

# CATCHING INFLATION BY THE TAIL – Animal metaphoric imagery in the conceptualisation of INFLATION in English

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## Abstract

ANIMAL metaphors are conventional in many languages and their metaphorical use is not limited only to human beings, non-physical domains may also be understood in terms of the assumed properties of animals. Set within the wider theoretical framework of Cognitive Theory of Metaphor, this paper deals with the conceptualisation of INFLATION as an ANIMAL in English. We focus on the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor, in which the most salient properties of wild animals as a source domain are mapped onto the abstract and complex target domain, INFLATION, producing various conceptual mappings, which refer to the ways wild animals move, look, sound, eat/are fed, attack and are controlled. We show how the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor functions within popular economic discourse, as well as how it structures our thinking about inflation, a dangerous phenomenon which poses a potential threat to every economy in the world.

**Key words:** conceptual metaphor, ANIMAL metaphors, inflation, INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL.

## Resumen

*COGIENDO LA INFLACIÓN POR LOS CUERNOS – Imágenes metafóricas de animales en la conceptualización de INFLACIÓN en inglés*

Las metáforas sobre ANIMALES son habituales en muchas lenguas y el uso metafórico que se hace de éstos no se limita en exclusiva a los seres humanos, sino que se aplica a ámbitos no físicos con relación a las supuestas características

de los animales. Enmarcado dentro de una visión global de la Teoría Cognitiva aplicada a la metáfora, el presente artículo aborda la conceptualización de la INFLACIÓN como ANIMAL en la lengua inglesa. Nos centraremos en la metáfora LA INFLACIÓN ES UN ANIMAL FERROZ como ejemplo de cómo las características más sobresalientes de los animales salvajes como dominio fuente se configuran dentro de un dominio meta abstracto y complejo como es INFLACIÓN que, a su vez, genera distintos mapas conceptuales que aluden al modo en el que los animales salvajes se mueven, se muestran, emiten sonidos, se alimentan/son alimentados, atacan y son controlados. Tratamos de mostrar la función de la metáfora LA INFLACIÓN ES UN ANIMAL FERROZ dentro del discurso económico divulgativo y, además, el modo en el que dicha metáfora estructura nuestro pensamiento en lo relativo a la inflación, un fenómeno peligroso que entraña riesgos potenciales para la economía mundial.

**Palabras clave:** metáforas conceptuales, metáforas sobre ANIMALES, inflación, LA INFLACIÓN ES UN ANIMAL FERROZ.

## 1. Introduction

Set within the broad theoretical framework of Cognitive Theory of Metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Charteris-Black, 2004; Cameron & Deignan, 2006; Semino, 2008), this paper deals with the conceptualisation of INFLATION as an ANIMAL in English. Being a metaphor itself<sup>1</sup> (injecting money into the economy to produce higher prices is like blowing air into a balloon), inflation as a rather abstract and difficult-to-understand economic phenomenon is often interpreted in terms of more concrete entities. Here we focus on the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor, in which the most salient properties associated with wild animals (the ways they look, eat, behave, sound, attack, as well as the ways they are tamed, controlled, caught or killed) are mapped onto the target domain, INFLATION.

animal metaphors are conventional in many languages (see, among others, Halverson, 1976; Nilsen, 1996; Ana, 1999; Baider & Gesauto, 2003; Halupka-Rešetar & Radić, 2003; Fernández Fontecha & Jiménez Catalán, 2003; Talebinejad & Dastjerdi, 2005; Deignan, 2005; MacArthur, 2005; Hsieh, 2006; López Rodríguez, 2007; Silaški, 2009). As Kövecses (2002: 124) claims, “[m]uch of human behavior seems to be metaphorically understood in terms of animal behavior”. The human behaviour is animal behaviour metaphor, Kövecses explains, probably originates from the fact that “humans attributed human characteristics to animals and then reapplied

these characteristics to humans” (Kövecses, 2002: 125). This we owe to The Great Chain of Being, “a cultural model that concerns kinds of beings and their properties and places them on a vertical scale with ‘higher’ beings and properties above ‘lower’ beings and properties” (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 166). Animal names are used to describe people (the people are animals metaphor), to assign them various desirable or undesirable animal properties, to address them either with abuse or affection, etc. Studies of animal metaphors mainly focus on animal names used for the purposes of semantic derogation, particularly on the differences between the animal names used to describe men and those used for women.

