

## Use of Discourse Markers *kind of* and *sort of* in Modern American English\*

**Myongsu Park**  
Sangmyung University

**Park, Myongsu. (2015). Use of discourse markers *kind of* and *sort of* in modern American English. *Modern English Education*, 16(1), 21-37.**

The study aims to explore how discourse markers, *kind of* and *sort of*, are used in modern American English. For the purpose, the spoken section of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was investigated to examine the frequency and functions of the target discourse markers chosen for the study. By frequency, *kind of* was more frequently used than *sort of*. Compared to the usage of the target discourse markers in the spoken portion of the British National Corpus (BNC), it was found that modern American English prefers *kind of* to *sort of*. The analysis of COCA produced that both discourse markers showed high frequency in the corpus and they played various roles such as a face-threat mitigator, a delay device, a compromiser, and a softener depending on which constituent the marker modifies. Out of these functions, no prevailing function was identified as the instances of the target discourse markers taken from COCA were too many to be analyzed in detail.

[corpus/discourse markers/native speakers/modern American English/  
코퍼스/담화표지/원어민/현대미국영어]

### I. INTRODUCTION

Learning English through online and digital media is now commonplace to many of Korean learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Such authentic materials can facilitate foreign language acquisition (Blake, 2011; Guariento & Morley, 2001; Peacock, 1997; Weyers, 1999). Containing genuine communication in real-world contexts, authentic materials serve as a wonderful source to contextualize language learning (Gebhard, 1996) and to enhance learners' motivation (Dörnyei, 2001; Lee, 1995; Peacock, 1997). As it is

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\* This work was supported by the 2014 Sangmyung University faculty research grant.

natural that the learners of English would like to sound like and speak like native speakers of English, they often memorize and imitate whole or parts of an authentic material. While using authentic materials for language learning purposes, learners can acquire naturalness and appropriateness of the target language from real, natural interactions in authentic materials.

Reflecting real life situations in daily encounters, authentic materials contain live or genuine language which is spontaneous and natural. Such natural speech, however, is peppered with much of discourse markers which are commonly found in daily conversation as a very common linguistic phenomenon. Discourse markers are the word insertions to provide continuity in conversations, which includes *um, uh, well, sort of, kind of, like, you know*, etc. Although the use of discourse markers is a significant feature of colloquial speech and oral discourse (Brinton, 1996; Schiffrin, 1987, 2001) and the appropriate use of these discourse markers is associated with fluent and confident second language proficiency (Hlava, 2006; Sankoff et al., 1997), they have been almost neglected or ignored in an EFL classroom teaching environment mainly because textbooks are often devoid of such pauses, hesitations, or slips.

Discourse markers have received a great deal of attention in the study of linguistics, in particular, pragmatics for over several decades. Out of many different discourse markers, the present study aimed to investigate the occurrences and usage of two-word discourse markers *kind of* and *sort of* in modern American English as they are commonly used in spoken English. Although there has been little agreement on the terms, definitions, and functions of discourse markers (Brinton, 1996), the study used the term discourse markers as they are generally and widely used as a generic term covering all of the different terms.

The research questions guiding the research are as follows:

- 1) Are there any differences between American and British Englishes in the usage of *kind of* and *sort of*?
- 2) How frequent are the target discourse markers in modern American spoken English?
- 3) What are the prevailing functions of the target discourse markers in modern American spoken English?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Definition and Functions of Discourse Markers

Discourse markers, referred to as pragmatic markers (Fraser, 1993), pragmatic particles (Östman, 1981), discourse particles (Schourup, 1985), pragmatic expression (Erman, 1987),

connectives (Blakemore, 1987), and smallwords (Hasselgren, 2002), are a characteristic of spoken language. There exists a large body of research on the use of discourse markers in writing (e.g. Blakemore, 1992; Connor, 1984; Field & Yip, 1992; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Intraprawat & Steffensen, 1995). These studies often investigated on connective functions of discourse markers (e.g. *however*, *although*, *nevertheless*) as linking phrases or sentence connectors. The literature review, however, is confined to the studies relevant to discourse markers and speaking, as the present study focused on their usage in conversation.

