

**I Had My Heart on My Palm:
Conceptualization of the Heart in Modern Standard
Arabic**

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1. Introduction

The human heart holds a profound and multifaceted symbolism across cultures, serving as the locus of emotions, morality, and cognitive processes (Sharifian et al., 2008). In the past few years, there have been various studies dedicated to unfolding its complex figurative meanings in several languages across the world, based on which we gain more idea about the similarities and cultural differences of cultural communities' conception of this vital organ (Sharifian et al., 2008; Maalej & Yu, 201; Brenzinger & Kraska-Szlenk, 2014).

In the Tunisian dialect of Arabic language, expressions and idioms featuring the heart (*qalb*) provide a window into how cultural and cognitive processes interact in the conceptualization of this vital organ (Maalej, 2023). However, despite the large number of its speakers, no research has so far been done on Modern Standard Arabic.

With over 200 million native speakers, MSA serves as the official language in over 18 countries and is widely used in education, media, literature, and formal domains throughout the Arab world (Aoun et al., 2009; Holes, 2004). Despite the numerous Arabic regional dialects (Maalej, 2023), MSA functions as a unifying linguistic standard that transcends geographic and sociopolitical boundaries within the Arab-speaking community.

This study aims to explore how the heart is metaphorically represented and understood in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the official and formal variety of the Arabic language, through the analysis of idiomatic expressions. By examining several Arabic idioms and expressions related to the heart in MSA, this study aims to uncover the cultural models and conceptual metaphors that underlie the Arabic-speaking societies' understanding of the heart, how they connect it to human features, psychological abilities, and everyday activities. The findings of this study will contribute to the broader cross-cultural study of embodied cognition and the role of the body in shaping language and thought (Gibbs, 2006).

2. Theoretical Framework

Research on body part vocabulary and embodiment in language has long been a focus in cognitive linguistics and cultural studies. The human body represents one of the most fundamental and universal experiences shared across cultures as it is the first and most basic way we interact with and make sense of the world around us (Enfield et al., 2006). Cognitive linguists have observed that while some embodied metaphors and metonymies appear to have cross-cultural parallels, the specific ways in which body parts are used to represent abstract concepts can vary dramatically

based on cultural values, beliefs, and practices (Kövecses, 2003, 2005; Maalej, 2004, 2007, 2008; Sharifian et al., 2008).

This study is grounded in the theoretical perspectives of cultural embodiment (Maalej, 2004, 2007, 2008) and cultural linguistics (Sharifian, 2017). The cultural embodiment framework posits that cultural conceptualizations arise from the interaction between physiological embodiment and cultural experience. As Maalej (2008) argues, “the control of experience and its conceptualization is permeated by culture,” resulting in “a culturally-situated form of embodiment” (p. 396). Cultural embodiment allows for culture to be “read” in the body through linguistic and conceptual representations.

Cultural linguistics provides analytical tools for examining these cultural conceptualizations, such as cultural metaphors, cultural schemas, and cultural models (Sharifian, 2017). Within this paradigm, metaphors are viewed as figurative elaborations that are shaped by underlying cultural schemas and models. By analyzing metaphoric expressions, underlying cultural cognition can be inferred (Kövecses, 2005).

Integrating these frameworks, this research will investigate the conceptual metaphors, metonymies, and imaginative structures employed to represent the heart in Modern Standard Arabic. The analysis will explore the heart as both a source domain, mapping onto other conceptual targets, as well as a target domain itself, conceptualized through various cultural models and image schemas (Kövecses, 2003). Particular attention will be paid to how these linguistic and conceptual patterns reflect Arabic cultural perspectives, values, and experiences associated with the heart.

3. Data and Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, corpus-based approach to analyze the conceptualization of the heart in MSA in 33 idiomatic expressions. The data was collected between May 2024 and September 2024. The primary data was drawn from comprehensive dictionaries of Arabic idioms and expressions, including *A Dictionary of Idiomatic Expressions in Written Arabic for the Reader of Classical and Modern Texts* by Mahmoud Sami Moussa, *Mugam Attabir Al-Istilahi Fi Al Arabiya Al Mu'asira* (A dictionary of idiomatic expressions in contemporary Arabic) by Mohammad Mohammad Dawud, and the online Almaany dictionary of Arabic idioms.

In addition, a large corpus of texts comprising the Arabic Web Corpus 2024 from Sketch Engine was utilized to investigate heart-based phraseology in authentic contexts, aligning with the “usage-based” view of language. Token numbers were provided to reference each contextual

example from the corpus, and all translations were provided by the author of the study. The contextual examples extracted from the corpus underwent minor modifications to enhance clarity and coherence. Specifically, irrelevant, or extraneous information was omitted from certain example sentences using an ellipsis (...) to maintain concision. Furthermore, in instances where additional context or referential information was deemed necessary for comprehending the idiomatic meaning, relevant details were inserted by the author using square brackets [].

