

# Blending in Pindar

written by Anna Bonifazi | 1. November 2022

The quintessentially dense ancient Greek texts of the lyric poet Pindar (ca. 518-437 BCE) cannot be conceived, performed, studied, and taught without the basic human ability to create and understand networks of blends. [Blending](#) happens whenever we unconsciously connect conceptual counterparts and integrate them, so that new meanings emerge. Identifying blends not only helps us make sense of Pindar ('Pindar' metonymically stands for 'Pindar's poems'), but also of our blending-based thinking in general - as suggested by Mark Turner in [The Literary Mind](#).

My view of this fundamental use of conceptual blending theory has developed over time. At the time of my Master thesis on [deixis](#) in Pindaric victory odes, I was not trained to analyze blends in poetry. My focus then was on the contextual (or pragmatic) meaning of several Pindaric lexical choices that philologists had already tied to the extralinguistic environment - for example where a certain victory ode supposedly had been performed first, in front of which audience, and whether the original performance was choral or by a soloist. In my book [Mescolare un cratere di canti. Pragmatica della poesia epinician in Pindaro](#) ("Mixing a bowl of songs. Pragmatics of epinician poetry in Pindar"), I went further: I used pragmatic frameworks not only to describe the ambivalent meanings of deictic markers of time, place, and person, but also to suggest the performative relevance of some song metaphors, and to reflect on the re-enactment of words spoken by gods and heroes of the mythical past.

In more recent times, I had the chance to meet inspirational cognitive linguists, and I started applying blending theory and other general cognitive concepts to Homeric poetry. Now I can go back to my work on Pindar and re-cognize my findings in cognitive terms. In what follows, I select two micro-linguistic features of Pindar that I point out in previous works of mine, and re-read them in the light of the ubiquitous phenomenon of blending. I conclude by linking the emerging meanings of the blends in question to the multimodal essence of Pindaric poetry.

The first feature is the adjectival use of the *hēde*, *hóde*, *tóde* ("this [here]" in feminine, masculine, and neuter form) in the noun phrase *tónde kômon* ("this

revel band”), to be found for instance in [Olympian 14.15-17](#): “(...) may you, Thalia, lover of song, look with favor upon this revel band, stepping lightly in celebration of kindly fortune” (tr. Race 1997). The same expression occurs in *Olympian* 4.9, *Olympian* 8.10, and *Pythian* 5.22. In an article on deixis in Pindar I observe that the use of the word *tónde* to mark proximity does not clarify whether the noun *kômos* is intended *literally* (as the actual revel accompanying the celebrations of the athletic victory) or *metaphorically* (to describe the performance of the victory ode). Nothing tells us how near the singing “I” is to the revelers, or if the two entities coincide. My point is that these ambiguities could have been deliberate; they could have simply enhanced the overall effect of including the revelry in the public glorification of the victor – brought about by the Pindaric praise.

The effect of Pindar’s *tónde kômon* is illuminated by the concept of blended classic joint attention: To begin with, classic joint attention happens when a person communicates with another by directing them to a shared focus on something they can both perceive. For example, one spectator directs the focus of another by pointing out the emerging victor in a running event. Then, *blended* classic joint attention happens when people create a new focus “by blending the scene of joint attention with other things that do not in fact fit that scene” (Turner 2017:3). For example, television viewers invited ‘here’ by a sports anchor to a rebroadcasted race can perceive the excitement of victory even though they didn’t attend the original event, because they recruit scenes of classic joint attention.

Now let’s apply this to Pindar. Multiple people may focus on the revel because it is available in the immediate perceptual environment of the festive occasion. Pindar’s use of the expression “this revel” lets those who attend any re-performance of that specific victory ode feel the same blended sense of inclusion. If Pindar meant *kômos* metaphorically, the blend is further connected to the emerging meaning of the victory ode itself as ‘revel’. On top of that, we modern readers can understand (and enjoy) the cleverness of the noun phrase because we can participate in this blended classic joint attention as well, in spite of no access to the original visual context. In short, the basic cognitive operation of blended classic joint attention is what makes the vivid meaning of this demonstrative phrase (and the like) survive centuries of Pindaric appreciation.

