

A song of identity: Yoik as example of the importance of symbolic cultural expression in intercultural communication/health care

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Abstract

Yoik is the old Sami form of music/singing produced according to old conventions and used in various communication contexts. A yoik referring to a particular person, a so-called person-yoik, constitutes a musical expression of that person and may be a more powerful symbol of identity and connectedness than a person's name and may awaken memories otherwise forgotten in patients with dementia. This paper is based on a qualitative interview study on good dementia care among the Sami, the indigenous people of the northernmost part of Europe. The primary focus is on aspects of yoik related to identity and mental health in general and patients with dementia in particular. Yoik here serves as an example of the significance of culture-specific symbols and ways of expression and the importance of being open to symbols and representations foreign to us for us to become successful intercultural communicators.

Key words: yoik, the Sami, traditional music, intercultural communication, dementia, mental health care

Introduction

Music is one of humankind's most universal and important ways of expression and markers of identity, both socially and culturally (Fock 1997). Furthermore, music and the cultural symbols within it is a powerful medium of communication, relationship and understanding as music communicates feelings and creates pictures in the listeners' minds independent of words. According to Livingstone and Thompson (2010) this is so because music biologically exhibits a close relationship to language and is connected to social functions and human feelings. Music is communicated through a combination of universal and culture specific cues (Fock 1997). The universal cues make humans understand at least some of the symbolic expressions even in traditional music foreign to them, for instance in *yoik*, the traditional music/singing of the Sami. Music is therefore particularly suitable to help people connect interculturally.

The background for this paper is the Sami part of a study on intercultural aspects of dementia care where yoik was discussed by some of the interviewees. These data will serve as examples of the importance for health care personnel and others to be open to foreign cultural expressions and to the role they may play to the person/patient and to successful intercultural communication. The focus in this paper is primarily on aspects of yoik related to identity and mental health in general and patients with dementia in particular.

The Sami and the yoik

The Sami is the indigenous people of northern Scandinavia and north-western Russia. According to estimates, there are currently some 60 000 Sami, approximately 40 000 of whom are living in Norway. Only about one third speak a Sami language (approx. 15 000 in Norway, 3 000 in Sweden,

2 000 in Finland, and 500 in Russia) (ung.no 2010). Their culture[1] has long roots and one believes that yoik has existed since the Stone Age (Wikipedia 2010). Many Norwegian Sami today do not live in typical Sami communities. Oslo, the capital city, has for instance a considerable Sami population (Bor det ... 2010).

Even if a Sami person have lived a 'Norwegian' life in the city and had Norwegian as primary language in adult life, he or she may practice yoiking in private. If dementia sets in in later life, short time memory deteriorates and with it the ability to understand and speak languages other than one's mother tongue. Even one's mother tongue deteriorates with severe dementia. A Sami individual who previously spoke Norwegian very fluently may therefore loose his or her knowledge of that language and revert to his or her native Sami language and ways of thought. If the person is a yoiker, yoik may become an important means of communication when his or her grasp of the outside world deteriorates.

Yoik may be defined as "the old Sami form of music, a textual-musical expression fraught with meaning produced according to old conventions and used in various communication contexts" (Graff 2004, p. 147). There are many aspects of the yoik. In spite of Graff's definition, it does not necessarily contain words; it may be expressed through melody and rhythm only. Besides yoiks which describe nature, yoiks referring to a person seem to be the most common. The latter kind of yoiks are called person-yoiks. When one yoiks (sings) a person-yoik, one 'yoiks' that person. This is not a song *about* that person, but the melody line is an expression of that person's personality. The yoik or melody "is a musical symbol of that person. Instead of using the person's name, one may sing that melody. But the person does not own that melody in a sense that he or she can decide how it is used. Anyone may use the yoik melody freely in the same way as one uses the person's name freely" (Graff 2005, p. 30).

Although the melody of a yoik is set, the text is not. Whether the text describes a person's deeds, is teasing and jocular, rebuffing, etc., the identity of the melody does not change. And although the text may change, it is always about the person who's personal yoik it is. The referencing function of yoiks opens up for various usages.

Not all Sami practice yoik. The official Norwegian assimilation policy towards the Sami which ended around 1970 is a main reason why this form of singing is not so frequently practiced as it once was (Wikipedia 2010).

