



Aethiopica 27 (2024)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

ALEKSANDER KACPRZAK, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

Article

Emotions, Morality, and Cognition: The Unprecedented Scope of the Concept of the Heart in Amharic

Aethiopica 27 (2024), 250–271

ISSN: 1430-1938; eISSN: 2194-4024

Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut
Hiob-Ludolf-Zentrum für Äthiopistik
der Universität Hamburg
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

by Aaron Michael Butts

in cooperation with

Bairu Tafla, Ludwig Gerhardt, Hewan Semon Marye,
Susanne Hummel, and Alexander Meckelburg

Editorial Team

Sophia Dege-Müller, Karin Ghion-Hamadu

Emotions, Morality, and Cognition: The Unprecedented Scope of the Concept of the Heart in Amharic*

ALEKSANDER KACPRZAK, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

Introduction

After a long period in which semantics was treated as a peripheral area of linguistics, the interest in the meanings conveyed by each language has acquired a new and buoyant life with the second cognitive turn in linguistics, which saw language as the key to understanding human cognitive abilities.¹ Simultaneously, following the ideas pioneered by linguists such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, Edward Sapir, and Benjamin Lee Whorf, a branch of (cognitive) ethnolinguistics has blossomed in Europe and across the world, bringing back to life the notion of worldview, understood as a unique way of perceiving the world encapsulated in every language.² One of the main research areas within both these currents has been body parts,³ not least the heart.⁴ This seems quite natural for two reasons. First, although referring to a seemingly universal piece of reality, each language carries a different, unique division of the human body, which allows one to appreciate fully the relativity that comes with using any natural language. Second, and even more importantly, through metaphor and metonymy, certain body parts, not least the heart, often enable language speakers to understand and reason about less tangible domains of experience, including the hardly penetrable realm of human cognition and emotions.

When it comes to the conceptualization of the human body encapsulated in Amharic, its uniqueness starts already at the most general level, where there exist

* I would like to thank the editorial and review team of *Aethiopica*, who with their comments allowed me to improve significantly the first version of the manuscript. I would also like to thank, from the bottom of my heart, my dear friends Kalkidan Tenkir Bireda, Bamlak Abagare Sitota, and Yohannes Gebretsadik Araya for their readiness to help me with their insights and proofreading. ከልቤ አመሰግናለሁ።

¹ Lakoff 1987; Langacker 2013.

² Sapir 1949; Whorf 1956; Humboldt 1999; for deeper analysis, see also Głaz 2022: 77–78.

³ Sharifian et al. 2008; Yu 2009; Brenzinger and Kraska-Szlenk 2014; Kraska-Szlenk 2019.

⁴ Goddard 2008; Yoon 2008; Yu 2008; Afreh 2015; Baş 2017.

at least three different lexemes that profile the concept of the body from different perspectives: *akal* ‘physical body, not rarely in opposition to spiritual, also organ’, *sāwännāt* ‘body, figure’, and *gāla* ‘body as seen from the outside’. This special kind of conceptualization concerning the body as a whole also happens with respect to the concepts connected with the single body parts.⁵ The part that stands out the most, however, is probably the heart. This is because its scope is much greater than what one is used to in European languages, such as English, Polish, or Russian, as it also embraces the cognitive dimension, allowing one to realize the relativity of the division between the mind and the heart, which is so deeply enrooted in most European cultures and languages. Furthermore, even in the areas that are more familiar to the European ear, the concept of the heart in Amharic is shaped differently, as it includes a number of original, linguistically entrenched ways of understanding single emotions and character traits.

Therefore, the present article seeks to study the conceptualization of the heart in the system of the Amharic language and bring out its most unique characteristics. More precisely, the two major goals of the study are:

- to uncover the vast scope of the concept, including its emotional, moral, characterological, and cognitive dimension;
- to analyze the lexical representations of the concept, together with their surroundings, and the way they function in different contexts.

Through this procedure, this study will mark another step towards gaining a better understanding of the conceptual universe of Amharic, which, apart from several very valuable semantic analyses,⁶ still remains largely unexplored. Furthermore, the study will also contribute to the overall goal of uncovering the differences in how the human body is conceptualized and verbalized across the world’s languages.

Material

In order to complete the two main goals described above, three sets of linguistic data were used in the study: dictionary data, corpus data, and a self-collected corpus of excerpts from texts and spoken language. When it comes to dictionary data, seven dictionaries were used to conduct the present study. The basic lexicological data concerning the main lexical representation of the concept—the noun ልብ (*labb*)—as well as its derivatives was excerpted from the

⁵ For instance as in Abinet Sime 2019.

⁶ Mengistu Amberber 2001; Mengistu Amberber 2007; Mengistu Amberber 2008; Zelealem Leyew 2003; Abinet Sime 2019.

contemporary monolingual dictionary of the Amharic language *Amarəñña mǝzgābā qalat* (henceforth AMC),⁷ as well as the older but similarly (if not more) comprehensive *Addis yamarəñña mǝzgābā qalat* written by Dästa Täklä Wäld⁸. Subsequently, the idiomatic expressions found in AMC were complemented by two additional dictionaries: *Yä 'amarəñña fäliṭoččä*,⁹ and *Amharic–English Dictionary*.¹⁰ The former provides a specialized overview of idiomatic expressions in Amharic and is fairly rich with regard to idioms including the word *labb*, for which it provides Amharic definitions. The latter, although a bilingual dictionary, provides an even richer pool of idiomatic expressions involving the word *labb*, including some that do not occur in the other dictionaries used in the present study. The bilingual dictionary written by Thomas Leiper Kane was, to some extent, also used to complement AMC with regard to basic information pertaining to the lexical representations of the concept. In this context, however, one needs to take into consideration that the author of the dictionary based his definitions on translations from other dictionaries.¹¹ Therefore, and because of the lack of one-to-one equivalence between Amharic and English, the provided English translations should be treated as a signal post, rather than the ultimate explanation of the potential meaning held by the discussed lexemes. In order to broaden the comparative perspective as well as to further enrich the lexicological data used, the study also embraced the Amharic–Russian dictionary *Amxarsko-russkij slovar'* written by Ėmmanuil Berovič Gankin and Kaša Gäbrä Həywät,¹² which also offers rich information about the lexical representations of the concept, including phrases not registered by any other of the dictionaries analyzed. Finally, Kidanä Wäld Kəfle's *Māṣḥafā sāwasəw wägəs wāmǝzgābā qalat ḥaddis*,¹³ as well as Wolf Leslau's *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez* was used to study the etymology of the discussed lexemes.¹⁴

The above dictionaries paint a fairly comprehensive picture of how the heart is conceptualized and verbalized in the system of the Amharic language.¹⁵ Follow-

⁷ Ethiopian Languages Research Centre 2000/2001.

⁸ Dästa Täklä Wäld 1970.

⁹ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991.

¹⁰ Kane 1990.

¹¹ Kane 1990, I, vii–viii.

¹² Gankin and Kaša Gäbrä Həywät 1969.

¹³ Kidanä Wäld Kəfle 1955/1956.

¹⁴ Leslau 1991.

