

The Kind Of/Sort Of Construction

Author(s): Paul Kay

*Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* (1984), pp. 157-171

Please see “How to cite” in the online sidebar for full citation information.

Please contact BLS regarding any further use of this work. BLS retains copyright for both print and screen forms of the publication. BLS may be contacted via <http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/bls/>.

---

*The Annual Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* is published online via [eLanguage](#), the Linguistic Society of America's digital publishing platform.

THE KIND OF/SORT OF CONSTRUCTION

Paul Kay

University of California, Berkeley

0. Introduction

In this paper I will attempt to establish two generalizations regarding the hedging words kind of (kinda) and sort of (sorta).<sup>1</sup> First, these words have a syntactic property that cannot be described adequately in terms of the usual primitives and rules of English; rather to specify correctly the distribution of these words we are forced to posit a special syntactic category and a special rule referring to this category. Secondly, the semantic characterization of kind of and sort of requires a similarly sui generis formulation: namely, the particular semantic character of these words is of an inherently metalinguistic nature. Frequently these hedges denote the speaker's attitude toward the denotational aptness of certain other word tokens in the utterance in which the hedge appears; but other metalinguistic purposes may also be served by kind of and sort of. Finally, I will discuss kind of and sort of as instances of a grammatical construction in an attempt to bring some conceptual unity to these apparently disparate facts.

1. Syntax

The hedges kind of and sort of are not to be confused with the corresponding nonconstituent sequences of noun and preposition. In (1)a a noun-preposition sequence occurs, whereas in (1)b we find a hedge.

(1)a A mastodon is a kind of (?an) elephant.

b A mastodon is kind of an elephant.

In the noun-preposition sequence, (1)a, a determiner always precedes the singular noun kind or sort, while with the hedge there is no preceding determiner. In plural noun phrases, the noun kind or sort takes the plural morpheme, while the hedge kind of or sort of shows no indication of plurality; concomitantly in the hedge case the object of of must show plurality while in the former, the noun-preposition case, the object of of need not show plurality and is prohibited from doing so in formal registers. These observations are reflected in the contrast between (2)a, with a noun preposition sequence sort of, and (2)b, with a hedge sort of.

- (2)a Several kinds of exception to that rule have been pointed out.
- b Several kind of exceptions to that rule have been pointed out.

The plural verb agreement in both cases shows that in (2)a kinds is the head of the subject NP while in (2)b exceptions is the head of the subject NP. I have, in fact, found no evidence that the hedges kind of and sort of contain the nouns kind and sort.

More interestingly, it appears that the hedges may occur as preposed modifiers with the maximal projection of any major syntactic category. Examples (3,4,5) are attested. In (3), as in (2), sort of modifies a noun phrase; in (4) kinda modifies an adjective phrase and in (5) kinda modifies a verb phrase.

- (3) Crete is sort of an island.
- (4) All the papers were kinda really interesting.
- (5) I kinda have to get going now--because I have to pick up my car at 5:00.

In the last case, the interlocuter's response was, "If that's the reason, you could have done without the 'kinda'," indicating that the entire verb phrase is in the scope of kinda.<sup>2</sup>

Kinda and sorta may also modify lexical categories or intermediate bar categories. In attested examples (6) and (7), sort of modifies an adjective.

- (6) Those of us who grew up in the extremely sort of comforting days of linguistics...
- (7) He does very sort of creative things with language and literacy.

In example (8), sorta modifies an  $\bar{N}$ .

- (8) Marvin's a sorta self-made straw man.

In the following example, sort of modifies a noun; in the situation in which the example was produced the word cross-registration was used to denote the practice at a conference of attending a session other than that to which one had been assigned.

- (9) There's a lot of sort of cross-registration going on around here.

In (10)a,b the hedge forms a constituent with a preposition, in (10)c with a prepositional phrase, in d with an adverb, in e with an adverb phrase, and in f, g, and h with a clause or sentence.

- (10)a He distributed the grapes sort of amongst the mangoes.
- b while singing kinda in between the notes...
- c Sort of all over the world reports kept cropping up.
- d She did it very kinda unfalteringly.
- e It began to shake kinda very jerkily.
- f I was wondering sorta how many of the people he thought he could fool how much of the time.
- g Kinda twist it over the flange and under the casing.
- h in trying kinda to outdo herself...