Research approach

This paper is based on an interview study conducted in Finnmark[2], Norway, regarding what constitutes good dementia care[3] to Sami patients. This study is part of an intercultural and international study: "*Good dementia care in a multicultural society*"[4]. The research questions are:

- a. What constitutes good care for patients with dementia according to nursing staff and patients' family?
- b. How do nursing staff accommodate for special needs of patients with dementia in a geriatric institution?

The interviewees in all parts of the project are asked the following research question:

- Based on your experiences from this institution, can you tell us stories that illustrate good dementia care?

As so often is the case in qualitative research, unlooked-for findings turned up. Even though yoik was something this researcher did not ask about, this song tradition was pointed out as of great importance to some Sami patients with dementia as well as to their family members. To four of the family members this was a central topic during the interview.

Interviewees: A total of 15 individuals were interviewed, 8 family members of Sami patients with dementia and 9 members of nursing staff working in the town's geriatric institution and experienced

with dementia care. 2 of the nursing staff doubled as family respondents as they had close family members with dementia. All but 2 of the nursing staff were Sami. All interviewees spoke fluent Norwegian, the language in which the interviews were conducted. The interviews, lasting 20-130 minutes, took form of an electronically recorded talk where the respondents were encouraged to recount their experiences. Transcriptions were verbatim.

Data analysis

The interviews were thematically analysed. The themes grew out of the interview data (van Manen 2001).

Ethical aspects

Interviewees were asked to give their written informed consent to participate. They were in writing and orally informed that they were free to pull out of the project whenever they wanted without giving any reason for this. Transcriptions are stored safely[5]. Recorded interviews were deleted after transcription. The project is approved by the Regional Committee for Research, Norway, and The Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

Findings

As part of the Norwegian society, individuals and families may adhere to different aspects of traditional Sami culture to varying degrees. This is so also with yoik, the traditional form of song practiced among the Sami.

Yoik – sinful or a way of life?

Members of the Sami community are divided in their views on yoik; to some it is an integral part of life, to others it is sinful as it is seen as connected to the old pagan pre-Christian religion. This division is also found among Sami health care worker, according to an interviewee. To those who uphold this ancient singing tradition, yoiking (the act of singing a yoik) is presented as an important part of one's identity:

"My mother is not one of those who think yoik is sinful. After all, it has been our life. I come from a family where we always yoiked. And that was how it was in her childhood home, too. They would yoik, and then they would correct each other and discuss the yoik and discuss whether it suited that person."

The view that it is sinful to yoik is, however, very much alive. One interviewee tells about her mother, a lady with severe dementia who is a resident at the Health Centre:

"And she started to yoik. ... it was my father's yoik. And one of the mentally clear patients says: 'No, you must not sin!' 'Sin', my mother says, 'I am yoiking my husband!' 'Yes, yes, but you must pray for forgiveness because you yoiked.' This did not deter my mother, however, so she finished her yoiking. And then, after a little while, she says that perhaps she has sinned. It was as if she woke up. 'No', I said, 'you haven't. You have yoiked your husband out of love, so don't think about what the others are saying'."

This interviewee was upset about how some people denounce yoiking and think it is the work of the Devil. She said:

"I have still not been able to understand why yoik is the work of the Devil. I don't get it. ... Because when I yoik I yoik a specific person because I am thinking of that person. When I know that they have a yoik, when I know their yoik, I yoik them. ... To us yoik is something happy; it reminds us of people. But here [in this town] it is very often seen as the work of the Devil."

It is problematic that patients who like to yoik are reprimanded by other patients. "They are being bullied or rebuked" one interviewee says. Several interviewees pointed to the Læstadians[6] as causing the condemnation of the practice of yoiking. Even some of the health care workers may see yoiking as sinfull. After episodes where her mother was reprimanded by other patients without intervention from the nursing staff, one of the interviewees told the nurses that her mother was to be allowed to yoik if she wished to do so as it made her happy.

I expressed surprise that this derogatory view of yoik still exists today. One of the interviewees said:

"In [the neighbouring town] there are people who are yoikers, they yoik from the moment they get up in the morning until they go to bed, and I have been told that there are people there who try to stamp that out it wounds my heart that one does not respect one's own culture. This is so wrong. And now, the generation who are Læstadians and who reside at the Health Centre, there are many there who are ardent Læstandiens, but there are also many who like to yoik, but they don't dare to do so. Because among the generation who is there now, the view is that it should not be done at the Health Centre, [or] when one stays in a hotel or some such place. Never in public. One does not yoik in public."

