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Transforming life: Gene transformation

Kartik Gupta, Divyansh Singh, Ashmit Manchanda, Dr Meena Chaudhary, Dr Gunjan Chandwani
Department of Computer Science and Technology Manav Rachna University Faridabad, India

Abstract
Gene Transformation is the process of transferring new genes it may be DNA or RNA into a human's body cell to change or modify its genetic character. It was introduced in the early 1990s. Earlier it was introduced for the treatment of inherited diseases but due to the advancement in the technology it has gained many more uses. In today's era, this is used in many areas including research, medicine and agriculture. The goal of genetic transformation is to alter the properties of living organisms by changing its genetic nature. This enables improvement by introducing new traits or abilities by improving growth. The new genes can be present during the whole life of the organism. As it has many advantages but also has the potential to disrupt the whole ecosystem by reducing biodiversity.

Keywords: Gene, DNA, RNA, gene transformation, inherited, genetic, cell, organisms, ecosystem, biodiversity

Introduction

Gene transformation is the process of inserting specific genes into an organism's genome which leads to expression of new characteristics or traits. The interest in gene transformation was first seen in the mid-1960s.At that period, the idea and need for gene transformation by introducing external DNA had arisen [1]. This idea converted into reality in 1990 by using external methods, for the treatment of adenosine deaminase (ADA) deficiency [2]. The results were outstanding.

The persons on whom which the trial was done were recovered fully after this experiment. Between 1989 and 1994, around 100 trials and ideas were approved for this treatment [3]. The experiment yielded positive results while ensuring patient safety. Optimizing various physical parameters is essential for effective gene transfer to a specific cell or tissue type [4]. The first step to begin gene transformation is to prepare or make the DNA that will be given to the target cell. The gene is then inserted and prepared for transferring it into the host. Common vectors used in gene transformation include plasmids (circular DNA molecules), viruses (for viral vector delivery), or even artificial chromosomes. These vectors are engineered to carry the gene of interest and sometimes selection markers to identify successful transformations. Extrachromosomal expression is typically transient, as the DNA gradually dilutes with each cell division [5].

Methods of Gene Transformation

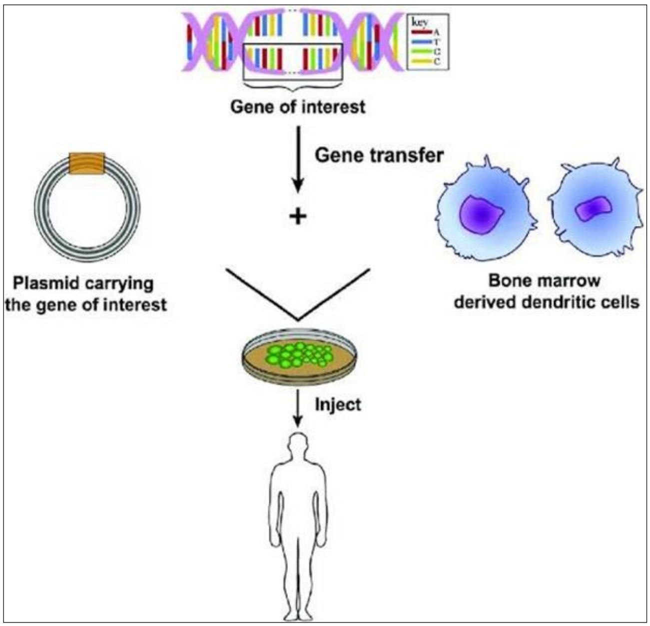
1. **Transformation in Bacteria:** Certain species of bacteria can become competent to take up high molecular weight DNA from the surrounding medium [6]. It is the way of inserting some foreign DNA in a bacterial cell which causes some changes in the genes. It is very impactful in the fields of genetic research, and medicines. It helps scientists in the modifications of the genetic makeup of bacterial cells as well as giving them some new abilities or characteristics, like producing some specific proteins, resisting antibiotics, and metabolizing new substances.

- **Chemical Transformation**: It is mainly one of the parameters used by the scientists to help bacterial cells in taking new DNA with the help of some special chemicals. It is very often performed in laboratories for the modifications of bacteria mainly for research purposes. The ability to introduce individual molecules of plasmid DNA into cells by transformation has been of central importance to the recent rapid advancement of plasmid biology and to the development of DNA cloning methods [7]. Molecular genetic manipulation of bacteria requires the development of plasmid-mediated transformation systems that include chemical transformation, electro-transformation, biolistic transformation, and sonic transformation, leading to the introduction of exogenous plasmid DNA into bacterial cells [8].

