The Textual Metafunction as a Didactic Problem in Applied Translation Studies

Robert Spence

`mailto:robert@spence.saar.de`

The URL of this PDF document will be

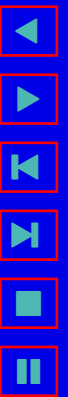`http://spence.saar.de/papers/brest2001.pdf`

About these slides...

About these slides...

French stoicism in the face of an aesthetic dilemma:

About these slides...

French stoicism in the face of an aesthetic dilemma:

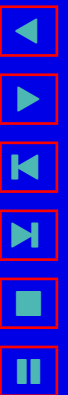1) put up with well-meaning Anglo-Saxon assaults on the French language?

About these slides...

French stoicism in the face of an aesthetic dilemma:

1) put up with well-meaning Anglo-Saxon assaults on the French language?

2) switch to English and abandon the myth of French as *the* international language?

About these slides...

French stoicism in the face of an aesthetic dilemma:

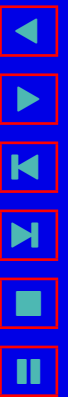1) put up with well-meaning Anglo-Saxon assaults on the French language?

2) switch to English and abandon the myth of French as *the* international language?

If President Mitterrand could unflinchingly put up with Queen Elizabeth's French, then you can try to put up with mine...
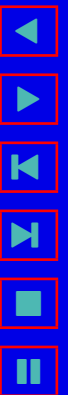
About these slides...

French stoicism in the face of an aesthetic dilemma:

1) put up with well-meaning Anglo-Saxon assaults on the French language?

2) switch to English and abandon the myth of French as *the* international language?

If President Mitterrand could unflinchingly put up with Queen Elizabeth's French, then you can try to put up with mine...

... if the pain becomes too great, use earplugs or a walkman, so you can concentrate on the content without being distracted by the form.
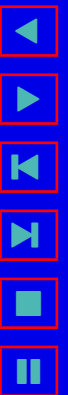
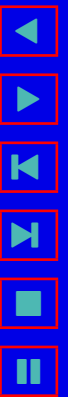# ... "content" vs "form" ...

... "content" vs "form" ...
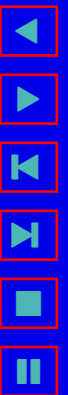
... is actually one of the central problems.

... "content" vs "form" ...

... is actually one of the central problems.

Maintaining the illusion of that distinction is a lot easier if ...

... "content" vs "form" ...

... is actually one of the central problems.

Maintaining the illusion of that distinction is a lot easier if ...

one sticks to the ideational metafunction ...

... "content" vs "form" ...

... is actually one of the central problems.

Maintaining the illusion of that distinction is a lot easier if ...

one sticks to the ideational metafunction ...

and only deals with 'premeditated' texts ...

... "content" vs "form" ...

... is actually one of the central problems.

Maintaining the illusion of that distinction is a lot easier if ...

one sticks to the ideational metafunction ...

and only deals with 'premeditated' texts ...

rather than with spontaneous texts of the kind that are most essentially involved in maintaining and transmitting ideologies.
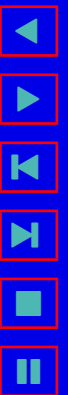
... "content" vs "form" ...

... is actually one of the central problems.

Maintaining the illusion of that distinction is a lot easier if ...
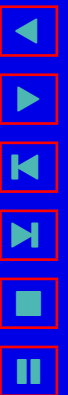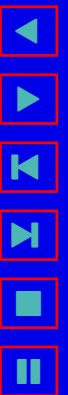
one sticks to the ideational metafunction ...

and only deals with 'premeditated' texts ...

rather than with spontaneous texts of the kind that are most essentially involved in maintaining and transmitting ideologies.

How does an old-fashioned armchair linguist access the content of her own spontaneous utterances independently of their form?

Such a linguist is likely to be only concerned with the 'ideational' content …

Such a linguist is likely to be only concerned with the 'ideational' content ...

and is thus limited by the traditional notion of linguistic structure:

Such a linguist is likely to be only concerned with the 'ideational' content ...

and is thus limited by the traditional notion of linguistic structure:

'structure' ='constituency' and 'interdependency'
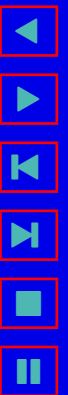
Such a linguist is likely to be only concerned with the 'ideational' content ...

and is thus limited by the traditional notion of linguistic structure:

'structure' = 'constituency' and 'interdependency'
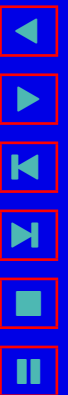
i.e. 'structure' = 'ideational structure'.