However, it is not only human beings and their behaviour which are understood as animals, but non-physical domains may also be understood in terms of the assumed properties of animals (Kövecses, 2002). Although Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claim that metaphors are grounded in human physical, bodily experience, recent research has shown that “some metaphors cannot be traced back to experiential experience, but rather have their basis in the perceived similarities or resemblances, i.e. in the perception of common characteristics or structures between entities or areas of experience” (Semino, 2008: 7). In this paper, the inflation is an animal metaphor falls into the latter category. In other words, owing to the knowledge we as human beings have of animals and their behaviour, we perceive similarities between (wild) animals, on the one hand, and inflation as a dangerous and threatening phenomenon, on the other. Thus, for example, “horse metaphors have been used to describe rates of inflation with danger being suggested by the increasing speed of the horse e.g. trotting inflation; galloping inflation; run-away inflation and even, (...) inflation – the riderless horse” (Henderson, 1986: 112-13; see also Fuertes-Olivera & Pizarro-Sánchez, 2002). However, the real or perceived similarities between inflation and other conceptual domains have not been drawn only from the source domain of animals. Thus, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provided linguistic evidence of the conceptual metaphor inflation is an adversary. Inflation has also been reported to be conceptualised as robbery, disease, enemy, entity, and engine (Fuertes-Olivera & Velasco Sacristán, 2001; Fuertes-Olivera & Pizarro-Sánchez, 2002; and Velasco Sacristán, 2009) as well as a ghost (Đurović, 2007).

Nevertheless, with the exception of sporadic references to the conceptualisation of INFLATION as an ANIMAL within more detailed studies, to the best of our knowledge there are no papers which

systematically cover this issue, which proved to be enough of a challenge to inspire a search for the linguistic realisations of the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor. These linguistic metaphors will demonstrate how the conceptual metaphor in question is realised by making use of the full scope of the properties of the source domain, thus systematically structuring the way people understand the concept of inflation in a culture determined by the English language.

## 2. Theoretical framework and data collection

According to the main tenets of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the metaphor is not a property of individual linguistic expressions and their meanings, but of whole conceptual domains. Thus, at the heart of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory lies the "conceptual metaphor", defined as an essential conceptual tool which consists of the "source" and "target" domains. Lakoff and Johnson use the TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN formula to describe the metaphorical connection between the two domains. More precisely, the conceptual metaphor consists of a structural mapping between the source conceptual domain in terms of which the target conceptual domain is understood metaphorically, and the target conceptual domain, which is to be understood metaphorically (Turner, 1990). It is of crucial importance to draw a distinction between "metaphor" and "linguistic metaphor". While "metaphor" is now used as the equivalent to "conceptual metaphor", "linguistic metaphor" (more commonly known as a "metaphorical expression") is the linguistic realisation of a particular conceptual metaphor. As Lakoff (1993: 209) emphasises, "contemporary metaphor theorists commonly use the term "metaphor" to refer to the conceptual mapping, and the term "metaphorical expression" to refer to an individual linguistic expression (...) which is sanctioned by a mapping". The corollary is that it is our conceptual system that is metaphorical in nature, not the language itself. Language thus becomes one of the ways of expressing our conceptual system and is assigned a subsidiary role. As Cameron and Deignan (2006: 672) claim, "[w]hile linguistic examples are cited throughout the central work in the field, their importance is as evidence for cognitive links rather than in themselves".

However, contemporary metaphor research from the late 1990s and 2000 onwards has completely shifted focus from viewing metaphor as a primarily

cognitive phenomenon, placing great emphasis on “the importance of language use in understanding metaphor” (Cameron & Deignan, 2006: 672). In other words, metaphor now emerges as an equally cognitive and linguistic phenomenon, the link no longer being uni-directional (thinking → language), but a two-way interaction between language and thinking (Cameron & Deignan, 2006). In addition to its linguistic form and conceptual content, metaphor possesses a notable socio-cultural dimension. One of its dimensions is the affective force, reflected in “the beliefs, attitudes, values, and emotions of participants” (Cameron & Deignan, 2006: 674). Hence in this new “emergentist perspective” metaphor is viewed as a blend of linguistic, conceptual and socio-cultural aspects (Cameron & Deignan, 2006). Charteris-Black (2004: 24) also emphasises the “interconnecting aspects of metaphor” arguing for such a definition of metaphor which incorporates its semantic, cognitive and pragmatic dimensions. A semantic role of a metaphor refers to creating new meanings for words, “since the meanings of words change over time” (Charteris-Black, 2004: 20) and it is difficult to determine what counts as a metaphor. Thus, definitions of metaphor also need to address a cognitive role of metaphor in developing our understanding on the basis of analogy, and a pragmatic one arising from “the underlying purpose of [a metaphor] influencing opinions and judgements by persuasion” (Charteris-Black, 2004: 21).

