

Lessons from the Master : What We Can Learn from Krapp's Last Tape for the Language Classroom

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Although Beckett's theater and the language classroom are worlds apart, the possibility nevertheless arises of lifting the basic situation of Krapp's Last Tape from the play and turning it into a device for enhancing language learning. With a little tinkering, the image of the old man on the stage listening to past versions of himself that he has recorded on tape can be converted into the reality of a student monitoring her progress as a language learner (and more generally, as a growing, developing individual). In effect, adaptation of the Krapp situation for language learning offers the student an opportunity to keep an audio or tape-journal analogous to the writing journals often recommended in composition courses. Though not meant to rival or replace the written type, the tape-journal can be used to advantage for the specific purpose of promoting proficiency with the spoken word. The fact that the student can play back what she has recorded makes it a natural instrument for self-reflection and self-assessment in all crucial domains: content, expression and linguistic performance. If welcomed, teacher assistance can be provided to help the student on the path toward increased competence.

Beyond private journal keeping and monitoring, the Krapp model lends itself well to class projects of various kinds. One possibility is for individual students to replicate Krapp on stage, replaying and responding to segments of their journals, with the option of the class audience responding interactively at the end of each presentation. The persona in the journal could be the student herself, or perhaps an invented character, a celebrity or a historical figure. Another possibility is for members of the class to collaborate on the writing and staging of an original play featuring a character of their creation, while preserving the basic structure of the Krapp model. As Krapp's Last Tape is available on video and DVD, students could watch the play and discuss it before embarking on their own variants. The above and other possibilities of bringing Krapp into the language classroom will be explored in my paper.