Examples could be multiplied, but I think the following generalization is established.

- (11) The hedges kind of and sort of may occur directly to the left of any category  $X^i$ , forming with that category a constituent of type  $X^i$  (not  $X^{i+1}$ ) where  $X \in \{N, V, A, P, ADV, S\}$ .<sup>3</sup>

What shall we say about the syntactic category of the hedges kind of and sort of themselves and how shall we take account of the generalization given in (11)? We could add to the grammar a category H (for hedge) that contains just the two lexical items under discussion and a rule schema like

- (14)  $X^i \rightarrow H X^i$  ( $X \in \{N, V, A, P, ADV, S\}$ )

It seems a shame to add both a syntactic category and rule with the power of (14) on account of two measly lexical items, but I am unable to think of a less undesirable alternative.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, just as the hedges kind of and sort of need to be distinguished from the phonologically identical noun-preposition sequences, they need also to be distinguished from the likewise phonologically identical scalar adverbs meaning approximately "slightly, a little, somewhat." Preceding an adjective such as schizophrenic or an adverb like hastily, it is impossible to tell a hedge (kinda/sorta) from an adverb (kinda/sorta) out of context and sometimes hard to distinguish them in context. But in other environments the distinction surfaces unambiguously. The clearest of

these environments is exemplified in the attested sentence

(15) Chomsky has a very sort of classical theory of syntax.<sup>5</sup>

Several grammatical processes show that a phrase like (16)a with the hedge sort of has a structure distinct from that of a phrase like (16)b with the scalar adverb slightly.

(16)a a very sort of classical theory

b a very slightly worn tire

In the former, very sort of is not a constituent while in the latter very slightly is: only the adverb phrase constituents, but not the adverb-hedge, nonconstituent sequence can be conjoined, stylistically extraposed, occur with a parenthetical conjunction like but only or in fact, or be referred to by an anaphoric adverb like correspondingly or proportionately.

These contrasts are illustrated in (17), (18), (19), and (20).

(17)a a very slightly but unevenly worn tire

b \*a very sort of but  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{engagingly} \\ \text{surprisingly} \end{array} \right\}$  classical theory

(18)a That tire is worn very slightly.

b \*That theory is classical very sort of.

(19)a The tire is worn, but only very slightly.

b \*The theory is classical,  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{but only} \\ \text{in fact} \end{array} \right\}$  very sort of.

(20)a That [very slightly]<sub>v</sub> worn tire is [proportionately]<sub>v</sub> discounted.

b \*That [very sort of]<sub>v</sub> classical theory is [correspondingly]<sub>v</sub> admired.

We have established a syntactic distinction between the hedges kinda/sorta and the adverbs of the same phonological shape in the environment INTENSIFYING ADVERB \_\_\_\_\_ ADJECTIVE; in that context kinda and sorta do not have the same syntax as deintensifying adverbs like slightly or somewhat. We saw earlier that the hedges can also modify nominal, prepositional, and clausal elements, environments where adverbs do not occur. We have not yet shown that when kinda or sorta modifies an adjectival or adverbial element that it is ambiguous between a hedge construction, following rule (14), and a familiar adjective phrase or adverb phrase construction where the (scalar) adverbs kinda and sorta may appear. That is, sentences like (21)a and

(22)a appear to have distinct hedge and adverbial readings--as indicated in the b and c versions. But can we show that this notional distinction arises from a syntactic ambiguity, thus validating rule (14) for these contexts?

(21)a John is sorta schizophrenic.

b John is what you might call schizophrenic.

c John is slightly schizophrenic.

(22)a Mary left kinda hastily.

b Mary left what you might call hastily.

c Mary left somewhat hastily.

The answer is Yes. If the discourse context is such that an adverb is required as in (23), we find that kinda or sorta may appear alone but not preceded by very. On the other hand, if the pragmatics of the context does not impose the requirement of an adverb of intensity, the sequence very kinda/sorta may occur, where kinda/sorta is a hedge inserted by rule (14).

