> Is this normal behaviour for IDL's default formatting?

Looks like it is.

> Suppose the files are already there (can't set format keyword in
> printf), how should I read this file without reading strings (data is
> not fltarr(5) but fltarr(50,50,14))?

Looks like you can't. So now I know what that paragraph in the STRMID
documentation must have been trying to explain...

Greg