Subject: Re: RSI's priorities
Posted by krist on Mon, 16 Nov 1998 08:00:00 GMT
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Just a few thoughts while I'm waiting for an IDL program to finish executing:

I've been using IDL since 1986, when it was at V1.0 and graphics output meant a Tektronix terminal and an HP plotter (I had to write my own workstation display and Postscript drivers, before RSI came out with them). I have used IDL as my primary programming and data analysis environment since then (even during the dark days at work where using IDL to do something was essentially forbidden because of all of the development effort in IRAF/STSDAS).

I have developed something of a love/hate relationship with IDL over the years. I love the ability to work directly and interactively with my data and do things with one line of code that would take many in other languages; I can appreciate the power and simple beauty of the WHERE function; and I can respect the utility of widgets.

However, some things drive me crazy. It seems with every major release, much of my code and the code in libraries I use (like the Astronomy User's Library) breaks because RSI changed a keyword, changed the functionality of a procedure, or altered the behavior of some feature. The utmost worst time I ever had with IDL was with widgets. It got to the point that every minor release changed the way widgets behaved, breaking code right and left. It seems to me the same has been happening with objects. They were implemented before they were really well thought out. I would never recommend IDL for mission critical work unless its use was frozen to a specific version. It's just not safely backwards compatible.

Cost is also a factor, and it hurts the further widespread use of IDL in more than one way. I myself cannot afford the $1895 for a Windows or Linux license (yes people, the price is going up after January 1, not down), and that doesn't factor in the cost of maintenance contracts. I know more than one place where IDL is still at version 4 or so, because the cost is just too high. And of course, when people start using new features like objects, these places are left out, unable to use other's code, futher souring there relationship with IDL.

Give me a stable, moderate cost environment and I'll be happy (well, content). What we need is a Turbo Pascal sort of thing (low cost, does the job) to shake some sense into RSI. Volume, volume, volume!

And don't get me started on dongles...

John Krist

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The opinions expressed above are my own and not necessarily those of my employer (STScI) or its employer (AURA) or its employer (NASA) or its employer (the Government) or its employer (me). Oops, I guess they are!