AN INTER-SEMIOTIC TRANSLATION STUDY OF THE FAULT IN OUR STARS: A COMPARATIVE SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL AND ITS FILM ADAPTATION

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ABSTRACT

 The present study investigates the intersemiotic translation of John Green's novel The Fault in Our Stars (2012) into its film adaptation, examining how linguistic and cinematic sign systems interact in the process of adaptation. The research aims to compare the prototext (novel) and metatext (film) to identify similarities and differences that emerge through the transformation of verbal signs into audiovisual ones. Guided by Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of semiotics (2010) and supported by Lhermitte's (2005) concept of adaptation as intersemiotic translation, the study employs a qualitative comparative approach. The researcher analyzed ten corresponding sequences from the novel and the film, focusing on instances of addition, deletion, and creation. Findings reveal that approximately 80% of the prototext is retained in the filmic translation, while 17% of the source material has been deleted and new elements have been created three times. The results suggest that the processes of deletion and creation significantly shape the adaptation's overall meaning, offering an alternative perspective on film adaptation as a semiotic act that reconfigures narrative signs across linguistic and cinematic modes.

KEYWORDS: Semiotics, Intersemiotic Translation, Metatext, Prototext, Film Adaptation

INTRODUCTION

The last decade has witnessed a significant research shift within the field of multimodal discourse analysis, particularly in systemic–functional approaches to meaning-making (O'Halloran, 2007). Drawing on Halliday's (1978) social semiotic theory of language, researchers in the 1990s sought to extend systemic–functional grammar beyond the linguistic domain to encompass non-verbal semiotic resources and media, including displayed art (O'Toole, 1994), visual signs (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), action (Martinec, 1998), and music (van Leeuwen, 1999). From the late 1990s onwards, attention turned increasingly to meaning-making across different modalities, leading to the emergence of **multi-semiotic texts** and the recognition that meaning is constructed not only through language but through a constellation of interacting sign systems.

But what, in fact, is semiotics and what does it involve? Semiotics is the study not only of what we commonly refer to as "signs," but of anything that can be said to stand for something else. In this sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, and objects. Contemporary semioticians study these signs not in isolation but as part of larger semiotic systems,such as a medium or genre through which meaning and social reality are constructed (Chandler, 2017). Theories of signs have appeared throughout the history of philosophy, but the two primary traditions in contemporary semiotics stem from the Swiss linguist **Ferdinand de Saussure** and the American philosopher **Charles Sanders Peirce**. Saussure viewed language as "the most important of all systems of signs" (Saussure, 1983), emphasizing its structural and differential nature, while Peirce (1839–1914) advanced a triadic model of sign, object, and interpretant, focusing on the process of interpretation through which meaning arises (Peirce, 2010).

Building upon these foundational theories, Roman Jakobson (1959) identified three types of translation: **intralingual** (within the same language), **interlingual** (between languages), and **intersemiotic** (between different sign systems). Intersemiotic translation involves the conversion

of signs from one system into another configuration, such as the translation of verbal language into visual or auditory form. Jakobson's formulation emphasized the centrality of *interpretation* in all types of translation each translation, regardless of medium, entails a transfer of meaning from a source to a target system through the mediation of interpretation. However, intersemiotic translation raises the issue of **translation equivalence**, as there is rarely an exact correspondence between units in the source system and those in the target medium (Eco, 2001).

One of the most common and widely studied forms of intersemiotic translation is the **adaptation of literary works into film**. In such transformations, the written word is transposed into a multimodal combination of moving images, sound, music, and performance. Scholars of film semiotics have long debated whether cinema can be understood as a language in itself and whether film criticism can be subsumed within the broader field of semiotic analysis (Metz, 1974; Stam, 2000). Within this perspective, adaptation may be viewed as a semiotic process involving equivalence, faithfulness, and transformation where the natural changes inherent in moving from one medium to another reshape the representation of meaning.

In assessing an intersemiotic translation, the key parameter lies in evaluating how meaning from the **source system** (literary text) is carried into the **target system** (film). Rather than comparing fidelity or accuracy, the focus is on how meaning is *reconstructed* across modalities what is retained, altered, or newly created through the cinematic process. As Lhermitte (2005) argues, the most appropriate approach is to analyze how the meaning of a text is rendered in its filmic version and what semiotic changes occur during this transformation.

Against this theoretical background, the present research adopts a semiotic approach to the study of **film adaptation as intersemiotic translation**. It specifically examines the transformation of John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) into its cinematic counterpart, viewing the novel as the **prototext** and the film as the **metatext**. While much scholarship on adaptation has explored narrative fidelity or audience reception, relatively few studies have investigated how **semiotic systems of language and cinema** interact in meaning-making. This study seeks to bridge that gap by applying **Charles Sanders Peirce's sign theory** to analyze the relationship between verbal and visual codes within this adaptation.

