

*Summary of discussion on*  
**What is XML and how do we teach it?**

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The topic of XML was introduced as a specific example of many of the more general problems being discussed. It was hoped that some participants would have concrete ideas about how this particular subject area should be taught within the context of translation studies.

In response, Daniel Gouadec pointed to the wealth of information on XML available on the Internet. He also offered a basic differentiation between XML and the more well-known HTML by explaining that XML was designed to describe structured data whereas HTML is simply concerned with the displaying of data.

Mark Shuttleworth (Imperial College, London) added that XML allows you to define your own set of tags to mark up data in an intelligent and meaningful way, whereas HTML is only concerned with the representation format of data and not with its structure and meaning. Examples provided during the discussion illustrated the use of XML tags to label different types of information contained in a document such as author, price, first line of address, French term, or German translation memory segment.

Supplied was also a link to an article written by Michael Beddow entitled “What is XML and what use is it? Some answers from a Humanities perspective”: <http://and5.anglo-orman.net:8082/sitedocs/whatis.html>. This article is used as a starting point for students at Imperial College, London, where teaching XML forms part of the Language Engineering module of the M.Sc. program in Scientific, Technical and Medical Translation with Translation Technology. The main objective of this course is to keep students up-to-date with how markup languages are evolving and to emphasize the particular relevance of this technology as far as translation and localization are concerned.

In terms of the actual course content, Shuttleworth explained that the module combined a significant theoretical component with a degree of practical work involving creation of simple XML documents. The popularity of this component would suggest the merits of such a course, further reinforced by the decision of some students to produce their dissertations on XML-related topics.

Anthony Pym intervened by making the point that currently his students are not really taught HTML let alone XML. While some time is spent on looking at the workings of HTML, the documents are usually created using software without students learning the mark-up language itself.

Pym's concern was that some students are highly skilled linguists but are uncomfortable with excessively complicated coding. Up to now teaching has concentrated on the creation tools available, making it unnecessary to teach the underlying coding languages. In the same way, the theory of XML could be taught without developing practical elements, although the worry is that this could be counter-productive.

Daniel Gouadec addressed Anthony Pym's reservations and suggested that once students have acquired a reasonable level of computer literacy, curiosity and interest, they are often capable of teaching themselves "whateverML".

At Gouadec's institution there are two IT teachers who deal with Visual Basic, Perl, and JavaScript, and another teacher who covers DTDs, HTML, XML, etc. Gouadec reported that the student take-up is high and that the syllabus is under constant review after hearing the reports from graduate work placements and taking on board feedback from former students. Advantage is also taken of the students' ability to teach their fellow students (Gouadec remarked it was the way they introduced subtitling, SDLX, dubbing, website cloning and localization of videogames).

Melany Laterman commented that, in her 12 years experience as a translator in software localization, it is not necessary for a translator to become an engineer or to learn how to write code (XML or any other) in order to work in the software or website localization industry. She agreed that a translator planning to work in this field must have some degree of technical know-how (for example, how to work with different file formats, text editing programs, CAT tools) as the market dictates that professional translators (with the possible exception of literary translators) must be prepared to tackle the non-translation aspects of the task in question.

Laterman strongly believed that students must be very familiar with different file formats. While she thought that programming and compiling code was really the territory of qualified engineers, any translator in a position to provide these services is adding enormous value to their product.

The final contribution in this discussion came from Patrick Drouin, who teaches localization at the University of Montreal. He stated that all students taking his localization courses must be familiar with XML to the extent that they should be able to understand what TMX, TBX and XLIFF are. Those students who opt to take part in the localization program receive tuition from lecturers from the Library Sciences Department, where they learn about DTDs, XML, SGML, ODA and XSLT.