¹⁵ Key in this context is the notion of (linguistic) worldview, here understood after Jerzy Bartmiński as a 'language-entrenched interpretation of reality, which can be expressed in the form of judgements about the world, people, things, events. It is an interpretation, not a reflection; it is a portrait without claims to fidelity, not a photograph of real object. The interpretation is a result of subjective perception and conceptualization of reality performed

ing the spirit of today's ethnolinguistic research,¹⁶ the above sources were also complemented by additional sets of data to ensure a more dynamic and contemporary character of the data and, consequently, of the linguistic analysis provided. Firstly, the main collocational patterns involving the lexical representations of the concept were derived from the *Amharic Web Corpus (amWaC)*, which is a corpus based on texts collected from the Internet, the total size of which is almost 26 million words. Such a resource made it possible to complement the analysis with the main collocations used in today's Amharic. Additionally, it provided a better sense of which idiomatic expressions registered by the dictionaries are, in fact, part of the everyday language, as opposed to peripheral and outdated expressions. Secondly, a self-collected corpus of text excerpts was used to provide a deeper qualitative analysis of the semantic properties of the lexical representations of the concept as well as the ways in which they are used in the contemporary Amharic discourse. A considerable part of the corpus was constituted by text excerpts coming from the *amWaC* corpus, but, in order to ensure greater variation and scope of the analysis, examples from music, literature, news websites (*Ethiopian Reporter* [ethiopianreporter.com], *BBC NEWS አማርኛ (Amarəñña)* [bbc.com/amharic], *አዲስ ማለዳ (Addis Maläda, 'New morning')* [addismaleda.com], *Ethiopian News Agency ENA* [ena.et]), and popular shows available on YouTube (*Seifu ON EBS @seifuonebs*, *ቅዳሜን ከሰዓት (Qadamen käsä 'at, 'Saturday afternoon')* @ebstvWorldwide, *African Renaissance Television Service @ArtsTvWorld*), were also included in the corpus.

Lexical Representations of the Concept

More often than not, in order to trace the roots of a chosen concept in Amharic, one needs to go back to its Gə'əz origin. A quick look at the two dictionaries of Gə'əz used in the preset study allows one to understand that this is certainly also the case with the modern-day concept of the heart.¹⁷ Here, one can see that the noun *labb* ('heart'), that is, the main lexical representation of the concept, already possessed an unusual scope during its Gə'əz days. Apart from the definitions provided by the lexicographers, this is reflected in a multitude of linguistic facts. Firstly, both dictionaries confront their readers with an impressive number of various derivatives of *labb*. Most interesting in this context is probably the fact that

by the speakers of a given language; thus, it is clearly subjective and anthropocentric but also intersubjective (social). It unites people in a given social environment, creates a community of thoughts, feelings and values. It influences (to what extent is a matter for discussion) the perception and understanding of the social situation by a member of the community' (Bartmiński 2009, 23).

¹⁶ Underhill 2012; Bartmiński 2018.

¹⁷ Kidanä Wäld Kəfle 1955/1956, 555–556; Leslau 1991, 304–306.

the concept of the heart in Gə‘əz was also represented by the derived verbs *läbbäbä* / *läbbäwä* (‘possess understanding, understand, comprehend, perceive, be clever, be mindful, devise, pay attention, beware’),¹⁸ with the latter giving origin to two more derived verbs (*aläbbäwä*, ‘caus. of *läbbäwä*, also instruct, give understanding, make intelligent’, and *täläbbäwä* ‘be comprehended, understood’). Other than that, one can also find nominal, adjectival, and adverbial derivatives, such as *läbbuna* / *läbbona* (‘understanding, intelligence, insight, wisdom, reason, reasoning, prudence, skill, cleverness’), *läbbawe* (‘intelligence, prudence, mind, intellect’), *läbbunawi* (‘wise, understanding, attentive’), *läbbawi* (‘pertaining to the mind, rational’), *läbbəwä* (‘skillfully’), or *bäläbbuna* (‘attentively’). What all of the above lexemes have in common is that they highlight the intellectual side of human existence, demonstrating that the ties between the Amharic heart and what one in English would call ‘mind’ and ‘reason’ go far back in time. Secondly, Kidanä Wäld Kəfle’s dictionary also offers a number of established phrases formed with the main nominal representation of the concept. Here, the weight shifts more to the particular traits of human character, as in *läbbä ‘anəst* (‘weak, faint-hearted, lit. of feminine heart’) and *läbbä ‘əbn* (‘hard, hard-hearted, pitiless, bleary, lit. heart of stone’). Interestingly, when compared to other qualities, heavily underrepresented in both Gə‘əz dictionaries is the aspect of emotionality, which should be very well known to the English-speaking audience of the present article, and which, as we shall see later in the article, has also become one of the main perceived functions of the heart in today’s Amharic.

When it comes to modern Amharic, the traces of the uniqueness of the main representation of the concept—the noun *läbb*—can already be found in the bilingual dictionary published by Kane, where it is translated by thirteen different English words and phrases: ‘heart, belly, chest, ventral portion of the body; inside of s.th. e.g a *dabbo*-bread; courage, good sense, intelligence, mind, attention; truth, fact, heart of the matter’.¹⁹ The Amharic–Russian dictionary is slightly more sparse in this regard, as it translates it into four main lexemes, that is, сердце (*serdce*, ‘heart’), разум (*razum*, ‘reason’), ум (*um*, ‘mind’), and интеллект (*intellekt*, ‘intelligence’), but other words, such as душа (*duša*, ‘soul’) or сознание (*soznanie*, ‘consciousness’), are also used in connection with the single idioms involving the name *läbb* (see section 4). The range of the translations provided,

¹⁸ Kidanä Wäld Kəfle’s dictionary treats these two verbs under one definition (Kidanä Wäld Kəfle 1955/1956, 555), while Leslau provides two separate, although highly similar definitions of the two (*läbbäbä* ‘understand, be intelligent, be perspicacious, pay attention (denominative from *läbb*)’, *läbbäwä* ‘possess understanding, understand, comprehend, perceive, be clever, be mindful, devise, take heed, beware’ [...] denominative from *läbb* or one of its derivatives such as *läbbäwi* ‘rational’” Leslau 1991, 305–306).

¹⁹ Kane 1990, I, 72.

particularly the ones pertaining to human cognition and reason, may, perhaps, confuse a non-Amharic speaker. The dictionary makers, however, were not mistaken, as they simply attempted to reflect the unusually vast scope of the concept that the noun *labb* represents. In fact, the definition of *labb* in the contemporary dictionary of Amharic (AMC) is ever more embracive:

1. በሰውነት ውስጥ የደምን ዝውውር ያሟያከናውን ውስጠ ክፍት የሆነ የሰውነት ክፍል።
2. እንደ አእምሮ ሁሉ የስሜት፣ ሃሳብ፣ ... መፍለቂያ እንደሆነ ተደርጎ የሚወሰድ አካል።
3. የዳቦ ቡጥ ወይም የእንጨት፣ የፍሬ፣ ... መሃለኛው ክፍል።
4. ከአገናዛቢ ምእላዶች ጋር እየሆነ ሃሳብ፣ ስሜት፣ ... የሚል ፍቺ የሚሰጥ (ለምሳሌ ልቤ ተሸበረ / ልቡ ተጨነቀ)።
5. (ዘይ.) ድፍረት፣ ወኔ።²⁰

‘1. A part of the body, which serves to process blood circulation inside the body 2. An organ, which, just as *a’əmāro*,²¹ is conceptualized²² as a manifestation of emotions, thoughts, etc. 3. The inner part of a loaf of bread, a log of wood, a fruit, etc. 4. A way of expressing feelings and thoughts which combines with possessive suffixes [for instance *labbē täšäbbärä* ‘I was scared, lit. my heart was scared, terrorized’ / *labbu täčännäqä* ‘he was worried, lit. his heart was worried’] 5. (metaphorically) courage, spirit’.

Quite obviously, the first of the senses provided by AMC refers to the most basic, physical role that the heart plays within the human body. The second of the senses, in turn, refers to the qualities ascribed to the heart within the Amharic worldview, stressing the fact that they are a result of human conceptualization, and not objective reality.²³ Perhaps most interesting in this context is the fact that the heart is here juxtaposed with another important category, that is, *a’əmāro* (‘mind, brain’), and that the two are presented as standing in a complementary, rather than contradictory, relation. Other than that, one can, once again, observe

²⁰ Ethiopian Languages Research Centre 2000/2001, 33.

²¹ The word *a’əmāro* is most often translated into English as ‘mind’, but can, in some contexts, also mean ‘brain’.

