified its implementation. For example, LegUp does not schedule operations from different basic blocks during the same clock cycles even when doing so may be advantageous [22]. On the other hand, Xilinx is heavily invested in Vivado HLS and likely has a large team of experienced engineers improving and maintaining the tool. Thus, it is expected that Vivado HLS would utilize a larger number of advanced features – such as concurrent scheduling of basic blocks – and generate smaller, higher
performing designs than LegUp. That being said, it is still possible to identify specific features that may be causing the disparities between circuits generated by Vivado HLS and LegUp.

As previously discussed, the primary cause of the performance disparity is the two clock cycles of port latency incurred each time a debug port function is called. This latency is incurred because LegUp schedules all function calls under the assumption that the latency of the function is unknown (even when the latency of a function is deterministic). Thus, it must add two control states – one to start the function and one to wait until it completes – for each function call. Further, LegUp does not schedule function calls in parallel with other function calls or operations even when it is possible to do so. This ensures that each function call requires at least two clock cycles to execute.

LegUp’s handling of function calls also increases the area of the final circuit (when instrumented for debug) in ways that do not always occur in Vivado HLS. First, the two control states added to implement the debug port function call result in a larger FSM (requiring more LUTs and FFs to implement). Second, it requires the creation of additional control logic (i.e. the start and finish signals). Finally, it forces each value written to a debug port (i.e. used as an argument to a debug port function) to be registered prior to being written to the debug port. In many cases, such values are registered anyway. However, in some cases, such as when operations have been chained, instrumentation will cause additional registers to be created.

### 6.2 Required HLS tool Support for Source-to-Source Transformations

In general, an HLS tool must support two features in order to efficiently use the source-to-source transformations presented in this dissertation. These features are listed in the following requirements:

- **Requirement #1**: The HLS tool must provide a mechanism for creating user-defined, top-level ports.

- **Requirement #2**: The HLS tool must be able to schedule I/O operations to user-defined ports in parallel with other I/O operations (i.e. during the same clock cycle).

The need for Requirement #1 is self-evident. Unless an HLS tool has the ability to create top-level ports the source-to-source compiler cannot add them, no matter how much it is modified.
to support a specific tool. Requirement #1 also makes the assumption that the HLS tool generates appropriate handshaking signals onto top-level ports or otherwise documents the interfacing protocol of said top-level ports. Requirement #2 allows debug ports to be interspersed throughout a design without necessarily having to halt or increase the latency of a data path for the purpose of writing values to debug ports. The ability to schedule I/O operations concurrently with other data path operations also makes it possible for the HLS tool to avoid adding registers to store debug values prior to writing them to ports thereby avoiding unnecessary increases in area. The fact that Vivado HLS conforms to Requirement #2 is likely the reason that latency overhead was almost non-existent. On the other hand, the fact that LegUp did not conform to this requirement is the reason latency overhead was so dominant in LegUp designs.

6.3 Potential HLS Tool Candidates for Source-to-Source Transformations

The requirements specified in the previous section can be used as a litmus test to help determine whether other HLS tools might be amenable to the source-to-source transformations presented in this dissertation. Specifically, if an HLS tool conforms to the two requirements presented in the previous section it is likely that designs generated by that tool would be a good target for instrumentation via the transformations presented in this dissertation. To determine how widely used the transformations might be, the user guides (and other supporting documentation) of a sample of existing C/C++-based HLS tools were examined. The analysis was complicated by the fact that many HLS tool vendors do not post their user guides Online. Further, many user guides do not directly specify whether their tool meets Requirement #2 (Scheduling I/O in Parallel with data path operations). Thus, indirect means were often used to make this determination (e.g. examining scheduling figures in user guides and tutorials).

In practice, the only certain way to determine if a specific HLS tool is a good fit for the transformations described in this dissertation is to test them with the tool. However, individual testing on a large number of HLS tools was infeasible for this study. Even though implementing the tool-specific components for the source-to-source compiler for an individual HLS tool is not particularly time-consuming or difficult, a great deal of effort is often required to setup and become familiar with the idiosyncrasies of an unfamiliar HLS tool. For example, HLS tools often support different synthesizable subsets of the C language. Thus, it can be laborious to port benchmarks
from tool to tool and accurately evaluate the results. Therefore, as discussed, this dissertation opts to determine whether an HLS tool is a good candidate for source-to-source transformations by examining HLS tool documentation.

### 6.3.1 Tool-by-Tool Analysis

This section introduces several HLS tools and determines whether or not each tool conforms to the requirements presented in in Section 6.2. Then, based on the analysis and taking other details into account a judgement is made as to whether each tool is a good fit for the techniques discussed in this dissertation. The findings of this analysis are then summarized and discussed in Section 6.3.2. Vivado HLS and LegUp are not included in this analysis as they have already been discussed in detail in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5.

**CyberWorkBench**

CyberWorkBench, by NEC, is one of the earliest commercial efforts to develop a C-based HLS tool [41] [63]. The primary purpose of CyberWorkBench is to support an “All-In-C” design flow for Large-Scale-Integration (LSI) ASIC and FPGA development [64]. CyberWorkBench allows a user to develop and debug individual modules and then automatically generates bus interface circuits [41]. From the available documentation [41] [64] it appears that CyberWorkBench adheres to both Req. #1 and #2 (see Figures 7.3 and 7.6 of [64] as well as [65]). It also supports source-level debugging in simulation; but does not clearly articulate support for in-system debugging. The fact that it conforms to Reqs. #1 and #2 and does not already support in-system debugging likely make it a good match for source-to-source compilation.

**Catapult C**

Calypto Catapult C is a commercial HLS tools used for converting C/C++/SystemC designs to ASIC or FPGA [66]. Catapult boasts “a unified flow for modeling, synthesizing, and verifying complex ASICS and FPGAs” [66]. Like Vivado HLS, Catapult C generates independent hardware IP modules. As such, Catapult C supports the insertion of user-defined top-level ports (Req. #1)
and concurrent scheduling of I/O operations with data path operations (Req. #2) [66] [67]. Available documentation claims no support for RTL or in-system debugging. It is likely a good fit for the transformations.

**Hercules**

Hercules is a commercial HLS tool by Ajax compilers [68]. Hercules is unique in that a source-to-source code optimizer is included as part of the flow [69]. The primary input to Hercules is GIMPLE (i.e. the intermediate representation used by GCC). Therefore, in theory, given a proper front-end, Hercules can handle input from any language that can be translated to GIMPLE [70]. The Hercules users manual clearly describes support for user-defined ports [71] (Req. #1). Support for concurrent I/O (Req. #2) was confirmed by examining the state machine of some generated RTL. Hercules has no support for in-system debugging and is a good candidate for the transformations.

