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FROM RECORD HIGHS TO NEW LOWS: A COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC STUDY OF THE FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE OF ECONOMIC INDICATORS

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Abstract

This paper investigates how English uses the economic indicators *inflation* and *price* figuratively to describe broader economic phenomena, drawing on authentic data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Adopting the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the study examines how metaphor and image schemas structure our understanding of economic processes. Five morphosyntactic patterns are analysed: *Inflation + Verb*, *Verb + Inflation*, *Price + Verb*, *Verb + Price*, and the Caused Motion construction. The analysis reveals that abstract economic entities are consistently reified and metaphorically construed in terms of motion, spatial configuration, force dynamics, and agency. Image schemas such as UP/DOWN, PATH, and CONTAINMENT motivate expressions of scalar change, while conceptual metaphors (e.g., INFLATION IS A KILLER, HIGH PRICES ARE BURDENS) frame inflation and price as agentive or manipulable forces. Special attention is given to the interaction of grammatical construction and metaphorical content, particularly in the Caused Motion pattern, where non-volitional economic causes metaphorically initiate movement toward reified scalar goals. The study concludes that metaphor and grammatical structure work in tandem to conceptualise economic indicators, confirming the central claim of cognitive linguistics that metaphor is a foundational mechanism of thought.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, image schema, reification, Caused Motion construction, economic discourse, inflation, price.

1 Introduction

The language of economics is not merely descriptive – it is profoundly figurative. Economic indicators such as inflation and price are frequently framed in metaphorical terms that conceptualise abstract processes through embodied, physical experiences. Expressions like *inflation is eating away at savings*, *prices shot through the roof*, or *prices plunged* exemplify the metaphorical density of economic discourse. Such language is not ornamental but cognitively foundational: it reflects the way we understand, evaluate, and communicate complex economic phenomena. It is impossible to understand economic processes without metaphor. Abstract and dynamic systems such as markets, interest rates, and value are regularly made intelligible through conceptual mappings grounded in bodily experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003).

The paper focuses on two core economic indicators, *inflation* and *price*, with the aim of demonstrating that their linguistic representation in discourse is not incidental but systematically metaphorical. The central premise advanced here is that verbs collocating with these nouns, when used figuratively, give expression to deeply entrenched conceptual structures. Many of these structures are motivated by image schemas and/or structural metaphors, which provide the cognitive scaffolding for the way economic processes are understood and communicated.

The figurative construal of these two indicators is investigated as they appear in contemporary usage. The analysis is grounded in naturally occurring linguistic data drawn from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)¹. Nevertheless, the study is not to be regarded as strictly corpus-based. Rather, it should be seen as corpus-informed: the corpus functions as a rich empirical resource from which illustrative patterns and representative linguistic evidence are extracted. These examples serve not as statistical proof, but as a means of supporting and illuminating a theoretical, cognitively grounded account of metaphor, one that seeks to uncover the systematicity underlying figurative representations of economic phenomena.

The study is informed by Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), especially as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003), Lakoff (1993), and expanded by Dancygier and Sweetser (2014). A key component of the theory is the role of image schemas – recurring spatial and force-dynamic patterns derived from embodied experience (Johnson, 1987). For example, schemas such as UP / DOWN, PATH and MOTION, and CONTAINMENT structure the way we conceptualise abstract domains such as QUANTITY or QUALITY,

¹ Davies, Mark (2008-). The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA): One billion words, 1990-2019. Available online at <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>.

CHANGE, and CONTROL, respectively. Thus, *inflation rises* invokes the UP schema to metaphorically express an increase in quantity, while *prices fall* maps vertical descent onto economic loss. Similarly, *contain inflation* draws on CONTAINMENT to suggest boundedness and imposed CONTROL.

Although previous work – such as Charteris-Black (2005) – has explored the persuasive function of metaphor in economic and political discourse, the present study offers a more linguistically grounded and morphosyntactically precise contribution. By integrating constructional patterning with CMT-based metaphor analysis, it reveals how verbs encode metaphorical thought and how grammatical structure shapes conceptualisation in English economic language.

The paper examines five morphosyntactic patterns involving *inflation* and *price*, outlined in table 1.

Table 1
Morphosyntactic patterns

Pattern	Description
1. Inflation + Verb	Inflation in subject position
2. Verb + Inflation	Inflation in object position
3. Price + Verb	Price in subject position
4. Verb + Price	Price in object position
5. Caused Motion	Directional causation involving inflation or price (e.g., <i>push inflation down</i>)

Each of these five patterns is analysed in a dedicated section. In Section 3.1 (Inflation + Verb), examples are grouped according to their metaphorical motivation – either primarily grounded in image schemas (e.g., UP, DOWN, PATH) or predominantly structured by conceptual metaphors (e.g., INFLATION IS AN AFFLICTION, PRICES ARE LIVING ORGANISMS). This distinction is not maintained in subsequent sections, as there is naturally too much overlap between the two groupings. In each case, the verbs are examined individually in terms of their non-figurative and figurative meanings, and metaphorical implications. Moreover, consideration is given to both the speed and the manner of motion.

In Section 3.2 (Verb + Inflation), the analysis focuses on metaphorical constructions in which *inflation* appears in object position. Special attention is given to conceptual metaphors that depict inflation as a hostile entity, such as INFLATION IS AN OPPONENT, INFLATION IS A DESTRUCTIVE FIRE, or INFLATION IS AN ANGRY BEAST, etc. Section 3.3 (Price + Verb) examines constructions in which *price* occupies the subject position. The focus here is primarily on motion verbs metaphorically describing increases or decreases in price. These are often motivated by image schemas such as UP / DOWN

and PATH. Section 3.4 (Verb + Price) investigates cases where *price* functions as the syntactic object. Many of the verbs here involve control, manipulation, or causation. While image schemas are still relevant, this section places more emphasis on agency and metaphorical causation. Finally, Section 3.5 (Caused Motion) isolates a specific construction in which verbs of forceful movement (e.g., *push*, *drag*, *drive*) cause inflation or price to move in a particular direction.

2 Theoretical framework

As outlined in the introduction, this study adopts Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as its analytical foundation, drawing on the seminal work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003), Lakoff (1993), and subsequent refinements by scholars such as Dancygier and Sweetser (2014), and others. In general terms, conceptual metaphor is defined as a set of unidirectional mappings that project conceptual material from one discrete domain onto another. It enables speakers to understand and structure abstract domains such as TIME, EMOTION, or ECONOMY in terms of usually more concrete, embodied experiences. Central to this theory is the idea that metaphor operates through systematic mappings from a source domain (typically a more concrete or more intersubjectively accessible domain) to a target domain (typically more abstract and thus less intersubjectively accessible). These mappings are not arbitrary; they reflect entrenched conceptual associations grounded in bodily experience and sensory-motor patterns.

