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Article

Semantic and Pragmatic Features of New Sincerity in 21st Century Young Adult Literature and Their Translation

Nosirova Dilnoza Rizokulovna
Associate Professor of the Department of Foreign Languages and Social Sciences, Asia International University

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Abstract: This study explores the semantic and pragmatic features of New Sincerity in contemporary young adult literature and examines how these features are reproduced in Russian and Uzbek translations. In twenty-first-century YA fiction, emotional authenticity, intimacy, and ethical engagement replace postmodern irony, creating specific linguistic patterns expressed through metaphor, focalization, humor, and conversational discourse. These elements present challenges for translation, as sincerity depends not only on lexical meaning but also on pragmatic effects and cultural context. Using a qualitative interdisciplinary approach that combines literary analysis, pragmatics, and translation studies, the research focuses on John Green's The Fault in Our Stars and its translations. The findings show that effective translation requires adaptive strategies that preserve emotional tone, pragmatic functions, and reader empathy rather than literal equivalence. The study contributes to translation theory by demonstrating how semantic and pragmatic mechanisms of modern literature can be successfully negotiated across languages.

Keywords: New Sincerity, Young Adult Literature, Literary Translation, Semantic Analysis, Pragmatic Analysis, Translation Strategie, Metaphor, Discourse, Emotional Authenticity, John Green

1. Introduction

The early decades of the twenty-first century saw a major reconfiguration of American literary sensibility. Genres that were long considered marginal have risen to the cultural foreground, with Young Adult (YA) literature emerging as an especially prominent location of literary production (Procházková, 2022; Cart, 2016). This transition is part of a larger cultural shift away from the sarcastic detachment that defined late postmodernism and toward a renewed emphasis on authenticity, affect, and ethical engagement. Scholars have highlighted that postmodern irony, which was once an effective critical approach, had begun to induce emotional distancing and moral paralysis by the end of the twentieth century. In reaction, critics and writers began to define the boundaries of a post-postmodern aesthetic known as New Sincerity, which prioritizes emotional risk and authentic communication over detachment and parody (Kelly, 2010; Kayavo, 2025). Although the theoretical beginnings of New Sincerity are often found in adult literary fiction, recent research reveals that young adult literature has become its most creative and culturally relevant incarnation (Zelichenok, 2014; Waltcher, 2021). This paper contends that YA literature serves as the major cultural laboratory in which contemporary American culture negotiates the move from postmodern irony to genuine involvement.

2. Methods

This study uses a qualitative interdisciplinary method that combines literary theory, narratology, cultural studies, and pragmatic analysis to investigate Young Adult fiction as both a textual and cultural phenomena. This approach is especially relevant for YA studies, as the genre intersects aesthetics, ideology, readership habits, and media ecosystems. Recent research has shown that multi-layered qualitative frameworks are particularly efficient for studying genre growth, reader engagement, and the social functions of young adult literature in the twenty-first century (Lawton & Cain, 2022; Kuklová, 2022).

At the theoretical level, the study is based on postmodern and post-postmodern literary criticism, namely disputes about the demise of postmodern irony and the rise of New Sincerity as a predominant cultural paradigm. This viewpoint enables the analysis to place YA literature into broader aesthetic developments rather than regarding it as an isolated or solely commercial genre (Kelly, 2010; Kayavo, 2025). YA fiction is thus investigated not only as a story genre, but also as a cultural response to digitalization, social fragmentation, and shifting affective standards.

The narratological component of the research is based mostly on Gérard Genette's idea of focalization (Genette, 1980), which offers a framework for investigating how narrative perspective influences readers' access to character awareness, emotional experience, and ethical standing. First-person narration, unreliable focalizers, and gendered focalization are highlighted because they are critical to John Green's examination of misimagining, identity development, and emotional authenticity. Narratology is employed in this context not only as a formalist technique, but also to connect story structure to ideological and ethical consequences.

Furthermore, the paper analyzes The Fault in Our Stars' semantic architecture using conceptual metaphor theory created by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Central metaphors like "the little infinity," disease as containment or flooding, and love as finite but significant space are investigated as cognitive frameworks that influence readers' perceptions of death, intimacy, and value. Metaphor analysis allows for the identification of reoccurring semantic areas that structure the novel's philosophical viewpoint and emotional resonance.

The pragmatic feature of the methodology is concerned with language use in context, namely the communication roles of humor, irony, neologisms, and epistolary discourse. Drawing on Leech's (1983) pragmatic principles model, the study investigates how characters' speech acts serve as emotional control, resistance to pity, and identity negotiation techniques. Dark humor and sarcastic understatement are highlighted as coping methods that correspond with New Sincerity's ideal of balancing emotional openness and self-awareness.

