
Subject: Re: Rumors about new plotting software in IDL
Posted by [landsman](#) on Tue, 31 Oct 1995 08:00:00 GMT
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In article <472svd\$s0a@post.gsfc.nasa.gov>, thompson@achilles.nascom.nasa.gov (William Thompson) writes...

>
> I've heard a rumor that RSI is planning to change their plotting software in an
> upcoming release of IDL. From what I hear, the new software will not be
> downwardly compatible with the old software. Supposedly, user's will be
> initially given the option of using either the old or new methods, but
> eventually, the old software will be phased out.
>
> Does anybody know anything more definite about this? I'm very concerned about
> backwards compatibility. Making a new version of IDL that isn't compatible
> with all our current software only pours flames on the debate about whether we
> should look for something to replace it with.
>
> Of course, I may have this hopelessly garbled. I'm only repeating what I heard
> second hand. Thus, take what I say with a grain of salt. The point of this
> post is to try to get more detailed information.

Here are some of my notes on a talk given by David Stern at the Astronomical Data Analysis and Software Systems (ADASS) meeting in Tuscon last week.

- (1) IDL V5.0 (~Summer 96) will use new internal plotting software, but RSI will make every effort to make the user interface backward compatible with the current version of IDL.
- (2) However, the new plotting software will not be 100% backward compatible. Therefore, users will have the option using either the new or the old internal plotting software. I am pretty sure that nothing was said about eventually phasing out the old software, although that seems a reasonable supposition.

So my impression was (1) it will not be very difficult to update existing IDL code to run the new internal plotting software, certainly much easier than the changes that were needed to go from IDL V1.0 to V2.0, and (2) existing IDL code should work without any changes on the most current version of IDL for at least the next ~2 years.

The above approach seems reasonable to me *provided* that the new graphics software provides significant improvements, and that detailed instructions are given on how to update existing IDL code (perhaps it could be automated?) I think backwards compatibility should be a very high priority for IDL, but it should not be an inviolable rule (or as high a priority as it should be for, say, FORTRAN), if there is no other way to add powerful new features to the language. Projects can always freeze their IDL version, if absolute backward

compatibility is required.

I should emphasize that my impressions are based on a 30 minute talk, and not on any detailed conversations or inside information, and that the release of V5.0 is sufficiently far in the future, that RSI could easily change their plans.

--Wayne Landsman

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