Broadly speaking, discourse markers are expressions used to connect sentences to what comes before or after (Swan, 2005); to reveal a speaker's attitude to a verbal message (Fung & Carter, 2007; Jucker & Ziv, 1998); and to function as cues or guides to the hearer's interpretation (Aijmer, 1996, p. 210). Schiffrin (1987) established a usage model of discourse markers: exchange structure, action structure, ideational structure, participation framework, and information state. Having investigated eleven markers: *oh*, *well*, *and*, *but*, *or*, *so*, *because*, *now*, *then*, *you know*, and *I mean*, she claimed that discourse markers provide "contextual coordinates for utterances and they index an utterance to the local contexts in which utterances are produced and in which they are to be interpreted" (p. 326).

Discourse markers are known to perform various functions in conversation. They play multifunctional roles in discourse, semantics and pragmatics and depending on the functions, they have been described differently in previous research. Regarding the classification of discourse markers, Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan. (1999) broke down them into ten types: interjections (e.g. *oh*, *wow*, *ouch*); greetings and farewell expressions (e.g. *hi*, *hello*, *good morning*); linking adverbials (e.g. *therefore*, *well*, *besides*); vocatives (e.g. *hey you*, *madam*); response elicitors (e.g. *huh*, *alright*, *okay*); response forms (e.g. *yes*, *no*, *I see*); hesitators (e.g. *er*, *erm*); various polite speech-act formulae (e.g. *sorry*, *pardon*, *please*); and expletives (e.g. *blast*, *damn*, *oh hell*). Over the last several decades a large body of studies examined the functions of discourse markers (Aijmer, 2002; Andersen, 2001; Blakemore, 1987; Fraser, 1993; Halliday & Hasan, 1992; Schiffrin, 1987). These previous studies show that discourse markers have little lexical but much practical meaning which warrants further studies into the polyfunctionality of discourse markers.

## 2. Corpus-Driven Research on Use of Discourse Markers

Although most research on spoken discourse markers has been based on the discourse of native speakers of English, some research examined the occurrences and usage of discourse markers by non-native speakers of English (e.g. Chaudron & Richards, 1986; Fuller, 2003; Fung & Carter, 2007; Helleman & Vergun, 2007; Liao, 2009; Müller, 2005; Pulcini & Damascelli, 2005; Pulcini & Furiassi, 2004). In a 5-year-long study, Helleman

and Vergun (2007) investigated the frequency of use and functions of three discourse markers: *well*, *you know*, and *like* in verbal interactions. They concluded that the more discourse markers the students use, the more acculturated they are to the U.S., which confirms the previous research findings by Brinton (1996), Sankoff et al. (1997), and Schiffrin (1987, 2001) that the use of discourse markers is a significant feature of colloquial speech and oral discourse.

There is a strong correlation between learners' discourse marker competence and their overall fluency in speech (Hasselgren, 2002). Some researchers investigated the usage of discourse markers based on corpora. For example, Marcela and Castro (2009) investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively the occurrences and frequencies of discourse markers in classroom interaction by Spanish learners of English. Even though their study was a small scale one with only five students and one teacher, it was observed that the target discourse markers used with several textual and interpersonal purposes and the non-native teacher used the discourse markers effectively to fulfill interpersonal and pragmatic functions.

Savolainen (2000) conducted a contrastive study investigating the use of four discourse markers: *and*, *well*, *so*, and *you know* in the corpus based on the interviews taken from Florida Corpus. In the comparison of the use of the target markers between Finnish Americans and native speakers of English, the study found that non-native Finnish speakers were almost same as their counterparts in terms of the frequency of the target discourse markers.

