The heart as a source of semiosis: The case of Dutch

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Abstract

This contribution presents Dutch idiomatic expressions with the word hart ‘heart’ which are used for conceptualizing aspects of inner life, in particular emotions. A comparison is made with German and English data, which shows that there are differences in detail. The descriptive part of the paper is preceded by a discussion on the question in how far such conceptualizations are universal or culture specific, concluding that an adequate theoretical model should integrate both aspects. The last part of the paper considers the history of conceptualizations of inner life in western culture, in particular the question where inner life is to be located. In Antiquity, different views were defended, some polycentric, others more holistic, some more cardiocentric and others more cerebrocentric. After the Middle Ages, a polycentric view has become dominant, with the head and the heart as the two places where inner life is to be located.

Keywords: cardiocentrism, cerebrocentrism, dualism, Dutch, embodiment, emotion, heart, reason

1. Introduction

The human body plays an important role in the conceptualization of experience. People differentiate between experience coming from the outer world (“I see a bird”), the own body (“I have a stiff leg”) and the inner world or inner life (“I think that it rains”, “I feel happy”). “Inner life” is used here as a catch all term for thinking, feeling, intuition, attitudes, intentions, etc. Besides providing the basis for this tripartition of experience, the body functions as a source domain for figuratively conceptualizing the other two domains, the outer world and inner life.

The present paper deals with the question how parts of the body are used to conceptualize inner life. In recent years, this topic of research has shown to be a productive one, see, among many others, the special issue of Pragmatics & Cognition which was devoted to ‘The body in description of emotion’ (Enfield and Wierzbicka eds. 2002) and the special issue of Cog-
initive Linguistics (1:2, 23) on how people talk about thinking (Palmer, Goddard and Lee eds., 2003).

Like the other papers in the present volume, my paper focuses on the heart as a source of semiosis for inner life, see section 3, where I will use examples from Dutch as an illustration and make a comparison with English and German. In section 4, diachronic changes will be discussed in relation to cultural changes in western culture. But first, in section 2, I will discuss some general theoretical issues regarding the relation between the body and the conceptualization of inner life.

2. Inner life and the body

In present day western cultures, the body is strongly present in public space and discourse: there is no taboo on talking about it, showing it, enjoying bodily experience, or on asking for plastic surgery. Cognitive studies also “discovered” the body, after two thousand years of philosophical thinking about the relation between language, thought and reality, in which the body did not play any serious role (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Whether there is a relation between the present cultural and scientific popularity of the body is a question that I happily leave to the sociology of science.

2.1. A short historiography of embodiment

The observation that the human body is an important source of semiosis fits in with the more general idea of embodied cognition, which is now considered as a fundamental dimension of cognitive linguistic thinking. 1987 was an important year in this respect, with the publications of Lakoff (1987) and Johnson (1987), cf. Lakoff (1987: xiv): “Thought is embodied, that is, the structures used to put together our conceptual systems grow out of bodily experience and make sense in terms of it”, succinctly echoed in the first sentence in Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 3): “The mind is embodied”. This view has been supported in many empirical studies, for example by Heine, Claudi and Hümmemeyer (1991, chapter 5), who analyzed the original meaning of the spatial prepositions ‘on’, ‘under’, ‘in’, ‘front’ and ‘back’ in 125 African languages. The human body turned out to be the most important source domain, which led the authors to propose the Body Part Model (p. 126). In English, expressions like ‘the foot of the mountain’, ‘the head of the department’ and ‘the heart of the city’ (to mention only a few) also illustrate the idea of the body as a source of semiosis. For more examples see Gioschler (2005), who shows that machines, computers and nations are “anthropomorphized” in terms of the body.

Embodiment is programmatic in modern cognitive linguistic research, but similar ideas have been proposed earlier in the twentieth century within the context of philosophy and cultural studies. First and foremost, phenomenology must be mentioned here, in particular in the version that is proposed in the work of Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1962). The Nijmegen dissertation by de Witte (1948) was inspired by phenomenology. De Witte studied body part terms and their secondary meanings in different languages, in particular in Dutch, Bare’e (a Malayo-Polynesian language, spoken by the Toraja on Sulawesi) and Marind (a language of Papua New Guinea). De Witte was further inspired by Ernst Cassirer, cf. the following quote (1948: 9, from Cassirer 1923: 266): “Der menschliche Körper und die Unterscheidung seiner einzelnen Gliedmassen dient als eine der erstens und notwendigen Grundlagen der sprachlichen ‘Orientierung’ überhaupt” [The human body and the distinction of its different parts serves as one of the first and necessary foundations of linguistic orientation]. Much of the linguistic data that de Witte analyzed was taken from anthropological studies, where the study of body part terms and their extended meanings has a long tradition too.

