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"Well, you know, Mean Gene...": The Professional Wrestling Interview

**"WELL, YOU KNOW, MEAN GENE..."
THE PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING INTERVIEW¹**

Lynn Coddington

Professional Wrestling has been around for a long time, but has enjoyed a significant increase in popularity during the last two years. Last spring Sports Illustrated devoted its cover and eighteen pages to what the author calls "the original sham-sport". In this article the author attributes the surge in interest in wrestling to the upscale image marketed by Vince McMahon, the head of the World Wrestling Federation (WWF) (Newman 1985). Much of this success has been achieved by tapping cable television markets, where, as of last April, four of the nation's ten top-rated cable-TV programs were wrestling shows (ibid.: 31). In addition to the recent success in video markets, wrestling has long been a sell-out venue at large arenas such as the Philadelphia Spectrum and Madison Square Garden (ibid.: 68). There are several regional wrestling troupes, but the WWF, originally a Northeast operation, has led the way in building a national following.

Because I am married to a wrestling aficionado (and because I worked for a year as a house parent in a home for delinquent teenage boys), I have inadvertently acquired a high degree of familiarity with the broadcasts and personalities of the WWF. One aspect of these hour-long broadcasts has particularly drawn my husband's and the boys' attention--and now, for different reasons, mine. This is the wrestling interview in which Mean Gene Okerlund "interviews" one or more of the

wrestlers or their managers. "Interview" is used very loosely here because these speech events may bear only a marginal resemblance to other television interviews. At first glance they appear to be nothing more than an opportunity for the wrestler or manager to "rant and rave" about how horrible and degenerate his opponents are and about what a superb and superior specimen of mankind he himself is. Upon further study of these interviews, however, I have found that they are tightly organized and follow a number of different patterns. These patterns are principally discourse patterns, although individual participants may display their own distinctive syntactic patterns and styles as well. In this paper I will present my analysis of these professional wrestling interviews.

Before continuing with the analysis it would be useful to explore the nature of a sports interview. What is a normal sports interview, and how is the wrestling interview similar to or distinct from it? My discussion here is based on my experience in watching sports broadcasting in America for many years and is not intended to define, describe, or assign categories to various sports interviews; rather, I wish to make explicit some of my expectations as a native English-speaking American when I hear the words "sports interview". First of all, I expect the interviewer to ask questions and the athlete to answer them. I expect to hear either new information or the athlete's personal reaction to a situation. In either case, I do not expect to know beforehand exactly what the athlete will say. Finally, I expect a presentation that reflects the participants' genuine and honest, though humble, expressions of their abilities and strong points.

It is in this domain that wrestling interviews are most notably different from other sports interviews. When I asked my husband, who has been a wrestling fan from childhood, what the single most definitive aspect of these interviews was, he said: "The braggadocio. It's obviously a charade, and the audience plays along with it...". This charade may at times be enacted in other sports interviews. In wrestling, however, the charade defines the interview.

In looking at the WWF interviews, I find that these segments occur in regular slots during the broadcast. The same set of interviews may be broadcast with different sets of matches and other features in a single day. For example, on March 7, 1986, Channel 57's ten o'clock broadcast used the same four interview segments as follows:

BROADCAST #1 3-7-86

- Opening Gorilla Monsoon & Jesse "The Body" Ventura
- Match 1 George Steele vs. The Junkyard Dog
 - Update: Lord Alfred Hayes
- Match 2 King Kong Bundy vs. unknown
 - Interview 1: Mean Gene Okerlund w/ Jimmy Hart
- Match 3 The Killer Bees vs. A.J. Petruzzi & partner
 - Interview 2: Mean Gene announcing info on Wrestlemania II
- Match 4 Adrian Adonis vs. Ivan MacDonald
- The Body Shop Jesse "The Body" Ventura with a new wrestler from Tonga, and the Fabulous Moolah
 - Interview 3: Mean Gene: taped segments of Mr. T vs. Orton match; Hulk Hogan vs. King Kong Bundy match; progress report/taped interviews with Mr. T and Hogan in L.A.
- Match 5 Simpson & Wells vs. The Funk Brothers
 - Interview 4: Mean Gene w/ Jake "The Snake" Roberts; Mean Gene w/ King Kong Bundy
- Closing Segment: Gorilla Monsoon & Jesse "The Body" Ventura

