

Former Title: (Dis)placing writing transfer: Post-Soviet literacies on the move

Current Working Title: Toward a Transfer of Resistance: *Techne*, Translation, and Post-Soviet Literacies

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Institutional Description: While I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Washington, Seattle, a large public research institution in the Northwest United States, my research for this article occurred in East Kazakhstan at a public institution where I used to teach academic writing. A concise description of this context is provided in the article on page 4.

Key Theorists/Frames:

Transfer; Key Theorists/Researchers: DePalma & Ringer; Donahue; Feaux de la Croix; Mulcahy; Nowacek

Research on writing transfer is primarily interested in the ways that writers adapt prior knowledge and discursive resources to engage similar and novel genres and contexts for composing. Many of the theorists I cite in this article call for an understanding of transfer research that considers the rhetorical negotiations that writers undergo when transferring writing knowledge and the relationships they engender in the process.

***Techne*; Key Theorists: Atwill; Alexander & Rhodes; Pender**

Techne is an ancient conception of art classically identified with medicine and rhetoric—arts involving both physical bodies and social bodies of knowledge (Atwill, 2006). While a *techne* can be defined as a “set of transferable strategies contingent on situation and purpose” in a constant state of revision (Atwill, 1998, p. 7), this revision depends upon the accumulation of lived experiences through bodily engagement with such knowledge.

Translation; Key Theorists/Researchers: Bakhtin; Bou Ayash; Gonzales; Horner; Savage

Like transfer, translation points to the mobilization of knowledge across diverse literacies, and I am particularly interested in theories of translation that consider the rhetorical negotiations occluded by the finished translated product. I also consider translingual approaches to translation that view all writing as translation work and center the multimodal valences to translation practices.

Glossary:

Medium of Education (MoE): When specific institutions designate named languages (in this case Kazakh, Russian, or English) as the primary language of instruction and assessment.

Multiliteracy Autobiography: A genre posed by Gentil’s (2018) academic biliteracy pedagogical model that has students “narrate how, in what contexts, and what types of texts they had learned to read and write” (p. 120) across languages.

Әжелер: A term meaning “grandmothers” in Kazakh, generally referring to elderly women.

Zhannat and her group members were eager to present the qualitative results of their writing class' capstone project, in which they had analyzed their study participants' conflicting feelings concerning local Kazakh language reclamation programs. Her group's motivation for this topic stemmed from their own positionalities as self-identified ethnic Kazakhs, Tatars, and Russians respectively in a Central Asian borderland region where linguistic identity and ethnic identity are often conflated (Fireman, 2009), and where the government has framed efforts to revitalize the Kazakh language as necessary for restoring a Kazakh people still recovering from the Soviet-imposed genocide of the 1930s (Dave, 2006). After a brief introduction in English, Zhannat began presenting her section of the literature review by discussing the perspectives of Russian Sign Language (RSL) literate, self-identified ethnic Kazakhs in the region, such as herself. While doing so, she oscillated between English and RSL to highlight quoted material, arguments, and RSL-community-specific vernacular, at times simultaneously translating her English speech into RSL. Following Zhannat, a groupmate engaged in similar practices by including descriptions and even entire arguments in Tatar. The group only presented the methodology section entirely in English. At a Kazakhstani institution that takes seriously the country's federal trilingual language policies, all students had been encouraged to make use of whatever linguistic resources were available to them to present their research, with the goal of improving students' literacies in English, Kazakh, and Russian in tandem. Through the use of RSL and Tatar, Zhannat's group ascribed alternative aims for their project: they intended, through both their research and performance, to transfer their linguistic and writing knowledge across modalities to work against others' limiting assumptions of their linguistic identities as evidence of the more critical approach to translation they had cultivated in their writing course.

In this chapter, I examine Zhannat's transformations in progress as evidence of transfer, considering how she mobilized writing knowledge across modalities, linguistic repertoires, and genres to resist local language representations and cunningly engage her peers. To situate the question of transfer within a literacy ecology such as the one Zhannat engages in Kazakhstan, however, necessitates that we consider the goals for transfer research beyond measuring students' integration into/of specific academic literacies. What happens when we ground the locus of transfer research in a context where integration presents as necessarily fraught due to politically and ethnically charged language policies, as well as where local efforts are underway to restore and codify indigenous languages and knowledges through targeted literacy programs?