Such a linguist is likely to be only concerned with the 'ideational' content ...

and is thus limited by the traditional notion of linguistic structure:

> 'structure' ='constituency' and 'interdependency'

> i.e. 'structure' = 'ideational structure'.

Other kinds of structure include:

Such a linguist is likely to be only concerned with the 'ideational' content ...

and is thus limited by the traditional notion of linguistic structure:

> 'structure' ='constituency' and 'interdependency'

> i.e. 'structure' = 'ideational structure'.

Other kinds of structure include:

> 'prosodic' (interpersonal)

> 'culminative' (textual)

Such a linguist is likely to be only concerned with the 'ideational' content ...

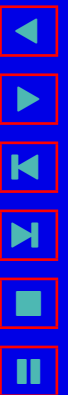and is thus limited by the traditional notion of linguistic structure:

> 'structure' ='constituency' and 'interdependency'

> i.e. 'structure' = 'ideational structure'.

Other kinds of structure include:

> 'prosodic' (interpersonal)

> 'culminative' (textual)

This leads us to the first kind of challenge posed by the textual metafunction from a didactic point of view:
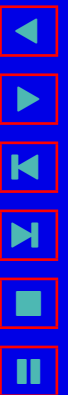
Conceptual challenges

Conceptual challenges

- the need to extend the traditional notion of structure

Conceptual challenges

- the need to extend the traditional notion of structure

- this problem is partly reducible to one of linguistic representation

Conceptual challenges

• the need to extend the traditional notion of structure

• this problem is partly reducible to one of linguistic representation

• within a didactic context the problem of linguistic representation usually reduces even further, and becomes a problem of choosing the most appropriate visual metaphors for various kinds of linguistic structure.

Conceptual challenges

• the need to extend the traditional notion of structure

• this problem is partly reducible to one of linguistic representation

• within a didactic context the problem of linguistic representation usually reduces even further, and becomes a problem of choosing the most appropriate visual metaphors for various kinds of linguistic structure.

... but there are also terminological and methodological challenges ...

Terminological challenges

Terminological challenges

- These occur at two levels:

Terminological challenges
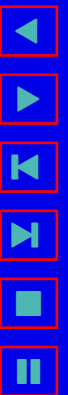
- These occur at two levels:

    - the object level (first order)

Terminological challenges

- These occur at two levels:

    - the object level (first order)

    - the meta level (second order)

Terminological challenges

- These occur at two levels:

    - the object level (first order)

    - the meta level (second order)

At each of these levels, the problems are in the present case related to one of the central watersheds on the Eurasian language typology continuum:

Terminological challenges

- These occur at two levels:

    - the object level (first order)

    - the meta level (second order)

At each of these levels, the problems are in the present case related to one of the central watersheds on the Eurasian language typology continuum:

low-morphology languages		high-morphology languages		...
non-case-marking languages		case-marking languages		...
fixed-word-order languages		free-word-order languages		...
English	French	German	Russian	...

⇑

Some typological differences among the object languages English, French and German that may impact upon the textual metafunction in one particular translation-teaching context: Francophone students in Saarbrücken
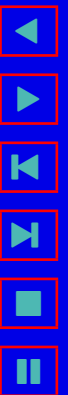
Some typological differences among the object languages English, French and German that may impact upon the textual metafunction in one particular translation-teaching context: Francophone students in Saarbrücken

Students' native language (French) and second foreign language (English) are typologically similar, except for ...
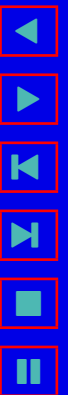
Some typological differences among the object languages English, French and German that may impact upon the textual metafunction in one particular translation-teaching context: Francophone students in Saarbrücken

Students' native language (French) and second foreign language (English) are typologically similar, except for ...

minor differences in possibilities of participant tracking due to primary classification of nouns:

(French: phenotypic classification on basis of gender;

English: cryptotypic classification on basis of consciousness)

Some typological differences among the object languages English, French and German that may impact upon the textual metafunction in one particular translation-teaching context: Francophone students in Saarbrücken