BROADCAST # 2 3-7-86

Opening: Vince McMahon and Bruno Sammartino
Match 1 Barry "0" & John K-9 vs. Cpl. Kirchner & Danny Spivy
Update: Lord Alfred Hayes
Match 2 Les Thornton vs. Paul "Mr. Wonderful" Orndorf
Interview 1: Mean Gene Okerlund w/ Jimmy Hart
Match 3 Special Delivery Jones & Andre Malo vs. The Hart Foundation
Interview 2: Mean Gene announcing info on Wrestlemania II
Match 4 Butch Cassidy vs. The Haiti Kid
Piper's Pit: Roddy Piper, Bob Orton & The Haiti Kid
Interview 3: Mean Gene: taped segments of Mr. T vs. Orton match; Hulk Hogan vs. King Kong Bundy match; progress report/taped interviews with Mr. T & Hulk Hogan in L.A.
Match 5 Nelson Velleux & Lenny Poffo vs. Beefcake & Valentine
Interview 4: Mean Gene w/ Jake "The Snake" Roberts; King Kong Bundy

All of the interviews I watched referred to upcoming matches in the Philadelphia area, leading me to believe that different interviews are broadcast in different regions. The lead-ins from the match announcers never specify the participants; rather, the announcers hold the audience's attention with such brief statements as "Hang on for a special interview, coming up next". Music is used to fade into and out of the interview spots which vary in length from a minute to two minutes total. They always involve Mean Gene Okerlund, a short balding man in his forties, who wears a tuxedo and is adept at producing sports announcer talk (SAT) (Ferguson 1983). The other participants are always wrestlers or managers, the principal participants and players in the WWF.

Description of Data Collection

In order to study the phenomenon of the professional wrestling interview in more depth I watched and tape recorded five one-hour WWF broadcasts on Saturdays between February 22nd and March 15th, 1986.

Each broadcast contained four interview segments. Out of the twenty interviews, I concentrated on those that involved the interviewer and one or two interviewees. Several of the interviews involved more participants, but in these cases, no one person talked for a long enough time to enable me to form valid opinions about each of their styles. I chose eight of the interviews that were clearest and easiest to understand and analyzed them in an attempt to discover distinctive patterns. I then made rough transcriptions, focusing primarily on the functions that utterances served, such as introductions, reference to past events, threats, and insults. I did some accurate transcription for each of the participants involved so that I could see if there were any common syntactic patterns across the speakers.

Analysis of Data

A professional wrestling interview is really a pseudo-interview in that the participants respond as characters rather than as serious, honest, and straightforward individuals. Mean Gene Okerlund uses SAT features such as copula deletion (Ferguson 1983) to invoke a sense of regular television sports broadcasting, as in "Here now, my guest, Rowdy Roddy Piper". He also uses tempo, rhythm, and intonation that are suggestive of SAT, but only during the openings and closings of the interviews. Okerlund does not address the wrestlers during these times, only the audience; the interviewee is generally not in the picture until he (Okerlund) has finished. The closings are almost exclusively a shouted reminder of the city, place, date, and time of the interviewed wrestler's next area match; they are often heard over a combination of the wrestler's raving and the fade-out music. When

Mean Gene speaks to the interviewees directly he does not normally use the SAT register in the interviews I recorded. In fact, he often says things that are so obviously out of place that they are funny, and, I think, deliberately so. The following is an example:

(After attributing a rumor to another wrestler, Gorilla Monsoon, who is off camera):

Mean Gene: Did you, or did you not, utilize a foreign object when you hit Tito Santana?

Macho Man: Sour grapes, right there; and there's a perfect example of sour grapes right there.

