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THE INTERPRETER IN THE ZONE (AND OTHER ZONES)

Interpreting requires a high degree of concentration and engagement in the moment, and the results of the two studies indicate that this type of intense attention can lead to an in-the-zone experience. As introduced in Chapter 1, being “in the zone” is an exhilarating experience in which people are completely absorbed in what they are doing and are performing at their best. Their skills and judgment rise to the challenges before them, and they experience a state of euphoria.

Being in the Zone

Professionals, artists, performers, athletes, and others report having in-the-zone (flow) experiences. Csikszentmihalyi¹ clarifies what allows for this type of experience to occur by explaining,

The optimal state of inner experience . . . [is one] in which there is *order to consciousness*. This happens when psychic energy—or attention—is invested in realistic goals, and when skills match the opportunities for action. The pursuit of a goal brings order in awareness because a person must concentrate attention on the task at hand and momentarily forget everything else. These periods of struggling to overcome challenges are what people find to be the most enjoyable times of their lives.²

In-the-zone experiences are characterized by intense attention and the successful application of skills, expertise, and decision-making, which allow one to overcome challenges and to feel good about that accomplishment. Csikszentmihalyi explains that there are three primary characteristics of flow: the complexity of the experience, the pleasure of the experience, and its contribution to one’s ability to grow and develop.

In addition, when in the zone, one can call up one’s expert intuition, which allows people to accomplish remarkable feats. Consider, for instance,

the following examples of expert intuition that Kahneman describes: “We have all heard such stories of expert intuition: the chess master who walks past a street game and announces ‘White mates in three’ without stopping, or the physician who makes a complex diagnosis after a single glance at a patient.”³ Just as the on-the-spot judgments of a surgeon and the ability of a chess master to play multiple players are prime examples of in-the-zone experiences, interpreters and translators can be engaged in making judgments in the moment that are quite varied, complex, and require complete engagement.

Interpretation and translation, as with these other examples, are multifaceted processes that must be juggled, can be all consuming, and yet can allow one to access resources that can sometimes boggle the mind. One selected interpreter stated in an interview that when interpreters are engaged in live simultaneous interpretation (SI), they are “coping with what is pretty much an impossible cognitive task. It really is!” Yet this is not an impossible task with the help of expert intuition, which can be developed from hard work, support, and successful experiences.

When expert interpreters are in the zone, they can more easily manage the interpreting process, pull from their repertoire of controls, have quick intuitions about the construction of meaning in context, monitor their own cultural behaviors and target language (TL) production, make quick professional and ethical decisions, and instinctively work as part of a team. Being in the zone and relying on one’s expert intuition allows interpreters to approach problems confidently, use strategies and tactics to resolve immediate issues, and seek help from others as needed. Interpreters in the zone are not hindered by challenges, because this optimal psychological experience is like riding a wave of possibility.

Being in the zone may seem like some ideal, miraculous process, but, as Kahneman explains, “expert intuition strikes us as magical, but it is not. Indeed, each of us performs feats of intuitive expertise many times each day.”⁴ In-the-zone experiences are not confined to one’s professional life; people can have an in-the-zone experience in their personal lives as well. An in-the-zone experience can happen when people are engaging in a favorite activity or addressing a life challenge that requires their total attention and skills. They can sense that time slips away and can experience this euphoric state of complete immersion in the experience when, as

Csikszentmihalyi states, their “psychic energy—or attention—is invested in realistic goals and when skills match the opportunities for action.”

In the Zone vs. in Flow

I use the phrase *in the zone* throughout this book instead of the phrase *in flow*, which Csikszentmihalyi uses in his work.⁵ I want to acknowledge that the terms refer to a similar experience and that people may use the terms interchangeably. Both relate to a state of consciousness in which a person is using available resources to accomplish challenges, and the result is a highly pleasurable experience. In addition, for both, people can have an experience that can range from quite intense to a lower-level form of the experience. However, there are two important differences between how Csikszentmihalyi uses the phrase *in flow* and how I use the phrase *in the zone*.

