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INFLATION IS A PERSON – ON LANGUAGE-IMAGE RELATIONS IN INTERNET MEMES

Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to analyse language-image relations in Polish-language Internet memes in which the concept of INFLATION is communicated by means of conceptual metaphors. The memes chosen for this study rely on two modes, which are: written language and static image. With this in mind, this analysis concentrates on a multimodal process of meaning construction by showing how these two modes contribute to the shape of conceptual metaphors that can be identified in connection with a given meme. The meaning construction is seen as a cognitive process in which the final product is a conceptual metaphor characterized by the pattern B is A, where B, being the metaphorical target concept is INFLATION, whereas A, being the metaphorical source domain is a concept linked with the domain HUMAN BEING. With the assumption that meaning is a mental process, the analysis is cognitively oriented, and the adopted model is the extended conceptual metaphor theory (ExCMT) as proposed by Kövecses (2017, 2020). The unquestionable advantage of this model is the fact that being a multi-level theory of metaphor, the ExCMT accounts for the creation of novel metaphors in discourse.

Keywords: multimodality, discourse studies, conceptual metaphor, metaphorical creativity, extended conceptual metaphor theory.

Introduction

The study of language-image relations is but one aspect of the wide and diversified area of research within the discipline of linguistic multimodality, which is a relatively young, fast-developing area of studies in linguistics. An increased interest in multimodality was observed in the second decade

of the 21st century as a corollary of such earlier seminal publications as, for example, Kress & van Leeuwen (2001, 2006 [1996]), Bateman (2008), or Jewitt et al. (2009) (cf. Forceville 2020: 66, Stöckl 2020b: 42).

Linguists dealing with the topic of multimodality generally agree that the meaning of multimodal messages arises from the interaction between particular modes that contribute to a given communicative act, and there is a general agreement that (...) *When several modes are involved in a communicative event (...) all of the modes combine to represent a message's meaning* (Jewitt, 2014: 28, cf. also Bateman (2014b: 6), Forceville (2020), Stöckl (2020b: 51), Hart and Queralto, 2021: 530). This is also the case with Internet memes, which are a multimodal genre and typically, although not exclusively, rely on such modes as written or spoken text combined with a static or moving image. An interesting issue in this respect is to analyse the correlation between different modes, as well as the role of each mode in the contribution to, and interaction with, the multimodal communicative act as a whole (cf. Jewitt, 2014: 27, Górska, 2020: 12, Hart & Queralto, 2021: 531).

The purpose of this paper is to analyse language-image relations in Polish-language Internet memes in which the concept of INFLATION is communicated by means of conceptual metaphors. The memes under analysis rely on two modes, written language and static image. In other words, this study concentrates on a multimodal process of meaning construction by showing how these two modes contribute to the shape of conceptual metaphors at different levels of metaphorical conceptualization. In order to achieve this aim, the framework adopted for this research is the extended conceptual metaphor theory (ExCMT) as proposed by Kövecses (2017, 2020), which, importantly, is a multi-level theory of metaphor. The main purpose of the analysis is to show the language-image relations in correlation to levels of metaphorical abstraction. Additionally, we will look at the role of language and image in evoking emotions.

1. Theoretical background

One of the crucial terms in multimodal studies is mode. As commented by Forceville and Urios-Aparisi (2009: 4) (...) *the definition of a mode is an extremely thorny one*. In a similar vein, Stöckl (2023: 12) notes that (...) *one must concede the persistent difficulty in ascribing mode status and delineating various modes* (cf. Maćkiewicz 2017, Forceville 2020). In any case, as Forceville (2009a) observes, in linguistic research on multimodality, the term mode cannot be restricted in a one-to-one manner to five senses.

Additionally, linguists generally agree that modes are genre-specific and thus multimodality studies should focus on genre-specific patterns (cf. Bateman 2016, Stöckl 2020b, Forceville 2023). Our study, with a focus on Internet memes, fulfills this requirement, and the two modes taken into account are written language and static visuals, or, in other words, language in its written form (henceforth abbreviated to L), and image (henceforth abbreviated to I).

Importantly, due to different mode combinations multimodal discourses arise, and consequently, when studying meaning in such multimodal complexes, it is of vital importance to establish (...) *which elements of the verbal message correspond to the elements of the visual message*, as well as (...) *to evaluate the relative contribution of each of the two modes to the multimodal communicative act as a whole* (Górska 2020: 12). In this respect, Stöckl (2020a: 191) applies the terms *image-centricity* in the sense of (...) *perceptual dominance of the image over text (...) on the screen* (Stöckl 2020a: 189, cf. Stöckl et al. 2019)¹. All Internet memes are image-centric as this is, in fact, a characteristic feature of modern, computer-mediated mass communication. Nevertheless, as indicated by Stöckl (2020a: 194), (...) *where language and text are supposed to be subordinated and led by an image, it may after all be the little language there is that has the most semantic impact*. With this in mind, a vital concept in our analysis is *anchoring*, which concept can be traced back to Barthes' (1977) study of advertisements. This author observed that in advertising images are often polysemic, and it is the role of the verbal element to direct or limit the viewer's understanding of the image. In other words, language anchors the meaning of an image. Another situation possible is the *relay relationship*, that is, when both modes are equally important and mutually contribute to the intended meaning (Bateman 2014a). The notion of mode anchorage is, but one aspect of modal coherence in multimodal discourses, which as proposed by Stöckl (2020b) should be analysed with the help of a 5-step procedure. In brief, this includes the analysis of: a) the composition of a multimodal message; b) communicative activities; c) thematic structure; d) formal and propositional coherence relations; e) intertextual and interdiscursive relations (cf. Stöckl 2015, 2016).

With the main aim of this paper to show the role of language and image in shaping the metaphorical conceptualization of inflation in memes, a short comment on conceptual metaphors, as well as on the distinction between mono- and multimodal metaphors needs to be made. As regards the conceptual metaphor, it is due to the seminal work by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) that linguists started to perceive verbal metaphors as manifes-

tations of patterns of metaphorical conceptualization. The authors characterized metaphor as (...) *understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5). More specifically, within the cognitive theory of metaphor (CTM), conceptual metaphor is understood as a cross-domain mapping relying on similarity, with the mapping obtaining in accordance with the pattern B (target domain) is A (source domain). Significantly, metaphorical thinking is not restricted to its expression by means of the verbal mode, but it occurs within different modes and in mode combinations, as shown by studies of pictorial (e.g., Forceville 1996, 2000, El Refaie 2003), gesture (e.g., Müller 2008, Cienki and Müller 2008) or music metaphors (e.g., Zbikowski 2009, Forceville 2009b) (cf. Forceville 2014: 56). With this in mind, Forceville (2006: 384, 2009: 24), describes multimodal metaphors as: (...) *metaphors whose target and source are each represented exclusively or predominantly in different modes*, and explains that the metaphor should be considered monomodal if information provided in a single mode is sufficient for the identification of source and target. Importantly, as suggested in Forceville (2024a: 50), the distinction between monomodal-multimodal metaphor is not clear-cut, and (...) *the monomodality – multimodality pair constitutes a continuum rather than a dichotomy*. In order to check to which pole of the continuum a given metaphor belongs, one can (...) *mentally delete the information in all but one mode: if the target and source can still be identified as such, it is a monomodal metaphor; if not, it is, or verges toward, being multimodal* (Forceville 2024a: 50).