Mean Gene: I told you, Gorilla.

Here Okerlund backs off from his accusation and appears ingratiating. He looks quickly from Monsoon back to Macho Man with an initial hint of (mock) fear and then slight relaxation, when Macho Man appears placated. There are numerous instances of Mean Gene's arguing with his interviewees and goading them, only to retreat meekly as soon as they challenge him. He uses features of "caretaker" speech (Snow 1977) when speaking with a wrestler who, because he is supposedly retarded, speaks in a slow form of baby talk. More than in a "normal" sports interview, the general picture in a wrestling interview is one of role play in which such factors as the participants, the reputation of the wrestler being interviewed, and the upcoming bout determine the content.

Equally important is the lack of genuine information-oriented question and answer interactions. Sometimes the question form is used, as in the example above; in this case, however, the question was not directly addressed, since the "question" was not a genuine request for new information. After all, the attack has been so well publicized that every viewer knows the Macho Man Tito Santana with something besides his fist, even if they did not actually witness the event. The

question's function is to bring up a controversial past event and to relate it, along with its dramatic tension, to the upcoming rematch between these two wrestlers. The interviewer, Okerlund, serves as a foil for this sort of conflict and revenge scenario. He tries to heighten the audience's sense of excitement, drama, and interest.

Revenge is a major element in the wrestling scenario and is highlighted in most of the interviews. During the period in which I was collecting data there were several wrestlers expressing their desire for revenge in upcoming bouts with opponents who had recently wronged them. For example, Mr. T was out for Roddy Piper's blood after an incident in which Piper whipped him with a belt. The refrain "I ain't been whupped since I was six years old, and that was by my mama!" was accompanied by threats against Piper in all three of the recorded interviews with Mr. T. King Kong Bundy, in one of a series of attempts to take the WWF championship from Hulk Hogan, entered the ring at the conclusion of one of Hulk's matches and illegally "body-splashed" the Hulkster. (Bundy weighs 460 pounds.) Supposedly Hulk's ribs were broken, and he was carted off on a stretcher to an ambulance. In his subsequent interviews he appeared with tape around his mid-section, lamenting his misfortune and promising not to disappoint all the Hulkamaniacs who witnessed his humiliation. In his upcoming and widely publicized match with Bundy, he would do his best to render Bundy a "spent force".

In the corpus of interviews under study, only those involving George "The Animal" Steele and Jake "The Snake" Roberts did not involve the subject of revenge. Steele is presented as severely retarded and, therefore, does not interact in the same ways that the other wrestlers

do. Roberts' interview was his first WWF appearance; he was new to the fold and had not yet participated in any fights.

Seen within this context, the main purpose of the interview segments appears to be that of promoting the live matches and future television broadcasts. Upcoming matches are always announced as part of the interview. Okerlund introduces a series of taped interviews (#3 in the program outlines above) with "Standing by with comments regarding their upcoming bouts...".

Depending on the individual participants the interviews can take one of three different forms. All three of the forms begin with an introduction and announcement of relevant upcoming events in a register somewhat similar to other television sports broadcasting talk. In the first type of interview this introductory stage may occupy half to two-thirds of the time; this is followed by a brief appearance by a WWF personality, and, finally, a quick announcement of the most important or relevant future match. In the second type of interview, the initial announcements by Okerlund are short, generally lasting ten seconds or less, and the bulk of the remaining time is spent in interaction between Mean Gene and his "guest". This interaction may involve questions of the type mentioned above, or it may consist solely of an exchange of comments between "interviewee" and "interviewer". Again, this interview finishes with a restatement of the initial information by Okerlund. The third type of interview does not seem to fit my conception of an interview at all. Here Gene briefly announces the future matches, introduces the wrestler and turns the floor over to him. The wrestler then launches into an almost manic display of energy and rapid-fire verbosity aimed primarily at his future opponent.

Eventually the music comes up and drowns him out, and we hear Okerlund repeat the place, date, and time of the impending massacre.

