

# On the History of the Concepts 'salt' and 'salty' in Finno-Ugric Languages

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## Abstract

© 2018, Estonian Academy Publishers. All rights reserved. After reconsidering the existing Finno-Ugric etymologies for taste and smell terms (such as 'salty', 'sour', 'bitter', 'spoiled', 'rancid' etc.), two FU etyma for taste (and smell) of food are reconstructed: \*k Ęc3(r3/-k3) 'sour, salty, bitter' (in a positive sense), denoting, in its optimal sense, the sour-salty taste of fermented food, and in its maximum expression (mainly in derivatives) the taste of too sour or too salty (up to unpleasant) food (in modern Udmurt the meaning is 'salty'); and \*kačke 'spoiled, rancid, uneatable' with derivatives (suffix \*-m3) meaning 'smoke, burning' or 'mould'. Possibly, the two reconstructed roots could represent cases of Proto-Finno-Ugric palatal–velar alternation similar to the Hungarian *döböz* 'small box' ~ *doboz* 'box'. From the historical point of view it is important that these reconstructions demonstrate the absence of the use of salt in the dietary and food-preservation tradition among the speakers of Proto-Finno-Ugric, which relates to hunting and fishing being the base of their economy and accounts for the later borrowings of words for salt from different sources.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3176/lu.2018.3.01>

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## Keywords

Etymology, Finno-ugric Languages, Historical dietology, Taste and smell terminology, Udmurt language, 'salty', 'sour'

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