(23) Ann: How classical is the theory?

a Bob: Very classical.

b Bob: Sorta classical.

c \*Bob: Very sorta classical.

Compare

(24) Ann: What is the theory like?

a Bob: Very classical.

b Bob: Sorta classical.

c Bob: Very sorta classical.

We can tell that sorta may be the hedge in (24)b because sorta is possible in (24)c, in which sorta has to be a hedge because the adverb phrase \*very sorta is impossible, as can be seen from (23)c where the context calls for an adverbial of intensity. On the other hand, in (23)b sorta has to be an adverb of intensity. Thus sorta (and kinda) can occur either as adverbs or as hedges before an adjective or adverb. That is, (21) and (22) are syntactically ambiguous.<sup>6</sup>

To summarize the syntax of the hedges kinda and sorta, these words are to be distinguished both from the two-word, nonconstituent sequences consisting of a noun followed by a preposition and from the scalar adverbs of the same phonological shape. The syntactic privileges of occurrence of the hedges entirely subsume those of the adverbs if we take the non-ambiguity of phrases like (16)a and the stars on expressions like (23)c to reflect semantic filtering rather than syntactic ill-formedness. In any case, the hedges have much broader syntactic privileges of occurrence, as indicated in generalization (11) and rule (14). It appears that the hedges kinda and sorta constitute a syntactic category of their own, reflected in rule (14).

## 2. Semantics

We turn now to the meaning of the hedges kind of and sort of. As far as I have been able to discover, these two items mean exactly the same thing, though of course there may remain subtleties that have escaped me. In the introduction to this paper the claim was made that this meaning is inherently metalinguistic. By this I meant that the rock bottom literal meaning of these words is metalinguistic, that what we have to do with here is not a conveyed meaning that is parasitical upon a more basic denotation of the familiar type.

As suggested in several of the glosses given above, I believe the hedges sort of and kind of serve, when they are in construction with a phrase X, to express a reservation or apology on the speaker's part for attempting to denote with the linguistic object X what X is in fact being used to pick out in the utterance. Impressionistically, the most common occasion on which this problem arises occurs when the speaker can't think of the mot juste. An apparently straightforward example of this type is (9) (repeated).

(9) There's a lot of sort of cross-registration going on around here.

As far as I know, and apparently as far as the speaker knew--which is more to the point--there is no brief and accurate English expression that denotes attendance at a session of a conference other than the one to which one has been assigned instead of the one to which one has been assigned. We would not, of course, want to say that our description of this kind of occasion is part of our description of the meaning of sort of and kind of. Rather this is just one kind of occasion on which speakers express hesitancy about the aptness of the words they have employed in their utterance.

Let us for convenience christen this gloss of the hedges kinda and sorta the "as it were" gloss. (I wish to do this without taking a position on whether or not the English expression as it were has exactly the same semantic value as kinda and sorta.) What evidence can be adduced for the claim that this particular gloss for kinda/sorta is correct, and thus for the more general claim that these are

inherently metalinguistic lexical items? The evidence is of two general kinds: evidence internal to the sentences and utterances containing the hedges and external evidence, derived from the testimony of the utterers of these sentences regarding what they meant by what they said.

Let us take internal evidence first. If we consider (9) in its context which, I tell you now, did in fact include a lot of people attending sessions other than the ones they had been assigned to, it is clear that sort of functions here to signal the fact that the word cross-registration is being used to denote an activity that is not part of the normal denotation of cross-registration.

Nominal expressions like (9) and like (3) (repeated)

(3) Crete is sort of an island.

are generally hard to construe as scalar predicates and therefore often present prima facie evidence for a metalinguistic gloss of an accompanying kinda or sorta. In uttering (3), the speaker did not intend that Crete is a peninsula. (We will return to what the speaker of (3) may have had in mind.)

Non-nominal X's can also give internal evidence for a metalinguistic gloss of an accompanying kind of or sort of. The following example is from a newspaper.<sup>7</sup>

(25) With a number of disappointing program changes, pianist-composer B\_\_\_\_\_ 's Friday recital sort of imploded. The form of the event collapsed with those shifts.