**C2H**

C2H, by Altera, is an HLS tool designed to accelerate programs running on their (Altera’s) NIOS II processor [72]. In the C2H design flow the user first develops and tests code on the NIOS II and then specifies functions for C2H to accelerate [72]. The user can then use inline pragmas to specify the structure of the Avalon buses between the processor and the accelerator(s). C2H supports user-defined I/O through the creation of Avalon Master interfaces [72] which can be automatically connected to other modules via shared or unshared buses [73]. Since a debugging instrument could be connected to an accelerator over an unshared Avalon bus C2H conforms to Requirement #1. Further, figures within the user manual [72] suggest that C2H conforms to Requirement #2 as well. Since C2H has no support for simulation or in-system debugging [72] it is likely a good candidate.

**Forte Cynthesizer**

Cadence Forte Cynthesizer is an HLS tool targeting C++/SystemC [74]. Cynthesizer leverages SystemC syntax for describing both modules and system-level operation and interconnections
as well as for supporting the creation of user-defined top-level ports [75]. A paper written by Cynthesizer developers demonstrates that Cynthesizer conforms to Requirement #2 [76]. Cynthesizer appears to be a good match for source-to-source transformations.

**Impulse C**

Impulse C is a commercial HLS tool dedicated to modeling streaming systems [33]. In Impulse C, developers specify module functionality within processes that are connected via streaming channels. The use of processes allows Impulse C’s software simulation to more accurately reflect the concurrent behavior of hardware. Impulse C Codeveloper also provides a Stage Master Debugger which provides a form of source-level debugging which stepping through the RTL simulation [77]; however, no support for in-system debugging is provided. This analysis found that Impulse C supported both Req. #1 [33] and Req. #2 [78] and appears to be a good candidate for source-to-source transformations.

**Excite**

Excite HLS by Y Explorations [79] is another HLS tool targeted to accelerate soft-core CPUs on FPGAs. Excite is similar to Altera’s C2H in that it generates accelerators that are tightly coupled to an embedded software processor via on-chip buses. However, it does provide a mechanism for creating “channels” or buses that connect to other modules than the embedded soft processor [79] (thus supporting Req. #1). However, its support for Req. #2 is unclear from the available documentation. However, based on the fact that almost every other HLS tool supports Req. #2 one would assume that Excite would also support it in order to generate competitive hardware. An email was sent to the vendors to confirm; however, no response has yet been received. Excite is also likely a good candidate.

**ROCCC**

ROCCC is an academic HLS tool developed at the University of California, Riverside [80] [81] [82]. The focus of ROCCC is generating hardware accelerators for performance critical
portions of hardware applications [83]. The user manual for ROCCC shows support for both requirements #1 and #2. Thus, ROCCC is likely a good fit.

GAUT

GAUT is an academic HLS tool for DSP applications [84] [85]. GAUT maps the applications to a specific hardware architecture including an I/O module (COMU), Processing Unit (PU), and a memory unit (MEMU) [84]. These units are connected using a variable number of shared buses. It appears that GAUT increases the number of buses as needed to meet the initiation interval (II) specified by the user. I/O is implemented in GAUT using Globally Asynchronous Locally Synchronous Latency Insensitive System (GALS/LIS) communication interfaces [84]. In other words, I/O ports are buffered using FIFOs. Technically, GAUT appears to conform to both requirements; however, it is hard to tell how the bus and I/O architecture will scale as debug ports are added. Depending on how the bus and I/O architectures scale GAUT might be a good fit.

Shang

Shang is another academic-oriented HLS tool [86] [87]. Shang is built on the LLVM machine layer and contains special cross-level optimizations. For example, Shang uses the ABC synthesis tool to map logic operations (&, |, etc.) to LUTs prior to scheduling. First-hand experience with Shang along with personal communication with those involved in its development has revealed that Shang does not conform to Req. #1 which precludes its ability to conform to Req #2 (since Req. 2 stipulates the use of user-defined I/O).

6.3.2 Analysis Summary and Discussion

The results from the analysis are summarized in Table 6.1. The “Top-Level Ports” column reports whether the HLS tool conforms to the Requirement #1 (allows the user to define top-level ports). The second column, “Schedule I/O In Parallel,” reports whether the HLS tool conformed to Requirement #2 (schedules I/O operation to user defined ports in parallel with other operations). The final column reports on the final assessment of whether the HLS tool was a good fit for the source-to-source transformations presented in this dissertation.
As shown in Table 6.1, the analysis found that 7 of the 12 HLS tools (including Vivado HLS and LegUp) examined in this study were good candidates for the instrumentation techniques presented in this paper. It was unclear whether three of the HLS tools (GAUT, C2H, and Excite) were a good fit. Although it was clear that GAUT and C2H met both of the stated requirements it was unclear whether the architecture imposed by these HLS tools would result in excessive overhead once debug ports were added. It is likely, although unconfirmed, that Excite conforms to both of the stated requirements; however, the hardware generated by Excite appears to be similar to that of C2H and inherits the same uncertainties with regards to area overhead. As has already been discussed, LegUp is not a great candidate; although transformations could still be applied. In its current state, the Shang HLS tool could not be used do to its inability to support user-defined ports.

### 6.4 Conclusion

This Chapter examined the differences in the Vivado HLS and LegUp results to determine what criteria makes an HLS tool amenable to instrumentation by the debug port transformation. It found that in order for a HLS tool to be amenable to the debug port transformation, it must have a mechanism for creating a user-defined port and be able to schedule I/O operations in parallel with other operations. The user manuals and other documentation of 10 additional C-based HLS tools
were examined to determine whether they would be amenable to the transformations. Of the 10 HLS tools examined, 6 were found to be amenable, 3 were likely to be amenable, and one was not. Thus, by writing small, tool-specific components the source-to-source compiler could likely be extended to support a majority of these HLS tools.
CHAPTER 7. BOUNDS AND LIMITS

This Chapter addresses three previously unaddressed questions about the debug port transformation: 1) What is the minimum cost of instrumenting an expression? Under what conditions can the debug port be instrumented at that cost? 2) What is the worst case overhead that might be experienced by applying the debug port transformation to a given design? 3) What is a reasonable bound on the size of the debugging instrument required to monitor the debug ports? These are important questions to consider for those building or updating a compiler to automate the insertion of a complete debugging solution (i.e. one that adds ports as well as a debugging instrument) based on the debug port transformation. Further, the ability to answer these questions could also lead to an HLS-like debugging solution in which a debug tool analyzes a design and attempts to make trade-offs to achieve the greatest degree of visibility at the lowest cost in area or performance. The following sections address each of the three questions heretofore posed using data and experiences during the research phase of this dissertation. In addition, at the end of the chapter, a comparison is made between a “complete debugging solution” based on the source-to-source transformations and the built-in debug support provided by LegUp.