The primary focus of the analysis is John Green's The Fault in Our Stars (2012), which was chosen for its cultural effect, critical response, and paradigmatic standing in contemporary young adult literature. A detailed reading of this novel is aided by comparisons to Green's earlier works, Looking for Alaska and Paper Towns, which allow for a diachronic examination of thematic growth, narrative methods, and focal shifts. This comparative dimension situates The Fault in Our Stars within Green's larger output and the emergence of YA sincerity as a literary style.

Finally, the methodological approach is informed by reader-centered and cultural perspectives, recognizing that young adult fiction is created and consumed in highly interactive digital contexts. While this study does not perform empirical reader-response research, it does use current literature on fan groups, BookTube culture, and participatory readership to assess the broader cultural implications of the texts under consideration (Van Leeuwen, 2021; Lawton & Cain, 2022).

When combined, these interdisciplinary approaches enable a thorough analysis of YA literature as a semantic, pragmatic, and cultural system, allowing the study to link in-

depth textual analysis with more general theoretical discussions about sincerity, post-postmodernism, and the changing role of literature in modern society.

3. Results

Irony, metafiction, and self-referential play were no longer viable forms of cultural critique, and by the late twentieth century, postmodern literary techniques had hit what many critics refer to as an artistic impasse (Hutcheon, 1988; McHale, 2004). Although postmodernism first arose as a response to modernist grand narratives and ideological certainties, its distinctive methods eventually got accepted and integrated into popular culture. As a result, tactics that were originally meant to undermine authority and question prevailing epistemologies began to function more and more as decorative conventions with no transformational power.

This final phase of postmodernism, according to Linda Hutcheon, is a form of "complicitous critique," in which texts both reveal and replicate the systems they aim to subvert (Hutcheon, 1988). Similar to this, Brian McHale contends that by the end of the century, postmodern fiction had mostly moved from epistemological inquiry to ontological repetition, recycling well-known ironic gestures without producing novel aesthetic or moral possibilities (McHale, 2004). Irony lost its ability to function as a key tool in this setting and instead solidified into a default cultural stance that valued emotional detachment, skepticism, and distance.

An important contribution to this discussion is David Foster Wallace's seminal article E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction (1993). According to Wallace, irony was the most common rhetorical device in late 20th-century American society, greatly influenced by mass media and television. Wallace contends that irony is ultimately emotionally crippling even if he acknowledges its usefulness in exposing hypocrisy and undermining false authority. He contends that irony is structurally incapable of providing affirmative values or upholding belief; it eliminates meaning without offering substitutes. Because of this, both authors and readers have affective paralysis and are unable to express genuine commitments without worrying about being ridiculed or naïveté (Wallace, 1993).

Importantly, Wallace does not support a return to sentimentality or naïve realism. Rather, he advocates for a new literary stance that, in spite of irony's cultural dominance, is prepared to take a chance on emotional transparency, vulnerability, and ethical seriousness. This appeal serves as the conceptual cornerstone of what later critics would refer to as New Sincerity, a sensibility characterized by the deliberate reconfiguration of postmodernism rather than its rejection.

According to later research, New Sincerity is a corrective aesthetic movement that aims to preserve postmodern formal awareness while restoring emotional seriousness, interpersonal accountability, and ethical engagement (Kelly, 2010; Kayavo, 2025). Instead of eliminating irony, New Sincerity places it in a secondary position so that it can coexist with sincere speech within a "both/and" framework. This method affirms the potential for meaning, empathy, and true connection while also acknowledging the manufactured character of narratives and identities. Crucially, critics stress that New Sincerity should be viewed as a wider societal reaction to media saturation, late-capitalist alienation, and the decline of faith in institutional authority rather than as a single literary school (Kelly, 2010).

The rapid growth of digital media in the early 21st century had a significant impact on the change toward sincerity-oriented narratives rather than happening in a vacuum. Reading habits, attention patterns, and narrative expectations were all drastically changed by the growth of the internet, social media, and mobile technology. According to N. Katherine Hayles (2007), there is a cultural shift from "deep attention," which is defined by prolonged concentration on difficult texts, to "hyper attention," which is characterized by quick switching between information streams and a desire for emotional stimulation and immediacy.

The complex self-referential structures of late postmodern fiction increasingly seemed unapproachable or unimportant to a new generation of readers in this altered cognitive and cultural milieu. Young Adult fiction, on the other hand, closely matched the affective and cognitive patterns influenced by digital culture because of its focus on first-person narration, psychological interiority, and emotionally transparent storytelling (Cetkovski, 2017). YA tales are especially well-suited to the communication rules of online connection because they emphasize character-driven stories, direct emotional appeal, and subjective experience.

Furthermore, the relationship between authors and readers was drastically altered by digital media. Readers were able to interact with authors and with each other at previously unheard-of levels thanks to social media, blogs, and video-sharing services. Online YA literature fan groups serve as participatory interpretive venues where emotional authenticity is both demanded and collectively supported, as Van Leeuwen (2021) points out. In this situation, sincerity becomes a social expectation rather than just an aesthetic choice.

