CONCEPTUAL MAPPINGS OF STRUCTURAL METAPHOR "INFLATION IS AN ENEMY" IN VIETNAMESE ONLINE ECONOMIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract: This study investigates the conceptual metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY in Vietnamese online economic discourse from 2015 to 2025. Drawing on the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and employing a combination of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) and Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), the paper analyzes a dataset of 320 articles from major Vietnamese news sources. The findings demonstrate a variety of ontological correspondences between the source domain of ENEMY and the target domain of INFLATION. These metaphorical mappings not only serve cognitive functions - rendering an abstract economic concept more comprehensible - but also contribute to shaping public attitudes, emotional responses, and support for monetary policy interventions. The study also offers implications for metaphor-based teaching in language education and further research on metaphor variation across cultures and media platforms.

Key words: Conceptual metaphor; economic discourse; inflation; CMA; Vietnamese media

ÁNH XẠ Ý NIỆM CỦA ẨN DỤ CẤU TRÚC "LẠM PHÁT LÀ KẺ THÙ" TRONG CÁC DIỄN NGÔN KINH TẾ TRỰC TUYẾN TIẾNG VIỆT

Tóm tắt: Bài viết khảo sát ẩn dụ ý niệm LẠM PHÁT LÀ KẺ THÙ trong diễn ngôn kinh tế trực tuyến tiếng Việt giai đoạn 2015-2025. Trên cơ sở lý thuyết ẩn dụ ý niệm và vận dụng kết hợp giữa thủ pháp MIP và phương pháp phân tích ẩn dụ phê phán (CMA), nghiên cứu đã khảo sát 320 bài báo từ các tờ báo điện tử chính thống. Kết quả chỉ ra cấu trúc ánh xạ phong phú từ miền nguồn KẺ THÙ đến miền đích LẠM PHÁT. Các ánh xạ ẩn dụ này không chỉ giúp lý giải hiện tượng kinh tế trừu tượng mà còn có chức năng định hình nhận thức xã hội, thái độ và cảm xúc của công chúng, từ đó hỗ trợ cho việc định hướng và hợp lý hóa các chính sách kinh tế vĩ mô. Nghiên cứu cũng đồng thời đưa ra đề xuất về việc ứng dụng ẩn dụ trong giảng dạy ngôn ngữ và gợi ý hướng nghiên cứu tiếp theo về so sánh ẩn dụ liên văn hóa trong truyền thông kinh tế.

Từ khóa: Ẩn dụ ý niệm; diễn ngôn kinh tế; lạm phát; phân tích ẩn dụ phê phán; truyền thông tiếng Việt

1. Introduction

Recently, due to strong fluctuations in the global socio-political context, inflation has risen in many countries. Under globalization conditions, inflation shocks spread through international trade and finance, creating mutual impacts between economies. Vietnam is also not an exception. As a result, macroeconomic health and living standards have come under pressure. Consequently, inflation is an issue that the Vietnamese government closely monitors and regularly communicates to the public. Within today's information ecosystem, digital newspapers provide a convenient and timely channel to reach citizens, helping them grasp information about the global and domestic inflation developments as well as how governments worldwide and the Vietnamese government operate anti-inflation policies.

In Vietnamese online economic discourse, authors often express the idea of inflation through source domains that are physical, concrete, and directly connected to human embodied experiences. The concept of AN ENEMY - associated with embodied experiences of war and conflict - is a typical source domain projected onto the target domain of INFLATION. The conceptual mappings in the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY help digital newspapers not only reflect multiple facets and attributes of inflation in vivid, concrete terms but also enhance Vietnamese readers' understanding of this complex economic phenomenon. At the same time, when used in online economic discourse, the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY also influences public views and attitudes toward economic policy in general and the Vietnamese government's actions in particular.

Several studies have recently examined inflation metaphors or conceptual metaphors drawing on the source domain AN ENEMY, but they have focused primarily on English corpora. To date, no study has investigated the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY in Vietnamese data. In addition, previous studies on inflation metaphors have seldom combined Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) and Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA). This article aims to critically interpret and explain the conceptual metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY in Vietnamese online economic discourse. The focus of the study is on the following two issues: (i) Identifying and analyzing the cross-domain mappings from the source domain ENEMY onto the target domain INFLATION; (ii) Interpreting and explaining the cognitive function, communicative value, and social impact of the INFLATION IS AN ENEMY metaphor in Vietnamese economic discourse. To achieve these objectives, the article seeks to address the following questions:

1. In Vietnamese online economic discourse, which conceptual mappings of the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY are realized, and what linguistic expressions are commonly used to represent these mappings?

2. What cognitive functions does the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY perform, and how does it influence the framing of inflation and the legitimation of policies, as well as the forming of public views and behaviors?