A major difference is that Csikszentmihalyi uses *in flow* in a more general sense. His focus has been on how people achieve in-flow experiences in various endeavors and overall life experiences. These experiences range from completing a difficult project, to skiing, to enjoying art, to having an intense conversation with a friend. All of these cases involve intense focus and enjoyment, some degree of attainment, and a sense that one’s mind and actions are in sync. When I use *in the zone*, I do not include such a wide range of experiences. I use it in a more specific sense to refer to experiences that involve a specific professional or life challenge (which would include completing a difficult project and skiing in some cases). I take in-the-zone experiences to occur in particularly high-level endeavors that inherently entail specific challenges and being able to manage those challenges.

Another major difference is that Csikszentmihalyi focuses on how people can be less dependent on external forces and situations to achieve happiness. He writes the following about his research:

What I “discovered” was that happiness is not something that happens. It is not the result of good fortune or random chance. . . . Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for . . . [and] cultivated. . . . People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy.⁶

He goes on to explain that “optimal experience is thus something that we *make* happen.”⁷ Although I agree that people can make such optimal

experiences happen more in their lives, I do not use the phrase *in the zone* to refer to enhancing one's enjoyment in life (although that is definitely what happens in these types of experiences). I use it to refer to a euphoric state that one experiences when one is especially challenged, as can happen in one's professional life. When challenged in one's professional life, one does not have the option to *not* engage at some level in the inherent challenges of the task. To not engage is to fail. My focus is not so much on one's happiness in life, but on successful, peak experiences one may experience by successfully meeting one's professional challenges.

Getting into the Zone

People are not in the zone all of the time, so when do people have more in-the-zone experiences? Csikszentmihalyi used a research method called the *Experience Sampling Method*, whereby people were prompted eight times a day at randomly selected times to write in a journal what they were doing and how they felt about what they were doing.⁸ This experiment was conducted with more than 100 people who worked full time, and the results indicated that these people had more flow-like experiences at work than they did when they engaged in leisure activities. The results indicated that

about half the time the people are working, they feel they are confronting above-average challenges, and using above-average skills. In contrast, when engaged in leisure activities such as reading, watching TV, having friends over, or going to a restaurant, only 18 percent of the responses ended up in flow.⁹

In addition, managers and supervisors were in flow more often (64%) than clerical workers (51%) and blue-collar workers (47%).

During the in-flow experiences, people reported feeling more positive and feeling happy, strong, creative, and satisfied. In their free time people feel that there is generally not much to do and their skills are not being used, and therefore they tend to feel more sad, weak, dull, and dissatisfied. Yet they would like to work less and spend more time in leisure.¹⁰

He further explains that people can create their own flow experiences by engaging in challenges that require one's total attention and effort. That

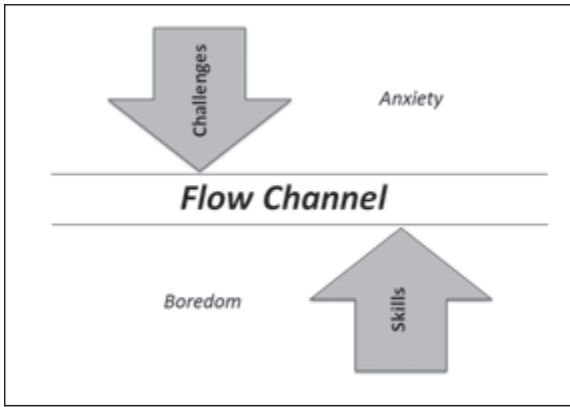


Figure 3.1. Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Channel appears between anxiety on one hand and boredom on the other; it is the point at which skills rise to meet challenges. Adapted from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experiences* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).

is also key to interpreting in the zone: Interpreters can create, and engage in, their own interpreting-related challenges, either by the situations in which they put themselves or by fully engaging in the challenges before them when they are interpreting.

