A Case Study of Translanguaging in Bilingual Teaching and Learning in Public Universities in Malaysia

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the cross-language learning, referred as translanguaging in bilingual teaching and learning (T&L) at the level of higher learning institutions, through the analysis of case studies conducted at three Public Universities (UA) in Malaysia. This study uses a case study method involving three lecturers in three UAs in Malaysia. Data is derived from audio recordings of three lectures per lecturer, in-class observations, as well as interviews with lecturers and a group of students from each class. All lecture recordings and interviews were transcribed and qualitatively analysed. This study shows that translanguaging occurs in all recorded T&L sessions. Translanguaging becomes the practice for both lecturers and students as it encourages students to be more interactive and responsive and to prepare students to join the broadercientific community on an international level. This study is equally crucial for both parties, since the use of a language other than the medium of instruction should be given space in T&L in public universities which uses English as the medium of instruction.

Keywords: Translanguaging, Bilingual Teaching and Learning (T&L), Malaysian Public Universities (UA).

1. Introduction

The landscape of higher education in Malaysia has undergone several changes in terms of the medium of instruction since the country achieved independence in 1957. Although the English language dominated the education field in the early stages of the post-independence, Malay language began to take place gradually until it is used as the medium of instruction in public universities in 1980 (Puteh, 2013). The year 1983 had charted a new history when all courses (such as Literature, Science, Engineering, Medicine) used Malay as the medium of instruction in higher learning institutions (Puteh, 2006). However, few changes took place in the 90s, as the medium of instruction in Public Universities (UA) and Private Universities (US) shifted again.

In 1993, the Education Act 1996 has allowed slight changes in the UA's medium of instruction as well as some flexibility for the US (Ramli, Sarudin, & Mohamed Redzwan, 2017). This shift became the starting point for English as a medium of instruction in lectures involving international students. As a result, the use of English in the US constantly permitted, which involves more lectures using English as the medium of instruction.

Meanwhile, UA also got afflicted adversely when most of the courses started to conduct in English.

Even until now, the medium of instruction used for courses other than Malay courses and compulsory university courses is in English. This implies that almost all courses in the field such as science, computer, mathematics, accounting, arts and music (just to name a few) use English as the medium of instruction. However, in real, Malay is still widely used in the T&L process, either by lecturers or students (Ramli et al., 2017).

Therefore, this study aims to explore the cross-language learning, referred as translanguaging in bilingual T&L at the level of higher learning institutions, through the analysis of case studies conducted at three Public Universities (UA) in Malaysia. This study focuses on classes with multiracial students from the majority ethnicities primarily Malays, Chinese and Indians. This situation led to the use of more than one language as a medium of instruction in the lectures conducted, although, the policy of medium of instruction sets English as the official medium of instruction for science and mathematics-based courses in almost all UAs in Malaysia (Ramli et al., 2017). The choice of language used in the T&L process depends on the lecturer and the students. However, in most cases, the lecturer has the authority to set the language to use.

The selection and the use of language in lectures in the three selected UAs indicate that both Malay and English are the dominant languages and used interchangeably in the T&L process. The three lecturers provide space for students to use both languages in their T&L activities; nevertheless, the language setting policies in the three UAs studied are slightly different, as will be explained in the next section.
2. Problem Statement

Translanguaging is a relatively young area of research in the context of bilingual studies, particularly in the higher education level in Malaysia. Translanguaging is a new strategy that is often used by lecturers and students to get a meaningful T&L. Apart from Malay course lectures, almost all lectures at the UA level using English as a medium of instruction. In this case, the language used in T&L usually involves more than one language (viz., Malay, English), and other native languages. Often the practice of using a language other than the medium of instruction is seen as a "mistake" in T&L. In the notion of traditional bilingual education, the use of bilingualism is an unencouraged practice (Baker, 2006; Garcia, 2009; Garcia & Li, 2014). Bilingualism is known for its use for various terms such as "code-mixing", "code-switching" and "language borrowing".

