

Tweeting the War: Herodotus, Thucydides, and War in Ukraine on Social Media

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Canolfan Ymchwil Iaith
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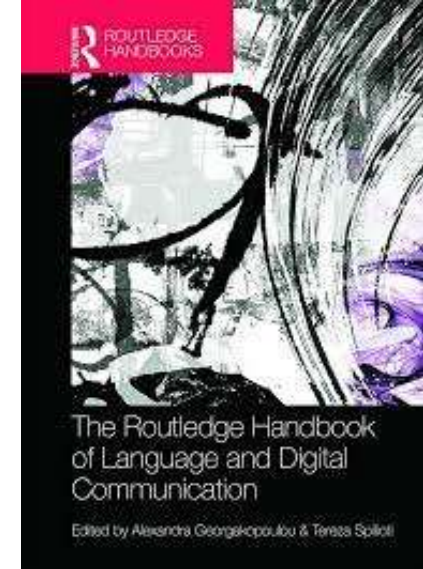
A couple of words about my background...

- Research on the intersection of language, media and society (media linguistics, media sociolinguistics, media discourse analysis)
- ... with a particular interest in how language and communication are shaped by and shape digital media and technologies.

Georgakopoulou, A. and Spilioti, T. eds. 2016.

The Routledge Handbook of Language and Digital Communication.

London and New York: Routledge.



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Spilioti, T. and Tagg, C. eds. 2017.

The Ethics of Online Research Methods in Applied Linguistics.

Applied Linguistics Review (special issue), Volume 8, Issue 2-3.



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Giaxoglou, K. and Spilioti, T. 2020.

The shared story of #JeSuisAylan on Twitter:

Story participation and stancetaking in visual small stories.

Pragmatics 30 (2), pp. 277-302.

The shared story of #JeSuisAylan on Twitter

Story participation and stancetaking
in visual small stories

Korina Giaxoglou and Tereza Spilioti
The Open University, UK | Cardiff University

Despite an increased interest in the discourse representations of refugees in the media, little attention has been paid so far to the circulation and uptake of such portrayals in social media. This article addresses this gap by examining networked users' reactions to the iconic image of Alan Kurdi, which

Twittering the War: The Question(s)

Starting Point:

How (and why) is the **ancient past** mobilised in contemporary and novel forms, contexts and media?

➤ How are **ancient historical texts and associated narratives** mobilised on Twitter?

How are **Herodotus' *Histories of the Persian Wars*** and **Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*** mobilised and (re)embedded in public tweets about the war in Ukraine?

Twittering the War: The Methodology

Collecting the tweets

The image shows a sequence of steps to access Twitter's advanced search. On the left, a partial view of the Twitter mobile app interface shows a menu with three dots and the word 'eos'. A large red arrow points from this menu to a 'Search filters' panel. This panel has a title 'Search filters' and two sections: 'People' and 'Location'. Under 'People', 'From anyone' is selected with a blue checkmark in a circle, and 'People you follow' is unselected. Under 'Location', 'Anywhere' is selected with a blue checkmark in a circle, and 'Near you' is unselected. At the bottom of the panel is a link 'Advanced search'. A second large red arrow points from this link to a screenshot of the 'Advanced search' page. This page has a title 'Advanced search' with a close button 'x' and a 'Search' button. It contains several filter sections: 'words' with options 'All of these words' (selected), 'This exact phrase', 'Any of these words', and 'None of these words'; 'These hashtags' with the option '#Ukraine' (selected); and 'Language' with the option 'English' (selected). Examples are provided for each section.

Search filters

People

From anyone ☒

People you follow ☐

Location

Anywhere ☒

Near you ☐

[Advanced search](#)

Advanced search

Search

words

All of these words
Herodotus
Example: what's happening - contains both "what's" and "happening"

This exact phrase
Example: happy hour - contains the exact phrase "happy hour"

Any of these words
Example: cats dogs - contains either "cats" or "dogs" (or both)

None of these words
Example: cats dogs - does not contain "cats" and does not contain "dogs"



These hashtags
#Ukraine
Example: #ThrowbackThursday - contains the hashtag #ThrowbackThursday

Language
English

Collecting the tweets (iterative process)