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical background

2.1.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), is a prominent research direction of cognitive linguistics. According to this theory, metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a fundamental cognitive mechanism that enables human beings to understand, conceptualize, and construct new knowledge about the world through mappings between different conceptual domains. In this metaphorical thinking process, people often rely on concrete source domains grounded in embodied and perceptual experiences to comprehend and express abstract target domains. For example, we indicate abstract concepts such as time, love, life, and death through more specific, familiar source domains such as motion, objects, journeys, and wars. A conceptual metaphor is often named according to the formula TARGET DOMAIN IS/AS SOURCE DOMAIN. The target domains tend to be non-physical, abstract, harder to observe, and not fully understood. Meanwhile, the source domains are more physical, concrete, easily observable, and better understood. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also affirmed that metaphorical expressions in language are considered surface manifestations of conceptual processes, providing valuable evidence of how abstract phenomena are mentally represented and conceptualized in human cognition.

Cognitive linguists have pointed out that cross-domain mappings in conceptual metaphors are systematic, tightly structured, and governed by the Invariance Principle. This means that a conceptual mapping preserves the inferential structure of the source domain in a way that is compatible with the inherent structure of the target domain (Kovecses, 2010, p. 131). Metaphorical conceptual mappings are also unidirectional; that is, they proceed in only one direction from the source domain to the target domain and not the other way around (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, p. 132). Cognitive linguists explain that in order to fully understand an abstract concept, we must use a more concrete one. "Our experiences with the physical world serve as a natural and logical foundation for the comprehension of more abstract domains. This explains why in most cases of everyday metaphors the source and target domains are not reversible" (Kovecses, 2010, p. 7). Mappings in conceptual metaphors are not arbitrary. Within a given mapping, only some properties of the source domain are projected onto the target. Cognitive theory calls this a partial mapping or an emergent mapping. The highlighted, mapped properties constitute the semantic focus of the conceptual metaphor.

Based on the cognitive function criterion, cognitive linguists divide conceptual metaphors into three types: structural metaphors, orientational metaphors, and ontological metaphors. According to Kovecses (2010, p. 46), structural metaphors map the structure of the source domain onto the target domain, allowing speakers to understand one domain in terms of another. For example, the target domain ARGUMENT is structured through the source domain WAR, as in expressions like "*He attacked my point*" or "*She defended her position strongly.*" Orientational metaphors serve primarily an evaluative role, and they make large groups of metaphors coherent with one another. The metaphor HAPPY IS UP, SAD IS DOWN illustrates how vertical orientation is mapped onto emotional states, as in "*I'm feeling up today*" or "*His mood went down.*" Ontological metaphors allow people to conceptualize abstract phenomena as entities, substances,

or containers, providing a fundamental but crude knowledge of target concepts. For instance, in the metaphor THE MIND IS A MACHINE, the abstract concept THE MIND is understood as A MACHINE (an entity). This metaphor is reflected in expressions such as "*My brain isn't working properly today*" or "*She's running out of steam.*"

Drawing on core principles of conceptual metaphor theory, we classify the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY as a structural metaphor, in which the target domain INFLATION is constructed through properties of the source domain AN ENEMY. The cross-domain mapping in this metaphor is systematic, unidirectional, and selective (highlighting). The mapping proceeds in one direction only - from the source AN ENEMY to the target INFLATION. Besides, not all source-domain attributes are projected onto the target; rather, journalists mobilize only certain correspondences to conceptualize specific aspects of the inflation phenomenon.

2.1.2 Critical Metaphor Analysis

Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), proposed by Charteris-Black (2005, 2018), seeks to uncover the intentions and underlying ideologies behind metaphor use in discourse. This approach integrates cognitive linguistics, critical discourse analysis, and rhetoric, treating metaphor both as a cognitive phenomenon and as a persuasive instrument. According to Charteris-Black (2005), in political-media discourse, metaphors play a key role: they frame issues, shape social ideologies, and function as persuasive tools to influence public cognition and legitimize a speaker's views. CMA focuses on the relationship between metaphor, ideology, and persuasion. Correspondingly, the choice of metaphor both reflects the speaker's implicit ideological views and increases the persuasiveness of the argument, while also being associated with the construction of discursive power (Charteris-Black, 2018, pp. 217-223). Unlike purely semantic or descriptive analyses, CMA goes beyond identification and classification to explain why particular metaphors are chosen and how they operate rhetorically and ideologically in discourse (Charteris-Black, 2018, pp. 243-257).

This study is based on the combination of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the theoretical framework of Critical Metaphor Analysis. The integration of CMT and CMA allows for a comprehensive analysis of inflation metaphors INFLATION IS AN ENEMY - capturing both the cognitive depth and the broader social function. Within these approaches, conceptual metaphors are not only understood as cognitive mechanisms that shape how people think and talk about inflation but also as socially influential rhetorical strategies. The theoretical perspectives also enable the study to explore the interrelationship between language, cognition, and ideology in Vietnamese economic discourse on inflation.