Such questions signal a deviation from common goals and contexts for transfer research that closely follow pedagogical aims of many writing courses—goals that treat socialization into professional and academic disciplines as the assumed goal. Donahue has criticized this limited scope across multiple publications (2017; 2018; 2020), positing that North American Writing Studies' most capacious methodologies for understanding transfer still remain tethered to "optimizing integration" in which "troublesome knowledge and boundary-crossing disrupt integration... but the implication in the scholarship is that the disruption is useful insofar as it can enable further integration over time" (2017, p. 112). In a recent critique of Writing-about-Writing (WaW) pedagogies, Brown (2020) has similarly argued that Writing Studies' preoccupation with students' adaptation into particular professional and disciplinary communities depends on colorblind notions of linguistic diversity that render as afterthoughts more critical approaches to language, such as translanguaging approaches, when assuming the kinds of writing knowledge we hope students will cultivate in our courses and later transfer into future situations. Instead, Brown argues that "we must also ask colleagues who study institutional

literacies to make space for the language and the languaging that arises from pleasure, protest, reflection, and *art*” (p. 614, emphasis added).

I view Zhannat’s efforts to transfer knowledge as primarily engaged in protest and resistance, as translations, and ultimately as art. In doing so, I echo work on writing knowledge and learning transfer occurring external to North America that posits *translation* as a more encompassing term than *transfer*, as it implicates the rhetorical negotiations inherent but often occluded in all knowledge mobilization in multilingual literacy ecologies (Donahue, 2020; Hilaricus, 2011; Mulcahy, 2013) such as the one I study in Kazakhstan. In this article I consequently substitute references to transfer for those to translation as a relational metaphor (Mulcahy, 2013) to highlight Zhannat’s learning and languaging work. As a rhetorician, I also understand translation as a form of artistic labor, drawing from a tradition of *techne* that highlights the multimodal and embodied negotiations inherent in all instances of productive knowledge mobilization. The scholarship underpinning this conception of *techne* emphasizes its resistance to conformity of bodies as well as bodies of knowledge and its identification with ongoing practice. This chapter’s organization highlights Zhannat’s artistic labor as a form of embodied resistance, revealing how multiple instances of her translation work across modalities engendered a transformation not only of knowledge but of relations of power.

Translation as Artistic Labor

I understand artistic labor as the work of both intervention and invention to create new social possibilities through *techne*, including the *techne* of translation. *Techne* is an ancient conception of art classically identified with medicine and rhetoric—arts involving both physical bodies and social bodies of knowledge (Atwill, 2006). While a *techne* can be defined as a “set of transferable strategies contingent on situation and purpose” in a constant state of revision (Atwill, 1998, p. 7), this revision depends upon the accumulation of lived experiences through bodily engagement with such knowledge. Some traditions have reduced *techne* to an acontextual, skillful guide for producing a useful result, but Atwill (2006) convincingly argues that *techne*’s primary function lies in its cunning power to resist—its ability to redraw boundaries, mobilizing and obscuring bodies conceived as stable or prone to exclusion. Put another way, this understanding of *techne* reimagines social boundaries by exposing the ethereal, “alienating space between bodily self and representation as a productive space for critique” (Alexander and Rhodes, 2015).

Techne theory presents a useful premise for foregrounding the relations of power embedded in all acts of knowledge mobilization and is consequently referenced by some of Writing Studies’ most critical pedagogies. One of the earliest explicitly transfer-oriented curricula, Dew’s (2002) writing-about-writing model, called for a “pedagogical shift to rhetoric as *techne*” (p. 96) as a way of reconceiving students’ agency when engaging institutional genres. Translingual scholars have further argued for pedagogical content that centers translation as a *techne*, demonstrating how this conception of translation undergirds all acts of multimodal composing and positions multilingual writers as especially capable in negotiating literacies (Gonzales, 2018). Until her WAC course, Zhannat had conversely been instructed to understand translation as a neutral and almost mechanical activity. Throughout her schooling, her parents and grandparents, administrators, and/or government policies had shuffled her among different academic institutions due to a combination of her ethnic identifications and home language use, frequently forcing her to segregate sociolinguistic resources and identities in her writing in ways that belied her daily translingual practices. In the follow-up interview to her conference

presentation, however, she reflected on the ways that her writing in this WAC course resisted not only monolingual ideologies, but also their ethnolinguistic attachments. In what follows, I analyze Zhannat's translations (as transfer) through the lens of *techne* theory to foreground the ways by which she redefined the boundaries of her own writing and linguistic knowledge to reshape relations of power between herself and often restrictive educational structures, extending work on boundary crossing and transfer (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Medina, 2019) to propose a framework for identifying and affirming students' rhetorical engagements in transfer-as-resistance.