In the study of metaphors within multimodal environments, an important contribution to the field is Forceville's (2016) classification of pictorial and multimodal metaphors into 4 prototypical types. These are: 1) contextual metaphor, where the visually depicted source is to be understood, on the basis of contextual background knowledge, as the target; 2) hybrid metaphor, in which the source and target are physically integrated in the visual layer; 3) simile, where the comparison between the source and target is salient, i.e., by means of the juxtaposition of the image relating to the source and the one relating to the target; 4) verbo-pictorial metaphor, in which both the image and text contribute to the structure of metaphor. As stressed by the author, the verbo-pictorial metaphor is multimodal, whereas the remaining types are pictorial, that is, monomodal metaphors².

Another important contribution to the study of metaphors in multimodal texts is the Visual Metaphor Identification Procedure (VISMIP) procedure, as presented in Šorm and Steen (2018). This procedure, in the form of successive steps, is meant to enhance the identification and description

of visual metaphors. In brief, there are 6 main points, with additional sub-points, to be followed by the researchers. These are:

- establishment of the general meaning of the image;
- defining units for the analysis, i.e. identifying meaningful elements in the picture and assigning them to conceptual domains;
- identification of incongruent elements;
- checking if the incongruent element can be replaced by a different one which will be congruent and coherent with other elements in the picture;
- testing if two elements belong to different conceptual domains;
- carrying out the indirect discourse test.

Both Forceville's (2006, 2009, 2014, 2016, 2023), as well as Šorm and Steen's (2018) proposals have their unquestionable merits, but as indicated, for instance, by Libura (2019), Kowalski (2022), and Forceville (2024b), they also require further refinements. Undoubtedly, they are an important step forward in the dynamically developing studies of multimodal meaning identification, interpretation, and description, and for this reason, our analysis, as outlined in detail in the following section, will also draw upon elements of these proposals.

2. Methodology and data selection

Our analysis is focused on Internet memes³ whose main theme is 'inflation'. Memes, being a genre of multimodal Internet communication, are a relatively new object of linguistic study, with a surge of interest on the part of linguist researchers observed during the Covid-19 pandemic (see, e.g., Dynel 2021, Younes and Altakhaineh 2022, Abdelghany et al. 2023). The choice of the key concept, i.e., INFLATION, was not accidental, as starting from the second half of 2021, inflation, defined as (...) *The rate at which the general level of prices for goods and services is rising*⁴, has been a worldwide issue, regularly discussed in the media. The importance of the phenomenon of inflation for Polish citizens is confirmed by the results of a survey, carried out by the online magazine *Business Insider*, according to which the term *inflation* was voted the word no. 1 of the year 2022 by the Internet users⁵.

The main objective of this study is to show how the role of L and I is related to different levels of metaphorical abstraction, and the analysis is carried out within the framework of ExCTM (Kövecses 2017, 2020). The unquestionable advantage of this model is the fact that being a multi-level theory of metaphor, the ExCMT accounts for the creation of novel, creative metaphors in discourse, and, due to this feature, it compensates for the

deficiencies of the standard conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), as initiated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) (cf. Kövecses 2020: 17–21). Importantly, to the best of our knowledge, ExCMT, being a relatively new proposal, has not been applied to the study of Internet memes and multimodal discourse yet.

To give some details, the ExCMT is a schematicity hierarchy in which it is assumed that conceptual metaphors occur at different levels depending on their schematic versus specific character. As explained by Kövecses (2020: 52), at the top of the hierarchy the most schematic conceptual structures, i.e., image schemas, are found, followed by more specific domains, then frames, and finally, at the bottom of the hierarchy, highly specific mental spaces. In brief, image schemas are highly schematic analogue structures which are supposed to reflect universal human cognition. The definition of a domain in ExCMT copies the traditional understanding of this conceptual structure as (...) *a coherent area of conceptualization relative to which semantic units may be characterized* (Langacker, 1987: 488). Nevertheless, in ExCMT it is stressed that domains are (...) *highly inclusive knowledge structures* (Kövecses, 2020: 56), not infrequently forming a kind of a domain matrix presupposing a variety of concepts that characterise different aspects of the domain. In metaphorical conceptualization, only chosen aspects of domains are projected onto the metaphorical target domain. In the ExCMT, the aspects that participate in the mappings are called frames (cf., e.g., Fillmore 1982). As clarified by Kövecses (2020: 57) (...) *The frames elaborate the specific aspects of domains*. The lowest level in the schematicity hierarchy, i.e., the level of mental spaces (cf. Fauconnier 2007) is most important in the discussion of metaphors in discourse. Kövecses (2020: 57) defines mental spaces as (...) *highly specific structures occurring in online processing in particular communicative situations*. (...) *[F]ully influenced by several different kinds of contextual information*⁶. Additionally, the author (2020: 69) suggests that the online use of metaphors at the level of mental spaces presupposes the activation of related frame, domain, and image schema metaphors. At this point, it has to be mentioned that the online processing in memes cannot be understood exactly in the same way as the online processing in, for instance, spontaneous speech, as the exchange of information between a meme creator and a meme recipient always extends over time. What is more, in the case of memes, the contextual information influencing the shape of mental spaces has to be understood as the current socio-political-cultural information that served as the incentive for the creation of a given meme, as well as all data, in whatever mode, included in the meme itself. Furthermore, depending on the background knowledge of the particular recipient, the depth of interpretation may differ from one person to another.

Apart from the ExCMT as outlined by Kövecses (2020), this study also adopts the distinction between mono- and multimodal metaphors proposed by Forceville (2006, 2009a), and refers to this author's proposal for the classification of visual and multimodal metaphors (Forceville, 2016). Furthermore, during the analysis we drew upon elements of the VISMIP procedure (Šorm and Steen's 2018) for visual metaphor identification, as well as Stöckl's proposal (2020b) for the analysis of multimodal coherence.

