

History of the *sort of* construction family¹

David Denison
University of Manchester
d.denison@man.ac.uk
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Introduction

This paper results from some brief comments on examples like

(1) these sort of ideas (1788)

in (Denison 1998: 121-122), in which I suggested that the phrase *these sort of* might be a complex postdeterminer. Evelyn Keizer developed this into a full-blown corpus analysis of certain nominal patterns in ICE-GB (Keizer 2001), including a generative analysis — which she doesn't believe — of the main variants. I then added a historical account, and we've been working together on the synchronic material. This is an attempt at a Construction Grammar perspective, and we hope to complete our joint paper shortly (Keizer and Denison 2002). More recently I was given a copy of Paul Kay's chapter on the topic (1997).

Summary of paper

I will briefly survey the properties of SKT-constructions, try out a CxG analysis — but with many more questions than answers — move on to the history, and make some concluding remarks.

SKT patterns in Present-day English (PDE)

D1 N1 of (D2) N2

Keizer studied patterns of the form *N1-of-N2* in the ICE-GB corpus, where *N1* is *sort*, *kind* or *type* ('SKT-nouns') and

- there are possible premodifiers attached to *N1* and/or *N2*
- a determiner is only rarely attached to *N2*
- the construction as a whole may be postmodified

In short

¹ I am grateful to Evelien Keizer and for comments made by audiences at Manchester, York and Stanford, especially Bill Croft, Willem Hollmann, Richard Hogg, Paul Kiparsky, Yaron Matras, Emma Moore, Jennifer Smith, Tom Wasow.

(2) D1 N1 *of* (D2) N2

Two main variants emerged, **binominal** and **qualifying** constructions, with clear syntactic, semantic, discourse and formal differences, summed up in Table 1 below. It is relatively easy to give conventional syntactic analyses. A third major subtype, the '**complex determiner**', is of uncertain status, both as to its analysis and whether it is a subvariant or not. At this stage I'm using 'construction' in a pre-theoretical way.

The binominal construction

N1 functions as a noun. Either N1 or N1's determiner or premodifier receives full stress, with secondary stress on N2. Premodification of N2 is rare. Apparent premodification of N1 is really premodification of the whole construction. N1 and N2 typically agree in number:

- (3) a. Collagen is *the sort of material* that is found already ... in the dermis of the skin
 b. [DP [D the] [NP [N sort] [KP of [NP material]]]]

In the sense of Goldberg (1995: 153, etc.) this may not be a construction, since its meaning is probably compositional.

The qualifying construction

In this construction, the string *sort/kind of* forms a unit which qualifies N2:

- (4) a. But it I suppose it's as a that's as *a sort of holiday*, kind of doing you know doing nothing but sitting around (ICE-GB)
 b. [DP [D a] [NP [Qual sort-of] [N holiday]]]

Type is not found in this pattern.

The complex determiner (or postdeterminer) construction

Common only in speech, always singular N1 and plural N2. *Sort of/kind of/type of* preceded by plural anaphoric determiners *these/those/all*; are postdeterminers and incompatible with other postdeterminers; are never focal. Possible analysis for demonstrative type, later rejected:

- (5) a. I mean I don't associate you with uh you know one of *these sort of skills like like driving* (ICE-GB)
 b. [DP [D these] [[PostD sort-of] [NP [N skills]]] [??]

This pattern bears some resemblances to both of the previous.

	sem- antic head	discourse function	D1	N1	N1 number	primary stress	N2 omiss- ible	style
binominal	N1	discourse topic or anaphor	almost all possible	<i>sort,</i> <i>kind,</i> <i>type</i>	sg or pl	D1 or N1	yes	neutral
qualifying	N2	hedge, often meta- phorical	usually indefinite	<i>sort,</i> <i>kind</i>	sg	N2	no	informal
post- determiner	?	anaphoric (like <i>such</i>)	plural, definite (<i>these,</i> <i>those, all</i>)	<i>sort,</i> <i>kind,</i> <i>type</i>	sg	D1 or N2	yes	informal

Table 1

The most noticeable feature of the post-determiner pattern is the agreement mismatch, a phenomenon similar to mismatches in French and Spanish 'affective' constructions (Casillas Martínez 2001).