Certain information appears to be obligatory in all of the interviews, and it is often presented in the same pattern. As can be clearly seen, the time, date, and location of the next local match is always the first piece of information given. This information was presented by Okerlund in all the interviews I collected. The next obligatory information is a reference to the past events that have created conflict between the interviewee and his stated opponent. This can be introduced by Okerlund or by the interviewee. In any case, the interviewee always includes a reference to past events in the early part of his speech. An example comes from an interview with Hulk Hogan, where his first statement upon being handed the floor is, "Well, you know, I'm just glad it's all laid out, man, all the history of why we're in the steel cage". "Rowdy" Roddy Piper states early in one of his interviews, "Oh, Orndorf, you remember, long ago, when you got all messed up...". Giving the history of the conflict reintroduces the context for the upcoming matches, keeping it fresh in the audience's mind. This is integral to the continued success of professional wrestling. Any new viewers can figure out what's going on immediately, and old fans can relish the defeats, victories, humiliations, and thirst for revenge yet another time. The wrestler's interpretation of past events is often blatantly biased and very funny in an absurd sense. In an interview with King Kong Bundy after the aforementioned illegal attack on Hulk Hogan, Bundy, while relishing the fact that all the little Hulkamaniacs were crying when the champion went down, accuses Okerlund of "crying little crybaby tears right along with

everyone". My informant/husband finds this passage particularly amusing; he tells me that the vicarious enjoyment of anti-social behavior is one of professional wrestling's chief attractions for him.

The next step in the interview is for the wrestler to mention the upcoming event in which he will be involved, usually in terms of threats and insults directed at his opponent. This may differ in the case of a good guy champion who has undergone a severe threat to his status. He may spend some time highlighting the humiliation he has been subjected to, as Hulk Hogan does in this set of interviews. This seems to be an attempt to raise questions as to the outcome of the future title defense match. Occasionally wrestlers will actually commend opponents on technique or physical strength. Another element that is closely related to giving threats, and that can occur at this stage, is a set of predictions. I do not have specific predictions in my data, but one wrestler refers back to a prediction he made during a previous interview, and Mean Gene confirms this prediction.

Another element which is intertwined with these steps in the interview process is the clear identification of the characters. This is done by both Okerlund and the interviewee through the role playing that was mentioned earlier. The wrestlers and managers have distinctive personas and identify themselves with the various factions in the WWF; most of the conflicts are developed along factional lines. They are well known to fans and are often referred to in the interviews. Since coalitions are frequently formed, especially for the big national matches, the interviews provide a means of keeping track of who is on whose side. Wrestlers mention their allies and enemies by name. Last year's national event, Wrestlemania, developed out of one

of these factional fights that pulled in rock musicians and Mr. T. This year's Wrestlemania II has been built out of that same successful conflict, and this year's popular wrestlers and other current media stars have been added.

The final element in all the WWF interviews is, as noted above, the restatement of the details about the relevant upcoming matches by Gene Okerlund. The wrestlers do not always come to a clear ending statement. Often they are simply cut off by Gene or by the rising volume of the transition music, probably due to the time limitations of the spot.

To summarize, then, the obligatory information in professional wrestling interviews includes:

- 1) the announcement by Mean Gene of upcoming matches related to the geographical area where the broadcast is seen and related to the interviewee;
- 2) a statement of the events leading up to the current conflict;
- 3) a mention by the wrestler of his upcoming bout in the area;
- 4) the restatement by Okerlund of the place, date, and time of this match.

This information represents a clear discourse structure.

