The Grammatical Phenomenon
of
Rankshift in Systemic Grammar

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Abstract

The paper tries to explore the grammatical phenomenon of rankshift in Systemic Grammar, a functional grammar that establishes five units or the rank scale , : namely *sentence, clause phrase, word and morpheme* .Rankshift a Hallidayan term , occurs when a given unit is downgraded or shifted down the rank scale and operates further down its rank or a rank equal to itself as when a clause which has to operate in sentence structure operates at *q* " qualifier" in a nominal group.

The paper , quite significantly, introduces the systemic background that enunciates the systemic theory whose organising concept system rather than structure. The paper then, grammatically explores *rankshifted elements, successive rankshifting, degrees of rankshifting* and types of rankshift .It ends with some concluding manifestations that serve to highlight the importance and necessity of this downgraded process.

Key words: Rankshift , Hallidayan term , Systemic Grammar , functional grammar

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1-<u>Foreword</u>

Dictionaries tentatively and inchoately define <u>rankshift</u> and/or speak of the process of <u>rankshifting</u>. Collins English Dictionary (2003) for example, looks at rankshift [ŕœŋk,Sift] as "a phenomenon in which a unit at one rank in the grammar has the function of a unit at a lower rank, as, for example, in the phrase <u>the house on the corner</u>, where the words <u>on the corner</u> shift down from the rank of the group to the rank of word. <u>The Random House Dictionary</u> (2010) (reference.com/ browse) defines rankshift (in Systemic Linguistics) in terms of using "a unit as a constituent of another unit of the same or lower on the rank scale, as in using the phrase <u>next door</u> within the phrase <u>the boy next door</u> or the clause <u>that you met yesterday</u> within the phrase <u>the girl that you met yesterday</u>. Likewise an [internet] lecture defines 'rank shift' as a "unit (above morpheme rank) [which] is used as part of another unit of the <u>same</u> or <u>lower</u> rank ;it is , thus, shifted down the rank scale and is treated as if it were a unit of lower rank." The same source mentions five units on the rank scale: <u>sentence</u>, <u>clause</u>, <u>phrase</u>, <u>word</u>, and <u>morpheme</u>. It also speaks of what it roughly calls as the rank scale principle which is expressed by the grammatical notion that "each unit on the rank scale (except the morpheme) is made up of one or more units from the next lower rank" (Johannesson, 2010).

2-<u>Systemic Background</u>

A Systemic Linguistics advanced to answer relevant questions about language has recently been thought a necessity. In a relevant sense, Systemic Linguistics is employed to reveal the functions and structures of language.

Halliday recognises (2003:191-193) that a salient feature in the evolution of systemic theory is its permeability from other theories of language and also from theories outside linguistics. He maintains that some linguists prefer to speak of languaging and not of language to show that their object of study is more <u>process</u> than <u>entity</u>.

He argues that a linguistic theory has to be a means of "intersemiotic translation, interfacing with other theories of social meaning..", that systemic theory is a system "whose stability lies in its variation", that a language is a 'meta stable' system whose continuity shows constantly in its flux. He ends by defining language as a semiotic system "not in the sense of a "system of signs" but in the sense of "a systemic resource for meaning." Halliday highlights the fact that what distinguishes syst6+emic theory is that "its basic form of synoptic representation" is paradigmatic and not syntagmatic and that its organising concept is system and not structure.

In a more specific sense, in his paper "Categories of the Theory of Grammar." Halliday tries (1976:70-71) to relate the categories to each other and to their <u>exponents</u>, as well. He enunciates that the theory has to separate with three scales of abstractions, namely, the scales of <u>rank</u>, <u>exponence</u> and <u>delicacy</u>. He recognises that the scale of rank is the basic category operating on the scale of unit and that the syntactic ('downward') determination of classes is a feature of the systemic theory. With regard to the category of class, he assumes that the rank scale appears to have logical precedence in the sense that it runs from highest to lowest unit. <u>Exponence</u>, Halliday maintains, is realised to be the scale that relates categories which are characterised by the highest degree of abstraction to the <u>data</u>. <u>Delicacy</u>, however, is being envisaged as the scale of <u>differentiation</u> or depth, "a cline", the limit of which is the primary degree in the categories of structure and class. The theory of grammar itself embodies 'shunting', moving up and down the rank scale, a thing shown to be crucial to the interrelation of the categories.