Other SKT patterns

This doesn't exhaust the range of constructions. There are several semi-conventionalised variants of the patterns mentioned, one of which is particularly interesting.

Variants of D1 N1 of (D2) N2

The phrasal pattern *sort of thing* is found with all three SKT-nouns as an adverbial hedge, usually in clause-final position:

(6) if he had visitors he used to send her out of the room *type of thing* (WSC)

Then there are patterns in which N2 is absent. This may be through ellipsis of the binominal or postdeterminer patterns:

(7) 'They won't last long, mate, *these type* never do.' (BNC)

Or it may be because there really is no N2. I call this the **adverbial** construction.

The adverbial construction

This pattern concerns only *sort* and *kind*, not *type*:

(8) I *sort of* saw his point. (Frown)

The string *sort/kind of* most commonly premodifies A, or V, (8); more rarely Adv or P, or it may be used more independently, as in (9):

(9) He didn't remember inviting her, but she seemed to be with him, *sort of*. (Frown)

In fact Paul Kay (1997: 146-147) shows that it can modify phrasal, lexical or intermediate bar categories. Quirk et al. (1985: 446 Note [c], 598, 599 Note [b]) label *sort of* and *kind of* as 'downtoners' and more specifically 'compromisers' or (for some speakers) 'approximators'. Kay would distinguish between 'hedge' in a narrow sense — essentially a speech act adverbial, often glossable by 'as it were' — and the normal downtoning adverb.

And according to Jennifer Smith (p.c. 6 January 2002), this use of *sort of* is becoming more and more semantically bleached. Especially with young speakers, it seems to have lost even its (semantic) downtoner function (as in example (10) provided by Jennifer Smith), and largely resembles the increasingly popular use of *like* in examples like (11). They can even be used together, in either order, reinforcing each other as pragmatic mitigators of the force of the illocution:

- (10) ... and I *sort of* opened the door, and looked out, and I *sort of* saw Richard ...
 (11) I should have *like* just whipped up this amazing meal (ICE-GB)
 (12) As I remember it used to be *sort of like* fairly common for a Tuesday, that I'd pretend to be sick, <laugh> and so I didn't have to go to school (ICE-GB)

It's not clear whether to treat this bleached use as a separate construction.

Variants without *of*

In addition to patterns with ellipsis of the entire *of*-phrase, there are also variants with omission of *of* but presence of N2. In PDE this only concerns *type*, though in older English *manner*, *kind* and *kin* could also appear without intervening *of*.

- (13) It's one of *those type LPs*. I had all 'soul brothers' (1959 [OED])
 (14) virtually *any type projector* (1979 [OED])

The semi-suffix *-type*

Again, this only concerns *type*:

- (15) what you're saying is we need *multiple type of*. I mean ideally we need *a multiple type building* [other speaker(s) and overlap omitted — DD] sorry a building with *multiple type rooms* (LLC)

See for example (Dalton-Puffer and Plag 2000). I won't have time to discuss these two peculiarities of *type*, but I think the similarity between the *any type* of (14) and the *multiple type* of (15) is unlikely to be accidental.

Variation among the SKT nouns

Sort and *kind* are usually interchangeable. Sometimes *type* shares their distribution, sometimes not. There are dialectal preferences. In general, *kind of* is more favoured in AmE as against *sort of* in BrE (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan 1999: 867, Keizer 2001). The figures on SKT-constructions in ICE-GB have *sort* 481 times, *kind* 387, and *type* 116. And there may be slight stylistic differences. It was suggested to me by Penny Eckert that to her, *sort of* actually sounded more learned than *kind of*. One might suspect some interaction for an American with the transatlantic difference.

Need for c construction analysis

At this conference of all places one shouldn't have to defend doing an analysis in terms of constructions. However, the majority of Construction Grammar work I have seen has involved constructions at the sentential, clausal or VP levels, notably of verbs and their arguments, and linking rules. I have seen little on the internal structure of NPs or on function words in general. If my patterns are indeed constructions in the CxG sense, they are oddities: on the one hand rather more towards the lexical end of the spectrum, on the other, idiom-like items which function as grammatical 'words'.