In order to collect memes for the analysis, we entered the Polish language phrase *memy inflacja* 'inflation memes' into the Google⁷ and Bing⁸ search engines, marking the image option for the results shown. In order to guarantee that the notion of inflation in the memes retrieved was communicated metaphorically, we took into account the following three criteria for metaphor identification (cf. Forceville 1996):

- a) A relation had to be made between the phenomena which belong to different categories;
- b) The two phenomena were presented as target (in our study INFLATION) and source, and they were presented only in the format B (= INFLATION) is A (= any source domain);
- c) At least one characteristic related to the source domain was matched with a characteristic related to the target domain.

As a result, we identified 120 memes, in which the concept of INFLATION was understood metaphorically. In the next step of corpus collection, we took a closer look at each meme, assessing which linguistic and visual elements were vital for the construction of the metaphorical pattern INFLATION IS A. This allowed us to identify different source domains. In nearly half of the memes, i.e. in 57 instances, the message was interpreted with the help of the INFLATION IS A PERSON conceptual metaphor. This set of memes formed the corpus for the analysis.

During the analysis proper, we first looked at each meme as if it included one mode only, that is we concentrated exclusively on either the visual or the verbal layer (cf. Forceville 2023). This stage allowed us to distinguish between monomodal and multimodal metaphors at the domain level with the source domain PERSON. Next, in the case of each meme, we identified metaphorically relevant verbal and/or visual elements, asking the following questions:

- Does the verbal layer cue the metaphorical source/target?
- Does the visual layer cue the metaphorical source/target?
- Which verbal feature(s) is/are to be mapped from source to target?
- Which visual feature(s) is/are to be mapped from source to target?

In general, when it comes to the verbal layer, we paid attention to the literal vs non-literal interpretation of linguistic expressions within the context available, referring to the comprehensive Polish-language dictionary *Wielki słownik języka polskiego*⁹ (WSJP). Regarding the image layer, we checked if there was no incongruity between particular elements of the depicted object(s) (cf. Šorm and Steen 2018: 56).

Additionally, in the case of multimodal metaphors, we tried to assess which mode anchors the metaphorical meaning, i.e., has the leading role in the creation of metaphor. Here we assigned metaphorical patterns referring to individual memes to one of the following options: a) L-I relay relationship – when both modes were equally important for the metaphorical message to arise; b) language anchorage, when the metaphoricity was predominantly cued by the verbal layer; c) image anchorage, when the metaphoricity was predominantly cued by the image layer. The word *predominantly* is crucial here, since, as observed by Hart (2017: 7) sometimes (...) *weak metaphorical framing in one modality is strengthened by a metaphorical framing in another accompanying modality*.

Keeping in mind that the domain level is considered the basic level of metaphorical conceptualization, and the pattern INFLATION IS A PERSON applies to the domain level, it is at this stage of the analysis that we identified metaphorical patterns at the level of the image schemas, frames and mental spaces. Identifying a metaphorical pattern at a given level, we looked at the relationship between verbal and visual elements in terms of their mutual elaboration, i.e., clarification or illustration, and enhancement of meaning, i.e., enrichment in details (cf. Stöckl 2020b: 51).

Finally, knowing that metaphor interpretation involves both decoding and inferring (cf. Forceville 2024a), we tried to decipher non-explicit meanings. We were especially concerned about the extratextual references (cf. Stöckl 2020b), with intertextuality understood as an allusion to prior texts, both linguistic and visual (cf. Hart 2017). In this respect, we often consulted our informants, i.e., our colleague linguists and teenage relatives, as well as we relied on picture detection tools.

3. Language and image in the personification of INFLATION

The aim of this section is to show the intricacies of the conceptualization of INFLATION in memes, in relation to different levels of metaphorical conceptualization, and most importantly, the role of written language and static image. The analysis is focused on the presentation of conceptual metaphors with the pattern INFLATION IS A PERSON, and hence the personifi-

cation of INFLATION. As observed by Lakoff and Turner (1989: 72) regarding poetic metaphor, (...) *personification permits us to use our knowledge about ourselves to maximal effect, to use insights about ourselves to help us comprehend (...) abstract concepts.*

Since in the framework of the ExCTM the conceptual metaphors are complexes of image schemas, domains, frames, and mental spaces (Kövecses, 2020: 90), the analysis starts with a comment on the role of image schemas linked with the domain-level metaphor INFLATION IS A PERSON. In the set of memes under analysis, two schemas are of importance, that is: MOVEMENT and SCALE. As regards the MOVEMENT schema, two related conceptual metaphors were identified: CHANGE IS MOTION, and MORE IS UP. Both are extremely general conceptual metaphors and are directly related to the definition of inflation in business and economy, where inflation is perceived as an increase in prices, with the increase equal to ‘change in the upward direction’. On the contrary, inflation can also be defined as a decrease in the value of money, with the decrease understood as ‘change in motion in the downward direction’. Nevertheless, in the memes analysed, the conceptualization was limited to the motions UP and FORWARD. The table in Fig. 1 below presents a compact description of L-I relations relevant for the conceptualization in terms of the MOVEMENT schema.

IMAGE SCHEMA	TEXT (The lexemes underlined indicate the movement upwards)	IMAGE (I)	COMMENT
MORE IS UP	<i>Gdy patrzysz jak twoja mała inflacyjka dorasta (...) ‘When looking at your little inflation growing <u>up</u> (...)’</i>	I does not evoke the conceptualization of the motion UP	Monomodal, verbal metaphor (Fig. 9)
	<i>Inflacja już nie skoczy ‘Inflation won’t <u>jump</u> (<u>up</u>)’</i>	Adam Małysz – a ski jumper getting ready for a jump	Multimodal metaphor; text anchorage (Fig. 12).
	<i>INFLACJA WEDŁUG: NBP, mediów, memów, na zakupach ‘INFLATION ACCORDING TO: NBP, media, memes, when shopping’.</i>	An adult is tossing a child into the air.	Multimodal metaphor; an L-I relay relationship (Fig. 2)
	<i>INFLACJA ‘inflation’ (on a construction worker climbing up) POLSKI RZĄD ‘Polish government’ (on the worker pushing the other one up)</i>	A construction worker is pushing his colleague up a building with a thick stick.	Multimodal metaphor; an L-I relay relationship

IMAGE SCHEMA	TEXT (The lexemes underlined indicate the movement upwards)	IMAGE (I)	COMMENT
CHANGE IS MOTION	<i>INFLATION</i> (written on the first runner)	Runners on a running track	Multimodal metaphor; an L-I relay relationship (Fig. 13)
	<i>INFLATION</i> (written on the pink character)	Two cartoon characters with one following the other	Multimodal metaphor; an L-I relay relationship (Fig. 18)
	<i>Tymczasem inflacja: Lubie zapiera*łać</i> ‘Meanwhile inflation: I like <u>running fast</u> ’.	A racing driver (recognizable as a racing driver due to his outfit, not a motorbike)	Multimodal metaphor; text anchorage
	<i>Ale ta inflacja zapieprza. Pamiętam jak były za darmo</i> ‘But the inflation is <u>running fast</u> . I can remember the times when they were for free.’	I does not evoke the conceptualization of the motion FORWARD.	Monomodal, verbal metaphor (3 more memes in the corpus followed the same pattern, that is, the text included a figuratively interpreted verb denoting in colloquial Polish, ‘fast motion forward’.)
	<i>INFLATION</i> (written on the character riding a motorbike)	A human-like character riding a motorbike scaring away other characters, who are fleeing away in panic.	Multimodal metaphor; an L-I relay relationship

