

# Loose Talk and the Pragmatics of Anti-Realism

Although anti-realists in any domain tend to appeal to the notion of loose talk, their appeals are typically made with a cheerful disregard for the actual linguistics of the phenomenon. I'll show how to do better: the theories of loose talk advocated by Križ 2015 and Hoek 2018 naturally extend beyond paradigm cases of loose talk to cases of ontologically loose talk.

Loose talk comes up in response to the following kind of flatfooted objection to anti-realist positions. If, say, fictional characters like Sherlock Holmes do not exist, then how can it be that I am right now wearing the kind of hat that Holmes always wears? If numbers do not exist, then how come the number of cards in a regular deck is 52? And if microscopic particles do not really exist, then how can water be made out of H<sub>2</sub>O? Well, the anti-realist retorts, if those claims appear true it is because they are *loosely* true, or true *as a manner of speaking* — they are not literally true. The Križ-Hoek theory of loose talk can substantiate such replies, providing a pragmatic mechanism that can explain both why “Portugal has ten million inhabitants” has an approximate reading *Portugal has around ten million inhabitants*, and also why “I am wearing the same hat as Holmes” has an ontologically neutralised reading *I am wearing a deerstalker*. Interestingly, this approach vindicates certain kinds of antirealism but not others, thus providing a powerful illustration of the way in which insights from pragmatics can have metaphysical ramifications.

- Hoek, Daniel, 2018, “Conversational Exculpature.” *The Philosophical Review* 127(2): 151-196.
- Križ, Manuel, 2015, *Aspects of Homogeneity in the Semantics of Natural Language*. PhD thesis, University of Vienna.