Significantly, it is argued that the descriptive relevance of keeping the scales distinct is that it enables us to show what happens if one shifts on one scale, while the other two kept in their place.

Referring to the basic scale of <u>delicacy</u>, Robins explains (1971:294-295) that within accepted phonemic theory, in phonology, the classes of <u>bilabial plosives</u> and <u>velar plosives</u> are envisaged to be 'more delicate' than the classes of plosives, bilabial consonants and velar consonants. Robins also explains that the scale of <u>exponence</u> relates form to substance. This means relating the abstractions of grammar, lexis and phonology to the actual phonic or graphic data, the <u>exponents</u>. Thus from passing from <u>predicate</u>

as an element of clause structure to verbal group (VG), one is passing to the actual data.

Firth, however, speaks of the term <u>exponent</u> in connection with the phonetic and phonological 'shape' of words or parts of words generalised in the categories. He argues (1957:15-16) that the exponents of elements of structure and of terms in systems are always consistent and that they cannot be mutually contradictory.

Halliday et al also specify (1974:27-29) <u>RANK</u> as the term that is being used to name the hierarchical relation among the units which are recognized to range in a fixed order on the <u>rank</u> <u>scale</u> , an order that allows people to speak of a unit as being 'next below' another in rank. It is suggested that language displays the phenomenon of rankshifting, a phenomenon which shows itself when a given unit is <u>shifted down</u> the rank scale and is made to operate further down its rank or at rank equal to itself. However, the authors distinguish <u>rankshifting</u> from <u>discontinuity</u>, the latter aspect being exemplified by the clause 'you'll find me in the library' in the sentence 'you'll find me, if you want, in the library'. They also significantly draw our attention to the grammatical fact that each element of structure implies a kind of <u>choice</u> and that there are two sides to any choice situation, namely <u>restriction</u> and <u>freedom</u>. Thus, for the element subject (S), one is free to choose singular or plural nominal group but one cannot choose a verbal one.

The idea of dependency of items, expressed in one of its manifestations, in rankshifting and non-dependency in <u>discontinuity</u> is emphasised. Halliday recognises (1985:195) that the relation of modifying in the sense of one element <u>modifying</u> another is not the only relation that materialises between the members of a "clause complex". Halliday, in fact, uses two terms to denote <u>different</u> relations: Hypotaxis and Parataxis. He defines <u>hypotaxis </u>as the relation between a dependent element and the element which it depends upon or what he calls, "its dominant". He contrasts the term with <u>parataxis</u> which signifies a relation between two elements of equal status.
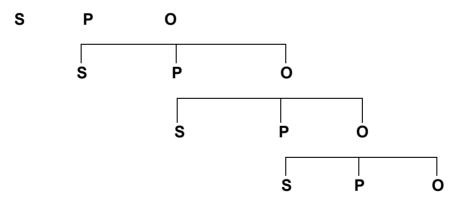
We have also what may be envisaged as ordered system of scales. Strang suggests (1969:81) that the relationship prevailing throughout the scales is a taxonomic hierarchy and calls the process of downgrading of elements as <u>rankshift</u>. For her, the process 'moves' a unit habitually having one rank to function in a given structure at a rank below, 'perhaps considerably' below its habitual rank. She, thus, explains that in 'the cock that crowed in the morn', we have a clause-like structure <u>that crowed in the</u> <u>morn</u> degraded to constitute a part of a phrase[1].

Lyons, who looks at rankshift as a 'surface structure notion' points out (1968:206-207) that the relationships between sentences, clause, phrases, words (in the sense of 'lexemes')and morphemes is one which could be explained in terms of a unit of 'higher' rank consisting of units of 'lower' rank.

We have also what may be realised as successive rankshifting. Palmer provides us (1965:155) with an intricately illustrative example in: <u>I got him to persuade her to ask him to change his mind</u>.

He makes us realise that the object of <u>got</u> is <u>him to persuade her to ask</u> <u>him to change his mind</u>, that the object of <u>persuade</u> is <u>her to ask</u> <u>him to</u> <u>change his mind</u>, that the object of <u>ask</u> is <u>him to change his</u> <u>mind</u> and that the object of <u>change</u> is <u>his mind</u>.