Between Anxiety and Boredom

If people are not able to meet challenges, they may experience frustration and anxiety. Conversely, if they are not challenged enough, they may experience boredom or lack of motivation. In-the-zone (flow) experiences exist between anxiety on the one hand and boredom on the other; Csikszentmihalyi explains that flow experiences exist in a “flow channel” between these two extremes (see Figure 3.1).

Interpreters in the Zone

The interpreters who participated in both studies were asked, “How can you tell when an interpretation is successful and ‘is working’?” The responses to this question indicate how interpreters know when they are having a more in-the-zone experience.

When the Interpretation Is Working: Survey Results

When the interpreters in both studies were asked how they could tell when an interpretation is successful or is working, they mentioned similar external cues. The following are some examples of these kinds of external cues from the survey:

- From the Deaf person—their facial expressions, being familiar with the client and knowing their comprehension levels. From the hearing person—they respond, they nod, etc.
- Both parties are communicating with one another, asking and answering questions appropriately. . . . Or if it's a lecture etc., then [the] consumer nods indicating comprehension.
- When clients ask appropriate questions or statements to what was said.
- The two people start to converse as if there is not a third person in the room.

In both studies, such external cues were the most commonly mentioned indicator that the interpretation was successful. These responses composed 61% of the survey responses to this question.

Thirty-seven percent of the respondents mentioned both external and internal cues that signal the interpreting is working. The following are examples of how some of the survey respondents described this internal experience:

- It's a feeling like what athletes describe as "being in the zone." You are totally immersed in the proceedings.
- When everything is working, it's the most exhilarating feeling! I feel confident in how I'm visualizing and understanding the communication and the environment, I can sense the trust of the consumers and the appropriateness of the responses/interactions between the communicants.
- Time flies by. I "own" the message.
- I feel a sense of "zen" even when it's still challenging work.

These internal cues seem to reflect an in-the-zone experience. Other descriptions of this internal sense include "It feels like it flows," "I am

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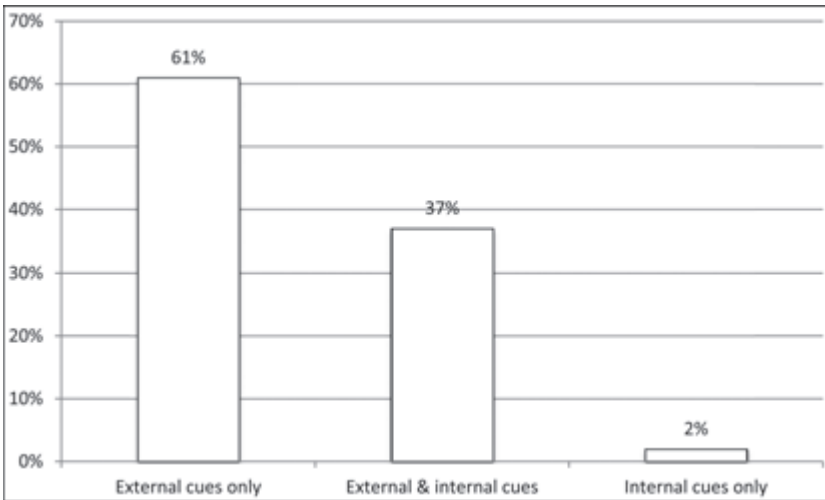


Figure 3.2. This chart indicates the number of survey respondents who identified external cues only, both internal and external cues, and internal cues only that allow them to know the interpretation is working.

‘on top of it,’ and “I think an interpreter ‘feels’ when an interpretation is really working. I call this being ‘on’ during an interpreting assignment.”

A very small percentage—only 2%—of the participants in the survey exclusively described internal in-the-zone experiences as their means to note success. Thus, very few of these interpreters report depending exclusively on internal cues. The survey results indicate that these interpreters overall depend mostly on external cues when it comes to knowing when an interpretation is working and, secondarily, depend on both internal and external cues. Only a few depend on internal cues alone. In other words, most of these interpreters are externally referenced in this respect, and very few are internally referenced (see Figure 3.2 and Table 6 in Appendix 6).

