

What is the Human Heart? Some Ontological Metaphors in the New Testament

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Abstract

The article discusses ontological metaphors with the target domain HEART in the text of the New Testament. It aims at exploring cross-domain mappings through the analysis of metaphoric expressions, involving lexeme *heart*, obtained by the Bible corpus analysis employing the method of continuous sampling. The research is based on the principles of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and proves its tenet that abstract ideas are conceptualized on the basis of knowledge about basic concrete things. It is stated that the two superordinate mappings involve domains THING and PERSON. Each of these mappings has elaborations and metaphoric extensions, which unravel the heart's non-ordinary and unexpected features, justifying a different viewpoint to its understanding. The obtained results can be useful for adapts of Christianity's theologians and literary scholars as they provide insight into conceiving one of the essential theological concepts – HEART, deeper than its literal reading, which contributes to a more profound understanding of the Biblical messages.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor theory, cross-domain mapping, elaboration of metaphor, extension of metaphor, source domain, target domain

INTRODUCTION

Modern studies prove that

in the heart are found volitions, ambitions, aspirations, and motivation, but it is also the seat of human consciousness and spirituality, moral concepts, and moral consciousness. The heart has conscience and the original heart as its form, and moral emotions as its function (Zhang, 2017).

The heart is not only an organ that reflects our emotional state of mind but can also determine it. Studies have found that the heart has direct neuronal input into many emotions regulating compartments of the brain and can greatly influence the activity of these areas (Roberts, 2020). For example, researches have shown that unrecognized cardiac arrhythmias are detectable before the onset of panic attacks (Mccraty et al., 2009).

Ancient philosophers, such as Aristotle, believed that the heart was the human body's centre of intelligence. Though according to classical belief, the brain has proved to be such a centre, there are studies (see Kniss, 2020), which demonstrate that the intelligence of the mind does not only reside in the brain but also in the heart. Therefore, we can't dismiss the fact that the heart plays an inevitable role in moulding human personality along with that it maintains body functions. This might be explained by the fact that the network of neurons, which send information from the heart to the brain is the most extensive, compared to any other organ in the body (Cameron 2002).

Although, such scientific conclusions cannot be viewed as novel in the ontological sense, the view that the heart is the centre of human personality has been entrenched for thousands of years in the Bible. Since the heart is not only a concrete body organ but also an abstract spiritual entity, we hypothesize that according to the tenets of Conceptual Metaphor Theory it should be conceptualized in relation to some basic material concrete entities. For now, there exist a number of works that are focused on the study of Biblical metaphors, among the most recent are Haddox (2016), Smit (2017), Zimran (2018), Sherwood (2018), Veremchuk (2022). The far more exhaustive list is given in Lancaster (2021) and in the online compendium of Biblical metaphors (biblicalmetaphor.com). However, having analyzed these sources, one can come to the conclusion that the concept HEART as a target domain for ontological mappings in the Bible has not yet become the object of research. Given this fact, and being inspired by Owiredu's (2021) research, aimed at the analysis of ontological metaphors for the target domain SIN, which has a methodology, very similar to ours, we believe it is necessary to focus on the investigation of ontological mappings, involving source domain HEART.

Therefore, the aim of the given paper is to unravel the way the heart is conceptualized in the New Testament through cross-domain mappings. The object of research is ontological metaphors with the target domain HEART. The highlights of the paper are: revealing the way the heart is conceptualized in the text of the New Testament; determination of the metaphoric cross-domain mappings, in which the heart acts as a target domain; establishing the range of heart metaphor.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The source of the material for analysis is represented by the New Testament corpus. The New Testament is a collection of sacred books that encode the Christian edifice, one of the most salient aspects of which are the relations between people and God as well as interpersonal relations among humans. Therefore, the concept HEART is one of the most essential Biblical concepts as it is related to the human inner world, which any religion is aimed at.