This reorientation in metaphor research raises certain doubts about the corpus of (mostly artificially constructed) examples isolated from discourse contexts which was used to emphasise only the cognitive aspect of metaphor and which pinpointed mainly conventionalised or “dead” metaphors. Consequently, traditional CMT based on such a corpus was frequently unable to provide viable explanations for either novel innovative metaphors or the highly specific non-literal meanings of many expressions. This noted shortcoming has been overcome by the development of discourse and corpus approaches to metaphors focusing on a metaphor as contextualised, i.e. on the discourse context of metaphors (Cameron & Deignan, 2006).

Therefore, in this paper an attempt will be made to explain how the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor functions in authentic discourse, as evidenced by its textual manifestations, as well as to show how this particular metaphoric choice shapes our view of inflation. Being used in a particular discourse – popular economic and business discourse, it will also be argued that an important aspect of the

INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor is the prominent expression of the affect and attitude of the discourse participants. Adopting a deductive method in our analysis, we will start with the overarching INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor, focusing on as many linguistic realisations as we managed to gather from online sources as possible, with the aim of showing how this metaphor is structured with respect to the most characteristic features of wild animals mapped onto inflation.

The data collection for the analysis that follows has been gathered by means of an Internet search. Namely, in the course of reading various texts about the current global economic crisis, written in English and originating from different sources (newspapers, magazines, web sites, etc.), we noticed that the authors of those texts frequently likened inflation to an animal. The most salient features of animals, of wild animals in particular (the ways they look, eat, behave, sound, attack, as well as the ways they are tamed, controlled, caught or killed), have been used to describe the various aspects of the abstract phenomenon, inflation. However, in order to verify the validity of our intuitive judgement as regards the conceptualisation of inflation as a wild animal in English – since “intuitions are not necessarily explicit and systematic” (Semino, 2008: 14) – as well as to corroborate our observation by authentic linguistic data, we conducted a Google search in which the query was *inflation beast*, combined with a small number of words referring to the salient features of (wild) animals (mainly verbs<sup>2</sup> which describe the ways animals *move* – e.g. gallop, crawl, trot, hack, etc., *eat* – e.g. gobble, devour, etc., *look* – e.g. jaws, claws, etc. and *sound* – e.g. howl, bellow, bark, growl, etc.). The texts obtained in this way were extracted and compiled in one Word file, totalling around 65,000 words.

The research then proceeded in the following way: the texts were read carefully in order to identify those metaphorical expressions which we intuitively felt provided instantiations of the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor. We then applied the *metaphor identification procedure* (MIP) proposed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007) in order to check the metaphoricity of the lexical units<sup>3</sup> relating to the previously mentioned salient features of animals as well as to establish their contextual and basic meaning. The basic meaning is defined here as that which is more concrete, related to bodily action, more precise, as well as historically older (Pragglejaz Group, 2007), thus encompassing the etymological meanings as well. Having established the presence of metaphoricity, we then extracted the parts

(sentences, parts of sentences or titles of newspaper articles) containing those expressions which both of us judged to be metaphorical. Some of these sentences will be used to illustrate our points in the analysis that follows and a list of all sources from which examples have been extracted is provided in the Appendix.<sup>4</sup> Finally, we classified the data according to the conceptual mappings present in the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor, which will be discussed later in the text.

The texts from which we excerpted these metaphorical expressions proved to be mainly aimed at the general public, i.e. ordinary people, not specifically at experts, and they originate mostly (with a few exceptions) from daily or weekly business and finance oriented newspapers, magazines and periodicals, web sites offering advice on how to deal with the effects of the current global financial crisis, as well as from the economy or business sections of dailies or weeklies of general orientation. Such discourse may be termed “popular economic and business discourse”, which refers to “journalistic texts that deal with current economic and business matters for an audience of experts and nonexperts, and seek to inform and entertain more generally” (Skorczynska & Deignan, 2006: 89).

Therefore, the goal of this paper is not to offer a corpus-based analysis of the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor nor is it to establish the absolute or relative frequencies of metaphorical expressions or metaphor density in the data collection. Our main goal is, by using a text-based approach, to provide an illustration and analysis of the linguistic instantiations of this conceptual metaphor as well as to show, from a discursive point of view, how this metaphor is structured in terms of the most salient animal properties mapped onto the target domain, inflation.