On the other hand, Müller (2005) analyzed the use of *well*, *so*, *like*, and *you now* in the Giessen Long Beach Chaplin Corpus (GLBCC). In the study, she compared the usages of the target markers between non-native German learners of English and native speakers of English. Her study showed that non-native speakers underused the target discourse markers in their speech. In a similar vein, Jabeen, Rai, and Arif (2011) made the comparison between British and Pakistani English regard the use of eight discourse markers: *I mean*, *you know*, *I think*, *kind of*, *sort of*, *well*, *you see*, and *so*. Investigating the two corpora: the British part of International Corpus of English (ICE-GB) and a corpus of Pakistani Spoken English (PSE), they found that native speakers use more discourse markers than the non-native speakers.

### III. METHODS

#### 1. The Corpus Investigated

For the present study, the researcher investigated and analyzed the occurrences of the

target hesitation markers in the spoken section of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)<sup>1</sup>. The spoken portion of COCA contains 95,385,672 words which consist of the unscripted conversation from more than 150 different TV and radio programs from 1990 to 2012. In addition to the spoken section of COCA, the spoken section of the British National Corpus (BNC)<sup>2</sup> was also investigated to compare the occurrences of the target discourse markers. The BNC spoken section contains around 10 million orthographically transcribed words and accounts for 10% of a 100-million word BNC corpus. The spoken component of the BNC consists of natural, spontaneous conversations heard all around us and from the language of lectures, business meetings, after dinner speeches and chat shows.

## 2. Target Discourse Markers

The study aims to explore how discourse markers *kind of* and *sort of* are used by native speakers of English. For the purpose, the spoken section of COCA was investigated to study the occurrences of the target discourse markers. The frequencies in the present section have only the instances where *kind of* and *sort of* were used as discourse marker.

**TABLE 1**  
Frequency of Target Discourse Markers in COCA Spoken Section

Discourse markers	Raw frequency
<i>kind of</i>	80,909
<i>sort of</i>	40,816

Discourse marker *kind of* in the table includes the cases of *kinda* and *sort of* includes the cases of *sorta*. Both *kinda* and *sorta* are a short form of *kind of* and *sort of*, respectively. They mean the same thing as *kind of* and *sort of* and are often used in informal and spoken English. *Sorta*, however, was not found in the spoken section of COCA, but only 12 cases were found in the fiction section. COCA produces a total of 140 instances of *kinda* out of which only 24 were found in the spoken section. So the 24 instances were included in the sum of *kind of* occurrences.

<sup>1</sup> The COCA was created by Mark Davies (2008), a professor of Brigham Young University. More detailed information of COCA is available at [http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/help/texts\\_e.asp](http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/help/texts_e.asp).

<sup>2</sup> BNC was originally created by Oxford University Press from the 1980s to the early 1990s. More detailed information of the BNC is available at <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/corpus/index.xml?ID=products>.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Comparison of Target Discourse Markers in COCA and BNC

Table 2 indicates that the use of discourse marker *kind of* is more common in American English than in British English, which is identical to Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik. (1985).

**TABLE 2**  
Frequency and Chi-Square Test Result of Target Discourse Markers

Discourse markers	COCA spoken	BNC spoken	$\chi^2/G^2$
<i>kind of</i>	80,909 (851.7)	2762 (276.2)	3,762.378**
<i>sort of</i>	40,816 (429.6)	11838 (1184)	7,722.547**

\* Figures inside the parenthesis are normalized frequencies per million words.

\*\* indicates that the difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

The difference is statistically significant in favor of COCA ( $\chi^2=3,762.378$ ). British English, however, shows approximately 4.2 times more occurrences of *sort of* compared with those of *kind of*, clearly revealing its preference of *sort of*. As shown in Table 2, the difference in case of *sort of* is statistically significant ( $G^2=7,722.547$ ).

