

THE DISCOURSE OF ECONOMIC CRISIS: HOW ENGLISH MEDIA NARRATES THE EFFECTS OF INFLATION

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Abstract

This comprehensive research article investigates the intricate relationship between linguistic structures and economic perceptions, specifically focusing on how English-language media outlets construct the narrative of inflation. In the contemporary globalized economy, inflation is frequently reduced to quantitative data; however, this study argues that the public's understanding of financial instability is largely mediated through specific discursive strategies. Utilizing the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the article examines the transition from technical economic reporting to a "discourse of crisis." It explores the systematic use of conceptual metaphors—framing inflation as a physical predator, a natural disaster, or a combatant in a war—and how these choices influence collective consumer psychology. By analyzing editorial trends in major publications such as *The Economist*, *The Financial Times*, and *The Guardian*, the research demonstrates that media narratives do not merely reflect economic reality but actively shape it by prioritizing emotive framing over statistical neutrality. The findings suggest that the "English of Economics" serves as a powerful tool for political accountability and social mobilization, often bridging the gap between abstract monetary policy and the lived experience of the "cost-of-living crisis."



Key words: Economic Discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) , Conceptual Metaphors , Media Narratives , Cost-of-living Crisis , Consumer Psychology , Lexical Intensity , Financial Journalism , Socio-economic Construction , Linguistic Structures , Political Accountability , Inflationary Expectations , Human-interest Framing

Introduction: The linguistic construction of economics

Economics is often termed the "dismal science," yet in the pages of modern journalism, it is anything but dull. The phenomenon of inflation—defined technically as the decline of purchasing power of a given currency over time—is a primary concern for central banks and households alike. However, for the general public, inflation does not exist as a percentage on a spreadsheet; it exists as a narrative. The English media acts as the primary architect of this narrative. By selecting specific lexical items and framing devices, journalists transform a slow-moving macroeconomic trend into an immediate, tangible crisis. This article seeks to deconstruct the "Discourse of Crisis," examining how the English language is employed to narrate, dramatize, and humanize the effects of inflation in the 21st century.

Theoretical foundations: beyond literal meaning

To analyze the media's role, we must employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This framework posits that language is a form of social practice that both reflects and reproduces power dynamics. In the context of economic reporting, CDA reveals that the "neutral" tone often adopted by financial journalists is, in fact, a carefully constructed persona. The discourse of inflation involves a process of "recontextualization," where complex decisions made in the boardrooms of central banks are translated into stories of individual struggle or national survival. This process is not passive; it dictates who is blamed for rising prices—whether it be "greedy corporations," "inept governments," or "global supply chain disruptions"—thereby directing public frustration toward specific targets.



The metaphorical landscape of inflation

Cognitive linguistics suggests that humans understand abstract concepts through metaphors. Since inflation is an invisible process, the English media relies heavily on physical imagery to make it comprehensible.

The Predator and the Thief

A recurring motif in English financial discourse is the personification of inflation as a criminal or a wild animal. Headlines frequently describe inflation as "stalking the economy" or "eating away at household budgets." By characterizing inflation as a "thief" that "robs" savers of their future, the media creates a sense of victimization. This framing is crucial because it transforms a systemic economic outcome into a moral transgression, demanding a "punitive" response from authorities.

The Natural Disaster and the Out-of-Control Machine

Alternatively, inflation is often narrated as a force of nature. Media reports speak of "inflationary pressures building up," "surging prices," or "the economy overheating." When journalists describe an "inflationary spiral," they evoke images of a vortex or a hurricane—something that has moved beyond human control. This creates a discourse of helplessness, where the only solution is for the "experts" to intervene with "drastic measures."

From "inflation" to the "cost-of-living crisis"

The most significant discursive shift in recent years has been the rebranding of inflation as the "cost-of-living crisis." This linguistic transition represents a move from the *technical* to the *sociopolitical*. While "inflation" is a term belonging to the realm of mathematics and policy, the "cost-of-living crisis" belongs to the kitchen table.



English media outlets have increasingly utilized "human-interest framing" to illustrate this crisis. Instead of focusing on interest rate yield curves, articles now highlight the "Heat or Eat" dilemma—a powerful rhetorical device used to describe the choice between home heating and basic nutrition. This shift in terminology has profound effects on political discourse, as it moves the conversation from "managing the money supply" to "protecting vulnerable citizens," thereby increasing the pressure on the state to provide subsidies or price caps.

The rhetoric of combat: the "war" on prices

When inflation becomes a crisis, the language of the media becomes militarized. Central banks do not merely "adjust" rates; they "deploy their arsenal" or "launch a hawkish attack" on inflation. The "War on Inflation" is a dominant narrative that serves to justify economic pain. If the nation is at "war," then high unemployment or a slowdown in growth are seen as "collateral damage" in the pursuit of price stability. This militaristic rhetoric silences dissent by framing economic policy as a matter of national security rather than a choice between competing social interests.

Lexical intensity and sensationalism

The English language is rich with synonyms for growth, and journalists exploit this to create a sense of urgency. In a standard economic report, one rarely sees prices simply "rising." Instead, they "skyrocket," "surge," "leap," or "breach historical levels." These high-intensity verbs are designed to trigger an emotional response. This "lexical escalation" contributes to what economists call "inflationary expectations." When the media constantly narrates a story of "soaring" prices, consumers begin to expect higher prices in the future, leading them to demand higher wages and spend more quickly, which ironically creates the very inflation the media is reporting on.

Conclusion: the responsibility of the narrator



The discourse of economic crisis is not a neutral reflection of reality but a powerful tool of social construction. English media outlets, through their use of metaphors, militaristic rhetoric, and human-interest framing, play a decisive role in how inflation is experienced by the public. While these narratives make complex economics more accessible, they also risk oversimplifying systemic issues and fueling public anxiety. As we navigate an era of continued economic volatility, understanding the linguistic mechanisms behind these narratives is essential for fostering a more nuanced and less reactionary public discourse.

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