- **Electroporation**: It is a way in which foreign DNA is introduced in bacterial cells using electricity. It leads to the opening of the pores of the bacterial cell membranes and leads to the uptaking of foreign DNA. The technique is fast, simple, reproducible, frequently gives very high transformation frequency and appears to be applicable to a wide range of bacterial types previously thought untransformable, the technique can also offer advantages for transformable bacteria such as Escherichia coli [9].

- **Natural Transformation**: Natural genetic transformation is the active uptake of free DNA by bacterial cells and the heritable incorporation of its genetic information. Since the famous discovery of transformation in Streptococcus pneumoniae by Griffith in 1928 and the demonstration of DNA as the transforming principle by Avery and coworkers in 1944, cellular processes involved in transformation have been studied extensively by in vitro experimentation with a few transformable species [10].

Authors	Title	Area of work	Advantages
Wolff JA, Lederberg J	An early history of gene transfer and therapy	Early development of genetic transformation	correction ,long-term effects on organisms
W French Anderson, R Michael Blaese, Kenneth Culver	The ADA human gene therapy clinical protocol	Clinical gene therapy, medical genetics	Genetic correction, improved immune, future therapy introduced
W F Anderson	End-of-the-year potpourri-1995. Hum Gene Ther 1995; 6: 1505–1506.	Gene therapy advancement, biomedical study	Rapid advancement, encouraging clinical results
Sanford, J.C., Smith, ED. and Russell, J.A.	Optimizing the biolistic process for different biological applications.	Gene delivery techniques, genetic engineering	Direct DNA control, precision control
Notani, N.K., Joshi, V.P. & Kanade, R.P.	Genetic transformation in bacteria.	mechanisms and methodologies of genetic transformation in bacteria.	Enables gene manipulation in bacteria efficiently.
Fraley, R. T., Rogers, S. G., Horsch, R. B., & Gelvin, S. B.	Genetic transformation in higher plants.	Plant genetic engineering.	Stable gene transfer in plants.
Modric, T., & Mergia, A.	The Use of Viral Vectors in Introducing Genes into Agricultural Animal Species.	Animal biotechnology and genetic engineering.	Enables efficient gene delivery in animals.
BABALE, Yakubu Kume; ATOI, Ewere Nelson.	Ethical Concerns and Risk Perceptions Associated with the	Focus on ethical concerns, risk perceptions, and public attitudes toward the	Highlights societal views on genetic engineering.



2. **Transformation in Plants:** Successful transformation of plant cells has been obtained utilizing vectors and DNA delivery methods derived from the plant pathogen, Agrobacterium tumefaciens [11]. It is the process of introducing new genes into plant cells to provide them with some useful traits, like disease resistance, weather tolerance, and faster growth which can be more productive as well as resilient. Plant transformation technology has become a versatile platform for cultivar improvement as well as for studying gene function in plants, this success represents the culmination of many years of effort in tissue culture improvement, in transformation techniques and in genetic engineering [12].

- **Agrobacterium-Mediated Transformation:** A method that exploits the natural ability of Agrobacterium tumefaciens to transfer DNA into plant cells. Agrobacterium tumefaciens is a soil phytopathogen that naturally infects plant wound sites and causes crown gall disease via delivery of transferred (T)-DNA from bacterial cells into host plant cells through a bacterial type IV secretion system (T4SS) [13].

- **Gene Gun (Biolistics):** Biolistics or gene gun method or particle bombardment is another method of introducing foreign DNA into plant cells. It is mainly used where transformation is not possible using Agrobacterium-mediated methods. High velocity microprojectiles are used to carry DNA or other substances past cell walls and membranes because DNA is being ‘shot’ into cells, it represents a type of biological ballistics, hence the term “biolistics” [14]. It mainly uses high-pressured gases to shoot DNA-coated microscopic gold particles inside plant tissues. Millions of DNA-coated metal particles are shot at target cells or tissues using a biolistic device or gene gun [15].

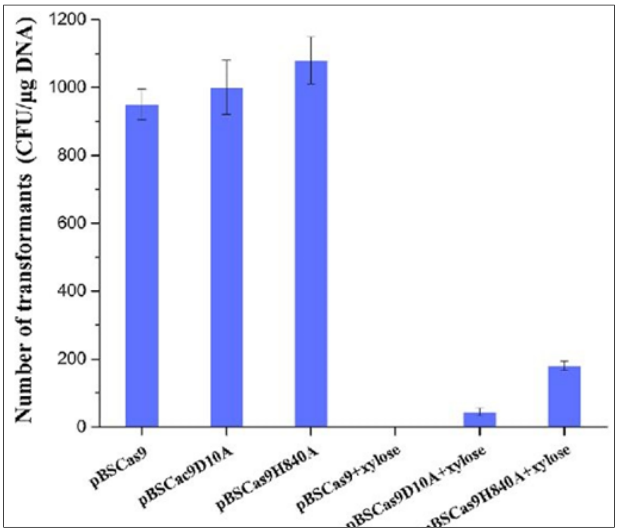
- **CRISPR/Cas9:** CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) is a precise gene editing tool that focuses only on limited modifications in plant genes. It is mainly used for crop improvement, like disease resistance, weather tolerance, yield improvement, nutritional enhancement, herbicide resistance, and hybrid seed production. Transgenic plants are usually developed by in vitro regeneration from single transformed cells, which requires using different in vitro culture-based methods [16]. CRISPR was first discovered as an adaptive immune system in bacteria and archaea, and then engineered to generate targeted DNA breaks in living cells and organisms [17].