Table 3 below summarizes the distribution of *kind of* and *sort of* before major constituents, NP, AdjP, AdvP, and VP. By frequency, *kind of* is more commonly used before noun-phrases, followed by verb-, adjective-, and adverb-phrases. The finding is similar to Aijmer's study (1984). Based on her investigation into the London-Lund Corpus, Aijmer (1984) reported that *kind of* prefers noun phrases to the other phrases.

In case of *sort of*, it is more common before VP, followed by NP, AdjP, and AdvP. The finding is somewhat different from Aijmer's (1984). She found the occurrence of *sort of* before NP was higher than those of other usages. In her investigation of the London-Lund Corpus, she reported that by frequency, NP ranked first with 302, followed by VP (145), AdjP (19), and AdvP (8).

**TABLE 3**  
Syntactic Distribution of Target Discourse Markers

Discourse markers	NP	AdjP	AdvP	VP
<i>kind of</i>	35,416	12,827	1,459	15,268
<i>sort of</i>	9,007	6,061	1,197	12,977

By frequency, it is clear that *kind of* is more commonly used than *sort of* in American

English. The target discourse markers are common before NP and VP but much fewer cases are found in the constituent of adverb phrases than the other constituents. By crosstabulation plot, the observed frequencies were compared with the expected frequencies by chance. The resulting distribution was highly significant ( $\chi^2=5590.05$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p<0.0001$ ). The number of NPs following *kind of* is much larger than expected by chance while the numbers of AdjPs, AdvPs, and VPs, respectively were smaller than expected by chance. In case of *sort of*, the number of NPs was much smaller than expected by chance while the numbers of AdjPs, AdvPs, and VPs, respectively were larger than expected by chance.

As illustrated in Table 3, both target discourse markers are commonly used before noun phrases. Table 4 shows the frequency of top 10 *kind of* and *sort of* before NP.

**TABLE 4**  
Frequency of Top 10 *Kind of* and *Sort of* before Noun

Rank	<i>Kind of</i>	Raw frequency	<i>Sort of</i>	Raw frequency
1	kind of thing	3088	sort of thing	1783
2	kind of stuff	729	sort of stuff	148
3	kind of person	505	sort of way	124
4	kind of guy	429	sort of person	52
5	kind of people	372	sort of sense	47
6	kind of money	339	sort of information	45
7	kind of information	274	sort of people	41
8	kind of situation	267	sort of problem	39
9	kind of work	223	sort of part	34
10	kind of way	219	sort of compromise	34

When the usage of *kind of* before noun means a class or type of something, those cases were excluded from the list. For example, the following examples display the instances of a class or type of a following noun.

- (1) You talk to a lot of establishment Republicans who think, flat out, he cannot be the nominee of the party, yet Mitt Romney can't seem to get the love. So does that lead to a ***kind of*** situation where, as the former Republican Party Chairman Michael Steele said just yesterday, a 50-50 chance of a brokered convention?

<ABC This Week aired on 2012-01-22>

- (2) I find that Fred is very, very good at expressing what I'm calling a ***kind of*** domestic pain.

<NPR Sunday aired on 1997-07-06>

As shown in Table 4, *kind of* is often followed by nouns. The most frequent one is *thing* whose frequency outnumbers the other nouns in the list. *Sort of* also shows a similar trend as the most frequent noun after *sort of* is *thing* which is identical to Aijmer's (1984) study. Regarding the functions of the target discourse markers before noun, the four functions—a face-threat mitigator, a frame, a delay device, and a insufficiency—defined by Jucker (1993) were investigated in COCA instances. Among them, a frame which functions to separate discourse units is rarely found in the target discourse markers. The following examples illustrate three functions of *kind of* and *sort of*.

A marker of insufficiency (Lakoff, 1973 cited in Jucker, 1993) was originally used in the context of questions and answers. For example it is often found when a respondent gives somewhat insufficient information. The following examples (3) and (4) are a relevant example.

