

A Phonostylistic Study of Suspense in Peter Drury's Commentary

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Abstract

This study attempts to show the phonostylistic devices used to create suspense in sports commentary. It accounts for the impacts of pitch, uptalk, alliteration, assonance, and rhythm on the phonetic level. To achieve the aims of the study, a sample of analysis is chosen represented by Peter Drury's "Best Commentary in the Champions League Matches" 2021/2022 that took place between Manchester City vs. Real Madrid and Villareal vs. Liverpool. PRAAT is employed to analyze and measure the degree of intensity, uptalk, loudness, and pitch. Suspense is triggered in rise and rise-fall levels of intonation. It is found that the peak of intensity, shown on the spectrogram, denotes the emotion and the excitement on the match. While uptalk is used to shift the focus and emphasis. The vocal fry or creaky voice directs the hearers to the results.

Keywords: phonostylistics, suspense, sport commentary, PRAAT

1. Introduction

Phonostylistics is usually defined as the branch of linguistics which deals with the phonetic features that form the style of an individual or a group. It, thus, approaches phonetic resources from a stylistic perspective (Alowonle, 2023). In addition, it scrutinizes and accesses the stylistic potentials of a language sound composition to identify the expressive and aesthetic means of the sounds used in a language (Fayzulloyevna and Rashidovna, 2023).

In this regard, this study tries to investigate how Peter Drury creates suspense in his commentary through phonetic means. Consequently, this study makes an attempt to answer the following questions:

- a. What are the phonetic devices utilized in Drury's commentaries to create suspense?
- b. How do phonetic features like pitch , pause , speech rate, etc. contribute to creating suspense in Drury's commentaries?

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-
- c. Which phonetic devices are utilized more frequently than others in Drury's commentaries?

2. Literature Review

2. 1. Phonostylistics

Stylistics pertains to the ways in which speakers utilize the diverse potentials of language variation to convey meanings in social interactions. It investigates how individuals express varied social identities and foster distinct social relationships via their choices in style. Consequently, style encompasses the multitude of strategic actions and performances employed by speakers to frame their identity and social milieu (Coupland, 2007)

Phonostylistics is regarded as a branch of linguistic stylistics. It deals with the use of phonetic elements as rhythm, stress, tone, rhythmic melodic, and tempo of conversation. This branch investigates and evaluates the stylistic means of the sound composition to identify the language features and the sound expressiveness of a language, and the stylistic characteristics of phonetic means in a certain context. It is significant in understanding the manner in that sound patterns are not decorative but they contribute directly to mood and interpretation (Stockwell & Whiteley 2014).

2. 2. Suspense

Suspense is a condition or a state of excitement and uncertainty with anxiety because of unknown outcomes. It is the state of being uncertain, undecided, or doubtful. It is also seen as a feeling of worry and tension of what will happen. Suspense is regarded as hidden if it is not noticed directly (Kemertelidze and Manjavidze, 2013).

Suspense depends upon the addressee's powerful sense of uncertainty about the events. The reactions to this type of uncertainty are concerned with positive feelings and enjoyment. Suspense has an effect on the audience's suspension of disbelief (Delatorre et al.2018). It is an expectation that is followed by a delay until a resolution completes the arc of suspense(Schubert, 2025).

2. 3. Language of Sports

Sports commentary is seen as different from political interactions, academic lectures, and sermons because the commentators do not direct their speech to a particular person and they do not receive feedback from the others. Furthermore, Beard points out that sport commentary is "an instant response to something happening at the moment as unscripted, spontaneous talk, aiming to capture the on-going excitement of the event and this type of definition applies to live

action commentary, that's why sport commentary is even more complex because it has to report simultaneously what is seen with the eye at the time"(Beard, 1998,p. 79).

The prosodic features and the characteristics of voice normally investigated in phonostylistics are tempo, loudness, rhythm, and intonation. These aspects are employed by commentators to keep up a flow of speech and to sound interesting. The non-stop nature of commentaries is due to the fact that commentators do not read from a script, or recite from memory. They prompt themselves with talking about known topics which have been selected carefully with some relevant notes (Crystal & Derek, 1969).

The characteristics of sport language are: simplification which can be seen in sentences that lack many elements as initial noun phrase and copula. The lack of initial material are termed prosiopesis which is a distinctive feature of different registers of spoken English. Another characteristic of sports language is the employment of inversions where a predicate can precede its subject, e.g. "Holding up at third is Murphy" (Ferguson 1983: 160). The speaker wants to denote that his reports can lead to a specific state in the ongoing activity. In sportscasting, it is a frequent occurrence in that the announcer involves an incidental and brief identification with the name of a player(Ferguson, 1983).

3. Phonetic Tactics

Phonostylistics focuses on the study of sounds. In literature, aspects like alliteration, assonance, rhythm, and rhyme fall under this category. How a text sounds can greatly affect its mood and meaning (Crystal, 2008). Some of the phonetic aspects usually analyzed in phonostylistics are:

3. 1 Intonation

It is concerned with the oral speech and structures of a particular system. This system is organized by the rhythm, melody of speech, logical emphasis, the speed and timbre of speech. Intonation has two functions in communication: it divides the flow of speech into meaningful constituents to convey new content. The other function is to represent the affective (emotional) sense of the speech. These senses reveal a special stylistic meaning (Haydarov & Navruzova, 2021). Intonational effects have communicative function in the way that the speaker's decision is gradient. For example, each of the following manner of pronouncing an utterance conveys greater involvement as the representation of speaker's true or false feeling. The speaker's range of comfortable speaking rate of pitch level, the overall placement of an utterance within a speaker's pitch span, the overall distance between low and high in an utterance or pitch excursion associated with a pitch accent and the lower level of pitch over the span of an utterance. "There is no denying the role of intonation in conveying attitude, as witness both the common observation that the problem was not what he said but the way that he said it, and the

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large amount of attention devoted to the attitudinal function of intonation" (Nolan, 2020,p. 446). One of the significant levels of intonation is rising-falling intonation which refers to the level of the pitch that rises in one part then falls in another. This is employed to convey strong feelings of surprise, approval, and disapproval (Roach, 2000). The Classification of Attitudinal Functions of Intonation according to Roach's (2000) are as follows:

Tone	Attitude
Level	Boredom, routine, and disinterest.
Rise	Invitation to request, continue, for information and excitement.
Fall	Certainty and finality,
Fall-rise	Hesitation, limited agreement, having reservations, and pleading.
Rise -fall	Strong feelings of approval, disapproval, surprise, agitation, and sarcasm.