In his overview on the “corporeal turn” in twentieth century thinking, Ruthrof (2000: 14) points out that “for some time now, the body has been a dominant feature in feminist theorizing ... The most relevant work in this respect is that of Julia Kristeva, Lucie Irigaray and Hélène Cixous”. Ruthrof sees certain shortcomings in phenomenological and feminist thinking, whereas he is rather enthusiastic about the cognitive linguistic work of Lakoff, Johnson and Turner.

The “corporeal turn” in cognitive linguistics had as its most direct impetus the need for extralinguistic ‘grounding’ (of formal) linguistic categories. In a first step, language was linked to conceptualization processes. This step was, in fact, the starting point of the cognitive enterprise in the 1980s. Soon it was realized that cognition is embodied, see Johnson (1987). And in the 1990s, Damasio pointed out that cognition is strongly related to emotion, cf. Damasio (1994: xii): “I began writing this book to propose that reason may not be as pure as most of us think it is or wish it were, that emotions and feelings may not be intruders in the bastion of reason at all: they may be enmeshed in its networks, for worse and for better”.

...
It is interesting to note that recent studies of interaction also show interest in embodiment, see Zlatev (2002) and Linell (2005: 19): “Talk-in-interaction involves bodily gestures: participants use their voices, faces, bodily orientations and movements to signal messages. In brief, spoken language and interaction are embodied”. It seems that Gibbs (2006: 13) is right when he states that “the time is ripe for a reappraisal of the body’s role in human cognition. Our bodies, and our felt experiences of our bodies in action, finally take center stage in the empirical study of perception, cognition, and language in cognitive science’s theoretical accounts of human behavior”.

2.2. The universalistic approach

In people’s perception of their inner life and their body, the latter shows symptoms that are felt as caused by the first. In particular emotions have physiological effects: “For example, heart rate and temperature go up when people feel angry, but go down when they feel sad” (Gibbs 2006: 250). This perception can lead people to locating emotions in certain body parts, cf. Gibbs (2006: 257): “Anger in Chinese individuals is frequently located and experienced in the chest and heart, depression is often experienced in terms of something pressing into the chest, or down on the head, and grief may be experienced in terms of a kind of back pain”.

In its first stage, the theory of conceptual embodiment (cf. Lakoff 1987: 12) had a universalist outlook. In this approach, the human body is considered to be the same in all cultures. The body provides a substrate that conceptualizations depart from, cf. Palmer (1996: 292): “There are several sources of universal constraints on language, including the universal form and functions of the human body and brain (perhaps including physiological components of a few basic affective states) ...”.

Against this background, one would expect that people all over the world tend to locate emotions and other aspects of inner life in the same way. This is not the case, however. As Gibbs (2006: 252) says, “people are poor perceivers of their physiological changes”. This thus leaves much room for variation in conceptualization processes. Even with respect to the question whether inner life is located at all, there is variation. North Americans often describe their emotion experience as “intrapsychic feelings”, without specifically locating these emotions (Gibbs 2006: 257). And if location takes place, again we might expect a certain variation.

2.3. Cultural models

1987 was not only a pivot year for the general idea of embodied cognition (Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987), it was also the year when the volume of Holland and Quinn (eds.) appeared, in which the notion of “cultural model” was introduced, which, since then, has played an important role in cognitive linguistic theorizing.

People in different cultures conceptualize the world differently, including their “inner world”. In some cultures and languages certain emotions are “hypocognized” whereas other emotions are “hypercognized”. In Tahiti, for example, anger plays a prominent role in social cognition, whereas sadness and grievance are suppressed. This corresponds with the number of words and expressions that are available in the language (cf. Röttger-Rössler 2002), and probably with the strength of experiential presence of certain parts of inner life for people in that culture (cf. also Bamberg 1997). People can also focus on different symptoms belonging to the same emotion, for example on “heat” or “inner pressure” as different symptoms that belong to anger. Kövecses (2005: 246) calls such variation “experiential focus”.

The cultural relativity also shows in the bodily localization of inner life in different cultures. De Witte (1948) reports that in Marind (Papua New Guinea), the ear, kambêt, is the organ that occurs in expressions for thinking, knowledge and remembering, whereas the emotions are associated with békai, which refers to heart and lungs, the organs involved in breathing. A similar dualistic model seems to be widespread in Australian languages, see Gaby (this volume), who shows that in Kuuk Thaayorre, intellect and emotion are located in the ear and the belly, respectively. In Japanese (see Ikegami, this volume), the dualistic model seems to correspond to the western one. In comparison to this ‘dualistic’ cultural model, we find a more holistic model in Tsou, an Austronesian language in the highlands of Southwest Taiwan, cf. Huang (2002: 172): “The body part most intimately associated with cognition (thinking or intending) or feeling in Tsou is koyu ‘ear’, the seat of Tsou emotion and emotion”. Another holistic model was found with the Ifaluk, a Micronesian people, living on the island of Ifaluk, cf. D’Andrade (1987: 142): “The model used on Ifaluk ... differs from the present western model in considering the mind to be located primarily in the gut, which includes the stomach and abdominal region. Thus, thoughts, feelings, desires, hunger, pain, and sexual sensations are all experienced in the gut”.
If we focus on the heart, we see variation on a more fine-grained level. Šileikaitė (2004) showed that German, Lithuanian and Georgian not only differ in the number of phraseological expressions involving ‘heart’ for feelings, but she also showed that in a quantitative ranking positive feelings (love, sympathy) rank first in German, but second and sixth in Lithuanian and Georgian, respectively. The latter languages have negative feelings like worrying and sadness at the top of the ranking.