However, from the perspective of contemporary bilingual education, this practice is seen as a cross-language practice, and this area has emerged and gained interest among linguistic researchers abroad. The method of using more than one language according to Ramli (2014) is seen as a strategy that should be used in bilingual education, and based on several factors as below:

i. Students' English proficiency level, as well as lecturers.
ii. Types of activities carried out in lectures.
iii. The tendency of language selection by lecturers and students, for several reasons and requirements in T&L.

According to Canagarajah (2001a), translanguaging is a naturally occurring phenomenon among multilanguage students, even though teachers do not allow it. Nevertheless, in most situations, teachers are more likely to give students space to use their language, and even teachers use their language for meaningful learning purposes. The use of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy can provide opportunities for students to maximise their language ability to help comprehend the content.

Therefore, this study was explored to examine the practice of translanguaging in lectures conducted bilingually. Lecturers and students need to be aware that translanguaging usage is a universal practice and is considered an essential strategy in the survival of bilingual T&L worldwide. The perception that the use of bilingualism in T&L as a poor practice needs to be corrected, and translanguaging practices should be positively seen to enable teaching and learning.

Theoretical Framework of Translanguaging in Classroom

Translanguaging is a theoretical lens that offers a different view of bilingualism and multilingualism. It is derived from the term cross-linguaging which emerged as a new concept from certain misconceptions such as code-mixing and code-switching, which has been the focus of research in the field of bilingual/multilingual education. Lately, many international researchers have shown a great interest in analysing translanguaging in the studies related to the area of bilingual education, which provides a new perspective on the need and appropriateness of the use of two or more languages in bilingual classes. As aforementioned in this previous section, the perception to use bilingual and multilingual in T&L as a poor practice needs to be rethought in a positive approach for meaningful T&L process.

The term translanguaging is derived from the Welsh language trowsiethu/and inscribed by Cen Williams (1996, 1996 in Garcia & Wei, 2013). Initially, the term was used to refer to pedagogy practices that require students to change languages for understanding and producing the language used in learning, for example, students may be asked to read in English and write in Welsh, and vice versa (Baker, 2011). Since then, translanguaging term has been developed by many scholars such as Canagarajah (2011b), Creese and Blackledge (2010) and Garcia (2009) to refer to the practice of complex language usage among multilingual individuals and communities.

The translanguaging term began to emerge in the field of bilingual education and explored in-depth in this past decade. Bilingual education scholars refer to translanguaging as ‘various discourse practices of bilingual speakers when speaking to understand their bilingual world’ (Garcia, 2009, p. 45). Translanguaging is seen as a transition step from the speech symptoms such as ‘code-mixing’, ‘code-switching’ and ‘code-borrowing’, which is a turning point in the paradigm in the concept of ‘language’ itself. If all this time ‘language’ is known as a distinctive and identifiable system, this perspective has changed the idea of ‘language’ which is seen as a continuous process and exists as a languaging – which is the cognitive process to produce meaningful and understandable output in language learning (Swain, 1985). The ongoing languaging process will shape and be
formed by human beings as they interact in various contexts such as social, cultural, and political. What is emphasised is the process, no longer focusing on the code used (Mazak & Herbas-Donoso, 2015).

There are several assumptions related to translanguaging as a new term for multilingual study. Among them, language is part of the collections of multilingual speakers used for their communicative purposes, and language is not something separate or separated but forms a system that integrates them (Canagarajah, 2011B, p. 1). Canagarajah further explains that multilingual competence emerges as a result of the speaker's internal training when multiple languages are used for communication purposes; even their language proficiency is not a different competency for each language. Still, it is a wide range of efficiency that works in a variety of other languages mastered by the speakers. Thus, multilingual speakers' skills are focused on building a collection of languages they master, such as improving their ability to use different languages according to other functions - compared to the actual mastery of each language they master (Canagarajah, 2011b). This describes why multilingual speakers use all the language resources they have for various purposes and communication functions in their lives. This situation no longer sees the mastery of speakers in a particular language, but their ability to use a language that is appropriate to the linguistic context that requires them to use more than one language they master.