2.2 A review of previous studies related to the research topic

Conceptual metaphors related to the phenomenon of inflation have attracted scholarly attention in various international studies, especially in the field of economic discourse analysis. In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identified several conventional metaphors of inflation in English economic discourse, including INFLATION IS A SUBSTANCE, INFLATION IS AN ENTITY, and INFLATION IS AN ADVERSARY. Silaški and Đurović (2010), Hu and Chen (2015), and Hu and Liu (2016) further explored the cognitive models of inflation based on English corpora. Silaški and Đurović (2010) highlighted the metaphor INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL, frequently used in English media to express inflation

as a dangerous phenomenon threatening economic stability. Hu and Chen (2015) examined conceptual metaphors of inflation from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives, using data from COCA and the TIME Magazine Corpus (TMC). Their study identified a variety of source domains mapped onto the target domain INFLATION, such as FIRE, LIQUID, PLANT, ANIMAL, and DISEASE. The authors also suggested integrating metaphorical analysis of inflation into the teaching of economics to help students better understand the conceptual nature of economic phenomena, as well as to facilitate vocabulary acquisition related to inflation. Hu and Liu (2016) extended this line of research by examining diachronic changes in inflation metaphors, drawing on data from the TIME Magazine Corpus (1923–2006). They compared metaphor usage with historical economic trends to demonstrate the influence of socio-economic context on metaphorical models in economic discourse. Conversely, Olivera and Sacristán (2001) focused on inflation metaphors in English economics textbooks and their Spanish translations, exploring the cognitive and cultural implications of metaphor translation. Sacristán (2009) proposed a translation-based teaching methodology for conceptual metaphors in LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) classrooms, using inflation metaphors from previous studies as examples for teaching business English.

In addition to research focusing on conceptual metaphors of inflation, conceptual metaphors that adopt the source domain of AN ENEMY have also been investigated in various research works. Wicke and Bolognesi (2020) analyzed the use of war-related conceptual frames in media discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the virus COVID-19 is metaphorically represented as an ENEMY to be eliminated. Nguyen (2020) demonstrated that both Western and Vietnamese politicians frequently utilize the conceptual structure of AN ENEMY to metaphorically refer to negative social phenomena, thereby intensifying the emotional impact of political discourse and mobilizing public resistance to social issues such as war, poverty, ignorance, and injustice. Le (2023), in a comparative study of structural metaphors in English and Vietnamese health news, found that both Vietnamese and English communities employed the ENEMY source domain to structure conceptualizations of DISEASE/PANDEMIC, reflecting a shared cognitive approach to framing health crises.

An examination of both domestic and international literature indicates that, as of now, no study has specifically discussed the conceptualization of the target domain INFLATION or conducted an in-depth critical analysis of the conceptual metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY within Vietnamese online economic discourse. This gap offers an opportunity for academic investigation of this research.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research design

This study employs a mixed methods design that combines both quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative component involves the systematic collection and coding of metaphorical expressions related to inflation. This provides empirical evidence for their frequency, distribution, and variation. The qualitative component focuses on interpreting conceptual mappings and examining the cognitive and social functions of metaphors. This integrated design ensures both objectivity and interpretive depth, making it possible to explain how metaphors shape public attitudes towards inflation and authorizes governments' policies.

3.2 Data collection

The study investigates the conceptualization of inflation in Vietnamese economic discourse by analyzing a dataset of 320 online news articles published between 2015 and 2025. These articles were collected from five major Vietnamese digital news platforms: *dantri.com.vn, tuoitre.vn, vtv.vn, tapchitaichinh.vn*, and *vneconomy.vn*. These platforms are among the most widely accessed in Vietnam and are characterized by a concise writing style, proximity to daily language, and significant influence in the national media context. Articles were retrieved using the keyword *lạm phát* (inflation) via each platform's internal search engine. The selection criteria were the following:

- The content must directly address the topic of inflation, including its causes, impacts, and regulatory policies.

- The articles must contain potentially metaphorical expressions describing inflation, which were preliminarily identified through skimming and locating commonly figurative expressions.

- The corpus includes a diversity of article types, such as policy analysis, financial and economic news reports, business news, and commentary.

3.3 Analytical procedure

The research adopts a combined approach, integrating the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by Group (2007) and the framework of Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) proposed by Charteris-Black (2005, 2018) to identify and interpret conceptual metaphors related to inflation in Vietnamese economic discourse.

The MIP consists of three main steps: (1) Read the entire text-discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning; (2) Determine the lexical units in the text-discourse; (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 (Group, 2007)

Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) follows a three-step procedure: (1) metaphor identification; (2) metaphor interpretation; and (3) metaphor explanation. (Charteris-Black, 2005).

The MIP serves as a methodological tool for detecting potential metaphorical expressions in texts. Following the MIP protocol, metaphorically expressed units were identified by comparing their contextual meanings with their more basic meanings in Vietnamese. Once metaphorical items were identified, the CMA was adopted to examine their discursive functions and ideological implications. The combination of MIP and CMA allows the study to fulfill two main objectives: (1) ensuring objectivity and reproducibility in the identification of metaphors in the dataset; and (2) providing a critical analysis of the impacts of conceptual metaphors of inflation within their social and media contexts, thereby enabling insights into the way public perceptions of inflation are formed. The integrated procedure consists of four steps as follows:

Step 1: Apply the MIP to detect and compile metaphorical linguistic expressions of inflation that include lexical items related to the semantic field of enemy or war.