When the Interpretation Is Working: Interview Results

All of the interviewees were also asked how they could tell an interpretation is working, and this topic also came up organically as we discussed

samples of their work during the interview process. Their responses were similar to those from the interpreters who responded to the survey. They emphasized external cues or a combination of internal and external cues. At least two interpreters from each group, however, seemed to describe in-the-zone experiences that let them know the interpretation was working. Consider the following, for example:

- Yeah. It just feels really smooth. It's very—this happens, this happens, and then all of a sudden—oh, my God—did half an hour just go by? It felt like five minutes. You're just kind of suspended in time. (*Novice interpreter*)
- (*The following is in response to an excerpt of the interpretation that was more deeply processed.*) I think I'm more in the flow of it. It was kind of, not a release, but you get in the flow of things and it kind of picks up and goes better, but I'm not sure why. (*Novice interpreter*)
- It feels good. Even if you have a moment when [you] didn't get something . . . [and there's a] break in the flow . . . [it is] successful because you are in a situation you can correct, [and] have that connection with the Deaf person. It's a feeling . . . like when you are in the moment: Okay this is going good. (*Professional interpreter*)
- (*The following is an interpreter's description of interpreting an artistic performance.*) I have an out-of-body experience. My hands are the message, the body is the rhythm, my face is the tone. I am channeling the artists. I depend less on feedback in these moments. (*Professional interpreter*)
- You know . . . sometimes it feels like . . . painting or music for me, or writing, and those sorts of tasks. Why did I decide to put green on the canvas right then? I don't know. There's a process of discovery that's sometimes happening. I decide to do that and it works, so my next decision gets guided by that, you know. Sometimes that's how my decision-making is happening: "Oh, that worked! Whew! Now, what's next? Oh, that worked? Okay, now I'm going to go this way a little bit or that way . . .," and it's really fluid that way for me. (*Selected interpreter*)
- [I can tell the interpretation is working by] my own sense of how on top of it I feel. . . . The metacognition part of me . . .—the supervisory function—is actually able to observe at the same time that the interpretation is happening. (*Selected interpreter*)

There are two primary findings from these survey and interview results.¹¹ First, interpreters who have varying degrees of experience can have in-the-zone experiences, not just those who are more accomplished. Even though this experience can vary, having this sense of engagement can signal that interpreters are working at their full potential. Second, interpreters may be more externally referenced (dependent on external cues), more internally referenced (dependent on internal cues), or a mixture of the two. The interpreters in these two studies appear to be more externally referenced overall, but the selected interpreters tend to be more internally referenced and have more meta-awareness of tactics, strategies, and decisions. Both of these findings—having in-the-zone experiences and being more internally referenced—can benefit interpreters and students of interpretation as they learn how to increase in-the-zone experiences. Interpreters can build on their successful, in-the-zone experiences where they experience success and can learn to rely on the types of internal cues that have been described here.

Implicit and Explicit Memory

The nature of two types of memory helps clarify the in-the-zone experience. *Explicit memory* involves more conscious, deliberate attention and recall. In contrast, *implicit memory* takes place in the unconscious, involves the quick recognition of patterns, and results in more automatic responses to situations.¹²

Two examples from the world of golf clarify the relationship between these two types of memory and one's attention and attainment.¹³ One study of golfers indicates that although people assume that the faster a task is performed, the less accurate it becomes, this is not necessarily the case for expert golfers. In one experiment, novice and expert golfers were studied under two conditions: They either had up to three seconds to putt or all the time they wanted. Only novices did better when they took more time. When novices used less time, they performed worse and had fewer target hits. Conversely, the expert golfers did much better when they had a limited amount of time.

In another study, the novice golfers also did *better* when they had time to *concentrate* on how they completed their swings. However, the expert golfers did more poorly when they concentrated on their swings, and they

performed *better* when they had a *distraction task*, which in this case was counting recorded tones. This difference not only speaks to the difference between novices and experts, it also indicates that performing in the moment—in the zone—cannot be achieved when there is an overconcentration on subtasks, which can become a distraction for expert golfers who are more dependent on their implicit memory. Rather, intense immersion in the overall “flow” of the event is achieved with an immediate matching of skills to the goal, and so overthinking steps (depending too much on explicit memory) can move one out of the zone.