Table 1: Functions of Intonation

The frequencies that are concerned for the phonetic measurement of intonation patterns extend from about 70 Hz to 250 Hz for male voices, and from 120 Hz to 350 Hz for female voices, and 500 or 600 Hz or more for babies and children (Gibbon, 2017).

3. 2. Creaky voice

Vocal fry, creaky voice, or laryngealization are terms used synonymously in voice science (Laukkanen & Rantala, 2021). Vocal fry is a low-pitched speech that can be caused by the extreme slow vibration of the vocal cords. Some say that it is compared to the sound of "frying bacon" since pulses or individual vibrations are observed due to the long phonatory cycle in which a short glottal open phase generates acoustic excitations (Blomgren et al.1998). A small part of vocal cords can vibrate with a slow rate and a small amplitude. Creaky voice is employed as a general term classified into different kinds of acoustic signals which have been labelled as vocal fry, aperiodic voice, multiply pulsed voice, non-constricted creak, and tense or pressed voice. Speakers can use creaky voice to enhance satisfaction to the interaction. Creaky voice can be detected in PRAAT by the f0 curve, fast Fourier transform spectra, and oscillogram (Laukkanen & Rantala, 2021).

3. 3. Uptalk

Uptalk is a phenomenon which points to a rising intonation for words and phrases that do not have this type of intonation before, involving declarative sentences (Eckert & Mendoza-Denton, 2006). Uptalk does not seem to be spreading across regional varieties only, but it is also used across in various communicative contexts as academic settings. Many phonetic parameters have been outlined as relevant for the phonetics of uptalk: rise onset and peak, the range of pitch excursion (from minimum to maximum F0 values), the duration of the rise, and rise relative to the syllable carrying the nuclear accent (Paunović, 2022).

There are several reasons for this characteristic. For example, a rising intonation can be regarded as a sign that more is coming to indicate that the speaker has more to say. Additionally, uptalk can be a kind of a tag, or accent, to attract the listeners for more information and it is a way to link phrases and to link the speaker to the listener (Gorman, 1993).

3. 4. Alliteration

Alliteration, like other phonetic expressive means, cannot bear lexical or other meaning "unless we agree that a sound meaning exists as such" (Galperin, 1977 ,p. 126). Alliteration is a tactic denoting the repetition in two nearby words of initial (consonant) sounds. It does not point to the repetition of letters that start the words. It rather denotes the repetition of a sound at the initial words. For instance, the words "kids' coats" is alliterative, even if the words have various consonant letters, they have the same pronunciation (Nizomova, 2021).

This tactic can refer to the repetition of syllable initial phonemes and homophonous accented syllables, initial phonemes (as in cash and carry, house and home, tea for two) for stylistic effects (Bussmann, 2006). Alliteration can be of full and partial types between two onsets as in "bridge and brand" which alliterate because they have identical onsets and "To the music of mild-minded melancholy" (Galperin, 1977 ,p. 126).

3. 5. Assonance

Assonance is the repetition of identical or comparable vowels in a close word as in stressed syllables, for instance rose, sole, soul, etc. (Abrams and Harpham, 2012). It occurs in initial, medial, and final positions of the words (Vinafari, 2014). It is a main type of musical imagery which provokes associations with thoughts and feelings (Ebzeeva et al, 2015). It is employed for different expressive impacts as emphasis, harmony, attraction, and enhancement. It is often employed to comprise all kinds of phonological recurrence or juxtaposition, such as rhyme and alliteration (Wales, 2011 & Al- Araj, 2025).

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3. 6. Rhythm

Rhythm is described by phonologists as having connotations which overlap partly with musicologists. However, unlike music, speech intervals are not isochronous (Kotz, et al. 2018). Rhythm is not only concerned with duration, but also with presence and absence of syllable codas. It establishes the distinction between lightest, light, and heavy rhythms, as well as longest, long, and short ones.

Rhythms are observed as syllable sequences enclosed by pauses. The criteria of rhythms are perception of stress and duration. It is established on intrinsic duration of specific segments and their order on syllables through beats (Romero, 2020). Speech rhythms are regular oscillations below 10 Hz which modulate the speech source bearer signal and are triggered in spectral analysis as magnitude extends in the low frequency (LF) spectrum of the amplitude modulation (AM) of the speech signal, concerned with the syllable outline of the waveform, and the FM linked to perceived pitch contours (Gibbon, 2023).

Rhythms are series of alternating values of feature or features of speech as duration, intensity, or melody of words, phrases, syllables, words at equal time intervals, that play a role in the aesthetics, stylistics and rhetoric of speech (Gibbon, 2017).

4. Phonetic Features

4.1. Pitch

Speech, melodies, and other stimuli are processed in terms of the relative pitch variations between sounds. Relative representations allow recognition of pitch patterns though variations in the overall pitch level between speakers and/or instruments. Sounds with high frequency energy are regarded as brighter than those with less frequency (McDermott et al. 2008). Relative pitch patterns can be linked to language-specific linguistic or phonetic elements, such as stress, intonation, and lexical tones (Lennes et al. 2016).

4. 2. Pause

Pause is the most significant feature in speech naturalness and accentedness (Kim & Jang, 2017). It can be used as expressive tool. It can convey a speaker's evaluation, or opinion. It has a stylistic function to attract the addressee's attention to what is going to be said or to emphasize the argument. It is employed to impress the listener (Duez, 1982). Many instances of pauses do not associate with articulation only but with what the speaker is pointing to as long pause variables, punctuation, syntax, rhetoric and expressive emphasis, and stylistic peculiarities (Kirsner et al., 2002). Thoughts can be collected by a pause. One pauses before the utterance to think about what he/she is going to say and to prepare the listener to receive the message.

Effective suspense and interest can be created by pauses. The addressee needs to know the outcomes behind pauses, if the speaker pauses before the conclusion. By pausing, a psychological and emotional state can be conveyed to the audience (Mohammed & Badr, 2022).

