研究ノート

The Form and Meaning Asymmetry[i]：
Focusing on "Commencement Ceremony" and "Confidence Trick"

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1.　Introduction

As one example of the form and meaning symmetry, "commencement" (Form) primarily functions to refer to "the beginning of something" (Meaning 1 or the literal meaning) according to dictionaries such as Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (OALD Online) and LEXICO. This form and meaning symmetry can be illustrated in (1) and (2), in which the literal meaning of "commencement" in the headline in (1) is guaranteed by further supportive details, "will jointly hold the first meeting" in the recapitulation of the news press in (2) below. Thus, the literal meaning (LM or the Meaning 1) of "commencement" corresponds to its contextual meaning[ii] (CM or Meaning 2) in (1). However, the symmetry exhibits only partial semantic characteristics of "commencement." As a counter-example to the symmetry, "the Commencement ceremony" (Form) in (3) is not a ceremony to mark the beginning of university life in its literal meaning, but a graduation ceremony, i.e., a ceremony to mark the completion or end of college life in its contextual meaning. The contextual meaning of "commencement" in (3) can be verified by such phrases as "graduating students" or "graduation" in the immediate context.

(1)　<u>Commencement</u> of the First Meeting of Public-Private Committee on New Technologies toward Decarbonization of Aircraft
　　　　　　(METI Homepage, underlined by the author, attested on July 9th, 2022)

(2)　On June 20, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) <u>will jointly hold the first meeting</u> of Public-Private Committee on New Technologies toward Decarbonization of Aircraft.　　　(METI Homepage, attested on July 9th, 2022)

(3)　A group of <u>graduating</u> <u>students</u> at the University of Notre Dame are planning to silently walk out of Vice President Mike Pence's commencement address this Sunday. #The demonstration, organized by the student activist group We Stand For, is meant to protest Mr. Pence's policies as Indiana governor, including his

signature of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 2015. # "We invite all students, faculty, and families who will be attending the <u>Commencement ceremony</u> to walk out with us as we take back our <u>graduation</u> and show our dissatisfaction with the University's selection of Mike Pence as honored speaker," reads a Facebook event page for the protest, which says more than 100 people have agreed to participate.   (COCA, Washington Times, 2017)

Further, another form and meaning asymmetry instance is "confidence." The primary function of "confidence" (Form) is to indicate "trust" or "belief" (Meaning 1 or the literal meaning) according to OALD Online and Merriam-Webster Online. In (4) below, the LM (Meaning 1) of "confidence" is identical to the CM (Meaning 2). On the other hand, the CM (Meaning 2) of a "confidence game" in (5) below contrasts with its LM. In this contradiction between the LM and the CM in (5), the "confidence game" is not a trustworthy game but an untrustworthy game, i.e., "a professional swindling" game (OED, 1989).

(4)   He also secured the <u>continuation</u> of his government through a vote of <u>confidence</u>.
                                                                                        (LEXICO)

(5)   You two were victims of the oldest confidence game going - the pigeon drop. But he just seemed so honest. Well, that's why it's called <u>a confidence game</u>. He has to win your confidence or you wouldn't put up the money. It wasn't his idea.
                                                                                        (COCA)

This paper is a case study of the aforementioned form and meaning asymmetry, which is named the dust puzzle[iii] in Fu (2020) and Fu (2021). With a focus on the dust puzzle of the "commencement ceremony" type and the "confidence trick" type, this research aims to solve the puzzle of one form with contradicting senses from multiple perspectives. Following Introduction in Part One, Part Two introduces and outlines the relevant literature on the dust puzzle. Next, Part Three examines the puzzle of the "commencement ceremony" type involving a conceptual perspective of language users, while Part Four solves the puzzle of the "confidence trick" type by employing a refined syntactic-semantic approach. Finally, Part Five is an interim conclusion of the study.

2.   Literature

Karaman (2008) analyzes "contronymy[iv]" holistically from a semantic perspective, leaving much space for further discussions on syntactic and contextual supports for the contradictory meanings of each contronym. Fu (2020) adopts a syntactic-semantic

approach and focuses on one example of the dust puzzle. The characteristics of the Cover Type and Remove Type uses of the contronym "dust" in Fu (2020) can be summarized in Figs 1 and 2. In the figures below, in the Cover Types use the subject of the verb "dust" sprays dust or dust-like substance (hereinafter referred to as "dust" for brevity) onto the object, while in the Remove Type use the subject removes dust from the dusty or dirty object. The ambiguity of the verb "dust" originates from the fact that at the lexical conceptual specification (LCS) level, the direction of the movement of dust is not defined (Fu, 2021).