The examples just given make clear that an adequate study of the heart in relation to inner life needs, besides a universalistic theory of embodied cognition, the framework of ‘cultural linguistics’, cf. Palmer (1996: 290): “The term [cultural linguistics] invokes the anthropological tradition that culture is the accumulated knowledge of a community or society, including its stock of cognitive models, schemas, scenarios, and other forms of conventional imagery”. The present volume is a piece of proof for this view. A balanced view on the universalist and the ‘social constructionist’ approach and a synthesizing account can be found in Kövecses, Palmer and Dirven (2002).

2.4. Metaphor, metonymy and beyond

The title of the present paper is a variation on the phrase “the body as a locus of semiosis”, that was used by Ikegami (1989: 102). After introducing this phrase, Ikegami continues: “[A]s the generator of semiosis, the body works in two ways: either it may project itself metaphorically onto other entities and processes or it may extend itself metonymically to other entities and processes.” Ikegami (1989: 110) perceived an interesting east-west difference in preference for the two types of semiosis: “the former type [metaphor] is dominant in the Western and the latter [metonymy] in the Eastern tradition”. If Ikegami is right, one might expect that this preference also shows in western based cognitive linguistic theorizing (linguists are not immune against their cultural background). And indeed, there is a tendency in the Western literature to analyze expressions that involve body parts in relation to aspects of inner life in metaphorical terms, cf. Kövecses (2000: 168): “… the Zulu metaphor that involves the heart: ANGER IS (UNDERSTOOD AS BEING) IN THE HEART”. But we should realize that the relation between bodily organs and inner life is not the same as, for example, the relation between a building as a source domain for conceptualizing scientific theorizing (“the foundations of a theory”, etc.). The inner organs have a direct experiential relation to inner life. This implies that when people talk about (properties of) the heart when they mean (properties of) emotion, they use a metonymic way of conceptualizing emotions: the heart as location-for-located, effect-for-cause, part-for-whole, etc. Panther and Thornburg (2004) call such relations “conceptual metonymies”. Now that cognitive linguistic theorizing realizes that in processes of conceptualization metonymy is as important as metaphor, and that the two often go together, it is time to reconsider some analyses of emotion expressions. What has been analyzed in terms of metaphor might as well, or at least partly, be analyzed in terms of metonymy.

The link between emotions and the heart, mediated by the anterior cingulate cortex, can be considered as the neurophysiological basis for the figurative, metonymic use of the heart in the description of emotions. The specific aspects of the heart that are subsequently focused on, and which lead to ‘images’ of the heart can be the result of additional metaphor, conceptualizing the heart as a container, construed out of certain material, with a certain color, taking a certain position in the body, changing its place and size under the influence of certain forces, and serving as an object which can be manipulated by oneself and others. Underlying the metaphor in which the heart is seen as a container (for the emotions), lies, thus, a metonymic relationship between the emotions and the heart (cf. Kövecses and Radden 1998: 61).

It is very well possible that metonymy and metaphor are not sufficient as analytic instruments to catch the whole picture of how expressions involving body parts function to characterize inner life. Take a “simple” example like a heart of gold. Here, such connotations of ‘gold’ as ‘precious’ or ‘pure’ are “blended in”. In other words, the conceptualization works with different input domains at the same time, cf. Fauconnier and Turner (2002).

Finally, cultural practices in which body parts play a role might be relevant for a full understanding of the linguistic expressions. This seems to hold in particular for the heart. In different cultures, the heart has become a symbol, an emblem, for certain feelings or aspects of the inner self (romantic love, religious feelings, the personality). The heart gets “a life of its own”, it becomes a cultural model, separated from the body. The “cultural heart” manifests itself in a variety of cultural practices, as is illustrated by the following examples.

- Western culture: When Pope John Paul II died in the beginning of April 2005, the Polish people expressed the wish that ‘their pope’ would be buried in his
homeland. In addition, they said that if the Vatican would not allow this, they would like to have at least his heart be returned. Not a hand or an ear, but his heart. In the nineties, an American woman, Claire Sylva, got a new heart, and afterwards she developed a taste for beer and chicken nuggets and motorcycles, as she reports in her (1997) book. Later, she found out that her new heart had belonged to a young man who indeed had these preferences. Similar stories have never been reported by patients who got a new kidney or lung. In autumn 2004 and spring 2005 the Teylers Museum in Haarlem, the Netherlands, and the Museum Dr. Guijslain in Gent, Belgium, had an exhibition on representations of the heart in popular and religious culture. We would not expect a similar exposition on the liver or the bladder.

