



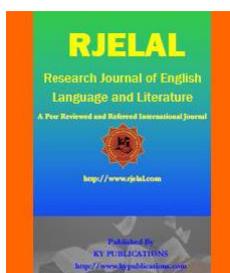
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## A KIND OF : FROM A NOUN CONSTRUCTION TO A DISCOURSE MARKER

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the various uses of *a kind of*, ranging from a noun construction equivalent to *a type of* to a discourse marker with interpersonal or textual meaning, and special emphasis is laid on the differences between its nominal qualifying and adverbial uses and its peculiarity as a discourse marker. Grammaticalization underlies the different uses and their co-existence. There is a close correspondence between its form and meaning, and on the other hand, the proper interpretation of the different uses depends on the context.

**Key words:** *a kind of*, grammaticalization, nominal qualifier, adverbial, discourse marker

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

(A) *kind of/sort of* occurs with a significantly high frequency in spoken English. There are a lot of systematic studies of *kind of/sort of* as a discourse marker, or “compromiser” (James 1983, Quirk et al. 1985), “contextualization cue” (Fetzer 2009), “discourse particle” (Aijmer 1984, 2002), “epistemic modal form” (Coates 1987, 2003), “hedge”<sup>1</sup> (Lakoff 1972, Hübler 1983, Kay 1997), “pragmatic particle” (Holmes 1988), “softener” (Crystal & Davy 1975), etc. and it is generally accepted that the *type of* meaning of *kind of/sort of* should not be confused with that of the discourse marker (Aijmer 1984,

2002, Holmes 1988, Kay 1997). Generally speaking, while *a kind of* can be assumed as a synonym of *a type of* (e.g. Aijmer 2002: 176), *kind of* has always been taken as a discourse marker. Note, however, the identification of the various uses of *a kind of* is far more complicated. Does *a kind of elephant*, for instance, always refer to a particular subcategory of elephants? What is the difference between *a kind of elephant* and *a kind of an elephant*? In addition, are there any cases in which *a kind of* is used as a discourse marker?

In Fetzer’s (2009) systematic analysis of *sort of* and *kind of* functioning as head of NP, modifier of qualifying function, discourse marker and contextualization cue, *a sort of human being* can refer to both a particular subcategory of humans and a particularized animate nature. *A sort of* in both cases is nominal, in which *sort* can be viewed as the lexical head of the construction meaning *a type of* and a premodifier signifying fuzziness respectively.

According to COB<sup>5</sup> and LDCE<sup>5</sup>, as illustrated in the following examples, “a kind of +n (single)” is

<sup>1</sup> It is found that the term “hedge” is used by different scholars with different definitions in previous studies. According to Lakoff (1972: 195), hedge is used to refer to a word or phrase “whose job it is to make things fuzzier”. In Brown and Levinson (1987: 271), hedge is seen as “an extremely important resource for the realization of politeness strategies” within face-threatening acts. Following Kay (1997), this study defines hedge as a metalinguistic commenting device.

used to say that the description of something is not exact or refer to something we are uncertain about, but it is roughly like the thing mentioned or has the qualities mentioned.

- (1) I still have a kind of suspicion about it. (COB<sup>5</sup>)  
(2) a kind of reddish-brown color (LDCE<sup>5</sup>)

As to “a kind of a NP”, in some previous research (e.g. Kay, 1997, Fetzer 2009, Aijmer 2002), it is not explicitly stated that whether it is accepted or not. Kay (1997:145), for instance, argues that *kind of/sort of* as a “hedge”, is “not to be confused with the corresponding nonconstituent sequence of noun and preposition”. The difference is found in the following example:

- (3) a. A mastodon is a kind of (? an) elephant.  
b. A mastodon is kind of an elephant.

In the noun-preposition sequence, such as (3) a, a determiner always precedes the singular noun *kind* or *sort*, while with the discourse marker there is no preceding determiner. A *kind of* here is obviously taken as a noun followed by a preposition meaning *a type of*. But in (3) a, should *elephant* be preceded by the indefinite article?

Aijmer (2002: 176) holds that in the formula “X is a *sort of* (*kind of/type of*) Y”, X can be a hyponym of Y (*a robin is a sort of bird*). In that case a *sort of* can be paraphrased as *a type of*. When *kind of/sort of* is preceded by the indefinite article or another determiner (*this* and *that*), it falls into the structure of “Determiner+Head+Postmodifier” and can be analyzed as [a[sort[of NP]]] which has the meaning *a type of*. She continues to argue that when *sort of* modifies the nominal head, following the pattern [[sort of](a) NP], it serves as a discourse marker, or “discourse particle” in her work. It seems that the presence or absence of the indefinite article before the NP has something to do with the functions of (*a*) *sort of*, but there is not any further explanation and it is not clearly stated whether *a sort of a bird* is accepted.