Recitals, not being physical objects, cannot literally implode. Clearly the author has in mind not gradual, slight or partial inward physical collapse, but rather metaphorical collapse, with sort of stuck in as a metalinguistic apology for the fancy metaphor.

Considering external evidence, the following is typical of a number of recorded brief interviews. Upon hearing a speaker say

(6) Those of us who grew up in the extremely sort of comforting days of linguistics...

the linguist asked, "Why did you say 'sort of'?" To which the speaker replied, "I was in doubt whether 'comforting' was the word I wanted to use."

While in all these cases the evidence indicates that we are dealing with a metalinguistic literal meaning, it is not clear that the "as it were" gloss is applicable in every case. For example, with regard to the Crete sentence (3), the context was that the speaker had been asked why the ancient Attic Greeks hated the Cretans. We have no direct testimony regarding the speaker's motivation for putting the sort of hedge in the reply, but noting that the word island does not denote a scalar predicate and that Crete is

an island, we see that there cannot be any problem here about the denotation of the word used not agreeing precisely with the intended denotatum. We may speculate that the speaker may have had in mind some complex of ideas involving geographical separation leading to cultural separation and hence to enmity, or something of the sort. But speculation in that direction is beside the point. A speculation that is to the point, as well as plausible, is that sort of functions here as a hedge on the speech act in the sense of being offered as an apology for producing a declarative sentence with Crete as the subject in answer to a question about Crete and which therefore appears to be an answer to the question just posed--but which isn't really an answer to the question. If we look again briefly at example

- (5) I kinda have to get going now--because I have to pick up my car at 5:00.

we see something similar. Consider again the addressee's response:

- (26) If that's the reason, you could have done without the "kinda."

Again we note that there is nothing problematic about the denotation of the phrase have to get going now. But the addressee seems to have taken the function of kinda as an apology for giving a reason to terminate the conversation. Since the speaker of (5) was me, I know that he intended it that way as well. It appears that kinda and sorta can be used, not only to mark a speaker's sense of inaptness of his words to what he is talking about, but also of inappropriateness of the act he performs in using them.

### 3. Pragmatics

Taking as established the claim that kinda and sorta have inherently metalinguistic meaning, we now consider the question whether this construction also has certain pragmatic properties associated with it directly. We have noted casually that utterances containing tokens of kinda and sorta may have certain pragmatic forces of warning or apology connected with them. We now address the question whether these pragmatic forces are, in Grice's terms (1978), conventional or conversational. That is, is the pragmatic force a part of the conventional signification of these linguistic objects, or are these forces derived anew on each occasion of utterance by general principles of conversational inference, i.e., inferred from the fact that a sentence having the conventional meaning that this one does was uttered in this context. It has been argued by Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor (1983) that many grammatical constructions have pragmatic forces associated with them conventionally. One example is the construction that underlies a sentence like Watch me drop this said when assisting one's host with a precariously balanced tray of glasses (Fillmore 1979). Another is a sentence like

Him be a doctor?! (See Akmajian 1982). Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor argue that it is part of the conventional signification of sentences like (27), which employ the conjunction let alone, that they are usable only in a context in which the proposition that Jenkins achieved the rank of General has been posed, and that in such contexts they simultaneously answer to the maxim of relevance in asserting that Jenkins didn't achieve that rank and to the maxim of quantity in asserting that Jenkins didn't reach the lower rank of first lieutenant.

(27) Jenkins didn't make first lieutenant, let alone general.

Returning now to sentences with kinda or sorta, if we consider only the "as it were" gloss (i.e., the signal that what is to follow is not the mot juste) a case might be made for claiming this to be part of the standard, truth-conditional meaning of the utterance. I think this would be a hard claim to develop convincingly, but something might be attempted along the lines of expanding the notion of context of utterance, say, as specified by Kaplan (1977, 1978), to include the speaker's actual words, so that metalinguistic adjustments might become part of the possible-worlds model. (See Sag 1981 for an expansion of the notion of Kaplan-context to provide a model theoretic approach to contextually specified intensions of a non-metalinguistic kind.) Such a formulation, if it could be pulled off, might in effect have the speaker of (6) assert literally and simultaneously both the proposition that certain days were comforting and the proposition that the intended denotatum of the word comforting in the expression of the present proposition is not properly a part of the conventional denotation of the word comforting. Or perhaps not. It is not entirely clear to me what the formal objective of such an analysis would be and it is entirely obscure to me what technical machinery would be required. In any case, the idea would be that the addressee is literally apprised that there is something a little off in the utterance--as if the speaker had actually said, "the extremely comforting days--I'm not sure I just used the word 'comforting' in a standard way--of linguistics..."

Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, we are invited not to pursue this line of argument any further by reconsidering the utterances (3), (5), and (8) (repeated).

(3) Crete is sort of an island.

(5) I kinda have to get going now--because I have to pick up my car at 5:00.

(8) Marvin's a sorta self-made straw man.

In all of these cases, we noted that the "as it were" gloss doesn't apply. Crete literally is an island and the speaker of (5) literally had to get going. There is no denotational mismatch to be

signaled in either case, so we cannot suppose the addressee infers conversationally a force of warning or apology from a literal statement about failed denotation. In (8) on the other hand, we have a play on words. Sorta cannot signal here that what self-made straw man is intended to denote in this utterance is not part of the conventional denotation of self-made straw man, because self-made straw man has no conventional denotation. The following example similarly involves a play on words.

(28) The Daily Cal is kinda overpriced.

(To get the force of the example, one should know that The Daily Californian is a newspaper that is distributed free.) It is not clear to me in (28) the extent to which kinda functions straightforwardly to indicate that overpriced here is being asked to denote something outside of its usual denotation--that is, according to the "as it were" gloss--as against functioning to characterize in some way the unusual sort of speech act being performed in uttering this sentence. It appears that sort of and kinda in (3), (5), (8), and perhaps (27) function to signal conventionally that there is something defective in the speech act being performed.

But can any defect of a speech act be signaled by sorta and kinda or do constraints exist? In the paper I presented at this conference last year I argued that loosely speaking and technically are metalinguistic hedges with conventional pragmatic import, noting however, that not every defect in an act of assertion could be signaled by them. For example, the use of uninterpretable indexicals or failure to answer a question cannot be palliated by the hedge loosely speaking. These constraints on loosely speaking are indicated by the stars on (29)a and (30)a (from Kay (1983) ).

(29)a \*Jack and John were running and loosely speaking he fell down.

b \*Jack and John were running and kinda he fell down.

(30)a Ann: When did Mary get her car tuned up?

\*Bob: Loosely speaking because the engine was knocking.

b Ann: When did Mary get her car tuned up?

\*Bob: Sorta because the engine was knocking.

The b versions with kinda or sorta are hardly any better, suggesting that these same constraints apply to kinda/sorta as well. Are there utterances that permit kinda/sorta but not, say, loosely speaking? For me there are, as indicated by the fact that (31)a,b are for me pragmatically inappropriate in the contexts in which the corresponding sentences with kinda/sorta (3 and 5) are appropriate, but I am aware that there is great variation in acceptability judgment in the area of pragmatic appropriateness.

- (31)a #Crete is  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{loosely speaking} \\ \text{technically} \end{array} \right\}$  an island.  
 b  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Loosely speaking} \\ \text{Technically} \end{array} \right\}$  I've got to get going now...

I'm afraid I haven't any more to say on the substance of the conventional pragmatic import of kinda and sorta except to suggest that while loosely speaking and technically appear to convey that the speaker has clearly in mind the defect in his speech about which he is warning, kinda and sorta seem to convey the opposite idea, that the speaker is not prepared to specify the precise nature of the defect pointed to by the hedge. Thus if I say

- (32) He is loosely speaking schizophrenic

I signal that I am ready with a straightforward answer to the question

- (33) What do you mean, "loosely speaking"?

while if I say

- (34) He is (very) sort of schizophrenic

the sort of seems to amount to a verbal shrug of helplessness--a signal not only that schizophrenic is not the mot juste but that I can't do any better. Other than the observation that loosely speaking and technically are characteristic of formal, and specifically academic, registers while kinda and sorta are colloquial, I have no supportive evidence for this claim and so abandon it as an unabashed conjecture.

