

An Analysis of Conceptualization of Inflation in Vietnamese Economic Discourse

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Abstract—This study investigates how Vietnamese economic discourse conceptualizes inflation through the source domain of a physical object. Using the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and adopting a Critical Metaphor Analysis approach (Charteris-Black 2005, 2014), the study examines a corpus of 281 metaphorical expressions extracted from economic discourse in Vietnamese online newspapers between 2011 and 2025. The findings reveal two prominent derived metaphors: ‘INFLATION IS A MOVING OBJECT’ and ‘INFLATION IS A BURNING OBJECT.’ These metaphors play an important role in helping the public comprehend fundamental aspects of inflation by linking this abstract economic phenomenon with universal embodied experiences. Beyond their cognitive function, such metaphors function as strategic discursive tools for shaping public views, emotional responses, and expectations toward macroeconomic policies. The study contributes to cross-linguistic research on economic metaphors and offers insights into the ideological functions of discourse. It also suggests pedagogical applications for teaching media and journalism language as well as teaching Vietnamese for specific purposes.

Index Terms—cognitive linguistics, metaphor of inflation, Vietnamese economic discourse, Vietnamese media

I. INTRODUCTION

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is one of the most prominent approaches within cognitive semantics, a major branch of cognitive linguistics. Initiated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, this theory proposes that metaphor is not merely a rhetorical or linguistic phenomenon but a fundamental cognitive process that enables humans to conceptualize, understand, and talk about the world through systematic mappings across conceptual domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The simplified model of a conceptual metaphor is as follows: ‘TARGET DOMAIN IS/AS SOURCE DOMAIN.’ The target domain is frequently more abstract, whereas the source, which is employed to understand the target, is more concrete, physical, and typically directly connected to human experiences in the physical world. Lakoff and Johnson also distinguished conceptual metaphors and metaphorical expressions. The conceptual metaphor is a conceptual thinking mechanism (meaning it only exists within the human mental world), while metaphorical expressions are the linguistic manifestation that reveals the existence of the conceptual metaphor. Metaphorical expressions contain metaphorically expressed words (also known as metaphorical units or metaphorical items) that present aspects of the source domain. Thus, scrutinizing metaphorical language is an effective way to interpret the conceptual thinking patterns of language users.

One of the most salient economic phenomena frequently conceptualized through metaphor is inflation - a recurring issue in many countries, directly affecting the trajectory of economic development, monetary policies, and the quality of life of citizens, particularly those in low-income groups. In the Vietnamese context, inflation is not only a main macroeconomic concern closely governed by the government but also a recurring topic in public discourse, especially on Vietnamese online news platforms. In these media discourses, inflation is often described metaphorically. From the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, such metaphorical expressions do not merely reflect but actively shape the way Vietnamese people understand and evaluate this economic phenomenon. Thereby, metaphors of inflation play an important role in constructing public understanding, authorizing policies, and influencing social views toward economic and financial issues.

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Globally, various research has applied CMT to analyze economic metaphors across different languages such as English (Greco, 2009; Langer, 2015; Pang, 2021), Chinese (Hu & Xu, 2017), Malaysian (Mahmood et al., 2013), Serbian (Silaški & Đurović, 2010a), and so on. Several studies have explored metaphorical conceptualizations of inflation in English economic discourses (e.g., Hu & Chen, 2015; Silaški & Đurović, 2010b). However, there remains a lack of research on the conceptualization of inflation in Vietnamese economic discourse. This paper seeks to identify and examine the conceptual metaphors of inflation used in Vietnamese economic discourse published on major online news platforms between 2011 and 2025. Then, it aims to illuminate cognitive and social functions of inflation metaphors as well as their important role in online Vietnamese media.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In numerous international studies, the conceptual metaphors of inflation have attracted considerable scholarly attention, both in the analysis of everyday language and in economic discourse.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identified common conceptual metaphors of inflation used in everyday English language, such as 'INFLATION IS A SUBSTANCE,' 'INFLATION IS AN ENTITY,' and 'INFLATION IS AN ADVERSARY,' in their seminal work 'Metaphors we live by.' These metaphors show how more tangible source domains are used to metaphorically express the target domain 'INFLATION'.

Several studies have focused on identifying the cognitive models of inflation in English corpora, including Silaški and Đurović (2010b), Hu and Chen (2015), and Hu and Liu (2016). These studies have identified a variety of source domains that are employed to conceptualize different aspects of the target domain 'INFLATION'.

In their study titled 'CATCHING INFLATION BY THE TAIL - Animal metaphoric imagery in the conceptualisation of INFLATION in English,' Silaški and Đurović (2010b) investigated metaphorical thinking patterns of inflation in public economic discourse such as newspapers, magazines, and websites. They discovered the conceptual metaphor 'INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL,' which depicts inflation as a dangerous and aggressive monster that threatens economic stability.

Hu and Chen (2015) used the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English), which comprises more than 450 million words covering the period 1990-2012, to examine metaphorical expressions of inflation. Their findings revealed a significant number of conceptual metaphors, such as 'INFLATION IS FIRE,' 'INFLATION IS LIQUID,' 'INFLATION IS A PLANT,' 'INFLATION IS AN ANIMAL,' 'INFLATION IS A DISEASE,' 'INFLATION IS WARFARE,' 'INFLATION IS A RACER,' 'INFLATION IS A MACHINE,' and 'INFLATION IS AN ENTITY.' These metaphors indicate the negative impact of inflation and its perceived threat to both citizens' living standards and national economies. The study also suggested the pedagogical implications, arguing that metaphor analysis can be integrated into economics education to help students better understand inflation as a complex and dynamic concept. Additionally, it also emphasized the use of conceptual metaphors for vocabulary acquisition and thematic comprehension in economics-related English training.