Figure 1. MOVEMENT image schema

The SCALE schema was, in turn, relevant in the conceptualization of INFLATION as a human body or a part of human body, most frequently in terms of contrasts. Importantly, all metaphors linked to the SCALE schema are multimodal, with an L-I relay relationship. The contrasts between tall/big/muscular vs. small/thin human body, or body part, were cued by the visual layer, whereas the target concept INFLATION was an element of the written text, as shown in Fig. 3, Fig. 8.

The following, main section of our analysis is a presentation of conceptual metaphors with the domain-level pattern INFLATION IS A PERSON. The titles of particular subsections are labels for major frames identified in the conceptualization of inflation, which are: BODY, FAMILY, PROFESSION, and BEHAVIOUR.

3.1. Frame: (HUMAN) BODY

In the analysis, we have discovered that such body parts as belly, breasts, and face appear in the metaphorical conceptualization of inflation (9 memes in our corpus). In the case of belly and breasts, the map-



Figure 2. MORE IS UP schema

Figure 3. SCALE schema

ping obtains between the size of a body part and the rate of inflation. In the case of face, it is the aesthetic judgment or the fact that the face of a well-known politician is shown that underlies the personification of inflation.

The following metaphors linked with the frame BODY were identified:

INFLATION IS A BELLY
INFLATION IS A HUMAN FACE
INFLATION IS FEMALE BREASTS

Importantly, these three metaphors are multimodal, as body parts appear in the image layer of the meme, whereas the target concept INFLATION is evoked textually. When it comes to the question of mode anchorage, two variants were identified, that is, a L-I relay relationship and text anchorage. The relay relationship is claimed in cases where the caption *inflation* is placed on, or next to, the relevant body part (e.g., Fig. 6, Fig. 8). Text anchorage with the question: *Gapisz mi się na inflację?* '(You) looking at my inflation?' was identified in 5 memes (e.g., Fig. 4, Fig. 5, Fig. 7). The same question, being a meme template, was used with different images or different responses. The text is an intertextual reference to the TV series *Trailer Park Boys*, which in the original, English version is 'Looking at meh gut?', and in the Polish translation *Gapisz mi się na bebech?*, with *bebech* being an informal Polish word for *belly* (cf. WSJP). The images in Fig. 4 and Fig. 7 are scenes from this TV series. Generally, all images in memes linked with the frame BODY are photos of real people, with some of them being public figures. Depending on the recipient's familiarity with the person(s) in the photo, metaphors at the level of mental spaces arise. This is, for instance, the case in Fig. 4 and Fig. 5, where Mateusz Morawiecki, the Polish Prime Minister at the time, can be recognized. In the meme in Fig. 4,



Figure 4. INFLATION IS M. MORAWIECKI'S BIG BELLY

Figure 5. INFLATION IS M. MORAWIECKI'S FACE

Morawiecki's face is pasted onto a body with a large belly, which occupies the central section of the photo. Thus, on the basis of both the text and the picture, the metaphorical pattern INFLATION IS M. MORAWIECKI'S BIG BELLY arises.

Furthermore, one may note that in Fig. 4 only Morawiecki's head is pasted into the photo. This is important because the concept of HEAD often stands metonymically for the ABILITY TO THINK and for CONTROL (cf. Kopecka, 2009: 158). Consequently, the following metaphorical correspondence arises:

M. Morawiecki is responsible for his body mass → M. Morawiecki
is responsible for inflation

With this correspondence in mind, negative emotions towards the Prime Minister might be evoked. Analogically, relating to the meme in Fig. 5, the metaphorical pattern at the level of mental spaces takes the form INFLATION IS M. MORAWIECKI'S FACE. The same metaphorical pattern emerged from 2 more memes in our corpus, which relied on similar L and I elements.

In turn, in Fig. 6, the attention is first drawn to two faces/heads and one can observe the contrast between a beautiful, nice vs. an ugly, but also threatening face. Thus, the message seems to rely simultaneously on the following two metaphors: REAL INFLATION IS AN UGLY FACE, and OFFICIALLY REPORTED INFLATION IS A BEAUTIFUL FACE. Those who have adequate socio-cultural knowledge will recognise the two characters as Princess Leia from the film Star Wars, and the actor Danny Trejo, who, imitating Princess Leia's hairstyle, made a deliberate parody of her. With this knowledge, one may arrive at even more specific metaphors at the level

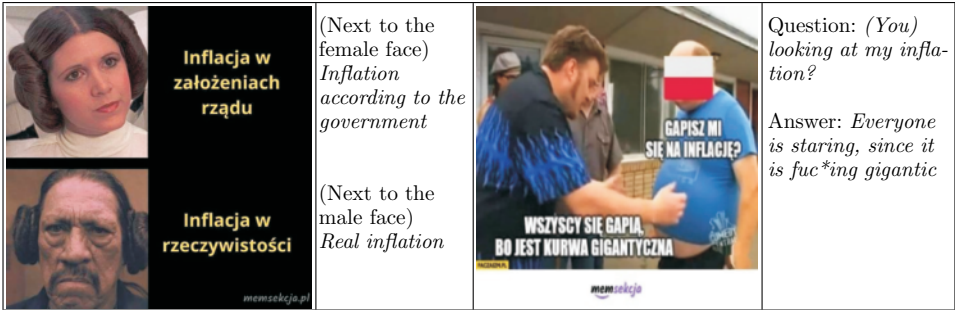


Figure 6. INFLATION IS A HUMAN FACE

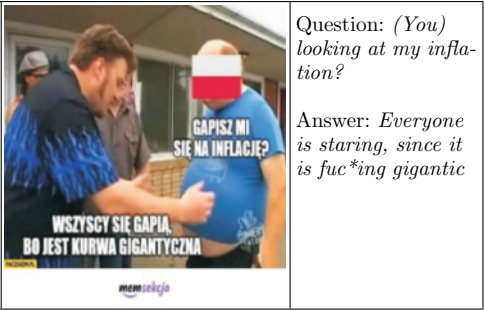


Figure 7. INFLATION IS M. MORAWIECKI'S FACE



Figure 8. INFLATION IS FEMALE BREASTS

of mental spaces, that is: OFFICIALLY REPORTED INFLATION IS PRINCESS LEIA'S FACE and REAL INFLATION IS DANNY TREJO'S PARODY OF P.L.'S FACE. The mappings relevant for the conceptualization of inflation can be formulated as follows:

Treho's face resembles Leia's face → governmental information about inflation resembles real information on inflation

Treho's face is a parody of Leia's face → governmental narration about inflation is a parody of real information (= it is not true)

Treho's face is threatening → real inflation is threatening

On the contrary, the people in the memes in Fig. 7 and in Fig. 8 are not recognizable public figures. However, the Polish flag placed on the man's face in Fig. 7 is a metonymic reference to Poland, and thus a more specific variant of the frame-level metaphor linked with this particular meme is: INFLATION IN POLAND IS A BIG BELLY. In connection with Fig. 8 the frame-level metaphors take the form REAL INFLATION IS BIG FEMALE BREASTS and OFFICIALLY REPORTED INFLATION IS SMALL FEMALE BREASTS.

