

***Kubooa*: Towards an Understanding of Hunger Sensations and Cognitions**

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ABSTRACT

In Knut Hamsun's Nobel Prize-winning novel, starkly titled *Hunger* (1900), the central character feels compelled to invent a whole new word – *kubooa* - to describe his experience of hunger. I ask in this talk why the resources of language are so strained when it comes to the description of qualia sensations in general and the feeling of hunger in particular. It is easy enough, for instance, for people to identify the color 'red' through a simple act of deixis; if asked to describe the same color in words, however, they almost always fall back on metaphor or metonymic exemplification. In its first part 'Language', my presentation focuses on the linguistic, and especially the metaphoric, correlates of the sensation of hunger in two languages (Hindi and English). The second part, 'Culture', considers the implications of hunger used as a political and moral tool on the Indian subcontinent (for example, in the Gandhian protest tool of 'hunger strikes'). It also examines the underlying socioeconomic reasons as to why the most recent Global Hunger Index (2021) places India at an abysmal 101 in a list of 116 countries, finding that endemic hunger is actually growing in India despite adequate food reserves. In the final section on 'Mind', I return to the question I raised initially about the difficulties of identifying, verbalizing and studying this most commonly embodied of sensations, deeply embedded in our evolutionary history and felt by the entire species from infancy on throughout a lifetime. I report experimental studies in which participants in Hindi and English qualitatively describe the feeling of hunger under different sets of conditions and propose the concept of 'epistemic hunger' as the cognitive counterpart of sensory hunger.