

A Preliminary Study on *sort of* and *kind of*

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0. The aim of this paper is to specify some problems pertaining to the English phrases *sort of* and *kind of*. The nouns in the phrases, *sort* and *kind*, have several functions: (1) they refer to a member of some set as nouns, (2) they modify a noun combined with preposition *of* as adjective phrase, and (3) the phrases are used adverbially as downtoners or softeners⁽¹⁾. The phrases are speculated to have had semantic extension from noun to adverbial⁽²⁾. It will become clear in the following argument that the phrases have extended semantically and the extension is described and explicated in clearer terms given the analysis employed in dynamic theory⁽³⁾.

1. The nouns, *sort* and *kind*, can refer to a member of some set consists of members which share certain property or properties, and imply that there are some varieties among the members of the set as in (1).

(1) This kind of books is rare to find.

It is clear from the subject-verb agreement that the head of the subject noun phrase is the noun *kind*. The most common structure assigned to the subject noun phrase in the literature is [NP [Det this [N' [N kind] [NP books]]]] before the *of* insertion or in more conventional way [NP [Det this [N' [N kind] [PP of [NP books]]]]]. The second noun *books* together with the preposition *of* is the complement of the head noun. The status of the first noun, however, is not so decisive.

- (2) i. You have a funny sort of cars.
 ii. You have a funny sort of a car.
 iii. You have a funny sort of car.

In (2) i and ii, the second nouns following the prepositions in the object NP form noun phrases as we can see from the determiner and the plural suffix. However, the syntactic status of the noun *car* in (2) iii is definitely not a noun phrase and if it is not the maximal projection, the *of* insertion is unexplainable and impossible⁽⁴⁾. But the grammaticality of (2) iii could be explained, if we take *car* as the head of the whole object NP as in [NP [Det a [? sort [? of [N car]]]]].

There are some evidences that illustrate some of the second nouns in the NPs which consist of the string *sort / kind of N₂* should be analyzed as head nouns.

- (3) Still, he did have to make some kind of show of it. (705)⁽⁵⁾
 (4) 'Mr Mandrake, are you all right? I heard shouting beneath the gate arch and I thought you must be in some kind of trouble. We get some very unsavoury characters...' (718)
 (5) 'The flat is neat, tidy. She had an orderly mind. She must have kept some kind of record.' (725)
 (6) And when Cindy had flung herself face down on the bed, he had stood over her, hissing at her like some kind of snake or something in that snaky raspy voice of his. (708)

If the N₂s are complements, they could be deleted without causing so much changes in the sentences. The N₂s in (3)-(6), however, are a part of the idioms specifically: *make a show of*, *be in trouble*, *keep record*, and *N (definite) or something*. That shows the second Ns are not be deletable without changing the meanings of those sentences.

Although the linear order of the elements of *sort/ kind of N₂* is not different, in some cases the head noun of the NP is the second N

and consequently the structures assigned to them are also different. The shift can be explained by additive process specified in dynamic theory. It seems that *sort* and *kind* are easy to be considered as a head when they are modified with attributive adjectives as in sentences like, 'A *very special and cutting kind of humour; the biting comment delivered oh-so-politely out of the corner of the mouth.*' (688). But when they are not accompanied with any modifiers, the semantic weight seems to be inclined to be put on the second noun. In the sentence like, 'I had a *kind of holiday in the summer,*' the noun holiday is felt to be a semantic head. This causes syntactico-semantic discrepancy, specifically head-nonhead conflict in the strings in question. The structure (7) is reinterpreted into (8) based on the model like (9) and (10) in order to cancel the head-nonhead conflict.

(7) [NP [Det a [N' [Nkind] [PP of [NP holiday]]]]]]

(8) [NP [Det a [AdjP kind of] [N holiday]]]

(9) I had a certain holiday.

(10) [NP [Det a [Adj certain] [N holiday]]]

The string *sort / kind of* which forms nonconstituent in generative grammar can be syntactically reinterpreted as an adjectival modifier and assigned adequate structure only when we accept the assumptions of dynamic theory and its additive process.

There are some grammatical phenomena which add more weight on our ground. The nouns, *sort* and *kind*, are moved to the end of the NPs to make the semantic head less ambiguous.

(11) He could remake engines of any kind so that they far outperformed their factory spaces. (616)

(12) Nicholas was long-muscled and wide-shouldered. It was obvious that he was an athlete of some kind,... (621)

(13) Cars of that sort are enormously expensive to run.

The movements are nonhead shifts which make the nonhead status of the shifted constituents more clear.

2. The modifier phrase, *sort/ kind of*, is not always adjacent to N. It appears in the position before NP, adjective, and verb.

- (14) I've had sort of an idea about what we could do.
 (15) I'm not sure why, but I feel kind of sorry for him.
 (16) And anyway, some of these shapes, when he stopped to think about it, were actually kind of scary in real life. (697)
 (17) And it sure did look creepy out there, all wide and empty, the mist kind of swirling around on it and ... (700)
 (18) I sort of thought this might happen.
 (19) She sort of laughed at the idea.
 (20) 'Is she interested?' 'Well, kind of.'

