
Subject: Re: Negative array indices

Posted by [penteado](#) on Fri, 03 Dec 2010 01:28:07 GMT

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On Dec 2, 10:35 pm, b_gom <b_...@hotmail.com> wrote:

> Another example is the new list and hash objects. The documentation
> does a good job describing what their methods do, but doesn't really
> explain what they are better for than arrays and structures, and what
> performance trade-offs to be aware of. I guess that is where your new
> book comes in..

I had not even noticed that the documentation did not mention motivation. Maybe all the many requests for lists, hashes and negative indices over the years (mine, for one) left them with the impression that everyone already wanted them. Negative indices are a good syntactic sugar (basically an abbreviation for things like `a[n_elements(a)-1]` and `b[0,(size(b,dimensions))[1]-1]`), and I find them very useful, but they are not even close in importance to lists and hashes. I was leaving IDL for Python because of the lack of lists and hashes.

In nearly every program I write I need a dynamic, possibly heterogeneous container. Without lists, it is too much work to have to predict or alter the dimensions of arrays, or handle (particularly, read) several layers of indirection through nested pointer arrays. And I usually have a bunch of different variables to keep associated, where structures are too awkward to use because they are static. Usually because the code needs to deal with data that can come in varied forms, not known at compile time (being a dynamically typed language is one of the main factors in my choice to use IDL).