Mobilizing and Resisting Kazakh Literacies

Universities in East Kazakhstan represent a microcosm of the shifting demographics of the region as a whole. Although Kazakhstan witnessed a mass exodus of self-identifying ethnic Russian residents to Siberia post-independence, a large Russian presence remains in this borderland province. Since the mid-twentieth century, the Russian language has also served as the *lingua franca* in Eastern cities despite the Kazakh language's growing prominence in the country's capital, Southern, and Western regions, at times creating ethnolinguistic tension between Kazakhs from these regions and those in the East. Language policies since the early 2000s have openly called for increasing the status of the Kazakh language as an indigenous rights project, and many Kazakh-language speakers feel they are correcting nearly a century of Soviet Russian oppression by reclaiming Kazakh as the language of all Kazakhs. In East Kazakhstan, many local Russian speakers conversely lament federally-funded migration and educational programs that require Kazakh language proficiency and provide either repatriation or scholarships to Kazakh-speakers willing to settle in East Kazakhstan specifically. Several minority groups, including Koreans, Tatars, and Uighurs, also historically resided in East Kazakhstan and were granted citizenship upon independence. These groups generally speak Russian in addition to their heritage languages, while Mongolian residents, many of whom can trace kinship ties to Kazakhs and historically engaged in nomadic pastoralism throughout the oblast, speak Mongol and often Kazakh. Against this diverse linguistic backdrop, federal trilingual language policies assert that all students must learn English, Kazakh, and Russian, and public and private institutions alike group students by the medium of education (MoE) through which they will receive the majority of their instruction, typically Kazakh or Russian.

Zhannat identifies ethnically as Kazakh, but she and many of her local Kazakh classmates were placed by their university into the Russian group as they had matriculated from Russian-medium local secondary schools. In many ways, the MoE divide at this institution served more cultural and geographic than linguistic: those enrolled in the Kazakh sections mostly identified as either Southern Kazakhs or Mongolian and had traveled to East Kazakhstan for university, while those in the Russian-medium section were local students. Majoring in "2 Foreign Languages," (English and Korean), Zhannat enrolled in the WAC course as one of the few classes on her schedule offered in English. Following Gentil (2018), this class adopted an academic biliteracy approach that centered translation as content. Zhannat completed three major assignments for the course: a multiliteracy autobiography; a terminology assignment through which she had contributed various meanings of the term *gender* across Russian, Kazakh, and English to a class multilingual glossary; and a final, collaborative qualitative research project on some aspect of translation, the results of which were both submitted as a single academic essay and presented at an undergraduate research conference at a neighboring university. In an interview following this presentation, one of the authors asked Zhannat about her translation decisions, composition

process for each assignment, use of different technologies, and historical and daily literacy practices.

Although Zhannat felt highly skilled in navigating local language politics as a young adult, she described in both her interview and multiliteracy autobiography the dissonance she perceived between her own linguistic and ethnic identities and those of her relatives and later institutions:

When I was born in my parents' family, my grandparents decided that they were going to live with us: with my deaf mom, deaf father, and me. My Kazakh grandparents were afraid that I would never speak in my life and that I should know Kazakh even though my parents don't speak Kazakh. Kazakh is the language of Kazakhstan now. While my parents spoke in Russian Sign Language to me. My parents had taken me to a Russian Kindergarten, and my grandparents moved me to a Kazakh school at the age of 5 or 6. Then I messed and mixed the languages and spoke them mostly at the same time, but amazingly I did speak though no one was really that happy about it.