Complementary to conceptual metaphor, this study draws on the notion of conceptual metonymy, understood as a 'domain-internal mapping in which one of the domains involved provides a point of access to the other' (Ruiz de Mendoza & Mairal, 2007, p. 33). In contrast to metaphoric mappings, which are typically domain-external – involving correspondences between distinct conceptual domains – metonymic mappings operate within a single domain, based on the relation of contiguity.

Within CMT, image schemas are schematic cognitive structures, originally proposed by Mark Johnson (1987). These schemas serve as schematic patterns of embodied experience, and some of them reflect preconceptual spatial organization, e.g., UP / DOWN, PATH, BALANCE, FORCE, or CONTAINMENT. Image schemas are not metaphors in themselves, but they provide the cognitive scaffolding for metaphorical mappings. Orientational metaphors organize abstract concepts in relation to spatial image schemas, such as UP / DOWN, IN / OUT, or FRONT / BACK. In contrast, structural metaphors involve mapping a more complex and detailed structure from one conceptual domain onto another, allowing us to understand and reason about

a less intersubjectively accessible domain in terms of a more intersubjectively accessible one (e.g., INFLATION AS AN ANGRY BEAST).

The cognitive power of image schemas lies in their schematicity – their ability to structure a wide variety of abstract domains without being semantically rich themselves. Dancygier and Sweetser (2014, p. 23) define them as: ‘basic, skeletal conceptual structures emerging out of the spatial and force-dynamic sense of our bodies. They are not fleshed out with propositional content, but participate in the construction and emergence of more elaborate concepts, (...)’. In this respect, the present study gives special weight to image schemas, not merely as part of metaphor theory, but as essential conceptual tools for understanding the figurative structure of economic discourse.

Complementing image schemas is the broader and more abstract framework of the Event Structure Metaphor (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014), also rooted in CMT. The Event Structure Metaphor allows speakers to understand complex changes and states in terms of physical motion and spatial configuration. It consists of several entrenched sub-mappings, including CHANGE IS MOTION, STATES ARE LOCATIONS, and CHANGE OF STATE IS CHANGE OF LOCATION. These conceptualisations enable speakers to describe economic developments in terms of spatial events, such as movement (*prices moved higher*), location (*inflation is back*), or directional change (*inflation climbed to new highs*). Although the Event Structure Metaphor is not always explicitly foregrounded in analyses of economic language, it underlies many of the constructions examined in this study – especially those that involve image-schematic verbs of motion.

Another key theoretical construct is the ontological metaphor, which allows abstract entities to be reified and treated as if they were physical objects or substances. In economic discourse, this is particularly relevant for abstract nouns such as *inflation* and *price*, which are conceptualised as entities capable of acting, changing, or being acted upon. The cognitive process of reification allows grammatically inanimate subjects, such as *inflation*, to take verbs like *rise*, *erode*, *eat away*, or *plague*, which typically imply animate or agentive behaviour.

In image-schematic construals, *inflation* and *price* typically function as trajectors (TRs), e.g., the focal entities whose movement is profiled against a landmark (LM) background (Langacker, 1987). Though both are abstract, they occupy this role through reification via an ontological metaphor that allows dynamic processes or states to be conceptualised as entities (Radden & Dirven 2007, p. 82). More specifically, they may be construed either as objects or substances, thereby licensing metaphorical motion expressions. For present purposes, it is sufficient to treat *inflation* and *price* as reified entities, capable of metaphorical movement within spatial schemas such as PATH or VERTICALITY.

Yet another interpretive distinction in this study concerns the axiological profile of the indicators themselves (Krzeszowski, 1997). While inflation is conceptually and evaluatively negative both in absolute terms (its prototypical semantic load) and in actual terms (contextual interpretation) – price is more ambivalent. The evaluation of price depends heavily on context and construal: a soaring share price may be good for investors, whereas soaring fuel prices are typically framed as undesirable. This asymmetry plays a significant role in the metaphorical patterns observed, particularly in how the UP and DOWN schemas are valued and reversed depending on the entity involved.

Finally, the study is also informed by Cognitive Construction Grammar, particularly the view of constructions as form-meaning pairings (Goldberg, 2006, p. 5). This perspective is relevant not only to metaphorical verbs in subject-verb or verb-object pairings, but also to larger constructions such as the Caused Motion construction, in which an agent causes a theme to move along a path (e.g., *The central bank pushed inflation down*). These constructions are not purely grammatical but encode metaphorical content that aligns with the image-schematic and / or structural metaphors at play. While not all examples in this study rely on Caused Motion, those that do are analysed separately in a dedicated section.

In a nutshell, the theoretical framework for this study draws on several key strands of cognitive linguistics: the metaphorical structuring of abstract domains through Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the foundational role of image schemas, the explanatory value of the Event Structure Metaphor, the ontological process of reification, the trajectory-landmark distinction in figure-ground alignment, and the interpretive potential of Cognitive Construction Grammar. Together, these perspectives allow for a nuanced, semantically rich analysis of how *inflation* and *price* are metaphorically constructed in contemporary English.

3 Corpus-informed analysis of inflation and price construals

This section presents a corpus-informed analysis of how the economic indicators inflation and price are metaphorically construed in contemporary American English. Drawing on authentic examples from COCA, the analysis focuses on five key morphosyntactic patterns: *Inflation + Verb*, *Verb + Inflation*, *Price + Verb*, *Verb + Price*, and the Caused Motion construction. Within each pattern, examples are grouped and interpreted according to their underlying metaphorical motivation: either image-schema based and / or structural metaphor based.

3.1 Inflation + verb

In this section, I analyse expressions in which *inflation* functions as the grammatical subject of a verb. The verbs it collocates with reflect two main types of metaphorical motivation: (a) primarily image-schema-based, where inflation is construed as an entity in motion – a trajector (Langacker, 1987); and (b) predominantly structural-metaphor-based, where it typically functions as a damaging and often uncontrollable agent.

(a) Image-schema based motivation

These expressions are grounded by image schemas such as UP, DOWN, and PATH, which structure motion along a vertical path. Crucially, manner of motion – whether fast, slow, abrupt, or steady – adds interpretive nuance and often reflects metaphors MORE IS FAST and LESS IS SLOW. These two metaphors are experientially grounded in the observed correlation between the speed of motion and the distance traversed: greater speed typically entails a longer distance covered, whereas slower movement corresponds to reduced displacement within the same temporal span. The orientational metaphors MORE IS UP and LESS IS DOWN, alongside MORE IS FAST and LESS IS SLOW, motivate the use of the verbs in bold below:

- (1) *As the economy declined, inflation **rose** beyond money issuance.* (COCA ACAD 2019)
- (2) *As inflation **soared**, food prices rose, and ensuing shortages led to widespread rioting.* (COCA ACAD 2013)
- (3) *The Kenyan shilling dropped 18 percent as foreign investors fled, inflation **jumped**...* (COCA MAG 1997)
- (4) *Inflation **crept up** to 8.3% in 1937 while unemployment was at 14%.* (COCA BLOG 2012)
- (5) *Inflation **climbed** from 25 percent to 50 percent per month...* (COCA ACAD 1998)
- (6) *Inflation **skyrocketed**, with food prices rising by 30 percent.* (COCA SPOK 2018)

In examples 1 – 6, *inflation* is the trajector undergoing upward motion. The verbs differ in manner: *skyrocketed* in 6), *jumped* in 3), and *soared* in 2) encode rapid, forceful increase – reflecting MORE IS FAST and high volatility. *Climbed* in 5) implies effortful but steady movement, while *crept up* in 4) suggests gradual, subtle increase – an instance of LESS IS SLOW. *Fell* in 7) below signals downward motion, intensified by the modifier *a bit faster*, reinforcing MORE IS FAST and conveying a sharp drop in inflation levels.