²² Literally, ‘made to express / stand for’.

²³ This is a significant adjustment when compared to the definition provided by the dictionary written in 1970 by Dästa Täklä Wäld, where there is no reference to the status of the perceived intellectual role of *labb*: ከውስጥ አካላት አንዱ፣ የደም መመላለሻ፣ ያሳብ መፍለቂያ (*käwast akalat andu yädäm mämmälaläša yassab mäfläqiya* ‘one of the inner organs, transporting blood, giving origin to / generating thoughts’) (Dästa Täklä Wäld 1970, 701). This could indicate that the globalized scientific worldview has been significantly entrenched in the mentality of the Amharic speakers in the period that separates the release of the two dictionaries in question. Therefore, it would be greatly desirable to follow up the present study with a study of older Amharic texts, which could cast light on the potential development of the discussed lexeme in the last 50–100 years.

that the conceptualizations connected with the heart in Amharic embrace not only feelings and emotions,²⁴ but also thoughts. The third sense corresponds with the translation ‘inside of s.th. e.g a *dabbo*-bread’ present in the bilingual dictionary written by Kane, meaning that the heart in Amharic serves as a regular base for various metonymic extensions based on the IN-OUT image schema. The fourth sense, interestingly, refers to the grammatical properties of the word *labb*, which can take up possessive suffixes in order to express the feelings and the thoughts of the experiencer. The fifth and last sense provided by the dictionary points to yet another important aspect embraced by the heart in Amharic, that is, courage. Thus, in general, in light of the two definitions presented in the above, the noun *labb* in Amharic can be said to span three major dimensions: the emotional, the cognitive, and the characterological.

Apart from the noun *labb* itself, the various aspects of the concept mentioned above are also apparent in its derivatives. AMC names three such lexemes: the noun *labbona* / *labbuna*, as well as the adjectives *labbam* and *labbawi*. The former is defined through two other, highly complex terms, that is, *ḥallina* (‘conscience’) and the already mentioned *a’əmaro* (‘mind, brain’). What is a mistake from the lexicological point of view, however, can help us once again to observe the ties between *labb* and *a’əmaro*, which seem to complement each other, rather than form a stark opposition known from the European languages. Highly valuable in the context of drawing the initial sketch of the scope of the concept is also the link between the heart and the moral dimension of the human existence (conscience), which was not named in either of the definitions of the lexeme *labb* discussed already. When it comes to the two adjectival derivatives, the former of the two (*labbam*) is clearly connected with intelligence and skill, as the dictionary distinguishes two separate senses for it: 1. *astāway, yāmmayzānägga* 2. *balāmuya* ‘1. observant, thoughtful, not forgetful 2. professional, a skilled person’. The latter (*labbawi*), in turn, sheds light on yet another aspect of the Amharic heart, that is, its connection with desire and will (*kāmulu fəllagot wäyamm səmet yämänäččä*, ‘stemming from all one’s desire / will or feelings’).²⁵ The number of derivatives is slightly higher in Kane’s bilingual dictionary. Apart from *labbona* / *labbuna*, translated as ‘sense, intelligence, mind, conscience, faculty of understanding’, and *labbam* (similar to another derived adjective *labbāñña*, ‘intelligent, clever, observant, insightful; attentive’), the dictionary has also registered nominal forms *labbāññannät* and *labbamənnät*, meaning ‘intelligence, attentiveness’.²⁶ The Am-

²⁴ Worth noting in this context is the fact that Amharic does not have the same division between *emotions* and *feelings* as English does, with both being expressed by the word *səmet*.

²⁵ Ethiopian Languages Research Centre 2000/2001, 35.

²⁶ Kane 1990, I, 76.

haric–Russian dictionary offers an even higher number of derivatives than its English counterpart, as it also includes the adjective *labbawi*, which it translates as *сердечный* (*serdečnyj*, ‘cordial’), *искренний* (*iskrennij*, ‘sincere’), as in *labbawi sǝmet* (искренние чувства, *iskrennie čuvstva*, ‘true feeling(s)’).²⁷ Interestingly, the verbs *labbābā* / *labbāwā* (‘possess understanding, comprehend’), already mentioned in the context of the Gə‘əz origins of today’s concept of the heart in Amharic, are present only in the dictionary of Amharic written in 1970 written by Dästa Täklä Wäld.²⁸ This could be another important indicator of the changes that the concept has been undergoing in the last half century under the pressure of the globalized scientific worldview.

Idiomatic Expressions

The vast scope of the concept of the heart is seen even better in the light of idiomatic expressions involving the word *labb*, which also spans the emotional, the cognitive, the characterological, and the moral dimension of human existence. Starting with the aspects that are least foreign to the English ear, the collected material allows one to conclude that *labb* in Amharic constitutes the uncontested center of one’s character. Firstly, it is the place from which most of one’s strength, courage, and energy comes, with a number of highly entrenched idiomatic phrases profiling each of these aspects (*labbä bǝrtu*, ‘of strong character, lit. of a strong, energetic heart’; *labbä däffar*, ‘fearless, courageous, lit. of bold heart’; *labbä qorǝt*, ‘courageous, bold, determined, lit. of determined heart’; *labbä mulu*, ‘bold, courageous lit. whole heart’; *labbä gorämsa*, ‘of young heart, used in reference to strong and energetic elderly people’).²⁹ Logically, lack of strength, determination, and courage is also conceptualized in terms of experiencing certain problems with the heart, as a weak and lazy person can be conceptualized as having a dead (*labbä mut*, ‘of a dead heart’), loose / lax (*labbä läl*, ‘of a lax heart’), or lazy heart (*labbä sänäf*, ‘of a lazy heart’), while lack of courage is perceived as simply lacking the heart (*labb yälelläw*, ‘coward, fearful, lit. not having heart’).³⁰ Hesitance, in turn, is viewed in terms of breaking the perceived unity of the heart (*hulätt labb mähon*, ‘be hesitant, lit. to have two hearts’), which is why making up one’s mind relies on bringing the heart back to its original state (*labbun* and *adärrägä*, ‘to make up one’s mind, lit. he made his heart one’).³¹ Secondly, the heart is the main storage

²⁷ Gankin and Kaśśa Gäbrä Həyväw 1969, 94.

²⁸ The verb is presented under one definition in two spelling forms *labbāmā* and *labbāwā*. Dästa Täklä Wäld 1970, 704.

²⁹ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččāw Wäru 1990/1991; 22–23; Kane 1990, I, 74.

³⁰ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččāw Wäru 1990/1991; 21–23; Kane 1990, I, 74.

³¹ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččāw Wäru 1990/1991, 21; Kane 1990, I, 74.

place for goodness. Therefore, a good, mild, and humble person can be conceptualized as someone who has a heart made of pure honey (*labbä wäläla*, ‘heart of gold, lit. heart of pure honey’), or simply a pure, sincere heart (*labbä qən*, ‘sincere heart’).³² Apart from this, strongly reflected in the collected material is the connection between the heart and compassion (*labbun bällaw*, ‘feel sorry for someone, be moved to compassion for someone’, and *labbu rarra*, ‘to soften the heart, to feel pity’), as well as forgiveness (*labbu marä*, ‘to forgive sincerely’).³³ Unsurprisingly, the heart in Amharic is also linked with honesty and straightforwardness, as seen in very basic and commonly used conceptualizations such as *käläbb tännaggärä* (‘say something from the heart’) or *labb sättä* (‘give one’s heart’).³⁴ Obviously, just as was the case with the previous group of attributes, the antonyms of goodness, honesty, and compassion are also perceived in terms of an aberrative state of the heart. Evil spirit and lack of compassion can, among other things, be rendered by phrases such as *labbä dängay* (‘lit. heart of stone’), *labbä dārāq* (‘merciless, ruthless, lit. of dry heart’), *labb aṭṭa* (‘with no heart’), *labbä čäkkāñ* (‘of oppressive heart’), and *labbä kǎntu* (‘of vain heart’).³⁵ With regard to the uniqueness of the Amharic worldview, perhaps particularly noteworthy in this context is the correlation between having a bad character and the conceptualized fatness of the heart, as reflected in the phrases *labbu sāba* (‘his heart became fat’), and *labbä dāndanna* (‘unfeeling, hardhearted, lit. of fat heart’).³⁶ Finally, and interestingly, in Amharic the heart is also responsible for patience. Also in this case, simple rules apply: the more spacious and heavier the heart, the more patience it gives to its possessor (*labbä säffi*, ‘patient, lit. of wide heart’; *labbä bahər*, ‘patient, lit. of heart like an ocean’; *labbä qällal*, ‘lit. of a light heart’).³⁷