3. **Transformation in Animals:** Gene transformation in animals comprises introduction of foreign DNA inside animal cells for the modifications of their genetic structure. It is mainly used for biomedical research, agriculture, transgenic livestock, gene therapy in humans, and xenotransplantation. The introduction of genes into animal cells through the use of purified DNA has potential applications ranging from gene therapy to cancer research [18].

- **Viral Vectors:** The use of viral vectors is a method for introducing foreign genes into various animal species. Vectors based on retro-, adeno-, flavi-, and parvoviruses have been used for research in animal species of agricultural importance, such as chickens, quail, swine, cows, goats, sheep, fish, crustaceans, and mollusks [19]. Mainly uses engineered viruses like retrovirus, lentivirus, adenovirus to carry and introduce foreign genes into the host genes. Viral vector is the most effective means of gene transfer to modify specific cell type or tissue and can be manipulated to express therapeutic genes [20].

- **Microinjection:** Directly injecting foreign DNA into the nucleus of animal cells. Direct microinjection of DNA by glass micropipettes was used to introduced the Herpes simplex virus thymidine kinase gene into cultured mammalian cells, when DNA was delivered directly into the nuclei of LMTK−, a mouse cell line deficient in thymidine kinase activity, 50–100% of the cells expressed TK enzymatic activity [21]. This method is mainly used for generating transgenic animals in research and biotechnology. It enables precise genetic introductions but with some limitations like very low survival rate.

- **Liposome-Mediated:** Liposome-mediated gene transfer has become an alternative method for establishing a gene targeting framework, and the production of mutant animals may be feasible even in laboratories without specialized equipment [22]. Lipid-based delivery systems are used to insert foreign DNA into cells.



Applications of Gene Transformation

1. Agriculture

- **Pest and Disease Resistance:** Introduction of new genes in a plant's cell to boost up its ability to fight with pests and diseases. The insertion of the Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt) gene into crops like cotton, corn, and potatoes allows these plants to produce a protein toxic to specific pests, such as the European corn borer. This reduces the need for chemical pesticides, lowering production costs and environmental impact.

- **Drought tolerance:** Due to global warming the temperature is getting higher day by day and in many areas, drought is more likely to occur. In these situations, there are high chances of crop damage which will result in a huge loss.

- **Nutritional value:** The nutritional value of the crop can be increased highly by this process. A notable example is Golden Rice, which has been genetically modified to produce higher levels of beta-carotene (a precursor of Vitamin A) to combat vitamin A deficiency in developing countries. Other GM crops have been developed to enhance the levels of essential amino acids, vitamins, or micronutrients.

2. Medicine

- **Gene Therapy:** Transformation techniques used to introduce therapeutic genes into human cells to treat genetic disorders or cancers. Gene therapy approaches have been developed for cancer, where the aim is to alter the genetic makeup of cancer cells to either kill them directly or make them more sensitive to chemotherapy and radiation. For example, genetic modifications may be made to tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes (TILs), enhancing their ability to remove cancer cells.

- **Vaccine Development:** The medicine used in vaccines are developed using this technique to build up immunity and fight against life killing diseases. This helps in saving lots of lives. The bacteria and virus are built artificially and then used in vaccination which makes it more effective and safer.

- **Stem Cell Engineering:** Stem cell engineering is a field of research that combines engineering with stem cells to develop new treatments and products. It involves genetic modification of stem cells. Genetic modifications of stem cells create more effective treatments for regenerative medicine.

3. Research

Gene transformation is widely used in research to understand gene function, create model organisms for disease study, and produce proteins for industrial use. Recombinant DNA technology has enabled the production of pharmaceuticals like insulin and growth factors in bacteria which helps in maximising production and makes the product enhanced and more effective.

4. Biological Methods

While using the gene for stable transformation it is necessary to maximize DNA delivery and reduce cell damage. One way of achieving this is by maximising the osmotic pressure. This approach was first utilized with yeast and was demonstrated to increase transformation rates in plants [23]. Gene transformation has totally changed a wide range of fields, whether it is agriculture, medicine, research or environmental science. Its applications have led to large improvements in crop yields, disease resistance, and nutritional content. In medicine, gene therapy and recombinant protein production have opened up new treatments for genetic disorders, cancers, and infections. Furthermore, gene transformation continues to drive scientific discoveries and innovations that will shape the future of biotechnology.