**Fig. 1 The Movement of Dust[v]
in the Cover Type Use of "Dust" in Fu (2020, 2021)**

**Fig. 2 The Movement of Dust
in the Remove Type Use of "Dust" in Fu (2020, 2021)**

In addition to the above linguistic approach, a perspective of a speaker's indirect understanding is advocated by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) to examine form and meaning asymmetry examples. In (6), two contradictory or opposite understandings of the same sentence can be possible, with M and M' in Lakoff & Johnson (1980) respectively being the literal meaning and the contextual meaning in this paper[vi]. Lakoff and Johnson further elaborate on the CM as in (7), which pushes out the boundary of the linguistic or formal analysis to the psychological and conceptual approaches[vii].

(6) In uttering a sentence S (S = "He's a real genius"), which has the objective meaning M (M = he has great intellectual powers), the speaker intends to convey to the hearer objective meaning M' (M' = he's a real idiot).

(Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 207)

(7) The objectivist accounting of understanding is thus always based on its account of objective truth. It includes two kinds of understanding, direct and indirect. Direct understanding is understanding a literal objective meaning of a sentence in terms of the conditions under which it can be objectively true. Indirect

understanding involves figuring out when the speaker is using one sentence to convey an indirect meaning, where the conveyed meaning can be understood directly in terms of objective truth conditions.

(Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 208-9)

However, the suggested approaches in Karaman (2008), Fu (2020), Fu (2021), and Lakoff & Johnson (1980) do not directly apply to the dust puzzle of the "commencement ceremony" or "confidence trick" type. Therefore, this paper takes the position that a refined version of the above approaches is required to solve these two types of the dust puzzle.

3. The Dust Puzzle of the "Commencement Ceremony" Type: Language Users' Perspective

This section first provides a concise historical account of the form "commencement" based on dictionary descriptions. The first use of "commencement" in the literal meaning (Meaning 1) as in (8) and (9) appeared around the year 1250 (OED, 1989) or in the late 13th century (Online Etymology Dictionary). Then, the first use of "commencement" in the contextual meaning (Meaning 2) as in (10) and (11) appeared as late as the year 1387 in OED (ibid.) or in the late 14th century in Online Etymology Dictionary. Thus, both dictionaries agree that Meaning 1 was introduced about 100 years earlier than Meaning 2, which supplements the viewpoint of this research that Meaning 1 should be the literal meaning of "commencement," and Meaning 2 the contextual meaning.

(8) Meaning 1 of "commencement" in OED
    The action or process of commencing; beginning; time of beginning.
(OED, Second Edition, CD-ROM, 1989)

(9) Meaning 1 of "commencement" in Online Etymology Dictionary
    late 13c., "a beginning, act or fact of coming into existence," from Old French comencement "beginning, start" (Modern French commencement), from comencier "to begin, to start" (see commence).   (Online Etymology Dictionary)

(10) Meaning 2 of "commencement" in OED
    The action of taking the full degree of Master or Doctor; esp. at Cambridge, Dublin, and the American universities, the great ceremony when these (also, in some cases other degrees, esp. in U.S., that of Bachelor) are conferred, at the end of the academical year.   (OED, Second Edition, CD-ROM, 1989)

(11)   Meaning 2 of "commencement" in Online Etymology Dictionary

   "school graduation ceremony" attested by 1850, American English, originally in
   colleges, in reference to the ceremonies by which members of the graduating class
   are made ("begin to be") bachelors, masters, etc. (commencement in the sense of
   "entrance upon the privileges of a master or doctor in a university" is from late
   14c.); thence extended to graduation ceremonies of academies and lower schools.

                                                      (Online Etymology Dictionary)

   Based on (10) and (11), the advent and development of Meaning 2 of
"commencement ceremony" in the collocation of "commencement ceremony" can be
summarized in Table 1. As common sense in a regular educational system in the world
we live in, a graduation ceremony plays a dual role in celebrating both the completion
of a course, such as a degree course at universities, and the beginning of an academic
degree, such as a master or a doctorate. In the early stage of "commencement
ceremony," "commencement" still maintained its literal meaning in language users'
cognitive and conceptual fields, as the phrase was limited to the beginning to be
bachelors or masters after graduation from universities or colleges. The binding to the
literal meaning of "beginning" might represent the then social backdrop that the
beginning to be bachelors or masters was more highly valued than the end of the
academical year or degree courses at colleges. However, with the further developments
in higher education and the extended uses of the phrase to the school graduation
ceremony in general, the CM of "commencement ceremony" gradually overrode its LM
and has been deemed approximately identical to the graduation ceremony in language
users' cognitive and conceptual fields. In summary, the above diachronic account of the
form "commencement" reveals that it is the language users' cognition of the then social
background that leads to the advent of the CM in the collocation of "commencement
ceremony."