From a young age, Zhannat learned to confidently move through different institutional spaces in ways that conformed to communities' expectations for her language use, and with the exception of her relatives, she almost always described her languaging practices in reference to the ethnicity of those to whom she communicated. She reported that through the multiliteracy autobiography, she cultivated a deeper understanding of these literacy identities, expanding the class' discussion of "discourse community" to frame her Russian and Kazakh usage in reference to these languages' situated histories of ethnic identification in the country. By contrast, she associated her Korean and RSL practices in reference to "K-pop lovers" and the tight-knit RSL speaking community of her town.

Critically considering how her different languaging practices signaled community membership helped Zhannat conceptualize participant interaction in the subsequent qualitative research project as she developed her own discourse surrounding literacy, which she described in her interview:

The first thought I had was, "I never thought of my languages in this way." Like, I never had to explain each language that I spoke, like how it happened, why, and stuff. Like, nobody asks that. People say, "How many languages do you speak?" I say, "5" and they're like, "Wow you're so smart; you're a genius." Of course from the USA especially. And when we were writing that paper, I thought, "that's good, now I kinda appreciate the languages I speak. I put like frames in my head, like I'll use this language this way. That's good...I think [the multiliteracy autobiography] helped me to understand the languages that I speak, and explain to the interviewee, for example, "As for me, I know that I speak Korean this much, but for example, if I didn't speak Kazakh but I understood it, I would know it. I would know what this person felt here, and what this person is trying to explain to me."

Through this example, Zhannat juxtaposes Korean and Kazakh to link her linguistic identities to her affective experiences as an ethnic Kazakh in the region and help her interview participant describe their own practices. By suggesting that "if I didn't speak Kazakh but I understood it, I would know it," she seeks to ameliorate any embarrassment her interview participant might feel toward any perceived limitations in Kazakh language use. She instead suggests that experiences as an ethnic Kazakh in the region offer a perfectly acceptable substitute for perceived gaps in proficiency, and sought to affirm her participant's daily translanguaging practices. Zhannat explained that for herself, framing proficiency in relation to lived experiences as a Kazakh

presented a new way of legitimizing literacies. In the construction of interview questions with her qualitative research group as well as her individual interactions with study participants, she began to translate her own developing critical understanding of language use from the multiliteracy autobiography into her qualitative research design in order to tap into her participants' conceptions of their own literacies. By reframing her interview protocol, she also tacitly resisted institutional discourses she felt delegitimized the heritage identity of those identifying as Kazakhs with less fluency and access to quality Kazakh literacy programs.

Reflecting on her daily language use through the multiliteracy autobiography further enabled Zhannat to cultivate critical awareness of language such that she could articulate her rhetorical choices concerning translation in varying contexts and modalities, which she often framed in terms of discourse community. When speaking about marketing through social media for her work at a local library, Zhannat revealed her thought process when posting videos on Instagram. For her, language choices across modes determine who will engage and how, and Zhannat wanted peak engagement with all her posts. Pointing to a Kazakh hashtag associated with older Kazakh *әжелер* (grandmothers), she laughingly said:

In Instagram, when I'm trying to make like a funny video, I'm thinking, "Who will watch this if it's in Kazakh?" Some people can't relate, like people who speak Russian, but they can understand Kazakh even if they can't speak it. They can understand Kazakh, because they see it. Because they say, "Oh, Zhannat is behaving like my grandma. Hahahaha it's funny." So that's how I use discourse community.

Thinking through the affordances of Kazakh and Russian, Zhannat started to conceptualize both nuanced and broad target audiences as she considered which literacies each might possess and in what languages.

From a translingual perspective, Zhannat's articulation of her own translation practices testifies to work she performs in both maintaining and resisting language representations through her writing (Bou Ayash, 2019; Horner, 2020), a kind of labor I conceive as artistic. At the most foundational level of *techne*, Zhannat elaborates on flexible and transferable strategies dependent on embodied knowledge and circumstance. She refines these strategies through engagement with contingent situations, exemplifying her capacities of invention and intervention (Atwill 2006; Edwell, Singer, & Jack, 2018; Pender 2011), for example, when she appeals to collective social knowledge of Kazakh *әжелер* beyond the boundaries of alphabetic print. Further, she mobilizes her strategies of translation to affect particular results, such as gaining Instagram traffic and followers by calculated use of discourse and transition between named languages. Most significantly, Zhannat's recognition and legitimization of diverse literacy identities reflects the potential of *techne* to transform and blur lines marking social categories (Atwill, 2006; Pender, 2011), as she translates discourse about language ideologies from her multiliteracy autobiography to her qualitative interview protocol to resist nationalist and ethnolinguistic constructions of what might constitute legitimate Kazakh language practice.