4. 3. Speech Rate

Speech rate is identified with the number of segments of speech units divided by the total number of their duration. Thus, speaking rapidly causes excessive burden. The speech rate affects the perception of the rhythm (Arcuri et al. 2009). Speech consonantal intervals can be shorter than in slow speech since they have a direct influence on the extent to the durations which can vary on an absolute level. Shorter intervals can cause lower absolute variation, while longer intervals can cause higher the variation. Within languages, syllable rates can increase as a function of speakers' speech rate. They can be very slow, slow, normal, or fast (Dellwo et al. 2006).

4. 4. Intensity (Loudness)

Intensity is the basic element in amplitude. It is identified as the acoustic correlate of perceived loudness, and is reported in decibels (dB) (Chun, 2002). Roy and Siebein (2019:25) state four levels of intensity:

1. quiet level (70 dBA) which is safe for hearing and great for speaking;
2. moderate level (71-75 dBA) which is also safe for hearing, and favorable for speaking,
3. loud level (dBA 76-80) is hard for speaking; and
4. very loud level (81dBA): to which long exposure can cause hearing loss.

5. Research Design

This study employs a phonostylistic analysis approach to examine the phonetic tactics Drury employs to create suspense. It uses qualitative techniques such as close listening (Creswell 2014) and the PRAAT software to measure creaky voice, pitch, loudness, and uptalk. The researchers have adopted the following analytical procedures to investigate the phonetic aspects:

- Choosing the samples of suspense to be analyzed.
- Cutting the sample of analysis into mp4 clips.
- Transforming the chosen mp4 clips into a WAV form to suit the PRAAT software.
- Analyzing the samples representing suspense remarks made by the commentator.

Figure (1) below shows the PRAAT software sound window:

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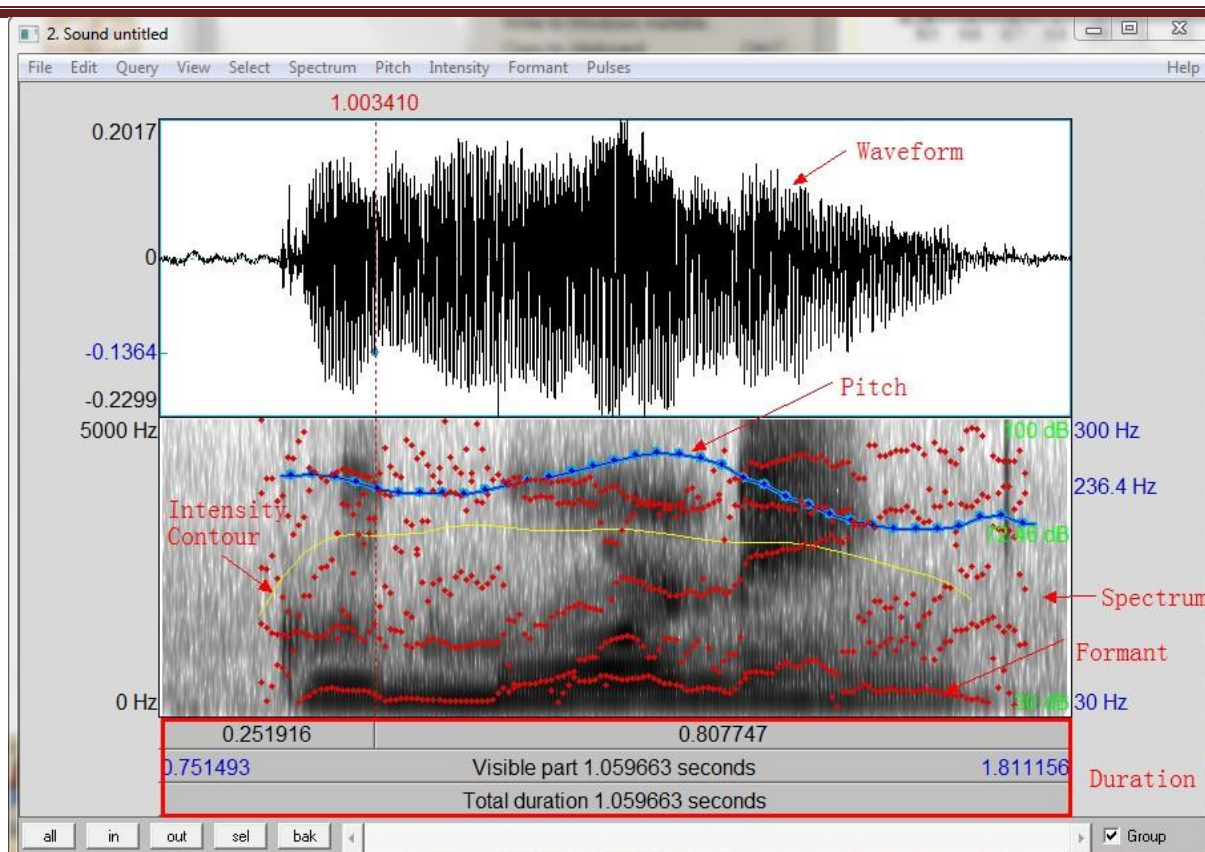
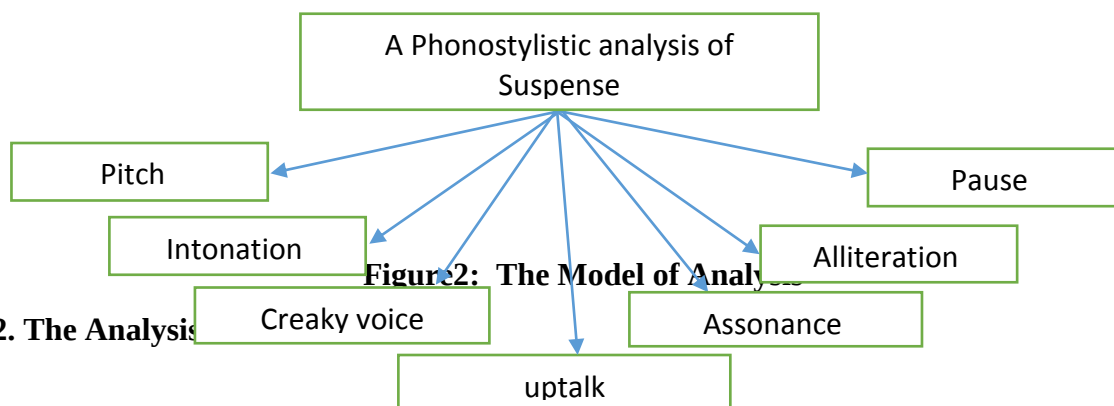