From some other studies (e.g. Bolinger 1972, Quirk et al. 1985), it is found that *a kind of* may occur before a single noun (phrase) with or without the indefinite article before the noun (phrase), namely, falling into the pattern “a kind of NP” or “a kind of a NP”. It seems that, however,

there is no clear explanation of the differences between the two patterns.

In Bolinger (1972:123), there is a thorough discussion of the semantic and syntactic features of *sort of*, in which we can find an analysis of the relationship between its *type of* meaning and its function as a discourse marker, “intensifier” in his work. As shown in (5), the indefinite article before *telescope* is accepted, but what accounts for the occurrence of the indefinite article *a* before *telescope* and what is the difference between *a sort of telescope* and *a sort of a telescope*?

- (4) It’s (a) sort of a telescope.

As exemplified in (5) below, Quirk et al. (1985:451) argues that with *kind of* and *sort of* there are several possible constructions in informal style and the difference lies in the degree of informality.

- (5) a. This must be a sort of joke.  
b. This must be sort of a joke. (informal)  
c. This must be a sort of a joke. (more informal)  
d. This must be a joke, sort of. (most informal)

Interestingly, the expressions with *kind/sort of* have also been examined from the perspective of grammaticalization in a number of studies (e.g. Tabor 1993, Denison 2002, Davidse et al. 2008, Brems & Davidse 2010, Margerie 2010, Brems 2011), most of which concentrate on the nominal uses, namely, the binominal, postdeterminer, qualifier, quantifier, modifier constructions, arguing that the latter several developed via grammaticalization from the binominal construction. Notably, though, there seems no explicit explanation of what accounts for the occurrence or absence of the indefinite article before the single noun (phrase).

It seems that an exception is Margerie (2010), who investigates the various uses of *kind of/kinda*, ranging from propositional to expressive meanings, and delineates a grammaticalization path. Margerie distinguishes nominal uses from adverbial functions, maintaining that *a kind of* in the pattern “*a kind of* A NP” is a nominal construction and “has almost achieved the status of a set phrase” and “A is the only determiner possible in that position” (2010: 339). If *a kind of* here is nominal, however, what is its peculiarity compared with *a kind of* in “*a kind of* NP” functioning as a nominal modifier?

From the previous research, it is found that *a kind of* in a kind of NP" may not necessarily be equivalent to a type of, but there is no explanation of the difference between "a kind of NP" and "a kind of a NP". As to the discourse marker use of *a kind of*, it seems that it has received little scholarly attention, since it is almost exclusively seen as a nominal construction.

This study argues that *a kind of* is variously used in discourse and grammaticalization underlies the different uses. The remainder of this article will be devoted to its various uses, namely, a binominal construction with *kind* as head, a nominal qualifier, a hedge and a discourse marker<sup>2</sup> and special emphasis will be laid on the differences between its nominal qualifying and adverbial uses, and its peculiarity as a discourse marker.

This study is based on a selection of texts representing contemporary, everyday, semiformal or informal spoken American English from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (hereafter COCA) and the Michigan Corpus for Academic Spoken English (hereafter MICASE).

## 2. A *kind of* as a noun construction

As shown in (6), *the hermaphrodite connector* refers to a particular subcategory of *general radio connector*. It is obvious that *a kind of* in such instances can be viewed as the synonym of *a type of*.

(6) S1: right, h- hermaphrodite <LAUGH> no, the the uh hermaphrodite connector is a kind of general radio connector. [S8: okay.] the other kind of connector which is also called a general radio connector, uh i- which is sort of like a type N connector, if you know what that is. um, we had to change. (MICASE)

<sup>2</sup> This article does not attempt to cover all the nominal uses of the construction, since as is proved in the diachronic corpus study by Brems and Davidse (2010: 428), the binominal construction, in which the type noun is used as head, develops into a nominal qualifier, although there are different paths of development and a number of other nominal constructions, namely, quantifier, modifier and postdeterminer, emerge in the process as the result of the complex interlocking paths. Put in another way, it seems that nominal qualifier is a more crucial stage in the process of evolution.

In example (7), however, things are different.