These developments were further intensified by changes in the publishing industry's economy. Genres with high marketability, franchise potential, and cross-platform adaptability were given priority as publishing houses merged into massive media conglomerates (Plum, 2023). Within this approach, YA fiction emerged as a particularly appealing investment due to its committed following and great potential for cinema and streaming adaptations. Because of this, YA literature benefited disproportionately from increased institutional support, marketing resources, and cross-media awareness.

Thus, the emergence of YA literature as a dominating cultural form was made possible by the intersection of digital culture, cognitive transformations, and publishing economics. YA literature emerged as the main literary arena where the principles of New Sincerity could be most fully realized and extensively shared, thanks to the support of extremely active online communities and plots that prioritize emotional immediacy and ethical seriousness.

4. Discussion

The Fault in Our Stars reframes finitude as existentially significant rather than intrinsically tragic through central metaphors, most notably the idea of the "little infinity." According to Touhami (2015) and Khan et al. (2022), the metaphor closely corresponds with existentialist ideas of value created through limitation, choice, and relational depth by viewing restricted time as a form of infinity trapped behind boundaries. The metaphor suggests that importance arises from lived connection rather than duration by reorienting attention toward intensity, intimacy, and presence rather than portraying death as the ultimate denial of meaning.

Crucially, sentimental excess is resisted by this metaphorical framework. Hazel purposefully avoids using extravagant or histrionic language while describing the "little infinity." Zelichenok (2014) points out that Green's metaphorical economy avoids rhetorical inflation in order to preserve emotional clarity. The metaphor emphasizes the importance of shared experience while acknowledging loss rather than promising transcendence beyond death. The novel's connection with the New Sincerity ethos, which values authenticity above catharsis, is largely dependent on striking a balance between emotional openness and mental discipline.

Recurring images of water serve as a symbolic register of vulnerability, instability, and loss of control, creating a supplementary semantic field. Hazel often uses analogies related to her lungs and respiratory apparatus to explain her disease, such as drowning, flooding, or containment. These pictures portray both the psychological sensation of being overpowered by forces outside of one's control as well as physical fragility (Zelichenok, 2014). Here, water, which has historically been connected to rebirth or purification, is reframed as an unstable medium that can support life while always posing a threat to it.

By reflecting the ambivalence of lived disease, such imagery supports the novel's rejection of simple symbols and adds to its perceived emotional authenticity.

Green's vocabulary strategically employs dark humor and neologisms, particularly phrases like "cancer perks," to further underscore this authenticity at the pragmatic level. According to Galimova and Mukhtarova (2019), these linguistic innovations serve as communicative coping methods that enable characters to reclaim agency over situations that are usually framed through medical authority or societal pity. The characters retake discursive control by renaming parts of their situation in lighthearted or humorous terms, turning passive suffering into active meaning-making.

Most importantly, this humor does not minimize suffering. Rather, it serves as a practical boundary-setting tool, indicating opposition to outside narratives that turn the characters into sympathetic objects. Humor becomes a way to preserve dignity and relationship equality, as Green (2012) shows throughout the book, especially when interacting with healthy people whose reactions are frequently filled with discomfort or misguided compassion. In this sense, pragmatic comedy techniques closely correspond with the more general ideas of New Sincerity: irony is employed to safeguard sincerity from appropriation or distortion rather than to avoid feeling.

When combined, the novel's pragmatic linguistic techniques and metaphorical accuracy provide a discourse that is sincere without naïveté, sardonic without cynicism, and emotionally accessible but resistant to sentimentality. The Fault in Our Stars is a prime illustration of how modern YA literature operationalizes New Sincerity at both semantic and pragmatic levels, and this complex balance explains much of its cultural relevance.

5. Conclusion

Young Adult literature has become a defining force in American society in the twenty-first century, assimilating New Sincerity's philosophical imperatives and transforming them into stories that are both morally and emotionally compelling (Waltcher, 2021; Lawton & Cain, 2022). YA fiction is no longer limited to a transitory or merely commercial role; instead, it has emerged as a key area where modern readers confront and discuss issues of identity, vulnerability, mortality, and social responsibility. A larger societal shift away from sarcastic detachment and toward forms of expression that value authenticity and emotional risk is reflected in its emphasis on emotive openness, relational depth, and moral seriousness.

The Fault in Our Stars by John Green is a very clear example of this change. In a genre that was previously thought to be minor, the book shows how sincerity may coexist with sophisticated storytelling, intellectual contemplation, and broad cultural influence. The text articulates a paradigm of YA writing that is both academically challenging and accessible to a wide readership through its precise metaphorical language, practical use of humor, and rejection of emotional excess. By doing this, it validates YA fiction's ability to actively influence a generation of readers' ethical and emotional perspectives in addition to reflecting current cultural changes.

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