3.2. Frame: FAMILY

The basic frame level metaphor linked with the frame FAMILY is INFLATION IS A CHILD. This conceptualization is present in 5 memes in our corpus. In four memes, a more specific variant in the form INFLATION IS A POLITICIAN'S/POLITICIANS' CHILD/DAUGHTER can be identified. When it comes to the distinction between mono- and multimodal metaphor, it appears that the pattern INFLATION IS A CHILD is realized as a verbal metaphor, while the pattern INFLATION IS A POLITICIAN'S/POLITICIANS' CHILD/DAUGHTER is multimodal, with the target concept INFLATION appearing in the textual layer, and the source concept PARENT evoked either by I alone, or L-I complex. In four memes, real photos of politicians are used; in one, a meme template with a mother-daughter conversation appears.

Starting with the memes with politicians, language has the metaphor anchoring effect, as none of the images, when interpreted on their own, evokes metaphorical connotations.



Figure 9. INFLATION IS GLAPIŃSKI'S CHILD (DAUGHTER)

Figure 10. INFLATION IS MORAWIECKI AND GLAPIŃSKI'S CHILD



Figure 11. INFLATION IS SEMENIUK AND PATKOWSKI'S CHILD

In more detail, the text in Fig. 9. informs us that someone, who is a father, is proud of his *inflacyjka* 'little inflation', who grows up and becomes a mature inflation. Clearly, growing up and maturing are subsequent

stages of human life, with maturity reached in Poland at the age of 18. At the end of 2022, inflation was close to 18 per cent, and at the beginning of the year 2023 it exceeded 18 per cent. Undoubtedly, this number played a significant role in the metaphorical mapping, not only in the meme in Fig. 9, but also in one more meme in our corpus, where the photo shows the same politician, and the concepts of PARENT and CHILD are implied with the text *When your inflation reaches adulthood*, placed at the top of the meme. Furthermore, since in Polish the noun *inflacja* ‘inflation’ is feminine, a speaker of Polish conceptualizes *inflacyjka* ‘little inflation’ in Fig. 9 as a GIRL. In sum, on the basis of the linguistic input alone, the following metaphorical correspondences, linked with the metaphor INFLATION IS A CHILD/DAUGHTER, can be drawn:

a child/daughter grows up/matures $\rightarrow$ inflation rises/reaches its peak

a man fathered his child/daughter → someone is responsible for
(= created) the inflation

father is proud of his daughter → someone responsible for the inflation
is proud of the results of his action(s)

The final correspondence, relying on irony, contributes to the humorous appeal of the meme. Providing one is able to recognize the politician in the photo as A. Glapiński, Governor of the Polish National Bank at the time, the metaphor at the level of mental spaces assumes the form: INFLATION IS A. GLAPIŃSKI'S DAUGHTER.

In the meme in Fig. 10, the metaphorical pattern INFLATION IS A CHILD is evoked on the basis of the text *Fathers of inflation*. The visual input enriches the conceptualization, as it becomes clear that the noun *fathers* relates to the two politicians, i.e., M. Morawiecki and A. Glapiński. Thus, when both L and I are considered, the metaphor at the level of mental spaces assumes the form INFLATION IS MORAWIECKI AND GLAPIŃSKI'S CHILD. This metaphorical conceptualization might seem unusual in the Polish society, where the adoption of children by homosexual couples is legally not permitted. However, with the text at the top of the meme, *Modern Youth*, being a name of a liberal youth association, the meme becomes humorous, especially when taking into account the age and the political orientation of the politicians. Additionally, due to the relationship of the text *Ojcowie inflacji* 'fathers of inflation' with the phrase *ojcowie sukcesu* 'fathers of success', the conceptualization of the two politicians as FATHERS OF INFLATION must be considered ironic.

In Fig. 11, the text clarifies that the people in the picture are politicians, as well as it informs the reader on their roles in politics. It also mentions

their engagement. In this context, the phrase *fruit of relationship* needs to be understood metaphorically as the ‘child’. This metaphorical meaning is in Polish lexicalised. Furthermore, it should be noted that in Polish the adjective *kosmiczny* ‘cosmic’ has two senses. Literally, it relates to the universe, space, and in figurative, fully lexicalized use, it functions as a synonym to ‘very great’. Consequently, it is a reference to both the woman’s function in the Polish Space (lit. Cosmic) Agency and to the extent of inflation. In turn, those who are able to recognize the two politicians will arrive at the metaphor at the level of mental spaces: INFLATION IS SEMENIUK AND PATKOWSKI’S CHILD.

Last but not least, in the mother and daughter conversation in a meme in our corpus the girl asks: *Mum, why am I called inflation?* Mother replies: *Because you are getting bigger every day, darling!*, which text serves as the metaphorical anchor. Also, analogically to the meme in Fig. 9, the mapping in the mother-daughter meme occurs between the process of growing up and the increasing rate of inflation.

3.3. Frame: PROFESSION

The 10 memes assigned to the frame PROFESSION are fairly diverse, in that the professions identified range from more prototypical ones, such as of a sportsperson or a politician, through peripheral, as, e.g., a thief, to occupations, or rather social roles, existing in the world of fairy tales and computer games. The related frame level metaphors are:

INFLATION IS A SPORTSPERSON

INFLATION IS A POLITICIAN

INFLATION IS A FEMALE SINGER

INFLATION IS A THIEF

INFLATION IS A SOLDIER/WARRIOR

INFLATION IS A QUEEN

All these metaphors are multimodal, and in all of them the target concept, i.e. INFLATION appears as an element of the textual message, whereas the source concepts are evoked, in most cases, exclusively with the image layer. When it comes to the images, the majority are meme templates with pictures from cartoons, films, and computer games graphics. Only three memes include photos of real people, and the message in all three of them is linked with the multimodal metaphor INFLATION IS A SPORTSPERSON, or more specifically, INFLATION IS A SKI JUMPER, INFLATION IS A RUNNER, and INFLATION IS A CAR RACER.