Hu and Liu (2016) extended the work of Hu and Chen (2015) by incorporating a diachronic perspective into the analysis of inflation metaphors. Their study utilized the TMC (TIME Magazine Corpus), which contains 100 million words published between 1923 and 2006, to identify metaphorical expressions of inflation. By comparing these expressions with corresponding historical economic data, the authors emphasize the significance of historical context in interpreting economic metaphors. While confirming many of the conceptual metaphors identified by Hu and Chen, the study provided frequency data within the corpus and focused specifically on temporal variations in metaphor use. Their findings confirmed the dominance of organic and mechanical metaphors of inflation across different periods, revealing shifts in metaphorical framing that aligned with broader economic and political changes.

Fuertes-Olivera and Sacristán (2001) examined metaphors of inflation in English economics textbooks and analyzed how these metaphors were translated into Spanish. Their study focused on the decision-making processes of translators when handling metaphorical expressions. They demonstrated that a translator's socio-cultural knowledge can shape metaphorical mappings and, in some cases, lead to the creation of new conceptualizations. The authors confirmed that translation practices - particularly in specialized domains such as economics - can greatly benefit from an informed application of conceptual metaphor theory.

In a related study, Sacristán (2009) presented a metaphor-based translation method for teaching conceptual metaphors in LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) classrooms. Drawing on earlier studies on the topic, she demonstrated how such inflation metaphors can be employed as pedagogical tools in teaching business English, especially in contexts requiring cross-linguistic and cross-cultural competency.

Taken together, these studies have largely focused on three main areas:

- The identification of cognitive models used to conceptualize inflation;
- The impact of historical and political context on metaphor use during times of economic crisis;
- The role of conceptual metaphors in translation studies and LSP pedagogy, especially for economic discourse.

However, until now, no in-depth study has examined how inflation is metaphorically conceptualized in Vietnamese economic discourse. This gap provides the rationale for carrying out this study. Adopting the Conceptual Metaphor Theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the study works towards the following three main goals:

1. Identify the conceptual metaphors of inflation and analyze their cross-domain mapping structure in Vietnamese economic discourse.
2. Interpret and explain the cognitive and social impact functions of these inflation metaphors as they appear in Vietnamese economic discourse.
3. Discuss the role of Vietnamese metaphors of inflation in promoting the effectiveness of economic media discourse on inflation and anti-inflation policies.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Data Collection

This study investigates the conceptualization of inflation in Vietnamese economic discourse based on self-compiled data of 320 online news articles published between 2011 and 2025. The data were sourced from five major Vietnamese online newspapers: *dantri.com.vn*, *tuoitre.vn*, *vtv.vn*, *tapchitaichinh.vn*, and *vneconomy.vn* - widely circulated platforms known for their high readership and accessible writing styles that closely resemble daily language. Articles were selected using the Vietnamese keyword 'lạm phát' (inflation) through the internal search engines of each news website. They fall into various genres such as policy analysis, economic commentary, financial reporting, and business news. Metaphorical expressions about inflation were extracted from the article texts and included in the conceptual metaphor identification process.

B. Metaphorical Identification Procedure

To identify metaphorical expressions, this study uses the 'Metaphor Identification Procedure' (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). This method has the following basis: 'Metaphorical meaning in usage is indirect meaning: it arises out of a contrast between the contextual meaning of a lexical unit and its more basic meaning, the latter being absent from the actual context but observable in others' (Steen et al., 2010, p. 6). According to Pragglejaz Group (2007), the procedure consists of the following three basic steps:

1. Read the entire text to gain a general understanding of its meaning;
2. Identify all lexical items in the text;
3. For each lexical unit, determine its basic meaning (usually more concrete, human-oriented, related to bodily action, and historically older) and its contextual meaning as it appears in the text. If the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it, then the lexical unit is marked as metaphorical (as cited in Nguyen, 2025).

Consider the following example:

Thời điểm những năm tám mươi ấy, tốc độ lạm phát của các nước châu Phi cũng là hai con số, ở châu Mỹ Latinh cũng là ba con số. (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 23/05/2022)

[In the 1980s, the pace of inflation in African countries was in double digits, while in Latin America it reached triple digits.] (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 23 May 2022)

The sentence describes the situation of inflation in African and Latin American countries during the 1980s. In this case, inflation is measured by its "pace," and its severity is expressed through numerical values. Lexical items include 'thời điểm, những năm tám mươi, ấy, tốc độ, lạm phát, các, nước, châu Phi, cũng, là, hai con số, ở, châu Mỹ Latinh, cũng, là, ba con số.' Among these lexical items, the word 'tốc độ' (pace) is particularly noteworthy. The word 'tốc độ' (pace) basically refers to the speed at which an object moves. However, in the sentence above, it is used to describe the rate at which inflation increases. Thus, the phrase 'tốc độ lạm phát' (pace of inflation) functions as a metaphorical unit. At this point, the sentence can be identified as a metaphorical expression of the conceptual metaphor 'INFLATION IS A MOVING OBJECT'.

C. Analytical Framework

After being identified through the MIP, metaphorical expressions are categorized into conceptual metaphors following the pattern 'INFLATION IS A,' where A represents the source domain. To extend the analysis beyond the level of linguistic description, this study employs the framework of Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), suggested by Charteris-Black (2005, 2014). Critical Metaphor Analysis consists of three stages: identification, interpretation, and explanation. The first stage identifies and classifies metaphorical keywords in the text, determines whether their meanings are metaphorical or literal, and infers broader conceptual metaphors. The second stage interprets these metaphors to discover cognitive models and structures that shape the way experiences are conceptualized. The final stage explains the social and ideological motivations behind the use of metaphors. Using the combination of the MIP and CMA analytical frameworks allows the study to explore not only the cognitive functions of inflation metaphors but also their social impact in forming attitudes, beliefs, and expectations for the Vietnamese public.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Through investigating the corpus of articles, we discovered 281 linguistic expressions with 38 metaphorically expressed words belonging to the conceptual metaphor 'INFLATION IS AN OBJECT' in Vietnamese economic

discourse. Upon classification and labeling, it is shown that the source domain ‘AN OBJECT’ branches into two lower-level source domains: ‘A MOVING OBJECT’ and ‘A BURNING OBJECT.’ This hierarchy results in two derived metaphors, illustrated in the figure below:

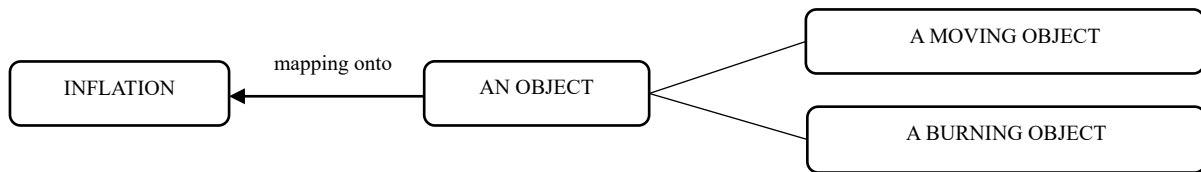


FIGURE 1. HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE OF THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR ‘INFLATION IS AN OBJECT’

The two derived source domains (‘A MOVING OBJECT’ and ‘A BURNING OBJECT’), which are closely related to physical human experience, are mapped onto the target domain ‘INFLATION.’ Accordingly, in Vietnamese economic discourse, there exist two lower-level conceptual metaphors: ‘INFLATION IS A MOVING OBJECT’ and ‘INFLATION IS A BURNING OBJECT.’ Due to the cross-domain mapping mechanisms, the abstract concept of inflation is conveyed clearly and vividly. However, the distribution of metaphorical expressions and lexical items associated with these metaphors is uneven. Table 1 presents the frequency of metaphorical expressions and lexical items found in each metaphor type:

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF SUBMETAPHORS OF THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR ‘INFLATION IS AN OBJECT’

No.	Submetaphors of the conceptual metaphor INFLATION IS AN OBJECT	Metaphorical expressions	Metaphorical items
1	INFLATION IS A MOVING OBJECT	136	30
2	INFLATION IS A BURNING OBJECT	145	8
TOTAL		281	38

The statistics demonstrate that while the metaphor ‘INFLATION IS A BURNING OBJECT’ generates more metaphorical expressions, they are concentrated in fewer lexical units than ‘INFLATION IS A MOVING OBJECT.’ It is obvious that the scope of coverage and the richness of the mapping structure of each metaphor differ within Vietnamese economic discourse.

A. Conceptual Metaphor ‘INFLATION IS A MOVING OBJECT’

When projecting the source domain ‘A MOVING OBJECT’ onto the target domain ‘INFLATION,’ Vietnamese economic discourse mainly uses four typical source domain attributes, including ‘velocity of a moving object,’ ‘direction of a moving object,’ ‘controlling the movement of a moving object,’ and ‘characteristics of the movement path.’ The ontological mapping model is reproduced in Table 2 below:

TABLE 2
CONCEPTUAL MAPPINGS FROM THE SOURCE DOMAIN ‘A MOVING OBJECT’ TO THE TARGET DOMAIN ‘INFLATION’

Source domain: A MOVING OBJECT	mapping onto	Target domain: INFLATION
Velocity of a moving object	→	Development of inflation
Direction of a moving object	→	Trend of inflation
Controlling the movement of a moving object	→	Controlling the degree of inflation
Characteristics of the movement path	→	Characteristics of the process of controlling inflation

The ontological correspondences between the source and target domains, as illustrated in Table 2, allow for various aspects of inflation - such as its degree, trends, progression, and control process - to be described in a clear and engaging manner in Vietnamese economic discourse.

(a). Metaphorical Mapping From ‘VELOCITY OF A MOVING OBJECT’ Onto ‘DEVELOPMENT OF INFLATION’

Metaphorical lexical items associated with the source domain’s attribute ‘VELOCITY OF A MOVING OBJECT’ are frequently used to indicate the target domain’s attribute ‘DEVELOPMENT OF INFLATION’ in Vietnamese economic discourse. These include ‘tốc độ’ (pace), ‘tăng tốc’ (accelerate), ‘giảm tốc’ (decelerate), ‘đà tăng’ (upward momentum), ‘đà giảm’ (downward momentum), ‘bứt tốc’ (suddenly accelerate), ‘tốc độ chóng mặt’ (dizzying acceleration), and ‘chậm lại’ (slow down). The metaphorical image of a moving object whose velocity fluctuates - at times rapidly, at other times decelerating or slowing down, at times gaining upward momentum, and at other times losing momentum - is used in Vietnamese economic news to concretize inflation, a complex and abstract phenomenon rooted in macroeconomic processes. The use of metaphorical items allows Vietnamese readers to visualize more intuitively the variability and continuity of inflation, facilitating their understanding of its severity or manageability within different national economies. The following are illustrative examples of this metaphorical structure:

1. **Tốc độ tăng lạm phát tiếp tục chậm lại** khiến giới đầu tư kỳ vọng Cục Dự trữ Liên bang Mỹ (Fed) sẽ nói lỏng lập trường chính sách tiền tệ cứng rắn được giữ vững trong cả năm 2022. (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 15/02/2023)