Yoik as personal identifier

In every culture and sub-culture there are symbols which carry special meaning and which functions as personal identifiers. Yoik is such a symbol. When you are given a yoik, that yoik becomes part of you. The composer of the yoik, usually a relative, tries to catch the essence of the person in rhythm and melody. At a seminar in town during my stay one of the speakers yoiked her parents. I tried to create a picture in my mind of their respective personalities based on their yoiks even though I did not understand the language. I tried to explain my impressions to one of the interviewees in the following way: "She first yoiked her father, who I imagined was very strong ... a quick, strong and perhaps even impatient person. And when she later yoiked her mother, I felt that she must have been a very mild and patient person. I don't know, but that is the pictures I got by listening." And the interviewee said: "Yes. And how the melody is put together, how ... whether it is quick or slow, it runs slowly here and quickly there, all of that create a picture of the person in question in your mind."

Learning the various yoiks starts early: "I couldn't talk properly until I was three, but I knew how to yoik". Everyone in the family of this interviewee had his or her very own yoik and "they were proud of their yoiks".

Yoik as communication and a tool of remembrance

Yoik is an artistic form of expression in its own right, but is also a more general, everyday form of communication. An interviewee tells that when her mother

"meets a person and she has a yoik, she can yoik it as a greeting. Yes, it is kind of like a conversation; it serves as an ice breaker and you can talk. And if there is a person you care about, you can yoik her. You show that person that you care about her when you yoik her. That is what the yoik means to me. Why should I not yoik it? I am happy. And that person knows that I care about her when I yoik. It is the Sami way."

A yoik may also serve as long distance communication when words otherwise will be lost in the wind:

"When you are in the mountains and see someone on the opposite side of a valley. Far away; you cannot shout to him, he cannot hear, he cannot differentiate words. You think that you recognise him from the way he moves. So you start yoiking him. If it is his yoik, he'll answer in kind. If it isn't him, he will not answer. Or rather, he will answer by yoiking

himself [sing his personal yoik]. That way he introduces himself and you know who he is. You do not have to shout names, words. They get lost."

Yoik may also serve as a powerful tool for helping demented patients remember. Several interviewees told stories about how their old, demented relatives were not able to recognise or remember them when they came to visit, but when they yoiked the old person's yoik and their own, memory and recognition would return. One lady told me: "[Mother] recognises her own yoik. When I visit her and yoik her, even her facial colour changes. I can clearly see that she recognises it She recognises her own yoik, she recognises many yoiks when I yoik them to her. And I think that one should focus on everything that creates recognition."

Yoik as a means to lift the spirit and as mental therapy

Several interviewees told about how yoiking may ease the pain of loss when in mourning, lift the spirit of sadness, and it makes them happy when they yoik certain persons. One lady was given the following advise by her mother:

"If Daddy was in a bad mood, my mother would sit and look at him and then she would hum his yoik. That cheered him up! He would become so happy and in a good mood ... And then she says: 'yes, all it takes is to yoik to Daddy, and then he is happy and easy to handle. ... You should do that, too, if he becomes angry. Do that.' And that is what I do, and it helps."

The importance of a person-yoik is that the yoiker thinks about the person who's yoik he or she is singing. This produces a feeling of connectedness which may be very therapeutic. One lady related how she within a period of a few days had had to cope with the loss of two very close family members. While one had a yoik, the other did not. She said:

"It was much harder to process NN's death than XX's, because I could yoik XX, but not NN. I constantly yoiked XX. Whenever I was driving my car, I would yoik him. While NN – that sorrow I had to process through talking. I have [children] and we talked very much together, and I probably talked such a lot because NN died and I could not yoik him. While we yoiked XX."

Many years later this lady found that one of her children had written a text about what had been told about NN and put it to music: "He had made a song for NN to overcome his loss, even though he only was very young when NN died. But, he had missed NN in his soul. ... There is a lot of therapy in a yoik."

Discussion

The discussion will focus on yoik as communication and its importance in relation to mental health, dementia and feeling of identity and connectedness.

