

**A STUDY OF HOW “NEW SINCERITY” IS ENCODED SEMANTICALLY AND
PRAGMATICALLY IN CONTEMPORARY YA FICTION AND HOW IT IS
REPRODUCED IN TRANSLATION.**

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Abstract

This study examines the semantic and pragmatic features of New Sincerity in contemporary young adult literature and explores how these features are conveyed in Russian and Uzbek translations. In twenty-first-century YA fiction, emotional authenticity, intimacy, and ethical reflection often replace postmodern irony, shaping distinctive linguistic patterns expressed through metaphor, narrative perspective, humor, and conversational dialogue. These elements pose particular challenges for translators, since sincerity is conveyed not only through lexical meaning but also through pragmatic effects and cultural context. The research adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach that combines literary analysis, pragmatics, and translation studies. The analysis focuses on John Green’s “The Fault in Our Stars” and its Russian and Uzbek translations. The findings suggest that successful translation depends on flexible strategies that preserve emotional tone, pragmatic meaning, and the sense of empathy experienced by readers, rather than relying solely on literal equivalence. The study highlights how the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of modern literature can be effectively conveyed across languages and cultures.

Keywords

New Sincerity; young adult literature; semantic features; pragmatic features; translation studies; emotional authenticity; conversational discourse; metaphor; focalization; John Green; The Fault in Our Stars; Russian translation; Uzbek translation.

Introduction

The first decades of the twenty-first century have brought significant changes to the landscape of American literature. Genres that were once considered secondary have moved to the center of cultural attention, and Young Adult (YA) literature has become one of the most visible and influential areas of literary production (Procházková, 2022; Cart, 2016). This development reflects a broader cultural shift away from the ironic detachment that characterized late postmodernism and toward a stronger focus on authenticity, emotional expression, and ethical reflection. By the end of the twentieth century, many scholars argued that postmodern irony—once seen as a powerful critical strategy—had begun to create emotional distance and even moral passivity. As a response to this situation, critics and writers started to outline a new aesthetic orientation known as New Sincerity, which values emotional openness and genuine communication instead of detachment and parody (Kelly, 2010; Kayavo, 2025). While the theoretical roots of New Sincerity are often associated with adult literary fiction, recent studies suggest that its most dynamic and culturally meaningful expression can be found in young adult literature (Zelichenok, 2014; Waltcher, 2021). In this sense, YA literature can be seen as an important cultural space where contemporary American society explores the transition from postmodern irony to sincere emotional engagement.

Methods



This study adopts a qualitative interdisciplinary approach that combines literary theory, narratology, cultural studies, and pragmatic analysis in order to examine Young Adult (YA) fiction as both a literary text and a cultural phenomenon. Such an approach is particularly suitable for YA studies, since the genre exists at the intersection of aesthetic practices, ideological frameworks, readership behavior, and contemporary media environments. Recent scholarship suggests that complex qualitative frameworks are especially effective for analyzing the development of the genre, patterns of reader engagement, and the broader social role of young adult literature in the twenty-first century (Lawton & Cain, 2022; Kuklová, 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, the research is grounded in postmodern and post-postmodern literary criticism, particularly debates concerning the decline of postmodern irony and the emergence of New Sincerity as a dominant cultural orientation. This perspective allows YA literature to be interpreted within wider aesthetic and cultural transformations rather than being viewed merely as a commercial or isolated literary category (Kelly, 2010; Kayavo, 2025). In this sense, YA fiction is examined not only as narrative storytelling but also as a cultural response to processes such as digitalization, social fragmentation, and changing emotional norms.

The narratological dimension of the study draws primarily on Gérard Genette's concept of focalization (Genette, 1980), which provides a framework for analyzing how narrative perspective shapes readers' access to characters' thoughts, emotions, and moral viewpoints. Particular attention is given to first-person narration, unreliable focalizers, and gendered focalization, as these techniques play an important role in John Green's exploration of misinterpretation, identity formation, and emotional sincerity. In this study, narratology functions not only as a formal analytical tool but also as a way to connect narrative structure with broader ideological and ethical meanings.

The semantic dimension of the analysis is informed by conceptual metaphor theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The study examines key metaphors in *The Fault in Our Stars*, such as "the little infinity," illness conceptualized as containment or overwhelming force, and love portrayed as a limited yet meaningful space. These metaphors are interpreted as cognitive structures that shape readers' understanding of themes such as mortality, intimacy, and personal value. Through metaphor analysis, the research identifies recurring semantic fields that contribute to the novel's philosophical outlook and emotional impact.

The pragmatic aspect of the methodology focuses on language use in context, particularly the communicative roles of humor, irony, neologisms, and epistolary forms of discourse. Drawing on Leech's (1983) model of pragmatic principles, the study analyzes how characters' speech acts function as strategies of emotional regulation, resistance to pity, and identity negotiation. Special attention is paid to dark humor and ironic understatement, which often serve as coping mechanisms and reflect the balance between emotional openness and self-awareness that characterizes the ethos of New Sincerity.