- (7) *Yes, it's true that inflation **fell** a bit faster than markets expected during the 1980s.* (COCA BLOG 2012)
- (8) *The inflation **grew** at an unbelievable pace.* (COCA FIC 2006)
- (9) *By the time inflation **peaked** at 13.5% in 1980.* (COCA MAG 1992)
- (10) *...either the recovery continues and inflation **picks up** again, or the E.C.B. will have to act.* (COCA NEWS 2014)

The use of *grew* in 8) appears to be primarily motivated by a conceptual metaphor in which inflation is conceptualized as a living entity – such as a plant or organism – that can develop, expand, or increase in size over time. Accordingly, it should be classified under section (b) below. However, it also conveys an increase in magnitude and is accompanied by an adverbial phrase emphasizing rapidity, thereby exemplifying the MORE IS FAST metaphor as well. The verb *peaked* in 9) draws on the PATH schema, like all other verbs in (a), but it involves a trajectory with a bounded endpoint, which is both profiled and emphasised. It is also motivated by the UP schema. *Picks up* in 10) suggests resumed upward motion, indicating renewed acceleration. These examples consistently portray inflation as a reified entity that moves or grows, with metaphorical direction and speed mapping onto economic value and urgency.

(b) Structural metaphor based motivation

In this group, inflation is conceptualised not as a moving entity, but as an agent, force, or affliction. Each verb is primarily motivated by a structural metaphor, in which source domains such as crime, disease, violence, or uncontrolled force are mapped onto the target domain of inflation. Due to space constraints, each corpus example below is directly accompanied by a single identified conceptual metaphor underlying the verb in bold.

- (11) *Even with inflation **eating away** at the buying power of his savings...* (COCA NEWS 1996)

Metaphor: INFLATION IS A DEVOURER / DESTROYER. Inflation is personified as an agent that gradually destroys value. The verb *eating away* highlights slow but relentless erosion, with metaphorical roots in consumption and decay.

- (12) *Inflation **robs** you of what you have now by destroying your savings.* (COCA NEWSWEEK 2009)

Metaphor: INFLATION IS A ROBBER. This metaphor maps a criminal agent onto inflation. The verb *robs* presupposes intention, agency, and violation of ownership, emphasising inflation's perceived injustice.

- (13) *Inflation **kills** an economy, and it's a key item The Fed watches.* (COCA WEB 2012)

Metaphor: INFLATION IS A KILLER. Here, inflation is framed as a lethal force. *Kills* attributes the capacity for total systemic destruction, reinforcing high affective intensity and policy urgency.

- (14) *The result there was immediate shortages of goods and a black market, where inflation **raged**.* (COCA NYT 1994)

Metaphor: INFLATION IS A FORCE OF NATURE. The verb *raged* construes inflation as an uncontrollable natural phenomenon. It suggests intensity, unpredictability, and damage on a large scale.

- (15) *Even as inflation **buffeted** the American economy...* (COCA NEWS 2019)

Metaphor: INFLATION IS A VIOLENT EXTERNAL FORCE. *Buffeted* evokes repeated impact or blows, mapping weather or conflict metaphors (e.g., winds, waves, attacks) onto inflation. The economy is thus the patient under assault.

- (16) *We've seen the market trading down on the fears of inflation **crushing** the world-wide economic recovery.* (COCA BLOG 2012)

Metaphor: INFLATION IS A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE. *Crushing* conveys overwhelming power. This metaphor imagines inflation as a physical force that incapacitates growth, combining elements of violence and mass.

- (17) *Hyperinflation is when inflation **feeds on itself** and takes off beyond control.* (COCA MAG 2010)

Metaphor: INFLATION IS A SELF-PERPETUATING SYSTEM. This reflexive construction casts inflation as autonomous and cyclical. The metaphor suggests runaway feedback, portraying inflation as dangerously self-sustaining.

- (18) *Inflation **inflicts** many harms, but it can be particularly brutal in eroding the value of bonds.* (COCA FORTUNE 2008)

Metaphor: INFLATION IS AN AFFLICTION. The verb *inflicts* draws from the domain of punishment or suffering. Inflation is conceptualised as a harmful agent that causes damage, especially in financial domains.

- (19) *When Reagan arrived in Washington, sky-high inflation **plagued** the economy.* (COCA NEWS 2004)

Metaphor: INFLATION IS A DISEASE. *Plagued* reflects sustained suffering and systemic harm. The metaphor draws on epidemiological framing and suggests inflation as chronic and hard to eliminate.

- (20) *With inflation threatening to **overtake** negotiated wage increases of 5.5 percent.* (COCA NYT 2000)

Metaphor: INFLATION IS A PURSUER. This metaphor maps a chasing entity on inflation – fast, menacing, and closing in. It implies competition, danger, and pressure on wage growth.

- (21) *As inflation **gallops** along at 3 percent a day...* (COCA BLOG 1992)

Metaphor: INFLATION IS A FAST-MOVING ANIMAL. *Gallops* encodes speed and lack of control, activating the metaphor MORE IS FAST. Inflation is construed as a powerful, living force in rapid motion.

Together, these expressions portray inflation as an agentive, destructive, or volatile force. The metaphors range from human agents (robber, killer), to diseases and afflictions (plague, affliction), to uncontrollable systems (self-feeding), and to forces of nature (storm, animal). Each verb carries specific metaphorical entailments – intentionality, violence, autonomy, or threat – which influence how inflation is framed in public discourse. What unites these examples is that primarily inflation acts rather than moves. It exerts pressure, causes harm, or accelerates autonomously. This stands in contrast to image-schematic construals and reflects a foregrounding of metaphorical agency while backgrounding motion. Such structural metaphors highlight danger, justify intervention, and evoke emotional urgency in economic communication.