Next I would like to look more specifically at what characterizes the speech of a typical professional wrestler within this discourse framework. The individual wrestlers and managers use a variety of styles and syntactic patterns. What do they have in common, and how do they differ? In order to answer these questions I drew up a matrix of features and plotted each interview participant's characteristics, with the exception of Okerlund's, based on the recorded interviews. These characteristics are based on linguistic and discourse features and other variables that suggested themselves as significant in the sport. Among the former are aspects of voice quality, such as volume and pitch, as well as speed of speech, intonation, stress patterns, gesture, and use of repetition and formulaic phrases. Significant variables in the sport include status within the WWF, physical stature, whether the individual is considered a good or bad character, and the length of membership in the WWF. I used my husband as an informant for details in these categories. The matrix in Figure 1 describes those participants in the recorded interviews for whom I had sufficient material for analysis.

**FIGURE 1: SPEECH CHARACTERISTICS OF PRO-WRESTLERS
IN RECORDED INTERVIEWS**

<u>WRESTLER</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>II</u>	<u>III</u>	<u>IV</u>	<u>V</u>	<u>VI</u>	<u>VII</u>	<u>VIII</u>	<u>IX</u>	<u>X</u>
Hulk Hogan	G	++	++	+	+	+	low	++	++	2,3
George Steele	fa	+	+	++	+	-	v.low	-	-	2
Jake Roberts	B	?b	+	-	+	-	low	+	-	1
Don Muraco	B	+	++	+	-	+	mid	+	+	2
Roddy Piper	B	++	+	+	+	++	m. hi	++	++	3 3
K. Kong Bundy	B	++	+++	-	+	+	low	+	+	2
Randy Savage	B	+	+	+	+	-	v.low	+	-	1,2
Adrian Adonis	B	+	+	++	-	-	high	+	+	2
Mister T	G	+	+	-	+	+	low	++	++	2,3
Ricky Steamboat	G	+	+	+	+	+	mid	+	+	3
Greg Valentine	B	+	+	+	-	+	low	+	+	2
Bobby Heenan	B	++	-	++	-	+	m. hi	+	+	2
Jimmy Hart*	B	+	-	+	+	+	high	+	++	2
Bob Orton	B	+	++	+	-	-	low	+	-	3

I. Good or Bad
 II. Status
 III. Size
 IV. Length of membership in WWF
 VI. Volume

VII. Pitch
 VIII. Intensity
 IX. Speed
 X. Type of interview
 1=mainly introduction
 2=interaction Gene/guest
 3=solo by wrestler

a: F stands for "freak" (see text)

b: Roberts has been in the WWF too short a time to judge his status.

*: = manager

This matrix reveals not only individual variation, but also certain common features which allow us to divide the interviewees into subgroups according to certain characteristics. The most obvious is the distinction between the good guys and the bad guys. The bad guys constitute an overwhelming majority of the fourteen interview participants listed. When I mentioned this to my informant/husband he said, "Well, of course. The bad guys are more interesting". This comment fits well with his previous comments about the vicarious experiencing of normally unacceptable behavior through professional wrestling. He pointed out to me that there are two other categories that contrast with the good and bad. The first of these consists of the wrestlers who are in the ring primarily to get beaten up by the big names. Most of these men do not have developed professional wrestling personalities, and while many of them belong to the low-status bad guy group, some characters are so ill-defined that fans do not know if they are good or bad. The second category consists of what my husband calls the "freaks". George "The Animal" Steele is the wrestler in my sample who fits this category. These are characters who are represented as being subhuman in some way. Steele acts retarded and behaves like a confused simpleton. The implication is that these characters do not have the capacity to choose between good and evil.

Hulk Hogan is the epitome of a "good guy" wrestler. In professional wrestling, however, "good" does not mean nice, and the Hulkster sounds every bit as angry and intimidating as King Kong Bundy, an arch "bad guy". Mr. T. is a good guy, yet he accosts Mean Gene with an angry "What chu want, fool?" when Okerlund sticks a microphone in

his face. "Good" means tough but honest and often includes some notion of protecting orphans and old ladies from the deceitful doings of the "bad guys". Hulk says of Mr. T, "Do you think he does this for himself? No way, man. He's here for all the poor kids who look up to him". Hulk frequently addresses his own following, assuring them that he will protect them from the likes of Bundy. In one interview he goes so far as to say that he could not live in a world in which Bundy held the WWF championship belt.