Figure (1): PRAAT software sound window

6. Data Analysis

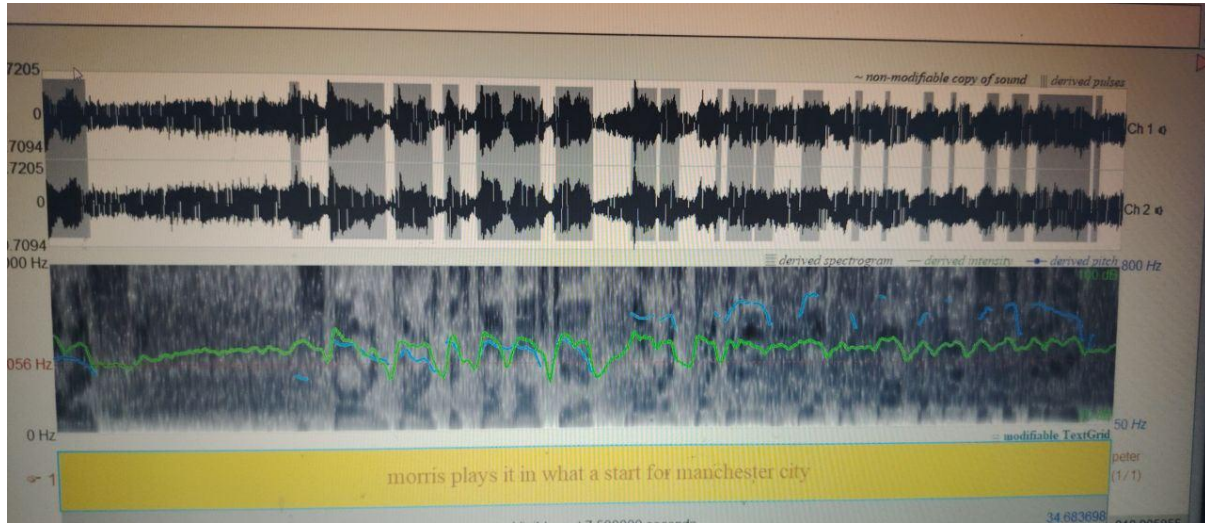
6. 1 The Sample and Model of Analysis

The sample of analysis in this study is abstracted from Peter Drury's Best Champions League Matches 2021/2022 that took place between Manchester City vs Real Madrid and Villareal vs Liverpool (<https://youtu.be/0IckAAoVCh4>). The study employs a phonostylistic analysis to demonstrate the commentator's manner in portraying the suspense in the chosen samples. Figure (2) displays the model of analysis:

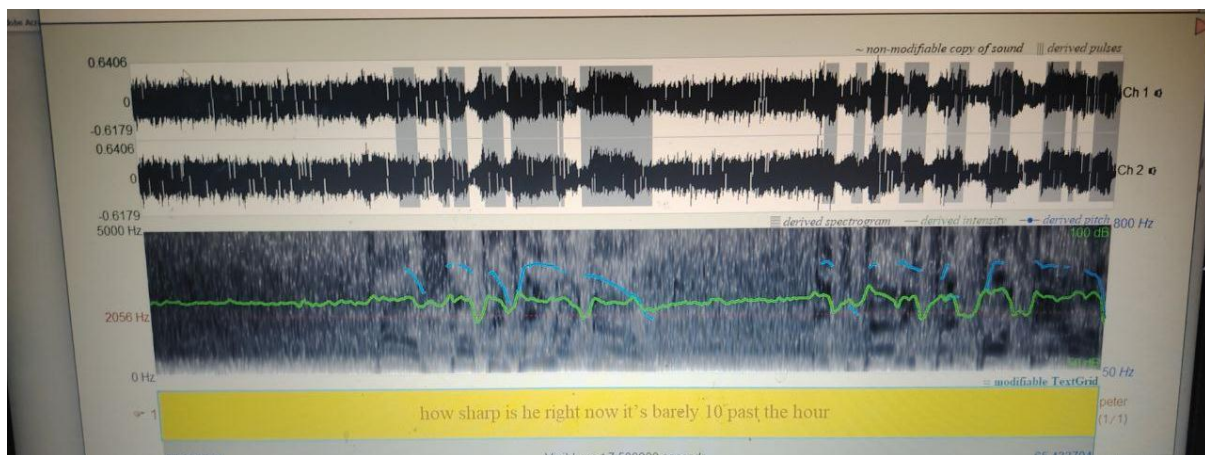


5. 2. The Analysis

The commentator employs alliteration "*enticing enchanting*" to enforce the player's ability. He also omits some phrases and clauses for speed and urgency "*by de bruyne jesus turning and scoring*".



Drury employs uptalk in the word "in" in the sentence "Mortis plays it in what a start for Manchester City" to raise suspense and amazement. There is another uptalk in the word "start" to convey astonishment. The speaker uses creaky voice in "what" and "sta-art" that makes the sound breathless and strained, which mimics the commentor's feeling phonetically. The pitch reaches its highest points on "what" to portray unbelievable actions and shock. The pitch falls in "for Manchester City" to provide a resolution. The intensity is a significant sudden surge. The volume peaks on the exclamation "WHAT a START!" in which the loudness conveys the shocking nature and excitement of the goal. Suspense is observed in the shift from the descriptive talk to the emotional exclamation quickly. The exclamation also creates rhythm because of intensity. The uptalk on "in" hints at a micro-suspense in which the addressee experiences the impact of the action with the commentator.