The material for the analysis is represented by 166 contexts from the New Testament, obtained by the method of continuous sampling, which contain the lexeme *heart* referring to humans in a spiritual sense (not in the meaning of “body organ” or “centre” like in the phrases *heart of the company* or *heart of the city*, etc.) Therefore, the regular direct meaning of the word *heart* in the retrieved contexts is “the part of a person that feels strong emotions and feelings” (Longman dictionary). The next step was semantic and contextual analysis of the retrieved contexts aiming to find the use of the word *heart* in readings other than its literal one given above. This yielded the establishment of lexical and semantic variants of *heart*, the relations among which were analyzed in terms of metaphoric transference in a polysemic word. After that, the contexts were searched for the metaphoric expressions with *heart*, which are classically viewed as figurative language, employed to embellish speech. The shortlisted samples were further analyzed within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which treats metaphor as a way of structuring reality and organization of the knowledge of the world. This step presupposed a number of stages. Firstly, we identified the primary cross-domain mappings, which sanction the use of the found metaphorical expressions. Secondly, we analyzed the central mapping, which is the projection of the most basic source domain feature upon the target domain HEART. Ultimately, we searched for elaborations and extensions of central mapping and, if found, highlighted the cross-mapping zone. The last step was the interpretation of the analyzed metaphoric cross-domain projections and delineating the range of the HEART metaphor.

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR THEORY

The classical metaphor theory is rooted in the realm of literary studies, particularly in rhetoric and poetics, originally on the views of Aristotle and Cicero. But metaphor can be viewed not merely as a literary expressive means, realizing stylistic and rhetoric purposes, but as a cognitive mechanism for structuring experience and knowledge about the world. This view is based on the theory of conceptual metaphor (Kövecses, 2017; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), which explains the mechanisms of cognitive features projection from one domain to another.

Within the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) distinguish three types of metaphorical projections: ontological, structural and oriental. The given paper is focused on ontological mappings. This type of metaphor normally involves a projection of something concrete onto something abstract. According to Lakoff and Johnson:

Ontological metaphors are so natural and persuasive in our thought that they are usually taken as self-evident, direct descriptions of mental phenomena. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)

The ontological metaphorical transfer involves understanding one domain of experience (HEART) in terms of an absolutely different domain of experience (PERSON or THING, for instance). Such mapping is tightly structured and it presupposes mapping of source domain features (like 'solidity', 'purification', etc. from the domain THING) upon the target domain HEART, sanctioning the use of metaphoric expressions, like *pure heart* or *hard heart*. It is worth mentioning that within this paper we use the term 'metaphor' in relation to conceptual cross-domain mappings (like HEART IS A PERSON) and metaphorical expression (like 'heart went out'), which are sanctioned by the mapping.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Biblical polysemy of the lexical concept HEART

Semantic and contextual analysis of the retrieved contexts with the target lexeme *heart* proved that in some samples it has readings other than literal. These readings indicate that the target lexeme is a polysemic unit, the semantic space of which is organized in a form of a radial set. The found contextual meanings (or lexical and semantic variants) are as follows:

- 'Feeling' (1): *For this people's **heart has become calloused**; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.* (Mt. 13:15)
- 'Desire' (2): *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, **set your hearts on things above**, where Christ is seated at the right hand...* (Col. 3:1)
- 'Daring' (3): *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But **take heart!** I have overcome the world.* (Jn. 16:33)
- 'Conscience' (4): *Dear friends, if our **hearts do not condemn us**, we have confidence before God* (1Jn. 3:21)
- 'Mind' (5): *Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they **were thinking in their hearts**, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things?"* (Mk. 2:8)
- 'Soul' (6): *For where your treasure is, there your **heart** will be also.* (Mt. 6:21)

The first meaning is the most salient as it has regular lexicographic registration, and as semantic and cognitive analysis showed, it is the most central one, as it organizes the whole radial set around itself. This means that the extended senses are clustered around this central meaning and are related to it by metaphoric and partial/holistic profiling of distinct segments of the schematic meaning of *heart*.

Lexical and semantic variants 'desire', 'daring' and 'conscience' are hyponymic, in relation to the superordinate meaning 'feeling', since these meanings refer to the types or kinds of feelings that are characteristic of humans, like the feeling of volition, courage and guilt correspondently. Therefore, these senses partially profile the more schematic meaning 'feeling' specifying its particular type. Thus, the lexical and semantic variant 'feeling' is the most prototypical for the lexical concept *heart* and all the aforementioned meanings exhibit a family resemblance structure. Such semantic development can be explained by the fact that concepts function as mental reference points. When the human mind comes across new phenomena it tends to interpret them in terms of existing categories, which aligns with the principles of efficiency, cognitive economy (see Geeraerts, 1997) and apperception.