Step 2: Classify and label specific conceptual mappings from the source domain ENEMY onto the target domain INFLATION.

Step 3: Interpret the cognitive framing functions of the metaphorical expressions, focusing on how they evoke emotions and shape social attitudes.

Step 4: Discuss and explain the role of metaphorical mappings in forming public perceptions of inflation and legitimizing government policies.

4. Research findings

The results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses, statistical processing, and discourse analysis indicate that in Vietnamese online economic discourse, various aspects of the conceptual domain INFLATION are metaphorically represented through six attributes of the source domain ENEMY. These include *characteristics of an enemy, actions of the enemy, actions against the enemy, defensive weapons, strategies to defeat an enemy, and the outcomes of fighting an enemy*. The metaphorical mapping INFLATION IS AN ENEMY is illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Conceptual Mappings from the Source Domain ENEMY to the Target Domain INFLATION

TT	Source Domain: AN ENEMY	mapping onto	Target Domain: INFLATION
1	Characteristics of an enemy	⟶	Characteristics of inflation
2	Actions of an enemy	⟶	Development of inflation
3	Actions against an enemy	⟶	Counter-inflation actions
4	Defensive weapons	⟶	Anti-inflation tools
5	Strategies to defeat an enemy	⟶	Anti-inflation strategies
6	The outcome of fighting an enemy	⟶	The outcome of controlling inflation

The source domain ENEMY is a conceptual construct embedded within the war discourse frame, typically associated with negativity, danger, threat, and the need for strong counteractions. The projection of this domain's attributes onto the target domain INFLATION allows economic discourse to focus on inflation as a harmful, uncontrollable phenomenon that must be confronted. In addition, the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY, as used in Vietnamese online economic discourse, plays a crucial role in shaping public cognition, emotions, and attitudes. In doing so, it potentially influences public support for or resistance to macroeconomic policies.

The survey also revealed that 24 metaphorical items derived from the source domain AN ENEMY were used to conceptualize INFLATION in Vietnamese online economic discourse. The frequency of these metaphorical words, which constitute the conceptual metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY, is illustrated in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Metaphorical Items Activated in the Conceptual Mapping INFLATION IS AN ENEMY

TT	Aspects of the Source Domain	Metaphorical items	Frequency
1	Characteristics of an enemy	*cứng đầu (stubborn)*	2
2	Actions of an enemy	*trỗi dậy (resurge)*	1
		cố thủ (entrench)	2
3	Actions against an enemy	*ứng phó (respond)*	3
		đối phó (cope with)	13
		chế ngự (suppress)	1
		(cuộc chiến) chống (fight against)	89
		kiềm (restrain)	3
		kiềm chế (restrain)	58
		ngăn chặn (prevent)	6
		đối mặt (confront)	8
		chống chọi (struggle with)	1
		vật lộn (wrestle with)	2
		tung chiêu đối phó (launch countermoves)	1
		cầm cự (contend)	1
4	Defensive weapons	*lá chắn (shield)*	1
5	Strategies to defeat an enemy	*án binh bất động (remain dormant)*	1
6	The outcome of fighting an enemy	*chiến thắng (win)*	10
		thắng lợi (win)	4
		đầu hàng (surrender)	1
		ngấm đòn (take a hit from)	1
		thất bại (lose the battle against)	1
		kết thúc (the war) ends)	3
		đạt được nhiều tiến triển (make considerable progress)	1
	Total	**24 metaphorical items**	**214**

Statistical data presented in Table 2 indicate that the two most prominent aspects in terms of both the number and frequency of metaphorical expressions are actions against the enemy and outcomes of the battle. The distribution of metaphorical words across these aspects is notably uneven. Among the total of 214 occurrences, lexical units related to *actions against the enemy* appear most frequently, with 186 instances, accounting for 86.9% of the total. Meanwhile, metaphorical units denoting the *outcomes of the battle* are represented by 7 different lexical items, with a total of 21 occurrences. This disparity in both the diversity and frequency of metaphorical items emphasizes a notable discursive emphasis on combating inflation and the consequences of inflation control efforts. These findings indicate that economic discourse in contemporary Vietnamese media tends to foreground the counter-inflation actions and their potential outcomes, reflecting major areas of concern for both policymakers and the general public.