It is impossible to analyze the phrases in the above sentences as adjective phrases. Even in (14) the phrase appears before the determiner or 'I'. The phrase ought to be analyzed as some kind of modifier phrase and the most plausible candidate is an adverbial phrase. The adverbial phrases can be used for a reply to an interrogative sentence as in (20).

The string *sort / kind of* is syntactically reinterpreted as an adjectival phrase, and the status of adjectiveness makes it possible to be adjoined to any left position sister of N'. Adjectives can be shuffled among them if there are no differences in their affinity to the head noun. Thus, one can say either, '*expensive, luxurious food*' or '*luxurious, expensive food*.' The same process happens to the string such as '*expensive sort of food*' and '*sort of expensive food*' or a second noun is modified by a more essentially connected adjective than the string *sort/ kind of*, as in '*McGee was a kind of father figure to him*.'

- (21) i. [NP [Adj. expensive [Adj. luxurious [N food]]]]

- ii. [NP [Adj. luxurious [Adj. expensive [N food]]]]
 (22) i. [NP [Adj. expensive [Adj. sort of [N food]]]]
 ii. [NP [Adj. sort of [Adj. expensive [N food]]]]
 (23) [NP [Deg.Adv. rather [Adj. expensive [N food]]]]⁽⁶⁾

When the string is located in outermost place of I', the linear order of the constituents seems same as that of NP in which a degree adverb modifies an adjective. In (23) the head of the modifier phrase that limits the head noun *food* is the adjective *expensive* and the degree adverb modifies the adjective. Although in (21) neither of the adjectives modifies the other, in (22) ii the adjective *expensive* can be taken as the head of the modifier phrase and the string as a degree adverb. This is another case of head-nonhead conflict, even though the two adjectives in the above are not in the relation of head-nonhead. When the focus of the meaning of *sort/ kind of* is moved from 'a varied member of' or 'a member of an off-centered, peripheral, inferior type' to 'to some extent, more or less', the semantic readings of (22) ii and (23) are quite similar. Then based on the model (23), the structure of (22) ii is reinterpreted to (24)

- (24) [NP [Deg.Adv. sort of [Adj. expensive [N food]]]]

Accordingly we could see the syntactic reinterpretation, that is categorical shift of the string in the following data. Firstly, the string modifies whole NP, or more precisely I' just as some other degree adverbs do, though adjectives cannot modify NP.

- (25) It is quite/ nearly/ rather a good book.
 (26) It is sort of a good book.

Also the string modifies adjectives, verbs as in (15)-(19). Those data illustrate the process of internal generalization has taken place.

Secondly, the pronunciations of the new constituents string *sort*

of and *kind of* are reduced into [sɔ:rtə] and [káindəv, káində] and they are often spelled as ‘sort o’, sorter, sorta, kind o’, kinda, kinder’ reflecting the reductions. When the new constituent strings occur, they are more often than not reduced into one phonological unit at least in informal style. This shows that the strings are considered to be one grammatical phrase of some kind and also illustrates the process of subordinator suppression in progress. The subordinator suppression occurs when there is a grammatical formative in original constituents string which indicates nonhead status of the constituent, it is suppressed to assure the status of head in the new constituent string. In the case of *sort/kind of N₂* string, the preposition *of* is the grammatical formative to indicate the complement status of the second noun. Although the preposition *of* in the new modifiers is not suppressed completely, it suggests the preposition does not function as a preposition in those cases.

3. There seems to be a few remaining problems in the study and those will be investigated in the next paper. To list the few, it seems that the adjective status of the modifier is not so firm. They are not so freely shifted in the sequence of adjectives.

- (27) i. a kind of huge, expensive car
 ii. a huge kind of expensive car
 iii. a huge, expensive kind of car

The likely semantic reading of (27) ii is that the NP refers to a type of huge car in the set of expensive cars. The kind in (27)ii is taken as a head noun of the NP. And the problems of the exact location of the phrase in each construction should be specified. The relation to the bare-NP adverbs should also be described.

4. In this preliminary paper, we gave a tentative explanation of the extension of the nonconstituent phrase *sort/ kind of*. The extension is

described as the successive application of syntactic reanalysis. It is illustrated that the shift can be best explained by additive process and syntactic reinterpretation proposed in dynamic theory. The evidences which support the formulation are nonhead shift, partial subordinator suppression, and internal generalization.

Notes

- (1) As for the definitions and classifications of the adverbial intensifiers in question, see Close (1975), Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1972) and (1985).
- (2) See Bolinger (1972) pp. 112-114.
- (3) See Kajita (1977), (1985)
- (4) See Abney (1987)
- (5) The example sentences followed by certain consecutive numbers in parentheses are taken from Collins Cobuild on CD-ROM. There are 876 sentences showed up in 'Word Bank' of the CD-ROM When we hit the phrase 'kind of' and the consecutive numbers are the same as those assigned in the 'Word Bank'.
- (6) As Bolinger (1972) has pointed out, 'rather' has the similar function as the string *sort/ kind of*. He also observes both degree adverbs originate from other grammatical elements, but "...the syntactic switch now takes place in the opposite direction to that taken by rather and its companions, which went from sentence adverbs to modifiers of individual constituents: from serving as modifier of the noun, sort of becomes a sentence adverb..." The directional difference doesn't matter if it is possible to assume the functions of rather has already existed in the course of language acquisition as a model for the shift of *sort/ kind of*.

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