Subject: Feature, or bug?
Posted by whdaffer on Sat, 19 May 2012 19:20:40 GMT
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Found an interesting, ummm, feature.

I frequently use the following construct.

```
if n_elements(a) * n_elements(b) * ... * n_elements(z) eq 0 then
begin
  Message,'....'
endif
```

with a catch block to do my preliminary argument processing.

It turns out, there are circumstances where this product can equal 0, even when all the n_element()'s return non-zero numbers

To see this, consider...

```
IDL> print, long(27072)^6
0
```

Any more than 5 arrays with 27072 elements followed by whatever else and that construct will always evaluate to 0. I had 6, plus a few that had fewer elements.

I also tried a case where I put the arrays with fewer alements up front. It failed too.

```
IDL> a=(b=(c=(d=(e=(f=fltarr(27072))))))
IDL> print,(n_elements(fltarr(10)) *n_elements(1) *n_elements(a))
*n_elements(b) * n_elements(c) *n_elements(d) *
n_elements(e)*n_elements(f)  & print,check_math()
0
0
```

and check_math says all is okay (If I understand check_math correctly)

Doesn't seem to be a 32-bit/64-bit issue, I replicated it on a 64-bit machine.

```
IDL> help,!version
```

```
** Structure !VERSION, 8 tags, length=76, data length=76:
   ARCH            STRING    'x86'
   OS              STRING    'linux'
   OS_FAMILY       STRING    'unix'
   OS_NAME         STRING    'linux'
   RELEASE         STRING    '8.1'
   BUILD_DATE      STRING    'Mar  9 2011'
   MEMORY_BITS     INT           32
   FILE_OFFSET_BITS
                   INT           64
IDL>
```

Since n_elements returns a long (not even a ulong, which, when you think about it for a second, it really should, but that wouldn't have helped me, in my particular case because that had the same behavior) I guess the upshot is: don't use that construct!

Safer would be

if (n_elements(a) eq 0)*... then begin ...

I just never imagined that I could multiply nonzero integers together and get a zero!

whd

whd