Two of the memes interpreted through the metaphor INFLATION IS A SPORTSPERSON, require special attention. In Fig. 12, language has the metaphor anchoring effect, as the photo of A. Małysz preparing for a jump, on its own, is not metaphorical. As for the linguistic input, the verb *skoczyć* ‘jump’ in the context *Inflation won’t probably jump high any more*, refers in its primary sense either to the human or animal movement, and in a lexicalized, figurative sense, it can also be collocated with changes in measured values, typically atmospheric pressure. For these two reasons, only weak text anchorage is claimed in connection with the metaphor INFLATION IS A PERSON. Importantly, the next part of the text *Also inflation:* directs the attention of the meme recipient to the photo, indicating that the ski jumper A. Małysz is about to jump. Thus, on the basis of L-I analysis, the metaphor at the level of mental spaces INFLATION IS ADAM MAŁYSZ can be discovered, and the following metaphorical correspondence can be formulated:

a ski jumper/A. Małysz is about to jump up → prices start increasing

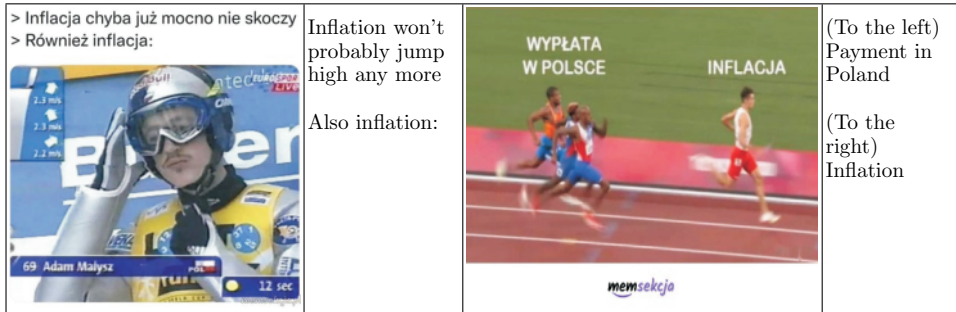


Figure 12. INFLATION IS A SKI JUMPER **Figure 13.** INFLATION IS A RUNNER

Regarding Fig. 13, an L-I relay relationship is claimed, as both the L and I need to be considered simultaneously to arrive at the metaphorical interpretation. Thus, noting that the first runner (= INFLATION) is dressed in white and red, which are the colours of the Polish flag, two more specific multimodal, verbo-pictorial metaphorical patterns are identifiable: INFLATION IN POLAND IS A FRONT-RUNNER and PAYMENT IN POLAND IS A BACK-RUNNER. The fact that a Polish runner is ahead of runners of colour, who are well known for excellent results in running competitions, serves as the basis for the mapping between an extremely fast run and a rapidly increasing inflation. The metaphor INFLATION IN POLAND IS A FRONT-RUNNER is motivated metonymically. For those familiar with the names of top Polish runners, this

metaphor might take an even more specific form, i.e., INFLATION IN POLAND IS MARCIN LEWANDOWSKI.

There are two more memes in our corpus in which the message is interpreted on the basis of the metaphor INFLATION IS A SPORTSPERSON. In one of them, the metaphorical message is evoked by the L-I combination; the text *Meanwhile inflation: I like running fast* mentions the target concept, whereas the image shows a racing driver. In the other meme, the same metaphorical pattern is realized purely verbally with the text: *Inflation beats another record*. In the image layer, the speaker, watching TV, addresses these words to his wife.

Another interesting meme in the set of memes assigned to the frame PROFESSION is presented in Fig. 14, where, in the visual layer, the head of the cartoon character Captain Planet is replaced with the head of J. Kaczyński, the president of the Polish right-wing political party. Thus, the analysis of the image alone gives rise to the pictorial metaphor of the hybrid type (cf. Forceville 2016) J. KACZYŃSKI IS A SUPERHERO. The verbal message, interpreted independently from the image, evokes the metaphorical pattern INFLATION IS CAPTAIN PLANET, as the text *by your powers combined, I am captain inflation!* is a slightly modified quote from the series *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*. When L and I are considered, the resulting metaphorical pattern at the level of mental spaces is INFLATION IS THE SUPERHERO J. KACZYŃSKI/POLITICIAN. The mapping occurs here between positive kids' characters and their powers, and problematic issues in Poland, expressed linguistically on the images of particular children. This metaphorical message requires an ironic interpretation. Importantly, taking into account both the perceptual image dominance and the placement of J. Kaczyński's head in the picture, image anchorage is claimed in the case of the multimodal metaphor INFLATION IS THE SUPERHERO J. KACZYŃSKI.

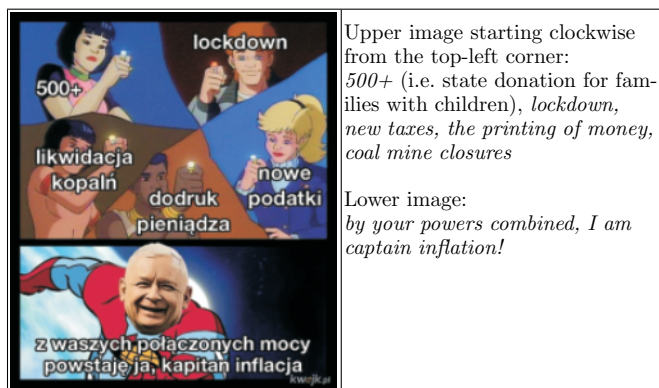


Figure 14. INFLATION IS CAPTAIN PLANET/SUPERHERO KACZYŃSKI

The metaphorical patterns INFLATION IS A THIEF, INFLATION IS A SOLDIER/WARRIOR, INFLATION IS A QUEEN, applying to individual memes, are all evoked by L-I complex. The target concept INFLATION appears as a caption on, or next to, a character in the meme, whose profession, or social role, is depicted in the picture. This is, for instance, the case with the memes in Fig. 15 and Fig. 16, where the intertextual reference to the film *Asterix and Obelix* (Fig. 15), and to an animated comedy film *How the Grinch stole Christmas* (Fig. 16) is made. Being familiar with the film *Asterix and Obelix*, one will know that in the next scene Obelix hits the Roman soldier in his jaw so that the soldier goes up in the air. Hence, the following mappings linked with the metaphorical conceptualization:

Obelix hits the soldier → government increases social benefits
 The soldier goes up in the air → inflation raises rapidly

The characters in the memes in Fig. 15 and Fig. 16 can be identified by their names, and thus metaphorical patterns at the level of mental spaces could be formulated. Nevertheless, it seems that in the metaphorical conceptualization of inflation, the frame-level interpretation is more adequate.