- [The pace of inflation has continued to **slow down**, leading investors to expect that the U.S. Federal Reserve will ease its hardline monetary stance that was maintained throughout 2022.] (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 15 February 2023)
2. **Lạm phát sẽ *bứt tốc* trong năm 2016.** (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 3/12/2015)
[Inflation is expected to **suddenly accelerate** in 2016.] (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 3 December 2015)
 3. **Lạm phát tại Nhật *giảm tốc* trước thêm cuộc họp của ngân hàng trung ương.** (<https://vtv.vn>, 21/04/2024)
[Inflation in Japan **decelerated** ahead of the central bank's policy meeting.] (<https://vtv.vn>, 21 April 2024)
 4. **Lạm phát cơ bản tại thủ đô Tokyo của Nhật Bản đang *trên đà tăng* lên trong tháng 8 và đây là nền tảng để kích thích Ngân hàng Trung ương Nhật Bản (BOJ) tăng lãi suất.** (<https://vtv.vn>, 30/08/2024)
[Core inflation in Tokyo is **on an upward momentum** in August, forming a basis for the Bank of Japan (BOJ) to raise interest rates.] (<https://vtv.vn>, 30 August 2024)
 5. **Bà cho hay các nhà hoạch định chính sách của ECB cần có thêm bằng chứng cho thấy tăng trưởng tiền lương đang *chậm lại* trước khi chắc chắn rằng lạm phát đang *trên đà giảm* xuống mức mục tiêu.** (<https://vtv.vn>, 28/11/2023)
[She stated that European Central Bank policymakers need further evidence that wage growth is slowing before they can be confident that **inflation is on a downward momentum** toward the target.] (<https://vtv.vn>, 28 November 2023)

In examples 2 and 4, metaphorical terms like ‘*bứt tốc*’ (suddenly accelerate) and ‘*trên đà tăng*’ (on an upward momentum) all reveal a concerning state of inflation marked by rapid, frequently uncontrollable escalation. According to these expressions, inflation is depicted as a moving object gaining momentum. Once it reaches a certain threshold, it becomes harder for policymakers to control. On the contrary, metaphorical items such as ‘*chậm lại*’ (slowdown), ‘*giảm tốc*’ (decelerate), and ‘*trên đà giảm*’ (on a downward momentum) (in examples 1, 3, and 5) imply that inflation is improving, signaling optimistic prospects for the economy.

The metaphorical mapping - from the ‘VELOCITY OF A MOVING OBJECT’ onto ‘DEVELOPMENT OF INFLATION’ - enables Vietnamese readers to recognize inflation as a dynamic process with constant fluctuations in its level and severity rather than a static or unchanging economic phenomenon. This cognitive model also implies that inflation is not self-regulating but highly susceptible to external forces, such as geopolitical conflicts (e.g., war), commodity price volatility, or government intervention. Accordingly, Vietnamese economic discourse can enrich public understanding that inflation can be actively steered, slowed, or accelerated depending on economic goals. This metaphorical structure can reinforce the perception of inflation as manageable through policy while simultaneously highlighting its potential volatility and inherent risk if left unchecked.

(b). *Metaphorical Mapping From ‘DIRECTION OF A MOVING OBJECT’ Onto ‘TREND OF INFLATION’*

In Vietnamese economic discourse, the source attribute ‘DIRECTION OF A MOVING OBJECT’ is adopted to project onto the ‘TREND OF INFLATION.’ Metaphorically expressed words such as ‘*đi ngang*’ (moving sideways), ‘*dao động*’ (fluctuate), ‘*quay trở lại*’ (returning), ‘*đi đúng hướng*’ (move in the right direction), ‘*quay đầu*’ (reverse), ‘*vượt xa mục tiêu*’ (far exceed the target), ‘*xa rời mục tiêu*’ (diverge from the target), ‘*tiến gần hơn đến mục tiêu*’ (approach the target), and ‘*tiến tới mức mục tiêu*’ (move toward the target) are commonly used to express the trajectory and evolution of inflation over time. These lexical units assist Vietnamese readers in determining whether inflation is progressing in a desirable direction (i.e., toward policy goals) or deviating from it.

Metaphorical expressions that involve the source domain ‘DIRECTION OF A MOVING OBJECT’ have played a central role in depicting inflation as a physical entity moving over an economic map – a map with defined policy objectives. When inflation remains stable or changes slightly within a controllable range, it is portrayed through expressions such as ‘*đi ngang*’ (move sideways) or ‘*dao động*’ (fluctuate), which suggest gentle horizontal or vertical movements without a clear directional trend:

6. **Bà Lagarde đã cảnh báo *lạm phát sẽ dao động* quanh mức hiện tại trong thời gian tới.** (<https://vtv.vn>, 3/01/2025)
[Ms. Lagarde warned that **inflation would fluctuate** around its current level in the coming period.] (<https://vtv.vn>, 3 January 2025)
7. **Với thực tế giá năng lượng và thực phẩm toàn cầu thấp hơn nhiều so với trước, các chuyên gia kinh tế kỳ vọng *lạm phát tiêu dùng* tại Trung Quốc tiếp tục *đi ngang* trong nhiều tháng tới.** (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 5/08/2023)
[With global energy and food prices significantly lower than before, economists expect **consumer inflation** in China to continue **moving sideways** over the next few months.] (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 5 August 2023)

When inflation progresses in line with government policy directions or public expectations, it is conceptualized as a moving object that ‘*đi đúng hướng*’ (move in the right direction) and ‘*tiến tới mức mục tiêu*’ (move toward the target):

8. **Các chuyên gia tin rằng những số liệu của tháng 5, mà mới nhất là giá cả PCE, đã cho thấy rằng *lạm phát đang thực sự đi đúng hướng* về mục tiêu 2% mà FED kỳ vọng.** (<https://vtv.vn>, 29/06/2024)
[Experts believe that the latest figures for May, particularly the PCE index, show that **inflation is truly moving in the right direction** toward the Fed's 2% target.] (<https://vtv.vn>, 29 June 2024)
9. **Biên bản cho biết nếu dữ liệu đúng như dự đoán rằng *lạm phát sẽ tiến tới mức mục tiêu 2%*, trong khi việc làm vẫn ổn định, thì ‘việc chuyển dần sang lập trường chính sách trung lập hơn theo thời gian có thể sẽ là phù hợp.’** (<https://vtv.vn>, 28/11/2024)