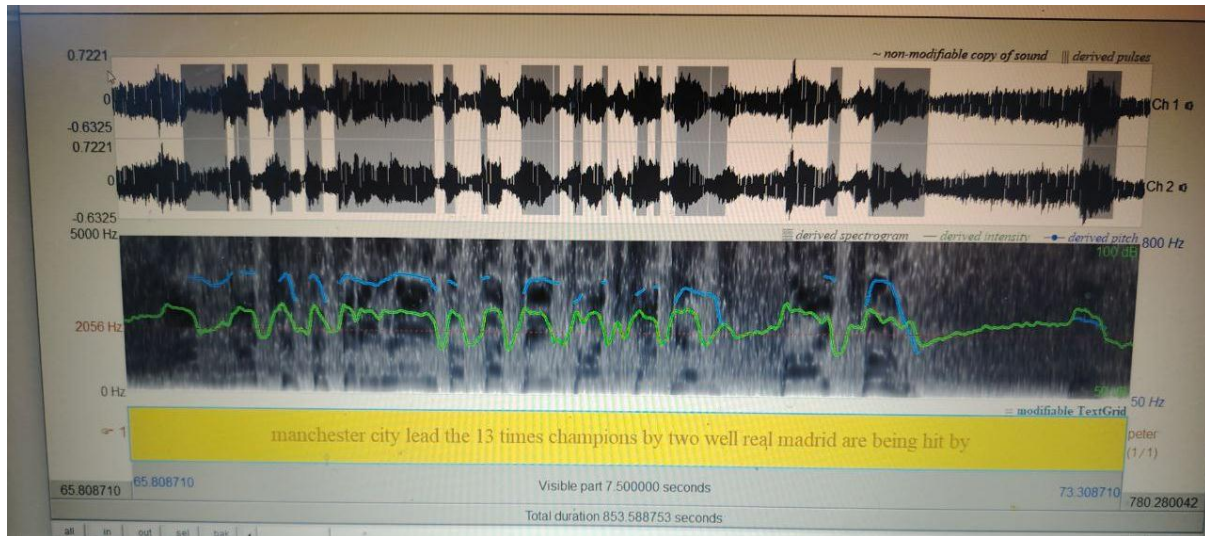
Uptalk is noticed on "sharp" in which the commentator forces the other to acknowledge player's incredible form. It builds suspense about the player and his team. The vocal voice makes the

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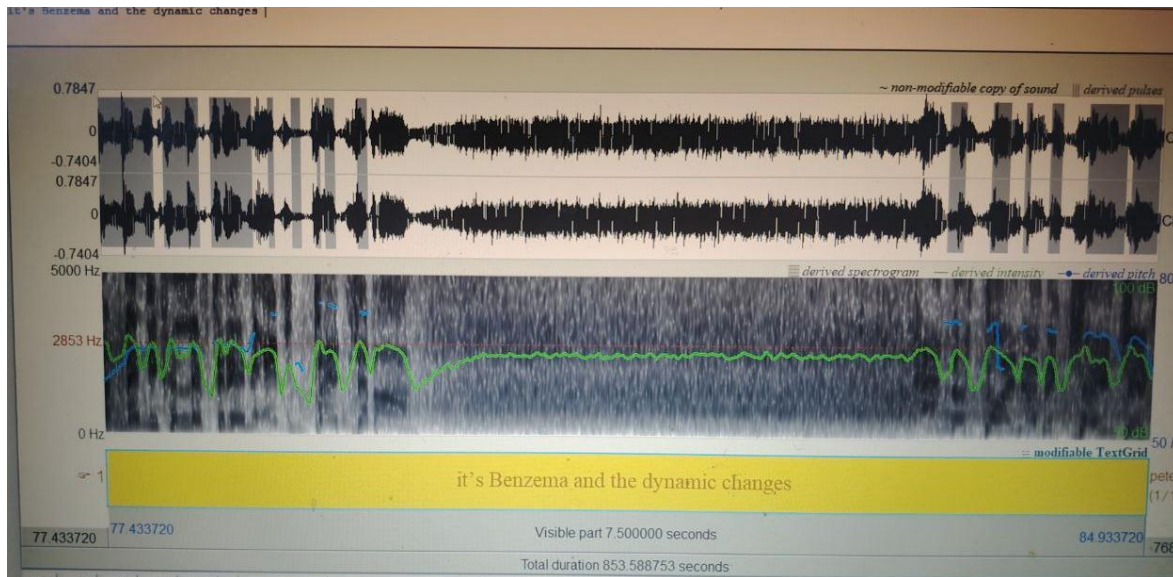
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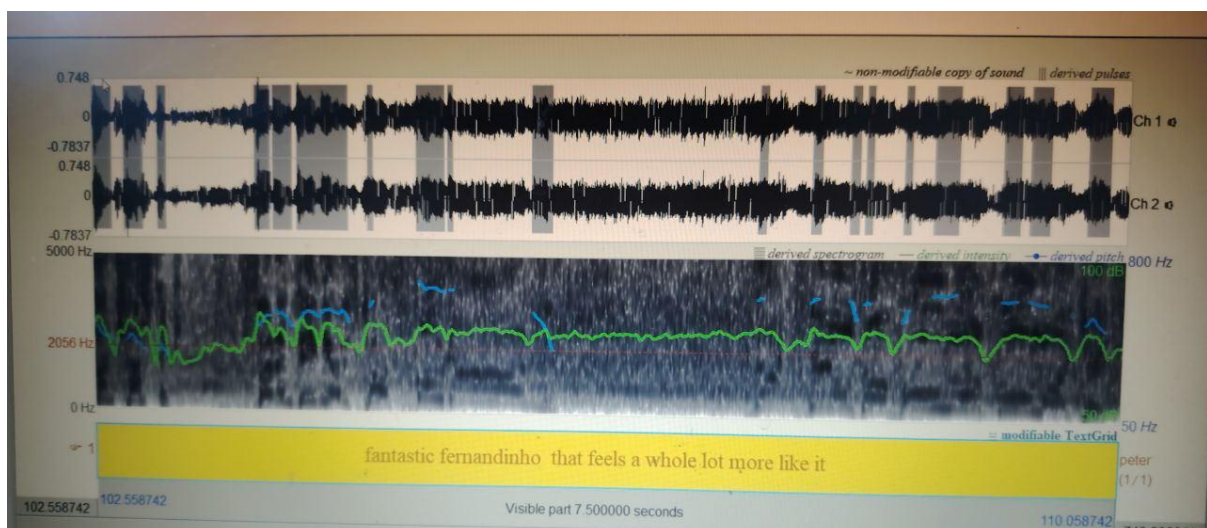
time as heavy element to feel which is noticed in the word "hour". A fall-rise intonation creates an unspoken consequence as in "How sharp is he↘↗...". A rise-fall is employed for emphatic astonishment. High pitch words are "sharp" and "ten". Drury uses his voice to build suspenseful comments. He employs a high pitch on "sharp" for emphasis and the uptalk on "now" for immediacy. While a creaky voice is used in "sharp" to make it sound dangerous.



