Subject: Re: Top 10 for old farts
Posted by bjackel on Fri, 28 Jul 2000 07:00:00 GMT
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Continuing in the apparently pointless, but extremely interesting discussion about "old farts" and IDL...

We're a mid sized (approximately 12 people) research group in a physics department. Quite a range of experience with IDL, ranging from novice to over 10 years.

One person here is using objects: me. The only reason I'm doing that is out of curiosity. The ideas are intellectually appealing, and some experience with OOP seemed like a good idea. I've put together some classes for various purposes, have enjoyed the experience, and will probably never use them for general purpose work. They are so completely different from our existing code, and would require some re-tooling on the part of people here, as well as the collaborators that we share code with. That's the kind of thing I had plenty of time for as a student, but won't happen as a researcher.

(Actually, I might argue that the problem with IDL is not enough object functionality. If *all* variable types were first class objects which allowed *all* low level function calls ie. mag= c->abs(), cstar= c->conj() then things might make some more sense.)

Clearly, there are people out there who find objects very useful from a programming perspective. I respect that, but do worry that the good people at RSI might listen a point of view that may be the majority in this newsgroup, but does not at all represent our needs here.

As a side note, David Fanning made some brief comment in a previous message expressing (possibly tongue in cheek?) incredulity that not everyone was using widgets yet. Again, *none* of our daily work uses widget-based tools. Don't get me wrong, I'm a big fan of widgets, and wrote quite a few during grad school and after. For certain purposes they are wonderful. However, for evolving research they're rarely useful. I write functions, try them from the command line, hook them together with scripts, and look at the results with direct graphics. After many iterations I (hopefully) figure out what the appropriate analysis is, and would be ready to roll it all up into a nice widget bundle. Of course by then it's time to make some figures for the paper, and then move onto something entirely different. No time to write the widget,

and no real need.

I'm going to wait until after I've beta-tested 5.4 before putting together my top 10 wish list, but right now it simply consists of a general desire for faster more stable numerical routines and special functions. The core of what we do is based on math, and if that's not easy and reliable then nothing else matters. After that, there's I/O to deal with the different large data sets we use. That's something that IDL is already superb at, and doing a good job keeping up with new file types (ie. PNG, CDF).

Brian Jackel
