
Subject: Re: Ranting and Raving and getting back to global variables

Posted by [Martin Schultz](#) on Mon, 20 Apr 1998 07:00:00 GMT

[View Forum Message](#) <> [Reply to Message](#)

David Fanning (davidf@dfanning.com) wrote in a reply to J.D. Smith (jdsmith@astrosun.tn.cornell.edu) who, in another elegant and well-reasoned article, this time on main-level variables, ends the article by writing this:

>

[...]

>

>

> Having spent considerable time afield (and I say this with
> considerable humility and respect for the efforts of people
> trying to learn IDL), I believe that more often RSI errs
> on the side of *overestimating* the user's ability to harness
> and control the power of IDL.

True enough: I still remember my first months' struggle trying to convince myself that the effort of learning IDL may pay off one day. I strongly agree with David's suggestion that the IDL folks should make an effort to consolidate the powerful system they provide before it may one day become totally incomprehensible (just imagine David would retire one day ! ;-)

Coming back to the point of global variables etc.: I still can't fully understand the need to create main variables in a subroutine. My philosophy (may be a bit antique ?) is that you should know what to expect from a subroutine when you are calling it, hence you can pass it a parameter which would in your example return the image that you loaded and manipulated (if you don't like to restrict yourself to an image, you can pass a structure and stuff it with everything you like). So what is the point of typing (at a minimum two !) additional characters to a call like

```
my_fancy_widget_routine_that_does_everything_anybody_has_eve r_dreamed_of
```

(simply add ,a and you can get back to the main level any kind of data, images, etc. you like).

E.g in my case; I am very often working with 2D data sets that have an additional variable_names array associated with them. So almost all of my subroutines can be called as

```
routine,data,header
```

or sometimes

```
routine,data=data,header=header
```

and I don't even have to think about this any more when I type it. So why should I bother and call

```
routine
```

bring_to_main_level,data,header
(or something alike) ?

Should I sign with Joe Farmer now?
Best regards,
Martin

Dr. Martin Schultz
Department for Earth&Planetary Sciences, Harvard University
186 Pierce Hall, 29 Oxford St., Cambridge, MA-02138, USA

phone: (617)-496-8318
fax : (617)-495-4551

e-mail: mgs@io.harvard.edu
IDL-homepage: <http://www-as.harvard.edu/people/staff/mgs/idl/>