The analysis followed an inductive approach, identifying and categorizing the various conceptual metaphors, metonymies, and imaginative structures employed to represent the heart in MSA across the data sources.

4. Findings and Interpretation

The analysis of heart-related idiomatic expressions in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) reveals conceptualizations rich in imagery and metonymies. At the core of these conceptualizations lies the heart's profound symbolic significance in Arab culture and Islamic philosophy. The word "qalb" itself carries connotations of change, transformation, and fluctuation, implying that the heart is a dynamic entity capable of undergoing reversal or alteration (Murata, 1992).

The Quran also depicts the heart "as the locus of that which makes a human being human, the center of the human personality." This significance attributed to the heart stems from the deep connection between humanity and God that involves both cognitive and moral aspects (Murata, 1992). Hence, the conceptual metaphors, metonymies, and schemas identified not only reveal universal patterns of embodied cognition but also culturally specific perspectives that reflect Arabic societies' unique beliefs, values, and experiences associated with the heart.

The idiomatic expressions analyzed in this study are systematically categorized according to their conceptual patterns: image schemas (container and verticality), physical properties (texture, hardness, strength), color properties, size properties, personification, temperature properties, metonymic mappings (heart for person, emotions, and inner self), and culture-specific models (heart as guide/spiritual receptor and as symbol of unity). These categories reveal both universal patterns of embodied cognition and cultural aspects that reflect Arabic societies' unique beliefs, values, and experiences associated with the heart.

4.1. Image Schemas

4.1.1. Container Schema

- (1) ashrab fi qalb -ih
 imbibe in heart his
lit. ‘for something to imbibe/soak his heart’
fig. to be filled with a desire

Example 1: The ancient Arab imbibed in his heart the love of language, so he composed poetry and prose using it, crafting precious words of wisdom. (Token no. 1691051181)

Example 2: He issued this ruling at a time when wine was imbibed into everyone’s hearts in the world. Paul the Apostle’s followers deemed drinking water without wine as degrading to their status, the people of Iran considered it a drink fit for royals, while the people of India saw no better alternative to grow closer to their gods, not to mention that most religious and worldly rituals also utilized wine. (Token no. 4688436256)

This idiomatic expression employs the metaphor the HEART IS A CONTAINER, where the heart is understood as a vessel or container that can be filled or soaked with desires, emotions, or psychological states. The verb “imbibe” or “soak” suggests the metaphorical filling of the heart-container with a particular desire or emotion, in this case, the love of language (1) or the desire for wine (2).

In addition, the expression involves the metonymy HEART FOR PERSON, where the heart stands for the person’s innermost desires, emotions, or psychological states. By referring to the heart being “imbibed” or soaked, the expression metonymically refers to the person themselves being filled with a particular desire or emotion.

- (2) farigh al qalb
empty of -heart
lit. ‘empty-hearted’
fig. in a very bad state

Example: It was as if God was saying...Remember Me when you are blessed, and I shall remember you when you are weak, empty-hearted, and craving sin, so that I may protect you and fortify you. (Token no. 2482975224)

The heart is conceptualized as an empty container, corresponding to a state of emotional or spiritual emptiness or turmoil. This arises from the metaphor EMOTIONS ARE SUBSTANCES that can fill or vacate the heart-container. An empty heart lacks the necessary emotional or spiritual “substance” to be in a good state. The example links the “empty heart” to states of weakness, spiritual deficiency (craving sin), and need for divine intervention to “fill” and “fortify” the heart against despair, depression, or negative all-consuming emotions in general.

4.1.2. Verticality Schema

- (3) ghas qalb -uh fi qadama -yh
sank heart his in feet his
lit. ‘his heart sank in his feet’
fig. to have one’s heart in one’s boots, be panicked

Example: His heart sunk to his feet as he sank into his armchair. It embarrassed him that he was on the verge of tears despite being a mature man on the threshold of old age. (Token no. 6981491313)

This employs the VERTICALITY image schema mapped onto the heart’s movement to conceptualize panic or fear. The expression employs the expression HEART IS A MOVEABLE OBJECT, where it “sinks” downwards from its normal position, it represents an intense psychological state. This portrays the heart as a responsive organ that can manifest emotional states through physical displacement.

- (4) ghas qalb -hu fi sadr -ih
 sank heart his in chest his

lit. ‘his heart sank in his chest’

fig. to have one’s heart in one’s mouth, be nervous

Example: Her heart sank in her chest as she saw the powerful and demanding Nasser who always made her cry, going to sleep sniffing, indicating a long, hot cry that left a trail of dry tears on his firm cheeks. (Token no. 6186863048)

Similar to the “sinking to the feet” expression, THE HEART IS A MOVEABLE OBJECT, but here the downward motion is contained within the chest region. The same VERTICALITY schema is employed to depict nervousness or anxiety that creates an unsettled, uneasy feeling.

