Metaphor, Relevance and the Interpretation of Fiction
(Abstract)

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“It appears, at least to me, that the approach most likely to enhance the relevance
of fictional utterances might be to consider them interpretations of the thoughts
of the speaker in much the same way as metaphor, and that this is the most
productive way of approaching fiction.” (Reboul, 1987: 729)

In a number of works that raise intriguing questions about the interpretation of
fiction, Anne Reboul (1986, 1987) asked “why people are prepared to spend time
reading or listening to fiction, even though they know it is false”. The answer she
proposed is that fictional utterances might achieve relevance in similar ways to
metaphorical utterances, and be worth reading or listening to for similar reasons.
However, the approach to metaphor that Reboul had in mind – first put forward by
Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1986/1995) – has evolved considerably in recent
years (see e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 2008). In this paper, I will reflect on Reboul’s
proposal, considering what light (if any) this new approach to metaphor sheds on the
relevance of fiction, and how Reboul’s original insights into what makes fiction worth
attending to can be preserved.
References