4.1 Conceptual mapping CHARACTERISTICS OF INFLATION ARE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ENEMY

In the conceptual metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY, the characteristics of inflation - a complex and abstract economic phenomenon - are represented through the salient traits of a dangerous and challenging enemy. The metaphorical expression *cứng đầu* (stubborn) found in the discourse activates this conceptual mapping:

(1) *Năm 2023 chứng kiến 5 ngân hàng của Mỹ phá sản. Còn với người tiêu dùng, họ vừa phải đối mặt với **lạm phát cứng đầu**, lãi suất vay tiêu dùng cao và xăng dầu tăng giá. (https://vtv.vn, 02/01/2024)*

[*The year 2023 saw five U.S. banks collapse. Meanwhile, consumers had to deal with **stubborn inflation**, high interest rates, and soaring fuel prices.*] *(https://vtv.vn, January 2, 2024)*

(2) *Phản ứng của thị trường sau số liệu CPI phần nào đó cho thấy một chút lo ngại rằng **lạm phát có thể cứng đầu** hơn kỳ vọng trước đó. (https://vtv.vn, 15/11/2024)*

[*Market reactions to the CPI data revealed concerns that **inflation might be more stubborn** than previously expected.*] *(https://vtv.vn, November 15, 2024)*

According to the Vietnamese Dictionary (Hoang, 2003, p. 231), *cứng đầu* (stubborn) typically refers to the personality trait of a person who is unwilling to obey or submit and is persistently defiant. In sentence (1), the usage of *cứng đầu* (stubborn) creates an image of inflation as a chronic enemy, highlighting its prolonged and burdensome influence on the everyday life of Americans. In example (2), the metaphorical mapping is further developed so that inflation appears as a cunning, unpredictable, and hard-to-control adversary, which in turn complicates the U.S. government's efforts to bring it under control.

The use of the adjective *cứng đầu* (stubborn) not only reflects inflation's feature but also arouses emotional responses such as anxiety and caution among the Vietnamese public and investors in the face of prolonged global economic instability. Simultaneously, this metaphorical mapping helps to justify aggressive policy responses from the government, contributing to the construction of social expectations that controlling inflation is a prolonged process requiring determination and sustained effort.

4.2 Conceptual mapping THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFLATION IS ACTIONS OF AN ENEMY

The following examples illustrate the conceptual mapping from *actions of an enemy* to *the development of inflation*:

(3) *Dù còn nhiều tranh cãi về hiệu ứng của các chính sách này với tăng trưởng kinh tế Mỹ, nhiều chuyên gia kinh tế nghiêng về khả năng các chính sách đó có thể khiến **lạm phát ở Mỹ trỗi dậy**, phá hỏng thành quả cuộc chiến chống lạm phát mà Fed đã có được tính đến thời điểm này. (https://vneconomy.vn, 16/02/2025)*

[*Although the effectiveness of these policies on U.S. economic growth remains a subject of debate, many economists lean toward the possibility that these measures may cause **inflation in the U.S. to resurge**, undermining the progress the Fed has made thus far in its battle against inflation.*] *(https://vneconomy.vn, February 16, 2025)*

In this case, the verb *trỗi dậy* (resurge) typically denotes the return or re-emergence of a hostile force or adversary after a period of suppression. The use of this term to describe inflation as a dangerous opponent - one that lies dormant, waits for the right moment, and then unexpectedly strikes the U.S. economy.

(4) *Theo Phó Tổng Giám đốc điều hành IMF Gita Gopinath, các yếu tố lạm phát vẫn còn **cố thủ** trong nhiều nền kinh tế và thị trường dường như đang quá lạc quan về tình hình hiện tại, đặc biệt là ở các thị trường mới nổi. (https://vtv.vn, 19/05/2023)*

[*According to IMF Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath, inflationary pressures remain **entrenched** in many economies, while markets appear overly optimistic about the current situation, particularly in emerging markets.*] *(https://vtv.vn, May 19, 2023)*

The verb *cố thủ* (entrench) is commonly used in military discourse to describe the act of strategically defending a position. It implies persistent, organized resistance from an adversary. When applied to inflation, it metaphorically suggests that inflation is deeply rooted, difficult to eliminate, and resilient to control measures in many economies. On this basis, this metaphorical word creates a cognitive effect for Vietnamese readers, evoking inflation as an elusive adversary - hard to detect and hard to defeat with routine policy measures.

The conceptual mapping underscores the persistent and unpredictable nature of inflation. The depiction of inflation as *trỗi dậy* (resurge) or *cố thủ* (entrench) implies that the fight against inflation is an arduous and prolonged battle. Furthermore, these metaphorical expressions construct a discursive frame of caution and alert, shaping public perception and emotions toward inflation as a threat. They also help to legitimize the need for strong government action and the implementation of more aggressive policies.

4.3 Conceptual mapping COUNTER-INFLATION ACTIONS ARE ACTIONS AGAINST AN ENEMY   Vietnamese economic discourse frequently employs metaphorical expressions to activate the conceptual mapping COUNTER-INFLATION ACTIONS ARE ACTIONS AGAINST AN ENEMY, with verbs such as *ứng phó* (respond), *đối phó* (cope with), *chế ngự* (suppress), *chống* (fight against), *kiềm, kiềm chế* (restrain), *ngăn chặn* (prevent), *đối mặt* (confront), *chống chọi* (struggle with), *vật lộn* (wrestle with), and *tung chiêu đối phó* (launch countermoves). These metaphorical words frame inflation as an aggressive, destructive enemy that threatens national economies and demands immediate defensive or combative responses from governments, policymakers, and institutions. Together, these lexical units imply opposition, defense, and confrontation - evoking a discursive scenario of intense and ongoing war.