This portrays the heart as a mobile, responsive organ that can react to emotional states by shifting position within the body. Specifically, the direction in which the heart moves can have its own connotation, either positive or negative. In this case where the UP-DOWN schema is employed, DOWN IS BAD (Maalej, 2008).

4.2. Physical Properties

- (5) qad qalb -uhu min hajar
 cut heart his from stone

lit. his heart is cut from stone

fig. to have a heart of stone

Example: She nodded, her golden hair flying from around her face, mesmerizing even those with a heart of stone. (Token no. 1559472207)

The heart here is an OBJECT, where the HARDNESS property is mapped to equate a heart made of stone with being cruel and unfeeling. As an extremely solid substance, stone metaphorically represents an impenetrable heart unable to experience empathy. This portrays the person as emotionally detached, insensitive, and impervious to the suffering or feelings of others.

- (6) jamid al -qalb
 solid of heart
lit. ‘to have a solid heart’
fig. Hard-hearted

Example: Arab and Persian sources depicted his character in a frightening way: he was extremely cruel, hard-hearted, and prone to bloodshed. (Token no. 383141065)

The heart is conceptualized through the HEART IS AN OBJECT metaphor, mapping the property of solidity or hardness from the source domain of physical objects. A hard heart represents emotional callousness, cruelty, or lack of compassion.

- (7) ghaliz al -qalb
 thick the heart
lit. ‘thick-hearted’
fig. cruel

Example: Try to be a compassionate manager, not one who is rude or cruel. (Token no. 177798069)

Here, the HEART IS AN OBJECT, with the THICKNESS property mapped onto it. A “thick” heart represents insensitivity or lack of responsiveness to the feelings of others, likely drawing on the metaphorical link between thickness and inability to be penetrated or affected, akin to expressions like “thick-skinned.”

- (8) qalb -uhu hadid
heart his iron
lit. heart of iron
fig. to signal one's courage

Example 1: A person with a heart of stone is surely different from that who possesses a heart of iron thanks to their courage, bravery, and superior ability to confront terror, all without losing their empathy. (Token no. 590991123)

Example 2: Sayed faces life's struggles from a young age and his enthusiasm grows strong until his heart becomes made of iron, allowing him to work closely with a major businessman. (Token no. 148229383)

Here, the HEART IS AN OBJECT, mapping iron to metaphorically represent courage and suggest unwavering strength, resilience, and an unyielding spirit (1). In other contexts, it can also imply that the person's heart became as solid and unbreakable as iron due to his perseverance through hardships, becoming capable of withstanding the greatest challenges and adversity, while also gaining success in his professional life (2).

4.3. Color Properties

- (9) qalb -uh 'abyad
heart his white
lit. 'His heart is white'
fig. a heart free of envy and malice

Example: A believer is said to have a white heart, one that is void of hatred. (Token no. 263572822)

This idiomatic expression employs the COLOR metaphor. The color white symbolizes purity, innocence, and the absence of negative traits like envy or malice, especially in the context of

Islamic beliefs. This maps onto the conceptual metaphor WHITE IS GOOD, which is common across many cultures (Maalej, 2008).

- (10) qalb -uhu ‘aswad
 heart his black
 lit. ‘his heart is black’
 fig. to express that one's heart is full of malice toward other people

Example: His heart turned black, losing all sense of empathy. (Token no. 555361733)

The COLOR metaphor is mapped onto the heart, with the black color representing malice, ill intent, and a focus on negativities rather than virtues. A “black heart” evokes the metaphor BLACK IS BAD, and implies a person who is filled with negative emotions, such as spite, resentment, hatred, or intolerance towards others (Maalej, 2008). The example above portrays the person as harboring deep-seated malice and a lack of goodwill towards those around them.

4.4. Size Properties

- (11) kabir al -qalb
 big of heart
 lit. ‘big-hearted’
 fig. kind-hearted

Example 1: A big-hearted, selfless, and conscientious man. (Token no. 607661850)

Example 2: It is common that there are people who claim to be big-hearted and loving to all people, including friends and even foes. (Token no. 610213944)

Here, size is mapped from the domain of physical objects onto the heart through the OBJECT metaphor. As Maalej (2008) notes, the HEART IS A MANIPULABLE OBJECT, where big heart represents kindness, generosity, and warm-heartedness (1). This arises from the conceptual metaphor that BIG

IS GOOD, where greater generosity and emotional capacity is conceptualized as greater size (2) (Maalej, 2008).

- (12) dha'if al -qalb
 weak of heart
 lit. 'weak-hearted'
 fig. lacks courage, a coward

Example 1: There are good, weak-hearted young men who are influenced by these words and are determined to do [something] because so-and-so said, "He is no man who does not do such," so it is a way of proving manhood. (Token no. 617663411)

Example 2: If a weak-hearted person is afflicted with slander, he should move away from disappointment and victimization. (Token no. 721068613)

The HEART IS A PERSON, attributing the physical property of weakness to it. The metaphorical basis is that the physiologically vital function and centrality of the heart is mapped onto inner strength or courage. Therefore, a weak heart correlates with weakness of spirit.