Figure 15. INFLATION IS A SOLDIER

Figure 16. INFLATION IS A THIEF

In turn, the metaphor INFLATION IS A FEMALE SINGER, as identified in the memes in our corpus, is evoked exclusively by the text: *Inflation? I don't know these foreign singers_{fem}*. This text is attributed to the character visible in the meme, that is, a popular Polish meme character known as *Janusz the proboscis monkey*, who in the meme, is looking at his smartphone. *Janusz*, being a male name, is in Polish often used in the sense of 'an uneducated adult man' (cf. WSJP). So, even though the metaphor is cued verbally, the image, alluding to the fact that those who lack proper education do not understand the mechanism of inflation, enriches the conceptualization.

3.4. Frame: (HUMAN) BEHAVIOUR

In the conceptualization of inflation linked with the frame BEHAVIOUR, the following metaphorical patterns were discovered:

INFLATION IS AN ATTACKER/ENEMY
INFLATION IS A PERSON EATING
INFLATION IS A PERSON WISHING YOU GOOD
INFLATION IS A PERSON ASKING FOR A FAVOUR
INFLATION IS A PERSON HIGH-FIVING YOU
INFLATION IS A HAPPY PERSON

The conceptualization of INFLATION as an ATTACKER is most frequent in our corpus, as it was identified in 10 memes. When the closely-related conceptualization of inflation as an ENEMY is considered, the number of memes rises to 16. The difference is that the concept of ENEMY is also directly linked with the WAR frame, whereas the concept of ATTACK may, but does not need to be, linked with this frame.

In detail, in the case of all memes whose interpretation is linked with the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ATTACKER, the target concept INFLATION is evoked linguistically, with the word *inflation* written on a particular character, whereas the source concept ATTACKER is cued by the visual layer. This means that an L-I relay relationship should be claimed. As regards the visual layer, nearly all memes, with two exceptions, depict cartoon, human-like characters, some of whom are well known as, for example, *The Simpsons*, and others are meme templates. In all cases, both the attacker (INFLATION) and the person attacked are visible in the meme. Importantly, in all memes in this group, it is the frame level metaphor INFLATION IS AN ATTACKER that seems most important. This is to say that even though in some memes, it is possible to identify the name of the attacker taking the role of inflation, the action performed by the given character is more important than the name of the character. This is, for instance, the case in Fig. 19, where the actor Will Smith slapped the comedian Chris Rock during an awards ceremony.

It seems quite natural that if inflation is conceptualized as an ATTACKER, it will also be conceptualized as the ENEMY, which conceptualization is directly linked with the frame WAR¹⁰. The frame-level metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENEMY is, in the memes in our corpus, realized exclusively by means of a monomodal, verbal metaphor. In all memes with this conceptualization, war-related linguistic expressions are used, whose metaphorical sense is lexicalized in Polish. Translated literally, these are such phrases as: *a long-term*



Figure 17. INFLATION IS AN ATTACKER (film)

Figure 18. INFLATION IS AN
ATTACKER (cartoon
story)



Figure 19. INFLATION IS AN ATTACKER (real photo)

strategy to combat inflation, get inflation under control, fight with inflation, inflation is in retreat. In the visual layer of all memes with INFLATION conceptualized as ENEMY either photos or cartoon images of the politicians M. Morawiecki or A. Glapiński appear. These two politicians are presented ironically as those who try to stop or fight with the enemy. Strangely enough, none of the images shows them fighting.

Finally, in individual memes, inflation is metaphorically presented as an ordinary person who acts as people do on a daily basis, as presented in brief in Fig. 20.

Two memes in this group require a more thorough presentation, as in both of them, depending on the depth of the analysis, either a monomodal or multimodal metaphorical patterns arise. In Fig. 21, the text analysed on its own is a realization of the pattern INFLATION IS A PERSON EATING. When both L and I are considered, the multimodal metaphor with text anchorage and the pattern INFLATION IS M. MORAWIECKI EATING arises. Additionally, the meme template with mummies pointing to something is used to communicate a major difference in opinion and criticism of one's actions.

METAPHORICAL PATTERN	TEXT (metaphorically interpreted words are underlined) ...	IMAGE	COMMENT
INFLATION IS A PERSON EATING	<i>Inflation</i> (written on a fluffy character) <i>My savings</i> (written on a child)	A picture taken at a family picnic. Some- one dressed as relatively big human-like, fluffy monster is pretending to be eating a child.	A multimodal metaphor with an L-I relay relationship
INFLATION IS A PERSON WISHING YOU GOOD	<i>Inflation</i> <u>wishes you a good</u> <u>shopping experience</u>	Three banknotes of 100 PLN (Polish currency) and three shopping trol- leys (full, half-empty, nearly-empty)	Monomodal, verbal metaphor
INFLATION IS A PERSON ASKING FOR A FAVOUR	<i>When you are having a good time but you remember that</i> <u><i>inflation had asked you to</i></u> <u><i>remove your feet* from the</i></u> <u><i>freezer and you forgot to</i></u> <u><i>do it.</i></u> * (feet – a literal translation of PL <i>stopy</i> , which is in Pol- ish homonymic and refers to a) ‘foot _{plural} ’ and b) ‘inter- est rates’)	a photo of A. Glapiński	Multimodal metaphor with text anchorage; (the image clarifies who the pronoun <i>you</i> refers to)
INFLATION IS A HAPPY PERSON	<u><i>Inflation</i></u> <u>when it finds out</u> <u>that, in response to inflation,</u> <u>the government offers the</u> <u>14th pension to the retired</u> <u>people.</u>	A scene from a film, showing a happy per- son, probably celebrat- ing a success.	Multimodal metaphor with text anchorage.

Figure 20. INFLATION IS A COMMON PERSON

In connection with the meme in Fig. 21, the mapping should be observed between FOOD (on the plate) and MONEY, and the following correspondence is at work:

food disappears when M. Morawiecki is eating → during inflation money loses its value (due to the actions of M. Morawiecki)

As regards the meme in Fig. 22, the text on its own needs to be interpreted with the metaphorical pattern INFLATION IS A PERSON HIGH-FIVING. Nevertheless, when the L-I complex is analysed, the metaphorical pattern will take the form INFLATION IS A DECEITFUL PERSON WHO, BY HIGH-FIVING YOU, LETS YOU SINK (= DIE), and thus also INFLATION IS AN ATTACKER.



Figure 21. INFLATION IS M. MORAWIECKI EATING



Figure 22. INFLATION IS A PERSON HIGH-FIVING

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this small-scale study contributes to the ongoing discussion of multimodality in discourse. The role of written language (L) and image (I) in the construction of conceptual metaphors with the pattern INFLATION IS A PERSON was studied on the basis of Internet memes.