The primary object of analysis is John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012), selected for its significant cultural influence, strong critical reception, and representative position within contemporary young adult literature. A close reading of this novel is complemented by references to Green's earlier works, *Looking for Alaska* and *Paper Towns*, which allow for a diachronic perspective on the development of thematic concerns, narrative techniques, and shifts in focalization. This comparative element helps situate *The Fault in Our Stars* within both Green's broader literary career and the wider evolution of sincerity within YA literature.

Finally, the methodological framework also incorporates reader-oriented and cultural perspectives, acknowledging that young adult fiction is produced and consumed within highly interactive digital environments. Although the present study does not include empirical reader-response research, it engages with existing scholarship on fan communities, BookTube culture,



and participatory reading practices in order to consider the broader cultural significance of the texts analyzed (Van Leeuwen, 2021; Lawton & Cain, 2022).

Taken together, these interdisciplinary approaches make it possible to examine YA literature as a complex semantic, pragmatic, and cultural system. This methodology allows the study to connect detailed textual interpretation with wider theoretical discussions about sincerity, post-postmodern aesthetics, and the evolving role of literature in contemporary society.

Results

By the end of the twentieth century, literary scholars increasingly argued that postmodern techniques such as irony, metafiction, and self-referential play had reached their limits as tools of cultural criticism (Hutcheon, 1988; McHale, 2004). While postmodernism originally emerged as a challenge to modernist grand narratives and ideological certainty, its stylistic strategies gradually became normalized within popular culture. As a result, devices that once aimed to question authority and destabilize dominant systems of knowledge began to function more as stylistic conventions than as transformative critical practices.

Linda Hutcheon describes this late stage of postmodernism as a form of “complicitous critique,” where literary texts simultaneously expose and reproduce the structures they attempt to challenge (Hutcheon, 1988). Similarly, Brian McHale suggests that by the end of the century postmodern fiction had shifted from exploring epistemological questions toward repeating familiar ontological patterns, often recycling ironic gestures without generating new aesthetic or ethical insights (McHale, 2004). In this context, irony gradually lost its critical force and became a dominant cultural attitude characterized by detachment, skepticism, and emotional distance.

An important intervention in this debate came from David Foster Wallace in his influential essay *E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction* (1993). Wallace argued that irony had become the prevailing rhetorical mode in late twentieth-century American culture, largely shaped by the influence of television and mass media. Although he acknowledged irony’s effectiveness in exposing hypocrisy and challenging authority, Wallace also warned that it ultimately undermines emotional commitment. According to him, irony can dismantle meaning but cannot replace it with new values. This situation, he suggested, produces a kind of emotional paralysis in which both writers and readers struggle to express genuine beliefs without fear of appearing naïve or sentimental (Wallace, 1993).

Importantly, Wallace did not call for a return to sentimental or naïvely realistic literature. Instead, he proposed a new literary orientation that would risk emotional openness, vulnerability, and ethical seriousness despite the dominance of irony in contemporary culture. This idea later became a foundational concept for what critics describe as *New Sincerity*, an aesthetic tendency that reconfigures rather than rejects postmodern strategies.

Subsequent scholarship has interpreted *New Sincerity* as a corrective cultural movement that retains the formal awareness of postmodernism while reintroducing emotional depth, interpersonal responsibility, and ethical engagement (Kelly, 2010; Kayavo, 2025). Rather than eliminating irony completely, *New Sincerity* places it in a secondary role, allowing sincere expression and ironic awareness to coexist within a “both-and” framework. This perspective acknowledges the constructed nature of narratives and identities while still affirming the possibility of meaning, empathy, and authentic connection. Scholars emphasize that *New Sincerity* should be understood not simply as a literary trend but as a broader cultural response to media saturation, late-capitalist alienation, and declining trust in institutional authority (Kelly, 2010).

The rise of sincerity-oriented storytelling in the early twenty-first century was also closely connected to the rapid expansion of digital media. The development of the internet, social networks, and mobile technologies significantly reshaped reading habits, patterns of attention,



and expectations of narrative engagement. N. Katherine Hayles (2007) describes this transformation as a shift from “deep attention,” characterized by sustained concentration on complex texts, to “hyper attention,” marked by rapid switching between information sources and a preference for immediacy and emotional stimulation.

Within this changing cognitive and cultural environment, the complex and highly self-referential structures typical of late postmodern fiction often appeared inaccessible or irrelevant to younger audiences. In contrast, Young Adult (YA) literature with its emphasis on first-person narration, psychological depth, and emotionally direct storytelling closely reflected the cognitive and emotional patterns associated with digital culture (Cetkovski, 2017). YA narratives tend to focus on character-driven plots, subjective experience, and direct emotional engagement, qualities that align well with contemporary modes of online communication.

