
Subject: Re: Why IDL Is Not My Favorite Platform (was Re: IDL alternatives?)

Posted by [thompson](#) on Thu, 01 Jun 1995 07:00:00 GMT

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zowie@banneker.stanford.edu (Craig DeForest) writes:

> For an example in the language syntax itself [one of many], the vector
> processing is very nice -- but (at least, in 3.5 -- don't know if this
> has changed in 4.0) the n:m and * syntaxes don't generalize to higher
> dimensions. ...

I don't understand this. One has always been able to use syntax such as

```
A = B(3:5,*)  
C = D(*,*,6:*)
```

and in my experience IDL 3.5 was no exception to this.

> An example of poor data structure design: Matrices act like their
> transposes. Enough said. ...

Is this another one of those row-major versus column-major wars? You'll find proponents on both sides of this issue. IDL differs from C in this, but agrees with FORTRAN, so take your pick.

The complaint that IDL has grown organically rather than being developed from the ground up is valid. It started out as a plotting tool for Tektronix 4010 type interfaces. Over the years additional features were added, such as image processing and widgets, and it's been ported to a bunch of operating systems it wasn't originally developed for. It's burdened by the need to be backwardly compatible for those institutions like here which have spent many years developing code under it. For all of that, I like it. I think the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.

As far as price goes, it is expensive. From what I've been able to tell, its price is roughly comparable to other high end scientific processing packages available for Unix and VMS platforms. That's not to say that I wouldn't want to see it cheaper.

For Windows and Mac platforms, however, it's a very expensive product. Of course I could be wrong, but I think that RSI sees the product as something that people buy primarily for workstations but also want to use on their PCs and Macs as well. That's unfortunate, if true.

Bill Thompson