(7) DIANE-SAWYER-1-AB# Voiceover ... According to the Centers for Disease Control, Central Appalachia is now number one in the country for toothlessness. It's the diet, lack of dental care, and the dentist tells us something else, a huge consumption of Mountain Dew, the soft drink with 50% more caffeine than Coke or Pepsi. It seems to be used as a kind of antidepressant. (COCA)

When *a kind of* is followed by an articleless single noun, namely, in the formula "X is a kind of Y" (a *be* predication is either given explicitly or implied), it can be interpreted as follows:

(8) a. X is [ a [ kind [ of Y ] ] ]

b. X is [ [ a kind of ] Y ]

In the first case where *kind* is the lexical head of the construction qualified by a postmodifier, as illustrated in (6), X is a particular subcategory of Y. In other words, there is a hyponymous relationship between X and Y, and *a kind of* means *a type of*. In this case, *the hermaphrodite connector* (X), for instance, meets all of the necessary features of *general radio connector* (Y) to qualify as a member of that category. With *kind* as the head of the construction, Y is "the satellite" (Bolinger 1972: 113) and dependent and therefore occurs without any articles, definite or indefinite.

The second interpretation of the formula, as shown in (7), is the result of the reanalysis of the first one, in which *a kind of* is converted from an independent noun phrase (a noun-preposition sequence) with dependent nouns into a nominal qualifier (Bolinger 1972). In this case, *a kind of* is employed to refer to "a particularized member" (Fetzer 2009: 128) rather than a particular subcategory of a generalized class. It indicates, *Mountain Dew, the soft drink* (X), for instance, does not necessarily meet the features of *antidepressant* (Y) fully and therefore needs to be put somewhere in the continuum between "the core of the cognitive prototype" of *antidepressant* and its "periphery" (Fetzer 2009: 128). The attribution of *Mountain Dew* to the superordinate category of *antidepressant* signals some degree of fuzziness and conveys additionally his evaluation on the connectedness between the chosen expression *antidepressant* and

what he actually intends to convey as not a perfect match. Put differently, the hedging meaning of *a kind of* becomes observable due to an increase of "subjectification", or the expression of speaker attitude, in the process of grammaticalization (Traugott 1995: 14). As a nominal qualifier functioning as a whole, *a kind of* modifies the following lexical head and therefore, it is not necessary to have another article before the head.

It should be noted that the formula "X is a kind of Y" does not prefer either interpretation analyzed above (Cf. Fetzer 2009). Generally speaking, the features that characterize the *a type of* meaning of *a kind of* are both formal and prosodic. When *a kind of* means *a type of*, it generally comes immediately before a noun (phrase) without a pause or hesitation. Meaning *a type of*, it usually receives some stress and is pronounced as the unreduced [ə 'kaindəv].

The local context plays an important role in interpreting the different meanings of *a kind of*. *The other kind of connector which is also called a general radio connector* in (6), for instance, strongly supports the *a type of* meaning of the foregoing *a kind of*.

When *a kind of* construction co-occurs with some semantically determinate devices, such as the attributive clause in (9), which functions as a postmodifier and supplies relevant contextual information, the lexical string, namely, *a kind of matter*, becomes more determinate and therefore the *a type of* meaning of *a kind of* is more clearly recognizable.

(9) **Dr-LAWRENCE:** ... But the universe, 380, 000 years after the Big Bang, was made of hydrogen, a little bit of helium, a tiny bit of lithium, and a kind of matter that we call dark matter that's of a different sort entirely. And that's it. (COCA)

In addition, when *kind of* is preceded by other determiners (definite, demonstrative and interrogative), quantifiers or qualifiers such as *the, this, that, what, some, any, each, certain*, etc., as shown in (10) below, the *type of* use becomes easily identified. Obviously the occurrence of any determiners, including the indefinite article before the postmodifier *college*, will render the sentence ungrammatical.

(10) **S2:** y- they wanna look at\_ they want (us) look at the kind of college you're coming from and they wanna ... (MICASE)

It is also noted that *the/this/that kind of* is frequently followed by some vague or general nouns such as *thing, person, stuff*, etc. As exemplified in (11), the *type of* meaning of *kind of* is salient in this case, since in a particular context, "general nouns are used with anaphoric reference and therefore are pragmatically enriched and more determinate" (Fetzer 2009: 143).