It is also often linked to a lack of "manhood" or masculinity (1), where some individuals may feel compelled to prove their "manhood" by undertaking certain actions, even if they are cowardly at heart, due to the cultural pressure and expectations surrounding masculinity. Such usage also reflects the cultural model of the heart as the SEAT OF COURAGE, where "weak heart" is someone who is timid, fearful, or lacking in bravery (2).

4.5. Heart as Person

- (13) raqasa qalb -hu fi dulue' -ih
 dance heart his in ribs his
lit. 'his heart danced within his ribs'
fig. to rejoice

Example: She giggled again, and his heart danced happily in-between his ribs.
(Token no. 6170361876)

Here, the HEART IS A LIVING ENTITY, and an energetic being that can “dance” inside the body. Drawing on the HEART FOR PERSON metonymy, it implies that when a person is overcome with joy or elation, their heart becomes animated, almost as if it is performing a celebratory dance within the confines of the chest cavity.

4.6. Temperature Properties

- (14) qalb dafe'
 heart warm
lit. 'warm-hearted'
Kind, generous

Example: Feel better soon, precious Marcel. May your warm heart that spreads its utmost joy and beauty recover soon. (Token no. 294461164)

Here, the TEMPERATURE metaphor of “warmth” is mapped onto the heart, with warmth in the heart representing positive qualities like kindness and generosity. This likely arises from the primary metaphor, AFFECTION IS WARMTH (Grady, 1997), where cognitive conflation between physical warmth and the physiological effects of emotional warmth or affection.

4.7. Metonymic Mappings

4.7.1. Heart For Person

- (15) mayyit al -qalb
 dead of heart
 lit. ‘dead-hearted’
 fig. heartless

Example: As for the heartless, they are not affected, nor do they learn from situations, nor do they fear the consequences. (Token no. 1343691353)

This idiomatic expression metaphorically characterizes a heartless or cruel person. Here, the HEART IS A PERSON, and being devoid of life suggests a complete lack of empathy, compassion, and moral sensibility (Maalej, 2008). In the example, it evokes the HEART FOR PERSON metonymy, equating a dysfunctional heart with an unfeeling person.

- (16) bi la qalb
 with no heart
 lit. ‘without a heart’
 fig. heartless

Example: Tony felt that nothing could touch a man with no heart or feelings. (Token no. 568936823)

The heart here is understood as an OBJECT OF VALUE, where the complete absence of it represents the lack of crucial empathetic qualities. Similar to the previous expression, it evokes the HEART FOR PERSON metonymy, where having no heart equates to being utterly heartless. By saying someone is “with no heart,” the metaphor suggests that the person is completely devoid of the normal human qualities and feelings that are associated with the heart, portraying them as emotionally detached, insensitive, and lacking the basic human capacity for compassion and care.

- (17) basit al -qalb
 simple of heart
 lit. ‘simple-hearted’
 fig. naive, innocent

Example 1: Those who have gone to the streets to protest are simple-hearted people, their goal is to live in peace. (Token no. 4842191989)

Example 2: When I came to know Father, I found him to be a simple-hearted and sentimental man...He loved Jesus from a simple heart that was as naïve as a child’s. (Token no. 6739725230)

Here, the HEART IS AN OBJECT, mapping SIMPLICITY from the domain of physical objects. This conceptualization reflects the cultural value placed on simplicity and innocence within the Arab context. Simplicity of the heart represents innocence (1), naivety, guilelessness, or lack of cunning (2).

- (18) qalb -hu ‘ala kaff -ihi
 heart his on palm his
 lit. ‘his heart on his palm’
 fig. to risk himself

Example 1: ...the soldier, who has his heart on his palm, does not know whether he will return home or die a martyr. (Token no. 265809381)

Example 2: I heard a sound again that interrupted my thoughts...I said to myself, go to the bathroom to see where this sound is coming from... and so, I went to the bathroom and had my heart on my palm. (Token no. 6422590449)

This expression conceptualizes a courageous person as having their “heart on their palm.” It draws on the HEART IS AN OBJECT OF VALUE metaphor, where placing one’s heart on their palm suggests a

willingness to take great risks and put everything on the line. The metaphor implies that the person is so fearless and bold that they are ready to expose their most vital organ, their heart, to potential harm, portraying them as someone willing to take extreme measures and face danger head-on.

- (19) salim al -qalb
 healthy of heart
 lit. ‘sound-hearted’
 fig. of pure intentions, one who has goodwill

Example 1: Tolerance is one of the most important and complex topics...if you instill [tolerance] in a child, he will grow up to be sound-hearted and loving. (Token no. 254154619)

Example 2: A sound heart is one that does not desire what displeases God. (Token no. 201552484)

Here, the HEART IS A PERSON, attributing the quality of soundness or health to the heart. This expression is often employed in the Quran, metaphorically representing someone with pure, untainted intentions, and goodwill towards others (1).