Diagrammatically shown, the sentence would be something like:

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[1] Strang's introduction of phrase in scale follows Quirk (1968:185-207) Chapter II-''Grouping Words into Structures''

This kind of analysis, as Palmer suggests, involves 'downgrading' or 'rankshifting' in which a clause having an SPO structure is shown to function as the object of the main clause. The author says that all that is required at this point is to have a hierarchical analysis in which a 'downgraded' clause is intentionally not given the status of a clause element. He recognises that this downgraded structure could be better shown diagrammatically by <u>brackets</u> rather than [by] tree:

$$SP (SP ((SP (((SPO))))))$$

Speaking of scales in connection with the process of rankshift, Robins argues (1974:294-295) that the scales seem to be independent in theory in the sense of realising different kinds of relationships. In practice, however, they relate to each other in subtle ways. Significantly, part of the recursive possiblities of linguistic structures, Robins maintains, are envisioned in terms of rank-shift:

> **a unit is shifted in rank when it occupies**

> **a structural place, not in the structure of the unit next above, but in the structure**

> **of a unit at the same rank-size as itself or**

> **below it.**

The term rankshift

Lyons suggests (1968:206-207) that the term 'rank' is a Hallidayan term and other terms having roughly the same sense are used by linguists (e.g. 'level' by Pike, 'Stratum' by Lamb). It may also be pointed out that the term 'rankshift' which is also coined by Halliday was earlier called down-grading (Hill, 1958:15-16). Muir suggests (1972:35-36) that the use of this term articulates a descriptive convenience and that the <u>rankshifted structure</u> as an umbrella term is required. "The structure could easily be called something else (the traditional terms 'restricted / non – restricted', 'defining / non – defining' would describe relative clauses so involved, but there are a few other rankshifts in English , and a generic term is needed".

Not everyone seems to be pleased with the term 'rankshift' McGregor (1997:127-128,131) likes to define downward rank shift as reclassification. His reason for renaming the process is that it involves a <u>change in part- of- speech membership</u>. Most significantly, in an anti-Hallidayan gesture, he maintains that rankshift involves <u>external</u> as well as <u>internal</u> reclassification. Apropos, he defines rankshift as the process which entails a unit of a given rank, being, as it were, demoted in size and reclassified as a unit of lower rank. This would result in the unit taking on the grammatical and semantic properties "inherent to the lower ranking unit". McGregor (1997:131) draws the conclusion that finite clauses cannot be rankshifted or nominalised, whereas non-finite clauses can.

While agreeing with McGregor about the importance of including the internal properties of ranksifted units into their description and classfication, <u>Heyvaert</u>, a German, recognises (2003:50) that McGregor has failed to classify the significance of these properties to the analysis of rankshifted units. McGregor's failure is attributed to his overt realisation of structural properties and to his attempt not to adopt a functional perspective.

Halliday's specification of the types of rankshift which are permitted is also being criticised by Fawcett, who recgnises (2000:269) that the specification is extremely narrow as it provides for limited cases such as <u>what Jack built</u> and <u>for Jack to build a</u>

house , cases which only realise **embedded clauses** that fill the subject.

It is obvious that the description of language requires a surface as well as a deep component. Muir (1972:90 ff.) makes it clear that at its deepest level (i.e. at its **deep structure**) language is concerned with the organisation of systems and choices and that these meaningful choices are related to the classes and structures of surface grammar by a scale of realisation. Muir envisages a systemic term as a structural component. Thus, the feature selection of 'indicative, declarative, operative' is realised in clause structure as SPC. The structures of language are themselves functional in the sense of achieving effective communication. These functions are designated as being **experiential**, **interpersonal** and **textual**. The functions are successively expressed as 'meaning', 'mood' and 'message'. 'Meaning' designated matters of experience (real or otherwise) and is clearly related to the transitivity system, to the participants and the process involved. 'Mood' underlies the speaker's role (questioning, stating, commanding, etc). 'Message' connects with the distribution of information and clearly relates to the **theme** and information system. These deliberations seem to be based on Halliday's article 'Language Structure and Language Function' in **New** **Horizons in Linguistics** ed. John Lyons, (1970:140-145). In this article, Halliday[2] distinguishes three (p.140) grammatically relevant language functions with illustrative examples from English. These are (i) ideational (ii) 'interpersonal' and (iii) textual. The first refers to 'cognitive meaning' or 'propositional content' of sentence; the second to distinctions of 'mood', or 'modality' (e.g. the difference between statements, questions and commands); and the third to the way in which the grammatical and intonational structure of sentences relates them to one another in continuous texts and to the sentences in which they are used.

