
Subject: Re: Migrate away from idl?

Posted by [lecacheux.alain](#) on Mon, 23 Nov 2009 16:23:07 GMT

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I am a little bit surprised by the lack of enthousiasm of many of you regarding current IDL.

I am a French astronomer and use IDL since v2.0 (introduced to me, in the mid 80s, by a visiting colleague from Colorado University). Since then, IDL has taken over all other programming languages that I was using (except in a few cases dealing with instrumentation or real time programming).

Main advantadge of IDL, in my opinion, is that it can adapt very well to very different programming situations: for quickly examining a short subset of data, just as well as for developping large data processing applications. But in the latter case, the executable code can also be made quite efficient (even when compared to compiled C, etc...) so long as you know how should be manipulated 'histogram', 'value_locate', 'where' and other ([array1])[array2] nice (but a bit criptyc) IDL constructs.

With IDL, you can easily open any kind of file (of any format and/or huge size), apply to data nearly any kind of scientific processing (linking with external libraries is not very difficult) and produce quite nice plots of publishable graphic quality, especially when using 'object graphics'. The general OO implementation is not perfect, but is sufficient for nearly all purposes. 'Bridges' from and to other environments are quite useful. IDL license is expensive but there is the VM, which allow IDL executables to be run for free. Finally, a rich library of nice user contributions is available.

So, what is the problem ?

I must admit that I would have expected to find, in the last few years, more appealing novelties than ITools and the Workbench. The ITools are not really helpful to me (and, I guess, to many, except for learning how object graphics subtilities can be circumvented). And the Workbench has disappointed many (or every ?) Windows user, and maybe still contains bugs (or weaknesses, like the sudden breakpoint inactivity, pointed out by David).

However, IDL has some firm basis and still appears to be a solid construct for scientists. I am afraid that many of us might be leaving IDL, being appealed by more recent and seducting tools, whose future is, in my opinion, not really guaranteed.

Alx.