### 3. Inflation as an entity

The INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor reveals a very complex cognitive structure. At its core it belongs to the class of entity and substance metaphors, also known as “ontological metaphors” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 25), which are connected with our experiences with physical objects, including our bodies. The most common case of ontological metaphors is related to the perception of ideas, events, emotions and activities as substances, or concrete entities. One type of ontological

metaphor consists of viewing an abstract notion such as inflation as an entity, as the following examples (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 26) show:

- Inflation *is lowering* our standard of living.
- Inflation *is backing us* into a corner.
- Inflation *makes me sick*.

Viewing inflation as an entity enables its quantification, the identification of its particular aspects, seeing it as a cause, and even believing that we understand it (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The INFLATION IS AN ENTITY metaphor is “necessary for even attempting to deal rationally with our experiences” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 26). In addition, the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor entails a particular type of ontological metaphor where we “zoomorphise” an inanimate concept, INFLATION, assigning it animal characteristics, the way animals eat, move, attack, sound, etc. Attributing animate features to inanimate concepts such as inflation “not only gives us a very specific way of thinking about inflation but also a way of acting toward it” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 34), i.e. it allows us to make sense of the phenomena in the world around us.

The conceptual basis for the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor is the semantic transfer of the most salient attributes that are stereotypically associated with (wild) animals to refer to inflation and its harmful effects. The salient properties of wild animals, such as being dangerous, violent, cruel, fierce, savage, speedy, or untamed, are mapped onto inflation to depict its detrimental effect on currency, people and their savings, and a country’s economy in general. “Animals therefore serve as prototypes for threats and dangers to mankind” and in turn are “typically employed to construct negative evaluations” (Charteris-Black, 2004: 184-5).<sup>5</sup> What follows are different extensions of the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor illustrated by the most striking examples from our data collection.

#### 4. Inflation as a ferocious animal

Inflation is unpredictable and high inflation is an undesirable force regarded as harmful to an overall economy – high inflation adds to existing inefficiencies in the market, making it difficult for companies to budget or plan long-term; it can act as a drag on productivity; it creates uncertainty



about the future purchasing power of money and discourages investment and saving; it can impose hidden tax increases, etc. Since it is a highly complex and abstract phenomenon, metaphor users try to visualise inflation in order to facilitate its understanding and propose strategies for coping with it. On the basis of the selected metaphorical expressions, several sub-metaphors of the INFLATION IS A (FEROCIOUS) ANIMAL metaphor may be identified regarding the various properties of wild animals. These are discussed in the sections which follow.

#### 4.1. The ways animals move

The following examples profile the inherent properties as regards the movement of animals, the INFLATION (as an) ANIMAL being projected as a composite one.

- (1) Oil prices went through the roof, and inflation *flew* up to 12 percent.
- (2) Inflation in construction *is galloping* at 1.5% per month.
- (3) Inflation has been contained at approximately 3% for 2009 compared to *trotting* inflation rates for the past 5 years.
- (4) And if you hold cash as actual cash, well, inflation just keeps *backing away*, leaving you with less than you started with.
- (5) Getting more income coming in will definitely make inflation easier to *ride out*.

Thus most birds can “fly”, and horses, as domesticated wild animals, “gallop”, or “trot” or “hack away”.<sup>6</sup> Examples which connote movement in the air – “fly”, or on the ground – “gallop, trot or hack away” – share a saliency of speed and agility which in the case of flying and galloping further results in the conceptualisation of inflation as an uncontrolled, wild and untamed animal. Hence in examples (2), (3), and (4) inflation is visualised as a horse whose motion – i.e. speed and control – is in no way tempered or restricted by an agent. This serves to rationalise risk and danger (of inflation) “for the far greater strength and weight of the animal makes any kind of struggle between the animal and its human controller an ill-matched one” (MacArthur, 2005: 73). However, attempts aimed at transforming inflation into an animal subservient to the intentions of economic policy-makers call for know-how, knowledge and skill which are usually subdued or at best hinted at. Therefore, the verb “ride out” (example 5) used with the

implication of “rider” in mind – i.e. of someone who will control the motion of inflation – introduces more positive evaluations, subjecting inflation to the agent’s active stance and their willingness to reduce it. Still, it echoes the hardship and duration of the whole process.

