

# What 'need' lacks, that 'lack' needs

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## Introduction

This talk aims to give a semantics for the verb 'lack'. 'Lack' is traditionally taken to be a member of the intentional class of predicates associated with absence (Moltmann, 2008). This class is generally exemplified by the verb 'need'. However, 'lack' differs from 'need' in at least three major ways. These differences are the primary focus of the talk and an initial analysis attempting to tie them together will be presented.

## Differences

### Universal reading

Usually an indefinite noun phrase is translated with an existential quantifier. Intensional verbs, however, are different in that they have a non-specific reading; this is exemplified in 1) where no specific cleaner is required, but merely a member of the kind 'cleaner'.

1) John's apartment needs a cleaner.

There are a number of tests for intentional predicates: failure of existential quantification, use of special quantifiers, identity conditions, and no support anaphora (Moltmann, 2008). 'Lack' passes these tests.

'Lack', in addition to the non-specific reading also appears to have a universal reading. That is 2) appears to also have the reading in 3).

2) John's apartment lacks a picture. (\*it has two already)

3)  $\forall x(\text{picture}(x) \rightarrow \text{lack}(x, j))$

This reading is preserved for the bare plural, but lost when a strictly count complement is used.

4) John's apartment lacks pictures. (\*it has two already)

5) John's apartment lacks three pictures. (it has two already)

### Gradability

In addition to a universal reading, 'lack' is also a gradable property. When combined with an indefinite noun phrase it appears to be on an upper closed scale, as indicated by the grammaticality of 'entirely' and the oddity of 'slightly' in 6).

6) John's apartment lacks a picture entirely/?slightly.

With a bare plural however, 'lack' appears to be on a totally closed scale, demonstrated by the grammaticality of 'entirely' and 'slightly' in 7).

7) John's apartment lacks pictures entirely/slightly.

'Need', on the other hand, never has an upper limit and appears to have a lower limit in both cases as shown by 8) and 9).

8) John's apartment needs a picture \*entirely/slightly.

9) John's apartment needs pictures \*entirely/slightly.

When a strictly count complement is used both 'need' and 'lack' appear to lose any form of gradability.

10) John's apartment lacks three pictures \*entirely/\*slightly

11) John's apartment needs three pictures \*entirely/\*slightly

#### Comparability

Both 'need' and 'lack' allow for comparisons of the number of objects needed or lacking, 12).

12) John's apartment needs/lacks more pictures than Mary's does.

'Lack', however, does not allow for comparisons with the number of objects actually possessed, while 'need' does. This is demonstrated in 13).

13) John's apartment needs/\*lacks more pictures than it has.

#### Analysis

An initial analysis will be presented, which draws upon the apparent mass/count distinction in the complement of 'lack' to account for the universal reading and its gradable properties. A comparison, between the number of objects needed to fulfill the requirement and the number of objects currently possessed, will be built into the meaning of 'lack'; explaining why a comparison with the number of objects currently possessed cannot be made.

#### References

Moltmann, F. (2008). Intensional verbs and their intentional objects. *Natural Language Semantics*, 16(3), 239-270.