The grammaticalisations of sort of, kind of and type of in English

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Background
- Diachronic work done by me 2000-02, in part with Evelien Keizer (synchronic PDE).
- Presented in an informal CxG framework (Helsinki 2002).
- I simply assumed much grammaticalisation in history of SKT words (Santiago 2005 abstract).
- Data here from ARCHER unless specified.
- Partial travel support from British Academy gratefully acknowledged.

SKT patterns in Present-day English
Nucleus of set of constructions is N₁-of-N₂ as part of NP, where
- N₁ is sort, kind or type (= ‘SKT-nouns’)
- possible premodifiers before N₁ and/or N₂
- a determiner is only rarely attached to N₂
- construction as a whole may be postmodified
  e.g. D₁ N₁ of (D₂) N₂
  this type of presentation

The binominal construction
The mind of the victim of this kind of assault must be considered equally with the body.

[DP [t] [NP [N kind] [KP of [NP assault]]]]
head
N
p

The qualifying construction
When thanks is not forthcoming, we feel a kind of emptiness

[DP [t a] [NP [A-Qual kind-of] [N emptiness]]]
head
not N
not P

Type is not found in this pattern.

The postdeterminer (or complex determiner) construction
Those sort of creatures know no bounds when they think they have a purse in view that will answer their impudent demands

[DP [t those] [PostD sort-of [NP [N creatures]]]]
head
??not N
??not P

Grammaticalisations of SKT
Summary of three NP patterns

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<tr>
<th>binom</th>
<th>N₁</th>
<th>anaphor</th>
<th>free</th>
<th>sort</th>
<th>kind</th>
<th>type</th>
<th>D₁</th>
<th>or</th>
<th>N₁</th>
<th>N₁ num</th>
<th>prim.</th>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>N₂</th>
<th>om.</th>
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<td>N₂</td>
<td>hdlg</td>
<td>indef</td>
<td>sort</td>
<td>kind</td>
<td>N₂</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>inf'1</td>
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<td>or</td>
<td>N₂</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>inf'1</td>
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Partial lexicalisations

a kind of | any kind of | what kind of
all sorts of ‘many kinds’ → ‘much, many’
and the fact was causing all sorts of gossip and unrest
sort of thing
- Not at all clear to me how frequent (how entrenched?) a string has to be for it to take on a life of its own.

Sort of thing

... by which I take it you mean the mind. Every day in every way I get better and better. That sort of thing.
it’s been a an about town sort of thing (WSC)
‘Is that a single-engine plane?’.. ‘Kind of executive runabout kind of thing.’ (OED)

Variants of D₁ N₁ of (D₂) N₂

- Sort of thing is found as an adverbial hedge, usually in clause-final position:
  if he had visitors he used to send her out of the room type of thing
- Ellipsis of N₁ from the binominal or even the postdeterminer patterns:
  ‘They won’t last long, mate, these type never do.’

Patterns without of for type only

- A variant of the postdeterminer pattern
  It’s one of those type LPs. I had all ‘soul brothers’ (1959 [O E D])
  virtually any type projector (1979 [O E D])
- The semi-suffix - type
  This indicated to us not only that quick-reaction type missions are feasible, but also that the results are more than satisfactory.

Adverbial

You’re being kind of melodramatic, aren’t you?
I kind of admire what he’s doing. It’s clever as hell.
I put a thousand dollars in the bank today, in my own name. I drive a car. I am a grownup.
Look, I walk, talk, run. Type. Even fuck. Sort of, I don’t understand anything. Anything.
... and I sort of opened the door, and looked out, and I sort of saw Richard ... [Jen Smith p.c.]
Adverbial

I *sort of* reckon by now you must be in Chester but maybe you are not.

I was born in country like this, you know, the real thing. I mean you didn’t drive out anywhere to *sort of* see it. You just sat down on the back porch and – there it was. Something to run from; something to get the hell away from as fast as you could.

- Only sort and kind, not type.

Subdivisions of adverbial?

- degree modifier
- hedge
- ‘as it were’
- bleached
- etc.?
- Some of these are discourse particles.
- Different pragmatics and sometimes different syntax suggest more than one construction.