Distributing Artistic Labor through Multimodal Translation

Zhannat's positioning in relation to local language representations (particularly of Kazakh and RSL) shaped her rhetorical translation practices in later class assignments, such as the collaborative qualitative research project. After completing the WAC course, Zhannat and her group mates presented their project's results at an undergraduate research conference hosted by a nearby private university. This presentation required translation on multiple fronts. As the research had been initially composed for academic audiences in a class designated English-

medium, Zhannat and her group mates needed to consider languaging choices that accounted for the diverse sociolinguistic landscape represented by their East Kazakhstani peers and faculty attending the conference. The presentation also represented a translation across genres (from research paper to conference presentation) and modalities, heavily utilizing data analysis charts and participant quotations/analyses on a PowerPoint as well as embodied multimodal strategies (Gonzales, 2018) such as gestures and targeted eye contact.

While most students at the conference relied upon either Russian or a combination of Russian and English to present their research, Zhannat's group stood out for its strategic and considerable use of Tatar, Kazakh, and RSL. Zhannat specifically translated into RSL all directly quoted material from her interview participants, terminology and phrases describing the RSL speaking community of her town, and her entire closing final argument. These choices certainly drew the attention of her audience members, particularly when Zhannat's use of RSL meant the appearance of silence in the large conference room. She and her group mates knew that many of their audience members would not understand RSL, Tatar, or perhaps even Kazakh, yet she was adamant in her interview that she wanted the attention of everyone in the room. She cited the presence of Russian on every slide of the PowerPoint as a way to ensure understanding, while all presenters were also able to represent their own languages in the delivery of the presentation.

Zhannat recalled standing in front of the screen displaying the information from her project that she had translated from English into Russian for the sake of understanding. Her own body, by contrast, communicated in part by drawing from a diverse range of literacies she sought to legitimize. In the follow-up interview, she argued that this positioning served her own purposes well in multiple ways. Concerning the majority of her peers and faculty in the audience, she recalled:

We got the attention we wanted to get. The goal was accomplished, they were paying attention to us, and they were also looking at the presentation, like "what is it she's translating? What is it she said?" When you don't understand something, you need to understand, right? You try to see the view. You want to know.

In projecting Russian literacies via a non-human agent while communicating RSL through embodied translation strategies (Gonzales, 2018), Zhannat demanded active engagement from her audience members with her research and with the perspectives of her interview participants.

She also felt that she could only authentically represent the project's quoted perspectives of RSL speakers using RSL, welcoming the prospect of making her participants work to understand the key arguments her interviewees were making. As such, all of her study's more quantitative information and summative results appeared toward the end of the conference presentation (as opposed to beginning paragraphs of the Results Section of her qualitative research paper). These choices encouraged audience participation throughout the presentation and suggested intentionality behind translation decisions as a means toward promoting continual engagement with the research being presented beyond random use of RSL and Tatar. Zhannat framed these choices with the following metaphor:

We used our languages as Easter eggs, well, not exactly Easter eggs. But we didn't give it all at the beginning. We didn't just slap people with the facts that we had. We just started showing something different that you don't understand, but to understand that, you have to look at [the graphics on the screen]. Active look at the research and actively engage with it.

As Zhannat explained her group's choice to include their own individual languages, she indicated a conscious decision to orchestrate audience interaction. In doing so, her group

leveraged multiple modalities to separate presenters' heterogeneously languaged deliveries and the research translated for a collective.

Beyond conceptions of a general audience of East Kazakhstani students/faculty, Zhannat's group sought to speak directly to and legitimize the practices of individual communities with whom they identified. In her interview, she spoke about her group's decision to draw from RSL and Tatar literacies specifically to speak to those communities, as they might especially appreciate their research's findings:

Zhannat: We were speaking to people who speak Tatar, or people who have some Tatar heritage. People who have some relatives who are deaf in Kazakhstan. They could also relate and they could be like, "oh, this person kinda knows what I know. It relates to what I know. Or I kinda know what she knows."

Interviewer: Did you think of that before you began your presentation?

