
Subject: Re: Discussion on global variables in IDL
Posted by [david\[2\]](#) on Fri, 10 Aug 2001 11:43:55 GMT
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Alttyntsev Dmitriy writes:

> I do not understand why IDL can not do all this stuff itself. It can
> be done several ways.

My all-time favorite quote about IDL was made on this newsgroup. Someone in a similar thread complained that "IDL looks like it had been thrown together by a bunch of different programmers over a long period of time."

Well, ... exactly.

The remarkable thing about IDL, it seems to me, is not that it works in such a quirky way after almost 20 years of existence, but that it works at all. What would your car look like, do you think, if all the modern improvements had to be added to the original 20-year old chassis and design? Probably NOT like the new 2001 model.

IDL is no different. It is a very BIG program. With a LONG history. One can certainly argue (as many in this newsgroup have, including me) that IDL's implementation of objects is not perfect. But the fact that they are available at all--in any form--is a remarkable programming achievement given the constraints the RSI programming team had to work under.

Would IDL be better off, more self-consistent, a sleeker, more high-powered language if it was written over from scratch? You better believe it! And I'm sure every one of the IDL programmers would be grateful for the opportunity to build that wonderful new program.

But it can't be easy, or some young hot-shot in some garage somewhere would already have done it.

I don't mean to discourage people like Dmitriy from questioning what IDL is and where it is going. Lord knows there are many things that

CAN be done that (for whatever reason) are not.
But you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's
ear. You can't turn several million lines of
C code into the latest and greatest C++ program
in a one-year maintenance cycle. Having experienced
first hand how frustrating it is to maintain a
few measly thousand lines of code, I am enormously
sympathetic to anyone carrying out the thankless
task of maintaining--and extending--IDL functionality.

IDL is far from perfect, true. But, like Paul van Delst,
I would find it hard to live without it.

Cheers,

David

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