   Despite the semantic development of "commencement," the ambiguous aspect of
"commencement ceremony" still remains in present-day English. The above-mentioned

Table 1 The Advent and Development of "Commencement Ceremony"
in OED (1989) and Online Etymology Dictionary

	LM (Meaning 1)	CM (Meaning 2)
late 14c	**beginning** to be bachelors, masters, etc.	
by 1850		**end** of the academical year or degree courses at colleges

two-faced semantic features of "commencement ceremony" in the language users' cognition and conception lead to the ambiguity of the construction. On the one hand, the CM of "commencement" in "commencement ceremony" is restricted to educational contexts, in which the beginning to be bachelors or masters is identical to the end of the academical year or degree courses at colleges. On the other hand, the "commencement ceremony" used beyond educational contexts, such as (12) below, can only be deemed as its LM, in which the form "mark the official start of" matches the LM reading of "commencement."

(12)   LECM held the works <u>commencement ceremony</u> for its new building on 11th August 2006 (Friday) at 10:00 am to <u>mark the official start of</u> construction of the New LECM Building."

                    (LECM, https://www.lecm.org.mo/en/news/30, attested in July, 2022)

The analysis of conceptual and cognitive aspects so far on the dust puzzle of the "commencement ceremony" type can apply to languages other than English. In Japanese, for example, the literal meaning of *o-hiraki* (Form) is "to open or begin;" however, it is sometimes employed to declare the end (the contextual meaning) of congratulatory banquets, such as a wedding ceremony. In other words, the same Japanese form *o-hiraki* has two contradictory meanings, "to open or begin" (the LM) and "to end" (the CM). According to *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten* (2006), as common sense in Japan, *imi-kotoba*, i.e., taboo words, such as *owaru* (literally meaning "to end") or *waru* (literally meaning "to break"), should be avoided at a wedding ceremony, for instance, and are usually replaced by *o-hiraki*. Lee (2001) states that "linguistic expressions code a particular way of perceiving the relevant scene" (p. xi); cognitively speaking, the end of a wedding ceremony is coded by *o-hiraki* to mark the beginning of the couple's new stage of life thereafter.

In summary, the common sense in educational contexts and the cognitive and conceptual viewpoints of language users lead to the puzzle of the "commencement ceremony" type with two contradicting senses. Just as the completion or end of a master's course marks the beginning or start of a master, there is no wonder that "commencement ceremony" can express not only the literal meaning (beginning) but also the contextual meaning (end). Similar to "commencement" in English, the non-linguistic account for the puzzle is also applicable to *o-hiraki* in Japanese[viii].

4. The Dust Puzzle of the "Confidence Trick" Type: A Refined Syntactic-Semantic Approach

The literal meaning of confidence is approximately "trust" or "belief" (OALD Online) as in (14) below. A refined version of Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 in Part Two above can illustrate two subtle movements of "confidence" and "vote" between two participants in the event of the vote in (13), the techs and Sidewheel. According to the formula of "vote for" or "vote against" in (13), "the techs" is the subject of the vote whilst "Sidewheel" is the object of the vote. The semantic relation in Fig 3 exhibits that the techs' confidence is approaching Sidewheel; similarly, the meaning interaction in Fig. 4 displays that the techs' vote is also towards Sidewheel. To sum up, the identical direction of movements of "confidence" and "vote" between the event participants leads to the literal meaning of confidence in (14).

(13)   Formula: Agent + [vote for or vote against] + Patient[ix]

(14)   Tommy and Barry asked the techs to cast <u>a confidence vote</u> on Sidewheel.
                                        (Google Books, attested in July, 2022)

the techs   confidence   →   Sidewheel

**Fig. 3 The Movement of Confidence
in the Semantics of "a Confidence Vote"**

the techs   vote   →   Sidewheel

**Fig. 4 The Movement of Vote
in the Semantics of "a Confidence Vote"**

Although "a confidence trick" in (15) has a similar syntactic structure as that of "a confidence vote" in (14), "confidence" in (15) does not employ its literal of "trust," but its contextual meaning of "swindling" as in (16). This difference can be illustrated in Fig. 5, in which "confidence" in Fig. 5 shows the opposite direction of movement to that of "confidence" in Fig. 3. Moreover, "confidence" in Fig. 5 also shows the opposite direction of movement to that of the trick between "he" and "us" in Fig. 6. These differences lead to the contextual meaning of "a confidence trick" as in (16) below.