7.1 Inserting Debug Ports at Minimum Cost

The situation that results in a minimum cost debug port (excluding changes in optimization that cause the circuit area to shrink) occurs when the signals that need to be connected to the port exist in the uninstrumented netlist. Thus, when the debug port is inserted into the source code and the instrumented circuit is created the effective change to the circuit is the connection of the existing signals to the port and perhaps the inclusion of a few additional LUTs to implement a data valid signal. This best case situation can only occur under the following conditions:

- **Condition #1**: The signals corresponding to the instrumented expression have not been optimized away by either compiler or logic synthesis optimizations.
• **Condition #2:** The debug port is connected to a single expression that is instanced only once in the HLS design.

• **Condition #3:** The scheduling of the debug-port write does not result in additional states and/or registers to store the debug expression across clock edges.

### 7.1.1 Potential Effects if Conditions Are Not Met

If any of these conditions are not met the likely result is a circuit with increased size or decreased performance. For example, regarding Condition #1, if an expression was optimized away in the uninstrumented version of the circuit, inserting a debug port to trace that expression would effectively preserve that expression at the expense of the optimization that would have eliminated it. Since optimizations usually result in a net improvement to the circuit, preventing an optimization from occurring by instrumenting an expression is likely to have the opposite effect.

A debug port that is connected to multiple expressions or multiple instances of a single expression (Condition #2) cannot achieve minimum overhead because the HLS tool will be required to insert multiplexers to share the debug port. There are two ways that these situations can arise. The first one is that the debug port may be purposely connected to multiple expressions by either the developer or source-to-source compiler. The second one is that the HLS tool may choose to duplicate the region of code containing the expression. This can occur due to function call hierarchy, function inlining, loop unrolling, or the HLS tool creating multiple copies of a function and scheduling them in parallel. Regardless of the cause of the debug port being connected to multiple expressions the result is always the same. The HLS tool must multiplex the expressions connected to the debug port. The other challenge of sharing debug ports is that the expressions sharing the debug port cannot be scheduled in parallel. Impacts from this effect were actually observed in a small number of expressions that had been duplicated by Vivado HLS (see Section 3.2.2).

Condition #3 illustrates how the scheduling of the debug-port write can affect the observed overhead. The scheduler has many different possible options when reacting to the insertion of a debug port. As observed in Chapter 3, significant changes to the schedule are unlikely (at least in Vivado HLS); however, the scheduler may still take actions that result in unnecessary overhead. For example, the scheduler may insert additional control states to accommodate the changes inflicted
by the insertion of the debug port. This results in a larger state machine and possibly increases the critical path in the design. The other possibility is that the scheduler may schedule the execution of an instrumented expression in a different clock cycle than it schedules the operation that writes the result to the debug port. This forces the HLS tool to create a new register to preserve the expression result across the clock cycle. However, this may not be much of a concern because there is a good chance the expression will be registered anyway.

7.2 Worst Case Overhead of Debug Port Transformation

This section identifies a possible worst-case bound of the area and performance overhead incurred from the use of the debug port transformation. Identifying such a bound is complicated by the fact that inserting debug ports can affect the HLS tool’s ability to optimize the circuit in unpredictable ways. Even multiplexing overhead, which at first glance appears easy to predict, is heavily influenced by optimization decisions made within the HLS tool (e.g., inlining, range analysis). The introduction of debug ports to a design can also interact with and inhibit logic synthesis optimizations in unpredictable ways. Despite these difficulties this section describes a method for determining a reasonable upper bound for overhead incurred from the use of the debug port transformation.

7.2.1 Identifying a Worst-Case Bound

The approach to identify a potential worst case bound taken by this dissertation is to 1) assume that all optimizations performed on an HLS design result in an improvement to the final circuit and 2) assume that the only interaction a debug port can have with an optimization is to prevent it from being performed. The converse of the first assumption is that when a given optimization is not performed, circuit area and/or performance is degraded (relative to the circuit where the optimization has been performed). The worst case circuit then, under these assumptions, is one where inserting debug ports prevents all optimizations from occurring.

As one might expect, these assumptions are not true in all cases, but, appear to be true in enough cases to provide an accurate model. For example, it was demonstrated in Chapter 4, that the omission of an optimization due to the insertion of a debug port actually resulted in a
smaller, higher-performing circuit. In addition, it is possible that inserting a debug port could sway an HLS tool into performing an optimization as well as preventing one. However, as was shown in Section 3.2.2, only 1/4 of the Single Port Experiments resulted in improvements to both area and performance and at least half of these experiments were shown to be the result of CAD tool variation under an easy to achieve clock rate. Further, all of the Multiple-Port experiments (see Section 3.2.3) demonstrated area and performance degradation when all assignment operations were added. Therefore, while the assumptions may not be perfect they appear to accurately model the vast majority of debug ports effects.

7.2.2 Experiment

To determine if the unoptimized design approach (as described in Section 7.2.1) does indeed result in a plausible worst-case bound on the overhead of the debug port transformation a series of experiments were performed using the LegUp HLS tool. In the experiments, LegUp was used to compile and simulate the CHStone benchmarks with all optimizations disabled. This was done in LegUp by setting the NO_OPT, NO_INLINE, and DEBUG_KEEP_VARS_IN_MEM variables to 1 in the LegUp project Makefile. These variables instruct LegUp to respectively set the compiler optimization level to -O0, disable function inlining, and store all variables in the memory controller (by disabling the mem2reg pass, which moves variables from memory to IR registers) [22]. Once the unoptimized benchmarks were compiled and simulated by LegUp they were mapped to a Cyclone III by Quartus (Cyclone III was used to ensure the FPGA was large enough to contain the design). The latency and area results are then compared to previous results LegUp to determine if the unoptimized design does indeed form a worst case bound for the debug port transformation. The reason LegUp was used in for this experiments (and not Vivado HLS) is because Vivado HLS does not allow the user to disable all optimizations as can be done in LegUp.

One of the benefits of using LegUp for this experiment is that it is not necessary to instrument the benchmarks with debug ports. This is because the infrastructure generated to support the centralized memory controller (where all variables are stored) is similar to the multiplexer structure that would be required to support debug ports. The memory controller effectively represents the situation in which all instrumented expressions are shared between two debug ports (since the memory controller is dual ported). The very worst case, all expressions sharing 1 debug port, can-
not be evaluated without modifying and using the source-to-source compiler. However, the two debug port situation provides a realistic enough scenario for the purposes of this dissertation.