Baker, the scholar responsible for translating the Welsh word translanguaging, explains that cross-language as “the process of making meaning, shaping experience, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages” (2011, p. 288). Lewis, Jones and Baker (2012, p. 1) explain that both languages are used dynamically and functionally to organise and assist mental processes in the process of comprehension, speech, literacy, and even learning. Cross-language emphasises effective communication, function compared to form, cognitive activity, and language production. According to Baker (2001), there are four potential translanguaging benefits in education, i.e.:

i. Translanguaging can promote a better and more in-depth understanding of a particular aspect.
ii. Translanguaging can help the development of a language that remains weaker.
iii. Translanguaging facilitates links and collaboration for home schooling.
iv. Cross-language can help the integration between fluent speakers and new speakers of a language.

The cognitive processes involved in translanguaging are more relevant for maintaining and developing bilingualism, not just for the early stages of the bilingual continuum. Baker explained that to read and discuss a topic in one language, and then write it in another, requires it to be processed and "digested" (2011, p. 289). Translanguaging not only facilitates a deeper understanding of the content but also helps to build a weaker language concerning more dominant languages.

Also, bilingual students develop their language knowledge and content simultaneously because the concepts they acquired in one language are transferred to another language, as suggested by Cummin (2000) regarding interdependence. As a result, students can create and apply the knowledge learned when they solve problems, produce new experiments, and when they are required to explain their thoughts. According to García and Kleifgen (2010), cross-language frameworks include:

i. refer to texts that use one language and discuss it using another language;
ii. refers to different texts that use different language;
iii. discuss in one language but check comprehension in another language;
iv. read in one language and write in another, discuss in one language and write in another;
v. combining student language resources;
vi. use both languages flexibly, or code exchange.

As a research field, translanguaging is relatively a new area of discovery, but the related theme to this study like code-switching, bilingualism and various languages has been extensively studied. Nevertheless, translanguaging research in the context of higher learning institutions is still not yet much done. Adamson and Fujimoto-Adamson (2012) are one of the early scholars who have explored the preliminary studies in this field. Their study examines the phenomenon of translanguaging at the self-access language centre located at a university in Japan. The results of the study found that the majority of students and mentors at the centre see translanguaging as a way to create a 'learning space' that allows students to learn in a more comfortable and safer environment, especially for less confidence and motivation students.

Besides, the study of Andersson, Kagwesage, and Rusanganwa (2013) on the language used in group assignments at a university in Rwanda shows that translanguaging has excellent potential to improve learning. Meanwhile, Mazak and Herbas-dono (2014; 2015) study focused on the practice of multilingualism in science
courses at the University of Puerto Rico and found that translanguaging approach is seen as a strategic and dynamic practice as well as help to understand the content.

3. Research Objective

In general, this study is conducted to examine the translanguaging phenomenon among lecturers and students who use bilingual in T&L in Malaysian UAs. The objectives to be achieved are:
1. Identify translanguaging phenomena among lecturers and students in T&L in the lecture room.
2. Analyse the function of cross-language in T&L in Malaysian UAs.

4. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative method, involving data in the form of lecture recordings and semi-structured interviews with lecturers and a group of students from three different UAs in Malaysia. All three lecturers involved are from the field of information science. A total of three lectures from those lecturers’ classes were audio-recorded to analyse their language usage aspect.