In the second example (2), it may also relate to Islamic concepts of a “pure” heart in the spiritual sense, i.e., a heart completely pure of sin. In the Quranic portrayal, the heart possesses qualities like purity, piety, love, and repentance, yet these virtues are not innate; rather, they are bestowed by God. Purity of heart is seen as essential for gaining closeness to God and attaining spiritual enlightenment. In the absence of this, the heart may succumb to negative traits such as illness, sinfulness, malevolence, and hatred (Murata, 1992).

4.7.2. Heart For Emotions

- (20) yewqtae niat al -qalb
 it cuts strings of heart
 lit. ‘to cut the heart strings’
 fig. heartbreaking

Example: What happened recently in Palestine cuts the strings of the heart, even making them bleed. (Token no. 478256455)

This expression draws upon the metaphor the HEART IS AN OBJECT, particularly an instrument with strings that can be “cut” or severed, causing emotional pain or heartbreak. The act of “cutting the heart strings” suggests a metonymic association, i.e., HEART FOR EMOTIONS, between the heart and emotions, and its strings symbolize the connections or attachments that, when broken, lead to heartbreak.

- (21) das alaa qalb -ih
 he stepped on heart his
 lit. ‘he stepped on his heart’
 fig. to break your own heart by doing something against what you love

Example: He found himself facing a very difficult decision: either he would get married, start a family, have children, and give up literature, or he would step on his heart, his emotions, and his love, and devote himself entirely to literature. (Token no. 1014828516)

The metaphorical mapping here is of physically stepping or trampling on one’s heart, which represents doing something that breaks one’s own principles or values. It evokes the HEART IS AN OBJECT OF VALUE metaphor through the notion of self-inflicted hurt. The contextual example conveys the idea of an individual consciously going against their own desires or deeply held beliefs, causing emotional pain and heartbreak.

- (22) wade yad -ih alaa qalb -ih
 he placed hand his on heart his
lit. ‘he placed his hand on his heart’
fig. to be anxious, scared

Example 1: Everyone keeps their hands on their hearts and wish to avoid war, warning of its dangers. Secretary-General of the United Nations, most European, Arab, and Asian countries, and most importantly, Iranian leaders and the American administration say they do not want war. (Token no. 59209562)

Example 2: It is no secret that such superstitions [astrology] attracts the attention of social media followers... You would always find a person, especially one who lacks faith in religion and science, disturbed and anxious about the future, always placing his hand over his heart for fear of what will happen, and at the same time you see him as greedy and yearning for a better future full of good luck! (Token no. 3260742428)

This expression employs the HEART IS AN OBJECT OF VALUE metaphor, where one metaphorically needs to physically guard the heart to represent feeling anxious or scared. This conceptualization further reflects the cultural belief in the heart’s ability to manifest physical sensations in response to emotional experiences.

In the context of anxiety or fear, as depicted in the examples, the hand-on-heart gesture metonymically represents an attempt to exert control over the turbulent emotions arising from those psychological states.

- (23) haraq qalb -ih
burned heart their
lit. ‘he burned someone’s heart’
fig. to vex, exasperate someone

Example 1: It [poem] described his exile. In it, he addressed his wife, describing his love for her and the burning of his heart because he had no companion or anyone to help him during his illness. (Token no. 2029433921)

Example 2: Shaheen became certain of Faten’s feelings, and felt the fire burning his heart, as he realized that his love for her was not impossible because she was married, as marriage could end in divorce even when two people are still overwhelmed by the power of love. (Token no. 3349081732)

Example 3: He confirmed in his confession that he wanted to “take revenge on her, so he decided to get rid of her son in order to burn her heart over him [her son] just as she burned his [the person confessing].” (Token no. 5719445329)

This idiomatic expression conceptualizes the HEART IS A LIVING ENTITY, mapping FIRE to represent vexation, exasperation, and emotional anguish as a metaphorical burning of the heart-container’s contents. Specifically, it instantiates the metaphor ANGER IS FIRE where the heart can be metaphorically “burned” by intense negative emotions like anger, grief, or anguish.

In (1), the poet’s heart “burns” due to the anguish of separation from his beloved wife during exile and illness, with the burning represents his intense suffering and longing. In (2), a man, Shaheen, feels his heart metaphorically “burning” with the intense passion of forbidden love, highlighting the anguish caused by his unrequited feelings. In (3), the act of “burning her heart” is framed as an act of vengeance in response to a previous act of aggression, metaphorically inflicting the same intense emotional pain that she had previously caused.