Rather expectedly, the heart in Amharic is also the center of one’s emotions. In this role it is often easy to arouse and difficult to calm down. This is apparent in a number of verbonominal collocations formed with the prefix *tä-* that introduces passivity, such as *labb täqäsäqqäsä* (‘lit. heart was roused’), *labb tännssassa* (‘heart was incited, aroused’), and *labbu tänawwätä*, which means that the possessor of the heart has been stirred emotionally, excited, or motivated to do something, and which all present both the heart and its possessor as rather passive victims of the emotions raging within them.³⁸ However, the heart also has the power to calm itself down, as seen in the phrases *labbu rägga* (‘lit. his heart calmed

³² Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 22; Kane 1990, I, 74.

³³ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 25; Kane 1990, I, 71.

³⁴ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 27; Kane 1990, I, 72.

³⁵ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 26; Kane 1990, I, 74.

³⁶ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 23; Kane 1990, I, 71–73.

³⁷ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 22; Kane 1990, I, 74.

³⁸ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 24; Kane 1990, I, 72.

down'), *labbu arräfä* ('lit. his heart calmed down, relaxed'), and *labbu gäbba* ('lit. his heart entered').³⁹ When it comes to the specific emotions and feelings associated with the heart (as opposed to the rather unspecified influx of energy and emotions highlighted by the above phrases), the most linguistically prominent of them are certainly love, anger, and preoccupation. When it comes to preoccupation, very widespread are the conceptualizations pertaining to the destruction of the heart, frequently in a rather violent manner, as in *labbu färräsä* ('be weighed down, oppressed, lit. his heart was destroyed'),⁴⁰ *labbun sänättäqä* ('to upset someone, lit. cut his heart in two'),⁴¹ and *labbun säqqäläw* ('be preoccupied, worry, lit. hung / crucified his heart').⁴² Interestingly, however, preoccupation and sadness in Amharic can also be rendered by the phrase *labbu qäzäqqazä* ('be sad, melancholic, lit. his heart became cold'),⁴³ which draws on the similar experiential foundation as the English idiom cold-hearted, but, nonetheless, denotes a different state. The other spectrum of the domain of temperature, in turn, serves as the base of the phrase *labbu täqqattälä* ('his heart burns / is on fire'),⁴⁴ highlighting the anger of the experiencer. Anger and fury can also be expressed by using conceptualizations referring to a physical injury being done to the heart, for instance, *labbu q^wäsälä* ('to be angry, vexed, lit. his heart got wounded / injured'), and *labb aq^wäsl* ('importunate, nagging, argumentative').⁴⁵ But arguably the richest in idiomatic phrases is the connection between the heart and love. Starting from the most basic, the phrase *labbu wäddädä* ('to love, lit. his heart loved')⁴⁶ demonstrates that the heart has a lot of free will when it comes to choosing the object of love, with the possessor of the heart being seen as the passive follower of its notions. *Kälabb wäddädä* ('love truly, lit. love from the heart'),⁴⁷ in turn, is a phrase based on the connections with sincerity, already discussed in the previous paragraph. Just like in English, the heart in Amharic can also, through metonymy, stand for love itself, as seen in the phrase *labbäš käne gar aydällämm* lit. 'your heart is not with me'.⁴⁸ The phrase *labbu gäbba* ('to fall in love, have a crush, lit. entered his heart'),⁴⁹ in contrast, rests on the very basic HEART IS A CONTAINER metaphor, with falling in love being conceptualized as entering the heart by the

³⁹ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 23–25; Kane 1990, I, 71–73.

⁴⁰ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 24; Kane 1990, I, 74.

⁴¹ Kane 1990, I, 71.

⁴² Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 25; also compare with Kane 1990, I, 71.

⁴³ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 24; Kane 1990, I, 72.

⁴⁴ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 24; Kane 1990, I, 72.

⁴⁵ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 24–26; Kane 1990, I 72– 75.

⁴⁶ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 24; Kane 1990, I, 73.

⁴⁷ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 27.

⁴⁸ Own example.

⁴⁹ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 24; Kane 1990, I, 73.

object of love. The most numerous group of idioms, however, is based on the metaphor that presents falling in love as a result of one's heart being captured or taken by the object of love, as in *labbun sälläbäččäw* ('to make fall in love / steal one's heart, lit. she took out his heart'),⁵⁰ *labbun wässädäččebbät* ('lit. she took his heart against him'),⁵¹ and *labbun marräkäw* ('lit. his heart was captivated'),⁵² which all mean that one has fallen in love or loved something.

At last, we arrive at the most distinctive (at least from the European standpoint) group of idioms, that is, the ones which link the heart with various aspects of human cognition. Although the link has already been discussed in the previous section dedicated to lexicological definitions, it is only now, in the light of the idiomatic expressions, that one can fully appreciate the scope and the strength of this connection. To start with, as seen in idioms such as *labbä bär* ('intelligent, quick of apprehension')⁵³ and *labb abäräta*, ('increase one's intelligence / understanding, lit. to strengthen the heart'),⁵⁴ in the system of the Amharic language, the heart is regularly linked with intelligence. Even more widespread, however, are the phrases in which the heart is perceived as the center of one's memory and focus. The latter of the aspects is particularly reflected in two of the most frequently used idioms involving the name *labb*, that is, *labb alä* ('focus, pay attention, lit. to say *labb*')⁵⁵ and *labb adarrägä* ('focus, pay attention, lit. to do heart').⁵⁶ When it comes to memory, in turn, trying to recollect something can be perceived as searching one's heart (*labbun märämmärä*),⁵⁷ while remembering something very important is associated with placing and storing it in one's heart (*bälabb awalä*).⁵⁸ Interestingly, when a recollection suddenly comes out by itself, it also does not pop into someone's head or mind, like in English, but their heart (*labbun mättaw*, 'lit. it hit his heart').⁵⁹ Logically, lack of focus, memory, and intelligence is also conceptualized as an aberrative state of the heart. Especially visible in this context is the metaphor presenting the experiencer as lacking the heart, which can

⁵⁰ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 25; Kane 1990, I, 71.

⁵¹ Own example.

⁵² Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 25; Kane 1990, I, 71.

⁵³ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 22; Kane, 1990, I, 74.

⁵⁴ Kane 1990, I, 72.

⁵⁵ In Amharic, the verb *alä* serves as regular means to form composite verbs, as in *däss alä* ('be glad, happy'). In such constructions, it is fully deprived of its original meaning (Leslau 2000, 125–126).

⁵⁶ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 26; Kane 1990, I, 72–73.

⁵⁷ Kane 1990, I, 71.

⁵⁸ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 27; Kane 1990, I, 75.