[The minutes stated that if the data confirms that **inflation is moving toward the 2% target** while employment remains stable, ‘a gradual shift toward a more neutral policy stance over time may be appropriate.’] (<https://vtv.vn>, 28 November 2024)

By contrast, when inflation moves beyond the boundaries of control, it is framed as ‘xa rời mục tiêu’ (diverge from the target) or ‘vượt xa mục tiêu’ (run far beyond the target):

10. *Sẽ rất khó cho Fed cắt giảm lãi suất để ngăn đà suy yếu của thị trường lao động nếu lạm phát tăng trước và vượt xa mục tiêu hơn cả tỷ lệ việc làm.* (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 12/05/2025)

[It will be extremely difficult for the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates to slow the momentum of labor market decline if **inflation** gains pace ahead and **runs far beyond the target** - outpacing even employment growth.] (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 12 May 2025)

11. *Báo cáo mới nhất càng làm tăng thêm lo ngại cho Fed khi lạm phát tăng trở lại và dần xa rời mục tiêu 2%.* (<https://vtv.vn>, 14/11/2024)

[The latest report adds to the Fed’s concerns as **inflation** begins to rise again and increasingly **diverges from the 2% target**.] (<https://vtv.vn>, 14 November 2024)

Additionally, when inflation changes direction opposite to the previous trend, the metaphorical item ‘quay đầu’ (reverse or turn around) is often employed - suggesting a sudden shift in trajectory:

12. *Lạm phát ở Mỹ đã quay đầu giảm kể từ giữa năm ngoái.* (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 27/08/2023)

[Since mid-last year, U.S. **inflation has turned around** and **entered a downward trajectory**.] (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 27 August 2023)

These examples show that in Vietnamese economic discourse, inflation is cognitively mapped onto spatial movement, where its direction signals progress, deviation, or policy alignment. Framing inflation as a moving object enables the Vietnamese public to better visualize its trajectory and assess whether it is advancing positively or spiraling out of control in relation to economic targets.

(c). *Metaphorical Mapping From ‘CONTROLLING THE MOVEMENT OF A MOVING OBJECT’ Onto ‘CONTROLLING THE DEGREE OF INFLATION’*

Metaphorical phrases such as ‘thúc đẩy lạm phát gia tăng’ (propel inflation upward), ‘làm giảm tốc’ (slow inflation down), ‘kìm hãm lạm phát’ (curb/brake inflation), ‘kìm đà lạm phát’ (restrain the momentum of inflation), ‘giữ lạm phát ở mức’ (keep inflation at), ‘đưa lạm phát về ngưỡng/về mức’ (bring inflation to the threshold/target), or ‘đưa lạm phát xuống mức’ (bring inflation down to the threshold/target) provide vivid linguistic representations of governmental interventions in the management of inflation. Inflation is expressed as a moving object, while the government performs the role of an agent or operator actively steering its course. The ontological correspondence between the source attribute “controlling the movement of a moving object” and the target attribute “controlling the degree of inflation” existing in Vietnamese economic discourse helps reinforce the image of a government in command - capable of steering inflation toward or away from desirable outcomes.

Inflation can be ‘thúc đẩy gia tăng’ (propel upward) through governmental actions such as low-interest-rate policies or fiscal stimulus packages aimed at boosting consumer demand:

13. *Chính sự kết hợp của nhiều yếu tố đã thúc đẩy lạm phát gia tăng, trong đó bao gồm chính sách lãi suất thấp của Cục Dự trữ Liên bang (Fed) và các biện pháp kích thích nhu cầu tiêu dùng của người Mỹ được Quốc hội thông qua.* (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 13/02/2022)

[A combination of various factors **has propelled inflation upward**, including the Federal Reserve’s low-interest-rate policy and consumer demand stimulus measures approved by Congress.] (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 13 February 2022)

Hyperinflation may be slowed down or brought under control through economic policy interventions. Linguistic units such as ‘làm giảm tốc lạm phát’ (slow inflation down), ‘kìm hãm lạm phát’ (curb inflation), ‘kìm đà lạm phát’ (restrain the momentum), ‘giữ lạm phát ở mức’ (keep inflation at), and ‘đưa lạm phát xuống mức mục tiêu’ (bring inflation back/down to a target) all evoke the act of guiding a moving object - reflecting inflation as a phenomenon that can be managed and governed by policymakers. Consider the following examples:

14. *Tuy nhiên, ở một số nước, áp lực lạm phát đang rất lớn; ở những nước như vậy thì tôi muốn nhấn mạnh rằng rất nhiều chính sách kìm hãm lạm phát đang được thực hiện và chúng tôi đánh giá những chính sách này đưa ra kịp thời, đúng lúc.* (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 7/05/2011)

[However, in some countries, inflationary pressure remains extremely high. In such cases, I would like to emphasize that a wide range of policies aimed at **curbing inflation** are being implemented, and we consider these measures to be timely and appropriate.] (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 7 May 2011)

15. *Lãi suất 10 năm đã chạm đáy vào năm 2020 và tăng liên tục, cho thấy dấu hiệu của gia tăng lạm phát, nhưng phải mãi tới 2022 Fed mới vào cuộc để nâng lãi suất ngắn hạn nhằm kìm đà lạm phát.* (<https://vtv.vn/>, 26/11/2024)

[The 10-year interest rate bottomed out in 2020 and then continued to rise, signaling mounting inflationary pressure. However, it was not until 2022 that the Federal Reserve intervened by raising short-term interest rates to **restrain the momentum of inflation**.] (<https://vtv.vn/>, 26 November 2024)

16. Ông Lane cho biết, việc trở lại mục tiêu này vẫn chưa thể chắc chắn; đặc biệt, lập trường tiền tệ sẽ phải duy trì ở phạm vi hạn chế trong một thời gian cần thiết để thúc đẩy quá trình đưa lạm phát trở lại mục tiêu đúng thời điểm. (<https://vtv.vn>, 25/08/2024)

[Lane noted that returning to this target remains uncertain. Monetary policy will need to stay restrictive for a necessary period to support efforts in **bringing inflation back to target** at the right time.] (<https://vtv.vn>, 25 August 2024)

These examples (14, 15, and 16) reveal two distinct modes of inflation control: reversing the upward trajectory of inflation and redirecting it downward, or applying regulatory tools to restrain or stabilize the rate of inflation. Metaphorical mapping in verbal terms truly made inflation-controlling activities more tangible and visual. By using the mapping, the authors of articles enhance Vietnamese readers' understanding of the governable property of inflation. Readers can be confident that inflation can be fully operated, oriented, and adjusted in the process of governments running the economy. Moreover, this metaphorical framing can also reinforce the legitimacy of state intervention and foreground the government's role as a rational agent actively steering the economic trajectory in times of turbulence.