#### 4.2. The ways animals look

The physical properties of inflation conceptualised as an animal are further instantiated in the way this animal looks, as can be seen from the following examples:

- (6) Second, you must assemble a portfolio that will protect you from *the claws* of inflation.
- (7) But you’ll need to ensure that the money you’ve tucked away is generating its own income so that the vicious *jaws* of inflation don’t rip it to shreds.
- (8) Inflation *flashes its sharp teeth* against the back drop of dark clouds of recession.

At a more superficial level, inflation can bite us, cut us, tear us and rip our income to shreds, with its “claws”, “jaws” and “sharp teeth”. At a higher level of abstraction, however, inflation can hurt us, leaving us deprived of something extremely valuable, it takes us aback and we are unprepared for its onslaught. The fear we feel is very realistic and these metaphorical expressions vividly depict all of the detrimental effects inflicted upon us. If we relate (something as abstract as) inflation to some of the most unpleasant sensations in our physical experience, depicted by animal’s sharp claws, teeth or jaws, this presupposes taking the necessary steps to ward off any undesirable outcome and the expectation that we will be on the alert and act accordingly. Such a conceptualisation serves the purpose of advising the public to take precautions for the future, e.g. by (re)investing their money more wisely.

#### 4.3. The ways animals sound

The further decomposition of inflation conceptualised as a ferocious animal focuses on the different sounds animals make, illustrated by the following examples:

- (9) Inflation *roars* back in Venezuela in April.
- (10) In it, Goyette explains alternative investments that should remain strong in the face of *howling* inflation, and gives readers tools to maintain the value of their savings and take advantage of inevitable future opportunities.
- (11) As a result, it will never tame inflation until it becomes a clawing, *bellowing* threat.
- (12) Developing Markets' Inflation Beast Keeps *Growling*.
- (13) We have long argued that inflation, although the central banker's nightmare, is little more than the dog *barking* in the night!
- (14) Caged beast of inflation *utters a hiss*.

Animal metaphoric imagery is again very rich, as the above examples show. The “roaring” of lions, the “howling” of wolves, the “bellowing” of bulls, the “growling” and “barking” of dogs or the “hissing” of snakes, all of these menacing animal sounds underlie the intense feeling of fear of impending events. The sounds stand for bad omens that may or may not materialise. For example, a dog may bark with the intention of biting you or greeting you, wolves and dogs alike howl, uttering cries of anger but also of pain or grief, bulls bellow in anger or pain alike. These sounds inspire fear, sometimes rational, on other occasions irrational, which in the latter case calls for a qualified and credible explanation of our apprehension and advice on how to minimise the uncertainty of future events.

#### 4.4. The ways animals eat/are fed

The metaphorical extensions of the ANIMAL metaphor referring to the way animals eat or are fed map onto different policies or protective measures undertaken to tackle the issue of inflation.

- (15) Just what is inflation, this *ravenous* beast that *eats away* at the value of every dollar you earn?
- (16) Russia *is feeding* the beast that soon will *devour* it.
- (17) If your money is stowed in a “safe” investment, like a low-yielding savings or money market account, you'll never see how inflation *is gobbling up* virtually all of your return.
- (18) Inflation *Gnaws* At Pet Food Companies.

- (19) The inflation beast, once out of its cage, can *devour* savings quickly and disrupt an economy for a long time (...)
- (20) But the *voracious* inflation in the 1970s (the consumer price index went up nearly 84 percent from 1969 to 1979) *ate away* most of the gains.
- (21) Push interest rates up far enough and you can tame the *bloated* beast.
- (22) How *to starve* the inflation beast?

Generally, inflation only erodes the real value of money (the functional currency) and other monetary items. It is known that inflation has no effect on the real value of non-monetary items. This in turn means, no matter how surprising it may be for lay people, that inflation may also be credited with some positive effects. If held at low or moderate levels, it would for example allow labour markets to reach equilibrium faster, ensure that nominal interest rates stay sufficiently above zero (so that if the need arises, the bank can cut the nominal interest rate) or lower the return on monetary assets relative to real assets, which would result in an increase in investment, etc. Therefore, sometimes the beast should be “fed” (example 16) or the “bloated” beast starved, for example by pushing interest rates up far enough (examples 21 and 22) so as to extract positive effects and restore proper economic balance. However, the harmful effects of inflation far outweigh the positive ones, thus imputing the extremely negative characteristics of the beast to inflation, such as being “ravenous” and “voracious”, the beast who will “gnaw”, “eat away”, “gobble up” and “devour” not only what people have but the overall economy as well, again memorably emphasising the devastating effects of inflation. At a higher level of abstraction, verbs like “gobble up” or “devour” (both marked as [+AGGRESSIVE] by Koller, 2003: 183), grounded on the physical experience of food moving down inside the body, may imply the annulment of existence which is experientially reminiscent of the cruelty of beasts. Likening inflation to a voracious beast which gobbles up or devours underlies the inability and ineffectiveness of those accountable for letting the (inflation) beast grow so large and difficult to control, as well as the helplessness of ordinary people when faced with the harmful effects of periods of inflation.