Anyway, in brief, the main reasons why SKT-patterns seem to demand a construction analysis are the following. Only the binominal pattern is straightforward for conventional grammar. A structural analysis particularly of the postdeterminer pattern is difficult and arbitrary. Word class labels for the SKT-'nouns' or of strings like *sort of* are equally problematic.

A construction analysis should make sense of the fact that all three SKT-words pattern similarly and are treated by speakers as near-equivalents in many of the patterns under discussion. And in principle it allows us to account for the fact that certain SKT-patterns associate a particular syntax and semantics with all sorts of other properties (pragmatics, discourse effects, style, intonation).

Construction analysis for PDE

Analogy with such

Notice that *sort/kind of* isn't entirely unique, though nothing has quite the same distribution. Paul Kiparsky (p.c.) suggested a historical comparison with *such*. As pointed out independently to Evelien Keizer by Lachlan Mackenzie (p.c.), the sequence of demonstrative

and *sort-of/kind-of/type-of* may well be in complementary distribution with anaphoric *such*. Mackenzie (1997: 89) cites (Bolinger 1972) and (Altenberg 1994), the latter for claiming that *such* is predominantly identifying in function in a written corpus, whereas 'intensifying *such*, which Bolinger claims to be historically derived from the older identifying meaning', is adverbial in function and occurs above all in the spoken material. The parallel with Table 1 is striking, with qualifying *sort of*, a hedge, in the same semantic area as an intensifier. Bringing in *so* as well as *such*, especially the recent British and slightly more longstanding American

(16) You *so* don't understand.

would widen the parallel to adverbial *sort of* as well, though I haven't explored this yet. On the other hand, recent analyses of *such* as an adjective would weaken the parallel somewhat (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, Spinillo 2002).

Relationships

I'm not ready with a full-blown CxG analysis, since I am unclear what notation and formalism to adopt and am nervous of *post hoc* reasoning, but the general shape I have in mind involves both a network-related family and multiple inheritance:

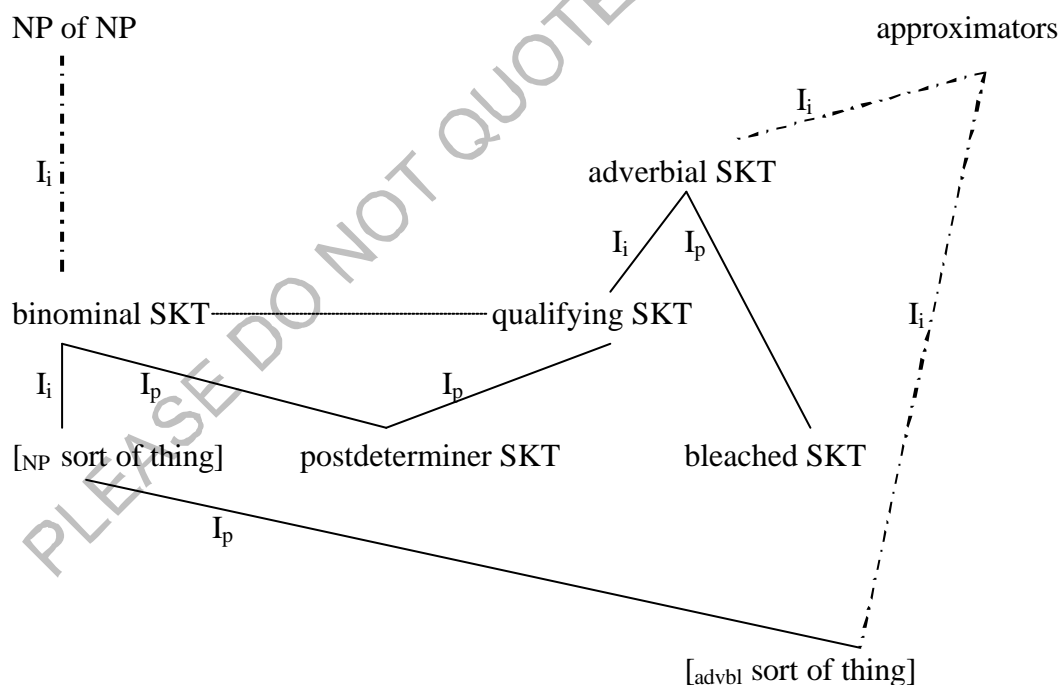


Figure 1: a sketch of a network-related family

This is no more than a first sketch and not to be taken too seriously. I could have put in boxes with rows for semantic, pragmatic and syntactic info — all the nodes are amenable to