- Egyptian culture: In their mumification rituals, the heart was removed and placed in its own sacred urn to signify importance. The brain was unceremoniously removed and discarded as so much trash (http://goosebeartshinity.blogspot.com, 2006).

- Meso-American culture: Fischer (1999: 482) discusses the notion of heart k'nal as a key concept in Mayan culture and cosmology. In Aztec religious rituals, the heart was cut out of living bodies and shown to the gods.

- African culture: The Yaka in Congo have an initiation ritual called "mbwoohi". Part of the ritual is spitting on the heart of a wooden cult statue. The heart is considered as the seat of acquired knowledge and of morality.

Such cultural practices go beyond the strict processes of conceptualization of body and inner life. The impact of such practices on discourse is something that needs further study if cognitive linguistics wants to integrate the cultural dimension in its full consequence, see Dobrovolskij and Pirainen (2005), Ziemke, Zlatev and Frank (eds.) (2007) and in particular its twin volume Frank, Dirven, Ziemke, and Bernárdez (eds.) (2008).

3. The heart in West Germanic languages

Niemeier (2000, this volume) shows that in English the heart is a very productive source of semiosis for conceptualizing inner life. The expressions, that are listed in 3.1 show that the same holds for Dutch.

3.1. The ‘heart’ in Dutch

The expressions presented below, are mainly taken from the Van Dale Dutch dictionary of 2005. They include words and phrases with varying categorical status: adjectival derivations like hooghartig ‘high-heartedly’, noun phrases like een hart van goud, ‘heart of gold’, and verb phrases like van zijn hart geen moordkruit maken ‘not to turn one’s heart into a murderer’s den’, iemand een hart onder de riem steken, ‘to stick a heart under someone’s belt’, meaning ‘to encourage someone’. Occasionally, I will add relevant observations on other languages.

In this inventory, I will not try to categorize the expressions into metaphorical or metonymic ones. In many cases, both figurative processes work together, and, in addition, blending from other domains is involved. For a serious analysis, each expression should be analyzed in detail, for which there is no room in the present context. Taking together the multiplicity of expressions, one gets the impression that we have to do with a ‘heart’ discourse, which is an integral part of the cultural practice of heart symbolism, in which the heart has become a ‘place holder’ for all inner life that goes beyond the purely intellectual dimension: feeling, involvement, intuition, personal character.

Presence, absence and involvement of the heart.

Hartelijk ‘heartily’, harteloos ‘heartless’; heb het hart eens!, lit. ‘have the heart’, ‘don’t you dare!’; hij heeft er hart voor ‘he has his heart in the matter’. The adjective hartelijk, ‘heartily’ implies warm and friendly feelings, harteloos, ‘heartless’, implies cold and cruel behavior.

The heart has a default location but can be dislocated. The dislocation stands for particular feelings or character traits.

Default position: het hart op de juiste plaats hebben ‘to have got one’s heart in the right place’: to have a good character; zijn hart vasthouden, lit. ‘to hold one’s heart’. By holding one’s heart, it doesn’t move to a different position. The expression is used when someone is concerned about a process, worrying about how it will end.

Marked position: Hooghartig lit. ‘high-hearted’, arrogant, laaghartig lit. low-hearted, ‘mean’. The negative meaning of Dutch hooghartig can be explained by the EXCESS image-schema, which, in this case, overrules the positive axiological charge of UP (cf. Peña Cervell 2003: 287; see also Hampe 2005 for a relativization of the positive and negative axiological charges of the image-schemas). That deviation of the normal position of the heart is negative (at least in Dutch), can also be seen in two expressions for being afraid: Zijn hart bonzde in zijn keel ‘his heart was beating in his throat’ (upward movement) and Zijn hart zouk ’m in de schoenen ‘his heart
sank into his shoes’ (downward movement). Zijn hart sprong op van vreugde ‘his heart jumped up with joy’. This expression, which can be found frequently in the Bible, involves positive feelings, which would be in accordance with the axiological UP schema.

A few observations regarding the position of the heart in other languages: Ewe (cf. de Witte 1948:357): the heart is in my belly = I am happy, it does not bounce in my throat). English: wear your heart on your sleeve ‘to show your true feelings openly’.

The heart as an object that you can win, conquer, lose, steal, give away.
Je hart aan iemand verliezen ‘to lose your heart to someone’; iemands hart stelen ‘to steal someone’s heart’; hartendief ‘thief of heart’, de harten van de mensen veroveren ‘to win one’s way into people’s hearts’, hartveroverend, ‘heart conquering, nice, attractive’. Iemand een hart onder de riem steken, lit. ‘to stick a heart under someone’s belt’, ‘to encourage someone’.