Digital media also transformed the relationship between authors and readers. Through social networks, blogs, and video-sharing platforms, readers gained unprecedented opportunities to interact with writers and with one another. As Van Leeuwen (2021) observes, online YA fan communities function as participatory interpretive spaces where emotional authenticity is actively valued and collectively reinforced. In this environment, sincerity becomes not only a stylistic feature but also a social expectation.

Economic changes within the publishing industry further reinforced these developments. As publishing houses became integrated into large media corporations, greater emphasis was placed on genres that offered strong market potential, franchise possibilities, and cross-media adaptation (Plum, 2023). Within this framework, YA fiction proved particularly attractive because of its loyal readership and its suitability for film and streaming adaptations. Consequently, the genre received increased institutional support, marketing investment, and cultural visibility.

Taken together, the interaction of digital culture, cognitive change, and publishing economics created conditions in which YA literature could emerge as a dominant cultural form. Supported by highly active online communities and characterized by narratives that emphasize emotional immediacy and ethical engagement, YA fiction has become one of the primary literary spaces where the principles of New Sincerity are articulated and widely disseminated.

Discussion

In *The Fault in Our Stars*, the concept of finitude is presented not as purely tragic but as a source of existential meaning. This idea is conveyed through several key metaphors, most notably the notion of the “little infinity.” Scholars such as Touhami (2015) and Khan et al. (2022) note that this metaphor reflects existentialist ideas about value emerging from limitation, choice, and meaningful relationships.

By describing limited time as a form of infinity within boundaries, the novel suggests that significance comes not from the length of life but from the depth of human connection. In this way, attention is shifted from the inevitability of death to the intensity of lived experience, intimacy, and presence.

Importantly, this metaphorical structure avoids excessive sentimentality. When Hazel speaks about the “little infinity,” she deliberately avoids dramatic or overly emotional language. As Zelichenok (2014) observes, Green’s use of metaphor remains restrained, preventing rhetorical exaggeration and maintaining emotional clarity. Rather than promising transcendence beyond death, the metaphor emphasizes the value of shared experience while openly acknowledging the reality of loss. This careful balance between emotional openness and intellectual control reflects the principles of New Sincerity, which prioritizes authenticity over emotional manipulation.

A secondary semantic field in the novel is created through recurring water imagery, which symbolizes vulnerability, instability, and loss of control. Hazel frequently describes her illness



through metaphors connected to breathing and water, using images of drowning, flooding, or containment to convey her physical condition. These images represent both the bodily fragility caused by illness and the psychological feeling of being overwhelmed by forces beyond one's control (Zelichenok, 2014). Traditionally associated with purification or renewal, water is here reinterpreted as an unstable element that can sustain life but also threaten it. This ambivalent symbolism reflects the lived complexity of illness and strengthens the novel's sense of emotional authenticity by avoiding simple or idealized imagery.

At the pragmatic level, Green further reinforces authenticity through the use of dark humor and inventive expressions, including terms such as "cancer perks." As Galimova and Mukhtarova (2019) argue, these linguistic choices function as coping strategies that allow the characters to reclaim control over situations often defined by medical discourse or social pity. By humorously renaming aspects of their illness, the characters transform passive suffering into an active process of meaning-making.

Crucially, this humor does not diminish the seriousness of their experience. Instead, it establishes boundaries and resists external narratives that portray the characters merely as objects of sympathy. Throughout the novel, especially in interactions with healthy individuals whose responses are often awkward or overly compassionate, humor helps maintain dignity and equality within relationships (Green, 2012). In this sense, pragmatic uses of irony support the broader principles of New Sincerity: irony is not used to escape emotional engagement but to protect genuine feeling from distortion or trivialization.

Taken together, the novel's carefully structured metaphors and its pragmatic use of language create a discourse that is sincere without being naïve, ironic without becoming cynical, and emotionally accessible without falling into sentimentality. For this reason, *The Fault in Our Stars* stands as a strong example of how contemporary YA literature embodies the principles of New Sincerity at both semantic and pragmatic levels, which largely explains its cultural impact and enduring relevance.

Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, Young Adult (YA) literature has become an influential cultural force in American society, incorporating the philosophical principles of New Sincerity and translating them into narratives that resonate both emotionally and ethically (Waltcher, 2021; Lawton & Cain, 2022). Rather than functioning only as a transitional or purely commercial genre, YA fiction has developed into an important literary space where contemporary readers explore questions of identity, vulnerability, mortality, and social responsibility. Its focus on emotional openness, meaningful relationships, and ethical reflection reflects a broader cultural movement away from ironic detachment and toward forms of expression that value authenticity and emotional courage.

John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* provides a particularly clear illustration of this transformation. The novel demonstrates how sincerity can coexist with narrative complexity, intellectual reflection, and significant cultural impact within a genre that was once considered secondary. Through carefully crafted metaphors, the strategic use of humor, and a conscious avoidance of sentimental exaggeration, the text establishes a model of YA storytelling that is both intellectually engaging and widely accessible. In doing so, the novel not only reflects contemporary cultural shifts but also confirms the capacity of YA literature to shape the ethical awareness and emotional sensibilities of a new generation of readers.



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