this — but it wouldn't have added much. I have tentatively used Goldberg's four-way classification of inheritance links (1995: 74-81), adopting i[nstance] quite happily but p[olysemy] less so. Items connected by solid lines are the family of SKT-constructions. The horizontal dotted line linking binominal and qualifying SKT is not an inheritance link in synchronic grammar, but the two are related because there are intermediate cases. The dominating items with dashed lines are meant to stand for more general constructions outside that family. Likewise one would want to add partitives, focus particles and whatever constructions permit *such*.

History

The set of SKT-nouns

Looking at the problem with a longer perspective, we might widen the SKT lexical field to include at least the following items:

(17) *sort, kind, kin, type, manner, variety, class, brand, species, category*

It becomes clear that *kind* is historically the crucial member. Syntactically speaking, all of the items except *kin* can occur in D-N1-*of*-N2 constructions, and several show the kind of number clash seen in the postdeterminer construction, notably in (18)-(19) below:

(18) or printing and fixing *those variety of Colours* in that white Cloth (1655 [OED])

(19) for all *these manner of operations*. (1676 [OED])

(20) *This class of females are* known by the gang as 'Chippies', and most of them come from the slums. (1886 [OED])

As far as origin of words is concerned, *kind* and *kin* can be traced from OE onwards — *OED* draws attention to the etymological link between them — but nearly all the others date from later French or classical influence on English. *Brand* is a Germanic word in OE but does not join this lexical field until the nineteenth century. I will only look at *kind*, *manner*, *sort* and *type* in any detail, basing my account on *OED*, *MED* and historical corpora.

'Class' meanings

These four words all develop a general sense of denoting a 'class' of things or persons, in most cases from a more specific sense.

kind

Presumed earliest meanings of *kind* include 'birth, descent, nature'. One meaning was to denote a class of things. *OED* distinguishes several subsenses, *inter alia* a natural group of

living things having a common origin, and more generally a class of individuals or objects merely having common attributes, both recorded from OE times (s.v. 10.a, 13.a). For convenience I will label these meanings as '**class (specific)**' and '**class (general)**', respectively.

manner

Manner means 'method, mode of procedure, behaviour'. The *OED* entry on *manner* has been rewritten to give as the primary sense what we shall call a 'class (general)' meaning (*OED Online*, draft 15 Sept. 2000). This is recorded from eME, earlier than any other sense of the word in English.

sort

Sort comes from a Romance source meaning 'lot, fate'. It is '[u]sed of persons, with special reference to character, disposition, or rank' from c.1386 (*OED* s.v. *sort* n.², 2.a), and more generally to mean '[a] kind, species, variety, or description of persons or things' from about the same date (s.v., 1.a) — again what we might call 'class (specific)' and 'class (general)' meanings. From the fifteenth century (*MED*) the latter meaning occurs with a following *of*-phrase.

type

Type has a different history. It moves from meaning 'symbol, emblem' (c.1470, *OED* s.v. *type* n.¹, 1.a) to a 'figure, picture; distinguishing mark' (1559, s.v., 2-3), through 'the characteristic which distinguishes a class' (1843, s.v., 5.a), to '[a] kind, class, or order as distinguished by a particular character' (s.v., 6.a): I take the last one to be 'class (general)', so that all four words have had almost synonymous senses. We might suspect the construction of exerting some kind of coercion on the lexical sense of *type*.