All lecturers, and a group of three to five students from the recorded lecture group, were interviewed to obtain their perception and views on the usage of the language by lecturers and students in lectures. This interview is also to explore the usage of the medium of instruction used for science and technology courses at UA. The following are the profiles of the lecturers and the profiles of the students interviewed in this study (see Table 1 and Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Lecturers’ profile</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Profile</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest qualification</td>
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<td>Expertise</td>
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<td>Period of service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students’ Degree level</td>
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<td>Language used</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The three lecturers who are respondents of this study are from the science field and graduated from local and international universities in all levels of their studies. The English proficiency of all three lecturers is reasonable, based on the assessment of their English-speaking ability. Hence, they have no problem to conduct lectures thoroughly in English. They are experienced in to handle lectures in English entirely for master level lectures, or lectures involving international students because the condition for lectures involving international students is that lecturers must use English fully during T&L, whilst at the master’s level, students can use English completely for the T&L process.

<table>
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<th>Table 2. Students’ profile</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Profile</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Course</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year of program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language used:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. lecture &amp; discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Test or written exam</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Students who are involved in this study are the students from two or three programs at the UA. The majority of students from UA1 and UA2 are Malays, while students in UA3 from all races, (viz., Malay, Chinese and Indian). For lectures at UA1, both English and Malay are used in T&L activities and examination.
However, the situation somewhat different from UA2 and UA3; the use of bilingual is only allowed in lecture activities and in-class discussions. For the presentation and written examination, students are required to use English fully.

5. Findings & Discussion

Discussions of this study’s findings are made based on two purposes presented at the beginning of this paper, which is to identify translanguaging phenomenon among lecturers and students, as well as analyse translanguaging functions that occur in Malaysian UAs’ T&L.

Identification & Translanguaging Phenomenon among Lecturers and Students in Lecture Room’s T&L

A total of three audio recordings were made from lecturer A’s lecture. Two traditional lectures delivered by the lecturer A, while one lecture involved students’ presentation. Lecture 1 is a students’ presentation for the tasks that have been given earlier on ‘Cloud Computing’. Lecture 2 and 3 are a traditional lecture on the topic ‘Cloud Computing’ and ‘Strategic Planning for IS/IT’ respectively.

In all three lectures, the translanguaging occurs in the practice of pedagogical lecturers in several ways. The most dominant way is to use a particular term of the field in English while discussing the contents of the subject in Malay. This means that discussions are made mainly in Malay, but the fields’ special terms are maintained in the English.

Example 1

Student: Storage tu dia simpan dekat public cloud, iSolution tudiapakai private cloud. Daripada yang apa yang web space tu, dia macam bagiservice untuk managemobile apps, so dia akan manage apa yang cloud niapasemua cloudtubuat, finishing apasemualah.


(RK1UA1)

Description: Italic: English word Normal: Malay word
In Example 1, the term ‘cloud’ has remained in English, although most of the descriptions are made in Malay or mixed with both languages. Besides that, the translanguaging also occurs when the lecturer reads a text in English but discussed in Malay. From the three lectures of Lecturer A recorded, it is found that she used English thoroughly for all forms of written material such as notes displayed on the screen in the lecture room, as well as notes are given in the website (portal). However, the discussions on the notes were made by using both languages Malay and English. Therefore, the use of bilingualism in such situations is regarded as significant in translanguaging context.

Example 2

Lecturer A: … So, IT/IS Strategic Planning (lecturer reading the notes on the screen). Content dia apa yang akankitabcangialah some good practices in planning. The practices in planning nidatang daripada best practices amalansebenarlahdalammembuatperancangan. So, it is not the standard text bookatau pun policyatu pun fixed way but it is practices daripadapengalaman industri.

(RK3UA1)

1 Code used for audio recording – Recorded Lecture 1 at UA1 (RK1UA1)
The excerpt in Example 2 is taken from Lecture 3 when lecturer A begins to discuss notes displayed on the screen. All notes and written materials are provided in English. However, she started to explain ‘good practices’ and ‘best practices’ as a real practice or practice based on her industrial experience. A situation like this much happens in her lectures when she gives a lot of information in Malay or a mixture of both English and Malay.

The lecturer A also refers to diagrams and tables in English but explains in Malay as the science and computing fields depend heavily on various modalities, visual forms such as figures, charts, and tables, often used in notes and teaching materials in lectures. It was found that lecturer A used Malay a lot to explain the diagrams and tables provided in her notes.

