
Subject: Re: IDL as programming language?
Posted by [wally](#) on Thu, 01 Sep 1994 16:43:53 GMT
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The comments that IDL is a quick and dirty language aren't totally fair. IDL is a very powerful language that is easy to use, but that doesn't mean that code written in IDL is necessarily dirty. It has the constructs that allow you to write clear well structured programs if you take the time. If you're not willing to invest the time in good software development practices then you will get confusing unmaintainable software, but that's true in Fortran or C also. I've seen plenty of examples of spaghetti code written in Fortran. However, I will say that there is one feature of IDL that is easily abused and tends to create dirty code. IDL is not a strongly typed language like PASCAL. Not only don't you have to define variables, IDL is perfectly happy to dynamically redefine variables in the middle of a program changing an array to a scalar. For example you could have

```
a = fltarr(10,10)
```

but later if you have

```
a = 1
```

you won't get an error; a is redefined to be a scalar integer. So even if you define all your variables at the front of a program you're not guaranteed those definitions are valid. On the other hand this feature is one of the aspects of IDL that makes it so easy to use.

In addition IDL is funny in how it creates variables on the fly.
If you have

```
a = fltarr(10)  
b = a
```

that's ok. On the other had if you have

```
c(0:4) = a(0:4)
```

then you get an error that c is undefined

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