

EBS 282: Forms and Functions of the English Clause

Week 1

Topic: The English Grammatical Rank Scale

Outline of Lesson

- ▶ What is rank?
- ▶ What is rank scale?
- ▶ **Relationship between grammatical units on the rank scale:**
 - consist-of relationship
 - constituent relationship

Objectives

- ▶ By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:
 - a) define the terms rank and rank scale.
 - b) explain the relationship that exists between the grammatical units on the rank scale.
 - c) analyse clauses according to their constituent units.

Required Reading

- ▶ Thompson, G. (2014). *Introducing functional grammar* (3rd edn.). New York & London: Routledge. [Chapter 2](#)

Key terms

- ▶ Rank
- ▶ Rank scale
- ▶ Consist of
- ▶ Constitute
- ▶ Constituent
- ▶ Grammatical unit

What is rank?

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What is rank?

- ▶ The grammar of every language is made up of a finite set of units that realise the grammatical meanings in the language. These units are not of equal sizes; some realise larger units of meaning than others. We refer to each of these units as a rank. Larger units of meaning are normally realised by bigger ranks while smaller units of meaning are realised by smaller ranks. Across languages, we identify **one rank that tend to realise the largest grammatical meanings in the language**. This unit is the **clause**. It serves as the interface between grammar and discourse. Languages, however, differ in the number and nature of units lower than the clause. Other strata (or levels) of language such as phonology have their own ranks different from those of grammar.

What is rank?

- ▶ The term ‘rank’ in grammar, therefore, refers to a distinct grammatical unit. We can use the terms ‘unit’ and ‘rank’ interchangeably.
- ▶ English has four grammatical units or rank as follows:
 - a) morpheme
 - b) word
 - c) phrase/group
 - d) clause.

What is rank?

- ▶ Each rank is dedicated to realizing particular grammatical meanings (e.g. systems and functions). E.g.
 - a) grammatical systems such as tense, number, and person are normally realised at the rank of word.
 - b) Functions such as Premodifier, Head, and Postmodifier are realised at group/phrase rank.
 - c) systems such as transitivity and mood are realised at clause rank. Functions such as Subject, Predicator, Object, Adjunct, etc. are also realised at clause rank.
 - d) morphemes are the basic resources that feed the meanings of the higher ranks. They have no systems of their own rank neither can they be analysed into structural elements. A morpheme is indivisible.

What is rank scale?

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What is rank scale?

- ▶ **A rank scale** is the hierarchical arrangement of the grammatical units according to their size.
- ▶ The concept of rank scale is based on the assumption that grammatical constructions are not linear but rather hierarchical. Higher units consist of lower units.

Rank Scale

An analysis of a clause to show the hierarchical arrangements of units in the rank scale

rank	The	girls	are	playing	football
clause	Subject		Finite	Predicator	Object
group/phrase	noun group		verbal group		noun group
word	determiner	noun	auxiliary	main verb	noun
morpheme	the	girl-plural	present tense; plural	play-ing	foot + ball

The clause

- ▶ **The clause** can be defined in terms of its **grammatical size** on the rank scale. It is the biggest/highest grammatical unit within which the lower units are found.
- ▶ The clause is made up of at least one group/phrase.
- ▶ The clause can be analysed into one or more clausal elements. Clausal elements are Subject, Predicator, Object, Complement, Adjunct.
- ▶ Each clausal element is equivalent to a group/phrase.