Interpretation and Implicit and Explicit Memory

The results of a study by Köpke and Nespoulous¹⁴ indicate some differences between novice and expert interpreters that parallel the differences in implicit and explicit memory between novice and expert golfers. Köpke and Nespoulous studied 18 second-year French/English interpreting students (novices) and 21 professional interpreters who worked on a permanent or freelance basis (experts). They found in their study of working memory that although there were no differences between how novice interpreters and expert interpreters performed in tasks involving *simple short-term memory* (such as recalling simple lists of words), there were significant differences between the two groups on three other tests.

One of these tests required the participants to listen to a 12-word list when repeating the syllable “bla” repeatedly and then recalling as many words as they could. In another test, the participants listened to single words one at a time and were to state whether or not each word belonged to the same semantic category as the words on a provided list. The third test asked participants to repeat back sets of unrelated sentences, remember the last word in each sentence, and then repeat back all of the last words at the end of the task.¹⁵

Although Köpke and Nespoulous’s original hypothesis was that expert interpreters would fare better than novice interpreters on all of these tasks involving short-term memory, the result of these three tasks was just the opposite. Novices did significantly better than the experts. Köpke and Nespoulous attribute these findings to the fact that novices are more dependent on their short-term working memory, and experts have developed different processes that they use in SI and, consequently, are less

dependent on their short-term working memory. In other words, the cognitive process each group uses is much different.

Returning to the discussion of implicit and explicit memory, we see that the novice interpreters are similar to the novice golfers, as they benefit from more consciously attending to their working memory (depending more on their explicit memory). Expert interpreters, however, make more use of their implicit memory. In these specific tasks that focus on decontextualized meaning and require use of explicit memory, the expert interpreters' implicit memory is not to their benefit. Their implicit memory has developed in such a way as to limit the amount of short-term memory needed to do SI. Thus, these tests that required more dependence on short-term memory (explicit memory) were like new tasks for them, and they did not do as well as the novice interpreters.

Choking and Panicking

In sports, the extreme form of being out of the zone is called *choking*, and there are many famous examples of top athletes suddenly choking.¹⁶ These athletes are often top in their field and then suddenly lose their superb control and never recover. The pressure seems to get to them, and they choke. When people are choking, they revert to the explicit mode and seem to function like a learner again. They lose the reflexivity of the unconscious mind. Being in the zone entails a balanced blend between the conscious and unconscious mind. Being highly engaged in the moment and in the task or process at hand (using the implicit mode) does not allow for being overly self-conscious (using the explicit mode), which can interfere with one's performance in the zone.

Gladwell contrasts choking with panicking, and states,

Panic . . . is the opposite of choking. Choking is about thinking too much. Panic is about thinking too little. Choking is about loss of instinct. Panic is reversion to instinct [which is problematic when a person does not have the necessary instinct]. They may look the same, but they are worlds apart.¹⁷

Gile's Tightrope Hypothesis shows that choking and panicking can happen to interpreters as well. An interpreter may experience some degree of cognitive overload and still maintain a successful interpretation; however, an interpreter may also be too self-aware or may overthink the process

and, thus, choke. An interpreter may also panic if the interpreter has an insufficient System 1 (honed intuition), where the challenges are too great and the skills and resources (controls) of the interpreter are insufficient.

Creativity and Being in the Zone

The in-the-zone experience is in direct contrast to choking and panicking. When people are in the zone, more cognitive space exists for them to depend more on their expert intuition. This can allow them to be more creative, pull upon their resources to use new approaches to solve problems, and contribute new ideas to an area of expertise.

Csikszentmihalyi identifies nine features of flow, and these features allow the conscious and unconscious to work in harmony to achieve goals, which frees the mind to be more creative. Each of these nine features is summarized below¹⁸:

1. **There are consistently clear goals.**

Description: When in flow, people have a strong sense of where they are headed (i.e., there is a strong sense of purpose and what needs to be done).