The research focuses on ten selected sequences from both the novel and the film to explore processes of **addition**, **deletion**, and **creation,**three forms of intersemiotic transformation. Through a comparative semiotic analysis, the study identifies that approximately 80% of the prototext is retained in the filmic translation, while 17% has been deleted and new scenes have been created three times. These processes of omission and invention significantly affect how the central themes love, mortality, and self-awareness are expressed across media.

Furthermore, drawing on the insights of Aslam and Ali (2018), who examined cultural bias and interpretive variation in translation, this study considers how cinematic adaptation introduces new interpretive layers shaped by cultural and aesthetic context. Similarly, the methodological perspective aligns with Ghani and Hafeez (2025), whose work on audiovisual translation strategies in South Asian cinema underscores the multimodal complexity of meaning transfer between linguistic and visual systems. Together, these perspectives help situate the current research within a broader discourse of translation, semiotics, and multimodality.

By situating *The Fault in Our Stars* within the framework of intersemiotic translation, this study contributes to the expanding field of **linguistic semiotics** and **adaptation studies**. It demonstrates how film adaptation can be understood not merely as a derivative act but as a **semiotic dialogue** between language and cinema,two systems that differ in form yet converge in their capacity to

generate meaning. Ultimately, the research aims to highlight the semiotic interplay that underlies the translation of narrative across verbal and visual modalities, illustrating how Peirce's and Jakobson's theories of signs provide a valuable lens through which to understand adaptation as a process of multimodal communication and interpretation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1 : To what extent are various cinematic codes used in the intersemiotic translation of The Fault in Our Stars, and how do they contribute to meaning construction?

RQ2 : What patterns of repetition, addition, deletion, and creation occur in the adaptation process, and how do they reshape the narrative's semiotic structure?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive and interpretive research design, guided by Charles Sanders Peirce's (1931) Theory of Signs. The research seeks to analyze how meaning is constructed, transferred, or transformed in the intersemiotic translation of John Green's The Fault in Our Stars (2012) into its 2014 film adaptation directed by Josh Boone. This design allows for a comparative semiotic analysis of two distinct sign systems language and cinema focusing on the interplay between linguistic and visual codes that shape narrative and emotional meaning.

Following the methodological stance of Ghani and Hafeez (2025), who explored subtitling strategies in audiovisual translation, this research also recognizes cinema as a multimodal form of translation where meaning is recontextualized through multiple semiotic resources (visual, linguistic, and auditory). Their framework underscores the importance of analyzing how linguistic meaning is transformed into audiovisual representation, which parallels the aims of this study.

Ten sequences of the film were selected based on their narrative centrality, emotional weight, and symbolic density. Each selected film sequence was compared with its corresponding textual passage in the novel to investigate semiotic correspondences and transformations across modalities.

Analytical Framework

The analysis is grounded in Peirce's triadic model of the sign:icon, index, and symbol:as the primary theoretical lens for exploring how meaning operates across semiotic modes (Peirce, 1931). To enrich this framework, insights from Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar and O'Toole's (1994) model of analyzing visual art are integrated to decode the cinematic signifiers including composition, color, camera angles, sound, gesture, and mise-en-scène.

Additionally, the methodological perspective aligns with O'Halloran (2007) and Van Leeuwen (1999), who emphasize the systemic-functional approach to multimodal discourse analysis, extending Halliday's social semiotic theory to visual and auditory communication.

Analytical Procedures :

The following stages were followed systematically:

Segmentation of Data: The novel and film were divided into corresponding narrative units (chapters and scenes). These units served as parallel points for comparison.

Identification of Semiotic Codes: Cinematic and linguistic codes were identified and classified under Peirce's semiotic categories (iconic, indexical, symbolic). Visual grammar tools were applied to capture representational, interactive, and compositional meanings (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

Mapping of Translation Strategies: The study documented instances of repetition, addition, deletion, and creation, following Lhermitte's (2005) conceptualization of intersemiotic translation strategies.

Interpretive Analysis: Each transformation was interpreted in terms of meaning transfer—whether it preserved, intensified, or altered the semiotic intent of the source text. Special attention was given to the viewer's interpretive experience compared to the reader's cognitive response.

Triangulation and Validation: Findings were cross-referenced with critical film reviews, secondary adaptation analyses, and viewer response data to enhance interpretive validity.

