
Subject: Re: Introducing FL

Posted by [Craig Markwardt](#) on Tue, 04 Apr 2006 02:17:00 GMT

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JD Smith <jdsmith@as.arizona.edu> writes:

>> And finally, with this proliferation of "almost-IDL" clones (FL, IDL,
>> ANA, Yorick), I have to wonder why everybody has to re-invent the
>> wheel (see above). I see the GDL people meticulously toiling over
>> basic functionality, and it makes me wonder: wouldn't it have been
>> better to write an IDL-to-{Python,Ruby,Perl} translator, and get the
>> existing well tested script environment for free? And not only that,
>> but Python for science seem about to really take off. An infusion of
>> well-tested IDL libraries into that community might be enough
>> cross-fertilization to really get a non-proprietary version of an
>> IDL-like language going strong.

>
> Python has been set to "take off" in the astronomy field for about 8
> years, and it just hasn't really happened. In my view, it's just
> inertia. It took RSI 30 years to get to where they are, and they have
> built up an impressively large (if ungainly and not exactly stylish)
> bag of tricks.
> ...

True, but that's kind of my point. *If* we could easily translate all
our IDL code to Python (say), we'd have the immediate benefit of a
stable and supported runtime environment, where the wheel had already
been invented, and done well.

Then there are all sorts of possibilities. An individual could then
(a) translate all of their routines to Python and then just "switch"
to Python once and for all. Or (b) they could still think in IDL but
compile to Python whenever needed.

Python would gain a whole suite of great science software originally
written for IDL, and IDL users would gain the freedom to switch away
from a proprietary environment. Everybody would gain! (with very
little change in inertia)

I just don't think it's possible for the clone writers of GDL or FL
can sustain the effort long enough to write a complete new invention
of the wheel (interpreter environment plus library). [*] Why not let
the Python people do more than half of that?

Craig

[*] - I do appreciate the impressive effort that the GDL and FL
writers have put in!

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