Yoik as sinful

Yoik is a traditional/cultural expression very much alive in many Sami families and communities. Internationally recognised 'world music' artists like Mari Boine have brought this singing tradition to non-Sami populations and have helped raise its standing. Even so, the former official Norwegian assimilation policy towards the Sami in combination with religious movements who saw (and still today perceive) yoik as sinful, has caused this singing tradition to be replaced by the singing tradition of the majority Norwegian community, particularly Christian hymns and songs (Wikipedia 2010). Especially the Læstadian movement played an important role in this.

According to Livingstone and Thompson (2010) the motivation for performing music commonly is to communicate and engage affectively with others. Because of the attempts to Norwegianise the Sami population yoik today is a form of musical communication that may create an unintentionally negative affective reaction in the listener. The division between pro-yoikers and anti-yoikers seems to be so great that the Sami population may musically speaking be perceived as separated into two camps. Nymo (2003), herself Sami, claims that as many tradition-specific symbols of the Sami culture like yoik and traditional clothing, are perceived as something sinful by the most ardent Læstadians, this impacts the Sami culture negatively. Those who perceive such expressions of the traditional Sami culture as pagan and sinful, also see them as contradictory to church involvement. Many Sami will therefore hide when in public the fact that they cherish these expressions, according to Nymo.

Yoik as personal identifier

According to Graff (2004, p. 147) a yoik "functions as a *musical name*. A yoik melody belongs to a person almost in the same way as a name belongs to that person. To yoik someone is therefore both a way of introducing that person and to make that person present in one's mind". Graff furthermore points out that a yoik can be said not to exist without the person to whom it belongs. The person becomes part of the yoik and can be said to constitute the definition of the yoik. "This because the yoik's implicit reference to the referenced person constructs the identity of the yoik. At the same time the yoik is an identity marker for that person ... The yoik more or less becomes a part of that person" (ibid., p. 148).

Graff (2005) maintains that if you are a person with a yoik, your yoik melody may be said to *be* you in the same way as your name *is* yours. The stories I was told by members of families who keep up the yoiking tradition indicate, however, that this does not quite cover the depth of the bond between a yoik and its owner. One of my interviewees explained that a yoik "is perhaps even more than a name. Certainly. You cannot repeat a name all day, right, but a yoik you can sing constantly. And then you think about that person. All the while when you yoik you think about that person." The daughter of a lady who no longer recognised the names of her daughter and grandchildren, supported this notion of a yoik being a much deeper identifier than a person's name. The yoik melodies made the old lady aware of her own identity as well as of that of her family members. A famous yoiker has according to Graff (1993) called yoik a person's *most innermost name*.

A yoik verifies a person's identity. Graff even holds that "[t]he yoik creates identity" (2005, p. 32). It also connects the person to the society in which he or she lives. It is composed by someone in that community and is a gift, an expression of the receiver being part of that particular society. According to Graff (2005)

"[w]e create our identity through our meeting with other people. 'The others' create the consciousness necessary to see oneself. The fact that others see me, makes me see myself. Yoik is a tool in this process. Through the yoik one can express one's perception of another person. One may express both positive and negative attitudes towards a person. Yoik functions as an instrument for identity-ascription. The referenced object is focused through this referencing function" (p. 36).

This is in keeping with Livingstone and Thompson's (2010) claim that a significant function of music revolves around the concept of identity and that "music functions as a means of self-expression and identity" (p. 99). Furthermore, they point to the way music universally also enables group identity.

Individuals with dementia gradually lose their feeling of self and ability to recognise and relate to the surrounding world. It is therefore imperative to identify signs and symbols that contribute to remembrance. Within geriatric nursing reminiscence work is important (Kennard 2006). In relation to Sami patients who yoik, person-yoiks seem to represent a powerful reminiscing tool as they create a ray of recognition and feeling of identity into the severely demented person's otherwise estranged inner

world. This is an important achievement and should be welcomed in health care settings, regardless of what feelings health care personnel may have towards yoik in general. Fock (1997) claims that "[t]here is a tendency to reinterpret the more complex elements in foreign music – especially the music that seems incomprehensible, due to the lack of knowledge – into primitivity or even ugliness" (p. 56). Although many Sami live in non-Sami areas where yoik is foreign to the majority population and something non-Sami tend not to listen to, it is a form of communication that needs to be respected by the patient's surroundings. If it should create negative feelings in or disturb other patients, patient and family should be able to retire to a private room where they freely may yoik and visit with each other in the way they prefer.