The defining characteristics of bad guys are that they are sneaky and deceitful and that they resort to cheating to win matches. They are wonderfully melodramatic villains, so obviously rotten and so gleefully corrupt that fans love hating them (Newman 1985). Significantly, most managers are bad guys. They are portrayed as the brains behind the underhanded doings of the bad wrestlers. Bobby Heenan, who planned the Bundy/Hogan controversy, is nicknamed both "The Brain" and "The Weasel". He is openly insulting to Mean Gene, for instance, answering Okerlund's inquiry about a possible conflict of interest with lines like "No way, Bozo". Mean Gene is frequently on the receiving end of the wrestlers' less than considerate remarks.

Two other important characteristics of the wrestlers are their relative status within the WWF and their physical stature. These two features seem to be closely related. Status is in large part determined by size. Hulk Hogan is six feet eight inches tall and weighs 310 pounds; Bundy is six foot six and weighs 460. Most of the wrestlers in the interviews under study are between 6'2" and 6'6" and weigh between 250 and 300 pounds. The managers are not necessarily big men--both Heenan and Jimmy Hart are under six feet tall, and Hart has a

slight build. Their status depends on their cunning rather than on their strength. In contrast to the wrestlers who are frequently interviewed, there are many low status wrestlers who never participate in interviews. My informant tells me that they are generally smaller and are not as likely to be given the opportunity to develop their characters.

Professional wrestling relies heavily on cultural stereotypes. There are good guys, bad guys, freaks, homosexuals, hillbillies, and rednecks, and members of various ethnic groups. Presenting readily identifiable caricatures to fans is unquestionably part of talking like a professional wrestler. Newman (1985) discusses this in his article and points out that this is an offensive aspect of the WWF to many viewers, particularly to wrestling purists.

Let us now look at the linguistic features and styles used in the WWF interviews. Each character seems to have his own instantly recognizable style of speaking. Hulk Hogan is, to use King Kong Bundy's description, something of a "souped-up hippie". He calls everyone "brother" and "sister" and peppers his interviews with "man" and "All I got to say is.." Roddy Piper has a taunting, goading tone and has been called "...the master of the stream of unconsciousness interview" (Newman 1985). He uses a very slight Scottish accent, wears a kilt and can talk longer, louder, and faster than anyone in the WWF. Jimmy Hart is nicknamed "The Mouth of the South" and runs a close second to Piper in number of words per second. He is rather flashy and effeminate, and he giggles a lot.

In spite of the differences in the individual styles, there are some overall trends in the use of volume, speed, and pitch. Likewise,

many personalities use repetition of words, phrases or entire utterances for emphasis or effect. There are numerous examples of this type of repetition. Roddy Piper and Randy Savage use repeated rhyming couplets in their interviews. Piper begins his interview with "Ohhh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive". He then repeats the first word as he addresses his opponent: "Ohhh, Orndorf,..". Randy Savage tells us: "A solid right hand from the Macho Man sent Tito Santana to the promised land". The use of repetition of parallel structures occurs as well. In Ricky Steamboat's interview he repeats the same ungrammatical phrase three times, claiming that three different men "...have bit off too much more than..." they can chew. The phrase did not come out quite right the first time, but once it was out, it was more important to be faithful to the structural element of triple repetition than to correct grammatical errors. The Macho Man repeats many of his utterances at least twice and has a rhythmic, chanting style. The phrase about "sour grapes" cited above illustrates this, as does the following:

Mean Gene: (Asks about Macho Man's hitting Tito Santana with a foreign object)

Macho Man: You gotta be ribbin!

Mean Gene: Whaddaya mean?! I'm not ribbin! I'm bringing it up!

Macho Man: You gotta be ribbin. You gotta be ribbin about that.

Mean Gene: I'm not!