⁵⁹ Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991, 24; Kane 1990, I, 71.

mean both forgetfulness (*labbä bis*, ‘forgetful, lit. without heart’; *labb aṭṭa / asaṭṭa*, ‘forgetful, lit. he lost / was made to lose his heart’) and lack of intelligence (*labbä ṭul*, ‘lacking intelligence, reason, lit. without heart’; *labbä godlo*, ‘unintelligent, lit. deficient / lacking heart’), although the latter characteristic may also be conceptualized as the heart being clogged or deaf (*labbä dafən*, ‘unintelligent, imbecile lit. of stopped up / deaf heart’; *labbä dānq^wäro*, ‘stupid, lit. of deaf heart’).⁶⁰ Finally, the ties between the heart and cognition can be observed in idiomatic phrases pertaining to imagination and ambition, as reflected in phrases such as *labbä tārara / labbä tälləq* (‘one who has lofty, (overly) ambitious goals’), *labbä tännəš* (‘small-minded, one who does not have lofty thoughts’), as well as *labb wälləd tarik / mäsḥaf* (‘novel, fiction’) and *labb wällədännät* (‘state or condition of being fictional’).⁶¹

In this light, it is easier to understand why the lexeme *labb* is not rarely translated into the English ‘mind’, and not ‘heart’. What adds to the intricacy is the fact that it, on some occasions, also comes close to the English term ‘reason’, or ‘good sense’, as evidenced by the translation provided in Kane’s bilingual dictionary. This is very well visible in phrases following the pattern *labb* + possessive suffix + object marker + verb + personal pronoun suffix, such as *labbun sälläbāw* (‘lit. he castrated his heart’), *labbun nässaw* (‘lit. he lifted his heart’), and *labbun säwwärāw* (‘to go mad, lit. he hid his heart’),⁶² in all of which the possessor does something to the heart, depriving it of the ability to work normally, and which results in the person going mad. The logic underlying the above phrases is simple: an aberrative state of the heart is equal to lack of rational thinking and good sense. The connections with the reasonable mind are also perfectly shown in the translations provided by the Russian dictionary. Most prominent in this context is the lexeme ум (*um*, ‘mind’), which is present in a number of equivalent Russian phrases, such as сводить с ума (*svodit’ s uma*, Amharic: *labb asaṭṭa*, ‘madden, drive crazy’) and набрать ума / стать умным / поумнеть (*nabrat’ uma / stat’ umnym / poumnet’*, Amharic: *labb gäzza*, ‘acquire good sense, be sensible’), but also the word разум (*razum*, ‘reason’) occurs once in the translation of the Amharic saying yäbäləḥ labb ändä mizan näw (разум мудреца подобен весам, *razum mudreca podoben vesam*, ‘the mind / brain of the wise is like a weighting scale’). Interestingly, in three cases, also the word *duša* (‘soul’) occurs in the Russian translations of Amharic phrases involving the noun *labb*: *labb awälläqä* (вымотать душу, *vymotat’ dušu*, ‘lit. wear out / exhaust the soul’), *bäläbbu* (в глубине души, *v glubine duši*, ‘deep in the soul’), as well as *ändäläbbu*

⁶⁰ Kane 1990, I, 73–74.

⁶¹ Kane 1990, I, 74–75.

⁶² Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččāw Wäṛqu 1990/1991, 25; Kane 1990, I, 71–72.

(сколько душе угодно, *skol'ko duše ugodno*, ‘all the soul wants’).⁶³ This, however, testifies both to the great scope of the Amharic concept of the heart, and the place *duša* plays in Russian language and culture.⁶⁴

Further Examination of the Concept

The analysis of the lexicological data has already illuminated the key role that the heart plays within the Amharic worldview. Most importantly, it has allowed one to appreciate the vast scope of the concept, spanning not only the emotional, moral, and characterological planes, but also serving as a faculty of cognition. In the present section, we shall expand on these observations, as the additional sets of data make it possible to draw a fuller and more dynamic picture of the analyzed concept.

First and foremost, in the light of the collocational patterns involving the noun *labb*, one can better understand the basic properties of the Amharic heart.⁶⁵ The metaphor that seems to be governing most of the basic logic behind the conceptualization of the heart in Amharic is the HEART IS A CONTAINER. Within the framework of the metaphor, *labb* is a container for emotions, feelings, and thoughts, which, themselves perceived as OBJECTS or FLUIDS, can ENTER it (*labb gäbba*, ‘entered the heart’), then be STORED within it (*labb wäst*, ‘inside the heart; *labb wäst tägäññä*, ‘was found inside the heart’; *labb bāX tämolla*, ‘the heart was filled by X’), and LEAVE it (*kälabb*, ‘from the heart’; *kälabb mänäččä*, ‘sourced from the heart’; *kälabb wätta*, ‘left the heart’; *kälabb täffa*, ‘disappeared from the heart’). Obviously, this metaphor allows for a number of elaborations:

- (1) በጣም ደስ የሚለው ነገር እምነትን ከልብ አውጥቶ የሚወስድ ማንም የለም።⁶⁶
‘The great thing is that there is no one who can take faith from one’s heart.’
- (2) ይህ የውስጠኛውን የልባችንን በር የሚከፍተው ቁልፍ ነው።⁶⁷
‘This is the key that opens the innermost door of our heart.’

In the first of the above examples, the basic properties of the CONTAINER metaphor are strictly followed, but, nevertheless, the conceptualization is much livelier, as it presents faith as an OBJECT, which can be BROUGHT OUT and then TAKEN by

⁶³ Gankin and Kaša Gäbrä Həywät 1969, 92–93.

⁶⁴ Wierzbicka 1992.

⁶⁵ All the collocational patterns have been collected from the *Amharic Web Corpus (amWaC)* through Sketch Engine, <https://ske.li/2cq>, accessed 24 August 2024.

⁶⁶ ‘*awdä məhrät* 2012–2014, awdemiheet.blogspot.com/2012/05/blog-post_23.html, 23 May 2012, accessed on 1 November 2023, via *amWaC*.

⁶⁷ Shimelis Mergia 2012–2023, https://shimelismergia.blogspot.com/2012/01/blog-post_21.html, 21 January 2012, accessed on 1 November 2023, via *amWaC*.

someone from the *labb*. The second of the examples is even more creative, as the CONTAINER metaphor allows one to depict the heart as a HOUSE with a DOOR, which can only be UNLOCKED if one possesses the right KEY to it. Altogether, this allows the author to present the heart as a very intimate space, where valuable things are hidden, and which only few people have the right to enter. Obviously, in the highly religious and predominantly Christian Ethiopian society, the heart is a HOUSE / HOME metaphor is also used in order to refer to Jesus, who is conceptualized as living in everyone's heart (*bälabbacčän wäṣṣäyämminoräw*, 'living in our hearts').

Nevertheless, the CONTAINER metaphor is not the only productive way of providing logic for the perceived functions of the heart. Obviously, as a human organ, the heart is also part of a larger CONTAINER, that is the body, from where it can be TAKEN, as perfectly reflected in the already mentioned phrases pertaining to falling in love, such as *labbun wässädä* ('lit. took his heart') and *labbun marräkäw* ('lit. captivated his heart'). Very prominent in Amharic is also the metaphor that has the heart as something on which one can write. It seems to be used particularly often with regard to the cognitive functions of the heart, most notably memory:

- (3) የእሳቸው ትምህርት በብዙ ኢትዮጵያውያን ልብ ውስጥ የተጻፈ መሆኑ እውን ነው።⁶⁸

'It is beyond doubt that his teachings are written in the hearts of many Ethiopians.'

As can be seen in the above example, the metaphor is fully compatible with the CONTAINER metaphor—normally a memory or a value is written on the inside of the heart. As has been the case with the other metaphors, in the collected corpus of texts one can find more creative elaborations of this basic conceptualization, as in the below excerpts, where the writing on the heart is done with a special kind of print (4), or is engraved on the heart (5):

- (4) በፍራንክፈርት ነዋሪ በሆኑ ዜጎቻችን ልብ ውስጥ በማይጠፋ ቀለም ተጽፎ አልፏል።⁶⁹

'He passed away having written his name with an unremovable paint in the hearts of our citizens living in Frankfurt.'