2. **Feedback on one's actions is immediate.**

Description: People know right away how well they are doing; they spot all of the indications of success or the need to change and adapt.

3. **There is a balance between challenges and skills.**

Description: People's ability and opportunities are well matched to the actions they need to take. This can be contrasted to when a challenge is too great and anxiety may set in, or when there is not much of a challenge and boredom may set in. During flow, there is a good balance between people's challenges and skills, and there is enjoyment in the process.

4. **Action and awareness/concentration are merged.**

Description: In some areas of people's lives, they can be doing one thing and thinking about another (such as thinking about one's grocery list while listening to a lecture or thinking about a previous discussion while one is driving); however, in flow, complete concentration is focused on the activity at hand. This is made possible by having clear goals, the ability to have immediate feedback, and maintaining

a balance between challenges and skills. They are in sync; their mind and actions are one.

5. **Distractions are excluded from consciousness.**

Description: The consciousness is so engaged in the activity, it is not easily distracted. The mind is focused on what is relevant in the here and now.

6. **There is no concern about failure.**

Description: During flow, there is a sense of total control, and people are too involved to be concerned about failure.

7. **Self-consciousness disappears.**

Description: People are not concerned about what others think when they are in flow. Rather, their attention is too focused, and they are too energized to be concerned about ego. Although being more selfless, they are actually more fully themselves.

8. **The sense of time is distorted.**

Description: In flow, time either goes by quickly, or it can seem that time has passed very slowly. Either way, people's sense of time is distorted when they are in flow.

9. **The activity is autotelic (vs. exotelic).**

Description: *Autotelic* means that someone engages in an activity for its own sake and for the experience it provides. Many activities in life are *exotelic*, meaning that people do not necessarily enjoy them, but do them in order to achieve a goal. Exotelic activities can become autotelic (i.e., at the point that people begin doing these activities for their own sake).

This is the nature of being in the zone. It is an all-consuming experience in which one can achieve challenging tasks and engage in creativity. However, an interpreter can also be in other zones.

In the Zone and Other Zones

Based on the interviews and my own experience as an interpreter and interpreter educator, it has become evident to me that there are degrees of being in the zone. Indeed, more than one zone exists. I propose that there are three zones, and each of these varies in the degree to which an

INTERPRETING IN THE ZONE

Out of zone	Comfort zone	Working zone	In the zone
Not in flow	→ → → In	flow → → →	→ → → →
(n/a)	(low)	(mid)	(high)

Figure 3.3. This figure illustrates that an *in-the-zone* experience entails a *high* degree of flow experience, the *working zone* entails a mid-level of flow experience, the *comfort zone* entails a low level of flow experience, and being *out of zone* means that the person is *not in flow*.

individual is in flow: from high (being in the zone), to mid, to low. A person may also be out of the zone (see Figure 3.3).

The ultimate experience is being *in the zone*. When in the zone, mastery reigns, interpreters are very much in control of their interpreting work, and they experience a euphoric, possibly out-of-body, experience where challenges are met by available resources.

At the other extreme, people may be *out of the zone*, in which case their skills, knowledge, and expertise do not, or cannot, rise to the challenges encountered at all. Instead, they are out of their element; they feel overwhelmed and uncomfortable.

The two remaining zones exist in between these two. Neither is totally in the zone nor totally out of the zone.

The *working zone*, which is characterized by a mid-level of flow, entails working very hard, but unlike being in the zone, the person who is in the working zone is scrambling to meet the challenges at the moment. In this state, the person is in danger of falling out of the zone at any moment. Overall, however, the person is getting by and making it work. This zone exists *between* the in-the-zone state and the out-of-zone state, and results from struggling with the challenges presented.