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[2] For further information on the subject, see Halliday's article 'Functional Diversity as seen from a consideration of 'Modality' and 'Mood' in English' in <u>Functions of Language</u>, Vol. 6, (1970:322-361).

3-Rankshift as a downward Process

3.1. Rankshifted Elements

It is suggested (Scott et al, 1968:143-145) that clauses represent sentence elements: <u>alpha</u>, <u>beta</u>, <u>gamma</u> and so on. However, instances of clauses occurring as elements of a clause, filling positions usually filled by nominal groups are <u>rankshifted</u> clauses. Such clauses cease to represent sentence elements. They, then, realise elements of a lower rank on the scale of <u>sentence, clause ,group, word, morpheme</u>, ,. More specifically, clauses occurring as Q [=qualifier] elements in nominal groups are rankshifted. Scott et al provide us with the following examples which are successively shown to represent a rankshifted clause and a clause that represents a sentence element [i.e. a non – rankshifted clause]. Thus, in

a.

 M   H

<u>The   letter [[which he gave me]] was posted last week</u>, (see appendices I and II for non- letter as well as letter symbols) the wh-marked clause qualifies the preceding word i.e. <u>the letter</u>. The elements of a group are usually represented by words but in the example the Q element is represented by a clause, in this case, a <u>rankshifted</u> clause.
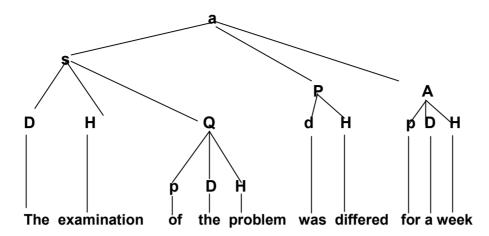
   In

   b.   The <u>letter was posted last week, ll which was too late</u>,

the wh- marked clause which is not directly attached to any word in the preceding clause depends in its meaning on the preceding clause as a whole. The sentence, thus, consists of two clauses, the second being dependent on the first. This means that the sentence has an <u>alpha</u>, <u>beta</u> structure.