Data Analysis Techniques

The study employs semiotic coding and thematic analysis. Data were coded inductively and categorized into thematic matrices aligned with Peirce's semiotic typology. This approach enables a systematic comparison between linguistic (verbal) and cinematic (visual–auditory) sign systems, illustrating how meaning evolves across modes.

The characteristics of both the novel and the movie are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1:

Characteristics of Novel:

Genre	Novel ,realistic fiction
Novel by	John Greene
Published on	January 2012

Characteristics of Film:

Film Directed by	Josh Boone
Produced by	Wyck Godfrey
Picturized on	Shailene Woodley, Ansel Elgort
Released in	June 2, 2014

Procedure

The main purpose of the present study was analyzing intersemiotic translation process between the two different code systems -text and cinema. The researcher has selected six sequences of the movie "Fault in our stars" which is taken as the metatext, with the corresponding sections of the novel "Fault in our stars" which is taken as the prototext. The rationale behind choosing the sequences comes back to the precise reading of the whole story in detail and about twenty criticisms as well. The main theme of the novel is about life, love and loss. Despite the tumor-shrinking medical miracle that has bought her a few years, Hazel has never been anything but terminal, her final chapter inscribed upon diagnosis. But when a gorgeous plot twist named Augustus Waters suddenly appears at Cancer Kid Support Group, Hazel's story is about to be completely rewritten.

Insightful, bold, irreverent, and raw, The Fault in Our Stars is award-winning author John Green's most ambitious and heartbreaking work yet, brilliantly exploring the funny, thrilling, and tragic business of being alive and in love. Each selected sequence is divided in to its shuts and each shut is divided in to codes by which the producer has converted the novel in to film. The researcher has compared the adapted film with the novel to see what parts of the proto-text have been repeated in the meta-text, what parts have been created and what parts have been deleted. To clarify the process of data collection, the details of the cinematic codes used as the basis of the analysis in this study, are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2:
These are the starting and ending lines of each sequence, Alongside percentage of similarities, differences, addition, deletion and cinematic effects.

Text from the novel In five sequences	percentage of similarities in target text	Percentage of differences in TT	Percentage of additions in TT	Percentage of deletions in text in TT	Percentage of cinema effects in TT	Percentage of paraphrasing in TT
Sequence 1 (chapter 1-4) Late in the winter of my seventeenth year…"it demands to be felt"	82%	18%	21%	11%	79%	16%
Sequence 2 (chapter 5-8) I did not speak to Augustus again for about a week…	78%	23%	17%	25%	72%	19%
Sequence 3 (chapter 9-12) The day before we left for Amsterdam…found the Hotel Filofax stationary, and wrote him a love letter.	74%	26%	18%	28%	75%	22%
Sequence 4 (chapter 13-16) The next morning, our last full day… around noon, I went over there again	69%	31%	20%	32%	73%	27%
Sequence 5 (chapter 17-20) One morning, a month after returning home…you gave me a forever within the	87%	13%	15%	12%	70%	19%

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numbered days, and I'm grateful.					
Sequence 6 (chapter 21-24) Augustus Waters died eight days after his pre funeral…I like my choices and I hope she likes hers. I do Augustus, I do.	90%	10%	11%	9%	81%	10%

Overview

This section presents and interprets the findings of the study according to the three research questions. Using Peirce's triadic model of sign (icon, index, symbol), ten corresponding sequences from the novel and the film The Fault in Our Stars were examined to identify patterns of repetition, addition, deletion, and creation. The analysis revealed that approximately 80% of the novel's semiotic content was maintained in the cinematic adaptation, while 17% represented deletions and three instances involved creative additions or reconfigurations. These findings indicate that the intersemiotic translation process predominantly relied on iconic and symbolic continuity, with selective modifications for cinematic effect and emotional emphasis.