Zhannat: Well, I thought like, "ok there will be different types of people. We're gonna like get in there, like in their hearts,"... not like, exactly hearts, but yeah. But now when I said about discourse community, now I'm thinking like, "Yeah, that was about discourse community."

Rather than communicate exclusively to a generally conceived local audience, Zhannat also focused on specific communities with shared literacies: communities she felt Kazakhstan's language policies, and specifically MoE programs, had excluded. In efforts to relate to her multiply-conceived audience, Zhannat sought to make richer affective appeals by connecting to audience members on an experiential level located in her own body. To her, these languaging practices only augmented the legibility of her work and potential for audience/readers' reception of her data. She contrasted these appeals with peers' and even her own past writing that used unnecessarily dense vernacular in either English or Russian, recalling how she told her group members, "if we're trying to make people understand this, we don't need to make it that hard." Instead, she agonized over the clarity of her translation work across literacies, including her signed language and the writing on the PowerPoint. Moreover, her delivery through RSL made concrete the embodiment of these appeals through gesture as a central rather than supplemental form of communication, a decision that further exemplified her group's argument that alternative literacies belonged in Kazakhstani institutions.

I view Zhannat's translation practices in this presentation through the lens of an interventional form of *techne* involved in the production of critique and the assumption of justice. Concerning the former, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990), speaking at the intersections of cultural studies and rhetorical studies, refers to *techne* as the artistic production of "persistent critique" (p. 296), a perspective on "subject formation [that] must bring the idea of collective agency into crisis" (p. 300). Through this lens, knowledge transformation is productive insofar as it upends (rather than balances) bodies of knowledge perceived as discrete and stable. Zhannat's presentation is notable from this perspective for its attention to juxtaposing recognition of individual and collective bodies in a way resistant to broad ethnolinguistic generalizations. This dual purpose represented a significant departure from Zhannat's prior understanding of translation work as politically neutral movement between two discrete languages. Instead, Zhannat does not simply refuse to occlude the rhetorical negotiations inherent in her translation process from the qualitative paper in English to the conference presentation: she also distributes the labor of translation by forcing her peers to grapple with their own conceptions of the

boundaries demarcating specific ethnic and national identities, physical abilities, and language representations in order to comprehend her study's findings.

When Zhannat and her group members translate their research into their respective languages for the sake of identifying more deeply with the Tatar and RSL speaking communities, they further invoke an aspect of *techne* associated with justice. To create a more just world, classical notions of political *techne* included a disposition of *aidōs*, often translated “respect.” *Aidōs* is the aspect of justice which ties consideration for others to the respect reserved for oneself, which is described as a “posture of the body and the heart rather than an idea in the mind” (Atwill, 1998, p. 211). Zhannat and her group members take up this posture through the delivery of their presentation. The separation of their deliveries and the information presented on the PowerPoint slides redistributes labor in such a way that demands respect of linguistic diversity beyond assumptions and connotations of Kazakh language and Kazakh identity as well as of the embodied labor producing such knowledge.

At the same time, this *techne* depends upon the agency of both a body and the technologies projecting on the PowerPoint as also contributing to the reshaping of boundary-making practices. Critical feminist research as early as Haraway (1988) has argued for the treatment of bodies as “objects” that draw agency from their own mapped boundaries, and this view of *techne* understands the dissonance “between bodily self and representation as a productive space for critique” that might lead to the “formation of an ethical stance” (Alexander & Rhodes, 2014, p. 116). Zhannat’s body, read as female and ethnically Kazakh, placed in an institutional space that designated her primarily as a Russian speaker, and positioned in front of—yet importantly separated from—technologies displaying conventional institutional literacies acts to help foment this space of critique: shaping and being shaped by Zhannat’s efforts to transform relationships to institutional spaces and blur ethnic attachments to particular literacies in this particular moment. Just as she says her group will “get in” the hearts of their audience members, her group’s own hearts and bodies remain actively both postured towards *aidōs*, the expectation of mutual respect, and concerned with building alternative relationships.

From here, I want to discuss possibilities for recognizing the artistic labor of students seeking to resist institutional discourses and pose a framework for transfer-as-resistance. I also might hedge against claims of linguistic tourism (Matsuda) and argue for a situated understanding of translation that accounts for techne that writers engage to transform knowledge.

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