The heart is a container for feelings.
Pijn in het hart, ‘pain in the heart’; het hart is vol vreugde ‘the heart is full of joy’; je neemt een grote plaats in in m’n hart ‘you take a big space in my heart’, implying positive feelings towards someone; waar het hart van vol is, loopt de mond van over ‘if the heart is full of something, the mouth runs over’, je hart luchtten je hart uitstorten ‘speak out one’s heart’, uit het oog, uit het hart lit. ‘out of sight, out of heart’, ‘if one does not see someone anymore, one stops thinking of that person’. One can talk about more specific positions in this container: Diep in m’n hart ‘deep in my heart’, uit de grond van m’n hart ‘from the bottom of my heart’.

The heart has a certain size and this size can change.
Een groot hart hebben ‘to have a big heart’, een grote mond, maar een klein hart ‘a big mouth but a small heart’, ruimhartig ‘big-hearted’, mijn hart kromp ineen van medelijden ‘my heart shrunk with pity’, zijn hart zwaait van trots ‘his heart swells with pride’. In Dutch, a small heart stands for fear, lack of courage. In Moroccan Arabic it stands for not being able to tolerate a joke, for being easily annoyed.

The heart is made of a certain material.
Een gouden hart/hart van goud, ‘a heart of gold’ (cf. the song by Neil Young); een hart van steen, ‘a heart of stone’ (cf. The Rolling Stones). In Dutch ‘houten hart’ is not a viable expression, but in a recent pop song (by De Poema’s), it does occur, probably under English influence (cf. Elvis Presley ‘Woolen Heart’). However, the Middle Dutch dictionary (Verwijs and Verdam 1894, part III, p. 388) mentions van herten hout, hout van herten. In Moroccan Arabic, a heart of iron stands for ‘mercilessness’. The Van Dale dictionary also mentions ‘iron heart’ for Dutch, but this is not really in use. The same holds for ‘heart of ice’. Van Dale mentions for Flemish peperkoeken hart, ‘ginger cake heart’, which means ‘empathic’.

The heart has weight.
Licht, ‘light’ and zwaar ‘heavy’ are frequent collocations of ‘heart’. The adjectives indicate positive and joyful emotions and negative, depressing emotions respectively.

There can be pressure on the outer surface of the heart.
Op iemands hart trappen ‘to trample on someone’s feelings’, iets op zijn hart hebben ‘to have something on one’s mind’; het is een pak van m’n hart ‘the burden is off my heart, I am relieved’, het gaat na aan het hart, lit. ‘it comes close to my heart’, ‘it really affects me’, de schrik sloeg me om het hart lit. ‘the fear wrapped itself around my heart’, ‘my heart missed a beat’. Iemand iets op het hart drukken, lit. ‘to press something onto someone’s heart’, ‘to tell someone that he should not forget (to do) something’.

The heart has a temperature and can melt or burn.
Hartverwarmend ‘heartwarming’, een koud hart ‘a cold heart’. Mijn hart staat in vuur en vlam, ‘my heart is in fire and flame’. Mijn hart smelt als ik hem zie, lit. ‘my heart melts when I see him’, ‘I feel strong sympathy for him’.

The heart can be damaged.

The heart can have color (but not in Dutch).
In Moroccan Arabic, someone with a white heart is good, generous, someone with a black heart has a bad character. In Endo (Joost Zwarte, p.c.), someone with a white heart is generous, someone with a black heart is annoyed. In Shakespeare’s Macbeth, Lady Macbeth says, in Act II, Scene II:
My hands are of your color, but I am ashamed to have a heart so white, by
which she means that she is innocent.

Besides color, there are many other properties ascribed to the heart that
are relevant in relation to inner life in other languages: the heart can be
clean or dirty (Modern Eastern Syriac: clean heart = above suspicion, see
Wolk and Yafla, this volume), wet or dry (Modern Eastern Syriac he has a
dry heart = he is cruel), sweet or bitter (In Endo, a bitter heart stands for a
jealous person, Joost Zwarts, p.c.).

In a cultural analysis, it would be interesting to relate the language-
specific properties ascribed to the heart and the relevance of these properti-
es in the respective cultures. Can one say, for example, that the distinction
between clean and dirty is more relevant in Middle East cultural models
than in western ones?

In so far as the expressions describe emotions, a first step of a more general
analysis could start along the following lines. In many of the listed expres-
sions, a property with scalar value is involved: big-small, cold-warm,
heavy-light, high-low, in rest-moving, etc. Even when such a property
seems absent at first sight, it might be indirectly there. Take material like
iron, wood and ginger cake. These materials can be put on a hard-soft scale.
The material stands metonymically for the property. The values on the
scale go from neutral to extreme, and they are associated with positive and
negative evaluations. These scalar properties can be metaphorically related
to general properties of emotions. Emotions are positive or negative and
they are more or less intensive. In the linguistic expressions listed, the
properties are not related to the emotions directly, but via the heart. The
properties are ascribed to the heart, whereby the question whether real
hearts can have such a property, seems rather insignificant. The heart stands
for emotions, on a metonymical basis. But as the heart has taken the posi-
tion of a cultural symbol, this metonymical basis does not play a significant
role in the genesis of new expressions anymore, with the consequence that
the distinction between metonymy and metaphor seems neutralized.