Savage also repeats "yeah" and "right there" frequently. George Steele repeats the phrase "Captain say..." as a preface to each of his few remarks (the captain is his manager, Captain Lou Albano). Jimmy Hart uses repeated giggling; Mr. T. frequently says "What chu want, fool?"; and Hogan constantly repeats, "Well, you know...", "man", "brother", and "All I got to say". Most of the repetitions come at the beginning or end of utterances.

Moving on to aspects of voice quality, eight out of fourteen personalities used louder than normal volume, as compared with my sense of normal conversational volume. Those personalities who speak more quietly tend to have "bad" , very "macho", "strong but silent" images. Examples are "Cowboy" Bob Orton, Randy "Macho Man" Savage, and Jake "The Snake" Roberts. Adrian Adonis uses an almost conversational volume; he is an exaggeratedly grotesque stereotype of a homosexual. He flits about the stage, wagging limp wrists, flicking scarves, squirting perfume on Okerlund, and speaking in a stereotypically effeminate style. Lack of volume seems appropriate to this style.

A second important aspect of voice quality is voice intensity. Nine out of the fourteen used a level of intensity that I associate with extremely strong emotion. This may, but does not always, co-occur with high volume; for instance, Randy "Macho Man" Savage speaks with low volume and high intensity. As mentioned earlier, he uses a chanting speech style and punctuates his speech with heavily accented syllables; he opens one of his interviews with a response to Mean Gene's reference to the dubious manner by which he won the Intercontinental title by saying, "Unbelievable man, tarnish the belt". (Underlining indicates heavy stress.) On the stressed syllables the pitch changes, and the intensity is more pronounced than in the rest of the utterance. Other examples from Savage are:

- a. I predicted this, and it came true. Fantastic!
- b. Everybody get excited because I'm gonna...
- c. Cause I'm the champion!
- d. ...they've got a chance to honor the champion.

Many of the highest status wrestlers and managers such as Hulk Hogan, Roddy Piper, and Jimmy Hart, have incredibly intense interview styles--

they are almost manic. They combine high volume and intensity with a very rapid rate of speech. Half of the characters I listened to speak so quickly that they remind me of horse racing announcers. Of the remaining half only George Steele actually speaks slowly, and he is an unusual case. The other six range from an average conversational speed to a brisk, but not break-neck, pace. This combination of speed and intensity suggests strong emotions--anger, fear, resentment, indignation, excitement, contempt, hatred, and loathing.

In looking at all the different aspects of the speech found in professional wrestling interviews, this last point seems important. Wrestlers and managers employ a variety of styles, choice of vocabulary, and intonation and pitch patterns, but they all express some level of emotional involvement, usually intense emotion. The most common emotions are anger, derision, and the excitement of victory; the last usually takes the form of gloating. Since revenge is the most significant dramatic ploy used in professional wrestling, this is not surprising. Any strong emotions that are traditionally possible in a revenge situation are appropriate in a WWF interview. The participants must successfully convey intense anger, contempt, and indignation, and they must be able to convincingly gloat over an opponent's misfortune in the space of ninety seconds or less. The exceptions to this are the wrestlers like George Steele who do not participate in moral and emotional decision-making because they portray subhuman characters.

Acting is critical in professional wrestling interviews. They are melodramatic performances with a superficial resemblance to other sports interviews. Within the context of the total WWF broadcast, they serve to inform viewers about upcoming live matches and to generate

interest in them and future broadcasts. The interviews bridge gaps between matches by developing the factional conflicts and melodrama that are fundamental to professional wrestling. Using the term "interview" to describe these performances serves to associate them with more legitimate sports broadcasts, as does referring to professional wrestling as a sport. It is, in fact, probably closer to vaudeville, and the interviews are similar to short character sketches. The relationship of the participants to each other is dictated by ongoing cycles of revenge, wherein the most important requirement for speaking like a professional wrestler is that one speak with great emotion and conviction. Anything less and the wrestler looks weak and vulnerable. In the WWF bluster and braggadocio are valuable commodities.

'This paper was prepared for Prof. D. Hymes' course, "The Ethnography of Speaking".

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