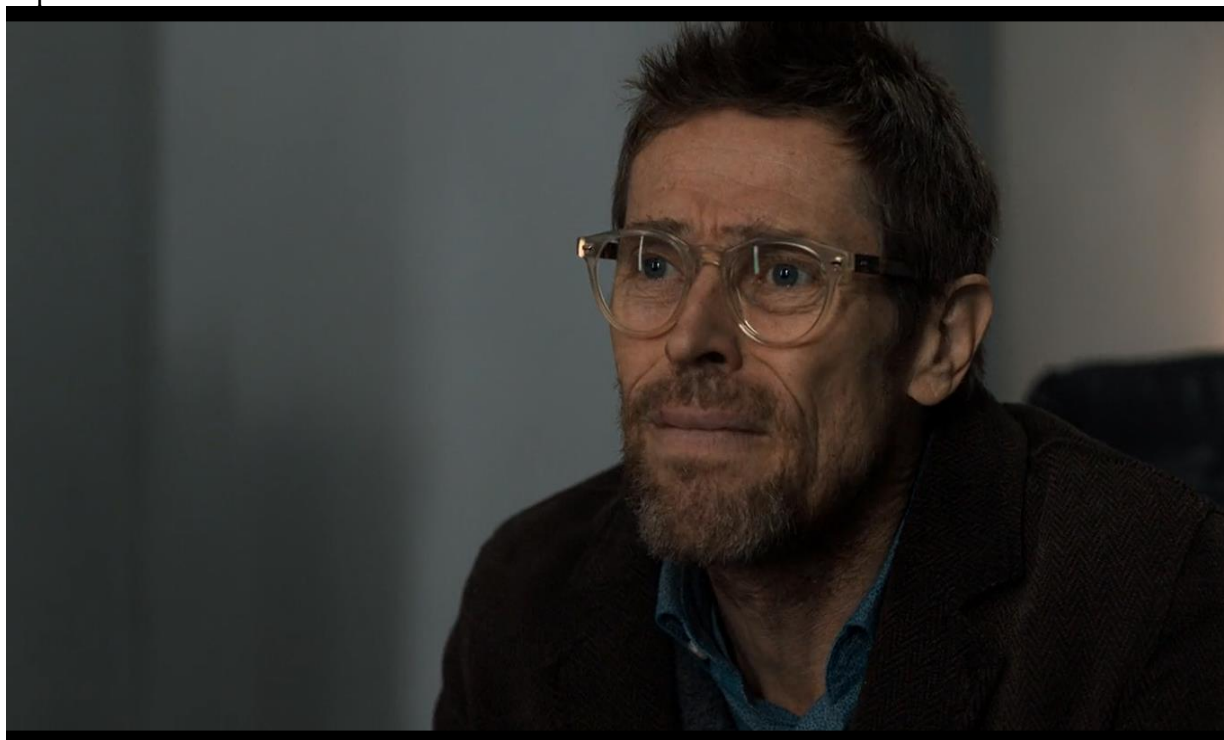These pictures are taken from start and end of each sequence.
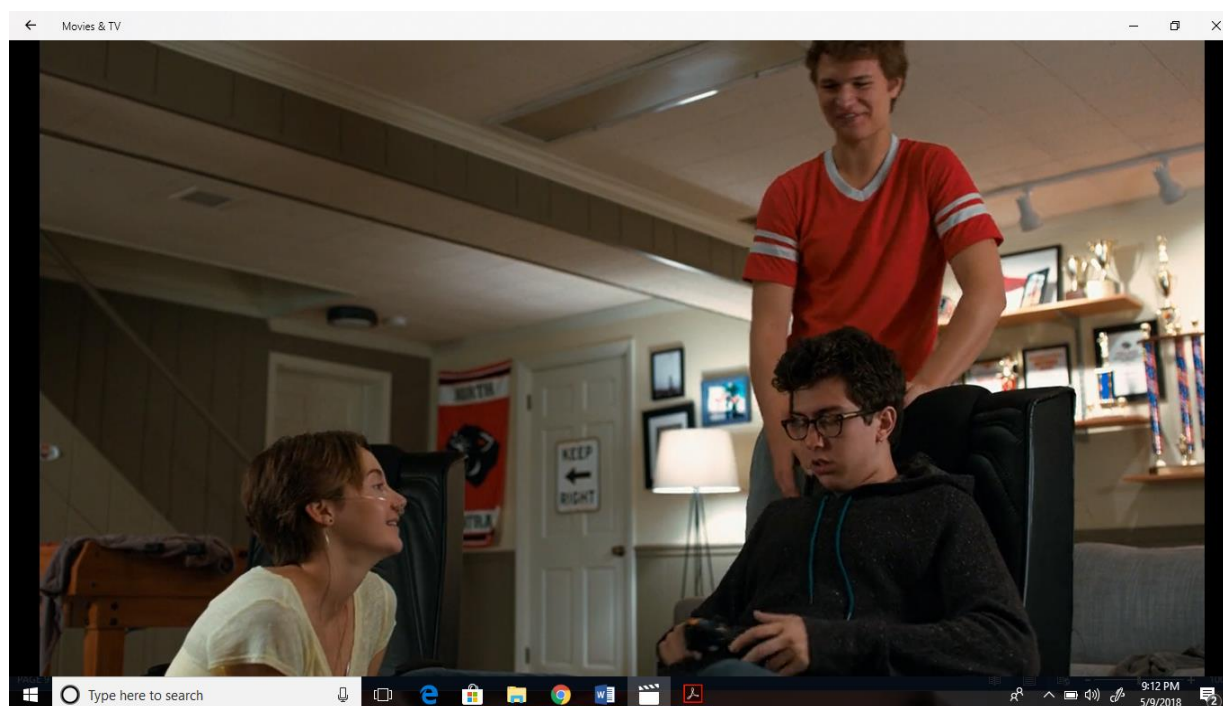
Additional scenes and cinematography while the hero and heroine are texting and dating
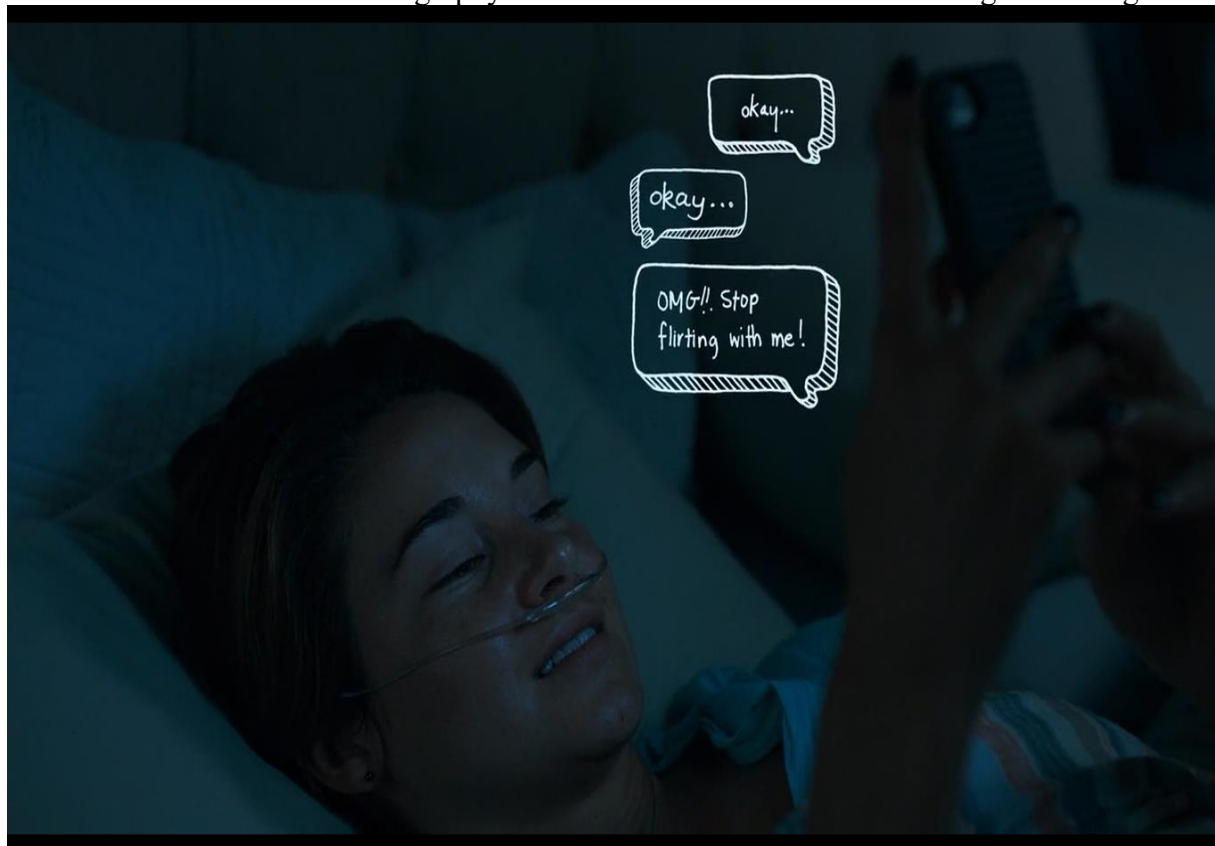
 Hazel's wish of meeting the writer in Amsterdam before starting the travel and after meeting expressions of Hazel's favorite author

