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Aomori Prefecture English Education Society

### Communication: Complexity - Accuracy - Fluency (CAF)

コミュニケーションは、複雑さ - 正しさ - 流暢さ

Many students ask me about how to improve their communication skills ... my response is to point out that good communication is the ability to adjust your speaking patterns to meet the circumstances and requirements of the communication situation. This adjustment is both *in preparation* for a specific communication task, such as preparing to speak about something to children versus preparing to speak to a group of experts, or *in and during the act of communicating*, which means recognizing that the other person or people may not be understanding you completely or that you are taking too long ... and adjusting as you speak.

My approach to this - preparing and adjusting communication - is based on three elements:

**Complexity - Accuracy - Fluency**      複雑さ - 正しさ - 流暢さ

In a 'language-centered' view, Complexity-Accuracy-Fluency is a way to measure and assess language skill by focusing specifically on the characteristics of the language use - the C, the A, and the F. This view recognizes 'performance trade-offs' between these three characteristics, as when accuracy is sacrificed to achieve fluency (*when urgency is important: the focus is on fluency*) or when fluency is sacrificed for accuracy (*in a formal speaking test: accuracy is important*).

From a 'communication-centered' view, understanding Complexity-Accuracy-Fluency means these 'performance trade-offs' become 'intentional communicative adjustments' which we control in our human-centered interaction in order to produce professionalism on one hand or ensure comprehension on the other ... depending on task and circumstance. We adjust between:

<i>Higher Complexity in Content/Vocabulary</i>	—	<i>Lower Complexity in Content/Vocabulary</i>
<i>Higher Accuracy in Grammar Precision</i>	—	<i>Lower Accuracy in Grammar Precision</i>
<i>Fluency: Time Efficient and Register-correct</i>	—	<i>Fluency: Comprehensible &amp; Audience-correct</i>

Let's look at some 'real-world examples' of what this would be:

**Case 1:** A science professor discussing nuclear power with other scientists at a science conference. This would be: **High Complexity - High Accuracy - Efficient & Register Correct**  
The science professor would use high complexity in both *specialized content and vocabulary*, high

accuracy/precision in the *use of language*, and adopt a fluency pattern that is *most efficient and register correct*. Both the professor and the audience are experts and can accommodate this high CAF communication style.

**Case 2:** A science professor explaining nuclear power to elementary school students. This would be: **Low Complexity – Low Accuracy – Comprehensible Fluency**

The science professor would need to adjust – using low complexity in both *content and vocabulary*, being less accurate/precise and more general in *language use*, and adopting a fluency pattern that is *slower and repetitive*, presents the content in a *step-by-step* pattern, and is *easy to understand*. While the professor knows about the subject, elementary school children do not; thus, a lower CAF style is needed.

**Case 3:** To give an example that *does not involve 'science'...* but rather reflects everyday life: I might tell you about my Sunday (which was, for me, terrible) in a *very short and easy way*:

*< my wife made me go shopping – it took all day – in the end,  
she only bought one thing – what a terrible day. >*

Why this pattern? You are probably not that interested in my Sunday and I don't want to bore you, so I keep it short, vague, general and easy to follow ... a listener-friendly CAF style.

On the other hand ... I might tell you about my terrible Sunday in a *long and descriptive manner* with *many specific details about what happened* at every point throughout the day; I want to tell you everything that happened and how I felt as the day went on.

*< we started from 10:00 – right when the stores opened – we spent one hour in the 1st store – she tried on six dresses – but then didn't buy anything – I couldn't believe it ... what a waste of time – and then we drove over to another store ... etc. etc. etc. ... and finally, she finished and we went home – all day, and she only bought one thing – I had so many things I had to do ... what a wasted day!! >*

For this version, I want you to experience how terrible the day was ... with all the details.

This **Complexity-Accuracy-Fluency** approach to communication can help you both in Japanese - where you can *fully* control the language with confidence ... and in English - where you may have less confidence and a bit more trouble controlling the language. To practice CAF in communication - grab a friend and try out both styles with some topic you know well ... a higher CAF style - *which will be more polished and professional sounding* ... and then a lower CAF style - *which will be more interactive and listener-friendly*. You should be able to 'feel' the difference.

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