Yoik as communication and a tool of remembrance

Seeger (1977, in Feld 1984, p. 1) claimed that speech is the communication of "world view as the intellection of reality" while music is communication of "world view as the feeling of reality". According to Livingstone and Thompson (2010) affective mechanisms associated with music overlap with those of speech prosody. And Juslin and Laukka (2003) found in their study a strong similarity in communicative accuracy between vocal emotion and music performance emotion.

As the county of Finnmark borders on both Finland and Russia, many of the Sami living here are bi- or multilingual. Besides their native Sami language, a great majority speaks Norwegian, and many also speak Finnish and/or Russian. As mentioned earlier, dementia patients exhibit a gradual deterioration in general linguistic prowess as their illness develops[7]. In bi- or multilingual dementia patients the linguistic deterioration tends to begin with the most recently learned language, while the ability to communicate in the language of childhood lasts the longest[8]. Also the ability to speak their mother tongue and express themselves nonverbally gradually becomes poorer. Face and gestures are less expressive than in healthy older people, and they have problems reading other people's facial expressions (Ekman 1993). The result is that it becomes progressively more difficult for Sami patients with dementia to understand and be understood by health care personnel in general, but even more so by non-Sami health care personnel who do not have the necessary intrinsic knowledge of Sami verbal symbolism and non-verbal communication. The more the patient's communicative skills deteriorate the more important native Sami speaking health care personnel with an intimate understanding of Sami language and culture becomes for the patient to be understood.

In a study on Finnish and Swedish speaking nursing staff's care for Finnish patients with dementia in Swedish nursing homes, Ekman (1993) found that while able to communicate adequately with the Finnish nursing staff, many of the Finnish immigrant patients had problems communicating with the Swedish speaking staff. The many misunderstandings concerning what patients tried to communicate caused nursing staff to communicate by way of orders to patients and by way of repeatedly interrupting them. The demented Finnish immigrant patients functioned on a manifest level of communication which seemed to be much lower than their latent level of communication when they had to speak Swedish. Ekman (1993) assumes that the presence of Finnish speakers among the nursing staff creates an environment which very much furthers these patients' quality of life and ability to communicate as well as reduces the cost of care for these patients. This is a finding which may be transferred to similar intercultural settings.

In relation to Sami patients with dementia who practice yoiking, the yoik is a way of remembering – it connects a person with the innermost feelings of the theme of the yoik, and may thus build a communicating bridge between times, persons, and landscapes (Gaski 2000, p. 193). My findings show that person-yoiks may be powerful and positive communication tools when communicating with patients with dementia. The old lady who neither recognised her daughter's face or name nor her own name, regained awareness of herself and her daughter through her daughter's yoiking them both (singing both their personal yoiks). Graff (2005) says that yoiks can be seen as 'memory art' through its referencing function: "The referencing function draws the referenced objects present in the mind of the yoiker. As a symbol for the referenced object the yoik will have a great associational potential when it comes to the object. The referencing function steers the associations towards the object" (p. 35).

This referencing effect of the musical expression of person-yoiks may be more universal than Graff seems to think. Livingstone and Thompson (2010) hold that although music itself is not symbolic in the same way as language is, "music does have the capacity to be referential, and certain musical forms, styles and works can obtain an indexical relation" (p. 99). This may explain why a feeling of the personalities expressed in the yoiks was created in me as a listener while doing this study (above) even though I neither understood the language nor am a connoisseur of yoiks. This indicates that the implicit intercultural communicative potential of culture-specific symbols is greater than one first may think, as long as one is willing to let them speak to you.

Graff (2005) tells about a man in a Sami town who suffered from personal problems and depression. His wife invited friends to their home:

"There they yoiked his melody, and in that yoik they told him how much they appreciated him and what a good man he was. ... This was the help this man needed to get through his depression. Through yoiking this man with his personal melody a direct connection with the man was created, they established a field of communication between friends. Using his yoik signalled a positive attitude, the man was shown as someone positive" (p. 35).