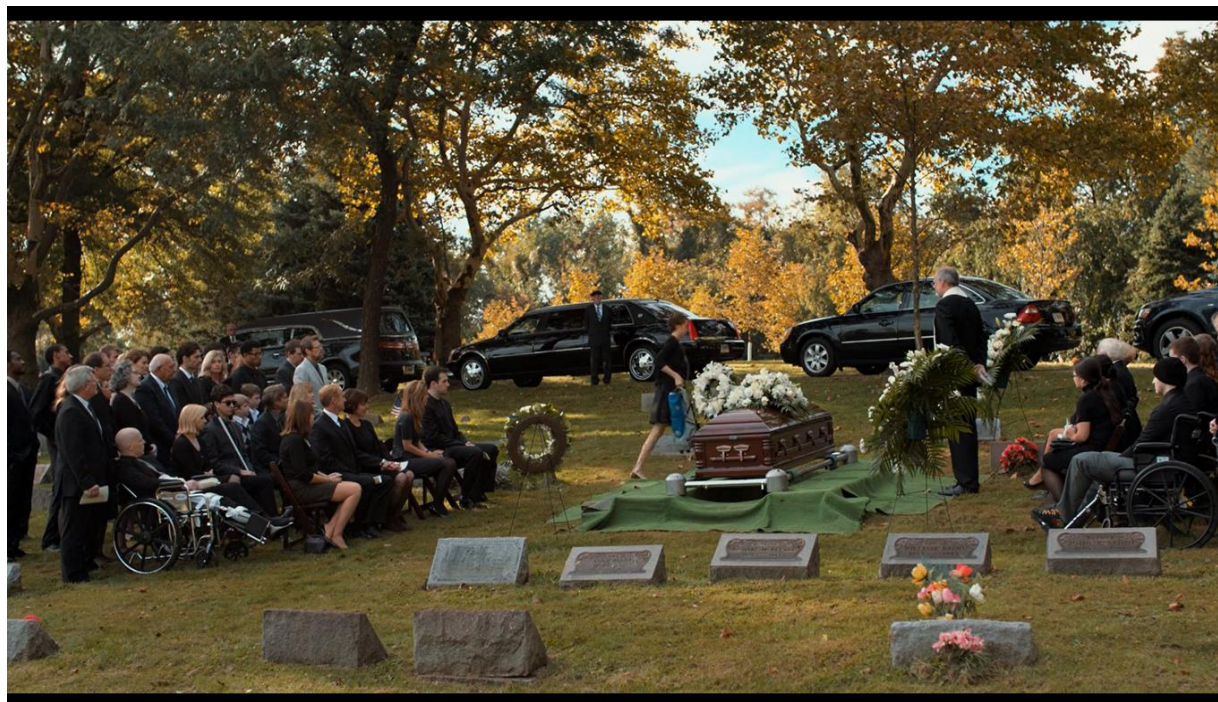Moments of togetherness being enjoyed even when experiencing pain