Summary of historical development

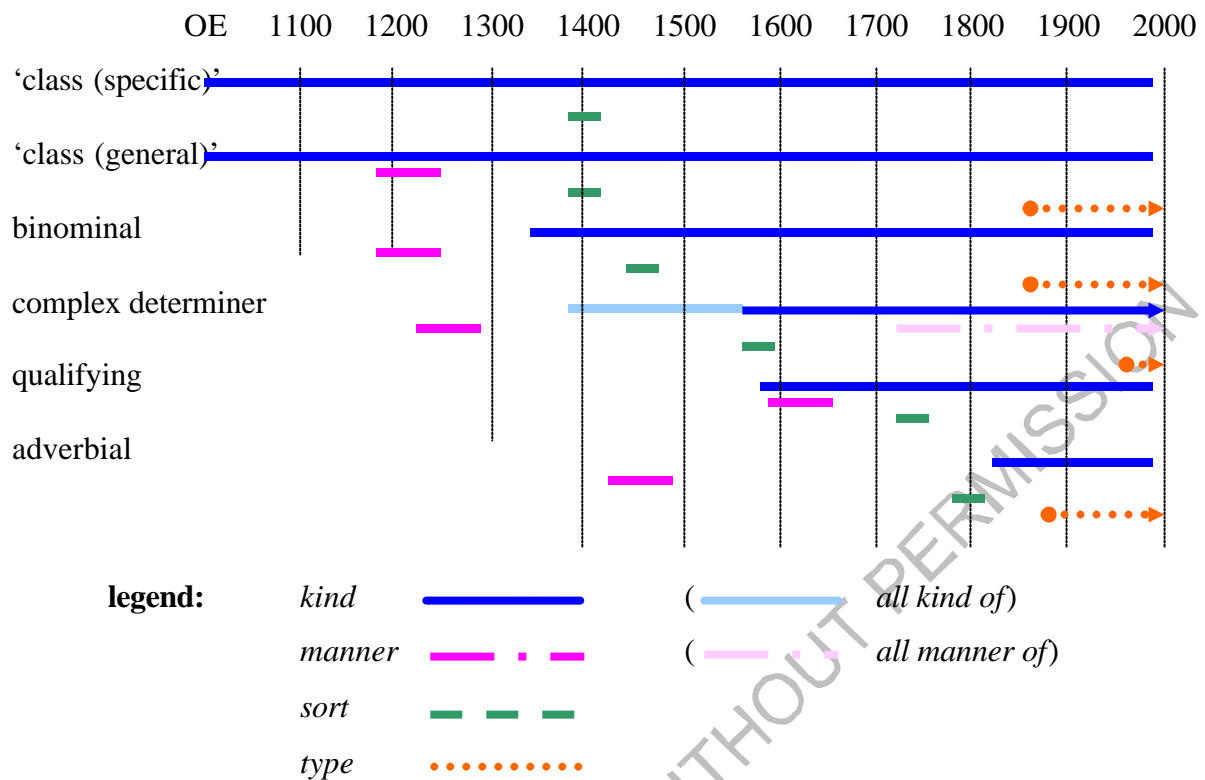


Figure 2: date ranges of some SKT-patterns

Notice that *type* is altogether more recent in this family, but that with the others, the complex determiner is at least as old as the qualifying use, probably much older, while the adverbial use is only a couple of centuries old (the adverbial uses of *manner* and *type* are rather different in form).

The overall development of these uses seems to proceed as follows:

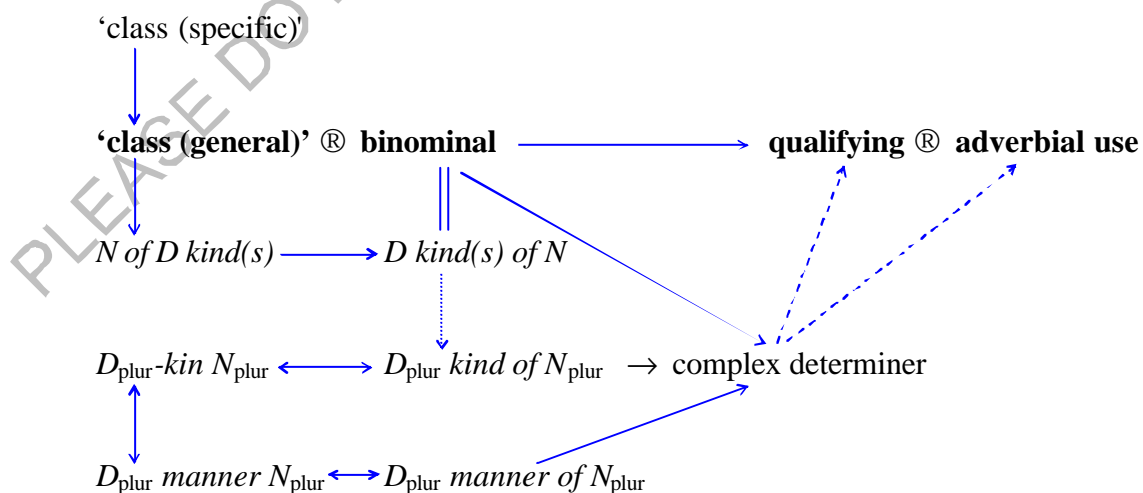


Figure 3: historical derivations of some SKT-patterns

The emboldened row in Figure 3 represents the main line of development, with a word meaning 'class' coming to be complemented by *of*-phrase, giving the binominal construction, which is subsequently weakened semantically and reanalysed syntactically to form the qualifying construction, and then extended syntactically to give the adverbial use. All the older stages persist alongside the newer ones. By the way, when I invoke **reanalysis**, I don't necessarily mean a binary switch from old to new: I argued in a recent paper (Denison 2002) that reanalysis can be a stepwise process involving intermediate stages. I won't discuss here some of the lower left part of the diagram, involving (i) loss or addition of *of* and (ii) a possible switch of order:

Later usage transposes the syntactical relation in such constructions as *all kinds of trees* = 'trees of all kinds', *this kind of thing* = 'a thing of this kind'. (*OED*)

It's reminiscent of some of the permutations of arguments with *in(to) possession* in Fillmore's abstract.

The reconstruction in Figure 3 is speculative, though based on the information in *OED*. Can its stages be made plausible?

'Class' → binominal

For any noun with a general sense of 'class', there are several obvious ways of specifying the particular class in question, including a genitive NP (this applies to *kin* and *kind* in OE), a premodifier (*mortal kind*), or from ME onwards, an *of*-phrase. The last-named produces the binominal structure, and I don't propose to explain it any further.

Binominal → qualifying

From binominal to qualifying constructions can be envisaged as follows. Binominal constructions have N1 as syntactic head, but the information value of the SKT-word can be relatively low, especially when unpremodified, with focus more on N2. (In this respect they resemble partitives.) Consider a modern example like (21)a, where the use of *a kind of N2* presupposes that N2 is not a simple, undifferentiated class and that there are potentially **different** kinds of N2 — otherwise the simpler (21)b would have served adequately (the variant (21)c makes the presupposition even clearer):

- (21) a. I mean there's no tennis club doesn't have *a kind of pecking order* (ICE-GB)
 b. I mean there's no tennis club doesn't have *a pecking order*
 c. I mean there's no tennis club doesn't have *some kind of pecking order*

With nouns of subjective or metaphorical content especially, a conversational implicature could arise that the SKT-construction as a whole is used to refer not to a normal member of the class of N2 but to a **possible** member, or perhaps an arguable member, or a peripheral member, or a near-member. That is, if the SKT-word is defocused and hence a precise listing of kinds is not at issue, then the construction is in effect about the nature of membership of the class of N2. If the implicature becomes grammaticalised, the syntax changes accordingly, and the qualifying construction is born.² Its hedging nature is evident early on:

- (22) *She was a kind of a what d' ye call 'em..a sort of a Queen or Wife, or something or other to somebody, that liv'd a damn'd while ago. (1752 [OED])*

I love this example, even if it requires me to claim that such a curmudgeonly and vigorous speaker could use a hedging construction.

Why doesn't *type* take part? For essentially diachronic or synchronic reasons: either because the change was time-limited and was completed before *type* entered this lexical set, or because the complex determiner pattern is a necessary intermediate stage and that pattern is only 50 years old with *type*, or because *type* has not yet reached some necessary frequency threshold. I would prefer the latter.

Binominal* → *complex determiner

The status of the complex determiner construction is less clear, both historically and in PDE. Assuming for now that it can be treated as a separate construction, its main source is an alternative reanalysis of the binominal. A likely vehicle for such a reanalysis is the pattern D-N1_{sg}-of-N2_{plur}, without premodification of N1 apart from a determiner unmarked for number, as in (23):

- (23) *as giving him some kind of hopes that ... (1627 [CEECS])*

OED implies that in form the complex determiner construction has two other sources as well, at least insofar as the SKT word is subordinate pragmatically to N2; that was the part of the lower left of Figure 3 which I am leaving out here.