(d). *Metaphorical Mapping From 'CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MOVEMENT PATH' Onto 'CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROCESS OF CONTROLLING INFLATION'*

The conceptual metaphor 'INFLATION IS A MOVING OBJECT' is further elaborated through ontological correspondence between the 'CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MOVEMENT PATH' (source domain's attribute) and the 'CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROCESS OF CONTROLLING INFLATION' (target domain's attribute). Metaphorical items such as 'con đường chông gai' (a thorny path), 'tiền trình gập ghềnh và thử thách' (a bumpy and challenging process), 'chặng đường dài và thử thách' (a long and arduous journey), and 'chặng đường dài' (a long road) are employed to underscore and vividly articulate the difficulties and obstacles that governments come across in their attempts to manage inflation effectively. These metaphorical expressions emphasize the prolonged and often unpredictable nature of inflation control. Rather than portraying inflation control as a straightforward intervention, the mapping pattern conceptualizes it as a journey fraught with uncertainty and hardship - thus legitimizing potential delays, reversals, or policy struggles as inherent to the process.

Through conceptual mappings embedded in metaphorical expressions, the process of controlling inflation in Vietnamese economic discourse is described as a complex and uneven journey, laden with unexpected risks and challenges (see examples 17, 18, and 19). Inflation management is not perceived as an endeavor that yields immediate results, but rather as a prolonged undertaking that demands perseverance and sustained governmental effort. Phrases such as 'con đường chông gai' (a thorny path), 'tiền trình gập ghềnh và thử thách' (a bumpy and challenging process), and 'chặng đường dài' (a long road) not only serve to concretize the obstacles faced by policymakers but also function to point out the necessity of long-term macroeconomic strategies.

17. Theo đó, thống nhất mục tiêu là đảm bảo ổn định giá cả và đưa lạm phát về mức 4%. Báo chí Nga đã gọi đây là **con đường chông gai**, khi lãi suất cơ bản do Ngân hàng Trung ương Nga đặt ra đang ở mức kỷ lục và trở thành chủ đề kinh tế được quan tâm nhiều nhất hiện nay. (<https://vtv.vn>, 26/11/2024)

[Accordingly, the agreed-upon goal is to ensure price stability and bring inflation down to 4%. Russian media has described this as a **thorny path**, as the key interest rate set by the Central Bank of Russia remains at a record high, becoming one of the most closely watched economic issues today.] (<https://vtv.vn>, 26 November 2024)

18. Nhìn tổng thể, lạm phát đang tiến dần về mục tiêu dài hạn 2%, dù với một **tiền trình khá gập ghềnh và thách thức**. (<https://vtv.vn>, 15/11/2024)

[Overall, inflation is gradually moving toward the long-term target of 2%, through a **bumpy and challenging process**.] (<https://vtv.vn>, 15 November 2024)

19. Tuy nhiên, FED vẫn cho rằng quá trình đưa lạm phát về mức 2% sẽ còn một **chặng đường dài**. (<https://vtv.vn>, 15/11/2023)

[However, the Federal Reserve maintains that the journey to **bring inflation back to the 2% target will still be a long road** ahead.] (<https://vtv.vn>, 15 November 2023)

This metaphorical mapping facilitates public understanding of the complexity of inflation control while also framing political action as an effortful, ongoing process - thus potentially engendering greater public empathy and patience.

The conceptual metaphor 'INFLATION IS A MOVING OBJECT' originates from the universal human experience of motion in space. The embodied basis of this metaphor is grounded in fundamental image schemas such as 'MOTION' (movement with velocity, direction, and destination), 'FORCE' (forces that promote or inhibit motion), and 'PATH' (the trajectory of movement and characteristics of the journey) (Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Kovecses, 2015; Littlemore, 2019). In Vietnamese economic discourse on online news platforms, this metaphor allows the inflation to be conceptualized through concrete and familiar physical experiences of object motion and directional navigation. The mapping of the source domain 'A MOVING OBJECT' onto the target domain 'INFLATION' not only enhances the vividness of linguistic expression but also deepens Vietnamese public understanding of this abstract phenomenon.

B. *Conceptual Metaphor 'INFLATION IS A BURNING OBJECT'*

The experience with burning objects is common and closely related to the subjective impression of heat and light created by fire. This experiential grounding has been used in Vietnamese economic discourse to represent the abstract

notion ‘INFLATION.’ Specifically, the source domain ‘A BURNING OBJECT’ linked to the embodiment of heat is used to infer the target domain ‘INFLATION.’ Three prominent aspects of the source are activated in the cross-mapping mechanism, including ‘the physical state of a burning object,’ ‘the fluctuation of temperature,’ and ‘external actions performed on the burning object.’ These prominent properties not only allow for the articulation of inflation through physical experiences, but more importantly, they actively build cognitive models - constructing new ways of understanding the nature, dynamics, and severity of inflation within public discourse. The metaphorical mappings from the source to the target domain and metaphorical units that carry attributes of the source domain ‘A BURNING OBJECT’ are listed in Table 3 and Table 4 below, respectively:

TABLE 3
CONCEPTUAL MAPPINGS FROM THE SOURCE DOMAIN ‘A BURNING OBJECT’ TO THE TARGET DOMAIN ‘INFLATION’

Source domain: A BURNING OBJECT	mapping onto	Target domain: INFLATION
The physical state of a burning object	→	The progression of inflation
The fluctuation of temperature	→	The fluctuation in the severity of inflation
External actions performed on the burning object	→	Measures taken to respond to or control inflation

TABLE 4
METAPHORICAL ITEMS IN THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR ‘INFLATION IS A BURNING OBJECT’

Source domain's attribute (A BURNING OBJECT)	Metaphorical items	Source domain's attribute (A BURNING OBJECT)	Metaphorical items
The physical state of a burning object	<i>bùng lên (flare up)</i>	The fluctuation of temperature	<i>tăng nhiệt (heat up)</i>
	<i>âm i (smolder)</i>		<i>giảm nhiệt / hạ nhiệt (cool down)</i>
External actions performed on the burning object	<i>dập tắt (extinguish)</i>		<i>nóng lên (become hot)</i>
	<i>thổi bùng (fan the flames of inflation)</i>		<i>dịu đi / dịu xuống (cool down)</i>

A closer look at metaphorical items based on the source property ‘A BURNING OBJECT’ shows a variety of expressions that vividly capture different facets of inflation. For instance:

20. *Lạm phát dễ bùng lên trong tháng 9.* (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 26/07/2013)

[Inflation is likely to flare up in September.] (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 26 July 2013)

In example 20, the verb ‘bùng lên’ (flare up) - typically used to describe the sudden and intense ignition of a fire - is metaphorically employed to indicate a rapid, unexpected, and difficult-to-control rise in inflation. This expression evokes a sense of urgency and potential danger.

21. *Tuy nhiên, nhiều nước châu Á chưa thoát khỏi khó khăn với lạm phát lương thực vẫn đang âm ỉ...* (<https://vtv.vn>, 2/01/2024)

[However, many Asian countries continue to face difficulties as food inflation smolders...] (<https://vtv.vn>, 2 January 2024)

The lexical unit ‘âm ỉ’ (smolders) refers to a fire that continues to burn at a low level and may reignite under certain conditions. Metaphorically, it suggests that inflation, though not currently surging, remains latent and capable of intensifying in response to external triggers. The term emphasizes the importance of maintaining constant vigilance when monitoring inflation.

22. *Fed sẽ trở nên quyết liệt hơn trong việc tăng lãi suất để dập tắt lạm phát.* (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 14/07/2022)

[The Fed is expected to act more aggressively to extinguish inflation.] (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 14 July 2022)

23. *... xung đột khu vực có thể thổi bùng lạm phát trở lại...* (<https://vtv.vn>, 29/01/2025)

[... regional conflict could fan the flames of inflation...] (<https://vtv.vn>, 29 January 2025)

In example 22, the phrase ‘dập tắt lạm phát’ (extinguish inflation) likens inflation to a fire that, if left unchecked, can spread destructively. Here, the metaphor foregrounds the necessity of forceful policy interventions (e.g., interest rate hikes) to fully contain inflation. Similarly, example 23 uses ‘thổi bùng lạm phát’ (fan the flames of inflation) to describe how external shocks - such as geopolitical conflicts - can reactivate and exacerbate inflationary pressures.

24. *Lạm phát đang có dấu hiệu tăng nhiệt...* (<https://tuoitre.vn>, 30/05/2024)

[Inflation is showing signs of heating up...] (<https://tuoitre.vn>, 30 May 2024)

25. *Chi tiêu quá mức là nguyên nhân khiến lạm phát nóng lên.* (<https://vneconomy.vn>, 21/02/2025)

[Overspending caused inflation to become hot.] (<https://vneconomy.vn>, 21 February 2025)

Linguistic expressions such as ‘tăng nhiệt’ (heating up) and ‘nóng lên’ (become hot) in examples 24 and 25 signal the intensification and harmful impacts of inflation on daily life and the economy.

26. *Giá xăng giảm mạnh là yếu tố chính khiến lạm phát hạ nhiệt theo tháng.* (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 13/01/2023)

[A sharp drop in gasoline prices caused monthly inflation to cool down.] (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 13 January 2023)

27. *Lạm phát Mỹ dịu đi...* (<https://vneconomy.vn>, 14/05/2025)

[U.S. inflation has cool down...] (<https://vneconomy.vn>, 14 May 2025)

28. *Lạm phát của Mỹ và châu Âu có dấu hiệu dịu xuống.* (<https://tapchitaichinh.vn>, 17/05/2024)

[There are signs that **inflation** in the U.S. and Europe is **cooling down**.] (<https://tapchitaichinh.vn>, 17 May 2024)

Conversely, lexical items like ‘hạ nhiệt’ (cool down), ‘điều đi’ (cool down), and ‘điều xuống’ (cool down) in examples 26, 27, and 28 indicate a relative easing of inflationary pressure, often interpreted as signs of effective policy measures or market corrections.

The conceptual metaphor ‘INFLATION IS A BURNING OBJECT’ is grounded in the universal embodied experience of human beings with heat and fire, perceived primarily through the sense of touch. In everyday life, fire is commonly associated with sensations of heat, danger, rapid spread, and difficulty in control (Kovecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). For this reason, the source domain ‘A BURNING OBJECT’ serves as an ideal conceptual basis for representing phenomena that are highly risky and have potentially damaging consequences in social and economic contexts. In this metaphorical mapping, salient aspects of a burning object - such as sudden temperature increase, violent flare-ups, lingering smoldering states, widespread damage, and the urgent need for intervention to extinguish the burning object - are projected onto the target domain of inflation. This mapping is motivated by both experiential and socio-semantic correspondences between the threat of a burning object and the threat inflation poses to the economy and societal well-being. Within this metaphorical model, inflation is conceptualized as a burning phenomenon that may flare up, intensify, spread, remain latent, or smolder, and therefore requires tight control, cooling down, or complete extinguishment to ensure economic stability and social welfare. When this metaphor is activated in Vietnamese economic discourse on online news platforms, ‘INFLATION IS A BURNING OBJECT’ not only renders the abstract concept of inflation more concrete and imaginable but also functions as a discursive strategy to shape public perception - emphasizing urgency, risk awareness, and the necessity for decisive government intervention.