Students' native language (French) and second foreign language (English) are typologically similar, except for ...

minor differences in possibilities of participant tracking due to primary classification of nouns:

(French: phenotypic classification on basis of gender;

English: cryptotypic classification on basis of consciousness)

minor differences in degrees of markedness associated with certain relative sequencings of Complements and Adjuncts, often due to differences in verb valency patterns

Some typological differences among the object languages English, French and German that may impact upon the textual metafunction in one particular translation-teaching context: Francophone students in Saarbrücken
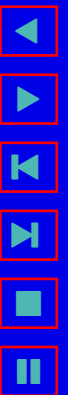
Students' native language (French) and second foreign language (English) are typologically similar, except for ...
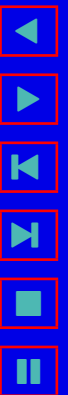
minor differences in possibilities of participant tracking due to primary classification of nouns:
(French: phenotypic classification on basis of gender;
English: cryptotypic classification on basis of consciousness)

minor differences in degrees of markedness associated with certain relative sequencings of Complements and Adjuncts, often due to differences in verb valency patterns

some differences in the choice of primary deixis in verbal groups (partly genre-related)

Some typological differences among the object languages English, French and German that may impact upon the textual metafunction in one particular translation-teaching context: Francophone students in Saarbrücken

Students' native language (French) and second foreign language (English) are typologically similar, except for ...

minor differences in possibilities of participant tracking due to primary classification of nouns:
(French: phenotypic classification on basis of gender;
English: cryptotypic classification on basis of consciousness)

minor differences in degrees of markedness associated with certain relative sequencings of Complements and Adjuncts, often due to differences in verb valency patterns

some differences in the choice of primary deixis in verbal groups (partly genre-related)

some tenor-related differences in the interaction of pronominalization and thematization (extraposed Themes)

Students' first foreign language (German) is typologically quite different:

Students' first foreign language (German) is typologically quite different:

a case-marking, free-word-order language

Students' first foreign language (German) is typologically quite different:

a case-marking, free-word-order language

with three genders ($\Rightarrow$ participant tracking potential)

Students' first foreign language (German) is typologically quite different:

a case-marking, free-word-order language

with three genders ($\Rightarrow$ participant tracking potential)

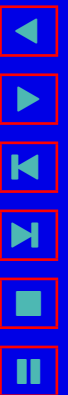a strong dislike of intercalated material at group/phrase rank (but not at clause rank)

Students' first foreign language (German) is typologically quite different:

a case-marking, free-word-order language

with three genders ($\Rightarrow$ participant tracking potential)

a strong dislike of intercalated material at group/phrase rank (but not at clause rank)
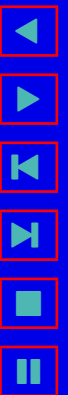
and a weak association between Theme and Subject

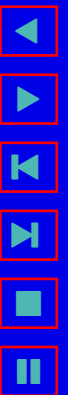Students' first foreign language (German) is typologically quite different:

a case-marking, free-word-order language

with three genders ($\Rightarrow$ participant tracking potential)

a strong dislike of intercalated material at group/phrase rank (but not at clause rank)

and a weak association between Theme and Subject

$\Rightarrow$ German lies on the other side of the typological watershed.

Students' first foreign language (German) is typologically quite different:

a case-marking, free-word-order language

with three genders ($\Rightarrow$ participant tracking potential)

a strong dislike of intercalated material at group/phrase rank (but not at clause rank)

and a weak association between Theme and Subject

$\Rightarrow$ German lies on the other side of the typological watershed.

The typological differences at the object level are associated with terminological differences at the meta level.

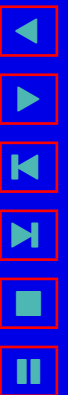# Typological differences reflected at the meta level: the example of "Theme"

Typological differences reflected at the meta level: the example of "Theme"

The notion of a 'psychological subject' has played a greater role in the historical development of the 'Theme' concept in English and French linguistics than in German linguistics

Typological differences reflected at the meta level: the example of "Theme"

The notion of a 'psychological subject' has played a greater role in the historical development of the 'Theme' concept in English and French linguistics than in German linguistics

and seems to 'intuitively fit the facts' of English and French

Typological differences reflected at the meta level: the example of "Theme"