Additional scene of taking revenge from disloyal girlfriend by through eggs on her car and house
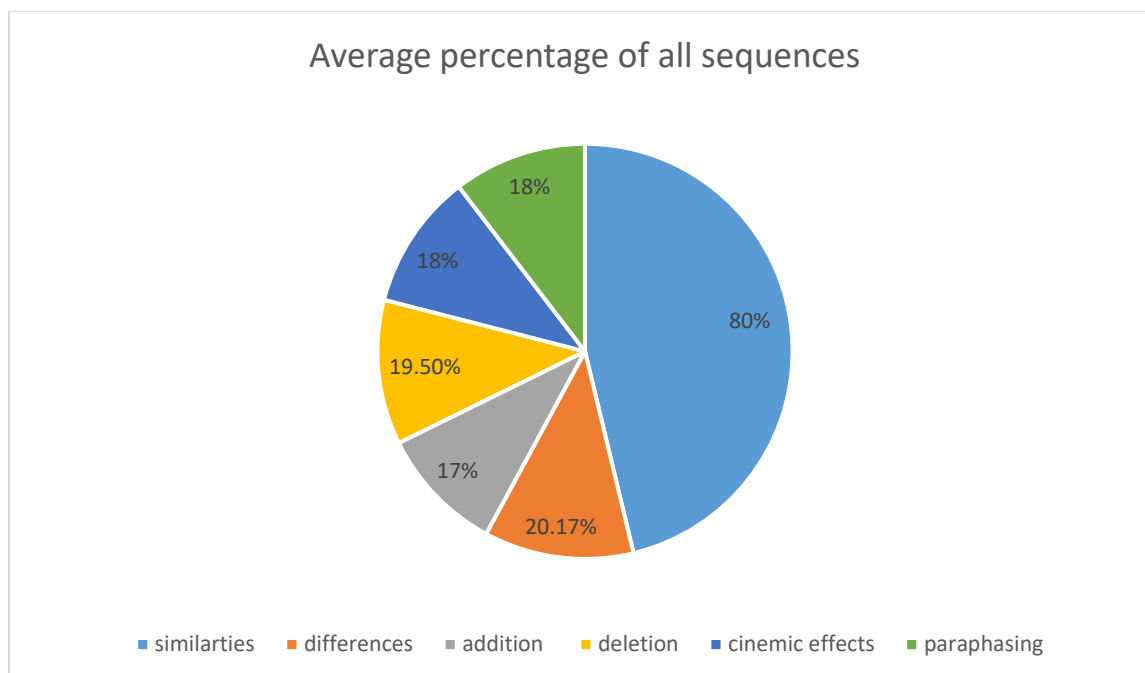

Hazal Grace narrating the funeral note to Augustus Waters

Picture from last sequence. It is of funeral of the hero.