Translanguaging Phenomenon at UA2

Like lecturer A, lecturer B at UA2 also used both languages in her lectures on the topic ‘Interactive System Information and Consultancy’. A total of two lectures were audio-recorded on the topic ‘Hardware’ and ‘Interpersonal Communication’. Lecturer B did a lot of code-mixing in her lectures, using both Malay and English interdependently from the beginning to the end of the lecture. However, she also uses Malay a lot to decipher and explain PowerPoint notes written in English. Her lecture 1 related to the topic of ‘Hardware’ and the explanation made by referring computer hardware diagram from the notes given to students.

Example 3

Lecturer B  

Next, okay. This is the hardware component connection, meaning that kalutadikitalihatapakhdialamhardware, inipulakadalahkitalihatbagaimanacomponeentrebutakanbertindak. So, yang steppertamadia - fast instruction, second - decode instruction, third - execute instruction, four - store result. So apabendani?

(RK1UA2)

Translanguaging Phenomenon at UA3

The lecturer C is the only male lecturer of this study. Three lectures were audio-recorded. Lecture 1 related to the title of ‘Interface’, lecture 2 on the topic of ‘Graphical User Interface’, and lecture 3 titled ‘File Management’. Of all lecturers involved in this study, Lecturer C used English most widely in his lectures. In all three lectures he delivered, he used English entirely for the first 20 to 30 minutes almost, and usually will only use Malay if there is a student who responds or asks questions in Malay. In this aspect, his language usage pattern is quite different from the language usage pattern of lecturer A and B. However, Malay is widely used to provide further explanation to the notes prepared in English.

Example 4

Lecturer C  

Yes. Master component yang mengandungibanyakkomponen-komponenkecil di bawah dia. Contohdalamskrintadi, adasatukomponen yang dipanggil layout. Dalam layout then we have buttons, text boxes. So siapa yang jadi root dia? The first layout yang mengandungisemuatu. So siapa yang perlukitaattachpadascene?

(RK1UA3)
In example 4, lecturers C explains the term ‘component’ and ‘layout’ in more detail by using Malay. In this context, special terms of the field are also maintained in the English.

**Example**

Lecturer C  
*Once we have root, then we need to attach the root to? To scene. Very good. Sebelum kita attach scene, kita need to create a copy. Cara diamacambiasalah, scene, scene, apasajamamatapiuntukmahuse the same name. Scene equal to new...*

Student  
*Scene.*

Lecturer C  
*Scene. Apamaknani?*

Student  
*Parameter*

Lecturer C  
*Parameter, dalamkelas scene ada constructor yang akanmenerimaparameter-parameter.*

(RK2UA3)

**Description:** *Italic:* English word  
*Normal:* Malay word

Example 5 is an excerpt indicates that Lecturer C explains the diagram from the notes displayed on the screen. The quote is a small part of the lecturer's question and answers (Q&A) with the students related to the diagram shown on the screen. He describes the diagram using both English and Malay while pointing towards the areas discussed in the chart with the pointer.

**Analysis of Translanguaging Phenomenon in UAs’ T&L**

The findings of the study indicated that translanguaging occurs in all T&L sessions in the three studied UAs. This can be noted in the recording of their lectures, as well as acknowledged by themselves in interviews with them. The official medium of instruction for all lectures recorded in English; however, the study also examined that Malay is also widely used. According to Lecturer A, she basically uses English. The use of full-fledged English only occurs in masters’ degree level or bachelor’s degree level lectures involving international students. If the class consists of local students, a mixture of English and Malay will be used. Lecture recordings also showed that the use of mixed languages dominates language usage in her lectures. According to Lecturer A, the use of mixed language aims to get more students’ involvement in the T&L process. This is in line with the educational needs of the 21st century, i.e. lecturers, are encouraged to use more interactive and student-centred methods, such as ‘blended learning’. The freedom of language usage among students is seen as a booster for them to be more active and responsive in conversations and discussions conducted during T&L. Malay is seen as a ‘capital’ for students to engage in discussions made in lectures actively.