According to Graff this 'treatment' helped this man because of the yoik's referencing function. This had "established a basic meaning in addition to what they specifically wished to say in the yoik about friendship and the man's character" (2005, p. 35). Graff (2004) sees the *referencing function* of a person-yoik as the basis for the symbolic meaning that it communicates. "The reference function means the yoiks can function both as a memory of the object and as a means of communication between people" (p. 149). The latter is very much the case in both the examples in this section. The latter example illustrates that although the text can be changed to suit the occasion, the melody stays the same. The melody is therefore the part of a yoik that carries most symbolic meaning and which serves as the referencing tool. Graff claims that "[t]here are different levels of meaning that together form the totality that is a yoik. The entire time, however, the referencing function of the melody is underlying as a fundamental level of meaning" (ibid. s. 149).

Conclusion

Livingstone and Thompson (2010) found through their various studies on music and psychology that music possesses "an underlying, cross-domain, universal method of emotional communication, referred to as affective engagement" (p. 100). According to them, music plays a significant role "at the cultural level, including its use in symbolic rituals, in identity of self and ethnicity" (p. 100).

In this paper yoik, the Sami traditional music, and a variety of meanings and communicative aspects it may hold, have been discussed. Yoik may have served as an example of the importance of culture specific expressions and the understanding thereof in intercultural communication, particularly within dementia care. As we have seen, cultural expression may hold very different symbolic meanings even to individuals who hail from the same ethnic background. And it may be totally mystifying to people with no relationship to that particular cultural expression at all. To understand yoik and other culture specific expressions does not only require the ability to understand its context and what it expresses here and now; it also requires "an intimate acquaintance with the person ..., and ... characteristic events affecting the person, as well as a good deal of metaphoric competence, which is often rooted in completely local conditions" (Gaski 2000, p. 197).

Stanford and Schmidt (1995) hold that often the difficulty within intercultural communication is not so much language as the misunderstanding of customs. They tell the story of a Native American who spoke English and managed well in the nursing facility until he began to treat his chronic illness pains by chanting Indian prayers of healing: "Staff heard this as 'gibberish'. They stopped asking what he wanted and explaining care procedures, because they believed he was becoming demented. Nothing the niece could say helped the staff to understand" (ibid. p. 4).

This story and Gaski's assertion of the need for intimate knowledge of person and culture to attain understanding cross-culturally, point both to the difficulties in successful intercultural communication and to the challenge of being willing to open up to symbols and representations foreign to us. Music, however, may be a bridge builder. My data illustrate that it is important to recognise and respect culture specific ways of expression. It is also important to be aware that various forms of communication may be ambiguous or have many-faceted meanings, and that it is the meaning it holds for the person in question which must be focused and understood.

Notes:

¹ Although one tends to speak of "the Sami culture", the Sami are divided into several groups, representing several languages or dialects. The most frequently used written languages are Northern Sami, Southern Sami and Lule Sami (Wikipedia 2011).

² Finnmark is the northernmost county of Norway. Although the country's largest county (48 637 km², 15 % of mainland Norway's territory, a larger territory than all of Denmark), Finnmark has a population of less than 73 000 inhabitants. In the town where this study was conducted, 85-90 % of the population is Sami.

³ This study was made possible by the Norwegian Department of Culture's Gandhi-grant for 2010, an invitation by the local municipality and the collaboration with Kristine Grønmo.

⁴ This is an international umbrella project with studies conducted in Norway (Oslo and Finnmark) and in Montenegro, Serbia, and South-Africa (the South-African part of the project not yet commenced), headed by the author. While co-researchers are participating in the international studies, the Norwegian ones are conducted by the author only. Each study is analysed separately, but the material will be seen as a whole when all sub-studies are completed.

⁵ Ethical research guidelines (Helsedirektoratet 2009)

⁶ **Læstadianism**, a Lutheran Church revivalist movement initiated by the Swedish minister Lars Levi Læstadius (1800-61) in Swedish Lapland. In the 1840s the movement spread to Finland and Northern Norway, later also to North America, England, Germany, Russia, and Estonia. Today the movement is split into fundamentalist and liberal branches. Although part of the Lutheran Church they have their own communion, baptism and confirmation ceremonies (Wikipedia 2010).

⁷ It is impossible to specify the rate of language deterioration in persons with dementia as it depends on type of dementia, what part of the brain is affected and/or the stage/severity of the illness.

⁸ Researchers disagree on whether the most recently learned language disappear first in persons with dementia or whether all languages deteriorate at an equal rate. Most of my Sami interviewees agree with the first view, while two had experienced that parents had lost Sami and Norwegian simultaneously and at the same rate.

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