3.2 Verb + inflation

In this section, I analyse expressions in which *inflation* functions as the **direct object** of a verb – the **Verb + Inflation** pattern. Although inflation is an abstract phenomenon, it is metaphorically reified as an entity that can be controlled, fought, triggered, or influenced. The verbs in these constructions typically reflect metaphorical motivations grounded in **structural metaphors**, many of which imply agency, danger, or volatility. Unlike in Section 3.1, the distinction between image-schematic and structural metaphor-based motivations is downplayed here; instead, the examples are grouped according to shared conceptual metaphors. Each example is discussed individually.

A) INFLATION IS AN OPPONENT / ENEMY

This set includes verbs that construe inflation as an adversary in a fight or war. Verbs such as *fight*, *combat*, *attack*, *defeat*, *counterattack*, *battle*, *bash*, *stamp*, *knock*, and *stomp* reflect the metaphor INFLATION IS AN OPPONENT or more specifically, INFLATION IS AN ENEMY IN A WAR or BATTLE. The metaphor attributes volition, threat, and destructiveness to inflation and casts the subject (often the Fed or government) in a protective, controlling role.

- (22) *Well, what I'm saying is we want the Fed to **fight** inflation.* (CNN COCA 2018)
The verb *fight* evokes a direct, possibly prolonged conflict. Inflation is construed as an adversary that must be resisted by an institutional agent (the Fed).
- (23) *To prevent such an eventuality, the state began adopting policies designed to **combat** inflation in basic food commodities.* (ACAD COCA 2002)
Combat reinforces the framing of inflation as a hostile force. The term has military connotations and implies strategic opposition.
- (24) *The interest paid on Treasuries doesn't even **beat** inflation.* (BLOG COCA 2012)
Beat implies competition and measurable superiority. Inflation is conceptualised as a rival in a performance-based contest.
- (25) *The Fed would raise rates this year to **attack** inflation.* (NEWS COCA 2007)
Attack is strongly aggressive and violent in tone. It assigns intentionality to the subject and danger to inflation.
- (26) *...who raised interest rates to record heights in order to **defeat** inflation.* (WEB COCA 2012)
The verb *defeat* frames inflation as an opponent in a conflict scenario. It presupposes a struggle with a clear winner and loser, with the ultimate goal being the eradication or subjugation of inflation.
- (27) *A tightening policy package implemented to **counterattack** inflation.* (ACAD COCA 2003)
Counterattack implies retaliation against a prior threat, deepening the war metaphor. It frames inflation as the initiator of hostilities.
- (28) *The former Fed chairman who **battled** inflation in the 1980s.* (NYT COCA 2008)
Battled conveys long-term, difficult struggle. It implies a sustained, policy-driven effort over several years – not a single act – which aligns with historical

facts (e.g., Paul Volcker's multi-year anti-inflation campaign). The metaphor places the Fed in a heroic or combative role.

- (29) *Greenspan's determination to keep **bashing** inflation by holding rates high...* (MAG COCA 1996)

Bashing is violent, informal, and repetitive. It conveys both frustration and moral justification for punitive action.

- (30) *Well, if they stamp on the brakes to **kill** inflation, they will push us back into a recession.* (SPOK COCA 2011)

Kill presupposes that inflation is alive and destructive. The metaphor intensifies urgency and casts policy as lethal force. Interestingly, the expression *stamp on the brakes* draws on the driving metaphor, ECONOMIC POLICY IS DRIVING, where the economy is conceptualised as a vehicle and policy as the act of controlling its speed and direction.

- (31) *He believes in **stomping** inflation when the economy is strong enough to take it.* (MAG COCA 1999)

Stomping suggests overpowering with force. It implies dominance and physical suppression.

- (32) *One sure way to **knock** inflation down: a recession.* (CNN COCA 1990)

The verb *knock down* is prototypically associated with **boxing** or **hand-to-hand combat**. It invokes a physical combat scenario, specifically one of striking and toppling an opponent. While it fits within the broader metaphor INFLATION IS AN OPPONENT, one can offer a more specific metaphor that captures the embodied nature of this action, that is, INFLATION IS A BOXER / FIGHTER IN A RING.

This cluster of verbs consistently constructs inflation as a hostile agent that must be neutralised through deliberate, often violent intervention. The metaphor motivates public and policy responses framed as combat, reinforcing high stakes and the moral legitimacy of aggressive countermeasures.

B) INFLATION IS A DESTRUCTIVE FIRE

The set comprises verbs such as *ignite*, *spark*, *stoke*, *rekindle*, *reignite*, and *fan*. These verbs construe inflation as a destructive or flammable substance that can be triggered, fuelled, or reignited. The metaphor INFLATION IS A DESTRUCTIVE FIRE highlights inflation's volatility, potential for sudden spread, and need for containment.

- (33) *China worries that such rapid growth could **ignite** inflation.* (NEWS COCA 2004)

Ignite suggests the initial spark of an uncontrollable blaze. The metaphor presupposes high sensitivity to external triggers (e.g., growth), framing inflation as latent danger.

- (34) *Japanese and German products don't have enough market share to **spark** inflation.* (NEWS COCA 1995)

Spark implies a small stimulus capable of producing a larger, spreading phenomenon. The metaphor presents inflation as something flammable, needing only minimal fuel.

- (35) *And all this has happened without **stoking** inflation, which has hovered below 2%. (MAG COCA 2013)*
Stoking refers to feeding a fire. The metaphor suggests that economic actions can intensify inflation unless controlled.
- (36) *For instance, if interest rates are pushed too low, that could **rekindle** inflation. (NEWS COCA 1991)*
Rekindle presupposes that inflation construed as fire had previously died down. The metaphor implies resurgence and return of danger after apparent control.
- (37) *...he fears that rising labor costs will **reignite** inflation. (MAG COCA 1998)*
Reignite closely mirrors *rekindle* but with a slightly more abrupt connotation. The metaphor frames inflation as flaring up again from dormant embers.
- (38) *Mr. Bernanke has **fanned** inflation and contributed to the decline of the dollar. (NYT COCA 2008)*
Fanned implies making a fire grow by increasing air supply. The metaphor construes inflation as something already burning, made worse by external action.

These verbs consistently evoke the image of inflation as a flammable, destructive force – something that may lie dormant but can be reignited or exacerbated by economic policy or market behaviour. The metaphor adds connotations of urgency, volatility, and the need for fire prevention or suppression strategies.

C) INFLATION IS A WILD ANIMAL / AN ANGRY BEAST

This set encompasses verbs such as *tame*, *unleash*, and *feed*, all of which construe inflation as a wild, potentially dangerous creature – something that needs to be restrained, controlled, or feared when released. The metaphor INFLATION IS A WILD ANIMAL or AN ANGRY BEAST projects volatility, autonomy, and latent aggression onto inflation, especially in contexts of economic intervention.