(5) *Trong năm 2022 và 2023, thêm nhiều quốc gia đã điều chỉnh mức lương tối thiểu để **ứng phó với vấn đề gia tăng lạm phát**. (https://dantri.com.vn, 30/11/2024)*

[*In 2022 and 2023, more countries adjusted their minimum wages to **respond to the problem of rising inflation**.*] *(https://dantri.com.vn, November 30, 2024)*

Ứng phó (respond) suggests a proactive reaction in the face of an impending threat. Inflation is viewed as a serious danger to both the economies and people's livelihoods worldwide, necessitating early preparation.

(6) *Các nhà hoạch định chính sách của Mỹ đang cân nhắc xem họ cần phải tăng lãi suất bao nhiêu nữa để làm chậm nền kinh tế và **chế ngự lạm phát**. (https://dantri.com.vn, 13/01/2023)*

[*U.S. policymakers are considering how much further interest rates need to be raised to slow the economy and **suppress inflation**.*] *(https://dantri.com.vn, January 13, 2023)*

In example (6), rising interest rates is metaphorically associated with attempting to contain a powerful opponent. The word *chế ngự* (suppress) refers to the U.S. authorities' act of subduing an energetic and dangerous opponent.

(7) *Lạm phát đang giảm nhanh hơn dự kiến tại các nền kinh tế phát triển. Điều này đánh dấu bước ngoặt mới trong **cuộc chiến chống lạm phát** của các ngân hàng trung ương. (https://dantri.com.vn, 18/12/2023)*

   [*Inflation is falling faster than expected in developed economies. This marks a turning point in central banks' **fight against inflation**.*] *(https://dantri.com.vn, December 18, 2023)*

The metaphorical mapping in the phrase *cuộc chiến chống lạm phát* (fight against inflation) allows linguistic expression (7) to reconstruct the decisive actions of central banks as a form of combat against severe inflation. The timely implementation of monetary policies is conceptualized as strategic action against a formidable enemy.

(8) *Hiện tại, một số ngân hàng trung ương trên thế giới đang **ngăn chặn lạm phát** bằng việc tăng lãi suất. (https://dantri.com.vn, 14/07/2022)*

   [*Currently, several central banks around the world are **preventing inflation** by raising interest rates.*]   *(https://dantri.com.vn, July 14, 2022)*

(9) *Trong khi nhiều quốc gia khác phải **vật lộn với trình trạng lạm phát cao** thì Trung Quốc lại đang đối diện với rủi ro rơi vào một giai đoạn giá cả sụt giảm kéo dài, hay còn gọi là giảm phát. (https://dantri.com.vn, 05/08/2023)*

   [*While many countries are **wrestling with high inflation**, China faces the risk of entering a prolonged period of price deflation.*] *(https://dantri.com.vn, 5 August 2023)*

(10) *Các nhà bán lẻ Nhật Bản **tung chiêu đối phó lạm phát**. (https://vtv.vn, 30/03/2023)*

   [*Japanese retailers are **launching countermoves to tackle inflation**.*] *(https://vtv.vn, March 30, 2023)*

The verb *ngăn chặn* (prevent) describes efforts of global central banks to stop inflation before it escalates further. The expression *vật lộn* (wrestle with) reflects national attempts to manage inflation while simultaneously conveying a sense of difficulty and limited control over a powerful, destructive enemy. The phrase *tung chiêu* (launch countermoves) emphasizes proactive strategies taken by retailers to minimize the negative impacts of inflation on business operations.

Overall, by mapping the *actions against an enemy* onto *counter-inflation actions*, Vietnamese economic discourse highlights urgency, determination, and preparedness. Inflation is considered an ever-present, aggressive threat that necessitates immediate and forceful responses from governments, central banks, and the business sector. This mapping also serves to legitimize strong economic policies, such as wage adjustments and interest rate hikes, by framing them as necessary weapons in the battle against inflation.

4.4 Conceptual mapping ANTI-INFLATION TOOLS ARE DEFENSIVE WEAPONS

This mapping pattern is expressed in only one linguistic unit: *lá chắn* (shield). *Lá chắn* (shield) is a protective weapon used to block or minimize injury from enemy attacks. Its primary

function is to defend the bearer in combat situations, reducing or neutralizing threats posed by an enemy.

(11) *Bitcoin,* **lá chắn chống lạm phát** *hay chỉ là "ru ngủ"? (https://dantri.com.vn, 18/03/2025)*

[*Bitcoin, a* **shield against inflation** *or merely a "sedative"?*] *(https://dantri.com.vn, March 18, 2025)*

The metaphorical use of *lá chắn* (shield) creates the image of a protective instrument used in war or conflict to absorb or deflect damage. When mapped onto the target domain INFLATION, this word suggests that Bitcoin is conceptualized as a financial safeguard - a tool for asset protection during times of economic volatility. In the linguistic expression (11), the metaphor highlights the potential role of Bitcoin as a buffer against inflation-driven loss. At the same time, its use within a rhetorical question introduces skepticism, inviting readers to critically evaluate whether Bitcoin truly functions as a reliable economic defense mechanism or merely provides false reassurance.