(11) **Mr-HICKS:** ... I will say that, on the hate crime issue, I think the other thing's that's going to drive it, in addition to Obama and his election, is just the economic downturn and the unemployment. That always seems to drive people to some other - some of their more base emotions come out when they are worried about being able to just afford, you know, afford their homes and to protect and to afford to take care of their children and that kind of thing. (COCA)

When *a kind of* functions as a nominal qualifier expressing some degree of indeterminacy and fuzziness, it may not necessarily receive stress. Sometimes, the presence of hesitation pauses may help to signal that *a kind of* in such instances should not be taken as equivalent to *a type of* which indicates category membership.

The features characterizing the *a type of* meaning and the nominal qualifier use of *a kind of*, however, are not always mutually exclusive and therefore, there are still instances where it is difficult to be certain which use of *a kind of* is intended. What is dealt with, actually, is a continuum (Holmes, 1988).

### 3. *A kind of* as an adverbial hedge

As exemplified in (12), (13) and (14) below, there are also some instances falling into the pattern of "(X is) a kind of a Y" in MICASE and COCA. *A kind of* in this case is employed to mark the speaker's concern for the appropriateness of the chosen expression, which can be interpreted as a comment "what you might call" or "as it were" and serves as instructions for a loose interpretation (Weinreich 1966: 162). Obviously, *a kind of* here serves as a hedge, "which is allocated to the word class of adverb and to the grammatical function of

adverbial" (Fetzer 2009: 129). The item concerned in this use can be easily recognized because of the accompanying linguistic cues, such as *I don't know*, hesitation pauses realized by the vocal cues *uh* right before and after the explanatory remarks, and the modal adverb *maybe* in (12).

(12) **S1**:...so, it seems to me that, if we understand the plot in relation to what the Spanish really says, it really means, when it happens you are bound forever. now, that's a kind of a mystic notion. uh i don't know uh, maybe it's because i was finishing up rereading the novel at four in the morning... (MICASE)

(13) and (14) illustrate similar cases.

(13) **Rep. MOLINARI** Once we heard a Pentecostal preacher we couldn't - given that our film was really about oral traditions and storytelling, that tradition of preaching is so phenomenally artistic, artful, you know, it's way - it's up there with jazz as a kind of, it seems to me, an American art form. (COCA)

(14) **JIM WOOTEN**: Okay. So for more on those pesky germs and ways to get rid of them, we're joined by the author of the University of Arizona study, microbiologist Dr. Charles Gerba. Thank you very much. This is a, a kind of a, you know, a very touchy subject. But let's abandon the battle of the sexes, and just let's get to why a desk is so dirty in the first place, huh? What can you tell me? (COCA)

It is easily found that *a kind of* on such occasions signals the description of something may not be as exact or appropriate as the speaker would like. It seems that what makes it different from the second use of the construction "X is a kind of Y", namely *a kind of* as a nominal qualifier, is the indefinite article right before the single noun Y. Is it really safe to say, however, they are the same if the formal difference is not taken into consideration?

As illustrated in the examples in section 3, when *a kind of* is followed by an articleless single noun, it may function as a NP with *kind* as its head or a qualifier qualifying the following head noun. It appears to be fundamentally nominal in both cases. We can see the shift from nominal to adverbial when *a kind of* is followed by a single noun with the indefinite article. What is to be noted is that it is the indefinite article that marks *a kind of* can be viewed

as an adverbial<sup>3</sup>. *A kind of* here can be stylistically extraposed. In other words, it can be placed as an apposition outside the noun phrase it modifies. When the lexical string following *a kind of* is predicative, *a kind of* "moves in the direction of a sentence adverb" (Bolinger 1972: 113). Put differently, the syntactic shift takes place, and *a kind of* can be viewed as having clausal scope. It is clearly seen after the original "X is a kind of a Y" is rewritten as "X is a Y, kind of" (the indefinite article of *a kind of* is missing in the progress of grammaticalization). The adverbial *a kind of*, obviously, has both narrow scope, qualifying a single constituent (basically a noun or NP here), and wide scope, modifying a sentence or a clause within a sentence.

From a noun construction to an adverbial, clearly, *a kind of* has undergone both syntactic reanalysis and semantic-pragmatic change. It is decategorized in the sense that there involves a shift from a more major to a more minor grammatical class (Brinton 2008: 51). Meanwhile, it is desemantized, losing its concrete literal meaning *a type of* and assuming a more abstract meaning, namely, conveying the speaker's concern for the aptness of his/her words. What is also involved in

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that uncountable nouns are also found occurring after *a kind of* in my data. In such instances, without the indefinite article before the head noun as a cue, it is sometimes not easy to tell whether *a kind of* is a nominal or adverbial construction, and therefore, the proper interpretation of the different uses of *a kind of* depends strongly on the specific context. In example (1), for instance, *a kind of* means *a type of*, which is indicated by the attributive clause describing a particular feature of the plastic. *A kind of* in (2), however, is better to be taken as an adverbial hedge because of the pauses and the co-occurring metacommenting *what I call*.