The other zone is the *comfort zone*, in which a person experiences a low level of flow and engagement, but feels quite confident and secure in the moment. The comfort zone tends to be a comfortable place for interpreters to be, where one's resources appear to be meeting challenges, and interpreters basically feel that they can be on autopilot when doing the work. The comfort zone also exists *between* the in-the-zone state and the out-of-zone state; however, the danger of the comfort zone is that boredom may creep in and affect the interpreting work. When people are in their comfort zone, there is a danger of becoming too comfortable and

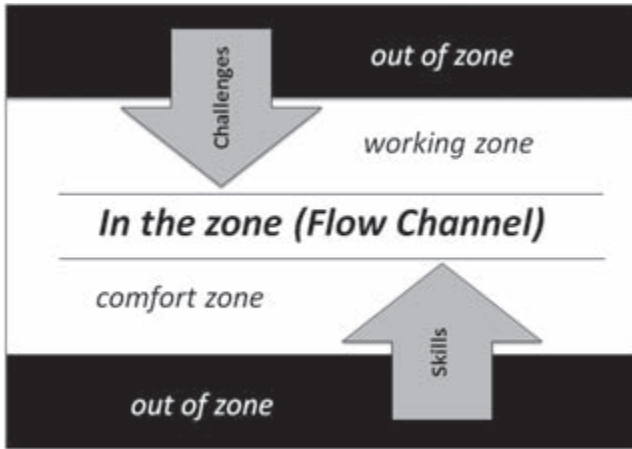


Figure 3.4. This figure shows that the *working zone* is between the in-the-zone state and the out-of-zone state and results from *challenges* that are difficult to manage, and the *comfort zone* is also between the in-the-zone state and the out-of-zone state; however, this zone results from increased *boredom* that may cause issues with complacency.

complacent, which can result in little conscious awareness or monitoring of their work. The comfort zone can be either an authentic experience or it can be a deceptive one, as I explain in the next section (see Figure 3.4 for an illustration of the zones).

The Comfort Zone Can Be Authentic or Deceptive

The comfort zone can be authentic, wherein interpreters can continue to have a successful, in-the-zone experience. However, the comfort zone can be deceptive in that interpreters can assume that they are in the zone and all is going well, but they are, in fact, experiencing a false sense of success.

When in the *authentic comfort zone*, interpreters experience an in-the-zone experience (but with a low level of flow) in which their consciousness is on the lower end of awareness, and the unconscious mind is doing much of the work successfully. At the same time, interpreters do not feel challenged and feel they are doing “the same old thing.” A danger of being in this authentic comfort zone is that interpreters can either become too bored and be pushed out of zone, or become too nonchalant and not sufficiently monitor their interpreting work. Either of these can

negatively affect their processing, decision-making, and the construction of meaning.

The comfort zone can also be an *artificial, deceptive experience* where interpreters may think they are in the zone, but they actually are not. As with the authentic comfort zone, the interpreter's consciousness is on the lower end of awareness, and the unconscious mind is doing much of the work. However, because interpreters in the deceptive comfort zone are too complacent, they are not using their *observing self* (metaconscious). The result is interpreting work that can be quite inconsistent. Interpreters in this state can have the illusion that they are in the zone, because the process seems so automatic; but having automaticity is not the same as being in the zone. When interpreters are in the zone, they feel truly alive and in control of the task. They are able to coordinate their mastery and its application in context.

This kind of deceptive, artificial comfort zone does not have the high level of engagement or success of the in-the-zone experience. Interpreters in this zone feel that they are doing a rote task, and little, if anything, seems new. Moreover, if unmonitored, errors in the unconscious will go unchecked, which is especially a problem when the interpreter does not have the necessary expert intuition. In addition, the monitor may miss important nuances in meaning or a need to change gears in order to try a different tactic or strategy in the interpreting process.

The distinction between these two comfort zones is important. In the authentic comfort zone, interpreters are in control of their work and feel comfortable and confident, and the result is successful. In the artificial comfort zone, interpreters are not working at their peak. Instead, they are not truly in control of their work and cannot trust their monitor to ensure that the unconscious will do effective work, which is a dangerous combination.