4.5 Conceptual mapping ANTI-INFLATION STRATEGY IS STRATEGY TO DEFEAT AN ENEMY

Vietnamese online economic discourse employs a unique metaphorical item derived from the conceptual domain of military strategy - *án binh bất động* (remaining dormant) - to conceptualize the anti-inflation strategy.

(12) *Tuy nhiên, dữ liệu lạm phát mới nhất của Mỹ không khiến các nhà kinh tế thay đổi quan điểm rằng Fed sẽ tiếp tục "***án binh bất động***" về lãi suất cho tới cuối mùa hè. (https://vneconomy.vn, 14/05/2025)*

[*However, the latest inflation data in the United States has not led economists to alter their view that the Fed will continue to "***remain dormant***" regarding interest rates until the end of summer.*] *(https://vneconomy.vn, May 14, 2025)*

The expression *án binh bất động* (remain dormant) originates from military discourse, referring to a tactical decision to stay inactive while patiently waiting for the opportune moment to strike back at the enemy. In example (12), this word is used to project onto the financial policy domain, suggesting that the Fed's decision to maintain current interest rates is not a passive delay but rather a strategic, calculated defensive stance in a prolonged battle against inflation. By using this metaphor, the Vietnamese authors depict the Fed's monetary policy as a deliberate and cautious strategy in the face of an ever-looming enemy (inflation). This framing serves to rationalize governmental policy decisions, fostering public consensus and emotional reassurance, and potentially reducing public anxiety in uncertain economic conditions.

4.6 Conceptual mapping THE OUTCOME OF CONTROLLING INFLATION IS THE OUTCOME OF FIGHTING AN ENEMY

The fight against inflation is metaphorically framed as a military campaign, with possible outcomes including victory, defeat, persistence, and termination. Metaphorical expressions such as *chiến thắng, thắng lợi* (win the war against), *đầu hàng* (surrender), *thất bại* (lose the battle), *ngấm đòn* (take a hit), *cuộc chiến kết thúc* (the war ends), and *đạt được nhiều tiến triển* (making

considerable progress) construct a narrative of combat against the enemy inflation-encompassing engagement, damage, and eventual outcomes. Consider the following examples:

(13) *Business Insider nhận định FED đang **chiến thắng trong cuộc chiến chống lạm phát** và điều này có thể giúp nền kinh tế Mỹ tránh được một cuộc suy thoái "đớn đau". (https://vtv.vn, 14/04/2023)*

[*Business Insider claimed that the Fed is **winning the war against inflation**, which may help the U.S. economy avoid a painful recession.*] *(https://vtv.vn, April 14, 2023)*

(14) *Theo Ngân hàng Trung ương Nga, việc nới lỏng chính sách tiền tệ sẽ là sự **đầu hàng trước lạm phát** và đẩy lạm phát lên cao hơn. (https://vtv.vn, 06/12/2024)*

[*According to the Central Bank of Russia, easing monetary policy would amount to **surrendering to inflation**, pushing inflation even higher.*] *(https://vtv.vn, December 6, 2024)*

(15) *Các ngân hàng trung ương trên thế giới đang **đạt được nhiều tiến triển trong cuộc chiến** nhằm đưa lạm phát toàn cầu trở lại trong tầm kiểm soát. (https://vtv.vn, 03/08/2024)*

[*Central banks around the world are **making considerable progress in the battle** to bring global inflation under control.*] *(https://vtv.vn, August 3, 2024)*

The phrase *chiến thắng trong cuộc chiến chống lạm phát* (win the war against inflation) is a metaphorical expression for positive outcomes in inflation control. It conveys reassurance and strengthens public confidence and expectations in the American government's monetary policy. By contrast, *đầu hàng trước lạm phát* (surrender to inflation) implies resignation and powerlessness, foregrounding the harm inflation inflicts on Russian consumers. Through such metaphorical choices, Vietnamese online economic discourse seeks both to warn the public and point out the need for decisive Russian government actions. The phrase *đạt được nhiều tiến triển trong cuộc chiến* (make considerable progress in the battle) helps cultivate optimism about economic performance and the central banks' policy stance.

These metaphorical mappings serve not only to concretize abstract economic outcomes in an accessible and emotionally resonant manner but also to frame public expectations regarding governments' performance. Furthermore, they act as rhetorical methods to support or legitimize policy decisions that are framed as steps toward victory in the war against inflation in the world.