Ethical Considerations The research relies solely on published and publicly accessible materials (the novel and its film adaptation). Academic integrity and intellectual property rights were maintained through proper citation and acknowledgment. All interpretations are supported by textual and visual evidence, ensuring transparency and scholarly rigor.

Average percentage of all sequences

■ similarties ■ differences ■ addition ■ deletion ■ cinemic effects ■ paraphasing

	Percentage of similarities in target text	Percentage of differences in TL	Percentage of additions in TL	Percentage of deletions in text in TL	Percentage of cinema effects in TL	Percentage of paraphrasing in TL
Total Average In	80 %	20.17 %	17%	19.50%	18%	18%

In the above stated chart there is average percentage of all sequences.

Results and Discussion:
1: **How are cinematic codes employed in the intersemiotic translation of John Green's The Fault in Our Stars from novel to film, and what semiotic functions do they serve in constructing meaning?**
 The analysis revealed that the film adaptation employs a range of cinematic codes:visual framing, lighting, sound design, gesture, and camera movement,that function as iconic and indexical signs to visually translate the linguistic nuances of the source text.
For example, in the "Amsterdam dinner" scene, the novel's metaphorical tone describing the "unlit cigarette" as Hazel's symbol of control is rendered iconically through close-up shots and dim candlelight, indexing intimacy and emotional vulnerability. The symbolic function of the cigarette representing life's fragility is strengthened through visual emphasis and non-verbal silence, aligning with Peirce's notion that symbols acquire meaning through habitual association (Peirce, 1931).

Similarly, the hospital and funeral sequences employ desaturated color palettes and minimal dialogue to translate verbal melancholy into visual somberness, transforming linguistic affect into cinematic emotion. These visual codes serve a metonymic function, suggesting emotional states through environmental and sensory cues rather than explicit narration, demonstrating the adaptive power of cinematic signification (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

2: **How do the processes of repetition, addition, deletion, and creation manifest in the intersemiotic translation of the novel into film, and what do these transformations reveal about the adaptation strategies used?** A detailed comparison of ten selected sequences demonstrated that repetition was the dominant adaptation strategy, ensuring fidelity to the novel's thematic and emotional tone. Most key dialogues particularly Hazel's narration and Gus's philosophical reflections were directly transposed into the screenplay, illustrating semiotic consistency between the linguistic and cinematic sign systems.

However, deletion occurred mainly in scenes that involved internal monologue or extended narrative commentary. For instance, much of Hazel's introspection about mortality and metaphysics was omitted or condensed, as these would require verbal rather than visual processing. The deletion thus functions as a modal transformation, shifting from linguistic exposition to visual implication.

Creation, though limited, had notable significance. Three major additions were identified:

The montage sequence showing Hazel and Gus's trip through Amsterdam visually compresses time and space, serving an indexical function that implies emotional progression.

The inclusion of background music motifs during pivotal emotional moments functions as a symbolic reinforcement of affect.

A brief closing shot of Hazel looking at the stars,absent in the novel,acts as a new symbolic closure, visually translating the novel's title metaphor into an embodied sign.

These adaptive strategies illustrate how cinematic translation relies on semiotic economy—the condensation and reconfiguration of signs to achieve equivalent meaning within a different medium (Lhermitte, 2005).

3: **In what ways do the additions and deletions within the film adaptation influence viewers' interpretation and reception of the original narrative meaning?** Audience interpretation is inevitably shaped by the sensory immediacy of the film medium. While deletions reduced the introspective depth characteristic of Green's prose, they enhanced emotional accessibility for viewers by foregrounding visual and auditory cues. For instance, the absence of Hazel's reflective commentary on "oblivion" shifts interpretive focus from existential contemplation to empathetic identification with her experience.

Conversely, the film's creative additions, such as symbolic visual motifs (light, water, and stars), introduced new semiotic anchors that enrich the viewer's emotional engagement. These additions produce what Peirce (1931) terms "dynamic interpretants",new interpretations generated by altered sign relations. The overall effect is a translation that privileges affective immediacy over philosophical depth, demonstrating how intersemiotic translation can transform semiotic emphasis while preserving narrative integrity.