Challenges in Gene Transformation

Gene transformation also faces several challenges that impact its consistency and effectiveness. Some of the major issues are low transformation effectiveness, where only a few percent of cells successfully incorporate the introduced DNA. In genome editing methods like CRISPR-Cas9, off-target effects may cause unintended mutations. Despite the rapid progress in basic research and clinical tests, some underlying problems present continuous, significant challenges, such as editing efficiency, relative difficulty in delivery, off-target effects, immunogenicity, etc [24].

1. **Efficiency and Delivery:** One of the biggest challenges in gene transformation is to make sure the foreign gene enters the cells properly and works as expected. The issues of vector immunogenicity, off-target mutations, and gene delivery to target cells persist despite tremendous progress, the successful implementation of targeted gene therapy is further hindered by hereditary illness complexity and genetic background diversity [25]. Achieving high-efficiency gene transfer is often challenging, especially in eukaryotic organisms, where cellular barriers are more complex. Effective delivery systems that ensure stable incorporation and expression of foreign genes need further development.

2. **Ethical and Safety Concerns:** Ethical issues arise from the potential creation of genetically modified humans and animals, especially in areas like gene therapy and transgenics. Therefore, this study examines the ethical concerns and risk perceptions associated with the application of genetic engineering with a view to ascertain the dangers and usefulness of this biotechnological advancement to the wellbeing of humanity [26]. Environmental concerns surrounding genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and potential unintended consequences.

3. **Stability of Transformed Traits:** Ensuring that transformed traits are stably inherited through generations can be a significant challenge. The stability of silencing implies the involvement of trans-acting components, although none of them have been identified so far [27]. Epigenetic silencing is a natural phenomenon in which the expression of genes is regulated through modifications of DNA, RNA, or histone proteins, it is a mechanism for defending host genomes against the effects of transposable elements and viral infection, and acts as a modulator of expression of duplicated gene family members and as a silencer of transgenes [28]. Epigenetic effects or silencing of inserted genes can interfere with gene expression.

Future Directions

- The future of genetic transformation hides immense potential across diverse fields, going forward by advancements in biotech, genetic engineering etc. Some key areas of interests are:

- **CRISPR/Cas9:** The development of better gene editing tools such as CRISPR/Cas9 for safer, efficient and effective transformation will help continue refine the modifications with minimum anomalies. Future variants like base and prime editing are expected to enhance accuracy and broaden the applications of gene transformation.

- **Gene Therapy and Regenerative Medicine:** Ongoing research into gene therapy will expand its applications in treating a wider range of genetic disorders, cancers, and degenerative diseases. New delivery systems and improvement to vectors will enhance the accuracy, efficiency and safety of therapeutic gene transfer.

- **Agricultural Innovations:** The development of genetically modified crops with enhanced resistance to climate change, drought, and pests will contribute to global food security. Additionally, modified plants with improved nutritional profiles and reduced environmental impact will become increasingly important in the future.

- **Transgenic Animal Models and Biomedical Research:** The use of transgenic animals for modeling human diseases and testing potential treatments will continue to help humanity in the future with better cures. Innovations in gene transformation will facilitate the creation of more accurate, efficient and effective models for studying complex genetic disorders and potentially treating them for the better.

- **Environmental Applications and Bioremediation:** Genetically modified microorganisms and plants have and will play a crucial role in environmental conservation, including improving air quality, balancing the carbon cycle, improving soil quality and fixing the general environment.

- **Ethical and Regulatory Advancements:** As gene transformation technology progresses, ethical considerations and regulatory frameworks will evolve to address concerns related to human gene editing, biodiversity, and unintended ecological problems. Balancing scientific progress with societal values will be vital for the responsible use of gene transformation technologies in the future.

Conclusion

Gene transformation or genetic transformation has emerged as a transformative technology, revolutionizing fields such as agriculture, medicine, and research. By enabling accurate genetic modifications, it has improved crops in general by increasing their resistance to the environment and their yield, facilitated gene therapy for genetic disorders, and advanced biomedical research through different genetic models. Despite these remarkable achievements, challenges such as low transformation efficiency, ethical concerns, and stability of transformed traits etc, continue to pose obstacles.

However, the advent of next-generation gene-editing technologies like CRISPR, advancements in synthetic biology, and the development of innovative delivery systems offer promising solutions to these challenges. As research progresses, gene transformation will continue to reshape the landscape of biotechnology and genetic engineering, paving the way for groundbreaking discoveries and applications.

Moving forward, a balanced approach that considers scientific progress, ethical concerns, and ecological impacts will ensure that gene transformation technologies are harnessed responsibly to benefit society and the environment.

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