The second feature is Pindar's use of a construction consisting of a metaphorical head noun modified by another noun in the genitive case to denote sung poetry ([Bonifazi 2001](#): 110-111; 157-158; 169). Examples include:

1. *kratēra ... meléōn* ("bowl of tunes"), *Isthmian*2
2. *pursōn húmnōn* ("fire of hymns"), *Isthmian*43
3. *moîran húmnōn* ("portion of hymns"), *Isthmian*62
4. *púlas húmnōn* ("gates of hymns"), *Olympian*27
5. *thróon húmnōn* ("murmur of hymns"), *Nemean*81
6. *kéleuthon húmnōn* ("path of hymns"), 191
7. *ánthea d' húmnōn* ("flowers of hymns"), *Olympian* 48
8. *húmnōn ... ánthos* ("flower of hymns"), *Olympian* 105
9. *húmnōn thēsauros* ("treasury of hymns"), *Pythian*7
10. *húmnōn sélas* ("lightning of hymns"), *Paeon* 5
11. *kratēr ... aoidân* ("bowl of songs") *Olympian* 91
12. *phúll' aoidân* ("foliage of songs"), *Isthmian* 27
13. *krhpid' aoidân* ("basement of songs"), *Pythian* 3
14. *ókhm' aoidân* ("chariot of songs"), 124.1
15. *aoidân dípsan* ("thirst of songs"), *Pythian* 9.103

While the head noun is almost always singular, the modifying noun is always plural. The metaphorical nature of the head noun can be inferred by the semantics of the host clause(s) addressing the singing activity - mostly the poetic victory song being performed. This construction represents a Pindaric strategy to refer to the performance of his own songs in terms of a domain that is relevant to the celebratory occasion (e. g. 1, 2, 3, 11, 13), or a core theme (e. g. 4, 7, 8, 10, 12, 15) of the ode featuring the construction.

Unlike other cases where head nouns are assigned target functions and modifiers are assigned source functions (see e. g. Shen and Gadir 2009 and Bolognesi and Strik Lievers 2018; let us think of "warm regards", where "warm" expresses the source), here we have the opposite: the head nouns express the source, and the genitive nouns the target. As Nikiforidou has shown, in several Indo-European languages the different meanings of head nouns and genitives can be explained through a series of interconnected conceptual metaphors, including e.g. distinctive property is a constituent part;

constituent material is origin; attributes are possessions ([Nikiforidou 1991: 170-187](#)). With regard to our Pindaric constructions, source domains such as 'treasury (shrine)', and 'flowers' in fact represent crucial constituent parts of the performances of the respective odes. In "we are mixing a (...) bowl of the Muses' songs" ([Isthmian 6.2-3](#))" the bowl is not only a constituent part but also the origin of Pindar's praise in turn metaphorized as water/wine to be poured. Targets and sources in these constructions get blended to create new meanings. The poetry acquires important contextual attributes, and contextual attributes are imbued with poetic value. I dare to posit that behind each of these genitive constructions multiple semantic extensions might be intended at once - for example, in the context of a nocturnal festival, "fire of hymns" can blend the song with torches used in ritual races or with big sacred fires. Pindar may have left the cross-space mappings and the emerging meanings of the blends underlying these metaphorical expressions open to his addressees, patrons, and audiences - anyone invited to realize the centrality of his odes. Let me add that the plural forms of the target nouns metonymically stand not only for the ongoing individual victory ode (whole for part) but also for the tradition the victory odes belong to (multiple instances of traditional songs for the tradition itself).

Finally, these micro-linguistic blends heavily rely on the multimodal essence of Pindaric odes. In other words, they are manifested in words, but they were originally conceived and received through a variety of experiences. Melodies, instrumental accompaniment, dance, ad hoc festive settings, and the lyrics of epinician songs (whose metrical arrangement is the only direct trace of multimodality we have today) made *laudator* and *laudandus* as well as producers and attendees enjoy the enhanced meanings of those and many other blends without philosophical, esthetical, or philological complications. However elaborated and extraordinary, Pindar's works made sense primarily because of everybody's embedded, enacted, and extended cognition.

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