² Hollmann (p.c., 11 Oct 2001) brings a Cognitive Grammar perspective, suggesting that 'the construal operation that Langacker calls "abstraction" (Croft's "scalar adjustment")' is crucial, which he glosses as 'the ability to view a situation in different degrees of abstractness / granularity'. That is, it is 'possible to move towards a less holistic construal of [a] category, recognising its internal structure (degrees of centrality)'.

Qualifying → adverbial

There are several scenarios by which the adverbial construction might have arisen. In one it derives from the qualifying construction; the relative dates in Figure 2 can be seen to fit well for *sort* and *kind*. With the semantics and pragmatics of that construction established as a hedging device in an NP slot, the syntactic range of *sort/kind of* is simply extended from modifying a noun, as in

- (24) a. I suppose it's ... *a sort of holiday* (ICE-GB, = (4))
 b. [DP [D a] [NP [Qual sort-of] [N holiday]]]

to modifying other categories, its semantic and pragmatic values held constant. The wider range is illustrated in:

- (25) and they *kind of* group . put people into *kind of* categories — . (LLC)

Example (25) shows *kind of* used first with a verb and then, after a pause to reframe the VP, before a noun: adverbial and qualifying constructions are used in parallel. If the category of *sort of* must be given in traditional terms, it is not clear what the most appropriate labels are. Before N in (24)b we have used the label Qual = qualifying element. In extended use before V or A or even P it might be more conventional to use AdverbP or DegMod, neither of which is normally thought of as a possible modifier of N, but it is not obvious that extension requires a category change in *sort of*.

Complex determiner → qualifying/adverbial

In my reconstruction in Figure 3 the complex determiner is surprisingly early: it precedes both the qualifying and the adverbial structures for both the relevant SKT-nouns. Purely for that reason, and the fact that it shares with the other two a constituent *sort/kind of* in which *of* belongs with the preceding word, I have provisionally assumed that it too contributed to their formation.

Binominal ? → adverbial

Tabor (1993) does not consider this scenario at all. First he explores the possibility that the adverbial construction might have developed by reanalysis from a subtype of the binominal with an adjective between *sort/kind of* and the head noun, as follows:

- (26) But in such questions as the present, a hundred contradictory views may preserve *a kind of imperfect analogy*; (1743 [Tabor (15)])

An earlier (27) would be reanalysed as (28) (formulas adapted from Tabor (1993: 6-7)).

(27) [NP a [N' [N kind] [PP of [NP imperfect analogy]]]]

(28) [NP a [N' [AP [DegMod kind-of] [A imperfect]] analogy]]

[or adapt further to make like (24)b with DP hypothesis??]

However, Tabor decides against this route because of the co-existence of *sort/kind of* and *a sort/kind of*, which would suggest two virtually simultaneous reanalyses. He believes that the adverbial usage developed specifically in patterns in which (a) *sort/kind of* preceded an AP:³

(29) The Macaronian is *a kind of burlesque poetry* (1751 [OED])

He argues that a connectionist grammar would predict the formation of an analysis of (a) *sort/kind of* intermediate between (what we could call) the binominal analysis and the adverbial construction, providing a bridge between a left-to-right parsing in which *sort/kind* is N and *of* is P, and a re-parsing from that point on, in which *sort-of* or *kind-of* is DegMod followed by A:

(30) a. a kind [PP of burlesque poetry]

b. [AP (a) kind of burlesque] [N poetry]

This development would produce both *a sort/kind of* and *sort/kind of* as possible degree modifiers of adjectives.⁴ This is an interesting and original take on the historical development. However, although (a) *sort/kind of* does precede adjectives with fair frequency, many of the adjectives would not be interpretable as taking degree modification. That objection probably applies not just to our (29) above but also — to pick at random a convenient subsample — to every other occurrence of *a kind of* + Adjective from the same date in *OED*:

(31) Arenation..*a kind of dry bath*

(32) Chrysoberyl, a precious stone; being *a kind of pale beryl*, with a tincture of yellow.