PDE construction relationships

History

- The set of SKT-nouns sort, kind, kin, type, manner, variety, class, brand, species, category
- or printing and fixing *those variety of Colours* in that white Cloth (1655, OED)
- for *all these manner of operations*. (1676, OED)
- *This class of females* are known by the gang as ‘Chippies’, and most of them come from the slums. (1886, OED)

‘Class’ meanings

- kind:
  - ‘birth, descent, nature’
  - ‘a natural group of living things having a common origin’ ([class (specific)])
  - ‘a class of individuals or objects merely having common attributes’ ([class (general)], from OE)
- manner:
  - ‘method, mode of procedure, behaviour’ (OED 1)
  - [class (general)] (from 13C, OED 2)

‘Class’ meanings

- sort:
  - from a Romance source meaning ‘lot, fate’
  - ‘a(s)ed of persons, with special reference to character, disposition, or rank’ ([class (specific)])
  - [a] kind, species, variety, or description of persons or things’ ([class (general)], from late 14C)
Grammaticalisations of SKT

‘Class’ meanings

- **type:**
  - ‘symbol, emblem’
  - ‘figure, picture; distinguishing mark’
  - ‘the characteristic which distinguishes a class’
  - [a] kind, class, or order as distinguished by a particular character [class (general), from mid-19C]

Historical development?

- ‘class (specific)’
- ‘class (gen)’ → binom → qualif → adverbial

Is there grammaticalisation here?

- If the postdeterminer use is genuine, then we have a new recruit to the (relatively) closed class D eterminer.
- D eterminer, like Modal, is a recent addition to the inventory of morphosyntactic categories in English.
- D, like M, is clearly still evolving as a class.
- Development of postdeterminer SKT ought to qualify as an instance of grammaticalisation.

Is there grammaticalisation here?

- syntactic reanalysis
- univerbation
  - bleaching of meaning
  - progress towards functional status
  - decategorialisation
  - phonetic attrition
  - subjectification
  - layering

Questions include ...

- Is qualifying use a grammaticalisation?
- Why did only sort and kind develop qualifying use? Why not type?
- Lexical meaning?
- Structure?
- Date?
- What about manner?
- How interchangeable are the SKT words?
- Development of postposed sort of thing.

Are kind of and sort of synonyms?

- There are distributional differences between BrE (favours sort of) and AmE (favours kind of).
- In BrE, most uses belong to informal registers.
- For many Americans, sort of is more formal.
  - This may follow from the preceding.
  - If so, sociolinguistic effects are beginning to skew history: in this case interdialectal influence.
Why did manner almost drop out?

There are three manner of rights of Property: that is, Property absolute, Property qualified, and Property possessory. (1708)

I hate republicans, as I do all other manner of fools. (1876)

- Could it be phonological (rhythm)? – the other SKT words are monosyllables and can form a disyllable with reduced of.

Why no qualifying type?

- Because class (general) meaning is too young?
- Because other meanings interfere too much?
- Because other syntactic possibilities interfere?
- Because the development was time-limited, and when sort and kind underwent it, type was not yet a member of the SKT set?
- Because it isn’t frequent enough? Cf. approx. ARCHER figures: type 253 vs. sort 494 vs. kind 765.

Origins of adverbial?

Qualifying → adverbial (DD)

I suppose it’s … a sort of holiday

[DP [a] [VP [sort-of] [N holiday]]]

Approximator meaning retained, syntactic subcategorisation widened.

and they kind of group, put people into kind of categories — .

Binominal → adverbial (Tabor 1993)

a hundred contradictory views may preserve a kind of imperfect analogy (1743)

[NP a [NP a kind of imperfect analogy]]

[NP a [NP a kind of imperfect analogy]]

The Macaronian is a kind of burlesque poetry

a kind [PP of a burlesque poetry]

[a kind of burlesque poetry]

Conclusions

- What do (would) we get by identifying certain episodes as grammaticalisations?
- Does it help predict pathways of development? (Yes.)
- Does it tell us anything new about processes of grammaticalisation? (No?)

Selected references