The Consciousness Paradigm and the Zones

The Consciousness Paradigm illustrates how the dynamic between conscious and unconscious effort may change as one is interpreting (see Figure 3.5). The paradigm also helps clarify which zone someone is in at any given time. Those who are not conscious of their work and are not monitoring it, are out of the zone, as represented by the blackened area to the far left in the figure. On the other end, those who are highly conscious of their work and are using their unconscious only slightly are also

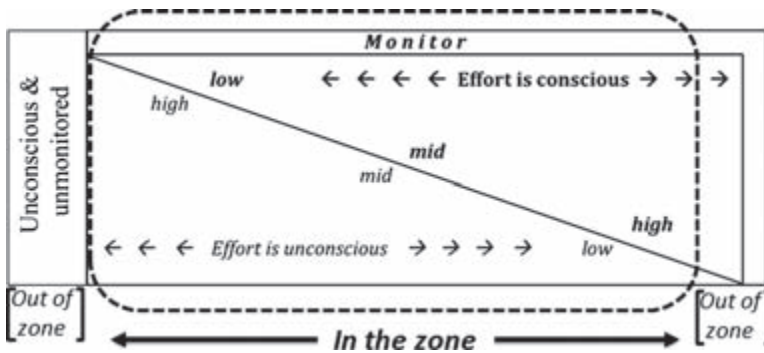


Figure 3.5. This figure illustrates that in-the-zone experiences occur in the middle range (and mostly to the left-side) of the Consciousness Paradigm, and the far-left and the far-right regions represent where out-of-zone experiences occur.

not in the zone; this is the area to the far right in the figure. Those who are highly conscious would not be “in the moment” enough to have an in-the-zone experience. In-the-zone experiences tend to happen between these two points, but mostly when interpreters are functioning at the mid-conscious/mid-unconscious or low conscious/high unconscious levels. In this range, resources match challenges, and effective unconscious efforts are guided and monitored by the metaconscious (see Figure 3.5).

Based on the interviews and my own experience with interpretation, for one to be in the zone requires a certain amount of unconsciousness (automaticity) about the process. That being said, people may still be in the zone when they find themselves working hard, as long as they are still engaged in the moment, as can happen in the working zone. Moments when there is an increase in conscious awareness *do* happen, but there still needs to be a certain synergy between the conscious and unconscious for an interpretation to be effective.

The Zones and Interpretation

As Csikszentmihalyi explains,

The self becomes complex as a result of experiencing flow. . . . When we choose a goal and invest ourselves in it to the limits of our concentration, whatever we do will be enjoyable. And once we have tasted this joy, we will

redouble our efforts to taste it again. This is the way the self grows. . . . Flow is important both because it makes the present instant more enjoyable, and because it builds self-confidence that allows us to develop skills and make significant contributions.¹⁹

Novices and experts experience being in the zone in different ways, and everyone wants to repeat these experiences. The confidence and success that is realized in in-the-zone experiences can be used as a foundation to build interpreters' skills and decision-making abilities. Being more aware of which zone interpreters are in at any given moment can help them navigate their interpreting work and to further develop strategies and tactics that can help them gain greater expertise.

Notes

1. Csikszentmihalyi is pronounced "chick sent me high ee."
2. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: Psychology of Optimal Experience*, 6.
3. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 11.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and Psychology of Discovery*; Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: Psychology of Optimal Experience*.
6. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: Psychology of Optimal Experience*, 2.
7. *Ibid.*, 3.
8. *Ibid.*, 158–160.
9. *Ibid.*, 158–159.
10. *Ibid.*, 159.
11. Hoza, "Interpreting in the Zone."
12. Eagleman, *Incognito: Secret Lives of the Brain*; Eagleman, "Secret Life of the Mind."
13. Gigerenzer, *Gut Feelings: Intelligence of the Unconscious*.
14. Köpcke and Nespoulos, "Working Memory Performance."
15. The three tests were called a *free recall test with articulatory suppression*, a *semantic condition test*, and a *listening span task*, respectively.
16. Gladwell, "Art of Failure."
17. *Ibid.*, 88.
18. Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and Psychology of Discovery*.
19. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: Psychology of Optimal Experience*, 42.