The lexical and semantic variant 'soul' is a schematic extension of the central meaning 'feeling' based on the same metonymic transference part/whole, since feelings are the property of the human soul. Meaning 'mind' is a metaphoric extension of the basic meaning 'feeling', which is based on their common feature 'volition', since the source of human desires can be both feelings (impulsive aspirations) and mind (rational and premeditated desires). The lexical and semantic variant 'mind' also has one more structural part/hole connection with the meaning 'soul' in the radial set, since the mind is a rational part of the human soul.

It should be noted that in some contexts it appears challenging to draw a sharp demarcation line between one meaning and the other, as more than one reading proves to be possible, which indicates the fuzziness of the *heart*'s semantic space. For instance, the blurred borders can be found between the meanings 'feeling' and 'mind':

You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. (Mt. 12:34)

This context might refer to both: the overflow of feelings and the overflow of thoughts. Since meaning 'soul' has the most general meaning, sometimes it is difficult to state whether the context actualizes this reading or one of its hyponyms like 'feeling', 'desire' or 'mind':

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Mt. 11:29)

In the provided context lexeme *heart* can have all the aforementioned readings, since a person can be humble in feelings, desires and thoughts.

Range of HEART metaphor

Range of metaphor is defined as a number of source domains, which map their properties upon the target domain HEART. To delineate it we analyzed the retrieved contexts searching for metaphoric expressions involving the target lexeme *heart*. Conceptual analysis of metaphoric expressions enabled us to determine the ontological cross-domain mappings, in which HEART is involved as a target domain.

Heart is a thing

Given that HEART in the analyzed Biblical contexts denotes the spiritual centre of a person rather than a body part, mapping HEART IS A THING is aligned with the tenet of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, that an abstract entity is conceptualized as a physical object. The central mapping is represented by the feature 'possessing' that both source and target domains share and underlies elaboration and extension of the cross-mapping zone. Metaphoric elaboration is represented by the transference of other adjacent features from source to target domain, to which belong:

- 'being taken: *Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment.* (Mt. 9:22), see also (Mt. 9:2; Mt. 9:22; Mt. 11:29; Jn. 16:33).
- 'pure': *He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.* (Ac. 15:9), see also (Mt. 5:8; 1Ti. 1:5; 2Ti. 2:22; Ja. 4:8; Ro. 1:21)

- 'dark': For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Ro. 1:21)
- 'distantly located': *These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.* (Mt. 15:8)
- 'hard': *...for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.* (Mk. 6:52), see also (Mk. 6:52; Ep. 4:18)
- 'fragile': *Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."* (Ac. 21:13)
- 'valuable': *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* (Ph. 4:7)
- 'covered': *Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.* (2Co. 3:15)
- 'lost': *Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.* (2Co. 4:1), see also (2Co. 4:16, He. 12:3, He. 12:5)

Though metaphoric expressions like *take heart*, *lose heart*, *break one's heart* are trite, since their meanings are registered in the dictionaries, they reveal that the abstract ideas of courage or daring (which are the readings of *heart*) and human feelings, like love (the other reading) are conceptualized as material things that can be grabbed, lost and broken.

The mapping HEART IS A THING has a number of extensions. The first one is HEART IS A CONTAINER. The central mapping is represented by the projection of the feature 'ability to contain' upon the human heart, since the heart, as a core of human personality, is understood as an entity that contains human qualities, feelings and emotions.

Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. (1Jn. 5:10)

This mapping has a number of metaphoric elaborations, which include a projection of the following source domain features:

- 'letting in and out': *But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean* (Mt. 15:18). *For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.*" (Mk. 7:19)
- 'being filled': *And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.* (Ro. 5:5), see also (Ac. 5:3; Ac. 14:17; 2Co. 1:22; 2Co. 8:16; Re. 17:17).
- 'being open': *One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshipper of God. The*

Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. (Ac. 16:14), see also (2Co. 6:13).