- (39) *Vietnam, which had struggled to **tame** inflation and stabilize its currency, is seeing a surge in foreign investment. (NEWS COCA 2015)*
Tame implies domestication of a dangerous or unruly creature. Inflation is construed as something that resists control and must be subdued through sustained effort.
- (40) *The Fed's zero-interest-rate policy would **unleash** inflation. (MAG COCA 2015)*
Unleash presupposes that inflation has been held back (like a leashed dog or beast) and that its release could lead to destructive consequences. The metaphor captures threat, loss of control, and explosive power.
- (41) *But the Fed also warned that the spike in gas prices will **feed** inflation. (SPOK PBS 2012)*
Feed implies that inflation is alive and capable of growing stronger when nourished. The metaphor suggests indirect encouragement of inflation's power and spread.

In this set, inflation is metaphorically animate and forceful. It cannot be negotiated with or managed passively; instead, it must be restrained, tamed, or kept hungry. These construals resonate with public fears of economic instability and the difficulty of containing inflation once it escapes control.

D) INFLATION IS A VEHICLE / FORCE IN MOTION

The set includes verbs such as *outpace*, *cool*, *brake*, *derail*, and *slow*, all of which construe inflation as a moving object or system – often one that must be decelerated or stopped. The metaphor INFLATION IS A VEHICLE / FORCE IN MOTION conceptualises inflation as something with momentum, trajectory, and speed, often threatening to run out of control unless actively regulated.

- (42) *Tuition increases have **outpaced** inflation for years.* (USAToday COCA 1995)
Outpaced treats inflation as something that moves forward along a measurable path. The metaphor allows for economic comparison in terms of speed.
- (43) *Investment when times are bad and when times are good it is used to **cool** inflation.* (BLOG COCA 2012)
 More specifically, the underlying metaphor is INFLATION IS AN OVERHEATED ENGINE. The verb *cool* evokes regulation of temperature or mechanical systems. The metaphor presents inflation as something whose momentum must be reduced through policy intervention.
- (44) *Partly to **brake** inflation, by making imports cheaper, the Chinese authorities...* (WEB COCA 2012)
Brake presupposes motion and the need for deceleration. The metaphor suggests that inflation is speeding forward and must be slowed or stopped.
- (45) *If we fall into recession it will likely **derail** inflation for a while.* (BLOG COCA 2012)
Derail invokes a train leaving its tracks. The metaphor implies that inflation follows a predictable course unless disrupted, often violently.

These expressions construe inflation as a dynamic force moving along a path. The agent (often the Fed or policy tools) acts as a regulatory mechanism – applying brakes, cooling systems, or creating disruptions to stop inflation from advancing further. This metaphor foregrounds inflation's momentum, and the necessity of external intervention to interrupt or redirect its course.

E) OTHER METAPHORS

This loose cluster comprises metaphors that construe inflation in terms of disease, interpersonal relations, and uncontrollable forces. While these mappings are less frequent, they offer insight into diverse ways of conceptualising inflation's threat, spread, and manipulability.

- (46) *Reagan **cured** inflation.* (CNN COCA 1990)
 Metaphors: INFLATION IS A DISEASE and ECONOMY IS A PATIENT.
Cured presupposes an ailment. The sentence *Reagan cured inflation* frames inflation as an abnormal, harmful condition requiring expert intervention and

healing. At first glance, this expression evokes the metaphor INFLATION IS A DISEASE, with *cure* as the metaphorically extended verb. However, a closer look at the syntactic structure reveals that *cure* takes *inflation* – conceptualised as a disease – as its object, which is atypical, since we normally cure a patient, not a disease. This suggests the presence of the metonymy DISEASE FOR PATIENT, whereby the disease, as a conceptualisation of inflation, stands for the entity afflicted by it – the patient. The patient serves as the source in the ECONOMY IS A PATIENT metaphor, an instantiation of the more general mapping ECONOMY IS A LIVING ORGANISM. The metonymy DISEASE FOR PATIENT appears to provide a conceptual link between the two metaphors INFLATION IS A DISEASE and ECONOMY IS A PATIENT.

- (47) *While central banks are still **courting** inflation by pumping up cheap credit...* (MAG COCA 2012)

Metaphor: INFLATION IS A ROMANTIC PARTNER. *Courting* implies intentional attraction or seduction. The metaphor ironically reverses the usual adversarial frame and highlights inflation as a target of economic policy that may later become dangerous.

- (48) *GOP Tax Cuts Could **Revive** Inflation, White House Says.* (MAG COCA 1994)

Metaphor: INFLATION IS A LATENT FORCE. *Revive* treats inflation as something dormant that can be brought back to life. The metaphor implies inflation is cyclical and responsive to political or economic stimuli.

The expressions in this cluster portray inflation as something that can be healed (*cured*), reawakened (*revived*), or even seduced (*courted*). Such metaphors expand the range of framing from violent or kinetic models to more experiential and socially grounded scenarios, engaging with bodily, interpersonal, or life-cycle domains.

In the *Verb + Inflation* pattern, inflation is consistently metaphorically reified as a patient of human or institutional action. The verbs reflect different ways of construing this entity: as an opponent, a destructive fire, a wild animal, a vehicle in motion, or a disease. These metaphorical construals frame inflation as something that must be fought, tamed, cooled, derailed, or healed. Each framing imposes its own logic of control, urgency, and policy intervention, shaping how economic actors and the public interpret the threat and management of inflation.

3.3 Price + verb

This section examines expressions in which *price* functions as the grammatical subject followed by a verb. As with *inflation* in previous sections, *price* – an abstract economic measure – is metaphorically reified as an entity in motion or a force undergoing change. The conceptual metaphors that motivate these expressions typically involve vertical motion schemas (UP / DOWN), often further specified by the manner of motion (e.g., sudden, gradual, extreme), which, at a more schematic level, also reflects metaphors such

as MORE IS FAST and LESS IS SLOW. All examples are drawn from COCA and analysed individually.

- (49) *The price **drops** to \$50 if you're a farmer.* (COCA MAG 2012)

The verb *drops* profiles the price as a trajector undergoing vertical descent, motivated by the orientational metaphor LESS IS DOWN. At the same time, the metaphor construes the decrease as relatively rapid and perceptible, thereby invoking the MORE IS FAST.

- (50) *If you're willing to be just outside city limits, the price **falls** very steeply.* (COCA WEB 2012)

Very steeply intensifies the DOWN schema. As an adverbial modifier, it adds a sense of suddenness and extremity, reinforcing the metaphor MORE IS FAST and highlighting the economic significance of the change.

- (51) *In Armenia, the gas price **rose** from \$65 to \$70 in 2005 to \$110 in 2006.* (COCA ACAD 2010)

The verb *rose* construes *gas price* as a trajector moving upward along a vertical path, mapping physical elevation onto scalar economic increase. This reflects the orientational metaphor MORE IS UP, reinforced by the PATH schema: the price moves from a source (\$65), through an intermediate point (\$70), to a goal (\$110). The motion is unmarked for manner, suggesting a steady, uninterrupted change. This pattern aligns with the Event Structure Metaphor, in which a change in numerical value is conceptualised as motion along a path, while a change of state is construed as a change of location. The upward trajectory thus represents a continuous and measurable transformation in economic terms.