- (3) My main thing was finding that hey, they found him liable, 12 people found him liable, and that really made me *kind of* yes.

<ABC Nightline aired on 1997-02-10>

- (4) DR-JANET-TAYLOR: Mix it up a little bit. Be willing to do that.  
HARRY-SMITH: There's *kind of* no -- and especially if there's a no-fault written into the -- into the -- were going go to do this thing.

<CBS The Early Show aired on 2010-11-26>

A function of face-threat mitigator (Jucker, 1993) was also found in COCA. In order to signal and mitigate some sort of confrontation in conversing each other, *kind of* and *sort of* are used not to threaten each other, which is intended to mitigate any imposition. In other words, both discourse markers can be used to soften the meaning of a word followed by *kind of* and *sort of*. The example (5) illustrates a case in which *kind of* is used to mitigate the word trouble directly and by using the discourse marker, Dr. Park in the example tries to sound somewhat vague or meant the same thing indirectly with less worry to embarrass the counterpart. Likewise the example (6) also reveals the speaker's intention to mitigate confrontation in the debate by using the discourse marker, *sort of*, before problem.

- (5) Dr. PARK: The shuttle is eating it up. In fact, that's how we got into the box that we're in right now. That's what really was wrong in the program that led to the *kind of* trouble we're having BUCHANAN But wasn't that a great program, the shuttle?

<ABC Nightline aired on 1997-02-10>

- (6) And then later on, through June of 1989, I had repeated surgeries and hospitalizations, and they were all due to either side effects or some *sort of* problem that I'd been having.

<CNN Sonya aired on 1993-01-28>

As a delay device, the target discourse marker can be useful for stalling time or finding time to come up with a right word to say. The following example shows the delay function of the target discourse marker.

- (7) KOTB: Looks delicious.

GEIST: Inside we got chicken, corn, beans, jalapeno peppers. Then you get into here with like some *kind of* a dipping sauce, a ranch dipping sauce.

KOTB: Yeah. OK.

<NBC Today aired on 2012-04-23>

In the example (7), Geist is unsure of how to describe the sauce and uses *kind of* when trying to search for the correct word.

Table 5 below displays the instances of *kind of* and *sort of* before a verb. The frequency was calculated after the verbs following the target discourse markers were lemmatized. Both *kind of* and *sort of* have a function of softener (Aijmer, 1984) which weakens the meaning of a statement by approximating what to say. Virtually all of the top 10 verbs following *kind of* and *sort of* are most commonly and frequently used verbs in English. As shown in the table, the most frequent verb after both *kind of* and *sort of* is *get*. Both discourse markers share eight verbs *get, go, have, be, look, like, take, and make* as part of the top ten list based on its frequency. As the verbs except *be* are commonly used as a single-word lexical verb in English conversation, their frequent use together with the discourse markers is also quite natural in spoken interaction.

**TABLE 5**  
Frequency of Top 10 *Kind of* and *Sort of* before Verb

Rank	<i>Kind of</i>	Raw frequency	<i>Sort of</i>	Raw frequency
1	kind of get	684	sort of get	393
2	kind of go	478	sort of be	373
3	kind of have	439	sort of have	349
4	kind of be	364	sort of take	291
5	kind of look	338	sort of go	289
6	kind of like	339	sort of make	238
7	kind of take	323	sort of say	228
8	kind of make	321	sort of look	196
9	kind of come	280	sort of like	191
10	kind of feel	251	sort of do	191

The findings from Table 5 show that the instances of *kind of* before a verb are commonly found in the spoken English although the usage is hardly recommended in the written, formal English.

- (8) He needed -- he would really have to *kind of* get out on the stump all weekend long...

<CBS This Morning aired on 2012-01-27>

- (9) So I would imagine though that you have to *kind of* have a good attitude if you go back into the workforce for financial reasons or it won't succeed, right?