 In addition to clauses, we have rankshifted groups in the following example, the prepositional group (pG) is rankshifted because it occurs as a Q element:

```
                                    a
                    s                         P        A
            D     H          Q          d   H      p  D  H
                          p   D   H
        The examination   of the problem  was differed  for a week
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The tree diagram shows clause elements represented by groups. The nominal group (NG) occurring as subject (S) has a prepositional group at Q, the structure of which is pDH. This rankshifted group is shown to occupy a rank lower than that occupied by a group structure. However in <u>several flies still droned</u> *around the web* the prepositional group in bold italics does not depend upon the head of the group (i.e. flies) but on all the other elements of the clause. The group is, therefore, not rankshifted but acts as an adjunct (A) of its clause.

It is suggested (Muir, 1972:35-37) that morphologically <u>I visited in town</u> in <u>the man I visited in town has gone away</u> which has the structure of SPA can be identified as a clause. Clauses normally operate higher on the rank scale i.e. at the structure of a sentence. However, <u>I visited in town </u> seems to have moved down the scale to operate in the less usual position of <u>q</u>^{3} in nominal group. Muir, who recognises this phenomenon of rankshift embraces the importance of distinguishing between clauses operating in sentence structure (the norm – not rankshifted) and rankshifted clauses operating at <u>q</u> in the nominal group (N).

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[3] **Notice the difference between Scott et al and Muir in their use of letter symbols. In this paper, I have retained the symbols used by each author.**

S		
N		
m	**h**	**Q**
The	man	[who came to dinner]

stayed a month.

Here we have in Muir's example a nominal group operating at **S** and having a rankshifted clause at q.
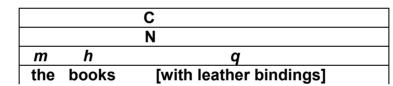
In the following example, also provided by Muir, we have two non- rankshifted clauses operating in sentence structure:

My dad, <u>who is an artist</u>, paints pictures like that. (Such clauses are marked off by commas in the written language and by intonation breaks, in the spoken language)

In

He chose the books *with leather bindings*

The group in bold italics is an adverbial group. This group is rankshifted since it operates at q within the nominal group.

C		
N		
m	*h*	*q*
the	books	[with leather bindings]

He chose

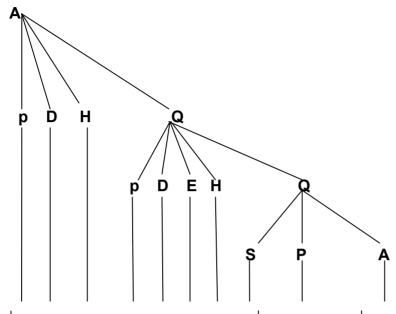## 3.2. <u>Degrees of Rankshifting</u>

It is shown (Scott et al, 1968: 146-147) that rankshift could be repeated several times in the same sentence. In the following example given by Scott et al, a rankshifted clause acts as a qualifier of a rankshifted group which qualifies a prepositional group

He │ sniffed │ thoughtfully │ at the scent [of the dry grass [[he was crunching underfoot]]].

The rankshifted elements are isolated by square brackets. A tree diagram could also isolate these elements: The adjunct in the sentence above has the following structure:

...at   the scent   [of the dry grass[[he was crunching underfoot]]].

The square brackets show that each rankshifted element is inset within the other. Thus, in the following example:

He got desperate in his search [for possible handholds [down the rocky sides [of the shaft]]],

The most deeply inset prepositional group (pG) is of the shaft that the next most deeply inset group is down the rocky sides of the shaft and that the next is for possible handholds….shaft. Thus we have degrees of rankshifting. The first degree rankshift is indicated, in the example, by the outside pair of single square brackets….in his search [for possible handholds down the rocky sides of the shaft].

The second degree rankshift is indicated by the pair of brackets inside these:

…in his search [for possible handholds [down the rocky sides of the shaft]] .

The third degree rankshift falls within the innermost pair of brackets:

....in his search [for possible handholds [down the rocky sides [of the shaft]]] .

One has to note that the scope of the left hand bracket is not limited until the right hand member of its pair is reached. The brackets between <u>search</u> and <u>for</u> does not end at the bracket between <u>handholds</u> and <u>down</u>.

The examples only show that complexity at <u>q</u> which is mainly realised by recursion results in successive rankshifting. Very often a q in the group, has a structure containing further rankshifts.

S	P	C		A
N	V	N		Ad
H	*L*	*H*	*p*	C=[N]
				m *h* *q*
I	found	Him	in	[the house [in the main street]]

However the following example by Muir (1972:37) <u>I found him in the house in the</u> <u>main street</u> does not mean (a) <u>I found him in the house</u> and (b) <u>in the main street</u> , but rather <u>I found him in the house</u> (ie <u>the house</u> <u>which</u>) <u>is in the main street</u>.

3.3 <u>Types of Rankshift</u>

All these grammatical show that the units most rankshifted are clauses and groups. Sometimes a series of clauses or groups are rankshifted. However Muir isolates (1972:79-80) five main types of rankshift.