- (52) *Once anyone slaps the word 'collectible' on something, the price **jumps** substantially.* (COCA WEB 2012)

Here, MORE IS UP and MORE IS FAST work in conjunction.

Jumps encodes rapid and abrupt upward motion. The metaphor implies a sudden re-evaluation of value. The adverb *substantially* adds weight to the increase, both in speed and in magnitude.

- (53) *... just before the price **plummeted**.* (COCA SPOK 2018)

In this example, as in many others, the metaphors LESS IS DOWN and MORE IS FAST operate in conjunction, suggesting a compounded metaphorical interpretation – namely, that a faster and more dramatic downward movement corresponds to a greater degree of loss, which could be expressed as MORE OF LESS IS FAST DOWN. The verb *plummet* suggests a dramatic, uncontrolled fall, and evokes both a rapid downward motion and a sharp decrease in value, mapping spatial and speed-related schemas onto the abstract domain of economic loss.

- (54) *..., bitcoin's price **plunged** by almost 10 percent.* (COCA MAG 2019)

Plunged reinforces the metaphor of vertical free fall. The verb suggests not only steep decline but also a lack of control – possibly activating the LOSS OF CONTROL IS A DOWNWARD MOTION mapping. As with the verb *plummet*, the metaphors LESS IS DOWN and MORE IS FAST interact here, jointly reinforcing the conceptualization of rapid and significant decline.

- (55) *The company's stock price **soared** this week after much better than expected earnings.* (COCA SPOK 2013)

Soared evokes fast, effortless upward motion, often associated with unexpected or impressive growth. The metaphor highlights positive valuation and strong market momentum.

Together, these expressions portray price as an abstract entity through reification, capable of metaphorical motion along a vertical axis, with verbs encoding not just direction (UP or DOWN) but also speed, force, and evaluative intensity. While *rose* and *fell* are relatively neutral in tone, verbs like *plummeted*, *soared*, and *jumped* convey strong emotional or financial salience, with their figurative power grounded in embodied experiences of movement and gravity.

3.4 Verb + price

This section examines metaphorical constructions in which *price* appears in object position, focusing on the verbs used to describe its manipulation. While image schemas may still be present in the background (e.g., verticality in *raise*), the majority of examples reflect structural metaphors involving control, manipulation, or causation. Each example is analysed individually, with attention to the verb's basic literal meaning and its metaphorical projection in the economic domain.

- (56) *Tobacco companies agreed, behind the scenes, to **raise** prices by 50 cents per pack.* (COCA BLOG 2012)

The verb *raise* typically means to lift something upwards physically. In this context, it is metaphorically applied to *prices*, projecting from the orientational metaphor MORE IS UP. The use of *raise* also implies deliberate agentive control, suggesting that price is treated as an object whose vertical movement can be manipulated. Reinforced by MORE IS UP, the underlying conceptual metaphor in this context is RAISING PRICES IS MOVING OBJECTS TO A HIGHER LEVEL. This metaphor also motivates the use of verbs such as *lift*, *elevate*, *push up*, *move up*, and *drive up*, and implies that PRICES ARE OBJECTS THAT CAN BE CONTROLLED.

- (57) *By reducing expenses, companies can maintain profits and even **cut** prices in a intensively competitive global economy.* (COCA MAG 2019)

The verb *cut* denotes a physical act of severing or reducing material. When applied to prices, it activates the metaphor PRICES ARE PHYSICAL OBJECTS THAT CAN BE REDUCED OR TRIMMED. This metaphor frames prices as manipulable entities, subject to deliberate intervention. Notably, QUANTITY in this context is not necessarily conceptualized in terms of VERTICALITY. Instead, the use of *cut* is motivated by the mapping LESS IS SMALLER, or QUANTITY IS SIZE.

- (58) *It just seems unconscionable that you would **inflate** prices by such an extraordinary amount.* (COCA SPOK 2019)

The verb *inflate* derives from the physical act of expanding something with air, such as a balloon. Metaphorically, it reflects the mapping MORE IS BIGGER, supported by the ontological metaphor PRICES ARE CONTAINERS THAT CAN BE EXPANDED. Here, *price* is conceptualised as a bounded space or object capable

of inflation, often implying artificial or unjustified increase. The evaluative stance is explicitly negative, highlighting the unethical manipulation of an economic variable.

- (59) *Low supply is **boosting** prices higher and higher.* (COCA MAG 2017)

The verb *boost* originates in the physical act of lifting or propelling something upwards. Metaphorically, it suggests both agency and positive force. In this case, the metaphor MORE IS UP is again active, but *boosting* also implies intensification, drawing on the metaphor INTENSITY IS FORCE. Ontologically, price is treated as an object that can be driven upward by external factors, in this case *low supply*, suggesting a causal chain framed by PRICES ARE ENTITIES THAT RESPOND TO FORCES.

- (60) *The White House on Friday left the door open to tapping the country's oil reserve to **ease** prices.* (COCA WEB 2012)

The verb *ease* means to reduce strain, pressure, or burden. When applied to *prices*, it metaphorically frames them as burdens that can be lightened through external intervention. This reflects the metaphor HIGH PRICES ARE BURDENS, which is a specific instantiation of the broader metaphor DIFFICULTIES ARE BURDENS. The intervention (*tapping the oil reserve*) is construed as an attempt to relieve this economic pressure, reinforcing the conceptualisation of price as a weight or strain on consumers or the economy.

These examples demonstrate that when *price* functions as the object of the verb, it is typically construed as a manipulable entity – something that can be raised, cut, inflated, boosted, or eased through intentional action or external force. The dominant mappings – PRICES ARE OBJECTS THAT CAN BE CONTROLLED and PRICES ARE BURDENS THAT CAN BE RELIEVED – are made possible by the operation of ontological metaphor. While orientational metaphors (e.g., MORE IS UP) and primary metaphors (Grady, 1997) (e.g., MORE IS BIGGER) remain relevant, they are frequently embedded within larger causal or agentive frameworks. In each case, the choice of verb reveals not only the direction or manner of change, but also the underlying conceptualisation of price as an object of economic agency.