7.2.3 Results

The results in Table 7.1 show that the unoptimized LegUp circuits do form a plausible upper bound on the overhead of the debug port and shadow pointer transformations. This can be seen by the fact that the results for all of the other benchmarks (which are normalized to the unoptimized benchmarks) are significantly less than the unoptimized circuit. As can be seen in the table, even the worst-performing instrumented circuits (LegUp Default Binding) did not approach the area or latency of the unoptimized circuits. In fact, the average area of the LegUp Default binding benchmarks is less than half that of the unoptimized benchmarks.

An interesting exception was the area results for the sha benchmark which amounted to 95% of the unoptimized version of the benchmark (for both versions of the instrumented LegUp circuits). This is an interesting result considering that the uninstrumented, optimized benchmark resulted in a circuit that was roughly three times smaller. By comparing the RTL for both the instrumented and uninstrumented circuits (i.e. the baseline circuit), it was determined that the most significant difference was that a specific function was inlined in the uninstrumented version and not inlined in the instrumented version. In other words, instrumentation had prevented the function
from being inlined. To determine the contribution of the prevented function inline, the source code for the optimized version of the circuit was modified to include the `noinline` attribute on the offending function. Inserting the `noinline` attribute, with no other changes, more than doubled the area of the optimized `sha` benchmark. Thus, it seems likely that at least 2/3 of the difference between the uninstrumented and instrumented versions of the benchmark are due to a single function inline.

The Vivado HLS results are purposefully omitted from this Table. They are omitted because differences in the structures of the generated circuits (i.e. LegUp has a memory controller, Vivado does not) make it unlikely that the unoptimized LegUp designs will correspond to a reasonable upper bound on the instrumented circuits. Rather, it is likely that the uninstrumented LegUp circuit represents a significant overestimate on the debug port and shadow pointer overhead. A better approach to finding the upper bound would be to disable optimization in Vivado HLS. Unfortunately, Vivado HLS does not provide a mechanism to accomplish this.

### 7.2.4 Common Optimizations Significantly Affected by Debug Ports

As shown in the previous section, interfering with the HLS optimization process is perhaps the biggest liability of the using debug port transformation. This is because, in some cases, interfering with optimizations can result in significant increases in the area and latency of the circuit. The large number of experiments performed for this dissertation provided ample opportunities to analyze the causes of excessive overhead for a number of experiments on a case-by-case basis. During these analyses it was observed that excessive overhead for debug ports was commonly the result of a debug port preventing either function inlining or if-conversion optimizations. These optimizations can often result in significant changes in area overhead and latency because they can directly affect the control flow (schedule) and RTL module hierarchy of the circuit.

Ideally, the insertion of debug ports would have no impact on the application of the if-conversion and function inlining optimizations. In fact, it would be best if these optimizations were applied the same way whether or not debug ports are present. This is because changing an if-conversion or function inline can result in changes to the schedule; which, in turn, can affect whether some bugs will manifest. A simple approach to ensure that these optimizations are applied the same way in both the instrumented and uninstrumented circuits would be to modify the HLS tool to write the final state of each if-statement (i.e. converted or unconverted) and each function
call (i.e. inlined or not inlined) to a file. Then, when the circuit is instrumented, the HLS tool could refer to this file and apply the optimizations in the same way. The challenge with this approach, however, is that it does rely on vendor support. However, the amount of effort required to implement this approach appears to be minimal and likely less than the effort required to provide their own debugging infrastructure.

7.3 Debugging Instrument Bound

The purpose of this section is to answer the final question addressed in this chapter: What is a reasonable bound on the size of the debugging instrument required to monitor the debug ports? However, before answering this question, this section examines two different approaches for generating debugging instruments and determines which debugging instrument would be more applicable for the most common HLS applications. The two approaches examined in this section were introduced by Goeders and Wilton [27] and Keeley and Hutchings [25]. This section then proceeds to answer its initial question by estimating the overhead of the selected debug approach as well as determining the total overhead of both the debugging instrument and debug ports.

7.3.1 Goeders’ Debugging Instrument

The debugging instrument approach described by Goeders and Wilton [27] attaches three trace buffers to each HLS circuit at the RTL level. For the purposes of this dissertation, the most interesting trace buffer to examine is the one that records the activity of data-path registers (i.e. registers that correspond to source-level expressions). The interesting component of this trace buffer is a multiplexer network that is generated (using the HLS schedule) to funnel and efficiently pack the run-time values of these registers into the trace buffer. The benefit of Goeders’ approach over a standard ELA approach is that it only records the values of data-path registers when the schedule indicates that they will be updated. This allows his approach to almost completely avoid using the limited on-chip memory to store useless data. Goeders’ demonstrated that his approach increased the amount of source-level activity (e.g. executed lines of source code) captured by his ELA by an average of 31X over a standard ELA approach. Assuming the Vivado HLS-generated schedule was available, this approach could used with the debug port transformation by connecting the de-
bug ports to the back end of the multiplexer network. The other trace buffers are also important components of Goeders debugging instrument but are not vital to the discussion at hand.

### 7.3.2 Keeley’s Debugging Instrument

In Keeley and Hutchings’ approach [25], an ELA including trace buffers, RS-232 communication, and a trigger unit, is inserted into the circuit after place and route. In their approach, signals of interest are routed to trace buffers (unused BRAMs in FIFO mode) distributed throughout the FPGA. Excess resources (e.g. unused LUTs and FF) are then reclaimed to construct a trigger unit and the necessary RS-232 communication. The benefit of inserting the ELA after place and route is that it can be done without affecting the original placement and routing of the circuit. Further, Keeley demonstrated that using his approach all FFs in several benchmarks could be connected to a nearby trace buffer (using a simple maze router) [25]. Another benefit of Keeley’s approach is that the debugging instrument is inserted without requiring the developer to re-run the vendor tool-flow. In order to use Keeley’s approach with debug ports, the debug port would need to be compiled into the circuit. Depending on the developers starting point, this may require the developer to re-run the vendor tool flow. Once the debug ports had been added to circuit, the developer could select and change which debug ports were traced by the debug instrument without re-running the vendor tools.