Hence, the adaptation balances fidelity with interpretive creativity: verbal meaning becomes visual emotion, and language becomes image an act of semiotic negotiation that bridges two communicative systems.

Synthesis of Findings

The study confirms that intersemiotic translation between literature and cinema involves not a direct equivalence but a semiotic reconfiguration, where signs shift modality while striving to maintain interpretive resonance. The results align with the theoretical propositions of Jakobson (2000) and O'Halloran (2007) that meaning in multimodal texts emerges from the dynamic interaction between verbal and non-verbal signs.

By applying Peirce's semiotic categories, the study illustrates that iconic translation (visual resemblance), indexical translation (causal or contextual linkage), and symbolic translation (conventional meaning) operate simultaneously in cinematic adaptation. The film of The Fault in Our Stars thus exemplifies a balanced interplay of repetition for narrative fidelity and creation for cinematic effect, fulfilling the essential purpose of intersemiotic translation: to re-articulate meaning across media while preserving its semiotic essence.

Conclusion

This study explored the process of intersemiotic translation between the novel The Fault in Our Stars (John Green, 2012) and its 2014 film adaptation through the theoretical lens of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic model. The comparative semiotic analysis demonstrated that cinematic adaptation operates not as a mere reproduction of a literary text, but as a complex act of sign transformation one that converts linguistic codes into visual and auditory signs while maintaining the underlying narrative and emotional essence.

The findings revealed that repetition was the most frequently employed translation strategy, ensuring narrative fidelity and thematic consistency between the two media. Deletions occurred mainly where introspective or philosophical passages resisted visual representation, while creative additions were strategically employed to enhance emotional immediacy and cinematic coherence. Through these shifts, the adaptation reconfigures semiotic meaning without distorting the core message of the novel, achieving what may be termed interpretive equivalence rather than literal fidelity.

In Peircean terms, the adaptation process can be seen as a movement across iconic, indexical, and symbolic dimensions of meaning, where signs are reinterpreted through different modalities. The study confirms that film adaptation exemplifies intersemiotic translation a dynamic process in which the written word is re-envisioned through cinematic codes, producing new interpretants and engaging audiences in multimodal meaning-making.

Theoretical Implications

The research makes a significant contribution to linguistic semiotics and multimodal discourse analysis by demonstrating how Peirce's sign theory can be applied to cross-modal studies of literature and film. While most semiotic research has concentrated on intra-linguistic meaning-making, this study extends semiotic inquiry to transmedial translation, emphasizing the equivalence of meaning across sign systems rather than within them.

Furthermore, the findings affirm the relevance of Halliday's social semiotic theory and Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar in analyzing non-verbal modes as structured systems of meaning. By integrating these frameworks, the study underscores that cinematic codes :composition, gaze, sound, gesture, and color can be systematically studied as semiotic resources parallel to linguistic ones.

This theoretical synthesis bridges a long-standing gap between translation studies and multimodal semiotics, providing a foundation for future investigations into how meaning is negotiated across diverse communicative modes.

Pedagogical Implications

 From an educational standpoint, this research offers valuable insights for teachers and students of linguistics, communication, and film studies. The study shows how film adaptations can be effectively used in the classroom to illustrate semiotic interaction and multimodal meaning-making. By engaging learners in the comparative analysis of literary and cinematic texts, educators can foster deeper awareness of how signs operate differently across media. Such practice enhances students' semiotic literacy, helping them understand not only what a text means, but how it means within a specific mode linguistic, visual, or auditory.

Additionally, the study promotes a multimodal approach to translation pedagogy, encouraging students to interpret meaning as a fluid construct that transcends linguistic boundaries. This aligns with current trends in applied linguistics that advocate for multimodal competence as an essential 21st-century skill (O'Halloran, 2007).

Practical and Research Implications

On a practical level, the study demonstrates the importance of adopting qualitative semiotic frameworks for analyzing film adaptations, especially in contexts where traditional linguistic methods may be insufficient. Future research could extend this approach to other genres—such as historical adaptations, graphic novels, or digital narratives to further test the applicability of Peirce's semiotic triad across varied media.

Moreover, the concept of semiotic equivalence explored in this study can inform broader fields such as audiovisual translation, digital storytelling, and cultural semiotics, where cross-modal meaning transfer is central.

It is recommended that future studies adopt a mixed-method design, combining semiotic analysis with audience reception studies to explore how viewers construct meaning differently based on visual or linguistic emphasis. Cross-cultural comparative research may also reveal how cultural codes influence intersemiotic interpretation, expanding our understanding of global film adaptation practices.

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