The complex sentence of "Manchester City lead the 13 times champions by two well Real Madrid are being hit by" enhances suspense by information. Uptalk is employed for continuity on "two" to make micro -suspense. Creaky voice implies texture and weight to the heavy words. Drury uses creaky voice on "times" to make it sound revered, and immense (13 ti-imes). It phonetically paints Real Madrid as a historical giant. The word "hit" with a creaky voice makes the impact sound more painful and powerful. The pitch contour differentiates between the two teams and their situations. "Manchester City lead..." starts with a declarative and high pitch to describe the current situation. The suspenseful aspect is in the word "by" through a fall-rise intonation. The rise is the suspense device which tells the audience that there are more actions.



Drury's ability is observed in "It's Benzema and the dynamic changes." He creates suspense around a player's impact. Drury raises the significance of the play through uptalk in "It's Benzema". There is a rise on ("-ma") which is the final syllable, to open unexpected information. Drury produces the name of the player with creaky voice. He utters "Ben-ZE-ma" with a full creak. The other creaky voice is on "dy-" and "-mic" which makes this shift sound weighty. The pitch has a fall-rise intonation. The expressive force of "It's Benzema" increases suspense about the players' upcoming anticipation. A suspense tool is a micro-pause that occurs after "Benzema" in which the commentator uses the uptalk rise to separate the cause (Benzema) and the effect (the change). This pause is where the suspense peaks.



Uptalk seeks the hearer's agreement and recognizes the significant moments with the commentator. The rise is on "it" which marks a suspenseful validation. Creaky voice adds emotional weights. The speaker employs creak in the first syllable of "Faa-tastic" which makes the genuine and emotional praise conveyed with admiration. The creak in "who-ole" gives a

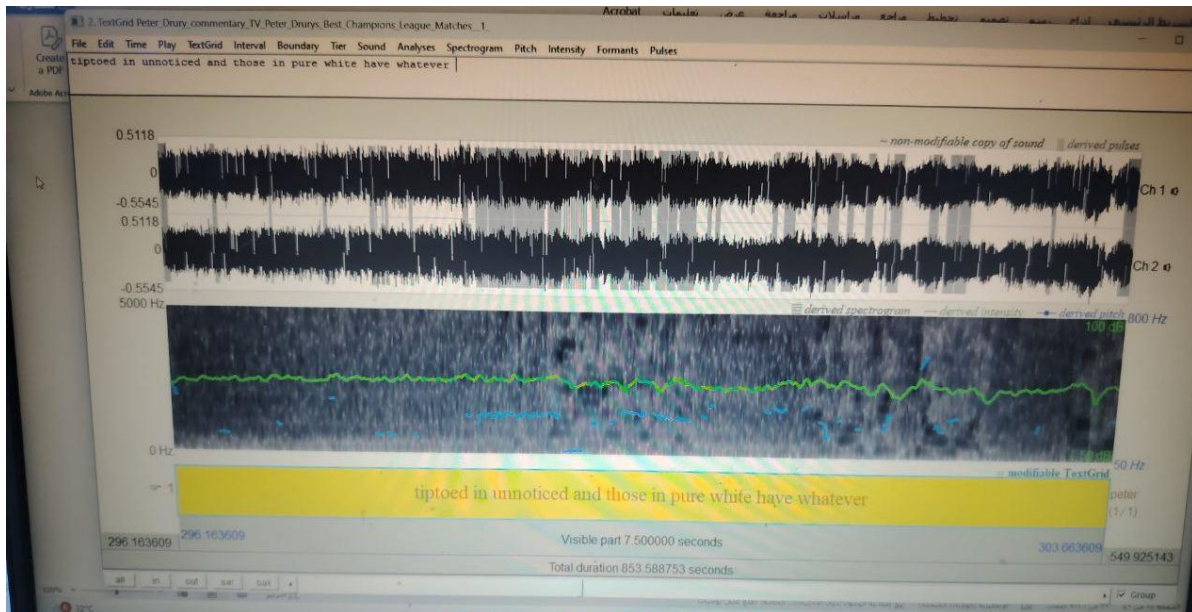
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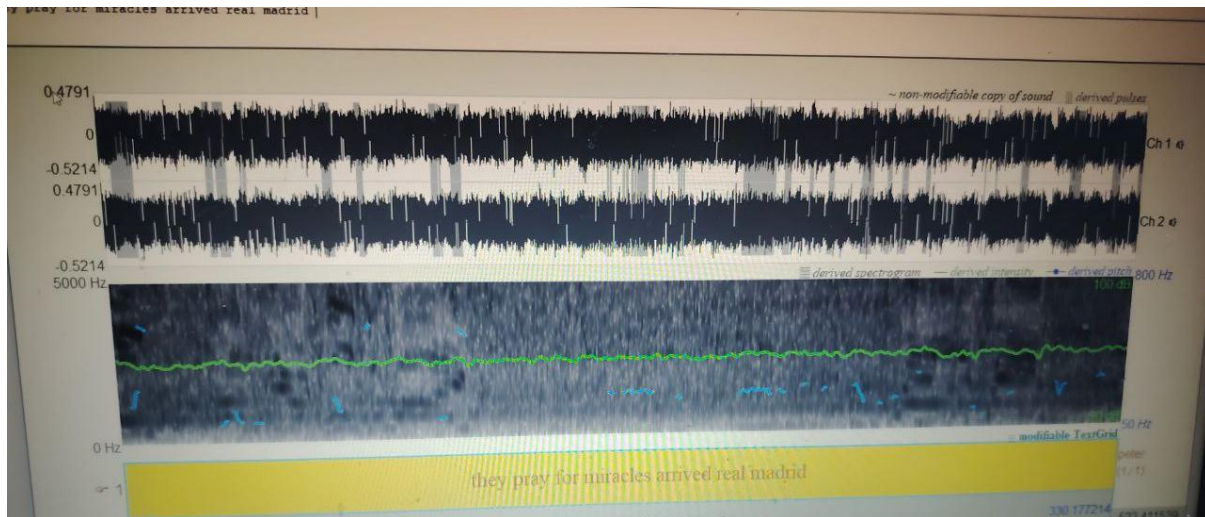
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sense of completeness. It makes the difference to feel significant. The rise tone creates suspense by implying the acknowledgement and the importance of what to come. It triggers a new anticipation.