Sampling Criteria	Initial Sample (93 tweets)	Final Sample (293 tweets; 11,139 tokens; 8,215 words)
(key)words	Herodotus; Thucydides	Herodotus; Thucydides; Leonidas; Thermopylae; Scythia; Battle of Marathon; Melian/Peloponnesian War; Athenian/s; Pericles; Russia/Ukraine
hashtag(s)	#Ukraine	#Ukraine
language	English	English
dates	24 Feb – 24 Jun 2022	24 Feb 2022 – 24 Feb 2023

Storing and Organising the tweets

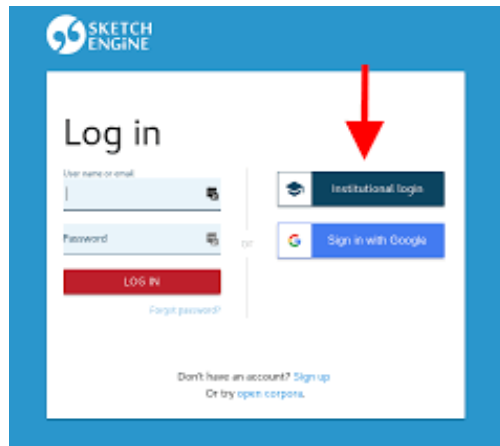
DATE	Twitter handle	TEXT	Other content	LINK to other content	LINK to tweet	ENGAGEMENT Replies – Retweets - Likes			
Search Terms	Date	Username	Text	Image	Text of Image / Embedded link	Link to Tweet	Replies	Retweets	Likes
Herodotus + #Ukraine	18-Feb-23	unpubmedia	"One year on, most of the world understands that [Putin is] not an evil genius — just a liar, a brute, and a war criminal." A Year of War in #Ukraine: Putin Should Have Read Herodotus. We All Should - Bloomberg #Ukrainewar #warnews		https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2023-02-18/a-year-of-war-in-ukraine-putin-should-have-read-herodotus-we-all-should	https://twitter.com/unpubmedia/status/1626915867274498048	1	1	3
	18-Feb-23	unpubmedia	A Year of #War in #Ukraine: #Putin Should Have Read #Herodotus . We All Should - Bloomberg #uspoli #cdnpoli		https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2023-02-18/a-year-of-war-in-ukraine-putin-should-have-read-herodotus-we-all-should	https://twitter.com/unpubmedia/status/1626915463111270401	0	0	1

Analysing the tweets

(illustrating potential lines of enquiry)

- How are *Herodotus' Histories of the Persian Wars* and *Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War* mobilised and (re)embedded in public tweets about the war in Ukraine?
- ❑ What themes and/or wider discourses are invoked in the tweets that mention Herodotus and Thucydides in the context of this war?
- ❑ How are the two ancient historians (re)presented in the sample (cf. reception of Herodotus and Thucydides)?

Analysing the tweets *(illustrating potential lines of enquiry)*



SketchEngine: ‘is the ultimate tool to explore how language works. Its algorithms analyze text corpora to identify instantly what is typical in language and what is rare, unusual or emerging usage’ (SketchEngine 2023)

Wordlists (*Frequency Lists*) & Themes

10 most frequent words

1.	the
2.	.
3.	be
4.	,
5.	”
6.	#ukraine
7.	of
8.	and
9.	to
10.	in

VS.

20 most frequent nouns

1.	#ukraine	11.	trap
2.	thucydides	12.	Russia
3.	#russia	13.	king
4.	leonidas	14.	history
5.	war	15.	#ukrainerussiawar
6.	ukraine	16.	herodotus
7.	Thermopylae	17.	Spartan
8.	world	18.	day
9.	time	19.	power
10.	#putin	20.	year

Wordlists (Frequency Lists) & Themes

10 most frequent pronouns

- | | |
|-----|-------|
| 1. | it |
| 2. | they |
| 3. | their |
| 4. | I |
| 5. | you |
| 6. | he |
| 7. | we |
| 8. | his |
| 9. | our |
| 10. | them |

Examining the word in context

Concordance: ‘a collection of the occurrences of a word-form (node), each in its own textual environment’ (Sinclair 1991: 32).