⁶⁸ YäBole mänbärä bərhan qəddus əgzi'abḥər ab be/k sä/t bet 2011–2014, holyfathersunday school.blogspot.com/2011_08_28_archive.html, 3 September 2011, accessed on 1 November 2023, via *amWaC*.

⁶⁹ Ethiopia Zare 2007–2022, <https://ethiopiazare.com/amharic/articles/38-tomar/2782-tadesse-bezabeh-yemerkatow-ayete-part-two-by-beljig-ali>, 4 February 2013 (Ləḡəg 'Ali), accessed on 1 November 2023.

- (5) በልቡ የቀረፀውን ያንተን ምስል እያሰበ ጥሩና መጥፎውን በራሱ ነፃ ፈቃድ እንዲመርጥ ስልጣን ሰጠኸው።⁷⁰

‘You gave him the power to choose right or wrong out of his free will, while thinking about your image carved out in his heart.’

Finally, with regard to the basic properties of the noun *labb*, it is worth noting that it also co-occurs with collective nouns, for example, *həzb* (‘people, nation’), *zegočč* (‘citizens’), and *səwočč* (‘humans, people’), with the phrase *yähəzb labb ašännäfe* (‘won the heart of the people’) being particularly popular in this context (other, similar phrases include *yähəzbun labb ägännä / yazä*, ‘found / seized the heart of the people’). Equally frequent is the phrase *yäsaw labb*, which most often serves to convey a universalistic perspective on human beings. Also, here the specificity of the Amharic worldview is clearly reflected, as most of the contexts in which the phrase occurs do not come from texts related to the natural sciences but religiously laden texts.

When it comes to the individual aspects of the heart, most of the functions of the heart distinguished in the previous section are also present in the most frequently occurring collocations in the *amWaC* corpus. In general, the heart in Amharic is conceptualized as a very intimate space, where one’s innermost feelings and thoughts are stored (*yälabb*, ‘innermost’). Therefore, it is not surprising that sincerity is one of the aspects that are most richly reflected in the gathered material, as in the constructions involving the preposition *kä* (*kälabb wäddädä / šälläyä / ammänä / amäsäggänä*, ‘love / pray / believe / thank from the heart’), or the phrase *bäqən labb* meaning ‘sincerely, lit. by a sincere heart’. Among the most prominent positive feelings stored in the heart, one must, in the first place, name compassion (*labbən näkkaw*, ‘I was moved (emotionally)’),⁷¹ lit. ‘it touched my heart’), and love (*kälabb wäddädä*, ‘love from the heart’, *faqər bälabbäččən*, ‘love in our heart’), while the negative side of the emotional spectrum is clearly dominated by sadness (*kälabb azzänä*, ‘be sad / sorry from the heart’; *labb säbbärä*, ‘to sadden, grieve, lit. break one’s heart’; *labbun yämmisäbr*, ‘heart-breaking, sad). Additionally, genitive constructions such as *yälabb hassab* (‘lit. thought of the heart’) or *yälabb məkər* (‘lit. advice of the heart’) demonstrate, once again, that the heart is not only the center of one’s emotions, but also cognition and rationality, although it seems that, in the majority of cases, the thoughts of the heart are of a more intuitive character, drawing on connections with the other aspects of the concept. When it comes to the cognitive functions of the heart, however, most frequent are the collocations that refer to attentiveness and focus, most notably

⁷⁰ *Addis Admas* 2011–2024, http://www.addisadmassnews.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=18028:ግራንድ-ኢንኮዊስተር&Itemid=209, 16 April 2016 (F. Dostoevsky, tr. Aššännafi Asäffa) accessed on 1 November 2023, via *amWaC*.

⁷¹ Kane 1990, I, 1042.

the already mentioned *labb adärrägä* and *labb alä*, which seem to occur particularly often in gerund constructions (for example *labb bälö / adärgo särra*, ‘he worked attentively’), or in the imperative form (*labb bäl / labb adärg*, ‘focus!’). The imperative form is also used frequently with another key phrase found in the corpus, that is, *labb gäzza*, meaning ‘to start behaving rationally, be(come) sensible’.⁷² Finally, interesting to note is the fact that the name *labb* sometimes occurs with the noun *a’ämäro* (‘mind, brain’), which was already mentioned above. The relation between the two is complex and certainly deserves a separate semantic study. In the present article, let us limit ourselves to observing that the contexts, in which the phrases *labbänna a’ämäro* (‘heart and mind’) and *a’ämäronna labb* (‘mind and heart’) occur in the *amWaC* corpus rarely pertain to the perceived contrast between the mind and the heart known from the European languages and discourses. This seems quite logical within the framework of the Amharic language, where, as has been demonstrated throughout the present analysis, *labb* serves cognitive functions and, on some occasions, also stands for rationality.

To a large extent, the prominence of single aspects of the heart depends on the specificity of the discourse in question. For instance, in spite of the already discussed and impressively vast scope of the concept, there is little doubt that popular culture is currently dominated by one of its aspects—emotionality. Unsurprisingly, the connection most eagerly taken up by contemporary musicians is the one between the heart and love. This can be very well seen in Teddy Afro’s song *Marakiyye*, which uses two different phrases involving the word *labb*:

(6) ማራካዩ ማራካዩ አንቺ የልቤ ጉዳይ [...]

ከሩቅ አስረሽ ልቤን የት ያምልጥ ከራሱ⁷³

‘My attractive, my attractive, you the matter of my heart [...]

‘From far away you captivated / imprisoned my heart, where to escape from oneself’

Until recently, music in Ethiopia was mostly tied to religion. Nowadays, however, although the individual phrases involving the noun *labb* have preserved their conceptual uniqueness, the contexts in which they appear in the popular Ethiopian music resemble, at least to a certain extent, the global, English-driven musical scene. This is not surprising given that global culture and the English language

⁷² One needs to note, however, that the collocations with the verb *mägzat* ‘to buy’ also occur in a different, slightly less idiomatic sense ‘to win someone’s support’.

⁷³ Teddy Afro (= Tewodros Kassahun) 2012–2024, ማራካዩ (*marakiyye* ‘My attractive’), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srmofmrC4Xk>, 10 October 2017, accessed on 6 November 2023.

have had an increasing influence on Ethiopian culture.⁷⁴ The development pertains not only to the verbal means of expression but also to the visual. With the increased access to the internet, hearts with arrows, cupids, and other foreign concepts are streaming into Ethiopia and are becoming increasingly recognizable among the speakers of Amharic.

Somewhere on the other side lies the religious discourse, which, due to the great degree of religiousness in Ethiopia, constitutes a significant, if not the most significant, part of the overall discourse in Amharic. The significance of the religious discourse is further amplified by the fact that it is inextricably connected with the everyday life of Amharic speakers and the everyday language that they use, of which God is an inherent and foundational part. In fact, not many things are conceptualized as happening without the active interference of God in Ethiopia, as seen in the below example, where the author calls for God to give the Ethiopian people a true (sincere) heart:

- (7) በመሆኑም ሁላችንም ነጻ ካልወጣን ማንም ብቻውን ነጻ መውጣት ስለማይችል ከዘር ይልቅ ሰብዓዊነትን ከፍ አድርገን የምንሰብክበትን ማኅበረሰብ ለመገንባት እንድንችል ፈጣሪ ሁላችንንም ይርዳን፤ ቅን ልብ ይስጠን⁷⁵

‘Therefore, if all of us do not free ourselves up, because no one can become free on their own, may God the Creator help all of us so that we could build a society where humanism is preached more than race, and give us a sincere *labb*.’

In general, in religiously laden texts, the full scope of the word *labb* is utilized, depending on the situation and context. This also pertains to the cognitive functions of the heart, where *labb* stands for rationality and good sense. Fairly frequent is also the connection between *labb* and *hassab* (‘thought’):

- (8) የሰው ልብ እግዚአብሔር እንዳየው ይህን ይመስላል ‘እግዚአብሔርም የሰው ክፋት በምድር ላይ እንደበዛ የልቡ ሐሳብ ምኞቱም ሁልጊዜ ፈጽሞ ክፋ እንደሆነ አየ’ ይላል ዘፍ 6፥5።⁷⁶

‘When God saw human heart, it was like this: “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5).’