The notion of a 'psychological subject' has played a greater role in the historical development of the 'Theme' concept in English and French linguistics than in German linguistics
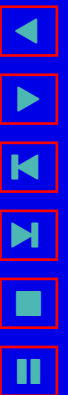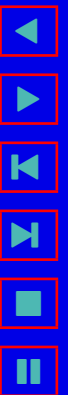
and seems to 'intuitively fit the facts' of English and French

$\Rightarrow$ *the object-language-specificity of such terms has potentially serious consequences for* multilingual *teaching*

The translation class as a transcultural space

The example is again that of translation classes for French-speaking students in Saarbrücken, Germany:

The translation class as a transcultural space

The example is again that of translation classes for French-speaking students in Saarbrücken, Germany:

the metadiscourse about translations is usually conducted in the target language
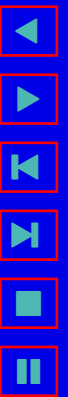
The translation class as a transcultural space

The example is again that of translation classes for French-speaking students in Saarbrücken, Germany:

the metadiscourse about translations is usually conducted in the target language

half the time that language is a foreign language (for the students, but not for the teacher)

The translation class as a transcultural space

The example is again that of translation classes for French-speaking students in Saarbrücken, Germany:

the metadiscourse about translations is usually conducted in the target language

half the time that language is a foreign language (for the students, but not for the teacher)

if the students are translating the same native-language source text into both their foreign languages (German and English), we sometimes agree to use their first foreign language (German) to discuss *both* translations — "to save time" (!)

The translation class as a transcultural space

The example is again that of translation classes for French-speaking students in Saarbrücken, Germany:

the metadiscourse about translations is usually conducted in the target language

half the time that language is a foreign language (for the students, but not for the teacher)

if the students are translating the same native-language source text into both their foreign languages (German and English), we sometimes agree to use their first foreign language (German) to discuss *both* translations — "to save time" (!)
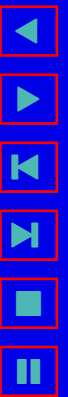
... but these kinds of didactic challenges pale into insignificance when compared with the ...

Methodological challenges

Methodological challenges

Didactic discourse follows different preferred forms in different cultures; these forms are an integral part of cultural ideology ...
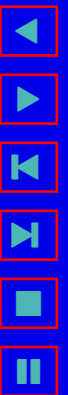
German: 'methodische Einführung'

"we need a system! so let's develop one, however complicated it is, and follow it at all costs, because [it's self-evident that ...] order is always better than chaos!"

$\Rightarrow$ the priorities may sometimes seem counterintuitive and the logic may be hard to follow, but it's massive, impressive, well-organized ...

French: 'initiation raisonnée'

"since all human beings are equally endowed by Nature with the innate faculty of reason, it stands to reason that an introduction should be based on rational principles and all rules of practice should be deduced (via reasoned proofs) from those principles"

$\Rightarrow$ definitely following some kind of Cartesian or Neo-Platonist intellectual programme ... intellectually stimulating ... well-formulated ... it often doesn't seem to matter how well it actually works in practice ...
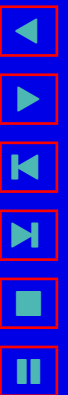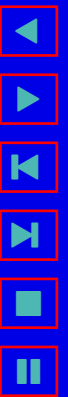
Anglo-Saxon: 'practical introduction'

"as long as twelve unbiased jurymen chosen at random feel that it works in practice, and it doesn't go against common sense, we could agree to go on using it in the spirit of our forefathers, at least until someone comes up with something more practical"

$\Rightarrow$ it doesn't seem to matter about the utter lack of systematicity in the formulation and labelling of abstract concepts ... as long as the students get lots of hands-on practice ...

The label 'didactic' doesn't really get to the heart of the matter
these preferred didactic forms are also 'pedagogic' (Bernstein):

as discourses, they're not solely concerned with transmitting knowledge

they're also concerned with maintaining social control, i.e. they're
concerned with transmitting systems of restricted access to power
and privilege

The label 'didactic' doesn't really get to the heart of the matter these preferred didactic forms are also 'pedagogic' (Bernstein):

as discourses, they're not solely concerned with transmitting knowledge

they're also concerned with maintaining social control, i.e. they're concerned with transmitting systems of restricted access to power and privilege