### 7.3.3 Compare and Contrast the Debugging Instruments

At first glance, it would appear that these two approaches offer opposing benefits. For example, Goeders’ debugging instrument holds out the promise of long execution traces; yet, these lengthened traces come at the cost of a sizable multiplexer network. Keeley’s approach, on the other hand, is constructed entirely of “left-over” FPGA resources. Because they were unused by the design and using them has no impact on the circuit his debugging instrument effectively has no area overhead. However, trace lengths under Keeley’s approach would be limited to 512 cycles on most Xilinx devices\(^1\). Further, in some designs, much of the memory would be filled with useless

\(^1\)This assumes that trace buffers are implemented using BRAM set to a width of 72 bits. The resulting trace buffer depth is 512.
data. This is because signals of interest are recorded on every clock cycle whether or not they hold useful or valid data.

It is interesting to note, however, that the amount of useful data captured by Keeley’s approach is highly dependent on how the instrumented HLS circuit is scheduled. For example, consider a circuit instrument with 10 debug ports which are connected to Keeley’s debugging instrument. If only one debug port was valid each cycle, the trace buffer would record 1 valid transaction and 9 invalid transactions. The result would be that only 10% of trace buffer’s memory would be used to capture useful data. Now consider a circuit with 10 debug ports and 9 of those debug ports are valid every cycle. In this case, 90% of the trace buffer’s memory would be used to capture useful data.

In general, the benefit of using Goeders’ approach is that it adapts (using the HLS schedule) to ensure that on every clock cycle it is capturing the highest amount of useful data possible. However, as demonstrated by Monson and Hutchings [58], the advantage of using Goeders’ approach diminishes as HLS circuits become more pipe lined. For example, Monson and Hutchings observed (essentially) no increase in trace length, relative to a standard ELA, when their approach (which is very similar to Goeders’) was applied to a fir filter with a pipeline initiation interval (II) of one. It is interesting to note that even Goeders’ himself admits that “In extreme cases where all signals need to be recorded every cycle, the [multiplexer network] would contain no logic, and the architecture would be identical to a logic analyzer [27].” One situation in which all signals need to be recorded every clock cycle is an HLS circuit which has been scheduled with an II of one. Here, Goeders’ himself admits that his approach would be no more effective than a standard logic analyzer approach (e.g. Keeley’s approach).

It is important for the reader to understand, that, most often, obtaining a high performance accelerator on an FPGA requires obtaining an II of one. Even circuits with IIs of two may not be good enough to merit FPGA implementation. As has been discussed, at an II of one, Goeders’ and Keeley’s approaches are essentially identical (in terms of trace length), therefore, other factors must be considered in the decision. Assuming the HLS-circuit has an II of one, the only substantial difference between the two approaches at this point is **when** the debugging instrument is inserted into the circuit. Keeley’s approach has an advantage here because it is inserted after place and route while Goeders’ approach is inserted into the RTL. The benefit of inserting the debugging in-
strument after place and route is that signals of interest are free to be routed to the nearest available trace buffer input. Keeley demonstrated that using this approach the signals of interest could easily be routed to trace buffer inputs on that utilized up to 50% of the chip [25] (higher utilizations were not tested). Keeley did, however, note that routing signals-of-interest to trigger logic was more difficult and sometimes resulted in the circuit no longer meeting the specified timing constraint. On the other hand, insertion into the RTL artificially constrains each signal of interest to a specific trace buffer input which may or may not be placed near the signal of interest in the final circuit. This can result in a decrease in the maximum clock rate of the circuit. Thus, Keeley’s approach is a better option for pipe-lined HLS circuits with an II of one.

A challenge associated with Keeley’s approach is that there are may not be enough excess BRAMs to implement the trace buffers. In this case, the user would be required to scale back his debugging efforts. It should also be noted, however, that under these circumstance other ELA-based approaches would also be required to scale back as well.

7.3.4 Debugging Instrument and Complete Solution Overhead

This section estimates the overhead of a “complete debugging approach” using source-to-source transformations and Keeley’s debugging instrument. Since Keeley’s approach merely reclaims unused FPGA resources it effectively adds no area overhead beyond the debug ports. It is still an interesting exercise, however, to estimate how many of these unused resources would need to be reclaimed. As previously discussed, Keeley’s approach would add an RS-232 communication module (UART) and a trigger unit as well as a host of trace buffers. Xilinx reports that the size of one of their RS-232 modules is about 100 slices (400 LEs) [88]. Keeley also reports on the sizes of trigger units with various numbers of inputs [25]. Keeley reports that a trigger unit of 256 inputs uses 100 slices (400 LEs). The assumption is then made that another 200 LEs is required to implement a simple state machine to set the trigger unit and orchestrate trace buffer read-back. Therefore, Keeley’s debugging solution requires a total of 1000 LEs to be left unused after place and route. In the Zynq-7020 (a relatively small FPGA device), 1000 LE only accounts for about 2% of the total number of available LEs. This amount of logic is not hard to come by even for circuits that utilize high percentages of the available logic (e.g. 80-90%).
Table 7.2: Debugging Instrument Overhead Estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmarks</th>
<th>Base Area (LEs)</th>
<th>$N_{\text{Bits}}$</th>
<th>Debug Port Overhead</th>
<th>Debug Sol. Goeders (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adpcm</td>
<td>9,290</td>
<td>4,560</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>sha</td>
<td>4,806</td>
<td>1,767</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>8,678</td>
<td>3,172</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to use Keeley’s debugging instrument one must also demonstrate that the FPGA has enough trace buffer inputs to accommodate all of the signals that need to be traced. According to the “Zynq-7000 All Programmable SoC Overview” the Zynq-7020 has 140 BRAMs (i.e. the FPGA primitives used as trace buffers) [89] with 72 inputs each [90]. This means that the Zynq-7020 has more than 10,000 trace buffer inputs available. Table 7.2 reports the number of debug-ports bits for each benchmark that need to be connected to a trace buffers input (see $N_{\text{Bits}}$ column). As can be seen from the $N_{\text{Bits}}$ column in Table 7.2, the Zynq-7020 (which has more than 10,000 trace buffer inputs) has more than double the number of required trace-buffer inputs needed for all but one of the circuits (jpeg). This provides a little breathing room should the design occupy a large percentage of the BRAMs (used to implement the trace buffers).