Additionally, in religious discourse, the related category of *labbuna* / *labbona* is also frequently used. Most unique in this context seems to be the phrase *haggä labbuna* (‘lit. the law of *labbuna*’), which refers to the inherent sense of right and

⁷⁴ Zelealem Leyew 1998; Zelealem Leyew 2012.

⁷⁵ <http://revolutionfordemocracy.com/category/news/page/40/> (now offline), via *amWaC*, accessed on 1 November 2023.

⁷⁶ http://www.abaselama.org/2012/12/blog-post_26.html (now offline), via *amWaC*, accessed on 1 November 2023.

wrong believed to be part of every human. Nevertheless, the productivity of the category of *labbuna* / *labbona* goes far beyond one phrase and one type of context. In the example below, a different semantic property of *labbuna* / *labbona* is used, namely the one which links it to human psyche and mentality:

- (9) ደማዊ ግንኙነት ባይኖራቸውም መዋለድ ቋንቋ ነው ብለው የሥነ ልቦና አንድነት አዳበረው በአንድ ሰፈር ሐዘንና ደስታ እየተጋሩ በእኩልነት ስሜት ተፈቃጅደው በፍትርና በሰላም የሚኖሩ ሕዝቦች ቁጥርም እንደዚሁ አያሌ ነው።⁷⁷

‘Although they are not tied by common blood, by thinking intermarriage is [another type of] language, and, thus, by reinforcing the mental connection existing between them, they have been living in one place, sharing the sadness and the joy, living in equality, tolerance, love and peace. The number of such peoples / nationalities has been significant.’

In the above, one can see that the phrase *sənä labbona* can function as an equivalent to what in English is called ‘mentality’. Equally important, however, the same phrase is also conventionally used to refer to ‘psychology’, understood as a branch of science.

Conclusions

Languages dissect reality differently, providing their speakers with established ways of understanding the surrounding world. This fact becomes apparent if one tries to compare the Amharic concept of the heart with its equivalents in the European languages. Most striking is, obviously, the impressively vast scope of the concept—which spans not only emotions, character traits, and morality, but also cognition, and, to some extent, rationality. The uniqueness of the Amharic worldview, however, can be seen at several other levels as well. First, the lexical representations of the concept are different from what one is used to hearing in European languages; suffice it to mention the related noun *labbuna*, which, among other things, stands for the inherent human sense of right and wrong, as well as human psyche. Then, there are the single conceptualizations incorporated into the phrases involving the lexical representations of the concept, with one of the examples being the connection between the perceived fatness of the heart and evil character. Finally, what also makes the Amharic concept of the heart unique is the relation it has to the other parts of the Amharic worldview. In this context, especially worth mentioning is the omnipresent figure of God, around whom the whole Amharic worldview revolves. In light of the analyzed corpus of text excerpts, the clash between the heart and the mind, well known from the European languages,

⁷⁷ *Ethiopian Reporter*, ፌፖርተር 2015–2024, ethiopianreporter.com/121595/, 20 August 2023 (Gäbre Yäntiso Däkkö), accessed on 24 November 2023.

is not applicable to the same degree in Amharic. This is perhaps only logical, given that the heart in Amharic serves cognitive functions more regularly than in the European languages.

One can ask, however, if, or even how long, this is going to last. In a number of places in the analysis, there have been indications that the concept may be trending towards the more global (English-driven) perception of the heart. The verbs *läbbäbä* / *läbbäwä*, known already from Gə'əz, are now gone from the system of the Amharic language, and so are a number of other derivatives of the noun *läbb*. The definition of the word *läbb* provided by the modern Amharic dictionary (AMC) implicitly demonstrates the discrepancy between the modern scientific worldview and the conceptualizations of the heart present in the traditional worldview of Amharic. Finally, the words *läbb* and *läbbuna* / *läbbona* are, indeed, still widely used in contexts related to the intellectual but mostly in a) the most petrified phrases, and in b) religious discourse, which is rooted in older texts (including texts from Gə'əz) and unfolds along specific, not rarely anachronic, categories. All this allows one to wonder about the future of the unique concept of the heart in Amharic. For now, however, the present study could serve as a starting point for an in-depth analysis of the linguistic development of the concept in the last fifty to one hundred years, as well as for comparisons with the concepts of the heart present in the other languages of Ethiopia.

List of References

- Abinet Sime 2019. 'Semantics of Amharic *ras* "Head"', in I. Kraska-Szlenk, ed., *Embodiment in Cross-Linguistic Studies: The 'Head'*, Brill's Studies in Language, Cognition and Culture, 20 (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2019), 183–204.
- Addis Admas, አዲስ አድማስ (2011–2024), addisadmassnews.com, accessed 1 November 2023.
- Afreh, E. S. 2015. 'The Metonymic and Metaphoric Conceptualisations of the Heart in Akan and English', *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 26 (2015), 38–57.
- Amharic Web Corpus (amWaC)*, <https://www.sketchengine.eu/amwac-amharic-corpus/>, accessed 1 November 2023.
- Amsalu Aklilu and Daññaččäw Wäru 1990/1991. የአማርኛ ፈላጎች (Yä'amarəñña fäliṭočč, 'Amharic idiomatic expressions'), 2nd edn (1st edn 1986/1987) (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1983 EC = 1990/1991 CE).
- 'Awdä məhrät 2012–2014. ዐውደ ምሕረት ('Awdä məhrät, 'Assembly of mercy') (Blog) <http://awdemiheet.blogspot.com>, accessed 1 November 2023.
- Bartmiński, J. 2009. *Aspects of Cognitive Ethnolinguistics*, ed. J. Zinken, Advances in Cognitive Linguistics (London–Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2009).
- ed., 2018. *The Axiological Lexicon of Slavs and Their Neighbours*, I: *The Concept of Home*, tr. K. Wengorek-Dolecka, 1st edn in Eng., abridged (Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press; 1st edn 2015 as *Leksykon aksjologiczny Słowian i ich sąsiadów*, I: *Dom*, 2018).