3.5 Metaphoric extensions of the Caused Motion construction

The Caused-Motion construction, as originally defined by Goldberg (2006) and cast in Hilpert's (2019, pp. 35 – 36) wording, expresses the meaning 'X causes Y to move along or toward Z'. It denotes an event in which an agent causes a theme to move along a path or toward a goal. Prototypical realisations involve physical motion verbs such as *throw*, *kick*, or *pull*, which already entail both a theme and a trajectory (Hilpert, 2019: 35):

- (61) *John threw the ball over the fence.*

- (62) *Franz kicked the ball into the goal.*

- (63) *She pulled a handkerchief out of her pocket.*

As Hilpert (2019: 35 – 36) notes, the Caused Motion construction is subject to two key constraints. First, the subject must be an agent, not an instrument (e.g., **The key allowed John into the house*). Second, the movement of the theme must be a deliberate outcome of the agent's action. Sentences such as **John chopped the carrots onto the floor* or **Bob poured milk next to his glass* are unacceptable because the resulting paths are unintended and pragmatically implausible. However, if the verb itself denotes involuntary action, as in *sneeze*, the requirement for an intentional path is relaxed. This explains the acceptability of metaphorical extensions like: *He sneezed his tooth right across town*. (Goldberg, 2006, p. 6). Here, the involuntary nature of *sneeze* aligns with an unintended yet vivid trajectory, making the construction pragmatically coherent.

In metaphorical economic usage, the subject of the Caused Motion construction rarely functions as a prototypical volitional agent. Rather, it is more accurately characterised as a cause (Bierwiazek, 2016, p. 17) – a participant that initiates change directly or indirectly. Such causes include different market phenomena, policies, trade tensions, or more specifically limited availability, supply gluts, or competitive pressures. They are metaphorically conceptualised as forces, consistent with the conceptual metaphor CAUSES ARE FORCES, which underlies all examples analysed in this section. This metaphorical force (the cause) acts upon an abstract economic theme (price), initiating metaphorical motion along a path typically expressed by a preposition (e.g., *to, through, below, down*) and directed towards a goal realised as a noun phrase (e.g., *a record high, new lows, marginal cost*). These noun phrases often involve converted adjectives used as nouns, such as *a record high* or *new lows*, reflecting the reification of abstract scalar endpoints into bounded conceptual targets. The acceptability and coherence of this metaphorical extension rely on the metaphoric mapping STATES ARE LOCATIONS (BOUNDED REGIONS IN SPACE), which enables abstract economic conditions (such as high or low prices) to be treated as fixed destinations in a conceptual landscape. The structure of the Caused Motion construction is thus preserved while being metaphorically extended into the domain of economic change.

- (64) ..., *limited availability of arabica coffee sent prices to a record high in April* (COCA NEWS 2012)

Argument structure: CAUSE (*limited availability of arabica coffee*) – THEME (*prices*) – PATH (*to*) – GOAL (*a record high*). This example instantiates the metaphorical extension of the Caused Motion construction, with a non-volitional economic phenomenon (*limited availability of arabica coffee*) acting as the CAUSE. The verb *sent* encodes the causation of metaphorical motion. The THEME (*prices*) is set in motion along a PATH (*to*) towards a GOAL (*a record high*), which functions as a reified scalar endpoint in conceptual space. The metaphors CAUSES ARE FORCES and STATES ARE LOCATIONS are central here,

supported by the orientational metaphor MORE IS UP. The GOAL phrase, *a record high*, features a converted adjective (*high* used nominally), reflecting the reification of a scalar endpoint into a bounded conceptual target.

- (65) *..., which has sent prices through the roof* (COCA)

Argument structure: CAUSE (unspecified antecedent) – THEME (*prices*) – PATH (*through the roof*) – GOAL (implicit, an extreme high). In this idiomatic expression, *through the roof* functions as an intensified metaphorical PATH, structured by the image schemas of CONTAINMENT and VERTICALITY. The PATH evokes violent upward motion breaching an upper boundary, but the construction lacks an explicit GOAL expressed by a distinct noun phrase. Instead, the GOAL is implicitly understood as an extreme or uncontrolled high point on the price scale – a scalar endpoint that is pragmatically inferred rather than syntactically realised. The metaphors involved are CAUSES ARE FORCES, MORE IS UP, and STATES ARE LOCATIONS. The image-schematic structure centres on a forceful upward trajectory that breaks the container boundary (the roof), signalling not only vertical movement but the surpassing of a conceptual limit. While no noun phrase functions overtly as a GOAL, the sentence still implies a destination beyond the upper limit, highlighting how some figurative Caused Motion constructions vividly encode PATH while leaving the GOAL inferential and pragmatically recoverable.

- (66) *The Treasury sold a large amount of gold earlier than expected, which sent prices plummeting* (COCA NEWS)

Argument structure: CAUSE (gold sale) – THEME (*prices*) – PATH (*plummeting*) – GOAL (implied lower state). Here, the verb *sent* again expresses caused motion. The PATH is encoded in the verb *plummeting*, which evokes the image-schema metaphor LESS IS DOWN, in conjunction with MORE IS FAST. The GOAL is not overtly expressed but implied as a low or otherwise undesirable price state. The Treasury's sale of gold functions as the abstract CAUSE. The relevant metaphors include CAUSES ARE FORCES and STATES ARE LOCATIONS. Since STATES ARE LOCATIONS and CHANGE IS MOTION (with motion understood as change of location, as expressed by *plummeting*), we arrive at the metaphor CHANGE OF STATE IS CHANGE OF LOCATION, which here frames price as moving between identifiable states in economic space.

- (67) *We need more free market pressure to bring prices down* (COCA)

Argument structure: CAUSE (market pressure) – THEME (*prices*) – PATH (*down*) – GOAL (lower state). This example uses *bring* to realise the Caused Motion construction, encoding deliberate causal movement. The CAUSE (market pressure) is metaphorically a force acting on the THEME (*prices*), and the PATH is realised by *down*. The GOAL is a conceptual low-price state, once again being motivated by STATES ARE LOCATIONS and LESS IS DOWN. The motion is metaphorical and follows the constructional template 'X causes Y to move towards Z'. CAUSES ARE FORCES is the primary conceptual metaphor framing market pressure as an agentive force.

- (68) *The problem is that competition drives prices to marginal cost* (COCA ACAD)

Argument structure: CAUSE (*competition*) – THEME (*prices*) – PATH (*to*) – GOAL (*marginal cost*). Here, *drives* implies both direction and exertion of force. The PATH (*to*) guides the THEME (*prices*) toward the GOAL (*marginal cost*), a bounded economic endpoint. *Competition* is metaphorically construed as

a CAUSE exerting pressure. The metaphors CAUSES ARE FORCES and STATES ARE LOCATIONS apply, with the GOAL (*marginal cost*) functioning as a precise state in conceptual space.