3.2. Germanic comparisons: Dutch, English and German

In Dutch-English and Dutch-German bilingual dictionaries, many of the
expressions involving ‘heart’ have a literal equivalent in the other language.
For example een gebroken hart, ein gebrochener Herz, a broken heart. At
the same time, there are several phraseological expressions in these lan-
guages where the dictionary prefers a translation that does not involve the
heart. This can be illustrated with a few examples from the Dutch → Eng-
lish dictionary in the Van Dale series: met een gerust hart, lit. ‘with a calm
heart’ → with an easy mind/conscience; het is niet veel, maar het komt uit
een goed hart, lit. ‘it is not much, but it comes out of a good heart’ → it’s
not much, but the intention is good; iemand een goed hart toedragen, lit. ‘to
bear a good heart to someone’ → to kindly disposed towards someone.

The German Duden, Nr. 11 (2002) (Redewendungen), a phraseological
lexicon, specifies, under the entry Herz, ‘heart’, several expressions that
can not be translated literally with a hart-expression into Dutch. Some ex-
amples: sich ein Herz fassen/nehmen, lit. ‘to take oneself a heart’, ‘to gather
all your courage’; sein Herz in die Hand nehmen, lit. ‘to take one’s heart in
his hand’, ‘to gather all one’s courage’; seinem Herzen einen Stoff geben,
lit. ‘to give one’s heart a kick’, ‘to overcome one’s inner resistance and
come to a decision’; jemandem ans Herz gewachsen sein, lit. ‘to be grown
to someone’s heart’, ‘to have become dear to someone’; jemandem wird
das Herz schwer, lit. ‘someone’s heart becomes heavy’, ‘to become sad’.

English has the expression to eat one’s heart out, which has no counter-
part in Dutch or German. Dutch has met de hand op ‘t hart, lit. ‘with
the hand on the heart’, with a counterpart in German, Hand aufs Herz, but
no literal counterpart in English, ‘to swear to something faithfully’. Dutch has
de hand over het hart strijken, lit. ‘to brush one’s hand over one’s heart’,
‘to give in’, which has no literal counterpart in English or German, etc.

The general picture that arises from the dictionary entries is, that on the
overall level, Dutch, English and German have a similar conceptualization
of the heart as the organ that is associated with feelings and the self, but
that, at the same time, each language has conventionalized its own range of
expressions. Even if these languages share the same cultural model, we can
not predict the exact inventory of expressions in each language. The lan-
guage-specific inventory of heart-expressions is the result of more or less
idosyncratic conventionalization processes, within the boundary of the
shared western cultural model.

4. Diachrony and dualism

When we consult (etymological) dictionaries of Dutch (EWN, Verwijs
and Verdam, WNT), we find that under the lemma for ‘hart’ several mediaeval
expressions are listed that have since then disappeared. They typically pertain to the rational part of inner life, as is also noted by de Witte (1948: 437).

This diachronic shift, involving replacement of heart expressions by head expressions, which has also been noted for English (see Niemeier, this volume), is generally linked to the development in Western medicine and philosophy in the 16th and 17th century, when the 'real' function of the heart was discovered. The anatomist Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) laid the foundations in his De Humani Corporis Fabrica ('The Fabric of the Human Body'), published in 1543, in which he gave precise descriptions with exquisite drawings of the internal organs. The next step was taken by William Harvey (1578-1657), who in 1628 in his Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordis et Sanguinis in Animalibus ('An Anatomical Exercise on the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals') showed what the real function of the heart is, namely, to pump blood in the process of blood circulation.

A short excursion into the medical-philosophical literature of the Middle Ages and Antiquity shows a mix of the theory of the four humors (cf. Geeraerts and Grondelaers 1995) and a vivid discussion on the question where the powers of inner life are to be located. In the present context, we can leave out the theory of humors and concentrate on the discussion regarding the location. Two positions can be distinguished: a more monocentric one, adopting one centre for inner life, and a more pluricentric one. Within the monocentric view, there were two main competing positions: cerebrocentrism (or the encephalo-centric theory, as Crivellato and Ribatti 2007 call it) and cardiocentrism, cf. Clarke and O'Malley (1968: 1):

Although earlier Western civilizations such as those of the ancient Egyptians, the Mesopotamians, and the Hebrews had selected the heart as the central organ, the Greeks were divided on this matter. Thus Empedocles, Democritus, Aristotle, Diocles, Praxagoras, the Stoics, and the Epicureans favored the heart, whereas Alcmaeon, Pythagoras, one of the Hippocratic Writers, Plato, Herophilus, Erasistratus, Rufus, and Galen chose the brain.