The selection of the future elite begins early; being admitted to university to study translation is merely the final stage in a long chain of pedagogic discourses
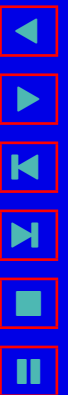
The label 'didactic' doesn't really get to the heart of the matter these preferred didactic forms are also 'pedagogic' (Bernstein): as discourses, they're not solely concerned with transmitting knowledge

they're also concerned with maintaining social control, i.e. they're concerned with transmitting systems of restricted access to power and privilege

The selection of the future elite begins early; being admitted to university to study translation is merely the final stage in a long chain of pedagogic discourses
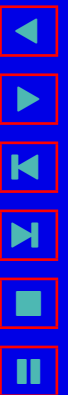
These discourses are based around a central ritual of control – the production or reproduction, on command, of a piece of text, which is then evaluated by the teacher
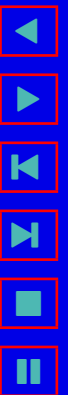
(the first such text is the poem you have to recite to the man in the Santa Claus suit; if you do it right, you get your candy; if you do it wrong, you get punished)

By the time they get to university, students are very familiar with the rules of these rituals:

you sit in a room for three hours writing silently while someone watches you

your text has to have a special form: handwritten (legibly) with extra spacing between the lines and an extra-wide margin for the teacher's part of the ritual: correcting, commenting, grading...

By the time they get to university, students are very familiar with the rules of these rituals:

you sit in a room for three hours writing silently while someone watches you

your text has to have a special form: handwritten (legibly) with extra spacing between the lines and an extra-wide margin for the teacher's part of the ritual: correcting, commenting, grading...

Marginalia — collecting the marginal notes that teachers write on student translations

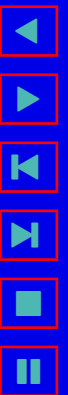to try to understand the various alternative systems underlying this part of the ritual.

By the time they get to university, students are very familiar with the rules of these rituals:

you sit in a room for three hours writing silently while someone watches you

your text has to have a special form: handwritten (legibly) with extra spacing between the lines and an extra-wide margin for the teacher's part of the ritual: correcting, commenting, grading...

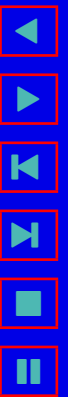Marginalia — collecting the marginal notes that teachers write on student translations

to try to understand the various alternative systems underlying this part of the ritual.

These systems have to be learnt, somehow. In the case of unknown, culturally foreign systems ($\Rightarrow$ Erasmus exchange programme), or non-explicit culturally native ones, a novice teacher can ask the students to teach it to him/her.

What are the responses of the students?
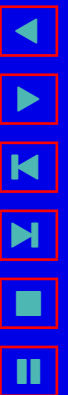
German students are used to an explicit system, and can therefore often function as agents of transmission and normativization by teaching it to the teacher.

German students are used to an explicit system, and can therefore often function as agents of transmission and normativization by teaching it to the teacher.

French students respond more warily (suspecting some kind of trap?), but if pressed, admit to remembering that their teachers chastise them for two kinds of errors in their translations: errors of content and errors of form. They then brighten up considerably, as this dualistic model seems to have struck a positive chord somewhere.

German students are used to an explicit system, and can therefore often function as agents of transmission and normativization by teaching it to the teacher.

French students respond more warily (suspecting some kind of trap?), but if pressed, admit to remembering that their teachers chastise them for two kinds of errors in their translations: errors of content and errors of form. They then brighten up considerably, as this dualistic model seems to have struck a positive chord somewhere.
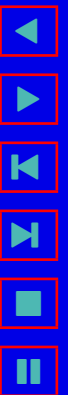
British and Irish students grovel pitifully – as if they've just been hauled before the Inquisition ...

Do they classify the situation as a ritual form of public humiliation?

Or do they come from an educational culture which has no (or no explicit) system of evaluation of performance?

'invisible pedagogy' (Bernstein)

'competence-based models of pedagogic practice' (Bernstein)

or just good old Anglo-Saxon inductive empiricism?

'invisible pedagogy' (Bernstein)

'competence-based models of pedagogic practice' (Bernstein)

or just good old Anglo-Saxon inductive empiricism?

Investigating such transcultural phenomena involves a lot of dangerous undercover work.

