

**Where was and is sadness? A corpus-based diachronic investigation  
of metaphorical containers of sadness in English**

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**Abstract**

Emotions are often metaphorically conceptualized as a physical substance inside a container, usually the body of the experiencer, as evidenced by the English metaphorical expressions in (1) and (2), or more specific parts of their anatomy, as in (3) and (4).

- (1) [...] he thought with anger and frustration building up inside him. (BNC, EA5 77)
- (2) I was filled with happiness. (BNC, G07 4264)
- (3) [...] but his heart was filled with fear for his old friend. (BNC, GV7 390)
- (4) As she looked up at him she saw such tenderness, such deep love in his eyes [...] (BNC, JYE 4705)

Previous studies have established that there exist cross-cultural differences with regard to the conceptualized containers of an emotion. For instance, it has been shown that English has the whole body as a container for the emotion anger, i.e. rather than any specific body part; Hungarian can have the head as a container in addition to the body as a whole (Kövecses 1995); Japanese sees the belly as the major container (Matsuki 1995); and Chinese places anger in the whole body, the liver, the heart, and the spleen (Yu 1995). To date, only few have investigated whether there might be within-cultural diachronic differences as well; a notable exception is Gevaert (2005), also working on anger. The present study will further address the question of conceptual change through a case study of diachronic variation in the conceptualized container of sadness in English culture/the English language. Like the other studies referred to, it will be framed in Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Data sourced from *Literature Online*, *Early English Books Online*, and the *British National Corpus* will lead to the conclusion that the conceptualization of sadness is rooted in a changing general conception of body and emotions which has earlier been connected with changes in the conceptualization of anger. The study will add to the pool of observations on the diversity in the conceptualization of the seat of an emotion and can inform further reflection on the relationship between culture, thought and language.

## References

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