4.7.3. Heart For Inner Self

- (26) habat al -qalb
 kernel of heart
lit. ‘the grain/kernel of the heart’
fig. the person you love the most

Example 1: My ten-year-old daughter, Sadeem... is the grain of my heart... [she is] the light of the eyes and the life flowing from the precious soul. (Token no. 2740601902)

Example 2: He went to meet Salima, the grain of his heart, in the days of his youth. (Token no. 7174892608)

This idiomatic expression employs the HEART IS AN OBJECT OF VALUE conceptualization, utilizing “grain” or “kernel”, i.e., the most essential and valuable part of a plant, to refer to a favorite or beloved person. The person or thing being referred is of utmost importance, deeply cherished, and intrinsically connected to the individual’s core, essence, or being. In corpus data, this expression often refers to family members (1) or a person’s romantic interest (2).

- (27) suayda’ al -qalb
 endosperm of heart
lit. ‘the endosperm of the heart’
fig. the depth of the heart, the most beloved

Example 1: A year has passed, and the soul still longs to meet you. O, you who had a pure heart, the endosperm of my heart is your resting place. Father, my feelings are conflicted. I accept God’s will [your death], but my heart still bleeds after our parting. (Token no. 1175793274)

Example 2: The sad scenes of its [war] poisonous arrows have struck the endosperm of the heart become too much for the heart to bear. Rather, they have become a

heavy burden and a frightening nightmare in people’s memories’, which are already burdened with the pain and sadness of the past years of war. (Token no. 441749262)

Similar to the previous expression, this idiomatic phrase employs the metaphor the HEART IS AN OBJECT OF VALUE, but it focuses on the “endosperm” or the innermost part of the heart as representing the most beloved person or entity (1). Specifically, the term “endosperm” refers to the nutrient-rich tissue within a seed that provides nourishment for the developing embryo. Using “endosperm” suggests a metonymic association between the heart and the deepest or most intimate part of one’s emotions or affections (2), i.e., HEART FOR DEEPEST EMOTIONS metonymy.

- (28) fataha qalb -hu li-
 he opened heart his for
lit. ‘to open his heart to something’
fig. to reveal oneself

Example 1: Your partner is trying to open their heart to you to find the reasons behind your unusual treatment. (Token no. 26400335)

Example 2: The Syrian people opened their hearts and homes to Armenians fleeing genocide at the beginning of the 20th century. (Token no. 133746185)

Example 3: A servant is in need of his Lord to open his heart to the Quran and see its treasures. (Token no. 327614910)

This draws on the HEART IS A CONTAINER metaphor. However, in examples (1) and (2), it extends to revealing one’s innermost self, including one’s emotions or vulnerabilities, i.e., exposing its contents.

Pattillo (2023) notes that in Christian thought, an “open heart” represents openness to divine grace. Similarly, in contextual usage like in example (3), MSA also taps into a conception where one’s heart capacity to be open and receptive to divine guidance. However, as asserted by Quranic

teachings, the hearts of those who commit wrongdoings can become hardened and harsh (Murata, 1992). Conversely, if the heart is not receptive, it can become as hard as stone, linking back to idiomatic expression (5).

4.8. Culture-Specific Models

4.8.1. Heart as Guide and Spiritual Receptor

- (29) ‘aemaa al -qalb
 blind of heart
 lit. ‘blind-hearted’
 fig. lacking in insight

Example: The light [of his teachings] is only concealed from he who is blind-hearted, unconscionable, ignorant, and unobservant. (Token no. 507831915)

The VISION metaphor is mapped onto the heart, metaphorically portraying it as having the capacity for sight or vision, which is then negated to indicate a lack of insight or understanding. It draws on the conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING. This personification of the heart as a “blind” entity reflects the cultural belief in the heart’s role as the source of intuitive understanding and perceptiveness (Baranyiné Kóczy & Sipőcz, 2023). It also stems from the broader Quranic model that views the heart as the locus of one’s innermost self, capable of providing deep insight and understanding beyond mere rational thought.

- (30) hadath -ahu qalb -hu
 spoke he heart his
 lit. ‘his heart spoke to him’
 fig. he felt it in his heart, as an intuition

Example 1: During this period, Omar bin Al-Khattab was experiencing an intense psychological conflict. His heart told him that these people might be right. (Token no. 2473225380)

Example 2: It was no mere sentence by the late writer Ahmed Khaled Tawfik, as we all witnessed it on the afternoon of Tuesday, April 3, 2018...It was as if the man had predicted the scenes of his funeral in his novel “*Coffee with Uranium*” when he said, “It was very likely that my burial would be Sunday, April 3,” as if his heart spoke to him, revealing to him the day on which he will die. (Token no. 6449901035)

This expression draws on the HEART AS A PERSON metaphor, where the heart is personified as being able to “speak” and communicate intuitions to the person. It portrays the heart as an agentive organ that provides intuitive knowledge or guidance to inform the person’s judgments or decisions (1). It also connects to cultural models of the heart as a receptacle for divine guidance or spiritual wisdom, as suggested by the context of the writer's premonition of his own death (2).