(1) **S1**: ... if you just take them, off the shelf they they have a kind of plastic that won't, take the high temperatures. (MICASE)

(2) **KARLA DAVIS**: I don't think it does other than it symbolizes that there is very little defense of any society against anarchy. And it's my sense that we would be wise to do a kind of, what I call, preemptive Aikenization. If you remember, Senator Aiken suggest that we declare victory and get out of Vietnam. (COCA)

this process is increased subjectification, scope of modification (in the case of sentence adverbial) and phonological reduction without bonding (the indefinite article of *a kind of* is missing).

Let's then go back to (3) a, *A mastodon is a kind of (? an) elephant*. It can be analyzed as:

(3) a1. A mastodon is a kind of elephant.

a2. A mastodon is a kind of an elephant. (= A mastodon is an elephant, kind of.)

*A kind of* in (3) a1 is nominal, which theoretically can be interpreted as an equivalent of *a type of* indicating category membership, or a nominal qualifier signifying fuzziness. Of course, it is clear that if a mastodon is considered as a subcategory of elephants, it cannot refer to some particularized elephant-like mammal. Practically, the latter interpretation is preferable since a mastodon does not fully qualify as an elephant because of some dramatic differences between mastodons and the members of the elephant family.

*A kind of* in (3) a2 is an adverbial and functions as a qualifier of the *be* predication as a whole. With *a kind of*, the speaker expresses that the name *elephant* is more or less appropriate to *a mastodon*. What is involved in this case is the speaker's attitude towards the proposition and "metalinguistic" (Kay 1997: 151) comment about his expression.

#### 4. A *kind of* as a discourse marker

In previous research, *kind of* (or in the phonologically reduced and bonded form *kinda*) is generally taken as a discourse marker, which usually occurs before verbs or adjectives (typically predicative constituents) (Holmes 1988, Aijmer 2002)<sup>4</sup> or in incomplete sentences, and is of interpersonal or textual significance. *A kind of*, on the contrary, has seldom been examined as a discourse marker, since it is predominantly found in pre-noun position. This study argues that *a kind of* may also serve as a discourse marker, although such instances are not common in my data. The item concerned can be primarily interpersonally significant, focusing on the relation between the speaker and the hearer and relating to the

<sup>4</sup> As a full-fledged discourse marker, *kind of* (or *kinda*) in its mitigator use sometimes occurs in the clause-final position in my data.

communication of politeness and intimacy. It may also be textually significant. To be more precise, it can be used as a hesitation filler, which signals utterance continuation and contributes to the stream of the discourse.

#### 4.1 Interpersonal function

In (15), (16) and (17), *a kind of* "has mainly affective meaning" (Aijmer 2002: 178). The employment of *a kind of* on such occasions enables the speaker to avoid sounding assertive, when face-threatening acts are involved and the speaker intends to show his/her concern for the face wants of the participants (Brown & Levinson 1987: 62). Put differently, *a kind of* in this case is used as a politeness strategy. The exhaustive examination of the instances of *a kind of* as a pragmatic softener reveals that it exclusively precedes a predicative adjective phrase or verb phrase and is typically employed when the speaker expresses strong or extreme opinions, positive self-evaluation, disapproval, complaints, etc., primarily denoting positive politeness.

As shown in (15), *a kind of* is used to soften the strong or extreme opinions. In this case, the speaker puts himself/herself in a position where he/she can retreat from the proposition "if it turns out to be unacceptable to others" (Coates 1987: 121). Or, to put it another way, the speaker sounds less authoritative or direct and hence avoids disagreement or disapproval of the hearer.

(15) **S2**: ...uh cognitive representation is a collection, a feature, of the objects, in the brain, and sometime they might have a network, they for example, can i just use the board? because it's a kind of pretty abstract for me. (MICASE)

*A kind of* in (16) makes the speaker's positive comments on their high-stakes balloon hunt sound reasonable and may cause a positive response from the audience.

(16) **FLATOW**: Welcome to SCIENCE FRIDAY. Hi, there.