CONCORDANCE TwitterCorpus_War

DDL Simpson, king +7 • 26
0.00419 per million tokens • 0.03%

Details Left context KWIC Right context

1	doc#0 West now must do the same with the #USA. <king> The spirit of	king	Leonidas is back. <king> We will bow for no one <king> Period.
2	doc#0 rupert's 300 have denied Putin his prize against all odds. <king>	king	Leonidas I would be very proud. #Ukraine I'm interesting to see if
3	doc#0 The ~500 Ukrainian warriors = The 300 Spartans Serhiy Volynia =	king	Leonidas A myth of a nation and of the world is being born out of
4	doc#0 a spaceship... <king> @BorisJohnson pretends he's some sort of	king	Leonidas by walking empty streets & pretending he's in a war zone
5	doc#0 , with 2 comrades - against all odds - saved Rome from a foreign	king	2502 years ago a Spartan, Leonidas, with 300 - against all odds -
6	doc#0 res. <king> This is #Ukraine! #Zelenskyy represents the spirit of	king	Leonidas I #putin is more cowardly than Xerxes I #Ukraine is our
7	doc#0 MR_putin President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will be remembered like	king	Leonidas and the Brave 300 <king> They are giving their lives to
8	doc#0 <king> This is clear, but Ukraine are like the 300 and Zelenskyy is like	king	Leonidas, giving the West time. #Ukraine "Three famous #music
9	doc#0 zelenskyyUa" Volodymyr Zelenskyy will be forever compared to the	king	Leonidas of Sparta no matter how this ends. #BidenWar #Ukraine
10	doc#0 He comedy skill by #Zelenskyy is a parody of 300 where he plays	king	Leonidas Abramovich Quote from 300 #Ukraine #UkraineRussiaUa
11	doc#0 rldas Abramovich Quote from 300 #Ukraine #UkraineRussiaUa	king	Leonidas: The world will know that free men stood against a tyrant
12	doc#0 resident Volodymyr Zelenskyy is achieving the immortal status of	king	Leonidas <king> Both fought for their people and didn't back down
13	doc#0 I said "Molon Labe" upon being told to surrender his weapons by	king	Xerxes. <king> "Come and take them" is a fairly accurate translation
14	doc#0 history will document our tragic indifference #Ukraine President is	king	Leonidas #Zelenskyy #UkraineWar Everyone loves you man... <king>
15	doc#0 rldasUnderAttack "Ukraine is the Sparta, and @ZelenskyyUa is	king	Leonidas in the context of 300 #UkraineRussiaUa Ukrainian Soldier
16	doc#0 His troops while they all defend their home. <king> Courage like	king	Leonidas. ?? #DefeatPutin #VolodymyrZelenskyy #Ukraine Russia

Exploring reception of ancient historical texts through the lens of ‘collocation’

Collocation: ‘a frequent co-occurrence of words’ (Sinclair 1996: 28) – ‘you shall know a word by the company it keeps (Firth, 1957: 11)



must/should
read
— Ancient Historian
[Herodotus]
[Thucydides]



Exploring reception of ancient historical texts through the lens of ‘collocation’

Ancient Historian _____

[Herodotus]

[Thucydides]

Herodotus as a ...

[1] **Herodotus reports** that just before the Battle of Thermopylae [sic], a Spartan warrior [...] “Good, Then we shall have our battle in the shade” #Ukraine #sparta #resilience #Courage (user2, 26 Feb 2022)

[2] [...] meanwhile the central and southern #Ukraine was inhabited by Sarmatians which were the part of the Scythia culture. More than 2000 years passed since **Herodotus visited** these territories [...] (user 3, 25 May 2022)

Thucydides as a ...

[3] With respect to #Ukraine & #Russia the Melian dialogue , a cornerstone of anyone studying #war remains valid . The **observation by Thucydides** just as **correct** now as it has always been.(user 5, 26 Feb 2022)

[4] My heart and soul is devastated because of the Russian invasion and attack against #Ukraine. Here are some thoughts. [...] think how **Thucydides had defined** the origins of war: honor, fear, interest. (user 6, 27 Feb 2022)

Thank you for your attention!

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