

**Title:** Tolstoy's Modes of Communication as Moral Indices  
**Author:** Alexei Pavlenko, Colorado College

Leo Tolstoy's life-long preoccupation with finding ever more honest and precise forms of communication is deeply connected to his religious and philosophical search for truth. The issue of the narrator's inadequacy to communicate the fullness of his experience is foregrounded already in *Childhood*, especially in chapter "Verses" (Jones). In the *Cossacks*, *War and Peace*, and *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy further deepens his exploration of various modes of verbal and non-verbal communication among his characters, as well as between the narrator and his audience. Characters' ability to understand the other serves as an index of their moral development. Olenin's failure to read his companions in Moscow and in the Caucasus is contrasted with Lukashka's immediate and wordless communication with his dumb-and-deaf sister, Styopka. Napoleon's arrogant language is opposed to Kutuzov's silent understanding, and to Andrey Bolkonsky's final trans-verbal vision. Kontstantin Levin experiences his best, most authentic moments when he communicates with his eyes and body language (with his dog Laska, the cow Pava, and his brother Nikolai), and hints at words (playing "secretary") rather than using them when he makes his successful declaration to Kitty. Tolstoy's paradoxical distrust of language is akin to – yet more thoroughgoing than – Rousseau's dismissal of the written word as a supplement. Tolstoy's characters and narrators are compromised and diminished by their language, which is rooted in and represents the "crude force" of the corrupt society. The preferred indirect modes of communication are central to Tolstoy's concept of true art and its power to "infect."