#### 4.5. The ways animals attack

Conceptualised as a ferocious animal, which in search for food sometimes invades another animal’s territory, inflation is ready to attack and “ravage” the economy:

- (23) How to protect your money from this *predatory* inflation?
- (24) However, you don't have to *fall prey* to inflation, if you take the right steps to avoid here.
- (25) Fending off inflation's *ravages*.
- (26) Inflation gauges show the beast that *ravaged* the 1970s and early 1980s remains subdued.

The authors of the above metaphorical expressions seem to instil humanlike characteristics which are added to the conceptualisation of inflation as our enemy, as examples (25) and (26) show. Perceiving inflation as an enemy who “ravages” serves to rationalise all the measures at one's disposal in order to fend off inflation attacks. In other words, the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL THAT ATTACKS sub-metaphor seems to mobilise the public and assure them of the inevitability of certain defensive measures, i.e. metaphorically speaking, of “making sacrifices” in the national economy by, for example, the lowering of salaries and general standard of living. This conforms to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980: 34) view that when “we are suffering substantial economic losses due to complex economic and political factors that no one really understands”, the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL THAT ATTACKS sub-metaphor “at least gives us a coherent account of why we're suffering these losses.”

Hence the general public are supposed to be watchful and alarmed at the prospect of the pending “danger”:

- (27) *Beware* of the inflation beast.
- (28) The *menacing* inflation beast.
- (29) Where to invest to *escape* inflation?
- (30) The inflation beast remains a *threat*, but we are confident that it can be caged – in the developed economies at least.

The “danger” aspect seems to integrate both the physical sensation and mental representation of INFLATION AS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL. On the one hand, we actually feel inflation as a real “menace” (example 28), chasing its prey, i.e. the general public. People are threatened and warned and try (sometimes in vain) to “escape” from it (example 29). This connotes the speed, skill and cunning with which one should be equipped in order to elude the inflation beast. On the other hand, we may form a mental image

of danger and “threat” as a premonition of imminent jeopardy which should in turn expedite all precautionary measures on our part.

#### 4.6. The ways animals are controlled

In its cognitive aspects, the sub-metaphor INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL THAT MUST BE KEPT UNDER CONTROL stems from the previous one, INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL THAT ATTACKS. The following are some examples of this sub-metaphor:

- (31) Inflation about to be *unleashed*, says the economist who called the crunch.
- (32) Cheaper food prices keep inflation *on leash*.
- (33) He did this to keep inflation *under leash* and has hinted that rate increases are likely to continue.
- (34) Korea to double efforts *to tame* inflation.
- (35) In other words, from time to time governments deliberately squeezed credit as an act of policy *to curb* inflation.
- (36) Slow growth *will tame* the inflation beast.
- (37) Is it really time *to whip* inflation now?
- (38) *Keeping* the beast *in its cage*.
- (39) I have said many, many times that inflation is a sinister beast that, if *uncaged*, devours savings, erodes consumers’ purchasing power, decimates returns on capital, undermines the reliability of financial accounting, distracts the attention of corporate management, undercuts employment growth and real wages, and debases the currency.
- (40) Nonetheless, the Bank was concerned about price pressures, and decided it was safest not to touch the rate, lest it *unleash* the inflation beast.
- (41) The experience of the late 1970s and early 1980s highlights the difficulties in *recapturing* the inflation beast once *uncaged*.

