

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

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