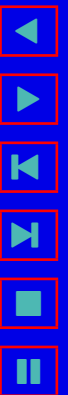closer to home: the risk of being caught dirtying the nest

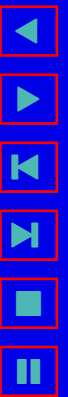on foreign fields: the lack of a cultural logistic support network ...

like Candide among the Leibnizian optimists

or Tintin in the land of the Soviets

or Pavel Morosov all alone in a family of kulaks ...

The final three pages of the handout document some of the results of the attempt to investigate the system of categorization and evaluation:

The final three pages of the handout document some of the results of the attempt to investigate the system of categorization and evaluation:

on the third-last page:

a well-organized and explicit German system, apparently with something like three strata: semantics, lexis/grammar, orthography (from top to bottom)

The final three pages of the handout document some of the results of the attempt to investigate the system of categorization and evaluation:

on the third-last page:

a well-organized and explicit German system, apparently with something like three strata: semantics, lexis/grammar, orthography (from top to bottom)

on the last page:

a simple but explicit bistratal French system based on the opposition of (mental?) content and (physical?) form

The final three pages of the handout document some of the results of the attempt to investigate the system of categorization and evaluation:
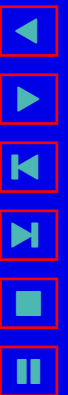
on the third-last page:

a well-organized and explicit German system, apparently with something like three strata: semantics, lexis/grammar, orthography (from top to bottom)

on the last page:

a simple but explicit bistratal French system based on the opposition of (mental?) content and (physical?) form

and on the second-last page:

as much as could be gleaned from observing the written and unwritten practices of Anglo-Saxon colleagues.

The final three pages of the handout document some of the results of the attempt to investigate the system of categorization and evaluation:

on the third-last page:

a well-organized and explicit German system, apparently with something like three strata: semantics, lexis/grammar, orthography (from top to bottom)
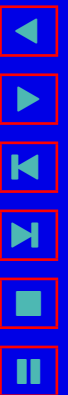
on the last page:

a simple but explicit bistratal French system based on the opposition of (mental?) content and (physical?) form

and on the second-last page:

as much as could be gleaned from observing the written and unwritten practices of Anglo-Saxon colleagues.

In all of these systems, the textual metafunction appears to be largely absent.

Why?

In the case of the French evaluation system, it may be because the textual metafunction, as a purely 'enabling' function, is perceived by a bistratal theory of semiosis as not having anything to do with 'signs' in the sense of 'content-expression pairs' — i.e., the external tokens of textuality fail to count as signs because their content is unidentifiable.
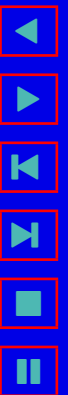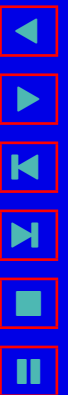
In the case of the French evaluation system, it may be because the textual metafunction, as a purely 'enabling' function, is perceived by a bistratal theory of semiosis as not having anything to do with 'signs' in the sense of 'content-expression pairs' — i.e., the external tokens of textuality fail to count as signs because their content is unidentifiable.

In the British (implicit) evaluation "system", or loose set of practices, there is evidence that the correctors are at least aware of the *existence* of certain aspects of textuality: attested marginalia include: 'word order', 'reference' and even: 'text'

But the British system lacks any explicit dimensions — although one might have expected the culturally favoured notion of function ("what can it be used for in practice?") might have provided a basic (perhaps the sole) organizing principle – thus there is no indication that the correctors have a notion of a coherent language system behind the text at all...

"A nation of shopkeepers."
— Napoleon, sarcastically recontextualizing a quotation from Adam Smith

"What the petty bourgeoisie respects most of all is immanence: every phenomenon which has its own term in itself via a simple mechanism of return, i.e., literally, every phenomenon which is *paid* ...

... the whole of petty bourgeois mythology implies the refusal of otherness, the negation of the different, the happiness of identity and the exaltation of that which is alike. ..."
—Roland Barthes, Mythologies, 957, pp. 85-87

The Anglo-Saxon insistence that the signs of the metalanguage be treated as self-contextualizing, self-defining, self-referential ("word order is word order"), and thus requiring no didactic explanation ...

... an indication that Napoleon and Barthes were right??
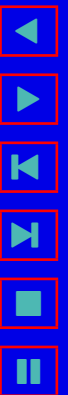
C'est fini!

You may now remove your earplugs or switch off your walkmans (walkmen?)

I've finished speaking French.