#### 4. Grammatical constructions

Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor (1983) have proposed that the minimal unit of a speaker's grammatical knowledge is the construction, a bundle that comprises, in the general case, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic information. (For a related approach that shares this overall orientation, see G. Lakoff 1984.) On this view the paired syntactic-semantic rules of a Montague-type grammar, e.g., GPSG, or any of the interpreted logical languages on which these approaches to natural language are patterned, are seen as grammatical constructions that are, in a way, degenerate, in that they comprise syntactic and semantic information but lack lexical and pragmatic information. On the construction-based view, the generalizations that can be drawn about syntax and semantics, abstracted away from information about lexicon and pragmatics, necessarily limit themselves to a proper subset of the tacit knowledge of syntax and semantics possessed by the native speaker, real or ideal. There seems little doubt that the phenomena treated in such isolating

approaches are real and that the insights provided by these methods are genuine: every language appears to possess grammatical constructions that don't involve conventional pragmatic forces and that also don't involve lexical information beyond membership of words in one of a finite, and in fact quite small, set of syntactic categories. But to assume, as is common in formal linguistics as currently practiced, that the boundary of this subset of constructions is the boundary of the language faculty, may be in the current state of our knowledge premature. If natural languages are like formal languages in that all the syntactic and semantic rules that comprise them involve lexicon minimally and pragmatics not at all, then the assumption that syntax and semantics should be studied in isolation from lexicon and pragmatics is sensible. But it would probably be a good thing if not all grammarians were to operate within the framework of this assumption just in case it should turn out to be less than absolutely true. It appears that phenomena such as sentences involving the hedges kinda and sorta are not conveniently studiable in an approach that isolates lexicon and pragmatics from the rest of grammar, precisely because knowledge of these sentences is knowledge of a construction that has lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects.

#### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup>I gratefully acknowledge help from Claudia Brugman, Amy Dahlstrom, Charles Fillmore, George Lakoff, Tom Larsen, Mary Catherine O'Connor, and Karl Zimmer.

<sup>2</sup>I have not made careful phonetic recordings of the attested examples, and the orthographic alternations kind of/kinda and sort of/sorta are based on rough impressions. It appears that the forms lacking a final consonant are more likely both before a word beginning in a consonant and in relatively informal registers; but this also is impressionistic. As some of the attested examples given below suggest, these hedges sometimes occur in surprisingly formal speech settings. I don't believe there is any phonetic difference between the hedges and the corresponding noun-preposition sequences.

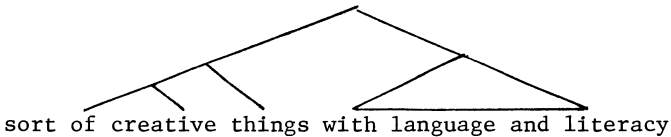
<sup>3</sup>In example (7), the presence of the intensifying adverb very, preceding the hedge, makes it clear that the scope of the hedge is restricted to the single word creative. There is the possibility of a semantically irrelevant syntactic ambiguity here depending on whether we consider sort of to be in construction with the adjective creative or with the adjective phrase creative. If we eliminate very the possibilities for ambiguity, now semantically relevant, are increased. Elimination of very from (7) produces the noun phrase

(12) sort of creative things with language and literacy

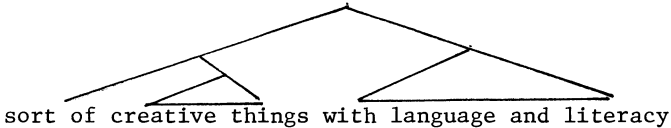
This expression is three ways ambiguous. The three semantically distinct constituent structures of (12) are given schematically in

(13)a,b,c. In (13)a the minimal constituent properly containing sort of is sort of creative; in b it is sort of creative things; and in c it is sort of creative things with language and literacy. (The c reading doesn't seem pragmatically likely in this attested example; but compare a phrase like sort of creative things with the detritus of historical linguistics.)

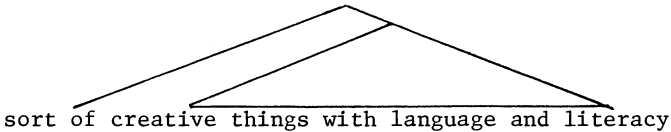
(13)a



b



c



The degree to which ambiguities like these may be resolved prosodically is an interesting problem, but one which I do not address here.