- (31) rabat alaa qalb -ih
 he tied-PAST on heart his
 lit. ‘to tie his heart’
 fig. God has given him power to endure

Example: His affliction is deep, and his grief at the loss of his entire family is even deeper. We ask God to grant him patience and fortitude. We ask God to tie his heart and grant him patience. (Token no. 340652987)

This expression employs the metaphor of the HEART IS AN OBJECT that can be bound or tied, and where the abstract notion of emotional strength or fortitude is understood in terms of a more concrete and physical domain. It draws on the metonymy HEART FOR EMOTIONAL STRENGTH. Most contextual examples in the corpus suggest that God is the only being who is capable of performing this action. By God metaphorically “tying” the heart, one is able to harness the emotional strength necessary to face adversities, such as the passing of a loved one.

4.8.2. Heart as Unity and Popularity

- (32) ‘akhadh bi -majamie al -qulub
he took in totality of hearts
lit. ‘he took the total of the hearts’
fig. to capture hearts or be very popular

Example 1: The sun’s rays reflect on the mountains and hills on the horizon, revealing a picturesque view that captures all the hearts. (Token no. 958632258)

Example 2: During his lectures, he spoke words that captured all the hearts, engaging those listening to him mesmerizingly, so that none of them would leave until the lecture was over, not to mention that the attendance was large, no less than a thousand men. (Token no. 5316155986)

Example 3: She made it clear that she likes a rational man with sound logic, who, when he speaks, captivates hearts, and provokes minds, and whoever hears him cannot help but believe his words and admire his style and logic. (Token no. 649259816)

This expression utilizes the metaphor HEART IS A LIVING ENTITY, where hearts are conceptualized as beings that can be “captured” or won over, representing the ability to gain popularity or affection. The act of “capturing hearts” can both be performed by object or abstracts like beauty (1), or people (2), especially in terms of rhetoric and character (3).

This also suggests a HEART FOR AFFECTION metonymy, where there is an association between the heart and emotions, particularly love or affection. This metaphor reflects the cultural significance of winning the hearts and affections of others, which may be valued in the Arab context as a form of social capital or popularity.

- (33) alaa qalb rajul wahid
 one heart man one
 lit. ‘on one man’s heart’
 fig. to express solidarity and agreement

Example 1: The UAE flag is a symbol of identity, cohesion, and brotherhood that unites the people of the Emirates under the heart of one man, all behind one leader. (Token no. 212631)

Example 2: These struggling people will remain united on one man’s heart in the face of the occupier, until our full rights are restored, no matter how long it takes and no matter how great the sacrifices are. (Token no. 72589239)

This expression conceptualizes the heart as an OBJECT that can be shared by multiple people who have the same opinion or position. The act of being “on one man’s heart” suggests a metonymic association between the heart and unity or agreement, where the heart represents shared identities (1), beliefs or perspectives (2), i.e., HEART FOR UNITY metonymy. This metaphor reflects the cultural value placed on solidarity, consensus, and unity within the Arab context, where shared beliefs and perspectives are symbolized by having one united heart.

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the heart in MSA is conceptualized through a variety of interrelated domains, reflecting both universal and cultural patterns. A central theme that emerges is the conceptualization of the heart as a moral compass. Expressions like “white heart” and “sound heart” draw on the COLOR and HEALTH metaphors to represent purity, virtue, and righteous intentions, reflecting the cultural belief in the heart as the seat of moral and spiritual purity. Conversely, a “black heart” or “dead heart” metaphorically captures malice, ill-intent, and a lack of empathy, traits that are seen as antithetical to the heart’s sanctified role. These patterns underscore how the heart is deeply embedded within the cultural and religious framework of Arabic societies, serving as a symbolic embodiment of one’s moral character and proximity to God.

Another prominent theme is the heart's representation as a source of strength, courage, and emotional resilience. Expressions like "heart of iron" map physical properties of solidity onto the heart to signify unwavering strength, fortitude, and an unyielding spirit. Conversely, a "weak heart" is equated with cowardice and lack of bravery. These linguistic patterns highlight the high value placed on stoicism, composure, and emotional self-control within traditional Arabic culture, with the heart serving as a symbolic locus of these esteemed qualities.

The conceptualization of the heart as a living, responsive entity that can physically manifest emotional states is another emerging theme. Expressions depicting the heart as "sinking," "throbbing," or "dancing" draw on the heart's physiological functions to capture the embodied, transparent experience of emotions. This aligns with the broader cultural model of the body as a medium for the outward expression of subjective, experiential phenomena (Maleej, 2008).