Table 7.2 also reports the area overhead of a “complete debugging solution” using both the debug port transformation and Keeley’s debugging instrument. As previously discussed, Keeley’s debugging instrument effectively has no area overhead, therefore, the area overhead of the “complete debugging solution” is the overhead resulting from the insertion of the debug ports and shadow pointers (see Debug Port Overhead column in Table 7.2). For completeness and comparison, Table 7.2 also reports estimates of the “complete debugging solution” overhead using Goeders’ debugging instrument. Recall, that Goeders’ debugging instrument is useful for circuits with high initiation intervals (greater than one). It is not difficult to demonstrate that the CH-Stone benchmarks fall into this category. The process used to estimate these number is reported
in Appendix A. As a side note, Goeders approaches were estimated rather than implemented because Goeders’ approach currently is only available in LegUp and cannot be directly applied to Vivado HLS. The impact of using Goeders approach as implemented in Legup are also presented in Appendix A.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter set out to address three important questions related to the costs of debug ports. In answer to these questions, this chapter was able to 1) outline the conditions under which a debug port could be instrumented at minimum cost, 2) identify and experimentally demonstrate a potential worst case bound on the overhead that could be caused by debug ports, and 3) determine which debugging instrument was best for tracing debug ports and determine the cost of that debugging instrument.
CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

8.1 Summary of Contributions

The following is a summary of the research contributions contained in this dissertation:

Chapters 1 and Chapter 2 introduced and provided motivation and background for this dissertation. In particular, Chapter 2 introduced the reader to FPGAs, HLS, source-to-source transformations and in-circuit debugging techniques. The most important contribution of Chapter 2 is a comprehensive literature review of current HLS debugging techniques.

Chapter 3 introduced and investigated the feasibility of using source-to-source transformations to instrument source-level expressions with debug ports. The feasibility of these transformations were investigated using roughly 50,000 experiments performed on a super computer. The experiments tested the effects of instrumenting one expression at-a-time (Single-Port) as well as the effects of instrumenting large sets of expressions (Multi-Port). These experiments demonstrated that the debug port approach was indeed feasible and that individual ports could be added with 1%-2% increase in area. These experiments also demonstrated that ports added by the debug port transformation ensured that the instrumented expression was preserved into the final circuit.

Chapter 4 demonstrated that the debug port transformation could also be used to effectively instrument pointer-valued expressions. This was accomplished using the shadow pointer transformation. The shadow pointer transformation provided a means to overcome HLS tool restrictions and effectively instrument pointer variables. Chapter 4 demonstrated that all pointers in the CH-Stone benchmarks could be instrumented with shadow pointers and debug ports at an average cost of 2.58% increase in circuit area.

Chapter 5 demonstrated that the debug port transformation can be ported to a different HLS tool – LegUp. LegUp presented a particular challenge because each write to a debug port incurred a two clock cycle penalty which became significant when a large number of expressions were instrumented. Chapter 5 presented a debug-port binding strategy that cut the average latency incurred
by this penalty in half. This strategy worked by bundling compatible debug port writes into a single debug port function call. Chapter 5 also demonstrated that the shadow pointer transformation could be migrated to LegUp without any changes to the transformation itself.

Chapter 6 determined that 9 C-based HLS tools, in addition to Vivado HLS, have qualities similar to Vivado HLS that make them likely to be amenable to source-to-source transformations. On the other hand, however, only one of the examined HLS tools was determined not to be amenable. These findings were the result of an in-depth examination of the available documentation of each HLS tool.

In Chapter 7, the conditions for instrumenting an expression with minimum overhead were described. Chapter 7 also introduced a method to determine a possible worst case bound for each design. Chapter 7 also examined two styles of debugging instrument and determined which debugging instrument would be the best fit for trace HLS-generated circuits instrumented with debug ports. The size of this debugging instrument was then estimated.

8.2 Future Work

This dissertation demonstrated the feasibility of using source-to-source transformations to instrument an HLS design for debug. There are still many challenges as well as opportunities in the areas of HLS debug and applying source-to-source transformations applied to HLS. Among the challenges are:

Reducing HLS Debug Overhead

Area and performance overhead always have the potential to become obstacles during in-circuit debugging. Excessive overhead can result in increased compilation times and reduced circuit performance. It would be interesting to experiment with other source-level constructs to insert debug ports. For example, it may be possible to eliminate multiplexing overhead by creating a debug port for all instances of an expression. This could be done using pointers to represent debug ports (instead of global variables) and passing them through the function call hierarchy. Another approach for reducing debug port overhead would be to ensure that if-conversion and function
inlining are performed in the same fashion in both the instrumented and uninstrumented designs. However, it may be difficult to get this information from the tool.

**Automatic Expression Selection**

A common challenge for developers is selecting signals to instrument before the bug has been localized to a specific region of a design. One approach is to analyze the design and try and determine which signals will be most useful for debug. This has been examined for RTL designs on FPGAs [91]; however, it has not examined for HLS-generated circuits.

**Heisenbugs**

“Heisenbugs” [92] are bugs that disappear when you attempt to observe them (i.e. by instrumenting the circuit). Heisenbugs are a problem for almost all forms of debugging and HLS-generated circuits are no exception. In general, however, the more the circuit is altered the more likely a Heisenbug will manifest (by not manifesting!). One approach to reduce the likelihood of encountering a Heisenbug would be to select expressions to minimize the change in the structure and timing of the circuit. It would be interesting to process the results of the Single-Port experiments (see Chapter 3) to determine if any trends related to changes in the structure and timing of the circuit are observable.

**Customizing HLS Optimization with Source-to-Source Transformations**

In order to attract as many customers as possible, most HLS tool vendors have opted to tune their tools to achieve high-performing circuits – the most common synthesis goal. However, not all customers have high-performance as their primary objective and may need an HLS tool that balances performance with other constraints (e.g. power, area, or reliability). Many HLS tools – especially those that support SystemC – provide methods or structural means that allows users to affect the scheduling and binding of an HLS generated circuit by altering their source code. It would be interesting to see how much control these mechanisms provide and whether they could be used to allow HLS users to achieve custom optimization goals that are not directly support by the HLS tool vendor.
Post-Place and Route Insertion of Debug Instrument Compression

This dissertation found that Keeley’s debugging instrument was the best fit for HLS-circuits generated with debug ports. Much of this was because his approach allowed the debugging instrument to be added after place and route. However, the one disadvantage of his approach is its limited trace lengths. One approach to improving trace lengths is to use hardware implementations of compression techniques. However, inserting the compression unit after place and route without impacting timing could be challenging; however, this would provide ample opportunities for interesting research.

8.3 Concluding Remarks

The increasing use of HLS tools in new and demanding environments (such as the data center) by hardware experts as well as software engineers underscores the need for an automated approach to debugging HLS-generated circuits. Even though HLS tool vendors are beginning to see this need, in-circuit debugging support for commercial HLS tools is still very limited. At present, the only commercial HLS tool to support any form of in-circuit debugging is Xilinx’s SDAccel [17]. However, the impacts and limitations of SDAccel’s OpenCL printf statement support are unclear from the documentation. For example, it is not even clear (from the documentation [17]) that the printf statements are able to report the values of internal expressions while the kernel is operating on the FPGA. Further, the printf approach does not provide the ability to trigger a debugging instrument based on internal circuit values or efficiently capture and replay circuit activity. Given the number of challenges that must be addressed, it is unclear whether Xilinx or other HLS tool vendors will be willing to expend the resources to properly support HLS debug.