Rank Scale

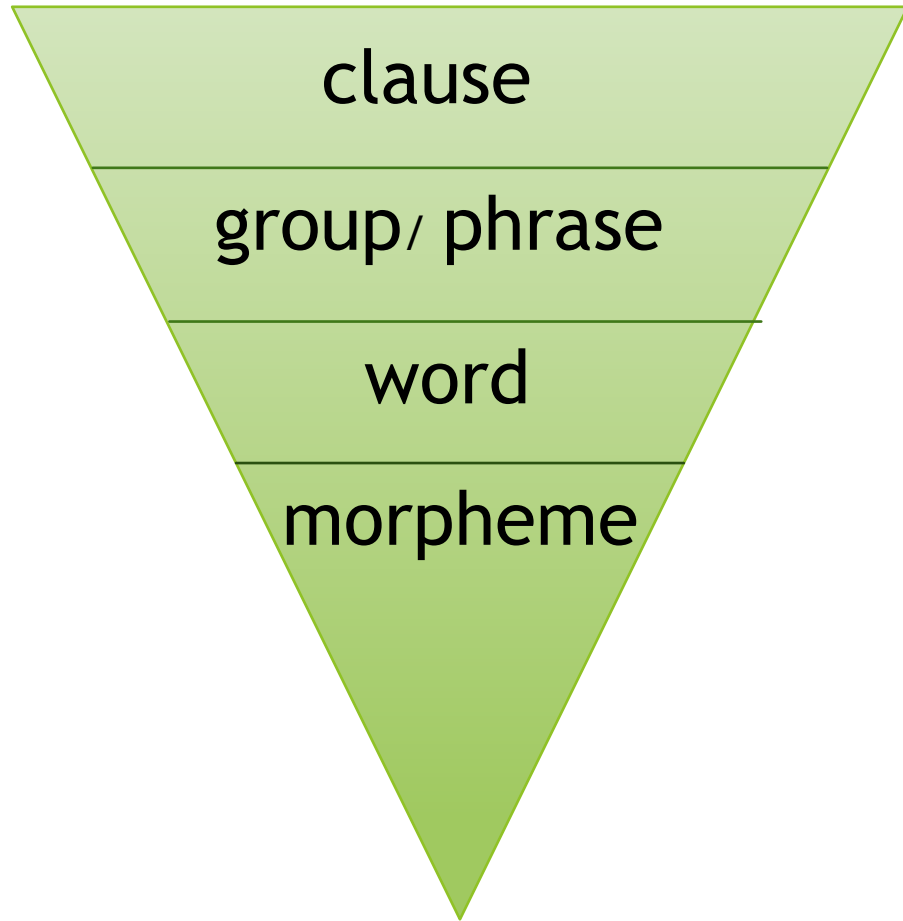
An analysis of a clause to show that clausal elements are equivalent to group/phrase

rank	The dog	swallowed	the bone.
clause	Subject	Predicator	Object
group/ phrase	noun group	verbal group	noun group

*Clausal
elements*



Diagrammatic Illustration of Rank and Rank Scale



Highest/biggest



Lowest/smallest

The Group/Phrase

- ▶ The phrase/group is the next grammatical rank or unit below clause.
- ▶ The group/phrase functions within the clause. e.g. Functions such as Subject, Object, Complement, Adjunct are functions within the clause and they correspond to groups/phrases.

Group/Phrase

- ▶ Some grammarians of English make a distinction between **group** and **phrase**.
- ▶ Group and phrase are **different grammatical units** of the **same rank**, i.e. they are equal in grammatical size. They both perform the same level of functions within the clause.
- ▶ A group is an expanded word; the nucleus is a lexical word (e.g. *man*) expanded by the addition of modifiers (e.g. *A young handsome Ghanaian man*).
- ▶ A phrase is a reduced (or contracted) clause; the nucleus is a preposition ('a minor verb'; e.g. *in*) with a participant realised by a noun group (*in the box*).
- ▶ The phrase is therefore more complex than the group; the phrase normally embeds a group in its structure.
- ▶ According to this analysis, English has only one class of phrase called the **prepositional phrase** and three or four major classes of group, including the **noun group, verbal group, and adverbial group**. The fourth group, the adjectival group is considered by others to be a reduced form of the noun group.

Group/Phrase

Examples of groups as expanded words

rank	a	beautiful	girl
group	Premodifier	Premodifier	Head
word	determiner	adjective	noun

Noun group

rank	have	been	going
group	Premodifier	Premodifier	Head
word	auxiliary	auxiliary	main verb

Verbal group

rank	Very	gracefully
group	Premodifier	Head
word	intensifier	adverb

Adverbial group

Group/Phrase

Example of the prepositional phrase as a reduced clause

rank	The	boy	stood	<i>on</i>	<i>the burning deck.</i>
clause	Subject		Predicator	Adjunct	
group/ phrase	noun group		verbal group	prepositional phrase	
				minor Predicator	Complement
word	determiner	noun	verb	preposition	noun group

The Word

- ▶ The word is the grammatical rank below the group/phrase.
- ▶ The word performs functions within the group/phrase. e.g. Functions such as Premodifier, Head and Postmodifier are functions of the word within the group/phrase.