The extension of metaphoric projection HEART IS A CONTAINER is HEART IS A STOREHOUSE:

*The good man brings good things **out of the good stored up in his heart**, and the evil man brings evil things out of the **evil stored up in his heart**. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. (Lk. 6:45)*

Further extension yields projection involving 'extended' source domains in a spatial sense, one of which is HEART IS A RESTRICTED SPACE, which maps the following traits:

- 'having inner room': ***Make room for us in your hearts**. We have wronged no-one, we have corrupted no-one, we have exploited no-one. (2Co. 7:2)*
*I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you **have such a place in our hearts** that we would live or die with you. (2Co. 7:3)*
- 'suitable for activities': *Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. **Sing and make music in your heart** to the Lord (Ep. 5:19), see also (Re. 18:7)*

The analyzed mapping is superordinate for further two 'spatial' metaphoric extensions: HEART IS A DWELLING and HEART IS A KINGDOM, which map the following traits:

- 'suitable for living': *...so that Christ may **dwell in your hearts** through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love... (Ep. 3:17).*
- 'ruling': *Let the peace of Christ **rule in your hearts**, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (Col. 3:15).*

The widest spatial extension of the source domain is represented by the mapping HEART IS A UNIVERSE. Such mapping is aligned with the view that the human microcosm is a reflection of the macrocosm in which we live:

*And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the **day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts**. (2Pe. 1:19)*

Another direction of metaphoric extensions (CONTAINER – DWELLING – KINGDOM – UNIVERSE) is the metaphorical equating of the target domain HEART with particular physical objects:

- LIGHTHOUSE ('shining'): *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his **light shine in our hearts** to give us the light of the*

- knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2Co. 4:6)*
- FIRE ('burning'): *They asked each other, "Were not our **hearts burning** within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Lk. 24:32)*
 - SOIL ('sowing'): *When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was **sown in his heart**. This is the seed sown along the path. (Mt. 13:19)*
 - TOOL ('serving'): *...God, whom I **serve with** my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you (Ro. 1:9), see also (Ro. 15:6)*
 - RECORD BOOK ('be written in/on'): *You yourselves are our letter, **written on our hearts**, known and read by everybody. (2Co. 3:2), see also (Ro. 2:15; 2Co. 3:3; He. 8:10)*

The analyzed mappings show that in the text of the New Testament, HEART as one of the main spiritual concepts is represented as a material THING for the reason that mapping of concrete features upon the target domain of an ideal (non-material) nature contributes to more clear communication of moral ideas to the ordinary people, so that the majority of speakers may clearly understand the input message associating it with more simple basic life experience.

Heart is a person

The personification of the heart is an instance of metaphorical mapping, in which the central part of the human body and essential constituent of the inner world is associated with the person itself, instantiating the metonymic transference of synecdoche type as well when a part is associated with the whole. Central mapping of such projection is represented by the feature shared by both source and target domain 'ability to govern', since the inner world of the person governs human actions and deeds. The elaboration of this mapping is represented by the scope of metaphoric expressions sanctioned by the central mapping, which leads to the projection of the following traits:

- 'turning': *But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and, in their hearts, **turned back** to Egypt. (Ac. 7:39), see also (Lk. 1:17; He. 3:12).*
- 'walking': *And in their prayers for you their **hearts will go out** to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. (2Co. 9:14), see also (Lk. 7:13).*
- 'weighing': *Be careful, or your **hearts will be weighed down** with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. (Lk. 21:34)*

- ‘worrying’: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let **your hearts be troubled** and do not be afraid.* (Jn. 14:27), see also (Jn. 12:27; Jn. 14:1)
- ‘experiencing emotions’: *Therefore my **heart is glad** and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope.* (Ac. 2:26)
- ‘being slow’: *He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how **slow of heart to believe** all that the prophets have spoken!”* (Lk. 24:25)
- ‘being searched’: *I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who **searches hearts** and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.* (Re. 2:23), see also (Ro. 8:27).