<CNN Newsroom aired on 2012-01-28>

- (10) How gigantic did that feel? And can you *sort of* take us into your mind when you were walking up to the stage to accept that?

<CNN Showbiz aired on 2005-06-03>

- (11) But you *sort of* are, right?

<NBC Today aired on 2008-11-24>

The discourse markers in the examples (8), (9), (10), and (11) function as adjusters, indicating that the verbs—get out, have, take, and are—approximators or compromisers (Quirk et al., 1985). The labeling such as approximators and compromisers is changed into a different term but meant the same thing by different scholars. For example, the same function was categorized and named a hesitation marker (Erman, 1987), filler (Brown, 1977), hedge (Holmes, 1997).

The target discourse markers are also followed by adjectives as illustrated in Table 6

below. Both *kind of* and *sort of* in the examples function as a hedge (Lakoff, 1973) which reduces the semantic value of the adjectives that they modify. In other words, both *kind of* and *sort of* are used as downtoners for adjectives (Quirk et al., 1985).

**TABLE 6**  
Frequency of Top 10 *Kind of* and *Sort of* before Adjective

Rank	<i>Kind of</i>	Raw frequency	<i>Sort of</i>	Raw frequency
1	kind of hard	257	sort of political	122
2	kind of interesting	225	sort of interesting	118
3	kind of political	188	sort of public	84
4	kind of funny	156	sort of social	83
5	kind of like	138	sort of new	69
6	kind of weird	128	sort of hard	66
6	kind of fun	128	sort of weird	66
8	kind of military	110	sort of personal	58
9	kind of scary	100	sort of strange	55
10	kind of strange	99	sort of funny	51

(12) So when you got in these debates where you really almost did seem to pull his punches a little, it's -- it's *kind of* hard to understand.

<CBS This Morning aired on 2012-01-27>

(13) And I thought that was *sort of* strange that you would stay at a place in which you were laid off.

<CNN TalkBack aired on 1999-07-27>

The discourse marker *kind of* and *sort of* in the examples above is used to express the approximate sense, indicating that whatever is in the marker's scope should not be taken too literally. From the perspective of the speaker, this function helps him or her feel relieved from a complete commitment to the truth value of a word followed by the target discourse marker.

The discourse markers in the examples (14) and (15) below also show the hedge functions, lessens the semantic meaning of an adjective following the marker.

(14) I mean, it's just *kind of* weird, because one would think you love the water, you want to stay in it a while.

<CNN King aired on 1995-02-28>

(15) Well, I'm *sort of* new to it. I think people who grew up with it don't understand how special it is.

<NPR Saturday aired on 2005-10-08>

Whether softening, downtoning or hedging the message, the examples above show that both discourse markers *kind of* and *sort of* are used almost for the same purpose and the discourse markers serve as important maneuvers to facilitate interpersonal communication.

The similar functions as shown above are also identified in the examples below which displays the instances of both discourse markers *kind of* and *sort of* followed by an adverb.

**TABLE 7**  
Frequency of Top 10 *Kind of* and *Sort of* before Adverb

Rank	<i>Kind of</i>	Raw frequency	<i>Sort of</i>	Raw frequency
1	kind of just	250	sort of just	119
2	kind of hard	73	sort of very	66
3	kind of very	73	sort of how	65
4	kind of really	72	sort of more	58
5	kind of how	58	sort of almost	39
6	kind of almost	58	sort of really	32
7	kind of a	47	sort of maybe	22
8	kind of more	40	sort of out	20
9	kind of out	34	sort of a	16
10	kind of always	30	sort of always	14

(16) But with the success of " Housewives, " you know, I was *kind of* really taken aback with all the attention.

<PBS Tavis aired on 2006-04-21>

(17) A bit of oil because we want to brown it off. We want to give this color, *kind of* almost burned, caramelized.

<CBS SatEarly aired on 2007-12-08>

(18) We don't wear the makeup anymore. We *sort of* just stop.