The wealth of metaphorical expressions, such as “to unleash”, “to keep inflation on/under leash”, “to tame it”, “to curb it”, “to whip it”, “to keep it in its cage”, or “to recapture the inflation beast once uncaged”, adds up to a diversity of surface and deeper meanings and implications alike. Inflation is thus projected as a lower life form which, if displaced from its natural

habitat (i.e. the wilderness where it is usually guided by survival instincts) should be kept in a cage, on leash, or controlled and restrained with the intention of curbing or taming it. What this sub-metaphor seems to highlight are the most salient properties of wild animals, such as cruelty, savagery and the instinct to kill. If unchecked and released from the watchful eye of its tamer, the inflation beast could jeopardise the lives of those around. Metaphorically speaking, inflation is an entity that demands the constant attention of experts in economic issues as well as that of the general public. It is perceived as a permanent threat, i.e. “sinister beast” (example 39), which can wreak havoc on the whole economy, a beast that devours savings and erodes consumers’ purchasing power, etc. Consequently, the conceptualisation of inflation as A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL THAT MUST BE KEPT UNDER CONTROL allows us to quantify it, to feel its consequences and identify it as the cause of certain events. We are also sensitive to the measures undertaken in order to “keep the beast in its cage” (example 38), such as “cheaper food prices” (example 32), “credit squeeze” (example 35), or “slow growth” (example 36).

However, in line with the principle of “metaphorical highlighting” (Kövecses, 2002), this sub-metaphor seems to hide the awareness that in spite of all training and hard work, i.e. expertise, policies and forecasts, inflation conceptualised as a FEROCIOUS ANIMAL defies the belief that it is a phenomenon which may be completely kept under control – it is not possible to fully domesticate wild animals, as supported by the expressions “inflation on the run”, “runway inflation”, “the beast of inflation is on the loose”, “inflation is still running wild”, or “the beast of inflation is running amuck” in the following examples:

- (42) Inflation *on the run*.
- (43) The increase is more than expected but far short of the *runaway* inflation some fear may result from the Obama stimulus package.
- (44) The beast of inflation is *on the loose* and will likely be with us for quite a while.
- (45) US inflation still *running wild* as recession looms.
- (46) Even applying the same yardstick, the four consumer price indices reveal that, far from being subdued, the beast of inflation *is running amuck*. Simply put, inflation rate is not negative but in double digits.

“Runaway inflation” (via the image of a runaway horse) which is “on the loose” and “runs amuck” are ingrained metaphorical expressions which connote “being out of control”, “being not confined or bound”, highlighting “the difficulties in recapturing the inflation beast once uncaged” (example 41). On the basis of the examples below, we become familiar with the ways of restraining such an unpredictable and relentless entity as inflation. The last three mappings offer clear ways of how to regulate certain behaviour for the common good.

#### 4.6.1. Sending the beast to sleep

In the first of these cases controlling inflation is perceived as SENDING A WILD ANIMAL TO SLEEP.

- (47) Inflation is *a snarling vicious dog that has been put to sleep*.
- (48) The Fed purchase of government securities was a purely artificial attempt *to dope* the inflation horse.
- (49) Inflation is not dead; it *is* just *hibernating*.
- (50) However the most recent readings from around the world point to an inflation beast either *comatose* or mortally wounded.
- (51) Many investors will continue to fret until it becomes clear that the Fed *has not awakened* the inflation beast.
- (52) While there has been lots of noise about inflationary pressures, the beast itself *is* still *slumbering*. The MPC should not act until they see convincing evidence of it *waking up*.

The metaphorical images of putting a “snarling”, “vicious dog to sleep” (example 47), “doping the inflation horse” (example 48) and being “comatose” (example 50), unlike the natural processes of “hibernation” (example 49) or “slumbering” (example 52) which are not induced either chemically or in some other way, equally suggest low level of bodily activity, the weakening of instincts, the inability to react and stupor. On a more positive note, the SENDING A WILD ANIMAL TO SLEEP sub-metaphor foregrounds the jubilation of devising ways and strategies to quell inflation and channel its subversive force. What this sub-metaphor conceals is the short-term nature of policy and the expectations and fear of what will happen when inflation beast awakens and becomes fully operational again.



As example (49) states, “Inflation is not dead; it is just hibernating”, therefore any partial measures may only serve to postpone the inevitable.

#### 4.6.2. Catching the beast

The next sub-metaphor proposes a more effective way of restraining the uncontrollable process of inflation, that linked with pursuing and catching the beast, as illustrated by the following examples:

- (53) Inflation to be *trapped* with neo matrix.
- (54) Currently at over 4 percent, inflation in Britain is expected *to tail-off* in line with the falling oil price.
- (55) Let’s hope the ugly beast of inflation can *get controlled* before it takes us into an economic tailspin.
- (56) There is still fear in the market. But you are seeing the beginning of signs that the inflation beast *is being caged*, which is much more reassuring.
- (57) The inflation beast *was* finally *contained*.

