Fancy Types for XML:

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Fancy Types for XML: Friend or Foe?

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XML and the Web

• Any candidate web-programming language must deal seriously with XML

• At least, there must be good support for XML concrete syntax... but this is a pretty trivial matter.

• The real question: How XML gets into the type system?
Xtatic

• Xtatic is a lightweight extension of C# with
  • regular types
  • regular pattern matching (a la XDuce)

See my web page for lots of papers
The Xtatic Experience

What was learned:

- XML processing with "native" static types is indeed very pleasant
- rich type structure of many XML documents more traction for type system
The Xtatic Experience

What was learned:

- XPath-style ("vertical") and regular-pattern-style ("horizontal") pattern matching are both very useful, in different situations

- it appears [cf. Benzaken et al 2005, Gapeyev&Pierce 2004, etc.] that they can be placed on a common foundation

- one nice use-case for the horizontal style is statically typed string regexps

- another is that horizontal patterns also generalize ML-style algebraic pattern matching

See our PLANX ‘05 paper for more details
The Less-Than-Xtatic Experience

Some tricky issues...

- Standards compliance (W3C Schema, XPath, etc., etc.)
  - "Best effort" approach (but, e.g., no notion of "Schema-validated run-time values")
  - deciding subtyping efficiently
    - algorithms are known that seem to be "efficient enough in practice," but these are not trivial to implement [Hosoya/Vouillon/Pierce ICFP 2000]
  - compiling regular patterns efficiently [but cf. Michael Levin's forthcoming dissertation]
  - Precise type inference for pattern variables [but not clear it is absolutely necessary]
  - Finding the "right" type system for attributes is still an open problem [but see proposal by Hosoya&Murata]
Some Critical Design Points

- **Structural** (types are descriptions of structure of values) vs. **nominal** (each value is tagged at run time with a single atomic "type name" that it belongs to) treatment of types

- Interaction between **subtyping** of XML types and the full language's subtype relation. (Your language has subtyping, right??)

- **Single-type tree grammars** (W3C Schema, XQuery) vs. full **regular tree grammars** (XDuce, Xtatic, CDuce, RelaxNG, etc.)

- **Power** of the language of XML types (unions and recursion for sure; but what about intersections? differences? interleaving?)