- (69) *That price area may act as a magnet to drag prices slightly lower from here.* (COCA BLOG)

Argument structure: CAUSE (*that price area*) – THEME (*prices*) – SOURCE (*here*) – PATH (*from*) – GOAL (*slightly lower*). The verb *drag* encodes slow, resistant downward motion, typically involving effort and carrying negative connotations. The CAUSE (*that price area*) is metaphorically conceptualised as a gravitational force (*magnet*), activating the metaphor CAUSES ARE FORCES. Crucially, *drag* activates the downward direction due to its inherent negativity, in accordance with BAD IS DOWN, and simultaneously triggers LESS IS DOWN through its scalar endpoint (*slightly lower*). The expression *drag prices up* would be metaphorically incoherent, as it violates the verb's negative axiological profile. In absolute terms, this reflects the broader conceptual opposition GOOD IS UP vs BAD IS DOWN, reinforcing the evaluative framing of the price movement. In addition to its directionality and negativity, *drag* also encodes slowness of motion, which further contributes to the construal of undesirable price change. This slow, reluctant movement reflects the metaphor LESS IS SLOW, the inverse of MORE IS FAST, adding a temporal dimension to the scalar reduction.

The construction profiles a Caused Motion event in which the THEME (*prices*) moves from a SOURCE (*here*), with the PATH formally realised by the preposition *from*, toward an explicitly stated GOAL (*slightly lower*). Although a *to*-phrase is absent, *slightly lower* functions unambiguously as a scalar endpoint, metaphorically construed as a location. This spatial construal is licensed by the metaphors STATES ARE LOCATIONS and CHANGE OF STATE IS CHANGE OF LOCATION, which enable economic values to be understood as entities occupying and transitioning between distinct metaphorical states. Overall, the construction integrates force dynamics, scalar motion, tempo, and evaluation, with *drag* serving as the central lexical trigger for both orientational metaphors and the image-schematic structure.

- (70) *An anticipated glut of DRAM memory chips this year had pushed prices to new lows* (COCA MAG)

Argument structure: CAUSE (*an anticipated glut of DRAM memory chips*) – THEME (*prices*) – PATH (*to*) – GOAL (*new lows*). This example clearly instantiates the Caused Motion construction with the verb *pushed*. The CAUSE (*an anticipated glut of DRAM memory chips*) is an economic condition metaphorically framed as a causal force. The THEME (*prices*) moves along a PATH (*to*) toward the GOAL (*new lows*), a scalar endpoint reified as a bounded location. The image schemas PATH and VERTICALITY are active, while the metaphoric mappings include CAUSES ARE FORCES, LESS IS DOWN, STATES ARE LOCATIONS, and CHANGE OF STATE IS CHANGE OF LOCATION. The noun phrase *new lows* involves a converted adjective functioning nominally, exemplifying the reification of scalar states as discrete objects.

The examples analysed in this section demonstrate how the Caused Motion construction is systematically and productively extended into the metaphorical domain of economic discourse. Although the construction originates from prototypical physical actions involving volitional agents and concrete trajectories, its metaphorical applications rely on abstract economic phenomena acting as causal forces. These metaphorical causes – such as competition, market pressure, or limited availability – lack intentionality but retain the ability to initiate change, which aligns with the broader metaphor CAUSES ARE FORCES. The affected participant is consistently *price* or *prices*, reified and construed as a theme moving along a conceptual path toward a scalar goal.

The image-schematic structure of the construction is preserved across all examples, with PATH, VERTICALITY, and occasionally CONTAINMENT serving as the underlying schema. Directional prepositions (e.g., *to*, *through*, *from*) and motion verbs (e.g., *send*, *bring*, *push*, *drive*, *drag*) encode metaphorical trajectories within economic space. The resulting goal states, such as *a record high* or *new lows*, are conceptually understood through the metaphor STATES ARE LOCATIONS. These abstract endpoints are often realised syntactically through converted adjectives functioning as reified nouns, underscoring the ontological metaphor that allows scalar qualities to be treated as bounded locations.

Crucially, orientational metaphors such as MORE IS UP and LESS IS DOWN anchor the directional dimension of the construction. In some cases, as with *drag*, additional metaphoric mappings emerge – such as BAD IS DOWN and LESS IS SLOW – which enrich the construal of economic movement with evaluative and temporal dimensions. While most examples overtly specify a goal phrase, others (e.g., *through the roof* or *plummeting*) rely on intensified PATH expressions that imply the goal inferentially. These examples demonstrate the flexibility of the construction, allowing the GOAL to be syntactically present or pragmatically recoverable. Overall, the metaphorical extension of the Caused Motion construction in economic contexts is both structurally consistent and conceptually motivated. It enables abstract, scalar economic change to be expressed in concrete, spatial terms, integrating concepts of force, motion, direction, speed, and evaluation. This reflects not only the cognitive power of metaphor but also the robustness of constructional meaning across domains.

4 Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that the figurative language used to describe the economic indicators *inflation* and *price* is conceptually systematic,

semantically motivated, and structurally grounded in both metaphor and grammatical patterning. Drawing on authentic examples from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the analysis has shown that these abstract economic phenomena are regularly construed through spatial, force-dynamic, and agentive schemas, which enable speakers to reason about complex processes in concrete and experientially accessible terms.

The five morphosyntactic patterns examined – *Inflation + Verb*, *Verb + Inflation*, *Price + Verb*, *Verb + Price*, and the Caused Motion construction – reveal that specific verbs encode metaphorical agency, causation, directionality, manner, intensity, and evaluation. These metaphorical mappings are underpinned by both image schemas (e.g., UP / DOWN, PATH, CONTAINMENT, FORCE) and/or structural metaphors (e.g., INFLATION IS A DESTROYER, PRICE IS A BURDEN, INFLATION IS AN OPPONENT, etc.). The consistent presence of these mappings confirms that metaphor in economic discourse is not ornamental but conceptually foundational.

Orientational metaphors such as MORE IS UP and LESS IS DOWN are central to the figurative construal of inflation and price, often interacting with MORE IS FAST, LESS IS SLOW, or BAD IS DOWN, depending on the verb's manner of motion and evaluative load. These metaphors do not occur in isolation but form part of broader conceptual systems in which abstract entities are metaphorically reified as moving objects, substances, agents, or forces. The notion of reification, grounded in ontological metaphor, plays a crucial role in licensing these constructions, allowing inflation and price to behave grammatically and conceptually like physical participants.

Particularly in the Caused Motion construction, metaphorical extensions are highly productive. Economic causes and conditions (e.g., supply shortages, competition, policy changes) are metaphorically construed as forces that move prices along a conceptual path toward a scalar goal (e.g., *new lows*, *a record high*). These goals are often expressed as converted adjectives functioning as nouns, reflecting the metaphor STATES ARE LOCATIONS and the cognitive process of understanding scalar endpoints as bounded regions in economic space.

In sum, this study has provided a cognitively grounded and constructionally precise account of the figurative structure of economic language. It demonstrates that metaphor and constructions interact dynamically. Both metaphor and constructions – such as the Caused Motion construction – motivate the choice of verbs and the conceptual framing of economic change. The findings underscore the central claim of Conceptual Metaphor Theory: that metaphor is not a matter of linguistic decoration, but of fundamental conceptual organisation.

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