<NBC Today aired on 2007-03-06>

(19) I mean, like I said, I wish we had been able to get together some *sort of* very sophisticated tools of network analysis...

<NPR Science aired on 2009-12-11>

As illustrated in Table 7, the discourse marker *kind of* and *sort of* in the examples (16) to (19) are followed by adverbs, which, however, is the relatively least frequent compared with the instances of the target discourse markers followed by nouns, verbs, and adjectives. The role of discourse markers, as in the examples, is important even though each of them can be left out from the sentences without a big change in the meaning of each sentence. In

other words, the messages intended without these discourse markers may be interpreted "less lively and less polite" (Stenström, 1994, p. 17).

## V. CONCLUSION

The main goal of the present study was to describe the occurrences and frequencies of the target discourse markers, *kind of* and *sort of* in order to examine the usage of them in modern English. First of all, in comparison with British English, American English shows its preference of *kind of* to *sort of*. On the other hand, it was found that *sort of* was more common in British English than in American English. Both cases showed statistically meaningful differences (See Table 2 and 3).

In syntactic distribution of the target discourse markers, it was observed that the target discourse markers are common before NP and VP but much fewer cases are found in the constituent of adverb phrases than the other constituents. The target discourse markers showed a pretty similar syntactic distribution except for its most frequent constituent. By frequency, *kind of* is more commonly used before noun-phrases, followed by VP, AdjP, and AdvP while *sort of* is more commonly found before VP, followed by NP, AdjP, and AdvP.

The study also examined the functions of the discourse markers. As discourse markers cover a range of functions in different contexts and the functions are dependent on the roles and relationships of the interlocutors (Fuller, 2003) and the term used in the previous literature varies depending on researchers, it is true that a specific term hardly covers all of the different functions. That's why the present research used the various terms interchangeably. When the target discourse markers followed by NP, both markers were found to play various functions including a face-threat mitigator, a delay device, and an insufficiency.

Another common function found in the discourse marker *kind of* and *sort of* before AdjP and AdvP is a hedge to tone down the semantic value of an adjective or an adverb followed by. When the target discourse markers modify VP, it plays a role of an adjuster in order to compromise the meaning of a verb following the marker.

As shown in the examples taken from COCA, the target discourse markers of *kind of* and *sort of* displayed various functions mentioned above. Although the present research showed some examples of each function, it was far from a detailed function description of the target discourse markers and it was hardly possible to classify each and every function with its occurrence in a large corpus like COCA. In order to provide a clear description of *kind of* and *sort of*, a relatively small-sized corpus is definitely more suitable for such a purpose.

The present research revealed that the target discourse markers, *kind of* and *sort of*, are widely and frequently used in modern American English. Native-like proficiency by definition entails appropriate use of discourse markers (Hlavac, 2006). Such a frequent use by native speakers of English carries a significance that the appropriate use of the target discourse markers sound natural and is fundamental to effective and efficient interaction in daily conversations. In other words, non-target-like use of discourse markers can "mark a speaker as disfluent in the target language in subtle ways" (Hellermann & Vergun, 2007, p. 161). Although non-target-like use or underuse of discourse markers may be unlikely to hamper communication, foreign language learners of English need to recognize that the ability to express oneself fluently and confidently in a second language entails the use of those discourse markers that native speakers produce so effortlessly (Sankoff et al., 1997).

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**Examples in: English**

**Applicable Languages: English**

**Applicable Levels: Secondary/ Tertiary**

Myongsu Park  
Department of English Language & Literature  
Sangmyung University  
31, Sangmyungdae-gil, Dongnam-gu, Cheonan-si,  
Chungcheongnam-do (330-720)  
Tel: (041) 550-5147/ H.P.: 010-7163-0157  
Email: myongsu@smu.ac.kr

Received 15 December 2014

Revised 29 January 2015

Accepted 15 February 2015