

The Negatable Difference: A Speech Act Approach to Epinician Prayers
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Following Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and linguistic anthropologists, such as Richard Bauman (1992 and 2004) and William Hanks (1987), who have applied practice theory to the description of language, this paper will present a practical taxonomy of Pindar's prayers that makes it possible to identify (1) a crucial strategy of epinician praise poetics and (2) evidence for the oral composition of epinikion. A practical taxonomy is here understood as a way of describing the kinds of speech acts that are recognized by and meaningful to a given community. As Hanks's and Bauman's synthesis of practice theory and the *Ethnography of Communication* (Hymes 1974) suggests, what makes a practical taxonomy practical is that its descriptive criteria and categories emerge from an ethnographic, user-centered observation of language practices. Such an approach differs from existing scholarship on epinician prayers, where two overlapping trends prevail (Bundy 1962 is an exception that proves the rule) and signal an entrenched preference for an analyst-centered perspective in studies of Pindar's language: some Pindarists categorize prayers on basis of whether or not they are forms of speech that are addressed to some god (Bowra 1964:322, Hamilton 1974:17, Race 1990:85-117, and Mackie 2003:102); others describe epinician prayers in terms of syntax, such as first person future verbs (Hamilton 1974:17, Pfeiffer 1999, and Mackie 2003:77-106) or imperative verbs (Hamilton 1974:17). From an ethnographic, user-centered point of view, however, language content (i.e. the question of whether an instance of speech is addressed to a god or not) and syntax prove to be negligibly relevant taxonomic criteria. Instead, the practice—performance—of Pindar's prayers indicates that function and second person addressivity are the crucial taxonomic criteria. By analyzing all of the words, or metalanguage, that Pindar uses to identify his precatory speech acts, it is possible to discover both individual kinds of speech acts and how they relate to one another. For example, the speech functions that *eukha* 'prayer' names include an array of illocutionary speech acts (an act of speaking that causes subsequent actions [Austin 1975]) briefly described here in terms of their metalanguage: *apuein* 'to invoke', *ara* 'prayer', *epeukhesthai* 'to utter a prayer', *lissesthai* 'to entreat', *lita* 'entreaty', *litaneuein* 'to entreat', and *litos* 'supplicatory.' Another form of Pindar's metalanguage for prayers, *eukhesthai*, can apply to these speech acts and, thus, be appropriately glossed as 'to pray'. The fact that *eukhesthai* can also apply to the kind of speech acts identified by the word *eukhos* 'vaunt' introduces a productive problem: *eukhos* 'vaunt' and *eukha* 'prayer' clearly contrast (e.g. Pindar never names an entreaty type prayer, or any other type, *eukhos* 'vaunt') and have some complementary relationship by virtue of the fact that *eukhesthai* can mean 'to pray' or 'to vaunt'. Speech act theory (Austin 1975 and Searle 1969 and 1979) makes it possible to describe how in certain contexts a Pindaric *eukha* 'prayer' can be an act of praise, *eukhos* 'vaunt', so that the illocutionary speech act of *eukha* becomes a kind of performative speech act (an act of speaking that is an action [Austin 1975]) appropriate to Pindar's praise poetry, namely *eukhos*.

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