(15) "Saad," said Marcus with complete surprise in his voice. "Why would he wish to
      <u>play a confidence trick</u> on us?"   (Google Books, attested in July, 2022)

(swindler) he ← confidence us (victims)

**Fig. 5 The Movement of Confidence
in the Semantics of "a Confidence Trick"**

(swindler) he trick → us (victims)

**Fig. 6 The Movement of Trick
in the Semantics of "a Confidence Trick"**

(16) a method of professional swindling, in which the victim is induced to hand over
      money or other valuables as a token of 'confidence' in the sharper (OED, 1989)

       A similar analysis can be valid in the form of "a confidence game" in (18) below.
As in the formula in (17), with "play a confidence game on" deemed as a set phrase, the
subject of the event coded by the set phrase is "a few people," i.e., swindlers, and the
target "the masses," i.e., "victims." The movements between these two event
participants illustrate that "confidence" moves from the victims to the swindlers, i.e.,
swindler-oriented or agent-oriented, while "game," i.e., trick, moves from the swindlers
to the victims, i.e., victim-oriented or target-oriented. The opposite movement
directions lead to the contextual meaning of "a confidence game," which contradicts its
literal meaning.

(17) Formula: Agent + [play a confidence game on] + Target

(18) Every few years or so it seems that we see a streak of white-collar crime happen,
      and that's only what we find out about. That's pretty much what happened in
      1929 with the stock market crash, a few people play <u>a confidence game</u> on the
      masses, get everyone into the over-confident buying frenzy, and then the
      confidence guys pull the carpet out from under everybody when nobody seems to
      be looking.   (Google Books, attested in July, 2022)

5.   Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper is a case study of the dust puzzle, one type of the form and meaning asymmetry. The research has focused on the dust puzzle of the "commencement ceremony" type and the "confidence trick" type, respectively from a non-linguistic perspective and a refined syntactic-semantic perspective. In the former case study, the conceptual viewpoints of language users solve the puzzle of "commencement" with two contradictory meanings. In the latter case study, the movement direction of "confidence" and "trick" between the event participants is the key to its ambiguity in different contexts. The non-linguistic approach and a refined syntactic-semantic perspective approach have been proved valid in solving the dust puzzle of the "commencement ceremony" and "confidence trick" types.

Notes

[i] I am grateful to three anonymous reviewers for their insightful and valuable comments. The remaining errors and deficiencies are my own.

[ii] The contextual meaning, i.e., Meaning 2, in this paper, is also called "the non-literal use" in Lindner (1982).

[iii] In Fu (2020), "we adopt the term 'contronym' to indicate a lexical item that has at least two senses that contradict each other and "contronymy" to refer to the linguistic fact or phenomenon in which a lexeme has two senses that are opposite to each other." The contronymy, i.e., one form, two contradicting literal meanings, is a typical example of the dust puzzle, while in a broad sense, the dust puzzle also includes such a linguistic fact or phenomenon in which a lexeme's literal meaning and contextual meaning contradict each other.

[iv] Contronymy in Karaman (2008) is approximately equivalent to the dust puzzle in Fu (2020).

[v] I am in debt to Ms. Fu Minran for her creative ideas in the figure design.

[vi] According to Lakoff & Johnson, the contextual meaning (M') of sentence S in (6) can be caused by sarcasm, for example.

[vii] In Talmy (2000), three approaches to the analysis of language are the formal approach, the psychological approach, and the conceptual approach (pp. 1-3).

[viii] Another example of one form with two contradictory meanings is the proverb, "A rolling stone gathers no moss." The interpretations of the proverb contradict each other in British English and American English. This contradiction is not caused by linguistic elements, but by non-linguistic elements such as social value or the so-called common sense in respective communities.

[ix] In Fu (2022, forthcoming), a formula "exhibits the syntactic-semantic traits of a verb, such as the usages of the verb and required or optional participants of the event or state encoded by the verb." For the convenience of analysis, "vote for" or "vote against" in this formula is deemed as a phrasal verb, and the form following "vote for" or "vote against" as a patient.

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