Emotional impacts are observed in exclamations such as "oh excellent!" and "well, Madrid is a miracle club!" to denote exclamatory interjection. Alliteration is the repetition of hard /k/ sounds in "coached up towards Camavinga" to denote sharpness.

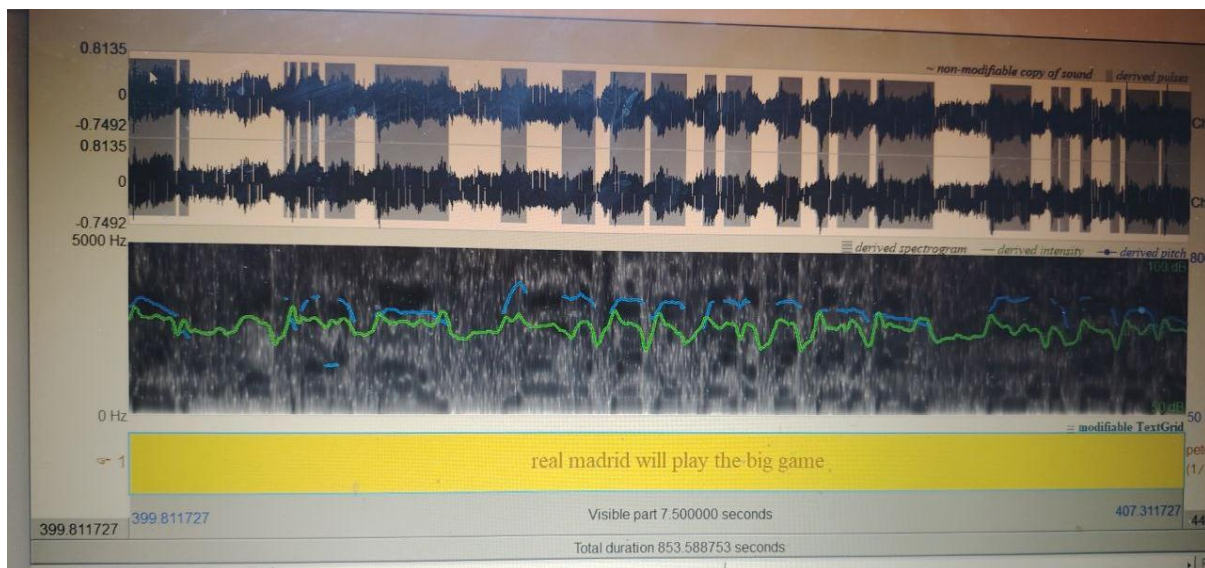


Uptalk is used to add the sense of uncertainty. The strong uptalk on "-ever" (in whatever) would be a tool of suspense device. The rise pushes the listener to ponder what to come. The instance of creaky voice in "unnoticed" is that the speaker uses creak on "un-" or "-noticed" to make. It mimics the racing movement of drumroll or heartbeats. The pitch highlights the contrasting points that are "Liverpool in unnoticed" and "and those in pure white." The pitch rises on "unnoticed" (uptalk) to shift the focus and emphasis. A fall-rise is "whatever" to build suspense. The addressee is left in suspense to observe what form that "whatever" can take.



Creaky voice is used on "pray" to mark the desperate hope and amazement. It is an intense whispered pray that makes hope more real and vulnerable.

The second word "miracles" is seen as the realization of the first. The words are conveyed with softer intensity. They draw the addressee closely. The intensity peaks on "Madrid," landing to emphasize the force of the team's identity. The pitch falls then rises (uptalk) on "miracles".



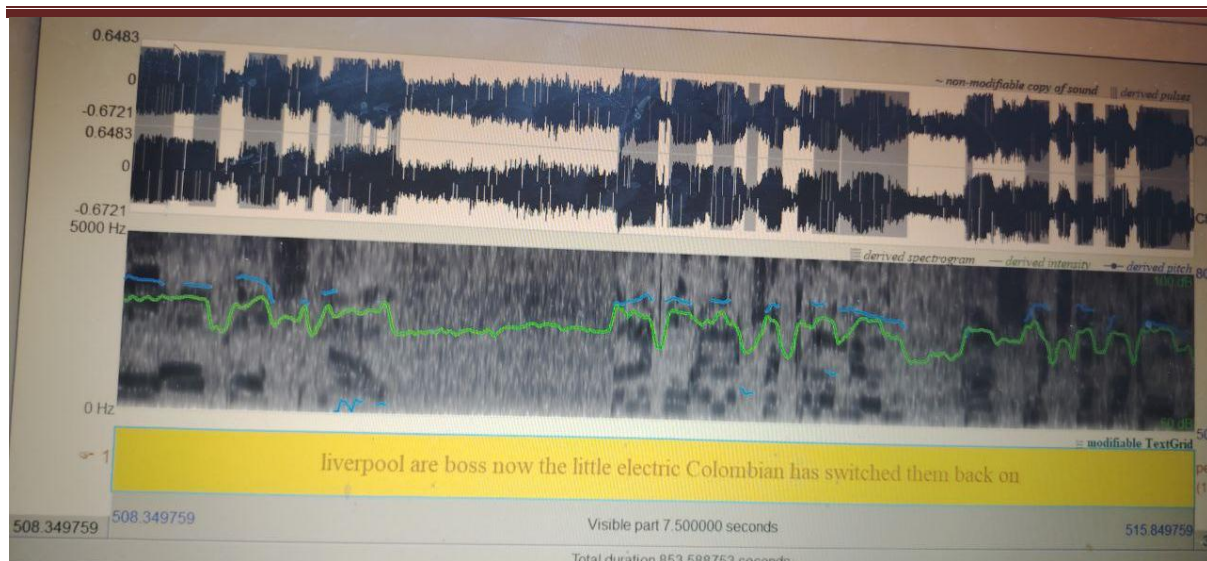
"Real Madrid will play the big game" is delivered to create weight anticipation and weight. Drury produces "big" with creaky voice as "bi-i-ig" with a low pitch to add a level of solemnity and gravitas. The word "game" is also seen as a creak, particularly if it is part of a fall-rise pattern. This gives a weight to the entire statement. Uptalk on the word "play" enforces anticipation and makes listeners to be eager to know the results. The pitch reaches a peak on "big" for emphasis.