In addition, the heart is frequently conceptualized as a container that can be filled, emptied, or burdened by various psychological states, desires, and emotions. This container metaphor, while a common cross-cultural phenomenon (Baranyiné Kóczy & Sipőcz, 2023), is realized in cultural ways that reflect the central role of the heart in housing, regulating, and expressing the full range of human experiences within the Arabic-speaking context. This belief stems from the deep-rooted cultural and religious significance accorded to the heart, which is viewed as the locus of one's innermost self, including their emotional, spiritual, and moral essence (Murata, 1992).

Another emerging theme is the immense value and significance accorded to the heart within the Arabic cultural context. The heart is not merely portrayed as a physical organ but is conceptualized as an object of supreme value and preciousness that must be guarded, risked, or even metaphorically injured. Expressions like "placing one's hand on the heart" to represent anxiety or "having one's heart on the palm" to convey courage highlight the heart's ontological preciousness, it is treated as something so valuable that its safety must be ensured through physical gestures.

The heart is also portrayed as an entity that can be potentially compromised, such as "stepping on one's heart" to signify violating one's own values and principles. Such depictions underscore the cultural belief that the heart houses the depths of an individual's moral character and emotional core.

Such sacred status is further exemplified by expressions denoting the heart's innermost depths as representing the ultimate object of affection, such as the "kernel/endosperm of the heart."

This lends vivid imagery to the conceptualization of the heart as a life-giving seed that contains one's most cherished attachments. The valorization of the heart's contents is also reflected in the idiomatic notion of being "without a heart" to represent utter heartlessness and lack of basic human empathy.

Finally, the data also reveals the heart's conceptualization as an authoritative source of insight, intuitive wisdom and divine guidance that transcends mere rational thought. Expressions like the "blind heart" lacking insight and the heart "speaking" its intuitions to the person lend it a privileged epistemological status rooted in Islamic theology. The Quran portrays the heart as the locus of spiritual wisdom and moral judgment, a faculty that allows one to perceive truth and receive divine enlightenment (Murata, 1992). This is exemplified by the metaphor of needing to "open one's heart" in order to become receptive to spiritual knowledge.

Significantly, the valence of these heart conceptualizations is often highly context-dependent, reflecting the heart's dual potential to embody both elevated ideals and human weaknesses. This nuanced and multivalent portrayal suggests that the heart in MSA is neither uniformly virtuous nor inherently flawed, but rather a complex and dynamic construct that encompasses the full spectrum of human experience.

Interestingly, the relative absence of expressions directly linking the heart to romantic love or intimate affection in the MSA corpus points to potential cultural differences in the heart's conceptualization compared to Western contexts. This may suggest that the heart's symbolic significance in Arabic-speaking communities may lean more towards moral, spiritual, and emotional fortitude, rather than the realm of interpersonal attachment and passionate desire. Further cross-cultural research could shed light on these divergent cultural models and their linguistic manifestations.

It is also worth noting that this study was based on a relatively limited dataset of 33 idiomatic expressions. While these expressions were carefully selected and analyzed in-depth, a broader corpus of heart-related phraseology in MSA may uncover additional conceptual metaphors, metonymies, and cultural models that were not captured in the current investigation. The study has also identified several expressions that can be closely linked to Quranic teachings and Islamic philosophy. However, the analysis has only briefly touched upon these religious and theological dimensions. Future research could delve deeper into the the linguistic conceptualization of the heart and its prominent role within the Islamic belief system.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the conceptualization of the heart in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) through a qualitative, corpus-based analysis of 33 idiomatic expressions. By examining linguistic metaphors, metonymies, and imaginative structures employed to represent the heart, the research sought to uncover the cultural models and conceptual mappings that underlie Arabic societies' understanding of this vital organ.

The key findings reveal conceptualizations that reflect both universal patterns of embodied cognition as well as cultural perspectives rooted in Arabic beliefs, values, and experiences. Prominently, the heart emerged as a symbolic embodiment of morality, virtue, emotional fortitude, and receptivity to spiritual guidance, serving as a moral compass and the locus of one's innermost self.

A novel contribution of this study lies in its empirical investigation of heart metaphors within the formal Modern Standard Arabic variety, an understudied area compared to regional Arabic dialects. The analysis elucidates how MSA taps into the heart's symbolic significance as established within the Arab-Islamic cultural framework, drawing upon Quranic teachings and philosophical ideals to conceptualize this organ as housing the depths of human character, morality, and spiritual wisdom.

In addition, the findings shed light on potential cultural divergences in the heart's symbolic connotations compared to Western contexts. While in Arabic the heart is strongly associated with fortitude, resilience, and divine receptivity, there was a relative lack of expressions linking it directly to romantic love or intimate desire. This may suggest cultural variations in the situating of the heart as an embodied source domain, an area warranting further cross-cultural inquiry.

Overall, the study's corpus-based methodology allowed for a contextualized examination of heart metaphors grounded in authentic language use, offering nuanced insights into the intricate interplay between universal and culture-specific conceptual patterns. However, the analysis drew upon a relatively limited dataset, leaving room for future investigations to uncover additional expressions and conceptual models through larger corpora.

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