Morpheme

- ▶ Morpheme is the smallest grammatical unit or rank.
- ▶ Morphemes realise grammatical functions or meanings within the word.
- ▶ Morphemes cannot be analysed further into constituents.

Relationship between units in the rank scale

Relationship between units in the rank scale

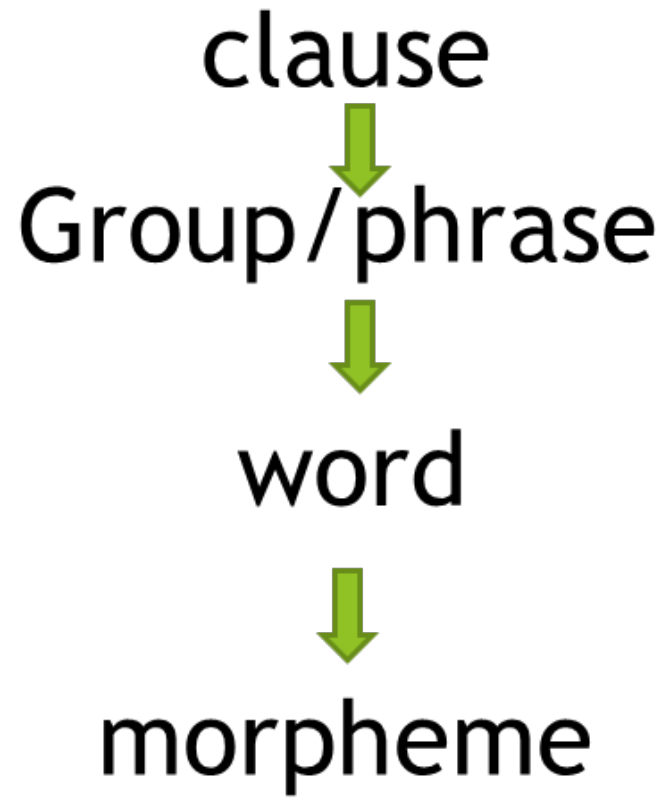
- ▶ We can view the relationship between units in the rank scale from two points of view:
 - a) Top-down - i.e. a consistit-of relationship
 - b) Bottown-up - i.e. a consituent relationship

Top-down relationship ('consist-of')

- ▶ A preceding rank normally consist of unit of the next lower rank.
- ▶ The clause which is the highest unit is made up of units below it on the rank scale.
- ▶ The rank scale is read from top to down.
- ▶ The **clause** consists of at least one **phrase or group** and the phrase at least one **word**. The word also consists of at least one **morpheme**.
- ▶ Each unit must be a whole unit and a multiple of one or more units.

Diagrammatic illustration of Consist-of Relationship

Top
↓
Down



Examples of Consist-of Relationship

- ▶ **Clause:** The police had arrested the thief



- ▶ **Groups:** Made up of three groups; the police(noun group)



Had arrested(verbal group)

The thief (noun group)

- ▶ **Words:** the, police, had, arrested, the thief



Are made up of 8 morphemes

- ▶ **Morphemes:** the (bound morpheme) Police (free morpheme)

Had (has + ed) free/bound morpheme

Arrested(arrest + en) bound morpheme

The (bound morpheme)

Thief (free morpheme)

Bottom-up Relationship (Constituent)

- ▶ The constituent relationship shows that lower grammatical units serve as constituents of a unit immediately above it.
- ▶ The morpheme is the constituent of a word, the word is a constituent of the phrase, and the phrase is the constituent of the clause.
- ▶ Here, the rank scale is read bottom-up.

Diagrammatic Illustration of Constituent Relationship

Upwards



Bottom

clause



group/phrase



word



morpheme

Self Study Questions

1. (a) Define rank in one sentence.
(b) How many ranks do we have in the grammar of English? Mention them.
2. (a) What is rank scale?
(b) Analyse the following clauses to show that it consists of lower grammatical ranks. Use the box diagram shown in slide 12:
 - The man has registered his name.
 - Freda had won the beauty contest.

Self Study Questions

- ▶ In two paragraphs, explain the two kinds of relationship between units on the English grammatical rank scale. Provide illustration in your explanation