The major issue that we tried to trace was the metaphor anchoring effect. It turns out that two variants prevailed, with a slight dominance of the first pattern. These are: a) memes in which L and I need to be interpreted simultaneously to arrive at the metaphorically motivated meaning (e.g., Fig. 3), and b) language has the metaphor anchoring effect (e.g., Fig. 10). Furthermore, we also observed that the language anchorage in metaphorical conceptualization can be perceived as a scalar notion (cf. Hart 2017: 7). Weak anchorage of language was claimed either when the primary meaning of verbal elements that cue metaphorical interpretation was very general, or if their metaphorical sense was fully lexicalized

(e.g., Fig. 12). Monomodal verbal metaphors were relatively rare. In the set of memes under study, we have identified only one meme in which the image has the metaphor anchoring effect (Fig. 14), indicating that it is a negligible type of metaphor anchoring effect in memes. In general, pictures, unless they contribute to the metaphorical interpretation to the same extent as language, are typically used to enrich the metaphorical interpretation in memes. In rare cases, the interpretation of the verbal layer alone leads to a different metaphorical pattern than the interpretation of both L and I (Fig. 22).

Another problem under analysis was the monomodal vs. multimodal nature of metaphors in memes, whose defining feature is the multimodal character. It turns out that mono- vs. multimodality of metaphors is linked with the level of metaphorical conceptualization in the schematicity hierarchy as proposed by Kövecses (2017, 2020). Namely, in the memes under study, at the domain and frame levels, both monomodal and multimodal metaphors are found; however, the metaphors at the level of mental spaces are predominantly multimodal. This is to say that it is usually at the level of mental spaces that the image contributes to the highly specific structure of metaphor. Put differently, the role of images tends to increase along with the increasing level of metaphor specificity, especially in memes where language has the metaphor anchoring effect. To give one example (Fig. 9), the frame-level metaphor INFLATION IS A CHILD (DAUGHTER) is monomodal in the sense that the source concept CHILD, as well as the target concept INFLATION are both encoded verbally. In turn, the lower-level variant, located at the level of mental spaces, i.e., INFLATION IS A. GLAPIŃSKI'S DAUGHTER is an example of a multimodal metaphor, as the source domain element GLAPIŃSKI'S DAUGHTER is motivated by two modes.

Finally, on the basis of the present study, a few comments about the emotional value of metaphors at different levels can be made. Most importantly, it is hesitantly suggested here that, as regards conceptual metaphors in memes, the emotional value is a scalar notion, and it tends to increase together with the increasing specificity of a given metaphor. To be more precise, the domain level metaphor INFLATION IS A PERSON seems emotionally neutral. The frame-level metaphors, that is, for example: INFLATION IS A (HUMAN) BODY PART, INFLATION IS A CHILD, INFLATION IS A SPORTS-PERSON, are, in our judgment, only mildly, if at all humorous. The strongest emotions are evoked at the level of mental spaces with such conceptual metaphors as, for example: INFLATION IS M. MORAWIECKI'S BIG BELLY, INFLATION IS A. GLAPIŃSKI'S DAUGHTER, INFLATION IS THE SUPERHERO KACZYŃSKI. Nevertheless, within the topic of inflation, which is an issue in politics, the relevance of the depth of metaphorical analysis is linked with the type of

image, and the interpretation at the level of mental spaces seems adequate only in memes with photos or cartoon images of politicians. In other cases, the frame level interpretation appears to be sufficient, as is, for instance, the case with the pattern INFLATION IS A THIEF (Fig. 16), where humour seems to be linked with the frame-level to the same extent as with the related metaphor at the level of mental spaces INFLATION IS GRINCH. Thus, this observation casts a new light on the claim made by Kövecses (2020: 21) who notes that it is at the level of mental spaces that speakers add the emotional value to metaphors. Our analysis also indicates that in memes humour is evoked either by means of images (e.g., Fig. 4), or it is connected with metaphorical mappings (e.g., Fig. 9). One could also conjecture that, in the case of memes, the strongest emotions are linked with multimodal metaphors whose shape is influenced by both L and I. Furthermore, in terms of emotions, it should be kept in mind that the depth of interpretation always depends on the familiarity with the current sociocultural background. Hence, with the topic of inflation, a meme with the face of a top politician is likely to evoke a wider range of emotions, also including negative ones, than a meme with cartoon characters or the face of the man in the street.

Definitely, the findings presented above can only be considered a signal of possible tendencies, which, no doubt, require verification on a larger set of memes linked with different topics. In any case, we hope that even such a micro-analysis may serve as a building brick for the construction of the multimodal metaphor theory.

NOTES

¹ Cf. Norris (2004) who speaks of *modal intensity* or *modal weight*.

² Additionally, Forceville (2016) mentions a fifth type of pictorial metaphor, i.e., integrated (product) metaphors, which, however, is linked only with three-dimensional products or buildings.

³ The term *meme* was introduced by Dawkins (1976), who created it in analogy to *gene*. For Dawkins, memes transmit cultural information, e.g., music, beliefs, fashion, from one person to another in the same way as genes transmit biological data.

⁴ See: *The dictionary of financial and business terms*; vdocuments.net/dictionary-of-financial-and-business-terms-5584a5d9f30f9.html

⁵ See: Business Insider, Issue: 3.Jan.2023; <https://businessinsider.com.pl/gospodarka/slowo-roku-2022-inflacja-wygrala-nawet-z-wojna/5wrnmjnc>

⁶ Musolff (2006) uses the terms *scenario* and *scene* in the description of metaphorical conceptualization at a highly specific, individual level.

⁷ www.google.pl/search?sca_esv=3e5381c58a31f6c2&sca_upv=1&q=memy+inflacja&udm=2&fbs=AEQNm0Dvr3xYvXRaGaB8liPABJYdGovAUMem85jmaNP43N9LWkpJzPExVfN1dM6Qi4rLZCUpN5qLHKOqAlKUxwZpsmlou8qLwHyBOcWJHi8Pqxo1R5Z

JsvG6djMMleofA8yVnAM2wUkqoFFvXDQ0imbpG98fgb7YeJotsYKgW-1_FTMLTu9d
 HPUJ5S9jCF2dn0eKsUfppt&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwihgPa434WIAxVhAxAIHYsQPScQ
 tKgLegQIFhAB&biw=1536&bih=710&dpr=1.25

⁸ www.bing.com/images/search?q=memy+inflacja&form=HDRSC4&first=1

⁹ <https://wsjp.pl/>

¹⁰ Semino (2008: 100) observes that in American-English the frame of WAR can be metaphorically applied to (...) *any any domain of experience that involves difficulties, danger, effort and uncertain outcomes*.

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