(33) He stood undistinguished in the circle..with *a kind of an indrawn reserve*.

(34) So that the station of a Professor is only *a kind of legal Noticer* to inform us where the shattered bulk of Learning lies at anchor.

(35) From implying an ordinary pre-acquaintance, to presume *a kind of general and universal Notoriety*.

It remains to be seen just how common truly ambiguous strings were. Note too that Tabor's derivation from the binominal cannot explain why *type of* fails to occur in the adverbial

³ It is unclear to me whether it is part of the structural condition that the whole string be in predicative position.

⁴ Tabor is probably justified in treating *a sort/kind of* as special. As a quick test of general frequency, if we take all occurrences of *kind of* in *OED* for the period 1750-1850, 1018/1821 = 56% involve the collocation *a kind of*. The next most frequent collocations, *this kind of* (90) and *that kind of* (46), are vastly less common.

construction, unless it is the case that the relevant frequencies for *type of* happen to fall below some threshold. The alternative derivation from the qualifying construction would automatically explain the absence of adverbial *type of*.

Binominal → SKT-of-thing

A plausible origin is as follows. *SKT-of-thing* was a frequently-occurring binominal SKT-construction which became lexicalised, often appearing clause-finally in sentences like (36)-(37):

- (36) it's been *a an about town sort of thing* (WSC)
 (37) 'Is that a single-engine plane?'.. 'Kind of *executive runabout kind of thing*.' (1977 [OED])

But (37), unlike (36), can be reanalysed: either *executive runabout* is a modifier and *kind of thing* is nominal, or *executive roundabout* closes the NP, in which case *kind of thing* becomes an adverbial hedge. I believe that such processes led to unequivocal adverbials like (6), perhaps the only context in which *type* occurs in a hedging construction. If this is right, the *SKT-of-thing* adverbial develops directly from the binominal rather than the qualifying construction, adding another layer of complexity to a complex weave of constructions.

Adverbial → bleached

The general extension of the adverbial usage to more and more kinds of modifiee often coincides with movement toward metalinguistic meaning and subjectification, in accordance with general principles of semantic change identified by Traugott (1995: 31).

Losses

Kin had moved out of the system well before the modern period and was not used with an *of*-phrase. *Manner* was an important early member but began to move away in the IModE period.

- (38) There are three *manner of rights of Property*; that is, Property absolute, Property qualified, and Property possessory. (1708 (OED))
 (39) I hate republicans, as I do *all other manner of fools*. (1876 (OED))

The complex determiner pattern with *manner* has become largely obsolete, which is why *manner* does not figure in our account of SKT-constructions in PDE. Examples (38)-(39) are the latest examples of the complex determiner pattern that I have, apart from the set phrase *all manner of*, and (39) is merely a variant of that phrase. Otherwise the 'class (general)' meaning of *manner* is only found in the negative polarity items and semi-conventionalised

phrases *no manner of* and *any manner of*. Perhaps it was interference from the 'conduct' and 'procedure' sense branches, both of which essentially involve non-stative semantics, that eventually made *manner* less suitable than *kind* and *sort* as a general classification word.

Concluding remarks

For each of these words there is an early period when there is no significant relationship with the SKT-constructions. Even after that, for each of them there have always been usages which have no connection. But for the usages which do seem to have a connection with SKT, we have a problem of level of analysis: at what point does it start being useful to discuss that lexical item in relation to SKT (and in the case of *manner*, at what point might it cease being useful)? What are the processes of attraction into a construction and possible ejection from it? And for historical work, how far can we go without being *post hoc* in motivating these processes in an objective way, perhaps in terms of frequency and saliency? Here the problem of finding a large enough balanced corpus is an obstacle.

Even without bringing historical change into the picture, I would want to motivate much more strongly the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic patternings which could justify both the network relationship and the inheritance links hinted at in Figure 1. Otherwise the formal grammarians are not going to be persuaded of the descriptive, let alone the explanatory power of CxG in this instance. But their demands for binary choices, unique analyses, a fixed set of categories, and modular separation of syntax from everything else look hopelessly unpersuasive on this set of data.⁵

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