“Traps” are supposed to be efficient devices for catching or capturing animals so as to force them into a place from which they are not likely to escape. The usual associations of being trapped are being unable to move, being forced to stand still, “get controlled” (example 55), “being caged” (example 56), hence “being contained” (example 57). Therefore, in comparison with the previous SENDING THE BEAST TO SLEEP sub-metaphor, CATCHING THE BEAST implies a greater level of power over the inflation beast.

#### 4.6.3. Killing the beast

Finally, the sub-metaphor INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL THAT SHOULD BE KILLED highlights the best option for handling inflation, that which entails its complete destruction.

- (58) Mexico’s central bank pulled the monetary trigger again Friday, raising its benchmark interest rate to 8.25% in a bid *to shoot down* inflation.
- (59) Super Savings accounts that *slaughter* inflation.
- (60) Volker proved that you can *slay* the inflation beast with enough determined interest rate hikes.

- (61) I think the “tight money” crowd is simply arguing that we should *kill* the inflation beast on the first go around and *not let it live* for the inevitable final battle.
- (62) 7 ways *to beat* the inflation beast.
- (63) They will then be able to position themselves as inflation-fighters – white knights that ride to the rescue *to kill-off* the inflation beast before it inflicts too much damage on the economy.

Examples (58), (59), and (60) invoke images of different weapons placed at one’s disposal to kill the beast. Examples (59) and (60) of “slaughtering” and “slaying” inflation, which stand out as extremely cruel and violent, are particularly vivid and thus underlie the danger and brutality of beasts. Notwithstanding the horrific effects of the selected metaphorical expressions, the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL THAT SHOULD BE KILLED sub-metaphor, no matter how contradictory this may be, ends on an optimistic note by placing the emphasis on successful ways to stop the beast – e.g. by “super savings accounts” in example (59), “determined interest rate hikes” in example (60) and “tight money” in example (61). The rhetorical effect the metaphorical expressions achieve in examples (59) and (62) illustrates the fact that metaphors in discourse may also function as powerful persuasive and attention-grabbing devices (Semino, 2008).

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper an attempt has been made to study one possible way of conceptualising inflation in English. By linking the conceptual and the linguistic (Cameron & Deignan, 2006), we have tried to point out how the FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor functions in authentic discourse as substantiated by numerous and diverse linguistic realisations which refer to the ways wild animals move, look, sound, eat/are fed, attack and are controlled. It may be claimed that apart from the conceptual and the linguistic, what matters most in the case of the FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor used for the conceptualisation of inflation in English is its affective force, manifested in the attitudes and emotions of the discourse participants, such as fear, menace, threat, etc.

It would be insightful to conduct similar research in other languages, including Serbian, in order to verify whether the conceptual mappings and

their linguistic instantiations found in the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor in English are shared by the speakers of other languages, especially of those nationalities who have been hit by hyperinflation in their history. If these mappings, accompanied by similar linguistic realisations, prove to be common, then the INFLATION IS A FEROCIOUS ANIMAL metaphor may be regarded as a conventional metaphor, which appears “to play a privileged role in transmitting social understandings of situations” (MacArthur, 2005: 71-72), serving as “a means of expressing a collective evaluation” (MacArthur, 2005: 72), in this case, of a phenomenon which poses a potential threat to every economy in the world.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Although now highly conventionalised and mainly considered a dead metaphor, the term INFLATION has a clear metaphorical etymology (Smith, 1995: 45).

<sup>2</sup> Although in previous research on ANIMAL metaphors and particularly on the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor, it was mainly nouns which were reported to be metaphorical in nature, in our analysis “animal metaphor[s] tend[s] to capture particular behaviour, and these are typically referred to by verbs” (Semino, 2008: 201; see also Deignan, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> A “lexical unit” refers not only to individual words but also to multiword expressions (Semino, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Each source provided in the Appendix contains information about the web site from which each individual example has been excerpted, the name of the media, the title of the article (where applicable), the name of the author (where available), and the date of the publication (where available).

<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that the ANIMAL metaphor imparts only negative evaluations. For its positive aspects see, among others, Charteris-Black (2004) and Silaški (2009). For Serbian, see Halupka-Rešetar & Radić (2003).

<sup>6</sup> Although the verb “hack” means to go for a ride on horse for pleasure, the contextual evidence (“leaving you with less than you started”), as well as the particle “away” suggest firstly, that inflation is used in an active subject construction and secondly, that, if unchecked, hacking can easily be turned into the trotting or galloping of inflation.

## Appendix: Sources of examples

[Numbers in brackets refer to examples in the main text]

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