<sup>4</sup>Certain highly presuppositional qualifiers like even appear to have similar, although not identical, privileges of occurrence. For example, both even and kinda can occur as sisters to a phrase that properly contains a word or smaller phrase which bears heavy stress and serves semantically as the item focused by the modifier, as in (i) and (ii):

(i) Expert muralists can even get the paint into the stucco.

(ii) Expert muralists can kinda get the paint into the stucco.

Kinda can quite generally also occur next to the focused element, forming a constituent with it, while this is often impossible with even:

(iii) Expert muralists can get the paint kinda into the stucco.

(iv) \*Expert muralists can get the paint even into the stucco.

Similarly, kinda/sorta can be stylistically extraposed more readily than even.

- (v) a John is sort of a boy scout.  
 b John is a boy scout, sort of.
- (vi) a John was even an eagle scout.  
 b ??John was an eagle scout, even.

The fact that even modifies clearly referential noun phrases while kinda/sorta does not, as in (vii)a,b, is probably better viewed as a semantic-pragmatic than a syntactic difference.

- (vii)a Even John passed the test.  
 b \*Kinda John passed the test.

<sup>5</sup>I am indebted to David Justice for this example and for calling to my attention the existence of adjective phrases of the form IN-TENSIFYING ADVERB + HEDGE + ADJECTIVE.

<sup>6</sup>(22)c may be possible for some speakers with something like the contradiction intonation of Liberman and Sag (1974). For such speakers it appears that in so responding Bob can indicate that the word classical isn't quite apt but that he accepts it anyway. As I understand the testimony of one such speaker, the contradiction intonation targets Ann's use of classical and so entitles Bob to hedge classical with sorta as if he were introducing it for the first time. Both the judgments and the rationale are tenuous. In any case, the most relevant feature of (23) is not so much that c is bad as that b is good and clearly features sort of as a deintensifying adverb.

I should point out that for convenience I am using the term "hedge" in a more restricted sense than that introduced by G. Lakoff (1972). In Lakoff's terminology, both what I have called hedges and what I have called deintensifying adverbs would be called hedges, as would also the intensifying adverb very. I imbue this terminological distinction with no theoretical importance but have simply contracted my use of the term hedge in the present paper to something more like its meaning in ordinary English in order to distinguish, for each of the phonological words kinda and sorta, two distinct syntactico-semantic objects, an adverb and a "hedge."

<sup>7</sup>The San Francisco Chronicle, September 10, 1979. The article is by Heuwell Turcuit and entitled "Disappointing Program from Ailing Pianist."

References

- Akmajian, A. 1982. The grammar of exclamatory sentences. Unpublished paper read at West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics. Stanford.
- Fillmore, C. 1979. Innocence: A second idealization for linguistics. BLS 5.
- Fillmore, C., P. Kay, and M.C. O'Connor. 1983. Regularity and idiomatcity in grammatical constructions: The case of let alone. Paper read at Center for the Study of Language and Information. Stanford.
- Grice, H.P. 1978. Further notes on logic and conversation. Syntax and semantics, vol. 9 (Pragmatics), ed. by Peter Cole. New York: Academic.
- Kaplan, D. 1977. Demonstratives. Los Angeles: Ms., University of California.
- 1978. Dthat. Syntax and semantics, vol. 9 (Pragmatics), ed. by Peter Cole. New York: Academic.
- Kay, P. 1983. Linguistic competence and folk theories of language: Two English hedges. BLS 9.
- Lakoff, G. 1972. Hedges, a study in meaning criteria and the logic of fuzzy concepts. CLS 8.
- 1984. There constructions: A case study in grammatical construction theory and prototype theory. Berkeley Cognitive Science Program Working Paper No. 18.
- Liberman, M., and I. Sag. 1974. Prosodic form and discourse function. CLS 10.
- Sag, I. 1981. Formal semantics and extralinguistic context. Radical pragmatics, ed. by Peter Cole. New York: Academic.