- Baş, M. 2017. 'The Metaphoric Conceptualization of Emotion through Heart Idioms in Turkish', *Cognitive Semiotics*, 10/2 (2017), 121–139.
- Brenzinger, M. and I. Kraska-Szlenk, eds, 2014. *The Body in Language: Comparative Studies of Linguistic Embodiment*, Brill's Studies in Language, Cognition and Culture, 8 (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2014).
- Dästa Täklä Wäld 1970. ዐዲስ ፡ ያማርኛ ፡ መዝገበ ፡ ቃላት ፡ በካህናትና ፡ በሀገረ ፡ ሰብ ፡ ቋንቋ ፡ ('Addis yamarəñña mǝzgābā qalat. Bākahənatənnā bāhagärä säb q'ʷanq'ʷa, 'A new Amharic dictionary. In the language of the priests and people') (Addis Abāba: Artistik mattämiya bet, 1970 CE).
- Ethiopia Zare ኢትዮጵያ ሣሬ (2007–2022), ethiopiazare.com, accessed 1 November 2023.
- Ethiopian Languages Research Centre 2000/2001. ያማርኛ መዝገበ ቃላት (Yamarəñña mǝzgābā qalat, 'Amharic dictionary') (Addis Abāba: Artistik mattämiya bet, 1993 EC = 2000/20001 CE).
- Ethiopian Reporter, ሬፖርተር (2015–2024), ethiopianreporter.com, accessed 24 November 2023.
- Gankin, È. B. and Kaša Gäbrä Həywät 1969. Амхарско-русский словарь: около 25 000 слов, አማርኛና ፡ መስኮብኛ ፡ መዝገበ ፡ ቃላት ፡ መዝገበ ፡ ቃላት ፡ በግምት ፡ ፳፭፻፲፱ ፡ ቃሎች ፡ የያዘ ፡ ነው ፡ ('Amxarsko-russkij slovar': okolo 25 000 slov, amarəññanna mäskobəñña mǝzgābā qalat. Mǝzgābā qalat bāgəmmət 25ših qaločč yāyazä näw, 'Amharic–Russian dictionary: approx. 25,000 words') (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Sovetskaja Ėnciklopedija, 1969).
- Glaz, A. 2022. *Linguistic Worldview(s): Approaches and Applications*, Routledge Studies in Linguistics, 32 (New York, NY–Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).
- Goddard, C. 2008. 'Contrastive Semantics and Cultural Psychology: English *heart* vs. Malay *hati*', in F. Sharifian, R. Dirven, N. Yu, and S. Niemeier, eds, *Culture, Body, and Language: Conceptualizations of Internal Body Organs Across Cultures and Languages*, Applications of Cognitive Linguistics, 7 (Berlin–New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 75–102.
- Humboldt, W. von 1999. *On Language: On the Diversity of Human Language Construction and its Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Species*, ed. M. Losonsky, tr. Peter Heath, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, 2nd rev. edn in Eng. (Cambridge–New York, NY–Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999; 1st edn in Eng. as *On Language: The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind*, 1988; 1st edn as *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluß auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts*, Berlin: Druckerei der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften–In commission bei F. Dümmler, 1836).
- Kane, T. L. 1990. *Amharic–English Dictionary*, I: ሀ–ነ; II: ኘ–ፒ (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1990).
- Kidanä Wäld Kəfle 1955/1956. መጽሐፈ ፡ ሰዋስው ፡ ወግስ ፡ ወመዝገበ ፡ ቃላት ፡ ሐዲስ ፡ ንባቡ ፡ በገእዝ ፡ ፍችዉ ፡ ባማርኛ ፡ (Mäṣḥafä säwasəw wägəs wāmǝzgābā qalat ḥaddis: nəbabu bāgə'əz fəččəw bamarəñña, 'A book of grammar and verbs, and a new dictionary: reading in Gə'əz and translation in Amharic') (Addis Abāba: Artistik mattämiya bet, 1948 EC = 1955/1956 CE).

- Kraska-Szlenk, I., ed., 2019. *Embodiment in Cross-Linguistic Studies: The 'Head'*, Brill's Studies in Language, Cognition and Culture, 20 (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2019).
- Lakoff, G. 1987. *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago, IL–London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- Langacker, R. W. 2013. *Essentials of Cognitive Grammar* (Oxford–New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- Leslau, W. 1991. *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic): Ge'ez–English / English–Ge'ez, with an Index of the Semitic Roots*, 2nd edn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1991; 1st edn Otto Harrassowitz, 1987).
- *Introductory Grammar of Amharic*, Porta Linguarum Orientalium, Neue Serie, 21 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000).
- Mengistu Amberber 2001. 'Testing Emotional Universals in Amharic', in J. Harkins and A. Wierzbicka, eds, *Emotions in Crosslinguistic Perspective*, Cognitive Linguistics Research, 17 (Berlin–New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001), 35–67.
- 2007. 'Remember, Remind, and Forget in Amharic', in Mengistu Amberber, ed., *The Language of Memory in a Crosslinguistic Perspective*, Human Cognitive Processing, 21 (Amsterdam–Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 263–277.
- 2008. 'Semantic Primes in Amharic', in C. Goddard, ed., *Cross-Linguistic Semantics*, Studies in Language Companion Series, 102 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008), 83–119.
- Sapir, E. 1949. *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality*, ed. D. G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley, CA–Los Angeles, CA–London: University of California Press, 1949).
- Sharifian, F., R. Dirven, N. Yu, and S. Niemeier, eds, 2008. *Culture, Body, and Language: Conceptualizations of Internal Body Organs Across Cultures and Languages*, Applications of Cognitive Linguistics, 7 (Berlin–New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008).
- Shimelis Mergia 2012–2023. ወደ ጥንተ ተፈጥሮ መልስ (*Wādä tǝntä tāfätro mäls*, 'Return to primeval nature') (Blog, shimelismergia.blogspot.com, accessed 1 November 2023).
- Teddy Afro (= Tewodros Kassahun) 2012–2024. @TeddyAfroOfficial (YouTube channel), <https://www.youtube.com/@TeddyAfroOfficial>, accessed 6 November 2023.
- Underhill, J. W. 2012. *Ethnolinguistics and Cultural Concepts: Truth, Love, Hate and War* (Cambridge–New York, NY–Melbourne–Madrid–Cape Town–Singapore–São Paulo–Delhi–Mexico City: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- Whorf, B. L. 1956. *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, ed. and with an introduction by J. B. Carroll, foreword by Stuart Chase (Cambridge, MA: The Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology; London: John Wiley & Sons, 1956).
- Wierzbicka, A. 1992. *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition: Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations* (New York, NY–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- YäBole mänbärä bərhan qəddus əgzi' abḥer ab be/k sä/t bet 2011–2014. የቦሌ መንበረ ብርሃን ቅዱስ እግዚአብሔር አብ ቤ/ክ ሰ/ት/ቤት (*yäBole mänbärä bərhan qəddus əgzi' abḥer ab be/k sä/t bet* 'Bole mänbärä bərhan Holy Father Sunday School'), (Blog) holyfathersundayschool.blogspot.com, accessed 1 November 2023.

- Yoon, K.-J. 2008. 'The Korean Conceptualization of *heart*: An Indigenous Perspective', in F. Sharifian, R. Dirven, N. Yu, and S. Niemeier, eds, *Culture, Body, and Language: Conceptualizations of Internal Body Organs Across Cultures and Languages*, Applications of Cognitive Linguistics, 7 (Berlin–New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 213–246.
- Yu, N. 2008. 'The Chinese Heart as the Central Faculty of Cognition', in F. Sharifian, R. Dirven, N. Yu, and S. Niemeier, eds, *Culture, Body, and Language: Conceptualizations of Internal Body Organs Across Cultures and Languages*, Applications of Cognitive Linguistics, 7 (Berlin–New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 131–168.
- 2009. *From Body to Meaning in Culture: Papers on Cognitive Semantic Studies of Chinese* (Amsterdam–Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009).
- Zealelem Leyew 1998. 'Code-Switching: Amharic–English', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 11/2 (1998), 197–216.
- 2003. 'Amharic Personal Nomenclature: A Grammar and Sociolinguistic Insight', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 16/2 (2003), 181–211.
- 2012. 'The Ethiopian Language Policy: A Historical and Typological Overview', *Ethiopian Journal of Languages and Literature*, 12/2 (2012), 1–59.

Summary

This study sheds light on the unique conceptualization of the heart in Amharic, based on dictionary data, corpus data, and a self-collected corpus of text excerpts. What stands out is the unusually vast scope of the concept, which embraces not only emotions, character and morality, but also cognition, and, to some extent, rationality. Thus, the noun *labb* can, depending on the context, be translated into English as 'mind', 'good sense', or even 'reason'. The broad scope of the concept is even better seen in light of the derivatives of the word *labb*, most notably the noun *labbuna* / *labbona*, connected with psyche, reason, and the sense of right and wrong, as well as the adjectives *labbam* and *labbetña*, meaning 'intelligent, attentive'. The uniqueness of the Amharic worldview is also reflected in the conceptualizations underlying the single idiomatic phrases formed with the noun *labb*, as well as the connection it has to the other parts of the Amharic worldview. Particularly worth highlighting here is the figure of God, around whom the whole Amharic worldview revolves, as well as the concept of *a'əməro* 'mind', which does not introduce the same stark opposition between the mind and the heart as the one known from European languages and discourses.