Taken together, the conceptual metaphor ‘INFLATION IS A BURNING OBJECT’ demonstrates how Vietnamese economic discourse draws on embodied experience to conceptualize inflation. By aligning the abstract economic phenomenon with familiar sensory experiences of fire and heat, these metaphorical expressions enhance intelligibility as well as lead to emotional responses for the Vietnamese public. They not only provide vivid linguistic representations of inflation’s state, severity, and trajectory but also implicitly shape public perception, concern, and expectations regarding its control and management.

V. DISCUSSION

From a public communication perspective, Vietnamese economic discourse acts as a crucial mediating tool between macroeconomic policy (both national and international) and the general public, including individuals, businesses, and investors. When disseminated through online news platforms, such discourse not only helps explain complex economic phenomena through concrete and embodied expressions but also actively shapes the public’s cognitive framing of domestic and global economic conditions (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998).

By employing two derived source domains, ‘A MOVING OBJECT’ and ‘A BURNING OBJECT,’ the authors of online articles enhanced the communicative effectiveness of the inflation issue for the Vietnamese public. With the source ‘A MOVING OBJECT,’ prominent attributes such as velocity, direction, controllability, and the characteristics of movement trajectories enabled the writers to present the trends, developments, and fluctuations of inflation over time, particularly as influenced by governments’ political policies and social factors. Meanwhile, with the source ‘A BURNING OBJECT,’ salient traits such as temperature, burning state, and actions performed on the burning object helped the authors portray the serious impact and dangerous nature of high inflation as well as the urgent need to reduce or eliminate this issue from the economy. Hence, the conceptual metaphor ‘INFLATION IS A MOVING OBJECT’ proves particularly meaningful in discourses aiming to describe the process, trend, and trajectory of inflation control, whereas the metaphor ‘INFLATION IS A BURNING OBJECT’ is highly effective in discourses intended to create a strong impression of urgency, to issue warnings about potential risks, and to signal positive economic prospects to the audience. It is clear that each conceptual thinking model, with its dominant mappings, corresponds to a specific cognitive function. Beyond their cognitive role, these metaphors both perform affective and behavioral functions. By eliciting anxiety over inflation’s harmful effects, they influence economic behaviors such as reducing consumption, increasing savings, and delaying investment decisions. They also foster public support for the government’s long-term inflation-control strategies.

The identification and analysis of the two cognitive models of inflation in this study has contributed to the growing body of research that applies cognitive linguistics and critical discourse analysis, thereby reaffirming key aspects of Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Charteris-Black’s Critical Metaphor Approach. The research results also clarify the role of conceptual metaphors in increasing the communicative effectiveness of Vietnamese economic discourse in the public sphere. Importantly, these insights also carry practical value for teaching media and journalism language as well as teaching Vietnamese for specific purposes. In teaching media and journalism language, the analysis of conceptual metaphors in classroom practice enables students to gain a deeper understanding of the role that metaphor plays in journalistic discourse. Such an approach equips them with the ability to employ metaphorical expressions appropriately, thereby producing messages that are not only clear and coherent but also socially persuasive. Moreover, an awareness of the functions of conceptual metaphors enhances students’ critical thinking skills, allowing them to engage critically with how language impacts public perceptions of economic issues. In the teaching of Vietnamese for economics, particularly for international learners or students majoring in economics, these metaphorical

models serve as a valuable pedagogical resource. The integration of phrases such as ‘lạm phát bứt tốc’ (inflation accelerates), ‘lạm phát hạ nhiệt’ (inflation cools down), or ‘kìm hãm lạm phát’ (to curb inflation) into educational activities enhances learners’ specialized vocabulary and develops their competence in using language effectively within professional and disciplinary contexts.

However, there are still several drawbacks with this study. Firstly, it focuses mainly on Vietnamese and therefore does not provide a comparative perspective on how conceptual metaphors of inflation are employed in other languages. Secondly, empirical research has not yet tested the social impacts of these metaphors in Vietnamese economic discourse, only observing them descriptively. These limitations open avenues for future research. Comparative studies between languages, such as Vietnamese and English, could help reveal both similarities and differences across cultures in the conceptualization of inflation. In addition, experimental or survey-based research involving readers could test the persuasive effects of different metaphorical frames - for example, whether the burning object metaphor evokes stronger emotional and behavioral responses than the moving object metaphor. Such research would further clarify how conceptual metaphors shape economic discourse, influence public attitudes, and affect decision-making in real-world contexts.

VI. CONCLUSION

Through an examination of Vietnamese economic discourse, the study reveals that the conceptual domain ‘AN OBJECT’ is commonly employed by journalists to express inflation. This source domain is further elaborated into two subordinate domains - ‘A MOVING OBJECT’ and ‘A BURNING OBJECT’ - which are metaphorically mapped onto the target domain of ‘INFLATION.’ When projected onto the target domain, these source domains clearly demonstrate the salience of the underlying cognitive model. Grounded in bodily experiences with motion, force, path, and fire, these conceptual metaphors make inflation’s properties more accessible and comprehensible to the public. Beyond their cognitive function, these metaphors greatly influence public views and policy expectations, functioning as effective tools for strengthening economic media discourse. The findings carry significant pedagogical implications for language instruction while also inviting further research into cross-cultural metaphor use in economic contexts and experimental studies on the social impacts of metaphorical models under changing economic conditions.

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