For Lecturer B, the languages used in the lectures are mostly mixed languages. All written notes, slide shows, assignments, examinations and student presentations are made in English, whereas Malay is widely used to describe certain aspects in more depth. She once tried to use full English in bachelor’s degree lectures, but students became passive and less responsive. Besides, student examination results are also seen to be declining, an indicator of the lack of students' understanding of the lectures conducted. Students become more responsive, and the atmosphere of the lecture gets more interesting when both languages are used. Students feel more confident to give answers and opinions in Malay than English.

Lecturer C regarded that the full use of English in lectures will create an atmosphere of silence among students. His usual practise is to start lectures and discuss notes on slides in English thoroughly. He uses Malay if he feels that the explanation given can be made better by using Malay than English. Because the technical field uses many terms in English, the application of those terms in students’ understanding needs to be followed and mixed with Malay. Malay is often used when making further descriptions of the notes provided in the slides, or when students begin to ask questions in Malay. When the students started asking questions in Malay, he took note that the students somewhat left out with the explanation given by the lecturers in the English. According to him, mixed languages are more commonly used during discussions or sessions in the computer lab, to create a more relaxed atmosphere. Students seem to be more comfortable responding to the activities carried out if they can use both languages.

**Students’ Language Usage in T&L**
A total of five students from each lecture were recorded, interviewed to get their practices and perception towards the medium of instruction in T&L. The respondents consist of various races, genders, courses, and years of study.

The group of students from UA1 consist of students specialising in the same field, and also the same year of study. All respondents from UA1 are female students. They used both languages in lectures, but Malay is more dominant. According to them, using Malay makes it easier for them to understand the contents discussed in the lecture because Malay is a common language used in daily life. From their viewpoint, their lecturer used a balanced Malay and English, but students used Malay more frequently. They admitted that it is more comfortable to use Malay in T&L, while English is widely used on expressing terms.

Students from UA2 consist of male and female students from different years of study, mainly year two and three. All of them specialising in the same field. This group of students also used Malay and English in a mixed manner, but Malay is more widely used. All of them agreed that their understanding is better when the description for a topic is made in Malay.

The group of students from UA3 were year two students, from different specialisations because the Programming Course is a minor course. In general, these students also used mixed language in their lectures. A common practice in such lectures is the lecturer begins the T&L with English, which usually refers to written materials such as slides provided in English. Malay is widely used during discussion and question and answer sessions. Students acknowledged that they are more comfortable and feel effortless when they are allowed to use Malay in T&L. Only specific terms from the fields are retained in BI.

6. Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that translanguaging occurs in all T&L sessions in the three studied UAs. Based on the recordings, observations, and interviews made with the lecturers and students, the identified translanguaging function is to obtain more students’ involvement in the T&L process. Based on the observations made in the lectures through the recorded data, translanguaging is capable of encouraging students to be more interactive and responsive, especially in conversations and discussions conducted.

Also, translanguaging opens a larger space for students to understand the aspects discussed as the use of English is often limited to formal situations in education. The acceptance of bilingualism helps students to be more liberal in providing their views and questions, which ultimately guides them to more meaningful learning. The strategy of maintaining specific field terms in English is done to familiarise and prepare students to join the more extensive science and technology community, particularly in the context of obtaining information from abroad.

In conclusion, the translanguaging is a common phenomenon practised by the lecturers studied in this research, involving courses that use English as the medium of instruction at Malaysian UA. Unnoticeably, this phenomenon becomes an essential strategy for both lecturers and students to ensure lectures can be delivered effectively, and learning can take place meaningfully. Translanguaging phenomena should be regarded encouragingly, as well as practised openly so that lecturers and students can use all available resources within themselves and also around them to achieve a successful T&L.

7. Appreciation/Acknowledgement

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