
Subject: IDL compatibility

Posted by [Craig Markwardt](#) on Wed, 10 Jan 2001 23:00:28 GMT

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I had a chance to try an IDL 5.3 installation today. I know I am behind the times, sorry :-)

Anyway, I was a bit surprised to find that one of my programs crashed because of a call to STR_SEP. Okay, not amazed because one of my programs crashes, because contrary to popular belief they do that all the time. :-) Apparently STR_SEP has been declared "obsolete" in IDL 5.3 and above. A new built-in routine, STRSPLIT, is provided which gives the same functionality, plus more.

I'm glad RSI keeps "improving" IDL. The regular expression aspect of IDL 5.3 looks tantalizing indeed. However I would urge them to be careful in the compatibility department. The revelations about STRTOK and the date routines make me wonder what's going on there. Now that STR_SEP may disappear too I am a bit more worried. It's been around since IDL 3 for goodness's sake! It's entrenched!

In my case I eventually found my own error. I misconfigured the !PATH, so lib/obsolete wasn't included. Thankfully STR_SEP is still there, for now.

However, here's what I think should happen. This is me tickling the RSI secret agents who read this newsgroup. :-) See if people agree:

- * when replacing one routine with another (as in the case of STR_SEP and STRSPLIT), leave STR_SEP.PRO as a wrapper routine. Then at least people's programs won't break. So far this is not an issue since STR_SEP is still included in the "obsolete" directory.
- * when adding undocumented built-in functions, as for STRTOK, the function name should really have a unique prefix, like "RSI_". This avoids name clashes with innocent user routines.

And generally, I would advise RSI that they should only break functional IDL code if:

- * it fixes a serious bug (would people classify the Y2K problem in the date routines as a serious bug? I'm not sure I do), or;
- * in IDL 6.

Let's see if I have any sway with the big boys :-)

Craig

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