Two points of comment are in order here. Firstly, the writings that are attributed to Hippocrates (460-377 B.C.) are a corpus of different authors (the 'Hippocratic Corpus', cf. Phillips 1973: 38ff.), which do not take unequivocally the same position. In one of the books from the Corpus, The Sacred Disease, a cerebrocentrist position is defended, cf. the passage quoted in Clarke and O'Malley (1968: 4):

One ought to know that on the one hand pleasure, joy, laughter, and games, and on the other grief, sorrow, discontent, and dissatisfaction arise only from [the brain]. It is especially by it that we think, comprehend, see, and hear (...).

Secondly, the position of Plato (c. 429-347 B.C.) is a combination of pluricentrism and monocentrism, cf. Clarke and O'Malley (1968: 6):

The soul was made up of three parts, and the most important part, the rational, was assigned to the head and presumably to the brain; the other parts were in the heart and in the upper abdomen.

It is surprising, that Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), in contrast to Hippocrates and Plato, defended a cardiocentric position, cf. Clarke and O'Malley (1968: 8):

Aristotle argued that the heart was the chief organ of the body and the center for thought and appreciation of sensation. The brain, an important structure, was secondary to it and functioned only as a means of cooling the heart's heat.

Aristotle's position was criticized by Galen (A.D. 129-199) in a lively treatise (see Galen 1981), in which he defends the Hippocratic and Platonic position. This did not result, however, in a final triumph of cerebrocentrism, cf. once again Clarke and O'Malley (1968: 16-17):

One cannot avoid admiring the way in which Galen attacked his opponent and (...) it is difficult to understand why the Aristotelian theory survived the onslaught. Its authority in the medieval period and later was probably owing to the greater availability of Aristotle's works.

After the Middle Ages, Western culture fragmented. Religious and scientific views diverged. In the context of the Catholic Church, the devotion of the Sacred Heart, which had started much earlier, became strong in the seventeenth century, cf. the Catholic Encyclopedia on the history of the 'Sacred Heart' cult:

The image of the Heart of Jesus was everywhere in evidence, which fact was largely due to the Franciscan devotion to the Five Wounds [of the dying Jesus on the cross] and to the habit formed by the Jesuits of placing the image on their title-page of their books and the walls of their churches.
In the (Catholic) Counter-Reformation, it was stressed that religious belief is a feeling, which one should not try to understand. Placing faith in God in the heart, fitted, of course, the dualistic pressure from philosophy and science, it helps to make faith ‘immune’ for rational critique. At the same time, this religious cultural model might very well have had a conserving effect on expressions which relate the non-rational part of inner life to the heart.

Descartes (1596–1650) is the prototypical representative of the shift to dualism (cf. Damasio 1994). But we should not forget that it was especially the emotions that caused a problem for Descartes. He devoted a separate publication to the problem of the passions: Les Passions de l’Amour (“The Passions of the Soul”, 1645–46), dedicated to Elizabeth, Princess of Bohemia (1618–1680), with whom he corresponded about the passions. Unavoidably, Descartes’ solution gets a dualistic twist, cf. Gaukroger (1995: 401): “Passions are the perceptions which have their origin in the body”. This means that emotions are considered to be in the body, but at the same time, they are perceived by the mind, duplicated intellectually, and the duplicate is called “passions”. Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) had a discussion with Descartes on September 23 and 24, 1647. This discussion has not been written down, but Pascal might have protested against the idea that emotions are perfectly transparent to the mind, cf. his well-known saying “that the heart has its reason that reason knows not of ... Do you love by reason?”

In the history of Dutch, some traces of the shift from cardiocentrism to dualism can be found: expressions in which intellectual functions like memory and wisdom were associated with the heart were gradually replaced by expressions in which the heart did not play any role. Today, memory is associated with the head: *uit het hoofd leren* ‘to learn by heart’, but the Middle Dutch dictionary mentions *bi der herten* ‘by heart’, cf. present-day French *par coeur* and English *to learn by heart*.

In the Middle Dutch dictionary, we find many expressions that conceptualize the heart as the seat of intellect and thought (p. 391): *van herten onbekent* ‘with restricted intellect’, *Hi docht int hert sere* ‘he thought strongly’. The WNT (volume 6: 19) states that in the Bible the heart is the seat of wisdom: *Alle vrouwen die wijs van herten waren* ‘all women who were wise of hearts’ (Exodus 35, 25); *Ick hebbe a een wijs, ende we standigh herte gegeven* ‘I have given you a wise and sensible heart’ (1 Kings 3, 12); *Dat wijs een wijs herte bekomen, *‘that we get a wise heart’ (Psalms 90, 12). In the official Dutch Bible translation of 1637, called *Statenvertaling*, the collocation of heart and wisdom is still frequent, but in later translations the heart is left out. For example, in 1 Kings 10, 24, it is said that people went to Salomo to hear the wisdom that God had given to his heart, as the *Statenvertaling* says *(om zijn wijsheid te horen, die God in zijn hart gegeven had)*, but in modern translations we read “...om te luisteren naar de wijsheid waar en God hem vervuld had”, ‘to listen to the wisdom with which God had filled him’. A computer search in the NBV (*New Bible Translation*) of 2004, shows that there are 13 passages left in which heart and wisdom co-occur; remarkably, a search on collocations of ‘heart’ and feelings like ‘joy’ or ‘sorrow’ gives more results in the modern translation than in the older one.