The source-to-source transformations presented in this dissertation provide a means for HLS application developers to obtain in-circuit debugging support for HLS without relying on the vendor to provide it. Using the source-to-source transformations, HLS application developers can instrument specific expressions with debug ports at an average 1-2% area overhead per port or can add an entire debugging solution for an average 63.7% increase in circuit area (using the Goeders’ approach). If Keeley’s approach is used (see Section 7.3.2), the overhead of a complete debug solution is reduced to the average overhead of the debug ports (27.2%).
source transformations are performed automatically, thereby increasing the productivity of the developer who is relieved of the time-consuming task of inspecting the generated RTL and/or manually inserting debug ports.

The use of source-to-source transformations makes a vendor independent HLS debugging tool a possibility. This is because debug ports not only remove the need for vendor debug support but they make it possible for the source-to-source compiler to be relatively HLS tool agnostic. In other words, the source-to-source approach could be used to create a unified HLS debugging suite that could easily be extended to many HLS tools. A vendor independent tool could be beneficial for HLS users as well as vendors. HLS tool vendors could benefit from such a tool by creating a consortium or open-source foundation to create and maintain this tool thereby saving their own resources and dividing the expense. Further, this kind of cooperation could result in a standard format for storing pertinent debug information and perhaps a standard method for adding user-defined, top-level ports. On the other hand, HLS-users would benefit from the regularity of a common debug tool and the performance of a mature, highly-developed HLS debugging suite. Such a tool would allow HLS application developers to focus their efforts on creating and debugging applications and HLS tool vendors to focus their efforts on improving synthesis results.
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APPENDIX A. ESTIMATING THE SIZE OF GOEDERS’ DEBUGGING INSTRUMENT

This appendix estimates and analyzes the overhead of a “complete debugging solution” based on the debug port transformation and Goeders’ debugging instrument [27]. A comparison is also made between estimates of a complete debugging solution (based on the debug port transformation and Goeders debugging instrument) and LegUp’s built-in debugging support (which also uses Goeders’ debugging instrument). The comparison finds that, when evaluated fairly, the overhead of the “complete debugging solution” is roughly equivalent to the overhead of LegUp’s built-in debugging support.

A.1 Goeders and Wilton Implementation Data

The data provided by Goeders and Wilton relates the size of a debugging instrument\(^1\) (in LEs) with the number of benchmark signals (or bits) connected to it. A chart of this data is found in Figure A.1. In the figure, the x-axis is the number of signals (or bits) connected to the debugging instrument and the y-axis is the increase in circuit area caused by inserting the debugging instrument. As can be seen in the figure, the size of a debugging instrument is directly proportional to the number of signals connected to it. Thus, the incremental cost of the debugging instrument can be expressed in terms of the increase in area (LEs) per bit connected to the debugging instrument. The incremental debugging instrument cost between 0 and 4,000 bits is about .9 LEs per bit. The position of the outlying data point near 8,000 bits suggests that this trend either continues or improves slightly as the number of signals increases.

It is important to note that the debugging instruments generated by Goeders’ tool have both a static region (i.e. one that does not grow with the number of bits) and an incremental region (i.e. one that does grow with the number of bits)\(^2\). According to Goeders [27], the static region

\(^1\)The size of the debugging instrument was determined by measuring the increase in area associated with inserting the debugging instrument into one of the CHStone benchmarks.

\(^2\)The terms static region and incremental region are not used by Goeders.
is about 1,250 LEs and consists of components such as an RS-232 communication module and hardware break-pointing logic. The incremental region, on the other hand, consists primarily of multiplexers. It is the incremental region that is assumed to grow at a rate of .9 LEs per signal (as described in the previous paragraph).

This data, however, is likely an overestimate for circuits mapped to a Zynq-7000 (the FPGA in our previous Vivado HLS experiments). This is because the data was generated using an Altera Cyclone II rather than the Zynq-7000. The important difference between these chips is that the Cyclone II uses 4-input LUTs and the Zynq-7000 uses 6-input LUTs. A circuit mapped to 6-input LUTs will use the same or fewer LEs than a circuit mapped to 4-input LUTs. Since the data (provided by Goeders) was generated using 4-input LUTs it must be adjusted to provide an accurate estimate of mapping the circuit to 6-input LUTs. According to Xilinx, a 6-input LUT (and a FF) is equivalent to 1.6 4-input LUTs (and a FF) [93]. This conversion factor is used to adjust the debugging instrument area estimate provided in Section A.4.

Figure A.1: Growth of Goeders and Wilton’s ELA circuit with respect to bits traced.

![Debug Circuitry Overhead (LEs) vs. Bits Connected to ELA](image-url)
A.2 Structure of Goeders’ Debugging Instrument

As discussed in his work [26] [27], Goeders’ debugging instrument was incorporated into and became the built-in debugging support in LegUp 4.0 [22]. To evaluate the results, it is important for the reader to understand the structure of Goeders’ debugging instrument. Goeders’ debugging instrument consists of three trace buffers that record the activity of different parts of the circuit. The first trace buffer records the activity of data-path registers. Due to the large number of data-path registers and the relatively infrequent activity of each register, Goeders’ approach was to generate a network of multiplexers that funnels and efficiently packs the values of data-path registers into a single trace buffer. The select signals of the multiplexer network are the state machine signals. This multiplexer network is the incremental region of the debugging instrument discussed in the previous section. The second trace buffer records writes to variables stored in the centralized memory controller (usually arrays). The final trace buffer records the activity of the state machines of all functional units in the circuit. The state machine signals are also funneled through a multiplexer network into the trace buffer.