**NICK**: Yeah, I just want to shout out and say that we were one of the groups that tried to throw off, just a kind of add a real world environment to it. With i3 Detroit, we actually flew our own balloon, and it was number three, for i3 Detroit. (COCA)

Moreover, as exemplified in (17), *a kind of* may also be employed to weaken the force of the negative comments about others, which indicates the speaker's tentativeness and his need for a sympathetic response from the hearer. Interestingly, negative politeness<sup>5</sup> is also involved in this case since the speaker "does not want to offend her addressees by assuming their agreement with the proposition" (Coates 1987: 121).

(17) **GEORGE-WILL:** Many millions. Or Mrs. Clinton. This is not a great week for Mrs. Clinton. I mean when she comes out and attacks Barack Obama for something he said in kindergarten. She was a kind of flailing inevitably. Those two don't fit together....

#### 4.2 Textual function

*A kind of* is also found in the incomplete sentence. It is followed by a reformulation of what the speaker intends to convey, which may be syntactically related or unrelated to what precedes *a kind of*. Similar to *kind of*, *a kind of* in this case actually serves as a hesitation filler, which provides the speaker with verbal planning time and contributes to the stream of the discourse.

In (18), the speaker resumes talk after *a kind of* with a following pause. He makes a minor correction, namely *making* is replaced by *connecting*, within the same syntactic structure.

(18) **S2:** okay right. yeah. i think that's a very good point. um, i mean it's also making a kind of<PAUSE:06> i mean it's connecting in some sense religion and politics. (MICASE)

The speaker in (19) changes to an alternative syntactic structure when he starts a cut-off sentence at the point where *a kind of* occurs with a following pause. The search for the proper expression defeats the speaker to the extent that he gives up the original syntactic structure (Holmes 1988: 97).

(19) **Mr. FRED BALL** Well, I think he led us in a kind of, there was some deviousness in Roosevelt's policy, as there was in the policy of Lincoln at times during the Civil War and Jefferson during his administration. (COCA)

The shift of *a kind of* from a nominal item to a sentence adverbial paves the way for its further development into a discourse marker. It is further desemantized and pragmatically enriched. As a discourse marker, it works on a more global level and its primary function is no longer to convey the speaker's metalinguistic comment. Instead, it evinces an increase of pragmatic and procedural significance and is accorded both interpersonal and textual functions. Moreover, the item under discussion is further phonologically reduced in this process, which explains why the item concerned as a discourse marker predominantly occurs in the form of *kind of* and the more particle-like *kinda*, but not often *a kind of*.

The relationship between the adverbial use of *a kind of* and its discourse marker functions is obviously seen. Generally speaking, the different discourse marker functions of *a kind of* can be taken as the generalized and conventionalized contextual uses (Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg 2004) of the item as a hedge. The item concerned, for instance, is very often employed when face-threatening acts are involved, since the speaker can distance himself/herself, to some extent, from the responsibility for using a particular expression if it turns out to be imposing or unacceptable to others by questioning whether his/her chosen expression is a fitting term to convey what he/she actually intends. It is then gradually accorded interpersonal meaning and can be used as a marker signaling politeness. The discourse marker functions of the item, clearly, develop from but are over and above its adverbial use as a hedge.

#### 5. Conclusion

While *kind of* is generally taken as a discourse marker, *a kind of* has often been assumed as a noun-preposition sequence meaning *a type of*. Actually, *a kind of* has undergone a process of grammaticalization and it is variously used in discourse. In addition to a NP equivalent to *a type of*, *a kind of* can also serve as a nominal qualifier, an

<sup>5</sup> According to Brown and Levinson (1987), negative politeness relates to the speaker's intention for not imposing on the hearer, or for not impeding the hearer's freedom of action while issuing requests, suggestions, expressing strong (negative) emotions, such as anger and hatred, etc. It is noted that while *a kind of* as a mitigator primarily conveys positive politeness, *kind of* or *kinda* expresses either positive or negative politeness, or on some occasions both.

adverbial and a discourse marker. There is a close correspondence between its form and meaning. While *a kind of* in “*a kind of NP*” is a nominal construction meaning *a type of* or signaling fuzziness, for instance, (*a*) *kind of* in “*a kind of a NP*” is usually metalinguistic hedge conveying the speaker’s concern for the properness of his/her expression. The occurrence of the indefinite article before the NP in the latter case indicates the adverbial status of *a kind of*. As to its discourse marker functions, they can be seen as the generalized and conventionalized contextual uses of its sentence adverbial use as the result of further grammaticalization.

It is important to point out that, however, since what is dealt with is a continuum, it is not unproblematic to decide the status of *a kind of* in some instances. On such occasions, the local context and co-occurring linguistic cues play an important role in interpreting its different uses.

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