
Subject: Re: Unhappy plotter

Posted by [Rick Towler](#) on Fri, 07 Apr 2006 16:08:57 GMT

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liamgumley@gmail.com wrote:

> I'm not a Matlab user, but a while back I spent some time looking at
> the documentation for the Matlab handle graphics suite. It really looks
> very simple, straightforward, and powerful.

Everything looks greener from the other side of the fence...

About a year and a half ago I started working in a MATLAB shop. I had always wanted to spend some real time with MATLAB and now I had the chance. Someone opened the (very expensive) gate and guess what? The lawn on the other side has just as many brown spots, mole mounds, and doo doo piles.

From a programmer's perspective, I think IDL's OG are superior to ML's HG. IDL's object API is superior. I hear Michael and others groaning, but the truth is while not complete it is sufficient and most importantly easy to use. Maybe it is just me, but I always feel constrained (and a bit confused) when writing classes in MATLAB. In IDL, I was composing classes in literally minutes under David's tutelage.

To be fair, ML's HG aren't bad. The biggest advantage (and I guess this is pretty big, I have been waiting for this from RSI for *years*) is that the HG system has a lot of "value added". Mathworks doesn't just give you the bricks, but full blown houses. RSI gave us the atoms and took a "If you build it, they will come" attitude and, well, very few people have come.

But at the end of the day they both have their warts. MATLAB doesn't pass by reference, doesn't have keywords nor pointers, and is *really* expensive. IDL's IDE is lacking (especially non-windows platforms), the GUI builder is weak, and it's OG library is limited.

To bring this back to the iTools discussion, for those of you that haven't used MATLAB, the iTools are, IMO, RSI's attempt to provide an interface similar to MATLAB's figure. And let's be honest, this is sorely needed in IDL. I think the problem is that RSI went from one extreme (atoms) to the other (iPlot, iSurface, ilmage) and I think the majority of IDL users live somewhere in between wanting something with the ease of the direct graphics system and the power of the object graphics system. While some of us have made attempts, we the users can't really do it. iTools has shown us that some of this needs to be implemented internally. I wish I would have had the vision to see this back during the 6.0 alpha...

It will be interesting to see where all of this goes. I for one will stay around, not because of the iTools, but because (despite the warts) when I need to do 3d, IDL is the best game in town. But since now I need to do some quick and dirty 2d plots from the command line, I'm firing up MATLAB.

-Rick