The other direction of metaphoric elaboration is mapping human body organs and their features upon the target domain HEART:

- ‘having eyes’: *I pray also that the **eyes of your heart** may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called* (Ep. 1:18)
- ‘being circumcised’: *You stiff-necked people, with **uncircumcised hearts and ears!** You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!* (Ac. 7:51), see also (Ro. 2:29)

The extension of the superordinate mapping HEART IS A PERSON is represented by the projections, involving hyponyms of the source domain:

- JUDGE (‘condemning’): *Whenever our **hearts condemn** us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.* (1Jn. 3:20), see also (1Jn. 3:21)
- TRAVELLER (‘going astray’): *That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their **hearts are always going astray**, and they have not known my ways.’* He. 3:10, see also (2Th. 3:5)
- DEAR PERSON (‘being valuable’): *I am sending him — **who is my very heart** — back to you.* (Phile. 1:12)

The use of these metaphoric expressions represents the human heart as a human, who can behave and undergo actions, which contributes to a more clear and efficient way of conveying complex ideas through more simple and understandable associative parallels. As Aristotle remarked:

strange words simply puzzle us; ordinary words convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh (cited by Smith, 1982: 128)

Therefore, the use of metaphor enables thinking processes, which leads to learning something new. Summarizing, the range of the HEART metaphor comprises

the following source domains for ontological projections: THING (with the extensions CONTAINER, STOREHOUSE, RESTRICTED SPACE, DWELLING, KINGDOM, UNIVERSE, LIGHTHOUSE, FIRE, SOIL, TOOL, RECORD BOOK), and PERSON (with the extensions JUDGE, TRAVELER, DEAR PERSON)

CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

The practical value of the given study can be an application of its findings in the literary studies and theological sphere for promoting Christianity and its moral code, since the addressed issues reveal that the heart is the centre of human feelings, volitions, conscience, courage and consciousness, that is it forms the essence of human personality. The revealed cross-domain mappings illustrate the way how such an abstract, ideal and inscrutable entity as the human heart can be understood in terms of simple basic concepts from the central life experience. Highlighting such parallels may prove to be useful in promoting human values and ethical ideas as integral components of modern Europe and the World in General. The mapped source domain features unravel the usual, common traits of the human heart not as a biological body organ but as an entity, which makes up the spirit of a Human and maintains a connection with God. Realizing these features can cast light upon the understanding of such a phenomenon from a different, more concrete and understandable perspective and unveil the mystery of what really the human heart is. Attributing source domain features to the human heart makes up a metaphoric visual image that can attract attention and make the reader rethink and reconsider his own inner world. This is so, since metaphoric expressions, sanctioned by the mapping from one hand, draw the recipient's attention, and from the other hand, if given proper thought to it, reveal new senses and implications.

We hope that the obtained insight might inspire other researches, dedicated to the application of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory to the investigation of ontological metaphors in literary studies.

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Kaj je srce človeka? Nekatero ontološke metafore v Novi zavezi

Članek obravnava ontološke metafore z osrednjim področjem »srce« v besedilu Nove zaveze. Cilj je raziskovanje domenskih preslikav skozi analizo metaforičnih izrazov, ki vključujejo leksem »srce«. Slednji je bil pridobljen z analizo korpusa Biblije, ob uporabi metode kontinuiranega vzorčenja. Študija temelji na načelih teorije konceptualne metafore in dokazuje, da se abstraktne ideje oblikujejo v pojme na osnovi poznavanja konkretnih bitnosti. Ugotovljeno je, da dve glavni preslikavi vključujeta domeni »stvar« in »oseba«. Vsaka od teh preslikav ima razširitve in metaforične izpeljanke, ki razkrivajo nenavadne in nepričakovane značilnosti »srca«, kar upravičuje različen pogled na njegovo razlago. Pridobljeni rezultati bi lahko koristili tako obrazlagalcem krščanstva kot teologom, saj dajejo globlji vpogled v razumevanje enega ključnih teoloških konceptov, to je koncepta »srce«. Slednji presega njegovo dobesedno dojetje, s tem pa prispeva k bolj poglobljenemu razumevanju biblijskih sporočil.

Ključne besede: konceptualna teorija metafore, meddomensko preslikavo, elaboracija metafore, razširitev metafore, izvorno področje, ciljno področje