A.3 Adaption for Use With Debug Port Transformation With Vivado HLS

In order to use Goeders’ debugging instrument with the debug port transformation and Vivado HLS one must explain how each trace buffer of Goeders’ instrument is connected to the Vivado HLS-generated circuit. The data-path register trace buffer would be connected to all of the instrumented expressions through the debug ports and a multiplexer network especially generated for the circuit. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is assumed that Vivado HLS provides the state transition graphs (i.e. the schedule of the HLS circuit) necessary to generate the multiplexer network (Vivado HLS currently does not do this). The state machine trace buffer would be connected, through another multiplexer network (which could be generated using the state transition graphs), to the state machines of all functional units within the Vivado HLS-generated RTL. The memory controller trace buffer could be discarded since Vivado HLS circuits do not have a memory controller. The area and memory saved from discarding the memory controller trace buffer would be put to use in the data-path register trace buffer.
A.4 Debugging Instrument Estimates

Now that the incremental cost of the debugging instrument is known (from Section A.1), it can be used, along with previously reported data, to estimate the overhead of a complete debugging solution (as previously defined). To accomplish this the following formula is used to estimate the size of the debugging instrument:

\[ DI_{size} = \frac{SR_{size} + 0.9N_{Bits}}{1.6}. \]  

(A.1)

In Equation A.1, the size of the debugging instrument, \( DI_{size} \), is determined by adding the static region, \( SR_{size} \), to an estimate of the size of the incremental region (\( 0.9N_{Bits} \)) and then multiplying by the 4-to-6 input LUT conversion factor (\( 1/1.6 \)). In this analysis, the size of the static region is considered to be 1,250 LEs (as was reported by Goeders). The estimate of the incremental region is generated by multiplying the incremental cost of the debugging instrument, .9 LEs per bit, by the number of bits, \( N_{Bits} \), connected to the debugging instrument. The whole sum is then divided by 1.6 to convert the result from 4-input LUTs to 6-input LUTs. It is important to note that each bit, or net, is connected to the debugging instrument only once even though (as discussed in Chapter 4) a single bit may drive more than one debugging port. Further, debug-port bits driven by constant values are not connected to the debugging instrument. These decisions effectively reduce the size of the debugging instrument without sacrificing any debug information (assuming the appropriate book-keeping is performed).

A.5 Results and Analysis

Table A.1 presents the “complete debugging solution” overhead estimates for each benchmark as a percentage (see Complete Solution column in the Table A.1) of the area of the uninstrumented baseline circuit (Base Area). The “complete debugging solution” estimate is the sum of the overhead contributions from the debug ports and shadow pointers (see Debug Port Overhead column) and the estimated debug instrument size (see Debug Instrument Overhead column). Table A.1 also reports the number of bits connected to the debugging instrument (\( N_{bits} \)). As shown in Table A.1, the “complete solution” overhead of most of the benchmarks falls between 40 and 70 percent. Although it appears to be a outlier, the overhead of the worst performing benchmark,
### Table A.1: Debugging Instrument Overhead Estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmarks</th>
<th>Base Area (LEs)</th>
<th>(N_{Bits})</th>
<th>Debug Port Overhead</th>
<th>Debug Instrument Overhead</th>
<th>Complete Debug Sol. (%)</th>
<th>Legup Partial Visibility (%)</th>
<th>Legup Full Visibility (%)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>4,806</td>
<td>1,767</td>
<td>1,598</td>
<td>1,775</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>8,678</td>
<td>3,172</td>
<td>2,426</td>
<td>2,566</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**blowfish**, was 113%. It is also interesting to note that, on average, the contributions of the debug ports and the debugging instrument to the total overhead is almost even (49% to 51%).

**A.6 Comparison to LegUp Built-in Debug Support**

For comparison, the last two columns of Table A.1 report on the debug-related overhead incurred from enabling LegUp’s built-in (Goeders’) debug support. Each column reports the area overhead of enabling LegUp’s built-in debugging support at one of its available levels of in-circuit visibility: partial and full. The partial visibility results were obtained by compiling the benchmarks using LegUp’s default optimizations. The default optimizations settings run optimization passes that remove source-level expressions from the circuit before the debugging instrumentation can be added to observe them; therefore, only partial in-circuit visibility is available. Goeders reported [27] that an average of 11% of source-level variables were removed from the CHStone benchmarks when the -O3 (default) optimizations were applied. The full visibility results were obtained by setting the NO_OPT variable to 1 in LegUp project Makefile. Setting the NO_OPT variable causes LegUp to set the optimization level to zero (i.e. -O0). Setting this variable does not disable all compiler optimizations; however, the remaining optimization passes that are run do not reduce the level of in-circuit debug visibility.
As can be seen in Table A.1, in most cases, switching from a debug-enabled circuit with partial visibility to one with full visibility resulted in an increase debug instrument overhead. These increases are due to increases in the size of the debugging instrument (from observing more signals) as well as increases in circuit area that results from disabling optimizations. In the most extreme cases, \textit{dfsin} and \textit{sha}, debug overhead more than doubled. For \textit{adpcm}, \textit{aes}, and \textit{jpeg}, the debug overhead was reduced by 5\%, 5\%, and 16\% respectively. This reduction is not an actual reduction in the size of the debugging instrument but a reduction in size due to disabling optimizations. This can be seen by compiling these circuits with the same options except disabling debug. Removing the debugging instrument respectively caused reductions of 10\%, 5\%, and 19\% (with respect to the uninstrumented baseline circuit) for \textit{adpcm}, \textit{aes}, and \textit{jpeg}. This indicates that the actual debug instrument increased in size for \textit{adpcm} and \textit{jpeg} and remained the same for \textit{aes}. However, increases in area do not tell the whole story. Disabling optimizations also resulted in an average increase in latency of 29\% over all of the benchmarks. This increase drops to 13\% if the 280\% contribution of apparent outlier \textit{adpcm} is not included.

The LegUp-full visibility results were included in order to provide a fair comparison to the “complete debugging solution” results. This comparison is consider fair because both solutions provide the same degree of in-circuit visibility. As shown in Table A.1, the average LegUp-full visibility overhead is 18.3\% less than the than avarage “complete solution” overhead. However, when considered benchmark-by-benchmark, the LegUp results are not always better. For example, the overhead of the \textit{dfadd}, \textit{dfmul}, and \textit{dfsin} benchmarks are all greater in the LegUp-full visibility results than the “complete solution” results. In fact, if the effects of outliers (\textit{blowfish} and \textit{jpeg}) are removed, the average difference between the LegUp results and the Vivado HLS results drops to 6.3\% (52.9\% to 59.2\%) with LegUp still slightly better. These results are close enough, given that the difference in circuit quality between Vivado HLS (Vivado HLS circuits are generally smaller and have shorter latencies), to declare a virtual tie.

When considering these results it is important to attempt to understand how broadly they can be applied. This can be done by answering the question: how well do these benchmarks represent real-world HLS applications? Unfortunately, the answer to this question is “not very well.” In general, when synthesized by an HLS tool, the CHStone benchmarks generally result in low-performing, highly sequential circuits. This is especially true given that, due to the amount of
effort required, no attempt was made to manually optimize these circuits using compiler directives. However, the general use case for HLS tools is to liberally apply compiler directives to generate highly optimized circuits with large amounts of parallelism. These are certainly not the kind of circuits that result from the CHStone benchmarks – especially when no compiler directives have been added.