5. Discussion

Research findings reveal that Vietnamese economic discourse frequently employs the conceptual metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY to perceive and express the abstract concept of inflation. This metaphor encompasses a range of detailed conceptual mappings - including *characteristics of an enemy, actions of the enemy, actions against the enemy, defensive weapons, strategies to defeat an enemy, and the outcomes of fighting an enemy* - reflecting an emotionally charged and strategic cognitive model. This metaphorical pattern enables the public to conceptualize inflation, an abstract macroeconomic phenomenon, through the more familiar experiential schema of war and confrontation. Consequently, aspects such as inflation's development, severity, and controllability are rendered more concrete and cognitively accessible.

The analysis of Vietnamese economic discourse indicates that the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY performs both cognitive functions and exerts social impact. This is also consistent with the previous work showing that war metaphors are often used to talk about complex and intractable socio-economic problems, and that metaphors in political and economic discourse are persuasive and behavior-oriented (Charteris-Black, 2005, 2018). The study notes the prominent role of the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY in shaping the Vietnamese public's understanding of inflation. Specifically, the conceptual mappings depict inflation as a lurking adversary, thereby raising readers' awareness of its harms and of the necessity of bringing it under control. Metaphorical expressions appearing in online economic discourse create the impression that controlling inflation is an urgent, top-priority task, just like defeating an enemy to protect economic stability. In addition, the research also finds evidence that this metaphor is used to influence Vietnamese public views and behaviors. Attributing vivid enemy-like properties to inflation "not only gives us a very specific way of thinking about inflation but also a way of acting toward it" (Hu & Liu, 2016, p. 124). By framing inflation as a hostile force, the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY helps persuade the public to support the forceful anti-inflation policies adopted by governments worldwide and by the government of Vietnam, similar to supporting wartime measures. For example, expressions like *lạm phát cứng đầu* (stubborn inflation) and *lạm phát trỗi dậy* (inflation resurgence) not only convey information but also activate anxiety and adversarial attitudes, thereby legitimizing robust steps such as interest-rate hikes and tighter monetary controls. In this sense, the metaphor functions as a bridge between macroeconomic policy and public acceptance, translating complex economic ideas into simple, accessible messages. The findings align with prior research: "The essential role of the inflation metaphors allows the author to conclude that it would be "hard to imagine such large-scale initiatives becoming popular or even plausible without major framing metaphors accompanying them" (Hu & Liu, 2016, p. 124).

From an educational perspective, critical analyses of the INFLATION IS AN ENEMY metaphor have practical applications in language education. In journalism and media training, the results can be used to illustrate lessons on how language shapes social thought and behavior. By giving examples of how journalists often use linguistic expressions containing the source domain AN ENEMY to describe inflation, teachers can help students understand the power of metaphor in steering public opinion. Students learn to identify and analyze metaphors in economic discourse in order to uncover the persuasive intents behind particular formulations. For example, when an article states that *cuộc chiến chống lạm phát đang đạt được tiến triển* (the war on inflation is making progress), students can discuss why the writer chooses the word *cuộc chiến* (the war), what emotions the word evokes in readers, and how it affects interpretations of economic policy. Developing such awareness helps students leverage metaphor to improve the quality and impact of their writing and to recognize the need to use language more responsibly. In the field of language-for-specific-purposes (LSP) teaching, especially in teaching Vietnamese for economics to foreigners or economic majors, the results provide a valuable instructional resource. Teachers can integrate the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY into their lessons to help learners grasp specialized terminology more deeply. For example, when studying inflation, beyond technical definitions, learners can analyze metaphorical expressions such as *lạm phát cứng đầu* (stubborn inflation), *cuộc chiến chống lạm phát* (the war against inflation), and *vật lộn với lạm phát* (wrestle

with inflation) to understand the nuances and the socio-cultural implications embedded in economic terms. This, in turn, supports longer-term retention and context-appropriate usage.

However, the study also has some limitations. Because it only focuses on analyzing the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY, the study has not covered the system of source domains that project onto the target domain INFLATION. In addition, the analysis approach is mainly dependent on discourse observation and has not really empirically confirmed the actual impact of metaphors on public perception. These limitations mark a gap for further studies on metaphors in media language.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined how Vietnamese online economic discourse conceptualizes the phenomenon of inflation through the source domain of AN ENEMY. The conceptual metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY proves not only prevalent but also systematically developed through a wide range of metaphorical mappings. The findings show that these metaphorical projections vividly reflect how the Vietnamese media perceive and evaluate inflation as a formidable opponent to all economies that must be restrained and brought under control. Beyond its descriptive value, this metaphor performs important cognitive and directive functions. It allows the public to comprehend the complex nature of inflation by drawing on the familiar experiences of war. At the same time, it creates a sense of urgency, legitimizes aggressive economic policies, and shapes public emotions and attitudes toward vigilance and confrontation.

The research also offers practical implications for both language education and the critical analysis of public discourse. Recognizing the role of metaphor in structuring knowledge and influencing social attitudes can help students enhance their conceptual awareness and develop critical thinking when engaging with economic issues. For future work, the research can be extended to cross-cultural and cross-linguistic comparisons of inflation metaphors or to exploring the interactions among war-based source domains during times of economic instability; it can also be deepened to study the role of metaphors in policy reasoning.

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