Alliteration is in the repetition of sound /b/ in "Boisterous" and "blue" and assonance is a rhythmic device in "defined" and "beyond".

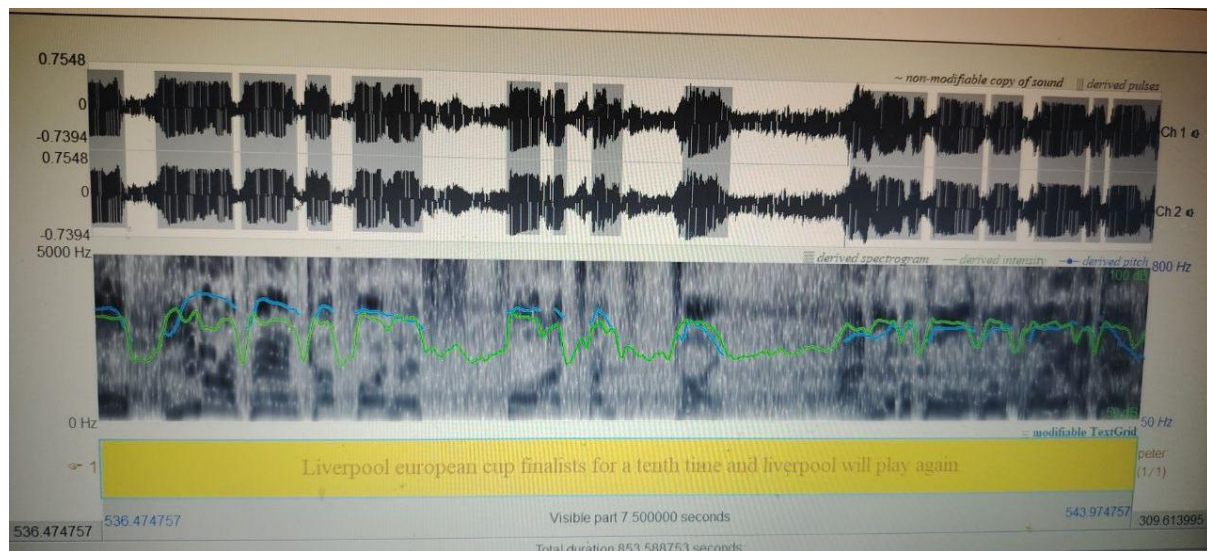
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Uptalk (high-rising) is employed not only to create continuity but also to highlight a revelation. It tells the listener: "This is crucial and there's more to come." The word "now" is conveyed with a strong uptalk to emphasize the shift and to create anticipation. The creaky voice in "boss" is made to add intimacy and emphasis. "Liverpool are boss" is presented with a mid to high pitch. The highest point of pitch, however, is on "-tric" of "electric" to highlight the subject. The fall on "back" indicates the completion of the action. The rise in "on" leaves the audience with ongoing power and energy.



Suspense fills the gap between the present achievements and the future. The low creaky voice is on "time" to give importance to a historic event. The pitch rises at the word of "time" as it appears on spectrogram to show a break of regular pulses. The peak of intensity concentrates on the emotion and the excitement on what may happen. The suspense of "time" is created with

phonation and pitch. Another tool used to create suspense is the pause that occur after the creaky, rising "time". The listener is left waiting for the results.

6. Results and Findings

The frequencies and percentages of used phonetic tactics of suspense are represented as follows:

Phonetic devices	Frequency	%
Uptalk	9	22.5
Creaky voice	8	20
Intonation	6	15
Pitch	5	12.5
Rhythm	5	12.5
Alliteration	3	7.5
Assonance	2	5
Pauses	2	5
Total	40	100

The analysis shows that many phonetic tactics have been used to trigger suspense, such as the use of intensity, creaky voice and uptalk. Readings like 800, 2056, and 5000 Hz clearly show high intensity and pitch since they are not normal rates that are outlined by scholars such as Gibbon (2017) and Boersma, & Weenink (2024). Pitch is raised to denote importance, excitement, and emotional arousal. Drury employs a variable speech rate. He slows down to focus on important things then he speeds up to convey excitement and urgency. The commentator restrains his full power and intensity which build suspense for the release. A faster rate transforms excitement and urgency. The commentator uses alliteration to demonstrate excitement. Uptalk is used as a significant tool for the construction of suspense. It shifts the focus and creates anticipation. It records 22.5%. Strategic pausing is observed in tandem with uptalk and creaky voice to build the suspense. Alliteration and assonance enhance the rhythm and reinforce the excitements that are generated by prosodic features. Intensity is shown in the sudden surges to shed light the climatic events and exclamations that mark shock and excitement to the audience.

7. Conclusions

The selected samples of Drury's commentaries show suspense from a phonostylistic perspective at the phonetic level. The special construction of suspense is triggered through phonostylistic means which create the listeners' maximum expectation and concentration of action. Suspense is created by the phonetic tactics of intonation, creaky voice, alliteration, and assonance. The

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commentator uses such tactics to attract the listeners' attention and ignite passion. He makes the audience curious to know what will happen. Uptalk and creaky voice are the prominent and frequent devices by Drury to structure suspense, followed by intonation patterns and use of pitch. The speaker emphasizes the significance and greatness of the match throughout these phonetic tactics. They direct the attention to the more exciting results that are about to come. Pauses force the audience to anticipate its result, thereby peaking suspense. The phonetic tactics overwhelm the audience with sensory input that reflect the frantic nature of the play.

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