1. Clause rankshifted to operate at q in nominal group:

The man [who came to dinner] stayed a month.

2. **Clause rankshifted to operate as whole nominal group (traditionally called noun/ nominal clause)**
   [Where the river bends] is a nice spot.

3. **Adverbial group rankshifted to operate at q in nominal group structure:**

   The house [by the river] will not last long.

4. **Nominal group rankshifted to operate at d in nominal group structure**

   [The town council]'s houses.

5. **Nominal group rankshifted to operate at c in an adverbial group:**

   p   c

   up [the hill].

4. Conclusions

The paper has shown that the theory of grammatical structure confidently answers questions pertaining to the upward and downward movement of the structural units of language. Hence, one could conclude that the theory, on which the model of description is established, works elegantly to allow for the downward process of rankshift. Within this perspective, the paper has discussed rankshifting as a surface structure notion which poses problems.

One of the problems that has transpired in the preceding discussion is the flexibility of the word classes to realise the elements of the nominal group structure, a thing which is apt to motivate questions relevant to problems of derivation and lexis.

Another problem relates to successive or multiple rankshifting which is a feature of some English registers. This kind of rankshifting is a two edged reality. On the one hand, excessive use of rankshifting could impair understanding. On the other, little use of it would result in an effect that borders on naivety. A propos, in practice the use of rankshift and/or multiple rankshift varies according to the taste of individual writers.

We have also in rankshifting an aspect of language that puzzles and/or enriches for, in certain instances, rankshifted sequences could lead to ambiguity. Thus, a sentence like: <u>He sold the cottage in the country</u> may be analysed as having SPC structure where the <u>C</u> is realised by a nominal group <u>the cottage in the country</u> which has a rankshifted adverbial group at q or as having SPCA structure where <u>in the country</u> is an adjunct in the clause structure. Thus, the sentence offers two readings. It either means that <u>he sold the cottage which was in the country</u> (SPC structure) or <u>while in the country he sold the cottage</u> (SPCA structure).

All these details show that this phenomenon of rankshift is, syntactically speaking, quite interesting and could be looked at as a separate aspect that provides a crucial criterion in the definition of structural units.

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Appendix I

<u>Scott et al's Non –letter Symbols</u> (p. xi)

III   sentenace boundary

II   clause boundary

I   group boundary

+   morpheme boundary

[[ ]]   boundaries of a rankshifted clause

[ ]   boundaries of a rankshifted group

<< >>   boundaries of an inserted clause

< >   boundaries of an inserted group

 *   a non – attested sentence or form

→   is transformed into

&   indicates linkage

=   indicates apposition

−   indicates a broken element

<u>Muir's marking boundries of units </u> (p.9)

Unit   symbol

Sentence	III
Clause	II
Group	I
word	(space)
morpheme	+

Strang's symbols (p.81)

III	sentence boundary
II	clause boundary
I	group boundary
¦	phrase boundary
space	word boundary
+	morpheme boundary
[[ ]]	boundary of rank-shifted clause
[ ]	boundary of rank-shifted group

Appendix II

Letter Symbols

Scott et al's Letter Symbols

α = Independent Clause

β = Dependent Clause

(NG) = Nominal Group (NG) (NG_1, NG_2, NG_3)

(H) = Head

(Q) = Qulifier

(C) = Complement

(C^1) = Intensive Complement

(C^E) = Extensive Complement

(D) = Determiner

(d) = Auxiliary (The sequence pattern of a verb)

(E) = Epithet

(P) = Predicator

(p) = Preposition

VG = Verbal Group

V^g = Ing Form

V^n = Participle

V^{to} = Infinitive

A = Adjunt

AG = Adverbial Group

S = Subject

Muir's Letter symbols

∑ = Sentence Clause

α = Independent Clause

β = Dependent Clause

S= Subject

P = Predicator

A = Adjunct

Ad = Adverbial

N = Nominal Group

$Z^{(voc)}$ = Lexical element (vocative)

p = Preposition

q = Qulifier

m = Modifier

C = Complement

h = Head

e = adjective

V = verb

l = Lexical verbal

d = Determinor form (d_1, d_2, etc)

a/ aux = auxiliary

الضاهرة النحوية لتدني الرتبة في النحو النظامي

أ.د.عزيز يوسف المطلبي*   م. ندى عزيز يوسف**

المستخلص

يحاول هذا البحث استكشاف ظاهرة تدني الرتبة. في "النحو النظامي" وهو نحو وظيفي يؤسس خمس وحدات على مقياس الرتبة وهي *الجملة الكبرى ، الجملة الصغرى، العبارة، الكلمة، المورفيم (الوحدة الصرفية)*. وعلى هذا المقياس، يحدث "تدني الرتبة" وهو مصطلح الكلمة "هاليدي" حين تخفض الرتبة (المنزلة) النحوية او تحول الى ادنى على المقياس المذكور وتعمل كثيراً في ادنى من منزلتها النحوية او في منزلة نحوية مساوية لها في الرتبة مثلما تعمل الجملة الصغرى ، (او الجميلة) التي يجب ان تعمل في بنية الجملة الكبرى *واصفة* للاسم في المجموعة الاسمية.

وعلى نحو مهم ، يقدم البحث مهاداً نظامياً يرفع النظرية النظامية التي يكون مفهومها المنظم هو "النظام" لا "البنية". ويستكشف البحث ، نحوياً ، العناصر المتدنية الرتبة نحوياً ، وتدني الرتبة المتعاقب، ودرجات تدني الرتبة النحوية وانماط تدني الرتبة. وينتهي البحث باظهار مستنتج يفيد في تسليط الضوء على اهمية وضرورة هذه العملية المنخفضة للرتبة النحوية.