The English expression *to learn by heart*, to memorize, shows that at least in the English language the emotional-intellectual dualism is reflected in an absolute way in the language. Norman French *par coeur* might have played a role here: abstract domains got French labels (*spirit* instead of *ghost*) and this might have protected such expressions from change, even when they were *calques*. Niemeier (this volume, section 2.3) comments on another expression, *to take it to heart as follows*: “If one takes something to heart, one thinks about it very seriously. This expression may well be reminiscent of the Old or Middle English concept of the heart as the seat of knowledge ...”. Although Dutch has given up the equivalent of *to learn by heart*, there are, just like in English, some expressions left that we would associate, at least partly, with intellectual functions such as *Diep in mijn hart denk ik dat hij gelijk heeft* ‘Deep in my heart I think that he is right’ or *ter harte nemen* ‘to take to heart’. Thoughts and knowledge that are strongly associated with the ‘self’ are still in the heart, scientific, encyclopedic and everyday knowledge are in the head. We can conclude that the brain is seen as an information processor, and the heart as the ‘self’, where, besides feelings, personal thoughts, convictions and intuition are located.

5. Conclusion

Expressions involving the heart for the conceptualization of inner life clearly fit the view that cognition is embodied. At the same time, we have seen that the heart has a cultural value, which makes it necessary to take the cultural context into consideration when analyzing such expressions.

The picture that arises for the Dutch data is radically different from the one that is sketched by Yu (this volume) for Chinese. In Chinese, the heart
is the ruler, it supervises the emotional and intellectual functions that are located in different parts of the body. The Chinese picture is at the same time a distributed and holistic one. The Dutch data fit into the Western dualistic model, in which the heart is not the supervisor of the other organs. Heart and head may even play conflicting roles in inner life as e.g. in mijn hart zegt ja maar mijn verstand zegt nee ‘my heart says yes but my head says no’.

The strong similarities between Dutch, German and English do not exclude micro-variation between them. A cultural model does not predict the lexical and phraseological details of a specific language. We can conclude that further research should thus continue to explore three levels of analysis: the language-specific details, the culture-specific generalities (‘Western cultures’, ‘Chinese culture’, etc.) and the universal constraints that play a role in the embodied conceptualization of inner life.

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The heart and cultural embodiment in Tunisian Arabic

Zouhair Maalej

Abstract

The Muslim concept of the heart as an instrument of understanding is evident in the teachings of the Koran (the Holy Book of Muslims). The heart in present-day T. Arabic, however, is almost exclusively the seat of emotions and cultural values, but hardly ever the instrument of thought and understanding, which are relegated to the 3aql ‘intellect’. Compared to other parts of the body, the heart is one of the most productive source domains for cultural conceptualizations in present-day T. Arabic. It is a CONTAINER for emotions, people, and objects that can enter it and leave it (IN-OUT schema). It is also capable of movement as in UP-DOWN (fear, panic, and worry), and WIDE-NARROW (worry, anxiety) image schemas. The heart provides metaphorical conceptualizations for love and sadness, and is also involved in conceptualizations of cultural values such as compassion, cruelty, courage, encouragement, generosity, hard work, kindness, laziness, meanness, (in)tolerance, conscience, remembrance, and so forth. The metonymic model of the heart’s idealized Cognitive Model describes the HEART FOR PERSON metonym, where the heart stands for the person. Compared to the conceptualizations of the heart in English, the heart in present-day T. Arabic is fairly restricted in scope. Indeed, while the heart in English describes a wider range of emotions, mental faculties, and cultural conceptualizations — equating this organ with the mind, thinking, understanding, etc. — in present-day T. Arabic the qaşb ‘heart’ is largely dissociated from the mind, thinking, and understanding.

Keywords: heart, metaphor, metonymy, cultural model, cultural values, emotions, Tunisian Arabic.

1. Introduction

In the West, three models of the relation between body and mind can be isolated: (i) the humors model, which originated in the Greek culture and medicine and dominated Western thought up to the middle ages, with remnants still felt in some language use nowadays (Geenerts and Grondelaars 1995); (ii) the body-mind split model, which was staunchly defended by Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle and systematized by Descartes, and which dominated Western philosophy for many centuries (Lakoff and Johnson 1999); and (iii) embodied thought model, which called